

## **World No Tobacco Day 2026: Young people at Project Zero are fighting back against the tobacco industry**

The Project Zero in Spain has an ambitious goal: making the generation of 2030 the first to grow up free of tobacco and nicotine. “Project Zero is a movement led by young people, for young people. That is exactly what sets it apart from other campaigns”, says Sofia Sáenz Rincón, one of the project’s 60 volunteers.

“Young people taking the ownership of the project is crucial to its success”, she continues. “As the primary targets of the aggressive marketing from the tobacco and nicotine industry, young people like us are well positioned to recognize these tactics and counteracting them.”

Laura Jarandilla Martín – also volunteering at Project Zero – adds: “Growing up, my grandfather, father and uncle were all smokers, so I saw the health consequences that came with that. At the same time, I am part of the generation that lived through the rise of new nicotine products. The industry repackaged e-cigarettes as something fun, trendy and harmless. I experienced constant peer pressure to try them and witnessed how saying yes or no defined acceptance in certain circles. I couldn’t stay silent about it.”

### **How the tobacco and nicotine industry deliberately targets young people**

More and more young people in Spain and across Europe are starting to use new and emerging nicotine products at an early age. Across the WHO European Region, 4.2 million adolescents aged 13-15 use e-cigarettes. “There is a misconception among young people that vaping is harmless,” says Sofia. “E-cigarettes gained popularity by being marketed as a quitting tool for tobacco. Now, it is the opposite: people start smoking tobacco after they started vaping and became hooked on the nicotine.”

The tobacco and nicotine industry markets their products specifically to young people, by using influencer marketing, sponsoring music festivals and other events, and using sweet flavors. “What I find most disturbing is the deliberate blurring of the line between nicotine products and toys,” says Laura. “The industry designs e-cigarettes that look like children’s toys. This is not accidental, but a calculated attempt to normalize these products from the earliest age possible.”

Apart from looking and tasting appealing to youth, new and emerging nicotine products are also widely available. While the sale of conventional cigarettes is often regulated – for example, restricted to licensed outlets or banned online – new nicotine products are not always subject to the same controls. “They are sold in clubs, beauty stores and supermarkets,” says Sofia. “They are everywhere.”

## **How Project Zero is pushing back**

To counter the industry's influence the volunteers of Project Zero are working across 5 different thematic groups: sports, education, leisure, arts and culture, and environment. "We work on all fronts simultaneously," says Laura. "We raise awareness, maintain a strong social media presence, and show up physically where young people are." Project Zero works with universities, schools and the media, as well as institutions ranging from local and regional administrations to the European Parliament and international forums.

The volunteers at Project Zero are organizing initiatives that speak to youth directly, for example, by organizing smoke- and nicotine-free spaces at music festivals that are attractive to young people. "We want to make the smoke- and nicotine-free zone at festivals enjoyable for young people. We do that by offering things they value, such as a good spot near the stage or fun activities and games," explains Sofia.

Another example is how the project is organizing educational activities in schools. "Instead of traditional lectures about why smoking is bad, we focus on mental health. By teaching children to manage and understand their emotions, we aim to prevent future use of nicotine and other addictive substances," says Sofia.

## **A tobacco-free generation in Spain by 2030**

Sofia and Laura are witnessing the impact that Project Zero has on young people's lives. "Many of us at Project Zero have stories of friends who quit or want to quit tobacco and nicotine because of this movement. This is powerful to see. Even one peer trying to quit makes it all worth it," shares Sofia.

However, to achieve a tobacco-free generation in Spain by 2030, Project Zero also calls for a comprehensive tobacco law that regulates both conventional tobacco as well as new and emerging nicotine products, and includes

- advertising bans, including in digital media,
- bans on flavours and design features that make product attractive to young people,
- extended smoke- and aerosol-free public spaces,
- point-of-sale restrictions,
- plain packaging, and
- increased taxation.

"If I could send one message to other young people across Europe," shares Laura, "I would say that you don't have to accept a world where addiction is sold to you as fun, freedom, and part of a good night out. You have the right to a life, public spaces and a planet that

isn't shaped by an industry profiting from making people sick. Project Zero started in Spain, but this is a global fight – and together we are a majority that cannot be ignored.”