



7-Step Plan to Reduce Smoking Rates in Portugal

Tobacco consumption is currently the single largest avoidable health risk, and it is estimated to be responsible for [more than 13,000 deaths](#) in Portugal every year, representing 18.6% of the total of all deaths among men and 4.4% of the total of all deaths among women. For some age groups, such as those between 50 and 69 years old, 1 in 4 deaths are attributable to tobacco consumption. In fact, [the three main causes of death in the country](#) are all tobacco-related. Despite the above, still, 17% of the population aged 15 or over are smokers. Yes, almost 1.5 million Portuguese still smoke every day.

Eliminating exposure to tobacco smoke would achieve an 81% reduction in lung cancer, a 75% reduction in laryngeal cancer, a 51% reduction in oesophageal cancer, and a 50% reduction in cancer of the oral cavity and pharynx in men. Unfortunately, the Government's draft of the [Strategy to reduce cancer](#) (hereafter referred to as ENLCC, for its acronym in Portuguese), which was presented in June of this year, failed to propose pragmatic solutions to tackle smoking rates and mainly prologues the unsuccessful "quit or die" approach.

The upcoming update of the EU Tobacco Products Directive (TPD), along with the implementation of the Portuguese ENLCC (which is still under design), will determine the evolution of smoking rates and tobacco-related diseases in the following years in Portugal.

It is now a perfect time for Portugal to implement harm-reduction policies and put practical solutions such as vaping at centre stage. With a consumer-friendly vaping regime similar to that of the United Kingdom, [half a million smokers in Portugal could switch to vaping](#). By switching to this [95% less harmful alternative](#), people can substantially improve their lives and public health will greatly benefit.

In this document, we present a 7-step strategy to reduce smoking rates in Portugal and improve the life of smokers and public health overall.

Steps to be taken by the Portuguese Government

1. **Embrace tobacco harm reduction:** Scientific evidence and facts on vaping, as well as the testimonies from former smokers, have proven that vaping is much less harmful than smoking and works as a smoking cessation tool. Without vaping and other nicotine delivery alternatives, the fight against smoking-induced cancer and other illnesses will fail, and the goals established by the Portuguese Government in the ENLCC will never be met.
 - The Portuguese Government should make a clear commitment to the concept of tobacco harm reduction and focus on proven solutions such as vaping to lower smoking rates.



2. **Promote vaping as a smoking cessation tool:** [Vaping is the most successful smoking cessation method](#) yet devised and it should be promoted as such. Many smokers are not aware of the existence of safer alternatives to cigarettes, and the same applies to many physicians. Without common awareness about the potential of vaping to help smokers quit cigarettes, it is unlikely that smokers will switch and that doctors will recommend them to try it.

The Portuguese Government announced in the ENLCC different initiatives to promote smoking cessation, such as improving training for health professionals in smoking prevention and treatment development or giving free of charge pharmacological treatments for the treatment of smoking addiction.

- **Vaping should be included and acknowledged as the most efficient smoking cessation method in such training, and it should also be recognized as a treatment for smoking addiction, allowing physicians to prescribe it. Tobacco harm reduction must become a key element in all anti-smoking policies in Portugal.**
3. **Allow vaping in smoke-free environments:** Smoke-free areas, which are implemented in order to protect non-smokers from second-hand or passive smoking, are widely implemented in Portugal for all tobacco related products, including nicotine-containing vaping.

Yet, even if the aerosols from e-cigarettes contain nicotine that can be assimilated by bystanders, they do not carry carcinogenic substances like the smoke of tobacco does. Research showed that "[those near a 'vaper' inhale 100 times less nicotine than a passive smoker \(...\) negligible levels that rule out the existence of passive vapour](#)".

- **Therefore, we urge the Portuguese Government to exclude vaping from smoke-free areas restrictions. This would be yet another incentive for smokers to switch to a safer alternative.**
4. **Lower taxation on vaping products and adjust it to its relative risk:** Portugal is one of the countries with the highest excise tax on e-liquids, at 0.30€ per millilitre. This tax adds more than 3€ to the price of a standard vaping-liquid bottle.

E-cigarette sales are very sensitive to price changes and making vaping less appealing to smokers by increasing prices discourages current smokers from switching to less harmful alternatives. Studies show that [increased prices on vaping products lead to higher smoking rates](#). Consequently, we can assume that the high taxes on vaping products in Portugal are having a negative effect on public health. On the other hand, studies show that [greater availability of e-cigarettes can reduce tobacco consumption](#), as reductions in e-cigarette prices would make it much more likely for smokers to reduce or quit smoking.

Despite all the evidence, the Portuguese Government contemplated "limiting access to tobacco products, novel nicotine products and e-cigarettes by: (i) increasing prices; (...)".

- **Less harmful alternatives to cigarettes must not become luxury products. Instead, vaping products should be taxed at a level adjusted to their relative risk in comparison to tobacco. The Portuguese Government should abstain from imposing higher taxes on vaping products and reduce the excessive taxation of e-liquids as soon as possible.**



- 5. Reject flavour bans and don't further limit nicotine:** Vaping has helped millions of smokers quit, and nicotine and flavours have been essential in this process. As the Portuguese Government revisits the regulation of ingredients, including flavourings, it is important to remember that the regulation of ingredients and flavours should guarantee the safety of products while allowing consumers to choose the liquids and flavours that best fit their needs.

More than two-thirds of vapers are using flavours other than tobacco, and [those using flavours are 230% more likely to quit smoking](#) than those who don't vape flavours at all. Without flavour options, adult consumers will have no choice but to turn to the black market or return to smoking. Restricting flavoured liquids makes it more challenging for smokers to quit and risks progress made by consumers who have moved away from cigarettes. Hence, we recommend the Portuguese Government to reject all proposals to ban flavours as they [can potentially push 5 out of 10 vapers back to smoking or the black market](#), where there is no guarantee of safety or quality.

When it comes to ingredients, the level of nicotine contained by the liquids is of critical relevance for smokers to switch. Despite this, and the fact that [nicotine is relatively harmless](#), the amount of nicotine vaping liquids can carry has already been limited at the European level.

- **We urge the Portuguese Government not to further restrict nicotine in vaping liquids and to regulate ingredients only to the minimum extent necessary to ensure the safety of liquids.**
- 6. Keep vaping widely available:** Several countries are imposing tight restrictions on the sales of vaping products commonly under the assumption that minors have easy access to them, and it was announced in the National Strategy for the Fight Against Cancer that the Portuguese Government was going to seek a stricter regulation of sales too. Vaping regulations should be smart and make sure the necessary age restrictions are put in place to prevent minors from taking up on vaping. Meanwhile, it is important that vaping remains available to adults.

The use and purchase of vaping products in Portugal is already restricted to those over 18 years of age.

- **To prevent the uptake of youth vaping, existing laws need to be enforced smartly and more strictly, but policies such as banning online sales or limiting them to state tobacconists should be avoided, as they would cause more harm than good.**
 - **Measures such as increasing fines for those selling vaping products to minors or simply allocating more resources to law enforcement may instead be the solution.**
- 7. Promote tobacco harm reduction in the EU institutions and legislations:** Many aspects surrounding vaping, such as packaging, advertising or nicotine levels of the liquids are mainly regulated at the EU level. Portugal should become a leader in tobacco harm reduction similar as it is already in other areas.
 - **We strongly recommend the Portuguese Government to promote and defend tobacco harm reduction in European institutions and to fight legislation reducing consumer choice and restricting vaping.**