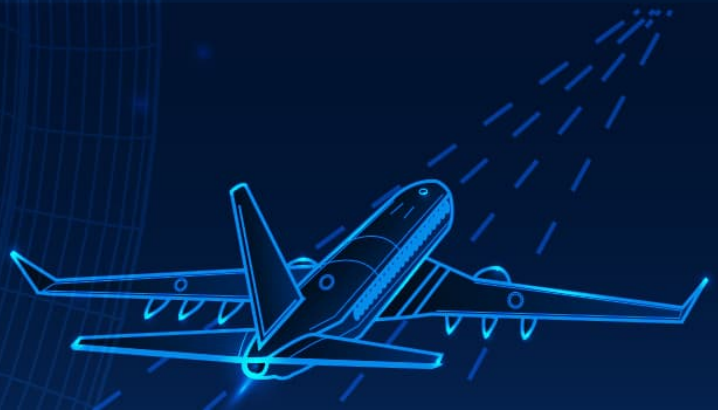
Mental health in aviation operations in conflict zones

Dr. Ansa Jordaan

INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION

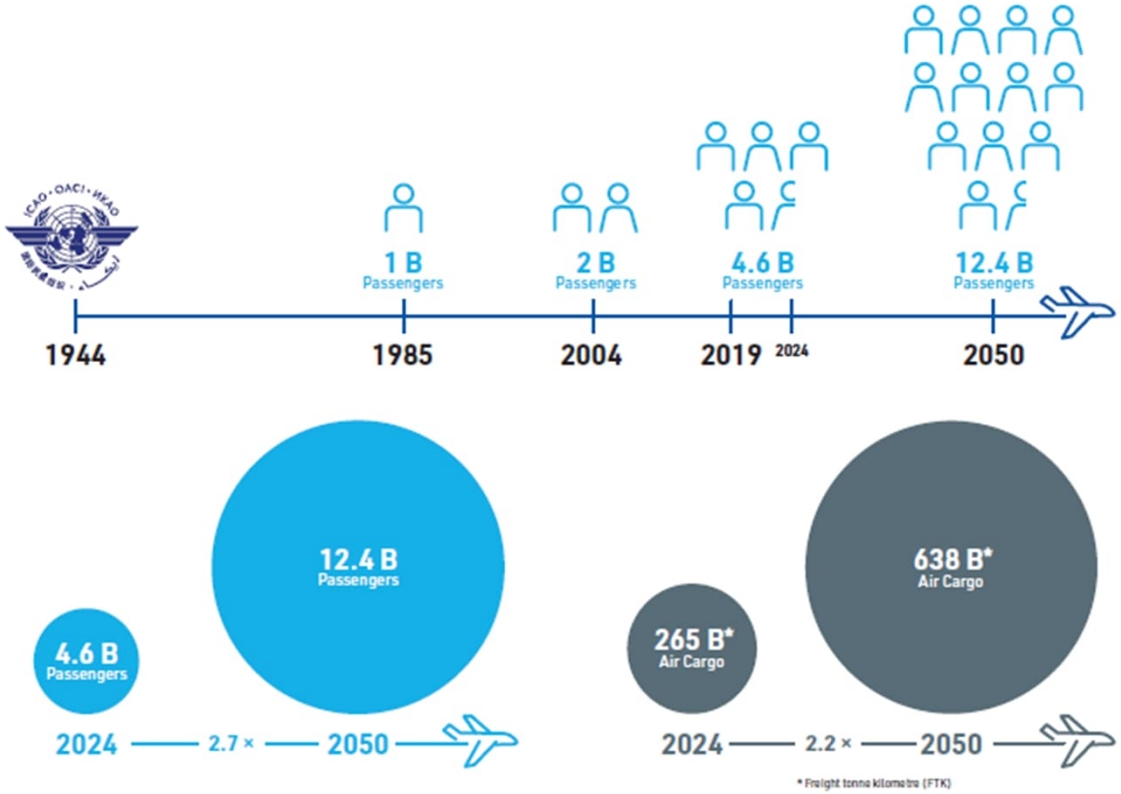






The ICAO Strategic Plan (2026 – 2050)

Context of Civil Aviation: Present and Future (2050)



Global mental health in 2025

WIDESPREAD



Nearly

1 in 7

people globally live with a mental disorder

UNDERTREATED



71%

of people with psychosis do not receive mental health services

UNDER-RESOURCED

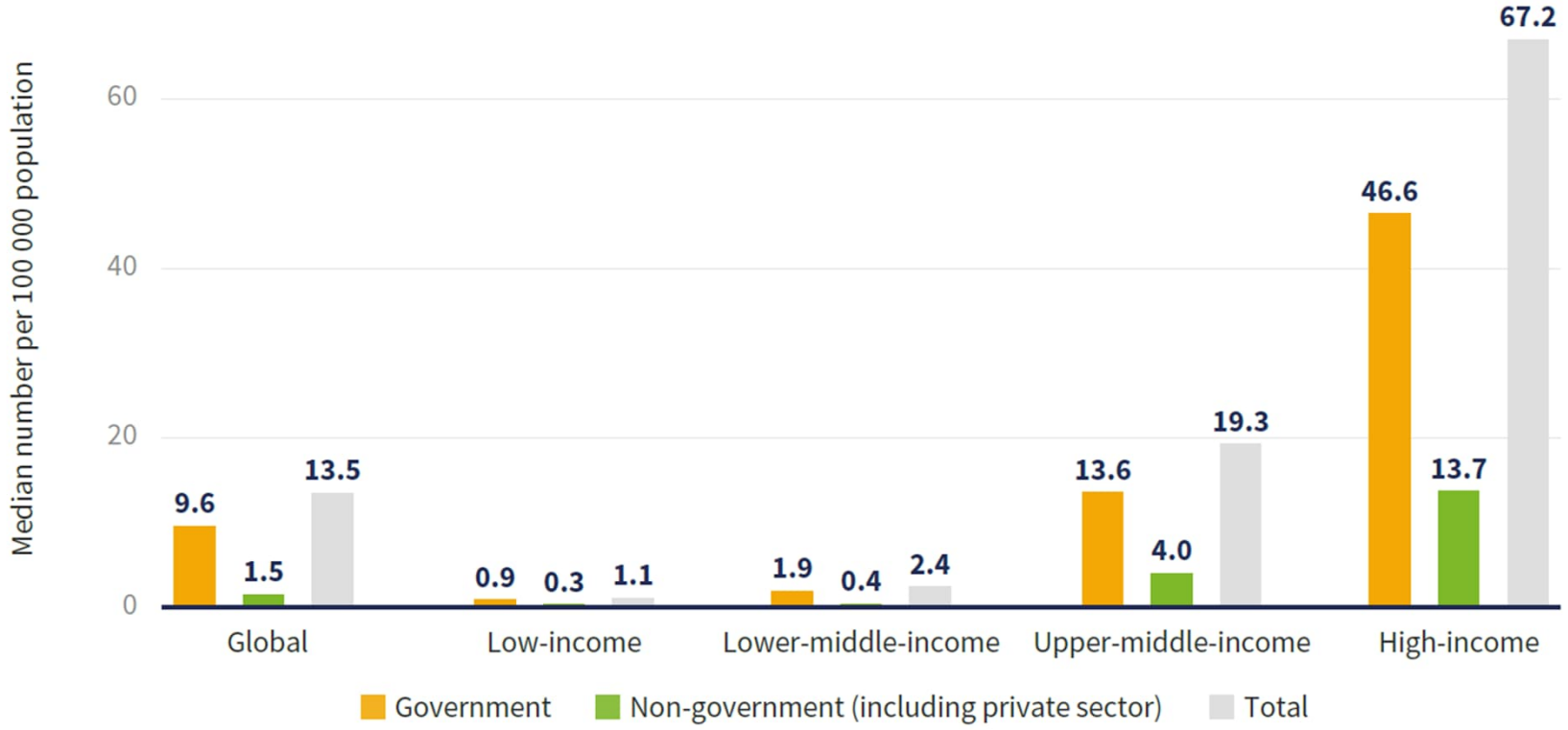


1.4%

or less of health budgets in LMICs, on average, go to mental health

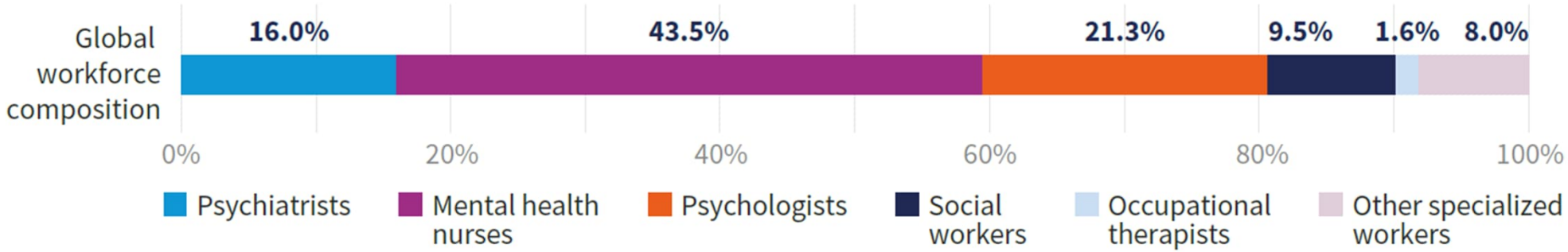
Source: IHME, 2024 *(3, 4)*; WHO, 2025 *(2)*.

The specialized mental health workforce



Source: WHO, 2025 *(2)*.

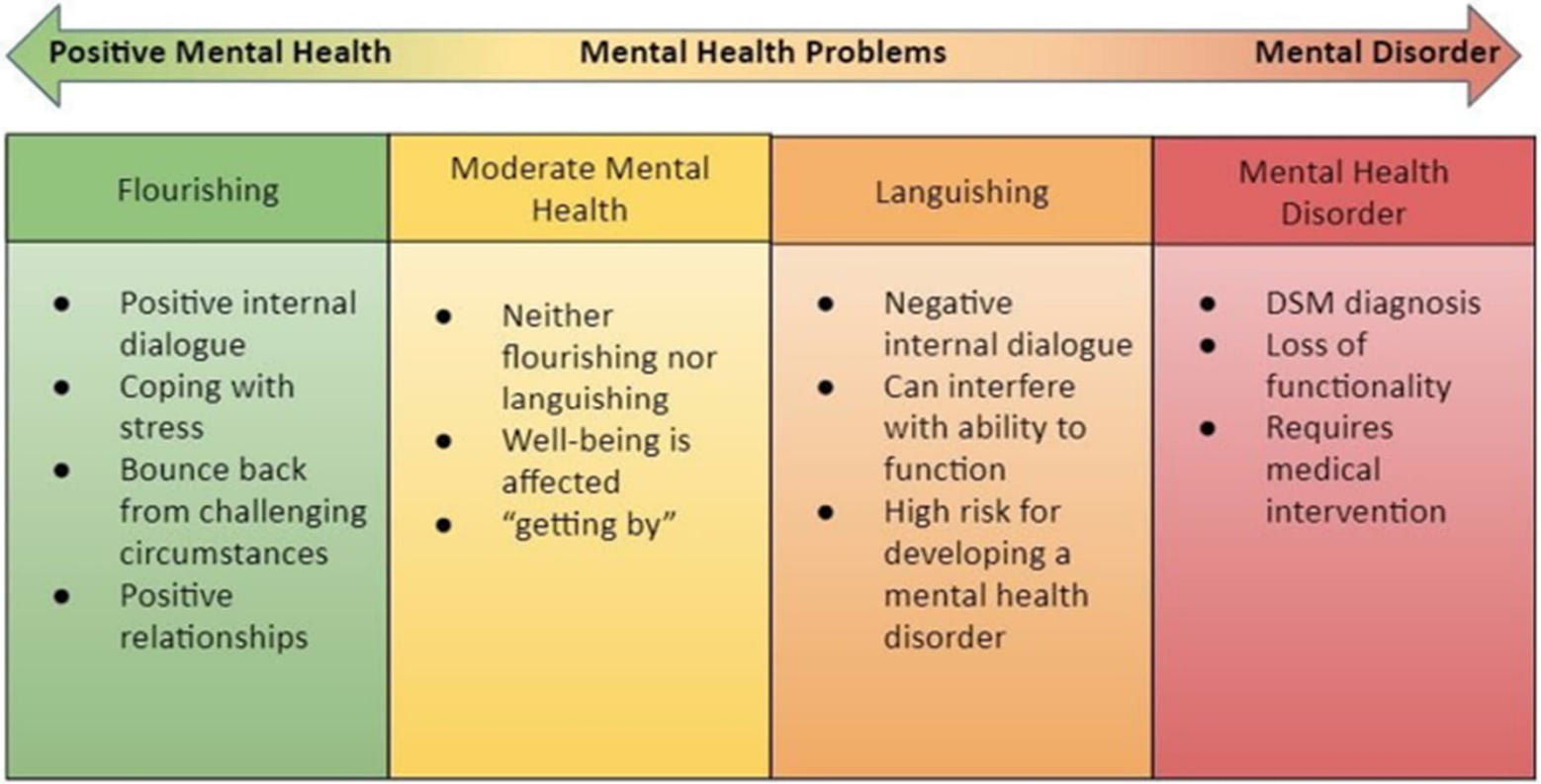
The specialized mental health workforce



Source: WHO, 2025 *(2)*.

Understanding mental health

Complex continuum, different in different persons and in one person at different times



Sources of mental stress

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Individual	Aviation	Conflict situation
• General level of mental well-being	• High pressure environment	• Exceptional circumstances
• Reluctance to seek assistance	• Operational requirements	• Additional stressors
• Sense of responsibility	• Physiological limitations of human in the aviation environment	• Indirect or direct exposure
• Cultural factors		• Acute, cumulative or chronic effects

Effects on aviation personnel

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Acute	Chronic	Cumulative
• Anxiety	• Depression	• Low morale
• Distraction	• Problematic use of psychoactive substances	• Reduced performance
• Hypervigilance	• PTSD	• Depression
• Sleep disturbances	• Mental health disorders	• Exhaustion
• Fatigue		• Burnout

Potential effects on flight safety

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Reduced performance

Functional impairment

Safety occurrences

Incidents or Accidents

Mitigate negative outcomes

Enhance aviation safety

Build aviation resilience

ICAO

Risk management Principles

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People-centered

- Aviation personnel at risk
  - flight crew, cabin crew, ATC
  - maintenance personnel
  - ground personnel
- Promote& support mental well-being
- Consider passengers

Operation centered

- Work collaboratively
- Proactive strategies
- Type of aviation operation
- Multi-layered risk mitigation

Mitigation measures

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Dependent on:

- Affected groups
- Type of situation
- Available resources
- Other considerations that could impact implementation

Mental health awareness and support

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- Confidential environment
- Resources and activities to support mental wellbeing
- Employment Wellbeing, Counselling or Peer Support programmes
- Recognize stress and apply techniques
- Refer for further assistance

Potential actions

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After a traumatic event

- Critical incident response measures
- Professional psychological support
- Allow time off for recovery.
- Refer for further evaluation

Longer-term actions

- Gradual return-to-work plans
- Access to counseling or professional help.
- Encourage team members to support each other

Operational communication

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Visible leadership engagement

- Best = in-person communication
- Video communication scheduled at regular intervals
- Written communications do not have the same impact

Timely, transparent & two-way

- Management and aviation personnel
- Objective - decrease uncertainties
- Suggested topics
  - difficulties, constraints
  - potential solutions
  - reasons for decisions
  - expectations from aviation personnel
  - potential incentives
  - available support mechanism

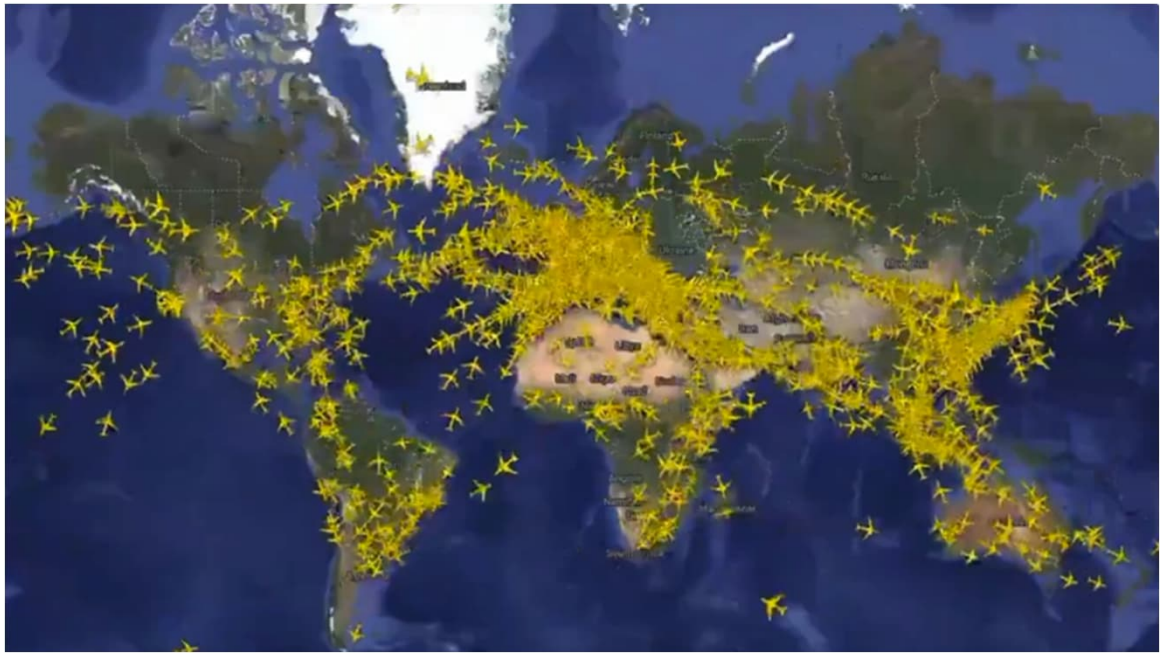
Manage operational risk

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- Actively engage operational personnel in discussions
- Rotate assignments
- Manage duty time
- Simplify workflows and staffing patterns
- Access to recreational activities or safe spaces
- Updated safety and security briefings, including pre-flight

2026: Aviation today

1. **Record air traffic:** 23 July 2026
2. 153,359 flights
3. Highest number ever in 24 hr
4. Conflict in the Middle East (overflight restrictions)
5. **Trend of increased traffic** despite geopolitical crises & climate emergencies



Thank You



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