SAFER POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: SUBREGIONAL WORKSHOP ON ALCOHOL CONTROL POLICY ADVOCACY AND CROSS-COUNTRY LEARNING IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGION

5–7 December 2023
Manila, Philippines
MEETING REPORT

SAFER POLICY IMPLEMENTATION:
SUBREGIONAL WORKSHOP ON ALCOHOL CONTROL POLICY ADVOCACY
AND CROSS-COUNTRY LEARNING IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGION

Convened by:

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC

Manila, Philippines
5–7 December 2023

Not for sale

Printed and distributed by:

World Health Organization
Regional Office for the Western Pacific
Manila, Philippines

March 2024
NOTE

The views expressed in this report are those of the participants of the SAFER Policy Implementation: Subregional workshop on alcohol control policy advocacy and cross-country learning in the Western Pacific Region and do not necessarily reflect the policies of the conveners.

This report has been prepared by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific for Member States in the Region and for those who participated in the SAFER Policy Implementation: Subregional workshop on alcohol control policy advocacy and cross-country learning in the Western Pacific Region in Manila, Philippines from 5 to 7 December 2023.
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SUMMARY

The use of alcohol is a causal factor in more than 200 disease and injury conditions. This is a concern globally and in the World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific Region, where every minute one person dies from alcohol-related harm. In 2019, the regional total per capita (for population 15 and older) consumption (in litres of pure alcohol) in the Western Pacific was 10% higher than the global value (5.5 litres per capita), with some low- and middle-income countries and areas (LMICs) in the Region experiencing an increase since the last global survey data in 2015.

Since the endorsement of the Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol during the Sixty-third session of the World Health Assembly in 2010, progress in implementation of the strategy has been uneven across countries and areas. In the Western Pacific Region, the implementation of evidence-based interventions, particularly those outlined in the SAFER technical package, has been slow. Urgent action is needed to expedite the implementation of SAFER interventions to mitigate the adverse health, safety, social and economic impacts of alcohol use.

Building on related activities from 2017 to 2019, the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific organized a subregional workshop on alcohol control policy advocacy and cross-country learning for SAFER policy implementation. This workshop aimed to take stock of progress made in the last four years and discuss ways forward. It brought together participants from relevant government sectors and civil society in five countries where alcohol consumption is relatively high or has significantly increased: Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

Following up on the Subregional Webinar on Alcohol Control Policy Advocacy and Cross-country Learning in the Western Pacific Region held in October 2023, which delved into the current alcohol control situation and challenges in the five countries, this face-to-face workshop focused on fostering multisectoral collaboration for alcohol control. The goal was to advance alcohol control policies through understanding the most recent data and evidence, tackling both unique and common challenges, and sharing valuable lessons and experiences. The desired outcome was the development of a multisectoral action plan to advance identified priority SAFER policies and interventions, considering local contexts.

This comprehensive workshop provided a platform for knowledge exchange, capacity-building and collaborative planning to advance alcohol control policies and interventions in the Western Pacific Region. The workshop and its key output, the multisectoral action plan, aim to facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaborative actions among different sectors within participating countries. Furthermore, the experiences and lessons learnt from these five countries can provide valuable insights to other Member States in implementation of SAFER interventions with support of the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Meeting organization

The SAFER Policy Implementation: Subregional workshop on alcohol control policy advocacy and cross-country learning in the Western Pacific Region took place on 5−7 December 2023 in Manila, Philippines. A total of 29 participants joined from five priority countries − Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Most attended in person, while two speakers joined virtually. The list of participants is available in Annex 1 and the programme of activities in Annex 2.

1.2 Meeting objectives

The objectives of the meeting were:

- to form a collaborative network of multisectoral partners from participating countries to advance alcohol control policies and interventions;
- to enhance understanding of evidence-based alcohol control interventions, share best practices and discuss strategies to overcome challenges; and
- to develop a multisectoral action plan aimed at promoting identified priority policies and interventions.

2. PROCEEDINGS

2.1 Opening session

Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab, Acting Regional Director, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific, and Dr Hiromasa Okayasu, Director, Division of Healthy Environments and Populations, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, delivered the opening remarks, emphasizing the broad impact of alcohol consumption and the necessity for multisectoral efforts to address it. To set the scene for the three-day workshop, three presentations were given on alcohol control for sustainable development and societal well-being, the harms of alcohol to others and society, and the prevalence of alcohol use and disease burden globally and in the Western Pacific Region.

2.2 Solutions and interventions

This session introduced the WHO technical package on alcohol control, SAFER, covering its global implementation and monitoring, interference from industry, and evidence on key elements for effective interventions.

2.3 Where we are

A summary of the current situation, progress since the 2019 workshops, and key challenges faced by the five countries based on their reports during the October 2023 webinar was presented. Participants engaged in discussions on advancing the implementation of SAFER policies and overcoming challenges. This recap helped to set a baseline for interventions and to identify the common challenges to which inter-country learning would apply.

2.4 SAFER zoom-in sessions

SAFER is a package of evidence-based policy interventions identified by WHO that can effectively reduce alcohol consumption and its associated health harms when implemented collectively and
appropriately. Previous assessments have shown that all five participating countries have existing policies or legislation aimed at restricting alcohol consumption. However, there are gaps compared to the SAFER recommendations.

Days 2 and 3 of the workshop focused on five interventions within the SAFER package. Each session on an intervention was structured to include an explanation of its rationale and technical specifications, empirical evidence of its effectiveness in reducing alcohol use, and group discussions to develop country-specific implementation plans. Some highlights from each of the sessions are described below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.4.1 Raise prices on alcohol through excise taxes and other pricing policies (R)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A comprehensive introduction to using tax and pricing policies to reduce alcohol consumption was presented. Case studies from Mongolia and the Philippines were highlighted to showcase successful tax policy implementations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mongolia: Amendment to the Law on Excise Tax in 2022 resulted in a significant reduction in alcohol sales and associated crime due to drink-driving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Philippines: Republic Act No. 11467 increased the real prices of alcoholic beverages, albeit without a notable impact on affordability.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.4.2 Enforce bans or comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship and promotion (E)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentations focused on the prevalence of alcohol marketing and its strategies, emphasizing the need for comprehensive restrictions due to the evolving nature of digital marketing. Successes in enforcing bans from various countries were discussed.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.4.3 Strengthen restrictions on alcohol availability (S)</th>
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<tr>
<td>An overview of availability controls was provided, including legislation, licensing systems, venue regulations and age limits. Participants discussed effective strategies and challenges in controlling alcohol availability.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.4.4 Advance and enforce drink-driving countermeasures (A)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentations highlighted the risks associated with drink-driving and effective countermeasures, including road safety legislation and enforcement mechanisms. Panel discussions featured experiences and challenges from the Philippines and Viet Nam, as well as countries in the WHO European Region.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4.5 Facilitate access to screening, brief interventions and treatment (F)
An overview of screening, brief intervention and referral to treatment (SBIRT) for hazardous and harmful drinking was presented, followed by panel discussions on addressing challenges and facilitating access to interventions.

2.5 Additional sessions
Two additional sessions were included:

2.5.1 Multisectoral approach: promoting health and addressing root causes of noncommunicable diseases
This session aimed to promote multisectoral collaboration in addressing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including alcohol-related issues, through presentations, case studies and discussions.

2.5.2 Mobilizing knowledge for impact
This session aimed to facilitate knowledge sharing and learning from other regions and technical areas. It included presentations on innovative communication approaches, a review of alcohol control policies using the International Alcohol Control study method and a panel discussion on potential learning from other public health interventions.

2.6 Putting it together
During the three days, through presentations, question-and-answer sessions, country group work and cross-country discussion, participants shared in-depth information about alcohol consumption status in their countries and policy development, and discussed their respective policy and legislative gaps. In addition, participants were invited to assess the opportunities and feasibility of implementing SAFER interventions in their countries. At the conclusion of the three days, each country group identified their priority policy interventions for the next biennium based on discussions during the workshop.

2.7 Closing session
At the end of the workshop, Dr Huong Thi Giang Tran, Director, Division of Programmes for Disease Control, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, gave the closing remarks. She thanked all the participants for their open sharing and engagement in discussions, as well as their commitment to work across different ministries to push for alcohol control interventions on all fronts.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Conclusions
The workshop successfully achieved all three of its objectives. Participants were able to identify the priority interventions for their respective countries with the potential for progress over the next two years. All demonstrated a high level of interest in the contents of the workshop and actively contributed their knowledge to the development of national workplans. They expressed a keen desire to continue collaborating with WHO to advance the alcohol control agenda. The workshop received positive
feedback, and the organizers were particularly commended for the multisectoral nature of participation and the well-designed agenda that encouraged active engagement.

3.2 Recommendations

3.2.1 Recommendations for Member States

The five participating countries are encouraged to consider the following:

(1) Cambodia – Develop a proposal for alcohol control policy improvement from 2024 to 2028. Specifically, strengthen policies to restrict alcohol availability and marketing and introduce specific taxes on alcohol products.

(2) Lao People’s Democratic Republic – Comprehensively update alcohol control-related laws by seizing the opportunity to include alcohol control law in the list of health laws to be reviewed in 2024.

(3) Mongolia – Ban all forms of alcohol marketing and shorten on-premise trading hours. Closely monitor implementation of the newly passed laws on alcohol control, and assess potential challenges and improvements.

(4) Philippines – Strengthen regulation on marketing restrictions, improve taxation policies to further lower affordability, and enhance enforcement of the drink-driving policy, especially enabling random breath testing.

(5) Viet Nam – Strengthen taxation and pricing policies to further reduce affordability, and expand marketing restrictions to cover products with alcohol by volume under 15%. Closely monitor implementation of the drink-driving regulation, and document and summarize the experience.

3.2.2 Recommendations for WHO

WHO is requested to provide support to the participating countries on the implementation of their workplans in 2024 and beyond, namely:

(1) Provide technical support on policy development and advocacy.
(2) Continue to facilitate multisectoral engagement and partnership.
(3) Provide financial support for the implementation of country-level activities.
(4) Communicate clearly on alcohol harms and WHO’s recommendations for evidence-based interventions.
(5) Provide the latest evidence and data to facilitate advocacy in countries.
ANNEXES

Annex 1. List of participants

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Annex 2. Programme of activities

SAFER POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: SUBREGIONAL WORKSHOP ON ALCOHOL CONTROL POLICY ADVOCACY AND CROSS-COUNTRY LEARNING IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGION

Manila, Philippines
5-7 December 2023

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1: Tuesday, 5 December 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30-9:00</td>
<td>Registration</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00-10:05</td>
<td><strong>Breaking the Ice</strong></td>
<td>Xi Yin</td>
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<td>• Opening remarks by Zsuzsanna Jakab, Acting Regional Director, WHO Regional</td>
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<td>Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO) (5’, video)</td>
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<td>• Opening remarks by Hiromasa Okayasu, Director, Division of Healthy</td>
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<td>Environments and Populations (DHP), WPRO (5’, video)</td>
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<td>• Overview of the programme (Xi Yin, Coordinator, NCD Prevention and Health</td>
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<td>Promotion, DHP, WPRO) (10’)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• introduction of participants and group activity: The issue at hand (30’)</td>
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<td>• Group Photo (15’)</td>
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<td>Break (10:05-10:20)</td>
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<td>10:20-11:45</td>
<td><strong>Understanding the landscape</strong></td>
<td>Dan Fang</td>
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<td>• Keynote: Alcohol control for sustainable development and societal</td>
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<td>well-being (Jurgen Rehm) (20’)</td>
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<td>• Alcohol: Harm to others and the society (Orratai Waleewong) (20’)</td>
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<td>• Prevalence of alcohol use and disease burden globally and in WPRO (Jurgen</td>
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<td>Rehm) (30’)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Open Forum: Questions and Reflections (15’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:45-12:45</td>
<td><strong>A multisectoral approach to addressing alcohol use</strong></td>
<td>Leslie Ulmido</td>
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<td>• Healthy Society Game</td>
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<td>Lunch (12:45 – 14:00)</td>
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<td>14:00-15:10</td>
<td><strong>A multisectoral approach to addressing alcohol use (cont.)</strong></td>
<td>Amy Bestman</td>
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<td>• Multisectoral approach: promoting health and addressing root causes of</td>
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<td>NCDs (Xi Yin) (20’)</td>
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<td>• Case Study 1: Partnerships in advancing policy interventions ((joint</td>
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<td>presentation by Ms Hun Jeudyla, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports</td>
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<td>of Cambodia and Dr Mom Kong, Cambodia Movement for Health) (15’)</td>
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<td>• Case Study 2: Working across sectors to advance tobacco tax policy in</td>
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<td>the Philippines (Mr Filomeno Sta. Ana, Cofounder and Coordinator,</td>
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<td>Action for Economic Reforms, Philippines) (15’)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Open Forum: Questions and Reflections (20’)</td>
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<td>Time</td>
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<td>Break (15:10-15:25)</td>
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| 15:25-16:25 Solutions and Interventions | • SAFER technical package, global implementation and monitoring (Dag Rekve) (15')  
• In focus: Protecting public health objectives—A key SAFER strategy (Dag Rekve) (15')  
• Effective interventions: What evidence tells us (Jurgen Rehm) (15')  
• Open Forum: Questions and Reflections (15') | Lam Nguyen Tuan                 |
| 16:25-17:25 Where we are          | • Recap of October Webinar: Current situation, progress and common challenges (Dan Fang) (10' presentation + 10' comments from five countries on any updates)  
• Group discussion: How do we advance from where we are to implement SAFER policies and overcome challenges (to get different perspectives by dividing participants into health, non-health, and NGO groups) (20')  
Report back (20') | Rose Vandermeer                |
| 18:00-19:00 Alcohol-Free Reception |                                                                             |                                |
| Day 2: Wednesday 6 December 2023 |                                                                             |                                |
| 9:00-9:10 Recap of Day 1 | Dan Fang                                                                   |                                |
| 9:10-10:20 Zoom in: Raise prices on alcohol through excise taxes and other pricing policies (R) | • Case study 1: Mongolia’s tax policy—How was the progress made and next steps (Mr Mungunkhuleg Munkhjargal, Mongolia MOF) (20')  
• Case study 2: Philippines’ health tax effort—Lessons learned and next steps (Mr. Gabriel Ian N. Salar Philippines DOF) (20')  
• Country presentations on current situation: Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam (30') | Daravuth Yel                     |
| Break 10:20-10:35 |                                                                             |                                |
| 10:35-12:30 Zoom in: Raise prices on alcohol through excise taxes and other pricing policies (R) (contd.) | • High impact intervention: Raising the price of alcohol through excise taxes and pricing policies (Chonlathan Visaruthvong) (30')  
• Open Forum: Question and Reflections (15')  
• Country work 2: Developing a multi-sectoral action plan on alcohol taxation (20')  
• Report back and feedback/questions to follow each country presentation (50') | Daravuth Yel                     |
| Lunch 12:30-13:45 |                                                                             |                                |
| 13:45-15:25 Zoom in: Enforce bans or comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and promotion (E) | • Prevalence of alcohol marketing and marketing strategies of alcohol industry (Nicholas Carah) (20')  
• Alcohol marketing: The youth perspective (Bolormaa Purevdorj) (15')  
• Successes on enforcing bans on alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and promotion globally and in WPR (Sally Casswell) (20')  
• Open Forum: Questions and Reflections (15')  
Country work 2: Developing a multi-sectoral action plan on Enforce bans on alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and promotion (30') | John Juliard GO                   |
<p>| Break 15:25-15:40 |                                                                             |                                |
| 15:40-16:15 Zoom in: Enforce bans or comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and promotion (E) (contd.) | • Report back on enforcing bans on alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and promotion (35') | John Juliard GO                   |
| 16:15-17:30 Mobilising knowledge for impact | Xi Yin                       |                                |</p>
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<th>Time</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• Innovative approaches in Europe: Communicating harm and alcohol labelling (Maria Neufeld) (20’ + 5’ Q&amp;A)</td>
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<td>• IAC Project: A review of policies in five countries (Sally Casswell) (20’ + 5’ Q&amp;A)</td>
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<td>• What can we learn from other public health interventions (Moderator: Xi Yin; Panellists: Daravuth Yel, WHO Cambodia; Bolormaa Sukhbaatar, WHO Mongolia; John Juliard Go, WHO Philippines; Lam Nguyen Tuan, WHO Viet Nam) (20’ + 5’ Q&amp;A)</td>
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<td>Day 3: Thursday, 7 December 2023</td>
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<td>9:00-9:10</td>
<td>Recap of Day 2</td>
<td>Dan Fang</td>
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<td>9:10-10:55</td>
<td>Zoom in: Strengthen restrictions on alcohol availability (S)</td>
<td>Rose Vandermeer</td>
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<td>• Key measures to reduce availability, successes, and key challenges (Sally Casswell) (20’)</td>
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<td>• Cross-country group discussion: what’s working and what’s not (20’)</td>
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<td>• Report back (10’)</td>
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<td>Zoom in: Advance and enforce drink-driving countermeasures (A)</td>
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<td>• Drink driving counter measures: the perspective of transportation sector (Dan Fang) (15’)</td>
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<td>• Panel discussion: What does it take to tackle drink and drive (Moderator: Dan Fang; Panelists: Matts-Ake Belin, Safety and Mobility, WHO HQ; Ms Bui Thi Kim Thao, National Traffic Safety Committee, Viet Nam; Ms Jarizza Mae Biscante, Office of the Undersecretary for Road Transport and Infrastructure, Philippines) (30’)</td>
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<td>• Open Forum: Questions and Reflections (10’)</td>
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<td>Break 10:55-11:10</td>
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<td>11:10-12:45</td>
<td>Country work 3: Developing a multi-sectoral action plan on restricting availability or drink driving counter measures (20’)</td>
<td>Amy Bestman</td>
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<td>(Countries can choose one from the two measures)</td>
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<td>• Country presentations: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Viet Nam and Philippines (75’)</td>
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<td>10’ presentation from each country + 5’ Comments and questions by other countries following each presentation</td>
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<td>Lunch 12:45-14:10</td>
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<td>14:10-15:10</td>
<td>Zoom in: Facilitate access to screening, brief interventions, and treatment (F)</td>
<td>Bolormaa Sukhbaatar</td>
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<td>• Current situation and challenges (Martin Vandendyck) (20’)</td>
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<td>• Panel discussion: Addressing the challenges (Moderator: Bolormaa Sukhbaatar; Panellists: Representatives from MOH in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Philippines, and Viet Nam) (30’)</td>
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<td>• Next steps on strengthening the “F” in SAFER (Martin Vandendyck) (10’)</td>
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<td>15:10-15:55</td>
<td>Putting it together</td>
<td>Xi Yin</td>
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<td>o Plenary discussion: Potential ways forward on SAFER (30’)</td>
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<td>o Summary and next steps (Dan Fang) (10’)</td>
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<td>o Closing remarks (<a href="#">Dr Huong Thi Giang Tran</a>, Director, Division of Programmes for Disease Control, WPRO)</td>
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<td>16:00</td>
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