

MAKING TOBACCO A THING OF THE PAST: TAKING ACTION

IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE ASHGABAT DECLARATION:
TOWARDS A TOBACCO-FREE
WHO EUROPEAN REGION



FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Abstract

The "Implementation of the Ashgabat Declaration: towards a tobacco-free European Region" project, conceptualized by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and Turkmenistan, is the first step towards implementation of the Ashgabat Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020. The project runs from April 2015 to December 2019, and this final report provides an overview of the accomplishments of the project both at regional level, to accelerate action towards implementation of the Ashgabat Declaration, and within Turkmenistan, towards supporting the country's ambition of serving as a model country in tobacco control.

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Acronyms

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
GMF	Global Monitoring Framework
NCDs	noncommunicable diseases
NIS	newly independent states
SEE	south-eastern European (countries)
SDGs	(United Nations) Sustainable Development Goals
WHO FCTC	WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control



BUILDING ON
INSPIRATION

A visionary future

People who lived when tobacco was considered harmless – when doctors, nurses and dentists promoted tobacco products – would no doubt be astonished to find how successful tobacco control has become.

A visionary future of a tobacco-free WHO European Region can be a reality, with Finland (2040), Ireland (2025), Turkmenistan (2025) and the United Kingdom (Scotland) (2034) paving the way by introducing plain packaging, banning smoking in cars carrying children and aiming for a tobacco-free millennial generation (1,2). The United Kingdom (England) plans to reduce population smoking and create a smoke-free generation by 2022 (3). In Romania, the “2035 – first tobacco-free generation” initiative has support from more than 350 nongovernmental organizations, and the anti-tobacco campaign “Smoke-free generation” in the Netherlands is gaining ground, with a key goal to create a tobacco-free generation by 2040 (3). Ideas and theories regarding the transition from tobacco control to the end of the tobacco problem¹ are flourishing in academic papers (1).

However, the actual future we would face if countries maintain their efforts at the same level to date is that 26% of people in the Region would still smoke by 2025 (4).

The approach to achieving this visionary future needs to be well orchestrated, with coordination among different sectors within countries and, equally paramount in the globalized world, between countries.

It starts with full implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first step to achieving the voluntary global target of a 25% relative reduction in premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and a 30% relative reduction in prevalence of current tobacco use in people aged 15 years and over by 2025 (Global Monitoring Framework (GMF)).

¹ This refers to having a prevalence of tobacco use of less than 5%.

More needs to be done.

Creating a visionary future can go beyond current expectations and result in a Region free of tobacco-related morbidity, mortality and addiction.

Stronger action is needed. This project is the foundation for building on the inspiration for a visionary future for a tobacco-free world.

It is also central to attaining the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, particularly SDG 3 on “ensur[ing] healthy lives and promot[ing] well-being for all at all ages” (5–7). The SDG 3 target aspires to reduce premature mortality from NCDs by one third by 2030, and further provides strength and legitimacy to efforts underway to “strengthen the implementation of the WHO FCTC in all countries, as appropriate” (SDG target 3a) (7).

Prospects for achieving the NCD premature mortality targets in the WHO European Region as a whole are promising (3). It is projected that at least 18 countries will achieve the premature mortality target of a 25% reduction, and eight would be close with some extra effort. On average throughout the Region, the GMF mortality target is expected to be achieved by 2025 and will even surpass the SDG target in 2030, if current trends are maintained (3).

The levels achieved so far, however, are insufficient to reach the target of tobacco-use prevalence-reduction among the adult population in the WHO European Region by 30% in 2025 (4). Only six countries in the Region are projected to achieve this, while 31 are likely to achieve a decrease in prevalence, but less than 30% (4).

This level of progress means that close to 90% of the countries of the WHO European Region will not reach the target for tobacco-use prevalence-reduction.

The Ashgabat Declaration

The Ashgabat Declaration sets the stage for strong commitments from countries for a tobacco-free Region (8). Turkmenistan hosted the first WHO Ministerial Conference on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020, held in Ashgabat in December 2013. Health ministers of the Region agreed unanimously through the Ashgabat Declaration to accelerate actions to protect present and future generations from the devastating consequences of tobacco. Member States confirmed their commitment to accelerate efforts to achieve full implementation of the WHO FCTC and shared the joint ambition to make the voluntary global NCD target on reduced tobacco use by 2025 a reality in all countries of the Region and to work towards a tobacco-free Region (8).

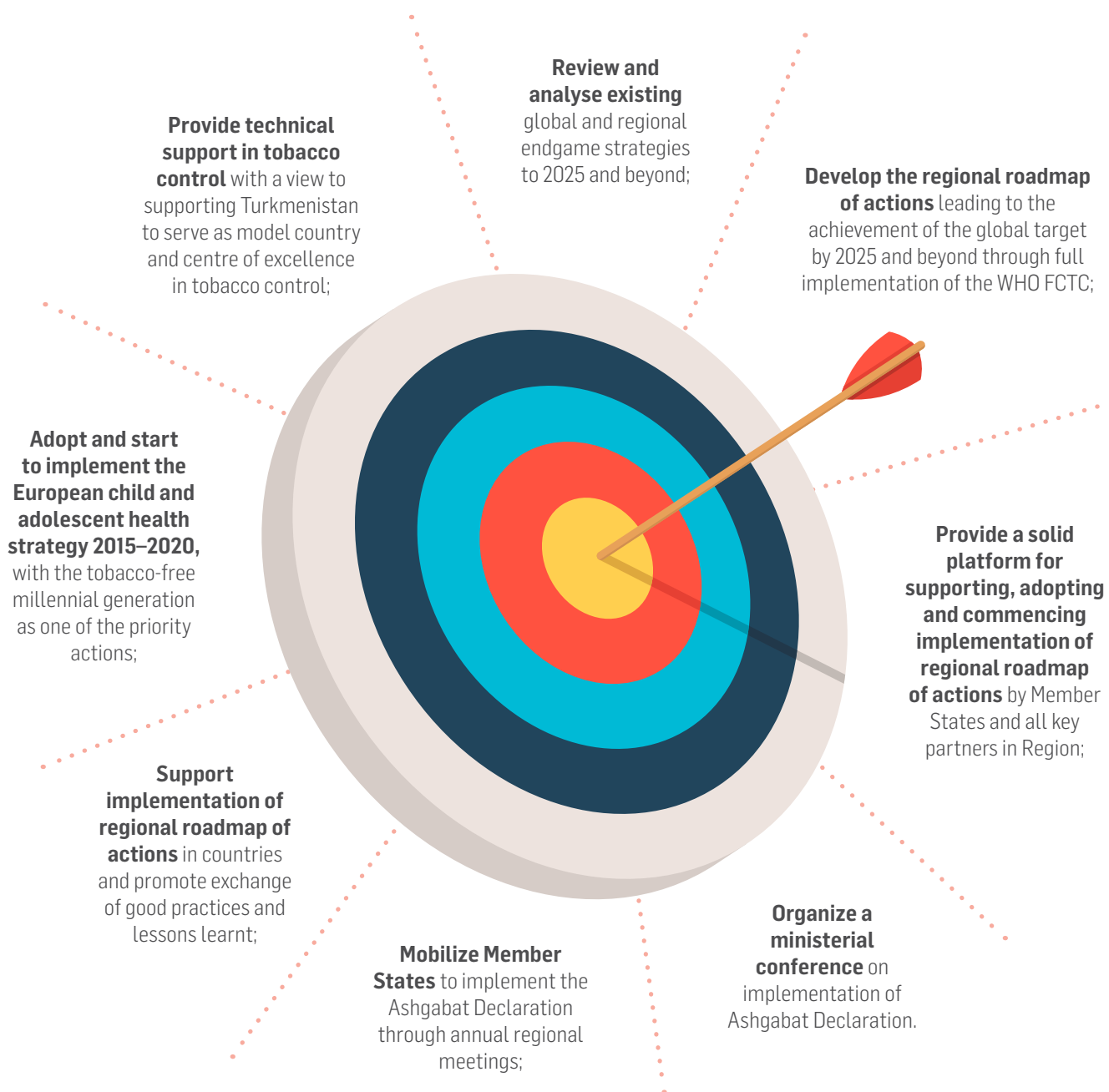
The Ashgabat Declaration was endorsed at the 64th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in September 2014 and Member States requested a roadmap to support their efforts and commitments (8). In addition, Member States endorsed Investing in children: the European child and adolescent health strategy 2015–2020, with a tobacco-free millennial generation as one of the priority actions (9).

The project

The "Implementation of the Ashgabat Declaration: towards a tobacco-free European Region" project, conceptualized by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and Turkmenistan, is the first step to accelerate action towards implementing the Ashgabat Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020. The project runs from April 2015 to December 2019, with the key project objectives outlined in Box 1.

The project perfectly celebrates the 25 years of bilateral cooperation between WHO and Turkmenistan.

Box 1.
Key project objectives



The project's key regional achievements are:

1 REGIONAL ROADMAP –
ADOPTED BY 53 COUNTRIES

1 HIGH-LEVEL INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE

2 SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES

2 STUDY TOURS

2 REGIONAL MEETINGS

5 SUBREGIONAL MEETINGS

5 PUBLICATIONS

44 COUNTRIES DIRECTLY
BENEFITED

916 135 000 PEOPLE
POSITIVELY IMPACTED

Building on ambition and successes

Spearheading the ambition and accelerated progress within the Region while building on political commitment to accelerate action, is an integral part of the project. The newly independent states (NIS) and south-eastern European (SEE) countries received particular focus in the project.

Another key focus of the project is technically supporting Turkmenistan in adopting and implementing even more advanced tobacco-control policies so it can continue to shine as a model country.

Turkmenistan has spearheaded many initiatives, for which the President's commitment and leadership has been recognized by the WHO Director-General's special recognition certificate for World No Tobacco Day in 2014, followed with a memorial plaque presented by the Director-General in 2015. More recently (April 2019), a certificate signed by the Director-General was issued to Turkmenistan marking its outstanding contributions in the prevention of NCDs, specifically tobacco and alcohol control.

The most prominent accomplishments in Turkmenistan within the terms of the project are outlined in Box 2.

Hosting of the Fifth Asian Indoor Martial Art Games

Strong smoking policy that served as inspiration for the smoke-free World Nomad Games in Kyrgyzstan and smoke-free European Games in Belarus

National tobacco-cessation guidelines

Developed following a country assessment and study tours to the United Kingdom and Turkey for an exchange of good practices

Tobacco-free Turkmenistan 2017–2021 (action plan)

A result of a country assessment, together with consultations and a compilation of global best practices

National multisectoral tobacco tax working group

Composed of eight ministries and government entities, together with WHO

National survey assessing tobacco use

A subsequent study to the STEPS 2014 conducted in 2018, whereby tobacco use was assessed and biomarkers were utilized for validation

Workshops and training for journalists

Intended to make tobacco-related stories seem more appealing and newsworthy and build the media's capacity for coverage

Tobacco-free month

Aimed to promote tobacco-free societies as a vision for the future through a variety of media and communication initiatives

Legal work for the law on graphical warnings

Ten new pictorials, adopted from Australia, will enter into force in the beginning of 2020, occupying 70% of the front and back of the package

Box 2.

Accomplishments spearheaded by Turkmenistan



THE STORY OF TURKMENISTAN



Countries reaching the global target can act as sources of inspiration, encouragement and experience for others in the Region. Since 2000, Turkmenistan has made outstanding progress in tobacco control. Enforcing a ban on smoking in all public places in 2004, ratifying the WHO FCTC in 2011, adopting one of the strongest comprehensive tobacco-control laws in 2013, introducing pictorial warnings in 2015 and increasing the price of tobacco products over the past five years by 250–300%, the country has become one of the tobacco-control leaders in the WHO European Region. Strong and continuous tobacco-control measures have had clear results, expressed through low smoking prevalence rates among the adult population. Turkmenistan has already achieved the lowest prevalence in the WHO European Region, with only 3.4% of the population using tobacco.



2000–2010

Turkmenistan has long taken a strong stand against tobacco and had already enshrined many of the provisions of the WHO FCTC in legislation, such as restrictions of advertising of tobacco products and enforcing a ban on smoking in public places, in 2004, prior to ratifying the Treaty. Additionally, a ban was imposed on the use of nas/nasvay in 2004, and a further ban was imposed on the production, importation and distribution of nas/nasvay in Turkmenistan in early 2008.



2011

Turkmenistan ratified the WHO FCTC in 2011, and the ban on any direct advertising of tobacco products and sponsorship by tobacco manufacturers, as well as new standards for the packaging and labelling of tobacco products, entered into force.



2012

A national action plan for tobacco control for 2012–2016 was developed and approved by Presidential Decree. The same decree established an Interagency Coordinating Committee to oversee implementation, comprising representatives of 18 ministries, agencies, and international and public organizations. Nine trust centres (tobacco-cessation centres) were set up within the structure of the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry.



2013

Turkmenistan hosted the first WHO Ministerial Conference on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020, held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan in December 2013. Turkmenistan became one of the tobacco-control leaders in the WHO European Region through the adoption of one of the strongest comprehensive tobacco-control laws.



2014

The Ashgabat Declaration was endorsed by the 53 countries of the WHO European Region at the 64th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in September 2014. The Presidential Decree approved the national strategy for implementation of the tasks defined by the Ashgabat Declaration on the prevention and control of NCDs in Turkmenistan. The first STEPS survey was also conducted in Turkmenistan in 2014, revealing that 8.3% of the population were tobacco users – the lowest rate in the Region.



The President of Turkmenistan, Dr Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, had received the WHO World No Tobacco Day Director-General's special recognition certificate in June 2014 due to his outstanding leadership and personal commitment, encouraging other countries to defend strong tobacco-control policies and align existing legislation with the WHO FCTC and its guidelines.



2015

The close collaboration between WHO and Turkmenistan was further solidified in early 2015, with the conceptualization of the "Implementation of the Ashgabat Declaration: towards a tobacco-free European Region" project. Turkmenistan accepted the Protocol on the Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, which is the first protocol to the WHO FCTC. Excise stamps on tobacco products were introduced in Turkmenistan, as well as pictorial warnings on cigarette packs.



The WHO Director-General awarded the President of Turkmenistan in July 2015 with a memorial plaque containing the inscription, “To the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov from the World Health Organization for his outstanding contribution in making the WHO European Region tobacco-free.”

2016

All indirect advertising was prohibited in 2016. That same year, the President of Turkmenistan signed a Decree on importing tobacco products into the country. Additional excise stamps for tobacco products were introduced, and the sale of tobacco products without excise stamps was prohibited. The action plan for implementation of the WHO FCTC in Turkmenistan for 2017–2021 was approved, including a provision that taxation on tobacco products in the country would increase annually by 25% within this period.

2017

Turkmenistan hosted the Fifth Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, leading strong efforts to protect the approximately 5 000 athletes, 11 000 people serving the Games and 40 000 spectators from the harms of tobacco, and serving as an inspiration for the smoke-free World Nomad Games in Kyrgyzstan in 2018 and the smoke-free European Games in Belarus in 2019.

A national multisectoral tobacco tax working group was established, with representation from eight ministries and government entities.

2018

Legislation on packaging of cigarettes was introduced, with 10 new pictorial warnings adopted from Australia entering into force in Turkmenistan, effective from the beginning of 2020. The warnings will occupy 70% of the front and back of the cigarette package. A second national study, subsequent to the STEPS 2014 survey, was conducted in Turkmenistan, showing that the level of tobacco consumption among the adult population had decreased to 3.4%. This once again designated Turkmenistan as the country with the lowest prevalence of tobacco use in the WHO European Region.

2019

The Turkmenistan national tobacco-cessation guidelines were adopted, followed by training across all nine trust centres. Turkmenistan hosted the WHO European High-level Conference on Noncommunicable Diseases in Ashgabat in April 2019, with the theme of, “Time to Deliver – Meeting Noncommunicable Disease Targets to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in Europe”.

The WHO Director-General signed a certificate to the President of Turkmenistan in April 2019, marking the country’s outstanding contributions to the prevention of NCDs, specifically tobacco and alcohol control, in which policies had been changed and for which decreasing trends were clear.



A hand is holding a magnifying glass with a silver handle and a clear lens. The lens is focused on a red square that contains the text "A CLOSER LOOK" in white, uppercase letters. The background is a light blue gradient.

A CLOSER
LOOK

The project

The project officially was launched in July 2015 at the International Health Forum in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of Turkmenistan's state health programme. This kick-started an ambitious project that gained momentum across subsequent years.

Laying the groundwork for the roadmap – promoting evidence to accelerate action

An analysis of all global, regional and national tobacco endgame documents and related strategies was undertaken. A senior advisory group guided the drafting process of a roadmap, which underwent a consensus-building process to build momentum to its adoption.

Adopting the roadmap at the Regional Committee

Several priority areas within the project led to the adoption of the roadmap at the 65th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in September 2015 with the vision to make tobacco a thing of the past. The roadmap aims to guide movement in the desired direction and assist Member States and the Region to reach the voluntary global target of a minimum 30% relative reduction in the prevalence of current tobacco use by 2025 and achieving its vision (10).

Building regional capacity for implementation of the roadmap

Supporting a tobacco-free millennial generation

The Regional Office prepared a publication, *Tobacco-free generations – protecting children from tobacco in the WHO European Region* (11), in 2017. It details the extent of tobacco use among young people in the Region, outlines the human rights treaties that protect children and provides a series of country case studies that highlight strategies countries have employed in paving the way for a tobacco-free generation.

Sharing experiences, discussing implementation and defining the way forward at regional workshops

The first anniversary of the project was marked in April 2016 at a regional gathering after the adoption of the roadmap, providing an excellent opportunity to discuss implementation and the way forward to reach the voluntary global target of a 30% reduction in the prevalence of tobacco use by 2025. A press conference was held in May 2016 to present the results from the first year of the

project and launch National Tobacco-free Month in Turkmenistan.

WHO collaborating centres on tobacco control based in Europe convened in September 2017, strategizing how to work together on tobacco control for the next two years and how to streamline their work with that of the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Representatives of over 40 countries gathered for the WHO European regional meeting on the implementation of the WHO FCTC in November–December 2017, marking the second regional gathering since the roadmap was launched. The aim of the meeting was to share the latest developments in tobacco control in countries of the Region and discuss the best approaches to reaching the global targets set out in the GMF on NCDs and the SDGs. In this context, the meeting focused on two key topics:

- ➔ **the economic costs of tobacco and the value of tobacco taxation; and**
- ➔ **policy coherence in tobacco control and the cross-sectoral relevance of Article 5 of the WHO FCTC.**

The Government of Turkmenistan hosted the WHO European High-level Conference on Noncommunicable Diseases in Ashgabat in April 2019. With 11 years left to reach targets set out in the SDGs, the conference provided an opportunity to review progress made in the Region and strategize the next steps. The conference plenary session discussions were complemented by an exchange of information on specific topics (including new opportunities in implementing the WHO FCTC) within NCD control. This provided opportunities to exchange ideas and experiences to foster inspiration and drive action. The meeting was attended by 330 people, including government representatives from 44 countries of the WHO European Region.

Equipping policy-makers and tobacco-control advocates with the latest data

The Regional Office published a report in September 2017 entitled *Taking stock: tobacco control in the WHO European Region in 2017* (12). The report presents a rich compilation of the most recent data on tobacco usage and tobacco-control policies based on the 2008–2017 series of WHO global reports on the tobacco epidemic, and draws on evidence compiled in the Tobacco Control Playbook in considering how far the WHO European Region has travelled along the roadmap and how far there is to go.

The Regional Office published a new report on the use of smokeless tobacco, a complex and widespread challenge to public health that continues to receive little attention globally, in 2018 (13). The report gives an overview of smokeless tobacco use and focuses particularly on the use of nasvay (a type of tobacco for oral use) in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). It considers the latest available smokeless tobacco prevalence data, addresses

topics such as its distribution and specifies the available policy responses and regulatory approaches applied in CIS countries.

Using robust techniques to evaluate the impacts of policy and public health interventions

Natural experiment studies conducted by the Regional Office and presented in a 2018 supplement of the *European Journal of Public Health* are among the first to use new more robust techniques to evaluate the impacts of national policy and public health interventions on the prevention and control of NCDs (14). The three tobacco-related studies presented in the journal supplement were:

- ➔ subnational variation in the impact of the large tobacco tax increases in 2009 and 2010 to test for the influence of the illicit tobacco trade in Romania;
- ➔ the impact on cardiovascular disease of the comprehensive and large-scale tobacco-control law implemented in 2013 in the Russian Federation; and
- ➔ changes in political discourse associated with changes in the long-term trend of tobacco consumption between 1960 and 2016 in Turkey.

Equipping policy-makers and tobacco-control advocates with evidence-based arguments to counter and succeed against the tobacco industry

The Regional Office published the Tobacco Control Playbook in May 2019 (previously available as an online tool since 2017) as a valuable resource for sharing experiences and best practices for countering the tactics of the tobacco industry. It provides a well developed narrative, collecting numerous evidence-based arguments from different thematic areas and directly challenging the most common tactics and lines taken by the industry to obstruct effective control.

Building subregional capacity for implementation of the roadmap

Subregional meetings to forge closer cooperation among SEE and NIS countries

Two subregional meetings on scaling up implementation of the WHO FCTC took place in November and December 2015 to support the actions of the roadmap. They aimed to forge closer cooperation among the participating SEE and NIS countries in aligning priorities and joint initiatives. The subregional meeting targeting SEE countries that took place in October 2016 mirrored the NIS subregional meeting in December 2015 but was tailored to the needs and implementation challenges of the WHO FCTC that are unique to the SEE subregion.

Another subregional workshop targeting SEE countries was held in May 2017, aimed at deepening understanding of the

Box 3.

Main findings from abridged SimSmoke modelling

The abridged SimSmoke modeling in SEE countries revealed that with strong policies consistent with the WHO FCTC, smoking prevalence can be reduced by at least:

23% within 5 years

30% within 15 years

35% within 40 years

role advocacy can play in efforts to implement the WHO FCTC and helping participants develop an advocacy plan for priority strategies, such as smoke-free public policy, plain packaging, mass media campaigns and taxation increases. This was followed by a multisectoral workshop for NIS countries in October 2017, intended to raise awareness about the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products among different government sectors involved in its ratification or implementation. Technical requirements of the Protocol were discussed, including the tracking and tracing systems to be established, as well as existing good practices in implementing Protocol measures.

Modelling the effects of tobacco-control policies in SEE countries

Modelling the effects of tobacco-control policies on smoking prevalence and smoking-attributable deaths in SEE countries was undertaken. SEE country-specific fact sheets based on the abridged SimSmoke modelling were published and launched in March 2016, serving as tools for strategic planning and advocacy. Box 3 reveals the main findings from the modelling in the SEE countries.

An analytical article based on these was prepared and published in the March 2018 edition of the *European Journal of Public Health* (15).

Building capacity in Turkmenistan

Improving enforcement of smoke-free tobacco policies

Great emphasis was placed on smoke-free environments in 2016 and 2017, particularly in the context of Turkmenistan's hosting of the Fifth Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in September 2017. This was the first time this large international sports competition had been held in the central Asian subregion and served as testament to Turkmenistan's strong policy of promoting active and healthy lifestyles for every citizen in the country.

The Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games had a wide reach, with an estimated 5 000 athletes from 62 countries competing for medals in 21 sports. Approximately 11 000 people served the Games, and there were about 40 000 spectators.

An assessment was conducted in Turkmenistan in February 2016 to identify the measures in place to secure smoke-free environments and evaluate their effectiveness. Recommendations were provided in the context of the next five-year strategy. Missions subsequently were organized in May and November 2016 to understand the country's needs and resources, identifying what works well, what can be improved and what legislative support will be required. An independent assessment of compliance and possible unintended consequences was conducted in November 2016, after which 19 recommendations identifying concrete possible next steps and actions leading up to the Games were offered to the Ministry of Health.

Following this, a high-level meeting led by the Ministry of Health and involving the WHO Regional Office, the WHO Country Office in Turkmenistan and the Government of Turkmenistan was organized in March 2017 to discuss progress towards the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games and determine other areas of support that may be provided. Work on building capacity for enforcement and supporting the event continued energetically over the months leading up to the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, with the involvement of practically all ministries. Training was given to hospitality-sector representatives and Games volunteers by the WHO Country Office, covering issues such as the harms of passive smoking and the rationale behind the smoking policy (Box 4) and the rules for handling smokers and informing them about the availability of a designated smoking area.

Experiences were shared with Kyrgyzstan for the third biennial World Nomad Games in September 2018 and Belarus for the second European Games in June 2019. For the first time in their history, both the World Nomad Games and the European Games were declared smoke-free events.

Strengthening cessation support

An assessment mapping the current state of the national tobacco-cessation and treatment system was conducted in Turkmenistan in November and December 2015. Specific actions to strengthen the system to help tobacco users to quit were recommended.

A train-the-trainer workshop on smoking cessation and counselling was held in Turkey in April 2016, followed by a study tour to the United Kingdom in December 2016 to exchange experiences on smoking cessation. The Turkmenistan national tobacco-cessation guidelines were ready by the end of 2016, with training supplied for health professionals across all nine trust centres on the use of the proposed guidelines in February 2017 and adoption of the guidelines in April 2019.

Box 4.

Smoking policy led by Turkmenistan at the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games

- ➔ No cigarettes sold on the premises
- ➔ No garbage bins with cigarette ashtrays
- ➔ Designated smoking places outside of the Olympic City
- ➔ No trade, advertising or sponsorship of tobacco products allowed
- ➔ Any form of association to tobacco company symbols or products with the Games prohibited
- ➔ “No Smoking” signage placed across the Olympic City
- ➔ Radio announcements reminding the Organizing Committee of the smoking-free zone broadcast throughout the competition
- ➔ A special hotline number offered to receive complaints about smoking in prohibited areas
- ➔ Nicotine replacement therapy sold at the pharmacy
- ➔ Smoking prohibited in all bars and restaurants

All the dedication and strong efforts led by Turkmenistan to protect the athletes, spectators and volunteers from the harms of smoking have served as an inspiration for other countries.

Building media and communication capacity

Turkmenistan hosted a one-day workshop in December 2015 to make tobacco-related stories seem more appealing and newsworthy to the national media and build the media's capacity for coverage.

A communication mission was organized in September 2016 to bring together key stakeholders to discuss the needs of the country, provide an overview of best practices and reach an agreement on next steps. The result was a strong component devoted to information campaigns within both the national action plan for the implementation of the WHO FCTC, which had been adopted in April 2017, and the national action plan of the information centre of the Ministry of Health.

Media and communication initiatives aiming to promote tobacco-free societies as a vision for the future were developed through events during the Tobacco-free Month and celebrating World No Tobacco Day and included:

- ➔ “tobacco-free cars” – volunteers handed out information leaflets in car-parking areas about the dangers of smoking inside the car;
- ➔ a mass event at Central Park – dedicated to the opening of the Tobacco-free Month, it included videos, prizes, informational flyers and a children's entertainment corner; and
- ➔ events at football games, focused on the theme of “Sport and tobacco”.

Also, flyers with information on the harm of tobacco use and referring to the phone numbers of the trust centres and anti-smoking videos to be broadcast in health houses and other locations were developed.

Within this time period, taxation on tobacco products in the country will
increase annually by 25%.

Analysing taxation

An analysis of the current tobacco taxation policy was compiled in May 2016. A tax simulation was conducted in October 2016 with consideration of three scenarios, resulting in policy recommendations. A national multisectoral tobacco tax working group was established in February 2017, with the representation from the following: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce and Foreign Economic Relations, Main State Tax Service, Main State Customs Service, Ministry of Health and Medical Industry, Ministry of Economics, Main State Service “Turkmenstandartlary”, State Committee on Statistics and the WHO Country Office in Turkmenistan. The group is tasked with developing a new system of taxation and pricing of tobacco products in Turkmenistan for 2017–2021, in line with WHO recommendations.

Adopting the national strategy and action plan

An assessment of current progress in Turkmenistan was compiled and published; together with consultations and global best practices, this fed into the new action plan, The National Programme and Action Plan for the Implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control for 2017–2021, with the aim of a tobacco-free Turkmenistan by 2025. The action plan, finalized in December 2016 and adopted by the President in April 2017, stipulates the implementation of a set of preventive measures within the framework of the WHO Health 2020 policy framework. In line with the action plan, all government buildings, along with the United Nations Building in Turkmenistan, have been designated tobacco-free status.

Continuing work focuses on implementation and assessing WHO FCTC implementation in the context of NCDs, for which reporting is completed every second year.

Sharing of best practices

In May and December 2016, study tours were organized in two of the leading tobacco-control countries in the Region – Turkey and the United Kingdom – covering a wide array of topics, while also focusing heavily on tobacco cessation and tobacco-free sports and games.

Assessing tobacco status

As a follow up to the STEPS survey conducted in 2013–2014 (16), a subsequent study carried out in 2018 assessed tobacco use and biomarkers (such as the presence of cotinine in urine) for validation. The survey was conducted among 4500 respondents (aged 18–69), with results indicating that the new proportion of adults smoking had decreased from 8.3% in 2013–2014 to 3.4% in 2018. This indicator is the lowest in the WHO European Region.

A child with curly brown hair is seen from behind, wearing a blue t-shirt and light blue jeans with white stars. They are holding a large, handmade airplane made of cardboard and tape. The airplane has a silver duct tape propeller. The child's right arm is extended forward. The background is a solid teal color. A red rectangular box with a white border is positioned in the center, containing the text "BUILDING ON ASPIRATIONS".

BUILDING ON
ASPIRATIONS

Beyond the project

The initiation of the "Implementation of the Ashgabat Declaration: towards a tobacco-free European Region" project between Turkmenistan and WHO has served as the cornerstone for recent progress within the WHO European Region.

The project was conceptualized at a time when ideas regarding the transition from tobacco control to the end of the tobacco problem were flourishing in academic papers, and several countries within the Region had already taken strong action in paving the way to make a tobacco-free generation a reality.

It also came at a pivotal moment in history in the midst of various global commitments, such as the global target of a 30% relative reduction in prevalence of current tobacco use in people aged 15 years and over by 2025 (the GMF) and the global target of reducing premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases by one third by 2030 (SDGs).

As the project itself comes to a close in December 2019, its impact is long-lasting and the aspirations stemming from it will continue to manifest and steer the WHO European Region for the next 5–10 years and beyond.

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