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Mental Health Europe Position Paper on the occasion of the High-level Conference on Labour Market Inclusion

Inclusion of Young People with Mental Health Problems into Employment

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Policy Context - Unemployment of young people with mental health problems

Mental Health Europe welcomes the High-level Conference on Labour Market Inclusion, particularly as one of its main areas for discussion will be focussing on labour market inclusion for young people with health problems.

In nearly all EU member states, some groups in society are more vulnerable than others, with fewer chances to access the labour market such as younger people, older people, and people with health problems, migrants and homeless. Young people with (mental) health problems have a dual disadvantage. On the one hand they lack experience and therefore have fewer chances to enter into employment and on the other hand when they have additional (mental) health problems, employers are even more reluctant to employ them. This effect is being emphasised by the current economic and financial crisis.

In their Communication "Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society", the European Commission emphasises the importance of integration of young people with health problems into the labour market and calls for the elimination of barriers in education and training and their engagement in community life, while it also testifies the link between a lower socio-economic status and levels of education with a higher incidence of mental and physical health problems as well as drug abuse. Also, in the context of ageing societies, the importance of better, earlier and more investment in young people to promote their education, employment, social inclusion, health and active citizenship in a lifecycle approach is highlighted.¹

Furthermore, the EU's Active Inclusion Strategy² with its claim for adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services calls on the EU member states to build the prerequisites for the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as for example people with mental health problems into society and employment, whereas it needs to be pointed out that more efforts are needed. The implementation of this strategy is still pending in many EU member states and specific measures are needed to ease young people's access to the labour market,

¹ Commission Communication "Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society" COM(2007)498 final: http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0498en01.pdf

² Commission Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market C(2008) 5737)

especially of those young people who are suffering from health problems. Targeted support programmes play a crucial role in this context such as does effective mentoring of the young job seekers.

The European Pact for Mental Health and Wellbeing³ with its five priority areas: older people, youth, mental health in the workplace, depression and suicide as well as the fight against stigma, discrimination and social exclusion, provides some recommendations for policy-makers and calls on ensuring early intervention for the detection of mental health problems in the educational system including the training of professionals in the health and education sectors. In this context, the training of teachers to identify and react sensitively to mental health problems is one important element.

Young People in today's Europe

Societal circumstances play a decisive role in the occurrence of mental health problems of young people. 50 % of all mental health problems have their onset in childhood and adolescence. Also mental health problems among young people have been increasing in the last years.

Nowadays, we often observe that more and more people have a lesser degree of emotional intelligence, everyone is more and more focused on themselves with less consideration for other people. Society witnesses an increasing number of divorces and single-parent households who have to cope with a number of challenges without support from anyone else. In this context, young people have more difficulties in finding their way. Young people need a feeling of belonging and security in order to develop a healthy self-confidence and trust in their own abilities. Often youth lack this feeling of security and confidence which can result in depression, aggressive behaviour or alcohol and drug abuse.

The solution of mental health problems should not exclusively be sought in medical treatments, but should be found in the creation of a framework to foster the healthy development of an adolescent. This includes the provision of a minimum income for families, the provision of appropriate accommodation and the reconciliation of work and family life, for example by the provision of adequate childcare services. Moreover, the social environment should be strengthened, for example with an offer of social and leisure activities, also in deprived areas, where young people feel secure and accepted and where they can further develop their own personality. It needs adults who are ready and willing to act as role models. At the same time, they should give youth the feeling that they respect and appreciate them and encourage them to be an active citizen.

Furthermore, the school system plays a crucial role in the transition of young people into the labour market. Young people should be supported in discovering and developing their talents and capabilities and to establish what profession to choose. Schools and their teachers are often not trained to provide this guidance in an appropriate way. For young people with mental health problems a more tailor-made approach is needed.

³ See EC web site : http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/mental/docs/pact_en.pdf

Mental Health Europe's recommendations for policy-makers to foster the inclusion of young people with mental health problems into the labour market

- Focus on early intervention of mental health problems to streamline mental health and wellbeing of the population at all levels to respond to the needs of youth in today's society and to ease their successful integration into the labour market.
- Provide for the overall framework to support families to enable youth to grow up in an environment that supports the development of their skills. This should include adequate childcare but also support structures in schools encouraging young people to discover and develop their talents and capabilities in order to support them to choose a profession that suits them best. Teacher training should therefore address the ability to provide this support to the youth, and these skills should regularly be strengthened through continuous training of the teachers.
- Urge the state and its Public Employment Services to assume responsibility to ensure the provision of functioning guidance and counselling for young people, tailored to the individual needs of the young people including those with mental health problems and also provide opportunities to receive job coaching after having taken up employment.
- Apply a holistic approach to include young people with mental health problems into the labour market, including targeted training, work placements, confidence building, mentoring and flexibility in working time.
- Provide effective information and interaction of labour offices with (potential) employers to increase their awareness for the integration of particularly disadvantaged groups such as people with mental health problems.
- Support anti-stigma campaigns and activities in media, schools and at the workplace to promote the integration of people with mental disorders, and promote good examples of successfully integrated young people with health problems into work towards employers.
- Develop strategies to overcome barriers to take up an employment by avoiding the incompatibility between work and incapacity payments, avoid that taking up an employment automatically leads to the loss of incapacity payment rights.
- Increase financial support for labour market inclusion of young people with mental health problems, for example through the European Social Fund.
- Improve the overall working conditions in Europe to ensure a long and (mentally) healthy working life by minimizing the precariousness of workers, promoting secure contracts and cushioning the effects of unemployment by the provision of a minimum income that allows everyone to live in dignity.

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.

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