

EuroHealthNet contribution to the consultation on the updated Council Recommendation on Smoke-free Environments

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EuroHealthNet is a not-for-profit European partnership of organisations, agencies and statutory bodies working on public health, health promotion, disease prevention, and reducing inequalities. With a long-term commitment to health, equity, and wellbeing EuroHealthNet recognises the importance of timely and comprehensive **action addressing unhealthy and unsustainable lifestyles and behaviours, such as prevention of tobacco smoking as well as the use of novel tobacco products.**

EuroHealthNet welcomes the European Commission's efforts launching a consultation on the update of the 2009 Council Recommendation on smoke-free environments to better protect EU citizens from exposure to second-hand smoke, as well as further encourage current smokers to quit. The update has been brought about by the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, which calls for a creation of a 'Tobacco-Free Generation' of less than 5% of the population using tobacco by 2040 (compared to about 25% today). Encouragingly, it proposes to extend the Council Recommendation's coverage to emerging products, such as e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products (HTPs). Another welcome move is for the Recommendation to explicitly include "certain outdoor spaces such as schools, playgrounds and outdoor terraces of bars and restaurants in its scope." **Reducing tobacco use among existing consumers and preventing its take up by young people, removing it out of the public space, accounting for vulnerabilities and inequalities are important objectives towards a Tobacco-Free Europe.** In addition to our previous input to this avail ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), EuroHealthnet has further called for a comprehensive address of health determinants via a [contribution to the European Commission imminent NCDs Healthier Together initiative](#). In here, we called for stronger and more comprehensive tobacco control across the EU.

EU legislative tobacco control policies and initiatives have contributed to a decline in the tobacco consumption at the general population level, but the progress has not been equal for all population groups. Therefore, EuroHealthNet welcomes the revision of the Smoke-free environments Council Recommendation as **there are bigger, quicker and more socially-just gains to be made, notably in the area of (digital) advertising and marketing, regulation of novel tobacco products and e-cigarettes, their content, taxation, and last but not least – extension of the smoke-free environments legislation.** This is particularly the case for the new generation of smokers (the youth, females) and those who are involuntarily exposed to second-hand smoke in and around schools, playgrounds and outdoor hospitality facilities (bars, restaurants, summer gardens) or public parks or beaches. With [20% of smoking rates among young Europeans aged 15-24](#), 56% of smokers starting before the age of 18 and 93% before the age of 25, it is of utmost importance to prevent children, adolescents, young adults from taking up tobacco and nicotine use. Rates of smoking among (young) females have kept persistently stable and not falling fast enough, with a worrying increase in occasional tobacco

use and uptake of novel tobacco products consumption, precisely. While overall smoking rates dropped slightly during the early days of the pandemic, the prolonged periods of lockdowns, social isolation and mental health strain may have increased smoking behaviours, especially among socio-economically vulnerable and deprived population groups, children and young adults, and women ([here](#) and [here](#)).

For the reasons presented above, the exponential growth of the novel tobacco products market across the EU, and unequal protection against second-hand smoke and nicotine vapour in the EU countries, **EuroHealthNet partnership strongly supports the continued vigilance and revision of evidence as it emerges to improve EU state of the art science-informed decision-making.** We are of an opinion that both (1) the extension of the smoke-free environments legislation to cover the emerging products, such as e-cigarettes and HTPs, and (2) the inclusion of well-defined outdoor and quasi-outdoor spaces in the definition of smoke-free environments, which would be then transferable and applicable across all EU countries, would increase equitable public health protection. **The use of novel smoking products should be restricted to specific clearly designated and sufficiently isolated areas. A particular factor should be considered here in terms of proximity of such spaces to those frequented by children and adolescents.** Furthermore, it will contribute to better air quality, denormalisation of smoking in public sphere, ultimately leading to decreasing smoking prevalence, for the general but importantly for the young generation.