

The Nordic Alcohol and Drug Policy Network (NordAN) considers alcohol advertising and sponsorship a key influence on alcohol related problems, especially in a way it affects youth and their decision to drink. Research shows that the exposure of young people to alcohol marketing hastens the drinking debut and increases alcohol consumption among those who already drink [1-3]. Legislation that imposes restrictions on advertising of alcohol is a well-established preventive measure used by authorities in many parts of the world, despite opposition from the alcohol industry. In 2011, World Health Organization (WHO) announced that enforcement of alcohol advertising bans is one of the three "best buys" - an intervention that has a significant public health impact, is highly cost-effective, inexpensive and feasible to implement [4]. Alcohol advertising is banned in Norway, Iceland and Faroe Islands.

The goal of the policy paper

This policy paper aims to provide framework for setting goals and guiding activities of NordAN in regards to controlling alcohol advertising and sponsorship, as one of the best instruments for reducing alcohol consumption and thus reducing alcohol related harm in Nordic and Baltic countries.

Key words and terms

NordAN - Nordic-Baltic alcohol and drug policy network.

Nordic and Baltic countries - Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Faroe Islands, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia.

Alcohol advertising - any form of communication, recommendation or action, related to commercial, industrial or financial activity of the company designed to promote acquisition and consumption of alcohol products either directly or indirectly (Based on Republic of Lithuania Law on Alcohol Control, TAPS).

Sponsorship - any form of contribution to an event, activity or individual with the aim, effect or likely effect of promoting an alcohol product or alcohol use either directly or indirectly (Based on the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control).

Background

This policy paper is an extension and further development of the NordAN alcohol policy platform adopted by the annual assembly of representatives in Reykjavik, Iceland on 12th October 2007 and issues identified in the first seminar on Alcohol marketing monitoring in the NordAN region in Vilnius, Lithuania 18-19th May, 2013.

This policy document is based on the principles and evidence outlined in the following major policy documents:

1. Framework for alcohol policy in the WHO European Region (WHO, 2006);
2. EU Alcohol Strategy (EC, 2006);
3. Global strategy to reduce harmful use of alcohol (WHO, 2010);
4. Reducing the Economic Impact of Non-Communicable Diseases in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (WHO, 2011).

Recognizing the evidence and consensus that

Alcohol:

- is a harmful, addictive [5], carcinogenic [6] and teratogenic substance [6,16];
- is a cause of approximately 250 diseases and conditions, and 1 in 8 of all deaths amongst 15-64 year olds [7];
- is identified as the most harmful of legal and illegal drugs for individual and society [8].

Alcohol advertising and sponsorship:

- seeks to increase alcohol consumption [9];
- increases the number of new users [10];
- decreases the alcohol consumption initiation age [10].

Alcohol production and marketing industries:

- are increasingly represented by global companies and cooperating industries [9];
- exerting combined influence towards legal and executive structures of governments defending their commercial interests against public health interests [9].

Current varied level of advertising restrictions in the region:

- are not sufficient in preventing exposure of young people to alcohol advertising [13].

Full alcohol advertising bans are effective, while:

- partial alcohol advertising restrictions implemented in most countries of the region produce disproportionate financial and administrative cost for the governments [14; 15];

Nordic and Baltic countries:

- experience substantial health, social, financial costs resulting from alcohol consumption [11];
- need effective and cost-effective ways to reduce alcohol related harm [12].

Acknowledging that:

- there is an inherent conflict of interest between the goal of public health and the profit interests of the alcohol and related industries;
- populations of the countries implementing full advertising bans, such as Iceland, Norway, Faroe Islands, experience less alcohol related harm [11].
- there is a need to promote cost-effective alcohol control interventions;
- banning alcohol advertising is one of three “best buys” advocated by WHO as a cost-effective measure for reducing alcohol related harm [4].

NordAN concludes that there is sufficient evidence that a full ban on alcohol advertising and sponsorship is a cost-effective way to reduce alcohol consumption and exposure of young people to alcohol advertising and should be promoted as such. Politicians and policy makers in the Nordic-Baltic region should be encouraged to choose this intervention before seeking other more complex and expensive interventions.

Therefore **NordAN sets a policy goal**

to research, promote, advance, protect and monitor implementation of a full ban on advertising and sponsorship of alcohol in the Nordic – Baltic region.

As an umbrella organization NordAN will

- work towards a full statutory ban on alcohol advertising and sponsorship in all the countries of the NordAN region;
- encourage the development and promotion of the framework for legal cooperation among national alcohol control authorities towards adopting and implementing the ban;
- encourage the development of the framework for cooperation of NGOs and state agencies to support adoption and implementation of alcohol advertising and sponsorship ban;
- encourage the development of the framework for regional monitoring of industry's marketing practices;
- monitor marketing control regulation in the Nordic – Baltic region and produce an annual report;
- provide a platform for sharing examples of good practice;
- encourage and support NordAN member organizations in the above activities.

The goal and outcome

The target policy outcome is a full statutory ban on alcohol advertising and sponsorship in all countries of the Nordic – Baltic region.

Review

The implementation of this policy paper should be assessed annually and reviewed after five years after adoption of the policy paper.

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Annex 1

The roadmap for the NordAN policy paper regarding full statutory ban on alcohol advertising and sponsorship in the Nordic-Baltic region.

Even after the policy goal of the full statutory ban on alcohol advertising and sponsorship is accepted policy for the NordAN, the way towards achieving it is far from straightforward.

There are significant differences between the countries, ranging from a full ban in Iceland, Norway and Faroe Islands to relatively liberal advertising and sponsorship control in Denmark. The political, financial and legal situation might require different approaches for achievement of the final goal. The specific steps taken and timeframes adopted may also vary.

The roadmap stresses importance of:

1. Analysis and research;
2. Publishing and dissemination of information;
3. Knowledge and consensus building within the NordAN network;
4. Knowledge and consensus building within the national and regional networks;
5. Drafting activity plans and monitoring their implementation;
6. Realistic assessment of achievements and threats.

Some of the legislative issues to focus on:

- information provision by media companies on alcohol marketing revenues;
- information provision by alcohol producers on alcohol marketing expenses (also by tax authorities);
- information provision regarding alcohol advertising volume;
- information provision of the financial sponsorship by alcohol industry (also by tax authorities).

Recommended activities:

- Include advocating for full alcohol advertising ban among main goals of NordAN members and member organizations;
- Inform, educate and emphatically advocate for a statutory advertising and sponsorship ban;
- Support adherence to current control regulations and monitor and report violations;
- Seek consensus regarding step-by-step action plans for all NordAN members on how to achieve an advertising ban in their respective countries;
- Encourage member organizations to develop action plans for promoting advertising bans;
- Actively strengthen international policies leading to a full ban on alcohol advertising in respective countries and all through the Nordic-Baltic region;
- Monitor and document levels of alcohol advertisement exposure on youth in countries and NordAN region as a whole;
- Advocate for countries to adopt uniform methodology for monitoring youth exposure and fluctuations of alcohol advertising that is in specific countries and region;
- Advocate that volume of alcohol advertising funding should be declared;
- Focus all efforts on the legislative changes and large scale international advocacy projects;
- Focus on building up legal competence and speedy exchange of legal expertise, dissemination of successful legal experience;
- Advocate for funding for large scale international monitoring and advocacy activities.