



REDUCING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS

Policy recommendations from Mental Health Europe

Brussels, April 2009

How the economic crisis affect mental health

In its Communication "Driving European recovery"¹, the European Commission highlighted the need of supporting people through the crisis and of reducing its human cost. A key aspect in this context is to minimise the harmful impact of the crisis on the mental health and well-being of people.

The psychosocial impact of the crisis is a complex interaction. The crisis leads to a deterioration of several socio-economic determinants of the mental health and well-being of the EU-population². The crisis drastically shifts the social determinants of health to the negative. In particular, mental health and well-being are concerned. Protective factors, such as life control, get weakened, while risks increase.

The prevention of mental health problems plays a crucial role to act before mental health problems occur or to alleviate their gravity. People experiencing poverty are particularly vulnerable towards getting mental health problems, since due to financial hardship or not having a job frequently their social contacts are suffering and there is often a lack of personal recognition and fear and uncertainty about the future dominate their daily lives.

Mental Health Europe (MHE), among other NGOs active in the field of mental health, is strongly concerned about the negative impact that the financial and economic crisis can have and is already having on the mental health sector of many Member States. MHE calls upon policy and decision makers at EU and national level to take responsibility to protect the mental health and well-being of the population. MHE wishes that the citizens of Europe are empowered to design and receive the care which is appropriate for a democratic society and a modern Europe.

¹ COM 114 final of 4 March 2009: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/press_20090304_en.pdf
² Round Table "Reducing the psychosocial impact of the financial and economic crisis", Brussels, 27 April 2009 (MHE represented here by Ms Malgorzata Kmita, President, and Mary Van Dievel, Director):
http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/mental/docs/ev_20090427_rd01_en.pdf

Key recommendations from Mental Health Europe

Acknowledging the fact that there is a need for a significant political step to make mental health and wellbeing a key priority, and taking forward the recommendations of the European Commission Communication on "Driving European Recovery", Mental Health Europe invites policy and decision makers to take urgent action to reduce the psychosocial impact of the financial and economic crisis. NGOs have to be closely engaged in the decision making process as they play a crucial role in building social cohesion and protecting those groups of the population at major risk of developing mental health problems:

- **NGOs are essential in delivering participatory democracy.** Slogans such "People before profit" and "People Matter" can be very meaningful at times of change and crisis.
- **NGOs are essential in affirming civil society in Europe** by reaching out to local communities and by reminding people that they can affect change at political, social and economic levels.
- **NGOs can be closer to humanitarian issues/concerns** and able to understand how societal decisions affect everyday lives of ordinary people and their mental health and well-being (e.g. experiences of domestic violence, traumas, poverty, inequality and discrimination). Human mental capital is indeed the force to be reckoned with.
- **NGOs can raise awareness**, lobby decision makers, give evidence and support (e.g. the de-institutionalisation process), press for actions at local, national and European levels, organise campaigns informed by current political and social thinking.
- **NGOs can encourage citizens to increase their levels of observance** whilst monitoring of human rights issues, improvements in welfare and self help / empowering strategies.
- **NGOs can allow people to establish local ways of providing life course support** and to avoid stigma, discrimination and social exclusion, which are very meaningful at times of crisis.
- **NGOs can act as conduits between European and governmental organisations** by translating policies into local awareness and action. NGOs can thus help establish information exchanges through the engagement and empowerment of their member organisations,
- **NGOs can help harness our human and mental capital** where citizens become disaffected. This is indeed a big strength and support for European citizens.
- **NGOs can enable people and politicians to better understand how social determinants of health can affect mental health and well-being.** This can be achieved by seeking the views of local people regarding their experiences and identifying mechanisms which constrain or impinge upon freedoms. NGOs can also encourage alternative views and solutions in times of crisis and difficulties.
- **NGOs rely on the method of open dialogue and exchange** and can play a vital role in creating solidarity amongst service users and ex users and in independent evaluation of policies, strategies and procedures with users and carers support. NGOs can also influence (mental) health professionals and help expand on the holistic vision of mental health and well-being.

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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