

ECToH Milan 2026 Declaration

Context and urgency

The environments in which people live profoundly shape behaviours, social norms, and health outcomes. With the theme “*Nicotine-Free Spaces for Healthier Cities*”, the ECToH Milan 2026 Declaration recognizes cities as pivotal actors in advancing tobacco and nicotine control across Europe. Today, most Europeans live in urban areas, and this proportion is expected to continue increasing in the coming decades.

Despite significant progress, tobacco use remains alarmingly widespread in the WHO European Region: 24.1% of adults still use tobacco, and approximately 1.2 million people die prematurely each year from tobacco-related diseases. Among adolescents aged 13–15 years, an estimated 4 million use tobacco products and 4.2 million use e-cigarettes. The WHO European Region also has the highest prevalence of both tobacco and e-cigarette use among young people globally.

In rapidly changing urban environments, creating nicotine-free spaces is essential to protect public health, prevent initiation among young people, denormalize nicotine consumption, and reduce health inequalities.

While national governments establish the legislative framework for tobacco control, cities are uniquely positioned to act more rapidly, implement more ambitious policies, and directly influence social norms and everyday behaviours. To maximize their public health impact, these measures should be applied comprehensively and consistently across all tobacco and non-therapeutic nicotine products, supported by robust monitoring and effective enforcement.

Across Europe, cities are increasingly demonstrating that smoke- and aerosol-free policies are both feasible and effective in protecting health and saving lives. The host city of ECToH 2026, Milan, stands as a leading example of this commitment through the extension of smoke-free regulations to outdoor public spaces.

We recognize that

- Tobacco use remains one of the leading and entirely preventable causes of disease, disability, and premature death, placing a substantial burden on individuals, communities, and health systems.
- New and emerging nicotine and tobacco products are rapidly expanding across Europe, particularly among young people, often exploiting regulatory gaps and benefiting from aggressive marketing and industry tactics.
- Taxes on tobacco and nicotine products vary considerably across European countries. In many countries, the real price of tobacco and nicotine products remains low and, in some cases, has effectively declined due to inflation. This has increased the affordability of these products — particularly among young people — thereby weakening one of the most effective public health measures for reducing tobacco and nicotine consumption.
- The growing use of nicotine products among children and adolescents constitutes an urgent public health challenge, driven by product attractiveness, affordability, availability, accessibility, and targeted industry promotion - determinants that can be directly addressed through effective local and national policies.
- Exposure to second-hand smoke and aerosols in public spaces contributes to the normalization of tobacco and nicotine use, undermines prevention efforts, and compromises the fundamental right to have clean air for future generations.
- Tobacco and nicotine products cause significant harm to urban environments through air pollution, litter, plastic waste, and electronic debris, imposing additional environmental and economic costs on cities.
- The use of heated tobacco products, e-cigarettes, and other emerging nicotine and tobacco products in indoor public places remains inadequately regulated and enforced, creating inconsistencies that undermine public health protection.
- The adoption and implementation of comprehensive tobacco and nicotine control policies remain uneven across the WHO European Region, with many countries maintaining only partial regulatory frameworks.

Significant gaps persist in tobacco and nicotine control policies, particularly on electronic cigarettes, heated tobacco products and nicotine pouches, including comprehensive smoke- and aerosol-free policies and bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

- Industry interference continues to obstruct, delay, and weaken the adoption and implementation of effective public health policies.

These challenges require a stronger, more coordinated, and more coherent response tailored to the realities of rapidly evolving urban environments.

Call to action

We call on local, national and European authorities to implement and enforce bold, comprehensive measures addressing all tobacco, nicotine and related products, by:

1. Making **cities nicotine-free by default**, including expanding smoke- and aerosol-free policies to indoor and outdoor public spaces, including parks, schools, transport, hospitality and health-care settings.
2. Applying **the same strict regulations to all products**, closing loopholes across tobacco, e-cigarettes, heated and emerging non-therapeutic nicotine products.
3. Strengthening **price and tax policies** on all tobacco and non-therapeutic nicotine products to reduce affordability, particularly among youth.
4. Protecting nicotine non-users, including **children and young people** by reducing exposure, attractiveness and accessibility of all non-therapeutic nicotine products, also adopting forward-looking tobacco control measures such as nicotine-free generation policies.
5. Regulating **retail** through licensing, zoning and limits on points of sale.
6. Guaranteeing **consistent and adequately resourced enforcement**, supported by effective monitoring and dissuasive penalties for non-compliance.
7. Integrating tobacco and nicotine control into **urban environmental and sustainability policies**, addressing pollution and waste.
8. Investing in **accessible cessation, and primary and secondary prevention services**, embedded in health and community systems and ensuring sustained funding for independent research in tobacco control and prevention.
9. Protecting policies and research from **industry interference**, in line with WHO FCTC Article 5.3.
10. Advocating for the inclusion of strong, evidence-based measures in the **revised European Union tobacco-related directives** -specifically the Tobacco Tax Directive, the Tobacco Products Directive, and the Tobacco Advertising Directive- ensuring comprehensive coverage of all tobacco, nicotine, and related products, while closing existing loopholes.

Conclusion

Healthier cities require clearly defined and widely protected nicotine-free spaces.

It is time to move beyond the misuse of harm reduction rhetoric by the tobacco and nicotine industry and reaffirm smoking cessation and other evidence-based tobacco control policies as the fundamental pillars of an effective nicotine endgame strategy.

By acting decisively, European cities and countries can reshape social norms, protect future generations and accelerate the transition towards a tobacco- and nicotine-free future.