



MHPSS TWG - Bulgaria

Meeting Minutes

16/03/23



Members

WHO, UNICEF, IOM, CRWB, Za Dobroto, FSCOD, AKNO, Aid for Ukraine

1. Intro and revision of action points.

- The ToRs was circulated for last revisions. No further comments were received, thus the ToRs is finally endorsed, both the extended and the compact versions.
- Action point remained pending: UNICEF and Razkazhi Mi shall draft a brief survey to seek inputs from members regarding needs and best practices of working with Ukrainian adolescents in Bulgaria, as an app aiming to provide online counselling and psychotherapy to age group 14-24 is being developed.

2. MHPSS TWG action plan for 2023

The TWG ToRs should be accompanied by an action plan for 2023, namely a set of minimum standard activities collectively identified as relevant to the context and having the greater possible positive impact on refugees well-being.

As a baseline for discussion, some general reflections on developing an action-plan, refugee demographic data in Bulgaria, and information extrapolated from the UNHCR MSNA have been presented to the group (full presentation is attached for reference).

It was also suggested that for maximum impact, most of activities should focus on Self-Care and Informal Community Care (community-based approach, high frequency of needs, low cost).

Based on the available data and info on refugee conditions, and feedback received during bilateral interviews with TWG members, a list of suggested priority activities was presented to the participants for further discussion. It was noted that action-plans are based on members commitments and allocations of funds, once priority actions are identified.

From available data, it seems that the large majority of refugees experiencing MHPSS related issues, were not able to obtain professional support for their needs. Moreover, almost 3/4 of the interviewees said they did not know where to go to, to receive the needed support. However, it was noted that the info collected via the MSNA should be further validated before drawing conclusions.

It was also noted that decisions about what activities should be implemented and make more sense, should be taken based on evidence and refugee needs assessment. Nevertheless, assessments could be an action that members believe to be an operational priority and hence included in the action-plan for 2023. It was also noted that most of refugees cope at family and community level, and get relief from recreational and cultural group activities, especially women. Seeking help from mental health professional seems to be unlikely, due to cultural barriers. Despite very successful examples of this approach are already available and rolling in Bulgaria, a focused training on Community-Base MHPSS could be nonetheless well-received by partners.

It was raised that need for harmonizing skills across psychologists working with Ukrainian refugees has emerged, and that WHO PM+ could be a good tool to roll out, as helpers training or ToT. Other scalable psychological interventions as Self-Help+ and IPT were mentioned in the presentation.

It was moreover suggested that the TWG shall do all possible to prevent institutional scenario that increase stressors for refugees, through advocacy efforts, as outlined in the ToRs. The chair noted that the TWG would be pleased to contribute to any agreed upon inter-agency advocacy initiative and this point shall also be raised with the larger humanitarian group e.g. the IACWG.

It was concluded that in order to have more clarity and reflect upon what actions would be most relevant moving forward in 2023, agencies should consult frontline staff and psychologists for more informed decision.

3. AoB

- AKNO will be supported in longitudinal assessment and interventions by a doctor and global health master student at Maastricht university (Eric Hoffmeister).

- Chair to circulate the presentation, with the suggested activities to be included in the action-plan, and TWG members to discuss internally with their respective staff whether they make sense or other seem more appropriate, based on needs and current operational conditions.



Updates & Achievements



Action Points