

Montenegro bans indoor smoking in public places

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Smoking indoors in public places was banned from Wednesday in Montenegro, a major challenge in the tobacco-mad Balkan country with some of the highest smoking rates in Europe.

More than one third of adults among the population of just 650,000 are regular smokers, according to the public health institute.

Under the new law, lighting up is prohibited in all closed [public places](#), including restaurants and cafes where smoking was previously common as elsewhere across the region.

The exception is casinos, where smoking will still be allowed. Businesses can also set up separate rooms solely for smoking.

Fines for violating the law range from 500 euros (\$560) to 20,000 euros (\$22,370) under legislation that also regulates cigarette sales and warnings on the packaging.

On Wednesday, cafes in the capital Podgorica had put up notices about the ban in their windows and removed ashtrays from indoor tables.

"Fines are high and we have to comply with the ban," said barista Milan.

But the ban is not without its critics.

"This law is hypocritical. If its adoption was motivated by [health](#)

[concerns](#), casinos should not have been exempted," says Dusan, a customer.

Montenegro, which is hoping to join the European Union, had already adopted an anti-tobacco law in 2004, but it was not respected.

Regulations passed in 2012 requiring restaurants to pay additional taxes for allowing smoking inside were similarly ineffective.

"The Ministry will persevere in its efforts to enforce every section of the law to the letter," assured Health Minister Kenan Hrapovic.

According to the [health ministry](#), some 400 Montenegrins are diagnosed with [lung cancer](#) every year.

The [medical treatment](#) is costly—amounting to some 70,000 euros per patient.

Smoking indoors is widespread in the Balkans, though Croatia and North Macedonia have similar bans on closed public places.

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