



# Alcohol Consumption among 15-16-Year-Olds in EU Countries & Norway

Summary of KEY FINDINGS  
from the latest ESPAD REPORT

EUROPEAN SCHOOL  
SURVEY PROJECT  
ON ALCOHOL AND  
OTHER DRUGS

March 2021

# Executive Summary

- Positive trends in underage drinking – less alcohol consumption, less binge drinking, less 15-16-year-olds ever to be drunk – are continuing across the EU. On EU-average:
  - ↳ a drop of -22% was observed for alcohol consumption in the past 30 days (vs. 2003 levels).
  - ↳ a decline of -19% was observed for heavy episodic drinking and -24% for frequent heavy episodic drinking (vs. 2007).
  - ↗ 86% of respondents reported never to be drunk in the past 30 days, the highest level since the start of ESPAD surveys in 1995.
- The pace of improvements has somewhat slowed in the past four years.
- Notable differences exist between countries: certain positive trends are more pronounced in some countries, while they are less so in others.
- As demonstrated by these differences, there seems to be no one-size-fits-all approach to address the issue of underage drinking across Europe.
- Targeted, country-specific interventions adapted to their respective social and cultural contexts seem best-suited to advance the positive trends further in the future.
- Concerted, multi-stakeholder efforts also seem to contribute to the positive trends observed.

## About the ESPAD report

The 7<sup>th</sup> data-collection survey was conducted in 35 countries during the spring and autumn of 2019 and published in November 2020. It paints a comprehensive picture of the present situation among 15–16-year-old school students as regards the use of cigarettes, alcohol, illicit drugs, inhalants, new psychoactive substances and pharmaceuticals, as well as providing insights into gambling, social media use and gaming. The **full report** offers an overview of trends for the period 1995-2019 and is available at: <http://espad.org/>

## About this summary document

This document contains a summary of the report's key findings with regards to alcohol consumption in EU countries plus Norway. It has been prepared for educational purposes by spiritsEUROPE in March 2021 based on the data contained in the full ESPAD report published in November 2020. For any enquiries regarding the summary document please contact: [info@spirits.eu](mailto:info@spirits.eu)

# Key Findings

1.	<p><b>Alcohol consumption in the past month</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fell by -22% on EU-average (vs. 2003 levels)</li> <li>dropped to the lowest overall levels observed (51% of respondents) in 2019</li> <li>differs between countries from 1 in 4 respondents (lowest level/SWE) to 3 in 4 (highest/DK) in 2019</li> <li>declined in all countries (vs. 2007, except Hungary)</li> <li>experienced a decrease in 14 EU MS &amp; an increase in 10 EU countries (vs. 2015)</li> </ul>
2.	<p><b>Beverage type</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>beer remains the most consumed alcoholic beverage type, followed by spirits drinks and wine</li> <li>consumption preferences are converging: the gap between beer, wine and spirits is narrowing</li> </ul>
3.	<p><b>Consumption at the last drinking day</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fell from 5cl to 4.8cl pure alcohol on EU-average (since 2015)</li> </ul>
4.	<p><b>Heavy episodic drinking<sup>1</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fell by -19% on EU-average (since 2007)</li> <li>stands at 37% of respondents on EU-average in 2019 (the lowest level since 2003)</li> <li>differs between countries from 1 in 5 (lowest level/EU MS SWE, even lower for NOR) to more than 1 in 2 (highest/DK)</li> <li>continued to decline in all but 3 countries between 2003 and 2019</li> </ul>
5.	<p><b>Frequent heavy episodic drinking<sup>2</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fell by -24% on EU-average (vs. 2007)</li> <li>stands at 14% of respondents on EU-average in 2019</li> <li>saw a 1 percentage point increase among girls (since 2015), but the proportion is still below boys in 2019</li> <li>differs between countries from 6% (lowest level/FIN) to 28% (highest/DK) in 2019</li> <li>decreased in all but 4 countries between 2007 and 2019</li> </ul>
6.	<p><b>Never reported drunkenness in the last month</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>86% of respondents reported never to be drunk in the past month on EU-average, the highest level since the start of ESPAD surveys in 1995</li> <li>This share increased by +23% on EU-average (since 2003)</li> <li>The share increased in all countries with one exception (since 2003).</li> <li>Differs between countries from 93% (top level/Lithuania) to 60% (worst level/Denmark) in 2019</li> </ul>
7.	<p><b>Other observations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no clear link between the frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption, nor between frequency and heavy episodic drinking as well as reported drunkenness</li> <li>Moreover, the relationship between heavy episodic drinking and reported drunkenness seems to be rather weak</li> </ul>

1 = +5 drinks on a single occasion in the last month

2 = +5 drinks at least 3x on a single occasion in the last month

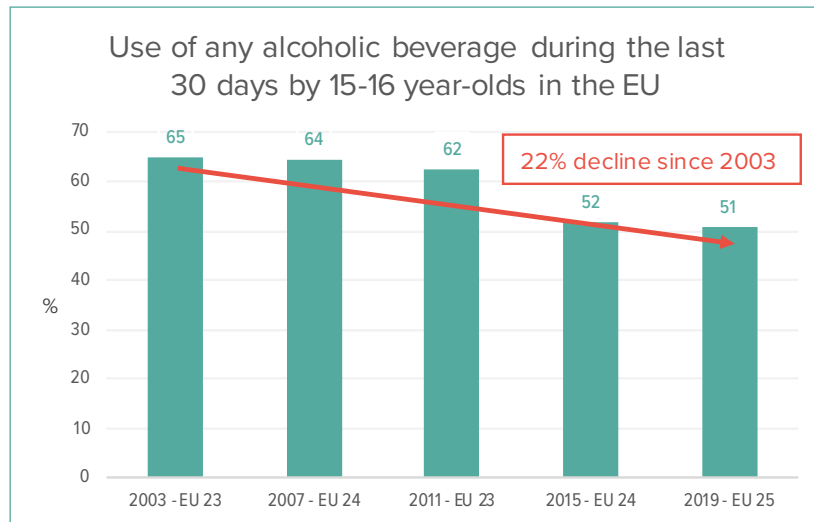
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## Note on country definitions:

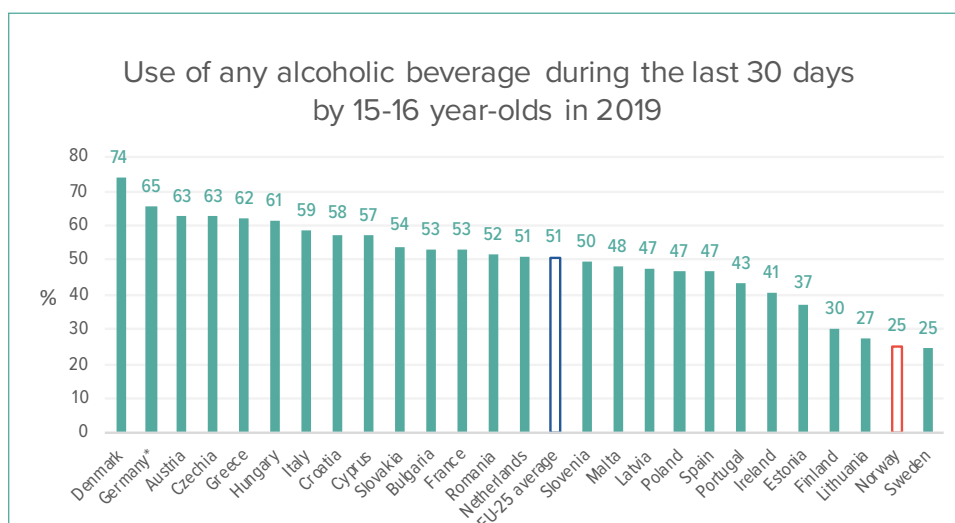
- **Spain:** participated in the ESPAD survey for the first time in 2019. When trend data for Spain is displayed, it refers to a similar national survey.
- **Germany:** only 1 federal state (Bavaria) participated in 2019 and stands for Germany. In previous years, 6 federal states participated in Germany. Hence, findings for Germany are not necessarily representative for the entire country.
- **Belgium:** refers only to Flanders and hence is not necessarily representative for entire Belgium.

# 1. Alcohol consumption in the last 30 days



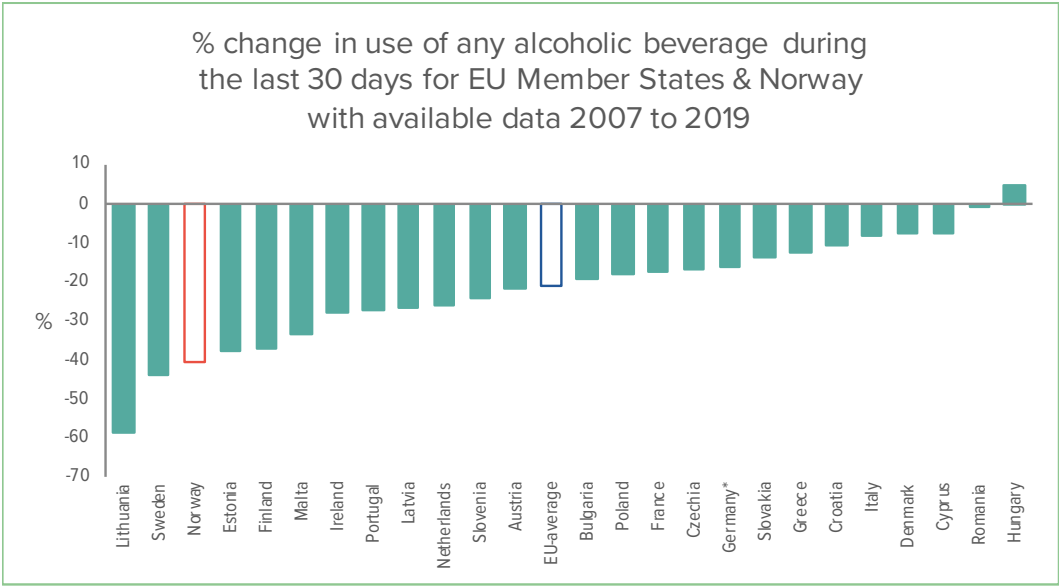
Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

Since the start of ESPAD surveys in 1995, any alcohol consumption during the last 30 days in the EU, reached its lowest level ever in 2019 for both 15-year-old girls and boys. The decline since 2003 (that survey year contained already 23 EU Member States) amounts to 22% for both boys and girls together. A stronger decline can be observed for boys than for girls. Indeed, last months alcohol use by girls remained unchanged at 51% between 2015 and 2019. While in the past the level of any alcohol use by boys was higher than by girls, it reached the same level in 2019.



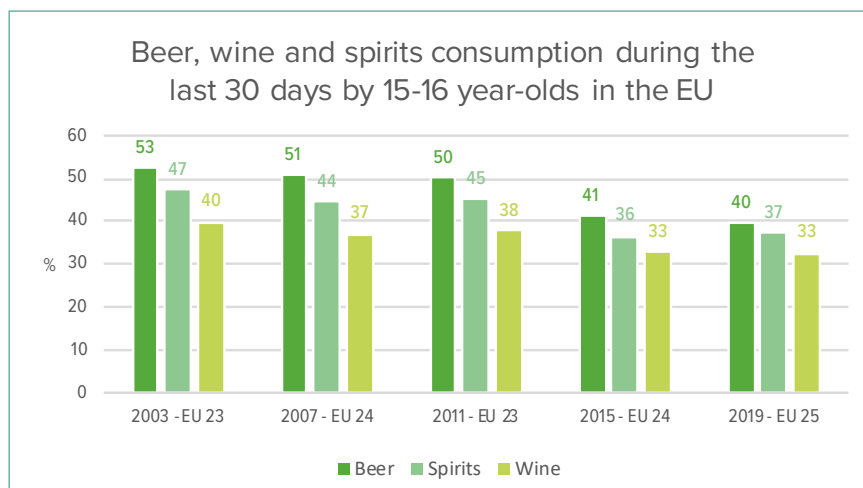
Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

Significant differences in the proportion reporting any alcohol consumption during the last month can be observed among countries. In Denmark, 74% reported some alcohol consumption in the last month, compared to 25% in Sweden in 2019. **Compared to the survey wave in 2015**, the biggest decline can be observed in Lithuania (-20%), Cyprus (-15%), and Malta (-10%). The sharpest increase occurred in Ireland (+16%), Norway (+14%), and Hungary (+11%). However, the proportion of 15–16-year-olds that reported any alcohol consumption **in 2011 compared to 2019**, declined in all countries apart from Romania (+5%) and Hungary (+0.5%). The biggest decline occurred in Lithuania (-57%). The proportion of 15–16-year-olds that reported any alcohol use in the last month declined in all countries (apart from Hungary, +5%) between **2007 and 2019**.



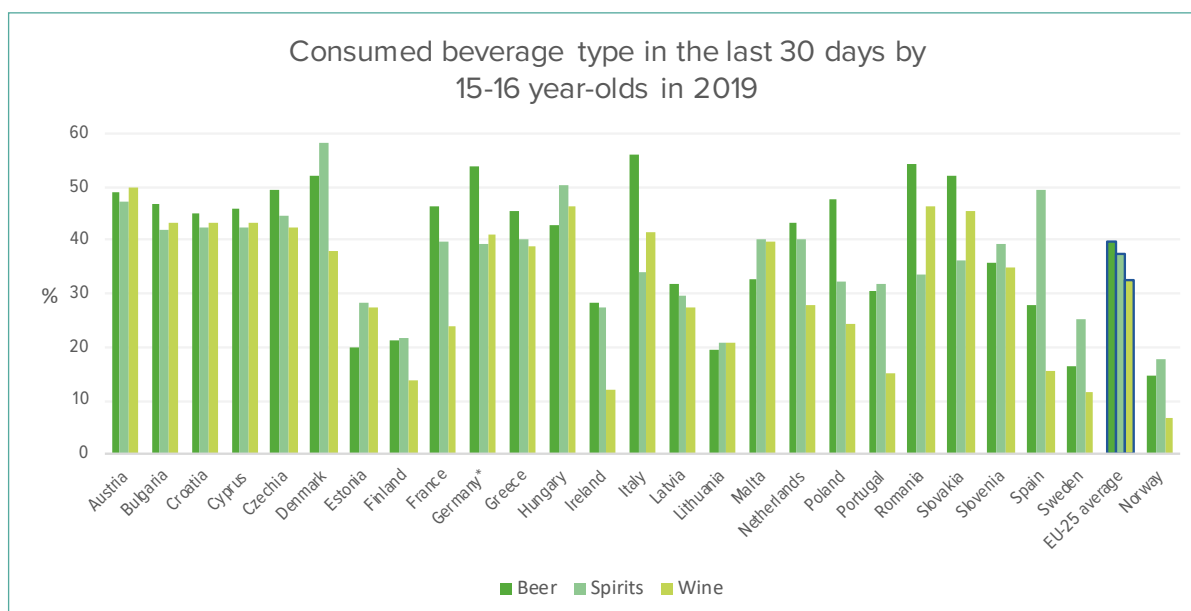
Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

## 2. Beverage type



Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

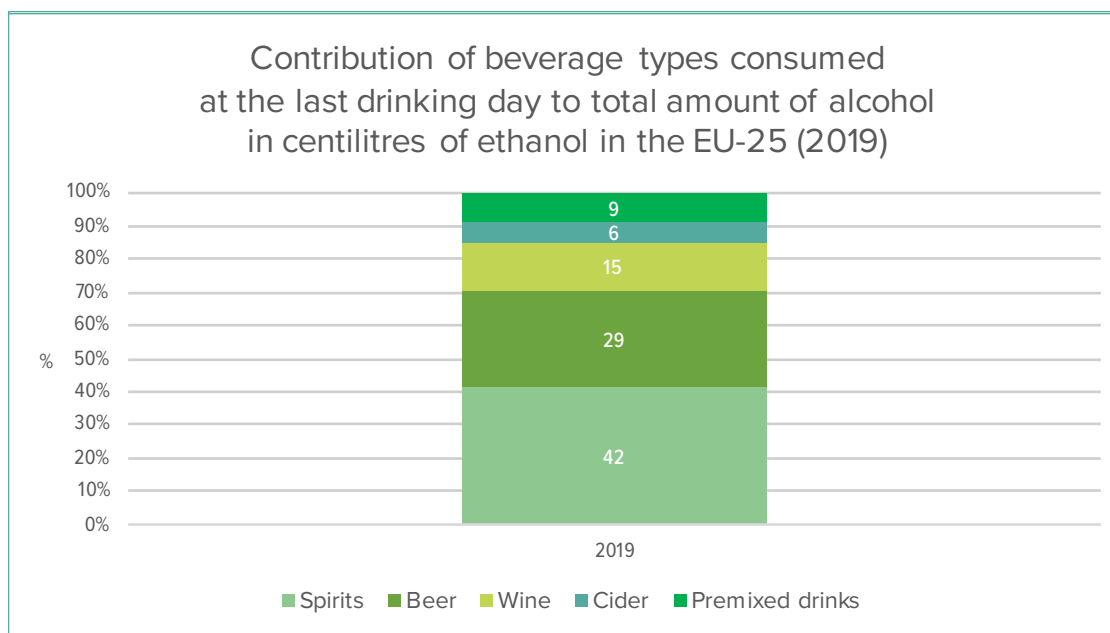
In the EU, the preferred beverage type remains beer followed by spirits and wine since 2003. However the gap between beer and spirits declined over the years. In 2019, 40% of 15–16-year-olds reported some beer consumption within the last 30 days, 37% some spirits and 33% some wine consumption. Beer is the preferred beverage type in 15 (58% of countries), spirits in 10 (38% of countries) and wine in 1 out of 26 countries in 2019.



Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

At the last drinking day, 43% reported some beer consumption, 41% some spirits, and 26% some wine consumption in 2019. In 14 out of 26 countries, beer was the most popular choice of beverage, followed by spirits (in 11 out of 25 countries) and wine (in 1 country).

### 3. Consumption at the last drinking day

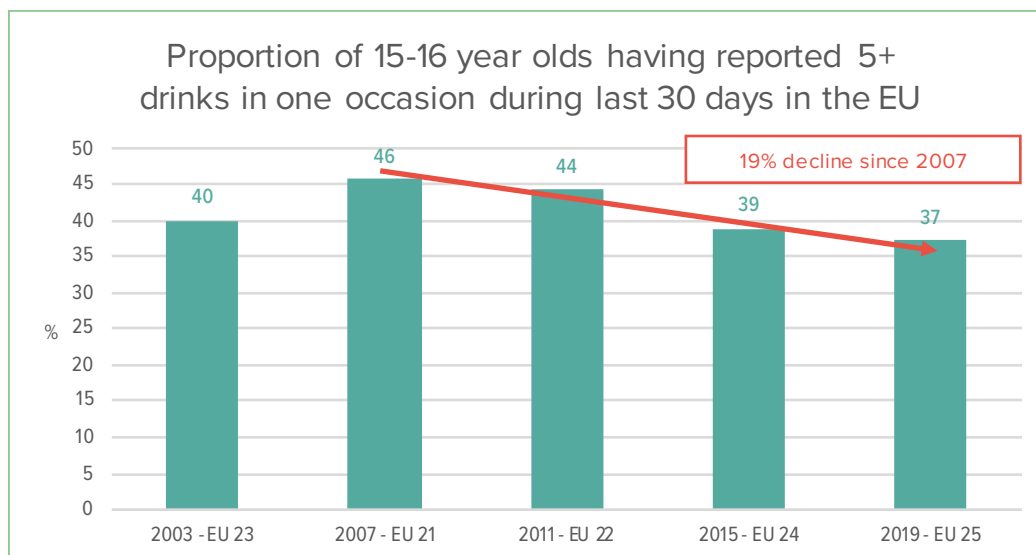


Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

Estimated alcohol consumption in centilitres of pure alcohol at the last drinking day declined in the EU from 5.0cl in 2015 to 4.8cl in 2019. On EU-average, 42% of pure alcohol consumption at the last drinking day was contributed by spirits drinks, 29% by beer, and 15% by wine in 2019.



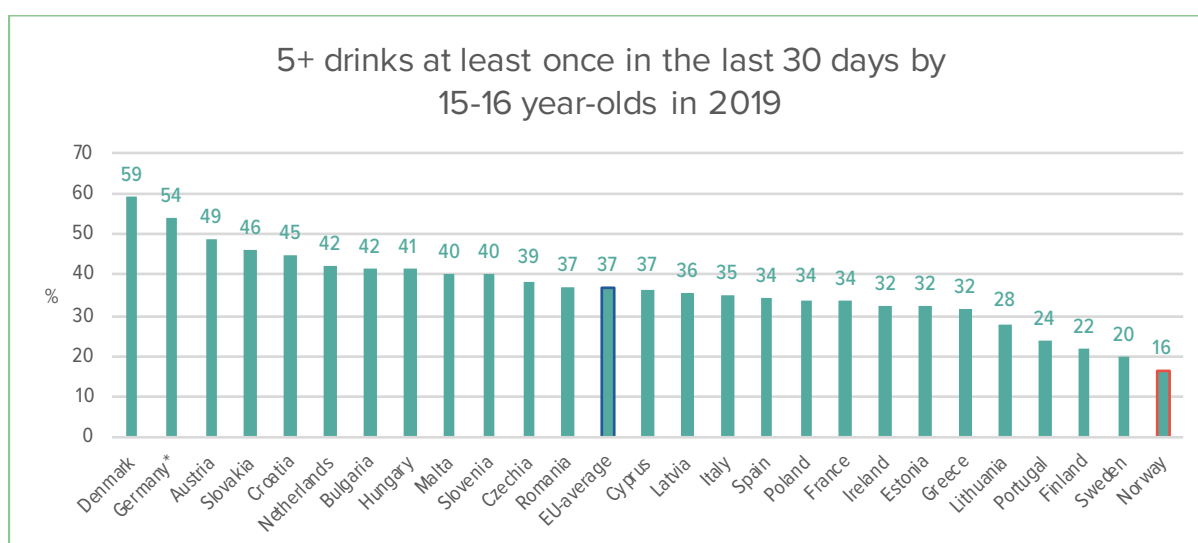
## 4. Heavy episodic drinking



Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

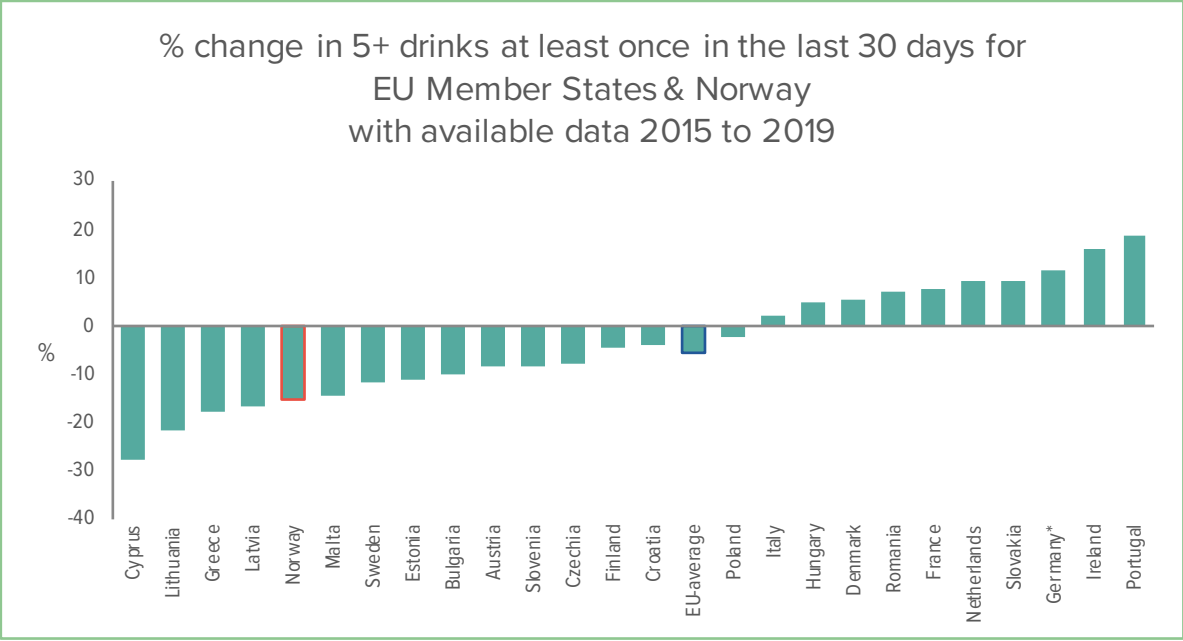
Since 1999, the level of heavy episodic drinking (5+ drinks on one occasion) at least once in the last 30 days reached its record low level on EU-average in 2019: 37% (the level was slightly lower in 1995 but referred to only 11 countries). A 19% decline can be observed in heavy episodic drinking between 2007 (when it peaked) for boys and girls together on EU-average. The declining trend is stronger for boys than girls, but the level of reported heavy episodic drinking at least once in the last 30 days remained slightly higher (2 percentage points) for boys compared to girls in the EU.

Significant differences in the proportion reporting heavy episodic drinking at least once in the last month can be observed among countries. In Denmark, almost 60% reported heavy episodic drinking at least once in the last month, compared to 20% in Sweden (or 16% in Norway) in 2019. Compared to the survey wave in 2015, the biggest decline can be observed in Cyprus (-28%), Lithuania (-22%), and Greece (-18%). The sharpest increase occurred in Portugal (+19%), Ireland (+16%), and Germany (+11%).



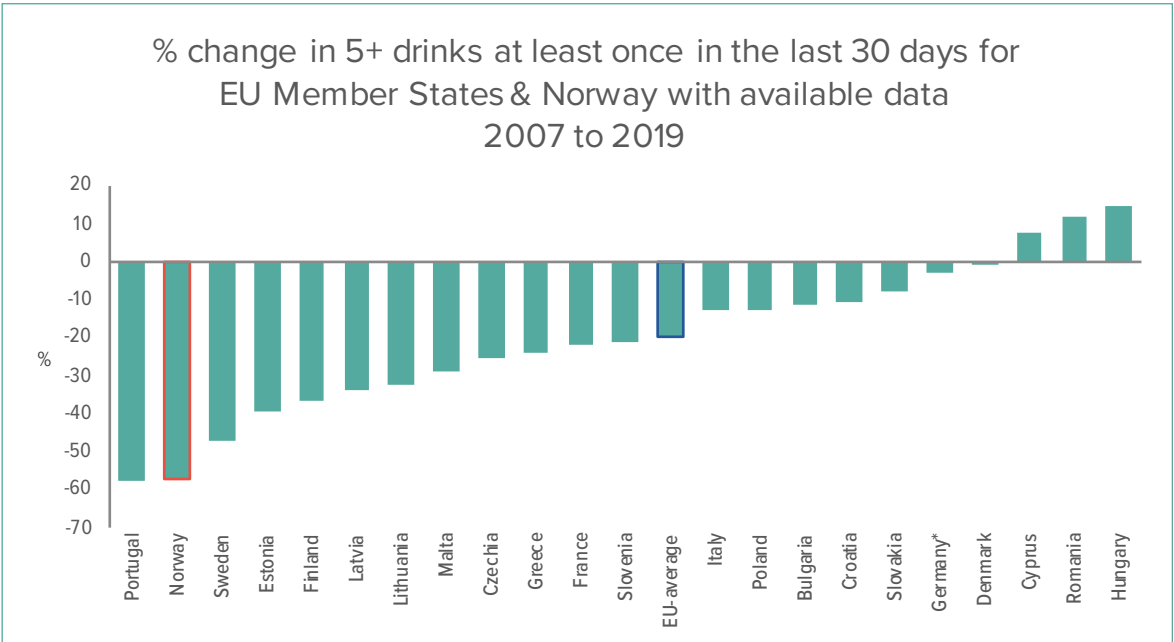
Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

Between 2011 and 2019, increases in heavy episodic drinking at least once in the last 30 days can be observed in 3 countries (Portugal & Denmark (both +6%) and Romania (+2%)), in all remaining countries a decline can be observed, up to -45% in Norway, followed by Estonia (-40%), Finland (-37%), Sweden (-36%), Greece (-29%) or Czechia (-28%).



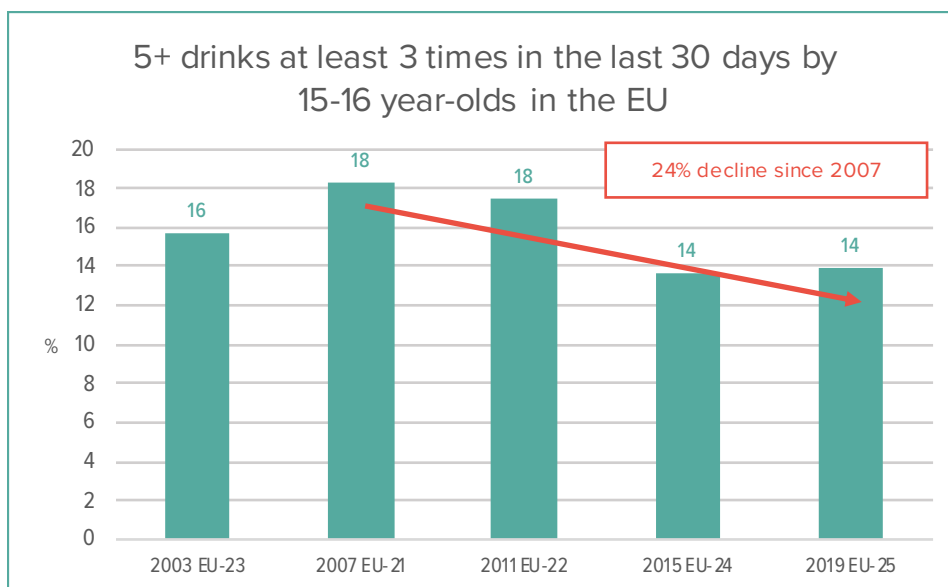
Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

Between 2007 and 2019, increases in heavy episodic drinking at least once in the last 30 days can be observed for Hungary, Romania and Cyprus, the remaining countries experienced a decline: in Portugal and Norway (-57%), Sweden (-47%) or Estonia (-40%).



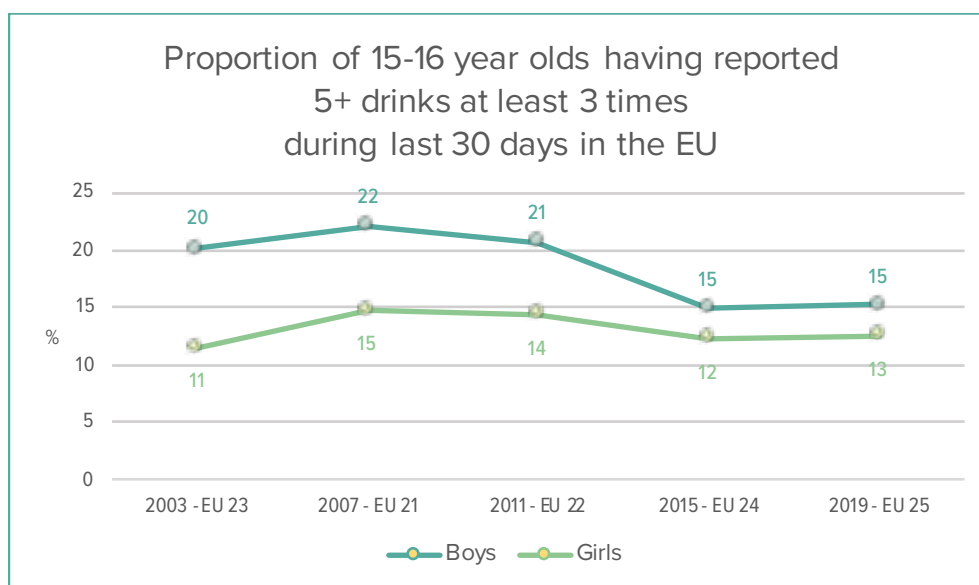
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# 5. Frequent heavy episodic drinking



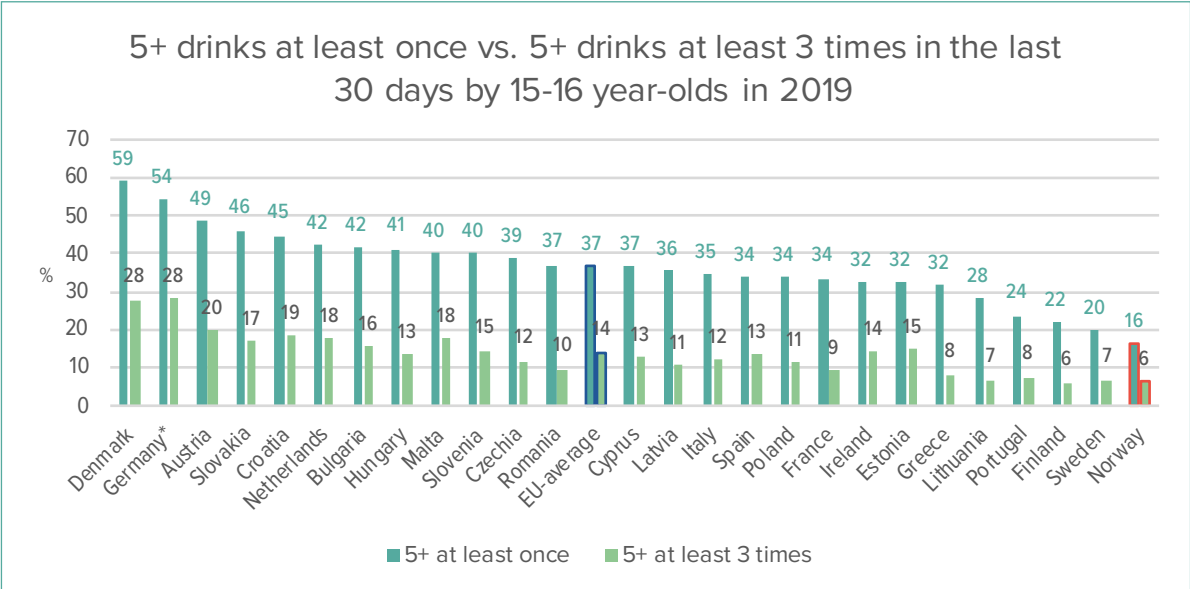
Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

Heavy episodic drinking (5+ drinks on one occasion) at least 3 times in the last 30 days decreased by 24% between 2007 and 2019 for both girls and boys together on EU-average. It remained stable between 2015 and 2019 at 14%. More frequent heavy episodic drinking reached its lowest ever level in history for boys in the EU in 2015 and remained stable at 15%. However, for girls, a 1 percentage point increase can be observed between 2015 and 2019 on EU-average. Note that the level in 2019 is still below the level from the year 2007 and 2011. Moreover, the level for girls was and remained always below the level of boys.



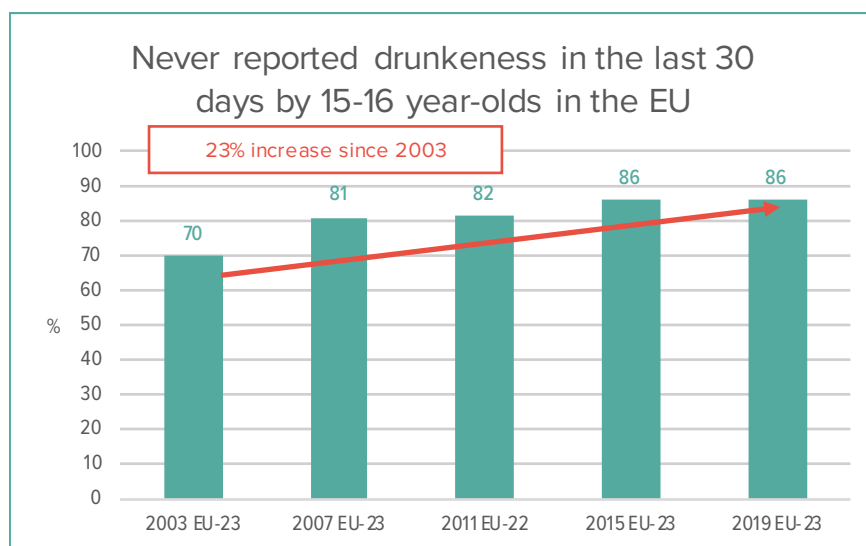
Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

Frequent heavy episodic drinking levels differ across EU countries. From levels below 10%, such as in Finland or Norway (both 6%), Swede or Lithuania (both 7%), Portugal or Greece (both 8%), and France (9%), to levels close or above 20%, such as in Croatia (19%), Austria (20%), Denmark or Germany (both 28%).



Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

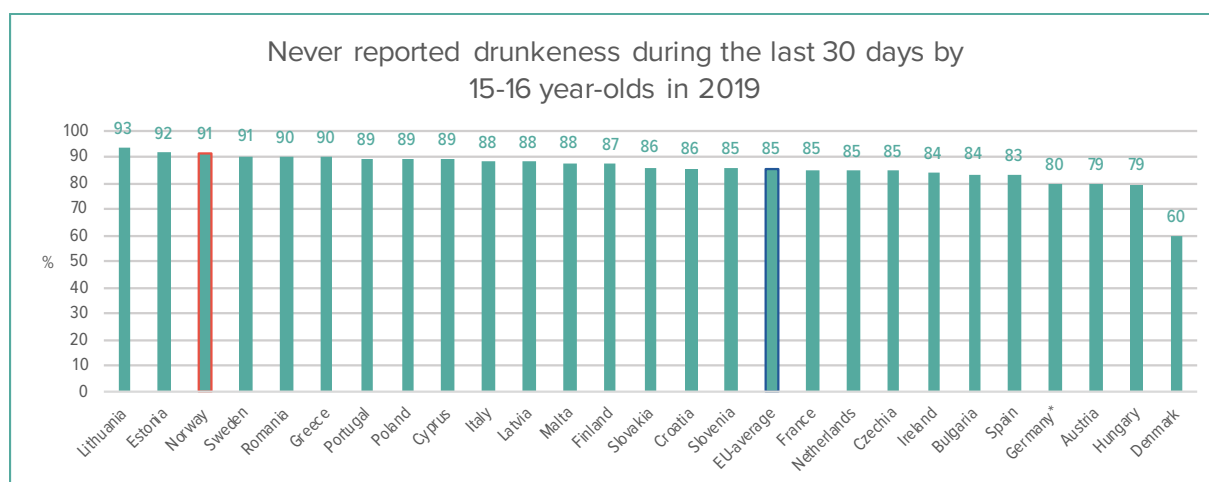
## 6. Never reported drunkenness in the last month



Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

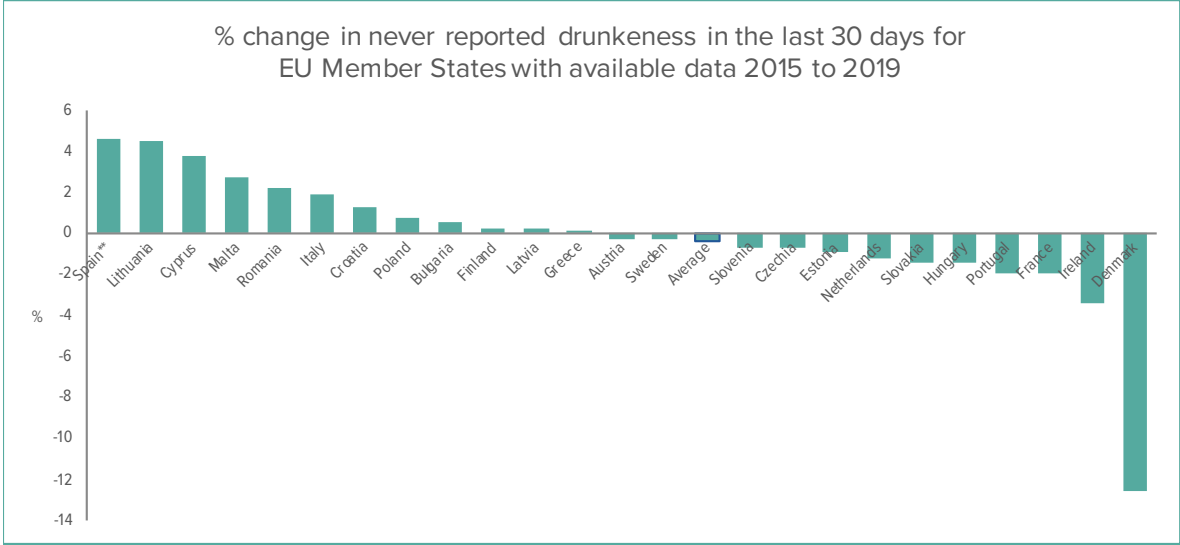
In 2019, never reported drunkenness in the last 30 days reached the same level as in 2015 (86%) for both girls and boys together on EU-average: the highest level since the start of ESPAD surveys in 1995. Since 2003, never reported drunkenness in the last 30 days rose by 23% for both girls and boys together on EU-average.

In 2019, country differences can be observed as regards never reported drunkenness in the last 30 days, though the range is relatively small (if Denmark is being ignored): from 79% in Austria and Hungary to 93% in Lithuania. Denmark is the worst performing country with 60%. Lithuania is followed by Estonia (92%), Norway (92%), Sweden (91%), Romania and Greece (both 90%), Portugal and Poland (both 89%), Cyprus (89%), Italy (88%), Latvia (88%), Malta (88%), Finland (87%), Slovakia (86%), Croatia (86%), Slovenia (85%), EU-average (85%), France (85%), Netherlands (85%), Czechia (85%), Ireland (84%), Bulgaria (84%), Spain (83%), Germany\* (80%), Austria (79%), Hungary (79%), Denmark (60%).



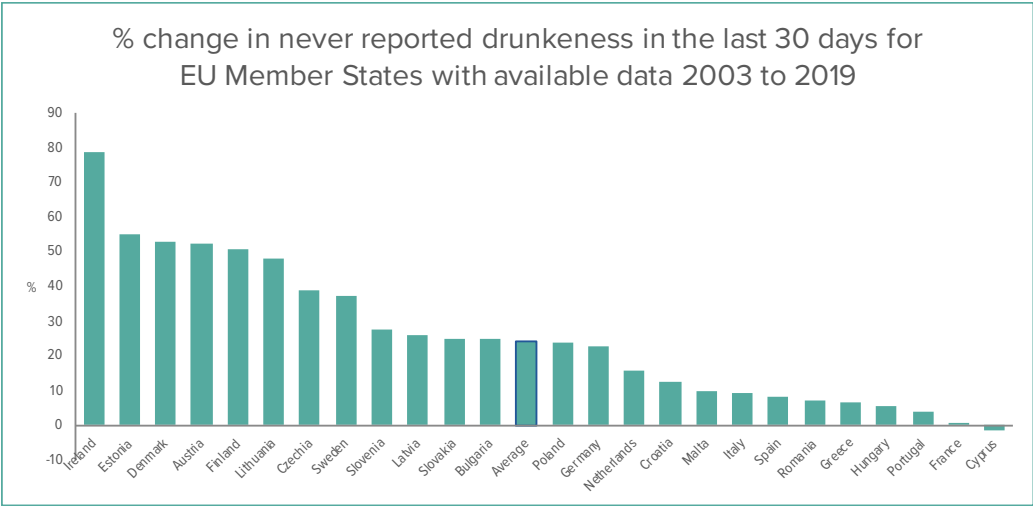
Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

Between 2015 and 2019, never reported drunkenness increased and decreased in some countries. The largest decrease can be observed for Denmark (-13%), Ireland (-3%), France and Portugal (both -2%). The sharpest increase in never reported drunkenness between 2015 and 2019 can be observed in Lithuania (+5%), Cyprus (+4%), Malta (+3%), Romania and Italy (both +2%).



Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

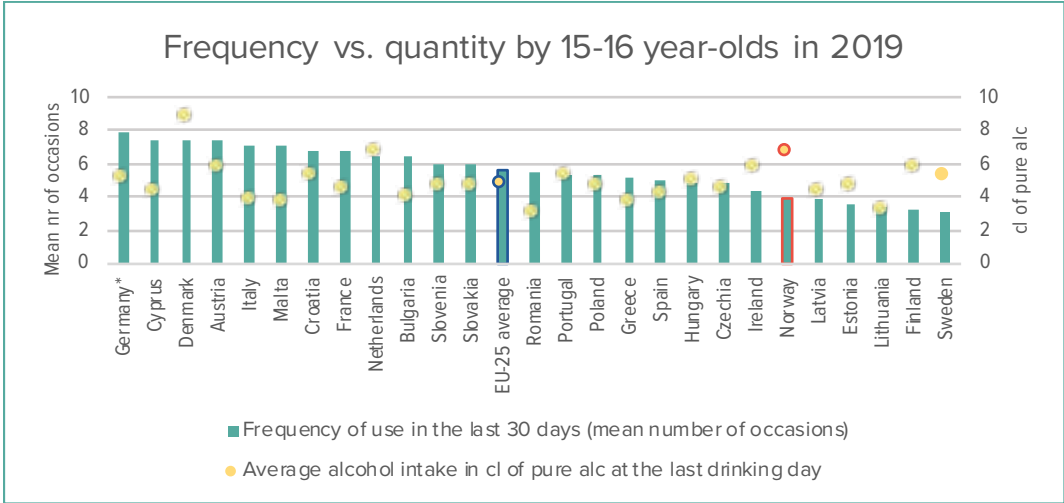
However, the change between 2003 and 2019 (longer-term trend) is more positive. Never reported drunkenness increased in all countries apart from Cyprus.



Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

# 7. Other comparisons

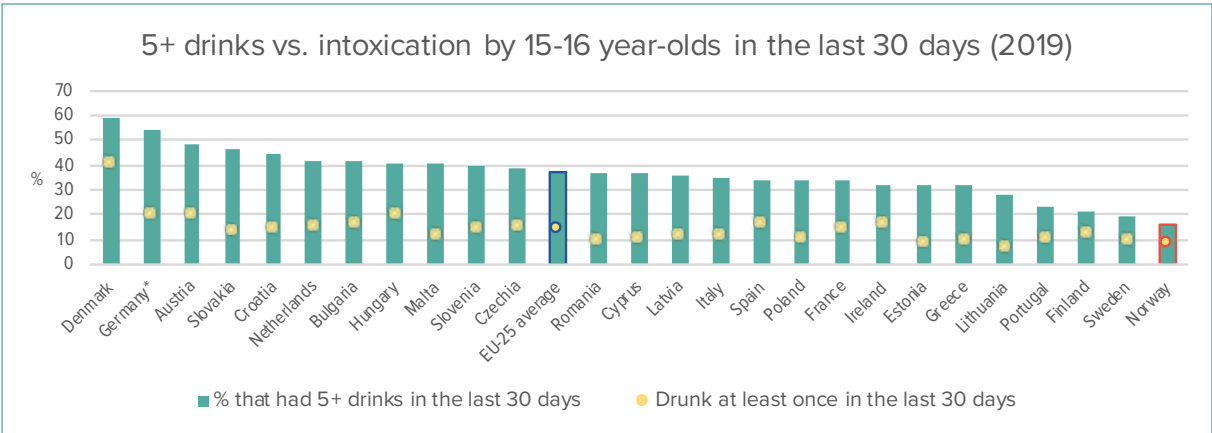
If we compare frequency of any alcohol consumption in the last 30 days to the average quantity in cl of pure alcohol consumed at the last drinking day, it seems that these two indicators are not correlated to each other. In other words, higher quantities of alcohol consumption at the last drinking day does not depend on the frequency of alcohol use.



Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

The relationship between frequency of any alcohol consumption in the last 30 days seems to be slightly closer related to heavy episodic drinking during the last 30 days, but the correlation appears to be rather weak. The same applies to frequency of any alcohol consumption in the last 30 days and at least one-time reported drunkenness in the last 30 days.

The relationship seems to be similar for heavy episodic drinking (5+ drinks on one occasion) at least once in the last 30 days and reported intoxication in the last 30 days.



Source: [espad.org](http://espad.org)

# Conclusions

Overall, there is a positive trend in less alcohol consumption, fewer heavy episodic drinking occasions and an increase in never reported drunkenness on EU average over the last decade. The improvement slowed down or remained stable between the latest two survey waves (2015 and 2019).

There are significant differences across countries and especially between the last two survey waves (2015 and 2019) with several positive trends, but also some negative developments to be addressed at local level.

It seems that the multi-stakeholder approach to reduce underage drinking contributed to positive trends. Country differences indicate that there is no one-size-fits-all solution and that different countries/genders could be selected for specific, targeted intervention that fit to social and cultural conditions.









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