



Estimates of Average Adult Alcohol Consumption 2001-2011 and International Comparison

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COMPARISON OF LEVEL

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Average adult consumption of alcohol

The level and trend of average alcohol consumption are important elements in the debate on alcohol policy. The data presented below are discussed more fully in a forthcoming report for the Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland. Composite average alcohol consumption is derived from aggregating the alcohol content of the different beverages based on Revenue Commissioners data and relating that to the population aged 15 and over from the CSO population estimates or where available the Census of Population. In the estimates used here, cider is measured with a 5% alcohol content and wine with a 12.5 % alcohol content. Data for alcohol clearances in 2011 are available for January to November. We assume the decline in total alcohol consumption experienced in the first eleven months of the year (0.6%) is reduced to 0.5% for the full year.

Average alcohol consumption declined from its peak in 2001 of 14.4 lpa to 13.5 lpa in 2003. It broadly stayed at this level until 2007 and in 2008 it declined to 12.5 lpa.

There was a further decline in 2009, followed by an increase in 2010 and no change in 2011.

The movements in 2009 and 2010 were influenced by the changing level of cross border purchases of alcohol. Part of the recorded decline in 2009 and part of the recorded increase in 2010 are due to this influence. The 2011 estimate is based on the CSO April 2011 estimate of population and an estimated reduction of 0.5% in the total volume of alcohol. The number of adults declined slightly in 2011 compared to 2010.

Table 1: Average adult consumption of alcohol 2001 to 2011

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 (estimate)
Average per adult consumption lpa	14.4	14.3	13.5	13.6	13.5	13.5	13.5	12.5	11.4	12.0	12.0

Source: As identified in the text.

Overall, adult average consumption of alcohol has declined over the past decade but not continuously each year. A big decline occurred in 2003 compared with 2001 and 2002. Following several years at the same level there was a further decline in 2008

and again in 2009. Average consumption increased in 2010 and has stayed the same in 2011. The estimated 2011 level of 12.0 lpa is 17% below the 2001 peak.

The average consumption level is determined by the number of adults and the total volume of consumption. It should be noted that pre-census estimates of the population from 2007 to 2011 (2006 was a census year) will be changed in light of the higher than expected population identified by the 2011 Census of Population.

The 2011 census population was 97,000 persons higher than the earlier estimated 2011 population or 2.2% of a difference. These revised populations for 2007 to 2010 will be included in the April 2012 Estimates of Population and Migration. In this exercise, we use the currently available population details from the CSO for 2007 to 2010 and the 2011 figures are also from the Estimates to maintain consistency. The effect of the revisions and use of the 2011 census population will be to lower the measured average alcohol consumption levels for 2007 to 2011 by a small amount which will, in turn, increase the rate of decline from 2001 to 2011. If the proportionate change in the number of adults was the same as the total population the 12.0 lpa estimate for 2011 would be revised down to about 11.8 lpa.

International comparisons of alcohol consumption

International comparisons of alcohol consumption are also important elements in the discussions on alcohol policy. Unfortunately comparable up to date 2010 data is not available. The OECD health indicators database is used. Data is available for 2009 for most the OECD countries. However, for some countries 2008 data is the latest

available. We present data for 2001, the year of highest per adult consumption in Ireland, 2005 and 2009 (or 2008).

It is of interest that between 2001 and 2009 (2008 in some cases), average consumption increased in several countries and declined in Ireland along with among others Austria, Denmark, France and Germany. The Irish consumption level in the OECD database is slightly lower than estimated in Table 1 due to different alcohol conversion factors.

Ireland's consumption level in 2009 is exceeded by Austria, Czech Republic and France (2008). In 2001, the Irish consumption level was the highest of the sample of countries in the table. In 2005 it was also the highest. In 2009, it was fourth highest.

Table 2: Alcohol Consumption per Adult LPA various years, Sample of OECD Countries

	2001	2005	2009	Change 2001 - 2009
Australia	9.6	9.8	10.1	+
Austria	12.8	12.6	12.2	-
Canada	7.6	7.8	8.2	+
Czech Rep	11.8	12.0	12.1	+
Denmark	13.1	12.7	10.1	-
Finland	9.0	10.0	10.0	+

France	14.2	12.7	12.3(2008)	-
Germany	10.4	10.0	9.7	-
Ireland	14.4	13.4	11.3	-
Netherlands	9.9	9.6	9.4	-
New Zealand	8.8	9.3	9.3	+
Norway	5.5	6.4	6.7	+
Sweden	6.5	6.6	7.4	+
Switzerland	11.1	10.1	10.1	-
United Kingdom	10.7	11.4	10.2	-
United States	8.3	8.4	8.8(2008)	+

Source: OECD

From a health policy perspective, it is of interest to discover what effect, if any, the decline in average consumption over the past decade has had on the incidence of harmful consumption behaviour and on the consequences of alcohol misuse.