

EU4Health project:

Support groups for Ukrainians living in Europe:

Guidance note.

Background for the intervention:

Displacement related stressors, living apart, being exposed to very different life circumstances, having for each of the partners to grow in unexpected ways and take on tasks that would either be done mutually or delegated to the partner who is now not present.

Objective: provide a psychosocial support for people coming from Ukraine through a peer-to-peer volunteer lead support.

The aims of the basic group intervention are to:

- provide a safe space to share thoughts and feelings and hopes for their life with their close ones who may be with them in Europe or living in Ukraine.
- be and feel supported by peers
- normalize reactions to displacement and to living apart.
- share thoughts, ideas and suggestions for how to handle the situation.

The intervention:

- consists of themed session that are carried out following the same model.
- carried out by trained MHPSS staff and volunteers who run groups of five to eight people in same gendered groups.
- Structured so it is easy for the lead person.
- Each session has a theme.
- Participants are informed about the themes for the sessions before signing up for the group.
- Participants are assigned “buddies” so they can follow up with each other between sessions and provide peer support in pairs.

The sessions are run following this structure and are repeated at each meeting:

Opening of each group support session:

- The group gathers and is welcomed by the leader of the support group.
- The ground rules are explained and are posted on the wall.
- The structure of the meeting is explained.
- The theme is introduced.
- The first round where participants each talk about the theme that is conducted.

- Tea and coffee break
- The group gathers after the break and a short calming exercise is conducted.
- The second round is conducted.
- Participant share ideas and suggestions with each other
- The session is closed with psychoeducative remarks.

Session one

- Welcome to the group and the format and content (as above)
- Round of presentations
- Present the whole program and expectations.
- Introduce importance of social networks and fabrics. Introduce buddy system. Safe referrals.
- Introduction to the **theme I: What are the changes our lives since the war in Ukraine began. Adapting to changes and to a new phase in life in Europe.**

Rounds of reflections:

- How have I changed since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.
 - Short tea and coffee break
 - A calming breathing exercise from the Well-being Guide
- How has my partner/child changed since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.
- How are these changes impacting our relationship/our life as a family.
 - The group is invited to offer ideas and suggestions and other support to each other
- Closing the session with psychoeducative summing up of the theme of the session

Note that the first meeting is aimed at getting participants feel safe, and accommodating themselves in the group. You may choose to stay only on the first question. Do not try to cover all listed above.

Session two

- Welcome – how are you today?
- Round of introduction of new members have joined the group
- Introduction to the **theme II: Learning from adversity.**

Rounds of reflections:

- What have I learnt (skills, coping, about myself) since the beginning of the war in Ukraine
 - Short tea and coffee break
 - A calming breathing exercise from the Well-being Guide
- What has my partner/child learnt since the beginning of the war in Ukraine
- How are what we have learnt impacting our relationship/our life as a family
 - The group is invited to offer ideas and suggestions and other support to each other

- Closing the session with psychoeducative summing up of the theme of the session

Session three

- Welcome – any changes you have noticed since the last group meeting?
- Introduction to the **theme III: *Creating a new future and hope.***

Rounds of reflections:

- What are my hopes and dreams for the future now.
 - Short tea and coffee break
 - A calming breathing exercise from the Well-being Guide
- What are my partners/child's dream for the future.
- How are our dreams impacting our relationship/our life as a family.
 - The group is invited to offer ideas and suggestions and other support to each other.
- Closing the session with psychoeducative summing up of the theme of the session

Session four

- Welcome – any changes you have noticed since the last group meeting?
- Introduction to the **theme IV: *Taking stock.***

Rounds of reflections:

- What have I gained and learned from being in the group.
 - Short tea and coffee break
 - A calming breathing exercise from the Well-being Guide
- What impact has my being in the group had on my relationship to and understanding of my partners/child.
- How has this impacted our relationship/our life as a family.
 - The group is invited to offer ideas and suggestions and other support to each other for the future
- An evaluation sheet is handed out to participants and filled out by participants
- Closing ceremony and handing out of a small symbolic gift as a beautiful notebook

Facilitation Tips:**Preparation****Announcing to participants:**

- Use simple language when informing about the purpose of the meeting not to create impression of a “group therapy”
- Inform about the objective being safe space to receive support, share challenges, learn about possible solutions
- Confidentiality
- Trauma-warning: discussion might be sensitive at times.

Training of staff and volunteers as group leaders

It is a pre-requisite for group leaders to be trained in MHPSS background, PFA and PFA in groups and be knowledgeable about community-based psychosocial support.

The training or briefing in running support groups will cover the following topics:

- Looking at research into benefits from participating in a support groups and peer support
- Assessing participants for the group intervention
- Coping with participants who show symptoms of distress or are disruptive.
- Tolerating emotional distress as a facilitator
- Brief and include translators (if used) in the training.

Pilot the questions in the native language of participants for clarity of meaning.**Implementation**

- Have two co-facilitators. Discuss and distribute the roles in advance.
- Be ready to provide psychological first aid, as strong emotional reactions are to be expected.
- Be prepared to provide psychoeducation and normalise any possible reactions, which are natural to arise.
- Have validated and updates referral contact information for focused mental health support and community based MHPSS activities
- Make sure participants have basic tools to help themselves, i.e. include calming exercise in the introduction part, allow to stop or take a break at any point, have water and napkins
- Stress that participation is voluntary, encourage to stay engaged but do not force to speak.
- Collect feedback after the meeting.
- Pair the participants in pair to apply the buddy system.
- No more than 8 participants
- Clarify the whole programme aims and objectives in session one. Manage expectations of participants: this is not psychotherapy but a peer to peer support.
- Discuss benefits of support of social networks

Be prepared to navigate facilitation challenges:

Time management: it is natural for people to share their stories and memories. It can be the first opportunity for them to do so. It is important to provide the space for it.

What can be done to ensure the pace of the meeting flow: to structure the meetings with clearly stated open questions (if you are using translators, be sure you check and test the questions in advance), write the questions on the flipcharts. Making a group charter, i.e. ground rules, in the beginning, refer back to it when needed. Use time at the break to plan, leave out the questions if needed, do not attempt to cover it all.

Hearing difficult memories and stories:

- Have an advance self-care plan in place for facilitators, i.e. activity plan which will help to recover, “who/what/where and how can support me”.
- Ensure supervision and briefing after
- Peer-feedback
- Inform participants that some discussions are going to be sensitive and they have the right to leave the room or ask for support.

Monitoring and evaluation

A variety of tools are available for monitoring and evaluating the support sessions, including:

Required for the project managers and reporting under the **EU4Health project** :

- **Attendance form:** EU4H Project managers are required to use an attendance form that includes, at a minimum, disaggregation by gender and age. This form can be further adapted to meet specific programming and planning needs, such as capturing data on participants the region of origin, language preference, or disability status. Attendance must be recorded for every participant per session, and each session should be counted individually.
- **EU4Health activity report or EU4Health activity log:** Both tools, can be found in the [EU4Health M&E toolbox](#), are available for reporting after completing a series of sessions.

Feedback mechanisms for facilitators:

- **Recommended Optional. Anonymous. After each session:** Consider including a self-assessment anonymous tool for feedback, also aiming to give space and develop self-reflection skill among participants.
 - How do I feel now before the start of the session. please, rate 1 to 10. 1 “bad” 2 “good”
 - How do I feel now after the session. please, rate 1 to 10. 1 “bad” 2 “good”
 - Any observations, ideas, thoughts, you have had during the session
 - Any suggestions for the next meeting
- **Activity feedback questionnaire. Recommended Optional. Anonymous. After completion of the series of sessions:** This form is used to collect post-activity feedback. It can be adapted to suit the specific activity being evaluated and may include questions such as:
 - Were you satisfied with the activities? (Yes/No) Why?
 - What went well during the activities?
 - What can be changed for future activities (e.g., date, location, size, content)?
 - Would you recommend this activity to your community?
 - What activities could be of interest to the community?

To facilitate easier data collection, the feedback questionnaire can be developed digitally and distributed via a QR code.

Follow – up

- Propose the group to set up dedicated communication space, e.g. a group on social media
- Encourage participants to engage between the meetings
- Post additional information if needed, e.g. psychoeducation