

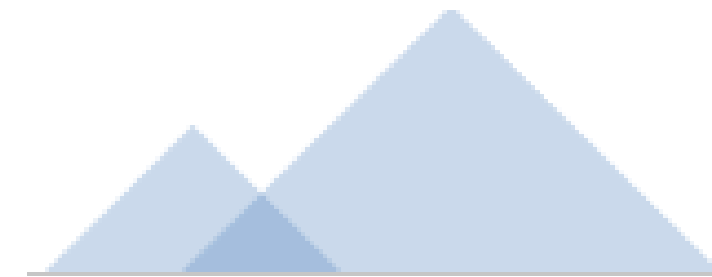


UNECE

 **Standing
Working Group
on Ageing**

Policy Dialogue on Ageing

Mental Health of Older Persons: A Conceptual and Empirical Overview



UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing No. 29

► Includes:

1. Main policy challenge
2. Determinants of mental health at later life
3. Prevalence of mental health conditions among older persons
4. Policy strategies & examples
5. Recommendations
6. Checklist

► Produced with Standing Working Group on Ageing

► Available: <https://unece.org/policy-briefs>

POLICY BRIEF

UNECE

Policy Brief on Ageing

Mental Health of Older Persons

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Suggested strategies

- Address specific needs of older persons in mental health strategies and plans
- Eliminate stigma and improve mental health literacy
- Combat ageism
- Invest in prevention and early detection
- Integrate mental health services into primary and long-term care models
- Train health-care professionals in geriatric mental health
- Improve access to treatment for mental health care
- Support older persons during challenging life events
- Enhance data collection and research on mental health challenges specific to older populations

Policy challenges

The mental health of older persons often goes unnoticed. Yet, a significant portion struggle with mental disorders, particularly depression. Depression alone affects up to 30 per cent of older Europeans and 14 per cent of older persons in North America, with a concerning increase in prevalence in recent years.^{1,2} Loneliness, a major risk factor, impacts nearly 30 per cent of older persons in some countries,³ further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Effectively promoting, protecting, and caring for the mental health of older persons requires addressing several challenges. This involves closing the significant treatment gap – 80 per cent of cases of depression among older persons in Europe are untreated. It also requires mitigating the negative impacts of poor mental health on older persons and their families, while protecting vulnerable groups like those in long-term care facilities. Due to the multiple and intersecting factors putting older persons from disadvantaged backgrounds at greater risk of mental disorders, addressing the wider social disparities in mental health is equally important.

What this brief is about

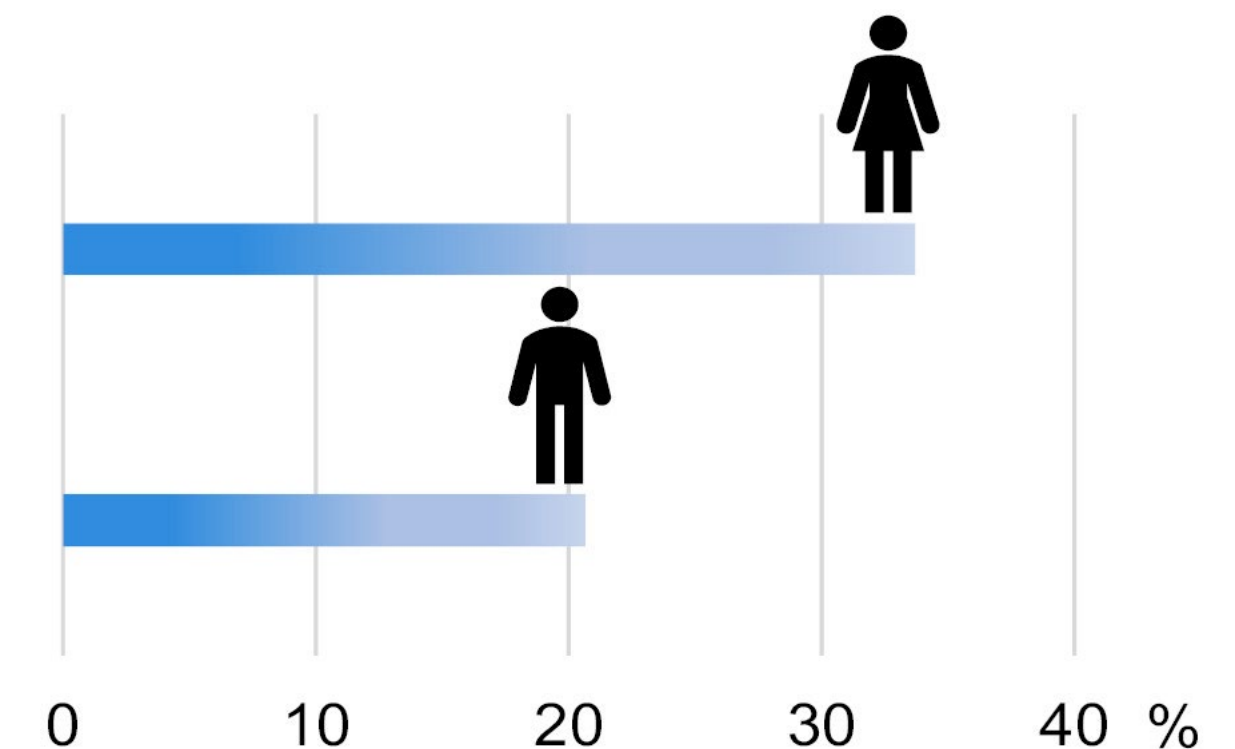
This policy brief presents determinants and risk factors of poor mental health among older persons and provides a detailed overview of the prevalence of mental health disorders among older persons of different socio-demographic characteristics across the region. The policy brief highlights different policy strategies to promote, protect and care for the mental health of older persons, with examples contributed by Governments and civil society organizations across the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region. The policy brief also offers a checklist of effective measures to promote and protect the mental health of older persons covered in this brief.

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The policy challenge

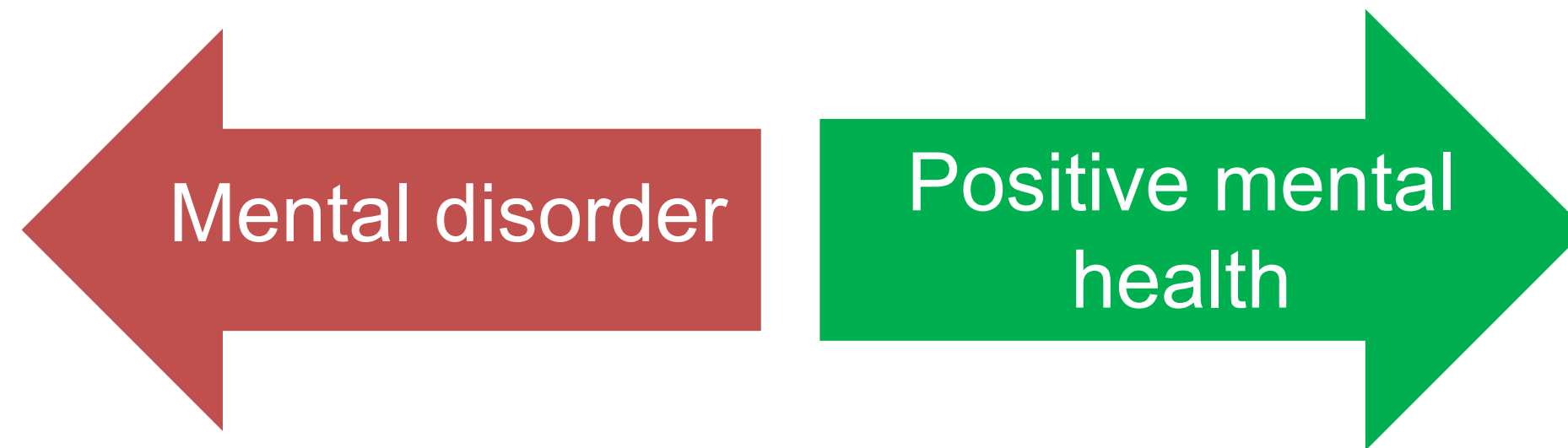
- Significant share of older persons are affected by mental disorders
- Older persons at high risk of suicide
- Loneliness impacts nearly 30 per cent of older persons in some countries
- Concerning increase in prevalence in recent years, esp. after the pandemic

► **Depression affects a large share of older persons**



Mental health of older persons

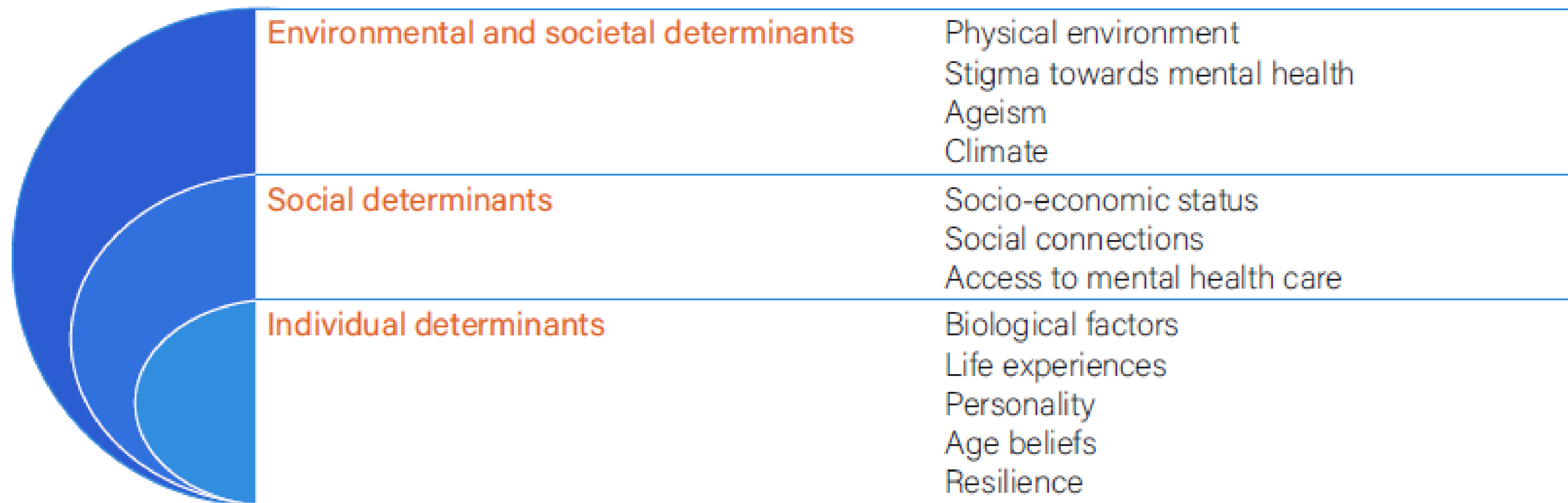
- Cornerstone of individual and societal well-being
 - Basic human right
 - Continuum



- ▶ **Important recognizing the multitude of individual experiences**

Determinants of mental health across the life course

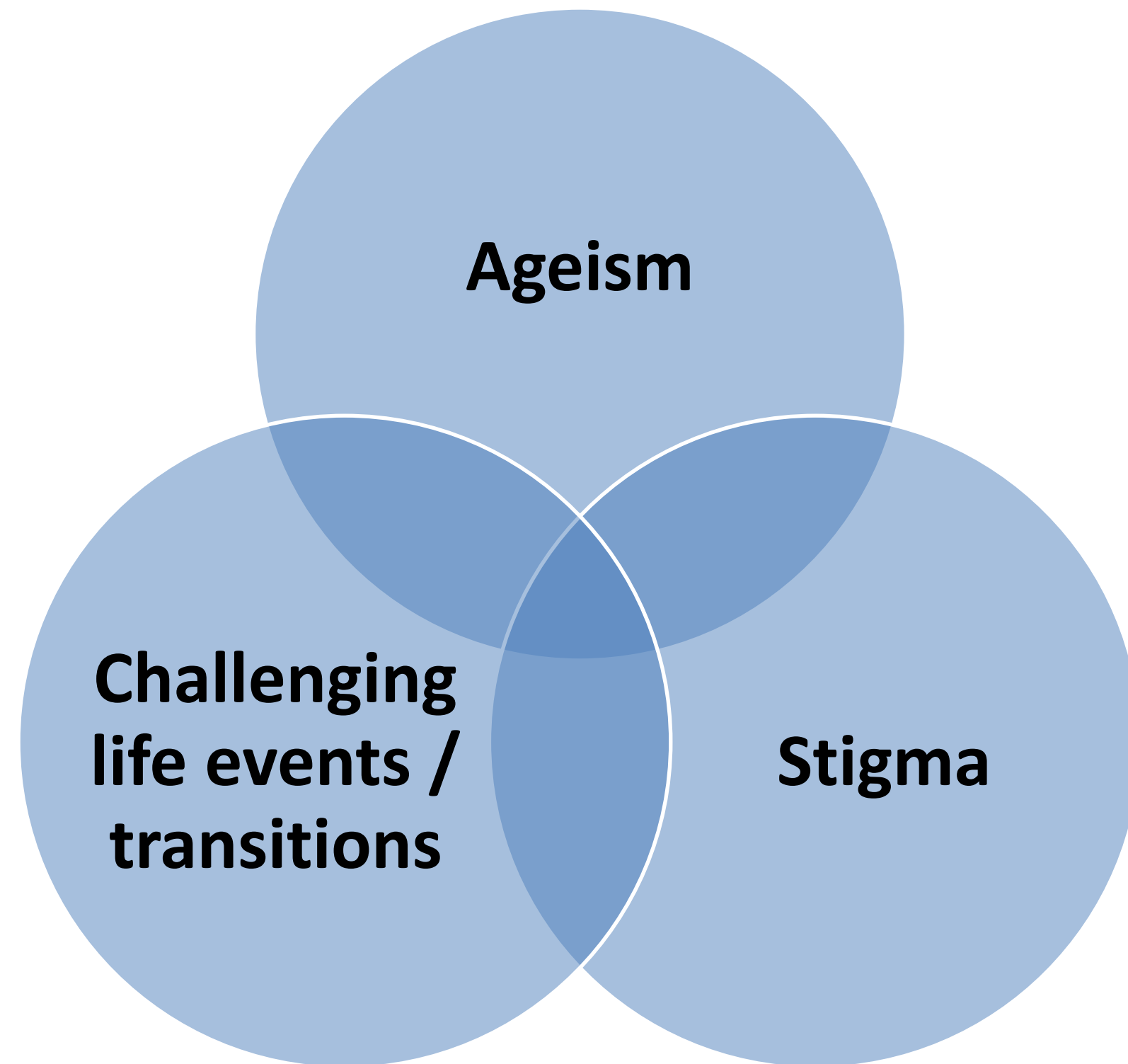
► Can increase or decrease vulnerability



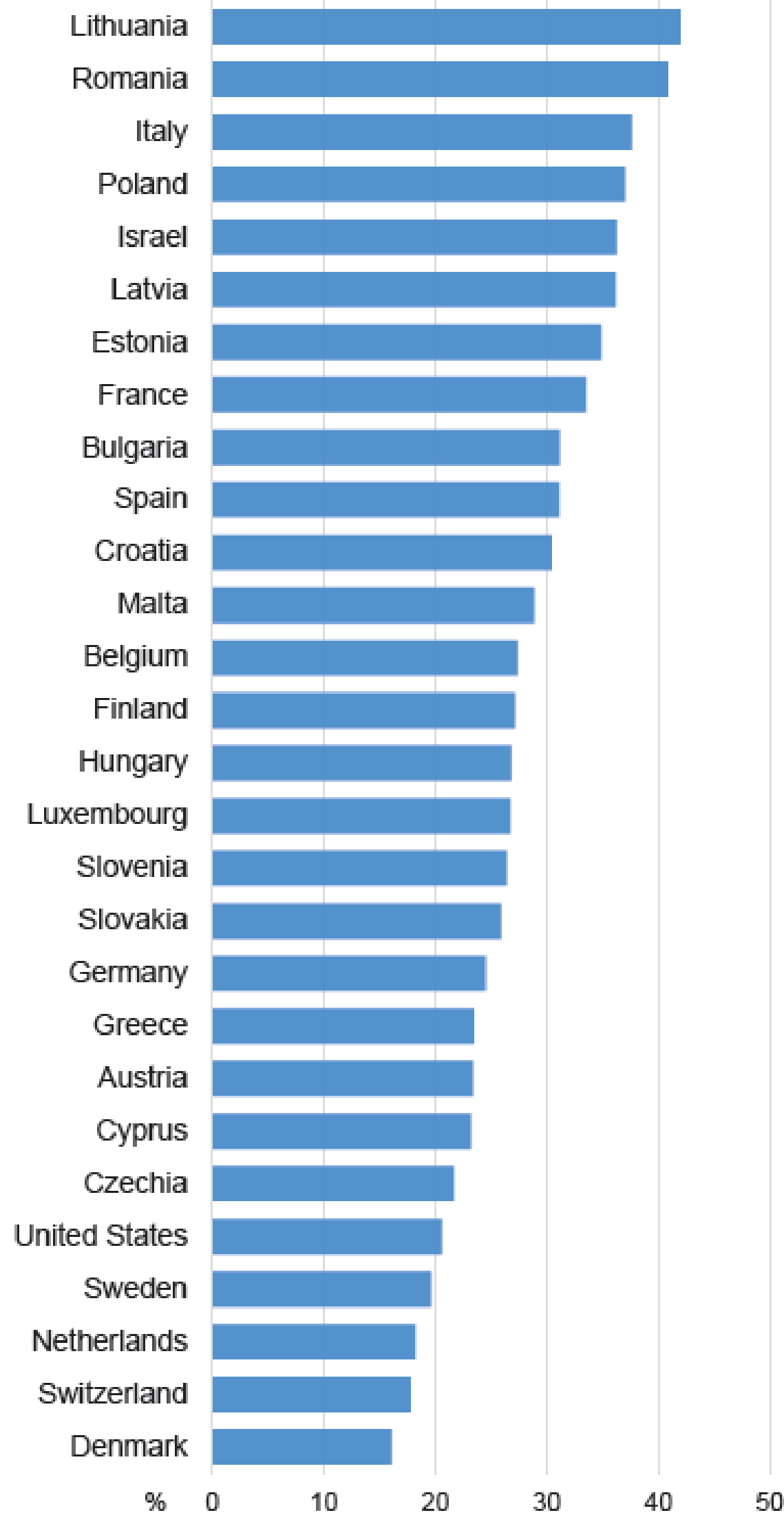
Sources: Adapted from World Health Organization (2014).⁹

Mental Health of Older Persons

- ▶ Older persons face triple burden
- ▶ Specific needs often not recognized in policies



Prevalence of depression (60+)



► Depression affects more than 1 in 4 older persons

Prevalence of depression (60+)



► **Women, less educated persons and those aged 80 years or above bear the greatest burden of depression**

Policy Strategies & Recommendations

Address specific needs of older persons in mental health policies

Combat ageism, eliminating stigma and improving mental health literacy

Invest in prevention and early detection

Improve access to treatment

Provide support at work and during challenging life events

Enhance research and data collection

► **Involving diverse stakeholders and older persons with mental health conditions in decision-making**