



NO NAME KITCHEN
COMMUNITY CENTER
HANDBOOK

SJENICA, SERBIA



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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CENTER (CC)?

Taking care of ourselves and others is a profound challenge, especially in contexts where border regimes perpetuate systemic violence, exploitation, and harm to both mental and physical health.

For people on the move, community centers play a crucial role in providing a **safe and welcoming environment** outside the confines of camps or temporary settlements.

These spaces offer more than just physical refuge—they create a **sense of belonging and dignity**, giving individuals access to essential services, opportunities to participate in activities, and the chance to build meaningful connections. By fostering inclusivity and support, community centres help ease the isolation and stress often tied to displacement.



WHY A COMMUNITY CENTRE?

In many contexts, fundamental rights to stay and leave with dignity are systematically restricted, often through violent border policies or bureaucratic barriers. When movement is halted—whether by external forces or internal distress—solidarity must go beyond simply facilitating onward travel. It must take a different form: creating spaces where people can regain agency, find refuge, and feel a sense of belonging, even when they are stuck.

While basic needs like food and shelter may be met in other places, people on the move are often deprived of their psycho-social needs: opportunities for self-determination, meaningful activities, empowerment, and social connection. A community center can address these needs by offering a supportive environment where people can access their own resources, take on responsibilities, form relationships, and establish routines.

Beyond providing daily support, community centers also play a crucial role in documenting rights violations, bearing witness to the lives of people on the move, amplifying their voices, and challenging the systems that perpetuate their suffering.



In this context, providing psychosocial support—whether through creating safe spaces, offering activities, or simply fostering human connection and giving voice to injustices—becomes an act of political resistance. Offering a place where people can experience dignity and solidarity is, in itself, an act of defiance against systems of control.

A Community Center is not just about meeting immediate needs; it's about resisting systemic injustice by providing a **different narrative—one focused on dignity, social support, and humanity.**

WHY THIS HANDBOOK?

The purpose of this handbook is to provide practical suggestions to the Community center's teams to create an environment where people on the move feel welcome and where psychosocial activities can be developed considering needs and vulnerabilities.

The handbook begins from the understanding that mental health is a broad concept, shaped by legal, social, and political factors exploring how the systemic violence of border systems, traumatic events and the uncertainty of being on the move can impact people, contributing to stressors that can manifest in various ways. Building on this, it explains what trauma is, how its symptoms might appear, and how to approach these challenges within the safe space of a community centre. The handbook outlines the kinds of activities that can be offered in response to these needs, as well as the limitations of psychosocial interventions.

With this foundation, the handbook aims to equip Community Centre activists with practical suggestions and methodologies to create an environment where people on the move feel welcome, reasoning in terms of boundaries, attitudes and behaviors and in space organization. Additionally, the handbook includes activity ideas, providing guidance and suggestions on how to shape them according to people's needs; the focus is on fostering collective care—sharing time, ideas, and plans, and involving everyone in a collaborative process of support and experimentation to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Lastly, there is a focus on networking as an essential part of integrating community centers into the local context, creating connections with other organizations and local groups that can help support people on the move starting from considering their needs and interests.

The ideas analysed alongside this handbook derived from an assessment conducted at the Sjenica Community Centre involving all the actors, from people on the move, to the activists and the team. These activities have been adapted for broader implementation and designed to fit into diverse projects. While there is a specific focus on the Serbian context as a case study, the principles and approaches can be applied to Community Centres in various settings, with an understanding that each context shapes its unique needs and possibilities.



UNDERSTANDING THE SURROUNDING CONTEXT

MENTAL HEALTH & CONTEXT

The context in which people are passing through or are stuck is crucial for understanding their overall well-being. Taking the time to explore and understand the political, historical, and cultural background of the community center's location is key to gaining a clear picture of people's mental health conditions.

Being on the move exposes individuals to various risk factors that can impact their well-being, which can be divided into pre-migratory, migratory, and post-migratory (Aragona et al., 2006). In most cases, working in a community center means engaging with people on their journey, which means they've already faced many challenges. At the start of their journey, many have fled conflicts, discrimination, poor conditions, environmental disasters. During their journey, they likely experienced pushbacks and various forms of border violence, which can vary depending on the countries they've passed through and the current political climate. Some may be seeking asylum in the country where you meet them, and in this case, the importance of social support and context shifts from being temporary to something crucial for their future.

Understanding this context and being informed about these experiences provides valuable insights into people's histories and mental health. Mental health is never just about individual psychology; it is deeply interconnected with social, political, and cultural dimensions.

COMMUNITY CENTER IN SJENICA: A CASE STUDY

Following an assessment conducted in January 2024, NNK decided to open a project in Sjenica to support people on the move present in the area. After an initial phase, from October 2024, a Community Center was opened to provide a safe and welcoming space for individuals staying in the camp, especially during the colder months.

The Special Police Operation carried out in Serbia in October 2023 marked a turning point in the dynamics of people's movements across the country. The closure of several camps forced many individuals, who had been residing in Serbia for extended periods due to various circumstances, to gradually relocate to the Sjenica camp.



As a result, Sjenica has increasingly become a place where people are forcibly congregating. Sjenica is a place of waiting—a wait that, for some, lasts only a few days, while for others, it can stretch into years. During the initial assessment made by NNK, it was observed that some individuals displayed signs of mental health or psychiatric challenges.

Although officially designated as an asylum seekers' camp with a capacity of 350 beds, in practice, Sjenica also functions as a transit camp. The camp hosts a diverse population, including a dozen asylum seekers, a few long-term residents who are not asking for asylum in Serbia, and individuals who stay only briefly before moving on. This dynamic results in a high turnover of people, also fueled by continuous internal deportations carried out by Serbian police from border areas and Belgrade. Indeed, Sjenica camp has become the destination for those subjected to pushbacks along the Serbian-Bosnian or Serbian-Croatian borders, as well as for individuals apprehended in Belgrade.

Even those detained for 3 to 6 months for irregular presence in Serbia are transferred to Sjenica upon release. In the initial months after the police operation, most arrivals at Sjenica continued their journey towards Montenegro. More recently, however, there has been a shift, with individuals attempting to return to Belgrade to resume their journey—primarily toward Bosnia and, increasingly in recent months, Hungary.

Among the actors present in the camp there are UNHCR, which is supposed to offer support to asylum seekers; DRC and SIGMA PLUS (<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89400>), which offers recreational activities seasonally; and IOM, which provides workshops on voluntary return. In addition to these organizations, there are two different private security companies working within the camp.

Sjenica is never a destination of choice; for many, it becomes a place where they are stuck for months or even years. In this environment, the mental health of people on the move is entirely neglected. In addition, this is incremented by a lack of opportunities and activities, making each day feel indistinguishable from the next. Compounding these challenges, numerous instances of physical and psychological violence against people in transit at the camp have been documented, with beatings disproportionately targeting the most vulnerable individuals. The absence of adequate support, coupled with prolonged uncertainty, isolation, and abuse, further exacerbates feelings of hopelessness and despair among those forced to remain in Sjenica.



MENTAL DISTRESS ON THE GAME

PSYCHOEDUCATION

This short chapter aims to give an idea of the psychological struggles that people on the move might experience, starting with an exploration of what trauma is and how it shows up in people's behavior. While it's not possible to make formal diagnoses in these settings, being aware of how symptoms appear can help us recognize the vulnerabilities and difficulties people on the move are going through. This awareness can guide how we engage in the activities of community centers and emphasize the importance of offering social support in places deeply affected by structural violence, scarcity, and instability. In this context, it's also crucial to understand what is possible within the limits of mental health care. Recognizing the complexity of mental health can help us reflect on what we can realistically do by implementing some strategies and approaches psychology suggests to support individuals while acknowledging the boundaries of our role.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

The term "trauma" (from the Greek *trayma*, meaning "perforation" or "to go beyond") refers to an intense and disruptive experience. In medicine, traumatic pathology encompasses all disorders that arise as a reaction to the violent impact of external agents. In psychology, trauma is defined as an **event of such overwhelming intensity** that the individual is unable to respond effectively (Laplanche J., Pontalis J.B., 2003). This makes it difficult to process, manage, and find meaning in the experience, further hindering emotional and psychological recovery.

In simple terms, trauma can be seen as a "cause" that, through violent impact, brings about changes in an individual. It's clear that the key elements in any traumatic experience are the event itself and the person going through it. The way trauma affects different people can vary a lot, depending on their personal strengths and coping resources (often referred to as "resilience"). Those who have experienced past trauma or have certain vulnerabilities may face more severe and lasting effects (Bettelheim B., 1984). Likewise, the impact of trauma can change for the same person, depending on the type of event they are dealing with. Working with People on the Move means encountering a variety of personal histories, each shaped by different events.



It's important to remember that the impact of trauma can vary even for the same person, depending on the type of event they are facing. When trauma comes from "natural" violent events—things beyond human control—the person dealing with it will often face "material" consequences like poverty, loss, or financial struggles (which is common for refugees who've had to leave their homes, families, jobs, and social positions). Despite these hardships, they might still have some form of "trust" or hope, drawn from the basic belief that they can rely on others. However, when trauma comes from human violence, the psychological damage goes deeper, affecting core beliefs and assumptions that the person once considered fundamental and unquestionable. This can make it much harder to return to life as it was before. This is especially true for refugees who have been tortured, as they often undergo deep personality changes, whether temporary or lasting, which can completely alter how they perceive themselves, think, and relate to the world around them (Lalli N., 1997).

MENTAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH

In the transcultural psychiatric approach, there's a distinction between disease, illness and sickness. Disease is seen as something that can be measured using diagnostic tools and clinical symptoms, typically through a Western medical lens. Illness is how someone personally experiences distress—it's their own interpretation of what they're going through, influenced by their culture, social situation, beliefs, and values. Sickness is the process for the socialisation of disease and illness, not so much the meaning that the individual person attaches to what he or she is experiencing, but a broader attribution that is given by society to create a social order. Illness can't always be understood using Western medical systems but needs to be seen through the person's own worldview, including the social consequences which pathology can lead to. In this framework, doctors diagnose diseases, while people deal with illnesses, in a society that makes judgements and considerations about this state.

In the context of humanitarian aid, this distinction translates into the difference between mental health and psychosocial health. Mental disorders, like diseases, can be assessed using clear indicators, as laid out in the DSM. Treatment here aims to restore mental health using Western psychological methods. Psychosocial disorders, on the other hand, are often shaped by culture and reflect suffering in emotional, physical, social, moral, or spiritual ways. **Psychosocial support** focuses on **reconnecting the individual to their community, culture, and environment**.

Through fieldwork with NNK, activists engage directly with the experiences, histories, behaviors, and attitudes of People on the Move (PoM). In this context, it is essential to have a general understanding of trauma and its impact on mental health, as this awareness helps prepare for the challenges that may arise during activities in community centers. It is also important to approach this work with the understanding that experiences are subjective and can vary significantly based on cultural differences.

Building on this, it's possible to work together to develop strategies that create a safe and supportive environment for everyone.



PTSD: SIGNS TO BE AWARE OF

Not everyone exposed to traumatic events develops post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Whether PTSD occurs often depends on how individuals react to the experience and the resources they have to cope with it. There are not a lot of studies on the topic, some of them analyzed the impact of detention in 'reception' or identification centers on the mental health of asylum seekers and refugees highlighting a high prevalence of post traumatic disorders (PTSD), anxiety disorders, depressive reactions (Robiant K. et al., 2004).

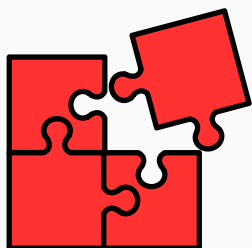
But what are the common signs of PTSD?

PTSD often shows up as 'intrusive' symptoms that make a person relive the traumatic event, disrupting their daily life. This can happen through **vivid and recurring memories**, strong emotions, or even sensations like smells, sounds, or images that bring back the event as if it's happening again. When these moments occur during daily activities, the person may freeze and remain motionless, staring blankly at one spot. These symptoms can also appear during sleep as vivid nightmares so intense they wake the person.

People with PTSD also **tend to avoid** anything that reminds them of the trauma, such as certain places, people, or feelings. Sometimes, they might not even remember parts of the event, as if their mind has blocked it out to protect them.

Another common sign of PTSD is feeling constantly 'on edge' because of the **hyperactivation** of the nervous system, which controls things like breathing and heart rate. This can make someone feel like something bad is about to happen all the time. Triggers, such as small spaces for someone who was detained or loud noises for someone involved in a conflict, can cause physical reactions like a racing heart, shaking, sweating, or irritability.

Another symptom, called 'numbing,' makes people feel emotionally disconnected or **detached from others**. They may also struggle to feel anything about things that used to matter to them (Henigsberg N. et al., 2004).



Let's picture this through the lens of a Community Center. Imagine a scenario where people are participating in a painting or drawing workshop together. At one point, someone draws a river, and another person suddenly stops what he's doing and starts staring blankly at one spot. After a few moments, an activist softly asks if everything is fine with him and he then shares that the image of the river brought back the memory of being violently pushed back at a river on the border.

(Sjenica, December 2024).



How to Support Someone in These Moments?

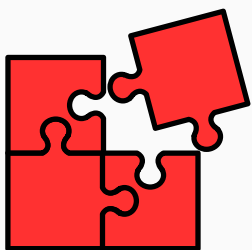
When trauma comes from human violence, it often causes deeper psychological damage, challenging core beliefs and assumptions—like the idea that you can trust others. This can lead to the belief that there's no one they can truly rely on. Living in a situation of stagnation, such as in a camp with limited resources, can reinforce these unconscious beliefs, while also contributing to a loss of community and a deep sense of loneliness.

That's why creating a safe space where **trust can be rebuilt** is very important. Trust might seem like a small thing, but it can be very important for mental health. In practice, this can mean creating a space where PoM can feel welcomed and comfortable in which they can meet NNK team and other people in a different context, creating connections and relationships that can differ from the ones characterizing the camp. In this direction, informal activities and sharing meals is a good way to start creating trust relationships.

At the same time, it's important that the team shows **care and willingness to listen** to people's needs, also respecting their pace and not pressuring them to share their story if it's not the right time for them. Let them process in their own time, trust can be built through patience and respect for each person's needs.

In this sense, it's important to keep in mind that for someone telling his own history is something very painful that can make a lot of thoughts and emotions emerge and because of this it's important to give them the right attention, **space and time** when someone feels ready to share it. The risk otherwise is to create conditions whereby the person sharing experiences re-traumatisation (condition whereby a person who has already experienced trauma is reactivated by a stressor that leads them to experience further trauma. In the case described, recounting one's traumatic experience in a context perceived as unsafe can itself become a second traumatic experience). It's not just a matter of advocacy and collecting testimonies, it is also a matter of going in depth with personal suffering and pain. In this sense, creating a relation of trust has a meaning that goes beyond the simple connection with other people but it can be the engine of a process of reappropriation of the sense of trust and social support lost during the suffered violence.

As seen before, it can happen that PoM can have moments of detachment and deep thoughts about past events. In these moments, it is important to give them their own space but to also be close to their difficulties they are experiencing.



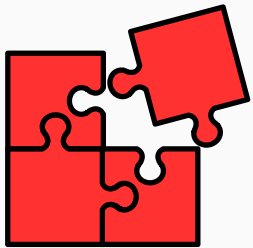
Let's picture this in practice through the lens of the previous scenario of at the painting workshop. In practice, a way to provide support can be to share the difficulty we are observing by saying something like "I think that while we were drawing you passed through some thoughts, if you want to share something feel free to speak with us". In some situations, also sharing silence can be very useful because it can make people feel that someone is there with them.

Since the stay with NNK project is temporary, it's important to remember that each activist will spend only a limited amount of time in the field, meaning many PoM will encounter multiple activists over time. In this context, fostering meaningful and balanced relationships is essential, along with encouraging connections among PoM themselves.

Additionally, it's crucial to recognize that during migratory journeys, many connections are formed and lost along the way. To avoid contributing to feelings of abandonment or being forgotten after leaving the field, efforts should focus on creating a **sense of continuity** and support, rather than inadvertently reinforcing disconnection.

Limits

Sometimes aggressive behaviors and symptoms can be very severe and it's important to recognise the **limits that psychosocial intervention has**. In these cases, an important way is to look for strategies and external help that can represent an additional support to the person.



For example, if you observe someone in a very depressive state and with some signs of self harming behaviors (like scratches on the arms) and referred suicidal thoughts, it is important to recognise the need for specialistic support, trying to understand which are the services that are available on the field, like psychiatric support, psychological support (even if online, better than nothing) and to ensure the person the link with them (es. going with the person to the specialistic service). This can also mean to inform the camp's services (the doctor's camp, UNHCR,...). The objective should be activating all the possible services that can provide support to the person.

Risks

Working with people in high mental distress can also mean dealing with people using substances and drugs which sometimes can translate in aggressive behaviors that can be towards others attending the center or, less likely, towards the team. In these cases, knowing PoM's vulnerabilities, does not mean that nothing can happen and it's important to overcome the tendency to underestimate risks or to justify people in mental distress for any behaviors. Instead, it is important to take seriously people who verbally threaten violence and physically use violence, who do not recognize boundaries and do not adhere to minimal rules (guidelines) even if we are talking about people in high mental distress. Having this in mind, it is important to take action putting safety of the team and of the whole community center before.



METHODOLOGY

ORGANIZING THE SPACE

Community centers are places where people come to spend time in different ways. Some are just passing through, staying for a few days before continuing the game, while others face difficulties moving forward and end up staying much longer, becoming well known faces.

Because of this, it is important to have **a space that works for different needs**; it is important that it could be somewhere to rest and a place for activities especially for those attending the center regularly. In fact, those who are stuck can benefit from things to do, while those just passing through might just want a quiet spot to relax and have some tea.

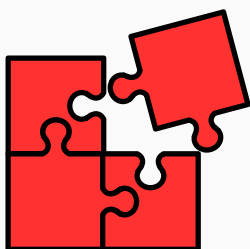
A possible strategy is to divide the space into **two areas**—one always available for rest where people can have tea and freely enjoy games and **free space**, and another **dedicated to specific activities**. In this way it is possible to ensure that there is always a space for all needs.

On the wall

Especially when stuck, a lot of PoM living in a camp feel that days are all the same and it happens that they lose the sense of time flow.

Because of this, it's important to have an **opening and closing time** together with a **calendar** that people can have in mind. This can provide people with a schedule and seeing the different activities and days can help to keep a rhythm.

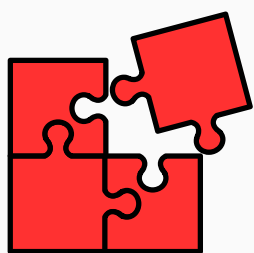
In addition to being useful for people's detachment, this can also foster trust which can also mean sticking to timetables and schedules.



For example, if there's a distribution planned for Monday, it's important to follow through, or if it needs to be postponed, explaining the reasons ahead of time, especially in winter time when having a jacket or a good pair of shoes can be crucial for crossing the border and people can rely on it for their organization.



It's also important to have clear **Guidelines** written down and visible in the center so that PoM attending the space are aware of them at all times. Having these guidelines in place helps the team manage situations when they arise, reinforcing that these are organizational decisions—not personal ones made by whoever is present at the moment. Everyone should follow these guidelines, and they set the boundaries for how the space is used. Having the guidelines translated in different languages can make them more comprehensible and clear to all the people attending the Community Center.



Especially when the community center first opens, a great way to create a sense of community and belonging is to hold a workshop where people discuss and write the guidelines together translating them into different languages. Another idea is to create symbols for each rule, asking to draw them alongside the guidelines. This way, the guidelines become more accessible and visually clear for everyone.



It is also important that it is explained to the surrounding place what the community center is, so it is important to create a simple explanation of WHAT CC IS and what NNK activists do inside.

It is important to have it translated also in the local language and not only in english. This also helps define the boundaries of what a community center can and cannot do, making it easier to decline requests that exceed our capacities and to avoid fostering assistentialism (below an example).

BOUNDARIES

Being an activist in community centers means interacting with many different people, sometimes continuously throughout your entire stay with NNK.

Because of this, it's important to **set boundaries** to avoid becoming overly involved in personal relationships and to prevent difficult or challenging situations.

Community centers are meant to be free spaces where people feel welcome, can rest, and enjoy activities. However, it's important to recognize that they are not free from **power dynamics, we are also part of these dynamics**. Power dynamics can develop and express through the unequal distribution of information (e.g. who knows the CC particularly well, who knows the processes and details, who has been in Sjenica for a very long time and knows about many structures), privileges (e.g. race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, ...), presence (e.g. who is there particularly often, who shows initiative to do things) or language (e.g. who speaks English, Arabic, Serbian, French, etc. particularly well) (applies to both groups of people, volunteers and PoMs).

These are complex social and societal dynamics that we won't be able to overcome easily. However, it is extremely important that we are aware of these power dynamics, actively observe them, discuss them and act accordingly. This means we need to be aware of our role in the space, as our behavior and presence contribute to the overall environment.

Examples for power dynamics can be:

It's also important to be aware that certain behaviors, sometimes unconsciously, can create hierarchies, always involving the same people in specific tasks. Because of this, people attending the center should not be responsible for activities like cleaning or serving meals, ensuring that everyone can **experience the space on equal terms**. Another way we contribute to shaping hierarchies is through distribution activities, where activists' experiences have shown that the research approach changes based on our relationship with the person making the request. In this sense, it is important to be mindful of these dynamics, as they play a role in creating hierarchies and potentially overstepping boundaries.

Being aware of these dynamics it's essential to stay mindful of everyone, ensuring that no one is left behind. At the same time, it's natural to feel closer to some people than others, but this should be balanced to **avoid favoritism**.

We may never fully understand the power dynamics present in the camp, or maybe only partially, but we can at least try to **balance them within the community center**. The goal is to create a space where everyone feels free to use it in the way that suits them best. Sometimes, this also means being firm in certain situations, even with simple things, like the use of threatening language or physical contact.

In these cases, it's important to set boundaries, not just to prevent certain situations but also to avoid becoming overly involved in personal relationships, especially considering the long hours spent in the community center. One key boundary is **avoiding sharing personal phone numbers** or continuing conversations after the center's closing time.



While it may feel rewarding at first, it can quickly eat into your free time. Taking breaks is crucial to staying energized on the field. Instead, **using the CC phone** for communication ensures availability in case of emergencies while preventing relationships from becoming too individualized. It is also a way to distribute dynamics, tasks and a potential emotional burden in a collective way and manage the things as a team. Still you can be in touch in a person way through the base phone by starting

This approach also lightens the emotional burden, as handling emergencies as a team makes things more manageable. That said, having a more personal touch in conversations is still possible, you can always start a message with “Hi, it’s _____.” We recommend to share your number only with a few people you connect with at the end of your stay, while making your capacities of staying in touch transparent.

However, giving your personal number to everyone can lead to an overwhelming number of messages, making it impossible to disconnect during breaks or respond once you're back to your normal routine. A better approach is to share your number only with a few people you connect with at the end of your stay, while making it clear that once you return to work or studies, you won't be available to chat like you were in the field. This also helps prevent a sense of abandonment, something many people experience along their journey, and which is made worse by the high turnover of activists especially for the ones who are stuck since many time.

Another important topic for collective reflection is the **subjectivity of boundaries**: what feels uncomfortable for some activists may not be for others. Therefore, it is essential to discuss how we can prevent difficult situations, recognizing that boundaries are not only individual but also impact the collective dynamic. For example, sharing very personal information with People on the Move (PoM) at the center might unintentionally create expectations, putting pressure on activists to disclose their own personal details as well. This can lead to uncomfortable situations, especially if certain topics or behaviors cross boundaries, potentially resulting in harassment. This doesn't mean setting specific limits about what we can share or what we cannot, but it's an important consideration to have in mind because the way we interact and we behave, especially when our involvement is temporary, influences collective dynamics.

Speaking about the subjectivity of boundaries brings us to the topic of **gender dynamics**. Being in the CC for longer (as an activist), seeing the same people over and over and spending a lot of time with them, holds the challenge to recognise, maintain and acting upon own boundaries. It can happen that volunteers' own personal, intimate space is violated by PoMs. For example, people feel harassed by inappropriate questions, glances and physical contact. Here, too, the boundaries are very individual. However, this makes it all the more important to have a collective view and responsibility for this. And we always have room for manoeuvre in specific situations, sometimes it is not visible at first glance, so it is helpful if more eyes are alert and focused on each other. And then to react and act together as a group.

It's also common for people to invite you for a coffee or drink outside the CC. While this can be well-intentioned, it's important to **avoid drinking alcohol together**. Many people may struggle with alcohol abuse, even if it's not obvious to the team, and drinking together can unintentionally reinforce this behavior.



This is especially common among those who have experienced trauma. Beyond that, accepting such invitations can become tricky, others in the center may notice and start asking you to do the same. Since you already spend the entire day together, there's no real need to go out at night or on your days off.

In the beginning, you might feel full of energy and eager to say yes to everything, but it's essential to recharge. If someone asks to meet outside CC hours and it seems truly important to them, **discuss it with the team first**. If you decide to go, make sure to go as a group or at least in pairs, never alone.

Additionally, people may ask about your weekend plans. In these cases, it's best not to involve those attending the center. This can put you in difficult situations and take away from the weekend as a necessary time for you and the team to rest and reset.

You already spend the whole week together, there's **no need to extend that into your weekend time. Time is also a boundary**.

Boundaries mean also care

Being on the field makes it challenging to maintain an objective view of how boundaries are being handled. Often, we only realize when they have already been overstepped. This happens mainly because we tend to underestimate the importance of relationships and only recognize their impact when clear signs emerge. For this reason, and especially in community centers where prolonged contact with PoM occurs, this can go over control easily. To address this, it's important to take time to reflect on boundaries both personally and collectively, allowing for breaks when we feel they are close to being overstepped. Using collective reflection both with the team on the field and the health care team it's a important tool for maintaining healthy interactions.

Reasoning together about boundaries can help in navigating the complexities of working in a community center, ensuring that both activists and PoM experience a space that is supportive, respectful, and sustainable.



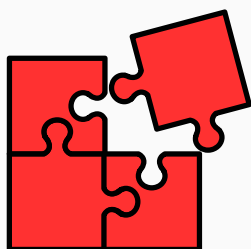
EMERGENCIES

While people on the move attend the community centre spaces, it may happen that they face psychological emergencies or psychiatric emergencies. The first represents a difficulty in continuing with routine and activating coping mechanisms following severe distress, while the second one is a more serious situation, usually related to mental disorders. For both, the risk may be self-harm or harm to others.

The factors that can trigger an emergency can be various, in some cases they are identifiable and foreseeable, but in other cases they are not, which is why it is good to have protocols in mind that can be followed when such a situation arises.

When the factors that may trigger an emergency or crisis situation are predictable, it's good to have a way of handovering information between teams. If some people have already had previous crises or if there are materials or activities that have put other people in difficulty in the past, it is important to have a safe space where to note what happened and especially the strategies used and the changes introduced. Respect for the person's privacy must always be guaranteed, but in order to be able to better organise space and activities without causing a reactivation, there must be this transmission.

For all unforeseeable emergency situations, from the principles of psychological first aid, we know that the management of a critical event is crucial to avoid secondary damage therefore it is important to support people with regard to their basic needs and health needs, it is important to listen to them without judging and try to connect them with the information they need; at the same time it is crucial to recognise the limits of one's actions and to remember that the goal is safety.

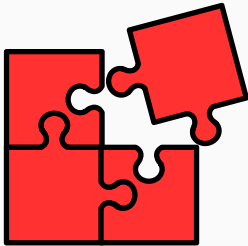


For example, if a person threatens to injure himself or starts hurting himself, if he cannot recover from a crisis, or if he becomes a danger to others, he is unlikely to find the support he needs in community centre volunteers.



Severe behavioural crisis

One of the most frequent emergencies that can occur in the community centre is that of an acute behavioural crisis: a situation in which the person manifests behaviour that puts him/ her/ they at risk of harming himself/ herself/ themselves or others.



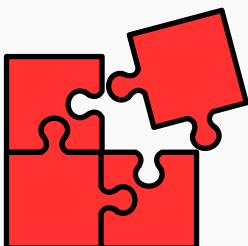
For example, if a person in the community centre:

- Threatens to harm him/herself or others, with or without harmful objects
- Verbalises suicidal intentions
- Manifests violent or destructive behaviour towards objects
- Engages in violent and aggressive behaviour towards other people

Usually other people experience difficulties in managing the acute moment with the skills and resources available, but it is important to try to prevent escalation.

Since one cannot control or be sure of the behaviour of others, the first thing to do is to GET SAFE, which means: assessing the space (whether it is possible to remove dangerous objects, avoid access to the bathroom and open the doors); removing other people who may be in danger/ assessing whether someone can be a support for the situation and having emergency contacts at hand.

After being secured, a series of DE-ESCALATION techniques can be activated, combining verbal and non-verbal communication aimed at maintaining contact with the person to try to calm them down. During a crisis it is usually difficult to reason with the person so the most important aspects are the non-verbal aspects of the body and voice.



De-escalation techniques include:

- Slow movements and a distance of at least 1 metre from the person
- Direct contact with the person (calling them by name) showing empathy and understanding, non-judgmental and genuinely interested
- Clear and brief communication
- Explicit prohibition of attacking other people or being violent with objects
- Offering possible alternatives, starting with simple things like changing position or drinking some water
- Emotional control, not reacting with anger and not challenging the person



If what has been done previously is not sufficient, it is worth considering the option of contacting external support. The priority must always be the safety of the person, the volunteers and others involved. If, on the other hand, containment works and the crisis slowly recedes, it is good to consider two final steps: reworking and connecting.

RE-ELABORATION refers to the possibility of having a space in which the person is reassured of any feelings of guilt or shame.

By CONNECTION, on the other hand, we mean a moment later (possibly even the next day), where we can reflect with the person with respect to strategies that may be useful in the future.

After an intense episode, such as a severe behavioural crisis, talking about what happened, start processing collectively and setting the next steps is also essential for community centre volunteers. For this reason, it is important to contact the Care Team, who can provide a debriefing session and, if necessary, can organise a space for collective reflection to plan next steps.



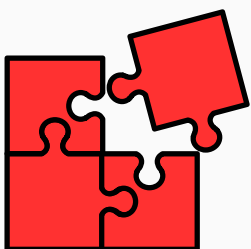
ACTIVITIES

COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH

At the base of this approach there is the importance of understanding and considering the political context, the receiving population, gender roles, community dynamics, and protection risks, concerns and priorities.

Being on the move sometimes means living in temporary “communities”, sharing places and time with others having different cultures, religions, and backgrounds even if they do not perceive themselves as belonging to any community. With this in mind, considering people attending a community center as members of a temporary community, a community-based approach can be applied, understanding that its members can play a crucial role in being drivers for their own care and, with this in mind, they should be meaningfully involved in the activities rather than just beneficiaries of a project. Adopting a community based approach means to recognize the resilience, capacities, skills and resources of PoM and, starting from this awareness, it builds on these to create strategies, improvements and support. A community-based approach is a way of working hand in hand with PoM attending the center being aware that the project is meaningful as long as it is tailored to PoM’s needs. In other words, in order to improve psychosocial well-being, what services are delivered is as important as how people are involved in the process of working towards improved well- being. This involvement can have different gradations, and consist of informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering creating a collaborative synergy between PoM and the activists on the field. This approach also means that we recognize our role as facilitators, our limitations in capacities and resources, the temporary nature of our presence, and the long-term impact of our interventions.

The strong link between the ways that interventions are delivered and the well-being of those who receive the aid is usually referred to the promotion of meaningful participation, the respect of religious and cultural practices and the empowerment of the ability of affected people to holistically promote their well-being.



Reflecting this approach in the Community Center, we can say that it should be more than just a safe space or a place in which activities or clothes are delivered. It should be a space where people feel free to express themselves and actively contribute to shaping and developing the center and its services.



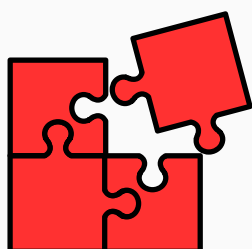
In this sense, both during the activities and during the whole opening time of the CC, important strategies to have in mind:

Create safe and inclusive spaces. Ensure that both organized activities and the ones done in the free space are conducted in a way that promotes safety, respect, and inclusivity. In this sense, it is important to encourage participation from all people attending the center, regardless of their background or experience. Gender, age, or religion and other factors should not be the cause of exclusion for people to participation of activities.

Voluntary participation and flexibility. Participation in psychosocial activities should be voluntary, with no pressure placed on PoM to participate. There could be days in which none want to join and days in which a lot of PoM will join as long as the activity starts! Ensure flexibility in how activities are conducted, recognizing that people may need breaks or may not be ready to participate at all, preferring to enjoy the free space.

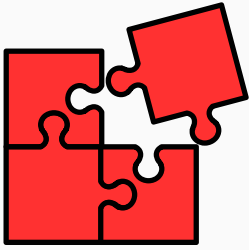
Integrate cultural sensitivity into activities. Be mindful of the cultural backgrounds and diverse needs of participants, activities should respect and be thought according to different cultural norms, languages, and practices. Physical contact can be a main topic to think about while planning activities.

Facilitate group activities to foster social connections. Design group activities that encourage interaction and connection among participants, helping to rebuild social support networks, including art activities, games, board games, music or collective moments to share about experiences and build trust. For this reason it is important that activists on the field make themselves **facilitators of relationships** between people in the camp: preferring group interactions where possible, concentrating the focus between POMs rather than activists-POM relationships. The latter is certainly of paramount importance, but it is advisable not to make it the purpose of the interactions. In a perspective of decentralizing themselves from the focus of their own experience, activists on the field are responsible for an initial engagement. This process can lead to further relations and socialization dynamics in which activists are a fundamental part but not the main subjects.



For example: a new person shows up at the field. After the initial introducing moment with the team, it is important to introduce him/her/they to the new person and at the end of the day, this should be a tool to familiarize the person with the activities and connect him/her with other people in the field.

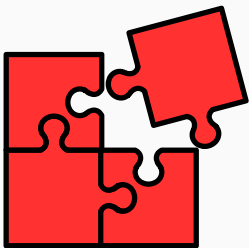




Another example: the team knows that two people attending the CC have common interests; this information can be a tool to create a relationship between the two people.

Monitor activities and free space. Regularly monitor and evaluate psychosocial activities to ensure they are meeting the needs of participants and having a positive impact. Use feedback from participants, also in informal conversations, to adjust and improve the activities and the ways PoM can be involved. A good strategy to collect feedback can be at the end of each activity taking a brief moment to reason together on how to improve.

Openness to suggestions. Being open to suggestions and new ideas is fundamental especially from PoM attending the center. Taking inputs and suggestions from them it's something that can help the center answer PoM's needs and requests.



To create a space where PoM can leave their feedback, an idea can be to create a box in which small papers can be written and left asking PoM to write ideas and suggestions using the language they prefer. It is recommended also to verbally explain this possibility to PoM attending the center and identify an activist on the field who can collect these thoughts because some people attending the CC can be illiterate. In this way, everyone can participate feeling free to write or to tell his own hints.

In the Community Center

Engaging in activities at the center helps make each day different for both PoM and activists on the field. While simply being in the space and enjoying free activities is valuable on its own, organized activities offer an additional way for PoM to participate, interact, and break the routine. Especially when stuck, a lot of PoM living in a camp feel that days are all the same and it happens that they lose the sense of time flow. In this sense, organizing activities creates opportunities for social connection, creativity, and learning, contributing to a more dynamic and inclusive environment.



To ensure the community center is welcoming and meets everyone's needs, it is important to have **two distinct areas**—one always available for rest, where people can enjoy tea, play games, and relax freely, and another designated for structured activities. Ideally, these zones should be physically separated, but if that is not possible, curtains or other dividers can be used to create a sense of space.

1. ENJOYING THE FREE SPACE

The Community center is a place where different people can have access: on one side, people just passing by and staying for a few days before continuing the game, and on the other one, people stuck who will become very well known to the NNK team. Because of this and especially for the first group of people, it is important to have a space that can just be enjoyed by people, especially in the cold of winter days.

Every context in which a community center is established, there are specific characteristics. Because of this, in organizing the free space it is important to have in mind different needs and to shape it accordingly. Here some ideas connected with people's needs:

- It's very common that PoM attending the CC are staying in a place (whether a refugee camp or a jungle) in which there is a poverty of food access. In this sense, it can be very appreciated to organize breakfasts at the opening times, or, if the food consumption it's not allowed in the center, to bring coffee and tea to be enjoyed in the center (especially during winter). People can be invited to take care of their own cup washing after their use to contribute to CC care. In particular periods, for example during Ramadan, an alternative can be providing some food at the end of the fast.
- In the majority of cases, speaking with families or with friends both at home, in the destination place or to other friends doing the game is extremely important. In this sense having some communitarian phones in the CC with internet access that can be used to call whoever people want can be very useful especially because it can happen that PoM lose their phones or got stolen along the way.
- It can be nice to think about a cozy space with plugs and different chargers in a way that PoM can rest and charge their own phones.



- Creating a “cultural space” can be very meaningful. To create it, it can be nice to do research or ask people if there are classical readings and to have them in the original language in a small library in the Community center. It can be very important to have religious books in different languages (ex. Coran in Arabic language) as religion is always a very important component in people’s life.
- Providing a space with colors, paper, and other art supplies can encourage self-expression. Having a dedicated table for creative activities ensures easy access and a welcoming environment for free artistic expression. Drawings and paintings can after be displayed on a dedicated wall.
- Having free access to games such as a puzzle or chess can invite people to enjoy them freely and to start engaging without the need of inviting them. Also more “active” games, if the space allows it, can be important like a ping pong table or a foosball.
- Regarding the barber corner, careful consideration is needed before setting it up. In both camps and informal settings, privacy is often limited, so the space should be slightly separated, with a mirror and a power outlet. In some contexts, instead of using a designated barber corner, People on the Move (PoM) have taken razor blades to the bathroom and locked the door. This can be risky, as some individuals, due to mental health vulnerabilities, may engage in self-harming behaviors. To address this, a barber corner should be designed to provide privacy without allowing complete isolation. One solution could be using a partition while ensuring that razor blades are not freely accessible. Instead, they should be requested from activists, allowing someone to discreetly keep an eye on their use from a distance.
- Organizing one space for enjoying music freely can be an idea, putting some instruments available to be used from the people attending the CC; it is recommendable to choose specific moments to set up this space (for example, twice a week) in a way that people attending the center who enjoys having a quiet space cannot be bothered.



2. ACTIVITIES TEMPLATES

Engaging in activities at the center helps make each day different for both PoM and activists on the field. Because of this, it is important to take a moment to define a calendar with the team (for example, monthly before the beginning of the upcoming month) that will be displayed in the CC. Having decided this, it's important to follow it in order to let people learn the calendar and be aware of what is coming next.

The calendar should change and be modified by the team on the field according to PoM attending the CC in a specific moment, their needs and interests. It should also change according to activists that are on the field and their personal characteristics.

Concerning the number of activities to be done per week, it depends on the number of activists because it is important that at least two activists remain available in the free space. A suggestion can be to start progressively including two activities (ex. Tuesday morning English lessons and Friday afternoon painting) and, after the first couple of weeks or the first month in which they are tested, starting to add more ones especially to not feel overwhelmed by having to prepare things, starting to understand specific tasks of every team member and getting used to the rhythm. Engaging PoM with activities is also a way to prevent dual relationships with activists that can be created in a free space preventing from difficult situations, especially with vulnerable ones.

This section presents a variety of activities designed to foster personal growth, community connection, and well-being. These activities are divided into four key categories:

- Personal development and expressive activities
- Sports, relaxation, and recreational activities
- Activities to take care of the space
- Community engagement activities

Each category offers a different approach to engaging with participants, whether through learning new skills, promoting physical health, contributing to the upkeep of the center, or connecting with the broader community. By offering a diverse range of activities, we aim to create an inclusive, supportive environment that encourages self-expression, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, both to the community center and to the local community.



2.1 Personal development and expressive activities

Personal development and expressive activities play a vital role in fostering empowerment, creativity, and collaboration among individuals. These activities not only provide an outlet for self-expression but also create opportunities for learning, connection, and emotional healing. Whether through language lessons, storytelling, drama, art, or music, such activities allow participants to explore new skills, share experiences, and engage in meaningful interactions with others.

Language Lessons

Description

Language lessons are activities that can be organized with PoM and kept regular in a weekly plan. Learning languages can be an activity that engages people with the objective of learning something useful for the future, both in the place where the CC is located (especially for people wanting to ask for asylum in the place) or the country PoM wants to reach. Because of this, English classes, the language of the place the CC is involved (Serbian for Sjenica for example) or other European languages can be taught (this last one depends also from the knowledge of activists on the field and from PoM's shared interests at a specific moment).

Key points

Empowerment

(Re)gaining
confidence

Materials

- Paper
- Cardboard
- Painting / color pencils



In practice

In all cases and depending on the people attending the center, a good strategy can be to organise lessons dividing people according to basic and intermediate levels in a way that they can be grouped with people having the same level. Avoiding formal classes is highly recommended, finding strategies and approaches that go beyond the frontal lessons. In this sense, it can be useful to be in a circle during the lesson. Moreover, informal methods are suggested in order to foster learning in a practical, funny way.

(continue on the next page...)



In practice

Some strategies:

- Creating a memory game with cards showing images to be coupled with corresponding words can be a way to learn about clusters of words (ex. colors and fruits);
- Arriving at the community center with the groceries made for the center can be a interacting way to learn food names and/or ways to interact in the supermarket, creating also a exchange moment asking for translation in the native languages of people attending the course;
- Role plays can be very important to start interacting in a new language: in this way different situations can be simulated asking people to personified a specific figure in a certain context;
- Going outside together to explore a place can be a way to familiarize with the city places and with information.

Tips

These are just some ideas of informal ways to learn together some languages. The important thing to keep in mind is that when people are passing through distressing moments, keeping attention for a long time is not something easy. Making it more participative can be a way to foster participation and enthusiasm avoiding people to feel overwhelmed from new information.

Going beyond

Especially for language lessons of the place in which the CC is involved, an idea can be to look for some volunteers in the local community. In this way, in addition to providing a learning moment, it is also a way to connect with the local population and foster solidarity without relying only on NNK activists support. On the other side, PoM can be involved in organising language classes for the local community, inverting the roles and doing something useful for the community.



Storytelling Journal

Description

This workshop can be organized to provide an opportunity for participants to recall and share positive, funny memories, experiences representing and telling them for and with the group. This can be made by creating a small journal where people are encouraged to represent the scenes they have in mind using different materials and, if they feel comfortable, then presenting it to the group.

Key points

Self-awareness

Empathy

Creativity

Materials

- A4 paper (folded)
- Cardboard
- Old magazines
- Needle and thread
- Painting / color pencils
- Scissors
- Glue



In practice

Papers can be firstly used to create a small journal that after needs to be sewed using needle and thread. Once this is ready, newspapers together with pencils or/and paintings can be used to decorate the first page thinking about a funny, positive scene people have in mind. At the end, people can be encouraged, if they feel comfortable, to tell the others the moment they represented in order to share funny moments.

Tips

Facilitating this workshop, It is crucial to stress the importance of focusing on some funny memories; if this is not done, the risk is that people tend to easily recall negative or extremely sad memories, especially in the case of traumatic experiences.



Drama

Description

Creating some drama workshops, participants can explore different stories together and practice their storytelling skills as well as acting skills.

Key points

Self-expression

Collaboration

Materials

Depending on the chosen stories



In practice

Starting from a simple history (also a simple one, simulating what happens in the community center) can be a way to initiate this kind of activity. People can be encouraged to create together the story being guided only roughly by the facilitator. If people engage, according to their interests and ideas, other stories can be proposed during the activity in order to start working as a group and preparing different small scenes.

Tips

Working on small scripts can foster people's participation, especially considering that some transiting people can be willing to participate.

Going beyond

If people are engaged and willing to do a small theatre performance, external community can be invited to the community center organizing a small tea or snacks together with a small performance.



Art and Craft

Description

Creating artistic workshops is something that can be very appreciated and that can also involve people in high mental distress. It can help detaching from thoughts and feeling part of a group. An “artistic” moment in the week can be organized in a fixed way and used proposing every time different ideas.

Key points

Self-effectiveness

Empowerment

Creativity

Materials

- Paper
- Cardboard
- Painting / color pencils
- Clay
- Recycled wood or materials



In practice

- Real time drawing or painting: people can be asked to create a composition on a table and after to draw or paint it. It is possible to play with time, changing the composition and giving different times to draw or paint what people are seeing. For example, ten minutes to draw a composition made of books and cups, then 2 minutes to draw the same composition. In this way, after every time slot, it is possible to observe the differences compared with the other chosen time. Another possibility, instead of creating a composition, can be asking someone to pose changing different positions and change them accordingly to the setted time spots (this makes the moment more interactive and funny).
- Thematic drawing or painting: people can be proposed with a general topic and are asked to take inspiration from this to realize their work. This can be made using particular supports, like wood pieces or recycled materials.
- Workshops with clay can be something very appreciated and can be an opportunity to engage also people that do not feel comfortable with painting or drawing. As it seems more practical, working with clay can be a good way to engage more people, also who feel less confident with art or who are less willing to participate in other activities.
- Personalizing a wall or a specific part of the community center with a message can be a free way to engage people in artistic workshops letting them be free to express as they want and with the tool they prefer. This can also be a way to foster collaboration and to make people work together with a shared objective.



Music and Chairs

Description

Music can be a powerful tool, capable to involve everybody creating enjoyable moments but also to evoke strong feelings connected with home, or with traumatic events. Doing something practical while enjoying music can be helpful to prevent such feelings and it keeps people on the game's aim. At the same time, an easy task like choosing a chair allows also people in high mental distress to participate without difficulties.

Key points

Body (re)activation

Materials

- Chairs (participants no. - 1)
- Music speaker



In practice

The number of chairs required depends on the number of participants, and they should be arranged in a circle, facing outward (everyone should have a seat). When the music starts, participants should move and dance around the chairs while the facilitators remove one chair. When the music stops, everyone must sit down. The person left without a chair is out and can help choose the next song. The game continues until just one person remains in the game.



Musical Instruments

Description

Organizing a workshop on musical instruments can be a starting moment to connect music with creativity and it can also be a starting moment to then start doing a game with rhythms.

Key points

Creativity

Agency

Materials

- Wood or plant pods
- Plastic (e.g. shower curtains)
- Paper towel roll
- Rice
- Nails



In practice

- An idea can be to build together some rain sticks starting from paper towel rolls; one of the extremities should be closed using, for example, some plastic or a piece of cloth. Then, they should be filled with rice and closed on the other side. Adding nails alongside the paper tower roll will change the sound of these small instruments;
- Another practical thing can be to create drums using wood or plant pods. In both cases, plastic from shower curtains can be used to cover the surface using some twine to keep the plastic taut so that it can be played.
- Once the instruments are ready, a drum circle can be created, reproducing rhythms that all the others should try to reproduce. Changing the person choosing the rhythms can be very funny as well as playing at different intensities or rapidity.



2.2 Sports and recreational activities

Sports and recreational activities are a great way to bring people together, promote physical well-being, and build a sense of community. These activities not only help participants stay active but also offer opportunities for team building, stress relief, and a break from static daily routines.

Sports Outside

Description

Sports are something really important that can engage anyone; moreover, they can help to detach from boredom and thoughts going in the direction of body reactivation. Because of this, finding spaces outside the CC that can be freely used to organize these kinds of activities is fundamental, like football or volleyball camps. In this way, a specific afternoon or morning can be dedicated to sport in which PoM together with activists are involved in training and/or in games.

Key points

Team building

Body
(re)activation

Materials

- Ball
- A field to play the matches



In practice

- If there are PoM interested in training together, an idea can be to schedule training (one or two per week according to people's interests) during the activities provided by the community center.
- Organizing matches can be another activity to be proposed; in this case, participants need to be invited in advance and, according to the number, the number of teams should be established. If people enjoy, this can become a recurrent event (for example, once every two weeks).

Tips

Playing football matches may be a source of conflict for participants, especially with different national backgrounds. A strategy can be to mix the teams, otherwise, as a facilitator, you should be aware and pay attention to this and aspire to ending the match on good terms.

Going beyond

If there is a group of PoM especially interested and enthusiastic for a sport, an idea can be to organize something with the local community. For example, if there is a high interest in football, an idea can be organizing a friendly football match with a local team.



Tournaments

Description

Ping pong, chess, dama, cards are games that are usually highly appreciated by PoM. Despite having them to be used in the free space, an idea can be to organize small tournaments. In this way people can participate and also engage when it is not their turn and can follow the game with enthusiasm.

Key points

Team building

Body
(re)activation

Materials

One among:

- Chess
- Dama
- Table tennis
- Foosbal



In practice

Whether it's dama, chess, or ping pong, organizing a tournament can be something very appreciated. To do so, a way can be to start collecting “inscriptions” from the day before and establish an order of playing and displaying it during the different games. To make things more participative, a way can be to organize small prizes for the winners.



Cooking

Description

Cooking is something that usually brings people together. In places like camps, where food choices are limited, cooking can be a chance for everyone to have a say and express themselves. But cooking directly at the center might not always be possible because of rules around permissions and hygiene, which need to follow local guidelines. One alternative could be to find informal spots outside the center where cooking is possible and not under the center's responsibility.

Key points

Team building

Body
(re)activation

Materials

- Food and water
- Pots
- Stove or fire
- Dishes, glasses
- Plates

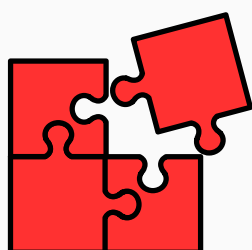


In practice

One way to cook together is by having the people at the center choose a different recipe each time. The day before the cooking activity, the recipe can be chosen and a list of ingredients can be made. By the time the cooking starts, the team should already have all the ingredients ready. Everyone involved can then join in, sharing tasks and tips as they work through the recipe. To wrap up the cooking experience, a shared meal is a great way to bring everyone together. Afterward, playing some music can add to the enjoyment and create a relaxed atmosphere.

Tips

Cooking moments can be shaped according to cultural traditions. For example, for the end of Ramadan (Eid El-Fitr) an idea can be to organise a dedicated cooking moment where typical food is prepared for the occasion.



For example, in Sjenica, cooking at CC is not possible because of hygiene standards. An alternative is to cook together in an abandoned space usually attended by PoM.



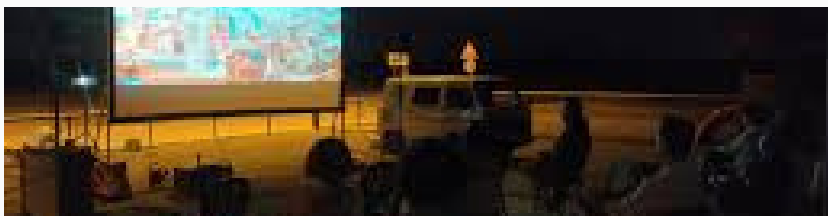
Cinema

Description

Cinema is something highly appreciated, especially during the evening which can involve people together.

Materials

- Computer
- Projector
- Chairs
- Popcorn/chips



In practice

Choosing a film together may take some time, especially when trying to find something that appeals to a diverse group. Additionally, it's important to consider the availability of subtitles, which can be hard to find in certain languages. For this reason, it's a good idea to start thinking about the film the day before the planned activity. This way, you can decide with the group what kind of film they'd like to watch and whether they have any suggestions. Having a list can be a way to facilitate this process. At the time of the projection, having popcorn to share can be nice and also at the end it can be nice to have a sharing moment to comment the film together

Tips

It's important to avoid violent films which can activate thoughts and memories. If the choosing process becomes difficult, going for a match or a documentary can be a plan B.



2.3 Activities to take care of the space

These activities are designed specifically for individuals at the center who may find it hard to engage in more recreational activities, often due to low motivation levels that lead them to decline any proposed activities. During the assessment, it was noticed that people with low motivation still care about the space and, in many cases, are willing to help the team with tasks on the ground. With this in mind, these activities offer alternative ways for participants to get involved in the center's care, without stepping into tasks typically handled by the team members.

Handicraft Labs

Description

Building something for the community center is an activity that can be done together with the people who attend the center. Many ideas can be brought to life, especially by considering suggestions from the attendees themselves if they notice something missing or lacking in the space.

Key points

Community
belonging

Body (re)activation

Materials

- Wood
- Tools: saw, hammers
- Screw and nails
- Glue
- Paintings



In practice

- Building a small library together can be an engaging and accessible workshop. It can be divided into two parts: the first focuses on design, where participants collaborate to decide on the shape, dimensions, and structure, and create a project plan. Once the design is finalized, the second part involves preparing and cutting the material (not with the people). The final stage of the workshop consists of assembling the pieces with the group, such as screwing the shelves, building the structure, and then painting everything.
- Creating benches for the community center or for its front, especially with the warmer season approaching, could be a great additional workshop idea. In this case as well, separating the design phase from the assembly phase can be helpful, as it allows time for the team to cut the materials. After the assemblage, benches can be painted as people prefer.

(continue on the next page...)



In practice

- Another idea could be to organize a dedicated space, such as a music area where people can find (and even build, as part of the musical instrument building workshop) musical instruments. To create this space, a good approach might be to design specific chairs or stools for playing, guitar footstools, or shelves to store the instruments, all in collaboration with the participants.

Tips

Some recommendations for the proposed activities focus on the tools: it's important to use the more dangerous ones (like a saw) before the workshop or in a separated moment, ensuring that materials are prepared and ready ahead of time.

Planting

Description

The ground and plants can help enhance the space for people attending the community center while offering a way to engage them in a daily activity. Although planting seeds is an event in itself, the plants require daily care, making it a meaningful task for individuals who may struggle to engage in other activities. Moreover, this can be particularly rewarding for people who have been in the camp for a long time, allowing them to see the results of their efforts.

Key points

Body (re)activation

Self-effectiveness

Community belonging

Environment
connection

Materials

- Plant pots
- Soil
- Seeds
- Labels
- Tools: hoe, spade



(continue on the next page...)



In practice

- Planting sessions: the center can provide plant pots, potting soil, and various seeds. Together with the participants, seeds can be planted, and labels with the plant names can be created in different languages (ex. tomato, pomodoro, طماطم, ..). This activity can be repeated with different types of seeds, for example, planting vegetables one week and flowers the next. After each session, participants can take responsibility for their own plant, or one person can be assigned to water them.
- Another activity, especially following the planting session, could be building a greenhouse for the center. Like the handicrafts workshops, this could be carried out in two stages: one focused on design and the other on assembling everything.
- If the community center comprises some external space, an idea can be to create a small vegetable garden.



“Renting” and Bike repair

Description

The ground and plants can help enhance the space for people attending the community center while offering a way to engage them in a daily activity. Although planting seeds is an event in itself, the plants require daily care, making it a meaningful task for individuals who may struggle to engage in other activities. Moreover, this can be particularly rewarding for people who have been in the camp for a long time, allowing them to see the results of their efforts.

Key points

Collaboration

Self-effectiveness

Materials

- Bikes
- bicycle pump
- Simple tools:
 - screwdriver, ...



In practice

At least two bikes are needed to be available to be rented. A register controlled by the team could be created to track who takes the bikes, allowing people to use the bikes for a day at a time. Additionally, a dedicated space could be set up at the CC for bike repairs, with a bicycle pump and simple tools available for when something goes wrong.

Going beyond

Many PoM, especially when stuck, lose their sense of having a role in society as they are in transit from the place they fled, where they left their work and social role, to a new place that is still to be discovered. Being on the move, particularly when stuck, can feel like a loss of social role, and doing something useful for the community can be very meaningful. In this sense, setting up a small bike repair shop at the CC could be very impactful. It would provide PoM with something to do and care about, giving them a sense of contributing to the local community.



2.4 Community Engagement Activities

These activities are designed with social aspects in mind. On one hand, they are thought to help people attending the community center to feel more connected to the space, creating a sense of belonging. On the other hand, some activities are thought to create synergies and connections with the local community the Community Center is surrounded by.

A Wall against Violence

Description

Building something for the community center is an activity that can be done together with the people who attend the center. Many ideas can be brought to life, especially by considering suggestions from the attendees themselves if they notice something missing or lacking in the space.

Key points

Trust

Collaboration

Materials

- Poster
- Paintings and colors



In practice

The activity could involve creating a large paper to be displayed on the wall, or painting directly on the wall, where people can add words related to the center's guidelines, discuss them, and translate them into different languages. The artwork could be set having a peace flag as background.

Tips

As we are talking about guidelines, an idea can be to involve translators in the activity especially if there are some people that do not understand very well english.



Peer Activities

Description

Peer activities offer a unique opportunity to engage individuals in the center's events, especially those who have been attending for a long time. Before implementing these activities, it's important to consider the specific skills and interests of the persons. Organizing peer activities also requires time and collaboration with those who are interested in taking on a role in organizing.

Key points

Self-effectiveness

Collaboration



In practice

A good approach could be to observe someone who shows a particular interest in an activity, like painting or dancing, and enjoys it in the context of the center. Once you've identified their passion, invite them to collaborate in creating a moment for others to enjoy, tapping into their enthusiasm and skills. This can be done for any kind of activity, from painting, to dance classes to poetry sessions.



Activities with local community

Description

These activities can be thought to support participants in gaining a sense of community with the host community where they are staying. It will create a sense of efficacy and usefulness by also providing them with a feeling of agency and creating ownership. These are additional ideas to the ones already proposed in the paragraph “beyond the CC”.

Key points

Self-effectiveness

Collaboration

Sense of usefulness
and purpose



In practice

- An idea can be organising some “Open days” of the Community center where the team and PoM explains together what the Community center is and engage together in a workshop or in an activity (for example engaging in typical dances or having a sharing typical tea together). This can be made, after at least one week of communication of the event, for example preparing some small flyers to distribute in the local community.
- Another idea can be to do something for the local community, like cleaning a road or a specific public park establishing synergies with the local community;

Tips

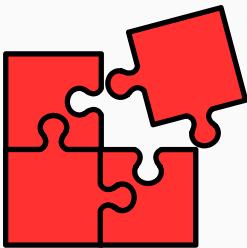
Activities together and for the local community can be many and they change accordingly to the context and the specific moment. Being on the field allows to capture the needs starting from which many ideas can be developed. Creating synergies with local realities like religious communities can help to find different ways to engage with the local community.



Monitoring and Evaluation

In a community-based approach, **monitoring and evaluation (M&E)** is not just a managerial tool but a **political and relational practice**. It is a way of ensuring that the Community Center (CC) remains grounded in the needs, desires, and experiences of the people who use it. It is also a tool for accountability—not only towards partner organizations or donors, but above all towards the people on the move (PoM) who participate in the space. In this sense, M&E becomes an opportunity to reflect collectively on what we are doing, how we are doing it, and with whom.

Monitoring and evaluating activities in a CC does not mean applying fixed metrics or external standards, it requires dialogue, openness, and a willingness to listen and change course when needed, this more than numbers.



It means asking: Are we creating a space where people feel safe, welcomed, and empowered? Are the activities meaningful to them? Do they feel seen, listened to, and involved in the process?

Principles

There are certain principles that can be followed during monitoring and evaluation to gather important and consistent information on which to base a review of what is being done.

1. **Participatory**: People attending the center must be involved in assessing what works and what doesn't. Their feedback, perspectives, and suggestions should shape the evolution of activities and space management.
2. **Continuous**: Evaluation is not a one-time process but a continuous practice, integrated into everyday interactions, informal conversations, team reflections, and collective moments.
3. **Flexible and culturally sensitive**: Not all participants are comfortable with surveys or forms. M&E tools should adapt to different communication styles, literacy levels, and emotional states.
4. **Qualitative over quantitative**: Numbers (attendance, frequency, etc.) can be useful, but they should be complemented by qualitative insights—how people feel, how relationships evolve, and what kinds of changes are observed in the space.
5. **Empowering**: Evaluation should not reinforce power dynamics. It should build confidence, ownership, and the sense that PoM are not passive users of services but co-creators of the community space.



Tools and Practices

To implement effective community-based M&E, a **blend of formal and informal tools** can be used. These tools should not be applied mechanically but adapted to the specific dynamics of the center and the people attending it.

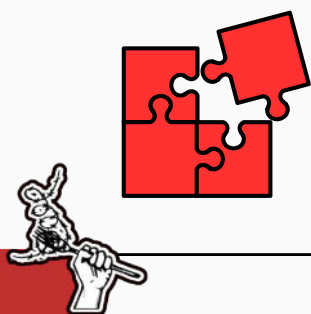
- **Suggestion box / Feedback wall:** A visible space in the center where people can leave ideas, thoughts, or critiques—written or drawn—in any language. Activists should periodically check and discuss the input with the team and, when possible, respond to it publicly.
- **End-of-activity check-ins:** After group activities (art workshops, language lessons, sports games), facilitators can hold short feedback moments—asking participants how they felt, what they liked or didn't like, and if they have suggestions. This can be verbal, symbolic (e.g. using colors, emojis, objects), or written depending on the group.
- **Creative feedback tools:** Journaling, drawing, storytelling, or visual maps can help people reflect on their experience in ways that feel less formal and more personal. For example, participants can be invited to draw how they felt before and after an activity.
- **Observation and relational indicators:** Activists should observe participation patterns, emotional responses, social interactions, and signs of trust or disengagement. Who speaks? Who participates repeatedly? Who sits alone? This form of “relational monitoring” offers insight into the emotional and social life of the center.
- **Mid-term team reviews:** Every two or three weeks, the activist team should schedule a moment to reflect together on how activities are going. Questions to explore may include:
 - Are we reaching new people?
 - Are we responding to emerging needs?
 - Are there people who stopped coming? Why?
 - Are some activities reinforcing hierarchies or exclusion?

Indicators to Track

In a community-based logic, indicators are not fixed in advance—they **emerge from practice**. However, some examples of **flexible, meaningful indicators** could include:

- Level of participation (voluntary, engaged, passive)
- Diversity of participants (age, nationality, gender)
- Emotional atmosphere during activities (joy, tension, silence, openness)
- Repetition / retention (do people return to the same activity?)
- Initiatives or suggestions coming directly from PoM
- Number of activities co-facilitated or inspired by PoM
- Quality of social interactions and group dynamics
- Expression of trust (e.g. through personal sharing, care for the space, spontaneous involvement)

These indicators are not to be “measured” in a strict sense, but discussed collectively within the team and, when appropriate, with participants.



Closing the Feedback Loop

An essential part of participatory M&E is **closing the loop**. If participants give input or suggestions, they must see that their voices are being heard. This doesn't mean that every request can be implemented, but that responses are given with transparency and care.

For example, if someone suggests organizing a music evening, the team can respond: "We heard your idea, and we're trying to plan it for next week." Or, if an idea can't be realized: "We really appreciate your proposal, but at the moment we don't have the materials or space. Let's think together how we might do it in the future."

This kind of communication builds trust, reinforces agency, and helps prevent disappointment or disengagement.

M&E as Collective Care

Monitoring and evaluation should never be reduced to a bureaucratic exercise or a tool for external reporting. Within a community-based framework, M&E becomes a **form of collective care**—a shared responsibility to ensure that the Community Center (CC) continues to be a space of dignity, relevance, and humanity.

In this sense, monitoring and evaluation are not just about "what works," but about **who is seen, who is heard, and who is missing**. They are opportunities to ask: are we truly responding to the lived experiences of the people who attend this space? Are our activities inclusive, meaningful, and flexible enough to hold the complexities of the moment? When approached with this depth, M&E becomes a **tool for relational justice**, allowing the team to notice patterns of exclusion, moments of silence, signs of burnout, or the slow fading of someone's presence in the space.

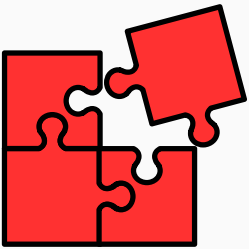
Collective care also means **sharing responsibility**. M&E shouldn't fall on one person's shoulders, nor should it become an isolated administrative task. Instead, it should be woven into the everyday rhythms of the CC: a practice of pausing, listening, asking questions, and reflecting—together. Whether it's during informal check-ins at the end of an activity, a weekly team circle, or a quiet moment with a participant who hasn't shown up in days, each of these is a monitoring act—**small, relational, and profoundly meaningful**.

This approach challenges the idea that evaluation is about efficiency or productivity. In a context shaped by displacement, trauma, and instability, care is not always "efficient." There are days when no activity happens, when people are exhausted or withdrawn. These are not failures, but part of the emotional ecology of the space. **Evaluation, in this light, becomes a way to honour what is present**, not just what is planned. It asks us to be attentive to subtle shifts, to relational dynamics, to the atmosphere of the room.



Moreover, framing M&E as collective care allows the CC to **remain alive and adaptable**. It keeps the center responsive to changing needs: the arrival of a new group, a shift in border policies, a sudden increase in anxiety or conflict. Rather than being rigid or pre-scripted, the center can breathe with the community it holds—adjusting its pace, its activities, even its tone of presence. Evaluation becomes a form of listening—not only to words but to silences, gestures, and the unsaid.

Lastly, practicing M&E as collective care means holding ourselves accountable—not only to structures or donors, but to the people we are walking alongside. It is a way of saying: **we are here, we see you, and we are willing to adjust to stay close**. It is also a reminder that activists, too, are part of this ecosystem of care. Monitoring how the team is feeling, what dynamics are emerging among us, what tensions or exhaustion are surfacing—this, too, is part of evaluation.



In this vision, M&E is not a task to complete but a **relational practice to inhabit**. It invites presence, humility, and courage. It tells us that care is not only in what we do, but in how we pay attention—and in our commitment to never stop asking: is this still a space of trust, creativity, and collective life?



NETWORKING AND LOCAL ANCHORING

Working in a Community Center (CC) cannot happen in isolation. Building a solid network with local actors is an essential part of creating impact and ensuring the sustainability of the project. “Networking” should not be reduced to simply having contacts—it is about **building conscious, critical, and practical alliances** with individuals and organizations that share (even partially) the goals of defending rights, promoting dignity, and offering spaces of support and solidarity to people on the move.

Objectives of Networking

- **Improve access to services** (healthcare, legal aid, housing, psychological support) through informed referrals and active accompaniment.
- **Coordinate with other actors** to avoid duplication, contradictory interventions, or waste of resources.
- **Amplify political and communication impact** by uniting voices against structural border violence.
- **Foster cultural exchange** with the local population through joint activities and events.
- **Increase visibility and legitimacy of the CC**, making it a recognized and trustworthy community resource.

How to Build a Network

1. Mapping Local Stakeholders

- Create a dynamic map of NGOs, grassroots groups, religious communities, unions, professionals, activists, and institutions active in the area.
- Distinguish between institutional actors (e.g. municipality, social services, UNHCR, schools) and more independent or critical actors (e.g. mutual aid collectives, self-organized networks, independent legal teams).

2. First Contact

- Prioritize informal approaches: in-person visits, phone calls, invitations to the CC. Avoid overly bureaucratic communication.
- Clearly explain **who we are, what we do, and what we do not do**, to prevent misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations.

3. Building Trust

- Start with small collaborations (e.g. translation help, co-hosting an event, support with referrals).
- Communicate openly, sharing not only goals but also the limits and vulnerabilities of the CC and its team.
- When the relationship has been established previous your arrival by other NNK mates who were there before you, ask about the type of relationship we use to have with those partners and build trust from that.



Operational Collaboration

Operational collaboration is one of the most concrete outcomes of a meaningful networking process. It involves going beyond occasional contact or information exchange, and instead creating shared spaces of action, where local actors, organizations, and the Community Center team can work together on common goals.

This collaboration can take many forms. One approach is to co-organize public events such as film screenings, roundtable discussions, or cultural workshops. These moments serve both to engage people on the move and to open the Community Center to the broader local population, fostering a sense of inclusion and breaking the social isolation often imposed by institutional frameworks. Collaborative events can also serve as opportunities for advocacy—raising awareness about border violence, sharing personal stories, or highlighting the structural causes of displacement.

Another important aspect is the shared delivery of services. When trust and coordination are established, the CC can partner with other organizations to provide regular language lessons, mental health support, legal information sessions, or mobile clinics. These services, when offered in a coordinated way, allow each actor to contribute their expertise while reducing duplication and fragmentation. The presence of external professionals, when done with sensitivity and care, can significantly enhance the scope and effectiveness of what the CC is able to offer.

A key principle in operational collaboration is the mutual sharing of resources—whether they are spaces, materials, skills, or time. This exchange should be rooted in reciprocity, not hierarchy. Community Centers should not be reduced to mere service delivery points for NGOs, nor should partner organizations be treated as tools to "fill gaps." Rather, collaboration should be based on horizontal relationships, where different actors recognize and respect each other's limits, contributions, and political commitments.

True operational collaboration strengthens the ecosystem of solidarity around people on the move, creates synergies, and builds a more resilient support structure. It reminds us that care is most powerful when it is shared, distributed, and collectively sustained.

Referral system

In contexts where access to health care, legal aid, and protection services is fragmented or insufficient, referral systems are essential to ensure that people on the move (PoM) can access specialized support that goes beyond the capacity of the Community Center (CC). A well-organized referral system enables the team to act responsibly when facing situations that require more than informal psychosocial support.

Rather than attempting to "solve" everything internally, referrals allow the CC to function as a connector—a place that recognizes needs, listens without judgment, and helps people navigate toward trustworthy resources.



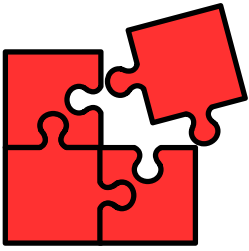
1. Objectives of a Referral System

- Ensure access to specialized services (e.g. psychiatric, legal, medical, shelter-related). Use the mapping exercise done in previous phases.
- Recognize the limits of non-specialized actors, avoiding the risk of overexposure or unsafe interventions
- Respond ethically to severe distress, suicidal ideation, violence, or exploitation
- Support PoM in navigating complex systems that are often hostile, confusing, or discriminatory
- Promote continuity of care, especially in high-turnover contexts

2. How to Set Up a Functional Referral System

- Stakeholder Mapping: Create and regularly update a list of reliable services operating in the area: NGOs, clinics, hospitals, shelters, legal aid teams, translators, social services, and psychological support providers (including remote/online services). Include availability, contact persons, opening hours, languages spoken, and accessibility (costs, documentation required, safe for undocumented people?).
- Internal Protocols
 - Define clear criteria for when a referral is necessary (e.g. signs of suicidal thoughts, severe self-harming behaviour, need for asylum advice, medical emergencies).
 - Develop a step-by-step guide on how to activate a referral (who to contact, how to document, how to follow up).
 - Assign one or more referral focal points in the team (can rotate weekly) responsible for initiating and tracking referrals.
- Consent and Confidentiality
 - Always ask for informed consent before sharing any personal information with external actors.
 - Explain clearly what the referral entails and what the risks/limits are.
 - Avoid acting “on behalf of” the person unless explicitly requested or in emergencies.
- Accompaniment and Mediation
 - When possible, offer to accompany PoM to the referred service—physically or through a phone call.
 - Act as a bridge, especially when institutional services are intimidating, unclear, or discriminatory.
 - Prepare the person beforehand: what to expect, what to bring, what questions might be asked.
- Documentation and Follow-up
 - Keep a confidential log (secure and GDPR-compliant) of referrals (date, reason, outcome - if known).
 - Use shared tools (referral tracking sheets or simple databases) to avoid losing information during team transitions.
 - Schedule follow-up check-ins to understand if the person accessed the service, and how they felt about it.
- Monitoring and Evaluation
 - Periodically assess if referrals are effective and ethical.
 - Collect feedback from PoM: were they treated respectfully? Was the service useful?
 - If services prove problematic, discriminatory, or unhelpful, remove them from the referral map.





Important Considerations:

- No one-size-fits-all: people may reject referrals or not feel ready to access formal services. Respect their timing.
- Avoid paternalism: referral is a support tool, not a way to impose decisions.
- Trauma-informed attitude: approaching referral with care, patience, and honesty is often more important than speed.

This system should always be flexible, team-based, and oriented toward empowering people to choose what kind of help they want to receive—if any. The goal is not only to “redirect” but to walk with people through complex decisions, reinforcing their agency and dignity.

A Final Critical Reflection

Not all partnerships are beneficial. Consider whether a potential ally acts in ways that are coherent with the values of the CC.

Be particularly cautious with actors tied to border control or deportation policies (e.g. state agencies, return programs), as their mandates may conflict with the principles of dignity, self-determination, and care.

Create and regularly update an internal contact list (“networking log”) with names, focus areas, notes, and type of engagement.

Set up weekly or bi-weekly team meetings to discuss network relationships, reflect critically, and adjust strategy.

Explore opportunities to **build broader networks** across cities or borders—connecting with other community centres, solidarity projects, and activist collectives.



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