

# Smoking ban takes effect in Austrian bars, restaurants

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A ban on smoking in Austrian bars and restaurants took effect Friday, making it one of the last European countries to stub out the habit in indoor public places after years of protracted debate and protests.

Parliamentarians approved the ban in July in a bid to rid Austria of its status as the "ashtray of Europe". Only members from the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) opposed the measure.

A quarter of the country's 8.8 million inhabitants smoke, exceeding the European average of 18 percent, but calls for bans dated back more than a decade.

The FPÖ—formerly led by a keen smoker—had stymied a previous attempt to ban [smoking](#) in pubs and restaurants when it entered the government in December 2017.

That prompted a backlash from large sections of the public and the Austrian medical association, which organised a petition in favour of the ban signed by almost 900,000 people, or around 14 percent of voters.

However, in May the FPÖ left government under the shadow of a corruption scandal, paving the way for the proposal to be voted again in parliament.

Up until now, smoking has been legal in bars and restaurants larger than 50 square metres (540 square feet) as long as it was done in a separate area—although this rule was not always rigidly implemented.

No separate area was necessary in smaller establishments if the owner was happy to allow smoking on the premises.

However, a growing number of restaurants and cafes had already banned smoking of their own accord.

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