



# IOM Mental Health and Psychosocial Response

## Introduction

Migration and displacement due to conflict or natural disasters require major adaptations as people cross interpersonal, cultural, socio-economic and geographic boundaries. This movement, whether planned or not, requires the individual to redefine roles and values within themselves, their family and within their community and society. This can be a major upheaval and a source of stress for the individual, family and communities involved. Providing psychosocial assistance and mental health care to migrants and displaced persons may reduce psychosocial vulnerabilities and enhance coping abilities.



## IOM's Mental Health and Psychosocial Approach



While specific psychosocial and mental health programmes may be required, general humanitarian assistance is also provided in a psychosocially conscious manner throughout every step of the migration process. Activities are designed to promote psychosocial wellbeing, support the smooth re-definition of social, professional, family and interpersonal roles and prevent long term individual mental health issues and social unrest.

To achieve this, IOM uses the following guiding principles in its approach to psychosocial support and mental health care:

**Flexibility** - Projects and programmes are adapted to specific target populations, cultures and situations.

**Assessment** - Needs assessments are carried out, where possible, before designing support programmes

**Community based** - Programmes are always community based when possible. This means programmes work with and through the community and are designed to strengthen existing networks and empower the community ensuring sustainability.

## Mental Health

Mental Health is defined as: "a state of well being, in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community." (WHO, 2002)

Good mental health does not refer only to the absence of mental disorders but more widely to the capacity of individuals to actively contribute to their communities' life. In wars, conflicts and major disasters the latter breaks down. The resulting stresses are not to be considered "normal stresses of life", and community mobilization becomes as important as individual care in providing psychosocial responses in these situations.

## Psychosocial

The term psychosocial pertains to "the influence of social factors on an individuals mind and behaviour, and to the interrelation of behavioural and social factors, and more widely to the interrelation between the mind and society." (OED, 1997)

Psychosocial activities therefore look at the interconnectedness of social (collective) issues, individual (personal) states and the cultural frameworks influencing these connections.



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM)  
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)



# IOM Mental Health and Psychosocial Response

## IOM Mental Health and Psychosocial Activities

The following activities make up IOM's comprehensive psychosocial response in most emergency situations.

- Participatory psychosocial needs assessment.
- Mapping of existing psychosocial services and co-ordination of interdisciplinary services amongst partners.
- Ensuring mental health and psychosocial considerations are mainstreamed when providing all forms of humanitarian assistance.
- Training general humanitarian workers in psychosocial and 'Do Not Harm' approaches
- Providing psychosocial trainings for community leaders and members.
- Establishment of a multidisciplinary mobile team, able to provide/facilitate activities. Each team is comprised of a psychologist, social worker, artist and educator.
- Providing psychosocial first aid (PFA) and training partners and front line workers in PFA.
- Promoting beneficiaries access to transparent and accessible information on how to access basic services.
- Supporting communities in re-establishing community life and rituals, including grieving rituals.
- Organizing community activities including recreational, sporting, artistic and cultural programmes, group discussions, support groups and Forum theatres on indentified problems.
- Provide individual and group counselling
- Training counselling professionals in transcultural, systemic and emergency approaches.
- Specialized psychosocial care for people with pre-existing mental disorders, those living in institutions and people in acute distress through referral, wherever possible, or direct provision of essential services.



## Case Studies

### HAITI 2010

The devastating earthquake in Haiti left hundreds of thousands of people affected by the event, losing loved ones, houses and livelihoods. IOM and other partners supported activities organized in camps, churches, schools and other humanitarian institutions to help survivors resume their own productive lives. Psychosocial activities and counselling were organized to help community members come to terms with their experiences. IOM also ran sessions to build the capacity of professionals and general humanitarian workers in psychosocial response.

### LEBANON 2007 - 2008

Directly after the war in 2007, IOM provided support to internally displaced persons, returnees and resident communities affected by the conflict. The recreational and counselling centre for families in Baalbeck offered recreational, art therapy, artistic and cultural workshops and events as well as professional psychological support to more than 4,000 direct beneficiaries.

In 2008, in collaboration with the Lebanese University, the Ministry of Social Affairs and UNICEF, IOM organized a one-year executive professional Masters programme in Psychosocial Animation in War-Torn Societies. Graduates from the Masters stayed with the Ministry of Social Affairs for one year, training the Ministry staff and detailing psychosocial preparedness plans in five different provinces.

More information can be obtained from the **IOM Migration Health Division (MHD)**

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