EUMH Alliance
European Alliance for Mental Health Employment and Work

eumhalliance.com
Brussels, 7th April 2017

World Health Day 2017

Depression: the biggest barrier to workplace well-being

On World Health Day 2017, the European Alliance for Mental Health Employment and Work (EUMH Alliance) calls for better mental health promotion and prevention at work. The Alliance believes that investing in mental-health promotion, prevention of and recovery from mental health problems, and stigma reduction at work is key to fair, healthy and growing societies.

Depression is a challenge for people experiencing it and those close to them, but is also a puzzle for European health systems and labour markets. Depression is common, with one in seven people likely to experience it, and carries significant personal, societal, and economic costs. Work-related depression costs across EU Member States represent nearly €620 billion in 2012, including employee absenteeism and lost economic output[1]. To build strong, fair economies and resilient workplaces, action on mental health in the workplace is urgently needed.

Depression is one of the most common mental health problems in Europe and worldwide, and accounts for up to 50% of long-term instances of sick leave and disability. Up to 70% of people with depression do not seek help and support and less than half receive treatment. Therefore, the EUMH Alliance is pleased to see that the World Health Organization recognises depression as a major public health concern.

Addressing depression in workplace settings means preventing psychosocial workplace risks, promoting resilience and wellbeing, enabling early detection of poor mental health, supporting rehabilitation of workers facing mental ill health, and reducing stigma.

There is an important role for all in the workplace. Managers should foster a culture of openness in which employees are supported in times of ill health and returning from sick leave. Co-workers should be aware of the realities of mental ill-health and not be driven by prejudice. Employees must know that, as with physical illness, a welfare safety net exists and can be relied upon. This is particularly important for workers from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often lack tools to increase their own resilience.

The EUMH Alliance recommends a number of steps to support individuals facing mental health difficulties at work and minimise the impact on the labour market, including:

- Increase organisational training and support for managers to recognise the first signs of depression (and other related mental health difficulties) in employees.
- Implement anti-stigma campaigns in the workplace.
- Ensure targeted mental health promotion across work levels, so that people from different socioeconomic backgrounds can profit from enhanced well-being.
- Establish mechanisms which support those who need time off before returning to work.
- Increase engagement between employers, policy-makers, and advocates to find solutions that empower workers and benefit employers.

[1] Matrix Insights, 2012