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Illicit drug policies and social outcomes: a cross-country analysis
ERANID-funded project 2017-2020

Lisbon Addictions 2019, 23-25 October 2019, Lisbon

Background

- Worldwide diversity in national drug laws and policies
  - Variety of paradigms, e.g., crime-centred or health-centred
  - Reflection of each country's social, economic and cultural drivers

- Illicit drugs generate social costs
  - And yet little is known about the relationship between key drug-related indicators and the applicable drug policy framework
  - (naturally) difficult task
    - Written policy vs. policy in action vs. perceived policy
    - Each country's drug policy is unique, contextual and evolved over time

- Understanding the relationship between drug policy and key social indicators is, therefore, important
  - Aim of this project

Overview

- "Ingredients"
  - 7 countries: Portugal, France, Italy, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia
  - 20-year period: 1996-2016

- Results ("dessert")
  - Shed further light on the impact that specific drug law characteristics may have on drug-related indicators
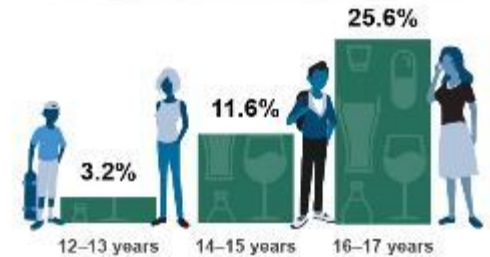 - (hopefully) of value to inform policy making

The "recipe"

WP3: perceptions

WP4: Social indicators

Rates of alcohol or illicit drug use in the past 30 days among adolescents aged 12–17 years increased with age. The rate for adolescents aged 16–17 years was **more than 7.5 times** the rate for adolescents aged 12–13 years.

3.2% — 12–13 years
11.6% — 14–15 years
25.6% — 16–17 years

?

WP5

WP2: the law

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The "chefs"

ADVISORS

Cláudia Costa Storti, EMCDDA
Paul de Grauwe, LSE
Mathias Siems, European University Institute
Jennifer Williams, University of Melbourne

Paris School of Economics, U. Paris I
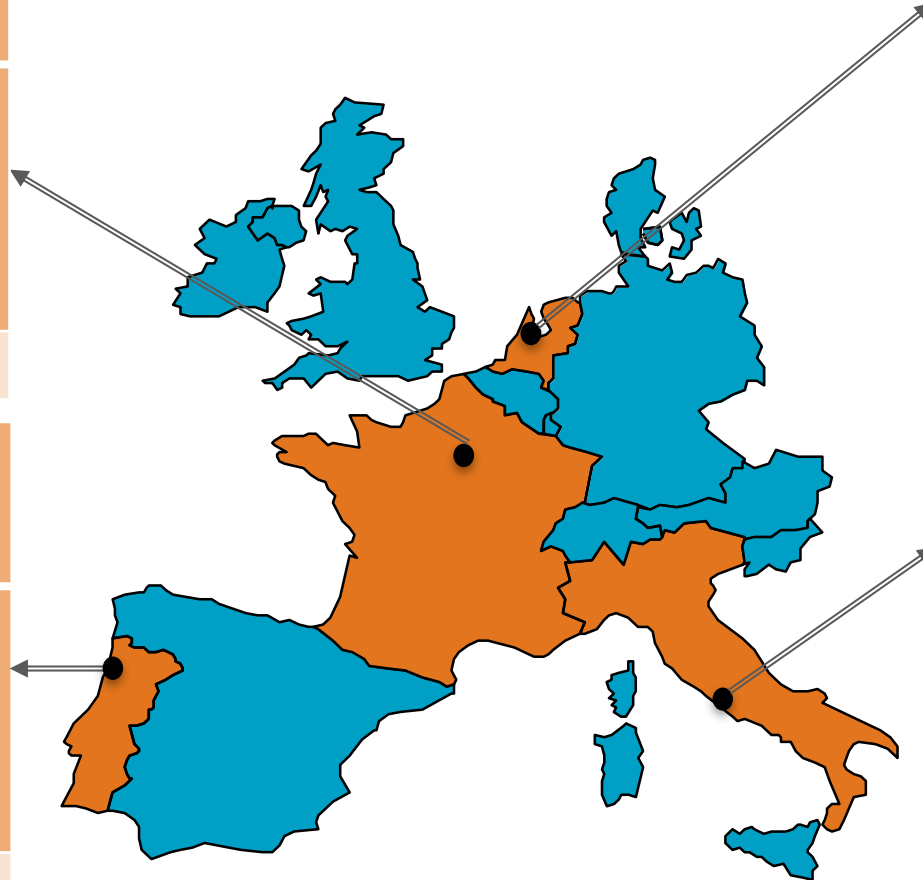
Co-PI and WP4 leader
Pierre Kopp

Marysia Ogrodnik

Católica Porto Business School, U. Católica Portuguesa

PI and WP5 leader:
Ricardo Gonçalves

WP2 leader: Ana Lourenço
Hélia Marreiros

Faculty of Law. U. Amsterdam

Co-PI and WP3 leader
Dirk Korf

Ton Nabben

Nienke Liebregts

Annemieke Benschop

MIPA

Co-PI
Carla Rossi

Alessio Canzonetti

Francesca De Marinis

Fabio Massimo Lanzoni

Dario Cirillo

A closer look into the "kitchen"

- No dessert to be seen yet ☺

  - But work progressed largely as originally planned

  - Now entering the final year of the 3-year project, so we still have some "cooking time" ☺

WP2: the law [Ana Lourenço]

- Aim: to 'convert' drug law into numbers, allowing intertemporal and cross-country comparisons

- Methods:
  - state-of-the-art comparative law technique: leximetrics
    - Used in other areas: e.g., corporate governance, investor protection, workers' protection
    - Involves the construction of an index of illicit drug policy for each country
      - Essentially through the use of a coding algorithm which assigns numerical values to variables of interest associated with each country's drug policy timeline

WP2: the law [Ana Lourenço]

- Drug policy is multi-dimensional
  - As such, we have developed an index for each of the relevant dimensions that we are looking into
  1. Consumption
  2. Possession for consumption
  3. Traffic
     - 31 – Cultivation; 32 – Production; 33 - Distribution
  4. Harm Reduction
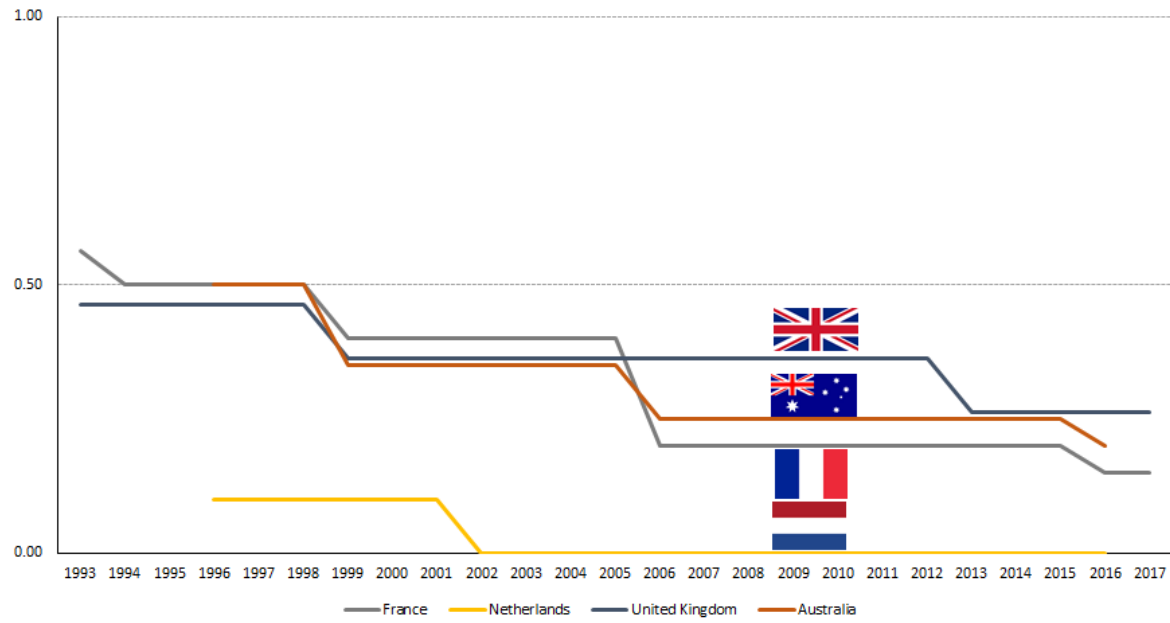 5. Treatment
  6. Prevention

WP2: the law [Ana Lourenço]
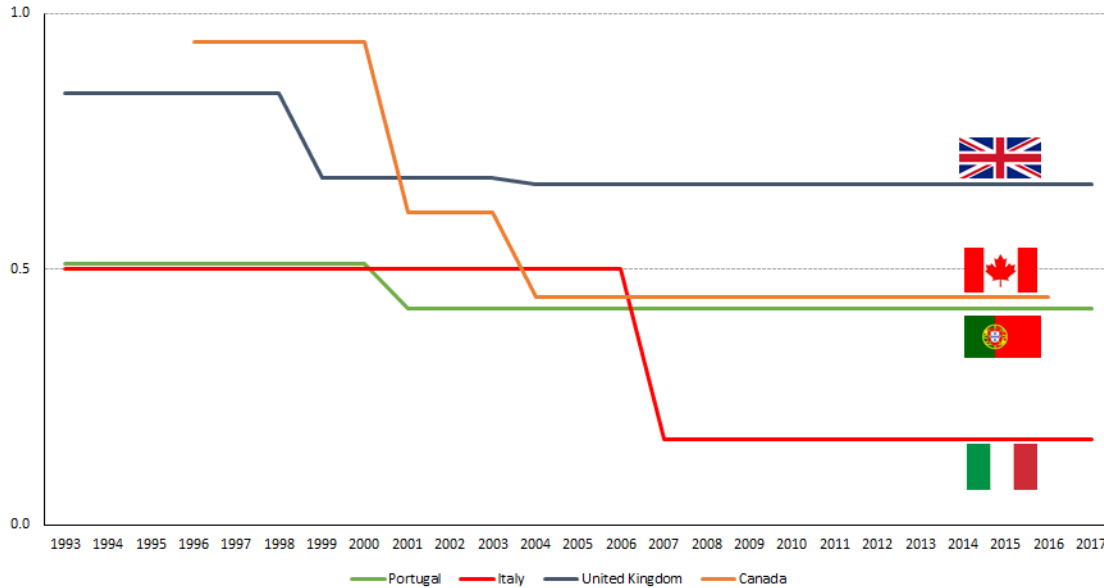
- An example: consumption (cannabis) in Portugal

Macro Variable	Index// Dimension	Variable	Description		Period/ Code
1C. Cannabis Consumption	1C - 1. Maximum consequence	1. Non-addict, 1st time	1	arrest >3 months	1993-2000: 0.8
			0.8	arrest ≤3 months	
			0.6	pecuniary sanction	
			0.4	non-pecuniary sanction	
			0.2	warning / provisional suspension of proceedings	
			0	no offense	
		2. Non-addict, n time	1	arrest >3 months	1993-2000: 0.8
			0.8	arrest ≤3 months	
			0.6	pecuniary sanction	
			0.4	non-pecuniary sanction	
			0.2	warning / provisional suspension of proceedings	
			0	no offense	
		3. Addict, 1st time	1	arrest >3 months	1993-2000: 0.8
			0.8	arrest ≤3 months	
			0.6	pecuniary sanction	
			0.4	non-pecuniary sanction	
			0.2	warning / provisional suspension of proceedings	
			0	no offense	
		4. Addict, n time	1	arrest >3 months	1993-2000: 0.8
			0.8	arrest ≤3 months	
			0.6	pecuniary sanction	
			0.4	non-pecuniary sanction	
			0.2	warning / provisional suspension of proceedings	
			0	no offense	
	1C - 3. Allowances	9. Allowance for therapeutic/medicinal cannabis	Is there an allowance for therapeutic/medicinal cannabis?		1993-2016: 1
			1	No	
			0	yes	

WP2: the law [Ana Lourenço]

- Outputs

5 - Harm Reduction

Legend: France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Australia

1C- Consumption Cannabis (v1C)

Legend: Portugal, Italy, United Kingdom, Canada

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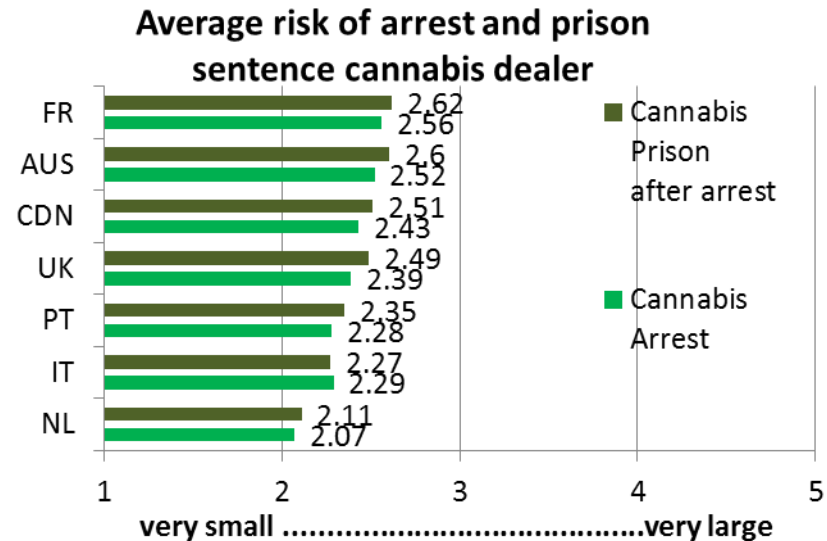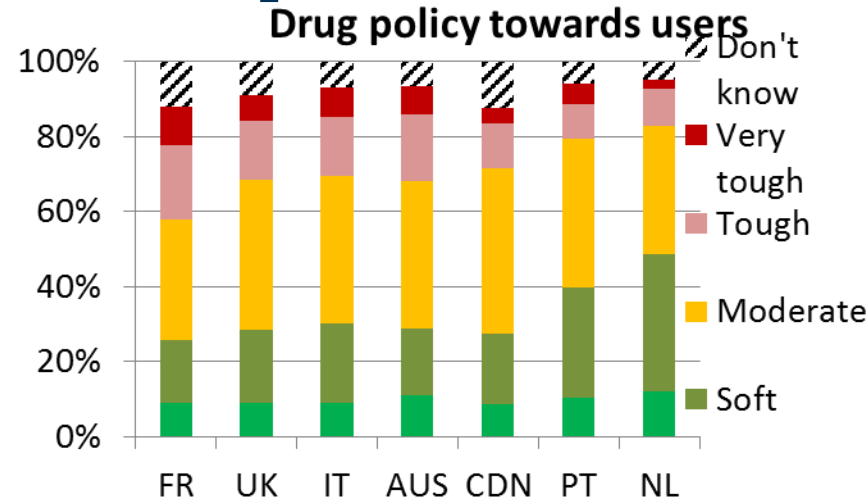
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WP3: perceptions [Dirk Korf]

- Aim: assess perceptions of drug policies on the ground ('law in action') in the 7 countries.

- Methods:
  - 1. Qualitative **interviews with experts** (health, law enforcement) in each country: view on evolutions in drug laws, policy and practice + on outcome indicators. (PT, NL and UK completed).
  - 2. Quantitative online **general population survey** (GPS) 18-40 yrs in each country: perception of drug laws, drug policy; focus on cannabis.
  - 3. Quantitative **survey cannabis users** 18-40 yrs from each country, recruited and interviewed in coffeeshops in NL. Same items as GPS + access to treatment, drug supply, self-regulation, social norms.
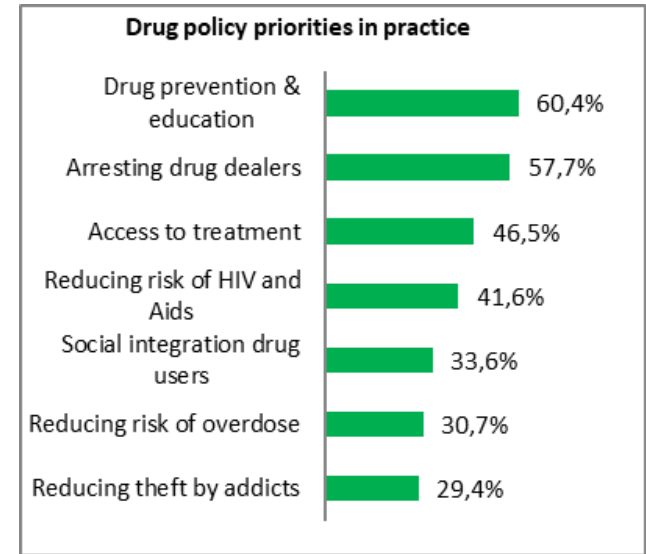
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IDPSO-cross-country   11

WP3: perceptions [Dirk Korf]

- **General Population Survey**
  - N = 7,105 (1,000+ in each country).
  - Draft internal report ready.
  - Overall, **NL perceived as least and FR as most punitive**:
    - Toughest towards users
    - Highest risk of arrest and prison sentence for cannabis dealers.
      - "How large or small is the chance that a drug dealer who sells 100 grams (3.5 ounce) of cannabis (marihuana, hashish) in one month to users in your country will be arrested by the police?" … and "…that such an arrested dealers will be sentenced to prison?"

Drug policy towards users

Legend: Don't know / Very tough / Tough / Moderate / Soft

Categories (x-axis): FR, UK, IT, AUS, CDN, PT, NL

Average risk of arrest and prison sentence cannabis dealer

Legend: Cannabis Prison after arrest / Cannabis Arrest

	Cannabis Prison after arrest	Cannabis Arrest
FR	2.62	2.56
AUS	2.6	2.52
CDN	2.51	2.43
UK	2.49	2.39
PT	2.35	2.28
IT	2.27	2.29
NL	2.11	2.07

very small ………………………………………very large

1   2   3   4   5

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WP3: perceptions [Dirk Korf]

- **General Population Survey**
  - **perceived top-three drug policy priorities in practice**
    - In ALL 7 countries respondents frequently nominated drug prevention / education,
    - in 6 countries also "arresting drug dealers"
    - and in 5 countries also "providing drug addicts access to treatment".

Drug policy priorities in practice

Priority	Percentage
Drug prevention & education	60,4%
Arresting drug dealers	57,7%
Access to treatment	46,5%
Reducing risk of HIV and Aids	41,6%
Social integration drug users	33,6%
Reducing risk of overdose	30,7%
Reducing theft by addicts	29,4%

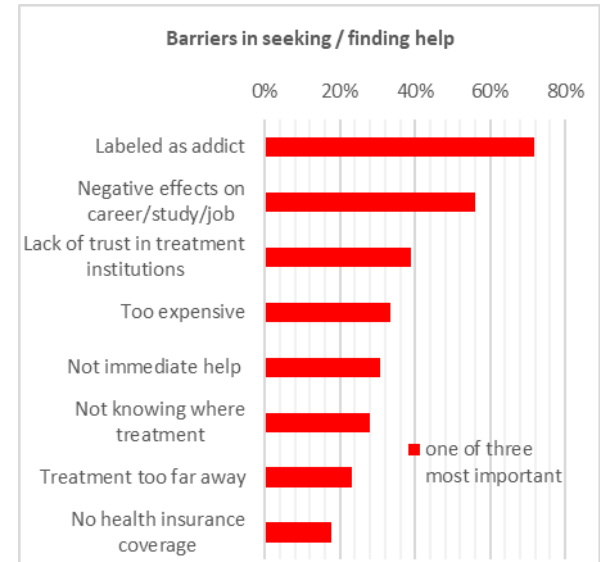|	# 1 (= most frequent)	#2	#3
FR	Arresting dealers	Prevention	Reducing risk HIV/Aids IDU
IT	Arresting dealers	Social integration drug users	Prevention
UK	Arresting dealers	Prevention	Access to treatment
AUS	Prevention	Arresting dealers	Access to treatment
NL	Prevention	Access to treatment	Arresting dealers
CDN	Prevention	Access to treatment	Arresting dealers
PT	Prevention	Reducing risk HIV/Aids IDU	Access to treatment

WP3: perceptions [Dirk Korf]

- User Survey
  - Drug policy perceptions
    - Data-collection completed.
      - N = 1,059 (45 Australia – 230 France). First internal draft ready.
    - Perception of drug policy priorities largely similar to GPS.
      - Perceived risk of arrest and prison sentence for cannabis dealers higher in User Survey.
    - Cross-national differences in perceived accessibility to drug treatment.
      - For **cannabis** related problems easiest in PT and CDN. Most difficult in UK.
      - For **heroin** related problems easiest in NL, PT and UK. Most difficult in France.

WP3: perceptions [Dirk Korf]

- **User Survey**
  - perceived top-three BARRIERS IN SEEKING HELP for drug related problems
    - In ALL 7 countries "Addict label" and "Negative effects on career" #1 or #2.

Barriers in seeking / finding help

	# 3 (= third frequency)	#4	#5
FR	Lack of trust	Too expensive	Not knowing where
IT	Lack of trust	Too expensive	Not immediate help
UK	Lack of trust	Too expensive	Not immediate help
NL	Lack of trust	Not immediate help	Not knowing where
AUS	Too expensive	Not knowing where	Lack of trust
CDN	Treatment far away	Not immediate help	Lack of trust
PT	Too expensive	Not immediate help	Treatment far away

WP4: social indicators [Pierre Kopp]

- Aim: to build a comprehensive database of social indicators associated with the 6 policy dimensions

- Methods
  - Main challenge: to ensure data compatibility and consistency over such a long period
  - Period: 1990-2019
  - Source: EMCDDA; national data

WP4: social indicators [Pierre Kopp]

- Indicators to consider
  - prevalence of drug use
  - overdose deaths
  - prevalence of infectious diseases
  - demand for treatment
  - seizure of drugs
  - law offenses

- Results
  - France, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, UK: data collected
  - Canada and Australia: in progress