

MHE News and Policy Work



Slovenia on its way to developing National Platform for Mental Health

On the September 10, the first in a series of seminars aimed at establishing National Platforms of Mental Health, took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The seminar was hosted by MHE member SENT and carried out in collaboration with MHE. Taking place in the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia, the event was opened by its President Mr Blaz Kavcic, together with SENT Executive Director and President of MHE, Mr Nace Kovac. The seminar was well-attended, with many different stakeholders represented, including the Slovenian ombudsman, a number of NGOs, public foundations and government representatives, local authorities, European representatives and service users.

The event was a great success. It was the opportunity to discuss collaboration between different Slovenian civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, in order

to foster progress in the field of community-based services, an alternative to institutions. Building on the positive experience of the adoption of the Slovenian mental health act in 2008, it was agreed among all stakeholders that this learning experiences had clearly showed the benefits of collaboration were more important than the challenges.

The participants of the event will be invited to follow-up activities to this kick-off seminar. MHE will facilitate the exchange of experience between members who work towards the establishment of National Platforms of Mental Health, in order to ensure they can learn from each other and support the continued development of the collaboration in the mental health sector at the National level.

Photos and a video clip from the event are available at: <http://www.ds-rs.si/?q=node/3346>

The full report is available [here](#).

Editorial

Dear readers,

The beginning of this beautiful month of September has been intense for MHE. We welcomed many positive developments, including the first seminar for the establishment of national mental health platforms, which took place in Slovenia. Moreover, MHE was been featured extensively in mainstream media. Still, behind these newsletter articles, mainly focusing on the effects of the financial crisis on the mental health, there is a dark reality. Persons with psychosocial disabilities have been disproportionately affected by the crisis in terms of cuts of benefits, limited access to services, violence and hate-crimes, and there is a sharp rise in mental health problems among the general population. Maybe the most serious effect of the crisis is the dramatic increase of suicides. Hopefully, the fact that light is finally shed on this situation will help policy makers to take wiser decisions, and start investing in mental health services and support. This is more important than ever in times of crisis! To finish on a more encouraging note, I would like to draw your attention to two upcoming events, organized by MHE and mentioned in this newsletter. One is the launch on November 14 of the first ever report on persons with mental health problems living in institutions in Europe, and the other is the final conference of the project "Train Improve Reduce," on November 23.

The number of places is limited so make sure you register quickly!

Maria Nyman
Director

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Highlights

Slovenia on its way to developing national platform for mental health

MHE gets quoted in CNBC and receives flurry of coverage in mainstream media

Suicides are about people, not numbers – MHE and FEANTSA call for EU Action Plan on Homelessness

MHE gets quoted in CNBC and receives flurry of coverage in mainstream media

September was an excellent month for MHE in terms of media coverage, as the organization was featured on [CNBC Europe](#), discussing the increase in depression and suicide as a result of the financial crisis. MHE Senior Policy Advisor José Van Remoortel was quoted as saying that the financial crisis is affecting all areas of life, not just economies, and its impact on mental health is creating a deep chasm in our society. Moreover, she added that the financial crisis will not last forever, but rushed measures taken by national governments to patch their economies will surely have prolonged effects. The CNBC article was picked up by [Swedish](#), [Belgian](#), [Italian](#), [Polish](#) and [Romanian](#) media.

Moreover, MHE Information and Communications Manager published an article on homelessness and suicides in Public Service Europe, and MHE Director Maria Nyman and MHE Social Policy Officer Paulina Banas were quoted in Polish newspaper [Rzeczpospolita](#).

MHE and FEANTSA publish press release calling for EU Action Plan on Homelessness

One of the main characteristics of the current financial crisis is an obsession with number crunching. Concerned with figures, many European Union (EU) governments have launched austerity plans that have forced rising numbers of people into joblessness, and not only damaged efforts to improve the lives of the most excluded members of society, but also pushed new masses of people into poverty. The effect that austerity measures have on families and communities is now becoming increasingly clear. For each 1% rise in the unemployment rate, there is a 0.8% rise in the rate

of suicides. Naturally, becoming homeless takes a serious toll on people's mental health. At the same time, people with existing mental health problems are more vulnerable to losing their homes, as studies show that mental illness was one of the most important causes of homelessness. In most EU countries, more than 50% of the homeless population suffers from serious mental health problems. What is more, homeless people are more likely to complete suicide than the general population - in Denmark, homeless men were found to be 7.3 times more likely to take their own lives than the general population, and homeless women were an astonishing 14.8 times more likely to do so. Other UK research states that the prevalence rates of suicide in the homeless population range from 1-3%, compared to approximately 0.0001% in the general population. Therefore, on September 10, World Suicide Prevention Day, Mental Health Europe and FEANTSA reminded the governments of EU Member States and the EU institutions that suicides are about people, not numbers. The helplessness and desperation felt by a person willing to take their own life is unquantifiable, and real action must be taken to ensure that all people have their most basic needs met, such as that of a stable home, in times of crisis or otherwise.

Mental Health Europe and FEANTSA also called on the European Commission to create a comprehensive EU Action Plan on Homelessness that includes a comprehensive mental health perspective, and to prevent suicides by ensuring that affordable and adequate housing is available to all.

For more information, please contact MHE Information and Communications Manager Silvana Enculescu at silvana.enculescu@mhe-sme.org or FEANTSA Communications Officer Suzannah Young at suzannah.young@feantsa.org. To read the full press release, please go to http://www.mhe-sme.org/news-and-events/mhe-press-releases/suicides_are_about_people_not_numbers.html

Mental health problems are linked to violence – just not how you'd think! - Press release on Peace Day 2012

As a media consuming public, we are often led to believe that people with mental health problems are violent. Like the Norwegian shooter case once again proved, mass murderers are deemed as "mad" even before any psychiatric evaluations, movies often portray criminals as having mental health problems, and the sensationalist press hardly shies away from associating negative character traits with mental illness. Therefore, it is no wonder studies show that people significantly overestimate the probability of violence linked to mental health problems, a perception which only leads to further discrimination and victimization of this already-excluded group.

Actually, the truth could not be further away. Mental health problems are not, and never were predictors of violence. Instead, research shows that people with mental health problems are 2.5 times more prone to becoming victims of violence themselves, compared to other members of society. Women with psychosocial disabilities, whose testimonies about their experienced aggression are interpreted as symptoms of mental illness, are also more likely to suffer violence or sexual abuse. Moreover, according to the World Health Organization, children with mental health problems or intellectual disabilities are 4.6 times more likely to suffer from sexual violence compared with their non-disabled peers. This is largely due to stigma, discrimination, or ignorance about mental health problems, along with greater vulnerability to violence and a lack of appropriate support. Therefore, on September 21, Peace Day 2012, as part of the Peace One Day 'Reducing Domestic Violence' Coalition, Mental Health Europe set the record straight on violence and



Save the Date

Hitting the spot - Safeguarding the mental health of victims of domestic violence

Final Conference of the Mental Health Europe Daphne Project "Train Improve Reduce - Diminishing the mental health impact of violence against women by training law enforcement agents"

November 23, 2012 9:00 - 16:30
Thon Hotel, Avenue du Boulevard 17, Brussels

Prompted by the knowledge that every fifth woman in Europe has been a victim of intimate partner violence, Mental Health Europe and its partners decided to tackle domestic violence by training law enforcement agents - the first points of contact for women denouncing their aggressors - on the mental health aspects associated with this type of violence. The Final Conference will present the outcomes of the project and pave the way for future endeavors in this area.

To register, please fill in the registration form and email it to Mental Health Europe at secretariat@mhe-sme.org by October 25. You can download the registration form from: http://www.mhe-sme.org/news-and-events/hitting_the_spot.html



mental health. The two are surely connected, just not the way you might think. Whether through forced treatment, constant bullying, or flat-out aggression, persons with mental health problems experience a higher degree of violence than the general population. They are victims, not perpetrators. Moreover, the financial crisis has further deteriorated this situation, as a poll from the United Kingdom shows that 46% of the disabled people interviewed feel that attitudes towards them have worsened in the past year.

For more information, please contact MHE Information and Communications Manager Silvana Enculescu at silvana.enculescu@mhe-sme.org. To read the full press release, please go to http://www.mhe-sme.org/news-and-events/mhe-press-releases/linked_to_violence.html

MHE establishes task force on the DSM 5

The launch of the new edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), which is the world's most widely used psychiatric reference book, is expected in May 2013. MHE is concerned that the process of DSM-5 development, despite the involvement of international organizations, is

based on the American culture and the economical interests of the multinational.

The debate is particularly intense because the manual is both a medical guidebook and a cultural institution. It helps doctors make a diagnosis and provides insurance companies with diagnostic codes without which the insurers will not reimburse patients' claims for treatment. The manual often organizes symptoms under an evocative name. Labels like obsessive-compulsive disorder have connotations in the wider culture and for an individual's self-perception.

MHE, as an organization for all people involved in mental health, and with no link with the pharmaceutical industry, thinks that mental health problems and mental health in general depend on many factors which need to be considered appropriately for each individual within his/her own context. If the DSM-5 development is going in the direction of even further medicalization of problems, it is important to develop at the same time all the other non-medical instruments having to do with mental health.

In order to elaborate an MHE work strategy and position on the DSM 5, MHE is currently setting up a task force focusing on the DSM 5, chaired

by MHE Board member Pino Pini. If you would be willing to contribute to this work through being a corresponding member to this task force, which will mainly work through e-mails, please inform the MHE secretariat at maria.nyman@mhe-sme.org before the end of October 2012.

MHE attends the Meeting of Governmental Experts on Mental Health and Well-being

On September 17-18, MHE attended the Meeting of Governmental Experts on Mental Health and Wellbeing in Luxembourg. The meeting was organized by DG Sanco and focused on the newly-formed EU Joint Action on Mental Health and Well-being, the use of Structural Funds for the period 2014-2020 and a DG Sanco survey on suicide in the EU Member States. The Commission stated that the Joint Action has been approved and that the set-up has been nearly completed. MHE will be present as an collaborating partner in the Joint Action and will specifically work on the work-packages that include the 'DI-process' and how to include 'mental health in other policies / sectors'. More information will follow on this as soon as the Joint Action documents have been completed.

In the use of structural funds for the next period 2014-2020, the Commission will provide guidelines on how these funds (for health investments) should abide to enhance the DI-process. However, how far these guidelines really force EU Member States to use the funds accordingly is not known. MHE has stated that stricter measurements should be taken to make sure that the EU Member States uphold these guidelines and the CRPD that has been signed by both the EU and most of the EU member states.

DG Sanco finally provided the results of the survey it has undertaken amongst EU Member



Save the Date



Setting standards - Discussing health inequalities in the context of the European Year of Citizens

A spotlight on mental health and homelessness

A hearing hosted by Kinga Göncz MEP



Centred on free movement, the discourse around the European Year of Citizens 2013 fails to acknowledge the deep inequalities still present in EU Member States, such as health inequalities. This hearing will discuss inclusive citizenship from the viewpoint of homeless people with mental health problems. Raising awareness of the discrimination and lack of access to health care often experienced by this group it will present tools to prevent mental health problems in persons who are homeless. Most importantly, the hearing will underline the idea that the European Year 2013 cannot be developed in a vacuum – active citizenship depends on active inclusion, and a fair democratic society cannot be achieved without the guarantee of a minimum standard of living. For more information, please go to http://www.mhe-sme.org/news-and-events/setting_standards.html

November 13, 2012 14.00 - 16.30
European Parliament, Room Paul-Henri Spaak P7C050

To register, please fill in the registration form and e-mail it to Mental Health Europe Social Policy Officer Paulina Banas at paulina.banas@mhe-sme.org by October 21. You can download the form on http://www.mhe-sme.org/news-and-events/setting_standards.html

States on their suicide rates over the past years. The Commission stated that the suicide rates increased but that the figures were not dramatic, using Greece as an example where the rates may have gone up, but that their suicide rates were low to start with. MHE objected to this view and noted that during the 2009-2011 period eleven EU Member States showed an increase of more than 10% in their figures.

For more information about the meeting, please contact MHE Policy Office Yves Brand at yves.brand@mhe-sme.org

‘Mapping Exclusion’ – an MHE report on how European countries still lock users of psychiatry up

Mental Health Europe is currently in the last stage of finalizing its publication entitled ‘Mapping Exclusion,’ a report which will be launched in the European Parliament on November 14. The launch event will be hosted by Cecilia Wikström, Member of the European Parliament and speakers will represent the United Nations, the European Commission, civil society, the Open Society Mental Health Initiative and the UN CRPD Commission.

The publication will aim to give a

snapshot on how both the European Union and its Member States deliver on their obligations about deinstitutionalization. This will be the first ever such publication, focusing specifically on the mental health field in Europe. The first half of the paper will give details on the European and International tendencies and how EU and the obligations under the UN CRPD can support the transition process toward community-based service systems. In the second part there, will be 32 country reports (all EU Member States plus Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Moldova and Israel), giving a picture of each country's service and legal system - figures of beds in psychiatric institutions and community-based services, government plans (or lack of plans) for closing institutions and developing community-based services, information on guardianship and involuntary treatment laws and practices. ‘Mapping Exclusion’ will be published in English but a summary of it plus the country reports will be available in Spanish, Dutch, French, Polish, Romanian and Hungarian. The development of the paper was supported by Open Society Foundations.

For more information, please contact MHE Human Rights Officer Gabor Petri at gabor.petri@mhe-sme.org

MHE sends letters to the Council of Europe about Croatian and Serbian cases

Recently, MHE co-signed two different letters to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. At the end of September, the Committee discussed issues about recent case-law at the European Court of Human Rights. In the case of X. v. Croatia, despite the Court's previous decision in 2011, Croatia failed to deliver the judgment. The rights of the applicant (a person with mental health problems) were violated. The violation resulted from the fact that the applicant, having been judicially denied of her legal capacity (capacity to act), was excluded from proceedings which resulted in the adoption of her daughter. MHE and SHINE (Croatia, www.sjaj.hr) warned the Council of Europe that Croatia has an obligation to deliver the judgement. Read the whole letter here: <http://www.mhe-sme.org/assets/files/documents/MHE-SHINE-X%20v%20Croatia-FINAL.pdf>

In the case of Salontaji-Drobnjak v. Serbia, the Court also found that Serbia violated the applicant's rights to private life. This letter was developed by Mental Disability Rights Initiative Serbia and co-signed by MHE. MHE and MDRI sent a warning to the Committee that Serbia had failed delivering the judgement. Read the letter here: http://www.mhe-sme.org/assets/files/documents/CoE_committeeofministers_communication3008.pdf

MHE participates in debate on deinstitutionalization in Croatia

On September 4, SOIH (the national disability council of Croatia) and a number of local NGOs, including MHE members, participated in a meeting with the Croatian authorities in Zagreb. MHE, along with other European NGOs,

presented the Common European Guidelines, a comprehensive document aiming to provide information for European and national decision-makers on deinstitutionalization. Kristijan Grdjan, MHE Board Member and representative of MHE member Shine, also gave a speech on the state of community-based care in Croatia for users of psychiatry. Unfortunately, during the event, Croatian government officers introduced plans for closing down big mental health institutions, but building smaller units for 30-40 people – NGOs, including MHE were critical about this approach, highlighting that it is not in line with the UN CRPD that was ratified by Croatia.

NGOs deliver training for officials of the European Commission on the need for transition to community-based services

A coalition of Brussels-based NGOs, including Mental Health Europe, will deliver a training for officers of the European Commission on October 12. The training has two aims: to raise-awareness and challenge prejudices among desk officers and high level officials about the target groups concerned (disabled people, users of psychiatry, children, elderly people) and to support Commission officials with information for their closer follow-up on spending EU Structural Funds in EU Member States.

The training will be based on the Common European Guidelines on Deinstitutionalization (to be launched later in November) and cover a range of issues such as good practices in developing community-based services, human rights concerns about institutional care, alternatives in community care, how to use Structural Funds for community-care etc. Jan Pfeiffer, former chair of the European Expert Group on Deinstitutionalization will give a presentation and answer questions about concerns,

practices and alternatives available for users of psychiatry.

News from MHE members

‘Udenfor – the Life on Edge’ – new book by Preben Brandt sheds light on mental illness, homelessness and severe exclusion.

Preben Brandt has been dedicating his life to people with severe mental illnesses who are homeless. August 2012 has seen his autobiography published and reach the shelves of Danish bookshops.

As a trained psychiatrist, Preben Brandt has been working against severe exclusion of people with psychosocial disabilities for over 30 years, using social and person-centred approaches in his work. Preben has been approached by a publisher due to his visibility in the media and involvement with local policy makers to fight for the cause of people with mental health problems who are homeless. His autobiography contains many stories of those he met on his professional path, giving insights into the complex mechanism of their severe exclusion and what can be done about it. The book also brings to light Preben's sometimes painful and almost always complicated past, which has been a driver for his work and dedication.

Preben is a founder of MHE member Project UDENFOR, an organisation that reaches out to those left out by any other services, who sleep rough in the streets of Copenhagen. Since 1993, Preben has also been involved with the European-level policy making. He was a Board member of Mental Health and is currently Chairing its Task Force on Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups. He is also one of the founding members of MHE member SMES-Europa.

“For more than 30 years I have had the luck to meet the excluded and homeless people out in the community where they live, and not

only in the clinics. I have seen and followed their sorrow, suffering and happiness. It has only been possible to understand what I saw by applying my own life story and experiences,” Preben told MHE. “I have had a fantastic opportunity to help and offer treatment, to argue on professional methods and to tell politicians what I think is a right way to go to give those people a chance for a better life,” he added.

The book and all the related events have succeeded in bringing attention to this ever important topic of severe exclusion of people with psychosocial disabilities who are homeless. One aspect of such exclusion, namely access to services, is currently among the top priorities of the MHE Task Force on Social Inclusion.

For links to online resources about the book, please contact paulina.banas@mhe-sme.org, Preben Brandt at pb@udenfor.dk

Psykisk Hälsa to start help-line for older people

This year is the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. Depression, mental health problems and suicides are considerably more common among elderly persons than the rest of the population. Against this background, the Swedish association Psykisk Hälsa will shortly start a help line for elderly persons who do not feel well and need to talk to a supportive person. Talking can considerably relieve anxiety, it can be comforting and bring new perspectives. Sometimes, the person calling can also be assisted in seeking more professional help.

For more information, please contact info@psykiskhalsa.se

Meet the new MHE members!

The Association for the Mental Health (S.O.P.S.I.) of Patras (Greece) was founded in 2003

after an initiative from sensitized citizens, mainly psychiatrists, psychologists,

social workers, users of services of mental health and their families. The aim of

the association is the self-organization of users of services of mental health and

their families for the defense of their individual and social rights. The objectives of the association are:

- To support users of services of mental health and their families
- To aid the self-help of members.
- To enlighten the community on subjects of mental health, with the aim of fighting stigma and discrimination

- To help improve the mental health services so that they meet the real needs of the users.

Today, the Association for the Mental Health (SOPSI) of Patras has more than 300 active members.

The **Association for psychosocial support SUSRET (Croatia)** is a small organization which provides supported accommodation in small housing units for 10 people with mental health problems. The organization is mainly focused on the development of social capacities aimed at providing care for people with mental health problems in the community.

The **Association for Mutual Assistance in Mental**

Distress / Fenix (Bosnia and Herzegovina) was founded on April 1, 2000. Fenix advocates in favour of users' interests and the empowerment of the user movement, and is known and recognized for the creation of mental health policies in their local community and beyond. With financial aid from foreign donors and support from the local community, Fenix has implemented many projects.

The **Hellas Employee Assistance Programs Ltd** (Greece) was set up by Dr. Anastasia P. Rush, who

founded the Hellenic Branch of the Employee Assistance Professional Association Int. in 2003, and established the Hellas Employee Assistance Programs (Hellas EAP) two years later. The founder and CEO of Hellas EAP brought to the Greek corporate sector 30 years of experience from USA in the mental health field, including leading positions in the area of mental health legislation, community mental health services, direct services and innovative pilot mental health programs.

EU Institutions and other bodies

United Nations reviews Hungary under the CRPD - concluding observations about people with psychosocial disabilities

On September 19-20, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities held its 8th Session in Geneva, Switzerland. After Spain having been reviewed last year, Hungary was the second European country to come in front of the Committee. Both the Hungarian Government and the Hungarian Disability Caucus sent in their reports and opinions on the implementation of the Convention, and the questions and answers, or the list of issues, were discussed at the meeting. The Committee has published its

'Concluding Observations' shortly after the event, also referring to many important issues regarding the mental health field.

In the Concluding Observations, the CRPD Committee expressed its concerns about the fact that the definition of disability in Hungarian legislation does not cover people with psychosocial disabilities; that Hungary still has a guardianship regime that is contradictory with Art. 12 of the CRPD; that medical treatments often happen without the informed consent of people with psychosocial disabilities.

Please find the state report and the Committee's observations [here](#) and a concise report on the meeting [here](#).

Do you wish to share information, make an announcement or contribute to the Members' Newsletter? Do you have thoughts on the content or the layout of our publication? We would love to hear from you!
Please send your opinions or contributions to silvana.enculescu@mhe-sme.org



This publication is supported by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013). This programme was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields. The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.