



Consultation on Public Transport

MHE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the “Green Paper towards a New Culture for Urban Mobility”. The document is certainly an instrument with important challenges for better transport for people with disabilities. We can only agree on the different proposals for achieve more accessible, safer and securer transport but have many reserves as far as implementation is concerned.

In MHE’s report “From Exclusion to Inclusion – The way forward to Promoting Social Inclusion of People with Mental Health Problems in Europe”. An analysis based on national reports from MHE members in the 27 EU Member States we could find several references to the problems people with mental health problems face in the field of transport. We would like to clarify this specific needs and challenges people with mental health problems encounter with transport.

Urban transport being a major instrument to tackle social exclusion of people with mental health problems, lack or bad transport is excluding them further from society.

The barriers encountered can be:

- Lack of urban transport in many regions. Very often urban and public transport in remote areas is non existing and very irregular. This obliges people with mental health problems to have treatment in hospitals and not in out patient facilities. Busses also do not deserve frequently so that people cannot return home in the evening.
- Financial reasons. Transport is expensive and people with mental health problems have difficulties in paying the fare. They cannot receive the reduction or financial support some countries give to the other disabled people. Here again, people stay at home cannot visit friends, day centres, leisure facilities, hospitals, etc. which exclude them more and more.
- No personal assistant. In some cases people with mental health need a personal assistant to accompany them, as other disabled persons. These assistant have to pay the full fare which again is discrimination compared with other disabled persons. The major reasons where accompanying persons are needed are: anxiety disorders and dementia.
- Attitude of staff. People with mental health problems have often difficulties with charging systems and the staff approach is often discriminating. Also information (ITS) is difficult for people with mental health problems. Training programs for staff (not only for technical purposes but also in psychological support to people with disabilities and elderly people) should be implemented. Education, training and awareness raising have a very important role in making transport more “people friendly”

Positive initiatives taken with regard to ensuring access to transport possibilities for people with mental health problems include a special pass issued in Luxembourg that allows for the use of public transport without charges. In Estonia, there are efforts to provide out-patient care services as close as possible to the patient's place of residence in order to avoid problems of transport. And in many countries, mental health and social care organisations organise transport for the users of their services themselves on a voluntary basis.

Recommendations

Many countries report that people with mental health problems face situations of isolation, loneliness and social exclusion due to transport problems. Social aspects of transport should be a challenge for the policy makers.

- ➔ Provide people with mental health problems with price reductions support for access to public transport, just as for all people with disabilities
- ➔ Pay special attention to people living in rural areas with limited access to public transport.
- ➔ Raise awareness of transport staff for the specific problems people with mental health problems have.
- ➔ Keep prices of fare low and affordable for people with low income.

Annex: Country reports on transport

In MHE's report "From Exclusion to Inclusion – The way forward to Promoting Social Inclusion of People with Mental Health Problems in Europe". An analysis based on national reports from MHE members in the 27 EU Member States we could find several references to the problems people with mental health problems face in the field of transport

Austria

Participation in public transport still forms a major barrier for people with mental health problems. In order to guarantee mobility, people with mental health problems are often in need of a person to assist and accompany them.

Belgium

In the Flemish region of Belgium, some psychiatric institutions are not reachable via public transport, which creates difficulties for relatives to visit patients. The same problem exists in the Walloon region, where services are sometimes not well-accessible. In cases where public transport is not available, access for people with mental health problems becomes even more difficult

Bulgaria

No exclusion except for economic reasons.

Cyprus

People with mental health problems and their families experience important difficulties in mobility (public transport is deficient). As a result of the fact that their needs are not addressed under the schemes of the physically disabled persons (with benefits/exemptions for public transportation) it is not possible for them to have easy access to area of community participation which could enable inclusion.

Czech Republic

It seems that transport is not a very problematic issue for people with mental health problems. If people have a right to full disability pension they can travel for lower prices by bus or train; however, with "restricted" disability pension there is no such advantage.

The issue of transport is in fact related to the financial situation, given the lack of money people with mental health problems have to think twice before they decide to travel somewhere, be it for therapy, to visit a day hospital, etc., so that in many cases they have to simply stay at home.

Denmark

No special services are offered to people with mental health problems.

Estonia

People with mental health problems experience difficulties accessing mental health services as a result of an inability to pay for public transport. Furthermore, transport is crucial for access to any kind of services, for example employment, leisure etc. Especially in rural areas the social exclusion is magnified by long distances and reduced frequency of public transport.

An effort is made to provide family physicians and specialised out-patient care services as close as possible to the patient's place of residence, thus avoiding transport costs for reaching help. Some local communities have organised transport for people who are interested in participating in day centre activities.

France

People with mental health problems are treated as other handicapped people without holding specific account of need.

Greece

There is no law that gives people with mental health problems the opportunity to travel at no or reduced costs. Some organizations provide mini-buses for the transport of their service users when needed.

Ireland

A number of options are provided on a voluntary basis to meet the transport needs of people with mental health problems to access day activities or for social outings.

Italy

Public transport possibilities are generally good. There are different projects to pick up users from their houses. However, it is important to encourage people with mental health problems to use public transport with the aim to make them more and more autonomous. It could be convenient to offer tickets at lower price for people with low income or without a job.

Latvia

When asked about the transport situation, workers who work with people with mental health problems say that this is not a problem for them because only some of drivers of public transport do not want to carry them.

People with invalidity can access transport free of charge, but transport is not always available, for example, in some smaller cities. There is lack of budget for it.

Lithuania

Transport is problematic especially for children with mental health problems who live in rural and remote geographic areas.

Luxembourg

The transport situation is quite favourable for people with mental health problems who can often get a pass to use public transport without charges.

Malta

Whilst public transport is generally good, there are no projects or support targeting people with mental health problems. It would be helpful if transport subsidies are provided for those with low income or people who are unemployed.

Poland

People with legally acknowledged disability pay a lower price for public transport. People legally acknowledged as severely disabled can travel with an accompanying person who is entitled to travel without paying for a ticket.

In bigger cities, reduced price transport services are accessible for disabled or chronically ill persons. However, public transport is not equally accessible in different regions of Poland.

The same is true for mental health care facilities. Sometimes it is necessary to travel more than 100km to a mental health centre. This may become extremely difficult because of poor transport possibilities. Some local governments and self-help community centres organise transport for users of rehabilitation services – especially in rural areas and small towns.

Portugal

There are no special measures related to support for transport or mobility of people with mental disorders.

Romania

As a result of decentralisation it depends on the local authority what type of transport benefits are given to people with disabilities.

Scotland

Social isolation is an important factor for deteriorating mental health and suicide. Particularly in rural areas, people with mental health problems report that poor transport facilities increase their isolation and access to services. A MIND Report in 2004 reported that 84% of people with mental health problems feel isolated compared to 29% of the general population and nearly 60% of people with mental health problems felt that isolation was linked to discrimination on the grounds of mental health.

Slovakia

There is not specially designated budget for a help with transport of people with mental health problems. Only if someone has an invalidity status he/she has the right for a price reduction of 50% for both city, intercity and international transport.

Slovenia

People with mental health problems do not have any special rights like other groups of disabled people do (e.g. discounts, tax relief, and special provisions).

Spain

There is not much available information on the special needs of people with mental illness regarding transport. One issue that emerged was that in a specific case a group of people with mental illness have had problems to travel by plane. They needed to present a report from their doctor stating that they are able to travel and that they would understand the instructions from the crew in case of an emergency. This situation reveals the existing stigma, which on the other hand may be a necessary requirement for the establishment of special transport and travelling rights for people with disabilities.

Mental Health Europe, April 2008