

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of aspirations adopted by all members of the United Nations (UN) in 2015 and to be achieved by 2030.
- The 2030 agenda comprises 17 SDGs and 169 targets. It is universal, integrated, and indivisible. It is also legally non-binding, depending largely on the goodwill of national governments.
- The 17 SDGs cover all three aspects of sustainable human development: the social, environmental, and economical dimensions.
- Health and well-being are at the heart of the UN 2030 Agenda, which aims to form a concrete plan to end poverty, protect all aspects of the planet's habitability, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.
- Progress towards the SDGs is hindered by the harms caused by alcohol.



Alcohol use as an obstacle to achieving SDG3: Good Health and Well-Being

- Alcohol use adversely affects almost all targets of SDG3. Target 3.5 (Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol) is specific to alcohol with two indicators:

3.5.1: Coverage of treatment interventions (pharmacological, psychosocial, and rehabilitation and aftercare services) for substance use disorders; and

3.5.2: Alcohol per capita consumption (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year, in liters of pure alcohol. This demonstrates the key role of alcohol within the global health agenda.

- Alcohol consumption is a major risk factor for infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and COVID-19, as well as for noncommunicable diseases, such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, liver disease, pancreatitis, and diabetes. It is also linked to other risk

factors such as physical inactivity, an unhealthy diet, and tobacco use.

- Alcohol use affects the functioning of the brain and leads to impaired driving, which increases, at any blood alcohol concentration greater than zero, the risk of being involved in an accident.
- Alcohol-related harms place a significant burden on health systems. Alcohol is a psychoactive substance that can lead to dependence. Globally, at least 283 million people aged 15+ years suffer from an alcohol use disorder alone, which equals 5.1% of all adults worldwide.
- Alcohol consumption causes death and disability relatively early in life. In people aged 20–39 years, approximately 13.5% of total deaths are attributable to alcohol.



Alcohol consumption and other SDGs: social, economic and environmental dimensions



- **Beyond health consequences**, alcohol brings significant social, economic and environmental losses to individuals and society at large.
- Evidence shows that alcohol is a cross-cutting obstacle to achieving many areas of the UN 2030 Agenda, such as: eradicating poverty, ending hunger, ensuring healthy lives for all, ensuring quality education, achieving gender equality, ensuring drinking

water for all, promoting decent work and inclusive, sustainable economic growth for all, reducing inequalities, making cities safe and inclusive, ensuring sustainable consumption, combating climate change, protecting terrestrial ecosystems, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, and to revitalizing the global partnership for the SDGs.



SDG1: No Poverty and SDG10: Reduce Inequalities

▪ Alcohol frequently increases inequalities between and within countries. Instead of, the harm caused by a given amount of alcohol consumption is greater for alcohol users and their families with low incomes than for those with higher incomes. Given that global alcohol consumption is increasing in several lower middle-income countries, it is likely that the impact of alcohol on inequalities will worsen in the future.

▪ Individuals and families affected by alcohol use disorders are more vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity, as a larger proportion of household income may be expended on alcohol or on the treatment of alcohol-attributable diseases. Moreover, vulnerability to harm from alcohol use is often passed on through generations, contributing to the **vicious circle of social deprivation and food insecurity**.



SDG4: Quality Education



Alcohol use is associated with several negative education-related consequences, including poor school engagement and performance, and school drop-out. Alcohol risk factors on the community and family level (for instance, parental alcohol use disorders or permissive community alcohol social norm rules) can also impact educational results.

In the Region of the Americas, alcohol is the most widely available and most used drug for school-aged children and constitutes a major public health concern. Early initiation of alcohol use, frequent alcohol consumption, and intoxication can impact brain development and lead to harmful outcomes, and adverse psychological, social, and cognitive problems for young people, impacting school performance and attrition.

SDG5: Gender Equality

5 GENDER
EQUALITY

- Alcohol use fuels the epidemic of violence against women. Environments in which alcohol is widely promoted and inadequately regulated create contexts that stimulate loss of control. Alcohol consumption is often used as an excuse for otherwise socially unacceptable behavior, including unwanted sexual attention, harassment, and violence.

- Alcohol marketing perpetuates stereotypes about gender roles and social norms. Women and girls are highly objectified in alcohol advertising and marketing strategies, thus contributing to discriminatory and sexist attitudes. In marketing that targets women, in particular, alcohol consumption is promoted as a symbol of gender equality.

6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATIONSDG6: Clean Water and Sanitation,
and other environmental SDGs

Alcohol production is a threat to water security in many parts of the Americas due to the large footprint of alcohol production. For instance, to get 1 liter of wine, 870 liters of water are needed, and to get 1 liter of beer, 296 liters of water are needed.

Alcohol is an intersecting obstacle to achieving SDGs of the environmental dimension, such as ensuring drinking water for all, ensuring sustainable consumption, combating climate change, and protecting terrestrial ecosystems.

8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTHSDG8: DECENT WORK
AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Alcohol use is a central obstacle to socioeconomic productivity and economic growth, increasing the risk of unemployment, absenteeism, and presenteeism – an effect worsened by higher levels and a longer duration of alcohol consumption.

The substantial economic costs of alcohol harms were estimated at 2.6% of the gross domestic

product in high-income countries, with a large portion due to losses in productivity.

Estimates done in countries such as Canada and the United States of America show that the impact of alcohol harm in their economies is steep, costing billions of dollars.



The way forward

- Across the Region of the Americas, and especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, alcohol use remains a significant obstacle to the achievement of SDG3.5. So far, the policy response has been inadequate in protecting the people in the Americas from alcohol-related harms.
- Implementation of the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Alcohol Action Plan, adopted in 2022, which includes the most cost-effective alcohol control policies aimed at reducing population-level alcohol use, will help to achieve the SDGs by 2030.
- Alcohol policy is a catalyst for sustainable development and equity. However, partnerships with the alcohol industry (alcohol producers and their front groups) may threaten the 2030 Agenda, as they have an inherent conflict of interest with public health goals and those of sustainable development.

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