



Factsheet n°9 - Tobacco

Facts & Figures:

- Every year, more than 8 million people die from tobacco use.¹
- Tobacco kills up to half of its users.²
- Second-hand smoke exposure causes 1.2 million deaths annually.³
- Nearly half of all children breathe air polluted by tobacco smoke and 65 000 children die each year due to illnesses related to second-hand smoke.⁴
- 26% of the overall EU population and 29% of young Europeans aged 15-24 smoke.⁵

Our recommendations

The EU Cancer Plan announces the objective to create a “Tobacco Free Generation”, where less than 5% of the population uses tobacco by 2040. In order to reach that ambitious objective, AIM highlights the need to:

- ***Raise and harmonise taxation rates for all types of tobacco products.***

Increasing prices through tobacco taxation is an essential tool. Both adults’ and young people’s smoking prevalence and intensity of smoking are inversely related to price. Therefore, through taxation the health burden of tobacco use can be relieved and prevent millions of smoking-attributable deaths throughout the world. Studies referenced in the *WHO technical manual on tobacco tax administration* and *IARC Handbook of Cancer Prevention: Tobacco Control. Volume 14* show that increased taxation results in short-term and long-term decline in tobacco consumption. In addition, vulnerable groups like adolescents or individuals from lower socio-economic groups have been proven to be more responsive to tax and price increases than the general population. Taxation measures would thus help to reduce health inequalities and tobacco-related poverty.⁶

Tobacco taxes should be increased so as to reduce the affordability of tobacco products. “To maximize the public health impact of higher tobacco taxes while at the same time generating higher revenues, governments should significantly raise taxes to increase prices and reduce the affordability of tobacco products. In many LMICs, tobacco use increases with incomes, and since incomes rise faster than

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>

² *Idem*

³ *Idem*

⁴ *Idem*

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/overview_en

⁶ WHO, Guidelines for Implementation of Article 6 of the WHO FCTC, 2003.

tobacco product prices, these products are becoming more affordable. To reduce affordability, tax increases need to result in real price increases that are higher than the increases in real incomes.”

AIM recommends the implementation of a simple tax systems and the application a tax structure that relies mainly on the specific tax.⁷

Tax systems should minimize the incentives for users to shift to cheaper products as a response to tax or retail price increase.⁸ Taxation rates for all types of tobacco products need to be raised and harmonised. Differences in prices and taxation frustrate the very public health goals of taxation measures. It is therefore key to align the tax charges on different types of tobacco, in order not to undermine the overall tobacco control policies. AIM joins its voice to the Smoke Free Partnership⁹ in calling for the establishment of a minimum nominal value for the overall excise duty of “roll-your-own” / “make-your own” tobacco in the same way as it is done for cigarettes.

Achieving an upwards convergence of prices across the European Union would also contribute to tackle Illicit trade. Illicit trade increases the affordability and accessibility of tobacco products and therefore sabotages price and tax measures aimed at strengthening tobacco control. Smuggling and illicit trade must be tackled if the public health and revenue goals of tobacco taxation are to be met.¹⁰ Reducing illicit tobacco trade would result in not only in economic advantages but also in larger reductions in smoking especially among young people and lower socio-economic groups.¹¹ Raising the EU Minimum Excise Duty would particularly fit this purpose. As already mentioned, differences in prices and taxation frustrate the essential public health goals of taxation measures. Harmonisation both among Member States and among the various types of tobacco products would help fight illicit trade, harmful to tobacco control.

- ***Introduce an excise tax for e-cigarettes.***

AIM calls for the inclusion of e-cigarettes within the scope of excisable goods. Given the known effects of e-cigarettes on health, the lack of long-term evidence on their health impact, and their particular appeal to young consumers, those products should be taxed in order to reduce the incentive to experiment with them or use them as a substitute. Indeed, as WHO puts it in its latest report, “The long-term health effects of [Electronic Nicotine and Non-Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS/ENNDS)] products are still unknown, but they are clearly harmful to health. Furthermore, evidence on the effectiveness of ENDS products as a smoking-cessation aid remains inconclusive. Taxing these products could play a role in preventing their uptake, specifically among non-smokers, vulnerable groups, children and adolescents.” AIM therefore encourages the European Commission to introduce a tax category for e-cigarettes in the revision of its Tobacco Tax Directive (TTD). The excise tax should be applied on all e-liquids, whether or not they contain nicotine, as also recommended by WHO.¹² AIM also calls for the EU to invest in research on the short and long-term health and environmental effects of e-cigarettes.

⁷ [WHO technical manual on tobacco tax policy and administration](#), 2021, p.273

⁸ WHO, *Guidelines for Implementation of Article 6 of the WHO FCTC*, 2003

⁹ <https://www.smokefreepartnership.eu/news/sfp-news/updated-sfp-position-paper-on-tobacco-taxation> , p.10

¹⁰ Idem

¹¹ WHO, *IARC Handbook of Cancer Prevention: Tobacco Control. Volume 14*, 2011

¹² [WHO technical manual on tobacco tax policy and administration](#), 2021, p.75

A WHO report from 2020 revealed a worrying increase in e-cigarette use among adolescents in the European region.¹³ The most commonly cited reasons for using e-cigarettes among both youth and young adults are curiosity, flavouring/taste, and low perceived harm compared to traditional cigarettes. However, e-cigarettes expose users to several chemicals including nicotine, carbonyl compounds and volatile organic compounds known to have adverse health effects. “While nicotine is a highly addictive drug at any age, youth and young adults are uniquely vulnerable to the long-term consequences of exposing the brain to nicotine, and youth use of nicotine in any form is thus unsafe.”¹⁴ Moreover, second-hand aerosol that is exhaled into the air by e-cigarette users, though less toxic than combustible tobacco products, is far from being harmless. Therefore, and given the harmful health consequences of e-cigarettes, EU legislation should be adapted in order to properly regulate their use. Taxation of these products would reduce the incentive to experiment with e-cigarettes, while not undermining the efforts of those who turn to them as a step in the cessation process.

- ***Extend the ban on characterising flavours to all tobacco products, with no exception, and ban flavoured chemicals in electronic cigarettes.***

*All flavourings, including menthol, mask or reduce tobacco smoke’s harshness and contribute to promoting and sustaining tobacco use.*¹ According to the European Court of Justice, a ban on characterising flavours, irrespective of the type of tobacco product, would both facilitate the smooth functioning of the internal market for tobacco and related products, and contribute to ensure a high level of protection of human health, especially for young people.

Article 7 of the Tobacco Product Directive prohibits the placing of tobacco products with a characterising flavour on the market but exempts tobacco products other than RYO and cigarettes from that ban. AIM agrees with the Smoke Free Partnership in calling for a reinforcement of the prohibition and the removal of any exemption.¹⁵

The Tobacco Products Directive bans flavoured cigarettes and tobacco products. Yet, that ban does not apply to e-cigarettes.¹⁶ As highlighted by a study published in the British Medical Journal: “The concentrations of some flavour chemicals in e-cigarette fluids are sufficiently high for inhalation exposure by vaping to be of toxicological concern”.¹⁷ In addition, those flavours are particularly attractive to youth.¹⁸ In its final opinion (April 2021) on e-cigarettes, the Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER) highlights that “(...) there is strong evidence that flavours have a relevant contribution for attractiveness of use of electronic cigarette and initiation”. It further states: “Flavours decrease harm perceptions and increase willingness to try and initiate use of electronic cigarettes. Adolescents consider flavour the most important attribute in these products and were more likely to initiate using through flavoured electronic cigarettes. Among adults,

¹³ <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/tobacco/news/news/2020/12/new-who-report-reveals-that-while-smoking-continues-to-decline-among-european-adolescents,-the-use-of-electronic-cigarettes-by-young-people-is-on-the-rise>

¹⁴ The Surgeon General, *E-cigarette Use among Youth and young Adults*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016

¹⁵ SFP position on the evaluation and review of the Tobacco Products Directive

¹⁶ https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2016/july/tradoc_154817.pdf

¹⁷ <https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/25/e1/e10>

¹⁸ https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/Quick-Facts-on-the-Risks-of-E-cigarettes-for-Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults.html

electronic cigarette flavours increase product appeal and are a primary reason for many adults to use the product.”¹⁹

In addition to being harmful to health nicotine in e-liquids is implicated in the development of future addictions. Furthermore, e-cigarettes are sometimes a gateway to smoking for young people. Therefore, AIM recommends to the European Commission to extend the ban on flavoured products to e-cigarettes in its upcoming review of the Tobacco Products Directive.

- ***Enforce the bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship as well as plain packaging, including on e-cigarettes.***

In theory, the Tobacco Advertising Directive (2003/33/EC) introduces an EU wide ban on cross-border tobacco advertising and sponsorship in the media other than television.²⁰ Yet, in practice, individuals and in particular vulnerable groups such as adolescents are still exposed to the marketing of tobacco industry on social media, notably through influencers. Influencers reach and engage children and adolescents upon the invitation of industry. They serve as “brand ambassadors” and are offered financial incentives to promote their products.²¹

In a study published in 2015, data gathered over a week using the top 70 cigarette brands as keywords showed that “43 of the 70 representative cigarette brands had created 238 Facebook fan pages, 46 cigarette brands were identified in Wikipedia, and there were over 120,000 pro-tobacco videos on YouTube, associated with 61 cigarette brands”.²² As far as e-cigarettes are concerned, they are promoted as smoke-free and reduced-risk alternatives. Those marketing strategies contribute to renormalise smoking. According to WHO, they “drive long-term use of addictive nicotine products which, like tobacco, are undoubtedly harmful to the consumer, under the guise of being a healthier alternative”.²³

Therefore, AIM calls for comprehensive bans on the advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco and related products, including e-cigarettes. That ban should cover advertisement at the point of sale, on billboards and outdoor advertising²⁴ and on the Internet and social media, amongst others.

When it comes to packaging, Member States are required, since 2016, to include pictorial warning on cigarette packs that cover at least 65% of the external front and back surface of the unit packet and any outside packaging of cigarettes and roll-your-own tobacco. While the increased size of warnings was to be welcomed, implementing plain packaging would be a further step towards better tobacco control and would contribute to protect youth from the marketing of industry.

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/scientific_committees/scheer/docs/scheer_o_017.pdf

²⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/advertising_en

²¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/tobacco-industry-tactics-to-attract-younger-generations>

²²

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271332419_Exploring_How_the_Tobacco_Industry_Presents_and_Promotes_Itself_in_Social_Media

²³ <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/tobacco-industry-tactics-to-attract-younger-generations>

²⁴ According to data from WHO, not all EU Member States enforced bans on [billboard and outdoor advertising](#) nor at the [point of sale](#).

- ***Protect individuals from exposure to tobacco smoke and e-cigarette aerosol in public spaces.***

As the WHO highlights, there is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke.²⁵ It is therefore vital to protect non-smokers from exposure to it, especially vulnerable groups like pregnant women and children. The e-cigarette aerosol that users breathe from the device and exhale can contain harmful substances such as nicotine, flavouring such as diacetyl, a chemical linked to a serious lung disease, cancer-causing chemicals and heavy metals such as nickel, tin, and lead.²⁶

The use of tobacco and e-cigarettes should be banned in indoor and outdoor public spaces, especially those potentially frequented by children and youth. Their use should be restricted to specifically dedicated areas. Not only would such a ban protect individuals from second-hand smoke, it would also help smokers quit and reduce youth smoking.

Those aspects should be taken into account by the European Commission in the update of the Council Recommendation on Smoke-Free Environments. They should indeed be extended to e-cigarettes and emerging products, and include outdoor public spaces.

- ***Inform citizens about the danger of tobacco use and nicotine in any form, about the harms of second-hand smoke exposure, as well as the environmental impact of those products.***

One key measure in reducing tobacco use is increasing public awareness about the health risks of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke, as well as about the benefits of the cessation of tobacco use and a tobacco-free lifestyle. Awareness raising campaigns should be properly targeted and particularly focus on vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, children and their parents. Parents should be informed not only on the effects of second-hand smoke on their children's health, but also on their likelihood of becoming smokers themselves and their decline in academic success (e.g. lower performance at school).

Involving healthcare professionals and community level organisations is also key in achieving a greater adherence to recommendations. In addition, the power of social learning should be exploited, especially for younger generations, as peer to peer communication has the advantage of increasing likeability and relatability. Influencers are used by the tobacco industry for marketing. Their potential should be exploited for public health purposes as well.

Primary prevention is undoubtedly key in lowering tobacco consumption. However, those already using tobacco or other related products should not be forgotten. The above-mentioned campaigns should also seek to provide support for those wanting to quit.

If most consumers are aware of the negative consequences of tobacco for their health, the picture changes when it comes to its environmental impacts. "[Those impacts] range from the use of scarce arable land and water for tobacco cultivation, use of harmful chemicals on tobacco farms, deforestation, and carbon emissions from manufacture and distribution processes, to the production of toxic waste and nonbiodegradable litter."²⁷ The EU Green Deal objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals can only be met if consumers are aware of the impact of their consumption on the environment, and tobacco use should be no exception.

²⁵ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>

²⁶ https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/about-e-cigarettes.html

²⁷ <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.8b01533>

AIM encourages both the European Commission and the Member States to take those aspects into account in the development of their campaigns. AIM also encourages them to boost research in behavioural science and efficient communication through social media to make the most of their potential for public health. In addition, AIM recommends using the revenues from taxation for financing tobacco-control programmes such as awareness-raising campaigns and activities, health promotion and disease prevention, cessation services, and financing of appropriate structures for tobacco control.

Best practices

FNMF - France

The PPS Network of the Regional Unions of the Mutualité Française.

The PPS network of the Unions régionales de la Mutualité française implements a range of prevention and health promotion actions. The network proposes and implements about ten actions to meet the needs of mutual members on the theme of addictions, and more specifically on the excessive use of screens and the prevention of addictive behaviour (alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gambling).

The actions proposed may have a life-course approach and are mainly aimed at young people. These actions most often take the form of information and exchange groups, webinars and are carried out in schools (secondary schools). Their main objective is to give young people the means to take action on their health on a daily basis and to develop their health capital from childhood.

Some examples of action include: the action "Becoming big in a different way: Learning to say no to tobacco", the action "0 alcohol and 0 tobacco during pregnancy" or the action "Tobacco, Alcohol, Cannabis: better understanding so as not to use them".

The proposed actions can also have a thematic approach and consequently the subject of addictions is tackled within the framework of the prevention of the occurrence of chronic diseases, the family, the health of the active population but also environmental health. The actions that are proposed can take different forms: workshop, conference, stand & exhibition, information and exchange group. The objectives differ according to the formats but the objective is nevertheless to act on the health determinants favourable to the prevention of chronic diseases.

The mutuals also offer their members a variety of actions to facilitate their commitment to the prevention of chronic diseases like raising awareness through conferences/articles/videos or relaying the "Month without tobacco" campaign.

Mutual insurers and unions managing care and support establishments and services participate in national prevention campaigns like the "month without tobacco" - anti-smoking campaign. The FNMF and Santé Publique France have been partners since 2016 on the "Month without Tobacco" campaign. Within this framework, the FNMF regularly relays the campaigns to mutualist organisations.

Special Thanks

AIM thanks the Smoke Free Partnership for their expertise and support in the realisation of this factsheet.