Psychosocial support in Jordanian host communities

An improved health care system in Jordan strengthens mental resilience of Syrian refugees and Jordanians in need.

Qualified aid workers are a minority

For years, Jordan has seen rapid population growth: people from Syria, the Palestinian territories, Iraq and Sudan are seeking protection in the country with the second highest share of refugees in the world. Of the roughly 670,000 registered Syrian refugees, more than 80 per cent live outside refugee camps. Particularly in communities in the north of the country, immigrants often make up half or as much as two thirds of residents. Conflicts are escalating, as water, electricity, jobs and food are in short supply.

An already excessively strained infrastructure is no longer capable of meeting the needs of the growing population. The health care sector is a case in point: many of the refugees need psychosocial support to help them process their traumatic experiences and find their bearings again. Only few of the experts in the country are familiar with the tools of psychosocial support. Psychologists and medical personnel receive purely theoretical training at Jordan’s universities and they start their professional careers with practically no field experience. Their training does not integrate any elements specifically dedicated to dealing with people who have fled war and violence and have suffered great losses. No academic courses on psychosocial support have been developed so far. Experts are often exposed to the risk of exhaustion.

Enabling professional assistance and promoting exchange

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH is working on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to strengthen the actors in the Jordanian health care system and thereby improve the psychosocial assistance provided to the population. The project provides training to Jordanian and Syrian experts as well as future psychologists, physicians, teaching professionals and social workers. Under supervision, they gain experience in providing psychological and psychosocial support to children, young people and adults who have fallen victim to armed conflict and violence.
Together with three health care centres in Sahab, Mafraq and Zarqa as well as international and local organisations, GIZ organises training courses on specific topics for more than 100 doctors, nurses and other medical professionals. The Ministry of Health plans to establish a new unit for personnel and self-care. A manual compiling approaches and methodologies as well as new guidelines will help embed the topic structurally. In the long term, all 32,000 employees in the health care sector will benefit as a result.

Samar Al-Hourani
Samar Al-Hourani has spent six years working as a nurse at the health care centre in Zarqa. Despite her intense workload, she took the time to attend the psychosocial support training course: “I had never heard of, or thought about, the concept of psychosocial support, and I was surprised to discover how important it is, but also how neglected. It was already clear to me that the patients that come to the health centre need more than just medication. In my daily work, I always feel that it is important to listen to people’s problems, as they directly affect their health, but I was not aware of just how much people are in need of psychosocial support. Having completed the GIZ training, I now know exactly how I can treat patients holistically. Psychosocial support is important – if not, crucial – for the recovery of many.”

Samar Al-Hourani, nurse at Zarqa Health Care Centre

Training courses designed to enhance personal, social and professional skills are also offered to nursing personnel and community workers. They gain a firmer grounding in family-oriented counselling and other fields. The project is primarily active in the Sahab, Mafraq and Zarqa communities, which are host to roughly 300,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Aside from the refugees, local people in need also benefit from the improved psychosocial services offered by health care centres.

In addition, GIZ provides advisory support to the Jordanian Ministry of Health in the development of a strategy for improving the provision of psychosocial care nationwide. Policymakers, the scientific community and municipal representatives engage in exchange at dialogue events, and thereby foster understanding and acceptance of the topic in Jordan and the wider region. A robust Jordanian health care system with high-quality psychosocial services helps stabilise relationships between refugees and local people – and helps secure integration.

Our results: training for hundreds of experts

With the support of GIZ, Yarmouk University in Irbid and the University of Jordan in Amman have developed a training syllabus for community-based psychosocial support. As a result, 50 experts and graduates from a variety of disciplines such as psychology, medicine, social work and sociology benefit from practice-oriented training every year. Not only the experts themselves but also people in need benefit, for instance thanks to professional psychological first aid.

The project is part of the BMZ Special Initiative ‘Tackling the root causes of displacement, stabilising host regions, supporting refugees’. The supported measures benefit refugees and host communities alike. By taking a sustainable approach, the measures mitigate structural causes of displacement in the long term, such as social inequality or a lack of prospects. This project contributes to the psychosocial support of refugees and people in need in host communities, while fostering social cohesion in those communities.