

7th European Alcohol Policy Conference
Ljubljana 22-23 November

Conference declaration

Around 300 participants from more than 25 countries joined the 7th European Alcohol Policy Conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia on 22nd and 23rd November 2016, to work on the theme of Alcohol Policy for Sustainable Development. Participants were joined by the Health Ministers from Slovenia and Luxembourg and the First Minister of Scotland, the Minister of Public Health from Ireland and the Minister of Education and Sport from Slovenia contributed to the conference with video-statements. The Ministers and other high-level policy makers, as well as leading academics and key representatives of civil society have shown their firm commitment to evidence-based actions to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm in Europe.

European Region has the highest level of alcohol consumption and of alcohol-related harm in the world. The burden of alcohol-related harm falls more heavily upon the most disadvantaged people in society. There is an urgent need for focussed approaches and actions from policy makers at European, national and community levels. This must include partnerships with NGOs and civil society organizations that prioritize effective prevention programmes and interventions to support individuals and families who are affected by alcohol-related harms.

Messages from the Conference were clear:

- Alcohol consumption is one key impact factor on sustainable development. It negatively affects population health and wellbeing; it increases inequalities and poverty, and also reduces the chances of reaching other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Inequalities in health and in the effects of alcohol are the result of the lack of policies leading to unfair distribution of resources and failure to create conditions for all people to prosper and have the best opportunity to live healthy lives.
- The evidence presented at this conference has shown how not taking action to tackle inequalities caused by alcohol produces costs that reach far beyond the health sector. It undermines the current development potential of individuals, communities and states.
- Achieving the health and wellbeing potential of all Europeans needs a stronger focus on accelerating improvements in those who are falling behind. Our universal approaches are important because their benefit will be greater for the most disadvantaged. We need actions to keep people healthy and ensure our health systems keep being sustainable.
- The attributable harm from alcohol consumption could be reduced, if interventions are initiated, which have proven to be effective and enforceable in current political environments. Both, upstream policies and downstream interventions need to be applied. Upstream policies can modify the course of an alcohol-related epidemic and downstream interventions relieve suffering for individuals and families.

- Information and awareness campaigns are important for reasons which extend beyond individual direct behaviour change. Campaigns should aim to change perceptions and beliefs about alcohol, denormalize its use and build support for regulation.
- Every Member State needs to develop and implement an alcohol strategy or include harmful alcohol use with its health, social and economic consequences in a broader context of targeting Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs).
- The national and regional governments should take the lead in enforcing of alcohol laws (especially regarding age limits and over serving) and developing alcohol policies to restrict availability generally and in particular to young people.
- National governments and international bodies should prioritise population-level measures that focus on the WHO's three "best buys" – increasing the price of alcohol, reducing its physical availability and restricting its marketing – and on effective strategies in all 10 action areas of the European action plan to reduce the harmful use of alcohol 2012–2020.
- To see real success Alcohol policies across Europe should be informed and underpinned by a coherent policy framework, that prioritizes 'Alcohol in all policies' and inter-sectoral approach.
- For David to defeat Goliath effective NGO partnerships are more essential than ever.
- Networking and international cooperation between countries, health and research institutions and NGOs and sharing of good practice are important for successful and faster developments of alcohol policy at all levels.