

IOM IRAQ

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME: ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

OCTOBER 2020 – DECEMBER 2021



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAF	Amiriyat Al Fallujah	NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations	PHC	Primary Healthcare Centres
CwC	Communication with Community	PM+	Problem Management Plus
DOH	Directorate of Health	PFA	Psychological First Aid
FP	Focal points	PSS	Psychosocial Support
GBV	Gender-Based Violence	PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee	rPFA	Remote Psychological First Aid
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	SC	Social Cohesion
IHCHR	Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights	ToT	Training of Trainers
IOM	International Organization for Migration	TWG	Technical Working Group
MH	Mental Health	UNITAD	United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support	WHO	World Health Organization
MLI	MHPSS and Livelihood Integration		

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

Iraq has witnessed multiple waves of conflict and violence that greatly affected millions of Iraqis for a prolonged period of time. 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 the 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 supports internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and host communities to regain a sense of safety and human security, increase self and community efficacy, encourage the creation or reactivation of social networks, and develop tools for affected communities to deal with the past and regain hope in the future. Under a larger community stabilization objective, the MHPSS programme was implemented in close collaboration with other social cohesion and protection activities.

IOM began supporting psychosocial activities in Iraq in 2010, with more comprehensive MHPSS programming implemented from 2014 onwards. The programme aimed to address the MHPSS needs in Iraq originating throughout several adverse political and humanitarian situations. The programme is now shifting more towards stabilization and recovery activities, with some of the humanitarian work to address the protracted needs of Iraq, IOM's MHPSS programme has also worked on integrating its activities into other programming such as livelihoods to ensure a cohesive, sustainable approach.

From October 2020 until the end of 2021, IOM's MHPSS programme was active in 10 governorates across the country. All IOM services were tailored to the needs of the recipients depending on their phase of displacement and

their location, in or out of camps, and in areas of return. To ensure optimal reach, MHPSS services were offered both in community centres and through mobile teams, including outreach visits in both modalities.

All IOM MHPSS services were carried out in a manner consistent with the 'do no harm' principle outlined in the Sphere project, WHO's definition of mental health, and the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services in Emergency Settings. Beneficiaries receive 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, survivors of sexual violence and torture, elderly, orphans and other groups received age and cultural appropriate support through a variety of services. In each site, groups and individuals with vulnerabilities were identified to create an individualized plan for them.

In order to provide sustainable solutions and increase the impact of interventions, IOM continued to promote awareness on mental health throughout Iraq, aiming to reduce the stigma associated with it among the population and engaging civil society in MHPSS activities. To further support sustainability, capacity building for IOM workers, staff members of the Iraqi Government, NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) is a key pillar of the programme.



MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

IOM MHPSS activities reached 15,990 new beneficiaries and provided 69,835 services between 1 October 2020 and 31 December 2021. IOM implemented 58,925 of these directly and 10,910 through its implementing partners, which are local civil society organisations (CSOs).

 New MHPSS teams in AAF, Fallujah district and Garma, Al Qaim district (Anbar governorate); two new centres in Al Eitha and Ganous villages, Shirqat district (Salah Al Din governorate) and two new MHPSS teams in West Ninewa in Baaj and Qairrywan.

 Starting the MHPSS sub-working groups in Anbar and Salah Al Din governorates and co-chairing it with Directorate of Health (DOH) and maintaining the role as chair of the national MHPSS Working Group's capacity building and human resources (HR) management committee.

 Implementation of 16 MHPSS and Livelihood Integration (MLI) projects based on 2021 MLI needs assessments in the following governorates:

- Kirkuk (Al-Abbasi, Zab, Hawija)
- Anbar (Ramadi)
- Basra (Mudaina, Al Qurna)
- Ninewa (Mosul City, Hassan Sham U3 camp, Al Ayadiyah, Tel Afar City)

 Providing MHPSS support to the Yezidi community during the process of exhumation of mass graves and the reburials in Kocho in collaboration with Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) and other national and international organizations.

 In addition to the services provided to beneficiaries, 5,197 services were provided as a capacity building or training activity to IOM staff, local and international NGO staff and other government and humanitarian partners.

 Launching the draft of Iraq's national suicide prevention strategy in June 2021.



PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION



BENEFICIARY STATISTICS

TOTAL BENEFICIARIES
139,670



BENEFICIARY GENDER



31,260



38,575

BENEFICIARY AGE



54,127



15,708

BENEFICIARY MARITAL STATUS



11,532
SINGLE



9,585
MARRIED



1,640
WIDOWED



4,000
DIVORCED



116
SEPARATED

BENEFICIARIES WITH DISABILITIES



3,092
YES



56,579
NO



521
DID NOT DISCLOSE

3,092 people with disabilities received MHPSS services between 1 Oct 2020 and 31 Dec 2021

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS OF IOM MHPSS ACTIVITIES

Between 1 October 2020 through 31 December 2021, IOM's MHPSS programme was active in nine governorates in the following locations:

Dahuk Governorate

- Qadia camp
- Dawoodia camp
- Kabarto 1 camp
- Sharya Town
- Shekhan camp
- Bajid Kandala camp
- Khanke Town
- Aqre Hospital
- Bajed Kandala camp
- Darkar PHC
- Dahuk City
- Malta PHC
- Shekhan camp
- Sumel Youth Centre

Ninewa Governorate:

- Al Ayadiyah
- Baaj
- Dawoodia camp
- Hamdaniyah
- Hassan Sham U3 camp
- Jadaa 1 camp
- Mosul City
- Qairrywan
- Shekhan camp
- Sinjar
- Sinoni
- Tel Afar
- Zummar

Baghdad governorate

- Al Ameriya PHCC
- Al Jameat PHCC
- Al Yarmouk Hospital
- Hay Sumer

Kirkuk Governorate

- Al Zab subdistrict
- Azadi General Hospital
- Hawija
- Hay Askari PHCC
- Kirkuk-Hay Al Jamia
- Panja Ali PHCC
- Yahyawa camp

Erbil Governorate

- Debaga Camp clinic
- Halwer Teaching Hospital
- Mala Fandi PHCC
- Sarej PHCC

Najaf Governorate

- Al Radhawiya
- Misan

Salah Al Din Governorate

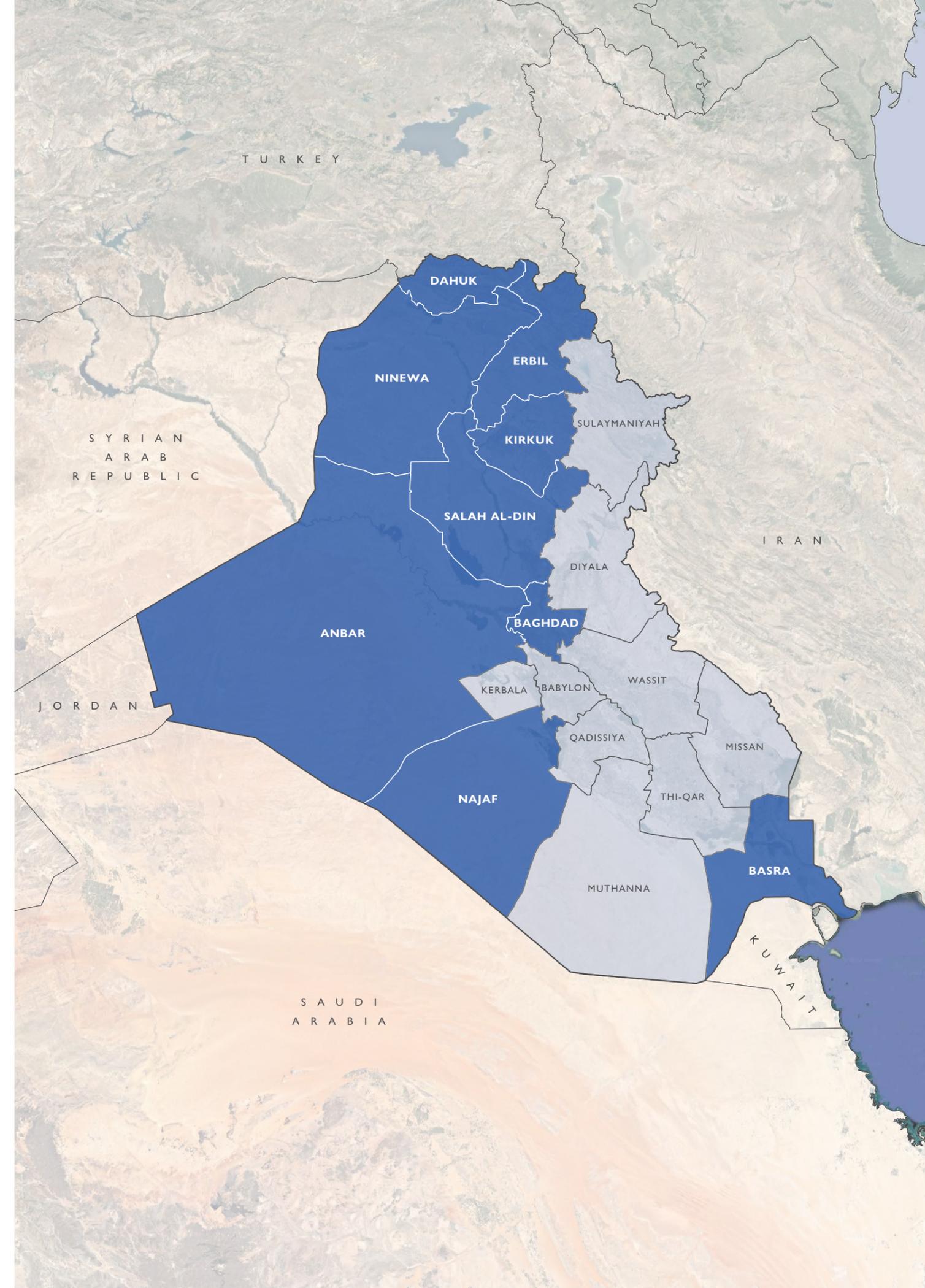
- Shirqat district: Al Eitha and Ganous villages

Anbar Governorate

- Abaalwa PHCC
- Al Ekhaa PHCC
- Al Ka'l'm
- Falluja
- Ramadi

Basra Governorate

- Abu al Khaseeb
- Al Zubair
- Basra Centre
- Mudaina
- Al Qurna



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 disorders. Psychiatrists and psychologists offered these services on a regular basis, and referrals were made to other mental health specialist when IOM services were not available.

- 6,068 specialized consultations.
- 177 referrals to other specialized services.

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.

All cases receiving these services were regularly followed up by case workers, who used psychometric tools such as: the Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ20),¹ Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ9),² and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to measure the individual's progress³. Family psychoeducation was also offered to households with people affected by mental health disorders, in order to increase their knowledge and facilitate support within existing social networks.

TESTIMONIAL FROM A SERVICE RECIPIENT'S CAREGIVER

“ I thought there is no way out of what I was feeling or going through, until I met IOM team. They supported me a lot and now I am happier with my life and less scared and anxious.”



1 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.
 2 Kroenke, K. & Spitzer, R.L. (2002). The PHQ-9: A new depression and diagnostic severity measure. *Psychiatric Annals*, 32, 509-521.
 3 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.

- 4,309 individual counselling and group support sessions.
- 5,145 emotional supportive sessions and PFA services.

Individual and group counselling were primarily offered for participants who required more structured activities in line with the MHPSS case management system which aims to provide each individual with the most appropriate service. During individual counselling sessions, the main issues observed and supported were family-related problems, adjustment challenges, anxiety, bed wetting, domestic violence, social isolation, nightmares and stress. Group counselling and group support were offered to families or groups of individuals sharing the same challenges. Frequently discussed topics were grief, difficulties expressing feelings, fear, anxiety, stress and building trust relaxation sessions were also frequently organized with group activities.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) was offered to recently displaced families in distress. This intervention helps to reduce stress symptoms and promote a healthy recovery following a highly distressful event. This evidence-based approach also helps participants develop a sense of safety and comfort along with emotional stabilization, and supports them through providing the necessary information and practical assistance in linking them with social support and other services. All IOM MHPSS staff are PFA-trained, along with IOM staff working in other units with frequent contact with IDPs.

Another tool 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.



COMMUNITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Most people of concern are able to 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 teams helped to strengthen or re-establish them. Communal celebrations, communication on positive coping strategies, informal educational activities, livelihood activities, art-based and sports-based activities, and recreational activities, aimed at improving the welfare of people of concern, building trust, and strengthening social cohesion in communities.

- 4,431 guided group discussion services.
- 2,694 social/cultural/religious activities.
- 6,099 recreational sports and arts activities.
- 5,077 life Skills development activities.

Guided group discussions

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

Group discussions were held on a monthly basis covering a wide range of topics such as, anger management, stress management, anxiety, self-care, positive thinking, effective parenting, the importance of youth in society, communication within the family, peer pressure, addictions, traditions, time management, leadership, women's rights, healthy relationships, motivation, peace building, coping mechanisms, problem solving and planning the future.

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

FEEDBACK FROM A PARTICIPANT

“ The IOM community centre has become a well-known safe haven, especially for children and women in our community. All age groups and both genders are considered in activities. I like the fact that we are involved in developing and suggesting new activities.

A MOTHER IN CAREGIVERS TRAINING

“ I have seen a change in the behaviour of my daughter. She is much more relaxed, and she told me that she talked about her nightmares in the group. She was afraid first but found the courage to share it with others.



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 reading hobby. IOM responded by making these services available through organizing book clubs and literature forums which attracted a diverse group of beneficiaries. These spaces helped to increase children, youth and adult's 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

Through 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 trainings 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 a strong interest in learning how to provide psychosocial support to their communities. IOM MHPSS teams organized basic helping skills training such as active listening, empathy, non-judgemental support and communication skills to enable these volunteers to fulfill 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 on a regular basis. Vocational trainings offer 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 activities and identify individual cases in need of additional support. Notably, some participants started their own business or were employed after completing these courses, increasing their ability to support themselves and their families.

The end of vocational trainings was usually celebrated with an event to bring the community together and showcase what the beneficiaries had learned. More recently, IOM Iraq conducted a needs assessment on MHPSS and livelihoods integration in order to find synergies and cross links between the two domains.

FEEDBACK FROM A PARTICIPANT

“ We benefited a lot from these courses to the extent that some of us got jobs within other organizations. We acquired the skills and the knowledge that paved our way to have a financial income to support ourselves and our families.

Language courses

Literacy, English, Turkmen, Kurdish and Arabic classes are offered to children and adults. These courses support the promotion of better intercultural understanding in communities, and enhance cultural knowledge and understanding.



Music activities

Music activities are used by IOM MHPSS teams 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 are given the chance to perform in public to their communities.

FEEDBACK FROM A PARTICIPANT

“ We have found a home in this community centre. We have made friends by playing instruments and singing songs. This was something that we never thought we could do after the war and our displacement. We lost our souls and we found it back through playing our songs that celebrate our heritage and our culture.

Recreational activities, and arts and crafts

Recreational activities provided by IOM 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. Such activities are especially useful for children as they support their cognitive, emotional and motor development. Additionally, these types of activities are also used to support people with disabilities.

FEEDBACK FROM A PARTICIPANT

“ After attending the drawing activity, I feel I'm able to express my thoughts and feelings.



Sports-based MHPSS activities for women

Sports-based MHPSS activities aimed to support girls and women 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. The participants attended regular fitness training sessions offered every week 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.



Religious and cultural events

Celebrating and commemorating special events is an important part of the daily life in Iraq. IOM Iraq supports local communities organize and celebrate special events to ensure years long 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. With the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions, face-to-face events were carried out on a smaller scale and in line with IOM guidelines, WHO and IOM guidelines, including physical distancing and the use of other protective measures such as wearing face masks and having sanitizers on site.

In Dahuk and Kirkuk, religious ceremonies and Eid's celebrations took place, supporting the affected population to celebrate important days in their community, enhance cultural dialogue and the sense of togetherness, such as reassuring the sen u Elias, Charshanba Sorse of identity and togetherness Ezidi community, such as Adha Xdr u Elias, Charshanba Sor and Newroz with the Ezidi community, while Ramadhan and Al -Adha Eid with the Muslim community.

On the holy month of Ramadhan, the team in both Dahuk and Kirkuk supported families of different religious backgrounds in preparing and sharing Iftar meals with their Muslim friends and neighbours.

FEEDBACK FROM THE IFTAR DINNER IN DAHUK

A Muslim female IDP from Mosul "I am very, happy to be participating in this activity, I had no friends before, since the day I have been displaced from Mosul.

A Christian IDP from Mosul "We thought, we can't ever enjoy a meal with our Muslim brothers.

A Christian host community member from Dahuk "I have participated in many events during my life, this is the first time, I am preparing dinner for the Muslims in my community, and I am very happy, thanks to IOM for organizing this event.

International days

IOM community centres celebrated a number of International day events such as, Women's International day, International Children's day, World Mental Health day and World Autism day in which relevant awareness raising sessions were developed and delivered.

International Children's Day

IOM Iraq's MHPSS team in Shirqat celebrated the International Children's Day on 20 November by distributing 200 school bags to first graders in the villages of Eitha and Ganous to increase their motivation to attend school. Also, the MHPSS team offered several rounds of MHPSS caregiver awareness sessions to parents and caregivers in Ganous and Eitha to disseminate important messages on challenges of psychosocial development in children and how they can address these challenges.



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 quite pertinent to all activities due to the challenging living conditions experienced in areas of displacement, and returnee and host communities 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.

- 20,343 awareness raising services.
- 424 coordination meetings held.
- 266 referrals to basic services and other service providers.
- 483 ICRS registration.

IOM's MHPSS programme in Iraq was globally recognized as a model for community based interventions and on the World Mental Health day – 6 October 2021, IOM Iraq presented at [the Global Mental Health Summit](#) organized by the French Government. IOM's MHPSS Program Coordinator, Dr. Hatem Marzouk, was a speaker in an MHPSS workshop on 6 October 2021 on the experience of IOM in field preparedness and capacity building. This included information on IOM Iraq's work in supporting local NGOs and governmental organizations through capacity building on MHPSS.



IOM CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

THE WORKING COMMITTEE ON MHPSS CAPACITY BUILDING AND HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

IOM was selected to chair the committee since July 2019, and continues to play an active leading role in capacity building for MHPSS actors country wide.

As a part of its commitment to the Technical Working Group (TWG) members, IOM trained 31 staff members from national and international NGOs from the National Protection Cluster (NPC) on Psychological First Aid and suicide prevention and response. The training locations targeted the governorates identified by the NPC as having the highest need which were Mosul (Ninewa), Dahuk and Kirkuk. Participants' feedback was very positive and the training objectives were achieved.

IOM recognizes the need for capacity building 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 teams, governmental entities, community leaders, CSOs and other national and international organizations. A total of 34 training sessions were delivered to 364 individuals. Topics ranged from suicide prevention and awareness raising, responsible media coverage of suicide training for journalists and media personnel, care givers support, disability inclusion, MHPSS for GBV survivors, remote psychological first aid (rPFA) and basic helping skills in MHPSS.

One of the key achievements in this period of reporting was the endorsement of the National Guidelines on Human Resources profiles and Capacity Building. The document provides guidance to organizations on human resources capacity building and the minimum requirements for different profiles. The document is available in English, Arabic, Sorani and Bahdini Kurdish and was endorsed by the ministries of Health in Baghdad and Erbil and the National MHPSS Technical Working Group.⁴



⁴ <https://iraq.iom.int/resources/national-guidelines-mhpss-human-resources-profiles-and-capacity-building>.

CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES FOR IOM STAFF AND PARTNERS

In addition to the commitment to the national technical MHPSS WG, IOM provided regular training to IOM national staff, community focal points and other local government, NGO and CSO staff to ensure sustainable learning and the development of local capacity. Some examples of such trainings include:

- Three rounds of art-based interventions in MHPSS were conducted in Baghdad and Dahuk. In this three-day training, the aim was to introduce art-based interventions that can be used by the staff to diversify the services and support they provide to service recipients. These tools and interventions facilitate the creation of a safe and confidential space to express their problems and challenges by creating artworks. 14 IOM staff participated in the first training conducted in Baghdad on 11-13 April 2021 and 30 IOM staff participated in the second round of training conducted in Dahuk between 4-9 July 2021. The intention was to introduce the medical students an alternative way of establishing rapport with patients and engaging them in art activities during treatment.

- A two-day training on counselling strategies and interventions were offered to 14 IOM staff in Baghdad on 16-17 March 2021. The purpose of this training was to enhance the skills of staff on counselling, cognitive behavioural interventions, data protection, using intake forms and following ethical guidelines.
- Caregiver support skills TOT delivered in January 2021.
- Training of trainers sessions were provided to 24 IOM staff on IOM's MHPSS case management tool to strengthen IOM's ability to address the mounting needs for MHPSS case management country wide.
- Throughout 2021, IOM provided MHPSS care givers skills training in Basrah to 144 Participants (77 Males and 67 Females). The training aimed to develop and strengthen the participants' skills of providing care to children and adolescents. The trainees were staff from the directorates of education, health, sport and youth, social welfare and local NGOs staff.



MEDICAL STUDENTS MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT SUMMER TRAINING

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

This workshop aims to introduce the participants to the different facets of mental health and psychosocial support, 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

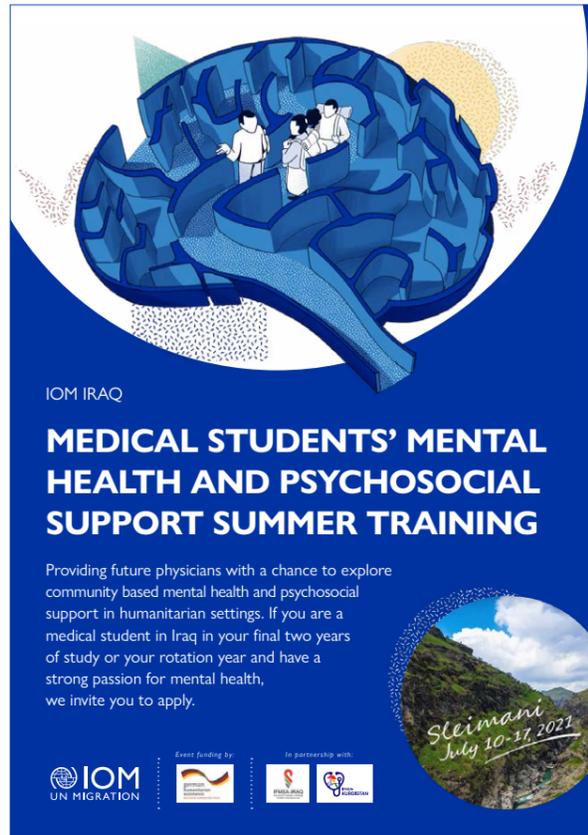
- Introduce medical students to the multi layered MHPSS model in humanitarian settings.
- Provide the participants with the knowledge and skills that would enable them to become mental health advocates and champions in their own communities.
- Enhance the communication, presentation and interpersonal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

10 medical students and interns from medical schools across Iraq participated in this week long training and some of them organized training workshops for their peers in medical school to pass on the knowledge and skills gained in IOM's training.

Capacity building plan for medical students in Babylon 26-27 November 2021

IOM developed a capacity building plan for medical students in Babylon, Baghdad governorate, and provided training sessions at the Babylon College of Medicine, including PFA, remote PFA and self-care. In total, the number of capacity building activities by IOM:

- Training, coaching and/or supervision activities to IOM, NGOs and CSOs staff: 4,438
- Trainings and capacity building activities to government institutions: 759



IOM NEW MHPSS CASE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

In the last quarter of 2021, IOM started a revision process to update its current MHPSS case management guidelines. To undertake this, IOM worked with a consultant to strengthen IOM's MHPSS case management system across the country with specific focus on standardization. A comprehensive assessment of the existing case management system informed the revision or development of new key MHPSS case management forms, tools and processes which are now being standardized across IOM's MHPSS programme in Iraq.

IOM's new MHPSS case management guidelines include a standardized MHPSS case management form, an updated consent form, an adapted suicide safety plan, MHPSS case management SOPs, as well as training material and a manual on the new case management system. Respectively, IOM developed an MHPSS case management training, which has been introduced to MHPSS staff through a training of trainers (ToT) in December 2021. The new case management guidelines and conducted ToT work to ensure comprehensive standardization of the new case management approach and guidelines across the programme.

INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS STORIES



"I'm a good person and I know I can do much better."

A 28-year-old man was referred to IOM MHPSS centre in Shirqat for psychosocial problems, and during the session he expressed deep sadness and loss of future perspective and hope. He was afraid of experiencing some of the negative events he lived in the past as a victim of torture in prison. He withdrew himself from his family and friends and once he came to know about IOM services, he reached out in the hope to get support for his daily suffering, the sadness, the anger, the worries and as consequences his sleep problems. Attending some community-based activities was the starting point for him to end his suffering and he agreed to be referred to a psychiatrist. After a course of sessions, this man was able to deal with his stress and came to realize his strength points and resilience. He is now gradually becoming a more sociable person and loves to interact with others and make new friends.



"I feel so proud to see my work presented in an event. That is what I work hard for to achieve what people are now seeing on display. This makes me believe that I'm capable of everything I want, and I really enjoyed participating in these activities"

A 16-year-old girl who dropped out of school after the war and displacement showed clear depression symptoms and isolated herself from everyone. She was not interested in anything and was not enjoying any aspect of her life. After a MHPSS outreach team visit, she registered herself in the knitting course. In addition, she received individual counseling to deal with her emotional problems. She started to feel hope again and was able to build friendship with others and eventually become an active member in the group and was keen to learn more about designs.



"This center changed my life. The activities I attended and the one I facilitated developed my skills and increased my knowledge. And this support I'm giving back to the community by helping them through similar activities and support".

A 25-year-old single man living alone in a camp, was eager to study after he finished high school, but was not able to continue studying due to displacement. During an outreach activity and the awareness raising on MHPSS service provision by IOM, he registered himself for a barber course and also attended group sessions on life skills and mental health awareness sessions. He was very committed and reached out to the team to work voluntarily at the center. Working as volunteer, he became more eager to support other residents in the camp and conducted many sessions on MH awareness raising, the support provided by IOM center and referral system. He then supported the team with some sessions inside the center and became a great addition to the volunteers team.

MHPSS AS A KEY PILLAR OF COMMUNITY STABILISATION

IOM's MHPSS programme works closely with the social cohesion programme in order 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 supports.

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 is an increased interest in the topic of suicide prevention with government entities increasing their investment in trainings, standard operating procedures on suicide prevention and response, and greater community engagement on the issue.

IOM continued to play an important role in supporting Iraq to adopt its first ever national suicide prevention strategy. In June 2021, IOM launched the first draft of the strategy after a series of consultations with national and international stakeholders. In a meeting in Baghdad, representatives of different ministries had the chance to discuss and reflect on the different components of the strategy and ensure that roles and responsibilities of all ministries are clearly defined. This was followed by another workshop in Erbil to provide the regional ministries in Erbil with a similar chance to provide their input.



In 2022, IOM aims to continue supporting the government of Iraq to adopt the strategy and proceed with its implementation.

In addition, IOM continues 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 was 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.

Following a [publication](#) by IOM Iraq on suicide prevention program in Intervention (the Journal on MHPSS in conflict-affected areas), Dr. Hatem Marzouk, IOM MHPSS programme coordinator was invited to speak at a [webinar](#) hosted by the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP). Suicide prevention activities have become an increasingly important component of IOM Iraq's MHPSS programming. Following a brief situation analysis of socioeconomic, cultural and political aspects related to the phenomenon of suicide in Iraq, the presentation and report outline the steps IOM Iraq has taken to support the government of Iraq in developing the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. It also details the efforts done towards building community awareness about suicide and building the capacity of community gatekeeper.

In September 2021, IOM collaborated with, Azhee, a leading local suicide prevention organization based in Erbil to organize a national event, commemorating the World Suicide Prevention day on 10 September 2021. The conference was hosted by Dahuk university with a strong participation from university professors and students, media representatives and national and international organizations working in the MHPSS field. The theme of the conference was: "Creating Hope for Suicide Prevention through Action with Media and Academia". This was the second time IOM collaborates with Azhee to organize an event commemorating the World Suicide Prevention day after their first collaboration in September 2019.

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 section, IOM arranged a series of awareness raising sessions about suicide in a number of locations throughout Iraq. In January 2020, two sessions

were organized in Hassan Sham U3 camp for IDPs in Ninewa and was followed by IOM developing a standard operating procedure for suicide incidents in the camp.

Journalists Trainings

Media reporting on death by suicide, has been observed as a risk factor in Iraq. The contents of the news shared on suicide, are not in line with the best practice guidelines, and media has a remarkable influence over different social media communities, where several channels continue to share stories on people who died of suicide

with minimal considerations given to the degree of harm this can cause to the community and more importantly to the bereaving families. In this realization, the IOM MHPSS team developed a training package titled "responsible media coverage on suicide" which is based WHO's principles on media coverage for suicide.

Several training sessions took place, one in Erbil and three in Dahuk. The training was attended by journalists, well known social media users and administrators of active social media sites that are commonly accessed and viewed by the affected population.



Awareness raising materials

In different assessments and consultations about suicide, IOM identified that the lack of awareness and information is a key element in the stigma around suicide. IOM's MHPSS team developed an awareness raising package that addressed different audiences such as healthcare workers, people working in schools, families who lost someone to suicide, and a general leaflet outlining common misconceptions surrounding suicide. The leaflets are available in English, Arabic, and Kurdish (Sorani and Bahdini). The electronic version was circulated with all members of the MHPSS TWG and IOM has donated hundreds of copies to the Ministry of Health in Baghdad and Erbil in addition to other NGOs that requested printed copies.

In April 2021, IOM developed awareness raising materials to support positive dialogue between parents and children, which continues to be a challenging area.



IOM NEW MHPSS CENTRE IN JADAA 1

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.

On 25 May 2021, 94 Iraqi households (382 individuals) arrived from Al-Hol camp in northeast Syria to Jadaa 1 Camp, south of Mosul. Of the arrivals, about 64 per cent were children under the age of 18 (120 girls and 122 boys); some 34 per cent were adults between the ages of 18 and 60 (89 women and 39 men) and three per cent were elderly above the age of 60 (9 women and 2 men). As returnees, this group now faces an extreme level of uncertainty about their future, having received little to no information on when and under what circumstances they will be able to return to areas of origin and reunite with their families and communities.

Throughout June and July 2021, IOM conducted a MHPSS needs assessment with main objectives of informing MHPSS actors of key mental health and psychosocial needs in Jadaa 1; and supporting the development of relevant MHPSS programming to address the needs of returnees both in the camp and upon their return to areas of origin or settlement in a third location.



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, providing an inclusive approach to response programming. The need to integrate MHPSS and livelihood support is especially high in countries affected by conflict, as the integrated approach is particularly important for persons who have faced "high levels of distress."

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.



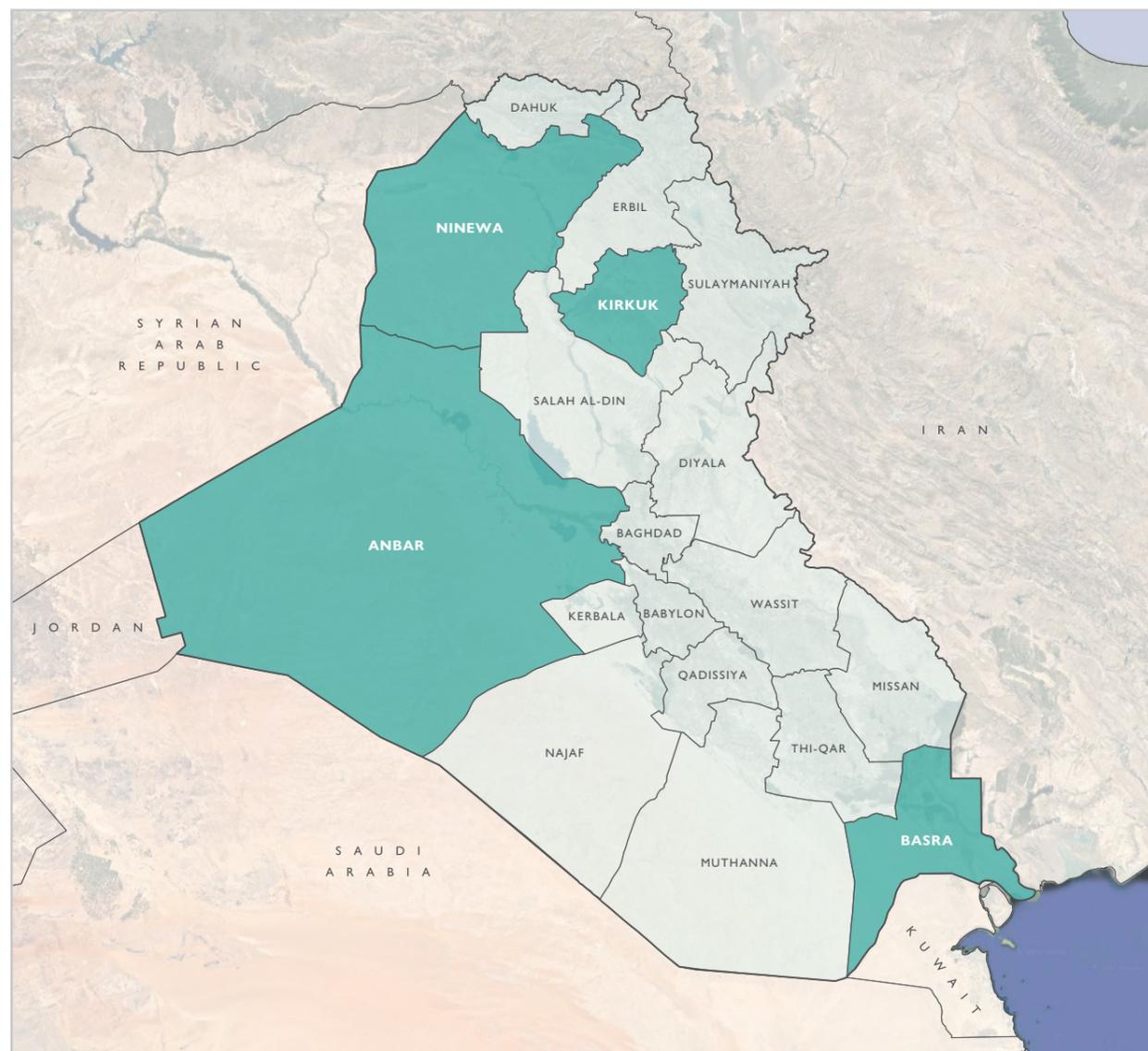
The relevance of integrated MHPSS and livelihood support programming in Iraq

In Iraq, MHPSS and livelihood needs continue to be enormous. During the most recent ISIL-insurgency, many Iraqis have lost their livelihoods and challenges to re-establish a functioning labour market 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 Iraqi population, the integration of MHPSS and livelihood support has been highly relevant to empower vulnerable Iraqis to engage in livelihood projects, strengthening their emotional well-being and resilience at the same time.

Based on the findings of the above-mentioned needs assessment, the MHPSS Programme developed an integration approach and subsequently designed and implemented MHPSS and Livelihood Integration (MLI) projects throughout 2021 in Ninewa, Kirkuk, Anbar and Basra.

Locations of Implemented MLI Projects



In 2021, the MHPSS programme implemented 16 MLI projects using two approaches. One approach directly integrated MHPSS activities into existing livelihood projects implemented by IOM's Return and Recovery Unit (RRU). MHPSS activities were combined either with individual livelihood assistance (6) or Cash for Work activities (7). The second approach was applied where the RRU had no presence. For example, at the Hassan Sham (U3) camp for internally displaced people, where RRU is not present programmatically, the MHPSS programme developed a stand-alone MLI project consisting of a carpentry workshop that integrates MHPSS activities.

The MLI approach developed by IOM Iraq integrates one MHPSS awareness session at the beginning of a livelihood programme, followed by 3-5 peer-support group sessions focused on building livelihood-related life, social and soft skills and request-based individual counselling. Each integrated session applies the MLI approach defined in the newly developed MHPSS and Livelihood

Integration manual (launching in February 2022), including the modules outlined in the manual. For each session, the livelihood participants choose what topics to focus or skills they would like to focus on. In 2021, the most common skills-building topics across locations were time management and problem solving. Building self-confidence and self-esteem was especially prominent among female participants.

In its first year, the MLI programme reached 537 livelihood participants (234=F; 303=M) across Iraq. The MHPSS programme provided 46 awareness sessions to livelihood participants as well as 146 peer-support group sessions. The most commonly chosen topics by participants for the MLI peer-support groups were positive thinking, problem solving and time management.

To ensure capacity-building and continued learning, 74 livelihood and MHPSS staff were trained in the MHPSS and livelihood integration approach and programming.



Results and impact

Livelihood participants reported high satisfaction with the integrated MHPSS support and found the content of the sessions relevant to their professional and personal lives. According to participant feedback across programme 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 strengthened the participant's problem-solving skills, while participants also noted that the sessions have improved their ability to adapt to new or changing situations at work using the positive coping mechanisms developed during the MHPSS sessions. Participant feedback further illustrated that the MHPSS group activities provided a safe space to build lasting connections and relationships. For example, male cash for work project participants in Mosul shared that even though they worked together daily, the MHPSS sessions brought them together in a way that encouraged them to build supportive connections.

On the other hand, female participants who started their own businesses in Mosul explained that the MHPSS sessions were useful to them as they met participants

from the same area in which they live, which they did not know before, and they began to understand the important effect social relationships can have on their psychological well-being.

Creating these strong social networks and relationships that go beyond the MHPSS sessions has been a primary goal of MHPSS integration into livelihoods in Iraq.

FEEDBACK FROM A PARTICIPANT

“ We worked in small groups every day but the MHPSS sessions brought us together and helped us build relationships with everyone. It improved our group work and communication together. – Male MLI participant in West Mosul

“ I was not comfortable working with the other women at first, but after time and with the sessions I have been able to make friends. Now it is easier to work together. We help each other. – Female MLI participant in Zab, Kirkuk



I learned how to keep home problems away from work and work problems away from home and solve them in a positive way – Male MLI participant in Ramadi, Anbar

The topics related to my work and taught me how to lighten pressure at work – Female MLI participant in Al-Qurna, Basra

The sessions helped me learn new communication skills and time management, which helps me work better with my customers – Female MLI participant in Abbasi, Kirkuk

I learned from these sessions to keep a balance between the needs of home and work by organizing my priorities – Female MLI participant in West Mosul, Ninewa



The session helped me understand that problems at work can be solved through practice, clarification, and flexibility in decision-making – Female participant in Ramadi, Anbar

Every job has pressures and problems, but success lies in how to deal with these problems in a positive way – Female MLI participant in Ramadi, Anbar

SELECTION OF QUOTES

What other MLI participants said about the skills they developed during the integrated MHPSS activities

I liked the sessions because they helped me express what is inside me and to learn skills to adapt better to my work – Male MLI participant in Hassan Sham (U3) camp, Ninewa

I was working in one of the hair-dressing salons, and after I got my own project, I had great fear about the success of the project, especially because I did not have enough experience, but through the sessions I learned the skill of managing stress and problem solving, for example, I learned the principle of experiencing and trying with things that I did not know – Female MLI participant in West Mosul, Ninewa

MHPSS, Livelihoods and Peacebuilding

For communities to rebuild, peacebuilding efforts, sustainable livelihoods and robust mental health and psychosocial well-being are essential.

Integrated MHPSS and livelihoods programming is complementary to social cohesion and peacebuilding efforts. In Iraq, MLI projects are implemented in areas with a heightened need for MHPSS, social cohesion and peacebuilding efforts, for example, areas of return and displacement. The common social cohesion concerns in such areas include tensions around returns, acceptance of returnees with perceived affiliation, distrust, division among returnees, IDPs and host communities, subsequent isolation, as well as unequal access to basic services, employment, complex social fabrics and multi-ethnic divides. MLI activities include and bring together different community members such as IDPs, returnees and other vulnerable persons, providing a safe space for the livelihood participants of different backgrounds and in different situations to meet and build supportive relationships, a key element for peacebuilding and community stabilization.

By choosing to integrate MLI into IOM's overall MHPSS programming in locations with peacebuilding and social cohesion needs across Iraq, the MHPSS programme further complements the broader social cohesion efforts of IOM in Iraq. Without mental and emotional well-being and no

access to sustainable work opportunities, the prospects of peace at the individual and community levels are vulnerable. MLI responds inclusively to mental health, psychosocial, livelihoods and peacebuilding needs and offers a safe space to strengthen community support and a sense of connection among different community members.

The MLI approach, programming and its interlinkage with social cohesion and peacebuilding was featured in the IASC webinar on MHPSS and Peacebuilding in October 2021. The webinar explored how integrated programming can support social cohesion and peacebuilding efforts in areas of return and displacement and considered the applicability of the IOM approach in other contexts.

MHPSS & Livelihood Integration: Community Stabilization & Peacebuilding in Iraq

In communities affected by conflict and crisis, several interventions are needed for recovery, rebuilding social structures and restoring social fabrics. Mental health and psychosocial support can serve as a key driver of peacebuilding efforts, sustainable livelihoods, social cohesion and community stabilisation through enhancement of the overall well-being of individuals and communities. IOM presented in [mhpss.net webinar](https://mhpss.net/webinar) on 19 October 2021 to share the experience of its programme activities with MHPSS professionals all over the world.



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