

Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Study (HBSC): 2009/2010 report

The HBSC is a cross-national study that has been researching the health behaviour of 11-15 year olds across Europe and North America for 30 years. Data is collected every 4 years in 43 different countries and the research is conducted in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office of Europe.

HBSC has just published its 2009/2010 survey data on Social determinants of health and well-being among young people. The particular survey covered 39 countries and regions across Europe and North America, examined more than 60 topics and involved over 200,000 children and young people. Some interesting key findings, demonstrate the variance in health inequalities between countries:

- Rates of overweight and obesity for girls, for example, range from 30% in the United States to only 5% in Switzerland.
- Smoking rates, although fairly similar at age 11 (less than 1%), differ dramatically across countries by age 15. Austria and Lithuania show smoking rates of over 25% for 15 year old boys and girls, but the rate is 10% in Norway and Portugal.
- Girls are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviours such as eating fruit, brushing their teeth and limiting soft drink intake, but almost 10% skip breakfast daily by age 15 and 40% are unsatisfied with their bodies – almost double the rate for boys.

As regards drinking, it is interesting to compare the trends in Europe in 2009/10 against 2005/6 when the survey was last carried out.

11 year olds - Trends in the right direction

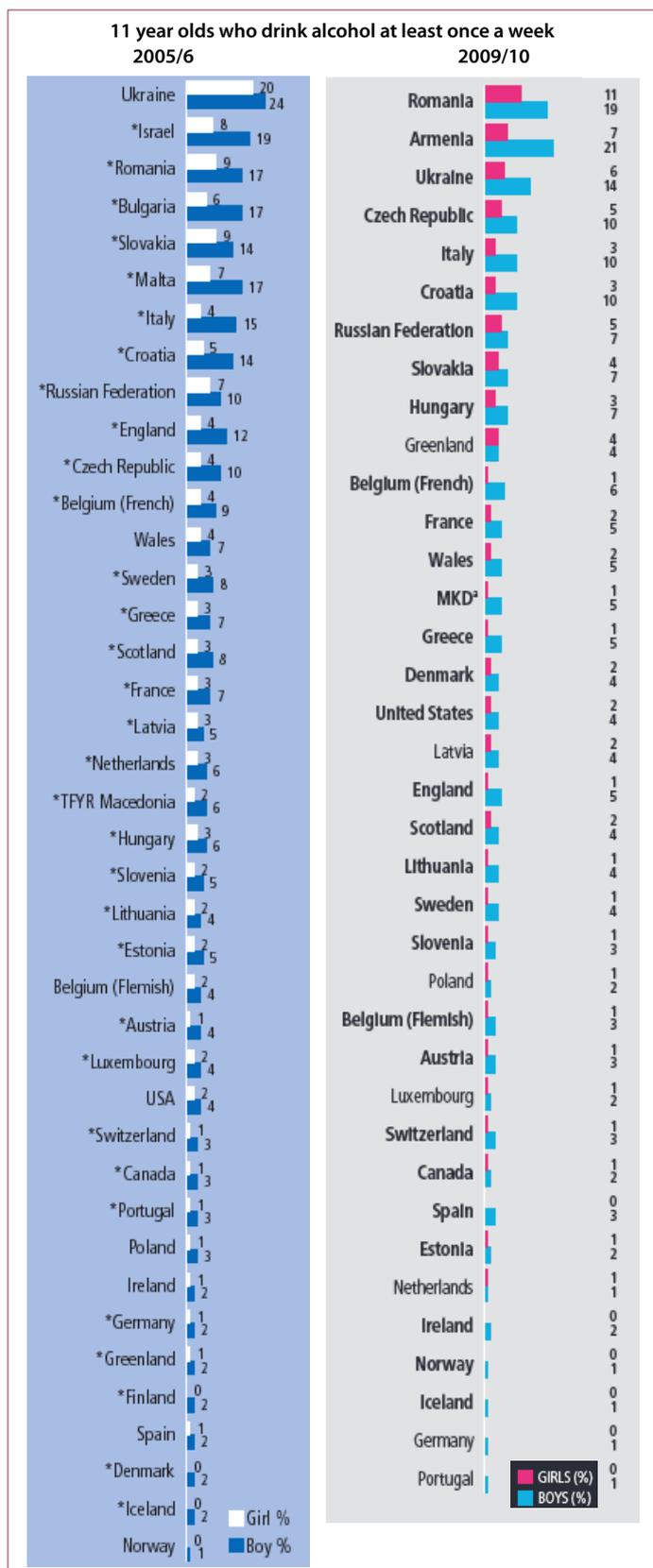
Very few 11 year olds have experienced being drunk - an average of 2% across the countries surveyed... a fall of 1% in four years. (2% of girls and 4% of boys in Wales, 1% of girls and 3% of boys in England and Scotland) for example.

Just 1% of 11 year old girls drink alcohol weekly in England and 5% of boys. In Italy, however, 10% of 11 year old boys drink weekly as do 19% of boys in Romania.

In 2005/6 12% of boys in England drank weekly, but this has fallen dramatically to 5% in 2009/10 suggesting less permissive parenting as towards alcohol consumption.

13 year olds - Rates of weekly drinking fall significantly

Italy has one of the highest rates of weekly drinking by age 13, 17% of boys (falling from 26% four years previously), yet the rates of drunkenness in Italy are the lowest of all countries surveyed at 5% for girls and 6% for boys against an average of 14% across all countries. 17% of 13 year old girls and 20% of boys in England were drinking weekly in 2005/6. This has fallen to just 10% for boys and girls in 2009/10. In Wales 20% of girls and 23% of boys were drinking weekly at 13 in 2005/6 and this has fallen to 14% for boys and girls. The highest level of drunkenness (at least twice at age 13) were led by



Latvia and Lithuania with levels of 25% and 20% for boys. Scotland and Wales had led this table in 2005/6 with levels of 26% and 27% for girls and boys, falling to 18% and 17% in 2010. Scotland has fallen from second in the league table to 7th, with rates declining from 21/22% to 16/14%, and England falls to 8th in the ranking from 4th place with an improvement from 19/21% (2005/6) to 15% for girls and boys in 2009/10.

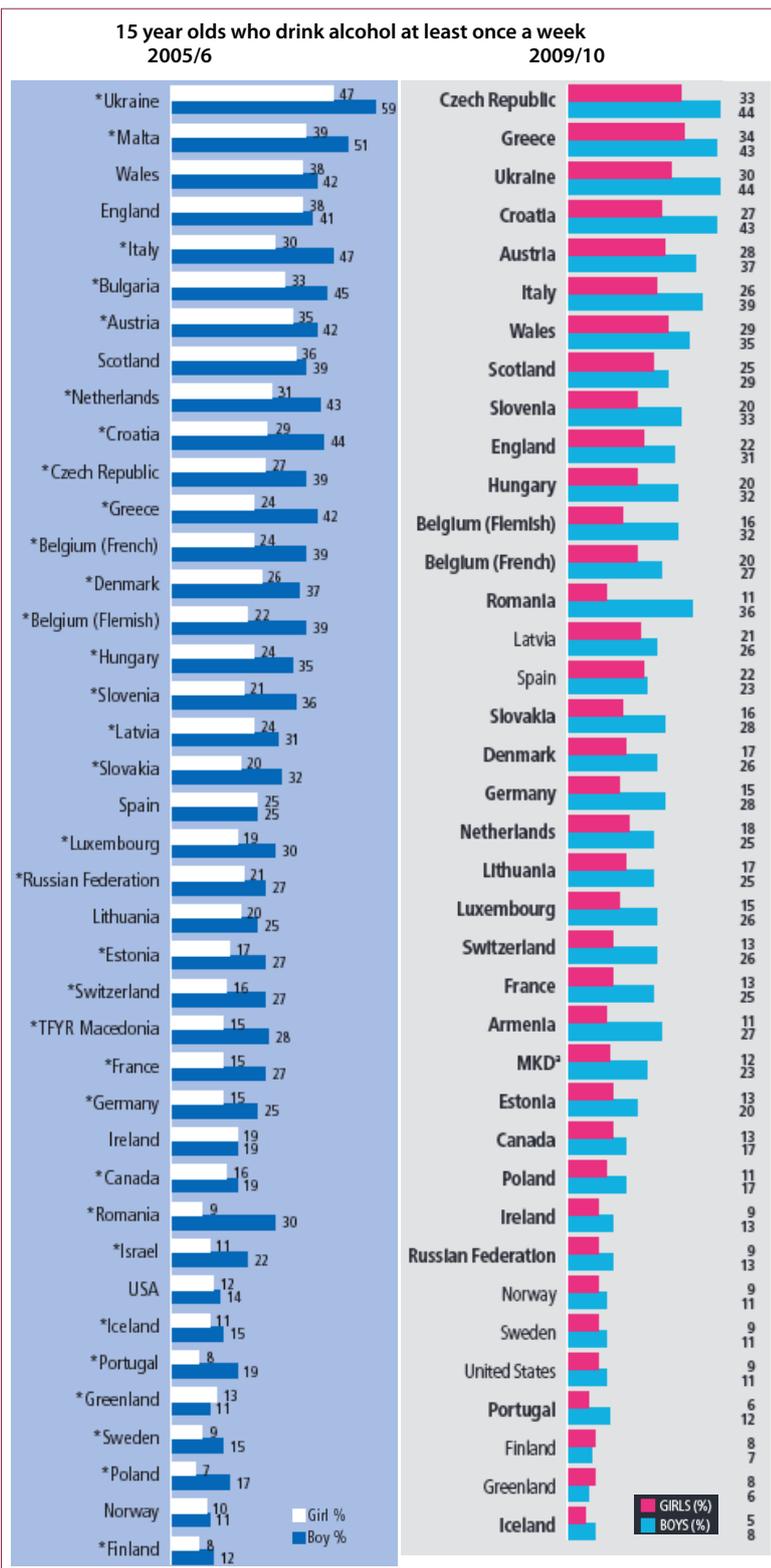
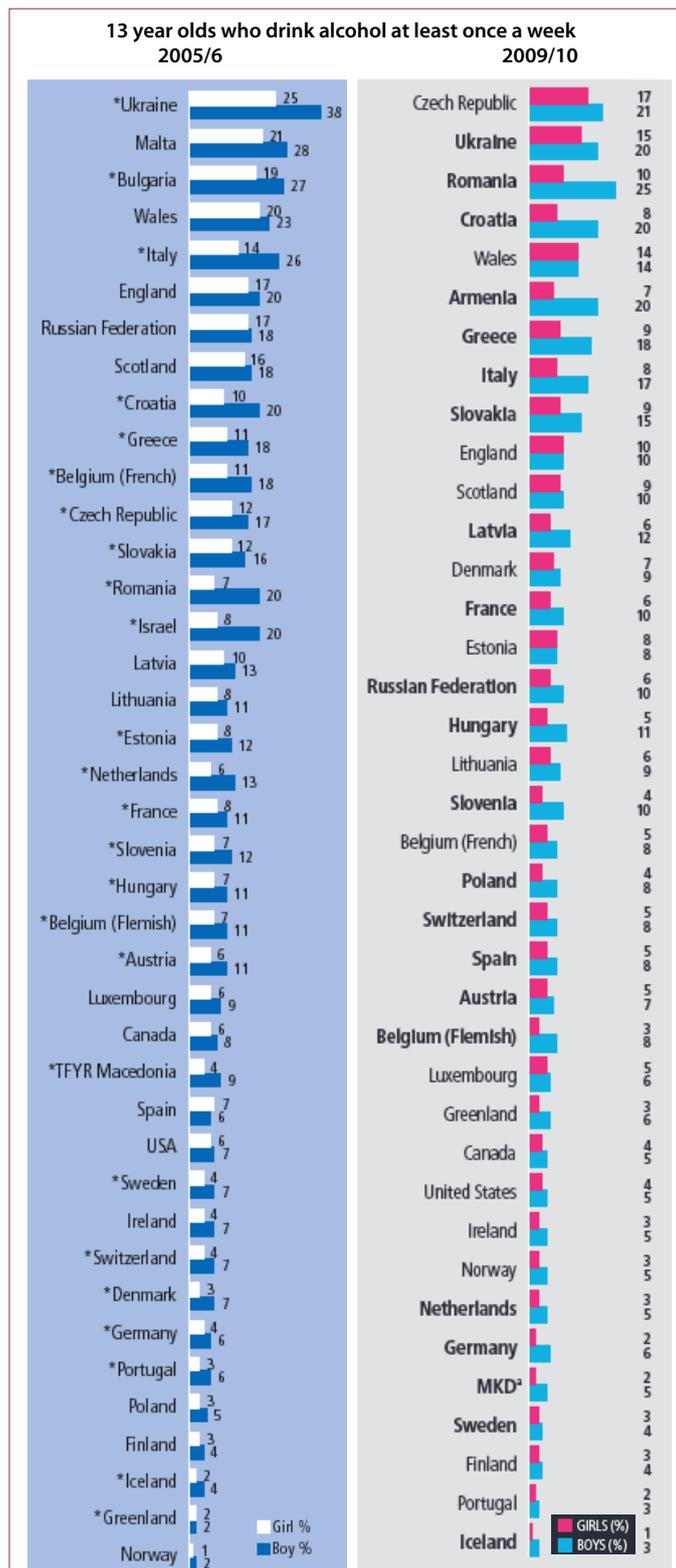
15 year olds

Again, across the UK, levels of weekly drinking among 15 year olds has fallen significantly from 38% of girls and 41% of boys in 2005/6 in England to 22% and 31%, in Wales it

has fallen from 38/42% to 29/35% and in Scotland from 36/39% to 25/29%. Levels of drunkenness (at least twice) have also fallen. Wales 54/52% falling to 50 and 47%, England 50/44% to 43 and 38% and Scotland 48/43% to 46 and 40%. The USA has shown a huge decline from 20% in 2005/6 to 13 and 15%.

Spain is one of the few countries where there has been an increase in being drunk at least twice from 33/29% to 36/31%.

Weekly drinking is not linked to levels of drunkenness in countries such as Italy and Greece - in Greece 34/43% of 15 year olds drink weekly, and 26/39% in Italy, yet their



percentage being drunk twice are amongst the lowest at 19/26% for Greece and 14/19% in Italy.. against the leader in the rankings Denmark at 56/55%!

According to the report 'The findings confirm previous HBSC surveys that showed prevalence rates of weekly alcohol use and (early) drunkenness increasing substantially with age (especially between ages 13 and 15) for boys and girls in all countries.

Boys are more likely to report weekly drinking and drunkenness, but the gender difference at age 13 is significant in fewer than half the countries and regions surveyed. Previous HBSC findings showed that the gender

gap declined between 1998 and 2006. Further research using data from the most recent survey will be able to confirm if the gender gap has narrowed further.

Family affluence is not found to have a large effect in most countries and regions. Social position among peers may be more important than family SES in predicting alcohol use. Family influence may decrease as the influence of peers and youth culture increases with age, particularly in relation to behaviours that do not start until adolescence (such as alcohol consumption), suggesting that the determining role of socioeconomic background for this type of behaviour might emerge only later in life.

Risky drinking and drunkenness in adolescence are often embedded in a high-risk lifestyle and may have negative social, physical, psychological and neurological consequences reaching into adult life.

Policy programmes that contribute to reductions in alcohol use include the following.

- Almost all European and North American countries currently have legal age limits on both off- and on-premises sales of alcohol (13). Legal purchase-age limits typically range from 16 to 21 years, but countries differ in the extent to which they are enforced. National drinking policies are related to lower rates of alcohol use among young people and seem an effective tool at macro level to reduce use.
- School-based intervention programmes focusing specifically on alcohol use and targeting adolescents and their parents have considerable effects. Generic, psychosocial and developmental, school-based prevention programmes focusing on life skills and a healthy lifestyle in general are also effective and could be considered as policy and practice options.
- Family interventions are effective in delaying alcohol initiation and reducing frequency of consumption among adolescents. Family treatments focused on change in maladaptive behaviours, multidimensional family therapy and group-administered cognitive behavioural therapies have received considerable empirical support.

www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/163857/Social-determinants-of-health-and-well-being-among-young-people.pdf

