

In a glimpse

SEPTEMBER 2025

Drug use in Europe at age 16 – ESPAD 2024 findings

This issue of *Tendances* presents the main findings of the latest European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD), conducted in 37 European countries in 2024. It provides a European overview of tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and other drug use among 16-year-olds, as well as an overview of trends over the past decade, both in France and across all participating countries.

The ESPAD survey is conducted every four years and aims to monitor risk behaviours among 16-year-olds in Europe, with a particular focus on their use of psychoactive substances. The 2024 edition took place between April and June, involving a representative sample of 113 882 young people surveyed across 37 countries, including 3 376 in France.

The results showed that France is now below the European average for all use indicators, recording one of the sharpest declines in drug use on the continent since 2015.

Tobacco, alcohol and cannabis: a particularly marked decline in France

Initiation into tobacco smoking declined significantly in France, at a faster pace than in most European countries. In 2024, one fifth of French 16-year-olds had already tried tobacco (20%), one of the lowest rates in Europe. Over the past decade, the proportion of 16-year-olds who smoke cigarettes daily has fallen fivefold (16% in 2015 vs 3.1% in 2024). This positions France among the European countries with the fewest daily adolescent smokers, alongside around ten countries – mainly in Northern Europe – with prevalence rates below 5%.

At age 16, seven in ten young people in France (68%) reported lifetime use of alcohol (67% of boys and 70% of girls, with girls now being more likely to experiment than boys), whereas in two-thirds of the participating countries, the average exceeded 70%. Although these levels of lifetime use were high, as was the frequency of heavy episodic drinking (HED) (22% in France and 30% in half of the participating countries), France was among the third of European countries with the lowest use of alcoholic beverages.

While France has long ranked among the countries with the highest levels of cannabis use, lifetime use of this substance during adolescence fell sharply: initiation to cannabis was reduced threefold over ten years, from 31% of 16-year-olds in 2015 to 8.4% in 2024. This downward trend in France appeared all the more significant because it contrasted with the stability observed in many European countries. Monthly cannabis use followed the same trend, declining from 17% to 4.3% over this period – its lowest level in twenty-five years. France is now among the countries where 16-year-olds use cannabis the least.

Illicit substances other than cannabis

In 2024, 3.9% of 16-year-olds in France reported lifetime use of at least one illicit drug other than cannabis, a level below the European average (5%). Among these illicit substances, cocaine remained the most commonly tried at age 16 (1.7%), followed by amphetamines (1.3%), crack cocaine (1.2%) and ecstasy/MDMA (1.1%). Over the past decade, the proportion of young people who reported lifetime use of at least one illicit drug other than cannabis has declined markedly, from 7.5% in 2015 to 3.8% in 2024.

A Europe-wide downward trend

This new snapshot of drug use behaviours among 16-year-old adolescents in Europe highlighted a significant reduction in the use of legal and illegal substances in many European countries, a trend that was particularly pronounced in France.

- The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD) is a school-based survey conducted every four years since 1995 (1999 in France). The ninth round was conducted in the first quarter of 2024 across 37 European countries, surveying 113 882 sixteen-year-olds.
- TOBACCO: significant declines were observed in most countries. With one fifth of 16-year-olds reporting lifetime use, France is now among the countries with the lowest levels of lifetime use. With daily smoking having fallen from 16% in 2015 to 3.1% in 2024, France now ranks among the ten or so countries, mainly in Northern Europe, where the level of daily smoking is below 5%.
- ALCOHOL: despite a slow and steady decline in use at both the European level and in France, levels remained high, with the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking in the past month exceeding 30% in nearly half of the countries and reaching 22% in France.
- CANNABIS: while lifetime use has remained around 12% over the past twenty years in many countries, it has, by contrast, decreased sharply in France over the past decade, falling from 31% in 2015 to 8.4% in 2024. Monthly use levels followed a similar trend, falling from 17% to 4.3%. This represents the lowest level recorded in twenty-five years, making France one of the European countries where 16-year-olds are now among the lowest consumers.
- OTHER ILLICIT SUBSTANCES: 3.9% of 16-year-old pupils in France reported lifetime use of at least one illicit drug other than cannabis, placing France below the European average (5.0%).