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Implementation of Smoking Ban in Greece

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Key points

Passive smoking is a very serious issue, which provokes hundreds of thousands of deaths every year all over the world. Despite the measures that have been taken at a European level, which urge the member states of the European Union to prohibit smoking in enclosed public places, the laws that have been enacted in Greece in order to deal with the problem are not implemented. The consequences of this fact are the inevitable burden on the health of non-smokers, the existence of an imminent risk to the lives of vulnerable groups, as well as the non-respect of the non-smokers rights to a clean atmosphere in the areas they act. For the better implementation of the anti-smoking legislation in Greece, this policy brief suggests: intensification of controls in stores and workplaces, increasing of the personnel which carries out the checks, better cooperation between competent bodies to implement the measures, organization of information campaigns on passive smoking in media, as well as in schools and universities and threat of stricter sanctions and their surefire implementation in the event of an infringement.

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Introduction

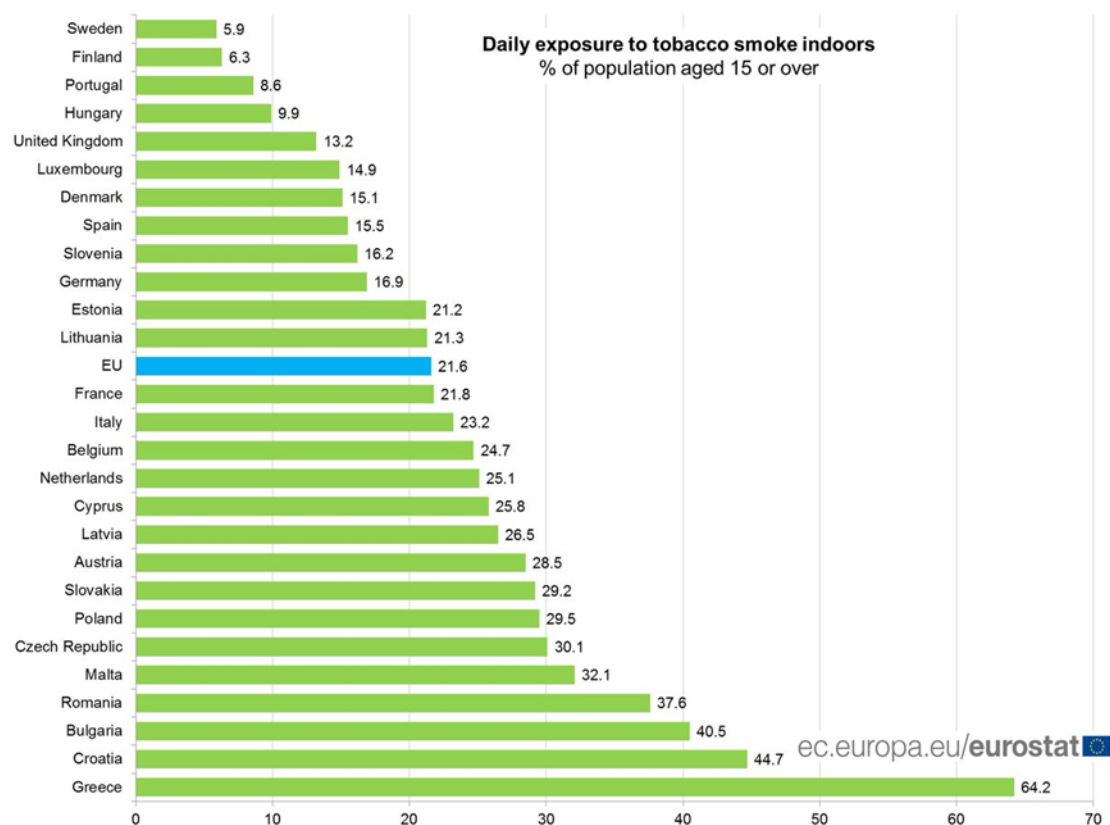
It is well known that passive smoking is a serious issue which concerns our society, in other words “the inhalation of tobacco from the cigarettes that other people smoke around us” (Behrakis, 2018). The victims of passive smoking each year amount to 600,000 people, many of whom are children¹. Unfortunately, on this issue, Greece has a long way to go, having a sad first, since in 2014 was the first among the European Union countries on the daily exposure to tobacco smoke indoors. In fact, its difference with the

¹ BEHRAKIS, Panagiotis, Smoking in Greece today, Institute of Public Health, Patra, 2018, page 17



other EU countries was remarkable, since the 64.2% of its population was daily passive smoker, while the same rate for Croatia in second place amounted to 44.7%².

The reduction of the passive smoking is a very important issue, which concerns every citizen of a country, because it affects directly their everyday lives and their lives in general. Non-smokers have the right to a clean atmosphere in the places they may be in and to not burden their health despite their will. On the other hand, smokers must respect this non-smoker right. In recent decades, a number of measures have been taken at a european level in order to reduce and eliminate passive smoking in enclosed spaces. Nevertheless, despite their assimilation with Greek national law and the existence of relevant laws, these laws are often not applied in practice.



(Eurostat, 2014)

² EUROSTAT, News Release 3-07122016-AP, 2016, page 3



Analysis

The effort for the reduction of passive smoking at a European level is thought to have started in 1989, when the Council of Health Ministers of the EU member states adopted a resolution on a ban on smoking in public places. The ban was related to buildings related to health, education, sports facilities, entertainment venues, services provided and goods sold to the public, waiting areas for public transportation, and the means of transportation themselves. The resolution also called on EU member states to create in the abovementioned areas spaces especially for smokers, so that those who wanted to smoke could be brought together there. Furthermore, after consultation followed the recommendations of the EU Council in 2002 and 2009, which called on member states to protect their citizens from passive smoking and to prohibit smoking in enclosed public places, in the means of transportation and in any other place needed, while in 2007 the European Commission adopted the green paper “Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke: policy options at EU level”, in which among other things the advantages and disadvantages of the measures that could be taken were analyzed.

At a national level, in Greece the first law on the smoking ban was in force in 1856 and it was about the enclosed workplaces. Many laws followed in 1952, 1979, 1980, 1990, 1993, which partially prohibited smoking in some enclosed places. In 2002 the first Greek law, which banned smoking in a complete set of public enclosed places was introduced. The ban included public and private buildings which provided services, buildings related to health and education, the means of transportation and waiting areas for certain means of transportation, as well as stores and entertainment venues. In many of the abovementioned areas was allowed the existence of defined areas for smokers with the simultaneous existence of ventilation system. At the end of 2008, another law was introduced, which banned smoking in a wide range of areas, such as workplaces, stores of health interest, enclosed waiting areas, public transportation, canteens and stations. Also, in many of them, there was provision for the existence of defined areas for smokers, which would have a special ventilation system. Finally, additional measures were taken in 2009, 2011, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Although there are many laws and measures that protect non-smokers from passive smoking, these laws are often not implemented in Greece, as a result of many factors. There are shortcomings in officials who carry out controls, checks are not as often as they should be and there is a misguided mentality of a large proportion of citizens and shopkeepers about the ban on smoking indoors, fact that reflects a lack of education and proper information around this matter. The result is that a large percentage of stores do not take seriously into account possible sanctions and allow smoking indoors, without separation of areas for smokers and non-smokers. In addition, citizens themselves still smoke in areas that this is not allowed, endangering the health of their fellow citizens



who are not smokers and violating their right to a clean atmosphere in the areas they co-exist.

One reason why the shop owners do not implement the ban on smoking is that they fear a reduction of their clientele. Moreover, reactions in case of more effective implementation of the anti-smoking legislation, may arise from the tobacco industry, as long as the restriction of the areas that smoking is allowed may in the future lead to a reduction of the smokers. However, the possibility of smokers areas in shops and generally in places that smoking is not allowed reduces such concerns. As far as employers are concerned, they will benefit from the implementation of the anti-smoking measures because there will be fewer absences of employees due to illnesses associated with tobacco. As far as employees are concerned, they will not be forced to leave the work premises in order to smoke, since there will be the possibility of creating a smoker area inside the building.

Recommendations

- In order to persuade the shop owners that are mentioned in the anti-smoking laws that they must not allow smoking inside their shop, the controls should be intensified, unpredictable and fines should be imposed on the offenders in practice. In this way, shopkeepers will realize that it is more of their interest to apply what the legislation defines about smoking tobacco, rather than defying it.

- In order to intensify the checks, the number of employees charged with this work, which has been significantly reduced in recent years due to economic problems, should be increased.

- There should be better cooperation between the competent bodies for the enforcement of anti-smoking measures and their immediate mobilization when they receive complaints of such violations.

- Apart from these direct measures, it is necessary to create a measure that will attempt to change the mentality of the citizens and instill them the idea of respecting the right of their fellow citizens to health and quality of life. So, informative campaigns should be organized through the media, but also in schools and universities, voluntary actions and interactive activities to make young people, in particular, aware of the importance of the project. Also, the informative campaigns it is possible to promote the reduction of future smokers.

- Finally, through education, information and the threat of stricter sanctions and their surefire enforcement in cases of violations, it should be attempted to change the way of thinking of the elder citizens, so as to stop smoking in places that is not allowed.



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