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**Mental Health Europe Position Paper on the occasion of  
the 7th European Round Table on Poverty and Social exclusion**

**"Active inclusion strategy for the people furthest from  
the labour market"**

***Marseille, France, 15-16 October 2008***

### **Introduction**

Mental Health Europe (MHE) welcomes the Round Table's focus on active inclusion as a unique opportunity to discuss the situation of people with mental health problems who are amongst the most vulnerable groups in society that are furthest away from the labour market.

Low social and economic status increases people's vulnerability for mental ill-health. Job loss and unemployment can lower self-esteem and lead to depression and poverty and this is an increasing dilemma in our today's society. Good mental health and well-being of the European population is a valuable resource, which enables citizens to realise their full intellectual and emotional potential and to find and fulfil their roles in society, in school, in working life and in retirement.

Targeted measures to create more and better jobs have to include vulnerable groups on the labour market such as persons with mental health problems who are often excluded from the first labour market. The economy should take full advantage of **all** existing potentials.

Mental Health Europe welcomes the Commission Recommendation of 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market. MHE sees the Active Inclusion strategy as one important element of the Social Inclusion strategy and stresses the importance of the three pillars minimum income, access to social services and inclusion into the labour market. MHE would like to highlight the following specific issues:

## **1. Minimum Income**

Clear and fair regulations on income for each group furthest from the labour market such as people with mental health problems should be enhanced. A minimum income should be provided for every citizen in the EU to promote equal opportunities for all in terms of minimum living standards ensuring a dignified life. The term "minimum income" should be further specified on the European level in order to facilitate a EU-wide harmonisation and applicability. Related regulations need to be clear and fair.

At the same time, the compatibility between work incomes and social benefits need to be assured. The taking up of an employment may not result in the complete loss of social contributions for covering costs related to the treatment of mental health problems. This will create incentives for the search of an employment that suits to the capabilities of the respective persons, leading to their social and professional (re)integration. Another problem to be tackled is that beneficiaries of social benefits such as people with mental health problems are often classified as economically inactive rather than unemployed which can lead to a lack of access to employment services that help people to get back into work.

## **2. Access to Quality Social Services**

Quality Social Services should not be a privilege of the working population due to their work-related social benefits. Everyone should have access to adequate social services and medical treatment, especially vulnerable groups like persons with mental health problems, and the provision of free-of-charge quality social services adapted to their specific needs should be promoted. The services should also include care services that are in particular important for women who would like to take up employment and preferential access to these services should be granted to the vulnerable groups.

MHE calls for the extension of mechanisms to inform people with mental health problems about their rights regarding financial support and access to social services, e.g. through the creation of contact points for advice and therefore appreciates the corresponding provisions in the Recommendation. Persons with mental health problems, especially those living in rural areas, often face a lack of transportation facilities and a limited budget. Price reductions and support for access to public transport for people with mental health problems and other vulnerable groups who rely on social assistance should be granted.

## **3. Integration of persons with mental health problems into the labour market**

Persons with mental health problems face particular problems regarding their (re)integration into the labour market and therefore this group needs specific attention.

One crucial element of the Active Inclusion strategy should be to take into account the difficulties of vulnerable groups furthest from the labour market such as persons with mental health illnesses and provide adequate support schemes with targeted advisory services. For job-seekers with a mental illness background this should include guidance, personal development and training, both vocational training and continuous training in the sense of a lifelong learning approach. A strategy for

pursuing sequential steps of integration (e.g. using public transport independently; engaging in voluntary work; engaging in part-time work; engaging in supported full-time work; work-related coaching; engaging in the regular labour market) should be further developed and implemented. MHE welcomes the approach of progressive reintegration into society and the labour market and the support for the social economy as well as the provision of financial incentives for employers as indicated in the Recommendation. Employers are often reluctant to recruit persons with mental health problems because of prejudices. Therefore it is important to raise the awareness among employers of the benefit and employment potentials of people with mental health problems.

MHE furthermore suggests to stimulate the possibility of reducing work time for mental health reasons and to find schemes which will allow the concerned person to retain a sufficient income and social security scheme. The Active Inclusion strategy also has to take into account the aspects of gender-related discrimination since women in particular face difficulties in (re)entering the labour market due to a lack of the provision of available child and other care services for dependents.

NGOs and other civil society organisations such as mental health associations should be increasingly involved in the discussion, drafting, implementation and monitoring of the National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion as a good means to achieve a more targeted approach for the (re)integration of persons with mental health problems into the labour market.

The OMC and the European support schemes are to play a crucial role regarding the provision of an adequate financial frame for the development of sustainable community-based mental health services. In this context, a bigger emphasis should be put on (financial) support of NGOs and other voluntary providers of mental health and social services.

Mental Health Europe emphasizes that Active Inclusion may not replace Social Inclusion, but should be seen as a part of it, therewith strengthening the Social Cohesion Pillar of the Lisbon Strategy.

Mental Health Europe is a European level non-governmental organisation (NGO) and network committed to the promotion of positive mental health and well-being, the prevention of mental disorders, the improvement of care, advocacy for social inclusion and the protection of the human rights of people with mental health problems and their families and carers.

MHE is recognised under Belgian law as an international not-for-profit organisation, which represents associations, organisations and individuals active in the field of mental health and well-being in Europe. In 2008, MHE has 67 member organisations in 30 European countries as well as 72 individual members. All the Member States of the European Union are represented in the membership.

Membership of MHE is open to NGOs, individuals, professionals, volunteers and others, including people with mental health problems, who are active in the mental health field at local, national, regional or European level and who share and who support MHE's vision. MHE represents the common interest of these organisations and lobbies and advocate for it at the European level.

For further information about MHE's position on the occasion of the 7th Round Table on Poverty and Social Inclusion, please contact MHE at: [info@mhe-sme.org](mailto:info@mhe-sme.org), +32 2 280 04 68