

# 6 International comparisons

## Introduction

International comparisons are useful for allowing informed discussion at many levels, and for assessing the effectiveness of different drugs policies throughout the world. However, comparative analyses of drug use in different countries are difficult due to cultural and political differences, and the legal framework of drug laws can differ greatly. In addition, each country has unique surveys and data collection methodologies, which make comparisons difficult. For example, the United States of America uses large-scale household surveys that specifically address drug use patterns and drug-related issues. In contrast, Great Britain collects drug use data as subsets of the Health Survey of England and the British Crime Survey. This chapter presents data on licit and illicit drug use for selected countries. The presentation is by drug, which differs from the country focus in the 2000 report to enable more countries to be reported and the comparative place of Australia to be acknowledged.

## Tobacco

Prevalence of daily smoking varies considerably among OECD countries, ranging from about one in three of the adult population in Japan and Korea, to less than one in five in Canada, Australia, the United States and Sweden (Table 6.1).

All countries reported have seen a decline in prevalence of daily smoking from 1971 to 2001, with major reductions in the early part of this period and a slowing of the decline in the last decade.

**Table 6.1: Prevalence of daily smoking, population aged 15 years and over, selected countries, 1971 to 2001**

<b>Country</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>2001</b>
Japan	46.1	43.1	37.7	34.3 <sup>2</sup>
Korea	n.a.	n.a.	34.7 <sup>1</sup>	33.5 <sup>3</sup>
Netherlands	55.0	42.0	38.0	33.0 <sup>1</sup>
Luxembourg	n.a.	n.a.	33.0 <sup>1</sup>	32.0 <sup>3</sup>
Norway	41.0 <sup>2</sup>	35.0	34.0	32.0 <sup>1</sup>
Denmark	56.0	49.0	44.0	30.5 <sup>1</sup>
Hungary	n.a.	n.a.	35.5 <sup>3</sup>	30.1 <sup>1</sup>
Belgium	n.a.	40.5 <sup>1</sup>	28.5	28.0
Ireland	45.6 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.	28.5	27.0 <sup>3</sup>
United Kingdom	46.5	39.0 <sup>1</sup>	30.0 <sup>1</sup>	27.0 <sup>1</sup>
France	n.a.	31.4 <sup>1</sup>	28.5 <sup>1</sup>	27.0
Austria	27.7 <sup>1</sup>	28.1 <sup>2</sup>	27.5	n.a.
Germany	n.a.	45.4 <sup>3</sup>	23.7 <sup>1</sup>	24.7 <sup>2</sup>
Italy	n.a.	n.a.	25.7 <sup>2</sup>	24.4 <sup>1</sup>
Iceland	n.a.	n.a.	30.5	23.6
Czech Republic	n.a.	n.a.	26.1 <sup>2</sup>	23.5 <sup>2</sup>
Finland	n.a.	27.2	27.0	23.4 <sup>1</sup>
New Zealand	n.a.	32.0	26.0	22.0
Canada	39.5	32.8	25.9	19.8 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Australia</b>	<b>37.0<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>36.0<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>19.8</b>
United States	37.3 <sup>1</sup>	33.5 <sup>1</sup>	22.0	19.0 <sup>1</sup>
Sweden	n.a.	30.4	25.1	18.9 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> Data from 1, 2 or 3 previous years.

<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> Data from 1, 2 or 3 following years.

Source: OECD Health Data 2002; National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2001.

A similar gradient across countries is observed for per capita consumption of tobacco, ranging from 3,600 grams per capita (aged 15 years and over) in Greece down to less than 1,000 grams in Finland (Table 6.2). Unlike prevalence, not all countries have seen a reduction in consumption, with notable increases in Greece and Turkey.

**Table 6.2: Tobacco consumption, grams per capita, population aged 15 years and over, selected countries, 1971 to 2001**

Country	1971	1981	1991	2001
Greece	2,311	2,961	2,936	3,624 <sup>1</sup>
Japan	2,442 <sup>1</sup>	2,576	3,283	n.a.
Netherlands	2,963	3,493	3,040	2,472 <sup>1</sup>
Belgium	3,649	3,036	2,468	n.a.
Austria	2,567	2,688	2,350	n.a.
Turkey	1,236	1,434	2,043	2,380
Germany	2,790	2,843 <sup>2</sup>	1,929 <sup>1</sup>	2,262 <sup>2</sup>
Hungary	2,885	2,974	2,221	2,055 <sup>2</sup>
Italy	2,093	2,643 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
France	2,152	2,232	2,270	1,912 <sup>1</sup>
Ireland	3,015	3,381 <sup>2</sup>	1,759	1,834 <sup>2</sup>
Iceland	2,655	2,932	2,419	1,762
Korea	n.a.	n.a.	2,194	1,725 <sup>2</sup>
United States	3,515	2,957	2,191	1,633 <sup>2</sup>
Sweden	2,310	1,980	1,860	n.a.
Denmark	2,166	2,046	1,821	1,611 <sup>2</sup>
Norway	2,019	2,103	1,956	1,509 <sup>1</sup>
Canada	3,185	2,974	1,667	1,432
<b>Australia</b>	<b>3,294</b>	<b>2,819</b>	<b>1,969</b>	<b>1,349<sup>2</sup></b>
New Zealand	3,114 <sup>1</sup>	2,905	1,738	1,339 <sup>1</sup>
United Kingdom	2,540	2,718	2,176	1,239 <sup>1</sup>
Finland	n.a.	1,406	1,355	957 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> Data from 1 or 2 previous years.

<sup>1</sup> Data from 1 following year.

Source: OECD Health Data 2002.

## Alcohol

Alcohol consumption is highly prevalent in many countries of the world, and for those countries where it is not, in most cases consumption is influenced by cultural or religious constraints. Hence international comparisons of population prevalence essentially group countries into two groups: those where it is the norm to consume, and those where it is not. A more useful indicator of consumption is total litres of pure alcohol per capita (or per capita aged 15 years and over), which has been shown to be correlated with other measures of alcohol-related harm.

In the year 2000, the Republic of Ireland reported the highest per capita consumption of pure alcohol, at 12.3 litres per person – largely driven by their high consumption of beer (Table 6.3). Among the top 45 countries listed, there is least variation in the per capita consumption of beer, ranging from 160.0 litres per capita in the Czech Republic to 22.4 litres in Singapore. This compares with a 60-fold variation in wine consumption, ranging from 60.8 litres in Luxembourg to 1.0 litre per capita in Singapore.

**Table 6.3: Alcohol consumption, litres per capita, selected countries<sup>(a)</sup>, 2000<sup>(b)</sup>**

Rank	Total pure alcohol <sup>(c)</sup>		Beer		Wine		Spirits (pure alcohol)	
	Country	Litres	Country	Litres	Country	Litres	Country	Litres
1	Republic of Ireland	12.3	Czech Republic	160.0	Luxembourg	60.8	Latvia	5.6
2	Luxembourg	12.1	Republic of Ireland	152.9	France	56.0	Russia	5.5
3	Romania	11.7	Germany	125.5	Italy	51.0	Romania	5.4
4	Portugal	10.8	Austria	108.1	Portugal	50.0	Slovak Republic	4.6
5	Czech Republic	10.6	Luxembourg	107.9	Switzerland	43.5	Thailand	3.5
6	France	10.5	Denmark	99.7	Romania	36.7	Czech Republic	3.4
7	Germany	10.5	Belgium	98.2	Argentina	34.9	Poland	3.2
8	Spain	10.0	United Kingdom	95.4	Greece	34.0	China	3.2
9	Denmark	9.5	<b>Australia</b>	<b>95.0</b>	Republic of Ireland	33.2	Hungary	2.8
10	Austria	9.4	Slovak Republic	87.5	Spain	33.0	Cyprus	2.7
11	Hungary	9.2	USA	84.1	Uruguay	32.6	Japan	2.6
12	Switzerland	9.2	Netherlands	82.5	Austria	31.8	France	2.4
13	Slovak Republic	8.5	New Zealand	80.0	Denmark	30.9	Spain	2.4
14	Belgium	8.4	Finland	78.4	Hungary	29.0	Republic of Ireland	2.4
15	United Kingdom	8.4	Venezuela	75.7	Germany	23.6	Bulgaria	2.3
16	Netherlands	8.2	Spain	71.8	Bulgaria	21.4	Finland	2.2
17	Russia	8.1	Canada	69.9	Belgium	20.0	USA	2.0
18	Greece	8.0	Portugal	65.3	<b>Australia</b>	<b>19.7</b>	Canada	2.0
19	<b>Australia</b>	<b>7.8</b>	Hungary	61.6	Malta	19.6	Guyana	1.9
20	Cyprus	7.7	Poland	59.6	Finland	19.2	Greece	1.9
21	Italy	7.5	Cyprus	59.4	Chile	18.8	Germany	1.9
22	Latvia	7.4	South Africa	58.7	Netherlands	18.8	Estonia	1.8
23	New Zealand	7.4	Switzerland	57.8	New Zealand	17.0	Colombia	1.8
24	Finland	7.1	Sweden	56.4	United Kingdom	16.9	Netherlands	1.7
25	Poland	6.9	Colombia	53.3	Cyprus	16.6	Luxembourg	1.6
26	USA	6.7	Brazil	53.0	Czech Republic	16.4	Chile	1.6
27	Canada	6.6	Norway	51.7	Sweden	15.3	Brazil	1.6
28	Japan	6.5	Mexico	49.7	Slovak Republic	11.3	United Kingdom	1.6
29	Argentina	6.3	Iceland	48.9	Canada	9.7	Switzerland	1.5
30	Bulgaria	5.2	Paraguay	46.1	Norway	9.7	Cuba	1.5
31	Uruguay	5.9	Japan	45.8	Iceland	7.9	Portugal	1.4
32	Chile	5.3	Malta	43.2	Russia	7.9	Austria	1.4
33	Malta	5.2	Greece	39.5	USA	7.6	New Zealand	1.4
34	Sweden	4.9	France	38.1	South Africa	6.7	<b>Australia</b>	<b>1.3</b>
35	South Africa	4.7	Romania	37.1	Poland	5.6	Belgium	1.2
36	Venezuela	4.7	Argentina	36.7	Latvia	3.2	Denmark	1.2
37	Brazil	4.5	Russia	36.0	Japan	2.9	Malta	1.1
38	Colombia	4.5	Latvia	34.0	Tunisia	2.8	Iceland	1.1
39	Iceland	4.4	Italy	28.1	Estonia	2.7	Sweden	1.0
40	Thailand	4.4	Chile	28.0	Brazil	2.0	South Africa	1.0
41	Norway	4.3	Bulgaria	27.4	Cuba	1.9	Venezuela	0.9
42	China	4.0	Taiwan	26.3	Paraguay	1.4	Uruguay	0.9
43	Mexico	3.1	Peru	25.7	Morocco	1.1	Norway	0.7
44	Taiwan	3.1	Uruguay	22.7	Peru	1.0	Taiwan	0.6
45	Guyana	2.9	Singapore	22.4	Singapore	1.0	Singapore	0.6

(a) Top 45 ranked countries based on per capita consumption of total pure alcohol.

(b) Calendar year for all countries except Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Taiwan.

(c) As published, conversion factors from wine and beer not known for individual countries.

Source: NTC Publications 2002.

The pattern of change over time in per capita consumption of alcohol varies considerably amongst the OECD countries (Table 6.4). For the majority, there appears to have been a peak of consumption in the 1970s and 1980s with a tapering off towards the end of the century. A few countries, notably Luxembourg and Ireland, have seen an increase in consumption over the past 40 years, while France and Italy have seen considerable decline over this period.

**Table 6.4: Alcohol consumption, litres of pure alcohol per capita, population aged 15 years and over, selected countries, 1961 to 2001**

Country	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Luxembourg	10.4	12.7	12.4	15.2	14.9 <sup>1</sup>
Portugal	17.2	20.0	15.6	15.8	13.0 <sup>1</sup>
France	25.1	22.5	19.7	16.2	12.9 <sup>1</sup>
Ireland	7.8	11.2	13.0	10.6	12.3 <sup>1</sup>
Czech Republic	n.a.	n.a.	12.3	11.5	11.8 <sup>1</sup>
Spain	9.6	16.0	17.6	13.2	11.7 <sup>1</sup>
Denmark	5.8	9.3	12.0	11.6	11.6 <sup>1</sup>
Austria	10.9	15.5	13.7	12.8	11.3 <sup>1</sup>
Switzerland	12.7	14.2	13.7	12.9	11.2 <sup>1</sup>
Hungary	8.1	11.9	14.8	13.3	11.1 <sup>1</sup>
Germany	7.5 <sup>1</sup>	13.4 <sup>1</sup>	12.5	12.4	10.5 <sup>1</sup>
United Kingdom	n.a.	7.4	9.1	9.4	10.2 <sup>1</sup>
Belgium	9.0	12.5	13.5	11.5	10.2 <sup>1</sup>
Netherlands	3.7 <sup>1</sup>	8.5	11.3	10.0	10.0 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Australia</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>9.8<sup>2</sup></b>
Greece	7.2	7.0	12.7	10.6	9.4 <sup>1</sup>
Slovak Republic	7.1	13.6	14.5	13.7	9.2 <sup>1</sup>
Finland	2.9	6.4	8.0	9.2	8.9
New Zealand	5.3 <sup>1</sup>	10.4	11.7	10.3	8.9
Italy	16.6 <sup>1</sup>	18.2 <sup>1</sup>	13.0	10.7	8.7 <sup>1</sup>
Poland	6.3	8.0	8.7	8.8	8.5 <sup>1</sup>
United States	7.8	9.8	10.5	9.7	8.3 <sup>3</sup>
Japan	n.a.	6.9 <sup>1</sup>	8.1 <sup>1</sup>	8.9	8.3 <sup>2</sup>
Canada	7.2	9.0	10.8	8.8	7.6 <sup>2</sup>
Iceland	2.5	4.1	4.4	5.1	6.3
Sweden	5.1	7.0	6.3	6.3	6.2 <sup>1</sup>
Norway	3.5	4.9	5.3	4.9	5.6 <sup>1</sup>
Turkey	0.9	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.4

<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> Data from 1 or 2 previous years.

Source: OECD Health Data 2002.

## Illicit drugs

The data presented here relate to the use of marijuana/cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy and opiates, and summarise and update collated data by the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODCCP). Only data relating to English-speaking countries are presented here. The countries use various types of population surveys and other data collection methods, and therefore comparisons should be treated with caution. For more detail on the methods and sources, readers are referred to the UNODCCP publication.

The levels and patterns of illicit drug use in the selected English-speaking countries vary considerably (Table 6.5). Marijuana/cannabis use in the previous 12 months is most prevalent in New Zealand (20.0%) and least prevalent in Canada (8.9%). Amphetamines use ranges from 1.1% in the United States to 5.0% in New Zealand, while ecstasy use is most prevalent in Australia (3.4%) and New Zealand (3.4%). The use of opiates is very low in all selected countries, with 1.0% of the population or less using in the previous 12 months.

**Table 6.5: Summary of drug use in the past 12 months: proportion of the population aged 15 years and over, selected countries, 2000–2001<sup>(a)</sup>**

Substance	Australia	Canada	New Zealand	United Kingdom <sup>(b)</sup>	United States
			(per cent)		
Marijuana/cannabis	15.0	8.9	20.0	9.4	9.3
Amphetamines	4.0	n.a.	5.0	1.9	1.1
Ecstasy	3.4	1.5	3.4	1.6	1.4
Opiates <sup>(c)</sup>	0.6	0.3	1.0	0.6	0.5

(a) Australia, New Zealand and United States 2001; Canada and United Kingdom 2000.

(b) United Kingdom figures for marijuana/cannabis, amphetamines and ecstasy relate to persons aged 16–59 years.

(c) Includes heroin, opium, morphine and synthetic opiates.

Source: Alcohol and Public Health Research Unit 2002; National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2001; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2002; United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention 2002.