



## European Health Union: a new comprehensive approach to mental health

Brussels, 7 June 2023

Today, delivering on the commitment of President **von der Leyen** in the 2022 State of the Union Address, the Commission adds a pillar to the European Health Union: a new comprehensive approach to mental health.

**This approach** is a first and important step to **put mental health on par with physical health** and to ensure a **new, cross sectoral approach** to mental health issues. With 20 flagship initiatives and €1.23 billion in EU funding from different financial instruments, the Commission will support Member States putting people and their mental health first.

Today's communication comes timely: before the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health problems already affected 1 in 6 people in the EU, situation which has worsened with the unprecedented crises experienced over the past years. The **cost of non-action** is significant, amounting to €600 billion every year.

### Mental health matters: key elements to tackle mental health issues

Against the backdrop of significant technological, environmental and societal changes, affecting people's ability to cope, **EU action on mental health will focus on three guiding principles:**

- (i) adequate and effective **prevention**,
- (ii) access to high quality and affordable mental **healthcare and treatment**, and
- iii) **reintegration** into society after recovery.

This comprehensive approach looks at mental health across all policies to recognise the multifaceted risk factors of mental-ill health. Following this approach, concrete actions will cover a broad area of policies and include efforts to:

- **Promote good mental health** through prevention and early detection, including through a European depression and suicide prevention initiative, a European Code for Mental Health and strengthened research on brain health.
- **Invest in training and capacity building** that reinforces mental health across policies and improves access to treatment and care. Actions will include training and exchange programmes for professionals and technical support for mental health reforms at the national level.
- **Ensure good mental health at work** by raising awareness and improving prevention. This will be done for instance through EU-wide awareness raising campaigns by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) and a possible future EU initiative on psycho-social risks at work.
- **Protect children and the young** during their most vulnerable and formative years, in a context of increasing pressures and challenges. Measures include a a child and youth mental health network, a prevention toolkit for children addressing the key health determinants of mental and physical health, and better protection online and on social media.
- **Address vulnerable groups** by providing targeted support to those most in need, such as the elderly, people in difficult economic or social situations and migrant/refugee populations. A special focus includes conflict-affected populations, notably people (in particular children) displaced from Ukraine and children in Ukraine subject to the trauma of war.
- **Lead by example** at the international level by raising awareness and providing quality mental health support in humanitarian emergencies.

### Background

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health problems affected **around 84 million people** in the EU, and these figures have only worsened since then. The pandemic has placed additional

pressures on mental health, especially among young people and those with pre-existing mental health conditions. In her [State of the Union address](#) in September 2022, President Ursula **von der Leyen** called for a new initiative on mental health.

The initiative also addresses calls from the European Parliament, and a proposal put forward by citizens in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The **cost of non-action** on mental health is **significant** and projected to rise, following global challenges linked to social, political and environmental changes, increased digitalisation, economic pressures and radical shifts in the labour market. The total costs of mental health issues – which include the costs to health systems and social security programmes, but also lower employment and worker productivity – are estimated to amount to more than 4% of GDP across EU countries, equivalent to over €600 billion per year<sup>[1]</sup>.

## For More Information

[Communication](#)

[Mental health \(europa.eu\)](#)

[Video on Mental Health](#)

[Factsheet on Mental Health](#)

[1] Health at a Glance – Europe 2018: [https://health.ec.europa.eu/state-health-eu/health-glance-europe/health-glance-europe-2018\\_en](https://health.ec.europa.eu/state-health-eu/health-glance-europe/health-glance-europe-2018_en)

IP/23/3050

Quotes:

Mental health is as important to our wellbeing as physical health. This was recalled again by citizens during the Conference on the Future of Europe. Today, we are taking a major step to support mental health in Europe, for the most vulnerable including for people and children fleeing from Ukraine. Children who have to overcome terrible experiences. Our European approach, the first of its kind, puts mental health on par with physical health and outlines everything we do to make sure support is accessible and affordable to all who need it.  
Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission - 07/06/2023

Today we are presenting a comprehensive, anthropocentric approach to mental health. Our Communication is an important step towards a healthier Europe, where the psychosocial needs of the most vulnerable of our societies are at the heart of our efforts. Solidarity with and protection of the most vulnerable are core European values, key components of our European way of life.  
Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life - 07/06/2023

There is no health without mental health and there can be no European Health Union without equal and timely access to prevention, treatment and care for our mental health. Today marks a new beginning for a comprehensive, prevention-oriented and multi-stakeholder approach to mental health at EU level. We need to break down stigma and discrimination so that those in need can reach out and receive the support they need. It is ok not to be ok, and it is our duty to ensure that everyone asking for help has access to it.  
Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety - 07/06/2023

Around half of European workers consider stress to be common in their workplace and it contributes to around half of all lost working days. It is time we confront the issue head-on for the benefit of our workers and our economy alike. As a company, if you do not have a healthy workforce, you cannot meet your productivity potential, so there is both a social and an economic imperative to tackling this increasing trend. Our mental health at work is just as important as our physical health.  
Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights - 07/06/2023

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