



Introduction

The needs assessment mission for the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) was conducted September 1-3, 2015, by the Convention Secretariat jointly with the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus.

The international team, which came at the government's invitation, included representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the WHO Prevention of Non-communicable Diseases Department. The team met with the leaders of government agencies, NGOs and civil society who are involved in implementing the WHO FCTC at country level.

Tobacco control milestones in Belarus

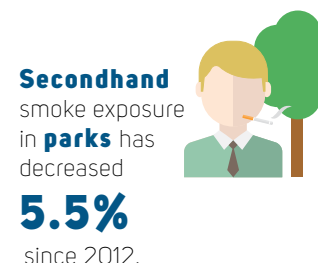
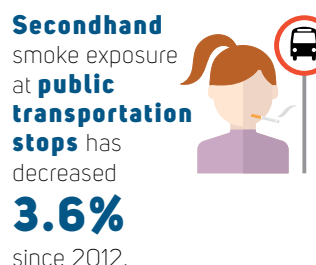
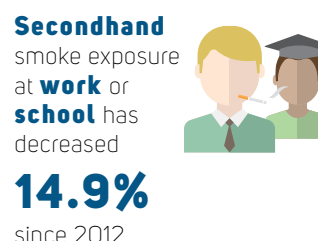
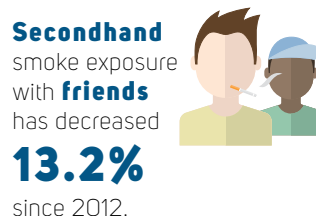
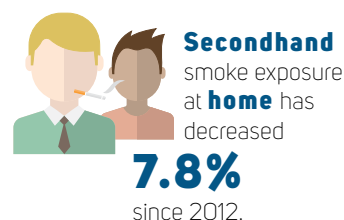
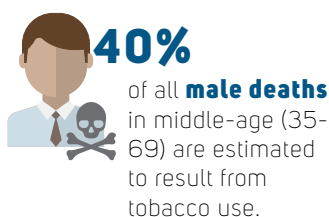
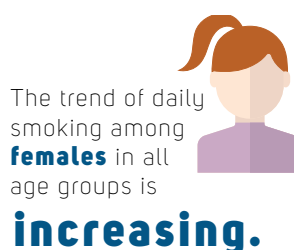
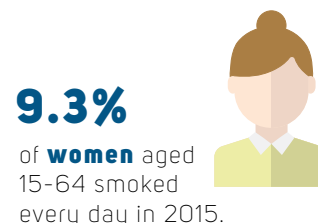
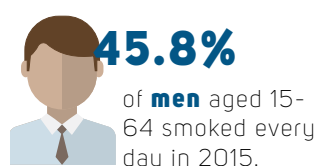


- 2002** Presidential Decree 28 regulates the production and circulation of tobacco and tobacco products.
- 2005** Belarus ratifies the WHO FCTC.
- 2008** Belarus passes Law 225-3, prohibiting tobacco advertising and the free distribution of tobacco products.
- 2011** Belarus begins implementing a comprehensive state policy and action plan to combat tobacco consumption in 2011-2015.
- 2015** Belarus bans tobacco displays and tobacco sales over the Internet.

SWOT analysis

- Strengths:** several tobacco control measures have been implemented, international partners are providing support and a comprehensive state policy and action plan has been implemented.
- Weaknesses:** several WHO FCTC requirements still need to be implemented, measures to prevent tobacco industry interference are lacking, enforcement mechanisms are vague.
- Opportunities:** a comprehensive draft law on tobacco control has been prepared, there is political momentum for tobacco control and a global and regional movement with specific targets for tobacco control.
- Threats:** the state owns the largest tobacco producer, there is a misperception that tax increases drive illicit trade and Belarus is increasingly a source of illicit cigarettes.

Key facts



Main findings and recommendations

No specific measures were in place to prevent tobacco industry interference in tobacco control policy.

Recommendation: Develop a code of conduct for public officials to guide interactions between the tobacco industry and civil servants.

● The Ministry of Health declared that tobacco control strategies are part of the People's Health and Demographic Safety of Republic of Belarus comprehensive program for 2016-2020.

Recommendation: WHO FCTC implementation should be specifically referred to in the preparation of the related action plan, including indicators to measure implementation where appropriate.

● Belarus has a WHO FCTC technical focal point person at the Ministry of Health and an interagency council that acts as a coordinating mechanism for tobacco control policy.

Recommendation: The interagency council should periodically include the WHO FCTC in its agenda to monitor full control and implementation, as well as inviting WHO and UNDP representatives to council meetings as appropriate.

● Current tobacco control legislation consists of several regulations. The Ministry of Health has proposed a new comprehensive tobacco control law to cover all aspects of the WHO FCTC.

Recommendation: Strengthen advocacy efforts to ensure the inclusion of this draft law in the 2016 legislative agenda.

● Cigarettes legally produced in Belarus are smuggled and traded illegally in other parts of Europe.

Recommendation: Consider ratifying the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products and strengthening customs procedures.

● Belarus has implemented effective tobacco tax policy to ensure that tobacco prices rise faster than prices for other goods and services. Nevertheless, tobacco products are still relatively inexpensive and affordable for most people in Belarus, including young people.

Recommendation: Increase tobacco tax rates to make tobacco products less affordable.

● There is a partial ban on smoking in most indoor public places, with designated smoking areas still allowed. A significant portion of the population is exposed to secondhand smoke, especially in the hospitality industry.

Recommendation: Implement a complete ban on smoking in indoor public places and enforce it.

● Regulations state that pictorial health warnings will be required to cover 50% of the front and back of tobacco packages by the end of 2016.

Recommendation: Develop the rules necessary to implement this requirement.

● Belarus has a number of mitigation programs implemented by state actors and funded by the state budget. These are mainly focused on publicizing harm caused by tobacco and encouraging people to quit using it.

Recommendation: Broaden the scope and target groups for these programs and coordinate the campaigns.

● Belarus has a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, including a ban on displaying tobacco products at points of sale, though the tobacco industry is allowed to support charities, such as cultural events and institutions.

Recommendation: Implement a full ban on tobacco industry sponsorships.

● Clinical guidelines for healthcare professionals to help people stop using tobacco are available and pharmaceutical products to treat tobacco dependence are available over the counter.

Recommendation: Make these pharmaceuticals more affordable through reimbursement and implement a national hotline to help people quit using tobacco.

● Belarus has regular surveys on tobacco use.

Recommendation: Include information on the determinants of tobacco consumption, tobacco-related mortality and social, economic and health indicators related to tobacco consumption.

● A number of partners support tobacco control measures in Belarus. These include the WHO and other UN organizations. WHO FCTC implementation is included in the next UNDAF program cycle. A new interagency noncommunicable disease control project also covers areas relevant to WHO FCTC implementation.

Recommendation: Fully incorporate WHO FCTC implementation into the UNDAF.

Post needs assessment assistance available from the Convention Secretariat

● Support for national stakeholder meeting to discuss the need assessment report and follow-up actions.

● Promotion of price and tax measures to reduce the demand for tobacco.

● Organize a roundtable discussion on "The effectiveness of tobacco taxation policy in the context of tobacco control".

● Conduct a study of the socio-economic costs of tobacco use in Belarus.

Outcomes



1) The needs assessment exercise was very well-received by government representatives.

2) It helped raise awareness of the importance of strong tax policies for tobacco products and the creation of smoke-free areas for protection of the public from exposure to tobacco smoke.

3) After the mission, an initiative has been put in place aiming at introducing changes to the existing legislation in order to introduce a complete ban on smoking in some public places, as well as on the regulation of electronic nicotine delivery systems.