

Alcohol use in adolescence continues to be very common in Europe with two in three adolescents aged 15 years old having tried alcohol at least once in their life in 2018, although the proportion of adolescents reporting to have been drunk more than once in their life has decreased in recent years (Figure 4.6).

Drinking initiation and heavy drinking in adolescence are of particular concern, since these can have severe health, education and social consequences. Despite the fact that the legal drinking age in most EU countries is 18, on average two-thirds of European adolescents report having drunk alcohol at least once in their life by age 15, and over 20% report having been drunk more than once in their life (Inchley et al, 2020). Adolescents who report early exposure to alcohol and having been drunk multiple times are more likely to develop problematic alcohol use and dependence later in life (Spear, 2015).

More than 30% of 15-year-olds in Hungary, Austria, Lithuania and Denmark reported having been drunk more than once in their life in 2018, compared with 10% or less in Romania and Luxembourg (Figure 4.5). Boys are more likely than girls to report repeated drunkenness in most EU countries (24% versus 20% on average across EU countries), with the biggest differences in Croatia, Malta and Denmark. By contrast, in Ireland, Poland, Spain and Sweden, a greater proportion of girls report having been drunk more than once.

On a positive note, the proportion of 15-year-olds reporting repeated drunkenness has declined in most EU countries over the past two decades, decreasing on average from 41% to 24% among boys, and from 29% to 20% among girls between 1998 and 2018 (Figure 4.6). Focusing on the most recent trends, between 2014 and 2018, the proportion of adolescents who reported having been drunk more than once has decreased significantly in most countries, although it has increased in Austria, Germany and Denmark.

A number of policies have proven to be effective to reduce alcohol use among adolescents, such as limiting accessibility to alcohol (e.g. through restrictions on location and hours of sales, and raising the minimum legal age for drinking), increasing prices (through taxation or minimum pricing of alcohol units),

regulating advertisement in traditional and social media, and restricting industry sponsorship of sport and youth events. Taxes on alcoholic beverages exist in all EU countries. However, despite the existence of a common EU-wide legal framework, tax levels vary widely across countries and by beverage type. When it comes to advertising on social media and the internet, the most common type of regulation across EU countries relates to restrictions on the content and/or the placement of advertising, although some countries have gone further and adopted advertising bans on social media (e.g. Norway). Regarding industry sponsorship of sport and youth events, about one-third of European countries report having voluntary agreements in place, while one-quarter have no restrictions (WHO, 2019).

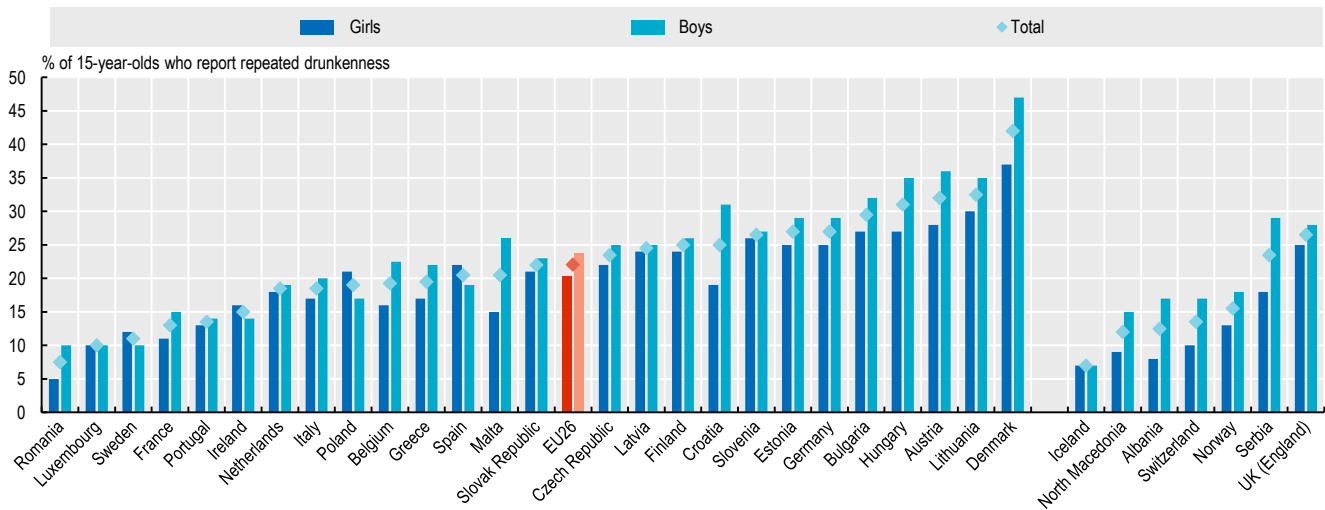
Definition and comparability

The data source is the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey. The HBSC survey has been collecting comparable data on alcohol use among 11-, 13- and 15-year-old students every four years since 1993-94 in nearly all EU countries with the exception of Cyprus. Repeated drunkenness is defined as having experienced drunkenness at least twice in life.

References

- Inchley, J. et al. (2020), *Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being: Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in Europe and Canada*, International report, Vol. 2, Key data, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen.
- Spear, L.P. (2015), "Adolescent alcohol exposure: are there separable vulnerable periods within adolescence?", *Physiology & Behavior*, 148, pp. 122-130, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physbeh.2015.01.027>.
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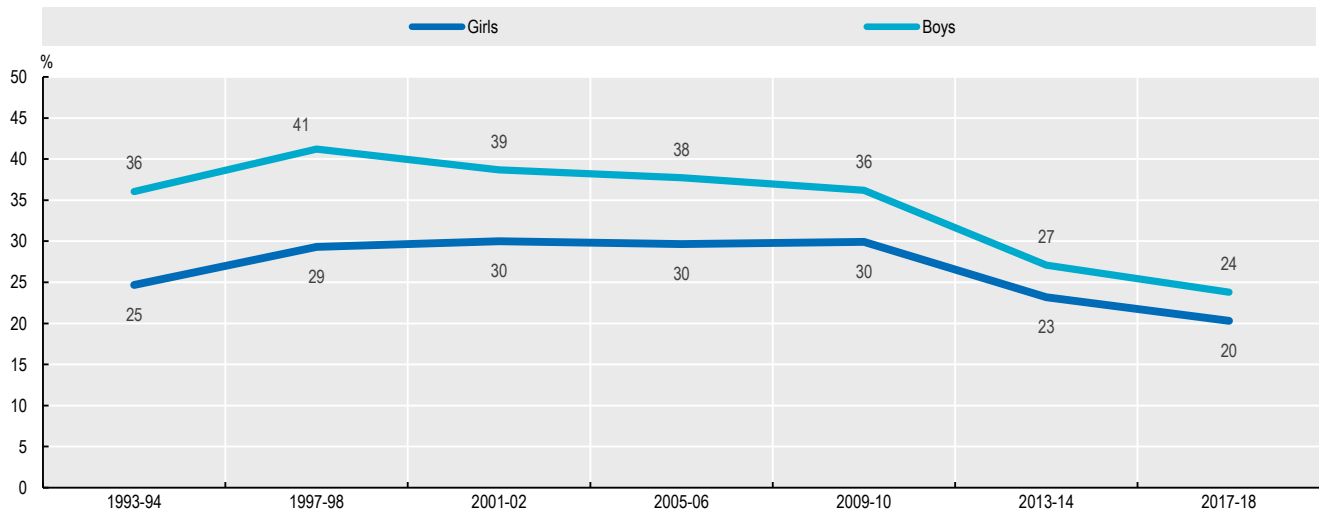
Figure 4.5. Share of repeated drunkenness among 15-year-olds, 2018



Note: The EU average is unweighted. The value for Belgium is the unweighted average of the Flemish and French Communities.
 Source: HBSC data from Inchley et al. (2020).

StatLink <https://stat.link/gyhi6k>

Figure 4.6. Trends in repeated drunkenness among the 15-year-olds, EU average, 1993 to 2018



Source: HBSC data from Inchley et al. (2020).

StatLink <https://stat.link/0uzg4h>



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