

NordAN resolution 2021 – Effective alcohol policies are hampered by industry interference



- Relentless lobbying by the alcohol industry is a main reason why Europe has failed to meet the goals that have been set out in different strategies and action plans.
- Industry tactics include lobbying and misrepresenting evidence about alcohol related harm.
- Industry lobby has influence only if policymakers allow them.

For as long as alcohol has been regulated, the economic operators have interfered with the implementation of alcohol policies and the achievement of public health goals. No matter how many studies and reports exist showing their negative effects, we cannot see their influence being curbed in any serious way. As a result of the industries' aggressive and targeted marketing, girls and women of all ages are particularly vulnerable. That is the case also in the Nordic and Baltic countries. In countries with solid alcohol policies, the industry is pushing to weaken the existing evidence-based measures. In countries with no such comprehensive policies, there is strong opposition from various players. This is one reason why many countries, and Europe as a whole, have failed to meet the goals that have been set out in different strategies and action plans. We urge every government and state institution to recognize that it is a mistake to consider businesses and industry's social aspects organizations with an apparent conflict of interest as stakeholders in alcohol policy discussions.

Industry tactics

There are two major ways how the alcohol industry affects policymaking. The first is their direct lobbying, in which they are often much more effective than public health organizations, given their resources. We can bring an example from Finland, where according to a [2019 study](#) the original purpose of changing the Alcohol Act was reducing alcohol-related harm, but as a result of lobbying by the alcohol industry, the aim of the reform was changed to the liberalization of alcohol policy. In Ireland, [Alcohol Action Ireland](#) found out that alcohol industry lobbyists met Government ministers, senior officials and Oireachtas members in 2018 more than 350 times the year the Dáil debated legislation aimed at combating harmful alcohol consumption.

The second is how the alcohol industry and their social aspect organizations communicate with the public and what they publish about different harms related to alcohol consumption. For [example](#), there is proof that the alcohol industry sometimes misrepresents or downplays evidence about the alcohol-related risk of cancer. A recent study in the [Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs](#) showed how the information published by the alcohol industry works to produce doubt and uncertainty. "The published traces they leave in the scientific literature enhance industry social aspects organizations ability to make credible claims that the original findings were controversial."

WHO Consultations

The public health and the alcohol industry interests are fundamentally at odds. It is therefore imperative that the WHO and Member States protect the formulation and implementation of public health policies from the alcohol industry influence. Whatever room the industry has, there is a substantial risk of using it to legitimize its involvement in policy development. In light of WHO's ongoing consultations on the Global Alcohol Action Plan, it is the right time to ensure that future alcohol policies are free from industry interference.

Whatever the strength of these industries' lobbying, their influence is limited by what politicians allow them to do. It comes down to the political will to adopt evidence-based policies.

The NordAN General Assembly adopted this resolution on November 19, 2021 in Vilnius, Lithuania.