

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMONG CHILDREN

Alcohol use in adolescence continues to be very common in Europe, with beer being by far the most popular alcoholic beverage, even though the percentage of 15-16 year olds reporting heavy episodic drinking has come down at least slightly in recent years in several countries (ESPAD, 2016).

Two adolescent drinking patterns are specifically linked to negative health, education and social outcomes – early initiation of alcohol consumption and binge drinking. About half of European adolescents started drinking alcohol at the age of 13 or even younger, and almost 10% have been drunk at least once by the age of 13 (ESPAD, 2016). Children who report early initiation to alcohol and having been drunk on several occasions are more likely to develop alcohol dependence later in life (Spear, 2015).

By age 15-16, over 80% of adolescents report having tried alcohol at least once in their life, and half say that they have consumed alcohol in the past month (ESPAD, 2016). More than two-thirds of 15-16 year olds in Denmark, Austria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic and Greece report having consumed alcohol over the past month, compared with less than one-third in Sweden and Finland. Frequent alcohol use is linked to how easy it is for adolescents to purchase alcohol. More than 90% of adolescents in countries where they report drinking regularly say that it is easy to obtain alcohol.

Heavy episodic drinking (also known as “binge drinking”) is a frequent behaviour among many European adolescents – 38% of 15-16 year old boys and girls reported at least one binge drinking session in the past month on average. Binge drinking is particularly popular among adolescents in Denmark and Cyprus, with half of 15-16 year olds reporting heavy drinking in the past month. This proportion was much lower in Portugal, Norway and Iceland (Figure 4.5)

On the positive side, the proportion of adolescents who report regular binge drinking has decreased significantly from 2011 to 2015 in most countries, while it has remained stable in several other countries. This proportion has increased significantly in only two countries (Cyprus and Montenegro).

In most countries, binge drinking is slightly more frequent among boys than girls, although the gap has narrowed recently (Figure 4.6). In 2015, 39% of 15-16 year old boys reported heavy alcohol drinking in the past month compared with 35% of girls. This gender gap remains particularly large in Romania, Cyprus, the Czech Republic and Greece.

Approximately a third of European adolescents report negative experiences while under the influence of alcohol. These include accidents or injuries (9% of boys and girls) and unprotected sex (8% of boys and 5% of girls).

A number of policies have proven to be effective to reduce alcohol drinking among adolescents, such as limiting accessibility (e.g. through restrictions on location and hours of sales, and raising the minimum age to drink alcohol), increase prices, and advertising regulations. In January 2018, Lithuania, which has one of the highest level of alcohol consumption among adolescents based on another children and adolescent survey (Inchley et al., 2016), introduced a new legislation on alcohol control particularly targeting young people. This legislation raised the legal drinking age from 18 to 20, restricted opening hours for sales in retail stores, and banned all advertising for beers, wines and spirits.

Definition and comparability

Heavy episodic drinking is defined as drinking five or more drinks in a single occasion in the past 30 days. National examples are given so that a “drink” is understood to contain roughly the equal amount of pure alcohol as a glass of wine.

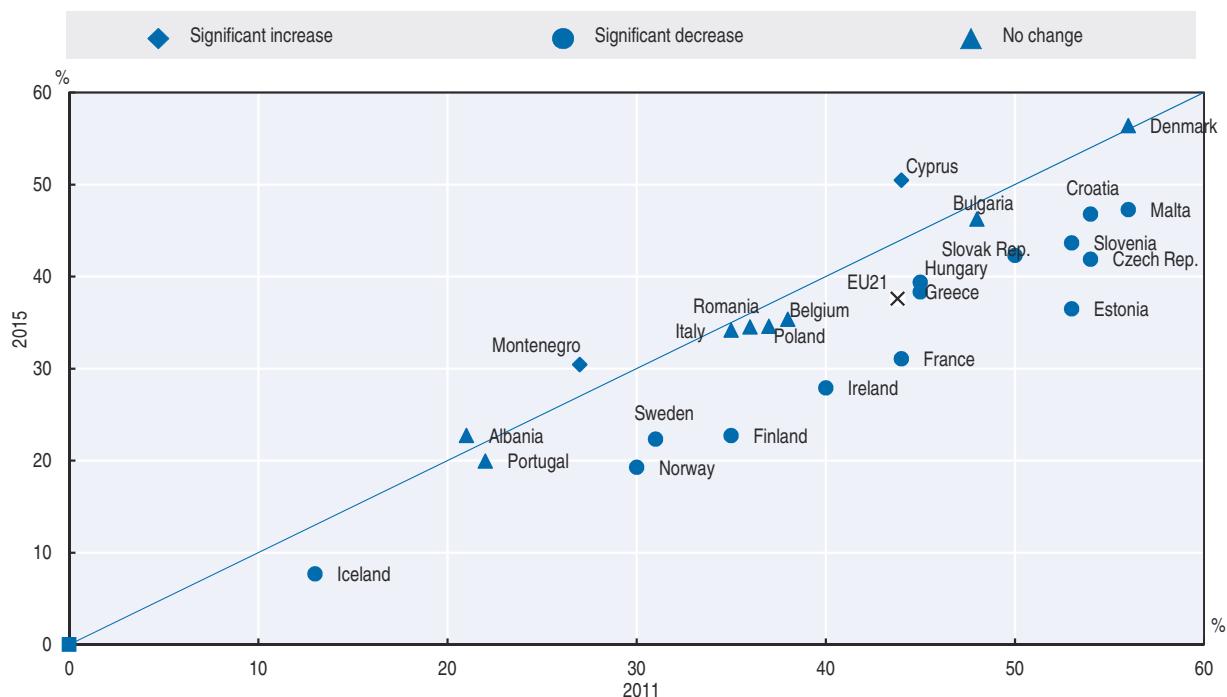
The data source is the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD). The ESPAD survey has been collecting comparable data on alcohol use and other substance use among 15-16 year old students in European countries every four years since 1995.

For more information, please see <http://espad.org/report/home/>.

References

- ESPAD Group (2016), *ESPAD Report 2015: Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs*, EMCDDA and ESPAD, <https://doi.org/10.2810/022073>.
- Inchley, J. et al. (eds.) (2016), “Growing Up Unequal: Gender and Socioeconomic Differences in Young People’s Health and Well-being”, *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study: International Report from the 2013/2014 Survey*, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/303438/HBSC-No.7-Growing-up-unequal-Full-Report.pdf.
- Spear, L.P. (2015), “Adolescent alcohol exposure: Are there separable vulnerable periods within adolescence?”, *Physiology & Behavior*, 148, pp. 122-130.

4.5. Changes in the proportion of heavy episodic drinking in the past 30 days among 15-16 year olds, 2011 to 2015

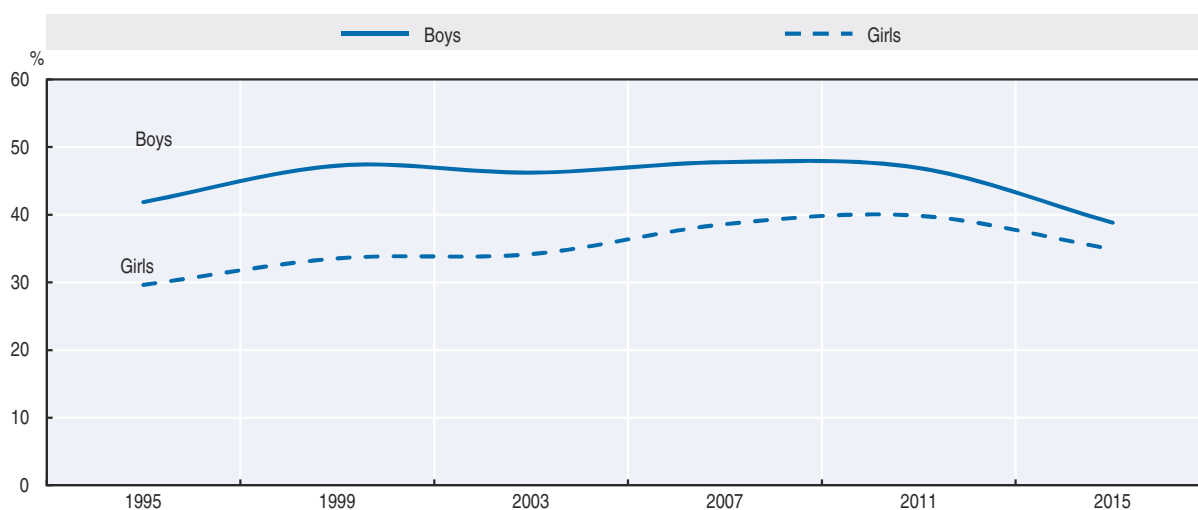


Note: The grey line represents “no change” between 2011 and 2015. Decreases of 3 or more percentage points between successive surveys are indicated with a square, increases of 3 or more percentage points with a triangle, and unchanged situations with a losange (less than ± 3 percentage points).

Source: ESPAD 2011 and 2015. The data for Belgium refers to the Flanders region only.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933835022>

4.6. Changes in heavy episodic drinking in the past 30 days among 15-16 year old boys and girls, average across EU countries and Norway, 1995 to 2015



Note: The average is not weighted by country population size.

Source: ESPAD.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933835041>



From:
Health at a Glance: Europe 2018
State of Health in the EU Cycle

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/health_glance_eur-2018-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD/European Union (2018), "Alcohol consumption among children", in *Health at a Glance: Europe 2018: State of Health in the EU Cycle*, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/health_glance_eur-2018-22-en

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.