



European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention aisbl

Information Release

**SILNE - Tackling socio-economic inequalities in smoking:
learning from natural experiments by time trend analyses and cross-national comparisons**

SILNE

A three-year European project co-ordinated by the University of Amsterdam, Department of Public Health, Academic Medical Centre, the Netherlands

and receiving financial support from the European Commission in the frame of Seventh Framework Programme (grant agreement no. 278273).



A three-year European project co-ordinated by the University of Amsterdam and receiving financial support from the European Commission in the frame of Seventh Framework Programme was launched on 30 and 31 January 2012 in Amsterdam.

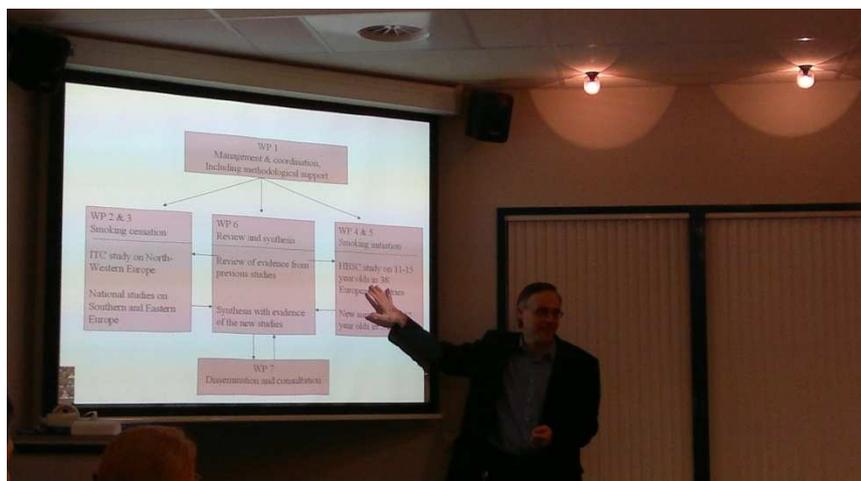
The kick-off meeting gathered representatives of the twelve partner organisations who joined forces to analyze a series of “natural experiments” in Europe in order to generate new empirical evidence to inform strategies to reduce socioeconomic inequalities in smoking:

- Dr Anton Kunst (NL, AMC)
- Prof. Karien Stronks (NL, AMC)
- Mirte Kuipers (NL, AMC)
- Jizzo Bosdriesz (NL, AMC)
- Frank Groen (NL, AMC)
- Gulseren Yalvac (NL, AMC)
- Prof. Marc Willemsen (NL, Unimaas)
- Drs. Gera Nagelhout (NL, Unimaas)
- Prof. Matthias Richter (DE, MLUHalle)
- Prof. Vincent Lorant (BE, UCLouvain)
- Ms Victoria Soto Rojas (BE, UCLouvain)
- Mr Francis Grogna (BE, ENSP)
- Prof. Amanda Amos (UK, UEdinburgh)
- Dr Enrique Regidor (SP, UCMadrid)
- Dr Bruno Federico (IT, UCassino)
- Prof. Jurate Klumbiene (LIT, LitUniv)
- Dr Mall Leinsalu (SW, Scohost)
- Prof. Arja Rimpelä (FI, UTempere)
- Prof. Julian Perelman (POR, UNLisboa)

The objectives for this first meeting of the steering committee were for all the partners to get acquainted and to formally start the project and each of its works packages. Other objectives were to reach agreement on the

structure and contents of the project and its work packages and practical matters such as financial issues, time schedules, advisory board members and authorship/access rules.

The Work Package Leaders presented their work pages. The discussions which followed focused on the management of the project, on the general frame of implementation of the work packages, as well as on methodology questions. The partners fully agreed on the general project design and the specific work plans developed at the workshop.

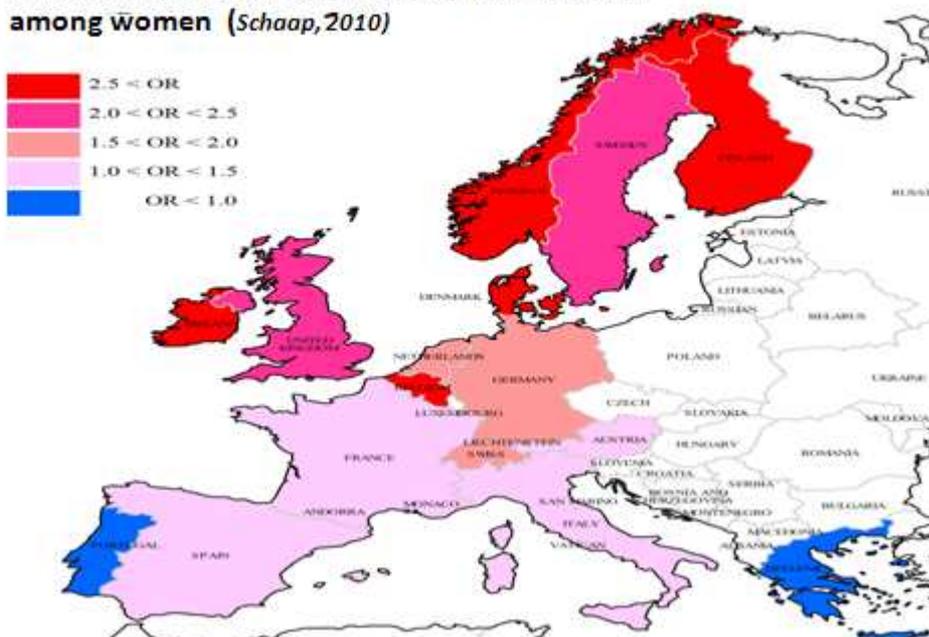




Project background

Within most European populations, smoking prevalence rates differ substantially according to people's educational level, occupational class and income level.

Educational inequalities in smoking prevalence among women (Schaap, 2010)



In northern European countries, smoking inequalities are generally largest, and smoking is the largest single contributor to socioeconomic inequalities in mortality. Large inequalities in smoking are now emerging in all European countries, especially in the youngest generations. Tackling inequalities in smoking is therefore vital to any strategy that is aimed at avoiding a further widening of socioeconomic inequalities in health, and making the narrowing of health inequalities a realistic goal.

Several effective interventions and programs are now available to address smoking in Europe. These include bans on smoking in public places and cessation support services for those wanting to quit. In addition, several supply-side measures are potentially effective, including bans on advertisements, increased tax on tobacco, and restrictions on sales of tobacco products to young people. Most of these measures have been implemented, to a

greater or lesser extent, in different European countries, stimulated by international initiatives such as the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Scientific evaluations of tobacco control policies have provided strong evidence of their effectiveness in reducing overall smoking in the general population, e.g. in case of tax policies.

A main challenge for research is to assess which of these tobacco control measures also have the potential to reduce socioeconomic inequalities in smoking, beside their impact on general smoking prevalence. The evidence accumulated so far is limited but encouraging. For example, in England, the introduction of stop-smoking services in poor neighbourhoods resulted in a decrease in inequalities in quit attempts, although inequalities in smoking cessation rates decreased to a lesser extent. Unfortunately, much of this current evidence is derived from evaluations of controlled experiments in selective populations. As a result, it is still highly uncertain which policies will be effective in reducing smoking inequalities if they are implemented in the general population.

There is therefore an urgent need for evidence on the effectiveness of policies, programs and interventions that have already been implemented at national or local levels. Evaluations of these actions may help to estimate more directly what has been achieved, and what can further be achieved, by real-world actions in the field of tobacco control. The overall aim of the current project is therefore to assess effects of such real-world policies by analyzing “natural policy experiments”.

The project takes advantage of the fact that Europe offers a large number of natural experiments in the field of tobacco control. Since the 1990s, many European countries have intensified tobacco control policies and introduced measures such as bans on smoking in public places, and further tax increases. The effects of such new policies could be assessed in time trend studies. Similarly, at any moment in time, large differences exist between European countries in the type and extent of tobacco control measures that have been adopted. Cross-national comparisons can be used to assess whether these variations are correlated with national smoking rates, and with inequalities therein.

In this project, we will utilize both types of comparative approaches, time studies and cross-national comparisons, to obtain evidence on the effectiveness of different types of tobacco control measures. We will assess effects both on smoking cessation by adult smokers, and on smoking initiation by young people. An explicit focus on young people is extremely important because large socioeconomic inequalities in smoking initiation now exist among adolescents in virtually all European countries, and these inequalities may be hard to remedy in later stages of the life course.

Variations between European countries are of interest not only because of the differences in tobacco control policies, but also because of differences in wider determinants or “strategic drivers” of health inequalities. For young people, educational systems and policies may be especially important. There is a wealth of evidence that the school environment plays an important role in adolescent smoking behaviour. However, very little research has assessed how broader educational systems and policies could impact on smoking inequalities among adolescents. The structure of educational systems differs greatly between European countries (www.pisa.oecd.org). A higher degree of inequality is inherent in segmented systems of secondary education (e.g. Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Italy) compared to less segmented systems (e.g. Finland, Sweden, France, Spain). Comparisons between countries with different educational systems offer unique opportunities to study how health inequalities are shaped under different educational systems and policies. In this project, we will seize this unique opportunity. Using smoking initiation by young people as a “tracer” indicator, we will aim to identify how “strategic drivers” such as educational systems may determine the size of health inequalities.

Project objectives

The overall aim of the project is thus to analyse several “natural experiments” available within Europe in order to generate new empirical evidence to inform strategies to reduce socioeconomic inequalities in smoking. The project has three specific objectives:

1. to assess, using trend analysis for several European countries, whether changes in specific national tobacco control policies since 1990s were associated with changes in socioeconomic inequalities in smoking cessation and related factors;
2. to assess, through comparisons between European countries, whether differences in specific tobacco control policies and in educational systems are associated with differences in socioeconomic inequalities in smoking initiation and related factors;
3. to review the evidence of published intervention studies on their impact on socioeconomic inequalities in smoking, to integrate this with the evidence generated in the current project, and to disseminate the combined evidence across Europe, including stakeholders and those involved in the development of tobacco control policies and health-related policies.

Project work packages:

WP1: Management and scientific co-ordination

WP2: Analysis of data of the ITC survey

WP3: Analysis of trends in eastern and southern Europe

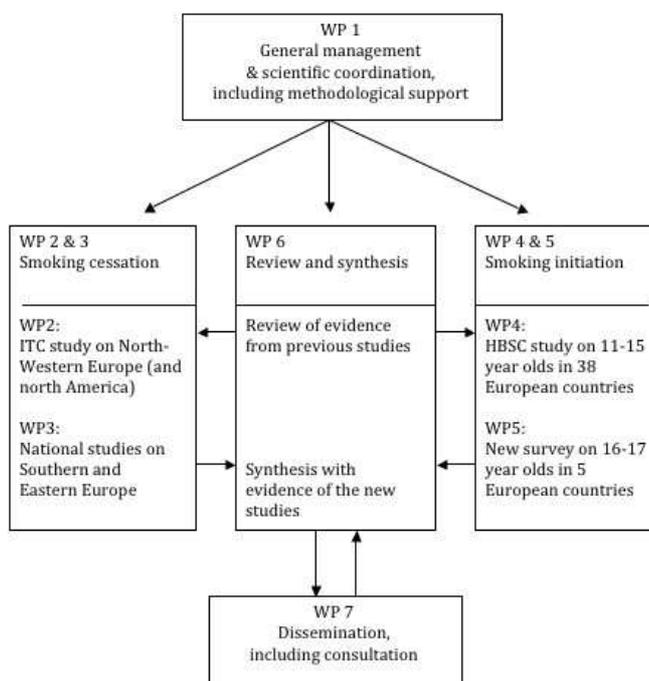
WP4: Analysis of data of the HBSC survey

WP5: New survey among 16-17 year old adolescents

WP6: Review and synthesis

WP7: Dissemination

Graphical presentation of the project and its work packages



Project Partnership

Twelve organisations joined in a consortium to develop and implement SILNE:

AMC - Department of Public Health, Academic Medical Centre, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

AMC is the leader of WP1 (management and scientific co-ordination) and of WP3 (analyses of trends in eastern and southern Europe). As the project co-ordinator, AMC is actively involved in all other WPs, especially in WP7 (Dissemination).

Unimaas - Department of Health Promotion, Maastricht University, CAPHRI (Research School Public Health and Care), the Netherlands

Unimaas is the leader of WP2 (analysis of data of the ITC survey). In addition, Unimaas will contribute to WP7 (Dissemination).

MLUHalle - Institute of Medical Sociology, Medical Faculty, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

MLUHalle is the leader of WP4 (analysis of data of the HBSC survey). Based on this role, MLUHalle will also contribute to WP7 (Dissemination). Furthermore, the beneficiary is responsible for the German part of the new survey on smoking among 16-17 old adolescents.

UCLouvain - The Institute of Health and Society (IRSS), Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium

UCL is the leader of WP5 (new survey among 16-17 year old adolescents). Furthermore, UCL is responsible for the Belgian part of the same survey. Based on these roles, he will also contribute to WP7 (Dissemination).

UEdinburgh - Centre for Population Health Sciences, Medical School, University of Edinburgh, UK

UEdinburgh is the leader of WP6 (review and synthesis). Given this central role in the project, UEdinburgh will actively collaborate with the leaders of all other WPs.

ENSP - European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention, Belgium

ENSP is the leader of WP7 (dissemination). ENSP will actively participate with all WP leaders, in order to maximise the potential impact of the project.

UCMadrid - Department of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

UCMadrid is responsible for the Spanish part of WP3 (analyses of trends in eastern and southern Europe) and will actively collaborate with the leader of WP3 as well as the other participants in WP3.

UCassino - Department of Health and Sport Sciences, University of Cassino, Italy

UCassino is responsible for the Italian part of WP3 (analyses of trends in eastern and southern Europe) and will actively collaborate with the leader of WP3 as well as the other participants in WP3. Furthermore, UCassino is responsible for the Italian part of the new survey on smoking among 16-17 old adolescents (WP5).

LitUniv - Department of Preventive Medicine, Public Health Faculty, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Lithuania

LitUniv is responsible for the Baltic part of WP3 (analyses of trends in eastern and southern Europe) and will actively collaborate with colleagues from Estonia and Latvia, with the leader of WP3, and with other partners in WP3.

Scohost - Stockholm Centre on Health of Societies in Transition (SCOHOST), School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University, Sweden

Scohost is responsible for the Central-Eastern European part of WP3 (analyses of trends in eastern and southern Europe) and will actively collaborate with colleagues from Central-Eastern countries, with the leader of WP3 and with other partners in WP3.

UTampere - School of Health Sciences, University of Tampere, Finland

UTampere is responsible for the Finnish part of the new survey on smoking among 16-17 old adolescents (WP5).

UNLisboa - National School of Public Health, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal

UNLisboa is responsible for the Portuguese part of the new survey on smoking among 16-17 old adolescents (WP5).

The next meeting of the SILNE Steering Committee will take place in June 2012.

Do not hesitate to visit the project webpage on www.ensp.org for more information.

Project co-ordinator contact details:

Department of Public Health, Academic Medical Centre, University of Amsterdam

Dr. A.E. Kunst

P.O. Box 22660, 1100 DD Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Tel +31-20-5664607

Fax: +31-20-6972316

E-mail: a.kunst@amc.uva.nl