

## Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

Difficult migratory journeys may trigger different emotions, feelings, negative thoughts and behaviours. For some migrants, psychological wellbeing is impacted by emotional suffering correlated to stress, worries and uncertainty about their future, while some may also have experienced severe stressors including violence, exploitation, torture, sexual violence, perilous travels and abuses. In some cases, pre-existing psychosocial problems and mental disorders are exacerbated during the migratory experience.

The provision of **mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)** in the framework of migrant centres can therefore play an important role in migrant protection and assistance, strongly contributing to the sustainability of other centres interventions. Since migratory experience are various, there is no single way or model to provide mental health and psychosocial support in migrant centres. Nevertheless, centre personnel shall receive basic training on how to avoid emotional harm to beneficiaries and on how to recognise physical, emotional, behavioural and cognitive signs of distress. Depending on the way migrant centres are structured, MHPSS services may be provided directly in the facility by IOM specialised personnel or implementing partners, or through referrals to specialised organisations or by external service providers. A clear system shall also be put in place for the referral of beneficiaries with severe mental health disorders to specialised mental health services.

Measures aiming at protecting and promoting psychosocial wellbeing mental health in the framework of migrant centre assistance include:

- **Mainstreaming MHPSS considerations when providing assistance:** the emotional and cultural impact gender relations and traditional household roles shall always been taken into account in the design beneficiaries. Centre staff shall receive guidance on how to mainstream MHPSS and on “do not harm” rules
- **Psychological First Aid (PFA)** is a set of simple techniques that can be used both by MHPSS professional in distress, prioritise their needs and refer them to appropriate services. PFA covers both social and psychological people in ways that respect their dignity, culture and abilities.

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- **Facilitated group discussions on psychosocial needs:** A peer support group is a space where people and receive support from each other. Peer support groups create a space for dialogue and conversation including fears, concerns, hopes, and fosters mutual support. Peer support groups may be the ground to different themes (e.g. the expectations before the departure, the challenges of the journeys, the emotions) organised in close coordination with beneficiaries and facilitated by a professional with an educational background with a deep understanding of beneficiaries' difficulties, needs, resources and cultural background. These groups allow returning migrants and allow to detect cases in need of more focused psychological care.

- **Psycho-education group session** are organised by a facilitator with an educational background to help beneficiaries to understand the psychological reactions that arise from the stressors they are confronted to, to provide a sense of the normality of these reactions and to provide a simple way to cope with distress and negative feelings. The language used should be simple and avoid using clinical terms.

- **Individual counselling** is a low-intensity psychological intervention for beneficiaries impaired by distress. It is provided by mental health practitioners. It aims at restoring positive coping mechanisms, strengthen resilience and reduce distress. For persons spending at migrant centres facilities does not allow to carry out multiple sessions and follow up, no person should be inadvertently harm the beneficiary. For persons on the move, therapeutic techniques shall therefore be adapted.

- **Group recreational activities** do not have a direct therapeutic objective but they can contribute to the sense of connectedness. For guidance on this matter, please consult [this entry](#).

## References and Tools

- [IOM Reintegration handbook \(MHPSS pillar\)](#)
- [Returning with a health condition. A toolkit for counselling migrants with health Concerns](#)
- [Reintegration counselling: a psychosocial approach](#)
- [Brief guidance note on mental health and psychosocial support for returning migrants assisted in IOM “transit centers” ...](#)

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- [IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings; IASC inter-agency Referral Form and Guidance No](#)
  - [Guía para la atención psicosocial a personas migrantes en Mesoamérica \(IOM\)](#)
  - [Guidance on emergency of suicidal attempt \(Greece\)](#)
  - [IOM Manual on Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies and Displacement](#)
  - [IOM booklet 'preparing for return'](#)
  - [Self-help booklet for men facing crisis in displacement \(EN\)](#)
  - [Self-help booklet for men facing crisis in displacement \(AR\)](#)
  - [Psychological counselling report \(Greece\)](#)
  - [Mental health and psychosocial support mapping in Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Ghana and The Gambia](#)
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