

Estimate of Irish Alcohol Consumption per Adult in 2024 with some International Comparisons for 2022

Anthony Foley
Emeritus Associate Professor of Economics
Dublin City University Business School

Commissioned by the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland
June 2025

Introduction

This objective of this brief paper is to calculate the 2023 level of average per adult consumption of alcohol. There is no official value of this indicator. The data used are from the CSO Population and Migration Estimates for April 2024 (published in August 2024) and the Revenue Commissioners' alcohol clearances data. The 2024 figures are derived from monthly data for 2024 which are available on the Revenue website.

Methodology

The level and trend in average alcohol consumption are important elements in public policy evaluation and design. The measurement approach follows standard international practice and also the practice of previous Irish estimates by Foley undertaken for DIGI such as (Foley 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024).

The aggregate alcohol contents 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 are used. Some international and national estimates use different 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. Obviously, if the adult population was measured as 18 years and over the average per adult consumption would be higher than the level based on the 15 years and older segment of the population.

Consumption is equated with clearances as is normally done in estimates such as these, although clearances are not an exact measure of consumption due to factors such as unrecorded out of state sourcing including duty free purchases, 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). There

are also other aspects of consumption apart from the average consumption measure such as the pattern of consumption which are not considered here.

Since the second quarter of 2024, Revenue publishes monthly data on a more detailed classification than its previous quarterly data. In addition, it publishes the usual annual summary in its Excise Volumes by Commodity series. The alcohol data used in this report are from the finalised annual series.

Average alcohol consumption per adult 2023 and 2024

The primary objective of this paper is to estimate the 2024 average alcohol consumption and compare this with the 2023 level.

The relevant 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 alcohol consumption.

Table 1. Average per adult alcohol consumption 2023 and 2024

	2023	2024	% change 2023/2024
Litres of pure alcohol (lpa), Total consumption	42,464,443	41,453,854	-2.4
Adult Population (aged 15 and over), millions	4.270	4.370	+2.3
Litres of pure alcohol per adult (LPA)	9.94 (rounded to 9.9)	9.49 (rounded to 9.5)	-4.5 (-4.0 based on rounded figures)
Beer (LPA)	18,230,592	17,943,359	-1.6
Cider (LPA)	2,629,594	2,543,710	-3.3
Spirits (LPA)	9,651,544	9,256,615	-4.1
Wine (LPA)	11,952,713	11,710,170	-2.0

Sources. CSO Population and Migration Estimates, August 2024. Revenue Commissioners, Alcohol Clearances data, Revenue Website, 2025, Excise Volumes by Commodity series.

Total alcohol consumption decreased by 2.4% in 2024 compared with 2023.

The number of adults (as defined by 15 years and over) increased by 2.3% in 2024. This resulted in a decrease of 4.5% in 2024 compared with 2023 in average alcohol consumption per adult. It was 9.94 LPA in 2023 compared with 9.49 LPA in 2024.

In figures rounded to one decimal place, the average per adult consumption is 9.9 LPA in 2023 compared to 9.5 LPA in 2024. This gives a decrease of 4.0% for 2024.

By long term comparison, average alcohol consumption was 10.9 LPA in 1990 and peaked at 14.44 LPA in 2001. Since 2001 the average per adult alcohol consumption

has declined by 34.3%, or over one third. Average per adult consumption dropped below 10 LPA in 2023 and continued to drop further below 10 LPA in 2024

Beverage Shares

There were volume decreases in all four beverage categories in 2024 compared with 2023. Wine volume decreased by 2.0%. The spirits consumption volume decreased by 4.1%. Beer volume decreased by 1.6%. Cider volume decreased by 3.3%.

In 2024, wine accounted for 28.2% of the total alcohol market by volume of alcohol content. Wine in 2023 accounted for 28.1% of total alcohol consumption The wine share was 13.2% in 2000. Beer was 56.6% of total alcohol consumption in 2000, and is now 43.3%. Cider is 6.1% of the 2024 total. Spirits is 22.3% of the 2024 total and was 22.7% of the 2023 total.

Table 2 Share of each beverage in total alcohol consumption 2023 and 2024

Beverage	2023 share %	2024 % share
Beer	42.9	43.3
Spirits	22.7	22.3
Wine	28.1	28.2
Cider	6.2	6.1

Source. derived from Revenue data

International Comparisons for 2022

The data used in this section are sourced from the OECD Data Explorer on alcohol consumption. Data is available from this source for 17 EU+UK countries for 2022. There is very limited data available for later years. The remaining EU countries' data are only available for earlier than 2022. The OECD uses a slightly different methodology than used in this report. Consequently, the figures for Ireland are slightly different from previously published DIGI estimates for 2022. The 2022 Ireland figure from the OECD is 10.2 LPA. The DIGI estimate for 2022 was 10.3 LPA in Foley (2023) and a revised figure of 10.1 LPA in Foley (2024) to account for population revisions arising from the latest Census of Population.

Of the sixteen EU+UK countries in addition to Ireland, nine exceeded the Irish average consumption of 10.2 LPA in 2022 and seven were below the Irish level. The average unweighted average consumption for the seventeen countries was 10.3 LPA which is slightly above the Irish level. By the standards of the seventeen countries in the sample Ireland is no longer an outlier in terms of high average levels of alcohol consumption as measured by the methodology used for that indicator. The full details are in Table 3.

Table 3 Average per adult alcohol consumption 2022, seventeen EU+UK countries

Country	Average per adult consumption LPA	Above/below Ireland
Austria	11.6	Above
Czechia	11.6	Above
Denmark	9.5	Below
Estonia	11.2	Above
Finland	7.6	Below
France	10.8	Above
Hungary	10.6	Above
Ireland	10.2	
Latvia	11.9	Above
Lithuania	11.2	Above
Netherlands	8.5	Below
Slovakia	9.5	Below
Slovenia	10.0	Below
Spain	11.8	Above
Sweden	7.5	Below
UK	9.9	Below
Romania	11.6	Above
Unweighted average	10.3	

Source, OECD Data Explorer, Alcohol Consumption

The 2024 Health Research Board publication on alcohol noted that Ireland was ranked 16th of 38 OECD countries on per capita consumption of alcohol. It was lower than fourteen other EU countries and lower than the UK. However, the HRB data uses 2023 data for Ireland and the other countries refer to 2021 and earlier. However, despite the data issues, it shows that Ireland is not now a high alcohol consumption country by EU or OECD standards.

Summary

Average alcohol consumption per adult, based on the methodology in this report, continued to decline in 2024.

In 2024, average alcohol consumption per adult remained well below 10 LPA at 9.49 LPA. Measured to one place of decimals it was 9.5 LPA. Average per adult alcohol consumption decreased by 4.5% in 2024 compared with 2023; from 9.94 LPA to 9.49 LPA. Total alcohol consumption volume decreased by 2.4% in 2024 and there were an increase in the adult population of 2.3%.

All four beverages categories, beer, spirits, wine and cider experienced volume decreases in 2024.

Beer accounts for 43.3% of the total alcohol market by volume of alcohol. Wine accounts for 28.2%. Spirits accounts for 22.3% and cider accounts for 6.1%.

The key features of the 2024 average alcohol consumption estimate are the continuing decline in 2024 and the average consumption remaining well below the 10 LPA level.

In a sample of seventeen EU+UK countries for 2022, available from the OECD, Ireland's average consumption was lower than nine countries and was higher than even countries. The unweighted average for the seventeen countries was 10.3LPA which was slightly above the Irish level of 10.2 LPA. By the standards of the seventeen countries in the sample Ireland is no longer an outlier in terms of high average levels of alcohol consumption as measured by the methodology used for that indicator. The Health Research Board in its 2024 publication on alcohol also shows that Ireland is not now a high alcohol consumption country by EU or OECD standards.

References

Foley Anthony. Estimates of Alcohol Consumption Per Adult 2017. Drinks Industry Group of Ireland. 2018

Foley Anthony. Estimates of Alcohol Consumption Per Adult 2018. Drinks Industry Group of Ireland. 2019

Foley Anthony. Estimates of Alcohol Consumption Per Adult 2019. Drinks Industry Group of Ireland. 2020

Foley Anthony. Estimates of Alcohol Consumption Per Adult 2020. Drinks Industry Group of Ireland. 2021

Foley Anthony. Estimates of Alcohol Consumption Per Adult 2021. Drinks Industry Group of Ireland. 2022

Foley Anthony. Estimates of Alcohol Consumption Per Adult in 2022 and Performance in, and before, the Covid Period. Drinks Industry Group of Ireland. 2023

Foley Anthony. Estimates of Alcohol Consumption Per Adult 2023. Drinks Industry Group of Ireland. 2024

Foley Anthony. Alcohol Consumption: Measurement and Data Issues; and Performance. Economics, Finance and Entrepreneurship Research Seminar Series. DCU Business School. November 2015

Health Research Board, Alcohol, availability, affordability, related harm and policy in Ireland. 2024

Population and Migration Estimates April 2024. Central Statistics Office. August 2024

Revenue Commissioners. Alcohol Clearances (available from Revenue Commissioners' website)

*For additional information/clarification on the data and calculations please contact
tony.foley@dcu.ie*