

The Prevalence of Smoking in Ireland

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Introduction

In October 2013 the Minister for Health, Dr. James Reilly launched the policy “A Tobacco Free Ireland by 2025”.¹ The aim of the policy is to reduce the percentage of the population smoking to less than 5 per cent. This note sets out the latest position.

Current Position

According to OECD health data 27 percent of the Irish population aged 15 or over were daily smokers in 2002. In 2007 this figure had increased to 29 percent despite the smoking ban being introduced in March 2004. In OECD Health at a Glance 2013 Ireland is ranked as having the third highest proportion of smokers out of 34 OECD countries with Greece ranked first and Chile in second.² Furthermore, Ireland is listed as having the highest proportion of female smokers in the OECD. However a closer look at the dataset calls for caution in comparing countries. The data refers to 2011 or the nearest year. However the figure for Ireland dates back to 2007 making it one of the oldest in the time series thereby making comparisons difficult. Table 1 shows the OECD data with countries ranked from highest to lowest in terms of the total percentage of the population who are smokers.

¹ <http://www.dohc.ie/publications/pdf/tobacco.pdf?direct=1>

² <http://www.oecd.org/health/health-systems/health-at-a-glance.htm>

The National Tobacco Control Office has more recent data on the prevalence of smoking in Ireland. The data is collected from a telephone survey of 1,000 respondents which has been carried out on a monthly basis from July 2002 to date. While this survey is consistent with OECD data which shows the prevalence of smoking was high in 2007, it tells a more positive story of a rapidly declining trend in adult smoking from 2007 to 2012. The data is shown in Table 2. In December 2007 27.26 percent of respondents were smokers and this figure had declined to 21.71 percent in December 2012. Note however that despite the decline in smoking, the December 2012 figure still places Ireland above the OECD average of 21 percent. The percentage of female smokers declined from 25.27 percent in December 2007 to 20.87 percent in December 2012, still well above the OECD average of 16.6 percent. Male smoking declined from 29.29 percent in December 2007 to 22.58 percent in December 2012 which is below the OECD average of 25.9.

Table 1: % of population (15+) who are daily smokers

Country	% of Total Population	% of Females	% of Males
Greece	31.9	26.1	38.0
Chile	29.8	26.0	33.7
Ireland	29.0	27.0	31.0
Hungary	26.5	21.7	31.9
Estonia	26.2	18.7	36.8
Turkey	25.4	12.3	39.0
Czech Republic	24.6	19.4	30.0
Spain	23.9	20.2	27.9
Poland	23.8	17.9	30.9
France	23.3	20.7	26.4
Austria	23.2	19.4	27.3
Korea	23.2	5.1	41.6
Italy	22.5	16.8	28.7
Germany	21.9	17.6	26.4
Netherlands	20.8	18.3	23.5
Belgium	20.5	17.7	23.6
Switzerland	20.4	17.6	23.4
Japan	20.1	9.7	32.4
Denmark	20.0	20.0	20.0
United Kingdom	19.6	19.1	20.3
Slovak Republic	19.5	12.5	27.1
Mexico	19.0	9.5	30.4
Slovenia	18.9	15.5	22.4
Portugal	18.6	11.0	27.2
Israel	18.5	12.6	24.8
New Zealand	18.1	17.0	19.3
Finland	17.8	14.8	21.9
Luxembourg	17.0	16.0	18.0
Norway	17.0	18.0	17.0
Canada	15.7	14.0	17.4
Australia	15.1	13.9	16.4
United States	14.8	13.3	16.4
Iceland	14.3	14.2	14.4
Sweden	13.1	12.4	13.9
OECD AVERAGE	21.0	16.6	25.9

Source: OECD Health Statistics 2013.

Table 2: Smoking in Ireland, 2007-2012.

Year	% of Total Population	% of Females	% of Males
2007	27.26	25.27	29.29
2008	27.16	26.22	28.11
2009	24.59	23.15	26.06
2010	23.04	21.33	24.79
2011	22.92	20.8	25.11
2012	21.71	20.87	22.58

Source: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/about/Who/TobaccoControl/Research/>