

BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE “HEADWAY – MENTAL HEALTH INDEX 2.0”

“Headway – A new roadmap in Mental Health” is an initiative conceived and launched in 2017 by the Think Tank **The European House - Ambrosetti** in partnership with **Angelini Pharma** with the aim of creating a **multidisciplinary platform for strategic reflection, analysis and dialogue** between various European experiences in the management of individuals with mental disorders.

Socio-economic uncertainty and geopolitical conflicts, in addition to **environmental degradation** and **pandemics** significantly impact the Mental Health of the population, underlining the crucial role the **determinants of Mental Health** play: where people live, study, work and age, influences the state of Mental Health wellbeing. These aspects and their interrelation must all be considered when planning for effective **strategies of promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of mental disorders**.

In particular, during 2022, the European population has witnessed the **concurrence of significantly impacting crisis factors**, which included the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical pressures (starting from the war in Ukraine) generating an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, **explosion of socio-economic uncertainties** (among others inflation and soaring energy costs) and the **disruption of supply chains**, adding up to **major global challenges**, such as the climate crisis, demographic winter and social tensions - all together may lead to a **substantial rise in mental disorders**.

This alarming scenario is adding to the already worrying context of Mental Health in Europe: according to the latest data, **over 110 million people are living with a mental disorder** – numbers which contribute to positioning mental disorders among the **10 most common** and the **2nd most disabling non-communicable diseases** in Europe (responsible for over **16.9 million** years lived with disability). The burden is even more alarming when considering that around **4% of total deaths** in Europe are attributable to mental and behavioural disorders; among these deaths, **140,000** are due to suicides (**4th cause of death among <20 years**).

The urgency to act today is supported by the **heavy economic burden** associated with mental disorders: the overall cost, estimated equal to **4% of the European GDP**, is driven by direct spending on healthcare, social security benefits expenditures, and indirect costs in the labour market. In the future, the **burden is expected to increase significantly**: according to recent estimates, by 2030, mental disorders will account for **more than half of the global economic burden of non-communicable diseases**.

The “**Headway – Mental Health Index 2.0**”, updated in 2022 with the introduction of a new area monitoring the **environmental determinants of Mental Health**, investigates the **Mental Health status of the population** and the **responsiveness of the systems** to mental health needs, specifically in **healthcare settings** and in **workplaces, schools, and society** in general. The introduction of an additional area provides an enhanced holistic and multidimensional picture on Mental Health across EU-27 Countries and the United Kingdom.

The new pillar called “**Environmental Determinants of Mental Health**” aims at monitoring the external conditions affecting the Mental Health and well-being of the population, which can be grouped into 3 main clusters: **natural environment** (e.g., hours of daylight, extreme events, climate change, etc.), **built environment** (e.g., air and noise pollution, urban green spaces, road traffic) and **socio-economic and political context** (e.g., conflicts, migration, economic recession, violence, etc.).

The “Headway Mental Health Index 2.0” is designed to provide a multidimensional picture on Mental Health across European Countries (EU-27 + UK) by monitoring 55 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) across 3 macro-areas:

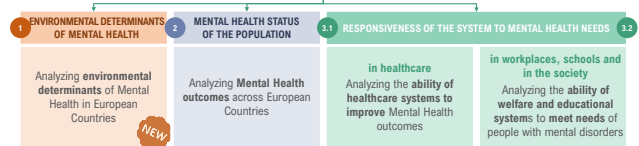


Figure 1. “Headway – Mental Health Index 2.0” structure –
Source: The European House – Ambrosetti, 2022

For example, the **effects of climate change on Mental Health** have been addressed only recently and knowledge on the pathways between the two is still limited. Among the documented impacts, there are **increased impulsive behaviours**, and **higher suicide rates**. With regards to **pollution**, scientific evidence has demonstrated that people exposed to certain air pollutants, such as PM2.5, are more likely to experience a mental disorder. On average in the EU, **12% of people living in urban areas are exposed to PM2.5**.

Environmental noise remains another major environmental determinant affecting the Mental Health and well-being of millions of individuals across Europe: according to recent data, at least **20% of the population lives in areas where traffic noise levels are harmful to Mental Health**. Another alarming finding is that around **1/5 of people in post-conflict settings** may develop a mental disorder. As the conflict in Ukraine continues to unravel, the prevalence of mental disorders is expected to grow across all Europe.

The pillar related to the responsiveness of the system to mental healthcare needs shows, once again, the heterogeneity of European Countries. The **availability of healthcare professionals and infrastructures is very diversified across Europe**, in which many Countries report values below the average threshold, indicating the need to increase support. In general, the results are likely to be biased by the overall **healthcare system design, cultural factors, and varying data reporting across Countries**.

In workplaces, individuals with mental conditions receive a salary on average **17.5% lower** with respect to the general population and are **more likely to work part-time and retire early**. Other than the personal burden, there is an important societal one related to a reduction in productivity. Alarming is also that **only 45.8% of the Countries** under analysis **have work-related Mental Health prevention and promotion programs** in place. In school settings, the scenario is not better, given that **nearly 14% of school dropouts** in Europe are students with a mental disorder and on average students indicating mental distress are **24% more likely to have repeated a grade**.

In conclusion, the “**Headway – Mental Health Index 2.0**” provides European decision makers with a useful tool for the **monitoring and planning for environmental, healthcare, welfare, and education policies** in Mental Health. Not including Mental Health in public health agendas, especially considering the current scenario, is a threat to **social cohesion, sustainability, better health, and economic growth**. It is therefore urgent to address Mental Health through **cross-sectorial and integrated policies**, as part of a comprehensive EU Mental Health Strategy and a **European Year dedicated to Mental Health in 2023**.



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For more information on the initiative and to download the complete report **scan here.**