



Title of Side Event:

Doing More and Doing Better: Towards a Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings

Sponsors and Organizers:

Sponsors: Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands

Organizers: International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Save the Children, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the World Health Organization (WHO)

Date and Time:

21 June 2021 0830-1000 EST

Background and objectives of event:

Regardless of country or circumstance, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have widespread and devastating impacts on people’s mental health and wellbeing. It has challenged the provision of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services, particularly for people already marginalized and those in vulnerable situations and humanitarian emergencies. But even before the pandemic, many of the countries, communities, and individuals experiencing complex humanitarian challenges already faced poverty, displacement, conflict, effects of climate and ecological crises - vulnerabilities that COVID-19 has only deepened - increasing the fragility of mental health services and psychosocial needs.¹

The global scale of mental health needs poses a development and humanitarian challenge - often exceeding the capacity of national health, social protection and education systems. Access to affordable, comprehensive and quality mental health and psychosocial support services is limited in humanitarian contexts. Yet, we know armed conflict, natural disasters, public health and other emergencies can lead to long-term harm to the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies.²

¹ WHO estimates prior to COVID-19 showed that over 1 in 5 people in conflict-affected settings have a mental health condition – double the general population, [Charlson et al, 2019](#)

² According to the United Nations “[Policy Brief: COVID-19 and the need for mental health action](#)”, failure to invest in MHPSS services could result in reduced productivity and increased health care costs, poorer educational outcomes, reduced cognitive development and persistent increases in mental health conditions for children and young people, and a need for lifetime care decreasing the potential of the next generation. People with severe mental health conditions on average die 10-20 years earlier than the general population, with suicide being the second leading cause of death in young people aged 15-29.



Mental Health is an accelerator for all sustainable development goals, with gaps in MHPSS service provision threatening commitments to achieve SDG3 (targets 3.4, 3.5 and 3.8) SDG4 (target 4.2), and SDG16 (target 16.2), Universal Health Coverage, and to leave no one behind.³ Effective MHPSS services reduce suffering and improve people’s mental health and psychosocial well-being. This can lead to improvements in people’s abilities to meet their basic needs to survive, recover and rebuild their lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to greater awareness of the importance of MHPSS, as well as innovative practices and technologies that can overcome historical deficiencies in MHPSS services in humanitarian settings.⁴ Lessons learned can guide governments, the UN system, civil society, international organizations, the private sector, and communities to better integrate mental health into the range of multi-sectoral health, education, and social protection services being developed and provided in humanitarian contexts.

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to assess how MHPSS service provision in humanitarian settings has been impacted, how it is being restored and even expanded to the most vulnerable, and what concrete steps can be taken now to address the persistent gaps and challenges for the future.

This event will build upon the recent commitment by Member States to increase efforts and funding to MHPSS services in humanitarian contexts, at ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS) 2021 via resolution [E/RES/2021/17](#).

Discussion points or guiding questions:

- Ensure a shared and cohesive understanding of the **impact of COVID-19 and beyond on the provision of MHPSS** in humanitarian settings to guide needs-based provision of MHPSS services, and **identify learning from innovative approaches, both digital and non-digital**, to improve the provision of MHPSS services across development and humanitarian contexts.
- Share pertinent **best practices to ensure MHPSS services reach diverse populations** and address complex intersecting needs with due regard to ethnicity, cultural context, race, age, gender, disability, migratory status, stigma, and sexual orientation among other factors relevant in humanitarian contexts through evidence-based approaches, including as it relates to the formal and informal barriers to access, particularly in conflict settings.
- Examine successful **policies, changes and financing measures** to address mental health and psychosocial needs, particularly of the most vulnerable.
 - Promote tools to better **track MHPSS funding** to strengthen the impact of MHPSS interventions.
- Provide concrete recommendations on the types of **scalable interventions and approaches** to improve access to MHPSS services for individuals and communities at the national level, ensuring the inclusion of the most vulnerable.

³ WHO [report](#) “The impact of COVID-19 on mental, neurological and substance use services”.

⁴ During the first year of the pandemic, the number of countries having an active interagency MHPSS working group more than doubled according to the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee](#).



- Identify gaps in the existing global health and humanitarian architecture on MHPSS and produce **recommendations** for further action, including to inform ongoing work on **future pandemic preparedness**.

Key concrete action points and recommendations/take away messages:

This side event will gather key cross-regional voices to support humanitarian actors to build effective multi-sectoral strategies towards sustaining and expanding MHPSS services in humanitarian settings. Cross-cutting recommendations will emerge from the event that can strengthen MHPSS services across the life course, enhance multisectoral accountability, and ensure gender, ability, and age among other factors is accounted for in MHPSS interventions.

It will also inform COVID-19 recovery plans to ensure that health, education and social care systems implement measures to provide robust, accessible, and sustainable MHPSS services for those in humanitarian contexts, including the populations affected by conflicts. Furthermore, the event will build momentum from and give guidance to the UN General Assembly, Security Council, and ECOSOC on MHPSS through a multi-sectoral humanitarian lens.

Format of the side event:

A 90-minute moderated, interactive panel discussion that will contain a range of actors over three segments. The opening segment will feature remarks by Member States and voices from the ground to frame the discussion. This will be followed by a panel discussion in which a range of experts will answer questions from the moderator. Following the panel, the final and longest segment of the event will be dedicated to audience questions and interventions. **Interventions should focus on substantive questions, limited to 1-2 minutes.**

Chair and moderator: Elisha London, Founder & CEO, [Prospira Global](#)

Panel composition (TBC):

Opening remarks will be provided by high-level representatives of Mexico, Morocco, and the Netherlands, followed by speakers including:

- Voices of children on mental health amid conflict, a video by Save the Children
- Milena Osorio, Mental Health and Psychosocial (MHPSS) Movement Cooperation Adviser, ICRC
- Country Programme Manager on MHPSS, IOM
- Rania Hibri, PSS & Protection Gender and Inclusion Program Manager, Lebanese Red Cross
- Ann Willhoite, MHPSS Specialist, Child Protection in Emergencies, UNICEF
- Fahmy Hanna, Co-Chair of the IASC Reference Group on MHPSS in Emergency Settings, WHO



Background Materials:

- [The MHPSS Minimum Service Package](#) - a unified intersectoral package of priority MHPSS activities that supports humanitarian actors to plan, coordinate, and implement an evidence-informed response
- [“COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health”](#), United Nations Policy Brief
- [IASC Guidelines](#) on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (in 14 languages)
- [MHPSS COVID-19 Toolkit](#)
[Key materials](#) from Humanitarian Networks & Partnerships Week, IASC Reference Group for MHPSS in Emergencies – Bringing wellbeing to the communities through multi-sectoral integration

Connection details to join the event

Zoom, **Please register** [here](#). Interventions should focus on substantive questions, limited to 1-2 minutes.

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