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Tobacco: Global trends

This ASH Research report examines the global trends in tobacco consumption and production.

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Tobacco prevalence and consumption worldwide

The World Health Organization estimates that there are around 1.3 billion smokers in the world, of which almost 1 billion are men. This represents about one third of the global population aged 15 and over¹ and the vast majority of these people, around 84% or 1 billion people live in developing countries.²

In China, alone, there are about 350 million smokers (60% men and 3% women), more than the entire population of the United States of America.³ If the current smoking patterns in China continue, around 100 million Chinese men now aged 0-29 will die as a result of their tobacco use.⁴

If there are no dramatic changes in cessation rates, no new interventions, and if children start smoking at expected rates, then the current figure of 1.3 billion smokers worldwide is predicted to rise to 1.9 billion consuming more than 9 trillion cigarettes by 2025.

Estimated numbers of smokers in millions and smoking prevalence for people aged 15 and over in the world (latest available data)⁵

Countries	Estimated number of smokers			Smoking prevalence	
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Female
Developed	275	150	425	35%	22%
Developing	700	100	800	50%	9%
World	975	250	1225	47%	12%

Death and disease caused by smoking

Tobacco kills more people than AIDS, legal and illegal drugs, road accidents, murder and suicide combined. Currently around 5 million people worldwide die each year from tobacco-related causes. In comparison HIV/AIDS is responsible for 3 million deaths per year.

By 2030, tobacco is expected to be the single biggest cause of death worldwide, with an estimated 10 million people world wide dying of tobacco related causes. Around 3 million of these will occur in the developed world and 7 million in developing countries.

Since the 1950s, more than 70,000 scientific articles have shown that prolonged smoking causes premature death and disability worldwide. Overall, one in two smokers will die prematurely, with one quarter dying in middle age, losing 20-25 years of life.

Smoking alone is estimated to have caused 21% of deaths from cancer worldwide.⁶

Smoking was linked to 856,000 deaths worldwide from lung, bronchial and tracheal cancers, 184,000 oesophageal cancers and 131,000 oral cancers in 2001.⁶ In developed countries, cardiovascular disease is the most common smoking-related cause of death. Smoking is currently responsible for a higher number of deaths in high-income countries (29%) than in low-mid income countries (18%) because of the shorter history of smoking in the latter, and in particular the lower prevalence of women smoking in these regions. With increasing numbers of women smokers and overall prevalence in some regions rising, the number of smoking-related deaths will continue to grow for many decades yet.

The Global Tobacco Industry

Worldwide over 15 billion cigarettes are smoked every day.⁷ Government-owned China National Tobacco is the world's largest producer of tobacco, and accounts for one third of the global market alone. China produces more than the next nine producing countries put together.⁸

Whilst tobacco is grown in over 125 countries, three quarters is grown in developing countries. Tobacco use and production has firmly moved from the developed to the developing world.

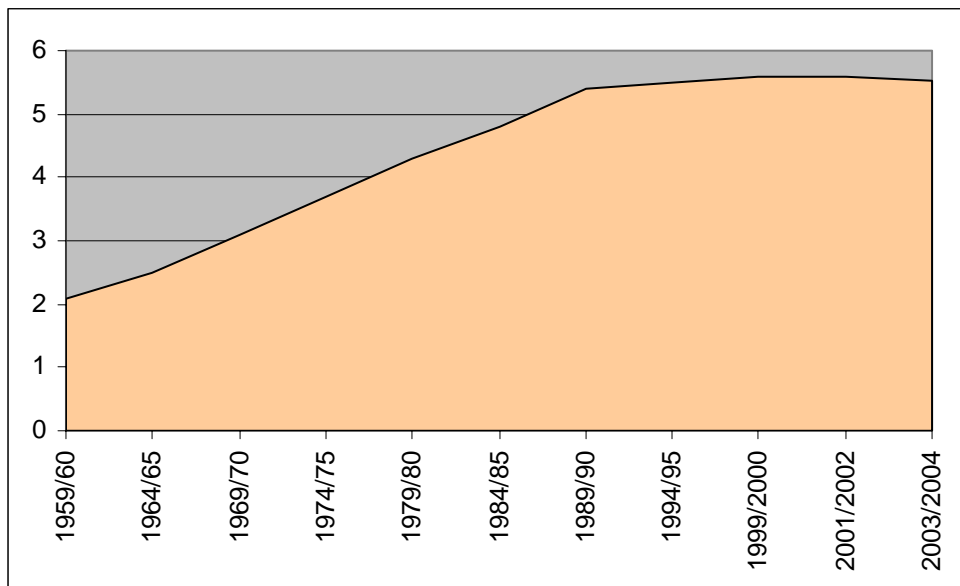
World's 6 leading producers of un-manufactured tobacco in 2004⁹

Rank	Country	Production (tonnes)	% of world total
1	China	2,013,735	35.1
2	Brazil	757,075	13.2
3	India	598,000	10.4
4	United States	357,612	6.2
5	Malawi	138,000	2.4
6	Indonesia	135,000	2.4
	Rest of world	1,735,292	30.3

In 1998, world production of cigarettes was 5.58 trillion. This was equivalent to 948 cigarettes per person or 2.6 cigarettes per day for every man, woman and child.¹⁰ The US Foreign Agricultural Service reports show that this number has reduced to 868 cigarettes or around 40 packets each in 2004.

Worldwide per capita production has not been this low since 1972.

Total World Cigarette Production (in trillions): 1960 - 2004¹¹



* Note: during the 48 year time span, cigarette production rose from 1.6 trillion in 1950 to 5.68 trillion in 1996.

Tobacco industry activity in developing countries

Globally there has been a shift in the tobacco market from developed countries where people are stopping smoking towards developing countries where sales are continuing to rise. Tobacco companies consequently have been expanding their international operations into Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, Arab nations and Africa for some time.¹²

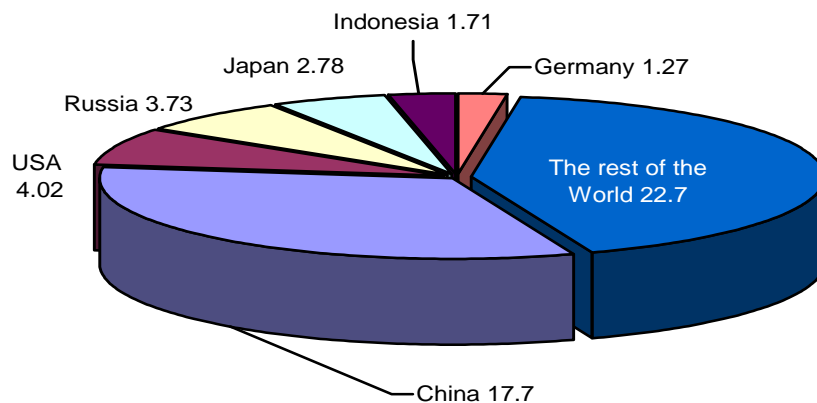
The Asia Pacific region is the fastest growing tobacco market in the world, with four out of the ten rapidly growing being: Malaysia; Indonesia; Pakistan and Vietnam.

Tobacco companies' expansion into new markets in the developing world has allowed them to target new and lucrative groups such as women and teenagers through unregulated marketing and advertising campaigns. These new markets are critical for tobacco companies as the lack of regulation has allowed them to cultivate brand loyalty from customers at a young age through media campaigns.¹³

Advertising in these developing countries tends to reflect the aspirations of the poor to emulate Western nations. For example in Africa brand names include 'Diplomat' and 'Embassy' in Ghana, 'High Society', 'London' and 'Pal Mall' in Nigeria and 'Sportsman' in Kenya.¹⁴ The result of this increase in expenditure on advertising is increased consumption and a corresponding impact on human health.

Over the last decade, Altria (the parent company of Philip Morris) has adopted a strategy of brand standardisation across the international markets, with some regional adaptation and tailoring of advertising messages. These messages transcend specific regional values and have been shown by market research as crucial for young people to commence smoking. Young adult values are described as: independence, coming of age, hedonism, freedom and comfort.¹⁵

Domestic consumption of manufactured cigarettes in 2004 Top 6 countries and the rest of world (billions of pieces)



Whilst China is still the largest tobacco consuming nation in the world, Russia has been one of the few countries to have a growth in sales from 2002 to 2004. Worldwide, in 2004 Bulgaria had the highest per capita cigarette consumption of 2,769 cigarettes smoked by each citizen according to Euromonitor.

India is also a large consumer and producer of tobacco. However, much of this tobacco is consumed in the form of hand rolled cigarettes known as bidis.

Female smokers

The tobacco industry targets women by using seductive images of vitality, slimness, emancipation, sophistication and sexual allure. They also create feminised brands for women; examples include 'Glamour' and 'Vogue'¹⁶ and cigarettes which are extra-slim, light coloured or menthol.¹⁷

Although worldwide fewer women smoke than men, the number of women smokers has been increasing for some time, particularly in developing countries. Recent increases in smoking prevalence by women have been reported in Cambodia, Malaysia and Bangladesh and women's smoking rates are higher than men's in five countries: the Cook Islands, Nauru, Norway, Papua New Guinea and Sweden.

In developed nations (such as Norway and Sweden) this reflects the substantial decline in male smoking prevalence while the rates of decline among women have been slower.

A more typical scenario has been the convergence of male and female smoking prevalence in many countries and this looks set to stay this way for the foreseeable future.

Tobacco Economics

The tobacco industry often uses economic arguments to persuade governments, the media and public that smoking benefits the economy. It is often claimed that if control measures are introduced then revenues will fall, jobs will be lost and other such arguments.

While governments worldwide generally recognise the health consequences of tobacco smoking, many countries, particularly tobacco producing nations, have been reluctant to implement measures which they fear would have adverse economic consequences.

However, as the World Health Organization points out, money spent on tobacco cannot be spent on basic human needs such as food, shelter, education and health care. Tobacco has the ability to worsen poverty among users and their families since tobacco users are at much higher risk of falling ill and dying prematurely, depriving families of much-needed income. It also imposes additional costs for health care. In many countries, workers spend a significant portion of their household income on tobacco: an estimated 10% in Egypt and 11% in China.¹⁸

Growing tobacco is also very labour intensive and although the tobacco industry provides jobs for thousands of people, the vast majority employed earn very little. For a Brazilian tobacco farmer to earn the equivalent of what a tobacco company director earns in one day would take around 6 years. To earn the Director's equivalent annual salary he would have to work for 2,140 years.

A report by the World Bank refuted economic claims by the tobacco industry showing that:¹⁹

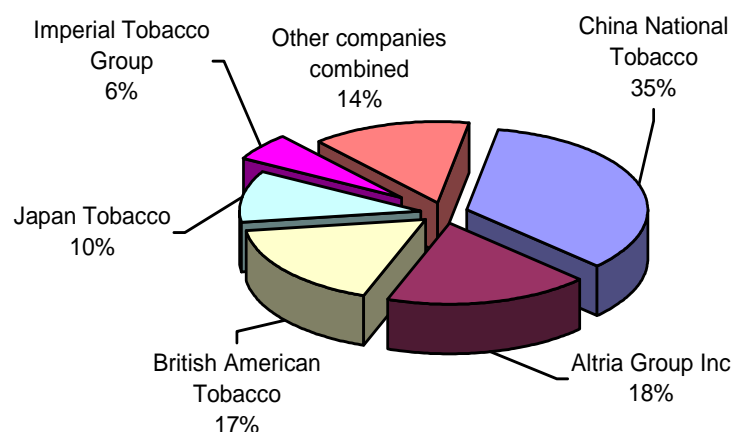
Falling tobacco consumption does not adversely affect economies because money formerly spent on tobacco will be spent on other goods and services.

Raising tobacco taxes is a good health objective because it leads to a fall in consumption. However, it also leads to a rise in tobacco revenues. This is because addicted smokers respond relatively slowly to price rises. The World Bank estimates that increases in excise taxes of 10% would increase tobacco tax revenues by about 7% overall.

Even where smuggling occurs at high rates, tax increases bring greater revenues and reduce consumption. This allays the common concern that higher taxes will lead to massive increases in smuggling thereby keeping cigarette consumption high but reducing government revenues. Therefore, the appropriate response is not to reduce taxes but to crack down on criminal activity.

Another concern is that increases in tobacco taxes have a disproportionate impact on the poor. While it is true that tobacco taxes take up a greater share of the income of poor smokers than of the rich, it is also important to note that poor consumers are usually more price responsive than rich consumers, so their consumption of cigarettes will fall more sharply following a tax rise.

Global sales volume: Top five cigarette companies, 2007²⁰



*This assumes that the proposed takeover of Altadis by Imperial tobacco goes ahead.

Smuggling of tobacco products

Tobacco smuggling has become a major worldwide problem. Cigarettes are the world's most widely smuggled legal product. It is estimated that sales via the internet and by other means of contraband cigarettes could represent around 14% of the US market.²¹ In the UK, approximately 15% of the cigarette market is comprised of smuggled goods.²² In China around 95% of foreign cigarettes are contraband, an estimated \$2.4 billion (US) loss in taxes per annum.

In 1996 around 355 billion cigarettes or around one third of total world cigarette production went into the contraband market. This significantly deprives governments of lost revenue.²³

Smuggling reduces the price of cigarettes, increases demand and undermines national tobacco tax policies and as a result, harms health by increasing overall tobacco use.

As smuggling is a global problem a concerted effort at international level is required. This should include labelling on every cigarette pack with its origin (manufacturer) and destination (country), with a health warning on packs to be printed in the language of the destination market. This would allow for easier determination of where the products have come from and where they were intended to go.

(More information on smuggling can be found in [ASH Essential Information on: Smuggling](#))

Tobacco control initiatives

In order to tackle the tobacco epidemic, a wide range of measures is required. Evidence from nations that have witnessed a decline in smoking shows that a combination of the following is needed: mass media health education programmes; a ban on all forms of tobacco advertising and promotion; vivid health warnings on tobacco products; regular increases in tobacco taxation; restrictions on smoking in public places and the workplace and better consumer information and help for smokers who wish to quit.²⁴ In addition, in countries where tobacco is grown, crop diversification should be introduced wherever possible.

In a developing country an effective smoking prevention program costs around \$20-\$40 per year of life gained.

Countries that have been able to introduce a comprehensive set of measures have dramatically reduced smoking prevalence and as a consequence also lowered cancers, heart disease, circulatory diseases and respiratory diseases.

In recognition of the global health impact of tobacco, the World Health Organization launched the Tobacco Free Initiative and took the lead in developing the world's first global tobacco control treaty – the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) was ratified on 27 February 2005 and is a legally-binding international treaty. It is the world's first public health treaty.

The FCTC is like other international treaties such as the Rights of the Child and the Landmine Treaty. Over 100 countries have ratified the treaty, representing close to 70% of the world's total population.²⁵

The objective of the FCTC is 'to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke.'²⁶

The FCTC sets out minimum standards required by the signatories. Countries will be encouraged to implement measures that are stronger than those set out in the treaty.










Significantly all parties are required to undertake a comprehensive ban on all direct and indirect tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship within 5 years of ratifying the treaty.

The FCTC states that warning labels should occupy at least 50% of the surface area of cigarettes packs and that descriptors such as 'light' or 'mild' be prohibited.²⁷ The FCTC also urges the strict regulation of tobacco product contents; higher tobacco taxes; global coordination towards the elimination of tobacco smuggling; and the promotion of smoking prevention, cessation and research programs.

All parties will also be required to implement effective measures to protect non-smokers from tobacco smoke in workplaces, public transport and indoor public places.

The FCTC has given new impetus to enact or strengthen legislation in many countries and also mobilised communities around the world to do more about tobacco control and smoking related issues.

Further reading and links

-  [Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#)
-  [The Tobacco Atlas](#)
-  [World Health Organization Tobacco Free Initiative](#)
-  [\(World Bank\) The Economics of Tobacco Control](#)
-  [Economics of Tobacco Myths and Facts](#)
-  [The Framework Convention Alliance for Tobacco Control](#)
-  [ASH Factsheet 17: Smuggling](#)
-  [ASH Factsheet 21: Tobacco and the developing world](#)
-  [More International resources on tobacco from ASH website](#)

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