

# Fact sheet:

## Monitoring alcohol policy

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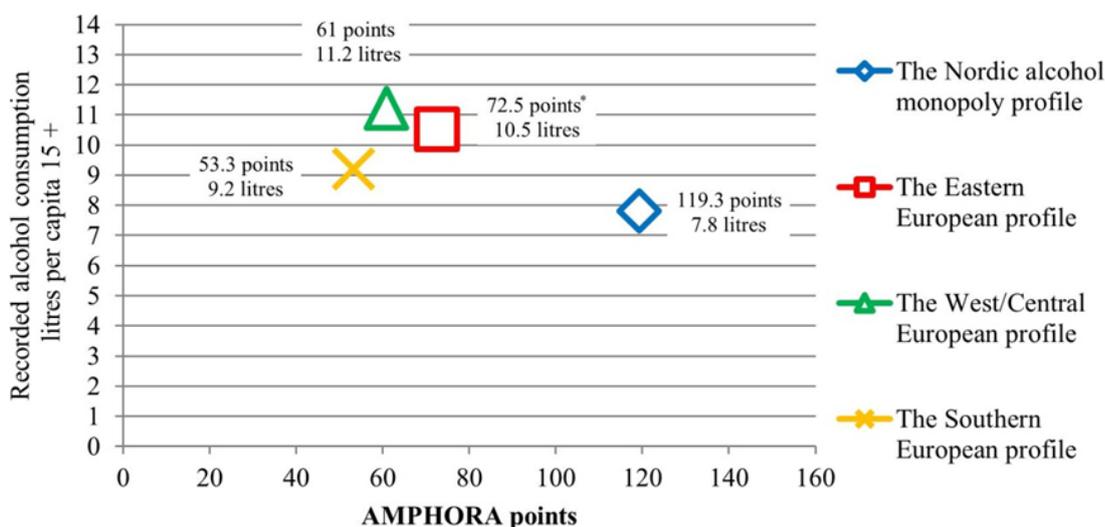


### Alcohol policy scale

By constructing a scale measuring the strictness and comprehensiveness of formal alcohol policies, and applying it in 33 European countries, we can create an overview on how alcohol is governed and controlled in Europe. The alcohol policy scale, with a mean score of 71.3, varied from 38.5 points (permissive Luxembourg) to 133 points (stringent Norway) out of a possible 160. Despite recent alcohol policy liberalizations in the Nordic countries, the four Nordic alcohol-monopoly countries have by far still the strictest alcohol policies in Europe. A common denominator for the top ranking countries is high taxes and restricted physical availability of alcoholic beverages.

### Alcohol policy and alcohol consumption

As the figure below shows, with the exception of the southern European countries, higher AMPHORA policy score is associated with lower alcohol consumption. The decrease in alcohol (wine) consumption in the Mediterranean countries has been influenced mainly by societal factors like urbanization and changes in work organization, rather than changes in formal alcohol policies.



### Using the alcohol policy scale

When using policy scales, one should remember that there are some built-in problems with the methodology. First of all, it is hard to quantify and reduce complex policies into numbers that are trustworthy and internationally comparable. It is also tricky to measure the degree of

enforcement, and including informal control practises in a scale should be avoided altogether. An attempt to measure enforcement was included in the AMPHORA scale derived from the WHO material, but only for a limited number of policies (BAC limits and advertising restrictions). It is hard to get objective data on how well policies are enforced, and in the end the enforcement estimates did not have any greater effect on the final scores in the AMPHORA scale. However, it is something worth looking closer at in future research.

Despite several built in flaws, the pros of the scaling approach still clearly outweigh the cons. The scale gives us a large amount of data in numerical form, which makes it a strong tool in communicating with the public or politicians. With the help of scales it is easy to compare and rank countries, as well as getting an overview of the alcohol policies implemented in Europe.

### Take home messages

1. The scale, which also serves as a tool for information gathering, translates formal alcohol policies into a single quantifiable figure, making it a strong tool in communicating with the public or politicians.
2. The results should be interpreted with caution, acknowledging the built in weaknesses of the scaling approach.
3. Although there are signs of convergence regarding both alcohol consumption and alcohol policies, there are still immense differences on how alcohol is governed in Europe.
4. Despite a turn towards more liberal alcohol policies during the past few decades, the four Nordic alcohol-monopoly countries still have by far the strictest policies in Europe.
5. With the exception of the Southern European Profile countries, higher alcohol policy scores, i.e. more strict and comprehensive alcohol policies, are strongly associated with lower alcohol consumption.

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