

## Smoke Free Sweden 2023

# Frequently asked questions

### What is Sweden's story?

Sweden is about to become the first 'smoke free' European country in 2023, with a smoking rate of below 5%. This is a huge achievement, and will be 17 years ahead of the 2040 EU target, which all other EU countries are set to miss.

Other EU countries have a smoking rate that is, on average, five times that of Sweden, and have struggled for years to reduce smoking rates. In fact, Sweden becoming smoke free is unprecedented – no other country in the world has become smoke free.

The Swedes have employed similar education and tobacco control efforts to many other EU countries. But the big difference is that Sweden has also embraced the role of a wide range of reduced-risk alternatives to combustible cigarettes and they have created a policy environment which encourages smokers to switch.

Yes, Swedes have used snus for decades but, crucially, the Swedes have ensured that EVERY type of safer alternative product is available in their country. They have also worked to make

these safer alternative products more accessible, more acceptable and more affordable than cigarettes. As a result, smoking rates have plummeted. In fact, the last decade has seen the number of smokers drop at its fastest rate ever – driven by the introduction of vapes in 2015 and modern nicotine pouches in 2018.

These products are dramatically and demonstrably safer than cigarettes, and this has had a massive impact on the health of Swedes.

As a result, today Sweden has the lowest levels of tobacco-related deaths and disease of any EU country. Lung cancer deaths are less than HALF the EU average, while total cancer deaths are 38% lower than the EU average.

If every country followed Sweden's approach and made safer alternatives affordable, acceptable and accessible to smokers, approximately 355,000 lives could be saved each year in the EU according to a 2020 study by Dr Lars Ramström. That's more than 3.5 million in a decade.

### Isn't the whole Sweden miracle just about snus which is not available anywhere else?

No, not at all. The Swedes have long used snus but the decline in smoking rates has actually accelerated significantly in recent years as new alternatives, such as vaping and nicotine pouches, have been introduced.

What it shows is that when countries create a policy environment where there are better alternatives available, and when they are accessible, acceptable and affordable, smokers will choose those better alternatives. This in turn leads to huge public health benefits, such as significantly lower tobacco-related death and disease.



## **Other countries are years behind Sweden, how can they catch up?**

Swedes have had lower smoking rates for decades due to their use of snus, but the decline has accelerated in recent years – as new, safer alternatives have been introduced. Among Swedish women, who historically smoked more than Swedish men, the decline has been especially rapid.

What Sweden's experience shows is that the first step is having a wide range of alternative products for smokers to switch to, and developing a specific policy formula that makes alternatives more accessible, more acceptable and more affordable for consumers than cigarettes. Other countries may be starting from a higher smoking rate than Sweden, but if they follow this formula, they can close the gap and become smoke free.

Finally, this is not about one specific alternative product, but about allowing smokers to shift to the safer alternative that works best for them.

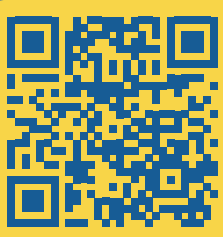
## **What about countries that have similar regulations to Sweden and allow all these products, but aren't seeing the same results? Can Sweden's experience really be replicated in other countries?**

The Swedish experience has shown that this is not only about specific regulations – it's about ensuring all less harmful alternatives to smoking are available. After that, governments need to implement a policy formula that makes alternatives accessible, acceptable and affordable for consumers to move away from smoking.

What Sweden has shown is that, to drive a trend of smokers switching to smoke free alternatives, policymakers need to make adjustments that encourage and incentivise smokers to switch.



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