

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

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UNMASKING THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY IN LATIN AMERICA

HOW IT INTENSIFIES ITS MARKETING STRATEGIES IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

SIX-COUNTRY REGIONAL REPORT

Civil society organizations from six Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay), committed with the fight against the tobacco epidemic, monitored the actions in marketing and advertising of the tobacco industry, manufacturers of electronic cigarettes and steamy shops during the confinement for the COVID-19 pandemic.



The results showed that, despite the fact that the consumption of tobacco products is associated with greater complications in case of contracting COVID-19, the tobacco industry intensified its promotional, advertising and marketing actions, both of its traditional products (cigarettes) as well as its new generation of products (electronic cigarettes and heated tobacco products) taking advantage of the progress of the pandemic and government measures of confinement.

WHY IS IT A PROBLEM THAT THE PROMOTION OF PRODUCTS FROM TOBACCO IS INTENSIFIED DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONTAINMENT?

- The region of the Americas is the most heavily affected by the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), coupled with the tobacco epidemic that has shaken the continent during decades. As of July 16 of this year, seven million cases and almost 300,000 deaths had been reported from COVID-19.
- The WHO stated that "**smokers are more likely to develop severe symptoms if you have COVID-19, compared to the non-smokers.**"
- In this scenario of extreme vulnerability for health systems, **the tobacco industry and its allies have widely spread the wrong messages:**
 - They claim that smoking is not a risk factor associated with COVID-19, when it has been proven that it is.
 - They claim to be part of the solution, and they seek to build a positive image publicly announcing that they are committed to the development of vaccines for COVID-19.

Most of the countries that participated in this report detected a greater intensity in advertising and product promotion strategies of tobacco products during the pandemic.

- On multiple occasions, these strategies **violate local control regulations of tobacco or take advantage of legal loopholes with the sole purpose of profit at the expense of public health** in a context of extreme vulnerability.
- Most of these strategies violate tobacco control policies contained in the Organization's Framework Convention on the subject of the World Health Organization (international public health treaty signed by more than 180 countries). With the exception of Argentina, the other five countries participants in this report, are Parties to this international treaty.
- **Advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products, including new products, seek to attract girls, boys and young people to addiction**, with the serious consequences for public health that this implies (this was the call on the WHO A World Without Tobacco Day "To protect young people from the manipulation of industry and prevent them from consuming tobacco and nicotine").
- Tobacco corporations mislead and confuse about the effects of consumption of tobacco products, electronic cigarettes and of heated tobacco, **in order to undermine the efforts of governments in the fight against smoking.**

EIGHT MAIN STRATEGIES OF TOBACCO COMPANIES, ELECTRONIC CIGARETTE MANUFACTURERS AND STEAMY STORES TO MAKE A PROFIT FROM THE HEALTH OF THE LATIN AMERICAN POPULATION DURING CONFINEMENT



1
In-store advertising of online brands and by email.
Photo: Email actions marketing in Argentina.

2
Special offers
Photo: Vype offers in Colombia and Mexico.

3
Big discounts.
Photo: Advertising on the internet at Colombia and Mexico.

4
Social Network advertising.
Photo: Advertising in Facebook and Instagram at Ecuador and Brazil.

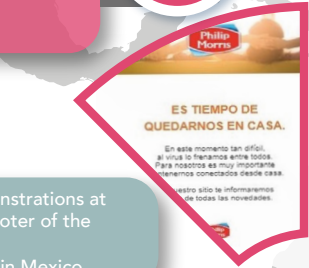
5
Intensification of advertising and display on platforms for home delivery that minors have access to.
Photo: Home delivery in Ecuador.

8
Indirect advertising through actions of societal responsibility
Photo: Miscellaneous foods delivered by businessmen, as an anonymous donation in Uruguay.

6
Lobbying to achieve the permission to once again produce cigarettes, activity that had been suspended as part of the isolation.
Photo: Press release in Argentina.

Product use demonstrations at home with a promoter of the brand.
Photo: Promotion in Mexico.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Government authorities in the six countries surveyed have publicly warned about the risks of smoking associated with severe cases of COVID-19, in addition to making a call to stop smoking (in line with objective 3 of Agenda 2030 and several of the pronouncements of regional bodies and international human rights protection standards within the COVID-19 framework). Some governments, such as Brazil, have even directly disputed alleged tobacco industry investigations. Others, like those in Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico, have documented how the use of electronic cigarettes increases the risk of severe symptoms of coronavirus disease.

These responses are valuable but not sufficient. For this reason, we propose than to protect the population from the devastating health, social, and economic consequences of smoking in times of the pandemic by COVID-19, governments should, among other measures:



Implement a complete ban on all forms of advertising, promotion and sponsorship of all tobacco products (both conventional as well as the new devices), including the display of the product.



Strongly discourage the use of these products and promote abandonment of all forms of tobacco use.



Strengthen their health risk communication campaigns that leads to tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke, in particular to develop severe symptoms from COVID-19.



Reject donations from social liability campaigns of the tobacco industry and to ensure transparency in the relations between the government and the tobacco industry.



Not to grant any special rescue package for the tobacco industry, since their products are not essential goods.