

# CONFERENCE REPORT

**A Human Right Left Behind: 2nd Nordic Conference on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings**

***18-19 March 2024 in Malmö, Sweden***



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MALMÖ  
UNIVERSITY

IN COLLABORATION WITH:



Government Offices of Sweden

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On **18 and 19 March 2024**, 148 delegates met in Malmö for the 2nd Nordic Conference on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings. The delegates represented more than 75 actors across **governments, civil society, UN agencies, academia, private foundations**, institutional and government donors and youth organisations. The delegates shared and exchanged ideas, formed partnerships and inspired new ways of working to achieve their common goals and leveraging their shared values as a region.

On **17 March 2024**, **14 youth delegates** met in Malmö for a preparatory youth conference for the 2nd Nordic Conference on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings. The delegates represented the Nordic countries via various organisations and academia. The delegates shared their ideas while **highlighting the need** to include youth in the work of MHPSS.

The results of the first Nordic Conference (Copenhagen, 2022) on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian settings were the creation of the Nordic network on MHPSS, agreements to endorse the 2022 Copenhagen Declaration on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings, and the 2022- 2030 Copenhagen Road Map. The Road Map is intended to be a living document, reassessed and updated every other year in relation to evolving needs and realities identified by Nordic MHPSS network members and stakeholders.

The 2nd Conference resulted in open pledges of the Road map, updating the recommendations based on the Networks members and stakeholders. This open pledge provides examples of potential statements and clauses that might be used to promote mental health and psychosocial support in fragile and humanitarian settings. The preparatory youth conference resulted in the launch of The Nordic Youth Network. The Youth Network will collaborate with the Nordic MHPSS Network **by offering a platform for young individuals to voice their perspectives and experiences**, and actively participate in the work of the Road Map.

# BACKGROUND

In August 2022, 120 delegates met in Copenhagen for the Nordic Conference on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings co-hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, and a coalition of Civil Society Organisation such as the Danish Red Cross, Danish Save the Children, the International Child Development Programme (ICDP) Norway, IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support (PS Centre), MHPSS Collaborative and War Child Sweden.

The conference resulted in the launch of a regional Nordic network on MHPSS, adoption of the 2022 Copenhagen Declaration on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings, and a series of co-created and endorsed recommended actions to inspire and aspire to, catalogued in the 2022-2030 Nordic Road Map for MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings.

Followed by a preparatory youth conference on 17 March 2024, the second Nordic Conference on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings took place in Malmö, Sweden on 18-19 March 2024. The conference focused on four thematic topics by linking them to the seven cross-cutting thematic areas identified in the Nordic Road Map. The four topics were as follows:

- **MHPSS and gender**
- **MHPSS and innovation and digitalisation**
- **MHPSS and climate change**
- **Integration of mental health and psychosocial support in health systems**

148 delegates were represented from more than 75 organisations across governments, civil society, UN agencies, academia, private foundations, institutional and government donors and youth organisations.

Through plenary-, breakout- and workshop sessions, the delegates formed partnership and exchanged ideas to further build on the recommendations from the Nordic Roadmap.



# THEMATIC TRACKS


The conference sessions were organised into four thematic tracks reflecting the priority areas from the Nordic Roadmap. Each thematic track included one plenary panel session and two concurrent breakout sessions.

## **Thematic track 1: Innovation and Digitalisation**

Thematic track 1 covered two areas of importance: the roles of innovation and scaling in MHPSS, and digital solutions and data in solutions. In fragile and humanitarian settings, communities can face challenges to access health services, including mental health services. In these settings, digital solutions and innovation are key enablers for driving transformational change and allowing for solutions that are adapted to the tough reality of on-site interventions. Ensuring the work of innovation and digitalisation can allow for effective methods and knowledge for MHPSS interventions.

## **Thematic track 2: Climate crisis**

Thematic track 2 highlights how the climate crisis affects mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. The climate crisis has far-reaching impacts on the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, including but not limited to increased levels of stress, trauma, loss, grief, isolation, symptoms of mental disorders, and anticipatory anxiety. Climate crisis also serves as a risk amplifier, increasing the risk of poor mental health and well-being even further among those already at increased risk, including those living in conflict-affected settings, migrants and displaced populations, and youth. Thus, we must promote recognition of mental health in connection to the climate crisis.





## Thematic track 3: Gender

Thematic track 3 centres around the importance of having a gendered perspective in the work of MHPSS. Mental health and psychosocial well-being are influenced by various factors, including socio-economic factors, patriarchal structures and gendered norms. Gender based violence, masculinity norms and power structures are vital to discuss for having tailored MHPSS approaches according to intersectional gender needs. The track addresses to find possible solutions and recommendations for having preventive and transformative programming and gender equal MHPSS interventions in fragile and humanitarian settings.

## Thematic track 4: integration of mental health and psychosocial support in health systems

Thematic track 4 addresses the importance building build better mental health systems for all people in need. This is important because mental health is crucial to the overall well-being, functioning, and resilience of individuals, societies, and countries recovering from emergencies. During emergencies, mental health requires special consideration. This is due to the issues of increased rates of mental health problems, weakened mental health infrastructure, and difficulties in coordinating agencies that are providing mental health relief services. Thus, by providing mental health in health care is a corner stone for mental health reform.



# WORKSHOP SESSIONS

*Besides the workshop session on the thematic tracks, three other topics were identified to focus on to reflect the priority areas of MHPSS for the Nordic region.*

## **Workshop session: Advocacy within the Nordic region and beyond**

Advocacy plays a pivotal role in enhancing awareness of the need for MHPSS and securing funding opportunities to support these vital services. When organizations collaborate, share experiences, and establish dedicated advocacy mechanisms, they can amplify their impact and drive positive change in policies and practices related to mental health and psychosocial support. Through sustained advocacy efforts, we can create a more supportive and inclusive environment for individuals with mental health needs, ultimately improving the well-being of communities across the Nordic region and beyond.

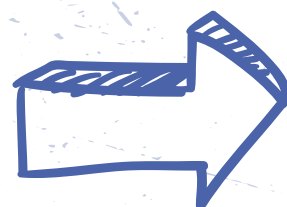
## **Workshop session: Financing MHPSS**

Alongside state agencies, civil society, academics and youth, donors are key stakeholders in realising the Nordic Roadmap. Decisions made on strategies and priorities directly impact how we contribute to closing the gap between the goals outlined in the roadmap. Securing funding for MHPSS is essential to meet the demand for mental health support, ensure the quality and effectiveness of interventions, promote equity and inclusion, and realize the economic benefits of investing in mental health. Through concerted advocacy efforts and collaboration among stakeholders, mobilising resources is needed to build resilient, supportive communities and improve the well-being of individuals affected by mental health challenges. Additionally, the necessity of increased financing for MHPSS is needed within additional thematic responses, including climate change, education, and emergency disaster response.



## Workshop session: Youth Engagement

Millions of children and young people around the world live in communities affected by conflict, violence, poverty, climate change and forced displacement, with the consequences exacerbated by structural inequities and inequalities, discrimination, oppression and racism. They face an increased risk of developing mental health conditions with enormous consequences to the global burden of disease and lost productivity. Engaging children and young people and ensuring their meaningful participation in all conversations and decision-making processes related to their wellbeing, assures the development of sustainable and context-relevant policies and solutions. Through collective action that prioritizes youth inclusion and meaningful participation, we can transform mental health support, creating more inclusive, responsive, and effective approaches that serve the diverse needs of young people worldwide.





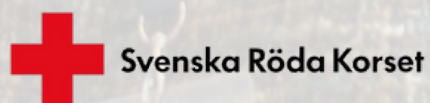
## Conference takeaways in support of youth engagement

- Beyond tokenism: Simply saying "get more young people involved" isn't enough. Organizations need to consider the practicalities of engaging diverse youth voices effectively and the potential barriers faced by youth in fragile and humanitarian settings.
- Structure matters: Clear guidelines, dedicated resources (like youth coordinators), and defined roles (like youth advisory boards) are essential for making youth engagement meaningful and sustainable.
- Youth expertise and trust: Young people possess valuable expertise and insights into their own needs and those of their peers. Recognizing this expertise and building trust is crucial for effective mental health and psychosocial support programs.
- Changing funder dynamics: There is a need to advocate for funding mechanisms that are flexible, responsive to youth perspectives, and prioritize youth capacity building and leadership.
- Tackling power imbalance: We need to actively work to reduce the power differential between adults and young people. This requires co-creation, placing youth in leading roles, and providing environments that ensure autonomy and agency.
- The value of peer-to-peer support: Youth-driven peer-to-peer methods can create safe spaces, build trust, and offer culturally relevant and sensitive support that resonates with young people.

# OUTCOMES

**The conference resulted in an open pledge** which is a commitment initiated and supported by participating agencies at the conference, allowing for additional endorsement and use by any conference agency. The open pledge contains clauses aiming to increase awareness, facilitate cooperation, and launch initiatives on the main outcomes of the conference. It provides examples of potential statements and clauses that might be used to promote mental health and psychosocial support in fragile and humanitarian settings. It has been developed to support the implementation of the Nordic Road Map on MHPSS in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings 2022-2030. It further supports the objectives and main thematic areas of the 2nd Nordic conference on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Fragile and Humanitarian Settings.

*The open pledges can be found in annex to this conference report.*



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