



# Alcohol in Europe

## FACT SHEET

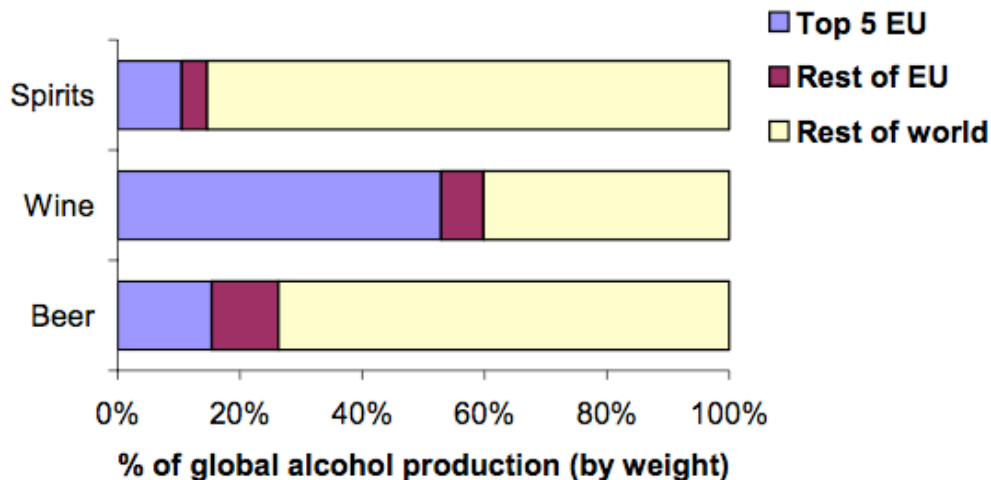
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### Alcohol and the Economy

Alcohol has an important economic role in European countries. According to the Alcohol in Europe Report (2006):

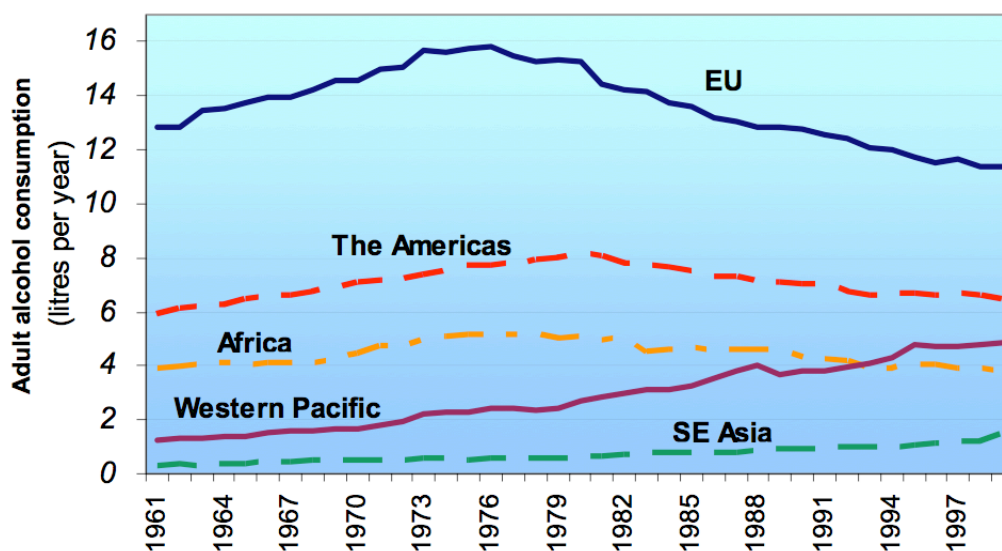
- Europe is both the largest alcohol market and the largest consumer of alcohol in the world.
- The production of many beverages is perceived as a component of national identity by European countries or regions.
- Europe produces a quarter of the world's alcohol and more than half of the world's wine.



- 70% of the world's alcohol imports and almost half of the world's imports involve the EU, the majority of trade being done between EU countries.
- Trade contributes with approximately €9 billion to the goods account balance.
- Alcohol excised duties amounted to €25 billion in 2001. Related taxes are important revenue sources for many national governments.
- Approximately 850,000 jobs in EU15 are in drinks production (mainly wine), and there are even more alcohol related jobs in the supply chain.

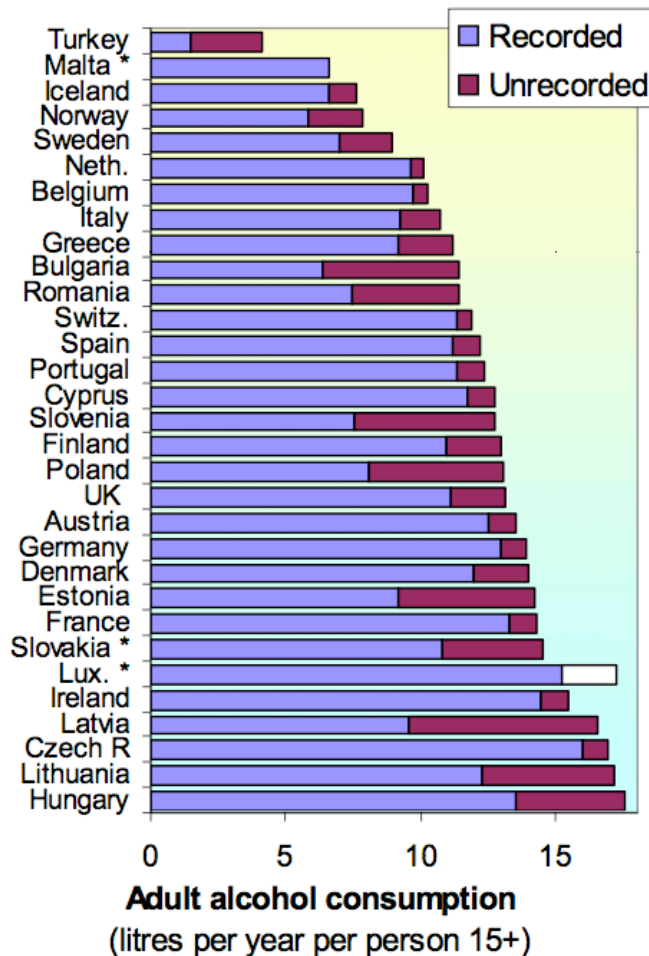
## Alcohol consumption in Europe

- Harmful consumption of alcohol is the source of a complex mix of social and health problems, **the social cost of alcohol** (e.g. health services or the criminal justice system) being estimated to amount to 125 billion Euro per year (WHO, 2009, p.1).
- With a consumption of 11 liters of pure alcohol per adult every year in 2003 (over 2,5 times the rest of the world's average), **the EU has the highest consumption rate of alcohol** in the world. According to the WHO European Community Health Indicators, the value had risen to 12 liters in 2005.



According to the Alcohol in Europe Report (2006):

- Even if the total consumed amount of alcohol has dropped from 15 liters in the mid 70s, there is **an increase of harmful drinking patterns** among 15% of people who consume alcohol, such as binge drinking or underage drinking.
- Recent decades show a decrease in alcohol consumption for traditional wine-drinking countries from southern Europe while eastern and northern Europe show unprecedented high values.
- 55 million European adults (15%) **abstain from drinking alcohol**.
- Regarding preferred alcohol, almost half of consumed alcohol is in the form of beer (44%), followed by wine (34%) and spirits (23%).
- In all societies, **men are far heavier drinkers than women**, drinking not only more often but also greater quantities.



- Not all women stop drinking alcohol when pregnant. 25-50% continue this habit, even at harmful levels.
- **Almost all European students aged 15-16 years have consumed alcohol**, starting at an average age of 12½ years and getting drunk for the first time at 14.

### Alcohol consumption and health inequalities

- The Alcohol in Europe Report (2006) states that alcohol contributes to health inequalities because it has greater harmful effects in less advantaged social groups.
- The **socio-economic status** (SES) is correlated with alcohol consumption: drinkers who have a lower SES are more likely to get drunk or to suffer from alcohol dependency.
- In Europe, health inequalities due to alcohol occur both between and within countries, with an estimation of 90 additional deaths per 100,000 men and 60 additional deaths per 100,000 women in the 10 countries joining the EU in 2004 compared to EU15.
- The Closing the Health Gap in the European Union Report (2008) describes considerable variations in alcohol-related harm throughout the EU, especially between EU10 and the rest of the Union. For example, the number of alcohol-related deaths is 11 times higher for Estonian men than for Dutch men, and the figure of alcohol-related cirrhosis deaths for Hungarian women is as high as 80 times as for Greek women.

## Current Attitudes Towards Alcohol in Europe

According to the latest Eurobarometer on EU Citizens' Attitudes Towards Alcohol (2010), Europeans have the following approach to alcohol:

### Consumption:

- An average of 76% Europeans have drunk alcoholic beverages in the past year, but values differ strongly between countries – e.g. there are more consumers in Denmark (93%) or Sweden (90%) compared to Portugal (58%) or Italy (60%).
- There are also significant differences between men (84%) and women (68%); drinking daily is more of a habit for people over 55 than to young people aged 15-24 (25% compared to 3%) and people with a higher occupational status tend to drink more than others (87% of managers compared to 61% of house persons).
- On average, 10% EU alcohol consumers have 5 or more drinks in each session. However, **25% of young people aged 15-24 are more likely to binge drink once a week.**

### Harm and Risk awareness:

- Europeans agree that alcohol has adverse health effects; 97% link it to liver diseases, but only 67% to cancers.
- There is also a high recognition of the social consequences of alcohol, such as street violence (96%), marital difficulties, low productivity/ performance at work/ school (all 94%).

### Attitudes towards alcohol policies:

- 53% of EU citizens believe that individuals are responsible enough to protect themselves from alcohol-related harm, while 43% think that there is a need for public intervention.
- 36% of Europeans agree that their purchasing of alcoholic beverages would be affected if they would be 25% more expensive and 83% consider random police checks would influence drinking and driving.
- There should be an age limit of 18 years for selling or serving alcoholic drinks according to 89% of EU citizens.

## Bibliography, References & Links

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- Zatonski E. (ed.) (2008). Closing the Health Gap in the European Union: [https://camtools.cam.ac.uk/access/content/group/5e895f99-398c-46c7-86ab-b1f76a48c718/2\\_Pbblc\\_Health\\_Assessment/03\\_The\\_east\\_west\\_gap\\_in\\_Europe/Closing\\_the\\_health\\_gap\\_in\\_EU\\_chs\\_1\\_and\\_2.pdf](https://camtools.cam.ac.uk/access/content/group/5e895f99-398c-46c7-86ab-b1f76a48c718/2_Pbblc_Health_Assessment/03_The_east_west_gap_in_Europe/Closing_the_health_gap_in_EU_chs_1_and_2.pdf) [accessed April 2010]
- 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>