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Technical Brief

Integrating mental health and psychosocial support into education in emergencies using the Minimum Service Package

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01

What is the MHPSS Minimum Service Package?

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) recently launched the mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) Minimum Service Package (MSP). The MHPSS-MSP can address the MHPSS needs of populations affected by humanitarian crises by helping stakeholders coordinate MHPSS responses within and across sectors, addressing gaps, advocating for needs, and planning and implementing activities. It includes high priority MHPSS activities that can be implemented by education, health, child protection, WASH and other sectors to ensure that the diverse MHPSS needs of populations affected by emergencies are addressed.

A checklist of actions to inform planning and implementation, and a list of relevant guidelines, standards, and tools, are provided for each [activity](#).

Additionally, the MSP includes:

[MSP Gap Analysis Tool](#)

(to assess and map MHPSS implementation and to identify gaps and prioritize activities)

[MSP Costing Tool](#)

(to calculate the costs of programme activities in humanitarian emergencies)



The MSP is designed for **all** humanitarian actors, including response coordinators, programme planners, donors, technical advisors, and all organizations and individuals involved in implementing MHPSS activities.

No single organization can conduct all MHPSS activities alone. Different sectors and stakeholders must collaborate and coordinate to effectively implement MHPSS interventions.

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02

What is the purpose of this brief and who is it for?

This brief aims to serve as a guide for education professionals on how to integrate MHPSS into Education in Emergencies (EiE) programming. An overview of MHPSS activities that can be implemented in EiE contexts is provided below, in line with the MHPSS-MSP.

03

Why is it important to integrate MHPSS in EiE?

MHPSS in EiE is vital in helping children affected by emergencies continue to learn and thrive. Education-based MHPSS interventions are essential for promoting and safeguarding students' and teachers' mental health and psychosocial well-being. These interventions are designed to provide the necessary knowledge, skills, support and care to ensure that students and teachers can thrive and achieve their full potential in their academic and personal lives.

In emergency situations, children's mental health and wellbeing can be severely impacted due to complex variables. Prolonged exposure to stress and adversity can lead to a range of mental health and psychosocial problems that can have long-term effects on children's lives. These include such as regression to earlier behaviours, aggression, social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide, which can have long-term effects on children's lives. Integrating MHPSS within education responses

is essential to protect children and adolescents from the negative effects of crisis and adversity. Concurrently, safeguarding the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of children and educators has a positive impact on learning outcomes.

Schools and learning environments offer stability and structure, can promote positive peer-to-peer and learner-to-teacher relationships, and make possible the development of positive coping strategies to deal with the loss, fear and stress experienced during emergencies. By creating stable routines, fostering hope, reducing stress, encouraging self-expression and promoting collaborative behaviour, learning environments can contribute to effective learning as well as improved mental health and well-being. MHPSS integration in education has shown to be effective in improving social and emotional skills, peer relationships, and hope, while reducing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.¹

¹ Hale DR, Bevilacqua L, Viner RM. Adolescent Health and Adult Education and Employment: A Systematic Review. *Pediatrics*. 2015;136(1):128-140. doi:10.1542/peds.2014-2105.

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Responding to the mental health and psychosocial support needs of teachers is also crucial during times of crisis, as teaching can be one of the most stressful occupations. Teachers influence students' social, emotional and cognitive development, along with their learning.

Awareness of the importance of improving the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of learners and educators, and how to accomplish it, is essential for all those who work in the education sector. By integrating MHPSS into EiE, education actors can help promote the holistic development of learners and create a positive impact on their learning and wellbeing. The MHPSS-MSP recommends the following key activities to integrate MHPSS in EiE response:



When reviewing the MHPSS- MSP guide, please look for the **education icon**.

Inter-agency coordination and assessment

- **Including the mental health and psychosocial well-being of target communities** (including children, caregivers and education personnel) in education **needs assessments**. (see MSP activities [1.2.7](#) and [2.1.7](#))
- **Working closely with actors** in health, child protection, early childhood development, gender-based violence, and other work areas to define roles and responsibilities, avoid duplication, improve the quality of care and ensure MHPSS activities are comprehensive and well-coordinated.
- **Advocate for the integration of MHPSS into emergency response**. (see MSP activity [3.1.7](#))
- **Inclusive services**. Providing and advocating across sectors for the provision of services in ways that promote the dignity of crisis-affected people and that are inclusive, participatory, person-centred and rights-based.

Country Example

In February 2023, devastating earthquakes struck northwest Syria, affecting an estimated 8.8 million people, including 3.7 million children. Even before the earthquakes, 2.4 million children across Syria were out of school and 1.6 million children were at risk of dropping out of school. The earthquakes further exacerbated an already dire humanitarian crisis, after nearly 13 years of sustained conflict.

In response to the urgent needs of vulnerable children, education, MHPSS, child protection and WASH actors jointly launched the WAQTI initiative ("my time" in Arabic), a multisectoral and targeted response for the most affected communities. The project aimed to provide children with various essential services in one place. Services included education, child protection, and WASH, as well as MHPSS. UNICEF successfully established 105 WAQTI centers, which reached over 200,000 children, adolescents and parents/caregivers across 56 communities in northwest Syria. Through the project, 964 teachers were trained in education in emergencies and psychosocial support. Parents and caregivers were engaged in project decision-making through parent-teacher associations and face-to-face interactions with children and project staff.



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Selected MSP

MHPSS programme activities to be implemented in the education sector (see Annex 1)

- Guaranteeing that education activities are accessible and meet the needs of people with mental health conditions.** It is crucial to ensure that educational activities are accessible and tailored to the specific needs of learners who are coping with mental health problems. This requires a comprehensive strategic approach that considers the unique challenges and barriers that these learners may face. By providing tailored support and accommodations, schools and learning environments can empower these learners to fully engage in their learning and reach their full potential.
- Equipping frontline education staff with knowledge and basic psychosocial support skills to promote and safeguard learners' mental health and wellbeing** (see MSP activity [3.2 7](#)). Teachers and educators play a crucial role

in promoting children's mental health and well-being in the classroom or distance learning environment. It is essential that all teachers and education staff receive appropriate training and ongoing support to understand the impact of adversity on learners' behaviour, relationships and learning readiness, and are prepared to provide support in the classroom. The training should include Psychological First Aid and offer practical recommendations and simple classroom activities that teachers can implement to promote a sense of safety and to enhance socio-emotional skills.

Case study [7](#)

Responding to multiple emergencies – building teachers' capacity to provide mental health and psychosocial support before, during, and after crises (Mozambique)



Country Example

In Poland, 170,000 Ukrainian children are now attending Polish public schools and preschools. In June 2023, UNICEF and the Polish Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the Learning Passport, a comprehensive e-learning platform that supports the inclusive education of refugee children. Poland's Learning Passport offers teachers access to resources and training to support their students' learning, mental health and well-being. UNICEF and the MOE developed a three-module teacher training programme to empower teachers to manage stress, prevent burn-out, communicate cross-culturally, create an inclusive classroom, and foster the resilience of their learners. After completing the training, teachers can continue to learn and share their experiences with peers through periodic one-day online workshops. As of February 2024, 9,500 teachers and educators completed training equipping them with skills to create classrooms that are responsive to the diverse mental health needs of approximately 200,000 learners, and 635 school managers completed an advanced and comprehensive MHPSS training programme covering stress management, burnout prevention, and psychological-informed classroom strategies. Teachers are reporting improvements in their cross-cultural teaching practices and decreases in the stress levels of their students.



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- **Disseminating key messages to promote mental health and psychosocial wellbeing across schools and learning environments** (see MSP activity [3.3](#)). An effective way to promote the mental health and psychosocial well-being of children and their teachers and caregivers is by disseminating key messages through schools and learning environments. These messages can encourage positive coping, help-seeking, and support for those experiencing distress. The key messages can be newly developed for a specific context or emergency, or adapted from existing messages.
- **Integrating activities to support the mental health of children and their caregivers in Early Childhood Education programming** (see MSP activity [3.5](#)). Disruption of essential services can severely impact young children and their caregivers. Preschools and childcare services can be set up in tents and other safe community spaces to provide a safe environment for children. Trained facilitators and teachers can engage children in developmentally appropriate play and learning activities. Child-driven free play can also be a powerful tool in helping children regain a sense of normalcy, order, and hope in the midst of a crisis. In addition, supporting caregivers' mental health and well-being, as well as their ability to provide responsive care and early learning opportunities for the children in their care, can have positive impacts on child development.

Case study [↗](#)

Learning social and emotional skills in preschool creates brighter futures for children (North Macedonia)



Case study [↗](#)

Early environments of care: Strengthening the foundation of children's development, mental health and wellbeing (Bhutan)



- **Delivering individual or group mental health and psychosocial support activities in schools and learning environments** (see MSP activities [3.4](#) to [3.8](#)). It is

important to ensure that children can access the type of MHPSS service they need to recover from the impact of the emergency in schools or through schools. Services can be divided into four categories:

1. **Mental health promotion:** Universal interventions for all learners who are not identified as being at risk of developing mental health problems should primarily focus on promoting positive mental health. For example, mental health and psychosocial support for students can be improved by integrating social and emotional learning programs into classroom activities. These activities generally take place in a group or classroom setting and have specific outcomes for mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.

Case study [↗](#)

Supporting the learning and socio-emotional development of refugee children (Colombia)



2. **Mental health prevention:** Interventions aimed at mitigating the risk of mental health problems and targeting vulnerable and marginalized children exposed to conflict, violence, or forced displacement may entail psychological group interventions and peer-to-peer support activities. Led by trained mental health focal points or school counsellors, these can be implemented at both group and individual levels.

Case study [↗](#)

Providing psychosocial support and promoting learning readiness during compounding crises for adolescents in Gaza (State of Palestine)



Case study [↗](#)

A whole-school approach to improve learning, safety and wellbeing (Jamaica)



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- 3. Mental health-focused care:** Interventions that address mental health problems affecting children's well-being and academic functioning can include structured psychological interventions facilitated by a mental health professional. These activities can be implemented at both group and individual levels.

Country Example

In response to the devastating 2023 earthquakes, UNICEF trained 1,123 school counsellors (663 female) in a school-based structured group counselling programme developed by the Ministry of National Education called "Post-Trauma Group-Based Intervention". This programme aims to teach students basic skills and techniques to deal with stressful situations and mitigate the risk of developing mental health problems among children who have been exposed to traumatic events. To support counsellors, education kits and therapeutic materials were developed and distributed. Training equipped counsellors with skills to conduct individual or group interventions to improve the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of students. Students in need of more specialized support were referred to healthcare institutions. Trained school counsellors are expected to reach an estimated 1.5 million students, including nearly 385,000 refugees in earthquake-affected areas.



- 4. Specialized services:** Services provided by mental health clinicians beyond the scope of general (non-specialized) schools and primary health services include interventions intended to manage mental health conditions. In most cases this type of service is provided outside of a school setting.



- **Establishing clear referral pathways and SOPs** (see MSP activities [3.6.7](#)). It is crucial to establish clear referral pathways for child protection, health, gender-based violence and mental health services, including telehealth options, in every school.
- **Promoting the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and other educational personnel** (see MSP activities [2.3.7](#)): Research shows that when teachers struggle with their own mental health, it can affect their ability to provide a safe, nurturing, positive learning environment for their students. To address this, it is crucial to provide teachers with good working conditions, a healthy work/life balance, and access to additional support. This will enable them to better support children who may be experiencing mental health challenges or distress.

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PROVIDE FOCUSED SUPPORT FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS OR MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

- 3.10 Provide mental health care as part of general health services**  ↗
- 3.11 Provide MHPSS as part of clinical care for survivors of sexual violence and intimate partner violence**  ↗
- 3.12 Initiate or strengthen the provision of psychological interventions**  ↗
- 3.13 Provide MHPSS through case management services**  ↗
- 3.14 Protect and care for people in psychiatric hospitals and other institutions**  ↗

Section 4: Activities and considerations for specific types of emergency settings

- 4.1 Integrate MHPSS considerations and support into clinical case management for infectious diseases**  ↗
- 4.2 Provide mental health and psychosocial support to persons deprived of their liberty**  ↗

Annex 02

Additional resources

1. **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Minimum Service Package (MHPSS-MSP)** (IASC, 2022)

The MHPSS-MSP is a resource for humanitarian actors who plan, support, coordinate, implement and evaluate humanitarian activities within and across sectors.

2. **INEE, INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery** [↗](#) (INEE, 2024)

The INEE Minimum Standards Handbook contains 19 standards organized within five domains, each with accompanying key actions and guidance notes. The handbook aims to enhance the quality of educational preparedness, response and recovery and increase access to safe and relevant learning opportunities for all learners. *(Languages available: Arabic, Azerbaijani, Burmese, Bahasa Indonesian, Bengali, Bosnian, Chinese, Croatian, Dari, English, French, Japanese, Korean, Kyrgyz, Mongolian, Nepali, Russian, Pashto, Portuguese, Serbian, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, and Vietnamese)*

3. **MHPSS and Education in Emergencies (EiE) Toolkit** [↗](#)

(MHPSS.net, 2021)

The MHPSS and EiE Toolkit offers access to key documents and resources of relevance to those working in the fields of Education in Emergencies (EiE) and of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). *(Languages available: PDF version in English and online version in more than 70 languages)*

4. **Global multisectoral operational framework for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) of children, adolescents and caregivers across settings** [↗](#) (UNICEF, 2022)

UNICEF's operational framework aims to help UNICEF staff and partners develop programmes across the social ecological model and the mental health continuum of prevention, promotion and treatment to improve the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of children, adolescents and their caregivers globally. *(Languages available: Arabic, English, French, and Spanish)*

5. **The role of remote modalities in implementing mental health and psychosocial support programs and services in the education sector** (UNICEF, 2022)

This report informs policymakers and practitioners about current interventions that promote the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of learners, delivered at a distance or through a blend of remote and face to face learning approaches, including support to educators and caregivers through schools and other learning environments.

6. **Young People's Participation and Mental Health: A Protocol for Practitioners** [↗](#) (UNICEF, 2022)

Developed by UNICEF's Adolescent Development and Participation team, this resource is intended for use by all who plan or implement participatory processes with young people, including young people themselves. It supports individual and organizational capacities to safeguard the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of young people through participatory processes, and to ensure young people's meaningful participation across programming, research, advocacy and communications. *(Languages available: English)*

7. **INEE Background Paper on Psychosocial Support and Social and Emotional Learning for Children and Youth** [↗](#) (INEE, 2018)

The purpose of this paper is to clarify relevant terminologies and approaches relating to psychosocial wellbeing and social and emotional learning (SEL) in education in crisis-affected contexts, and to explore how psychosocial support (PSS) and SEL relate to one another. *(Languages available: Arabic, English, French and Spanish)*

8. **SEL and PSS Measurement and Assessment Tools in Education in Emergencies: Identifying, Analysing, and Mapping Tools to Global Guidance Documents** [↗](#) (INEE, 2020)

This document covers programmatic measurement approaches, global measurement frameworks, assessment tools, and monitoring and results frameworks, to map what quality, equitable education in emergencies constitutes and

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how it can be assessed at the programme and individual learning levels. It also shows linkages between measurement at the programme or national level and global measurement frameworks. *(Languages available: English)*

9. Guidance Note for Teacher Wellbeing in Emergency Settings [↗](#) (INEE, 2022)

This INEE Minimum Standards-aligned Guidance Note puts teacher wellbeing at the centre of the response and recovery efforts in conflict and crisis affected settings. *(Languages available: Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Ukrainian)*

10. I Support My Friends: Peer-to-Peer Psychological First Aid Training for Children and Adolescents [↗](#) (UNICEF, Save the Children, the MHPSS Collaborative and WHO, 2020)

This four-part resource kit was jointly developed by UNICEF, Save the Children, the MHPSS Collaborative and WHO. I Support My Friends builds on the principles of Psychological First Aid to equip older children and adolescents with the skills and knowledge to support their friends in distress, under the mentorship and guidance of trusted adults. *(Languages available: Arabic, English, French and Spanish)*

11. Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation [↗](#) (UNICEF)

This is a package of guidance, tools, activities and supplies to support adolescents aged 10-18, especially those who are affected by humanitarian crises, with skills development and psychosocial support. The Kit aims to bring about positive change in adolescents' lives through arts and innovation. *(Languages available: Arabic, English. French and Spanish forthcoming)*

12. A Hopeful, Healthy, and Happy Living and Learning Toolkit [↗](#) (REPSSI, APSSI) and the **IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support** [↗](#) (PS Centre)

The three tools in this toolkit are: (1) the Guide for Teachers, (2) the Parent-Caregiver Guide and (3) the Activity Guide for Teachers, Parents and Children. The toolkit is designed to facilitate support for children, parents/caregivers and teachers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but may be useful for anyone, anywhere, at any time.

13. Online course: Coping with Changes: Social-Emotional Learning Through Play [↗](#)

This course is primarily designed for primary caregivers and teachers of young people. It explores the practical and emotional challenges facing children and provides learning through play and stress management strategies that can help. *(Languages available: English)*.

14. MHPSS Key Message bank for children and families in emergencies [↗](#) (UNICEF, in collaboration with UNHCR and Anna Goloktionova from the TWG in Poland, 2022)

This 'bank' of key MHPSS messages on a range of topics for caregivers of children and adolescents can be used flexibly by humanitarian actors as they develop materials for campaigns, trainings, and programming. *(Languages available: Arabic and English)*



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