

AUSTRIA: EUROPE' S DIRTY ASHTRAY

Austria has continued its near-perfect record of being a haven for the tobacco industry to ply its deadly trade unfettered ahead of the rights of its citizens, including children, to enjoy good health. A new tobacco control law recently passed parliament; however it will not be implemented until May 2018 and – as with the current inadequate legislation – there is little provision for enforcement.

Austria increasingly lags behind other European countries in tobacco control legislation, and has consistently received the lowest score among European countries in the Tobacco Control Scale (TCS) report, published by the Association of European Cancer Leagues. The TCS measures tobacco control policy implementation in six areas: price and taxation, smoke free areas, consumer information, advertising and promotion bans, health warning labels and cessation support. Austria was at the bottom of the rankings in 2007, 2010 and 2013. In the 2013 report, it received an overall score of 31 out of a possible 100 (the highest ranked country was the UK, which received 74/100). Austria's scores are notably dismal for price (11/30), public place smoking bans (8/22) and health and public information campaign spending (0/15). Vending machines which enable easy access by children are widely available, the minimum cigarette purchasing age of 16 is easily circumvented, and no display bans are in place for tobacco shops which sell other retail products purchased by children such as candy, soft drinks and magazines.

The new legislation includes some progress, such as expanding long-overdue smoke free requirements in hospitality venues, including in areas serving food or drinks and for areas accessible to children. However, these restrictions will not come into effect until 2018.

Despite these small gains, the new law is still woefully inadequate, most notably in the omission of advertising bans, the ongoing availability of vending machines, failure to raise the legal purchasing age from 16 to 18, and failure to ban smoking in hospitals and health care facilities.

While other European countries move ahead on tobacco control, Austria is increasingly becoming the continent's version of Jeff the Diseased Lung.

Source: Marita Hefler 2015, Tobacco Control 24, 5: 426