

ILLICIT DRUG CONSUMPTION AMONG CHILDREN

Adolescence is a period of experimentation sometimes linked to engagement in risky behaviour, including the use of illicit substances such as cannabis being by far the most “popular” drug. Frequent and heavy cannabis use during adolescence is linked to an increased risk of dependence and neurobiological problems (WHO, 2016).

Close to one in five 15-16 year olds (16%) in EU countries report having consumed cannabis at least once during their lifetime, and 7% say that they have consumed cannabis in the past month. The proportion of 15-16 year olds reporting to have consumed cannabis the past month is highest in France (17%) and Italy (15%), and the lowest in Finland and Sweden (2% only) (Figure 4.9). In all countries, boys are more likely than girls to report having consumed cannabis in the past month, although the gap is almost nil in some countries (e.g. Malta, Portugal and the Slovak Republic). About 1% of 15-16 year olds consume cannabis almost every day.

The lifetime use of at least one illicit drug other than cannabis at age 15-16 is 6% on average across EU countries (Figure 4.10). The highest rates are observed in Bulgaria and Poland, while the lowest rates are in Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Boys are more likely than girls to report having consumed illicit drug other than cannabis in a majority of countries. At least once in a lifetime consumption of ecstasy, amphetamines, cocaine, LSD and other hallucinogens are reported on average by 2% of 15-16 year olds. Crack and heroin use is less common, with only about 1% of 15-16 year olds reporting use at least once during their life.

The use of new psychoactive substances is an important concern in many European countries and has been identified as a priority for monitoring under Early Warning Systems. About 4% of adolescents aged 15-16 years old report to have used such new psychoactive substances at least once during their lifetime across EU countries, with the proportion being the highest in Poland and Estonia (10%).

The use of illegal drugs together with alcohol and other substances increases the risks of accidents and injuries for adolescents and mental health problems later in life (Connor et al., 2014). The vast majority of 15-16 year olds in EU countries (more than 90%) who ever smoked cannabis have also consumed alcohol and tobacco.

The overall trend in illicit drug use among 15-16 year olds seems fairly stable over the past decade in the case of cannabis or even showing a slight decrease in the case of other illicit drugs, following a large increase in the 1990s (Figure 4.11 and Figure 4.12). In recent years, the gender gap in the use of different types of illicit drugs between boys and girls has narrowed slightly.

Definition and comparability

The use of illicit drugs other than cannabis includes use of amphetamines, cocaine, crack, ecstasy, LSD or other hallucinogens, heroin and GHB.

The data source is the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD). The ESPAD survey repeatedly collects comparable data on the use of illicit drugs and other substance among 15-16 year olds students in European countries. The ESPAD survey data have been collected every four years since 1995.

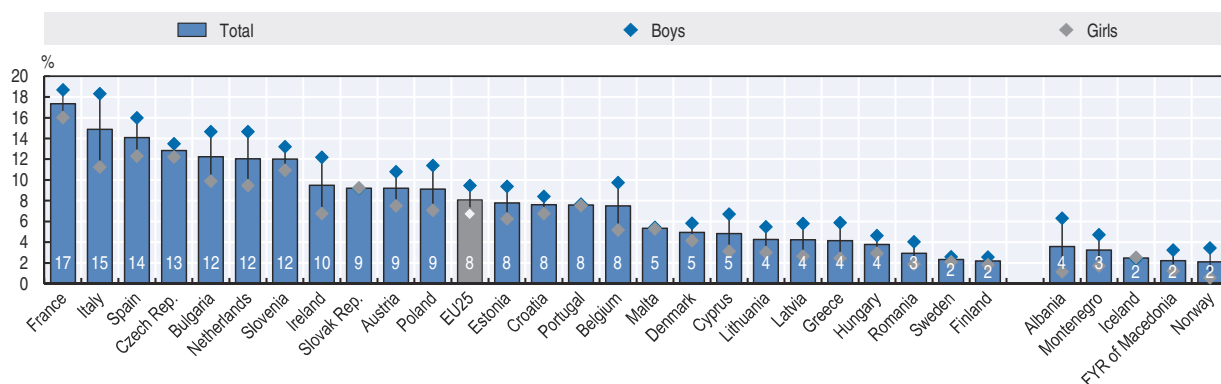
Data for Spain (a non-ESPAD country) come from the Spanish national school survey (2014-15), only including some indicators where comparability is high. Data from Latvia need to be interpreted with caution due to low sample size.

For more information, please see <http://espad.org/report/home/>.

References

- Connor, J.P. et al. (2014), “Polysubstance use: Diagnostic challenges, patterns of use and health”, *Current opinion in psychiatry*, 27(4), pp. 269-275.
- ESPAD Group (2016), ESPAD Report 2015: Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs, EMCDDA and ESPAD, European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction, Lisbon, <https://doi.org/10.2810/022073>.
- WHO (2016), The health and social effects of nonmedical cannabis use, World Health Organization, www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/msbcannabis.pdf.

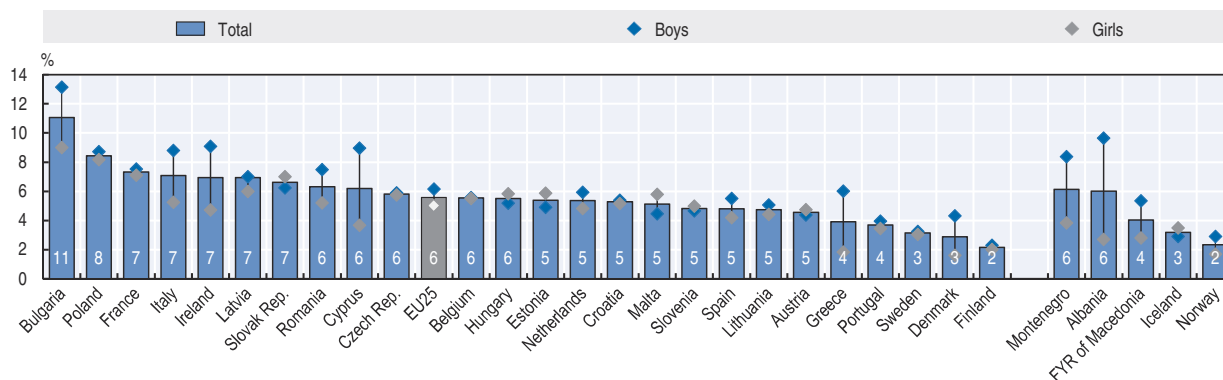
4.9. Prevalence of cannabis use in the last 30 days among 15-16 year olds, 2015



Note: The EU average is not weighted by country population size. The data for Belgium refers to the Flanders region only.
 Source: ESPAD, 2015. Spanish national school survey 2014-15 for Spain.

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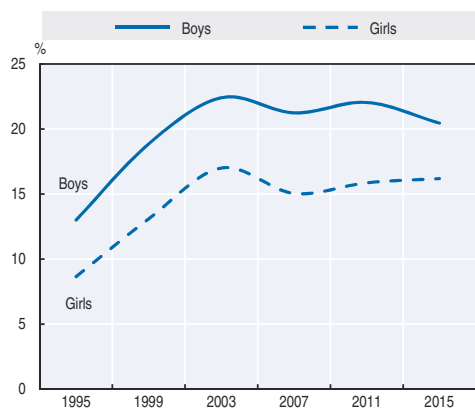
4.10. At least once in a lifetime use of illicit drugs other than cannabis among 15-16 year olds, 2015



Note: The EU average is not weighted by country population size. The data for Belgium refers to the Flanders region only.
 Source: ESPAD, 2015. Spanish national school survey 2014-15 for Spain.

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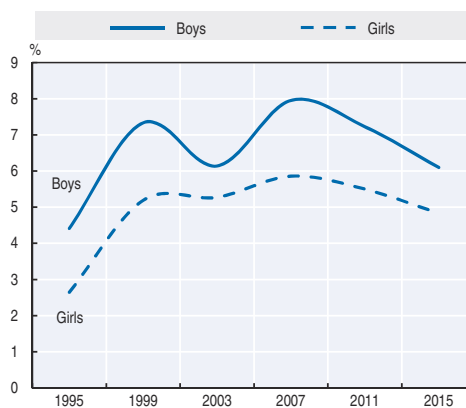
4.11. Lifetime use of cannabis among 15-16 year olds, average across EU countries and Norway, 1995 to 2015



Note: The average is not weighted by country population size.
 Source: ESPAD.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933835136>

4.12. Lifetime use of illicit drugs other than cannabis among 15-16 year olds, average across EU countries and Norway, 1995 to 2015



Note: The average is not weighted by country population size.
 Source: ESPAD.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933835155>



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