

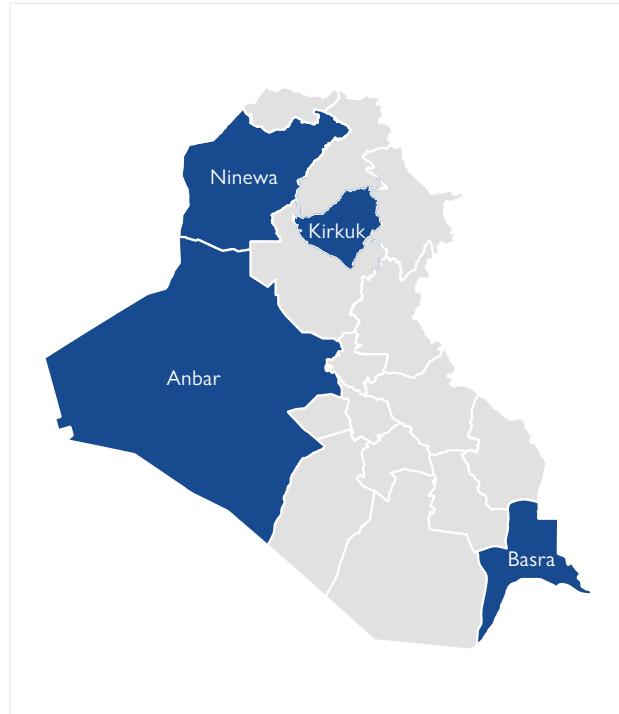
MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION 2021 – ONE YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

BACKGROUND

In Iraq, MHPSS and livelihood needs persist and remain amongst the highest priorities for the population, including returnees and people in displacement. A needs assessment on MHPSS and livelihood integration, conducted by IOM in 2020, found that a lack of job opportunities continues to be one of the most significant challenges among the affected population, causing anxiety and distress, and impacting the mental health and well-being of IDPs, returnees, and host communities ([Assessment One](#); [Assessment Two](#)).

To simultaneously address livelihood and MHPSS needs, IOM Iraq developed an MHPSS and Livelihood Integration (MLI) programme that integrates MHPSS into existing or new livelihood projects. 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.

In 2021, IOM implemented 16 MLI projects in 13 locations within the governorates of Anbar, Basra, Kirkuk and Ninewa. All MHPSS activities were adapted to address psychosocial stressors that can arise at work.



THE IMPORTANCE OF MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION

MHPSS integration into humanitarian and development interventions is grounded in the core principles of the IASC Guidelines (2007) and the Sphere Handbook (2018). Both promote MHPSS integration into humanitarian or development sectors and have become fundamental references for MHPSS inclusion in humanitarian and subsequently development or peacebuilding work. Research and needs assessments encourage integrating MHPSS into livelihood projects, especially projects that work with people who have faced severe adversity, including displacement and protracted violence. Conflict-affected livelihood participants can face daily stressors that can challenge their engagement in work. Integrated MHPSS helps address and manage these stressors, building problem solving and strengthening coping mechanisms as well as livelihood-related soft skills, such as teamwork, confidence building, communications or conflict resolution skills. Through group activities, integrated MHPSS promotes community support and cultivates a sense of belonging among participants of

different backgrounds, enhancing self-and community efficacy. The long-term benefits of MHPSS integration include improved sustainable livelihood outcomes and a workforce with robust coping mechanisms, social and soft skills. At the individual level, workers increase self-confidence, face less emotional distress and have stronger mental health.

OBJECTIVES

1. Prepare **livelihood participants** to mitigate and manage psychosocial challenges in work (and personal) contexts.
2. Build **life**, social and soft skills and strengthen the positive coping mechanisms of livelihood participants to promote livelihood success.
3. Provide a safe space for livelihood project participants to meet and shape supportive relationships and social connections beyond the programme, creating a sense of belonging and support networks among people taking up new work opportunities.

THE MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION (MLI) APPROACH

IOM's MHPSS and Livelihood Integration (MLI) approach integrates three core MHPSS activities into livelihood projects in Iraq. The integration begins with an MHPSS awareness session integrated into livelihood programme training or induction days. The sessions are followed by bi-weekly peer-support group activities focused on different work-related life, social and soft skills. All activities are tailored to the specific needs of the livelihood participants, who select each skills module to meet their interests. Additionally, request-based individual counseling is available where MLI is implemented. The individual counseling sessions allow participants to receive more in-depth skills building support. Whenever needed, livelihood participants can also be referred to specialised MHPSS support services. Before "In 2021": Add this - All MHPSS sessions for livelihood participants apply the newly developed MLI manual (see page 3). In 2021, apart from Hassan Sham Camp (U3), all MLI projects in Iraq integrated MHPSS activities into two types of livelihood projects: *Individual livelihood Assistance* (ILA) and *Cash for Work* (CfW), implemented by IOM's Transition and Return Division (TRD).

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The applied MLI monitoring approach includes an intake assessment, feedback evaluation forms, feedback focus groups, attendance sheets and staff consultations. After the awareness sessions, IOM conducts an intake assessment asking for demographic information, session feedback, interest in future MHPSS sessions, and relevant content. After completing all peer-support groups, the MHPSS team conducts a feedback evaluation form to assess the sessions, their relevance and impact. To expand the monitoring and evaluation approach, the MHPSS programme has also started to conduct feedback focus group discussions (FGDs) with a smaller number of participants. These FGDs are generally held two to three weeks after completing an MLI project. Finally, staff engaged in the MLI projects take part in staff consultations to share feedback, lessons learned, and areas of improvement. This varied monitoring and evaluation approach has delivered constant participant and staff feedback and highlights programmatic results at different stages of implementation. The process allows for immediate project improvements, consistent review and reflection, and, importantly, project tailoring to participant needs.

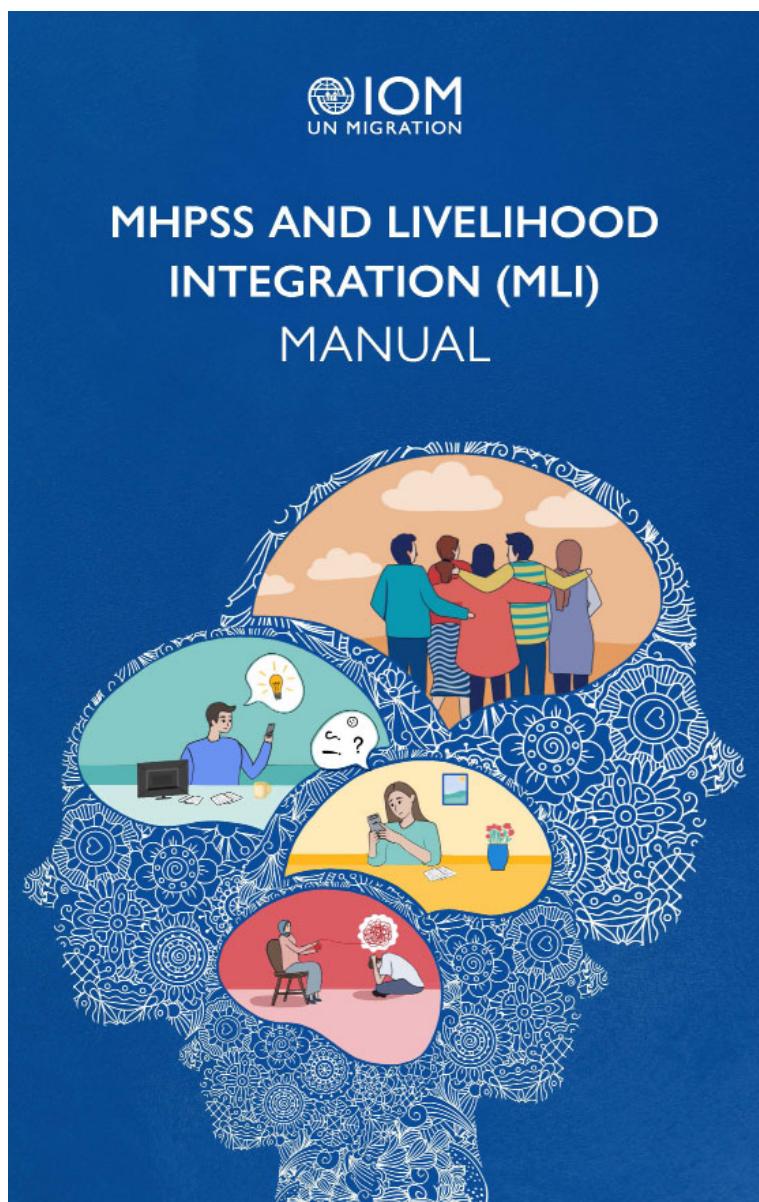


MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION MANUAL

IOM Iraq developed an MLI manual to inform MHPSS activities integrated into livelihood projects. The manual outlines the MLI programme approach, its benefits and wide-ranging considerations for MLI programming. The manual also provides information for facilitators and suggested templates for livelihood-adapted MHPSS sessions. The manual includes eight modules for MHPSS activities that are adapted for livelihood participants. The modules focus on specific livelihood-related life, social and soft skills, and guide facilitators through MLI-MHPSS sessions. The manual includes 23 newly developed corresponding leaflets that complement the modules and services.

IOM's MLI projects in Iraq are based on the manual. In early 2022, the first version of the manual was published in Arabic, Kurdish (Sorani) and English.

	Module 1
	Coping with stress, building Resilience
	Module 2
	Positive thinking, patience, adapting to change, perseverance and motivation
	Module 3
	Teamwork and conflict resolution skills
	Module 4
	Self-confidence and self-esteem (self-efficacy)
	Module 5
	Time management and prioritization skills
	Module 6
	Communication skills
	Module 7
	Problem-solving skills
	Module 8
	Leadership skills and relationship building



2021 MLI PROJECTS



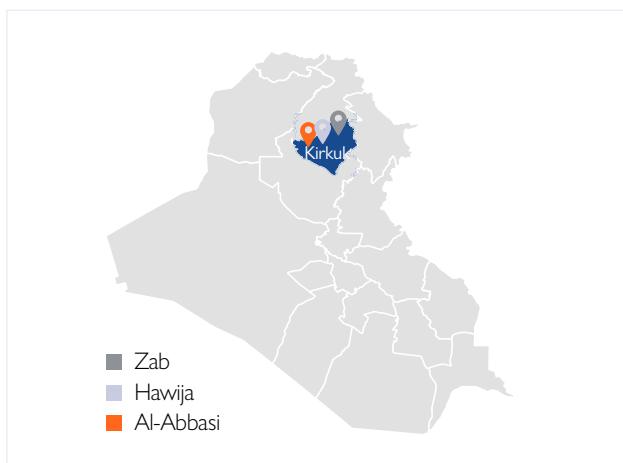
KIRKUK

In 2021, the MLI programme integrated MHPSS into three livelihood projects in Kirkuk, including in the sub-districts of Abbasi, Hawija and Zab. 148 livelihood participants (70 men; 78 women) benefitted from MLI in Kirkuk. In Al-Abbasi and Hawija, IOM integrated MHPSS into ILA programmes for male and female business owners. In Zab, MHPSS activities were integrated into one CfW activity for 20 women. Across the locations, the integrated activities included one MHPSS awareness session, subsequent 4-6 peer-support groups and request-based individual counseling. The peer-support sessions focused on building life, social and soft skills selected by the participants. Chosen skills included positive thinking, problem solving, adapting to change, time management, communication skills, teamwork, leadership and relationship-building skills. In Kirkuk, the MLI project worked mainly with returnees and the host community, as well as some internally displaced persons.

Feedback illustrates that participants utilized the skills developed during the MHPSS sessions when dealing with others and managing stress at work. Participants shared that they feel better equipped to keep a positive mindset at work and are more self-reliant and thorough in their daily tasks. Participants also noted that the sessions strengthened their organizational skills (e.g., “being able to organize tasks better”) while feeling more self-confident at work.

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

Al-Abbasi, Hawija, Zab



“What I liked most was that I got these sessions at the same time that I started my work.” Male MLI participant in Abbasi, Kirkuk

“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

MOSUL

East Mosul, West Mosul

IOM conducted several MLI activities in Mosul City, mainly supporting returnees and other vulnerable community members. In March 2021, IOM launched the first MLI project in Mosul, implemented in the Intesar district in East Mosul. The project included 27 male CfW participants and integrated two MHPSS awareness sessions, six peer-support group sessions and request-based individual counseling sessions. Subsequent MLI projects were implemented in Mansuria, West Mosul, including two CfW activities for 42 male participants and one CfW activity and one ILA project including 32 women. Overall, 127 livelihood participants received MHPSS support through the MLI projects in Mosul.

Each MLI projects applied the MLI approach, implementing one MHPSS awareness session, individual counseling if requested, as well as subsequent peer-support sessions. For skills development, the livelihood participants selected problem solving and positive thinking, teamwork and conflict resolution, self-confidence building, stress management and resilience, motivation skills, adapting to change, communication, relationship-building and leadership skills.

“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



“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

TEL AFAR AND AL-AYADIAH

From October to December 2021, IOM implemented two MLI projects in Tel Afar and Al-Ayadiah. Both communities have been heavily affected by conflict and are home to returnees, displaced persons and other vulnerable Iraqis. Both projects consisted of MHPSS integration into cash for work activities and included 37 men in Tel Afar and 27 men and 13 women in Al-Ayadiah. MLI reached a total of 77 individuals. The projects integrated one MHPSS awareness session, followed by three peer-support sessions focused on work-related soft skills selected by participants. The participants selected the following skills building: Skills building positive thinking, leadership and relationship building, teamwork and conflict resolution, stress management and resilience building, communication, problem solving, self-confidence building and positive thinking skills. The MHPSS team also offered request-based individual counseling.

Project participants shared that the group sessions helped them “organize the work between us as a team and prepared us to face challenges together.” Participants also shared that they greatly benefitted from each other’s experience and advice shared during the group meetings. Feedback highlights a high relevance of the MHPSS activities, and MHPSS facilitators shared that the interest in the MHPSS sessions was noteworthy, exceeding their expectations.

“I benefited from the teamwork topics, because I was working with a team” – female MLI participant in Al-Ayadiah



“The sessions helped me increase my self-confidence at work” – female MLI participant in Al-Ayadiah

“My problem-solving skills improved and I realized that when you face a problem, it does not mean it is the end of the work, but that I must face it and learn from the mistakes I made in order to develop my business.” MLI Participant in Al-Ayadiah

“One of the female colleagues and I live in the same area, but we did not know each other, now we always meet and visit each other at home.” – female MLI participant in Al-Ayadiah

BASRA

In Al-Qurna, northern Basra, the MLI approach supported 43 livelihood participants (24 men; 19 women) who engaged in an ILA programme beginning in August 2021. MLI included one MHPSS awareness session, similar to the other projects, as well as three peer-support sessions and request based individual counseling. The peer-support groups focused on time and task management, positive thinking, problem solving, teamwork and conflict resolution, adapting to change, motivation and patience skills. Participants who started businesses in sewing, restaurant management, carpentry and others shared that the MHPSS sessions supported them in feeling confident in their work, dealing patiently with customers and managing stressful situations applying the patience skills they developed during the integrated activities. One participant shared that the sessions supported him in establishing a healthy work-life balance to spend time with family.

IOM implemented a second MLI project in Al-Madaina, southern Basra, for 17 ILA participants (14 men; 3 women). Set up in the same way as the project in Al-Qurna, participants attended one MHPSS awareness session and three peer-support group sessions that focused on problem solving, time management, positive thinking and motivation skills, as selected by the participants.

During a feedback focus group discussion, male and female participants were asked whether they have developed new skills in the MHPSS sessions that help them engage in their work more comfortably. Participants shared that having learned how to organise time and knowing positive thinking and how to start a positively into the day

AI-MADEINA AND AI-QURNA



at work has especially supported them in keeping up with their work and other daily responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed. Participants reported feeling more confident addressing problems at work, having increased their self-confidence, organizational skills and ability to avoid time wasting activities through the added MHPSS sessions.

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

“Enhancing self-confidence helped me to work better and complete more tasks.” – female MLI participant in Al-Qurna, Basra

“I am using my patience skills and am trying to be more resilient. This helps me to solve problems, satisfy my current clients and receiving new clients” – male MLI participant in Al-Qurna, Basra

ANBAR

Ramadi

In November 2021, IOM's most recent MLI project launched in Ramadi, Anbar. The project includes 44 ILA participants (23 women; 21 men) of an ILA programme. Similar to the other projects, MLI in Anbar has integrated one MHPSS awareness session into the ILA induction day and facilitated three bi-weekly peer-support sessions focused on livelihood-related skills. In Ramadi, participants chose positive thinking and motivation skills, problem solving, time management, as well as self-confidence and self-esteem building as key skills to develop. As with the other MLI projects, each topic has been integrated into the peer-support sessions, using the MLI manual (see page 3).

"[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

"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

"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

Participant feedback across all projects highlights high satisfaction rates with integrated activities, their content and relevance to the participant's livelihood projects. Participant feedback found that the MHPSS sessions have enabled or improved positive thinking, work motivation, self-esteem and self-confidence as well as problem-solving skills as a team or alone. Feedback also indicates that the integrated MHPSS has enabled participants to engage more comfortably with others and work within a team, adapting to new or changing situations using positive coping mechanisms. Finally, participants reported that the sessions strengthened their social support network and sense of belonging.



HASSAN SHAM (U3) CAMP

In July 2021, IOM Iraq piloted its first standalone integrated MHPSS and livelihood support project in Ninewa Governorate's Hassan Sham U3 camp. The project entails a livelihood component, namely a carpentry workshop and an MHPSS component that focuses on teaching work-related life, social and soft skills. 85 IDPs in the camp, including 29 women and 14 persons with disabilities, participated in the activities as of December 2021.

"Everything about this project was excellent. I now know carpentry – a skill I never thought I would enjoy so much – and know how to stay focused and control my emotions," said 20-year-old Zina, who has been living in the camp for more than 4 years. "Although carpentry is considered a man's occupation here, I'm willing to open a small shop and create small furniture if I'm given the opportunity."

The MHPSS sessions and their topics were chosen by the participants themselves and directly complemented the livelihood dimension of the project. The participants of the workshops chose the following skills building topics: stress-management, self-care, problem-solving, positive thinking, adapting to change, motivational skills, self-confidence and self-esteem building; teamwork and patience skills; and others. The female participants were especially interested in topics related to confidence-building and empowerment. Where individual counseling was needed, participants were referred IOM's specialized services.

The livelihood workshop trainer, co-trainers and project focal points were hired from the camp community, offering further livelihood opportunities.

To continuously include people with disabilities and ensure their access to the livelihood opportunity and MHPSS support, IOM developed an outreach and integration approach to ensure consistent outreach to people with disabilities and raising awareness about their ability to be part of the workshop.



"The skills we learned in this course will benefit us forever. There were many times in my life when I couldn't work because of the psychological state I was in," said 24-year-old Ali, who was displaced from Mosul in 2017. "I was depressed and didn't have the motivation to do anything before, but now I'm interested in opening a small carpentry shop when I go back to Mosul – I understand that life goes on and I won't stay in this camp for good."

In early 2022, IOM launched a second MLI project in the camp, including a bakery workshop as a livelihood component, targeting vulnerable women with no access to livelihoods, female-headed households and women with disabilities. While the first rounds of this second MLI project will focus on women, further rounds for vulnerable male participants are also planned.

The livelihood workshops (carpentry/bakery) were chosen based on community consultations in the camp. Both workshops address immediate needs at the camp and provide the IDPs with an important opportunity to build livelihood skills that will be applicable when they return to their areas of origin.



LESSONS LEARNED

Coordination is key. The success of any MLI project depends on the coordination and cooperation between the MHPSS and livelihood teams. In 2021, IOM launched 16 MLI projects in 13 locations. The projects were more successful in areas where there was consistent coordination, collaboration, follow up and reflection between the MHPSS and livelihood teams.

MLI is especially relevant for women. While male participants are genuinely interested in integrated MHPSS and acknowledge the value of the sessions, one year of implementation has shown the significant interest in MLI also among female livelihood participants. MLI with female participants consistently saw especially high engagement and attendance rates. Consultations with livelihood and MHPSS staff confirm the significant relevance of MLI for women, who consistently came to the MHPSS sessions and enthusiastically engaged in the skills building. For many women, MLI provided a welcome opportunity to meet others in a similar situation and in a safe space to exchange work-related issues and support one another. In the communities where MLI is implemented, women, especially those who recently returned or are still displaced, often feel isolated, are hesitant to meet others and can face contests from family members about having a job. This can diminish self-confidence. Integrated peer-support sessions facilitated by MHPSS staff can strengthen self-esteem and confidence, as well as provide a space for female livelihood participants to connect and build supportive relationships.

Livelihoods are most important. The livelihood component of an MLI project is often more important for participants. Implementers must be aware of this and adjust programming accordingly. During this implementation period, some livelihood participants were not attracted to MHPSS sessions beyond their cash for work activity. In these instances, the MHPSS team adjusted programming and facilitated fewer sessions. The team encouraged the participants to keep

their connections active through continued conversation and to seek out MHPSS when needed at a later stage. The programme adaption worked well and participant feedback underscored that participants were eager to remain in touch after even a few sessions to support one another and their work, a main objective of integrated MHPSS. Many participant groups across locations mentioned that they have created different messenger groups to support each other and stay in touch after the IOM sessions ended.

MHPSS and livelihood staff must be well trained. From a programmatic standpoint, it is essential to train MHPSS and livelihood staff comprehensively on MLI. IOM developed an MLI orientation, which has been facilitated for livelihood and MHPSS staff who have been part of MLI projects in Iraq. A total of 74 IOM staff were trained in 2021. Apart from such orientations, it is critical for specialized MLI staff to frequently support the field teams. Technical support, guidance and advice has been essential for all MLI projects.

MLI promotes social cohesion and complements peace-building. Without mental and emotional well-being and no access to sustainable work opportunities, prospects of peace at the individual and community levels are vulnerable. MLI is implemented in areas with social cohesion and peacebuilding needs. In Iraq's return and displacement contexts, tensions are often around the acceptance of returnees, divisions among returnees, IDPs and the local community, unequal access to basic services, complex social fabrics and multi-ethnic divides. In such contexts, MLI offers a safe space for community members of different backgrounds and in varying situations to develop work-related skills, create meaningful and supportive social relationships as they pursue their livelihoods. Hence, MLI complements IOM's efforts to strengthen social cohesion and community well-being.

LOOKING AHEAD

In 2022, IOM Iraq is committed to continue MHPSS and livelihood integration across the country, with a continued focus on Kirkuk, Anbar and Nineveh governorates and a new focus on Halabja in Suleymaniah and Qarriwan in Sinjar. MHPSS and livelihood needs are expected to remain high among the local population, especially

affecting communities with high return and displacement rates. Through MLI, IOM addresses livelihood and MHPSS needs at the same time, applying an inclusive programming approach that provides direct, immediate and meaningful assistance to vulnerable communities in Iraq.