



**The Psychological Society of Ireland pronouncement regarding the invitation to contribute ideas on the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) responses in crises and emergencies**

In response to the IUPsyS call for member organisations to ‘contribute ideas on the IUPsyS responses in crises and emergencies’, the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), through guidance from the PSI Special Interest Group in Human Rights and Psychology (SIGHRP), is proposing a set of human rights-based recommendations to aid the IUPsyS policy mission for actions moving forward.

Following the Ukraine crisis, the Republic of Ireland received an unprecedented 50,000 refugees in less than a year (Central Statistics Office CSO, Republic of Ireland, 2022). The inevitable psychological demand this crisis presents reminds us daily how fragile but also how resilient the human condition is, whether persons be refugees fleeing from Ukraine or other and increasingly regular human-made or natural disasters. Other global pressures, such as climate change, are impacting the global south population’s access to food, clean water, and economic stability. Conflict crises, exacerbated by lack of these resources together with income inequality and poverty, means that there is a global refugee and displacement crisis within, between and outside of all our national borders.

From our experience in delivering rapid and actionable guidance to aid psychologists offering clear and practical advice to care for those with lived and ongoing refugee experiences, we propose that a human rights-based approach is vital to ensure adequate response to crises and emergencies in the future.

Taking that to mean a human right commonly understood as an inalienable, fundamental right to which a person is inherently entitled, simply because they are a human being, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights UDHR, Article 2 states: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind... [for example] made on the basis of political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs....”. A human rights-based approach will, therefore, enable psychological science to better comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UNCRPD (e.g., for jurisdiction signatories) where Article 4 seeks to “...abolish laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination” against persons seeking psychological interventions. Furthermore, a shift towards human rights-based approaches to mental health practice aspires to promote, encourage, and foster higher standards and good practices in their delivery. Recognising the shift in how equitable treatment should be provided for people experiencing mental health difficulties, the Republic of Ireland is presently also advocating for human rights-based reform to its own Mental Health Act 2001, that is, to ‘move the Act towards empowering people accessing mental health services to make decisions about their own healthcare insofar as possible’ (Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the Draft Heads of Bill to Amend the Mental Health Act 2001, Houses of the Oireachtas, Oct 2022, p.8).

We thereby recommend at the specific level of a practitioner, premises to aid the application of psychological science methods to treat those experiencing psychological crisis more humanely and without contributing to any additional trauma by: (i) practicing a more person-centric approach towards mental health care; (ii) working collaboratively across the psychological sciences to apply multi-disciplinary treatment of people accessing mental health interventions; and (iii) enhancing the regulation of mental health facilities and services. In summary, we contend a human rights-based approach will better inform how the Union, within its mission and capacity, more mindfully responds and contributes to alleviating the psychological effects of those crises for individuals, and we recommend that:

1. Psychological science methods are used to ensure resources, and psychological resources, reach the most vulnerable individuals experiencing crisis (e.g., children, the elderly, those with disabilities, the acutely distressed).

2. Psychological interventions take place with key facilitative infrastructure in place, facilities and procedures, to enable their dignified participation with, or uptake by, individuals experiencing crisis (e.g., hygienic treatment environments; non-judgmental interaction).
3. Psychological interventions are equally informed by psychological science and human rights-based approaches to ensure the autonomy and dignity of the individual experiencing crisis (e.g., ensuring person-centred treatment; assuring autonomy by using assisted decision-making approaches).
4. Psychological interventions have key regulatory infrastructure to enable their effective participation with or uptake by individuals experiencing crisis (e.g., document and implement procedures around issues of consent).
5. Psychological resources, whether they be professional or educational, are trauma informed, person centred and community focused for individuals experiencing crisis.
6. Further, we advocate that the IUPsyS in collaboration with other international psychology and human rights organisations, establish a forum to conduct international research on human rights awareness and best practice. This forum will help better inform professional bodies and share best practice with psychology practitioners and psychology practitioners in training.

**Dr Vincent McDarby**

**President, The Psychological Society of Ireland**



The Psychological Society of Ireland agrees for this pronouncement to be placed in a repository open to Union Members in its entirety.

The PSI wishes to express sincere thanks to members of the Special Interest Group in Human Rights and Psychology, particularly Dr Michelle Cowley-Cunningham (SIG Secretary) and Dr Elaine Rogers (SIG Chair), who were instrumental in the formulation of the PSI pronouncement.