

Decriminalising Suicide in East Africa

Aligning National, Regional and Global Action

Authors

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"After more than 90 years of criminalizing attempted suicide, Kenya chose humanity over punishment".

The Kenya High Court: 9th January 2025

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Background

- Suicide remains a **crime** in **5 Eastern African countries**
- This prevents people from seeking and obtaining life-saving care
- Aligning **global, regional** and **national advocacy** can accelerate policy and legal reform
- We present a case study on **Kenya's path toward decriminalisation**, paired with the work of the East Africa Community Mental Health Network (regional) and United for Global Mental Health (global) to achieve this.



Regional Advocacy

Leveraging the Kenya landmark suicide decriminalisation ruling in 2025, the EACMHN as a regional advocacy platform is working towards;

- **Building policy capacity:** EACMHN is engaging mental health stakeholders across all eight EAC Member States to strengthen their capacity for suicide prevention advocacy and policy engagement.
- **Regional advocacy platform:** EACMHN connects country-level advocacy efforts, enabling lessons from Kenya to inform broader East African policy dialogue and accountability.
- **Linking communities with political leadership:** EACMHN is working with the Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Mental Health to strengthen advocacy links between community actors and parliamentary leadership.
- **Amplifying community leadership:** Through its regional network, EACMHN provides a platform for member organisations and community actors to bring local experiences and priorities into regional policy discussions.
- **Creating a regional youth platform:** EACMHN is building the Youth Advocacy Forum as a mechanism through which young people across East

The Kenyan Case Study

- In 2025, The Kenya The High Court declared **Section 226 unconstitutional**, effectively **decriminalising suicide**. This came off the back of extensive advocacy from civil society.
- **Legal victory is only step one.** Despite the court ruling, systemic reform on the ground remains slow - highlighting the need for post-decriminalisation planning to address establish nationwide crisis protocols, and fully transition first-responders from police dispatch to healthcare.
- Kenya serves as a **landmark constitutional model** across the East African Region and globally - equipping advocates in countries like Uganda and Tanzania with persuasive legal arguments while affirming that **decriminalisation must be paired with system-wide healthcare investment**.

Global Advocacy

- In 2025, UnitedGMH advocated to successfully secure explicit **call for suicide decriminalisation** within the landmark UN Political Declaration on NCDs & Mental Health.
- Working with East African advocates in **Uganda, Tanzania** and **Kenya** helps ensures global wins translate into national change and similarly, that global advocacy is informed by national contexts.
- There are several ways decriminalisation can happen. Scan the QR code for a practical guide for how to advocate for decriminalisation.



"No one should be punished for being in pain."

Let us seize the opportunity to build a future where every life is valued, every cry for help is heard, and every person is supported to heal.