

TOBACCO CONTROL IN THE EU



September 2009

A long and healthy life is something everyone strives for. Tobacco use, however, greatly reduces the chances for such a life. While the number of smokers in the European Union (EU) has been decreasing, one third of Europeans still smoke. They risk their lives and put those exposed to their second-hand smoke in danger. With the aim of improving the health of the European citizens in an efficient and cost-effective way, the European Commission is continuously working on tobacco control, both with national authorities and at the global level.

Tobacco's toll on society should not be underestimated...

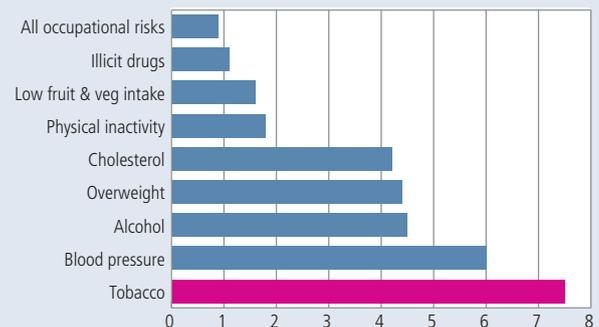
- 650.000 Europeans die every year prematurely because of tobacco use, which is more than the population of Malta or Luxembourg.
- 19 000 European non-smokers die every year from exposure to second-hand smoke either at home or at the workplace
- The economic loss for our societies caused by smoking amounted to more than € 100 billion in the year 2000

However, there are signs that the situation is improving:

- Smoking is becoming less and less socially acceptable
- More and more European Union countries are adopting smoke free legislation protecting their citizens from smoke in public places, public transport and in the workplace
- Tobacco control is gaining momentum internationally

Top 9 risk factors for ill-health in the European Union.

Adapted from WHO's *Global Burden of Disease study (Rehm et al.2004)*



Burden of ill-health (million DALYs lost)

DALY : disability-adjusted life year - a time-based measure that combines years of life lost due to premature mortality and years of life lost due to time lived in states of less than full health.



A POLICY OVERVIEW

EU tobacco control policy rests on three pillars:

- legislation
- campaigning
- international treaties

LEGISLATION ON TOBACCO CONTROL

Since the 1980s, there have been legislative initiatives in the EU to curb tobacco use among citizens. The aim was, on the one hand, to regulate tobacco products in order to ensure harmonised standards and appropriate consumer information, and on the other hand to provide for certain restrictions in the marketing of tobacco products for public health reasons. Today,

the key legislation in the field of tobacco control comes from two laws - the Directive on Tobacco Products and the Directive on Tobacco Advertising.

The European Commission meets regularly with representatives from EU Member States to ensure that the legislation is implemented effectively and takes account of new developments.

The Directive on Tobacco Products (2001) is the first major European legislation specifically related to tobacco products. The Directive:

- requires manufacturers to put health warnings on tobacco products
- bans the use of terms such as 'light', 'mild' or 'low tar'
- forces producers to provide full information on all ingredients utilised in their products
- sets maximum limits for tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide in cigarettes.

The **Directive on Tobacco Advertising (2003)** bans cross-border advertising of tobacco products in printed media, radio and on-line services. It equally bans sponsorship of cross border events if it has the effect of promoting tobacco products. Tobacco advertising and sponsorship on television was already prohibited since 1989. Now the Audiovisual Media Services Directive extends this ban to all forms of audiovisual commercial communications, including product placement. This comprehensive advertising ban in the countries of the European Union is a central pillar of an efficient tobacco control policy and helps to make smoking less visible and attractive in society.

SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENTS

Many European citizens are still regularly exposed to second hand smoke either at home, in public or at the workplace. There is clear evidence that exposure to tobacco smoke causes death, disease and disability and is particularly harmful to children and infants. About a third of European Countries have implemented comprehensive smoke-free legislation and the immediate positive health effects are impressive, for example the incidence of heart attacks has decreased between 11-19%. The Commission, on 30 June 2009 came forward with a Proposal for a Council Recommendation that calls on all Member States to move forward with measures which protect their citizens from exposure to tobacco smoke by 2012.

The Proposal for a Smoke Free Environment calls on Member States to:

- adopt and implement laws to protect citizens from exposure to tobacco smoke in enclosed public places, workplaces and public transport, within three years from the adoption of the Recommendation.
- enhance smoke-free laws with supporting measures such as protecting children and encouraging efforts to give up tobacco use and pictorial warnings on tobacco packages
- strengthen cooperation at EU level by setting a network of national focal points of tobacco control.



"Tobacco control is essential to improving public health. For many years in the EU, we have been active in this field, but fighting tobacco use and getting results is a complex task. This is why we develop legislation, participate in international tobacco control initiatives and fund large scale prevention campaigns. But we still have a lot of work to do and should not be complacent. The Commission will work towards further achievements in tobacco control, because each step towards reducing tobacco use is a huge gain for the health and quality of life of all citizens."

Andrzej Ryś, Director for Public Health and Risk Assessment, European Commission

BEYOND HEALTH POLICY

Measures to curb tobacco use are not only found in health policy; tobacco is a cross-cutting issue which affects numerous policy areas.

- Evidence clearly shows that high taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products are among the most effective instruments to reduce tobacco consumption, particularly in young people. This is why EU legislation on the **taxation of tobacco** is increasingly seen not only as a fiscal instrument but also as an instrument of public health policy. The Commission has made a proposal to increase the minimum tobacco tax levels. Discussions on this proposal are ongoing.
- **The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)** is involved in investigating cases of illicit trade of tobacco products which cost the EU billions of euros per year. In addition, illicit tobacco products are often cheaper and thus more easily affordable. This poses a threat to EU efforts on tobacco control.
- **Tobacco subsidies** used to be an important but controversial agricultural policy issue in the EU. In the interest of public health, tobacco subsidies are currently being phased out and are scheduled to be eliminated by 2010.

TARGETING THE PEOPLE

Aside from legislation, the EU has developed several instruments to raise citizens' awareness of the effects of tobacco and encourage them to stop using tobacco or to never start in the first place. These instruments are designed to inform people of the negative health effects of tobacco.

- Health warnings are known to be an important and effective element of a comprehensive tobacco control policy. In 2005, the Commission developed a series of pictorial warnings which show the negative impact of tobacco through powerful visual images. Pictorial warnings are currently not mandatory in the EU but the Commission is encouraging their wider use.
- Prevention is another key part of the EU's tobacco control policy. Focused on young people, and started in March 2005, the campaign: "HELP – for a life without tobacco" is one of the largest EU health awareness-raising activities ever

organised. The campaign is active in all 27 Member States with television spots, a website in 22 languages and a series of European and national press events. HELP 2.0 continues to target young people. The web-driven campaign is designed to give young people all the information they need about the dangers of smoking and how to quit. It encourages them to take control of their own life and pay less attention to media influences.

During its first phase (2005-2008), over 70,000 TV spots ran on more than 96 national channels and the HELP website received over 7.6 million visits. The campaign proved successful at reaching young people and informing them about the benefits of not smoking. 59% of Europeans under 25 declared that they had seen the Help campaign and 79% of young non smokers said that the adverts had made them think about the importance of not smoking.



WORKING ACROSS BORDERS FOR A TOBACCO-FREE WORLD

The EU is also working with international partners to reduce the use of tobacco world wide. In 2005 the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the first ever international treaty on health came into force. It commits over 160 countries across the world to take action to reduce disease and the number of deaths caused by tobacco products. On the basis of the Convention, further standards will be developed to make tobacco control measures more universal. The Commission is one of the major players in this process.

THE WAY FORWARD



The EU's approach to tobacco control - legislation, campaigning and international agreements - has proven fruitful in trying to limit tobacco use in Europe. In recent years, fewer people are smoking, and citizens know more about the negative effects of tobacco.

However, there are several troubling developments. Young people start to smoke at a younger age and on-line marketing of tobacco products is increasing. Also new trends are cropping up, such as the use of water pipes and non-combustible tobacco products or "electronic cigarettes", the harmful effects of which many people do not know about or take too lightly. The Commission is aware of these new developments and trends and is considering how best to address these new challenges.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- **DG SANCO's website on tobacco:**
http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/Tobacco/tobacco_en.htm
- **HELP – for a life without tobacco:**
<http://www.help-eu.com>
- **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control:**
<http://www.who.int/fctc>

Copyright: European Communities, 2009
Reproduction is authorised, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.
Directorate-General for Health and Consumers
European Commission – B-1049 Brussels
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm

ISBN 978-92-79-13189-9
doi 10.2772/42137

This document has been financed by the European Commission under a contract with the company Qwentex KANTOR.
It is intended for information purposes only and does not constitute official guidance from the Commission on the interpretation of EU laws or policies.

ISBN 978-92-79-13189-9



9 789279 131899