



UN WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING STRATEGY SUMMARY

A STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2018-2023

WHAT IS THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING STRATEGY?

The United Nations Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy is a comprehensive approach to address the needs the United Nations personnel and improve organizational capacities to prevent and protect mental health. It was endorsed by the heads of management of all UN system entities and it applies to the whole of the UN system.

WHY DO WE NEED A MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING STRATEGY FOR THE UN SYSTEM?

Working within the United Nations system can provide us with a strong sense of purpose and opportunities for helping others. It can also be challenging.

In 2015, over 17,000 United Nations system staff members across 11 United Nations entities completed the Global Well-Being survey. Approximately half of all United Nations staff members reported experiencing symptoms consistent with a mental health condition. This is greater than what is seen in the general population, and staff who had worked at the UN longest were more likely to experience poor mental health.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?

Our mental health directly influences how we think, feel and act: it also affects our physical health and impacts on those around us – both loved ones and work colleagues. Work, in fact, is one of the best things for protecting our mental health, but it can also adversely affect it.

Good mental health and well-being is not a black and white, on-off experience. We can all experience days, weeks or months where we feel resilient, strong and optimistic, regardless of events or situations. Often, that can be mixed with or shift to a very different set of thoughts, feelings and behaviours; or not feeling resilient and optimistic. For about 25% of us, that may shift to having a significant impact on how we think, feel and act in many parts of our lives, including relationships, experiences at work, sense of connection to peer groups and our personal sense of worth, physical health and motivation.

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

Despite significant and ongoing investment in mental health and well-being, there is still a long way to go in addressing the needs of the United Nations workforce.

The UN Global Well-Being survey found an association between poor mental health and:

1. The number of years worked for the United Nations system
2. Exposure to traumatizing events in the previous 12 months: both on-duty and off-duty
3. Low job satisfaction, perceived incivility and conflict in the workplace
4. Low levels of help-seeking or receiving any mental health services, internally and externally

In addition, findings from internal sick leave and pension data indicated a clear need for more to be done to protect, improve and resolve issues related to the mental health and well-being of United Nations staff members; with mental health disorders accounting for 14% of the sick leave days lost per year.



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HOW WAS THE UN WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING STRATEGY DEVELOPED?

The Strategy was developed in partnership with the UN Staff and Stress Counsellor Group, the UN Medical Directors, the HR Network, the UN Ombudsman and the UN Staff federations. The Project Team included IAEA, ILO, IOM, FICSA, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNOG, UN Secretariat, UN-Women, WHO and the World Bank.

The Strategy was endorsed by the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and, therefore, applies to all UN system entities. Secretary-General Guterres formally launched the Strategy in October 2018.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The comprehensive United Nations Workplace Mental Health Strategy aims to:

1. Create a workplace that enhances mental and physical health and wellbeing
2. Develop, deliver and evaluate high-quality psychosocial services everywhere that UN staff work
3. Welcome and support staff who live with mental health challenges
4. Ensure sustainable funding for mental health and wellbeing services

It also works to strengthen our individual knowledge, skills and behaviour with regard to:

- Taking care of others – colleagues, family and friends
- Taking care of our own mental health
- Taking care of the people who look after the health of others
- Seeking help earlier, to obtain access to a range of evidence-based psychosocial support and interventions

HOW IS THE UN WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING STRATEGY BEING IMPLEMENTED?

The UN Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy is led by a global governance body, the Implementation Board. The Implementation Board has representatives from UN system entities and key bodies such as Staff Federations, Associations and Representatives, Medical Directors and Staff Counsellors, and benefits from valuable input from an Advisory Panel made up of staff who have experience of a mental health condition. Achieving the goals of the Strategy requires a sustained, collective effort. We all have a role to play to ensure we have a healthy workforce for a better world.

