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**Working paper supporting the conference
"Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Mental Disorders in Children
and Young People – Making it Happen",
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Consumers, the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Swedish Institute
of Public Health**

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**Commission activities for promoting mental health and preventing mental disorders in
children and young people in the EU**

There is a growing awareness about the importance of mental health and well-being for public health in the EU, and also of the relevance of mental health and well-being in the population in the context of the EU's educational, social and economic development.

The foundation for lifelong mental health and well-being is laid in the early age, beginning already during pregnancy and in childhood and youth. This is why "Education and Youth" has been made one of the five priorities of the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being.

A number of Community policies undertake relevant activities, and help through their policies and activities to promote mental health and prevent mental disorders in children and young people. Some examples are presented below.

Several of these activities will be presented at the Thematic Conference on "Promotion of Mental Health and Preventing Mental Disorders in Children and Young People – Making it Happen". The outcomes of the conference will be communicated to the relevant Commission services.

After the completion of all five thematic conferences under the European Pact for Mental health and Well-being, they will be used for a summary process during 2011.

Health policy

Children and young people are a priority of EU health policy. To underpin this, Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou launched an initiative on the health of the European Youth, supported by a major conference in July 2009. An important aspect of this conference was to get feedback from young people on their priorities and their expectations from European health policy. In their feedback, the participating young people highlighted the importance of mental health as a priority in the context of youth health policy. At present the terms for the implementation of the initiative are being developed.

Under its health policy actions on mental health, the Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumers is building up the EU Compass for Actions on Mental Health, a web-based database, which will include overviews of relevant policies and actions in Member States, good practice summaries, recommendations for actions and the possibility of announcing commitments. Promoting mental health and preventing mental disorders in children and young people will be one theme addressed by the Compass.

Activities directly related to the mental health and well-being included the preparation of a Consensus Paper "Mental health in Education and Youth" for the high-level conference "Together for Mental health and Well-being" of June 2008. The paper set out trends, priorities and examples of initiatives.

An example of a project activity under an EU Health programme is the project "Child and Adolescent Mental Health in Enlarged Europe (CAMHEE)" developed recommendations to policy makers and compared policies and practices in the participating countries (the resulting study is distributed to conference participants).

A Flash Eurobarometer on Mental Health and Well-being of children and young people of 2008 examined parents' perceptions of their child's mental health. It revealed large variation between countries regarding the general health status of children and young people. This health status was also associated to national wealth, expenditure on education as well as education and employment status of parents.

Furthermore, the implementation of the EU Alcohol Strategy adopted in October 2006 emphasises the protection of children and young people, for instance through a task force which looked into the best ways to protect young people from alcohol marketing communication.

Public health activities also support the implementation of the EU Drugs Action Plan for 2009 – 2012, which, inter alia, aims at reducing the prevalence of drug (ab)use amongst young people. One relevant forthcoming activity is the organisation of a workshop exploring best practice to curb first and / or experimental drug use among young people. This workshop will take place at the end of 2009 and will be a part of the initiative on the health of European youth.

Education and youth policy

- *Education and training policy*

The overall objectives of EU education and training policies¹ are to make lifelong learning a reality for each citizen, to increase the quality of learning, to promote equity, active citizenship and social cohesion, and to promote creativity and innovation at all levels of education.

Member States have agreed concrete benchmarks² that support the mutual exchange of good practice and help to focus reforms. The new benchmarks to be achieved by 2020 include targets for making good quality early childhood education available for all children, ensuring the acquisition of basic skills by all, reducing the number of early school leavers, and increasing adults' participation in learning.

The European Reference tools, such as the Recommendation on Key competences for lifelong learning³, emphasise the role of education for individuals' personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship, and employability. The Key Competences Framework, for instance, refers not only to the 'traditional' competences like mother tongue, foreign languages, basic competences in maths and science, and digital competence, but also to the more transversal ones such as learning to learn, social and civic competence, initiative taking and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression.

Concerning the 'social and civic' competence, the Framework states that:

Social competence is linked to personal and social well-being which requires an understanding of how individuals can ensure optimum physical and mental health, including as a resource for oneself and one's family and one's immediate social environment, and knowledge of how a healthy lifestyle can contribute to this.

The core skills of this competence include the ability to cope with stress and frustration and express them in a constructive way.

In order to promote the development of key competences, the joint agenda on cooperation on school education⁴ stresses the need for schools to develop as creative and dynamic places that are open to cooperation and partnership. Schools should be based on the principle of inclusion and provide services for those who need particular support to fulfil their educational potential.

In order to achieve this, the Commission continues to work with Member States to make curricula more relevant to today's needs and to make school more equitable. But the more holistic approach to teaching and learning also requires a re-thinking of teachers' education. Teachers and school leaders are thus one of the priorities of the current and forthcoming work programme.

Ministers of Education in 2007⁵ noted that "teaching provides a service of considerable social relevance: teachers play a vital role in enabling people to identify and develop their talents

1 Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020") (2009/C 119/02)

2 Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training - Indicators and benchmarks 2008. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc1522_en.htm.

3 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (December 2006) on key competences for lifelong learning. (2006/962/EC)

4 Preparing young people for the 21st century: an agenda for European cooperation on schools Conclusions of the Education Council (November 2008)

5 Conclusions of the Education Council, 15 November 2007.

and to fulfil their potential for personal growth and well-being, as well as in helping them to acquire the complex range of knowledge, skills and key competences that they will need as citizens throughout their personal, social and professional lives.

They recognised that teachers must be capable of: “creating a safe and attractive school environment which is based on mutual respect and cooperation”, and must be able to “teach effectively in heterogeneous classes of pupils from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and with a wide range of abilities and needs, including special education needs”.

-Youth policy

The new EU *Strategy for Youth - Investing and Empowering* adopted by the Commission on 27 April 2009 proposes a dual approach: putting in place greater resources to develop policy areas that affect youth in their daily life and improve their well being, on one hand, promoting the potential of all young people, with a focus on those with fewer opportunities on the other hand. This strategy calls for greater collaboration between youth policies and other policy areas such as education, employment, inclusion and health, with youth activities and youth work playing a supporting role.

Health of young people is one of eight fields of action proposed by the Commission. The strategy underlines the role physical and/or mental health can play either in youth's participation, or on their social exclusion. It highlights also the specificity of youth in health issues, which thus need to be tackled cross-sectorally. An objective is to encourage healthy living for young people and physical education, sporting activity and collaboration between youth workers, health professionals and sporting organisations with a focus on preventing and treating obesity, injury, addictions and substance abuse, and maintaining mental and sexual health.

A range of actions are proposed, such as implementing the Council Resolution on Health and Well-being of Young People; promoting training opportunities on health for youth workers and youth leaders; encouraging cooperation between health and youth policy makers, and youth involvement in health policy; mobilising all stakeholders at local level to detect and help young people at risk; developing tailor-made information on health for young people, particularly those at risk of social exclusion, and mobilising youth information networks; encouraging peer-to-peer health education at school and in youth organisations.

Furthermore, in order to support the new youth cooperation framework, the Commission services are publishing the first report on Youth in the European Union, the EU Youth Report. The objective of this report, which was requested by the Council of the European Union, is to support the youth cooperation framework by collecting available statistics and data on the conditions of young people and to make the evidence and knowledge on the situation of young people in Europe accessible. One part of this report does address the health of the European youth.

Information society policy

Children and young people are expert users of online communication technologies like Internet and mobile phones. Although their use mostly benefits them, they might also experience risks or be prone to harm. The Safer Internet Programme covers the full range of

online risks for children, and some of them specifically have effect on their mental health: encountering potentially harmful material (eg. pornographic, violent or racist material), being bullied (cyberbullying), meeting online contacts offline, exposing oneself with images and videos etc.

In order to make sure that children and youth are empowered to keep safe online, the Safer Internet Programme under the Directorate General for Information Society and Media runs campaigns, conducts surveys and amongst a range of other activities co-funds a network of 27 Safer Internet Awareness centres in most Member States plus Norway and Iceland who carry out awareness-raising activities towards children, parents and teachers and organise Safer Internet Day each year. On Safer Internet Day 2009, a campaign was launched on the issue of "cyberbullying", which has reached most countries in Europe with a video clip with the message that bullying can be stopped.

The Safer Internet Programme also co-funds 19 Safer Internet helplines which work in conjunction with the Awareness Centres. The helplines are easily accessible contact points (phone, e-mail, chats, blogs etc) where parents and children can receive answers to questions about how to stay safe online, including advice on how to deal with issues such as grooming and cyber-bullying – in this regard, the helplines contribute towards the mental well-being of children and youth.

Regional Policy

Member States and Regions are able to use funding available under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for developing their health infrastructure.

In the context of the ERDF, a programme aiming to promote cooperation in the fields of urban development and to foster the exchange of experience among European cities is URBACT II. One theme addressed under the URBACT II programme is quality sustainable development with, amongst others, the project "Building Healthy Communities". It addresses the limited awareness of the contributions that a "healthy" urban policy can make to tackle challenges in health.

Research policy

Research on mental health has been supported across the various Framework Programmes. During the period 1998-2006, 17 projects have been financed for a total amount of about €24 million, including projects specifically dedicated to children and adolescents, and dealing specifically with mental health promotion and mental diseases prevention. The current Framework Programme (FP7, 2007-2013) has several entry points where research on children and adolescents mental health can be funded. For example, the Cooperation Work Programme includes under the Health Theme an overarching activity on child health, including childhood and adolescent mental health and disorders. Other opportunities for research in this field are also offered under activities such as "Research on the brain and related diseases", "Human development and ageing" or "Optimising the delivery of health care to European citizens". Dedicated topic will certainly appear in future Health calls.

As a complement to collaborative research, the FP7 also includes opportunities for individual researchers working in all fields of science, including mental disorders. In particular, the Ideas Work Programme includes a new initiative, the European Research Council⁶, which finances individual frontier research via advanced and starting grants.

More information:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/health/home_en.html

http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home_en.html

ANNEX

Examples of ongoing projects financed from Framework Programmes:

- o **ProMenPol** - Promoting and protecting mental health – supporting policy through integration of research, current approaches and practice

The project seeks to promote a ‘cross-sectoral’ consensus policy platform on mental health within the EU through identifying useful and practical approaches to the promotion and protection of mental health, to form the basis for a systematic multidimensional approach to promoting personal mental health and managing the risk factors that predispose distress and pathology. The project will propose Toolkits, bringing together current good practice, customised to three life stages and three contexts, i.e. school, the workplace and residences for older people.

Project web-site: <http://www.mentalhealthpromotion.net/>

- o **IMAGEN** - Reinforcement-related behaviour in normal brain function and psychopathology

IMAGEN wants to use neuroimaging to identify the neurobiological and genetic basis of individual differences in brain responses to reward, punishment and emotional cues in adolescents, and to assess their relevance to mental disorders. To this end, the project will perform the first multicentre functional and structural genetic-neuroimaging study of a cohort of 2,000 + 14 year old adolescents. Intermediate phenotypes of risk for adolescent mental illness will be explored based on cognitive, behavioural, clinical and neuroimaging data.

Project web-site: www.imagen-europe.com

- o **SEYLE** - Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe

A pilot intervention study will be implemented to assess 3 different health promoting / suicide prevention programmes in 11000 students across 11 European countries. Objectives are to:

I. Gather information on health and well-being in adolescents; II. Perform interventions leading to better health through decreased risk-taking and suicidal behaviours; III. Evaluate outcomes of interventions from a multidisciplinary perspective including social, psychological and economical aspects; IV. Recommend an effective trans-cultural model for promoting health for adolescents in Europe.

Project web-site: to be developed

- o **CHERISH** - Improving Diagnoses of Mental Retardation in Children in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia through Genetic Characterisation and Bioinformatics/-Statistics
CHERISH will establish an Eastern Europe and Central Asia consortium to develop a standardized approach for diagnosis of mental retardation (MR), create a large data-base of patients, identify and

⁶ <http://erc.europa.eu/>

sequence MR genes, analyse the molecular epidemiology of MR in Eastern European populations, and increase awareness on the possible genetic origin of MR and implications for novel therapeutic strategies. This will help reducing the health care costs and improving quality of life of the concerned population.

Project web-site: <http://www.cherishproject.eu/>

o **RICHE** - a platform and inventory for child health research in Europe

The health of European children is satisfactory, but there are concerns, such as obesity, mental health, alcohol abuse, and sexuality. The objective is to establish a network for researchers, funders, policy makers, advocates and young people in Europe, to support the future of child health research. RICHE will produce an inventory of research, report on gaps and make roadmaps for future research. It will support the development and implementation of child health research strategies and the use of evidence for child health action. These in turn will support innovative research and improve social policy for children.

Project web-site: to be developed (project under negotiation)