



**Work Programme of the
Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian Trio Presidency of the Council of the EU
(2010 – 2011)**

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MENTAL HEALTH EUROPE

Introduction: Why mental health must be at the core of the EU agenda

On 31 December 2009, the Swedish Presidency of the EU will terminate its mandate. Particular circumstances including the election of a new European Parliament, a new Commission and uncertainty surrounding the Treaty of Lisbon have characterised the last six months of 2009.

The Trio of Spain, Belgium and Hungary will hold the EU Presidency in 2010-2011 when further decisive and targeted actions will be needed in order to keep the European economy on the recovery track, to ensure that economic growth will be sustainable and to tackle the various impacts of the economic downturn and recession on the employment and social situation.

The shape of the post 2010 Lisbon strategy will be a key challenge for the Trio Presidency. This new strategy should enable the EU to make a full recovery from the financial and economic crisis; this is of vital importance as the crisis is already having a negative impact on public health in many Member states. The whole population and the mental health sector in particular can be seriously affected.

Taking steps to prevent mental health problems before they occur or to reduce the severity of mental health problems is a crucial undertaking. People experiencing poverty are particularly vulnerable towards developing mental health problems, mostly due to financial hardship or unemployment. Frequently a loss of social contacts and personal interactions coupled with a lack of personal recognition is highly significant and fear of uncertainty dominate their daily lives.

MHE recommendations to Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian EU Presidencies

Mental Health Europe (MHE) is a European non-governmental organisation active in the field of mental health promotion, social inclusion and human rights for all.

MHE believes that the European Union is a key actor for the promotion and protection of the mental health and well-being of the population. As in any democratic and modern society, all persons living in the EU have the right to be empowered in order to design and receive adequate care for their physical and mental health.

In the light of the above and in view of the start of the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian EU Presidency in 2010, MHE puts forward key recommendations in the following fields:

1. PUBLIC HEALTH

MHE recognises the importance of the European Union's role to help shaping better public health policies, by improving public health, preventing human illness and diseases, and obviating sources of danger to human health.¹ MHE calls upon the three presidencies to:

- **Work towards the implementation of the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being.** Following the high-quality work of the Swedish Presidency on the Pact's priority on children and youth mental health, MHE calls the Trio Presidency to a concrete commitment to implement the Pact for Mental Health and Well-being² at the EU level. In particular, the EU must take urgent action to design appropriate policies that address key mental health issues: prevention of depression and suicide, mental well-being of older people, mental health promotion at the workplace, and combating stigma and social exclusion.
- **Integrate mental health into other EU policies.** As recommended by the World Health Organization³, national mental health policies should recognize and address the broader factors that promote mental health, such as socioeconomic and environmental factors. This requires mainstreaming mental health promotion in the education, employment, justice, transport, environment, housing and welfare sectors, where local and national decision-makers' choices may have unintended consequences for mental health.
- **Take action in the field of social determinants of (mental) health.** MHE believes that mental health should be included as a key priority in a European strategy on health inequalities as mental health and well-being are central to understand wider health and social issues. The Trio EU Presidency must ensure that policies aimed at the reduction of inequalities in health are part of a comprehensive plan that includes social equality policies in all areas relevant for the citizens (and all vulnerable groups such as immigrants, mentally ill), equality of information, education, and work⁴.

2. SOCIAL INCLUSION

People with mental health problems are very often socially excluded and face stigma and discrimination in all aspects of life. MHE believes that these people have the right to get appropriate treatment and to fully participate in society. In order to improve the social inclusion and protection policies in the EU, MHE calls upon the Trio Presidency to:

- **Fight against poverty and social exclusion of all excluded groups in society.** In the frame of the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, MHE urges the Trio Presidency to turn the fight against poverty and social exclusion into actions. The most vulnerable groups in society - people with mental health problems in particular – must receive adequate social protection systems to live a dignified life, especially at the time of the financial crisis. Promoting the social inclusion of people with mental health problems by recognising their human, civil and social rights is essential for combating poverty.
- **Strengthening the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).** MHE acknowledges the OMC as a key instrument for the exchange of best practices among EU member states in the field

¹ As established by the Article 152 of the Treaty establishing the European Community

² http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/mental/index_en.htm

³ http://www.euro.who.int/mentalhealth/topics/20090825_1

of social inclusion and social protection. MHE would like the OMC to be improved by setting quantified European and national targets and by implementing an efficient monitoring system and a social impact assessment. Civil society organisations should be engaged in this process as one way to make the voices of the most vulnerable heard.

- **Bring forward the implementation of the Active Inclusion Strategy⁵ in order to:**

I. Make quality health and social services a basic right for all EU citizens. Severe budget cuts in the health and social services are currently affecting many EU countries. The closing of institutions is negatively impacting on the mental health sector. MHE calls on the Trio Presidency to foster the move towards community-based systems of care in the EU and to take the individuals needs into appropriate consideration. MHE believes that health care professionals should receive better training and education. In this context, health and social services play a crucial role for the creation of employment opportunities.

II. Develop a strategy for the employment of people with disabilities and mental health problems. MHE would like the Trio Presidency to ensure the accessibility to employment of the most vulnerable groups in society, with particular attention to the most excluded groups from the labour market, such as people with mental health problems. Providing efficient training and support schemes should be promoted on EU level.

III. Improve the overall working conditions in Europe and ensure a minimum income. MHE emphasises that sustainable support for a (mentally) healthy working life can be achieved by minimizing the precariousness of work contracts and by the provision of a minimum income for everyone to live in dignity. MHE points out that the benefit of a minimum income should not be bound to employment contracts only. People who are (temporarily) unable to work must have a minimum income to cover expenses for their basic needs.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS

People with mental health problems are at a high risk of human rights abuses. Across Europe, they are discriminated against on the grounds of their illness and cannot access basic rights such as the right to housing, access to health care, education and even employment. People with mental health problems have the same rights as everyone. Therefore, MHE calls upon the Trio Presidency to:

- **Promote equal rights for all, including people with mental health problems.** MHE calls upon the three presidencies to work towards the recognition of the human rights of people with mental health problems. Protection from abuse and discrimination, promotion of fundamental rights for all can be endorsed by establishing collaboration between EU institutions and key stakeholders; particularly with the Fundamental Rights Agency and the civil society. The implementation of UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities⁶ and its Optional Protocol by the EU should also be a key activity in order to promote human rights for people with disabilities and mental health problems.
- **Take initiatives to fight effectively against all forms of discrimination.** The fight against discrimination on ground of mental health problems as well as disability or gender should remain a key priority in the EU. MHE welcomes the work of the former Trio Presidency

⁵ Commission Recommendation 2008/867/EC, 3 October 2008 : <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0639:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁶ <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

(France- Czech Republic- Sweden) in the field of fundamental rights; in particular the work done on the EC directive⁷ of July 2008. MHE would like the next Trio Presidency to continue the actions already undertaken and to initiate new legislation and policies in order to promote non-discrimination on any grounds.

4. GENDER

Women with mental health problems are more likely to suffer from stigma, discrimination and social exclusion, subsequently leading to extreme poverty and family breakdowns. A high demand placed on women by virtue of their multiple roles puts them at greater risk, thus gender has considerable influence on the propensity and exposure to mental health risks and differences in mental health outcomes.

The financial climate risked overshadowing gender issues as it's always very difficult to talk about gender equality and what it is necessary to do during an economic crisis. Therefore MHE calls on the next trio presidency to:

- **Include mental health as a key priority in the forthcoming European strategy on gender equality⁸.** MHE was satisfied that the previous presidency kept equality issues high on the political agenda. MHE would like to see a continuation of this work with more emphasis on tackling inequalities in the field of mental health and providing opportunities for women to escape poverty. This should be key objective for new presidency as both poverty and gender are key determinants in mental health.
- **Address the link between gender and mental health in the context of combating poverty.** The European year for combating poverty and social exclusion 2010 should focus on the fact that women are poorer and experience greater deprivation, have less social and political power and have less access to health, education and employment than men⁹. Additional inequalities lead directly to an increased risk of poor mental health.
- **Recognise gender issues as key to the Lisbon strategy.** Gender issues must be acknowledged as an essential component to attain the objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion under the Lisbon process, and the implementation by the EU Member States and institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action.

CONCLUSIONS

Shaping better and coordinated policies in the EU is crucial as they impact on the mental health and well-being of the population. Mental Health Europe is confident that its recommendations will be taken into due consideration by the coming Trio EU Presidency and that the following priorities will be put into the EU agenda:

- Work towards the implementation of the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being
- Integrate mental health into other EU policies
- Take action in the field of social determinants of (mental) health
- Fight against poverty and social exclusion of all excluded groups in society
- Strengthening the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)
- Make quality health and social services a basic right for all EU citizens
- Promote equal rights for all, including people with mental health problems

⁷ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52008PC0426:EN:NOT>

⁸ *MHE response to European Commission consultation on gender equality:*

<http://www.mhe-sme.org/en/publications/mhe-position-papers.html>

⁹ *The World Health Report: The Global Burden of Disease.* Geneva, WHO

- Take initiatives to fight effectively against all forms of discrimination
- Include mental health as a key priority in the forthcoming European strategy on gender equality
- Address the link between gender and mental health in the context of combating poverty
- Recognise gender issues as key to the Lisbon strategy

Key documents and useful links

- **Official EU policy documents:**

European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/mental/index_en.htm

European Parliament Resolution on Mental Health

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0063+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

Commission Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0639:FIN:EN:PDF>

EC Proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52008PC0426:EN:NOT>

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/default_en.htm

- **Position papers of Mental Health Europe:**

MHE statement of support for the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being

MHE response to the Commission consultation on health inequalities

MHE response to the Commission consultation on Road map for equality between women and men 2006-2010 follow up strategy (2011-2015)

MHE Position on the occasion of the 8th Roundtable on Poverty and Social Exclusion

<http://www.mhe-sme.org/en/publications/mhe-position-papers.html>

*Mental Health Europe,
6 November 2009*

About Mental Health Europe

Mental Health Europe (MHE) is an organisation committed to the promotion of positive mental health, the prevention of mental distress, the improvement of care, advocacy for social inclusion and the protection of human rights for people with mental health problems, their families and carers. MHE vision is of a Europe where mental health and well-being is given high priority in the political spectrum and on the European health and social agenda, where people with mental health problems live as full citizens with access to appropriate services and support when needed, and where meaningful participation is guaranteed at all levels of decision-making and administration. MHE's values are based on dignity and respect, equal opportunities, freedom of choice, anti-discrimination, social inclusion, democracy and participation.

www.mhe-sme.org