

EXPLAINER

# THE TRIPLE-A INNOVATION: SWEDEN'S ROAD TO SMOKE-FREE SUCCESS

WE ARE INNOVATION

Sweden has emerged as Europe's leading example in smoking reduction, achieving what many considered impossible: bringing **smoking rates down** to 5.3 percent across the general population, with an even more striking 4.5 percent among citizens who have experienced Swedish tobacco policies throughout their lives - effectively reaching smoke-free status well ahead of European Union **targets**. The power of Sweden's approach is further demonstrated through its effect on European migrants, who show a remarkable smoking rate of just 7.8 percent after moving to Sweden, while their counterparts in their home countries maintain an average of 24 percent smoking rate. This striking three-fold difference proves that Swedish policies and social norms support smoking cessation, regardless of cultural background or previous habits.

## **THE SWEDISH EXPERIENCE: A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK**

The Swedish **approach** combines traditional tobacco control measures with pro-innovation strategies, creating a two-pronged system that has proven remarkably effective. This dual strategy has produced a 65 percent decrease in smoking rates from 2008 to 2024, setting Sweden apart from its European counterparts, where smoking remains prevalent at 24 percent on average.

## **THE THREE A'S OF SUCCESS**

Sweden's experience centers on three fundamental principles:

### **ACCESSIBILITY:**

A wide variety of innovative nicotine products are available in different sales channels, including online channels, and sufficient information is available for the consumer to choose the option that will stop them from smoking.

### **ACCEPTABILITY:**

Various flavors and nicotine levels in alternative nicotine products contribute to consumer choice and non-smoking.

### **AFFORDABILITY:**

the possibility of acquiring alternative nicotine products at a price that contributes to the consumer opting for them and not smoking.

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## GENDER-SPECIFIC ADOPTION PATTERNS

Research reveals distinct preferences across gender lines:

- **Male ex-smokers:** 75 percent chose snus as their primary alternative
- **Female ex-smokers:** Over 50 percent preferred nicotine pouches
- **E-cigarettes:** Higher adoption among women (14 percent) compared to men (7 percent)

## MEASURABLE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACTS

The results speak volumes. While Europe grapples with an average 24 percent smoking rate, Sweden has slashed its smoking prevalence by 65 percent since 2008, achieving the EU's lowest cigarette consumption rates. The public health impact has been dramatic: compared to EU averages, Sweden reports 21.2 percent fewer smoking-related deaths, 31.3 percent fewer cancer deaths overall, and 36 percent fewer lung cancer deaths specifically. Cardiovascular disease deaths have dropped by 12 percent, and tobacco-related cancer deaths by 25.3 percent, placing Sweden among Europe's three nations with the lowest lung cancer mortality rates.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

The Swedish case offers valuable insights for policymakers worldwide. Their success stems from:

- **Combining strict enforcement with behavioral support**
- **Providing innovative alternatives to smoking**
- **Implementing risk-proportionate policies**
- **Creating supportive environments for sustainable change**

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## CONCLUSION

Sweden has achieved near smoke-free status through a balanced approach that respects consumer choice while maintaining strong public health protections. The dramatic reduction in smoking rates among European migrants to Sweden (7.8 percent vs 24 percent) serves as decisive proof that these policies work across different cultural backgrounds. This success story offers a practical model for other nations seeking effective solutions to reduce smoking rates.

## ABOUT WE ARE INNOVATION

We Are Innovation is a dynamic network of individuals and institutions who deeply believe in innovation's power to drive progress and solve the world's most pressing problems. With over 45 think-tanks, foundations, and NGOs based worldwide, We Are Innovation represents the diverse voices of a global civil society committed to advancing human creativity, adopting new technologies, and promoting innovative solutions. Through our collaborative approach and cutting-edge expertise, we are driving global transformative change. To learn more about our work, visit us at <https://weareinnovation.global/>.

