

Colombia



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

There is a high level of tobacco industry (TI) interference in the policy-making process at both the national and subnational levels. Members of Congress with close ties to the TI have submitted bills that seek to weaken tobacco control regulations. The TI has actively participated in public hearings, influencing legislative outcomes, and has maintained strong connections with key entities such as the National Federation of Departments.

2. Industry CSR Activities

Despite a 2013 resolution prohibiting tobacco company Government entities have supported or partnered in activities led by the TI, such as the BAT Popular Art Salon and the campaign “Bogotá is Not an Ashtray.” The TI has also sponsored major youth-focused events such as Estéreo Picnic, despite Colombia’s ban on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship. This indicates continued normalization of TI participation in such events.

3. Benefits to the Industry

While there are no specific tax exemptions currently in place, free trade agreements have allowed tobacco products to enter the country without additional tariffs. Despite Colombia’s ratification of the WHO FCTC, the National Tobacco Fund, which supports tobacco production, remains unchanged. In addition, the TI has successfully lobbied against proposed tax increases on tobacco products, limiting efforts to strengthen public health measures.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

Several high-ranking government officials and their relatives have direct or indirect ties to the TI. Government agencies have accepted TI support for anti-smuggling initiatives and cultural events, and have allowed TI participation in trade fairs and official programs. These interactions raise concerns about conflicts of interest and undue influence on policymaking.

5. Transparency

There is no formal procedure for disclosing interactions with the TI. Although some entities, such as the Ministry of Health, have taken steps to disclose meetings with the TI and its representatives, these practices are not mandatory or institutionalized. Colombia also lacks a mandatory lobbyist register and legal requirements for disclosing TI interactions, which allows interference to go unchecked.

6. Conflict of Interest

There are no laws prohibiting or regulating donations from the TI to political campaigns. Numerous current and former public officials have worked for or are associated with the TI or its front groups. Family ties have also facilitated access and influence with senior officials.



7. Preventive Measures

Colombia has not implemented comprehensive preventive measures. There are no formal procedures for recording interactions, no specific codes of conduct, and no policies prohibiting contributions or gifts from the TI. Although the

Ministry of Health has adopted some positive practices, such as disclosing meetings with the TI, these remain informal and have not been institutionalized. There is no publicly available information that the government intends to implement Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adopt a comprehensive and legally binding framework that ensures full compliance with Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. This regulation should explicitly recognize the irreconcilable conflict of interest between the TI and public health, and establish enforceable obligations for all branches and levels of government.
2. Implement and enforce measures to prevent TI interference in public health policymaking. This includes prohibiting the participation of the TI, and its representatives or affiliates, in legislative debates, regulatory processes, technical committees, and decision-making forums related to health policy.
3. Invest in awareness-raising and capacity-building programs to promote understanding of Article 5.3 among public officials, policymakers, and the public. These initiatives should explain the rationale behind the WHO FCTC, highlight the risks of TI interference, and strengthen the commitment to protecting health policy from commercial interests.
4. Institutionalize mandatory transparency mechanisms for all interactions with the TI. This should include public disclosure of meetings, agendas, participants, and outcomes. Legislation should also explicitly prohibit the TI and its affiliates from taking part in any discussions or decision-making processes related to public health policy, ensuring these spaces remain free from industry influence.