

# SPORT AND MENTAL HEALTH

## Supporting forcibly displaced people

### Displaced communities, mental health and well-being:



#### **114 MILLION PEOPLE**

have been forcibly displaced worldwide.



Significant stressors affect the mental health and well-being of those forced to flee, before and during their migration, their settlement and when trying to rebuild their lives.



Displaced populations are at **higher risk of poor mental health, including conditions** such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), than host populations.



### Evidence on physical activity and mental health outcomes:



#### **AROUND 50% OF PEOPLE**

experience poor mental health in their lifetime.



There is **strong evidence** for the impact of physical activity in reducing symptoms of poor mental health and promoting positive mental health and well-being.



People who **experience poor mental health** (including mental illness) are more likely to **experience physical illness**, contributing to reduced quality of life and shorter lifespan.



Emerging evidence shows **physical activity can produce beneficial effects on mental health and well-being in forcibly displaced populations**, in terms of reduction in symptoms of psychological distress and improvements in functioning, self-efficacy and coping strategies.

- 1. Mental health professionals** and others working with displaced communities should support people to be more active through **sport** and **physical activity**.
- 2. Mental health services** should incorporate access to safe and supportive sport and physical activity covering both **treatment** and **prevention**.

## Enabling access to sport and physical activity:

- **Complements** mental health professionals' work and contributes to **core mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and protection outcomes**.
- Brings together the skills of mental health and physical activity/sports workforces to **maximise their strengths**.
- Contributes to development, humanitarian and peace **outcomes beyond health**.

*We should all have the right to play and the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Physical activity and sport are effective routes to deliver these rights which can help ease pressure on overburdened resources.*

## Supporting the mental well-being of displaced communities:

### Mental health professionals:

- Be “**physical health informed**”.
- Remember the evidence and follow the **WHO guidelines**.\*
- Learn about and link with those offering physical activities and sports **in your community**.
- Practice what you preach – **be active**, either alone or with others.
- Use **psychologically safe messaging\*** (e.g., enjoyment and how people feel over aesthetics).

### Physical activity and sports professionals:

- Be “**mental health informed**”.
- Draw on available resources in **trauma-informed sports practice**.
- Learn about and link with those offering MHPSS services **in your community**.
- Consider the **unique and intersecting barriers** experienced by people living with poor mental health and living in displacement – facilities and equipment are not enough.
- Use **psychologically safe messaging\*** (e.g., participation over competition).

## Work together - for effective sport and physical activity:

- 1.** Consider **social determinants of health** – how the conditions in which people live, work and play affect their access and ability to participate.
- 2.** Sport and physical activity **must be safe, inclusive, gender-responsive, culturally sensitive and co-designed**, to support forcibly displaced people.
- 3.** **Cross-refer and strengthen the network of support and services for forcibly displaced people.**

\*See the list of evidence and resources on the last page of this infographic

The Olympic Refugee Foundation Think Tank brings together a range of experts to advance knowledge and understanding as well as increase uptake of sport as a way of supporting young people in situations of displacement.

Learn more: [olympics.com/olympic-refuge-foundation](https://olympics.com/olympic-refuge-foundation)

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## Evidence and resources:

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Rosenbaum S., Ager A., Snider L., Warria A., Collison H., Hermosilla S., Vancampfort., D., (2021) Physical activity, mental health and psychosocial support. *Forced Migration Review*, 66. Retrieved from: [fmreview.org/issue66/rosenbaum-ager-snider-warria-collison-hermosilla-vancampfort](https://fmreview.org/issue66/rosenbaum-ager-snider-warria-collison-hermosilla-vancampfort)

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## Resources for physical activity and sports professionals:

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