



## PRESS RELEASE

Athens, 14 May 2026

### Webinar on Culture and Health

## The role of creative arts in promoting mental wellness

On Wednesday 13 May 2026, the **International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)** in cooperation with the **Permanent International Secretariat of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC PERMIS)**, organised successfully a Webinar on Culture and Health with title, **“The role of creative arts in promoting mental wellness”**.

More than **60 participants** joined the online event that provided an exchange platform for health professionals and culture experts, with the aim to increase understanding of how creative arts can support mental health and emotional wellbeing; share evidence-based insights showcasing the positive impact of creative arts on people and communities; raise awareness and initiate an open dialogue on mental health, in order to support inclusivity and mitigate societal stigma and discrimination.

The webinar was moderated by **Ms. Haroula CHRISTODOULOU**, Board Member, Association of Inter-Balkan Women’s Cooperation. On behalf of the organisers, **ICBSS Director General, Mr. Georgios MITRAKOS** in the opening speech, noted that we are not new to the culture-mental health correlation, as across times societies have turned to art and shared traditions for comfort and connection. Mr. Mitrakos stressed however, that modern lifestyles and global challenges lead to increased mental health conditions that to this day, face societal stigma and isolation, highlighting the need for effective support frameworks. On behalf of **BSEC PERMIS, Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Dimitrios RALLIS**, underlined the significance and pressing need of having an open dialogue on mental health issues and noted the efforts on behalf of the BSEC Secretariat to maintain the momentum with continuous discussions.

The first panel on **‘Understanding Mental Health: Common Challenges and Misconceptions’** consisted of health experts that shared insights about current mental health issues, myths and misunderstandings that often surround mental health, and the role of community involvement in promoting mental wellbeing. **Doç. Dr. Mariam KAVAKCI**, Advisor to the President, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, provided scientific evidence on the importance of cultural engagement for the mitigation of both neurodegenerative diseases, such as Parkinson’s, and mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety. As Dr. Kavakci stressed, the creative and performative arts have measurable effects on functional brain connectivity, cortisol levels, and cognitive processes. In her presentation, **Professor Albana FICO**, University of Medicine, Tirana,

Albania, highlighted the increased efforts in the country to support a community-based mental health strategy, promoting innovative actions across society, tailored to the needs of each age group. Starting from school programmes to seniors' activities, response has been positive, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts have been expanded to address additionally workforce mental health and wellbeing.

The second panel on **'Experiencing Art for Wellbeing'** was a culture-led round-table discussion highlighting creative strategies and case studies for promoting positive mental health. On behalf of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, **Dr. Margarita ALEXOMANOLAKI**, Head of Art on Prescription and Head of Performing Arts and Cinema Directorate, presented the groundbreaking **'Art on Prescription' National Programme**, developed and implemented by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, establishing a structured framework for incorporating art into therapeutic practices. As Dr. Alexomanolaki highlighted, the successful pilot phase of the Programme led to the adoption of the relevant legislation in Greece, to officially include cultural activities in the national medical prescription platform from September 2026. **Ms. Jana ECKERT**, Coordinator Culture on Prescription Erasmus+ project, Director at Institute for Social Infrastructure - Institut für Soziale Infrastruktur, continued with the presentation of an innovative project, the **Culture on Prescription Erasmus+ project**. As Ms. Eckert noted, the project was driven by the need to establish strategies for the promising concept of social prescribing to combat loneliness. It sought to combine the positive impact of cultural activities and pilot courses in five countries, with Dublin (Ireland) showcasing impressive results. Project participants reported greater self-expression and creativity, improved cooperation skills, and increased confidence in social interactions.

Discussion continued with the input of culture experts, sharing their insights from community-based practices of cultural engagement for mental wellbeing. From Romania, **Dr. Rarița ZBRANCA**, Programme Director at Cluj Cultural Centre; Co-director, Centre for Culture, Health and Social Well-being, Romania; Lead partner CARE - Culture for Mental Health project and Partner Culture and Health Platform, stressed that cultural engagement should be perceived as a health-related behaviour, like physical exercise or diet, given that even two-hours per week of art activities can show measurable results. In this context, Dr. Zbranca shared the example of the **'Music for Motherhood' project**, an initiative aimed to tackle post-partum depression through music, implemented at pilot-level in Romania, Italy, and Denmark. As Dr. Zbranca noted, the project was met with success by mothers as it had no side effects, or the societal stigma often associated with medical treatments for post-partum depression. From Greece, **Ms. Yioula KOUTSOUBOU**, Zero Waste Artist and Educator, emphasised the positive impact of art engagement, sharing examples from her work in refugee camps, with school groups, and troubled youth.

### **Key takeaways:**

- Scientific research for mental health has increased over the past years, underscoring the importance of mental wellbeing as equal to physical health.
- Advanced scientific evidence shows that the arts can have a positive impact on brain functions, related to both neurodegenerative diseases and mental disorders.
- Engagement with performative and creative arts should be aimed at all people, regardless of age or medical condition.
- Cultural engagement for health is currently in its early stages, therefore awareness needs to be intensified for more people to endorse it.
- Efforts to support the interaction of culture with mental wellbeing is often supported more by culture practitioners than healthcare professionals.
- Despite increased efforts, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, there are still societal constraints, such as stigma and isolation, associated to mental health challenges.

Watch the video of the webinar, here: <https://youtu.be/LDg8dsiK0VI>

For more information about the webinar, please visit <https://icbss.org/event/webinar-the-role-of-creative-arts-in-promoting-mental-wellness/>

For more information about the ICBSS, please visit <https://icbss.org/>

---

**About the ICBSS:** The International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) was founded in 1998 as a non-profit organisation. It has since fulfilled a dual function. On the one hand, it is an independent research and training institution focusing on the wider Black Sea region. On the other hand, it is a related body of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and its think-tank. Thus, the ICBSS pursues applied, policy-oriented research, promotes knowledge on the Black Sea region both within and outside its boundaries, and offers policy advice with the aim of fostering multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners.