



Hellenic Red Cross research into the psychological support needs of people displaced from Ukraine

Athens, 2024

CONTEXT

Program description.....	1
Designing the survey	1
Methodology	2
Results	4
Suggestions	7
Observations	9

Program Description:

What are the main objectives of the DG Sante/ EU4 Health?

The main objective of the program is to provide quality Psychological First Aid (PFA) and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Services, to individuals who have sought refuge in Greece due to the armed conflict in Ukraine. The program also aims to enhance the skills and capacity of National Society staff and volunteers, as well as professionals from other organizations supporting people who are refugees or migrants.

The program started in June 2022 and is already being implemented in five countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Poland. Since January 2023, 25 more National Societies have been included in the program, including the Hellenic Red Cross.

The program is managed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), while technical support is provided by the IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support.



Designing the survey:

Purposes and objectives

Surveys seeking to better understand the situation and needs of people National Societies intended to support were a standard requirement for participation in the DG Sante/EU4 Health program. In Greece this helped HRC explore people's needs and perceptions of psychological support, feeding in to the development of an action plan built on insights provided through the survey.

Research in Greece was designed and implemented by the program team with the technical support of the HRC Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) team, and sought to understand:

- Basic changes and issues that have affected the mental health of individuals since the beginning of the crisis
- Any changes in people's emotions since the beginning of the crisis
- Activities that have a positive impact on people's mental wellbeing
- How secure people feel where they are living now
- People's awareness of the psychological support available to them

Methodology :

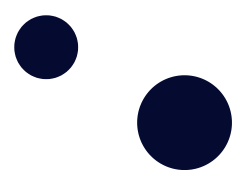
Preparing and conducting the survey

Through participatory meetings, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were identified as the preferred data collection method, because:

- Recommendations from Ukrainian cultural mediators strongly encouraged FGDs as a culturally preferred approach that would enable interactive discussion to explore issues through open discussion and dialogue
- It was felt FGDs would also provide a secure and encouraging environment for the discussion of mental health and psychological support and help enable people to feel safe expressing their opinions and emotions

During the preparation phase of the survey, the CEA team conducted technical meetings with the staff who would support the FGD's. During these meetings, practical issues and details that needed to be taken into consideration in advance were identified and discussed, such as:

- Ensuring provision of translation during the FGDs, and identifying suitable locations for the meetings
- Ensuring a diverse, inclusive, and representative sample of participants (gender, age, family situation etc)
- Keeping participants informed with timely and accurate information on the purpose and objectives of the survey, and managing expectations
- Preparing and supporting interviewers with management of the FGDs, fostering an atmosphere of trust and safety, ensuring all participants were able to contribute to the dialogue, observing non-verbal communication and ensuring appropriate handling of potentially sensitive questions
- Taking and compiling notes (including the creation of a standard online form for notetakers to use)
- Supporting data analysis and compilation of the survey report
- Communicating and disseminating research results to coordination networks and meetings, and planning future actions based on the findings



FGDs took place between October 11th and November 30th 2023, with a total of 52 participants from Ukraine forming a representative sample in terms of gender (12 males and 40 females), age (17-80 years) and family situation. Participants were all people who had previous contact with HRC services (Chart 1).

In total, 8 Focus Group Discussions (FGD's) were conducted at the Multifunctional Centers for Refugees in Athens and Thessaloniki, the Educational Health Station of Athens and the Psychosocial Support Service.

Thirteen HRC staff members supported implementation of the FGDs (program coordinators, social workers, nurses, interpreters, cultural mediators, and others).

For the FGD's, a structured questionnaire consisting of 6 questions was used.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted by the CEA team through the coding of responses and statistical representation of results.



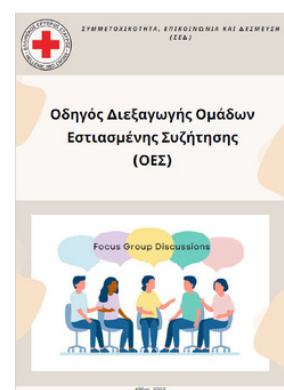
8 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS 52 PARTICIPANTS 17-80 AGE SCALE



Chart 1



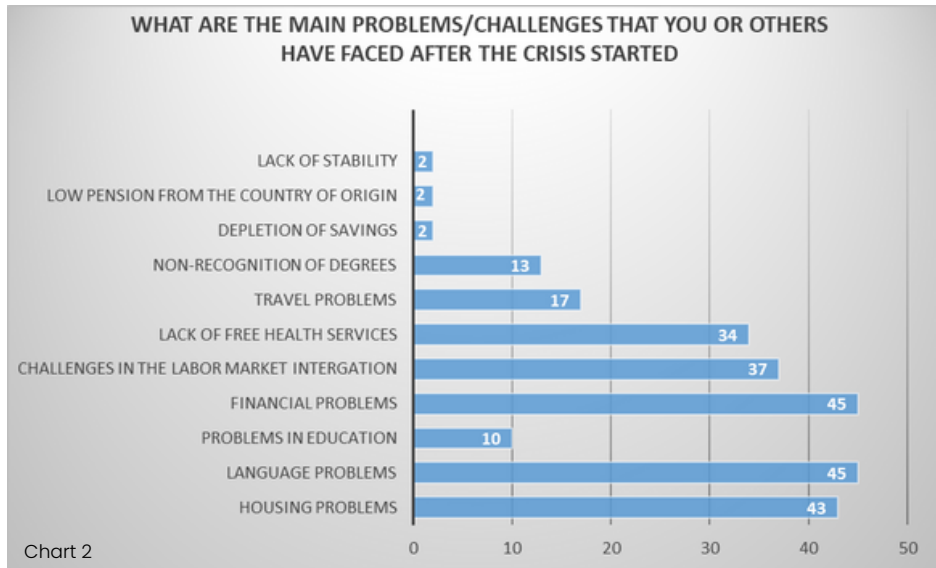
The designing and conduction of the FGD's was based on the HRC FGD's Guide that is available as a CEA methodological tool for the National Society.



Results:

Main findings of the survey

Question 1:



The three main problems/challenges that participants faced since the beginning of the crisis are:

1. Economic issues

2. Problems with the Greek language

3. Housing related issues

Additionally, difficulties in integrating into the labor market were reported by 37 individuals while 34 individuals mentioned the lack of access to free health services (chart 2).

Regarding economic problems, participants expressed challenges in paying their bills, inability to cover daily living expenses (due to the increased cost of goods), and the absence of allowances to provide financial support.

Participants mentioned various challenges that people faced when it came to learning the Greek language, noting that it was particularly hard for older people.

Without Greek, daily communication and interactions are a challenge - examples given included difficulties faced when enrolling a child in a basketball team, and the challenges young people faced when adapting to school in an entirely new language.

Language issues were also seen as a barrier to accessing healthcare services, and in communicating with hospital administration staff and medical professionals, with a lack of translations services also noted. Participants felt there were only limited opportunities to practice the language and were unaware of where they could access free language classes. Participants also felt attending classes could be a challenge due to work commitments

In relations to housing, participants identified the expiration of the "Ilios" program (the house renting was not funded anymore, so they had to pay for their own), high rental costs, and barriers as a result of being foreign (landlords were hesitant in making contracts with Ukrainians), were the main difficulties they faced.

Language was again identified as a barrier to accessing the labour market, as well as gender - a large proportion of people displaced from Ukraine are female and already face challenges in accessing employment - age (for those over 60) and the lack of work permits, that in some cases lead people to seek irregular employment.

In relation to access to medical care, participants mentioned that had difficulty accessing specialized medical care. Regarding non-free medical care, they mentioned that some medical examinations have to be done in private clinics and can be quite costly.

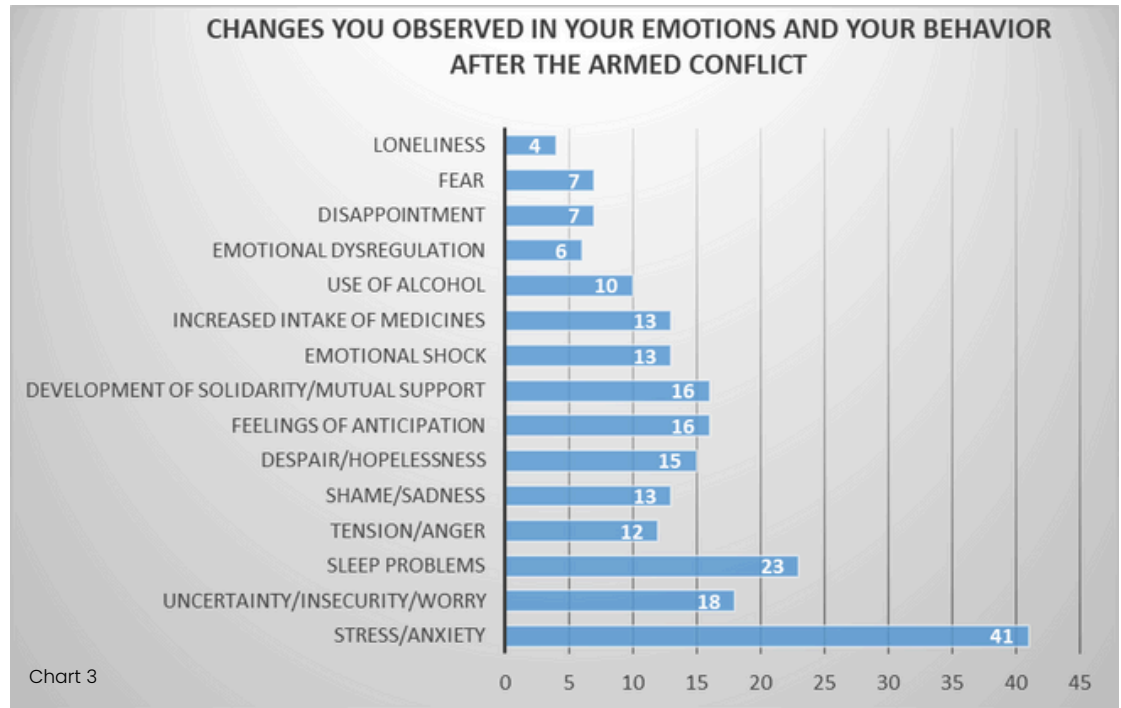
The ending of access to free public transport was mentioned as a challenge by 17 participants, while another two mentioned the general lack of stability and changes in where they lived, the lifestyle and diet.

Educational challenges were mentioned by ten people, where the limited availability of classes teaching people the Ukrainian language was noted.

Question 2:

Regarding the changes participants observed in their emotions and behaviour after becoming displaced:

The majority of respondents (41 individuals) reported experiencing stress and anxiety, 23 individuals mentioned sleep problems, while 18 individuals indicated that they have developed feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, and worry (Chart 3).

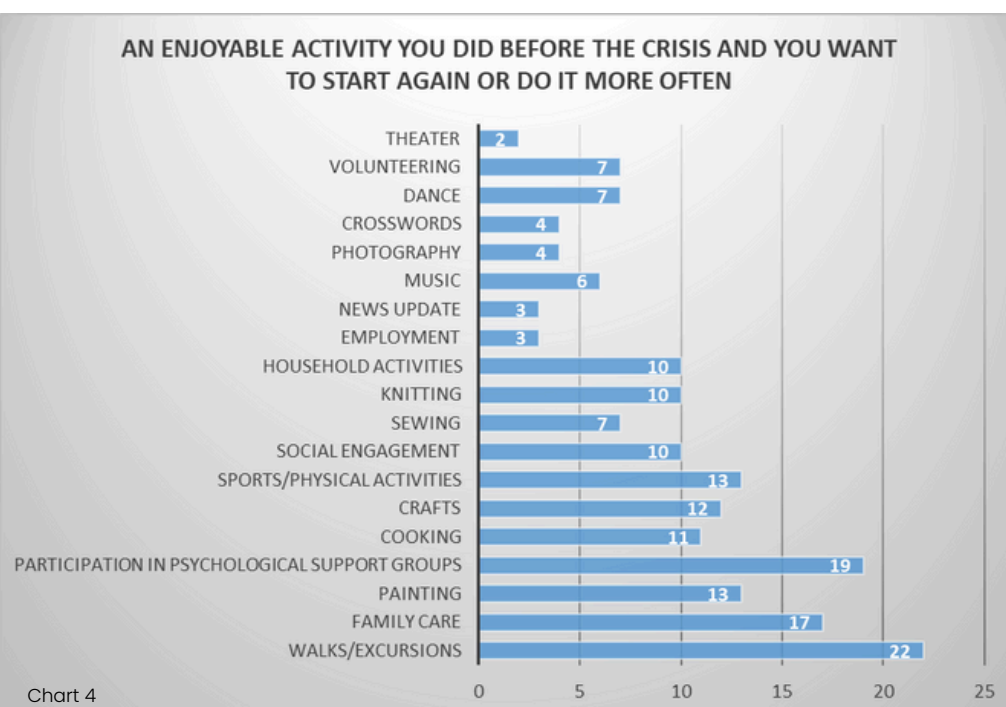


They also reported emotions such as feelings of anticipation (not knowing when they will return to their home country, with their lives being "on hold" as they described), feelings of despair and hopelessness (after seeing homes and property destroyed), but also feelings of solidarity and mutual support between members of the Ukrainian community.

Participants also reported feelings of tension and anger and emotional outbursts, as well as feelings of shame and sorrow, which were attributed by some to the situation of having to rely on other people, and feeling like passive recipients of support. As one participant said: "We have to ask for help, as older people we feel ashamed to be in this situation, to be a burden to our children and not to be able to contribute any more."

Emotional shock was reported as arising from the dislocation of family relationships, particularly for people with mixed Ukrainian/Russian families. The continuous exposure to news related to the conflict was also identified as contributing to people's distress, with sadness and disappointment at the curtailment of previous life and leisure activities that they were no longer able to pursue.

Question 3:

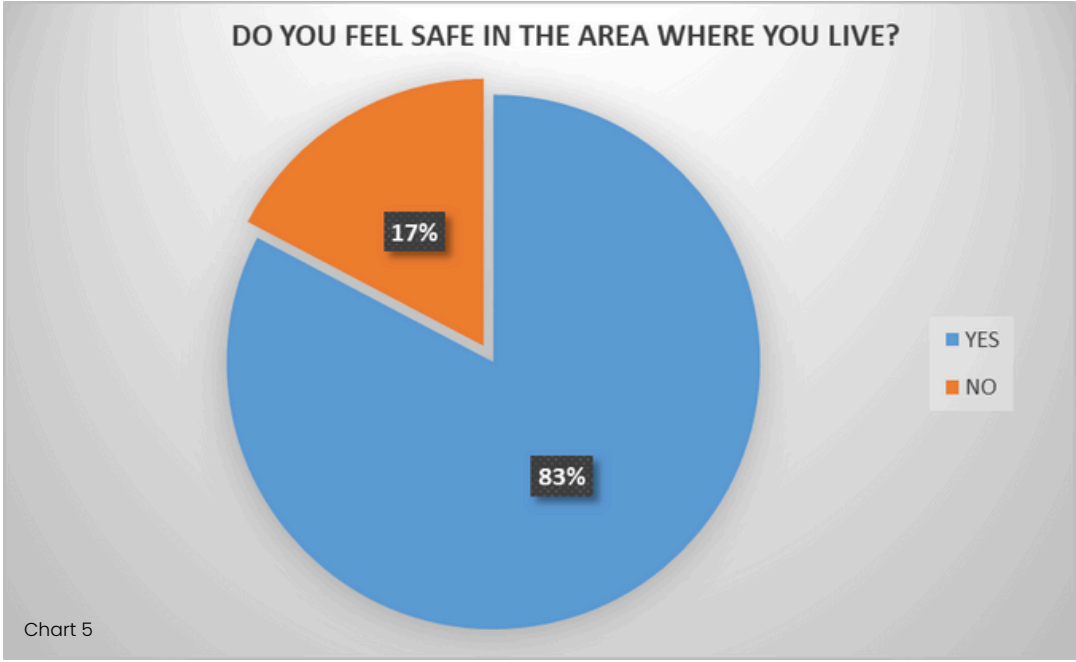


Regarding the question on which activities participants enjoyed most before and after the crisis, the majority mentioned walks/excursions involving swimming, and cycling (22 individuals), participating in psychological support groups (19 individuals), and practicing everyday family duties (17 individuals), since the parental role contributes positively to their psychological wellbeing (chart 4).

Painting was mentioned by 13 people as an activity they enjoyed, with participants also mentioning that painting groups of four to five people had been set up with members selling their artworks to generate income and support their families in Ukraine.

Psychological support groups were mentioned as happening both in person and online, but lack of translation was raised as an issue, creating a barrier to immediacy and spontaneity.

Finally, household activities include redecorating the interior space of the home. Specifically, one participant mentioned, "Moving furniture and rearranging the space helps me relax."



Question 4:

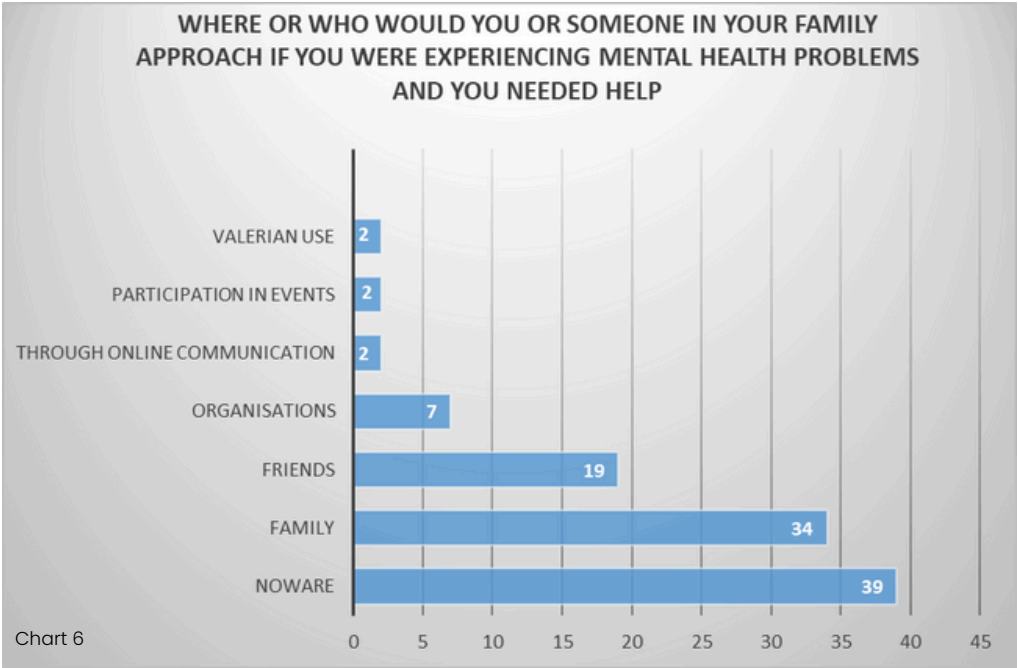
The overwhelming majority of respondents (83%) stated that they feel safe in the area where they reside, mentioning that there is calmness and peace in the country. Additionally, they highlighted that the positive and welcoming nature of the Greek people contributed positively to their social intergration (Chart 5).

17% responded negatively, specifying that the reasons contributing to their insecurity are: **a)** the geographical area/place of residence (specifically Agios Nikolaos, Viktoria, and the presence of substance-dependent individuals), and **b)** criminality (one case of assault, theft, and school bullying was mentioned).

Question 4:

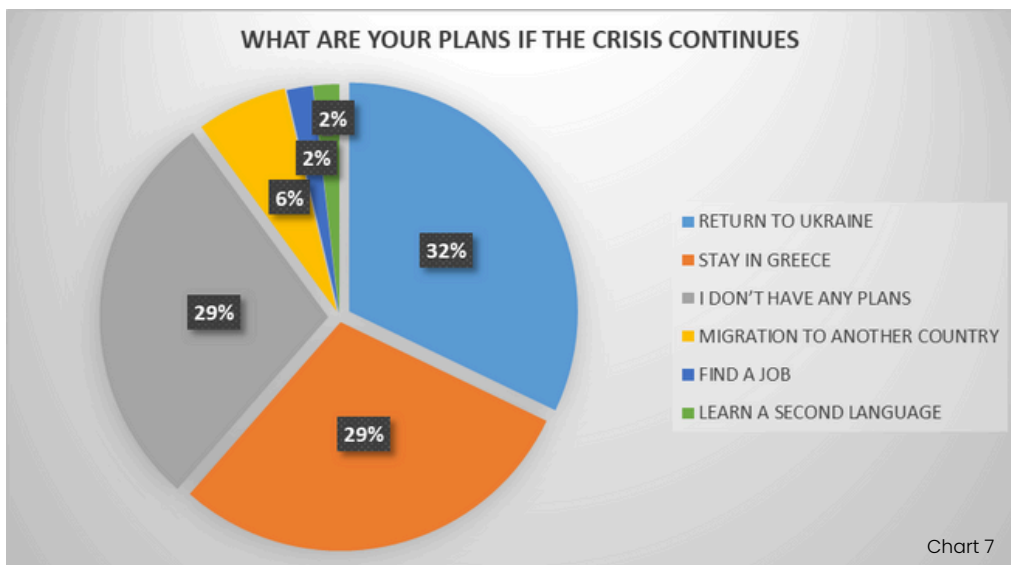
In case of emotional problems or mental health issues, 39 individuals stated that they would not seek help anywhere, specifying that "we are the doctors of our own" and "we don't feel anything, we feel flat".

34 individuals would adress issues to their family, while 19 individuals would seek help from friends (Chart 6).



Seven people mentioned that they would turn to NGOs and organisations like SoS Village, Blue Refugee Centre, Polydynamic Refugee Centre of ESS, Iris or Alkyoni, for support.

Question 5:



Regarding the plans of the respondents in case the crisis continues, 32% stated that they are considering returning to Ukraine due to the:

- Insecurity in Greece (but only if Ukraine is safe)
- Difficulty in finding employment in Greece

- Fact that their families are in Ukraine
- Discontinuation of rent-housing programs

29% stated that they will remain in Greece because:

- They have nowhere to return (their homes have been destroyed)
- They have already found work in Greece
- Moving is a difficult process
- They are satisfied with the behavior of Greek people

29% stated that they have no plans since everything depends on:

- When the war will end
- The economic situation

Smaller percentages mentioned that they are considering migrating to other countries, finding employment, and learning a second foreign language.

Suggestions:

Requests, questions, and opinions expressed by the participants

During the conduction of the Focus Group Discussions (FGD's) the discussion and the interactive dialogue gave participants the opportunity to express personal comments, opinions, ideas, suggestions, and requests, providing additional valuable information regarding a wide range of topics.

Specifically:



Requests

- Financial support of 50 euros vouchers for supermarkets
- Financial support of 20-25 euros for bus transportation
- Support to cover medical expenses in clinics outside the state health system
- Creation of Greek language groups in order to practice and interact with the Greek community
- More vocational training and employment support programmes for adults and out-of-school activities for children available in the areas where they live (manicure/pedicure, knitting, macramé, handicrafts, music groups for minors, sports groups for adults and children, excursions, extreme sports such as rafting and skiing)
- Psychological support programs with Ukrainian therapists (in order to overcome the issue of interpretation and ensure direct communication between therapist and patient)
- More available interpreters in order to facilitate face-to-face communication during medical appointments
- Establishment of an Information Center in order to provide both face-to-face and online information about the available services for the Ukrainian population
- The FGD's should be repeated, as they provided an opportunity for participants to express their feelings and discuss issues that concerned them
- Creation of an online platform for finding dignified employment opportunities which match participants' qualifications (and not just job positions for cleaners or kitchen assistants)
- Support regarding online payments
- More cultural and entertainment performances which people could attend for free
- Support with finding more affordable real estate agencies



Questions

- Availability of social housing
- Possibility of providing free clothing
- Future plans regarding the temporary protection card



Opinions

- Two participants suggested offering piano lessons for new learners
- It was expressed that Greek people are not aggressive which greatly facilitated their social integration

- One participant expressed admiration for Greek history and feels grateful to be in Greece
- It was mentioned that it is important to learn the Greek language as a sign of respect for the host country
- One participant mentioned that didn't face any difficulties enrolling their children in school and received support from the school environment
- It was also expressed that young people in Greece having more freedom to do and behaviour how they like, and that contradicts to the more conservative environments in Ukrainian culture

Recommendations:

Conclusions from the side of the interviewers

- The majority of participants warmly thanked HRC for the opportunity to express their concerns and worries, stating that it was a positive process for them. They also requested for similar meetings to be conducted again in future due to the positive impact on their well-being
- Participants reported that taking part in the FGDs was beneficial to their wellbeing, with the events providing an opportunity for positive interaction between group members, as well as a chance to sit and talk to people from a similar culture and with similar life experiences. In some cases participants exchanged contact details, suggested supporting each other by sharing resources, and shared information about upcoming social and cultural events
- It was observed that smaller groups were easier to manage with more opportunities for dialogue and discussion between participants
- The sample population participating in the FGDs included a very small percentage of young people, suggesting that young people are less frequently in touch with humanitarian service providers like the Red Cross
- Some questions had to be rephrased and explained in a more clear way to the participants in order to ensure their level of understanding, and also there were groups that chose not to answer certain questions at all



In the designing and implementation of the survey participated:

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