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Mental Health Europe Contribution to the European
Commission's Consultation on:

Reforming the Budget, Changing Europe

**A Public Consultation Paper in View of the
2008/2009 Budget Review**

April 2008

MHE Contribution to the EC Consultation on
Reforming the Budget, Changing Europe

About Mental Health Europe

Mental Health Europe (MHE) 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. The membership of MHE is composed of 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 individuals and lobbies and advocate for it at the European level.

MHE welcomes this consultation process, which allows European citizens to make their voice heard in the discussion on the EU budget priorities, design and implementation.

MHE has invited its members to have their say and to comment on the consultation paper. This document aims at providing an overview of the responses that MHE has received.

Changing priorities and needs in Europe

The mental health and well-being of the European population represents a valuable resource. Good mental health and well-being enables citizens to realise their intellectual and emotional potential and to find and fulfill their roles in social, school and working life. For the European Union, mental health and well-being will contribute to the attainment of some of the EU's strategic policy objectives, such as the EU's Lisbon Strategy. Mental ill-health, on the other hand imposes various costs, losses and burdens on citizens and societal systems.

At the present point in time, evidence shows that there ***many changes and situations are at work in Europe, which in many cases negatively affect the mental health and well-being of people***¹: Stress at the work place has risen over the last years due to various insecurities concerning the below minimum-wage and below decent-life salaries, the increase in working hours, the demands and the competition at work etc. For people who already suffer from mental health problems the main problem is to retain their work place or to have access to work. In many

¹ cf. MHE's response to the EC/BEPA consultation paper on "Europe's Social Reality". 2007. <http://www.mhe-sme.org/assets/files/publications/MHE-response-to-europe's-social-reality-stocktaking-exerci..pdf>

cases, people with mental health problems are discriminated against and denied jobs as a result of the stigma and the fear that they could be “dangerous”.

MHE believes that **education** – especially for children and young people - is a key tool towards social integration and inclusion of people with mental health problems. However, many people with mental health problems experience difficulties in equal access to education. This is especially the case in rural areas and areas that are most affected by poverty.

The social implications of the **changing roles of women and men** have various consequences for their mental health and well-being. Many positive developments have taken place in this regard in Europe, but on the other hand, social changes have led to a situation, for women and men alike, where insecurity, controversy and indecision is prevalent. This is often exacerbated by the above mentioned, i.e. a highly competitive job market, not enough possibilities for further education and training, an increasing gap between the rich and the poor and welfare states that are not capable to meet the needs of the citizens. MHE believes that due to the stigma and taboo associated with mental ill-health, people with mental health problems are affected by social changes to an even greater extent.

Connected to this is the matter of declining birth rates as well as child poverty. Without adequate attention and assistance **child poverty** will continue to rise in Europe. Mental illness is an under-recognised but significant contributory factor to child poverty.

The increasing number of **older people** who live alone leads to a rise in higher rates of depression and other mental health problems. The institutionalisation of these people perpetuates their social exclusion and is, in itself, a violation of human rights.

Segregating people, barring them from access to education and employment, denying them the right to choose where and how they live and with whom they associate, solely on the basis of a mental illness label, is unacceptable. And this does not only concern a small minority or only the most vulnerable groups, but it concerns society as a whole, the injustices that exist within and the social disintegration and conflict that results from it.

MHE makes a strong plea to restore social equality and life chances, i.e. opportunities that enable individuals to improve their quality of life. Measures of **EU budgetary reform should be targeted not towards the profit of a few but towards the prosperity of all**. Unity, diversity and social cohesion can only exist under the condition that everyday life is satisfactory for all, that there are life chances for all and equality for all.

MHE believes Europe possesses a great deal of knowledge about the above mentioned social challenges. What is needed now is to use the EU’s resources, including its budget, to promote innovative salutation to meet these challenges and needs in order to prevent further growth of inequalities, rising poverty and social exclusion. **EU policies and programmes must be strengthened that promote a better quality of life for all Europeans**, that is on a large scale and with long-term impact.

MHE position on reforming the EU budget

MHE is convinced that in reforming the EU budget more **attention must be paid to social challenges**, in particular those affecting the mental health and overall well-being of the EU populations such as growing inequalities and exclusion, rising poverty, deterioration of working conditions in certain sectors, downgrading of social protection systems, lack of adequate care infrastructures as well as gaps in the provision and integration of public services.

The **Structural funds, and in particular the European Social Fund**, have a key role to play in this contest, having made a difference for people facing exclusion at the national level. Likewise, some of the **multiannual framework programmes** (e.g. PROGRESS, the Public Health Programme, Daphne) have helped to achieve crucial social objectives. Combating social exclusion and promoting social justice as well as individual well-being requires a mix of strong programmes to help promote innovative solutions.

In the field of mental health many innovative good practices and much needed services and initiatives are carried out by non-governmental associations, operating at the national and local level under heavy financial and human resources constraints². The EU budget and framework programmes must **ensure the financing of these grass root level projects**. Currently many of them are unable to meet the requirements of EU co-financement levels that sometimes amount up to 40% (see for example the Public Health Programme). This is in particular the case for NGOs in the EU 10+2 Member States, many of which do not dispose of the necessary financial resources to take part in European projects and initiatives.

Expanding spending in the social field would support the EU's strategic and social goals by promoting mutual learning, cooperation and sharing of best practice among the Member States.

The **Open Method of Coordination** (OMC) is an important framework for promoting political coordination among Member States to identify and promote their most effective policies in the fields of social inclusion with the aim of learning from each others' experiences. This instrument requires adequate funding to function properly and deliver results. The objectives of the must be supported by an intersectoral policy mix which entails finances.

Any decision on how to distribute and spend the budget should involve all the people living in Europe that ultimately pay for it. **NGOs can play a key role** working with or voicing the concerns of people experiencing social exclusion, poverty and inequality. They can help bridging the gap between governing and governed, and for this reason their role in budgeting should be strengthened.

² cf. MHE. 2008. From Inclusion to Inclusion – The Way Forward to Promoting Social Inclusion of People with Mental Health Problems. An analysis based on national reports from MHE members in 27 EU Members States. [http://www.mhe-sme.org/assets/files/From%20Exclusion%20to%20Inclusion-Final%20version\(1\).pdf](http://www.mhe-sme.org/assets/files/From%20Exclusion%20to%20Inclusion-Final%20version(1).pdf)