



## Introducing Curated #7: Safeguarding Mental Health of Human Rights Professionals

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**Abstract:** Welcome to our seventh Curated series, which provides a space to reflect on mental health in relation to human rights professionals, by drawing on discussions developed within the EMAlumni Association and related Mental Health Support Group providing peer support, emotional first aid, and access to tailored resources.

We chose the topic of our seventh Curated series to elevate awareness of the need to protect the mental well-being of those working on human rights and the significance of preparedness to overcome challenges affecting them due to the nature of their work, which can entail exposure to, for example, emotionally draining situations, high-pressure environments, stress and trauma.

The seven blog posts are written by EMA alumnae who are engaging in conversation on the topic within the [EMAlumni Association](#) and related Mental Health Support [Group](#). In this regard, two online events were also held recently. On 23 April 2025, EMA graduate Joana Gameiro hosted a [workshop](#) on stress management, explaining different types of stress, how it impacts persons' sympathetic nervous system, and eight tools to

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transform stress into resilience, minimise unnecessary stressors and cultivate lasting calm in work and life. On 12 June 2025, EMA graduates Anita Amendra and Mélina Pelé held an interactive [webinar](#) entitled 'Women in Human Rights: Frantic to Flourish', reflecting on tips and tools designed for women to tap into more vitality and energy.

Every Monday over the coming weeks of June and July there will be a post addressing multiple aspects of the topic. The first contribution considers mental health as a critical human rights-related issue and underlines the overlooked mental health toll on human rights professionals. After reflecting on the brain's defensive and predictive functions, it addresses symptoms and consequences of vicarious trauma, with attention to the additional impact on health. In emphasising the unseen cost for the human rights workforce, it calls for systemic care and support. Safeguarding the mental well-being of those working in this field is seen as a critical tool to stand up for the human rights of all and everywhere.

The second post highlights that human rights work demands deep compassion, reflecting on the challenge of compassion fatigue, its common symptoms and the underlying conditions that contribute to it. Attention is then deserved on relevant steps that can be taken for maintaining emotional balance and well-being.

With a focus on humanitarian workers, the third post considers five research-informed and evidence-based strategies to support their mental wellbeing. It provides practical tools to care for others responsibly, without overstepping or causing unintended harm, namely: offering 'psychological first aid'; encouraging peer-to-peer support; practicing self-care without romanticizing resilience; using active listening and validation; and knowing personal limits and referring them when needed.

Undertaking a female perspective, the fourth post addresses the issue of burnout severely limiting women's ability to create impact in the human rights field. It discusses what can be done when women human rights professionals are overwhelmed, exhausted and reaching burnout. Multiple steps that can be taken to have a positive impact without burnout are then elaborated.

Changing the lens of analysis, another post addresses eco-anxiety as deeply affecting resilience, considering the need of therapeutic safe spaces and restoration of personal agency to help individuals cope with the emotional weight of climate change and foster empowerment amid planetary challenges. In this context, the sixth post reflects on environmental human rights defenders' suffering from mental health issues as consequences of their challenging work in the field, and the need to protect them properly.

The seventh post addresses that mental health is often neglected in discussions about disability, while it shapes—in both visible and invisible ways—the daily life of millions of people worldwide, including human rights professionals. It highlights that certain mental conditions are legally and medically acknowledged as disabilities, while many others remain unaddressed, misunderstood, or even unrecognised. It thus advocates for better recognition, legal protections, and access to care for everyone, including those working in the human rights field.

The contributors to this new Curated section include Mélina Pele, Shannon Ferber, Merel Cosijn, Anita Amendra, Geanina-Gabriela Turcanu, and Clarisse Jeannette Fagard.