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TOBACCO-FREE EUROPE, a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)

<https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2022/000005>

January 2023-January 2024

Call for signatures of 9,165 Irish citizens for a Tobacco-Free Europe:
A European Citizens' Initiative to achieve a Tobacco-Free Environment and the first
European Tobacco-Free Generation by 2030

WHAT IS IT AND WHAT'S NEEDED?

The race has begun to gather one million signatures to abolish the sale of tobacco in the EU to future generations, using a relatively unknown mechanism, the *European Citizens' Initiative* (ECI). If this initiative, called *Tobacco-Free Europe* (TFE), is supported by 1 million citizens across at least 7 EU countries, the European Commission must respond and take action to achieve a tobacco-free generation by 2030 and a tobacco-free environment. The threshold number of signatures for Ireland is **9,165**.

GOAL OF TFE

The goal of Tobacco-Free Europe (TFE) is the progressive **abolition of the sale of tobacco and nicotine products**, starting with citizens born on or after January 1, 2010, to achieve the first European tobacco-free generation. This would result in fewer deaths and disabilities from cancer, heart attack, stroke, and multiple respiratory and other diseases.

This ambitious EU-wide project, initiated by the Spanish NGO Nofumadores and the European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP), is being coordinated by organisations from 15 EU countries. The Irish coordinating member is the TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland (TFRI). The TFE initiative will support and reinforce Ireland's commitments to a ***Tobacco Free Ireland*** and follow the lead of New Zealand which has recently banned the sale of tobacco to the next generation. **Dr Joan Hanafin**, Director of Social Research, TFRI said "Smoking is not only the prime cause of lung cancer but also a known risk factor for many other cancers including stomach, cervical, and colon cancer. This initiative will protect our young people from cancer in the future."

WHO IS DOING THIS AND WHAT'S THE TIMELINE?

Individuals and organizations from Ireland as well as Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Slovenia, Spain, France, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Sweden have

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come together as coordinators to call the attention of our politicians to how harmful tobacco and nicotine products are, and the absolute need to put the health of European citizens and our environment before the interests of the tobacco industry.

Organisations supporting the initiative will start gathering signatures by January 26th 2023 and will have until January 16th, 2024 to reach the 1 million threshold. The TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland (TFRI) is coordinating the Irish limb of TFE with the Irish Heart Foundation, ASH Ireland, Irish Thoracic Society and the Irish Cancer Society. This action, as a Citizens' Initiative, is dependent on the goodwill and action of all EU citizens but as **Chris Macey**, Director of Advocacy and Patient Support, Irish Heart Foundation points out:

“In Ireland the public are way ahead of policymakers in demanding action that will end the scourge of smoking in Ireland and across Europe. There is overwhelming support here for measures such as increasing the legal age of sale of tobacco to 21; banning smoking in public places and beginning the process of phasing out tobacco sales completely. We hope this petition sends a strong message to politicians that it's time they catch up with the people they represent on tobacco control.”

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADDICTION and the Tobacco Industry

The organisations and individuals supporting this initiative admit that they are undertaking a giant task, but they are adamant about this being the right thing to do. The success of the tobacco industry depends on recruiting teenagers to become users of a highly addictive and harmful substance that will kill 1 out of 2 smokers and that kills 8.5 million people worldwide every single year, 600,000 in the EU, and 6,000 in Ireland.

The objective of TFE is to save the next generation from the pandemic created by the tobacco industry. The tobacco industry needs children and teenagers to become addicted to tobacco products so that they can replace the millions of customers who die prematurely because of tobacco use. They are needed by the tobacco industry to continue to generate their profits, ignoring the perpetuation of the cycle of addiction, disease, and death of citizens.

Raquel Fernández Megina, President of Nofumadores in Spain, explains that, if successful, this initiative, “will protect those minors who have never smoked from falling into the hands of an industry which is manipulating them to become addicted to their lethal product. The way to prevent that is to make tobacco unavailable for their generation because those who have never tried it will never miss it or need it.” **Dr Marcus Butler**, President, the Irish Thoracic Society put it this way “this initiative brings the vision of a tobacco-free generation within touching distance. The potential implications for the health and wellbeing of our children and future generations, as well as for our health systems, are game changing.”

ADVERTISING AND VISIBILITY

As well as supporting the progressive ban on tobacco products, the European Commission and the EU member states will need to accompany this measure with a significant restriction of places

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where current tobacco users can smoke, vape or use any heated tobacco device. It will also be necessary, as has been done in Australia, to drastically reduce the number of places where tobacco can be sold.

Therefore, to avoid manipulation by the tobacco industry, which tries to recruit our young people into nicotine addiction, this citizens' initiative also demands that the European Commission eliminates tobacco advertising and its presence in audio-visual productions and on social media, especially addressing covert advertising through influencers and product placement.

ENVIRONMENT

This initiative will not only benefit the health of European citizens, it will also protect and improve the health of the planet. The organizers of the initiative have also taken into account that cigarettes and e-cigarettes are not sustainable in a world of global warming. They cause significant harm to the environment.

Cigarette butts are the most frequently littered item, with estimates that 4.5 trillion butts are discarded each year worldwide, ending up on beaches and in waterways. Tobacco filters, made of cellulose acetate, are the number one ocean plastic, more numerous than plastic bottles, plastic bags or plastic straws. These filters end up dissipating into microplastics and entering the food chain. So far, the EU has taken steps to curb the production of plastic straws but has not yet banned the manufacture of cigarette filters which serve no good purpose.

Prof Luke Clancy, TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland welcomed the opportunity to join EU colleagues in coordinating this initiative which he said “will secure the human right of our citizens to be free to breathe clean air, help fulfil our duty to protect the environment, and protect our children’s future health and wellbeing.”

For those reasons, the initiative also requests that Europe creates a network of beaches and riverbanks free of tobacco, cigarette butts, and electronic cigarette waste, and pledges to do the same with National Parks, in order to reduce pollution and to curb the risk of fires, which has increased with climate change.

Eligibility

To be eligible to sign the TFE initiative, a person must be a European Union citizen and old enough to vote in European Parliament elections. TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland (TFRI) together with the Irish Thoracic Society (ITS), the Irish Cancer Society (ICS), the Irish Heart Foundation (IHF) and ASH Ireland highlight the importance of all Irish citizens over 18 years old subscribing to the initiative by simply signing [here](#). And they call on other entities, both public and private, to join in disseminating and supporting the initiative.

Webpages of the initiative in the European Commission's register

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Information about the initiative in the European Commission Register:

<https://eci.ec.europa.eu/029/public/#/screen/home/allcountries>

<https://tfe.ensp.network/>

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