

# ANNEX: SYNTHESIS OF DESK REVIEWS

An attachment to D1.2 Mental Health in a Changing Europe (Policy Brief)

## METHODOLOGY

The ADVANCE project partners carried out rapid desk reviews in six European countries (Denmark, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Switzerland, and the Netherlands) to provide an overview of how specific threats such as climate change, digitalization, migration, socio-economic stressors, and aging affect the mental health of pre-selected populations in those countries. The research then aimed to identify sub-groups at higher risk among the pre-selected populations. Collected data included overall demographic profiles, epidemiology of mental health and psychosocial problems, adversities and sources of distress, socio-cultural aspects, and the existence of and access to psychosocial services.

*Due to a different scope of research (i.e. scaling up an intervention that has been proven effective), the information gathered from the Finnish Desk Review will be included in ADVANCE's project policy outcomes at a later stage.*

## COUNTRY-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

### Youth affected by climate change, Germany

The focus of the intervention research in Germany is climate change and its impact on young people between 12 and 25 years old. Overall, a number of studies show that climate change is associated with a significant mental health burden in young people in Germany: climate-related distress is linked to higher depressive symptoms, increased anxiety symptoms and lower reported health-related quality of life. Young people themselves indicate negative, stressful emotions in relation to climate change and that their concerns about the environment limit their sense of joy and cause sleep problems. Youth are impacted by both the direct consequences of climate change through extreme weather events (EWE) (e.g., floods) and changes in their living conditions, as well as indirect and social consequences like the prospect that their and coming generations' living conditions will consistently worsen. Their vulnerability moreover stems from a combination of increased awareness about the effects of climate change and limited resources to impact climate policies and cope with global stressors.

The research team was able to identify two important subgroups at higher risk of negative mental health impacts: climate activists and young people having experienced EWE, such as floods. In addition to the distress experienced by the general population, young activists also report feelings of anger and frustration, disbelief and confusion about politics and politicians, and pressure and stress caused by the workload due to their engagement. For those affected by EWE, feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and extreme tension lingered also after the initial shock had subsided. In addition to this, there are specific risk factors, in form of indirect consequences like intra-family conflicts, little social support, the loss of social networks and relocation.

### Young adults affected by socio economic adversity, Lithuania

Young people can be particularly vulnerable to mental health problems. Adolescence and emerging adulthood are critical developmental periods characterised by significant biological, psychological, and social changes that can increase vulnerability to stress and mental health problems. During this period, individuals often experience heightened academic pressures, social expectations, identity exploration, and financial instability, all of which can contribute to increased psychological distress. These factors are exacerbated when individuals experience socio-economic adversities, increasing their vulnerability to mental health problems, as well as discrimination and stigma.

The desk review, predominantly based on data from student populations, highlights several vulnerabilities among Lithuanian youth. These include exposure to bullying, adverse childhood experiences, financial hardships, unemployment, residence in rural areas, physical disabilities, being female, as well as identifying as a sexual or gender minority.

### Adults in digitalised work settings in Small-to-Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the Netherlands

In the Dutch context, the focus is on the digitalisation of the workplace as the Netherlands has one of the most digitalised workforces in Europe. Initial research has shown that due to the increased use of digital technologies, employees feel they have

to work more and faster and therefore they are more stressed and experience worse physical and mental health problems. These employees also report being less happy, having more difficulties maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and experiencing more symptoms of burnout.

The desk review identified a body of research which reveals that factors such as age, gender, education, and higher levels of responsibility increase the risk for work-related mental health problems and stigmatization in the context of digitalized work settings in the Netherlands. As a result, the following groups are at higher risk of experiencing mental health concerns:

- Women, younger employees (< 35 years), senior managers, and employees with preparatory practical education or less ( $\leq$  VMBO) or theoretical education ( $\geq$  HBO) are generally more vulnerable to burnout symptoms in the workplace
- Women and younger (< 35 years) and older (> 50 years) employees suffer more from symptoms related to technostress
- Senior managers, women, younger (< 35 years) or new employees (e.g., started in the company within the last 6 months), and employees with preparatory practical education or less ( $\leq$  VMBO) or theoretical education ( $\geq$  HBO), suffer from difficulties with hybrid working for various reasons
- Men, younger employees (< 35 years), and employees with preparatory practical education or less ( $\leq$  VMBO) or theoretical education ( $\geq$  HBO), are less likely to disclose their mental health issues at work
- Moreover, men and employees with preparatory practical education or less ( $\leq$  VMBO) expect to experience more negative work outcomes when they do disclose mental health concerns (e.g. social consequences of getting fired)

### **Adults with a migrant background, Italy**

Italy is one of the primary destination countries for migrants seeking asylum in Europe. The migrant population, including undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, internationally displaced persons, labour migrants and other populations on the move faces a multitude of stressors and potentially traumatic events throughout the various stages of their migration journey. Based on a number of studies among migrant populations resettled in Italy, ADVANCE project partners

identified that people with the highest risk for mental health concerns with limited educational attainment and facing socio-economic challenges, particularly those without stable employment. Three main groups emerged as at higher risk in the desk review:

- Refugees from West Africa, whose vulnerability might be related to adversities on the migration route (i.e., central Mediterranean route), particularly through Libya. This route exposes them to conflict-related and interpersonal (gender-based) violence, and a highly protracted and challenging journey. Racism and discrimination are also experienced once resettled in Italy.
- Asylum seekers with pending asylum applications for international protection. Their psychological distress is linked to factors such as the long wait for asylum decisions, and the difficulty of finding long-term employment.
- Migrant women report poorer mental and physical health outcomes than men. This may be linked to ethnic discrimination and interpersonal and gender-based violence. They often work irregularly, facing heavy workloads and emotional stress. These factors may limit access to healthcare services and increase risks of developing mental health problems. Discrimination based on refugee and gender status may also be connected with underemployment. During the perinatal period, migrant women may find it difficult to access healthcare services due to costs, and may perceive a lack of cultural sensitivity, particularly for infant and young child feeding practices.

### **Adults with a migrant background, Denmark**

Migration is the chosen focus in the context of Denmark with particular emphasis on questions related to migration status, social integration, and their effects on mental health. Based on a body of literature in Denmark, the ADVANCE project partner has found (similar to the situation in Italy) that vulnerabilities for migrants in relation to mental health are linked to socio-economic and environmental determinants and traumatic experiences happening both pre- and post- arrival. The desk review identified three main sub-groups:

- Newly arrived refugees face long waiting times for the handling of their asylum application resulting in economic hurdles and social exclusion due to the low benefits they are entitled to and no opportunities to enter the labour market. In addition, they have

poor access to general health and specific mental health services leading to lack of early recognition of and intervention for trauma.

- Former child refugees (i.e., adult refugees who arrived in Denmark as children) may have experienced increased exposure to violence, family separation, absence of proper care, socioeconomic adversity, labour market marginalization and other social inequities, higher levels of mortality and psychiatric care, poor education attainment and labour market outcomes, limited access to healthcare and inconsistent health data transfer when turning 18 hindering continuum of care.
- People with higher levels of exposure to potentially traumatic events, including gender-based violence and torture survivors, represent a group with a need for more comprehensive care. The pre-migration experience to traumatic experiences increases the risk for mental health problems compared to non-exposed groups. Mental health needs in these populations are diverse. Many refugees experience barriers to accessing care.

### Older adults, Switzerland

As the tide of global aging rises, the urgency for informed public health interventions and policy development in the domain of gerontology becomes paramount. Therefore, the focus in Switzerland is on the aging population. Numerous international and national studies have shown that mental health and cognitive functioning are pivotal determinants of quality of life in older adults, a group that is steadily increasing. In this context, cognitive functioning — which includes memory, attention, language, and problem-solving abilities — is a crucial aspect of mental health in later life. Knowing that mental health critically interacts with cognitive functioning, especially in subpopulations with lower educational background and compromised socioeconomic resources, underlines the multifaceted challenges for healthcare systems, policymakers, and society at large.

The situation analysis identified three dimensions of vulnerability in this group: cognitive functions, physical abilities and health, and mental health. However, it is crucial to note that older adults are a very heterogeneous group. Health and functioning in old age are not uniformly distributed and - beneath the division between the third and fourth ages - depend on a range of social factors such as education, income, gender and, migratory status.

Additionally, experiences accumulated over the life course, such as engagement in cognitively stimulating activities and social relationships, influence how older adults cope with aging challenges and may also contribute to their vulnerability.

### ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Wasmus, H. (2024, February 6). ADVANCE WP7 - Presentation: Vulnerability - Youth affected by climate change. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10623955>

Brizar, A. (2024, February 22). ADVANCE WP7 - Presentation: Vulnerability and mental health risks in the Dutch workplace. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10692113>

Teixeira, R. M. (2024, March 15). ADVANCE WP7 - Presentation: Vulnerability from a Public Health standpoint. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10821726>

Prina, E. (2024, March 18). ADVANCE WP7 - Presentation: Understanding Vulnerability Among Migrant Populations: Insights from European Projects. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10830197>

Kliegel, M., & Mack, M. (2024, March 18). ADVANCE WP7 - Presentation: Vulnerability in older age with a focus on the Swiss population. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10830660>

Mack, M., Scarampi, C., Joly-Burra, E., Zuber, S., & Kliegel, M. (2024). Informing optimal strategies for public health interventions targeting mental health and cognitive functioning for older adults in Switzerland: A co-creation guided desk review. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10842616>

ADVANCE: Addressing mental health vulnerabilities from adolescence to older age: innovating prevention science for times of change



**Funded by  
the European Union**

*The ADVANCE project has received funding from the EU Horizon Programme under Grant Agreement No. 101080323. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Health and Digital Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.*

**Get in touch with us**  
advancementalhealth.ku.dk  
advance@ku.dk