SUICIDE PREVENTION IS A KEY COMPONENT OF IOM IRAQ’S COMMUNITY STABILIZATION PORTFOLIO

Erbil – World Mental Health Day is recognized every year on 10 October, to raise awareness of mental health issues around the world and mobilize efforts in support of mental wellbeing. This year, the focus is on suicide prevention.

Suicide prevention is becoming an increasingly important component of IOM Iraq’s Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programming. In recent years, increased reports of suicide cases in some IDP camps where IOM works; increased interest in the topic amongst governments entities; and official requests for support from the Iraqi Ministry of Health and Environment and local NGOs; have led to the development of a training module and material, standard operating procedures on suicide prevention and response, and other activities, as part of the organization’s community stabilization and social cohesion work.

IOM Iraq MHPSS staff have been holding trainings for service providers (MHPSS, Camp Coordination and Camp Management, Protection) in targeted camps, to introduce the topic of suicide, explain the risk factors and help separate fact from myth. The trainings equip MHPSS professionals to focus on high-risk sociodemographic factors such as stigma, domestic violence, poverty, illiteracy and the marginalization of women.

An internal Standard Operating Procedure was developed to guide colleagues who work with vulnerable beneficiaries on the topic of suicide prevention and response; IOM also supports local organizations that organize social awareness activities and advocacy on behalf of those affected by suicide.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), nearly 800,000 people die by suicide every year; for each suicide there are more than 20 attempts. The impact of suicides and suicide attempts can affect families, friends and communities, yet in some societies the topic is taboo and subject to stigma. However, suicides can be prevented, through measured actions at the individuals, community and national levels.

Goal 3 of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals is to “ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”. It includes a target related to the reduction of “premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being”; suicide prevention is included in this target. IOM Iraq’s work to destigmatize suicide, and support those impacted by it, represents progress towards the achievement of Goal 3.

IOM Iraq’s MHPSS programme has been active since 2014. It currently operates in eight governorates: Baghdad, Kerbala, Duhok, Najaf, Erbil, Diyala, Kirkuk and Ninewa. Since January 2019, the programme has reached 14,850 beneficiaries with the provision 45,012 services. These MHPSS activities are made possible with support from the United Kingdom’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office; USAID; the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA); the Government of Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
(DFAT); the European Union; and the Governments of Italy, Germany, Japan, Canada and The Netherlands.

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