

# South Korea

Overall score:

56

## Summary of Findings

### 1. Industry participation in policy development

There is no publicly available information on the government accepting or endorsing any offer of assistance from the tobacco industry in setting public health policy. The government has a multisectoral national tobacco control strategy, focal point for tobacco control and national coordinating mechanism for tobacco control. Throughout the year, the South Korean government, through the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety, continued to contend against a lawsuit filed by Philip Morris Korea Inc. in 2018 over the disclosure of information on its research on cancer-causing substances found in its heated tobacco products (HTPs). The current lawsuit is still ongoing.

### 2. Industry CSR activities

In 2019, Korea Tomorrow & Global Corporation (KT&G) continued to conduct its corporate responsibility activities in relation to public interest and youth smoking prevention. It has organized a number of activities that involved volunteer service to support low-income families nationwide. This program was attended by Chenoa City Hall officials and various social welfare organizations. KT&G also recently supported the reconstruction of the regional library in Goseong-gun, Gangwon-do, which was severely damaged by a large forest fire.

### 3. Benefits to the industry

While no new laws in regard to tobacco control were introduced in 2019, policies on display of tobacco products at points of sale, tobacco sponsorship and cross-border advertising originating from the country still remain non-existent. Despite several tobacco tax reforms, Korea still has one of the highest smoking prevalence rates and also the lowest cigarette price. Moreover, despite smoking bans and restrictions on e-cigarettes, the government permitted US-based company Juul Labs Inc. to enter and establish its local subsidiary in South Korea. Juul Labs Korea filed a trademark application with the Korean Intellectual Property Office and are allowed to market e-cigarettes with nicotine levels up to two percent.

### 4. Unnecessary interaction

In 2019, KT&G was certified as an excellent organization for cultural and arts sponsorship by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism for the creation of a cultural ecosystem where artists and the public can freely interact and enjoy. KT&G CEO Baek Bok-in received a certificate of excellent sponsorship for culture and arts at the 2019 ARKO Art Sponsor Night.

### 5. Transparency

No rules exist requiring government officials to disclose meetings and interactions with the tobacco industry to the public.

### 6. Conflict of interest

The South Korean Code of Conduct for Public Officials prohibits current government officials from holding positions in other business. Government officials are also strictly prohibited from accepting any form of monetary or non-monetary contributions from tobacco industry or any entity.

## 7. Preventive measures

There is no existing transparency or preventive measure system to disclose and record interaction with tobacco industry and its representatives in South Korea. There is also no concrete and systematic plan to raise awareness within government departments on policies relating to WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Article 5.3 Guidelines in South Korea.

However, in 2019, Health Minister Park Neung-hoo issued a strong warning on the use of liquid-type e-cigarettes over health concerns, drawing public attention to the different popular brands available in the country.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, South Korea's Ministry of Food and Drug Safety tightened its security and import measures, halting the general public from purchasing e-cigarettes and liquid nicotine after a series of vaping-associated deaths in the US.<sup>2</sup>

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## Recommendations

1. Develop a comprehensive and time-bound national strategy to raise awareness on and curb tobacco consumption and tobacco industry interference in public health policy making.
2. Cascade and mainstream WHO FCTC Article 5.3 and its guidelines within and among government departments involved in planning and monitoring of tobacco control policies.
3. Strictly ban tobacco industry marketing and promotional activities, directly through its so-called CSR activities or indirectly through its affiliates.
4. Expose harmful effects of and ban consumption of ENDS and HTPs.
5. Require the tobacco industry to submit information on tobacco production, manufacture, market share, marketing expenditures, revenues and lobbying activities.
6. Increase prices and excise tax on tobacco products, including ENDS and HTPs, to further reduce smoking prevalence and improve public health.

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<sup>1</sup> The Korea Herald (23 October 2019). What kinds of liquid-type e-cigs are sold in Korea? Accessed last 01 April 2020 from [http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20191023000778&ACE\\_SEARCH=1](http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20191023000778&ACE_SEARCH=1)

<sup>2</sup> Tobacco Reporter (13 December 2019). South Korea Maintains E-cigarette Advisory. Accessed last 30 March 2020 from <https://tobaccoreporter.com/2019/12/13/advisory-maintained/>