



Guidance Note

How to use the European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing?

★ Summary

The close of the [Joint Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) has left us with two important parting gifts:

- [The European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) (the Framework)
- The re-launched [EU Compass for Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) (the Compass).

The Joint Action, the three year project which brought together Member States, the Commission and stakeholders active in the field of mental health from across Europe, was the first real forum for the exchange of best practices on mental health at European level. You can and should benefit from all this expertise and the lessons learned by using the Framework and contributing to the Compass. What happens next really depends on Member State 'buy-in' to the Framework and you can help to encourage Member States to implement its call to action! This guidance is intended to help members understand and use the Framework as a policy tool going forward.

★ What you need to know about the Joint Action

It is important to remember the context in which the Joint Action began and the EU's limited and non-legislative competency in relation to health which consists of a leadership and co-ordination role to encourage the sharing of ideas and practices. With the EU's limited competency in mind, [the Council invited](#) Member States and the Commission to set-up the Joint Action in 2013 to provide a platform for exchange of views, cooperation and coordination between member states. 25 Member States choose to take part voluntarily in this Joint Action which is the culmination of [over ten years](#) of work at EU level on mental health.

★ Facts about the Joint Action

Who was involved? 51 partners representing 28 EU Member States, as well as Norway and Iceland, and 11 European organisations including MHE

Who funded it? The European Agency for Health and Consumers and DG Sanco through the EU health programme.

What was the focus? 5 key work packages: preventing depression and suicide and e-health approaches, community-based approaches, mental health at workplaces, mental health and schools and mental health in all policies.

Who co-ordinated? Nova Medical School at Nova University of Lisbon in conjunction with the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on mental health and wellbeing led by the Commission.

What was the objective? The objective of the Joint Action was to create a Framework on mental health as well as to contribute to the promotion of mental health and wellbeing, the prevention of mental disorders and the improvement of care and social inclusion of people with mental disorders in Europe.

What was the outcome: The Framework, the re-launched Compass and [the 5 reports from the work packages.](#)

★ What you need to know about the Framework

The Framework was the primary intended outcome document of the Joint Action and was prepared by participating Member States and the Commission through the GGE in consultation with other organisations who were part of the Joint Action including MHE. At MHE we believe that the lessons learned from the Joint Action are reflected in the Framework and can and should be used by Member States to improve their mental health policies and services.

The framework is:

A non-binding call to action adopted by those involved in the Joint Action including Member States and the Commission.

Full of useful recommendations and advice on how to improve mental health and mental health services.

Broad, given the range of topics covered, but also not exhaustive. For example it does not take a whole of life approach.

Comparative but reflects the fact that the state of mental health services across the EU varies, sometimes significantly.

Flexible as a result of the range of subjects and countries covered. The down-side to this is that those who work in more progressive contexts may not find the Framework innovative whereas others will find it progressive and challenging.

Human rights-based and aligns itself with other existing frameworks including the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UN CRPD) as well as the [WHO European Mental Health Action Plan](#).

Strategic in its approach in advocating for reforms in mental health based on a number of different factors (economic, social and human rights).

Persuasive given that it is supported by the weight of all the varied expertise

★ The compass

The Compass is a mechanism to collect, exchange and analyse information on policy and stakeholder activities in mental health. Between 2015-18 the Compass will undertake action to disseminate the Framework and it will monitor mental health and wellbeing policies and activities by Member States and non-governmental stakeholders through:

- **the identification** and dissemination of European good practices in mental health
- **the collection** of data on stakeholders' and member states activities in mental health through three annual surveys
- **the organisation** of three annual reports and forum events
- **holding** national mental health workshops in each Member State and Iceland and Norway

In addition, the Compass will support the work of the GGE through the preparation of four scientific papers. Outcomes of the Compass such as identified good practices, annual reports and consensus papers will be also be published on the Compass website, the upcoming good practice database and the Compass newsletter.

How to use the Framework ?

1. Read it!

Good news, while the Framework is broad in its approach it is also relatively short (22 pages). In order to use it, you will need to read it. The Framework is available at [the following link](#) and will hopefully be translated into other languages in the future.

2. Disseminate it!

Making people and stakeholders active in mental health, particularly Ministries, users of services, civil society, mental health professionals, service providers and government officials, aware of the Framework is the best way to get the Framework implemented. Many policy makers and people working in the field of mental health would be happy to receive guidance which is endorsed at the level of the Joint Action so send it to everyone you think should or might want to read it.

3. Use it to support your work!

If you are advocating for something specific then check the sections on the various work packages and you can also read the work package reports for further guidance on areas that might be of interest to you. The Framework as well as the reports from the work packages can be used as an authority or a source of information going forward. We encourage you to use specific quotes and reference the Framework in your own work where appropriate. You might be advocating for new mental health policies and mental health reform more generally.

If so, you are in luck because the Framework as a whole calls for a general review of mental health policies and legislation across Europe to bring them in line with the UN CRPD as well as to make them more effective.

4. Use the policy arguments presented!

One of the main takeaways from the Joint Action as a whole is that investing in mental health makes sense. Part of the power of the Framework is that it makes a very convincing argument for reforming mental health policies and services based on the following grounds:

- *Economic and social benefits*
- *Human rights obligations*
- *Improving overall health*
- *Improving overall wellbeing*

These arguments are persuasive and if one doesn't work then you can use another or all of them in combination.

5. Use it when applying for EU funding!

Now that there is a Framework for European action on mental health, there may be increased funding opportunities for our member organisations, more on this below. When applying for EU funding for mental health projects you will need show that you are aware of the existing work on mental health at EU level. The Framework is the most recent and comprehensive document in this regard and it would be prudent to use the Framework to show that your project aligns or supports the recommendations in the Framework or the reports from the work packages.

The recommendations are generally quite broad so it shouldn't be too difficult to show that your projects would support these actions. For example, there is an emphasis placed on improving data collection as well as strengthening knowledge, evidence base and sharing of good practices.

Many project proposals would satisfy any number of these goals. Check chapter IV of the Framework for Action for a summary of the objectives of the proposed actions.

How will MHE be using the Framework?

Of course the Framework is also important for MHE's advocacy work at European level. The most useful parts of the Framework for our purposes are the Implementation (Part V) and Follow-up Action (Part V) sections. Some of the calls for action in the Framework are addressed to the European Commission and includes a call 'to maximise the opportunities offered by the EU programmes, funds and tools that can play a relevant role in the follow-up of the recommendations included in the Framework for Action.' With this in mind, MHE will be using the Framework to encourage the Commission to increase funding for mental health. This will hopefully provide more opportunities for our members to become part of European projects. We will also be following up on the other calls for action including those calling for the Commission to complement the actions in the Compass and to strengthen collaboration between Member States and other stakeholders in the evaluation of mental health policies and strategies.

Conclusions

The Framework is the designated end product of over 10 years of EU co-operation on mental health and there is unlikely to be another document which is as comprehensive and comparative adopted at European level anytime soon. We therefore encourage all our members to spread the word and to use the Framework to push for change as well as to support their work and EU funding proposals. The re-launched Compass will serve as a unique EU-wide forum to share innovative practices and we further urge our members to try to respond to the annual Compass surveys when they arise and take part in the annual Compass events.



Please let us know about your own-use of
the framework!
mhe-sme.org