



**IOGT International Written Statement to
WHO EUROPE 69 Regional Committee Meeting**

02.09.2019

*Agenda item 3: Matters arising from resolutions and decisions of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board
European Action Plan to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol 2012 – 2020*

IOGT International, on behalf of our 134 Member Organizations from 56 countries, welcomes the opportunity to submit this written statement to the 69th Session of the Regional Committee of the WHO European region.

IOGT International is the premier global network for promoting development through alcohol prevention and control. Our members work from a Human Rights-based approach with all aspects of alcohol-related harm: protecting the rights of children from families with alcohol problems; preventing early onset of alcohol use in adolescence; providing treatment and recovery programs for anyone with an alcohol use disorder; exposing and counter-acting the unethical practices of the alcohol industry; awareness raising campaigns; as well as advocacy to translate scientific evidence into policy action.

We are concerned that many of our European governments are in fact failing their people and communities in the face of epidemic levels of alcohol harm. The latest WHO Europe alcohol status report 2019 illustrates the high burden of alcohol across the region and that alcohol use and related harms are not declining at an acceptable rate. While there have been improvements concerning alcohol-attributable mortality in EU+ countries, **there was no statistically significant decline in total alcohol per capita consumption** between 2010-2016. Worryingly, the observed decreases in heavy episodic alcohol use have come to a halt.



- Per capita consumption among adult alcohol users amounts to **3 bottles of wine per week**. Such a level of consumption leads to serious health consequences.
- In addition, patterns of alcohol consumption are also of major concern. Almost a third, **30.4% of the population, report binge alcohol consumption** in the past month.
- New WHO Europe data also underscores alcohol's economic burden. Alcohol is a **leading cause of working years of life lost** and also of lost economic productivity and development.
- Alcohol harm affects children and youth in Europe disproportionately. **1 in every 4 deaths among young adults is caused by alcohol.**

In the face of pervasive alcohol harm, the verdict is clear: implementation of cost-effective, high-impact and evidence-based policy best buys is still inadequate. And for that people, families, communities, and societies are paying a high price.

We commend WHO Europe's analysis of the challenges and opportunities regarding the implementation of the "European Action Plan to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol 2012-2020". **Implementation of the alcohol policy best buys has been low**, with pricing policies being the lowest priority. Costs of alcohol harm are high, both in terms of health system burden as well as economy and productivity losses. **Especially alcohol taxation should therefore be a priority as it is a triple-win measure.**

Interference of the alcohol industry remains a serious concern and stronger political leadership to protect public health policy making from alcohol industry tactics is urgently needed in the European region.

Europe's alcohol epidemic is not only a public health crisis. It is also a social crisis and a serious economic problem for communities and countries in Europe.



Therefore, we urge European leaders to step up their commitment and to **make alcohol policy the priority it clearly must be**. The way forward is clear:


Under the leadership of a number of European countries, member states adopted a decision at the recent World Health Assembly to task the WHO Secretariat with delivering a report on the review of the WHO Global Alcohol Strategy and the way forward at the WHO governing body meetings in 2020.

The **consultation process of this review is a critical opportunity for all European governments** to engage in substantively and constructively.

IOGT International calls for a **stand-alone, substantive agenda item** on alcohol policy at the WHO governing body meetings in 2020.

IOGT International supports the five “next steps” outlined in the information document and applaud WHO Europe for its leadership role. To ensure best possible implementation, we call for an **updated and improved action plan** and much better resourcing for WHO Europe to be in a position to respond in the best way to the alcohol epidemic and to the need from member states for technical support.

Yours sincerely,


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