WHO REPORT ON THE GLOBAL TOBACCO EPIDEMIC, 2015
Raising taxes on tobacco

Executive summary
Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies

Protect people from tobacco smoke

Offer help to quit tobacco use

Warn about the dangers of tobacco

Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship

Raise taxes on tobacco
Overview

In the decade since the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) came into force, and 7 years after the introduction of MPOWER to assist Parties in meeting some of their WHO FCTC obligations, there has been steady progress in global tobacco control. Today, more than half of the world’s countries, with 40% of the world’s population (2.8 billion people) have implemented at least one MPOWER measure at the highest level of achievement (not including the Monitoring and Mass media measures, which are assessed separately). This progress more than doubles the number of countries and nearly triples the number of people covered since 2007.

Raising tobacco taxes, the R measure in MPOWER and the focus of this WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2015, is an area in particular need of attention.

Despite the fact that raising tobacco taxes to more than 75% of the retail price is among the most effective and cost-effective tobacco control interventions (it costs little to implement and increases government revenues), only a few countries have increased tobacco taxes to best practice level. Raising taxes is the least implemented MPOWER measure — with only 10% of the world’s people living in countries with sufficiently high taxes — and is the measure that has seen the least improvement since WHO started assessing these data. Even so, by 2014, 11 countries had raised taxes to represent more than 75% of the retail price of a pack of cigarettes, joining the 22 countries that already had similarly high taxes in place in 2008. However, there are still many countries with extremely low tobacco tax rates, and some countries that do not levy any tobacco taxes at all.

Many countries have implemented multiple MPOWER measures at the highest level of achievement. A total of 49 countries with nearly 20% of the world’s population are covered by two or more MPOWER measures at the highest level, tripling the number of people protected by at least two fully implemented tobacco control measures to 1.4 billion people since 2007. Seven countries, five of which are low- and middle-income, have implemented four or more MPOWER measures at the highest level. Six of these countries (four of which are low- and middle-income countries with more than 4% of the world’s population — more than 300 million people), are only one step away from having all MPOWER measures in place at the highest level.

THE STATE OF SELECTED TOBACCO CONTROL POLICIES IN THE WORLD, 2014
Key Findings

Over the past 2 years, there has been progress towards controlling tobacco use. Since the previous WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2013, which reported data from 2012, the number of countries with MPOWER measures at the highest level has increased from 23 to 28, and the number of people (7% of the world’s population) affected by tobacco has increased from 330 million to 360 million.

Each MPOWER measure saw an increase in the number of countries implementing the measure since 2012.

Five countries with a combined population of 187 million people (China, Jamaica, Madagascar, Russia Federation, and Suriname) implemented a comprehensive smoke-free public places and work place.

Six countries (Arge, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands) implemented appropriate cessation services because they offered more than 25% of the retail price. Because four countries did not implement sufficient high taxes after 2012, a 20% increase in tobacco prices has provided a significant increase in tobacco prices.

Save countries (Brazil, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kiribati, New Zealand, and Romania) raised taxes on cigarettes to more than 75% of the retail price. For example, two countries in the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, and Yemen.

I produced a comprehensive report on the global tobacco epidemic, promoting the TAPS activities, which protect at least 20% of the population from exposure to TAPS.

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SHARE OF THE WORLD POPULATION COVERED BY SELECTED TOBACCO CONTROL POLICIES, 2014

INCREASE IN THE SHARE OF THE WORLD POPULATION COVERED BY SELECTED TOBACCO CONTROL POLICIES, 2012 TO 2014

Note: The tobacco control policies depicted here correspond to the highest level of achievement at the national level; for the definitions of these highest categories, refer to Technical Note I in the main report.
Conclusion

Progress spurred by the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco since 2005, MPOWER measures and the joint efforts of the world’s people and the WHO have led to significant improvements in the fight against tobacco-related diseases. Tobacco control measures have been effective in reducing tobacco use, particularly in high-income countries. However, many low- and middle-income countries have yet to fully implement effective tobacco control policies.

The focus of this report, Raising Tobacco Excise Taxes, is on the MPOWER measure that has experienced the most progress. Of the world’s people, 19 of the 20 countries that have adopted MPOWER measures have increased taxes on tobacco products by at least 75% of the retail price, making it the most effective measure within MPOWER. These measures are estimated to have reduced youth smoking and adult consumption by 30% and 10%, respectively.

It is estimated that raising tobacco taxes by 10 cents per cigarette could save 500,000 lives in the United States alone. However, the benefits of raising taxes are not felt evenly across all countries. Some countries have seen significant decreases in smoking rates, while others have seen little change. This is because the impact of tobacco taxes on smoking varies depending on the country’s economic and social context.

Support for tobacco control policies has been growing, particularly among non-governmental organizations and youth groups. However, tobacco control policies are often met with resistance from tobacco companies and their allies, who spend billions of dollars each year on advertising and lobbying to promote their products.

A significant challenge for tobacco control is to ensure that the benefits of raising taxes are realized by all countries. This requires international cooperation and support, including financial assistance, technical expertise, and political will. The United Nations Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) provides a platform for countries to work together to achieve the goal of eliminating the global tobacco epidemic.

The WHO report highlights the importance of tobacco control as a public health priority. By raising tobacco taxes, countries can make tobacco unaffordable, reduce demand, and save lives. This is a critical step in the global fight against tobacco-related diseases.
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