

ENSP FACT SHEET

ON CHARACTERISING FLAVOURS IN TOBACCO PRODUCTS



Background on the tobacco epidemic in the EU

Tobacco consumption is the single most important preventable cause of morbidity and mortality in the European Union (EU), responsible for 700,000 premature deaths per year¹. In 2017, 26% of the EU population reported being current smokers².

Ban on characterising flavours in tobacco products

The revised European Union (EU) Tobacco Product Directive (TPD) has a number of measures aimed at reducing tobacco consumption and its deadly impact. One such measure is a ban on “characterising flavours” in cigarettes and roll-your-own (RYO) tobacco, which went into effect in May 2016, with the exception of menthol-flavoured tobacco products which will be banned in 2020.

A 'characterising flavour' means a clearly noticeable smell or taste other than one of tobacco, resulting from an additive or a combination of additives, including, but not limited to, fruit, spice, herbs, alcohol, candy, menthol or vanilla, which is noticeable before or during the consumption of the tobacco product. The banning of such flavours from tobacco products is expected to have a marked impact on public health in the EU. Accordingly to the 2017 Eurobarometer, approximately 8% of regular cigarette smokers in the EU used cigarettes of menthol flavour and 7% of other flavours², with significant variation across EU Member States.

Public health implications of flavours

Research has shown that flavours play an important role in drawing in new users of tobacco products and sustaining long-term use. Flavours are particularly appealing to youth and young adults, especially fruit and candy flavour³. Historically, the tobacco industry has added flavourings to maximise its attractiveness to young people, using advertisement strategies to directly target this population⁴. Additionally, research indicates that by lessening the harshness of cigarette smoking, such as cooling effects of menthol or sweetness of other flavours, flavoured tobacco products can reduce harm perceptions of these products.

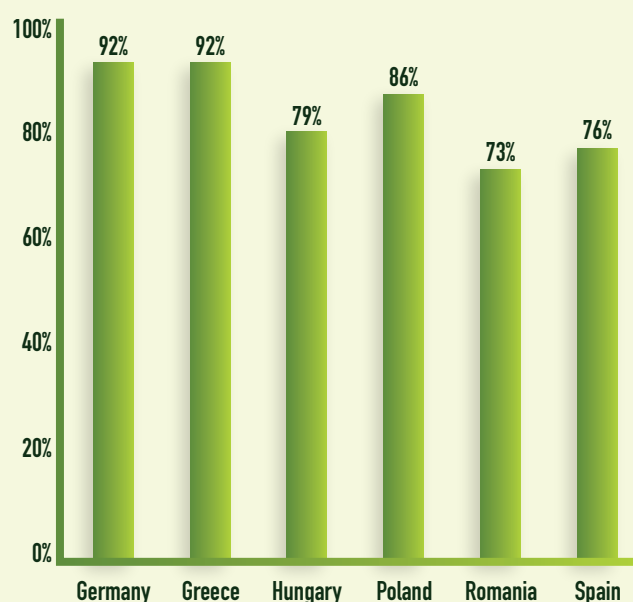
Use of flavoured cigarettes in the EU

Data from the EUREST-PLUS ITC Europe Surveys, which aims to evaluate the EU TPD⁵, shows that in 2016, on average, menthol and other flavoured cigarette smokers from six EU Member States were more likely to be younger (ages 18-24), as compared to older age groups⁶. Furthermore, in 2018, 13% of adult smokers from six EU MS believe that menthol cigarettes are less harmful than regular cigarettes⁶.



In order to make the EU TPD fully operational, the European Commission (EC) can set forth the procedures for determining whether a tobacco product imparts a characterising flavour. The main purpose of the EUREST-FLAVOURS project, is to provide the EC with scientific, economic and technical expertise to assist in decisions on whether tobacco products impart a characterising flavour other than tobacco. The results of the EUREST-FLAVOURS project will culminate in a clear science-based decision criteria to support the EC in the development of uniform rules for the procedures to determine whether a tobacco product imparts a characterising flavour.

Percentage of smokers who chose their brand of cigarettes because of how they taste, among those who have a usual brand, by country (2018)

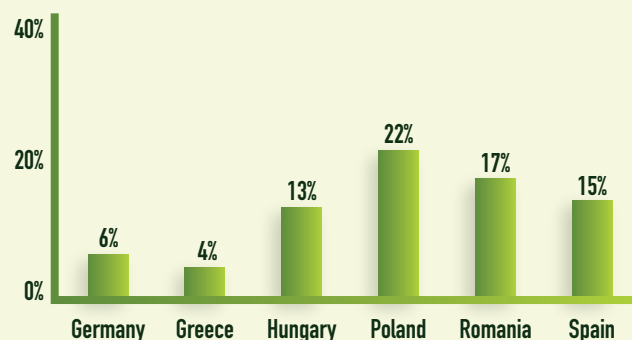


Note: the results shown are weighted, but unstandardized estimates (i.e. they do not control for potential differences in the age-sex distribution between countries).



eurest^{plus}

Percentage of smokers who “agree” or “strongly agree” that menthol cigarettes are less harmful than regular cigarettes, by country (2018)



References

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