

# Lebanon

72

## Summary of Findings

### 1. Industry participation in policy development

This is the third year that Lebanon has participated in the Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index. As such the findings will aim at establishing a comparison between 2018, 2019 and 2020 government efforts to comply with Article 5.3. In line with the Article 5.3 Guidelines all activities conducted by the Regie monopoly were considered as tobacco industry activities impeding the implementation of tobacco control in Lebanon.

2019 indicated that no improvement was noted compared to 2018 on tobacco control. There is no major finding to note in 2020 given the stagnation in the country due to COVID and the economic crisis. The main issues to highlight is that after being regulated in 2019, e-cigarettes have been in the Lebanese market since February 2020. COVID-19 led to an increase in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities by the Regie. The sole decision that was taken by the government, in particular the Ministry of Health, to the implementation of the tobacco control law by banning waterpipe use in public places did not last, as it was overruled by a decision by the Minister of Tourism in favor of restaurants owners, an action taken without consulting with the MOPH.

Nevertheless, many of the Article 5.3 principles can be implemented without a budget such as taking measures to limit interaction with tobacco, put in place procedures for disclosing the records of the interaction with the tobacco industry and its representatives and adopt or implement a code of conduct for public officials.

### 2. Industry CSR activities

The Regie conducted multiple CSR activities during this period. In line with its sustainable development plan, it offered financial grants to municipalities. In line with COVID support, it donated US \$1 million to the Lebanese government to support bringing back Lebanese students from abroad and to buy ventilators for COVID-19 patients. Its director visited the Minister of Health and discussed the possibility of buying the vaccine for employees and their families as part of Regie's CSR program. With respect to the financial crisis relief, it donated food rations to be distributed to support families in need.

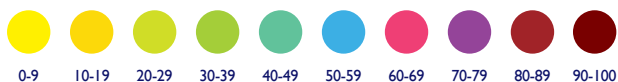
### 3. Benefits to the industry

In 2021, e-cigarette and IQOS were officially released in the Lebanese market; the IQOS booth breached Article 4, and chapter 5 of the law 174; however, no action was taken.

The Minister of Tourism allowed restaurants to serve waterpipe in outdoor spaces given they follow the rules. The decision to allow serving waterpipe in restaurants was in response to the pressure by the syndicates of owners of restaurants that complained that their business is in danger if waterpipe remained banned as it is their main source of income. This decision took place despite the call of tobacco advocates to keep the ban and backing it up by evidence of the harm of COVID and smoking.

### 4. Unnecessary interaction

The Regie visited the newly appointment Minister of Finance to update him of its financial situation. In the same meeting they offered to donate US \$1 million to Lebanese students from



abroad and to buy ventilators for COVID-19 patients. In addition, the General Director visited the head of the parliament; the reason of this visit was not revealed to the media.

## 5. Transparency

The situation did not change. There is still no procedure in place to ensure transparency when the government meets with the tobacco industry. There are no government rules for the disclosure or registration of tobacco industry entities.

However, Lebanon passed the decree 6940 dated 24/09/2020 implementing the Law No.28 dated 10/02/2017 (Right to have access to information). This is a step forward that will allow tobacco advocates to request that the Regie disclose its financial data, meeting minutes and memorandums of understanding with the tobacco industry.

## 6. Conflict of interest

The situation did not change from 2019. There is no publicly available data on senior retired officials taking part in the tobacco industry and the government does not have in place procedure to prohibit contributions from the tobacco industry.

## 7. Preventive measures

The situation did not change from 2019. Lebanon does not have a plan for implementation of Article 5.3. There is no procedure in place to disclose the government's interaction with the tobacco industry. The government has not adopted or implemented a code of conduct for public officials in their dealings with the tobacco industry.

While the tobacco industry is required to submit information on tobacco production and manufacture for tax purpose, there is no requirement for the industry to submit other information such as market share, marketing expenditures, lobbying, philanthropy and others.

There is no publicly available information to show the government has a program or plan to consistently raise awareness on Article 5.3 Guidelines within its departments.

Further, the National Tobacco Control head was assigned a new position, and no one was appointed yet in his place.

## Recommendations

1. In line with the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), further effort should be set in place to enhance public health policies.
2. Tobacco-related CSR activities must be banned as well as CSR activities by the Regie including donations.
3. The state-owned monopoly, the Regie, must be treated like any other tobacco company. Therefore, a law proposed by the Regie must not be accepted as this is a direct intervention in tobacco control policymaking; a "firewall" between the industry and tobacco control policy must be established.
4. There must be a procedure in place to disclose the records of government interaction with the tobacco industry.
5. A code of conduct should be adopted by the government to guide officials when dealing with the tobacco industry. The MOPH, through its Tobacco Control Program could take the lead in writing those procedures.
6. The tobacco industry should be required to submit information on tobacco production, manufacture, market share, marketing expenditures, revenues and any other activity, including lobbying, philanthropy, political contributions and all other activities.
7. The government should work on raising awareness within its departments on policies related to FCTC Article 5.3. Similar activities could be coordinated between the MOPH through its National Tobacco Program, civil society and academia.
8. The government must create a plan to fight illicit trade in coordination with neighboring countries and sign the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.
9. The Regie should disclose information on profits, financial data, board meeting minutes and records. This could be possible if the law of right to have access to information is enforced.
10. Publish details of meetings and memorandum of agreement with tobacco industry.
11. Prohibit the Regie or the tobacco industry from proposing policy drafts or studies to the governments.