

Sweden could become the first country to leave cigarettes behind for good

Even though everyone knows smoking causes serious disease and is addictive, there are around one billion smokers in the world today and the World Health Organization predicts this number will remain roughly the same come 2025.



The best choice any smoker can make is to quit tobacco and nicotine altogether, but those who don't deserve a pragmatic approach that moves them away from cigarettes through the effective use of less harmful alternatives. Sweden is a prime example of how the availability and use of smoke-free alternatives can support putting an end to smoking. With the lowest smoking rates in the EU at 5.8%, this is likely thanks to snus oral tobacco pouches.

What is snus?

Snus has existed in Sweden's history for centuries but gained popularity in the 1970s. A form of smokeless tobacco, it is a cellulose pouch that can be placed between the gum and the cheek or upper lip, allowing for the absorption of nicotine through the oral mucosa.

Nicotine is addictive and not free of risk, but it is not the primary source of smoking-related harm. The high levels of harmful chemicals found in cigarette smoke produced by burning tobacco are the primary cause. By eliminating burning, as is the case with smoke-free products like snus, the levels of harmful chemicals can be significantly reduced compared with cigarette smoke. Snus is just one variation of many smoke-free products

that can provide a better alternative to those adults who would otherwise continue smoking.

How has the adoption of less harmful alternatives in Sweden positively impacted society?

Public health data shows between 1976 and 2002, Swedish smoking rates fell from 40% to just 15% amongst men, and from 34% to 20% amongst women. Those rates have continued to fall, as snus prevalence—especially in men—correspondingly increased, suggesting a substitution effect.¹ And between 2004 and 2022, daily smoking in Sweden decreased among the population aged 16–84 years, with just 5.8% of both men and women being recorded as daily smokers.²

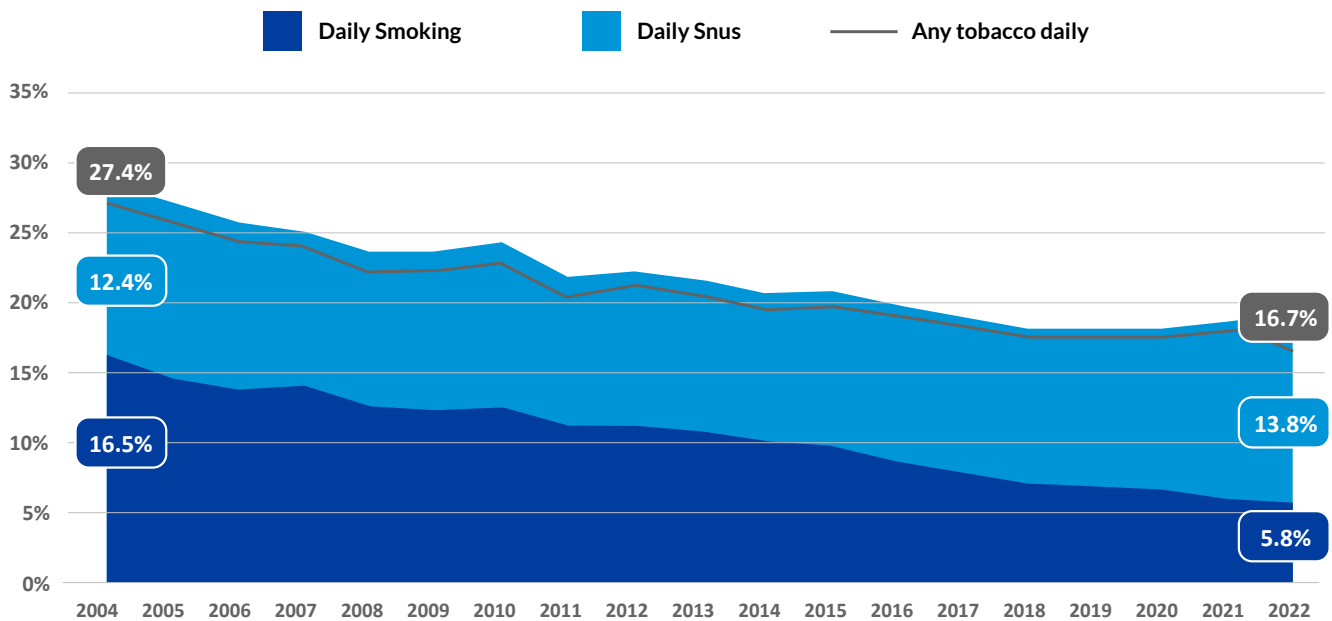
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Daily tobacco use in Sweden (both sexes, 16–84)



National Public Health Survey: http://fohm-app.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/Folkhalsodata/pxweb/sv/A_Folkhalsodata/A_Folkhalsodata_B_HLV_aLevvanor_aagLevvanortobak/hlv1tobaald.px/

But the impact goes beyond a reduction in smoking rates. Research reveals that Swedish men—who began switching from smoking to snus much earlier than Swedish women—have the lowest tobacco-related mortality rates among males in the EU, with 72 deaths per 100,000 attributed to tobacco use in 2019.³

The Swedish experience is a showcase of how having smoke-free products that are accessible, affordable, and acceptable alternatives for adults who don't quit altogether, can deliver monumental gains to public health.



Further, the Swedish Snus Commission estimates that 355,000 smoking-attributable deaths among men over 30 could have been avoided per year if the other EU countries, who ban snus, had matched Sweden's tobacco-related mortality rate.⁴

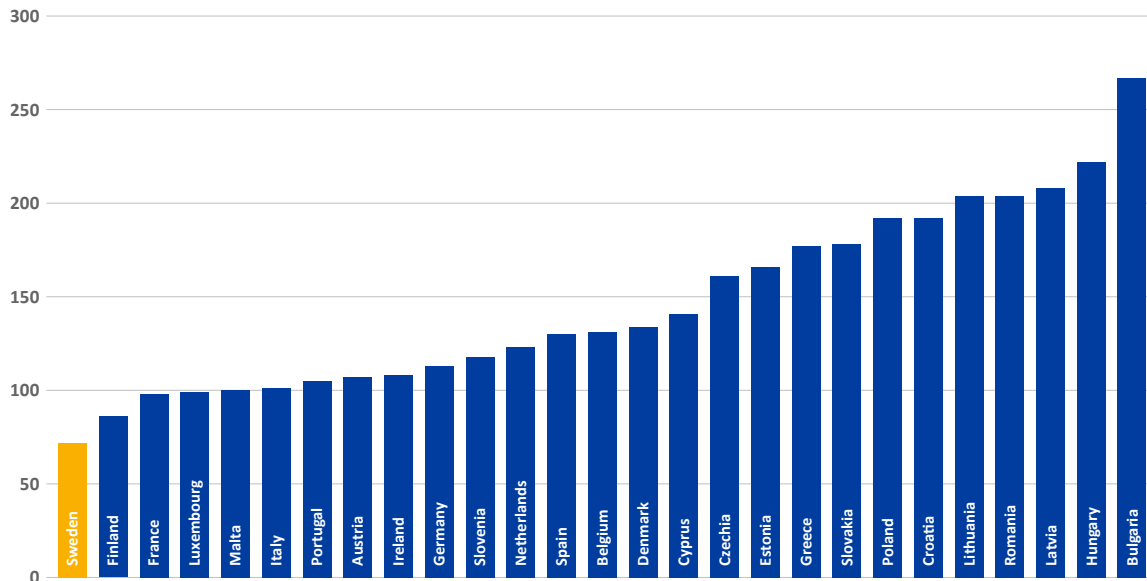
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Male deaths per 100,00 attributable to tobacco in the European Union, all causes, age-standardized (GBD, 2019)



Lars M. Ramström: National availability of snus is clearly associated with lower rates of mortality attributable to tobacco—while country-level implementation of WHO tobacco control measures is not, *Global Forum on Nicotine 2022*, <https://gfn.events/new-research/lars-m-ramstrom-2022/>

What can other EU countries learn from Sweden?

Sweden's progress puts it less than 1% away from achieving "smoke-free" status—which, like the targets set by most governments across the world, requires the country to achieve a smoking prevalence rate below 5%.

The European Union has set its Member States the task of becoming "smoke-free" by 2040. However, unless a dramatic shift in progress

occurs, most seem likely to fall short of this target by some distance. Sweden is the only country set to achieve this incredible milestone, 17 years ahead of the EU target date and long before every other nation has even begun to see progress.

The case of Sweden provides clear evidence that smoke-free alternatives can complement existing tobacco control measures to reduce smoking rates—and potentially smoking-attributable diseases—faster than traditional measures alone.

Science-backed, smoke-free alternatives can complement existing measures to help address the global health issue of smoking by providing an avenue for adults who don't quit tobacco and nicotine altogether to make a better choice than continued smoking. Coupled with the right regulatory encouragement and support from society, we can reach a smoke-free future, faster.

¹ Effect of smokeless tobacco (snus) on smoking and public health in Sweden: v012p00349.pdf (nih.gov)

² Användning av tobaks- och nikotinprodukter (självrporterat) efter ålder, kön och år. Andel (procent).. PxWeb (folkhalsomyndigheten.se)

³ <https://www.hpb.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/national-population-health-survey-2019.pdf>

⁴ Snuskommissionen_rapport3_eng_PRINT.pdf (snusforumet.se)

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