



FACTS

Child Injury: Harm done by alcohol

The European Region has the highest levels of alcohol consumption and alcohol related harm in the entire world. ¹

Alcohol is the second leading risk factor for disease burden in Europe. ²

The cost of alcohol related harm to the EU economy is estimated to be 125 billion euros a year and claims approximately 195,000 lives each year in the EU. ³

Harm to Others

Alcohol harms more than the drinker: the use of alcohol fuels high levels of violence, child neglect and abuse, fatal road traffic incidents as well as other types of injury including drowning, falls, burns, and poisonings. ¹

- Nearly 10% of children in the EU live in families suffering under alcohol misuse. ⁴
- Alcohol is a cause of child abuse in 16% of child abuse cases in Europe. ⁵
- Alcohol is a cause in 40% of all domestic violence cases in Europe. ³
- 19% of all homicides of children in Europe are due to alcohol. ⁶
- Alcohol is a major factor in fire fatalities. For example in Northern Ireland, impairment due to alcohol, illegal or prescription drugs is a factor in 80% of fatal house fires. ⁷

Alcohol and Road Safety

23% of all fatal road traffic injuries of children ages 0 to 15 are due to alcohol. ⁶

In total, 1 in 3 motor vehicle accidents are caused by alcohol. ³

Out of an annual average of 17,000 deaths due to road traffic in the EU, 10,000 of the victims are someone other than the drunk driver. ³

Out of 17,000 alcohol related road traffic deaths in the EU, 15,000 were attributable to males. ⁸

More aggressive policies against drink driving have reduced road fatalities in the EU, but enforcement is inconsistent and fatality rates between countries differ greatly. ⁹

Promising new measures and policies which use alcohol interlocks for drink driving offenders and commercial drivers (including for schools) are in various stages of implementation in Austria, Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, France, Belgium, Slovenia and Denmark. ⁹

Adolescents and Alcohol Consumption

Young people make up a disproportionate number of fatalities in which alcohol is a factor. ¹⁰

Worldwide, alcohol plays a factor in 1 in every 4 deaths of young men age 15 – 29, approximately 320,000 deaths a year, often due to motor traffic accidents, suicide, violence, falls, or other injuries. ²



Alcohol is involved in between 30 – 50% of all adolescent and adult drownings. ¹¹

A study of teenage head-first diving victims with severe spine injuries showed that alcohol was a factor in nearly 50% of the cases. ¹²

Binge drinking among European adolescents both male and female is increasing: 80 million European children 15 years of age report binge drinking once a week. ³

Whilst young people in Europe are starting heavy drinking at earlier ages, at the same time the availability and range of inexpensive alcoholic drinks has greatly increased, with young drinkers being by far the most frequent consumers of these products. ¹⁰

New alcohol drinks (such as alcopops, pre-mixed energy drinks) are designed and marketed in the EU to appeal to youth. These drinks generally mask the taste of alcohol with sweetness. ¹⁰

The adolescent brain is especially susceptible to alcohol, and the longer consumption is delayed, the less likely it is that alcoholic dependence will become a problem in adulthood. ¹

Harm to the Unborn Child

Alcohol is responsible for 60,000 underweight births per year in the EU, nearly half of which are within the EU 10. ¹³

FAS (foetal alcohol syndrome) and FASD (foetal alcohol spectrum disorders): prenatal exposure to alcohol can cause a range of intellectual and motor function deficits, and may be the most common cause of mental disabilities in the EU, more common than both Down Syndrome (1 in 600 births) and Spina Bifida (1 in 700 births). ¹⁴

Some deficits associated with FAS and FASD worsen as the individuals reach adolescence, possibly contributing to an increased rate of mental health disorders in Europe. ¹⁴

Preventing Harm by Alcohol

In 2010 the World Health Assembly approved a [resolution](#) to endorse a global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.

Recommended approaches through which Member States can reduce harm by alcohol include: ¹⁵

- regulating marketing of alcohol beverages, particularly to young people;
- regulating and restricting availability of alcohol;
- enacting appropriate drink-driving policies;
- Reducing demand through taxing and pricing mechanisms;



- Raising awareness and support for policies;
- Providing accessible and affordable treatment for people with alcohol use disorders;
- Implementing screening programmes and brief interventions for hazardous and harmful use of alcohol.

[The European action plan to reduce the harmful use of alcohol 2012 – 2020](#) is based on 10 recommended target areas consistent with those within the WHO global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol:

1. Leadership, awareness, and commitment;
2. Health services´ response;
3. Community and workplace action;
4. Drink-driving policies and countermeasures;
5. Availability of alcohol;
6. Marketing of alcoholic beverages;
7. Pricing policies;
8. Reducing the negative consequences of drinking and alcohol intoxication;
9. Reducing the public health impact of illicit alcohol and informally produced alcohol; and
10. Monitoring and surveillance.

This fact sheet was created in 2012 and updated in 2014.

References

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