The Challenges of Tobacco Control in Croatia

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Published online: 3 July 2009
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The challenges of tobacco control in Croatia are affected by the country's high unemployment rate, comparatively low levels of cigarette taxation and the issue of cigarette smuggling. Tobacco control legislation has gained prominence in Croatia due to the high rate of smoking and the European Union's accession requirements for tobacco control legislation. About one-third of the adults in Croatia smoke putting the country of 4.5 million people roughly on par with the heaviest-smoking EU member states (McDonald, N. USA 1st Edition Financial Times April 17, 2007). While the appropriate legislation on tobacco advertising, distribution, health warnings and ingredients are in place, Croatia lags behind other European areas in using a taxing strategy to combat smoking. Raising taxes on tobacco products is considered a highly effective component of a comprehensive tobacco control strategy. The effectiveness of a tax policy is undermined to the extent that there are smuggled or counterfeit tobacco products on the market. Although the percentage of smuggled cigarettes is an elusive number, the illicit tobacco trade is no stranger to Croatia. Cigarettes are widely available on the black market. Finally, in an economy with a 14% unemployment rate (Ministry of Economy, Labor, and Entrepreneurship accessed at www.mingorp.hr on 3/19/09), the public health sector is at odds with the sector that places an emphasis on the contribution of the tobacco industry to tax revenues and the livelihood of people who make their living growing or selling tobacco. While Croatia has made good progress in adopting legislation, it needs to strengthen its efforts both in terms of enforcement and increased taxation of cigarettes.

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