



Feedback from ESMO on the proposal for revising the European Union's (EU) Tobacco Taxation Directive

The [European Society for Medical Oncology \(ESMO\)](#), representing more than 45,000 oncology professionals in 179 countries and territories, welcomes the proposal by the European Commission to revise the Tobacco Taxation Directive - key EU tobacco legislation that has not been updated since 2011. The legislative proposal put forward on 16 July 2025 represents a comprehensive step towards promoting tobacco cessation and achieving the ambition of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to create a 'Tobacco-Free Generation' by 2040.

At present, tobacco use continues to be a major health hazard contributing significantly to the global burden of disease, including cancer and many other non-communicable diseases. Combustible cigarettes are classified as a group one carcinogen according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)¹ and it is estimated that over 7 million people globally die from tobacco use each year². Tobacco is responsible for approximately 700,000 deaths in Europe annually³ and accounts for about 25% of all cancer-related mortality around the globe⁴. It is therefore critical that strong action is taken at the EU level to lower smoking rates, reduce preventable cancer cases linked to tobacco, and protect public health.

Given that tobacco taxation is recognised by both the World Health Organization (WHO)⁵ and the World Bank⁶ as one of the most effective tools for reducing tobacco use, ESMO strongly supports the revision of the Tobacco Taxation Directive as a robust means to deter consumption of tobacco products, strengthen tobacco control policies across the EU, and reach the objectives of the Beating Cancer Plan. As the legislative proposal is currently being discussed by the EU Member States, we believe that the following points should be prioritised throughout the legislative negotiations:

- ESMO calls for maintaining the ambition of the European Commission's proposal and **increasing minimum excise duty rates on tobacco products** - which have seen only limited changes in recent years.
- ESMO supports extending the scope of the Directive and **establishing new minimum taxes for e-cigarettes, heated tobacco and nicotine pouches**. Novel and emerging tobacco and nicotine products are increasing in popularity across Europe, especially amongst young people, and in part due to targeted marketing strategies. Robust taxation at the EU level is therefore necessary to address the immediate and long-term health risks linked to these products.

¹ International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). [List of Classifications](#).

² World Health Organization (WHO). [Tobacco](#).

³ European Commission. [Tobacco](#).

⁴ WHO. [Effects of tobacco on health](#).

⁵ WHO. [WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2021](#).

⁶ World Bank Group. [Is Tobacco Taxation Regressive? Evidence on Public Health, Domestic Resource Mobilization, and Equity Improvements \(English\)](#).



- To ensure that EU tobacco taxation remains effective, it is important that **the minimum EU rate of excise duty for each product category is updated annually** - as opposed to every three years in the current Commission proposal.
- The 4-year transitional periods set for cigars, cigarillos, waterpipe tobacco, heated tobacco, other smoking tobacco, other manufactured tobacco, nicotine pouches and other nicotine products are extensive and should be **reduced to 1 year at the longest** - enabling the human health benefits of the legislative revision to take effect early on.
- The revision of the Tobacco Taxation Directive should be complemented by an urgent **legislative review of the Tobacco Products Directive and the Tobacco Advertising Directive**, with the latter not having seen a significant update since its adoption in 2003.

It is our conviction that implementing these recommendations is essential for improving human health and tackling the tobacco epidemic in Europe.

ESMO, as a Society committed to preventing tobacco-related cancer cases, stands ready to collaborate with the EU Member States and all stakeholders to develop effective tobacco taxation and tobacco cessation policies.

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