World Health Organization

European Region

76th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe Virtual Side Event

Addressing vulnerabilities across the life course through a mental health in all policies approach: launch of new evidence on adverse childhood experiences across 29 Member States

Overview

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic experiences that occur before the age of 18, including physical, emotional and sexual abuse; physical neglect; household substance use, mental illness or incarceration; parental separation or death; and witnessing domestic violence in the household.

ACEs are widely recognized as important determinants of health and well-being across the life course. Previous research has found that adults who experienced four or more ACEs are at four times greater risk of experiencing depression and at 30 times greater risk of suicide attempts than those experiencing no ACEs. ACEs also significantly increase the risks for chronic physical diseases, including heart disease and diabetes, as well as poor social outcomes such as unemployment and homelessness. These impacts across the life course can impose major costs on services and systems, including health, social care, education and criminal justice. Preventing these experiences where possible, building resilience when adversity occurs, and ensuring that people affected by ACEs can access appropriate support are important to building healthier and more resilient individuals, families and communities.

Measuring the impact of ACEs on health and social outcomes is essential to inform prevention and enable early intervention. In November 2025, WHO/Europe launched the first multi-country survey on ACEs in the 27 European Union Member States, Iceland and Norway, drawing on the experiences of more than 26 000 young adults aged 18–30 years across those countries. The survey is one of many actions under a collaboration between WHO and the European Commission, *Addressing mental health challenges in the European Union, Iceland and Norway*, through which WHO is providing tailored support to these countries to build stronger mental health systems and services. It aims to provide insights into the extent of ACEs amongst young adults in the participating countries; the relationship between ACEs, mental and physical health, and other social and behavioural outcomes in young adults; and the costs associated with different levels of ACE exposure.

The side event will present the findings of the report: ***Adverse Childhood Experiences in the European Union, Iceland and Norway: characteristics, consequences and costs,*** and provide an opportunity to discuss how the new evidence can inform policy and action across sectors, including approaches to preventing ACEs, addressing their root causes, building resilience and developing trauma-informed public services that can support people affected by childhood adversity throughout the life course.

Programme

Tuesday, 6 October 2026	
10:00 – 10:10	**Addressing vulnerabilities across the life course through a mental health in all policies approach** *Natasha Azzopardi Muscat, Director of the Division of Health Systems, WHO Regional Office for Europe* *Martine Ingvorsen, Policy Officer and Team Leader on Mental Health, Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (SANTE), European Commission*
10:10-10:30	**Findings of the ACEs survey** *Ledia Lazeri, Regional Adviser for Mental Health and Well-being, WHO Regional Office for Europe* *Mark Bellis, Director of Health Research and Innovation, Liverpool John Moores University, UK*
10:30-10:50	**Reflections from Member States** Moderated by *Ledia Lazeri, Regional Adviser for Mental Health and Well-being, WHO Regional Office for Europe* Representatives from: • Republic of Moldova • Monaco • Romania • Kazakhstan
10:50-11:10	**Panel discussion: Cross-sectoral actions to address ACEs and build resilience across the WHO European Region** Moderated by *Cassie Redlich, Technical Officer for Mental Health and Well-being, WHO Regional Office for Europe* Representatives from: • **Dana Benešová**, CEO, Society for All (SOFA), Czechia • **Saara Rapeli,** Manager of Youth Well-being, Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland

	• **Gabriele Fontana**, UNICEF
11:10 – 11:25	**Audience engagement session** Moderated by *Cassie Redlich, Technical Officer, Mental Health and Well-being, WHO Regional Office for Europe*
11:25 – 11:30	**Closing** *Natasha Azzopardi Muscat, Director of the Division of Health Systems, WHO Regional Office for Europe*

Practical information

Zoom connection details

Register here: https://who.zoom.us/meeting/register/P4hxKpqnSnGFNulW6qR7LA

Languages

This session will be in English and Russian