

UNGA79 High Level Side Event

Alcohol Policy for Delivering a Better Present and Safeguarding the Future - Why Delivering on the Global Alcohol Action Plan Is Critical for Meeting the SDGs

23 September 2024, 13:15–14.30. Church Center of the United Nations, New York

The role of the UN system in addressing alcohol harm.

Remarks provided by Dr Nick Banatvala

Dear Colleagues

Thank you for allowing me to join today from Geneva.

As almost all of you know, every 10 seconds someone (a father, a mother, a parent, a son or a daughter) dies from alcohol-related causes.

And as you have heard just now, the Global alcohol action plan 2022-2030, adopted by all WHO Member States, provides a clear roadmap to translate global intentions and commitments into action, to achieve tangible results across specific measurable targets.

One thing that the action plan is clear on is that the United Nations system needs to work as one to support Member States and other development partners meet the action plan's objectives and targets.

Reducing the socioeconomic burden from alcohol is key to meeting a number of SDG targets, not only the health ones, but the many other that relate to peace and justice, exclusion, deprivation, inequality and exploitation, as well as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

UN system agencies have a responsibility to support Member States respond to the impact of alcohol, in line with their respective mandates, including through the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on NCDs and specifically through the SAFER initiative (which promotes five of the most cost-effective interventions to reduce alcohol related harm at the country level) in accordance with the objectives of the Global alcohol action plan. Let me remind you what they are:

- Implementation of high-impact strategies and interventions
- Advocacy, awareness and commitment
- Partnership, dialogue and coordination
- Technical support and capacity-building
- Knowledge production and information systems; and
- Resource mobilization. The UN Health4Life Fund (the NCD and mental health multi-partner trust fund) led by a number of global south countries, three UN agencies and civil society, provides a

valuable financing mechanism that can support countries tackle the adverse socioeconomic issues around alcohol.

However, as a whole-of-UN system, we have a long way to go in responding to the challenge of alcohol.

This week the UN NCD Task Force Secretariat is publishing an assessment that describes how alcohol measures are being integrated into United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks – the key instrument for planning and implementation of the UN development activities at country level to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

135 countries rolled out a cooperation framework between 2020-2023. Of these, only 9 countries, or 7 percent, included alcohol measures as a strategic priority or in the results matrix (the section that includes specific indicators and outputs to monitor progress of the plan).

Clearly this demonstrates that alcohol is not sufficiently seen as a priority.

To maximize the possibility of alcohol measures being included as a priority in cooperation frameworks, there should be greater demand from Member States, with a focus on multisectoral action across government and the UN system as a whole.

There are many areas that require joint UN action. For example, WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO when it comes to the impact of alcohol on young people development and education. Or UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women when it comes to addressing alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

We have mapped the mandates of UN system agencies with the Global alcohol action plan, and have identified that at least 20 UN system agencies have an important role to play in supporting Member States and their partners scale up action at the country level, including through programmes such as SAFER as well as others initiatives led by governments and civil society.

The Task Force (Secretariat and members) are now using the results of this analysis to encourage greater UN-wide action around alcohol, not only to support Member States but also to fulfil the mandates of individual agencies, both in the lead up to next year's high-level meeting on NCDs and beyond.

Those of you here today need to help us make the case for scaling up the UN system's response and holding us to account in doing this.

Thank you.