

Social Support for Vulnerable Afghan Refugees and Host Communities (SSARC)

Advising the Pakistani government to set up structures for MHPSS service delivery

Context

For more than forty years, Pakistan has been hosting one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Approximately two million Afghan refugees are in Pakistan, with over half of them living in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. Around one-third of these refugees live in refugee villages, while two-thirds reside in communities and cities.

The economic infrastructure and social security systems of the host cities and communities are overstretched. The political uncertainties and precarious economic outlook, exacerbated by the effects of the COVID pandemic and the flood disaster in autumn 2022, are making mental stress an increasingly important issue in the country. On government level there is a growing commitment to offer MHPSS services across institutions. Experiences of violence or the threat of violence, trauma, depression, stress and existential and economic worries are leading to tensions in social cohesion among the population. Particularly affected are adolescents, women, girls, and other vulnerable groups.

Objective

Against this backdrop, the project, on behalf of the German Government, advises the Government of Pakistan on how to integrate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) approaches into its service delivery for vulnerable Afghan refugees and members of host communities at national, provincial, and district level in a sustainable manner.

At the same time, the project provides low-threshold, context-adapted, gender-sensitive psychosocial support services for vulnerable Afghan refugees and members of host communities. The aim is to strengthen individuals, families and communities as a whole in order to promote peaceful coexistence between Afghan refugees and members of the host communities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Project name	Social Support for Vulnerable Afghan Refugees and Host Communities (SSARC)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan
Lead executing agency	Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) / Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CCAR)
Duration	01.10.2019 – 30.09.2025

Approach

Representatives of the (Chief) Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees CCAR/CAR, the line departments of Health, Education, Welfare, Youth Affairs and Sports as well as cooperation partners such as multilateral organisations and civil society are qualified in MHPSS topics. Political decision-makers in middle and upper management are also supported in anchoring MHPSS issues in their institutions in the long term.



Left: Workshop on anchoring MHPSS services with leadership from CAR

Right: Training of coaches under the global Sport for Development (S4D) approach



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Left: MHPSS training for key persons in the communities

Right: Robotics course in which women are crafting small electric cars

Culture and gender-sensitive measures for the target groups offering psychosocial support are implemented at district and community level.

The three-stage approach aims to:



1. Enhance the capacity of key governmental and non-governmental actors in addressing psychosocial needs. This includes professionals from CCAR/CAR, line ministries, and other stakeholders working in the field. Additionally, key individuals such as teachers, social workers, and religious leaders, who interact with the population groups on a daily basis, are empowered for these tasks. The objective of these trainings is to expand the counselling skills of professionals and institutionalize expertise in their work environment.



2. Strengthen the resilience of more than 24,000 people through low-threshold psychosocial support measures (awareness-raising events, sports activities, community-based and youth-promoting events and vocational training measures). Meeting centres, so called safe spaces, for vulnerable groups are set up in municipalities. Here, those affected can meet and exchange ideas. For girls and women in particular, who are often housebound due to socio-cultural restrictions, these spaces serve as places to meet and socialise. They are also sensitised for certain psychosocial issues and receive information, for example on domestic violence, gender-specific violence and stress management. Sports activities under the global project Sport for Development (S4D) help to increase the well-being of young people and strengthen their sense of belonging.



3. Establish a systematic coordination mechanism between CAR, the line ministries and civil society in KP province to create a joint concept for the anchoring of MHPSS services for vulnerable groups. Dialogues and exchange forums serve the participants to develop the approaches.

Results

Strengthening the counterpart CCAR/CAR and the line departments: Training was provided to 201 staff of CAR/CCAR and the line departments, among them 30 women, on MHPSS and topics such as project management, gender-sensitive planning and decision-making.

MHPSS trainings: In accordance with a manual developed for MHPSS and related themes such as conflict resolution, stress and anger management and communication, 1,824 professionals and key persons in the communities, among them 861 women, gained MHPSS knowledge.

Psychosocial activities: 18,347 people, including 13,269 women and girls, participated in awareness-raising sessions on topics such as mental health, gender-based violence, stress management and/or community-based events, sports activities and vocational training.

Safe Spaces: Five safe spaces were established in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These spaces are used by Afghan refugees and members of the host communities for training courses, social gatherings, and recreational activities. Furthermore, a training room was set up in the CAR building in Peshawar. It offers space for around 40 people and is being used for learning purposes.

S4D: 240 coaches (including 103 women and girls) were trained on the S4D approach to sensitize young people in the communities about social cohesion and their own well-being. In addition, the trainers implement sports activities in the communities.

Youth development: 755 young people (including 375 girls) took part in community-based social and cultural projects. These initiatives promote exchange and dialogue between Afghan and Pakistani young people and contribute to reduce tensions and prejudices within families, among neighbours, and in communities. By working together, they ensure that social cohesion is strengthened.

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