

“Supporting mental health and care for the wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people”

- Mental health and well-being of every child and young people first, in Italy-



Summary

The European Commission is supporting four EU Member States in the context of a multi-country technical support project that aims to improve the provision of mental health, wellbeing, and psychosocial support to children and young people. The project will be implemented in Italy together with Spain (concretely in Andalusia), Cyprus and Slovenia.

In Italy the intervention will focus on improving mental health and psychosocial support services for adolescents of 10-19 years old, with a particular attention to the most vulnerable groups, and with the purpose of developing better integration of health, education and social services. Additionally, through the participation of the Youth Advisory Board in co-designing solutions, the project will aim at promoting young people's participation in awareness raising and decision making.

Context

Mental health challenges among children and young people are a growing concern in Europe and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nine million adolescents in Europe (aged 10 to 19) or an equivalent of 16.3% for this age group, are living with mental disorders, with anxiety and depression accounting for more than half of all cases (UNICEF, 2021).

Over the years, Italy has put in place prevention and treatment programmes to support youth mental health in the health, social and education sectors. The Italian National Health Service is based on the principles of universality, equality, and equity. Its health programmes are based on cooperation between the different levels of national and regional governing bodies. The complexity of the systems and the geographical territorial disparities in service provision require a framework for improving standardized collaboration between mental health and psychosocial support service providers for children and adolescents as envisaged by the National Prevention Plan 2020-2025 of the State-Regions Conference and by the Italian Fifth National Action Plan for the Protection of Child Rights and Development.

The project is in line with the European Child Guarantee, which aims to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing to children in need much needed access to a set of key services, including

health, social and education services. The project is also in line with the Italian Child Guarantee Action Plan (NAP) that aims to set up a preventive health care programme, strengthen mental wellbeing, upgrade care services, and improve the quality of mental health and psycho-social services whilst also raising awareness among authorities, service providers and the public about the importance of mental health and wellbeing of children and youth.

Support to be delivered

The technical support provided by UNICEF will strengthen Italian national and local authorities in providing integrated, participatory and comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support to adolescents (age 10-19 years old).

The project will support Italian authorities to address the fragmentation of health, social and education services, often leading to uncoordinated interventions. It will help to enhance professionals' knowledge, awareness and capacity to provide support services that are not part of their own sector to ensure a timely and effective continuum of services to address mental health and psychosocial support needs of adolescents. Young people's views and experiences will be included in the design and in the co-creation of recommendations and solutions on youth mental health and wellbeing, ensuring young people and their communities' effective participation.

In the long-term, the project aims to strengthen the national capacity in prevention and promotion of mental and psycho-social wellbeing, and to provide necessary support to children and adolescents in need through improved integration of services across sectors and increased knowledge and capacity of all involved stakeholders and services, while ensuring a participatory approach. The national authorities will be equipped with a framework to improve cross-sectoral integration of mental health and psycho-social support services for children and adolescents, with best practices, and digital tools to strengthen national, regional and local authorities' capacity to deliver quality services, in close consultation with children and young people.

Results to be achieved

Access to and use of quality integrated mental wellbeing and psycho-social services by children, adolescents, and young people, particularly the most vulnerable in Italy will be improved.

National and subnational authorities will be equipped with a cross-sectoral framework for developing and implementing a model for mental health provision for children and youth, and will have the necessary capacity and tools to actively address the issues in close cooperation with them.

EU assistance

This 24-months project is funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument (TSI).

It is implemented by UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, in cooperation with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM).

Project leadership is provided by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Italy together with ProMIS - Programma Mattone Internazionale Salute, who are the beneficiary authorities of the TSI.