

Tallinn, Estonia, October 28, 2017

NordAN 2017 resolution

Alcohol is a cross-border issue

Nordic Alcohol and Drug Policy Network (NordAN) welcomes the Estonian Presidency's focus on cross-border alcohol policy solutions. We urge European Member States and EU institutions to recognize the need to cooperate in reducing the harm caused by alcohol.

Alcohol is a regional, national and European issue. Action is needed at all levels. We are calling for a Single Market with high public health standards that supports Member States' efforts to reduce alcohol related harm.

Cross-border purchases and taxes

Taxation of alcoholic beverages is an important part of alcohol policy. Price measures, including taxation, are well documented strategies to reduce alcohol related harm and one of WHO's three "best buys" in alcohol policy. Price impacts both on total consumption in the population and on consumption in risk groups, such as young people and heavy drinkers.

In order to avoid unhealthy downward tax competition and border trade between EU member states, consumption taxes on most goods in the EU single market are levied at the rate of the country where the good is consumed.

However, in European Union individuals can move large amounts of alcohol for private use across internal EU borders without paying excise duty where the alcohol is consumed.

Due to significant tax differentials on alcohol between EU countries, these rules create strong incentives to purchase and transport alcohol across internal EU borders. Fear of - or real - losses in trade resulting from cross-border shopping has led many EU Member States to reduce, or refrain from increasing, alcohol taxes. This has negative effects on both tax revenues and the health of EU citizens.

NordAN calls on the EU to revise the rules for private import of alcoholic beverages. This revision should give Member States flexibility to lower the current indicative guide levels for alcohol and set absolute limits. We firmly believe this can be done in the framework of the Single Market, just as it has been done for excise duty on tobacco and fuels.

Cross-border marketing

There is consistent evidence that exposure to alcohol marketing increases alcohol consumption, especially among young people. This significantly increases both the economic costs and the social and health related harm of alcohol.

In a connected world, marketing crosses borders effortlessly. Effective regulations therefore require a European response. However, it has become clear that current regulatory policies in Europe struggle to keep up to speed with technological developments and do not sufficiently protect children and young people from alcohol marketing in digital and social media.

NordAN urges the European Union to strengthen alcohol marketing control. Ideally, we call for a ban on all alcohol advertising – a simple, cost effective policy measure, recommended by the World Health Organization.

Labelling

In 2011 the European institutions passed regulations that require food and soft drinks, including fruit juice and milk, to label nutritional information and ingredients. Unfortunately, alcoholic beverages were exempted from this obligation.

Listing ingredients contained in a beverage alerts the consumer to the presence of potentially harmful substances. Nutritional information such as energy content allows consumers to monitor their diets better, and makes it easier to choose a healthy lifestyle. The EU must ensure that consumers can make truly informed and easily comparable choices for alcoholic beverages, just as they can for all other products.

NordAN is calling for the current loophole in the regulation to be closed so that ingredients are listed and nutritional information in all alcoholic beverages is provided per 100ml.

We await the outcome of the on-going process to develop a labelling framework, but urge the Commission to take regulatory measures if the industry proposal fails to meet the the required standards.

The Commission's report on alcohol marketing recognizes that people have a right to know what is in the products they buy. In our view regulation on labelling should not stop there. Even moderate consumption of alcohol has health consequences. Alcohol is the cause of a large number of non-communicable diseases, including many cancers. EU-citizens have the right to know.

Nordic Alcohol and Drug Policy Network held it's annual General Assembly on October 28 in Tallinn, Estonia, where this resolution was adopted.

NORDAN was established in September 2000 as a network of non governmental, voluntary organizations who all worked to reduce the consumption of alcohol and other drugs and who supported a restrictive alcohol and drug policy and who did not receive contributions from the commercial alcohol industry. Acting on these principles NordAN today have grown to have 90 non-governmental, voluntary member organisations in all the eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden), all active in the alcohol and drug field.