Communicating for Tobacco Control: United Against Tobacco and COVID

March 2023

Table of Contents

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................................... 2
Overview ......................................................................................................................................................... 3
   Background ................................................................................................................................................. 3
   Objectives .................................................................................................................................................. 5
   Campaign Descriptions .......................................................................................................................... 5
Key Findings ................................................................................................................................................... 6
   Summary Conclusion ............................................................................................................................. 9
Jordan ......................................................................................................................................................... 10
Palestine ....................................................................................................................................................... 14
Egypt ............................................................................................................................................................. 18
Iraq ................................................................................................................................................................. 21
Conclusions .................................................................................................................................................. 24

Creative Commons license
This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution- Non Commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, P.O. Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA. The content in this document may be freely used in accordance with this license provided the material is accompanied by the following attribution: Vital Strategies. Communicating for Tobacco Control: United Against Tobacco and COVID. New York, NY; 2023. Available from: www.unitedagainsttobacco.org.
Overview

Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET), in partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Vital Strategies, implemented United Against Tobacco and COVID in 2022 in the Eastern Mediterranean, a region with exceedingly high tobacco use and correspondingly high rates of noncommunicable diseases. A strategic communication campaign carried out across four countries—Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine—targeted smokers to promote tobacco cessation by increasing risk perceptions about: the potential harms of tobacco use during the COVID-19 pandemic, including water pipes, which are popular in the region; the benefits of quitting; and the health harms associated with tobacco.

Background

The Eastern Mediterranean region is largely a neglected area when it comes to tobacco control. The region has not benefited from substantial, organized tobacco control efforts, and evidence-based smoking cessation campaigns had been largely absent, despite high rates of tobacco use.

In Jordan, for instance, 65.3% of men are smokers. In Palestine, smoking prevalence among males ages 18 and above was about 54%, and 8% among females. The use of water pipes among current female smokers there reached 67%. The prevalence of tobacco smoking in Egypt reached 22% in 2010 and about 20.7% in Iraq according to the latest Iraq STEPwise approach to

surveillance (STEPS) survey. Linking risks from COVID-19 and smoking, at the beginning of 2022, offered a unique opportunity to capture the attention of the public and policymakers to encourage tobacco cessation.

During COVID-19, public health and social measures were implemented, including lockdowns and curfews. Recognizing that water pipes were a particularly dangerous transmission route for COVID-19, 17 governments in the region took action to ban water pipe use in public in response to WHO recommendations. But as lockdowns lifted, the bans were removed.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recognizing the importance of protecting people from both COVID-19 and tobacco, partnered with the Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) and Vital Strategies to create United Against Tobacco and COVID. This initiative was designed to provide capacity building and technical assistance in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine through a year-long grants program with a goal of building capacity among government officials and civil society and creating a strategic media campaign that could call attention to the harms of smoking. The campaign was launched and logistically supported by EMPHNET and implemented by local grantees with technical support from EMPHNET and Vital Strategies, and under the leaderships of ministries of health in the four countries. The campaign’s technical advisory committee of regional stakeholders included the World Health Organization-Eastern Mediterranean Region Office (WHO-EMRO), CDC-Egypt, CDC Middle East and North Africa, UNICEF, and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC).

4 2015 Iraq STEPS Survey
Objectives
By raising risk perceptions about tobacco harms, increasing people’s understanding of the benefits associated with quitting, and promoting smoking cessation interventions, the campaign initiative sought to:

- discourage use of water pipes;
- encourage smokers to consider quitting;
- increase public support for cessation interventions for tobacco users; and
- encourage smokers to stop using tobacco by using smoking cessation services.

Campaign Descriptions
Communication materials, some previously created and evaluated by Vital Strategies, were adapted for mass media campaigns in the region. The messages in each of the countries were informed and approved by local steering committees that included the ministries of health, the WHO representatives, and local key stakeholders. A video called “Echo” that was previously used in Turkiye, was a centerpiece for a campaign in Jordan that ran on multiple channels—including television and digital media—for six to eight weeks. The Jordan campaign broadcasts were also seen in Palestine and Iraq. Iraq, Palestine and Egypt also created their own campaign materials that focused on the harms of water pipes as well as a testimonial campaign using actual smokers who told their stories.
Smokers and nonsmokers between 18 and 55 years of age were the primary target audience. The campaign's messages were also placed on social media in an effort to reach younger people since they are particularly at risk of tobacco use.

A mix of process and post-campaign evaluation methods were used to estimate campaign effects in the four countries. This included analysis of media reach estimated by media planning agencies, the number of news articles published about campaign launches, continuous monitoring of campaign performance by campaign managers, and outcome evaluation studies in Jordan (using quantitative methods) and Palestine (using primarily qualitative methods).

**Key Findings**

**High media reach.** The campaign reached an estimated 50 million smokers and nonsmokers across all four countries through TV, digital media, radio and out-of-home advertising, such as billboards and posters. This estimate was obtained via media planners and included about 29 million people in Egypt, 25 million in Iraq, 3 million in Jordan and more than 2.5 million in Palestine. In addition, campaign launches generated more than 40 media stories—an important indicator of the campaign’s potential effectiveness. When the news media writes about a campaign, it places the topic on the public agenda, and further amplifies its reach.

---

6 Data source: in-country media planners
Positive reactions to the campaign. The evaluation in Jordan showed that the media campaign was memorable and had the desired effect. In Jordan, approximately 36% of respondents recalled the campaign three months after it ended; almost half of them were smokers. Most of the campaign-aware respondents saw the campaign on TV (52%) and social/digital media (37%). The campaign messages had the intended effect: 52% said the campaign provided them with new information and 72% agreed that it made them stop and think about smoking.

Increased cessation activity. Campaign process and post-campaign evaluation results demonstrated that many people across Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine asked for support with quitting smoking. For instance, in Jordan, the campaign inspired an increased number of visits to the Ministry of Health smoking cessation clinics and website.
Increase in tobacco control policy support. Above and beyond cessation goals, the campaign demonstrated increased support for tobacco control policies:

- The survey in Jordan found that the campaign fostered public support for smoke-free policies. More than 90% of those surveyed in Jordan supported smoke-free policies for schools, churches, mosques and hospitals. This support was higher among those who were campaign-aware than among those who were unaware.

- In Palestine, participants expressed overwhelming support for smoke-free policies, with more than 84% of survey participants calling for smoke-free university buildings. Key informant interviewees indicated the need for more stringent smoke-free laws, and said they were willing to promote such laws. The campaign built a foundation for the launch of smoking cessation clinics and services in Palestine, and prompted the Ramallah municipality to enforce a ban on tobacco sales to minors.

- In Iraq, many people, including policymakers, called for comprehensive and more stringent smoke-free policies. In addition, in September 2022, the Ministry of Health asked the partners to extend the campaign to the Arba’een religious pilgrimage for three more days. This extension enabled the United Iraqi Medical Society for Relief and Development to reach an estimate 600,000 to 700,000 pilgrims.

Strengthened understanding of the value of strategic and tested tobacco control communication campaigns. The United Against Tobacco and COVID campaign garnered positive reactions and strong engagement with communication campaign activities. Many people across the region said the campaign caught their attention on social media.

---

7 Arba’een is the largest annual pilgrimage in the world, during which millions of people go to the city of Karbala in Iraq.
The project was well received by government and nongovernment public health activists across the region. Many spoke about the relevance and importance of the campaign and recognized its effective evidence-based approach and its implementation through various channels. In all cases ministries of health added their logos to the campaign materials. In Jordan, the campaign was launched under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Dina Mired at a high-profile event, which drew significant media attention. In Palestine, the Ministry of Health shared the campaign on its social media platforms, aligning the opening of its smoking cessation clinics with the launch of the campaign.

**Summary Conclusion**

The United Against Tobacco and COVID campaign had significant reach and effect. It led its viewers to reconsider tobacco use and it generated quit attempts. Moreover, the campaign created a forum for tobacco control conversations in the participating countries. It inspired public health activists to engage in a dialogue with newly receptive policymakers about tobacco-control policies and search for opportunities to advance tobacco control issues in their respective countries. The high-quality message-tested materials, reach, and newness of the approach resulted in activities from governments that sparked actions beyond the objectives of the campaign.
The Royal Health Awareness Society implemented the United Against Tobacco and COVID mass media campaign in Jordan from June to September 2022. The campaign, which targeted people ages 18 to 55, was designed to encourage tobacco cessation by highlighting the risk of using tobacco considering COVID-19, emphasizing the benefits of quitting, and providing information on quitting and available local services. Campaign materials, including social media posts and videos, were developed and disseminated through TV and digital media.

A webpage was created as part of the Ministry of Health’s official COVID website to provide additional information and resources on tobacco use and cessation services. A high-profile launch in Amman, under the auspices of Her Royal Highness Princess Dina Mired of Jordan, drew considerable press attention in Jordan and beyond. Media planners estimated that the campaign reached 3 million people through TV and social/digital media.

---

8 Ministry of Health webpage on Tobacco and COVID, [https://corona.moh.gov.jo/ar/QuitSmokingCampaign](https://corona.moh.gov.jo/ar/QuitSmokingCampaign)
Post-Campaign Evaluation Methodology

Mindset, a social research agency, with technical assistance from Vital Strategies, conducted a post-campaign evaluation in October–November 2022 to assess the campaign’s recall by the target audience and its effectiveness. A total of 1,013 smokers and nonsmokers ages 18 to 55 from six governorates of Jordan participated in the survey. The sampling frame was developed using data from the 2015 Population and Housing Census and relied on a multi-stage randomization model.
Post-Campaign Evaluation Findings

The representative survey found that the campaign was recalled by more than one-third (36%) of respondents; almost half of them were smokers. Most of the campaign-aware respondents saw it on TV (52%) and social/digital media (37%).

The study also found that 72% of campaign-aware respondents agreed that the campaign made them stop and think about smoking behaviors. About half (52%) of campaign-aware respondents said the campaign provided them with new information. Study results also showed that the campaign encouraged many to seek cessation services and to quit smoking.
These findings were supported by reports from the Ministry of Health that visits to the ministry’s cessation resource webpage and cessation clinics increased during the campaign period. The campaign also fostered public support for smoke-free policies. More than 90% of those surveyed in Jordan supported smoke-free policies for schools, churches, mosques and hospitals.

---

9 Data source: Jordan Ministry of Health’s Smoking Cessation Webpage (before and during the United Against Tobacco and COVID Jordan campaign ran on TV and social media, starting in June).
Palestine

The Institute of Community and Public Health and the Media Development Center at Birzeit University implemented the campaign in Palestine from April to September 2022. The campaign, targeting smokers and nonsmokers ages 18 to 29, aimed to increase public understanding of the risks associated with tobacco and COVID, with a special focus on water pipe use among youth, and increase national support for current anti-tobacco legislation, mainly its smoke-free provisions. The campaign was disseminated through radio, digital media, billboards and posters.

The Ministry of Health supported the United Against Tobacco and COVID campaign in Palestine by sharing all social media posts created during the campaign on its social media platforms and displaying campaign posters at the main entrances of hospitals and clinics. The ministry also aligned the opening of its smoking cessation clinics with the launch of the campaign and used the campaign platform to begin publicizing the clinics.
Tobacco campaign launch event in Palestine

Post-Campaign Qualitative Evaluation Methodology

To assess the effect of the campaign, its reach and its resonance, the Institute of Community and Public Health and the Media Development Center at Birzeit University conducted an in-house post-campaign qualitative evaluation between September and November 2022, immediately following the campaign implementation. The qualitative evaluation aimed to gather insights about the potential recall and effectiveness of the campaign from the perspectives of both the target audience and policymakers. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach and collected qualitative and purposive (non-representative) quantitative data. In-person key informant interviews (semi-structured) were conducted with 12 stakeholders involved in tobacco control work in Palestine and quantitative data was collected purposively from 659 Birzeit University staff and students via an online survey. Media planners estimated that the campaign in Palestine reached
more than 3 million people through radio, social media, billboards and posters, and electronic screens.10

### Campaign Reach by Media Channels (Palestine)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Channel</th>
<th>Reach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>4,067,000 Million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>2,200,000 Million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Challenge</td>
<td>1,254,800 Million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Posters</td>
<td>1,300,800 Million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Post-Campaign Evaluation Findings

The online survey found that 5 in 10 (53%) surveyed respondents reported seeing or knowing about the campaign. Many reported that they saw the campaign on social media (63%), followed by university activities (47%), radio (25%) and health facilities (25%). Study participants (students and staff of Birzeit University and key informants) expressed overwhelming support for smoke-free policies, with more than 84% of survey participants calling for smoke-free university buildings (89% of females and 80% of males).

The qualitative evaluation results supported these findings, with many key informants noting the campaign’s reach. One Ministry of Health representative said: “I think it has reached everyone. Other than the media spots, the use of posters on public cars in Palestine was very important … this variation I think had a great impact and it was a very successful idea.”

10 Data source: media planner
Study participants also noted that the campaign’s approach and execution style differed from the campaigns they had previously seen. Others pointed at the effectiveness of the selected media channels. One Ministry of Health representative said, "I saw how much it had an impact, especially when I was seeing posters on cars. People started to say that the water pipe is harmful …"

“I read about it (the campaign in Palestine), saw people’s posts on Facebook, and I know that it coincided with campaigns that were launched in Egypt, Jordan and Iraq.”

—Key informant interview participant, Palestine, 2022

Others spoke of social media as a leading dissemination mechanism, especially when reaching younger people. Moreover, key informant interviewees indicated the need for a more stringent smoke-free law and a willingness to promote such a law.

“This campaign targeted very specific areas, such as cleaning the pipe, what is inside the water pipe, somewhat detailed information that was absent from the mind of the audience, followers and viewers.”

—Key informant interview participant, Palestine, 2022
Egypt

The Cairo Association for Smoking, Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases—Egypt (CASTLE) carried out a campaign in Egypt between Sept. 26 and Dec. 21, 2022. Targeting people ages 15 to 24, the campaign aimed to increase their perception of the harms of tobacco and the risk of COVID-19 infection and complications among smokers.

Campaign materials included testimonials and animated videos, social media posts, and interviews on programs and talk shows aimed at women and youth. CASTLE held consultations with national public health experts throughout the process of developing the communication material. The campaign was disseminated through both traditional media channels (TV and radio programs) and social media. The national quit line number was included on all materials.
Process Evaluation Findings

United Against Tobacco and COVID in Egypt reached approximately 29 million people across the country through social media, TV and radio. More than 40% of the people reached through social media were under age 24.\textsuperscript{11}

The campaign in Egypt was positively received by both the target audience and policymakers. For example, the Ministry of Health and Population approved and supported the campaign by adding its logo to the campaign materials.

\textsuperscript{11} Data source: media planner
Many among target audience (on social media) shared that the campaign inspired them to quit and asked for tips on how to do so. The Ministry of Health reported an increase in the number of calls to the ministry’s smoking cessation hotline during the campaign period.
Iraq

The United Iraqi Medical Society for Relief and Development implemented the campaign in Iraq between March and August 2022. The campaign targeted smokers and nonsmokers ages 15 to 45 across the country. The campaign in Iraq sought to increase people’s understanding of the hazards of smoking tobacco, particularly water pipes, and increased risk of COVID-19 infection and complications among smokers. Campaign dissemination channels included social media, radio spots in Arabic and Kurdish languages, billboards, flyers and brochures, and screens at mobile clinics.

The campaign in Iraq was implemented in coordination with local government agencies including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, civil police and governors’ offices, among others. Campaign material included videos, social media posts, billboards and flyers. A series of interviews were conducted with Iraqi tobacco control advocates, including celebrities, influencers and athletes.

In addition, the United Iraqi Medical Society for Relief and Development, at the request of the Ministry of Health, extended its campaign for additional three days to target the Arba’een pilgrimage.
Process Evaluation Findings

Overall, the campaign reached about 25 million people, with an estimate of 600,000 to 700,000 people reached at the pilgrimage.\(^\text{12}\)

Campaign process evaluation results suggest that the campaign encouraged many people across Iraq to quit with some seeking advice on cessation services. Some on social media mentioned that the campaign encouraged them to ask their loved ones to stop using tobacco products and to get tested for diseases associated with tobacco use.

\(^{12}\) Data source: media planner
Campaign Reach by Media Channels (Iraq)

- Social Media: 10,900,000 Million
- Radio: 8,000,000 Million
- Outdoor Posters: 6,027,750 Million
Conclusions

United Against Tobacco and COVID’s campaign process and post-evaluation results suggested that the initiative across Jordan, Palestine, Egypt and Iraq was a successful public health endeavor. It reached an estimated 50 million people across four countries and helped to increase people’s understanding of the dangers associated with consuming tobacco, and specifically using water pipes. The campaign initiative motivated some smokers to try to quit and to seek help to do so and encouraged others to show support for smoke-free policies for indoor areas, especially educational facilities, religious institutions, hospitals, coffee shops and restaurants.

The campaign bolstered tobacco control across the region, with a diverse array of stakeholders in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine recognizing the campaign’s importance and relevance to public health. Across all four countries, the project initiated a dialogue between policymakers and tobacco control advocates and opened new possibilities for the development and promotion of strong tobacco control policies.

Many policymakers supported campaign implementation in their regions through various means. This finding was unanticipated and speaks to the campaign’s significant effect in the region. For example:

- In Palestine, the campaign prompted the Ministry of Health to initiate a dialogue with communities to enact tobacco control policies. The campaign also spurred Ramallah municipality to launch an effort to enforce a ban on tobacco sales to minors.

- United Iraqi Medical Society for Relief and Development, with the support of holy shrines and mosques, disseminated tobacco control messages in religious institutions and, at the request of the Ministry of Health, extended its campaign to the Arba’een religious pilgrimage.
• In all countries, the ministries of health added their logo to all campaign materials. In Egypt the campaign was launched under the leadership of the ministry, which oversaw material development and supported dissemination.
• In Jordan, the campaign was launched under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Dina Mired, drawing considerable media attention in Amman and throughout Jordan.

The United Against Tobacco and COVID communication campaign initiative demonstrated that strategic communication campaigns, when implemented using evidence-based strategies, can encourage cessation, support policy discussion, and begin to change attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, in a region with limited exposure to tobacco control campaigns, the results suggest that the effect can be significant even from one campaign. However, continued media campaigns, ideally running most months of the year, are critical to reducing smoking prevalence, and to affect policy and behavior change in the long run.
This brief was written by Elizaveta Zeynalova with guidance from Rebecca Perl and Nandita Murukutla. It was edited by Randa Saad and Karen Schmidt and designed by Eddie Mouradian.

The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET)
The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) is a regional network that focuses on strengthening public health systems in the Eastern Mediterranean region and beyond. EMPHNET works in partnership with ministries of health, nongovernmental organizations, international agencies, private sector, and relevant institutions from the region and the world to promote public health and applied epidemiology.

Vital Strategies
Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by equitable and effective public health systems. We partner with governments, communities and organizations to reimagine public health, and the result is millions of people living longer, healthier lives. Our goal is to build a future where better health is supported across all facets of our lives, in our families, communities, in our environment and our governments.

For more on United Against Tobacco and COVID visit www.unitedagainsttobacco.org
Read country reports and evaluations at www.unitedagainsttobacco.org/resources