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Universität  
Zürich <sup>UZH</sup>

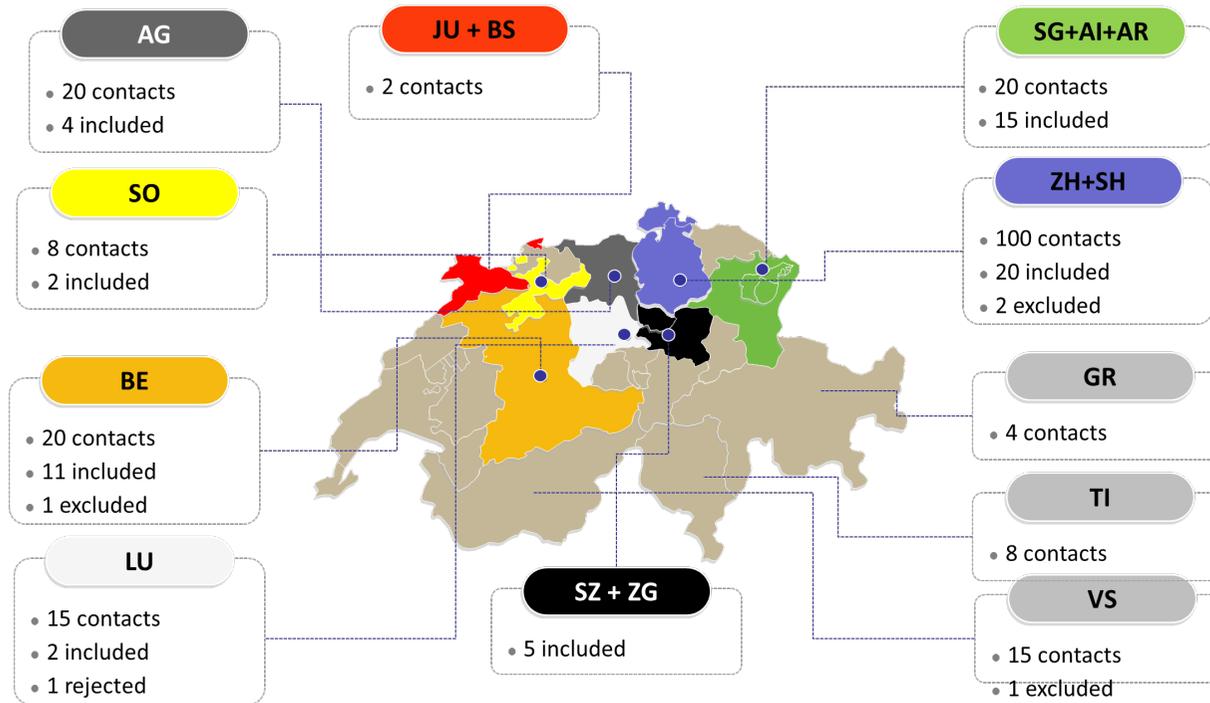
**SPIRIT**  
SCALING-UP PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS  
IN REFUGEES IN SWITZERLAND

# Changing system, changing lives: Lessons learned from the SPIRIT approach

**PD Dr. Naser Morina**

International Symposium: Scalable psychological interventions - From pilot bench to implementation  
January 30, 2026, Zurich

# Almost ten years ago...



# Switzerland: Mental Health Treatment Gap

## Barriers to Care

Language and cultural differences  
Shortage of specialized providers  
Complex traditional therapies  
Stigma around mental health  
Low health literacy



Out of the (classical medicine) box

Scalable psychological interventions!!!

High psychological distress among refugees and asylum-seekers with substantial barriers to accessing traditional mental health services

# WHO scalable interventions: Problem Management Plus (PM+)



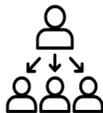
## Evidence-based

- Based on problem-solving & behavioural treatment techniques



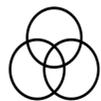
## Simple

- Five sessions à 90 minutes
- 4 core strategies



## Task sharing approach

- Sessions provided by non-specialist «helpers»
- Regular supervision by mental health professionals

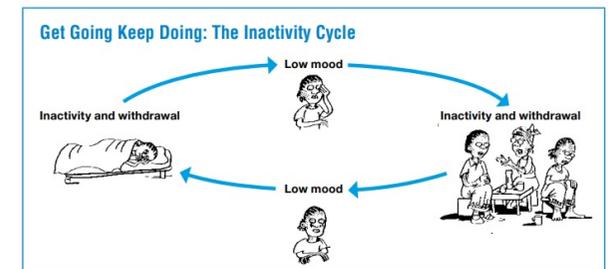
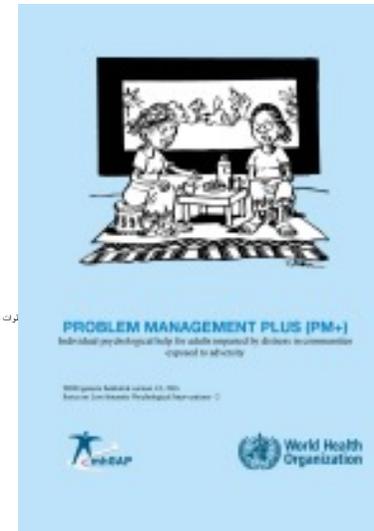


## Transdiagnostic

- No need for a diagnosis
- Suitable for individuals with mild to moderate distress

نوت ابرة المشكلت

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	اقتبر مشكلت
	حدد المشكلت
	اقتبر باقتبر
	اقتبر الاقتبر
	خطت العمل
	مراجعة



# SP<sup>IRIT</sup>

SCALING UP PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS  
IN REFUGEES IN SWITZERLAND

## Partners on national level

### Staatssekretariat für Migration SEM

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

### Bundesamt für Gesundheit BAG

Schweizerisches Rotes Kreuz 

 support  
for  
torture  
victims

## Academic partners

**ETH** zürich

**KOF**  Immigration Policy Lab  
Stanford | Zürich

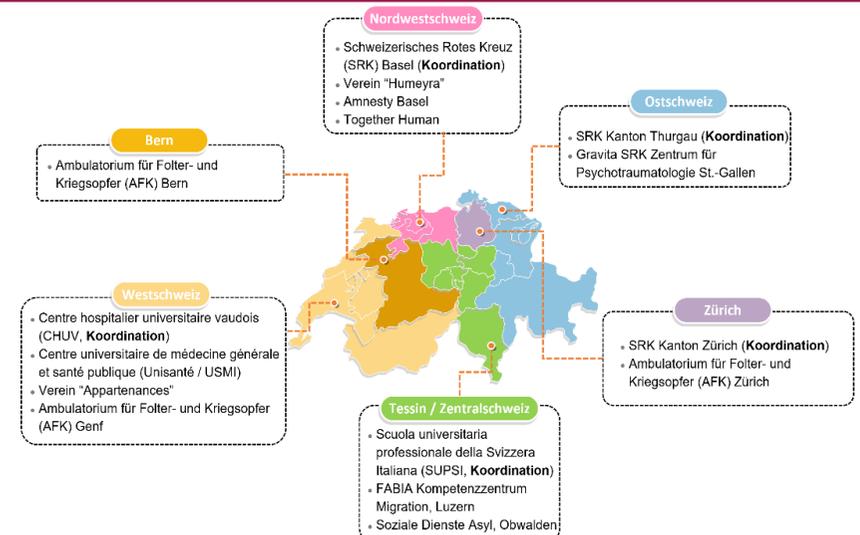
 **UNSW**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
Traumatic Stress Clinic

 **VRIJE**  
UNIVERSITEIT  
AMSTERDAM  
WHO Collaborative Center

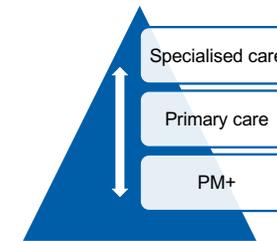
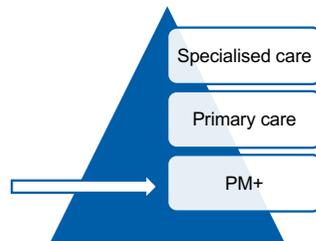
 **UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

 LONDON  
SCHOOL OF  
HYGIENE  
& TROPICAL  
MEDICINE

## Implementing partners & partners on cantonal / municipal level



## Objectives



By implementing PM+ in Switzerland, SPIRIT aims at improving the resilience of refugees and providing them with access to adequate health care

SPIRIT aims at establishing PM+ as the foundation of a stepped care model and at building local networks within the (mental) health care system

### Subgoals

- Awareness campaign for refugees and professionals working with refugees
- Systematic mental health screenings and Triage throughout Switzerland
- Implementation of PM+
- Establishment of local care networks linking PM+ with standard care

# Goal 1: Awareness

Instagram



spirit\_projekt\_ch

Folgen

Nachricht senden

4 Beiträge

42 Follower

0 Gefolgt

SPiRiT Projekt

SPiRiT -> SCALING-UP PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS IN REFUGEES IN SWITZERLAND  
[www.spirit-network.ch](http://www.spirit-network.ch)

BEITRÄGE

MARKIERT

## Scalable psychological interventions: Quo vadis?

International symposium on the effectiveness, challenges, implementation and future developments of scalable psychological interventions

### Program Symposium

- 09 - 09:15 Dr. Ulrich Schnyder, University of Zurich
- 09 - 09:30 Dr. Naser Abbas, Prof. Beatrice Beck-Schimmer, University Hospital Zurich/University of Zurich
- 09 - 09:45 Dr. Mark van Ommeren, World Health Organization
- 09 - 10:25 Prof. Marc Sijmold, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
- 09 - 10:30 Dr. Sander van der Bruggen, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
- 09 - 11:00 Prof. David McDowell, London School of Economics
- 09 - 11:50 Serge Hoernet, Federal Office of Public Health
- 09 - 12:10 Samir Al Mar & Inayeh Shehwan, SPiRiT

## Was ist SPiRiT?

- 1 SPiRiT steht für «Scaling-up Psychological Interventions in Refugees in Switzerland».
- 2 Das SPiRiT Projekt verwendet die von der WHO entwickelte psychologische Kurzintervention 'Problem Management Plus' kurz PM+ genannt.
- 3 Für die Teilnehmenden ist das Programm kostenlos.



www.spirit-network.ch

## Wer kann sich bei SPiRiT anmelden?



SPiRiT

www.spirit-network.ch

## Wie funktioniert Problem Management Plus (PM+) ?

Wie läuft das Programm ab? DAS PM+ PROGRAMM BEIHALTET 5 EINZELGESPRÄCHE À 90 MINUTEN.

Wer leitet das Programm an? GESCHULTE MITARBEITENDE FÜHREN PM+ IN DEINER ERSTSPRACHE DURCH.

[https://www.instagram.com/spirit\\_projekt\\_ch/](https://www.instagram.com/spirit_projekt_ch/)



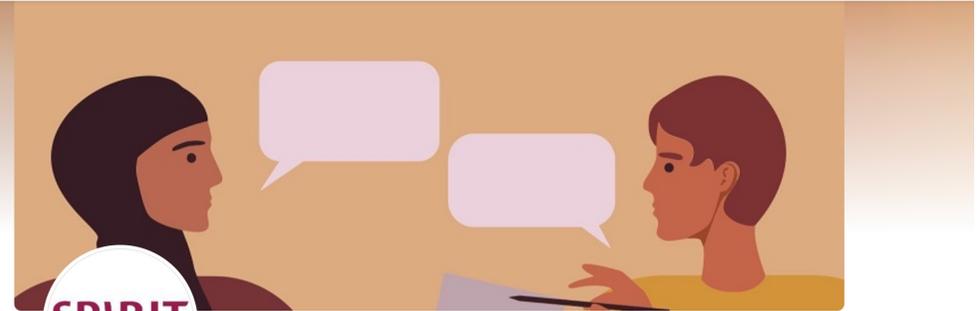
facebook

E-Mail-Adresse oder Hi

Passwort

Anmelden

Kontoinfo v



Spirit Projekt

24 „Gefällt mir“-Angaben · 25 Follower

Beiträge

Info

Fotos

Videos

### Steckbrief

Menschen mit Fluchthintergrund brauchen oft psychosoziale Unterstützung.

SPiRiT setzt hier an und hat zum Ziel, die Resilienz von Geflüchteten zu verbessern und

SPiRiT Spirit Projekt  
1 Tage ·

Das Programm für das SPiRiT Symposium: "Scalable psychological interventions: Quo vadis?" am 18. Januar, 2024!

Ein internationales Symposium über die Wirksamkeit, Herausforderungen, Implementierung und zukünftige Entwicklungen

<https://www.facebook.com/people/Spirit-Projekt/>



HOME DAS PROJEKT MITMACHEN TEAM NEWS KONTAKT DEUTSCH



Die Universität Zürich untersucht ein neues Programm, welches Personen im Umgang mit Alltagsschwierigkeiten unterstützt.

Das Programm wurde speziell für Menschen aus arabischsprachigen Ländern entwickelt und findet in Zürich, Bern und St. Gallen sowie auf Wunsch auch online statt.

Den Teilnehmenden werden von speziell geschulten Arabisch-sprechenden Personen einfache Strategien zum Umgang mit Belastungen im Alltag vermittelt.

Wie Sie davon profitieren können? Sie werden neue Strategien und Fähigkeiten erlernen, wie Sie sich selbst, Ihren Angehörigen und Freunden im Alltag noch besser helfen und sie unterstützen können.

WÜNSCHEN SIE UNS BEI DIESEM PROJEKT UNTERSTÜTZT ODER HABEN WEITERE FRAGEN?

DANN MELDEN SIE SICH BITTE BEI UNS!

STRENGTHS Project  
strengths@usz.ch | +41 79 913 24 69

KENNEN SIE JEMANDEN, DER ETWAS ÄHNLICHES ERLEBT HAT UND VIELLEICHT UNTERSTÜTZUNG BRAUCHT?

# Social media: Video campaign

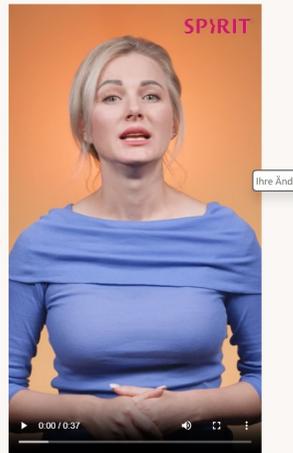
PM+ hakkında daha fazla bilgi edinin



په اړه نور معلومات تر لاسه کړئ د PM+



Learn more about PM+



En savoir plus sur PM+



درباره بیشتر بدانید PM+



Дізнайтеся більше про PM+



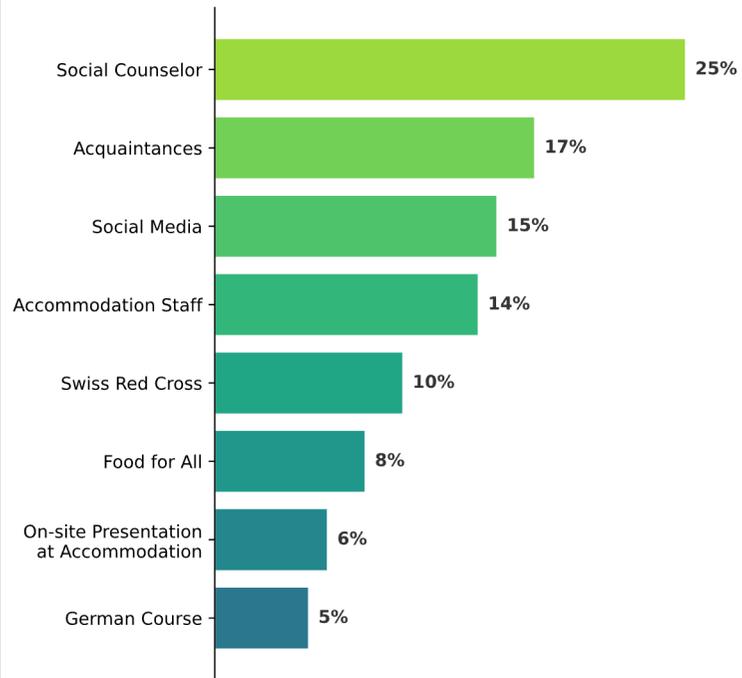
... and more

<https://www.spirit-network.ch/navigation/client/?lang=en>

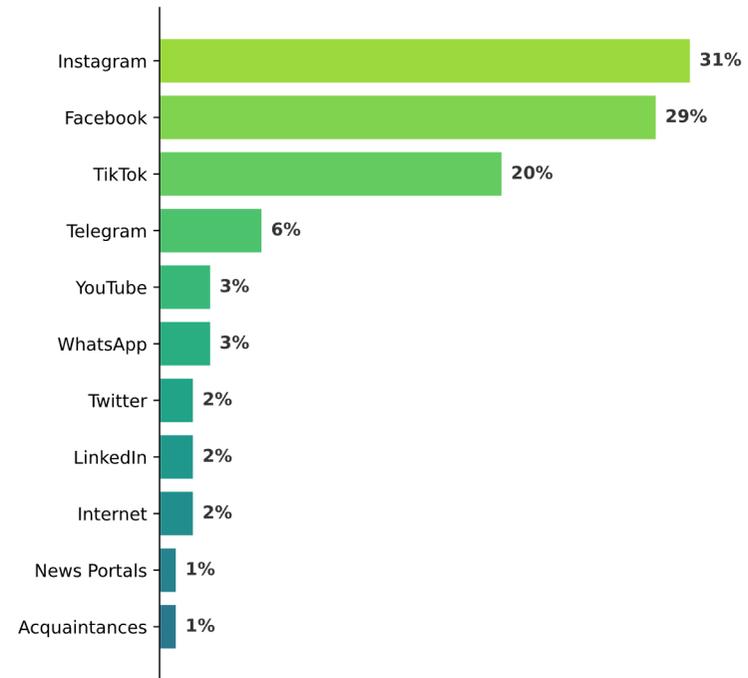


# Recruitment strategies 2025

### How did you hear about SPIRIT?



### How do you most often find information?



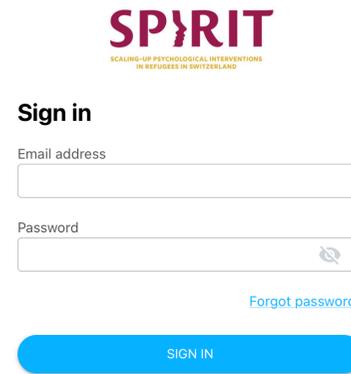
# Goal 2: Screening-Assessment-Triage

## PM+ intervention: Standard procedures and triage

Systematic screenings

Digital tool: certified as medical product

Triage



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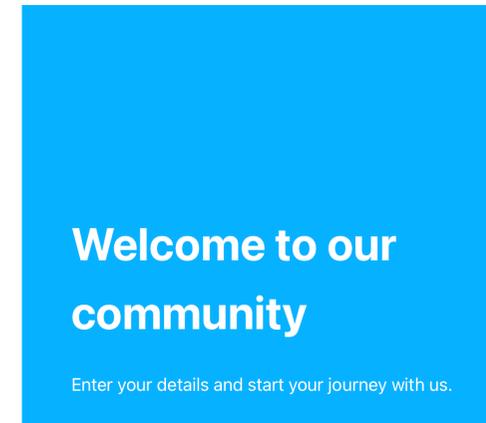
**Sign in**

Email address

Password

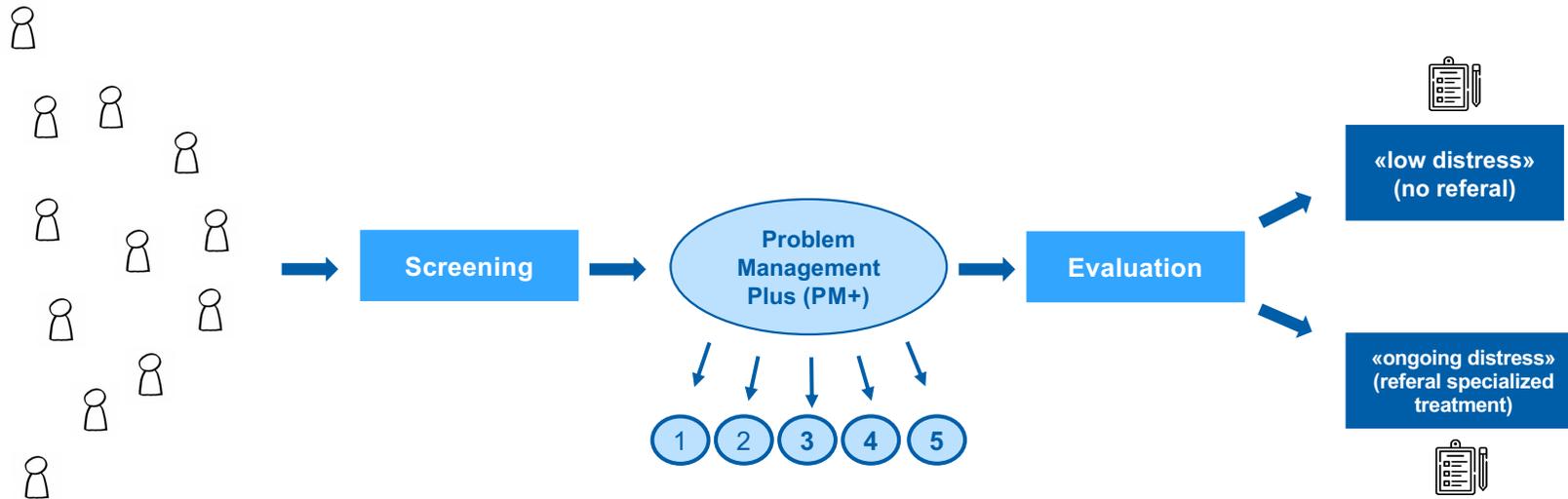
[Forgot password?](#)

**SIGN IN**



**Welcome to our community**

Enter your details and start your journey with us.



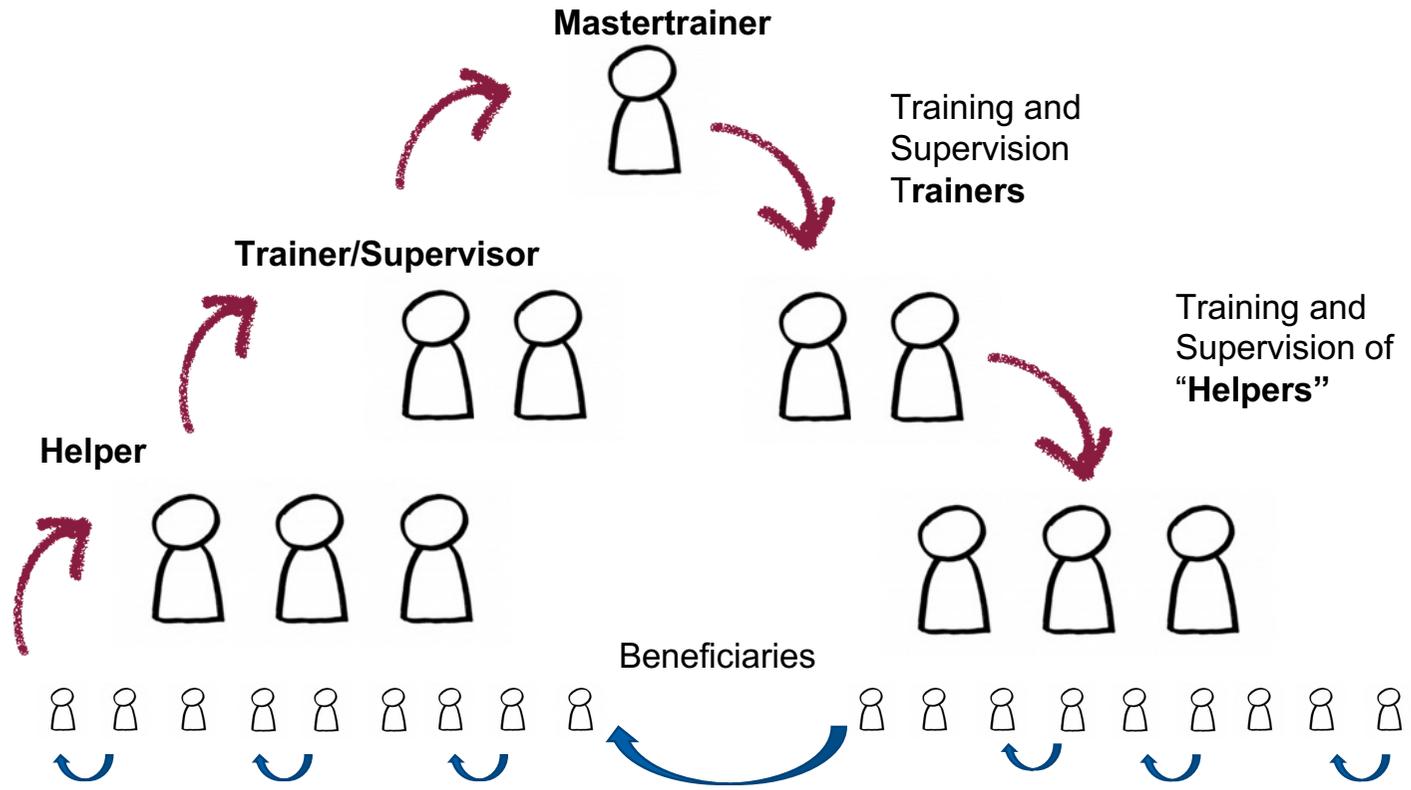
 Awareness Campaign 

Supervision & Quality Control

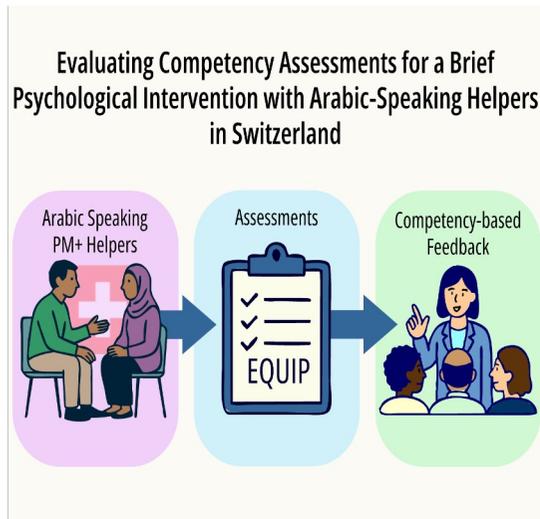
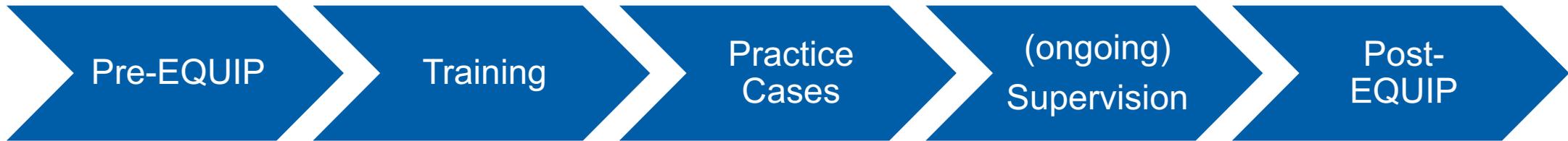
# Goal 3: Scale-up



- Ukrainian
- Arabic
- Tamil
- Kurdish
- Farsi
- Paschto
- Turkish
- Tigrinya
- Russian
  
- German – French - English



# Goal 3: Process of Training



Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health

[www.cambridge.org/gmh](http://www.cambridge.org/gmh)

### Research Article

**Cite this article:** Hemmo M, Akhtar A, Kohrt BA, Pedersen G, Alkamel AF, Martin Sölich C, Schafer A, Spaaij J, Bryant R and Morina N (2023) Piloting competency assessments for an evidence-based brief psychological intervention with Arabic-speaking non-specialists in Switzerland

## Piloting competency assessments for an evidence-based brief psychological intervention with Arabic-speaking non-specialists in Switzerland

Mahmoud Hemmo<sup>1,2</sup>, Aemal Akhtar<sup>3,4</sup>, Brandon A. Kohrt<sup>5</sup>, Gloria Pedersen<sup>5,6,7</sup>, Abdul Fattah Alkamel<sup>1</sup>, Chantal Martin Sölich<sup>2</sup>, Alison Schafer<sup>8</sup>, Julia Spaaij<sup>1</sup>, Richard Bryant<sup>3</sup> and Naser Morina<sup>1</sup>

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## Zertifikat

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**zum Abschluss der Ausbildung als «PM+ Helper» für das SPIRIT Projekt**

Das SPIRIT Projekt führt Trainings für die niederschwellige Intervention «Problem Management Plus (PM+)» durch. PM+ wurde von der Weltgesundheitsorganisation (WHO) entwickelt und zielt darauf ab, das Stressniveau von Geflüchteten und Asylsuchenden zu senken und ihre Resilienz zu fördern.

Hiermit bestätigen wir, dass

**NAME**

im Zeitraum von DATUM – DATUM!  
die Ausbildung als «Helper» im Rahmen des SPIRIT Projekts erfolgreich abgeschlossen hat.

PD Dr. phil. Naser Morina,  
 Projektleiter  
 Klinik für Konsultationspsychiatrie und  
 Psychosomatik  
 Universitätsspital Zürich  
 06.06.2023, Zürich

**SPIRIT**  
SWISS INITIATIVE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS IN REFUGEE AND IDP SETTINGS

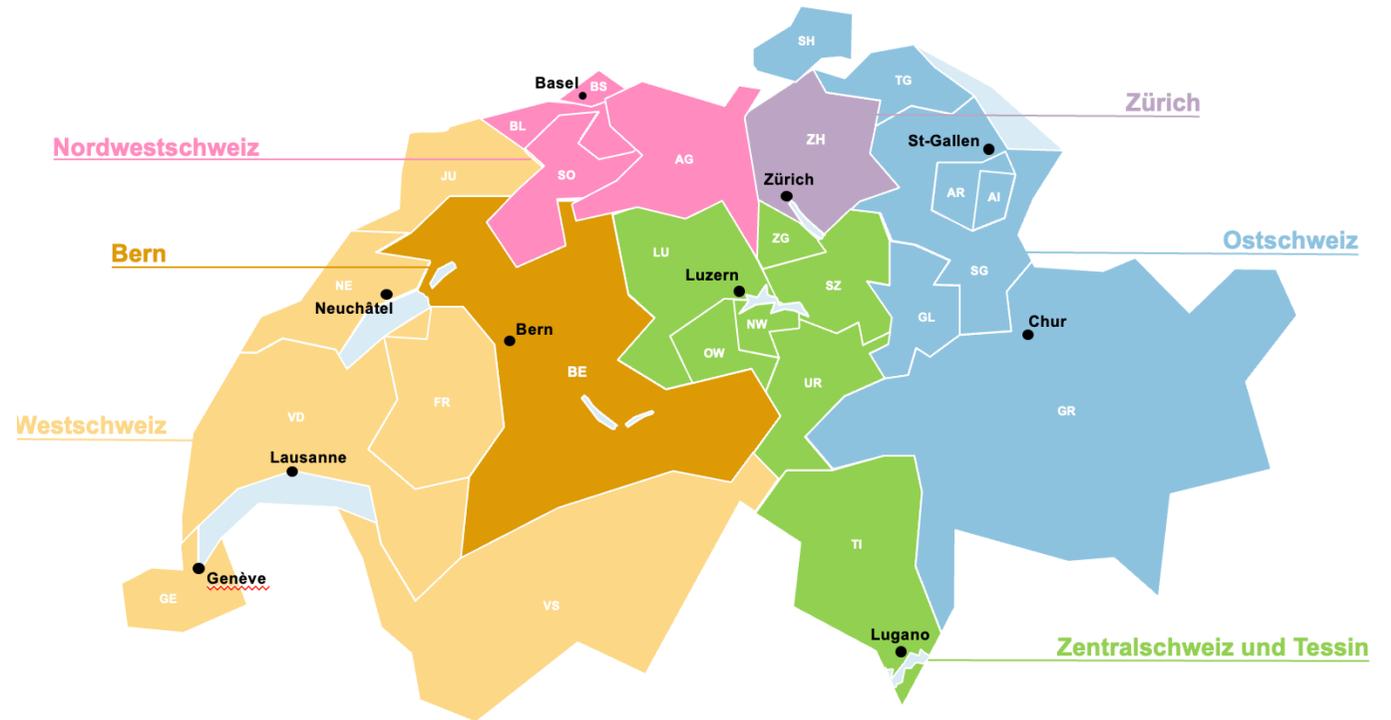
Das Projekt wird durchgeführt in Zusammenarbeit mit der Projektförderung  
 Prävention in der Gesundheitsversorgung von Gesundheitsförderung Schweiz

## Goal 4: Mapping and Network

Collaboration across

- disciplines
- agencies
- stakeholders

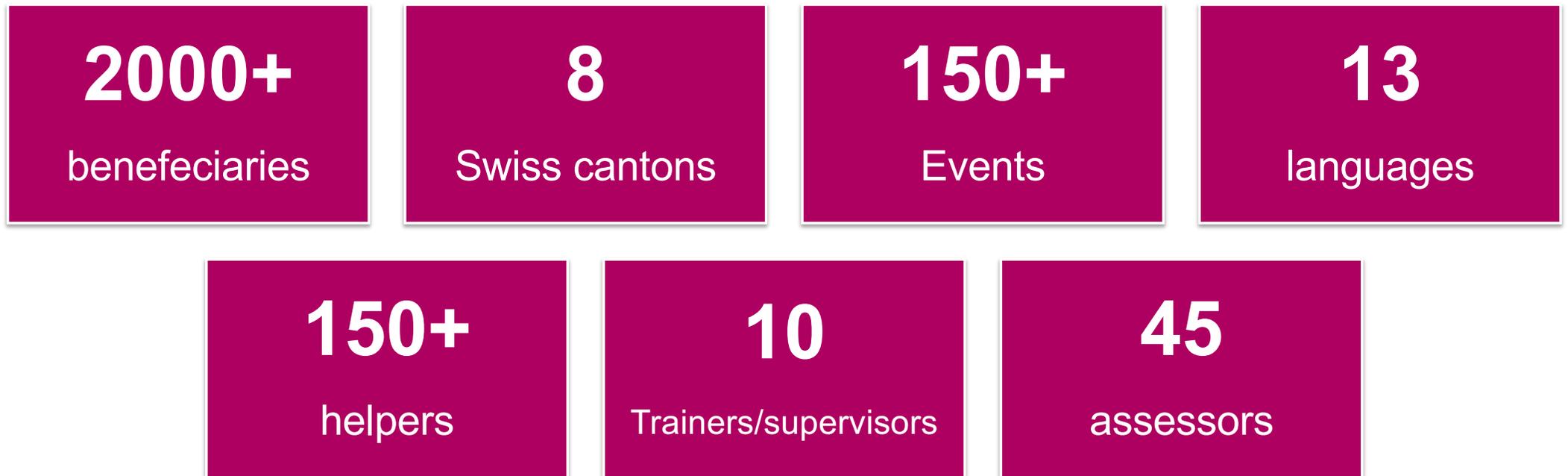
### Mapping of social, public health, and migration organisations and institutions in Switzerland



# SPIRIT: Scaling PM+ for Refugees in Switzerland



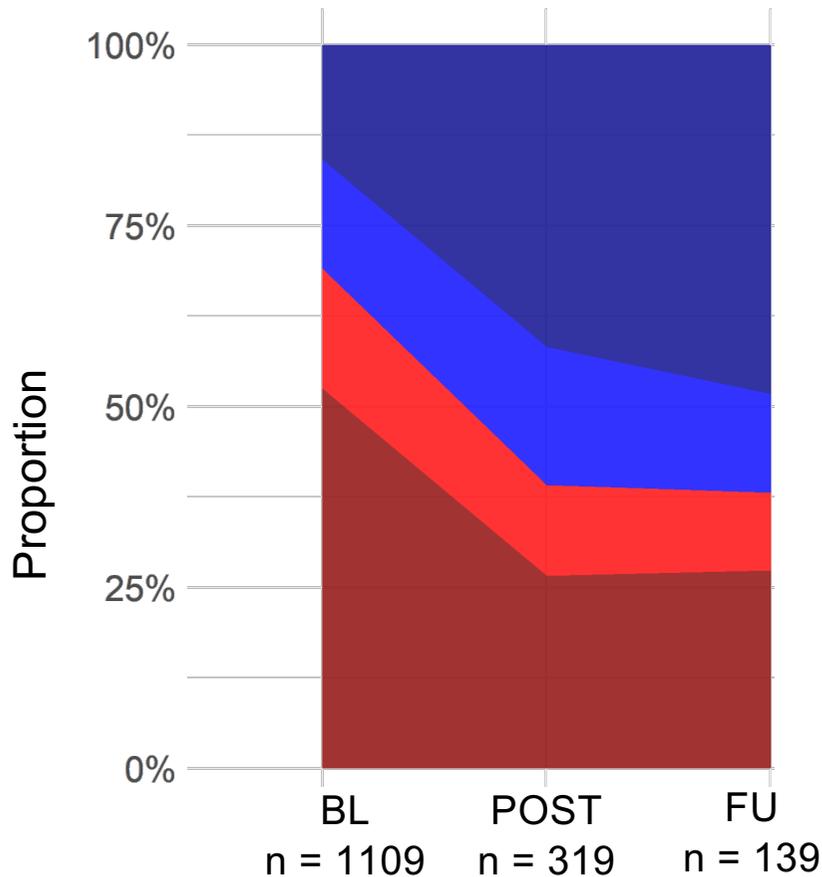
## Scale-Up Progress (2021-2025)



# Preliminary results



## Results: Psychological Distress

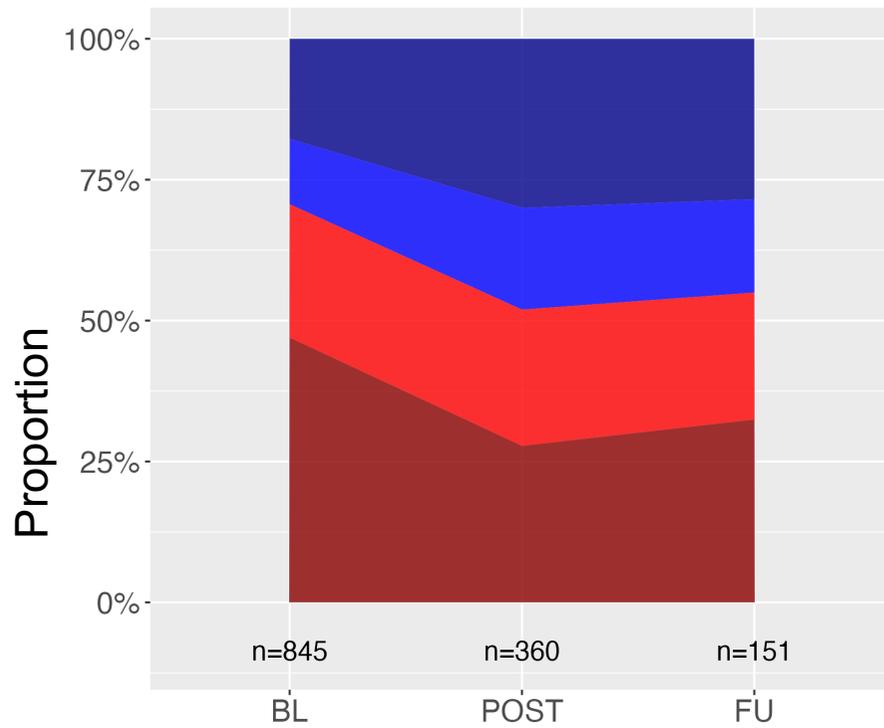


### Kessler K10: Distress

- (probably) none (K10: 10-19)
- mild (K10: 20-24)
- moderate (K10: 25-29)
- severe (K10: 30-50)

- 53% of clients state that they feel severely stressed before PM+. After PM+, 27% are still recommended specialised treatment
- 42% state that after PM+ they no longer feel distressed. That is almost three times more than before PM+.

# Results: Anxiety

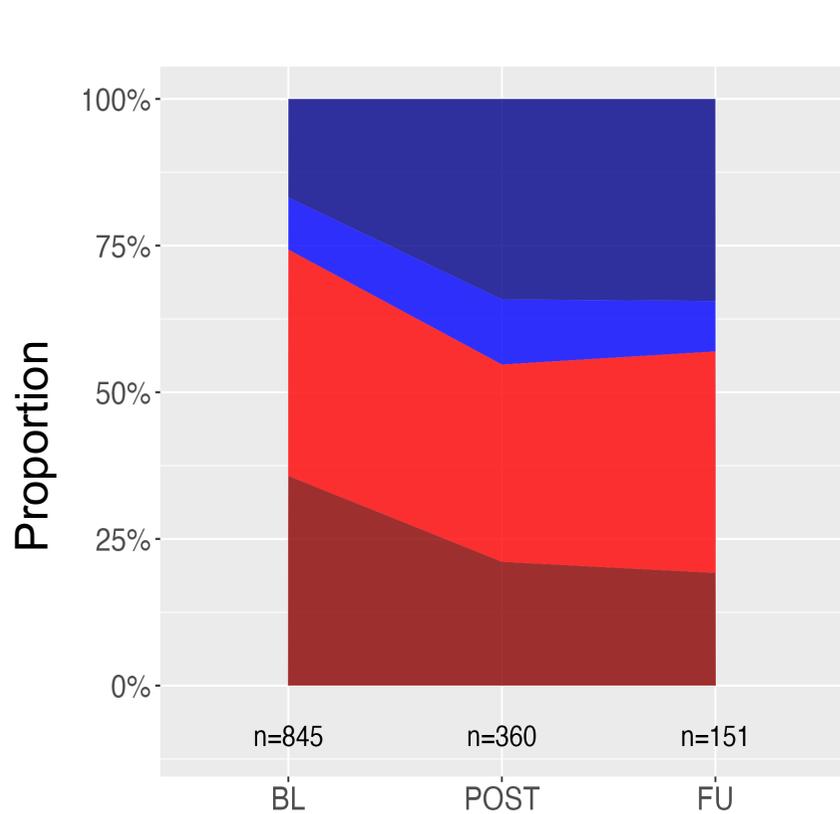


## HSCL 25: Anxiety

- not conspicuous
- slightly conspicuous
- clearly conspicuous
- strongly conspicuous

✓ After PM+, the proportion of people with noticeably high anxiety decreases and remains stable

# Results: Depression

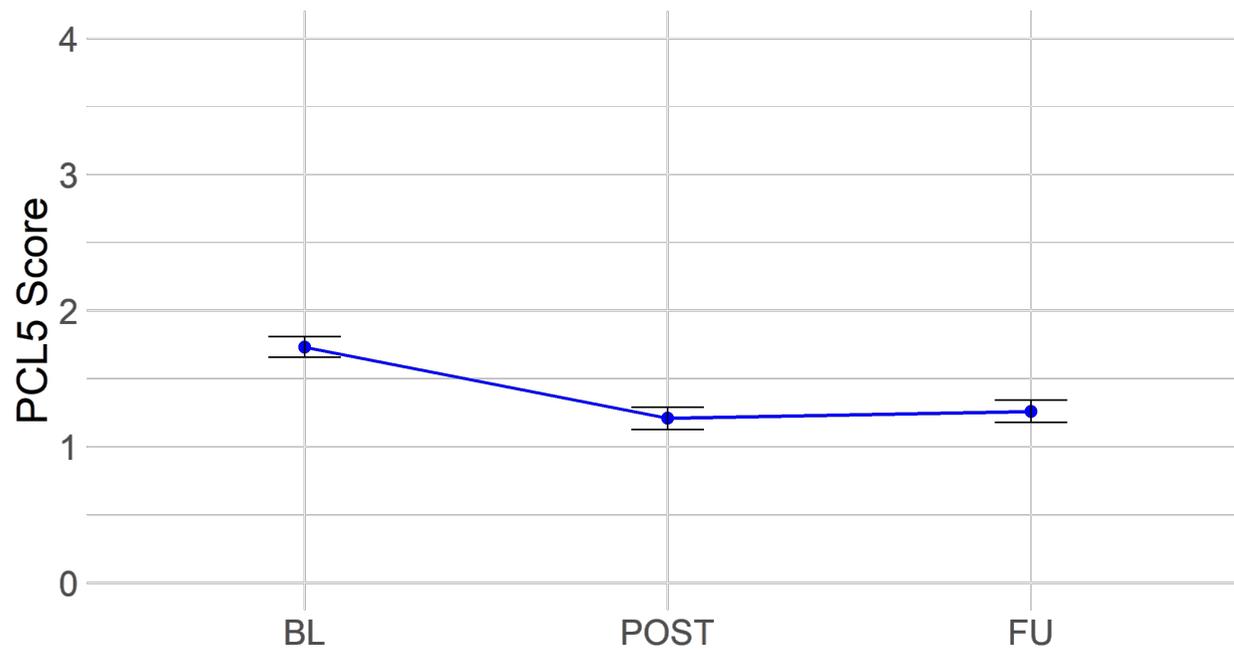


## HSCL 25: Depression

- not conspicuous
- slightly conspicuous
- clearly conspicuous
- strongly conspicuous

✓ After PM+, the proportion of people with noticeably high signs of depression falls and remains stable

## Results: Post-traumatic stress



### PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5):

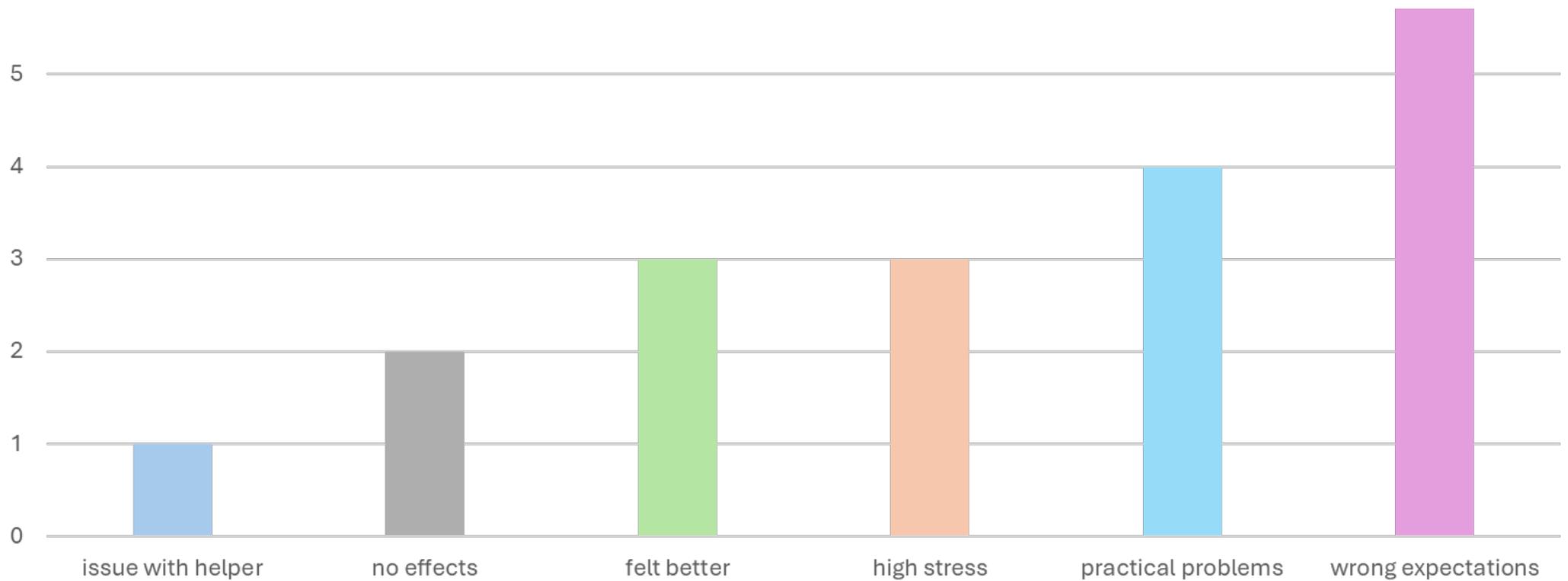
Statistically significant reduction from BL to POST/FU

✓ Post-traumatic stress is lower after PM+ and remains stable

n = 134

## Reasons for drop-out

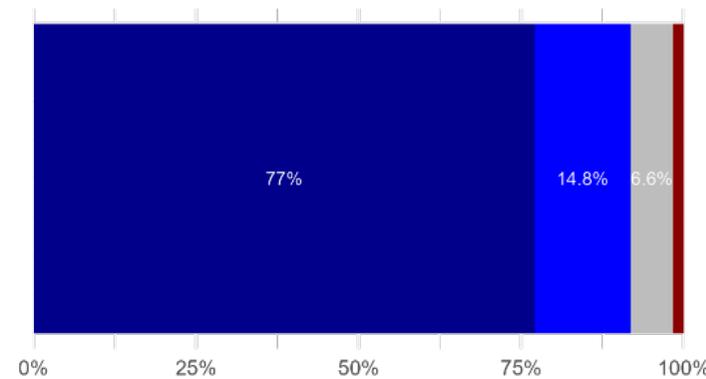
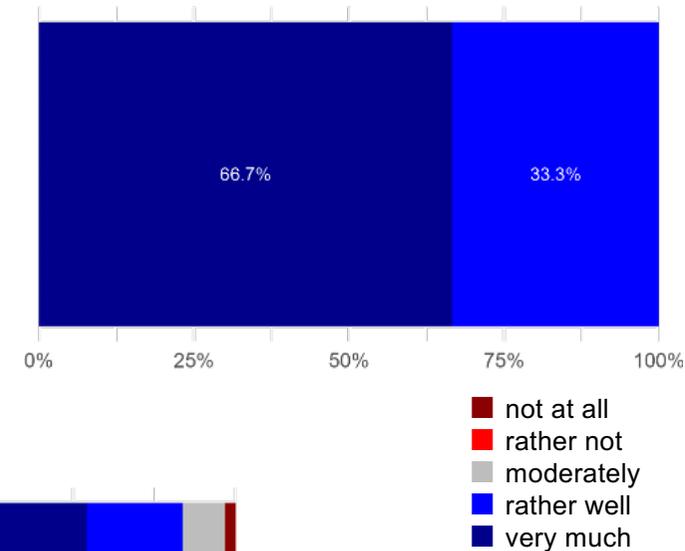
What was the main reason for not continuing with the intervention?



# Helper evaluation

- The helpers **enjoy their work** and the **majority are satisfied with the working conditions**
- **Lower satisfaction ratings for remuneration** (hourly wage and total compensation)
- The helpers consider **PM+** to be useful and also benefit from it **in their own everyday lives**
- Over **80%** of participants can imagine continuing as helpers in the future

## Satisfaction



- do not agree
- rather disagree
- neither agree nor disagree
- rather agree
- agree

## Meaningful

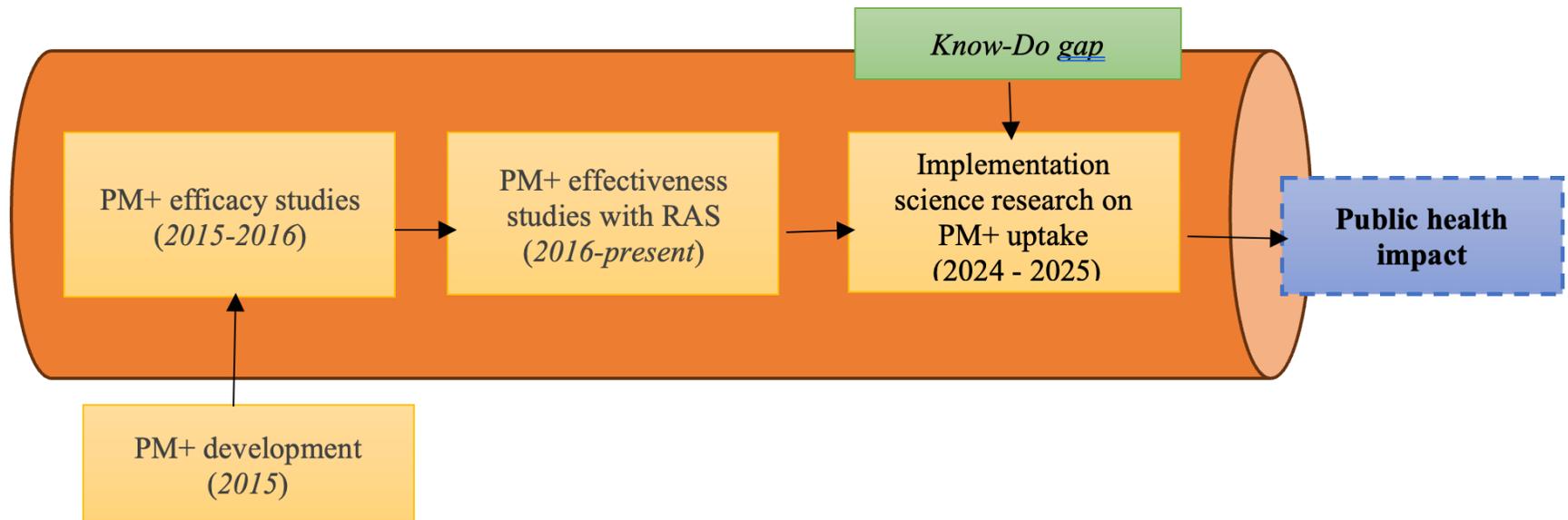
# BRIGHT Project - Boosting Refugee Integration Through Psychological Intervention

- First large-scale **representative survey**
- **Adapt and evaluate augmented PM+**
- Analyze how mental health benefits of PM+ impact social, political, economic, and navigational dimensions of **integration of refugees and asylum seekers**
- Psychological Outcomes
- Facial Expression
- Social security
- Integration index
- Health insurance data

# Process and lessons learned



# Implementation Framework



(Keyan, Bryant, Morina, 2023)

# 'PM+ Implementation in Switzerland: Multi-Level Challenges and Pathways Forward'

Stakeholder perspectives on barriers, opportunities, and system integration | CFIR Framework Analysis



**Key Finding:** Multi-level coordination and stakeholder engagement essential to balance barriers with opportunities



# Challenges we faced: barriers

## Decentralized governance in Switzerland

Variability across cantons in resources, staffing, and administrative systems required flexible, region-specific approaches

## Workforce availability

Addressed by training large numbers of lay helpers and establishing a national trainer network

## Linguistic complexity

Multiple languages across administrative systems and refugee populations

## Sustainability questions

Long-term financing depends on embedding mental health within cantonal integration programs and securing blended public-private funding

## Professional legitimacy

Navigating a therapeutic landscape typically dominated by specialist-led models; professional association endorsement emerging as key lever

# Implementation: continuum of low-level vs. complex

## Operational experience in SPIRIT

- Low-threshold intervention vs. complex/high implementation setup
- Long-term integration into existing systems vs. short-term pilot financing
- High initial costs for infrastructure vs. low intervention costs once established as routine care
- Responsibility diffusion: Health vs. Integration vs. Social

## What is needed for success

- Political understanding of undertreatment and its high downstream costs
- Sufficient initial funding
- Resources (personnel, time) for network building and awareness raising
- Conditions for stable workforce to avoid high turnover (hourly wages vs. fixed employment contracts)
- First-language access to the target population

# Factors promoting success

## Intersectoral Collaboration

Health, migration/integration, and social service systems working together provided multiple delivery platforms and entry points for PM+

## Policy Alignment

SPIRIT aligned with national priorities for refugee integration, social cohesion, and cost containment

## Federal Institutional Authority

Partnership with SEM and FOPH ensured policy alignment and cross-canton credibility

## Multilingual and Culturally Flexible

PM+ designed for adaptation across cultures; 12-language capability addressed diverse refugee populations

## Standardized Training Procedures (EQUIP)

National competency standards enabled scalable training while maintaining quality across regions

## Lessons learned: Changing systems



**Scale is a systems challenge, not a clinical one:**



Evidence-based interventions are necessary but insufficient



Real-world impact depends on governance, financing, workforce, and coordination



Fragmented pilot projects rarely survive without institutional embedding



**Key insight:**



Effective scale-up requires redesigning systems, not just delivering interventions

## Lessons Learned: Enablers of sustainable scale



**Task-sharing works when quality and trust are protected:**



Non-specialist delivery can be effective at scale



Requires structured training, supervision, and referral pathways



Fidelity to function matters more than fidelity to form



**Key insight:**



Quality assurance and supervision must be treated as core infrastructure

## Changing the system, impacting lives

When systems shift, people experience:

- Earlier and more equitable access to care
- Reduced stigma and fewer barriers
- More appropriate triage into stepped care
- Reduced chronicity and specialist service overload

→ When systems change, interventions become pathways - not projects

## Current status and future implementation

- Move beyond pilots to sustainable implementation
- Build close collaboration across actors and cantons
- Bring together practice, research, and policy
- Invest in long-term partnerships built on trust



## Partners

Promotion of Health Switzerland

B&A

SEM: State Secretariate of Migration

FOSP: Federal Office of Public Health

Swiss Red Cross: Zürich, Bern, Basel-Stadt,  
Basel-Land, Thurgau, Vaud

Caritas Switzerland

Cantons: Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft,  
Bern, Waadt, Luzern, Schwyz, Zürich,  
Thurgau, Schaffhausen, Vaud

CHUV

UNHCR, UNSW, ETH

USZ, UZH

**USZ** Universitäts  
Spital Zürich



Participants

Asylum seekers

Refugees

Migrants

**Thank you for your attention!**

**Merci pour votre attention!**

**Vielen Dank für Ihre  
Aufmerksamkeit!**

***Grazia fitg per l'attenziun!***

**Molte grazie per la vostra attenzione!**

naser.morina@usz.ch

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Horizon2020  
European Union Funding  
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FONDO NAZIONALE SVIZZERO  
SWISS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra



Gesundheitsförderung Schweiz  
Promotion Santé Suisse  
Promozione Salute Svizzera

**SP|RIT**

SCALING UP PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS  
IN REFUGEES IN SWITZERLAND

**BR|IGHT**

BOOSTING REFUGEE INTEGRATION  
THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION