

Building the Resilience of Young Adults during a time of Crises **FORUM REPORT**

Forum MHPSS European Network: Friday 30 September, 2 PM to 5 PM
Saturday 1 October, 10 AM to 6 PM
Sunday 2 October, 10 AM to 1 PM

The objectives of the training and MHPSS EN Forum 2022 were:

- ⇒ To share good practices and lessons learned when providing MHPSS that is directed to building the resilience of young adults, with specific attention to the conflict between Ukraine/Russia, climate anxiety, the impact of the corona pandemic, and other crises.
- ⇒ To share insights on the psychosocial needs of young adults within Europe and Central Asia
- ⇒ To consider how National Societies can build the resilience of young adults and integrate this into programmes and activities.
- ⇒ To share good practices and lessons learned when providing MHPSS that is directed to building the resilience of young adults, with specific attention on climate anxiety, the impact of the corona pandemic, and other crises.

The Netherlands Red Cross welcomed this forum that was implemented in Bilderberg Parkhotel in Rotterdam. We had the following number of participants:

- During the Training: 31 persons from 25 national societies and IFRC Regional Office, and IFRC PS Centre
- During the Forum: 78 persons from 32 national societies, IFRC Regional Office, IFRC Youth Commission and IFRC Psychosocial Support Centre



DAY 1

I. INTRODUCTION

A welcome speech was given by Cecilie Alessandri (French RC) followed by all members introducing themselves and putting a cross on the map of which national society they represent. Carolien Pronk (The Netherlands RC) then explained the schedule for the next three days and then participants were split up into pairs where they answered the question: “What do you do for young adults in your national society?” A few of the examples given are as follows: meeting places created by and for youths to prevent loneliness have been implemented in Norway, a program called “Be a buddy, not a bully” to combat bullying can be found in Ireland, and “Help the Helpers” is a program that offers psychological sessions for the young volunteers in Azerbaijan and a cross-generational matching program where young and old people are paired together has been doing well in both Croatia and Serbia.

II. WELCOME SPEECH

Marieke Van Shaik, Secretary General of the Netherlands Red Cross, officially welcomed and opened the forum. She spoke of how 1 in 5 children in the Netherlands are considered, mentally unstable and how this became worse during COVID since they were more affected than others. Researchers believe that young adults will continue to be affected because of other crises such as climate change and conflicts. A survey conducted with young adults showed that they believe no one understands their problems and that mental health is still a taboo topic but can be combatted with interventions as simple as a phone call, which is already taking place at the Netherlands Red Cross.



III. GLOBAL MHPSS COOPERATION AMONG STATES

Renet van der Waals, Senior Advisor MHPSS of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explained how MHPSS is advocated for, why it should not be forgotten about when discussing budgets, how it is facilitated, and that national societies should try to live up to these commitments.

IV. SCIENTIFIC INSIGHTS ON YOUNG PEOPLE’S ANXIETY TODAY

Barbara Juen, Austrian Red Cross and University of Innsbruck gave a presentation titled “Scientific insights into young peoples’ anxiety today”. Studies found that young adults were most affected (lowest psychological well-being score) by the pandemic, which was not expected. Risk factors for this group include perception of threat, negative consequences of school closure, reduced levels of enjoyable activities and physical activity such as loneliness. The effects on young people are that they become fearful about the future, develop physical symptoms such as headaches, and possibly experience anxiety or depression. Activating emotions such as concern and worry encourage adaptive reactions while inactivating emotions such as hopelessness and helplessness contribute to decreased wellbeing. As a last piece of advice, Barbara Juen explained that it is important to speak WITH young adults and take action after listening to what they have to say.

V. BUILDING THE RESILIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE DEALING WITH CLIMATE ANXIETY

Ea Suzanne Akasha, technical advisor at the IFRC Psychosocial Centre, introduced this topic with an exercise where groups discussed which season and accompanying social events they enjoy the most and then discussed how they would feel if climate change took the season and the social events away. This exercise was followed by a video of Pablo Suarez from the Climate Centre who explained that when speaking of climate change, he found that using humour and the element of surprise keeps the audience engaged. Ea Suzanne Akasha introduced using the parachute with children at first come up with ways to exemplify different weather conditions and next discuss how to prepare. The session ended with a discussion of a plan for sessions for young adults who are climate anxious.

VI. LAUNCH OF PAPER: IMPACT OF CLIMATE ON MENTAL HEALTH

Fleur Monasso, manager capacity strengthening and partnerships of the Climate Centre, discussed the launch of a paper which focuses on how climate change affects mental health directly after a natural disaster and over a longer period of time. Additionally, the paper details the strategies, tools, key messages, and learning outcomes that prepare national societies to respond effectively to the effects of climate change on mental health.

DAY 2

VII. OPENING & RECAPITULATION

Day 2 opened with an exercise where participants were split into groups of 3 and went for a 10-minute walk to discuss what was presented the day before.

VIII. WORLD CAFE

Participants could join four out of 8 different “cafes” that had a leader who explained what that specific country was doing to assist those displaced in and from Ukraine. After 15 minutes of discussion, participants would move to a new café where they continued the discussion of how refugees from the Ukraine/Russian conflict are being assisted in their respective and individual countries.

The possible countries to visit were Sweden, Portugal, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Portugal, Ireland, Ukraine, Armenia, and Poland.



IX. INTERNATIONAL MARKET

Participants brought materials and souvenirs/food from their respective countries. Participants were able to walk around and see what other national societies have to offer.

X. PAULUS CHURCH PRESENTATIONS

A. Experiences with MHPSS of migrants in the Netherlands by the Paulus church and Doctors of the World

Around 12pm, the participants left by foot to the Paulus church, a diaconal center that is there to support people in Rotterdam and surroundings that cannot survive without help, including homeless people, addicted people, psychiatric patients, people without residence permits, people without employment, young adults that have no guidance for the way of life and vulnerable elderly people. Huub, a more than 30 years experienced street doctor, explained how the Pauluskerk always search for perspectives to improve the situation of these people. Everybody is more than welcome. The Paulus church was during the eighties and nineties mainly focused on drugs addicted people on the street. Nowadays they focus on the support of young undocumented migrants, who are often homeless. Because of the bad economy, a lot of reductions at the social care and the healthcare and all the time stronger policies for foreigners and asylum it became more difficult to survive in this society. Without help of NGO's, churches, and informal networks, it's barely possible to survive. Through their activities they help young people to reflect on their lives and offer them new perspectives.

Martha Teijema and Irene Papa tell about the experiences with Doctors of the World. This international NGO helps people in deprived situation to access different forms of healthcare including mental health care. Every week, Doctors of the World organizes a psychosocial consultation hour. If needed there is a psychiatrist to provide them treatment and support.

B. Life skills for undocumented migrants by Netherlands Red Cross

Esther Zielhuis and Nikki van der Ven present their Life Skill program that focused to support the access to medical and psychosocial care for undocumented migrants. The program consists of 5 thematic workshops that is designed to build the knowledge and skills of people to find their access to medical and mental health care, as well as teaching them skills to enhance their psychosocial well-being and resilience. The program was developed in 2015 and implemented in several mayor towns in the Netherlands, with relatively many migrants. The Netherlands Red Cross has developed a video 'Stress and Healthy habits' which aims to educate migrants in the Netherlands how to deal with stress effectively and enhance their psychosocial wellbeing. The video is translated in many languages and can be used by all national societies within their own health and psychosocial support programs. See here the links: **Rode Kruis Workshop Stress & Healty Habits– for an international context** Rode Kruis Workshop Stress & Healty Habits– Arabic (INT) <https://youtu.be/vHcgVAUdeuc>; English (INT) <https://youtu.be/4rkXR3kzLbw>; French (INT) <https://youtu.be/PcjDyPxyvvo>; Dutch (NL) <https://youtu.be/bLA1uWixSRw>; Portuguese (INT)

C. Mental health and psychosocial support for young migrants and displaced persons

Tessa Ubels, Ph.D. candidate, gave a presentation on her work on the intended and unintended social consequences of mental health and psychosocial support for young migrants and displaced persons. Background: Historically, MHPSS research was mostly clinical. Policy makers and practitioners lead the way by also looking at social outcomes (e.g. peace and poverty reduction). The **aim** of this study is to understand how individual and social post-migration factors interact, and in consequence, affect the well-being of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands, and she included the analysis of 'Life Skills' workshops, a psychosocial support intervention from the Netherlands Red Cross. Her research shows that possible social outcomes relate to cohesion, person-to-person relations, socio-economic, stigma reduction, family care, peace, and communication.

DAY 3

I. WELCOME BACK EXERCISE

Participants used post-it notes to describe their experience of the forum in one word. This was then shared with the entire group of participants.

II. UPDATES: STEERING COMMITTEE

The steering committee adopted a new logo, ToR, name, and policy. This past year Doreen Branse and Toya both left the steering committee, but Lala Chirwa has since joined. Cecilie Alessandri will be leaving her position in the French Red Cross, Armida Zakharyan will be joining the steering committee and Carolien Pronk has taken over as co-chair. Portugal will be the location for next year's forum. 800 euros were left in the solidarity fund, which will be transferred to the Portuguese Red Cross for next year's forum.

III. UPDATES: PS REFERENCE CENTRE

Due to an increase in funding, the Centre has been growing. There have been interesting new collaborations such as with the ICRC and Universities. One of the programs is called "Focus", which centers on the dual integration of newcomers and host societies. Practical recommendations came out of this specific program. The Well-being Guide was created this year. There will be a secondary PFA webinar for people who are in prison and their families- dates to come.

IV. UPDATES: PS RESEARCH NETWORK

The PS research network is open access meaning that anyone within the Red Cross who has an interest in research is able to join. Last year, there were remote meetings, but there will hopefully be an in-person meeting in Copenhagen next year. Due to a change in the co-chair, the network will be relaunched for next year.

V. UPDATES: IFRC EUROPEAN OFFICE

Lala Chirwa from the IFRC Regional office explained that the IFRC is there to support those in national societies. For example, if a member needs assistance in developing a strategy, work plan, or capacity building, the IFRC can offer that support. As of now, there are four delegates in the regional office. Lastly, when funding is given, the IFRC can support national societies in their work.

VI. MHPSS RESOLUTION & ROADMAP

VII. PRESENTATION BY NATIONAL SOCIETIES

- ⇒ The **Portuguese Red Cross** discussed promoting the well-being and mental health of youth in the community, which emerged as an important topic that came out of several surveys that were done at branches. The commission initiatives include the toolkit, a manual of good practices, PFA for youth peers, the Refugialidades game, and a silent flash mob is planned for World Mental Health Day. The aim of the toolkit is to gather theoretical information along with some practical examples of interventions that branches could use when promoting wellbeing and mental health, while the game allows ones to reflect on the difficulties lived by refugees and to seek change in perceptions. The national initiatives include humanitarian talks (online meetings where youths talk about whatever they would like to share), a line of psychosocial support, the “Play with Your Future” game, and the Conviver project.
- ⇒ The **Netherlands Red Cross** presented their Podcast project where 4 student desks in different locations work together to enhance resilience. There are four pillars for this project including accessibility, breaking taboos, disseminating tips, and being recognizable. It was created for students by students during the COVID pandemic. Season 1 had 8 episodes that had different guest speakers in both Dutch and English. Season 2 will be out by the end of this year.
- ⇒ A representative of the **Danish Red Cross Youth** and two representatives from the IFRC Youth Commission presented the “Youth Manifesto” that 82 national societies (5,000 youth) have contributed to. The aim is to create an intergenerational dialogue on mental health and keep senior leadership aware of the mental health of youth as an important topic to consider.

VIII. WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY/WEEK SESSION

Participants were split into groups and discussed what each National Society could do for World Mental Health Day. One of the examples was to create a video where people from different nationalities can answer the following question “What is mental health for you?”

This session was related to the group picture taken the previous day during which a short video ending with “mental health matters” was made to be displayed during the mental health day.



Feedback, reflections from participants & evaluations

I. FEEDBACKS

At the end of the forum participants were asked to indicate on a post-it a word or sentence representing something they have specifically appreciated and/or would like to bring back to their national society.

Many mentioned PFA (the training was appreciated, and also how PFA can be used in different settings) and youth (young adults perspectives, needs, etc.), that were the main topics of this forum.

A lot of participants indicated that they enjoyed the sharing of experiences, the exchanges, the lessons learned, hearing from colleagues from different countries, etc. The forum was identified as productive, inspiring and informative. Finally, some mentioned the words “resilience”, “be”, “lucky”, “enjoyable”.

Feedback written or said at the end of the forum were very positive and highlighted the interest of such network meeting, and how appreciated is to have a combination of training, group discussions and plenary presentations, as all together contribute to reinforce the network, increase the knowledge and skills as well as our own wellbeing and resilience.



II. SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR NEXT FORUMS

The steering committee asked participants what topic they would like to hear about for next year’s forum. Topics that were popular were mainly:

- Caring for staff and volunteers
- Support for older adults
- Engaging youth and meeting youth’ needs
- Technical skills to support others
- Stigmatization

Finally, some suggested to plan the forum during the weekdays instead of a weekend to facilitate participation and rest of all. All these aspects will be discussed by the steering committee to plan the next forum in Portugal.

III. EVALUATION

The evaluations showed the following outcomes:

- Overall impression: 4.35 (on scale of 5)
- Relevance of the content of the forum for work: 4.12 (on a scale of 5)
- How included did you feel during the forum: 4.53 (on a scale of 5)