

Cannabis industry news from around the world



Thomas Walker looks at the latest developments in the international cannabis sector. Highlights include Zimbabwe's shift from tobacco to cannabis production, and recent cannabis legislation changes in Thailand.

The cannabis industry has seen a raft of changes in production and legislation in a number of countries. Below are some of the most significant developments.

THAILAND'S U-TURN ON CANNABIS

In June 2022, Thailand reversed its legislation on cultivating and consuming cannabis. The country now allows private consumption and growth of the entire plant.

This was a country that took an extremely hard stance on cannabis-related offences, with long prison sentences and the death penalty being common. Hundreds of suspected drug traffickers were executed by firing squad.

Since the change in the law, vendors of all types have jumped on the bandwagon and have been openly selling everything from flowers and edibles to weed-infused curries and bubble tea.

The change has been lauded by farmers, who have high hopes for a new income source.

In a world first, the government handed out millions of free cannabis plants to the populace. This can arguably be seen as the most liberal approach to cannabis reform in any country, but there are a few limits.

Smoking in public, or creating and selling a product from cannabis for which approval has not been obtained from the Food and Drug Administration of Thailand, can still result in a jail sentence, warns Tom Kruesopon, who was instrumental in persuading the Thai government to change its views.

ZIMBABWE PIVOTS FROM TOBACCO

The Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe announced recently that it would accept applications from hemp

and cannabis manufacturers, cultivators, importers, exporters and retail pharmacists. According to a Bloomberg report, cannabis would be offered as a "complementary medicine". This marks the first time that cannabis has been permitted to be sold in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe was one of the first African countries to legalise medicinal cannabis back in 2018.

THAILAND NOW ALLOWS FOR THE PRIVATE CONSUMPTION AND GROWTH OF THE CANNABIS PLANT

As is well known, tobacco was one of Zimbabwe's leading exports, but sales have fallen sharply in recent years, forcing legislators to seek alternate crops.

According to Bloomberg, the "demand for cannabis is projected to continue to grow while Zimbabwe's tobacco output may decline 15% by 2030".

Bloomberg also reported that in 2021, Zimbabwe "exported 30t of industrial hemp to Switzerland, its first foray into the European market".

Forecasts estimate that global cannabis exports will be worth R4,6 billion by 2028 and Zimbabwean officials said recently that that country wanted "at least U\$1 billion [R17 billion] of that, more than it currently makes from its top agricultural export, tobacco".

GERMAN MARKET SET TO OPEN

Recreational reform was one of the main topics at the Cannabis Europa conference in London recently.

Most speakers estimated that the recreational market in Germany could be operating in 2024, and this will have major implications for the rest of Europe.

CANNABIS SOCIAL CLUBS IN MALTA

According to the *Times of Malta*, recreational cannabis was partially legalised on the island in December 2021. It is now legal to carry up to 7g of cannabis, and households may grow up to four plants. Cannabis associations (cannabis social clubs) can cultivate and distribute cannabis among their members (a maximum of 7g/day and 50g/month per member). Smoking cannabis in public remains banned, however.

SINGAPORE

Singapore, which is notorious for the use of corporal and capital punishment, executed another convicted cannabis trafficker on 26 July 2022 at Changi Prison. People convicted of trafficking cannabis are handed a mandatory death sentence. This is the fifth execution for drug charges related to cannabis within the past four months.

For lesser drug offences, canings are administered with a 1,2m cane. The Singapore government reveals very little information about executions, so NGOs such as Transformative Justice Collective have to resort to obtaining information from prisoners or inmates' relatives.

Hopefully, the recent turnaround in Thailand will influence Singapore and Malaysia to look at reforming their legislation.

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