Prior to 1990, Russia, Poland and the Ukraine had high smoking prevalence and smoking-attributable death rates, especially among men. Following the political and economic changes in Eastern Europe during the early 1990s, multinational tobacco companies entered the region’s cigarette market and quickly established market presence, introducing consumers to new products and novel marketing techniques including heavy brand promotion (Gilmore & McKee, 2004). During that period, tobacco tax policies in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine began to diverge. Poland increased their tobacco tax rate substantially, while Poland increased their modestly and Russian remain among the lowest in the world.

These variations in tobacco tax policies may have contributed to differences in how smoking rates in these three countries have changed since the early 1990s. In Poland, rates have declined significantly, reaching 37% among men and 24% among women in 2010 (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2010a). In Ukraine, rates increased throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, reaching 67% among men and 20% among women in 2005, but then declined to 50% among men and 11% among women after the 2008–2010 tax increases (Ross, Shariff, & Gilmore, 2009; Ross et al., 2012; World Health Organization & Ministry of Health of Ukraine, 2009; WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2010b). In Russia, the smoking prevalence rate among men experienced a small decline but remained high at 60% by 2009, whereas the rate among women increased to 22% (Krasovsky, 2011; WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2009).

- Prior to 1990, Russia, Poland and Ukraine had high smoking prevalence and smoking attributable death rates.
- An increase in excise taxes:
  Cigarette excise taxes increase substantially from 1990 to 2010
- Excise taxes had a positive and statistically significant impact on smoking cessation
This study explored the impact of cigarette excise taxes on the rates of smoking cessation in these three Eastern European countries during the post-transitional period of the 1990s and 2000s. There is very little evidence on the tax elasticity of smoking cessation in LMICs. Using Global Adult Tobacco Survey data from 11,106 former and current smokers, we estimated the impact of cigarette taxes on the smokers’ likelihood of quitting over time. We first transformed the survey’s cross-sectional data into a pseudo-longitudinal format in which the average observation period for individual subjects was 12 years and then employed duration analysis. The average age of cessation in our sample was 41, and approximately 20% of the sample quit during the covered period. Poland had the highest average quit rate over the study period (29.9%), followed by Ukraine (20.4%) and Russia (13.9%).

In all three countries, cigarette excise taxes increased substantially from 1996 to 2010. The tax per pack during this period increased from $0.66 to $2.46 in Poland, from $0.03 to $0.21 in Russia, and from $0.03 to $0.60 in Ukraine in 2010 (Figure 1). In all models, the cigarette excise tax had a positive and statistically significant impact on smoking cessation. We estimated that a 10% increase in cigarette taxes during the observation period increased the probability of smoking cessation among smokers in these countries by 1.6% to 2.3%.

Cigarette tax increases have played a significant role in driving smoking cessation in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. Further increases in cigarette excise taxes are likely to encourage further cessation and thus impact the prevalence of smoking in the region.