



PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 4 May 2016

Today, in a meeting of the European Parliament Interest Group on Mental Health, Well-being and Brain Disorders hosted by Nessa Childers MEP, a draft Written Declaration was presented focusing on the mental health and well-being of refugees coming into the EU.

While many of the health needs of refugees are being acknowledged, there is little attention for the protection of their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. This is in shrill contrast with the trauma, fear, violence, rejection and discrimination they suffer on their way to their destination countries. Once arrived, they also often face rejection, social exclusion, discrimination and lack of meaningful future. These horrific experiences can –and will – have a negative impact on mental health and well-being and may lead to the onset of severe mental illness, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression and anxiety.

Speaking in the meeting, Dr Angelika Kiewel (German Chamber of Psychotherapists) underlined the effect of these traumatic experiences, stating that *'Studies of asylum seekers who have recently arrived in Germany show that 20 to 40 percent of them suffer from a PTSD and that the PTSD rate among refugees is at least 10 times higher than among the general population'. Among children, it is even worse: the PTSD rate in refugee children is 15 times higher than among children born in Germany'*.

The Written Declaration therefore focuses on the importance of access to psycho-social support as well as the need to prevent traumas from developing into full blown mental illness. It calls on the European Commission and national governments to incorporate mental health services into their overall health support packages.

Tomas Zdechovsky MEP, co-initiator for the Written Declaration and chairing the meeting, emphasized the need for this initiative, stating *'the statistics speak for themselves. Action is needed now by governments to take account of the mental health needs of asylum seekers and to show compassion for their plight. Support and services need to be available to those migrants that suffer from PTSD and other mental health problem as well as on the prevention of these problems'*.

The Written Declaration is also supported by GAMIAN-Europe, which recently held a regional meeting on this topic. It will now be finalised and tabled; it is hoped that 376 MEPs will sign to ensure adoption of the Written Declaration in Parliament.

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Notes for editors

- For the draft text of the Written Declaration: go to <http://www.gamian.eu/news/press-release-on-asylum-seekers/>
- The Interest Group on was set up in 2009 with the aim to advocate the development of sound EU policies which contribute to prevention of mental health problems and ensure good services, care and empowerment for those affected by mental health problems. It is currently co-chaired by MEPs Marian Harkin, Jean Lambert, Nessa Childers and Cristian Busoi.
- GAMIAN-Europe (Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe) is a patient-driven pan-European organisation, representing the interests of persons affected by mental illness and advocating for their rights. The organization coordinates the Interest Group on Mental Health, Well-being and Brain Disorders
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