

Patterns in drinking across the four UK nations

Evidence and Impact
Team, Drinkaware

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About Drinkaware

Drinkaware is the UK's leading alcohol charity which aims to reduce alcohol harm. We achieve this by providing impartial, evidence-based information, advice and practical resources; raising awareness of alcohol and its harms and working collaboratively with partners.

This paper compares trends in key variables around alcohol consumption between the four UK nations using data from Drinkaware Monitor surveys from 2017 to 2022. The Drinkaware Monitor is an annual survey carried out on behalf of Drinkaware by YouGov. The sample is weighted and representative of the UK adult population according to age, gender, social grade and region. More details about the survey and the methodology can be found on [Drinkaware's website](#).

Risk levels by nation

The proportion of high risk and possible dependent drinkers¹ is highest in Northern Ireland (8.1%) and lowest in Wales (6.6%). The observed change in the proportion of high risk/possible dependent drinkers between 2017 and 2022 was not [statistically significant](#) in any UK nation. Northern Ireland observed a percentage point decrease of 2.2, Wales decreased by 1.4, England decreased by 0.8 and Scotland decreased by 0.1.

Table 1: Percentage point change in High Risk/Possible Dependent AUDIT Scores from 2017 to 2022 by UK nation

	2017	2022	Percentage point change
England	8.0% (n=3,527)	7.2% (n=3,692)	-0.8
Wales	8.0% (n=1,012)	6.6% (n=1,013)	-1.4
Scotland	6.9% (n=1,129)	6.8% (n=1,001)	-0.1
Northern Ireland	10.3% (n=506)	8.1% (n=612)	-2.2

Source: Full AUDIT Score categories: Base all UK adults. (2022=6,318; 2017=6,174)

Weekly units by nation

The proportion of drinkers consuming more than 14 units each week² is highest in England (21.8%) whilst Northern Ireland has the lowest rates (19.6%). The largest percentage point decrease in the proportion of drinkers consuming more than 14 units each week was observed in Northern Ireland (5.9) and was statistically significant. Wales decreased by 1.9, Scotland decreased by 1.3 and England decreased by 0.9. However, the observed change in these nations was not statistically significant.

Table 2: Percentage point change in 15+ Weekly Units from 2018 to 2022 by UK nation

	2018	2022	Percentage point change
England	22.7% (n=5,166)	21.8% (n=3,165)	-0.9
Wales	21.9% (n=1,055)	20.0% (n=878)	-1.9
Scotland	21.9% (n=1,177)	20.6% (n=854)	-1.3
Northern Ireland	25.5% (n=504)	19.6% (n=531)	-5.9**

Source: A3_SUM. Weekly units score. Base all UK adults who drink alcohol. (2018=7,902; 2022=5,428)

¹ As defined by the World Health Organisation's AUDIT scale:

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/67205/WHO_MSD_MSB_01.6a.pdf;jsessionid=F617149EB888855D2A415534180F3E5A?sequence=1

² Department of Health (2016). *UK Chief Medical Officers' Low Risk Drinking*

Guidelines. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/545937/UK_CMOs_report.pdf

Drinking frequency by UK nation

The proportion of adults who drink on four or more days each week is highest in England (15.9%) whilst Northern Ireland has the lowest rates (11.3%). The largest percentage point decrease in the proportion of adults drinking on four or more days a week between 2018 and 2022 was observed in England (2.3) and this change was statistically significant. The observed change in the other UK nations was not statistically significant. Northern Ireland decreased by 1.1, Wales decreased by 0.8 and Scotland decreased by 0.7.

Table 3: Percentage point change in Drinking four or more days a week from 2018 to 2022 by UK nation

	2018	2022	Percentage point change
England	18.2% (n=5,803)	15.9% (n=3,692)	-2.3***
Wales	16.2% (n=1,195)	15.4% (n=1,013)	-0.8
Scotland	13.9% (n=1,315)	13.2% (n=1,001)	-0.7
Northern Ireland	12.2% (n=593)	11.3% (n=612)	-1.1

Source: A1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol? Base all adults (2018=8,906; 2022=6,318)

Prevalence of binge drinking

The proportion of drinkers who binge drink daily or almost daily in the UK is highest in Northern Ireland (3.0%) whilst Wales and Scotland have the lowest rates (1.8%). The observed change in the proportion of drinkers who binge drink daily or almost daily was not statistically significant in any UK nation. Whilst Wales observed a 0.4 percentage point increase between 2018 and 2022, Northern Ireland decreased by 0.9, England decreased by 0.3 and Scotland decreased by 0.2.

Table 4: Percentage point change in binge drinking daily or almost daily from 2018 to 2022 by UK nation

	2018	2022	Percentage point change
England	2.6% (n=5,166)	2.3% (n=3,165)	-0.3
Wales	1.4% (n=1,055)	1.8% (n=878)	0.4
Scotland	2.0% (n=1,177)	1.8% (n=854)	-0.2
Northern Ireland	3.9% (n=504)	3.0% (n=531)	-0.9

Source: Q6C. How often have you had 6/8 units or more units on a single occasion in the last year (6 for females; 8 for males)? Base all UK adults who drink (2018=7,902; 2022=5,428)

Glossary

Significance levels

An asterisk next to the figure in the 'Percentage point change' column indicates this change between the two years was statistically significant. Statistical significance means we can be confident that the differences are not down to chance. No asterisk indicates the results are not statistically significant.

***99% significance **95% significance *90% significance

Weekly Units

The Chief Medical Officer's low risk drinking guidelines recommend drinking no more than 14 units each week.

Binge drinking

In the UK, binge drinking is defined as consuming 8 units or more in a single session for males and 6 units or more in a single session for females.

AUDIT

Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) was developed by the World Health Organisation as a method of screening for excessive drinking and to assist in brief assessment. A score of 20+ on the AUDIT indicates Possible Dependence.

	AUDIT
Low Risk	0 to 7
Increasing Risk	8 to 15
High Risk	16 to 19
Possible Dependent	20+