

# Recent developments in Finnish alcohol policy

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# Key questions of Finnish alcohol policy



- What will happen to the public health–based alcohol retail monopoly?
- What will happen to the system for controlling alcohol sales and enforcing age limits?
- What will happen to the bans on alcohol marketing?
- What will happen to the WHO's effective measures for reducing alcohol-related harm (price, availability, marketing)?
- What will happen to the resources for preventive substance abuse work?



# Home delivery of alcohol



## Proposed changes by the Government:

- A separate **delivery licence and permit** for home delivery of alcohol
- Would **enable express deliveries**
- **Delivery within as little as 30 minutes**
- **Retail sales hours and restrictions** would apply to deliveries within Finland
- **Age verification** would take place **upon handover of the purchase**
- **No mandatory identification** required at the time of purchase
- **Delivery time and method** could be **freely agreed** between buyer and seller
- **Test purchases** would be allowed for authorities
- **Administrative fine** set at **€1,000** (previously €20,000)

## Observations:

- **Home delivery** is likely to **increase alcohol consumption at home**
- **Express deliveries** should not be allowed
- The **amount of alcohol delivered at one time** should be **limited**
- The **delivery licence** should be **strictly regulated** and subject to **tight conditions**
- In practice, **effective monitoring and enforcement will be impossible**
- There is **particular concern for the 89,000 children** living in families where **at least one parent has a serious substance abuse problem**

# Cross-border distance selling of alcohol



## Proposed changes by the Government:

- In the future, **foreign operators could sell alcoholic beverages up to 80% ABV** to Finland
- The proposal is **justified with EU law and a Supreme Court ruling** (even the interpretation is not unambiguous)
- A **distance seller could not deliver alcoholic beverages to Finland without a delivery licence or permit**
- The proposal **acknowledges that distance selling would weaken Alko's monopoly position**
- According to the **Government Programme, Alko's public health-based monopoly must not be undermined**

## Observations:

- The proposal **deliberately places different operators in an unequal position**
- **Foreign sellers and Alko** would be allowed to **deliver all types of alcoholic beverages to homes**
- **Domestic operators** could only sell beverages **up to the current legal limits of 5.5% / 8% ABV**
- There are **many open questions**, for example:
  - **Would it have been possible to work with the European Commission to find a solution allowing the same alcohol content limits for distance sales as for domestic retail sales?**
  - **Why should Finland accept that a single anticipatory interpretation of EU requirements might determine the entire direction of Finnish alcohol policy?**
- In practice, the reform would **open the door to challenging Finland's national alcohol percentage limits under EU law**

# Alcohol marketing



## Proposed changes by the Government:

- The proposal would **remove the ban on online marketing of strong alcoholic beverages**
- However, **advertising of strong alcohol would still be prohibited on television and radio**, unlike other alcoholic products
- **Marketing by social media influencers would be permitted**
- **Online stores could recommend alcoholic beverages to consumers based on their purchase history or in connection with food orders**

## Observations:

- **Foreign distance sellers would gain the ability to market and sell all types of alcoholic beverages** to Finnish consumers
- **Marketing of strong alcoholic beverages increases exposure to brands and normalises alcohol use**
- **Digital marketing is known to increase consumption**, especially among **high-risk consumers and young people**
- **Young people are exposed to alcohol-related messages** in digital environments and **lack the ability to recognise advertisers' persuasive intentions**
- **Age verification mechanisms on social media and online platforms are weak**: underage users can often **access websites and follow influencers sharing alcohol-related content** without significant restrictions

# Alcohol taxation



## Proposed changes by the Government:

- The Government has **raised alcohol taxes several times** across different product categories (**excluding beer**)
- The Government plans to **link the alcohol excise duty to the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP)**
- The **tax liability for alcoholic beverages ordered from abroad** has been **extended to cover both the seller and the buyer**

## Observations:

- **EHYT has supported increases in alcohol taxation and the indexation of the tax**
- **Distance selling increases the risk of tax evasion**
- **Customs and tax authorities are unable to monitor large volumes of online orders** (comparable to platforms such as *Temu*), and **no additional resources have been allocated for enforcement**
- **Alcohol imported from abroad weakens the state's tax base and expands the grey economy**
- **Growth in distance selling would also undermine the feasibility of future increases in alcohol taxation**

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# Thank you!

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