Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2520 (2023)[1]

Preventing addictive behaviours in children

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is dismayed by the addictive behaviours of children and the consequences for their mental and physical health and development. It notes that to date prevention policies have not succeeded in curbing the growth in these behaviours or the increasing number of forms they take.

2. Although cannabis is still one of the most widely used drugs, including by children, the continued emergence of new drugs is a growing problem factor when it comes to devising drug prevention policies. New addictive behaviours, linked mainly to the use of digital tools and applications, complicate attempts to address the problem. Exposure of children to addictive substances and addictive behaviours increased in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing socio-economic crisis. During lockdowns, pre-existing prevention measures often lacked flexibility and hence effectiveness.

3. The Assembly seeks to uphold every child's right to a healthy life, as underlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees "the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health", and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No. 3, whose aim is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, which includes the strengthening of "the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol".

4. The Assembly attaches importance to States' preventing or reducing addictive behaviours, thus eliminating their disastrous physical, psychological and social consequences, which hinder children's development and well-being. Bearing in mind the child's best interests, it proposes setting up flexible, responsive measures taking account of trends in addictive behaviours, based on a holistic approach to the situations which children face. In this respect, it should be noted that although addictive behaviours in children occur in all socio-economic settings, it is clear nonetheless that children living in disadvantaged environments or whose parents or close relatives use drugs are more prone to addictive behaviours.

5. The Assembly would also like to point out that for prevention and early treatment of addictive behaviours to be effective, measures must be introduced which target young children, including the very young, particularly when they are exposed to addictive behaviours in their environment.

6. In the light of the current lack of responsiveness and the inadequacy of policies to combat drugs and addictions in children, the Assembly considers it necessary for States to step up research on prevention and innovative prevention practices, both to combat addictions which have been known for some time and in the light of the addictive behaviours which have arisen in recent years.

7. Bearing in mind these considerations, the Assembly invites the Council of Europe member States to set up tools which help to prevent the use by children of the main substances, to develop comprehensive preventive measures geared to various addictive behaviours and to set up long-term responses to trends in addictive behaviours, in keeping with the child's best interests. Policies and action plans must include research, prevention, risk reduction and treatment, and take stock of the actual experiences of children in

1. *Assembly debate* on 13 October 2023 (24th sitting) (see Doc. 15830, report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Ms Diana Stoica). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 13 October 2023 (24th sitting).
See also Recommendation 2262 (2023).

different age categories, including young children. The Assembly insists on the protective approach of prevention policies aimed at children, including age-appropriate information about addictive substances and their consequences, and tools designed to limit access to them. In this connection, account should be taken of children's specific needs, with targeted action for certain more vulnerable categories and taking into account the various types of addictive behaviours.

8. In particular, the Assembly invites the Council of Europe member States to:

8.1. devise measures to strengthen the capacities of parents and families using drugs and alcohol to manage their situations so as to prevent addictions among the children of these families;

8.2. develop innovative prevention mechanisms involving children and young adults in dialogue with their peers. It also suggests devising training courses for young children and adolescents on ways of resisting the negative influence of their classmates, adults, the media or an environment that encourages the use of drugs or alcohol;

8.3. train adults working with children, particularly in schools, sport environments and medical contexts, to detect addictive behaviours in children and to report them so that they can be dealt with or deal with them directly;

8.4. reinforce the ban on the supply or sale of drugs and alcohol to children, including through systematic and proportionate penalties for suppliers and dealers;

8.5. set up reception spaces for children which are easily accessible and offer a comprehensive approach to the management of problems they must face, including psychological and social support designed to enhance their ability to manage difficult personal or external circumstances;

8.6. assess the problem of inhalant use and its impact on children's health;

8.7. combat synthetic drugs, targeting trafficking aimed at children in particular.

9. The Assembly asks the member States to co-operate closely with the digital industry with a view to:

9.1. prohibiting the online sale of psychoactive substances and alcohol to children and child access to online gambling and betting in the same way as in the real world;

9.2. prohibiting any form of online advertising of these substances and offers of gambling and betting to children;

9.3. setting up online child-appropriate prevention campaigns concerning online gambling and betting, and the excessive use of digital devices.

10. The Assembly invites Council of Europe member States as well as observer States and States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly, which have not yet done so, to join the enlarged partial agreement which established the Council of Europe International Co-operation Group on Drugs and Addictions (Pompidou Group).