World Health Organization

European Region

Global Youth Tobacco Survey in Ukraine

2023

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Abstract

The 2023 Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) was conducted among school students in Ukraine, with analysis focused on adolescents aged 13–15 years. The report examines the prevalence and patterns of tobacco and nicotine product (TNP) use, including cigarettes, other smoked tobacco products, heated tobacco products, electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and nicotine pouches; frequency of use; polyuse; access; second-hand smoke and aerosol exposure; marketing exposure; and attitudes towards TNPs. The GYTS was implemented under wartime conditions and, therefore, offers important insights into adolescent behaviours in a context of displacement, psychosocial stress, disrupted schooling and increased reliance on digital environments. While long-term declines in cigarette smoking have been sustained, the nicotine market continues to diversify and newer products play a prominent role in youth consumption patterns. In 2023, 19.6% of adolescents reported current e-cigarette use, exceeding the WHO European Regional average of 14.3% and global average of 7.2%. Patterns of current TNP use have shifted, with increases driven mainly by e-cigarettes and other emerging products. These findings underscore the importance of sustained surveillance and strengthened implementation of comprehensive tobacco control measures aligned with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, particularly regarding youth protection and the regulation of novel nicotine products.

Keywords

UKRAINE; ADOLESCENT; TOBACCO USE; NICOTINE; SURVEY

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Abbreviations

CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States of America
CI	confidence interval
e-cigarette	electronic cigarette
GTSS	Global Tobacco Surveillance System
GYTS	Global Youth Tobacco Survey
HTP	heated tobacco product
TNP	tobacco and nicotine product
WHO FCTC	WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

Glossary

Tobacco and nicotine products. Unless otherwise specified, this term includes cigarettes, other smoked tobacco products, electronic cigarettes, heated tobacco products, smokeless tobacco and nicotine pouches.

Types of use:

- **ever use** – having ever tried a specified product at least once, even if only experimentally;
- **current use** – use of a specified product on 1 or more days during the past 30 days prior to the survey (hereafter referred to as "past 30 days");
- **frequent use** – use of a specified product on 20 or more days during the past 30 days; and
- **polyuse** – concurrent use of two or more product types on 1 or more days during the past 30 days.

Executive summary

Over the past two decades, Ukraine has achieved substantial progress in reducing adolescent cigarette smoking. Between 2005 and 2023, ever cigarette smoking among students aged 13–15 years declined from 57.5% to 34.6%, and current cigarette smoking fell from 24.0% to 12.3%. Frequent cigarette smoking (as defined in the Glossary) declined from 7.7% in 2005 to 4.2% in 2023. These reductions occurred in the context of sustained implementation of comprehensive tobacco control measures aligned with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, including progressive increases in excise taxation, smoke-free legislation, pictorial health warnings and bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

At the same time, the youth tobacco and nicotine product (TNP) landscape has evolved substantially. The expansion of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), heated tobacco products (HTPs), smokeless tobacco and nicotine pouches has shifted patterns of adolescent nicotine use away from conventional cigarettes and towards newer products. Although cigarette smoking has declined, overall TNP use remains considerable, with diversification across multiple product types and evidence of overlapping use. Newer products increasingly represent entry points into nicotine use, often beginning in early adolescence.

In 2023, 19.6% of students aged 13–15 years in Ukraine reported current e-cigarette use, exceeding the WHO European Region average of 14.3% and the global average of 7.2%. This indicates that the diversification of nicotine use among adolescents in Ukraine is occurring within a regional context in which the level of youth e-cigarette use is already among the highest globally.

Perceptions of harm remain uneven. In 2023, 47.6% of adolescents reported "definitely" believing that second-hand cigarette smoke is harmful, a marked decline from 2011. Perceptions of harm were lower for second-hand aerosol (from e-cigarettes). Daily e-cigarette use (4.4%) and reports of morning cravings or use (11.8% combined) suggest emerging nicotine dependence among a subset of young people. Declining exposure to school-based prevention education (44.4% in 2023 vs 86.7% in 2005) is further weakening protective factors.

The ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine added to the complexity of implementation of the GYTS and to the interpretation of the findings. Displacement, psychosocial stress, hybrid schooling, increased digital exposure and the temporary suspension of routine state inspections under martial law have complicated enforcement and prevention efforts. Nevertheless, strengthened tobacco control legislation and sustained increases in taxation have continued to support long-term reductions in cigarette smoking.

Unless otherwise specified, findings refer to students aged 13–15 years, who represent the core GYTS age group.

Key findings at a glance

Changes over time are based on descriptive comparisons of survey estimates across rounds.

Progress in reducing cigarette smoking

- Ever cigarette smoking was 57.5% in 2005 and 34.6% in 2023.
- Current cigarette smoking was 24.0% in 2005, 9.2% in 2017 and 12.3% in 2023.
- Frequent cigarette smoking was 7.7% in 2005, 2.8% in 2017 and 4.2% in 2023.
- Early initiation has become less common compared with earlier survey rounds.

Use of new and emerging TNPs

In 2023:

- e-cigarettes were the most commonly used nicotine product, with 45.9% of students reporting ever use and 19.6% reporting current use (a slightly higher percentage of girls reported experimentation and current use, while a higher percentage of boys reported frequent use);
- 16.7% of students reported ever use of HTPs and 6.9% reported current use;
- for smokeless tobacco use, prevalences were 9.1% for of ever use and 5.1% for current use; and
- for nicotine pouches use, prevalences were 7.0% for use and 2.9% for current use.

Product diversification and polyuse

- In 2023, 18.4% of adolescents reported the current use of any tobacco product, including cigarettes, other smoked tobacco products, shisha, smokeless tobacco and HTPs (17.6%, excluding shisha).
- Patterns of use have diversified. The percentage of adolescents reporting current use of a single product declined from 15.8% in 2017 to 11.2% in 2023. Over the same period, polyuse (three or four TNPs) increased from 2.4% in 2017 to 4.9% in 2023.

Second-hand smoke exposure

In 2023 in the past 7 days:

- 24.9% of students had been exposed to second-hand smoke at home;
- 36.2% had been exposed to second-hand smoke in enclosed public places and 44.2% in outdoor public places; and
- 38.3% had seen someone smoking inside the school building or on school property.

Marketing and messaging exposure

- Among students who had visited a point of sale in the past 30 days, 49.5% reported noticing tobacco advertisements or promotions in 2023 compared with 62.5% in 2017.
- The percentage of students who reported noticing anti-tobacco messages in the media in the past 30 days was 61.9% in 2023, 49.1% in 2017 and 97.0% in 2005.
- In 2023 among students who had watched television, videos or movies in the past 30 days, 15.7% reported noticing tobacco use in these media.
- In 2023 among students who used the internet or social media in the past 30 days, 12.7% reported seeing TNP use most of the time or always.

School-based prevention education

- The percentage of students who had been taught in school about the dangers of tobacco use in the past 12 months was 44.4% in 2023 compared with 86.7% in 2005.

Conclusions and main policy implications

The pattern of TNP use by adolescents in Ukraine is complex and evolving. Overall, the long-term decline in conventional cigarette smoking (both experimentation and current use) is continuing. However, modest increases since 2017, particularly in frequent cigarette smoking among boys, suggest that progress remains fragile. At the same time, e-cigarettes have become the most commonly used nicotine-containing product among adolescents, with substantial levels of experimentation and current use. Use of HTPs, smokeless tobacco and nicotine pouches has also expanded, particularly among older adolescents, often alongside other smoked tobacco products.

These patterns suggest a shift from single-product use towards more diverse and overlapping forms of nicotine consumption. This evolving landscape calls for a coherent policy approach that adapts to emerging risks. Strengthening early, school-based prevention for children remains critical to address misperceptions about harm across all product types and prevent the establishment of nicotine dependence. Applying consistent regulatory standards across all TNPs, strengthening the enforcement of age-of-sale laws (including online), expanding smoke-free policies to cover all TNPs, reducing affordability through harmonized taxation and ensuring youth-appropriate cessation support are essential to sustaining progress. Continued surveillance will remain critical to ensure that prevention and control strategies remain aligned with changing patterns of use, particularly during periods of social and economic disruption.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Purpose and objectives

The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) is a school-based survey developed by WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) within the Global Tobacco Surveillance System (GTSS). The GYTS provides nationally representative and comparable data on tobacco and nicotine product (TNP) use among adolescents. The survey primarily targets students aged 13–15 years, although all students aged 11–17 years in selected classes are eligible to participate.

The GYTS aims to monitor trends in TNP use, initiation and cessation behaviours and intentions; assess exposure to second-hand smoke (from cigarettes), second-hand aerosol (from electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes)), and advertising and promotion; evaluate knowledge, attitudes and perceptions related to TNPs; and inform national tobacco control policies aligned with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) *(1)* and MPOWER.[1] Standardized global methods ensure comparability across countries and over time.

[1] MPOWER is a set of six evidence-informed tobacco control measures designed by WHO to support implementation of the WHO FCTC. The measures are to monitor tobacco use and prevention policies; protect people from tobacco smoke; offer help to quit tobacco use; warn about the dangers of tobacco; enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship; and raise taxes on tobacco *(2)*.

1.1.2 Implementation in Ukraine

Ukraine has conducted five rounds of the GYTS: in 1999, 2005, 2011, 2017 and 2023. The 1999 survey was conducted prior to GTSS standardization and was limited to Kyiv city; therefore, it is not comparable with the later nationally representative rounds and is excluded from trend analyses.

Trend comparisons in this report are based on the 2005–2023 survey rounds, all of which followed the standardized GYTS protocol. Prevalence estimates are presented as weighted percentages. Comparisons across survey years are based on observed point estimates, with no formal statistical testing of trends conducted.

Fieldwork was conducted from 2005 to 2017 by the Marzieiev Institute for Public Health of the National Academy of Medical Sciences of Ukraine and in 2023 by the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research after Oleksandr Yaremenko, with analytical support from the Public Health Centre of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine. All rounds were implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the WHO Country Office in Ukraine, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the CDC.

The 2023 GYTS was conducted under wartime conditions, which affected fieldwork feasibility and student participation. Nevertheless, the survey was implemented in 111 educational institutions. The 2017 and 2023 surveys covered government-controlled territories only; earlier data were recalculated to ensure geographical comparability.

In 2023 key contextual factors included widespread population displacement, hybrid or remote schooling modalities, and a rapidly evolving nicotine market characterized by increased availability of e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products (HTPs), smokeless tobacco and nicotine pouches, alongside expanded online and social media sales channels. Despite these challenges, the core GYTS methodology was adhered to. Data were collected through in-person school visits using the standard paper-based format rather than online administration.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Sample, data collection and ethics

GYTS uses a stratified two-stage cluster sampling design. Schools are selected with probability proportional to enrolment size within urban and rural strata. Within selected schools, intact classes are randomly selected, and all students present on the survey day are eligible to participate (Table 1).

Table 1. GYTS sample sizes and response rates by survey year

Year	Students surveyed (all ages)	Students aged 13–15 years	Overall response rate (%)
2005	–	6 579	72.4
2011	3 762	3 550	91.6
2017	4 065	3 040	81.6
2023	4 390	3 316	69.3

GYTS: Global Youth Tobacco Survey.

Students completed an anonymous, self-administered, paper-based questionnaire during a regular class period. Data collection was conducted by trained external interviewers; teachers were not involved. No personal identifiers were collected.

The 2023 GYTS was conducted under an exemption granted by the WHO Ethics Review Committee (ERC.0003979, 28 June 2023) and received ethical approval from the Commission on Professional Ethics of the Sociological Association of Ukraine. Participation was voluntary, with parental consent procedures applied in accordance with national requirements. Data processing followed standardized GTSS and CDC quality assurance procedures *(3,4)*.

1.2.2 Student population profile

The 2023 GYTS study population was well distributed across the target age range of 13–15 years. Students aged 14 years constituted the largest group (37.8%), followed by those aged 13 years (25.6%) and 15 years (21.9%). Smaller proportions of students aged 12 years (8.8%) and 16 years (5.0%) were included, reflecting the intact-class sampling design. Together, students aged 11 years or younger and 17 years or older accounted for < 1% of the sample. Girls and boys were represented in nearly equal proportions (49.2% and 50.8%, respectively), which closely reflected national school enrolment patterns.

Most students were enrolled in grades corresponding to early and middle adolescence: those in 8th grade (35.9%) and 9th grade (36.5%) together accounted for more than two thirds of the sample. Fewer were enrolled in 7th grade (13.7%) and 10th grade (13.9%), consistent with the age distribution.

The family educational background of the sample population was diverse: according to the students, 32.3% of their fathers and 44.6% of their mothers had completed university education. However, a substantial proportion of students were unable to report the level of parental education (32.6% for fathers and 23.3% for mothers).

Self-reported household economic conditions indicated that most students lived in families that could meet basic needs, although many had to save or borrow money to pay for major purchases. A minority described more constrained circumstances or high economic security.

Students were drawn from a range of settlement types, including large cities, small towns and rural areas, which ensured geographical and socioeconomic diversity. Together, these characteristics indicate that the 2023 GYTS sample provided a nationally representative profile of adolescents aged 13–15 years attending school in Ukraine.

Displacement was a defining characteristic of the 2023 study population. Since 24 February 2022, 58.8% of students had travelled outside their home settlement: 38.8% had relocated within Ukraine and 20.0% had spent time abroad. Additionally, 7.9% self-identified as internally displaced persons at the time of the survey.

Schooling modalities were mixed. Nearly half of students (48.0%) attended school fully in person, 47.0% participated in hybrid (online and in person) learning and 5.0% studied exclusively online. Data collection was conducted only in schools that were able to hold in-person sessions.

Overall, self-reported well-being was generally positive, although notable proportions of students reported indicators of fatigue, low energy or sleep difficulties. During the 2 weeks preceding the survey, 66.4% reported having a lively and good mood most or all of the time and 52.9% feeling calm and relaxed most or all of the time. Over the same period, 56.5% reported waking up feeling refreshed less than half the time or never and 40.9% reported feeling active and energetic less than half the time or never.

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2. Results

2.1 Overview of tobacco and nicotine use among students aged 13–15 years

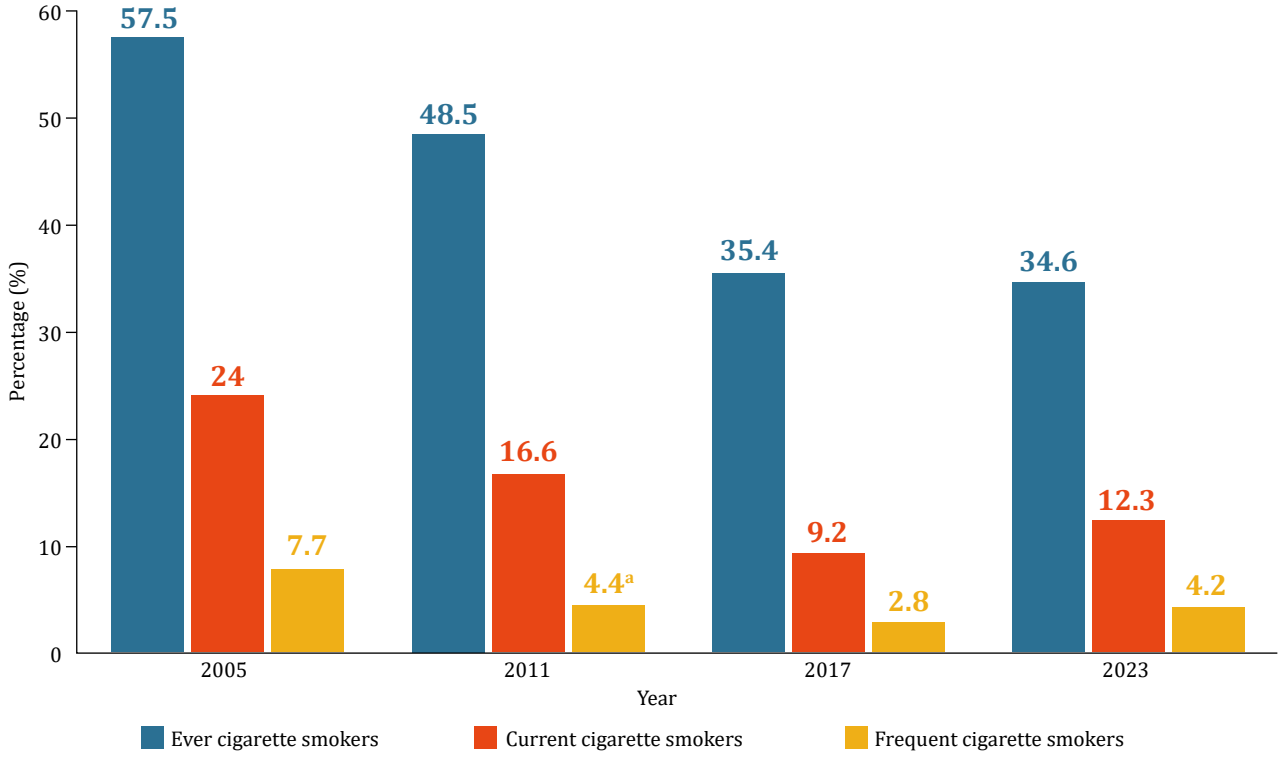
Patterns of TNP use among adolescents in Ukraine have changed substantially over the past two decades. Whereas cigarette smoking has declined markedly since 2005, the use of newer nicotine products (particularly e-cigarettes and HTPs) has increased, resulting in a more diversified adolescent nicotine market. This section summarizes the prevalence levels in 2023 and the long-term trends between 2005 and 2023 among students aged 13–15 years.

2.1.1 Overall prevalence and long-term trends

In 2005 cigarette smoking was widespread among adolescents aged 13–15 years. Over half of the students (57.5%) reported ever smoking cigarettes and 24.0% reported current smoking (see the Glossary for all definitions). Substantial declines were observed in subsequent survey rounds. By 2011 ever cigarette smoking had decreased to 48.5% and current smoking to 16.6%. In 2017 ever cigarette smoking decreased further to 35.4%, while current smoking reached its lowest recorded level at 9.2%.

By 2023, cigarette use remained well below the levels reported in the mid-2000s. Ever cigarette smoking was reported by 34.6% of students aged 13–15 years and current smoking by 12.3% (Fig. 1). Although this represents an increase from 2017, the prevalence of current smoking in 2023 is approximately half the level observed in 2005. Frequent cigarette smoking was reported by 4.2% of students in 2023, compared with 7.7% in 2005 and 2.8% in 2017.

Fig. 1. Prevalence of ever, current and frequent cigarette smoking among Ukrainian adolescents aged 13–15 years, 2005–2023



[a] Daily use.

Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey data for 2005–2023.

GYTS: Global Youth Tobacco Survey.

Over the same period, the TNP landscape diversified substantially. In 2023 approximately one in four students reported currently using any TNP (cigarettes, other smoked tobacco products, smokeless tobacco, HTPs, e-cigarettes and/or nicotine pouches). This indicates that although cigarette smoking has declined, overall nicotine use remains substantial due to the growth of products other than cigarettes.

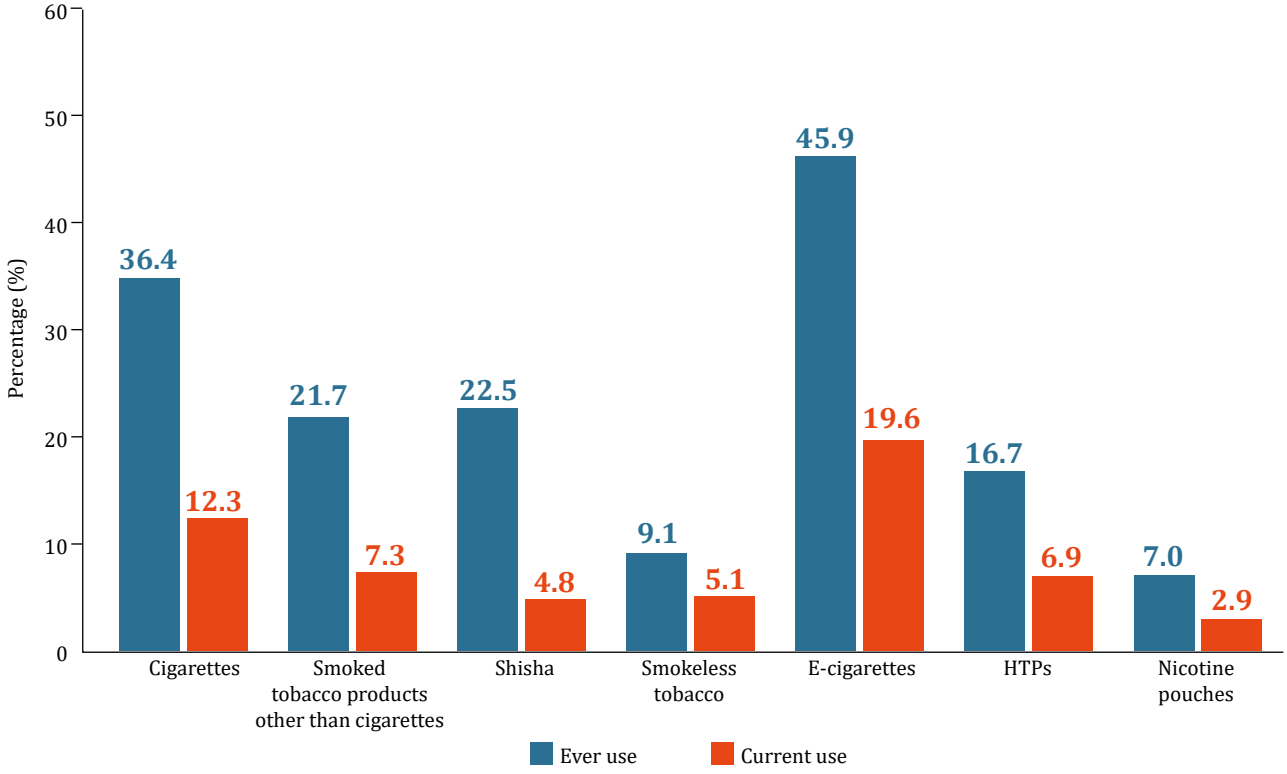
2.1.2 Use of any TNPs

In 2023, 53.4% of students reported ever using and 25.7% currently using any TNPs, including cigarettes, shisha, other smoked tobacco products, HTPs, smokeless tobacco, e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches. In the same survey, 18.4% of adolescents reported currently using any tobacco product, including cigarettes, other smoked tobacco products, shisha, smokeless tobacco and HTPs. Current use of any smoking tobacco products, including cigarettes, other smoked tobacco products and shisha, was reported by 15.6% of students. In 2023 more students reported ever using e-cigarettes (45.9%) than ever smoking conventional cigarettes (34.6%).

2.1.3 Current and ever use

In 2023, 34.6% of students reported ever smoking cigarettes and 12.3% reported smoking cigarettes in the past 30 days (current use) (Fig. 2). Among boys, 14.0% reported current cigarette smoking compared with 10.6% of girls. Frequent cigarette smoking was reported by 5.4% of boys and 2.8% of girls.

Fig. 2. Prevalence of ever and current use of TNPs among Ukrainian adolescents aged 13–15 years, 2023



Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey data for 2023.

E-cigarettes: electronic cigarettes; HTPs: heated tobacco products; TNPs: tobacco and nicotine products.

For e-cigarettes, 45.9% of students reported ever use and 19.6% reported current use. Current e-cigarette use was slightly higher among girls (20.7%) than boys (18.4%), while daily use was reported by 4.4% overall.

In 2023 the percentage of adolescents currently using other smoked tobacco products was 6.9% for HTPs, 5.1% for smokeless tobacco and 2.9% for nicotine pouches. Although these percentages are lower than those observed for cigarettes or e-cigarettes, they represent established use of multiple product categories.

2.1.4 Age and gender differences

The prevalence of TNP use increased consistently with age. Among students, 16.0% of those aged 15 years and 7.8% of those aged 13-year-olds reported current cigarette smoking. Levels of current use of any tobacco product including HTPs were 22.1% among 15-year-olds and 11.8% among 13-year-olds. Similarly, levels of current use of any TNP including e-cigarettes were 31.9% among 15-year-olds and 17.7% among 13-year-olds.

Gender differences varied by product category. Boys were more likely than girls to report current cigarette smoking (14.0% vs 10.6%), current HTP use (7.7% vs 5.8%), current smokeless tobacco use (6.8% vs 3.5%) and current use of nicotine pouches (3.8% vs 1.8%). In contrast, girls reported a slightly higher rate of experimentation with e-cigarettes (46.6% vs 45.0%) and of current e-cigarette use (20.7% vs 18.4%). Boys were more likely to report frequent or intensive patterns of use.

2.2 Product-specific findings

The 2023 GYTS showed a diversified market in which multiple categories of TNPs coexist, interact and frequently overlap. The following subsections describe the specific patterns for each product category.

2.2.1 Cigarettes

Among adolescents aged 13–15 years in Ukraine, cigarette smoking has declined substantially since 2005, but continues among a notable minority. In 2005 more than half of students (57.5%) reported ever smoking cigarettes and 24.0% reported current smoking. By 2011 the levels had fallen to 48.5% for ever smoking and 16.6% for current smoking. In 2017 further reductions were observed: ever smoking had declined to 35.4% and current smoking had reached its lowest recorded level at 9.2%.

In 2023 cigarette use remained well below levels reported in the mid-2000s, at 34.6% for ever cigarette smoking and 12.3% for current smoking. Although the latter represents an increase compared with 2017, it remains approximately half the level observed in 2005. Frequent cigarette smoking was reported by 4.2% of students in 2023 compared with 7.7% in 2005 and 2.8% in 2017. Moreover, 3.6% of students reported smoking on all 30 days in the past month in 2023.

Gender differences persist. In 2023 boys were more likely than girls to report current (14.0% vs 10.6%) and frequent (5.4% vs 2.8%) cigarette smoking. More boys than girls also reported ever smoking (37.9% vs 31.0%).

Age gradients remain pronounced. Current cigarette smoking had increased from 7.8% among 13-year-olds to 16.0% among 15-year-olds, reflecting a progression from experimentation towards more regular smoking with age. Similar age-related patterns were observed for frequent and daily smoking.

2.2.2 Other smoked tobacco products

Other smoked tobacco products, such as cigars, cigarillos, pipes and shisha were used less frequently than cigarettes or e-cigarettes but continue to contribute to combustible tobacco exposure among adolescents.

Between 2017 and 2023, the rate of ever use of tobacco products other than cigarettes (excluding shisha) declined from 28.5% to 21.7%. Over the same period, the rate of current use increased slightly from 6.2% to 7.3%. When shisha was included, the lifetime prevalence increased to 28.2% and current use to 9.3% in 2023.

Slightly more boys than girls reported current use of tobacco products other than cigarettes (excluding shisha: 7.9% vs 6.6%; including shisha: 9.6% vs 8.8%).

2.2.3 Smokeless tobacco

The use of smokeless tobacco products (including chewing tobacco, snuff and similar oral tobacco products) among adolescents in Ukraine remains less common compared with use of smoked or inhaled products, but has increased steadily over time. In 2017, 7.8% of students aged 13–15 years reported ever using smokeless tobacco; by 2023 this had increased to 9.1%.

Successive surveys have shown a consistent upward trend in the rate of current use. In 2005, 1.7% of students reported current use of smokeless tobacco. The level increased to 2.3% in 2011, 3.1% in 2017 and 5.1% in 2023.

Gender differences were marked in 2023. Boys were more likely than girls to report both ever use (11.6% vs 6.5%) and current use (6.8% vs 3.5%) of smokeless tobacco products. Age differences were also evident: the rate of current use increased from 2.8% among 13-year-olds to 7.1% among 15-year-olds, suggesting increasing uptake during mid-adolescence.

Difficulty in distinguishing between conventional smokeless tobacco products and newer oral nicotine products, such as nicotine pouches (section 2.2.6), may have exaggerated the reported rate of smokeless tobacco. However, the observed increase may indicate continued availability of or informal access to products that are officially restricted.

2.2.4 HTPs

HTPs have become an established component of the adolescent nicotine product landscape in Ukraine. Although prevalences of their use remain lower compared with e-cigarettes and conventional cigarettes, both experimentation and current use were reported among a measurable minority of students.

In 2023, 16.7% of students aged 13–15 years reported ever use and 6.9% reported current use of HTPs. The prevalence of current HTP use is higher than for smokeless tobacco (5.1%) and nicotine pouches (2.9%), but lower than for e-cigarettes (19.6%) and cigarettes (12.3%). Frequent HTP use was reported by 1.7% of students, of whom 1.1% reported daily use.

Gender differences in HTP use were observed: boys were more likely than girls to report ever use (18.6% vs 14.2%) and current use (7.7% vs 5.8%). Age gradients were also evident: the level of current HTP use increased with age, reaching 8.5% among 15-year-olds (from 4.7% among 13-year-olds and 7.4% among 14-year-olds). This increasing pattern is consistent with those observed for other nicotine products.

Awareness of HTPs was widespread in this age group. In 2023, 44.1% of students reported having heard of these products.

2.2.5 E-cigarettes

In 2023 e-cigarettes were the nicotine product most commonly used by adolescents in Ukraine. Although these products were first assessed in Ukraine in the 2011 GYTS, direct comparisons over time should be interpreted with caution due to changes in product types, device technology and questionnaire wording. Earlier survey rounds indicated very low levels of daily use (below 1%) but this has increased substantially in recent years.

In 2023, 45.9% of students aged 13–15 years reported ever use and 19.6% reported current use of e-cigarettes. The prevalence of current use exceeds those for cigarettes (12.3%), HTPs (6.9%), smokeless tobacco (5.1%) and nicotine pouches (2.9%), confirming that e-cigarettes are the most common source of nicotine use among adolescents. Frequent e-cigarette use was reported by 6.7% of students, of whom 4.4% reported daily use

Gender differences were modest but notable. Rates of ever use were 46.6% among girls and 45.0% among boys. Current use was also marginally higher among girls than boys (20.7% vs 18.4%). However, boys were more likely to report more intensive patterns of use, including daily use and frequent e-cigarette use.

Age gradients were also evident. Current e-cigarette use increased markedly with age, with a substantially higher prevalence among 15-year-olds (49.6%) compared with 13-year-olds (40.6%). The reported age of initiation suggests that first experimentation often occurs in early adolescence, commonly between 12 and 13 years of age (24.3%), indicating that uptake begins well before the upper bound of the target age group.

Indicators of nicotine dependence were present among current users. In 2023, 8.4% of students reported occasional and an additional 3.6% reported regular morning cravings for or use of e-cigarettes.

Almost all adolescents in this age group are aware of e-cigarettes: in 2023, 88.2% of students had heard of these products.

2.2.6 Nicotine pouches

Nicotine pouches are a relatively new but increasingly visible nicotine product for Ukrainian adolescents. Although the prevalence was lower for nicotine pouch use than for e-cigarette or HTP use, both experimentation and current use were observed in 2023.

In 2023, 7.0% of students aged 13–15 years reported ever use and 2.9% reported current use of nicotine pouches. The predominant pattern of use was occasional: 97.2% of students reported no use in the previous month, but a small subgroup (0.9%) reported frequent use, including 0.8% who used nicotine pouches daily.

Gender differences were observed: boys were more likely than girls to report both ever and current use, and also more likely to report more frequent patterns of use. Occasional use (1 or 2 days in the past 30 days) was reported by 1.3% of boys and 0.5% of girls, while daily use (over the past 30 days) was reported by 1.2% of boys and 0.3% of girls.

Awareness of nicotine pouches was notable. In 2023, 37.3% of all students aged 13–15 years reported having heard of these products, including 40.7% of boys and 33.7% of girls.

2.2.7 Polyuse as a driving factor for TNP use

Polyuse has emerged as an increasingly important feature of adolescent nicotine exposure. In this report, polyuse was assessed as a composite indicator based on current use of four product categories consistently measured across survey rounds (cigarettes, other smoked tobacco products, smokeless tobacco and e-cigarettes), with a count variable used to capture the number of product types used by each adolescent.

In 2023 most adolescents aged 13–15 years reported no current use of TNPs (78.6%; Table 2). However, among those who reported current use, concurrent use of multiple products was common. The percentage of adolescents who reported using only one product declined from 15.8% in 2017 to 11.2% in 2023, whereas the percentage who reported using two products remained relatively stable (4.4% in 2017 vs 5.3% in 2023). Over the same period, polyuse of three or four products increased substantially. The percentage of adolescents who reported using three or four product types increased from 2.4% in 2017 to 4.9% in 2023.

Table 2. Current TNP use among adolescents aged 13–15 years in Ukraine, 2017 and 2023

Number of products used[a]	Weighted prevalence			
	2017 (*n* = 3040)		2023 (*n* = 3316)	
	n	% (95% CI)[b]	*n*	% (95% CI)[b]
None	2 152	77.4 (73.5–80.9)	2 185	78.6 (75.0–81.9)
One product	372	15.8* (13.4–18.4)	296	11.2* (9.8–12.9)
Two products	104	4.4 (2.9–6.6)	142	5.3 (4.2–6.6)
Polyuse: three or four products	60	2.4** (1.6–3.7)	129	4.9** (3.4–7.0)

CI: confidence interval; GYTS: Global Youth Tobacco Survey; TNP: tobacco and nicotine product; *: $P = 0.003$; **: $P = 0.019$.

Notes: trends were assessed using multinomial logistic regression based on pooled GYTS data from 2017 and 2023, accounting for the complex survey design (rescaled weights, primary sampling units and strata). The design-adjusted joint F-test indicated statistically significant differences in the distribution of current product use between survey years ($P = 0.002$).

[a] Observations with missing data for at least one TNP category were excluded from the calculation of the total number of products used. Four product groups (cigarettes, other smoked tobacco products, smokeless tobacco and e-cigarettes) assessed consistently in both 2017 and 2023 were used for comparisons of prevalence between survey rounds.

[b] Percentages and 95% CIs are based on cross-sectional annual analyses rather than on estimates derived from the pooled GYTS data used for statistical comparison between survey rounds (2017 and 2023). Annual prevalence estimates are presented owing to the use of descriptive data and the report's focus on year-specific prevalence.

Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey data for 2017 and 2023.

When the minimum counts of products used were considered, a similar pattern emerged. The percentage of adolescents reporting the use of at least two product types increased from 5.4% in 2017 to 6.4% in 2023, and of three to four products from 2.5% in 2017 to 4.8% in 2023. In 2023, 6.5% reported using three to five TNPs.

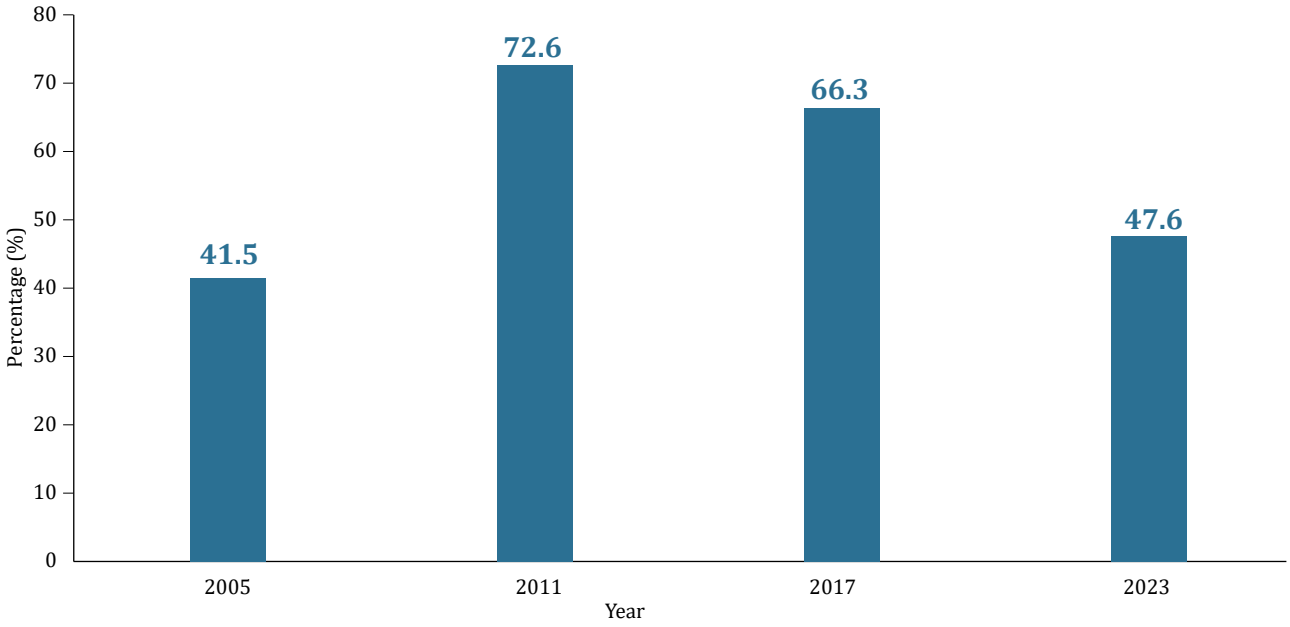
2.3 Knowledge, attitudes and perceptions

Adolescents' knowledge of tobacco-related harms and their attitudes towards smoking and regulation provide an important context for understanding their tobacco use patterns. The findings presented in this section are based on descriptive comparisons across survey rounds.

Perceptions about smoking in social contexts have remained relatively stable in recent years. In 2023, 28.5% of students reported that they thought smoking helps people to feel more comfortable at celebrations, parties and social gatherings (similar to the value of 27.5% in 2017). Percentages were nearly identical for boys (28.7%) and girls (28.3%).

The percentage of students who perceive second-hand tobacco smoke as harmful has varied over time. In 2005, 41.5% of students aged 13–15 years definitely thought that other people's tobacco smoking is harmful to them. This percentage increased markedly to 72.6% in 2011, declined to 66.3% in 2017 and further declined to 47.6% in 2023. Thus, the proportion who perceived second-hand tobacco smoke as definitely harmful was 25 percentage points lower in 2023 than in 2011 (Fig. 3). In 2023 similar percentages of boys (48.4%) and girls (46.6%) reported perceiving second-hand tobacco smoke as definitely harmful.

Fig. 3. Percentage of Ukrainian adolescents aged 13–15 years who consider that other people's tobacco smoking is definitely harmful to them, 2005–2023



Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey data for 2005–2023.

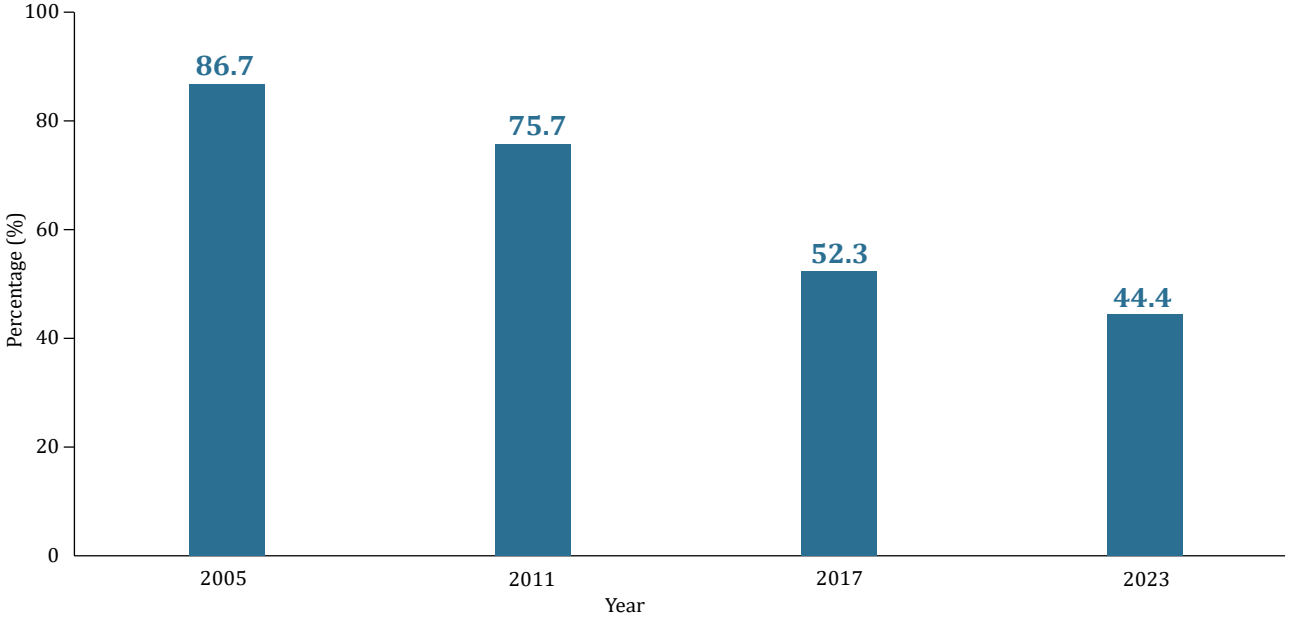
GYTS: Global Youth Tobacco Survey.

Support for smoke-free policies remains high but has varied over time. In 2005, 83.2% of students favoured banning smoking inside enclosed public places. The level of support increased to 86.6% in 2011, declined to 70.4% in 2017 and rose again to 81.8% in 2023. In 2023 support for the ban was slightly higher among girls (83.1%) than boys (80.5%). The degree of support for banning smoking in outdoor public places was first measured in 2017, when 51.2% favoured such bans. By 2023, the percentage had increased to 70.1%, representing 72.2% of boys and 68.5% of girls.

Cessation-related attitudes among current tobacco smokers appear to have weakened over time. In 2005, 74.5% of current cigarette smokers reported wanting to stop smoking; the percentage declined to 70.9% in 2011, 62.3% in 2017 and 47.1% in 2023. Similarly, the proportion who reported trying to stop smoking in the past 12 months declined from 82.1% in 2005 to 79.9% in 2011, 64.0% in 2017 and 49.7% in 2023. Although 78.7% of current tobacco smokers in 2023 believed they would be able to stop smoking if they wanted to, only 18.4% reported receiving help or advice from a cessation programme or professional. This represents an increase from 11.1% in 2017 but still indicates a limited use of formal support.

Exposure to school-based education on the dangers of tobacco use has declined across survey rounds. In 2005, 86.7% of students reported being taught about the dangers of tobacco use in school during the past 12 months (Fig. 4). This proportion declined to 75.7% in 2011, 52.3% in 2017 and 44.4% in 2023. This represents a drop of more than 40 percentage points of reported coverage between 2005 and 2023. In 2023 education coverage was similar among boys (45.4%) and girls (43.4%).

Fig. 4. Percentage of Ukrainian adolescents aged 13–15 years who had been taught about the dangers of tobacco use in school in the past 12 months, 2005–2023



Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey data for 2005–2023.

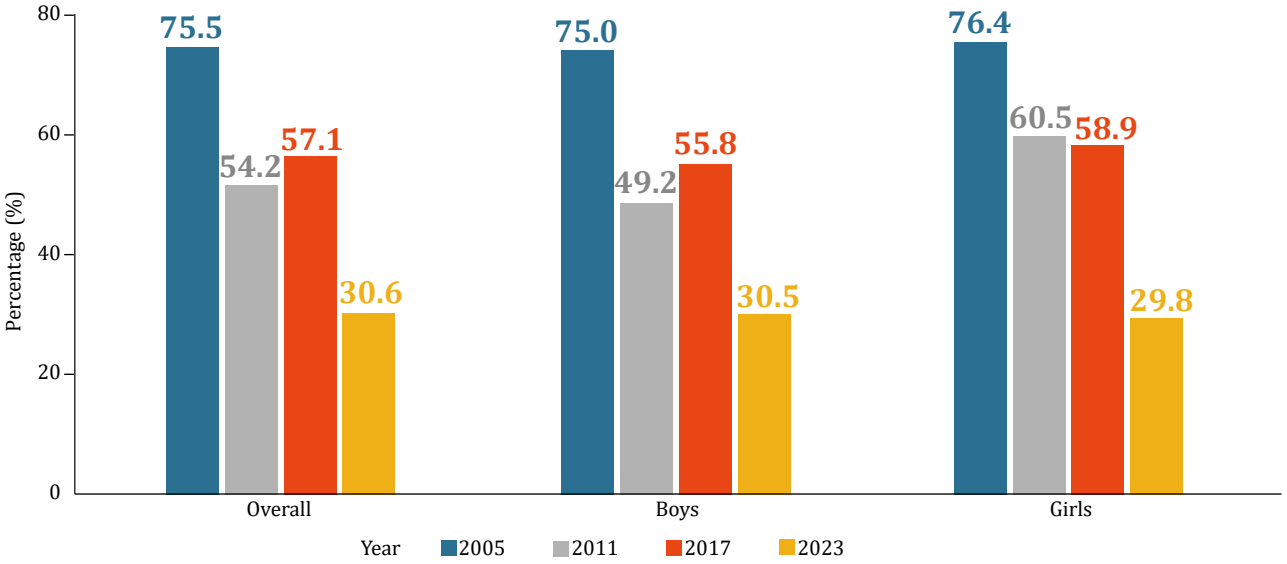
2.4 Access, affordability and marketing

Availability, affordability and marketing shape how adolescents initiate and continue TNP use. National GYTS data show that direct retail access to cigarettes among adolescents has declined since 2005, whereas social sources and indirect exposure through marketing, digital media and points of sale remain common. Over the same period, exposure to prevention messages has decreased, particularly in school and community settings.

Among current cigarette smokers, direct retail purchasing has declined markedly. In 2005, 75.5% reported buying cigarettes from a store (Fig. 5). This proportion decreased to 54.2% in 2011 and increased slightly to 57.1% in 2017, before declining further to 30.6% in 2023. The proportion of current cigarette smokers reporting that they had not been prevented from

buying cigarettes because of their age declined from 64.1% in 2005 to 55.7% in 2011 and 46.3% in 2017, before increasing slightly to 47.3% in 2023.

Fig. 5. Percentage of current cigarettes smokers who had bought cigarettes from an outlet by gender, 2005-2023

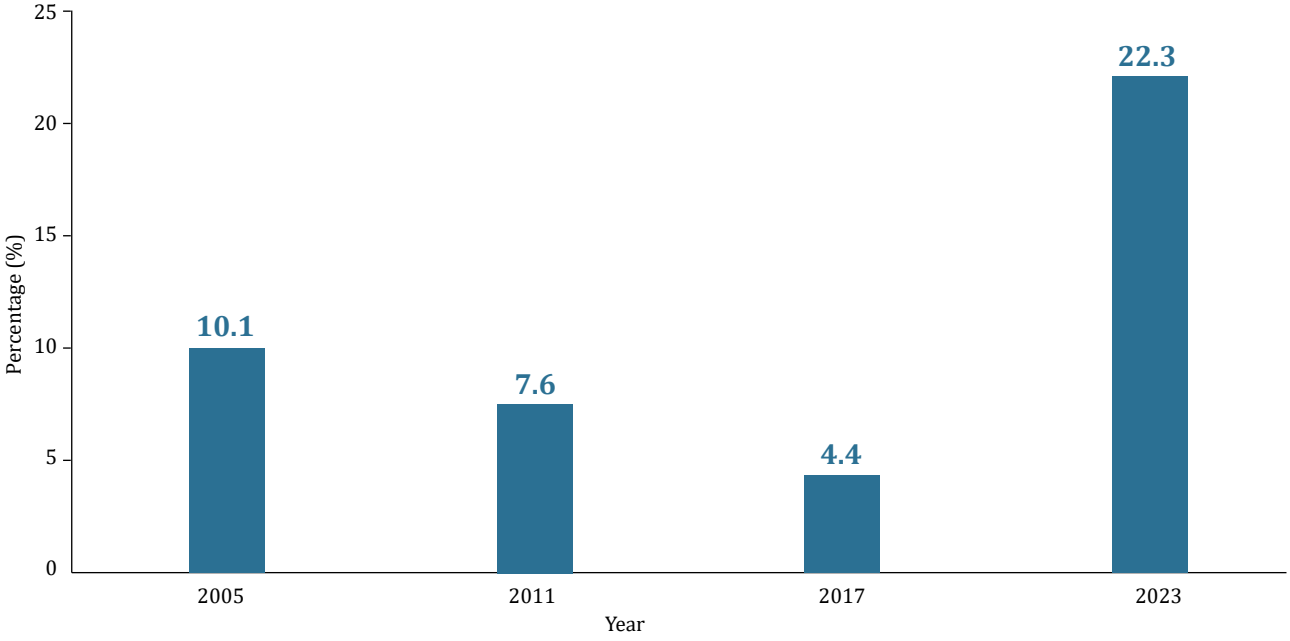


Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey data for 2005–2023.

The purchase of individual cigarette sticks (a marker of affordability and informal access) was reported by 18.8% of current smokers in 2017 and 17.5% in 2023.

Reports of being offered free tobacco products declined between 2005 and 2017 but increased markedly in 2023. In 2005, 10.1% of students reported being offered free tobacco products. The percentage declined to 7.6% in 2011 and 4.4% in 2017. In 2023 this rose to 22.3% in 2023 (Fig. 6), representing 23.6% of boys and 20.9% of girls.

Fig. 6. Percentage of Ukrainian adolescents aged 13–15 years who had been offered free tobacco products, 2005–2023

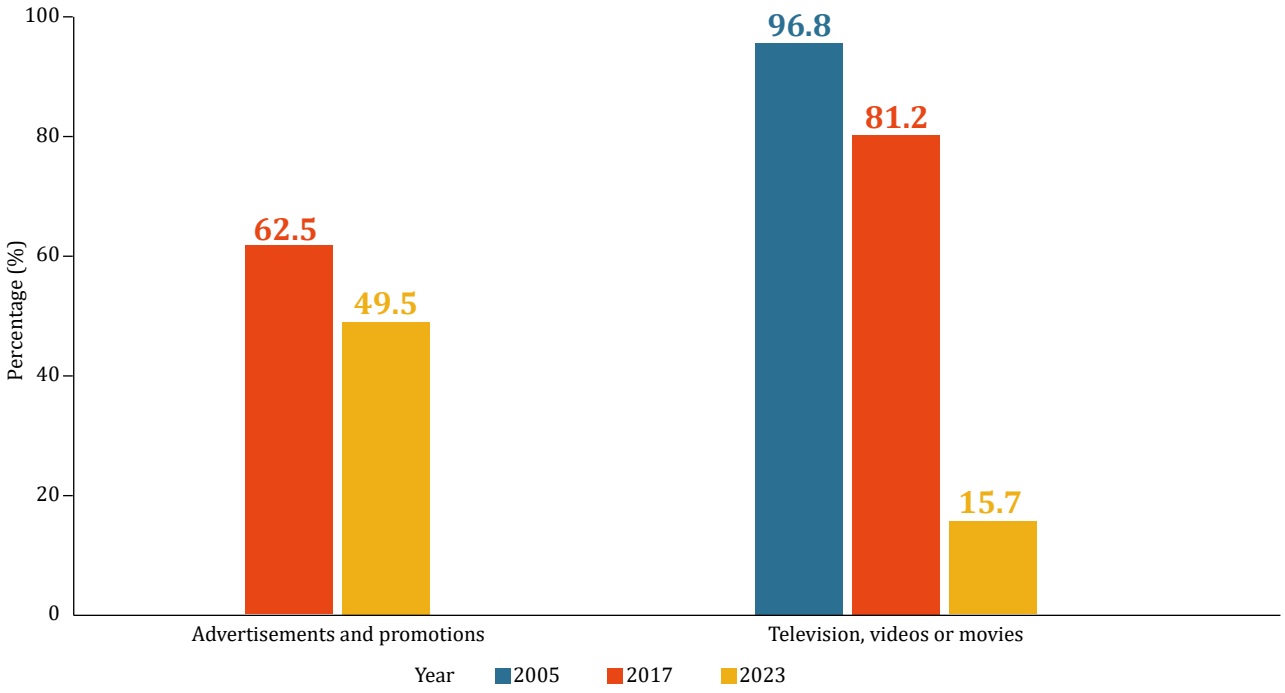


Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey data for 2005–2023.

Ownership of items with a tobacco brand logo has declined substantially since 2005, when 26.0% of students reported owning such items. This proportion decreased to 19.2% in 2011 and 7.8% in 2017, and remained relatively low at 8.3% in 2023.

Exposure to tobacco advertising at points of sale was reported by 62.5% of students in 2017 and 49.5% in 2023 (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7. Percentage of students who had noticed tobacco advertisements or promotions at points of sale or anyone using tobacco on television, videos or movies, 2005–2023



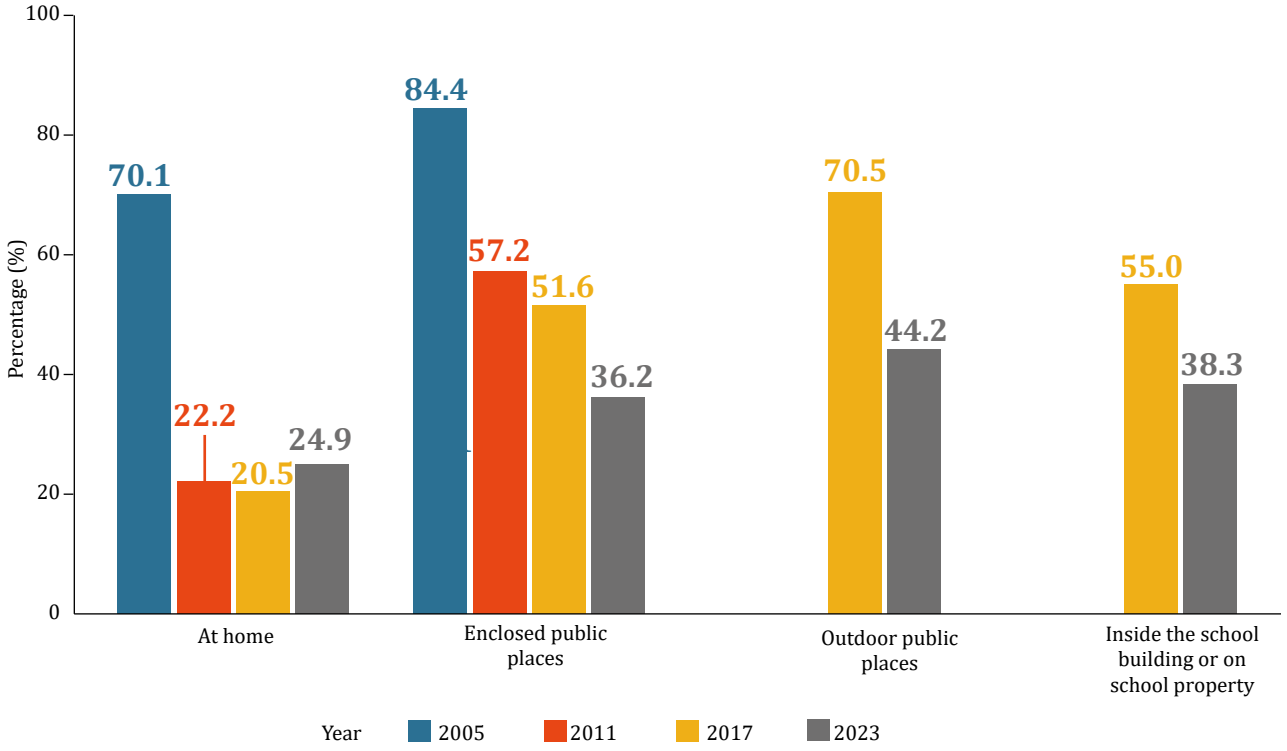
Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey data for 2005–2023.

Exposure to tobacco use in television, videos or movies has changed between 2005 and 2023. The percentage of students who reported noticing tobacco use in these media in the past 30 days was 96.8% in 2005, 81.2% in 2017 and 15.7% in 2023. Exposure to anti-tobacco messages has fluctuated. The percentage of students who reported seeing anti-tobacco messages in the media was 97.0% in 2005, 49.1% in 2017 and 61.9% in 2023. This indicator was not measured in 2011. The prevalence of exposure to anti-tobacco messages at sporting or community events declined from 64.2% in 2005 to 42.0% in 2017 and 38.3% in 2023.

2.5 Second-hand smoke exposure

Second-hand smoke remains a common source of involuntary toxicant exposure for adolescents in Ukraine, although exposure levels have declined since 2005 (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8. Exposure of Ukrainian adolescents to second-hand smoke, 2005–2023



Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey data for 2005–2023.

Exposure to tobacco smoke at home declined sharply between 2005 and 2011 and since then has remained lower than the 2005 level. In 2005, 70.1% of students reported exposure at home in the past 7 days. The exposure level declined to 22.2% in 2011 and 20.5% in 2017, and increased slightly to 24.9% in 2023.

Exposure to tobacco smoke in enclosed public places has decreased steadily across the survey rounds. In 2005, 84.4% of students reported being exposed to tobacco smoke in enclosed public places during the past 7 days. This proportion declined to 57.2% in 2011, 51.6% in 2017 and 36.2% in 2023.

Exposure to tobacco smoke in outdoor public places was first measured in 2017, when 70.5% of students reported being exposed. In 2023, 44.2% reported being exposed to tobacco smoke in outdoor public places during the past 7 days.

The percentage of students who reported seeing someone smoking inside the school building or on school property was 55.0% of students in 2017 and 38.3% in 2023. Although this represents a notable decline, more than one third of students in 2023 still reported that they had seen someone smoking in the school environment.

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3. Discussion and key policy implications

The 2023 GYTS confirms that Ukraine has achieved substantial and sustained progress in reducing adolescent cigarette smoking over the past two decades. However, it also documents a rapidly evolving nicotine landscape characterized by the diversification of products, shifting initiation pathways and emerging risks that are not fully addressed by existing tobacco control approaches. These findings highlight that earlier public health gains have been sustained but are becoming more vulnerable in the context of newer products, digital environments and wartime disruption.

3.1 Interpretation of findings

3.1.1 Sustained gains in cigarette control

Between 2005 and 2023, current cigarette smoking among adolescents aged 13–15 years declined from 24.0% to 12.3% and ever smoking from 57.5% to 34.6%. These reductions are consistent with the cumulative impact of measures implemented over the past two decades aligned to the WHO FCTC, including excise taxation, smoke-free legislation, advertising and

promotion bans, pictorial health warnings, and the broader denormalization of cigarette smoking. Although current smoking increased slightly between 2017 and 2023, the prevalence remains approximately half of the 2005 level, indicating that core tobacco control policies continue to generate long-term benefits.

3.1.2 Diversification and polyuse of TNPs

Although cigarette smoking has declined, overall nicotine product use has not diminished proportionately. E-cigarettes are now the most commonly used nicotine product among adolescents (current use: 19.6%), exceeding cigarettes (12.3%), HTPs (6.9%), smokeless tobacco (5.1%) and nicotine pouches (2.9%). Nearly one in five adolescents reported the current use of any tobacco product excluding e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches. When all nicotine product categories are considered together, the patterns of use increasingly involve multiple product types. The data indicate a shift away from cigarette-centred initiation pathways towards diversified and overlapping nicotine trajectories. Multiproduct experimentation and concurrent use (polyuse) increase the cumulative nicotine intake and may complicate cessation efforts.

3.1.3 Regulatory lag and enforcement gaps

The expansion of new nicotine products has outpaced regulatory adaptation. Restrictions on e-cigarette sales and marketing were introduced only recently, and nicotine pouches are only partially regulated. Enforcement challenges, particularly for online sales and digital promotion, are likely to have contributed to access and high awareness levels for young people (87.6% for e-cigarettes, 43.4% for HTPs). The sharp increase in free product offers reported in 2023 signals continuing promotional exposure.

3.1.4 Weakened and uneven harm perception

Although support for smoke-free policies remains high, the proportion of adolescents who perceive that second-hand smoke causes definite harm has declined substantially from 2011 levels. Misperceptions regarding newer products are more pronounced. The lower perceived risk of e-cigarettes and second-hand aerosol, combined with flavoured products and discreet designs, may facilitate experimentation and progression to regular use. The persistent belief that smoking enhances social comfort (28.5%) indicates ongoing normalization pressures.

3.1.5 Emerging indicators of nicotine dependence

Daily e-cigarette use (4.4%) and morning cravings or use (11.8% combined occasional and regular) indicate emerging nicotine dependence among a subset of adolescents. Although daily use remains less common than experimentation, the presence of dependence markers among young people who use e-cigarettes underscores the risk of sustained nicotine addiction into adulthood.

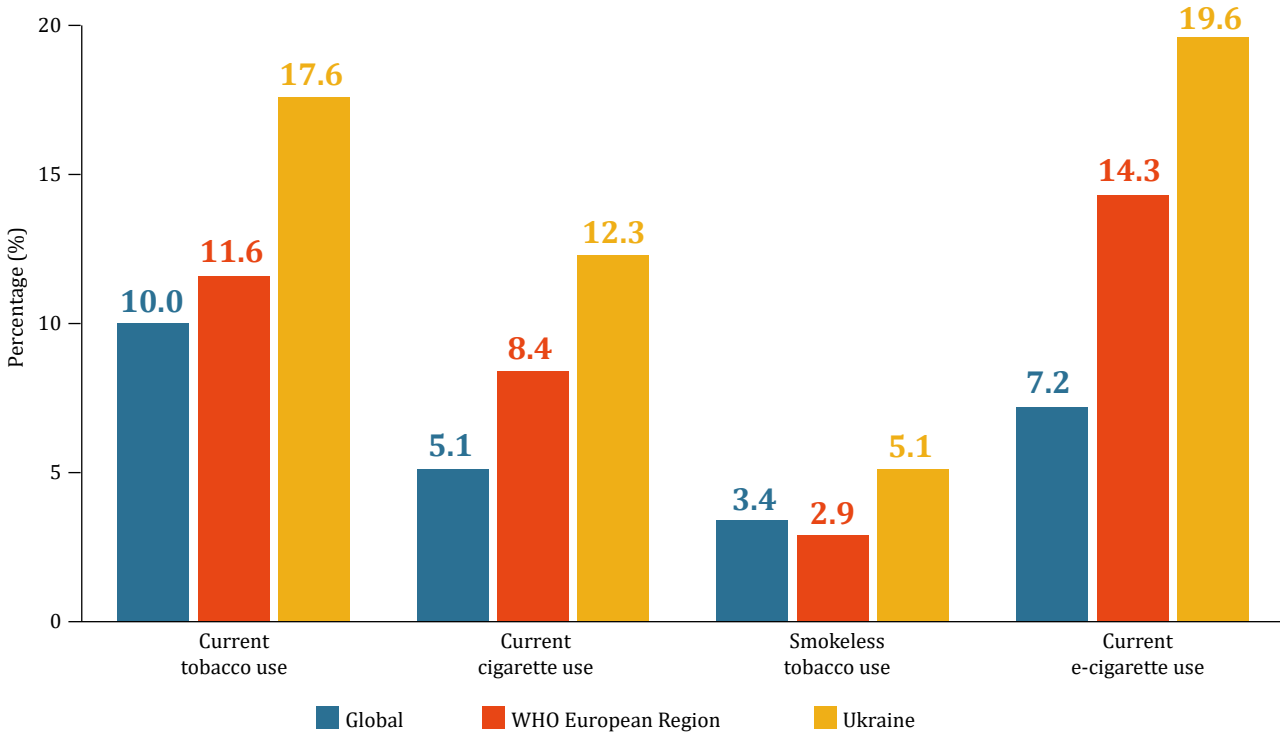
3.1.6 Wartime vulnerability

The 2023 GYTS was conducted under wartime conditions characterized by displacement, psychosocial stress, hybrid schooling and increased digital reliance. These contextual factors may have heightened exposure to online marketing while weakening the delivery and enforcement of prevention measures. Although wartime conditions do not fully explain the observed patterns, they probably intensified vulnerabilities and should be considered in policy responses.

3.2 Ukraine in the context of the WHO European Region[2]

Adolescent tobacco use in the WHO European Region, remains the highest globally *(6)*. The Region reports both the highest overall tobacco use prevalence and the highest cigarette smoking prevalence among adolescents aged 13–15 years. In this context, Ukraine shows a mixed pattern of convergence and divergence in adolescent TNP use, depending on the product type and age group. While long-term trends in cigarette smoking in Ukraine mirror regional declines, the current prevalences, particularly for cigarettes and newer nicotine products, remain substantially higher than regional averages (Fig. 9) *(6)*.

Fig. 9. Prevalence of TNP product use, globally, WHO European Region and Ukraine



Source: WHO *(6)*.

e-cigarette: electronic cigarette; TNP: tobacco and nicotine product.

[2] For comparability, this section draws on harmonized estimates from the WHO European Region and global datasets using standardised definitions and modelling approaches. Regional and global adolescent comparisons are based on data presented in Skipalskyi et al. *(5)*, which applies consistent age groups, indicators and estimation methods across countries.

3.2.1 Overall tobacco use

Across the WHO European Region, 11.6% of adolescents aged 13–15 years currently use any tobacco product. Despite representing historically low levels for the Region, this remains the highest regional prevalence globally *(6)*.

In Ukraine, 17.6% of adolescents reported the current use of any tobacco product in 2023, substantially exceeding the regional average of 11.6%. This gap of approximately 6 percentage points indicates that, despite long-term declines in cigarette smoking, overall tobacco use among Ukrainian adolescents remains higher than the regional benchmark.

3.2.2 Cigarette smoking: convergence in direction, divergence in level

The WHO European Region reports 8.4% current cigarette smoking among adolescents aged 13–15 years (boys: 8.2%; girls: 8.7%). Despite representing a long-term decline, this remains the highest regional cigarette prevalence globally *(6)*.

Ukraine is following a similar downward trajectory in adolescent cigarette smoking over time. However, the 2023 prevalence of current cigarette smoking among Ukrainian adolescents of 12.3% (boys: 14.0%; girls: 10.6%) is notably higher than the regional average of 8.4%.

Thus, Ukraine is converging with the Region in terms of long-term reduction trends, but not yet in absolute prevalence. Cigarette smoking among Ukrainian adolescents remains substantially above the regional average.

3.2.3 New and emerging nicotine products: divergence from regional averages

Divergence from patterns in the WHO European Region is more pronounced for new nicotine products, particularly e-cigarettes. The Region has one of the highest levels of adolescent e-cigarette use globally: 14.3% of adolescents aged 13–15 years currently use e-cigarettes (boys: 13.6%; girls: 15.0%), compared with the global average of 7.2% *(6)*.

However, Ukraine exceeds this high regional baseline. In 2023 nearly one in five adolescents reported current e-cigarette use (boys: 18.4%; girls 20.7%). This places Ukraine above the regional average and among the higher-prevalence countries in the Region.

Similarly, smokeless tobacco use averages 2.9% among adolescents (boys: 3.4%; girls: 2.3%) in the Region, whereas Ukraine reports 5.1% (boys: 6.8%; girls: 3.5%), again exceeding the regional benchmark. While the prevalence of smokeless tobacco use among adults remains low in the Region (1.2%), its higher prevalence among adolescents indicates the ongoing diversification of nicotine product use pathways.

A comparable age gradient is observed for e-cigarettes. Across the Region, the prevalence of e-cigarette use is several times higher in adolescents than in adults; this pattern is also evident in Ukraine. This finding underscores the youth-specific nature of the emerging nicotine market and highlights the disproportionate impact of new and emerging products on younger populations.

3.2.4 Product diversification and multiproduct exposure

Ukraine's divergence within the WHO European Region is also reflected in broader product diversification. In 2023 Ukrainian adolescents reported higher prevalences than the regional averages for the use of cigarettes (12.3% vs 8.4%), e-cigarettes (19.6% vs 14.3%) and smokeless tobacco (5.1% vs 2.9%) *(6)*.

This pattern indicates not only an elevated use of individual products but also the existence of multiple nicotine product use pathways. The coexistence of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, HTP, smokeless tobacco and nicotine pouches creates multiple entry points into nicotine use and increases the likelihood of experimentation across product types.

Given that the Region already has the highest adolescent tobacco use globally, Ukraine's higher use levels across several categories underscore the need for comprehensive, youth-focused regulatory measures to reduce total nicotine exposure and prevent substitution between products.

3.3 Implications for youth-focused tobacco and nicotine control policies

Ukraine's tobacco control strategy has achieved substantial progress over the past two decades, including strengthened legislation aligned with the WHO FCTC and a sustained upward trajectory in tobacco taxation and pricing. These measures have contributed to marked declines in adolescent cigarette smoking. However, the rapid diversification of nicotine products requires continued adaptation of the regulatory framework to ensure comprehensive protection for young people.

A coherent approach covering the full range of TNPs is essential. Consistent regulation across product categories, including harmonized taxation, restrictions on flavouring agents, standardized packaging and presentation requirements, comprehensive advertising and promotion bans, and an extension of smoke-free protections to all nicotine products, is critical to prevent substitution between products and to close the remaining regulatory gaps.

Stronger enforcement is particularly needed in online and social markets, where age-of-sale restrictions are more difficult to monitor. During the period of martial law, state supervision and inspections have been largely suspended, which has complicated the enforcement of existing tobacco control legislation. As inspection mechanisms resume, reinforcing compliance monitoring in both retail and digital environments will be essential.

Prevention strategies must also reflect the realities of a multiproduct nicotine environment. Declining exposure to school-based education underscores the need to revitalize early prevention initiatives and address persistent misperceptions about harm, including the risks associated with second-hand aerosol. Emerging indicators of nicotine dependence further highlight the importance of expanding youth-focused cessation support, including accessible digital tools and school-based interventions. Continued surveillance, legislative refinement and responsive policy adaptation will remain critical to sustaining progress in a rapidly evolving market environment.

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4. Conclusions

Over the past two decades, Ukraine has achieved substantial and sustained reductions in adolescent cigarette smoking, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of comprehensive, evidence-informed tobacco control policies aligned with the WHO FCTC *(1)*. Strengthened legislation, progressive increases in tobacco taxation and pricing, advertising restrictions, and smoke-free policies have collectively contributed to these public health gains *(7,8)*.

However, the 2023 GYTS revealed a fundamental shift in adolescent nicotine use exposure. While cigarette smoking has declined, overall nicotine exposure remains substantial with the expansion of e-cigarettes, HTPs and nicotine pouches. For many adolescents, these products represent an entry point into nicotine use that often occurs at younger ages and frequently involves concurrent use of multiple product types.

Persistent misperceptions about the harms of newer nicotine products, especially e-cigarettes and second-hand aerosol, continue to undermine prevention efforts. The relatively high prevalence of current e-cigarette use (19.6%), together with reported indicators of morning cravings or use (11.8% combined), suggests a risk of sustained nicotine dependence among a subset of adolescents. Declining coverage of school-based prevention education further weakens protective factors during a critical developmental period.

Wartime conditions have added complexity to this evolving landscape. Population displacement, disrupted schooling, psychosocial stress and increased reliance on digital environments may have intensified young people's exposure to nicotine products. At the same time, the temporary suspension of routine state supervision and inspections under martial law has limited enforcement capacity, despite the existence of strengthened legislation.

Looking forward, sustained progress will require continued strengthening and refinement of Ukraine's tobacco and nicotine control framework. This includes maintaining the upward trajectory of tobacco taxation, ensuring effective enforcement as inspection systems are restored, and further legislative amendments to comprehensively regulate e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches, other emerging product categories and visible product display at points of sale.

A fully integrated, youth-focused strategy is essential to sustain progress. This includes applying consistent regulatory standards across all TNPs, strengthening retail and online enforcement, revitalizing school-based prevention, protecting adolescents from both second-hand smoke and aerosol exposure, and expanding accessible cessation support. Continued surveillance and evidence-informed policy adaptation will be critical to ensure that emerging nicotine products do not erode hard-won public health gains among Ukrainian adolescents.

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[3] All references were accessed on 23 March 2026.

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