



News release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

CANNABIS LAWS IN EUROPE: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR POLICYMAKING

New report describes growing complexity and change in cannabis laws in Europe

(05.06.2023, LISBON) What forms of cannabis regulation are under consideration in Europe? What types of cannabis are controlled? Are cosmetic and wellness products containing cannabis legal? These are among the questions answered in a new report out today from the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA)**. The report — ***Cannabis laws in Europe: questions and answers for policymaking*** — addresses key issues and frequently-asked questions around cannabis legislation in Europe ⁽¹⁾.

The speed, and possible scope of, cannabis policy change and the potential impact of these changes on public health and safety, are among the factors which prompted the **EMCDDA** to publish the report. Updating a [2017 review](#), the report describes the state of play of cannabis policies and laws in Europe and current approaches to regulation and control. The primary focus of the report is on recreational cannabis use and ongoing developments in this area.

New approaches to regulating recreational cannabis supply

The report outlines some of the recent changes in cannabis policy in Europe. Over the last 20 years, the general trend in national laws in Europe has been to reduce, or even remove, prison penalties for minor cannabis possession offences (Figure 4). Today, five **EU Member States** (Czechia, Germany, Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands) and **Switzerland** are introducing, or planning to introduce, new approaches to regulate the supply of cannabis for recreational use (see Part 4). These developments often appear to be informed by policy approaches now established in **Uruguay**, or parts of the **United States** and **Canada** ⁽²⁾.

A challenging policy landscape

Complicating an already challenging policy landscape is the fact that cannabis products are becoming increasingly diverse, including extracts and edibles (high-THC content) and CBD products (low-THC content)⁽³⁾. The report describes how developments are, not only taking place in the area of cannabis as a recreational drug, but are also extending to the regulation of cannabis and cannabinoids for industrial, therapeutic, food or cosmetic uses.

Reclassification of cannabis under international law — cannabis still strictly controlled

In December 2020, following a recommendation from the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, the **UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs** voted to [reclassify cannabis](#) under international law. While cannabis and cannabis resin remain under Schedule I of the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (meaning that they remain under strict international control — see Table 1), they were removed from Schedule IV (which lists drugs that are considered most dangerous and of little or no therapeutic benefit).

Investment needed in monitoring, research and evaluation

All policy approaches to drug control bring with them both potential costs and benefits. However, understanding their key objectives, quantifying the costs and benefits accordingly, and measuring change

over time, calls for a robust evaluation framework, including baselines. This report reviews the elements necessary to support this process. More monitoring and research are also needed to understand the impact of policy changes on population health, crime and public safety. The EMCDDA will continue to monitor closely cannabis use, supply and policies, and provide sound information on cannabis-related issues to inform evidence-based policy and practice.

Alexis Goosdeel, EMCDDA Director says: ‘Cannabis is a drug which has long divided public opinion and, today, remains the subject of intense European and international debate. Our new analysis comes at a time when the scope of Europe’s cannabis policies is widening, now encompassing not only illicit cannabis control but also the regulation of cannabis and cannabinoids for therapeutic and other uses. These changes underline the need for ongoing monitoring, research and evaluation to fully understand their potential impact on public health and safety. This report reviews the elements needed to support evidence-based policymaking in this complex domain’.

New figures on cannabis will be released in the **European Drug Report 2023. Trends and Developments** to be launched in Brussels on **16 June**. [Read more >>](#)

Notes

(¹) *Cannabis laws in Europe: questions and answers for policymaking* is available in English.

https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/faq/cannabis-laws-europe-questions-and-answers-for-policymaking_en

(²) Since 2014, the supply and use of cannabis for recreational purposes, as opposed to medical or industrial purposes, have been legalised in some American states, as well as in Uruguay since 2012 and in Canada since 2018. The impact of these regulatory models is being closely monitored, following concerns that they may lead to increases in cannabis use and related harms. See EMCDDA report *Monitoring and evaluating changes in cannabis policies: insights from the Americas*.

(³) Cannabis contains many different chemicals, the best known being $\Delta 9$ -tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) — largely responsible for the intoxicating effects of cannabis — and cannabidiol (CBD), a cannabinoid now promoted as having many potential health benefits (although the evidence base for such claims is limited). See EMCDDA report *Low-THC cannabis products in Europe*.

For more on these issues, see the [EMCDDA cannabis policy hub](#).