
Health MEPs call for mandatory labelling for calories in alcohol

Plans for labelling the calorie content and the ingredients of alcoholic beverages should be tabled by the European Commission at the latest in 2016, said Health Committee MEPs in a resolution, voted on Tuesday, calling for a new EU Alcohol Strategy. The text calls for a specific focus on alcohol consumption by minors, and EU-wide labelling warnings against drink driving, and drinking while pregnant.

MEPs call on the European Commission to “immediately begin work on the new EU Alcohol Strategy (2016-2022)” in order to assist national governments in dealing with alcohol related harm. The strategy’s aims should include collecting reliable data, improving prevention and treatment, reducing accidents caused by drink driving and differentiating more clearly within drinking patterns, they say.

Ingredients and calories should be labelled

MEPs suggest that the European Commission should evaluate whether alcoholic beverages should in future be covered by a requirement to provide consumers with information on the ingredients and nutritional content.

The calorie content of alcoholic beverages should be clearly labelled as soon as possible, and the Commission should table a legislative proposal to this end in 2016 at the latest, say MEPs. They also call for EU-wide labelling alerting drinkers to the dangers of drink driving, and warning pregnant women not to consume alcohol. They also urge the Commission to ask the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) immediately to re-evaluate the use of acetaldehyde as a flavouring substance in alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

Minors

MEPs urge EU member states to step up efforts to protect young people from alcohol related harm by raising existing age limits to at least 18 years. They recommend that member states monitor the effects of alcohol advertising on young people and to take appropriate action to limit their exposure. Public money should never be used to promote the consumption of alcohol, they add.

They also call on member states to enforce existing national age limit laws strictly, and to consider further legally binding requirements to protect minors. MEPs also invite national authorities to consider measures to prevent the sale of very cheap alcohol.

The European Commission should also properly address the cross-border sale of alcohol on the internet, and member states should conduct campaigns to raise awareness on the dangers of binge drinking, especially for under-age people, and make further efforts to reduce traffic accidents related to drink driving, says the text.

Cultural values and subsidiarity

MEPs call on member states to inform citizens better “about the cultural values of responsible alcohol consumption, the positive impact on health of moderate alcohol consumption and its compatibility with a healthy and balanced lifestyle”.

While providing guidance and support to the competent authorities in the member states where there is added value, the subsidiarity and proportionality principles should however be respected, they add.

Next steps

The resolution, drafted by [Alberto Cirio](#) (EPP, IT), [Glenis Willmott](#) (S&D, UK), [Marcus Pretzell](#) (ECR, DE), [José Inácio Faria](#) (ALDE, PT), [Younous Omarjee](#) (GUE/NGL, FR) and [Piernicola Pedicini](#) (EFDD, IT) was passed by 63 votes to 4, with 1 abstention. It will be put to a vote by the full House at the 27-30 April plenary session in Strasbourg.

Background

Misuse of alcohol is the second largest lifestyle-related cause of disease in some member states and alcohol addiction is a risk factor in over 60 chronic diseases, including alcoholic liver disease (ALD), alcoholic chronic pancreatitis and almost all other digestive diseases, cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and neuropsychiatric disorders such as alcohol dependence.

Alcohol abuse causes 3.3 million premature deaths worldwide each year, or 5.9% of the total. In the 20-39 age group, roughly 25% of all deaths can be attributed to alcohol abuse. These deaths often follow accidents, acts of violence or liver disease.


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