



## Surveillance

### Why conduct surveillance?

*Is it a legal obligation?*

Yes, it is. Article 20 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) states that:

1. The Parties undertake to develop and promote national research and to coordinate research programmes at the regional and international levels in the field of tobacco control.
2. The Parties shall establish, as appropriate, programmes for national, regional and global surveillance of the magnitude, patterns, determinants and consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke. Towards this end, the Parties should integrate tobacco surveillance programmes into national, regional and global health surveillance programmes so that data are comparable and can be analysed at the regional and international levels, as appropriate.

The FCTC clearly calls on Parties to establish national surveillance systems and support national research to assess the needs and the dimensions of the tobacco epidemic. Through accurate data the challenges created by tobacco use can be addressed, necessary interventions identified and policy priorities set accordingly.

#### *Impact of national surveillance and research systems*

Comprehensive national surveillance and research systems inform decision-makers in government and civil society how the tobacco epidemic is harming their country and encourages the allocation of tobacco control resources where they are most needed and will be most effective. National level surveillance and research systems provide evidence of whether policies are working or not; and how different policies should be adapted to the needs of a particular country and to various target groups within the country. The lack of a surveillance and research system jeopardizes not only funds placed for tobacco control but the credibility of national tobacco control programmes.

Good dissemination of the outcomes and results of research and surveillance is essential or their value will be lost.

### What to survey and study?

National surveillance and research systems have to “provide overarching, as well as specific information on the tobacco epidemic. These include surveys on tobacco use prevalence and consumption levels by age group, sex, income and other demographic subdivisions, both nationally and by province or region. The effectiveness of local and national tobacco prevention programmes must also be closely assessed”. They also need to collect national data on:

- the economics of tobacco; the process and its impact on prevalence, the levels of smuggling; taxes and how tax might affect consumption;
- monitoring and evaluating of implementation of policies and laws; and
- tobacco industry strategies; policies and efforts to undermine tobacco control.

#### *Maintaining national surveillance and research systems*

To maintain an effective national surveillance and research system, “collaboration is needed among health practitioners, economists, epidemiologists, data managers, government officials and many others. Good management and organization are also necessary, which requires stable and sustained funding”.



## Global Tobacco Surveillance System

In 2000, the Global Youth Tobacco Survey was introduced for the first time in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Jordan was the first country to conduct the survey. Later in 2000, the first regional training workshop took place in Rabat, Morocco, where 10 countries were trained on implementing the survey.

The Global Youth Tobacco Survey is now a component in the Global Tobacco Surveillance System which is being implemented, along with its various other components, across the Region.

Through the implementation of the Global Tobacco Surveillance System, several key facts were revealed.

- The use of tobacco products by young people is increasing.
- Data from certain countries shows a rising trend in tobacco use among young girls.
- In some countries levels of female tobacco consumption was similar to that of males.
- The prevalence of tobacco use among young girls in some countries is more than that of adult females.
- There are many types of tobacco use in the Region, and the use of tobacco products other than cigarettes has been rising among girls and boys.

Conducting regular surveys identifies gaps in the implementation of legislation and loopholes in existing monitoring and implementation systems.

Although the Global Tobacco Surveillance System has been implemented for the last 10 years and adhoc research conducted in many countries on the economics of tobacco, there are still many gaps and challenges.

- The data on adult tobacco use need updating; there is a large gap in this area and a serious lack of information.
- National databases on the economics of tobacco are needed; there is a lack of information and without adequate data in this area it is difficult to implement recommendations of the FCTC.
- Most surveillance systems are externally funded; there is a need to establish national funding mechanisms to maintain these systems.
- There are no comparative data across the Region in many areas; the use of one methodology would facilitate the collection of comparative data between countries, paving the way for a coherent policy approach.

Although a majority of countries have tobacco data, there is a need for standardization to allow comparability between and within countries in order to focus more on trends rather than single point estimations.

Good policy is based on evidence.

Evidence is generated from research and surveillance.

The value of surveillance and research is lost if research results are not disseminated.