PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH & BUILDING RESILIENCE IN UKRAINE
1 JANUARY – 30 JUNE 2023
FOREWORD

Anh Nguyen
IOM Chief of Mission in Ukraine

The past six months have been marked by unprecedented challenges in Ukraine as communities continue to grapple with the ramifications of conflict and displacement. The profound effects of these circumstances on mental health and wellbeing are often hidden yet devastating - affecting individuals, families and entire communities.

Recognizing the pressing need for specialized care and support, IOM has redoubled its efforts to extend MHPSS services across Ukraine. This report chronicles our comprehensive approach, designed to provide immediate assistance while laying the groundwork for long-term resilience and recovery.

Through community-based interventions, focused support services, capacity strengthening and collaboration with local authorities, international partners, civil society organizations and academic institutions, IOM has worked diligently to ensure that our support is not just proactive, immediate and responsive, but continues to pave the way for long-term recovery and resilience.

But beyond the data and the programmatic details lies a story of human fortitude, empathy and a collective commitment to healing. It is about building bridges between despair and hope, isolation and community, trauma and recovery.

I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our team on the ground, the Ukrainian government, our donors and all partners involved. Your dedication, expertise and compassion make this vital work possible.

As we present this account of our endeavours in the first half of 2023, we recognize the complexity of the challenges ahead. I invite you to delve into this report to understand the breadth of IOM’s MHPSS activities in Ukraine. It is not just an account of what we have done but a reflection of what we believe in: the inherent dignity of every individual and the power of collective action to bring about lasting positive change.

Anh Nguyen
Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation began on 24 February 2022, the country has found itself embroiled in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The conflict has forced over five million people into internal displacement within Ukraine and driven close to seven million abroad, breaking families apart and disrupting the daily fabric of life. As of July 2023, an estimated 4.8 million individuals have been able to return to their homes after displacement due to the full-scale invasion, with 5.1 million people remaining displaced within Ukraine.¹

The scale and complexity of the crisis has demanded a multidimensional response. IOM implements programming in sectors including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), protection, health, food security, livelihoods and resilience, shelter, transition and recovery, water, sanitation and hygiene and site management support. Present in the country since 1996, at the start of the crisis IOM promptly initiated comprehensive assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and war-affected individuals across Ukraine, reaching over 4.2 million people² with critical support since February 2022.

While feasibility of sustainable reintegration and long-term intentions are subject to change and affected by conflict dynamics, in a recent IOM survey of return intentions, 88 per cent of returnees expressed their intention to remain in their current location (est. 4.2 million individuals). Sixty-four percent of all returnees are in only five oblasts – Kyiv city and Kyivska, Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovska and Odeska. Within this context, IOM’s MHPSS programme supports the psychological wellbeing and resilience of those affected by the war, including IDPs, returnees, veterans, their family members, third-country nationals and host communities. This comprehensive programme seeks to restore a sense of safety, foster self-efficacy and community solidarity and equip communities with the tools to navigate current and future stressors.

IOM collaborates closely with Ukraine’s First Lady’s initiative on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support and is piloting programmes with academic institutions and various Government of Ukraine Ministries to enhance the MHPSS certification process in a manner that makes it more inclusive of under-represented populations. Moreover, IOM is cited as one of the references for best practices in community based MHPSS in the WHO’s strategic response plan, Ukrainian Prioritized Multisectoral Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Actions During and After the War: Operational Roadmap.

IOM’s MHPSS programme in Ukraine includes an extensive range of services and interventions, designed to address both immediate needs and long-term wellbeing. All IOM MHPSS services are carried out according to the IOM Manual on Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies and Displacement and in a manner consistent with the ‘do no harm’ principle outlined in the Sphere project, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of mental health and the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings.
KEY PROGRAMMATIC PILLARS

1. **Raising MHPSS Awareness**: A dedicated focus on reducing mental health stigma and barriers to accessing services ensures that mental health support is accessible to all, including veterans and their families.

2. **Strengthening Social Networks**: Recognizing the disruptive effect of war on social networks, the team hosts communal celebrations, informal educational activities, livelihood initiatives and recreational activities, including art-based, sport and socio-cultural activities. These efforts aim to build trust, foster social cohesion and improve wellbeing within communities.

3. **Integrating MHPSS and Livelihoods**: The programme addresses work-related stressors and prepares psychologically affected individuals for livelihood opportunities, promoting a successful work environment.

4. **Providing Focused Support**: Targeted interventions promote resilience and positive coping mechanisms among the war-affected families, mitigating stress symptoms and aiding in recovery from distressing events. As a part of focused support, services are available through the IOM MHPSS emotional support hotline in Ukrainian, Russian, English and Arabic languages to callers throughout Ukraine and in Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom.

5. **Capacity-strengthening for MHPSS Practitioners**: IOM provides critical training for MHPSS field workers, volunteers, government entities, NGOs staff and other MHPSS professionals.

IOM’s programmes are adapted to the nuanced context in Ukraine at both national and local levels. Emphasizing the restoration of social support networks and valuing the agency of all communities involved, these programmes stand as essential mediators of individual and collective psychosocial wellbeing.

From the war’s onset on 24 February 2022 through 30 June 2023, IOM has provided over 82,000 MHPSS services to more than 60,000 individuals, with nearly 48,000 of these services delivered in the first half of 2023 alone. IOM’s presence spans 12 oblasts and 33 raions, with continued coordination with local partners and expansion to new areas, including hard-to-reach, war-affected locations.³

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³ This includes: Chernivtsi raion in [Chernivtska oblast]; Dniprovskyi, Kamianskyi, Kryvorizkyi, and Novomoskovskyi raions in [Dnipropetrovska oblast]; Iziumskyi, Kharkivskyi, and Kupianskyi raions in [Kharkivska oblast]; Khmelnytskiy raion in [Khmelnytska oblast]; the metropolitan area of Kyiv; Buchanskyi, Fastivskyi, and Vyshhorodskyi raions in [Kyivska oblast]; Chervonohradskyi, Drohobytskyi, Levskyi, Stryskyi, and Zolochivskyi raions in [Lvivska oblast]; Mykolaivskyi raion in [Mykolaivska oblast]; Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi and Odeskiy raions in [Odeska oblast]; Kremenchutskyi and Poltavskyi raions in [Poltavska oblast]; Khmelnitskaya, Khmelnytskyi, Tulchynskyi, Vinnytskyi, and Zhemchynskyi raions in [Vinnytska oblast]; and Berehivskyi, Khustskyi, Mukachivskyi, and Uzhhorodskyi raions in [Zakarpatska oblast].
47,945 SERVICES DELIVERED BETWEEN JANUARY - JUNE 2023

- 77% female
- 28% male

23% Implementing partners*

*Working in Kharkiv and Poltava

47,945 TOTAL SERVICES DELIVERED FROM JANUARY - JUNE 2023

IOM’s presence spans 12 oblasts and 33 raions
PROMOTING PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING

The war in Ukraine has caused personal tragedy and led to loss of property, disruption of social networks, discrimination and uncertainty about the future. In response to these challenges, IOM has implemented a robust community-based support and awareness raising programme to promote mental health and wellbeing among war-affected people in Ukraine. Topics covered in awareness sessions, which are often incorporated directly into community-based activities, include mental health, protection, self-care and wellbeing and the availability of related services, such as IOM MHPSS focused support services and the IOM MHPSS emotional support hotline. Collaborating with local and international partners, IOM identifies target population needs, engages communities in service development and keeps them informed about service availability.

IOM’s approach is inclusive and human rights-based, ensuring the availability and accessibility of psychosocial support for war-affected communities.

The activities IOM implemented in the first half of 2023 were diverse and aimed at improving wellbeing, building trust and strengthening individual and community coping mechanisms to the distressing factors associated with the war. These include communal celebrations, communication on positive coping strategies, informal educational activities, livelihood activities, art-based and sports-based activities and recreational activities, each aiming to improve the welfare of people of concern, building trust and strengthening social cohesion in communities.

In Western Ukraine, IOM programming focuses on supporting IDPs and facilitating positive interactions between IDPs and local communities. For example, between March and June 2023, IOM led 29 guided tours across Ukraine’s Zakarpattia region, engaging over 600 participants, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), host community members, veterans and their families. These tours, extending beyond mere sightseeing, fostered understanding, integration and a sense of belonging among different community members. Moreover, these excursions served as social catalysts, facilitating a connection to Zakarpattia’s diverse cultural fabric and supporting IDPs in exploring their new homes, socializing with host community members and exploring the sense of belonging in their own stories of displacement. The region’s relatively peaceful environment, being further away from the frontline, makes these tours especially beneficial for recovery and reintegration of veterans into their communities.

Moreover, in a compelling series of four events in Lviv, beginning in April and titled Ukrainian Women, Stories of Resilience, IOM embarked on a journey to highlight the remarkable fortitude of women in Ukraine. These events consist of portrait exhibitions coupled with collective storytelling sessions, engaging over 200 community members and are currently ongoing. The exhibitions are not just a display of faces; they unravel the personal triumphs and resilience of women who have weathered the storms of war, uncertainty, displacement and loss. From being community members, students, professionals, mother, wives, sisters and daughters, they have navigated multifaceted roles, drawing strength from their experiences during trying times. By casting a spotlight on the unyielding spirit of these women, the series serves as a celebration of human resilience and a tribute to the enduring roles that women continue to play amid adversity.

Similarly, in southern Ukraine, IOM’s response to the distressing aftermath of the damaged Kakhovka hydroelectric power station showcases a robust support system tailored for those affected by war, displacement and disaster. When floods engulfed the region, many displaced people and their families, primarily from non-government-controlled areas, faced terrifying uncertainties. For some, evacuation to Odesa took a harrowing eight days, leaving them disoriented and in desperate need of support in an unfamiliar city.

IOM’s MHPSS team in Odesa promptly commenced an assortment of activities, crafting a multi-dimensional approach to provide social and psychological assistance to over 300 flood victims. The support included awareness-raising sessions titled “Psychological Support in Times of Crisis,” detailing comprehensive information about IOM’s assistance. IOM’s intervention included four support group sessions, tailored to address the mental health needs of the survivors and fostering spaces for sharing life experiences and aiding psycho-emotional

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<th>30,163 COMMUNITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT AND AWARENESS SERVICES DELIVERED BETWEEN JANUARY AND JUNE 2023</th>
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recovery. Individual counseling was also made available on a regular basis, ensuring survivors and other community members had access to mental health support as needed. One of the highlights of IOM’s endeavors was the orchestration of a joint meeting known as Family Day. This event aimed to bridge the gap between previous and newly arrived IDPs, fostering resilience and community cohesion, elements vital to the personal and community recovery process.

In neighbouring Vinnytsia region, in April 2023 IOM and the regional Department for Social Policy invited over 110 individuals, volunteers, activists and community members to participate in a volunteer forum. The event served as a crucible for creativity, innovation and collaboration for volunteers; people from different backgrounds and regions of Ukraine came together to brainstorm, analyze and devise plans to support displaced and war-affected people in Vinnytsia. Several volunteer initiatives emerged from the event, each one reflecting the commitment, creativity and collaboration of the forum’s participants. One significant outcome includes the development of a forum of IDP success stories. Devised and organized by volunteers who met at the Vinnytsia event, the event served as stage for host community members and displaced people to share their journeys, triumphs and the resilience that shapes their lives. Events like this aim to catalyze social linkages, rebuild community bonds and support the wellbeing of community members.

Finally, in Eastern Ukraine, an area bearing the brunt of the war, the need for community support and resilience has never been more critical. The IOM MHPSS programme, coordinating closely with local NGOs such as Pectoral, Peaceful Sky and Slavic Heart, has stepped in to foster healing, growth and connection through various thoughtfully designed initiatives.

This close engagement with local partners is essential to building trust with local communities, ensuring that MHPSS activities are tailored to specific local needs and enhancing the reach, impact and sustainability of MHPSS programmes.

In Dnipro, IOM has led a series of innovative activities targeting various segments of the community. At a recovery garden event at a landscape design park IOM, led families displaced from Mariupol in art- and sports-based activities and psychosocial classes. The holistic approach aimed to release emotions, improve mood, develop a sense of security and foster interaction with the natural environment. In a compelling series of 20 events, organized since March in the Regional Children’s Library, IOM and its partners engaged over 300 children, veterans and adults in a range of recreational activities. From crafting wooden dragons to making bracelets and engaging in associative games, the meetings focus on restoring resources, building connections and helping participants discover new talents. The sessions also included mindfulness exercises to manage stress and anxiety. Lastly, in an event to support the families of fallen soldiers, IOM and its partners engaged 111 people in physical and mental wellbeing exercises, including art and craft activities and group discussions to provide participants with an opportunity to unwind, relieve stress, connect and create memorable experiences.

These diverse initiatives embody the spirit of community healing, resilience and connection that the MHPSS programme strives to foster across Ukraine. Collaborating with local partners, the programme offers adaptive and multifaceted support that reaches the heart of a community bearing the weight of conflict.

IOM and its partners’ continued work is not only a response to the immediate need but also a commitment to building a more hopeful and resilient future.
FOCUSED SUPPORT INTERVENTIONS: BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH TAILORED ASSISTANCE

Focused support interventions, delivered in person, through the IOM MHPSS emotional support hotline, or through remote consultations, promote resilience and positive coping mechanisms and are offered to host community members, recently displaced people families and otherwise war-affected people in distress.

Focused support interventions help to reduce stress symptoms and promote a healthy recovery following distressful events. Individuals can receive specialized assistance in the format of short or medium-term psychological or psychotherapeutic support sessions. Most beneficiaries request support related to one or more of the following:

- Difficulties with adaptation
- Anxiety or fear of the future
- Experiencing loss or grief
- Preoccupations and obsessive thoughts
- Sleep disorders or nightmares
- Problems with emotional regulation
- Personal or family conflicts and difficulties in parent-child relationships
- Depressed states
- Feelings of loneliness

While delivering focused support services, IOM’s MHPSS team employs a tool and methodology called Problem Management Plus (PM+). This evidence-based approach was developed to facilitate individual psychological help for adults impaired by distress in communities exposed to adversity. This intervention follows a problem-solving approach and can help people with depression, anxiety and stress and improve aspects of their overall mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. For more severe cases, IOM provides referrals for psychiatric consultations and clinical psychological counseling to help with pre-existing or emerging severe stress, behavioural problems, or moderate to severe mental disorders exacerbated by the war.

The IOM MHPSS hotline, available in Ukrainian, Russian, English and Arabic languages to callers throughout Ukraine and in Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom, serves as a crucial point of contact for affected individuals seeking individual counselling services. Following an initial consultation, the caller may be referred onward to receive formal psychiatric and psychological care under a curated treatment plan. This approach also helps participants develop a sense of safety and comfort along with emotional stabilization and supports them through providing the necessary information and practical assistance in linking them with social support and other services. Where necessary, IOM makes referrals for other forms of assistance such as legal or protection matters, either to other IOM services or external providers.
MHPSS CAPACITY STRENGTHENING: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH IN UKRAINE

IOM’s extensive efforts in Ukraine are a testament to the complex, rapidly evolving demands facing the country. In Ukraine, there is a pressing need to support MHPSS field workers, stakeholders, volunteers, government entities, NGOs, community leaders and professionals, who are rapidly changing their practices to adapt to the war. Given this, IOM initiatives to strengthen national and local capacity to respond to mental health needs across war-affected communities in Ukraine form an essential pillar of IOM’s strategy in Ukraine. Between January and June 2023, IOM engaged 2,243 people in capacity strengthening activities, including 1,851 women and 392 men.

Collaborating with Ukraine’s First Lady’s initiative on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, as well as piloting programmes with academic institutions and Ministries, IOM and its partners offer training to a range of stakeholders on psychological first aid (PFA), basic MHPSS skills, stress management, self-care and burnout prevention. IOM’s programming with academic partners has also focused on enhancing the MHPSS certification process, extending the reach to include under-represented populations, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and breadth of impact.

Preventing burnout and enhancing resilience among professionals and volunteers on the frontline has been a focus of IOM’s efforts. In early 2023, IOM launched a training series on PFA, stress management and emotional burnout, targeting key government partners like the Ministry of Health, mental health professionals, volunteer groups and humanitarian partners, including members of the National Protection Cluster. IOM has placed an emphasis on regular and sustained engagement with the national Ministry of Health and local Department of Health staff through ongoing trainings and training-of-trainer courses to extend the reach and sustainability of capacity strengthening efforts. Reflecting a nuanced understanding of the challenges facing stakeholders in Ukraine, IOM capacity strengthening activities also provide practical tools for local and national stakeholders beyond PFA, ranging from effective communication with affected populations to conflict mediation.

For example, in March 2023, IOM orchestrated eight intensive two-day training-of-trainers events for over 300 psychologists and education professionals, including teachers working in schools across Vinnytsia, reaching over five per cent of all teachers in the region. The training course aimed to equip these professionals with skills in delivering PFA and, importantly, in imparting those skills to others. The importance of having psychologists and educational professionals well-versed in MHPSS, particularly in PFA, lies in their unique position to identify, support and assist children who may be experiencing psychological distress due to displacement or conflict-related trauma. Trained teachers and psychologists can foster a more supportive and understanding environment, allowing for better adjustment and recovery. By empowering these professionals to pass on their knowledge to their own schools and communities, IOM is not only investing in immediate support but also in creating a sustainable, empathetic framework for ongoing mental health and psychosocial care within the affected areas.

In addition to these broad-reaching initiatives and as discussed further below, IOM and its partners in the Ukrainian Ministry of Veterans Affairs and Ministry of Health are devoting increasing attention to the specific needs of veterans, their families and their communities. Collaborating closely with these Ministries and healthcare providers across Ukraine, IOM is working diligently to strengthen evidence-based policy and processes on veteran reintegration and MHPSS. These efforts are informed by international best practices and aligned with IOM’s Manual on Community-Based MHPSS in Emergencies and Displacement, and they lay the groundwork for a system in which veterans and their families have direct and immediate access to essential support.

IOM’s MHPSS capacity-strengthening programme in Ukraine during the first half of 2023 illustrate a responsive and comprehensive approach, aligning closely to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11, building resilient and inclusive societies. The collaborative work conducted by IOM, the Government of Ukraine and other partners establishes a strong platform for ongoing efforts, reflecting the shared goal of promoting wellbeing and enhancing community resilience in Ukraine.
In recognition of the specific challenges faced by veterans, their dependents and the communities to which they return, IOM has been increasing its programmatic focus on the unique needs facing veterans in Ukraine. Beginning in early 2023, IOM has expanded and deepened its efforts, advising the Ministry of Veterans Affairs in developing community based MHPSS services and beginning coordination with a range of actors in Ukraine to support the wellbeing veterans, their family members and members of communities that veterans return to. This tailored approach aims to address the psychosocial stressors faced by veterans and those disengaging from military service, assisting them in reintegration into the community and dealing with the physical and psychological aftermath of war.

The imperative nature of this focus is underscored by the substantial challenges that many veterans face post-military service. The battlefield’s lingering effects leave many without the requisite support, compounded by strained governmental institutions and communities. Research conducted by IOM in 2021, covering all 24 oblasts of Ukraine, revealed that 75 per cent of veterans viewed psychosocial support as an acute need after completing military service. Alarming, 22 per cent reported experiencing intense emotional stress during the transition to civilian life. This research also uncovered key lessons, including the high priority veterans and their families place on MHPSS, as well as the gendered dimensions of such support. Particularly concerning is the persistent stigma attached to mental health, notably among male veterans, in part due to the scarcity of male MHPSS workers across Ukraine.

In response to these challenges, IOM’s ongoing and future programming aims to dismantle the barriers that impede veterans from accessing MHPSS services. Through concerted awareness campaigns and community outreach, IOM seeks to elevate public awareness about the importance of mental health, diminish associated stigmas and ease the path to support for veterans, their families and their communities. This approach encompasses broader family units and returning communities, extending the supportive reach of the program.

Strengthening collaboration with Ministry of Veteran Affairs, the Ministry of Health and healthcare providers across Ukraine and international experts is key to IOM’s strategy. By engaging national and international experts, IOM strives to build evidence-based policy, support veteran reintegration and enhance MHPSS and technical expertise and capacity across the board. Ongoing programming includes an initiative to build the capacity of over 200 MHPSS practitioners in Ukraine to support the specific needs of veterans, their families and war-affected populations.

Direct support for veterans is also being offered through longstanding collaborations with MHPSS partners, providing individual and group assistance. Options for online sessions and phone counseling have been made available to accommodate personal preferences and mobility restrictions and for people with disabilities.

In a broader context, these initiatives form a vital part of a whole-of-society approach to veteran reintegration, with the potential to make a direct and positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of veterans and their families. By ensuring long-term, equitable access to MHPSS, IOM is actively contributing to the Ukraine Recovery Plan, notably in the section on “Veterans’ rights protection” and reinforcing the resilience and active participation of war veterans and their families in their communities’ social and economic life.
JOURNEY TO HEALING AND HOPE: OLEKSANDR’S STORY

Rehabilitation and recovery after injury and engagement in armed conflict often represent more than a physical struggle. It is a complex and intertwined journey where emotional resilience, community integration, and the assistance of loved ones play pivotal roles.

A FATHER AND A FIGHTER

In the heart of Eastern Ukraine, Oleksandr, a devoted father and a veteran of the conflict near Avdiivka, embarked on a challenging journey after being seriously wounded in April 2022. The injuries were severe, resulting in the amputation of one leg, while the other was miraculously saved.

The path to learning to live anew was steeped in trials. As Oleksandr endeavored to be active for his family and society, the shadow of post-traumatic stress disorder began to manifest, leading to intense emotional challenges. The simplest joys of life, such as being in a crowd or watching others rejoice, became painful reminders of a country in conflict.

“Everything is normal, and then it comes up. It’s hard to see young girls and boys sitting in transport and not always giving up their seats to people with disabilities. Many of my colleagues started drinking alcohol. And I say that it is not worth it. It only helps temporarily, and then it gets worse anyway. I tried to calm down with alcohol for a while, but I realized it wasn’t for me, so I gave it up. In general, I advise everyone who has similar issues to undergo treatment. It helps a lot.”

During Oleksandr’s treatment and rehabilitation, he greatly missed spending time with his university-bound daughter, Karyna.

A FAMILY’S SUPPORT AND A DREAM REKINDLED

Without his family’s unwavering support, Oleksandr reflects on the uncertainty of enduring the toughest year of his life. Love and encouragement from Karyna, among others, became his source of strength. Reconnection with his daughter and a return to shared experiences became central to his healing process.

“I used to ride horses a lot as a child because I grew up in a village. But my daughter had never ridden a horse, so she really wanted to. She’s an adult now, we live separately, but we socialize a lot” - shares Oleksandr

VETERAN’S CONNECTION AND A BRIGHT FUTURE

The support among veterans, the trust in brothers-in-arms, and the shared experience play an essential role in Oleksandr’s life:

“You know, it is difficult for a veteran to communicate with a civilian psychologist. Somehow, there is much more trust in my brothers-in-arms. We try to support each other, give advice and listen to each other.”

His proactive stance led him to the state programme “Veteran’s Assistant,” and he aspires to start his own business as an electrician. A sense of purpose and the opportunity to help others resonate strongly with his spirit.

Oleksandr’s story is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the profound impact of integrated support systems. His journey underscores the necessity of comprehensive rehabilitation programs that address not only physical injuries but also the complex psychological and social dimensions of recovery.

Through the multi-faceted support of professional help, community-based activities, family support, and state-sponsored programs, individuals like Oleksandr can not only heal, but thrive. His story reminds us of the power of empathy, connection, and hope in forging new beginnings.

With the aid of IOM’s MHPSS initiatives, a unique opportunity arose. Oleksandr and his daughter were introduced to horse-riding sessions, a collective activity aimed at rebuilding social links, enhancing trust, and offering respite from lingering worries.

Oleksander and his daughter ©IOM 2023
INTEGRATING MENTAL HEALTH AND LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT: A PIONEERING APPROACH TO COMMUNITY HEALING IN UKRAINE

The challenges faced by war-affected persons in Ukraine are multifaceted and extend beyond the immediate trauma of war. Daily stressors, particularly related to livelihood pursuits, can exacerbate mental health issues, making reintegration into normal life and work exceptionally challenging. Recognizing the intricate interplay between mental wellbeing and livelihood stability, in June 2023 IOM began implementing its pioneering approach that integrates MHPSS into livelihood and developmental programmes. With an initial focus on communities in Kyiv and Poltava, this initiative seeks to address the complex web of MHPSS, livelihoods, social cohesion and peacebuilding needs. By fusing mental health support with livelihood programming, IOM is not only aiding war-affected individuals to manage daily work-related psychosocial stressors but also building and strengthening essential coping mechanisms, life skills and soft skills that can be applied at work and beyond.

This integrated approach kicked off in late June 2023. Through a series of initial peer support groups, group counselling sessions and awareness-raising activities, IOM provided targeted interventions that focus on the intersection of mental health and livelihoods. Participants were able to explore their unique stressors, learn strategies to manage them and understand how their mental wellbeing is connected to their economic success.

Initial assessments from participants, including scoping activities conducted in early 2022, have been overwhelmingly positive. Individuals report improvements in self-esteem and confidence, the creation of supportive social networks and enhanced adaptability to changing situations. The success of these activities highlights a transformative shift in thinking more positively about work and life, considering them not as separate entities but as interconnected aspects of overall wellbeing.

In the face of conflict and displacement, the IOM’s approach to integrating MHPSS into livelihood and developmental programmes in Ukraine stands as a testament to the value of holistic support. By acknowledging and addressing the profound connection between mental health and livelihood, IOM is not only strengthening emotional wellbeing but also increasing the success of livelihood opportunities, bolstering social cohesion and fostering peacebuilding within communities. This innovative model offers a promising pathway to recovery, laying the groundwork for a more resilient and connected future for those affected by conflict in Ukraine.
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS: ENHANCING IOM’S MHPSS PROGRAMMING IN UKRAINE THROUGH MULTI-SECTORAL COORDINATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Following discussion with international and humanitarian partners and those at the global, oblast and local levels, IOM plans to continue to increase and expand MHPSS programming across Ukraine. To begin preparing for this expansion, IOM has increased coordination with partners across sectors, recognizing the vital role that these collaborations play in enhancing the effectiveness and reach of its efforts. Existing and future partnerships include the following:

- **National and local authorities**: IOM collaborates closely with various governmental bodies, such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Veterans Affairs, Ministry of Youth and local authorities, to ensure a cohesive and aligned approach to MHPSS implementation across Ukraine.

- **Inter-agency collaborations**: Partnerships with global organizations like the World Health Organization, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is central to IOM’s multi-dimensional approach to MHPSS.

- **Humanitarian coordination**: IOM is an active member of various MHPSS working groups, including the IASC-associated Reference Group on MHPSS, a position which significantly informs and shapes programming in Ukraine. Moreover, IOM co-chairs the MHPSS sub-working group in the Dnipro coordination hub, promoting coordinated strategies and information sharing among over 30 national and international partners. Since October 2022, IOM has co-chaired bimonthly coordination meetings, both in person and remotely to ensure smooth coordination between different actors working in Eastern oblasts. At the global level, IOM co-chairs the working groups on community-based MHPSS; on MHPSS and Peacebuilding; on MHPSS, livelihoods and cash-based interventions; and on MHPSS for men and boys.

- **Civil society organizations and volunteer groups**: IOM’s engagement with local entities such as Pectoral, Slavic Heart, Peaceful Sky and volunteer groups in various locations is essential. This close coordination ensures that MHPSS activities are culturally resonant and tailored to local needs, builds trust with local communities and contributes to the sustainability and impact of MHPSS programming in Ukraine.

- **Academic and research collaborations**: IOM is exploring partnerships with academic institutions to conduct research on various facets of mental health in conflict and displacement settings, including the political, economic and social determinants of mental health as well as experiences of uncertainty, what it means to live and participate in the community for persons with severe mental illness, local idioms of distress, help- and health seeking and coping. The findings of this research will not only guide ongoing and future programming but also contribute to the broader field of mental health and psychosocial support.

- **Migration Health Research Portal**: IOM MHPSS’s contribution to this global repository emphasizes the interconnectedness of migration, health and policy and facilitates information exchange with policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders.

- **Professional associations**: By partnering and aligning with professional bodies such as the World Psychiatric Association and the Royal College of Psychiatry, IOM ensures that its MHPSS initiatives are informed by best practices and professional standards.

These partnerships and coordinated efforts enable IOM to provide comprehensive and culturally sensitive MHPSS services in Ukraine, leveraging local insights, building community trust and fostering long-term resilience and recovery.