

Tobacco use falls globally despite rising industry interference

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Tobacco use worldwide has fallen steadily across the last two decades, despite the tobacco industry's unrelenting efforts to interfere in government regulation of their products, two recent reports show.

About one in five adults worldwide consumed tobacco in 2022 compared to one in three in 2000, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) [tobacco trends report](#) [1] released on 16 January. One hundred fifty countries reduced tobacco use, although most will miss the voluntary goal of a 30% relative reduction in tobacco use by 2025, collectively reaching only a 25% global reduction. Among the 56 countries projected to reach the 30% relative reduction by 2025 are Brazil, which has already made a reduction of 35% since 2010, and the Netherlands, which is now close reaching the 30% cut.

WHO global report on trends in prevalence of tobacco use 2000—2030, 2024

“Good progress has been made in tobacco control in recent years, but there is no time for complacency. I’m astounded at the depths the tobacco industry will go to pursue profits at the expense of countless lives,” said Dr Ruediger Krech, Director of WHO’s Department of Health Promotion, in a [press release](#) [2].

In fact, the tobacco industry has intensified its interference in public health policy, finds the latest in a series of reports on tobacco industry interference globally. Called the [Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index](#) [3], the series has documented governments’ efforts to combat industry interference since 2019.

The 2023 Index, produced by the [Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control](#) [4] with support from [STOP](#) [5], uses data collected by civil society to review 90 countries worldwide. Since COVID-19, the industry “has stepped up its interference by signing more voluntary agreements with government offices, engaging diplomatic missions and conducting environmental programmes, which tend to distract governments’ attention,” notes the index.

The scores of 43 countries deteriorated in the latest index, while 29 strengthened protection of their health policies, especially in “applying greater transparency, not collaborating with the industry and adopting policies that provide a procedure for interaction with the industry.” The scores of eight countries were unchanged.

The index reveals disheartening findings in regard to industry interference in policymaking:

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- Government departments of finance, commerce and investment continued to be targeted by the tobacco industry;
- Many governments still accepted handouts from the industry, labelled as “corporate social responsibility” (CSR);
- Global issues such as the continued impact of COVID-19, natural disasters and the growing need for environmental protection led governments to continue accepting industry charity and compromising on policies;
- Transparency and accountability lagged; most countries do not have rules for disclosure of meetings with the tobacco industry, a register of lobbyists, or policies to require the industry to disclose information on marketing and lobbying;
- Five countries reported that the tobacco industry sabotaged efforts to pass comprehensive laws compliant with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

On the positive side, four governments progressed in protecting their policies from tobacco industry interference: Botswana, Bosnia, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire.

The Index's recommendations to reduce industry interference and protect population health include:

- Involve the whole of government to curtail tobacco industry interference;
- Require greater transparency for increased accountability;
- Denormalize and ban tobacco's “CSR” activities.

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- [1] <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240088283>
- [2] <https://www.who.int/news/item/16-01-2024-tobacco-use-declines-despite-tobacco-industry-efforts-to-jeopardize-progress>
- [3] <https://globaltobaccoindex.org/>
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