



FEANTSA

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For Immediate Release

EU Alcohol Strategy Must Address Alcohol-Related Health Inequalities Affecting Homeless Population

FEANTSA welcomes the resolution adopted by the European Parliament today calling for a new EU strategy to tackle alcohol related harm in Europe and calls on the European Commission to show political commitment by swiftly developing a new EU Alcohol Strategy (2016-2022).

There is a clear link between harmful alcohol consumption and homelessness. While a person may become homeless for various reasons, research shows that two-thirds of homeless people cite alcohol as a major reason for becoming homeless. There is also clear evidence that alcohol use increases as a consequence of homelessness, often used as a means of coping with the stress of homelessness. Mortality in homeless people (people who live on the street die 20 years before the general population) is an example of severe health inequalities and problematic alcohol use is a significant contributing factor to this. Problematic alcohol use accounts for over a third of all deaths among homeless people.

Homelessness and problematic alcohol use are complex issues that need to be addressed in an integrated manner. A multi-sector approach is needed to allow for partnerships among different health and social care providers so that they can coordinate support better. While it is important to develop a variety of treatments targeting homeless people with problematic alcohol use, there is also a pressing need to provide them with other support services. Evidence shows that stable housing both during and after treatment is key to recovery and can reduce the risk of relapse.

More evidence of effective policies to combat the harmful effects of problematic alcohol use has become available since the last EU Alcohol Strategy. The new strategy should build on this evidence and ensure, through adequate funding instruments, that alcohol-related harm is addressed comprehensively. When developing action, consideration should be given to population groups experiencing severe vulnerability and that are at risk of problematic alcohol consumption. The EU Health Strategy and the European Commission Staff Working Document, 'Investing in Health', recognise the importance of reducing health inequalities. The new Alcohol strategy should contribute to this by recognizing that problematic alcohol use exacerbates health inequalities, particularly among vulnerable groups such as homeless people.

The European Commission should take this strong request from the European Parliament, also expressed on various occasions by Member States and civil society, on board and propose a new and ambitious EU strategy to prevent and reduce problematic alcohol use and alcohol-related harm in Europe.

1 Mortality among homeless people in Denmark (Lancet, 2011)

2 Homelessness : a silent killer (Crisis, 2011)

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Notes for Editors:

1. FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless. It is an umbrella of not-for-profit organisations which participate in or contribute to the fight against homelessness in Europe. www.feantsa.org
2. Motion for a Resolution on the Alcohol Strategy <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B8-2015-0357&language=EN>