

news from the international study

CONTROL OF ADOLESCENT SMOKING

Comparing national policies on smoking in eight European countries

*This report compares national smoking policies in eight countries/regions of Europe — Austria, French-speaking Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia), Norway, Scotland and Wales — with particular focus on national laws that restrict smoking by staff and students in schools. The data were collected in 1998 as part of the EC-funded project, *Control of Adolescent Smoking*.*

- ~ Austria, French-speaking Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland and Norway had national laws which prohibited or restricted smoking in public buildings, including schools.
- ~ Denmark also had a national law which restricted smoking in public buildings, but this legislation did not apply to schools, which are under the jurisdiction of individual school boards.
- ~ Scotland and Wales had no national laws restricting smoking in schools.
- ~ Finland, Norway, Austria and Belgium had generally restrictive government policies on adolescent smoking, while Scotland, Wales, Denmark and Germany had fairly lenient policies.

Introduction

Smoking continues to be the single most important preventable cause of illness and death in Europe. Current trends suggest that worldwide tobacco mortality will rise to about 10 million deaths a year in 2030.¹ In the countries of northern and western Europe, although smoking among adults has been declining in recent years, smoking among adolescents has generally been increasing with the exception of Finland. (See Figure 1.) This increase has been most marked among girls.² Numerous studies have shown that most adult smokers were already smoking regularly by the age of 18. Moreover, people who start to smoke at a young age are more likely to continue smoking as adults because of the addictive nature of tobacco. This suggests that the recent declines in adult smoking may be reversed over the next few years in many countries.

Because of the enormous drain on national health resources of smoking-related diseases, many national governments in Europe have attempted to tackle the problem of smoking. Different governments have tackled it in different ways. Some have used legislation to ban advertising or restrict smoking in public places. Others have pursued a non-legislative approach by establishing voluntary agreements with the tobacco companies. A number of countries have focused on smoking prevention activities and health education programmes targeted to young people.

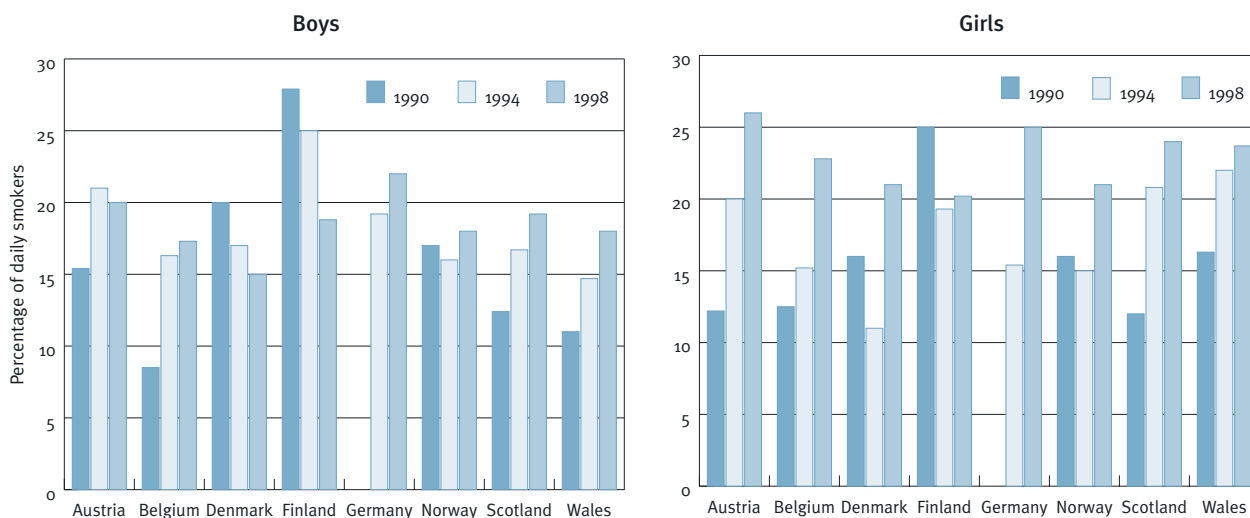
The EC-funded *Control of Adolescent Smoking (CAS)* project has sought to investigate the relationship between government tobacco policies — particularly as they impact upon smoking in schools — and adolescent smoking in eight countries/regions of Europe. Schools have a crucial, but also, in some cases, a paradoxical role in teaching young people about smoking. The lessons of health education classes are often counteracted or contradicted by lessons in the school yard, where smoking by pupils — and by teachers — may be commonplace. Therefore, one of the first aims of the CAS project was to gain an overview of how government tobacco policies in the eight countries related to school smoking policies. It is important to keep in mind that the picture presented here reflects the state of government policies in 1998. In some countries, government policies may have changed significantly since 1998.

Policies relating to smoking in schools

Table 1 compares some of the anti-smoking policies and strategies adopted by the national governments of the eight participating CAS countries, and which specifically relate to smoking by adolescents. Table 2 presents information about the ways in which these countries used national laws to restrict smoking in school or on school premises.

Based on this data, countries in this study may be classified according to the following two main categories:

Figure 1: Trends in daily smoking among 15-year-old boys and girls, 1990–1998



Source: 'Health Behaviours of School-aged Children: A WHO cross-national study'. No data available for Germany in 1990.

In the last decade, smoking among 15-year-old boys has decreased in Denmark and Finland, and has levelled out in Austria and Norway, but has increased in Belgium, Germany, Scotland and Wales. Smoking among girls has increased in all countries except Finland. In Austria, Belgium and Scotland, smoking prevalences among girls have doubled (or nearly so) in less than ten years.

1. countries with national laws that prohibit or restrict smoking in schools — Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany and Norway;
2. countries with no national laws that prohibit or restrict smoking in schools— Denmark, Scotland and Wales.

Countries with national laws that restrict smoking in schools

In Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany and Norway, smoking was prohibited in schools on the basis of national legislation concerning smoking in public buildings. The aim of these laws, in all cases, was to protect non-smokers from the harmful effects of passive smoking by providing a clean indoor environment. In Austria, these laws have been in effect since 1987, in Belgium since 1990, in Finland since 1995, in Germany since 1975, and in Norway since 1988.

In four countries (Austria, Belgium, Finland and Germany), the law allowed teachers to establish a separate smoking room inside the school. In Austria and Norway, earlier proposals to ban smoking in schools altogether met with strong opposition by teachers' unions and resulted in compromises to allow teachers to smoke. In Austria, this change allowed teachers to establish a smoking room inside the school building, but in Norway, only outdoor smoking was allowed. In Belgium, one law prohibited all smoking in school buildings, but another law on smoking in the workplace allowed teachers, in principle, to establish separate rooms for smokers. However, some Belgian schools had voted to ban smoking throughout the building. Similarly, in Finland, teachers could establish a separate room for smokers, but the law required that this room was not an area used by pupils under 18 years of age, and that no smoke from the room was able to enter areas where smoking was prohibited. Smoking outdoors on the school premises was not allowed in Finland.

In contrast, the Norwegian law stated that teachers could not smoke anywhere in the school building, but were permitted to smoke outdoors, on school grounds. In Austria, the law restricted smoking only within the school building, but did not stipulate any restriction outside the building on school grounds. In Belgium, the law on smoking in public buildings did not restrict smoking outside public buildings, except for buildings where teaching was carried out. In practice, however, this law was not enforced, and schools did not forbid smoking by teachers outdoors on school premises.

The situation in Germany was slightly different from Austria, Belgium, Finland and Norway. In these latter countries, the law on smoking in public buildings makes specific reference to schools as a type of public building. In Germany, however, any regulations concerning schools would rightfully fall within the jurisdiction of the federal governments, not the national government. Nevertheless, the national law in Germany required smoking to be restricted in all public buildings for the protection of non-smokers. Schools, as public buildings, were required to comply with this law. The way in which the law was implemented in schools could vary from one state to another, however. Germany also had a national law which forbade smoking by children and adolescents below the age of 16. Although this law did not concern schools, it did, in effect, result in a ban on smoking in schools for young people under 15. And this indirectly resulted in a ban on pupil smoking in certain types of German high schools (the *Hauptschulen* and the *Realschulen*), both in the school buildings, and on school grounds. In schools for pupils older than 15 (the *Gesamtschulen* and the *Gymnasien*), smoking by pupils was not forbidden by the national law. However, some of the federal states did, nevertheless, have their own smoking laws concerning schools for pupils older than 15.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, the region studied, teacher smoking was restricted to certain areas within the school building, and smoking by older pupils (16 years and older) was allowed, after a decision by the school conference and with parental consent, in restricted areas of the school grounds. No pupils, irrespective of their age, were permitted to smoke within school buildings.

Austria, like Germany, had different regulations for pupils under 16 and over 16. Pupils over 16 in Austria were permitted to smoke outside the school, in restricted areas of the school grounds.

There was variation between all countries in the way in which information about the national legislation was communicated to schools when it came into force. But in all cases, the responsibility for implementing and enforcing the law in the school lay with the school head and the teachers, and

there were no other formal structures to oversee the implementation and enforcement of the policy in schools.

Countries with no national laws that prohibit or restrict smoking in schools

Denmark— like Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany and Norway — also had legislation restricting smoking in public buildings. However, in Denmark, this legislation did not apply to schools, since Danish schools are under the jurisdiction of individual local school boards. For this reason, if schools in Denmark had smoking restriction policies at all, they varied considerably from one school to another.

In Scotland and Wales, smoking policies in schools, if they existed, had generally been developed by local education authorities or by the schools themselves; they were not based on

Table 1: National government activity relating to smoking, 1998

	Aus	Belg	Den	Fin	Ger*	Nor	Sco	Wal
Published government targets for reducing smoking	—	—	+	+	—	+	+	+
Published and government-funded strategy for reducing smoking among young people	—	—	—	+	—	+	—	—
Ban on direct tobacco advertisement (newspapers, magazines, billboards, etc.)	+	+	—	+	—	+	—	—
Legal age for purchasing cigarettes – 16 or older + – 18 or older ++	+	—	—	++	—	++	+	+
Restrictions on accessibility of cigarette vending machines to adolescents	—	+	+	+	—	+	+	+
National law restricting smoking in public places (offices, public transport, etc.)	+	+	+	+	+	+	—	—
National law restricting smoking in schools	+	+	—	+	+	+	—	—
Smoking education compulsory in schools	+	—	—	—	—	+	—	+

Key: — no + yes

* This data concerns national government activity only. Germany, as a federal state, organises some of these activities at the federal level. Therefore, for Germany, a minus (—) in some cases must not be interpreted to mean that there has been no activity in this area, only that there has been no activity at a national level.

Table 2: Countries with national legislation restricting smoking in school or on school premises

	Aus	Belg	Den	Fin	Ger*	Nor	Sco	Wal
Teachers' smoking restricted on school premises (indoors or outdoors)	+	+	—	+	+	+	—	—
Smoking by teachers banned totally inside school building**	—	+/-	—	—	—	+	—	—
Smoking by teachers banned outside school building on school premises	—	+	—	+	—	—	—	—
Smoking by students over 16 banned in school building and on school premises	—	+	—	+	—	+	—	—
Smoking by students under 16 banned in school building and on school premises	+	+	—	+	+	+	—	—

Key: — Country has no national law restricting smoking in this way. + Country has a national law which restricts smoking in this way.

* This data concerns national laws only. Germany, as a federal state, organises some of these policies at the federal level. Therefore, for Germany, a minus (—) in some cases must not be interpreted to mean that a law does not exist on this topic, only that a national law does not exist. National legislation in Germany, although it does not specifically address schools, does, in effect result in certain restrictions on smoking in school.

**In Belgium, one national law prohibited smoking inside school buildings, but another law (on smoking in the workplace) permitted teachers to establish separate smoking rooms within schools.

national legislation. Such policies were usually part of a more general local authority policy on staff smoking in the workplace. Even so, the heads of individual schools had enough autonomy to be able to modify smoking policies to suit the particular circumstances of the school, and so, although most schools had a written or unwritten ban on pupils' smoking in schools, there was a great deal of variation among schools in whether or not teachers were permitted to smoke, and the extent to which smoking restrictions for pupils were consistently enforced.

How do different national tobacco policies relate to each other?

A comparison of Tables 1 and 2 would suggest that the extent to which the countries in this study had national policies on school smoking was at least partly related to the number and types of other government activity relating to smoking in those countries at the time of this study in 1998. Finland and Norway, which had the most restrictive and comprehensive smoking control policies at the national level (Table 1), also had restrictive smoking control policies at school (Table 2). Conversely, Denmark, Germany, Scotland and Wales had relatively little smoking control policy at the national level (Table 1) and smoking restrictions at school, if they existed at all, were developed, implemented and enforced by regional or local authorities or by individual schools (Table 2).

Taken together, the data in these two tables indicates that Finland, Norway, Austria and Belgium had restrictive government policies on adolescent smoking, while Scotland, Wales, Denmark and Germany had fairly lenient policies. This classification is partly, but not entirely, based on a distinction between countries which do and do not have national laws prohibiting smoking in public buildings. In the case of Denmark and Germany, the public smoking law appeared to be counteracted by other more lenient policies relating to adolescent smoking, whereas in Finland, Norway, Austria and Belgium, the law on smoking in public places was supported by other national policies.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that five of the participating countries (Austria, French-speaking Belgium, Finland, Germany and Norway) had national laws which restricted smoking at school, while the remaining countries (Denmark, Scotland and Wales) did not have any such laws at the national level.

The aim of the policies regarding teacher smoking was mainly to protect non-smokers from the harmful effects tobacco

smoke indoors at school, rather than to establish smoke-free schools. This seemed to be the case even in countries with very restrictive policies. This finding may imply that policies do not necessarily reduce exposure to smoker role models at school, and in fact, may have unfortunate side effects such as in the case of Norway, where the prohibition of indoor smoking among teachers has led to an increase in outdoor smoking, thus increasing the potential for students to be exposed to smokers at school.

Countries that had laws restricting smoking in school generally also had a greater number of other policies relating to adolescent smoking. The exception was Germany. Germany had a national law restricting smoking in school, but this law was supported by little else in the way of national tobacco control policy for adolescents. This situation is at least partly due to the federal structure of German government.

National variations in tobacco control policies result from differences in historical, epidemiological and socio-economic factors. Societal norms regarding smoking and the acceptance of legislative measures vary considerably across countries. Moreover, the very structure of government and state systems may itself have implications for tobacco control policies. Policy-making is the responsibility of the central government in some countries (like Finland and Norway), while in other countries health policies and school policies to a large extent are determined at a regional level (Denmark and Germany).

According to Ham & Hill,³ policy analysis is "finding out what governments do, why they do it, and what difference it makes." The present report has demonstrated that there is variation in what the governments of these countries do to restrict smoking at school. Further research in the CAS study will help to explain what significance national tobacco policies have for schools and students in Austria, French-speaking Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Scotland and Wales.

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Credits

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