



fine gael 

ACTION
ON ALCOHOL ABUSE
www.fgaction-on-alcohol.ie

Campaigning to Win

IRELAND'S ATTITUDE TO ALCOHOL HAS GOT TO CHANGE



1. INTRODUCTION

Ireland's attitude to alcohol has got to change. We can no longer dismiss alcohol 'as part of who we are'. We are paying a huge price with the health and lives of our young people. Paying through clogged up accident and emergency wards. Paying through higher crime rates and paying through our taxes. Without proper action this situation will, without doubt, worsen.

The Government has commissioned report after report. It has appointed task forces. It has spoken about the need for action. But it has not acted.

Ireland needs action on alcohol abuse that is not simply concerned with issues like competition, price and choice. Instead, we need action that safeguards public health, ensures the law is upheld, protects families and strengthens communities.

We need to adopt a more mature attitude to alcohol. But changing Ireland's drinking culture will take time. We must ensure that children know the dangers of addiction, that young people take responsibility for their behaviour and all of us are aware of the consequences of our actions.

Alcohol abuse costs the people of Ireland around €2.4 billion every year. That is €600 for every man, woman and child in the country. This is money that would be better spent on education for our children, better spent on services for the elderly and better spent on healthcare for the sick.



**20% OF 12 TO 14 YEAR
OLD BOYS ARE
'CURRENT DRINKERS'**

2. WHY ACTION IS NEEDED

The scale of the problem is astounding:

- **50% of children under 12 have experimented with alcohol.**
That means in a class of 30 primary school sixth-class children, 15 have drunk alcohol.
- **20% of 12 to 14 year old boys are 'current drinkers'.**
That means that on an average under 14s boys soccer team, two members drink.
- **66% of 15 and 16 year old boys are 'current drinkers'.
33% of 15 and 16 year olds 'binge drink'.**
That means of the 61,000 Junior Cert students in 2002, around 20,000 got drunk regularly.
- **30% of road accidents and 40% of fatal accidents are due to alcohol.**
That means last year alcohol contributed to 164 road deaths and 1,965 injuries.
- **There are 25 drink related assaults on our streets every night.**
Gardaí had to deal with 33,792 cases of public drunkenness and 22,404 cases of threatening or abusive behaviour last year.
- **5,000 overnight stays in our hospitals - 25% of cases brought to Accident and Emergency wards are due to alcohol abuse.**
- **Between 1996 and 2002 there has been a 370% increase in teenagers being intoxicated in public places.**

For their sake, and everybody's safety, we need action.

THE CURRENT APPROACH TO ALCOHOL IS WREAKING HAVOC ON FAMILIES



3. GUIDING VALUES

The problems being caused by alcohol abuse, especially by younger people, need to be tackled in a comprehensive, coherent manner. There is no one simple solution. We need action which tackles the issue on all fronts.

There are some fundamental principles and values which guide our approach. The current approach to alcohol is not consistent with building a **safe society** in which citizens are protected and the **law is enforced**. The current approach to alcohol is wreaking havoc on **families and communities**, by not supporting them. The current approach to alcohol does not focus enough on the **responsibilities of individuals** for their own actions.

We need an approach that addresses the growth of violence on our streets **AND** attacks the root causes of lawlessness and alcohol addiction. We need action on both demand and supply. We need to focus on how children get access to alcohol and why they want to consume it. And we need to punish offenders while preventing alcohol abuse in the first place.

We need action.



IF ALCOHOL ADVERTISING DIDN'T WORK, DRINKS COMPANIES WOULDN'T ADVERTISE

4. FINE GAEL'S TEN POINT ACTION PLAN

Action Point 1

A total ban on all advertising, sponsorship and promotion together with clear public health warnings on alcohol labelling.

A recent report, *The Impact of Alcohol Advertising on Teenagers in Ireland*, shows that alcohol advertising is strongly attractive to young people, portraying lifestyles and images that are part of their social setting. We need a three-pronged approach to tackle underage drinking on this front:

- If alcohol advertising didn't work, drinks companies wouldn't advertise. We cannot hope to teach young people to have a responsible attitude to alcohol, and reduce the level of underage drinking, if they are subjected to such advertising at every turn, from TV programmes to sporting events. All alcohol advertising and sponsorship should be outlawed. To counteract the continued advertising by drinks companies in the British media, we believe that Ireland should promote this policy at EU level.
- It is vital that alcohol is not made any more attractive to young people than it already is. For this reason, Fine Gael supports proposals to ban promotions like free alcohol in pubs and off-licences, below-cost sales and 'all you can drink' events.
- And, at the moment, every smoker in the country is told that 'Smoking Kills' and 'Smoking Causes Cancer' on each packet of cigarettes they buy. The scale of Ireland's underage drinking problem means we need to take a similar approach to excessive drinking using stark warnings to highlight the serious health risks of binge drinking.

VENUES SUCH AS NIGHTCLUBS AND CHIP SHOPS ACT AS FLASHPOINTS FOR LATE-NIGHT VIOLENCE



Action Point 2

Revert to previous pub opening hours and examine the licensing of nightclubs and fast-food venues.

The problem of alcohol-related violence has been exacerbated by the decision in Summer 2000 to extend opening hours. The Liquor Licensing Commission has identified the problem and has called for the late opening of pubs on Thursday nights to be reversed, because of the high level of absenteeism from work and college on Friday mornings.

To tackle Ireland's drink problem, we believe that the changes made to opening hours in 2000 should be reversed in full.

Fine Gael believes that anti-social behaviour is anti-social - no matter what night of the week it happens.

There is little hope of creating a more mature attitude to alcohol if we say it is wrong to binge during the week, but it is acceptable to do so at the weekend.

This is only part of the problem, however. Throughout our cities and towns, other venues such as nightclubs and chip shops act as flashpoints for late-night violent assaults and public disorder. Venues which become a persistent problem and a consistent drain on garda resources should have their licences revoked or their opening hours limited.



INCREASE PENALTIES FOR PUBS, CLUBS & OFF-LICENCES THAT SELL ALCOHOL TO THOSE UNDER 18.

Action Point 3

Introduce legislation requiring all off-licences, clubs and pubs to ask for proof of age before selling alcohol to anyone and require labelling of alcohol sold for consumption off the premises.

In the United States it is simply not possible to buy alcohol unless you provide the seller with some form of photo ID. Such a policy in Ireland would drastically reduce the level of drinking amongst young people.

To help this happen, it is vital that the charge that is currently paid for the National Age Card be abolished. Other forms of **State-issued** photo ID - like passports and driving licences - should also be acceptable in licensed venues.

Those pubs without security personnel at the door should be required to ask for identification upon a customer's first purchase. For those premises that are too big, or too busy to do this, security personnel should be employed to ensure nobody under the age of 18 is allowed in.

Further, the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2000 allows for the labelling of containers in which alcohol is sold for consumption off the premises, so as to identify from which premises the alcohol was purchased. Such labelling would greatly help Gardaí in detecting the source of alcohol sold to minors. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform has so far failed to make the order to enact this legislation.

Action Point 4

Reduce the maximum blood/alcohol level to zero for provisional drivers and 0.5mg for all other drivers.

We must urgently get the message across to young people that you cannot drink and drive. Changing the law to allow for a situation where even one drink would put you over the limit would help to reduce the level of drinking amongst young people, and tackle the high level of deaths on our roads, which remains a national scandal.

PUBLICANS SHOULD BE SEVERELY FINED FOR ALLOWING DRUNKENNESS ON THEIR PREMISES



Action Point 5

Increase penalties for pubs, clubs and off-licences that sell alcohol to those under 18 and ban under 18s from pubs after 8pm.

More and more, the pub is a venue for a family meal, watching sporting events on TV and so on. However, this is mainly a daytime phenomenon and by late evening, pubs are generally unsuitable places for minors. For this reason, after 8pm, pubs should be a 'child free zone'.

Further, at the moment, a publican can be fined for allowing drunkenness on their premises. For persistent offenders, the law should allow for pubs to be severely fined if they serve drink to someone who is obviously drunk or under 18.

These measures would reduce the likelihood of underage drinking and drunkenness on our streets.

Action Point 6

Reduce demand through initiatives at school and community level.

The battle to stop young people falling into a pattern of alcohol abuse starts in our schools and communities. It is here that young people spend most of their time, come under peer pressure and form a lot of their habits. We propose three key measures to tackle demand:

- Measures designed to tackle the availability of drink are one thing, teaching young people to make decisions for themselves and treat alcohol wisely is another. While we support moves to update the curriculum to include a substantial course on the dangers of alcohol abuse and addiction, Fine Gael believes we need to go further.

Alcohol abuse stems, at least in part, from a lack of self confidence and self-esteem. It is vital that just as, for example, the need to respect the environment is continuously impressed on students, so too is the importance of resisting peer pressure and taking responsibility for one's own actions.



THE GREATER THE AVAILABILITY OF ALCOHOL, THE GREATER THE CONSUMPTION

To ensure this happens, teachers should be given full training. Experts should consult with teachers and parents about how best to communicate the message to children.

- In addition to a concerted education programme, there should be an expansion of health and social services to help young people who suffer as a result of excessive drinking. The Youth Worker Programme should be extended to reach out to young people, particularly vulnerable children, in their own communities.

Any costs associated with these programmes would be more than offset by the savings made to society by stopping yet more young people falling into a cycle of alcohol abuse.

- Part of the reason for high levels of underage drinking is the absence in this country of a proper sporting and social framework for young people. Local sports facilities - like changing rooms, soccer pitches and swimming pools are falling apart or non-existent. There are virtually no outlets for young people with an artistic talent or interest to express themselves.

Our young people should have ready access to sporting and recreational facilities. Such an outlook framed our policy when we opposed the extravagance of the National Stadium - and it frames our policy outlook now.

Action Point 7

A new approach to new licenses.

We believe Ireland has quite enough pubs already. Evidence clearly indicates that the greater the availability of alcohol, the greater the consumption. We believe any move to increase the number of pubs should be opposed.

Evidence also shows that the bigger the pub, the greater the chance that young people can 'slip through the net' and be served huge levels of drink. The presence of super pubs, where customers are packed in and where clever marketing promotes drinking as much as possible, in as little time as possible, is fast becoming a blight on Ireland's towns and cities.

RESEARCH SHOULD TAKE PLACE AT SCHOOLS, A&E WARDS AND AT COMMUNITY LEVEL



While we oppose any increase in the number of pubs we believe that any new licensed premises should be restricted to less than 2,000 square feet.

We will also support any legislation that allows institutions such as Health Boards, which have a unique overview of the public health needs of any area, to object to new licences on the grounds that they believe such a premises poses a public health threat.

Action Point 8

Appoint a Minister for State with responsibility for ensuring that these measures are implemented and the law is enforced.

This Government has been indicted by independent consultants for failing to deliver integrated initiatives involving more than one Department.

In order to ensure this works, we will appoint a Minister for Alcohol Policy assigned to the Department of Health and Children, Department of Education and Science and Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, with the sole responsibility of making our action plan work.

This Minister will be charged with ensuring that the law is enforced, setting clear targets for the Gardaí to reduce the level of alcohol-related crime, making life on Ireland's streets safer and our people less vulnerable. The buck will stop squarely with him or her.

Action Point 9

Monitor progress and undertake on-going research into the problem.

We need an on-going research programme of qualitative and quantitative research into trends in alcohol consumption by young people. This research would take place in schools, A&E wards and at community level. This programme would track the effectiveness of action taken and highlight new areas that might warrant action.



IT IS A CLEAR FACT THAT HIGH LEVELS OF ALCOHOL INTAKE LEAD TO HIGH LEVELS OF CRIME

Action Point 10

Mandate the installation of CCTV cameras inside and outside all nightclubs.

Evidence shows that there is a correlation between alcohol intake and levels of crime. High levels of alcohol consumption often result in violent episodes in and around nightclubs. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. CCTV installation in these environments will deter and help detect crime.

5. FUTURE POLICY OPTIONS

Fine Gael's Action on Alcohol Abuse Plan is designed to tackle head-on the scourge of alcohol abuse amongst society's youngest and most vulnerable members. We believe it will have a significant impact. We are conscious of the need to keep up the momentum and be flexible in our approach. We are also considering some additional policy plans. These include:

- **Increase the minimum drinking age from 18 to 20.**

This is a radical and unprecedented step. But with many 16 and 17 year olds mixing in the same circles as 18 and 19 year olds, their access to alcohol is high. Raising the minimum drinking age may be a necessary step to combat the high level of binge drinking amongst 16 and 17 year olds, who are at a critical stage in their development. It would ensure people are more mature when forming drinking habits.

There is growing evidence to suggest that alcohol use by adolescents impairs crucial aspects of brain development. In one recent study, heavy-drinking adolescents scored 10% lower than non-drinking peers on tests requiring verbal and nonverbal recall and skills needed for map reading, geometry and science.

U.S. experts have found that raising the age at which alcohol could be bought and consumed had lowered suicide rates by 12%.

WE NEED ACTION ON EVERY FRONT



- **Making passengers in a vehicle driven by a person who is convicted of a drink-driving offence liable to a fine.**

Such a move would make those who allowed someone over the legal limit to drive share the guilt if a conviction is made. A law to this effect would mean greater vigilance amongst the entire community about the dangers of driving while 'under the influence'.

- **Introduce legislation that allows for server or publican liability.**

In many countries, a publican is liable if she or he continues to serve drink to a customer when it is reasonably foreseeable that this would cause him or her to be in danger, or for that matter, put someone else in danger.

It may be necessary to legislate so that in such a situation the publican would be expected to place the customer in the care of a responsible person or to allow him or her to remain on the premises until they have sobered up - or to refuse to serve him or her so much alcohol that he or she became drunk beyond self preservation.

- **Implement selective tax increases on alcohol products that are particularly attractive to young people.**

This move is targeted at reducing demand for alcohol by targeting those drinks which prove particularly attractive to underage drinkers. By increasing the prices of those products that prove most popular with those below the legal drinking age, it is hoped that underage drinkers will look for other ways to spend their money and avoid the harm of alcohol abuse.



WE DO NOT INTEND
TO PENALISE
ANYBODY WHO IS
LEGALLY ENTITLED TO
DRINK

6. CONCLUSIONS

We do not intend to penalise anybody who is legally entitled to drink. All we seek is to give children the opportunity to grow up in safety so that they can make decisions with regard to alcohol when they are old enough and wise enough to do so.

At a time of unprecedented levels of violent attacks on our streets, and ever-increasing levels of alcohol consumption, we cannot hide behind half-baked measures and committee reports.

We need action on every front - tackling the root causes of demand for alcohol, addressing the problem of over-consumption and addiction and cracking down on alcohol-related violence.

Only then can Ireland hope for safer communities, stronger families and a more fair and caring society.

EQUALITY

ENTERPRISE

REWARD

SECURITY

INTEGRITY

HOPE

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