

Smoking among adults

Tobacco consumption is the largest avoidable behavioural risk factor to health in the EU and the most significant cause of premature death across EU countries, accounting for about 780 000 deaths in 2019 (IHME, 2021^[1]). Tobacco use is a major risk factor for severe chronic respiratory diseases, circulatory diseases and cancer, causing over 80% of lung cancer in Europe.

Despite some progress in reducing smoking rates over the last decade, close to one in five adults (19%) still smoked daily in 2020 on average across EU countries. The proportion of adults who smoke daily is lowest in Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, as well as Iceland and Norway) (12% or less) and at least two times higher in Greece, Hungary, France and Bulgaria (25% or above) (Figure 4.3). Estonia, Ireland, Finland, Denmark and Greece have achieved the largest reductions since 2010, with reductions of 7 or more percentage points.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of people who smoked increased in some countries while it decreased in others. A study gathering data from 24 countries suggests that the proportion of smokers was lower during the COVID-19 pandemic than before. Among people who smoked, the majority did not change smoking behaviours, while similar proportions reported smoking more or smoking less (Sarich et al., 2022^[2]).

Smoking remains more common among men than women in all EU countries (Figure 4.4). Nearly one in four men (24%) and one in seven women (15%) smoke daily on average in EU countries. This gender gap is particularly large in Latvia, Lithuania and Romania, as well as Moldova, Türkiye and Ukraine.

Across European countries, 3.6% of people used e-cigarettes or similar electronic devices daily or occasionally in 2019. The proportion is higher (5.1%) among those aged 15-24 (Figure 4.5). Regular use of e-cigarettes is more common among men than women in virtually all EU countries. On average, 4.5% of men aged 15 and over regularly used e-cigarettes compared with 2.6% of women in 2019. Among younger people, 6.4% of 15-24-years-old men regularly used e-cigarettes compared with 3.7% of women of the same age.

The European Commission calls for stronger actions to achieve the “Smoke-Free Generation” goal of the Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan, especially with regards to labelling, assessment of ingredients, cross-border sales, novel tobacco products such as heated tobacco products, and smoke-free environments including outdoor spaces (European Commission, 2021^[3]; 2022^[4]).

Definition and comparability

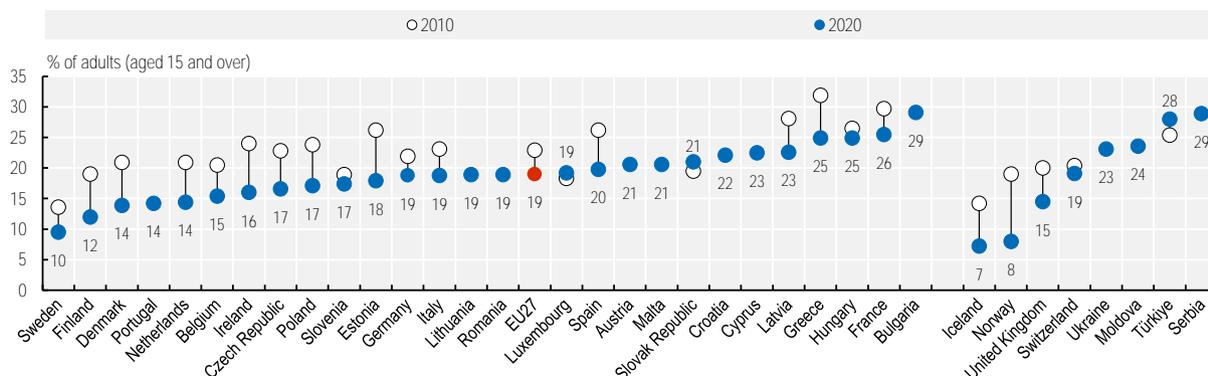
The proportion of daily smokers is defined as the percentage of people aged 15 years and over who report smoking tobacco every day. Other forms of smokeless tobacco products, such as snuff in Sweden, are not taken into account.

The use of electronic cigarettes or similar electronic devices (e.g. e-pipe, e-shisha) is defined as daily or occasional consumption. The data comes mainly from the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS 2019).

References

- European Commission (2022), *Leaflet on smoke-free environments*, https://health.ec.europa.eu/latest-updates/leaflet-smoke-free-environments-2022-06-03_en. [4]
- European Commission (2021), *EU Tobacco Products Directive is delivering but stronger action is needed*, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2563. [3]
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- Sarich, P. et al. (2022), “Tobacco smoking changes during the first pre-vaccination phases of the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis”, *EClinicalMedicine*, Vol. 47, <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ECLINM.2022.101375>. [2]

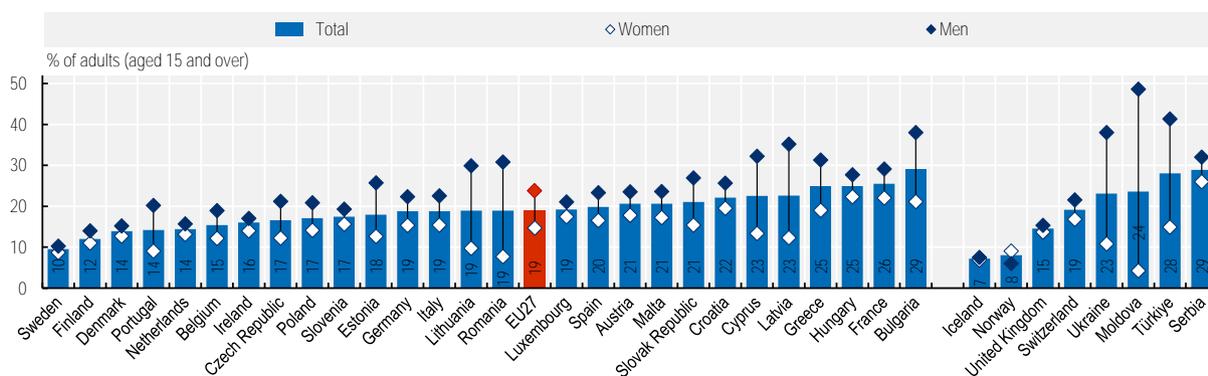
Figure 4.3. Changes in daily smoking rates among adults, 2010 and 2020 (or nearest years)



Note: The EU average is unweighted. 2021 data for Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg and Norway.
Source: OECD Health Statistics 2022 (based on national or European health interview surveys).

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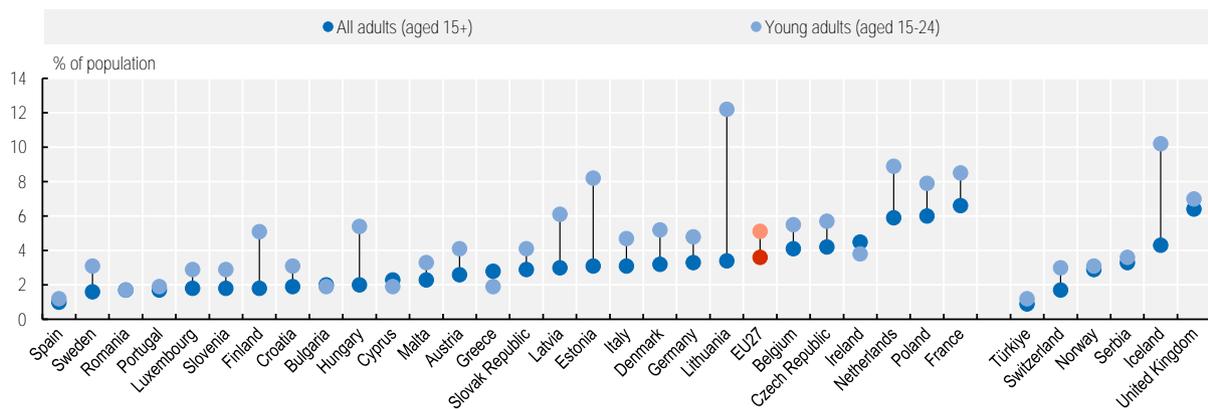
Figure 4.4. Daily smoking rates among adults, by gender, 2020 (or nearest year)



Note: The EU average is unweighted. 2021 data for Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg and Norway.
Source: OECD Health Statistics 2022 (based on national or European health interview surveys).

StatLink <https://stat.link/4w3qbs>

Figure 4.5. Regular use of e-cigarettes, by age group, 2019



Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019), complemented with national sources for Iceland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

StatLink <https://stat.link/x4offi>



From:
Health at a Glance: Europe 2022
State of Health in the EU Cycle

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/507433b0-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD/European Union (2022), "Smoking among adults", in *Health at a Glance: Europe 2022: State of Health in the EU Cycle*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/41bcc8db-en>

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