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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Mental Health Europe Contribution to the 8th Roundtable on Poverty and Social Exclusion: Social Inclusion of People with Mental Health Problems in Times of Recession

On the occasion of the 8th Roundtable on Poverty and Social Exclusion, taking place on 15-16 October 2009 in Stockholm under the auspices of the Swedish EU Presidency, Mental Health Europe (MHE) contributed with a Position Paper on the social inclusion of people with mental health problems in times of recession.

Mental Health Europe welcomes the Roundtable on Poverty and Social Exclusion's focus on social inclusion in times of recession and would like to point out that the current financial and economic crisis has a considerable effect on the mental health and well-being of the population. Due to financial hardship and uncertainties about the future, especially depressions, anxiety-disorders and Burn-Out are more and more commonplace.

Conversely to this development, several countries responded to the crisis and their rising public deficits with cuts in spending for public services, including mental health and social protection. Some countries like Hungary and Latvia are furthermore subject to conditionality of their International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans, demanding them to cut public expenditures. This is further aggravating the negative effect on mental health and access to basic social rights. Current developments in many countries also include redundancies and the closing of health, social and educational institutions.

Since the economic and financial crisis hit Europe, depression increased within the population, affecting not only people made redundant in the crisis, but whole families face an unsecure future. Due to unemployment and increasing poverty, social bonds are weakening and there has been an increased number of suicides. Another related negative effect that can be observed in the current situation is the increase in domestic violence. The mental health and well-being of children and young people is fundamental to the future social and economic growth of the European region. Targeted measures need to be taken in order to fight child poverty and to prevent the onset of mental disorders in childhood.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is warning of a "social crisis" with forecasted rises in unemployment. Mental Health Europe would like to point out that budget cuts in the social and health sector have a negative influence on solidarity and social cohesion and demands that measures are taken to counterbalance the effects of the economic crisis on the social situation and the health and well-being of the population.

Mental Health Europe would like to remind policy makers of the commitments made within the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being in the frame of 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. In times of recession with its effect on the mental health and well-being of the population and the deterioration of available health and social services, these priorities are more relevant than ever.

Mental Health Europe calls on policy-makers to take leadership

- The effective implementation of the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being needs to be ensured. The respect of human rights and the promotion of mental health and well-being for all must become key priorities in all policies!
- In the sense of a Social Pact, the exit out of the crisis needs to be managed in a coordinated way, encompassing social protection, housing, employment and training, while at the same time ensuring the reliable functioning of health, social and educational institutions and services in all EU member states.
- Develop a more egalitarian and inclusive social model in which the non-profit sector is an essential actor in order to empower the citizen and to mediate between the most vulnerable, such as people with mental health problems, to pass the right message on to policy-makers.
- Foster the exchange of best practices between EU Member States in the frame of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), in which civil society should also be involved through regular consultations and coordinated interactions with policy-makers.
- Implementation of the Active Inclusion Strategy with adequate minimum income schemes and a concrete outline on how to integrate those who are excluded from the labour market, how to make labour markets more inclusive and ensuring access to quality services.
- Invest in social and health services to ensure citizens' access to a social Europe and acknowledge the important role of health and social services as a motor for job creation, and this investment should be part of the national recovery plans!
- Improve social protection systems in order to cushion the impact of the economic downturn – Commit to strengthen these systems!
- Mental Health Europe calls on policy-makers to take leadership to protect and promote the mental health and well-being of the population. The citizens of Europe must be empowered to design and receive the care which is appropriate for a democratic society and a modern Europe!

To read the full position paper: <http://www.mhe-sme.org/en/publications/mhe-position-papers.html>

For further information:

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Notes to Editors:

Mental Health Europe (MHE) is a European non-governmental 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 (ex-) users of mental health services, their families and carers. For more information: www.mhe-sme.org