

Three quarters (74%) of the French adults state that their country is struggling with illicit tobacco trade

This represents a significantly higher percentage than the average (65%) for all 13 EU member states surveyed by Povaddo global research firm in November 2022

More than two-thirds of the French adult population is also convinced that the illicit tobacco trade in their country has a negative impact on the EU as a whole

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The results of a general population survey conducted in 13 EU member states—France and 12 other countries—in November 2020 reveal that while adult citizens in France recognize illicit tobacco trade and consumption as an important national and European threat to their security, safety, and public health, they are not aware of the true size of the illicit tobacco trade and its real cost in terms of state revenue losses.

The findings of the general population survey conducted among 13,000 adults, including 1,000 French citizens, were presented during a press event on April 4 in Paris by William Stewart, president and founder of global research firm Povaddo. The presentation was followed by a panel discussion, titled “Is the French policy approach to tobacco control working?” with Giorgio Rutelli, editor-in-chief of *Formiche*, Italian public health and political magazine, and Jean-Daniel Lévy, deputy director of Harris Interactive France.

In recent years, the price of a packet of cigarettes in France has risen dramatically due to tobacco tax increases. This price increase runs parallel to a worrying increase in consumption of illicit cigarettes, estimated at 29% of total consumption in France, according to the latest KPMG [annual study on illicit cigarettes](#) consumption in the EU, Norway, Switzerland, and U.K. The illicit tobacco trade siphons off billions of euros in state revenues every year that would be otherwise going to the French state treasury.

More than three quarters (77%) of the French adult citizens surveyed are aware that illicit tobacco trade not only has a negative impact on French state tax revenues; they also believe that illicit trade in tobacco and nicotine-containing products has a serious negative impact on the safety, security, and public health not only in their own country (78%), but also throughout the EU (80%).

Illicit trade also creates a deficit on the population side: 72% of the French people polled are convinced that illicit tobacco trade undermines efforts to reduce smoking rates—further, 69% believe that as long as illicit cigarettes are available, any efforts to control smoking behavior is nullified. Subsequently, three quarters (74%) of the French population believe that this same illicit tobacco trade also opens the door to minors who are easily exposed to cigarettes and nicotine-containing products. Another serious consequence is that the illegal tobacco trade prevents adult smokers who would not otherwise quit to switch to less harmful alternatives, according to 67% of the French population.

The Povaddo survey also indicates that a large majority of the French population surveyed (69%) believes that combating illicit tobacco and nicotine-containing products is an essential part of tobacco control measures, while 56% of them believe that the French anti-tobacco policy is ineffective and does not support adult smokers.

Governments must consider illicit tobacco trade as an unintended consequence when deciding how to regulate and tax tobacco and nicotine-containing products, 76% of the French people surveyed believe. Only 13% disagree.

Even more striking, 83% of the French people questioned believe that excessive tobacco tax increases encourage illicit tobacco consumption and trade, as the black market offers access to cheaper illicit tobacco and nicotine-containing products.

At the same time, the Povaddo survey shows that a majority of the French respondents (56%) have little or no knowledge about existing smoke-free alternatives from cigarettes, such as e-cigarettes. Regarding heated tobacco products, knowledge among them is even lower: Barely 14% appear to be familiar with them.

“The results of this survey show that the French public is open to a new policy strategy to tobacco control, because the ‘quit or die’ approach toward adult smokers that relies heavily on tobacco tax increases isn’t working and is, in fact, creating other negative consequences,” said William Stewart, president and founder of Povaddo.

In France, the problem of the illicit tobacco trade, combined with very high taxes on legal tobacco and nicotine-containing products and very low awareness of the available, less harmful smoke-free alternatives, creates a very complex situation in France that not only impacts negatively the French state budget and safety, but also puts public health at risk. In that respect, the Povaddo general population survey contains very valuable insights that can urge policymakers to rethink current tobacco control policies.

During the press event, Giorgio Rutelli, editor-in-chief of the Italian public health magazine *Formiche*, stated: “Despite all tobacco control measures applied around the world, the number of adult smokers worldwide remains stable. Therefore, I think it is necessary to find a new, more effective approach toward the adult smokers who are not willing to quit. Countries need to evaluate the role of technologies and alternative, less harmful products in the fight against smoking, and adult smokers who would otherwise not quit should be made aware of the available smoke-free alternatives. We should engage policymakers, the scientific community, and civil society in a continuous debate on one of the most important public health issues of our time. This should be part of any media platform’s activities, and *Formiche* magazine is engaged in stimulating constructive discussions like the one we’re having today in Paris, France.”

Survey methodology

Commissioned by Philip Morris International, Povaddo conducted between November 10 and 15, 2022, the online European general population survey on the awareness and perceptions of European adult citizens on illicit tobacco trade and consumption and the role of regulation and taxation. The survey was fielded among 13,630 general population adults aged 18 and older in 13 EU member states: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain. Around 1,000 online interviews were conducted in each country. The data are weighted to be representative of the online population in each country on the following variables: age, gender, and nicotine product usage per market to match national statistics. The overall results are accurate to a margin of error of $\pm 1\%$. Please note that results may not total 100% due to rounding.

The full survey results are available at <https://www.povaddo.com/point-of-view>