



20th July 2022 - The European Shisha Community Alliance (ESCA) is a trade association that aims to represent the interests of the thousands of businesses in Europe involved in the water pipe (also known as shisha or hookah) sector. Many of these businesses are shisha lounges and cafés which are hospitality venues dedicated to serving shisha. Similar to cigar lounges that primarily serve cigars, bierkellers that primarily serve beer and wine bars that primarily serve wine. Shisha lounges derive the vast majority of their income from shisha sales. In most Member States it is prohibited to serve shisha indoors and therefore the only avenue for most of these lounges and cafés is to serve this historic and culturally significant pastime to adult consumers on outdoor terraces where people have made an informed decision to either consume a shisha or be surrounded by those who do.

Unlike the rest of the tobacco value chain, the shisha sector is comprised of small and medium sized businesses (SMEs), many of which are owned and run by young entrepreneurs and members of migrant communities in the EU and their businesses solely rely on the serving of shisha in outdoor spaces or designated smoking areas. It is therefore crucial that this niche sector be considered in isolation with the nuances of the product and its heritage being seriously considered before any wide-ranging recommendations to Member States are made.

Shisha is a niche and cultural product that is prepared in venues dedicated to serving adults who specifically seek out shisha lounges and cafés to enjoy shisha. Any restriction on a shisha business' ability to serve shisha outdoors or in dedicated smoking areas or a restriction on a shisha consumers ability to consume shisha outdoors/in a dedicated smoking area would result in the destruction of thousands of businesses across the EU. Therefore, we urge the Commission and the Member States to exempt shisha lounges and cafés from their recommendations for further restrictions.

Shisha is a unique product and is fundamentally different to all other tobacco products. It is a centuries' old social tradition and contains the lowest amount of tobacco of any tobacco product. On average, shisha products in the EU contain between 15% and 25% tobacco leaf with the remainder consisting of glycerine, sugars, flavouring and technical ingredients.

The vast majority of shisha users enjoy shisha monthly or weekly¹. In Germany, for example, where shisha consumption is arguably more prevalent than in any other country in the EU, shisha is enjoyed on average twice a week.

It requires cumbersome equipment and expertise to prepare. One shisha session takes up to 20 minutes to prepare and between 45 minutes to an hour to consume. In contrast to cigarettes where tobacco is burned to produce smoke, shisha is heated at a lower

¹ In the United States a CDC study shows that on average 89% of users do so less than once per month, in Germany the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment estimates that on average shisha is used 2 to 3 times per week.

temperature, producing an aerosol that contains fewer and lower concentrations of constituents normally found in cigarette smoke².

1. Shisha is a cultural and niche product that represents less than 0.7% of the entire tobacco category in Europe. It carries huge cultural significance amongst those from the Middle East, Turkey and North Africa. It is a social outlet with consumption typically taking place with friends and family in adult venues such as shisha lounges and cafés.

- Most shisha consumers in the EU originate from Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa, or have family ties to those regions, it must be accepted that this ritual is used as a social outlet for many who, for religious or cultural reasons, do not consume alcohol. Banning the use of shisha on outdoor terraces would disproportionately deprive this minority community of venues to meet and socialise in an environment where they are comfortable.
- To restrict using shisha in lounges or cafés would be comparable to restricting alcohol for Westerners on the terraces of bars, cafés and restaurants.
- Shisha is a niche product and represents a tiny fraction of the overall consumption of tobacco in Europe. It represents less than 0.7%³ of the entire tobacco category and its use is extremely infrequent thus demonstrating that it poses no danger to the EU ambitions for a tobacco-free Europe for 2040 (tobacco-free meaning 5% smoking incidence).

2. Shisha lounges are predominantly small retail enterprises that are woven into their local communities. They provide jobs and opportunities for young adults usually in deprived neighbourhoods and areas with a high density of immigrants or Europeans with parents and grandparents of a migrant background.

- Across the EU, the shisha sector consists of SMEs supporting more than 60,000 workers⁴.
- We estimate that there are 11,000 shisha serving hospitality venues (all small and microbusinesses) in the Union, concentrated mainly in countries with large Turkish, Arab, and North African populations like Germany, France and Spain. Notably, for almost all of these venues, shisha sales account for the majority of revenue⁵.
- We further estimate that there are more than 13,550 retailers and wholesalers⁶ whose businesses are also at risk if restrictions are placed on serving shisha outdoors.
- Already shisha lounges and cafés, their employees and dependents have undergone unprecedented economic hardship due to the closure of their businesses during the global COVID 19 pandemic and have suffered further due to additional restrictions imposed on them for longer periods of time in specific regions like Andalusia in Spain.

² Shihadeh, A (21 July 2002). "Investigation of mainstream smoke aerosol of the argileh water pipe". Food and Chemical Toxicology, Wakeham, H (1972). "Recent Trends in Tobacco and Tobacco Smoke Research". The Chemistry of Tobacco and Tobacco Smoke. Boston, MA: Springer, Cooperation Centre for Scientific Research Relative to Tobacco. A Preliminary Comparison of flavoured waterpipe tobacco aerosol with cigarette smoke. P Wilkinson, Oct 2019

³ Estimate based on EU data – tax receipts, overall tobacco consumption, MS reporting requirements

⁴ Employed in over 25,000 legally operating shisha related businesses including factories, lounges, bars, nightclubs, restaurants, retailers, delivery, warehousing and accessories. ESCA Internal estimates.

⁵ ESCA Internal estimates = Lounges 10,250, Restaurant, Bar, Nightclub 750, General Retailers 12,900, Dedicated Retailers 650.

⁶ Ibid 4

3. Pursuant to the 2009 Council Recommendation for Smokefree Spaces, the resultant bans on indoor smoking in bars and restaurants more often than not impacted venues that did not rely at all on tobacco sales for the majority of their revenue whilst shisha lounges generate the majority of their revenue from shisha and not from food and beverages.

- It is not possible to stop selling shisha and start selling, for example, pizza successfully. The location of the venue, clientele, competition, lack of staff skills, investment in new kitchen equipment and establishing new commercial relationships with suppliers all add significant barriers to repurposing a shisha lounge to sell other products.
- A blanket ban on smoking on outdoor terraces would disproportionately impact the entire outdoor shisha lounge sector while leaving food and drink serving venues such as cafes, bars and restaurants relatively unscathed as they do not rely on tobacco for the majority of their revenue.
- Shisha lounges will simply go out of business if there is a restriction on the consumption of shisha outdoors resulting in a loss of income of up to 60,000 people across the European Union.

5. Many myths circulate about shisha and often research that has been carried out inside shisha lounges is misleading.

- The vast majority of shisha users in the EU enjoy it monthly or weekly⁷ and a recent study in Spain indicates that 94% of shisha consumers consume it less than once a week⁸. In Germany, the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment has stated that shisha is used on average 2 to 3 times per week⁹ and in the United States, the Centres for Disease Control claims that on average 89% of users do so less than once per month¹⁰.
- **The EU's Eurobarometer study from 2020 found that whilst 12% of all respondents had tried shisha once or twice, "very few make use of it more frequently"**¹¹.
- Other studies¹² on the air quality inside shisha lounges in Barcelona are misleading as even the authors acknowledge that;
 - there is *confounding caused by cigarette smoking which would release both nicotine and particulate matter into the environment which could be subsequently collected.*
 - *no attempt was made to assess the impact from other sources such as gas or solid fuels used in cooking, or those originating from outdoors which is applicable to all hospitality venues.*
 - a key observation is that even though the authors claim the recommended maximum levels of PM2.5 (fine particulate air pollution) set by the WHO and the European Union (25ug/m3) are exceeded inside shisha lounges it is important to highlight that based on a number of online air quality

⁷ Attitudes of Europeans towards tobacco and electronic cigarettes Special Eurobarometer 506

⁸ 2020 Kantar study on shisha consumption in Spain

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e7d19ef664af1615ab2ba0e/t/60d0b2b3bf06a733dda09796/1624289974388/KAN_TAR+June+2021+Spain+ENG.pdf

⁹ German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) Frequently Asked Questions about Water Pipes.

https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/frequently_asked_questions_about_water_pipes-60838.html Last accessed 15th June 2022.

¹⁰ Characteristics of Hookah Tobacco Smoking Sessions and Correlates of Use Frequency Among US Adults: Findings from Wave 1 of the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) Study

Robinson, Wang et al, Nicotine & Tobacco Research, Volume 20, Issue 6, June 2018, Pages 731–740,

¹¹ Eurobarometer 2020 QC6.1 p44

¹² Ariadna Feliu Et al - Exposure to second hand tobacco smoke in waterpipe cafés in Barcelona. An assessment of airborne nicotine and PM2.5.

measurements sites the outdoor PM2.5 levels are known to meet and even exceed these values on the street in Barcelona and in many other regions in Europe¹³.

- Shisha lounges are now predominantly located in outdoor spaces, are not frequented by families and are adult only venues.

Therefore, we strongly urge the Commission to consider the uniqueness of shisha as a small yet culturally significant product to many consumers in Europe. Particularly immigrants or Europeans with immigrant parents and grandparents. **Shisha lounges and cafés should be afforded the requisite exemptions in any prospective recommendations by the European Union to the Member States.**

¹³ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air/urban-air-quality/european-city-air-quality-viewer>