

## Fact sheet:

# Drinking before going out in Europe

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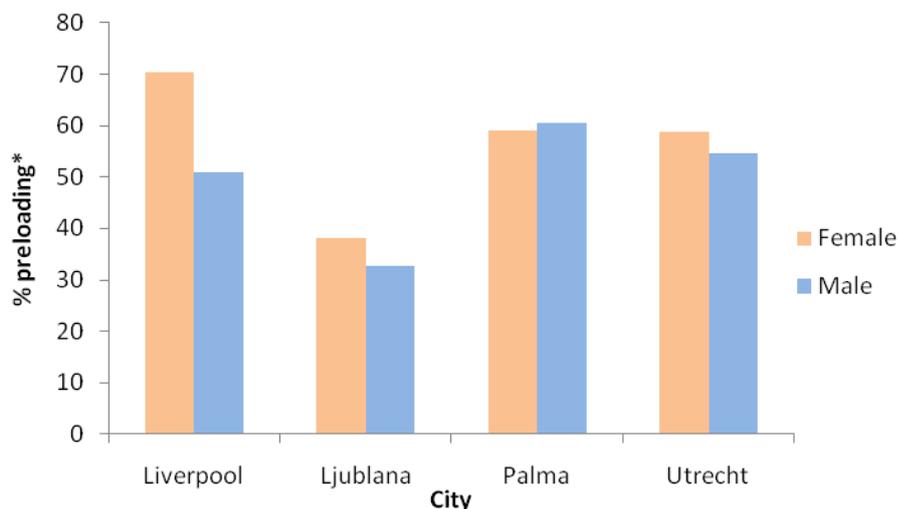


### Drinking before going out

Drinking by young people before going out was studied in four European cities, Liverpool in the UK, Ljubljana in Slovenia, Palma (de Mallorca) in Spain and Utrecht in the Netherlands.

The vast majority of drinkers in all cities expected to binge drink on the night they were studied, and in fact the amount of alcohol reported at interview had already reached binge drinking levels in all cities and for both genders. With the exception of those from Ljubljana, the majority of young nightlife users surveyed reported that they had consumed alcohol at home, a friend's home or, in the case of Palma, in public places prior to visiting public drinking environments. Such preloading behaviour is often motivated by price, with alcohol typically being vastly cheaper in supermarkets and other off-licensed premises than in pubs, bars or nightclubs. However such preloading has important implications for preventing harm in drinking environments as it means that individuals are arriving at pubs, bars and nightclubs already under the influence of alcohol, and in some cases likely intoxicated. Serving alcohol to individuals who are drunk is illegal in most European countries, yet a growing trend in preloading means that bar managers and staff face an increasingly intoxicated customer base.

**Figure 1. Percentage of participants having preloaded\*, by city and gender**



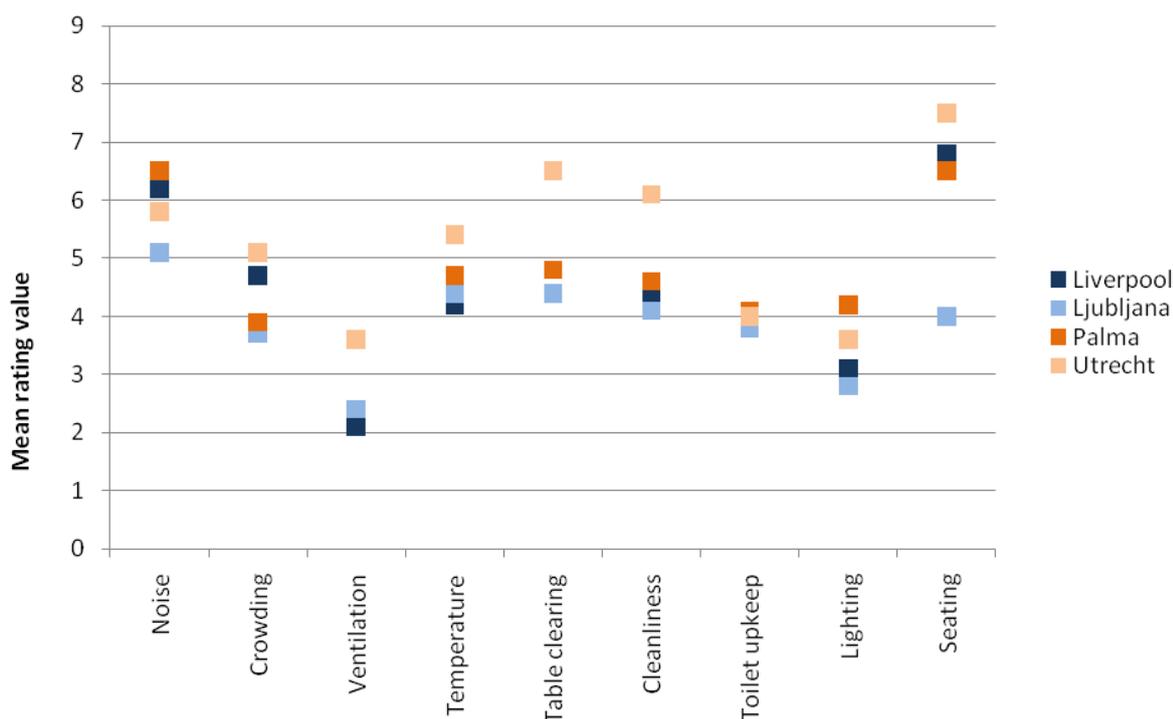
### Venues and intoxication

The physical environment within venues was assessed using a series of rating scales (from 0 to 9) measuring noise levels, crowding, ventilation, temperature, levels of lighting and factors regarding cleanliness. On all scales, higher values represented more 'problematic' levels.

Venues that are crowded, loud, unclean and poorly monitored are likely to see higher levels of intoxication, and consequently higher levels of related harm. Such characteristics are likely to be symptomatic of poorly managed bars where drunkenness and anti-social behaviour is left unchecked, with permissiveness having one of the strongest independent relationships with intoxication.

Strong relationships were also found between increased customer intoxication ratings and both plastic glassware and the promotion of non-alcoholic drinks. Both of these characteristics could be considered harm reduction measures, yet findings here urge caution around recommending them to prevent alcohol related problems. Relationships between plastic glassware and intoxication likely represent the use (often enforced by police or licensing authorities) of this measure to prevent serious violent injury in high risk bars; yet suggest that bars' use of plastic does not stop customers getting drunk, and therefore would not stop alcohol-related harm including violence. For non-alcoholic drink promotions, these were often focused on energy drinks that are typically consumed in combination with alcohol and have been linked to greater intoxication and alcohol-related harm.

**Figure 2. Mean ratings on physical environment scales**



0 mean rating value = "non problematic"; 9 mean rating value = "highly problematic"

## Take home messages

1. Preloading and binge drinking are common features of nightlife participation in young people across Europe. This leads to young people already being drunk by the time they arrive at a drinking venue, making intoxication difficult for bar staff to deal with.
2. Pre-loading is driven by cheap alcohol prices in shops and supermarkets, much cheaper than in drinking venues. An effective way to solve this is with the introduction of a minimum price per gram of alcohol sold.
3. Just from their physical structure, drinking venues are designed to promote problematic drinking. All drinking venues should be licensed to sell alcohol, and the renewal of the licence, which should be monitored on a regular basis, should be dependent on adhering to a range of minimum standard for the physical, social and staffing environments.
4. Although their use might seem intuitive, the use of plastic glassware and the promotion of non-alcoholic drinks, in particular energy drinks, may actually worsen intoxication rather than prevent harm.

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