



The prevention of alcohol-related harm



In the EU Member States harmful alcohol consumption is a threat to public health, social welfare and economic development. The level of alcohol-related harm is unacceptably high both at national and EU level. This is why the Swedish Presidency is prioritising work to prevent harm caused by alcohol consumption.

Harmful alcohol consumption affects health, social and economic development

Alcohol consumption is a significant risk factor for premature mortality in the EU. Alcohol causes twelve per cent of total premature male mortality in the EU. The corresponding figure for women is two per cent. This involves an estimated 200 000 people per year. Young people are particularly vulnerable. In the age group 15–29 alcohol is involved in a quarter of male deaths and a tenth of female deaths. Alcohol is estimated to lie behind 25 per cent of all road traffic accidents in the EU and causes more than 10 000 road traffic deaths every year. The use of alcohol has consequences not only for public health, but also for social and economic development in the EU and contributes to health inequality both within and between countries. Consequently, the joint work of reducing alcohol-related harm is of decisive importance to development.

The EU regards alcohol harm as an important issue

In autumn 2006, the European Commission adopted a strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm in the EU. The Council of the European Union and the European Parliament have expressed their full support for the European Commission's strategy. The Member States have also undertaken to work to implement the strategy at national level.

The EU alcohol strategy has led to alcohol issues being given a more prominent place in EU cooperation. The EU regards alcohol harm as an important issue. The Member States and the EU institutions will continue to give priority to the adopted alcohol strategy.

The ultimate purpose of raising the issue of harmful alcohol consumption as an important public health question again is to ensure a long-term perspective, i.e. that the issue will continue to have high priority in the EU in the next five-year period and long-term support from EU Member States.

The strategy highlights five areas in which Community measures supplementing national initiatives may contribute added value:

- protecting young people, children and the unborn child
- reducing injuries and deaths from alcohol-related road traffic accidents
- preventing alcohol-related harm among adults and reducing the negative impact on the workplace
- informing, educating and raising awareness on the impact of harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption and on appropriate consumption patterns
- developing, supporting and maintaining a common evidence base at EU level



The Presidency supports the implementation of the EU alcohol strategy

When the alcohol strategy was adopted in 2006 the EU health ministers requested that it be followed up. A first progress report will be presented by the Public Health and Risk Assessment Directorate of the European Commission in 2009. On the basis of this report the Presidency will work to ensure that Council conclusions in support of the EU alcohol strategy are adopted at the meeting in December 2009.

One question of concern is how young people can be better protected against increasing exposure to advertising and different forms of marketing. Further how compliance with current rules can be improved and the need for protection against unfair advertising and marketing of alcohol. The significance of purchasing power and price for patterns of consumption and harm in the EU will be highlighted.

Children and young people are an important target group.

Protection of the unborn child against alcohol-related foetal damage and measures to support children growing up in families with misuse problems are an important issue to be examined. It is feared that alcohol-related harm will increase in many EU countries. Alcohol is also estimated to be behind 16 per cent of all cases of child abuse and neglect in the EU.

Another important issue is the role of harmful consumption of alcohol in achieving the objective of healthy and dignified ageing. This is an area where key knowledge is lacking, for example as regards the extent and development of the problem in a growing ageing population, what the links are to ordinary states of ill health among older people, injuries, social welfare and costs of public healthcare and social services.

Informal meeting of the EPSCO Council, with the health ministers

EU health ministers will meet in the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO Council), on 6–7 July in Jönköping. Among the items addressed at the meeting will be alcohol and health, particularly the impact of marketing and advertising on young people's attitudes and drinking habits.

6–7 July in Jönköping

Expert conference on alcohol and health

Alcohol and health will be the subject of an expert meeting in Stockholm on 21–22 September. The aim is to support a sustainable, long-term and cross-sectoral strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm in the EU.

21–22 September in Stockholm