

# **Estimate of Alcohol Consumption per Adult in 2015**

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## **Introduction**

This objective of this brief paper is to calculate the 2015 level of average per adult consumption of alcohol. The data used are from the CSO Population and Migration Estimates for April 2015 (published in August 2015) and the Revenue Commissioners' alcohol clearances data (the 2015 figures were made available on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2016). The level and trend in average alcohol consumption are important elements in public policy evaluation and design.

## **Methodology**

The measurement approach follows standard international practice and also the practice of previous Irish estimates by Foley (2015). The aggregate alcohol content of the different beverages are based on 5% alcohol by volume for cider, 12.5% alcohol content for wine and the actual alcohol estimates provided in the clearances data by Revenue for spirits and beer. Some international and national estimates use lower alcohol contents for wine and cider. The international convention of defining the adult population as 15 years and over is used, although this is, of course, an inaccurate measure of the adult population. The population data refer to April of each year. Consumption is equated with clearances as is normally done, although clearances are not an exact measure of consumption due to factors such as unrecorded out of state sourcing, stock changes and the effects of outward and inward tourism. These and other limitations of the alcohol consumption measurement methodology are discussed in Foley (2015).

## **Average alcohol consumption per adult 2014 and 2015**

The data are presented in Table 1. The aggregate alcohol clearances and the "adult" populations are presented. These two are combined to provide the average per adult consumption.

**Table 1. Average per adult alcohol consumption 2014 and 2015**

	2014	2015	% change 2014/2015
Litres of pure alcohol (LPA), Total consumption	39,838,510	39,711,197	-0.3
Population aged 15 and over, millions	3.5937	3.6060	+0.3
Litres of pure alcohol per adult (LPA)	11.086	11.013	-0.7
Beer (LPA)	18,820,081	18,538,561	-1.5
Cider (LPA)	3,120,539	2,905,029	-6.9
Spirits (LPA)	7,217,997	7,357,644	+1.9
Wine (LPA)	10,679,893	10,909,963	+2.2

Sources. CSO Population and Migration Estimates August 2015, Revenue Commissioners' Clearances data March 2015.

Total alcohol consumption as measured by clearances decreased slightly by 0.3% in 2015. The number of adults increased slightly by 0.3%. Beer and cider decreased. Spirits and wine both increased. Average per adult alcohol consumption decreased in 2015, It was 11.086 lpa in 2014 compared with 11.013 lpa in 2015, a decrease of 0.7%. Average per adult consumption is now slightly above 11 lpa. By comparison, it was at around 11 lpa in 1994 and peaked at 14.44 lpa in 2001. Since 2001 the average per adult alcohol consumption has declined by 23.7%.

The pattern of annual average per adult consumption of alcohol over the past five years is shown below:

	lpa
2015	11.013
2014	11.086
2013	10.730
2012	11.614
2011	11.692

### Summary

Average per adult alcohol consumption decreased by 0.7% in 2015 compared with 2014; from 11.086 lpa to 11.013 lpa. Total consumption decreased by 0.3% in 2015 and there was an increase in the adult population of 0.3%. Beer volume decreased by 1.5%. Cider volume decreased by 6.9%. Spirits volume increased by 1.9%. Wine volume increased by 2.2%. Since its peak in 2001 the average per adult alcohol consumption has declined by 23.7%.

## **Appendix. International Context**

The objective of this paper is to estimate the 2015 average alcohol consumption per adult. It is useful to put the Irish figure into an international context. The latest OECD Health Statistics for 2015 reports an OECD average alcohol consumption (for 2013 or latest year available) of 8.8 lpa, Ireland in this database is measured as 10.6 lpa for 2013 (Foley estimates the Irish 2013 level to be 10.7 lpa).

The OECD average has been identified as a policy target for Ireland. However, this is not necessarily appropriate as an exact target. The OECD database includes far distant and culturally specific countries such as Turkey and Israel with very low alcohol consumption of 2.6 lpa and 1.4 lpa respectively and several other countries with "lowish" consumption such as Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico and USA. The non EU countries in the database have an average consumption of 7.1 lpa. The 21 EU members included in the OECD database have an average consumption of 9.9 lpa compared to the 10.6 recorded in the database for Ireland. Ireland is not widely out of line with this. These figures exclude unrecorded consumption which can be relatively high in some countries, such as, for example, Portugal.

Ireland is ranked ninth highest in the OECD database with all eight higher countries being from the EU. This ranking contrasts with 2001, which was Ireland's peak consumption level, when Ireland was the highest alcohol consuming country in the OECD.

The eight EU countries, of those in the OECD database, with higher alcohol consumption than Ireland (figures relate to 2013 or latest available year) were:

Austria 12.2 lpa

Czech Republic 11.5 lpa

Estonia 11.8 lpa

France 11.1 lpa

Germany 10.9 lpa

Hungary 11.1 lpa

Luxembourg 11.0 lpa

Poland 10.8 lpa

**References**

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