



ACTIVE

**SOBRIETY
FRIENDSHIP
PEACE**

Alcohol policy program

Active's vision is a democratic, diverse and peaceful world free from alcohol and other drugs where an individual can live up to her full potential.

Active's view on alcohol

The attractiveness of the image of alcohol is only socially constructed. It leads to the alcoholization of all social events and activities in Europe. This causes tremendous harm all over Europe. For young people in Europe it is among other consequences a gateway into abuse of other drugs and criminality, into early school dropout, long-term unemployment and into apathy.

Human Being

To start drinking is a personal choice. Why a person continues to drink depends on different environmental influences and genetic conditions.

Substance

Drugs create experiences that the user wants to feel again and thus they lead to mental addiction. The other part of the addiction is the complex physical effects of the drug. Alcohol is a toxic, that causes addiction. When the addiction both mentally and physically has made the human being more or less powerless, alcohol will steer the life of the user.

Society

Young people are especially prone to the influence of the environment around them. Therefore the attitudes of parents, friends, teachers, leisure time leaders and role models towards alcohol do affect their attitudes and behavior. We call this social heritage. Unsafe environments, where drugs are present and socially accepted, even expected, increase the risk for people starting to use drugs. In these kinds of environments young people are at particular risk to start drinking and thus expose themselves to the consequences of alcohol consumption.

Market

One of the biggest engines of alcohol consumption is the alcohol industry. As long as there are economic interests by entities that earn money from human being's alcohol consumption, public health improvement and social development will always encounter opposition. Alcohol is no ordinary commodity and therefore the alcohol market should be regulated.

Alcohol harm in Europe

Medical harm

Drugs hurt the human being both physically and mentally. Alcohol damages every single organ of a human body except of the inner ear and causes at least 60 different diseases and states of illness. The higher the consumption, the bigger are the risks.

Social harm

The alcohol problems are not limited to the user him/ herself like most of the medical harms but often lead to social problems. If someone drinks alcohol other people are likely to be affected negatively. Drink-driving is only one example. Children of alcohol addicts or violence are another. They often tend to have little or no self confidence, feel worse and perform worse in school. Alcohol is a pacifier and leads to apathy which has enormous consequences for society. Alcohol harm inflicted upon others is by far the most widespread problem related to alcohol use. It is important for Europe to understand the dimension of social harm and passive drinking alcohol causes. Passive drinking – harm imposed on people other than the alcohol consumer him/herself – is a significant obstacle for social progress and needs to be considered both when designing policies and when calculating the costs of alcohol consumption.

Economic harm

It is often said that the alcohol industry plays an important economic role in many European countries. This is short sighted because the social (children to alcoholics), health and economic costs (work absence, lost income) are higher caused by alcohol than the economic benefits. Drugs pose paramount sums to society every year. Europe plays a central role in the global alcohol market since a fourth of the world's alcohol is produced here. That gives Europe special responsibilities in reducing alcohol related harm all over the world.

Democratic harm

Alcohol consumption has the consequences that the user escapes from reality instead of solving the problem. Obviously this creates obstacles for human beings to participate in the democratic processes. This amounts to political harm because in a well-functioning society everybody is empowered and engaged and nobody is influenced by drugs.

Total consumption model

There is a direct connection between the consumption of alcohol and the extent of alcohol related harm. The amount of alcohol related problems in society is linked with the total alcohol consumption. Attempts to reduce alcohol related harm should therefore be aimed at reducing the total consumption of alcohol. Restrictive alcohol policies save lives and money and therefore contribute to development of the whole society.

Prevention paradox

It is often believed that drug problems are to be solved where they are the biggest – meaning among the group of drug abusers. The prevention paradox explains however, that the biggest prevention impact is achieved when alcohol policies aim at the entire population and not only at the group with abusive consumption. As a matter of fact, the group of average consumers stands for the most of the alcohol related harm in society.

Principle of disinterest

As long as there are economic interests in increased alcohol consumption, it will be difficult to control and reduce consumption. The principle of disinterest means that particular profit interests have to be kept out of the alcohol handling. This can be done, for instance, by policies regulating import, production and retail of alcohol. Companies and industry sector organizations have profit interest that stand contrary to society's interest in improving public health.

Triangle approach

Active's approach to prevention is illustrated by the prevention triangle, where control policies are combined with mobilization efforts and education methods. Applied together these three approaches form a holistic approach to tackling the alcohol problem in society, preventing alcohol related harm. Control policies mean restrictive policy measures and interventions into the alcohol market by governments and other decision makers. Education methods mean training of professionals, education of consumers, parents and youth and campaigns to raise awareness, challenge and motivate the public. Mobilization means to strive for making alcohol prevention a part of the agenda for social and political movements, link the alcohol issue to other key policy issues and involve leadership and members of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on all levels.

Alcohol policy measures – for reduced total consumption

The alcohol perspective

Alcohol has a negative impact on many areas of society. When developing new policies, local, national and international governments should consider how the use of alcohol affects the policy area, and make policies that contribute to the reduction of alcohol related harm. However different policy areas, such as youth policy, traffic safety, employment, health policy and crime prevention should be viewed in the alcohol perspective. Alcohol control policies should be developed further and not disabled when showing signs of success in reducing alcohol related harm. ACTIVE advocates a holistic alcohol policy, based on priority of the public health and safety, and not on financial or agricultural interests.

While media campaigns and school-based prevention programs are both important and popular, they have limited effect on overall consumption. The most effective means mentioned above don't always sell well in the public opinion. The most efficient means of reducing the alcohol consumption and alcohol related harm is through the use of market regulations such as taxation, age limits, restrictions on sales hours, laws against drunk driving, and strict marketing regulations. Market regulations should be accompanied by effective prevention programs, as well as treatment and rehabilitation for those affected by alcohol and/or drug addictions and their families.

Alcohol advertising

The global alcohol industry invests huge amounts of money into marketing in order to increase consumption in all demographics and presents alcohol as positive, glamorous and relatively risk-free. There is clear evidence that the advertising of alcohol leads to higher consumption. Mass media, advertising in sports events and street advertisements are putting pressure on people, especially young people, to drink. Sweet and colorful drinks are designed to target young people specifically. Alcohol related problems are linked to the massive advertising of alcoholic beverages in Europe. Industry self regulation on marketing has proven to be ineffective and should be replaced by a ban on all alcohol marketing.

Active demands that:

- Direct and indirect alcohol marketing should be prohibited all over Europe
- Sports events and any other events, especially those aiming at young people, should not be sponsored by the alcohol industry
- Self-regulatory approaches should be replaced by government policies regulating marketing
- Alcoholic beverages should be clearly marked with content labels and labels warning the consumers about the risks connected with alcohol consumption. The warning text should cover at least 40% of the label.
- Alcoholic beverages targeting young people should be banned
- Alcoholic beverages should not taste like candy and should not contain other substances like caffeine or other substances with the same effect. Alcohol beverages should not be designed to overcome the natural rejection of children's and youth's taste.
- Alcohol product packaging and labeling should not be allowed to create a misleading impression about the content of the beverage, about the effects of the alcoholic beverage and they must not appeal,, to minors
- Alcohol should neither be sold in multiple packages nor offered at quantity discounts
- The media should be cautious about consequences of alcohol consumption and avoid glamorization of alcohol consumption and alcohol products.
- Alcohol beverages must not be promoted as contributing to wellness, health and ecology

Alcohol availability

The closer and the easier accessible alcohol sales are the more will be drunk and thus the bigger will harm be. By restricting sales hours, setting age limits, reducing import quotas and reducing the density and number of outlets, it is possible to greatly decrease violence, teenage binge drinking, accidents, addictions and other alcohol related problems.

Active demands that:

- The European Union should recognize the member states' and all other European countries' rights to maintain their retail monopolies on alcoholic beverages
- European countries should adopt the model of retail monopolies for selling alcoholic beverages
- All European countries should introduce an overall minimum age limit at least 18 on alcoholic beverages, making it illegal to sell or give alcohol to people under the legal age. This age limit should comprise both on and off sale.
- Age limits for purchasing alcoholic beverages must be effectively enforced, and violations of the age limits should be met with sanctions such as fines or the withdrawal of sales licenses
- The import quotas of alcohol between EU countries should be radically decreased and harmonized.
- European countries should set maximum opening hours on bars and maximum sales hours of alcoholic beverages on retailers
- All forms of illegal alcohol must be fought against.
- Municipalities and local authorities should reduce the density of outlets
- Non alcoholic beverages should be always more available than alcoholic beverages
- Alcohol should not be sold in packages
- Only outlets with a license should be allowed to sell and distribute alcohol
- Producing and selling home-made alcoholic beverages should require a license

Alcohol affordability

Children and young people are especially sensitive to changes in price because of their very limited budget. Evidence shows that increased alcohol taxes and prices are causing reductions in alcohol related harm. The taxation of alcohol should therefore be high, and there should be no subsidies for alcohol production. Retail monopolies are efficient means of eliminating the profit motive from the trade with alcoholic beverages.

Active demands that:

- Prices on all alcoholic beverages should be high in order to lower the consumption.
- Non-alcoholic beverages should be less expensive than alcoholic beverages.
- All countries should increase minimum taxes on alcohol
- Minimum tax rates should be increased in line with inflation and should be proportional to the alcoholic content of all beverages that contain alcohol
- EU Member States should have the flexibility to limit individual cross-border purchases so as to secure the impact of their tax policies
- EU Member States should have the right to react flexibly by using the tax instrument to deal with specific alcoholic beverages, for example those targeting young people.
- Alcoholic products should be marked to determine their origin and follow their movement in order to tackle illegal alcohol
- All subsidies and support (financial or other) to the alcohol industry should be abolished
- Minimum prices for alcoholic beverages be introduced in all countries

Road and sea traffic safety measures

Driving under the influence of alcohol is an enormous threat to the driver and third parties., and the problems caused by drink-driving are among the major alcohol issues in Europe today. Campaigns against drunk-driving should be a part of the state's public health policy, and should be accompanied by random police controls of blood alcohol concentration (BAC). There is also a need for a common level of legal BAC limits all over Europe. Another effective measure is the use of graduated licensing for novice drivers, which limits the conditions of driving during the first few years of licensing.

Active demands that:

- Alcohol sales on gas stations should be prohibited to reduce drink-driving
- The BAC limit in Europe should be maximum 0,2 pro mille
- The enforcement of legal BAC limits should be strengthened by extended use of random breath tests
- Drink-driving should be met with sanctions such as high fines and administrative suspension of the driving license. These sanctions should be harmonized all over Europe
- All traffic, on the streets and highways, in the air and on the seas should be alcohol free.
- Alcohol locks should be introduced on heavy road traffic vehicles all over Europe

Education and Prevention

The underlying assumption that health information about the harm caused by alcohol and the dangers related to alcohol consumption increase knowledge, change attitudes and thus contribute to prevent alcohol related harm is misleading. Active recognizes that campaigns aimed at reducing teenage binge drinking, drunk driving and other forms of high-risk alcohol consumption are important, but not sufficient. The alcohol industry abuses prevention programs in order to market itself as socially responsible but these industry supported programs and campaigns are ineffective. Government restrictions on the alcohol market should be accompanied by campaigns and prevention programs.

Active demands that:

- Prevention programs must be effectively implemented into the educational system and other areas of society
- Prevention programs should only be used by policy makers as supplements to alcohol market restrictions
- Prevention programs should not receive sponsoring from the alcohol industry
- Governments should support schools and organizations working with prevention in the field of alcohol. Efficient school education on alcohol and health should be compulsory
- Alcohol-free activities should be available for all young people
- Youth organizations and youth sports clubs should take their responsibility in informing about the harms of alcohol consumption. Thus their activities should be alcohol free
- Young people should be consulted and involved in the prevention work
- Leisure time activities are offered throughout the year especially during holidays, so that children of alcohol abusers always have alternatives of safe environments to turn to
- All activities arranged by schools should be alcohol free

Treatment and rehabilitation

The biggest effect in reducing alcohol related harm is not attained by aiming at the group of alcohol addictions. Treatment, early intervention and rehabilitation are important to help the individual but in order to minimize alcohol related harm alcohol policies should aim the entire population. However governments have the responsibility of financing treatment of alcohol and other drug addictions. NGOs and governments should work together to treat those who suffer from alcohol and other drug addictions. Treatment should be followed by rehabilitation aimed at returning the patient to the labor market and back into the middle of society, preventing social exclusion and minimizing the risk of falling back into addiction.

Active demands that:

- Governments should provide free/affordable treatment to people suffering from alcohol- and drug addictions
- Treatment programs should include special efforts to help the people reintegrate into the labor market and social life
- The children and families of people suffering from addiction should receive the necessary help and support

Alcohol in society and politics

Alcohol is first of all a grown-up problem and young people should not have to suffer because of grown-ups alcohol consumption all over Europe, in all social classes. It is the responsibility of all actors in society and politics to ensure this.

The way the alcohol policy is made, affect the content of the policy. Strong industry lobbying and a political structure that favors agricultural and industry interests results in ineffective policies and blocks efforts to reduce alcohol related harm. To reduce the problems caused by alcohol in Europe, the decision making process must change.

Active demands that:

- A separate committee for public health and consumer protection be created in the European Parliament in order to better pursue public health interests
- The effect of alcohol consumption on all other policy areas should be analyzed and taken into consideration when forming policies
- Alcohol should not be treated as an ordinary commodity
- The alcohol industry should not be included in policy making on the alcohol field
- States that want to conduct more restrictive alcohol control policies to promote public health should be free to do so
- Tax revenues or any other incomes the state has, should not be spent on alcohol
- Research financed by the alcohol industry should be discredited and ignored in the policy making processes
- Decision makers must be well-informed and possess state of the art knowledge about alcohol and the harm it causes in society
- All municipalities and local authorities should have evidence based alcohol policy program
- Social development and public well-being should be given priority over short term economic interest
- The EU strategy to reduce alcohol related harm be re-formulated and improved without the alcohol industry's lobbyism
- A common level of alcohol control policies be established with a high lowest level which all EU Member States respect
- A common definition of alcoholic beverages should be agreed upon within the EU

Adopted
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