

Estimate of Alcohol Consumption per Adult in 2023

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Introduction

This objective of this brief paper is to calculate the 2023 level of average per adult consumption of alcohol. There is no official value of this indicator. The data used are from the CSO Population and Migration Estimates for April 2023 (published in September 2023) and the Revenue Commissioners' alcohol clearances data (the 2023 figures are available on the Revenue website). The paper also refers to the population revisions arising from the 2022 Census of Population for years up to and including 2022. These revisions change the previous estimates of annual average alcohol consumption

Methodology

The level and trend in average alcohol consumption are important elements in public policy evaluation and design. The measurement approach follows standard international practice and also the practice of previous Irish estimates by Foley undertaken for DIGI such as (Foley 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023).

The aggregate alcohol contents of the different beverages are based on 5% alcohol by volume for cider, 12.5% alcohol content for wine and the actual alcohol estimates provided in the clearances data by Revenue for spirits and beer are used. Some international and national estimates use different alcohol contents for wine and cider. The international convention of defining the adult population as 15 years and over is used, although this is, of course, an inaccurate measure of the adult population. The population data refer to April of each year.

Consumption is equated with clearances as is normally done in estimates such as these, although clearances are not an exact measure of consumption due to factors such as unrecorded out of state sourcing, stock changes and the effects of outward and inward tourism. These and other limitations of the alcohol consumption measurement methodology are discussed in Foley (2015).

Average alcohol consumption per adult 2022 and 2023

The primary objective of this paper is to estimate the 2023 average alcohol consumption and compare this with the 2022 level. Note that the 2022 average consumption presented here is different to the previously published DIGI estimate in Foley (2023) because of the population revision for 2022 arising from the 2022 Census of Population.

The CSO pre-2022 Census adult population estimate for 2022 was 4.0993 million and this was used in the 2022 calculation of average alcohol consumption. However, the current revised estimate of the 2022 adult population is 4.1697 million. This changes the 2022 average alcohol consumption per adult from 10.282 litres of pure alcohol (LPA) to 10.109 LPA. The estimates for previous years would also be lower than previously estimated. Revised estimates for those earlier years will be published in a later paper.

The relevant data are presented in Table 1. The aggregate alcohol clearances and the “adult” populations are presented. These two are combined to provide the average per adult alcohol consumption.

Table 1. Average per adult alcohol consumption 2022 and 2023

	2022	2023	% change 2022/2023
Litres of pure alcohol (lpa), Total consumption	42,149,969	42,529,463	+0.9
Adult Population (aged 15 and over), millions	4.1697	4.270	+2.4
Litres of pure alcohol per adult (LPA)	10.109 (rounded to 10.1)	9.96 (rounded to 10.0)	-1.5 (-1.0 based on rounded figures)
Beer (LPA)	18,317,894	18,230,355	-0.5
Cider (LPA)	2,783,572	2,626,776	-5.6
Spirits (LPA)	9,799,274	9,624,852	-1.8
Wine (LPA)	11,249,229	12,047,480	+7.1

Sources. CSO Population and Migration Estimates, September 2023. Revenue Commissioners, Alcohol Clearances data, Revenue Website, 2024.

Total alcohol consumption increased by a very small 0.9% in 2023 compared with 2022. Total alcohol consumption in 2023 is much the same as the last pre-Covid year of 2019 (42,476,575 LPA). 2023 is an increase of 0.1% compared with 2019. The number of adults (as defined by 15 years and over) increased by 2.4% in 2023. This resulted in a decrease of 1.5% in 2023 compared with 2022 in average alcohol consumption per adult. It was 10.109 LPA in 2022 compared with 9.960 LPA in 2023.

In figures rounded to one decimal place the average per adult consumption is 10.0 LPA in 2023 compared to 10.1 LPA in 2022. This gives a decrease of 1.0% for 2023.

By long term comparison, average alcohol consumption was 10.9 LPA in 1990 and peaked at 14.44 LPA in 2001. Since 2001 the average per adult alcohol consumption has declined by 31%, or almost one third.

Beverage Shares

Wine volume increased in 2023 compared to 2022, by 7.1%. Total spirits consumption volume decreased by 1.8% between 2022 and 2023. Beer volume decreased by 0.5%. Cider volume decreased by 5.6%.

In 2023 wine accounted for 28.3% of the total alcohol market by volume of alcohol content. Wine in 2022 accounted for 26.7% of total alcohol consumption The wine share was 13.2% in 2000. Beer was 56.6% of total alcohol consumption in 2000, was 43.5% in 2022 and is now 42.9%. Cider is 6.2% of the 2023 total and was 6.6% of the 2022 total. Spirits is 22.6% of the 2023 total and was 23.2% on the 2022 total.

Table 2 Share of each beverage in total alcohol consumption 2022 and 2023

Beverage	2022 share %	2023 % share
Beer	43.5	42.9
Spirits	23.2	22.6
Wine	26.7	28.3
Cider	6.6	6.2

Source. derived from Revenue data

Revisions to Previous Estimates

The estimates use CSO population figures. In non-Census years the CSO estimates the size and age distribution of the population. When the Census figures are available the previous estimates are revised. Usually the Census is held every five years but due to Covid the latest Census was undertaken in 2022. The previous Census was for 2016. The previously estimated populations for 2017 to 2022 are revised to reflect the latest detailed population from the 2022 Census. This affects the already estimated average alcohol consumption per adult for 2017 to 2022. In this paper the 2022 estimate was revised in light of the different 2022 population estimates. This lowered the 2022 level from 10.282 LPA to 10.109 LPA. The latter is used in this paper. A

forthcoming paper will present revised average alcohol consumption figures for the relevant years before 2022.

Summary

In 2023, measured to three places of decimals, average alcohol consumption per adult dropped just below 10 LPA. Measured to one place of decimals it was 10.0 LPA. Average per adult alcohol consumption decreased by 1.5% in 2023 compared with 2022; from 10.109 LPA to 9.960 LPA. Total consumption increased by 0.9 % in 2023 and there was an increase in the adult population of 2.4%.

Wine volume increased by 7.1% in 2023. Total spirits consumption volume decreased by 1.8% between 2022 and 2023. Beer volume decreased by 0.5%. Cider volume decreased by 5.6%.

Beer accounts for 42.9% of the total alcohol market by volume of alcohol. Wine accounts for 28.3%. Spirits accounts for 22.6% and cider accounts for 6.2%

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