

News release

EUROPEAN SCHOOL SURVEY PROJECT ON ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS (ESPAD): 30 YEARS
Generation ‘in profound transition’: latest ESPAD report calls for action on prevention, mental health and digital risks

(21.10.2025, LISBON) **EMBARGO 11.00 WEST | 12.00 CEST** The results of the **2024 European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD)** are released today in an extensive new [report](#) analysing adolescent substance use behaviours across Europe. The report — expanding on the key findings published in May 2025 — portrays a generation ‘in profound transition’.

Teenage drinking, smoking and cannabis use continue to decline but new behavioural and health risks are on the rise. The report flags growing concerns over increasing e-cigarette use, the non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs and a sharp rise in social media use, online gaming and gambling among teenagers. These trends are most striking among girls, where long-standing gender gaps in substance use appear to be narrowing, or even reversing.

According to the report: ‘While the continued decline in the use of established substances is welcome, it is clear that this does not necessarily correspond to a reduction in risk. Indeed, the intertwining of psychoactive substance use and digital risk behaviours represents a new and complex challenge for public health’.

The study, carried out in collaboration with the **European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA)** and coordinated by the **Italian National Research Council (CNR)**, is based on a 2024 survey in 37 European countries, including 25 EU Member States ⁽¹⁾. This is the eighth data-collection wave conducted by the **ESPAD** project since 1995, and the first one carried out after the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of **113 882 students** (aged 15–16-years) participated in this latest survey round, responding to an anonymous questionnaire. This edition marks **30 years** of monitoring adolescent risky behaviours across Europe.

Among the new challenges for policy and practice, the report highlights three strategic priorities.

- **Expanding evidence-based prevention** — Broader, evidence-based prevention approaches are needed to address the full spectrum of today’s youth risk behaviours. The roll-out of the EUDA’s European Prevention Curriculum ([EUPC](#)) — a training programme widely adopted by prevention professionals — is a positive step forward, as is the agency’s [Xchange](#) registry of evaluated prevention programmes.
- **Prioritising mental health and well-being** — New vulnerabilities call for a stronger focus on mental health and well-being in schools and communities. Gender-sensitive approaches to health promotion are needed to help address emerging risks among adolescent girls.
- **Addressing digital environments** — Urgent action is needed to develop interventions that limit young people’s early exposure to digital risks. These include tackling the potential harms of online gaming (e.g. addictive design) or preventing underage access to online gambling (e.g. stronger digital identity and age verification).

The report concludes by underlining the need to better understand and respond to the complex and dynamic changes shaping young people’s lives and build trust through multisectoral, agile interventions. ‘Only through such

a systemic perspective can risk be transformed into resilience, and environments be created that support the development of healthier and self-aware youth’.

The continuous and collective monitoring effort of the ESPAD project plays a vital role in advancing the understanding of adolescent risk behaviours and in providing robust, comparable evidence across time and countries to inform policymaking. The [ESPAD Report 2024](https://www.espad.org/espad-report-2024), released today, offers unique insights to guide prevention and policy.

Notes

(¹) *ESPAD Report 2024: Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs*
<https://www.espad.org/espad-report-2024>

To ensure the widest possible accessibility, this edition is accompanied by a range of additional tools.

The full set of data on which this report is based, including all the standard tables, is available online (<https://www.espad.org>). All tables can be downloaded in Excel format and used for further analysis.

A [summary of the survey findings](#) was released by the organisations in May 2025 and is available in 25 languages. See news release: https://www.euda.europa.eu/news/2025/new-espad-survey-results_en

In addition, the ESPAD Data Portal (<https://data.espad.org>) offers open access to 30 years of ESPAD data on substance use and other risky behaviours, allowing researchers, policymakers and the public to explore trends and make cross-country comparisons.

About the survey

The 2024 **ESPAD** findings relate to students’ experience of, and perceptions about, a variety of substances, including: tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, inhalants, pharmaceuticals and new psychoactive substances (NPS). Social media use, gaming and gambling are also covered. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and amid ongoing conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, **ESPAD** has also strengthened its focus on adolescent mental well-being. This survey round included a new focus on mental well-being and prevention activities, recognising the growing importance of these factors in shaping adolescent health outcomes.

The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs ([ESPAD](#)) is a collaborative network of independent research teams in over 40 European countries and the largest cross-national research project on adolescent substance use and other risky behaviours in the world. It is coordinated by the ESPAD Italian team at the Institute of Clinical Physiology - National Research Council of Italy (CNR-IFC).

The European Union Drugs Agency ([EUDA](#)) is your source of drug-related expertise in Europe. We prepare and share independent, scientifically validated knowledge, alerts and recommendations. We work alongside our partners to improve EU preparedness on drugs.