# Mental Health Support Program

Together for Ukraine

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HEALING WAR-RELATED TRAUMA, STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE, AND SUPPORTING COMMUNITY REBUILDING

The war in Ukraine, particularly the full-scale invasion by Russia, has created one of Europe's largest humanitarian crises since World War II, displacing over 6.8 million people as refugees and an additional 4 million internally (UNRefugees.org). Conflict, displacement, and the ongoing state of uncertainty have precipitated a profound mental health emergency—especially among children, families, and other vulnerable groups. Research indicates that one in five individuals exposed to war is likely to develop a mental health condition, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or anxiety (WHO.int).

Children are disproportionately affected. Years of violent conflict and insecurity have disrupted developmental milestones and exposed them to intense trauma. Surveys conducted by UNICEF reveal that up to half of 13–15-year-olds in frontline areas experience sleep disturbances, while one in five suffers from intrusive thoughts or flashbacks (UNICEF.org). Among refugees who fled Ukraine, rates of depression and anxiety are four times higher than those in host country populations, yet only a fraction of those affected have accessed mental health support (Migrant-Integration.ec.europa.eu; NUDZ.cz).

Without timely and robust interventions, the impacts of war-related trauma can become chronic, affecting not only individuals but also families and communities across generations. Recognizing these urgent needs, the Together for Ukraine Mental Health Support Program seeks to deliver comprehensive, trauma-informed care, empower local communities through capacity building, and leverage innovative tools (including AI-driven simulations) to broaden the reach and effectiveness of mental health services.

KEY OBJECTIVES & GOALS

1. **Deliver Trauma-Informed Care**
   Provide psychological support aligned with the distinct needs of individuals affected by conflict—especially displaced populations, refugees, and war survivors. Interventions will be designed to avoid re-traumatization, foster physical and emotional safety, and honor the lived experiences of participants.
2. **Foster Resilience and Coping Mechanisms**
   Equip war-affected individuals with coping strategies that address both acute and long-term trauma. Emphasis will be placed on stress management, emotional regulation, and skills that facilitate a return to everyday functioning amid persistent uncertainties.
3. **Promote Emotional Recovery**
   Facilitate healing and help individuals process their experiences through evidence-based therapeutic modalities (e.g., trauma-focused CBT, art therapy, group support, and psychological rehabilitation). Ensure that these interventions meet international best-practice guidelines for delivering mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in conflict settings.

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4. **Support Children and Families Affected by War**
   Provide specialized programs for children and families, offering child-friendly spaces, targeted counseling, and family-based interventions to mitigate intergenerational trauma. Recovery camps and structured group activities will be designed to restore normalcy, build hope, and nurture developmental needs.

# Research–Backed Program Design

### War-Related Trauma and Mental Health Impact

- **Scale of the Crisis**: Approximately 14–15 million Ukrainians have been uprooted from their homes, creating unparalleled demand for mental health services (UNRefugees.org).
- **Elevated PTSD and Depression Rates**: Meta-analyses show that conflict-exposed youth and adults have far higher prevalence of PTSD (20–30%) and depression (up to 30%) compared to general populations (PMC.NCBI.NLM.NIH.gov).
- **Children's Vulnerability**: Disrupted routines, prolonged sheltering underground, and separation from parents have led to widespread sleep disturbances, anxiety, and emotional distress in Ukrainian children (UNICEF.org).
- **Underutilized Services**: Stigma, language barriers, and lack of awareness hinder access to professional support. In one survey, only 3% of Ukrainian refugees with moderate-to-severe depression sought any mental health care

# Global Best Practices for Mental Health Support in Conflict Zones

The **Together for Ukraine** program embraces the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines and the WHO's Mental Health Gap (mhGAP) humanitarian intervention model (WHO.int). Best practices informing the design include:

1. **Multi-Tiered MHPSS Support (IASC Pyramid)**
   - **Base Layer**: Ensuring basic needs and safety—food, shelter, healthcare—are addressed, as these are foundational to emotional well-being.
   - **Community and Family Supports**: Engaging social networks, providing child-friendly spaces, and offering psychosocial support groups to restore a sense of normalcy and collective resilience.
   - **Focused Non-Specialized Support**: Training frontline providers, teachers, and volunteers to deliver basic mental health care and psychosocial support.
   - **Specialized Services**: Ensuring referral pathways to psychiatrists or psychologists for individuals with severe disorders.

2. **Integration into Primary Care**
   Embedding mental health services in existing healthcare and educational systems to reduce stigma, enhance accessibility, and utilize task-sharing strategies where general health workers receive training in basic mental health screening and interventions.

3. **Community Engagement and Cultural Sensitivity**
   Collaborating with local religious leaders, community elders, and culturally accepted coping strategies to ensure services are contextually appropriate. Emphasis on psychoeducation, destigmatization, and community ownership.

4. **Training and Capacity Building**
   Building local capacity through training educators, social workers, and volunteers in Psychological First Aid (PFA) and other low-threshold, evidence-based interventions. Structured supervision and self-care measures for staff are included to prevent burnout.

5. **Family and Community-Centered Approaches**
   Supporting caregivers alongside children, recognizing that a parent's mental health critically influences child outcomes. Community healing and social reconnection are essential to mitigate intergenerational trauma.

# Key Components of the Program

1. **Psychological Rehabilitation**
   - **Individual and Group Counseling**: Offer trauma-focused therapies (e.g., TF-CBT, NET, EMDR) to help participants process war-related experiences such as displacement, loss, or direct exposure to violence.
   - **Art- and Play-Based Therapies**: Provide outlets for emotional expression, especially for children who may struggle with verbalizing distress. Evidence from conflict zones confirms that creative therapies can reduce PTSD symptoms and foster resilience (PubMed.NCBI.nlm.nih.gov).

2. **Support for Vulnerable Groups**
   - **Children and Families**: Establish child-friendly spaces, incorporate structured play and psychoeducation, and deliver family therapy to address intergenerational trauma.
   - **Women and Displaced Families**: Engage specialized groups for women facing gender-based violence risks and families separated by displacement. Utilize supportive group sessions and individualized care planning.

3. **Collaborative Partnerships for Broader Impact**
   - **Local and International Collaboration**: Partner with Ukrainian organizations, mental health professionals, government bodies, and international NGOs to coordinate services.
   - **Resource Sharing**: Align with Ukraine's MHPSS Operational Roadmap to avoid duplication, fill service gaps, and standardize interventions under IASC guidelines.

4. **Training and Capacity Building**
   - **Lay Counselor and Community Worker Training**: Equip a diverse cadre—teachers, social workers, volunteers—to provide basic mental health support and referrals.
   - **Professional Development**: In partnership with TEEI, deliver advanced training for psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors. Focus on trauma-informed care and specialized interventions for severe cases.

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5. **AI-Driven Mental Health Tools**
    ○ **Simulation-Based Training**: Collaborate with Variment to integrate AI simulations that help practitioners identify trauma-related symptoms more accurately.
    ○ **Personalized Care Pathways**: Utilize AI-driven triage and screening tools to customize interventions and ensure timely referrals to specialized services.

# Implementation Strategy

### Phase 1: Needs Assessment and Coordination

- Conduct a rapid, targeted needs assessment to identify priority locations and populations (children, women, people with disabilities).
- Synchronize with governmental and NGO partners to confirm referral pathways and ensure resource mapping aligns with existing MHPSS initiatives.

### Phase 2: Capacity Building and Service Delivery

- **Train-the-Trainer Model**: Develop a scalable approach, where master trainers equip local educators, social workers, and medical staff in Psychological First Aid and basic trauma interventions.
- **Establish Child-Friendly Spaces and Safe Havens**: Create multiple access points for psychosocial activities in camps, community centers, and transit hubs.
- **Deployment of AI Tools**: Integrate simulation modules for mental health professionals, enhancing real-time identification of PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

### Phase 3: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Quality Improvement

- Employ standardized screening tools (e.g., PHQ-9 for depression, GAD-7 for anxiety, or PCL-5 for PTSD) to measure program effectiveness.
- Gather feedback from participants and stakeholders; use results to refine interventions.
- Document lessons learned for dissemination and potential replication in other crisis settings.

### Phase 4: Transition and Sustainability

- Embed mental health services into local health and educational systems (integration with primary care, schools, and community networks).
- Ensure knowledge transfer to local professionals, allowing community-led mental health infrastructure to continue beyond the direct intervention period.

# Expected Outcomes

### Improved Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being
Participants will report reductions in PTSD, depression, and anxiety symptoms, regaining a sense of safety and normalcy.

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**Increased Resilience and Coping Skills**
Trauma-informed education and skill-building activities will enhance individual and communal capacity to handle ongoing challenges.

**Strengthened Community Support Systems**
Training outcomes will yield robust, sustainable community networks, including lay counselors, peer groups, and local leadership actively engaged in mental health advocacy.

**Enhanced Professional Capacity**
Through AI-driven simulations and targeted training, mental health professionals and frontline workers will be better equipped to address war-related trauma effectively.

# Long-Term Impact

Over time, the Together for Ukraine Mental Health Support Program aims to:

- Mi**tigate Chronic and Intergenerational Trauma**: Ensure early and continuous access to quality psychosocial support, reducing the risk of long-term PTSD, depression, or anxiety disorders.
- **Build Enduring Infrastructures**: Strengthen Ukraine's mental health systems by integrating expanded capacity into healthcare and social services—a "building back better" approach observed in post-conflict regions worldwide.
- **Foster Community Resilience and Social Cohesion**: Facilitate community-led initiatives and collective healing processes, preventing fragmentation and fostering hope in the aftermath of conflict.

This program aligns with established international guidelines (e.g., IASC, WHO, UNICEF) and responds directly to the urgent realities faced by Ukrainians. By combining evidence-based therapies, robust training structures, cross-sectoral partnerships, and innovative AI-driven tools, the Together for Ukraine program positions itself to deliver compassionate, comprehensive care. This will not only address immediate trauma but also contribute to the long-term recovery and resilience of individuals, families, and communities striving to rebuild their lives amid and after conflict.

By anchoring interventions in proven strategies and tailoring them to the Ukrainian context, the Together for Ukraine Mental Health Support Program aspires to be a cornerstone of humanitarian relief and post-conflict recovery. Addressing mental health at scale will not only alleviate immense individual suffering but also strengthen the collective resilience of a society striving to heal, rebuild, and move forward with dignity.

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