

# Public attitudes to Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) for alcohol in Scotland



**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

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## Executive summary

The Scottish Government introduced a minimum unit pricing (MUP) of alcohol set at 50p per unit on 1 May 2018, with the aim of reducing alcohol consumption and tackling alcohol-related harms in Scotland. This research sought to investigate public attitudes towards MUP in 2023. Public Health Scotland (PHS) carried out [previous work](#) on public attitudes toward MUP both pre- and post-implementation of the policy. This formed part of the independent PHS [evaluation](#) of MUP and findings were included in the [final evaluation report](#) published on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023. Differences in methodology between the previous work and this new research means that findings are not comparable.

## Methodology

The Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos Mori to carry out public attitudes research through an omnibus survey, which asked a nationally representative sample of 1,029 adults across Scotland whether they were in favour of or against MUP. Respondents were also asked the main and secondary reason for why they were in favour or against MUP. Participants of the panel survey are random probability sampled and people without digital access are equipped with a tablet, email address, and basic broadband to enable their participation. The survey was in field between 13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

The survey used the same questions as the previous PHS work, but as mentioned several methodological differences mean that findings are not comparable. This work was carried out online through a panel survey whereas previous work was conducted face-to-face through the [Scottish Social Attitudes Survey](#). Previous work generally had larger sample sizes, with the exception of the 2019 wave (1,497 in 2013, 1,288 in 2015, and 1,022 in 2019). As described above, this work had a sample size of 1,029. Moreover, there are some differences in sampling techniques. Previous work used clustered random probability sampling to recruit survey respondents, while Ipsos Mori invites people to join an online survey panel through unclustered random probability sampling, and survey respondents are then chosen from the existing panel. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey also conducts fieldwork over a much longer period of time (June-October 2013, July 2015-January 2016, August 2019-March 2020 respectively) compared to this panel survey, which ran over one week (13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July 2023). Therefore, there was much greater scope in this new work for people's attitudes toward MUP to be influenced by current events or media coverage, or for responses to be impacted by a seasonal bias compared to previous work. As the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey is carried out over several months, from summer to winter, the risk for these biases and their impact on findings is significantly smaller.

## Key findings

Overall, people were slightly more likely to be in favour of MUP (43%) than against it (38%). Almost a fifth of respondents (18%) were neutral and a small number did not know (1%).

People were more likely to be somewhat in favour of MUP (26%) than strongly in favour (17%). Conversely, people were slightly more likely to be strongly against MUP (20%) than somewhat against it (18%).

The most common main reason for being in favour of MUP was to help tackle problems caused by alcohol in general (34% of respondents in favour of MUP), followed by to help tackle health problems from drinking (20% of respondents in favour of MUP).

The most common main reason for opposing MUP was feeling it punishes everyone for what some drinkers do (29% of respondents who were against MUP), followed by feeling that if people want to drink they will whatever the price (22% of respondents against MUP).

Analysis by socio-demographic characteristics revealed some differences in attitude. Most population subgroups were more likely to be in favour of MUP, except for:

- Men
- People aged 55-64 and 75+
- People on the highest household incomes (£100,000+ per annum)
- People living in the most deprived quintile ([Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) (SIMD) 1).

These groups were instead more likely to be against MUP.

Women were significantly more likely to be in favour of MUP compared to men (48% of women compared to 37% of men). Men were significantly more likely to be against MUP than women (44% of men compared to 33% of women).

## Introduction

The Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Act 2012 (“the 2012 Act”) allows the Scottish Parliament to set a price below which alcohol cannot be sold in Scotland. Minimum unit pricing (MUP) for alcohol was implemented in Scotland on 1 May 2018. MUP is a strength-based price floor for alcoholic drinks, meaning that licensed premises cannot sell an alcoholic drink for less than a certain price, determined by the alcohol-by-volume percentage of the drink. The price floor in Scotland is 50 pence per unit of alcohol.

The policy aim of MUP is to reduce the consumption of alcohol by setting a floor price below which alcohol cannot be sold. In particular, it targets a reduction in consumption of alcohol that is considered cheap, relative to its strength. It aims to reduce both the consumption of alcohol at population level and, in particular, those who drink at hazardous and harmful levels. In doing so, it aims to reduce alcohol related health harms among hazardous and harmful drinkers, and contribute to reducing harm at a whole population level.

The Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos Mori to carry out public attitudes research towards MUP for two reasons:

1. The 2012 Act contains a sunset clause, stating that the minimum unit pricing of alcohol (MUP) provisions will expire after they have been in place for 6 years (30 April 2024), unless the Scottish Parliament vote for it to continue. As part of work to ensure a strong evidence base to inform the Scottish Parliament’s upcoming decision on [the potential continuation of MUP](#), Scottish Government analysts conducted an evidence gap analysis in 2022 on the impact of MUP in Scotland. This identified that there was little evidence on public attitudes towards minimum unit pricing post-2019. This was considered a key data gap, particularly given the potential impact of COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis on public attitudes.

2. The 2012 Act requires Scottish Ministers to lay a report on the operation and effect of MUP as soon as practicable after the first five years of MUP implementation. The 2012 Act requires that, in preparing this report, Scottish Ministers must consult with relevant groups and anyone else they feel is relevant. Scottish Ministers determined that seeking the views of the general public would provide insight into the level of support there was for MUP across Scotland. The findings of public attitudes research would therefore also inform the preparation of this report on the operation and effect of the minimum pricing provisions.

[Previous work](#) on public attitudes towards MUP was carried out by Public Health Scotland (PHS) as part of the [5 year evaluation of MUP](#). This element of the evaluation compared attitudes towards MUP pre- and post-implementation using data from the 2013, 2015, and 2019 waves of the [Scottish Social Attitudes Survey](#). This new research uses a different

methodology to the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey and is therefore not comparable to previous findings. While it would have been preferable to use the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey for this work to enable comparison to previous data, this was not possible due to the timeframes of the survey.

## Methodology

This survey was conducted via the Ipsos Mori Knowledge Panel. It has 25,000 panellists, of which 3,000 are in Scotland, who are recruited using off-line random probability unclustered address-based sampling. This means that every household in the UK has a known chance of being selected to join the panel. People who lack digital access are able to register to the Knowledge Panel either by post or by telephone, and are given a tablet, email address, and basic internet access to allow them to participate online.

The survey was conducted between 13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July 2023. A total of 1,818 respondents from the Panel were selected and invited to take part in the survey, of which 1,029 responses were achieved amongst residents across Scotland aged 18+, representing a response rate of 57%.

In order to ensure the survey results are as representative of the target population as possible, the weighting was applied to the data in line with the target sample profile (Annex A).

The questions asked in the survey to assess levels of and reasons for support or opposition to MUP were the same that were asked in previous attitudinal research on MUP, and are set out in Annex B. However, it is crucial to note that this research is not comparable to previous public attitudes towards MUP research. Previous work, carried out through the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, generally had larger sample sizes, with the exception of the 2019 wave (1,497 in 2013, 1,288 in 2015, and 1,022 in 2019) and was also carried out face-to-face. As described above, this work had a sample size of 1,029 and was carried out online. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey used clustered random probability sampling to recruit survey respondents, while Ipsos Mori invites people to join an online survey panel through unclustered random probability sampling, and survey respondents are then chosen from the existing panel. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey also conducts fieldwork over a much longer period of time (June-October 2013, July 2015-January 2016, August 2019-March 2020 respectively) compared to this panel survey, which only ran over one week (13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July 2023). Therefore, there was much greater scope in this new work for people's attitudes toward MUP to be influenced by current events or media coverage, or for responses to be impacted by a seasonal bias compared to previous work. As the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey is carried out over several months, from summer to winter, the risk for these biases and their impact on findings is significantly smaller. The findings set out in this report should be interpreted with these considerations in mind, and comparisons should not be made with previous public attitudes to MUP.

Data collected through the survey was broken down by a number of socio-demographic and attitudinal cross-tabulations, and significance testing was carried out at the 95% confidence level.

## Findings

The findings of the public attitudes research are set out in the following chapter, and differences between groups are only statistically significant where this is highlighted. Reported sample sizes are unweighted, please see Annex A for weighting targets.

The first question respondents were asked was 'One way of trying to reduce problem drinking in Scotland is having a minimum price for different alcoholic drinks. The price is based on how much alcohol is in each drink. How much are you in favour or against minimum unit pricing of alcohol?'

The survey found that people were overall slightly more likely to be supportive of MUP with 43% of respondents in favour of MUP while 38% were against (see figure 1). People were more likely to be somewhat in favour of MUP (26%) than strongly in favour (17%). Conversely, people were slightly more likely to be strongly against MUP (20%) than somewhat against it (18%).

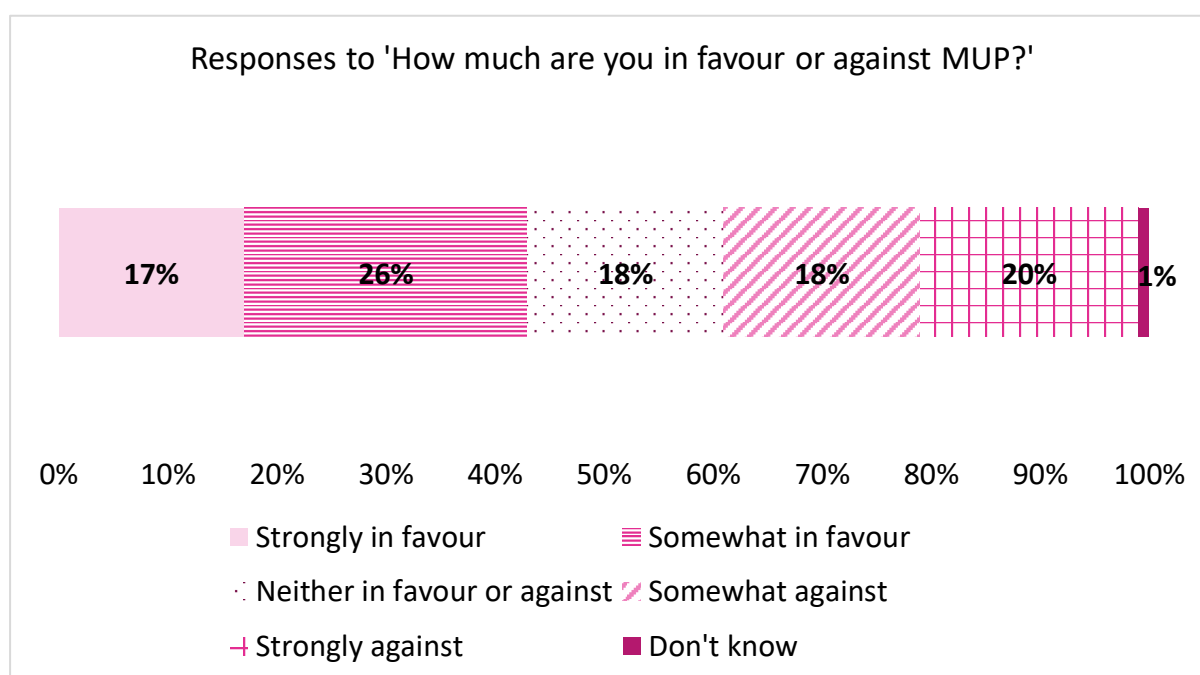
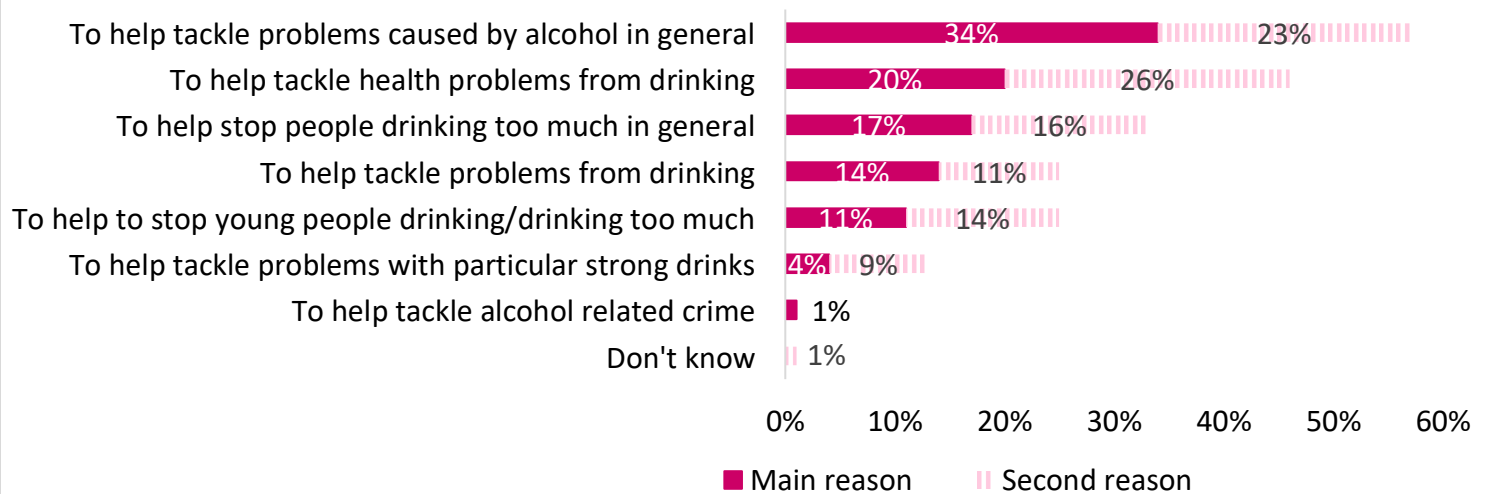


Figure 1: Attitudes toward MUP. Base: all respondents 18+ (1,029)



Respondents were asked what their main and second reasons for being in favour of or against MUP were. The most common main reason for being in favour of MUP was to help tackle problems caused by alcohol in general (34% of respondents in favour of MUP), followed by to help tackle health problems from drinking (20% of respondents in favour of MUP) and to help stop people drinking too much in general (17% of respondents in favour of MUP). This is presented in figure 2 below.

Reasons for being favour of MUP by main reason and second reason



**Figure 2: Reasons for being in favour of MUP by main and second reason. Base: All respondents in favour of MUP (443)**

For the people who were against MUP (38%), the most common main reason was that they felt it punishes everyone for what some drinkers do (29% of respondents who were against MUP). This was followed by feeling that if people want to drink, they will whatever the price (22% of respondents who were against MUP) and that it punishes those who are less well off (14% of respondents who were against MUP). This is set out in figure 3 below.

Reasons for being against MUP by main reason and second reason

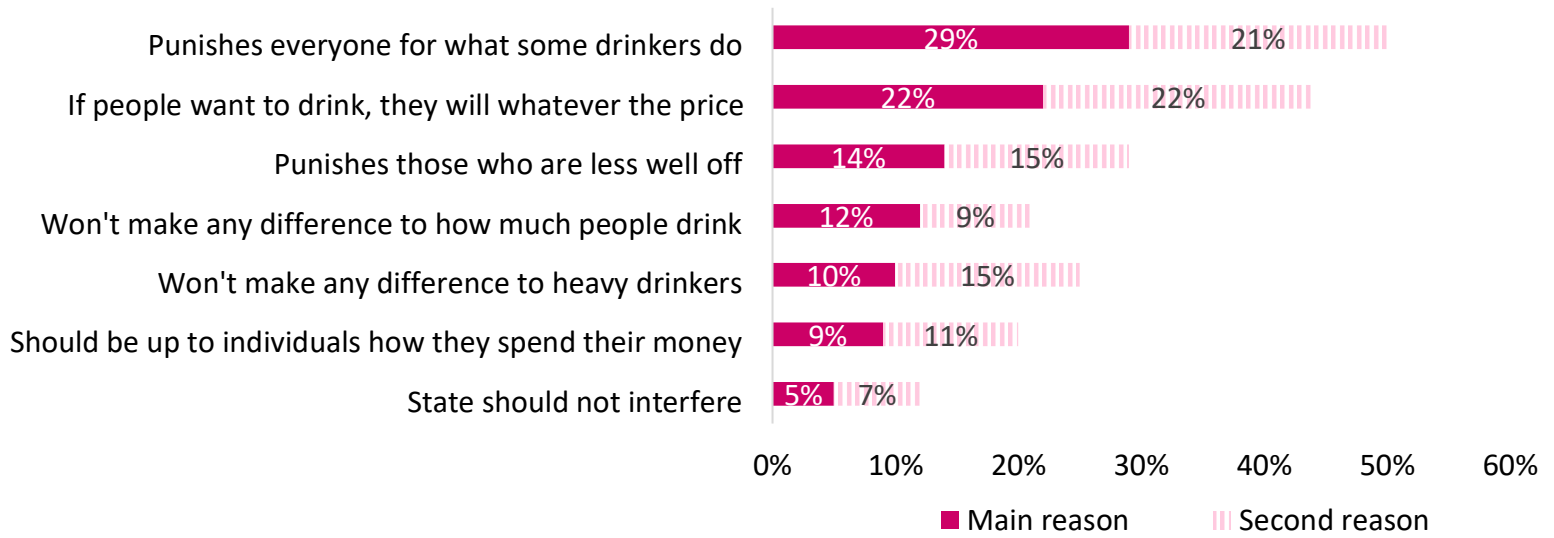


Figure 3: Reasons for being against MUP by main and second reason. Base: All respondents against MUP (404)

Attitudes by gender

Women were significantly more likely to be in favour of MUP compared to men (48% compared to 37%), while men were significantly more likely to be against MUP compared to women (44% of men compared to 33% of women ). This is illustrated in the below figure 4.

Men were also significantly more likely to be strongly against MUP (25% of men) compared to women (15% of women).

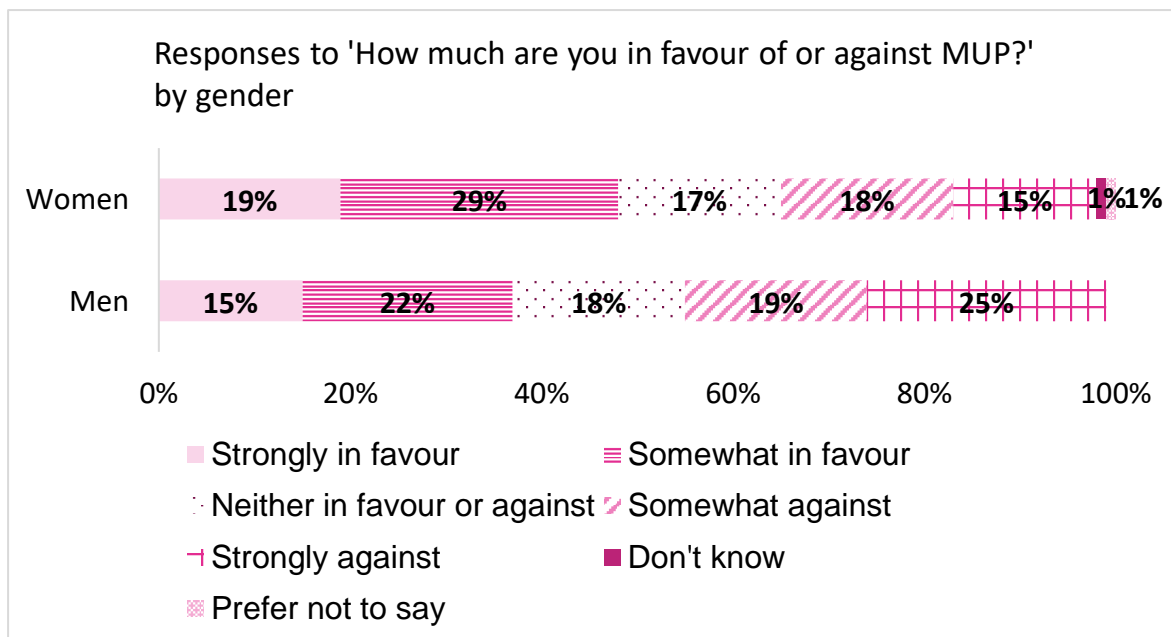
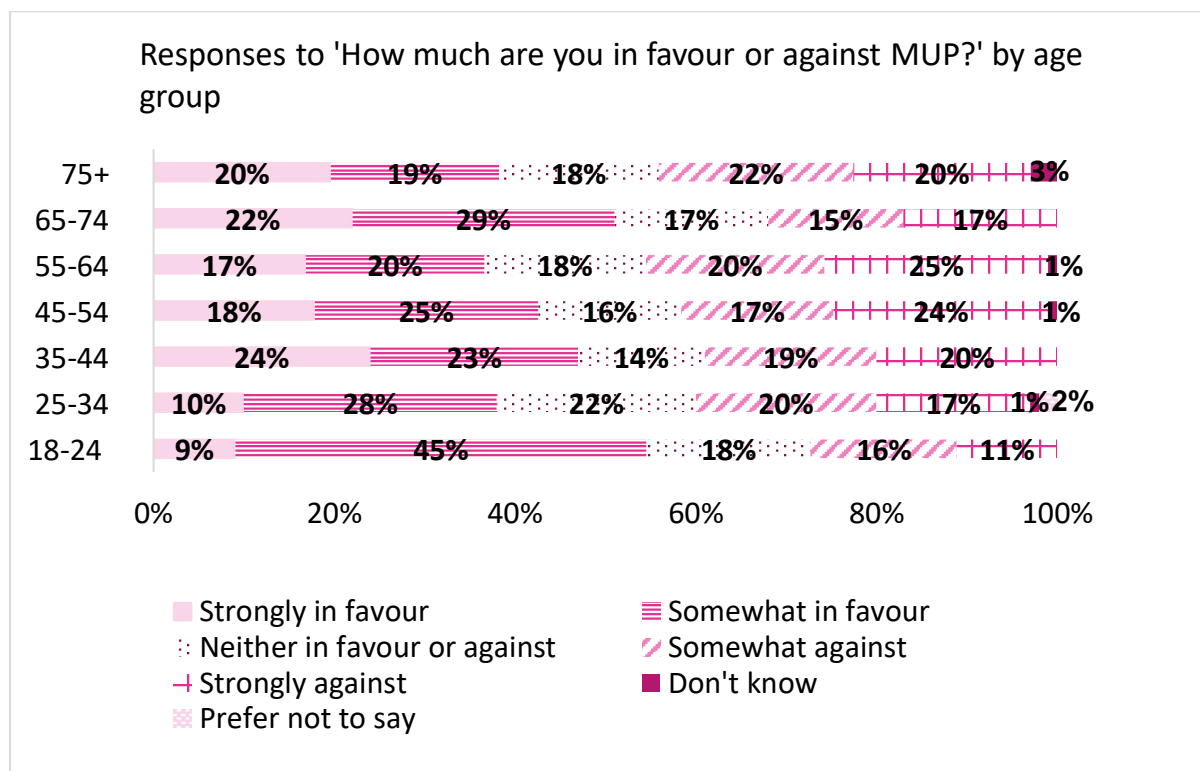


Figure 4: Attitudes to MUP by gender. Base: All respondents (1,029), women (485) and men (537).

## Attitudes by age

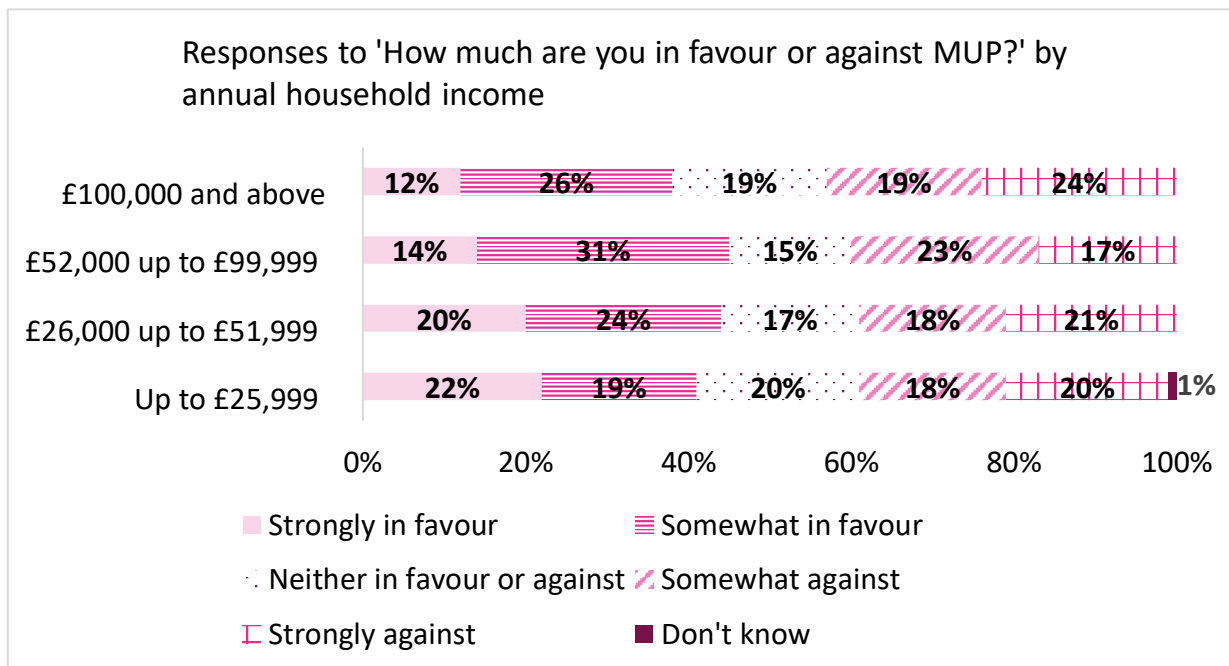
Most age groups were more likely to be in favour of MUP than against, as illustrated in figure 5 below which uses mostly ten-year age groupings. The groups 55-64 and 75+ were the only age groups that were more likely to be against MUP (44% and 42% respectively) than in favour (37% and 38% respectively).



**Figure 5: Attitudes to MUP by age group.** Due to rounding, totals may equal more or less than 100%. Base: All respondents (1,029), 18-24 (33), 25-34 (85), 35-44 (121), 45-54 (160), 55-64 (267), 65-74 (253), 75+ (110)

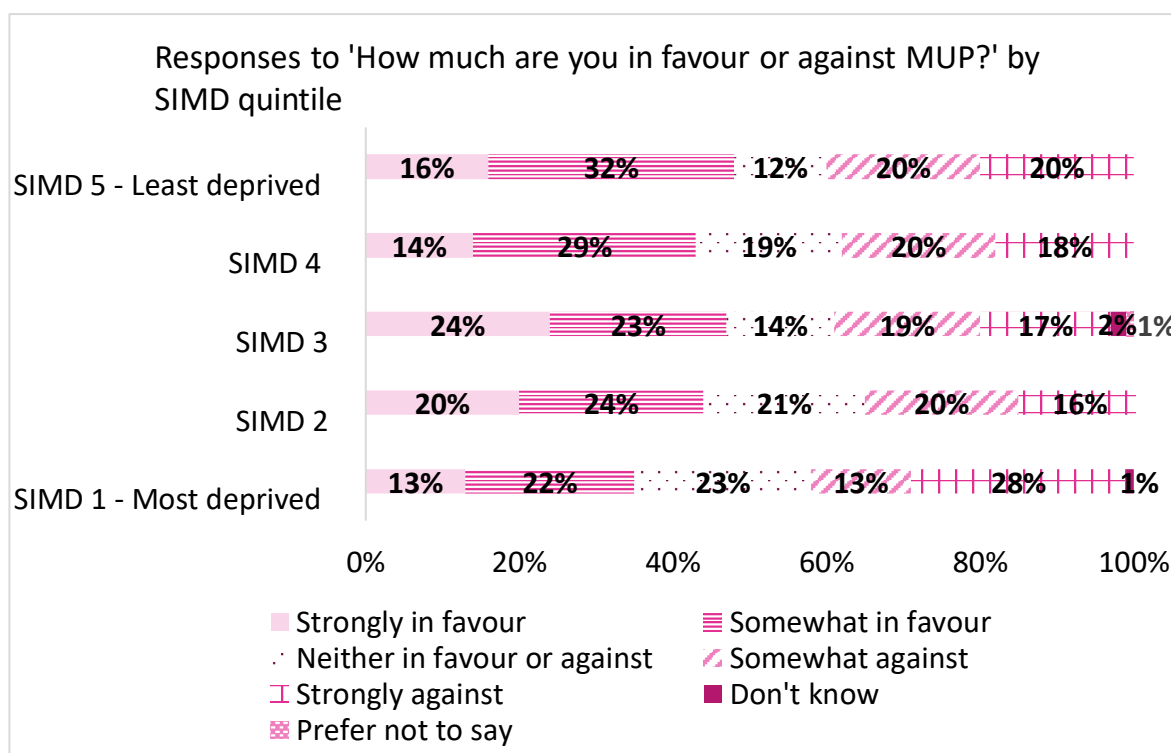
## Attitudes by household income and SIMD

Figure 6 shows attitudes to MUP by household income. People in each income bracket were more likely to be in favour of MUP than against with the exception of those with the highest household income (£100,000+ per annum) (37% in favour vs 43% against)



**Figure 6: Attitudes to MUP by annual household income. Due to rounding, totals may equal more or less than 100%. Base: All respondents (1,029), up to £25,999 (265), £26,000 up to £51,999 (358), £52,000 up to £99,999 (164), £100,00 and above (62).**

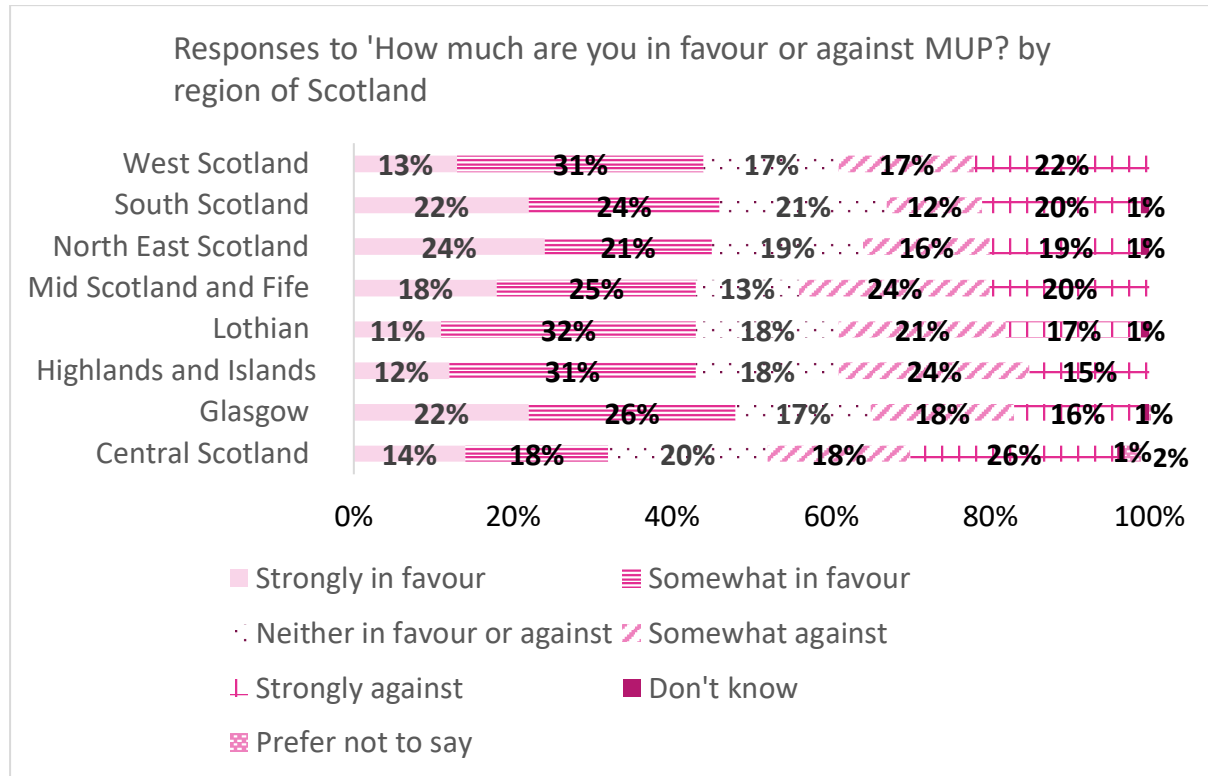
Figure 7 shows attitudes to MUP by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Those living in the least deprived areas were significantly more likely to be in favour of MUP than those living in the most deprived areas (47% vs 35%).



**Figure 7: Attitudes to MUP by SIMD quintile. Due to rounding, totals may equal more or less than 100%. Base: All respondents (1,029), SIMD 1 (182), SIMD 2 (167), SIMD 3 (204), SIMD 4 (232), and SIMD 5 (244)**

## Attitudes by region of Scotland

Finally, there were no significant differences between regions looking at overall attitudes to MUP. Attitudes by region of Scotland are set out in figure 8 below.



**Figure 8: Attitudes to MUP by region of Scotland. Due to rounding, totals may equal more or less than 100%. Base: All respondents (1,029), Central Scotland (99), Glasgow (121), Highlands and Islands (98), Lothian (172), Mid Scotland and Fife (151), North East Scotland (143), South Scotland (121), West Scotland (124).**

## References

World Health Organisation (2009) *Global Health Risks: Mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks.*

World Health Organisation (2022) *Alcohol Fact Sheet.* Accessed 11 August 2023.

## Annex A - Weighting

As two members per household are allowed to participate in the Knowledge Panel, a design weight is added to correct for unequal probabilities of selection of household members. Calibration weights are also applied using the latest population statistics relevant to the surveyed population to correct for imbalances in the achieved sample. The calibration weights were applied in two stages:

the first set of variables used the [ONS 2019 mid-year population estimates](#) as the weighting targets to create an interlocked variable of gender by age and region;

the second set of variables used the [ONS 2019 mid-year population estimates](#) and the [ONS Annual Population Survey](#) as the weighting targets for education, ethnicity, Index of Multiple Deprivation, and number of adults in the household.

**Table 1: Weighting targets for age and gender**

Age & gender	Male	Female	In another way	Prefer not to say
18-34	13.7%	13.6%	0.3%	0.1%
35-44	7.4%	7.7%	0.1%	0.0%
45-54	8.3%	8.8%	0.0%	0.0%
55-64	8.0%	8.5%	0.1%	0.0%
65-74	6.2%	6.8%	0.1%	0.0%
75+	4.3%	6.1%	0.0%	0.0%

**Table 2: Weighting targets for Scotland's regions**

Scotland – region	
Central Scotland	12.1%
Glasgow	13.1%
Highlands and Islands	8.3%
Lothian	14.6%

Mid Scotland and Fife	12.3%
North East Scotland	14.1%
South Scotland	12.6%
West Scotland	12.9%

**Table 3: Weighting targets for ethnicity**

Ethnicity	
White	94.4%
Non-White	4.7%
Prefer not to say/Not stated	0.8%

**Table 4: Weighting targets for education**

Education	
Degree level or above	28.5%
Below degree level	70.7%
Prefer not to say/Not stated	0.8%

**Table 5: Weighting targets for SIMD quintiles**

SIMD quintiles	
1	20.0%
2	20.0%
3	20.0%
4	20.0%
5	20.0%



**Table 6: Weighting targets for number of adults in the household**

<b>Number of adults in the household</b>	
One adult	21.7%
Two or more adults	78.3%

## Annex B – Survey Questions

1. One way of trying to reduce problem drinking in Scotland is having a minimum price for different alcoholic drinks. The price is based on how much alcohol is in each drink. How much are you in favour or against minimum unit pricing of alcohol?

Strongly in favour

Somewhat in favour

Neither in favour or against

Somewhat against

Strongly against

Don't know

2. If in favour, what is your main reason for saying that you are in favour?

To help tackle problems caused by alcohol in general

To help stop people drinking too much in general

To help to stop young people drinking/drinking too much

To help tackle health problems from drinking

To help tackle problems from drinking

To help tackle problems with particular strong drinks

Other

Don't know

3. And what is your second reason for saying that you are in favour?

[Options as above]

4. If against, what is your main reason for saying that you are against?

If people want to drink, they will whatever the price

Won't make any difference to how much people drink

Punishes everyone for what some drinkers do

Should be up to individuals how they spend their money

Won't make any difference to heavy drinkers

Punishes those who are less well off

State should not interfere

Other

Don't know

5. And what is your second reason for saying that you are against?

[Options as above]

### **How to access background or source data**

The data collected for this social research publication

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact [nadia.alnasser@gov.scot](mailto:nadia.alnasser@gov.scot) for further information.



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