

Trade challenges from wealthy countries may impede noncommunicable disease prevention in LMICs

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National regulations aimed at preventing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in smaller, low- or middle-income countries may be influenced by challenges made through the World Trade Organization (WTO) by wealthier countries, according to a study publishing this week in *PLOS Medicine*.

Pepita Barlow of the University of Oxford, United Kingdom, and colleagues, analyzed a newly created dataset of trade challenges related to food, beverage, and tobacco regulations among the 122 WTO members, and described the patterns of regulatory challenges. The researchers found 93 regulations were challenged over the course of 20 years. 'Unnecessary' trade costs were named as the focus of 15 (16.4%) of challenges. Of the challenges raised against low- and [middle-income countries](#), 72 (77.4%) were raised by high-income countries, and in at least 4 cases, challenges were associated with changes to food and beverage regulations.

The authors note that the data currently available precluded analysis into what proportion of challenges were valid, and the factors that influence which countries are involved in a trade [challenge](#). Still, the authors note WTO challenges provide a mechanism by which vested interests can exert external influence over national regulations meant to improve health: "These findings show that policy makers appear to face significant pressure to design food, beverage, and tobacco regulations

that other countries will deem consistent with WTO rules and that policy making in low- and lower-middle-income countries may face pressure from the economic and political interests of wealthier nations."

More information: Barlow P, Labonte R, McKee M, Stuckler D (2018) Trade challenges at the World Trade Organization to national noncommunicable disease prevention policies: A thematic document analysis of trade and health policy space. *PLoS Med* 15(6): e1002590. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002590

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