

PATH TO
SMOKE-FREE

WE ARE INNOVATION

BRIEFING PAPER

What Nicotine Pouches Could Do for Türkiye

The case for opening a legal pathway

September 2026

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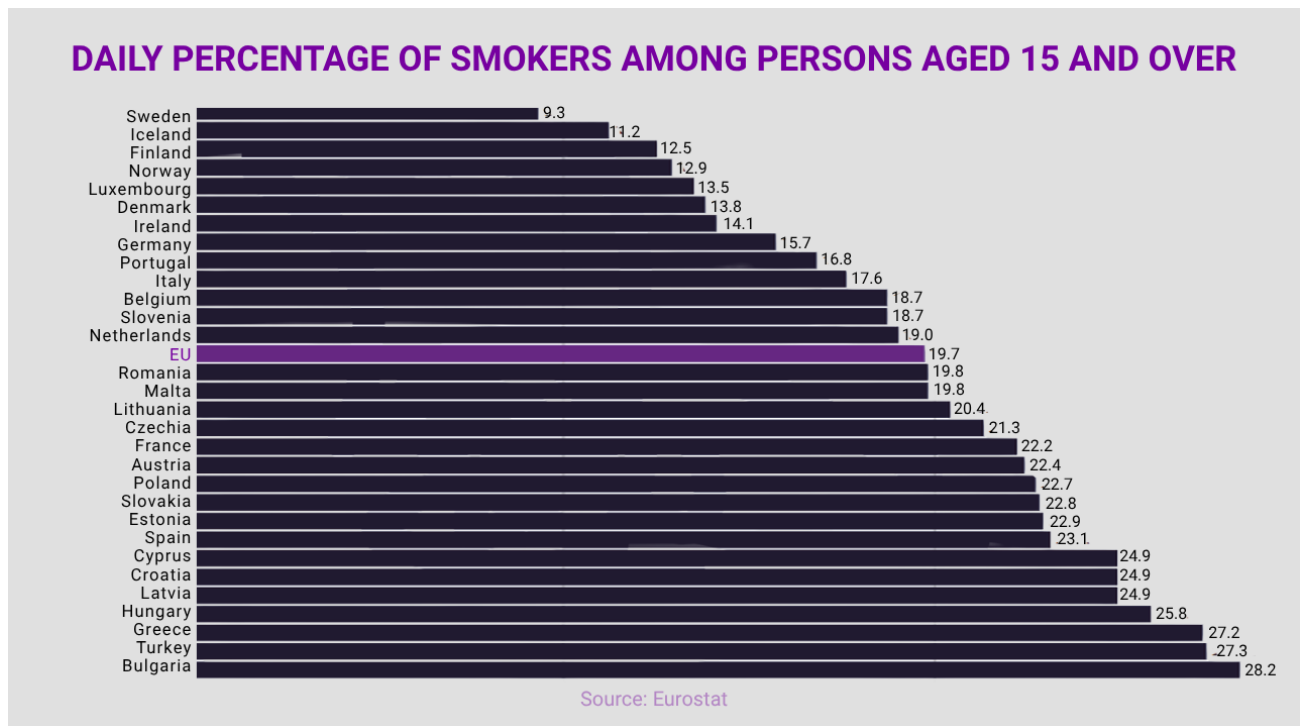
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Executive Summary

Türkiye has one of the highest smoking rates in the world and the second highest in Europe. Around 30 percent of adults smoke, or close to 32 million people, a rate that has declined only modestly over two decades. According to Eurostat data cited by Euronews, the countries that smoke the most in the EU are Bulgaria, then Türkiye, Greece, Hungary, and Latvia. Approximately 85,000 deaths are attributable to tobacco each year. At the current pace of decline, the [Path to Smoke-Free](#) platform projects that Türkiye will not reach smoke-free status until well into the 23rd century. At Sweden's pace it would arrive in 2071; even at the pace of the world's fastest-moving countries, not until 2088.



Nicotine pouches are small, tobacco-free pouches placed between the upper lip and gum. They contain nicotine derived from the tobacco plant but no tobacco leaf, no combustion, and no smoke. The user receives a controlled nicotine release over a period of around thirty minutes and then discards the pouch. Unlike cigarettes, they produce no ash, no smell, and no secondhand smoke. In June 2026, the US Food and Drug Administration took the unusual step of authorizing ZYN nicotine pouches to be marketed with a specific modified risk claim: “Using ZYN instead of cigarettes puts you at a lower risk of mouth cancer, heart disease, lung cancer, stroke, emphysema, and chronic bronchitis.” That sentence, vetted through an extensive FDA scientific review, is now permitted to appear on product packaging in the United States.

Products of this kind were [central](#) to Sweden's transformation from one of Europe's heaviest-smoking nations to its least. In Türkiye they are de facto banned. No legislative text explicitly prohibits them, but the absence of any regulatory framework for their sale amounts to the same thing. The result is that a product the FDA now formally classifies as lower risk than cigarettes is unavailable to Turkish smokers, while cigarettes remain freely sold on every street corner.

A proposed 2040 ban on all tobacco and nicotine product sales risks closing the last exit before the door is fully open. This report examines where Türkiye stands, what the evidence says about nicotine pouches, and what a rational policy pathway would look like.

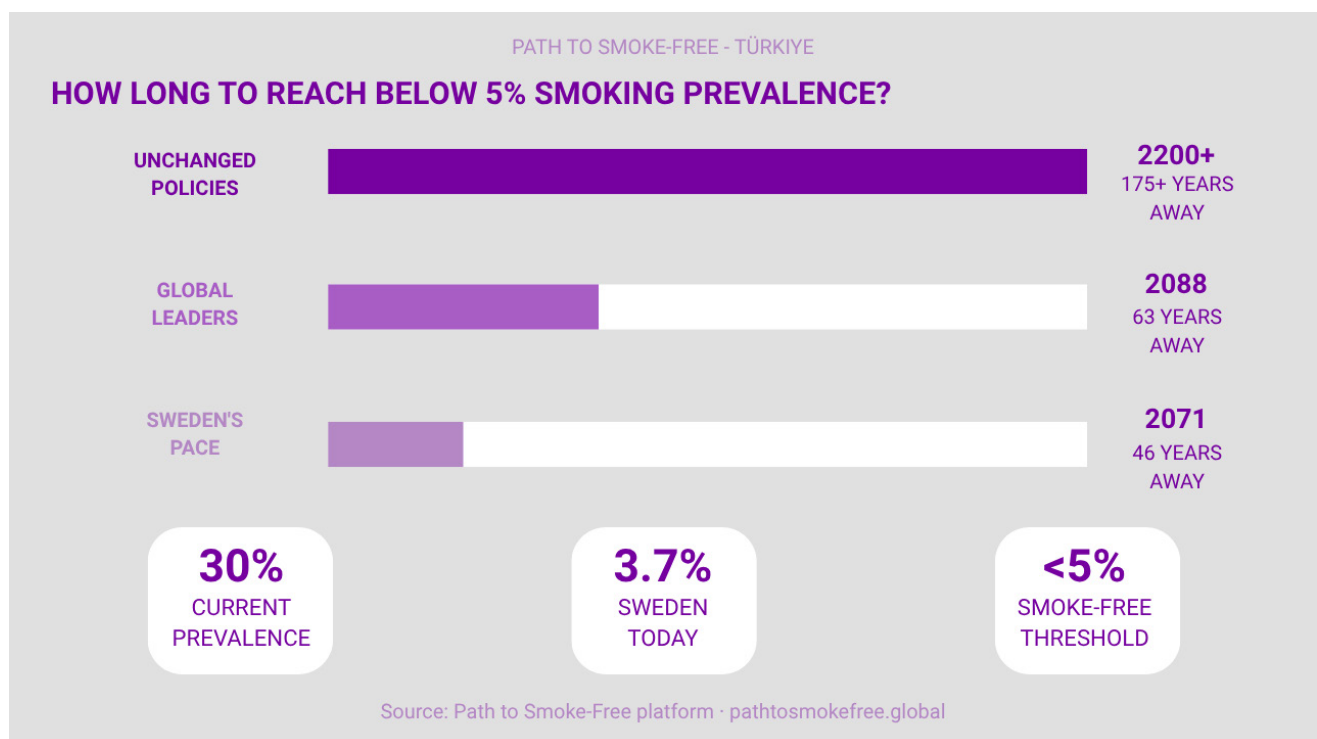
Introduction

Although many nations are moving forward, Sweden is the only country in the European Union that [has become](#) smoke-free, defined as a prevalence below 5 percent. Its route was built in part on oral nicotine products, including snus and, more recently, nicotine pouches. The latter have proven to be a game changer for women, contributing to a significant decline in smoking prevalence within this population group.

Sweden's smoking rate today stands at 3.7 percent. Türkiye's stands at 30 percent or almost 32 million of Turks.

The distance between those two numbers is partly a matter of policy. While the Swedish population had access to innovative nicotine products (INPs), Türkiye has banned virtually every smoke-free alternative on the market, from vaping to heated tobacco; although nicotine pouches are not officially banned in Türkiye, they are not regulated and this makes them unavailable on the market. The limited understanding of these products among regulatory authorities has also created uncertainty regarding how INPs including nicotine pouches should be regulated leaving combustible cigarettes as the only legally available nicotine product for most consumers.

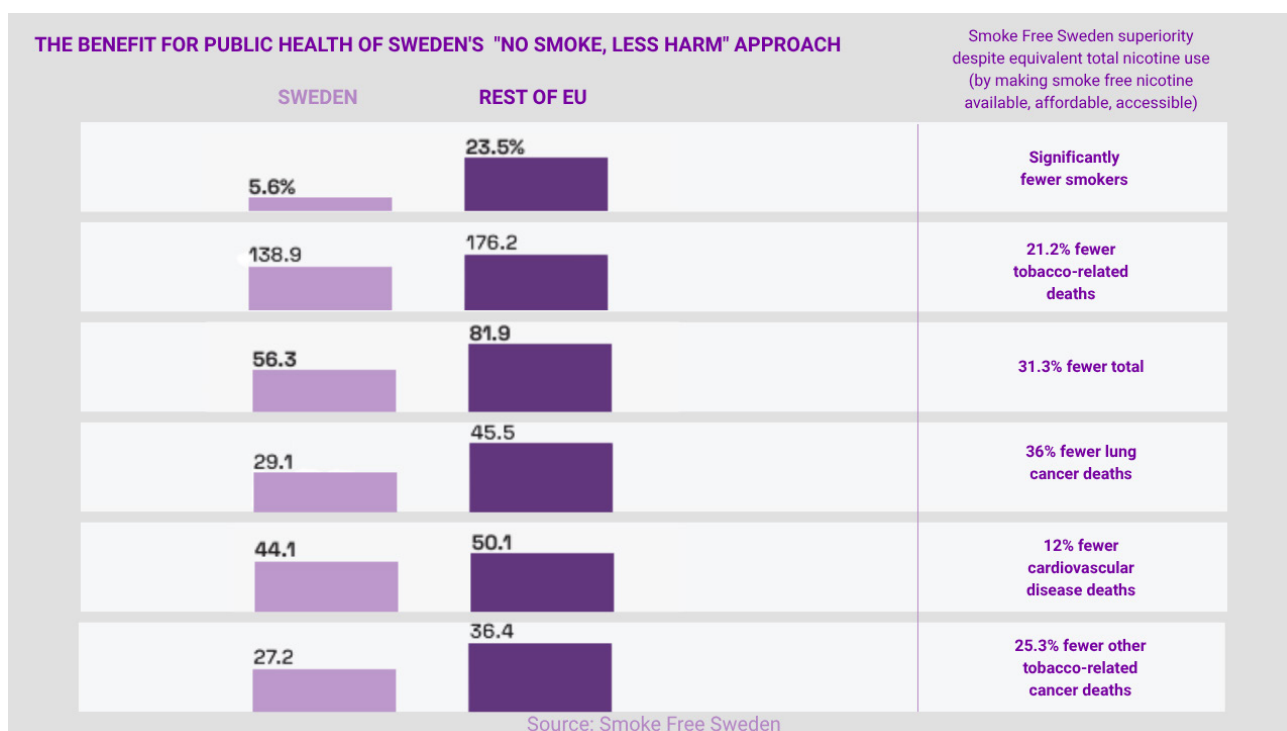
The Path to Smoke-Free is a platform which reveals how countries can harness innovation to defeat smoking and accelerate their journey toward smoke-free status. While Sweden is a benchmark for this scoring system Türkiye scores at 78 out of 101 on its overall index, a rating indicating serious underperformance. Accessibility of nicotine pouches scores near zero. Acceptability scores zero. Affordability scores zero. These are not the metrics of a country on a credible path to reducing smoking deaths.



This report focuses on nicotine pouches, small tobacco-free pouches placed between the lip and gum that deliver nicotine without combustion, smoke, or tobacco leaf, because they represent one of the most promising tools available for reaching smokers who have not responded to conventional cessation approaches.

The Scale of the Problem

Every year, approximately 85,000 people in Türkiye die from causes attributable to smoking. The Path to Smoke-Free platform puts current smoking prevalence at 30 percent, consistent with WHO trend data showing slow decline: from 32.9 percent in 2000 to a projected 29.9 percent in 2025. That trajectory, extrapolated, places the smoke-free threshold conventionally defined as below 5 percent somewhere beyond 2200.



The public health system bears an enormous load. Smoking-related disability-adjusted life-years [represent](#) a substantial share of the national burden of disease, though official government sources have not published comprehensive estimates. The Turkish Medical Association has reported prevalence figures consistent with WHO data, confirming the scale of the challenge.

Total tobacco product consumption among adults is not confined to cigarettes. According to available survey data, other nicotine categories, though prohibited, show adult incidence usage of 4.6 percent or more than 3 million people. Within that figure, nicotine pouches [account](#) for only 0.3 percent, a negligible share reflecting both the de facto ban and the absence of any legal market. Illicit trade in nicotine pouches does not at present represent a material enforcement problem, but the broader [illicit](#) tobacco market cost the government an estimated 100 billion Turkish lira (approximately 3 billion euros) in lost excise and VAT revenues in a recent year.

What the Science Says About Nicotine Pouches

The scientific and regulatory evidence on nicotine pouches has been accumulating for several years, and the direction of that evidence is reasonably consistent.

The US Food and Drug Administration, following an extensive review, concluded that:

“these nicotine pouch products have the potential to provide a benefit to adults who smoke cigarettes and/or use other smokeless tobacco products that is sufficient to outweigh the risks of the products, including to youth. [...] due to substantially lower amounts of harmful constituents than cigarettes and most smokeless tobacco products, such as moist snuff and snus, the authorized products pose lower risk of cancer and other serious health conditions than such products.”

Germany’s Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) reached a parallel conclusion:

“switching from cigarettes to nicotine pouches could represent a reduction in health risks for a person who smokes. However, measures should be taken to avoid that use of nicotine pouches leads to a higher nicotine intake compared with other products on the market.”

The Romanian Government, commenting on a proposed ban on nicotine pouches at EU level, stated that “nicotine pouches represent a lower-risk alternative to traditional cigarettes and can contribute to smoking reduction.” The Czech Government added that “nicotine pouches do not contain tobacco, do not burn, do not create smoke or ash” and are intended for smokers as an alternative to conventional cigarettes.

These assessments align with the position of the Swedish Government, which has described the replacement of cigarettes by oral nicotine products as “a positive development from a public health perspective,” pointing to Sweden’s significantly lower lung cancer mortality compared to the EU average as evidence.

The Regulatory Vacuum and Its Costs

Nicotine pouches fall outside the jurisdiction of both the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture, which governs tobacco products, and the Ministry of Health, which governs medicinal products. Because they contain neither tobacco nor approved active pharmaceutical ingredients, they occupy a regulatory gap that effectively prevents market entry. No consultation or draft proposal to establish a regulatory pathway is publicly known to be under development as of mid-2026.

The consequences of this vacuum are not neutral. Turkish smokers who are aware of nicotine pouches cannot access them legally. Those who seek them out operate outside any consumer protection framework, with no quality control, no age verification, and no nicotine strength limits. The informal market creates enforcement risk without delivering the public health benefits that a well-designed regulatory framework could provide.

There is, however, a practical path forward that does not require building an entirely new regulatory architecture from scratch. Across EU member states, two broad approaches to nicotine pouch regulation have emerged. Some countries have introduced product-specific frameworks and assigned oversight to a designated authority, typically a health or medicines regulator. Others have classified nicotine pouches as general consumer products and placed them under the jurisdiction of ministries responsible for consumer product regulation, most commonly the equivalent of a Ministry of Trade. Both approaches have proven workable in practice.

Türkiye could adopt the second model as an immediate first step. Classifying nicotine pouches as general consumer products under the authority of the Ministry of Trade would allow a legal framework to be established within a relatively short timeframe, without waiting for the more complex process of developing product-specific tobacco or pharmaceutical regulation. It would bring the category out of the regulatory void and into a supervised market, with standards for product safety, age restrictions, and labelling. Given the scale of Türkiye’s smoking problem and the pace at which the proposed 2040 ban is advancing through the legislative pipeline, the window for establishing such a framework is narrowing. Acting through the Ministry of Trade would allow the government to open a legal pathway for nicotine pouches before that window closes.

That window may be closing faster than it appears. The draft legislation [reportedly](#) being prepared by the governing party would ban the sale of all tobacco products from 1 January 2040. The bill as described in media reports would extend Türkiye’s existing definition of tobacco products to include “all products containing organic or synthetic nicotine,” which would encompass nicotine pouches. If enacted in that form, nicotine pouches would be prohibited under the same framework as cigarettes, eliminating the category’s potential as a harm-reduction tool before it has been permitted to function. A product the FDA formally classifies as lower risk than cigarettes would be banned alongside the cigarettes it could replace.

The experience of EU member states that have [regulated](#) nicotine pouches rather than prohibited them points in a different direction. Age restrictions, maximum nicotine strength caps, and flavour limitations have proven sufficient to protect consumers and limit youth access, without removing from the market a product that is helping smokers exit combustion. That is the outcome Türkiye’s 2040 legislation claims to pursue. Banning nicotine pouches under the same heading as cigarettes would undermine it.

The Household Dimension

Quitting smoking delivers benefits that extend well beyond the individual. A May 2026 [survey](#) conducted by Ipsos on behalf of We Are Innovation, covering over 4,000 individuals across five countries who live with or are close to former smokers, documented those benefits in detail. The research found that innovative nicotine products, including nicotine pouches, played a meaningful role in helping smokers quit traditional cigarettes, and that friends and family members reported noticeably greater positive changes when their loved ones used such products to quit. Those who used INPs during cessation demonstrated markedly improved emotional well-being compared to those who quit without them, according to the accounts of people close to them. Survey respondents also expressed overwhelming support

for adult smokers' rights to access innovative nicotine products.

In Türkiye, where 30 percent of adults or almost 32 million Turks smoke, the potential gains are substantial. A regulatory framework that gives smokers access to nicotine pouches is both a matter of individual choice as well as household well-being and wider social benefit.

The Gap Between Türkiye and Sweden

The gap between Türkiye and Sweden represents a difference in policy philosophy. Sweden allowed innovation, making smoking obsolete. Türkiye has, by regulatory default, removed that lever from the toolkit entirely.

The Swedish former MEP Johan Nissinen [put the point](#) plainly:

“Sweden is proof of the public health advantages that come from embracing snus and nicotine pouches instead of cigarettes.”

Türkiye is currently proof of what happens when those alternatives are absent. At Sweden's pace, Türkiye could reach smoke-free status by 2071. At the world's fastest pace, by 2088. Either outcome represents a generational improvement on the current trajectory. Both require treating nicotine pouches as a tool rather than a threat.

Javed Khan, author of the UK Government's independent review of Smokefree 2030 policies, [captured](#) the underlying principle:

“The government must facilitate access to the various already available safer alternative nicotine products such as nicotine pouches (a tobacco-free equivalent of snus), maximising their value to help smokers to quit, without creating new risks to young people.”

Conclusion

Türkiye is not a country that has ignored the tobacco problem. It has introduced some of the most stringent tobacco control measures in the world, earning recognition from the WHO and other public health organisations for its smoke-free indoor policies, advertising bans, graphic health warnings, and restrictions on point-of-sale display. By the conventional metrics of tobacco control, Türkiye has done much of what it was asked to do. And yet prevalence remains at 30 percent, second highest in Europe, and 85,000 people die from smoking-related causes every year. The measures have not been enough, because they have addressed only one side of the equation: making cigarettes less accessible and less appealing. They have done nothing to make alternatives available.

That is where nicotine pouches enter the picture. The proposed 2040 tobacco ban may reflect genuine public health ambition, but ambition without a harm-reduction component risks locking in the current situation rather than transforming it. Smokers who cannot access alternatives will not simply stop; they will continue to smoke. A regulatory framework for nicotine pouches, with age restrictions, flavour controls, and nicotine strength limits, would give those smokers a legal, lower-risk option while giving the state the oversight tools it needs. It would also be consistent with the approach of the EU member states Türkiye looks to as peers, and with the scientific conclusions of regulators from Washington to Berlin.

The distance between 30 percent smoking prevalence and smoke-free status is considerable. Nicotine pouches will not cover that distance alone. But a country that has already shown it can act decisively on tobacco control has the institutional capacity to regulate this category well. Closing the regulatory gap that currently makes nicotine pouches unavailable is the logical next step, and one that the scientific evidence, the experience of peer countries, and the welfare of Turkish households all support.



PATH TO SMOKE-FREE

Path to Smoke-Free is a comprehensive analytical platform developed by We Are Innovation that reveals how countries can harness innovation to defeat smoking and accelerate their journey toward smoke-free status. Drawing from Sweden's remarkable success in dramatically reducing smoking rates far below global averages—we identified three key elements: Accessibility, Acceptability, and Affordability of innovative nicotine products. Our platform combines comprehensive policy data with real insights from Swedish ex-smokers, offering interactive tools to compare how countries are harnessing innovation to defeat smoking. The platform features powerful forecasting charts that project smoking prevalence and when countries will reach smoke-free status under three scenarios: current policy trajectories, outcomes if countries matched Sweden's success rate, or results following the combined pace of leading nations. Policymakers, researchers, and health professionals can explore evidence-based strategies that could help their countries reach smoke-free targets faster, guided by proven success stories. Discover how your country could accelerate its journey to smoke-free status at <https://pathtosmokefree.global/>.

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We Are Innovation
The Future Is Calling. And We Are Ready to Answer

