

**BALTPREP PROJECT  
ENHANCING REGIONAL PREPAREDNESS  
AND RESPONSE CAPACITY  
FOR MAJOR ACCIDENTS IN THE BALTIC SEA  
REGION**

**MINIMUM STANDARDS  
FOR TRAININGS IN  
PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT**



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## Introduction

The Baltic Sea region covers a significant area of northern Europe and its EU member countries representing nearly a fifth of the EU population. Over the past few years, issues of preparedness have emerged strongly in the region. The BALTPREP project - *Enhancing regional preparedness and response capacity for major accidents in the Baltic Sea region* - was implemented during 2019-2020. The project aimed at improving and optimizing quality and interoperability of the Red Cross National Societies in the region, and hence increase the national and regional response capacity for major accidents and severe disruptions. Red Cross National Societies from Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were partners in the EU supported project, with Red Cross Societies in Sweden and Russia being involved in the regional cooperation alongside the EU project partners.

The BALTPREP project was implemented through 5 work packages, where work package 2 focused on building a sustainable regional framework for activities as regards psychosocial support in emergencies. Danish Red Cross and the IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support was leading the implementation of the work package 2 with the overall objective of promoting:

*“Improved and optimized quality and interoperability of Red Cross regional PSS-response capacity for major accidents and severe disruptions. Integrated PSS, including Protection, Restoring Family Links and Community Engagement and Accountability, is an incorporated part of emergency responses to support those affected in coping with crisis events and enabling the affected to handle emotional reactions as well as to respond adequately to the events”.*

As a result of the work package 2 the Minimum Standards in Psychosocial Support Trainings in the Baltic Sea Red Cross Societies have been developed. The minimum standards build the framework for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies in region by compiling a standard training approach and two sets of training curricula. The minimum standard hereby seeks to facilitate capacity development of the National Societies through increasing MHPSS competencies and skills among staff and volunteers.

## The Minimum Standards in Psychosocial Support in Baltic Sea Red Cross Societies

The training packages in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for the Baltic Sea Red Cross Societies establish minimum standards for psychosocial support in the trainings and interventions in the National Societies. These standards ensure that trainings in Baltic Sea countries are aligned with international humanitarian standards in mental health and psychosocial support.

The minimum standards in Psychological Support comes in three parts:

- A. Need for MHPSS in emergencies and policy frameworks
- B. Generic training methodology and standard learning outcomes in trainings
- C. Brief introduction to MHPSS in emergencies training curricula – 3-hour training and 4-day training

## A Need for MHPSS in emergencies policy frameworks

### **Everyone has mental health needs and psychosocial needs**

The background for the psychosocial training materials following Inter-Agency Standing Committee and IFRC humanitarian standards adapted to a Baltic Sea context is a growing acknowledgment of the importance of mental health and psychosocial needs in crisis and emergencies.

Psychosocial well-being describes the positive state of being when an individual thrives. It is influenced by the interplay of psychological and social factors. Psychosocial well-being fluctuates and can be strengthened, even during the most challenging circumstances.

### Mental health and psychosocial support matters

In any crisis as well as major emergencies safety will be challenged, social structures shaken, routines lost, and power dynamics changed. Early psychosocial interventions can be lifesaving and early interventions can mitigate the above changes that inevitable follow any crisis - big or small.

Participants will be introduced to a meta-study describing *Five Essential Elements of Immediate and Mid-Term Mass Trauma Intervention: Empirical Evidence* (by Hobfoll and others) that identified five empirically supported intervention principles that should be used to guide and inform intervention and prevention efforts at the early to mid-term stages. These are promoting: 1) a sense of safety, 2) calming, 3) a sense of self- and community efficacy, 4) connectedness, and 5) hope.

There is a growing recognition and body of evidence that mental health matters. The greatest need was to be listened to: *The importance of mental health and psychosocial support during COVID-19*” is the telling title of an ICRC and IFRC October 2020 report.

In conflict areas more than one in five suffers from depression and anxiety. Mental health conditions will double in a humanitarian crisis and staff and volunteers will be affected too. We know that working in the humanitarian sector is associated with an increased risk of adverse mental health. Humanitarians experience increased anxiety, PTSD, depression, burnout, alcohol, health complaints and suicidal ideations.

### IFRC and National Societies’ obligation in MHPSS

At the Council of delegates and the International Conference in December 2019 a resolution on MHPSS and a Movement policy on MHPSS were adopted. To assist National Societies in their work *A roadmap for implementing International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement commitments on addressing mental health and psychosocial needs 2020 – 2023* has been developed.

The resolution, policy, and roadmap are all guiding documents for National Societies, making mental health and psychosocial support a priority and obligation for the Movement.

## B Generic training methodology and standard learning outcomes in trainings

### **Basic psychosocial facilitation skills**

The facilitators must understand and use principles for adult and participatory learning and have good facilitation skills to be able to run the session. They should have good relational or soft skills, accept different reactions and perspectives within the group discussions and use these to demonstrate diversity and similarities. They will also facilitate learning and peer support by fostering a supportive atmosphere, modelling key skills and encouraging engagement and participation. Being able to set and hold boundaries and at the same time being flexible are equally important. Good time keeping and management is essential, and thereby showing respect for participant's time.

### **Adult learning**

It is generally acknowledged that adults learn when they are engaged in the learning, the learning builds on their own everyday experiences and that the learning can be transferred to a daily practise soon afterwards. Therefore, the training should be carried out without the use of PowerPoint to make it more engaging for participants, as adults learn best when being involved and when the learning is applicable to their daily lives and practices.

### **Adult learning needs and psychosocial learning**

For adult learners it is also important to find themselves in a safe, inclusive and respectful environment making it possible to experiment and maybe even make mistakes when practicing new skills. This requires that rules about confidentiality are discussed and that participants pledge to uphold confidentiality.

An inclusive emotional learning climate will help participants learn about and practice emotional regulation – key skills in psychosocial support. When learning about psychosocial support the learner needs to practise skills. Thus, learning is more than cognitive processes and needs to be based upon being engaged sensorially, relationally and mentally. An important part of any psychosocial support training is the relation-building where the facilitator creates a conducive environment for participants to relate to each other and thus the practice relational and reflective skills, they will use in psychosocial support. To engage participants in their own learning, there are daily sessions with a buddy where participants can reflect on their well-being and learning and a daily evaluation process to ensure every problem and suggestion can be addressed as soon as possible.

### **Steps in planning a training in psychosocial support**

When facilitators plan the training, they need to cover the following steps to create a good and conducive learning environment for participants:

- Map and assess learner's needs
- Present the learning outcomes for learners before and at the opening of the training
- Ensure sufficient time to create group cohesion
- Create options for participants to form relations to other participants
- Allow time for reflection after exercises to encourage higher order thinking
- Use many different modalities during the training: buddy talks, group work, roleplays, demonstrations, cases, scenarios, energizers, fishbowls, gallery walk, ball throws, written reflections, etc.
- Ensuring feedback during the training enabling adaptation to learner's needs

## Higher order thinking skills

The training should prepare participants to act in complex scenarios. It is acknowledged that to learn navigating and managing such complexities, higher order thinking skills are needed. Participants need to be able to analyse, plan, act finding creative solutions and evaluate outcomes – and these skills cannot be learnt by reading a textbook or listening to presentations.

## C Introduction to MHPSS in emergencies training curricula: a three-hour training and a four-day training

The training package consists of two curricula with different objectives, target groups and expected outcomes and supporting materials developed for the project.

**The three-hour training is for disaster staff and volunteers** without much previous training in mental health and psychosocial support. The short can be a standalone session or integrated into disaster management trainings. The objective of the training session is to acquaint participants with basic theories and methodologies in psychosocial support. Based on experience from previous emergencies in the Baltic Sea and Nordic countries, the topic of working with spontaneous volunteers is included and a folder developed for the purpose of briefing spontaneous volunteers. The session will enable participants to better understand the needs of those affected by emergencies as well as to understand the work of psychosocial teams under their guidance.

### Overview of the minimum standard learning outcomes for the three-hour session for disaster personnel and volunteers:

Participants in the three-hour trainings will:

- be informed about the importance of mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies
- the preventive effect of establishing early psychosocial measurements in any response
- be acquainted with the basic principles for mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings;
- learn about loss and grief in crisis and disasters
- work with different categories of volunteers.

**The four-day training curriculum is for psychosocial staff and volunteers;** ideally those with basic understanding of and experience in delivering community-based psychosocial support. The training objectives are for participants to be able to carry out psychosocial triage, offer different levels of psychological first aid and psychoeducation, plan and conduct needs assessments, plan interventions and manage and care for psychosocial volunteers including creating training plans for volunteers.

The four-day training covers psychosocial support in acute crisis as well as in crisis with longer term impact. If and when adapting the training to a specific context, it is key to include the following sessions:

Restoring family links, loss and grief in disasters, child protection, triage and assessment and psychological first aid, volunteer management.

## **Overview of the minimum standard learning outcomes for the four-day training for psychosocial personnel and volunteers:**

In the PSS four-day training, participants will:

- gain an understanding of psychosocial responses in acute crisis and long-term disasters
- learn about the importance of mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies
- understand and be able to advocate for the preventive effect of establishing early psychosocial measurements in any response
- know the basic principles for mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings;
- learn about loss and grief in crisis and disasters
- child protection in disasters
- work with different categories of psychosocial volunteers and discuss volunteer management
- learn about the importance of as well as practice peer support;
- learn about and practice psychological first aid (PFA) and psychoeducation;
- practice psychosocial triage and plan and practice assessments;
- plan interventions for the affected groups
- plan interventions and create training plans and for volunteers.

## **Supporting materials**

### **Volunteering for the Red Cross in crisis situations. Folder for spontaneous volunteers.**

As mentioned above, the initial analysis of needs in the BALTPREP programme showed the need for a folder for spontaneous volunteers. The folder is to be used in both trainings acquainting participants with it. During emergencies the folders can be used as a checklist for how to brief spontaneous volunteers ensuring they have access to basic and necessary information for their work. Secondly the folder is to be handed to each spontaneous volunteer thereby ensuring they have the information handy when volunteering. The folder is annexed to each of the training curricula.

### **Structured buddy talks**

Participants are paired with a buddy in the four-day training and conduct buddy conversations each day using the structured buddy talk template. The buddy conversations build trust, help create a safe environment in the training, model the uses of peer learning, and give participants an experience and insight in how important safe relations are when working in a crisis.