Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 2262 (2023)[1]

Preventing addictive behaviours in children

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution 2520 (2023) "Preventing addictive behaviours in children" and emphasises the responsibility that lies with member States to guarantee the right of children to enjoy the best possible state of health, including by adopting addiction prevention and treatment measures. The persistence, and even growth, of this problem among children have shown the long-term ineffectiveness of the national policies and laws in force.

2. Noting that socio-economic difficulties are a major source of stress for children and hence a cause of drug use and other addictive behaviours, the Assembly recalls its work on poverty, in particular its Recommendation 2234 (2002) "Eradicating extreme child poverty in Europe: an international obligation and a moral duty". It regrets the inadequacy of the Committee of Ministers' reply in this field and urges it to fully implement the recommendation so as to achieve, in Europe, the global goal of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030 (United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No. 1.1), thereby helping to reduce one of the root causes of addictions in children.

3. The Assembly welcomes the initial activities of the Council of Europe International Co-operation Group on Drugs and Addictions (Pompidou Group) focusing on children and families affected by parental drug use, and the Lisbon Declaration adopted on 14 December 2022, which incorporated protecting the rights of persons belonging to vulnerable groups and reducing the availability of illegal drugs, as well as preventing addiction to the internet and online gambling, into the priority activities of the Pompidou Group for 2023-2025.

4. In this context, the Assembly invites the Committee of Ministers to ask the governing bodies of the Pompidou Group to:

4.1. place emphasis on preventing drug use among children by stepping up their co-operation with other international organisations and civil society, basing their recommendations on validated studies and involving children in their activities. It notes the particular benefits of looking into the use of cannabis, which is the drug most used by children. A summary of the consequences of the use of cannabis on the physical and cognitive development of children could serve as a basis for a cannabis prevention policy co-ordinated at European level, and enable an approach taking account of the best interests of the child with regard to the recurring issue of the legalisation or decriminalisation of cannabis possession or use, so as to deliver a clear message which will be understood by the entire population and in particular by children;

4.2. focus their work on behavioural addictions facilitated by online technologies and practices, placing emphasis on the study of addictive behaviours in children and related prevention measures, including by proposing indicators making it possible to identify this type of addictive behaviour – indicators which should also be made available in a child-appropriate format, in particular to enable children to conduct self-assessments;

4.3. conduct studies on the prevalence of the use by children of new psychoactive substances, often synthetic drugs, whether legal or illegal, and propose appropriate prevention measures for children, parents and health professionals.

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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).

5. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers instruct the Council of Europe intergovernmental sector to devise tools to raise awareness among children of the consequences of excessive or addictive use of digital tools and applications, including online gambling and betting, as part of the implementation of its Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027.

6. The Assembly considers it worth developing regional networks in Europe and beyond and extending the work carried out in the context of the Mediterranean School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (MedSPAD) to all the member States of the Pompidou Group, thereby making it possible to survey the specific national characteristics of adolescent substance use and risk behaviours more broadly. Accordingly, it recommends that the Committee of Ministers instruct the governing bodies of the Pompidou Group to set up a broader surveying process, covering all addictive behaviours, possibly by region, so as to enable States to exchange good practices based on common indicators concerning adolescents. This survey should include populations of younger children.