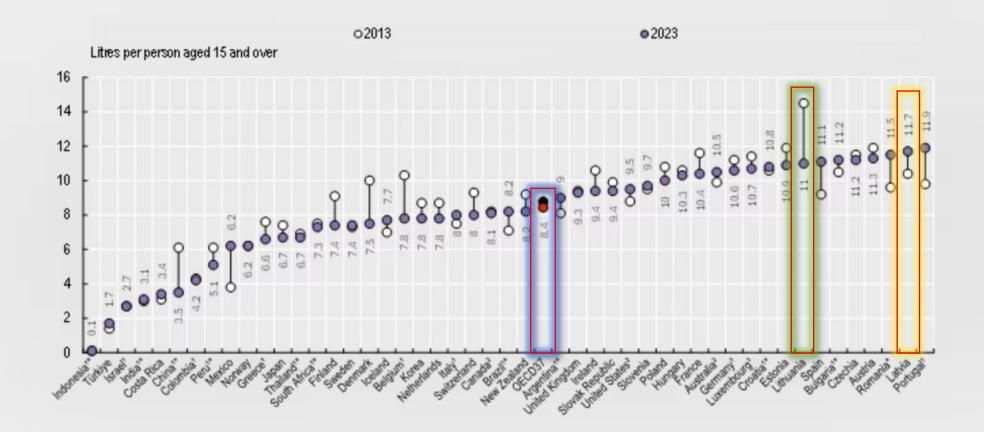
# From Field to Corridors ... and Back Again

Latvia's New Alcohol Policy Amendments



# The Field

Urgent public health signals



# We Drink a Lot. And We're Drinking Even More.

Source: OECD Health Statistics 2025.

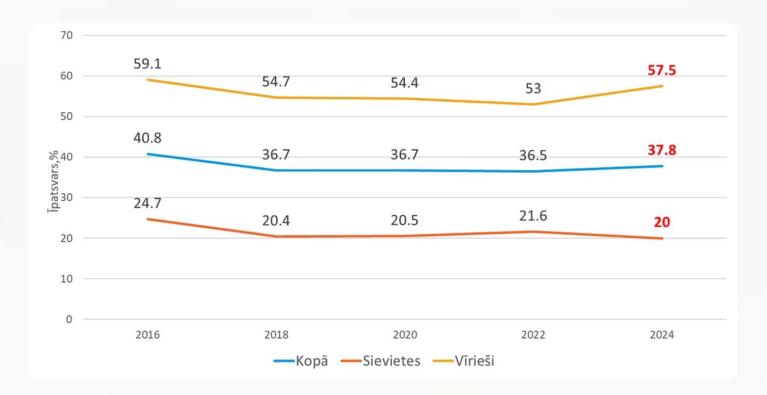
# We Binge Drink

Proportion of 15–74-year-olds who consumed at least six alcohol units on a single drinking occasion in the past year, by sex

Yellow- Men

Orange - Women

Blue- Average



# Our Drinking Is Strong — Literally

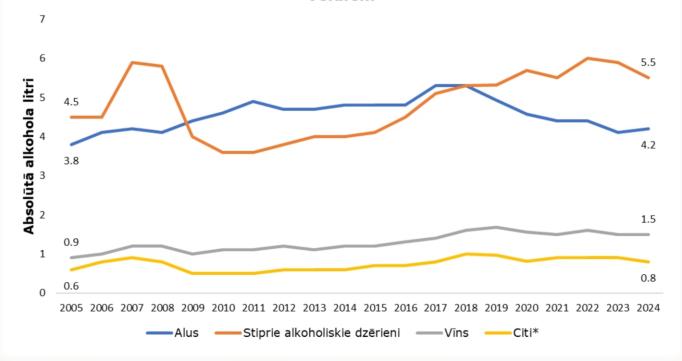
Orange – strong alcoholic beverages

Blue - beer

Grey - wine

Yellow - others

#### Reģistrētā absolūtā alkohola patēriņš litros 2005.-2024.gadā, uz vienu 15 gadus vecu un vecāku iedzīvotāju, pa dzērienu veidiem



## Other Key Trends in Alcohol-Related Harm

#### **Gender Disparities**

Men experience significantly higher alcohol-related and external-cause mortality rates than women, reflecting deeply rooted consumption patterns.

#### **Mental Health Crisis**

Since 2020, new cases of alcohol-related mental and behavioral disorders have risen by 8%. Nearly half involve alcohol dependence, with a growing share among women.

#### **Shifting Mortality Patterns**

Deaths from direct alcohol-related diseases are decreasing, but deaths from indirect causes like poisoning, falls, and suicides are slightly increasing.

# The Corridors

Sometimes decision-makers act differently under the same stressors

### **Shared Stressors [Leading to Tunnel Vision]**



#### **COVID-19 Pandemic**

Uncertainty, chaos, and widespread fear disrupted normal policy processes and created new public health challenges.



#### War and Regional Instability

Fear, activated trauma, and increased mental health burdens placed additional strain on health systems and communities.



#### **Economic Pressures**

Cost-cutting measures and weaker prevention budgets limited the capacity for comprehensive public health responses.



#### **Industry Influence**

Commercial interests pushing for liberalization created conflict of interest risks, complicating evidence-based policymaking.

# Different Responses to Shared Challenges

#### Lithuania's Bold Action (since 2018)

Implemented a comprehensive set of WHO's "best buy" alcohol control policies, including advertising bans, age restrictions, availability controls, and excise tax increase

#### Latvia's Slooooow Response

Despite similar public health needs, Latvia struggled for over 10 years to pass comprehensive measures. In March 2020, during the pandemic, Latvia even allowed online/mobile alcohol sales to "support" self-isolation.

#### Latvia's Decision: 2025 Policy Amendments Despite All Stressors



Critical gaps remain: No excise tax increase, Parliament rejected raising drinking age from 18 to 20, and the ban on petrol station sales was rejected—despite Latvia's high (and rising) number of drunk drivers.

# What Can We Learn from Latvia's Case?

#### **Strategic Action Framework**

01

#### **Collect Robust Data**

Systematic evidence gathering on alcohol harm and policy effectiveness

07

#### **Build Civil Society Advocacy**

Strengthen NGO networks to create grassroots pressure

02

#### **Communicate and Contextualize**

Translate data into compelling narratives that resonate with policymakers and the public

04

#### Wait for the Open Window

Prepare thoroughly so you can act fast when political opportunities emerge

# **Evidence-Based Advocacy in Action**



#### **Lithuania Case Study**

Analyzed by WHO and EVID-action, providing crucial evidence for regional policy development



#### Latvia Assessment Ongoing

WHO is evaluating public health results after the 2025 amendments, with publication expected by end of 2026

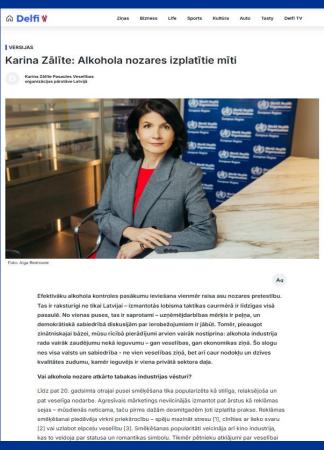


# **Enhanced Communication Needed**

We are missing strengthening advocacy and local-level lobbying to support evidence-based policies

## **Evidence-Based Advocacy in Action**







neizmantots - akcīzes nodokļa paaugstināšana alkoholam.

Lai arī redzam, ka tikko publiskotajā jaunajā budžeta plānā <sup>1</sup> Finanšu ministrija jeplānojusi

akcīzes nodokļa celšanu, tā ir tik neliela, ka pagaidām ieplānotais pieaugums uz gala

lietotāja pirktspēju atstāj nenozīmīgu ietekmi – piemēram, viena degvīna pudele pēc



# **Enhanced Communication Needed**

We are missing strengthening local level advocacy and lobbying to support evidence-based policies

#### **Grassroots Movement: "1000 Days Sober" and EVID-ACTION Youth**



**Agris Starts** 

Tavai Brīvībai — "1000 Days Sober" Initiative







# Joined by WHO EVID-ACTION Youth Advocates

Youth-led movements demonstrate the power of personal stories and community support in changing cultural norms around alcohol consumption.

#### From Preparation to Action



#### Continuously Gather & Refine Evidence

Build a robust and compelling body of data and case studies year-round.



#### **Nurture & Expand Networks**

Continuously engage and train civil society advocates to strengthen collective impact.



#### **Strategically Monitor Political Cycles**

Anticipate and prepare for opportunities presented by electoral and legislative timelines.



#### Be Ready to Act Decisively

Ensure all preparations are in place to capitalize immediately when the political window opens.

In Latvia, the next open window could appear right before elections and shortly after elections. This period isn't for passive waiting; it's a critical phase for active preparation. By continuously building strong networks, diligently gathering and refining evidence, and thoroughly training advocates, we ensure readiness to act decisively when political opportunities emerge. This ongoing strategic work makes all the difference.

# Thank You!

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