

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in the Middle East

Piloting, developing and sharing knowledge to improve MHPSS services for refugees and host communities

Background

The Regional Project (RP), "Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in the Middle East" serves to improve the practical know-how of actors working on MHPSS for refugees and host communities affected by the overlapping regional crises. Demand for MHPSS in the region is increasing as, in addition to the burdens caused by disasters, conflicts and displacement, economic prospects continue to decrease. Many people, especially refugees, experience their situation as hopeless. MHPSS measures aim to strengthen the psychosocial well-being of people, including in crisis situations, to reduce the risk of long-term mental health complications. Main-streaming MHPSS in development cooperation measures of different sectors contributes to increasing their impact. Cash for Work, livelihoods, employment or education projects are unlikely to be successful if workers or participants remain highly distressed or traumatised. Mental health and good psychosocial conditions are a key component for peace and stability of societies.

Our approach

The project's strategic approach consists of integrating MHPSS methods and approaches into development cooperation, multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral networking, impact research, the dissemination of knowledge on effective measures and the piloting of innovative MHPSS approaches. To this end, the RP cooperates with state and civil society actors and specialist organisations in the region, while also drawing on German and international expertise. The regional project is implemented as a complement to bilateral projects and other development cooperation measures in Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Syria. It implements MHPSS measures itself only if this serves regional learning and growth in knowledge. Within the framework of German development cooperation, there is still no specific sector strategy for the topic

of MHPSS in situations of violence and displacement. When requested, the project advises BMZ on MHPSS issues and supports it in assuming a pioneering role in the still young field of MHPSS in International Cooperation.

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| Project name | Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in the Middle East |
| Commissioned by | Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) |
| Project region | Middle East - Focus on Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Syria |
| Duration | 11/2022 – 10/2025 |

Example measures of the project

The RP developed context- and gender-sensitive standards for MHPSS measures through a consultation process with MHPSS actors of the German development cooperation who are active in the Middle East. As a result, the "Guiding Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Development Cooperation" was published. It is the first framework for MHPSS in development cooperation. Hitherto, MHPSS was defined for humanitarian aid only.

In the **Regional Conference 'The Cost of Social Injustice – Reimagining Mental Health and Psychosocial Support'** in July 2023 in Beirut, 75 mental health workers and clinicians from local grassroots organisations, United Nations rapporteurs, syndicate members, community leaders, academics, humanitarian workers, journalists and artists addressed the role of social injustice in relation to mental health, explored innovative ways to move forward together and established communities of practice.



photo left: Display of artwork from a workshop series on suicide prevention through creative arts implemented with the NGO Embrace. © Nour Achi
photo right: Snapshot from one of the working groups of the Regional Conference in Lebanon.
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Illustration: Cover of the MHPSS Guiding Framework
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To improve **staff, care for local employees**, the RP developed the REST approach (Responding to Staff Care Needs in Fragile Contexts) with the Sigmund Freud University and the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin, which is applied by different local NGOs. With medica mondiale, a **feminist staff care concept** was developed, which was piloted in a women's organisation in Iraq (EMMA).

A guiding framework on a **feminist approach** to MHPSS and an according hands-on implementation plan are to be published in 2025.

In a long-term study with families in **Jordan**, the project developed the **family-based psychosocial support approach "Nurturing Families"** together with the iNGO WarChild. This approach has subsequently been adopted and further improved by other local actors in the region, for example the local NGO Green Desert in Iraq. The approach addresses gender roles and norms on family level and conceptions of masculinity.

Together with the Academy for International Cooperation (AIZ), the RP developed training courses on MHPSS and trained external trainers on the concept. The course is now part of AIZ's standard program and offered several times per year.

In **Lebanon**, the RP cooperates closely with the governmental **National Mental Health Program**, on different MHPSS-related topics.

Suicide prevention is a central challenge in the region. In **Jordan and Lebanon**, the project piloted an approach for suicide prevention and response through arts in cooperation with the National Council for Family Affairs, IMC, UNHCR, the Lebanese NGO Embrace and the Embassy of the Netherlands. The creative arts therapy workshops with survivors of suicide attempts are documented in the handbook "When Art Breaks Taboos". Complementary is the RP's interactive website www.wojodi-amal.org, where people can express their lived experiences with suicide through art.

In **Iraq**, the RP organises the MHPSS Exchange Forum for the German Consulate in Erbil, which is a learning platform for governmental and civil society actors involved in MHPSS. Between April 2021 and February 2025, the Forum has been conducted overall 11 times.

Examples of RP knowledge products



[All products can be found on the GIZ Regional Project homepage](#)



[Guiding Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\) in Development Cooperation – The Example of the Context of the Syrian and Iraq Crises \(GIZ 2018\)](#)



[Recommendation Paper on Training and Capacity Development in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\) in Development Cooperation \(GIZ, 2019\)](#)



[Psychosocial Support Interventions in the Context of Forced Displacement – Process and Findings from a Systematic Review \(GIZ, 2021\)](#)



[Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\) Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) \(GIZ, 2020\)](#)

The Regional Project's MHPSS Awareness Raising Videos on YouTube:



[What is the role of staff care in development cooperation?](#)



[MHPSS in Development Cooperation: why do we need MHPSS-informed programming?](#)



[What does the integration of MHPSS into Development Cooperation projects look like?](#)

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