

Alcohol purchase age limits in Europe: current state of play

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Why protect young people from drinking alcohol?

“All children and adolescents have the right to grow up in an environment protected from the negative consequences of alcohol consumption and, to the extent possible, from the promotion of alcohol”

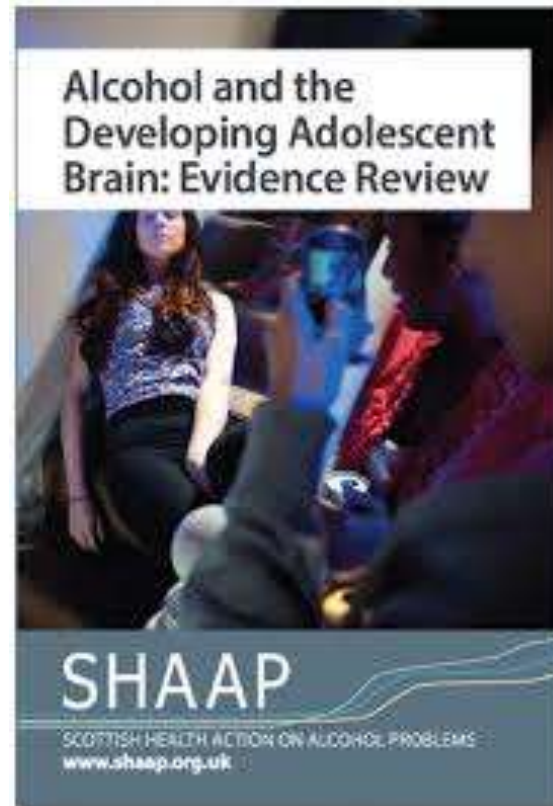
WHO European Charter on Alcohol (1995)



Risks associated with child drinking

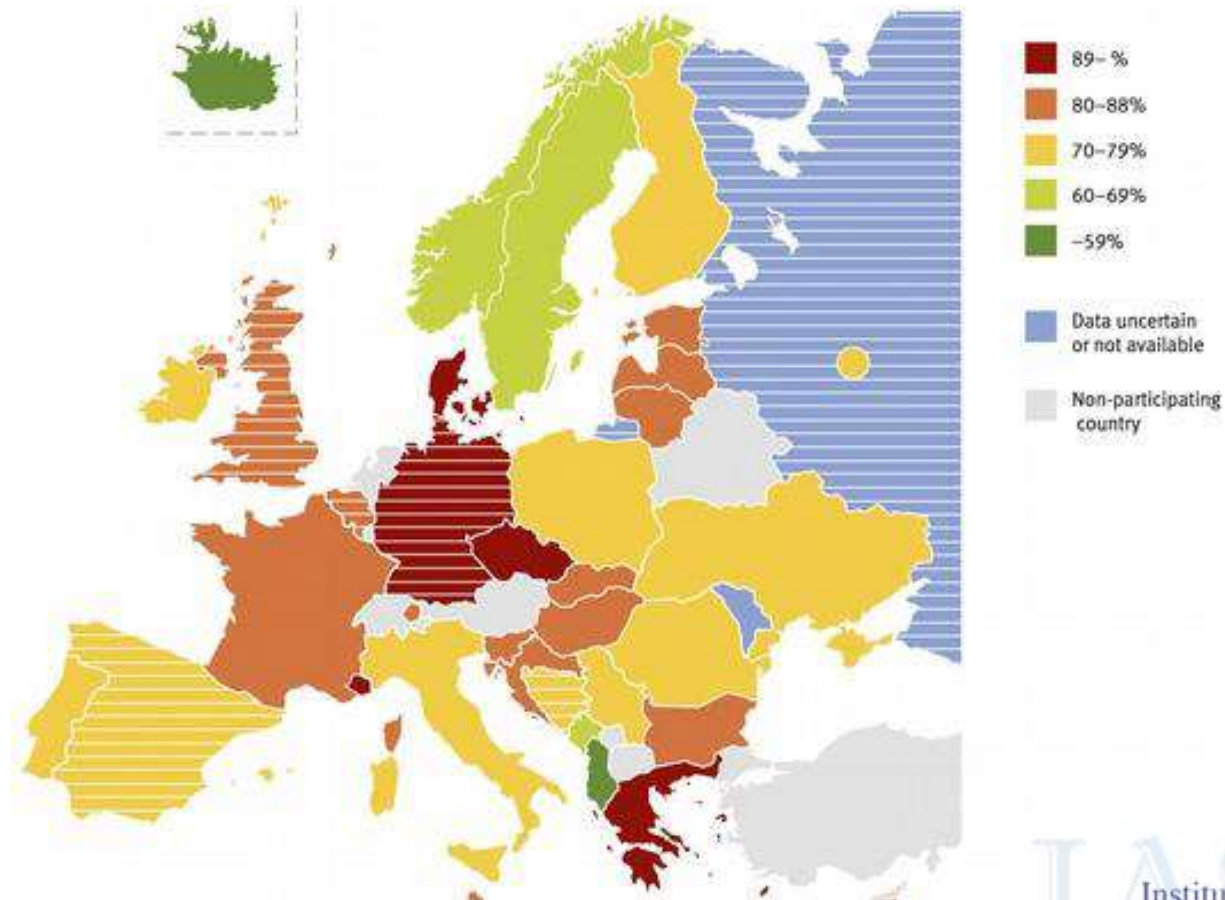
- Children who drink are at greater risk of brain damage
- Children who drink are at greater risk of developing problems with alcohol later in life, including dependency
- One-in-four deaths among 16-24 year olds alcohol related
- Young people higher risk road traffic accidents

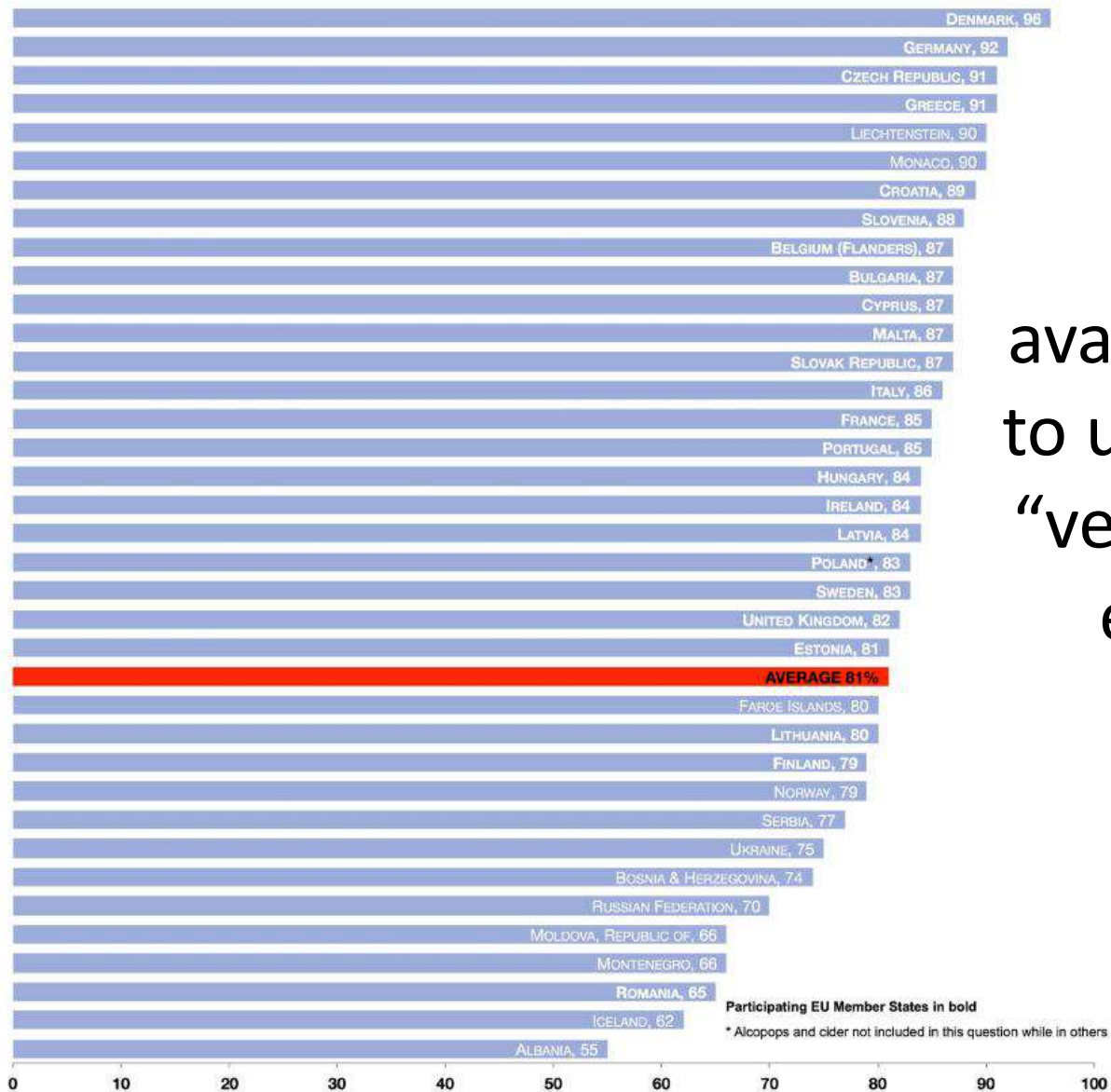
Adolescent drinking and brain damage



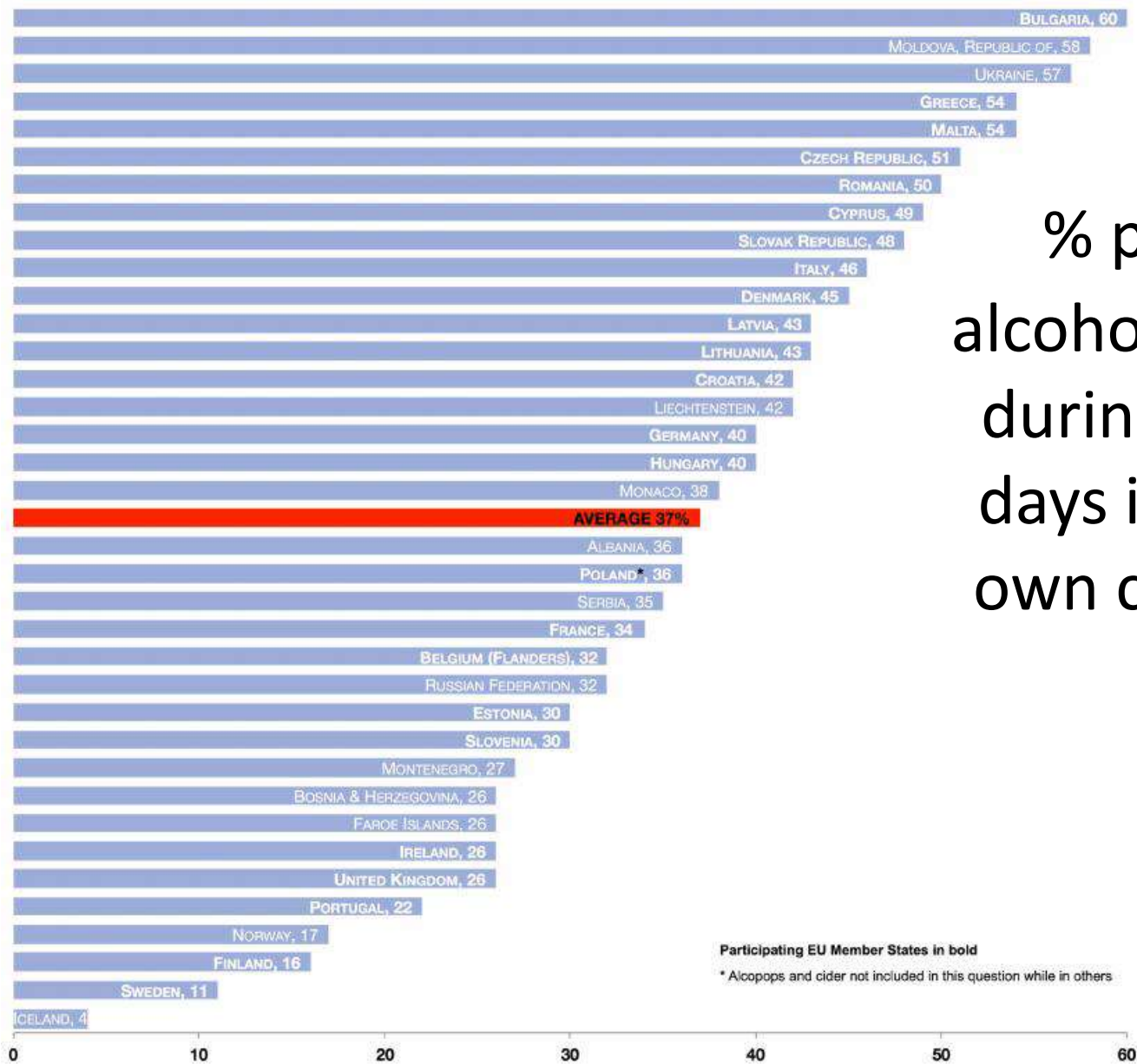
Underage drinking in Europe

Frequency of use of any alcoholic beverage during the last 12 months, ESPAD (2011)

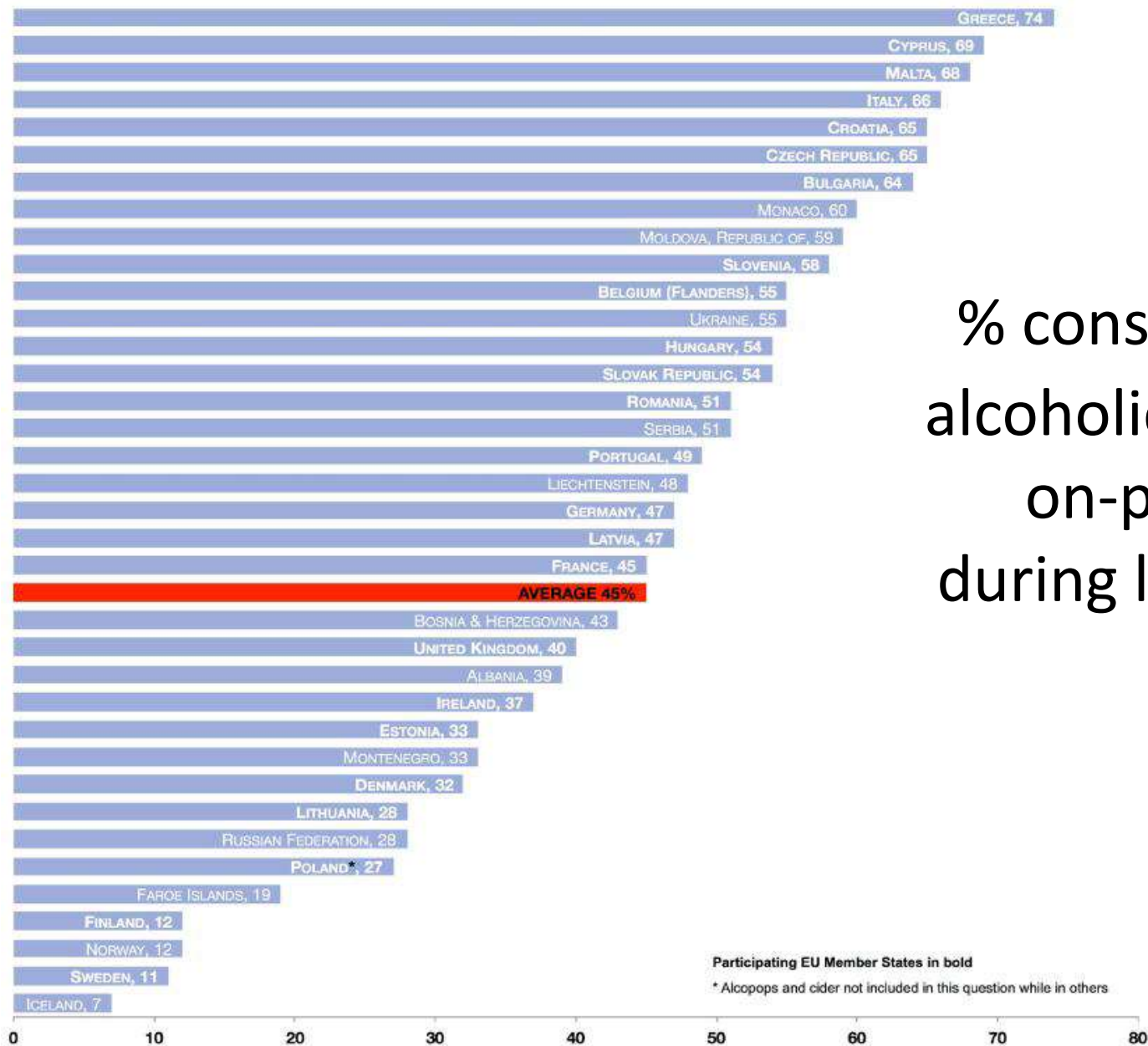




% perceived availability of alcohol to underage drinkers: “very easy” or “fairly easy” to obtain



% purchase of alcoholic beverages during the last 30 days in a store for own consumption



% consumption of alcoholic beverages on-premises during last 30 days

Options for action

- Raise the minimum purchase age to 18 years for all beverage categories at all sales outlets
- Mount educational and legislative efforts to increase enforcement of bans on selling alcohol to people under legal age

WHO EU Alcohol Action Plan 2012-2020

Options for action

Promote, ensure and enforce adequate level of controls in on- and off-premises particularly for legal age check:

- Use effective enforcement measures to reduce availability of alcoholic beverages to underage people
- Introduce on voluntary basis 25 years' or higher reference age for age controls
- Discussion on and exchange of best practices in CNAPA on distance sales, sales from automated tills, vending machines, and implementing automated control measures for face-to-face sales to prevent the purchase of alcohol by minors

*Action Plan on Youth Drinking and on Heavy Episodic Drinking
(2014-2016)*

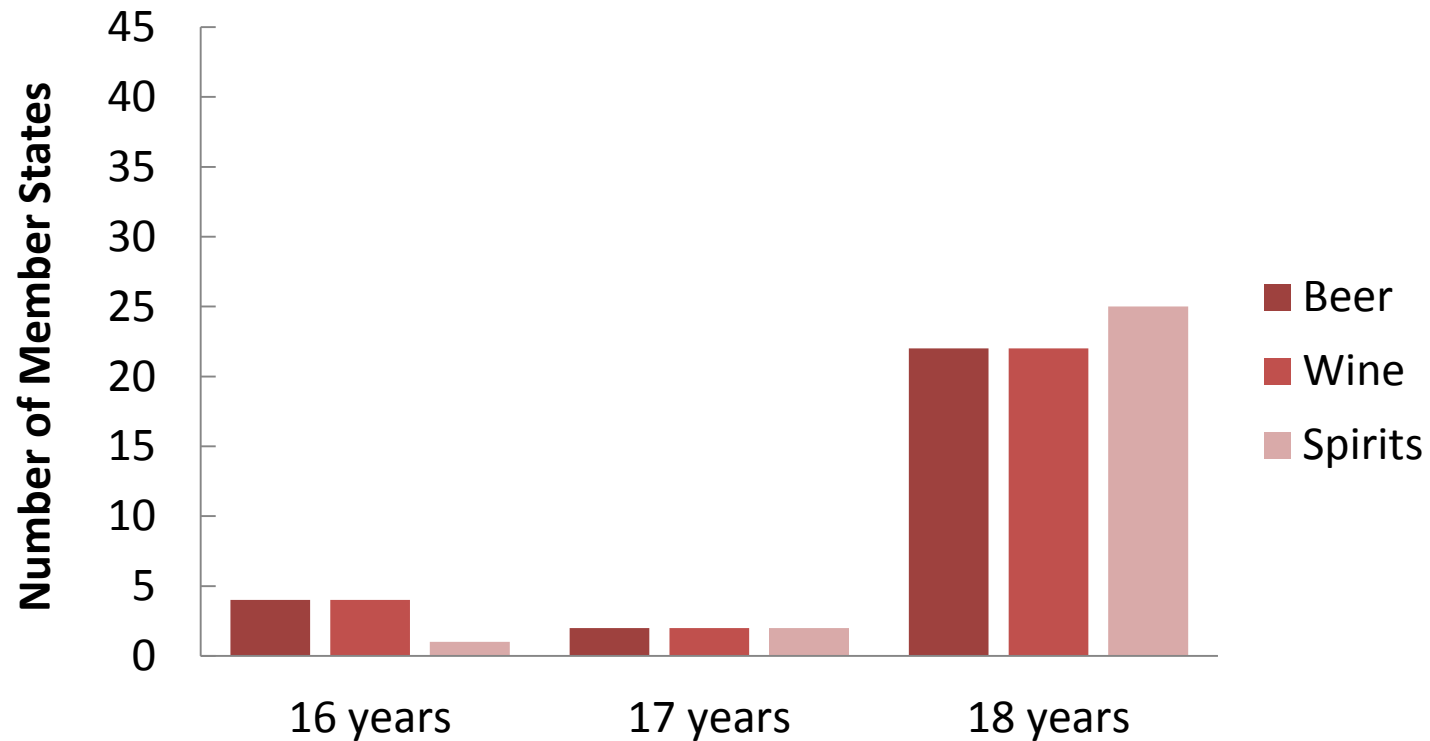
Options for action cont...

Support multi-sectorial approaches to ensure compliance with national regulations:

- Deliver national information campaigns to raise awareness of national legislation among sellers of alcoholic beverages and the general public
- Promote multi-stakeholder programmes including economic operators, police, and local authorities to ensure better enforcement of age limits

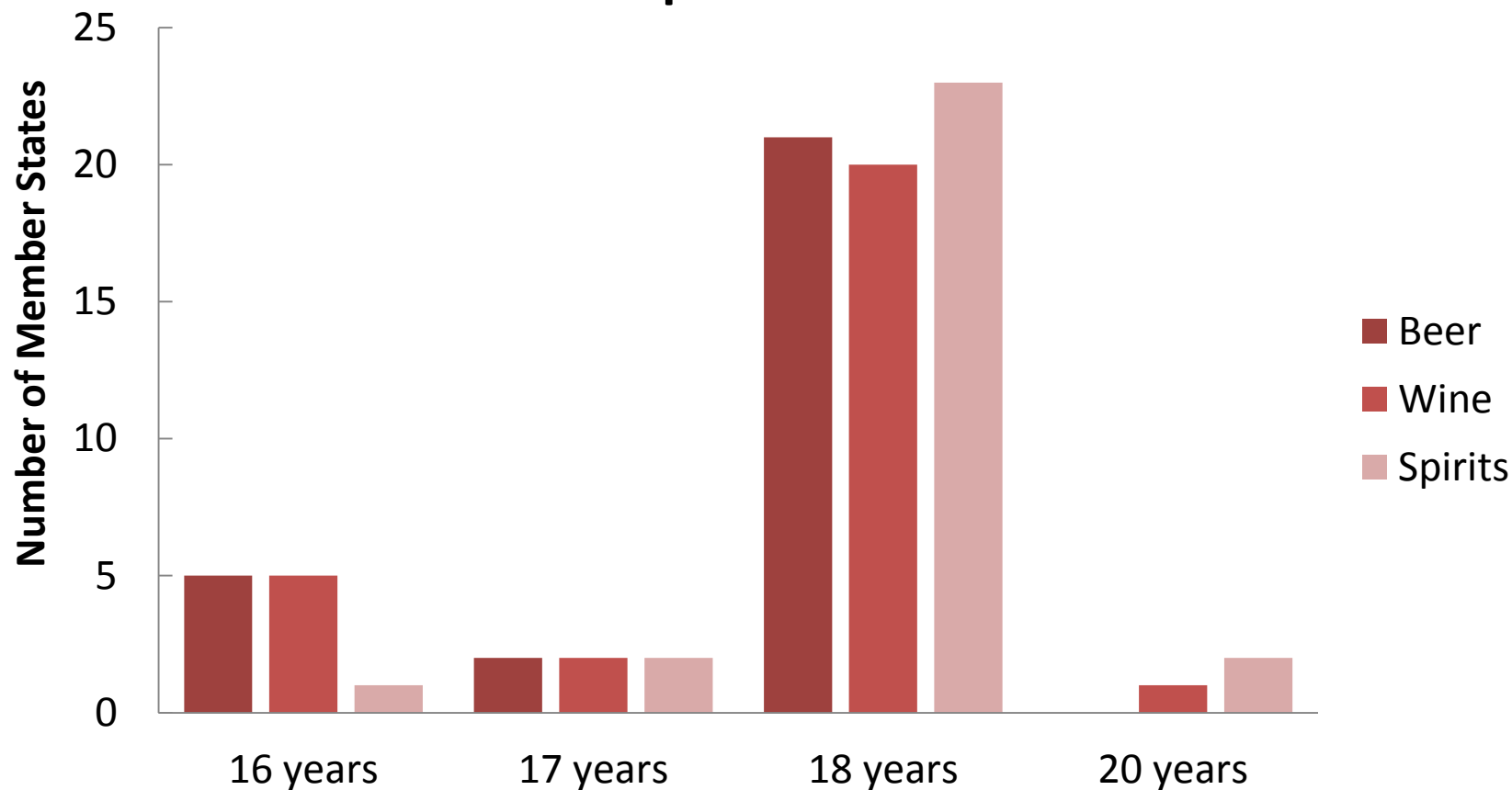
*Action Plan on Youth Drinking and on Heavy Episodic Drinking
(2014-2016)*

Legal minimum purchase age limits in Europe: on-premises



Minimum age limit for on-premise sale of beer, wine and spirits, by number of Member States (n=28) WHO (2015)

Legal minimum purchase age limits in Europe: off-premises



Minimum age limit for off-premise sale of beer, wine and spirits, by number of Member States (n=28) WHO (2015)

Case study: UK minimum purchase age laws

The law:

- Minimum age limit for on-premise serving and off-premise selling is 18*
- Protection of children from harm is one of four licensing objectives

Penalties for breaking the law:

- Purchase of alcohol by a person U-18 carries a fine up to £5,000
- The sale of alcohol to underage persons is punishable by either a maximum fine of £20,000 (for persistent offenders), or suspension of a license, or a closure order

How it is enforced:

- Local authorities, including Police and retailers, work in partnership to monitor and enforce minimum purchase age laws, including test purchasing outlets suspected of illegal trading
- Challenge 25 scheme – voluntary, but participating retailers subject to test purchasing/mystery shopping by Trading Standards Authority

Outcomes?

- Ave 10,000 test purchases conducted each year in off-trade, failure rate ~13%

*Some exceptions for 16/17 eating a meal accompanied by an adult to drink beer/wine/cider/perry

Policy challenges

- Establishment of minimum purchase age important but **enforcement** is key to success
- **Cross-border discrepancies** may undermine Member State efforts to control underage drinking
- New means of access via **online/automated sales need to be subject to same level scrutiny**
- Current levels of access to underage drinkers in Europe is unacceptable – **we must try harder!**

Thank you for listening.

Any questions?

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