

LIBYA - CONTEXTUAL UPDATE

Libya is a country struggling due to years of uncertainty and political instability. Following widespread protests against the regime of Muammar Qaddafi, the 2011 Libyan Civil War broke out, leading to a stalemate between fragmented and self-directed armed groups.

Over the last ten years, the Libyan people have suffered tremendously from conflict, indiscriminate violence, but also from direct attacks on health care facilities, schools, water resources, and residential areas. Damage and destruction of essential facilities consequently led to collapse of functionality of society and to a major economic crisis. On 21 August 2020, a cessation of hostilities was announced and was followed by a permanent ceasefire agreement in all areas of Libya on 23 October 2020. Although the conflict was complex and dynamic, it was not the only crises Libya faced at this time. The first case of COVID-19 case in Libya was confirmed on 24 March 2020. Health structures already strained by the effects of armed conflict were unprepared for the pandemic. In addition to the global pandemic and the armed conflict, Libya was the hub of a third crisis connected to the global trend of migration and displacement - the ongoing European Migration Crisis. The country remains the main transitional point of the Central Mediterranean route.

The years of war and crisis have left many Libyan people displaced. Ever-shifting frontlines compelled some to return home, where they faced the risk of unexploded ordnance, returnees suffered many casualties including children, but also humanitarians and security workers. Almost one-sixth of the total population (1.3 million out of 7.4 million) in Libya are considered people in need. More details can be found in [Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2021](#).



MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL OVERVIEW

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is a composite term used to describe any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder (IASC, 2007). It is important to emphasize that psychosocial well-being and mental health are intertwined and cannot exist without each other, one is prerequisite of the other and vice-versa.



Taking into consideration the contextual complexity of Libya, mental health and psychosocial well-being remain a dire concern. WHO informed that one in five people suffer from mental health conditions in conflict settings. In Libya, there is a lack of systematic information and almost complete absence of research.

Mental health and psychosocial interventions imply a multi-layered approach. Following is a pyramid of the MHPSS assistance (IASC, 2007):



Based on the preliminary data collected from the 4W exercise (who is doing what, where and when) done in Libya between October and December 2020, we can observe basic services and security (1st layer) which are prerequisites for mental health and psychosocial well-being, are almost non-existing or on a low scale, especially for some vulnerable populations (migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons). In 2020, due to the COVID 19 outbreak community support (2nd layer) was limited. Most organizations and health care facilities focused their MHPSS activities on the 3rd and 4th layer of the IASC pyramid, which means the provision of focused support and specialized services. Additionally, it was observed that there is unequal coverage of care in different regions. For example, the South does not have access to the 4th layer of the pyramid - specialized psychiatric care.

The stigma of mental disorders is present in the community and people do not often seek help from a mental health professional. To conclude, there is an obvious need to move from the psychiatric model of intervention, towards implementation of community-based MHPSS approaches with multidisciplinary mental health outreach teams that empower viewing affected people and communities as agents of change rather than passive recipients of services designed by others.

MHPSS TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP - COORDINATION UPDATES

In August 2020, the MHPSS technical working group was reactivated, chaired by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Medical Corps (IMC). Their mandate was to improve the coordination among actors and help define strategies to address mental health needs in Libya. During the initial month of the reactivation of the technical working group (TWG), coordinators from IOM and IMC put their efforts in understanding the broader mental health situation in Libya and needs of various populations. In parallel, the coordinators reinvigorated the coordination mechanisms by facilitating monthly coordination calls with the MHPSS stakeholders working in and for Libya and developed an annual plan for 2021 based on analysis of the existing situation. This was followed by conducting the 4W exercise and preliminary analysis to understand how the public services are organized. To improve coordination and collaboration TWG coordinators attended numerous meetings: 18 meetings with various sector leads, sub-sectors, and working groups, 5 meetings with the Ministry of Health, and more than 36 calls with MHPSS actors.

The MHPSS TWG contributed to the HNO and HRP processes in the sectors related to Health, Protection and Education and gave inputs to the REACH qualitative assessment questionnaires. The TWG supported referrals of people living with acute mental health disorders who had difficulties in accessing psychiatric care and transitioning to the community after treatment.

VOICES FROM THE LIBYAN CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Libyan Women's Union in the South, Anti al Watan Women Training and Support Center

Anti al Watan provides mental health and psychosocial support activities as part of the gender-based violence project in the southern region of Libya. The center offers multiple activities, such as group sessions with women to discuss psychological distress, parenting, sexual harassment, peer pressure, bullying, child marriage and marital challenges. The center facilitated awareness sessions on domestic violence and its impact on teenagers.

Psychosocial support was provided for displaced women from Masmar in Ansam al Hurriya camp. Psychoeducation sessions were provided for counselors and a life skills and psychosocial workshop was organized for people with disabilities. A social skills camps was organized for children from 5 to 12 years old.

Success story:

The social workers of the center provided remote support to many women across the country and beyond

(Germany) through phone calls, awareness-raising session on the radio (Ramadan FM) and webinars. This support contributed in certain cases to decreasing the sense of isolation and loneliness.





Libyan Red Crescent

The Libyan Red Crescent (LRC) participated in providing psychosocial support services during the COVID-19 pandemic through educational videos on the mental health of injured persons and the local community, conducting dedicated sessions to support peer volunteers in the field, and implementing awareness and educational activities related to the pandemic in the 36 branches of the LRC. The LRC also conducted training sessions on communication for more than 80 volunteers within the association and participated in the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Network meetings in North Africa and the Middle East region of the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Cross.

Bila Houdoud

As part of the project Improving Primary Health Care Provision in Libya in cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Ministry of Health (MoH), Bila Houdoud conducted a MHPSS training workshop in Tripoli from 29 November to 2 December 2020 under the slogan *there is no health without mental health*. In total, 20 MHPSS focal persons (FPs) from GIZ's partner municipalities in the West and Southwest of Libya learned about the fundamentals of MHPSS and were trained in MHPSS programming and coordination as well as community interventions.

The workshop covered all layers of the IASC MHPSS pyramid. Bila Houdoud facilitated the workshop after previously having supported the FPs in assessing the status of MHPSS in their municipalities. During the workshop, the MHPSS FPs defined a concrete action plan to be implemented in their respective communities under the supervision of Bila Houdoud. Finally, the workshop aimed at establishing a network between the FPs. Together with the MoH MHPSS coordinator and Bila Houdoud organization, the FPs created a WhatsApp group to strengthen the network and actively support each other in their new role.

In addition, on 3 December 2020, Bila Houdoud and WHO facilitated an awareness session to inform the MHPSS FPs about the important link to gender-based violence (GBV) in the context of the global 16 Days of Activism Against GBV campaign. After the session Bila Houdoud provided remote support to the FPs to start implementing the formulated action plan in December 2020 and January 2021. In Tawergha, for example, the FPs started to conduct awareness sessions on the importance of MHPSS at community level.





Ranwa Center

Ranwa Center provides a wide range of MHPSS activities in Tripoli. During the mentioned period, children were supported by the provision of diagnoses, free of charge. The activities of the center include:

- Free rehabilitation services provided for three children.
- An open workshop held with the parents of the children to discuss the development of their children and to take notes.
- An initiative was launched: Your child is entitled to access mental health care, with the aim to provide free rehabilitation services to three children every month at the Ranwa Center.

Success story: Mohab is a five-year-old child who was diagnosed with autism from the age of three. He was previously supported in different centers for a year. Rehabilitation began at the Ranwa Center on 21 November 2020. In the beginning, he was facing many challenges, such as the inability to go independently to the bathroom, language and communication problems and stereotypical movements. During a month and a half of rehabilitation, his echolalia completely disappeared, he started requesting things, he asked his mother to enter the bathroom, and most of his stereotypical movements disappeared.



Psychosocial Support Team Organization

Psychosocial Support (PSS) team with the support of UNDP and other partners, supported the launching of the free hotline for psychological, social and legal counselling.

The organization launched a new psychosocial support project for affected families in Tarhuna (currently in the needs assessment phase) and are addressing gender-based violence through continuous awareness campaigns.



Al Bayan

Al Bayan centre for women and children provides MHPSS services in Tripoli in collaboration with UNDP and IMC to support GBV survivors through individual and group sessions. The organization contributed to the 16 days awareness-raising campaign targeting internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, migrants and people in detention and the other vulnerable groups. Activities took place in IDP camps.

A visit was organized to Tahrouna to provide psychosocial support for persons and communities that have been exposed to conflict. A mental health and psychosocial assessment was done for migrants in shelter centers. The center also organized out-door activities in public spaces.

Libyan Organization for Psychological Counselling and Therapy – East focal point of the Ministry of Education

The Libyan Organization for Psychological Counselling and Therapy responded actively to the COVID-19 crisis and supported the national campaign “Together, we can eliminate Corona” under the slogan “*your home is safe for you and your family, stay home.*”

The campaign was organized in cooperation with experts, social workers, counselors, and key figures in the fields of psychology, psychosocial support and special education, targeting all segments of society. It aimed at helping community members to overcome the negative psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was implemented through several remote activities using digital media and social networking sites among which is a helpline program called “*Call, we hear you.*”

The second activity was related to awareness and educational lectures broadcasted online through social networking sites and radio channels. It was delivered by specialists and academics cooperating with the organization.

The topics of lectures were various including prevention and support in psychological crises for different target groups: children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. Special attention was given to responding to COVID-19 induced crisis through addressing the stress caused by home quarantine, anxiety, countering rumors and false news, and bringing about awareness-raising and social responsibility.

In addition, lectures were organized on topics such as bullying and nurturing the relationship of tolerance, as well as speaking about psychological problems in relation to conflict. Following were topics about changing negative behavior in children, teaching skills, and emphasizing the role of family in positive education. The last activity was related to designing awareness brochures and it has been shown continuously through social networking sites and other visual channels.

NEWS FROM INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

International Medical Corps

International Medical Corps (IMC) MHPSS counsellors and psychiatrists are supporting IDPs, migrants, refugees and host communities in primary health care centres (PHCs) and polyclinics with face-to-face services in Tripoli, Misrata, Benghazi and Sabha. The MHPSS providers are part of IMC's Mobile Medical Units (MMUs) and support the integration of mental health into primary healthcare.

Counsellors provide awareness-raising sessions and individual counselling, as well as referrals to specialized care as needed. Pictured here is MHPSS counsellor, who along with her team, supports the Aljadeed Polyclinic in Sabha. In addition to serving the general community, the MHPSS teams are also supporting frontline staff, including medical workers, as well as essential support staff and cleaners.



International Organization for Migration

International Organization for Migration (IOM) implements a community-based MHPSS approach in promoting resilience and psychosocial well-being of individuals and their community, following adversities. This approach aims to strengthen family and community support and care networks, and improve access to MHPSS services. IOM MHPSS team provides a varied set of services and activities to migrants and IDPs in different urban locations in Tripoli and Zwara, including disembarkation points following rescue/interception operations at sea.

IOM's MHPSS team provides individual counselling and psychological first aid, psychosocial awareness sessions, art-based psychosocial activities, support group sessions, facilitation of recreational activities for children and adults, psychoeducation sessions, psychosocial assessments, remote counselling and PSS through the IOM MHPSS helpline for migrants, and referrals to Protection, Direct Assistance and specialized mental health care services if needed. In addition to direct MHPSS services, IOM focuses on capacity building, mainstreaming MHPSS and supporting national coordination.

In the week leading to International Migrants Day (IMD) on 18 December 2020, IOM organized MHPSS workshops for women and adolescents from different nationalities. The workshops were focused on promoting and enhancing migrants' resilience, acknowledging

participants capacities' to overcome challenges, and strengthening coping mechanisms, such as family and community support and care networks.

Furthermore, IOM's MHPSS team organized several activities to acknowledge migrants' contributions to the community during the pandemic. The team organized three different psychosocial activities on 17 December at the IOM centre in Hay Alandalus, where migrants from different nationalities shared their experiences, challenges, hopes and contributions to the community during COVID-19.



Handicap International – Humanity & Inclusion

Handicap International (HI) is implementing awareness sessions in Tripoli, Misrata and Benghazi for local NGO staff and beneficiaries. The objective of the sessions is to support the local community in the identification of mental health disorders and to clarify the referrals pathway with each location's actors to establish a referral mechanism between PHCs, local NGOs, and international NGOs. The sessions are provided by HI psychosocial workers in the three areas.

Due to COVID-19, some of the sessions have been conducted online. Each session is four to five hours long and topics focus on psychosocial distress and the most common mental health disorders in adults by presenting videos to try to identify the signs and symptoms of each mental health disorder, then presenting the referral pathways for HI.



International Rescue Committee

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) provides direct clinical management of mental disorders by non-specialized and specialized care providers in primary health care facilities in Tripoli and Suq Aljumaa, as well as in Zliten in Misrata.

IRC also offers MHPSS services in the safe spaces in Qasr Ahmed area in Misrata and supports capacity building initiatives there. The direct service provisions targeted a total of 138 beneficiaries, among which 58 % were women.

From Tripoli there were 105 people reached, 33 from Misrata. Of people reached, 84% were in the age category of 18 to 59 years, with 45% diagnosed with depression, 11% with post-traumatic stress disorder and 10% with an anxiety disorder. For the capacity building initiative, three psychiatrists conducted a Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) training to seven general practitioners.

At the end of the training, participants understood the principles and aims of mhGAP, the essential principles of care and effective communication skills when interviewing persons with mental health needs. They were also made aware of the rights of people with mental health disorders and the impact of stigma and discrimination and were able to recognize common symptoms and more complex mental health disorders, as well as able to perform assessment, management and provide psychosocial and pharmacological interventions as needed and appropriate for the following conditions: depression, psychosis, suicide and self-harm, and other significant mental health complaints.

World Health Organization

At the end of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) started implementing a two-year MHPSS project funded by FCDO – Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (UK) to strengthen the community-based mental health care in Libya. The organization will capitalize on the trained human resource assets established through earlier projects, with the aim of bridging urgent gaps in mental health services in different Libyan regions.

The planned interventions aim to strengthen the capacity of the MOH to provide for the needs of people with mental and substance use conditions in Libya, in coordination and collaboration with other sectors. This will ultimately improve the health outcomes of one of the most vulnerable segments of the population. The project Strengthening the Coordination and Availability of Libyan Effective (SCALE) Mental Health Care in Primary Health Care Services aims to target three geographical regions in Libya (South, West and East).

LIFE STORIES

ACTED – PSS

Leila is a 9-year-old girl from Benghazi, Libya. In December 2020, she was part of 400 children targeted within the age group 6 to 13 years who received a recreational/ psychosocial support kit from ACTED within the framework of the project *Improved access of children to safe and inclusive learning environments through Bayti Child Resilience Centers*, implemented by ACTED in Benghazi and funded by UNICEF.

As one family was eligible for one kit, Leila shared the kit with her two siblings at home. Najla, her mother, recalls, *“Leila was very excited when we went to collect her kit at the school. She shared it happily with her younger brother and sister, who also loved it. I was a bit afraid that they might argue with each other over the kit, but it turned out to be the exact opposite. It seems the kit have had a very positive effect on my children’s interaction with one another.”*

Leila particularly enjoyed using the coloring books and pencils, as well as the watercolors, as she loves to draw and paint. She and her siblings also enjoyed reading through the different activities listed in the PSS activity booklet. Najla explains, *“Leila’s siblings are too young to read by themselves, so we read the booklet and did the activities together, as a family activity at home. The booklet is beautiful; it has so many useful tips for children. We all got to learn new life skills thanks to it. I like how varied the topics are, from self-confidence to hand-washing to good citizenship. It has been very useful to discuss many different, but equally important topics with my children.”*

Everything in the booklet was very helpful for all my children, and for me as well because I have learned new things by reading it. I also loved the design of the booklet; it was very child-oriented and child-friendly”.

As for Leila, she recalls one activity in particular: *“I really liked the activity that shows how germs spread through hands and how to wash hands properly to kill germs. That’s why it is important to wash hands often to avoid COVID-19, so now I understand and I wash my hands many times a day.”*



UNHCR - CESVI

Refugees and asylum seekers in Libya are particularly vulnerable, as many have been trafficked, faced physical or sexual violence, and spent long periods in detention, where conditions are dire and incidents of abuse are well documented.

Yusra is one of more than 200 refugees and asylum seekers who have received mental health and psychosocial support from UNHCR’s partner, CESVI, this year. The assistance includes individual sessions as well as group counseling. *“Something I learned from the doctor is that what is in the past has happened,”* Yusra added. *“Of course, we will not forget it, but we should not dwell on it. We use it as a lesson, as we might face other difficulties in our lives, [but] we need to think about what tomorrow will bring.”* Yusra said counseling had also improved her relationships at home.

“It has helped me with my children. Before, I would cry or get angry with them, but now these tantrums have stopped. I have become a different person,” she said.

Clinical psychologists working with CESVI said MPHSS counselling can prove hugely helpful for refugees and asylum seekers in Libya, who have faced many challenges both journeying to and living in the country.



ANNEX

| ORGANIZATIONS | SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS |
|---------------|---|
| IOM | <p>Social media Links for the World mental health day: https://www.facebook.com/IOMLibya/posts/1806094116218204?__tn__=-R IOM Libya MHPSS shared Libya MHPSS photobook: https://iommigrationhealth.exposure.co/recovering-hope?source=share-iommigrationhealth IOM Libya video: https://twitter.com/i/status/1314858889679077381 IOM Libya Spotlight from the Field https://bit.ly/33JAjvK</p> <p>And International Migrants Day: https://www.facebook.com/IOMLibya/videos/1279162332464069/?_tn_=-R https://www.facebook.com/IOMLibya/videos/216590176705608/?_tn_=-R</p> |
| UNHCR | <p>The link to Yusra’s story: https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2020/12/5fe0be714/mental-health-services-help-refugees-transform-lives-libya.html The video link here: https://www.facebook.com/UNHCRTripoli/videos/446454206364546</p> |

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The MHPSS Technical Working Group is supported by



Government of the Netherlands

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Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



Funded by
the European Union