

How Regulating Nicotine Pouches Could Cut Azerbaijan's Smoking Timeline by Decades

BAKU, AZERBAIJAN, June 2, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Path to Smoke-Free and We Are Innovation have published a new report assessing Azerbaijan's anti-smoking policies. The document, titled "[The Regulation That Could Change Everything](#). How Azerbaijan treats nicotine pouches now will define its smoking trajectory for decades," particularly explores how designing an appropriate regulatory framework for nicotine pouches could be decisive for the country to decrease its smoking rates.

Smoking in Azerbaijan is an issue that mostly affects the male population. Nearly 40% of Azerbaijani men smoke. Female prevalence is remarkably lower, which is something that should be preserved. Nevertheless, efforts should be made to reduce smoking as much as possible, as it continues to take thousands of lives. Of the 58,909 total deaths recorded in the country in 2024, 33,289 could be attributed to cigarettes.

Azerbaijan's current tobacco control framework follows the MPOWER principles, encompassing advertising restrictions, public smoking bans and a series of excise duties applied to cigarettes and, more recently, to vapes and heated tobacco. A comprehensive set of Technical Regulations covering nicotine and tobacco products, is expected to come into force by Azerbaijan's Ministry of Health in 2026 and a vape ban has already come into effect. This latest approach clashes with those observed in places like Sweden, Czechia, Greece, Japan and the UK, which have become success stories in the fight against smoking, after embracing Innovative Nicotine Products (INPs).

The vape ban that took effect on 1 April 2026 is, from a harm reduction standpoint, a step in the wrong direction. It removes a safer alternative from hundreds of thousands of adult users who had already switched away from cigarettes. Approximately 300,000 vaping devices were being sold monthly in Azerbaijan, and the users of those devices now face a stark choice: find a viable alternative or relapse to smoking.

This makes the regulatory treatment of nicotine pouches all the more urgent. They are currently the only remaining smoke free alternative accessible to former vapers and to the far larger population of adult cigarette smokers. Yet nicotine pouches still lack an adequate regulatory framework in Azerbaijan, an absence that has allowed low quality, extreme nicotine products to circulate alongside responsible ones, fueling misinformation and creating the conditions for exactly the kind of moral panic that tends to produce further prohibitionist responses. Getting

the regulation right now is not merely an administrative task. It is the most consequential harm reduction decision Azerbaijan's health authorities will make this year.

Azerbaijan has the chance to take some inspiration from nations like Greece, New Zealand and Czechia, which, instead of banning INPs, regulated them effectively: Greece took over three complementary digital tools involving age-verification and minor protection mechanisms; New Zealand's regulatory framework for vaping products is built around licensed adult-only retail stores; Czechia, in turn, established a 12 mg per pouch nicotine ceiling alongside youth access controls.

According to the Path to Smoke-Free platform, Azerbaijan will not achieve a smoke-free status (corresponding to a smoking rate below 5%) until 2105, if its current anti-smoking policies remain unchanged. However, if it follows the combined pace of the global leaders against smoking, it can become smoke-free in 2063. That is 42 years ahead of the current trajectory. Going further away, if it adopts Sweden's approach, it can accelerate its path in 51 years and move the date to 2054.

Sweden's unique case boils down to the so-called "Triple A" approach, which safeguards the accessibility, affordability and acceptability of INPs. This should be a significant starting point for Azerbaijan.

Nicotine pouches are still not very accessible in Azerbaijan, as they are being sold in only 400 retail points, compared to over 12,000 points selling cigarettes and heated tobacco products. This calls out for a more robust integration of the product in mainstream retail. Taxation also matters. The examples from Sweden, Czechia and elsewhere show that a meaningful price differential between cigarettes and nicotine pouches creates an economic pathway to switching. Moreover, countries like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia or the UAE, are also worth mentioning as having nicotine pouches integrated into broader harm reduction frameworks.

The decisions taken in 2026 will determine whether Azerbaijan accelerates its decline in smoking or misses a critical window for change. A pragmatic, evidence-based approach to nicotine pouches could be the turning point in shaping a smoke-free future.

ENDS

ABOUT PATH TO SMOKE-FREE

Path to Smoke-Free is an analytical platform by We Are Innovation showing how countries can use innovation to reach smoke-free status. Drawing from Sweden's success, it identifies three key drivers: Accessibility, Acceptability, and Affordability of innovative nicotine products. The platform combines policy data, insights from Swedish ex-smokers, and forecasting charts projecting when countries will achieve smoke-free status under different policy scenarios. Explore the evidence at <https://pathtosmokefree.global/>.

ABOUT WE ARE INNOVATION

We Are Innovation is a global network of individuals and institutions that believes in innovation's power to solve the world's most pressing problems. With over 50 think tanks, foundations, and NGOs worldwide, it represents a diverse civil society committed to advancing human creativity, new technologies, and innovative solutions. Learn more at <https://www.weareinnovation.global/>.

Beatriz Santos

We Are Innovation

[email us here](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/916756706>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.