

Responding to the Challenge of Non-communicable Diseases

Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products

1. WHO FCTC and its Protocol are essential legal instruments to ensure the attainment of global NCD targets

Tobacco use is responsible for one in six deaths from NCDs. While gains have been made by many countries on tobacco control, the fact remains that approximately 80% of the world's one billion smokers live in low- and middle-income countries: the tobacco industry is constantly looking for new markets in these countries and blocking tobacco control efforts.

Governments negotiated and adopted the WHO FCTC in 2003. This evidence-based treaty entered into force in 2005, becoming one of the most rapidly embraced conventions of the United Nations system. Currently there are 181 Parties to the WHO FCTC, representing 90% of the world's population.

The Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products was adopted in 2014, entered into force in 2018 and currently has 56 Parties. The Meeting of the Parties (MOP) was established in 2018 and has put into motion the mechanisms for implementing the Protocol.²

United Nations high-level meetings have highlighted the need for the UN to scale up its work on NCDs as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹

NCDs contribute to ill-health, poverty and inequities and slow the development of countries. Every year 15 million people die before age 70 from NCDs, with 86% of these premature deaths occurring in developing countries.

Major progress on NCDs is possible. Premature deaths from NCDs are largely caused by modifiable behavioral risk factors, such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol. Environmental risks (e.g. air pollution) and constrained access to basic services also contribute significantly to NCDs.

Addressing NCDs requires coordinated action from all UN agencies within a broader whole-of-society response.



¹ UNGA, Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, A/RES/66/2 (2011); UNGA, Political Declaration of the Third High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (2018); United Nations, Economic and Social Council, United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, E/RES/2018/13 (2018).

² WHO FCTC Secretariat, Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products (2013). Available at: https://www.who.int/fctc/protocol/illicit_trade/protocol-publication/en/

Two MOP working groups have been established: one on tracking and tracing systems and another on assistance and cooperation.³ The Convention Secretariat (CS) is also the Secretariat of the Protocol.

The political declarations of the high-level meetings of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of NCDs called on full implementation of the WHO FCTC while continuing to implement tobacco control measures without any tobacco industry interference; it urged Member States who have yet to ratify the WHO FCTC to accelerate the ratification process.

Target 3.a of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG2030) calls for strengthening the implementation of the WHO FCTC, which also contributes directly to Target 3.4 on prevention and control of the NCDs. Tobacco control can accelerate sustainable development in all its social, economic and environmental dimensions,⁴ and contributes to other health issues beyond those relating solely to NCDs, e.g. by addressing HIV and tuberculosis co-morbidities,⁵ maternal and child health, reproductive health and universal health coverage.

Target 5 of the WHO Global NCD Action Plan 2013–2020 is a 30% relative reduction in the prevalence of current tobacco use in persons aged 15 years and over.

As a legally binding instrument, the WHO FCTC is a powerful mechanism that reaffirms the right of all people to the highest standard of health.

In 2018, the Conference of the Parties (COP)⁶ adopted the Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control: Advancing Sustainable Development through the Implementation of the WHO FCTC 2019–2025 (GS2025). The Strategy seeks to make a meaningful contribution to reaching the overall health goal of SDG 3 and target 3.4 on NCDs. Furthermore, the Strategy adopted the voluntary global target of “a 30% reduction in the age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use in persons aged 15 years and over by 2025” as its own overall target, thus harmonizing WHO FCTC implementation with global NCD efforts.

The COP has recognized the strong contribution it can make to achieving the global NCD target on the reduction of tobacco use. Subsequently, the COP has called upon Parties to integrate WHO FCTC implementation with national multisectoral NCD policies. It also requested the Convention Secretariat to promote WHO FCTC implementation as an essential and high-impact strategy for achieving SDG target 3.4, and report on the efforts taken in the next COP sessions.

Protecting public health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry and establishing measures⁷ to protect the integrity of the decisions adopted by the governing bodies of WHO FCTC and its Protocol is at the core of the Parties' obligations under the Convention and its protocols.

3 WHO FCTC Secretariat, Establishment of Expert and Working Groups to advance global tobacco control (2019). Available at: <https://www.who.int/fctc/mediacentre/news/2019/expert-working-groups-cop-mop-advance-tobacco-control/en/>

4 WHO FCTC Secretariat and UNDP, The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control an Accelerator for Sustainable Development (2017). Available at: <https://www.who.int/fctc/implementation/publications/who-fctc-accelerator-for-sustainable-development/en/>

5 WHO FCTC Secretariat, Issue Brief: Integrating Tobacco Control into Tuberculosis and HIV Responses (2018). Available at: <https://www.who.int/fctc/publications/WHO-FCTC-HIV-TB.pdf?ua=1>

6 The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the governing body of the WHO FCTC and is comprised of all Parties to the Convention. The work of the COP is governed by its Rules of Procedure and keeps under regular review the implementation of the Convention: it takes decisions necessary to promote its effective implementation and may also adopt protocols, annexes and amendments to the Convention. For more information: <https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/governance/en/>

7 See decisions FCTC/COP8(4), (12), (18) at <https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/sessions/cop8/decisions/en/>

2. The Convention Secretariat has a role to play in supporting countries in preventing and controlling NCDs

The Convention Secretariat is a global authority overseeing implementation of the WHO FCTC. It promotes multisectoral, comprehensive tobacco-control policies and legislation at country level through strengthened coordination and planning.

Over the years, the Convention Secretariat has supported close to 60 Parties, mostly developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition by conducting needs assessments⁸ in the light of their obligations under the Convention. Parties have also received further support in development assistance including South-South and triangular cooperation with emphasis on the FCTC2030 project implemented in 15 Parties. Capacity-building initiatives at global, regional and country levels, sharing of best practices and dissemination of information, statements and position papers through the regular use of formal and informal communications with governments are part of the core attributions of the Convention Secretariat.

The Convention Secretariat has also a network of CS-Knowledge Hubs with expertise in different areas of Convention implementation which provide technical support to the Parties in various fields, e.g. research, legal, economic, surveillance and policy-making.

As part of the synergy framework promoted through COP decisions and resolutions of the World Health Assembly (WHA),⁹ the Convention Secretariat has reviewed the recommended cost-effective interventions endorsed by the WHA in order to identify those that are linked to its work at global, regional and country levels: specific examples are given in the table.

BEST BUYS

In 2017, the World Health Assembly endorsed a set of "best buys" and other recommended interventions to address NCDs.¹⁰ Best buy interventions address four NCD risk factors (tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity) and four disease areas (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory disease). There are 88 recommended interventions, including overarching/enabling policy actions.



8 WHO FCTC Secretariat, Needs assessments (2019). Available at: <https://www.who.int/fctc/implementation/needs/en/>

9 Seventh Session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC, Strengthening synergy between the Conference of the Parties and the World Health Assembly: Report of the Convention Secretariat, FCTC/COP/7/32 (2016). Available at https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/cop7/FCTC_COP_7_32_EN.pdf and Seventh Session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC, Strengthening synergy between the Conference of the Parties and the World Health Assembly, FCTC/COP/7(18) (2016). Available at: https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/cop7/FCTC_COP7_18_EN.pdf?ua=1

10 'Best buys' and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. WHO. 2017. Available at: <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259232/WHO-NMH-NVI-17.9-eng.pdf>

Evidence-based interventions	Convention Secretariat actions
Increase excise taxes and prices on tobacco products.	This is one of the specific objectives of the GS2025. Article 6 of the WHO FCTC is therefore a priority in the core work of the CS and includes development assistance projects such as the FCTC2030. Its application is supported by the Guidelines to implement Article 6 adopted by COP. Additionally, the CS-Knowledge Hub on taxation supports the CS in assisting Parties to implement Article 6 of the WHO FCTC. ¹¹
Implement plain/standardized packaging and/or large graphic health warnings on all tobacco packages.	This is one of the specific objectives of the GS2025 and bears on Article 11 of the WHO FCTC. Its application is supported by the Guidelines to implement Article 11 adopted by COP. As one of the time-bound measures under the Convention, country development assistance projects coordinated by the CS frequently cover pictorial health warning legislation. The CS also encourages granting licences for pictorial health warnings to promote large-scale and effective pictorial health warnings. The CS-Knowledge Hub on international cooperation also supports the CS in assisting Parties to implement Article 11 of the WHO FCTC.
Enact and enforce comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS). Ban cross-border advertising, including using modern means of communication.	TAPS bans are one of the specific objectives of the GS2025 and bears on Article 13 of the WHO FCTC as one of the time-bound measures under the Convention. Country development assistance projects frequently cover tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship legislation supported by the Guidelines to implement Article 13 adopted by COP.
Eliminate exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke in all indoor workplaces, public places public transport.	Guidelines on cross-border TAPS will be further elaborated. In decision FCTC/COP8(17), the COP established an intersessional working group to develop specific guidelines to address cross-border TAPS and the depiction of tobacco in the entertainment media under Article 13 of the WHO FCTC in the light of technological advances over the past decade such as the Internet and mobile communications. ¹²
Implement effective mass media campaigns that educate the public about the harms of smoking/tobacco use and second-hand smoke.	This is one of the specific time-bound objectives of the GS2025. Its implementation is supported by the Guidelines to implement Article 8 adopted by COP. As one of the time-bound measures under the Convention, country development assistance projects frequently cover smoke-free legislation. The CS-Knowledge Hub on international cooperation also supports the CS in assisting Parties to implement Article 8 of the WHO FCTC. ¹³
Provide cost-covered, effective and population-wide support (including brief advice, national toll-free quit line services) for tobacco cessation to all those who want to quit.	As one of the demand reduction measures under the Convention, country development assistance projects frequently cover education campaigns including mass media campaigns in line with Guidelines to implement article 12 adopted by COP.
Provide mobile phone-based tobacco cessation services for all those who want to quit.	As one of the demand reduction measures under the Convention, country development assistance projects frequently promote as broad a range of interventions as possible in order to support cessation in line with the Guidelines to implement Article 14 adopted by COP. The Convention Secretariat also works to promote targeted cessation initiatives when addressing co-morbidities such as HIV and tuberculosis. ¹⁴ Additionally, the CS-Knowledge Hub on international cooperation promotes implementation of Article 14 of the Convention. ¹⁵
Implement measures to minimize illicit trade in tobacco products.	The Convention Secretariat has promoted the legal adoption of the Protocol and continues to endorse awareness-raising initiatives to encourage Parties to the Convention to become Parties to the Protocol and to begin its implementation. The CS is working to bring its development assistance initiatives in line with MOP guidance and decisions.

11 WHO FCTC Secretariat, WHO FCTC Knowledge Hub on Taxation (2019). Available at: <https://untobaccocontrol.org/kh/taxation/>

12 Eighth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC, Tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship: depiction of tobacco in entertainment media, FCTC/COP8(17) (2018). Available at: [https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/sessions/cop8/FCTC_COP8\(17\).pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/sessions/cop8/FCTC_COP8(17).pdf?ua=1)

13 WHO FCTC Secretariat, WHO FCTC Knowledge Hub on International Cooperation (2019). Available at: <https://untobaccocontrol.org/kh/int-cooperation/>

14 WHO FCTC Secretariat, Issue Brief: Integrating Tobacco Control into Tuberculosis and HIV Responses (2018). Available at: <https://www.who.int/fctc/publications/WHO-FCTC-HIV-TB.pdf?ua=1>

15 *ibid*

3. Partnerships are critical for the Convention Secretariat to mobilize and implement the WHO FCTC and its Protocol and provide an effective response to NCDs

Twenty-eight international intergovernmental organizations and 21 nongovernmental organizations are accredited to the COP as observers. The Convention Secretariat cooperates with all observers in providing support to all Parties of both the WHO FCTC and its Protocol.

The UK- and Australia-funded FCTC2030 project¹⁶ has enabled the Convention Secretariat to work with UNDP and WHO to support 15 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in promoting and supporting governments to accelerate implementation of the WHO FCTC.

The Convention Secretariat leads the UNIATF Thematic Group on Tobacco Control under which several initiatives are taking place:

- The Convention Secretariat takes the lead in developing and promoting the Model Policy on preventing tobacco industry interference among the UN agencies.¹⁷ After it was adopted by the seventh meeting of the UNIATF, it was endorsed by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) meeting in 2017¹⁸ and reiterated again in 2018.¹⁹

- The Convention Secretariat and WHO joined forces with FAO and ILO to support their Governing Body decision to stop funding from the tobacco industry for child labour in tobacco growing areas.
- The Convention Secretariat is working with several UN agencies to develop a new joint programme to support low- and middle-income countries in developing economically sustainable alternatives to livelihoods based on tobacco growing.
- The Convention Secretariat promotes a smoke-free UN campus in the UNIATF and has joined forces with WHO to develop tools and guides.

Due diligence is required to ensure all partnerships advance health and development outcomes. Some private sector activities are beneficial for public health, while others contribute to NCD burdens for example by working to increase or preserve the availability, accessibility and/or desirability of health-harming products. An example is the fundamental conflict of interest between the tobacco industry and public health. Partnerships with some pharmaceutical companies may pose apparent or real conflicts of interest.



¹⁶ WHO FCTC Secretariat, FCTC 2030 (2019). Available at: <https://www.who.int/fctc/implementation/fctc2030/>

¹⁷ The purpose of this policy is to ensure that efforts to protect tobacco control from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry are comprehensive, effective and consistent across the United Nations system including the UN itself and its funds, programmes, specialized agencies, other entities and related organizations. To download the model policy: <https://www.who.int/ncds/un-task-force/events/model-policy-agencies-united-nations1.pdf>

¹⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, E/RES/2017/L.21 (2017). Available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2017/L.21

¹⁹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, E/RES/2018/13 (2018). Available at: <https://undocs.org/E/RES/2018/13>

4. Mobilizing resources to deliver

COP8 has developed a fundraising strategy for implementing the WHO FCTC in line with GS2025, including the concept of an Investment Fund as a regular and sustainable fundraising mechanism.²⁰

The Convention Secretariat has been actively mobilizing funds to support developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition to strengthen their implementation of the WHO FCTC.²¹



- 20 Eighth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC, Convention Secretariat's fundraising strategies: Investment fund concept, FCTC/COP8(5) (2018). Available at: [https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/sessions/cop8/FCTC_COP8\(5\).pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/fctc/cop/sessions/cop8/FCTC_COP8(5).pdf?ua=1)
- 21 WHO FCTC Secretariat, Donors and partners from 2018 (2019). Available at: <https://www.who.int/fctc/about/donorspartners/en/>



The United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases was established in 2013 by the Secretary General and placed under the leadership of WHO to coordinate the activities of the UN System to support the realization of the commitments made by Heads of State and Government in the 2011 Political Declaration on NCDs. Joint activities included in the work plan of the Task Force are additive to various, more comprehensive efforts conducted by the UN agencies to prevent and control NCDs. These joint activities offer important opportunities to address cross-cutting issues and to advance capacity and learning in countries.

