

Women, tobacco and human rights in France

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Smoking among women in France has been rising since the 1970s, and even though their smoking prevalence is lower than that of men, it now affects a significant proportion of the population of women and girls in France. More than one in five women aged 18–75 years smokes daily, and an additional 6% are occasional users¹. By the age of 17 years, nearly one in four girls has fallen into daily addiction². The proportion of women who continue to smoke during pregnancy (more than 16%) is also a good indicator of the scale of the epidemic³. France has one of the highest female smoking rates in the world; this is an obstacle for France, vis-à-vis a number of international commitments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as well as a violation of a number of human rights treaties that France has ratified.

The health effects are multiple in terms of morbidity and mortality. They include the risks associated with tobacco use regardless of gender, as well as risks specific to women. Certain age groups (50–74 years) are now more affected by lung cancer mortality than by breast cancer⁴. Other social, financial and even environmental damages are also more pronounced for women than for men.

This situation is the direct result of massive marketing campaigns deployed in France by tobacco manufacturers who have targeted women to encourage them to consume tobacco and dissuade them from stopping. These campaigns include new products designed for women, dedicated packaging, development of aromas, certain products being presented as being less toxic, promotional operations, development of specific advertising imagery, misappropriation of values associated with the assertion of women's rights, etc. Despite the many condemnations, tobacco companies continue to target women and girls.

The targeting of women by the tobacco industry violates their fundamental rights. Smoking has a negative impact on a number of human rights, including the right to life, the right to health, and in particular, the rights of children and women. Tobacco results, on average, in a loss of 10 to 15 years of quality life expectancy and kills one in two regular consumers when used as intended. Tobacco creates a major addiction that inhibits an individual's free will and results in difficulty in quitting smoking.

Reducing smoking, in particular female smoking, is an obligation of France by virtue of its international commitments. In recent years, France has embarked on an active and proactive tobacco control policy resulting in a reduction in consumption, particularly among women and young people. However, many tobacco control measures are not adequately implemented and the current tobacco control program therefore needs to be fully implemented, continued, and strengthened. The following measures should be executed by the French public authorities in order to meet their protection obligations:

- Monitor and improve the effectiveness of certain measures such as the ban on the sale of tobacco products to minors, protection against exposure to passive

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- smoking, behavioral smoking placements in cultural events, improvement of the healthcare cover for comprehensive treatment of tobacco dependence;
- Harmonize existing legislation on taxation, ingredients, and packaging, to avoid practices of circumvention and transfer of consumption;
 - Pursue a general tobacco control strategy including a component focused on female smoking; and
 - Implement new measures that will help to decrease smoking prevalence and allow France to become a country where women who will be 18 years of age in 2030 will be ‘the first tobacco-free generation in recent history’, as stated by President Macron on 4 February 2021.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

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