

Fact sheet: Infrastructures

December 2012



Are alcohol policy infrastructures in place across Europe?

Ten alcohol policy infrastructure elements were studied in 32 European countries for the year 2010: (1) Policies, priorities and goals, i.e. a national policy document on alcohol needed to set priorities, guide action and allocate resources; (2) laws and regulations that build a legislative basis related to alcohol and its implementation; (3) different governmental sectors at different levels involved in alcohol policy (multisectoral approach) and a coordinating body; (4) national politicians specialised in alcohol issues; (5) the alcohol industry engaging in alcohol policy as a pressure group; (6) civil society organisations and ‘voice’ as public health advocates; (7) science and research-based organisations building the knowledge base for the development of effective alcohol policy; (8) the professional workforce engaged in alcohol policy and practice; (9) monitoring and surveillance systems to identify and make information available; and (10) funding basis needed to develop effective alcohol policy.

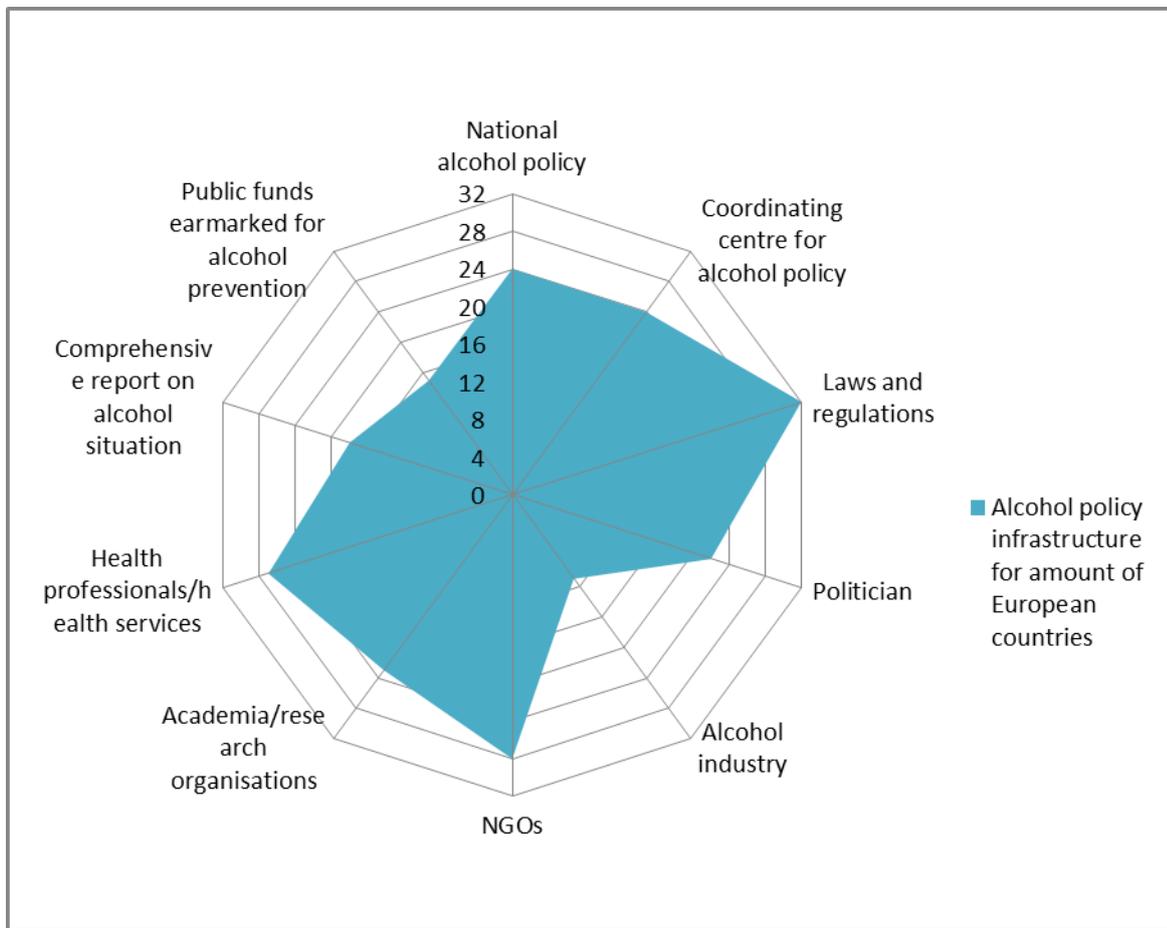
The spider web graph below summarizes the number of countries that had these infrastructures in in blue. The assessment of the categories ‘national alcohol policy’, ‘coordinating centre for alcohol policy’, ‘laws and regulations’, ‘politicians’, ‘comprehensive report on alcohol situation’ and ‘public funds earmarked for alcohol prevention’ examines the presence or absence of that infrastructure element for all countries. The categories ‘NGO’, ‘academia’ and ‘health professionals’ show countries with high and medium involvement of those stakeholders in public policy. The category ‘alcohol industry’, in contrast, shows the amount of countries where both manufacturers and producers/retailers have low or no involvement in public policy, since such involvement is found to weaken alcohol policy.

All countries have a number of laws and regulations addressing alcohol. This might be a comprehensive alcohol act or a number of laws and regulations addressing alcohol besides other issues. Twenty four of the 32 countries have a written national policy document, which can contribute to set priorities, show commitment and allocate resources and shape a country’s alcohol policy. The same number of countries had a coordinating body available that is responsible for the overall coordination of the development and monitoring of the national alcohol policy.

However, only about half the European countries have prepared a comprehensive report on the alcohol situation in their country despite the importance of monitoring and surveillance as a basis for priority setting and policy development. Only eleven countries had public funds earmarked for alcohol prevention.

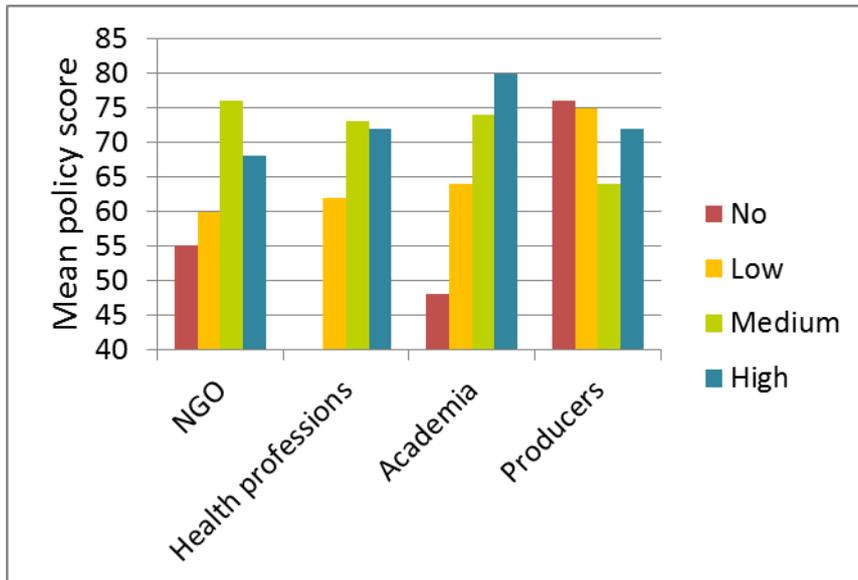
NGOs, academia/research organisations and health professionals/health services in most countries show high or medium involvement in alcohol policy. This could be a contributing factor to the development of effective alcohol policy. On the other hand, the alcohol industries showed a high involvement in alcohol policy, remembering that the spider web documents the number of countries with low no involvement in alcohol policy.

Spider web. European alcohol policy infrastructure

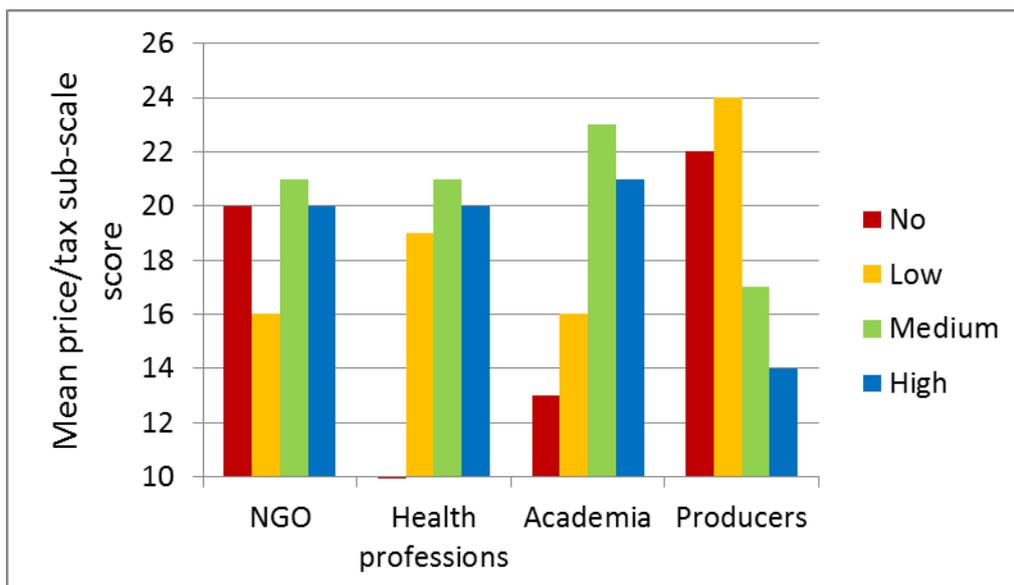


Do stakeholders make a difference to alcohol policy?

The mean scores for the strictness and comprehensiveness of alcohol policy by level of stakeholder involvement in alcohol policy development (no, low, medium or high) is shown in the figure below. An increased involvement of academia was associated with more strict and comprehensive policies (Beta=0.77, p<0.01). Increased involvement of producer companies was associated with less strict and comprehensive policies, but the relationship was not significant (Beta=-0.49, p=0.063).



When looking at alcohol pricing and tax policy, the figure below found that increased involvement of academia was associated with more strict and comprehensive alcohol pricing and tax policies (Beta=0.604, $p < 0.05$), while increased involvement of producer companies was associated with less strict and comprehensive alcohol pricing and tax policy (Beta=-0.73, $p < 0.01$).



Take home messages

1. The exercise of conceptualizing and mapping alcohol policy infrastructure in Europe is complex but important to identify the elements that have a major impact on alcohol policy and strengthen them.
2. Laws and regulations, written national policy documents, and coordinating centres for alcohol policy are the most widespread infrastructures. However, efforts have to be done to extend comprehensive reports on the alcohol situation and to establish public funds earmarked for alcohol prevention in all countries.
3. The impact of the involvement of different stakeholders in alcohol policy is diverse. Whereas academia involvement seems to facilitate stricter and comprehensive alcohol policy, the involvement of alcohol producers could be a barrier, at least, to a stronger pricing policy, while NGO involvement did not show any relationship.

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