



Title:

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Displaced and Migrant Populations during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

Sponsors and Organizers:

This event is organized and co-hosted by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the International Organization for Migration, in partnership with the Government of Ethiopia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as co-chair of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in Emergency Settings; World Vision International; the Psycho-Social Services and Training Institute in Cairo (PSTIC- a programme of Terre des hommes (Tdh)), with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Date and Time:

This is one of the side-events to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS), which builds on this year's HAS theme: *“Reinforcing humanitarian assistance in the context of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations: taking action for people-centred solutions, strengthening effectiveness, respecting international humanitarian law and promoting the humanitarian principles”*.

The side-event will take place on Friday, June 12th 2020, from 9:00-10:30am EST.

Background and objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic deeply affects the health and economic wellbeing of people all over the world. Less recognized is how the pandemic and the mitigating responses profoundly destabilize people's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. These effects are particularly salient for displaced populations including migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons who disproportionately experience the impacts of the pandemic due to their weakened social support structures, bleak socioeconomic prospects, unequal access to healthcare and social services, precarious housing, tenuous living and working conditions, vulnerability to misinformation, risks of exploitation and abuse. This is augmented for those in refugee settlements, camps, transit centres, in immigration detention or in crowded urban spaces, where physical distancing and other protection measures are difficult to observe. This leads to increased levels of anxiety, fear, hopelessness, feelings of helplessness and anger. In addition, measures by governments to curb the spread of COVID-19, such as closure of borders, restriction of travels, deportation, and suspension of programmes for resettlement and assisted voluntary return will have major psychological impact on migrants and refugees, fueling uncertainty and distress.

The COVID-19 response must therefore be inclusive in at least two ways: Firstly, by including provisions for mental health and psychosocial support, to address emotional and social suffering and prevent long term burden on health, social and economic systems, in line with the IASC Principals' decision of 5th of December 2019 to consider MHPSS as a cross-cutting issue in humanitarian responses. Secondly, including migrants and refugees, especially those with increased protection risks, in the MHPSS response is imperative: equitable access to services and support for all will increase the effectiveness of providing critical humanitarian assistance. This is in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which commit to leave no one behind, including the provision of mental health care. The current MHPSS COVID-19 response is guided by interagency consensus around essential MHPSS responses, overarching principles and globally recommended activities.¹ Recognizing the particular vulnerabilities of certain groups, specific actions are required to provide appropriate care for older adults, people with disabilities and chronic health conditions, families with histories of violence, children, and adults in isolation and quarantine. The broader social and economic recovery of COVID-19 needs to include social protection, access to basic services, promotion of community resilience and social cohesion.² This cannot be done without including considerations around mental health and psychosocial support. This is further outlined in the UN Policy Brief on *COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health*, which urges governments, civil society, health authorities and others to invest in and prioritize mental health in the COVID-19 response and beyond.³

This side event complements the High-level panel on *Addressing the increasing complexity of health challenges in humanitarian contexts*. It will explore principles and practices of MHPSS during the pandemic, with a particular focus on the specific situation of people on the move and their host communities. The event will emphasize the need for innovative solutions, using participatory and community based-approaches to reach and engage refugees and migrants in order to facilitate access to essential mental health services and psychosocial support in an unprecedented global humanitarian crisis. Member States, the UN System and civil society all have a role in ensuring that MHPSS interventions are adequately resourced and integrated and that refugees and migrants are fully included in the COVID-19 response.

The side event will combine the experiences of a diverse group of stakeholders:

UN Agencies:

- Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, UNSG; (Moderator);

¹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee: Interim Briefing Note Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak (<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/briefing-note-about>) and 'Operational considerations for multisectoral mental health and psychosocial support programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic' (currently being cleared by IASC Secretariat)

² United Nations (April 2020): A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-framework-immediate-socio-economic-response-covid-19>

³ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief-covid_and_mental_health_final.pdf

- Director General of the International Organization for Migration, a UN agency on the frontline of MHPSS provision for migrants and displaced populations in humanitarian settings;
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees. UNHCR is the agency leading on the integration of MHPSS for refugees and the forcibly displaced in operational responses;
- The IFRC Co-Chairperson of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on MHPSS.

Government Representatives:

- Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, who has championed inclusion of MHPSS in humanitarian action (closing remarks);
- Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Government of Ethiopia, a country that hosts a high number of migrants and refugees from neighbouring countries, deals with internal displacement, and is currently faced with pandemic-induced labour migrant returnees.

Civil Society:

- Director and Founder of the Psycho-Social Services and Training Institute in Cairo (PSTIC) – a programme of Tdh, for displaced and migrant populations in urban settings;
- The Syria Response MHPSS Coordinator of World Vision International;
- The Inter-Agency MHPSS Working Group Co-Chairs in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh;
- Person(s) with lived experience of migration and the COVID-19 context.

Discussion points

The session will focus on:

- Increasing awareness of the importance of the inclusion of MHPSS as a transversal issue in humanitarian response and the COVID-19 response particularly.
- Promotion of access to MHPSS services, and removal of barriers to key services for all migrants and refugees, including internally displaced people, and their host communities.
- Demonstrate how MHPSS is a valuable addition to the COVID-19 response, enabling more effective COVID-preparedness, response and recovery and countering further social disruption caused by COVID and the necessary response to it.
- Share examples and good practices that can be implemented in different phases of the pandemic with people on the move.

Key concrete action points and recommendations/take away messages

- Increased awareness on the importance of integrating MHPSS in every aspect of humanitarian and COVID-19 responses.
- Increased capacity to respond to MHPSS access challenges of at-risk populations; particularly migrants and refugees.
- Contribute to the advocacy outlined in *COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health* by highlighting innovative solutions and community-based approaches and models of work

to accessing and sustaining mental health care. This includes building local capacity, and the immediate and long term MHPSS capacity needs of programmes need to be considered in funding strategies.

Format

Chair and moderator

- Melissa Fleming, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, UNSG

Panel composition

First Session: MHPSS in Humanitarian Action and the COVID-19 Response

- Pre-recorded video from person(s) with lived experience in migration and the COVID-19 context
- Dr. Nancy Baron, Director and Founder, NGO Psycho-Social Services and Training Institute Cairo (PSTIC)
- Sarah Harrison, IFRC Co-Chair of the IASC Reference Group on MHPSS in Emergency Settings

Second Session: The Special Needs of Migrants and Forcibly Displaced Populations

- Dr. Ergogie Tesfaye, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Government of Ethiopia
- Antonio Vitorino, Director General, International Organization for Migration-UN Migration
- A.N.M. Mahmudul Alam, UNHCR, and Dmytro Nersisian, IOM; Co-Chairs of the Inter-Agency MHPSS Working Group in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh
- Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR
- Mariam Al-Salahat, World Vision Syria Response MHPSS Coordinator, World Vision International

Closing Remarks

- Sigrid Kaag, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

Interventions from the floor

- UNICEF

Q&A. Questions will be asked at the moment of registration and pre-selected.

Background Material

- IASC (2020). [Interim Briefing Note Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak](#)

- IASC (2020). [Operational considerations for multisectoral mental health and psychosocial support programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- United Nations (2020). UN Policy Brief [COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health](#)
- IASC (2020). Operational considerations for multisectoral mental health and psychosocial support programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic (currently being cleared by IASC Secretariat).
- Kingdom of the Netherlands (2019). [Mind the Mind Now. Declaration of the International Conference on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\) in Crisis Situations in Amsterdam](#)
- IOM Mental Health, Psychosocial Response, and Intercultural Communication Section [factsheet](#)
- [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\) in the COVID-19 Response: Guidance and Toolkit for the use of IOM MHPSS Teams](#)
- [IOM Manual on Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies and Displacement](#)
- [Operational Guidance: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programming for Refugee Operations](#)
- [UNHCR's Approach to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Displacement](#)
- IASC (2020). [My Hero is You, Storybook for Children on COVID-19](#)
- IASC (2020). [Basic Psychosocial Skills- A Guide for COVID-19 Responders](#)
- WHO (2020). [Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)

Connection details to join the event

(Ex: MS Teams, Zoom, WebEx connection details and password)

WebEx:

<https://iom.webex.com/iom/onstage/g.php?MTID=e57644aa3e07a2372ff294a383d243db7>

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