

Kazakhstan

Overall score:

63

Summary of Findings

1. Industry participation in policy development

The tobacco industry participates in policy development indirectly through the national business union "Atakemen." Regular annual fees from four transnational tobacco companies to the union are used as lobbying forces to block different public health initiatives at the national policy level. For example, in preparation for new Health Act advocacy, the Ministry of Health (MOH) team had to run special regulatory analysis review (RAR) which must be approved by "Atakemen." The MOH must discuss the content with every business association that applied which made advocacy by health professionals extremely difficult, intense and sometimes almost impossible.

2. Industry CSR activities

CSR activities by tobacco companies are allowed in Kazakhstan and even stimulated by the special CSR award "Paryz," established by the President of Kazakhstan in 2008. The tobacco industry had often been highly apprised by "Paryz." As a result, the NGO sector openly receives CSR sponsorship from the tobacco industry where charity NGO "Degdar" is well known as a long-term partnership with Japan Tobacco International (JTI).

There are no publicly available official records of any direct endorsement, support or partnerships between the tobacco industry and government agencies.

3. Benefits to the industry

There are no timeline benefits for implementation or postponement of tobacco control laws known or supported. But as for excise taxes, the only effective tobacco control intervention, the tobacco industry was able to lobby the Eurasia custom union which unifies five countries (Armenia, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) for the privilege of substantially low excise tax, which was signed on December 24, 2019. As per the Eurasia custom union, the tax agreement of only €35 per thousand sticks will be achieved in 2024 and not more than 20% increase will be allowed which shows significant benefits to the tobacco industry.

4. Unnecessary interaction

Unnecessary interaction with the tobacco industry happens on a senior level within different cultural and musical activities of the "Degdar" charity fund under JTI sponsorship, which might also serve as direct access to key decision-makers at the government and Parliament level. Another important tobacco industry interaction involves leading a scientific institution which openly receives sponsorship by Philip Morris to block heated tobacco product advocacy in Health Act.

5. Transparency

The WHO World Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) provisions and FCTC Article 5.3 Guidelines especially are neglected in Kazakhstan. As a result, there is no official or informal regulation to disclose meetings/interactions with the tobacco industry or rules for the disclosure or registration of tobacco industry entities, affiliated organizations and individuals acting on their behalf including lobbyists. Meeting with the tobacco industry is a norm in Kazakhstan and in some cases even required by law (Business Act).

6. Conflict of interest

FCTC provisions and Article 5.3 Guidelines especially are neglected in Kazakhstan. For example, well known ex-head of the "Atameken" union who currently works as MP and leader of "Akzhol" political party in Mazhilis regularly attempts to influence tobacco control and weaken the amendments. He never disclosed conflict of interest.

7. Preventive measures

As Article 5.3 Guidelines are neglected in Kazakhstan, no preventive measures have been put in place by the government and in parliament.

Recommendations

1. Develop and implement a special national rule or code to implement Article 5.3 Guidelines to stop tobacco industry collaboration with senior level politicians. The code should provide a transparent procedure of any tobacco industry interaction to all government officials and politicians, and public academic institutions including scientists.
2. Ban all forms of tobacco-related CSR activities.
3. Introduce and expand an awareness campaign on Article 5.3 Guidelines at a senior political level and for media.
4. Continue collecting and disclosing records of all tobacco industry interference.