

24-10-2023 – [The Parliament](#)



By The Parliament Partner Content
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Taking on illicit trade

Trade in illicit tobacco is rising at an alarming rate in some European states, but declining in others, including in Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal and Romania. How can policy-makers learn from the approach taken in these member states to take on organised crime and tackle the problem?



KPMG's latest report into illicit cigarette consumption in Europe presents a mixed picture across the continent. The report, commissioned by Philip Morris International, has been carried out on an annual basis since 2007, providing a longer view on how consumption is changing over time. It covers the EU, UK, Norway and Switzerland, and this year for the first time Ukraine and Moldova have been included in the analysis.

The overall figure for the consumption of contraband and counterfeit cigarettes has seen a relatively modest increase since 2019, 33.4 billion to 35.8 billion cigarettes in 2022; but this overall figure masks two developments. The first is the alarming growth in the counterfeit market, which has increased from 5.5 billion in 2019 to 13.1 billion in 2022, more than doubling its share of the illegal market. The other is the very uneven distribution, France alone accounts for 47% of the EU27's illicit consumption, whereas 21 out of the EU-27 experienced stable or declining consumption.

"France's consumption has more or less doubled in three years," says Gregoire Verdeaux, senior vice president of External Affairs, PMI. "Illicit consumption is based on empty packet surveys, so if anything, these figures are under-estimates."

Asked why France had particularly stark figures Verdeaux said that there were three elements that had created a perfect storm: "Do you have a high prevalence of smokers? Are these smokers sensitive to price changes? And, are people able to easily turn towards the illegal or black market?"

In general there is a much lower prevalence of smoking among professionals, but a much higher rate for the unemployed and those on lower incomes. The cost-of-living crisis has led to many smokers turning towards the illegal market, especially where there is high taxation and a lack of affordable alternatives.

By contrast, the KPMG study found that 21 countries had experienced a stable or declining share of illicit cigarette consumption. If France is taken out of the picture, overall illicit consumption declines by 7.5%. This is largely due to decreases in Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal and Romania. Remarkably, Poland and Romania have reduced their illicit consumption to its lowest since the studies started.

Asked how this has come about, Verdeaux says: "Countries like Poland and Greece still have a high prevalence of smokers, but the illicit market is in decline. Traditional tobacco control policies are simply not enough. Aggressive fiscal policies, prohibitionist approaches, and lack of deterrence in some countries are only benefitting criminals and pushing smokers toward the black market."

Lukasz Koslowski, Chief economist from the Federation of Polish Entrepreneurs, attributes Poland's success to four factors: "In Poland, we have a tobacco taxation roadmap. It shows us the level of taxation on cigarettes and other tobacco products until the year 2027. So the market has a much greater opportunity to adapt. Secondly, Polish tax authorities have established partnerships with market partners, this has helped to clamp down on illicit activities. I also think that the fact that our tax policy includes differentiation of the level of taxation of tobacco products, is encouraging people to look for legal and cheaper alternatives to tobacco, such as, heated tobacco, e-cigarettes or nicotine pouches. Finally, the level of illegal traffic has been reduced by stricter border controls with Belarus. Today the trend in Europe is for illegal factories within a country."

The failure to reduce the illicit market brings two heavy costs. Firstly, KPMG estimates that increasing taxes on legal cigarettes has the counterintuitive result of reducing tax revenue from cigarettes. KPMG estimates that this could be worth as much as €11.3 billion a year. This marks a significant increase of more than 8.5% on 2021.

Secondly, the growth in counterfeit production has become a valuable revenue stream for organized criminal groups (OCGs). European law enforcement agencies report that production seems to be largely based in the EU. Despite record seizures in 2022, illicit cigarettes are a rewarding business for OCGs; a model that is booming in the current environment. While the ongoing war in Ukraine and Belarus stemmed imports from these countries, OCGs have stepped in to set up their own production lines, ready to supply the higher-priced Western European markets. "We don't have 100% clarity," says Verdeaux. "But police raids suggest the phenomenon of illegal manufacture has become a domestic issue in the EU."

"OCGs are attracted to the higher profit they can make from the counterfeit market," says Vanessa Franssen, Professor at ULiege, Affiliated Senior Researcher KU Leuven. Franssen says that in her interviews with law enforcement, they foresaw growing illegal trade to the UK, for example, with planned increases in tax on cigarettes. "There is a debate on what is the optimal tax level, but as long as there are divergent tax rates there will be an incentive for organized crime."

Juan Carlos Buitrago Arias, a retired Brigadier General from Colombia's national police who has worked on all questions of illicit commerce and the involvement of criminal organisations, says that international cooperation is critical. His work included cooperation with several agencies, including Europol, in order to tackle these large complex organisations. He says that the illegal trade of cigarettes is very much entangled with hard drugs and in some instances is a lot more profitable for criminal gangs: "Illicit trade in cigarettes is neither petty nor victimless. It is a high-profit, low-risk crime, which serves transnational criminal networks. This is a reality that governments must face head on."

Research has also found that the production of illegal cigarettes often involved people who may have been trafficked. "People were living in horrible situations and treated inhumanely," says Franssen. "We also see the risk of corruption; organized crime tries to infiltrate customs and police forces to gain intelligence. We don't know the extent of this problem."

Law enforcement are making efforts to tackle the illicit trade, but it is an uphill struggle and various channels, including online platforms, continue to grow, with orders quickly fulfilled through third party delivery services.

"The Netherlands is taking an interdisciplinary, inter-institutional approach focusing on the problem," says Franssen. "It brings together police, data analysts, the custom authorities, the public prosecution service and this has seen a decline of counterfeit cigarettes."

In other countries cooperation is proving difficult between different agencies, there is also a need to build trust between agencies in different countries, something Europol is trying to do.

PMI are calling for a reassessment of the policy choices they believe are leading to the growth of this market.

"Some countries are unwilling to embrace innovation and offer alternatives to cigarettes to adult smokers," says Verdeaux. This means lifting bans, making alternatives legally available; raising awareness of alternatives; ensuring that alternatives are able to compete on price with the illicit market; and, making sure that the alternatives are acceptable, in terms of experience, for current smokers. "The cost of ignoring the negative impact of illicit cigarettes on adult smokers, and on public health, is too high to turn a blind eye to."

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04-10-2023 – [The Parliament](#)



By Carissa During

Carissa During is the Director of Considerate Pouchers, a consumer advocacy group dedicated to promoting a smoke-free world and consumers' rights to alternative products.

04 Oct 2023

[@carissaduring](#)



Follow Sweden's example to unleash the life-saving potential of nicotine pouches in Europe

Countries are desperately seeking the right way to approach nicotine pouches and with over 200 years of experience, Sweden is a shining light.



Swedish nicotine pouches have sparked an unwarranted moral panic across Europe. Countries are desperately seeking the right way to approach this novel product. Sweden is a nation with a history of snus usage spanning over 200 years and, recently, the birthplace of safer tobacco-free nicotine pouches. Instead of learning from Sweden and encouraging the adoption of an effective harm-reduction method, European countries are, at best, stigmatising and, at worst, prohibiting nicotine pouches. Our work as an organisation has revealed just how much is at stake. Nicotine pouches save thousands of lives in Sweden; many more lives could be saved throughout Europe, too.

Nicotine pouches are small, teabag-like pouches placed under the lip, releasing nicotine into the bloodstream. They are smoke-free, tobacco-free, and have 99.8% less cancer risk than cigarettes. While their function resembles the old Swedish product snus, the absence of tobacco sets them apart. Since introducing nicotine pouches on the Swedish market in 2016, smoking rates have plummeted from 12% to less than 6%. Sweden is on track to becoming the first country to meet the EU target of achieving smoke-free status, defined as having a smoking frequency lower than 5%. Paradoxically, the European Union might impede this positive development by hindering the use of alternative products. Discussions on severely regulating or prohibiting nicotine pouches have already begun.

Although understandable at face value, the moral panic lacks substance, revolving as it does around concerns such as accessibility and the attractiveness of the often sweet or minty flavours, particularly among younger individuals. Misconceptions about the product's composition and dangers contribute to the alarm. While all nicotine products contain an addictive component, the risks relative to cigarettes are negligible.

A rational approach to address these concerns would involve studying the originating country, which has already successfully grappled with these questions, and modelling legislation accordingly. In Sweden, an age limit of 18 years is enforced, and various nicotine products are taxed according to their established harmfulness. The objective is to incentivise individuals to transition from the more harmful product (i.e., cigarettes) to safer alternatives such as nicotine pouches or snus.

Rather than being deemed dangerous, flavours are understood to be one of the primary reasons people switch from cigarettes to nicotine pouches. The effect is most pronounced among Swedish women, for whom smoking rates have dropped by 40% since the launch of nicotine pouches. At the same time, women's use of snus and nicotine pouches has increased.

Despite Sweden's success in reducing smoking rates through this transformative harm reduction model, some countries, such as the Netherlands, have chosen a complete ban. Consequently, they are missing out on a life-saving product that has already saved thousands of lives in Sweden. In a report from Smoke Free Sweden, the estimated number of lives that could have been saved in the European Union between 2000-2019 is 2.9 million if all the countries had the same smoking-related mortality rates as Sweden.

The push to ban nicotine pouches extends beyond individual countries and has reached the European Union itself as it seeks a unified approach to new and emerging nicotine products. This course of action would not only be detrimental to countries now presented with a significantly healthier and safer alternative on their journey toward the 2035 smoke-free goal. It would also put Sweden in a rather uncomfortable position where its best smoking substitute would be banned or deprived of the central components of its success.

Nicotine pouches have demonstrated their potential to save lives by reducing tobacco-related harm. Banning them instead of adopting Sweden's successful regulatory model risks slowing our progress toward a smoke-free future with healthier and longer lives. Our focus should remain on ensuring accessibility, avoiding counterproductive flavour or nicotine restrictions, and enforcing an age limit, perhaps through a licensing system, while adjusting taxation to align with harm levels. Ultimately – and this is a point worth repeating – nicotine pouches have the potential to save millions of lives. Sweden is already doing it, and it is up to the rest of the European Union to follow in its footsteps.

28-06-2023 – [The Parliament](#)



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By The Parliament Events

Our events bring together MEPs, policy-makers from across the EU institutions and influential stakeholders to share ideas and discuss the issues that matter at the heart of European politics

28 Jun 2023

Reaching a smoke-free Europe: lessons from the Swedish experience

On 31st May 2023, World No Tobacco Day, MEPs and researchers gathered in the European Parliament at an event hosted by We Are Innovation and The Parliament Magazine, to discuss the remarkable success of Sweden in achieving a smoke-free status.



The European Union has committed itself to reaching a tobacco-free generation, with less than 5% of the population using tobacco by 2040. But Sweden has nearly reached this target seventeen years ahead of the deadline. Whilst other EU countries are struggling to make anywhere close to the same level of progress in reducing smoking prevalence, Sweden already has its level of tobacco usage down to 5.6%.

Tomislav Sokol MEP (EPP, Croatia), who co-hosted the event, set out the EU's objective of prevention in the EU's Beating Cancer Plan: "We know that prevention is the most cost effective type of healthcare. 40% of cancers in the EU are preventable and 27% of cancer is linked to smoking. I think the Swedish example is very interesting and should be analysed. It shows that alternatives to smoking can lead to better health outcomes."

We Are Innovation, a network of more than 30 think tanks, NGOs and foundations worldwide, commissioned an IPSOS survey of more than 1,000 Swedish ex-smokers between 18 and 65 who switched from cigarettes to alternative nicotine products, to examine what lessons could be drawn from the Swedish approach.

P Reaching a smoke-free Europe: lessons from the Swedish experi...
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**Breaking the Habit:
Learning from Sweden's
Success with Alternative
Nicotine Products**

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Sweden's secret sauce

CEO of We Are Innovation, Federico Fernández explained that his organisation focused on topics that use innovation to address societal issues in a way that makes a deep human impact, and the Swedish approach to creating a smoke-free society caught their attention for this reason. "Sweden found the missing piece of the puzzle. Sweden has implemented the policies of the European Union and World Health Organization, it has also invested heavily in educating its population on the risks associated with smoking; but what distinguishes Sweden is its approach to alternative nicotine products (ANP) such as snus and newer, more innovative products, like nicotine pouches, vaping and heated tobacco."

The survey showed that for all ex-smokers, the main factor when they were switching from cigarettes to ANPs was health. One of key elements for consumers in switching and staying away from cigarettes was accessibility to a wide range of ANPs. Unusually, Sweden had a higher rate of smoking for women than men. The survey found very different preferences between men and women. For example, women were more likely to switch from cigarettes to nicotine pouches and vaping than to snus.

Other important issues for smokers were acceptability and affordability. Having alternatives to smoking in a flavour of your choice was important to 89% whilst a choice over nicotine level was important to 75%. Affordability was the other major driver to help smokers choose alternatives to cigarettes. Sweden taxes cigarettes more highly than snus, for example.

Dr Christopher Russell, a behavioural psychologist based in Scotland, said that the overarching goal of tobacco control policy in any government should be to help save lives and prevent disease as rapidly as possible: "Healthcare providers, regulators and policymakers have - and I choose my words carefully - a duty to help more people quit smoking. If other EU member states followed the Swedish example, it could make quitting smoking achievable for millions of EU citizens."

Sara Skyttedal MEP (EPP, Sweden) said that it is no coincidence that Sweden has the lowest rate of tobacco-related mortality. Skyttedal attributed this to three factors that can be drawn from the Swedish model: "Firstly, we should refrain from total bans on novel nicotine products. I would say this was obvious, but apparently it needs to be said with Belgium's decision to ban nicotine pouches. Secondly, when the Tobacco Product Directive is revised there will be pressure to ban flavours, this would be a mistake. Thirdly and lastly, we should ensure that our tax systems reflect the relative dangers of different products. For example, e-cigarettes and healthier alternatives should be taxed less than cigarettes."

Johan Nissinen MEP (ECR, Sweden), said that he had never smoked or used any of the ANPs, but spoke about how his father had found e-cigarettes critical to quitting cigarettes: "It is such a strong habit and e-cigarettes helped him move away from this physical habit."



Asked if Sweden could do even more, Nissinen said that he would like to see a system where cigarettes and ANPs were sold at the same point, with clear labelling to show the relative risks of each product, "that way consumers could make more informed, healthier choices."

A physician and audience member called on the World Health Organisation to undertake country studies and to look at Sweden, but also examine how other countries like South Korea, Japan and the UK are also including alternatives to tobacco within their overall strategies to reduce harm and help those who find it difficult to stop smoking use safer alternatives.

21-06-2023 – [The Parliament](#)



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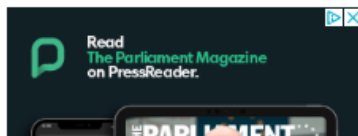
By The Parliament Events

Our events bring together MEPs, policy-makers from across the EU institutions and influential stakeholders to share ideas and discuss the issues that matter at the heart of European politics

21 Jun 2023

Shaping Europe's beating cancer agenda: science, policy, and innovation

Tobacco consumption continues to be the leading cause of preventable cancer in Europe, with 27% of all cancers attributed to smoking so The Parliament teamed up with three think tanks to look at Europe's beating cancer agenda.



The European Commission's Beating Cancer Action Plan is aimed at reducing the number of deaths from cancer in the EU. The action plan addresses the entire disease pathway, from prevention, early detection, treatment, to enhancing the quality of life of patients. Tobacco consumption continues to be the leading cause of preventable cancer in Europe, with 27% of all cancers attributed to smoking.

The Parliament alongside three think-tanks: the Istituto Bruno Leoni of Italy, European Expression of Greece, and Academy for Politics in Health of Croatia, organised a discussion in the European Parliament with MEPs that looked at the latest research into harm reduction and alternatives to smoking.

An evidence-based approach

Aldo Patriciello MEP (EPP, Italy) said that governments at an EU and national level should take into account the results of consolidated scientific studies to inform the policy response. Both Patriciello and Tomislav Sokol MEP (EPP, Croatia) said that all alternatives to smoking needed to be measured against the indisputable harmful effects of smoking.

"By embracing harm reduction products, we can give smokers a path away from cigarettes. Alternatives offer a less harmful way for smokers to satisfy their nicotine cravings without exposing themselves to the toxic cocktail of combustible tobacco," said Radka Maxová MEP (S&D, Czechia).

Valter Flego MEP (Renew, Croatia) said that if the pandemic had taught us anything, it was the importance of taking an evidence-based approach to determine policy choices.

The MEPs present saw the clear benefits of harm-prevention strategies, but were concerned that younger people could be attracted to vaping, in particular, when sweet flavours were added. There was general agreement among the MEPs and scientists that regulation was still needed to prevent alternatives acting as a gateway to a younger generation.

Prevention

Dr Johann Rossi Mason, MOHRE (Mediterranean Observatory on Harm Reduction, Italy), underlined the importance of prevention and how measures from the use of car seat belts to the roll out of anti-HPV vaccines, have been successful. Rossi Mason highlighted the importance of taking a non-ideological approach based on solutions that had a real impact on reduction and which improved mortality.

Dr Pero Hrabac, School of Medicine in Zagreb, pointed to a report on 'Nicotine without smoke: Tobacco harm reduction' by the Royal College of Physicians. The report found that the hazard to health arising from long-term vapour inhalation from e-cigarettes, based on the evidence available today, is unlikely to exceed 5% of the harm from smoking tobacco.

Both scientists and think-tanks were concerned by a widely held misconception that nicotine causes cancer. While nicotine is highly addictive and is the reason most people continue to smoke, it is in itself relatively harmless. Almost all of the harm from smoking comes from the other chemicals in tobacco smoke. Head of Lifestyle Economics, at the Institute of Economic Affairs, Christopher Snowdon, which publishes a Nanny State Index on government regulation of smoking, alcohol, and food and soft drinks, shared his concern that this was not widely understood and that the public needed to be provided with more unambiguous information to make better choices.

Hrabac also pointed to a recently updated Cochrane review of e-cigarettes. The Cochrane approach is considered to be the 'gold standard' and is a meta-analysis of available quality research; in this instance, 78 studies with more than 22,000 participants. The review concluded with "high certainty" that people are more likely to stop smoking for at least six months using nicotine e-cigarettes, or 'vapes', than using nicotine replacement therapies, such as patches and chewing gum. Evidence also suggested that nicotine e-cigarettes led to higher quit rates than e-cigarettes without nicotine.

Romanian Professor of Dentistry Mihaela Răescu (Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme) spoke about the transformation that alternatives delivered in terms of dental hygiene greatly reducing bacterial plaques that forms on teeth. Dentists also recommend that patients use alternatives to cigarettes if they a tooth implant, as it aids with bone resorption.

Heino Stöver, professor of Social Scientific Addiction Research at the Frankfurt University outlined the current situation in Germany where few actions have been taken to address the relatively high level of smoking. More than 60% of German smokers consider e-cigarettes to be equally as bad or worse for health than cigarettes.

Stöver's work looked at the situation in Germany, which has a very high smoking prevalence at just over 35% of the adult population. Cigarettes are available from vending machines and there is some reluctance to introduce workplace restrictions on smoking. Stöver was sceptical that Germany would be able to reach its goal of reducing this figure to 5% by 2040 without more action. He emphasised that alternatives had to be part of the solution, given that complete cessation is very difficult for most people. The vast majority of smokers want to stop but the success rate in quitting was low. Since smoking is more prevalent among those in lower income groups barriers such as cost, or imposing additional taxation, are to be avoided.

Carlo Stagnaro from the Istituto Bruno Leoni pointed to the success of Sweden which has achieved remarkable success in reaching the 5% target for smoking without imposing strict restrictions on smokers. This was partly achieved through the wide availability of alternatives, especially snus. Snowdon also pointed to the UK, where the national public health body had recognised that alternatives should be encouraged to help people quit.

While potential long-term consequences of alternatives cannot be known in full, the current evidence is now extensive and shows the clear benefits of adopting policies that help smokers reduce exposure to carcinogens. Dr Fernandez Bueno, President of the Platform for Tobacco Harm Reduction said that the World Health Organisation needs to review its approach urgently in the light of the evidence and called for this to be done at its Conference of the Parties (COP10) at the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control meeting in November this year, saying that an approach that doesn't include harm reduction through alternatives was no longer morally or ethically acceptable.

Finally, Themistoklis Kossidas of European Expression based in Greece looked at the positive benefits of a change in approach which apart from bringing health dividends, would also make a huge difference to the economy. Stöver estimates that in Germany alone the cost of continued smoking costs the Germany economy €100 billion on an annual basis.

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This article was produced in partnership with European Expression, Istituto Bruno Leoni and Medwork.

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By Philip Morris International

05 May 2023

Is the French policy approach to tobacco control working?

France has become the largest market for illicit cigarettes in the EU, both damaging revenue from taxation and posing a risk to national security. At a recent event in Paris, polling organisation Povaddo presented the findings of their new survey mapping the attitude of French consumers



In 2022, Povaddo – a US-based polling organisation – carried out a survey into public perceptions of different aspects of tobacco control. The online survey, commissioned by PMI (Philip Morris International) included more than 13,500 adults from 13 EU countries where the smoking rate is at a consistent level of between 20 to 40%.

At an event hosted at the Hub Institute in Paris, Povaddo's president and founder William Stewart presented the main findings of the survey, comparing French views with those of the other countries polled. The presentation was followed by comments and discussion with Jean Daniel Lévy, Deputy Director of Harris Interactive, a French polling organisation, and Giorgio Rutelli, the Editor-in-Chief of Formiche magazine, which recently published a special issue on prevention and harm reduction in Italy, taking a multi-disciplinary approach bringing together researchers, associations and politicians.

Stewart provided a snapshot of the current situation in France. Smoking rates in France are among the highest in Europe, 25.3% smoke daily despite a steep increase in the price of cigarettes: 70% over ten years. In the 1980s Sweden's smoking rate was over 30%. Today, thanks to snus and other new products, it is the lowest in Europe – 5.6%, five times less than in France. The UK, where smoking rate was similar to the French one, ago, now, thanks to vaping being encouraged and subsidised, has less than half the smokers of France.

France is now the largest market for illicit cigarettes in the EU accounting for 29% of illegal cigarette consumption, according to a study by KPMG in 2021. By comparison, other European countries which have had more measured increases in tobacco taxation, including Italy, have successfully cut illegal trade. The illicit trade has both damaged revenue from taxation and poses a risk to national security.

French respondents (83%) agreed that extreme tax increases can lead to an increase in illicit tobacco products. This has no doubt been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis and the fact that smokers are disproportionately represented among economically disadvantaged groups. Smokers also feel that they are treated unfairly and face a disproportionate tax burden. The

French group believed (76%) that governments have failed to take into account the unintended consequences of its approach to tobacco reduction. At the same time the French (74%) are, perhaps unsurprisingly, much more aware than other countries surveyed (65%) of the problem that illicit tobacco and nicotine products present.

Public ahead of public policy

The survey found that the French group had a poorer knowledge of cigarette alternatives, such as e-cigarettes (40%) and heated tobacco products (14%), than their European peers. They also thought that adult smokers should be given accurate, scientifically substantiated information on smoke-free alternatives to cigarettes (69%). The French also seemed to think that taxing alternatives to tobacco in a similar way to tobacco would significantly reduce their appeal, but that the tariff should be enough to dissuade youth or non-smokers (66%).

26-10-2022 – [The Parliament](#)

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By Michael Landl

Michael Landl is the director of the World Vapers' Alliance.

26 Oct 2022

[@vapers_alliance](#)

Widespread misinformation about vaping hurts public health

Quitting cigarettes is one of the hardest things to do, as many former and current smokers know from painful personal experience. Public health and politicians must do better to help smokers quit. 700,000 deaths per year in the EU should be enough of an incentive to make us rethink our current approach.



To effectively help smokers quit for good, three conditions must be met:

Firstly, smokers must be able to choose from as many options as possible to find out what smoking cessation method works best for them. People are different, and therefore different ways to give up smoking must be made available and affordable. For very few people (less than 4%), quitting with no help works. For a few, nicotine replacement therapy (such as nicotine gums or patches) works, and it turns out that for many people, new nicotine alternatives help them with quitting smoking once and for all. Those products range from vaping and heat-not-burn products to snus or nicotine pouches. What all these new forms have in common is that they separate nicotine consumption from the combustion of tobacco (which produces the vast majority of the toxicity of smoking), making them far less harmful than smoking cigarettes. Each one is different, each working best for each different person.

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62% of smokers in France and 53% in Germany believe anti-smoking policies ignore how difficult it is to stop smoking. Clearly, smokers are not satisfied with traditional cessation methods and therefore look to vaping as a means of quitting

Secondly, we need a modern, open regulatory framework to fit these new alternatives. These new products are not the same as smoking. Hence, they must not be painted with the same regulatory brush. What we need instead is risk-based regulation. Vaping is 95% less harmful than smoking and, therefore, must not be treated the same way. Harm reduction must become a centrepiece of anti-smoking policies, like in the field of pharmaceutical drugs. Harm reduction follows practical strategies and solutions to reduce harmful consequences associated with using certain substances instead of an unrealistic ‘just quit’ approach. Encouraging smokers who are not able to or don’t want to quit smoking to switch to vaping is

Currently available scientific evidence is crystal clear: vaping is by far less harmful than smoking and should be part of every smoking cessation framework around the world...Dr.

Konstantinos Farsalinos

The survey was conducted to gain a greater insight into the impact of misperceptions about vaping among general practitioners, smokers, and policymakers, on the future harm reduction policy in Europe and found that only 3 out of 15 doctors in Germany say they even know the term ‘harm reduction’. So, even the people who could directly help smokers improve their lives are hardly informed about harm reduction. Tobacco Harm Reduction should be integrated into modern medical education. Vaping alone has the potential to help 19 million smokers in Europe, and 200 million worldwide quit smoking. Vaping is a 95% less harmful alternative to conventional cigarettes. Doctor Konstantinos Farsalinos, cardiologist and public health expert, states that “currently available scientific evidence is crystal clear: vaping is by far less harmful than smoking and should be part of every smoking cessation framework around the world.”

Nevertheless, a worrying amount of 33% of smokers in France and 43% in Germany wrongly believe vaping is as harmful or more harmful than cigarettes. This is a massive problem for public health. Such wrong risk conceptions hinder millions of smokers from switching to less harmful alternatives such as vaping.

Additionally, 69% of smokers in France and 74% in Germany incorrectly believe that nicotine causes cancer. People may smoke to consume nicotine, but they die from the smoking, not the nicotine consumption. Many consumers and doctors mistakenly believe that nicotine causes various illnesses, while it is proven that the many other toxins involved in smoking are the ultimate culprit, as proven by the British National Health Service. Therefore, we need science-based risk communication addressed to smokers, the general public, and health practitioners to combat these wrong perceptions.

At the same time, 62% of smokers in France and 53% in Germany believe anti-smoking policies ignore how difficult it is to stop smoking. Clearly, smokers are not satisfied with traditional cessation methods and therefore look to vaping as a means of quitting.

It is time for politicians and public health officials to accept the facts and to endorse vaping as a harm reduction tool.

07-09-2022 – [The Parliament](#)

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By **Ubaldo Cuadrado**

Ubaldo Cuadrado is the Vice President of Nofumadores, a Spanish public health NGO advocating for a tobacco-free future

07 Sep 2022

[@ucuadrado](#)



How to stamp out cigarettes for good

The European Commission has registered a European Citizens' Initiative to create the bloc's first tobacco-free generation. The Spanish NGO behind the bid makes its case for banning the sale of cigarettes to those born after 2010



One million signatures from European citizens in seven different countries: that is what it will take for the European Commission to consider banning the sale of tobacco to those born after 2010.

On 24 August, the Commission [registered](#) a European Citizens' Initiative entitled 'Call to achieve a tobacco-free environment and the [first European tobacco-free generation](#) by 2030', which was organised primarily by our small team at [Nofumadores](#), a Spanish NGO. We have six months from that date to gain enough signatures for the Commission to react.

This is a giant task for us highly idealistic but ultimately cash-strapped anti-tobacco activists. Yet drawing our politicians' attention to the harm caused by tobacco and nicotine products and the irredeemable nature of the tobacco industry is the moral thing to do. And by doing so, we are claiming that the sovereignty of the EU rests on the shoulders of the bloc's citizens and not on the lobbying capacity of these transnational corporations with slavery in their DNA.

Just to be clear, if cigarettes were invented today, they would never make it to market. Cigarettes cause so much cancer and disease that if no one were allowed to smoke, the number of people diagnosed with lung cancer in Spain would decrease by 85 per cent, [according to](#) the president of the Spanish Society of Medical Oncology. As European citizens, we have every right to ask ourselves why such a deadly product should remain legal at all. However, our goals are reasonable: we want to start by saving the next generation from this scourge.

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As European citizens, we have every right to ask ourselves why such a deadly product should remain legal at all

By ending the sale of tobacco and nicotine products to citizens born after 2010, we aim to create the first tobacco-free European generation. Over time, this measure will bring an end to tobacco sales entirely.

However, such action must be paired with enforcement measures and expensive fines for those selling tobacco to minors as well as a massive expansion of outdoor smoke- and vapor-free spaces, especially those places frequented by minors such as parks, swimming pools, sports centres and events.

We also cannot overemphasise the importance of banning cigarettes from bars, restaurants and clubs of any kind, not only indoors but outdoors too. We are addressing these issues as well by calling for a ban on any kind of advertising or promotion of the act of smoking or vaping, both old and new.

It is vital for European citizens to understand the true nature of tobacco corporations: they are, in many cases, direct heirs of enterprises built on slave labour. Tobacco was one of the most intensive cash crops used to fuel colonial trade. The atrocity of the Atlantic slave trade and the way tobacco was produced in Virginia around the Chesapeake Bay are embedded with a general disregard for the dignity of human life.

Slavery is inherent to the industry, a point that we want to make very clear because tobacco companies have co-opted and perverted the meaning of freedom. They have no right to use that word and yes, abolition is the right term to end the trade of such a shameful, addictive, deadly product.

To summarise, we are asking the EU to free the next generation. Tobacco companies need teenagers to perpetuate the cycle of addiction, disease and death. The EU must accompany this measure with sweeping restrictions on where current smokers are allowed to light a cigarette, vape or use any heated tobacco device. There is also a huge need to decrease the number of places where tobacco can be sold.

Freedom has nothing to do with tobacco since it's an addictive product, and when someone is addicted to something, the freedom of choice doesn't exist. Real freedom starts by preventing minors who have never smoked from falling into the hands of a manipulative industry bent on getting new recruits addicted to their lethal product. The best way to achieve this aim is by making tobacco inaccessible to young people, because those who have never tried it will never miss it or need it.

Also, cigarettes and e-cigarettes are not sustainable in a world of global warming. Tobacco farming is highly water intensive, contributes to biodiversity loss and causes close to **five per cent of deforestation** in low- and middle-income countries, due to land clearing to grow the crops and procure wood for tobacco curing. In terms of carbon emissions generated, the **footprint of tobacco** is equal to that of entire countries. These staggering statistics are the impact of just a handful of companies that not only created the playbook for corporate denialism but also, in the case of climate change, have widely funded and lent institutional support to climate change deniers, causing further harm.

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Moreover, cigarette butts are a frequently littered item – an estimated **four and a half tn butts** are discarded each year – and often end up on beaches and in waterways. Tobacco filters, made of cellulose acetate, are the **number one ocean plastic**, more numerous than plastic bottles and wrappers. These filters end up dissipating into microplastics and entering the food chain. The EU has taken measures to curb plastic straws, but cigarette butts have, once again, slipped under the radar.

We have proposed creating a network of tobacco-free and butts-free beaches and riverbanks in Europe. Nofumadores has already taken up the challenge in Spain, by gathering more than **356,000 signatures** to enact a national law that would make beaches off-limits to tobacco products. A more recent proposal to free national parks from the perils and pollution of smoking and cigarette butts has been gathering steam during the most damaging fire season Spain has experienced in decades (some of the fires were caused by smokers) – the petition already has **78,000 signatures**.

We know that creating Europe's first generation of tobacco-free citizens is a giant task, one that will require much more than one million signatures. But we will work tirelessly because we see ourselves as expanding human freedoms. We are standing on the shoulders of the giants in England who abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery in 1833. However, Europe should never bail out these companies the way England did with slave owners.

It is the extreme cruelty of this product, the continuous deception and corruption of these companies and the immense power and wealth of these descendants of slave traders that we are trying to end. The EU is a haven of human rights and a project where real sovereignty belongs to the citizens and not in the hands of such harmful, predatory people.

As Curtis H Judge, then president of the Lorillard Tobacco Company, said in a deposition in 1984, "No one should sell a product that is a proven cause of lung cancer." For once, we can agree on something.