



BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY SCORECARD (JANUARY-JUNE 2018) MENTAL HEALTH & HUMAN RIGHTS

In order to engage with and analyse the performance of the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, [Mental Health Europe](#) has devised a scorecard system. We use it to evaluate each Presidency's commitment to and promotion of mental health. It is based on the following criteria:

- Promotion of mental health and well-being
- Commitment to the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities
- The involvement and empowerment of users of mental health services

The Bulgarian Presidency worked on some files of importance for mental health, pending a common agreement within the Council. Although mental health was not mainstreamed, MHE commends the Bulgarian Presidency for its ability to reach a Council common position (General Approach) on the [proposal for a Directive on Work-Life Balance](#). This means that the file can now enter tri-lateral negotiations with the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the EU. This will hopefully lead to more positive work-life balance measures across the EU, which is of great importance from a mental health perspective.

Although mental health was not an integral part of the Bulgarian Presidency's programme, some actions have been taken which include a mental health component. Notably, the Bulgarian Presidency built on previous Presidencies' efforts in fields such as the future of work and children's health. Even if mental health was not fully mainstreamed in Council Conclusions, mental health was taken into account.

SCALE OF APPRECIATION: HOW WAS THE WEATHER DURING THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY?



GOOD



FAIR



AVERAGE



POOR

PROMOTION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



A priority of the Bulgarian Presidency was children's rights and wellbeing, which culminated in the adoption of two Council Conclusions - [Integrated early childhood development policies as a tool for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion](#) and [Healthy nutrition for children: The healthy future of Europe](#). MHE welcomes both initiatives and is pleased to note that mental health and well-being were mentioned as important aspects of childhood development and nutrition.

Another priority for this Presidency has been the future of young people, with the specific aim to create concrete European Youth Goals to present at the [EU Youth Conference](#) in Sofia. MHE is really pleased to see that one of the eleven Goals focuses on 'Mental Health & Wellbeing'. The Goals will serve as tangible recommendations to the European Commission with regard to the next European Youth Strategy and the work on the Goals will continue at the EU Youth Conference in Austria, where participants will advance plans for the implementation of the Youth Goals.

During the Bulgarian Presidency, the Council of the EU managed to reach a [common position on the proposal for a Directive on Work-Life Balance](#). This remarkable step allows negotiations on the proposal to continue.

However, we regret to see that the General Approach taken by the Council is not ambitious and does not include mental health and psychosocial disabilities.

On 21 June the [Council Conclusions on the Future of Work: a Lifecycle Approach](#) were adopted. They recognise, among other aspects, the interlink between positive mental health and the ability to develop one's potential and to work productively and creatively. The Conclusions also invite Member States to promote the development of mental health and emotional skills from an early age throughout the working life.

The Bulgarian Presidency had a collaborative approach to the [third EU Mental Health Compass meeting](#), engaging with stakeholders and participating at the conference. This was a very positive signal from this Presidency, specifically considering the current shrinking space for health in general, and mental health in particular, on the EU agenda.

COMMITMENT TO THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL DISABILITIES



In February the Presidency organised the High Level Conference [Investing in people – the way forward](#) as a conclusion to the 60-year anniversary of the European Social Funds (ESF). The event brought together relevant actors at the European and national levels to discuss ESF priorities and expectations in the light of the post-2020 funding regulations. One of the themes of the conference workshops on social inclusion was '[promoting dignity and independent living through deinstitutionalisation \(DI\)](#)'. Despite this, discussions on the rights of people with psychosocial disabilities was very limited, with the interventions being primarily focused on employment and active inclusion.

Triologue discussions on the European Accessibility Act began with the Bulgarian Presidency, yet they did not reach an agreement. Whilst we appreciate the Bulgarians' constructive approach and openness to improve the draft, negotiations were slowed down by other Council members and the process will have to be continued by the Austrian Presidency. It is unfortunate that an agreement could not be reached during this Presidency's mandate as this means that certain discrimination of persons with disabilities – and the mental distress stemming from it – will continue to persist for the time being.

INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF USERS OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



The Bulgarian Presidency put health at the centre of EU debate as one of the areas where cooperation at European level can bring added value. On 6 March, the conference [Health as the Real Winner: Presidency conference on options to provide better medicines for all](#) discussed, among other topics, availability of reliable data on the effectiveness of therapies, patients' interests and informed access to medicine. The conference gathered generic manufacturers, drug sellers and regulatory institutions, yet no users organisations were involved nor was the perspective of users included on the agenda.

On a more positive note, at the national level the Bulgarian Presidency was active in building the capacity of NGOs and seeking their involvement, alongside civil society in the mental health field, in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Conferences were organised to discuss SDG3, which included mental health when discussing health.

CONCLUSION

MHE is glad that progress has been made regarding the long overdue adoption of the General Approach, although the Bulgarian Presidency missed out on some opportunities to mainstream mental health, most notably on the common position on a Directive on Work-Life Balance. We were also pleased to see mental health mentioned in some Council Conclusions. MHE also commends the Presidency for its commitment to mental health by engaging with the EU Mental Health Compass and involving and empowering users of mental health services.



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