

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002895/26
to the Commission
Giuseppe Antoci (The Left)
(13 July 2026)**

Subject: Mental health of young people in Sicily and reducing territorial disparities as regards access to psychological support services

A study carried out by the Italian Society of Psychiatric Epidemiology (SIEP) — which draws on data provided by the Ministry of Health's mental health information database — has highlighted that certain regions (including Sicily) are lagging significantly behind in the provision and organisation of mental health services.

In addition, a petition submitted by the Network of Sicilian Mental Health Advocacy Associations [Movimento delle organizzazioni per la promozione della salute mentale in Sicilia] has drawn attention to the growing number of teenagers and young people who are struggling with mental health, to the staff shortages dogging the island's mental health services, to the high number of patients who end up being sectioned and to the failure to use all of the resources earmarked for tailored treatment pathways.

In the light of the communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health (COM(2023)298 final), which identifies mental health as an EU priority and calls for initiatives to reduce service access disparities, I ask the Commission:

1. Is it aware of the mental health situation of young people in Sicily?
2. How could the EU4Health programme, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF +) and the EU's cohesion funds be used to support efforts to improve prevention and psychological care services in the EU's most disadvantaged regions?
3. Will it implement additional initiatives designed to foster the exchange of good practices and reduce territorial disparities in access to mental health services for young people?

Submitted: 13.7.2026

**Answer given by Mr Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission
(24 August 2026)**

The Commission is aware of the mental health challenges of children and young people. The current focus is on the implementation of the 2023 Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health ⁽¹⁾, which focuses on supporting vulnerable groups, including young people.

In collaboration with Unicef, a prevention toolkit is being developed to support policymakers in their work on mental and physical health of children and young people ⁽²⁾.

The regional programme Sicily 2021-2027, supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), allocates EUR 70 million to strengthen primary healthcare, improve access to care and reduce inequalities. The national programme Health Equity, with EUR 375 million in EU funding, helps improve healthcare in less developed regions.

ERDF can support prevention and psychological care services by financing health infrastructure, equipment, and digitalisation of community-based and outpatient services.

Through the European Social Fund+, the Member States can support the affordability and accessibility of healthcare, including prevention and psychological care, for vulnerable groups. Other EU funding instruments including the Recovery and Resilience Facility also provide support for access to healthcare services.

The Commission is supporting the World Health Organisation in providing targeted support to Member States via policy dialogues and capacity building to reinforce their mental health systems.

The EU Best Practices Portal on Public Health ⁽³⁾ has a repository of 29 best and promising practices. Under the collaborative action PRISM ⁽⁴⁾, Member States are transferring three of these practices, including Act, Belong, Commit, that fosters emotional wellbeing in children and young people.

⁽¹⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/public-health/european-health-union/comprehensive-approach-mental-health_en.

⁽²⁾ <https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/european-commission-and-unicef-announce-new-partnership-improve-health-outcomes>.

⁽³⁾ <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dyna/bp-portal/>.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://japrim.eu/>.