

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

The health burden related to excessive alcohol consumption, both in terms of morbidity and mortality, is considerable. High alcohol intake is associated with numerous harmful health and social consequences, such as increased risk of heart, stroke and vascular diseases, as

Overview

Alcohol consumption as measured by annual sales stands at 9.5 litres per adult on average across OECD countries, using the most recent data available. Leaving aside Luxembourg because national sales overestimate consumption, Austria, Korea and France reported the highest consumption of alcohol, with 12.0 litres or more per adult per year in 2010. Low alcohol consumption was recorded in Indonesia, India, Turkey and Israel where religious and cultural traditions restrict the use of alcohol among some population groups, as well as in China, South Africa, Mexico and some of the Nordic countries (Norway, Iceland and Sweden).

Although average alcohol consumption has gradually fallen in many OECD countries over the past three decades, it has risen in some others such as Korea, Iceland, Norway and Poland. There has been a degree of convergence in drinking habits across OECD countries, with wine consumption increasing in many traditional beer-drinking countries and *vice versa*. The traditional wine-producing countries of Italy, France and Spain, as well as Portugal, Greece, Switzerland have seen per capita consumption fall substantially since 1990. Alcohol consumption in the Russian Federation, as well as in Brazil and China has risen, although in the latter two countries per capita consumption is still low.

Variations in alcohol consumption across countries and over time reflect not only changing drinking habits but also the policy responses to control alcohol use. Curbs on advertising, sales restrictions and taxation have all proven to be effective measures to reduce alcohol consumption. Strict controls on sales and high taxation are mirrored by overall lower consumption in most Nordic countries.

Although adult alcohol consumption per capita gives useful evidence of long-term trends, it does not identify sub-populations at risk from harmful drinking patterns. Much of the burden of disease associated with alcohol consumption occurs among persons who have an alcohol dependence problem. The consumption of large quantities of alcohol at a single session, termed “binge drinking”, is a particularly dangerous pattern of consumption, which is on the rise in some countries and social groups, especially among young males.

well as liver cirrhosis and certain cancers. Foetal exposure to alcohol increases the risk of birth defects and intellectual impairments. Alcohol also contributes to death and disability through accidents, injuries, assault, violence, homicide and suicide. It is, however, one of the major avoidable risk factors.

In 2010, the World Health Organization endorsed a global strategy to combat the harmful use of alcohol, through direct measures such as medical services for alcohol-related health problems, and indirect measures such as policy options for the availability and marketing of alcohol.

Definition

Alcohol consumption is defined as annual sales of pure alcohol in litres per person aged 15 years and over.

Comparability

The methodology to convert alcoholic drinks to pure alcohol may differ across countries. Official statistics do not include unrecorded alcohol consumption, such as home production. Italy reports consumption for the population 14 years and over, Sweden for 16 years and over, and for Japan 20 years and over. In some countries (e.g. Luxembourg), national sales do not accurately reflect actual consumption by residents, since purchases by non-residents may create a significant gap between national sales and consumption.

Sources

- OECD (2012), *OECD Health Statistics*, OECD Publishing.

Further information

Analytical publications

- Huerta, M. and F. Borgonovi (2010), “Education, Alcohol Use and Abuse among Young Adults in Britain”, *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 50.

Statistical publications

- OECD (2012), *Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2012*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2012), *Health at a Glance: Europe 2012*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2011), *Health at a Glance*, OECD Publishing.

Online databases

- OECD Health Statistics.

Websites

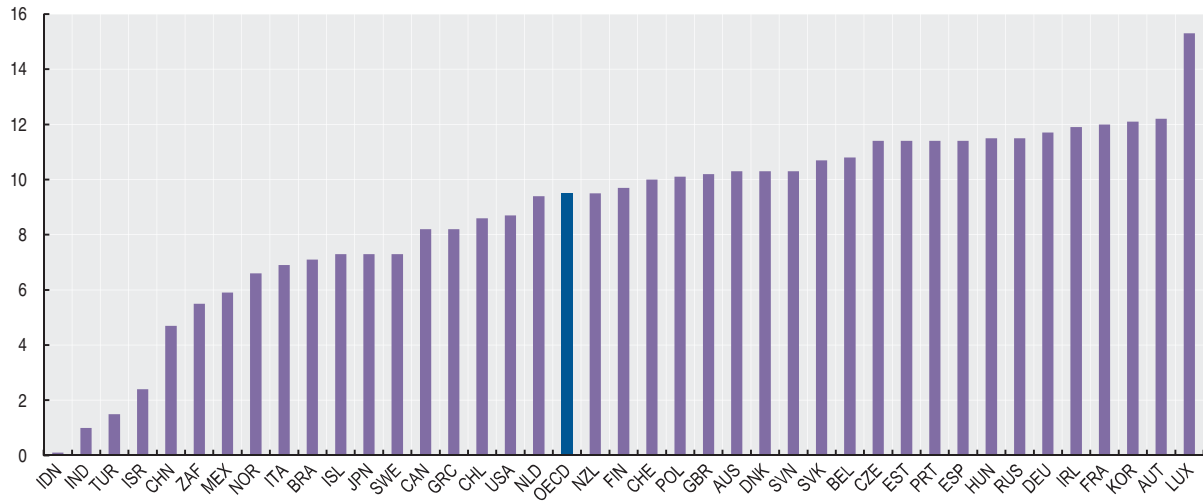
- OECD Health Data, www.oecd.org/health/healthdata.
- Health at a Glance 2011, www.oecd.org/health/healthataglance.



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Alcohol consumption among population aged 15 and over

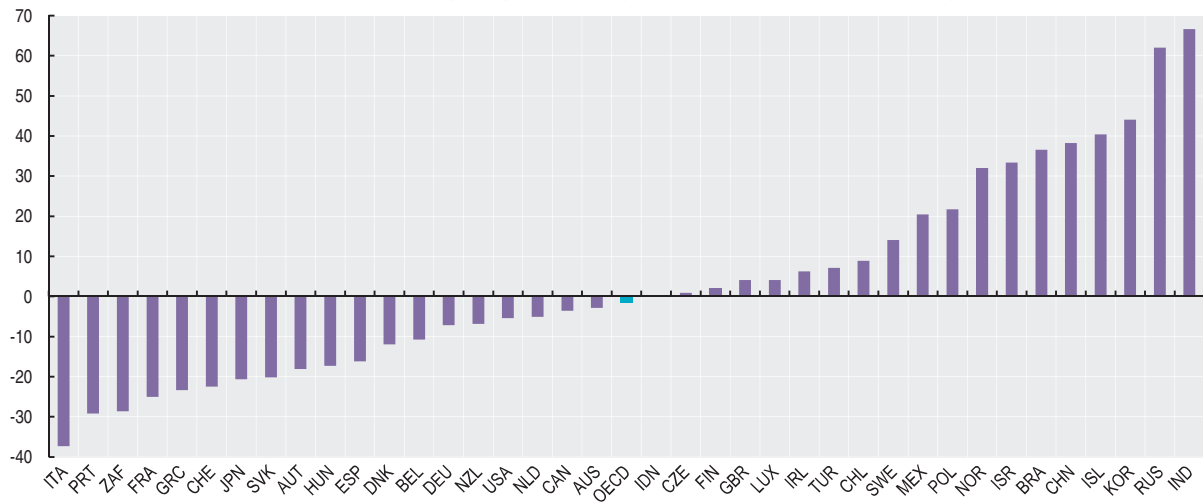
Litres per capita, 2010 or latest available year



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932710783>

Change in alcohol consumption in litres per capita among population aged 15 and over

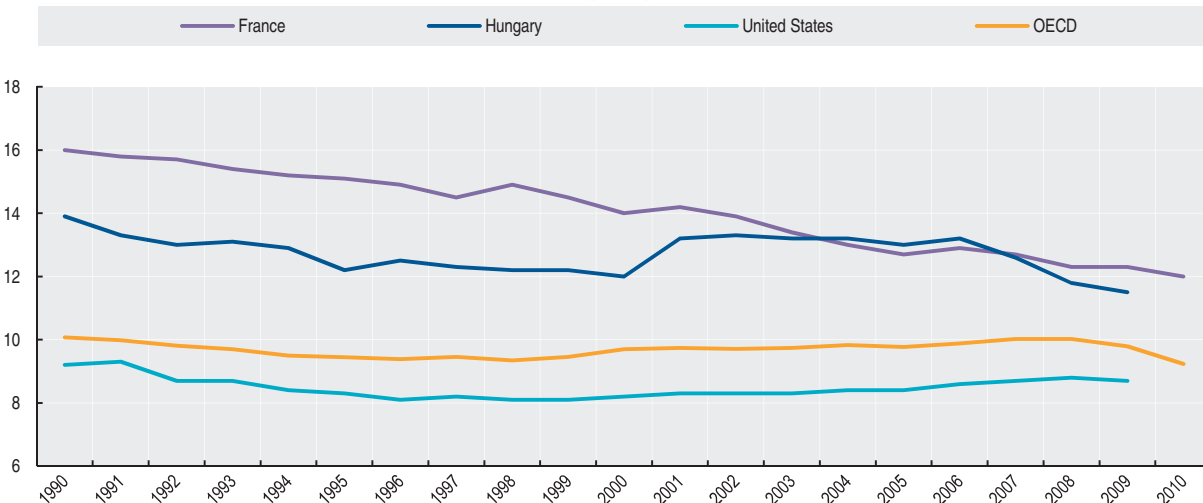
Percentage change in litres per capita over the period 1990-2010 or latest available period



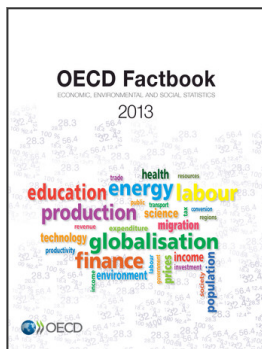
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932710802>

Trends in alcohol consumption among population aged 15 and over

Litres per capita



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932710821>



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