

Heavy-drinking Lithuania bans alcohol ads, raises minimum age

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Lithuania on Thursday banned alcohol advertising and raised the legal drinking age to 20 from 18 as part of efforts to curb consumption in one of the world's hardest-drinking nations.

The measures, which also include a ban on [alcohol sales](#) between 8pm to 10am, were approved by 101 lawmakers in the 141-seat parliament. Ten MPs were opposed, and another ten abstained.

The blanket ban on [alcohol ads](#), which includes billboards, TV, radio, the printed press and the internet, will come into force on January 1, 2018.

Fighting alcoholism was among the key campaign promises that gave the Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union (LPGU) a surprise victory in elections last October.

LPGU party chairman Ramunas Karbauskis said the EU nation of some 2.8 million people was taking its cue from several Nordic countries that have strict rules on [alcohol](#) sales.

"We need changes so that fewer people become dependent on alcohol and kids are not affected by this industry," Karbauskis said Thursday.

The average Lithuanian over the age of 15 consumed the equivalent of 13.2 litres of pure alcohol last year, the country's statistics agency reported this week, down by nearly a litre per person compared with a year ago.

But Gauden Galea, a senior World Health Organization official, last month pegged average annual consumption at 16 litres per person, making Lithuanians the world's "top" drinkers, according to the Baltic News Service.

Critics said the measures were unlikely to be effective.

"We're preventing adults from buying alcohol and we think that this will solve all social ills. This is a short-sighted approach," said liberal lawmaker Ausrine Armonaite.

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