

Joint Statement of the WINE Intergroup on the WHO's Position on Alcohol and Wine

Adopted at the meeting of the CoR WINE Intergroup on 21 October 2025 in Eisenstadt, Burgenland, Austria

The CoR WINE Intergroup – Committee of the Regions Wine Intergroup for Nature and Economy – notes with concern the position of the World Health Organization (WHO) on alcohol, in particular the general classification of all alcohol consumption, including wine, as harmful to health. Such a one-sided view does not reflect the cultural, social and economic importance of wine in Europe. Nor does it take into account the potential health benefits of moderate wine consumption.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) stated in their “Review of Evidence on Alcohol and Health” that moderate wine consumption is associated with benefits such as reduced risk of cardiovascular disease; no evidence linking it to increase cognitive decline; and protective effects on longevity.

Wine is much more than an alcoholic drink. It is part of Europe's cultural heritage and the expression of a centuries-old tradition deeply rooted in our regions. In many European communities, wine is closely linked to social life, culinary identity and regional history. It brings people together, creates community and stands for mindful, moderate enjoyment.

Wine is also recognised under EU law as a food product. According to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), wine and fresh grapes are listed among agricultural products and are therefore subject to the EU's food and agricultural legislation. Therefore, this sector is governed by the Common Organisations of Agricultural Markets (Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 and subsequent amendments), which regulates vineyard plantings, oenological practices, designation of origin, geographical indications and support programmes. This means that wine production is embedded in a framework of food safety, labelling and quality standards, highlighting that wine is not only a cultural and social good but also an integral agricultural and food product within the Union's legal system.

Furthermore, winegrowing is a key pillar of rural economies across Europe. It provides livelihoods for nearly 3 million people along the entire value chain, from grape production and winemaking to marketing, tourism and trade. According to a PwC study for the European Committee of Wine Companies (CEEV) in 2022, wine contributes around €130 billion to the EU's GDP, equivalent to 0.8% of the European economy. Fiscal revenues linked to the sector amounted to approximately €52 billion in the same year, representing almost 0.7% of total EU public expenditure.

At the same time, winegrowing preserves unique cultural landscapes, promotes sustainable and climate-friendly practices and strengthens social cohesion in rural regions. Wine tourism plays a particularly important role, generating about €15 billion annually, combining cultural authenticity with economic value, supporting regional products and fostering direct encounters between producers and consumers. These diverse contributions to regional development, the

environment, quality of life and Europe's competitiveness must not be overlooked in health-related debates.

The WINE Intergroup is fully committed to promoting a responsible approach to alcohol and supports initiatives aimed at preventing abuse, addiction and harmful consumption. At the same time, we reject the general statement that there is "no safe level of alcohol use" because it ignores cultural contexts, drinking patterns and product diversity. Such generalisations are scientifically debated and politically problematic.

We therefore call for an open and balanced dialogue between health institutions, political decision-makers, the wine sector, regions and the scientific community. Only through fact-based and respectful exchange measures can be developed that promote health protection while also respecting cultural diversity and supporting economic resilience.

The WINE Intergroup underlines: Wine is not in conflict with responsibility – it is an expression of a conscious and culturally rooted way of life. We will continue to advocate for a differentiated approach to alcohol policy that combines education with respect and prevention with culture.