

be an economic problem that impacts health and security as well. Illicit tobacco products are usually more accessible and affordable than legal ones, particularly impacting young people, the poor and other vulnerable groups by undermining WHO FCTC price measures and thus increasing tobacco consumption.¹⁶ By avoiding taxation, illicit products also lead to a substantial loss of national tax income. The Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, adopted by the COP in 2012 and which entered into force in September 2018, provides specific support to address this.¹⁷

4. The executive branch can take important first steps to advance tobacco control and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

The right to health is a fundamental responsibility of the government. Tobacco threatens this right, damages the environment and poses a severe economic burden.

In the first instance, the executive branch should:

- Support tobacco control coordination and planning across government sectors, including participating in or supporting the work of the NCM for tobacco prevention and control and the development or updating of comprehensive multisectoral national tobacco control strategies or action plans.
- Reflect national tobacco control priorities and targets in institutional and sector-specific programmes, strategies, and plans, including those that aim to reach SDG targets.
- Ensure tobacco control programmes, plans and strategies are sustainably and sufficiently resourced.
- Support the process to become a Party to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products and/or support implementation if already a Party.¹⁸
- Strengthen enforcement of existing tobacco control measures, including implementing protocols and inspections, conducting regular monitoring and inspections under the law and ensuring inspectors from responsible agencies are sufficiently trained.
- Implement measures to improve transparency and protect against tobacco industry interference in line with WHO FCTC Article 5.3.

In line with the Convention Secretariat's [Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control 2025](#) and [UNDP's Strategic Plan 2022-2025](#) and [HIV, Health and Development Strategy \(2022-2025\)](#), these briefs emphasise the importance of a coordinated, multisectoral whole-of-government approach to tobacco control, empowering Parties to work across sectors to achieve policy coherence.

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Tobacco Control

What the Executive Branch Needs to Know

Key Points

- 1 Tobacco control requires a whole-of-government, whole-of-society response.
- 2 Tobacco control benefits all sectors and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 3 The executive branch is uniquely positioned to strengthen implementation and enforcement of the WHO FCTC.
- 4 The executive branch can take important first steps to advance tobacco control and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) aims 'to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages'.¹ One of the means of achieving this goal is to strengthen implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) in all countries, as appropriate (Target 3.a).

The WHO FCTC is a legally binding treaty that reaffirms the right to health.² It was developed in response to the tobacco epidemic and currently has 183 Parties, covering more than 90 percent of the global population.³

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1. Tobacco control requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society response.

THE DEADLY CONSEQUENCES OF TOBACCO OF TOBACCO AND WHY GOVERNMENT SECTORS MUST WORK TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT THE WHO FCTC

The social, economic and environmental impacts of tobacco consumption and production are staggering. Without adequate investment in tobacco control it is estimated that up to 1 billion people could die from tobacco-related diseases during this century alone.⁴ Smoking-attributable diseases cost the global economy over a trillion US dollars annually, due to medical expenses and lost productivity.⁵ The environmental impacts, due to plastic pollution, deforestation and soil degradation from tobacco growing, as well as water and soil pollution from pesticide use and cigarette littering, are of growing concern. Levels of tobacco consumption and production in society are determined largely by policies beyond the health sector. This means that development consequences of tobacco are largely avoidable through better policy coherence and common strategies that deliver shared gains for all sectors involved, accelerating progress against multiple SDGs.

Entire governments commit to fulfilling WHO FCTC obligations when becoming a Party to the Treaty. Moreover, due to the multisectoral nature of factors that play into tobacco consumption and its negative consequences, ministries beyond health have a key role to play in fully implementing the WHO FCTC.

Below are examples of entities and their potential roles in tobacco control:ⁱ

- Ministry of finance and planning: allocate funding for tobacco control and tobacco tax policy, invest in alternative livelihoods for tobacco farmers and integrate tobacco control priorities into broader development plans and processes.
- Ministry of labour: protect young people from being used as child labour in tobacco farms and factories, support sustainable alternative livelihoods for tobacco growers and promote and support implementation of smoke-free workplaces and cessation services.
- Ministry of education: Ban tobacco sales, use and advertisement in and around schools and other places children and youth frequent, educate all youth and parents on the negative consequences of tobacco and

ⁱ This list is intended to illustrate potential roles only and is not exhaustive. For more information, please see Tool 3 of the Secretariat of the WHO FCTC and UNDP. National Coordinating Mechanisms for Tobacco Control. Toolkit for Parties to Implement Article 5.2(a) of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

secondhand smoke and ensure implementation and monitoring of tobacco control measures to protect youth from tobacco.

2. Tobacco control benefits all sectors and progress towards SDGs.

Evidence shows that scaling up support for cost-effective tobacco prevention and control will yield substantial socio-economic benefits that will extend beyond the health sector. WHO FCTC implementation is highly interlinked with the SDG targets, as implementation causes positive impacts across 67 social, economic and environment targets.^{ii,iii,6} Indeed, investing in tobacco control will facilitate progress across Agenda 2030 and can therefore help executive bodies achieve their sector-specific development goals and wider national objectives.

Education: Spending on tobacco products and health care due to tobacco-related ill health prevents households from financially supporting children’s education and increases the risk of them dropping out from school.⁷ By supporting tobacco control measures, ministries of education can improve access to education and achieve better education outcomes among youth.

Agriculture: Tobacco cultivation eats up large swaths of land that could otherwise support sustainable food production systems. Tobacco farming causes deforestation and contributes to global warming, land degradation and irreversible biodiversity loss.⁸ By supporting tobacco control measures, ministries of agriculture can increase food security, protect the environment and strengthen the resilience of agricultural producers.

Economy and Finance: Tobacco control can help avoid the tangible productivity and GDP losses that result from premature mortality, sick leave and unwell workers who

ⁱⁱ The average interaction scores were calculated to produce a high-level sense of WHO FCTC-SDG interactions; they are not meant to be prescriptive in terms of where to devote efforts.
ⁱⁱⁱ For more information, see Nilsson M., Griggs D., and Visbeck M., Policy: Map the interactions between Sustainable Development Goals. Nature 2016; 534:320-322. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/534320a>.

remain on the job but perform below capacity. In addition, tobacco taxes can help generate additional government revenues that can be re-invested in sustainable development initiatives. By supporting tobacco control measures, ministries of economy and finance can avert significant economic losses from tobacco while strengthening the resilience and productivity of their national economies.

3. The executive branch is uniquely positioned to strengthen implementation and enforcement of the WHO FCTC.

As highlighted in the 2021 Global Progress Report on implementation of the WHO FCTC, 60 percent of Parties to the Convention reported they had specific gaps between the resources available and the needs identified in implementation of the WHO FCTC, with lack of sufficient financial resources the most frequently reported gap. More than one third of Parties that submitted reports identified tobacco industry interference as the most common barrier in implementation. Lack of technical capacities, human resources, sustainable funding for tobacco control programmes and multisectoral coordination were also common barriers reported.⁹ Executive branches can play a key role in addressing these gaps and barriers.

Effective tobacco control requires strengthened governance and policy coherence.

Achieving policy coherence and a shared national vision for tobacco control across all sectors of government can be a challenge. Recognising this, WHO FCTC Article 5.1 calls for Parties to develop and implement comprehensive multisectoral national tobacco control strategies and programmes, while WHO FCTC Article 5.2(a) obliges Parties to strengthen governance for tobacco control. Developing a national tobacco control strategy and establishing a national coordinating mechanism (NCM) can facilitate WHO FCTC implementation, ensure that non-health sectors participate in the tobacco control response and strengthen coordination and policy coherence across sectors. High-level executive branch leadership and support are crucial to a successful whole-of-government response and strengthened implementation of the WHO FCTC.

Enforcement continues to be a key challenge.

Countries often have insufficiently strong mechanisms to drive compliance with national tobacco control policies and legislation and, as a result, face difficulties in enforcing key tobacco control measures.¹⁰ Moreover, only half of countries that maintain a database of national laws and regulations on tobacco control include information on the enforcement of those laws and regulations.¹¹ In addition to conducting regular monitoring and inspections, countries can consider training inspectors for the relevant agencies and linking enforcement actions with other implementation activities such as education or media campaigns.¹²

Health policymaking must be protected from tobacco industry interference.

Implementing measures to protect health policymaking from tobacco industry interference is critical for effective WHO FCTC implementation. As a result, under WHO FCTC Article 5.3, Parties are obligated to “protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law”.¹³ Several countries have taken decisive action to protect health policy from tobacco industry interference:

- In 2017, Thailand implemented a comprehensive ban on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities by the tobacco industry. Thailand also implemented a cabinet decision to ensure the state-owned tobacco industry Thai Tobacco Monopoly (TTM) was treated in the same way as any other industry, prohibiting the acceptance of any contributions from TTM.^{14, iv}
- In 2019, Australia issued “Guidance for Public Officials on Interacting with the Tobacco Industry”, which comprehensively details public health officials’ and organizations’ legal obligations regarding their interactions with the tobacco industry.¹⁵

Illicit trade undermines the effectiveness of tobacco control measures.

While the scope of illicit trade in tobacco products is often overstated by the tobacco industry, it can

^{iv} Other examples of countries’ approaches to implementing Article 5.3 of the Convention are available in the WHO FCTC Global progress reports and in the WHO FCTC implementation database. For more information, see <https://fctc.who.int/who-fctc/reporting/global-progress-reports> and <https://untobaccocontrol.org/implddb/article-5/> (see updates).