

Tobacco Products Research Surveys

Methodology Note

Any queries in relation to the methodology or the surveys themselves can be addressed to Revenue's Statistics & Economic Research Branch (statistics@revenue.ie)



Background

Each year since 2009, Revenue, in conjunction with the HSE's National Tobacco Control Office, has commissioned Ipsos MRBI to conduct independent market research among smokers about the source of their cigarettes. The purpose of this research is to estimate the volume of non-Irish duty paid cigarettes being consumed in Ireland. Since 2013, this has been complemented by an additional survey on roll your own ("RYO") tobacco.

The results of the surveys are published on the Revenue website at:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/research/surveys/tobacco-consumption-survey/index.aspx>.

The purpose of this note is to briefly outline the methodology used in the surveys.

Methodology

Sampling

The cigarette survey is conducted among nationally representative samples of 500 Irish smokers and of 300 Central/Eastern European nationals living in Ireland. The RYO survey is conducted among a nationally representative sample of 200 Irish RYO smokers. All those interviewed are aged 18 or older.

The sample size was selected during the initial scoping undertaken between Revenue, the HSE and Ipsos MRBI for the cigarette survey in 2008. Ipsos MRBI presented sampling options and varying margins for error based on sample size, Revenue/HSE made a selection based on these.

Using the same sampling approach for both populations (Irish and Central/Eastern Europeans) is not possible due to differences in available data on the profile of smokers living in Ireland. The Irish sample is representative of Irish smokers. For the other group, the profile of smokers is not known so a nationally representative sample (of smokers and non-smokers) is used.

Ipsos MRBI identify potential sample cases and their fieldworkers visit the target group in their homes until the sample quota is met. The sample is stratified by region in proportion to population, the Republic of Ireland is divided geographically into 3,440 Electoral Divisions ("EDs") ranged across urban and rural districts throughout the country. Individual EDs are identified as the primary sampling points for this study. Each interviewer is provided with a sampling point and from there they follow a random route and work to quotas set by age, gender and socio-economic group until their set number of interviews is complete.

Interviews

The survey interviews are conducted by Ipsos MRBI fieldworkers, usually over a two month period in October and November of each year. Interviews are conducted face to face in the respondent's home and take about 5 minutes.

The main questionnaire content was agreed as part of the initial scoping undertaken between Revenue, the HSE and Ipsos MRBI for the cigarette survey in 2008. The design of this was driven by Ipsos MRBI based on their expertise in the area of market research and the information required to be gathered to meet the objectives of the surveys.

At the outset of the interview, respondents are advised that the research relates to health information shown on packaging. To qualify for participation respondents must be carrying a cigarette pack/ RYO tobacco pouch. The information from cigarette packages/RYO pouches is recorded by the interviewer during the interview and at the end of the interview respondents are asked to provide their pack for further analysis. An incentive is offered (a scratchcard) and the response rates are consistently high (over 80%).

Analysis

Ipsos MRBI collate the data from their fieldworkers and analyse the survey results.

Revenue tobacco experts are provided with some of the data from the survey and the packs/pouches collected. This information is used to determine whether the pack/pouch is legal. The assessment of legality is based on a combination of examination of the pack/pouch (the tax stamp and health warnings in particular) and the source of the pack/pouch (as declared to the interviewer). This information is returned to Ipsos MRBI and incorporated into the dataset. In addition to illegal packs, legal non-Irish duty paid packs are also identified.

Population estimates are combined with smoking prevalence and consumption rates to provide an estimate of the total cigarette consumption in Ireland. For the illegal cigarettes survey, Irish smoker data are weighted to profiles obtained from the Healthy Ireland research. For other nationalities, data are weighted to Central Statistics Office data. For the RYO survey, data are weighted to profiles obtained from the NTCO Smoking Prevalence research.

The survey findings are finalised by Ipsos MRBI and presented to Revenue and HSE. Revenue then publish a summary of the results on its website each year.¹

¹ To acknowledge the limitations of presenting a single figure for the key results of the survey (the level of illicit non-Irish Duty paid in the market), the margins of error with 95% confidence interval are included.

Procurement

Revenue and the HSE place great emphasis on comparison of trends over time in the tobacco market, rather than the results for any given year. Therefore, it is critical for both Offices that the methodologies used in the surveys are consistent from year to year. For this reason, the same market research company is awarded the contracts to carry out the surveys. Revenue discloses on its Circular 40/02 return any contracts awarded without a competitive process and that are over the €25,000 threshold.

Data Protection

Ipsos MRBI, and the tobacco surveys process, are fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR") and have an appointed Data Protection Officer. Personal data collected during the interview (name, phone number & address) are not processed with the rest of the survey data. Personal data of respondents are never passed back to the Revenue/HSE and are only used for quality control purposes (10% of interviews are backchecked). These data are not recorded anywhere else aside from the paper questionnaire. Paper questionnaires are securely stored and then shredded after 6 months. Respondents who take part in the research are given a thank you note from interviewers, which includes a link to the Ipsos MRBI privacy policy and commitment to GDPR.