

CONFERENCE



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PUTTING MENTAL HEALTH AT THE HEART OF EUROPE: Strengthening Preparedness for EU Polycrises.

30 January 2025

9:30 - 13:30 CET

Hybrid

European Economic Social Committee,

Rue Belliard 99/101, 1040 Bruxelles



European Economic
and Social Committee

mentality
MENTAL HEALTH QUALITY PRACTICES



**Mental
Health
Europe**

EuroHealthNet



**Liga za
duševné
zdravie**
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FOUNDATION

**Polish
Migration
Forum**



Putting Mental Health at the Heart of Europe: Strengthening Preparedness for EU Polycrises.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the prevalence of mental ill-health, which was already a major contributor to disability in Europe. Vulnerable groups—including children, migrants, individuals with disabilities, older people, and those facing socio-economic challenges—have been disproportionately affected, revealing significant disparities in both the availability and access to mental health services. Furthermore, healthcare professionals have encountered considerable challenges during this time.

The conference will address the urgent need for resilient mental health systems in the face of polycrises such as pandemics, wars, and climate disasters. It will explore how innovative mental health practices can drive policy reforms and bridge gaps in public health, particularly for vulnerable populations. Testimonies providing firsthand evidence of how beneficiary-focused, quality practices have addressed crisis-intensified mental health challenges will enrich the discussion.

The event will also emphasise the need to scale up these practices across the EU, as public health emergencies disproportionately impact vulnerable communities, exacerbating mental health and social inequities. It will serve as a platform to advance these priorities, strengthening Europe's commitment to mental health and resilience through strategic collaboration, investment, and policy innovation.

The conference will engage a diverse array of stakeholders, including practitioners, providers, policymakers, insurers, and investors, to influence decision-makers and promote sustainable cross-border collaboration for a more resilient mental health system in Europe.

Event programme

Agenda

Live captioning in English and translation in Greek, Latvian, Polish, Romanian and Slovak.

- 9:00-9:30 **Registration and coffee**
- 9:30-9:40 **Welcome and Introduction**
- **Pietro Barbieri**, Member of Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) at the European Economic and Social Committee
 - **Claudia Marinetti**, Director, Mental Health Europe
- 9:40-9:55 **Setting the Scene**
- **Anna Iwona Bulzacka-Bogucka**, Project Adviser - Mental Health, European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA)
 - **Emanuela Del Savio**, Mentality Project Coordinator, Mental Health Europe
- 9:55-10:45 **Session 1 (hybrid)**
Impact of Effective Mental Health Practices During Polycrises: Personal Testimonies
- This session will offer a snapshot of beneficiary-focused best practices for addressing mental health challenges during crises, complemented by personal testimonies that underscore the transformative impact of these - quality interventions. Additionally, the session will explore how innovative mental health strategies can drive policy reform and enhance public health services, especially for vulnerable populations.
- Moderated by **Arz Stephan**, MHPSS Specialist, RCRC Movement MHPSS Hub
- **Mental Health Support for Children.** Testimonies from Slovakia and Greece.
 - **Migrant Populations and Crisis Impact.** Testimony from Poland.
 - **Care Frontline Workers' Burnout and Emotional Health.** Testimony from Latvia.
 - **Free interactive maps of mental health support centres.** Testimony from Romania.
- 10:45-11:00 **Coffee break**
- 

11:00-12:05

Session 2 (hybrid)

Strengthening European Mental Health Preparedness in a period of polycrisis

This session will bring together policymakers and other experts to discuss how inspiring mental health practices can stimulate policy reforms and address gaps in public health, especially for vulnerable populations. The discussion will focus on the urgent need for stronger mental health systems during crises such as pandemics, wars, and climate disasters, enhancing resilience through policy adaptations, preparedness strategies, and lessons learned from recent emergencies.

Moderated by **Hannes Jarke**, Project Coordinator - Mental Health Policy, EuroHealthNet

Speakers:

- **Maria Walsh**, MEP for Ireland's Midlands-North-West constituency and co-chair of the MEP Mental Health Alliance
- **Claudia Marinetti**, Director, Mental Health Europe
- **Ana Maria Tijerino Inestroza**, Technical Officer - Mental Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe

Q&A session

Final reflections and key insights from the session

12:05-12:40

Session 3 (onsite only)

Engagement and Synergy Sessions

Introduction to the session: **Marcel Marchetti**, Communication Officer, Mental Health Europe.

This session will be exclusively for onsite participants.

The session provides an interactive platform for participants to connect with speakers, explore best practices, and build networks with similar organisations. It includes four thematic tables, each showcasing a specific best practice, where participants can circulate to gain a well-rounded view of mental health practices within the MENTALITY project. Project representatives from Slovakia, Greece, Poland, Latvia, and Romania will share insights from their initiatives, focusing on unique challenges and successes to foster cross-country learning and inspire innovative approaches to mental health.

12:40-12:45

Wrap-up

Claudia Marinetti, Director, Mental Health Europe

12:45-13:30

Light lunch

Speakers

Session 1

Impact of Effective Mental Health Practices During Polycrises: Personal Testimonies



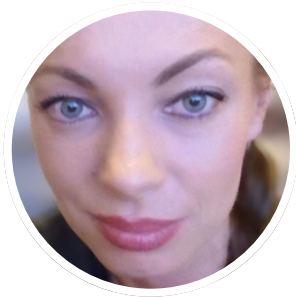
Arz Stephan, MHPSS Specialist
RCRC Movement MHPSS Hub

Arz Stephan is the MHPSS Specialist and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement MHPSS Hub focal point. He leads the portfolio on youth mental health and child-focused MHPSS, supporting Red Cross National Societies and the movement to innovate approaches addressing the needs of children and young people.



Tetiana Kulish, Project Manager
League for Mental Health (Slovakia)

Tetiana Kulish manages internal communications for the effective implementation of mental health initiatives of the Mentality project, including the Map of Support and Toolkit for Teachers. She supervises international collaborations and ensures that data and outcomes are accurately reported to key stakeholders.



PaedDr. Tímea Donová, Mentality Beneficiary
Slovakia

Tímea Donová is an English teacher at the Elementary School “Základná škola Pionierov 1 Rožňava” (Slovakia) where she has been implementing the practice “Toolkit for Teachers” with the support of League Mental Health Slovakia.



Vicky Bempi, Project Manager
Prolepsis Institute (Greece)

Vicky Bempi is an experienced epidemiology and public health researcher. She has over seven years of expertise in observational and implementation studies, as well as clinical trials, with a strong focus on study design, methodology, and outcome interpretation. She has participated in numerous European research projects and has presented her work at national and international conferences.

Speakers

Session 1

Impact of Effective Mental Health Practices During Polycrises: Personal Testimonies



Aleksandra Kuśnierkiewicz, Project Coordinator
Polish Migration Forum (Poland)

Aleksandra Kuśnierkiewicz is a graduate of international relations, social activist working for the benefit of refugees and coordinator of social, educational and aid projects. At PMF, she managed various MHPSS initiatives, including the psychological support programme at guarded centers for foreigners. Involved in advocacy initiatives calling for departure from migration detention.



Jose Luis Guzman Torrez, Social Integration Assistant, Cultural Animator and Event Organiser
Polish Migration Forum (Poland)

Jose Luis Guzman Torrez is a social integration assistant, cultural animator and event organiser at the Polish Migration Forum. He specialises in designing and facilitating various events that bring migrants and locals together, fostering dialogue and mutual understanding. As a dedicated community-builder and leader, he has extensive knowledge of cultural differences and works actively to create inclusive spaces where diverse communities can connect and collaborate.



Katerina Žiga, Clinical and Health Psychologist
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Division, Riga City Council (Latvia)

Katerina Žiga is an experienced psychologist. She has over ten years' experience in health promotion and project coordination. She has participated in numerous projects, including European projects and has presented her work at national and international conferences.



Inga Dreimane, Mentality Beneficiary
Latvia

Inga Dreimane has experience both as a consultant in working with children and adolescents, as well as in administering projects and participating in the development of public health policy, in the introduction and implementation of new health prevention and intervention services.

Speakers

Session 1

Impact of Effective Mental Health Practices During Polycrises: Personal Testimonies



Amedeea Enache, Executive Director
Estuar Foundation (Romania)

Amedeea Enache has 20 years experience serving communities and vulnerable groups, including 12 years as the Director of Estuar Foundation. She has an educational background in Social Innovation and Management (Vienna University, 2022), Sustainable Development (University of Minnesota; Fulbright Program, 2020-2021), Anthropology and Project Management and Economics.



Raluca Birtar, Mentality beneficiary
Romania

Raluca Birtar was born in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. She pursued her studies at Babeş-Bolyai University, earning a Master's degree in American Studies. With a decade of experience as an English teacher, Raluca dedicated herself to education before facing personal challenges that led her to step away from her teaching career. Since then, she has actively sought support from organizations like the Estuar Foundation, focusing on personal growth and maintaining a fulfilling life.

Session 2

Strengthening European Mental Health Preparedness in a period of polycrisis



Hannes Jarke, Project Coordinator - Mental Health Policy
EuroHealthNet

Hannes Jarke oversees the mental health portfolio at EuroHealthNet. His work predominantly focuses on the translation of scientific evidence to practice, as well as the adaptation and upscaling of mental health interventions into different contexts and countries. In addition, he provides evidence-based advocacy across relevant stakeholders in Europe. Hannes' expertise builds on many years of experience connecting research, policy, and practice.

Speakers

Session 2

Strengthening European Mental Health Preparedness in a period of polycrisis



Maria Walsh, MEP for Ireland's Midlands-North-West constituency (EPP), Founder and Co-Chair of the Parliament's first Mental Health Intergroup

Maria Walsh is serving her second term as a MEP, representing the constituency of Midlands-North West which spans 15 counties across Ireland, as a member of the EPP Group in the European Parliament. MEP Walsh sits on the Parliament's Agricultural and Rural Development (AGRI) and the Women's Rights and Gender Equality committees (FEMM) as a full member, and is also a member of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and Regional Development (REGI) committees. She is also a Founder and Co-Chair of the Parliament's first Mental Health Intergroup and has been strong and impactful advocate for mental health over the past five years.



Claudia Marinetti, Director
Mental Health Europe

Claudia Marinetti (she/her) is the Director of Mental Health Europe. Claudia has worked for 20 years in policy, advocacy and research around health promotion, health equity, social determinants of health, disease prevention, access to quality services, and social inclusion. She holds a PhD in Social and Applied Psychology from the University of Oxford (UK).



Ana Maria Tijerino Inestroza, Technical Officer - Mental Health
WHO Regional Office for Europe

Ana Maria Tijerino is a clinical psychologist with extensive technical, operational, and leadership experience in promoting and implementing mental health programs and public health interventions. Her areas of work include the development and monitoring of mental health plans and policies, as well as providing technical assistance to WHO Europe member states in the expansion, transformation, and strengthening of mental health services.

Evidence-Based Mental Health Quality Practices of the Mentality project

Interactive map of centres providing mental health support

The interactive map of mental health support centres (MapaWsparcia.PL practice) was originally developed in Poland. The MENTALITY project facilitated the adaptation and replication of this practice in Romania and Slovakia. MapaWsparcia.PL is a non-profit, dedicated interactive map that identifies facilities offering **free mental health support to individuals experiencing mental health distress and those in vulnerable situations**, particularly during times of crisis.

Practice owner: [The Human Foundation, Poland](#)

Implementers: [League for Mental Health Slovakia](#); [Estuar Foundation, Romania](#)

New approach to support care professional teams

The Dignity and Pride Programme in the Netherlands has introduced a novel approach called 'Team Reflection' to provide support for professional care teams in maintaining their well-being. The MENTALITY project has facilitated the adaptation and replication of this practice in Latvia. This approach is based on the premise that **healthcare professionals**, when surrounded by their team members and colleagues who have encountered similar challenges, are best equipped to cope with stress. Participants are equipped with **tools to address stress and are encouraged to support each other through a peer-to-peer approach** within their teams.

Practice owner: Noud van Hecke; René van het Erve (Dignity and Pride Programme)

Implementers: [Riga City Council, Latvia](#)

Tools designed to facilitate support for children, parents/caregivers and teachers

The "Hopeful, Healthy, and Happy Living and Learning Toolkit / Teachers' Guide" is a collaborative effort between REPSSI, APSSI, and the IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support (PS Centre), with support from MHPSS.net and funding from Education Cannot Wait. This comprehensive toolkit comprises the Guide for Teachers, the Parent-Caregiver Guide, and the Activity Guide for Teachers, Parents, and Children. Within the framework of the Mentality project, the teachers' guide was implemented in Slovakia and Greece as a tool to help teachers assist children in reflecting on their pandemic experiences and developing essential coping skills. It includes exercises and activities focused on **16 key life skills that aid in cognitive, social, and emotional development, with the goal of fostering resilience and enhancing psychosocial well-being**.

Practice owner: [Ea Suzanne Akasha, IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support](#)

Implementers: [League for Mental Health Slovakia](#); [Prolepsis Institute, Greece](#)

“Discover Your Potential:” measures to support mental health of migrants and refugees in times of crisis

A mental health support programme for migrants and refugees was created in Poland, drawing inspiration from the Mind-Spring training developed by the ARQ Nationaal Psychotrauma Centrum in the Netherlands. The new method, called “Discover Your Potential,” is a **preventive group intervention providing psychoeducation for migrant communities, targeting young adults aged 18-35**. Each session is led by two trainers: a mental health professional and a trainer with a migrant background. The inclusion of trainers with a migrant background, known as peer educators, adds significant value by ensuring that the content is effectively translated to meet the language and cultural needs of the participants.

Practice owner: *Inspired by* the Mind-Spring training by the ARQ Nationaal Psychotrauma Centrum, Netherlands

Implementers: [Polish Migration Forum, Poland](#)

1. THE MAP OF SUPPORT BY LEAGUE FOR MENTAL HEALTH, SLOVAKIA



2. MAP OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BY ESTUAR FOUNDATION, ROMANIA

CONTEXT

In Romania, adults with mental health problems face barriers to social support and community inclusion, compounded by stigma and reliance on families for care. While policies emphasise the rights of individuals with psychosocial disabilities, gaps in implementation leave many without essential resources, highlighting the need for solutions to bridge these gaps.



KEY OBJECTIVES



- Increasing awareness of available mental health services
- Facilitating access to mental health care
- Enhancing coordination among service providers

TARGET POPULATION



- Adults with mental health problems
- Relatives and carers
- Mental health specialists
- Education professionals
- Employers
- General public

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

- SANA Framework
- Data collection & Validation
- Platform Development
- Testing & Launch: early 2024
- Promotion & Outreach



KEY ACTIVITIES



- Training on peer support and the psychosocial model
- Map Creation
- Community Outreach
- Stakeholder engagement
- Advocacy & Empowerment of beneficiaries

KEY OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS



- 179 services listed (Jan 2025)
- 40 experts by experience involved in development
- 3 psychiatric hospitals involved in dissemination
- 496 unique visitors / 1606 site visits (Jan 2025)

CHALLENGES & MITIGATION STRATEGIES



- Limited free services
 - › Organised advocacy
- Information upkeep
 - › Regular communication & updates
- Cultural resistance
 - › community engagement

AREAS OF SUCCESS



- First comprehensive map of mental health services in Romania
- Improved access to information
- Strong stakeholders & community engagement
- Promoted inclusion and new initiatives

CONCLUSION

The Map of Mental Health Services in Romania represents a significant step toward improving the mental health care landscape by enhancing accessibility, coordination, and awareness.



3. TEAM REFLECTION BY RIGA CITY COUNCIL, LATVIA



RIGA CITY
COUNCIL

CONTEXT

Latvia faces lasting impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic — health issues, loss of loved ones, and emotional toll. The ongoing war in Ukraine and Latvia’s proximity to Russia added further stress. Social workers and healthcare staff face chronic challenges: stressful conditions, high workloads, and low pay, exacerbating burnout risks.



KEY OBJECTIVES



Improve psycho-emotional well-being among care professionals

TARGET POPULATION



- Care staff: social workers and healthcare workers.
- Colleagues with similar professional challenges

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS



- Preparation Phase:
 - › Translation & adaptation of training materials
 - › Hiring specialists: psychologist and interpreter
- Trainer Training: 4 sessions in August 2023
- Institutional setup: social care centres & shelter
- Session Rollout
- Supervision by practice owners

KEY ACTIVITIES



- Team Meetings: structured group discussions and reflection sessions facilitated by a specialist.
- Workbook Exercises for stress management strategies
- Buddy Approach

KEY OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS



- 4 groups, 50 participants, 8 meetings (2 meetings/group), 4 municipal social care institutions
- Significant benefits in stress management, communication & mutual support
- Enhanced team cohesion
- Stronger buddy systems

CHALLENGES & MITIGATION STRATEGIES



- Scheduling conflicts
 - › Gather group information beforehand
- Group dynamics
 - › Prefer small and homogeneous groups
- Sustainability
 - › Plan budget and secure resources

AREAS OF SUCCESS



- Extremely positive supervisory impact
- Improved active listening, mutual support, and problem-solving
- Positive shifts in handling stress.
- Plans to integrate strategies for long-term impact

CONCLUSION



The “Team Reflection” practice implemented by the Riga City Council has proven to be a valuable initiative in supporting the psycho-emotional well-being of care professionals improving stress management, team cohesion, and stronger support networks.

4. A TOOLKIT / GUIDE FOR TEACHERS BY PROLEPSIS INSTITUTE, GREECE

CONTEXT

Children faced prolonged periods of social isolation due to not only the COVID-19 pandemic but also a **series of natural disasters that had severely impacted Greece over the past three years**. This disruption in education and loss of exposure to a classroom environment led to decreased engagement, motivation, and academic performance. It also heightened feelings of isolation, loneliness, uncertainty, fear and stress.



KEY OBJECTIVES



- Alleviate mental health distress among primary school students
- Include schools from diverse backgrounds and regions
- Support schools in areas directly affected by natural disasters

TARGET POPULATION



- Primary school students
- Teachers and educators

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS



- SANA Framework Development
- Stakeholders engagement
- Selection of Themes and Activities
- School Recruitment and Teacher Training
- Implementation and Monitoring
- Dissemination and Evaluation

KEY ACTIVITIES



- Translation of the guide into Greek
- Creation of monitoring plans
- Schools' engagement
- Webinars for teachers
- Ongoing guidance and support
- Feedback collection

KEY OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS



- Participation of 14 schools & 40 teachers from all over Greece
- Participation of schools from areas affected by natural disasters
- 50% of teachers spend one hour implementing the guide's activities
- The toolkit effectively fosters student relationships and a supportive environment

CHALLENGES & MITIGATION STRATEGIES



- Teachers Workload
 - > Good communication to explain responsibilities
- Teachers Engagement
 - > Frequent communication, offering support & material
- Difficulties in communication with educational authorities
 - > good collaboration with school principals

AREAS OF SUCCESS

- Open communication & effective collaboration
- Effective involvement of psychologists
- Impactful activities
- Meticulous organisation

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the "Toolkit / Teachers' Guide" effectively fostered supportive environments and emotional resilience among students, with teachers noting its positive impact on classroom dynamics and student well-being.



5. A TOOLKIT / GUIDE FOR TEACHERS BY LEAGUE FOR MENTAL HEALTH, SLOVAKIA



CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption in education across Slovakia, creating challenges for teachers, parents, and students. Prolonged school closures led to setbacks in academic progress, difficulties in forming healthy social bonds, and heightened anxiety about the future. Moreover, the limited availability of mental health services has made it difficult for individuals to access support when most needed.



KEY OBJECTIVES



- Alleviate mental health distress among school students
- Enhance mental health support in schools
- Offer practical strategies to manage stress in education

TARGET POPULATION



- Primary & secondary school students
- Teachers and educators

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS



- SANA Framework
- Partnership with the Coalition of Schools (76 schools)
- Toolkit Dissemination at Key Events
- Translation and adaptation of the Toolkit
- Online training programme
- Adoption by schools

KEY ACTIVITIES



- Development of the toolkit
- Workshops and training sessions
- Classroom pilots
- Feedback loop
- Outreach and stakeholder engagement

KEY OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS



- 18 institutions involved
- 128 teachers enrolled, 104 completed the programme
- Integrated teaching methods
- Improved classroom environment
- Positive impact on students' mental health and emotional wellbeing

CHALLENGES & MITIGATION STRATEGIES



- Teacher Workload
 - › simplifying activities
- Implementation timing
 - › teachers' flexibility to choose their own timing
- Consistent Engagement
 - › Regular updates
- Cultural differences
 - › local and cultural adaptation

AREAS OF SUCCESS



- Engaging and practical activities
- Improvements in student emotional awareness
- Improvements in classroom's environment
- Positive feedback from educators
- Broad school participation

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Toolkit demonstrated that a well-designed, easy-to-implement mental health toolkit can have a lasting positive impact on students' well-being and foster better relationships within the classroom.



6. “DISCOVER YOUR POTENTIAL” BY POLISH MIGRATION FORUM



CONTEXT

Migrants often face significant challenges when settling into a new country, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and social isolation. These difficulties can be compounded by limited access to healthcare, housing, and employment opportunities. The psychological strain from these factors, along with the trauma of displacement, makes it crucial to provide tailored support to help migrants integrate into their new environment.

KEY OBJECTIVES



- Foster mental well-being and resilience among migrant communities
- Support integration
- Address mental health taboos
- Promote preventative care

TARGET POPULATION



- Ukrainian migrants
- Spanish-speaking migrants
- Mixed-ethnicity migrant students

KEY ACTIVITIES



- Development and delivery of the psychoeducational workshop series
- Tailoring of the workshop to each target
- Collaboration with universities to engage migrant students
- Recruitment of two pairs of trainers to reflect cultural diversity.
- Outreach & stakeholder engagement

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS



- Needs assessment
- Trainer selection & collaboration
- University Partnership
- Workshop planning
- Promotion & Outreach
- Adaptation & Feedback

KEY OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS



- 3 workshops, 12 unique participants, 41 sign-ups
- Enhanced cooperation between native and migrant trainers
- Enhanced mental health and integration strategies
- Strengthened resilience skills
- Established collaboration with universities

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT



- Low Participation Rates
 - › Shift focus to labour market benefits
- Cultural mental health stigma
 - › Frame workshops as lighter social activities
- Scheduling Conflicts
 - › Adapt to participants' needs
- Engagement of Ethnically Diverse Groups
 - › Tailored approach

AREAS OF SUCCESS



- Innovative training materials combining psychoeducation with social integration
- Cross-cultural collaboration between trainers
- Positive participant feedback
- Progress in reducing stigma around mental health in migrant communities

CONCLUSION



The psychoeducational intervention “Discover Your Potential” provided valuable insights into the needs of migrant communities. The programme demonstrated the positive impact of tailored support, helping participants develop essential tools for better social and labour market integration.

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