

IOM IRAQ

MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION 2022

YEAR TWO OF IMPLEMENTATION



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IOM IRAQ

MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION 2022

YEAR TWO OF IMPLEMENTATION



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ABBREVIATIONS

EPW Employment for Public Works

IOM International Organization for Migration

FGD Focus Group Discussion

MHPSS Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services

IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee

MLI MHPSS and Livelihood Integration

ILA Individual Livelihood Assistance

TRD Transition and Recovery Division

BACKGROUND

In Iraq, MHPSS and livelihood needs continue to persist, remaining among the highest priorities for the population, including returnees and people in protracted displacement. Assessments conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) focused on MHPSS and livelihood integration 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 internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and host communities ([Assessment One](#); [Assessment Two](#)).

To concurrently address livelihood and mental health or psychosocial needs, and in response to these assessments, IOM developed the MHPSS and Livelihood Integration (MLI) approach in 2021, which integrates MHPSS into

existing or new livelihood projects. This integrated MHPSS assistance prepares livelihood programme participants to manage and mitigate unexpected work-related stressors, strengthening their positive coping mechanisms, while at the same time building psychosocial life, social and soft skills that are related to and essential for livelihood success. In 2021, 16 MLI projects were implemented across 13 locations Iraq,¹ followed by 14 MLI projects implemented across 10 locations in 2022. The 2022 projects focused on Anbar, Baghdad, Ninewa and Kirkuk governorates, reaching **597 livelihood project participants, integrating 3,896 MHPSS services**. Twelve out of the 14 projects were implemented in coordination with IOM's Transition and Recovery Division.

¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM). *MHPSS and Livelihood Integration 2021 – one-year of implementation report*, 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iom-iraq-mhpss-and-livelihood-integration-2021-one-year-implementation>.



The MHPSS and Livelihood Integration projects in 2022 focused on Anbar, Baghdad, Ninewa and Kirkuk governorates.

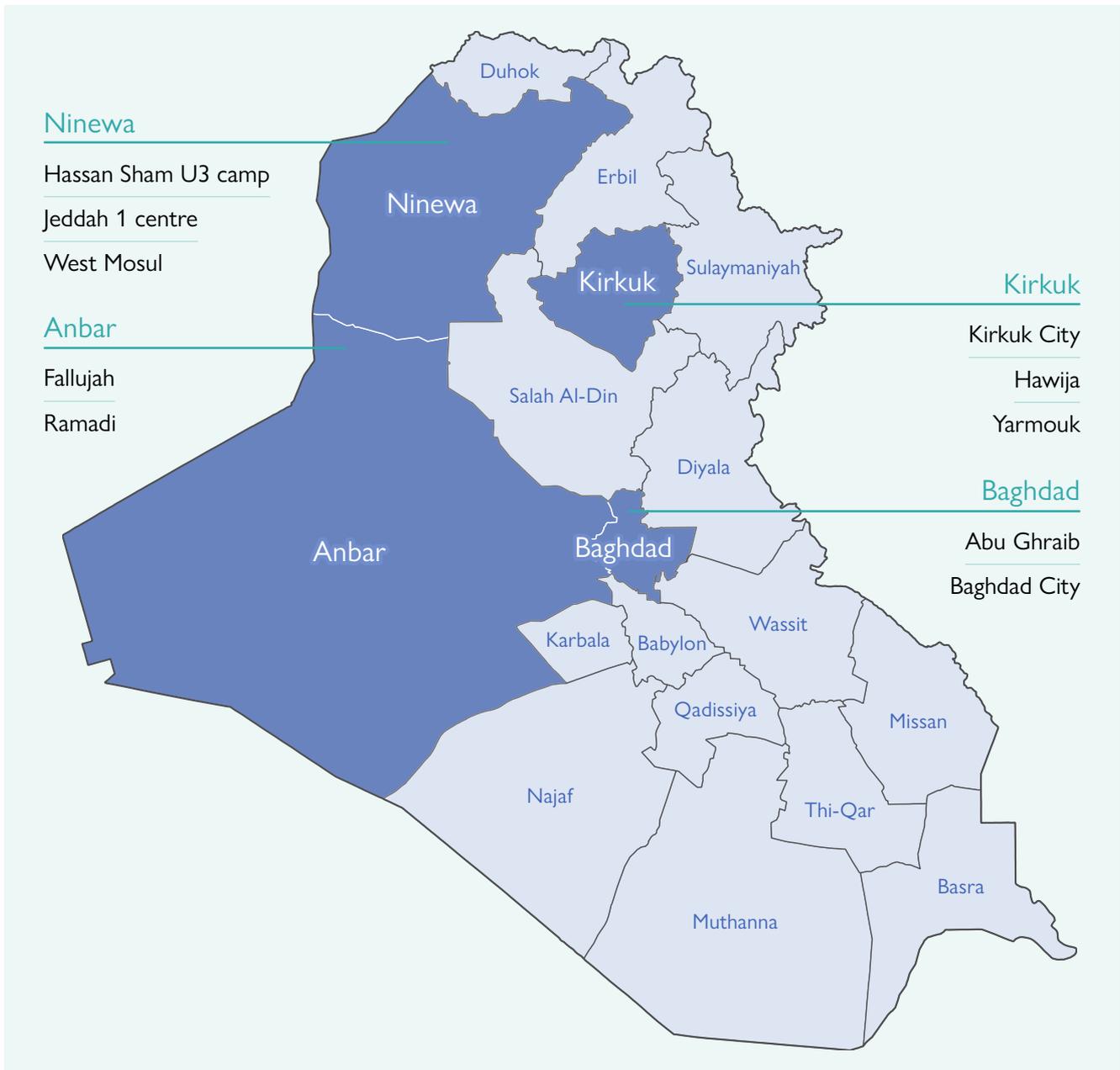
REACHING

 **597**
Participants

INTEGRATING

 **3,896**
MHPSS Services

LOCATED IN



THE IMPORTANCE OF MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION

MHPSS integration into humanitarian and development interventions is grounded in the principles of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (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 work. Research and needs assessments encourage integrating MHPSS into livelihoods, especially in areas where people have faced severe adversity, including displacement and protracted violence.² Conflict-affected livelihood participants can face daily stressors that may be overwhelming and hence challenge their engagement in work. Integrated MHPSS helps improve their insight and empowers them to address and manage these stressors by building and strengthening positive coping mechanisms and livelihood-related soft skills, such as teamwork, confidence building, communications or problem-solving skills. Through group activities, integrated MHPSS promotes community support and resilience and cultivates a sense of belonging among participants, 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.

MLI OBJECTIVES



Prepare

livelihood participants to mitigate and manage psychosocial challenges in work (and personal) contexts.



Build

the life, social and soft skills of livelihood participants to promote livelihood success.



Provide

a safe space for participants to meet and build supportive relationships and social connections beyond the programme, creating support networks among people that are taking up new work opportunities and find themselves in similar situations.

2 Schinina, Guglielmo, Babcock, Elisabeth, Nadelman, Rachel, Sonam Walsh, James, Willhoite, Ann, and Willman, Alys. "The integration of livelihood support and mental health and psychosocial well-being for populations who have been subject to severe stressors" *Intervention*, vol. 14, no 3, 2016, pp. 211-222. p.212.

THE MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION APPROACH

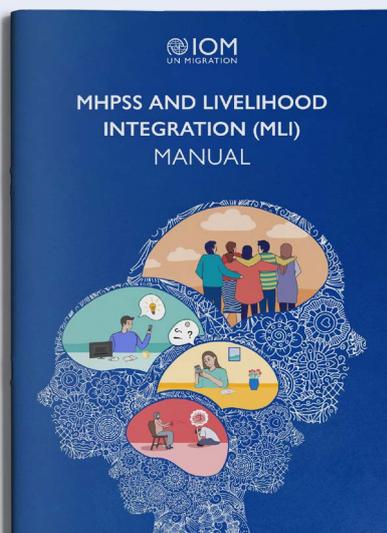
IOM's MLI approach integrates three core MHPSS activities into livelihood projects in Iraq. The integration begins with an MHPSS awareness session combined with livelihood training or induction days. These sessions are followed by bi-weekly peer-support group sessions focused on building different and participant-chosen work-related life, social and soft skills. All integrated MHPSS activities are adapted to the specific needs of livelihood participants, who select each skills module to meet their interests. Additionally, request-based individual counseling is available where MLI is implemented. MHPSS services integrated into livelihood projects directly support the identification of persons in need of specific mental health assistance and offer an opportunity to refer persons safely to focused and specialised MHPSS service providers.

In 2022, MLI projects in Iraq integrated MHPSS activities into two types of livelihood projects: **Individual Livelihood Assistance (ILA)** and Employment for Public Works (EPW),³ implemented by IOM's Transition and Recovery Division (TRD). In two locations where TRD was not present, the MHPSS programme implemented structured skills-based vocational workshops with integrated MHPSS services applying the MLI approach, described on [page 10](#).

All MHPSS activities integrated into livelihood projects were adapted to address psychosocial stressors that can arise at work and were based on the [IOM MHPSS and Livelihood Integration Manual](#).

MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION MANUAL

In 2021, to inform MHPSS activities that are integrated into livelihood projects, IOM Iraq developed the MHPSS and Livelihood Integration Manual, which was released in early 2022 in Arabic, Kurdish (Sorani) and English. The manual outlines the MLI approach, its benefits and wide-ranging considerations for MLI programming. The manual provides information for facilitators and suggests templates for livelihood-adapted MHPSS sessions. The manual features eight modules of MHPSS activities that are adapted for livelihood participants. The modules focus on specific livelihood-related life, social and soft skills, guiding facilitators through the implementation of each session. To complement the modules, the manual includes 23 corresponding leaflets. In 2022, IOM's MHPSS teams were comprehensively trained on the MLI approach and manual, ready to implement the respective services across the country.



Module 1: Coping with Stress, Building Resilience

Module 2: Positive Thinking, Patience, 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

³ Formerly referred to as Cash-for-Work (CFW).



MHPSS AND LIVELIHOOD INTEGRATION PROJECTS IN 2022



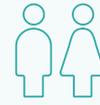
14

MLI projects
implemented



10

locations
reached



597

people
benefitted



3,896

Integrated MHPSS services



1,025

Awareness Sessions Services



2,866

Peer-support Group Services



5

Individual Counseling Sessions



61

Staff Trained on MLI



MLI Project Overviews

Kirkuk

KIRKUK CITY, HAWIJA



In 2022, IOM integrated MHPSS into three ILA projects in Kirkuk, including in the sub-district of Hawija and in Kirkuk city. **Eighty-five livelihood participants** (♂36 ♀49) benefitted from MLI in Kirkuk.

Across both locations, the integrated activities included **one MHPSS awareness session, three subsequent peer-support group sessions and request-based individual counseling.** The peer-support sessions focused on building life, social and soft skills selected by the participants as per the MLI manual.

Participant feedback shows that participants feel better equipped to keep a positive mindset at work and are more self-reliant and thorough in their daily tasks. Participants also noted the applicability of the integrated MHPSS support.

“ The sessions were linked to my reality. We discussed how we can find solutions to challenges, and sharing about my situation with others helped me.
– Female MLI participant in Yarmouk, Kirkuk

“ We learned a lot about how to run our business. The psychosocial sessions helped me increase my confidence, overcome my challenges and focus on my strengths.
– Male MLI participant in Hawija, Kirkuk

Ninewa

WEST MOSUL



In 2022, IOM continued to offer integrated MHPSS services for livelihood project participants in West Mosul, mainly supporting returnees and other vulnerable community members.

During the year, IOM integrated MHPSS into **four livelihood projects** (1 ILA and 3 EPW), reaching **147 livelihood participants** (♂169 ♀51) with MHPSS services.

The integrated support applied the MLI approach and included **one MHPSS awareness session** per project, followed by **3-4 MHPSS peer-support group sessions** as per need.

Individual counseling was available on request, and persons in need of specialised support were referred accordingly.

“ After the sessions, we are feeling more confident in addressing problems at work and at home. We also can better focus on working as a team and problem solve together. Knowing about problem solving has helped us have more confidence in ourselves and the importance of building good relationships between team members.
– Female (EPW) MLI participant in West Mosul, Ninewa

Anbar

FALLUJAH



IOM applied the MLI approach in Anbar throughout 2022, integrating MHPSS into **three livelihood projects** (1 EPW and 2 ILA).

Two projects included both men and women, and the third only focused on women.

Overall, MHPSS services were integrated for **220 livelihood participants** (♂169 ♀51).

Like the other projects, **one MHPSS awareness session** was provided in combination with the ILA induction and EPW training days, followed by bi-weekly peer-support group sessions focused on livelihood-related life, social and soft skills.

“ The sessions made me feel more linked to my work and helped me become a stronger personality with more determination to work. I understand now how I can benefit from challenges without avoiding them and from resolving things that make me unproductive. During each session, I liked exchanging experiences and options with the others.
– Female MLI participant in Ramadi, Anbar

“ Work is very pressuring; the topics that helped me most were about managing pressure and problems at work. I learned to manage problems and solve them in a positive way, how to organize my time better and replace negative thoughts with positive ones.
– Male MLI participant in Ramadi, Anbar

Baghdad

ABU GHRAIB

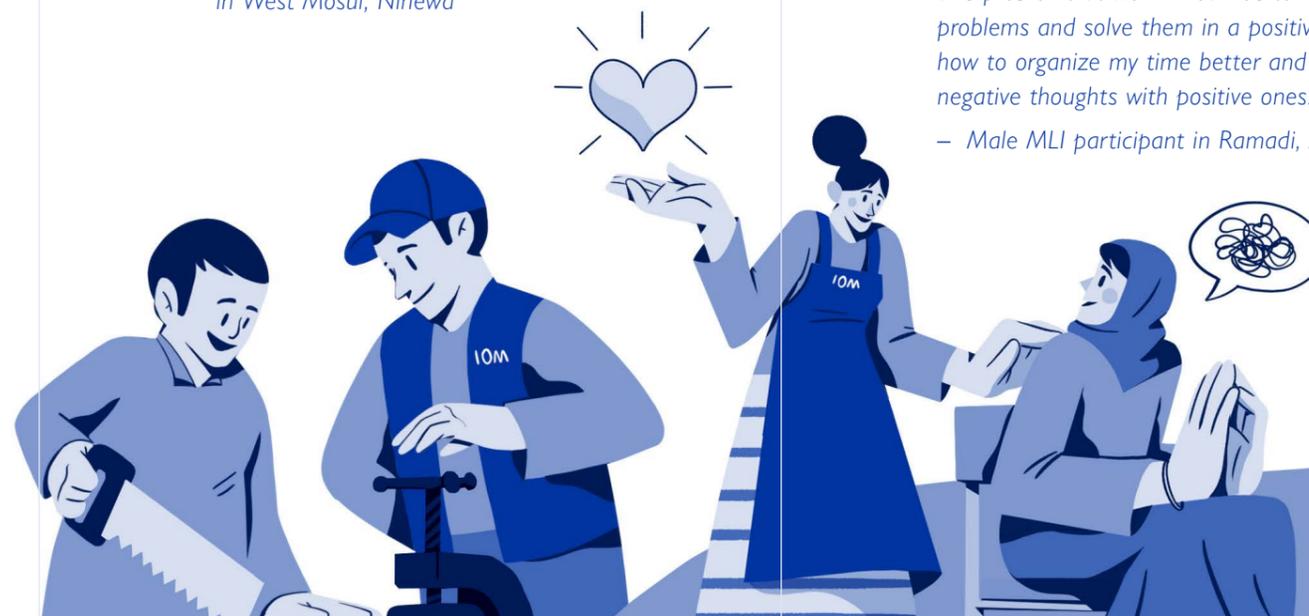


Beginning in June 2022, IOM's MHPSS programme integrated MHPSS into an ILA project in Baghdad with **14 participants** (♂13 ♀1), as per the request of the Livelihoods team, which noticed heightened MHPSS needs. This project was followed by a longer-term MLI EPW project implemented Abu Ghraib, Baghdad. The second project reached **41 participants** (♂21 ♀20) and included **one MHPSS awareness session** and **7 peer-support groups sessions**, with integrated arts-based activities for the participants' children.

Noting a need for continued MHPSS intervention after conducting an FGD with the participants, the MHPSS team decided to continue the provision of integrated services for a longer time. Most of these additional sessions focused on well-being, and how to deal with stress and manage problems. In Baghdad, as was the case in other places, women participants connected quickly through the facilitated peer-support group sessions, becoming friends and an important social support network for each other.

“ Among the skills that I developed during the MHPSS sessions were time management and to not be afraid or anxious when I am behind in my work. We also learned about communication and how to deal with problems occurring at work with colleagues or the supervisor. We learned how to remain calm. We learned from the facilitator and from the other men in the group. I liked learning time management skills because we learned how to divide daily tasks according to what is most important, urgent and non-urgent.
– Male MLI participant in Abu Ghraib, Baghdad

“ I most liked meeting other women in the sessions, which made us all feel happier. We really benefitted from each other's experience and supported each other, giving advice to others who need it. We liked having these sessions during all this time. For us it was the first time we attended MHPSS sessions – now we are sure we need these sessions and can ask for them without feeling shy.
– MLI female participant in Abu Ghraib, Baghdad



SKILLS-BASED VOCATIONAL WORKSHOPS WITH INTEGRATED MHPSS SERVICES

In settings such as camps, and where IOM is not implementing livelihood projects, the MHPSS programme developed structured skills-based livelihood workshops that are combined with MHPSS services, applying the MLI approach and manual. By offering skills-based livelihood workshops that have a positive camp-wide impact, IOM assists internally displaced persons in developing livelihood skills that are relevant to their camp and eventual return contexts, while at the same time strengthening their mental health well-being.

The skills-based vocational workshops with integrated MHPSS apply the MLI approach, but the timeframes

and modalities are slightly modified. For example, a livelihood workshop can run for four to six weeks based on the project and is complemented with one MHPSS awareness session in the beginning of the workshop and weekly peer-support group sessions until the end of the workshop. When needed, individual counseling is available, and participants are referred to IOM's specialized services in cases where additional assistance is required. In 2022, the workshop participant selection focused on female-headed households and persons with little to no work experience. Whenever possible, people with disabilities have been integrated into each workshop.



Image from MLI carpentry workshop. © IOM Iraq 2022



Image from MLI tailoring workshop. © IOM Iraq 2022



Image from MLI bakery workshop. © IOM Iraq 2022



Image from MLI bakery workshop. © IOM Iraq 2022

HASSAN SHAM (U3) CAMP

In Hassan Sham U3 IDP camp in Ninewa Governorate, a location where IOM's TRD is not present, the MHPSS team implements two standalone MLI projects, based on needs assessments and community consultations. The projects include skills-based livelihood workshops focused on carpentry and baking, with integrated MHPSS components that strengthen work-related and psychosocial life, social and soft skills.

In 2022, **358 IDPs** (♂221 ♀135), including **23 persons with disabilities** (♂17 ♀6), participated in the MLI projects at Hassan Sham U3 camp.

“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 anyway, 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. 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.

– MLI carpentry workshop participant in Hassan Sham U3 camp, Ninewa

In early 2023 and in addition to the bakery and carpentry workshops, IOM launched a third workshop focused on agriculture and gardening.

JEDDAH 1 CENTRE

In August 2022, IOM conducted community consultations in Jeddah 1 centre in Ninewa Governorate, to inform the implementation of integrated MHPSS and livelihood support programming there. The assessment highlighted interest in integrated programming and the relevance of providing MHPSS services with combined skills-based livelihood workshops. Based on the consultations, the first MLI pilot project was launched in September, combining a tailoring workshop and psychosocial support sessions, as per the MLI approach.

Between August and December 2022, **98 individuals** (♂55 ♀43) took part in the pilot project. The majority of participants found the integrated project **very relevant (98%)** to their contexts.

“We learned how to solve challenges and how to help others. The sessions helped us to think more positively and support each other.

– MLI female participant in Jeddah 1, Ninewa

Informed by the success of the initial project in Jeddah 1 centre and driven by community needs, in early 2023, IOM began implementing two additional workshops, namely bakery and carpentry workshops. Like in Hassan Sham U3 camp, the MLI projects at the Jeddah 1 centre are entirely based on IOM's MLI approach and apply the MLI manual.

The types of workshops implemented by IOM's MHPSS team are based on community consultations and must meet two essential criteria: 1) each workshop must have an immediate benefit for the camp community. For example, through the carpentry workshop, participants can learn how to build their own beds, cabinets, or doors for their tents, while the bakery workshop produces different meals and sweets for the participants and camp community, for whom food shortages are common; 2) each workshop must have relevance in the area(s) of return, meaning that through skills-building, the participants are better placed to find a work opportunity upon their return.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION: PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

To monitor and evaluate MLI programming, IOM conducts intake assessments, feedback evaluations and feedback focus group discussions (FGDs). After each MHPSS awareness session, IOM conducts an intake assessment asking for demographic information, session feedback, interest in future MHPSS sessions and relevant content. Upon completing all peer-support groups, the MHPSS team employs a feedback evaluation form to assess the sessions and their impact. To expand the monitoring and evaluation approach, the MHPSS programme organizes feedback FGDs with a sample

number of participants. These FGDs are 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.

Across locations and projects in 2022, participant feedback highlights strong overall satisfaction rates with the integrated MHPSS activities, activity content and their relevance to the participants' livelihood projects. Specifically, participant feedback illustrates that the integrated MHPSS sessions have improved problem solving skills, positive thinking, work motivation, belief in one's work, self-confidence, as well as communication skills. Feedback also indicates that the MHPSS services has enabled participants to engage more comfortably with others, noting the usefulness of learning from and with others. Importantly, participants reported that the sessions also strengthened their social support network. Across locations, the connections made during peer-support group sessions were maintained well beyond the IOM programming, with the participants continuing to support each other within their communities after a project had ended.



A group of men attend a technical MLI carpentry session at Hassan Sham U3 camp. © IOM Iraq 2022

EVALUATING INTEGRATED MHPSS AWARENESS SESSIONS

The 2022 awareness session feedback surveys found that 31 per cent of MLI participants had no prior knowledge about MHPSS, while 61 per cent had some knowledge and only 8 per cent reported having a lot of knowledge. Ninety-one per cent of the participants reported being very satisfied with what they had learned during the awareness session, with nine per cent being somewhat satisfied. Importantly, 95 per cent reported that the awareness session was relevant to their livelihood project, five per cent reported the session to be somewhat relevant. All participants (100%) noted that the session supported them in learning more about ways to deal with problems at work. Furthermore, the survey asked participants if they would be interested in attending additional sessions that discuss emotional well-being and work-related skills to determine the interest in and need for continued MHPSS integration. Across locations, 99 per cent of the participants said yes, while one per cent were not interested in additional support. Out of those interested, 97 per cent indicated interest in peer-support groups, while three per cent favoured individual support. Based on this, subsequent and bi-weekly peer-support group sessions followed the awareness sessions across locations.

2022 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

To further understand the impact of integrated MHPSS and livelihood support, IOM conducted an impact assessment in 2022, looking at the self-reported contribution of integrated (MHPSS-Livelihood) and standalone (Livelihood) interventions to the psychosocial well-being of participants from Kirkuk, Anbar, Ninewa and Basra. The assessment findings note that the integrated MHPSS sessions had a significant positive impact in improving the mental health and psychosocial well-being of livelihood participants, assisting them in gaining useful life, social and soft skills to manage work and daily life; building better relationships (e.g., with customers, family members); and becoming more resilient (e.g., in the face of financial challenges, the loss of loved ones). The assessment underscored that integrated services are highly beneficial for livelihood programme participants, and the publication will follow in 2023.

EVALUATING INTEGRATED PEER-SUPPORT GROUP SESSIONS

Across locations, 96 per cent of the participants reported being very satisfied with the group sessions, while 4 per cent were somewhat satisfied. Eighty-seven per cent reported that the sessions were relevant to their work, with 12 per cent reporting that the sessions were somewhat relevant. When asked if the peer-support groups helped participants in learning more about ways to deal with challenges at work, 100 per cent responded with yes. Equally important, 99 per cent of the participants highlighted that the sessions were very useful because they were able to meet with others in similar situations. After the first three peer-support group sessions, participants were asked about their interest in attending additional group activities to which 83 per cent responded with yes, 10 per cent with maybe and seven per cent with no. Overall, the feedback collected from MLI project participants in 2022 illustrates that the integrated MHPSS assistance was overwhelmingly well received across locations.



LESSONS LEARNED

FOR PRACTITIONERS

Coordination is key

The success of any MLI project depends on coordination and cooperation between the MHPSS and livelihood teams. In 2022, IOM launched 14 MLI projects in 10 locations. The projects were most successful in areas where there was consistent coordination, collaboration, follow up and reflection between the MHPSS and livelihood teams.

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. When livelihood project participants are not or less interested in the MHPSS sessions, the implementing team can adjust programming and facilitate fewer sessions. In these instances, the MHPSS team can encourage the participants to keep their connections active through continued conversation and to seek out MHPSS when needed at a later stage. This programme adaption has worked well for IOM Iraq, 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.



Female MLI participants attend a peer-support group session in Abu Ghraib. © IOM Iraq 2022

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. Apart from such orientations, it is critical for technical MLI staff to frequently support the field teams. Technical support, guidance and advice has been essential for all MLI projects.

Disability-inclusive project design and implementation

IOM's skills-based vocational workshops with integrated MHPSS services apply a disability-inclusive approach to design and implementation. This means that during project development stages, IOM consults persons with disabilities and subsequently facilitates their inclusion in livelihood workshops (carpentry, agriculture, tailoring or bakery) and the MHPSS sessions. To continuously include persons with disabilities and facilitate their access to the MLI project, the MHPSS programme developed a disability-inclusive outreach and integration approach for consistent and effective outreach to persons with disabilities (and their families), raising awareness about their eligibility to be part of the MLI projects. MHPSS staff and livelihood workshop trainers have been trained on disability inclusion in livelihood/work settings by IOM disability inclusion staff. In addition, all MLI implementation spaces have been made easily accessible, and reasonable accommodations including the involvement of a support person are ensured. MLI project participants with disabilities are regularly consulted on their experiences and on what can be improved. Adjustments are made accordingly.

LESSONS LEARNED

FOR ADVOCATES

MHPSS and Livelihood integration is relevant in urban and camp settings

Integrated MHPSS and livelihood programming is equally relevant in urban and camp settings, as needs relevant to both continue to exist in both locations. MHPSS and livelihood support work in tandem and complement each other, whether they are provided to returnees and receiving communities in urban settings, in informal settlements or to internally displaced persons in camps or other displacement settings.



A group of female MLI participants attend a practical carpentry workshop session in Hassan Sham U3 camp. © IOM Iraq 2022

MLI promotes social cohesion and complements peacebuilding

Without mental and emotional well-being and without 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, including vis-à-vis tensions around the acceptance of returnees; divisions among returning and receiving communities, IDPs and the local community; unequal access to basic services; complex social fabrics; and multi-ethnic divides. In such spaces, MLI offers a safe space for community members of different backgrounds and in varying situations to develop work-related skills, as well as meaningful and supportive relationships as they pursue their livelihoods. Hence, MLI complements IOM's efforts to strengthen social cohesion and community well-being.

“ The sessions helped us build new social relationships. We are from the same area, but in the past, we did not work together and did not gather in sessions or exchange opinions. We now talk with a sense of humour. And in most cases, we have the same opinions, and we share the same concerns and problems. It helps to talk.

– Male MLI participant in Baghdad

In line with the above, MHPSS and Livelihood Integration is unequivocally critical and relevant in **return and reintegration contexts**. Integrated programming can substantially contribute to the promotion of successful return and reintegration, addressing two significant individual, family and community needs: mental health and finding and sustaining a work opportunity.

LOOKING AHEAD

In 2023, IOM Iraq is committed to continuing MHPSS and livelihood integration in urban and camp settings. Furthermore, IOM will look to expand MLI services within areas of high return, to promote the achievement of successful return, reintegration and durable solutions.

MHPSS and livelihood needs will remain high among the local population into the future, especially among communities in displacement or return contexts. Through MLI, IOM addresses livelihood and MHPSS needs simultaneously, ensuring inclusive programming that provides direct, immediate and meaningful assistance to vulnerable communities across Iraq.



🏠 iraq.iom.int
✉ iomiraq@iom.int

UNAMI Compound (Diwan 2),
International Zone,
Baghdad / Iraq

🌐 [f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [y](#)
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