



Swedish tobacco policy

Key takeaways in reducing smoking and the challenges that remain

What is snus?

Tobacco snus is a smoke-free tobacco product made from tobacco leaves, usually in a small pouch, which is placed between the gum and upper lip. Historically, tobacco snus has mainly been used by men.

Research into a link between tobacco snus and cancer is inconclusive, partly due to the lack of sufficient independent research into the health effects of tobacco snus. There is research showing an increased risk of certain cancers, including cancer of the pancreas, oesophagus, stomach and rectum. Studies have also shown that using snus increases the risk of dying following a cancer diagnosis, a stroke or a heart attack. There are also studies indicating an increased risk of other diseases such as type 2 diabetes. Women are advised against using snus during pregnancy, as this can cause complications such as premature birth or respiratory distress in the newborn baby.

A Swedish research review shows that over time, more snus users start smoking compared with people who do not use snus. There is no scientific evidence that using snus helps people to give up smoking.

Nicotine snus, also known as nicotine pouches or white snus, is used in the same way as tobacco snus but does not contain tobacco leaves. Nicotine snus contains nicotine (often extracted from the tobacco plant) and other plant fibres. Nicotine snus was launched in Sweden in 2016 and is not covered by EU law. As yet, it is too early to conduct research into the long-term health impacts of nicotine snus.

The publication uses the term “snus”, which includes both tobacco snus and nicotine snus, internationally known as “nicotine pouches”.

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Sweden's road to reduced smoking – takeaways and future challenges

Tobacco use is one of the world's greatest risk factors for premature death and a major preventable risk factor for non-communicable diseases like cancer.

In Sweden alone, smoking causes 4,500 cases of cancer every year and is still one of the biggest preventable risk factors for cancer. Although Sweden has one of the lowest smoking rates in the world, total use of tobacco and nicotine products remains a significant public health challenge. Sweden's example has attracted international interest, especially regarding the use of legislation, tax increases and extensive public health initiatives to reduce smoking.

A comprehensive policy

Sweden carried out a number of important policy changes early on, and then continued its prevention efforts in the following decades, leading to Sweden's low smoking rate. Reducing the availability of and demand for cigarettes and making smoking less socially acceptable were success factors in reducing smoking in Sweden, achieved by means of legislation that changed social norms. Greater access to services helping people to stop smoking (tobacco cessation) has also been an important factor. During the 1990's, Sweden implemented powerful measures that had discouraging and normative effects, stemming from the first regulations in the 1960's when the National Board of Medicine was given an annual mandate to inform the public of the health risks of tobacco smoking. In 2005, Sweden was one of the first countries in Europe to introduce an indoor smoking ban in restaurants, cafés and bars, a measure that proved to be effective

and was then followed by an outdoor smoking ban in all such establishments with outdoor seating areas.

Use of tobacco and nicotine products is rising

There is still a need for additional measures to reduce smoking further across all groups of society. At the same time, Sweden currently faces new challenges. The use of other tobacco and nicotine products has increased significantly in recent years, especially among young women. New products such as nicotine snus and e-cigarettes, also known as vapes, have changed the tobacco landscape, raising questions about how future regulation and public health interventions should be designed.

Sweden's low daily smoking rate makes it unique in Europe. Sweden also stands out as the only EU country with an exemption allowing the sale of tobacco snus.

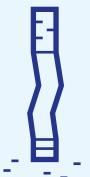
The tobacco industry often seeks to claim a link between Sweden's low smoking rate and the consumption of tobacco snus; a claim for which there is no scientific evidence. In 2016, the tobacco industry launched a new type of snus on the market, a nicotine snus which does not contain parts of the tobacco plant, so circumventing both Swedish and European law. From 2016 to 2022, nicotine snus was completely unregulated and quickly became established among the very youngest users. Today, one in three girls at upper secondary school uses nicotine snus. The fact that nicotine snus is not covered by the EU's snus ban means it has been possible to export it.

This publication sheds light on what can be learned from Swedish tobacco policy and identifies the challenges that remain.

Success factors in reducing smoking in Sweden

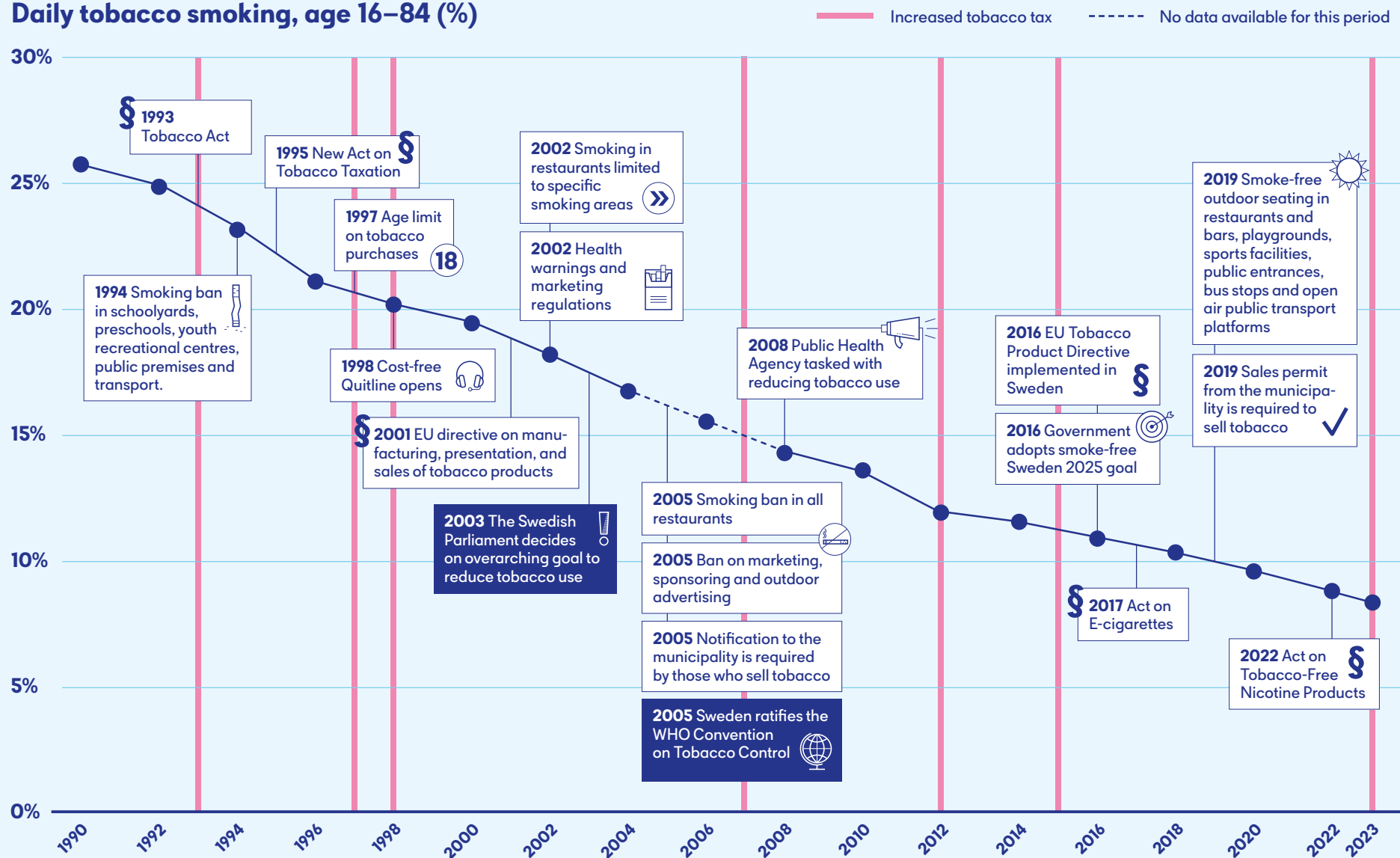
1. Reduced access to products
2. Reduced demand for and social acceptance of smoking cigarettes
3. Greater access to smoking cessation programmes.

Source: Public Health Agency of Sweden



Tobacco policy measures to reduce smoking in Sweden

Daily tobacco smoking, age 16–84 (%)



Source: Surveys of living conditions 1990–2023: Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) conducted by Statistics Sweden

Strong measures led to reduced smoking rates

In the past 40 years, daily smoking has steadily declined in Sweden. The first measures to reduce smoking began in the 1960s and were expanded into a broad tobacco prevention programme from the 1990s onwards.

Efforts to prevent the use of tobacco have had a long-term focus and been run jointly by several different actors at international, national, regional and local level. Tax regulation, age limits on buying tobacco, strict marketing regulations and a widespread smoking ban are some examples of measures that have had an impact.

Legislation and tax

In Sweden, the sale of tobacco and its use are regulated by several central pieces of legislation, such as the [Act \(2018:2088\) on Tobacco and Similar Products](#). The act regulates how tobacco products and e-cigarettes can be sold, marketed and packaged, including requiring a clear health warning on the packaging. The age limit making it illegal to sell tobacco products to people under the age of 18 is an important element of the act.

A widespread ban on smoking is another important element in the Act on Tobacco and Similar Products. The smoking ban includes all restaurants, cafés and bars, as well as school grounds and workplaces. Smoking is also banned in some public outdoor spaces – such as

the entrances to public buildings and playgrounds, the outdoor areas of restaurants and bars, and sporting arenas – as well as on trains, buses and other means of public transport.

First passed in 1995, [Act \(2022:155\) on Tobacco Tax](#) has enabled several increases in tax on cigarettes and tobacco snus since the 1990s as a measure to reduce tobacco consumption. Tobacco taxes have been adjusted to keep pace with inflation and to make tobacco products less attractive.

In 2022, Sweden passed the [Act \(2022:1257\) on Tobacco-Free Nicotine Products](#) to regulate nicotine snus, which governs the sale and use of nicotine products that do not contain tobacco. The act expands the scope of regulation to cover these new products, protecting public health and preventing them being targeted at young people. Here too, the age limit for buying the products is 18. The act also regulates marketing but whereas the marketing of cigarettes and tobacco snus is prohibited, it is legal to market nicotine snus to people over the age of 25.

Taxation of nicotine snus and other nicotine products is regulated under the [Act \(2018:696\) on Taxation of Certain Products Containing Nicotine](#). Tax on nicotine products is lower than that on other tobacco products, which means that the price of nicotine snus, for example, is low in Sweden.

Application and implementation of legislation

Regulation has played a major role in reducing smoking, but implementation and enforcement are important too. Enforcement of tobacco-related legislation in Sweden is a collaborative effort involving several government agencies and actors at local, regional and national level, enabling effective oversight of compliance.

The Public Health Agency of Sweden, a nationwide government agency, takes a leading role in efforts to reduce tobacco consumption. It contributes to the long-term strategy of positively influencing public health by providing guidance on healthy lifestyles, and gathering and analysing data on tobacco use.

The Swedish Tax Agency has an important supervisory role, especially in terms of tracking and controlling the sale of tobacco products. The Swedish Tax Agency is responsible for ensuring that tax on tobacco products



Sweden put a number of crucial policy changes in place early on, and continued these measures over time, leading to Sweden's low smoking rate.



is paid correctly and that tobacco is not sold without payment of the correct taxes and duties. The agency also monitors illegal tobacco sales to prevent smuggling and sale on the black market.

Furthermore, there are 290 municipalities in Sweden which are responsible for ensuring compliance with the regulations on tobacco sales and smoking bans. A specific permit is needed to sell tobacco, issued by the municipal supervisory units. Inspectors visit shops regularly to check compliance with the rules, preventing sale to minors and ensuring that products are labelled correctly. The municipalities also carry out test purchases, where a person who appears to be under the age of 18 tries to buy tobacco to check whether the shops are complying with the age restriction. Compliance with the smoking ban in public places and workplaces is also subject to supervision. Sanctions such as warnings or fines are issued for failure to comply with the ban, and in some cases the sales licence may be withdrawn. Repeated infringements, specifically such as recurring sales to minors or serious non-compliance with the statutory requirements, can lead to the licence being withdrawn.

Smoking cessation services

In Sweden, smoking cessation services have been an important tool to help people to stop smoking since the 1990s. In 1998, Sweden launched a free national helpline, a Quitline, providing support and advice to people looking to stop smoking. The Quitline methods and results have been continuously monitored and studied. The line is staffed by people from different key professions in healthcare, dentistry and behavioural science, all of whom are trained in tobacco cessation and in motivational interviewing (MI).

The healthcare system, which is publicly funded and accessible to all, also offers smoking cessation services free of charge. This system means that everyone can access help to stop smoking, whatever their financial situation.

Smoke-free environments have been a contributory factor in changing the norms around smoking in Sweden.

Use of tobacco and nicotine products in Sweden

Over the years, Sweden has implemented crucial policy changes which have led to a low daily smoking rate. However, Sweden is not smoke free. Smoking is still the cause of most preventable cases of cancer in Sweden every year.

The WHO recommends that countries measure smoking in terms of “current use”, in other words total smoking including both daily smoking and occasional smoking. In Sweden, the total proportion of people who smoke is 11 percent, while the proportion of daily smokers is 5 percent. However, there are major differences between different population groups. Daily smoking is almost four times as common in people with only compulsory education (11 percent) than in people who have completed university/higher education (3 percent) (Figure 1).

This leads to roughly three times as many cases of cancer linked to smoking in people with lower levels of education, compared with people with higher education.

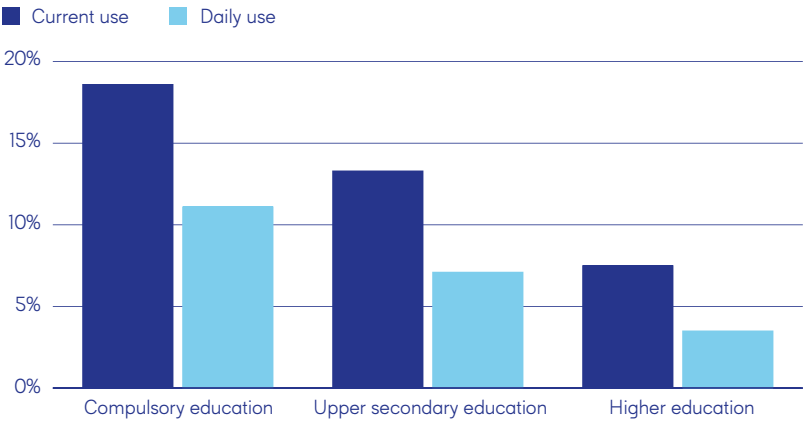
For much of the 2000s, use of snus in Sweden remained largely at the same levels, but use started to rise after 2016, coinciding with the tobacco industry launching new products on the market. This increase has mainly occurred among women.

From 2016 to 2024, the use of snus, both tobacco snus and nicotine snus, soared among women, rising from 6 percent to 13 percent (daily or occasionally). Among men, the increase was only four percentage points over the same period. Figure 2 shows the decrease in daily smoking over time among women, and the increase in daily snus use over the last couple of years.

The total proportion using tobacco and/or nicotine products (daily or occasionally) was 28 percent in 2024 (22 percent in women and 34 percent in men).

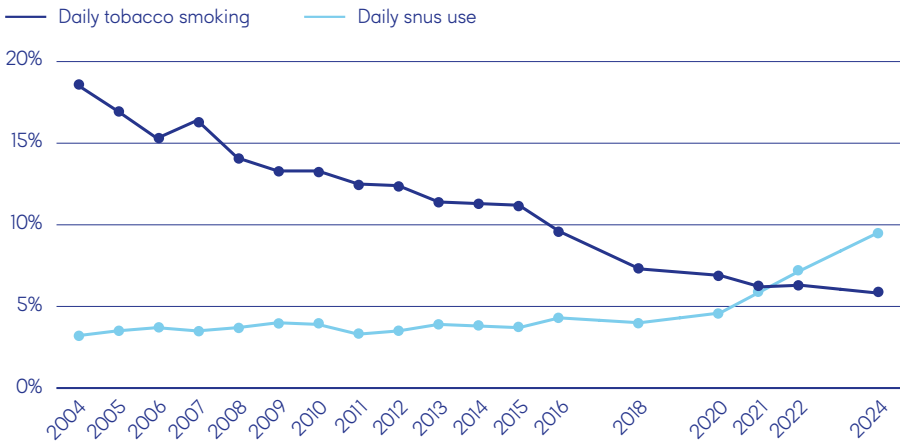
Where the term “snus” is used, this includes both tobacco snus and nicotine snus, internationally known as “nicotine pouches”.

Figure 1. Tobacco smoking, age 25–84, 2024



Source: Public Health Agency of Sweden, National Public Health Survey, current use, age standardised data

Figure 2. Daily smoking and snus use in Sweden, women aged 16–84



Source: Public Health Agency of Sweden, National Public Health Survey

New challenges as use increases among young people

Tobacco and nicotine use is growing among young people, and the significant increase in the use of snus by young women is particularly concerning. Despite the age restrictions, minors manage to access these products.

Cigarette smoking in schoolchildren has fallen considerably since the 2010s. However, this decline has stalled in the past three years and a slight increase has been seen among 17-year-olds. In 2024, 21 percent of 17-year-olds stated that they smoked. Smoking is slightly more common among girls than among boys (Figure 3).

Total tobacco use in young people aged 16-29 is higher than in the population as a whole. The proportion of young people aged 16-29 who use tobacco and/or nicotine products (daily or occasionally) is 35 percent. There are small gender differences in usage.

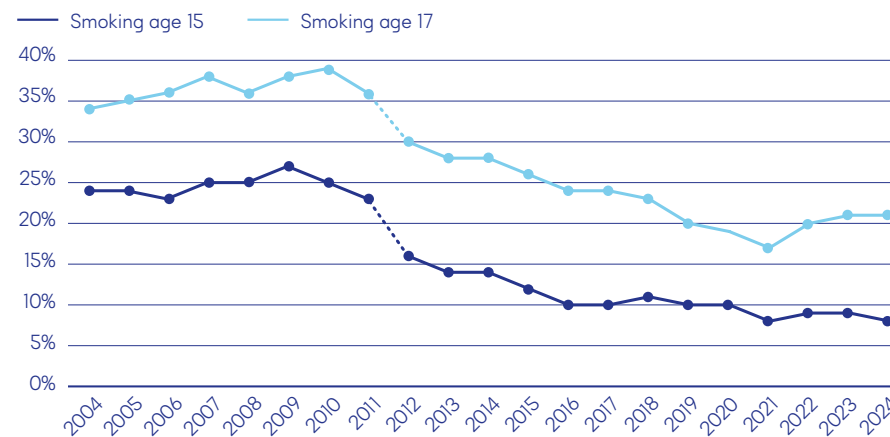
The use of snus among young people aged 16-29 has increased in the 2000s. It is worth highlighting that this increase is strongly linked to consumption by young women. In 2018, only 3 percent of young women used snus daily. Today almost one in five young women do so, equivalent to an increase of 500 percent in just six years (Figure 4). This can be compared with the population as a whole, where the proportion using snus daily increased from 11 percent to 16 percent in the same period, equivalent to an increase of 31 percent (Figure 4).

Although Sweden has been successful in many areas, the growing use of new tobacco and nicotine products, especially among young people, shows that challenges remain.

The same trend is seen in the very youngest users. The proportion of 15-year-old girls who use snus (daily or occasionally) has increased from 3 percent to 14 percent. Because an age limit of 18 applies to both tobacco snus and nicotine snus, it is concerning that so many children are getting hold of tobacco and nicotine products, indicating that although Sweden has legislation aimed at preventing the sale of tobacco to minors, this legislation does not go far enough (Figure 5).

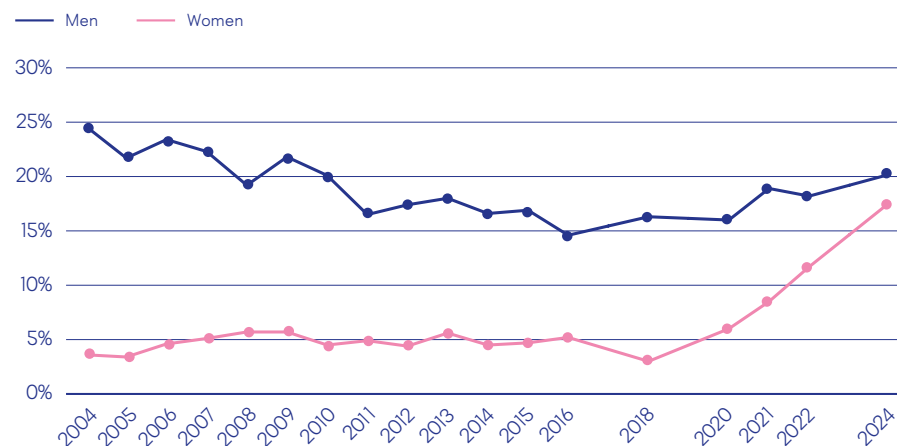
If we look at the use of nicotine snus and e-cigarettes (vapes) across the population, it is clear that both products are considerably more popular among the youngest groups and least popular among the oldest groups. The use of e-cigarettes doubled between 2022 and 2024, but still remains low in the population as a whole. E-cigarettes are mainly used by young people (Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 3. Tobacco smoking in young people in Sweden



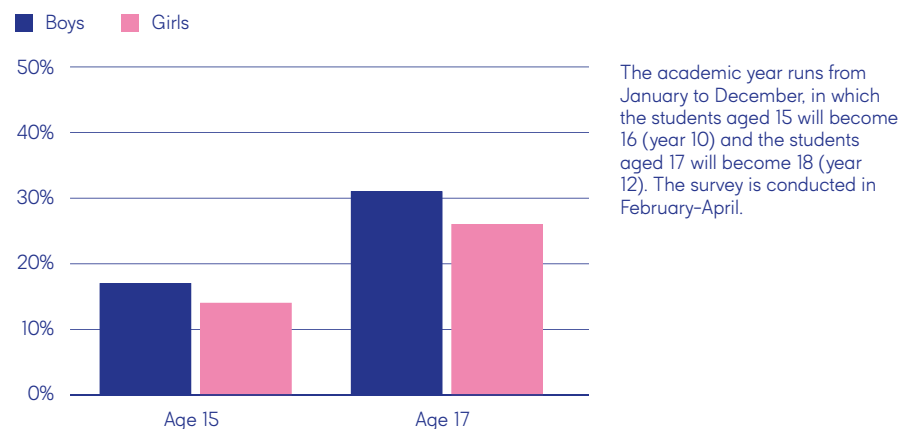
Source: Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN), National School Survey, current use

Figure 4. Daily snus use, age 16–29



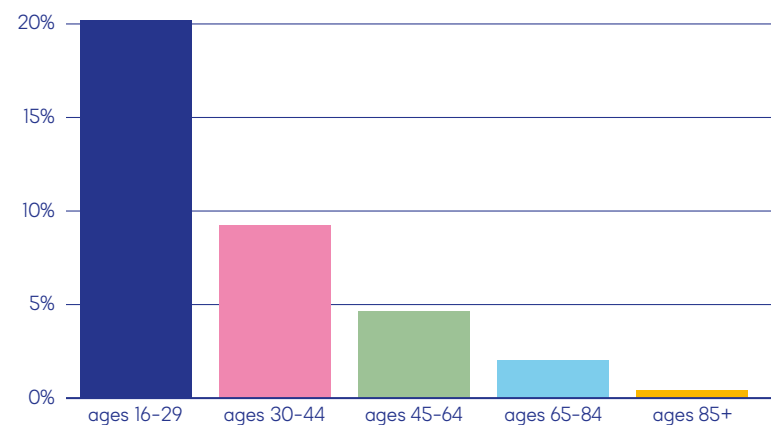
Source: Public Health Agency of Sweden, National Public Health Survey

Figure 5. Use of snus in young people in Sweden, 2024



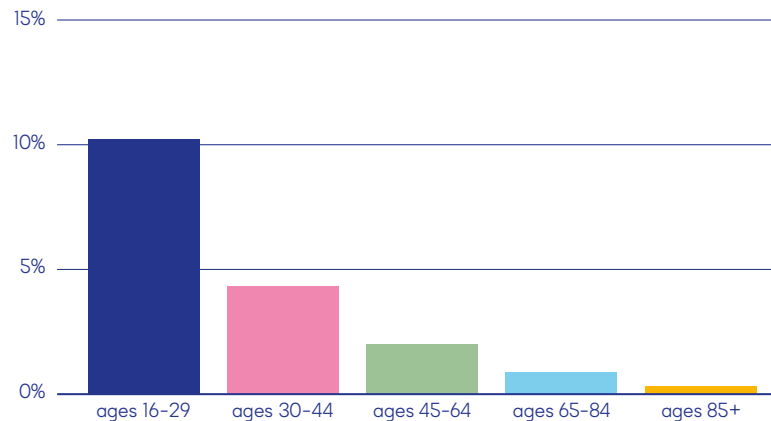
Source: Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN), National School Survey, current use

Figure 6. Nicotine snus use, 2024



Source: Public Health Agency of Sweden, National Public Health Survey, current use

Figure 7. E-cigarette use, 2024



Source: Public Health Agency of Sweden, National Public Health Survey, current use

Sweden's experience can guide other countries

Sweden has been successful in reducing smoking thanks to a long-term, research-based, comprehensive tobacco policy.

Measures such as consistent tax increases, clear legislation on the sale of tobacco and smoke-free environments, and early introduction of smoking cessation services have been crucial in reducing smoking. Sweden's success is the result of the interaction between many factors over a long period: strong regulation, an active public health strategy, and policy decisions focusing on making it harder to start smoking and easier to stop.

Snus is not a smoking cessation product

It is sometimes claimed that snus is the explanation for Sweden's low smoking rate. However, there is no scientific evidence for such an assertion. Snus is not a smoking cessation product. Quite the opposite, people who use e-cigarettes or tobacco snus are more likely to start smoking over time, compared with people who do not use e-cigarettes or snus. Young people who use snus or e-cigarettes are more than four times more likely to also smoke cigarettes, compared with young people in general. The increased use of snus in recent years is not driven by former smokers switching products, but by an increase in use among new target groups such as women and young people.

A comprehensive policy covering all products

Although Sweden has been successful in many areas, the growing use of new tobacco and nicotine products, especially among young people, shows that challenges remain. Snus and e-cigarettes have changed the tobacco landscape and continued work is needed to reduce tobacco use and prevent young people becoming nicotine-dependent. It is therefore vital that policy continues to be dynamic, and covers all tobacco and

nicotine products, not only cigarettes. Experience from Sweden can serve as guidance for other countries that also want to reduce smoking, but instead of focusing on specific products, other nations should seek to introduce a comprehensive and integrated tobacco policy. This involves complying with the WHO's Tobacco Convention, actively combatting the influence of the tobacco industry and ensuring that effective measures are in place to reduce the use of all products developed by the tobacco industry.

Effective and powerful measures to reduce tobacco and nicotine consumption are vital in ensuring that fewer people get cancer and other non-communicable diseases. In 2021, the European Commission presented Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, which seeks to reduce the number of people who are diagnosed with and die from cancer. The Cancer Plan includes a long-term objective of reducing tobacco consumption across Europe. The target of a tobacco-free generation by 2040, where less than 5 percent of the population use tobacco, demonstrates the EU's commitment to eliminating tobacco consumption in Europe.

Achieving a tobacco-free 2040

If we are to achieve this goal, it is crucial that the EU includes all non-medicinal nicotine products in the Tobacco Products Directive and the Tobacco Taxation Directive. These products should be covered by the same rules on age limits, flavourings and nicotine content. It is also important to introduce requirements on plain packaging to reduce the attractiveness of all tobacco and nicotine products.

The Swedish Cancer Society wants the EU to:

- ✓ Include non-medicinal nicotine products (nicotine snus, different types of e-cigarettes, etc.) in the Tobacco Products Directive. These products should be covered by the same rules on age limits, flavourings and nicotine content and a ban should be introduced on misleading health claims on tobacco products.
- ✓ Include non-medicinal nicotine products in the Tobacco Taxation Directive and increase tax levels regularly.
- ✓ Introduce requirements on plain packaging without logos.
- ✓ Ban advertising of nicotine products in the same way as for tobacco products.
- ✓ Apply the precautionary principle regarding all new products.
- ✓ Require that companies are able to present an acceptable analysis of the potential health impacts of a product at individual and population level before a product can be launched on the European market.

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The Swedish Cancer Society's vision is to beat cancer. We are working to ensure that fewer people get cancer and more people survive cancer by funding cutting-edge research, spreading awareness of cancer and influencing decision-makers.

The Swedish Cancer Society is an independent, non-profit, non-subsidised organisation. Our work relies entirely on bequests and donations from individuals and companies.

We are one of the largest funders of Swedish cancer research. Since 1951, we have awarded more than SEK 16 billion to the foremost research projects in Sweden. Cancer survival has more than doubled over the same period. Thanks to research advances, today seven out of ten people who get cancer survive. We have come a long way but we are not there yet.

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