



**Conference:  
Child Poverty and Drug Addiction:  
Challenges and Lessons in Central and Eastern Europe  
to improve the dialogue with the EU institutions on a Child inclusive  
Health Policy**

**Combating social exclusion: a fundamental step towards preventing  
drug abuse among street children and vulnerable children**

**10-11 of December 2009 Warsaw**

Joint declaration

The EU has an obligation, under Art. 152 of the Treaty to "complement the Member States' action in reducing drugs-related health damage, including information and prevention". In the framework of the renewed Social Agenda, the European Commission has launched in 2008 a EU Health Strategy titled "Together for health", which is articulated along key principles and objectives, such as "Reducing inequalities in Health Access" and "Health in All Policies", and calls for promoting healthy lifestyles for all. These, if fully implemented, could contribute to a more equal access to health and to a better attention to the economic, social and environmental determinants of health.

In spite of these promising orientations, great challenges remain. The European Action on Drugs reports the following alarming data:

- An EU citizen dies every hour of an overdose;
- There are 7 000 to 8 000 drug-induced deaths in Europe every year;
- There are 3 000 new cases of drug-related HIV in Europe every year;
- Between 1.3 and 1.7 million people in the EU are problem opioid users;

Young people from vulnerable groups, and particularly homeless people, are disproportionately subject to drug abuse and the related threats to health, as they might be prone to earlier, more frequent, more problematic, or more rapidly progressing drug use. Children who run away from home or, more commonly, from institutional care, and become homeless or street children, are at particular risk.

Universal prevention strategies have little role in preventing drug use amongst young people from vulnerable groups who are most at risk of developing drug problems: firstly, they may not be attending school because they are dropouts; secondly, they tend to be unresponsive to universal strategies because they don't address their specific needs. "Selective" prevention

strategies that map vulnerable neighbourhoods and target the action towards the most vulnerable groups are more effective for directing or channelling policy responses at those groups or geographical areas where problem drug use is more likely to develop. They are particularly relevant for groups who are exposed to different social exclusion factors and thus face multiple vulnerabilities.

Drug abuse is one among several problematic behaviours that arise within socially excluded groups. Risk and protective factors are always context-dependent, but drug use among children is often linked with drug and alcohol abuse in the family, lack of parental supervision, low quality of family relations, low education and truancy, problematic economic conditions; more frequently with institutional care, homelessness, and conflict with the law.

Interventions that adopt a holistic approach and address the underlying problems of social exclusion together with drug use have proven more effective, as they improve the child's "life skills" and self-esteem and respond to the needs that are connected to drug use.

Outreach services combined with drop-in centres prove to be most effective in tackling drug abuse among vulnerable children according to EFSC members. However, outreach work is still limited in most Member States. Successful interventions also establish inter-institutional synergies at the local level and are multifaceted in a way that they also aim to prevent other problem behaviours, such as violence. Culturally sensitive interventions for children of minority or migrant families, and alternatives to detention and penal sanctions for children in conflict with the law are more likely to lead to rehabilitation.

Drug addiction is a phenomenon that has no beginning or end. It appears always in new forms, and continues to attack the most vulnerable groups of children and orphans without family and support in society. Therefore the participants:

- *Call on the European Institutions and Governmental Authorities of the Member States, to undertake, within their competences, complementary, professional, intensive, properly co-ordinated and funded initiatives, aiming to:*
  - o **Support the increase of the number of projects and shelters for street children**, that enable these children to develop their own value system, respect for their own health, their interests, desires and aspirations, and that protect their dignity and health; and
  - o **Support the monitoring, data collection and evaluation on the trends and developments of the phenomenon**, as well as information and exchange of experiences between professionals from different countries.
  
- *Call on the European Union to promote a holistic approach towards social policies which include tackling the social determinants of drug abuse; this involves **strengthening the open Method of Co-ordination** in the social field also as a result of the recent entry into force of the Lisbon treaty;*

- Call on the European Commission to explicitly **address the issue of drug abuse among young people in the framework of the EU Strategy “Together for health”** – as a preventive approach in promoting health in an ageing society and to **facilitate the access for NGOs to the support programmes and funding** foreseen in that framework;
- Call on the European Commission to foresee, in the framework of its European Action on Drugs, **specific actions targeted to vulnerable young people** to be coupled with universal prevention measures;
- Call on Member States to fully **endorse the “Health in All Policies” principle, including by considering the social determinants of health**;
- Call on all EU Member States to support **specific drug prevention programmes** which target vulnerable groups of young people and support outreach work with adequate funding and trained personnel;
- Call on Member States to promote **non-detention measures** of social rehabilitation for children in conflict with the laws on drugs;
- Call on all actors involved in the social rehabilitation of vulnerable children to **establish networks and build synergies** among them.



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- *providing analysis and policy advice on PROGRESS policy areas;*
- *monitoring and reporting on the implementation of EU legislation and policies in PROGRESS policy areas;*
- *promoting policy transfer, learning and support among Member States on EU objectives and priorities;*
- *and relaying the views of the stakeholders and society at large*

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