WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2023

Protect people from tobacco smoke

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
“MPOWER was designed to catalyze global action on tobacco control. In protecting over 5 billion people, I am proud to say that it has delivered on its promise. But it is a promise that must be kept. We must continue to prioritize tobacco control to protect the health of billions more people in the future.”

Dr Margaret Chan
Former WHO Director-General (2007–2017)
Dean of Vanke School of Public Health, Tsinghua University
Overview

With over 8 million tobacco-related deaths a year, tobacco use continues to be one of the biggest public health threats and tobacco control remains a global health priority. This is the ninth WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic and the fifteenth year since MPOWER was introduced as a technical package designed to help countries implement the demand-reduction measures of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. This report shows that, in 2022, more than 5.6 billion people – 71% of the world’s population – were covered by at least one MPOWER measure implemented at the highest level (Fig. 1).

The number of countries with one or more MPOWER measure in place has more than tripled since 2007 – from 44 to 151 countries, and the number of countries with two or more MPOWER measures in place has increased almost 10-fold – from 11 to 101 countries (Fig. 2). Forty-eight countries have at least three policies in place, covering 1.5 billion people.

Of the 44 countries that have not yet reached the highest level of achievement (or best-practice level, meaning they have achieved the criteria as described in Technical Note 1) for any MPOWER measure, 31 are just one level away from best-practice for one or more of their MPOWER measures.

While progress has been steady since 2007, the pace has certainly slowed since 2018. Since 2020, five countries that previously had no best-practice measures in place (Cabo Verde, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Sudan and Zambia) have reached the highest level of achievement on one or more measures. All five countries are low- or middle-income countries.

Fig. 1. At least one MPOWER measure at highest level of achievement (2007–2022)

5.6 billion people, over 70% of the world’s population, are now covered by at least one MPOWER measure at the highest level of achievement.
Smoke-free measures must be scaled up to protect people from a major cause of health burden

Protecting people from tobacco smoke – the “P” of the MPOWER measures – is the focus of this ninth WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic and is a crucial component of the MPOWER package. Smoke-free measures in public indoor areas are highly cost-effective interventions that not only protect non-smokers from the many dangers of second-hand tobacco smoke but also “denormalize” the act of smoking and can increase smokers’ motivation to try to quit.

Complete smoke-free indoor public places, workplaces and public transport now cover 2.1 billion people living in 74 countries. This is a seven-fold increase since 2007 and means that smoke-free environments comprise the second most adopted MPOWER measure in terms of the number of countries covered. Over the 15 years since monitoring MPOWER progress began, almost 2 billion people have been newly protected by laws mandating 100% smoke-free environments.

Despite the evidence demonstrating that designated smoking areas or rooms (DSRs) do not help to protect people in public indoor areas, 71 countries continue to allow them in many venues, and especially in hospitality-based venues such as restaurants, bars and cafés. Simply by removing these provisions, 39 of these countries would immediately achieve best-practice status.

Reported compliance is highest in health care and educational facilities and lowest in pubs, bars and cafés, followed by universities and restaurants. To ensure compliance, countries must ensure enforcement mechanisms are established and followed. While almost all countries (87% or 170 countries) prescribe fines for violations of smoking bans, less than one third of countries have dedicated funds for enforcement.

Eight countries are only one measure away from achieving all MPOWER measures at the highest level of achievement

Of the 101 countries now covered by at least two MPOWER measures, 36 have three measures at the highest level of achievement, and eight countries have four measures at the highest level of achievement (Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Jordan, Madagascar, Mexico, New Zealand and Spain). Meanwhile, the total number of countries that have adopted all of the MPOWER measures at best-practice level has increased by two since the last report, which sees Mauritius and the Netherlands (Kingdom of the) welcomed to this rank achieved by Brazil and Türkiye.

More than two billion people remain unprotected by any of the MPOWER measures at best-practice level

All countries can adopt and implement comprehensive tobacco control policies to prevent the immense burden imposed by tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke. Yet, in 2022, 44 countries had not yet adopted a single MPOWER measure at best-practice level, leaving 2.3 billion people vulnerable to the harms of tobacco.
Progress in tobacco control continues but must be accelerated

In 2022, the MPOWER measure that saw the most progress was banning tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS), with seven countries reaching the highest level of achievement, covering a population of 246 million additional people since 2020. Although TAPS bans remain an under-adopted measure, almost 2 billion people in 66 countries are now covered.

High-income countries are lagging when it comes to reaching best-practice on TAPS bans, with only 15 out of 60 high-income countries reaching this level (25% of all high-income countries). By contrast, 38 out of 106 middle-income countries (36%) and 13 out of 28 low-income countries (46%) have achieved best-practice level.

Graphic health warning policies at the highest level of achievement have been adopted by 103 countries. This means that more than 4.5 billion people (or 57% of the world’s population) are now protected by large graphic pack warnings featuring all recommended characteristics, making it the MPOWER measure with both the highest population coverage and the largest number of countries covered. It is also important to note that by the end of 2022, 22 countries had adopted legislation mandating plain packaging for tobacco products and had issued regulations with implementation deadlines. A handful of other countries have required plain packaging by law but have not yet issued rules for implementation.

Few countries have policies on cessation services, with only 32 countries providing such services at best-practice level, covering almost 2.8 billion people. Six countries have reached best-practice level since 2020, covering an additional 260 million people. Although this measure is adopted by very few countries, these countries are home to more than one third of the world’s population, making it the second most adopted MPOWER measure in terms of population covered.

Monitoring tobacco use, unfortunately, continues to be significantly hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection efforts were hindered in many countries during 2020 to 2022, as was the release of results for surveys completed before and during the pandemic. A total of 74 countries achieved the highest level of achievement for monitoring tobacco use in 2022, down from a peak of 82 in 2014.

While raising prices through taxation is the most effective way to reduce tobacco use, this measure has been slow to progress. A large increase in population coverage by this measure was observed between 2016 and 2018 (from 8% in 2016 to 13% in 2018), but since then, the proportion of the world’s population protected by taxes at best-practice level has dropped slightly to 12% in 2022. Fig. 3 shows the overall status of selected tobacco control policies globally.

Over the last 15 years, the number of countries covered by comprehensive smoke-free environments has increased from 10 in 2007 to 74 in 2022.
Key findings

Countries across the world continue to adopt MPOWER measures at a steady pace

Each MPOWER measure has been newly adopted at best-practice level by additional countries since 2020.

- Three countries (Belarus, El Salvador and Mauritius) improved monitoring to best-practice level.
- Five countries (Kyrgyzstan, Mauritius, Mexico, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Ukraine) newly adopted complete smoke-free laws covering all indoor public places, workplaces and public transport.
- Six countries (Ethiopia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Mauritius, Romania and Zambia) advanced to best-practice level with their tobacco use cessation services.
- Two countries (Benin and Myanmar) adopted large graphic pack warnings.
- Seven countries (Cabo Verde, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mexico, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Sudan and Ukraine) introduced comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, including at point-of-sale.
- Four countries (Australia, Lithuania, Nicaragua and Vanuatu) moved to the best-practice group by levying taxes that comprise at least 75% of retail price.

Two billion people are still unprotected by any regulatory restrictions on electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS)

The previous WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic showed how MPOWER measures could be applied to ENDS and called on countries to regulate ENDS to protect their populations. This new report highlights the fact that 121 countries regulate ENDS in some way. Thirty-four of these countries (covering 2.5 billion people) ban the sale of ENDS, and the other 87 countries have adopted (partially or completely) one or more legislative measures to regulate ENDS, covering 3.3 billion people.

The current regulatory options taken by 87 countries include a wide range of measures with no globally common approach to address these products.

Seventy-four countries (seven fewer than in 2020) still have no ENDS ban or regulations in place, leaving over 2 billion people particularly vulnerable to the activities of the tobacco and related industries.

Particularly relevant to smoke-free environments, only 42 countries completely ban the use of ENDS in all indoor public places, workplaces and public transport (although this is an improvement on the 36 countries with the presence of such bans in 2020).

Only 23 countries comprehensively ban the advertising, promotion and sponsorship of both ENDS devices and e-liquids. An additional five countries apply these bans only to the devices, while three countries apply them only to the e-liquids.

ENDS marketing targets children and young people through a number of tactics, including making ENDS available with many enticing flavours. Astonishingly, very few countries have measures in place to protect children from ENDS. Only four countries now ban all flavours while nine others restrict or allow specific flavours, and 88 countries, covering a population of 2.3 billion people, have no minimum age at which ENDS may be purchased.

15 years of MPOWER have made a major impact on global tobacco control

Since 2007 and the launch of the MPOWER technical package, all MPOWER measures have made notable progress. Fig. 4 illustrates how graphic health warnings have made the most progress compared with the other measures, protecting an additional 52% of the world’s population since 2007, while offering cessation services, successfully adopted in some populous countries like India, is second with an additional 30% of the global population protected since 2007. Tobacco taxation has been the slowest measure to progress, with only an additional 5% of the population covered in the last 15 years.

Fig. 4. Increase in the world population covered by selected tobacco control policies, 2007* to 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M Monitoring</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Smoke-free environments</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O Cessation programmes</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W Pack warnings</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Mass media</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Advertising bans</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 2010 for W mass media, 2008 for R taxation.

b The share of the world’s population covered by mass media campaigns decreased since 2010.
Conclusion

MPOWER was introduced 15 years ago. At the time 1.1 billion people were protected by at least one MPOWER measure at best-practice level. Now more than 1.5 billion are covered by at least three of these measures and 5.6 billion people are protected by at least one.

The MPOWER technical package has achieved some huge successes. Fifteen years of dedicated collaboration have seen the global prevalence of smoking decline from 22.8% in 2007 to 17.0% in 2021. If this prevalence had not declined, there would be 300 million additional smokers today. This reduction in the prevalence of smoking has come about through the collective and coordinated efforts of a global community dedicated to tobacco control and remaining steadfast against the interference from the tobacco and related industries. But with more than 8 million people dying from tobacco-related diseases every year, new and emerging threats such as those posed by ENDS and the ongoing presence of an ever-shifting industry, we still have so much work to do.

This year we are very pleased to congratulate two countries, Mauritius and Netherlands (Kingdom of the), which join Brazil and Türkiye as countries that have accomplished the landmark achievement of putting in place the full MPOWER package at best-practice level. And with only one measure left to adopt, a further eight countries can soon join their ranks. Establishing all MPOWER measures at best-practice level means that the combined impact of these measures will be greater than their parts, and is the best way to protect a country’s population and give them the best chance to reduce tobacco use and improve the health of generations to come.

While 71% of the world’s population is afforded protection from MPOWER policies in place, 2.3 billion people, in 44 countries, are not covered by any evidence-based demand-reduction tobacco control measures, leaving them at most risk of health and economic harms of tobacco use. And although the prevalence of smoking has declined in most countries, as the total population grows, the total number of people smoking decreases at a slower pace. The gaps in MPOWER adoption need to be filled much faster.

This report, which focuses on measures aimed at protecting people from tobacco smoke, brings our attention to the need to accelerate the adoption of smoke-free environments and strengthen implementation to ensure compliance with such laws. Smoke-free indoor public places protect non-smokers and encourage smokers to quit so that smoking is viewed increasingly as socially unacceptable by generations to come. In spite of the strong opposition from the tobacco and related industries, almost half of the world’s countries have managed to extend 100% smoke-free laws to the venues most vigorously defended by industry lobbyists: restaurants, cafés, pubs and bars, including not allowing designated smoking areas or rooms or other exceptions under the law. And studies have demonstrated both the health and economic benefits reaped as a result. This illustrates what can be achieved.

Health care and educational facilities have progressed further than venues associated with hospitality, and now 75% of countries have comprehensive legislation protecting people in these spaces. In some countries, measures to protect children, an especially vulnerable population, from second-hand smoke have extended to outdoor and private places. Sixty countries have adopted smoke-free playgrounds and 25 require cars transporting children below the age of 18 to be smoke-free.

To effectively protect people from the dangers of second-hand tobacco smoke, enforcement of smoke-free legislation is essential to ensuring compliance with the law. Currently, 111 countries use fines to penalize both the patron and the establishment for violations of smoking bans, an additional 7 countries fine only the establishment where the violation occurred and 52 countries fine only the customer who smoked, amounting to a total of 170 countries that fine smoking in a smoke-free place. Establishments can also be fined for failing to display no-smoking signs in 117 countries, and for allowing ashtrays in smoke-free areas in 29 countries. Only 61 countries have dedicated funds for enforcement written into their legislation and 91 are required by law to have an established complaint mechanism system.

This year we not only celebrate the fifteenth year of MPOWER but also the twentieth anniversary of the WHO FCTC, reminding us that every government has an obligation to protect the health of its people, and that is why all Parties to the WHO FCTC have made a commitment to implement strong tobacco control policies as an important means of doing so. There is still more work to do but with these established and powerful global health tools we are in an excellent position to accelerate progress and make bold strides to a healthier future.

Four countries have now achieved the full MPOWER package at best-practice level, and a further eight countries need only to attain one more measure before they have the full MPOWER package.
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