



Depressions and suicides: how to reduce the human cost of the crisis

The crisis is increasingly taking its toll on people's mental health. Studies show that for every 1% increase in unemployment, suicide rates go up by 0.8%. However, strong social safety nets can make all the difference and therefore should remain intact regardless of any austerity measures, MEPs and experts agreed at a workshop on 19 June in the European Parliament.

The workshop titled Mental Health in Times of Economic Crisis was organised by the Parliament's environment committee, bringing together experts and MEPs.

From debt to depression

British Social-Democrat MEP Glenis Willmott said the issue of mental health merited special attention in times of austerity. She pointed out that in Greece the suicide rate had increased by 40% in the first half of 2011. This is why mental health should play an important role the EU's health programme for 2014-2000.

David McDaid, a researcher at the London School of Economics and Political Science, said unmanageable debt increases the chance of developing depression, anxiety and obsessive disorders. To tackle this, more money needs to be invested in social services and solutions should be found with the financial sector to help those with unmanageable debts.

The importance of social services

Jose Luis Ayuso-Mateos, professor of psychiatry at the Autonomous University of Madrid said there were several factors increasing the risk of mental disorders and suicide. These included economic conditions, the lack of social support and the culture of the country. Research shows that in time of crisis countries with a strong network of social services do not suffer from an increasing suicide rate.

Roberto Bertollini, the World Health Organization's representative to the EU, suggested several measures to reduce the human cost of the financial crisis, such as employment and debt relief programmes, improvement of health care services and strengthening family networks.