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EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT
(EUR-OPA)

**PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND SERVICES TO
DISASTER VICTIMS**

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

Introduction

Adequate psychosocial intervention following disasters can reduce ill health and foster resilience if handled appropriately. The European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) wants the citizens of Europe and the Mediterranean to have access to comparable services regardless of where they live. By a more systematic focus on psychosocial support within each member State's emergency planning, by proper training of volunteers and professionals, and by describing a minimum level of care for those who experience disasters, this aim can be reached. The enclosed draft recommendation which has been proposed by the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations will ensure that a similar level of care will be accessible for those who become victims of a disaster throughout Europe and the Mediterranean.

The Committee of Permanent Correspondents is invited to examine and discuss the present draft recommendation and, if appropriate, adopt it.

Draft Recommendation on psychosocial support and services for victims of disasters

The Committee of Permanent Correspondents:

- A. recognising that adequate psychological intervention following disasters can reduce ill health and foster resilience if handled appropriately;
- B. noting that its Medium Term Plan 2007-2011 encourages the Agreement to promote, in co-operation with professional associations, the establishment of networks of specialists with the capacity to act in emergency situations or to train local psychologists in dealing with disaster victims, in particular children and other vulnerable groups;
- C. conscious that it is desirable that each member State of the Agreement incorporates psychosocial support in its provisions for emergency planning, promoting proper training of volunteers and professionals and setting standards as to the minimum level of care to be received by victims of disasters;
- D. thanking the Standing Committee on Disaster Crisis and Trauma Psychology of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) for their ideas and their wish to collaborate with the Agreement in promoting an improved psychosocial attention to victims of disasters;
- E. **recommends** that member States:
 1. ensure that, following disasters, survivors, bereaved and rescue personnel have appropriate access to psychosocial help and services free of charge;
 2. integrate as appropriate, psychosocial support into national laws and regulations and ensure that such support be part of emergency plans;
 3. ensure that psychosocial support and services include the following elements:
 - i. psychological first aid is available for all survivors and bereaved immediately after disaster. Adequate information systems that secure early identification of those involved, embedded in a caring environment, reduce the mental strain of individuals and families, and should be prioritized in the early help efforts;
 - ii. out-reach early interventions are actively offered to bereaved families and survivors
 - iii. screening is undertaken (1-3 months after the disaster) to ensure that effective treatment is available for people at risk

- iv. culturally sensitive long term follow-up is offered to individuals, families and communities that experience significant mental distress over time as a result of the disaster
 - v. special efforts are taken to ensure that children get appropriate services and assistance.
 - vi. Specific concern and approach are adopted for vulnerable or highly exposed group.
4. promote the elaboration of action plans on psychosocial support at national, regional and local levels, as appropriate, including the following elements:
 - i) coordination of psychosocial resources and activation plans from the federal to the local level
 - ii) mapping the trauma risks within a country with its possible psychosocial consequences
 - iii) mapping resources available for psychosocial support
 - iv) designate parties responsible for organising and delivering psychosocial support
 - v) inclusion of psychosocial resources in emergency drills and exercises
 - vi) description of the services that survivors and bereaved have the right to access including community support, and the duration of services.
5. promote appropriate training of professionals and volunteers who work with victims of disasters;
6. collaborate with other European and Mediterranean States in exchanging experiences and good practices in the field of psychosocial assistance, ensuring mutual help and support in case of transboundary disaster;
7. keep the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the Agreement informed of measures taken to implement this Recommendation.