

# Ireland

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## The country

Ireland, known in the Irish language as Eire, is a republic comprising about five sixths of the island of Ireland, which is situated at the western edge of Europe. The country consists of the provinces of Leinster, Munster and Connacht, and part of the province of Ulster. For administrative purposes, the Irish Republic is divided into 26 counties and five county boroughs. Six of the counties of Ulster in the north-eastern part of the island belong to the United Kingdom.

The republic of Ireland has an area of 70,273 km<sup>2</sup>. With a population of 3.9 million inhabitants the average population density is 56 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. Population density is highest in the east and south. The population is young, with 37 per cent being under the age of 25 years. (Census 2002, Central Statistics Office) Emigration, which for more than a century caused the population of Ireland to decrease or stagnate, has virtually ceased and, as a result of recent strong economic growth, there is now substantial immigration. The capital and the largest city is Dublin with over 1 million inhabitants. Some 60 per cent of the Irish population nowadays live in urban areas.

The Irish population is predominantly of Celtic origin but since the ninth century Ireland has been subject of successive invasion by Norse, Normans and English. About 93 per cent of the Irish population are Roman Catholics, and 4 per cent are Protestants. Religion is of importance in many people's lives, but the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church has declined significantly in recent decades. Originally the Irish language was predominant, but nowadays almost all Irish people speak English. About a quarter can still speak some Irish. According to the constitution both Irish and English are official languages.

Ireland achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1922 and became a republic in 1949 when Commonwealth ties with the United Kingdom were ended. The prime minister serves as the head of the government, and is appointed by the president after nomination by the lower house. The president of Ireland is the official head of the state and is elected by direct popular vote for a seven-year term. Ireland has a bicameral parliament known as the Oireachtas. The lower house (Dáil Éireann) is directly elected by the Irish population and has 166 members. The upper house (Seanad Éireann) is elected by a combination of vocational panels, university representatives and nominees from the prime minister (Taoiseach) and has 60 members. The upper house is limited in authority, while the lower house has the power to support or bring down the government in the parliamentary tradition.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the Irish economy was predominantly agricultural and trade was predominantly with the United Kingdom. Since the mid-

1950s, however, the country's industrial base has been transformed. Manufacturing accounts for approximately 36 per cent of the gross domestic product, while agriculture accounts for about 10 per cent. In recent years the highest growth rates in Irish industry have been achieved in the high technology sectors of manufacturing. In the mid-1990s, about 28 per cent of the population worked in the industrial sector, approximately 12 per cent in the agriculture and about 60 per cent in the service sector.

The Irish economy is very open to international trade with exports accounting for 73 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and imports for 54 per cent of the GDP. Tourism is also a significant source of foreign exchange and has increased rapidly over the past 20 years. In 1997, some 5.5 million tourists visited Ireland. Ireland has experienced a considerable social and cultural change over the past decades due to increasing economic prosperity, membership of the European Union (EU) and the influence of the mass media of the United Kingdom and the United States. While becoming more open to outside influences, some aspects of indigenous culture, particularly music, literature and sport, remain strong.

### **Alcohol production and trade**

Ireland has a long tradition of brewing and distilling, and until the middle of the twentieth century these industries were among the few large manufacturing industries. The Irish distilling industry is dominated by the Irish Distillers, which in 1994 produced 95 per cent of the country's total output of distilled spirits. In the same year, imports accounted for 37 per cent of the Irish consumption of distilled spirits. Irish whiskey dominates the spirits market, followed by vodka and gin. In 1994 whiskey covered 46 per cent of the spirits market. Over the past 20 years, whiskey has been losing ground to vodka and miscellaneous other distilled beverages (Hurst, Gregory and Gussman, 1997).

The Irish beer market is served by three independent brewing companies with seven breweries. The largest brewer, Guinness Ireland and its parent Diageo, dominate the market and its stout accounts for half of total beer sales. The consumption of lagers has risen to 40 per cent of total beer consumption over the past 20 years, largely at the expense of ales, whose share of the beer market has declined sharply since the early 1980s. In the mid-1990s the market share of domestic beer was 90 per cent, but imports of beer have gained ground in the last two decades. In 1975 imported beer covered only 0.4 per cent of the Irish beer consumption, but it increased to 9.7 per cent by 1996. In 2002 total production of beer reached 8.1 million hectolitres, of which 2.5 million hectolitres were exported, (Irish Brewers Association Factsheet 2003) the United Kingdom being clearly the most important export market for Irish beer (Hurst, Gregory & Gussman, 1997).

With the exception of made wine, wine produced from imported concentrate, all of the wine consumed in Ireland is imported. Wine consumption has increased considerably in Ireland over the past twenty years. French, Italian and Spanish wines have the largest shares of the wine market. In 1976 table wine had a market share of about 50 per cent. The share of fortified wine was 32 per cent, that of made wine 16 per cent and that of sparkling wine 3 per cent. In 1994 table wine accounted for about 90 per cent of all

wine consumed. The rates of fortified wine, made wine and sparkling wine had declined to 5 per cent, 4 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively (Hurst, Gregory & Gussman, 1997).

Cider and perry, cider made from pears, are also popular in Ireland. This market has grown significantly during the past twenty years (Hurst, Gregory & Gussman, 1997). In the mid-1970s the consumption of cider and perry was some 50,000 hectolitres a year. At the beginning of the 1990s the total consumption of cider and perry in litres of the product exceeded that of wine, and in 1998 the yearly consumption of cider and perry reached 550,000 hectolitres. Within this market, perry accounts for about one fifth of the sales. Domestic producers supply 85 per cent of the cider and perry market.

Ireland is a net exporter of alcoholic beverages. In 1996, the value of exports was one and a half times the value of imports of alcoholic beverages. While exports of alcoholic beverages have increased dramatically in volume and value terms over the past 30 years, alcohol exports have declined as a share of total exports due to the growth of other manufacturing industry (Foley, 1999). Also the value of alcohol exports to alcohol imports has declined because of a strong growth in alcohol imports.

### **Employment in the drinks industry and trade**

Total employment in the drinks industry has declined over the past two decades from 8,299 persons, constituting 3.1 per cent of total manufacturing employment in 1981, to 4,874 persons in 1995 (Byrne, 1999). Direct employment in the manufacturing of alcoholic beverages generates indirect employment through the purchase of services, raw materials or other inputs in other industries. Every manufacturing job generates approximately 2.3 additional jobs in services and the supply of inputs. This means that the 4,900 manufacturing jobs in 1995 generated 11,000 additional jobs, excluding jobs in the retailing of alcoholic beverages (Byrne, 1999).

Because of high levels of part-time work and the variety of outlets in which alcoholic beverages are sold, it is difficult to estimate accurately the total employment in the retail distribution of alcoholic beverages. Figures in different surveys and censuses diverge widely. A conservative estimate of the total full-time equivalent employment in the retailing and wholesaling of alcoholic beverages in 1997 is 39,000 (Byrne, 1999).

Workers in retailing alcoholic beverages are distributed over a very large number of retail outlets. According to the Survey of Licensed Premises (Economic and Social Research Institute 2004) there were 11,557 licensed on-premises in Ireland in 2004. Of these, 70 per cent were public houses and the rest were other types of licensed retail outlets, including hotels, sports clubs, nightclubs, restaurants etc. Of the 10,000 retail outlets, most are small. Because of the historical evolution of the licensing system, there are many more pubs per 1,000 inhabitants in rural areas than in Dublin and other major towns. Dublin, with almost one third of the population, only contains 10 per cent of licensed premises.

## Alcohol consumption

There are some differences between the figures for alcohol consumption in Ireland prepared by different organisations. These differences are largely explained by differences in units of measurement. Traditionally Ireland used the imperial barrels and gallons to measure alcohol consumption. These were changed to litres in the mid-1970s for distilled spirits and wines and to hectolitres for beer in 1993. The most reliable sales data are those supplied by the Irish tax authorities based on their receipts of excise duties on alcoholic beverages, and those figures are used here unless otherwise indicated. These figures capture most alcohol consumption apart from small amounts of alcohol purchased in other EU member states by the Irish people and consumed in Ireland. Illegal distilling today accounts for negligible consumption.

Total alcohol consumption per capita has increased in Ireland threefold between 1950 and 1998, from 3.2 litres per capita to 10.2 litres. Alcohol consumption was quite stable in the 1950s and even decreased in some years. The 1950s were a period of economic stagnation in Ireland. Between 1960 and 1980 the total alcohol consumption grew from about 3 litres per capita to almost 7 litres per capita in 1980. This period was a time of economic growth, though growth slowed in the 1980s. After a decrease in the early 1980s, the total alcohol consumption increased again during the rest of the 1980s and in the 1990s (Table 10.1). In 1998 it reached a figure of 10.2 litres per capita. It peaked in 2001 at 11.36l per capita (Health for All Database, WHO 2001) The period since 1990 has been one of unprecedented growth in the Irish economy, accompanied by a strong growth in consumer incomes.

Table 10.1. Consumption of alcoholic beverages by beverage categories in Ireland in litres of pure alcohol per capita and as percentages of total recorded alcohol consumption in the years 1955, 1965, 1975, 1985 and 1995, five years' averages

	1955	1965	1975	1985	1995
Total alcohol consumption	3.29	4.01	6.37	7.29	8.66
Consumption of distilled spirits	0.76	1.05	1.99	1.76	1.60
Consumption of wines	0.10	0.16	0.33	0.44	0.80
Consumption of beer	2.35	2.74	3.98	4.96	5.73
Consumption of cider and perry	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.13	0.53
Percentage of distilled spirits	23	26	31	24	18
Percentage of wines	3	4	5	6	9
Percentage of beer	71	68	62	68	66
Percentage of cider and perry	2	1	1	2	6

Sources: Central Statistical Office (CSO) Statistical Abstract, various years; Revenue Commissioners' Annual Report, various years.

The consumption of beer remained stable in the 1950s and began to increase in the 1960s. The increase continued to the mid-1970s, when it reached a figure of 4.1 litres of pure alcohol per capita in 1974. The consumption of beer stayed on about the same level until 1989. The figures in consumption statistics, however, do show a sudden increase to 4.9 litres per capita in 1984, but this reflects the change in calculation methods from standard barrels to hectolitres rather than a real increase in beer consumption. In fact,

the change in measurement practice happened in 1993 but because of the correction of consumption figures backwards for a ten years period this change is showed in statistics in 1984. During the 1990s beer consumption continued to increase, with the most rapid growth taking place after 1994. In 1998 beer consumption was up to 6 litres of pure alcohol per capita.

The consumption of distilled spirits remained stable in the 1950s at a level of about 0.8 litres pure alcohol per capita a year. It began to increase in the early 1960s. The consumption of distilled spirits peaked in 1978 at a level of 2.3 litres of alcohol per capita. After a sharp decrease during the 1980s, the consumption of distilled spirits has grown from 1.4 litres in 1983 to 1.9 litres of pure alcohol per capita in 1998. The apparent decrease in recorded consumption of distilled spirits in the 1980s may have resulted from a significant smuggling of distilled spirits from Northern Ireland due to a higher excise duty in the Republic of Ireland compared to Northern Ireland, as well as to the economic recession experienced in Ireland at that time. Since the 1980s spirit consumption has risen again, by 1992 it was up to 2.18 l per capita. Throughout the 1990s it continued to rise and peaked in 2002 at 3.17 l per capita. (Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, Second Report 2004)

Also the consumption of wine was quite stable in the 1950s, and began to increase in the early 1960s. With a slight decrease in the early 1980s, the consumption of wine has shown a constant increase since the early 1960s. In the 1990s the growth in wine consumption was very strong, and it reached a figure of 1.2 litres of pure alcohol per capita in 1998 and by 2002 it had risen further to 1.19 litres (Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, Second Report 2004)

In Irish statistics the consumption of cider and perry is presented separately. In broad terms the consumption of cider and perry did not change much during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. During the 1980s the consumption of cider and perry doubled from 0.1 litres to 0.2 litres of pure alcohol per capita a year, and by the year 1998 it had further grown to 0.9 litres of alcohol per capita.

At the beginning of the 1950s, beer dominated the Irish alcohol market with a share of little over 70 per cent. By the end of the 1990s the market share of beer had decreased but in 1998 it was still 62 per cent of the total alcohol consumption. Since then it has dropped further to 54%. (Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, Second Report 2004). At the beginning of the 1950s, distilled spirits accounted for one quarter of the total alcohol consumption. This proportion had grown by the late 1970s to over 30 per cent. By the late 1990s the proportion of distilled spirits of the total alcohol consumption had decreased to just below one fifth (Table 10.1). It has climbed again slightly to 22 per cent in 2002. The market share of wine has increased from a low 3 per cent in 1950 to over 11 per cent in 1998. It has continued to increase and was 16 per cent in 2002 (Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, Second Report 2004). The proportion of cider and perry of the total alcohol consumption was 2 per cent at the beginning of the 1950s, and it decreased to just under 1 per cent in the mid-1970s. During the late 1980s and in the 1990s the proportion of cider and perry increased, and in 1998 it accounted for almost one tenth of the total alcohol consumption.

The number of abstainers decreased from 47 per cent of the Irish population in 1968 to 30 per cent in 1981. Today only 13 per cent of the adult Irish population do not drink alcohol. Abstainers are nowadays largely found in the over 55 age group and they are predominantly women (SLÁN, 1999).

Traditionally, drinking in Ireland was considered a male privilege, and it was not socially acceptable for women to be seen drinking in public or to be seen in drinking establishments. Since the end of the Second World War, there has been a gradual acceptance of women in public houses. Distilled spirits are considered the most favoured drink of women. Traditionally alcoholic beverages have not been integrated with meals except on festive occasions such as weddings. Prior to the 1970s, food was rarely served in pubs, but today food is available in over 35 per cent of on-premise establishments (Hurst, Gregory & Gussman, 1997).

A 1988 study found that 84 per cent of Dublin drinkers did most of their drinking in public bars or lounges. It was estimated that 90 per cent of beer, 70 per cent of distilled spirits and 68 per cent of cider and perry were consumed in on-premise establishments. During the last decade drinking at home has increased, due to changing social habits and decreased public tolerance of drunk driving. Between 1990 and 1994, distilled spirits sold for off-premise consumption increased from 28 per cent to 45 per cent, and in 1994, about 50 per cent of the cider and perry were sold for off-premise consumption (Hurst, Gregory & Gussman, 1997).

In 2000 about 193 litres of alcoholic beverages in their beverage form were consumed in Ireland, consisting of 7 litres of distilled spirits, 33 litres of wine and 153 litres of beer. In 1980 the corresponding figure was about 131 litres. In 2000 the consumption of commercial non-alcoholic beverages was about 658 litres per capita, consisting of 270 litres of tea, 155 litres of milk, 120 litres of soft drinks, 48 litres of juices, 40 litres of coffee and 24 litres of waters. In the 1985-2000 period the annual per capita consumption of soft drinks increased by 72 litres, that of juices by 43 litres, that of tea by 19 litres, that of bottled waters by 22 litres, that of coffee by 7 litres and that of milk by 8 litres (World Drink Trends, 2002).

### **Administrative structure of preventive alcohol policies**

On behalf of the government, the department of health and children prepared in 1996 the first National Alcohol Policy - Ireland and as such provided the main structure for preventive alcohol policies from a public health perspective. However, many other government departments and agencies also have an important part to play in alcohol policy (Table 10.2). The eight regional health boards, through their regional drug coordinators and health promotion officers, provide the regional structure for addressing the prevention of alcohol-related problems and for promoting the health and well-being of local communities.

Table 10.2. Role of government departments and agencies in alcohol policy in Ireland

Employer/Employee Organisations	Concerned regarding alcohol-related absenteeism, lost productivity and workplace accidents.
Medical Profession	Provides primary care and treatment services
Private Clinics	Provide treatment services
Voluntary groups	Promote prevention strategies, treatment services and lobby for policy changes.

The document National Alcohol Policy - Ireland aims to promote moderation in alcohol consumption among those who wish to drink and to reduce the prevalence of alcohol-related problems, thereby promoting the health of the community. The policy outlined in this document covers environmental and public health strategies in relation to the availability, pricing and promotion of alcoholic beverages, and to drunk driving regulations, as well as strategies oriented to individual prevention and treatment. These preventive strategies include awareness and education, working in settings such as schools, colleges, families, communities and workplace, the training of those who serve alcohol, high-risk groups, especially young people and a broad community-based treatment service. National Alcohol Policy - Ireland stresses the importance of a multisectoral approach and a commitment at national, regional and local levels. The plan of action sets out the actions required of the different partners, such as government departments, health boards and the drinks industry, in implementing national alcohol policy (National Alcohol Policy - Ireland, 1996). The health promotion unit established the national alcohol surveillance project in 1997 with a brief to monitor the implementation of the alcohol action plan.

In the 1950s there were no specific national coordinating mechanisms for preventing and dealing with alcohol-related problems. However, the Irish national council on alcoholism (INCA), a voluntary organisation mainly of interested psychiatrists, was formed in 1966 with its primary aim to prevent alcoholism, to encourage its early diagnosis and to provide treatment for alcoholism. Its ideology was grounded on the disease concept of alcoholism with a strong curative emphasis. In response to a request from the Minister of Health, INCA published in 1973 a report Alcoholism - Report to the Minister of Health setting out an extensive list of recommendations in relation to preventive alcohol policy issues around information, education, availability, advertising, and treatment (INCA, 1973). During 1973 it was also given statutory funding and formal recognition by the Minister of Health (Butler, 1999). INCA had a high profile for many years and produced publications and provided information and advice on alcoholism and training to social workers in the alcohol arena. During the early 1980s INCA began to recognise the public health perspective and the role of alcohol control policy as an essential feature of preventive measures (Butler, 1999). However, INCA's demise was inevitable when its funding ceased, and it was closed in 1988.

Since then a new organisation has been set up, the Irish National Alliance for Action on Alcohol, which was established in 2002. It is an independent alcohol interest group comprised of individuals and organisations from a variety of social and public health fields concerned about the unacceptable levels of inappropriate alcohol use and alcohol-

related harm in Irish society. In 2004 the organisation changed its name to Alcohol Action Ireland.

Its aim is to call for the protection of the health, well-being and quality of life of Irish citizens through the adoption of policies and strategies which protect society from alcohol-related harm.

The public health perspective on alcohol was also reflected in the activities of the Health Education Bureau, established in 1975 by the Minister for Health, with a broad remit to develop health education. It was the lead organisation in promoting the World Health Organisation (WHO) vision of health promotion. The Health Promotion Unit, a policy and executive section of the department of health, replaced in 1987 the health education bureau as part of a new core structure for health promotion. The intersectoral national consultative committee on health promotion chaired by the Minister of State was also established to advise the Minister for Health and to submit periodic reports on health promotion to a cabinet subcommittee. In 1991, the government announced its intention to formulate a national alcohol policy. The Minister for Health requested the advisory council on health promotion to undertake this task. As part of the consultative process, interested parties were invited to make written submissions. In addition, a number of reports were commissioned from the economic and social research institute (Butler, 1999). The National Alcohol Policy - Ireland was eventually published in 1996.

### **Licensing policy**

Alcohol producers need a licence to operate. The licence is granted by the department of enterprise and employment and issued by the revenue commissioners. Alcohol wholesalers and importers must have a beer licence, which is granted on the production of a certificate by a judge of the district court. For distilled spirits, wine and liqueurs a licence is obtained from the Revenue Commissioners without the requirement of a court certificate. The cost of the licence is 200 Irish punts per year and it is paid to the revenue commissioners.

In the retail sector, a licence is also required of anyone who wishes to sell alcoholic beverages. The licence is granted by a judge on the district court and it is renewed each year. The annual licence fee ranges from 200 to 3,000 Irish punts, depending on turnover, and it is collected by the revenue commissioners. There are four main types of outlets for which licences are issued: off-licence, on-licence, restaurants and clubs. The licence permitting the sale of alcoholic beverages on the premises is the most common licence, attached mainly to pubs and hotels.

In 1998 a parliament committee proposed radical changes in the liquor licensing laws (A Review of Liquor Licensing Laws, 1998). In the same year the competition authority examined the economic effects of the liquor licensing laws and their impact on competition in the retail drinks market. The report recommended total deregulation to allow the market to function efficiently and in the best interests of the consumer (Competition Authority, 1998). During the year 2000 the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform introduced a new liquor licensing bill which proposed a broad set of measures to allow for greater availability of alcohol.

Under the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2000, a new licence may be issued in substitution for one existing licence anywhere in the country, provided the court is satisfied that the person meets a number of conditions. This is a fundamental change to the general restrictions existing since the early part of the twentieth century against granting of any new licences. The 1902 Licensing Act and subsequent Licensing Acts restricted the granting of a new licence except where an existing licence, or two licences, depending on geographical location, had been revoked. This in effect prevented any overall increase in licences. For example, the number of publicans' licences was 13,427 in 1925, 11,962 in 1955 and 9,970 in 1996 (Competition Authority, 1998).

Under the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2000 restaurants can obtain a full licence in the same way as pubs, and those with on-licence for only wine can now also serve beer with a meal. Registered clubs may supply alcoholic beverages to their members and guests on the basis of having a certificate to do so from the courts. A club must satisfy the court that its rules qualify it for registration. In recent years entry to the alcohol retail sector has occurred mainly through an increase in the number of clubs and hotels applying for a licence. In 1986 there were 658 registered clubs. Ten years later the corresponding figure was 919, an increase of almost 40 per cent. The number of hotels registered with Bord Failte showed an increase of 10 per cent in the same ten-year period (Competition Authority, 1998). A growth in the off-licence trade has also occurred due to an increase in the number of outlets attached to licensed facilities and in the food retail sector, where supermarkets or grocery shops can either obtain a full off-premises licence or a licence for selling only wine, which is easier to obtain.

### **Special restrictions of alcohol availability**

Alcoholic beverages cannot be sold to persons under 18 years of age and they cannot be consumed in public by persons under 18 years old. There is no legal age restriction on alcohol consumption in private. The licence-holder who serves alcoholic beverages to those aged under 18 years can be convicted and fined (National Alcohol Policy - Ireland, 1996). The Intoxicating Liquor Act 2000 provides for mandatory closure of licensed premises for selling alcoholic beverages to underage customers.

The 1988 Intoxicating Liquor Act tried to address the problem of underage drinking in a number of ways. It removed existing loopholes in the sale of alcoholic beverages to those aged under 18 years of age by easing the burden of proof in removing the word knowingly from the Intoxicating Liquor Act, thus making it easier to obtain convictions. It legislated that a person under 15 years of age cannot be in a licensed bar unless accompanied by his or her parent or guardian. It also stated that a person under 18 years of age cannot be in licensed premises during the time an exemption is in force, i.e. outside normal opening hours, and that a person under 18 years of age cannot be at any time in an off-licence outlet unless accompanied by his or her parent or guardian.

The 1988 Intoxicating Liquor Act also contained a provision that the Minister for Justice could introduce by regulation a national age card for a person of or over 18 years of age. However, this regulation was not introduced until 1999. These regulations provide for a voluntary national age card scheme. The cards can be purchased by

persons who have reached 18 years of age in order to confirm that they have attained the legal age for the purchase of alcoholic beverages. Despite the 1988 changes, the age limit was not strictly followed and enforced, partly due to the legal anomaly of the reasonable grounds defence which continued to make convictions very difficult. However, under the new 2000 Liquor Licensing Act this defence is no longer acceptable.

Major expansion of the opening hours began with the 1960 Intoxicating Liquor Act, by which the opening of licensed premises was extended by one hour in the winter from 10 to 11 p.m. and to 11.30 p.m. in the summer. Further changes occurred in 1962, by which restaurants were allowed to stay open until half an hour past midnight provided that a substantial meal was served. The concept of drinking-up time was also introduced, where customers were allowed 10 minutes to finish their drinks. In 1988 the drinking-up time was extended to 30 minutes.

The 2000 Liquor Licensing Act has further increased the permitted hours of trading with alcoholic beverages. The main changes are an additional hour of drinking on three nights a week, the abolition of winter time regulations and the abolition of the Sunday holy hour regulation, and longer opening hours for nightclubs, which can serve alcohol until 2.30 a.m. plus 30 minutes of drinking-up time. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday licensed premises are now open from 10.30 a.m. to 11.30 p.m. plus 30 minutes drinking-up time all year round. On Thursday, Friday and Saturday the opening time is one hour longer (12.30 a.m.) plus 30 minutes drinking-up time all year round. Opening hours on a Sunday are from 12.30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Off-licensed premises may now open for sales at 8 a.m. on weekdays. Earlier they could open at 10.30 a.m. Alcohol is not for sale in pubs on Christmas Day or Good Friday.

In 2003 a new law, the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003, amended the Licensing Acts in response to concerns outlined in the Interim Report of the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol (May 2002). Its main change was to reverse the change in opening hours for Thursdays. The Act is also concerned with combating drunkenness and disorderly conduct as well as addressing the problems of underage and binge drinking. It introduced provisions relating to the sale and supply of intoxicating liquor to drunken persons and drunkenness on licensed premises and places a duty on licensees to preserve order and prevention of disorderly conduct on licensed premises. It also introduced the sanction of temporary closure of premises in relation to certain offences.

The licensing laws over the years have permitted application to the courts for exemptions, which means an extension of opening hours outside that of the normal business hours for licensed on-premise outlets. The 1962 Liquor Licensing Act saw the introduction of four new categories of exemptions, giving a total of six categories, as well as an increase in the number of exemptions permitted each year. The number of exemptions granted were further extended in 1977, which meant that many on-premise outlets were able to open more often and for longer hours. There was a tenfold increase in the number of special exemptions granted between the years 1967 and 1997, from 6,342 in 1967 to 68,204 in 1997.

Nowadays there are six main exemption categories, each of them has a different application in terms of availability, and allows alcoholic beverages to be sold at discos

or nightclubs, at special events such as dinner dances and at local or general festivals. The special exemption order, under which nightclubs obtain extensions, is by far the biggest category. Under the 2000 Liquor Licensing Act, there are substantial increases in the number of special exemptions and area exemption orders which can be granted by the courts. In addition, special exemptions are no longer restricted to hotels and restaurants and extended opening hours are permitted until 2.30 a.m. plus 30 minutes drinking-up time.

Generally, drinking in public places is not allowed, as alcohol can only be consumed in licensed premises or in private houses. However, there are some exceptions under the licensing laws. At sporting events, many sport clubs or sporting venues have a licence to sell alcoholic beverages. Therefore, alcohol can be consumed generally before or after a sporting event and in some cases also during the event. Many cultural events and concerts, including open-air events, can obtain a licence to sell alcoholic beverages. Alcoholic beverages are also allowed to be sold and consumed during train journeys. Urban by-laws have recently been passed in many cities and towns to restrict drinking in public places.

### **Alcohol prices and taxes**

There are a number of economic measures which governments could take in relation to the price and availability of alcohol that can influence alcohol consumption or change the pattern of alcohol consumption. A government can make alcoholic drinks more expensive both in absolute and relative terms through increasing taxes on alcoholic beverages. In Ireland the price elasticity of demand for alcohol, which measures the responsiveness of the demand for alcohol to a change in its own price, is less than - 1. Conniffe and McCoy (1993) estimated the price elasticity for total alcohol consumption to be at -0.4. This means that increasing the price of all alcoholic beverages by 1 per cent would result in a drop of 0.4 per cent in total alcohol consumption. The demand for distilled spirits and wine is more responsive to price changes than beer, and there is a high degree of substitutability between the different alcoholic beverages.

A major issue which has not been addressed is the high cost of non-alcoholic beverages in Irish pubs. As the prices of non-alcoholic beverages are not controlled, publicans can often make a greater profit on these than on alcoholic beverages, the price of which has been subject to brief periods of price control. For moderate drinkers who might alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, there is little incentive to switch to non-alcoholic beverages if they are almost as expensive as beer, as is frequently the case in Ireland.

Conniffe and McCoy (1993) estimated the income elasticity of total alcohol consumption to be at 1.15 in 1987. This would mean that an increase of 1 per cent in consumers' incomes would result in a slightly greater increase in total alcohol consumption. The income elasticity of wine was particularly high at 1.63, and this partly explains the dramatic increase in wine consumption over the past decade. The fact that the income elasticity of alcoholic beverages is higher than one makes a reduction in total alcohol consumption difficult to achieve in a period with growing consumer incomes.

In Ireland the difference between on- and off-premise prices of alcoholic beverages is not as large as in other EU countries. One explanation for this presumably is that many on-premise outlets also sell alcoholic beverages for home consumption.

In Ireland the excise duty on beer is nowadays calculated per hectolitre per degree of alcohol in the finished product (Table 10.3). The excise duty on wine is based on hectolitre of the product in three different categories expressed in per cent alcohol by volume and whether the beverage is still or sparkling. For fermented beverages other than wine and beer, including cider and perry, the excise duty is set per hectolitre of the product in four different categories expressed in per cent alcohol by volume and whether the beverage is still or sparkling. For intermediate products the excise duty is calculated per hectolitre of the product in two categories on the basis of the alcohol content by volume. For distilled spirits the excise duty is set per hectolitre of pure alcohol in the finished product.

Table 10.3. Excise duty rates for alcoholic beverages in Ireland in 2000 in Irish punts and in euro

Alcoholic beverage category*	IRL	EUR
Beer, per hectolitre per degree of alcohol in the finished product	15.65	19.87
Wine, per hectolitre of the product		
Less than 5.5% alcohol by volume	71.66	90.99
From 5.5 to 15% alcohol by volume, still	215.01	273.01
From 5.5 to 15% alcohol by volume, sparkling	430.02	546.01
Fermented beverages other than wine and beer, per hectolitre of the product		
Not exceeding 6% alcohol by volume	35.03	44.48
Over 6 but less than 8.5% alcohol by volume	151.59	192.48
Over 8.5% by volume, still	215.01	273.01
Over 8.5% by volume, sparkling	430.02	546.01
Intermediate products, per hectolitre of the product		
Not exceeding 15% alcohol by volume	215.01	273.01
More than 15% alcohol by volume	311.97	396.12
Distilled beverages, per hectolitre of pure alcohol in the finished product		
Not exceeding 5.5% alcohol by volume	15.65	19.87
5.5 or over 5.5% alcohol by volume	2,175.00	2,761.68

\* For details of the lower limits of alcoholic beverages and other EU rules concerning alcohol taxation, see Chapter 2.

Source: European Commission, DG XXI, Excise duty tables, November 2000.

Alcohol excise duty rates prevailing in 2000 were introduced in January 1994. Before 1994 there had been numerous changes in excise duty rates since the 1950s. The history of excise duty rates since 1975 is documented in Hurst, Gregory & Gussman (1997). According to that data, excise duty rate for beer increased from 42 Irish punts per

standard barrel of a specific gravity of 1055 in 1975 to 68 punts in 1979 and further to 90 punts in 1980 and to 154 punts in January 1983. Since then it decreased somewhat but rose again in January 1989 to 153 punts per standard barrel. Since 1993 beer has been taxed on the basis of the amount of pure alcohol in the finished product.

In 1975 the excise duty rate for distilled spirits was 838 punts per hectolitre of pure alcohol in the finished product. By 1979 it had increased to 1,195 punts, in 1980 to 1,708 punts and in January 1981 to 2,156 punts, which is about the same rate as in 2000. The excise duty rate for distilled spirits peaked in 1983 at 2,578 punts per hectolitre of pure alcohol in the finished product, but was significantly reduced a year later due to a suspected increase in illegal cross-border trade with Northern Ireland.

The excise duty rate for table wine was 38 punts per hectolitre of the product in 1975. By 1979 it had increased to 63 punts, by 1980 to 110 punts and by January 1983 to 208 punts. In 2000 it was 215 punts per hectolitre of the product. Excise duty rates for fortified and sparkling wines have increased in similar manner (Hurst, Gregory & Gussman, 1997).

Excise duty rates for all alcoholic beverages have increased greatly in absolute and relative terms since 1950. Between 1950 and 1994 the excise duty rate for distilled spirits increased by 660 per cent while the excise duty rate for beer increased by 2,570 per cent. The excise duty rates increased sharply in the 1960s and 1970s but the rate of increase slowed since 1980. While excise duty rate for beer increased by 1,350 per cent between 1960 and 1994, it only increased by 120 per cent between 1980 and 1994. The increase in the excise duty rate for distilled spirits has been much smaller than the increase in that for beer, which has narrowed the differential between the price of beer and the price of distilled spirits. The excise duty rate for distilled spirits has actually fallen since 1983 partly to counteract smuggling from Northern Ireland. The excise duty rate for distilled spirits in Ireland was so much above the United Kingdom rate at the beginning of the 1980s that there was significant smuggling from Northern Ireland to Ireland, resulting in a loss of state revenue, which led to a reduction in the Irish excise duty rate for distilled spirits. While the overall excise alcohol duty rate for alcoholic beverages is high in Ireland, alcohol excise duties have not been increased significantly over the past five years. Therefore, the real burden of alcohol taxation has fallen slightly as prices of other consumer goods have risen.

The VAT of 21 per cent is nowadays applied to all alcoholic beverages. In 1975 the VAT was only 10 per cent. In 1981 it was raised to 15 per cent, in 1982 to 18 per cent, in 1983 to 23 per cent and in 1986 to 25 per cent. In 1990 the VAT was lowered to 23 per cent and in 1991 to its present level. The reduction to 21 per cent was in response to the pressure to harmonise indirect taxes in the single European market.

Changes in the excise duty levels on alcoholic beverages referred to above are given in nominal values. During the 1950-2000 period the value of the Irish currency has decreased because of inflation. The increase in the general price level in Ireland in the 1960-2000 period as described by the consumer price index (CPI) is given in table 10.4.

Table 10.4. Consumer price index in Ireland, 1960-2000, 1995 is 100

Year	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
CPI	7.4	9.1	11.7	21.8	42.1	75.1	88.3	100.0	113.4

Source: OECD, Main Economic Indicators, March 2000 CD-ROM.

The real price of all alcoholic beverages increased in Ireland during the 1960s by about 20 per cent, mainly at the beginning and at the end of the decade (Walsh & Walsh, 1981; see also Sulkunen, 1978). In the 1970s the real price of alcoholic beverages first declined, reaching its lowest level in 1974, and then increased again. At the end of the 1970s the real price of alcoholic beverages was some 10 per cent lower than at the beginning of the decade. The increases in the real price of beer have been stronger and decreases weaker than the corresponding changes in the real price of distilled spirits. In 1979 the real price of beer was about 20 per cent higher than in 1961, whereas the real price of distilled spirits was about 10 per cent lower in 1979 than in 1961 (Walsh & Walsh, 1981, 110). According to the data collected in the ECAS project the real price of alcoholic beverages increased in Ireland in the 1979-1995 period by a third (Leppänen, 1999).

Calculated per litre of pure alcohol, the excise duty is lowest for cider and perry. It is only half of the excise duty set on beer. The excise duty on wine is about 15 per cent and that for distilled spirits about 40 per cent higher than that of beer. If the VAT is also taken into account, the tax burden on distilled spirits is some 15 per cent higher than that of beer. Calculated as a percentage of the price, the total tax burden is 44 per cent for beer, 50 per cent for table wine and 65 per cent for distilled spirits.

The taxation of alcoholic beverages is a major source of revenue to the Irish government. In 1997 the VAT and excise duties on alcoholic beverages raised over 1 billion Irish punts in taxation. Excise duties were 579 million Irish punts and the VAT receipts were about 432 million Irish punts. Indirect taxes collected from the drinks industry were about a quarter of all excise receipts and about 13 per cent of VAT receipts. A further 240 million Irish punts are collected in profits tax, income tax and social insurance contributions from those directly employed in the industry. Together with the VAT and the excise receipts from alcoholic beverages, this produced a total annual tax revenue of 1.2 billion Irish punts in 1997 (Byrne, 1999).

Heavy dependence on alcohol tax incomes is a long-standing phenomenon in Irish state revenues. In the early 1950s about 18 per cent of all state revenue came from alcohol taxes. Since then this rate has decreased to 16 per cent in 1960, to 10 per cent in the late 1970s and to 5 per cent in 1994 (Walsh & Walsh, 1981; Hurst, Gregory & Gussman, 1997). As a result of the high excise duties on alcoholic beverages, spending on alcohol has taken a large part of total consumer expenditure in Ireland. It was 7.6 per cent in 1960, 10 per cent in 1970 and 11.5 per cent in 1996 (Foley, 1999; Walsh & Walsh, 1981).

## **Alcohol advertising**

Advertising of alcoholic beverages is allowed in Ireland, with the exception of the broadcast media, television, radio and cinema, where advertising of distilled spirits is not permitted. The voluntary code of standards for the broadcasting media, provided in the 1990 Broadcasting Act, was updated in 1995 to be in keeping with EU directive 89/552/EEC. No alcoholic beverage advertisements are allowed in or around programmes primarily intended for young viewers or listeners. The provision of the 1995 updated code also applies to sponsorship. It ensures editorial independence, and does not allow the drinks industry to sponsor youth programmes.

The advertising standards authority for Ireland (ASAI) is a self-regulatory body which has drawn up a code of standards as a means of self-regulating the advertising industry. The new revised 1995 code applies to all media, i.e. to press, radio, television, cinema and outdoor advertising, and where appropriate to direct marketing and sales promotions. The code, in relation to alcohol, notes that advertisements for alcoholic beverages should be socially responsible and should not exploit the young or the immature. They should neither encourage excessive drinking nor present abstinence or moderation in a negative way. The rules regarding the advertising of alcoholic beverages now require that anyone depicted in such an advertisement should appear to be over 25 years of age. The code of sales promotion practice also administered by ASAI aims to regulate marketing techniques. There is no specific section on alcohol in the code of sales promotion and practice, but it does state that promotional products and samples should be distributed in such a way as to avoid the risk of harm to consumers. The code of the poster advertising association of Ireland indicates that the advertising of alcoholic beverages should not appear within 100 yards of schools, youth centres, hospitals, churches or other places of worship. The code of the cinema advertising association provides that alcohol commercials cannot be shown to an overtly young cinema audience.

Overall, the advertising of alcoholic beverages is mainly self-regulated through a number of voluntary codes across various media. There is no effective independent monitoring mechanism to ensure that alcohol advertisements comply with the various codes.

The code of ethics and good practice for children's sport in Ireland was developed by the government and has been in effect since 1996. It actively discourages the use of alcohol as being incompatible with a health approach to sporting activity. It calls on organisers of underage sports clubs to ensure that celebrations are in a non-alcohol environment. It indicates that sports leaders in children's sports should refrain from seeking sponsorship from the alcohol and tobacco industries. To date, the drinks industry group has not endorsed this code.

The drinks industry group published a voluntary code of practice in 1997 in relation to the naming, packaging and merchandising of single-serve alcoholic drinks. This was in response to the public outcry with the launch of alcopops, alcoholic fruit drinks that resemble fruit drinks in terms of packaging and flavour, and were attracting underage drinkers, especially girls. In Ireland the market value of alcopops was 30 million Irish

punts in 1996. A weakness in the code is that the complain procedure is not independent of the drinks industry.

In earlier years alcohol advertising, especially in the broadcast media, was more clearly defined than at present. Since 1967 the national television station (RTE) has had a special code of standards governing the advertising of alcoholic beverages as part of the broader RTE code of standards for broadcasting advertising, which is revised from time to time. The 1985 code included a stipulation that when a group scene featured drinking alcohol not more than six people could be depicted and that the sound effects should be kept to a minimum. There were specific criteria of what was and was not acceptable regarding sequencing, tag lines, music scores and optical effects. On television the same alcoholic beverage commercial could not be shown more than twice per night, and alcohol commercials were excluded from afternoon television sports outside broadcasts. All of the above mentioned criteria have been omitted from the present 1995 code.

### **Education and information**

In the post-primary schools, alcohol education is part of a wider substance abuse prevention programme called on my own two feet, with a strong life-skills approach. This programme and supporting resource materials, available to teachers after 50 hours of training, is supported by the department of education and science, the health promotion unit (HPU) in the department of health and children and the regional health boards. It is part of the social, personal and health education curriculum in schools. At primary level, a similar programme was developed and initially directed at schools in disadvantaged areas but it has been expanded to other schools. To youth leaders, the youth work support pack for dealing with the drug issue, including alcohol, is available through a training process. Alcohol and drug school policies are also promoted through the health promoting school framework.

At community level a resource package, drug questions local answers (DQLA) and family communication and self-esteem, are provided through training to professionals, parents and other interested local groups with the purpose of helping long-term prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Both the youth leader pack and the DQLA were developed and supported by the HPU. The appointment of regional drug coordinators in each of the health boards, as part of the national drugs strategy, has provided a focus and resource to address illegal drugs and alcohol problems, recognising that alcohol is the major drug of abuse among young people in Ireland. Health promotion officers within some of the health boards facilitate parenting courses and are involved in other health education initiatives.

Information leaflets for problem drinkers, their children and family members, designed for use with addiction counsellors, were produced and distributed in the health board areas in 1997. A national alcohol awareness campaign using posters was developed by the HPU in 1998. It was targeted at young adults, and focussed in particular on the practice of high-risk drinking. The overall message was: control your drinking before it controls you. An evaluation showed that overall there was a very low recall of the campaign; however, among binge drinkers 41 per cent indicated that the message made them think a little more about the amount they drank, and 33 per cent said they were

determined to cut down (HPU, 1998). The most recent alcohol awareness campaign has expanded previous efforts and includes an advocacy focus on public support for public health alcohol policy. The national safety council has for many years implemented a high profile TV campaign against drinking and driving. The clear message is: don't drink and drive, and the campaign depicts strong images of crashes and its aftermath.

There was a major shift from the 1960s to the 1990s in the approach to alcohol issues, both in scope and method, which was reflected in the development of the awareness and educational initiatives. In the 1960s the main focus was information on alcoholism and treatment services. This was developed and delivered by the voluntary organisation INCA. The health education bureau set up in 1975 extended health education beyond just a knowledge base and had at its core the empowerment model advocated in the health promoting Ottawa Charter. Therefore, health education programmes developed since the 1970's were based on a strong empowerment and life-skills framework.

### **Drunk driving**

The Road Traffic Act of 1994 set the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level at its present level of 0.08 per cent. The 1994 Act also allowed the Minister for Environment to vary the levels of alcohol permissible in a person's blood, urine or breath and to set different limits for different classes of drivers. This possibility has not, however, been used to date. Breath testing is carried out by the police after they have formed an opinion that a person in charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle has consumed alcohol. This can occur at a road checkpoint or at any other place. If positive, the driver must provide a blood or urine specimen taken by a qualified doctor, and this is then analysed by the medical bureau. Evidential breath testing is currently being introduced and will allow for a more effective system. Random breath testing is still being considered.

The reduction of fatal road traffic accidents linked to drinking was set as a priority in the strategy for road safety by the government for the years 1998-2002, in which alcohol was reported as an important factor in up to 40 per cent of road accidents. Enforcement of the drunk driving laws is evident from the first progress report, which indicated that in 1998 there was an increase of 19 per cent on the previous year in the number of blood and urine samples submitted for analysis (High level group on road safety, 1999).

The Road Traffic Acts of 1994 and 1995 introduced penalties for drunk driving offences. Automatic licence disqualification for three months is applied to all drunk driving convictions for the first offence. For the second offence, the period of disqualification is doubled to six months. Disqualification can be for up to four years, depending on the BAC level in individual cases and the reoccurrence of offences. Other penalties such as fines, the retaking of the driving test and possible terms of imprisonment are at the discretion of the court. In some cases the judge may impose attendance at an alcohol education programme.

Historically, the BAC was set much higher. Under the 1968 Road Traffic Act the permitted level was 0.125 per cent. However, the analytical procedures prescribed by

this Act, although brought into force in 1969, did not come into general application until 1971 (Hickey, Hayden & Layden, 1975). The 1978 Road Traffic Act further reduced the BAC limit to 0.1 per cent, and in 1994 the BAC was lowered to its present level of 0.08 per cent.

### **Administrative structure of treatment for alcoholism**

Treatment services currently provided by the statutory sector by eight regional health boards are based on the community outpatient model, unless specific psychiatric needs are identified. Public health treatment services are available firstly through the outpatient service provided by alcohol addiction counsellors, or through inpatient treatment services in psychiatric hospitals, or in some acute cases in general hospitals, and are then provided by a team of health professionals including psychiatrists, counsellors, psychologists and psychiatric nurses.

Since the introduction of the community outpatient model, inpatient admissions for alcohol-related disorders have only shown a slight reduction. Consequently, treatment services are also provided on an inpatient basis. Therefore, it could be concluded that the new community outpatient service provides treatment for a new treatment population, i.e. those who are at an earlier stage of alcohol dependence. Nearly all of the nonstatutory treatment centres are inpatient-based (Butler, 1999).

In the most recent Irish psychiatric services report (1998) the length of a stay in an inpatient treatment in the public health service varied from less than a week to several weeks or months. The vast majority, however, were discharged from hospital after two weeks. Treatment could then be continued on an outpatient basis through the addiction counselling services. In the private treatment services, length of treatment may be several weeks, with many of the patients availing themselves of health insurance cover. Treatment services, be they community-based addiction counselling services or inpatient treatment in psychiatric services, are free to all who wish to use them. The patients with health insurance are covered for up to 91 days of hospital treatment during any five-year period.

Historically, treatment services were predominately available in the public psychiatric sector, and were inadequate due to funding problems. However, in 1957 the voluntary health insurance scheme was established which, for the first time, covered the cost of alcohol treatment services in private hospitals. This ensured a funding mechanism and the expansion of treatment services in private psychiatric hospitals. During the 1970s, INRA reported that treatment was predominately inpatient treatment services and that private psychiatric hospitals provided for 52 per cent of the admissions to the treatment of alcoholism in Ireland (INCA, 1973).

In 1984 the report on the development of psychiatric services, planning for the future, recommended a policy shift towards community-based outpatient treatment services. The rationale for this shift was that alcohol-related problems occur in local and family settings and a local service can, therefore, provide for an earlier response, and that the drinkers' immediate environment must also be part of the solution. A community-based approach is also more likely to be cost-effective. Guidelines for developing of local

alcoholism services recommended that one consultant psychiatrist take special responsibility for the development of the services in each hospital catchment area, and that alcohol counsellors and general practitioners be part of this service. The report also recommended that services provided by voluntary agencies should be integrated with the local health board service.

The green paper on mental health, published by the Government in June 1992, noted that some health boards had developed local alcohol services under the community care programme and others provided services through the psychiatric services. The report concluded that either administrative structure can work, provided that responsibility for the development of services for alcohol dependence in the catchment or community is clearly identified.

## **Summary**

The trend in alcohol policies in Ireland has been to treat alcoholic beverages more and more like normal commodities with relatively fewer restraints on where, to whom and when they can be sold and when, by whom and where they can be consumed. This reflects the declining influence of the temperance movement as well as the more recent general developments in western societies towards allowing people to take responsibility for their own life and health. Like the temperance movement from the first half of the twentieth century with its emphasis on the moral evils of heavy drinking, the elaborate system of control of places and time of alcohol availability inherited from the British rule in the early years of the twentieth century seems to be fading away.

Ireland is a country where alcoholic beverages have traditionally been consumed in public houses, usually at weekends and without any connection to eating. The drinks preferred by the Irish people have been traditional and national. Beer has accounted for the biggest part of alcohol consumption. In the Irish context beer has meant stouts and ales. Only quite recently have lagers increased their proportion of the beer consumed by the Irish people. Distilled spirits have had the second largest rate, and the most popular distilled spirits have been national in origin, namely Irish whiskey. Even today the traditional alcoholic beverages play an important part in alcohol consumption, and although wine consumption has increased, it accounted for only just over 10 per cent of the total alcohol consumption in the late 1990s.

Does Ireland have an official preventive alcohol policy? The answer must be affirmative. There are clearly government-funded efforts to increase awareness of the dangers of high risk and heavy drinking. The retail sale of alcoholic beverages has been and still is regulated and both off- and on-premise retail outlets need a licence to operate. There are regulations concerning opening hours, and there are very specific rules on exemptions to these general regulations. Ireland has age limits for buying alcoholic beverages, and in the 1990s there have been legal changes to increase the effectiveness of the enforcement of these rules. Alcohol excise duties are well over the EU minimum levels. Alcohol advertising is self-regulated. There are numerous educational and information programmes. There is a BAC limit for drunk driving, and

this limit has been lowered during the last decades, and its enforcement has become stricter.

Despite these preventive alcohol policy measures the per capita alcohol consumption has increased almost steadily during the last decades, and there is a very worrying increase in alcohol consumption by young people. These developments are undoubtedly related to the increased availability of alcoholic beverages, particularly in clubs, nightclubs and off-licences outlets. The total alcohol consumption has also increased due to the increased affluence of Irish people. Many young people who are in full-time education have part-time jobs and often their earnings are spent on alcohol, which is consumed in large quantities on one or two weekend nights. In addition to being damaging to health, the Irish drinking habits often lead to violence and road traffic accidents. The recent extension of opening hours of pubs on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights has been linked to increased levels of late-night violence in Ireland. The controls of alcohol advertising have been relaxed, and while there is some education on the dangers of excessive drinking, these are largely confined to schools and are not forcefully aimed at adult drinkers. Legal controls of the sale of alcohol are not rigorously enforced, particularly the controls on sale of alcohol to people under 18 years of age.

The Irish system of regulating alcohol availability has mainly been concerned with on-premise consumption as most alcohol consumed in Ireland has been and still is consumed in pubs or other on-premise outlets. Alcohol prices have been high and they are still reasonably high compared to other European countries. This, combined with the habit of drinking in public houses rather than at home, has led to the situation where the amount of disposable income spent on alcohol has been very high in Ireland, despite the fact that alcohol prices in on-premises outlets are quite similar to those of off-premise outlets. High alcohol taxes have also meant high state revenues from alcohol.

Although Ireland's only border is with Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom and which also has alcohol taxes that are higher than the average taxes in EU member states, smuggling and cross-border trade have already had their effect on the decisions concerning the Irish alcohol taxation. Excise duties on distilled spirits have been considered to be too high, and they have been lowered. Therefore, it is unlikely that the Irish government will be willing or able to increase excise duties significantly in the future, whether for health and social policy reasons or to raise state tax revenues. Rather it is to be expected that excise duties will in the future be brought closer to the average EU levels.

The fact that excise duties on alcoholic beverages are unlikely to be raised means that other methods of promoting more moderate drinking habits are all the more important. Since the decline in the influence of the temperance movement, there has been no effective non-governmental organisation whose role is to lobby for an effective preventive alcohol policy. By contrast, the licensees who retail alcohol are a powerful political lobby, and are well represented in the parliament. They resisted the lowering of the BAC level and they succeeded in extending the opening hours of pubs. Alcohol policy, like all government policy, is the outcome of compromise, and governments must balance the welfare of the population as a whole against sectional interests. Excessive consumption of alcohol in Ireland creates considerable costs which were

estimated to 1.9 billion Irish punts in 1999, many of which were paid for from public expenditure. Effective policies to moderate alcohol consumption and decrease alcohol-related problems are therefore urgently needed, and must be carefully formulated and vigorously implemented if they are to be effective.

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