

# HEY, HOW ARE YOU? HOW YOU FEEL MATTERS



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MIGRATION IN MIND  
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**HEY, HOW ARE YOU?  
HOW YOU FEEL  
MATTERS**

This guide was developed as a part of the project “Migration in Mind - Enhancing access to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for persons in migration by improving mental health literacy, the quality of care and breaking through stigma” (MinM), implemented with **co-funding from the European Union** through the granting authority of the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HADEA) and the **EU4Health programme** and is co-funded by the **Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs (Government of the Republic of Croatia)**.

**PUBLISHED BY:**

Médecins du Monde ASBL Belgique - Dokters van de Wereld VZW België through its offices in Croatia and Belgium, TENENET oz., Medicos del Mundo Spain and Udruga Ludruga.

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# HOW TO READ THIS GUIDE?

The guide you are holding in your hands has been developed for people in migration. **It aims to support your well-being and enhance your understanding of mental health.** The migration journey can involve a wide range of experiences and may involve diverse challenges that affect each person differently. Access to basic services –such as security, food, shelter, hygiene etc. – is essential for ensuring well-being. In that respect, **this guide can potentially offer meaningful and useful information and ideas but may not be adapted to your current situation.** Therefore, we advise you to **take** from it **what is relevant for you and to leave out what is not**, without pressure or judgment toward yourself and your current situation.

This guide is not a traditional book – **you can read it sequentially or simply refer to the table of contents to find a specific topic of interest or relevance at a given moment.** Each section can be read independently. An **electronic version** of the guide is also available in multiple languages on websites of Médecins du Monde ASBL Belgique - Dokters van de Wereld VZW België, TENENET oz., Medicos del Mundo Spain and Udruga Ludruga.

# CONTENTS

<b>How to read this guide:</b>	3
<b>1. Well-being and mental health: what is it all about?</b>	5
<b>2. How can forced migration impact mental health?</b>	7
2.1 How does the impact of forced migration show?	8
<b>3. How to cope with these challenges?</b>	11
3.1 What helped others?	14
3.2 Let's figure out what works best for you!	19
<b>4 What else can you do?</b>	20
4.1 Help, the stress is overwhelming me!	21
4.2 Help, I can't breathe!	25
4.3 Help, I can't sleep!	26
4.4 Help, I'm struggling to parent my children or deal with their stress!	27
<b>5. Who can I speak to for support?</b>	30
<b>Conclusion</b>	35
Support services in Croatia	36
Support services in Slovakia	38
Support services in Belgium	39
Support services in Spain	40

# 1. WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

“Hi, how are you?”... “Peace be upon you” .... These are common phrases we use to greet each other. Even if we use these greetings by habit, it shows that, as human beings, we are interested in how others feel and do, wishing for them to feel good and peaceful.

**The way we think, feel, act and deal with stress in life, how we build relationships, how we contribute to our community, make choices and decisions, is an important part of our health. This part of health is called mental health,** according to the definition of the World Health Organization.

**Mental health, just like physical health, changes over time.** Some days, you may feel good, other days, not so much. It's a scale, not a fixed state. Most of the time, we are somewhere in between, depending on the current circumstances, the support we receive, and our own inner resources such as our ability to manage stress, be kind to ourselves during difficult times, and maintain hope.

Living with a physical condition, especially in cases where the condition is chronic or painful, can have an impact on your daily life and ability to engage in activities or habits you usually enjoy.

This can lead to isolation, frustration, or sadness. Mental and physical health are closely connected – just as feeling mentally unwell can lead to physical symptoms, having a physical illness or injury can also affect your mental well-being. Recognising the close relationship between physical and mental health and taking care of both or asking for help when needed is important (for example, talking with friends/family, discovering new activities, allowing yourself to rest, setting small achievable goals...).

**When you're mentally well, you can manage your thoughts, emotions and behaviour in a more productive, confident and calm way.** And **when life gets tough** – through loss, fear, or harm – things shift. **You might feel upset, sad, worried, or disconnected from things you once enjoyed.** Your thoughts and emotions may seem overwhelming or out of control.

**This happens to almost everyone at some point,** and for most people, these struggles don't last forever. Even in difficult moments, you will most probably be able to take care of yourself, support your loved ones, and hold onto hope. Interestingly, once you feel more confident, you can find yourself thinking more productively and you are usually better at solving problems, at least those that you have control of.

**But for some people, mental health challenges persist and become severe.** In such cases people can feel extremely upset or sad for a long period of time, to the point of not being able to maintain their daily routines. They may struggle to distinguish between what is real and what is not, and become aggressive and defensive, which is unlike how they behaved before. These can be the signs that professional help is needed. **Just like diabetes or high blood pressure, mental health conditions require care and support.** Therapy, counselling, medication, or a combination of both can help ease suffering and bring life back into balance.

## 2. HOW CAN FORCED MIGRATION IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH?

**Forced migration can have a deep and lasting effect on mental health and well-being.** As you

already know, migration can be a long and difficult journey with a lot of challenges at different moments in time. **Everything you experience – before leaving,**

**on your migration route, coming into a new country, and while trying to settle in – can affect you and how you feel.** It's natural to experience many emotions and concerns in times of uncertainty. You may feel uneasy around the police and authorities, grieve what you've left behind, or find yourself overwhelmed by memories of the past. Worries about basic needs, like where to sleep, what to eat, or how to care for your children, can add to the stress.

**“Mental health is not so much that the problems are taken away from you, but how you face them”**

*Person in migration in Spain*

If you are a woman, you might have additional concerns about safety.

If you are part of LGBTQIA+ or any group that often faces discrimination, you may worry about how others will treat you.

Children often share these worries too, and such feelings are normal in difficult life circumstances.

Even after reaching your destination, new challenges may emerge: adapting to a different language, finding medical help, finding a safe place to live, or looking for work. These concerns, layered on past experiences, can feel heavy. **It's important to remember that you are not alone, many others share these feelings.** Support is available, and step by step, you can navigate these challenges.

## 2.1 How does the impact of forced migration show?

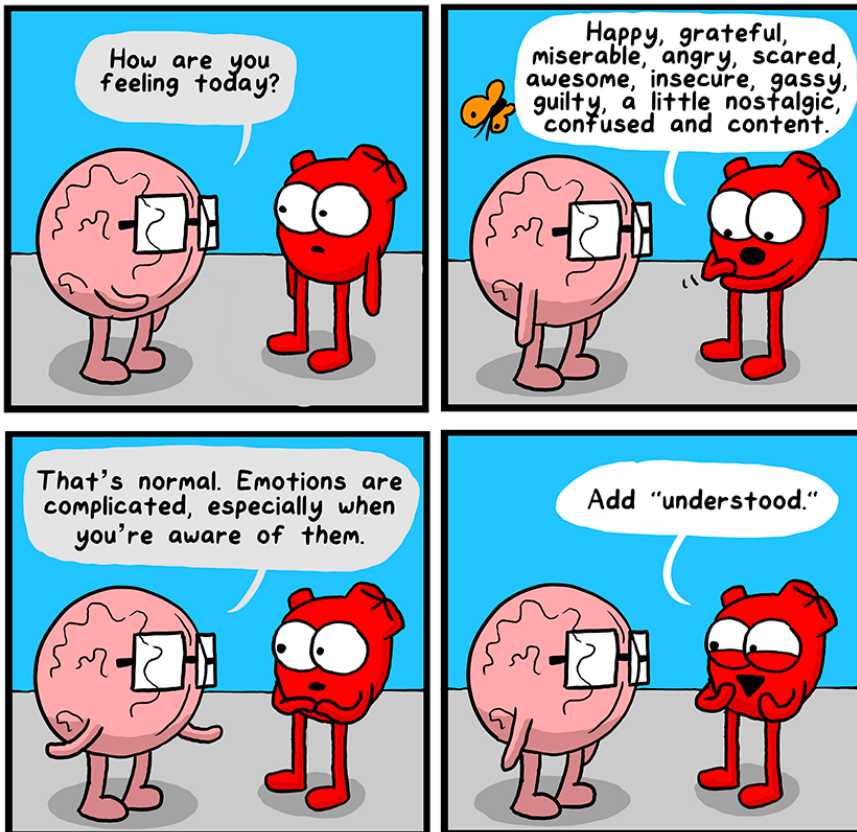
**All your experiences will impact the way you feel, think or behave.** Still, forced migration can result in physical and emotional strain.

FEELINGS	THOUGHTS	BEHAVIOUR
<p><b>There are a lot of feelings: both pleasant and unpleasant ones.</b> There is happiness, joy, excitement, but also sadness, loneliness, fear, anger, frustration, and so on. There are times when you feel nothing.</p> <p>The potential trauma from your past, combined with the ongoing challenges of living in a new country, can create a continuous cycle of worry, fear, sadness, shock, anger, and confusion.</p>	<p>Thoughts are what we have in our head and the <b>way we interpret events from past, present and future.</b></p> <p>You may experience that your thoughts become very negative or that you have a hard time concentrating while facing challenges of migration. You may constantly worry about your safety or the safety of your family, even when they you are in a safer place.</p>	<p>Behaviours are the <b>things you do, the actions you take, the way you react to events.</b></p> <p><b>The stress of migration can also impact the way you behave.</b> You may start to avoid situations that remind you of your past or the traumatic experience you went through. For example, you may stop going out or meeting friends, preferring to stay at home where you feel safe.</p>

FEELINGS	THOUGHTS	BEHAVIOUR
<p><b>It is important to know that emotions are normal and necessary.</b></p> <p>They act as a <b>compass, reminding you of what is important to you in terms of your values and needs, and protecting you from danger.</b></p>	<p>These negative thoughts can make it hard to make plans or to trust that things will get better. <b>However, it is important to remember that these thinking patterns, though painful, are common and usual temporary reaction to very stressful unusual events.</b> With time and the right support, you can find that your thoughts become clearer and less dominated by fear and negativity.</p>	<p>You might also have trouble sleeping or eating, as your body and mind struggle to find a sense of normality. In some cases, you may become more aggressive or easily startled. You may also react with anger or frustration when faced with minor problems, because of the constantly high levels of stress you are experiencing. You may also be trying to relieve difficult-to-manage emotions through behaviors that can have a negative impact on your health, such as drinking alcohol or using drugs excessively.</p>

Feelings, thoughts and behaviour are different for every person and **there is no "right" way to react when faced with many challenges of forced migration, as every person is different.**

**When experiencing crisis, your emotions, thoughts, and actions can be more intense, and this will fluctuate over time, becoming less overwhelming over time.** Support from friends, family, community, ... can help you overcome difficult emotions and thoughts.



Heart and Brain

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## 3. HOW TO COPE WITH THESE CHALLENGES?

There is **no single right way** to handle stress because **every person is unique**. You may find that talking about your problems helps, while others may prefer quiet time or creative activities to express their feelings. **The important thing is to try different methods and discover what works best for you. Sometimes, a change in life circumstances can have a positive impact on how you feel.**

There are two main ways you can deal with a challenge; they can sometimes be combined for the same situation, but not for the same purpose.

### Problem solving

**Taking action** to deal with the cause of your stress. For example, if you feel overwhelmed because you cannot find the help you need, you might ask a trusted friend or a community worker for support, look for resources, or make a plan to solve the problem. This way of coping is very useful when there is something **you can do to change the situation**.

### Focus on emotions

**Doing things that help to soothe yourself**, like talking with someone about how you feel, taking long walks alone or with a person whose company you enjoy, listening to music, or taking deep breaths to calm yourself down. Coping focused on emotion **does not solve the problem itself, but it helps to make pain easier to bear**. It is appropriate **when there is not much you can do to control or change the situation you find yourself in**.

**Healthy coping** is about **finding ways that help you feel better without causing more problems**. Some people use alcohol or drugs to get rid of painful feelings and upsetting thoughts and memories. And although it helps to feel and think nothing for a short period of time, this way of dealing with stress doesn't last; the memories and difficult feelings usually return even more intensely. Furthermore, people might neglect important daily tasks or relationships and end up even more isolated and hurt. If you are struggling with this, you can choose to talk about it with a professional (doctor, psychologist, or any other professional that is available to you).

Healthy coping means using strategies that

- work for you
- are safe for you
- do not harm other people

**Sometimes, what helped you during one stressful time may not be as helpful in a different situation.**

*For example, you might find that taking a walk helped you calm down during one difficult period, but later the same coping strategy might not have the same effect because your stress has changed. This is normal because our needs and circumstances change over time.*

When you notice that a particular way of dealing with stress is no longer effective, it is a good idea to try something different. **Being flexible and open to new strategies is a strong sign that you are learning how to handle stress in different situations.**

Sometimes, you might do things to solve the problem and then switch to emotional coping to take care of your feelings.

*For example, if you are stressed because you have no means to support yourself, you might first try to solve the problem by looking for an opportunity to get a job or asking for social welfare help. At the same time, you might talk to someone you trust about your worries or do things that make you calmer and don't require money. By using both types of coping, you can deal with stress from more than one angle, which often leads to better results.*

It is also important to understand that **coping is not about eliminating all stress or unpleasant feelings. Stress is a natural part of life, and it is okay to feel upset, angry, or sad sometimes.** It is not possible nor useful to make these feelings disappear completely; it is rather about how to recognise them, acknowledge them and manage them so that they do not control your life.

When you find ways to deal with your stress, you can focus on **small steps** that can make a big difference. **Setting small, achievable goals can give you a sense of control and build your confidence.** Each small step can help you feel more secure and in control of your life.

*For example, if you are feeling overwhelmed, you might decide to take a walk, talk to a friend, or do a small task that you know you can complete.*

## 3.1 What helped others?

The examples listed here are given by people who have a migration background or are still on their migration journey. Please take what is applicable to you and what is possible in your situation.

### Staying busy

**Structuring your time, developing routines and keeping yourself occupied with diverse activities can help you manage stress, difficult feelings and thoughts.**

Some ideas:

- Preparing food
- Engaging in classes and workshops that are available
- Looking for a job (when possible)
- Going out to meet friends or people in the community
- Having a walk

**“Work helps you because you are busy. Your body is working, and your brain stops. Not totally stops, but the ideas, the memories, things inside your head somehow stop when you are working.”**

*Person in migration in Belgium*

This is more easily applicable when you are in safe and stable conditions, such as in a shelter, reception centre or community-based housing and you have access to different activities and opportunities.

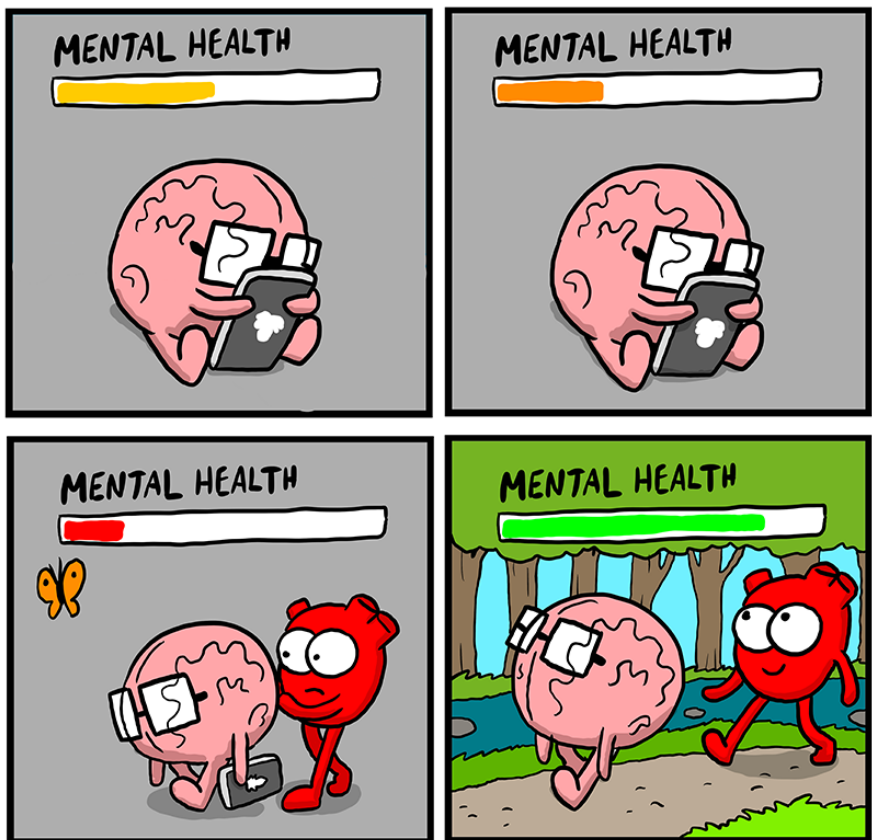
### Exercise

**Relieving the muscles and body from tension that accumulates because of stress can be very helpful for some people and help them clear their mind.** You can use the type of physical activity that suits your style, preferences and habits and look for what is available in your situation. Whatever works for you, the best results might come

if you share this activity with people you are comfortable with, and have some fun, at least for a while. If you prefer exercising on your own, that is okay too.

Some ideas:

- Dance it off
- Go have a walk or go for a bike ride
- Do some sports




**Heart and Brain**

**@theAwkwardYeti**

## Engaging in creative or learning activities

Some people find that engaging in creative activities, either in group or alone, helps in several ways. **It can be a way of expressing and channelling difficult feelings for those who rather don't talk about it. It can help to divert your thoughts from negative patterns to something that is constructive and immersive.** If you choose to join a creative group activity, you might find that you have some fun and connect with other people, which helps relieve some of the negative feelings and build relationships and supportive network.



**“It relaxes us a lot, it entertains us. We do that every Saturday as a way to get out of the dull routine. This past Saturday we did it with 15 people joining the group. I’m the one who cooks, I cook here, I cook there, I’m the chef and most of them help me. And you notice that helps with anxiety, like I’m already doing something, I’m entertaining myself and I feel different because I get back to my room and I feel tired, I want to take a bath, I feel, I feel relieved.”**

*Person in migration in Spain*

Some ideas:

- Dancing, singing and acting
- Painting

What if you have never done such a thing and you don't have the necessary skills? It doesn't matter! It is not about the result; it is about spending time in a nice way. Many people report that it helps increase confidence and feel better about themselves.

## Sharing and being together

**Some people feel understood and supported better by those who went through and survived similar things.** They feel they are not alone and isolated in their pain and suffering. It is important that you feel comfortable and safe in the group you choose to share with and receive support from.

There are also support groups, organised by persons in migration who received training and support to lead such groups. The advantage of such peer support groups is that they have rules keeping everyone safe and comfortable.

**“The fact that you talk about emotional stuff differently, you can feel that you are not alone in having emotional difficulties. And it gives you the strength or the desire to fight in life.”**

*Person in migration in Croatia*

**“When you see that someone has gone through something similar and managed to cope... It gives you hope”.**

*Person in migration in Slovakia*

**“One of the things the psychologist insisted on was looking for little things that made you feel good. For me, for example, it was going to the beach. You feel relieved, you relax just by sitting on the sand and feeling the breeze and feeling your feet in the sand... it’s the best. You let go of everything you have when you’re there”.**

*Person in migration in Spain*

## Enjoying in quiet, solo activities

For some people, and at certain times, spending time alone and doing things that help soothe and calm an overworked mind and nerves is just what is needed. **This alone time and activities serve to rest our mind and body and to calm our feelings.**

Some ideas:

- Read
- Listen to music
- Watch films or series
- Write
- Walk
- Go into nature
- Relaxation exercise (see part 2.4)

However, **if you start feeling lonely, isolated, distanced and withdrawn from others, it is probably time to try something else.**

## Praying and attending gatherings with other believers

Many people report that praying and gathering with others who share their faith can bring comfort during tough times. **When praying, people feel a sense of hope and peace, even when life is difficult. Coming together with others allows people to share their feelings and reminds them that they are not alone.** This support can help make the stress and challenges a bit easier to bear.

**“We converse; we talk a lot. You understand? My mind will calm down because you feel like you are home [...] we used to go there and pray. After prayers, we used to sit down and talk a lot.”**

*Person in migration in Belgium*

## 3.2 Let's figure out what works best for you!

How did you manage difficulties and kept going day after day during your migration journey? Note all the things you can remember that were helpful.

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What do you think is useful to continue doing in your current situation? Note all the things you can do to manage stress and difficulties in the way that works best for you.

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What are some things you haven't tried yet that you'd like to try?

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What is the first small step that you will take right now to deal with stress and difficulties in a way that works best for you? When and how could you start doing it?

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After you take your first small step, and each day after that, reflect on what you noticed that is just a little bit better in how you are handling your difficulties. How did you manage that? Note what your next small step will be.

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## 4. WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

**What matters the most is finding the strategies and techniques that suit you.** On the following pages, you'll find some ideas for techniques that may improve your well-being. **Some of them need to be practiced regularly to see more significant results.**



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## 4.1 Help, the stress is overwhelming me!

**Stress is part and parcel of daily life.** It prepares us to respond to everyday challenges. It is the tension we need in order to respond to the demands of our environment. **Stress can be positive, helping us to adapt and react quickly to problems or to motivate us.** However, **it can also be negative when we feel like the balance between our resources and the situation is unequal, leaving us feel overwhelmed** – as if we do not have enough resources to face the situation.

**Here are some tips that might help you cope:**

- Create routine
- Do things that make you feel good – even if it is only for five minutes
  - ~ Tip: make a list of activities and things you like to do so you can easily refer to it when needed
  - ~ Start small
- Listen to your own advice - Ask yourself: if a friend or family member came to you with this problem, what would I tell her/him?
- Write down your worries or share them with someone:
- Engage your body in physical activity

Take care of yourself.  
Not only do you need to, but you also deserve to.

Stress and anxiety are often linked. Here are some practical things you can do to calm these emotions down:

### 1) 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 technique

First take a few deep breaths. Identify:

- **5** things that **you can see** at that moment. Name them to yourself (e.g., window, plant, table, hands, tree).
- **4** things **you can touch** or feel on your skin (e.g., mobile phone, chair, clothes, your arm).
- **3** things **you can hear** (e.g., birds, distant cars, your breath).
- **2** things **you can smell** (e.g., food, incense).
- **1** thing **you can taste** in your mouth.



This technique can help calm your mind and stop you from focusing on the symptoms of anxiety. Take three deep breaths to finish.

## 2) Progressive muscle relaxation:

This technique involves **contracting and relaxing multiple muscles areas and consciously experiencing the different bodily sensations**. Tense your hands by squeezing them tightly into fists for a few seconds, then quickly release the tension. Repeat this movement, and then start to contract your muscle as shown in the pictures:

You will work on your arms, back, face, legs, shoulders and stomach.

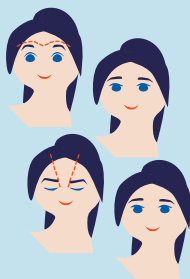
### ARMS



### BACK



### FACE



### LEGS



### WAIST



### BELLY



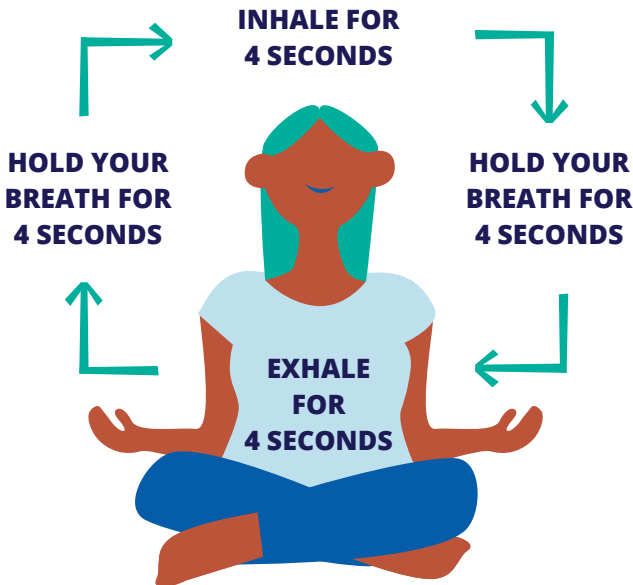
### 3) Square breathing

This breathing works in 4 parts:

- **Inhale for 4 seconds.**
- **Hold your breath for 4 seconds.**
- **Exhale for 4 seconds and pause with your lungs empty for another 4 seconds.**

**Breathing like this helps focus the mind, improves concentration and balances the nervous system.**

Some people find it helpful to draw mentally the sides of a square or physically with their finger while practicing this technique (as illustrated in the image). Alternatively, others prefer to count through each phase of their breath in their mind ("Inhale 1, 2, 3, 4... hold 1, 2, 3, 4... exhale 1, 2, 3, 4...").



*If you're looking for more resources and guided breathing/relaxation exercises, you can find some on the website: <https://www.care4refugees.com/relax.html>, <https://www.mentalhealth4all.eu/> or <https://mental-health-zone.com>*

## 4.2 Help, I can't breathe!

When you suddenly have **difficulty breathing**, have a **rapid heart-beat** or **feel like having a heart attack**, **feel dizzy, shaking**, or **sometimes even feel like you're dying**, you should **consult a healthcare professional first (depending on your symptoms)**..

**If there is no physical explanation for your symptoms, you may be having an anxiety or panic attack.** Here are some small tricks you can try, but if the symptoms persist, a **psychologist can help you!**

Keep in mind:

- Panic attacks usually last for **5-20 minutes**.
- You will not die from it, even though it may feel that way.

What you can do:

- **Slow your breathing** - Put one hand on your stomach and inhale slowly through your nose and exhale through your mouth at least 10 times.
- **Stimulate your senses** - Try to calm down by focusing on things outside your body. Touch some objects, listen to the noises around you, count backwards, drink a glass of water, tell yourself what you are seeing now, ...
- **Acknowledge what is happening (and do not fight it)** - It may seem counterintuitive, but one of the most effective ways to respond to a panic attack is to ride it out rather than resist it. It is like a wave – it rises and passes on its own.
- Remember that:

**"Even though this is not pleasant, it will not kill me, and I will not go crazy."**

**"The feeling that I am in danger is just one of the symptoms of a panic attack."**

**"Panic attacks are here now, but they will go away, I just have to be patient."**

**"This will pass too - as it always does."**

## 4.3 Help, I can't sleep!

Sleep is necessary but **often disturbed during stressful situations or while on the move**. We will give some tips for when you would like to sleep better, and you are in a situation where you can work on these issues.

**Not enough sleep can impact your memory, mood, capacities, reactivity and decision making.** This can also become a vicious circle like episodes of intense worry, deep sadness or other emotional problems.

Here are some tips that might help you improve your sleep:

- Try to **avoid using your mobile phone** or other electronic devices just **before going to sleep**, as screens can disrupt your ability to fall asleep.
- **Maintain a bedtime routine**, do things that could potentially calm you down and try to apply them on a daily basis. Also, try to maintain as much regularity in your sleep schedule as possible.
- **Relaxation techniques** can reduce your anxiety and help you get the sleep you need. If you can only sleep for a few hours or sleep during daylight, make sure your sleep is restful and restorative.
- **Do not force yourself to lay still in bed if you are not sleepy.** If you **cannot fall asleep within 20-30 minutes, get up and do a relaxing activity away from your bed.**
- **Do not pay attention to the clock at night** as it will just increase your stress.
- Try to **avoid overeating and heavy meals** in the hours before bedtime.
- Try to get some **light exercise during the day**, even just going for a walk, but **do not exercise right before going to bed.**
- **If you have not slept well, try to do something enjoyable after getting out of bed to help you feel better**, like stretching or reading something uplifting.
- **Reduce** as much as possible the use of **caffeine, alcohol, or toxic substances** as it will disrupt the quality of your sleep.

## 4.4 Help, I'm struggling to parent my children or deal with their stress!

Being a parent can be challenging on its own. It can be even harder when you're dealing with stress - especially as a single parent - or when your child is going through a tough time. How do you support your child, talk to them about their feelings, and help them cope? Parenting often raises many questions about how to do what's best for your child.

### What can you do as a parent to help your children?

- Try to maintain or create **routines**. This helps your children feel safe and have a sense of stability
- **Notice changes in child's behaviour:** Pay attention to any visible signs of distress from you child, like withdrawal, aggressivity, changes in sleep and eating habits
- **Practice active listening:** We all know what it means to listen, but active listening is slightly different than the usual way we listen to each other. It means giving your **full attention** and encouraging your child to express their feelings and thoughts **without judgment**. Respect their pace and privacy, **without offering immediate solutions or fixes** - simply welcome what your children share with you, showing your interest and care verbally and non-verbally, without interrupting them. You can show **engagement in the conversation** by looking at them, being turned in their direction and nodding

You can ask some questions, when necessary, ideally open-ended ones like: **"What happened?"**; **"What did you feel?"**. You can also, at some point, **reformulate or summarise what your child said** to show them how you understand the situation.

Please remember that **taking care of yourself is important if you want to practice active listening**. It can be more difficult to listen effectively when you're feeling tired or overwhelmed. Depending on how you're feeling, there may be times when you're not able to listen fully - and that's okay. It's important to recognise this and not force a

conversation, as it could have a negative effect on your child. You can try incorporating active listening into your daily routine, like before your child goes to bed.

- **Encourage your child to do what they are good at or support the positive friendships** they build. It is helpful if their own social support extends beyond the family circle.
- **Identify shared interests, spend time together** and look for other ways or opportunities to talk.
- **Share your feelings with your child.** A common misconception is that parents must hide all unpleasant emotions to make their child feel safe. In reality, what supports healthy child development is showing them how to understand and manage their own emotions.

*The key is that parents should share their emotions in an age-appropriate way, considering the context and the intensity of what they're feeling, so as not to overwhelm or burden the child.*

**Expressing emotions is helpful because it teaches your child to recognise their feelings, put them into words, notice emotions in others, and learn ways to cope, by watching you.** For example: "I feel sad today, and that's okay. That's why I need some time alone.". **The key is to balance your emotional sharing with offering support and guidance to help your child manage things. You are their most important role model.**

**Avoid:**

- **Harshly** spoken prohibitions, **shouting** and physical punishments
- Failing to recognise your child's needs, **not giving them enough attention or time**
- **Dismissing** your child's emotions or their perception of a situation
- Passing your own stress onto your child. **It is better to take a break for yourself if possible.**

**Use the knowledge you have of your own children** to guide them on their journey through childhood/adolescence. If you are not comfortable with speaking about emotions – there are various manuals and courses to practice these skills or psychoeducational videos available online (for example for teenagers: [EASE from the World Health Organization and UNICEF](#), and for parents [Save the children program: Parenting on the move](#) ). At the same time, **a peer helper or mental health professional can provide you with support in this field or support your child directly.**

## 5. WHO CAN I SPEAK TO FOR SUPPORT?

If you feel you need support or that all of the above doesn't seem enough and you still feel overwhelmed, unsure how to handle your situations, feelings, thoughts ... **you can ask for professional help.**

**“But now I understand that people should seek help in several cases: First, when they have experienced traumatic events. War, fleeing home, losing loved ones -these are not things you can just endure or wait out.**

**Second, when you notice that you can't function normally. For me, it started with insomnia, then I began having memory lapses. I could go to the store and forget why I was there. I started snapping at my children over small things.**

**Third, when you see that your condition is affecting your family. Children are very sensitive. I thought I was hiding my anxiety well, but the children could still feel it.**

**And of course, people should seek help when they start having thoughts that everything is hopeless, that nothing good will ever happen again. Those are dangerous thoughts, and you shouldn't be alone with them.”**

*Person in migration in Slovakia*

If you or someone you know shows **one or more of the signs below**, it may be time to seek help from a mental health professional.

- **Persistent sadness or hopelessness:** Feeling extremely sad or hopeless for several weeks or longer.
- **Suicidal thoughts:** Having repeated thoughts of self-harm or ending your life.
- **Overwhelming anxiety or panic:** Experiencing constant worry or panic that disrupts daily life. It can feel like chest pain, difficulty breathing, trembling hands, ...
- **Sleep and appetite changes:** Trouble sleeping, eating too little or too much, or not having the energy to take care of yourself as you would like to.
- **Recurring flashbacks or nightmares:** Having vivid and realistic memories of difficult and traumatic events while you are awake or in nightmares.
- **Social withdrawal:** Isolating yourself from family, friends, or community activities.
- **Sudden behavioural changes:** Noticing significant changes in your behaviour, such as increased anger or aggression.
- **Difficulty with daily tasks:** Struggling to complete everyday activities, particularly when you have others who are depending on your care – children or elderly.
- **Feeling disconnected:** Experiencing feelings of numbness or that what is going on is somehow not real.
- **Increased use of drugs or alcohol:** Using more alcohol or drugs (including prescription medication) than you would like, especially when it starts to affect your daily life and you don't want this to happen.
- **Loss of interest:** Losing interest in activities or hobbies that used to bring you joy.

“In my opinion, the main difficulty is understanding that you need help. First, you need to understand that you need psychological help - this is the most important thing. Then, if you understand that you need support, and you are not afraid to go to a psychologist, because you do not accept social stereotypes, which are still the source of many problems for us, then you will easily find your psychologist [...] I realised I needed a psychologist because there were issues that I couldn't share with my husband, my kids, or my family. I needed someone who would just listen, support me, and not judge me. Just no judgment.”

*Person in migration in Slovakia*

Sometimes, especially when a difficult situation lasts for a long time, it may seem that there is no solution and that the circumstances will never change. But do not hesitate to ask for help! **The situation might not change but your perspective on it can, as well as how you cope with it.**

Once you are looking for professional help, most often the easiest way is via a **general practice doctor** or a **nurse**. They will give you the first support you need and check if you will need some more specialised support.

Here is who can offer such support and what they do:

“Remember that adaptation takes time, and every step forward is a small victory [...] I try to remind myself that difficulties are temporary, and that each new day can bring change.”

*Person in migration in Slovakia*

		WHO ARE THEY?	WHAT DO THEY DO?
Other professions	Social workers	They will support you in your <b>social needs and offer basic support</b> for your feelings and difficult thoughts. They will refer you to specialised professionals if needed, since they are not specialised in mental health.	They <b>help individuals navigate complex systems like healthcare, housing, and legal services, making it easier to access the support they need.</b>  By offering practical guidance, counselling, and connecting people to community resources, social workers often help reduce the stress and isolation that often come with migration. They also advocate for individuals, assist with language barriers, and help resolve everyday problems.
	Interpreters & cultural mediators	They will translate between you and the professional in your presence. This can be done online, by telephone or face-to-face.	The <b>interpreters' role is to accurately translate</b> between you and the professionals assisting you, ensuring mutual understanding when you do not speak the same language. <b>They do not speak for you or the professionals, nor take actions on your behalf, but help facilitate communication.</b>  <b>Cultural mediators help people in migration understand life in a new country.</b> They not only translate between languages but also explain local customs, rules, and available services. They also help local organisations learn about the cultures and needs of migrants. This work <b>helps everyone communicate and get along more easily</b> , helping people who are migrating settle into a new community.

Mental health specialist	Psychologists	<p><b>Mental health professional</b> who offers a safe and <b>confidential</b> space for you to talk about your difficult feelings, thoughts, and problems</p> <p>They <b>do not prescribe medication</b></p>	<p>They can help you gain <b>new perspectives on challenges, discover your strengths, and find support to cope better</b>. Through counselling and psychotherapy, they assist with overcoming difficulties by helping you change how you perceive problems, improving relationships, and developing healthy coping strategies. <b>Psychologists ask questions and listen carefully, offer guidance if appropriate, and teach skills to manage problems.</b></p>
	Psychiatrists	<p><b>Medical doctor who specialises in diagnosing and treating mental health conditions using both medication and therapy.</b></p> <p>They <b>can prescribe medication</b> and monitor how it affects the body, adjusting the treatment as needed.</p>	<p>They usually treat people whose <b>difficulties are such that their everyday functioning is severely disrupted</b>. Their focus is on medical treatment and managing mental health conditions with a combination of medication and talking to their patients.</p>

To make sure they help you the right way, these professionals:

- Often **collaborate** to provide the best mental health support.
- Share a common principle of **confidentiality**, which means to keep what you shared private.
- Treat everyone with **kindness and respect**, no matter who they are.
- **Act in the best interests of their patients and clients**, offering the best care and advice for their needs.
- **They should always be honest with people and make sure they understand** their (treatment) **options before making decisions**.
- They **do not make a decision regarding your legal status**.

# CONCLUSION

Hopefully, this guide has given you some ideas on how to take care of your mental health and well-being in times of difficulties you might be experiencing. Certainly, there are many more things that could work for you, and you might already be doing some of them. Some of the ideas in this guide might not feel relevant to your current situation. But if you return to it at some point in the future, you might find that something resonates or fits better at that time.

# Support services in Croatia

## Telephone numbers – for free

- **Emergency number:** 112

## Counselling & support centres

- **Centar dobrodošlice za izbjeglice i migrante - Welcome Center (One stop shop):** Not related directly to mental health but this centre allows foreigners to get help regarding their rights and integration in Croatia as well as finding languages classes, recreational activities, other events and activities related to integration...

**Address:** Petrinjska ulica 31, Zagreb

Open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m,  
Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 am to 6 pm.

**Telephone:** +38517001974 **Mobile:** 091 1622129

**E-mail:** [integracija.stranaca@zagreb.hr](mailto:integracija.stranaca@zagreb.hr)

- **Društvo za psihološku pomoć (DPP) / Society for Psychological Assistance (SPA) - Centar za djecu, mlade i obitelj MODUS / Centre for Children, Youth and Families MODUS**

**Services:** Psychosocial support and counseling

**Address:** Ulica kneza Mislava 11/1 (courtyard building, 1. floor),  
Zagreb

**Working Hours:** Monday to Friday from 09:00 - 20:00 h

**Telephone:** +385 1 4826 111

**E-mail:** [spa@dpp.hr](mailto:spa@dpp.hr), [modus@dpp.hr](mailto:modus@dpp.hr)

- **Rehabilitacijski centar za stres i traumu - The Rehabilitation Centre for Stress and Trauma (RCT)**

**Address:** Kvaternikov trg 12, Zagreb

**Telephone:** +385 1 4641 342

**E-mail:** [info@rctzg.hr](mailto:info@rctzg.hr)

- **Hrvatski crveni križ (HCK) - Croatian Red cross**

The Croatian Red Cross provides psychosocial support in both group and individual formats, offers practical assistance with daily living, and organises a range of social, educational, and recreational activities.

**Address:** Reception Center for Asylum Seekers, Sarajevska cesta 41, 10010, Zagreb.

- **Médecins du Monde ASBL Belgique - Dokters van de Wereld VZW België office in Croatia (MdM)**

In Croatia, MdM provides medical and psychological support through group and individual activities and facilitates access to healthcare services.

**Address:** Reception Center for Asylum Seekers, Sarajevska cesta 41, 10010, Zagreb,

# Support services in Slovakia

## Emergency help (Free hotlines)

- **Nezábudka Mental Health Helpline:** 0800 222 450 (UA/RU), 0800 800 566 (SK)
- **IPčko Crisis Helpline:** 0800 500 888, online chat: [krizovalinkapomoci.sk](http://krizovalinkapomoci.sk)
- **National Mental Health Helpline:** 0800 193 193
- **Children's Helpline:** 116 111 (SK, 24/7), 0800 500 500 (UA, Tue 13:30–19:30)

## Counseling & support centres

- **IPčko "Káčko"**  
24/7 Walk-in Support  
**Bratislava, Nitra, Trnava, Košice, etc.**
- **Blue Dot Centers (UNHCR/ UNICEF)**  
Free support  
**Bratislava, Košice, Michalovce, Nitra**

- **Slovak Catholic Charity (Caritas)**  
Free counselling  
**Bratislava:** +421 902 190 444,  
**Košice:** +421 911 711 357

- **Slovak Humanitarian Council (SHC)**  
Psychological & social support Bratislava, Košice, Nitra, etc.

- **People in Peril**  
Free psychosocial support  
**Košice:** +421 911 720 105,  
**Prešov, Zvolen, Banská Bystrica**

## Trauma & specialised support

- **EQUITA**  
Trauma & Gender-Based Violence  
**Telephone:** +421 948 339 647
- **TENENET**  
Community & Psychological Support  
**Telephone:** +421 911 546 044
- **Public Mental Health Services**  
Free for insured migrants (NGOs can assist with referrals)

# Support services in Belgium

## Telephone numbers – for free

- Emergency number: 112
- Questions about suicide – Dutch or English: 1813
- Have a talk (teleonthaal) – Dutch: 106
- Have a talk (télé accueil) – French: 107
- Have a talk for young people (awel) - dutch: 102
- Have a talk for young people (ecoute enfants) – French: 103
- Questions about violence: 1712
- Community Help Centre Helpline - English (logistic to emotional problems): +32(0)26484014

## Websites

- Information on mental health: <https://www.tegek.be/>
- Organisation for well-being: <https://www.caw.be/>

# Support services in Spain

## Emergency numbers

- **Help for suicidal behaviour: 024**
- **Telephone service providing information, legal advice and immediate psychosocial care by specialised personnel for all forms of violence against women: 016**
- **Esperanza: 717 003 717**

## Counselling & support centres

- **Centro SIRA**

Centro de Atención a Víctimas de Malos Tratos y Tortura

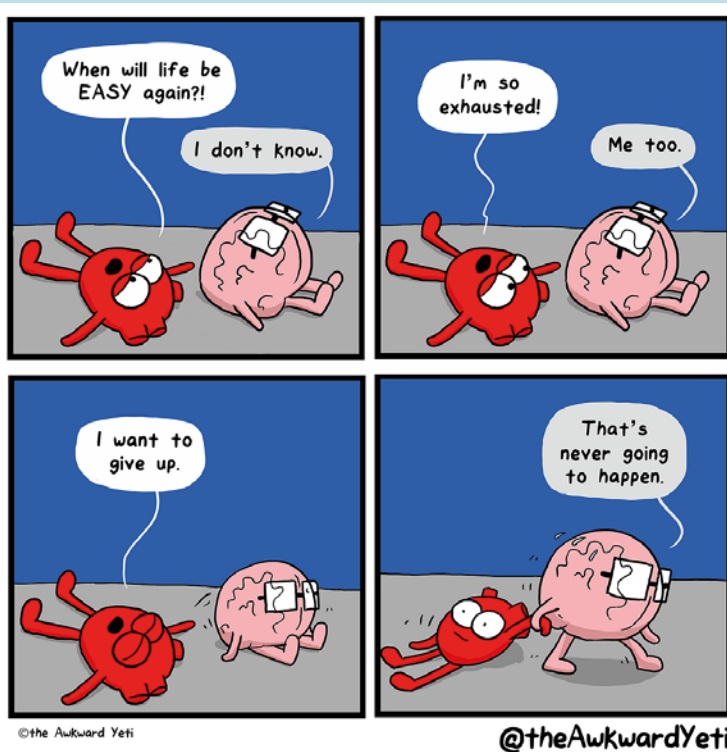
**Website :** centrosira.org

- **Salud Entre Culturas**

**Website :** saludentreculturas.es

- **Centro de psicología y psiquiatría transcultural de Vall D'hebron**

**Website :** <https://hospital.vallhebron.com/es/asistencia/especialidades/psiquiatria>



The cartoons in this guide are the work of an artist, available at [theawkwardyeti.com](http://theawkwardyeti.com)

*The project "Migration in Mind - Enhancing access to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for persons in migration by improving mental health literacy, the quality of care and breaking through stigma" is funded by the EU4Health programme of the European Union. Views and opinions expressed in this document are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HADEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.*

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