

## Keynote Speech

# **Public health aspects of mental health among refugees and migrants**



**Second WHO Global School on Refugee and Migrant Health:  
Sharing country experiences on health and migration**

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# Problems and stressors facing migrants and refugees

Stressors before and during their migration journey, as well as during settlement, integration or return, that **impact mental health** include:

- Exposure to **violence**, armed conflict and detention
- **Poverty**, unemployment, lack of opportunities for education
- Poor living or working conditions,
- **Separation** from family members and support networks
- **Inequality**, discrimination, and social isolation
- **Lack of access** to services to cover their basic needs.



Refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants are of special concern and need protection and support

# Prevalence of mental health conditions

Many migrants and refugees will experience distress which will improve over time.

Some studies show higher prevalence among migrants and refugees compared to host populations of:

- Depression
- Anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Psychosis



Some studies show elevated risk of suicide among asylum seekers

# Access to mental health care

- Refugees and migrant populations are often **not able to access affordable and quality mental health care and social care services**.
- Refugees and migrants may also face **disruptions** in continuity of mental health care while on the move and additional **barriers** (e.g. language, costs).



The **COVID-19** pandemic has brought refugee and migrant health to the fore, as people in vulnerable situations have been disproportionately affected.

WHO surveys have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has **disrupted mental health services in 93% of countries**

# Responding to the mental health needs of migrants and refugees

## Overcoming barriers to receiving mental health care

- Provision of **clear information** on mental health care entitlements and how to receive services
- **Outreach** to at-risk groups
- Facilitation of affordable and non-discriminatory access to care regardless of legal status, ensuring **financial coverage** of mental health services
- Ensure **continuity** of care
- Facilitation of **communication** (e.g. interpreters)
- Providing culturally appropriate and **person-centred** care
- Addressing **social determinants** and promoting **social inclusion**



Facilitating the engagement of **multiple sectors and systems** (e.g. law enforcement, protection, social services and education) to integrate mental health considerations and ensure referral.

# WHOs work

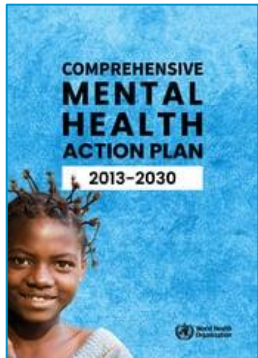


- WHO is the lead International agency in providing **technical advice on mental health** and works closely with other UN partners, including **IOM** and **UNHCR** to meet the mental health needs of migrants and refugees.



WHO is operational on mental health **in a range of countries and territories** that host large numbers of migrants and refugees. These include Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Peru, Sudan, Turkey and Uganda.

- WHO **co-chairs** the **IASC Reference Group on MHPSS** in Emergency Settings that provides advice and support to organizations and helps ensure that the mental health response is coordinated and effective.



WHO updated its **Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan** (2019-2030), which includes overarching priorities and guiding principles to promote the health of refugees and migrants.

- As part of WHO's **Global Evidence Review on Health and Migration** series, WHO is conducting a review of evidence and recommendations on **access to mental health services** of refugees and migrants to support to inform policy makers



# Relevant WHO Tools and Guidelines



**WHO mhGAP intervention guides** can help build capacity among general health care providers to assess and manage priority mental health conditions ([mhGAP-HIG](#) and [mhGAP-IG](#) ).

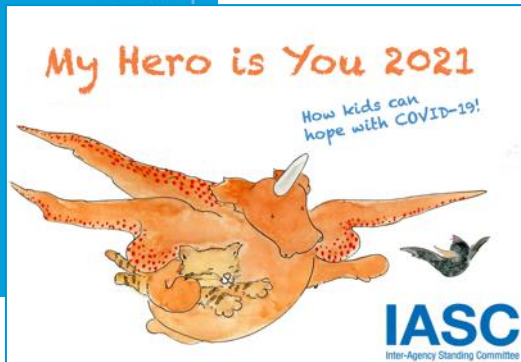


**WHO Psychological interventions** that can be delivered by trained and supervised non-specialized workers have been shown to be effective for **common mental disorders** among refugee and other populations.

Strengthening mental health as part of primary healthcare and other community-based services can help **identify** migrants and refugees with mental health conditions and can make **quality** care more widely **available**, **acceptable** and **accessible**.

# Relevant WHO Tools and Guidelines

Policy Brief:  
COVID-19 and the  
Need for Action  
on Mental Health



Guidance and tools have been developed by WHO and together with partners on many topics on **COVID-19 and mental health** for program planning and tailored to specific groups (e.g. children, older adults).



WHO together with UNICEF and in collaboration with UNHCR and UNFPA is currently piloting an **MHPSS Minimum Services Package (MSP)** which aims to ensure that humanitarian responses to mental health needs are better informed by global guidelines, evidence based, predictable, equitable and make more effective use of limited resources.

# List of Resources

WHO **Factsheet on Mental health and forced displacement.** <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement>

WHO Webpage **on Ensuring a coordinated and effective mental health response in emergencies.** <https://www.who.int/activities/ensuring-a-coordinated-and-effective-mental-health-response-in-emergencies>

WHO **Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030.**  
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240031029><https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240031029>

WHO and UNHCR (2015). **mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide** (mhGAP-HIG): Clinical management of mental, neurological and substance use conditions in humanitarian emergencies.  
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241548922>

WHO webpage on **Mental health & COVID-19.** <https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/mental-health-and-covid-19>.

**MHPSS MSP** draft for pilot testing: <https://mhpssmsp.org/en/>



# Thank you