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**A PROSPECTIVE INITIATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON  
'A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH'**

CALL FOR EVIDENCE FEEDBACK

*The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation comprising more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from over 20 European countries, with a total of more than 5 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. CESI represents public and private sector workers.*

CESI welcomes the envisaged initiative of the European Commission for a new comprehensive approach to mental health (as outlined in its Call for Evidence roadmap of January 18 2023) by integrating a mental health streamlining perspective into all relevant EU policies.

CESI shares the analysis that recent socioeconomic megatrends such as technological change and an inflation-induced rise in living costs have a direct negative impact on mental health of increasing numbers of people, and that adverse multi-layered impacts the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine have further aggravated the threat of mental health problems in the population.

CESI concurs with the view that an estimated 50% of all European workers consider stress to be common in their workplace, significantly increasing the number of lost working days.

CESI supports the finding that such widespread mental health disorders carry a high financial and human cost for both affected persons as well their employers and the economy, public finance and society as a whole.

CESI agrees that investing in improving people's mental health is not only about health but also about ensuring that European society is citizen-centred, resilient and cohesive.

CESI approves of the focus on (a) the promotion of good mental health practices and exchanges on an adequate prevention of mental health problems, (b) an improved early detection and screening of mental health problems, (c) actions to further tackle psychosocial risks at work, (d) a reinforced access to treatment and care of mental health problems, and (e) measures for an improved quality of life with patient-centred follow-up care and facilitated returns to school and work.

CESI however believes that the implementation of the approach should, where action by Member States is proposed, also be carried out in the context of the European Semester – and not just through the existing UN SDG health monitoring and different European Core Health Indicators.

CESI underlines that trade unions and social partners should be adequately involved, to reach a bottom-up, life-cycle approach to mental wellbeing.



In terms of output deliverables of the approach, CESI stresses that the approach should also span to the following priority areas:

1. Member States must be encouraged to step up investments and evidence-based policies in mental health. They must take immediate action to include a mental health perspective also in mainstream economic policies.
2. More effective programmes for a better occupational well-being should be developed and implemented in the workplaces. Negative psychological, physical and social impacts on work-related stress, burnout or depression could be prevented if mental well-being in the workplace became a standard priority for management, work councils, trade unions and individual workers who need to be more empowered and in charge of their wellbeing. Mental health is a major occupational health and safety concern and should be included in EU-OSHA frameworks as well as national health and educational strategies.
3. The European Year of Skills in 2023 should play an important role to further mental health too. Its awareness-raising and capacity-building should flank considerable public investments to adapt to skills mismatches labour markets and to thus improve labour market integration and broader active labour market policies. This would ensure better and more secure employment conditions for all and help alleviate mental pressures associated to uncertain evolving working environments and skills needs on labour markets.
4. A new approach to mental health should also re-focus attention to a right to telework and a right to disconnect. If well-designed, new forms of work contribute to changing mindsets towards more flexibility at work. Telework and ICT-based mobile work lead to higher degrees of flexibility of work arrangements – yet also to a blurring of work and private life. Any new approach to mental health should make clear that a right to disconnect and the respect of rest periods as foreseen by the EU working time directive are of crucial importance.
5. Mental illnesses including anxiety and depression should be recognised in all Member States as serious health issues. Stigmas around mental health need to be lifted, addressing mental health issues needs to be able to be a part of our daily societal reality. Moreover, appropriate funding for health services to address mental health problems should be made available, affordable, and accessible. This includes investments in properly trained health care personnel in sufficient numbers. Despite a variety of therapeutic paths, many people facing mental illness do not receive sufficient mental-health treatment.
6. A particular emphasis should be placed on an improved prevention and early detection of mental distress, in order to prevent mental health problems from developing in the first place. The costs to prevent mental illnesses are lower than the costs for treating them, and facing absenteeism at work due to mental illness is more expensive than taking appropriate preventive measures at organisational level. As such, targeted and tailored campaigns to raise further awareness about the mental health of workers are needed. Trade unions and social partners can play an active role in this awareness raising exercise.