



IFRC Competency Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Personnel in Emergencies

November 2024

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1 Introduction

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) is a key technical sector when addressing the suffering and emotional toll of people affected by disasters and crises. As an evidence-based field of work, the delivery of such services during emergencies requires competent and well skilled personnel, who can respond confidently to the demands of challenging circumstances. MHPSS surge personnel play a critical role in addressing both the immediate and long-term mental health needs of affected populations. Ensuring that these individuals are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to navigate the complexities of such high-stress environments is essential for the effectiveness of the services they provide. Therefore, a competency framework outlining the essential skills, knowledge, and behaviours required for effectively responding to mental health and psychosocial needs during emergencies is required.

To support this objective, the *Competency Framework for MHPSS Personnel in Emergencies* has been developed, updating the previous version from 2016. This framework outlines the core skills, knowledge and behaviours required for MHPSS personnel to perform effectively in their roles. It provides a consistent and competency-based approach to the recruitment, selection, learning and development of surge MHPSS personnel, to support the IFRC network's response to emergencies. The deployment of MHPSS personnel in emergencies supports the implementation of both the IFRC's strategy 2030 and the 2019 Resolution of the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent on [Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs of People Affected by Armed Conflicts, Natural Disasters and other Emergencies](#).

1.1 IFRC Strategy 2030

Strategy 2030 sets out how the IFRC will build on over 100 years of striving for a more humane and peaceful world and adapt to emerging 21st century challenges. It ensures that the IFRC and National Societies will remain a dynamic global network of organizations that are fit for purpose and can best serve our communities. The IFRC Strategy 2030 also serves as the basis for updating, harmonizing, and developing new implementation tools, such as the Competency Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Personnel in Emergencies.

The IFRC Strategy 2023 has three main aims:

1. People anticipate, respond to, and quickly recover from crises
2. People lead safe, healthy, and dignified lives, and have opportunities to thrive
3. People mobilise for inclusive and peaceful communities

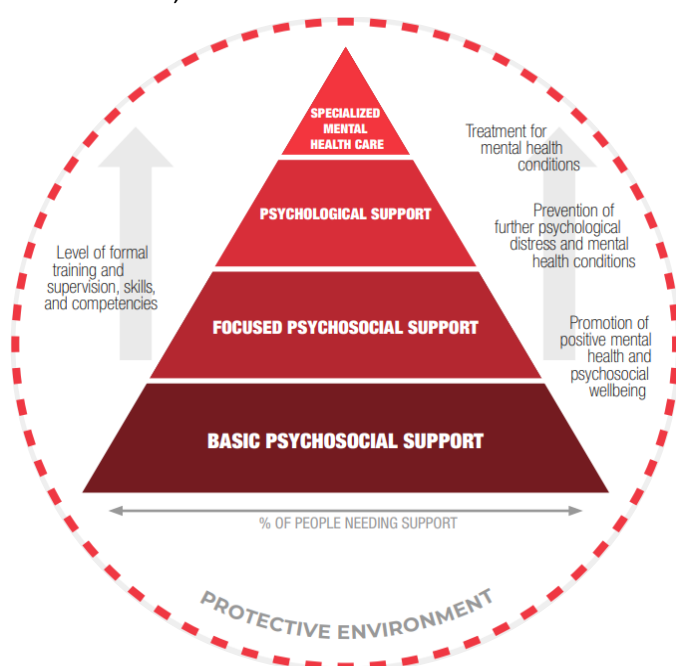
1.2 MHPSS Movement Framework and Policy

In December 2019, the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement adopted a set of commitments on addressing mental health and psychosocial needs, including a Movement MHPSS policy¹. The *International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement policy on addressing mental health and psychosocial needs* refers to

¹ The RCRC MHPSS policy and resolution can be accessed here: <https://pscentre.org/about-us/focus-areas/roadmap-policies-and-resolutions/>

work conducted in all contexts by all the components of the Movement. It presents eight policy statements to frame and address the mental health and psychosocial needs of affected populations, including staff and volunteers. The policy statements include:

1. Ensure impartial access to mental health and psychosocial support and prioritize prevention and early response;
2. Ensure comprehensive and integrated support and care for people with mental health and psychosocial needs;
3. Recognize the resilience, participation, and diversity of people in all mental health and psychosocial activities;



4. Ensure protection of safety, dignity, and rights;
5. Address stigma, exclusion, and discrimination;
6. Implement and contribute to the development of interventions based on mental health and psychosocial support standards and practices that are internationally recognized and informed by evidence;
7. Protect the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of staff and volunteers;
8. Develop mental health and psychosocial support capacity;

Each component of the Movement responds to mental health and psychosocial needs in accordance with its role and mandate. The pyramid model represents the framework of mental health and psychosocial support services that are required to address the needs of individuals, families, and communities in all contexts.

2 Competency Framework for MHPSS Personnel in Emergencies

The IFRC Competency Framework for MHPSS Personnel in Emergencies (MHPSS Competency Framework) was developed by the MHPSS Surge Technical Workstream² in 2024. It is aligned with the IFRC Core

² The MHPSS Surge Workstream is an autonomous working group, with links to the Health Surge Technical Working Group, composed by different Movement components which contribute with expertise and time to develop, update and harmonize relevant MHPSS guidance and tools for MHPSS in Emergencies, in accordance with its ToR.

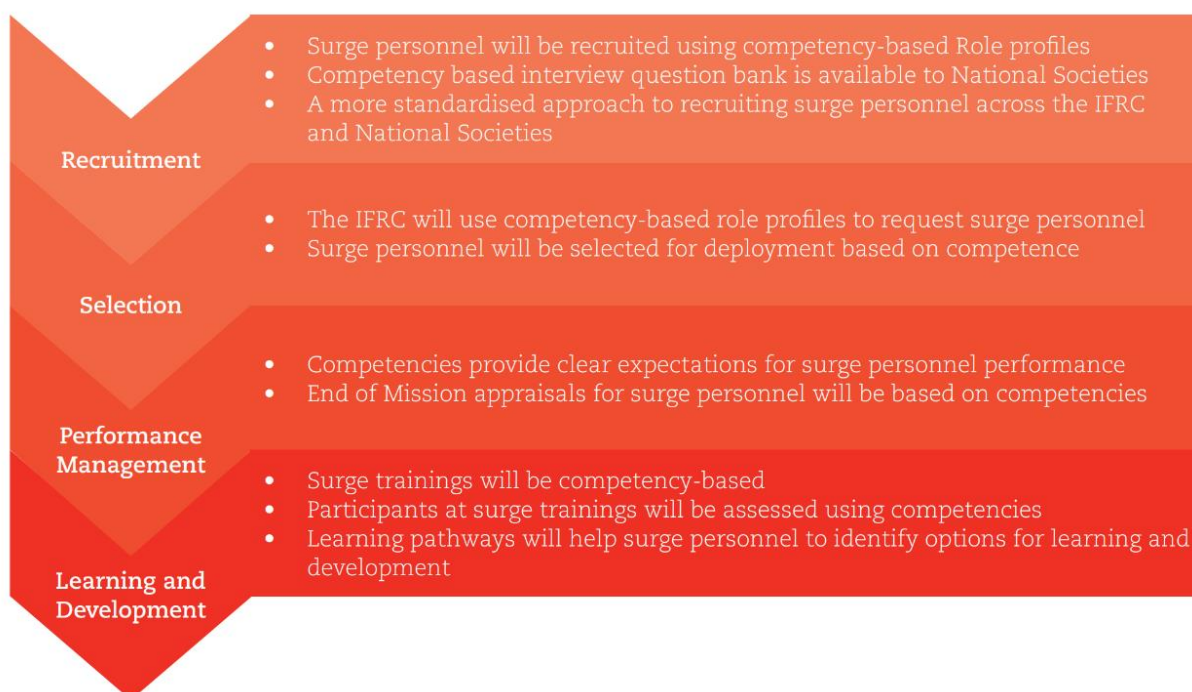
Competency Framework for Surge Personnel³, and it aims to clarify the competencies required of MHPSS personnel to fulfil their roles in emergencies. It describes the relevant IFRC core competencies and the MHPSS technical competencies for all MHPSS personnel. In addition, the MHPSS Competency Framework identifies roles specific training requirements and objectives for four different roles profiles for MHPSS surge deployments, available in the [Catalogue of Surge Services](#). These are:

- MHPSS Coordinator
- MHPSS Officer
- ERU MHPSS Team Leader
- ERU MHPSS Officer

2.1 How to use the MHPSS Competency Framework

The competency framework can be used by:

- Human Resource departments in IFRC and National Societies to ensure more informed recruitment and deployment of MHPSS personnel;
- Surge desks at IFRC and National Societies to match the needs of a specific disaster response with personnel available for deployment;
- MHPSS and health teams in IFRC and National Societies to plan trainings for surge rosters;
- Emergency leadership profiles, relevant technical profiles, National Societies considering surge support, IFRC Regional and Geneva-based staff members as well as MHPSS personnel themselves to get an overview of competencies, tasks, and responsibilities.



³ IFRC, 2019, Core Competency Framework for Surge Personnel, Geneva. <https://www.ifrc.org/document/core-competency-framework-surge-personnel>

Additional reference can be made on the use of a competencies-based approach as per the graphic, originally from the IFRC Core Competency Framework for Surge Personnel.

2.2 IFRC Surge Core Competencies

There are twenty competencies in the IFRC Core Competency Framework for Surge Personnel, and these are grouped into four categories:



1. Red Cross Red Crescent competencies
2. Operational competencies
3. Cross-Cutting competencies
4. Behavioural competencies


All 20 core competencies are applicable to every surge role, regardless of their position in the operation. However, each competency is divided into four different tiers⁴ and the tier required for each competency is different for each position. The following matrix includes each of the 20 core competencies and the tier required for each of the existing four MHPSS Role Profiles.

Core Competency Framework for Surge Personnel

Surge Optimisation

December 2019

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⁴ There are four tiers of competency, each with a set of indicators, and each tier builds upon the indicators set out in the previous tier. In other words, the Tier 2 competencies assume that all the Tier 1 competencies have been met and Tier 3 assumes all of Tier 1 and Tier 2 have been met. The tier definitions are as follows:

- Foundational tier: Foundational knowledge needed to build a deployable level of competency in this area.
- Tier 1: Displays a practical understanding of effective day-to-day behaviours for this competency and able to function effectively as part of a Red Cross Red Crescent team.
- Tier 2: Displays impact for this competency by providing advice and guidance to others within a defined scope. Translates strategic decision into sectoral direction.
- Tier 3: Models the behaviours and creates an environment which enables these behaviours to be displayed. Operates at a strategic, multi-sectoral level in a response of any magnitude.

Core competency	MHPSS Coordinator	MHPSS Officer	ERU MHPSS Team Leader	ERU MHPSS Officer
Red Cross Red Crescent				
1. Movement context, principles, and values <i>Ability to apply Movement knowledge and fundamental principles and standards within the humanitarian sector</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
2. National Society Capacity Strengthening <i>Ability to understand and promote the host National Society and to effectively collaborate and build short-term operational or sustainable long-term capacity within the National Society</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
Operational				
3. Coordination <i>Ability to harmonise interactions and activities between and among Movement members and external partners</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
4. Assessment <i>Ability to identify and analyse the needs of the affected communities and gaps in existing capacity and use this information to make evidence-based decisions</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
5. Direction Setting and Quality Programme Management <i>Ability to develop plans, implement interventions, monitor progress and report against the plan</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
6. Information Management <i>Ability to identify and make use of information for evidence-based decision-making</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
7. Resource Management <i>Ability to understand and effectively apply financial, logistical and human resource processes</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
8. Safety and Security <i>Ability to maintain safety and security for Movement personnel</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
9. Transition and Recovery <i>Ability to manage operational transitions in a coordinated way from response to recovery to long-term programming</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
Cross-cutting				
10. Community engagement and accountability <i>Ability to shape the response based on the voice of the community and to provide</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1

<i>information to empower communities</i>				
11. Protection, Gender and Inclusion <i>Ability to identify and analyse the distinct needs, risks to, and capacities of all girls, boys, women and men to inform programming</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
12. Environmental Sustainability <i>Ability to identify, analyse, mitigate and report on environmental risks that could negatively impact programming and the affected communities</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
Behavioural				
13. Collaboration and Teamwork <i>Ability to build strong relationships within the team to achieve results</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
14. Conflict Management <i>Ability to address conflicts by focusing on the issues at hand, to develop effective solutions when disputes or disagreements occur</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
15. Interpersonal Communication <i>Ability to actively listen and clearly convey ideas and information in an engaging manner</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1
16. Cultural Awareness <i>Ability to demonstrate acute awareness of cultural surroundings and context</i>	Tier 3	Tier 2	Tier 2	Tier 2
17. Judgement and Decision Making <i>Ability to make objective judgements and decisions</i>	Tier 2	Tier 2	Tier 2	Tier 2
18. Motivating Others <i>Ability to see the overall objective in a changing context and taking responsibility to motivate others to achieve it</i>	Tier 2	Tier 2	Tier 2	Tier 2
19. Personal Resilience <i>Ability to maintain your own and others well-being in a stressful environment and cope with rapid change</i>	Tier 2	Tier 2	Tier 2	Tier 2
20. Integrity <i>Ability to act in an honest and ethical fashion to create a safe environment</i>	Tier 2	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 1

2.3 MHPSS technical competencies

There are 19 MHPSS technical competencies, across 6 domains: MHPSS technical knowledge and skills; programme design and planning; training and facilitation; mentoring and supervision; staff/volunteer management; and advocacy. The MHPSS Officer and ERU MHPSS Officer must meet Tier 1 competencies and the MHPSS Coordinator and ERU MHPSS Team Leader must meet Tier 2 competencies. Each tier builds upon the indicators set out in the previous tier. In other words, the Tier 2 competencies assume that all the Tier 1 competencies have been met.

Foundational tier	TIER 1	TIER 2
1. MHPSS technical knowledge and skills		
<i>Ability to apply and translate technical mental health and psychosocial support concepts and approaches</i>		
Describes key MHPSS concepts and activities.	Explains MHPSS concepts and activities and translates to plain language for the understanding of individuals with no previous knowledge of MHPSS.	Explains MHPSS concepts and activities from basic psychosocial support to specialized mental health care to people directly/indirectly involved in MHPSS activities, internally or externally.
Can explain the MHPSS Movement Framework and Policy.	Describes and communicates about the MHPSS Movement Framework and Policy in a practical way specific to emergencies.	Advocates for the inclusion of MHPSS across sectors in line with the MHPSS Movement Framework, Policy and Resolution.
Can explain key MHPSS tools, activities and approaches used in the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in emergencies.	Analyses and provides guidance on appropriate MHPSS tools, activities and approaches relevant to the emergency context.	
Is aware of MHPSS International Movement Hub, IASC MHPSS guidelines in emergency settings, and other MHPSS technical guidance, documents and tools.	Identifies and incorporates the use of relevant tools from the MHPSS International Movement Hub, IASC MHPSS guidance and other tools and resources, relevant to the emergency context, ensuring an evidence-based approach of MHPSS activities.	Strategically guides stakeholders and partners on the use of MHPSS tools, technical documents, and types of intervention in the development of emergency and recovery MHPSS programming.
Has the ability to select MHPSS tools according to the needs.	Makes needed adaptations to the MHPSS tools identified for a given purpose, in order to make it fit-for-purpose, culturally sensitive, and adapted to local context.	
Is aware of how mental health and psychosocial support is understood by the target population in terms of culture and faith.	Is able to identify, analyze, and integrate considerations and strengths relating to culture and faith within any MHPSS service delivery.	
2. Program design and planning		

<i>Ability to assess, planning and programme development of MHPSS activities</i>		
Demonstrates knowledge of MHPSS assessment tools.	Is able to develop or adapt assessment tools and train assessment teams to carry out MHPSS assessment.	Ensures the integration of MHPSS into multi-sectoral, and other, assessments across the emergency and recovery phases.
Demonstrates basic understanding of IFRC emergency response tools.	Develops and/or adapts MHPSS activity planning in line with overall emergency Plan of Action/Operational Strategy, including consideration for recovery and NS capacities.	Develops country specific MHPSS strategies and plan for all phases of the emergency with anticipation of sustainability of MHPSS in NS.
Knows the relevant MHPSS M&E tools, suitable for emergencies.	Adapts and integrates appropriate MHPSS M&E tools into programme planning.	Analyses, makes proper use and interprets MHPSS data.
Demonstrates knowledge of MHPSS community-based approaches	Supports the implementation and / or adaptation of mental health and psychosocial community-based support approaches and interventions.	
3. Training and facilitation		
<i>Ability to prepare and facilitate MHPSS related trainings, sensitization sessions and workshops.</i>		
Demonstrates capacity to deliver basic psychosocial training and sensitization sessions, including psychological first aid, awareness raising, recreational activities and staff and volunteer care approaches.	Successfully prepares a training agenda and all the needed resource materials for delivering the training and considers participant needs.	Is able to analyze the needs of participants to determine and adapt specific contents and develop the materials accordingly.
Demonstrates knowledge of adult learning, facilitation and transfer of knowledge.	Is able to apply different methodologies in order to keep participants engaged and being able to respond to individual learning styles.	Is able to design full training with diversified methodologies and is able to adapt according to the needs of the participants.
4. Mentoring and Supervision		
<i>Ability to mentor and supervise local staff and volunteers.</i>		
Is able to support and guide staff and volunteers on the implementation of basic psychosocial support.	Shares relevant knowledge based on experience and relevant to the situation, points towards resources, and connects to relevant networks.	Is able to support and guide leadership, staff and volunteers, based on current needs but also towards broader specific developmental goals.
Understands the importance and objective of supervision to MHPSS staff and volunteers.	Demonstrates a guiding and supportive attitude towards supervisees, fostering an environment of open and constructive communication, and supports the development of their capacities.	
5. Staff/Volunteer Management		
<i>Ability to manage and work with local staff and volunteers.</i>		
Is aware of the National Society process of	With the National Society, can develop volunteer/staff profiles and job description according to	

recruitment for staff and volunteers and related conditions, such as working hours, per diem, salary, insurance etc.	the context and support recruitment.	
Can effectively communicate with local volunteers on basic psychosocial support.	Understands the profiles and experiences of local volunteers and staff and can work with them effectively.	Is able of anticipating needs, expectations and challenges regarding the MHPSS volunteer-base, and act accordingly.
<p>6. Advocacy and Humanitarian Diplomacy <i>Ability to articulate MHPSS concepts, community MHPSS needs and influence for the integration and sustainability of MHPSS in emergency response activities.</i></p>		
Knows how to leverage MHPSS needs, evidence base, policies, and activities in order advocate for the prioritisation of MHPSS in emergencies.	Can support the NS to engage in advocacy for the prioritisation and integration of MHPSS in emergencies.	Articulates plans and strategies on how MHPSS can be prioritized for emergency preparedness and response, including through integration and mainstreaming in other sectors.
Demonstrates familiarity with the MHPSS Reference Group and national, or local, technical working groups, Cluster Coordination Groups and government systems where MHPSS advocacy can take place.	Supports the NS in engaging with national or local MHPSS technical working groups, and other relevant forums, to promote advocacy and prioritization of MHPSS service provision	Supports the NS in presenting in relevant forums, including MHPSS Reference Group calls, to position itself as a main actor in the MHPSS response and foster collaborations accordingly.
In able to articulate the need for budget allocation for MHPSS needs of affected communities and for MHPSS activities.	Supports the NS to plan for, and prioritise, resources required for the implementation of MHPSS activities, including through utilizing IFRC funding mechanisms.	Engages with stakeholders from different sectors to identify potential opportunities for funding and partnerships.

3 Minimum standards for MHPSS personnel educational and professional background & experience

The following criteria serve as global minimum standards for MHPSS personnel across the IFRC network. National Societies can advance these according to their own requirements.

Education	Required	
Academic training in mental health and psychosocial support (including but not limited to social work, psychology, psychotherapy, psychiatry, mental health nursing, community mental health, disability support etc.)	X	
Professional background	Preferred	
Counsellor, social worker, psychologist, or psychiatric professional	X	
Teaching or pedagogical professional	X	
Health or public health professional	X	
International studies or related areas	X	
Experience	Required	Preferred
Solid experience in assessing, planning, designing, and implementing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities	X	
Experience in planning and conducting trainings in MHPSS, e.g., Psychological First Aid	X	
Professional work experience in an emergency setting	X	
Experience mentoring and managing volunteers and staff		X
Experience working with communities and community groups		X
Experience in providing counselling and psychological interventions		X
Languages	Required	Preferred
Fluency in English (spoken and written)	X	
Good command of other IFRC official languages (French, Spanish or Arabic)		X

4 Minimum training requirements

All MHPSS personnel deployed through surge must complete the following required training and additional role specific training, as outlined below.

Source	Training course	M = Mandatory R = Recommended
IFRC Minimum training for Surge personnel	Induction modules	M
	Stay Safe 2.0 Global Edition: Level 1- Fundamentals	M
	Stay Safe 2.0 Global Edition: Level 2- Personal and Volunteer Security in Emergencies	M
	Safe 2.0 Global Edition: Level 3- Security for Managers	R for Tier 1 M for Tiers 2 and 3
	The World of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (WORC)	M
	101: Corruption Prevention	M
	102: Corruption Prevention for Managers - an Introduction	R for Tier 1 M for Tiers 2 and 3
	Targeted – An introduction to cyber security	M
	Saying NO to Sexual Misconduct	M
	Live the Code	M
	Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance	M
	Project/Programme Planning (PPP)	R
	Surge Video Series: an introduction to Rapid Response in Disaster and Crisis (CURRICULUM)	M
	Unconscious Bias and Diversity Essentials	R
	Emergency Needs Assessment	R
	Building a Better Response	R
	Your Guide to Project Financial Management at IFRC	R
According to National Societies' requirements	International Mobilization and Preparation for Action (IMPACT)	R
	Security training or Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT)	R
MHPSS technical requirements	Psychological First Aid (minimum 1 day, preferably in person training)	M
	MHPSS in Emergencies ⁵	R for Rapid Response profiles M for ERU profiles

4.1 Role specific training requirements

Additional training is required for MHPSS personnel, according to the specific role, as described below.

MHPSS Coordinator	MHPSS Officer	ERU MHPSS Team Leader	ERU MHPSS Officer
MHPSS Surge Capacity	MHPSS Surge Capacity	ERU training for MHPSS personnel	ERU training for MHPSS personnel

⁵ Training guide available from the PS Centre: <https://pscentre.org/resource/training-guide-mental-health-and-psycho-social-support-in-emergencies/>.

4.2 Additional recommended training

National Societies can complement the mandatory training packages with contents that align with the expected responsibilities required from their roster members, and according to their previous work experiences. Based on the MHPSS technical competencies described before, the below two trainings are recommended for consideration:

1. Supportive supervision: Supervisor Training⁶
2. Monitoring and Evaluation for MHPSS⁷

5 Mandatory reading list for MHPSS personnel

In order to abide by the best international and Movement MHPSS standards, MHPSS personnel deployed in emergencies are expected to have familiarized themselves with the following documents:

- [International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Policy on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs](#)
- [IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings](#).

⁶ Training guide available from the PS Centre: <https://pscentre.org/resource/supportive-supervision-training-curriculum-for-red-cross-red-crescent-societies/>

⁷ Training guide available from the PS Centre: <https://pscentre.org/resource/monitoring-evaluation-for-mhpss-programmes-training-facilitator-notes/>