

IOM IRAQ

# MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME: ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

JANUARY – DECEMBER 2022



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AAF</b>	Amirayt Al Fallujah	<b>ISIL</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
<b>AVRR</b>	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration	<b>KSA</b>	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
<b>CCCM</b>	Camp Management and Camp Coordination	<b>MH</b>	Mental Health
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization	<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
<b>DoH</b>	Directorate of Health	<b>MLI</b>	MHPSS and Livelihood Integration
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion	<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>FHH</b>	Female Headed Household	<b>NPC</b>	National Protection Cluster
<b>FVM</b>	Facilitated Voluntary Movement	<b>PFA</b>	Psychological First Aid
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence	<b>SEOs</b>	Socio-economic Orientations
<b>GoI</b>	Government of Iraq	<b>ToT</b>	Training of Trainers
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee	<b>TRD</b>	Transition and Recovery Division
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration	<b>TWG</b>	Technical Working Group



# INTRODUCTION: IOM IRAQ MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS) PROGRAMME

Iraq has witnessed multiple waves of conflict and violence that have greatly affected millions of Iraqis for a prolonged period. For many individuals, this has led to a multitude of stressors and challenges that are often difficult to cope with. Experiencing a disruption of social networks, lack of community support, distressful personal events, human rights violations, discrimination, harsh living conditions during displacement, loss of property, and uncertainty about the future are common stressors that have a negative impact among people affected by conflict.

The IOM Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programme aims to improve psychological and social well-being and strengthen the overall resilience of individuals affected by conflict. Implemented through different levels of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) pyramid of intervention, IOM implements a range of MHPSS activities that support internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and host communities to regain a sense of safety and human security, increase self and community efficacy, encourage the reactivation of social networks, and develop tools for affected communities to deal with the past and regain hope for the future. Under a larger community stabilization objective, the MHPSS programme is implemented in close collaboration with other social cohesion and protection activities.

IOM began supporting psychosocial activities in Iraq in 2010, with MHPSS programming implemented from 2014 onwards. Aiming to address the MHPSS needs in Iraq originating from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) occupation and subsequent forced displacement, to the Kurdish Referendum and the Government of Iraq initiative to support return, which have seen a rise in returns throughout the state and subsequent stabilization. As of recently, MHPSS programming more broadly responds to the needs of returnees in Iraq, who are affected by compounded psychosocial stressors. The programme also offers MHPSS capacity building for local figures in different fields. Due to the protracted needs

int Iraq, IOM's MHPSS programme has also worked on integrating its activities into other programming such as livelihoods, transitional justice, durable solutions and others to ensure a cohesive, sustainable approach.

All IOM services were tailored to the needs of the recipients depending on their phase of displacement or return and location (in or out of camps) including areas of return. To ensure optimal reach, community-based MHPSS services were offered in community centres through mobile teams and outreach services.

All IOM MHPSS services were carried out in a manner consistent with the 'do no harm' principle outlined in the Sphere project,<sup>1</sup> WHO's<sup>2</sup> definition of mental health, and the IASC<sup>3</sup> Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services in Emergency Settings. Beneficiaries received comprehensive services adapted to their needs, including:

- ▲ **Specialized services**
- ▲ **Focused non-specialized services**
- ▲ **Community and family support**
- ▲ **Social considerations in basic services**

Girls, boys, women, men, youth, persons with disabilities, female headed households, survivors of sexual violence and torture, elderly, orphans and other groups received age and culturally appropriate support through a variety of services.

To provide sustainable solutions and increase the impact of interventions, IOM continued to promote awareness on mental health throughout Iraq, through community outreach teams focusing on key messaging on MHPSS. Using the whole-of-society approach in reducing stigma associated with MHPSS and building trust among the population, key community members and civil society organizations were supported and engaged in community-based MHPSS activities.

1 Sphere. (2018). The Sphere Handbook. <https://spherestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Sphere-Handbook-2018-EN.pdf>.

2 WHO. (n.d.) Mental Health. <https://who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>.

3 IASC. (2007). IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-11/IASC%20Guidelines%20on%20Mental%20Health%20and%20Psychosocial%20Support%20in%20Emergency%20Settings%20%28English%29.pdf>.



MHPSS kite flying activity with children and other community members in Salah Al Din. © IOM Iraq

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2022

**31,124** Beneficiaries

**26,016**  
unique individuals



Gender



43% male



57% female



Age



31% under 18



69% above 18



Disability



3.6% yes



96% no

<1% did not disclose

## 79,619 Services Provided

**6,753**

Specialized  
Services

**14,748**

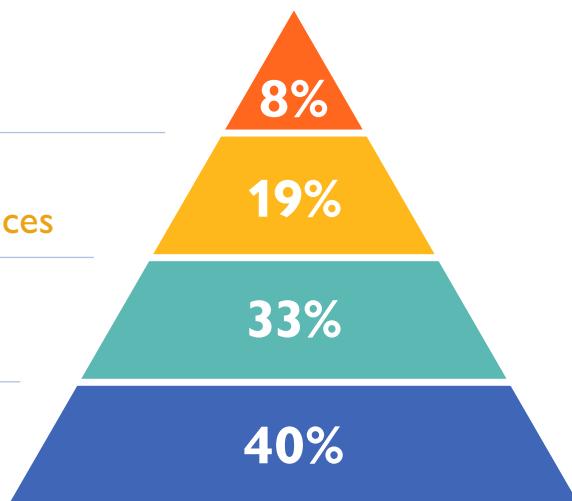
Focused  
Non-Specialized Services

**26,365**

Community and  
Family Support

**31,753**

Social Considerations  
in Basic Services



**73,947**  
implemented directly

**5,672**  
implemented through  
partners (local CSOs)



**1,644** additional services  
provided to staff and partners

In addition to the services provided to beneficiaries, 1,644 services were provided as a capacity building or training activity to IOM staff, local and international NGO staff and other government and humanitarian partners.

# MHPSS Activities



## MHPSS programme was active in 6 governorates

targeting areas of displacement (camp and out of camp locations) and areas of return.



## New locations reached

With high levels of need including in Biji and Samarra in Salah al-Din while MHPSS teams were sustained across locations throughout the year.



## 15 MHPSS and Livelihood Integration (MLI) projects implemented

Anbar, Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Ninewa.



## New collaborations to support return and reintegration

To support beneficiaries of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Programme through the provision of MHPSS awareness, counseling and other needed psychosocial support for returnees.

The MHPSS Programme has also started to provide tailored MHPSS services to IDPs returning from years of displacement to areas of return, providing consistent complementary MHPSS assistance in the displacement and return context (see more on page 31).



## MLI manual launched

In February 2022, followed by rigorous staff training to ensure that the majority of IOM's MHPSS field teams can implement MLI programming.



## Continued co-chairing of MHPSS sub-working groups

In Anbar and Salah al-Din governorates. IOM co-chaired the sub-working groups together with the Directorate of Health (DoH). IOM also maintained its role as chair of the national MHPSS Working Group's capacity building and human resources management committee.



## IOM's vocational workshops with integrated MHPSS assistance continued

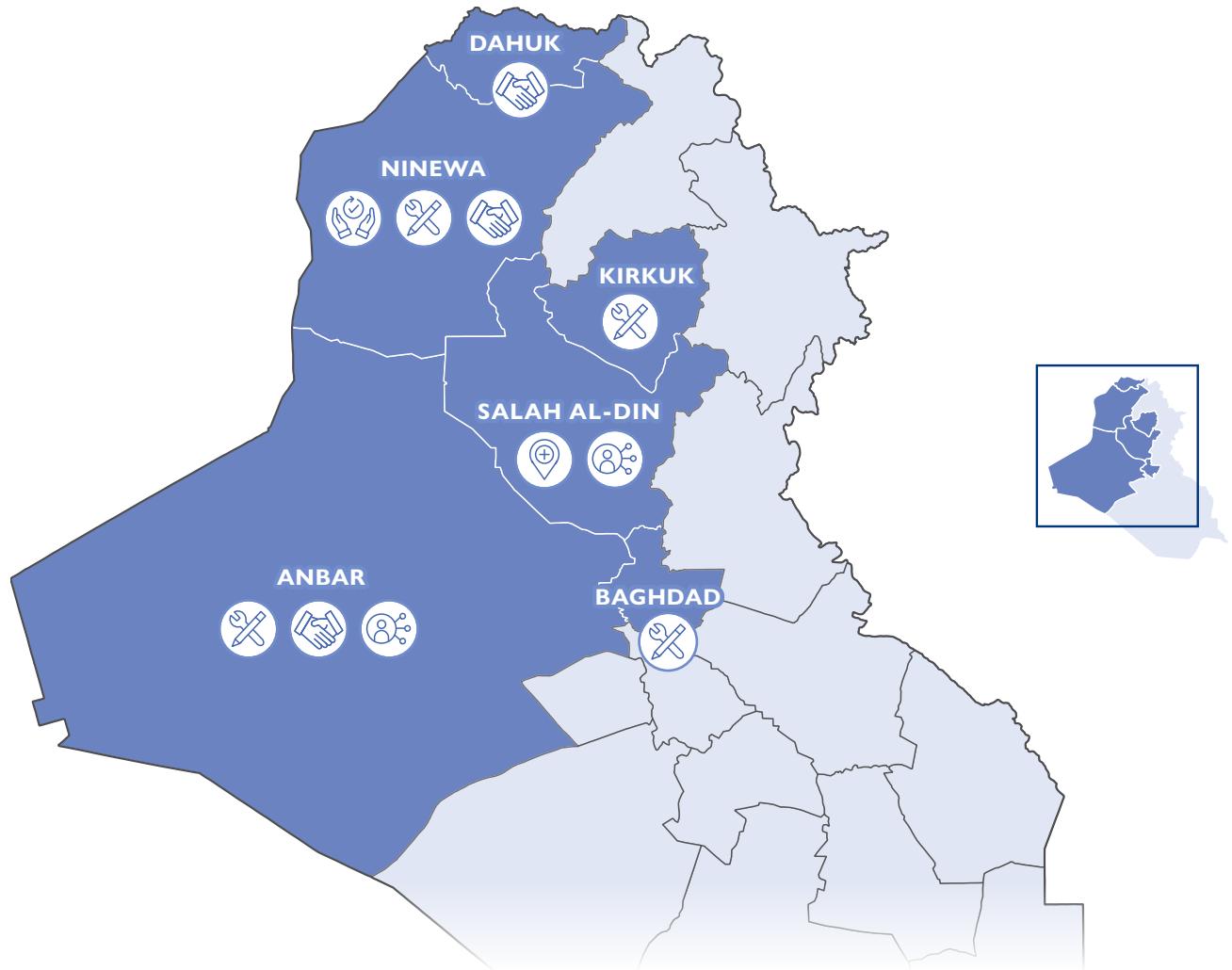
In Hassan Sham U3 camp throughout 2022, while a new project kicked off in Jeddah 1 center.



## Iraq's national suicide prevention strategy finalized

An IOM-led workshop with government officials in late 2022 led to the finalising of the draft of Iraq's national suicide prevention strategy.

# Areas of Activity



## ANBAR

- Amrat Al Fallujah including AAF camp
- 7 Kilo settlement
- Al-Qaim
- Fallujah
- Ramadi

## BAGHDAD

- Abu Gharib
- Latifiah informal settlement
- Yousifiah informal settlement

## DAHUK

- Qadia camp
- Dawoodia camp (Rusaz Organization, CSO)
- Kabarto 1 camp (Better World Organization, CSO)
- Sharya town (DAK Organization, CSO)
- Shekhan camp (Hariwan, CSO)
- Bajid Kandala camp
- Khanke community
- Dahuk city

## KIRKUK

- Wahed Huzeiran informal settlement
- Hay al Jamia
- Hawija
- Zab

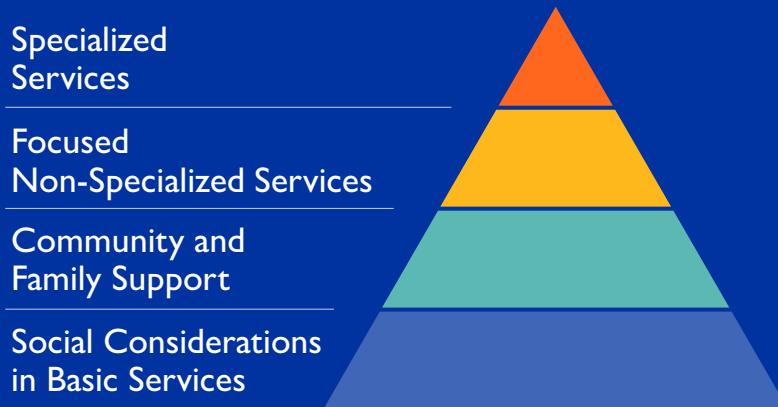
## NINEWA

- Hassan Sham U3 camp
- Jeddah 1 center
- Mosul
- Hamdaniyah (Qaraqosh)
- Ayadhiyah in Tel Afar
- Zummer
- Sinjar
- Baaj
- Qayrawan

## SALAH AL-DIN

- Al-Eitha and Ganous villages in Shirqat
- Sheikh Hamad in Shirqat
- Biji
- Samarra
- Tikrit

# DIFFERENT LAYERS OF MHPSS INTERVENTIONS





## Specialized Services

Psychiatric consultations and clinical psychological counselling are provided to people with pre-existing and/or emerging forms of severe stress, behavioural and relational problems or moderate to severe mental health disorders. Three psychiatrists and one clinical psychologist delivered these services on a regular basis, and conducted referrals to other mental health specialists when IOM services were not available at a given location.

IOM specialized service providers dealt with a wide range of mental health disorders. They intervened rapidly in urgent cases, when people were identified at risk of hurting themselves or others or presented with acute behavioural conditions.

All cases receiving these services were regularly followed up by case workers, who used psychometric tools such as: The Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ20),<sup>4</sup> Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ9),<sup>5</sup> and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to measure the individual's progress.<sup>6</sup> Family psychoeducation was also offered to households with people affected by mental health disorders, to increase their knowledge and facilitate support within existing social networks.



### Feedback from a service recipient

*After feeling down for so long, I am now able to take care of myself and my children. I no longer leave my children hungry or uncared for and this gives me a feeling of confidence.*

*– A woman with depression and suicidal thoughts after receiving specialized mental health services by the IOM MHPSS team*

4 Harding TW, Arango MV, Baltazar J et al. 1980. Mental disorders in primary health care: a study of the frequency and diagnosis in four developing countries. *Psychological Medicine* 10: 231–42.

5 Kroenke, K. & Spitzer, R.L. (2002). The PHQ-9: A new depression and diagnostic severity measure. *Psychiatric Annals*, 32, 509-521.

6 Goodman R (1997) The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: a research note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 38:581–586.





## Focused Non-specialized Services

IOM MHPSS teams identified cases in need of focused non-specialized support through community centres, outreach activities and referrals from other units. A team of trained social workers and psychologists implemented these activities on a daily basis to promote resilience and positive coping mechanisms.

Individual and group counselling are primarily used at a later stage of a participant's development succeeding the case management system, that follows each individual and identifies which service is most suitable in their case. For individual counselling, the main issues observed and supported in 2022 include family-related problems, depression, anxiety, bed wetting, family violence, phobias, isolation, nightmares, brain fog, stress and aggressiveness. Group counselling and group support was offered to families or groups of individuals sharing the same challenges. Frequently discussed topics included dealing with grief, aggressiveness amongst others, difficulties in expressing feelings, fear, anxiety, stress, lack of trust and adaptation to the life in displacement or in return contexts. Relaxation sessions were also frequently organized for groups of people.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) was offered to recently displaced families in distress as well as families that have recently returned to their areas of origin or other destinations. This intervention aims to reduce stress symptoms and assist in a healthy recovery following a highly distressful event. This evidence-informed approach helps offer safety and comfort, emotional stabilization, information and practical assistance, in connection with social support and linked to services. All IOM MHPSS staff are PFA-trained, as are other IOM staff working in other different with frequent contact with IDPs or returnees.

One of the tools used by IOM's MHPSS team is Problem Management Plus (PM+). This evidence-based programme was developed to facilitate individual psychological help for adults impaired by distress in communities exposed to adversity. This intervention follows a problem-solving approach and can help people with depression, anxiety, and stress, and improve aspects of their overall mental health and psychosocial well-being.



**6,212**  
individual counselling and  
group support sessions



**3,397**  
emotional supportive  
sessions and PFA services

### Feedback from a beneficiary in Kabarto IDP camp



*I remember very well the first time I entered this room, I felt fear, anxiety and great sadness. I felt helpless and hopeless because I could not do anything, negative thoughts and feelings always controlled me, I could not recognize myself anymore. Only after I continued with the sessions (individual counselling), my life changed. I learned skills that I did not know before. The medication surely helped, but the counselling sessions helped me adapt my thoughts, to be more positive. I realize now the importance of MHPSS and the extent of its impact on physical and mental health and on all aspects of my life. I am grateful for the results and happy because I decided to take the sessions and change my life.*



# Community and Family Support

Most people of concern can maintain their mental health and psychosocial well-being if they receive assistance in accessing the available community and family support. In Iraq, as conflict and displacement caused a major disruption of social networks, IOM's MHPSS programme helps to strengthen or re-establish them. Communal celebrations, communication on positive coping strategies, informal educational, livelihood and recreational activities, aimed at improving the welfare of people of concern, building trust and strengthening a community's overall social cohesion. Community consultations were conducted regularly to identify the most relevant community and family support activities in each location.

The below outlines short descriptions of a number of community and family services that the MHPSS programme implemented in 2022.

## Guided group discussions

People of concern sharing similar interests or challenges gathered to discuss topics related to their psychosocial well-being and learn strategies to promote growth and address difficulties. IOM facilitators helped beneficiaries explore different perspectives, recognize and question their assumptions, improve their listening and conversational skills, and engage as agents in their own development.

A wide range of topics were discussed every month; for instance, anger management, stress management, anxiety, self-care, positive thinking, caregiver skills, the importance of youth in society, communication within the family, peer pressure, addictions, traditions, time management, leadership, healthy relationships, motivation, coping mechanisms, problem solving and planning for the future.

Suicide continued to be one of the most relevant topics, focusing on its causes and consequences. These discussions have been part of a holistic plan to prevent suicide among people affected by conflict in Iraq.



### Feedback from a service recipient

**“** These mental health activities empowered participants from different backgrounds.  
– A young woman who recently returned to Mosul after seven years in displacement

### Feedback from two participants

**“** I have been involved in group activities with members from another community that live in the same area. I feel now that I know more about them, I trust them, and it makes me feel safer in my city.

**“** I had a child with a challenging behaviour. I used to get angry and was not sure how to deal with this problem. Attending the parenting group sessions made me realize that I am not alone in this. I benefited a lot from the other mothers who had similar experiences, as well as from the facilitator.

## Informal education and vocational training

In some IOM community centres, the communities expressed a need to have local libraries and further support to pursue their hobby of reading. IOM responded by making these services available and by organizing book clubs and literature forums which attracted a diverse group of beneficiaries. These spaces helped increase children, youth and adults' motivation to read and learn in a welcoming environment. In some sites, library rooms were used additionally as a space to provide school support to children.

## Leadership training for women and youth

Though this training, women and youth were empowered to be active members of their community, speak up to affirm their rights, and start their own initiatives.

## Psychosocial support awareness raising campaigns training for volunteers

Young volunteers were trained in MHPSS and the facilitation of MHPSS awareness raising campaigns. The training allowed them to conduct sessions in their communities, increasing the outreach capacity of the IOM teams.

## Training of peer support outreach volunteers

In some IOM locations, peer support outreach workers expressed interest in learning how to provide psychosocial support to their communities. IOM MHPSS teams organized basic skills training such as active listening, empathy, non-judgmental support and communication skills to enable these volunteers to fulfil their interest without doing further harm to their communities.

## Vocational training

As a part of engaging the community and building active social networks of support, IOM organized regular knitting, hairdressing, accessories making, calligraphy, and maintenance of mobile phones and electric devices courses. Vocational training has offered a space for people to connect with others, learn new skills, and develop their confidence and self-efficacy. As one of the most demanded IOM activities, IOM's MHPSS team uses these activities to further engage participants in other MHPSS services and identify individual cases in need of additional support.

Notably, some participants started their own business or became employed after completing the courses,

increasing their ability to support themselves and their families and building their resilience. The end of vocational training was usually celebrated with an event to bring the community together and showcase what the beneficiaries have learned. IOM MHPSS teams conduct regular community consultations to identify the most relevant vocational training in different communities.



A young man learns tailoring in an MHPSS tailoring course in a camp setting. © IOM Iraq

### Feedback from a participant

*“Being the head of our household with two children, I fill the role of being a mother and a father at the same time. When there were issues around the tent that required electrical maintenance, I had to look for someone to help me out. But now, after attending IOM’s electrical maintenance sessions, I can depend on myself to get things done. These sessions helped me set up electrical circuits within the tent and carry out maintenance work for the cooler. I feel happy because now I have become more self-confident, I can rely on myself, and I can also help my neighbours and other families in the camp.”*

*– A young mother in Hassan Sham U3 camp*

## Music activities

Music activities have been used by IOM to reduce stress, regulate mood, enhance concentration and learning, achieve self-awareness, connect with others and express emotions. Adults and children from different communities participate in courses to use traditional musical instruments and perform in public to their communities.

## Language courses

Literacy, English, Turkmen, Kurdish and Arabic classes are offered for children and adults. These courses support the integration in new areas of displacement and schools, enhance cultural knowledge and understanding, and help small children who grew up in occupied areas learn their mother language.

## Recreational activities, and arts and crafts

Recreational activities provided by IOM can include but are not limited to poetry, storytelling, interactive theatre, dancing, board games, crafts, glass painting, embroidery, knitting, wood carving, baking, beading, pottery, painting and drawing. These activities are used to create safe spaces for the community to come together, improve an individual's self-esteem and communication skills, and promote awareness on mental health, psychosocial support and overall social cohesion. These activities are especially useful for children, as they support the development of their cognitive skills, enhance psychomotoricity, and provide them an opportunity to express their feelings without words. Additionally, these types of activities are often used to support people with disabilities.

### Feedback from participants

**“** Theatre is very important to me. Through theatre, I can express social issues that concern society. We wanted to create a play that would reflect the psychosocial impact of domestic violence and look for ways to address and reduce this phenomenon. IOM helped us with this.



Internally displaced women engaged in community and family support sewing and knitting sessions. © IOM Iraq

## Sports-based MHPSS activities for all

Sports-based MHPSS activities aimed to support youth and adults in accessing sports facilities, helping them nurture their physical well-being and realize its connection with positive emotional health, along with bringing them together further activating their social networks. Across several locations, the participants attended regular sports sessions offered by a professional trainer. The MHPSS team members supported the trainer and the participants by conducting weekly focus group discussions on the importance of physical activities in mental health in a confidential and safe context. The introduced MHPSS topics included body-mind connection, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, negative mood, self-esteem, body perception, cognitive functions, mental alertness, sleeping problems, tiredness, and resilience.

### Feedback from a participant

**“** Sports are good for mental and physical health and I am very happy to have met such a wonderful group of friends now.

– A 14-year-old boy who participated in recreational activities at Kabarto IDP camp in Duhok



IDP youth engage in a recreational soccer activity implemented by the MHPSS programme. © IOM Iraq

## Life skills building sessions

IOM facilitated different life skills sessions for adults, youth and the elderly, focused on topics selected by each group and including self-confidence building, problem solving, time management, perseverance skills, adapting to change, simple communication skills and others. These sessions supported community members in displacement and return areas to regain confidence and develop essential psychosocial life skills that enhance their daily lives and engagement with others.

Other courses provided by IOM include computer classes, teaching methods, self-regulation, parenting sessions, general knowledge, self-awareness, self-care, adolescent's development, life-skills and PFA.

## RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL EVENTS

Celebrating and commemorating special events is an important part of the daily life in Iraq. IOM's MHPSS programme supports local communities in organizing celebrating special events to ensure that yearlong traditions, that bring joy and connection, are maintained. Other international days commemorating a cause, or an event are also used by IOM to raise awareness and open community-level discussions on a wide array of topics.

### Ramadan and Eid – April and May 2022

In some IOM community centres where Ramadan is celebrated, smaller groups of women and girls came together to celebrate and bake sweets for both special occasions. In Kirkuk, the MHPSS team brought together a group of community members to celebrate and bake sweets for both occasions. The community members baked and packaged sweets which they later distributed in the community. With each sweet basked, IOM shared awareness raising flyers on stress management and self-care.

### Yazidi New Year

IOM's MHPSS teams in Sinjar and Duhok visited Yazidi families to celebrate Yazidi New Year in April, distributing colourful eggs and sweets in an aim to maintain cultural traditions and connection with the community. The family members visited were happy to receive IOM teams and presents on this important day.

## INTERNATIONAL DAYS

### International Youth Day

In Kirkuk, IOM's MHPSS team, in collaboration with the Directorate of Youth and Sport, organized an International Youth Day celebration, focused on psychosocial well-being and the environment. The MHPSS staff led a youth gardening group activity with youth from the community who volunteered to clean the youth center's garden.

### World Children's Day

On 20 November, IOM celebrated World Children's Day in Eitha, Ghanous and Sheikh Hamad villages. The international day was dedicated to promote international togetherness, awareness among children worldwide, and improving children's welfare. In line with this, the MHPSS team in Salah Al Din governorate conducted related events to increase community awareness on the importance of promoting children's mental health well-being. Children in each area were invited to take part in fun activities at the MHPSS centres where key messages on emotional well-being were disseminated. Special focus was given to adolescent girls who were invited to group discussions about their role in the community, the challenges they face and their mental health wellbeing. Success stories and positive examples of women in the community and other international figures that were able to overcome prevailing difficult circumstances were also shared with them.



*Ultimately, the main aim of those activities was to rekindle the inherent strengths, resilience and uniqueness of children in this community.*

*– IOM's MHPSS programme officer overseeing IOM's activities in the governorate*

### World Mental Health Day

October 10 marked World Mental Health Day, dedicated to raising awareness on mental health issues and mobilizing efforts to support better mental health around the world. This year's theme was "Making Mental Health and Well-being for All a Global Priority." IOM conducted a series of events and activities to mark the day in numerous communities across Iraq.

## Salah Al Din

In Salah Al Din's Eitha and Ganous villages, where cycling has been identified among the most common interests of youth, the MHPSS team organized a bicycle race for community members. It is well known that exercise can contribute to improved mental well-being and provides an opportunity for the strengthening of community bonds.

During consultations with women in Shirqat district, many shared fun childhood experiences of flying kites and the sense of joy and freedom that it brought. For World Mental Health day, IOM's MHPSS team supported this group of women and others to reconnect with this activity, providing materials necessary for kite-making and hosting a kite-flying afternoon. In addition to its physical health benefits, kite flying can improve mental and emotional health by creating the opportunity for fun and connecting with nature.

## Kirkuk

To mark World Mental Health Day in Kirkuk, IOM led a Mental Health event in coordination with DoH. The event brought together community members, mental health actors and others to discuss community mental health needs and services in Kirkuk. The event featured speeches by the DoH and IOM, highlighting the vital role of mental health for individuals and families. During the event, IOM raised awareness through a short play by volunteers on mental health and its impact on society, and a group of young children performed a local song with different mental health messages. The event closed with a mental health awareness debate and an open discussion on mental health needs and gaps in Kirkuk, and how to minimize stigma and the fear to speak up on mental health issues.



IOM World Mental Health Day event in Kirkuk. © IOM Iraq



A group of MHPSS staff and activity participants during a visit to Lalish on World Mental Health Day. © IOM Iraq

## Ninewa

Across Iraq, the IOM MHPSS programme is committed to protect the mental health and well-being of front-line workers who directly engage with and support affected communities. This is why several IOM MHPSS teams in Ninewa governorate chose to offer self-care and mental health and well-being activities on World Mental Health Day, to local partner, civil society, NGO and INGO staff, as well as for staff working in schools and primary health care centres.

For example, in Hassan Sham U3 Camp for IDPs – where IOM implements a variety of projects – the MHPSS team conducted an interactive session with staff from partner organizations on the importance of self-care and building skills to effectively deal with work-related burnout. At the Hamdaniyah primary health care centre – where IOM provides specialized services - IOM invited healthcare staff to join a discussion on identifying signs of burnout, tips on practicing self-care and how to focus on mental health wellbeing on a daily basis. The team delivered a similar session for health care staff in Nimrud.

## Duhok

To commemorate World Mental Health Day among the Yazidi community, IOM Iraq organized event in Lalish – site of the Yazidis' holiest temple. Event participants visited seven locations in Lalish, before taking part in a discussion on mental health and psychosocial well-being provided by IOM's MHPSS team. Baba Chawish, an influential Yazidi religious leader, welcomed the group and delivered a speech encouraging participants to turn to their inner peace during times of stress. The day's events were attended by 10 Yazidi families from the in Qadia camp for IDPs in Duhok. The participants included children, youth, persons with disabilities and survivors of ISIL crimes with MHPSS needs. Prior to the visit, IOM conducted a consultation session with the participants to ensure that the plan of the day and visit was in line with their expectations, ensuring that they would feel comfortable during the visit.

### Feedback from a participant

**“** It is the first time that my two children, a girl and a boy, have visited this special place [Lalish]. They were always asking us to bring them here, but due to the economic challenges, we could not do it. It was the first time they didn't feel dizzy while travelling in the bus because they were so excited about coming here.

## Anbar

On World Mental Health day, the MHPSS teams in Fallujah and Al-Qaim districts focused on disseminating awareness raising messages to individuals seeking medical support at primary health care centres and in the Faulljah general hospital. Because the role of healthcare workers in supporting communities cannot be overlooked, the team also invited healthcare workers to join a session on the importance of self-care and how to prevent work related burnout.

## Celebrating the three-year anniversary of the IOM MHPSS Khanke community centre

In July 2022, the MHPSS programme organized a ceremony to mark the three-year anniversary of the IOM psychosocial support centre in the Khanke, Duhok. The event featured music from a band comprised of MHPSS beneficiaries, performing traditional songs as

well as a theatre performance by beneficiaries and members of the IOM field team. The theatre highlighted the importance of community support. The event also hosted drawing and handicraft exhibitions, and a tashi (a traditional way of making a thread by spindles) was presented by elderly women from the community. The ceremony was attended by DoH representatives, representatives of the local police, local organizations and community members, raising awareness about mental health well-being and the important role that the community can play in strengthening the mental health and psychosocial well-being of families and individuals.

## MHPSS street festival in Duhok

The MHPSS team in Duhok organized an MHPSS Street Festival in collaboration with the Directorate of Health and two civil society organizations that IOM supports, Rusaz and Better World Organizations, on December 12 in the Newroz Park of Duhok. The festival was open to the public and aimed to increase awareness of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing through various art-based activities, including paintings, handcrafts, music, and theater, as well as short videos introducing some psychosocial challenges and disorders, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD. The videos were played on a large screen in the park as well as on tablets that the festival visitors could watch during the day. During the day, there were also group sessions to raise awareness, and the MHPSS team gave out informational flyers to people in the community who were interested in learning more about IOM's MHPSS services.



## WELCOME TO MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL

### SUPPORT (MHPSS) STREET FESTIVAL!

An Awareness Raising Campaign by the MHPSS Team of IOM Iraq and Duhok Directorate of Health

12-12-2022, Duhok – Newroz Park  
10:30am – 03:15pm

بخيربهين بو فيسنه ملا لسر جادت ب نافتي  
ساخته مينا دهروونى و پالپشتيا دهروونى و جفاكى

کەمپینا بلندکرنا هشيارىت زلائى تىما ساخته مينا دهروونى و پالپشتيا  
دهروونى و جفاكى يازىخراوا IOM با عىراقت دەكل رېفەدەرىا  
ساخته مينا پارىزىكەدا دەھەتكىن

12-12-2022, پاركاجۇزى - كەوهە  
10:30am – 03:15pm



Youth perform traditional songs at the three-year anniversary celebration of IOM's psychosocial support center in Khanke. © IOM Iraq



Elderly women perform tashi at the three-year anniversary celebration of IOM's psychosocial support center in Khanke. © IOM Iraq



# Awareness, Advocacy and Supporting Access to Basic Services

IOM Iraq's MHPSS team supports beneficiaries' access to basic services through awareness raising, advocacy, referrals and coordination with other international and local organizations, and governmental authorities. This is pertinent to all activities due to the challenging living conditions experienced in areas of displacement and return where IOM operates. By IOM facilitating access to basic services and awareness raising, there is less pressure on the other levels of intervention.

In coordination with local communities, camp management and other international and local organizations, IOM identifies the needs of the target population, involves the local community in the development of services and informs them about updated service availability. Additionally, IOM coordinates to refer beneficiaries to appropriate service providers and advocates for their needs when services are available. IOM's MHPSS team coordinates referral to other internal units and programmes such as livelihoods, protection, legal assistance and health whenever appropriate.

In anticipation of starting activities in Baaj, Qayrawan and Al-Qaim in Ninewa and Anbar governorates in early 2022, IOM's MHPSS team coordinated with the local Directorate of Health, youth groups, and other relevant stakeholders to begin a rapid MHPSS needs assessment in the areas of intervention.

## MHPSS needs assessments and community consultations

In 2022, IOM conducted MHPSS needs assessments in Baaj, Qayrawan, Kirkuk, Jeddah 1 centre and Al-Qaim. IOM also published a 2021-developed MHPSS needs assessment from Basra. Each assessment outlines the existing MHPSS needs, the perceived causes of these needs, coping strategies, and gaps in service provision. The assessments examine the respondents' relationships with their families and community members to understand the impact of social relations on mental health and psychosocial well-being. The MHPSS programme conducts regular needs assessments to inform and adapt interventions and to advocate for increased services in areas of high need and with limited services available.

In addition to the assessments, IOM conducted frequent community consultations in displacement and return areas where the programme implements services. The purpose of these consultations has been to understand immediate and changing community needs and to respond to those through targeted and integrated MHPSS support. Consultations ensure that the MHPSS programme activities are relevant to the community, meaningful and effective in improving mental health and psychosocial well-being.



**28,173**  
awareness raising services



**206**  
coordination meetings



**131**  
referrals to basic services  
and other service providers



**50**  
ICRS registrations



IOM MHPSS needs assessments in Basra, Jeddah 1 center, and Kirkuk. © IOM Iraq

## MHPSS RESEARCH PROJECTS

The MHPSS programme conducts regular research on topics relevant to mental health and psychosocial support in Iraq. In February 2022, IOM published<sup>7</sup> an article in the Intervention Journal on the perceptions of climate change and its cases and impacts on mental health among IDPs in Iraq. The findings were presented in an online webinar in September organized by the Intervention Journal. The research study included IDPs in both Duhok and Ninewa and findings show that many of the surveyed individuals are aware of the causes of climate change and its impacts, having personally suffered from them. The research showed that extreme hot weather conditions negatively influence psychosocial well-being in Ninewa, causing increased anxiety, a reduced ability to concentrate on tasks and reduced levels of sleep and mood status. In Duhok, the assessment underscored a higher level of increased irritability than in Ninewa. Recommendations based

on the findings, to local and international humanitarian organizations, local and national government institutions, include awareness raising on causes and consequences of climate change, diversifying humanitarian and development interventions to consider the impacts of extreme weather conditions, while activating and strengthening social support mechanisms.

IOM also conducted an impact assessment to evaluate the relevance and impact of IOM's MHPSS and Livelihood Integration (MLI) projects. The assessment looked at how MHPSS integration for livelihood participants can strengthen psychosocial life skills and promote mental health well-being and social connections among Iraqi IDPs, returnees and other vulnerable members of the community. The research is expected to be published in 2023.

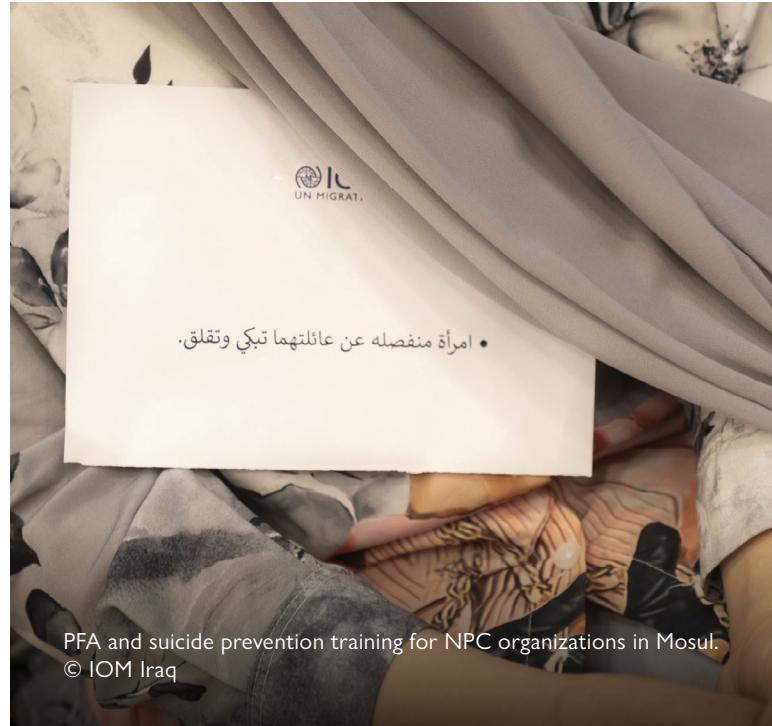
<sup>7</sup> Assessment of perceptions of climate change and its causes and impacts on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing among a group of internally displaced persons in Iraq. Marzouk, H. A., Duman, Y., Meier, J., Lashkri Khudhur, Q., and Alani, O. (2022). Assessment of perceptions of climate change and its causes and impacts on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing among a group of internally displaced persons in Iraq. *Intervention*, 20(1), 98-106.



## IOM CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

### The Working Committee on MHPSS capacity building and human resources management

IOM was selected to chair the Working Committee on MHPSS capacity building and human resources management in July 2019 and continued to play an active leading role in capacity building for MHPSS actors' country wide in 2022. As a part of its commitment to the MHPSS Technical Working Group (TWG) members, IOM trained 41 staff members from national and international NGOs from the National Protection Cluster (NPC) on Psychological First Aid and suicide awareness, prevention and response. The training locations were recommended by the NPC, which noted that the areas of training are among those that have the highest need for PFA and suicide prevention training, including Ninewa (Mosul), Kirkuk (Kirkuk), Duhok (Duhok), Anbar (Ramadi and Fallujah) and Salah Al Din (Tikrit) and Kirkuk. Participants' feedback was overall positive and all training objectives were met.

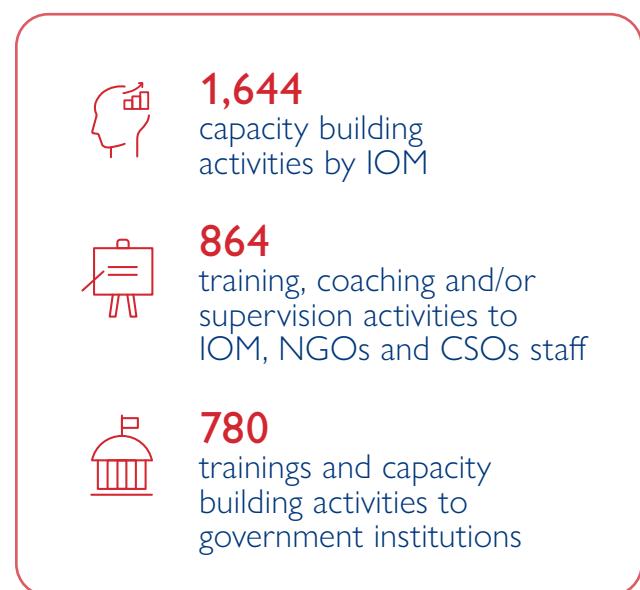


## Capacity building activities for IOM staff and partners

IOM recognizes the need for capacity building in Iraq, particularly for MHPSS field workers, stakeholders and CSOs. For several years, this has been one of the strategic priorities for the MHPSS programme in Iraq. To address some of these needs, IOM organized a series of training sessions for different groups, including IOM MHPSS and non-MHPSS teams, governmental entities, community leaders, CSOs and other national and international organizations. A total of 223 training sessions were delivered to 479 individuals. Topics ranged from suicide prevention and awareness raising, care givers support, disability inclusion, MHPSS for GBV survivors, to PFA and basic helping skills in MHPSS. The below are examples of training sessions conducted in 2022:

- IOM delivered a round of training sessions on MHPSS case management for GBV survivors to 18 national IOM MHPSS and CSO staff members in Duhok. The training content was developed by the MHPSS programme and introduced concepts of PFA and emphasized the importance of applying a survivor-centered approach when it comes to MHPSS case management for GBV survivors.
- IOM organized a comprehensive four-day MHPSS training for the DoH's Women Empowerment Department (WEPD) in Erbil. This training focused on PFA, self-care and MHPSS awareness raising. Participants included 20 WEPD focal points from Baghdad, Diyala, Salah Al Din, Kirkuk, Anbar, Babylon and Karbala DoH, as well as the forensic medicine departments.
- IOM delivered a three-day counselling strategies ToT for IOM psychologists and social workers. The training was held to refresh counselling knowledge, introduce new approaches in counselling, support staff in designing and implementing more effective counselling sessions, and increase their capacity in delivering supervision to staff.
- IOM delivered a three-day capacity building training on the inclusion of storytelling and conflict analysis and resolution in MHPSS interventions to MHPSS staff based in Kirkuk and West Ninewa. The training aimed to diversify the staff's approach to interpersonal psychosocial problems and challenges and help them become more competent and creative in supporting the beneficiaries by adopting tools and approaches in conflict analysis and resolution.
- An external disability inclusion consultant trained IOM's MHPSS field teams rigorously on disability inclusive MHPSS programming. Field teams in camp settings also received several coaching sessions related to disability inclusion and disability inclusive MHPSS services.
- IOM delivered a one-day training on suicide prevention and response to humanitarian actors operating at the Jeddah 1 centre, including CCCM, Legal and Protection actors. 16 representatives from different organizations joined. The training aimed to improve suicide awareness, response and referrals in Jeddah 1 and led to the drafting of standard operation procedures for suicide prevention and response at the centre.
- IOM delivered a multitude of PFA trainings throughout 2022, including for staff from different IOM units, such as Protection, Tribal Engagement, Durable Solutions and others. These training sessions provided an overview of the main actions of PFA and ways to apply them in different situations and to people with differing needs. The training also included an MHPSS service orientation and information on safe referrals to facilitate easy referrals at field level.
- IOM delivered a ToT on supporting caregivers' skills to MHPSS staff in Kirkuk who later delivered the training to teachers, school counsellors, local authorities and key community members in an effort to increase knowledge and awareness of MHPSS issues, ultimately increasing local capacity to support people in need, including IDPs, returnees and other vulnerable members of the host community. Topics of the training included the effects of community violence on caregivers, effects of harsh physical punishment on children, tips on positive discipline practices, promoting mental health well-being of caregivers, common child and adolescent behavioural and emotional issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, and dealing with common community predicaments such as bullying and discrimination, excessive phone and internet and early child marriage.

- The MHPSS programme delivered a training on PFA and the psychosocial stressors of migration and return to IOM Protection staff working in the assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programme.
- IOM's MHPSS teams were trained on IOM's MHPSS case management tools.
- IOM delivered a ToT to 8 MHPSS field staff on the MHPSS and Livelihood Integration (MLI) approach and respective manual. The training ensured that MHPSS staff across locations can implement MHPSS activities that are tailored for livelihood project participants and train others on the approach and programming type. The ToT trained staff went on to deliver a 3-day MHPSS and Livelihood integration training to 51 IOM MHPSS field staff.
- IOM's MHPSS team delivered a range of training sessions for IOM Belarus healthcare personnel to address the MHPSS needs of stranded migrants at the Belarussian-Polish borders returning to Iraq. The training was conducted remotely by technical MHPSS staff and comprised of PFA, emotional support and basic helping skills.
- IOM's technical team also delivered an MHPSS orientation workshop to field teams working in Jeddah 1 centre and Hassan Sham U3 camp to equip the staff with skills of delivering key MHPSS outreach messages to camp residents. The workshop also explored modalities of integrating psychosocial support within vocational skills courses and recreational activities.
- In collaboration with colleagues from IOM Bahrain and IOM KSA and as a part of a series of counter-trafficking trainings delivered to labour inspectors and shelter personnel in Bahrain and in Saudi Arabia, the MHPSS programme in IOM Iraq supported the other missions in their capacity building efforts by providing sessions on “Understanding Trauma and Victimization and its Impact on Victims.”



### Medical students' mental health and psychosocial support winter training

Iraq struggles with the scarcity of qualified mental health professionals, causing serious challenges to mental health services. There is limited interest in psychiatry and mental health among medical graduates across medical schools all over the country. To allow medical students and interns to explore a different angle of mental health other than the purely medicalized model, IOM developed a training for medical students focused on different MHPSS dimensions.

This workshop aims to introduce the participants to the different facets of MHPSS, with a focus on the interaction between different psychological, social and economic factors that determine the mental health and well-being of individuals and the population at large.

#### The training objectives

- Introduce medical students to the multi layered MHPSS model in humanitarian settings.
- Provide the participants with the knowledge and skills that would enable them to become mental health advocates and champions in their own communities.
- Enhance the communication, presentation and interpersonal skills of the participants to enable them to instil positive attitudes about mental health through public engagement.

In 2022, 10 medical students and interns from medical schools across Iraq participated in this week-long training. Some of them organized training workshops for their peers in their local medical schools to pass on the knowledge gained in IOM's training.

### Building the capacity of local CSOs

Over the past years, IOM's MHPSS programme has been supporting various local CSOs through in-kind and capacity building assistance and training. In 2022, one of these CSOs graduated from IOM support, namely the DAK organization, and was able to take over the operations of the IOM psychosocial centre in Sharya, Duhok.

In 2018, IOM began to support DAK organization, a local CSO based in Duhok. Assistance was provided through MHPSS and project management capacity building in an effort for the CSO to provide MHPSS services in Sharya town. The initial capacity building focused on technical MHPSS topics and introduced DAK to organizational and project management. Soon after, DAK was selected to become an IOM implementing partner for the MHPSS programme. As such DAK began to provide MHPSS services, while being supported by IOM through funding as well as intensive coaching, supervision and other capacity building. In 2019, IOM further expanded its support to DAK by offering the CSO to provide their MHPSS services out of the IOM psychosocial support centre in Sharya town. Since then, through direct service implementation, DAK supported over 2,463 individuals and offered 4,337 services.

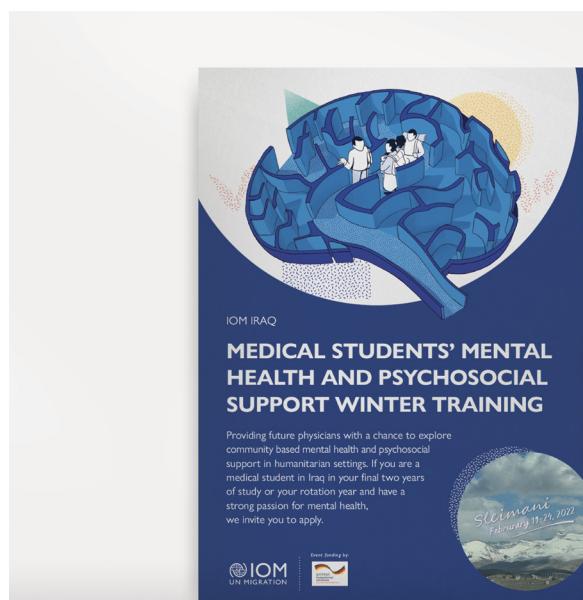
In late 2022, IOM handed over its centre to DAK. Through the partnership with IOM over the past years, DAK was able to become an independent local MHPSS service provider and able to manage their own fundraising, advocacy and organizational management.



Medical students participate in IOM's week-long MHPSS winter school.  
© IOM Iraq



Medical students participate in IOM's week-long MHPSS winter school.  
© IOM Iraq



Training announcement. © IOM Iraq

## MHPSS AS A KEY PILLAR OF COMMUNITY STABILIZATION

IOM's MHPSS programme works closely with different other programmes of the Peacebuilding and Stabilization Division, including the social cohesion units, to ensure synergy between both programmes. From a sociological point of view, there is a clear link between social cohesion activities conducted to strengthen social fabric with the second level of the IASC pyramid of intervention that focuses on community and family support.

### IOM IRAQ SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY AND ACTIVITIES

Suicide prevention has become an increasingly important component of IOM Iraq's MHPSS programming being closely associated with social cohesion and community stabilization. In recent years, there has been an increased interest in the topic of suicide prevention with government entities growing their investment in trainings, standard operating procedures on suicide prevention and response, and greater community engagement on the issue.

#### Iraq's national suicide prevention strategy

In 2022, IOM continued to play an important role in supporting Iraq to adopt its first ever national suicide prevention strategy. Since July 2019, IOM has been supporting the government of Iraq and the Ministry of Health in facilitating conversation forums with relevant mental health stakeholders to discuss the national working plan and strategy on suicide. The national working committee on suicide under the national technical MHPSS working group was formed in 2019 and 2021, a draft of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy was announced. In January 2022, IOM organized a workshop in Baghdad to convene the committee stakeholders to deliberate and agree on an initial draft strategy. This strategy was again reviewed and then finalized at an IOM-led workshop with the committee in December 2022. The final draft was approved by the committee and steps are being taken to finalize the legal procedures and approvals from the Iraqi government to ratify the strategy.



Deliberations are underway among government officials to finalize Iraq's draft Suicide Prevention strategy. © IOM Iraq

#### Suicide prevention, awareness and response

In addition, IOM has continued to lead in capacity building activities on suicide prevention, response and awareness raising, an effort that started in 2019 with a series of awareness raising and training activities. IOM's MHPSS programme in Iraq has been selected as one of the model examples in the capacity building section in WHO's "Live Life" global suicide prevention guide that was issued in June 2021 and continued to provide capacity building on suicide awareness, prevention and response in 2022.

IOM prioritized supporting the training and awareness raising components of the national suicide prevention working plan. In addition to the training mentioned in the capacity building and training chapter, IOM arranged a series of awareness raising sessions about suicide in several locations throughout Iraq, including Anbar, Duhok, Ninewa, Kirkuk and Salah Al Din.

#### Feedback from a participant

*"I am grateful for what I have learned through the suicide prevention awareness sessions that I attended. The knowledge I gained helped me provide necessary support to a friend who was suffering from suicidal thoughts. It felt good to be able to help someone else in need especially because I have experienced similar thoughts when I lost my hand during the war."*

*– Male attendee of a suicide prevention awareness session in Mosul*

## Awareness raising materials

Across locations, IOM's MHPSS teams held suicide prevention awareness sessions using an IOM developed awareness raising package that addresses different audiences such as healthcare workers, people working in schools, families who lost someone to suicide. The package also includes a general leaflet outlining common misconceptions surrounding suicide. The leaflets are available in English, Arabic, Sorani and Badini Kurdish.

## World Suicide Prevention Day Workshop at Koya University

In October 2022 to mark World Suicide Prevention Day, IOM conducted its third Suicide Prevention Conference and Workshop. This year, the event was organized in collaboration with Koya University and in partnership with Azhee Organization. 120 professionals from academic institutions, humanitarian organizations, local and national institutions, media, and civil society organizations attended the event, which included a panel on the role of religion in suicide prevention and how the community can contribute to suicide prevention. The event also allowed for participants to discuss in groups the role of (I) education and research, (II) media, (III) policy making, (IV) health, and (V) civil society and gender in suicide prevention. Following the discussion sessions, the co-leaders of each group presented the topics discussed and decisions made for the future collaboration between the stakeholders. One such possible collaboration for IOM is to conduct joint research with Koya University on perceptions of suicide and suicide prevention among youth and present the research findings at the next suicide prevention conference in 2023.



## MHPSS services in Jeddah 1 centre

An estimated 31,000 Iraqi nationals reside in Al Hol Camp in northeast Syria. The population is diverse and includes Iraqis who travelled to Syria prior to 2014; those who fled when ISIL took over their area of origin; those who crossed the border during the military campaign to dislodge ISIL from Iraqi territory; and others who arrived after remaining strongholds in Syria were recaptured. Since the first returns from Al-Hol to Jeddah 1 centre in May 2021, IOM's MHPSS programme has provided a total of 7,965 MHPSS services to the returnees, including a wide range of community-based MHPSS services in line with the different layers of intervention of the IASC pyramid.

The nature of the population residing at the Jeddah 1 centre is dynamic due to the continuous batches of families arriving at and departing from the centre to their areas of return. This calls for flexible MHPSS services adapted to meet the MHPSS needs of the community. For instance, at the time of arrival, the MHPSS team is present to provide immediate PFA, emotional support and referral services for individuals in need of other support. Following the arrival and settling in of the residents at Jeddah 1, the MHPSS team conducts services orientation outreach sessions where they inform individuals of the location of the IOM MHPSS services at the IOM Community centre, and the available MHPSS services which include specialized, non-specialized focused, and community and family support services.



With the harsh living conditions individuals faced in their time of displacement at Al-Hol, it is paramount to understand their psychosocial needs. For this, IOM conducted a rapid MHPSS needs assessment after the initial arrivals in 2021 and again in August 2022 to ensure that MHPSS service provision is adapted to the needs of the families that are returning. The assessments have also supported other actors in better understanding the psychosocial needs of the community, including non-MHPSS actors and partners in the centre such protection, health and legal services. The main objectives of the 2022 assessment were to 1) identify the needs of the residents, 2) understand the existing positive coping mechanisms and strengths of the community, 3) and to shape MHPSS programming in a way that is supportive of these mechanisms and strengths and sensitive to the community's needs.

Findings of the 2022 MHPSS needs assessment with families in Jeddah 1 centre highlights that experiencing different forms of emotional distress has been attributed

to a multitude of factors such as the exposure to traumatic and violent events prior to and during displacement, the loss of loved ones, lack of basic services and the loss of the sense of safety, all of which have been identified as key findings in the assessment. Additionally, the most common psychological manifestations encountered by the assessment respondents were feelings of sadness, anger, loss of interest, sleeping and appetite problems, along with suffering from suicidal thoughts. On the other hand, having patience, practicing problem solving skills and falling back on spiritual beliefs and religious practices were identified as the most adopted positive coping mechanisms by the respondents. With regards to the departure of the residents to their areas of return, fear of being discriminated against, refused by the receiving community and the uncertainty on whether they would be resettling at were identified as the main psychosocial needs regarding their return and reintegration within the community.



## MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT INTEGRATION

### MHPSS and Livelihood Integration (MLI) Programming

#### Why is MHPSS and Livelihood Integration important?

Integrated MHPSS and livelihood support programmes holistically consider the physical, material and emotional needs of returnees, IDPs and other members of conflict-affected communities. Integrated support provides an inclusive approach to response programming. The need to integrate MHPSS and livelihood support is especially high in countries affected by conflict. Integrated MHPSS prepares livelihood programme participants to manage and mitigate unexpected work-related stressors, strengthening their positive coping mechanisms, while at the same time building life, social and soft skills that are essential for livelihood success (e.g., teamwork, confidence building, communication or conflict resolution skills). Through group activities, integrated MHPSS promotes community support and cultivates a sense of belonging among the participants, enhancing self-and community efficacy.

#### The relevance of integrated MHPSS and livelihood support programming in Iraq

In Iraq, MHPSS and livelihood needs continue to be enormous. During the ISIL-insurgency, many Iraqis lost their livelihoods and challenges to re-establish a functioning labour market persist and complicate this issue. The IOM Iraq's needs assessment on MHPSS and livelihood integration, conducted in 2020, found that a lack of job opportunities continues to be one of the most consistent and significant challenges among the affected population, causing anxiety and distress, and thus impacting IDPs, returnees, and host communities' mental health and well-being. Given the immense need for livelihood support and the heightened mental health and psychosocial challenges among the population, the integration of MHPSS and livelihood support has been highly relevant to empower vulnerable Iraqi's to engage in livelihood projects, strengthening their emotional well-being and resilience at the same time.

Based on the findings of the mentioned assessment, the MHPSS programme in Iraq developed an MHPSS and Livelihood integration approach in 2021, called

MLI, which has since been implemented through several projects. In 2022, IOM implemented 15 MLI projects including in Ninewa (Mosul, Hassan Sham U3 IDP camp, Jeddah 1 centre), Kirkuk (Hawija), Anbar (Fallujah and Ramadi) and Baghdad (Baghdad city and Abu Gharib). IOM reached 1063 persons (647 women; 415 men) across Iraq through MLI projects, providing 3097 MLI services.

In coordination with IOM's Transition and Recovery Division (TRD), the MHPSS programme integrated MHPSS activities into existing livelihood projects. MHPSS activities were combined either with individual livelihood assistance or Cash for Work activities. Where TRD has not been present with livelihood projects and in vulnerable displacement settings, the MHPSS programme has developed stand-alone MLI projects consisting of a vocational livelihood workshop that integrate MHPSS. In 2022, this approach was implemented in Hassan Sham U3 camp and Jeddah 1 centre in Ninewa, including carpentry, baking and tailoring workshops.



Tea cakes made by MLI workshop participants in Hassan Sham U3 camp.  
© IOM Iraq

The MLI approach developed by IOM Iraq integrates one MHPSS awareness session at the beginning of a livelihood programme or workshop, followed by three to five peer-support group sessions focused on building livelihood-related life, social and soft skills and request-based individual counselling. Each integrated session is tailored to the specific participant group and applies the MLI approach defined in the IOM-Iraq developed MHPSS and Livelihood Integration manual.

To ensure capacity-building and continued learning in 2022, 74 livelihood and MHPSS staff were trained on the MLI approach and programming. In addition, IOM's MLI team delivered a Training of Trainers (ToT) to 8 MHPSS field staff on the MLI approach and respective manual. The training ensured that MHPSS staff across locations can implement MHPSS activities that are tailored for livelihood project participants and train others on the approach and programming. In a subsequent MLI workshop, the ToT trained staff delivered a 3-day MHPSS and Livelihood integration training to 51 IOM MHPSS field staff.

### Results and impact

In 2022, livelihood participants reported high satisfaction with the integrated MHPSS support and found the sessions relevant to their professional and personal lives. According to participant feedback across locations, the MHPSS sessions have enabled and improved positive thinking and improved motivation to work. Participants also reported having gained increased self-esteem and confidence in themselves and their work. Importantly, the integrated MHPSS has continued to improve the participants' ability to adapt to new or changing situations at work using the positive coping mechanisms developed during MHPSS sessions.

Similar to 2021, participant feedback continued to highlight that the MHPSS group activities provided an important safe space to build lasting connections, relationships and support networks among different community members. Creating these strong social support networks and relationships that go beyond the MHPSS sessions are a primary objective of MHPSS integration into livelihoods in Iraq.

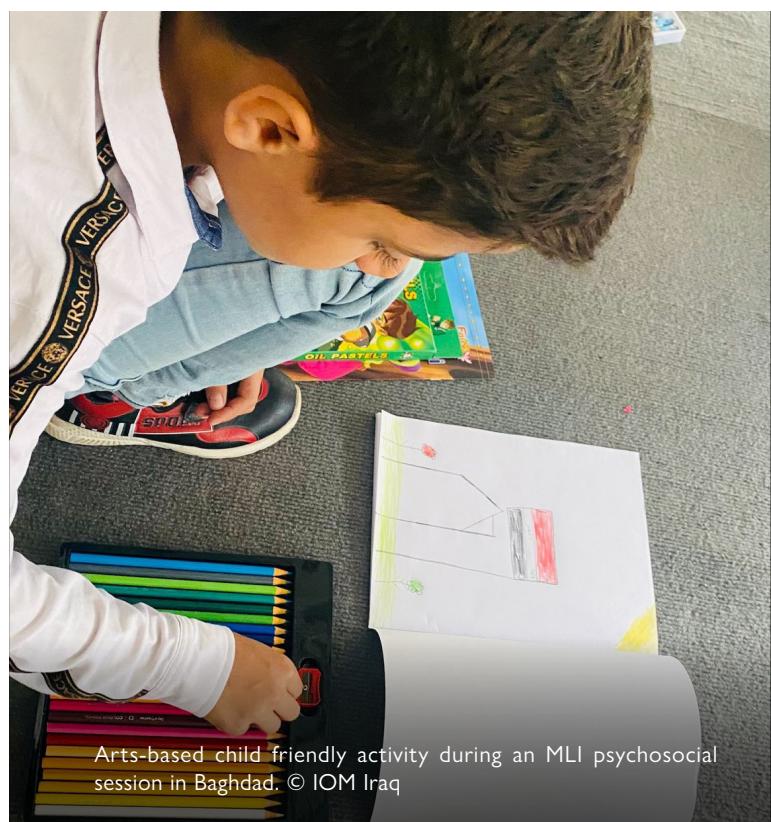
In 2022, IOM conducted an impact assessment to better understand the impact that the integrated programming has had on service recipients. The results will be

published in 2023. Additionally, and throughout 2022, IOM published an **MHPSS and Livelihood Integration series** to highlight the experiences of MLI participants and what the integrated support has meant to them and their families.

**In 2022, MLI projects became especially relevant in return contexts, where returnees and host community members can benefit considerably from combined MHPSS and livelihood assistance and its positive impact on strengthened community relationships and support networks.**



MLI awareness session in Baghdad. © IOM Iraq



Arts-based child friendly activity during an MLI psychosocial session in Baghdad. © IOM Iraq



## Feedback from a young mother\*

When I heard about the carpentry and MHPSS training, I loved the idea. I told my husband about the carpentry workshop; 'It is a man's job' he said. But I said I would love to participate anyways, and he said okay. I don't like to sit idle. I love to be productive. I have done a tailoring course as well before — but it was carpentry that I fell in love with.

There is something satisfying about cutting and making items out of wood. I can make chairs, tables, stools. When I am in the workshop, I forget about my pains. I used to cry a lot before, and that made the kids sad too. They kept asking me why I cried, why I felt sad most of the time. All that's gone now. Now when I return from the workshop, they come to me and kiss me.

Self-confidence is the first step if you want to succeed in anything. Before participating, I had no energy to do anything. My thoughts were scattered. I couldn't focus on anything. Now I have assigned time for everything. I know what to do and when.

*The skills I learned can be applied in everything, especially in a workspace.*

\* Feedback from a young mother of six and displaced with her children at Hassan sham U3 camp in Ninewa.



## Feedback from a young IDP\*\*

I am a person who likes learning, and when I heard about this training that combines livelihoods skills and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), I immediately applied.

For the livelihoods part, it was a carpentry workshop during which I learned how to use different carpentry tools. I can now make chairs, tables, stools, closets. I can make stools in a matter of minutes. I feel like I want to do carpentry for the rest of my life after I return to my area of origin — either to set up my own business or work for a carpentry place because I have acquired the skills, and I have a certificate for it. This gives me a great sense of achievement. As for the MHPSS part, I learned skills that help me cope with my situation in the camp and help me organize my personal life a bit, such as time management, problem solving and more.

*For me, it was the MHPSS part that turned my life around completely.*

\*\* Feedback from a young IDP who looks after for the four children of his diseased brother, displaced from Gayara, Nineva in 2014 and who has been at the Hassan Sham U3 camp since 2017.

## Feedback from a 38-year-old single headed household mother of three participated who recently returned to Hawija and attended an MLI project

By participating in the MLI training, I learned many things, including time management and problem solving. I have dedicated time for everything now. I have time for kids, time for family meals, for family gatherings, for my training, my wife and more. And whenever I face a problem, I write it down, analyse it and ask myself why it happened in order to get to the root of the cause. Then, based on that, I propose a solution. If one solution doesn't work, I look for other solutions in this same manner. And this gives me an even greater sense of achievement.

I had no confidence in myself at first, and I saw that the sessions could boost my confidence, so I was keen to come also to have a better chance to make my business successful. After the MHPSS sessions, I feel completely new. The money I get from the livelihoods project may not be much, but it is useful, and the sessions have helped me stay more positive and taught me how to push myself to be better. I no longer ask for support from others, I can now support myself and my family.

*“The business [assistance] has helped me support my children to go to school or the hospital, and the sessions made me feel good about myself and [encouraged me] to work hard for a positive benefit and business.*

### Launch of the MHPSS and Livelihood integration manual and review workshops

In February 2022, IOM launched the MHPSS and Livelihood Integration manual, which outlines the MLI approach and modules that can be applied in MHPSS sessions tailored for livelihood participants. The launch was held in Erbil and attended by representatives of numerous local and national NGOs and agencies.

After having applied the manual in the field for several months, IOM conducted a manual review workshop with MHPSS field staff in the fall of 2022. The feedback received during this workshop and the responses that IOM received at the initial launch has consolidated and is currently integrated into a second edition of the manual, launching in 2023.



Presentations at the 2022 launch of the MLI manual. © IOM Iraq.

## MHPSS IN RETURN AND REINTEGRATION CONTEXTS



### RETURN

The most common psychosocial reactions to return are feelings of guilt, fear, frustration and shame, loneliness and helplessness. Returnees often experience a combination of these feelings as well as a sense of loss, the perception of self as a failure, disorientation and anxiety. Many returnees also experience low self-esteem, isolation, and strained family relations as well as poor community acceptance, stigma and discrimination. MHPSS services work to address these reactions, aiming to strengthen positive coping mechanisms during the return and reintegration processes.<sup>8</sup>

To support the return process through a psychosocial approach in Iraq, IOM's MHPSS programme leverages its previous work and experience in areas of return, where returnees struggle to cope with the residual stressors from displacement and the challenges faced during return and reintegration.

Since July 2020, IOM provides a range of structured and specialized MHPSS services areas of high return, including in Shirqat (Salah Al Din), and Al-Qaim (Anbar), to address the needs of the increased number of IDPs returning to these areas. IOM primarily provides MHPSS support in return areas that are characterized by the lack of MHPSS services and the scarcity of human resources trained in MHPSS.

<sup>8</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM). Reintegration Handbook – Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance. 5.11.2019: <https://publications.iom.int/books/reintegration-handbook-practical-guidance-design-implementation-and-monitoring-reintegration>.

## REINTEGRATION

To support sustainable reintegration, IOM provides community based MHPSS interventions in return locations based on MHPSS needs assessments and community consultations. MHPSS in reintegration and return contexts aims to support individuals and families in recovering their self-confidence and sense of control over their lives. MHPSS assistance works to reduce feelings of stigma, increase motivation and heighten engagement and participation in the reintegration process.

In 2023, IOM's MHPSS programme will continue the provision of community based MHPSS services in areas of high return, including in Anbar, Ninewa and Salah Al Din. The programme will continue its coordination with other actors and build local MHPSS capacity to ensure a holistic response to the needs in return and reintegration contexts.

Within the return and reintegration context, the MHPSS programme integrates FVM and AVRR subprograms.

To improve the reintegration process, IOM's MHPSS programming in Iraq offers the following:

### AT THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

The MHPSS programme strengthens local mental health systems and builds the basic MHPSS and PFA skills of local stakeholders, including medical staff, teachers, tribal leaders, law enforcement and others that are involved in the reintegration process.

### AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

MHPSS programming includes peer-support, socio-relational and cultural activities and the integration of MHPSS and livelihoods.

### AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

MHPSS assistance includes counseling, MHPSS case management and follow up, while also ensuring safe referrals to other needed services.

## MHPSS integrated into Facilitated Voluntary Movement (FVM)

In 2022, the MHPSS Programme began to collaborate closely with IOM's Durable Solutions team of the Transition and Recovery Division (TRD) to support their Facilitated Voluntary Movement (FVM) caseload with mental health and psychosocial support. Under this integrated work, MHPSS services are provided to families within the FVM projects in areas of displacement and return.

For example, in different displacement locations, including IDP camps in Duhok and Anbar, the MHPSS team has started to provide MHPSS awareness sessions to IDP families interested in returning through the FVM process. In Duhok, the MHPSS teams have also supported IDPs on 'go and see visits,' which allow the IDPs to visit their potential locations of return and see the conditions at areas of destination. During the 'go and see visits' local MHPSS teams are present to provide emotional support and PFA.

In Anbar, the MHPSS team provided awareness raising sessions, individual counselling, PFA and emotional support to returning families in areas of displacement, in an effort to improve the return experience, strengthen positive coping mechanisms and build essential psychosocial life skills to aid in the return and subsequent reintegration processes.

Once the families have returned, IOM MHPSS teams based in the areas of return follow up with the families and provide continued support when needed. In 2023, IOM will continue the integration of MHPSS services into FVM processes.

The MHPSS programme also plans to develop a toolkit focused on tailored MHPSS services for beneficiaries of the FVM approach as well as other returnees. The toolkit will include a series of relevant services that can be provided pre-return in the area of displacement and post-return in the area of destination.

## MHPSS and Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)

Because of increased demand for specialized MHPSS support among returnees who are part of IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, the MHPSS team has worked closely with IOM's Protection Division in 2022, to support returnees of the AVRR programme, including those returning from Belarus and other countries.

MHPSS services provided to AVRR returnees have included individual counselling, PFA and awareness raising. The MHPSS programme has also integrated MHPSS components into AVRR-led Socio-Economic Orientations (SEOs). IOM's technical MHPSS team developed specific awareness raising materials for such SEOs in an effort to best support the returning individuals, strengthening their mental health well-being and coping mechanisms. In 2022, SEO sessions with integrated MHPSS sessions have been implemented in Duhok, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Baghdad. Feedback from participants has been positive and they reiterated the importance of delivering repeated sessions that discuss mental health topics, such as coping with stress and managing difficult emotions. Connecting with other individuals in similar situations and sharing experiences has also been perceived as positive by returning participants.

**“** No one has spoken to us about these topics before; about how we feel as a group. We need this kind of psychosocial support as well, not only financial and livelihood support.

– A participant in the MHPSS session within the SEO

Within the SEOs, many returnees shared their feelings and thoughts on the challenges they faced since their return to Iraq, especially those returning from Belarus. Most of them have experienced harsh conditions during their time away, which has negatively impacted their well-being, self-efficacy and daily functioning.

**“** From the time I returned (to Iraq), I feel that I am not okay. I sleep only for 2 hours every day.

– A participant in the MHPSS session within the SEO

The uncertainty of the future for themselves and their families, the financial loss and the negative comments made by some family members after their return further complicate their situation and some of the returnees have requested to receive more specialized MHPSS support such as individual counselling and psychiatric consultations.

**“** We all need support after what we have faced there (Belarus).

– A participant in the MHPSS session within the SEO



Psychosocial outreach session during a departure day in the AAF informal site. © IOM Iraq

## DISABILITY INCLUSIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

In 2022, the IOM MHPSS programme invested significantly in the capacity building of its field teams in developing and implementing disability inclusive activities. The MHPSS programme was committed to ensure the provision of disability inclusive MHPSS services across locations. In the beginning of the year, MHPSS teams in Kirkuk, Mosul and Hassan Sham U3 camp met with a disability inclusion specialist to share their challenges and discuss different opportunities for disability inclusion in their respective locations. Later in the year, IOM MHPSS team leaders and psychologists from different locations met to exchange their experiences, share the challenges they have faced and solutions they have created to ensure disability inclusive services. This process was overseen by the same disability inclusion specialist who provided further guidance. These continued conversations and experience exchanges have allowed MHPSS staff to better understand how to safely and meaningfully integrate persons with disabilities into MHPSS activities, how to support caregivers, and raise awareness about the inclusiveness of MHPSS services.

To further promote disability inclusion, representatives of all IOM MHPSS field teams came together for a three-day workshop on disability inclusive MHPSS, engagement of persons with disabilities and how to integrate persons with varied and complex disabilities meaningfully across MHPSS services.

### Feedback from one of IOM's psychologists

**“** Participating in the Disability Inclusive MHPSS workshop expanded our knowledge on how to integrate people with disabilities in our MHPSS sessions and activities. The training provider and facilitator was a brave woman with vision impairment which made the workshop even more impactful. There is no one better qualified to understand how persons with disabilities can be included in programming than persons with disabilities themselves.

– IOM MHPSS psychologist



## Integrating a young boy with a disability into MHPSS services – A success story from Qaim, Anbar

In Al-Qaim, Anbar an 11-year-old boy with down syndrome had been avoiding all kind of social interaction due to repeatedly bullying in and outside of his family. Under the supervision of his mother, his little sister had been participating in child group sessions provided by the IOM MHPSS team in Al-Qaim. After witnessing the activities and interacting with the staff on site, the mother reached out to the MHPSS team and informed them of her son's condition. She inquired whether the MHPSS team could support him.

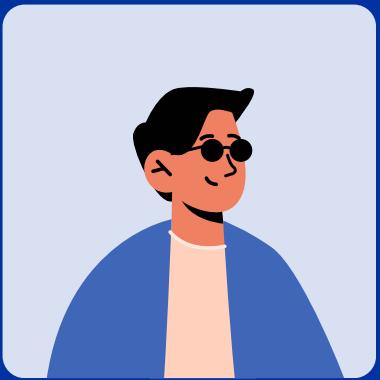
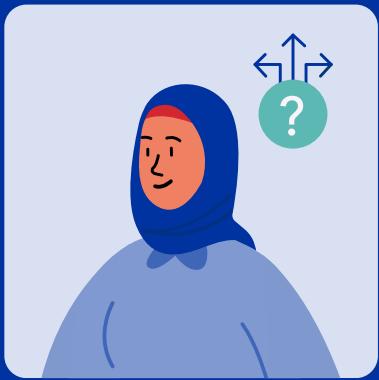
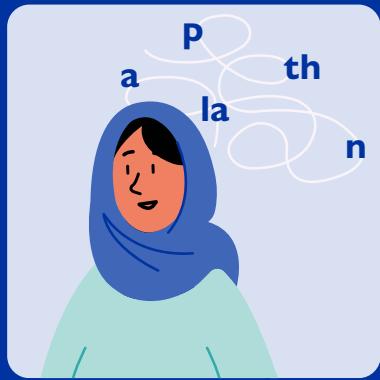
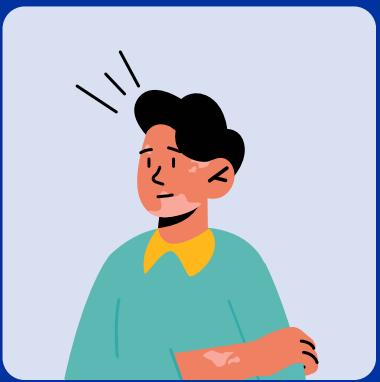
Accordingly, the team provided psychoeducation sessions to the family on his disability and shared information about the behavioural issues that he could encounter, while sharing practical tips with his family members on how to deal with these challenges in case they arise. The family was encouraged to allow the young boy to join an upcoming psychosocial art-based activity. Prior to the start of the activity, the MHPSS social worker sensitized the other children about the boy's condition and the importance of accepting neuro-diverse children, in an effort to prepare them to welcoming the young boy into the sessions. When the boy joined the session, he was embraced warmly by the other children and was included immediately. As a result, the boy felt encouraged to attend the sessions regularly and his social anxiety and overall well-being improved significantly. This was evident by his punctuality to the sessions, the level of interaction with his peers within the group and the testimony by his mother on the improvement of his well-being.

## Integrating a young man with a disability into the MHPSS team – A success story from Kirkuk

IOM's MHPSS in Kirkuk hired a young man with a disability as community focal point to support the implementation of MHPSS activities. The motivated 26-year old man had been living in the Kirkuk – Al-Jamia neighbourhood for years and often attended IOM MHPSS services. He shared: My life wasn't easy because of my disability. I have often felt ashamed and afraid of being looked at and bullied. This is why I chose to isolate myself from everyone. In 2011, I joined a youth group that provided basic humanitarian support and this work started to build my self-confidence. I always felt that I could do more for my community, and especially persons with disabilities. To do this, I knew that I needed more skills, which is why I attended time management and self-care sessions at IOM's MHPSS centre in Kirkuk. These sessions were a turning point for me. I improved my well-being and developed more self-acceptance towards myself regardless of my disability. The MHPSS sessions helped me to think more positively and deal with the problems in my life more effectively. However, it was still difficult for me to find a job because of my disability. This was until IOM's MHPSS team offered for me to join their team and help implement activities.

 *This is my message to any person with disability: If you love yourself and believe in yourself, you can do anything, never give up!*

# INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS STORIES



## Specialized support for a widow in Anbar



A 40-year-old woman who lost her husband during the ISIL liberation in Al-Qaim, becoming the primary caretaker of their daughter has been dealing with significant emotional and financial challenges that forced her to leave her home and move back in with her family. Although she expected a safe environment at her family's home, she and her daughter were exposed to a great deal of family violence especially from her brothers. This added to her distress and significantly impacted her mental health wellbeing.

She developed suicidal thoughts and eventually attempted suicide several times.

When one of her neighbours recommended the MHPSS services provided by IOM at the local primary health care center, she went for an intake assessment with a psychologist. Together with her, the psychologist developed a safety plan related to her suicidal thoughts and she was referred to the psychiatrist for specialized mental health consultations. The IOM MHPSS team also referred her to the IOM legal team to receive advice on her financial status and rights as a widow.

After the follow-up sessions with the psychiatrist and psychologist, the woman's emotional wellbeing improved, and she started to re-connect with her family. Additionally, she was able to retain her legal financial rights, which empowered her to start over, having the ability to provide for herself and her daughter.

## Overcoming adversity with the support of the MHPSS team in Bajid Kandala IDP camp in Duhok



Bullied during his childhood due to vision loss, witnessing the death of several family members including his father, and having lived in displacement for as long as he can remember, a young man sought psychiatric support several times over a time period of two years and was prescribed several medications but with minimal improvement. After being introduced to the services provided at the IOM psychosocial centre in Bajid Kandala IDP camp, they young man opted to attend individual counselling sessions, which improved his condition slowly but surely. He also started attending psychosocial life and social skills sessions and improved his stress management skills and the ability to cope with adversities.

## Art-based activities to promote resilience after loss and tragedy in Salah Al Din



When ISIL invaded Eitha village in Salah Al Din, members of the group threatened a 50-year-old man and his family because he refused to join the group. This left him and his family displaced at a nearby camp. Years later and after the liberation from ISIL, the family returned but continued to receive threats from ISIL-affiliated members. Tragically, the family's house was targeted and caused the death of the wife. Struck by the loss of his wife and the impact this had on his life, the man developed signs of depression, began to isolate himself, and became unable to perform his daily functions.

When visited by the MHPSS outreach team in Eitha village, the man received psychological first aid and was encouraged to join other MHPSS activities at the IOM psychosocial center in Eitha. Soon after, he attended counselling sessions with a psychologist at the center and discovered his passion for drawing in one of IOM's psychosocial activities. He quickly noticed that drawing was his preferred positive coping and self-care strategy. He joined an arts-based psychosocial activity and because of his unique talent and excitement to paint, he began to volunteer and facilitated several of the IOM community-led painting sessions. Since then, the man taught many other community members how to draw and paint, frequently facilitating art-based sessions for children, youth and adults. More recently, he participated in the IOM World Mental Health Day event and facilitated the painting workshop:

*I started a new page in my life.*

## Strengthening emotional wellbeing through psychosocial life skills sessions in Mosul



A 32-year-old woman who recently returned to her hometown of Mosul, after being displaced since 2014, found herself staying in her house most of the time, isolated from her community and trapped in low self-esteem. She felt marginalized and lost any motivation to engage in daily tasks or activities. Despite this, she attended a language learning course offered by the IOM MHPSS team in Mosul that included discussions about problem-solving skills, effective communications, and tips on building self-confidence. Soon

after attending these activities, the woman felt confident enough to join a local NGO as a volunteer where she began to work with children and their families. She found a way to engage with others and when she realized that some of the returnee children had not been able to resume their education in Mosul due to a lack of documentation, she started providing reading and writing lessons to these children out of her home. Although she faces worries from her family, she continues to provide these lessons outside of her home, in the remnants of a house that was destroyed during the war.

## Finding hope through individual counselling at the Hassan Sham U3 camp



When a 36-year-old mother of two first asked for help at the IOM community centre in Mosul, she complained of psychosocial problems such as low self-esteem, mood swings, loss of appetite and disturbed sleep. She also suffered from recurrent thoughts of death, and took her stress out on her children, which in turn made her feel guilty. All this impacted her mental health and her day-to-day life, which she began to address through different MHPSS services offered by IOM. She joined a tailoring skills course,

which she says: Not only helped me develop my tailoring skills, but also supported me in learning more about how to deal with stress, take care of myself and my family, and how to solve my problems. The sessions connected me with other community members who shared tips on how I can best take care of my children and deal with them in a positive way.

*I feel more stable now even if the situation is not as good as we want, but at least I know how to deal with it.*

## Vocational activities to restore mental health wellbeing in Mosul



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*I started to believe again that there are still people out there who can help me.*

## A fourteen-year-old displaced boy develops psychosocial skills and self-confidence in Duhok

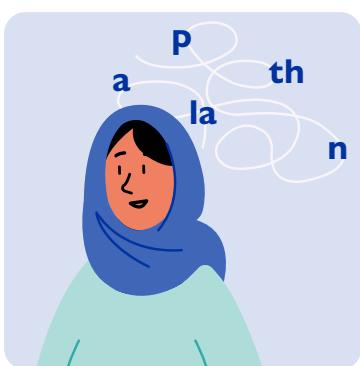


Knowing nothing else but displacement, a young 14-year-old boy has had difficulties communicating with his family, friends, and his community in general. He was shy, anxious and doubted himself. Through the IOM team in Duhok, he was able to participate in several community and family support sessions offered at the MHPSS community centre in Kabarto IDP camp, including an English language course, several life skills sessions and recreational sports activities. He noted the positive impact that these sessions had on his daily life,

enabling him to become more confident in himself: Self-confidence is one of the keys for success, and overcoming difficulties requires a good way of thinking, and I am very happy to learn these things in such a short period, and I strive to learn more wonderful things. My message to young people is to develop themselves, make good use of their time, and participate in activities - then achieving success will be easy.

*Failure does not mean the end of things; it is an attempt, and it can be repeated until success.*

## Individual mental health and psychosocial support for a young woman with a stutter



A 19-year-old woman from Mosul shares her story with a speech disability and how IOM's MHPSS team in Mosul was able to support her: I have a speech problem that has affected me since my childhood. I stutter when I talk and have been bullied during my entire childhood. The bullying was unbearable, and I dropped out of school. I became stuck in my despair, isolated, feeling blue most of the time. Many times, I wished that I did not exist, I even tried to take my own life once. I was desperate to receive any kind of help,

but my family was against it because of the stigma around mental health in my community. Regardless, because of how severe my condition was, my mother finally felt the need to seek support. We first went to the primary health care center, and they referred us to the IOM MHPSS services in Mosul. At the community center, IOM provided me with a mental health consultation and counselling. After several sessions, I started feeling better and more confident with myself.

*I was also enrolled in a tailoring and literacy skills course and my speech improved over time. The support I received made me hold on to life after losing hope for so long.*

## Overcoming shyness and social anxiety through psychosocial support in Qayrawan



11-year-old boy with vitiligo was registered in IOM's Little Friend programme in Qayrawan, West Ninewa. The boy presented with extreme shyness and isolation, and after receiving consent from his caregivers, the IOM psychologist assessed his mental health well-being. Having been bullied has negatively affected his self-confidence and pushed him to withdraw from social interactions. In addition, the boy struggled to connect with his caregivers. Together with the psychologist and his parents, the boy

designed a well-being plan to improve his condition. The plan included counselling sessions for the boy, but also the provision of psychoeducation for his family, including on caregiver skills and building a warm and a nurturing relationship with the child as well as tips on how to strengthen and improve his self-confidence. After attending several MHPSS services, the boy shared: Now I can play without covering my feet. His mother disclosed that her son was able to significantly increase his self-confidence:

*“My son never used to show any part of his body that was affected by the disease, not even at home. Now I am glad that he has crossed the line of shame after the support he and we have received.”*



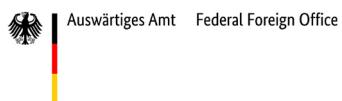
Daily life during spring in Hassan Sham U3 camp. © IOM Iraq

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