

Open Letter to Governments and Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Practitioners in the EU and Neighboring Countries on Refugees from Afghanistan

As mental health and psychosocial support practitioners and human rights activists, members of the Consortium on Refugees' and Migrants' Mental Health (CoReMH) express our deepest concern for the safety, dignity, mental health, and wellbeing of Afghan residents and displaced Afghans. The political and humanitarian crisis that is unfolding in front of the eyes of the international community painfully demonstrates the dangers, persecutions and human right violations Afghan nationals seeking refuge in our countries are fleeing from. It is regrettable and a huge injustice that too often their suffering and fears are not acknowledged and the right to seek international protection is denied. Since 2018, Afghan nationals are the second highest group to seek international protection in Europe, and yet are facing the highest variation in recognition rates between EU countries¹. This demonstrates inconsistency and the unfairness of what is supposed to be a common asylum system.

At the same time, and partially as a result of the flaws and injustices in the EU asylum system, an unknown number of Afghans, including vulnerable groups like unaccompanied minors, families with children and survivors of traumatic events, are trapped in transit countries in uncertain, dangerous conditions which degrade their human dignity and presents a risk for their lives and health, including mental health. The transit countries and communities do not offer, and often do not have the capacity for adequate help and support as well as durable solutions for protection. All this further increases the suffering and negatively impacts the physical and mental health of Afghan nationals on the move. The current situation in their country of origin only adds to all these adversities due to fear of being forcibly returned and/or fear and concern for the lives and safety of the loved ones that are left behind. The impact of the suffered or witnessed traumatic events, if not addressed, can be devastating and long-term.

We therefore request the national governments and decision makers in EU member states and neighbouring transit countries to amend for the unjustified treatment of Afghans on the move and employ all mechanisms under the international and regional refugee law to grant protection to Afghan nationals and habitual residents currently in their territories. We urge governments and decision makers not to prolong the harmful precariousness of their situation and to fully respect the non-refoulement principles. The right to seek asylum must be respected and all cases assessed fairly according to international law and a common asylum system. It is of the utmost importance to consistently and efficiently carry through family unification procedures as to enable legal and safe pathways for family members.

Drawing from our expertise and experience in providing mental health and psychosocial support services to refugees and migrants, we appeal to authorities to most urgently ensure access to dignified and safe accommodation to all in need. We urge authorities to ensure access and provide support to mental health and psychosocial support providers, as well as to other support services, in order to address the social and health, including mental health, needs of the population of concern.

We considered it necessary for national and international decision makers to prepare efficient structures and mechanisms for refugees' arrivals in future months and years, including safe and dignified

¹<https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Policy-Note-17.pdf>



reception conditions and provision of care, including mental health and psychosocial support. This is critically important for the health and long-term wellbeing of the people on the move, but also for the transit communities which are undergoing prolonged strain and stress. We appeal to mental health and psychosocial support practitioners and relevant authorities to contribute to protection of mental health and wellbeing of both people on the move and local communities.

Finally, we urge governments of EU member states and neighbouring transit countries to, without delay, negotiate durable regional solutions for long-term protection and integration of affected populations. These solutions should be built on humanity and solidarity with the forcibly displaced as well as on solidarity within the EU and with transit countries.

About CoReMH

Consortium on Refugees' and Migrants' Mental Health (CoReMH²) consists of mental health professionals working with people on the move. The goal of CoReMH is to facilitate international cooperation between mental health experts and practitioners in the transit context. Our populations of concern are refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. CoReMH consists of 23 members organizations from 10 countries, including Member States at the EU external borders (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary & Italy) and countries bordering them (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo³, Serbia, & Turkey).

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List of signers:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ARCT – Albanian Rehabilitation Center for Trauma and Torture, Albania 2. ARM-BG – Association on Refugees and Migrants, Bulgaria 3. Center for community services PUZ, Bosnia and Herzegovina 4. CESIE, Italy 5. Cordelia Foundation for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, Hungary 6. Greek Forum of Refugees, Greece 7. HumanRights360, Greece 8. KRCT – Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims, Kosovo 9. Mavi Kalem, Turkey | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Médecins du Monde Belgium – Bosnia and Herzegovina mission 11. MSYD – Association of Assistance Solidarity and Support for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers, Turkey 12. PIN – Psychosocial Innovation Network, Serbia 13. Rehabilitation Centre for Stress and Trauma, Croatia 14. Refugee Trauma Initiative, Greece 15. SCS Aelle Il Punto Onlus, Italy 16. Society for Psychological Assistance, Croatia 17. Solidarity Now, Greece 18. Syn-Eirmos NGO, Greece 19. ZEUXIS, Greece 20. Mental Health Europe (MHE), Belgium |
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² <https://www.facebook.com/consortium.coremh>

³ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the

Kosovo declaration of independence.