

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH IN DISPLACED COMMUNITIES:

Implementation Guide for iFightDepression®



SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH IN DISPLACED COMMUNITIES:

QUICK START GUIDE

1. Assess your community context
2. Build local partnerships
3. Recruit and train guides
4. Engage users through trusted channels
5. Measure and adapt

KEY METRICS AT A GLANCE (As of November 2024)

- 710 total users engaged
- 758 guides trained across regions
- 42,756 visitors to Ukrainian version
- 272,402 visitors to Russian version
- Implementation across 6 European countries



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the MESUR project began implementing the iFightDepression® tool for displaced Ukrainian persons across six European countries, the team quickly learned that success would require much more than simple translation of materials. From Estonia to Greece, each implementation site revealed unique insights about engaging communities, breaking down stigma, and building trust.

CORE SUCCESS FACTORS

- Deep community engagement
- Cultural adaptation beyond translation
- Multi-channel support systems
- Trust-building through local partnerships
- Flexible implementation strategies

This guide tells the story of that journey, sharing the challenges faced, solutions discovered, and lessons learned along the way. Through the experiences of healthcare providers, community organizations, and the displaced persons themselves, we offer practical guidance for organizations seeking to implement digital mental health support in their communities.

NB! A Note on Using This Guide While we've organized this guide to flow naturally from planning through implementation, each community's journey will be unique. We encourage you to explore the sections most relevant to your current needs while keeping in mind the interconnected nature of successful implementation.

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

- Healthcare Organizations
- NGOs & Community Services
- Mental Health Professionals
- Refugee Support Networks
- Social Service Providers
- Community Leaders

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Focusing only on translation
- Overlooking cultural context
- Rushing partnership building
- Ignoring mobile accessibility
- Insufficient guide support.

Through the experiences of healthcare providers, community organizations, and the displaced persons themselves, we offer practical guidance for organizations seeking to implement digital mental health support in their communities.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE JOURNEY

1.1 The MESUR Experience

IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHTS BY COUNTRY (November 2024)

- o **Poland:** 476 guides (277 Ukrainian-speaking)
- o **Estonia:** 393 active users, 33 guides (12 specialized Ukrainian/Russian-speaking experts and 21 local guides)
- o **Greece:** 31 guides (16 Ukrainian-speaking)
- o **Hungary:** 95 trained guides
- o **Bulgaria:** 36 guides (22 Ukrainian/Russian-speaking)
- o **Germany:** 87 guides (5 native speakers)

The story of implementing iFightDepression® for displaced Ukrainian persons unfolded differently across each country, yet common themes emerged. In Poland, success came through deep engagement with Ukrainian community organizations, leading to the recruitment of 277 Ukrainian-speaking guides. Estonia found success through innovative digital outreach combined with strong governmental partnerships. Greece discovered that careful attention to communication styles and timing made all the difference in community engagement. Germany learned about the importance of social media groups, especially Telegram, to reach Ukrainian communities and the impact of a prominent Ukrainian advocate.



The MESUR project's implementation has demonstrated remarkable success across participating countries. As of late 2024, the initiative has engaged 710 users through its comprehensive support system, with 585 users accessing the Ukrainian version (262 guided and 323

1. UNDERSTANDING THE JOURNEY

unguided) and 125 users utilizing the Russian version (111 guided and 14 unguided). This achievement significantly exceeded initial targets and demonstrates the project's effective reach within displaced communities. But numbers tell only part of the story. The real measure of success came through the relationships built, the barriers overcome, and the support provided to communities in need.

1.2 Why This Guide Matters

Implementing digital mental health tools for displaced populations isn't just about technical deployment - it's about understanding communities, building trust, and creating sustainable support systems. As one Ukrainian psychologist working with the project noted, "Mental health support needs to meet people where they are, both culturally and practically."

This guide shares the practical wisdom gained from real implementation experiences across diverse contexts. Whether you're a healthcare organization, NGO, or community support service, the insights here come from actual challenges faced and solutions found in the field.



2. BEFORE YOU BEGIN: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONTEXT

2.1 Learning from Ground Experience

READINESS CHECKLIST

- Community needs assessed
- Key partners identified
- Cultural context understood
- Technical infrastructure ready
- Guide recruitment plan in place
- Training materials adapted
- Engagement strategy developed
- Evaluation metrics defined

CRITICAL INSIGHTS

1. Understanding community journeys is more crucial than language translation
2. Natural touchpoints are key for introducing mental health support
3. Partner identification shapes program success
4. Cultural understanding drives engagement

“When we started, we thought the main challenge would be language translation,” shared one implementation team member from Estonia. “We quickly learned that understanding the community’s journey was far more crucial.”

This insight would prove fundamental across all MESUR implementation sites.

Estonia’s team began by mapping how displaced persons moved through their support systems - from initial arrival points to language schools, community centers, and healthcare services. This systematic approach revealed natural touchpoints where mental health support could be effectively introduced. More importantly, it helped identify the right partners and stakeholders who could help build trust with the community.

Implementation Insight

“Success doesn’t come from just knowing where displaced persons are - it comes from understanding their journey and the moments when they’re most open to support.”

MESUR Project Coordinator

2. BEFORE YOU BEGIN: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONTEXT

2.2 Building Cultural Understanding

One of the most profound insights from the MESUR project came through conversations with Ukrainian mental health experts about mental health stigma in Ukrainian communities.. While the term “depression” was familiar to many, its understanding and acceptance varied significantly. This learning fundamentally shaped how teams approached community engagement.

The Greek implementation team’s experience particularly illustrates this point. Rather than promoting mental health support directly, they found success by focusing on everyday experiences. Their social media posts asked simple questions about sleep troubles or feeling overwhelmed - experiences that resonated with their audience without triggering stigma-related barriers. Germany succeeded with the same approach.

Real-World Success In Greece and in Germany, posts asking “Have you had any problems with your sleep?” generated more engagement than those directly mentioning mental health support. This simple shift in approach opened doors to conversations that might otherwise have remained closed.

2.3 Finding Your Partners

The journey to successful implementation often begins with finding the right partners. Poland’s experience demonstrates how a systematic approach to partnership building can create a strong foundation for implementation: Through careful outreach and relationship building, the Polish team established connections with:

- UN agencies providing refugee support
- Local NGO networks
- Academic counseling services
- Ukrainian community organizations



2. BEFORE YOU BEGIN: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONTEXT

But partnership success wasn't just about making connections - it was about understanding each partner's unique role in the community. "Each partner brought different strengths," noted Piotr from the Polish implementation team. "Some provided direct access to communities, others lent credibility to our efforts, and still others helped us understand cultural nuances we might have missed."

Partnership Building in Practice

The most successful partnerships emerged when teams took time to:

- Understand each organization's existing work with displaced persons
- Identify shared goals and complementary strengths
- Build relationships before asking for commitments
- Create clear, manageable roles for each partner



2.4 Technical Readiness

While cultural and community aspects proved crucial, technical considerations couldn't be ignored. Feedback from users and guides across implementation sites highlighted key technical needs: "Many of our potential users primarily access the internet through mobile phones," reported the Bulgarian implementation team through their guide survey. This insight pushed teams to think carefully about how the tool would be accessed and used in real-world conditions.

3. BUILDING YOUR GUIDE NETWORK: Recruitment & Training

GUIDE NETWORK BEST PRACTICES

- Diverse recruitment channels
- Hybrid training approach
- Ongoing support systems
- Cultural bridge-building
- Regular community engagement

3.1 Rethinking Guide Recruitment

Overall guide recruitment has been exceptional, with 758 new iFD guides trained across all languages and regions. This includes 426 new local guides and 332 Ukrainian/Russian-speaking guides across all regions. This comprehensive network of trained professionals and support workers ensures broad coverage and accessibility of mental health services. This achievement, however, represents more than just numbers - it tells a story of innovation and adaptation in approaching mental health support for displaced communities.



The journey of guide recruitment across MESUR implementation sites reveals how flexibility and adaptation often lead to the most successful outcomes. When Poland's team began their recruitment efforts, they quickly realized that traditional approaches wouldn't be sufficient to meet their communities' needs.

3. BUILDING YOUR GUIDE NETWORK: RECRUITMENT & TRAINING

“We had to expand our thinking about who could serve as an effective guide,” shared the Polish implementation team, which ultimately succeeded in recruiting 476 guides, including 277 Ukrainian speakers. Their approach evolved to include not just mental health professionals, but also social workers with mental health backgrounds and healthcare support staff who understood their communities’ needs. Germany followed the same approach, as a lack of language skills among doctors and psychotherapists in particular made it difficult to recruit guides. By contrast, staff at refugee support facilities, including psychotherapists and social workers, generally had language skills or access to interpreters.

Success Story: Poland’s Approach

Poland’s remarkable success in guide recruitment came through a carefully layered approach:

- Collaboration with UN partners and the Refugee Response Plan
- Engagement with Ukrainian psychologist networks
- Integration with academic counseling services
- Training sessions with social workers and health mediators

This multi-channel approach not only met numerical targets but, more importantly, created a diverse, capable guide network deeply connected to the community.

3.2 The Training Journey

Training guides proved to be as much about cultural sensitivity as technical knowledge. The Hungarian implementation team’s experience highlighted the importance of flexibility in training delivery.

“We discovered that online training sessions significantly increased participation,” reported the Hungarian team. “But it wasn’t just about convenience - online sessions often made guides feel more comfortable asking questions and engaging with the material.” This insight led to a hybrid approach that combined the accessibility of online training with the relationship-building benefits of face-to-face sessions.

Training Innovation Estonia’s approach to guide training revealed an important insight: success often came from:

- Regular follow-up support
- Opportunities for guides to share experiences
- Ongoing technical support
- Community building among guides

3. BUILDING YOUR GUIDE NETWORK: RECRUITMENT & TRAINING

3.3 Supporting Your Guides

One of the most valuable lessons from the MESUR implementation came from understanding that guide recruitment was just the beginning – maintaining active engagement required ongoing support and community building. The Bulgarian team’s survey of guides revealed important insights about what makes guides feel supported and effective:

- Clear technical guidance
- Regular check-ins
- Opportunities to share challenges
- Access to peer support

“We learned that guides who felt supported were more likely to actively offer the tool,” noted the Estonian implementation team. Their success came from creating a community of practice where guides could share experiences and solutions.

Guide Feedback Insight Bulgarian guide surveys showed that while satisfaction with the tool rated 3-5 out of 5, accessibility and technical aspects rated lower. This feedback helped teams understand where additional support was needed.



3.4 Cultural Bridge-Building

Perhaps the most profound insight about guide recruitment and support came from understanding their role as cultural bridges. As our Ukrainian mental health advisors emphasized, stigma around mental health in Ukrainian communities meant that guides needed to do more than just provide technical support – they needed to help build trust and understanding.

The German team’s experience particularly highlighted this aspect: “Having Ukrainian-speaking guides wasn’t just about language – it was about creating cultural connection and trust,” reported the German implementation team. Their success in recruiting Ukrainian mental health professionals helped bridge not just linguistic but cultural gaps in providing support.

4. ENGAGING USERS: FROM OUTREACH TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

4.1 Understanding User Journey

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES THAT WORKED

- Integration with existing support systems
- Multiple touchpoints approach
- Focus on everyday experiences
- Mobile-first accessibility
- Trust-building through community channels

The path from initial awareness to active engagement proved to be one of the most nuanced aspects of the MESUR implementation. Estonia's remarkable success with user engagement - achieving over 300 active users of the unguided version - came through deep understanding of how displaced persons seek and accept support. "We discovered that the journey to accepting mental health support isn't linear," shared the Estonian team. "People often need to encounter the tool multiple times, through different channels, before they're ready to engage."



Estonian Success Factors Estonia's high user engagement came through:

- Integration with existing refugee support systems
- Collaboration with the Social Ministry of Affairs
- Strategic use of Google Ads
- Partnerships with language schools

But perhaps most importantly, they recognized that each of these channels reinforced the others, creating multiple touchpoints for potential users.

4. ENGAGING USERS: FROM OUTREACH TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

4.2 Breaking Down Barriers

Implementation teams across countries encountered various barriers to user engagement, but also discovered innovative solutions. The Bulgarian implementation team's survey of guides revealed common challenges: "Many potential users were hesitant to engage with digital mental health tools, either due to technical barriers or concerns about stigma," reported one guide. "But we found that addressing practical concerns often opened the door to deeper engagement." Key learnings about reducing barriers emerged:

Practical Solutions Teams found success by:

- Simplifying registration processes
- Providing clear, step-by-step guidance
- Offering both guided and unguided options
- Ensuring mobile accessibility

As one implementation team member noted, "Each barrier we removed made it easier for the next person to say yes to support."

4.3 The Power of Community Channels

The German team's experience with language schools and integration courses revealed the effectiveness of reaching people through existing community structures. "We discovered that approaching displaced persons through trusted community channels significantly increased receptivity to the tool," shared the German implementation team.

SUCCESSFUL OUTREACH CHANNELS

Their systematic approach included:

- Contacting over 1,000 language schools
- Engaging with integration courses
- Working through psychosocial centers
- Collaborating with psychiatric clinics

But numbers only tell part of the story. The real success came from understanding how these channels could be used effectively. "It wasn't just about having access to these networks," the team explained, "it was about understanding how to present the tool in ways that resonated with each specific community context."

4. ENGAGING USERS: FROM OUTREACH TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

4.4 Communication That Connects

Perhaps the most transformative insight about user engagement came from understanding the power of appropriate communication. The Greek team's experience proved particularly illuminating: "When we shifted from talking about mental health to asking about everyday experiences, people began to listen," shared the Greek implementation team. Their approach of posting in social media groups during evening hours, using simple, relatable questions about sleep or daily challenges, created natural openings for conversations about support.

Communication Success Elements

The most effective communication approaches:

- Focused on symptoms rather than conditions
- Used everyday language
- Met people where they were
- Created safe spaces for engagement

As one guide noted, "When we spoke their language - not just literally, but emotionally - people began to trust the tool as a resource."



5. MEASURING IMPACT AND ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

5.1 Understanding Our Impact

IMPACT METRICS FRAMEWORK

- User engagement rates
- Guide retention and activity
- Community partnership strength
- Cultural adaptation success
- Long-term sustainability indicators

Throughout the MESUR project, measuring success meant looking beyond simple numbers to understand real impact on communities. While the project achieved impressive metrics - reaching 585 Ukrainian-language users and 125 Russian-language users by late-2024 - the deeper story lay in how these numbers were achieved and what they meant for communities.

Each implementation country has made significant contributions to the project's success:

- **Poland** has established the largest guide network, with 476 trained guides, of which 277 Ukrainian-speaking professionals
- **Estonia** Estonia has shown strong user engagement with 393 active users and 33 guides (including 12 Ukrainian/Russian-speaking experts)



- **Greece** has developed a diverse support network of 31 guides, including 16 Ukrainian-speaking professionals
- **Hungary** has trained 95 guides, strengthening local mental health support capacity
- **Bulgaria** has created an integrated support system with 14 local guides and 22 Ukrainian/Russian-speaking specialists
- **Germany** has recruited 87 guides, including 5 native speakers, ensuring linguistic and cultural competency in service delivery

5. MEASURING IMPACT AND ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

This distribution of guides across countries demonstrates the project's success in building both local capacity and language-specific support, with each country adapting its recruitment strategy to meet their community's unique needs. "Each number represents a person who took a significant step toward seeking support," reflected one implementation team member. "Understanding the story behind these numbers helped us continuously improve our approach."

Beyond the Numbers Key achievements by late 2024 revealed important patterns:

- **Website Engagement:** Digital engagement has far surpassed expectations, with the platform attracting (as of October 2024) 42,756 visitors to the Ukrainian version and 272,402 visitors to the Russian version.
 - **Guide Recruitment:** The project's guide recruitment efforts have been particularly successful, with a total of 758 new guides trained: 426 local guides and 332 Ukrainian/Russian-speaking specialists now active across the implementation countries. This figure substantially exceeds the initial target of 20 guides, reflecting the strong community engagement and professional interest in supporting mental health initiatives for displaced persons.
 - **User adoption** grew steadily across implementation countries
- But more importantly, these metrics helped teams understand where and how their efforts were making the most impact.

5.2 Learning from User Experiences

The Bulgarian team's initiative to survey guides provided crucial insights into how the tool was being used and received. Their systematic approach to gathering feedback revealed both successes and areas for improvement: "We learned that while guides appreciated the tool's core capabilities, they also saw opportunities for enhancement," shared the Bulgarian implementation team. "This feedback became invaluable for understanding how to make the tool more accessible and effective." Key insights from guide feedback included:

User Experience Insights Guides reported:

- High satisfaction with core tool features (3-5 out of 5 ratings)
- Appreciation for the unguided version option
- Need for improved mobile accessibility
- Desire for simplified registration processes

These insights helped shape ongoing improvements and adaptations.

5. MEASURING IMPACT AND ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

5.3 Building Sustainable Impact

Estonia's approach to sustainability demonstrated how deep integration with existing systems could create lasting impact. Their success came through thoughtful connection with multiple support structures:

"We realized early on that sustainability meant becoming part of the fabric of existing support systems," shared the Estonian team. Their approach included:

- **Integration** with the Education and Youth Board
- **Partnerships** with Ukrainian psychologists
- **Collaboration** with public health officers
- Establishment of ongoing UNHCR relationships

But perhaps most importantly, they recognized that sustainability required continuous adaptation and learning. "Each success and challenge taught us something about creating lasting impact," noted one team member.

5.4 Looking to the Future

As MESUR implementation sites matured, teams identified key elements for ensuring long-term success. The Polish experience of integrating the tool into official healthcare systems provided valuable insights into institutional sustainability: "Integration isn't just about systems and processes," shared the Polish implementation team. "It's about creating a community of support that can continue to grow and adapt."

Sustainability Building Blocks

Successful long-term implementation required:

- Strong institutional partnerships
- Ongoing guide training programs
- Regular community engagement
- Continuous feedback loops
- Flexible adaptation to changing needs

Bulgaria's forward-thinking approach particularly demonstrated this commitment to sustainability through their establishment of a dedicated Refugee Centre, showing how digital tools could be integrated into broader support structures.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

6.1 Learning from Experience

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build flexible, adaptable systems
2. Maintain strong community connections
3. Prioritize mobile accessibility
4. Foster cultural integration
5. Enable community empowerment

As the MESUR project evolved across its implementation sites, clear patterns emerged about what makes digital mental health support successful for displaced communities. These insights came not just from what worked, but often from the challenges teams faced and overcame.

“Each implementation site taught us something unique,” reflected a senior Ukrainian mental health expert during a consortium meeting. “But what united successful approaches was their ability to adapt to community needs while maintaining consistent support.”

Key Success Patterns Through real implementation experiences, we learned that success requires:

“Meeting people where they are - both literally and figuratively,” as one Greek implementation team member noted. “This meant being present



in community spaces, but also understanding their cultural and emotional context.”

“Use support structures that are already established.” The German network of 47 psychosocial centres for refugees turned out to be one of the best channels to recruit guides as well as reach out to Ukrainians seeking help for mental problems. “Building trust before expecting engagement,” shared the Polish team, who successfully recruited 277 Ukrainian-speaking guides by first establishing strong community connections. “Creating multiple pathways to support,” demonstrated by Estonia’s combination of digital outreach and community partnerships, leading to their high user engagement rates.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

6.2 Adapting to Changing Needs

The project revealed how implementation strategies needed to evolve as communities' needs changed. Germany's experience with language schools and integration courses showed the importance of flexible approaches: "We found that displaced persons' needs shifted over time," shared the German team. "What worked in the early stages of displacement often needed adjustment as people settled into their new communities."

This insight led to several key recommendations for future implementations:

Adaptation Strategies Successful programs should:

- **Build Flexible Systems** "We learned to create support structures that could adapt to changing needs," noted one implementation team. This meant developing multiple access points and support options.
- **Maintain Community Connections** Regular engagement with community organizations helped teams stay attuned to evolving needs and opportunities.
- **Listen and Respond** As one guide shared, "Some of our most successful adaptations came from really listening to what users were telling us about their experiences."

6.3 Future Directions

Looking ahead, the MESUR implementation experience points to several promising directions for digital mental health support in displaced communities: "The future of digital mental health support isn't just about technology," reflected one implementation team member. "It's about creating human connections through digital means."

Key areas for future development include:

- **Mobile Accessibility** "The Bulgarian guide survey taught us that mobile access isn't just preferred - it's essential," noted one team member. Future implementations should prioritize mobile-first approaches while maintaining multiple access options.
- **Cultural Integration** As demonstrated across implementation sites, success comes from deep cultural understanding and adaptation. Future tools should build on this learning, incorporating cultural sensitivity from the ground up.
- **Community Empowerment** "Our most sustainable successes came when communities felt ownership of the tool," shared the Estonian team. Future implementations should focus on building community capacity and leadership.

7. CONCLUSION: THE PATH FORWARD

SUCCESS PRINCIPLES

- Human-centered approach
- Cultural sensitivity
- Community ownership
- Flexible implementation
- Sustainable support systems

The MESUR project's journey across six European countries demonstrated that implementing digital mental health support for displaced persons is both challenging and deeply rewarding. Through the dedication of implementation teams, guides, and community partners, the project not only reached its numerical targets but, more importantly, created pathways for sustainable mental health support.

Final Reflections “Success in this work isn't just about numbers,” shared one implementation team member. “It's about creating spaces where people feel safe seeking support, where cultural barriers become bridges, and where digital tools become instruments of human connection.” As you implement the iFightDepression® tool in your community, remember that each journey will be unique. Use these guidelines not as rigid rules but as a foundation for creating your own path to success, always keeping in mind the human stories at the heart of this work.



Authors

PRIMARY AUTHOR

Rainer Mere Estonian-Swedish Mental Health and Suicidology Institute (ERSI)

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Simge Celik Stojanovic European Alliance Against Depression (EAAD)

Albena Drobachka Sustainability of Progressive and Open Communication (SPOC)

Panagiota Fexi Regional Development and Mental Health (EPAPSY)

Ulrich Hegerl European Alliance Against Depression (EAAD)

Ines Keita German Depression Foundation

Anna-Lena Nadine Jasmin Leimberger German Foundation for Depression and Suicide Prevention

András Székely, Jr Végeken Mental Health Foundation (VEA)

Piotr Toczyski Maria Grzegorzewska University

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