

Comprehensive ban on alcohol marketing is a feasible, implementable and the most efficient way to protect public health online



Conference Resolution – ‘Digital alcohol marketing in the spotlight’

Vilnius, Lithuania, 23 June 2023

In a digital world with ever-changing media channels, the possibility for the international alcohol industry to promote their products are endless. Digital alcohol marketing can target groups of consumers with precision not experienced before. This affects current and potential drinkers, especially vulnerable groups, such as children, youth and people suffering from alcohol addiction, as they are often the target group for the industry.

There is enough scientific evidence that the legislation and policy tools in many countries are outdated, difficult to enforce and eventually insufficient to protect public health in the digital sphere. Even in countries with ambitious legislation the enforcement is weakened by industry tactics using grey-zone approaches and alibi marketing.

There is a need for immediate action by European countries to reduce the impact of digital alcohol marketing on health. Marketing continues to be one of the key driving factors to increase alcohol consumption and related harm, exposing children and adolescents to the risk of addiction and lifelong alcohol-related harm. Exposure to digital alcohol marketing among adolescents and young adults have shown to increase overall alcohol consumption and binge drinking, as well as an earlier alcohol use debut. Furthermore, modern predatory marketing algorithms target youngsters with marketing messaging, in mass, daily, both directly as well as disguised as regular social media content through influencers. In summary, the public and the individual is much more visible for marketers, while marketing tactics is largely invisible for the wider public and regulators.

Therefore, the need for efficient and future-proof legislation that puts the health of children and youth before profits of alcohol, marketing and related industries is imminent.

Comprehensive ban on alcohol marketing is a feasible, implementable and the most efficient way to protect public health online. Bans also enjoy strong public support as citizens today experience the negative effects of alcohol marketing messages in their daily life. This is the obvious and cost-effective response to the harms of alcohol.

A ban on alcohol marketing removes grey zone ambiguity on what is legal and thus simplifies enforcement in the digital space. This leads to better public health protection and long-term public health benefits.

The Conference calls upon:

1. European governments and countries to follow the good examples set by Norway and Lithuania and implement a full ban on alcohol marketing;
2. European governments and countries, where a complete ban is not yet feasible, to adopt full ban as part of long-term public health strategy and draft a roadmap to implementing a full ban: by installing increasingly restrictive marketing controls, through white-listing legislation, defining what alcohol marketing is legal such as the French Loi Evin.
3. European countries to prioritize systematic monitoring and enforcement of alcohol marketing regulations to ensure that bans and restrictions are upheld online.
4. European countries to close loopholes by implementing bans on so called “alibi-marketing”, when alcohol-free versions of alcohol brands are marketed instead to circumvent alcohol marketing legislation.
5. Strengthened international collaboration and support for comprehensive bans on alcohol marketing, especially to combat efforts by the alcohol industry to fight effective public health policy on marketing and reduce the effects of cross-border alcohol marketing issues.
6. The World Health Organisation to emphasize in the wording of the WHO Best Buys that a full ban of alcohol marketing is the most efficient policy solution to combat the negative public health effects of alcohol marketing.
7. More resources and efforts are needed for research to strengthen knowledge of how new digital media channels work and affects citizens and especially vulnerable groups.

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