



An increased convergence of 'addiction' policies in EU Member States has been found, with some interesting similarities of policies in the fields of licit and illicit drugs

**trends
 addiction policies
 forces
 decision making**

In order to analyse forces and factors influencing the development of the governance of 'addictions', three current drug policy trends found in Europe were selected:

- The wider acceptance of harm reduction.
- The decriminalisation of use of illicit drugs (and possession of small quantities for personal use), accompanied by a tougher, more punitive approach to the production and trafficking of illicit drugs.
- The growing interest in exploring the feasibility of regulation as drug control instrument.

Case studies were performed based on a purposive sample of five EU Member States (France, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and UK), representing different geographical regions and different governance approaches. The scope of the study was limited to heroin, cannabis, tobacco and gambling. We focussed on identifying important factors that influence policy decision making and shape the implementation of policy. Our aim was to explore the selected policy trends to identify important forces and factors that influence policy decision making and shape the implementation of policy in the field of drug use and gambling. Some important elements in our conclusions were:

- Regarding the process of convergence of policies in the EU: All three trends in the illicit drugs field show a primarily bottom-up driven process in the early stages, which - in the cases of the wider implementation of harm reduction and decriminalisation of use - later turned into a process where top-down forces played a dominant role.
- Regarding the content: All three convergence trends we analysed can be understood as paradigm changes, as the emergence of a new consensus among influential stakeholders, a prevailing perception of how elements of the 'drugs problem' have to be explained. Well-being might be a possible alternative for the currently prevailing health (illness) paradigm.
- Regarding the stakeholders: Our case studies show that besides politicians and policymakers three stakeholders played a decisive role in the decision making process: science and research, the supply lobby and social movements. Social movements and science played a key role in challenging dominant paradigms, functioning as facilitators of changes.
- Regarding the context: historical, economic, political and social-cultural factors have proven decisive in determining the influence of stakeholders or of specific policy content in the decision making process. Contextual factors that had a major impact on the policy changes in the field of illicit drugs seem to have been societal changes, the 'social mood' in societies, and 'uncertainties' about the approach to choose in a changing policy environment.

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Trautmann F et al. (2014): *Description and analysis of addiction governance practices - Understanding changes in governance practice*. Addiction and Lifestyles in Contemporary Europe: Reframing Addictions Project (ALICE RAP): [Deliverable 14.2](#)