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NEXT iGaming Market in Focus:
Kenya

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What's Inside

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SPORTINGTECH

FOREWORD

Sonja Lindenberg (Lead Researcher, NEXT.io)

Kenya is approaching the end of one of the most significant regulatory transformations its gambling sector has seen in years. The introduction of a more comprehensive licensing framework and a new regulator signals a clear move toward long-term stability in what is already a dynamic market.

Industry stakeholders acknowledge that while not every element of the new framework is ideal, the establishment of a coherent structure, including dedicated regulations for the online sector, is in itself a significant achievement. The market has long been shaped by inconsistency, particularly in areas such as taxation, where measures have often been introduced and subsequently revised following operator pushback.

Encouragingly, this reform process appears to have been shaped by a higher degree of collaboration between policymakers and industry stakeholders. This more inclusive approach has helped produce a framework that is better aligned with market realities. Ultimately, strong and stable regulation underpins any successful market. It provides clarity, strengthens player protection, supports operator performance, and encourages supplier investment.

That said, challenges remain. Higher capital requirements may place pressure on smaller operators, potentially driving consolidation but also creating opportunities for new entrants. For those with a deep understanding of the local landscape, the next phase of Kenya's market promises to be both competitive and full of opportunity.

Tom Ustunel (CEO, Sportingtech)

Kenya is entering a new phase of maturity, with its evolving regulatory framework laying the groundwork for a more stable and sustainable gambling market. For an industry that has historically faced periods of uncertainty, this shift represents a meaningful step toward greater clarity and consistency for all stakeholders.

One of the most encouraging developments is the inclusion of both B2C and B2B licensing. By formally recognising suppliers, platform providers, and certification labs, Kenya is raising the bar for the entire ecosystem. This creates a more transparent and accountable market, where operators can rely on properly licensed partners to ensure fairness, security, and compliance. In a market with highly tech savvy players, this level of oversight is not just welcome, it is essential.

At Sportingtech, we have already supported partners on the ground in Kenya and understand the importance of combining strong local execution with robust, certified technology. As regulation evolves, having a secure, compliant, and scalable platform partner will be critical. This reform positions Kenya as one of Africa's most promising re-regulated markets, and we are excited about the opportunities ahead. We hope this report serves as a valuable and practical guide for operators, investors and stakeholders looking to navigate and succeed in Kenya's new regulatory landscape.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHY KENYA MATTERS

Kenya's gambling industry is at an inflection point. A sweeping regulatory reform, rising investor interest, and a maturing consumer base are converging to reshape a market that has long been defined by volatility. This section maps the key themes: regulation, market structure, competitive dynamics, and strategic opportunity, covering everything any serious entrant needs to understand before going further.

Kenya has rewritten the rules of its gambling industry for the first time in more than half a century. Last year, a new gambling law replaced a framework dating back to the 1960s, ushering one of Africa's most active betting markets into a more tightly regulated, digital-first era.

The overhaul is framed as a push for stronger oversight and improved player protections. In practice, it is likely much more than that. Stricter licensing and compliance requirements, higher capital thresholds, and tighter advertising restrictions are set to reshape the competitive landscape. For investors, the changes shift both the risk profile and the flow of capital into a sector that has thrived on rapid, mobile-led growth.

Some uncertainty remains around implementation. While the law is already in force and a new regulator has been put in place, aspects of its application and enforcement are still taking shape, and timelines for full rollout remain fluid. But the trajectory is unmistakable. Companies with exposure to Kenya are already adjusting to a more disciplined regulatory environment, where capital, technology, and compliance capacity will determine who stays in the game.

Market Size

Kenya is one of Africa's most closely watched gambling markets, not only for its scale but also for the contradictions that define it. It ranks as the continent's third-largest market, behind South Africa and Nigeria. However, obtaining precise data remains challenging.

Estimates from *NEXT.io* sources suggest that, following recent tax changes, Kenya's gross gaming revenue (GGR) has likely reached around $1bn. Other calculations, based on deposit data, place the market slightly lower, at approximately $700m–$800m in annual GGR. Meanwhile, H2 Gambling Capital estimates Kenya's GGR at around $500m for 2025.

For context, Africa's total onshore GGR is estimated at around $8bn, with roughly half attributed to South Africa alone.

Within this landscape, Kenya represents a significant and fast-growing share. In terms of user activity, the market is substantial. Total active players are estimated at around 8 million, underlining the country's deep engagement with betting and gaming products.

Yet, the sector sits at the centre of an ongoing social debate. Betting is often viewed less as a form of entertainment and more as an economic opportunity, particularly among younger consumers. Research indicates that Kenya has one of the highest shares of young, frequent gamblers in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting both the market's strong commercial potential and the social risks tied to widespread participation. Gambling addiction has also emerged as a growing social concern.

~8million

Estimated Active Players

$500m–$1bn

Estimated Annual GGR
(Range Across Sources)

The wide spread in revenue estimates reflects genuine methodological differences rather than data error. Kenya's market is large and measuring it precisely remains an open challenge.

Market Evolution & Structure

Kenya's online gambling industry saw rapid growth around the 2014 World Cup, when online platforms gained traction and mobile payments had already transformed consumer behaviour. Widely regarded as the birthplace of mobile money, the country's adoption of digital payments far outpaces many regional and global peers.

Today, mobile-first betting dominates, with consumers transacting primarily via mobile wallets rather than traditional banking channels. Retail betting exists but remains secondary, unlike in other parts of Africa, where operators maintain large networks of betting shops.

The market remains distinctly local, with domestic brands continuing to dominate as major international operators have yet to establish a meaningful foothold. According to industry analytics firm Blask, the country's three largest operators, which are Betika, GameMania, and Odibets, together account for nearly half of the market.

Beyond this top tier sits a second group of established regional and international players. SportPesa, once the market's dominant force before regulatory pressures prompted a restructuring, remains a significant presence. BetPawa has pursued a broader pan-African strategy, expanding in Kenya with streamlined mobile onboarding and low-stakes betting products designed for price-sensitive customers. Both SportPesa and BetPawa feature international shareholders, though their operations were established primarily with the African market in mind. Serbian-founded MozzartBet, expanding steadily across Africa, also maintains a strong presence.

Over the past decade, Kenya's market has cycled through boom, correction, and consolidation, with change often abrupt. Regulatory volatility had been a longstanding feature, particularly around taxation. Sudden policy shifts in recent years created an unpredictable environment that, according to industry sources, "nearly killed" the legal sector at one point. Industry sources estimated that tax revenue fell by as much as 80% following a sharp tax increase in 2019, as operators and players moved activity offshore or into alternative channels, including digital assets and other unregulated betting environments.

Regulatory Reform

Kenya's recent gambling reform aimed to address the shortcomings of the past, delivering what could be the most consequential overhaul in decades. At the heart of the reform was the creation of the Gambling Regulatory Authority of Kenya (GRAK), tasked with enforcing stricter rules on licensing, advertising, and responsible gambling. The current licences are set to expire in June 2026. From July 2026 onwards, all new licences should be issued under the authority of the new regulator, marking the official transition to the updated licensing framework.

However, there remains uncertainty around the timeline. While the Gambling Control Act has been introduced, key supporting regulations have not yet been approved. As a result, significant gaps remain, which need to be addressed to provide clarity and certainty for both operators and players.

In theory, the required regulations could be finalised quickly, potentially within a matter of weeks, sources told *NEXT.io*. This would allow the new framework to be implemented in the near term. However, delays are also possible, with the process potentially extending to the end of the year or, in some cases, being postponed further. A conservative estimate would place implementation by the end of the year, although an earlier rollout, potentially before June 2026, remains a strong possibility.

The law itself introduces several significant structural changes. These include new B2C and B2B licence categories, along with mandatory technical and operational requirements, giving the regulator the power to impose fines or even jail operators for non-compliance. For the industry, the most significant benefit may be increased stability and predictability. Licences are now valid for three years, compared with just one year previously.

A centrepiece of the new framework is a mandatory, centralised self-exclusion system. Operators are required to close accounts, return funds, and remove users from marketing lists within two days. Family members and other third parties can also request exclusions, signalling a more interventionist approach to player protection. Complementing this is enhanced B2B oversight, which industry stakeholders say will reduce fraud, curb bonus abuse, and close loopholes historically exploited by bots and sophisticated players.

However, licensing costs have increased significantly due to higher fees and capital requirements. In certain subcategories, this might make it extremely difficult for existing operators to obtain new licences or renew existing ones. "Under the current framework, it was possible to obtain a licence and remain compliant with less than $20,000. Under the new requirements, however, that figure has, in some cases, risen to over $20m," one legal expert told *NEXT.io*. "We expect larger players from other markets, with deeper financial resources, to step in and take advantage of the space created by these changes, applying for licences and expanding their presence in the market," the source added.

Nana Totoe
Chief Operations Officer at Sportingtech

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It's a people-do-business-with-people market. Relationships matter, and often it comes down to who you know and who can introduce you. That's still the reality across many African territories.

From a B2B perspective, we've been building our platform for Africa for years. We launched there a long time ago and now operate in markets like Tanzania and Mozambique. Over the past four years in particular, we've focused on understanding what works in Kenya, and one thing is clear: simplicity wins.

If you bring in a complex product, it struggles. Take operators who enter the market with the same offering they use elsewhere, simply translated into Swahili. It doesn't work. They might generate some revenue, but they won't lead the market.

In many African markets, mobile limitations are a real factor. If a platform is overloaded with tens of thousands of casino games and huge volumes of sports betting content, it becomes too data-heavy. Pages buffer, games don't load properly, and players lose interest. It doesn't matter how many bonuses you offer. If the experience isn't smooth, users won't stay.

I also think many operators are behind the curve by leading with sports betting. Casino has really taken off, particularly crash games, and that's where we're seeing strong engagement.

Investor Interest

The combination of clearer rules, longer licence terms, and stronger consumer protections has renewed investor confidence, potentially marking a turning point for one of Africa's most closely watched gambling markets. Until recently, even operators conducting on-the-ground due diligence often walked away, deterred by the potential of abrupt policy shifts and an opaque regulatory environment. The promise of greater consistency is now beginning to reverse that trend. Lawyers and operators speaking with *NEXT.io* say the 2025 reforms have revived investor interest, reopening conversations that had stalled for years. Deal-making activity is also expected to follow. Sector experts anticipate an increase in mergers and acquisitions after a prolonged lull, during which transactions were rare and often limited to the sale of customer databases rather than full-scale businesses.

However, a key challenge is a proposed requirement for 30% Kenyan shareholding, currently included in draft regulations. This is not the first attempt to introduce such a provision. Around five years ago, a similar measure was proposed in legislation but was ultimately removed from the final version following industry pushback. This time, however, the requirement has remained in the draft framework.

From industry consultations conducted so far, the most significant challenge identified is the timeline required for implementation. Stakeholders say that the shareholding requirements, along with the introduction of real-time monitoring systems, are expected to be the biggest hurdles, both of which will require additional time to fully operationalise. As a result, there is growing expectation that the GRAK will consider allowing a staged or phased introduction of the new requirements, rather than a single, immediate rollout, to give operators sufficient time to adapt and comply.

Despite certain challenges, market experts point to Kenya's advantages as a relatively non-fragmented market for international operators and suppliers with an interest in entering the African market, as they deal with a single regulatory authority. This stands in contrast to other high-growth African markets such as South Africa and Nigeria, where operators must navigate both state and national regulatory frameworks.

Beyond consolidation, the market is showing signs of untapped potential. While restrictions on traditional advertising remain in place, the affiliate segment is still relatively underdeveloped, creating opportunities for alternative customer acquisition strategies. According to *NEXT.io* sources, the new regulator may also allow crypto gambling on a case-by-case basis. Product innovation is also gaining momentum. Football betting continues to dominate, but newer formats such as crash games have already demonstrated their ability to capture market share. Emerging categories, including prediction markets, are also beginning to attract attention, supported by a young, digitally native population and an increasingly engaged political landscape.

Proposed
30%
local shareholding requirement

Draft regulations include a provision requiring foreign operators to allocate 30% ownership to Kenyan shareholders. International investors should factor this into entry planning.

Challenges & Strategic Response

Rising investor interest does not necessarily translate into easy market entry. Despite a clearer regulatory framework, Kenya remains a difficult market to crack. The top three operators continue to dominate, limiting room for new entrants and raising the cost of gaining meaningful share.

Success depends heavily on execution at the local level. Operators need a deep understanding of Kenya's consumer behaviour, mobile-first payments infrastructure, and regulatory nuance. "This is Africa after all," said one industry insider, underscoring the gap between strategy on paper and reality on the ground. Sources speaking with *NEXT.io* emphasise that building strong local teams and partnerships is critical to navigating the market effectively. Even then, entry can come with informal costs, with consultants pointing to the need for "facilitations" to move processes forward. There is also lingering scepticism about how durable the current reforms will prove. Kenya has a track record of policy shifts, and while the current framework appears more stable, not all investors are convinced it will hold. For some, the memory of past reversals is enough to delay major commitments until the rules of the game prove more enduring. Investors may also be deterred by Kenya's placement on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) "greylist" in February 2024, which reflects identified deficiencies in the country's frameworks for combating money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing.

At the same time, strict limits on marketing and advertising tilt the playing field in favour of incumbents. With campaigns subject to tight controls, new entrants face an uphill battle to build brand recognition. "I don't see any of the serious, big international operators trying to get in, but I don't see any of the small local companies being able to get to scale," one source said.

For many operators, the challenges of entering Kenya point to a broader strategic conclusion: a single-market approach is difficult to realise in Africa. While Kenya is one of the continent's most developed betting markets, its size alone does not justify the level of investment and complexity involved. Instead, *NEXT.io* sources said success often requires a broader pan-African strategy. Operators must think in terms of regional portfolios, expanding across multiple markets to achieve scale and absorb any regulatory shocks. However, this comes with its own complications. Each country presents distinct regulatory frameworks, tax regimes, languages, and consumer dynamics.

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Outlook

Despite the structural and operational challenges, Kenya's newly formalised regulatory framework still represents the most significant opportunity the market has seen in years. Taken together, the country is emerging as both a growth story and a test case: a fast-expanding, mobile-first betting market in the midst of regulatory maturation, where the balance between commercial expansion, oversight, and social responsibility will define the next phase of industry development.

According to *NEXT.io* experts, one of the clearest growth vectors lies in the casino segment, which is expected to expand meaningfully over the coming years. Much of this momentum is being driven by the rising popularity of crash-style games, which are introducing a wider audience to casino-like mechanics in an accessible, mobile-native format.

As engagement deepens, players are increasingly expected to migrate into adjacent verticals such as poker, slots, and traditional table games.

Rather than cannibalising sports betting, growth in casino is more likely to reflect overall market expansion and rising cross-vertical engagement rather than a redistribution of existing spend. Sports betting will likely remain the dominant pillar, but its share of the broader ecosystem may gradually dilute as other formats scale.

At the same time, expectations among users are evolving. *NEXT.io* experts point to a clear shift toward locally relevant platforms that nonetheless meet international product standards. Features such as cash-out functionality and bet builders, once considered advanced innovations in many African markets, are rapidly becoming baseline expectations. This reflects a broader maturation of Kenya's online betting market, where product sophistication was previously a secondary consideration but might soon become a differentiator.

That maturation is, however, taking place against an uncertain fiscal backdrop. The Kenyan government's proposed 2026 Finance Bill — which remains subject to public participation and has not yet been confirmed — includes a provision to reinstate a 20% withholding tax on player winnings. If enacted, this would partially reverse the simplified tax regime introduced last year and could reintroduce uncertainty into a market that has only recently regained operator confidence.

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DASHBOARD

Economy & Demographics

Population:

53.3 million
(Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, mid-2025)

Life Expectancy at birth:

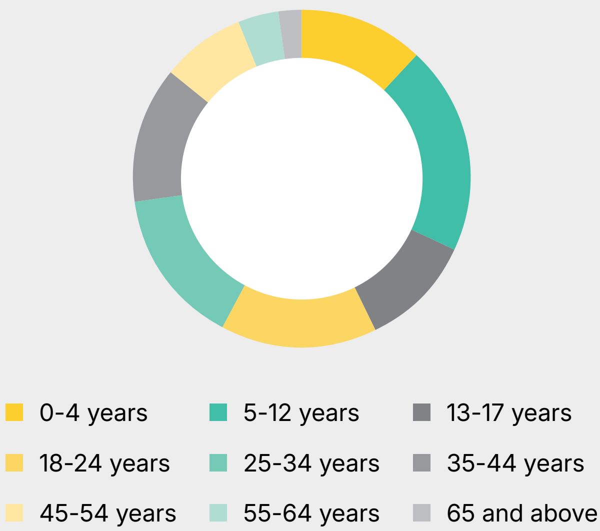
63.65 years
(2023, World Bank)

Median Age:

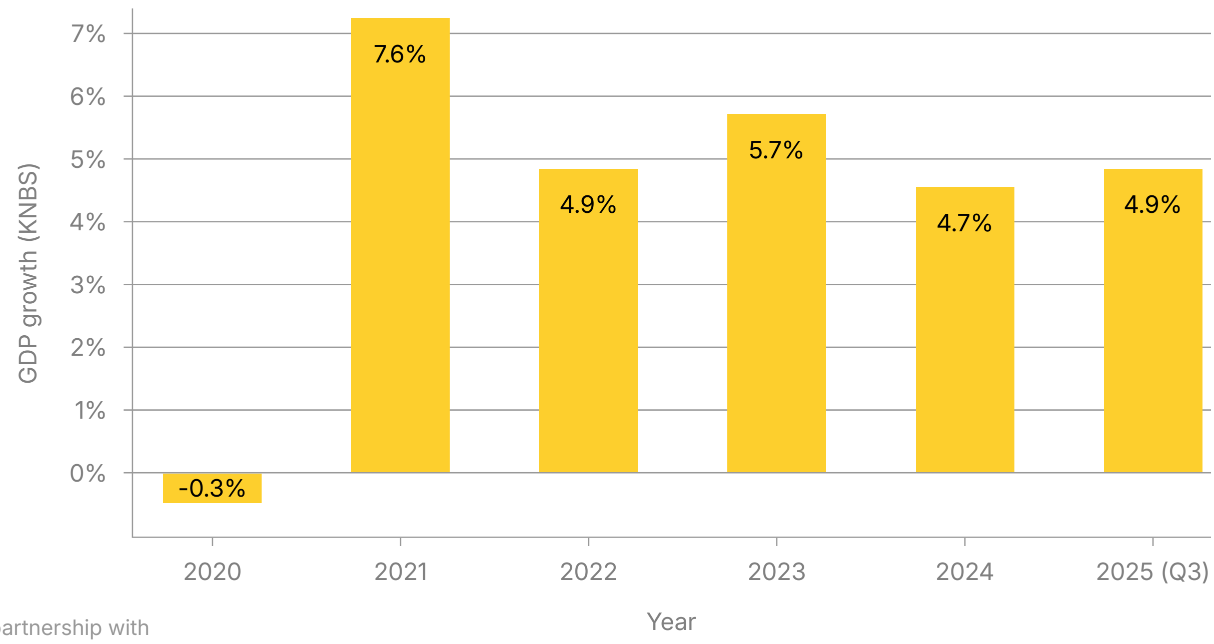
20
(2025, Data Reportal Digital Kenya, UN data)

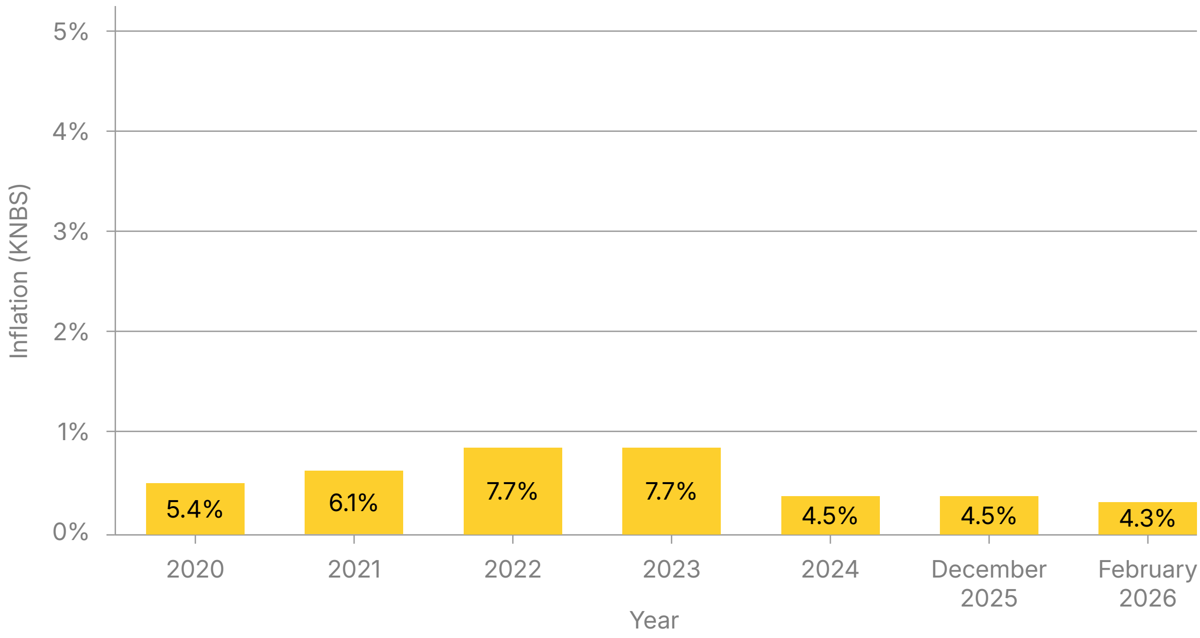
About 73.4% of Kenyans are under the age of 35, roughly three-quarters of the population.

Kenya demographic profile



Income level: Middle-income country *(World Bank)*





Employment

Share of Employment 2024

17.4 m = 83.6%

Informal Employment

3.4m = 16.4%

Formal Employment

Rankings

130 (out of 182 countries)

Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International)

Economic Outlook

4.9% on average for 2025-2027

Real GDP growth is projected

Digital Landscape

23.4 million (40.5% penetration)

Internet Users

18.4 million (31.8% of population)

Social Media Users

77.5 million (134% of population)

Mobile Connections

(DataReportal, Digital 2026: Kenya)

Gambling Industry

Regulator:	Gambling Regulatory Authority of Kenya (GRAK)
Legislation:	Gambling Control Act 2025
Licence duration:	3 years
Taxation:	5% on deposits, 5% tax on withdrawals The 2026 Finance Bill proposes reinstating a 20% withholding tax on player winnings. If enacted, implementation is expected around September 2026.
TAM:	approx. 30.2 million (adults over 18)
Estimated Gross Gaming Revenue (GGR):	\$800m – \$1bn (estimates by *NEXT.io* sources)
Estimated monthly active players:	8 million (estimates by *NEXT.io* sources)
Licensed Operators:	188 (for financial year 2025/26), with some 50+ active

Top Operators

Total Sector Employment

Approx. 10,000 people directly, 500,000 people indirectly

Industry Association: Association of Gaming Operators – Kenya (AGOK)

https://agok.org/

Since its inception in 2005, the Association of Gaming Operators – Kenya (AGOK) has led efforts to strengthen the country's gaming **Industry,** advocating for regulatory reform and promoting responsible gaming to foster a sustainable sector.

Timeline

1966:
The Betting, Lotteries and Gaming Act is enacted.

2004:
The Betting Control and Licensing Board (BCLB) is established as industry regulator.

2013:
The rapid expansion of mobile money accelerates the growth of remote betting across the country.

2019:
Sharp increases in sports betting taxes trigger market exits and industry disputes.

2020:
Betting tax rates are reduced to stabilise revenue collection.

2021:
Further adjustments to excise and betting duties contribute to ongoing regulatory uncertainty.

2023:
Broader reforms are proposed, including plans for a national lottery framework.

2024:
The regulator temporarily suspends gambling advertising.

2025:
The Gambling Control Bill enters into force.

2026:
The Gambling Regulatory Authority of Kenya (GRAK) takes over from the BCLB.

COUNTRY INSIGHTS

Capital: Nairobi

Currency: Kenyan Shilling (KSh or KES)

Official languages: Swahili, English

Head of State and Government: President William Ruto

Form of Government: Presidential Republic

National Elections: 2022 (last), 2027 (next)

Area: 582,646 square kilometres

Main Religions: Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, and Traditional Beliefs

Time zone: East Africa Time (GMT +3)

Population & Geography

Kenya stands out as one of East Africa's most dynamic nations, often described as the region's tech, finance and trade powerhouse, with its thriving innovation scene earning it the nickname "Silicon Savannah." With a strong service sector, high connectivity through the port of Mombasa, and a comparatively open social climate, the country contrasts with some of its neighbours even as it continues to face corruption challenges and growing inequality. Home to an estimated 53.3 million people in 2025, Kenya stretches from a low Indian Ocean coastline into fertile highlands and dramatic volcanic plateaus, including the sweeping Great Rift Valley and the striking Lake Turkana in the arid north.

Most citizens live in the highlands around the capital, Nairobi, while major cities such as Mombasa and Kisumu serve as important coastal and lakeside hubs. The population is diverse, with more than 40 ethnic groups and over 60 languages, and with English and Kiswahili as the official languages alongside widespread use of local mother tongues. This cultural vibrancy shapes Kenya's energetic urban centres, strong sense of community, and rich artistic and social traditions. Kenya is predominantly Christian (85%), with smaller Muslim and Hindu communities. Its strategic location, bordering Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia and fronting 536 kilometres of Indian Ocean coastline, also positions Kenya as a gateway to major regional trade blocs such as the East African Community (EAC) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), reinforcing its role as a pivotal and fast-evolving East African economy.

Government & Politics

Kenya's political system is shaped by its history as a former British colony, gaining independence in 1963 and adopting a republican form of government led by an executive president, a robust judiciary and a bicameral parliament made up of the National Assembly and the Senate. The country operates as a unitary state with a competitive multi-party system, and both MPs and Senators serve five-year terms. Kenya has maintained continuous political stability since independence, enabling it to play an active regional role in peacekeeping and humanitarian coordination, while its relatively mature democratic institutions have supported steady economic development.

The current president, William Ruto, was elected in 2022 after previously serving as deputy president, and his victory, which was narrow but was upheld by the courts, reinforced the strength and independence of Kenya's electoral and judicial systems.

Despite these democratic advances, governance is still challenged by entrenched corruption, as reflected in its low ranking on Transparency International's 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index (130 out of 182 countries). Kenya's political landscape is also influenced by ethnic allegiances, which can heighten tensions during elections but remain a central part of the country's social fabric. The next general elections are due to take place in 2027.

Economy

Kenya's economy reflects a paradox of strong growth alongside deep social and structural challenges. GDP growth over the past couple of years averaged 4-5%. Early 2025 saw economic momentum pick up, supported by easing monetary policy, a rebound in construction, and the strength of diversified sectors such as agriculture, finance, technology, and logistics. Inflation remained within target, and foreign exchange reserves reached record highs. Nairobi's emergence as "Silicon Savannah" continues to drive innovation, while mobile finance and payments, led by M-PESA, have expanded financial access nationwide.

Yet these gains contrast sharply with a labour market in crisis: youth, who make up 35% of the population, face unemployment rates of up to 67%, with nearly one million new entrants competing annually for scarce formal jobs, which account for only 16% of total employment.

Gen Z–led protests over tax hikes and uneven growth swept the country in 2024 and 2025, highlighting widespread frustration as public debt neared 69% of GDP and the fiscal deficit widened to 5.9%. Structural barriers, including an extensive state-owned enterprise sector and restrictive regulations, continue to hinder productivity, private investment, and job creation.

The World Bank projects real GDP growth of 4.9% through to 2027 but said it hinges on the country's ability to translate macroeconomic stability into inclusive growth that delivers meaningful employment for its young population.

67%
Youth unemployment rate

4.9%
Projected GDP growth through 2027 *(World Bank)*

Business Environment

Kenya's business environment is marked by a complex blend of regulatory ambition and persistent governance weaknesses that continue to raise the cost and risk of operating in the country. Despite the government's repeated pledges to fight corruption, and a legal framework that criminalises bribery, the practical reality for many sectors, including gambling, is that facilitation payments remain commonplace and enforcement is inconsistent.

The dominance of state-owned enterprises and highly restrictive regulations further stifle competition, making Kenya the most difficult business environment among its peer economies, according to the World Bank. These pressures have intensified since Kenya was grey-listed by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in February 2024 and subsequently added to the European Commission's list of high-risk third countries for AML/CFT deficiencies, triggering mandatory enhanced due diligence for EU-linked financial and business transactions. In response, Kenya strengthened its AML framework and introduced new mechanisms to oversee digital assets. The National Assembly's recent passage of the Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASP) Bill 2025 marks a significant step toward regulating the crypto sector, making Kenya one of the few African countries with a comprehensive legal framework governing virtual assets and service providers.

Digital Infrastructure & Engagement

Kenya's digital engagement continues to deepen, underpinned by a rapidly expanding mobile ecosystem. According to DataReportal's Digital 2026 Kenya report, by late 2025, Kenya had developed a robust digital landscape, with 77.5 million active cellular mobile connections. This means access to mobile networks is widespread, though not all connections necessarily include internet services.

Internet adoption continued to grow, with 23.4 million individuals online, representing 40.5% of the population, while 18.4 million social media user identities (31.8% of the population) point to increasing engagement on digital platforms.

Broadband connectivity was expanding as well, with 80.4% of mobile connections capable of accessing 3G, 4G, or 5G networks, although actual mobile internet use varied depending on service plans.

Social media use surged by 34.6% year-on-year, and among adults aged 18 and above, 56.1% were active on at least one platform. Despite these gains, around 60% of Kenyans remained offline, illustrating both the opportunities and challenges in expanding digital inclusion across the country.

REGULATORY INSIGHTS

Kenya's gambling sector is undergoing its biggest regulatory shake-up in nearly 60 years. The reforms will create a more structured market, but also a significantly more expensive one, reshaping the economics of East Africa's most dynamic betting industry.

Armed with a brand-new gambling law, many hope Kenya is poised to enact the most consequential overhaul of its regulated gambling market in decades. For years, the country's industry has operated under legislation dating back to the 1960s, a time when betting was largely confined to casinos and horse racing. Since then, the market has transformed dramatically: not just in customer reach, advertising and product offerings, but in the very definition of what it means to operate legally in Kenya.

Today, traditional casinos and horse racing account for only a fraction of the industry. Casinos have migrated online, offering a broad spectrum of digital products, while bookmaking has emerged as the primary engine of growth. Entirely new product categories, including large-scale jackpot games, now sit at the centre of the sector. Yet despite this evolution, repeated attempts to modernise the regulatory framework over the past decades faltered, often mired in prolonged parliamentary debate and public consultation.

That deadlock finally ended in 2023 with the introduction of the Gambling Control Bill. However, it would take another two years of legislative discussion and revision before the law was enacted. In 2025, President William Ruto signed a slightly revised version into law, replacing the Betting, Lotteries and Gaming Act of 1966. The new framework is more than a legal update: it reflects a deliberate effort to align Kenya's gambling sector with global best practices while strengthening consumer protection and safeguarding the public interest.

Industry stakeholders are cautiously hopeful about the law's practical impact, with some provisions still being clarified between regulators and industry participants at the time of writing. In other words, while the legal framework has been formally established, parts of its operational rollout are still evolving. There is also cautious optimism that Kenya may be moving beyond a long period of regulatory inconsistency, where policies, in particular in the area of taxation, were introduced and then frequently adjusted following pushback from operators.

Regulatory Authority

A key part of Kenya's transition is the introduction of a new regulator to oversee the reformed framework. The country has replaced its longstanding Betting Control and Licensing Board (BCLB) with the newly established Gambling Regulatory Authority of Kenya (GRAK).

The authority inherits the BCLB's licensing and supervision responsibilities but operates under a broader mandate, including real-time monitoring of online gambling, oversight of gaming equipment and software providers, and research into gambling's social and economic impacts.

"The authority will not only license operators but also monitor online gambling in real time, oversee gambling equipment and software providers, and conduct research into the social and economic impacts of gambling," a market expert told *NEXT.io*.

GRAK also comes with enhanced inspection and enforcement powers, enabling it to seize equipment, demand records, and work closely with county authorities and law enforcement agencies. For operators seeking recourse, the introduction of a Gambling Tribunal provides a formal mechanism to challenge regulatory decisions.

In late February 2026, the authority appointed Peter Maina Karimi as its first permanent Director General following a competitive recruitment process. Karimi brings nearly two decades of experience spanning gaming, telecommunications, mobile technology, payment systems, and digital services.

He now oversees daily operations, policy formulation, and strategic implementation under the Gambling Control Act, 2025, including licensing and the shutdown of illegal operations.

Karimi takes over from Peter Mbugi, the former BCLB CEO who led the authority in an acting capacity during the transition and will now assume a new role within the organisation.

Looking ahead, GRAK plans to expand its workforce by nearly 200 employees and deploy sophisticated surveillance tools to monitor financial transactions and operator conduct. Karimi highlighted the importance of these measures: “Many of these operations are online, and casinos, unfortunately, are attractive targets for illicit activities.” He stressed the necessity of “top-notch surveillance” to enforce industry standards and deter illegal activity.

John Mutua,
CEO at AGOK (Association of Gaming Operators Kenya)

Previously, licences were valid for just one year, and operators often faced changing requirements with each renewal. The new three-year cycle allows for better planning and a clearer view of how to achieve a return on investment. It makes the system much more stable and predictable.

Current Status

The GRAK’s first major task under the new law was to draft implementing regulations, which were published at the end of March 2026. The timing has left operators in an awkward holding pattern, according to *NEXT.io* sources. By March, most companies typically submit renewal applications ahead of the June licensing cycle. This year, however, uncertainty around the finalisation of the new rules has disrupted that rhythm. With key provisions still in draft form, it remains unclear whether the regulations will be fully approved in time for the next round of licensing.

As a result, many operators are holding back new applications while they wait for clarity, expecting instead to apply under the updated framework. If the new rules are not finalised in time, the existing system will need to remain in place to avoid a regulatory gap, meaning applications would continue to be processed under the legacy regime until the transition is complete.

Even once the new framework is formally implemented, industry participants expect a drawn-out adjustment period. The most immediate challenge will be compliance with sharply higher capital requirements. The result is a market caught between two regimes: one still operational, the other not yet fully in force, with operators and regulators alike navigating an uncertain transition.

Charles Kyengo
Partner & Head of Commercial Transactions

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Operators are likely to face several challenges under the new framework. These include stricter requirements around player verification. There are also concerns around the regulator’s requirement for real-time monitoring of online activity, which could prove complex to implement. At the same time, compliance obligations are expected to intensify, particularly in areas such as data protection, anti-money laundering, and cybersecurity.

B2C Licences

Kenya has introduced activity-specific licences for sports betting, online casinos, lotteries, and related verticals, with fees varying by category. The framework creates a clearer but more complex entry path for business-to-consumer operators. Companies must now be incorporated with at least 30% Kenyan ownership, and all gambling revenues must be held in accounts with authorised local financial institutions. Under the new regime, B2C licences will run for three years (instead of one year), offering greater stability for operators and suppliers. “If implemented effectively, this could bring much-needed clarity and predictability,” said one operator exec who requested anonymity. In the past, renewals were frequently delayed, with short-term extensions issued while reviews continued.

However, the new framework mandates substantial capital requirements, ranging from KSh50m for hybrid online licences to KSh2bn for the National Lottery.

Operators must also secure mandatory bank guarantees or insurance bonds to protect player winnings and tax obligations, with requirements set at KSh100m for lottery and online gambling, and KSh20m for land-based casinos. In some categories, higher capital thresholds may effectively price out smaller operators. Larger international groups, by contrast, are expected to move in and expand their footprint.

B2B Licences

Kenya is also raising the regulatory bar for suppliers and service providers in its gambling market. For the first time, companies supplying games, software, and other platform services will need to be licensed. Supplier licences are valid for one year, ensuring that companies providing games, software, and other platform services meet strict standards for fairness and security.

Under the new framework, operators must guarantee that all games on their platforms are certified, with complete documentation of algorithms and compliance with responsible gambling rules. Certification labs themselves are now required to hold licences, creating an enforced chain of accountability across the ecosystem.

“Kenya’s punters are highly tech savvy and will quickly spot weaknesses in a company’s systems,” a market source said. “Any gaps can quickly lead to financial losses or reputational damage.” Properly licensed suppliers help operators safeguard against such risks.

The licensing measures also aim to prevent disputes between players and operators, which have historically been common. One insider noted: “Operators sometimes refuse to pay out, claiming players used bots or exploited system loopholes.

Close collaboration with licensed suppliers and certified labs reduces these conflicts, ensuring fair play while helping regulators enforce the rules."

By strengthening controls around fraud, bot activity, and responsible gambling, Kenya's new supplier licensing framework makes transparency and compliance a core part of market participation. For operators, partnering with licensed suppliers is now essential to protecting revenue, reputation, and customer trust.

Licence Duration

Licence	New licence	Annual licence	Renewal
Online Gambling	3 years	1 year	3 years
Gambling equipment and device manufacture or assembling	1 year		1 year
Gambling equipment and device sale or distribution	1 year		1 year
Gambling equipment testing	1 year		1 year
Gambling software or platform;	1 year		1 year
Gambling equipment repair and servicing	1 year		1 year

Source: GAMBLING CONTROL (LICENSING) REGULATIONS, 2026 (Draft)

Technical and Operational Requirements

The draft Gambling Control Regulations 2026 introduce a detailed technical framework governing online platforms. Operators must ensure their systems meet minimum requirements, including approved domains, secure transaction recording, encrypted tamper-evident audit logs, and robust geolocation tools to block prohibited jurisdictions.

Real-time regulatory monitoring will provide access not only to the GRAK but also to the Communications Authority of Kenya and other agencies. Platforms must connect to at least two mobile network providers and maintain a customer support centre in Kenya.

Financial safeguards are strengthened. Player funds must be ring-fenced, fully funded, and segregated from operational accounts. Dormant balances should be returned to players, and long-unclaimed funds transferred to the Unclaimed Financial Assets Authority.

Minimum online betting stakes of KSh20 (€0.13) per wager are introduced to discourage low-income micro-stakes activity. Operators are also expected to implement responsible gambling tools, and all personal and financial data must be encrypted. In addition, player data must be stored and processed on servers located within Kenya, unless an exemption is granted by the regulator.

This localisation requirement is likely to increase compliance costs for international operators while giving authorities greater oversight of data flows and enforcement capabilities.

Payment systems are another focus area. All transactions must be encrypted and processed through payment providers licensed by the Central Bank of Kenya. Multi-factor authentication, including one-time passwords or biometric verification, is mandatory to prevent fraud.

Operators must also implement clear refund mechanisms for failed or erroneous transactions, particularly in promotional contexts.

Operators must notify the regulator of any material system changes within seven days, while platforms are subject to annual audits conducted or commissioned by the authority.

Failure to comply carries tangible risk. Operating an unapproved platform is a criminal offence, punishable by fines of up to KSh1m, imprisonment of up to six months, or both. More broadly, regulators retain the power to suspend or revoke licences for a wide range of violations, including security failures, non-integration with state systems, misleading disclosures, or suspected links to financial crime.

Game Rules

The draft rules also introduce stricter controls around fairness and transparency. Game rules must be clearly displayed before any wager is placed, and all random number generators must be certified and regularly tested for statistical integrity and return-to-player accuracy.

Operators are required to publish theoretical return-to-player percentages on their platforms and submit game rules for annual certification, reinforcing transparency requirements that are often inconsistently applied in emerging markets.

Operators wishing to offer jackpots must seek written authorisation from the GRAK, pay prescribed fees, and maintain separate fixed deposit accounts equal to the guaranteed jackpot amounts. The regulations set out detailed payment schedules and require operators to cascade unclaimed jackpots after 24 months to smaller prize combinations.

Marketing & Advertising

Marketing has emerged as a key area of regulatory enforcement. A 30-day blanket ban on gambling advertising in 2025 highlighted the regulator's willingness to act decisively in response to public concern. While the ban was lifted after negotiations, new conditions remain: advertisements must include responsible gambling messaging and cannot portray betting as a pathway to financial success. TV and radio ads are banned between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., except during live sports broadcasts. Celebrity endorsements, lifestyle marketing, and advertising near schools are prohibited. (See Operational Insights for more details)

Responsible Gambling

Responsible gambling measures have also been strengthened. Operators must now close accounts, return funds, and remove self-excluded players from marketing lists within two days. Players who recognise harmful gambling patterns can self-exclude temporarily or permanently, and a permanently self-excluded person cannot apply for removal from the register for at least three years, after which they may request a review.

Family members or other concerned parties can also request exclusions if gambling is causing financial harm, threatening dependents, or impairing judgment. The regulator reviews applications, gives affected individuals a chance to respond, and decides whether the exclusion serves the public interest.

The regulator maintains a central register to monitor compliance, and failure to act within seven days can result in fines of up to KSh1m (€6,592), a year in prison, or both. *NEXT.io* experts believe that the regulator will pay close attention, especially as most bettors are young adults aged 18 to 35. “There’s also a small segment of underage gamblers,” said a market insider. “However, enforcement will show how seriously they take the sector’s integrity.”

The government has also launched a Rapid Response Team through the Ministry of Health, rolling out a national helpline, school-based counselling, and public awareness campaigns. This multi-sectoral approach frames gambling not merely as a consumer issue but as a public health priority.

Allan Mwamuye Mzungu
Managing Partner at MMS Advocates

About five years ago, companies were required to demonstrate some level of CSR activity, but it was largely voluntary in practice, with little or no enforcement to verify whether commitments were delivered. Under the new framework, operators will need to provide concrete figures and evidence of CSR spending before their licences can be renewed for the next period. If a company declares a specific percentage of spend for CSR, that commitment becomes binding. Failure to comply could now affect the outcome of a future licence renewal, making the requirement significantly more stringent than before. In that sense, the framework is now much stricter, and this is generally seen as a positive development.

Regulatory Snapshot

Feature	Detail
Law	Gambling Control Act 2025 (replaced 1966 Act)
Regulator	Gambling Regulatory Authority of Kenya (GRAK), DG Peter Maina Karimi
Licences	B2C (sports betting, online casinos, lotteries): 3-year term, ≥30% Kenyan ownership, revenues in local banks B2B (suppliers/software/labs): annual licence
Player Protection	Mandatory self-exclusion, rapid account closure, third-party petitions, min online bet KSh 20 (€0.13)
Technical Requirements	Cybersecurity, geolocation, audit logs, ring-fenced player funds, real-time monitoring by regulators
Marketing	Ad restrictions: TV/radio 6 a.m.–10 p.m. (except live sports), 20% responsible gambling messaging, no celebrity/lifestyle marketing, no marketing near schools
CSR	Operators need to disclose plans and budgets for CSR initiatives
Black Market Enforcement	150 illicit sites shut in 2025, mobile money tracking, grey market persists (~40%), growing crypto activity
Taxation	Flat presumptive tax: 5% deposits / 5% withdrawals; proposed "stake tax" under discussion

Corporate Social Responsibility

Likewise, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is no longer optional for gambling operators. The country's new law makes CSR a formal licensing requirement, obliging operators to outline their initiatives along with the budgets allocated to support them.

Historically, operators have carried out CSR initiatives, though some sources note that many were more marketing-driven than focused on genuine community impact. Today, that approach is shifting. Across the country, operators are funding medical outreach programmes, improving access to healthcare, and investing in essential infrastructure, such as clean water and education. Targeted efforts in lower-income areas, including providing essential supplies for young women, highlight that responsible gambling in Kenya is now judged as much by its community impact as by player protection.

Regulators are considering proposals to introduce a mandatory savings scheme linked to betting activity, though no final decision has been made.

The Black Market

Unlicensed gambling remains a persistent headache in Kenya, siphoning revenue from the formal market while skirting taxes and consumer protections. Despite a modernised regulatory framework, illegal websites and offshore platforms continue to operate, exposing licensed operators to both financial and reputational risk.

Enforcement has also become more coordinated. In 2025, the Gambling Regulatory Authority of Kenya shut down roughly 150 illicit sites, in what industry insiders describe as a “360-degree approach” spanning domains, payments, and telecommunications. Mobile money sits at the centre of this effort. Authorities track unregistered paybill numbers, which are unique codes businesses use to receive mobile payments, and work with network operators to block them, cutting off cash flows to illegal operators. “Everything starts and ends with mobile money,” one source said. “The regulator shares specific paybill numbers with the networks to make sure illegal operators are shut down.”

These measures have narrowed consumer choice in the unlicensed sector and encouraged players to migrate to licensed operators, diminishing the influence of the traditional black market. Still, estimates suggest that a substantial grey market persists, potentially accounting for as much as 40% of all activity. Experts note that much of this black market now operates through cryptocurrency, making enforcement more difficult.

“What has really shocked me in the past couple of months is the growth of crypto,” said one industry source. “I used to think crypto would never take off in Africa, but when I talk to operators of crypto betting sites, many tell me they’re seeing significant traffic coming from Kenya.”

Spencer Okach
Former executive at Betlion, bwin Africa, Dafabet Africa

The new regulations are a good thing. While there are areas that may benefit from further refinement over time, there are also many progressive measures. The previous law, written in 1966, didn’t reflect modern gambling, making it difficult even to issue casino licences to online operators. The danger of having no proper regulation is that the regulator has the decision-making power of what can or cannot be done.

Industry Perspective

The industry is approaching Kenya’s new regulatory framework with cautious optimism. While questions remain around implementation, many operators see the reforms as a step toward a more structured and predictable market environment.

A positive development is the move to a three-year licensing cycle. Under the previous regime, licences were issued annually, creating uncertainty around renewals and regulatory changes. “As an operator, you want to understand the requirements and have some level of certainty,” one industry source said. “Moving from a one-year licence to a three-year cycle makes the system more stable and predictable.”

There is also broad support for the formal recognition of different licence categories. The separation of verticals is expected to allow companies to focus on their core activities, rather than navigating overlapping or unclear regulatory obligations.

Operators are anticipating improved working conditions and clearer rules of engagement, even if the transition has taken longer than expected. “There’s a sense of anticipation,” another source noted. “People are looking forward to better operating conditions and clearer structures. The wait has been long, but it’s understandable. This is new territory, and the regulator wants to get it right by consulting all stakeholders.”

While there is broad acceptance of the need for oversight, others remain wary of the government’s wider intentions and argue they view the sector as a revenue-generating “cash cow.”

Some industry voices are critical of the proposed mandatory savings scheme. “The early drafts suggest the people writing this have little understanding of how the industry works, or the psychology of punters,” one source said. “At best, it will be a pointless waste of engineering time; at worst, it could send the legal industry into decline again.”

Others are more cautious, emphasising that discussions are still at an early stage. “Operators want to engage with the regulator to understand how it would work in practice, because it will have a significant impact on players. For now, everyone is waiting to see what the final regulations look like.”

Meanwhile, legal experts highlight real-time monitoring of online gambling activity as a key challenge. “We expect the authority to clarify specific requirements around the protection of personal data,” one lawyer said.

Kenya’s Data Protection Act, introduced in 2019 and broadly modelled on Europe’s GDPR, sets out familiar principles governing the collection, storage, and use of personal information.

The 30% Kenyan ownership requirement is also proving challenging. Many of the sector’s leading players are foreign-owned, and persuading a local investor to take a 30% stake at market value could be difficult. (See Operational Insights for more details)

As the June 2026 deadline for full implementation approaches, the market is watching closely. The reforms could mark the beginning of a more structured, transparent, and predictable regulatory environment, or they could expose friction points that test the sector’s resilience.

Online Gambling Licence Fees

Item in KSh	Bookmaker	Lottery	Casino
Application fee	3,000,000	2,000,000	5,000,000
Licence fee	8,000,000	6,000,000	6,000,000
Application fee for renewal	8,000,000	1,000,000	2,500,000
Licence renewal fee	3,000,000	5,000,000	10,000,000
Annual operating licence fee	3,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000

Source: GAMBLING CONTROL (LICENSING) REGULATIONS, 2026 (Draft)

Other Fees (Annual)

Item in KSh	Application	Annual Licence
Gambling equipment and device manufacture/ assembling	50,000	500,000
Gambling equipment and device sale/distribution	50,000	500,000
Gambling equipment testing	50,000	500,000
Provision of any gambling software/platform	50,000	500,000
Gambling equipment repair and servicing	50,000	500,000
Additional game	5,000	
Duplicate licence	1,000,000	N/A
Provisional licence (3 months)	1,000,000	N/A

Source: GAMBLING CONTROL (LICENSING) REGULATIONS, 2026 (Draft)

Gambling Capital Requirement

Online licence (casino, bookmaker, lottery)	KSh50,000,000

Source: GAMBLING CONTROL (LICENSING) REGULATIONS, 2026 (Draft)

MARKET INSIGHTS

Kenya's online gambling market is dominated by a small group of leading operators, but the evolving framework could open the door to international entrants, provided they navigate the market carefully.

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Market Structure

Currently, Kenya's online betting and gambling market is described as saturated, with nearly 190 operators holding licences for on and offline gambling operations and a smaller core actively competing for customers in a crowded digital arena.

However, the new regulatory framework will likely function as a market filter. With licensing costs rising sharply and capital thresholds significantly higher than before, many of the sector's licensed operators are unlikely to meet the bar. The result, most industry observers expect, will be a leaner, more consolidated market, one where scale, compliance capacity, and financial resources determine who remains.

Industry insiders say the overall licence count in Kenya can be misleading. While more than 100 online betting licences have been issued, the number of companies actively operating at scale is far smaller. One market executive estimates that roughly 30 operators are meaningfully active across online betting, lotteries and digital casino products, with the remainder holding licences while either searching for international partners or waiting for an opportunity to enter the market.

"Some people acquire the licence almost speculatively," the executive said. "They expect a foreign operator to come in and need a local partner. Others quickly discover that running a betting business is far more complex than they expected."

That dynamic has created a market that appears crowded on paper but is far more concentrated in practice. When physical casinos and other gaming formats are included, the total number of serious operators rises only slightly, to roughly 35 companies competing for a digitally savvy customer base.

Market Evolution

One reason the industry developed so quickly is that Kenya largely bypassed the traditional retail betting model seen elsewhere in Africa. In markets such as Uganda, betting shops occupy street corners and serve as the backbone of the industry, but Kenya took a different path. "Kenya skipped a stage," the same executive said.

Kenya's gambling industry dates back to the 1960s, when lotteries were first introduced, followed later by slot machines and casinos. Its real boom, however, arrived with the rise of mobile betting, fuelled by the rapid spread of M-PESA and cheaper internet access.

By the mid-2010s, when betting began to accelerate, mobile money services were already deeply embedded in everyday life. Consumers were accustomed to moving funds digitally, while falling data costs and a wave of low-cost Chinese smartphones were making online connectivity increasingly widespread. The 2014 World Cup then acted as a catalyst, attracting new operators and driving a surge in betting volumes across the country.

The result was a market that moved almost directly into mobile betting. Retail outlets exist, but they never became the dominant channel. In many cases they function more as customer experience centres than major revenue generators, reflecting an industry that grew up primarily on the smartphone, rather than in the betting shop.

Regulatory pressure intensified under the previous regulator, the Betting Control and Licensing Board, which revoked licences over tax arrears in 2019 and 2020, prompting exits by major operators. The industry later rebounded, only to enter a new phase of tightening oversight and intensified competition.

Leading Brands

If the overall market appears crowded, its commercial power is concentrated at the top. Kenya's online betting sector is dominated by a small group of heavyweight brands, underscoring both the scale of the opportunity and the intensity of competition in one of East Africa's most closely watched gaming markets.

According to data from industry analytics firm Blask, the country's three largest operators, Betika, GameMania and Odibets, together control nearly half the market. That level of concentration highlights the advantages of early entry, brand recognition and sustained marketing spend in an industry where customer acquisition is expensive and loyalty is fluid.

Behind the top trio sits a second tier of established regional and international players.

SportPesa, once the market's dominant force before regulatory pressure forced a restructuring, remains a significant brand. BetPawa has pursued a broader pan-African strategy, expanding in Kenya with streamlined mobile onboarding and low-stakes betting products aimed at price-sensitive customers.

The remainder of the top 10 includes a mix of local challengers and multinational operators. MozzartBet, the Serbian-founded bookmaker with an expanding African footprint, maintains a strong presence. It is followed by brands such as Win Pesa, Kessgame, Pepeta and Betgr8.

Blask's rankings reflect a broader consolidation trend. Rising compliance costs, shifting tax regimes and tighter advertising rules have raised barriers to entry, squeezing smaller operators and reinforcing the dominance of well-capitalised brands. The near-50% combined share of the top three suggests that scale, technology investment and regulatory resilience have become prerequisites for survival rather than optional advantages.

Yet competition within the top tier remains intense. Operators are deploying aggressive bonus campaigns, faster payout systems and diversified in-app products, including virtual sports and casino offerings, to retain customers. As smartphone penetration rises and digital payments remain embedded in daily commerce, Kenya continues to function as a bellwether for the evolution of regulated online gaming across sub-Saharan Africa.

Blask's latest snapshot makes the hierarchy clear. While dozens of brands hold licences, real market power is concentrated among a handful of operators that have successfully combined technology, compliance and marketing at scale.

Market Size & Economic Importance

Kenya's betting industry runs on volume. Unlike mature markets where large wagers dominate, most bets in Kenya are tiny. "All the bets are small. One shilling, two shillings, three shillings. It does not even buy you a coffee," one industry executive says. The business model relies on frequency rather than stake size, with operators processing millions of micro-transactions through mobile platforms. Data from Kenya's statistics office suggests the average Kenyan bettor spends about KSh1,825 a month on gambling.

For the government, that steady flow of small bets has become a growing source of tax revenue. The Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) collected KSh24.2bn from the betting and gaming sector in the 2023/24 fiscal year, up 26.2% from KSh19.2bn the year before. Much of the increase follows the integration of the betting companies into the KRA's tax system, allowing authorities to track transactions in real time.

Rank	Brand	APS (K)	CEB (US$ M)	BAP (%)	YoY (%)	MoM (%)
1	Betika	4,264.90	142.36	34.53%	-21.08%	-1.97%
2	GameMania	1,508.00	39.98	12.19%	28.90%	0.94%
3	Odibets	1,482.70	60.67	11.81%	-42.24%	-6.04%
4	SportPesa	1,078.70	51.88	8.61%	-46.57%	-5.75%
5	betPawa	888.5	33.73	6.99%	-44.33%	-11.59%
6	MozzartBet	716.9	23.32	5.67%	-15.41%	-1.73%
7	Win Pesa	286.7	7.52	2.16%	8.58%	2.13%
8	Kessgame	221.1	4.86	1.64%	661.71%	3.78%
9	Pepeta	170.7	4.16	1.22%	17.40%	7.91%
10	Betgr8	233.2	4.03	1.18%	N/A	18.13%

Top 10 Brands Kenya 2025

Source: Blask

Liam Hodges
Co-Founder, Degenerate Group

The macro picture is very strong. Around 70% of Africa's population is under 40, and in the next five years, one in five internet users globally will be African. That is a huge pipeline of new users coming online.

In Kenya, we entered a market dominated by three large players, so we focused on carving out our own space. That was very important. Each major operator has its own niche. If you are a new entrant, you cannot simply outspend them, so you need to differentiate.

The big operators tend to focus heavily on football and rugby and spend heavily on those properties. We focused on culture and lifestyle rather than just traditional sports sponsorships. That mix was very effective for us.

The industry's footprint extends well beyond tax receipts. Betting companies employ roughly 10,000 people directly and support an estimated 500,000 livelihoods across related services and distribution networks. They have also become some of the most visible sponsors of sport in the country, particularly football, while funding CSR programmes ranging from drilling boreholes to equipping hospitals, building schools, and running medical camps in low-income communities.

Industry experts speaking with *NEXT.io* said that tax reforms introduced in 2025 have significantly boosted government revenue. The Finance Act 2025, which came into effect on 1 July, aimed to nearly double state earnings from gambling by overhauling the tax structure. The previous 20% excise on stakes was replaced with a 5% levy on deposits and a 5% tax on withdrawals. According to forecasts from the Parliamentary Budget Office, the change could lift annual gambling-related revenue from around $35m to approximately $74m in the next fiscal year.

The durability of this reformed framework is, however, not assured. Kenya's proposed 2026 Finance Bill includes a provision to reinstate a 20% withholding tax on player winnings, which would represent a significant partial reversal of the 2025 overhaul. Operators should monitor the legislative process closely, with implementation — if the bill passes — expected around September 2026.

Player Profile

Despite the industry's scale, betting occupies an uneasy place in Kenya's public image. Many Kenyans prefer to highlight the country's reputation as a regional technology hub rather than its booming wagering market. Operators themselves tend to keep a relatively low profile amid tightening advertising rules and growing political scrutiny. "People do not necessarily want to be seen as gamblers," one industry executive says.

Yet betting has become a firmly embedded part of everyday entertainment. According to the 2024 FinAccess Household Survey conducted by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and the Central Bank of Kenya, 11.2% of adults report actively participating in gambling. Participation is higher in cities, where 14.4% of adults report betting, compared with 8.9% in rural areas.

The typical bettor is young and male, often drawn in through sports wagering tied to European football leagues. Participation peaks among people aged 26 to 35, where 15.2% report betting activity. The 18 to 25 group follows closely at 14.3%.

Kenyan betting behaviour differs markedly from many other regulated markets. Opening an account is simple. Registration typically requires only a mobile phone number, resulting in high sign-up volumes. But many accounts never progress to actual betting activity. Activation and deposit rates are relatively low, meaning a large share of registered users never place a wager.

For operators, the challenge is retention. New entrants must focus heavily on converting registered users into active players and sustaining engagement over time.

Average bet sizes are extremely small, often less than $1. What the market lacks in stake size it compensates for in volume. Frequent micro-bets generate the bulk of operator turnover.

Player values are therefore relatively low on a per-user basis. A monthly active player may generate only $5 to $10 in revenue, which is considered strong performance in this market. Operators with only a few thousand players may struggle, whereas scale is critical to profitability.

A small VIP segment does exist, but it differs significantly from more mature gambling markets. In Kenya, players wagering as little as $20 to $30 can be considered high value. As a result, the market is defined less by large individual stakes and more by scale, frequency, and sustained engagement across a large user base.

Key Insights:

- **The Urban-Rural Divide:** Residents in urban areas are nearly **1.6 times more likely** to engage in betting than those in rural areas.
- **The Gender/Age Peak:** The highest concentration of activity remains among young males aged **26 to 35**, with a 15.2% active participation rate.
- **The Income Perspective:** Despite high participation, **57% of Kenyan bettors** spend a modest amount of less than $10 (approx. KSh 1,300) per month.

Blask Customer Profile

Problem Gambler Status
Non-problem gambler (55%)

Player Age
18-24 (45%)

Annual Income (USD)
Under 400 USD (40%)

Education Status
High School (35%); Vocational / Technical College (25%)

Employment Status
Employed for wages (40%); Student (20%)

Career
Retail (15%); Manufacturing (10%); Education (10%); Marketing sales (10%)

Which iGaming brand touchpoints do you have?
Social media (60%); YouTube (50%); Sports media outlets (50%)

Which products do you use?
Traditional sports (60%); Slots and other instant win games (30%); Live casino (25%)

Casino Online Betting Motivations
To pass the time when I'm bored (55%); Comfortable, easy/no need to leave home (50%); To escape from routine (50%)

Sports Online Betting Motivations
To pass the time when I'm bored (60%); Comfortable, easy/no need to leave home (55%); To earn money (50%)

Player Preferences

Sports betting still dominates Kenya's gambling revenues, accounting for roughly 75% of the total market. Casino games generate the remaining 25%.

But casino games are responsible for much higher player activity. Over the past decade, betting behaviour has shifted significantly. In the early years of Kenya's online betting boom, players focused heavily on football accumulators. Today, daily engagement is driven largely by crash-style casino games, particularly titles such as Aviator.

These games tend to dominate daytime betting activity. Players typically migrate to sports wagering later in the afternoon and evening as live football matches begin. Given many players' desire to win big, jackpot-driven games tend to attract the most attention.

While casino games produce the largest share of volume, sports betting continues to deliver stronger margins for operators.

Football remains overwhelmingly the most popular sport among Kenyan bettors. But wagering patterns are notably global and almost continuous. Rather than focusing on local teams or specific leagues, many bettors place wagers wherever matches are available at a given time of day. Betting activity spans leagues in Australia, Japan, China, Europe, and the US, among others. European competitions still draw the most attention when in season, particularly the English Premier League, the UEFA Champions League, Serie A, and the English Women's Super League.

Other sports such as basketball, tennis, and cricket represent smaller niche segments. These are often associated with expatriate communities or higher-value bettors. Cricket betting, for instance, is largely driven by Kenya's Indian diaspora. Although participation in these sports is limited, average bet sizes tend to be higher.

Spencer Okach
Former executive at Betlion, bwin Africa, Dafabet Africa

Traditionally, most players focused on accumulators, but now the craze is for crash games. During the day, these casino-style games dominate, and after a couple of hours, players shift to football betting. Football betting isn't limited to the Kenyan league. Players also bet on international leagues and competitions, including outliers like the Australian League and English Women's League, and even Japanese and Chinese leagues see activity. Other sports, like basketball and cricket, are mainly popular with expatriates, particularly Kenya's Indian community, who have a strong interest in cricket.

Player Motivations

The breadth of betting activity can give the impression of a highly informed sports audience. Industry insiders say the underlying motivation is different. For many players, betting is less about fandom or entertainment and more about the possibility of earning money.

That transactional mindset has elevated the role of tipster and prediction affiliates in the market. These services provide betting advice and selections, often through social media and messaging platforms. They are a major driver of new depositing players for operators.

In a market defined by small stakes and high frequency, the promise of turning a small bet into meaningful winnings remains the central appeal.

Regional Differences

Betting behaviour in Kenya varies between urban and rural areas, reflecting differences in income levels, accessibility and local preferences.

Nairobi is a highly diverse and densely populated market, with a population of around six million people. A significant proportion of this population is under the age of 25, contributing to high levels of digital adoption and betting activity. In cities such as Nairobi, where disposable income is generally higher, operators focus on convenience, platform variety, and brand recognition. Bonuses remain an important tool to attract and retain customers, but the market is largely dominated by well-established companies with broad reach.

In Western Kenya, activity is largely driven by football, reflecting both cultural preferences and local sporting interest. In contrast, parts of Central Kenya, often referred to as the "home of marathoners," show different engagement patterns, influenced by the region's strong athletic tradition.

In smaller towns and rural areas, operators often take a more community-oriented approach. Marketing strategies may include local engagement initiatives such as distributing branded merchandise to build trust and loyalty. Betting in these regions is frequently promoted through larger jackpots, offering the possibility of significant winnings and capturing public interest.

Demographic Category	Active Betting Engagement (%)
National Average (Overall)	11.2
Urban Residents	14.2
Rural Residents	8.9
Males	18.4
Females	4.4
Aged 18-25	14.3
Aged 26-35	15.2
Aged 36-45	10.8
Aged 45-55	5.8
Above 55	1.8
No Education	0.5
Primary Education	7.9
Secondary Education	14.1
Tertiary Education	17.5
Other	21.2

Source: 2024 FinAccess Household Survey (conducted by the KNBS and Central Bank of Kenya)

Demographic Category	Average Amount Spent on Gambling (KSh)
Overall	1,825
Rural	1,481
Urban	2,125
Male	1,876
Female	1,623
Aged 18-25	1,683
Aged 26-35	2,177
Aged 36-45	1,553
Aged 46-55	1,449
Aged above 55	1,067

2024 Finaccess Household Survey

Meshack Mutuku
Tax consultant and CFO

From a business perspective, the Kenya gaming space is moving towards consolidation. This is driven by the current regulatory changes. When the current licences expire in June, the new regulations under the Gambling Control Act will take effect. One requirement is proof of adequate capital, as well as security bond/guarantees. For example, an online licence (combining online casino, bookmaker and a lottery licence in one) will require KSh50m security bond, while land-based casino will be KSh100m. Global entities can often meet these requirements through their parent; however, many local operators may not be able to meet the capital requirements. This will likely lead to consolidation and/or acquisitions. In any acquisition process, particularly in Kenya, taxation must be carefully considered. Many operators may have hidden or unresolved tax liabilities.

Opportunity Areas

Despite a crowded landscape, Kenya continues to present attractive opportunities for new entrants, particularly in segments beyond sports betting. Industry insiders suggest that casino offerings, in particular, provide a lower-risk entry point than the country's hyper-competitive sports betting sector.

"A lot of operators are going in there with sports first," said a seasoned market expert. "Personally, I would do casino only if I had a choice. It cuts your overheads significantly. With sports betting, you need traders and data providers. With casino, you mainly spend on marketing."

This sentiment is based on recent experience. When the expert's team launched a casino-focused brand, roughly 90% of revenue came from casino titles, with crash games and blackjack leading the pack. The trend highlights a broader market pattern: Kenya's digitally savvy bettors favour games that are fast, mobile-friendly, and easily accessible. Casino-first strategies, then, can be a pragmatic entry point in a market often overshadowed by sports betting hype.

That trend is expected to accelerate further. *NEXT.io* sources point to crash games as an entry layer into broader casino engagement. Once players are familiarised with these mechanics, they are more likely to explore other verticals such as poker, slots, and table games, gradually expanding their participation across the casino ecosystem.

"There's no doubt casino will really take off," another industry source noted. "Crash games are bringing people in, and then they start learning poker, slots, Texas, even other formats. It becomes a gateway."

Beyond traditional casino games, prediction markets are emerging as a growing area of interest in Kenya, with several start-ups developing products tailored specifically to the local market. One such company is Spreadhit, founded by Wilfred Kiprop, which is working to build locally relevant prediction market infrastructure. However, liquidity remains an immediate operational challenge in a market where individual stakes are typically small.

To stimulate activity, Kiprop has been injecting capital into each market, but low participation often leads to imbalances between buyers and sellers. "On average, we lose from Ksh1500 to Ksh 2500 from each market that we create because there is no good balance between the buying side and the selling side to bring in that liquidity. Also, there is not enough volume yet," he said.

In Kenya, as in many other jurisdictions, there remains uncertainty over how prediction markets should be classified, whether as a form of gambling or as financial services, leaving their regulatory status still unresolved. "Prediction markets are really the next level of innovation," said one source. "But there's a need for proper structures and platforms where these predictions can be consolidated and accessed openly." Industry players emphasise the need to work closely with Kenya's regulator to establish frameworks that can safely and effectively integrate these new offerings.

Another underdeveloped area is the affiliate ecosystem. While affiliates today play a minor role in customer acquisition (operators mainly rely on on-the-ground activations), market participants see this as a potential growth lever if standardised and brought into mainstream operations.

Meanwhile, Kenya's evolving market is also fertile ground for innovative suppliers. "The market is dynamic, and creative B2B approaches can still make an impact," said one market expert. "There's room for suppliers who collaborate with local operators or offer differentiated content. It's not a one-size-fits-all market."

Kresten Buch
Chairman of PawaTech Group

Kenya has gone through multiple cycles of sharp policy shifts often followed by correction, but the market now appears to be on a more stable trajectory. That said, it remains highly volatile, and future changes to taxation or regulation could quickly alter the direction again.

For operators, the key response has been diversification across multiple jurisdictions, helping to de-risk regulatory shocks. We are now active in more than a dozen African markets. If something changes suddenly in one market, we can absorb it and move on.

At the same time, Kenya illustrates why some larger, more established European operators have historically been cautious. The operational complexity and regulatory uncertainty mean it can take many years to build a sustainable position, which ultimately limits the number of companies willing to scale aggressively.

M&A & Global Entry

Although market insiders report strong interest in the Kenyan market, the question for international brands is how best to enter. In the past, multinationals often struggled when strategy and operations were dictated from abroad rather than empowering local teams. “I don’t think a multinational can crack it,” one consultant told *NEXT.io*. “If you manage Kenya from London, you’re disconnected from the market. Local teams need real authority, or it won’t work.”

For global entrants, acquisitions may be the most viable route. Kenyan operators are largely founder-led, and smaller brands operate with informal accounting and compliance practices, which make due diligence challenging. However, many are professionalising by improving transparency and record-keeping, creating potential acquisition targets over the next three to four years.

However, there is little urgency to sell. “Thus far, some smaller operators are content with revenue of $50,000 a month,” said a *NEXT.io* source. “For European entrants, that may seem modest, but locally it is significant.” For the time being, most acquisitions target player databases rather than full-scale brands. The top operators already control the bulk of the market, leaving limited upside in acquiring mid-tier players. However, the introduction of new capital requirements could eventually force some smaller operators to reassess their position in the market and consider selling, particularly if they struggle to meet higher compliance and operational thresholds or secure additional funding.

Allan Mwamuye Mzungu
Managing Partner at MMS Advocates

Once the new framework comes into effect, there will likely be a transition period for compliance, particularly given the significant changes to capital requirements. For some categories, the capital requirements are extremely high, almost comparable to those required for a bank. We also expect market consolidation, with some mergers and acquisitions, alongside smaller operators exiting the market as they struggle to meet the higher capital requirements. Overall, this could result in a market increasingly dominated by larger players under the new regulatory regime.

Keith Hathaway
Founder of Af Gam Elite

Kenya is a very developed market. However, there haven't been many successful international entries, and there should be, because the opportunity is huge. But operators like Betsson and BetKing pulled out because they didn't get the local approach right.

As a result, it remains a very locally driven market. That said, the volume is strong, the profitability is there, and the upside is significant if someone enters with the right budget and a proper bridge between European expertise and local execution. Right now, the biggest opportunity by far is launching a new B2C operation.

Market Outlook

Kenya's gambling industry is approaching the future with cautious optimism, viewing the ongoing regulatory overhaul as an opportunity for a soft reset. While stakeholders welcome potential reforms, concerns remain that abrupt policy changes could disrupt the market's trajectory.

Despite this, market indicators show continued momentum. Casino engagement is on the rise, with players increasingly exploring poker, slots, and table games. Growing mobile penetration and more affordable devices are widening access, while innovations such as cash-out options and Bet Builders are driving fresh demand. Analysts predict that retail betting may decline further as digital channels take precedence, and lotteries could experience a revival.

"Kenya's consumers want more. They are after an African website with international benefits," said one market expert. "They are learning new games, exploring verticals beyond sports, and the opportunities for operators and suppliers are still huge. But success depends on local insight and execution. Multinationals that treat Kenya like a generic African market are likely to fail."

For operators prepared to navigate these dynamics, Kenya offers a landscape where innovation, local leadership, and mobile-first strategies can unlock substantial growth, positioning the country as one of the continent's most promising gambling markets.

OPERATIONAL INSIGHTS

Kenya's gambling industry sits at the intersection of rapid digital adoption and increasingly sophisticated regulation. It is a market defined by mobile money infrastructure, tightening advertising controls, evolving compliance standards, and a tax regime that has been overhauled and is now widely regarded as one of the most effective in Africa.

Payments

Kenya is a mobile-money-first economy, where credit cards and cash payments play a minimal role.

M-PESA remains the primary and fastest method for depositing and withdrawing funds on gambling platforms in Kenya. Launched in March 2007 by Safaricom, M-PESA is widely recognised as a pioneering mobile money service that brought financial services to Kenya's largely unbanked population. Using Paybill numbers or M-PESA Express (STK push), transactions are processed instantly, making the platform indispensable for both operators and players.

In March 2026, M-PESA marked a milestone, reaching 40 million customers and celebrating 19 years of driving financial inclusion. The platform has been central in empowering Kenyans to manage their money safely and securely, and it continues to underpin the country's digital economy.

An alternative competitor is Airtel Money. Industry participants state that while Airtel has some presence in the market, it accounts for a small share of users, many of whom also maintain M-PESA accounts. In practice, most operators rely almost exclusively on M-PESA, given its scale, ubiquity, and deep integration into everyday financial activity, particularly in a market where many consumers use multiple SIM cards but converge on Safaricom's ecosystem for transactions.

The structure of mobile money flows in Kenya introduces a layer of operational complexity that new entrants often underestimate. Operators speaking with *NEXT.io* stress that success in the market depends not just on offering mobile money, but on integrating it correctly.

Operators must manage two distinct streams of funds: customer deposits are received into one account, typically linked to M-PESA collections, while winnings are paid out from a separate account. If these systems are not properly aligned and funded, liquidity gaps can quickly emerge.

Industry sources point to instances where operators have accepted deposits without ensuring sufficient liquidity on the payout side. In such cases, players attempting to withdraw winnings may face delays, leading to frustration and, in some instances, accusations of malpractice.

In a market where trust remains a critical factor, these operational failures can be as damaging as regulatory non-compliance. As a result, robust payment integration, real-time reconciliation, and disciplined treasury management are essential for any operator looking to establish a sustainable presence in Kenya's fast-evolving gambling sector.

Crypto

Kenya's crypto market has long been associated with informal and black-market activity. However, the country's relationship with digital assets is shifting. Authorities are now taking steps to regulate crypto more broadly, and not just within gambling, by aiming to provide clarity on transactions, consumer protection and taxation.

At the centre of this shift is the recently enacted Virtual Assets Service Providers (VASP) Act 2025, which establishes a formal regulatory structure for the industry. The law brings exchanges, custodial wallets, and other virtual asset intermediaries under the supervision of the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) and the Central Bank of Kenya (CBK). It introduces mandatory licensing, due diligence requirements, and consumer protection obligations, effectively ending years of largely unregulated activity in a rapidly growing market.

However, the framework is still in the early stages of implementation. No exchange or wallet provider has yet been formally licensed under the new regime. Despite this, the sector is attracting a fresh wave of retail investors, making it an area to watch closely as Kenya navigates the transition to full regulatory oversight.

While regulation is still catching up, crypto usage in Kenya and across Africa continues to expand. Peer-to-peer transactions, particularly using stablecoins such as USDT and USDC, have become increasingly common. Users are drawn to these assets for their speed, lower transaction costs, and flexibility compared to traditional payment systems.

Some industry stakeholders argue that Kenya may eventually need to consider domestic stablecoin solutions to retain value within its own financial ecosystem. Without such measures, there is a risk that capital and transaction flows continue to move into offshore platforms, limiting local control and participation.

Crypto Gambling

Kenya's approach to crypto gambling is also beginning to take shape. The GRAK has signalled a willingness to engage with operators on a case-by-case basis, even as crypto gambling remains formally outside the scope of permitted activity.

Speaking to *NEXT.io*, a legal expert described a regulatory environment that is not actively pushing innovation but instead adjusting to realities already unfolding on the ground. "Crypto is already widely used in Kenya, which is one of the most active crypto markets in Africa, second only to Nigeria, and in some cases even surpassing it," the source said. "What we are seeing is regulation gradually catching up with existing market behaviour rather than actively driving it."

While there is no formal framework allowing cryptocurrency gambling, the regulator has indicated that operators can submit proposals for consideration. Approval, however, is far from guaranteed. "If you write to them and you are able to answer their questions satisfactorily, then they will see how to handle it," another source explained. "It is still a new area and largely unregulated, but they are open to reviewing applications."

That review process is expected to focus heavily on two key concerns: consumer protection and payout integrity. Regulators want to ensure that players are adequately safeguarded and that the use of cryptocurrency does not compromise the ability of operators to honour winnings.

KYC Obligations

In Kenya, operators have traditionally relied on third-party Know Your Customer (KYC) verification, with mobile numbers serving as the primary identifier. Because obtaining a SIM card requires users to be at least 18 years old, this has functioned as a simple and widely accepted proxy for age verification.

In practice, onboarding is streamlined. Users register with a phone number, and verification is typically completed using a one-time password (OTP) sent to that number. Safaricom, the country's dominant telecom provider, plays a central role in this process.

"If I come to your platform and register, I just enter my telephone number. If Safaricom has done the KYC, then my account opens automatically. Kenyans are apathetic to a long process. Don't ask them for their date of birth. Don't ask them for their email or residential address," said one consultant.

While effective, this approach has limitations. A mobile number is not a unique national identifier, creating the risk of duplicate accounts or misuse. Even so, the model has persisted because it strikes a balance between compliance and accessibility in a mobile-first market where frictionless onboarding is critical.

Some international companies have attempted to collect more detailed information at registration, such as name, address, age, sex, and email, but these fields are rarely completed when optional. “You can try, but there’s no real way of enforcing it. Ninety-nine percent don’t fill it in,” the consultant added. “So again, you end up with fractional player details.”

The new regulatory framework is expected to challenge the current KYC method. Kenya’s Gambling Act explicitly requires operators to verify the identity of each player, raising questions about whether mobile-based verification alone will remain sufficient.

Under the law, licensees must also implement internal control systems to detect and prevent money laundering, terrorism financing, fraud, and other criminal activity. In addition, operators are required to verify the identity of all players in line with KYC obligations set out in the Proceeds of Crime and Anti-Money Laundering Act.

Together, these provisions signal a shift toward more robust compliance standards. For operators, this will mean introducing stricter verification processes, potentially increasing onboarding friction in a market that has historically prioritised speed and simplicity.

The new regulatory framework is expected to challenge the current KYC method. Kenya’s Gambling Act explicitly requires operators to verify the identity of each player, raising questions about whether mobile-based verification alone will remain sufficient.

Anti-Money Laundering

Kenya has introduced a series of anti-money laundering reforms following its 2024 addition to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) greylist, which has increased international scrutiny of its financial system.

In June 2025, President William Ruto signed into law the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating of Terrorism Financing and Proliferation Financing (Amendment) Act. The law updates multiple statutes, including the Proceeds of Crime and Anti-Money Laundering Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The FATF has since said Kenya must continue implementing its action plan, including improving risk-based supervision, strengthening reporting of suspicious transactions, increasing prosecutions and enhancing transparency around beneficial ownership.

NEXT.io sources said they expect that, in the iGaming and betting sector, AML oversight will shift toward more continuous supervision, with regulators gaining greater real-time access to financial systems and, in limited cases, the ability to flag or intervene in suspicious activity as it occurs. There is a clear effort to strengthen the system and exit the greylist, as the designation has also affected investor sentiment.

Industry stakeholders note that existing reporting obligations are still expected to remain a key part of the framework. Under previous operating rules, transactions above certain thresholds, including daily reporting requirements and disclosures for individuals transacting above KSh100,000, had to be reported to the Financial Reporting Centre (FRC). Sources said these mechanisms are likely to remain in place, even if thresholds are later adjusted, as part of the broader effort to tighten compliance and align with FATF requirements.

Taxation

Kenya's gambling sector offers one of the clearest examples in Africa of how a tax regime can evolve from deeply problematic to broadly effective. Industry experts told *NEXT.io* that the country has shifted from being regarded as one of the most difficult jurisdictions for betting taxation to one of the most workable and transparent.

For years, the core challenge lay in *where* tax should be applied. Policymakers debated whether to tax stakes, player deposits, or winnings, each option carrying very different consequences for operators, consumers, and the state. One source told *NEXT.io* that the sector nearly collapsed in 2019, with tax collections falling by nearly 80%.

Until July 2025, Kenya operated a 15% excise duty on the amount wagered, alongside a 20% withholding tax on winnings. In practice, this proved unworkable. In a market dominated by frequent, low-value bets and accumulator wagering, defining what constituted a "win" became highly complex, leading to disputes, administrative inefficiency and inconsistent enforcement.

Operators speaking with *NEXT.io* also pointed to the licence renewal process as a lever the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) regularly used to ensure compliance. Licences cannot be renewed without a tax clearance certificate, which the authority may withhold unless tax assessments are paid in full. While this ensured prompt collection, operators alleged it bypassed normal judicial processes.

"We had a tax assessment that wasn't just double-counted, it effectively triple-counted the same items, ignoring the implications on corporate income tax. The resulting bill was sky-high. To dispute it, we had to prepay a third of the amount. Once the tribunal corrected the errors, the shortfall was minimal, but the prepaid sum was retained against future liabilities. Essentially, it functioned as a free credit line to the KRA while generating significant legal and accounting costs," one CEO said.

The turning point came with the adoption of a simpler, transaction-based model implemented in July 2025. Under the current framework, a 5% tax is applied to deposits into gaming wallets and a further 5% tax to withdrawals. The system's success owes much to technology: the KRA enforces compliance through mandatory API integration with mobile money providers and other payment platforms. Sources speaking to *NEXT.io* emphasised that this integration is what made the system workable. Every deposit and withdrawal is now traceable in real time, eliminating the need for complex interpretations of betting behaviour. "You can't fiddle the taxes anymore. The old high-tax regime was only necessary because nobody paid properly," one source said.

Not all industry voices share the same enthusiasm. Some argue that the player bears the greatest burden. One supplier said: "Across many African markets, black and grey operators still thrive. High taxation can push players away from licensed operators. A 5% withholding tax on withdrawals can feel like double taxation, especially when players have already been taxed on deposits. This makes unlicensed operators more attractive, particularly as many punters are focused on making money rather than entertainment, which increases sensitivity to costs."

In addition, one operator acknowledged that while the KRA takes pride in its real-time monitoring, implementation can be uneven. For some larger operators, the integration is allegedly not fully functional, and reporting can be inconsistent, leading to situations in which smaller operators end up paying proportionally more tax than much larger companies despite similar activity levels.

From the government's perspective, the reform has delivered tangible results. Tax revenues from the sector have increased by approximately 22% year-on-year, while administration has become simpler for the KRA. Operators benefit from predictability and reduced regulatory friction, while players face a clear and transparent system in which they know exactly what they are paying and when.

This positive picture is, however, subject to a significant caveat. The Kenyan government's proposed 2026 Finance Bill includes a provision to reinstate a 20% withholding tax on player winnings. The bill is currently under public consultation. If adopted, this would partially reverse the 2025 reform by reintroducing the winnings-based tax mechanism that the current system was specifically designed to replace. Sources speaking to NEXT.io assess the proposal as likely to pass, citing the government's need for additional revenue streams under fiscal pressure, though they emphasise this is not yet confirmed. If enacted, implementation is expected around September 2026, some months after the start of Kenya's fiscal year on 1 July. Companies entering or expanding in Kenya should factor this potential shift into their 2026 financial planning and monitor the legislative process actively.

Operators speaking with *NEXT.io*, however, emphasise that successful market entry depends not only on understanding the tax structure, but on navigating its operational realities. Integration with the KRA's systems is essential. Platforms must be able to report transactions accurately and in real time, yet in practice this process can be slow and technically challenging. "We ran into issues because the documentation they sent was basically a decade old," one operator told *NEXT.io*. "For a while, we had to rely on manual reporting to pay taxes," the source said. "If you don't pay, you're in trouble."

Compliance failures carry significant risk. Operators that fail to report or remit taxes correctly face substantial fines and, in extreme cases, the loss of their licence. As a result, ensuring seamless integration with both the KRA and local payment infrastructure is critical.

Experts also suggested that Kenya's model could serve as a reference point for other emerging markets grappling with similar challenges, such as Uganda, Ghana and Tanzania. "The problem is that none of these countries has a tracking system. Taxes are largely self-declared, and realistically, only about 20% of the listed taxes are collected. Kenya went the other way: mandatory tracking combined with significantly lower rates. It's brilliant in its simplicity and effectiveness," one proponent said.

IN THEIR WORDS

John Mutua
CEO, Association of Gaming Operators Kenya

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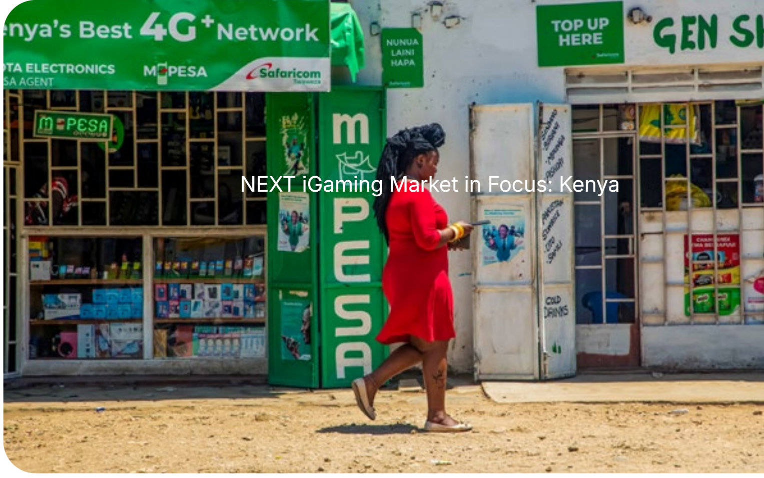
We are also pushing for alignment between licensing and taxation, so that operators are not dealing with constant shifts from one financial year to the next. Stability is critical, particularly for operators that are used to working in multiple jurisdictions and comparing markets. From an international perspective, this clarity is extremely attractive. Operators looking at Kenya can now say: this is the cost of entry, these are the obligations, this is the licensing cycle, and this is how long it will take to break even. That makes Kenya a far more compelling proposition than a market where rules change frequently.



Key Taxation Measures

Excise Duty:

A **5%** excise duty is applied to the amount deposited by a punter into their betting wallet from their mobile money account. This replaced a 15% duty on the amount wagered and is designed to capture revenue from all virtual operators, regardless of their location.

Withholding Tax (WHT):

A **5%** WHT is levied on all withdrawals from a player's betting or gaming account, regardless of whether the amount withdrawn is profit or the original stake. However, the 2026 Finance Bill, which is subject to public participation and has not yet been confirmed, proposes reinstating a 20% withholding tax on player winnings.

Corporate Tax:

Licensed betting companies are subject to a standard corporate tax rate of **30%** on their profits.

Mandatory Contributions:

The new Gambling Control Act 2025 may also introduce mandatory deductions from stakes or winnings to fund the Social Health Insurance Fund (SHIF) and pension schemes, though specific regulations are still being formulated.

Advertising & Marketing

Kenya's gambling sector has undergone a rapid overhaul of its advertising regime, as regulators move to rein in aggressive promotion and shield vulnerable consumers. As with earlier tax changes, the rules have often arrived abruptly, leaving operators little time to adjust.

In April 2025, the Betting Control and Licensing Board imposed a 30-day blanket suspension on all gambling advertising. When the suspension was lifted, it was replaced by a far stricter framework. These measures have since been incorporated into the Gambling Control Act and reinforced by the draft Gambling Control (Advertising) Regulations 2026, which are currently out for public consultation. Together, they form one of the most restrictive advertising regimes of any regulated betting market.

The new rules sharply curtail not just how gambling can be advertised, but whether it can be promoted at all. All advertisements must now be approved in advance by the GRAK. Operators must submit advertising materials for approval at least 14 days in advance, including full scripts and creative assets. Any public-facing promotion, from billboards to digital campaigns, falls within scope. Once approved, the operator must also submit the ad to the Kenya Film Classification Board.

All adverts must display licence numbers, responsible gambling warnings and clear disclaimers. Marketing that suggests glamour, financial success or social elevation is explicitly prohibited. Advertisements cannot include calls to action, testimonials or depictions of winners.

They cannot position gambling as a source of income or problem-solving, nor portray it as aspirational, glamorous or risk-free. The use of celebrities or public figures is banned outright, as is any content likely to appeal to minors.

Placement is equally constrained. Broadcast advertising is prohibited between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m., except during live sporting events. Print ads are limited to twice weekly and only within sports sections. Outdoor advertising is restricted, with billboards barred near schools and other learning institutions.

Even where advertising is permitted, it must dedicate at least 20% of its space to responsible gambling messaging, including warnings about addiction, age restrictions and operator details.

The compliance burden extends beyond operators. Media owners, agencies and platforms are required to verify that any gambling advertisement they carry has been approved and classified. Failure to do so exposes all parties in the chain to liability.

Penalties are severe. Violations can result in fines of up to KSh20m (€134,000), prison sentences of up to 20 years, or both. The scale of the sanctions underscores the government's determination to enforce the new framework aggressively.

The Influencer Grey Zone

Despite the blanket ban on celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing remains a regulatory grey area. Authorities have yet to clearly define what constitutes an "influencer," creating uncertainty for operators navigating digital channels. A campaign considered compliant under one interpretation could easily fall foul of enforcement under another.

This ambiguity is significant in a market where online personalities have become a primary route to younger audiences. Before the June 2025 clampdown, influencer-led campaigns were among the most effective acquisition tools available.

One operator described to *NEXT.io* how a €10,000 monthly budget, deployed across grassroots influencers in music, nightlife and boxing generated substantial reach. Meme-driven Instagram content routinely hit one million views, while an influencer-led boxing event drew a crowd of roughly 10,000. Combined with low-cost tactics such as branded merchandise and mobile phone giveaways, the campaign delivered around 200,000 new players in just two months. That playbook is no longer viable.

Ad Spend & Marketing Costs

The regulatory crackdown has had an immediate and measurable financial impact. According to the Communications Authority of Kenya, gambling ad spend fell by 89% in the first quarter of the 2025/26 financial year.

Between July and September 2025, total spend dropped to KSh131m (€920,000), down from KSh1.2bn (€8.4m) a year earlier. Television advertising fell sharply to KSh80m (€560,000) from KSh796m (€5.6m), while radio spend dropped to KSh51m (€360,000) from KSh513m (€3.6m). Print advertising disappeared entirely, compared with KSh60m (€420,000) the previous year. The figures reflect a near-total withdrawal from traditional media as operators scale back campaigns to avoid breaching the new rules.

In response, operators are exploring other channels. Traditional affiliate marketing is also gaining traction, but industry sources say the ecosystem remains underdeveloped and fragmented.

At the same time, on-the-ground activation continues to play a role. Street-level marketing and branded merchandise have long been effective in Kenya, offering visibility at relatively low cost. However, scaling these efforts requires sustained investment, which not all operators are willing or able to commit.

Industry estimates suggest that in the past, a well-resourced operator might allocate around €5m annually for marketing. However, experienced operators argue that this level of spend is not always necessary to achieve strong performance.

One source noted that companies with a strong local team can often achieve similar or better results at roughly half the cost. In their view, inefficiencies are common when operators rely too heavily on remote management without sufficient local expertise.

Localisation

Launching a new gambling operator in Kenya is not a matter of flashy bonuses or aggressive marketing. It's about trust as Kenyan players are notoriously sceptical. "If the bonus is too big, they'll call it a scam," said a market insider.

A case study illustrates the stakes. One operator initially offered a KSh 1,000 match to first-time bettors but failed to attract significant engagement. Local staff quickly identified the problem: the bonus was too generous. Players assumed it was a scam. The company recalibrated, offering bonuses that matched actual bets, meaning KSh 200 on a KSh 200 bet, and engagement soared.

For operators eyeing Kenya via a B2B route, platform selection is critical. Cost-saving decisions can backfire. Many operators migrate to cheaper platforms, only to face expensive overhauls when the initial choice proves incompatible with local requirements.

A viable platform must demonstrate deep market experience: reliable payment gateways, regulatory integration for seamless tax reporting and robust reporting tools capable of withstanding audits. "I always ask platforms to show actual numbers from operators already live in Kenya. Anyone can launch, but not everyone can make money," said an industry executive.

Bonus abuse and arbitrage betting are persistent concerns. Many Kenyan players operate multiple mobile devices, creating opportunities for exploitation. "It's an issue," one insider admitted. "But with the right technology and a strong team, including a risk manager and payments specialists, you can manage it quickly. Give out a reckless bonus, and you will get abuse; get it right, and it works."

In addition, operators entering the Kenyan consumer market must simplify rather than replicate complex international offerings. Data is limited, and slow load times quickly frustrate players. Successful operators streamline their offerings, focus on core products, and tailor interfaces to local preferences. "Football drives the vast majority of betting activity, so featuring other sports prominently on the homepage is largely wasted real estate," said one industry expert.

Key considerations include English-first interfaces with optional Swahili, intuitive wallet management, and seamless deposits and withdrawals. Any friction in these processes can quickly erode trust, undermining both acquisition and retention.

Solomon Godwin
Head of Africa at Booming Games

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I think any international software supplier or operator looking to enter the Kenyan market needs to start with patience. There are no quick fixes or shortcuts to success in this market. Many suppliers and investors may feel they are arriving early, but the market is already quite developed. There are numerous verticals, games, content, and operators already established. You need to be realistic and patient about how you enter and grow within it.

More importantly, you need to do something meaningfully different from what already exists, whether that’s your product, your platform, or your frontend design. You cannot come in with a standard, traditional offering. For example, a casino supplier should not simply bring a conventional slot game.

From an operator’s perspective, it is also essential to have the right local partner, someone who understands the market, the regulatory environment, its requirements, and who brings credibility. Across parts of Africa, there is also a trend with some people believing they are not winning because of external factors like the platform itself. Ultimately, success depends on having the right local partner and building a strong local team that understands both the market and what needs to be delivered.

Company Set-up & Local Shareholding

For foreign investors eyeing Africa’s betting and gaming boom, setting up a company in Kenya remains one of the least complex parts of the journey. Corporate registry officials typically confirm a name reservation, collect required documentation, and within two to three weeks, a private company can be registered. A single director and shareholder is legally sufficient, and foreigners face no onerous capital thresholds at the incorporation stage. Securing a Personal Identification Number (PIN) for tax purposes and establishing local compliance paperwork is largely procedural and predictable.

But the ease of incorporation masks the real hurdle: licensing and local participation rules. Under the new Gambling Control Act 2025, any entity seeking a licence to operate betting, online gaming or related gambling activities must meet stringent conditions. The law requires that a licensed corporate applicant have at least 30% of its shares held by Kenyan citizens, and that all gambling revenues be processed through local bank accounts in Kenya.

This foreign ownership limitation is by design: policymakers intend to give Kenyan investors and communities a meaningful stake in one of the most dynamic digital sectors of the economy. Industry analysts and operators alike acknowledge the logic but also flag the practical friction points.

For many established global operators, Kenyan shareholding carve-outs represent uncharted territory. Most of the sector’s dominant players are foreign-owned, and convincing a local investor to take up 30% equity at market prices, particularly in businesses with thin margins and regulatory uncertainties, may prove difficult.

In the absence of a willing local partner, questions arise about what qualifies as compliance: must operators sell below market rates? Can a shareholding be held through a trust or nominee structure? Do operators with existing licences receive a grandfather exemption from the new requirements?

The current law remains silent on these nuances. Regulators in Nairobi are now drafting subsidiary regulations and guidance notes to clarify implementation, and definitive answers will only come once these rules are published.

However, industry sources including *NEXT.io* stress that the idea of a local shareholding requirement is not entirely novel in Kenya's legal landscape. A similar provision appeared in the original Companies Act of 2015, which mandated that foreign-registered companies surrender at least 30% of their shares to Kenyan citizens by birth. That rule proved deeply controversial in business circles and was repealed before it ever took practical effect, after prompting intense debate about its potential to deter foreign direct investment.

Charles Kyengo
Partner & Head of Commercial Transactions

From a legal perspective, investors should engage with the regulator as early as possible and ensure full compliance with all requirements. Tax compliance, in particular, remains a key focus for the Kenyan government.

Operators must also demonstrate sufficient capital and provide financial security, whether through insurance, bonds or bank guarantees, with requirements varying depending on the licence type. While thresholds such as KSh20m for casinos or KSh100m for online operators may appear modest by global standards, they are significant in the local context and could create a bottleneck for smaller players.

We expect that some smaller operators, particularly those struggling to meet capital and security requirements, may look to exit the market once the regulations are introduced. At the same time, a clearer and more modern regulatory framework is likely to attract new interest. We are already seeing strong demand for legal guidance, especially around online gambling, as operators seek to understand the requirements and position themselves for entry into the Kenyan market.

Banking

In Kenya, access to banking services for gaming operators varies significantly depending on the institution. Some tier-one international banks, such as Standard Chartered, are generally more restrictive and may not open accounts for gaming businesses. In contrast, larger local banks, including Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), which is one of the largest banks in Eastern and Central Africa with assets exceeding KSh 2.1tn, are reportedly more open to servicing the sector.

Tier-two and tier-three banks, including Ecobank, Bank of Africa, GTBank, and UBA also actively support gaming operators and are generally receptive to onboarding clients in the sector. These banks have strong footprints across West Africa and broader regional markets.

Once an account is opened, operators typically integrate their systems with both the bank and Safaricom, Kenya's leading telecommunications and mobile money provider. Safaricom continues to invest heavily in strengthening its infrastructure, particularly around M-PESA, which remains a central component of mobile money and payments in the country.

Bureaucracy and Red Tape

Facilitation payments have historically been a recognised part of doing business in Kenya; however, industry experts stated that their prevalence in the gambling industry might decline as the regulatory environment is maturing.

A number of structural reforms have already been introduced across the sector. Changes to the tax regime, including lower rates and improved tracking mechanisms, have reduced the incentive and ability to under declare income, while increasing overall transparency.

At the same time, new requirements around bank guarantees are being implemented. These higher financial thresholds are expected to further formalise the market and strengthen regulatory compliance.

Historically, relatively low licensing costs made market entry easier but also contributed to inefficiencies and, in some cases, opportunistic behaviour. One source told *NEXT.io* that higher official fees are expected to reduce this dynamic, as companies are less able to absorb or conceal additional informal payments when upfront costs are already significant.

HR/Talent

From an HR perspective, Kenya stands out as one of the strongest talent markets in Africa's gambling industry. Contrary to concerns often raised by international operators and suppliers, sourcing skilled local talent is rarely a constraint. Industry executives say Kenya offers depth across operational roles, including technology, tax and compliance, marketing, accounting and general management. In areas such as marketing in particular, local teams have driven operators to scale at an extraordinary pace without relying on expatriate expertise. In addition, the presence of major global technology firms, including Oracle and Microsoft, which operates multiple offices in Nairobi, has contributed to a strong pool of digitally skilled workers.

While other African markets, notably Nigeria, are also recognised for their tech talent, Kenya's workforce is widely viewed as both highly capable and adaptable, with a strong culture of skills development and innovation. As a result, Kenya is increasingly seen not just as a place to staff local operations, but as a regional talent hub, with teams supporting betting and gaming activities across multiple African markets.

International Staff

One commonly overlooked factor for international operators entering Kenya is the importance of on-the-ground senior oversight. Industry sources suggest that deploying one or two experienced staff members from headquarters to the local market can significantly improve execution during the early stages of a launch.

While this approach increases upfront costs, including salaries aligned with European benchmarks, accommodation, transport, and local support such as drivers, these expenses are relatively modest when factored into overall market entry budgets. For example, hiring a driver may cost in the region of $300 per month, while work permits are straightforward to obtain and typically cost around $1,000.

Crucially, these senior personnel serve as a bridge between headquarters and local operations. Without this link, companies risk poor oversight and misaligned decision-making. Several operators have entered the market with substantial investment, providing platforms, payment infrastructure, and capital, but without sufficient supervision, leading to underperformance or financial losses.

By contrast, companies that embed experienced staff locally, particularly those who understand both the home market and the African operating environment, are better positioned to manage operations effectively and align strategy with execution.

Security

Security is generally not considered a major concern for operators, particularly as most transactions are digital and do not involve carrying large amounts of cash.

For visiting executives, standard precautions are typically sufficient. This may include arranging airport transfers, using a reputable driver, and staying in established international hotels. In some cases, companies opt for larger vehicles such as SUVs with experienced local drivers, although armed security is not necessary.

Industry sources with long-term experience in the region note that, while Kenya requires a degree of awareness, it is not inherently unsafe. As in any major market, risks can be managed through sensible precautions, such as avoiding unnecessary exposure in unfamiliar areas and relying on trusted local support.

Exit Considerations

In Kenya, the process of exiting or selling a business is generally straightforward, provided compliance has been properly managed from the outset.

When winding down operations, companies typically go through a structured process that includes disposing of assets, closing financial accounts, and completing the required tax audits. In cases where a business is simply being closed rather than sold, this process is largely administrative, with limited additional regulatory intervention.

However, where a business is being sold or transferred, additional tax considerations apply. These may include capital gains tax, typically at 15%, as well as value-added tax implications, currently at 16% in Kenya, depending on the structure of the transaction.

Capital gains assessments take into account factors such as inflation and value creation over time through indexation. This means gains are not calculated solely on the headline sale price, but adjusted based on the original acquisition value and relevant economic changes over the holding period.

Before a company can be formally deregistered or transferred at the Business Registration Service, approval must first be obtained from the Kenya Revenue Authority. This confirmation verifies that all outstanding tax obligations have been settled.

From a risk and compliance perspective, advisors emphasise the importance of establishing strong governance and enterprise risk management frameworks from the beginning of operations. Doing so ensures that exit processes, whether through closure or sale, can be completed efficiently and without regulatory complications.

Market Comparison: Kenya's Position in the East African Landscape

Within East Africa's rapidly evolving gambling sector, Kenya stands out as a mature, digital-first market that has developed differently from its regional peers. Unlike Nigeria, Uganda and Tanzania, where retail betting shops remain a key part of consumer behaviour and social interaction, Kenya has largely bypassed this phase. Betting is overwhelmingly mobile-led, supported by strong mobile money infrastructure, with retail outlets playing only a marginal role.

Taxation across East Africa is also diverging sharply. Kenya has shifted to a transaction-based system, applying a 5% tax on deposits and 5% on withdrawals. This replaced a previous winnings-based model and reflects a move toward real-time, volume-driven taxation supported by API-linked payment tracking. According to industry experts, Kenya is now among the most tax-friendly markets on the continent.

This favourable competitive position is, however, contingent on the current framework remaining in place. The proposed 2026 Finance Bill — not yet confirmed — would reinstate a 20% withholding tax on player winnings. If enacted, this would narrow Kenya's tax advantage over its regional peers and move it closer to the higher-tax end of the East African spectrum.

Tanzania, by contrast, retains a more traditional dual-tax structure. Operators are subject to a 25% tax on GGR across both online casino and sports betting, while players face taxes on net winnings, set at 15% for casino and 12% for sports betting. Meanwhile, Uganda is considering a far more aggressive model. Proposed reforms under the Lotteries and Gaming Act 2026 would introduce a flat 30% tax on GGR, alongside a 15% withholding tax on player winnings under a parallel Income Tax Bill. If implemented, this would place Uganda among the highest-taxed gambling markets on the continent.

Despite its maturity, Kenya continues to attract operator interest. However, several international brands have either struggled to gain traction or exited the market, with weak local execution frequently cited as a key factor. Even so, industry observers continue to view the market as attractive and highly profitable, with the strongest opportunities lying in well-capitalised B2C launches supported by deep local integration.

Ethiopia, meanwhile, represents the region's frontier market: large population, low penetration, but significant regulatory constraints, including restrictions on retail betting and complex ownership structures. While challenging, it is widely viewed as one of the most promising long-term growth markets in East Africa.

East Africa is increasingly defined by divergence rather than convergence. Kenya leads as a regulated, digital-first ecosystem; Tanzania and Uganda maintain higher-tax, more traditional frameworks; and Ethiopia remains an early-stage, high-potential market.

Liam Hodges
Co-Founder, Degenerate Group

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Kenya is one of the most tech-savvy markets in Africa, alongside South Africa and Nigeria, which sit in a slightly different tier but are also highly advanced.

Mobile adoption is extremely strong in Kenya. Unlike markets with lower connectivity, mobile usage is deeply embedded in daily life, largely driven by M-PESA. That has normalised phone-based payments and shifted much of the population into mobile banking and digital transactions.

This has transformed gaming behaviour. Where many African markets previously relied on retail or shop-based betting, Kenya has moved much further towards online and mobile-first gaming over the past decade. In that sense, it is one of the most advanced markets on the continent.

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