



Availability of Alcohol The Situation in the Regions **FACT SHEET**

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Availability of Alcohol and Young People

The 2007 ESPAD Report on substance abuse among students in 35 European countries shows that alcohol is easily available to young people in Europe.

78% of students stated they could obtain beer “fairly easily” “very easily”, 70% said the same for wine and 56% for spirits.

Source: 2007 ESPAD Report, p. 66

What policy options are available?

There are no total bans on the sale of alcohol in Europe. However, there exist a variety of measures for restricting the availability of alcohol, such as:

- Bans on the sale of alcohol in specific locations (schools, hospital, workplace)
- Government alcohol retail monopolies
- Licensing of alcohol sales outlets
- Restrict the eligibility to purchase alcohol (minimum drinking ages)

What works?

Research shows that cost-efficient policies to regulate the availability of alcohol are not always the most effective (Farke, 2008, p.8).

The most successful policy measure to regulate the availability and marketing of alcohol is to introduce and/or reinforce strict regulations on the number and density of alcohol sales outlets and their opening hours.

The least effective measure in terms of regulating the availability of alcohol is to aim for EU-wide agreements on banning the marketing of alcohol, although this would be the most cost-efficient measure.

Research has shown (Anderson & Baumberg, 2006, p. 265) that restricting the sales of alcohol to minors through the enforcement of **minimum drinking ages** has a direct impact on alcohol-related harm to young people:

- Less road traffic accidents involving young people
- Less injury admissions to hospitals
- Decreased consumption of alcohol by young people

Licensing schemes are an effective tool to ensure that establishments selling alcohol respect and apply the law on the availability of alcohol. Licenses should be granted and renewed only for establishments that do not serve under-age customers or persons who are already intoxicated. It is important to note the possible 'side-effect' of licensing schemes: licenses can constitute an important source of income for local authorities. It is important that authorities are not tempted by the potential to increase their income and allow the number of licences to grow.

When considering licensing schemes, it is important to take the density of outlets into account, i.e. the number of establishments offering alcohol within a given territory. Research has shown that the number of establishments has a direct impact on the amount of alcohol consumed and on alcohol-related harm (Anderson & Baumberg, 2006, p. 268).

Questions to consider

When developing policies on the availability of alcohol, WHO suggests that policy-makers consider the following questions:

1. You have a government alcohol retail monopoly - evaluate it.

If they exist, do they enjoy public and political support, are there any threats to their continued existence? WHO confirms that government retail monopolies reduce alcohol-related harm and that the transition to a private retail system for alcohol leads to an increase in the economic and social burden of alcohol.

2. You don't have a government retail monopoly - evaluate the possibility to create one.

Although in many countries a shift to a government monopoly for the retail sale of alcohol seems impossible, it is worth evaluating the feasibility of launching a debate on this issue. If policy-makers and the public consider levels of alcohol-

related harm unacceptable, this can be a good starting point for discussing introducing a monopoly.

3. Evaluate your alcohol licensing systems and the rules relating to density and opening hours.

Make sure that local authorities have sufficient powers to monitor and regulate the density of alcohol retail outlets and also their opening hours, as well as to revoke licences where the rules are not being respected. Licensing is a good means for controlling the availability of alcohol and ensuring that alcohol outlets are enforcing the law.

4. Is it possible to evaluate opening hours in order to reduce alcohol-related harm?

Restricting the days and hours that outlets can sell alcohol is an effective means for reducing alcohol-related harm.

5. Evaluate minimum purchase ages - can they be increased?

Increasing minimum purchase ages for alcohol is a policy measure that normally enjoys public support. Consider harmonising the minimum ages for different types of alcohol and also for different outlets.

6. Evaluate the enforcement of minimum purchase ages.

There is evidence to show that minimum purchase ages are not being enforced across Europe. It is important to invest in enforcing these rules, for example by using under-age persons who act as mystery shoppers and try to buy alcohol from an outlet.

(Source: WHO (2009), pp. 26-27)

Options for action

WHO (2009) puts forward the following options available to policy-makers:

→ **Maintain the status quo** – no change to current rules – but better enforcement

The major problem in most European countries appears to be the enforcement of existing rules, in particular rules on minimum purchase ages and rules on selling alcohol to customers who are already intoxicated.

→ **Raise minimum purchase age to 18 years if it is lower**

This minimum purchase age should apply to all kinds of alcohol, including beer and wine, and to all types of commerce. This increased minimum age limit should be accompanied by increased enforcement measures.

→ **Create stricter regulations on the availability of alcohol**

Policy-makers should evaluate the political and public support for reinforcing existing measures and in particular reducing opening hours for commerce selling alcohol,

reducing the density of such outlets and even introducing a government monopoly for the retail of alcohol.

Stakeholders for Action

- The Health Ministry should work with the Ministry in charge of regulating licensing.
- The police are an essential stakeholder, as they are in charge of enforcement.
- Consulting with alcohol producers and retailers when considering changes to the rules of availability is considered normal practice, even though they normally do not support measures to reduce availability.

Bibliography, References & Links

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- Further information on the AER Alcohol Peer Reviews is available on the AER website: <http://www.aer.eu/main-issues/health/alcohol-prevention/aer-alcohol-peer-reviews.html>