

Harnessing Innovation for a Smoke-Free Bangladesh: An Open Letter on Policy Opportunities

Distinguished Members of the Bangladeshi Government,

We are writing on behalf of We Are Innovation (WAI), a global network of over 45 think tanks, foundations, and NGOs dedicated to harnessing innovation's power to address pressing global challenges. We respectfully share our perspective regarding the proposed amendments to the Smoking and Tobacco Product Usage Act and the broader regulatory approach to innovative nicotine products (INPs) in Bangladesh.

We understand and commend Bangladesh's commitment to reducing smoking rates and protecting public health. These are crucial goals that we wholeheartedly support. We particularly acknowledge the efforts of the Ministry of Health in initiating amendments to the Smoking and Tobacco Product Usage Act to align with international best practices and World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations.

However, some of the proposed measures, particularly those seeking to implement a complete ban on INPs, may inadvertently hinder rather than help achieve these important objectives. As policy discussions around measures to eliminate smoking continue to evolve in Bangladesh, this presents a valuable opportunity for constructive dialogue about evidence-based approaches that have proven successful globally.

Current Situation and Challenges

Our organization has closely monitored pro-innovation policies worldwide through our [2024 Effective Anti-smoking Policies Global Index](#) and [Path to Smoke-free platform](#). In these assessments, Bangladesh currently ranks in the bottom half, highlighting key opportunities.

We understand the current challenges Bangladesh faces in moving smokers away from cigarettes, including:

- » Relatively affordable cigarette prices (approximately BDT 6.7/cigarette)
- » A significant black market for INPs due to high import taxes (289 percent)
- » Limited prevalence of pro-innovation strategies

However, these challenges call for smart regulation rather than prohibition, as evidence from other countries demonstrates.

International Evidence and Success Stories

In Europe, the latest Special Eurobarometer data provides [compelling evidence](#) that countries embracing innovation alongside traditional measures to eliminate smoking have successfully reduced smoking rates. Consider these examples:

Sweden stands as the [most impressive](#) case study, having achieved virtual smoke-free status with a smoking rate of just 5.3 percent, with an even more striking 4.5 percent among citizens who have experienced Swedish tobacco policies throughout their lives. This success stems from Sweden's [comprehensive approach](#) combining traditional measures to eliminate smoking with access to INPs, such as snus, nicotine pouches (tobacco-free), vaping, and heated tobacco. The Swedish model demonstrates three crucial elements:

1. **Accessibility:** Ensuring a wide variety of INPs through different sales channels
2. **Acceptability:** Allowing product customization including flavors and nicotine levels
3. **Affordability:** Maintaining price differentials that encourage switching from cigarettes

Other notable success stories include:

- » **Czechia:** Achieved a 7 percent reduction in smoking rates since 2020 through a framework that does not tax vaping products and allows their use in spaces where cigarettes are prohibited
- » **Greece:** Has recorded a 6 percent drop in smoking rates since 2020 while allowing manufacturers to communicate the relative risk of INPs vs cigarettes
- » **England:** Reduced daily smoking prevalence to 10.4 percent in 2023 through the pragmatic embrace of vaping
- » **Japan:** Witnessed a dramatic 52 percent reduction in cigarette sales through allowing and regulating heated tobacco products
- » **New Zealand:** By successfully implementing a multi-faceted strategy, including encouraging smokers to switch to vaping, reduced smoking rates from 16.4% in 2011 to 6.8% in 2023

Economic and Public Health Implications

The stakes for Bangladesh are significant. Expert public health reports [indicate](#) that 920,000 lives could be saved through a regulatory approach that integrates INPs in the strategy to become smoke-free, alongside traditional measures. This figure alone warrants serious consideration of more nuanced policies than outright prohibition.

Furthermore, our research indicates that INPs can help address [health disparities](#) among lower-income groups - a crucial consideration for Bangladesh's public health strategy. Evidence from Sweden and the rest of the European Union (EU) shows that when alternatives are more affordable than cigarettes, they contribute to lowering smoking rates across all socioeconomic groups.

Recommendations for a Balanced Approach

We respectfully suggest considering a framework that:

1. Maintains strong controls on cigarettes while recognizing the role of INPs
2. Implements appropriate regulations for INPs rather than outright prohibition
3. Ensures product quality and safety standards through proper regulation
4. Protects the underaged while preserving adult access
5. Considers relative risk in taxation policies to encourage switching away from cigarettes
6. Allows sufficient product information for adult consumers to make informed choices
7. Promotes innovation in developing solutions that can help achieve smoke-free aspirations

These recommendations align with the most successful international approaches while allowing adaptation to Bangladesh's specific context and concerns.

Offer of Support and Collaboration

We Are Innovation stands ready to share detailed insights from our research and analysis of successful smoke-free policies worldwide. Our network includes experts who have studied the implementation and outcomes of various regulatory approaches across different jurisdictions.

In conclusion, we respectfully urge consideration of a comprehensive approach that harnesses rather than hinders innovation's potential to reduce smoking rates. The evidence from multiple countries suggests that such an approach, properly implemented and regulated, can accelerate progress toward a smoke-free future while protecting public health.

We appreciate your attention to these important considerations and remain available to provide any additional information or insights that might be helpful in your deliberations.

Respectfully,

We Are Innovation

The future is calling. And we are ready to answer.

<https://weareinnovation.global/>



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/>.

