



European Union

Statement

WHO

156th Executive Board

(3-11 February 2025)

Agenda item 8 - Mental health and social connection

Geneva, 5 February 2025

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Chair,

Chair, Director-General, Excellencies, Colleagues,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States.

The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina* and Georgia as well as Armenia align themselves with this statement.

We welcome the report by the Director-General and appreciate the commitment to mainstream mental and social health across WHO's areas of work, including through the Fourteenth General Programme of Work.

Well-functioning communities, societies, and economies rest on the foundation of social connections between people. Social connection builds resilience in individuals and in societies and plays a crucial role for the development of our social, mental and physical health.

The EU and its Member States are encouraged by the increased awareness and initiatives focusing on mental health and social connection, such as the WHO Commission on Social Connection and the draft resolution on social connection. These initiatives mark the beginning of a global effort to protect and promote important social determinants of health that has been neglected for far too long.

Poor mental health, social isolation and loneliness are global concerns that affect all regions and countries. Social isolation and loneliness negatively affect social, mental and physical health, physical and cognitive development, life expectancy and well-being. They are widespread across all age groups but disproportionately impacting adolescents, persons with disabilities, older persons, as well as persons in vulnerable situations. They can be intensified

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

by conflicts, disasters, financial hardship or other specific circumstances, such as witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hence, addressing mental health, loneliness and social isolation must be recognized as a critical global public health priority. It requires a multi-sectoral and comprehensive approach, addressing root causes and their consequences, incorporating health equity and gender equality as well as inclusive and tailored interventions, at all levels, to meet the unique needs of all affected individuals.

The EU aims to tackle the growing issues of loneliness and social isolation. To this end, the first-ever EU-wide survey on loneliness in the European Union was carried out in 2022 uncovering, that around one out of eight respondents felt lonely most or all of the time, and these statistics are only at EU level. In April 2023, a first EU high-level meeting on loneliness was held.

The European Commission adopted the “Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health” in 2023, which help Member States and stakeholders to take swift action to promote mental health through enhanced social integration and participation.

Further global efforts in addressing social connection are needed, starting with evidence-based policies, programs and strategies at different levels. Social connection goes beyond the health sector; it is a cross-sectoral issue that involves commitment and collaboration among various stakeholders. Governmental actors, primary health care and health services providers, social workers, teachers and educators, the private sector, employers, academia and civil society all have a role to play in strengthening social connection and tackling loneliness and social isolation. Furthermore, there is need for health and social monitoring systems to include indicators on loneliness and social isolation. There is also need for increased public awareness of the issue, and it is necessary to emphasize the importance of quality social connections for social, mental and physical health and overall well-being.

Thank you.