



International Network of Women Against Tobacco

Advisory Board

Amanda Amos (United Kingdom), Norma Cronin (Ireland), Elif Dagli (Turkey), Margaretha Haglund (Sweden), Mervi Hara (Finland), Isabel Nerin (Spain), Martina Pötschke-Langer (Germany), Sofia Ravara (Portugal), Elizabeth Tamang (Italy), Dolors Marin Tuya (Spain)

Editorial

In this 8th INWAT Europe newsletter, we focus on the Finnish process to achieve a society free from tobacco and nicotine products by 2030. Finnish tobacco policy contributes to Finland's health policy which is to promote and maintain the population's health and well-being, working and functional capacity and social security, and to reduce health inequalities. Finland was the first country in the world to include ending the use of tobacco and nicotine products in legislation. The objective to phase out tobacco and other nicotine products is of great importance in particular to curb the rising epidemic of tobacco use among women and girls. The article highlights the current situation and future challenges in Finland.

Mervi Hara,
Executive Director of ASH Finland,
the rapporteur of the working
groups submitting the proposals
to end the use of tobacco and
other nicotine products in Finland.



Aiming at a tobacco and nicotine free Finland - women lead the way?

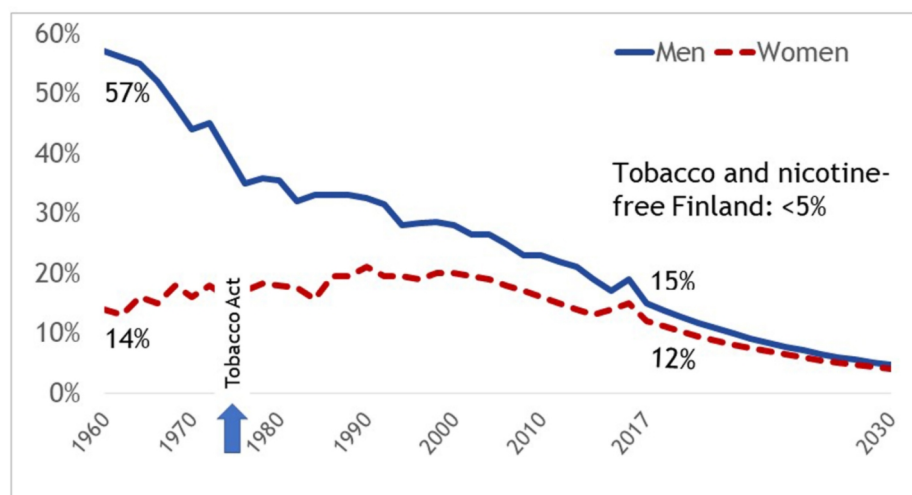
Finland's tobacco legislation dates from the 1970s. Ever since then, the tobacco legislation has been consistently developed regardless of fierce opposition from the tobacco industry. Major legislative tobacco policy measures, such as marketing bans on tobacco products and smoke-free workplaces and restaurants, have been embraced by the majority of the population after their implementation. The measures already implemented have helped to decrease smoking in Finland, while its social acceptability has also declined.

Over 40-year-old legislation took a new shift when, instead of reducing smoking, we decided to aim to end the use of tobacco and other nicotine products. This means that 5% or less of the Finnish adult population uses

tobacco or other nicotine products by 2030. The objective set by law indicates strong political will and obligation to create a tobacco and nicotine free environment.

In 1978–1982, 26% of the adult population smoked daily, while this proportion had halved in 2017. The decrease in smoking is already reflected in the number of cancers and cardiovascular diseases caused by smoking, among other things. The change brought about in Finland is based on determined and comprehensive tobacco policy, which has led to positive developments through the combined effects of several evidence-based measures.

Daily smoking in 20-64-year-olds in Finland 1960-2017



Source: National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), Finland

Adult smoking.

Smoking among adult men has been constantly decreasing. Among the female population, smoking prevalence slowly increased until 2007 and has been decreasing ever since (Figure 1). Nevertheless, smoking among women has been at an internationally low level. With a total tobacco advertising ban, we were able to prevent the tobacco industry's massive marketing efforts aimed at women that was experienced in many other countries. Nowadays, we are among the least smoking countries in Europe.

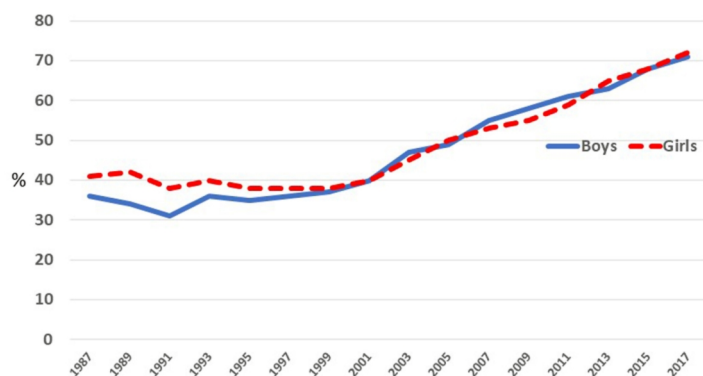
Adolescent smoking.

Smoking is not cool at all among adolescents: in 2017, 7% of girls and boys aged 14-18 smoked on a daily basis. The change among youngsters started at the beginning of the 21st century when 25% of them smoked on a daily basis. It was when the girls smoked daily more than boys.



In 2017, 72% of boys and girls had never tried smoking. Now that adolescents try and start smoking regularly at an increasingly older age in Finland, it is obvious that our young generation will be smoke-free. (Figure 2)

Never tried tobacco, 12-18-year-olds in 1987-2017



Source: Adolescent Health and Lifestyle Survey 2017

Smokeless tobacco, moist snuff.

When smoking has been decreasing, cigarettes have not been replaced by other nicotine products among adults. The most common nicotine product is Swedish moist snuff, smokeless tobacco. In Finland, the daily use of smokeless tobacco was 5% among adult men, 1% among women in 2017.

Regardless it is illegal to sell and market moist snuff in any EU Member State, except in Sweden, very recently several studies have revealed that the use of moist snuff is common among boys. The spill over of snuff from Sweden into Finland is a drastic phenomenon. The situation is even more worrying as it seems that the marketing tactics of the moist snuff industry are targeted at girls, too. The shops selling moist snuff in Sweden have paid special attention to feminine boxes and flavours.

E-cigarettes.

The use of e-cigarettes has not gained popularity in Finland yet. Among adults, the daily use of e-cigarettes was about 1% in 2018: 1.4% among men and 0.3% among women. It seems that adult women are not interested in novel nicotine products.

Why a nicotine free society?

Nicotine is an extremely toxic chemical that causes various harmful effects in the body, even in small concentrations. Although the role of nicotine in different tobacco-related diseases is not sufficiently well known, it is clear that nicotine products are not harmless. Nicotine is highly addictive, and this effect is further enhanced with the chemicals added to the tobacco products.

Manufacturers of tobacco and nicotine products are constantly bringing to the market new products based on creating and maintaining nicotine addiction. In Finland, we are against nicotine addiction, our policy measures are not based on harm reduction and novel nicotine products. Our

experience underlines that reduction in smoking is possible without replacing cigarettes with other nicotine products.

Our objective does not mean prohibition after 2030, however. Tobacco and nicotine products are still legally available after 2030 but their price will be high and there will be far fewer retail outlets for them.

The road map.

In mid-2018, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health published the proposals for legislative amendments and other actions to develop a tobacco and nicotine policy. The inter-sectoral working group emphasised that the implementation of the proposals is only an intermediate step in ending the use of tobacco and other nicotine products in Finland. The further actions must be carried out every few years. Every government until 2030 must investigate and evaluate how to achieve the endgame objective and propose the necessary further actions. The implementation of the actions must be included in every government programme.



The proposals of the working group are focused on taxation, prevention of young people starting smoking, smoke-free environments, smoking cessation, communication, marketing, new nicotine products, improving the effectiveness of enforcement, monitoring systems and other necessary methods. When drafting the proposals, the working group took into account the reduction of socio-economic disparities.

Urgent challenges:

Smoking during pregnancy. The prevalence of smoking during early pregnancy has not decreased in Finland, where 14% of all women giving birth in 2016 smoked during pregnancy. This figure has remained nearly unchanged since the mid-1990s.

While the number of pregnant women who quit smoking during pregnancy has also increased in Finland, the proportion of smokers at the end of pregnancy (8.2%) is still the highest among the Nordic countries.

Socio-economic disparities. Smoking is the most significant cause of health disparities between population groups. Smoking is the most prevalent in groups with a lower level of educational attainment. Although the socio-economic disparities of smoking are significant, they have no longer increased in recent years. Smoking accounts for 25% of socio-economic differences in mortality among men and 13% among women, respectively.

Moist snuff. Regardless of the fact that there is an EU-wide sales ban, moist snuff is spreading to Finland. Sweden's special dispensation to sell snuff, the more or less organised import of moist snuff to Finland and inadequate border control is reflected in the use of moist snuff among the young.

Although tobacco and nicotine companies want to recruit women as their customers, in Finland women still use less tobacco and other nicotine products than men in all education groups. Thus, we believe that women shall lead the way to a tobacco and nicotine free society.