

Lao PDR



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

The tobacco industry (TI) continues to interfere with the government at various levels. During the development of plain packaging regulations, the TI attempted to influence the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC) by mobilizing staff from other divisions of these ministries to pressure tobacco control officials and request access to draft regulations. After approval of plain packaging, the TI lobbied within the MOIC to delay implementation, sending letters to the MoH requesting a postponement of more than six months. The TI also lobbied the government to permit the establishment of new companies for the production of e-cigarettes and liquids, ostensibly for export.

2. Industry CSR Activities

No government department has accepted or endorsed any TI-related corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. The Prime Minister Decree on Tobacco Product Promotional Consumption Ban 2010 prohibits all contributions from the TI, including CSR activities. The Tobacco Control Law, amended in 2021, also bans all forms of sponsorship, including CSR activities.

3. Benefits to the Industry

Implementation of new pictorial health warnings (PHWs) was delayed by more than nine months due to TI interference, as companies repeatedly justified the delay by citing large stockpiles of pre-printed packets.

In addition, the 25-year (2001–2026) government joint venture with the Imperial Tobacco Group remains in effect. This agreement caps tax increases and grants incentives to the TI, which controls around 80 percent of the cigarette market. These benefits limit public access to information on the harms of tobacco use and reduce government revenue.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

The government received assistance from the TI for anti-smuggling enforcement activities. The government's joint venture with Lao Tobacco Company/Imperial Tobacco remains in effect, facilitating unnecessary interaction.

5. Transparency

The government does not publicly disclose meetings or interactions with the TI. While the MoH does not engage in meetings with the TI or its representatives, other government departments maintain communication, but the nature and content of these interactions are not publicly disclosed.

While tobacco companies are required to register, there are no rules for the disclosure or registration of TI-affiliated organizations or individuals who represent it.



6. Conflict of Interest

There are no political campaigns in Lao PDR, and consequently no political donations. However, senior officials from the Ministries of Finance and Industry and Commerce serve on the Board of Management of the joint venture, Lao Tobacco Company.

7. Preventive Measures

In December 2018, the MoH issued a Code of Conduct for the Health Sector to provide guidance on interacting with the TI. In November 2021, Article 4 of the Tobacco

Control Law was amended to require the state to protect public health policies from all forms of TI interference. Despite this amendment, implementation has been delayed, benefiting the TI.

Furthermore, the 2021 amendment obliges the TI to report twice a year on cigarette ingredients, emissions, marketing expenditures, and revenues. While such information may be accessible to the government's investment unit, it is not shared with other departments or applied to tobacco control efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Terminate the 25-year (2001–2026) government joint venture with Imperial Tobacco Group.
2. Require the TI to submit information on tobacco production, manufacture, market share, marketing expenditures, and revenues to support tobacco control measures.
3. Enforce compliance with the Standardized Tobacco Packaging Law without delay.
4. Implement Article 4 of the Tobacco Control Law to protect public health policies from all forms of TI interference.