

Executive Summary

This is the second Eastern Mediterranean Regional report on Tobacco Industry Interference Index. Evidence from nine countries (Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan and Sudan) show various forms of tobacco industry (TI) interference and governments' responses to these instances of meddling.

While some governments did not allow the TI to interfere in policy development, others were open to input from the industry, some governments received and endorsed charity from the TI, collaborated with the industry, participated in its events and allowed new tobacco products to be sold in the country. Some governments gave recognition to the TI through awards, portraying it as an exemplary industry. These instances of interference are similar to those found elsewhere in the world as reflected in the Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index 2023.

The TI regards the Eastern Mediterranean region as a lucrative market for their products and an opportunity for expansion as reflected in the acquisitions of local companies by transnational tobacco companies and their operations in sales of their products (see Table 1).

Evidence from the nine countries for the period April 2021 to March 2023 were documented and reviewed for compliance of governments in implementing Article 5.3 Guidelines. The questionnaire used by countries in the preparation of their respective reports was developed by the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) based on the specific recommendations from Article 5.3 Guidelines. All information used in the report are obtained from the public domain. The Index covers seven indicators based on the recommendations of Article 5.3 guidelines. Countries are ranked from lowest scores to highest scores, where lower scores indicate better compliance with Article 5.3 Guidelines.



Looking back at the historical conduct of the tobacco industry in EMR countries as well as their current virulent practices especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, it becomes clear that the industry has not changed much. Therefore, profiling their practices through the TI Interference Index is very important and provides a documentation and evidence that this industry is unlikely to change unless deterrence is introduced into tobacco control practices in EMR and Article 19 of the FCTC is implemented in full and to its maximum potential.

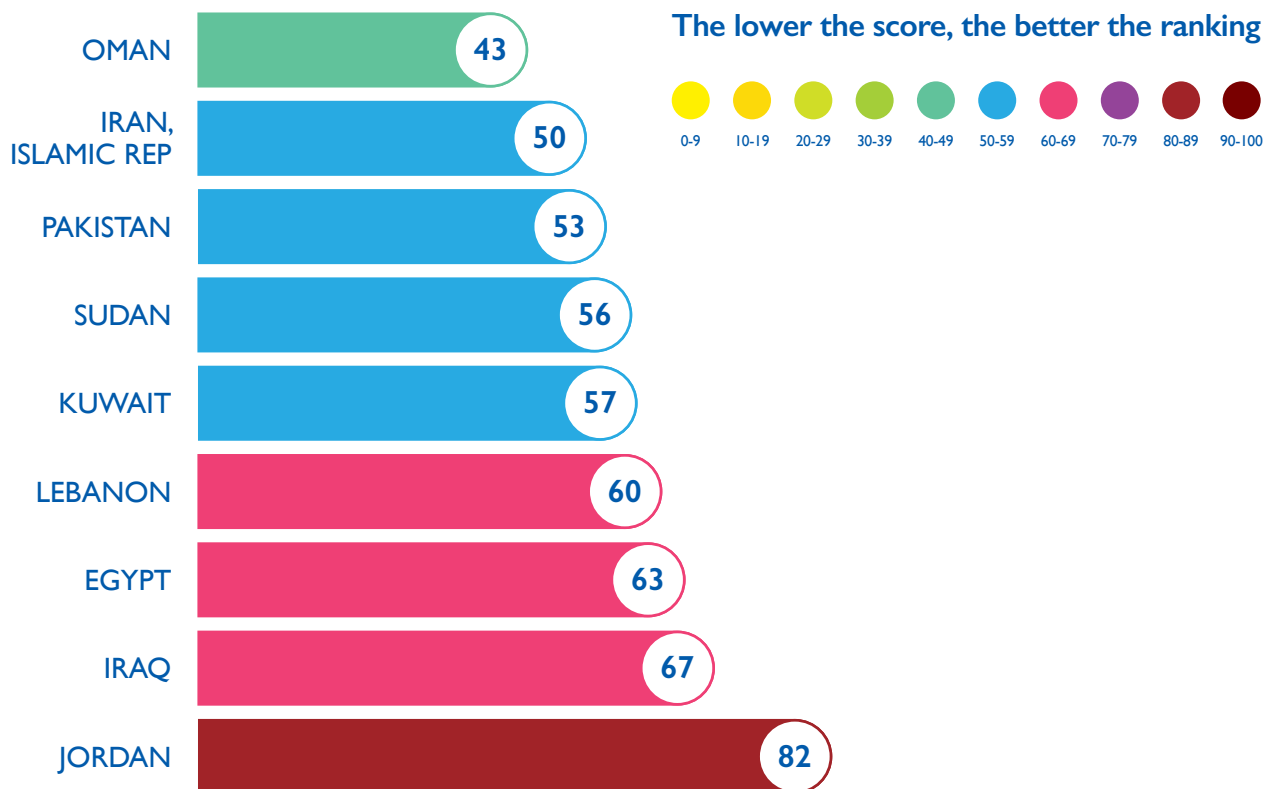
Dr Jawad Al-Lawati, Senior Consultant, Tobacco Control Programme, Ministry of Health, Oman

Table I: Main tobacco companies operating in nine countries

Egypt	Eastern Company SAE, Philip Morris International (PMI), British American Tobacco (BAT)
Iran (Islamic Republic)	Iran Tobacco Company (ITC), Japan Tobacco International (JTI), BAT
Iraq	The State Company for Tobacco and Cigarettes and local distributors of international brands
Jordan	PMI, JTI, BAT
Kuwait	National Brand Owners, company licensed to distribute brands on behalf of a Global Brand Owner (GBO) of the transnational tobacco companies: PMI, BAT, JTI and Imperial Brands
Lebanon	Regie Libanaise de Tabacs et Tombacs (Regie), PMI, JTI
Oman	Local distributors: Khimji Ramdass (PMI brands), Enhance Oman, (BAT brands)
Pakistan	BAT, PMI, Imperial Brands
Sudan	JTI (Haggar Cigarette & Tobacco Factory), BAT (Blue Nile Cigarette Company)

Figure I: Tobacco industry interference overall ranking

Figure I shows the ranking of the countries with **Oman** achieving the lowest score and less industry interference, compared to **Jordan** showing high interference with the highest score. The other countries show industry interference also exists and governments continue to succumb to industry lobbying in various ways.



Key Findings

- Though several countries do not allow the TI to be involved in tobacco control policy development, the industry still finds ways, such as through the national standardization body, to influence policy such as setting standards and allowing sales of new products and to delay implementation of tobacco control laws.
- **Iran** has banned tobacco related CSR activities and the governments of **Iraq, Kuwait** and **Sudan** do not endorse such activities.
- While **Oman** offered no benefits to the TI, the other countries gave the industry benefits such as tax exemptions, delays in implementation of legislation and establishment of a new factory.
- All nine countries allow international travellers to bring certain quantity of duty-free tobacco into the country which is a benefit to the industry.
- Government officials of **Sudan** do not endorse any tobacco event nor enter into any partnership with the industry, while officials in most of the countries engaged with the TI in various ways.
- None of the countries have established a procedure for interacting with the TI. Lobby groups and individuals funded by the TI in these countries are not registered nor their links publicly disclosed.
- Four countries, **Egypt, Iran, Iraq** and **Lebanon**, have state-owned tobacco enterprises where the governments will be conflicted when ensuring the protection and growth of the industry while simultaneously implementing the WHO FCTC to reduce tobacco use.
- Most of the governments have not adopted/ implemented a code of conduct for public officials prescribing the procedure when interacting with the tobacco industry. There is no record in the public domain that the governments have adopted a program to consistently raise awareness on Article 5.3 for other departments.
- **Lebanon** and **Oman** show the most improvement in implementing Article 5.3 Guidelines, while **Iran, Sudan, Jordan, Pakistan** and **Iraq** have deteriorated in their scores compared to the 2021 Index.



The WHO FCTC Article 5.3 is a powerful tool that can stop the tobacco industry in its tracks from sabotaging tobacco control policies. It is totally irresponsible that certain governments refrain from utilizing these guidelines to protect their citizens. The longer we delay, the more we allow the industry to win. Governments must act to fast-track its implementation to push the industry back and firewall their efforts to protect public health.

HRH Princess Dina Mired, Jordan

Recommendations

Governments can better protect their tobacco control policies by adopting the following measures:

- 1.** Inform and create awareness among all branches of government about the need to protect tobacco control policies from commercial and other vested interested of the tobacco industry through conducting regular awareness programs on Article 5.3.
- 2.** Adopt a clear policy for the government when interacting with the tobacco industry that ensures transparency. This can be a form of a code of conduct for all public officials to guide their interactions with the tobacco industry which should be limited to only when strictly necessary. Expand current code for officials of the tobacco control committee to cover whole of government to plug any loopholes.
- 3.** Denormalize and ban tobacco related CSR contributions as recommended in the WHO FCTC Article 5.3 and Article 13 Guidelines.
- 4.** Exclude the tobacco industry as a stakeholder at all levels of health policy development. Terminate existing collaboration with the tobacco industry to conduct training programs or law enforcement activities.
- 5.** Address conflict of interest situations and apply policy coherence across all sectors. Issue a policy on avoiding any preferential treatment to state owned tobacco industry.
- 6.** Adopt a procedure for disclosing records of all interactions with the tobacco industry and its representatives.

