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19 April 2021

Preventing addictive behaviours in children

Motion for a recommendation

tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

The modern world exposes children to many addictive substances such as alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, prescription medicines, and processed foods, as well as to addictive behaviours such as on-line gaming, social networking, gambling, watching pornography and compulsive shopping. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic often requires restrictive measures such as lockdowns, which lead to increased anxiety, pressure on parents and other caregivers and reduced opportunities for reaching out to children who need help.

In recent years there has been increasing global recognition among public health professionals and academics that addictive behaviours can have serious consequences for the physical or mental health and social interactions of the people concerned.

There is also a growing awareness that vulnerability to addictive behaviours is a result of diverse factors, from family and community background and insufficient support structures, to easy access to addictive substances and content and pervasive marketing by businesses and companies. Children are particularly vulnerable and need special protection, as they are in the process of developing their personality and are exposed to peer and media pressure and prone to risk-taking behaviour.

Addressing addictive behaviours in children is essential for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 3 "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages". The Parliamentary Assembly should examine this question from the perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly health care, and make recommendations on what measures should be taken and how to ensure that such measures put the best interest of the child first, are human rights- and evidence-based, tackle the root causes of additive behaviours and demonstrate effectiveness. These recommendations should also contribute to the new Council of Europe Strategy on Children's Rights.

