

Young people, sports, and alcohol

On May 28th, the final webinar for the FYFA project titled “Focus on Youth, Football and Alcohol” took place online.

Eurocare (European Alcohol Policy Alliance) was delighted to host a webinar attended by over 150 participants over 30 countries to highlight key findings from the FYFA project, which was co-funded by EU Health Programme and the Scottish Government. Mariann Skar, Secretary General of Eurocare, said “We are delighted to conclude the FYFA project and we hope that the work we have done here can be taken forward and further developed by exploring the field of sports and alcohol among young people”.

FYFA is a 3-year joint initiative aiming to identify and promote good practices targeting the reduction of heavy episodic drinking among young people and develop recommendations regarding alcohol for youth sport clubs across the EU.

Sport is one of the most popular activities for young people in Europe but is underappreciated as a target for policy and behavioural change. Policies should be established to support coaches, club officials, parents and community leaders should have the best possible practices available to reduce underage drinking. The FYFA project focusses on looking into the good practices at various policy levels (international, national, and local) and tries to provide the best available recommendations for people and/or sports organisations working directly with young people on local level.

Mr Marc Tarabella, Member of the European Parliament, opened the FYFA final webinar and warmly greeted the participants.

The webinar focused on presenting the key findings from research conducted throughout the lifetime of the project.

Dr Eric Carlin, Director of Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP), put forward their review of policies and practices related to young people, alcohol, and international sport. Attendees learned more about best practices applied on international level in several sports associations as well as got the insights on loosely regulated policies. Dr Carlin said,

“regulation of alcohol marketing and sponsorship within football is really reliant on industry self-regulation, with bans circumvented by the alcohol industry. This is about more than finances, this is about appealing to international sporting bodies to be more responsible, to think more carefully about the partnerships developed, and recognise the influence they have on young people.”

Dr Carlin concluded: “sport can be a powerful tool for the positive and that includes the messages it decides to promote.”

Prof. Emanuele Scafato (MD, MSc) and Claudia Gandin (MD, LPC) from Istituto Superiore di Sanita (Italy) presented the findings from the research on national levels in six EU member states – Belgium, Finland, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and the UK, which investigated about the knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of experts from sport settings and from the prevention area. The performed research gave insights on the perceived obstacles and facilitators, whenever available, to promote strategies to

reduce alcohol related harm in youth within sport contexts. The report has found that despite the presence of regulations, there is a low level of knowledge and enforcement at national level and in the sport contexts and there is the need of cooperation across organisations in order to increase awareness and create a renewed culture in alcohol prevention within sport settings starting from introducing and implementing real measures and policies ensuring a safer and healthier environment for youth. Scafato stated that “it is necessary to implement information strategies, prevention initiatives, training programmes and to support the dialogue between sporting and prevention settings”.

Ellen Coghe from the Flemish Centre of expertise on alcohol and other drugs (Belgium) presented their review of local policies and practices related to young people, sport, and alcohol in six local youth sports clubs in the previously mentioned Member States. Senior managers and staff at local youth clubs were interviewed to gather their views and learn more about clubs’ policies. The review found that there is a prevailing absence of focus on alcohol prevention and health promotion in the clubs’ documents. Sports club’s stakeholders are well aware of the risks involving alcohol consumption by their young athletes, but the implementation of a systematic health promotion initiative, covering alcohol consumption in areas that are not directly sports related, is lacking.

Leena Sipinen from the Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention (Finland) presented results from interviews with young men and young women from Belgium, Finland, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, and the UK about alcohol in sports settings and reducing alcohol-related risks and harms. Her presentation included insights from young people, including a [video](#) on how they perceive alcohol being associated with sports, alcohol marketing and regulation, as well as how engagement in sport can be an important protective factor against alcohol-related harms for young people.

Finally, Dr Katarzyna Okulicz-Kozaryn from PARPA (Poland) introduced recommendations for youth sport clubs. Dr Okulicz-Kozaryn said,

“There are three domains crucial for the effectiveness of alcohol prevention in sports environment: (1) International, national and local policies regulating alcohol use, distribution and marketing in sports settings; (2) Preventive interventions to be implemented in sports settings and (3) Social climate, determined mainly by interpersonal relationships in sports environment and clubs ideology.”

The FYFA research showed that there is a need for more communication and information campaigns in sports settings about the impact of alcohol on health. Governmental and national sporting organizations should support alcohol prevention initiatives and training programmes on alcohol-related harm for different target audiences in sports settings. Dr Okulicz-Kozaryn underlined that besides policy and decision-makers, there is space for other stakeholders in sport-based alcohol prevention, including trainers and coaches, parents and young players who can make sport even healthier, safer and more attractive.

Through the FYFA results and recommendations, we want to achieve policy changes at international, national and local levels, which will contribute to reducing alcohol related harm among young people and establish healthier environments.

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