

Recommendations from the Nordic Cancer Union

Why the EU must act now to safeguard a tobacco- and nicotine free future

Introduction

The need for a comprehensive policy approach

The EU Tobacco Directives profoundly impact millions of people across Europe, applying in 31 countries. They have been instrumental in preventing and decreasing tobacco use, saving many lives by obliging all Member States to adopt a standard set of measures. However, despite these successes, cigarette smoking remains far too high. [Tobacco use is still the number one riskfactor for cancer](#). Simultaneously, a disturbing trend has emerged: new tobacco and nicotine products have led to a significant increase in nicotine addiction among children and adolescents in recent years.

To counter these new threats and achieve the ambitious goal of a tobacco-free generation by 2040, as outlined in Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, it is essential that the EU Tobacco Directives are revised immediately. In their current form, the Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) and other related

directives can limit national action, hindering Member States with strong tobacco control traditions from fully implementing the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and introducing more ambitious measures.

The urgent challenge

New products increase addiction among youth

The tobacco industry continuously launches new products, and today, a wide range of different tobacco and nicotine products are available across Europe. Many are marketed as "less harmful" than cigarettes, despite limited scientific research on their long-term health effects. These novel products – such as nicotine pouches, e-cigarettes, and heated tobacco products – are often designed to appeal to young people and can act as a gateway, leading to nicotine addiction.

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Nicotine Pouches

Developed in Sweden and launched in 2016, these small pouches placed between the gum and upper lip are now available in several EU countries. While considered a form of snus in Sweden, the product evolution from tobacco snus to nicotine pouches (containing nicotine, often extracted from the tobacco plant, but no tobacco leaves) has allowed them to circumvent existing EU legislation. Newer nicotine products like pastilles and strips also fall into this regulatory gap.



E-cigarettes and Vapes

These electronic cigarettes typically contain nicotine or sometimes nicotine analogues. Both reusable and disposable variants, the latter increasingly popular among young people, are harmful to users and those exposed to their aerosols.



Heated Tobacco Products

These devices heat tobacco electronically to generate a vapor or aerosol. Some inserts are made from other plant fibers infused with nicotine. There is no conclusive evidence that heated tobacco is less harmful than conventional cigarettes.

Increasing nicotine addiction in the Nordic countries

In the Nordic countries, where nicotine pouches were introduced earlier, we are witnessing an alarmingly rapid increase in their use, especially among young people, since 2021. The use of oral nicotine products among youth has increased in most Nordic countries since 2018. Oral nicotine products cover both snus and nicotine pouches and, in some cases, also chewing tobacco. In Sweden, the use of oral nicotine products among 17-year-old girls increased from 6 percent in 2018 to 26 percent in 2024. Among 17-year-old boys, the figure is even higher at 31 percent in 2024.

The alarming rapid increase in the use of oral nicotine pouches in the Nordic region serves as a strong warning for the entire EU if immediate action is not taken. The report, *Use of nicotine products among youth in the Nordic and Baltic countries*, highlights a broader shift in nicotine consumption patterns.

The use of newer nicotine products, such as e-cigarettes and oral nicotine products (nicotine pouches etc.), has dramatically increased since 2018. This surge has been particularly evident from 2021 onwards, largely driven by the increased availability of disposable e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches and aggressive marketing.

A girl thing

A significant development is the rising popularity of these new products among girls. In several Nordic countries, e-cigarette

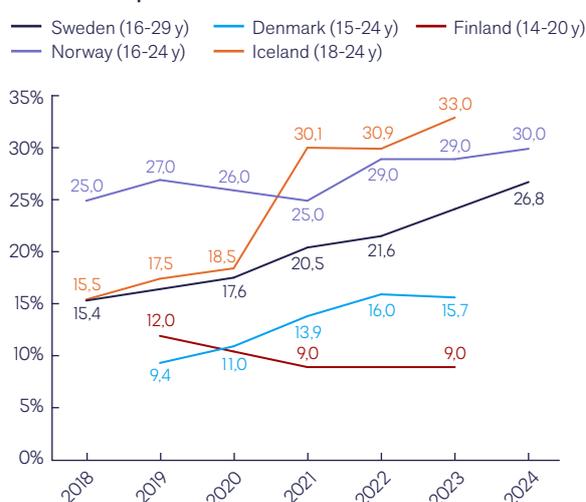
The alarming reality

Health risks and increasing addiction

All tobacco and nicotine products are harmful to health and highly addictive. Tobacco use causes lung cancer and at least 20 other types and subtypes of cancer, leading to nearly 700,000 deaths in the EU every year. Children and teenagers are especially vulnerable to the consequences of nicotine use, which is highly addictive. Nicotine can negatively affect brain development related to learning and impulse control and is associated with an increased risk of anxiety, depression, and higher alcohol consumption.

While more research is needed to fully understand the long-term health effects of new products, studies show that young people who use e-cigarettes are three times more likely to start smoking. Research also indicates that smoking and vaping together can increase the risk of lung cancer more than smoking alone, and that former smokers using e-cigarettes after cessation may face an increased risk of lung cancer compared to those who do not.

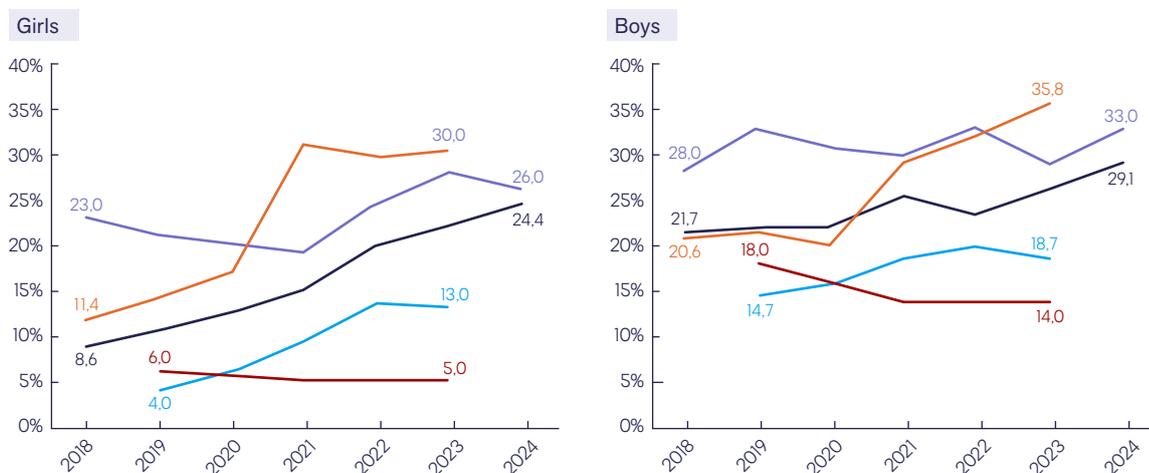
Oral nicotine product use in the Nordic countries



Sources: Arp, S., & Bast, L. S. (2025). Use of nicotine products among youth in the Nordic and Baltic countries: An overview. Nordic Welfare Centre.

Oral nicotine product use in the Nordic countries, by gender

— Sweden (16-29 y) — Norway (16-24 y) — Denmark (15-24 y) — Iceland (18-24 y) — Finland (14-20 y)



Sources: Arp, S., & Bast, L. S. (2025). Use of nicotine products among youth in the Nordic and Baltic countries: An overview. Nordic Welfare Centre.

use is now more common among girls than boys, with a more pronounced increase in girls' use since 2021.

Similarly, although oral nicotine products have traditionally been used more by boys, the rate of increase among girls has been faster, contributing to a narrowing gender gap.

Regarding oral nicotine products, Icelandic youth exhibit the highest prevalence at 33.0%, with Finnish youth having the lowest at 9.0%. The significant increase in oral nicotine product use in Iceland between 2020 and 2021 is partly attributed to the inclusion of nicotine pouches in the data from 2021, as well as a lack of taxation on these products.

Our recommendations

Three key areas for a stronger EU tobacco policy

1 Introduce higher minimum prices and limit personal import for all tobacco and nicotine products.

Price increases are the most effective measure to prevent tobacco uptake among children and adolescents. To ensure high minimum prices across the EU, it is crucial that the EU Tax Directive ensures higher minimum taxes for both cigarettes and all other tobacco and nicotine products.



A notable trend is the growing popularity among girls. In most included Nordic countries, girls' use of e-cigarettes has exceeded the use among boys.

To curb cross-border trade, which undermines national efforts and incentivizes lower prices, personal import limits must be drastically tightened. Currently, citizens are allowed to bring up to 800 cigarettes across EU borders. This should be reduced to a maximum of 100 cigarettes per person. Equivalent, stringent limitations must be applied to all other tobacco and nicotine products. For many other nicotine products, the current import limit is far too high; for example, in Finland, individuals can bring one kilogram of tobacco snus across the border, and soon the same will apply to nicotine pouches. These limits should be reduced to 100 grams per product.

2 Protect young people from the tobacco industry's marketing strategies and tactics.

A multitude of new tobacco and nicotine products have been introduced in recent years, aggressively appealing to children and young people through social media marketing, child-friendly flavors (such as bubblegum, fruits, mint, and spearmint), and brightly coloured packaging. To reverse the alarming trend of increasing product innovation and uptake among youth prompt action is required.

- **Future-proof definitions** Revise the definitions of tobacco and nicotine products to prevent the industry from circumventing regulations by creating new types or variants not covered by current rules. Directives should ensure consistent regulation of all nicotine and tobacco products, regardless of when they were marketed or their emission type. The definition of nicotine should also include synthetic nicotine and nicotine analogues.
- **Ban all marketing** Clearly ban all forms of direct and indirect marketing of all tobacco and related products, including advertising on social media. Introduce standardized plain packaging and plain products in all Member States, as is already the case in some Nordic countries, to

make products less attractive to children and young people.

- **Ban all flavours** Ban menthol and all other flavours as additives in all tobacco and nicotine products. This will prevent the industry from exploiting loopholes to sell flavoured products that appeal to children and young people.
- **Ban online sales** Introduce a ban on the online sale of tobacco and nicotine products in all Member States. This protects consumers from illegal marketing, prevents sales to minors, and hinders cross-border trade of illegal products.
- **Protect health policy** Ensure full implementation of WHO FCTC Article 5.3 to protect citizens and health policy from the undue influence of the tobacco industry.

3 Allow Member States to Introduce Ambitious and Forward-Looking Measures.

The tobacco control measures in the WHO FCTC are minimum requirements, and the Convention encourages countries to implement measures beyond this baseline. However, the current EU Tobacco Directives hinder the full implementation of these minimum measures and Member States' ability to adopt more ambitious policies. For example, Denmark proposed a ban on flavours in chewing tobacco in 2019 and a nicotine-free generation in 2022, both of which faced obstacles under the current TPDII. Norway, despite having a ban on new tobacco and nicotine products since the 1980s, was compelled by the EU Tobacco Products Directive to lift it and replace it with an approval scheme.

Several EU countries are already implementing "endgame" measures aimed at phasing out tobacco and nicotine. It is therefore crucial that future directives allow individual Member States the flexibility to adopt stricter measures than those outlined in the Tobacco Products Directives to better protect public health. This would enable Member States to adopt a ban on the sale of all tobacco and nicotine products by

a specified future date. We strongly recommend that, in the coming revision of the TPD and TTD, the Commission reinforces and expands the national room for action under Article 24 (2,3) to allow Member States to go beyond the directive in line with the WHO FCTC, thereby enhancing their ability to protect public health at national level. This recommendation aligns with Art. 2.1 of the WHO FCTC and the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, which requires both the EU and Member States to ensure a high level of protection of human health (XIV, Article 168).

Conclusion

An investment in a tobacco- and nicotine free future

Updating the EU Tobacco Directives is critical to protect Europe's youth and achieve a tobacco and addiction free generation. By adopting these recommendations, the EU enables leadership in public health and ensure that Member States have the tools they need to effectively combat nicotine addiction and implement the WHO FCTC at national level.

About Nordic Cancer Union

The Nordic Cancer Union (NCU), established in 1949, fosters collaboration among the cancer societies of the Nordic countries. Its primary objectives include cooperation on strategic issues, sharing experiences, and serving as a source of inspiration for the Icelandic Cancer Society, the Swedish Cancer Society, the Faroe Cancer Society, the Danish Cancer Society, the Cancer Society of Finland, and the Norwegian Cancer Society.