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Exploring and monitoring the tobacco industry in the United Kingdom: the UK Tobacco Industry Interference Index

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The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is a legally binding provision designed to control tobacco. Often considered a central feature of the treaty, Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC obligates states to protect tobacco control against the vested interests of the tobacco industry and seeks to curb the tobacco industry influence on public health policies. The Global Tobacco Index (GTI) serves as an evaluation tool to assess how effectively governments implement Article 5.3. The GTI ranks government responses to tobacco industry interference with the higher the score, the higher the overall level of interference.

Using a standardised set of twenty questions covering seven indicators (Participation in Policy Development, TI Corporate Social Responsibility, Benefits to the Industry, Unnecessary Interactions, Measures for Transparency, Conflict of Interest, and Preventive Measures) developed by the South-East Asian Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA), the Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath has evaluated the UK's commitment to obligations under Article 5.3 WHO FCTC. Data has been collected since 2017 to create the UK chapter of the GTI. Since then, three UK indices have been published and the fourth will be published in late 2023. Data is gathered from academic literature, media articles, government websites, and routine monitoring of the tobacco industry and associated organisations. This data is supplemented by Freedom of Information requests and consultation with the UK's leading tobacco control organisations.

Data from the period January 2017 to March 2021 suggested that the government performance in preventing tobacco industry interference slightly declined. In the 2019 report, the score was 26, increasing to 32 in both 2020 and 2021 reports. Data collection and analysis for the fourth report, covering the period April 2021 to March 2023, is ongoing. This presentation covers preliminary findings and offer reflections on the UK's changing performance.

While the UK remains a global leader in tobacco control, its ranking in the GTI fell from first in the 2019 Index to third in the 2021 Index. The latest index to be published in November 2023, will provide evidence on recent trends and offer a blueprint for the UK government for strengthening the implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC.

DISCLOSURE

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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