

World Mental Health Day 2024: 10 October

The purpose of World Mental Health Day is to improve knowledge, raise awareness and mobilise efforts in support of mental health around the world. This year's theme – 'Mental health at work' – underlines that supportive work environments foster mental health, providing purpose and stability. On the contrary, poor working environments – including excessive workloads, low job security and discrimination – can undermine mental health and lead to decreased performance and absence from work, and can also affect family members.

Background

The World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) defines 'mental health' as a state of mental well-being in which people cope well with the many stresses of life, can realise their potential, can function productively and fruitfully, and are able to contribute to their communities.

Multiple individual, social and structural factors may combine to protect or undermine mental health. Individual psychological and biological factors such as emotional skills, substance use and genetics can make people more vulnerable. Exposure to unfavourable social, economic, geopolitical and environmental circumstances (such as the pandemic, rising living costs, conflicts and war) also increases people's vulnerability to poor mental health. In addition, as underlined in the EPRS study [Future Shocks 2023: Anticipating and weathering the next storms](#), digitalisation and climate anxiety are among major trends that could contribute to a 'perfect storm' for the mental health and well-being of young Europeans.

[World Mental Health Day](#) was first celebrated on 10 October 1992 on the initiative of the [World Federation for Mental Health](#). The theme of World Mental Health Day 2024 – 'Mental health at work' – emphasises that safe, healthy working environments can act as a protective factor for mental health. On the contrary, unhealthy conditions can pose significant risks, affecting mental health, overall quality of life and, consequently, participation or productivity at work. [Risks](#) to mental health at work can include: under-use of skills or being under-skilled for work; excessive workloads or work pace, or understaffing; long, unsocial or inflexible hours; lack of control over job design or workload; unsafe or poor physical working conditions; an organisational culture that enables negative behaviour; limited support from colleagues or authoritarian supervision; violence, harassment or bullying; discrimination and exclusion; an unclear job role; under- or over-promotion; job insecurity, inadequate pay, or poor investment in career development; and conflicting demands of work and home.

Facts and figures

According to the WHO, in 2019 [one in every eight people](#), or 970 million people around the world, were living with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depression the most common.

In the EU, data on mental health collected at national level are not always comparable, as the survey instruments used to measure anxiety differ between countries, and some surveys may have small sample sizes or differences in the openness of populations to discussing their mental state. In the EU, it is estimated that mental health problems affected around [84 million people](#) (one in six) in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, and those figures have only worsened since, as reported in the 2023 [Country Health Profiles](#).

According to a [Eurobarometer survey](#) on mental health published in October 2023, 46 % of respondents have experienced an emotional or psychosocial problem, such as feeling depressed or anxious, in the past 12 months; 54 % of respondents with a mental health issue have not received help from a professional; 77 % of respondents think mental health patients are judged differently than other patients by society in general (stigma); and 25 % of respondents report that either they themselves, or a family member, have encountered one or more issues when accessing mental health services.

Stress and psychosocial risks at work can impact employees' mental health. It is estimated that 27 % of [workers](#) in the EU were suffering from stress, depression or anxiety in 2022.



The pandemic put additional pressure on mental health, particularly among [young people](#). The 2022 [Health at a Glance: Europe](#) report showed that almost one in two young Europeans report unmet needs for mental health care, and that the share of young people reporting symptoms of depression in several EU countries more than doubled during the pandemic. There is an increased state of [loneliness](#) among younger generations, leading sometimes to [suicide](#): in the EU in 2021, almost one in five deaths among those aged 15 to 29 was registered as intentional self-harm.

New data from the WHO Regional Office for Europe released in September 2024 reveal a rise in [problematic social media and gaming use](#) among adolescents: more than one in 10 adolescents (11 %) showed signs of problematic social media behaviour, struggling to control their use and experiencing negative consequences; over a third (36 %) of young people reported constant contact with friends online; a third (34 %) of adolescents played digital games daily, with more than one in five (22 %) playing for at least four hours on days when they engage in gaming; 12 % of adolescents are at risk of problematic gaming.

EU action on mental health

Policies and services addressing mental health are the individual EU Member States' responsibility. However, according to [Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#), the EU complements national policies while also fostering cooperation between Member States. The EU's work on mental health, part of its activities on [non-communicable diseases](#), is geared towards supporting action on the ground and promoting the exchange of best practice and knowledge.

On 7 June 2023, the European Commission adopted a [communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health](#), adding another pillar to the [European health union](#). According to that new approach, which aims to put physical health on a par with mental health, EU action on mental health will focus on three guiding principles: every EU citizen should have access to adequate and effective prevention, should have access to high-quality and affordable mental healthcare and treatment, and should be able to reintegrate into society after recovery. The new cross-sectoral approach recognises that mental health involves many policy areas, from education and employment to digitalisation, research, environment and climate.

The communication's 20 flagship initiatives – with financing opportunities worth €1.23 billion – will support Member States and EU stakeholders in their actions promoting good mental health, helping those most at need and vulnerable groups (e.g. children, young people, the elderly, victims of gender-based violence, homeless people, migrants and refugee populations). The Expert Group on Public Health ([PHEG](#)) advises the Commission on the implementation of the flagship initiatives. In addition, the Commission set up a drafting group on stigma and discrimination under the subgroup on mental health (under PHEG).

Mental health issues are a growing problem that extends beyond the EU and impacts populations suffering from wars, emergencies and humanitarian crises. In that context, EU4Health projects have been helping refugees and displaced persons from [Ukraine](#), working together with local and international organisations.

The Commission provides regular updates on the implementation of the actions stemming from the communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health ([tracking framework](#)).

As data on population mental health, and especially age-stratified data, remains limited in coverage, as of 2025, as announced in its June 2023 communication, the Commission will ensure that the [European Health Interview Survey](#) includes additional data on mental health to ensure strong monitoring and assessment of progress on mental health across the EU.

In her July 2024 [political guidelines](#), European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called for the stepping-up of work on preventive health, particularly for mental health, and for the protection of children and young people, especially online.

The **European Parliament** has consistently supported the promotion of good mental health and the need to put mental health at the heart of EU policymaking, through numerous opinions, studies, debates, hearings, written questions and own-initiative resolutions. On 5 July 2022, it adopted a [resolution on mental health in the digital world of work](#). On 12 December 2023, it adopted a [resolution on mental health](#), following the Commission's communication of 7 June 2023, on the basis of the [report](#) prepared by its new Subcommittee on Public Health ([SANT](#), rapporteur: Sara Cerdas, S&D, Portugal).