M·H·E
Mental Health Europe

Mental health and young people

It is time to start and shape a brighter future

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Young people are among the groups more at risk of marginalisation and most impacted by socio-economic determinants of health and overall well-being. Before 2020, about one-third of 16-29 year olds were at risk of poverty and social exclusion. At the same time, access to adequate housing is increasingly challenging for young people, leaving them at a high risk of homelessness. This situation has worsened over the past two years, as opportunities for adequate employment and education have decreased. All of this is leaving young people in front of an uphill path for their upcoming years and putting them at elevated risk of experiencing mental health problems throughout the life course.

The incidence of mental health problems among people aged between 15 and 24 has in fact doubled in most European countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people have been 30% to 80% more likely to experience depression, anxiety and loneliness than adults. Furthermore, the pandemic has had a huge impact on the mental health of youth experiencing marginalisation, further enhancing exclusion, stigmatisation and restricting their access to healthcare. In addition, the impact of the Ukrainian crisis can already be observed in our societies, and we will likely have to deal with its medium to long-term consequences for years.

It is therefore evident that urgent and immediate policy action is needed, and we should start now to shape a brighter future for all. Addressing young people's mental health is not only a question of guaranteeing their wellbeing and ensuring that they can realise their full potential. It is also a matter of prevention and of building mentally healthy societies, as about half of the mental health problems affecting people in their adulthood have their onset during or before adolescence.

The European Union and its Member States already have a variety of instruments that could be used to address the challenges and barriers that young people face and that impact their mental health. Initiatives and instruments such as the European Semester cycle, the Child Guarantee, the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, various funding streams are just some examples of tools where mental health should be better integrated and mainstreamed to maximise impact. However, the European Union (EU) does not currently have an action plan dedicated to mental health to ensure such integration. It would be appropriate for the European Commission to develop a European Mental Health Strategy, as it has been recommended by the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and various civil society organisations.

Mental Health Europe's policy recommendations:

Mental health system change requires joint action to ensure adequate **prevention** of mental health problems, meaningful **empowerment** and active **engagement** of young people in decisions about their mental health, and targeted mental health **support** at every stage of life.
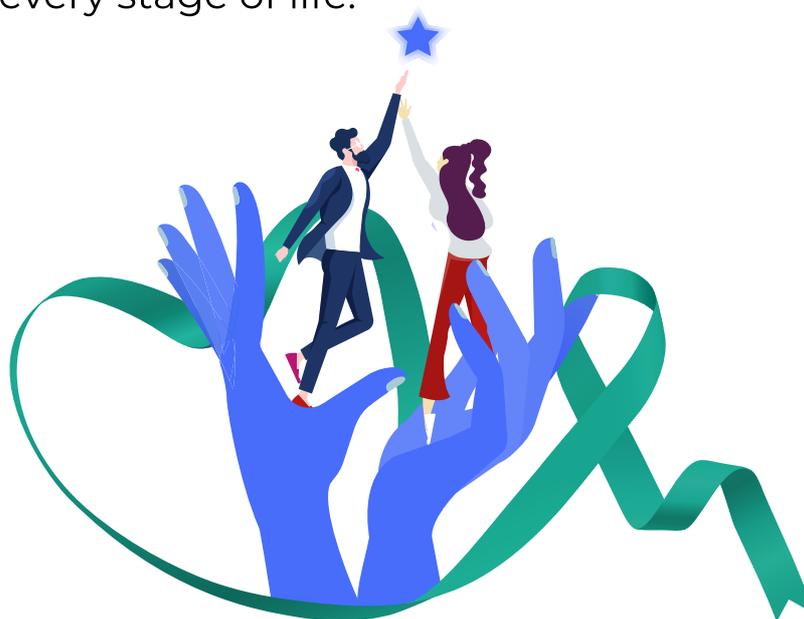
01 To ensure adequate prevention of mental health problems, MHE calls for the European Commission and its Member States to:

- Integrate mental health in all policies and monitor its implementation;

- Implement a holistic approach to mental health by promoting social rights and economic protection packages to address socio-economic determinants of mental health, with targeted support for people experiencing exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation;

- Invest in mental health literacy and include mental health in school curricula and the curricula of teaching staff;

- Provide social, healthcare and educational workers with the skills and resources to recognise mental health risk factors, provide basic support and referral to mental health services when needed;

- In times of crisis and emergencies, take into account and include mental health protective factors when developing and implementing responses.

02

To meaningfully empower and actively engage young people in decisions about their mental health, MHE calls for the European Commission and its Member States to:

- Ensure that appropriate and structured mechanisms are in place to meaningfully and continuously engage young people, in policy and decision-making, throughout all phases of the process;

- Develop forms of outreach and participation to allow the engagement of young people from diverse backgrounds, with a focus on young people from disadvantaged situations and living in severe exclusion;

- Develop or support comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns on human rights, ending stigmatisation and mental health;

- Recognise and support the essential role of youth organisations in providing support, information and services to young people regarding their mental health and well-being.

03

To provide targeted mental health support for the youth and at every stage of life, MHE calls for the European Commission and its Member States to:

- Provide tailored support to the specific needs of the person throughout the life cycle, including during transition periods;

- Ensure that all the relevant services can cater for the specific needs and provide person-centred support;

- Make mental health support affordable and accessible to all young people, including the most vulnerable among youth;

- Recognise and support the essential role of youth organisations in providing support, information and services to young people regarding their mental health and well-being.

- Better coordinate different services through an integrated approach (mental health services, social services, health services, educational systems, workplaces, etc.) and the provision of community-based services;

- Conduct further research and better coordinate the collection of disaggregated data across member states.

Want to find out more? You can contact us: info@mhe-sme.org | www.mhe-sme.org

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Mental Health Europe (MHE) is the largest independent network organisation representing mental health users, professionals and services providers across Europe. At MHE, we advocate for a psychosocial approach to mental health, which instead of defining mental ill-health as a 'disease' or 'illness' caused by purely biological factors, looks to a person's life and social environment, treating these factors as equally important in understanding wellbeing and mental ill health. We believe Mental health is not only about disease or the absence of it. It is also about wellbeing and experiencing positive emotions: it is about us, our lives, work, relationships, physical health and social environment.

Endorsed by:

Mental Health
Advocacy Platform

coalition
for mental health and wellbeing