

Template for developing a Well-Being Strategy and Policies

for Civil Society Organisations
Supporting Refugee Protection in
Europe



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1. Introduction

The Policy Template and Annexes are intended to facilitate the introduction of Well-Being Policies by organisations supporting refugee protection in Europe. They represent a tangible tool made available to such organisations for them to adapt and include within their own policy frameworks.

It is hoped that this accessible, modular and off-the-shelf tool will encourage organisations to take the first steps towards committing to their team members' well-being.

The Policy Template is composed of four basic documents that work with each other with the aim of producing one final Well-Being Policy that suits your own organisation:

- the **Template** itself;
- **Annex 1**, laying out a series of potential organisational responsibilities;
- **Annex 2**, offering a list of individual actions for team members;
- **Annex 3**, a useful Checklist to be read side-by-side with the other documents.

Using the Checklist will guide you towards reading through the Template and filling it with elements from Annexes 1 and 2.

2. Template: Well-Being Policy for Refugee-Assisting Organisations

2.1 Values and Objectives

The well-being of all team members is a top priority for the organisation. We acknowledge that whilst our team members are the organisation's back-bone, their activities within the organisation are only one part of their lives. It is our vision to enable staff to lead healthy and productive professional lives, to reach and maintain their full potential in the workplace, and to deliver high-quality service for the benefit of the people we work with and for.

Refugees seeking our services face unique and often complex mental health challenges due to displacement, trauma, uncertainty, and structural barriers. The pressure on staff members and volunteers is increasing due to hostile environments, intense workloads and structural short-comings. In many situations, the pressures are unavoidable as they constitute an inherent part of working with refugees in our national and European context.

The primary aim of this Well-Being Policy is to minimize the impact of these pressures by setting out the preventative and protective measures the organization is adopting, whilst also flagging individual steps each team member may take to protect their well-being and that of their colleagues. This Well-Being Policy is based on the following key values and principles:

- Physical and emotional **safety** of all our team members;
- A working environment that engenders **trust**;
- Offering meaningful **choice** and a **voice** in decision-making;
- Supporting **collaboration** of personal experience in overcoming challenges and improving the way we work as a whole.
- Recognising resilience as a pathway towards dignified **empowerment**.

We also underline that this Policy also seeks to pay attention to the specific situation of individual team members, either due to their identity or to particularly challenging situations they might be experiencing at any given moment.

This Well-being Policy should be read in conjunction with the Organisation's other policies and is building on the values of our organisation.

In addition, we build on the core principle of a trauma-informed approach: safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment. By putting these principles central we acknowledge that past or ongoing events affect both our team members and the people they serve, and we prevent re-traumatization, reduce burnout, and strengthen resilience across the organisation.

2.2 Shared Responsibility

The organisation's Well-Being Focal Point is XXXXX. XXXXX is responsible for overseeing this policy and all related communications, complaints, suggestions, etc. should be sent directly to them. In case communications need to be kept confidential from XXXXX, they should be sent to XXXXX.

Taking care of our team members' well-being is a shared responsibility. Whilst we will do our utmost to create spaces and offer incentives/benefits, team members' well-being is also a responsibility everyone has towards themselves, colleagues, clients and the organisation.

What does this mean? It means that activities and initiatives aimed at taking care of team members' well-being will be carried out by the organisation, whilst others will be implemented by team members themselves, either individually or with others. Either approach implemented alone is ineffective.

The organisation also appeals to everyone's good sense and personal commitment. We are happy to be flexible and accommodating, yet of course this is entirely dependent on a relationship of mutual trust. In the end, it is not only about separate measures, but about creating a culture in our workplace that supports the well-being of all.

2.3 Measures adopted by the Organisation

As a confirmation of our commitment to your well-being, we will be guaranteeing the following measures:

- XXXXX
- XXXXX

(COPY/TRANPOSE/PASTE FROM ANNEX 1 - MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES)

2.4 Individual Actions

These are operational measures you are strongly urged to explore and implement, either individually or with others. If you require support or assistance with any of these, do not hesitate to contact the Well-Being Focal Point XXXXX, your line manager or supervisor.

- XXXXX
- XXXXX

(COPY/TRANPOSE/PASTE FROM ANNEX 2 - INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS)

2.5 Policy Monitoring and Evaluation

This Policy is adopted on XXXXX and will be reviewed every XXXXX months/years. It is crucial this policy is based on the needs and expectations of our team members. That's why we commit to implementing monitoring and evaluation based on inputs of our team members by XXXXX.

Version history:

- Version 1: XXXXX
- Version 2: XXXXX

2.6 Communication and Awareness

Communication and awareness are a crucial part of this strategy because they ensure that everyone in the organisation understands the resources, policies, and practices available to support their well-being.

That is why our organisation commits to XXXXX.

Clear, consistent communication also helps normalise conversations about well-being, encourages participation, and signals that the organisation genuinely values well-being and mental health, which is essential for fostering a culture where psychological safety, support, and resilience are embedded in everyday workplace practices.

Annex 1: Measures adopted by the Organisation

Section 1: Introduction

Leadership plays a key role in shaping workplace culture and ensuring mental health is supported. Leaders are responsible for preventing harm, supporting staff, and leading by example to create a workplace where mental health is protected and promoted. The key-principles of a trauma-informed practice offer a solid foundation for the way we work:

- **Safety:** We ensure physical and emotional safety. This includes reasonable freedom from threat or harm, and attempts to prevent further traumatisation;
- **Trust:** We build trust to help people feel safe, prevent re-traumatization, and make it easier to open up and engage.
- **Choice:** We ensure that people have a meaningful choice and a voice in the decision-making process at both individual and organisational levels.
- **Collaboration:** We recognise the value of personal experience in overcoming challenges and improving the way we work as a whole.
- **Empowerment:** We highlight and strengthen resilience of people, encouraging confidence, solidarity, and dignity.

Section 2: Ideas to copy/transform/paste into the Policy

Creating a healthy work environment

- We will adopt organisation policies that ensure a safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace culture, in particular on workplace bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- We will adopt organisation policies seeking to regulate work-related activities outside of working hours, such as travels, emails, and messaging.
- We will develop a workplace that puts the development of autonomy, competence and connection central in policy and practice. These principles are central topics to address during personal development reviews and support in the shape of training is offered to identify what staff members need to thrive on these three principles.
- We foster a workplace that values employees input, collaboration and shared / democratic decision-making. This means that important policies and decisions are made with input of staff members, for example by gathering input from teams or by organising focus groups.
- We integrate mental health into occupational health & safety frameworks and have clear procedures for addressing stress, conflict, or crises at work, including

professional support for mental health and access to a confidential councillor or person of trust.

- We ensure reasonable workloads, fair deadlines, and realistic expectations, in line with existing resources and capacities. This also means being realistic about what we can do in the context of increased pressure on our organisation and funding cuts.
- We will provide you with resting periods in the eventuality of serious incidents or distressing personal situations.
- (We will ensure) You are entitled to XXXXX days' working remotely, to be discussed with your supervisor/manager.
- The office's core working hours are XXXXX. Outside those hours, you are invited to establish your working hours in discussion with your supervisor/manager.
- We will offer compensation time for those situations where you are overworking and/or travelling or overseas on work-related commitments.
- We will formulate clear job descriptions that reflect present responsibilities and targets, and also map out areas for professional growth. Descriptions also include clearly set out reporting lines, so staff members know who is their line manager that is responsible for support and discussing development and health issues.
- We ensure that line managers/ leadership are aware and capable of taking their responsibility in supporting and protecting the well-being of staff members.
- We offer you free and confidential counselling sessions.
- In the week before, during or after your birthday you may take an additional day of vacation.
- [Intervision](#) sessions will be organised at least once per XXXXX, during which all participants will be encouraged to discuss various aspects of their workload.
- We offer you an annual personal growth allowance of up to € XXXXX, to be used for non-work-related activities such as buying books, travelling, gym or fitness membership, a day at the spa.
- A trained mental health first aid contact will be appointed in order to deal with in-office psychological emergencies or intense situations.

Awareness and capacity strengthening

- At least once a year, all team members will be invited to participate in a well-being training session. The training will cover the themes of stress, burnout and secondary and vicarious trauma, organisational skills, communication and related themes including practical tips and guidance. The training content for team leaders/managers/supervisors will include components that ensure they are alerted to the well-being of their team members.
- The agendas of team meetings/supervisor meetings/ XXXXX will include a mental health component, thereby creating structured spaces for honest exchanges.

- Every XXXXX months, we will share with all team members information and resources relevant to your well-being, such as support services, reading materials, suggestions, etc. Share and communicate actively about available resources and helplines (e.g., counselling, coaching, professional psychological support, employee assistance programs, HR support).
- During interviews, onboarding and personal development reviews, we will reach out in order to understand the level of team member awareness of well-being and its implications at the workplace. Support onboarding and continuous skill development to enhance growth and resilience, depending on stage in employment cycle and needed competences for the job. Identify needs during personal development reviews/ HR talks.
- We provide training on supportive team dynamics and mechanisms that enhance solidarity, for example how to give constructive feedback, how to do intervision, how to do team-building.
- We provide training to ensure that managers know how to respond to mental health disclosures and signals of undesirable behaviour appropriately.

Supportive leadership practices

- We check in regularly with employees, not just on performance but also on wellbeing. We use semi-structured format and protect confidentiality to ensure a professional approach. Use these check-ins to signal, give information and refer if needed (psychological first aid).
- We will ensure that all team members are assigned at least one mentor/supervisor to discuss issues such as workload, case management, time management, well-being, communication, etc.
- During on-boarding and every XXXXX months, a user-friendly Burnout Self-Assessment Test will be distributed to all team members. This will be a confidential process that will not be seen or retained by the organisation, yet it will guide you to identify your own needs.
- During or after serious episodes in your life, we will be open to discuss adaptation of your work time such as flexible hours, phased return to work and other adjustments. Offer accommodations when needed (adjusted and/or diversified duties, flexible hours, phased return to work). Where conditions are difficult, ask what people need to improve conditions and undertake action to meet requests.
- We encourage asking for help, constructive feedback and open communication. Ensure an effective flow of information, including by establishing clear lines of reporting.
- We foster a culture of self-care by making mental health a shared responsibility. We create time and space for self-care (for example mental health days, mindful exercises, micro-breaks, journalling) and facilitate goal-setting exercises to make personal self-care plans.

- All team members will be invited to discuss their holiday plans - especially the longer periods - in the first quarter or every year. During this discussion you will be invited to plan and take vacation leave days!
- We facilitate and encourage peer-to-peer support (formal and informal), for example by setting up a collegial support team to provide support, organise reflective sessions, debriefs, facilitate intervision to reduce isolation and stress and strengthen team trust and resilience.
- Arrange for team building days or recreational fun activities to foster relationships.
- We identify and give guidance on specific issues that cause stress and frustration, for example structural shortcomings in refugee care, job insecurity, trauma and/or aggression of people we work with and for.
- We are as transparent as possible when faced with funding cuts and reorganisation. We realise the uncertainty of working in an NGO environment can be hard and we communicate openly about processes and steps to give staff members an honest picture of the situation. A social plan is part of the process in case of layoffs.
- We ensure continuous support on setting boundaries and time management in a demanding environment.
- We foster a positive and inclusive culture. We promote teamwork, recognition, and appreciation, which contribute to positive morale and solidarity. We pay attention to and celebrate cultural traditions of team members.

Leadership by example

- We will ensure that your supervisors/ XXXXXX act as models for healthy behaviours (taking breaks, using vacation, showing openness about wellbeing, not sending emails late at night or on the weekend).

Monitoring and improvement

- We regularly assess workplace stressors (through well-being surveys, feedback, and/ or risk assessments).
- We track absenteeism, turnover, and wellbeing indicators.
- We adapt strategies based on findings to continually improve.

Annex 2: Individual Actions

Section 1: Introduction

The organisation recognises that employees are also responsible for their own well-being, and it encourages practices that support mental health. Employees are supported in taking steps to manage stress, maintain balance, and access appropriate resources.

The key-principles of a trauma-informed practice are an important source of inspiration for taking individual responsibility on a daily basis:

- **Safety:** I protect and promote my own and others' physical and emotional safety;
- **Trust:** I build trust by being reliable and consistent, and supportive and honest to others
- **Choice:** I know that I can choose to use my voice to influence my work conditions and that I do not need to accept harm to my health at work.
- **Collaboration:** I recognise the value of collaboration with colleagues in overcoming challenges and improving the way we work as a whole.
- **Empowerment:** I focus on strengthening the resilience of myself and my colleagues, encouraging confidence, solidarity, and dignity.

Section 2: Ideas to copy/transform/paste into the Policy

Workload and time management

- Plan and prioritise tasks effectively, and support others to do the same. Set realistic goals and break larger projects into manageable steps. If needed, strengthen capacities to improve time management by following training. If you need guidance or training on how to do this, reach out to your supervisor/manager.
- Take regular (micro) breaks to prevent fatigue and stress, and invite others to do the same. Schedule lunch breaks in your agenda, avoid eating behind the computer, move your body, and seek out company during these breaks.
- Request reasonable adjustments to workload or work conditions if required and if possible, say no to tasks if you do not have sufficient time or capacity.
- For leaders, celebrate every victory in a manner that is visible to all team members.

Work-life balance

- If too often you find yourself taking work home over the weekend, leaving the office last, or working beyond office hours, talk to your supervisor/manager. Avoid excessive after-hours work when possible.
- Avoid checking your emails or work-related messages after working hours or over the weekend. If you find that your colleagues are doing this, flag it to them. Prevent

sending e-mails at night or on the weekend, and hold colleagues that do this to account.

- Remember you have vacation leave and other rest periods! It could be an idea to plan your holidays at the beginning of the year, especially for the longer periods. Utilize vacation, personal leave, and rest periods.
- Speak up when work-life balance is in danger and causing harm to your personal life.
- Make use of flexibility (flexible working hours, remote working) that is offered by the organisation to reduce stress about juggling with private tasks and obligations. If you are not aware of what these are or of the procedures to take them up, talk to your supervisor/manager.

Physical health

- Engage in regular physical activity during the day, such as stretching or walking.
- Maintain a balanced diet and stay hydrated.
- Ensure adequate sleep and rest.
- Do not accept working conditions that are harmful to your physical health. Address these conditions with your leader or HR.
- Inform yourself on existing safety and security regulations and procedures of the organisation and follow them.

Psychological safety and inclusivity

- Avoid visiting detention centres, disembarkation points, reception centres or other challenging environments in the afternoon but aim for times that allow you to unwind with colleagues before you return home.
- After an intense session with a client, including an asylum interview, secure at least 10 minutes to unwind either alone or with a colleague.
- Organize your schedule and meetings so that you do not have more than **XXXXX** individual meetings/interviews/sessions per day.
- Arrange to have colleagues around or in the meeting with you if you know the person you are meeting may be challenging or violent. You can also talk to your supervisor and choose not to handle a particular case if it makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Value diverse perspectives and backgrounds by listening actively without interrupting and acknowledge others' ideas, even if you disagree. Invite quieter colleagues to share their views.
- Know your professional boundaries with the population you work with. Setting boundaries protects you from burnout and also protects the people you serve, by giving them back responsibility. Talk to your supervisor if you need to discuss boundaries specific to your profession or organization.

- Share your own ideas and questions without fear. Admit mistakes and frame them as learning opportunities. Be open and honest about challenges or uncertainties.
- Avoid gossiping, exclusionary jokes, comments, or behaviours. Use constructive and respectful language.
- Do not accept bullying, (sexual) harassment, discrimination or any form of intimidation in the workplace, but speak up by using informal or formal channels, if needed with support (for example of a confidential councillor).

Stress management and self-care

- Keep time and space for activities that contribute to your physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. Time for pleasure and activities that you like is no luxury.
- Practice mindfulness, relaxation, journalling or other stress-reduction techniques that fit your personality.
- Identify stress triggers and develop coping strategies. Engage in goal setting exercises to make a self-care plan if needed.
- Reflect on feelings and challenges constructively. Treat yourself with kindness and if needed, learn how to tame the inner critic by consulting a coach or counsellor.

Supportive connections

- Communicate with trusted colleagues, mentors, and/ or leaders about challenges. This may include situations in your private life that affect your work. Ask for help and provide support to your team members if possible and needed.
- Participate in team-building and social activities to foster positive relationships and solidarity.
- Seek support from a confidential councillor, HR, employee assistance programs, or counselling services when experiencing unsafe or unhealthy conditions, practices or behaviours.
- Participate in peer-to-peer support sessions to solve complicated cases and situations together. Participate in guided intervision offered by the organisation.

Skill development and personal growth

- Strengthen mental health literacy skills to recognise symptoms of stress, burnout and secondary/ vicarious trauma and ways to prevent and reduce them by following a training or consulting public resources on this topic.
- Dedicate time to engage in professional development or personal growth activities to strengthen competences and knowledge that are relevant to the job. Make use of the learning opportunities and budget that are available in the organisation.
- Set achievable personal and professional goals to support your personal growth.
- Support the development of a positive workplace mindset by recognising and celebrating achievements, and focusing on strengths and solutions rather than limitations.

Annex 3: Template Checklist

This checklist serves as a helpful guide for developing the template for your own team well-being policy.

It should be read in conjunction with the Template as it provides section-by-section guidance. Each below section corresponds to the sections you'll see in the Template.

Section 1: Values and Objectives

This initial section brings together the persons involved together, to recognize the need for the creation of the well-being policy.

Suggestions

- Initial meeting of the management team for the organization to acknowledge (you can refer to Annex 1):
 - Refugee mental health challenges (trauma, displacement, uncertainty)
 - The strain this may have on the staff
 - Importance of staff wellbeing
 - Importance of a policy on staff wellbeing
- Review the core values of the organization in reference to the wellbeing of staff;
- Organization acknowledges the shared responsibility for staff wellbeing and supports the development of a well-being strategy.

Section 2: Shared Responsibility

This section serves the need to acknowledge the shared responsibility and to identify the people responsible for the implementation of the policy.

Suggestions

- A Staff Wellbeing Focal Point is designated (name/ contact);
- An alternative person is identified in the case of conflict with the focal point or absence. (a person feels uncomfortable talking to the focal point);
- A confidential councillor or person of trust is identified for discussing confidential issues and support;
- Staff meeting and/ or well-being survey with the purpose of:
 - Discussing well-being policy and shared responsibility
 - Evaluation of the current situation (e.g. discussion, questionnaires)
 - Team members understand their shared responsibility.

Section 3: Measures Adopted by the Organisation

At this section, the organization's responsibility is emphasized and the measures that will be adopted to ensure the well-being of team members are identified.

Look at Annex 1, identify the measures you think your organisation may implement, and adapt/incorporate into your own policy.

Suggestions

- Measures are being identified – can be copied from Annex 1 – Management Responsibilities;
- Organizational well-being measures are listed and implemented;
- Staff are aware of and have access to these measures.

Section 4: Individual Actions

Individual responsibility is emphasised at this section. Suggestions and guidance will be included in this part as actions every individual can take to ensure their own mental health.

Look at Annex 2, identify the measures you think your organisation may implement, and adapt/incorporate into your own policy.

Suggestions

- Staff are encouraged to take individual or team well-being actions;
- Support is available from the Focal Point and line manager.

Section 5: Policy Monitoring and Evaluation

At this section, the policy date is recorded along with periods of monitoring and examination of any adaptations.

Make sure to specify the methods by which these will take place.

Suggestions

- Policy adoption date is recorded;
- Initial evaluation results are recorded for the purposes of comparison;
- Reviewing of the policy is identified, recorded and based on staff input(e.g. every 12 months);
- Methods of reviewing and gathering feedback are identified;
- Next team meeting for evaluation of the policy and wellbeing feedback is identified;
- History of policy changes is recorded.

Section 6: Communication and Awareness

This part ensures that the policy is effectively communicated to the staff and that awareness for well-being is guaranteed.

Suggestions

- Policy is made available and attention to it is paid on a regular base by using internal communication channels (e.g. newsletter, intranet, webinars) every XXXXX months;
- Awareness on policy is raised during onboarding process and personal development reviews. Specify methods;
- Leadership speaks out on well-being on regular base.