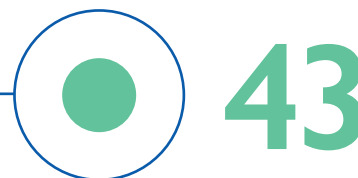


# Oman



## Summary of Findings

### 1. INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

After Saudi Arabia, Oman became the second nation in the region this year to enact a plain packaging legislation, which will go into effect in September 2023. Although there is no proof in the public domain that the government accepts support from the tobacco industry (TI) in tobacco control policy development, tobacco control laws and regulations are not as comprehensive and extensive as outlined in the WHO FCTC guidelines.

### 2. INDUSTRY CSR ACTIVITIES

Khimji Ramdas, the distributor for Philip Morris, presents themselves as a generous family-run business with a Corporate Social Responsibility Arm, Eshraqa. It was the only TI engaged in a number of sponsorship activities with the public sector. For the period of this review, Khimji Ramdas engaged in nine national and three sub-national activities with the public sector including ministries and other government institutions. High level government officials, including the Royal Family and Undersecretaries from the Ministries of Education, Labour and Social Development, participated in several of them and are quoted expressing appreciation for Eshraqa's efforts to serve the community. All of the activities involved the education, or social development sector(s) and/or targeted children, young people, people with disabilities or women; none engaged the health sector unlike in the previous review. On the other hand, these activities appear to be more strategically targeted than previously by addressing priority groups like young people, people with disabilities and young entrepreneurs. The government is exploring ways to ban CSR.

### 3. BENEFITS TO THE INDUSTRY

There is no evidence in the public domain of the government attending to requests submitted by the TI. The new regulation on plain packaging imposes an administrative fine of up to OMR 1,000 (US \$2,600). The 2019 excise tax on tobacco products provides an exemption for tobacco imported into Musandam, the northern governorate bordering the United Arab Emirates.

### 4. UNNECESSARY INTERACTION

No evidence was found in the public domain on the government accepting assistance from or entering into partnership with the TI.

### 5. TRANSPARENCY

No evidence was found in the public domain on the government meeting or interacting with the TI. No rules exist on requiring the government to disclose or register TI entities and their affiliated organizations.

### 6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A former Minister of Commerce and Industry is a Group Adviser for WJ Towell Group and in September 2020, was appointed to the 6-member Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman for a 5-year term. Since then, two high level managers from the TI have been appointed to government positions: one as an advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the other as a member, Board of Directors, Muscat Stock Exchange.

## 7. PREVENTIVE MEASURES

There was no evidence found in the public domain about the requirements of the government to disclose records of the interaction with the TI and its representatives. There were also no records of the government requiring the TI to periodically submit information on tobacco production, manufacture, market share, marketing expenditures, revenues and any other activity.

There is a policy for members of the multisectoral national tobacco control committee prohibiting them from receiving donations and accepting subsidies from tobacco companies or their agents. However, it does not apply for the whole government leaving the avenue open for the TI to approach other public officials.

## Recommendations

1. Raise awareness among all branches of government and the public about the need to protect public health policies for tobacco control from commercial and other vested interest of the TI, as well as its and the strategies to interfere with the development and implementation of tobacco control policies.
2. Expand the current code of conduct for members of the Tobacco Control Committee to all government officials, limiting interactions and prescribing the standards with which they should comply in their dealings with the TI.
3. Expand legislation on controlling tobacco promotional activities and ban sponsorship of events including philanthropic activities, financial or in-kind, by the TI with government entities. The regulation should also clearly define mechanisms for enforcement.
4. Develop clear conflict of interest policies that require applicants for public office positions which have a role in setting and implementing tobacco control policies to declare any current or previous occupational activity with any TI. Any person employed previously by the TI must not be allowed to be a member of any government body, committee or advisory group that sets or implements tobacco control or public health policy.
5. Establish a system to regularly collect and disseminate information on tobacco market share, marketing expenditures, revenues, philanthropy and other activities.
6. Strengthen tobacco control policies such as:
  - 6.1. Require stronger, larger graphic health warnings and introduce a regular review process (i.e., every six months).
  - 6.2. Reduce the affordability of both cigarettes and shisha tobacco by implementing a minimum specific tax and standard tax rates for all tobacco products, removing the duty-free status for importing tobacco into Musandam and earmarking tobacco tax revenues for tobacco control activities.
  - 6.3. Impose a comprehensive national ban on tobacco use in enclosed public spaces by removing the allowance in sub-national laws permitting designated smoking areas and exemptions for shisha cafes.