

# Alcohol Consumption in Ireland 1986 - 2006

Report for the Health Service Executive Alcohol Implementation Group



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Prepared by Dr. Ann Hope

This report should be quoted: Hope, A. (2007). Alcohol consumption in Ireland 1986-2006. Health Service Executive – Alcohol Implementation Group.

---

## Alcohol Consumption in Ireland 1986-2006

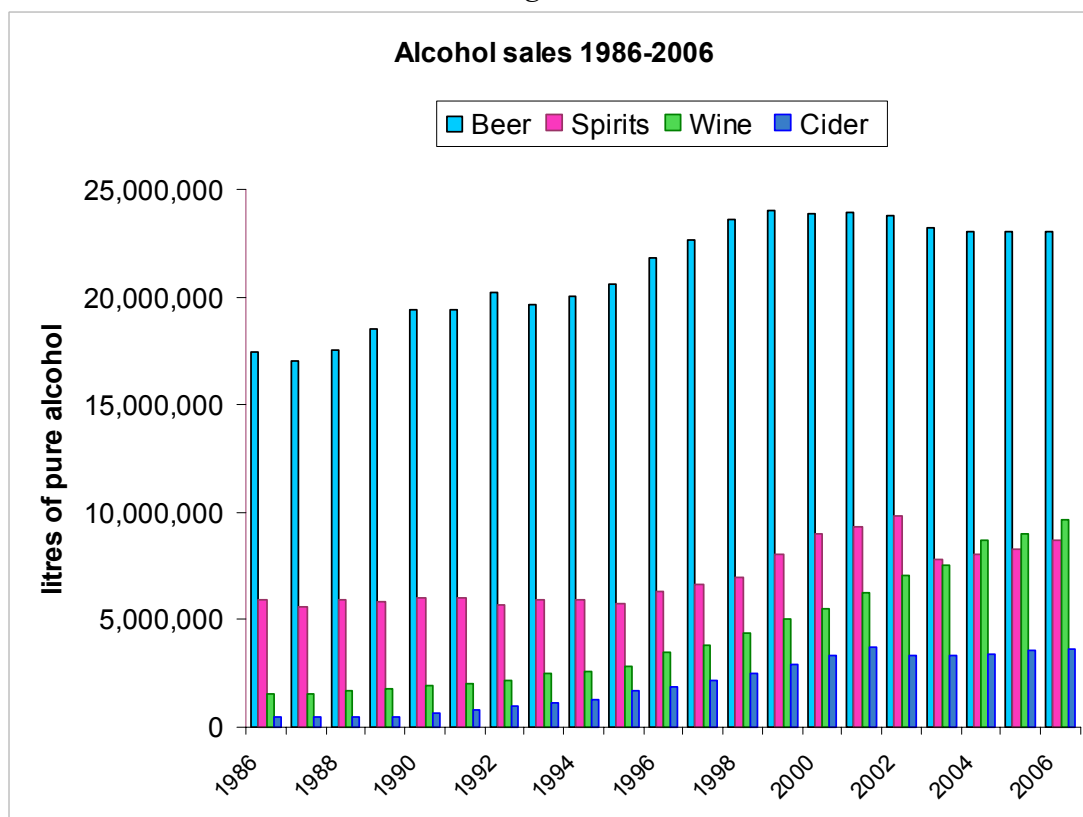
Alcohol consumption in Ireland is examined firstly using the alcohol sales figures provided by the Revenue Commissioners and secondly by adjusting for the population. Alcohol consumed across the population is presented both in terms of per capita (total population) and per adult (aged 15 years and over).

### Alcohol sales

Alcohol consumption can be assessed by the volume of sales generated for each beverage type (beer, spirits, wine and cider) which are provided by the Revenue Commissioners. The alcohol sales figures represent the volume of alcohol beverages released from warehouse and where excise duty has been paid, in other words the amount of alcohol available for sale in any given month.

The Revenue Commissioners provide the alcohol sales figures for each beverage type. Beer and spirits are provided in litres of pure alcohol. Wine is provided in litres of alcohol and converted to pure alcohol based on ABV of 12.5%. Cider is converted to pure alcohol based on ABV of 4.5%, given that the highest proportion of cider product sold in Ireland is at this alcoholic strength. The alcohol sales figure for each beverage type, in litres of pure alcohol, is presented in Figure 1 and listed in detail in Appendix 1.

Figure 1



Between 1986-2006 the sale of alcohol in Ireland has increased in all beverage categories. Beer sales have increased by a volume of 5,598,737 litres of pure alcohol representing a 32% increase while spirits sales increased by a volume of 2,716,808 litres equal to a 46% increase. The most dramatic increase by volume was in wine sales with an increase of 8,121,225 litres of pure alcohol representing a 523% increase, although this was from a

relatively low base. The sale of cider increased by 3,195,013 litres of pure alcohol, which represents a 647% increase. The changes during the twenty year time period will be examined more closely in the next section on alcohol consumption.

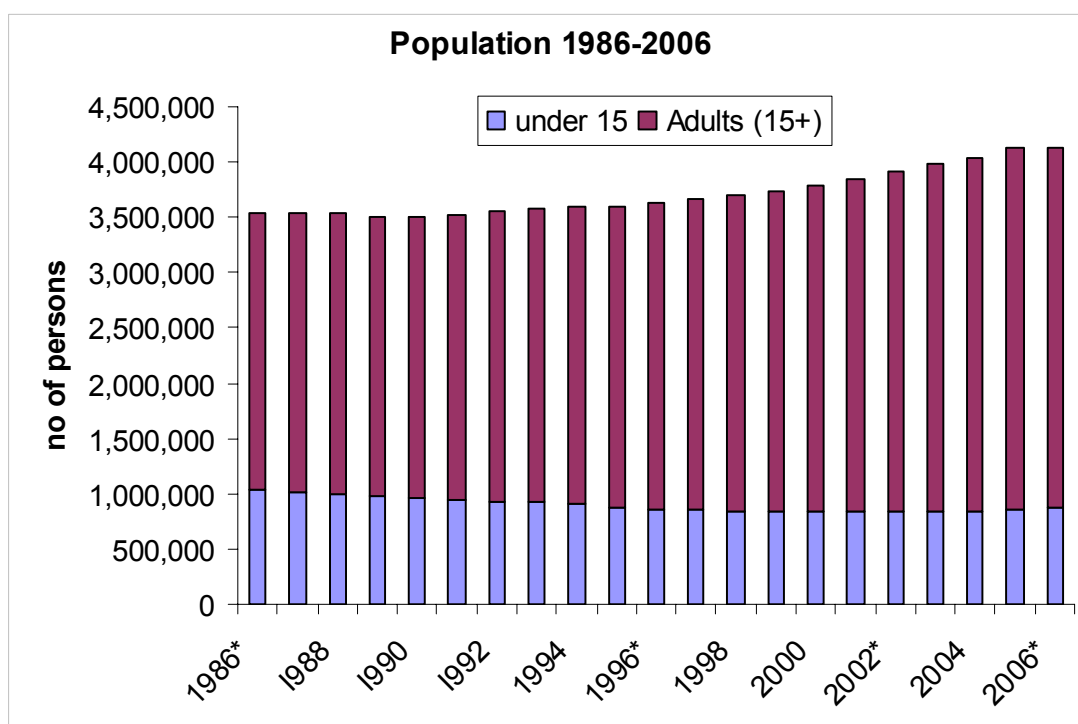
## Alcohol consumption calculations

The consumption of alcohol per capita and per adult in the total population is calculated using the sales figures provided by the Revenue Commissioners, converting wine and cider into pure alcohol as outlined above and dividing it by the population numbers provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The population figures are based on the census data collected every six years and estimated for the intervening years by the CSO. After a census year the estimated population figures for the preceding years are revised based on the actual census data.

## Population growth

The population in Ireland has significantly increased over the twenty year period from 3.5 million in 1986 to 4.2 million in 2006, an increase of almost 20%. The ratio of adults to children in the population has also changed. There has been a gradual increase in the proportion of adults in the population (Figure 2). This is an important factor when interpreting alcohol consumption figures.

Figure 2



If an increase in the population and/or the proportion of adults is greater than an increase in alcohol sales, then per capita and per adult consumption will not increase.

This occurred in 2005 where alcohol sales (pure alcohol) increased by 1.75% while the total population rose by 2.15% and the adults population increased by 2.4%. In 2006 the figures were more similar, where alcohol sales increased by 2.6%, population by 2.5% and adult population by 2.8%.

## Alcohol consumption per capita

Alcohol consumption (per head of population) showed an increase of 48% over the twenty year period 1986-2006. The increase in beer consumption was 10.5%, spirits 21.4%, wine 418% and cider 521%. As stated previously, the significant increases in wine and cider were from a low base. Alcohol consumption peaked in 2001 (11.23 litres of pure alcohol per capita). In 2003 consumption decreased by 5.9%, due mainly to a drop of 21% in sales of spirits. In the last number of years consumption has remained relatively stable (Table 1). Looking at specific beverage type, the peak consumption for beer was in 1999, for spirits in 2002 and for cider 2001. Wine has continued to increase each year (Appendix 2).

*Table 1: Alcohol consumption per capita, 2000-2006*

Year	Beer	Spirits	Wine	Cider	Total
1999	6.42	2.14	1.34	0.78	<b>10.67</b>
2000	6.29	2.37	1.46	0.89	<b>11.01</b>
2001	6.22	2.42	1.62	0.97	<b>11.23</b>
2002	6.08	2.50	1.79	0.84	<b>11.22</b>
2003	5.84	1.97	1.91	0.84	<b>10.55</b>
2004	5.69	1.99	2.15	0.84	<b>10.67</b>
2005	5.59	2.00	2.18	0.86	<b>10.63</b>
2006	5.44	2.04	2.28	0.87	<b>10.63</b>

Source: Revenue Commissioners and Central Statistics Office, Annual Reports

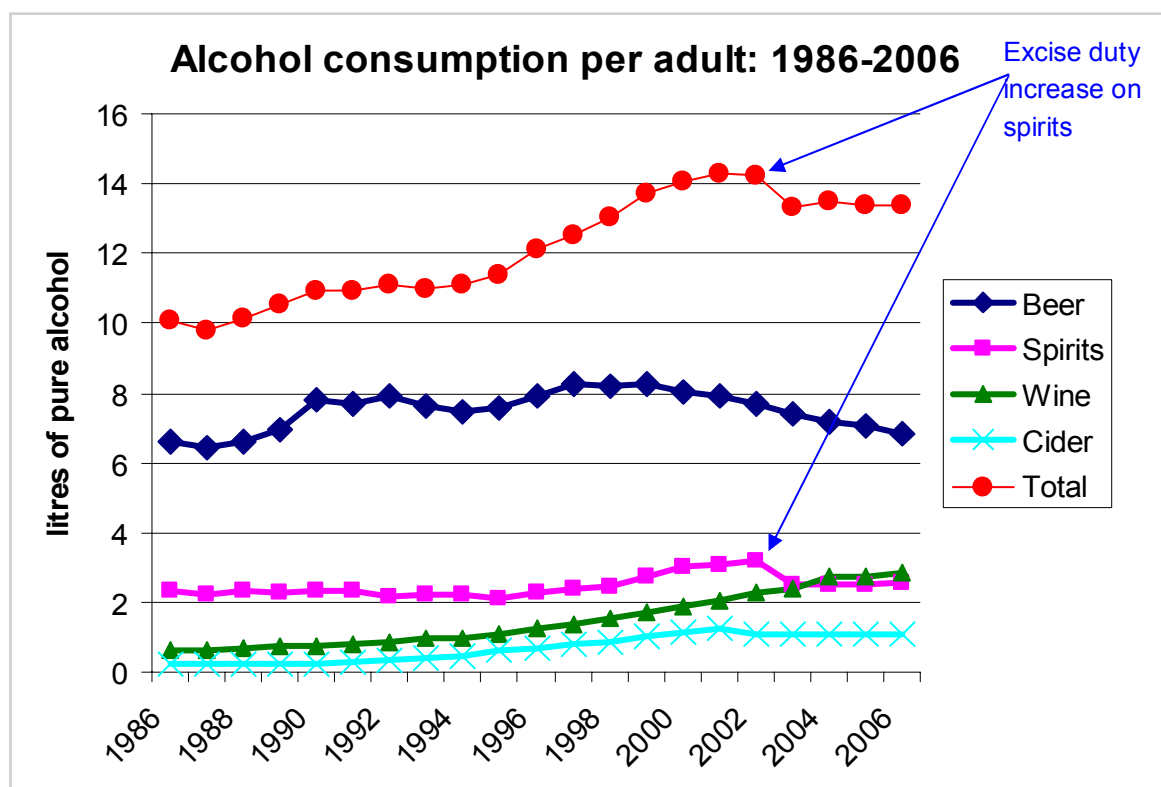
### Excise Duty Increases

During the twenty year period, 1996 was the year with the single highest year on year increase in per capita alcohol consumption that of 7.6% and 1999 the second highest with a 5.5% increase. The year with the greatest decrease, during the twenty year period was 2003, with a 5.9% decrease.

## Alcohol consumption per adult

Alcohol consumption per adult (15 years and over) is a more accurate measure for consumption rates, given that alcohol, for the most part, is not consumed by those under 15 years. Alcohol consumption per adult increased from 9.8 litres of pure alcohol in 1987 to a high of 14.3 litres in 2001, a 46% increase. The period of the most rapid change was from the mid 1990s to 2001, as illustrated in Figure 3. In 2003 alcohol consumption per adult decreased by 6% to 13.4 litres of pure alcohol. In 2004 consumption increased by 1%, due mainly to an increase in wine sales. In the last two years, alcohol consumption per adult has marginally decreased, due to a greater increase in the adult population than in the growth of alcohol sales, as discussed previously. In 2006 consumption per adult was 13.4 litres of pure alcohol.

Figure 3



During the period 1986-2006, changes in beverage preferences have taken place. While beer continues to be the most popular drink, the market share for beer has declined to 51% in 2006 from 69% in 1986 (Table 2). The real growth has been in wine where the market share has increased from 6% in 1986 to 21% in 2006.

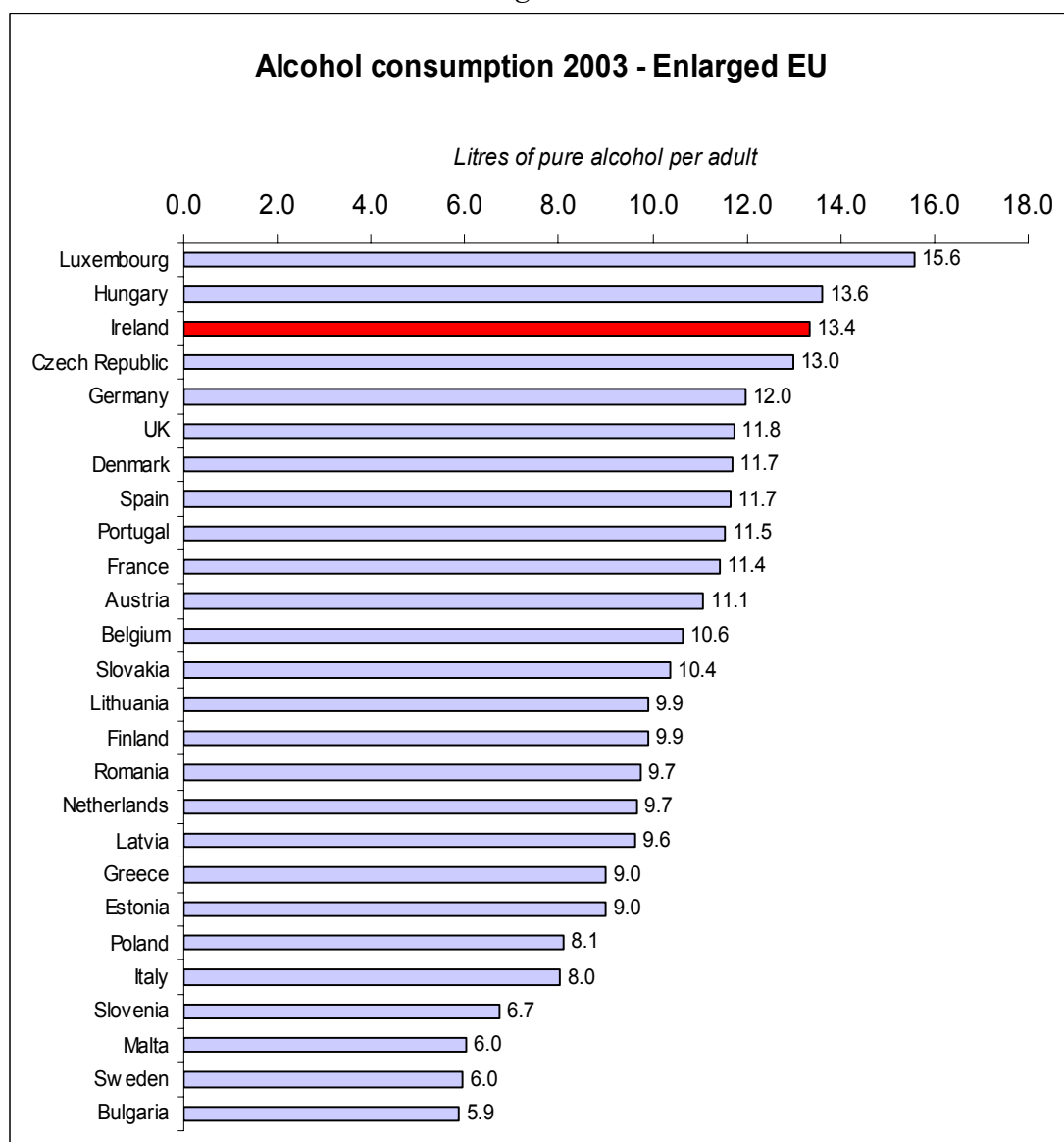
Table 2: Consumption of alcohol by beverage category in litres of pure alcohol and market share

	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006
Alcohol consumption per adult	10.10	10.92	12.14	14.30	13.36
Consumption of beer	6.93	7.49	7.89	7.93	6.83
Consumption of spirits	2.36	2.34	2.30	3.08	2.57
Consumption of wine	0.62	0.78	1.26	2.06	2.87
Consumption of cider	0.20	0.30	0.69	1.23	1.09
Percent of beer	69	69	65	55	51
Percent of spirits	23	21	19	21	19
Percent of wine	6	7	10	14	21
Percent of cider	2	3	6	9	8

## International comparisons

While alcohol consumption in Ireland has decreased from a peak of 14.3 litres of pure alcohol per adult in 2001 to 13.3 in 2006, Ireland continues to be among the highest consumers of alcohol in Europe (Figure 4). The average consumption per adult in the enlarged European Union is 10.2 litres of pure alcohol. Ireland ranks third in per adult alcohol consumption when compared with other International countries. Taking the EU 15 countries, Ireland ranks second after Luxembourg. The figures are based on recorded alcohol consumption.

Figure 4



Source: WHO Global Alcohol Database, 2006

Note: Figures for Ireland 2006, Finland 2004, all others 2003, no data for Cyprus.

## Appendix 1: Alcohol sales in litre of pure alcohol

Year	Beer	Spirits	Wine	Cider
1986	17,426,210	5,930,710	1,552,546	493,871
1987	17,061,680	5,579,885	1,571,058	526,359
1988	17,522,580	5,945,964	1,730,691	517,571
1989	18,486,280	5,828,819	1,816,251	526,333
1990	19,403,890	5,995,487	1,943,019	627,842
1991	19,374,560	6,042,020	2,017,179	784,988
1992	20,231,200	5,713,516	2,184,172	959,822
1993	19,646,000	5,901,825	2,507,625	1,112,565
1994	20,049,868	5,901,469	2,614,351	1,281,203
1995	20,639,959	5,777,690	2,881,112	1,703,978
1996	21,835,219	6,354,373	3,481,474	1,903,410
1997	22,667,377	6,679,238	3,78,6071	2,174,700
1998	23,581,051	6,998,984	4,392,864	2,481,721
1999	24,023,928	7,995,524	5,012,739	2,900,594
2000	23,840,483	8,994,007	5,536,929	3,355,379
2001	23,935,341	9,311,875	6,224,155	3,719,842
2002	23,818,491	9,762,174	7,022,301	3,301,149
2003	23,226,731	7,826,467	7,589,228	3,337,612
2004	23,022,490	8,049,450	8,675,258	3,403,639
2005	23,085,291	8,242,157	9,023,176	3,556,789
2006	23,024,947	8,647,518	9,673,771	3,688,884

**NOTE:** Revenue Commissioners provide the alcohol sales figures for each beverage type.

Beer and spirits are provided in litres of pure alcohol. Wine is provided in litres of alcohol and converted to pure alcohol based on ABV of 12.5%. Cider is converted to pure alcohol based on ABV of 4.5%.



## Appendix 2: Alcohol Consumption per capita, in litres of pure alcohol

Year	Beer	Spirits	Wine	Cider	Total	% change from year to year
1986	4.92	1.68	0.44	0.14	7.17	
1987	4.81	1.57	0.44	0.15	6.98	-2.78%
1988	4.96	1.68	0.49	0.15	7.28	4.42
1989	5.27	1.66	0.52	0.15	7.60	4.28
1990	5.53	1.71	0.55	0.18	7.98	5.03
1991	5.50	1.71	0.57	0.22	8.00	0.32
1992	5.69	1.61	0.61	0.27	8.18	2.25
1993	5.50	1.65	0.70	0.31	8.16	-0.28
1994	5.59	1.65	0.73	0.36	8.32	1.99
1995	5.73	1.60	0.80	0.47	8.61	3.43
1996	6.02	1.75	0.96	0.52	9.26	7.55
1997	6.19	1.82	1.03	0.59	9.64	4.06
1998	6.37	1.89	1.19	0.67	10.11	4.97
1999	6.42	2.14	1.34	0.78	10.67	5.52
2000	6.29	2.37	1.46	0.89	11.01	3.17
2001	6.22	2.42	1.62	0.97	11.23	1.96
2002	6.08	2.50	1.79	0.84	11.22	-0.10
2003	5.84	1.97	1.91	0.84	10.55	-5.93
2004	5.69	1.99	2.15	0.84	10.67	1.14
2005	5.59	2.00	2.18	0.86	10.63	-0.39
2006	5.44	2.04	2.28	0.87	10.63	0.04

Source: Revenue Commissioners and Central Statistics Office, Annual Reports

Excise Duty increase

## Appendix 3 : Alcohol consumption per adult (15 years+), in litres of pure alcohol

Year	Beer	Spirits	Wine	Cider	Total	% change from year to year
1986	4.92	1.68	0.44	0.14	7.17	
1987	4.81	1.57	0.44	0.15	6.98	-2.78%
1988	4.96	1.68	0.49	0.15	7.28	4.42
1989	5.27	1.66	0.52	0.15	7.60	4.28
1990	5.53	1.71	0.55	0.18	7.98	5.03
1991	5.50	1.71	0.57	0.22	8.00	0.32
1992	5.69	1.61	0.61	0.27	8.18	2.25
1993	5.50	1.65	0.70	0.31	8.16	-0.28
1994	5.59	1.65	0.73	0.36	8.32	1.99
1995	5.73	1.60	0.80	0.47	8.61	3.43
1996	6.02	1.75	0.96	0.52	9.26	7.55
1997	6.19	1.82	1.03	0.59	9.64	4.06
1998	6.37	1.89	1.19	0.67	10.11	4.97
1999	6.42	2.14	1.34	0.78	10.67	5.52
2000	6.29	2.37	1.46	0.89	11.01	3.17
2001	6.22	2.42	1.62	0.97	11.23	1.96
2002	6.08	2.50	1.79	0.84	11.22	-0.10
2003	5.84	1.97	1.91	0.84	10.55	-5.93
2004	5.69	1.99	2.15	0.84	10.67	1.14
2005	5.59	2.00	2.18	0.86	10.63	-0.39
2006	5.44	2.04	2.28	0.87	10.63	0.04

Source: Revenue Commissioners and Central Statistics Office, Annual Reports

Excise Duty increase