



## ANALYSIS OF THE 2015 ESPAD SURVEY RESULTS

There are two major studies on underage drinking which are published every 4 years: [HBSC](#) (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children, 11-13-15 years' old -[summary key finding last HBSC published in 2016](#)) and ESPAD (The European School survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs). This report analyses the latter.

The new [ESPAD study was published 20 September 2016](#). The report is based on the information provided by 96,043 students (15-16 years old) from 35 European countries, 23<sup>1</sup> of them being Member States of the European Union. About 600, 000 students have participated in the successive ESPAD data-collection waves since 1995, making the project the most extensive, harmonised data collection on substance use in Europe. This analysis examines the data for underage drinking in EU countries.

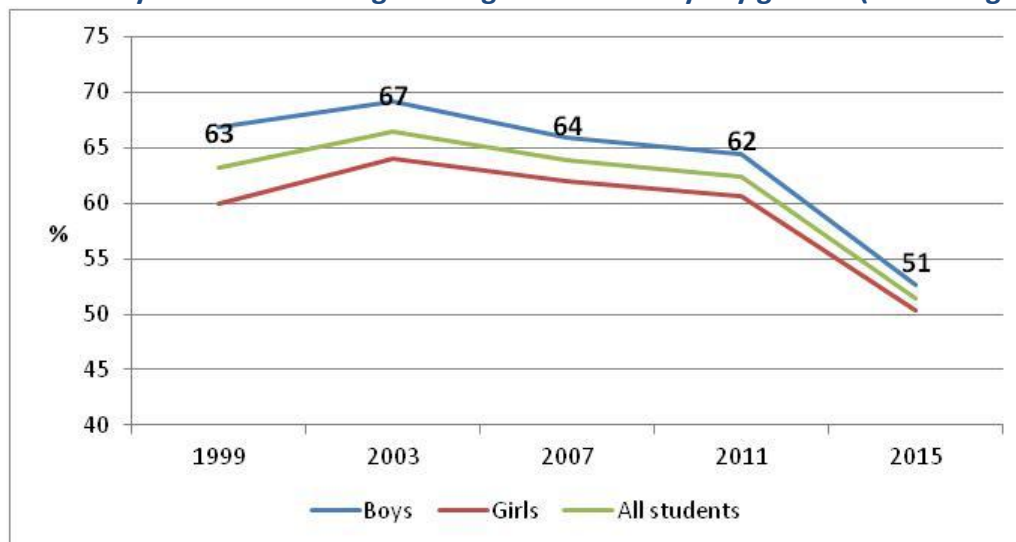
- Since the ESPAD surveys were launched, we reached **the lowest ever observed percentage of EU students who reported alcohol consumption in the last 30 days** - with a decline of 24% since 2003 (from 67% to 51% between 2003 and 2015).
- Both the **prevalence and the frequency** of drinking and heavy episodic drinking (binge drinking) **are down**:
  - **86% of European students are now reporting “never being drunk”** in the last 30 days. This is a 23% decline in the level of intoxication (since 2003).
  - **The frequency of heavy episodic drinking decreased by 28% since it peaked in 2007** (18% in 2007 down to 13% in 2015). These positive trends can be observed for both boys and girls.
- The ESPAD study confirmed that the efforts made by all stakeholders towards eliminating underage drinking are delivering tangible results.

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<sup>1</sup> *The 2015 report did not collect data from the UK* (but UK figures from past reports are included in the EU average of previous years). It is still important to note the equally positive trends in the UK. Government figures show that underage drinking has fallen by nearly 40% over the past ten years. In addition, official data shows that young people's attitude to underage drinking has hardened with those thinking it is acceptable to drink falling by 28%. According to NHS data, in 2014 only 38 per cent of 11 to 15 year olds had tried alcohol at least once, the lowest proportion since the survey began. As the number of EU Member States that participated at the first ESPAD survey is relatively small, we decided to start with the year 1999 as the data is more comparable.

## Use of any alcoholic beverage during the last 30 days

Use of any alcoholic beverage during the last 30 days by gender (EU average)



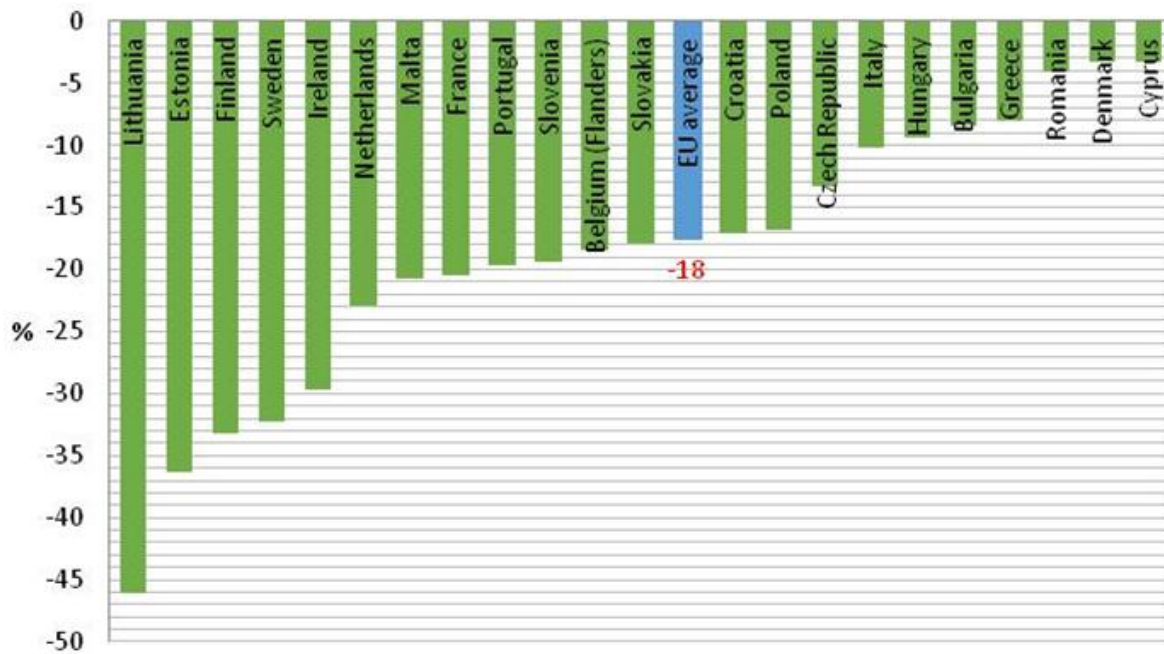
Since 2003, there is an observable downward trend in the percentage of students who reported drinking during the last 30 days. The 2015 figures constitute a 23% drop since 2003, the lowest percentage of alcohol use ever found in ESPAD surveys.

Use of any alcoholic beverages: % change between 2003 and 2015



The declining trend is most significant in Lithuania, Ireland and Sweden and least in Cyprus (increase), Hungary and France between 2003 and 2015. Cyprus is the only country in which student alcohol use in the last 30 days has increased since 2003. That said, it decreased slightly since 2011.

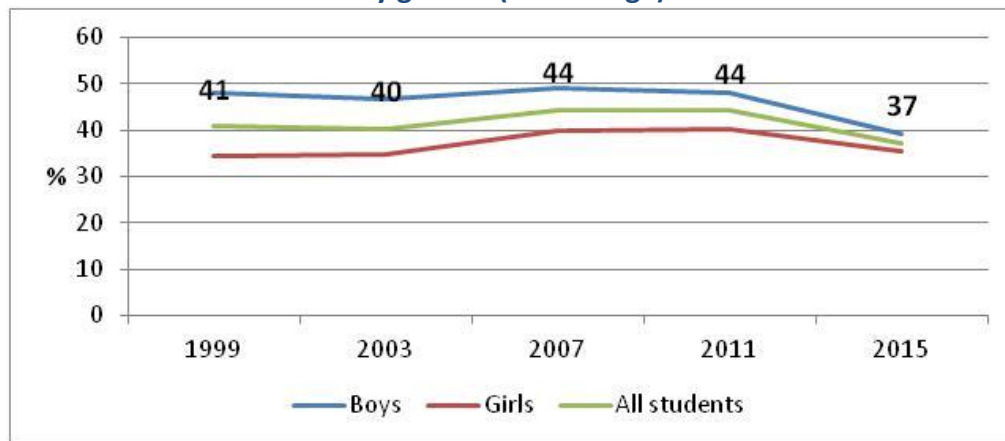
### Use of any alcoholic beverages: % change between 2011 and 2015



### Heavy episodic drinking (5+ drinks in one occasion) at least once during the last 30 days

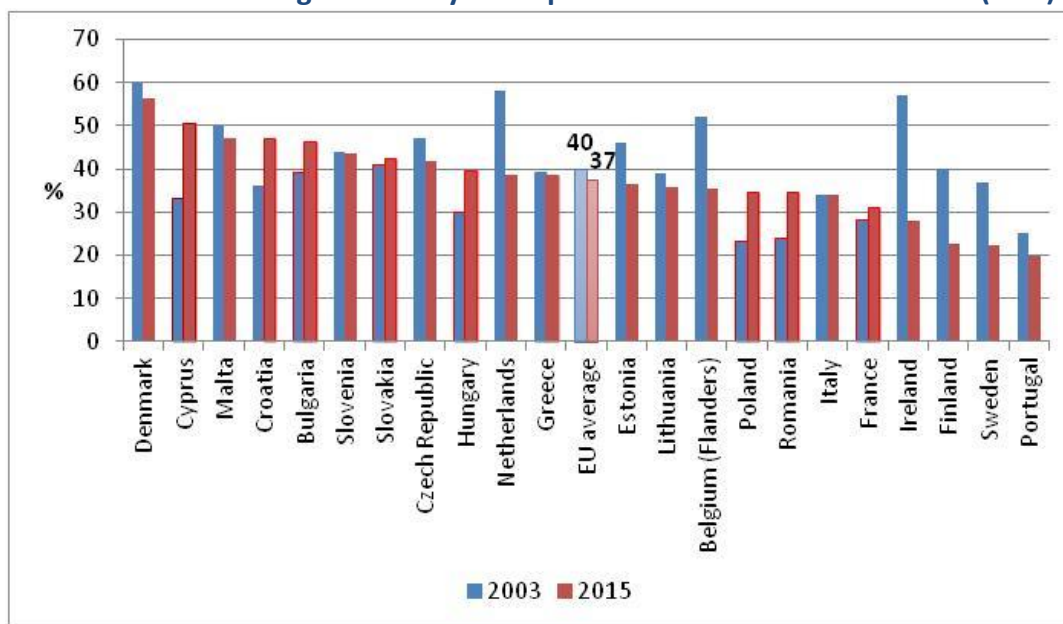
Heavy episodic drinking, when coupled with reported drunkenness, is certainly a serious harm indicator to consider (can lead to accidents, unprotected sex, etc.).

### Proportion reporting having had five or more drinks on one occasion during the last 30 days by gender (EU average)



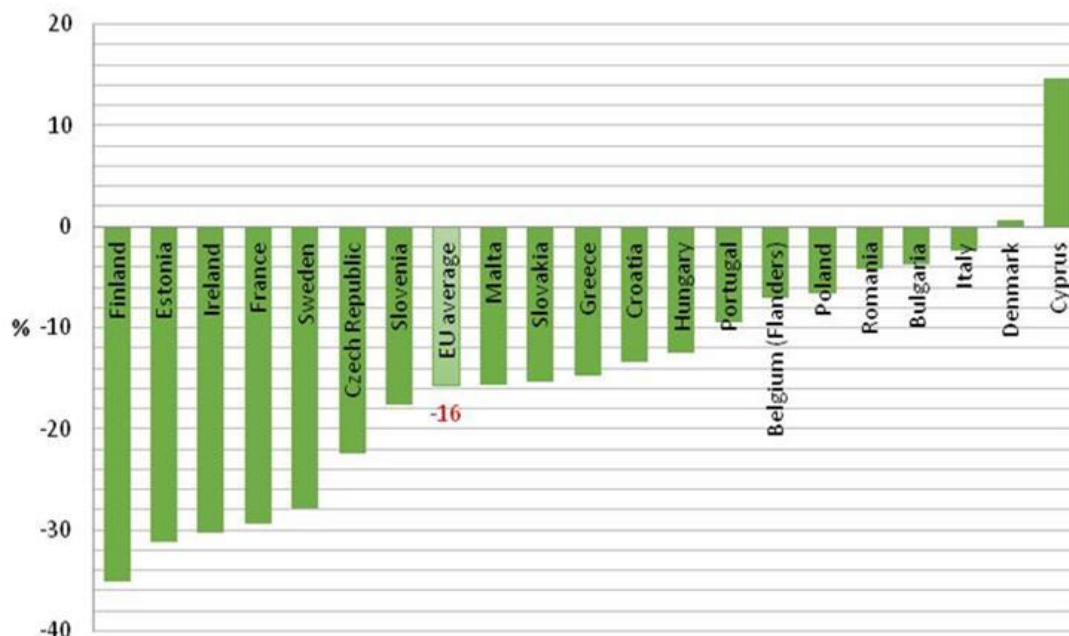
The EU-average is on the decline but there is a great disparity between countries in percentages and trends.

**5+ drinks once during last 30 days: comparison between 2003 and 2015 (in %)**



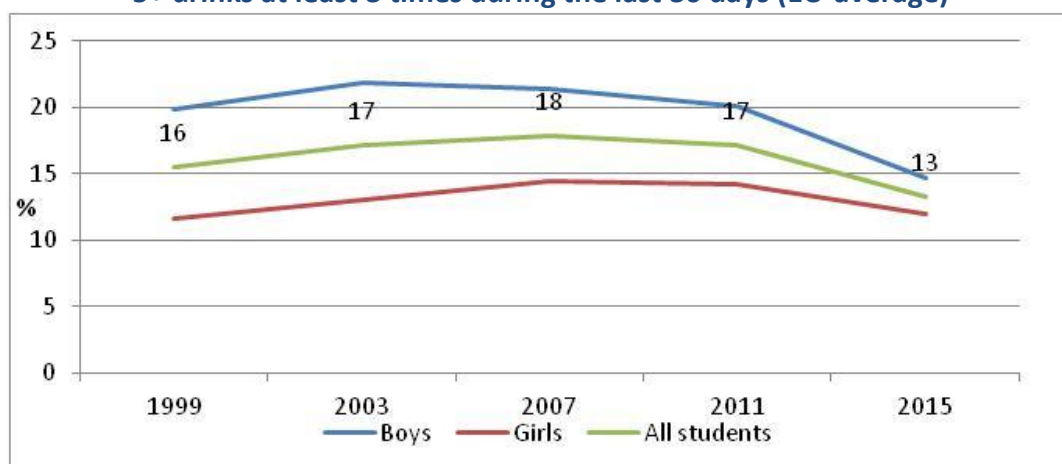
In 2015, Denmark, Cyprus and Malta had the highest proportion of 5+ drinks at least once in the last 30 days, while Portugal, Sweden and Finland had the lowest figures. Between 2003 and 2015, Ireland, Finland and Sweden experienced the most significant decline (more than 50% for Ireland). Cyprus, France and many of the Eastern European member states found that their proportion of students who reported having had 5+ drinks at least once in the last 30 days actually increased (substantially for Cyprus). Nevertheless, with the exception of Cyprus and Denmark, all Member States experienced declines in students reporting having had 5+ drinks at least once in the last 30 days since the last survey in 2011.

**5+ drinks once during last 30 days: % change between 2011 and 2015**



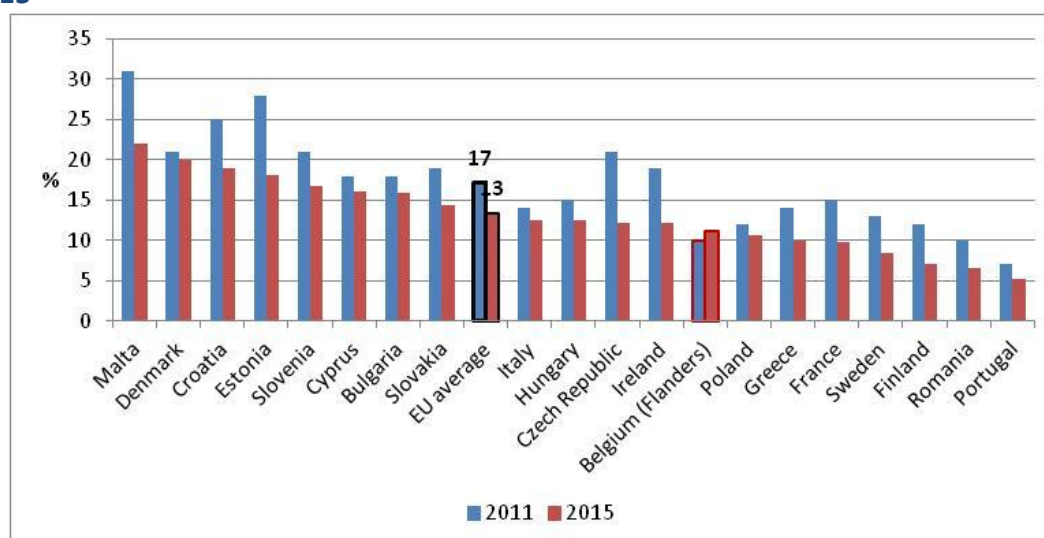
## Heavy episodic drinking (5+ drinks in one occasion) at least 3 times during the last 30 days

**5+ drinks at least 3 times during the last 30 days (EU-average)**



After a gradual increase up to 2007, the percentage of students in EU countries who have drunk heavily at least three times or more in the past 30 days has decreased. While the decrease was only 1% between 2007 and 2011, between 2011 and 2015 it went down by 4%.

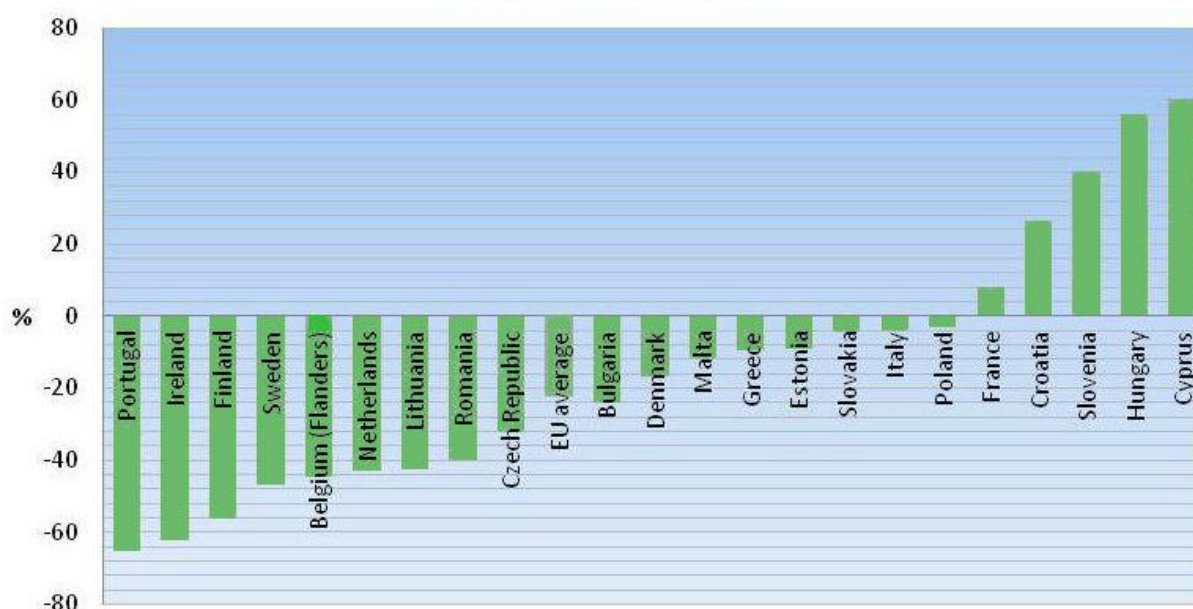
## % point change 5+ drinks at least 3 times during the last 30 days: comparison between 2011 and 2015



In 2015, Malta, Denmark and Croatia performed worst as regards frequent 5+ drinks in the last 30 days. Portugal, Romania and Finland can be found at the other end. Furthermore, with the exception of Belgium/Flanders, which increased by 1.11% (see above graph), heavy episodic drinking more than 3 times in the past 30 days decreased in all Member States

However, the same is not true when looking at the trends on a longer period of time between 2003 and 2015.

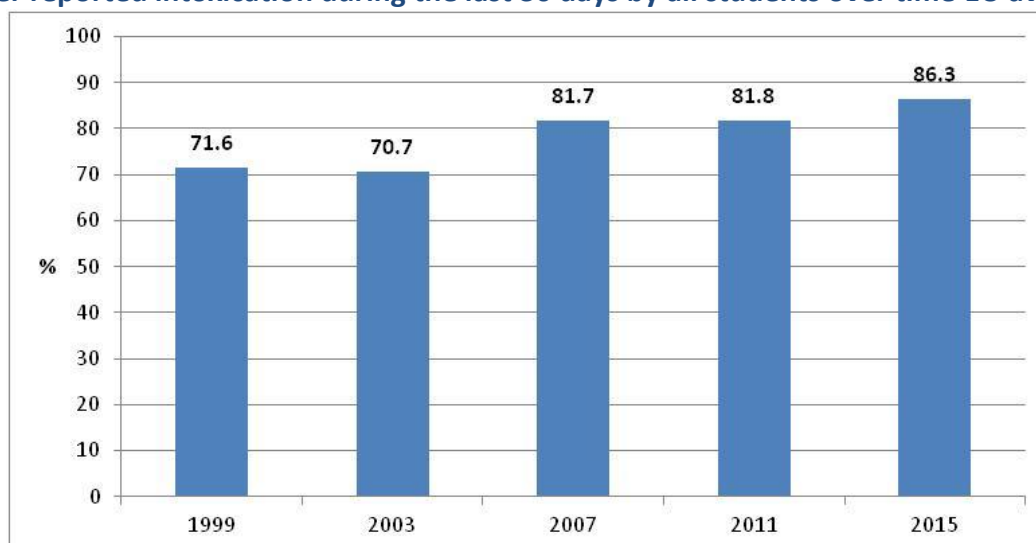
### 5+ drinks at least 3 times during the last 30 days: % change between 2003 and 2015



### Never reported intoxication in the last 30 days

This is an important question related to the pattern of drinking, and thus to harm. The absence of reported drunkenness could be related to low consumption or a consumption over a longer period of time together with maybe food and soft drinks. In that case, harm could be minimised although consumption should not have happened in the first place.

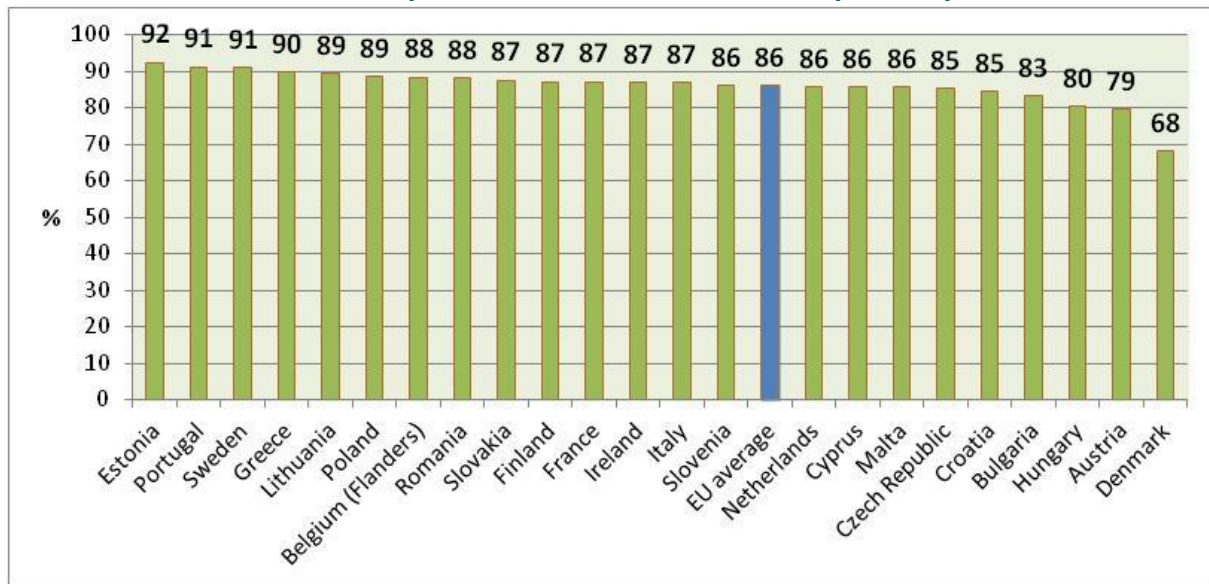
### Never reported intoxication during the last 30 days by all students over time EU average



The results from 2015 confirm the promising upward trend of EU students who have never reported intoxication in the last 30 days. Never reported drunkenness reached the highest level since the ESPAD survey was first undertaken (86.3%). That is an increase of 22% since 2003.

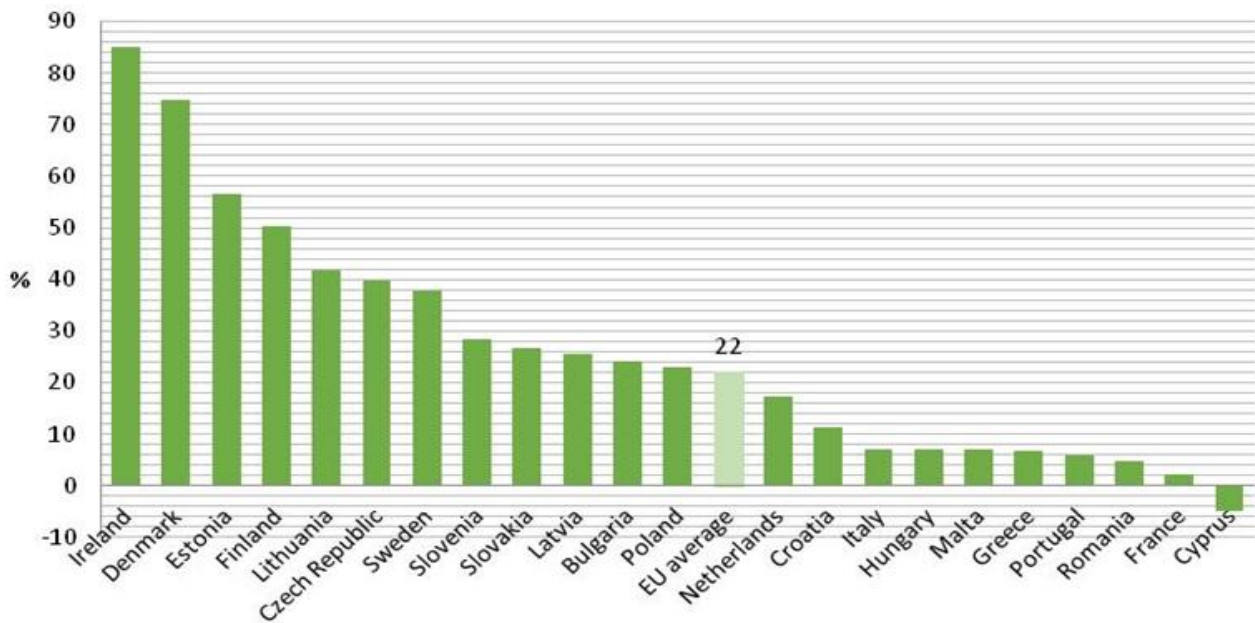


Never reported intoxication: % in 2015 by country

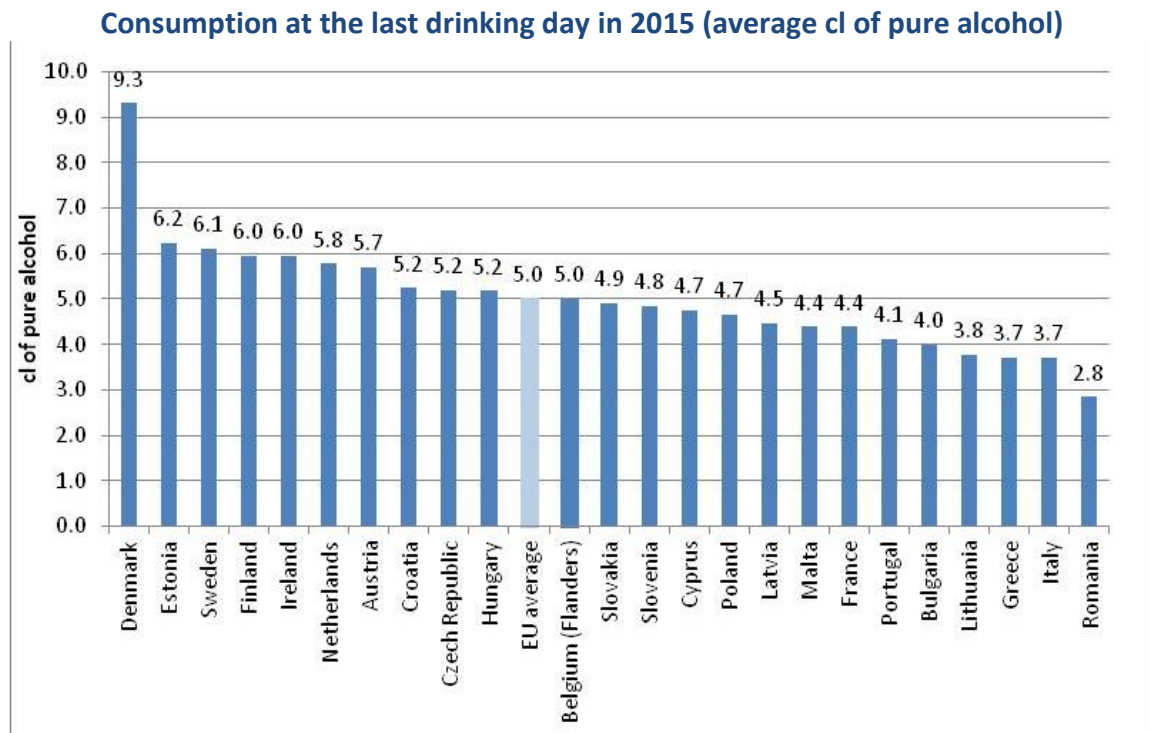


In 2015, Estonia, Portugal and Sweden were top (all above 90%), Denmark, Austria and Hungary performed worst. In spite of this, Denmark was one the countries that experienced the biggest increase in this category since 2003.

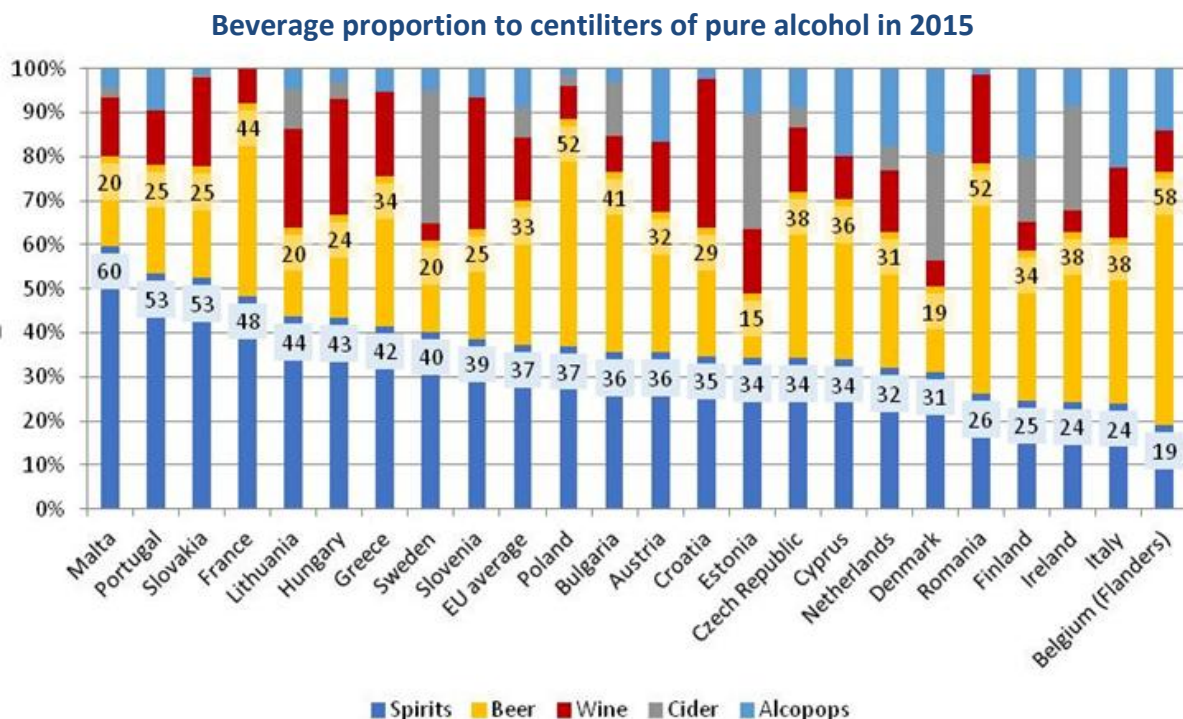
Never reported intoxication: % change between 2003 and 2015



## Estimated average centiliters of pure alc. consumption at the last drinking day



The data show again a great disparity between countries, with southern countries generally below the EU average. Romanians drink 70% less than young Danes, or 54% less than Estonians. Italians drink 60% less than young Danes, or 40% less than Estonians.





In 2015, beer was the most favoured drink in Belgium, Poland, Romania, Ireland and Bulgaria. Spirits were the most common choice in Malta, Portugal and Slovakia.

## **Conclusion**

The 2015 ESPAD study confirms that the efforts made by all stakeholders towards tackling underage drinking are delivering tangible results. There are positive trends in all sections of the report on underage alcohol use. These trends reinforce the results of WHO's HBSC research. Clearly, while we should celebrate the positive trend, there is no room for complacency.

A closer look at the data shows that alcohol consumption by minors varies greatly across Europe and that we need to continue assisting those most at risk. Indeed, while the considerable progress that countries such as Ireland and Estonia have made should be lauded, the report should serve as a wake-up call to countries that perform less well.

The fact that the incidence of underage drinking varies so much between different countries underlines the importance of targeted initiatives, which take local culture, context and issues into account. We strongly believe that a one-size-fits-all approach, targeting entire populations, is not the answer.

Instead, combating underage drinking, in partnership with local authorities and communities – which is a core and long standing commitment of our sector - should be the strategy pushed by the Commission and Ministries of Health.

## THE SPIRITS SECTOR AT GLANCE

- **spiritsEUROPE** represents the interests of the spirits sector in 31 national associations and the 8 leading multinational companies. As the voice of the European spirits sector, we seek to maintain and advance the freedom to produce and market spirits in a responsible way.
- Distilled spirits are as diverse as the EU's Member States, with **46 product categories**, including a host of geographically-specific products (GIs). These contribute to the culture of their regions and the European Union.
- Brandy de Jerez, Grappa, Ouzo, Genever, Deutscher Weinbrand are just a few of the **200+ registered protected GIs**. These spirits are important exports outside Europe generating a positive trade balance of **€8.75bn in 2015**.
- 2 out of every 3 bottles distilled annually by small, medium and large producers are sold in the EU, generating **€23bn for Exchequers**. The sector creates **1 million jobs in production and sale**.

Over the last decade the spirits sector engaged in more than 400 prevention initiatives to promote responsible drinking, including 76 education and awareness raising campaigns to fight underage drinking

