

Eurobarometer report on EU 27 drinking habits

Most EU citizens report fairly moderate levels of alcohol consumption, with 69% of self-reported drinkers saying they usually have 2 drinks or less on a day when they drink in the EU as a whole, 32% of women abstain from alcoholic beverages (last 12 months), compared to 16% of men.

A snapshot indicating European drinking habits and attitudes has been published by Eurobarometer and was commissioned for the European Commission Directorate-General Health and Consumers and coordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication.

Respondents from each of the 27 Member States of the European Union were polled between the 2nd of October and the 19th of October 2009 (26,000 interviewed in total, aiming to represent the European population above the age of 15).

The interviews were conducted in national language and responses were collected face-to-face in interviewees' homes. Questions relating to awareness of the adverse health risks and social effects of alcohol consumption were included for the first time in the 2009 Eurobarometer survey.

Report Findings

Although the level of abstainers varies widely between Member States, from 7% in Denmark to 39% in Italy, the majority of respondents in all countries of the European Union consume alcoholic drinks.

The highest proportions of consumers are in Denmark (93%), Sweden (90%) and the Netherlands (88%) while the lowest rates of alcohol consumers are found in Portugal (58%), Italy (60%) and Hungary (64%). In this respect, there is no change compared with 2006.

Three quarters of EU citizens (76%) have consumed alcoholic beverages in the past 12 months while 24% claim they have abstained. There has been little variation in the prevalence of alcohol consumption since the question was last asked in autumn 2006 (75%).

- Around half of alcohol consumers (49%) say they drink between 1 and 3 times a week, but consumers in some countries such as Portugal (43%) and Italy (25%) report drinking daily.

QC1c Did you drink any alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, spirits, cider or other alcoholic beverages) in the last 30 days? (to those who claimed to have drunk alcohol in the past 12 months - base = 20294 respondents)		
	Yes	No
EU27	88%	12%
Sex		
Male	92%	8%
Female	83%	17%
Age		
15-24	86%	14%
25-39	88%	12%
40-54	90%	10%
55 +	88%	12%
Education (End of)		
15-	88%	12%
16-19	88%	12%
20+	90%	10%
Still studying	84%	16%
Respondent occupation scale		
Self-employed	92%	8%
Managers	91%	9%
Other white collars	90%	10%
Manual workers	89%	11%
House persons	83%	17%
Unemployed	85%	15%
Retired	86%	14%
Students	84%	16%
Difficulties paying bills		
Most of the time	88%	12%
From time to time	88%	12%
Almost never	88%	12%

Figure 1

- Most EU alcohol consumers (69%) usually have 2 drinks or less in each session. 10% claim to usually have 5 drinks or more on certain occasions.
- Men are far more likely (84%) to consume alcoholic beverages than women (68%). Higher occupational status appears to correlate with higher prevalence of alcohol use; managers are more likely to drink (87%)
- Frequency and level of alcohol consumption also varies by age. Among those who have consumed alcohol in the last 30 days, those aged 55 years or more are more likely (25%) to drink daily than young people aged 15-24 years (3%).
- Of those who had drunk in the last 30 days, young people aged 15-24 years are more likely (25%) to drink 5 or more drinks once a week than people aged 55+ (11%).

Worryingly, just 27% of EU citizens were able to give a correct answer when asked what the legal blood alcohol limit for driving is in their country. More than one third (36%) gave an incorrect answer, while an equal number (37%) said they don't know. Although relatively few are able to state correctly the legal limit, a clear majority (61%) consider that having one drink or more (during 2 hours) before driving is too much.

EU citizens are aware of the negative health effects of excess drinking. Nearly all respondents (97%) believe that alcohol can contribute to liver diseases and 67% are aware about the potential risk of cancers (67%).

At a country level, the EU citizens most likely to have had an alcoholic beverage in the past 30 days

(amongst those who ever drink alcoholic drinks) are Italians (94%), Bulgarians, Greeks, French and Portuguese (all 91%) - these countries also have high levels of non drinkers (39% of Italian and 42% of Portuguese). This suggests a polarity of consumption patterns in these countries; while many do not consume alcoholic beverages, those who do tend to drink quite regularly and moderately.

Of those EU citizens who said they had consumed alcoholic beverages in the last 30 days, 72% reported drinking at least once a week and 14% drink daily. The breakdown of responses is similar to that of the previous survey in autumn 2006, with little change in drinking frequencies. (See figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2

QC3 On a day when you drink alcoholic beverages, how much do you usually drink?
(to those who claimed to have drunk alcohol in the last 30 days - base = 17827 respondents)

	Less than 1 drink	1 – 2 drinks	3 – 4 drinks	5 – 6 drinks	7 – 9 drinks	10 drinks or more	It depends (SPONTANEOUS)
EU27	12%	57%	18%	6%	2%	2%	2%
BE	4%	58%	21%	8%	3%	4%	2%
BG	20%	65%	12%	1%	0%	0%	2%
CZ	6%	52%	29%	9%	2%	1%	1%
DK	5%	46%	25%	13%	5%	5%	1%
DE	18%	56%	16%	5%	2%	1%	2%
EE	13%	56%	19%	7%	1%	3%	1%
IE	9%	25%	35%	19%	5%	2%	4%
EL	16%	67%	15%	2%	0%	0%	0%
ES	8%	62%	22%	5%	2%	0%	1%
FR	13%	59%	17%	6%	2%	1%	2%
IT	22%	71%	6%	0%	0%	0%	1%
CY	16%	56%	21%	5%	1%	1%	0%
LV	14%	56%	17%	7%	1%	1%	3%
LT	15%	46%	22%	10%	3%	2%	1%
LU	16%	59%	17%	4%	2%	0%	2%
HU	9%	69%	16%	4%	1%	0%	1%
MT	16%	48%	15%	10%	6%	4%	1%
NL	5%	60%	22%	9%	2%	2%	0%
AT	5%	62%	26%	3%	0%	0%	4%
PL	10%	55%	20%	7%	2%	2%	2%
PT	17%	64%	11%	3%	2%	1%	1%
RO	13%	57%	18%	5%	1%	1%	4%
SI	17%	58%	16%	5%	1%	1%	2%
SK	11%	55%	26%	6%	1%	0%	1%
FI	6%	50%	21%	13%	6%	4%	0%
SE	4%	52%	29%	10%	2%	1%	2%
UK	8%	43%	24%	12%	6%	6%	1%

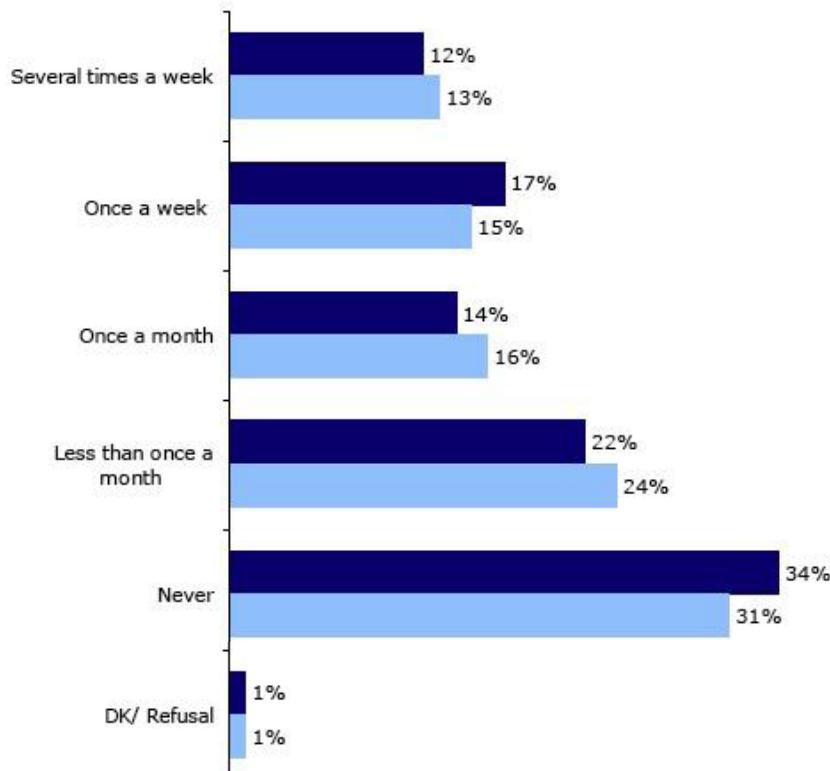
Highest percentage per country
Highest percentage per item

Lowest percentage per country
Lowest percentage per item

Figure 3

QC1b How often in the past 12 months have you had 5 or more drinks on one occasion?
 (to those who claimed to have drunk alcohol in the past 12 months
 - base = 20294 respondents)

■ EB72.3 October 2009 (EU27) ■ EB 66.2 Oct. - Nov. 2006 (EU25)



Since the question was last asked in autumn 2006, there have been only small changes in the frequency of self-reported binge drinking. There has been a slight increase from 15% in 2006 to 17% in 2009 (+2 percentage points) in the percentage saying they drink 5 or more drinks in one sitting once a week. On the other hand, there has also been a rise in the percentage reporting they never binge drink from 31% in 2006 to 34% in 2009 (+3 percentage points).

The country-by-country analysis shows variation across the EU in the frequency of binge-drinking. The table maps the proportions of respondents who report drinking 5 or more drinks at least once a week by Member State. The prevalence of frequent binge drinking is highest in Ireland (44%), Romania (39%), Germany and Austria (both 36%). The UK, Spain and Greece report 34%.

Frequent binge drinking is not confined to any particular region within the EU. Men are more likely (36%) to binge drink once a week or more often than women (19%).

The percentage of frequent binge drinking (having 5 drinks or more at least once a week) is highest (33%) among the youngest age group, 15-24 year olds. This is in line with the finding that 22% of this age group say they usually have 5 drinks or more on the days they drink. While half (46%) of the youngest age group say they never binge drink or do so less often than once a month, among the older age groups these answers are given by half or more of respondents.

When considering occupational groups, the prevalence of frequent binge drinking (once a week or more often) is highest among the unemployed (38%), manual workers (34%) and the self-employed (32%) (Figure 4).

89% support an age limit of 18 years for selling or serving alcoholic beverages across the EU.

The majority of EU citizens would welcome warning messages both on bottles and on alcohol advertisements. 79% support placing warnings for pregnant women and drivers on bottles.

The full report is available from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_en.htm#331

Figure 4

QC1b How often in the past 12 months have you had 5 or more drinks on one occasion?
 (to those who claimed to have drunk alcohol in the past 12 months - base = 20294 respondents)

	Several times a week	Once a week	Once a month	Less than once a month	Never
EU27	12%	17%	14%	22%	34%
Sex					
Male	16%	20%	16%	21%	26%
Female	6%	13%	13%	23%	44%
Age					
15-24	8%	25%	20%	22%	24%
25-39	10%	21%	17%	24%	27%
40-54	13%	15%	14%	25%	33%
55 +	14%	11%	10%	18%	46%
Respondent occupation scale					
Self-employed	15%	17%	17%	19%	32%
Managers	10%	16%	19%	29%	26%
Other white collars	7%	20%	14%	25%	33%
Manual workers	13%	21%	16%	23%	26%
House persons	12%	13%	11%	20%	43%
Unemployed	16%	22%	14%	20%	27%
Retired	14%	9%	9%	18%	49%
Students	6%	22%	22%	24%	25%
Difficulties paying bills					
Most of the time	19%	18%	14%	17%	31%
From time to time	15%	19%	14%	21%	30%
Almost never	10%	16%	15%	23%	36%