

Prevalence of tobacco and e-cigarette use by young people in the WHO European Region



World Health Organization

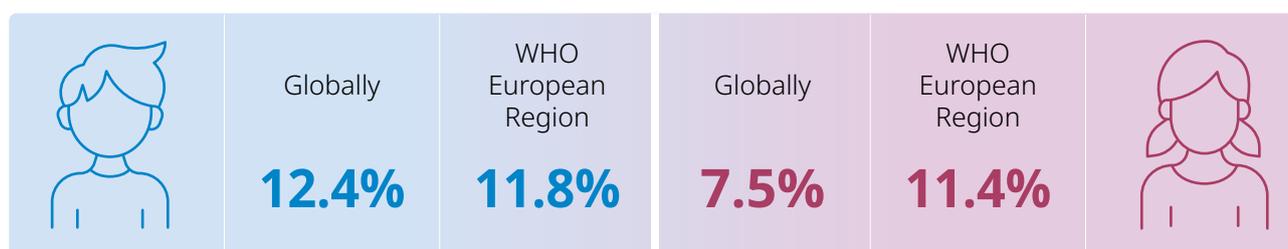
European Region

Overview

Worldwide, at least 40 million young people aged 13–15 years (10%) use some form of tobacco – 26 million boys and 14 million girls. The number in the WHO European Region is 4 million (11.6%) (1).

Girls from the European Region had the highest prevalence globally among girls at 11.4% (Fig.1). The average rate of tobacco use among girls in four other WHO regions¹ is 1.5–3.5 times lower than that among boys.

Fig. 1. Estimated average prevalence rate among students aged 13–15 years, by sex, globally and in the WHO European Region, 2024



Source: WHO (1).

Only about half the countries in the WHO European Region survey young people about their use of smokeless tobacco products. WHO has estimated that, in 2024, 0.5 million (2.9%) of the Region's population aged 13–15 years used smokeless tobacco products.

Tobacco use

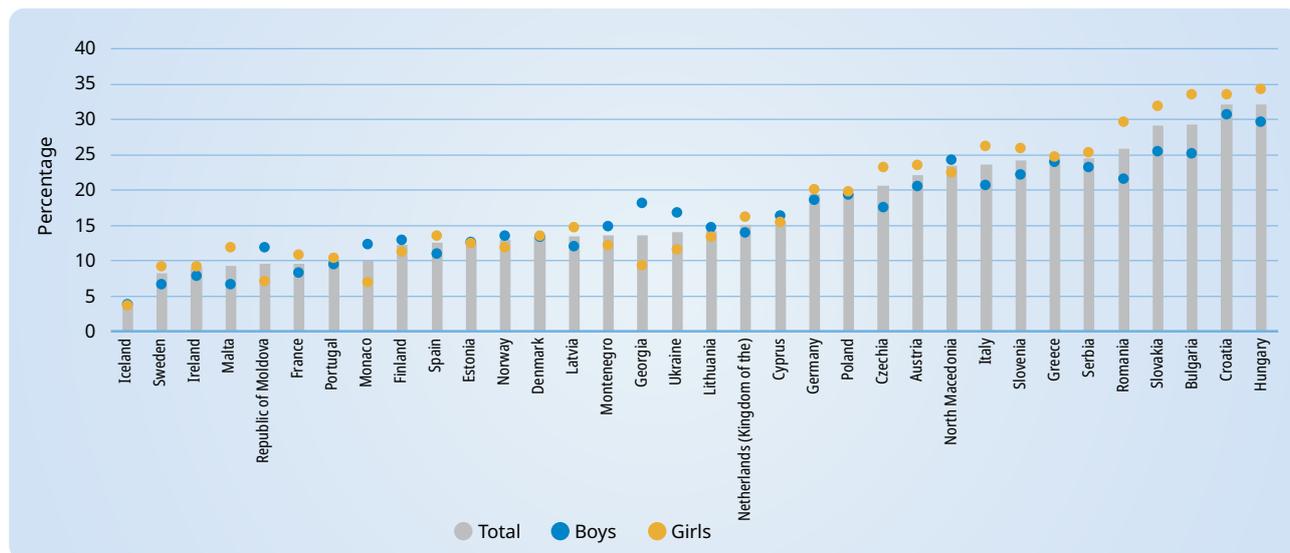
Data on tobacco use by young people is available from school-based surveys, including the Global Youth Tobacco Survey, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey, the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD) and national surveys.

According to the Global Youth Tobacco Survey, tobacco use by young people aged 13–15 years varies from 26.6% in Bulgaria (in 2023) to 1.7% in Uzbekistan (in 2021) (2).

Among older students, aged 15–16 years, the 2024 ESPAD survey found that the prevalence of current cigarette smoking ranged from 4.2% in Iceland to 32.2% in Hungary (Fig. 2) (3). In 25 of 34 countries, the rates of use among girls were similar or higher than those among boys.

¹ The WHO African Region, the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, the WHO South-East Asia Region and the WHO Western Pacific Region.

Fig. 2. Current cigarette smoking among students aged 15–16 years in 34 countries of the WHO European Region, overall and by sex, 2024

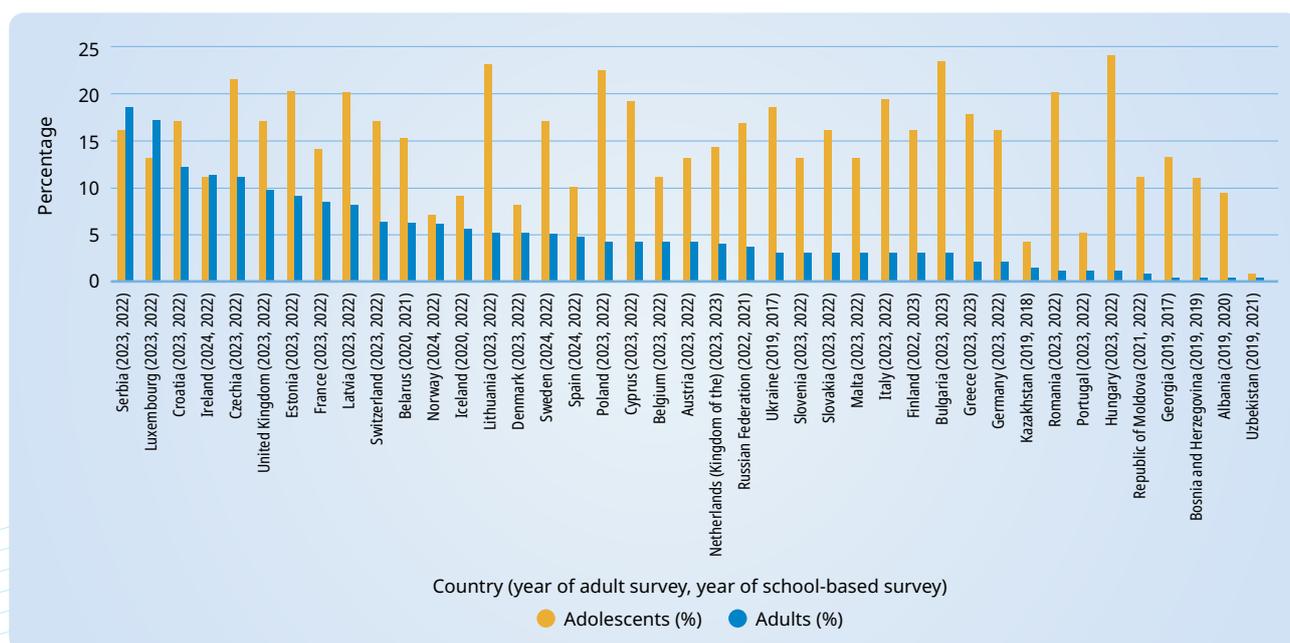


Source: ESPAD (3).

E-cigarette use

The uptake of e-cigarettes by young people has increased, and this trend has been reported to be of great public concern in several countries. A comparison of adult and adolescent surveys by country reveals a notable skew in the use of e-cigarettes towards adolescents (Fig. 3). In 41 countries, a population-based survey on e-cigarette use was run in the same year or within 1–2 years of a school-based survey asking about e-cigarette use among the population aged 13–15 years. Nearly half of these countries observed a ratio of five to one or higher in the prevalence of e-cigarette use among adolescents compared to adults. Just three countries in WHO European Region found that adults use e-cigarettes at the same or higher prevalence than adolescents aged 13–15 years: Ireland in 2022–2024 (11.2% versus 11.0%), Luxembourg in 2022–2023 (17% versus 13%) and Serbia in 2022–2023 (18.4% versus 16%) (1).

Fig 3. Prevalence of current e-cigarette use among adults compared with adolescents aged 13–15 years, WHO European Region countries with data

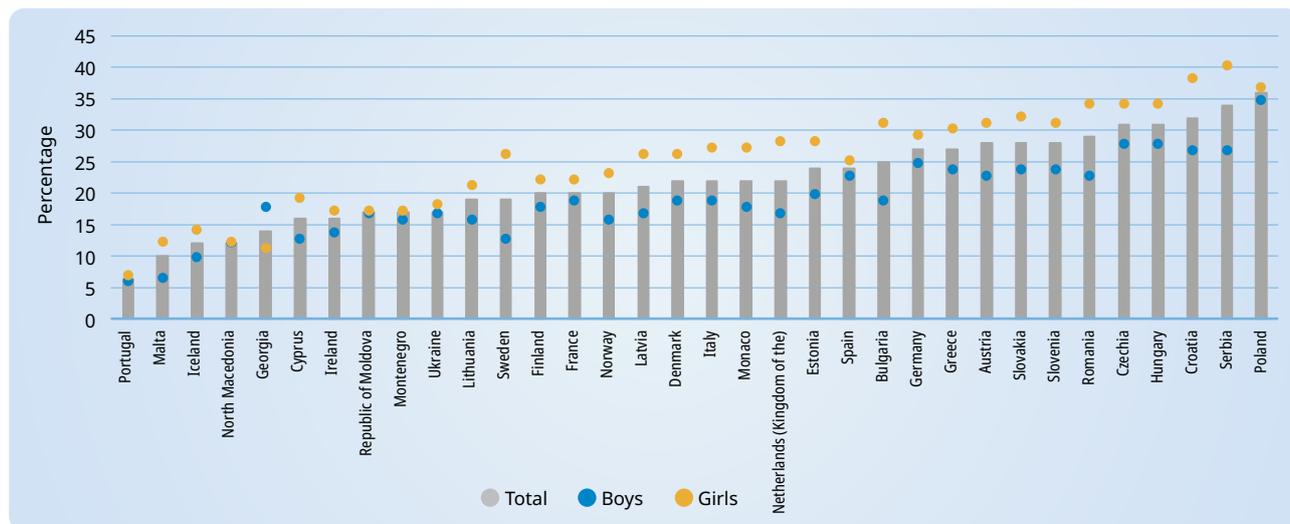


Source: WHO (1).

E-cigarette use among adolescents aged 13–15 years ranged from 0.7% in Uzbekistan (2021) to 23.3% in Bulgaria (2023). In nearly half of the countries with available data (Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russian Federation, San Marino and Ukraine), the prevalence of e-cigarette use was higher among girls than boys (2).

Overall current use of e-cigarettes by adolescents aged 15–16 years was 22% and ranged from 6.4% in Portugal to 36% in Poland in 2024. According to ESPAD, the prevalence was higher among girls (25%) than boys (19%), with the difference exceeding 10 percentage points in Bulgaria, Croatia, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Romania, Serbia and Sweden. Five countries – Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Serbia and Poland – recorded a prevalence of e-cigarette use of $\geq 30\%$ among 15–16-year-olds (Fig. 4) (3).

Fig. 4. Current e-cigarette use among adolescents aged 15–16 years in 34 countries of the WHO European Region, overall and by sex, 2024



Source: ESPAD (3).

What should be done?

- ▶ More countries should monitor all forms of tobacco use among youth, including new and emerging nicotine, tobacco and related products such as electronic nicotine delivery systems, electronic non-nicotine delivery systems, nicotine pouches and heated tobacco products.
- ▶ Countries are encouraged to use standardized protocols and questions in youth tobacco surveys to monitor key tobacco control indicators. Standardization ensures comparable data over time and across countries.
- ▶ Country capacity for preparing and implementing surveys and disseminating and using the data for monitoring and evaluation of policy should be strengthened.

References²

1. WHO global report on trends in prevalence of tobacco use 2000-2024 and projections 2025-2030. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2025 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/383060>). License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.
2. Global Tobacco Surveillance System Data [website]. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2024 (<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/global/gtss/gtssdata/index.html>).
3. ESPAD Group. ESPAD Report 2024: Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. Luxembourg: European Union Drugs Agency Joint Publications, Publications Office of the European Union (https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/joint-publications/espas-report-2024_en).

² All references were accessed 14 November 2025.