

Virtual INEBRIA Meeting – September 24, 2020

CHANGES IN ALCOHOL USE IN EUROPE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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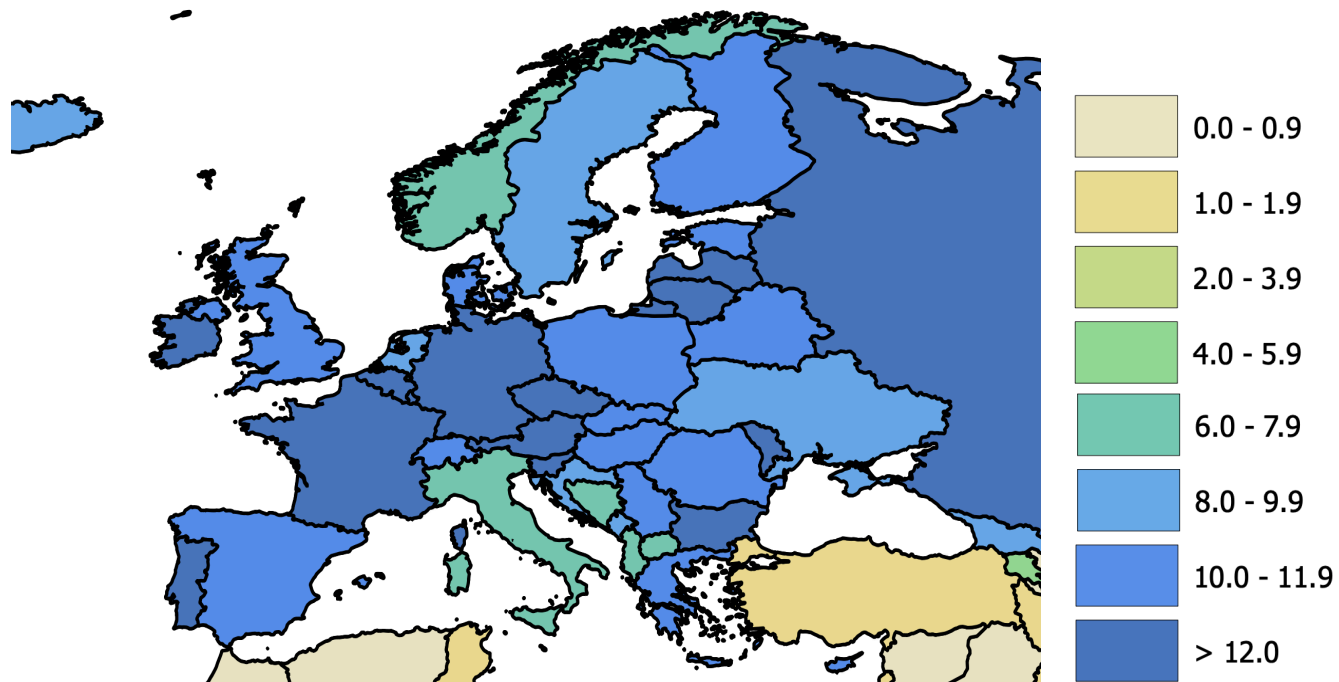
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OVERVIEW



1. Pre-pandemic alcohol consumption in Europe

Adult alcohol per capita (APC) consumption in litre pure alcohol (2017)



Source: Manthey, Jakob et al. (2019). Alcohol Exposure between 1990 and 2017 and Forecasts until 2030: A Global Modelling Study. *The Lancet* 393, no. 10190: 2493–2502.

2. How alcohol use will change during the COVID-19 pandemic

Two plausible mechanisms (Rehm et al. 2020)^{3,4}:

I. Distress mechanism:

Alcohol use as a maladaptive coping strategy to manage the psychological distress due to the pandemic

Alcohol
use ↑

II. Availability-affordability mechanism:

Reduced number of drinking occasions due to closure of outlets and consumptions sites, and reduced affordability due to growing unemployment and financial insecurity

Alcohol
use ↓

3. The European COVID-19 and Alcohol Survey

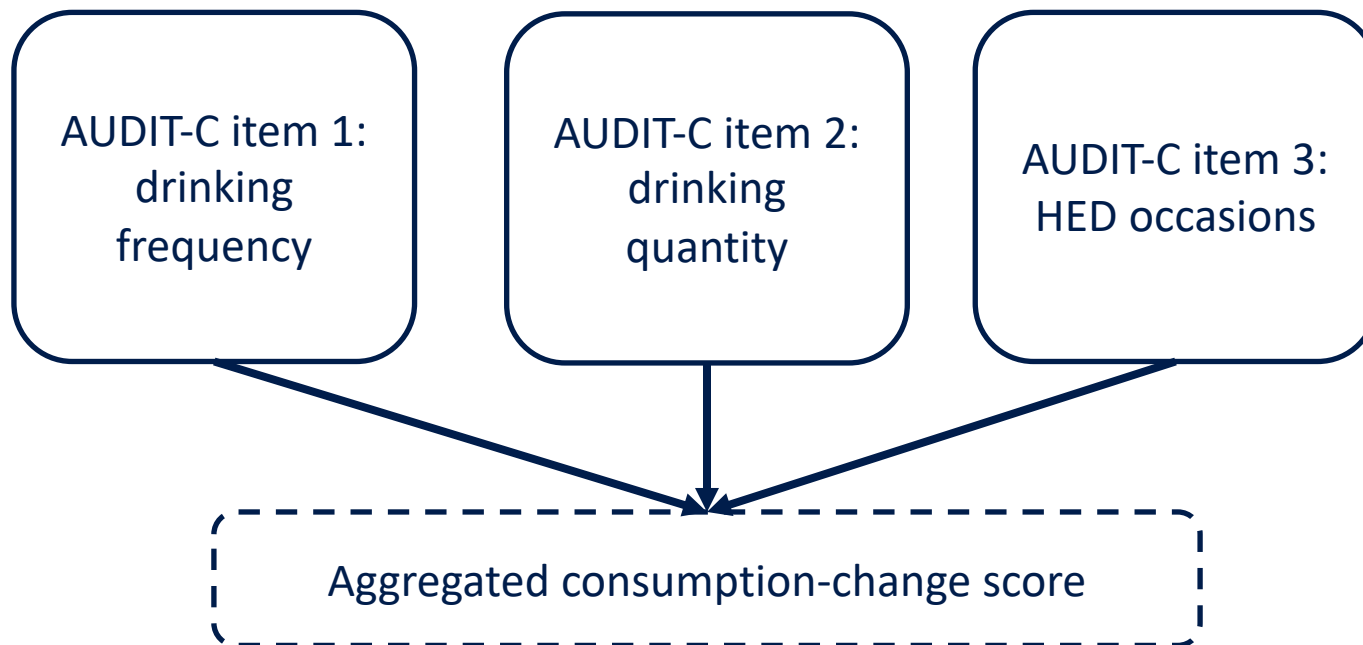
Key survey characteristics

- Cross-sectional online survey conducted between April 24 and July 22, 2020 (1st survey wave: 21 countries)
- Total sample: 40,064 people (completion rate: 75.2%)
- Analytic sample: 31,964 people, excluding past-year abstainers ($n = 4,311$)
- Convenience sample: oversampling of women, middle-aged adults (35-54 years), and individuals with higher educational attainment
- Distribution of drinking patterns (AUDIT-C⁵) comparable to those in other general population surveys, slight tendency of heavy drinkers being overrepresented

⇒ application of survey weights and adjustment for AUDIT-C

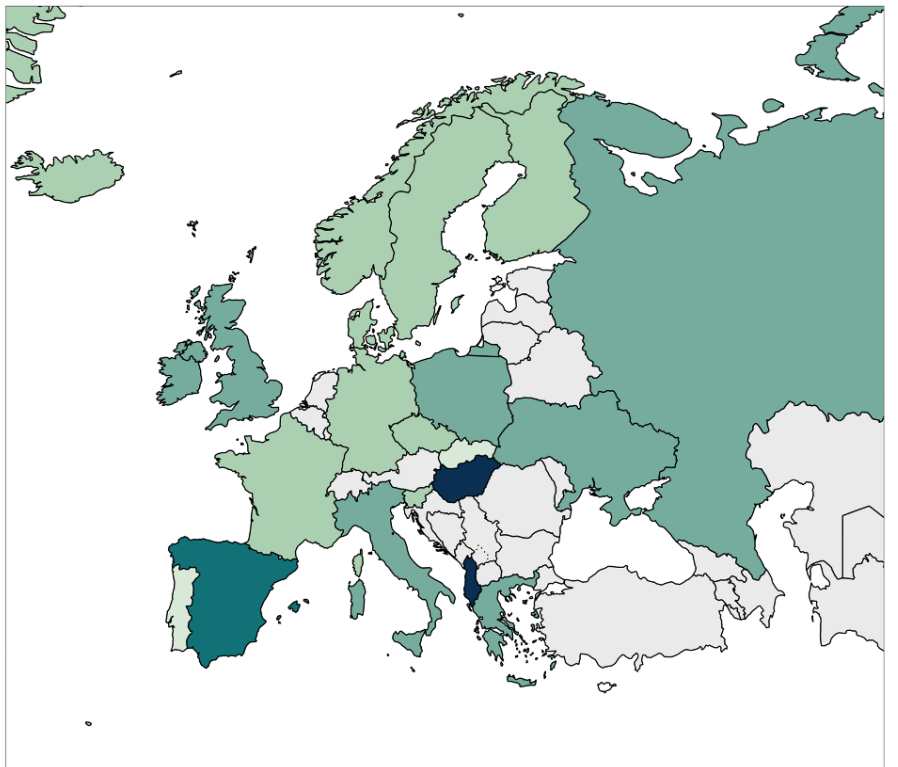
3. The European COVID-19 and Alcohol Survey

Assessment of changes in alcohol consumption: Changes in...



4. Alcohol consumption during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic

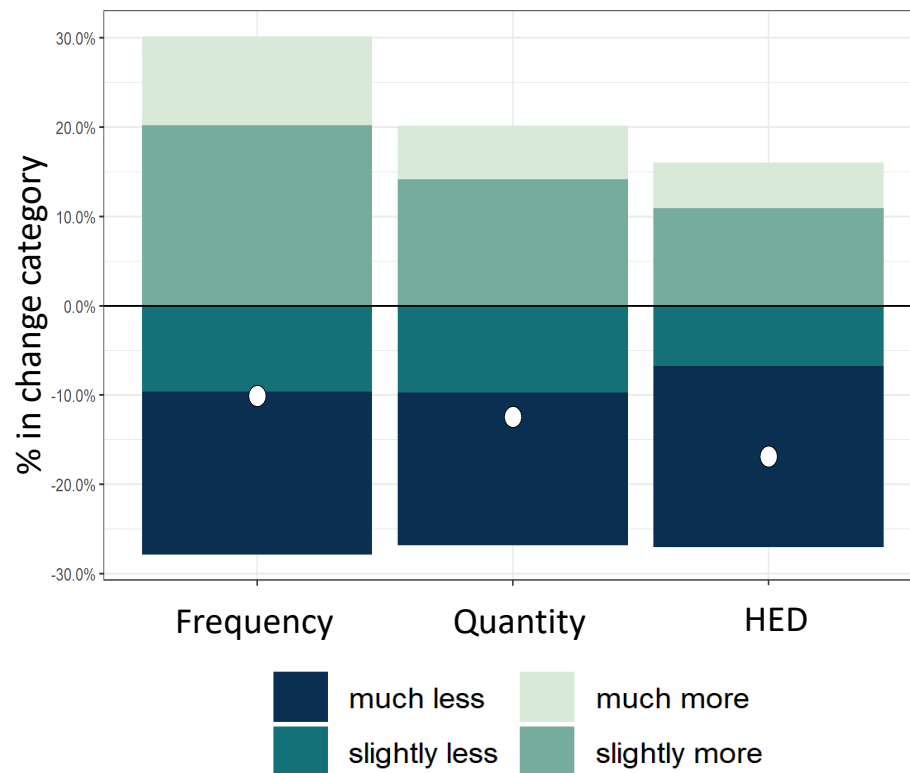
Experiencing financial or everyday distress



- **One in five respondents (22%)** reported substantial or high financial distress
- In Albania and Hungary, financial distress was reported by almost half of those surveyed (figure on the left)
- **More than half of the sample (53.8%)** reported everyday distress

4. Alcohol consumption during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic

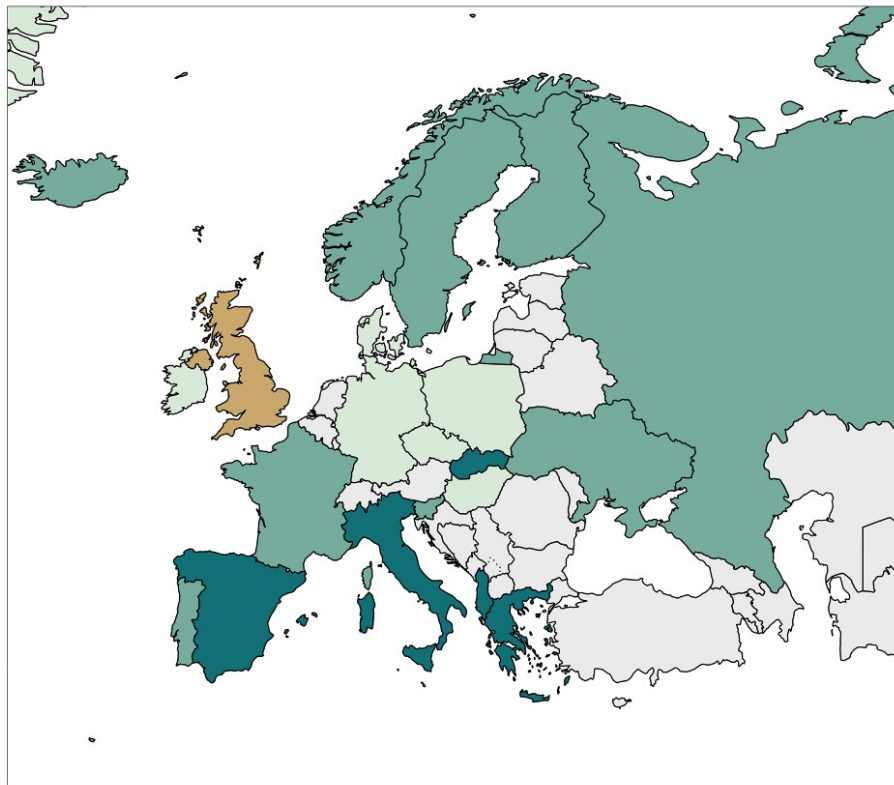
Changes in the individual indicators of alcohol consumption



- The weighted mean change (white circle) indicated a **significant reduction of alcohol consumption** for all three indicators ($p < .001$)
- The majority of those indicating a decrease or increase in drinking reported either to drink much less (often) or slightly more (often)

4. Alcohol consumption during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic

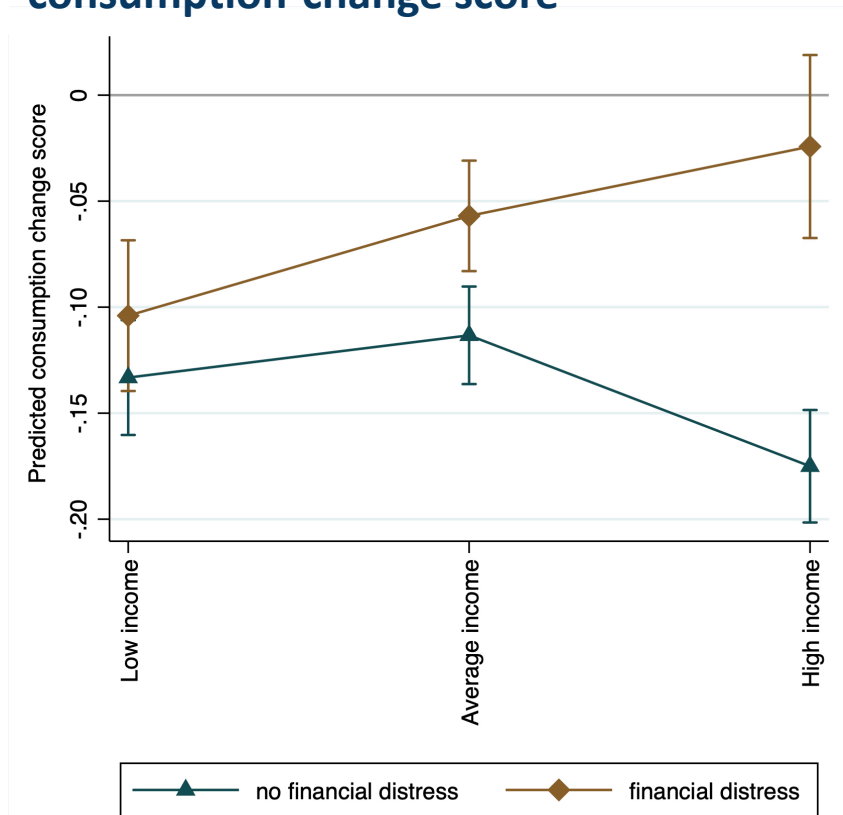
Changes in the aggregated consumption-change score



- Overall **decreasing consumption-change score** by 0.14
- No significant change in Ireland ($p = .084$)
- The **UK** was the only country where a **significant increase** by 0.10 was reported
- Consumption-change score was associated with income and distress experiences

4. Alcohol consumption during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic

Interaction of experiencing financial distress and income group on the consumption-change score



- Declines in alcohol consumption were less pronounced in those reporting financial distress (independent of income)
- Association of financial distress and consumption-change score **driven by people with high income**

5. Lessons learned from the pandemic

Short summary of our main findings

- Alcohol consumption was reported to decline on average during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic in all countries studied, except for Ireland and the UK
- Sharpest decline was observed in the frequency of HED events
- Changes in alcohol consumption were associated with income and distress experiences
- Financial distress appeared to be particularly relevant to changes in alcohol consumption among high-income respondents

5. Lessons learned from the pandemic

Study's limitations

- Convenience sample with possible bias, however, known biases were accounted for (gender, age, education, alcohol use)
 - Trends in alcohol use during pandemic to be validated and quantified by other data sources, such as household purchases or sales statistics
- ⇒ Any interpretation of the findings applies to the sample surveyed, which, however, comprises over 30,000 individuals and is in many ways comparable to samples from other general population alcohol surveys

5. Lessons learned from the pandemic

Overall alcohol consumption seems to decline during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe.

Vulnerable subpopulations exist who are at risk of increasing alcohol consumption and hence warrant increased attention.

The natural experiment provided by the COVID-19 pandemic provides further support that alcohol consumption at the populational level can be effectively reduced when its availability and affordability were further restricted.

Acknowledgements

The project is largely based on the commitment of the European Study Group on Alcohol use and COVID-19 whose members' contributions were indispensable for the realisation of the current project. We would therefore like to thank our partners, by name: Henri-Jean Aubin, Le Centre de recherche en Epidémiologie et Santé des Populations, France; Miroslav Barták, Vladimír Rogalewicz, and Benjamin Petrželka, Charles University, Czech Republic; Kim Bloomfield, Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University, Denmark; Jakob Manthey and Jürgen Rehm, Technische Universität Dresden, Germany; Katerina Koutra and Sofia Trivila, University of Crete, Greece; Elekes Zsuzsanna, Institute of Communication and Sociology, Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary; Manuel Cardoso and Patricia Pissarra, Serviço de Intervenção nos Comportamentos Aditivos e nas Dependências, Portugal; Eugenia Fadeeva, Artyom Gil and Konstantin Vyshinsky, National Research Centre on Addictions - branch, V.Serb'sky National Medical Research Centre for Psychiatry and Narcology, Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, Russian Federation; Beata Gavurova, Technical University of Košice, Slovakia; Sheila Gilheany, Alcohol Action Ireland, Ireland; Sveinbjörn Kristjánsson, and Rafn M Jónsson, Directorate of Health, Iceland; Ólafsdóttir Jóna Margrét, Faculty of Social Work, University of Iceland, Iceland; Igor Linskiy, Institute of Neurology, Psychiatry and Narcology of the NAMS of Ukraine, Ukraine; Fleur Braddick, Antoni Gual, Silvia Matrai, Nina Potapova, Chrisanthi Blithikioti, and Blanca Paniello, Clínic Foundation for Biomedical Research (FCRB) and Clinical Addictions Research Group (GRAC-GRE) Psychiatry Department, Neurosciences Institute, Hospital Clínic, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain; Jacek Moskalewicz, Michał Kucharski, and Janusz Sierosławski, Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology, Poland; Amy O'Donnell, Population Health Sciences Institute, Newcastle University, UK; Sandra Rados-Krnel, National Institute of Public Health, Slovenia; Peter Allebeck, Karolinska Institute, Sweden; Kirsimarja Raitasalo, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, University of Helsinki, Finland; Ingeborg Rossow, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Norway; Emanuele Scafato, Claudia Gandin, Silvia Ghirini, Alice Matone, and Riccardo Scipione, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Italy; Bernd Schulte, Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Suchtforschung, Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf, Germany; Enkeleda Shkurti, Universiteti i Mjekesise Tirane, Albania.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

www.covid19-and-alcohol.eu

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