

Burden of Tobacco Use in WHO African Region



Introduction

Tobacco use takes a huge toll on the health and economy of the Africa region. Even though some countries in the region have relatively lower smoking rates, the lethality of tobacco still produces far too much illness, death, and costs to the economy.

In addition to lowering this existing burden, addressing tobacco use in the region presents two key opportunities that must be addressed accordingly:

- **Preventing an epidemic from worsening:** Tobacco control advocates have a prime opportunity to stop the curve of tobacco use and prevent the tobacco epidemic from spiraling out of control in the region. Adopting and implementing tobacco control policies as outlined in the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and its Guidelines will ensure that the problem is addressed head-on.
- **Addressing tobacco industry expansion:** Tobacco companies view the low prevalence rates in the region as a unique opportunity for growth. It is already clear that the industry is looking to expand its market of both conventional and emerging nicotine and tobacco products in the region. It's imperative to take advantage of this opportunity to stop this growth and prevent a potential epidemic in Africa.
 - In Ghana, the Minister of Finance, announced a budget proposal in 2022 to tax e-cigarettes, effectively legalizing them despite their ban in the country. This decision has been attributed to the government's interaction with the tobacco industry. E-cigarettes were then banned in July 2023.⁴

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Key Facts & Overview

50%

Tobacco kills up to half of its users who don't quit.



7 million

annual deaths

1.6 million

annual deaths from secondhand smoke⁴

2/3 adults

of adult deaths due to secondhand smoke are women

80%

Percent of world's 1.3 billion tobacco users who live in low- and middle-income countries³

60 million

tobacco users who live in the WHO African Region³



Prevalence of Tobacco Use in WHO African Region



9.5%

Average adult tobacco use prevalence in the WHO African Region in 2022.³

9.2%

In 2021, 9.2% of adolescents (aged 13-15) used tobacco products in the WHO African Region.³

6.9%

Adults (aged 15+) who smoke cigarettes in 2022.³

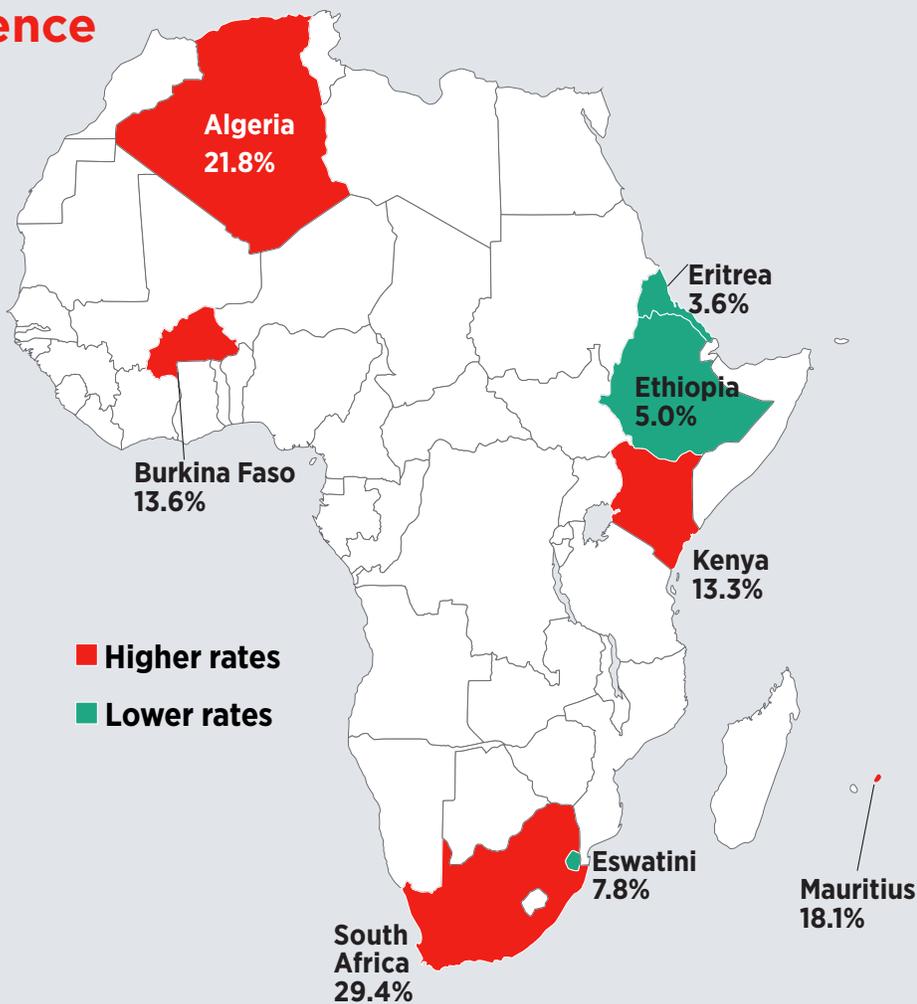
Country-Specific Examples of Tobacco Use Prevalence

HIGHER RATES

- South Africa 29.4%
- Algeria 21.8%
- Mauritius 18.1%
- Botswana 17.6%
- Burkina Faso 13.6%
- Kenya 13.3%

LOWER RATES

- Eritrea 3.6%
- Ethiopia 5.0%
- Eswatini 7.8%



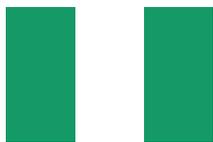
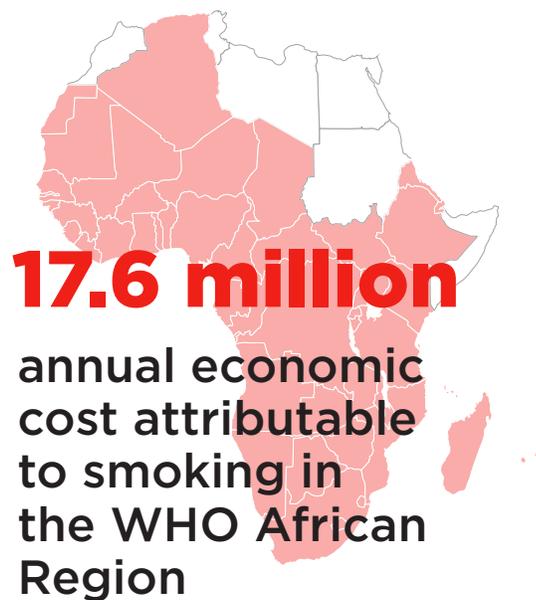
GENDER SPECIFIC PREVALENCE

While adult women continue to use tobacco at lower rates than men in the African Region, the range of tobacco use among girls (4.6% to 36.3%) is now comparable to that of boys (7.8% to 36.5%).³

Economic and Social Impact

In the WHO African Region:

- Tobacco killed an estimated 226,713 people in 2021.
 - 2.39% of all deaths were caused by tobacco.
- The economic cost attributable to smoking in the WHO African Region⁴ totals about **17.6 billion USD annually**, including healthcare expenditures and human capital lost as a result of illness and/or premature death caused by tobacco.⁴



NIGERIA

15,925

Deaths caused by tobacco in 2021.⁵



6,336 deaths

from secondhand tobacco smoke exposure



188 billion Nigerian naira annually

Economic cost attributable to smoking in Nigeria, including healthcare expenditures and human capital lost as a result of illness and/or premature death caused by tobacco.⁴



ETHIOPIA

8,395

Deaths caused by tobacco in 2021.⁶



2,489 deaths

from secondhand tobacco smoke exposure



7 billion Ethiopian birrs annually

Economic cost attributable to smoking in Ethiopia, including healthcare expenditures and human capital lost as a result of illness and/or premature death caused by tobacco.⁴



SOUTH AFRICA

32,441

Deaths caused by tobacco in 2021.⁵



7,691 deaths

from secondhand tobacco smoke exposure

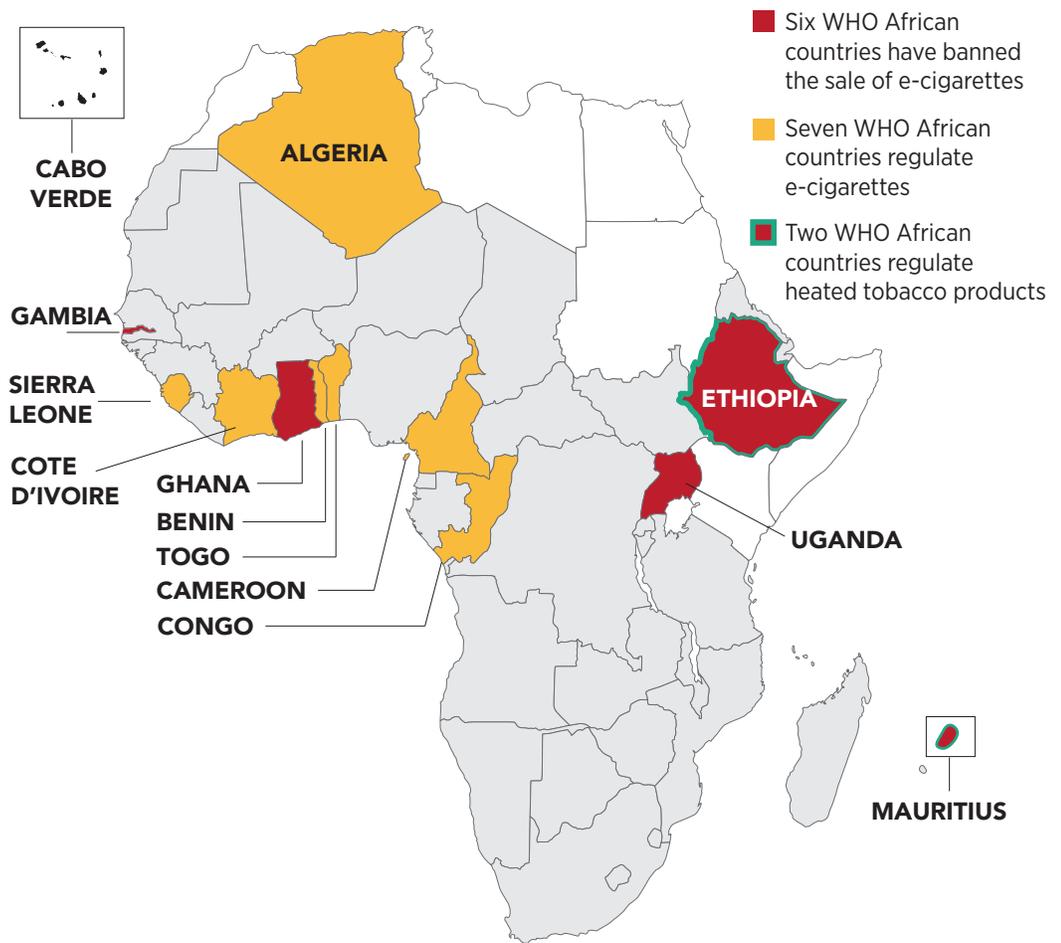


over 38 billion South African rands annually

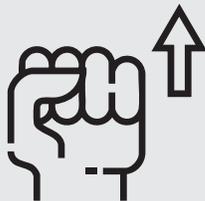
Economic cost attributable to smoking in South Africa, including healthcare expenditures and human capital lost as a result of illness and/or premature death caused by tobacco.⁴

Industry Interference and Emerging Threats

- **British American Tobacco (BAT)** successfully lobbied to downsize health warnings on nicotine pouches (Velo) in **Kenya**, raising concerns over youth targeting, school infiltration, and weak regulatory responses.⁴
- The tobacco industry has begun targeting African youth with tobacco and nicotine **emerging products** such as e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products despite mounting evidence of their health risks.⁴



Recommendations/Next Steps



Strengthen

taxation, smoke-free regulations, and graphic health warning labels implementation across the region



Monitor and regulate

emerging products (e.g. e-cigarettes, oral nicotine pouches) and protect youth from industry tactics



Increase regional collaboration

and accelerate WHO FCTC policy adoption across Africa

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