



Psychosocial Centre

ANNUAL  
REPORT  

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2023



*Front cover: Ancuta, a PFA trainer, Volunteer and Youth Manager, Romanian Red Cross, attending a training in Bucharest.*

*Back cover: Tala, working for the Jordan National Red Crescent Society based in Amman, Jordan.*

*Photos: IFRC Psychosocial Centre*



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## Psychosocial Centre

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Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support, 2024

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MENTAL HEALTH AND  
PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT  
IN THE CONTEXT OF COMPLEX  
EMERGENCIES AND  
SHRINKING HUMANITARIAN  
SPACE

Civilians and humanitarian aid workers including volunteers should never be considered collateral damage of armed conflict or targets of warring actors. However, the number of civilian casualties of airstrikes, bombs or artillery in 2023 is reported to be the highest recorded since 2010 and Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Database, registered hundreds of incidents of violence against aid workers across the globe. At the start of the year 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced and by June the number had passed 110 million.

The severe destruction, high number of casualties and large-scale displacement generated by the ongoing war in Ukraine and the war erupting in Gaza in October has rightfully been high on the agenda for politicians, media and in the public debate. However, 2023 has also seen the continuation and development of complex humanitarian crises generated by combinations of armed conflict, displacement, poverty often fueled or worsened by climate change and unfolding with less public attention including in Asia and Central Asia, the MENA region, across Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as Latin and South America. At the same time IFRC and National Societies' staff and volunteers are operating in a shrinking humanitarian space where organizational access and personal safety can no longer be taken for granted – a reality with severe potential mental health implications.

As a Movement, we have a duty of care. In the context of increasingly numerous and complex emergencies and shrinking humanitarian space

the IFRC PS Centre must constantly work to increase MHPSS capacity for exposed and vulnerable populations as well as frontline staff and volunteers from National Societies across the globe. The transition into an international movement Hub in 2024 under the IFRC and ICRC will positively impact our ability to support the entire Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.

Throughout 2023 this work entailed various strategies, tools and platforms including direct support and trainings to increase capacity of National Societies, research and knowledge sharing to distribute and develop new insights and methods, and humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy to keep Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) on the agenda.

We look back at a year defined by instability, conflict and crises knowing that this was, is, and will likely remain the conditions under which we seek to fulfill our mandate to improve mental health and psychosocial well-being. We do this knowing that we must continue to develop our work and take part in meeting these challenges – as IFRC staff members and as part of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.

*Nana Wiedemann*

Nana Wiedemann

Director, the IFRC Psychosocial Centre

# THE PS CENTRE IN NUMBERS 2023

## COMMUNICATION

In 2023, the PS Centre had

**153,476**

online visits on pscentre.org and

**19,690**

people followed the PS Centre on social media.

**2,381**

subscribed to the PS Centre newsletter, PS News.

People watched videos produced by the PS Centre more than

**100,000**

times on pscentre.org and social media.

The podcast Heartbeat of Humanity was downloaded

**6,497**

times.

## HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY & COLLABORATION

In 2023, the PS Centre participated in

**50**

international fora as host, facilitator, presenter, speaker or participant and had

**36**

academic collaborations with

**10**

universities and

**59**

organisations.

## RESOURCES

In 2023, the PS Centre created or contributed to

**118**

publications, guidelines, reports, tools, policy briefs and scientific papers, produced

**60**

videos,

**13**

podcasts and wrote

**47**

articles for pscentre.org.

Resources were downloaded

**39,856**

times from the PS Centre website.

## REQUESTS

In 2023, the PS Centre responded to

**2,504**

requests for assistance from

**137**

countries.

**1,416**

requests came from organisations within the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.

**1,088**

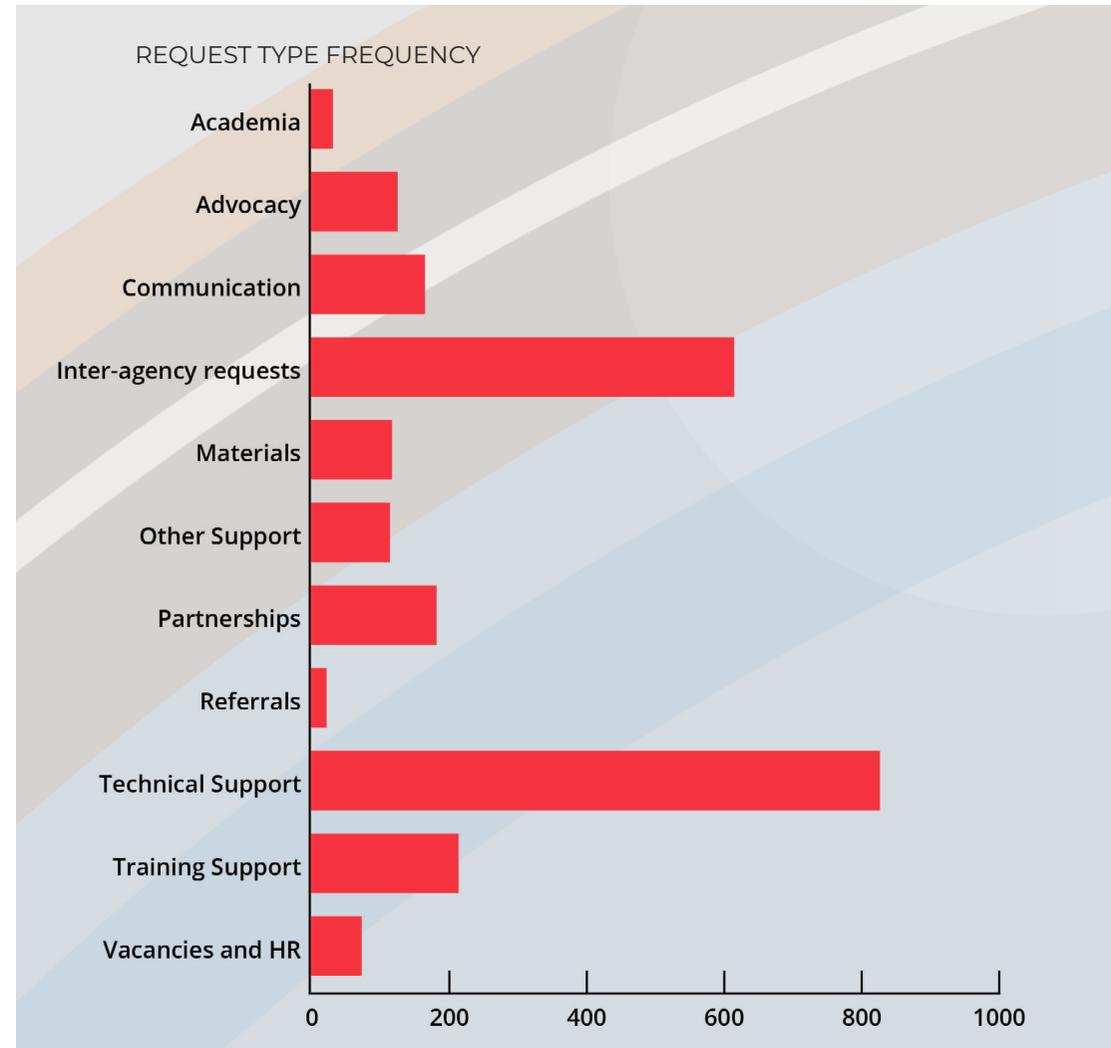
requests came from organisations outside the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.

# REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

As an IFRC Reference Centre, a centre of excellence, every day the IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) receives requests for assistance setting up or managing Mental Health and Psychosocial (MHPSS) support functions. The requests vary and cover a broad range of services - requests for trainings, for resources, for in-person assistance, for cultural adaptations of existing resources etc.

The main recipients of assistance from the PS Centre are within the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, mainly the 191 National Societies (NS). However, a wide variety of other organisations outside the Movement - research institutes, government representatives, NGOs, etc. - reach out to the PS Centre for guidance or assistance in their MHPSS work.

In 2023, the PS Centre received 2,504 requests from 137 countries. A little less than half of the requests were from organisations external to the Movement and approx. 20% of the requests were received through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Reference Group on MHPSS, co-led by the PS Centre and the World Health Organization (WHO).



## THE PS CENTRE ONLINE



[pscentre.org](https://pscentre.org)



[facebook.com/Psychosocial.Center](https://facebook.com/Psychosocial.Center)



[x.com/IFRC\\_PS\\_Centre](https://x.com/IFRC_PS_Centre)



[linkedin.com/company/ifrc-ps-centre](https://linkedin.com/company/ifrc-ps-centre)



[youtube.com/c/PsychosocialCentre](https://youtube.com/c/PsychosocialCentre)



[instagram.com/ifrc\\_psychosocialcentre/](https://instagram.com/ifrc_psychosocialcentre/)

# THE FUNCTIONS OF THE PS CENTRE



Advise and guide National Societies to sources of information on community-based mental health and psychosocial support



Support National Societies in developing their capacity to provide community-based mental health and psychosocial support to vulnerable groups and volunteers through assessment and training



Develop, translate, and share models, tools and case studies that reflect best practice in community-based mental health and psychosocial support within and outside of the Movement



Develop the necessary capacity to meet the demand for operational assistance to international mental health and psychosocial support programmes within National Societies



Identify relevant research and make it accessible to National Societies



Cooperate with other humanitarian organisations providing mental health and psychosocial support to exchange materials and experience, and to avoid duplication

# STRATEGIC OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) **Strategic Operational Framework** (SOF) outlines the priorities of the PS Centre. The SOF guides our global work to assist the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement to scale up and strengthen the quality of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) across the globe. Moreover, it outlines the ambition to maintain and increase the targeted global influence on MHPSS humanitarian diplomacy through a proactive and structured approach towards policy events and decision-making processes.

Concurrently, the 2024 SOF reflects the focus of the PS Centre, and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement more broadly, on the implementation of the

Movement's MHPSS Policy on addressing mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies. The policy, adopted at the 33rd International Conference in December 2019, commits the IFRC, ICRC and National Societies (NS) to scale up and strengthen the quality of MHPSS services, including in humanitarian, low-income, middle-income, and high-income settings.

The Annual Report 2023 is structured according to the SOF, providing examples of the work undertaken to meet the objectives under the key strategic approaches of the PS Centre, including:

STRATEGIC APPROACH 1: TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

STRATEGIC APPROACH 2: KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND SHARING

STRATEGIC APPROACH 3: HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY AND COMMUNICATIONS



# THE PS CENTRE ENTERING ITS THIRTIES WITH A STRONGER VOICE

*From left to right: Robert Mardini, Director-General International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Anders Ladekarl, Secretary General Danish Red Cross, and Jagan Chapagain, Secretary General and CEO International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) signing a partnership agreement transforming the IFRC Psychosocial Centre into a mental health and psychosocial support Hub supporting the entire Movement.*

*Photo: ©Dougados Magali*

“

*We have come a long way since the early years when the need for MHPSS was still just an inspired thought in the minds of a few dedicated experts. MHPSS now constitutes a global community, a body of work including research and tools, and is recognized as a vital component of Movement interventions.*

**Nana Wiedemann,  
Director for the PS Centre,**

”

Established in 1993, the IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) is celebrating its anniversary in Copenhagen in June 2024 marking three decades of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Next year also marks the beginning of a partnership agreement between the Danish Red Cross, IFRC and ICRC for the future Red Cross Red Crescent Movement MHPSS Hub – transforming the PS Centre into an MHPSS Hub supporting the entire Movement from January 2025.

“We have come a long way since the early years when the need for MHPSS was still just an inspired thought in the minds of a few dedicated experts. MHPSS now constitutes a global community, a body of work including research and tools, and is recognized as a vital component of Movement interventions”, says Nana Wiedemann, Director of the PS Centre, continuing: “However, it is absolutely vital that we take advantage of this acknowledgement and momentum, and continue to intensify the humanitarian diplomacy, to keep developing and ensure resources for MHPSS – we can now do so with a combined Movement behind us”.

Throughout 2023, the PS Centre has dedicated significant resources to advocating for MHPSS in internal and external fora at an international level at more than 50 high-level events across the globe. The scope of these humanitarian diplomacy efforts span across key counterparts at the EU level including DG’s ECHO, Sante, INTPA and NEAR; the International Forum on Emergency Medical Rescue hosted in Wuxi China; the Nordic MHPSS network; MHPSS in Latin America and the Caribbean with DG ECHO, GIZ and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Fifth Global Mental Health Summit hosted in Argentina.



## UKRAINE CRISIS: MENTAL HEALTH IN A VOLATILE CONTEXT

“

*The sheer scale, severity and volatile nature of the ongoing crisis means that the work of the PS Centre has been multifaceted in terms of interventions, wide in geographical scope and that strategies have been adapted to constantly changing contexts, with increasing vulnerability due to the cumulative long-term impact.*

”

Ganna Goloktionova,  
PS Centre Technical Advisor

*PS Centre Technical Advisor Ganna Goloktionova leading a technical meeting for staff and volunteers in the Ukrainian Red Cross Society, Kyiv, Ukraine 2023.*

*Photo: IFRC Psychosocial Centre*

Since the escalation of the armed conflict on 24 February 2022, more than 10 million people have been forced to flee the country or have been internally displaced. The United Nations (UN) estimated that 14.6 million people in Ukraine depended on humanitarian aid by the end of 2023 and large-scale destruction of civilian infrastructure continues. The mental health implications are significant and nearly one in ten of those affected by war grapple with moderate to severe mental health issues.

The IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) has engaged on multiple levels including coordination, advocacy and technical support in Ukraine as well as in countries hosting refugee populations. "The sheer scale, severity and volatile nature of the ongoing crisis means that the work of the PS Centre has been multifaceted in terms of interventions, wide in geographical scope and that strategies have been adapted to constantly changing contexts, with increasing vulnerability due to the cumulative long-term impact," says PS Centre Technical Advisor, Ganna Goloktionova.

The coordination particularly in the hectic early

phase involved setting up meetings and reaching out to regional National Societies and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) delegates, and liaising with key international actors including UN agencies in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

On the advocacy side, a key-message was to make sure all actors acknowledged all facets of displacement and adapted to the actual individual situation of the people affected. "From the emotional distress over the separation from family members or the loss of homes, identity and networks to the challenge of making a doctor's appointment or finding accommodation in a new country - displacement is in itself a devastating experience added on to the war atrocities people have already faced. Addressing practical challenges of adaptation and integration has to be the starting point for actors involved in MHPSS," says Ganna Goloktionova.

The PS Centre interventions spanned from creating online training sessions on Child Friendly Spaces and Psychological First Aid (PFA) to implementing a variety of online trainings for

groups, individuals, and staff and volunteers, and producing guides for mental health interventions.

The PS Centre responses to the Ukraine crisis are funded by two complementary funding streams allowing a broad scope of intervention. A project funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG Santé) with specific objectives to offer mental health support to the people displaced from Ukraine and support strengthening Caring for Staff and Volunteers structures in 25 European National Societies, while an appeal to National Societies allows the flexibility to address additional needs including trainings and technical support and capacity-building activities in specific technical areas.

# RED CROSS RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT MHPSS ACTIVITIES IN THE **EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA** REGION

## TRAINING

**35,479**

staff and volunteers trained in basic  
**Psychosocial Support**

**151,300**

staff and volunteers trained in **Psychological  
First Aid**

**Source:** Progress Report on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Activities within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – Europe and Central Asia region (based on responses from 50 National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC) summer 2022 to summer 2023.

## MAIN CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING MHPSS SERVICES

**8%**

have no budget dedicated for MHPSS activities

**67%**

indicate a lack of or limited funds

**56%**

point to challenges within the organisation

## GENERAL TRENDS: CAPACITY AND COORDINATION

**70%**

plan to expand their MHPSS activities

**25%**

plan to integrate or mainstream MHPSS in other programme activities

**69%**

are mentioned in national public health or disaster management plans

**71%**

are included as a participant in relevant humanitarian inter-agency mechanisms

**56%**

are included in inter-ministerial/departmental committees

# HEARTBEAT OF HUMANITY

The PS Centre podcast series **Heartbeat of Humanity** is targeting staff and volunteers in the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement working with Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services. It provides a platform to explain and discuss different aspects of MHPSS - like scalable psychological interventions, mental health and climate change, youth mental health, mental health stigmas etc.

In 2023, the PS Centre produced 13 episodes of Heartbeat of Humanity and the podcasts were downloaded 6,497 times.

Listen to the Heartbeat of Humanity podcast on the [PS Centre website](#) or subscribe to it on Apple Podcast, Spotify, Google Podcast, or wherever you find your podcasts.



# GENETICALLY CODED TO ASSIST: CHANGE OF COUNTRY – SAME DEDICATION

Shortly after Viktoriia Mihova moved to Germany from Ukraine in June 2022, she started working as a psychologist for the German Red Cross assisting people arriving from Ukraine.



*What is your background and how was your life in Ukraine prior to the armed conflict?*

I come from a long line of doctors - all my close relatives are healthcare professionals. I guess we are genetically coded for a dedication to the medical profession – it is always a motivation to make a change for people in need. Beyond working as a specialized professional and taking some of the most complicated cases in my region I enjoyed time with my family and my son.

*When and why did you come to Germany?*

As a psychiatrist in Ukraine, I worked with some of the populations most heavily affected by the armed conflict during the first months following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It was intense work, and I was planning to visit my sister in Germany, to get some rest, and also with an idea of seeking at least temporary safety for my son. When I arrived in June 2022 it was clear that the needs of Ukrainian refugees were severe, and I immediately got involved in a project under the IFRC to ensure assistance. In the end I decided to stay.

*What is the main difference between your life in Ukraine and Germany?*

The country has changed but the work with people in need continues. I provide consultations for people from Ukraine and offer Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and there are always people to see – we no longer have to advertise the support as the word has spread from mouth to mouth. The Red Cross recognized early on that there was a need for consultations in Ukrainian – we are dealing with vulnerable people and sensitive issues, so it is important to establish trust and discuss complicated emotions and deeply distressful experiences without facing a language barrier. And I can relate. I have been well received and I have no complaints about German hospitality – but the language is a main difference from my life and work in Ukraine. However, working for the Red Cross and doing what I do best is in my opinion the best way to integrate.

*What is the most rewarding part of your job with the Red Cross?*

Working with children and seeing the visible change in their lives. Children are exposed not only to their own stress but also the stress of their parents or caregivers. I recently had a case

where I consulted a mother about the distress of her child. During the consultations it became clear that the child's anxiety was mainly an affect of the mother's stress. In this and many other cases, support to a caregiver and their recognition of the situation will result in positive change for the mental well-being of a child. It can be simple things like structuring the everyday life of the child – sleeping routines for instance. Another example would be a Ukrainian woman who contacted us because she was facing eviction and police reports from a neighbour because of her three-year old child's continued crying and screaming. In fact, the child was not being abused but in our assessment was autistic – this was later confirmed. The situation was explained to the neighbour who was very sorry now is very supportive of the family.

*What do you miss about your life in Ukraine?*

This is an extremely painful issue and very hard to explain in words – I try not to go there in my thoughts. I focus on being grateful for the opportunity to make a difference for Ukrainian refugees here in Germany.

AFRICA REGION:  
UNDER THE  
RADAR BUT ON  
THE MHPSS  
ROADMAP



Ann Kahoi, Psychologist and KRCS Psychosocial Counsellor, presenting at a workshop organized by KRCS, Nairobi, Kenya.

Photo: IFRC Psychosocial Centre

“

*Not long ago, taking care of the mental health of survivors and people in distress would be considered secondary, but thankfully times are changing – and with this new framework, developed with invaluable support from Danish Red Cross and IFRC – it will change faster as MHPSS including PFA will be an organized component of any emergency response moving forward.*

**Dorothy Anjuri, Head of the Health, Nutrition and Social Services Department (HoD), KRCS**

”

In the shadow of armed conflicts causing large-scale displacement, massive casualty tolls and devastation in Ukraine and Gaza, numerous severe crises on the African continent have received comparatively modest attention. “I am tempted to use the phrase ‘forgotten continent’ but maybe it’s better to simply say that there are numerous neglected crises across Africa – armed conflict and civil war in Sudan, climate disasters and food shortage in Mali and Somalia just to mention a few”, says Guleed Dualeh, IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) Technical Advisor with focus on the African region.

Combinations of poverty and food shortage, health crises and outbreaks of epidemics, armed conflict and displacement often fuelled by climate change have severe mental health implications for people across Africa. Accordingly, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) is a vital component of humanitarian interventions and unmet mental health needs can be life-threatening. According to World Health Organization (WHO), there are less than two trained mental health professionals per 100,000 people in the African region. “There is no question that the African continent is challenged in relation to the severity of the crises in proportion to available resources. However, in relation to MHPSS the IFRC African region is rising to the challenge and showing real engagement,” says Guleed Dualeh.

A recent example of this leadership was the launch of a new comprehensive Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) MHPSS framework. The Framework was launched during a three-day dissemination workshop in Nairobi organized by the KRCS MHPSS unit in December 2023. The event

gathered over 50 MHPSS practitioners, including psychologists, health workers, and officials from the Kenyan Ministry of Health and Nairobi City Council. The framework represents a significant step in reshaping emergency response strategies by integrating organized and coordinated MHPSS services provided by the Red Cross and their partners in the healthcare sector. "Not long ago, taking care of the mental health of survivors and people in distress would be considered secondary, but thankfully times are changing – and with this new framework, developed with invaluable support from Danish Red Cross and the IFRC – it will change faster as MHPSS including psychological first aid (PFA) will be an organized component of any emergency response moving forward," KRCS Head of the Health, Nutrition and Social Services Department (HoD), Dorothy Anjuri stated during the opening speech.

The mental health needs of Kenyans – and Africans – first of all, is about recognition. Mental health has not been taken seriously for a while, even in big organizations, it's an invisible pain that people can't see, and what people can't

see, they don't understand, and what you can't understand you ignore. With this framework, we will address and counter suicide rates, for example, through structured programming and implementation, as well as influence policies and shed light on the importance of prioritizing mental health interventions," said Soony Wendy a Counseling Psychologist with KRCS MHPSS unit.

The new framework will streamline referral mechanisms including cooperation with the Kenyan Ministry of Health and the 47 counties, enhance community-based MHPSS, structure and standardize MHPSS services, ensure capacity-building of Red Cross volunteers who provide psychosocial support (PSS), as well as self-care and debriefing sessions for all volunteers – who often work under great stress and focus exclusively on assistance of others forgetting their own well-being.

2024 marks an important year for MHPSS on the African continent. The Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement comes together in South Africa with the objective of establishing an RCRC

MHPSS roadmap for Africa 2030. Further, the African Union is set to launch a Mental Health Advocacy Toolkit in collaboration with numerous international partners including the RCRC Movement and the PS Centre.

# RED CROSS RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT MHPSS ACTIVITIES IN THE **AFRICA** REGION

## TRAINING

**8,079**

staff and volunteers trained in basic  
**Psychosocial Support**

**6,200**

staff and volunteers trained in **Psychological  
First Aid**

**Source:** Progress Report on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Activities within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – Africa region (based on responses from a total of 43 National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC) summer 2022 to summer 2023.

## MAIN CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING MHPSS

**50%**

have no budget dedicated for MHPSS activities

**96%**

indicate a lack of or limited funds

**53%**

point to a lack of or limited technical expertise i.e. manuals, trainings, specialists as gaps in the delivery of MHPSS activities

**42%**

point to challenges within the organisation

## GENERAL TRENDS: CAPACITY AND COORDINATION

**33%**

plan to expand their MHPSS activities

**58%**

plan to integrate or mainstream MHPSS in other programme activities

**58%**

are mentioned in national public health or disaster management plans

**70%**

are included as a participant in relevant humanitarian inter-agency mechanisms

**60%**

are included in inter-ministerial/departmental committees

TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Gender-based violence	النوع	الجنسوية
Gratitude	امتنان	الحزن
Grief	حداد	
Grooming	استدراج	
Grounding	ارتكاز	
Guardians	أولياء الأمور	
Guilty	مذنب	

H		ARABIC
ENGLISH	OPTION 1	
TERMINOLOGIES		
hallucinogen	مهلوس	
Happiness	السعادة	
Harassment	تحرش	
Harm	أذى	
hashish or hash	حشيش	
Hazards	صادر الخطر	
Healing	شفاء	
Health	صحة	
Health care	رعاية صحية	
Health care provider	مقدم الرعاية الصحية	
HIV	فيروس نقص المناعة البشرية	
Holistic	شامل	
Homophobia	كراهية المثليين	
Hope	أمل	
Hopeless	يأس	
Hopelessness	يأس	

“

*Creating a common and consensus-based MHPSS language is a strategic way to counter the common stigmas related to mental health and simultaneously it also provides ownership, accountability, and empowerment to the respective communities - when you share a language, you also share a culture of meaning.*

”

Ahlem Cheffi,  
PS Centre Technical Advisor

WHEN WORDS  
MATTER:  
ARABIC MHPSS  
VOCABULARY

"The mental health implications of current and developing crises in the Middle East and North Africa will affect populations for decades to come. This is not something new and at the IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) we have long been aware of the need to increase Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) capacity in the region," says PS Centre Technical Advisor Ahlem Cheffi. "A vital precondition in this regard is to ensure that adequate, precise, quality translations are available in a language relevant for local staff and volunteers from Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) National Societies - this vocabulary allows the PS Centre to move quickly and ensure quality."

With support from the MENA MHPSS Network and volunteers from Red Crescent National Societies, the IFRC published an Arabic MHPSS vocabulary consisting of 547 key MHPSS terms translated into modern standard Arabic. However, the body of work related to MHPSS is immense, Arabic is a rich and diverse language offering numerous alternatives to English terms. While there are more than 30 different spoken Arabic dialects across the globe, written modern standard Arabic is universal. Therefore, the translations needed to offer several options in order to accommodate the local differences in spoken Arabic.

The first step of the translation work was months of reviewing literature and research on MHPSS and related or cross-cutting topics to identify the key-terms of vital importance in the context of translation support. Then came the process of actual translations. "The work was delegated among volunteers from National Societies from Bahrain, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen, and in the end, we decided on a template of three and - in some

cases - four or more options in Arabic per English term, enabling us to cover the specific term in Modern Standard Arabic", Ahlem Cheffi explains.

Further complications arose from the difference in cultural realities and contexts. "Frustrations caused by the translations are not really caused by English nor Arabic per se, but rather language use, local contexts, and how humans perceive and express reality through language. While we are not trying to start a linguistic or historical debate, it is clear that most of the MHPSS terms we operate with were born out of and defined through Anglo Germanic lenses and therefore had to be adapted for the needs of the MENA Region," says Ahlem Cheffi. Beyond the main aim of supporting operational needs for staff and volunteers, the translation process generated multiple other positive results. According to Ahlem Cheffi: "creating a common and consensus-based MHPSS language is a strategic way to counter the common stigmas related to mental health and it also provides ownership, accountability, and empowerment to the respective communities - when you share a language, you also share a culture of meaning."

Languages are living entities that change and transform and the field of MHPSS is constantly evolving so Ahlem and the MENA region colleagues are aware that the vocabulary will need to be updated regularly. For now, the vocabulary is instrumental in improving translation quality and accuracy and streamlining the translation process of text into Arabic and from Arabic into English.

# A DECK OF WELL-BEING

In 2023, the IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) created a set of activity cards presenting short and practical self-care exercises addressing well-being challenges such as struggling to calm oneself when feeling overwhelmed or distressed, when anxious and nervous, or if having problems sleeping. The cards come in a simple box and can easily fit in a vest pocket or a small rucksack familiar to volunteers.

The exercises can be used by Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) staff and volunteers – and other MHPSS practitioners – on their own initiative for self-care, as part of Caring for Staff and Volunteer sessions, as energizers during workshops or community sessions at branch offices, or amongst delegates deployed as part of emergency surge operations. The exercises have simple instructions and can be used in all settings with adults and children.

The cards are based on The Well-being Guide; Reduce Stress, Recharge and Build Resilience published by the PS Centre in 2022. "We came up with the idea of adapting the PS Centre Well-being Guide into smaller card formats so that they could easily be used by community volunteers, RCRC National Society staff and delegates. This makes the cards readily accessible and thus serve as a useful memory aid to practically help staff and volunteers to actively conduct self-care exercises within their everyday life and to encourage those they interact with during activities to also practise the exercises," says Sarah Harrison, Head of the PS Centre's MHPSS Technical Unit.

The cards are disseminated by PS Centre staff during trainings and workshops and are available for download on the PS Centre website. The cards have been translated into Ukrainian, French and Portuguese.



# RED CROSS RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT MHPSS ACTIVITIES IN THE **MENA** REGION

## TRAINING

**6,424**

staff and volunteers trained in basic  
**Psychosocial Support**

**9,079**

staff and volunteers trained in **Psychological  
First Aid**

**Source:** Progress Report on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Activities within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – MENA region (based on responses from a total of 14 National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC) summer 2022 to summer 2023.

## MAIN CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING MHPSS SERVICES

**14%**

have no budget dedicated for MHPSS activities

**79%**

indicate a lack of or limited funds

**57%**

point to challenges within the organisation

## GENERAL TRENDS: CAPACITY AND COORDINATION

**50%**

plan to expand their MHPSS activities

**50%**

plan to integrate or mainstream MHPSS in other programme activities

**50%**

are mentioned in national public health or disaster management plans

**57%**

are included as a participant in relevant humanitarian inter-agency mechanisms

**43%**

are included in inter-ministerial/departmental committees

THE IFRC ASIA  
PACIFIC MHPSS  
COLLABORATIVE:  
RECOGNITION,  
RESPONSIBILITY,  
REACH

Asia Pacific Regional Conference on MHPSS, Hong  
Kong Red Cross Headquarters, March 3, 2023

Photo: Hong Kong Red Cross

“

*With increased recognition comes a greater responsibility, and in response to a growing number of requests for support, we continue to expand our reach and interventions. However, with massive needs across the region we will continue our efforts to increase our capacity and impact.*

”

Dr. Eliza Yee Lai Cheung,  
IFRC PS Centre Technical Advisor



Since its establishment in 2021, the IFRC Asia Pacific Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Collaborative has served as the primary technical resource for MHPSS for IFRC and 38 National Societies (NS) in the Asia Pacific region. The model is the first of its kind but has proven efficient in providing support across a diverse, large and highly populated region and the IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) hopes to implement similar structures across other regions.

The scope of support of the Asia-Pacific MHPSS Collaborative spans across four areas: Assistance in Emergencies; Capacity-building in MHPSS; Knowledge Management and Information Sharing; Humanitarian Diplomacy and Resource Mobilization. "In 2023 the Collaborative has seen a continuation of significant increase in requests of technical support.

This positive development is generated by a wider acknowledgement in the region of both our ability to provide relevant support and a growing understanding of the importance of MHPSS, says Hong Kong based PS Centre Technical Advisor, Dr. Eliza Yee Lai Cheung.

Throughout the year, the Collaborative recorded a total of 512 requests, which surpassed the previous year's figure of 272 and more than quadrupled the requests received in 2021, which stood at 120. "With increased recognition comes a greater responsibility, and in response to a growing number of requests for support, we continue to expand our reach and interventions. However, with massive needs across the region, we will need more resources to continue our efforts to increase our capacity and impact" says Eliza Yee Lai Cheung.

*Caring for Staff and Volunteers Training for  
Afghan Red Crescent Society, Kabul, Afghanistan,  
October 3, 2023*

*Photo: IFRC Asia Pacific MHPSS Collaborative*

# RED CROSS RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT MHPSS ACTIVITIES IN THE **ASIA PACIFIC** REGION

## TRAINING

**4,712**

staff and volunteers trained in basic  
**Psychosocial Support**

**4,621**

staff and volunteers trained in **Psychological  
First Aid**

**Source:** Progress Report on Mental  
Health and Psychosocial Support  
Activities within the International Red  
Cross and Red Crescent Movement  
– Asia Pacific region (based on  
responses from a total of 31 National  
Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC)  
summer 2022 to summer 2023.

## MAIN CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING MHPSS SERVICES

**27%**

have no budget dedicated for MHPSS activities

**73%**

indicate a lack of or limited funds

**73%**

point to challenges within the organisation

## GENERAL TRENDS: CAPACITY AND COORDINATION

**35%**

plan to expand their MHPSS activities

**45%**

plan to integrate or mainstream MHPSS in  
other programme activities

**48%**

are mentioned in national public health or  
disaster management plans

**61%**

are included as a participant in relevant  
humanitarian inter-agency mechanisms

**33%**

are included in inter-ministerial/departmental  
committees



# REFUGEE-ED: PROJECT, PILOTS, PROGRESS

“

*The number of people forced into displacement due to combinations of armed conflict, persecution, and poverty often fuelled by climate change is increasing across the globe. In other words, the fact that the basic needs of too many children with a background of displacement are not fully met, is a challenge we simply have to address – in Europe and hopefully in time also in other regions.*

”

Sarah van der Walt,  
PS Centre Technical Advisor

*A girl being creative in a Child Friendly Space in the Solomyanskyi district in Kyiv, Ukraine.*

*Photo: IFRC Psychosocial Centre*

The IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) is one of the partners implementing the innovative project **REFUGE-ED** funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. REFUGE-ED is a response to challenges of meeting basic educational and well-being needs of a significant number of children with refugee or migrant backgrounds across Europe, including particularly vulnerable unaccompanied minors.

"The number of people forced into displacement due to combinations of armed conflict, persecution, and poverty often fuelled by climate change is increasing across the globe. In other words, the fact that the basic needs of too many children with a background of displacement are not fully met, is a challenge we simply have to address – in Europe and hopefully in time also in other regions", says PS Centre Technical Advisor Sarah van der Walt.

Through the **Brokering Knowledge Platform of Effective Practices** the project is relying on a solid and thorough base of research and experiences identifying the best practises to ensure a sense

of belonging, academic performance and the overall mental well-being of children with refugee and migrant background. This was achieved by bringing together Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). The project pioneered the 'dialogic co-creation process', a new method guided by seven principles: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation of difficulties into possibilities, the instrumental dimension of education, creation of meaning, solidarity and equality of differences.

"There are three main features that define this project and makes it both original and effective. The first is that it is evidence based and from the outset relies on a huge body of tested approaches that increases the potential of success. The other, that it is cohesive – meaning it includes both traditional pedagogical and educational tools and methods from the field of MHPSS to counter exclusion. Finally, the third is that it is holistic – in the sense that it does not exclusively focus on children as individuals but equipping teachers, families and communities and the broader

societal context they are situated in," says Sarah van der Walt.

REFUGE-ED pilots have been carried out across six countries including Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Sweden at 46 sites identified strategically to reflect diverse migratory contexts across Europe and including both formal and non-formal education settings such as public schools, and asylum, reception and community centres. The pilots have already proved effective in reducing school dropout rates, decreasing classroom conflict and improving the self-esteem and engagement in learning activities of the children involved.

The project not only seeks to re-define the European approach to education, well-being and inclusion of children with refugee and migrant backgrounds but also through additional funding to be able to introduce the developed methods and practises in **other regions hosting displaced children** outside of Europe.

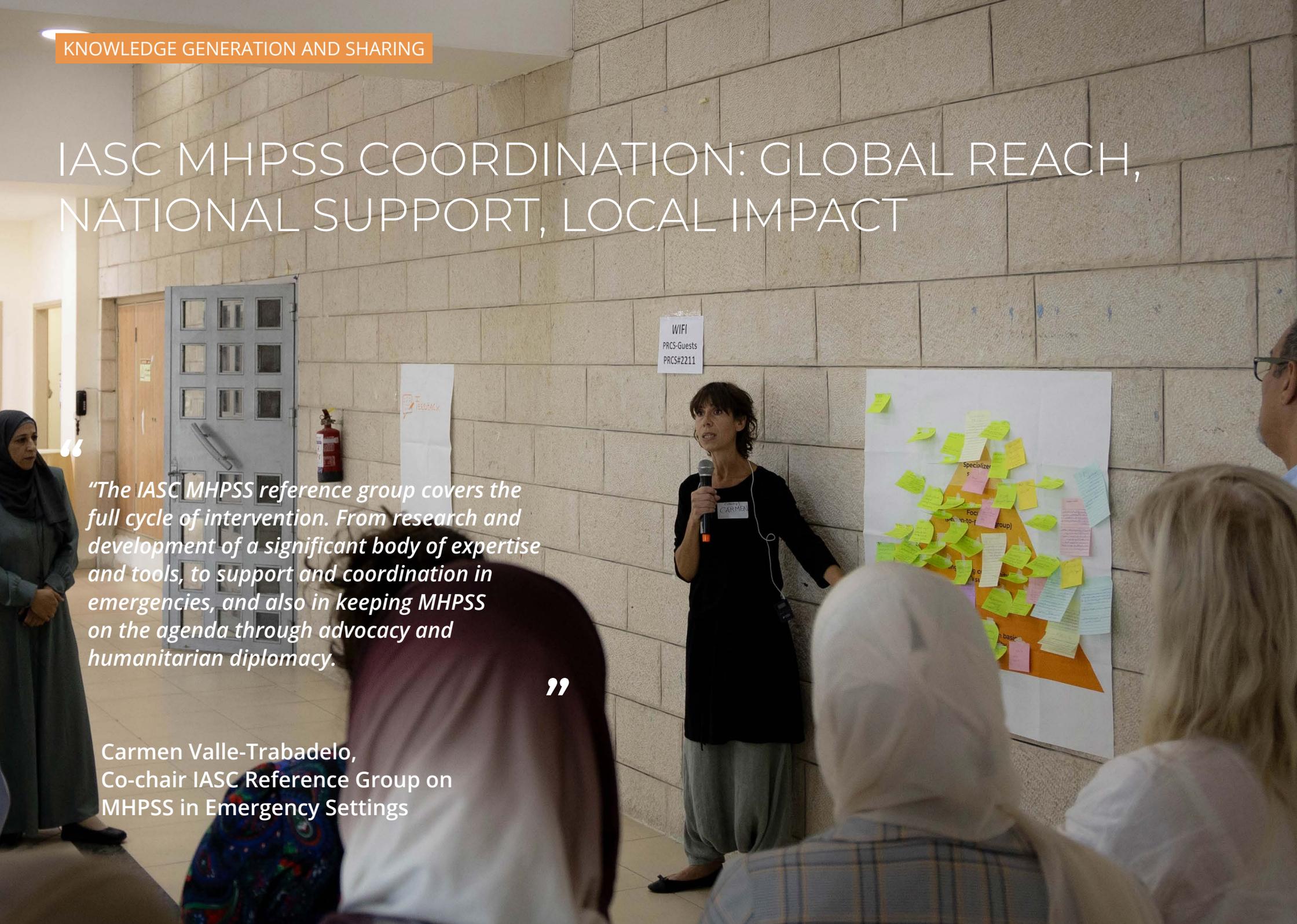
# IASC MHPSS COORDINATION: GLOBAL REACH, NATIONAL SUPPORT, LOCAL IMPACT

“

*“The IASC MHPSS reference group covers the full cycle of intervention. From research and development of a significant body of expertise and tools, to support and coordination in emergencies, and also in keeping MHPSS on the agenda through advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy.”*

”

Carmen Valle-Trabadelo,  
Co-chair IASC Reference Group on  
MHPSS in Emergency Settings



*MHPSS coordination training in July 2023 to build the capacity of the Technical Working Group in the West Bank, occupied Palestinian Territories.*

*Photo: IFRC Psychosocial Centre*

The IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) co-chairs the **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Reference Group on MHPSS in Emergency Settings**. The group consists of more than 65 members and 21 observer organisations representing NGOs, UN, International agencies and academia. The ongoing work includes high-level advocacy, and capacity building through the development of quality tools, guides, trainings as well as supporting and coordinating Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in the context of emergencies. “The group is a vital asset in bridging the gap between global and country level responses. We engage all relevant actors and rely on all available expertise including affected populations, country-level MHPSS actors, and global experts,” says co-chair, Carmen Valle-Trabadelo.

Coordination is a key-component in all phases of an emergency, from preparedness to active response and recovery. Country coordination is carried out by MHPSS Technical Working Groups (TWGs) and supported by the Reference Group at the global level. In 2023, 87% of all

humanitarian emergencies had a functioning MHPSS coordination mechanism, compared to 56% in 2019. The PS Centre IASC team provides support for the TWGs in countries going through emergencies across the globe – including humanitarian hotspots like Afghanistan, Syria, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Venezuela. The support includes technical advice, capacity strengthening, mentoring and humanitarian diplomacy. In 2023, the team conducted in-person missions to **Venezuela**, **Colombia**, the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), and Yemen. The PS Centre IASC team also provides support for the Inter-agency MHPSS Surge Mechanism. The mechanism established in collaboration with the Netherlands Enterprise Agency facilitates rapid deployments to establish or strengthen MHPSS coordination in humanitarian crises. In total, there has been 48 deployments in 38 countries between 2020 – 2023.

The co-chairing role not only increases the PS Centre’s capacity to respond to the world’s most severe humanitarian crises but also expands

its global network and influence. Throughout 2023 the PS Centre IASC team participated in and contributed to key-events at the global level such as the 5th Global Mental Health Summit, The Victim Assistance Conference from the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in Cambodia, the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks and the European Humanitarian Forum. “The IASC MHPSS reference group covers the full cycle of intervention. From research and development of a significant body of expertise and tools, to support and coordination in emergencies, and also in keeping MHPSS on the agenda through advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy”, says Carmen Valle-Trabadelo.

# THE MHPSS ROADMAP PROJECT MAPPING DEVELOPMENTS – A ROAD TO IMPLEMENTATION



“

*“The extension of the project marks a clear commitment to continue the work and we will do that based on an extensive and thorough mapping of the developments and remaining gaps in the implementation of MHPSS across the Movement.”*

”

Nathalie Helena Rigall,  
PS Centre Project Manager

*PS Centre Head of MHPSS Technical Unit Sarah Harrison, British Red Cross Head of Psychosocial and Mental Health Sarah Davidson and ICRC MHPSS Movement Cooperation Adviser Milena Osorio attending a Roadmap Project co-leads workshop in Copenhagen, April 2023*

*Photo: IFRC Psychosocial Centre*

The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Roadmap project was established to strengthen the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement's collective response to mental health and psychosocial needs on the basis of historical commitments and policies adopted in 2019. In early 2023, the project was extended by the MHPSS Steering Committee until the next Council of Delegates of the International RCRC Movement in 2024. "The extension of the project marks a clear commitment to continue the work and reflects the need to ensure the Priority Action Areas are well integrated into existing structures across the Movement continuing beyond 2024.," says IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) Project Manager Nathalie Helena Rigall.

Reactions from a physical Co-lead Workshop in Copenhagen conducted in the spring of 2023 reflected the same sentiment from experts across the Movement. "It is important to strengthen the evidence of the impact of MHPSS interventions in the Movement through research, monitoring and evaluation. This will inform learning, promote good practice and improve the efficiency, effectiveness and overall quality of MHPSS services with a view to providing human-centered and appropriate MHPSS," Monia Aebersold, Project Leader at the Swiss Red Cross, said at the time. Sarah Davidson, Head of MHPSS, British Red Cross pointed out: "It is very important to people's well-being and to their resilience to integrate a basic level of psychosocial support across sectors. It amplifies all the activities that the Movement does."

The respective members met to take stock of the Priority Action Areas and came together to discuss the final year of the MHPSS Roadmap Project in 2024. Among the topics were more detailed preparation for the 34th International

Conference and the proposal to conduct an MHPSS side event.

The Progress Report on MHPSS Activities within the International RCRC Movement released in October 2023, is a follow up to earlier surveys conducted in 2019 and 2021. The report reveals significant results: 151 RCRC National Societies (NS) - more than ever before - are providing MHPSS in emergencies. At the same time, 2023 marks a rise in the number of focal points with 134 appointed by NS, IFRC and ICRC. Further, the number of staff and volunteers trained in basic psychosocial support has nearly doubled to almost 80,000 people across 163 NS and the IFRC compared to 40,000 in 2021. "The survey data play an instrumental role in monitoring the implementation of the MHPSS policy and further serve as an important tool for advocacy. While it is extremely positive that the capacity and expertise increases gradually across the Movement the report findings also underline a growing need to match ambition with funding and coordination," says Nathalie Helena Rigall.

Throughout 2023, the MHPSS Roadmap project has mobilized considerable resources for coordination, outreach and advocacy to promote MHPSS within and beyond the Movement. Initiatives would include in-person co-leads meetings in Copenhagen and Geneva, participation on MHPSS related panels during the Global Mental Health Summit held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the development of webinars and other relevant tools, as well as a social media campaign around World Mental Health Day with an anti-stigma focus.

# MHPSS IN THE AMERICAS REGION: THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE



Venezuelan Red Cross volunteers responding to community needs in Táchira, a border state to Colombia.

Photo: IFRC Psychosocial Centre

“

***From violence in Haiti and civil unrest in Ecuador to the migration crisis of thousands fleeing poverty to wildfires in Chile and Dengue outbreaks across numerous countries it has been another challenging year for the Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies in the region.***

**Cátia Matos,  
PS Centre Technical Advisor**

”

With a combination of climate change and natural disasters, poverty, forced migration and civil unrest, the Americas region has seen its share of complex crises and emergencies in 2023. “From violence in Haiti and civil unrest in Ecuador to the migration crisis of thousands fleeing poverty to wildfires in Chile and Dengue outbreaks across numerous countries it has been another challenging year for the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) National Societies (NS) in the region,” says IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) Technical Advisor Cátia Matos continuing: “while the physical suffering caused by such crises is very visible there are of course also major implications on the mental health of exposed populations – whether we are talking about being forced to migrate, facing the insecurity over conflict and armed violence or feeling the fear and despair over the escalating climate change”. Given the diverse nature of the challenges across local contexts in the Americas region interventions need to be adapted and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) work covers multiple areas such as suicide prevention, Psychological First Aid (PFA), community-based support and other

tools and methods available. While the Americas region has limited MHPSS resources there is no lack of engagement and commitment from NS and their staff and volunteers. “There is a need for MHPSS structures and capacity building within coordination bodies and regional strategies, for example the need for a MHPSS focal point in the Americas Regional Office. However, despite the tough odds the NS are fully engaged and staff and volunteers deliver above and beyond what can reasonably be expected,” says Cátia Matos. In 2023, monthly meetings with the MHPSS focal points for the Spanish speaking NS began with the co-facilitation by Canadian Red Cross, the Regional Office and the PS Centre Regional focal point to form a Community of Practice. To better support the NS in the region, the PS Centre has prioritized the translation of key MHPSS resources including an M&E tool kit and PFA training modules, into Spanish. A regional global training in Spanish has been agreed on and will be conducted in 2024 within the region. Ongoing support has been delivered to NS in the region with a focus on emergencies and the requests received from the different NS.

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID AT HAND

In 2023, the IFRC Global First Aid Reference Centre (GFARC) launched the Universal First Aid App, an app for mobile devices promoting first aid knowledge and aiding with step-by-step guidance in emergency situations. Included in the app is a module on providing Psychological First Aid (PFA) developed by the IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre).

“As a first responder you are often exposed to many distressing events. With the Universal First Aid App and its newly added PFA component we seek to mainstream PFA by integrating it into the broader emergency response framework. Emergency responders, including paramedics, firefighters, and community volunteers will now have access to basic PFA principles as well as sub-topics such as children in distress and traumatic events” says Guleed Dualeh, Technical Advisor in the PS Centre and co-creator of the modules about PFA.

The information in the app is presented as interactive quizzes and simple step-by-step

everyday first aid scenarios, allowing you to see and track your progress, build your knowledge, and increase confidence in your skills and ability to assist in emergencies. The content in the app is preloaded which gives you access to all information at any time, even without a WiFi or mobile connection.

Since its launch on 5 September 2023, the app has been rolled out in over 190 countries and is available in 25 languages. It has been downloaded more than 400,000 times worldwide.

“The collaboration between the Global First Aid Reference Center and the PS Centre in developing the PFA section of the app has been an impactful journey. Together, we have crafted a resource that not only provides practical first aid instructions but also addresses the psychological aspects of emergency and critical incidents. It’s our belief that this holistic approach to first aid will empower individuals worldwide to act confidently and compassionately in times of need,” says Pascal Cassan, Director of GFARC.



# RED CROSS RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT MHPSS ACTIVITIES IN THE **AMERICAS** REGION

## TRAINING

**19,233**

staff and volunteers trained in basic  
**Psychosocial Support**

**18,995**

staff and volunteers trained in **Psychological  
First Aid**

**Source:** Progress Report on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Activities within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – Americas region (based on responses from a total of 27 National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC) summer 2022 to summer 2023.

## MAIN CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING MHPSS SERVICES

**45%**

have no budget dedicated for MHPSS activities

**79%**

indicate a lack of or limited funds

**41%**

reported stigma around tackling mental health and psychosocial needs

**31%**

point to lack of or limited access to affected communities and individuals

## GENERAL TRENDS: CAPACITY AND COORDINATION

**50%**

plan to expand their MHPSS activities

**41%**

plan to integrate or mainstream MHPSS in other programme activities

**59%**

are mentioned in national public health or disaster management plans

**62%**

are included as a participant in relevant humanitarian inter-agency mechanisms

**48%**

are included in inter-ministerial/departmental committees

# DONORS AND PARTNERS

The PS Centre collaborates and receives funding from a broad variety of Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies, research institutes, NGOs, institutional donors, and the private sector. Without their generous financial support and partnerships, the increase in activities and reach the PS Centre experienced in 2023 would not have been possible.

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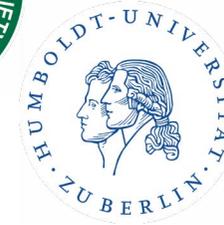


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Head of MHPSS  
Technical Unit



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MHPSS Technical  
Advisor



**AHLEM CHEFFI**  
MHPSS Technical  
Advisor



**CARMEN  
VALLE-TRABADELO**  
Co-Chair IASC RG on  
MHPSS in Emergency  
Settings



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**ARZ STEPHAN**  
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