55 million adults are estimated to drink at harmful levels in the EU (more than 40g of alcohol, i.e. 4 drinks a day, for men and over 20g, i.e. 2 drinks a day, by women). Drinking more than this is known to carry a health risk.

Harmful alcohol consumption is estimated to be responsible for approximately 195,000 deaths a year in the EU due to e.g. accidents, liver disease, cancers etc.

Harmful alcohol use is the 3rd biggest cause of early death and illness in the EU, behind tobacco and high blood pressure.

More than 1 in 4 traffic accident deaths on EU roads is caused by drink-driving (approximately 10,000 per year).

More than 1 out of every 4 deaths among young men (aged 15-29 years) in the EU is due to alcohol (often caused by road traffic accidents, homicide, violence, etc) and 1 in every 10 deaths among young women.
ALCOHOL AND DISEASE

- Harmful alcohol use is a cause of some 60 different diseases and conditions, including lung disease, breast cancer, mental and behavioural disorders, gastrointestinal conditions, cardiovascular problems, and foetal and reproductive disorders.

- Severe diseases, such as liver cirrhosis, are growing at an alarming rate and strike younger people than in the past. For instance, in England there has been a ten-fold increase among women aged 35-44 dying from this disease over the last 30 years.

- Exposure to alcohol during pregnancy can impair babies’ brain development. In France, more than 700 children were born with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome in 2001, and more than 60,000 people are estimated to be living with this condition.

Death rates from liver cirrhosis at all ages per 100,000.
Data collected between 1997-2000, selected EU-15 Member States

Death rates from liver cirrhosis at all ages per 100,000, (2003) selected EU-10 Member States, male and female combined

Liver cirrhosis is caused by long-term excessive drinking by individuals, regardless of their drinking patterns. These graphs demonstrate that such harm is very significant all across Member States.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

- The EU is the heaviest drinking region of the world. Total alcohol consumption in the EU amounts to an average of 11 litres of pure alcohol drunk per adult each year (11 litres = 1,400 small beers per person per year)

- The levels reached in the 1970s were even higher (15 litres per adult per year). This decline can be explained by a decline in wine consumption in France and southern Europe in recent decades, partly due to less alcohol being consumed during the working day.

- However, this decline is accompanied by a rise in harmful drinking patterns among some 15% of those who do consume alcohol, such as binge drinking (5 or more drinks on one occasion) and under-age drinking.
Binge drinking has become more widespread throughout Europe, especially in the 10 new EU Member States. For instance, in a 2003 World Health Organisation survey, over 38% of male drinkers in Poland and 30% of male drinkers in Hungary described themselves as weekly binge drinkers. This compares to 24% in the UK and 8.5% in Spain.

As regards under-age drinking, according to the 2003 WHO study on ‘Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children’, 5% of 11-year olds across the EU, 12% of 13-year olds and 29% of 15-year olds report weekly drinking.

The average age of the first time youngsters describe getting drunk is 13.6 years for boys and 13.9 years for girls.

In 2003, 23% of 15–16 year old boys in the EU reported binge-drinking at least 3 times in the previous 30 days, according to the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD).
ALCOHOL-RELATED HARM AND THE ECONOMY

The cost of alcohol-related harm to the EU’s economy has been estimated at €125 billion for 2003, equivalent to 1.3% of GDP. This estimate includes, amongst others, losses due to underperformance at work, work absenteeism and premature death. The actual spending on alcohol-related problems in the EU is estimated at about €66 billion, e.g. on crime, traffic accidents, health, and disease treatment and prevention.

The tangible cost of alcohol-related harm by component, 2003

Footnotes

2 Source: Adapted from WHO’s Global Burden of Disease study (Rehm et al 2004), Alcohol in Europe Anderson P, Baumberg B, Institute of Alcohol Studies, UK June 2006
3 Top 9 risk factors for ill-health in the EU, Adapted from WHO’s Global Burden of Disease study (Rehm et al 2004 Alcohol in Europe Anderson P, Baumberg B, Institute of Alcohol Studies, UK June 2006
4 The share of deaths attributable to alcohol in the EU citizens younger that age 70 years (year 2000). Source: Global Burden of Disease data (Rehm 2005)
6 Institute of Alcohol Studies UK ‘Alcohol Consumption and Harm in the UK and EU’.
7 Institute of Alcohol Studies UK ‘Alcohol Consumption and Harm in the UK and EU’. (‘UK1’ denotes England and Wales while ‘UK2’ denotes Scotland.)
8 WHO’s Global Burden of Disease study (Rehm et al 2004)
9 (INSERM 2001).
10 Source: WHO, World drink trends
12 ‘Recorded’ = legal domestic sales, ‘Unrecorded’ = illegal domestic and private imported sales
13 Alcohol in Europe A public health perspective, P Anderson and B Baumberg, Institute of Alcohol Studies, UK 2006
15 Report on Alcohol in Europe (Anderson and Baumberg), June 2006
16 An Ex Ante Assessment of the Economic Impacts of EU Alcohol Policies, (Rand Corporation), July 2006
17 Report on Alcohol in Europe (Anderson and Baumberg), June 2006