



## MHPSS – CA&EN Forum 2025

### Mental Health and Psychosocial Support- Central Asian and European Network

Hosted by The Turkish Red Crescent

Sanliurfa, Turkiye

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#### FORUM REPORT

#### *Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies*

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**Workshop MHPSS-CA&EN – Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies - 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> October**

**Forum MHPSS-CA&EN – Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies – 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October**

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#### DAY 1

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The Forum was opened by Turkish RC's Deputy Director General for Community Services, the President of Sanliurfa TRC Branch and the Head of Country, Turkiye for the IFRC who each welcomed **60 participants from 30 National Societies, ICRC, IFRC and the International Movement's MHPSS Hub**. The Steering Committee for the Network noted the new name for the Network – including Central Asia in our title to reflect our wish to increase inclusion for the National Societies (NSs) in this part of the region. They also presented findings of a recent Network survey, completed by 30 of the 56 NSs in the Network. All 30 deliver MHPSS as part of community resilience/capacity development, 26 as part of disaster response and 24 within migration and displacement. The survey showed that NSs in the Network deliver MHPSS activities covering all four layers of the Movement's MHPSS Framework across a range of contexts, the majority including basic psychosocial and focussed psychosocial supports. The main challenges NS face in implementing MHPSS are a lack of funding (27 NSs), a lack of trained staff/volunteers (15 NSs) and low prioritisation by leaders (8 NSs).

The Austrian RC presented the latest research findings on the effect of trauma work on helpers, noting the roles of emotions such as anger, guilt, shame, disappointment and loss of hope, moral injury and shattered assumptions, helplessness and exhaustion. The importance of learning to understand signs of stress in oneself, to identify stressful emotions and accept them to be a personal answer to destruction, trying to make a picture of the fragments felt, connecting to our teams and resilience work were highlighted, as were the need to create spaces for remembrance, contributing to the culture of remembrance and recognising the intergenerational transmission of resilience.

The Turkish RC shared the turning points in their MHPSS activities, dating back from the 1999 Marmara earthquake. They provide comprehensive MHPSS in emergencies and non-emergency situations, actively collaborating with national and international organisations to enhance service effectiveness. The Turkish RC mobilise staff and volunteers through coordination, training and simulations. Their field responses coordinate specialised teams during disasters, implement MHPSS activities focussed on specific populations and coordinate with other agencies and Government Ministries to ensure a comprehensive response. They have evolved standardised guidelines and protocols to ensure an organised response, undertaken research and case studies to improve interventions and developed policy papers and operational manuals for best practice.

There was feedback from the preceding days' workshop led by the Movement's MHPSS Hub, noting that psychosocial first aid isn't a service but an activity, appreciating the exercise which enabled connections between participants through a "dance card" booking system which provided opportunities for us to share resources, expertise, practises and inspiration from our own contexts, enabling less loneliness and isolation. Appreciation was expressed to the Armenian, Hellenic and Norwegian RC for presenting and commitments made to raise the visibility of MHPSS with senior leaders and forge stronger connections internally and across the Network.

The first day concluded with an International Marketplace where participants shared resources, information and treats from their National Societies/Movement components and countries.

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## DAY 2

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The day commenced with 3 choices of 5 masterclasses. The masterclasses were the most popular aspect of this Forum as they enabled people to engage interactively and hear about local examples across different contexts. The Icelandic RC presented on the MHPSS response of a volcano eruption and the evacuation of a town. In the preparation and delivery of MHPSS, tailored needs assessments informed responses. The Icelandic RC worked with those in the town in the preparation phase, so they were aware of their needs and wishes. One of the lessons learned was the need for mandatory supervision for managers. Participants noted how important the coordination was in the preparation and responses phase, learning about the adaptation of MHPSS responses, sustaining the hope of those wishing to return home and the importance of Standard Operating Procedures.

The Portuguese RC presented on Restoring Family Links (RFL) following large scale fires in 2017. Those affected were supported for up to a year after the fires and included a high number of older adults. RFL can be seen as a form of MHPSS and MHPSS is essential in delivering RFL. Many crises impact communications which impact RFL and supporting Government Authorities to enable families to remain together and find one another during and after a crisis can minimise mental health and wellbeing difficulties. Challenges were shared re how to integrate RFL and MHPSS across all activities especially where funding and capacity is limited, and the way that misuse of social media and artificial intelligence can lead to higher levels of disinformation.

The French RC presented on MHPSS responses in the context of epidemics in France and other countries alongside their National Societies. Similar obstacles and challenges were encountered at an individual and social level and regarding staff and volunteer support across contexts. Implications for preparedness were discussed considering the short- and longer-term impact of epidemics on mental health. The French RC have developed a package co-produced with those likely to deliver MHPSS following epidemics, attending to context. The package was tested over three years in Europe and Africa, involving training in contexts. Preparation was noted as important and the dangers of disinformation.

The Czech RC presented their responses to large scale flooding, including MHPSS and multi-agency working. They considered managing in depth needs assessments, the importance of only deploying volunteers for few days at a time (with three days preferred to promote volunteer wellbeing) and ensuring they had access to supervision, debriefs and follow up support as required. The Czech RC made use of a number of Apps that enabled people to be located and supported using basic MHPSS activities. Links for the applications were shared: Application Gina: <https://www.ginasoftware.com/>. Assyst technique: <https://scalingupemdr.com/assyst-complete-online-training> and Emotion Aid: <https://emotionaid.com/the-5-step-protocol/>

The Ukraine RC presented on the integration of MHPSS and crisis response. In ongoing conflict there is not a cycle of preparedness, response and evaluation and so it is important to embed and integrate learning and training in an ongoing manner. Mutual respect when working together is important and was facilitated through joint trainings, attendance of simulations, use of shared language which all enable familiarity and trust. Participants noted the importance of simplifying processes and sharing MHPSS skills and approaches focussed on what crisis responders wanted and needed, e.g. not talking about psychoeducation but opportunities to develop team and individual resilience. The importance of considering why and how rather than what of MHPSS was noted.

The day concluded with a visit to and tour of Sanliurfa.

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## DAY 3

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The day again started with a choice of interactive masterclasses. The Polish RC presented on their Friend in Touch programme for people affected by conflict. Beneficiaries of this programme are matched with trained staff who are able to have weekly calls with to discuss their emotional support needs and reduce loneliness. Challenges of running a referral line and specialised service were highlighted. Discussions considered the place of students needing to practice their listening skills alongside the needs of those who benefit from the service. The inclusion of volunteers in this program was also discussed, which could contribute to its expansion. Supervisors are used by the programme to oversee quality and are usually psychologists.

The Swedish and British RC shared details about the International MHPSS Hub and invited participants to consider how best to connect with the Hub's Steering and Advisory Committee. The groups noted the needs for: greater clarity between what the Hub and the IFRC's Regional Office lead on re coordination, consideration of a different funding model for the Hub so that they are less dependent on project funding and more able to take on a quality assurance role, and for a presence on the Hub's website for the Network so we are able to share more widely our activities and resources with the Network and beyond.

The Croatian RC demonstrated a session they usually conduct with staff and volunteers returning from deployments, including a role play of a support group meeting. The participants enjoyed the role play elements highlighting group work, support for wellbeing of our responders. Discussion considered how supervisors are recruited, managed and supervised.

Before the end of the Forum, representatives of the NSs from the Czech Republic, Iceland, Romania and Switzerland were announced as new members joining the Steering Committee. In 2026 the Steering Committee will update our Network's Terms of Reference and all were invited to be involved to consider new initiatives in the Network, such as connecting more with NSs in Central Asia, forming smaller communities between neighbouring NSs and/or around specific themes to enable mutual support and using the Solidarity Fund more broadly rather than exclusively to support access to the annual Forum. Participants were also invited to join and post on our [Community of Practice website](#) hosted by the IFRC.

*We look forward to seeing you in the Czech Republic for the 2026 Forum!*

*To find out more, please see our [Community of Practice website](#) hosted by the IFRC: MHPSS-EN Community.*



MHPSS-EN Steering Committee, 2025  
Sarah Davidson (chair), British RC  
Ayşe Çelik, Turkish RC  
Armida Zakharyan, Armenian RC  
Catarina Brito, Portuguese RC  
Hélène Ely, ICRC  
Ganna Goloktionova, MHPSS Hub  
Greisy Massiel Trejo, IFRC  
Marija Lindić, Croatian RC