

Joint Action JA ImpleMENTAL showcased its activities at the “High Level Meeting on Mental Health” 14 November 2023 in Avilés, Asturias, Spain.

The Covid 19 global pandemic, the rise in living costs, the war in Ukraine, and the climate change have further aggravated the mental health situation in the EU, especially affecting the most vulnerable groups. Nowadays, we have reached a significant milestone in the realm of mental health, transforming it from a silenced epidemic to a central topic for debate and action in the fight against stigma.

The Spanish Government has a strong commitment to improve mental health, therefore, has included it as a priority and prominent agenda under the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU.. The Ministry of Health of Spain held a "Mental Health Conference", a high-level meeting on Tuesday, November 14, 2023, at the Niemeyer Center in Avilés, Asturias.

José Miñones, the acting Minister of Health of Spain, strongly emphasized in his closing speech to confront the stigma and taboos that have traditionally revolved around mental health problems. He welcomed the fact that Member States are ready to prioritize mental health in their health agendas and unanimously supported **submission of a common strategic framework on Mental Health**, Spain would submit to the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Council of the European Union (EPSCO) on 30th November 2023.

“The framework is a broad and useful agreement that will allow any country that considers a review of its Mental Health strategy to do so, with guarantees and with the same strategic vision, making Mental Health a main focus of the community agenda in health matters, so that the vectors of prevention, detection and treatment will be common throughout Europe.” José Miñones also underlined the “paradigm change” in which Spain had been working in recent years endowed with 100 million euros, and enabling the implementation of different initiatives and actions, such as the update of the Mental Health Strategy and the approval of the Mental Health Action Plan 2022-2024, with specific projects, milestones and tools e.g.: in the field of suicide prevention or by providing comprehensive and integrated care for people with severe mental health issues or addictions to avoid institutionalisation.

The high-level conference was organised with the aim to reflect upon and discuss the current challenges and opportunities in order to facilitate the exchange of EU level policies, good practices and projects on mental health, as well as to support the development of mental health by showcasing the implementation of the "**Healthier together – EU non-communicable diseases 2022-2027**" on mental health, and highlight how EU-funded projects on mental health can provide a tangible contribution to **the European Commission's Communication "A comprehensive approach to mental health"** with guidance and active participation of national and international experts.

In line with the above, **JA ImpleMENTAL** - Joint Action on Implementation of Best Practices in the Area of Mental Health- financed from the EU4Health/Third health programme - **was honoured to present its main goals, network and so far achievements at the event, represented by Vasileia Konte**, Coordinator of the JA, on behalf of the Consortium leader, the Greek National Public Health organization, along with **Mag. Alexander Grabenhofer-Eggerth** from National Institute of Public Health of Austria (GÖG GmbH), and **Antonio Lora**, Department of Mental Health-Lombardy Region, who also participated and presented at the event.

The High Level Meeting was designed to lead a strategic reflection on the reinforcement that the European Union should provide for mental health-related issues. This included the protection of the most vulnerable groups, such as children and adolescents, addressing the challenge of unwanted loneliness in the elderly, and combating the stigma and discrimination that individuals with mental health problems often face. There were panel discussions which focused on 3 key topics: Progress in policies on mental health and mental health initiatives in the EU; Mental health for children and young people; and Prevention of suicide in Europe.

Vasileia Konte, MD participated in the panel: *Progress in mental health policies and initiatives in the European Union* where she informed the audience that JA ImpleMENTAL's Network includes 39 organisations from 21 countries, and more than 200 persons work together sharing knowledge and experience for improving mental health. 25 pilots are currently taking place across 20 countries in the framework of the JA, and 17 new or renewed suicide prevention plans across Europe will be formulated 14 countries are piloting and implementing changes in their community mental health services till the end of the project (September 2024). Ms. Konte also summed up major challenges, including resistance to change, missing of necessary data, and listed positive outcomes (such as the improvement of the collaboration with stakeholders) and major gains, including sharing of experiences, knowledge increase, building out a strong network that can create the climate for the necessary changes. As representatives of participating national ministries of Health have pointed, JA ImpleMENTAL is aligned with the national mental health strategies; and the results of country pilots can serve as a landmark for the future continuation of the work at national level. Areas of strong synergies have further been identified with many of the flagship initiatives of the New EU Communication on a Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health as well as the activities of the key Stakeholders participating in the JA ImpleMENTAL Stakeholder forum.

Activities of JA ImpleMENTAL in Spain were showcased by **María José Lozano Semitiel**, General Director of Mental Health, Region of Murcia. The Murcia government recently published "**The Strategy for the Improvement of Mental Health 2023-2026**", which is based on the transformation of services towards closer and rights-based intervention models focusing on prevention and groups of special vulnerability, with strong emphasis on suicide prevention. In the framework JA ImpleMENTAL two pilot project are currently implemented: "**Inclusive Living Projects**" based on the reform of mental health care in Belgium with the aim to improve the quality of life of people having serious mental illnesses and addictions and "**Together we are more**" project providing comprehensive and better integrated care to avoid institutionalisation for people with severe mental health issues or addictions.

In the Suicide prevention in Europe panel **Mag. Alexander Grabenhofer-Eggerth**, Head of the Department of Mental Health at the National Institute of Public Health of Austria, presented international outcomes of customised adaption of the best practice **Suicide Prevention in Austria (SUPRA)** a multi-level suicide prevention strategy that integrates universal, selective and indicated prevention interventions, based on the local implementation context, and building upon existing resources and initiatives.

Antonio Lora, Department of Mental Health-Lombardy Region, presented experiences gained within the JA ImpleMENTAL network in the transfer and pilot Implementation of selected elements of the **Belgian best practice** (Reform of Mental Health Care in Belgium), aiming deinstitutionalization and to facilitate the transition from institutional care, based on mental hospitals, to community-based care.

The event brought together around 150 Spanish professionals in person from various areas of mental health, experts representing central and regional governments and different types of mental health

institutions, who were joined by foreign colleagues following the bilingual event online from several international organisations and partners.

Other dignities who honoured the event included: **Delia Losa**, delegate of the Government in the Principality of Asturias; **María Concepción Saavedra Rielo**, Minister of Health for the Asturian Regional Cabinet; **Silvia Calzón**, Secretary of State for Health; **Nel González**, President of the Spanish Mental Health Confederation; **Pilar Aparicio Azcarraga**, Director-General for Public Health, **Mariví Montesirín**, the Mayor of Avilés, **Milena Angelova**, European Economic and Social Committee, Executive Vice-President - SGI Europe.

All participants agreed that exchanging views on policy recommendations on mental health are vital to stress the importance of prevention and underlined importance of continuous information exchange, the need to provide equal access to care and sharing good practices already in place.

We thank the Spanish Ministry for inviting us to present JA ImpleMENTAL at this High level Meeting as well as for their valuable assistance in providing and translating the media material issued by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of Europe.

Vasileia Konte, JA ImpleMENTAL Coordinator's speech is downloadable from: [here](#)

About JA ImpleMENTAL

The Joint Action involves 39 participating organisations from competent authorities in 21 EU/EEA countries and supports them to establish local networks for mental health and to strengthen community-based provision of preventive care services across sectors in order to improve access to a sustainable quality of care. JA ImpleMENTAL is focusing on the transfer and implementation of two best practices: (1) mental health reform in Belgium based on the principle of deinstitutionalization, the transition from primarily institutional care to community-based care in order to improve mental health outcomes and quality of life and avoid unnecessary hospitalizations, and (2) Suicide Prevention Austria (SUPRA), a multi-level suicide prevention strategy that integrates universal, selective and indicated prevention interventions, based on the local implementation context and building upon existing resources and initiatives. The activities of the JA ImpleMENTAL strongly support the new Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, which aims to put mental health on par with physical health and to ensure a cross-sectorial approach to mental health issues.

JA ImpleMENTAL is committed to improve the quality of life of people living with mental problems and illnesses with the involvement of all parties concerned.

For further information on JA ImpleMENTAL project: <https://ja-imental.eu/>

[A comprehensive approach to mental health \(europa.eu\)](#)