# UK rises to seventh in Europe for nanny state restrictions amid new vaping and smoking laws



The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), a leading British think tank, has released its annual “nanny state index,” revealing that the United Kingdom now ranks seventh in Europe for government restrictions on personal freedoms, particularly related to lifestyle choices. This shift from 11th place highlights a growing concern regarding state paternalism as individual liberties regarding eating, drinking, smoking, and vaping face increasing limitations.

The report underscores the UK government's stringent regulations surrounding tobacco and alcohol, which include some of the highest taxes in Europe on these products. The IEA’s analysis points to a worrying trend where personal freedoms have “decreased at a faster rate than almost anywhere else in Europe over the past two years." It notes that while Germany, Luxembourg, and Italy offer the most liberal consumer environments, others like Turkey, Lithuania, and Finland embody the extremes of state intervention.

Forecasts from the IEA suggest that Britain's rank could worsen as new legislation is proposed, including a forthcoming ban on disposable e-cigarettes, the implementation of a new tax on vaping products set to take effect in October 2026, and more restrictions on advertising "less healthy" food options. The vaping tax aims to discourage non-smokers from adopting these products, with government projections estimating revenue to reach £15 million by 2029-30. However, industry stakeholders have raised alarms about the potential for an illicit market surge and adverse effects on businesses as taxes escalate alongside strict regulations.

In tandem with these developments, the UK Parliament is gearing up for a significant vote on the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which seeks to implement even more stringent anti-smoking regulations. This bill aims to prohibit the sale of cigarettes to anyone born after January 1, 2009, and includes proposals to restrict advertisements for vaping products, ban sales from vending machines, and limit appealing packaging and flavours aimed at children. Additionally, it suggests extending smoking bans to outdoor spaces like pub gardens and children's playgrounds.

Public health advocates argue that tougher regulations are necessary to safeguard future generations from the dangers of smoking and vaping, reflecting a global trend toward more interventionist health policies. Indeed, the World Health Organization has underscored the benefits of increasing taxes on alcohol and sugary drinks, which have been shown to decrease disease prevalence.

However, this expansion of the regulatory framework is not without its critics. Business groups and some political factions express concerns about the economic ramifications of such sweeping restrictions, particularly within the hospitality sector, which may suffer from reduced patronage as smoking areas shrink. Historical context adds another layer of complexity; the term "nanny state" emerged in the mid-1960s amidst the introduction of traffic regulations aimed at protecting individuals from harm. Today, it reflects ongoing debates about the limits of government intervention in personal health choices.

As the UK continues to navigate this evolving landscape of personal freedoms and public health imperatives, the delicate balance between protecting citizens and preserving individual liberties is likely to remain a contentious focal point in national discourse.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2055309/britain-nanny-state-personal-freedoms-institute-economic-affairs> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://iea.org.uk/publications/nanny-state-index-23/> - The Institute of Economic Affairs' 2023 Nanny State Index ranks the UK as the 11th most restrictive country in Europe regarding lifestyle regulations, up from 12th in 2021. The UK has the most restrictive tobacco regulations and the second most restrictive food and drink policies. It ranks 13th for alcohol restrictions but has among the highest alcohol taxes. The UK and Ireland have the most liberal policies on e-cigarettes. Turkey, Norway, and Lithuania are the most restrictive, while Germany, Czechia, and Italy are the least restrictive.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/b242b189-8c51-48b8-8e1a-a53b2c64f243> - The UK government plans to introduce a vaping tax starting October 2026, with a duty of £2.20 per 10ml of e-liquid, aiming to discourage non-smokers from taking up vaping. This measure accompanies increases in tobacco and wine duties. The tax is expected to generate £15 million by 2029-30, while combined tobacco duty will yield £180 million. Industry stakeholders express concerns about potential illicit market growth and business impacts.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britains-parliament-vote-strict-anti-smoking-rules-2024-11-26/> - The UK Parliament is set to vote on the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, proposing stringent anti-smoking regulations, including prohibiting individuals aged 15 or younger this year from purchasing cigarettes. The bill also seeks to restrict vape advertising, ban sales in vending machines, and limit packaging and flavors appealing to children. Additionally, it considers extending indoor smoking bans to certain outdoor areas and implementing a licensing scheme for tobacco and vape product retailers.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/f2500012-a509-4b3e-b3ee-12497f76f163> - The UK government is considering extending smoking restrictions to outdoor areas such as pub gardens, restaurant terraces, children's playgrounds, and outdoor sports stadiums. This proposal is part of a tobacco and vapes bill from the new Labour government, based on former PM Rishi Sunak's policy to ban the sale of cigarettes to those born after January 1, 2009, and limit vape sales and marketing. Public health experts support stricter smoking laws, but industry groups and Conservative politicians warn of potential economic harm and job losses in the hospitality sector.
6. <https://www.who.int/news/item/05-12-2023-who-calls-on-countries-to-increase-taxes-on-alcohol-and-sugary-sweetened-beverages> - The World Health Organization (WHO) urges countries to increase taxes on alcohol and sugary sweetened beverages to promote healthier populations. At least 148 countries have applied excise taxes to alcoholic beverages at the national level. The WHO highlights that taxing unhealthy products can lead to less disease and generate revenue for public services. For instance, Lithuania's increased alcohol tax in 2017 resulted in decreased deaths from alcohol-related diseases.
7. <https://www.economist.com/britain/2023/10/10/the-rise-of-britains-new-nanny-state> - The Economist discusses the rise of Britain's 'nanny state,' highlighting the government's increasing intervention in personal lifestyle choices. The term 'nanny state' originated in 1965 with the introduction of a 70mph speed limit on England's motorways. The article examines the historical context and current debates surrounding government regulations aimed at protecting individuals from self-harm, reflecting on the balance between personal freedom and public health.