

SSARC Project, Pakistan

Promoting social cohesion between refugees and host communities

Context

For almost 40 years, Pakistan has been home to one of the largest refugee populations in the world. More than two million Afghan refugees live in Pakistan (1.3 million registered with UNHCR, around 880.000 Afghan Citizen Card holders and an estimated 500.000 unregistered refugees). More than half live in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Around one third live in refugee villages and two-thirds in host communities and cities.

The economic infrastructure and social protection systems in the host cities and communities are overstretched. The political and economic consequences have created tensions and frequently undermined social cohesion among population groups. Experiences of violence or the threat of violence, trauma, and existential and financial worries create a situation that can cause fear, stress and even depression. Children, adolescents, girls, women and other vulnerable groups are particularly affected.

Objective

Against this backdrop, the project works on behalf of the German Government to support the Government of Pakistan in developing psychosocial support services – locally adapted, gender-sensitive, easily accessible and consequently low-threshold – for vulnerable Afghan refugees and members of host communities. A special focus is on women and adolescent boys and girls. The aim is to strengthen individuals, families and communities as a whole in order to promote peaceful coexistence between Afghan refugees and host communities.

Project Name	Social Support for Vulnerable Afghan Refugees and Host Communities (SSARC)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Lead executing agency	Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) / Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CCAR)
Implementing organisation	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Project region	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan
Term	01.10.2019 – 31.12.2022

Approach

Culture - and gender-sensitive psychosocial support services are developed for the target groups. The personnel of the institutions and NGOs involved, as well as influential community members, are trained in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

The three-stage approach aims to:

1. Build the capacity of key state and non-state actors to address psychosocial needs. Included here are NGOs operating in the field and key figures like teachers, social workers and religious leaders who are in daily contact with the population groups. The aim of this training is to enable skilled workers and laypeople to better address the psychosocial needs of refugees and the Pakistani population.
2. Create 'safe spaces' where affected persons can meet and exchange views. These spaces serve as meeting places, particularly for girls and women who are otherwise confined to the house due to socio-cultural constraints.



Left: Young people from Afghan refugees and host communities assist each other in building a small car during a robotics course in Hajizai

Right: Workshop on gender-based violence / GBV in Peshawar



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Left: Meeting of a youth group at the CAR office in Peshawar to plan a community-based project.

Right: During a training about para-counselling in Kohat, women learn through role plays how to provide psychosocial support.

They are also made aware of certain psychosocial issues and are provided with information, for example, on domestic violence, gender-based violence, prevention of addiction and stress management, and are taught how to deal with these problems.

3. Implement measures that help enhance the resilience of young people. This means helping affected people to regain their psychological wellbeing and to strengthen their ability to deal with adversity. Young people are advised and guided in taking control of their lives and in engaging in their communities, so that they are recognised as full-fledged members.

The project works closely with the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR) in KP province on developing, coordinating and implementing all activities.

Results

The activities implemented during the project term are geared to the specific needs of the population, particularly women, girls and young people. They promote exchange and dialogue between Afghan refugees and host communities and help to reduce tensions and overcome prejudices in families, among neighbours and in the communities. In synergy, they work to strengthen social cohesion.

-MHPSS trainings: In accordance with a manual developed for MHPSS and related themes such as conflict resolution, stress management, dealing with aggression and communication, 1,385 key individuals in the communities, among them 736 women, gained MHPSS knowledge.

-Awareness-raising measures: 1,338 awareness-raising measures were carried out on topics including mental health, gender-based violence, stress management and menstrual health. These were attended by 17,869 participants, of which

13,155 were female. This included robotics courses, which were attended by 771 young people, among them 333 girls, with the aim of boosting self-esteem and building digital skills.

-Safe spaces: Five safe spaces were established in Peshawar (Naguman, Khazana), Charsadda (Hajizai), Kohat (Gamkol) and Nowshera (Akora Khattak) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These spaces are used by Afghan refugees and members of the host communities for training courses, social gatherings and recreational activities. A training and function room was set up in the CAR building in Peshawar. It offers space for around 40 people and is being used for learning purposes.

-Community-based projects: 668 Afghan and Pakistani youths (303 girls) developed social and cultural projects in their communities, including an art competition around painful experiences, a symposium on the importance of social cohesion and an environmental project on waste disposal.

-A digital platform was established to offer Afghan and Pakistani youths a safe space in which to meet virtually and share thoughts and experiences around topics such as mental health, plans for the future, and recreational activities, including outside the boundaries of their own communities.

-Strengthening the counterpart CAR: Training was provided to 156 CAR/CCAR staff, among them 30 women, on MHPSS and topics such as project management, gender-sensitive planning and decision-making.

The first effects can already be seen:

Community members are for the first time in contact with each other, are now in regular exchange, solve conflicts together, feel less isolated and see themselves as part of a community that offers support and protection.

The courses boost self-esteem among young people in particular, help them learn to develop their abilities, give them prospects for the future and enable them to make positive contributions to the community.

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