



**IMPACT OF CIGARETTE PRICES ON  
YOUTH SMOKING  
ONSET  
IN MONTENEGRO**

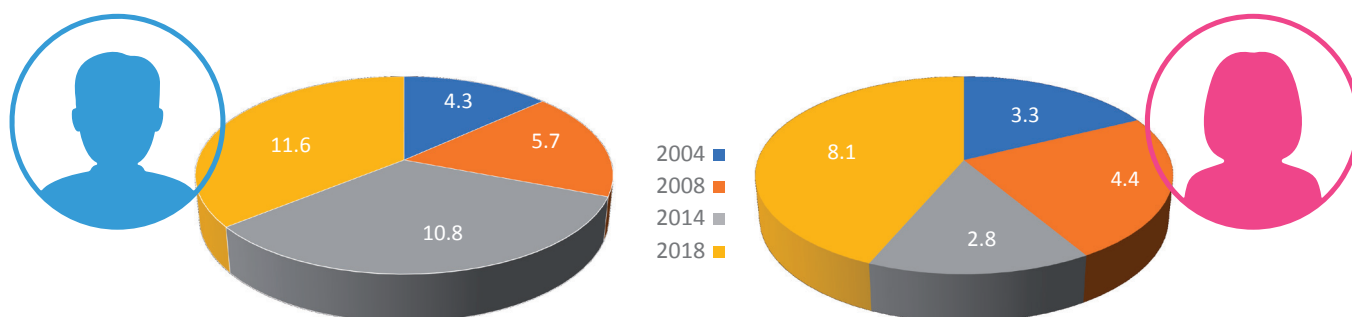
## KEY FINDINGS:

- An increase in cigarette prices through a cigarette excise tax increase would reduce youth smoking experimentation and initiation. An increase in price by 10 percent would reduce probability of youth smoking onset between 2.2 and 3.7 percent. The estimated effect is stronger for females than for males by more than one percentage point.
- Factors including being a male, having parents and peers who smoke, considering smoking as a factor of better social inclusion and acceptance, and being exposed to tobacco advertising are associated with a higher risk of starting to smoke.
- Stricter restrictions on advertising, sponsorship, marketing, sales, promotion of tobacco, and stricter restrictions on tobacco use in public spaces also significantly decrease the chance of youth experimentation and initiation.

### *Young adults initiate smoking at an early age*

Youth tobacco experimentation and initiation remain a significant public health concern, and understanding the risk factors of smoking experimentation and initiation is critical to reducing tobacco use among youth. Relevant data show an increase in youth smoking prevalence in Montenegro from 2008 to 2018. Surveys indicate that not only is high adult smoking prevalence, at 40.7 percent, a significant problem in Montenegro, but the high experimentation and initiation rates at an early age are an even more concerning issue. The two issues are almost certainly related. One in five current smokers tried their first cigarette before age 15. Evidence shows that smoking experimentation or initiation at an early age leads to a higher probability that individuals will become regular smokers. The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) also points to the significance of this issue, as its findings show an increasing trend in youth prevalence in Montenegro.

Figure 1. Prevalence GYTS results, 13-15 years



Despite the high importance of this topic, there is a lack of research focused on this issue in Montenegro. In addition, even though early-age smoking is a central challenge for tobacco control efforts, there is still no study that estimates the importance of different risk factors (including price, peer influence, and parental smoking) on youth smoking onset in Montenegro. Addressing this gap in the research is the main objective of this study assessing the effects of taxes, price and non-price tobacco control policies, regulatory changes, and any other relevant factors on youth smoking experimentation and initiation in Montenegro. The analysis uses the available GYTS database using three waves from 2008, 2014, and 2018, with interviewees aged between 13 and 15 years.

### *Many youth believe that smoking helps them feel more socially accepted*

The data show that 11 years is the average age of smoking initiation, and more than 50 percent of respondents have at least one parent who smokes. The influence of peers represents a socially important factor, as approximately 40 percent of respondents confirmed that some of their peers consume cigarettes. One-third of young people feel "more socially comfortable" when consuming cigarettes. A higher share of male respondents experiment with smoking at an earlier age (age seven) compared to females (55.6 percent of males compared to 44.4 percent of females). This relationship, however, shifts toward females as they get older, as the prevalence of experimentation with smoking is higher for women at 15 years of age (59.2 percent of females compared to 40.8 percent of males).

## What are the main factors of youth smoking initiation?



The price of cigarettes has a significant negative impact on youth smoking experimentation and initiation.

A 10-percent increase in price would reduce the probability of youth starting to smoke between 2.2 and 3.7 percent.



Parental smoking is an important risk factor for youth smoking experimentation and initiation.

Young adults with at least one parent who smokes are at approximately 47-percent higher risk of initiating smoking compared to those whose parents are non-smokers. Price affects adult smoking as well, which also has an indirect effect on youth smoking.



Peer smoking significantly increases the risk of youth smoking experimentation and initiation.

When young adults have at least some friends who smoke, they are 40 percent more likely to initiate smoking. Price typically has the largest effect on youth smoking, so the indirect effect of price is important here, too.



Policies related to tobacco control have a strong effect on reducing smoking onset in young people.

Stricter bans on tobacco selling, advertising, sponsorship, and promotion, as well as on tobacco use in public spaces decrease the chance of experimentation by 13percent.



Considering smoking as a **socially acceptable behavior** increases the probability of youth smoking onset.

Consumption of cigarettes makes a high share of young people feel more comfortable and "accepted" in society, and those boys and girls have approximately 50-percent higher risk of smoking experimentation.



**Girls** smoking experimentation is more affected by price increases compared to **boys**.

An increase in cigarette prices by 10 percent reduces the probability that females will start smoking by 4.3 percent, which is 1.2 percentage points more than in the case of males.



### Recommendations:

- Raise tobacco excise taxes to effectively reduce youth experimentation with or initiation of consuming cigarettes in Montenegro.

*To prevent young people from initiating smoking, the government should increase taxes on tobacco products sufficiently to significantly increase prices. Reducing consumption would improve the level of general health of youth and eventually adults as they would not initiate smoking or would do so much later.*

- Implement mass media campaigns and educational programs to prevent youth smoking initiation and to raise awareness of parents as role models.

*In addition to significantly increasing excise taxes, policy makers should pay attention to non-price factors that encourage experimentation and initiation, bearing in mind that parents, peers, and marketing influence the initiation of young people, and that smoking makes many feel more socially accepted. To this end, government should take measures to promote the negative consequences of cigarette consumption through mass media and educational campaigns.*

- Strictly prohibit advertising, sponsorship, promotion, and the use of tobacco in public spaces, as well as restricting sales (minimum purchase age, number and location of establishments, etc.), to reduce the chances of youth initiation.

*Government should strengthen non-price tobacco control policies and measures to reduce the probability of smoking onset and cigarette consumption among youth. This can be achieved by defining stricter prohibitions to determine policies that would protect youth from tobacco use and promote smoke-free environments. These decisions will foster the reduction of youth smoking onset.*

***The Institute for Socioeconomic Analysis (ISEA) is funded by the University of Illinois Chicago's (UIC) Institute for Health Research and Policy to conduct economic research on tobacco taxation in Montenegro. UIC is a partner of the Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use. The views expressed in this document cannot be attributed to, nor do they represent, the views of UIC, the Institute for Health Research and Policy, or Bloomberg Philanthropies.***

*The authors are grateful for comments from UIC.*

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