



## The Partnership between Al Mohammara (Lebanon) and Opfenbach (Germany): Establishing a Primary Healthcare Center



### Background and objective

In Northern Lebanon, the municipality of Al Mohammara confronts conflict, economic hardship, and a persistent refugee crisis. In the framework of the partnership with the German town of Opfenbach that started in 2018, Al Mohammara decided to address the urgent need for accessible healthcare. Officially populated with 2.300 residents, its true population exceeds 51.000, hosting more than 7.000 Syrians and a camp with 36.000 Palestinian refugees. Internal migration, economic challenges, and resource allocation complexities add to the municipality's intricate demographics. Amid Lebanon's economic crisis and an extremely high inflation rate, Al Mohammara's annual budget is insufficient to cover basic services provided by the municipality. Recognized by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) as among Lebanon's most vulnerable municipalities, the town grapples with a shortage of local infrastructure resulting in shortcomings in the field of waste management, clean water provision, wastewater treatment and, above all, health services.

In the face of these challenges, Al Mohammara started to collaborate with Opfenbach, facilitated by the "Municipal Know-how for the Middle East" initiative. The objective was straightforward: to build a sustainable Primary Health Center (PHC) addressing immediate healthcare needs and laying the foundation for long-term community well-being. In the framework of the program "Experts fund for municipal partnerships worldwide" of GIZ and SKEW, a local expert was assigned to Al Mohammara to support the development of the PHC.



### Methodological approach

The implementation methodology unfolded with the establishment of a Community Health Committee, a cornerstone of the project. The committee, supported by the international NGO Relief International and funded by UNICEF, plays a pivotal role, fostering inclusive decision-making and managing all the planning and implementation steps needed for the successful development of the PHC. Next to the management related to the PHC, the committee is also implementing awareness raising campaigns for disease prevention.

In parallel, a financial and business plan had to be developed in order to set up a project that was economically feasible and could be implemented even in times of financial crisis. To ensure that the PHC had a solid financial base, the local expert approached various donors and applied for programs that offered funding for municipal or health projects. Last but not least, a concept for medical and other staff of the center as well as trainings for the future staff had to be developed.



## Implementation and challenges

The implementation of the Primary Healthcare Center project faced significant economic difficulties, primarily in the form of financial challenges during the construction phase. These difficulties required intricate negotiations with key donors such as KfW and to secure funding and navigate uncertainties. Economic obstacles also manifested in the business plan development, where factors like inflation and currency rate instability impacted strategic decision-making. As a result, the business plan is regularly updated based on the recent inflation rate.

Another challenge that led to a delay in the implementation of the PHC was the outbreak of Cholera in Al Mohammara which came along with a high morbidity and mortality rate both within the refugee camp and the municipality. In order to contain the outbreak, the local expert paused her activities and engaged into campaigns, provision of clean water to households and collection of the necessary resources for the containment.

## Outcomes for the target group and the involved stakeholders

The ongoing partnership between Al Mohammara and Opfenbach is yielding remarkable outcomes for the diverse local population. Despite facing economic challenges and regional tensions, the establishment of the Primary Healthcare Center has evolved from a simple idea into a two-floor, 1000-square-meter facility. The center's design embodies inclusivity, boasting features like ramps, lifts, and accessible facilities to ensure everyone, regardless of age, gender, or physical ability, can access quality healthcare. Furthermore, it already has an own area for the treatment of infectious diseases strictly separated from the rest of the facility. While the center is not operational yet, since most of the equipment and personnel is still missing, it will become a crucial provider of basic healthcare in the Akkar region and hence foster health and well-being for both citizens and refugees while creating new jobs in the health sector as well as raising awareness on health topics.

## Learnings and conclusions

Adaptability emerged as a cornerstone of the project's achievements. While facing constant financial challenges and insecurities, the adaptation of a flexible approach including the frequent updating of the business-plan and the temporary focus on recent pandemic prevention was needed and despite of the substantial delays in implementation that were caused by these challenges, the project could still be continued. Furthermore, it has shown to be equally important to secure funding from various stakeholders, both national, international, state and non-state actors in order to reduce dependency on one single donor.