

BRIEFING

COMPARING THE DIGITAL ALCOHOL MARKETING REGULATIONS IN 6 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (CIPPAL-ADAM STUDY)

ABSTRACT

— Although they vary according to cultural and political contexts, the national systems for controlling audiovisual and digital alcohol marketing in Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, and Switzerland share the common goal of protecting minors.

— All the countries studied face challenges posed by evolving digital marketing strategies, lobbying by the alcohol industry against stricter regulations, and circumvention through product placement and advertising for non-alcoholic beers and wines, which are subject to fewer restrictions.

— Lithuania's total ban on alcohol advertising provides the strongest safeguard,

but alibi marketing (using key components of an alcohol brand's identity) is a growing threat to the system.

— Italy and Finland are commendable for smart provisions to counter digital marketing, but loopholes remain.

— France has defined a list, inherited from the Évin law, of media authorised to broadcast advertising (rather than a list of prohibitions), but the emergence of advertising on social media poses many challenges.

— Enforcement gaps are greater where industry self-regulation has prevailed to date, such as Ireland, Italy and Switzerland.

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AUDIOVISUAL AND DIGITAL ALCOHOL MARKETING: A CHALLENGE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

European States are steeped in traditions of alcohol production and consumption, centred on different emblematic types of alcoholic beverages, including wines, beers and spirits. These drinking traditions are comparable in how they refer to socialisation, identity-based lifestyles, and local economic history. Faced with high alcohol consumption among the population and the relating issues of public order, public safety and health, countries have adopted various forms of regulation, including regulatory or legislative tools. These tools have given rise to varying control systems, also influenced by specific political traditions (WHO, 2018) and self-regulatory measures established by the alcohol industry or the advertising sector.

Most of the systems put in place have followed a model of controlling access to alcoholic beverages for vulnerable groups identified by public authorities, mainly minors, for whom sales restrictions have been applied. Some countries have also engaged in reducing the attractiveness of alcohol, particularly in the second half of the 20th century, by regulating prices or advertising (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2021).

The European action plans to reduce harmful alcohol consumption defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe for the period 2012-2020, and then for the period 2022-2030, both support the implementation of the SAFER¹ initiative. This SAFER initiative presents five strategic areas documented as offering the best cost-effectiveness, known as “best buys,” listed in the following order, although they are of equal importance:

- Strengthen restrictions on alcohol availability;
- Advance and enforce drink driving countermeasures;
- Facilitate access to screening, brief interventions and treatment;
- Enforce comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and promotion;
- Raise prices on alcohol through excise taxes and pricing policies.

Reducing the alcohol marketing is therefore a priority for combating harmful alcohol consumption at European level. Nevertheless, alcohol advertising is subject to only limited regulation by European Union (EU) authorities. Regulation (EU) 2024/1143 of April 11, 2024 (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2024) legislates on the protection of geographical indications for wines and spirits in the presentation of these products. Directive 2006/114/EC of December 12, 2006 (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006), which is general in nature, defines the contours of misleading advertising, including when it is carried out by competitors, by distinguishing between the legal conditions for comparative advertising.

In 2022, the French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT) conducted a consultation with international experts and researchers on alcohol consumption control policies, which highlighted the major challenges posed by marketing in the digital age, through commercial or promotional communications deployed via television, cinema, the Internet, or social media. In November 2023, the OFDT launched a comparative European study on audiovisual and digital alcohol marketing, over 24 months, with financial support from the French Fund for Combatting Addiction (FLCA): the study Comparing International Public Policies of Alcohol control - Audiovisual and Digital Alcohol Marketing (CIPPAL-ADAM). Its aim is to compare the potential impact of national regulations on young people’s exposure to audiovisual and digital alcohol marketing, and to shed light on national experiences and contexts that offer added value from a public health perspective. The study covered a variety of policy frameworks (from state monopoly to liberal approaches) and economic models related to alcohol (winemaking tradition, brewing tradition or other) in different European regions, through the cases Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania and Switzerland. Under the coordination of the OFDT, a partnership was formed, comprising researchers and a regulatory body involved in each of the target countries, with no links to the alcohol industry, in order to implement a standardised research protocol based on a mixed method (see Methodology).

1. Strengthen, Advance, Facilitate, Enforce, Raise.

This briefing paper is a first milestone of this work, providing a comparative overview of the legislation of these six European countries in the field of audiovisual and digital alcohol marketing, based on a documentary analysis produced by each expert for their country. It summarises the regulatory frameworks in force in each country in 2024, emphasising their protective capacity, as identified by the study partners, with regard to public health concerns, particularly regarding minors. It then provides a cross-cutting overview of convergences and country-specific approaches. Finally, it offers areas for improvement, in light of these national experiences.

LEGAL CONTROL OF AUDIOVISUAL AND DIGITAL ALCOHOL MARKETING IN SIX EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

The regulatory frameworks governing audiovisual and digital marketing for alcohol in Lithuania, Finland, France, Italy, Ireland and Switzerland reflect specific national approaches, but they all share a common goal of balancing public health considerations with economic and socio-cultural interests. Indeed, the national systems of these six European countries are distinguished by their determination to protect vulnerable populations, in particular by minimising minors' exposure to audiovisual and digital marketing and reducing alcohol-related harm, including morbidity and mortality. The national cases presented here illustrate, first, the regulations that have specifically addressed the issue of marketing via social media, and second, those that take a more general approach.

■ Lithuania, near-total ban

Lithuania stands out with one of the most restrictive alcohol marketing bans in the world, establishing a near-total ban on advertising and sponsorship in all media, based on a public health approach, since the adoption of the Law on Alcohol Control in 1995 (Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 1995). In the 2010s, faced with some of the highest levels of per capita alcohol consumption and associated harm in the world, Lithuania benefited from unprecedented civic and political momentum to address health issues. Strong public mobilisation was evident in the citizen campaign 'For a sober Lithuania', which called for a parliamentary debate (gathering 60,000 signatures). Political momentum was decisive in 2016 with the election victory of a party that placed the reduction of alcohol consumption through stricter regulation at the heart of its programme. In 2017, Parliament voted for a set of control measures, guided by the WHO's best buys recommendations, despite strong opposition from the alcohol industry. These reforms, which came into force at the beginning of 2018, included raising the legal drinking age to 20, reducing legal sales hours, increasing excise duties and introducing a near-total ban on alcohol advertising. (Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 2018). In addition to print media and billboards, these drastic restrictions on advertising extend to:

- audiovisual media, including television, radio, and cinemas;
- digital media, encompassing the internet and other digital platforms, including user-generated contents.

The prohibition covers both direct advertisements and indirect promotional communications, limiting them to certain contexts. For example, sponsorship of sporting or cultural events by alcohol brands is prohibited. Advertisements or price reductions are prohibited outside of points of sale, as are all promotions encouraging the purchase of alcohol, such as contests, promotional games, lotteries, gifts, promotional items bearing an alcohol brand, free samples or coupon promotions.

The law describes the types of information that are not considered advertising and are therefore permitted, including online, on food delivery platforms and similar digital services. Permitted forms include, in terms of digital marketing, factual data without promotional language on the official websites of producers and sellers (e.g. name, type, alcohol content, origin, price). Permitted forms also include:

- product information on labels and packaging;
- information intended for specialists in trade publications and professional communications;
- company's name or trademark on its premises or vehicles;
- point-of-sale information, such as product display with factual tags or price lists available to customers;
- food and drink pairings, awards or medals won, and references to production methods or traditions, among other categories of information newly permitted by the amendment of 1 June 2024 to the 1995 Act.

It is important to note that these various restrictions do not apply to alcohol-free beers and wines (with an alcohol by volume, or ABV, of 0.0%). These products are exempt from the advertising ban as they are not classified as alcoholic beverages, though brands often use a visual identity similar to that of the alcoholic range.

Established in 2011, the Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department (NTAKD), under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, is empowered to monitor and act swiftly to enforce regulations on audiovisual and digital advertising for alcohol, in coordination with the courts. If an alcohol advertisement is published online targeting Lithuanian consumers, regardless of where the website is hosted, NTAKD can notify and request a national court to order its removal or blocking. Courts are required to review such requests within three days. Despite possible infringements by foreign platforms and the possibility for Lithuanians to consult foreign websites and accounts, enforcement is fairly effective, with rare transgressions by domestic broadcasters, thanks to swift legal tools for online content removal and the NTAKD's clear mandate as a supervisory body (Miščikienė et al., 2020).

Given the blanket statutory ban, there is little room for industry self-regulation codes on advertising content. Any historical self-regulatory initiatives are now considered obsolete beyond compliance with the law, which is formally supervised by reactive institutions (notably NTAKD). Nevertheless, alibi marketing² remains a grey area, not covered by the law, and likely to undermine the effectiveness of regulation.

■ Finland, a Nordic model targeting viral marketing

Finland traditionally possesses a culture of sobriety with regard to alcohol ('dry drinking culture'), characterised by high prevalence of drunkenness and heavy episodic drinking, but relatively low prevalence of regular alcohol consumption since the first half of the 20th century, despite an upward trend from the 1960s to the 2000s (fourfold increase), which has been followed by an overall decline since 2007 (Bruun et al., 1975 ; Room et Mäkelä, 2000). The country has a long history of restrictive alcohol policies, aligning itself with the so-called 'Nordic alcohol policy model'³ (ibid). The Nordic model focuses on limiting alcohol consumption and related harms by controlling its physical and economic accessibility. In Finland, one of the founding principles of this policy framework is the state monopoly on alcohol retail, Alko, established in 1932. However, recent legislative changes reflect a shift towards liberalisation under pressure from industry – such as in 2018 and 2024, when stronger alcoholic beverages were authorised in grocery stores independent of the Finnish alcohol retail monopoly.

In terms of marketing, regulations are set out by the Finnish Alcohol Act, issued in 1994 and amended in 2008 for audiovisual advertising and in 2015 to address online media (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2017). Alcohol advertisements on television and radio have been banned between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. since 2008. Advertising for alcoholic beverages is also prohibited in cinemas at film screenings permitted for minors. Apart from audiovisual and digital marketing, advertising is also prohibited in outdoor public places, such as billboards, bus stops and public transport, though sporting events involving adult competitors are not included in this restriction.

In the digital sphere, the 2015 amendment to the Alcohol Act introduced restrictions targeting both social media-specific advertising techniques and content characteristics. For instance, advertising campaigns that include games, lotteries, or competitions are prohibited. The use of user-generated text or audiovisual material in alcohol marketing is prohibited, as is the provision of promotional content to be shared on social media platforms. According to the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira), social media content creators must disable the option to share when publishing alcohol-related marketing content (Kauppila et al., 2019). Finnish regulations also extend to cross-border advertising if it is targeted at Finnish audiences, identifiable by factors such as the language used and product availability in Finland.

While all marketing is prohibited for alcoholic beverages with an ABV exceeding 21%, it is subject to a series of content restrictions for alcoholic beverages with an ABV of 21% or less. Where applicable, marketing must not:

- target or represent minors or persons to whom alcohol cannot be sold;
- associate alcohol consumption with driving a vehicle;
- emphasise alcoholic strength as a positive feature;
- portray heavy drinking in a positive light or sobriety/moderation negatively;
- portray alcohol as performance-enhancing or promoting social or sexual success;

2. Alibi marketing conventionally involves using the key components of an alcohol brand's identity in marketing communications (e.g. colours, fonts and slogans), but without explicitly mentioning the core brand name (Critchlow et al., 2025).

3. Referring to Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland, among other Nordic countries.

- suggest that alcohol has medicinal or therapeutic properties, acts as a stimulant, sedative or means of resolving conflict;
- be unfair, use unfair means, or provide untrue or misleading information about alcohol, its use, effects, or other characteristics.

The competent national authority (Valvira) and regional state administrative agencies (known as AVIs) oversee the enforcement of the law on alcohol promotion and bear the burden of proof for demonstrating violations (Montonen and Tuominen, 2017). However, Valvira lacks the resources to monitor social media advertising and relies primarily on cases reported by civil society (Katainen et al., 2020). This places a heavy responsibility on parents to monitor young people's use of social media and their exposure to alcohol marketing (Raitasalo et Markkula, 2024).

■ France, focus on a restricted authorised framework, with new challenges to be met

In France, alcohol is a major public health concern that has led to multiple preventive measures being put in place to control its accessibility and appeal (Inserm, 2021). In particular, alcohol advertising is regulated by the Public Health Code (CSP), mainly under Law No. 91-32 of 10 January 1991, known as the 'Évin Law', named after the Minister of Health Claude Évin (Président de la République française, 1991). This landmark law aims to reduce excessive consumption, protect minors and prevent the normalisation of alcohol while preserving economic interests. A major strength of the Évin Law is that it restrictively defines which media and content are authorised. This implies that anything not expressly authorised is prohibited, a principle that protected internet users until digital media were in turn authorised in 2009 (Basset et Rigaud, 2021 ; Gallopel-Morvan et al., 2017).

The Évin Law imposes a full ban on television and cinema advertising. Radio advertising is only permitted during designated hours with a minimal youth audience, as determined by the Council of State (Conseil d'État), i.e. from midnight to 7 a.m. on Wednesdays and from midnight to 5 p.m. on other days. Sponsoring of cultural and sporting events by alcohol brands is prohibited, whether it directly or indirectly promotes alcoholic beverages. In 2009, a significant opening was granted to the alcohol industry when alcohol advertising was authorised on online platforms and digital media (Internet and applications), with the exception of websites aimed at young people or dedicated to sport and physical activity, provided the advertising is neither intrusive nor interstitial⁴ (Président de la République française, 2009). However, Law No. 2023-451 promulgated on June 9, 2023, specifically regulates commercial influence and combats abuses by influencers on social networks, requiring paid partnerships to be clearly disclosed as "advertising" or "commercial collaboration" to ensure transparency (Président de la République française, 2023). Therefore, influencers must now comply with legal regulations concerning alcohol advertising.

In terms of content, France, like other countries, prohibits targeting minors, without however specifying how this prohibition applies to any depictions or references to minors, beyond the prohibited portrayal of this audience in promotional communications. Authorised alcohol advertising, including audiovisual and digital marketing, is strictly limited to factual information about alcohol products and their objective qualities, such as alcoholic degree, composition, origin, production methods, and consumption modalities (article L3323-4 of CSP). However, it is prohibited to depict people consuming alcohol or to associate alcohol with social success, seduction, sexual prowess, pleasure, glamour, performance, sport, enhanced masculinity/femininity or opinion leaders. A mandatory health warning, "Abuse of alcohol is dangerous for your health" ("L'abus d'alcool est dangereux pour la santé") must be displayed on all alcohol advertisements and sales units, such as bottles, cans and packaging (article L3323-4 of CSP). In practice, this warning is most often supplemented by the alcohol industry slogan "drink in moderation".

In this area, enforcement of the law primarily involves state authorities: the National health directorate (DGS), the General Directorate for Competition, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control (DGCCRF) and the Regulatory Authority for Audiovisual and Digital Communication (Arcom). However, the monitoring of alcohol advertising also involves the non-governmental sector (such as the Association Addictions France, which has been designated as a 'trusted reporter' by Arcom). Non-governmental organisations can thus

4. An advertisement is considered intrusive if it interferes with or hinders the reading or viewing of content, and interstitial if it appears in full screen between two online pages on the same site.

bring civil proceedings in court, and the courts can not only order the removal of content but also impose heavy fines (see Table 1). However, enforcement in the digital sphere is sometimes limited by a lack of resources for identifying problematic communications and the ambiguity of the definition of advertising via new information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Association Addiction France, 2024 ; Lecas et al., 2019).

The French system places significant emphasis on self-regulation through the Professional Advertising Self-Regulation Authority (ARPP), which provides ethical guidelines aligned with French law (ARPP, 2015). The ARPP clarifies certain legal provisions or illustrates them in concrete terms. For example, it recommends that alcohol advertisements should not feature minors or content that is likely to appeal to them. For this advertising sector, it also advocates excluding media outlets where the adult audience is likely to be less than 70%. In the digital sphere, this self-regulatory body emphasises transparency, urging advertising content to be instantly identifiable as such and avoid any confusion with non-advertising content. The ARPP provides advice and certification to influencers on ethical and legal compliance. However, the application of the ARPP's recommendations is entirely voluntary on the part of advertisers and their clients. These recommendations remain non-binding (with the exception, of course, of those transcribing the law) and the main lever of persuasion is reputational.

■ Italy, a fragmented framework but targeting social media

Italy has a comprehensive legal framework for alcohol advertising, primarily aimed at protecting minors from promotional messages that could encourage consumption (Beccaria and Rolando, 2015). This legal framework combines statutory provisions and self-regulatory codes from the advertising industry (first published in 1966) and the wine industry. Political commitment in this area has fluctuated, with significant attention being paid to the subject in the 1990s, which declined after 2001 (Beccaria and Rolando, 2015).

In the audiovisual sector, the 2001 Framework Act on Alcohol and Alcohol-Related Problems (Law n. 125/2001) prohibits alcohol advertising during programmes intended for minors or within 15 minutes before and after such programmes (Presidente della Repubblica, 2001). Spirits advertising is banned on radio and television between 4:00 pm and 7:00 pm. It is also strictly prohibited in cinemas during the screening of films primarily intended for young audiences, as is the case for newspapers and magazines aimed at minors. Furthermore, since 1993, sponsorship of media programs by entities whose main activity is the manufacture or sale of spirits has been prohibited (Ministro delle Poste e delle Telecomunicazioni, 1993).

With regard to advertising content, legal restrictions are relatively extensive and specific. In Italy, alcohol advertising is considered transgressive if it:

- depicts minors consuming alcohol;
- attributes efficacy or therapeutic indications, stimulating or calming properties, not recognised by the ministry of health;
- portrays alcohol consumption in a positive light or uses the high alcohol content of beverages as a positive or desirable quality;
- promotes excessive and uncontrolled consumption, or portrays abstinence or sobriety in a negative light;
- links the consumption of alcohol to enhanced physical performance or driving;
- suggests that alcohol consumption contributes to social or sexual success or may help to resolve psychological conflicts.

For digital media, Legislative Decree No. 208 of 2021, which transposed the European directive 2018/808, explicitly covers user-generated videos disseminated via social media platforms, emphasising child protection and condemning the encouragement of “immoderate” consumption (Presidente della Repubblica, 2021). In response to the lack of clear legal definitions for influencer marketing, the Italian Communications Authority (AGCOM) approved guidelines in January 2024 (AGCOM, 2024). These “soft law”⁵ guidelines require influencers to explicitly disclose the promotional nature of their content (e.g., using “Advertising” or “Promoted by” labels) and to ensure transparency and fairness of information, particularly regarding

5. Proposal for non-binding and non-enforceable rules.

the protection of minors. Influencers must not mislead audiences by appearing to act spontaneously or independently when promoting a brand. The AGCOM plays a central role in sanctioning broadcasters, particularly for violations concerning minors (cf. Table 1).

However, the application of the legal framework, particularly in the fields of digital marketing and influence, remains insufficient, with financial penalties often being minimal compared to advertising budgets (cf. Table 1). Political commitment to alcohol regulation has also diminished significantly since the 1990s, in the face of the economic clout of the alcohol industry, contributing to a fragmented and uncoordinated landscape around enforcement (Beccaria and Rolando, 2015).

The Advertising Self-Regulation Code provides more detailed guidelines, prohibiting for example the promotion of excessive use, references to minors, or the depiction of characters or symbols associated with minors. The Federation of Wine Producers (Federvini) also issued self-regulation guidelines in 2023 related to websites, SMS, MMS, social media, videogames and stating that protagonists, testimonials, and influencers must be at least 25 years of age, and must not represent minors or appear as such.

■ Ireland, from “laissez-faire” to a public health dynamic

Until the end of the 2010s, Ireland has historically adopted a laissez-faire approach to alcohol control policies, marked by strong alcohol industry influence and widespread acceptance of self-regulation of advertising in the sector. The Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 demonstrated a political will to regulate alcohol as a public health issue (Government of Ireland, 2018). However, implementation of this Act has so far been slow and partial.

Section 19 of this public health law, which came into force in autumn 2024, prohibits alcohol advertising on television every day between 3:00 am and 9:00 pm. It also bans alcohol advertising on weekdays (Monday to Friday) on the radio between 3:00 pm and 10:00 am the following day, in order to prevent children from being exposed to it through this source. Alcohol advertising is also prohibited in cinemas and on screen, unless the film has an age rating of 18. In addition, section 15 of the Act prohibits alcohol advertising on or in sports areas, including playgrounds and events intended for children. Section 16 prohibits alcohol industry sponsorship of child-oriented events and motor vehicle races.

The 2018 Public Health Alcohol Act does not explicitly mention digital marketing or social media. However, in October 2024, Ireland's first Online Safety Code was produced, covering audiovisual commercial communications harmful to children (including alcohol) and prohibiting those encouraging immoderate consumption for the general public (Government of Ireland, 2022). Nevertheless, advertising for non-alcoholic or low-alcohol products that use a brand identity (visual identity) similar or even identical to that of their alcoholic versions constitutes a worrying circumvention of the restrictions.

Other areas of the alcohol trade are subject to legal restrictions. For example, the sale, manufacture or import of children's clothing bearing an alcohol brand name is prohibited. Alcohol beverages and advertising in supermarkets and shops are restricted to specific areas, often enclosed by a barrier. Alcohol advertising is also prohibited on state-owned land, public service vehicles, trains and trams, bus stops and stations, and within 200 meters of schools, creches, or municipal playgrounds.

The Irish legal framework has been criticised for its substantial limitations, such as the continued presence of alcohol advertising on billboards surrounding sports grounds. Furthermore, its enforcement is considered weak and slow, given the low number of convictions or fines imposed by environmental health officers despite numerous cases of non-compliance being identified (Houghton, 2021 ; Houghton and Lombard, 2024). This situation has earned the law the nickname “paper tiger”.

Self-regulatory guidelines have been published by the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI), but their application is voluntary and non-compliance carries few penalties (ASAI, 2016). The ASAI code states that marketing communications must not be directed at children or encourage them to drink, and anyone depicted in an alcohol advertisement should be over 25 years of age and appear to be over 25. The code also prohibits the exploitation of aspects of youth culture or characters appealing to children. Finally, digital media directly linked to an alcohol brand must implement age-based filtering (to exclude minors).

■ Switzerland, a liberal mosaic of differentiated rules

Switzerland's approach to regulating alcohol marketing is characterised by a patchwork of rules, reflecting the influence of wine industry interests and a political culture that values economic liberalism and the preservation of traditions. Swiss regulations are relatively permissive compared to other European countries and differentiate between types of alcohol in terms of advertising, with stricter rules for spirits (>15% ABV) than for fermented beverages such as wine and beer.

For spirits, advertising is prohibited on radio and television. Content must only include representations directly related to the product's production and properties (Assemblée fédérale de la Confédération suisse, 1932). As for content restriction, it is forbidden to include images of landscapes or people drinking alcohol, or to associate consumption with an enviable lifestyle, performance, success or advantage. Price comparisons, promises of gifts or other benefits, and advertising competitions related to spirits are also prohibited. Advertising for spirits is also banned in public buildings, public transport vehicles and installations, sports fields, at points of sale and healthcare facilities, and sporting events or events organised for children or adolescents.

In Switzerland, legal provisions relating to physical media and the audiovisual landscape also apply to the digital sphere, in the absence of specific legislation on information and communication technologies. Spirit drink banners on websites targeting a Swiss audience must be clearly delineated from other content, and links or hashtags must relate directly to the product (e.g., #vodkafromrussia is acceptable, but #be_happy_drink_vodka is not). Until the publication of new guidelines by the Federal Customs and Border Security Office in February 2025, influencer marketing was a grey area, not explicitly subject to alcohol advertising laws (FOCBS, 2024). Influencers are now required to link their advertising content strictly to the product (without any other alibi subject) and are prohibited from basing alcohol promotion on lifestyle and from product placement of spirits in electronic media, films, and influencer publications.

For fermented beverages (<15% ABV), like wine and beer, the Federal Law on Foodstuffs and Everyday Objects applies, stipulating that advertising alcoholic beverages specifically targeting minors is strictly forbidden (Assemblée fédérale de la Confédération suisse, 2014). In practice, this means that advertising for wine and beer is prohibited in places and events frequented by young people, in publications addressed to young people, and on objects used by or distributed free of charge to young people. The cantons are responsible for enforcing these regulations. However, restrictions on images and positive ideas associated with spirits (e.g., linking drinking to good times or partying) do not apply to fermented beverages, an exception that contributes to trivialising their consumption.

The Swiss advertising and alcohol industries are also involved in self-regulation. The Swiss Commission for Loyalty (CSL), a foundation established by the Swiss advertising industry, issues non-binding recommendations. In 2021, Spiritsuisse, representing the spirits industry, published "Guidelines for Responsible Commercial Communication", which urge that those featured in commercial communications for alcohol be over 25 years of age (SpiritSuisse, 2021). Exceptionally, influencers who are active on platforms with user age control systems may be under 25, but never minors.

Major digital platforms like Meta allow spirits advertising in Switzerland, provided that it complies with local laws and does not target those under the age of 18. Google's regulations are more elaborate for paid advertisements, prohibiting targeting minors or promoting supposed virtues or excessive consumption, but these guidelines do not apply to user-generated and shared content.

COMPARISON OF LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

In essence, while all the European countries studies strive to mitigate the harms of alcohol through marketing controls, their regulatory systems differ in terms of their scope and effectiveness of enforcement. Table 1 summarises the capacity of each of the six national alcohol marketing control systems to address public health issues, as well as the limitations associated with each case. The penalties incurred by offenders are also summarised. The elements in Table 1 are not exhaustive, for the sake of brevity and because they illustrate the aspects identified by the CIPPAL-ADAM project partners as most distinctive in their countries. The following sections complement this overview by addressing, respectively, the convergences –positive or detrimental from a public health perspective– and notable specificities.

Convergences: protecting minors and adapting to digital technology

National legal systems for controlling alcohol marketing share common objectives but take different approaches. All six countries –Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, and Switzerland– converge on the fundamental objective of protecting public health and reducing alcohol-related harm, particularly among minors and populations identified by public authorities as vulnerable (such as young adults). This has resulted in the banning of all advertising content that targets or depicts minors or uses themes that may be appealing to them. However, countries' historical contexts, political landscapes, and cultural representations of alcohol have shaped specific regulatory frameworks.

All States struggle with the complex challenges posed by the rapidly evolving digital marketing landscape, including social media user-generated content, and influencer content. These platforms pose unique challenges due to the ephemeral nature of content, its widespread distribution, personalisation, and cross-border reach, which makes monitoring and enforcing the legal framework difficult. To foster a better understanding of digital marketing restrictions and advertising product compliance, guidelines can be developed by statutory or self-regulation bodies (as in France, Ireland and Italy). These soft-law tools, which are adaptative and flexible, can thus usefully complement the legal arsenal.

In the realm of digital media, several countries (France, Ireland, Italy) require transparency regarding the advertising status of posts published by influencers, in particular by exhorting them to explicitly disclose –at the beginning or during the video– whether their content/activities are the subject of a paid partnership. However, the promotional impact of communications from influencers and internet users on audiences who are identified by law as vulnerable is insufficiently regulated.

Product placement remains a cross-cutting issue. Whilst several countries have introduced transparency and clarity requirements for advertising by influencers on digital platforms (Switzerland, France, Italy), a significant part of product placements escapes the restrictions in force, including through more traditional audiovisual media (series, films, clips or other videos).

A major loophole lies in the absence of restrictions on non-alcoholic versions of alcoholic brands (with 0.0% ABV). When using the same brand image, advertising non-alcoholic versions can serve to promote their alcoholic counterparts. This surrogate marketing, carried out through “zero alcohol” beverages, is now widely used by the alcohol industry and even manages to erode the effectiveness of the strictest bans (Critchlow et al., 2025).

In all countries, alcohol industry lobbies persistently seek to liberalise regulations or exploit legislative loopholes to develop marketing (Inserm, 2021; Millot et al., 2022; WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2024). Their influence is reflected in a wide range of strategies, which often promote personal responsibility, challenge the effectiveness of legal restrictions, and advocate for self-regulation.

Table 1. Protective nature of restrictions on audiovisual and digital marketing of alcohol in the six countries studied, in 2024

Country	Scope	Key restrictions/	Limitations with regard to public health objectives	Penalties incurred in the event of a violation
Lithuania	Restriction close to a total ban	Near total ban on alcohol advertising in all media, including digital space.	Limited capacity to enforce cross-border digital ads which are accessed by users (e.g. influencers or foreign websites). No restrictions on non-alcoholic beverages, hence the existence of alibi-marketing, particularly via digital media. Regulation weakened by the lack of political consensus.	Fines ranging from €2 896 to €28 962 for businesses and from €165 to €3 000 for individuals. Cessation of prohibited advertising. No criminal prosecution.
Finland	High restriction Regulation governed by specific provisions for digital platforms.	[<18]; [C]: no association with a positive image of alcohol, various banned subjects being identified by law, such as success; [D]: viral communication limitation and influencer restrictions.	Persisting loopholes given the challenges in monitoring digital environments. Grey areas in user-generated content or international content reshared locally via social media.	A fine, the amount of which is not defined by the Finnish Criminal Code, or imprisonment for a maximum of 6 months. However, no penalties were imposed before 2024.
France	Partial restriction Health-focused informative framework aimed at reducing persuasive marketing and supporting reduced consumption.	[<18]; [H!]; [C]: factual content only, limiting persuasive content: no association with social or sexual success.	Less control outside traditional audiovisual media (TV, cinema) and limited adaptability to the digital domain due to a lack of real-time enforcement capabilities on viral content or influencers, and on cross-border streaming platforms.	Fine of up to €75 000 or 50% of the cost of the illegal operation. Possible additional penalties: cessation of advertising and, in the event of a repeat offence, a 5-year ban on the sale of the beverage in question. No criminal prosecution.
Italy	Partial restriction, assimilating the particularities of social networks.	[<18]; [C]: no association with a positive image of alcohol, such as success or therapeutic properties; [D]: restriction extended to user-generated contents.	High dependence on industry self-regulation, with controls not legally binding and limited enforcement mechanisms; in the case of digital platforms, protective measures are easy to circumvent.	Fine ranging from €5 000 to €225 000 depending on the severity and recurrence. No criminal prosecution.
Ireland	Partial restriction Comprehensive public health approach recently built on statutory guidelines (2024) for digital platforms.	[<18]; [H!]; Time restrictions; location/advertising media restrictions.	Gradual implementation of the law, taking effect slowly in 2024, and limited enforcement in the digital space, particularly on global platforms. No ban on indirect promotion, including branding.	Maximum fine of €5 000 and/or imprisonment for 6 months if convicted on summary conviction (offence), up to €250 000 fine and/or 3-years imprisonment if convicted on indictment (serious offence). Additional penalty of €2 000 if the offence continues. No sentence recorded until 2024.
Switzerland	Relatively limited restrictions, with basic health-focused protective measures. Self-regulation is preferred.	[<18]; [C]: for beverage ≥ 15% ABV, no association with landscape, alcohol drinkers, positive image (enviable lifestyle, performance or advantage); no price comparison or promises of benefits.	Emphasis on self-regulation and voluntary codes. Few legal restrictions, no mandatory health warnings, and no specific binding legislation for digital media (particularly influencer marketing via social media, which is largely unregulated).	Maximum fine of CHF40 000 for intentional violations, reduced to a maximum of CHF20 000 for spirits, if committed through negligence. No criminal prosecution.

Caption: [<18] no minor-targeting [H!] mandatory health warnings; [C]: content restrictions; [D]: digital media-specific restrictions (other than restrictions on minor audience); ABV: Alcohol By Volume.

Source: CIPPAL-ADAM partnership, 2025.

Moreover, most countries incorporate some form of self-regulation, which is advocated by the alcohol industry. However, self-regulation has major limitations, as the application of such a framework is voluntary, with poorly developed control mechanisms and potential conflicts of interest, such as industry funding of monitoring bodies or a position of judge and jury (Millot et al. 2022).

In general, prevention and advocacy actors deplore a lack of resources for law enforcement and real-time monitoring, particularly with regard to advertising on social media. Financial penalties are often considered insufficient in relation to the advertising budgets and considerable profits of alcohol producers, thereby reducing their deterrent effect. Regardless of the measures taken regarding digital media, countries report an inability to counter cross-border digital marketing, which can neutralise the protective measures in place at the national level. Unsurprisingly, efforts to consolidate regulations are contested by the alcohol industry, which highlights economic interests, the weight of tradition and cultural heritage.

Specific national approaches

Despite the challenges and objectives common to the six countries studied, each distinguished itself through unique approaches to alcohol marketing control, some of which could be real assets if transposed to other contexts. Provisions deemed relevant have been implemented in specific political and cultural landscapes. Although the feasibility of transferring them beyond their original borders should be assessed in greater depth, they are worth highlighting here.

Lithuania stands out with a near-total ban on alcohol advertising across all media and formats since January 2018. This ban extends to direct advertisements, sponsorships, and promotional items, with rare and factual exceptions limited to product labels, producer websites (without promotional language), professional communications, and point-of-sale information. The existence of clearly mandated and resourced institutions to enforce the law is crucial for effective implementation. This role is primarily undertaken by the Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department (NTAKD), which has the power to order the swift removal of advertisements or initiate the blocking of illicit online content.

Under the Évin Law (1991), France employs a distinctive “positive list” approach, meaning that anything not explicitly listed as authorised, both in terms of content and media, is by definition strictly prohibited. This regime protects the population from exposure to advertising conveyed by new media, as was the case with digital media until they were explicitly authorised by Law No. 2009-879. Although the 2009 amendments authorised online advertising for alcohol, provided that it is not intrusive or targeted at minors, France has maintained a total ban on television and cinema advertising, as well as a ban on alcohol brands sponsoring cultural or sporting events. Finally, Law No. 2023-451 (June 2023) defines and regulates commercial influence activities in order to combat abuse on social media.

Following the Nordic model of alcohol policy, Finland focuses on restricting consumption and harm by controlling the physical and economic availability of alcoholic beverages. Although specific time slots are in place for television and radio advertising, outdoor advertising is prohibited and, in general, in public places. Finland has been a pioneer in regulating digital advertising, both by restricting the use of user-generated content to curb viral dissemination and by banning specific techniques such as games or competitions in marketing campaigns.

Italy has a hybrid legal framework for alcohol advertising, combining legal provisions and self-regulatory codes, mainly focused on regulating content and locations. Recently (in 2021 and 2024), in the name of child protection, Italy took an important step forward by extending the scope of legal restrictions on advertising to user-generated videos on social media and influencer marketing, promoting transparency on advertising objectives. In terms of content, Italy prohibits certain associations, often omitted elsewhere, such as therapeutic properties and the use of alcohol for the resolution of psychological conflicts.

Driven by a strong culture of economic liberalism, Switzerland has opted for differentiated regulations depending on the type of alcoholic beverage, which are more favourable to fermented (traditional) beverages but particularly strict with regard to spirits (more than 15% ABV). Swiss regulations limit advertising for spirits to the factual properties of the product and prohibit it on radio, television, in public buildings, on public transport, at sporting venues and at events aimed at minors.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of alcohol marketing regulations across Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, and Switzerland reveals a diverse landscape, ranging from a near-total advertising ban in Lithuania to more fragmented and rather liberal regulations in Switzerland. However, it highlights several key conclusions about the persistent challenges and ways to better protect public health in the digital age.

In the universal and dynamic digital environment, control systems require continuous adaptation of laws in order to more directly cover emerging marketing techniques and fill regulatory gaps. As such, in 2024, it appears to be a priority to regulate partnerships with influencers and content generated by social media users. Lithuania faces the challenge of alibi marketing, and its ability to enforce national restrictions on cross-border advertising by global brands in digital media is limited. Although countries such as Finland, Italy and France have undertaken to amend laws to include digital media, significant gaps remain and raise major concerns about the online exposure of young people. In Italy, the hybrid, fragmented nature of the regulatory framework undermines its application in digital and influencer contexts. Ireland's Public Health (Alcohol) Act does not explicitly mention social media, reflecting a disconnect between the legislative framework and the realities of marketing. Finally, Switzerland does not specifically legislate on digital advertising, applying rules defined for physical spaces to this area and leaving alcohol producers and advertisers with relative freedom of interpretation as to the limits to be applied to influencer marketing.

Furthermore, enforcement mechanisms often prove insufficient, especially in the digital sphere. In Finland, the competent authority (Valvira) lacks the resources to monitor advertising on social media and mainly intervenes in cases that are reported to it. In Ireland, despite numerous cases of non-compliance, environmental health officers have been reluctant to enforce public health legislation (alcohol), resulting in a very low proportion of court convictions. Italy faces a lack of oversight in digital and influencer marketing, and financial penalties for violations are considered too low to have a deterrent effect, given the advertising budgets of the alcohol industry. Even in Lithuania, despite a dedicated agency (NTAKD) with strong legal tools, the lack of resources to monitor user-generated content remains problematic. This highlights the critical need for strengthened resources, proactive monitoring and deterrent measures to ensure compliance.

The influence exerted by the alcohol industry consistently seeks to challenge, delay and water down regulations in all countries. A common argument used by alcohol producers is to present stricter controls as a threat to economic interests, individual freedoms and cultural heritage (particularly in wine-producing countries such as France, Italy and Switzerland). The alcohol industry therefore advocates self-regulation as an alternative to legal controls. However, considering the examples observed, self-regulation mechanisms generally lack transparency and fail to hold economic actors accountable or impose meaningful sanctions, which minimises their effectiveness.

In several countries, the lack of restrictions on advertising for non-alcoholic or low-alcohol products, despite their brand image being similar to that of alcoholic versions, is a major concern and a loophole widely exploited by the industry. This practice maintains the visibility of alcohol brands among audiences that should be protected from such exposure and potentially normalises the association of these brands with representations that are prohibited when they relate to alcoholic beverages. In the various countries studied, researchers and advocates express serious concerns that this substitute marketing undermines the health and protective scope of legal alcohol advertising restrictions by exposing minors and providing a gateway for alcoholic brands to reach the general public, including younger people. This highlights the need to address the sharing of brand image between alcoholic and non-alcoholic ranges through regulation in order to remove potential confusion or extend advertising restrictions to alcohol-free or low-alcohol products of alcohol brands.

While Lithuania stands out for its strict and comprehensive ban, which applies to all media, other countries are faced with the industry's constant adaptation to exploit promotional opportunities offered by regulatory loopholes and digital developments. Effective regulation of alcohol marketing relies on legal frameworks that explicitly address new media and branding strategies, combined with strong political will to prioritise public health. It requires robust enforcement mechanisms and concerted efforts to counteract the

opposing actions of alcohol companies. International collaboration and the sharing of best practices, such as the WHO's best buys, are also crucial to better respond to the cross-border impact of alcohol marketing, particularly in the digital sphere, and to support national regulatory efforts to protect vulnerable audiences from potentially harmful exposure.

The regulations of the countries studied aim to control alcohol marketing for public health purposes, while offering some flexibility to the economic sector, a combination of historical legacy, political landscapes and the inherent difficulties of regulating an evolving and globalised industry. From a public health perspective, weaknesses in national regulation systems on digital alcohol advertising generally stem from:

- incomplete or outdated laws that fail to address modern digital platforms (social media, influencer marketing, etc.);
- enforcement gaps, particularly when rules are based on industry self-regulation;
- loopholes that allow indirect exposure or targeting of vulnerable people like minors, such as alibi marketing or substitute marketing carried out by non-alcoholic brands, which are exempt from advertising restrictions in terms of media, content or volume.

It is also crucial to gain a better understanding of the marketing techniques most likely to encourage alcohol consumption, particularly among minors, and to better identify the mechanisms at play by developing not only regular observatories but also studies based on mixed methods (Inserm, 2021).

The evolving nature of digital media and the persistent influence of the alcohol industry in the field of marketing continue to test the resilience and adaptability of these national regulatory frameworks for alcohol advertising. Without a globalised prohibitive framework, they call for continued vigilance and possible reforms in order to support the principle of promoting public health. Online marketing challenges the ability of states to harmonise their public health responses in the face of competitive, sometimes globalised markets and to adapt the pace of policymaking to the rapidly changing digital world.

Methodology

This overview is based on the study “Comparing International Public Policies of Alcohol control- Audiovisual and Digital Alcohol Marketing” (CIPPAL-ADAM) which was carried out in 2024-2025 as part of an international partnership covering Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania and Switzerland. The partners involved implemented a common study protocol, combining, for each country, a documentary analysis of the regulatory context for alcohol advertising, prior to qualitative and quantitative data collection from minors and young adults on their exposure to audiovisual and digital alcohol marketing and their perception of existing regulatory systems, among other topics. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted in each country (with young people aged 16 to 19) and, depending on the country, between 408 and 1 028 young people aged 15 to 21 responded to an online survey. The results of these studies will be compiled in a monograph for each country studied.

The documentary analyses underlying this summary required consultation of various open-access bibliographic databases (Pubmed, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect and Google Scholar), national legislative databases and other restricted-access academic databases, using a coordinated set of search keys. Various fields of marketing were included (advertising, sponsorship, influence, etc.), as well as different sources (scientific articles, grey literature and institutional reports) and disciplines (epidemiology, law and sociology, in particular). These documentary analyses were processed by AI, using NotebookLM®, based on a set of queries, such as ‘focus on the strengths/weaknesses of the six national legal systems for controlling alcohol marketing’. The results were reviewed, amended and supplemented by the study coordinator and lead author (OFDT, France), then reviewed by the CIPPAL-ADAM project partners.

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