

Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Conclusion No. 116 (LXXIII) on mental health and psychosocial support (2022)

The Executive Committee,

Recognizing that refugees, asylum-seekers, refugee returnees, stateless persons, and, in many situations, internally displaced persons (hereafter 'persons of concern to UNHCR) tend to display great resilience in the face of challenges linked to their displacement or statelessness,

Acknowledging that the experience of displacement or statelessness can lead to an increased prevalence of mental health conditions and challenges to psychosocial well-being,

Recognizing that mental health stressors may occur before, during, and after displacement, due to, *inter alia*, exposure to conflict, violence, persecution, life-threatening routes, economic and financial constraints, lack of access to livelihoods, separation from families, trafficking in persons, racism, xenophobia, discrimination and exclusion, and that such factors may also exacerbate pre-existing mental health issues for persons of concern to UNHCR,

Reaffirming the right of every human being, without distinction of any kind, to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health,

Welcoming with appreciation UNHCR's engagement to date on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), defined as any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental health conditions,

Recognizing the connection between sexual and gender-based violence and acute stress, and the increased risk of mental health conditions among survivors and victims of sexual and gender-based violence,

Recognizing the importance of actions to preserve and promote psychosocial well-being of individuals, households, families and communities, and of the prevention and treatment of mental health conditions, for persons of concern to UNHCR and for host countries and communities as part of comprehensive protection and durable solutions strategies in line with UNHCR's mandate,

Acknowledging the highly stressful environment in which UNHCR personnel, other humanitarian personnel and volunteers often operate, and recognizing the importance of their mental health and well-being to their work,

Welcoming the increased attention to MHPSS in humanitarian settings in recent years and recognizing the need for continued cooperation among States, United Nations partners and other stakeholders, such as civil society, including faith-based organizations, reflecting the sustainable development goals (SDGs), notably SDG 3.4 and 3.5,

Underlining the importance of accessibility of MHPSS to all persons of concern to UNHCR, including people with psychosocial and other disabilities,

Reaffirming its commitment to burden- and responsibility-sharing and recalling the importance of international cooperation, in particular to support communities and countries hosting persons of concern to UNHCR, in providing protection and assistance and achieving durable solutions, consistent with the Global Compact on Refugees;

Acknowledging the contributions of persons of concern to UNHCR to addressing MHPSS issues, including the preservation of their psychosocial well-being and mental health, as well as that of their families, households and host communities;

Recalling relevant Executive Committee conclusions, including conclusion N° 47 (XXXVIII) 1987 on refugee children; conclusion N° 105 (LVII) 2006 on women and girls at risk; conclusion N° 107 (LVIII) 2006 on children at risk, and conclusion No 110 (LXI) 2010 on refugees with disabilities and other persons with disabilities protected and assisted by UNHCR, among others, and taking note of the Joint Interagency Call for Action on MHPSS (2020);

Strengthening mental health and psychosocial support approaches, responses and links to protection and solutions

(a) *Encourages* States and UNHCR to continue integrating MHPSS into protection, solutions, emergency preparedness and response strategies, without discrimination of any kind, in ways that do no harm and in line with humanitarian principles, including from the outset of a displacement situation, as well as in protracted situations, with a view to promoting durable solutions;

(b) *Encourages* UNHCR, States and partners to support activities for prevention of mental health conditions, including mitigating risks of re-traumatization and acute stress, and for strengthening community resilience and including MHPSS support in disaster preparedness;

(c) *Underlines* the importance of raising awareness about mental health and psychosocial well-being, early identification of MHPSS needs, reducing stigma and discrimination associated with MHPSS and facilitating access for all persons of concern to MHPSS wherever it is needed and in their native languages whenever possible, based on the principle of informed consent, taking into account the local context, as well as language, cultural, social and religious diversity;

(d) *Encourages* States, UNHCR and all partners to provide accessible MHPSS services and to communicate information about MHPSS and related procedures, decisions, and policies appropriately so that it is accessible and understandable for persons of concern to UNHCR, including persons of concern with disabilities;

(e) *Encourages* UNHCR, States and other partners to apply a multi-sectoral approach in accordance with human rights, through which the mental health and psychosocial well-being of persons of concern is supported across different sectors of activity and assistance for persons of concern to UNHCR, including protection, assistance, health and education;

(f) *Encourages* UNHCR, States and other partners to provide accessible and continued MHPSS care, treatment and support, whenever possible in the native language of the persons of concern, to address *inter alia*, psychological trauma and serious protection risks, including for survivors and victims of sexual and gender-based violence; and clinical care to address severe or complex mental health conditions;

(g) *Encourages* UNHCR to promote the mental health and well-being of its personnel, other humanitarian personnel and volunteers, and to ensure the provision of MHPSS, where needed, to them, taking into consideration their role in providing effective and sustainable assistance to persons of concern to UNHCR and their host communities;

Support to the enhancement of mental health and psychosocial support capacity

(h) *Welcomes* and encourages continued provision of support, including capacity development and financial assistance for MHPSS for persons of concern to UNHCR, as well as host communities, including its provision in low- and middle-income countries, many of which host large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons;

(i) *Encourages* States to work towards further inclusion in national services and existing systems of care for MHPSS of persons of concern to UNHCR; and calls upon UNHCR and partners to effectively provide and facilitate further support for States in different situations, enabling them to build and expand the capacity of national health systems to provide MHPSS to persons of concern to UNHCR and to the communities hosting them, as well as support to wider protection, durable solutions and emergency responses, consistent with the principles of burden- and responsibility-sharing, taking into account the importance of national ownership and leadership;

(j) *Invites* all States, in line with their economic capacity, to invest resources and expertise to strengthen MHPSS, including the capacity of UNHCR, host states and relevant partners, encompassing, among other aspects, MHPSS provision and supervision by trained professionals, where possible, as well as capacity development and training opportunities for persons of concern to UNHCR and host communities, in line with paragraph 73 of the Global Compact on Refugees;

Participation and contributions by persons of concern

(k) *Encourages* States and UNHCR to facilitate the active participation and contributions by persons of concern to UNHCR in matters affecting them in the field of MHPSS, whenever possible, including by drawing on and further developing the capacity of individuals, families,

households and communities to provide support to others, including the delivery of peer-to-peer counselling and other forms of support;

(l) *Emphasizes* the benefits of exploring alternative delivery methods of MHPSS, including with the use of technology, consistent with data protection and privacy principles, to effectively meet the needs of persons of concern to UNHCR as well as host countries;

(m) *Calls on* UNHCR, in collaboration with host States, to focus on contextualized, inclusive, non-discriminatory and community-based approaches in the provision of MHPSS;

Partnerships

(n) *Encourages* UNHCR, States, other UN agencies and other relevant partners, such as civil society organizations, including faith-based, refugee-led, and women-led organizations, organizations representing persons with disabilities, and other organizations representing people in vulnerable situations, to continue to work together effectively and strengthen coordination around MHPSS for persons of concern to UNHCR;

(o) *Calls upon* States, UNHCR and other international actors to strengthen cooperation with and develop the capacity of local partners in the provision of MHPSS;

(p) *Calls upon* the international community to support and collectively contribute to the mental health and psychosocial well-being of persons of concern to UNHCR and host communities;

(q) *Encourages* States, UNHCR and other partners to use evidence- and research-based approaches and share information about good practices that have successfully supported effective MHPSS responses in different settings.
