

Psychosocial support in the context of the Syria and Iraq crises

Pooling expertise, increasing quality

Context

The devastating and long-lasting conflict in Syria, along with the spread of the terror organisation known as the “Islamic State”, has caused one of the biggest refugee crises of our time. Approximately 11 million Syrians have been forced to leave their homes¹. Most of them are internally displaced people (IDPs), or have fled to neighbouring countries Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, where they often live under precarious economic, social and health conditions. In Iraq, the number of refugees and IDPs has reached 4.3 million².

Along with flight and displacement, many of those seeking shelter have also experienced physical violence, witnessed the killing of family members, and other human rights abuses which have directly influenced their mental and social wellbeing, but the host countries often lack financial and/or professional resources for coping with these incidents and their consequences. A number of international organisations are therefore working alongside local experts to address mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) issues in the region. However, organisations working in MHPSS with refugees and IDPs in the Middle East do not yet systematically exchange lessons learnt or coordinate their activities sufficiently to have developed common quality standards.

The regional programme’s approach: mastering the challenges by working together

The programme supports synergetic effects and cooperation between governmental actors and civil society organisations working in MHPSS for refugees and IDPs across the region. Actors from the Middle East and Germany, working on a participatory, eye-level basis, search for and implement good psycho-

¹ UNHCR 2015 – Protecting and supporting the displaced in Syria (UNHCR Syria End of year report)

² UNHCR 2015 – Country operations profile Iraq

social approaches. The programme therefore pools knowledge developed in the region and links it to relevant scientific findings, such as elaborating the characteristics of good psychosocial work and identifying the needs of refugees and IDPs in the Middle East. These findings will be shared with all relevant actors by organising conferences and through developing a web-based knowledge platform which will offer materials for implementing MHPSS-related projects. This exchange will facilitate collaborative learning and enable actors to reflect critically on their own work. This improved networking will therefore help both refugees and IDPs, and people working in MHPSS across the region.

The regional programme will not implement any measures (such as trainings in refugee-camps) itself, but will instead act as a connector, knowledge broker, moderator, exchange-platform and service provider for all those who are working in MHPSS for refugees and IDPs in the region. It will also support any organisations who want to make the planning and implementation of their projects more MHPSS-sensitive. The programme will therefore improve the refugees’ situation by optimising support structures within its partner organisations.

The aims of the regional programme

The programme is part of a special initiative funded by the BMZ entitled “Tackling the root causes of displacement, reintegrating refugees”, which offers short-term support to refugees and host communities, while working to eliminate structural causes of flight such as poverty, inequality or food insecurity. The overarching objective of the regional programme is to strengthen the psychosocial support for Syrian refugees and IDPs by facilitating stronger cooperation between actors working in development in the region, and promoting the use of common gender- and context-sensitive standards. To achieve this, the regional programme has four fields of action:



Left: The effects of war, violence and flight are often felt particularly strongly by the most vulnerable groups, such as children.

Right: The programme encourages networking between regional actors and supports professional exchanges to improve psychosocial support for refugees and displaced persons.

Project name	Psychosocial Support for Syrian and Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced People
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development / Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)
Region/countries	Middle East/Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan
Main partners	Governmental actors and civil society organisations in Germany and the Middle East
Term	09.2015 – 08.2018

Field 1: Developing standards

Together with its partners, the regional programme develops gender- and context- sensitive standards for working in MHPSS with refugees and IDPs in the region, and publishes them in a common reference framework. The actors will use these harmonised standards to improve both the quality and efficiency of their work. The programme will also develop separate guiding frameworks for other MHPSS-relevant topics, such as MHPSS & education, and MHPSS & vulnerable groups.

Field 2: Promoting exchange between MHPSS-experts

The regional programme promotes exchanges between the different German and Middle-Eastern actors on tasks and approaches to MHPSS in the context of the Syrian crisis to facilitate the sharing of lessons learned. By including scientific institutions from the Middle East and Germany, the programme contributes to the professional anchoring of the MHPSS topic in the Middle East. Furthermore, scientific findings will positively influence practical work in the region.

Field 3: Setting up support structures for local MHPSS-staff

People working in the field of MHPSS are confronted with the suffering of the refugees and IDPs on a daily basis, leaving them at risk of secondary traumatisation and burn-out. The programme therefore works to develop regional support structures for

MHPSS-staff. Staff needs will be identified so that adequate organisational structures can be developed and field-tested, which will increase self-protection and team support amongst MHPSS professionals. Additionally, a continuous self-reflection in the context of MHPSS-work will lead to a further professionalisation of the assistance offered.

Field 4: Creating knowledge management

The regional programme is working on the creation of a web-based knowledge management system for actors working in the area of MHPSS for refugees and IDPs in the context of the Syrian crisis. This platform will make the products developed by the programme (fact sheets, guidelines, etc.) accessible and also enable exchange and critical reflection between the different actors working on MHPSS. This will increase innovation, facilitate the partners' organisational learning processes, and conserve knowledge beyond the duration of the programme. The regional programme will generate a pool of experts which will help all interested actors to access professional support in the field of MHPSS.

Contact

The programme sees itself as a networker and service provider for all actors working in the context of flight movement caused by the Syrian crisis. We therefore welcome requests from local and international actors seeking support for the MHPSS-sensitive planning and implementation of their projects, and encourages offers of collaboration with the regional programme:

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