

BUILDING RESILIENCE TOGETHER

SELF-CARE AS THE FOUNDATION
FOR CARING FOR OTHERS



Guidelines on Strengthening the Resilience
for Employees of the General Inspectorate
for Migration of the Republic of Moldova

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**Self-care as the foundation
for caring for others**

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for Employees of the General Inspectorate
for Migration of the Republic of Moldova

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French version:

Renforcer ensemble la résilience :

Prendre soin de soi pour mieux prendre soin
des autres.

Lignes directrices sur le renforcement de la
résilience des agents de l'Inspection générale
des migrations du ministère de l'Intérieur de
la République de Moldavie.

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The present Guidelines was conducted under
the Council of Europe project "Strengthening
the human rights protection of refugees and
migrants in the Republic of Moldova: phase II",
implemented under the Council of Europe
Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova
2025–2028.

Cover design and layout:
SC Promo Profit SRL

Cover photos / Inner photos: General
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■ The Council of Europe has strengthened its support in the fields of asylum and migration, as well as the protection of refugees and migrants in the Republic of Moldova, including in response to the refugee situation resulting from the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

The Project “Strengthening the Human Rights Protection of Refugees and Migrants in the Republic of Moldova: Phase II” builds on the achievements of the previous Project, “Strengthening the Human Rights Protection of Refugees and Migrants in the Republic of Moldova” (October 2022 – December 2024). The project aims to enhance the protection of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the Republic of Moldova by strengthening the capacities of the Moldovan authorities.

This objective will be achieved through the development of more effective, sustainable and human rights-based migration, asylum and reception systems in the long term, as well as through the provision of tailored support addressing the specific needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

The Project is structured around three main pillars:

1. Supporting the improvement of the legislative and policy framework in line with European and international standards.
2. Strengthening the capacities of various professionals and institutions to apply a human rights-based approach to the protection of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.
3. Facilitating access to support services, psychosocial assistance and integration programmes for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

A strong focus on access to psychological support services for refugees and migrants, alongside strengthening the resilience of professionals working in this field, is essential.

■ These efforts recognise that the protection of human rights extends beyond legal frameworks. Displaced persons often experience psychological trauma, stress and social isolation, which may affect their ability to exercise their rights fully and to integrate into society.

By promoting resilience, self-care and the development of a stress-sensitive organisational culture, the Council of Europe also supports the integration of a trauma-informed approach within the work of key migration-related institutions. This helps ensure that professionals are better equipped to deliver services in a human rights-based, sensitive and sustainable manner.

These Guidelines have been developed for the personnel of the General Inspectorate for Migration with the aim of strengthening their capacity to manage stressful and crisis situations, while contributing to the development of an organisational culture capable of operating effectively in demanding and rapidly changing contexts.

In addition to this publication, the Project has developed other practical resources of significant value for professionals working in the field.

■ “The Resilience Journal for Adolescents” is intended for young people aged 12–18, including refugees, migrants and adolescents from host communities. The journal aims to support young people in recognising and managing their emotions, building self-confidence, strengthening communication skills, and identifying where and how to seek support.

[*The Resilience Journal for Adolescents is available in English*](#)

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Glossary

This glossary provides definitions of key terms used in these Guidelines in order to ensure a common understanding of the main concepts related to stress, crisis, trauma, resilience, self-care and the development of a stress-sensitive organisational culture.

The terms are presented in a logical sequence reflecting the process of strengthening resilience — from recognising stress and its effects to building individual and organisational capacities that support well-being.

Term	Definition
Stress	A natural reaction of the body and mind to challenges, demands or pressures arising from the environment. In the short term, stress can be beneficial, as it helps mobilise energy and supports adaptation to demanding situations. However, prolonged or unmanaged stress without adequate recovery may lead to exhaustion and a deterioration in physical and mental well-being.
Stressor	An internal or external stimulus, event, challenge, demand or environmental pressure that triggers a stress response.
Chronic stress	Long-term and ongoing exposure to stress.
Crisis	A period of intense stress or instability during which usual coping mechanisms are insufficient. A crisis can be personal, professional or organisational and requires support and clear steps towards stabilisation.
Trauma/ Psychological trauma	A deeply distressing (painful, worrying) experience that overwhelms a person's ability to cope. Psychological wounds caused by extreme or life-threatening events (such as violence, accidents or the loss of a loved one). Exposure to traumatic experiences can be direct — when a person's life is endangered; indirect — when witnessing such an event; or secondary — when learning that the event happened to a close person, or through repeated professional exposure to traumatic material (testimonies, photographs or videos).
Window of tolerance	An optimal range of energy and arousal within which a person can effectively perform tasks, communicate, and regulate emotions.
Burnout	A state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged work-related stress. It is usually characterised by feelings of helplessness, loss of motivation and reduced effectiveness at work.
Coping strategies	Conscious and unconscious ways in which people deal with stress, emotions and difficult situations. They can be problem-focused (identifying causes and taking action) or emotion-focused (regulating emotional reactions). Effective coping strategies help maintain mental health, prevent burnout and strengthen resilience.
Assertiveness (assertive communication)	A way of expressing thoughts, feelings, and needs clearly and respectfully towards oneself and others. Assertive communication reduces stress and contributes to constructive relationships within the team.

BET Model B – Body E – Emotions T – Thoughts	A model used to reflect on the connection between thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and behaviours. It helps individuals increase self-awareness and understand how these elements influence one another in everyday situations.
Self-support	Conscious and intentional ways in which a person provides support to themselves in situations of stress, emotional strain or crisis, by recognising their own needs and boundaries, using simple strategies for calming and stabilisation, and deciding to seek support from others when needed.
Self-care	Intentional activities and practices through which a person maintains their physical, emotional and mental well-being. This includes rest, setting boundaries, seeking support, and maintaining a balance between work and private life.
Resilience	The ability of an individual, team, or organisation to adapt, recover, and continue functioning despite stress, change, or crisis. Resilience is strengthened through support, learning, and self-reflection.
Stress-sensitive organisational culture	A work environment that recognises and actively responds to employee stress, promotes openness, support and mental health care, and encourages healthy working relationships and communication.
Intervision	A collaborative process in which colleagues exchange experiences and advice regarding professional challenges. It is based on equality, mutual learning and the joint search for solutions within a supportive and confidential environment.
Supervision	A structured professional process in which a more experienced specialist (supervisor) works with employees (supervisees) to ensure the quality of work, strengthen professional competencies and self-confidence, reduce stress and the risk of burnout, and provide space for reflection and emotional processing. At the same time, supervision contributes to teamwork, professional development and a balance between professional and private life.



CHAPTER 1.

How to use the Guidelines

Employees of the General Inspectorate for Migration (GIM) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova face daily challenges that require a high level of professionalism, emotional stability and the ability to adapt quickly. Working in the fields of migration, asylum, integration of third-country nationals and other sensitive areas often involves significant pressure and complex situations.

Regardless of position, role or daily responsibilities, every person shares something essential: being a human being who feels, responds and carries responsibility. Every day brings new challenges — making decisions, caring for others, balancing professional and personal life, and coping with change or crisis.

Caring for oneself is a fundamental condition for remaining stable, effective and compassionate. These Guidelines have been developed to support everyone — those working on the front line, in offices, in management, in the field or in administration. Their message is simple, yet important: resilience is not innate; it is a strength that can be developed. Through small and consistent actions, such as mindful breathing, reflection, open dialogue and mutual support, individual capacities are strengthened, contributing to a more humane working environment.

An essential part of building resilience is recognising and respecting personal boundaries. Boundaries help define when to say “yes” and when to say “no”, thereby protecting one’s energy and mental well-being. Setting boundaries is not a sign of weakness, but an expression of courage and self-respect.

The absence of clear boundaries in the workplace often leads to professional burnout. Recognising one’s limits demonstrates respect both for oneself and for others.

Men and women in the workplace may experience different types of stress depending on cultural context and social expectations. Women often face pressures related to balancing personal and professional responsibilities, while men may feel pressure to appear constantly “strong” and emotionally unaffected. These socially shaped patterns can contribute to stress and emotional strain.

The Guidelines support the strengthening of personal resilience while recognising individual needs and experiences. Each person is unique, and the flexible approach of the Guidelines allows for adaptation to different contexts and personal preferences.

The Guidelines are intended for employees of the General Inspectorate for Migration (GIM) and aim to strengthen their resilience in coping with stress and crisis situations. Due to the diversity and broad scope of tasks, as well as continuous work with vulnerable individuals and groups, GIM staff are exposed to various stressors and face a high risk of burnout and deterioration of mental health. This reality makes strengthening employees’ resilience not only beneficial, but also a key priority for effective functioning.

— Objectives of the Guidelines

- ▶ Provide practical tools for recognising, managing and preventing stress and burnout.
- ▶ Strengthen individual and team resilience at all levels of the General Inspectorate for Migration.
- ▶ Promote a stress-sensitive organisational culture by strengthening resilience, supporting employees’ well-being and enhancing their effectiveness.

— Who can use the Guidelines

- ▶ **Frontline staff** – personnel who work directly with migrants, asylum seekers, and other vulnerable groups, often in emotionally and psychologically demanding conditions.

- **Administrative and technical staff** – employees who support the overall functioning of the institution, and who may also be exposed to stress due to workload, procedural pressures, or organisational changes.
- **Managers and department heads** – individuals responsible for leading teams, ensuring employee well-being, maintaining work efficiency, and fostering a supportive, stress-sensitive organisational culture.

— Structure of the Guidelines

The Guidelines are based on a combination of theoretical explanations and techniques applied through a series of practical exercises. This approach enables a better understanding of stress, burnout and resilience in the workplace. The theoretical section explains key concepts, while the exercises provide practical tools for recognising and managing stress, preventing burnout, strengthening resilience and building a stress-sensitive organisational culture.

The exercises are easy to apply both individually and within teamwork and mutual support processes. Special emphasis is placed on the role of leadership and on practical ways in which management can foster a positive organisational climate in stressful and crisis situations. The Guidelines offer flexibility, and the exercises can be used according to personal needs and in any order that suits the individual or the team.

This approach ensures that employees have practical resources for strengthening both personal and collective resilience.

— Resilience – the key to sustainable and humane action

Strengthening resilience is both a professional necessity and a moral responsibility. By investing in employees' well-being, mental health and emotional stability, the General Inspectorate for Migration promotes long-term effectiveness, protects human dignity and builds an organisational culture capable of responding to challenges with strength, compassion and integrity.

These Guidelines encourage individuals to take time to pause, listen to themselves and to others, and recognise that resilience is not limited to leaders or those who support others. It is a human capacity shared by everyone.

REMEMBER!

Strengthening one's own resilience is a process and a responsibility shared by every individual, both in private and professional life. Resilience is built gradually through small, consistent and everyday acts of self-care and care for others. These Guidelines do not offer ready-made solutions; rather, they provide basic elements, gentle reminders and practical steps that can help you pause, take a breath and listen to yourself.

It is important to recognise both your own strengths and your own limits. When challenges exceed individual capacities, it is entirely appropriate and responsible to seek additional support from colleagues, team members or supervisors. If difficulties persist and relief does not occur, seeking professional support from psychologists, psychotherapists or other qualified professionals is a sign of professionalism and self-care.

Seeking help does not indicate weakness or a lack of professional or technical competence. On the contrary, it reflects responsibility for one's own well-being, the preservation of professional functioning and the maintenance of healthy relationships with others. In doing so, we care not only for ourselves, but also for our families, colleagues, teams, organisations and the wider community in which we operate.

Resilience is not reserved only for those who care for others or for leaders. It is a human capacity that we all share and strengthen through self-care, mutual understanding and everyday practice.

Allow yourself first to become familiar with these Guidelines and experience them through training on their application. Then, step by step, through self-care and self-support, apply and adapt them in your everyday life and work at your own pace, in accordance with your needs and what is most important at a given moment.

CHAPTER 2.

Understanding stress and recognising stressful situations at work

This chapter provides an overview of stress, its effects on the body, mind, emotions and behaviour, as well as the difference between stress and psychological trauma. Special attention is given to stressors within the professional environment of the General Inspectorate for Migration, together with practical examples and exercises for recognising one's personal level of stress.

In this way, the chapter creates a foundation for a better understanding of reactions in stressful and crisis situations, strengthening resilience, and contributing to a healthier professional environment.

2.1. What is stress?

Stress is the body's natural response to challenges, demands and situations arising from the environment. An individual may perceive such situations as threatening, overwhelming or, at times, as sources of satisfaction and fulfilment.

The way we experience stress depends on the event itself (the stressor). Some stressful events are perceived as negative stress (for example, events that are disturbing and make a person feel angry, sad, afraid or distressed), while others are perceived as positive stress (for example, events that make us feel happy, satisfied and motivated).

In both cases, a person exposed to stress experiences reactions in the body, emotions and thoughts, and this response is referred to as stress.

— There are two types of stress:

- ▶ **Eustress** – a state of tension and excitement accompanied by positive emotions. This type of stress is considered beneficial and may bring a sense of fulfilment (for example, falling in love, the birth of a child or completing a project).
- ▶ **Distress** – states and bodily reactions caused by threatening, dangerous or subjectively unpleasant situations, accompanied by intense negative emotional reactions, anxiety, neuromuscular tension or significant fear.

Thus, stress is part of everyday life and is unavoidable in both professional and private settings.

In certain situations, such as a change of workplace, job rotation, redistribution of working hours, or new duties and responsibilities, it is natural for a person to experience a stress reaction. However, whether such a situation is perceived as positive or negative stress depends on the individual's perception, capacities and emotional state. It is important to engage in self-reflection by asking yourself: *How do I feel in my workplace?*



Recognise your emotions, bodily reactions and ways of coping with stress — for example, stress at work. Read the question, choose one or more answers, and mark them in the box.

Question	Color that describes my feelings	How my body reacts?	What helps me in a stressful situation ?
How do I feel in my workplace?	☐ Yellow – energetic and curious ☐ Blue – calm and stable ☐ Red – tense, under pressure ☐ Green – balanced ☐ Purple – inspired ☐ Grey – tired, unmotivated	☐ Rapid breathing ☐ Tension in shoulders ☐ Cold hands ☐ Calm breathing ☐ Feeling heaviness in the stomach ☐ Light-headedness ☐ Slow breathing ☐ Feeling energised through movement	☐ Deep breathing ☐ Short walk ☐ Talking with colleagues ☐ Coffee/tea break ☐ Listening to music ☐ Light stretching

Reflecting on this question helps individuals better understand their emotions and bodily reactions, and recognise what helps them as part of their own coping strategies.

The body has an innate physiological system that helps it cope with stressors in the environment.

2.2. How does the body react to stress?

The stress response begins in the brain. The brain gathers information through our senses (what we see, hear or anticipate) and evaluates whether a situation is stressful. If the brain determines that the situation is a stressor, a part at the base of the brain, connected to the whole body through the sympathetic nervous system, is activated.

The sympathetic nervous system works together (“in sympathy”) with other organs of the body — such as the heart, lungs and muscles — to prepare the body for action in stressful situations.

This means that the body enters a state of arousal and releases stress hormones — adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones provide additional energy and increase focus. The process occurs automatically and lasts only a few seconds.

In the short term, this response is useful because it increases readiness; however, in the long term, it may negatively affect health. It is therefore important to apply relaxation techniques in order to restore the balance of the parasympathetic nervous system.

The parasympathetic nervous system works “alongside” the sympathetic nervous system, helping to restore balance in the body by calming it after activation by the sympathetic system.

It is responsible for calmness, rest, restoration of energy and the recovery of a positive emotional state. Experiences of calmness and relaxation contribute to the development of resilience.

2.3. What are stressors?

A stressor is an internal or external stimulus that places a person in a state of stress — in other words, an event perceived as threatening to one’s life, safety, material possessions, position within the family or community, or self-esteem. A stressor is an event that may disrupt or change the usual course of life and is difficult to cope with.

For employees of the General Inspectorate for Migration, stressors are most often related to the nature of their work and can be divided into three categories:

— Operational stressors

These stressors are directly related to daily tasks and fieldwork.

- ▶ Interventions in stressful and crisis situations;
- ▶ Contact with vulnerable persons seeking to exercise their rights, often already exposed to heightened stress or trauma, as well as with aggressive or distressed individuals;
- ▶ Night shifts and work during weekends and holidays;
- ▶ Unpredictability and the risk of injury or fatal outcomes;
- ▶ Exposure to various weather conditions (cold, heat) and to noise in reception centres and offices.

— Organisational stressors

These stressors relate to the internal functioning of the institution.

- ▶ Excessive workloads and administrative obligations;
- ▶ Lack of resources or equipment;
- ▶ Poor communication with supervisors, colleagues and clients;
- ▶ Insufficient recognition or support in the workplace;
- ▶ Unclear or contradictory instructions.

— Psychosocial stressors

These stressors are related to interpersonal relationships and personal life.

- ▶ A weak sense of safety at work;
- ▶ Secondary traumatisation resulting from work with individuals in crisis situations (trauma, poverty, experiences of war);
- ▶ Lack of support within the community;
- ▶ Lack of trust in the system or a sense of helplessness;
- ▶ Social isolation caused by work and unexpressed emotions;
- ▶ Balancing work and family responsibilities.

The combination of these factors over a prolonged period may place a burden on employees' emotional, physical and cognitive functioning, and prolonged exposure to stress can lead to chronic stress, job dissatisfaction and serious health consequences.

Each employee assesses stressful situations individually and differently, depending on:

- ▶ Personal characteristics (for example, a person who is more emotionally sensitive may react more strongly to conflict);
- ▶ The nature of the event (for example, an urgent incident in a reception centre may be perceived as more stressful than routine administrative work);
- ▶ The environment (for example, the quality of teamwork and relationships with colleagues).

Personal coping strategies previously used by the employee (for example, clearly communicating that it is not possible to complete a report on time, recognising one's own limits, seeking support from colleagues, or taking a short break).



— Exercise – My stress at work

Objective: To help employees identify sources of stress at work and assess their intensity as a first step towards stress management.

Duration: 15–20 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen, personal planner/journal, quiet environment or soft music.

Steps:

1 List three work-related situations that have recently caused you stress:

• *Situation 1* _____

• *Situation 2* _____

• *Situation 3* _____

2 Assess each situation: How much is each of these situations currently affecting you emotionally?

3 For each situation, circle or mark the number that best describes your current state:

Use a scale from 1 to 10 where:

- 1 = very low stress (minimal burden)
- 10 = extremely high stress (maximum burden)

Situation 1: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Situation 2: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Situation 3: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- 4** Recognise your emotional and physical reactions, as well as your thoughts related to stressful situations, and develop a personal plan for better stress management.

Situation 1

Which emotions do you recognise: _____

What bodily reactions do you notice: _____

What thoughts arise: _____

Creating a personal stress management plan: _____

Situation 2

Which emotions do you recognise: _____

What bodily reactions do you notice: _____

What thoughts arise: _____

Creating a personal stress management plan: _____

Situation 3

Which emotions do you recognise: _____

What bodily reactions do you notice: _____

What thoughts arise: _____

Creating a personal stress management plan: _____

Example

Which emotions do you recognise: Anger and concern due to responsibility and the short deadline for the report.

What bodily reactions do you notice: Dry throat and tension in the stomach.

What thoughts arise: “I won’t finish it on time, I will be held accountable.”

Creating a personal stress management plan: I will count to seven and next time will ask for a more realistic deadline for the completion of the report.

Note: This exercise helps you understand that stress causes different types of reactions — emotional, physical and cognitive (related to thinking) — and that it is important to recognise and manage them by developing your own plan. You can return to your plan and update it whenever needed.

— Exercise – What do I carry on my shoulders?

Objective: To raise awareness of tension in the shoulders and upper back and support its release.

Duration: 5–10 minutes.

Materials: quiet space, comfortable chair or standing position.

Steps:

- 1** Close your eyes, focus on your shoulders, and imagine stress as a heavy backpack resting on them.
 - Inhale and gently lift your shoulders towards your ears. Hold for 2–3 seconds.
 - Exhale and slowly lower your shoulders. Repeat this movement 2–3 times.
 - Gently shake and stretch your shoulders.
 - Visualise removing the burden from your shoulders and placing it beside you. Inhale calmness and exhale tension.
 - Rotate your shoulders slowly in circles and become aware of your presence in the space around you.
- 2** After completing the exercise, take a moment to reflect:
 - How do I feel now?
 - Where do I notice relief in my body?
 - What am I ready to “put down” today?

Recognise that this short practice helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which supports calmness and balance. By combining breathing, movement and visualisation, the body learns to release accumulated tension and restore a sense of control and stability.

Consider how you can integrate this exercise into your daily routine:

- When could this short practice be most helpful? (for example, before or after meetings, after crisis calls, during breaks, or at the end of the workday)

Note: This exercise can be practised at any time during the day, especially when experiencing tension or needing a short mental and physical pause.

2.4. Early signs of stress

Early signs of stress help employees recognise the initial physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural indicators of stress through practical exercises in self-observation and self-reflection, enabling stress to be identified early and its negative impact reduced.

Physical signs: Headaches, rapid heartbeat, high blood pressure, muscle tension, shortness of breath or rapid breathing, trembling, dry mouth, skin changes, restless movements, sleep problems, nausea, stomach pain, increased sweating, fatigue and general exhaustion.

Emotional signs: Irritability and intolerance, anxiety (inner restlessness and worry), sadness or low mood, lack of willpower, loss of energy and motivation, feelings of helplessness (“Everything is pointless — I cannot influence the situation”), feelings of overload and dissatisfaction with achieved results, complaints about workload and lack of time, withdrawal (emotional distancing and avoidance of social contact), impatience (interrupting communication and demanding immediate responses), reduced satisfaction (loss of interest in work that previously brought joy), and feelings of low self-worth.

Cognitive signs (ways of thinking): Difficulties with concentration, trouble making decisions (“dilemmas” and a “foggy” mind), negative thoughts (“nothing is worth it, nothing can be changed”), forgetfulness, reduced attention, feeling “overwhelmed” or “lost.”

Behavioural signs: Avoidance of duties, tasks and responsibilities; constant rushing and a persistent lack of time; withdrawal from social interaction; changes in appetite (overeating or loss of appetite); increased use of alcohol, cigarettes or medication; and communication difficulties or conflicts with colleagues.

— Exercise – Recognising the signs of stress

Objective: To recognise the signs of stress and identify actions that may help reduce them.

Duration: 15–20 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen.

Steps:

- 1 In the table below, indicate whether you recognise any of the listed signs in yourself (**YES/NO**). If you recognise a particular sign, write **YES**; if not, write **NO**.

If your answer is **YES**, describe what helps you relieve these signs and identify specific actions you can take the next time you notice them.

Signs and Symptoms		YES / NO	What helps me relieve these signs?	My action plan
Physical signs	Rapid heartbeat, high blood pressure			
	Headaches, dizziness			
	Sleep problems, fatigue			
	Muscle tension and pain			
Emotional signs	Irritability, intolerance			
	Anxiety, inner restlessness, nervousness			
	Depression, sadness			
	Feeling overwhelmed			
Cognitive signs	Concentration problems			
	Difficulty making decisions			
	Constant rumination, worries			
	Forgetfulness			

Behavioral signs	Changes in appetite			
	Increased use of alcohol or nicotine			
	Avoidance of duties			
	Withdrawal from social contacts			

2 After completing the table, take a few minutes to reflect on your answers. Based on your reflections, write one or two concrete actions in the “My action plan” column that you can apply when similar signs appear again. These actions should be realistic and easy to practise during the workday.

Some examples of actions you may include in your daily routine when you notice signs of stress:

- ▶ Take a short walk or step outside for fresh air;
- ▶ Drink a glass of water slowly;
- ▶ Listen to calming music or soothing sounds;
- ▶ Write down the decision you need to make and list two or three possible options;
- ▶ Discuss the decision with a colleague or trusted person, if possible;
- ▶ Plan at least one regular and balanced meal during the workday;
- ▶ Pause before eating and take two deep breaths.

Note: This exercise helps you recognise your personal signs of stress and identify individual ways of managing them. Whenever you notice these signs, try to put your action plan into practice.

— Exercise – The balloon as a mirror of stress

Objective: To help employees recognise their level of stress, become aware of when they are approaching their limits, and identify ways to gradually release tension.

Duration: 10 minutes.

Materials: one balloon (it is recommended to keep one available at the workplace).

Steps:

- 1** Assess your current level of stress and reflect on the following questions:
- How do I feel today?
 - How many tasks, deadlines or demanding situations have I faced?

Examples may include: an urgent request for a residence permit; a crisis situation in an accommodation centre; a difficult conversation with a client; preparing and submitting a report within 24 hours; processing a large number of residence permit extension requests in one day; or an unplanned inspection or control.

- 2 Inflate the balloon for each stressor you identify. For every source of work-related stress, blow one breath into the balloon. Observe how the balloon gradually fills and relate this to the feeling of tension in your body.
- 3 Look at the balloon and ask yourself:
"Is my balloon (my body) at a manageable level of tension, or do I feel overinflated and close to bursting?"
- 4 Slowly release some air from the balloon. Imagine that, as the air leaves the balloon, part of your tension is also being released. While doing this, repeat a simple grounding thought such as:
"This is a temporary situation. I breathe and allow the tension to slowly leave my body."
- 5 Repeat the exercise as needed and reflect on the following questions:
 - How full was my "balloon" at the beginning?
 - What emotions arose while I was letting the air out?
 - How can I use this visualisation when I feel overwhelmed?

Note: This exercise can be used whenever you experience everyday stressors. It helps you recognise your limits, consciously release tension and remind yourself that after every stressful situation there is space for rest, recovery and balance.

2.5. Coping strategies for stress

The way stress is experienced, expressed and managed often depends on gender roles and social expectations. Social norms shape how men and women recognise and express stress, as well as how acceptable they perceive it to be to seek support or show vulnerability.

Women often experience stress related to multiple professional and family roles, which may lead to feelings of overload and emotional exhaustion. Their stress frequently arises from efforts to balance workplace demands with family care and other responsibilities, which can have a long-term impact on their physical and emotional well-being.

Men, on the other hand, may express stress through physical symptoms such as headaches, insomnia or irritability, and they often withdraw from social interactions. They are frequently under pressure to remain "strong" and avoid showing emotions, which can make communication and understanding within the family more difficult.

As a result, such situations affect not only the individual, but also family relationships, as exhaustion and tension from work often carry over into family life, reducing the quality of shared time and mutual support.

Coping strategies are essential — they help us preserve our own well-being while caring for others. There are various strategies for coping with stress: changing what can be changed, avoiding what cannot be changed, and accepting what needs to be accepted.

The following section explains each of these strategies and how they can help maintain balance and well-being.

1 Change the cause of the stressful situation

This means actively trying to solve the problem and eliminate the source of stress:

a) Problem-solving:

If you are experiencing difficulties in communication with clients, colleagues or supervisors, seek support through training in communication skills.

b) Talking to the source of stress:

If you feel that your stress is related to certain messages, emotions or dynamics in communication with colleagues or supervisors, try to have an open and assertive conversation about it. Express what you find difficult and, where possible, suggest constructive solutions.

Remember that assertive communication means expressing your thoughts, emotions and needs clearly, directly and respectfully, without violating the rights of others.

c) Better time management:

Frequent sources of stress include deadlines and multiple tasks (for example, document processing and report writing). Using a planner, taking notes and creating a realistic work plan that includes time for rest can significantly reduce stress.

2 Avoid the stressful situation

This strategy involves preventing entry into a stressful situation or finding a way to postpone it.

a) "A smart step back":

If you find yourself in a conflict situation with beneficiaries, colleagues or other officials, and you notice that it cannot be resolved constructively, postpone the conversation until a more suitable moment.

b) Setting boundaries:

Be prepared to say "no" if you are unable to complete a task within the given deadline. Employees often take on more than they can realistically accomplish, which leads to stress. Learn to assess your capacities and, when necessary, ask for help or delegate tasks.

c) Setting realistic goals:

Do not set overly ambitious expectations for yourself. Adjusting expectations to your own capacities helps reduce pressure and stress.

3 Accept the situation today, change it tomorrow

Sometimes it is not possible to change a stressful situation immediately. In such cases, it is important to accept the situation and work on developing a future response to it, thereby strengthening resilience.

BASIC Ph is an acronym referring to six channels of personal resources that people naturally use when facing challenges. Most people tend to rely more on certain strategies than others. It is useful to become aware of your own ways of coping with difficulties, stress, trauma and crisis, as this helps strengthen existing coping strategies while also identifying other approaches that can be developed and applied.

BASIC Ph - Channels of personal resources and examples of activities

Channels	Description	Examples of activities	Application in everyday life
B – Beliefs (Meaning and values)	Personal values, spirituality and a sense of meaning contribute to inner stability and resilience.	Meditation, prayer, reading inspiring texts, reflecting on personal values, gratitude journaling.	Remembering the objective and meaning of your work; connecting professional tasks with personal values and motivation.
A – Affect (Emotions)	Recognising and expressing emotions helps reduce tension and prevent emotional exhaustion.	Writing in a journal, talking with a colleague, emotional awareness exercises, mindful breathing.	Expressing emotions in a safe way; seeking support after a stressful situation or during emotional overload.
S – Social (Relationships)	Social support provides a sense of safety, connection, and belonging.	Regular meetings with family and friends, shared meals, tea/ coffee breaks, attending cultural events (cinema, theatre), walking with a pet.	Maintaining good relationships with family members and colleagues; teamwork; short supportive conversations during breaks.
I – Imagination (Creativity and expression)	Creative activities release tension and create space for emotional expression.	Painting, reading, writing, music, humor, dancing, crafting, walking with a pet.	Using creativity in problem-solving; integrating art and humor into team activities or relaxation moments.
C – Cognition (Thinking and learning)	Understanding and analysing situations helps manage stress and learn from experience.	Planning the day, positive thinking, reflecting after stressful events.	Making short daily plans; keeping a reflection journal about stressors and coping strategies; reflecting on lessons learned from experience.
Ph – Physical (Body and health)	Caring for the body supports both physical and emotional balance.	Walking, light exercise, spending time in nature, breathing exercises.	Taking short breaks for breathing or stretching; walking to work; practising mindful breathing during stressful moments.

— Exercise – Resource map

Objective: To identify personal and organisational support resources that help in stressful situations and strengthen resilience.

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Materials: paper or planner.

Steps:

1 Draw a large circle in the middle of the paper and place yourself at the centre. Around that circle, draw smaller circles and write down your channels of personal resources. Use the *BASIC Ph – Channels of Personal Resources* table for inspiration. In the circles, write everything that helps you cope with stressful situations and strengthens your resilience.

2 Look at your map and take a few moments to reflect. Ask yourself:

- Which of these sources do I use most often?
- Which source do I rarely use but could rely on more often?
- Which new sources of support have recently appeared in my life or work?

Write short notes about what you notice regarding your sources of support. Being aware of your support system helps you recognise both visible and hidden strengths and understand how you can activate them when needed.

3 Now reflect on the deeper meaning of what you have mapped. Ask yourself:

- How do different forms of support (emotional, practical or professional) help me cope with stress?
- What does this say about my way of dealing with difficulties?
- What values or beliefs shape the way I give and receive support?

4 Use your map in everyday life. Whenever you feel overwhelmed or stressed, look at it to remind yourself that you are not alone. Update it regularly by adding new sources of support or noting changes in existing ones. Choose one small action you can take this week to strengthen your resource channels and support network.

Examples of small actions:

- Talk to a colleague about a stressful situation.
- Go for a walk with a friend or family member.
- Schedule a short break or relaxation activity.
- Express gratitude to someone who supports you.

5 If the exercise is carried out in a group or team, take 5–10 minutes for collective discussion and sharing. Reflect on the following questions:

- Which sources of support are common to several team members?
- What shared strengths and values does our team have?

Example:

“My team can help me with completing tasks. I can strengthen my resilience by spending time with my pets or going for walks with loved ones. Each of us has a support network — it may be visible or hidden, formal or informal.”

Note: The Resource map can also be used as a team exercise, helping colleagues identify shared resources, recognise individual and collective strengths, and strengthen mutual trust and co-operation.

— Exercise – My personal plan for strengthening resilience

Objective: To help employees identify and apply appropriate strategies (change, avoidance or acceptance) in order to strengthen their resilience.

Time: 20 – 30 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen or planner.

Steps:

1 Identifying sources of stress and coping strategies

Write down situations from your work or private life that most often cause you stress:

Situation 1: _____

Situation 2: _____

2 Choosing a strategy

For each situation, reflect on the following questions:

- Can I change this situation? If yes, what exactly can I do?
- Can I avoid the situation or reduce its impact? If yes, how?
- If I cannot change anything at the moment, how can I better accept the situation and reduce its impact on me?

Situation 1:

• Change: _____.

• Avoidance: _____.

• Acceptance: _____.

Situation 2:

• Change: _____.

• Avoidance: _____.

• Acceptance: _____.

3 Creating a personal plan

Choose one concrete action for each situation that you will apply during the coming week.

Examples:

- ▶ **Change:** Arrange a meeting with my supervisor to discuss task priorities.
- ▶ **Avoidance:** Learn to say “no” when tasks exceed my capacity.
- ▶ **Acceptance:** Introduce 10 minutes of breathing exercises or take a short walk during a break to reduce tension.

4 Assessing your own strategies

Reflect on the following questions:

- Which strategies suit me best at this moment — change, avoidance or acceptance?
- What obstacles might make it difficult to implement the chosen actions, and how can I overcome them?
- How will implementing this plan contribute to my resilience and well-being?

5 Reflection after one week

After one week, take a few minutes to reflect on your experience:

- What did I learn about myself and my coping strategies?
- What will I do differently next time I face a similar situation?

Note: This worksheet helps you consciously choose coping strategies and gradually strengthen resilience to challenges in both professional and private life.

2.6. Stress and trauma – basic differences

Stress is a normal reaction to pressure or demands. It helps individuals adapt and respond to everyday challenges. However, when stress is intense or prolonged, it can develop into chronic stress, which negatively affects physical and mental health. Chronic stress results from prolonged exposure to stress and neglect of self-care. Timely recognition of stress and the use of positive coping strategies help prevent its harmful effects.

It is important to note that stressful situations are experienced and tolerated differently depending on a person's internal and external resources. Coping capacities are not fixed; they change depending on the environment, the support available and personal coping strategies.

The word *trauma* comes from the Greek language and means “wound”. In medicine, it was originally used to describe physical injuries, but today it also refers to psychological wounds resulting from extreme or life-threatening events. Such experiences may include violence, accidents, the loss of a loved one, sexual violence, abuse, war-related events (injury, captivity, rape or other forms of sexual violence), or natural disasters.

Exposure to traumatic experiences can be:

- **Direct** — when a person's life is personally endangered;
- **Indirect** — when witnessing such an event;
- **Secondary** — when learning that the event happened to a close person, or through repeated professional exposure to traumatic material.

During such extreme experiences, the body's defence system activates fight, flight or freeze responses. This represents the body's acute physiological reaction to extreme threat or helplessness. Trauma is not a sign of personal weakness; it is an adaptive response to an external stressor that exceeds an individual's capacity to cope.

The signs of psychological trauma can vary from intense feelings of fear, anxiety, sadness or anger, flashbacks, intrusive memories and nightmares, to difficulties with concentration, emotional numbness, withdrawal from social contact and sleep disturbances.

If you believe that you are experiencing symptoms of psychological trauma following life-threatening or extreme events, or as a result of professional exposure to the secondary effects of trauma in others, it is important to seek professional support from a psychologist or psychiatrist. Trained specialists can provide appropriate guidance and treatment to support the restoration of mental health and personal resilience.

It is therefore important to understand that not all stress is trauma. Accordingly, the focus of these Guidelines is on strengthening individual resilience, which contributes to better self-awareness and more effective coping with stressful and crisis situations.

— Exercise – 4–6 Breathing

Objective: To help employees reduce tension and establish a sense of calm through controlled breathing.

Duration: 5 minutes.

Materials: none.

Steps:

- 1 Sit comfortably and close your eyes if this feels comfortable, or focus softly on a single point in your surroundings.
 - Inhale slowly through your nose while counting to four.
 - Exhale slowly through your mouth while counting to six.
 - Repeat this technique three times, focusing on the rhythm of your breathing.

Notice the gentle movement of your chest and abdomen, and the sense of calm that comes with each exhalation.

- 2 After several breathing cycles, reflect on your experience:
 - How do I feel after practising 4–6 breathing?
 - Have I noticed any changes in my physical state?

Examples: slower heartbeat, relaxed muscles, clearer thinking.

- 3 Understand what controlled breathing does to your body and mind:
 - A longer exhalation activates the body's relaxation response and reduces tension.
 - Awareness of breathing supports emotional regulation and improves focus.
- 4 Integrate this exercise into your daily routine:
 - Use it before meetings or after challenging situations.

Note: The 4–6 breathing exercise is a simple yet effective way to regulate emotions and prevent the accumulation of stress.

— Exercise – Grounding

Objective: To help employees regain focus and calm through sensory awareness.

Duration: 3 – 5 minutes.

Materials: none.

Steps:

- 1 Sit comfortably and take a slow breath. Direct your attention to your senses:
 - Name three things you can see.
 - Name two things you can hear.
 - Name one thing you can feel through touch.

Example: "I see a chair, a pen and a picture on the wall; I hear colleagues talking and the sound of typing; I feel the back of the chair."

- 2 After completing the exercise, take a moment to reflect:
 - How does my body feel now compared to before?
 - Do I notice any change in tension or focus?
- 3 Recognise that grounding uses sensory awareness to connect the body and mind to the present moment, helping to reduce anxiety and restore a sense of stability.
- 4 Apply this exercise whenever you feel overwhelmed or distracted:
 - During a stressful meeting or after an intense phone call;
 - Before starting a complex task or presentation;
 - Whenever you feel overwhelmed or distracted.

Note: Grounding helps you return to the present moment, reduce anxiety and think more clearly.

— Exercise – Quick movement activities for stress reduction

Objective: To practice simple movements that help reduce stress quickly and effectively.

Duration: 5–10 minutes.

Materials: none.

Steps:

- 1 Perform short physical movements to release tension. Take a comfortable position, stand up, and prepare to move your body with awareness. Notice how your body feels before you begin.
 - Circular arm movements – relax your shoulders and make circular movements with your arms.
 - Stretching wrists and hands – gently stretch your fingers and make circular movements with your wrists.
 - Knee lifts – alternately lift your knees.
 - Shoulder rolls – roll your shoulders forwards and backwards.
 - Heel raises – rise onto your toes and lower yourself several times.
 - Shaking movements – gently shake your arms, legs and body to release tension.
 - Wall push – place your palms against a wall and push as firmly as you can.
 - Imaginary weight drop – imagine dropping a heavy object onto the floor while exhaling.

- 2 Take a short pause and reflect:
 - How do I feel after moving compared to before?
 - Which movement brought the most relief?
- 3 Short physical movements stimulate blood circulation, release tension and activate the body's relaxation response.
- 4 Apply one or two of these movements before meetings or after stressful calls.

Note: Even a few minutes of movement can help restore focus, energy and emotional balance.

CHAPTER 3.

Prevention of burnout at work

This chapter explains the early signs of burnout, the associated risks, and practical strategies that help preserve energy and a sense of purpose in demanding working conditions. Burnout is not merely fatigue, but a state of deep physical, emotional and professional exhaustion that can seriously affect individuals.

Preventing burnout is therefore not a one-time activity, but a long-term process that requires awareness, self-reflection and continuous care for oneself and others.

Understanding burnout, recognising the early signs of exhaustion, and using tools such as the window of tolerance help employees recognise when they are moving out of balance. The exercises presented in this chapter offer practical ways to regulate emotions, relieve mental strain and restore inner stability.

Only through a combination of individual and collective care it is possible to prevent burnout and create a resilient work culture in which every employee feels recognised, valued and supported.

3.1. Burnout

Burnout is a serious consequence of chronic stress that affects the physical, emotional and professional functioning of employees. It is closely linked to workload. In professional literature, the terms “burnout”, “exhaustion” and “overstrain” are often used interchangeably.

Burnout is commonly defined as a syndrome consisting of three dimensions:

- ▶ **Emotional exhaustion:** a prolonged feeling of depletion, overload and avoidance of contact with people.
- ▶ **Depersonalisation:** reduced sensitivity, emotional numbness and a cynical attitude towards clients and colleagues.
- ▶ **Reduced personal accomplishment:** a feeling of decreased competence and effectiveness, which may lead to loss of self-esteem and even depression.

Burnout has negative consequences for both employees and organisations, including more frequent absences, staff turnover, lower productivity, reduced job satisfaction and decreased commitment to work. Employees who are highly motivated and idealistic may be particularly at risk of burnout due to a mismatch between expectations and achievements.

The risk also increases when employees lose a sense of meaning and purpose in their work, or when they display characteristics such as heightened emotional sensitivity, dissatisfaction with life and lower sociability.

Stress vs. Burnout

Each person can observe their body, emotions, thoughts and behaviour. Paying attention to the body's signals makes it possible to assess the effectiveness of burnout prevention strategies already in use and to develop new ones.

How can stress be distinguished from burnout?

Stress	Burnout
Occasional tension and pressure	Chronic feeling of exhaustion
Feeling of anxiety and nervousness	Feeling of hopelessness and emptiness
Reaction to specific challenges	Consequence of prolonged exposure to stress and neglect of self-care
Can motivate positive actions	Drains motivation and energy

■ Exercise – Am I at risk of burnout?

Objective: To help employees assess their personal risk of burnout and identify initial steps towards seeking support and applying preventive measures.

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen.

Steps:

1 Mark YES or NO for each statement:

Statement	YES	NO
I often feel physically exhausted, even after resting.		
I have difficulties with concentration and memory.		
I increasingly avoid contact with colleagues and family.		
I often feel anxiety, tension, or irritability.		
I have problems with sleep (insomnia, frequent waking).		
I feel like my work has no meaning.		

2 Reflect on the following questions:

- What are the causes of these feelings or behaviours?
- How do these signs affect my energy, relationships or motivation?
- Which situations or working conditions most often lead to these feelings?

Recognising your own patterns helps you understand what you can change to protect your well-being.

3 Choose one concrete action you can take within the next five days to reduce the risk of burnout.

Write your chosen action here:

My next step towards recovery and balance (body, emotions and thoughts):

Examples:

- Schedule a short daily walk or stretching break.
- Turn off notifications after working hours.
- Plan one relaxing or enjoyable activity after work.

4 Follow up on your action plan.

Did I manage to carry out the action I planned?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partly

What difference did I notice in the way I cope with stress?

Write your observations in your personal notes.

Note: This exercise helps you develop self-awareness by recognising early warning signs, planning preventive actions and evaluating their impact.

3.2. Recognising and maintaining the window of tolerance

The window of tolerance represents the optimal range of energy and arousal within which a person can effectively perform tasks, communicate and regulate emotions. Different situations may lead a person into states of hyperarousal or hypoarousal. Awareness of these states contributes to strengthening resilience and maintaining balance within the window of tolerance, even in unpredictable stressful or crisis situations.

The window of tolerance demonstrates that a person is able to:

- ▶ Function effectively and perform tasks;
- ▶ Think clearly and make decisions;
- ▶ Stay connected with others and experience empathy;
- ▶ Manage emotions without becoming overwhelmed;
- ▶ Communicate feelings, thoughts and needs;
- ▶ Feel calm and physically relaxed while remaining alert.

The window of tolerance also reflects different states in which an employee may find themselves. When a person is within the window, it means they are coping effectively with stressful situations and that their coping strategies are functioning well. However, certain stressful events may push a person outside the window of tolerance, causing their energy levels either to rise (hyperarousal) or decrease (hypoarousal).

Outside the window of tolerance – Hyperarousal (above the window)

This state is characterised by excessive tension and heightened energy in the body, and may include:

- ▶ Intense anger, irritability or tension;
- ▶ Heightened sense of danger (hypervigilance);
- ▶ Difficulty thinking clearly and making decisions;
- ▶ Increased heart rate, shallow breathing and sweating;
- ▶ Restlessness or insomnia;
- ▶ Impulsive reactions;
- ▶ Regret about words spoken or behaviour;
- ▶ Increased conflict or emotional sensitivity.

Outside the window of tolerance – Hypoarousal (below the window)

This state is characterised by low energy and a sense of “shutting down”, and may include:

- ▶ Fatigue and loss of motivation;
- ▶ Feelings of emptiness or hopelessness;
- ▶ Slowed movement and breathing;
- ▶ Withdrawal from social activities;
- ▶ Indifference towards colleagues;
- ▶ Feeling “fed up”, even with activities previously enjoyed;
- ▶ Difficulty getting up and going to work.

Our autonomic nervous system automatically shifts us into these states in response to stress or perceived threats. While we cannot always choose our immediate reactions, we can learn strategies that help us return to a regulated state and re-enter the window of tolerance.

3.3. The General Inspectorate for Migration employees in the window of tolerance

Employees should be given space and time to recognise their own position and state within the window of tolerance and to reflect on how they feel and cope when they remain within this range. They are more likely to function effectively when they have a clear work plan, good communication and a sense of support. When difficulties arise, they are better able to respond constructively through personal resilience.

At the same time, it is important to raise awareness of what happens when a person moves outside the safe space of tolerance and enters a state of hyperarousal or hypoarousal.

Within the window of tolerance:

- ▶ Working in a team where agreed procedures are respected and communication is clear;
- ▶ Daily tasks that are planned and distributed without overload;
- ▶ Conversations with colleagues or beneficiaries (migrants, asylum seekers, etc) in which there is a sense of control and support.

Situations that may lead to hyperarousal:

- ▶ Unexpected crisis situations in reception centres;
- ▶ Intense disputes or conflicts with service users or colleagues;
- ▶ Pressure caused by short deadlines for submitting reports combined with an increased workload.

Situations that may lead to hypoarousal:

- ▶ Prolonged exposure to emotionally difficult stories without opportunities to process experiences;
- ▶ A sense that one's efforts are not recognised or that there is no possibility for change;
- ▶ Isolated work without support or feedback.

Common employee reactions in stressful situations:

Employees often rely on established behavioural patterns when under stress. These “typical reactions” may include:

- ▶ Taking on too many responsibilities in order to demonstrate commitment to work;
- ▶ Avoiding conflict and withdrawing from discussions in order to maintain harmony;
- ▶ Complying with decisions without question, even when feeling overloaded.

Such patterns may keep a person outside the window of tolerance, making it more difficult to return to a state of balance and effective functioning.

■ Exercise – Recognising and maintaining one’s own window of tolerance

Objective: To help employees recognise their own window of tolerance, identify signs of being within or outside it, and recognise the skills and support that help them return to an optimal state.

Duration: 15–20 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen.

Steps:

1 Take a few minutes to reflect on situations in which you felt balanced and situations in which you felt overwhelmed. Then answer the following questions. Write your answers in the space provided below each question.

What do I notice in my thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and behaviour when I am within my window of tolerance?

What do I notice when I am above my window of tolerance (hyperarousal)?

What do I notice when I am below my window of tolerance (hypoarousal)?

Which skills, forms of support and resources help me return to my window of tolerance?

How satisfied am I with my current window of tolerance?

- 2 Recognising stress levels helps you respond in time. What can you do right now to return to your window of tolerance (for example, stretching, deep breathing or drinking a glass of water)? Practise this whenever needed and observe how your body and emotions respond.
- 3 Reflect on your thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and behaviours using the BET model (Body – Emotions – Thoughts).

How to use the BET Model

Set aside a moment for yourself each day. Pause, take a few deep breaths, and gently direct your attention inward. In any situation, try to notice or write down the connection between your Body, Emotions and Thoughts. Then take a moment to reflect, assess the situation and decide on one small, concrete step you can take.

Example:

Body: What do I notice in my body?

Emotions: How do I feel in this moment?

Thoughts: What thoughts are going through my mind?

Assessment: Is this state related to stress? Do I need to take a break, rest, delegate tasks or speak with a supervisor?

Self-care – small step: Choose one small and practical self-care action (for example, taking a short walk, talking with a colleague, practising a breathing exercise or taking a personal break).

Reflection

Take a few moments to reflect on your experience and what you have learned through this exercise. Notice any changes in your body, emotions and thoughts, and consider how you can apply these insights in your daily work and self-care.

How do I feel after this exercise? Write: _____

What was most useful for me in this process? Write: _____

How can I use this exercise in my everyday work? Write: _____

Note: This exercise may help raise awareness of your current limits of tolerance and remind you of the importance of responding in a timely manner. If you notice that you are frequently outside your window of tolerance, consider seeking additional support through conversations with colleagues or professional assistance.

— Exercise – Quick tension release

Objective: To practise quick and simple techniques for releasing tension and calming the body through breathing and movement.

Duration: 5 minutes.

Materials: none.



Steps:

Inhale naturally through your nose, then exhale with a long, audible sigh. Repeat 2–3 times.

Intentionally provoke a yawn (even a simulated one) while raising your arms above your head. Hold the stretch for a few seconds.

Stand up and gently shake your arms, shoulders and legs for 20–30 seconds.

Reflection

- How do I feel after practising these short techniques compared to before?
- Which of these techniques could I use during short breaks at work?

Note: Use these techniques whenever you need a brief pause, especially during busy or overwhelming days.

— Exercise – The garden of my emotions

Objective: To help employees recognise and regulate emotions in situations of high stress and emotional burden, and to practise managing difficult feelings.

Duration: 15–20 minutes.

Materials: a comfortable and quiet place.



Steps:

1 Imagining your emotional garden

- Find a quiet and comfortable place where you will not be disturbed and take a few moments for yourself. Sit comfortably, close your eyes and take several slow, deep breaths.
- Imagine that all your emotions grow together in one large garden — the Garden of Your Emotions. What does this garden look like? Does it contain flowers, trees or paths? Is it calm, colourful or sunny? Create it in a way that gives you a sense of safety and comfort.
- Imagine that each emotion grows as a separate plant. Joy may appear as a flower in your favourite colour, sadness as a shadowy plant, anger as a thorny bush, and hope as a young tree growing stronger. Each emotion has its own place in your garden.
- This is your personal garden. You decide which plant you will approach and how much time you will spend with it. Approach the emotion that currently feels most difficult or burdensome (for example, stress, fear or anger). Observe it — what does it look like? Does it have a colour, smell or shape? Spend a moment with this emotion and consciously acknowledge its presence.
- When you are ready, thank the emotion for showing you how you feel. If it feels too intense, imagine pruning it or moving it slightly farther away, giving it a place where it does not overwhelm you.
- After spending time with a difficult emotion, approach a plant that symbolises a pleasant emotion (such as joy, hope or peace). Spend time with it and notice its presence and energy.
- Imagine yourself slowly leaving the garden, leaving each emotion in its place. Take a deep breath in and out, open your eyes and continue your day.

Reflection

Take a few moments to reflect on what you experienced in your garden. Recognising how emotions appear and change can help you better understand your emotional patterns and what supports your sense of balance.

Which emotions take up the most space in my garden?

Choose colours as symbols for emotions. Write the colours and explain what each of them represents.

What did I feel when I approached a difficult emotion? Write your reflections here.

How did my body respond while I was in the garden? Write your observations here.

2 Planning a small step.

Write one concrete action you can take to calm yourself and nurture pleasant emotions.

What small action can I take this week to cultivate more calm or joy in my “real garden”?

Practise this exercise over the next few days and observe its effect on your emotions and physical state.

Note: This exercise can be repeated regularly to help monitor changes in emotional states and strengthen emotional balance.

3.4. Strategies for preventing burnout

To reduce the risk of being outside the window of tolerance and to prevent burnout, employees can develop both individual and team strategies of resilience. Some examples include:



Individual strategies:

- ▶ **Setting boundaries:** Establish clear boundaries between work and private life.
- ▶ **Regular micro-breaks:** Take short breaks throughout the day for recovery and resetting.
- ▶ **Practicing mindfulness exercises:** Use simple breathing exercises or grounding exercises to manage emotional burden.
- ▶ **Personal support network:** Talk with colleagues, friends, or family for emotional support.
- ▶ **Reflection:** Keep a journal of thoughts and feelings to recognise emotional states.
- ▶ **Practising relaxation techniques:** Include breathing exercises, stretching, or meditation.

Organisational strategies:

- ▶ **Setting realistic boundaries:** Clearly communicate capacities and priorities to prevent overload.
- ▶ **Intervision meetings:** Regular peer meetings to share experiences about challenges and seek solutions with colleagues.
- ▶ **Recognition and feedback:** Acknowledge employees' efforts to strengthen motivation and engagement.
- ▶ **Supervision:** Whenever possible, organise regular supervision sessions with qualified staff or external experts. These sessions provide employees with a safe and confidential space to reflect on emotionally demanding situations, strengthen professional resilience, and prevent burnout.
- ▶ **Training and development programmes:** take part in workshops and trainings to improve stress management skills and strengthen resilience.
- ▶ **Encouraging a culture of support:** Build a work atmosphere where open conversations about stress and challenges are welcome, as they contribute to preserving employees well-being.

— Exercise – Socratic questioning of dysfunctional thoughts

Objective: To help employees recognise and challenge dysfunctional thoughts and develop more balanced patterns of thinking.

Duration: 20 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen.

Steps:

1 Socratic questioning is a method of asking thoughtful, open-ended questions in order to encourage critical thinking, self-reflection and deeper understanding. Reflect on a challenging situation at work that causes you worry or stress, for example: *"If I make a mistake in the report, it means I am not good at my job."* Write down the thought.

2 When reflecting on this thought, write down the emotions and bodily sensations you experience. Take a few moments to notice how these reactions influence your work or relationships. Observe your inner experience without judging yourself.

- 3 Ask yourself Socratic questions by choosing some of the following:
- What exactly makes me believe that this thought is true?
 - What evidence supports this thought, and what evidence contradicts it?
 - Am I basing this thought on facts or on feelings?
 - Is there another way of looking at this situation?
 - How might someone I trust interpret this situation?
 - What would I say to a colleague who had this thought?
 - Am I imagining the worst possible outcome? What is the most likely outcome?
 - What more balanced and helpful thought could replace this one?

- 4 Write down any new emotions and bodily sensations after formulating a more balanced thought.

How has my emotional experience changed after challenging this thought?

Which of the new thoughts seems most convincing and useful to me?

How can I apply this technique the next time I face a challenging situation?

The next time you notice a similar thought, use one or two Socratic questions to examine it in real time.

Plan one situation in the coming days in which you will apply this method and observe its effect on your emotions and reactions.

Note: This exercise supports the development of self-awareness and critical thinking, and helps reduce emotional burden associated with negative thoughts.

— Exercise – “Containment”

Objective: To help employees temporarily set aside overwhelming thoughts or images and regain a sense of control.

Duration: 15 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen.

Steps:

① Imagine your mental “box”

Imagine a mental “box” or another safe space where you can temporarily place disturbing thoughts.

Visualise placing these thoughts into the box and closing it securely. Tell yourself: *“I will return to these thoughts when I am ready; for now, I am setting them aside temporarily.”*

If you wish, you may draw your “box” on paper and write down the thoughts you are temporarily storing. You may also write one or two stressful thoughts on a piece of paper, fold it, and place it in an envelope, box or drawer — as a symbolic act of setting them aside for the moment.

② Recognise your responses

Reflect on the following questions:

- ▶ Which thoughts or images were the most difficult to place in the box?
- ▶ How did I feel during this exercise?
- ▶ Did the visualisation or the physical act of setting thoughts aside help reduce the intensity of distress?

③ Plan your next actions

- ▶ How could I use this exercise in everyday stressful situations?
- ▶ Choose one specific situation this week in which you will practise this exercise — either through visualisation or by physically writing down and setting thoughts aside. Write down when and how you used it.

The next time you feel overwhelmed, imagine your box again and use it to temporarily set aside distressing thoughts.

Note: This exercise does not aim to suppress thoughts permanently. Rather, it helps you temporarily “set them aside”, reducing feelings of overwhelm and restoring a sense of control.

— Exercise – Daily self-check

Objective: To help employees recognise and monitor their emotional states in order to improve stress management.

Duration: 5 minutes.

Materials: paper or a journal.

Steps:

- 1 Each day, ask yourself: *“How do I feel today?”*. Rate your current state on a scale from 1 (overwhelmed) to 10 (balanced).
- 2 At the end of each day, take a few minutes to review your notes and reflect:
 - What influenced my mood today?
 - What patterns do I notice throughout the week?
- 3 By monitoring your emotional states daily, you become more aware of how experiences influence your stress levels. Recognising these patterns helps you anticipate stress and take preventive action.
- 4 When your daily score drops below 5, practise a short relaxation, breathing or grounding exercise.
 - Review your notes weekly to identify triggers and plan small adjustments to your routine or workload.

Note: Monitoring emotional states over time increases self-awareness and supports emotional self-regulation.

— Exercise – Observing thoughts

Objective: To develop awareness of the present moment and reduce emotional stress.

Duration: 10 minutes.

Materials: a comfortable place to sit.

Steps:

- 1 Sit comfortably, close your eyes and focus on your breathing.

Notice your thoughts as they arise and pass by — observe them like clouds moving across the sky. If your attention drifts, gently bring it back to your breath. Recognise that you are not your thoughts — you are the observer of your thoughts.
- 2 Now take a moment to reflect on your thoughts and feelings:
 - How did I feel during the exercise?
 - Which thoughts appeared most frequently?
 - Was it difficult for me to stay focused on my breathing?
- 3 Observing thoughts without judgement helps create psychological distance from them.
 - When we observe thoughts instead of identifying with them, we strengthen emotional regulation and reduce emotional reactivity.
 - This process increases self-awareness and supports the ability to pause before reacting in stressful situations.

4 Try to use this practice before an important meeting or whenever you notice tension increasing.

Use 2–3 minutes of mindful observation during breaks to calm your mind.

Write short notes about when and how this exercise helped you in everyday situations.

Note: Regular observation of thoughts without judgement helps regulate emotions, strengthen concentration and promote mental clarity. Over time, it can become a natural strategy for maintaining inner calm.

CHAPTER 4.

Building resilience and self-care at work

This chapter explains and emphasises that resilience is a key skill for employees, as it supports the preservation of mental health, professional effectiveness and an empathetic approach when working with vulnerable groups and in management roles. Self-care practices — such as everyday self-reflection, short breathing exercises and the use of the BET model (Body – Emotions – Thoughts) — help employees cope more effectively with stress and maintain balance between private and professional life.

Strengthening individual resilience also contributes to strengthening the collective resilience of the organisation, leading to more stable and effective work. It is important to recognise that resilience is not a goal achieved once and for all, but a continuous process that is developed and nurtured over time.

4.1. Resilience in action

This section explains how resilience functions within the specific context of the General Inspectorate for Migration (GIM) and why it represents a key competence for employees working in dynamic and emotionally demanding environments. It highlights how everyday practices, supportive leadership and psychosocial support contribute to long-term well-being, professional stability and a healthier work culture. By understanding and consciously strengthening these aspects, employees can not only cope more effectively with stress, but also maintain motivation, empathy and effectiveness in their work.



For GIM employees, resilience is particularly important, as they work daily with migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups, face emotionally demanding situations and make decisions under pressure. Self-care is therefore a fundamental prerequisite for professional functioning and the preservation of mental health.

Resilience means that, even in the most difficult circumstances, an individual, team or organisation can continue to function effectively. It involves developing internal and external strengths and resources that enable people to move forward without harmful consequences for their health. This is achieved through continuous awareness of emotions, needs and boundaries; reflection on the interaction between body, emotions, thoughts and behaviour; and the development and nurturing of positive interpersonal relationships.

Ultimately, resilience contributes to effective self-care, a healthier balance between professional

responsibilities and personal life, and sustained investment in mental and physical well-being — all of which are essential for long-term job satisfaction.

Resilience is the ability of an individual, team or organisation to adapt, recover and continue functioning despite stress, change or crisis. It is strengthened through support, learning and self-reflection.

Resilience is developed through:

- ▶ **Self-awareness** — recognising and accepting one's own emotions, needs and boundaries.
- ▶ **Self-care** — maintaining physical and mental well-being and creating balance between emotions, body and thoughts, which helps harmonise work responsibilities and rest.
- ▶ **Flexibility and adaptability** — developing the ability to change perspectives, find new solutions and seek support from colleagues, the team or professionals when needed.

4.2. Factors of resilience

A number of important conditions work together to help individuals and teams cope with challenges, overcome stress and remain functional over the long term. In the context of employees of the General Inspectorate for Migration (GIM), understanding these factors helps strengthen both personal and professional capacities.

Resilience factors

- ▶ **Individual factors** — contribute to recognising and regulating emotions, understanding personal capacities, strengths and values, developing assertive communication and non-violent conflict-resolution skills, and practising daily self-care.
- ▶ **Social factors** — play an important role in strengthening mutual support, whether from family and friends or within the workplace, particularly from colleagues and supervisors.
- ▶ **Organisational factors** — provide the foundation for developing a stress-sensitive organisational culture that promotes supportive self-care and introduces measures aimed at strengthening human-resource capacities (such as intervention, education and supervision), all of which contribute to employee well-being.

The combination of these factors enables employees to remain functional and productive over longer periods, even in stressful and high-risk working conditions.

4.3. BET model (Body – Emotions – Thoughts) in strengthening resilience

Assertive and constructive communication makes it possible to express one's needs and opinions without harming others. Being assertive means taking care of one's own needs in a respectful and constructive way. Assertiveness can help improve self-esteem, strengthen mutual respect and encourage open dialogue. It also supports coping with stressful situations and reducing stress, particularly for people who find it difficult to say "no" and therefore take on not only their own responsibilities, but also those of others.

Active participation in maintaining one's own well-being includes every intentional action taken to care for the body, emotions and thoughts (BET model: Body – Emotions – Thoughts). It also means treating oneself as a person worthy of care and developing awareness of the importance of balance and connection. Self-care exercises and healthy lifestyle practices can help manage the effects of stress and strengthen personal resilience.

The BET model is a simple yet effective tool that helps employees develop self-reflection skills, better understand themselves, recognise their needs and strengthen resilience in stressful and crisis situations. It is used to observe the body (**B – Body**), emotions (**E – Emotions**) and thoughts (**T – Thoughts**) experienced in different situations.

Regular use of the BET model helps employees to:

- ▶ Notice internal reactions to everyday challenges and work demands;
- ▶ Connect bodily sensations, emotions and thoughts with their behaviour;
- ▶ Recognise early signs of stress and burnout;
- ▶ Make conscious decisions about how to respond in challenging situations.

The BET model supports awareness of what is happening in the body, emotions and thoughts, and how these reactions influence behaviour. When a person feels overwhelmed by work demands, deadlines, multiple responsibilities or conflicts with colleagues, it is important to recognise and pay attention to these reactions.

Examples may include:

- ▶ **Body:** tension, stiffness, pain;
- ▶ **Emotions:** anger, fear, uncertainty;
- ▶ **Thoughts:** negative or overwhelming thoughts that may contribute to destructive communication, conflict or withdrawal from tasks.

It is therefore important to pause briefly, assess the situation that triggered these reactions and take concrete steps towards self-care.

How to use the BET model

Set aside a moment for yourself each day. Pause, take a few deep breaths and gently direct your attention inward. In any situation, try to notice or write down the connection between your body, emotions and thoughts. Then take a moment to reflect, assess the situation and decide on one small and concrete step you can take.

Example:

Body: What do I notice in my body?

Emotions: How do I feel in this moment?

Thoughts: What thoughts are going through my mind?

Assessment: Is this state related to stress? Do I need to take a break, rest, delegate tasks or speak with a supervisor?

Self-care – small step: Choose one small and practical act of self-care (for example, taking a short walk, talking with a colleague, practising a breathing exercise or taking a personal break).

Practical examples of using the BET model

Work overload, multiple tasks and demands from others

Focus on your body, emotions and thoughts, then take one small step towards self-care.

- ▶ **Body:** Tightness in the chest, rapid breathing, dizziness;
- ▶ **Emotions:** Anxiety, nervousness;
- ▶ **Thoughts:** "I will not manage to finish everything."
- ▶ **Self-care – small step:** Take a 5-minute break, practise deep breathing, prioritise tasks.

Conflict with a colleague at work

Focus on your body, emotions and thoughts, then take one small step towards self-care.

- ▶ **Body:** Jaw tension, clenched fists;
- ▶ **Emotions:** Anger, frustration;
- ▶ **Thoughts:** "No one understands me."
- ▶ **Self-care – small step:** Pause the conversation, postpone it until a better moment, take a short break or use muscle relaxation techniques.

Early signs of burnout

Focus on your body, emotions and thoughts, then take one small step towards self-care.

- ▶ **Body:** Fatigue, headache, back pain;
- ▶ **Emotions:** Exhaustion, lack of motivation;
- ▶ **Thoughts:** “I cannot continue like this.”
- ▶ **Self-care – small step:** Plan the day with scheduled breaks and seek support from a supervisor or colleague.

— Exercise – Snake breathing and tapping

Objective: To activate the body’s calming response (the parasympathetic nervous system) in order to reduce tension and restore a sense of grounding and balance.

Duration: 5–10 minutes.

Materials: a comfortable place.

Steps:

1 Preparation

Find a quiet and comfortable place. Sit or stand, lower your shoulders and allow your body to relax. Before beginning, take a moment to notice how you feel — your breathing, your energy level and the sensations in your body.

Snake breathing

- Inhale through your nose or mouth, whichever feels more comfortable.
- As you exhale, slowly make the sound “sssss” like a snake, extending the exhalation for as long as feels comfortable.
- Repeat several times, focusing on the sensation of your body becoming more relaxed with each exhalation.

Adding tapping

- Below the left collarbone: Form a soft fist with your right hand and gently tap below the left collarbone while exhaling with the “sssss” sound.
- Below the right collarbone: Switch hands and repeat the tapping below the right collarbone while exhaling.
- On the breastbone (sternum): Place one hand in the middle of your chest and gently tap during the exhalation.

Repeat the sequence (left collarbone – right collarbone – breastbone) two more times at your own pace.

2 Reflection

After finishing the exercise, pause for a moment and reflect:

- What did I notice in my body during the exercise?
- At what moment did I feel the greatest change or relief?
- Do I feel calmer, warmer or more relaxed now?

3 Understanding the exercise

This exercise helps the body shift from a stress response (sympathetic activation) to a calmer state (parasympathetic activation). It supports emotional regulation, helps release muscle tension and brings attention back to the present moment through breathing and touch.

You can practise this exercise whenever you feel tension, restlessness or the need for a short pause. It can be done discreetly at work, before sleep or after a stressful conversation. Try practising it once a day — for example, after a meeting or before an important task — and observe how your body responds over time.

Note: The key is to move slowly, breathe with awareness and focus on the connection between breathing and gentle tapping. With regular practice, the body may more easily shift into a calm and grounded state.

4.4. Self-care and self-assessment questionnaires for employees

Self-assessment makes it possible to evaluate personal growth and development, recognise personal strengths and identify areas in which resilience needs to be strengthened, rather than comparing oneself with others. The questionnaires cover four areas: physical and mental health, interpersonal relationships, self-care in the workplace, and overall life satisfaction.

The results help individuals recognise the areas in which resilience may need further strengthening. Based on these results, each person can set one or two realistic and achievable goals within a specific timeframe. It is therefore recommended that the questionnaires be completed several times a year (at least three times) in order to monitor changes in these areas over time.



Instructions:

Assess each behaviour according to how often you practise it:

0 = I never do this

1 = I rarely do this

2 = I sometimes do this

3 = I often do this

After completing the assessment, use the final column — *“How I can improve this behaviour”* — to reflect on and note small, concrete actions that could help strengthen this area. You may write words or draw simple symbols to represent your ideas.

Physical health care

BEHAVIOURS	Assessment	How I can improve this behaviour
I regularly drink enough water.		
I eat regular meals.		
I eat healthy food.		
I monitor and maintain a healthy body weight.		
I regularly take stretching breaks during the workday.		
I regularly take breaks at work.		
I exercise regularly.		
I get enough sleep.		
I engage in physical activity.		

Mental health care

BEHAVIOURS	Assessment	How I can improve this behaviour
I manage to take breaks from my phone, email, internet.		
I make time for self-reflection.		
I pay attention to my inner experience.		
I practice relaxation techniques (such as breathing exercises or self-reflection).		
I read books unrelated to work.		
I actively work on reducing stress.		
I engage in hobbies.		
I acknowledge and appreciate myself when I do something well.		
I participate in activities that make me laugh.		

I spend time with positive people in a relaxing environment.		
I meditate when needed.		
I say “no” when necessary.		
I make time for personal activities.		
I seek professional support when needed.		

Interpersonal relationships

BEHAVIOURS	Assessment	How I can improve this behaviour
I maintain contact with friends.		
I share emotions with people close to me.		
I allow others to help me.		
I expand and maintain my social network.		
I make time for personal responsibilities.		
I attend important social events and celebrations (such as weddings, anniversaries or birthdays).		
I talk with colleagues at work.		
I discuss workload and work-related challenges with my supervisor.		
I participate in training sessions and workshops.		

Self-care in the workplace

BEHAVIOURS	Assessment	How I can improve this behaviour
I take the necessary time for breaks.		
I organise my work according to priorities.		
I clearly express my needs.		
I set clear boundaries with others.		
I acknowledge and praise colleagues for their achievements.		
I take regular breaks during the workday.		
I seek guidance or consultation when needed.		

Life Satisfaction Questionnaire

Rate each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

Nr.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	In most aspects, my life is close to ideal	1	2	3	4	5
2	The conditions of my life are excellent	1	2	3	4	5
3	I am satisfied with my life	1	2	3	4	5
4	So far, I have achieved the important things I want in life	1	2	3	4	5
5	If I could live my life again, I would change almost nothing	1	2	3	4	5
6	Overall, I consider myself a very happy person	1	2	3	4	5
7	My life brings me a great deal of satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5
8	I generally feel good	1	2	3	4	5
9	I think of myself as a happy person	1	2	3	4	5
10	Overall, I am less happy than other people ®	1	2	3	4	5®

11	I often feel depressed or sad ®	1	2	3	4	5®
12	I think I am at least as happy as other people	1	2	3	4	5
13	My future looks positive	1	2	3	4	5
14	I am satisfied with the progress I am making towards my goals	1	2	3	4	5
15	Whatever happens, I can usually see the positive side	1	2	3	4	5
16	I enjoy life	1	2	3	4	5
17	My life feels meaningful	1	2	3	4	5
18	I feel satisfied when I achieve something important	1	2	3	4	5
19	I feel satisfied when I experience love and support from others	1	2	3	4	5
20	I experience moments of complete happiness	1	2	3	4	5

Interpretation of results

Add up all your scores. Items **10** and **11** (®) are reverse-scored, meaning that higher scores on these items indicate lower life satisfaction.

For these items, reverse the values as follows:

- 5 → 1

- 4 → 2

- 3 → 3

- 2 → 4

- 1 → 5

Total score: A higher total score indicates greater life satisfaction and resilience.

Interpretation (indicative ranges)

- **80–100 points:** Very high life satisfaction;
- **60–79 points:** Average to good life satisfaction;
- **40–59 points:** Lower life satisfaction, possible difficulties;
- **Below 40 points:** Low life satisfaction; additional support may be beneficial.

These questionnaires are intended for self-assessment. They are designed to help you identify behaviours you may wish to strengthen or introduce in order to improve self-care and develop personal skills. After completing the questionnaires, use the column *“How I can improve this behaviour”* to write down concrete steps you plan to take in the coming period, including a timeframe for achieving them.

The results are intended for your personal use and are meant to support your professional and personal development.

REMEMBER!

- Resilience is the ability to adapt and recover after stress or crisis situations.
- Resilience reflects how you respond to stressful situations and regain balance.
- Resilience focuses on developing skills for coping with stress and crisis situations.
- Resilience helps you regain calm, communicate effectively and find constructive solutions during and after stressful experiences.

— Exercise – Three quick ways of releasing tension

Objective: To activate the body's natural calming mechanisms and quickly release tension in order to restore balance, focus and a sense of well-being in everyday work situations.

Duration: 5–10 minutes.

Materials: none.

Steps:

Before beginning, take a moment to notice how your body feels — your shoulders, breathing and overall energy level.

- 1 Sighing
 - Inhale naturally through your nose.
 - As you exhale, let out a long, audible sigh — “ahhhh” or another sound that feels natural to you.
 - Repeat 2–3 times, allowing your body to relax with each exhalation.
- 2 Yawning with stretching
 - Yawning with stretching
 - Open your mouth wide and intentionally yawn, even if the yawn feels artificial at first.
 - At the same time, stretch your arms above your head. You may add a sound or exaggerate the movement if it feels comfortable.
 - Lower your arms and shoulders, allowing your body to relax.
 - Repeat 2–3 times and allow spontaneous yawns if they arise naturally.
- 3 Diaphragmatic breathing
 - Place one hand on your stomach, if comfortable.
 - Inhale slowly and deeply, feeling your stomach rise.
 - Exhale gently, allowing your stomach to fall.
 - Continue for three slow and deep breathing cycles, allowing the exhalation to last slightly longer than the inhalation.

Reflection

After completing the exercise, take a few moments to reflect and, if possible, write down your observations:

- How do I feel after the exercise?
- Which of these techniques was most useful for me?
- Which part of my body experienced the greatest release or relief?
- When could I use these short pauses during my workday?

You may also note short impressions, symbols or words that describe your state (for example: *calm, lighter, warmer, relaxed*).

4 Understanding the exercise

These natural bodily responses activate the parasympathetic nervous system — the body's "calm mode". They help regulate breathing, release muscle tension and restore a sense of safety and control. Sighing, yawning and deep breathing are simple yet effective self-regulation techniques that can be practised at any time to support resilience and well-being.

These exercises can be used between meetings, during work breaks, in the car or before bedtime. Choose one of the three techniques and practise it once a day this week, especially when you feel tension or need to restore your energy. Over time, you may notice that your body begins to relax more quickly and naturally when using these short pauses.

Note: Regular use of short, mindful breathing or stretching exercises during the workday helps prevent tension from accumulating. By practising these simple techniques, we create small but meaningful pauses that support calmness, clarity and resilience throughout the day.

— Exercise – Micro-break routine

Objective: To reduce physical and mental tension during the workday and develop awareness of the connection between body and mind.

Duration: 3–4 minutes every 90 minutes.

Materials: none.

Steps:

- 1 Every 90 minutes, take a short break:
 - Stand up and stretch your shoulders, arms and neck.
 - Look out of the window or focus on a distant object to relax your eyes.
 - Take three slow, deep breaths through your nose and gently exhale through your mouth.
- 2 After each break, or at the end of the day, take a moment to reflect:
 - How do I feel after introducing micro-breaks into my routine?
 - Do I notice any difference in my concentration or mood?
- 3 Reflect on what this experience tells you about your body and mind.
 - Which signs indicate that I need a pause?
 - What happens when I ignore these signals?
- 4 Plan how to make micro-breaks a regular part of your work routine.
 - Set a reminder or share this practice with colleagues.

Note: Regular micro-breaks help prevent the accumulation of tension, improve concentration and support resilience throughout the workday.

— Exercise – Time management

Objective: To improve work organisation and reduce feelings of overload.

Duration: 3 minutes daily for reflection (plus short work–break intervals during the day).

Materials: planner, notebook or paper.

Steps:

- 1 Organise your workday by combining focused work with short periods of rest:
 - Use a work–break rhythm: 25 minutes of focused work + 3 minutes of short rest.
 - Divide tasks according to priorities: Must do / Should do / Can do later
- 2 At the end of the day, take a few moments to reflect:
 - Do I notice less stress when I divide tasks by priority?
 - How can I improve my daily plan to include time for rest?
- 3 The work–break rhythm is based on the idea that short periods of focused work, followed by regular pauses, improve concentration and help prevent burnout. Dividing tasks according to priority increases efficiency and supports a healthier work–life balance.
- 4 Try this rhythm for one week:
 - Record when you felt most focused and when you needed longer breaks.
 - Adjust the length of work and rest periods to suit your natural rhythm (for example: 25/3, 50/5 or 90/10 minutes).
 - At the end of the week, note what worked best and what could be improved.



Note: Regularly reviewing your task list and removing non-priority tasks helps create mental space for creativity and recovery. Effective time management reduces overload and supports sustainable productivity.

— Exercise – One small success

Objective: To strengthen motivation through the daily recognition of small successes.

Duration: 10 minutes.

Materials: paper or a journal.

Steps:

- 1 At the end of the day, write down one thing you completed successfully.
- 2 Reflect on how this small success contributed to your work or sense of productivity.
Ask yourself:
 - How did I feel when I accomplished it?
 - What made this moment feel satisfying?
- 3 Reflect on the following questions:
 - What does this exercise teach me about what motivates me at work?
 - Do I notice certain types of tasks that make me feel more satisfied?
- 4 Plan one small action for the next day that could create a similar sense of satisfaction, for example:
 - Finishing a small task early;
 - Supporting a colleague.

Note: This exercise helps reduce feelings of low productivity and strengthens motivation for future tasks.

— Exercise – The cosmic star: my work motivation

Objective: To help participants identify their personal reasons for doing their work and recognise the positive impact they have on others.

Duration: 15–20 minutes.

Materials: paper or a printed cosmic star symbol, and a pencil.

Steps:

- 1 Find a quiet space and take a few deep breaths. Look at the star symbol and imagine that each point shines because of your values, motivations and positive influence.
 - In the centre of the star, write three reasons that motivated you to choose this work.
 - Around the centre, in smaller stars or spaces, write three moments in which you positively influenced others.
- 2 Reflect on the following questions:
 - Do my current activities still reflect these reasons?
 - What can I do this week to keep my star shining?
- 3 Look again at your star and compare the reasons in the centre with your current work experience.
 - Which values or goals have remained stable?
 - Which areas may need renewal or more attention?
- 4 Write down one small action you can take during the coming week to “keep your star shining” (for example, showing appreciation, helping a colleague or taking a mindful pause).

You may also choose to collect your “stars” throughout the year as a personal reminder of achievements, growth and positive impact.

Note: The star symbolises light spreading outward. Each reflection strengthens awareness of your positive role and contribution.



CHAPTER 5.

The role of leadership in building a stress-sensitive organisational culture at work

This chapter emphasises that individual resilience is strengthened when leadership actively fosters a supportive and stress-sensitive organisational culture. Through open communication, fair and respectful use of authority, and regular team reflection meetings such as intervention and supervision, this culture helps employees feel valued, safe and emotionally supported.

Intervention refers to peer-support meetings in which colleagues share experiences and challenges, learn from one another and seek solutions together in a supportive and confidential environment.

Supervision provides deeper reflection, professional guidance and expert support led by experienced supervisors or senior professionals. It helps employees reflect on their work, strengthen professional resilience and reduce the risk of burnout and secondary traumatisation.

Encouraging assertive communication contributes to creating a work environment in which stress is recognised and managed in a healthy and constructive way. Such a culture not only helps protect employees from burnout, but also strengthens trust, team cohesion and job satisfaction. Through their own example, leaders demonstrate that caring for oneself and for others is an essential part of professionalism and leadership. In this way, the institution becomes more resilient, while employees feel safer, more motivated and better supported in contributing to their work.

Employee resilience should not be viewed solely as an individual responsibility, but also as the outcome of a supportive and stress-sensitive organisational culture shaped by leadership. In high-stress environments such as migration management, leaders play a key role in creating working conditions in which well-being, safety, trust, support and hope are recognised as priorities. Tools such as intervention, assertive communication, constructive use of authority and supervision help reduce the risk of burnout, strengthen team cohesion and improve the quality of work.

5.1. Stress-sensitive organisational culture

Organisational care involves creating a work environment in which employee well-being is recognised as a priority. In high-stress contexts such as migration management, this approach not only helps protect staff from burnout, but also improves overall effectiveness, job satisfaction and quality of work.

Leaders play a key role in shaping a supportive and stress-sensitive organisational culture. They set the tone for communication, model healthy coping strategies and help ensure that employees feel valued and heard. These Guidelines are intended to support leaders in developing and maintaining a culture that strengthens employee resilience and enhances the quality of work.

In practice, a stress-sensitive organisational culture recognises that stress is both an individual experience and a reflection of relationships, workload and organisational values. In such a culture, resilience is strengthened through daily practice, mutual support and mindful self-care. Employees are encouraged to integrate short and simple techniques into their workday, such as mindful breathing, stretching or brief reflection exercises. These small moments can help release tension, restore focus and strengthen emotional balance during demanding tasks, whether in the office, in the field or during crisis management.

Leaders can support this culture through small but meaningful initiatives, such as creating a “**Corner for Resilience and Balance**” — a safe and welcoming space where employees can take a short break, reflect and regain energy. Such a space may include comfortable chairs, calming colours,

inspirational messages, stress-relief tools or light reading materials. Its purpose is to help employees return to their tasks feeling calmer, more focused and emotionally balanced.

A stress-sensitive culture also recognises that men and women may experience and express stress differently. Women may face the combined pressures of professional and family responsibilities, which can contribute to emotional exhaustion, guilt or tension. Men may experience social pressure to appear strong and composed, which can contribute to physical symptoms, irritability or emotional withdrawal.

A stress-sensitive organisational culture recognises these differences and creates equal space for all employees to express emotions, seek support and restore balance. By integrating such practices, organisations not only reduce stress and help prevent burnout, but also strengthen trust, empathy and co-operation — creating a workplace in which self-care, respect and resilience become shared values.

Open communication between employees and leaders helps reduce stress and build trust, while recognition and appreciation reinforce a sense of value and motivation. Creating a resilient and supportive work environment based on mutual care also contributes to a better understanding of the different forms of influence reflected through various forms of power, which in turn positively shape workplace relationships.

The use of **“power with”**, **“power to”** and **“power within”** strengthens employees’ sense of safety, belonging and competence, while reducing the negative effects associated with **“power over”**. Such an approach provides the foundation for a stress-sensitive organisational culture. The institution becomes a place where both employees and leaders have opportunities for growth, feel safe and are empowered to use their influence in healthy and constructive ways.

Everyone within the organisation has a role in building resilience — from employees to leaders.

— Exercise – Recognising your own power at work

(power over, power with, power to and power within)

Objective: To explore how different forms of power appear in everyday work and how they can be used constructively to build a supportive and stress-sensitive organisational culture.

Duration: 20 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen.

Steps:

Think of a recent situation at work in which you influenced a decision, helped a colleague or resolved a challenge. Keep this situation in mind while completing the exercise.

1 Read the four types of power:

- ▶ **Power over:** Domination, control, coercion or imposing decisions without involving others.
- ▶ **Power with:** Sharing power through collaboration, support and joint decision-making.
- ▶ **Power to:** The ability to make decisions, initiate action and influence change.
- ▶ **Power within:** Inner strength, self-awareness, self-confidence and a sense of self-worth.

2 Reflection exercise

Reflect on your work and complete the table below. Consider where you recognise each type of power and how you already use it — or could use it — to improve the work environment.

Type of Power	How does it appear in my work?	How do I use it to improve work and organisational culture?
Power over		
Power with		
Power to		
Power within		

3 Personal reflection

After completing the table, reflect on the following questions and write your answers:

Which type of power do I use most often?

How does my use of power affect others in my team?

Which type of power would I like to strengthen in order to create a more supportive work environment?

Recognising these four forms of power helps develop awareness of how everyday actions influence trust, safety and co-operation. Constructive and balanced use of power is an important part of building a stress-sensitive and resilient organisational culture.

4 Planning a concrete action

Write down one specific action you can take during the next week to use your power more constructively and effectively:

Examples:

- Involve a colleague in planning or decision-making;
- Publicly acknowledge someone's contribution;
- Offer support or mentorship to a team member;
- Practise calm and confident communication during a difficult conversation.

Note: Whenever dilemmas arise, pause and reflect on whether you are using your power in a way that promotes respect, collaboration and emotional safety in the workplace.

Facilitating a supportive and stress-sensitive work environment:

- **Communicate regularly with employees:** Open and transparent communication helps reduce stress, prevent misunderstandings and strengthen mutual trust.
- **Recognise and appreciate effort:** Acknowledging employees' commitment and achievements strengthens motivation, sense of value and belonging.
- **Support work-life balance:** Provide flexibility whenever possible in order to help employees maintain personal well-being alongside professional effectiveness.

- **Provide training and tools for stress management:** Education and practical resources help employees strengthen resilience and develop self-care skills.
- **Be a role model:** Demonstrate healthy coping strategies and show that seeking support or speaking openly about difficulties is a sign of responsibility and strength.

5.2. Communication skills and assertive communication – the key to everyday teamwork

Communication is the foundation of interpersonal relationships and professional co-operation. It is a process through which we exchange information and, more importantly, build trust, understanding and mutual support. In organisations operating in stressful and demanding environments — such as social protection systems, healthcare or migration management — the quality of communication directly affects employee resilience, team cohesion and the quality of work. Communication skills are not innate; they are developed and strengthened through practice and reflection.

Well-developed communication skills contribute to:

- Reducing misunderstandings, conflicts and stress;
- Increasing the sense of safety and belonging;
- Strengthening trust within teams and institutions;
- Enhancing professional resilience and job satisfaction.

Investing in the development of communication skills is therefore just as important as developing professional competencies.

In everyday interactions, we use both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Verbal communication

Verbal communication refers to the content of what we say. Clear, precise and structured messages reduce misunderstandings and contribute to effective communication and teamwork.

Elements of verbal communication include: choice of words, clarity of expression, logical structure, tone and rhythm of voice.

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication includes tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, body posture and physical distance. The way a message is understood is influenced by several elements:

- 7% by the words themselves;
- 38% by tone of voice;
- 55% by non-verbal signals.

This means that *how* something is said often has a stronger impact than the actual words used. Non-verbal communication may therefore convey a more powerful message than speech alone. When verbal and non-verbal messages are not aligned, mistrust, misunderstanding and stressful situations may arise.

Types of listening

The quality of communication depends not only on speaking, but also on listening skills. Active and empathic listening are essential for building trust and creating a safe space for communication. Different styles of listening reflect different levels of attention and understanding.

Passive listening

The listener formally hears the words but does not show interest or respond. This may create an impression of indifference and can lead to feelings of insecurity in the speaker.

Selective listening

The listener hears only what confirms an existing viewpoint or expectation. This may lead to misunderstandings or conflict because important information is ignored.

Active listening

Active listening involves giving full attention to the speaker, asking questions, paraphrasing and using non-verbal signals that demonstrate attentiveness.

Empathic listening

Empathic listening represents the highest level of listening. The focus is not only on words, but also on the emotions and needs behind them. The speaker's message is understood both intellectually and emotionally, helping to build trust and a sense of being understood.

Assertive communication

Assertive communication allows individuals to express their needs, opinions and feelings openly while respecting the needs and opinions of others. It is a key skill for building trust and addressing challenges among employees, within teams and across institutions.

Assertive communication strengthens teamwork by ensuring that all team members feel heard and respected. It helps reduce stress during discussions, supports constructive dialogue and contributes to stronger co-operation and trust, rather than allowing frustrations to build up or lead to conflict.

How to use assertive communication

- ▶ **Verbalise thoughts and feelings** - express what you think and feel openly, clearly and respectfully, without suppressing or concealing your views.
- ▶ **Use respectful non-verbal** communication - use a tone of voice, facial expressions and body language that reflect respect for others.
- ▶ **Align verbal and non** - verbal communication - ensure that your words and non-verbal signals convey the same message. Consistency helps reduce misunderstanding and strengthens trust.
- ▶ **Practise active listening** - show the speaker that you are listening and trying to understand their perspective. For example: "I understand your concern...", "I hear what you are saying..."
- ▶ **Use "I" statements** - focus on expressing your own feelings and needs rather than blaming others. For example: "I feel overwhelmed when..."
- ▶ **Focus on solutions** - guide the conversation towards finding a constructive and shared solution.

Assertive communication helps reduce stress, encourages understanding and strengthens both individual and team performance, contributing to greater satisfaction and more effective co-operation.

These communication skills also provide an important foundation for interview meetings and supportive teamwork.

"You" and "I" statements

In everyday communication, it is important to recognise whether we use predominantly "You" statements or "I" statements. These approaches can either increase misunderstanding, conflict and stress, or contribute to greater understanding and constructive dialogue.

"You" statements often make the other person feel blamed or attacked, whereas "I" statements express personal feelings, needs and responsibility in a respectful way.

Examples of “You” and “I” statements in communication

Type of statement	Example	Possible consequences
“You” statement	“You never submit reports on time!”	Blaming, defensiveness, conflict.
“I” statement	“I feel overwhelmed when I receive tasks with very short deadlines. I would appreciate agreeing on realistic deadlines in advance.”	Open and constructive communication.

How to construct an “I” statement

An “I” statement usually begins with “I”, followed by:

1. A description of the feeling;
2. A description of the situation;
3. A constructive or desired outcome.

Example:

“I feel overwhelmed when I receive tasks with very short deadlines. I would appreciate agreeing on realistic deadlines in advance.”

Formula of an “I” statement

I + feeling + description of the situation + desired outcome

Using “I” statements is a key element of assertive communication because it allows people to express their needs clearly while still respecting others.

“I” statements support open and constructive communication, strengthen mutual trust and help resolve conflicts more calmly and effectively.

Recognising your communication style:

Style	Description	Example	Possible consequences
Assertive	Clear expression of one’s needs while respecting others.	<i>“I understand your concern, but it is also important for me to express my opinion.”</i> <i>“I would like us to agree together on how to distribute the tasks.”</i> <i>“I feel it is important that my perspective is also taken into account.”</i>	Trust, reduced stress, better cooperation

Passive	Withdrawal, avoidance of conflict and suppression of one's own needs.	<i>"It doesn't matter, whatever you say."</i> <i>"It's fine, even though it bothers me."</i> <i>"I won't say anything so I don't cause a problem."</i>	Frustration, accumulated stress
Aggressive	Imposing opinions, raised voice and criticism of others.	<i>"You never do anything right!"</i> <i>"This will be done my way, period."</i> <i>"You are always the problem in the team."</i>	Conflict, loss of trust, increased stress

■ Exercise – The difference between “I” and “You” statements

Objective: To practise expressing feelings and needs by using “I” statements in a clear and respectful way.

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen.

Steps:

- 1 “I” statements focus on the feelings and needs of the person speaking.

Example:

“I feel stressed when I do not receive the report on time because it makes it difficult for me to plan my work.”

By contrast, “You” statements often sound accusatory and may trigger a defensive reaction.

Example:

“You never submit reports on time!”

Now that you understand how “I” statements are structured, try applying this approach to your own work situations. Think of three situations at work that you currently find challenging. Prepare three “I” statements that express your feelings and needs in a more constructive way.

- 2 If possible, share your reflections with a colleague or within a small group and discuss the following questions:
 - How do I feel when I use “I” statements instead of “You” statements?
 - Do I notice a difference in the reaction of the other person?
 - In which situations is it most difficult for me to use “I” statements, and why?
 - How could using “I” statements improve relationships or co-operation at work?

This exchange can help participants learn from one another’s experiences and strengthen confidence in communication.

- 3 After completing the exercise, practise reading your “I” statements aloud in a calm and steady tone. You may do this alone, in front of a mirror, or with a trusted colleague in order to build confidence for real-life situations.

During the coming week, try using one of your “I” statements in an actual conversation and observe how it influences the interaction.

Note: Whenever possible, use “I” statements instead of “You” statements in communication. This approach improves relationships, strengthens mutual understanding and contributes to more constructive conflict resolution.

■ Exercise – Reframing communication styles

Objective: To identify passive and aggressive communication styles and practise reframing them into assertive communication.

Duration: 20 minutes.

Materials: paper and pen.

Steps:

1 Think of situations at work in which communication was not effective — one situation in which you responded passively and another in which you responded aggressively. Complete the table below based on your personal experiences:

A. Passive communication

Situation: _____

What I said or did: _____

How I could express it assertively: _____

B. Aggressive communication

Situation: _____

What I said or did: _____

How I could express it assertively: _____

- 2 After completing your examples, reflect on your communication habits:
 - Which communication style do I use most often — assertive, passive or aggressive?
 - How do I feel when using each of these styles?
 - How does my communication style affect my relationships with colleagues?

If possible, share one of your examples with a colleague or within a small group. Discuss what you noticed and how reframing the message into an assertive form changes the outcome or emotional tone of the interaction.

- 3 Recognising different communication styles helps develop awareness of how tone of voice, body language and choice of words influence others. Assertive communication means expressing one's needs clearly and respectfully while maintaining honesty and empathy. It helps reduce misunderstandings, prevent the accumulation of stress and strengthen mutual trust.

- 4 During the coming week, choose one real situation at work in which you will consciously practise assertive communication. Afterwards, reflect on the experience:
 - How did I express myself differently?
 - What was the response from the other person?
 - How did I feel afterwards?

Note: This exercise can be repeated regularly, especially after challenging situations at work, in order to strengthen awareness of communication habits and develop interpersonal skills.

Assertive communication promotes mutual respect, reduces misunderstandings and supports constructive conflict resolution. The exercise may also be adapted for group work or intervision sessions, where participants discuss practical examples and learn from one another's experiences.

5.3. Intervision – strengthens mutual understanding and identifies new opportunities

Intervision is a meeting of colleagues and professionals aimed at developing knowledge within smaller groups of employees and managers who share a common challenge or work-related problem. Through this process, employees can gain new insights within their peer group through professional experience and mutual support, which may help them address and resolve the identified challenge or problem.

Intervision provides a safe space for sharing experiences, gaining different perspectives on work-related issues and challenges, and learning new coping strategies that contribute to strengthening resilience. In practice, it is a joint meeting of professionals where participants exchange experiences, discuss challenges, and seek solutions to problems arising in their daily work.

For GIM employees, who often work in stressful and crisis situations, intervision is a valuable tool for maintaining professional resilience and mental well-being. It also helps managers make better decisions and manage employees and teams more effectively in stressful situations.

Intervision helps reduce stress by providing employees with a sense of safety and support, knowing that they have a space where they can openly discuss difficulties. It reduces emotional burden, as sharing experiences with colleagues helps ensure that challenges, worries, dilemmas, and responsibilities are not carried alone. Through jointly exploring solutions, feelings of helplessness may decrease while the sense of control and competence increases. Participants also gain new perspectives and strategies that support coping with stress and challenging situations.

When a positive climate is created in which stress can be openly acknowledged and discussed, trust within the team grows and team cohesion is strengthened. Intervision may be conducted within a team, a department, or across the entire institution, depending on the organisational structure and needs. Regardless of where it takes place or who facilitates it — whether an employee dealing with unforeseen situations while working with beneficiaries (migrants, asylum seekers, etc.), a head of administration or technical services, or a manager — the main objective is to ensure that intervision remains structured, safe and focused on addressing challenges arising in stressful and crisis situations.

The recommended duration of an intervision meeting is 90–180 minutes. Departments and institutions that prioritise the mental health and well-being of employees often organise intervision once a month and, in crisis situations, even more frequently.

At the beginning of each meeting, it is important to agree on the working methods and ground rules, which should be presented by the facilitator to all participants. Particular emphasis should be placed on confidentiality, active listening without judgement or belittling others, and the importance of discretion when participants share personal experiences or difficulties that may create additional emotional burden or challenges.

Intervision should include a clearly defined topic and objective. For example:

- ▶ “Today we are discussing how we cope with emergencies in reception centres”;
- ▶ “How communication functions between administrative staff and technical support”;
- ▶ “Management requirements regarding reporting”; — or any other topic identified as important for discussion during the intervision meeting.

Clear and focused questions during the meeting help participants achieve the agreed objective in line with the chosen topic.

Use clear questions such as:

- ▶ What went well for us during the previous period?
- ▶ What challenges did we encounter in our work?
- ▶ Which stress-reduction strategies were useful in those situations?

- What do we need in order to cope more effectively with challenges (for example, understanding, information, support, training or other resources)?

At the end of the intervention meeting, it is important to identify possible solutions, reach agreements and select one or two key challenges that can be transformed into opportunities for improvement and joint action.

Intervention meetings should always begin with a positive question or statement. Their value lies in providing employees with dedicated time and space to share what burdens them, discuss the challenges they face at work and receive feedback from colleagues who may offer useful advice, support and ideas. Participants are encouraged to communicate assertively so that everyone feels respected, heard and free from judgement or criticism. Altogether, this contributes to reducing stress in the workplace.

Protocol of an intervention meeting

The protocol helps the team maintain an overview of the process and monitor progress over time.

What should be recorded:

- Name of the team, date of the intervention meeting, participants present and absent (including the reason for absence, if relevant);
- The objectives of the intervention meeting and the topics planned for discussion;
- The methods used during the meeting, for example, exchange of experiences, case analysis or group reflection;
- The outcomes of the methods and discussions, for example, reduced tension, improved team communication or better understanding of specific cases;
- Special observations or reflections from team members, including whether the planned agenda needed to be adjusted and why;
- Ideas and proposed topics for the next intervention meeting.

Suggestions for intervention meeting facilitators

- At the end of each session, organise a “closing circle” in which each participant briefly shares what was most helpful for them or what they are taking away from the meeting, preferably in one sentence.
- Learn and apply short relaxation techniques, such as brief breathing exercises, stretching or one-minute pauses. These techniques can be practised during intervention meetings, and participants should be encouraged to use them in their daily work whenever they need a pause or a moment to step back from challenges.
- Agree on concrete measures following the discussion (for example, improved task distribution, clearer procedures in crisis situations or greater recognition and support in the workplace), all of which can help reduce pressure and stress.

Good preparation for an intervention meeting helps ensure that the process remains structured, safe and solution-oriented. Clear rules, agreed roles and effective time management contribute to the quality of the process and strengthen participants’ sense of safety and trust.

Recommendations for the preparation and implementation of intervision within GIM teams.

Elements of intervision	Recommendations
Timeframe	Once a month; more frequently in crisis situations (for example, every two weeks). Duration: 90–180 minutes.
Number of participants	5–10 persons from the same or related team/department.
Agreement on rules and working principles	Confidentiality, respect, active listening, absence of prejudice and judgment, discretion, and other principles that ensure a safe space for participants.
Result	Strengthened team resilience, stronger sense of unity and professional support, practical solutions to concrete challenges, emotional relief, and increased awareness of personal boundaries.
Long-term effect	Development of a culture of self-care and care for others within the team.
Facilitator - role and criteria	
Facilitator	A person from the team or institution with basic training in facilitation, understanding of stress, trauma, burnout, resilience building, communication skills, and process management. The role may be rotated among team members.
Criteria for the facilitator	Empathy, team experience, ability to lead a structured and interactive group process, neutrality, respect for self and others, confidentiality and the ability to guide exercises focused on emotional release, empowerment and self-awareness.
Intervision meetings: purpose and methodology	
Purpose	A structured process of mutual support and experience-sharing among colleagues aimed at addressing professional challenges and strengthening team resilience.
Role and importance	• Provides a safe space for discussing difficult experiences without fear of judgement; • Supports a preventive approach to burnout and professional exhaustion; • Develops a culture of mutual support and openness; • Encourages self-reflection and learning through practice, thereby strengthening professional competence and team resilience; • Strengthens team cohesion and trust among colleagues.

Methodology	Intervision meetings are based on active listening, shared reflection and the exchange of experiences. Meetings are structured around case analysis, peer feedback, brainstorming and reflective dialogue.
Structure of intervision meetings	
Introduction	The facilitator reminds participants of the agreed rules and defines the framework and purpose of the meeting.
Presentation of situation /Case/ Challenge	One participant presents a professional case, challenge or experience.
Discussion	The group asks questions, offers perspectives, and proposes possible approaches to addressing the case.
Reflection	Participants recognise feelings, reactions, and shared patterns.
Action Plan	Brainstorming on concrete actions and next steps related to the case. This may also include actions aimed at supporting employee well-being (for example, taking breaks, creating healthy distance from work or encouraging open conversations with colleagues).
Participants of intervision meetings	
Role	Active participation by all members through listening, sharing experiences and providing mutual support.
Confidentiality	Established and respected by mutual agreement; it represents a fundamental ethical value and an essential prerequisite for conducting meetings.
Responsibility for the process	Shared – all participants take responsibility for the atmosphere and outcomes of the meeting.
Level of formality	Less formal, collegial, and participatory in nature.

Regular and well-organised intervision meetings strengthen trust, resilience and the sense of belonging among employees. Through structured yet supportive and respectful exchanges, teams develop a professional culture grounded in care for oneself, colleagues and service users.

In this way, intervision becomes not only a discussion about problems, but also a process of learning, mutual support and shared professional development.

Examples of intervision meetings within GIM teams

Example – Intervision meeting on the topic:

“How to improve team co-operation in technical services during emergency situations”

The facilitator begins the session with an opening circle, during which each participant shares one example from practice in which co-operation was challenging. The purpose of the intervision meeting is defined as: *“Improving co-ordination and task distribution in crisis situations.”*

The discussion includes the analysis of situations such as staff overload and unsynchronised schedules, as well as proposals for improvement, for example, developing clear crisis-response plans and introducing task rotation.

At the end of the meeting, participants agree on one or two concrete measures for improving practice. The session concludes with each participant sharing one sentence summarising the main insight or conclusion they are taking away from the meeting.

Example – Intervision meeting on the topic:

“The role of administration in reducing stress”

The facilitator opens the discussion with the question: *“How can administrative support improve team performance?”* Employees and managers jointly identify challenges such as slow document processing and unaligned priorities. They propose solutions such as setting clearer priorities in case management, strengthening communication and improving understanding of workload distribution.

The group agrees on implementing concrete measures by the next meeting. The session concludes with each participant sharing one sentence summarising the main conclusion they are taking away from the discussion.

Example – Intervision meeting on the topic:

“How managers can provide better emotional support to employees in crisis situations”

The meeting begins with employees sharing experiences of situations in which managerial support was meaningful, as well as situations in which such support was lacking. Participants analyse factors that contribute to a sense of support and develop strategies such as organising brief regular check-ins with department or team managers, introducing short weekly relaxation activities and exploring possibilities for supervision.

At the end of the meeting, participants agree on concrete measures that managers can implement immediately. The session concludes with each participant sharing one or two sentences describing the key insights or conclusions they are taking away from the meeting.

Advice for facilitators of intervision meetings

During discussions at intervision meetings, participants should practise communication skills and apply assertive communication both at the beginning of the meeting and throughout the exchange of different opinions, perspectives and understandings. Participants should speak using “I” statements, listen to one another actively and empathetically, and ensure that only one person speaks at a time while others listen. In this way, each participant has the opportunity and space to express themselves. Everyone should communicate in a manner that respects others and contributes to finding constructive solutions.

The facilitator of the intervision meeting is responsible for guiding the process, which requires clear and positive communication, setting appropriate boundaries, and recognising passive and aggressive communication styles. The facilitator should encourage an assertive communication style, as it supports constructive discussion, reduces tension, fosters mutual respect and enables challenges to be addressed without creating additional stress.

5.4. Supervision – An empowering element of stress-sensitive organisational culture

Understanding and implementing supervision as part of preserving employees' mental health is one of the advanced principles of creating a stress-sensitive organisational culture.

Supervision is a structured professional process in which a more experienced specialist (supervisor) works with employees (supervisees) in order:

- to ensure the quality of work;
- strengthen professional competencies and self-confidence;
- reduce stress and the risk of burnout;
- and provide space for reflection and emotional processing.

At the same time, supervision contributes to teamwork, professional development, and balance between professional and private life.

Supervision improves employees' ability to analyse and manage complex cases, reduces staff turnover, and increases job satisfaction. It also helps reduce professional isolation and anxiety, restores motivation and hope, and empowers employees to cope more effectively with professional challenges.

It is important to distinguish between:

- **psychosocial supervision**, which has a reflective approach, and
- **psychological supervision**, which has a therapeutic and analytical approach.

1. Supervision with a reflective approach (psychosocial)

- ▶ **Educational function** – strengthening professional knowledge and skills.
- ▶ **Supportive function** – fostering employees' emotional well-being and resilience.
- ▶ **Administrative function** – ensuring that work is aligned with professional and ethical standards.

This type of supervision may be conducted by trained internal professionals who are familiar with the institutional context and employees' needs, and who possess the necessary skills and knowledge described in these Guidelines. Their role is to contribute, with objectivity and professional distance, to strengthening employees' resilience and creating a supportive work environment. Initially, such supervisors should work under the mentorship of more experienced supervisors in order to gradually develop independence and competence in leading supervision sessions.

2. Psychological supervision with a therapeutic-analytical approach

Psychological supervision involves a deeper psychological understanding of emotional and relational processes, including transference and countertransference dynamics that may arise in professional relationships. It is based on theoretical approaches such as psychodynamic, systemic, psychodramatic, reality therapy, cognitive-behavioural or integrative models.

This type of supervision is conducted by certified psychological supervisors — most often psychotherapists or psychologists with extensive professional experience who have received additional training in supervision and in providing professional support in complex emotional and professional situations.

Supervision has become an important principle for maintaining professional resilience, protecting mental health, and improving the quality and stability of work within the institution.

Overview of the two types of supervision that may be introduced within GIM

Aspect	Psychosocial supervision	Psychological supervision
Definition	Focuses on the emotional, relational, and professional aspects of employees' work; provides support, reflection, and resilience-building.	Focuses on a deeper psychological understanding of emotional processes, as well as transference and countertransference dynamics in work with clients.
Number of participants	May be individual or group-based (3–10 participants).	May be individual or conducted in small groups of professionals with similar profiles.
Supervisor	Internal professional trained in supervision, initially working under mentorship.	Certified psychotherapist or psychologist with formal training in supervision.
Criteria for the supervisor	Training in resilience-building, fundamentals of the supervision process, and a strong understanding of the organisational context and employees' work.	Certified psychologist or psychotherapist with several years (3–5) of professional experience and specialised education in supervision.
Purpose	Strengthening professional competencies, resilience and team support.	Developing a deeper understanding of emotional processes and professional functioning.
Structure of the session	Introduction, sharing experiences, situation analysis, reflection, conclusions, and agreements.	Case or process analysis with a focus on emotional and unconscious dynamics.
Frequency and duration	Once per month; 60–90 minutes.	As needed, usually every 2–4 weeks; approximately 60 minutes.
Interval between sessions	4–5 weeks.	2–6 weeks, depending on the complexity of cases and supervisor availability.
Role of participants	Active participation, sharing experiences, reflection and mutual support.	In-depth analysis of one's own reactions, emotions, and behavioral patterns.

Methodology	Reflective dialogue, case analysis, peer learning, and supportive methods.	Clinical analysis and interpretation of emotional and relational processes.
Result	Increased resilience, improved communication, and stronger team cohesion.	Deeper self-understanding and professional development.
Responsibility for the process	Shared between the facilitator and participants.	Main responsibility lies with the supervisor as the professional expert.
Level of formality	Moderate, supportive and reflective in nature.	High, structured, and guided by professional standards.
Confidentiality	Emphasised within the team and agreed upon at the beginning of the process.	Strictly defined and mandatory in accordance with professional ethical codes.

■ Exercise – Monthly team check-in

Objective: To help teams assess well-being, identify challenges, and provide timely support.

Duration: 15–20 minutes per month.

Materials: short questionnaire or discussion space.

Steps:

- 1 Organise a monthly team meeting or distribute a short questionnaire using questions such as:
 - How have we been feeling this week?
 - What aspects of our work are currently the most challenging?
 - What has been helpful in coping with stress?
- 2 Summarise the key points and share them with the team. Reflect on the following questions:
 - Did team members feel comfortable sharing openly?
 - What could we improve during the next check-in?
- 3 Regular check-ins help identify stress at an early stage and improve communication within the team. They strengthen trust, empathy and collaborative problem-solving.
- 4 Schedule the next check-in at the end of each month (or more frequently, if needed).
 - Summarise the main points discussed and agree on one practical improvement.
 - Review progress during the following meeting.

Note: Keep the atmosphere supportive and non-judgemental so that everyone feels safe to share their experiences. Short, regular check-ins help strengthen teamwork and foster a culture of care and support.

— Exercise – The tree – why do I do this job?

Objective: To help participants creatively recognise what sustains them in their work — values, skills, motivation, results and challenges — and strengthen their sense of purpose.

Duration: 20–30 minutes.

Materials: paper, pencil or markers.

Steps:

- 1 Imagine yourself as a strong tree standing firmly regardless of difficult or stressful conditions.

Draw your tree on paper and divide it into five parts:

- **Roots:** Your values, knowledge, skills and personality traits that support and nourish you in your work (for example, perseverance, compassion, openness or courage).
- **Trunk:** Your motivation and reasons for choosing this profession (for example, the desire to help others, a personal calling or professional growth).
- **Crown:** Your growth, positive changes and qualities developed through your work (for example, patience, flexibility or empathy).
- **Fruits:** The visible results of your work and the satisfaction they bring — both small and significant changes you have contributed to in the lives of others or within the community, together with the feelings of pride and fulfilment connected to them.
- **Branches of challenges:** On smaller branches, write the challenges you face (for example, lack of time, emotional pressure or complex cases) and what helps you overcome them (for example, team support, additional training, rest or clearer priorities).

- 2 Reflect on your tree:
 - Which part of my tree feels strongest at this moment?
 - Which part needs more care or support?
 - Which challenge is currently making my work more difficult?

- 3 The tree symbolises stability, growth and resilience. Recognising what gives meaning to your work helps maintain motivation and balance even during stressful periods.

- 4 Choose one aspect you would like to nurture in your “tree” over the next month (for example, patience, teamwork or time for rest).
 - Discuss with a partner or within the group what helps sustain you during demanding moments.
 - Revisit your tree later to reflect on how it has changed over time.

Note: This exercise helps visualise personal strengths and strengthens the connection between meaning, motivation and resilience.

REMEMBER!

Resilience is built through small, consistent steps. Each time you practise awareness, breathe consciously or share a moment of support, you strengthen your ability to remain calm, nurture relationships and contribute to a healthy work environment.

Every day offers an opportunity to move towards greater peace, strength and balance — for yourself and for others.

I choose to care for myself so that I can continue caring for others with calmness, awareness and compassion. Through small moments of awareness and gentle daily practice, I strengthen my resilience step by step, returning to balance and connection.

Taking care of myself is not a luxury, but a professional and ethical responsibility. Only in this way can I continue to support others with empathy, clarity and continuity.

My emotions belong to me. I recognise them, accept them and learn to bring them into balance with my thoughts and bodily experiences.

Chapter 6.

Your everyday steps towards stronger resilience

This chapter provides quick and practical support for applying simple exercises aimed at strengthening resilience in everyday challenging situations.

These exercises can be used whenever a person needs a pause, emotional distance or self-support — during stressful situations, moments of crisis, or while working with migrants and other vulnerable beneficiaries.

The exercises are also intended as brief supportive interventions that promote stabilisation and effective coping, while fully respecting each person's individual choices, boundaries and needs.

SIGNIFICANT STEPS I CAN TAKE FOR MYSELF

Breathing – restoring a sense of control and calm

"I cannot go on. I feel nervous, frustrated and angry."

In that moment, I direct my attention to my body and my breathing. I slowly inhale through my nose and gently exhale through my mouth. I repeat this several times, at a pace that feels comfortable and natural for me.

Grounding in the body – returning to the present moment

I direct my attention to my feet on the floor or to the feeling of my body supported by the chair. I gently press my feet into the ground, notice the support beneath me, and silently say to myself:

"I am here, in this moment, and I can feel my body."

Reframing overwhelming and exhausting thoughts – "I cannot cope anymore"

When the thought *"I cannot cope anymore"* appears, I consciously reframe it into more supportive and realistic thoughts, such as:

- *"This is difficult, and I need a short break right now."*
- *"I will ask a colleague what helps them in similar situations."*
- *"I will ask who in the team can provide additional support."*

Recognising and naming my feelings

In challenging situations, I recognise and name the feelings I notice in my body, such as tension, fear or fatigue. It is important to acknowledge and accept these feelings, as this often helps reduce their intensity.

Assessing the impact of stress

On a scale from 1 to 10, I assess my current level of stress.

- **1** indicates a low level of stress that I can manage using my own resources and resilience.
- **10** indicates a very high level of stress, reaching the limits of my endurance and signalling the need for immediate support from others.

Small but meaningful steps for my well-being

I ask myself:

"What is one small thing I can do right now to make this situation easier for myself?"

This may include:

- taking a short break;
- going for a walk;
- stretching;
- changing my body position;
- drinking a glass of water;
- talking with someone.

A sentence of self-support

I can offer myself a simple sentence of support, especially in moments of doubt or at the end of the working day:

- “I am doing the best I can in this moment.”
- “I have given everything I knew and was able to give.”

The exercises and suggestions presented above are only some of the many approaches that can support the strengthening of resilience. The more detailed exercises described throughout these Guidelines can also be applied easily and quickly in everyday situations.

Each person is encouraged to recognise and develop their own resilience-supporting practices according to their individual needs and creativity. This approach contributes to strengthening personal resilience, while also helping individuals recognise when challenges become prolonged or particularly intense and when it may be important to seek professional support.

EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS IN WORK WITH MIGRANTS AND OTHER VULNERABLE BENEFICIARIES

In everyday work, stressful situations are an integral part of the working environment. Below are examples from the migration context, with a focus on interventions aimed at ensuring safety, dignity and practical support.

Situation from practice	Possible signs of stress / crisis	What the staff member does	What is offered to the beneficiaries	Next step
Reception and first contact in a migration centre (registration, waiting, crowds)	Visible tension, irritability, conflicts while waiting	Uses assertive communication; remains aware of their own stress level (scale 1–10)	Understanding, choice and clear information; asks what would make the situation easier	Provides a safe space; gives brief and clear information about procedures and rights; involves team members when needed
Unaccompanied child	Crying, panic, aggression, withdrawal, searching for parents	Uses a calm voice; grounding techniques; involves colleagues	Offers simple choices; grounding techniques (for example, hands on knees); validates feelings by reassuring the child that their reactions are understandable in such a situation	Involves a guardian and child protection services

Conversation about violence, exhaustion or distrust	Tears, shame, disorganised speech, bodily tension	Shows empathy; maintains clear personal boundaries; involves team members when needed	Asks about needs and expectations	Refers the person to available support services; provides brief and clear information about procedures and rights
Suspicion of human trafficking / exploitation	Avoiding eye contact, fear, contradictory information	Focuses on safety and privacy; applies relevant procedures	Conducts an individual conversation and safety assessment: <i>"Your safety is a priority — how safe do you feel on a scale from 1 to 10?"</i>	Activates protection mechanisms; arranges medical and psychological assistance according to protocols; ensures safety assessment and safe accommodation; refers the person to available support services
Gender-based violence / domestic violence	Fear, withdrawal, control by partner, injuries	Uses active listening; maintains clear personal boundaries	Shows empathy; provides information about available support services and resources	Activates protection mechanisms; arranges medical and psychological assistance according to protocols; ensures safety assessment and safe accommodation; refers the person to available support services and team support
Conflict among beneficiaries	Threats, panic, violence	Conducts a rapid safety assessment; uses assertive communication; involves security services and team members	Gives short calming instructions such as: <i>"I see this situation is tense — violence does not resolve conflict."</i> ; provides breathing guidance	Applies safety protocols; avoids taking sides; provides time and space for conversation and support

Even seemingly small steps taken during moments of stress, crisis or uncertainty can have a significant impact.

Resilience does not mean enduring at all costs. Rather, it means recognising our own limits, seeking support when needed, and allowing ourselves — and others — time to pause and recover.

In work with migrants and other vulnerable beneficiaries, just as in caring for ourselves, it is essential to remember that safety, dignity and the right to choice must always come first. Every human being — whether a migrant, a service user or a professional — needs support, understanding and human presence at certain moments. When the burden becomes too heavy, seeking support is part of responsible, professional and humane practice.

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