

New Report Highlights Kenya's Opportunity to Lead Africa's Smoke-Free Transition

NAIROBI, KENYA, June 18, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Path to Smoke-Free and We Are Innovation have just unveiled a report titled "[Africa's Rulebook Is Being Written in Nairobi](#): How Nairobi's regulatory choices on nicotine pouches will shape a continent's path to a smoke-free future." It assesses Kenya's current regulatory framework on nicotine pouches and how some targeted changes could accelerate the country's path towards a smoke-free future.

Nicotine pouches are legal and regulated in Kenya, benefiting from one of the most comprehensive regulatory frameworks in all of Africa. However, it is necessary to evaluate whether this framework properly embraces the potential this product has for improving the public health landscape.

Kenya's smoking rate among men stands at 16%, far above the national average of 8.4%. Despite a 7% reduction in smoking rates since 2000, cigarettes are still responsible for about 12000 deaths annually. From all the people who die in Kenya every year from non-communicable diseases, 16.5% die from smoking.

Compared to the public health risks of cigarette smoking, nicotine pouches provide a safer alternative for nicotine use. Pouches do not contain tobacco, do not burn, and do not produce any smoke or ash. Given the fact that most smoking-related harm comes from the toxicants produced when tobacco burns, non-combustible products present a substantially different harm profile.

The [Path to Smoke-Free platform](#) measures how 101 countries are harnessing innovation to defeat smoking. Encouragingly, the platform classifies Kenya as the country, among those 101, where nicotine pouches have the highest acceptability. Strong acceptability means that various flavors and nicotine levels are available and socially embraced, contributing to consumer choice and quitting smoking. Nevertheless, there are still challenges regarding accessibility and affordability. Despite their high acceptability, pouches remain out of reach and unaffordable for many Kenyan smokers.

Evidence coming from countries like Sweden or Czechia shows that, when authorities rely on the Triple A approach - that is, ensuring that INPs are acceptable, affordable and accessible for consumers - smoking rates decrease and the public health landscape improves. In Kenya, this approach has been hindered by excise stamps, health warnings and planned flavor restrictions

applied to products like nicotine pouches. There is also an issue regarding taxation, since pouches are still treated the same way as cigarettes in this domain.

The argument Kenyan authorities are using to equate nicotine pouches to cigarettes is youth protection. However, data demonstrates that only 0.1% of Kenyan adolescents use nicotine products overall and that consumption has not increased with the sale of pouches. Besides this, nations like Greece and New Zealand show that it is possible to have strict youth controls while allowing adult access to alternatives. Greece possesses a robust digital-age verification system alongside a national retail register, while New Zealand has a licensed adult-only retail model.

Furthermore, Kenya does not regulate in isolation. As the largest economy in the East African Community (EAC), Kenya plays an influential role in shaping regional policy discussions and regulatory approaches. Because the EAC includes countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda, Kenya's decisions on nicotine pouch regulation are likely to influence how these neighboring markets approach the product, with implications for the broader regional regulatory landscape.

Kenya has a unique opportunity to lead Africa toward a pragmatic, evidence-based approach to tobacco harm reduction. By maintaining strong safeguards for youth while ensuring nicotine pouches are not just acceptable, but also affordable and accessible to adult smokers, policymakers can accelerate progress toward a smoke-free future and save thousands of lives. What happens in Nairobi today will have consequences far beyond Kenya's borders. The outcome could determine access to less harmful alternatives for millions of smokers across East Africa and beyond.

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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/>.

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