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Facts & Figures

- Nearly all **15-16 year old students** (>90%) have drunk alcohol at some point in their life. The average amount drunk on a single occasion by 15-16 year olds is over 60g of alcohol (equivalent to nearly four pints of beer), while more than 1 in 6 (18%) have 'binged'¹ three or more times in the last month.
- **The trend in youth drinking** has been for binge-drinking to rise, with most countries showing an increase between 1995 and 2003. In the older EU countries, this increase mainly happened between 1995 and 1999 with more varied patterns since, while the newer countries are still seeing further rises.
- While there has been a lot of concern over **girls' drinking** in Europe, boys continue to drink more and get drunk more often than girls, with little reduction in the *absolute* size of the difference between boys and girls.

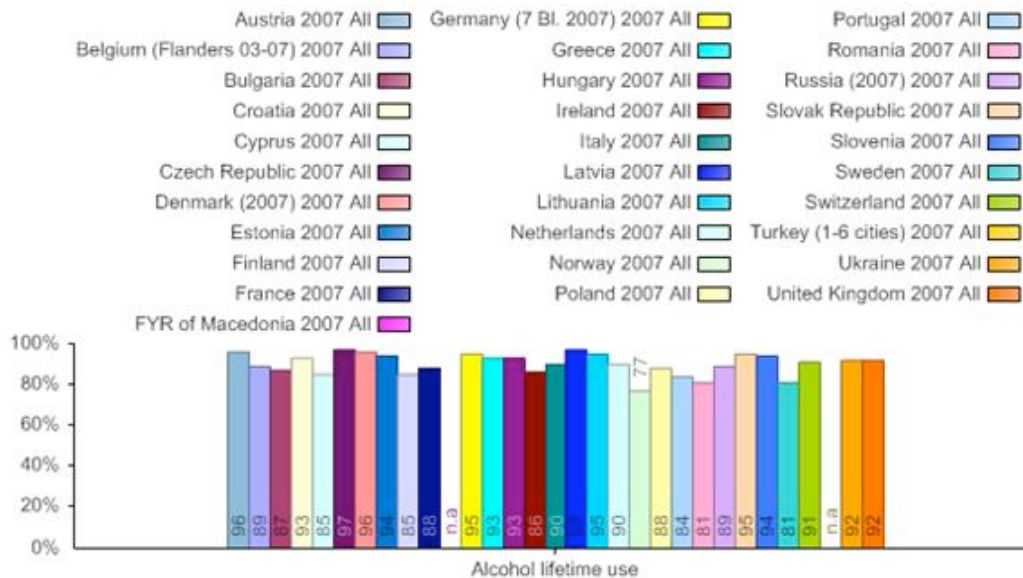
[Figures from: Alcohol in Europe report, P. Anderson & B. Baumberg, July 2006, p. 4]

The 2007 ESPAD Report on substance abuse among students in 35 European countries shows that:

- On average, across 35 European countries, almost 90% of students (young people aged 16 – average age of people surveyed was 15.8 years old) have drunk alcohol at least once. This figure is more striking when compared to the USA average of 62%.
- Of the above figure, one fifth of students (21%) of an average age of 16 years old have had alcohol on at least 40 occasions.
- We note a gender difference among frequent alcohol users: 32% of boys have used alcohol on at least 40 occasions, as opposed to 22% of girls.
- 61% of surveyed students had used alcohol in the month before the survey was conducted.
- When asked what kind of alcoholic beverage students had consumed in the past 30 days, 49% had drunk beer, 40% had drunk spirits, wine and alcopops were consumed by 35% and finally cider by 28%.
- Gender differences persist when it comes to preferred alcoholic beverages: boys prefer beer (58% as opposed to 40% of girls) whereas girls prefer alcopops (37% as opposed to 33% of boys).

[Figures from the 2007 ESPAD report, B. Hibell et al, pp.66-68]

¹ Defined as drinking 5 or more drinks on a single occasion



Graph illustrating lifetime use of alcohol for students in countries where AER has member regions

[ESPAD 2007 data - graph created on ESPAD website – ESPAD website key results generator- available at: <http://www.espad.org/keyresult-generator>]

A 2010 Eurobarometer survey showed that **binge-drinking** is more prevalent among 15-24 year olds than among older age groups.

- The survey defines binge-drinking as having a 5 drinks or more on a single occasion.
- One in four (22%) young people (aged 15-24) has at least 5 drinks on a single occasion.
- One in three (33%) young people aged 15-24 admits to having 5 drinks or more at least once a week. This defines them as the age group that drinks most frequently.

The harmful effect of alcohol on young people

According to the UK Institute of Alcohol Studies, alcohol consumption can lead to a diverse list of adverse effects on young people:

- Excessive consumption has an impact on young people's health. The brain in particular is at sensitive development stage during adolescence and alcohol exposure can lead to brain damage and cognitive deficits.
- Young people who consume alcohol are more likely to be involved in drink-driving accidents.
- Young people who have consumed alcohol are more like to have unprotected sexual intercourse, unwanted sexual relations or sexual relations that they regret the next day, as well as unwanted pregnancies and contracting sexually transmitted diseases.
- Young people, especially students, who consume alcohol are more likely to be victims of crime.

[IAS Factsheet (2009), p.4]

Young People's Policy Recommendations

In 2007, the European Youth Forum published a policy position to respond to and complement the 2006 European Alcohol Strategy.

The European Youth Forum's main recommendations are to:

- **Include young people in policy-making on alcohol**
Young people should not be considered only as victims or a group that misuses alcohol. They are able to make conscious choices and should be included in the formulation and implementation of policies addressed to them.
- **Consider the intergenerational dimension when developing policies for alcohol and youth**
Young people's habits are shaped by those of adults, therefore a holistic policy approach is required.
- **Empower youth**
We should inform young people, help them build their self-esteem and combat peer and marketing pressure and offer them alternative leisure activities.
- **Change the image of alcohol use among young people**
Alcohol should not have exposure in any youth environments (education, sport, recreation, entertainment), warning labels should be used and marketing restrictions should apply when it comes to advertising to youth.

The EU Strategy for youth and alcohol

The 2006 European Union Alcohol Strategy lists the prevention of alcohol-related harm among young people, children and the unborn child as a key priority for European action.

Aim 1: To curb under-age drinking, reduce hazardous and harmful drinking among young people, in cooperation with all stakeholders.

2006 European Alcohol Strategy, p. 8

The EU acknowledges the hazardous impact that alcohol can have on young people's health and social well-being, as well as the impact it has on their educational attainment.

To contribute to preventing this harm, the EU has committed itself to:

- Make the reduction of alcohol-related harm, especially among children and young people, a priority in its funding programmes, in particular the Public Health Programme;
- Help monitor young people's drinking habits, especially as regards binge-drinking and increased alcohol consumption among girls;
- Work with member states and stakeholders to develop strategies for reducing under-age drinking, in particular information and education programmes, strategies to prevent irresponsible marketing and the image of alcohol consumption and selling and serving schemes.

The EU Strategy also created the **European Alcohol and Health Forum**, where stakeholders from different fields (including the alcohol industry, health stakeholders and the marketing and communications sector) can, on a voluntary basis, join and sign up to a number of commitments on their part to reduce alcohol-related harm in Europe. There are no representatives of regional government within the current membership of the Forum (as at November 2009).

A 2009 report of the Forum on the commitments made by members showed that:

- 46% of all commitments are linked to information and education programmes
- 22% of commitments relate to responsible commercial communication and sales of alcohol
- only 6% of the commitments made by members refer to the promotion of behavioural change among children and young people

[Figures from the European Alcohol and Health Forum 2009 Report on Commitments made by members - pp. 9-10]

Bibliography, References & Links

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- Further information on the AER Alcohol Peer Reviews is available at: <http://www.aer.eu/main-issues/health/alcohol-prevention/aer-alcohol-peer-reviews.html>
- Further information on the AER Youth Regional network is available at: <http://www.aer.eu/events/committee-3-culture-education-interregional-cooperation/2010/the-4th-meeting-of-the-aer-youth-regional-network.html>

AER, April 2010