



## Position Paper on Tobacco

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## **1. Introduction**

Youth organisations have an important role to play in health policy - as underlined by the decision made by the members of the European Youth Forum (YFJ) several years ago, to ensure that health is a work area for the Forum. One of the major issues of concern for young people in this regard is smoking, and tobacco use. Smoking is the single biggest preventable cause of death in Europe and is something that has to be addressed. If the proper public policies are put in place, and actions implemented, young people can be supported to resist the temptation of tobacco, and even if they do take up the habit, be supported to give it up as early as possible.

### **1.1 The Importance of Youth Consultation in Policy Making**

The YFJ believes that young people should be involved and have a say on all policies that affect them. This paper is based on the text "Young People: For a life without Tobacco? - A European Youth Manifesto", which was drawn up by participants from across the EU, at the *Young People: For a life without Tobacco?* conference, held in Belgium on 19-21 May 2006. The Conference was organised in the framework of a project run by the European Youth Forum, based on a EU-wide consultation process on tobacco, involving more than 10.000 young people. This project was funded by the European Commission.

## **2. Tobacco and Youth**

Tobacco bears tremendous significance to health, social, economic and environmental issues.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, efforts have to be made to protect young people from the health risks and harm caused by tobacco use and Environmental Tobacco Smoke.

Young people are the group most concerned by tobacco<sup>2</sup>: Smokers usually start when they are young; they are subjected more frequently to passive smoking than other groups; they are a specific target group for the marketing of the tobacco industry and it is they that are most susceptible to addiction. However, young people should not only be seen as victims of tobacco use. Young people must be seen as actors for change and have to be included in all stages of the debate on the prevention of tobacco use, instead of being left aside as observers. Moreover, youth should be involved in relevant policy making and implementation.

### **2.1 The Role of Youth Organisations**

As youth is the age-group most affected by tobacco consumption, the role of youth organisations is very relevant in prevention, policy-making, and in raising awareness - both in the short-term, but in particular, in the long term. Concretely, youth organisations should be consulted and involved as actors with regards to important policy decisions that affect their lives: their involvement is vital.

In this respect, the relevance of education and the involvement of youth organisations in spreading awareness about tobacco use should be acknowledged. As youth organisations are among the main providers of non-formal education, they play an important role in helping to shape opinions and behaviours. In terms of smoking prevention and in helping young people to make informed and conscious choices, non-formal and formal education are of great importance; this is of particular significance

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1 For more information, see [http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/Tobacco/tobacco\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/Tobacco/tobacco_en.htm)

2 For more information, see <http://www.who.int/tobacco/research/youth/en/index.html>

[http://www.euro.who.int/eprise/main/who/informationources/publications/catalogue/20040518\\_1](http://www.euro.who.int/eprise/main/who/informationources/publications/catalogue/20040518_1)

to smokers starting at an early age, who are often subject to peer pressure. In this respect, informal education is also extremely relevant when dealing with tobacco addiction.

In order to be able to tackle all these issues, there should be more support measures (financial, political, logistical, etc.) for youth organisations working on tobacco prevention and harm reduction, as well as in other health areas. Finally, it is important to mention that support to youth organisations should be given at all levels - the local, national and European - promoting dialogue between all stakeholders involved in tobacco-related issues.

## **2.2 Protection of Third parties**

All young people should have the right to a smoke-free environment in indoor and enclosed public spaces. Consequently, the guiding principle of smoking bans should be the prevention of exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke in public places and facilities, workplaces and at home. This can be achieved by a comprehensive smoking ban including public spaces, public transport, schools, hospitals, kindergartens and workplaces, as well as leisure facilities (especially hotels, pubs and restaurants). However, designated smoking areas should be provided where possible.

Many countries already have restrictions on smoking in working environments and some have introduced wide-ranging smoking bans. In all countries, enforcement of those regulations must be ensured, and it is recommended that other countries learn from these experiences. The common lesson after the introduction of smoking bans is that after a short period of transition, the majority of citizens and consumers support and understand the importance of such legal regulations. In any case, proper monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the law on smoking bans has to be undertaken. The role of youth organisations in the implementation of smoking bans and their evaluation has to be respected and secured.

## **2.3 Prevention and Cessation**

### 2.3.1 Restricted Accessibility

As smokers often start when they are young, it is crucial to properly implement and enforce existing legislation prohibiting minors from accessing tobacco. As such, a retailer licensing system should be implemented and a ban should be introduced on tobacco product vending machines and internet sales. Moreover, the tobacco industry should be prevented from active promotion of tobacco to children and youth, particularly in developing countries.

### 2.3.2 Limited Visibility

Strongly related to the accessibility of tobacco is the problem of its visibility among young people. In order to have healthier youth, all forms of tobacco advertisements should be prohibited. In parallel, campaigns promoting healthy behaviours should be carried out at all levels, emphasizing the positive aspects of not smoking. Larger health warnings on cigarette packages, in addition, serve as a further method of increasing awareness of the harms of active and passive smoking.

### 2.3.3 Cessation

Support to those willing to quit smoking should be provided and access to cessation clinics and psychological support should be easily available and provided free of charge to young people. Furthermore, nicotine replacements and other methods to help stop smoking should be sold at a lower price than cigarettes. In relation to this,

research on gender and age-specific tobacco cessation programs should be promoted and supported. In this respect, the role of youth organisations on the local, national, and European level should also be considered. Finally, further restrictions should be considered on addiction-increasing additives, carcinogens and other toxic products, in tobacco products, which pose health risks to both active and passive smokers.

### **3. Conclusions**

The formulation and implementation of policies related to tobacco need the involvement of youth, just as much as young people need effective policies. Youth organisations have a role to play in the formulation of these public policies at both European and national levels. Moreover, youth organisations can play an important role in capacity-building, awareness-raising, and influencing the lifestyle choices of young people. It is clear that tobacco and cigarettes are very detrimental to the health of young people, now and in the future. Policies and measures that ensure that young people are not only informed about the dangers but are also supported and equipped to resist and desist the deadly addiction of tobacco and nicotine need to be put in place.