



**WEBINAR ON CULTURE AND HEALTH:
“THE ROLE OF CREATIVE ARTS IN PROMOTING
MENTAL WELLNESS”**

Wednesday 13 May 2026 | 11.00 - 13.00 EEST

CONCEPT NOTE

The International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), in cooperation with the BSEC PERMIS, organize the **Webinar on Culture and Health “The role of creative arts in promoting mental wellness”**, to be held online, on **Wednesday 13 May 2026, at 11.00 – 13.00 EEST**.

The event will provide a dialogue platform for health professionals, artists, academia, representatives of policy and civil society, with the aim to raise awareness on mental health, fostering cultural engagement as a means to reduce stigma and foster inclusivity.

Context

Mental health is an essential element of people's overall wellbeing, yet it is still often misunderstood and affected by societal stigma.

The UN has recognized mental health as equally important as physical health and urges its Member States to provide “equitable and universal access to health care and assurance of mental and social well-being, as well as promotion of mental health and well-being”.

Mental health challenges among adults are rooted in multifaceted and often interlinked factors, reflecting the complexity of modern life. Fast lifestyles, excessive social media exposure, societal pressures, economic instability, global political or environmental challenges, contribute to increased stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. These are further exacerbated by limited awareness on mental health issues that feeds societal stigma, discrimination, and isolation. People facing a mental disorder are often discouraged from seeking treatment or professional support due to stigma, lack of knowledge about available services, or concerns about costs.

Innovative approaches to treatment and mitigation

With more people affected by mental health challenges, there is a growing need for effective support services and interventions tailored to the diverse needs of adults in modern society.

The creative arts can play a significant role in fostering mental wellness by providing people with the means to express emotions, process experiences, and connect with others. Cultural activities such as painting, music, theatre, dance, creative writing, could support a therapeutic process to mitigate mental health challenges and empower people.

Acknowledging the need, many countries have launched initiatives to support the art and health correlation, such as the "Art on Prescription" Programme, under the NextGenerationEU framework. The "Art on Prescription" is a collaboration among medicine, cultural institutions, and local communities aimed to connect and engage people to with a variety of cultural activities in their communities.

Participatory art programmes provide frameworks for understanding mental health, foster community support, and offer coping mechanisms that strengthen social, emotional, and psychological resilience. Enhancing participation in the arts may contribute to enhancing overall wellbeing.

About the Webinar

The **ICBSS – BSEC Webinar on Culture and Health “The role of creative arts in promoting mental wellness”** will bring together health professionals, artists, representatives of policy and civil society, to share insights and perspectives on the effect of creative arts to mental wellbeing. Through expert talks and interaction with the audience, the webinar will aim to raise awareness on mental health, fostering cultural engagement as a means to reduce stigma and foster inclusivity.

Objectives

- To increase understanding of how creative arts can support mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- To share evidence-based insights showcasing the positive impact of creative arts on people and communities.
- To raise awareness and initiate an open dialogue on mental health, in order to support inclusivity and mitigate societal stigma and discrimination.



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AGENDA

Moderator: Haroula CHRISTODOULOU, Board Member, Association of Inter-Balkan Women's Cooperation

Welcome and opening remarks

11.00 - 11.20

George MITRAKOS

Director General

International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)

Amb. Dimitrios RALLIS

Deputy Secretary General

BSEC PERMIS

In Focus Session | Experts' Panel

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH: COMMON CHALLENGES AND MISCONCEPTIONS.

Experts' insights about current mental health issues, myths and misunderstandings that often surround mental health, and the role of community involvement in promoting mental wellbeing.

Speakers:

11.20 - 12.00

The Creative Brain: How Arts Rewire and Heal the Mind.

Doç. Dr. Mariam KAVAKCI

Advisor to the President

Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye

Main interventions for Mental Health in Albania in the recent years and alternative activities.

Professor Albana FICO

University of Medicine, Tirana, Albania

f. Director General at University Hospital Center “Mother Teresa”

f. Director General, Public Health Institute, Republic of Albania





AGENDA

Round-table discussion | Results from the field

EXPERIENCING ART FOR WELLBEING.

Culture-led session highlighting creative strategies for promoting positive mental health.
Case studies to inspire cultural engagement for wellbeing.

In Focus:

Art on Prescription Programme: Art for Mental Health

Dr. Margarita ALEXOMANOLAKI

Head of Art on Prescription Programme, Head of Performing Arts and Cinema Directorate
Ministry of Culture of the Hellenic Republic

12.00 - 12.40

Culture on Prescription Erasmus+ project

Jana ECKERT

Director, Coordinator Culture on Prescription Erasmus+ project
Institute for Social Infrastructure - Institut für Soziale Infrastruktur

Views from culture experts:

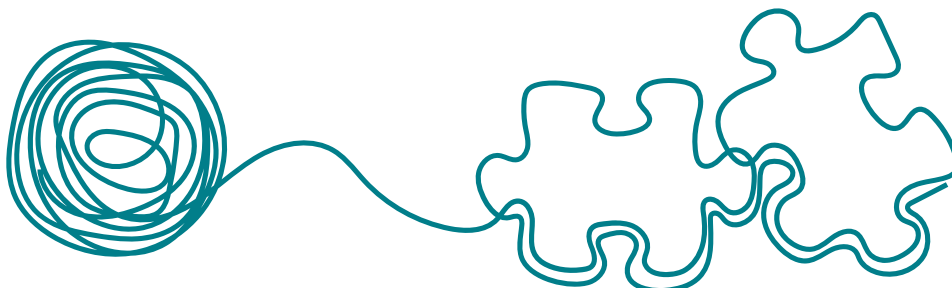
Dr. Rarița ZBRANCA

Programme Director, 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

Yioula KOUTSOUBOU

Zero Waste Artist and Educator

12.40 - 13.00 Q&A and input from the audience





SPEAKERS / MODERATORS

(in alphabetical order)



Margarita ALEXOMANOLAKI

Head of Art on Prescription Programme, Head of Performing Arts and Cinema Directorate
Ministry of Culture of the Hellenic Republic

Speaker at Round-Table Discussion | Results from the field
EXPERIENCING ART FOR WELLBEING.

Margarita Alexomanolaki has served as Head of the Directorate of Performing Arts and Cinema at the Greek Ministry of Culture since 2018. She studied piano at the Hellenic Conservatoire, and Musicology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. She holds an MMus in Ethnomusicology from Goldsmiths, University of London, and a PhD in Music and Memory in TV Advertising. In 2009, she enrolled at the National School of Public Administration in Athens. Upon graduating, she joined the Greek Ministry of Culture, where she has since been actively involved in the development and implementation of cultural policy in the fields of performing arts and cinema.



Haroula CHRISTODOULOU

Board Member
Association of Inter-Balkan Women's Cooperation

Moderator

Haroula Christodoulou is senior communications and public relations expert with over 30 years of experience in international organisations, diplomacy, and strategic media engagement. She currently serves as Senior Officer, External Relations and Communications at the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), with prior roles in the private sector, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, and the BBC World Service. As an advocate of social impact, she remains actively engaged in cultural and nonprofit activities that support inclusion, community development, education and culture. Ms. Christodoulou holds degrees in Computer Engineering and Business Administration (MBA).



Jana ECKERT

Director, Coordinator Culture on Prescription Erasmus+ project
Institute for Social Infrastructure - Institut für Soziale Infrastruktur

Speaker at Round-Table Discussion | Results from the field
EXPERIENCING ART FOR WELLBEING.

Jana Eckert holds a degree in Social Sciences. She is the Managing Director of ISIS Institut für Soziale Infrastruktur, a private non-profit organisation based in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Ms. Eckert has coordinated, among other projects, the Erasmus+ partnership in adult education, 'Culture on Prescription in Europe', from 2022 to 2024. She is also a founding member of the Healing Culture Network association and is involved with Expertise Network Social Prescribing (led by Charité Berlin) and the International Arts on Prescription Collaborative (led by NSAP).



SPEAKERS / MODERATORS

(in alphabetical order)



Albana FICO

University of Medicine, Tirana, Albania

f. Director General at University Hospital Center “Mother Teresa”

f. Director General, Public Health Institute, Republic of Albania

Speaker at the Experts’ Panel

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH: COMMON CHALLENGES AND MISCONCEPTIONS.

Albana Fico is an Albanian medical professional and academic specialising in Pulmonology and Internal Medicine. She currently holds an Associate Professor position at the University of Medicine, Tirana. Between 2018 and 2021, she served as the Executive Director of the Institute of Public Health (ISHP), overseeing national health protocols. From December 2021 to March 2024, she held the position of General Director of the University Hospital Center "Mother Teresa". During her career, she has authored numerous research papers on public health and clinical respiratory medicine.



Mariam KAVAKCI

Advisor to the President

Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye

Speaker at the Experts’ Panel

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH: COMMON CHALLENGES AND MISCONCEPTIONS.

Mariam Kavakci is an Advisor to the President of the Republic of Türkiye and an Associate Professor of Speech-Language Therapy and Neuroscience at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University. She holds a Ph.D. and dual M.S. degrees in Communication Sciences and Disorders and Applied Cognition & Neuroscience from the University of Texas at Dallas. Dr. Kavakci applies her clinical expertise as the founding manager of the Cognition, Communication, and Swallowing Rehab Laboratories at Ankara Bilkent City Hospital, bridging high-level public service with education and healthcare innovation.



Yioula KOUTSOUBOU

Zero Waste Artist and Educator

Speaker at Round-Table Discussion | Results from the field

EXPERIENCING ART FOR WELLBEING.

Yioula Koutsoubou is an agronomist, environmental artist and educator specializing in creative upcycling and eco-friendly art. Since 2010, she has been designing and leading workshops and community art projects that combine environmental awareness, culture and social inclusion, working with children, refugees, indigenous communities, students and vulnerable groups in Greece and Central America. Based in Lesvos since 2017, she has collaborated with municipalities, schools, museums and NGOs, using art as a tool for connection, creativity and mental well-being.



Georgios MITRAKOS

**Director General
International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)**

Speaker at Opening Session



Georgios MITRAKOS is the Director General of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS). He has more than fifteen years of experience in foreign policy advisory and public relations. His expertise includes politics, international relations, confidence building measures with emphasis on the Black Sea region and Southeast Europe. Prior to assuming his post at ICBSS, Mr. Mitrakos has worked as chief advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic and special advisor at the Ministry of Regional Development, Competitiveness and Shipping and the Ministry of State and Strategic Investments. Mr. Mitrakos holds an MSc in Politics and Communication from the London School of Economics and a BSc in Political Science and Public Administration from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

Amb. Dimitrios RALLIS

**Deputy Secretary General
BSEC PERMIS**

Speaker at Opening Session



Amb. Dimitrios RALLIS has been Deputy Secretary General of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization - Permanent International Secretariat in Istanbul, since 2022. During his career, he has acquired deep knowledge and vast diplomatic experience with emphasis to the promotion of multilateral, regional and international relations. For over ten years he was actively involved in passing EU legislation regarding economic integration and cooperation in the fields of, inter alia, internal market and development, transport, environmental protection, industry, energy, trade, agriculture, research and culture. As Chairman of the EU Permanent Representatives Committee and as Director General for European Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, he worked for the promotion of stability, good neighbourliness and international, European and regional cooperation, especially in the fields of economic integration and development. He has also served as Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Hellenic Cultural Foundation.

Rarița ZBRANCA

Programme Director, 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

Speaker at Round-Table Discussion | Results from the field
EXPERIENCING ART FOR WELLBEING.



Rarița Zbranca is Programme Director at the Cluj Cultural Centre in Romania. She has experience in arts management, curating, cultural research, and advocacy. She is also a member of the Culture and Education Committee of the Economic and Social Council of Romania, a policy adviser for Culture Next network, and a member of the board of Culture Action Europe network. Ms. Zbranca has co-founded the AltArt Foundation (1997) and Fabrica de Pensule (2009), an independent collective contemporary art space in Romania. Her work spans local, national, and EU levels, with a focus on culture, well-being, regional development, mental health, innovation, and fair working conditions in culture. She is the lead author of the CultureForHealth Report (2022) and co-director of the Centre for Culture, Health and Social Well-being Romania.



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ORGANISERS:



BSEC PERMIS

The BSEC PERMIS performs the secretarial duties for the **Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC Organization)**, a full-fledged intergovernmental, regional economic organization that includes 13 Member States from the wider Black Sea region (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkiye, and Ukraine).

BSEC has more than 25 areas of cooperation, which are of importance to its Member States, among them environmental protection, agriculture, culture, tourism, science and technology, education, energy, SMEs, emergency assistance, etc. In its 30 years since establishment (1992) BSEC is today the oldest, most representative, most inclusive and institutionally mature intergovernmental Organization in the wider Black sea area, which contributes to the promotion of regional cooperation and economic development.



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 Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and serves as 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 to foster multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners.



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