

The time is now to create an intersectional long-term Mental Health Strategy

The Mental Health Advocacy Platform Statement

October 2021

World Mental Health Day 2021 focused on 'Mental Health in an Unequal World'. Following this occasion, the Mental Health Advocacy Platform would like to call for a European Strategy for Mental Health that takes an intersectional approach and can meet everyone's diverse needs. A comprehensive European Mental Health Strategy is essential to tackle inequalities in mental health care, support prevention and early intervention services. Moreover, to promote the wellbeing of millions of people in the EU, protect the rights of people with lived experience of mental health problems and raise awareness to end mental health stigma and discrimination.

In Europe, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified existing mental health challenges, with disruptions to services and an increase in mental health problems, contributing to the economic crisis. At least one in six people (84 million) across EU Member States had already experienced mental ill-health, in 2016.¹ In addition, 1 in 10 children in the EU identified as living with mental health problems or symptoms such as depression or anxiety.² Mental health problems are considered the leading cause of disability in Europe, requiring urgent action more than ever.

In general, women and girls, children, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, LGBTI, older persons, undocumented people, young people and those with difficult socio-economic realities, are just a few examples of groups that are at risk of being disproportionately impacted by mental ill-health. Whilst certain groups are more likely to bear an unequal burden, they are also less likely to receive tailored mental health support. To that end, a human-rights based European Strategy on Mental Health that addresses the socio-economic determinants of mental health is imperative to achieve an equitable approach to mental healthcare.

In December 2019, the Council Conclusions on the Economy of Well-being invited the European Commission to "propose a Mental Health Strategy for the Union, taking into account the cross-sectoral impacts of different policies on mental health." Considering the increased shift towards the recovery phase of the pandemic and taking these reflections into account, the Mental Health Advocacy Platform is collectively calling on the European Commission to develop and adopt a comprehensive long-term Mental Health Strategy, which:

- Addresses the socio-economic determinants of mental health, with particular attention to those who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status, age or disability. This approach must take into account the underlying structural problems of mental healthcare systems;

¹ 2018, *Health at a Glance: Europe 2018 State of Health in the EU Cycle*, available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/default/files/state/docs/2018_healthatglance_rep_en.pdf

² 2021, Eurochild, *Our Europe Our Rights Our Future*, available at: <https://www.eurochild.org/resource/our-europe-our-rights-our-future/>

- Promotes awareness-raising initiatives, including those which tackle social stigmas around mental health problems at European, national and local levels;
- Underlines the need for more meaningful cooperation with civil society and the communities they represent, experts and particularly persons with lived experience. Holistic approaches to mental health support and services should be developed alongside affected communities, including above all with the meaningful involvement of people with psychosocial disabilities, through consultations and in a non-tokenistic manner;
- Promotes non-coercive, rights-based and person-centred mental health services and care, deinstitutionalisation and the respect for legal capacity as required of the European Union as a State Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These services should take a psychosocial approach, including by encouraging user-led services and initiatives, such as peer support and WHO Quality Rights training modules for professionals;
- Foresees the inclusion of mental health in all policies and considers the impacts of different policies on mental health;
- Integrates increased investment in education, research, mental health care, including investment in community-based care. Mental health service users and persons with lived experience should be fully involved throughout the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a European Mental Health Strategy;
- Aids in the development of complementary action plans at national level;
- Include comprehensive objectives with clear benchmarks and indicators, as well as an adequate budget allocated for its implementation.

Without urgent action, the rise of psychosocial support demands will certainly increase and the mental health impacts of the pandemic will be long-term and pervasive. Delivering a comprehensive Strategy would not just mitigate the mental health burden, but also support economic recovery and aid in the implementation of effective public mental health interventions, for future crises. Promoting positive mental health and respecting a person's human rights is key to social inclusion, participation and cohesive societies.

The Mental Health Advocacy Platform is dedicated to long-term discussions with EU institutions, Member States and other stakeholders to ensure adequate, rights-based and person-centred mental health care and support is a reality for all. We remain at your full disposal and welcome the opportunity to further discuss the need for a comprehensive European Strategy on Mental Health.

Signed by:

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Organisations

AGE Platform Europe

EMDR Europe Association

Eurochild

European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA)

European Health Management Association (EHMA)

European Network of (ex)users and survivors of psychiatry (ENSUP)

European Pharmaceutical Students' Association (EPSA)

European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe)

Global Mental Health Peer Network (GMHPN)

Mental Health Europe (MHE)



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