



# Girls and boys for change: tobacco control now



## Girls and tobacco use

### **A narrowing gap**

The Global Youth Tobacco Survey shows that tobacco use among girls age 13–15 around the world is increasing and the gap between the rates of girls and boys is getting smaller. In some countries, as many girls now smoke as boys.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, rates of tobacco use among school girls are rising rapidly and have reached as high as 19.5% in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 22.4% in Somalia, 26.8% in the Syrian Arab Republic, 27.7% in the occupied Palestinian territory (West Bank) and 54.1% in Lebanon. As in the rest of the world, the gap between girls and boys rates of tobacco use in some countries in the Region is decreasing.

The Region has the second highest rate (9%) in the world of girls' use of tobacco products other than cigarettes, including *shisha* and smokeless tobacco, with rates exceeding 30% in Lebanon and 20% in Jordan, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and occupied Palestinian territory (West Bank).

In addition, 38% of 13–15 year olds in the Region live in a home where others smoke, and 46% are exposed to second-hand smoke in public places. This poses great risks for girls' health and for their future well-being.

### **Why do girls start smoking?**

Tobacco use tends to start in adolescence and addiction can set in quickly. Teenagers who begin smoking at a younger age are more likely to become regular smokers and less likely to quit than those who start later.

Teenage girls may use tobacco to bolster low self-esteem, to manage stress and as a buffer against negative feelings. They may believe that it reduces appetite and helps control body weight.

Girls are increasingly being targeted by the tobacco industry in their marketing. This is done by advertising in women's magazines and designing brands, packaging and promotional items to appeal to girls. Advertisements target girls through their use of images of vitality, slimness, sophistication, female friendship, independence and beauty.

Tobacco use by parents, family members and friends also influences girls' tobacco use. Tobacco use has become more socially acceptable at home and in public. Teachers are role models for students, but only around half of all schools in the Region have a ban on the use of tobacco products by teachers. As gender norms change in the Region, rates of tobacco use among girls are likely to increase.

### **What can be done to protect girls from tobacco use?**

Implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control requires gender-specific tobacco control strategies in order to provide equal protection for both girls and boys against the harms of tobacco use. Girls have a right to protection from tobacco marketing and second-hand smoke. To achieve this:

- girls need to be empowered with information about the harmful effects of tobacco use and their right to live in a smoke-free environment
- the sale and marketing of tobacco to everyone, including young people, must be stopped
- adults should restrain from tobacco use around young people
- schools must become smoke-free environments.



**World Health  
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