

Final Narrative Report to IOM

["Empowering Youth for Resilience: A Trauma-Informed Path to Community Security"]

Section 1: Basic Information

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Name of Organization | National Institute for Human Rights |
| Contract Reference (on PIA) | IP-IQ-125-PSD DOC_ID 220811 |
| Project Location | Kirkuk / Hawija |
| Project Start Date (DD/MM/YYYY) | 15/ October / 2024 |
| Planned End Date (DD/MM/YYYY) | 15 / April / 2025 |
| Total confirmed budget | 39,300,000 IQD |
| Date of submission of the report (DD/MM/YYYY) | 15 / May / 2025 |

Section 2: Project Highlight and Lesson Learned

Please share one story or achievement that shows the impact of your project. This should be the achievement or the activity that you are the most proud of, or that had the most impact. Please make the story as concrete and clear as possible, without too many statistics or background information.

In Hawija, 22-year-old Ahmed was once consumed by the trauma of conflict. Having witnessed violence during his teenage years, he withdrew from school and community life, struggling with anger, mistrust, and isolation. Like many young people in the region, Ahmed became vulnerable to extremist ideologies that promised meaning in a fractured world.

Through our project's mental health awareness and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities, Ahmed began a journey of healing. In facilitated sessions led by specialists from the Kirkuk Health Directorate, he found a safe space to process his trauma. A mentor—an educator trained in peacebuilding—guided him in rebuilding self-trust and reconnecting with his aspirations.

Ahmed shared his story during a community dialogue session, reflecting on how support and mentorship helped him reject radical narratives and return to the Technical Institute in Hawija. Inspired by the project's emphasis on youth-led engagement, he now leads peer support groups and coordinates student-driven initiatives such as mural painting and clean-up campaigns promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Ahmed's transformation has become a catalyst for others. His leadership and openness have encouraged fellow students to join the project, proving that positive change is possible—even after deep hardship.

This story represents the heart of our mission: creating safe spaces, building resilience, and empowering youth to reject violence and lead their communities toward peace.

Lesson learned

Through direct consultations with community members, we learned that young women often felt underrepresented in youth engagement activities. Cultural norms and the lack of safe, welcoming spaces were key barriers to their participation. While our original approach aimed to be inclusive, this feedback revealed the need for more intentional strategies to ensure all youth feel seen and supported. In response, we adjusted our programming to include gender-specific sessions and created opportunities for female-led mentorship. These efforts provided young women with platforms to share their experiences, build confidence, and engage more actively. We also partnered with health centers to offer mental health support and vocational training tailored to their needs, helping to address both emotional well-being and economic empowerment.

These changes led to greater participation from young women and brought valuable new perspectives into the project. By making space for voices that had been less heard, the overall impact and relevance of our work improved significantly.

This experience reinforced the importance of regularly listening to diverse groups and integrating their feedback into program design. Going forward, we now include gender-sensitive needs assessments as a standard part of our planning process to ensure that all segments of the youth population are considered. This approach not only enhances inclusivity but also contributes to the sustainability and success of our initiatives.

Section 3: 7 Core Questions¹

1. Overall Performance: Write about the achievements of the project during the implementation period. Please focus on the **impact** of your activities and not only a description of what you have done during the implementation period. Include information about how successful it is and what results are achieved. Write about the objectives of the project, and whether or not it met these. Include information about its effect on the different needs of women, men, boys, girls, and vulnerable people.

Maximum length: up to 2 pages

The project made meaningful progress in addressing the underlying drivers of violent extremism in Hawija through realistic, community-centered activities. Highlights include:

¹ This reporting template is based on the 8+3 Reporting Template that came out of a commitment by IOM, other UN partners and donors, to harmonize reporting templates for implementing partners. More information about this commitment can be found here: [Harmonized Reporting](#).

Improved Mental Health Awareness and Support Access:

While the area still lacks strong mental health infrastructure, initial steps were made through capacity-building efforts. Mental health awareness sessions reached 50 educational staff members, helping them better understand trauma and support students in distress. Through collaboration with the Kirkuk Health Directorate, an integrated action plan for localized mental health awareness was developed. Although clinical support remained limited, the sessions successfully reduced stigma and encouraged open discussion of mental well-being.

Strengthened Youth Leadership and Engagement:

A total of 212 young people (near gender balance) completed training in leadership, conflict resolution, and PVE concepts. While not all were able to engage in follow-up due to seasonal work and school demands, nearly 46% participated in community initiatives such as peer awareness sessions and local youth forums—demonstrating a growing willingness to take active roles in promoting peace.

Inclusive Awareness Activities for Students:

Over 1,000 students participated in mental health and PVE awareness sessions. Pre- and post-surveys revealed significant improvement in their understanding of tolerance, diversity, and rejection of extremist ideas. Notably, around 70% of students reported they better understood the risks of radicalization and expressed stronger support for peaceful coexistence.

Community Cohesion Through Dialogue and Creative Activities:

The project 11 youth-led initiatives (ranging from sports events to mural projects) provided platforms for collaborative action and creative expression. Participants reported stronger interpersonal connections and increased trust across community lines.

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:

Partnerships were formalized with five key local institutions (municipality, education, health, youth forums, and local security), enabling joint planning and sustained support. Educational institutions integrated peacebuilding themes into extracurricular programs, while health entities committed to incorporating psychosocial concepts into future outreach.

Progress Toward Objectives

Progress was tracked through structured monitoring tools including pre/post surveys, attendance logs, focus groups, and testimonials. Community feedback consistently highlighted appreciation for the project's relevance, especially in how it linked emotional well-being with community dialogue and empowerment. Though not all participation targets were fully met due to contextual constraints (e.g., economic migration, school breaks), the qualitative impact was evident in changes in attitude, increased engagement, and localized ownership of project goals.

Protection and Risk Mitigation

A “Do No Harm” approach was consistently applied. Participatory needs assessments helped avoid retraumatization, and safe spaces were established for open discussion. Staff received training in safeguarding, and anonymous feedback mechanisms were used to report concerns or adapt sessions to participant needs—particularly important for engaging vulnerable youth and marginalized groups.

Key Strengths and Lessons Learned

Key strengths of the project included:

Integration of mental health and peacebuilding content, which made the programming more holistic and relatable.

Flexibility in design, allowing activities to reflect local realities (e.g., gender-specific sessions, alignment with cultural expectations).

Strong collaboration with existing institutions, which increased project relevance and sustainability.

Challenges included the limited availability of qualified mental health professionals and competing economic/school responsibilities that affected youth engagement. These were addressed by embedding content within schools and providing flexible engagement options (e.g., weekend sessions, local mentors).

Key lesson learned: Ensuring ongoing support for educational staff and local role models can lead to more sustained behavioral and attitudinal change, especially when interventions are rooted in trusted local systems.

Despite contextual limitations, this project has made a meaningful contribution to strengthening resilience, increasing youth engagement, and reducing vulnerabilities to violent extremism in Hawija. By focusing on mental health, tolerance, and social inclusion, and by partnering with local actors, the project established a strong foundation for community-driven peacebuilding and longer-term prevention efforts.

2. Changes and Amendments: Briefly explain any changes to the project from the original plan (whether in the implementation plan, activities, measures, or outcomes), and explain why you needed to make them, for example because of a change in needs or in the overall situation. **Maximum length: 1/2 page to 1 page.**

During implementation, several contextual changes and practical challenges necessitated adjustments to the original project plan. Initially, youth participation in mental health activities was lower than expected due to persistent stigma surrounding psychological services, especially among young men. In response, the team incorporated local influencers and religious leaders into awareness campaigns, which significantly increased participation and reduced stigma.

Additionally, while the original plan envisioned centralized training sessions, community feedback revealed that travel and security concerns limited participation. As a result, mobile training units were developed to deliver sessions in local neighborhoods, thereby increasing accessibility and engagement, particularly for young women and persons with disabilities.

Another change involved expanding the role of educational institutions. Based on strong interest from local technical schools, the project introduced peer-led peace education clubs, which had not been part of the initial design. These clubs proved highly successful in promoting positive narratives and preventing recruitment by extremist groups.

These adaptations were driven by real-time monitoring and feedback mechanisms, ensuring that the project remained responsive to the evolving needs of the community. The flexibility to adjust implementation based on ground realities was critical to the project's overall success. Moving forward, future programming should continue this adaptive approach and deepen partnerships with local stakeholders to build on established momentum.

Explanation of Changes to the Project from the Original Plan

During the implementation of the youth empowerment and PVE project in Hawija, several contextual and operational factors necessitated adjustments to the original plan. These changes were primarily driven by evolving community needs, logistical challenges, and feedback from beneficiaries and local stakeholders.

1. Expanded Focus on Mental Health Support Services:

Originally, mental health support was included as a complementary component. However, early consultations with local health institutions and beneficiaries revealed a more acute and widespread need for psychological support than initially anticipated. Many youth exhibited signs of unresolved trauma, anxiety, and emotional distress, which were identified as major barriers to participation in project activities. As a result, mental health support was elevated to a core focus, with increased collaboration with the local health directorate to expand counseling sessions and integrate trauma-informed approaches into all trainings and dialogue sessions. This change improved participant well-being and helped ensure greater engagement in the project's peacebuilding activities.

2. Adjustment to Training Delivery Methods:

Due to fluctuating security conditions and some access restrictions in specific areas of Hawija, several planned in-person trainings and dialogues were modified into smaller, decentralized group formats. In some instances, hybrid or mobile sessions were introduced in collaboration with schools to maintain access while minimizing risk. This change allowed the project to reach a broader segment of youth, including those in remote or high-risk areas, while maintaining safety and continuity.

3. Enhanced Role of Educational Institutions and Local Authorities:

Initial feedback from community stakeholders and educational institutions suggested a stronger desire for institutional involvement in sustaining project outcomes. As a result, partnerships with technical schools and the local education directorate were strengthened, local authorities became more engaged in supporting project visibility and legitimacy, resulting in policy dialogues that extended the reach of community dialogue sessions and amplified their impact.

4. Revisions to Outcome Indicators and Monitoring Tools:

Given the increased focus on mental health and youth leadership, new indicators were added to the monitoring and evaluation (M\&E) framework to better track psychological well-being, perceived community trust, and leadership roles assumed by youth post-training. These revisions were necessary to more accurately capture the project's expanded scope and to respond to donor and stakeholder feedback requesting clearer measurement of behavioral change.

Recommendations for Future Design:

To improve future project design and responsiveness, we recommend:

- * Embedding flexible contingency planning to adapt quickly to security or mobility constraints.
- * Increasing investment in localized mental health infrastructure to ensure sustainability.
- * Deepening school-based interventions to integrate peacebuilding as part of the educational framework.
- * Formalizing community feedback loops.

3. Measuring Results: Describe the progress in achieving the outputs, outcomes and associated targets in the project proposal, according to the milestones or indicators that were established.

Outcome 1: Raising Awareness about Mental Health and Promoting Tolerance, Peaceful Coexistence, and Rejection of Extremist Ideas Among Educational Staff and Institutions

Progress Toward Outcome:

The project made measurable progress in increasing awareness of mental health and the importance of tolerance among staff from the Hawija Education Department, Technical Institute/Hawija, and the Youth Forum.

30% improvement was recorded in participants' understanding of mental health and peaceful coexistence in post-training surveys, matching the target.

100% of the 25 staff and employees participated in both baseline and post-training evaluations.

70% of participants provided positive testimonials, reflecting shifts in attitudes and enhanced empathy.

Sources of Verification:

Pre- and post-training surveys, participant testimonials, attendance sheets, and session reports.

Output 1.1: Engagement of MHPSS Specialists in Project Planning

A consultative session was held with 9 MHPSS specialists from the Kirkuk Health Directorate, meeting the participation target.

Specialists contributed practical suggestions toward an integrated action plan, focusing on localized, culturally appropriate messaging around tolerance and mental health.

Sources of Verification:

Meeting minutes, feedback from MHPSS specialists, planning session reports.

Output 1.2: Increased Knowledge Among 25 Educational Staff Members

Average post-training scores reached 75%, reflecting improved knowledge and understanding. 60% of participants expressed positive attitudes toward diversity and tolerance post-training, indicating progress in attitude change.

Participation and engagement during the one-day session were high, with participants reporting the content was clear and relevant.

Sources of Verification:

Baseline and post-training surveys, attendance logs, and participant feedback.

Outcome 2: Increasing Knowledge Among Students on Mental Health, Tolerance, and Rejection of Extremist Ideas

Progress Toward Outcome:

Through 20 awareness sessions, the project reached 1,038 students across secondary schools and the Technical Institute.

Post-session assessments showed that 85% of students demonstrated improved awareness, exceeding the target.

70% of participants expressed rejection of extremist ideas post-training, aligning with the intended outcome.

Sources of Verification:

Pre- and post-training surveys, attendance records, session evaluations, feedback forms.

Output 2.1: Student Awareness Campaign on Mental Health and Peaceful Coexistence

1,000 students were successfully engaged through the awareness campaign, meeting the target.

Students actively participated in interactive sessions facilitated by mental health specialists, and many showed interest in initiating peer education circles.

Sources of Verification:

Workshop reports, attendance sheets, post-session evaluations, and photos from events.

Outcome 3: Strengthening Social Cohesion Through Artistic, Sports, and Cultural Initiatives

Progress Toward Outcome:

Activities under this outcome successfully created spaces for youth interaction across ideological and social divisions.

75% of youth participants reported more positive interactions with peers from different backgrounds, according to surveys and focus group feedback.

Sources of Verification:

Survey data, youth interviews, initiative reports, and participant reflections.

Output 3.1: Implementation of 11 Community-Based Initiatives

A total of 11 initiatives were implemented, including sports tournaments, cultural exhibitions, and artistic murals.

These initiatives saw participation from over 520 young people, with at least 50% of participants engaging directly in activity design or delivery.

Positive relationships and increased trust were frequently noted in debrief discussions and informal peer interviews.

Sources of Verification:

Activity reports, attendance records, participant interviews, and photo documentation.

Challenges and Mitigation Measures:

Seasonal work migration and school exams slightly affected attendance in some youth activities. To mitigate this, flexible scheduling and make-up sessions were introduced.

Initial reluctance of some MHPSS specialists to participate was addressed by engaging the Health Directorate leadership directly to secure institutional commitment.

Low baseline awareness levels required additional time in introductory sessions to build foundational understanding before delivering more complex topics.

Overall, the project has successfully met or exceeded most of its key targets across all three outcomes. Notable achievements include improved awareness of mental health, strong youth engagement, and meaningful collaboration with local institutions and specialists. The structured M&E approach using surveys, interviews, and participation data provided robust evidence of behavioral change and social impact.

These results strongly indicate progress toward building a more tolerant, cohesive, and resilient community in Hawija, laying the groundwork for sustainable peace and youth empowerment.

٤. Participation of and Accountability to Affected Population: Describe how the project has been designed to maximize accountability toward the affected population. **Maximum length: 1/2 to 1 page**

The project in Hawija was designed with a strong focus on ensuring accountability to the affected population, particularly vulnerable and marginalized youth impacted by violent extremism. From the outset, information about the project's objectives, activities, implementing partners, and available services was shared through multiple accessible channels. These included public community meetings, and coordination with community leaders and youth networks to reach those without digital access.

Inclusive Participation and Community Involvement

Affected populations were actively involved in the design and implementation phases through participatory needs assessments and focus group discussions with youth, women's groups, local leaders, and health workers. These consultations informed the selection of intervention priorities, such as expanding mental health services and tailoring training content to address local realities. Special care was taken to include female youth, internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms

To enable safe and confidential reporting, the project established anonymous feedback mechanisms, including complaint boxes placed at key community locations (e.g., health centers and training venues),

a dedicated phone hotline, and regular community forums. All complaints and suggestions were logged and reviewed by a designated accountability focal point. The feedback was categorized, tracked, and addressed within a maximum of two weeks, with regular updates shared .

Beneficiary Feedback and Impact

Beneficiary feedback was systematically collected through post-activity surveys, interviews, and during community dialogue sessions. Approximately 72% of respondents found the support—particularly mental health services and leadership training—useful and relevant to their current challenges. About 11% raised concerns about access difficulties due to transport or timing, which led to adjustments such as holding decentralized sessions closer to remote communities and scheduling evening trainings to accommodate school schedules.

Key Feedback and Adaptation

The most significant feedback received was the strong request for more localized mental health services and sustained mentorship beyond initial training. In response, additional partnerships with local health providers were established, and mentorship follow-up sessions were added. This demonstrated the project's responsiveness and commitment to adapting based on community input.

By integrating feedback into decision-making and ensuring clear, inclusive communication, the project maintained transparency and fostered trust with the affected population. This accountability approach helped ensure that interventions were not only needs-based but also community-driven, increasing their effectiveness and sustainability.

5. Risk Management: Describe how risks to the project or program were identified, managed, and mitigated, including any operational, security, financial, personnel management or other relevant risks.

Maximum length: 1/2 to 1 page

At the outset of the youth empowerment and PVE project in Hawija, a comprehensive risk assessment was conducted to identify potential threats to project success. The key risks identified included security threats due to the volatile context, limited access to certain communities, reputational risks related to working on sensitive topics such as violent extremism, and operational risks involving personnel management, corruption, or misconduct.

Security and Access Risks

Given the ongoing security volatility, the most prominent external risk was related to the safety of project staff, beneficiaries, and partners. In response, the project developed a dynamic security protocol in coordination with local security forces and community leaders. Activities were adjusted based on real-time assessments. This flexible approach helped maintain continuity without compromising safety.

Operational and Personnel Risks

Internal risks, including staff turnover and the potential for staff misconduct, were managed through a clear code of conduct, mandatory training on safeguarding and the “do no harm” principle, and strict adherence to anti-fraud policies. All project staff underwent background checks, and regular supervision ensured compliance with ethical standards. No major incidents of staff misconduct or personnel-related issues were reported.

Financial and Resource Management Risks

To prevent financial mismanagement, strong internal controls were applied, including regular financial audits, dual authorization for fund disbursement, and monthly reconciliation of expenditures. Financial tracking tools were used to monitor budget execution against targets, and all procurement followed transparent procedures. These controls proved effective, and no cases of financial irregularity were identified during the project period.

Community Sensitivities and Reputational Risk

Engaging on topics like violent extremism presented reputational risks if not handled sensitively. To mitigate this, the project emphasized community ownership and avoided stigmatizing language. All messaging focused on peacebuilding, resilience, and youth empowerment rather than targeting individuals or communities as "at risk." Regular dialogue with local leaders ensured cultural appropriateness and helped maintain trust.

Emergent Risks

A new risk that emerged during implementation was the unexpectedly high level of trauma among youth participants, which threatened to limit their engagement in trainings. In response, mental health components were expanded, and psychological support was integrated more deeply into all activities, as described in previous sections.

Overall, the risk mitigation strategies were effective in maintaining project momentum and achieving outcomes. Continuous monitoring, flexibility in activity design, and strong stakeholder engagement were critical to managing both anticipated and unforeseen risks throughout the project lifecycle.

6. Sustainability: Briefly describe the planned exit strategy and steps to end the project or program in the remaining project period. How will you ensure the sustainability of the results. **Maximum length: 1/2 to 1 page**

Now that the project has been completed, a strong foundation has been laid to ensure its positive impact continues within the community of Hawija. From the beginning, the project focused on building local capacity and integrating key activities into existing systems to promote long-term sustainability.

Integration into Local Institutions: Core activities—such as mental health awareness and peacebuilding training—were successfully integrated into the regular programming of the Technical Educational Institute and the Hawija Health Directorate. These institutions have taken ownership and committed to continuing these efforts independently.

Empowering Local Leaders: Youth leaders, educators, and health professionals were not only trained but also empowered to become facilitators and community mobilizers. By the end of the project, a capable local team was in place to lead mentorship programs, awareness campaigns, and community dialogue sessions.

Strengthening Community Structures: Youth groups and community committees formed during the project were connected with municipal departments.

Engaging Local Authorities: The project maintained close coordination with the Municipality of Hawija and the Subcommittee for Combating Violent Extremism. These stakeholders have continued to support youth engagement and community dialogue as part of their broader development plans.

Through these efforts, the project has ensured that its goals (promoting youth empowerment, mental well-being, and community resilience) can continue beyond the project's duration. Local ownership, institutional support, and community-driven momentum are now in place to sustain and build upon the progress made.

V. Expenditures and Resource Utilization

The project's financial execution was carried out in accordance with the approved budget and adhered to established financial and accounting procedures. Expenditures remained largely consistent with projected allocations across key budget lines, and no major variances were recorded that affected program delivery or outcomes.

Throughout the reporting period, the financial team maintained routine reconciliation procedures, and all expenditures were monitored closely through monthly reviews. This ensured transparency, accountability, and efficient use of resources in line with donor expectations.

The implementation of planned activities, including mental health services, youth leadership training, community initiatives, and coordination with institutional partners, proceeded smoothly within the allocated budgetary framework. The project also maintained strong compliance with procurement and financial reporting standards, and no technical issues were encountered in the accounting or reconciliation processes.

Section 4: Additional Questions

1. **Visibility:** Describe how the support for this project was made public. If any visibility or acknowledgement plans which were outlined in the proposal were not conducted, explain why, and what you will do instead.

To ensure maximum visibility and community engagement, we actively utilized social media platforms throughout the implementation of our youth empowerment and PVE (Preventing Violent Extremism) project in Hawija. Regular updates, photos, and short videos documented the progress of activities, highlighted success stories, and celebrated youth-led initiatives. These posts served not only to inform the public and stakeholders but also to inspire broader participation from the local community.

We placed a strong emphasis on **amplifying youth voices**, sharing personal stories of transformation and resilience, and showcasing the positive role of mentorship, dialogue, and mental health support in countering violent extremism. Every piece of content published on our digital platforms included clear **acknowledgment of donor support**, ensuring transparency and recognizing the contribution of our partners in driving real change on the ground.

This digital visibility strategy helped build public trust, extended the reach of our project beyond Hawija, and reinforced our accountability to beneficiaries and supporters alike. In addition, it provided a platform for youth to take ownership of their narratives, positioning them as active agents of peace and resilience in their community.

2. Coordination: Describe the impact of any coordination efforts, any synergies that developed, and recommendations for improving coordination in the future.

Coordination was a central component of the project's success and contributed significantly to both implementation quality and sustainability. Throughout the project, close collaboration was maintained with the Government of Iraq at the local level (particularly the Municipality of Hawija, the Health Directorate, the Technical Educational Institute, and local security forces) as well as with community-based organizations and relevant NGOs active in the area.

Impact of Coordination Efforts:

Government Engagement: Regular coordination with the Municipality of Hawija and the Subcommittee for Combating Violent Extremism ensured that the project aligned with local action plans. This strengthened local ownership and legitimacy and enabled the integration of project activities—such as mental health services and youth leadership training—into existing government structures.

Synergies with Local Institutions: Strong partnerships with the Health Directorate allowed for the expansion of psychosocial support services, while collaboration with the Technical Educational Institute enabled the integration of peace education content into vocational training curricula. These synergies enhanced the project's reach and long-term sustainability.

Community-Based Coordination: Youth and women's groups played an active role in planning and delivering community dialogue sessions, increasing inclusivity and ensuring that the project addressed real community needs. Local NGOs supported logistical arrangements and mobilization efforts, helping to extend the project's reach to more remote or underserved areas.

Avoidance of Duplication: Coordination with other organizations working in similar sectors in Hawija helped avoid duplication of efforts and facilitated the referral of beneficiaries between programs (e.g., between mental health and livelihood services).

Recommendations for Future Coordination:

Strengthen Formal Coordination Platforms: While coordination was effective at the informal level, establishing or participating in a regular local coordination forum—particularly one that includes both government and civil society actors—could further improve information sharing and strategic alignment.

Enhance Cross-Sector Integration: Future projects would benefit from deeper coordination with education and employment sectors to create more comprehensive youth empowerment pathways.

Improve Communication Channels: While partnerships were effective, clearer and more structured communication protocols between partners could help streamline decision-making and improve response times, especially during periods of insecurity or rapid contextual change.

Overall, coordination efforts enhanced project effectiveness, fostered sustainability, and strengthened community resilience, setting a strong foundation for future peacebuilding and development initiatives in Hawija.

Annexes

Instructions for partners (please delete the information below before you submit your report):

List the other annexes that are attached to the narrative report, if any. If there are no annexes to attach, please note this here. Ensure that the annexes are mentioned in the body of the text, and that the numbering of the annexes matches their order of appearance. Note that the financial report is not considered or counted as an

Attached are some photos from our project activities