

History of Psychosocial Support in the Red Cross

The International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies Psychological Support Programme emerged in the early 1990s, at a time when an increasing number of National Societies realised that disasters can lead to not just physical but also mental problems in affected populations, and that the traditional way of offering relief in the form of shelter, food and medical care was often not enough.

As a result, the Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support (PS Centre) was established in 1993 as a "Centre of Excellence" to support National Societies in promoting and enabling the psychosocial wellbeing of beneficiaries, staff and volunteers. Hosted by Danish Red Cross and located in Copenhagen, Denmark the Centre is a delegated function of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

PS Centre timeline: From trauma to resilience

1991: The IFRC launches the Psychological Support Programme as a crosscutting programme under the Health & Care Division.

1993: The General Assembly recommends the IFRC to "give high priority to psychological support issues and strongly advocate the implementation of psychological support programs in National Societies" and to "secure adequate material and human resources to implement those programs."

1993: The International Federation Reference Centre for Psychological Support is established.

Mid-1990s: Dissatisfaction with the traditional trauma-focused mental health interventions implemented in the aftermath of disasters and conflicts is growing. Along with this the articulation of many alternative approaches to psychosocial intervention emerges with the acknowledgement of people's capacity for resilience.

2003: The International Federation Psychological Support Policy Paper establishes the basis of Red Cross and Red Crescent intervention both in emergency response operations and in the implementation of long-term development programmes.

2004: The Centre changes its name to the Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support, underlining the community-based character of the interventions.

2008: The Centre develops the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) psychosocial support component in order to facilitate support that meets the psychosocial needs of disaster-affected populations, and to raise awareness among staff and volunteers about the benefits of providing this assistance as part of emergency response.