



Redefine Alcohol

Communications campaign report



Contents



Acknowledgements	iv
Redefine Alcohol: a strategic, evidence-based communications campaign	1
Campaign performance	5
At a glance	5
Social media metrics	6
Best performing content	7
Campaign engagement	8
National campaigns and country engagement	8
Networks and partners	10
Campaign conclusions	11
What worked well	11
Why this campaign matters	12

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Redefine Alcohol: a strategic evidence-based communications campaign

The challenge: normalization of alcohol in Europe

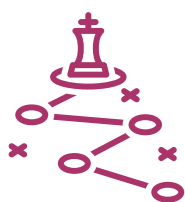
Alcohol can often seem ingrained in European environments, present and not questioned in nearly every social, professional and festive setting. Low prices, easy availability and appealing marketing normalizes alcohol in society, making it difficult for individuals to reflect on the harm that alcohol causes and critically examine alcohol's role in their lives and in their surroundings.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe's campaign Redefine Alcohol set out to challenge attitudes, reshape perceptions and disrupt misleading and industry-driven narratives about alcohol. From the outset, the goal was to encourage reflection on the harms that alcohol causes to our health and well-being, sparking conversations that could lead to greater awareness and more informed choices.



Grounded in evidence: the campaign development process

The development of the Redefine Alcohol communications campaign followed a clear and structured process, anchored in evidence and expert input. Each stage was designed to ensure that the campaign messages would resonate with the intended audiences while avoiding common communications pitfalls. Below, the process is described in five key steps.



1. Developing a solid communications strategy

The campaign began with a foundational review to ensure a clear strategic direction. Drawing on the experience of previous public health campaigns (including on alcohol, tobacco and physical activity), The WHO Regional Office for Europe, with support from an external behavioural communications agency, examined existing evidence on effective communication about alcohol.

This step also included consultations with experts working on alcohol policy, health literacy, risk communications, marketing and media. Three workshops on disrupting narratives on alcohol and creating new narratives took place between May 2023 and February 2024. These expert workshops underscored a central insight: public health communications about alcohol does not need to aim for immediate behaviour change. Communications campaigns need to meet the target audiences at their current level of understanding and improve this understanding. Thus, the focus of this campaign was determined to be on shifting public attitudes and increasing awareness to improve long-term health literacy. Changing societal narratives around alcohol, particularly with regards to its normalization and perceived social value, was identified as an achievable and impactful goal for the communications campaign strategy.

2. Choosing the right frames and values

Effective framing was essential to avoid reinforcing unhelpful beliefs or industry-led narratives about alcohol consumption and harm. To help with this, a diverse group of experts in the fields of alcohol, cancer, behavioural science, gender and youth engagement was engaged to co-create a set of 50 evidence-based “claims” – statements about alcohol harm that everyone should know about according to this group of experts and people with lived experience. These statements were designed to reflect values that audiences could connect with, such as care for others, fairness, inclusivity and health benefits.



Critically, fear-based claims that could shame or stigmatize individuals were excluded. Instead, the formulation of claims was either neutral in sentiment or focused on a positive and empowering tone that emphasized personal and community gains, such as “any reduction in alcohol consumption improves your health”. It was also important to counteract misleading industry narratives that experts in alcohol policy were aware of to ensure that the claims did not target “heavy drinkers” but could be relevant to individuals at any levels of alcohol consumption, including non-drinkers.

3. Finding shareable messages on alcohol

To ensure resonance and shareability of campaign messages, the 50 claims developed in the previous step were tested in a survey that covered 10 European countries with diverse drinking patterns, cultures, languages and communications preferences. The main research question was how likely respondents were to share the claim with somebody they knew, as well as how convincing and relevant they found the statement (Fig. 1). Beyond that, the survey included questions, assessing respondents’ drinking patterns and knowledge and awareness of alcohol-related harms.

Fig. 1. Example survey questions

This is how the different claims were presented to the survey participants. Participants could choose one or none out of three claims that they were most likely to share.

If you had to share one message with someone you know regarding alcohol, which one would it be?

We need more honest labelling of harmful products like alcohol. Labels should enable people to make healthier choices.	Starting to drink alcohol at a young age increases the risk of alcohol dependence later in life.	Alcohol harms individuals, families, and communities, affecting not only those who drink, but also those impacted by the drinking of others.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None of the above
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In addition, survey respondents were asked to rate randomized claims based on how relevant and convincing it is, and to which extent they thought everyone should be aware of it.

On a scale of 1 to 6, how **relevant** is this claim to you personally?

Reducing availability of harmful products like alcohol makes healthy choices easier.

☒ Not relevant ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ Very relevant

The survey results revealed the following universal trends across all countries.

- Messages about alcohol’s harm to others (e.g. during pregnancy, drink-driving, harms to young people, etc.) were most likely to be shared. These were also the harms from alcohol that most respondents were already aware of, so the conclusion was not to include these messages in this campaign, since the focus was on increasing knowledge and awareness of lesser-known harms.

- Messages that were framed in a positive way, especially those highlighting the benefits of reducing alcohol (e.g. “drinking less alcohol can improve your memory and sleep quality”) were more likely to be shared than negatively framed facts (e.g. “alcohol consumption negatively affects your sleep and mental health”). This was taken on board for developing the communications messages of the campaign.
- Messages linking alcohol to cancer were less likely to be shared. However, the respondents who considered the alcohol and cancer messages irrelevant or not shareable were often unaware of alcohol’s cancer risk. This was identified as an essential knowledge gap among the general public in target countries that this communications campaign needed to bridge.

Since initial statements about alcohol and cancer were not found to be shareable or convincing to the public, the communications team needed to find a more resonant framing. This led to a series of expert workshops, informed by framing analysis, to explore which values and narratives could help shift the public discourse on alcohol and cancer. A dedicated workshop on alcohol and cancer messaging was held in July 2024, bringing together experts in risk communication, media, behavioural science and alcohol policy, and representatives from the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Cancer messages were essential — not only because the alcohol and cancer link remains one of the biggest knowledge gaps, but also because the campaign was a deliverable of the European Union (EU)-funded Evidence into Action Alcohol Project (EVID-ACTION), which supports Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan. The workshop’s outcomes shaped the core messages and call-to-action of the Redefine Alcohol campaign.

4. Picking the right audience



As the campaign would be disseminated in 30 diverse countries, audience segmentation was crucial. Rather than a broad, one-size-fits-all approach, the WHO/Europe team focused on those most likely to be curious and open to new knowledge and to reflect on the topic. Through a survey of five countries that looked into knowledge and attitudes of the population on alcohol, we identified a key audience segment, primarily younger (18–35), health-conscious individuals in central and northern Europe, who were already more aware of health harms from alcohol and more likely to share messages, including those on alcohol’s cancer risk. The final campaign messages were aimed at this target group. This audience also included many “narrative-shapers” who could drive broader shifts in public discourse, including from a growing “sober curious” community – influential voices reconsidering their relationship with alcohol. Feedback from the EVID-ACTION Youth Alcohol Network members, identified as part of this target group, emphasized the need for visually creative and emotionally engaging content, which informed the final look and tone of campaign materials.

5. Getting people behind the campaign

With a refined strategy, strong message framing and tested content, the last step was designing a campaign that could build public and stakeholder support and begin shifting the cultural conversation around alcohol. The final concept – Redefine Alcohol – adopted a multi-dimensional approach including:

- storytelling and lived experience: showcasing diverse voices (e.g. people affected by breast cancer, LGBTQIA+¹ perspectives, alcohol-free adventurers) made the campaign more inclusive and relatable;
- accessible evidence: complex science was distilled into clear, compelling visuals and infographics tailored for digital platforms, emphasizing lesser-known harms such as alcohol’s cancer link; and
- an empowering tone: messaging encouraged self-reflection without blame, highlighting that even small changes in reducing alcohol consumption are beneficial.



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¹ LGBTQIA+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual and more.

Campaign visuals

Below is a selection of visuals and messages from the Redefine Alcohol campaign (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Selection of campaign visuals



Know the facts.
#RedefineAlcohol

© WHO / Lika Borregaard



Know the facts.
#RedefineAlcohol

© WHO / Sören Talu



Redefine your mindset.
#RedefineAlcohol

© WHO/Andreas Beck



Feel the power of
#LessAlcohol

© WHO / Sören Talu



Know the risks, redefine your understanding of alcohol.
#RedefineAlcohol



Redefine your mindset.
#RedefineAlcohol

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Campaign performance

at a glance 

The Redefine Alcohol campaign was launched on 2 October 2024 during a WHO/Europe studio talk show that brought together influencers and experts to share why we need to redefine the understanding of alcohol in our societies. The campaign ran on the WHO Regional Office for Europe's social media accounts and internationally until 8 December 2024. The main focus was on telling positive stories of real people with lived experience of alcohol, as well as raising awareness on the benefits of reducing alcohol consumption and the harms associated with alcohol, including cancer risk. Campaign materials were translated into 10+ languages and disseminated in over 15 countries. The campaign was a key part of EVID-ACTION, co-funded by the EU as part of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, working across 30 countries – the 27 EU Member States plus Iceland, Norway and Ukraine – from 2022 to 2026.

Click to access the [campaign webpage](#) and the [campaign materials](#).

Campaign reach

The campaign had an extensive impact on social media, potentially reaching over 151 million people (Fig. 3). Most people viewed the content on the WHO Regional Office for Europe's Instagram account, followed by news or blogs, the Regional Office's website and X account (Fig. 4).



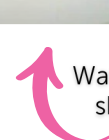
Watch the talk show here 

Fig. 3. Campaign reach on social media

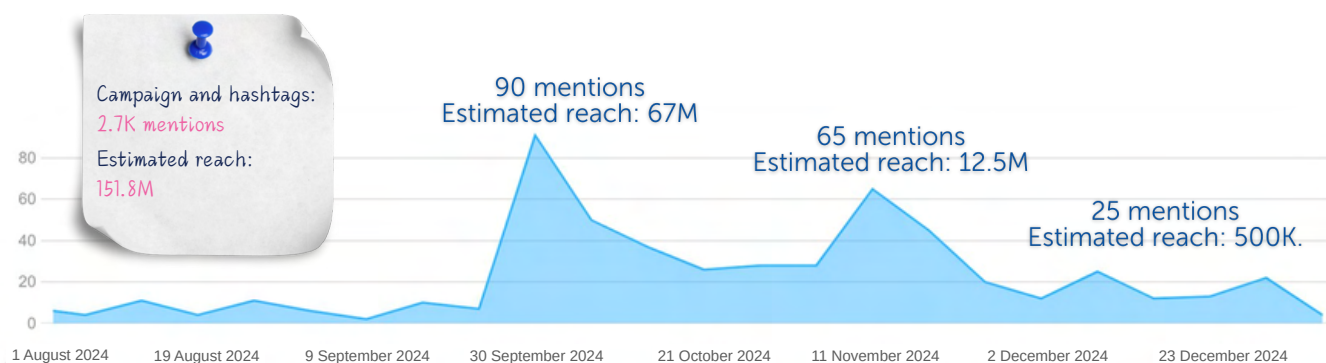


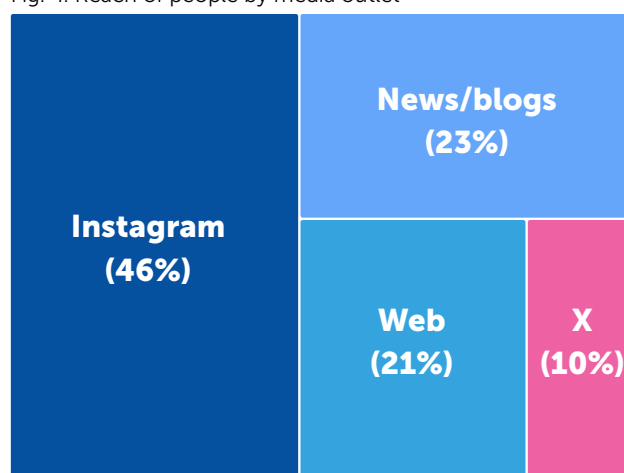
Fig. 4. Reach of people by media outlet



In the media

Between 2 October 2024 and 8 January 2025, the campaign generated over 700 media hits around the world with 70+ direct mentions.

The campaign was also featured in official public health websites in [Bulgaria](#), [Italy](#) and [Spain](#) and generated national media interest.



Campaign performance

social media metrics



Social media performance:

- 👁 1.3M+ impressions
- 💡 44.9K+ engagements
- ➡ 2.1K+ total shares

Redefine Alcohol was the best-performing organic digital campaign that the WHO Regional Office for Europe has run since after the coronavirus disease pandemic. For the first time since the pandemic, social media accounts increased in number of followers due to campaign activity.

The #RedefineAlcohol campaign on social media was featured in

📄 330 posts in total



83 Facebook posts



67 Instagram posts



91 LinkedIn posts



89 X posts



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Real people redefining alcohol: 12+ stories of people with lived experience

The stories of people with lived experience of alcohol were a core element of the campaign. The story of Tetiana, a Ukrainian marathon runner, highlights the subtle yet profound changes of living without alcohol. Daniel and Johnny list the benefits of alcohol-free adventures. Kashner, a Latvian artist, decided to quit drinking alcohol after suffering from alcohol-induced blackouts, allowing him to now be fully present in life's most precious moments. These different stories resonated well with social media audiences.



68 posts



44K+ reactions



22K+ engagements



1.3M+ impressions

[Watch six of the feature stories here](#)

Campaign performance



best performing content

Best performing post of the year in 2024 on the WHO/Europe's Instagram: **Margarida's story**

Margarida from Portugal, a general practitioner and social media influencer, is determined to change the social norms around alcohol. As a general practitioner, she regularly sees the consequences of alcohol consumption, but talking about it can be very difficult, because of the gaps in medical education of health professionals and how normalized alcohol is in European societies, making it difficult to assess alcohol consumption critically. Her story, shared on social media as a 3-minute video, received more views and positive comments than any other content on Regional accounts.

- 6.7K+ engagements
- 206K+ impressions
- 230 reposts

The post significantly boosted WHO/Europe's engagement rate on Instagram. Compared with average metrics for posts in 2023: 25x more impressions

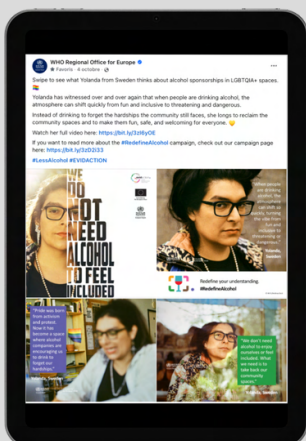


Collaborative amplification

Margarida is a known and trusted influencer in Portugal, who had not spoken about alcohol before the campaign. Since she was a social media "collaborator" on this post, the story could reach a broader audience, combining Margarida's followers with the WHO Regional Office for Europe's follower networks.



Top post on Facebook



Yolanda from Sweden advocates for safe, inclusive LGBTQIA+ spaces free from alcohol harm.

- 157+ engagements
- 12K+ impressions
- 3 reposts

Compared with average metrics for posts of 2023: 1.5x more impressions



Top post on X

Mia, a Danish social worker with incurable breast cancer, was shocked to learn that even low levels of alcohol consumption increase cancer risk.

- 96+ reactions
- 18K+ impressions
- 47+ reposts

Compared with average metrics for posts of 2023: 36x more reposts



Campaign engagement

national campaigns and country engagement



Twenty countries were actively engaged in the campaign, particularly countries that are part of the EVID-ACTION project:

Austria	Finland	Iceland	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)
Bulgaria	Germany	Ireland	Portugal
Cyprus	Greece	Italy	Slovakia
Estonia	Hungary	Latvia	Spain

Examples of campaign engagement

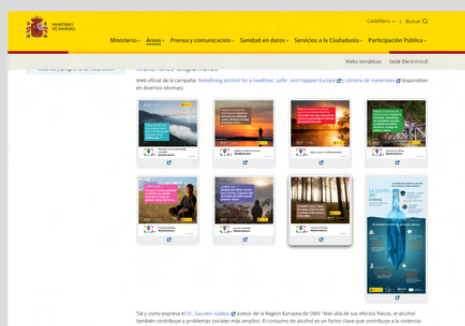
Several countries promoted the campaign through Ministry of Health websites and social media channels. WHO country offices amplified engagement of the campaign on social media.



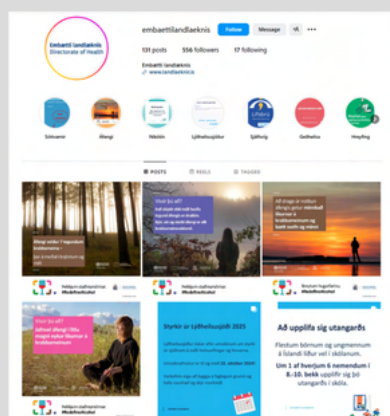
WHO Representative for **Bulgaria**, Guillaume Simonyan, speaking about the Redefine Alcohol campaign and alcohol-related harm on national television.



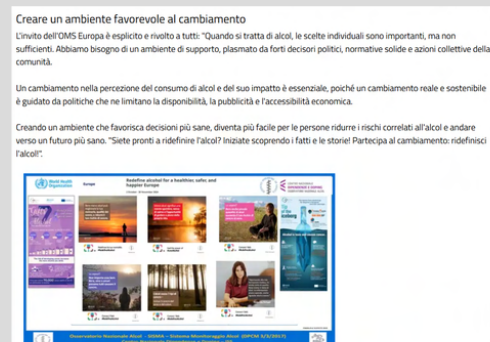
Campaign product "Tip of the Iceberg" infographic on alcohol shared on X by the WHO country office in **Latvia**.



The Redefine Alcohol campaign featured on the website of the Ministry of Health of **Spain**, with a selection of translated communications materials available to download.



Translated campaign social media visuals translated into Icelandic on the Instagram of the Directorate of Health of **Iceland**.



The campaign featured on the website of the **Italian** Institute for Health along with evidence-based information on harms from alcohol.

Country engagement with the Redefine Alcohol campaign went beyond that of official authorities, with multiple partners across the European Union – from civil society organizations to members of the EVID-ACTION Youth Alcohol Network – sharing the campaign messages. Here is a selection of a few:



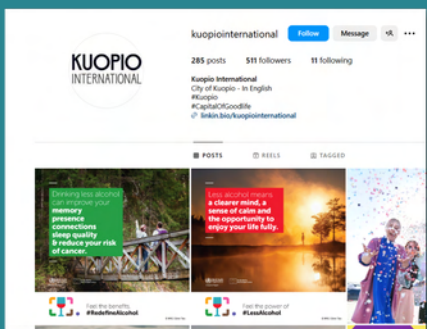
Infographics, videos and stories, translated into **German** were posted on social media channels and websites of national nongovernmental organizations.



Civil society organizations in **Estonia** shared campaign messages through social media posts, websites and alcohol awareness blogs. Locally translated materials generated a large number of comments.

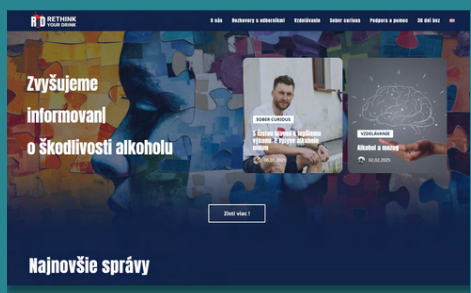


The campaign was spotted in **Netherlands** (Kingdom of the), where an article was posted on a Dutch news website specifically tailored for dietitians, dietetics students and professionals in the field of nutrition care.



Campaign materials were shared in English and Finnish on the international Instagram account of the **Finnish** city of Kuopio.

A member of the Youth Alcohol Network from **Slovakia** started a blog called "Rethink Your Drink". On the website and the associated Instagram account, she shares campaign materials and more information on alcohol and associated harms in Slovakian.



Taking the campaign into the real world!

In November 2024, medical students in Hungary organized stands with EVID-ACTION materials and quizzes on alcohol consumption and its health consequences in shopping malls across the country. The campaign in Hungary was launched with an international webinar.

An exhibition at the European Parliament during awareness week on alcohol-related harms on 2–6 December 2024 featured storytelling from the Redefine Alcohol campaign.



© Hungarian Medical Students' International Relations Committee



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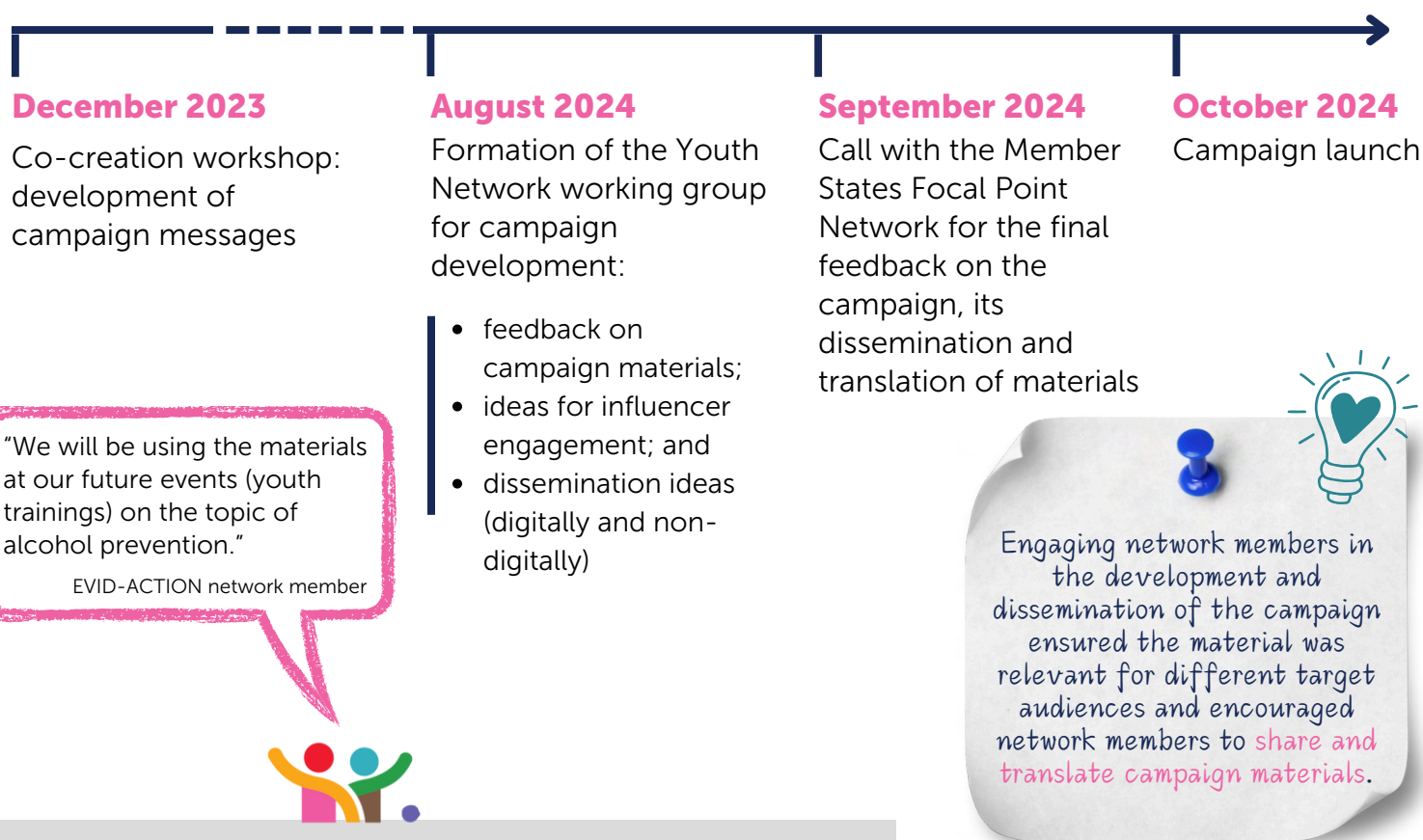
Campaign engagement

networks and partners



Networks that are part of the EVID-ACTION project, such as the Youth Alcohol Network and the Member States Focal Point Network on Alcohol, were actively engaged in the Redefine Alcohol campaign. Their involvement spanned from development of campaign messages to distribution of the final materials.

Pre-campaign: the timeline of network engagement



Campaign engagement in numbers

64% of surveyed EVID-ACTION network members found the campaign material relevant for their personal work and advocacy efforts.

82% of surveyed EVID-ACTION network members were likely to share campaign materials.

82% of surveyed EVID-ACTION network members felt that they contributed to the ideation and development of the campaign.

| 36% said they contributed to a great extent.

"A month after the campaign there was a news piece saying that establishments need to adapt to the trend of not drinking alcohol, so I shared some of the most impactful posts again."

EVID-ACTION network member

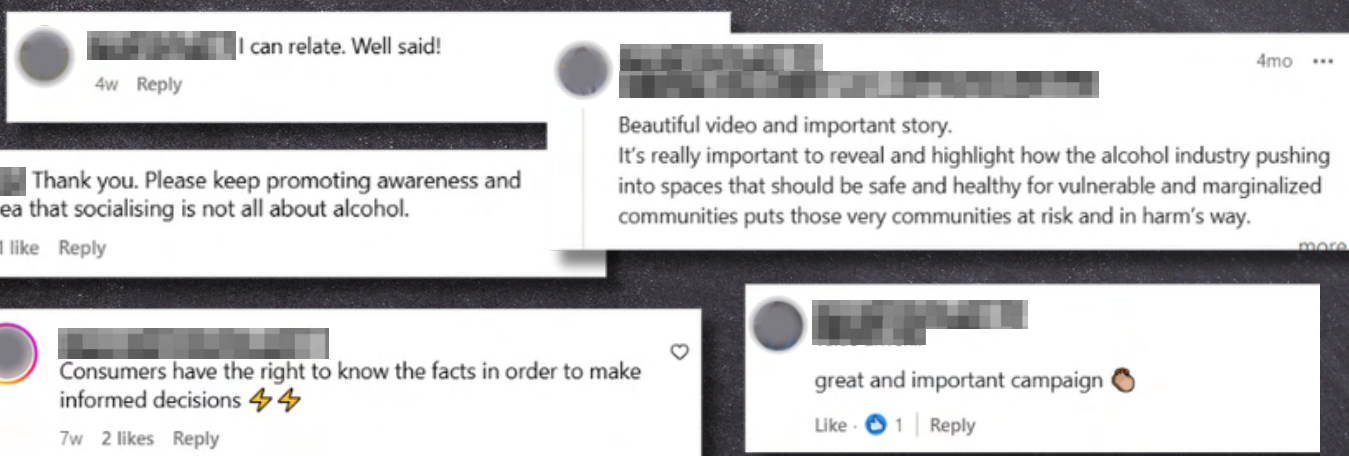
Campaign conclusions



what worked well

- ✓ **Storytelling** was one of the core elements of the campaign and it worked well! Personal narratives created emotional connections and helped transform complex health topics into relatable and shareable content.
- ✓ **Collaborating with influencers and trusted partners** significantly boosted visibility, ensuring the campaign messages reached a broader and more diverse audience.
- ✓ **Positive framing** that focused on the benefits of reducing alcohol consumption spurred high performance on social media. Campaign messages, developed through a co-creation process with a diverse group of professionals, ensured that they would be evidence-based and resonate with a wide audience.

The campaign social media posts received many positive comments and remarks across platforms and countries ...



... the video stories in particular engaged social media communities, that left many favorable, supportive and celebratory comments.



Campaign conclusions

why this campaign matters



The Redefine Alcohol campaign provided an example of a successful digital communications campaign aimed at shifting public attitudes toward alcohol through thoughtful, evidence-based communication and storytelling that resonates.

By meeting people where they were in terms of knowledge and awareness without judgment, and by providing compelling narratives and clear, accessible information, the campaign laid the groundwork for more informed discussions about alcohol's role in society. While behaviour change and broader policy interventions take time, reshaping perceptions – starting with receptive audiences – is a crucial first step toward enabling healthier choices.



Next steps

The Redefine Alcohol campaign was created to be adaptable with materials that have a long shelf life – allowing more countries to implement the campaign and tailor it to their local contexts. Moving forward, a multi-step evaluation process is planned to assess its impact and refine future efforts.

This evaluation will include:

- a post-campaign survey to measure shifts in awareness and attitudes in five European countries that ran nationally adapted Redefine Alcohol campaigns;
- an online survey on Meta platforms to understand reach and engagement across the digital platforms that featured the campaign; and
- focus group discussions with narrative shapers and influencers to gather qualitative insights on message effectiveness and resonance.

These steps will ensure that the Redefine Alcohol campaign continues to evolve and serve as a model for evidence-based communications campaigns on alcohol in the WHO European Region and beyond.

