

Bulletin

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Addictions and Lifestyles in Contemporary Europe Reframing Addiction Project



‘Legal highs’ – how should we regulate them?

In July 2011 the European Commission announced it was considering the best ways to respond to ‘legal highs’; new psychoactive drugs not controlled under United Nations Drugs Conventions.

The current framework (Council Decision 2005/387/JHA) provides an early-warning system for a substance, and, risk assessment and eventual EU-wide control, if necessary.

However, there are limitations to this and the Commission is looking at a range of **further measures**. These include how drug control can be aligned with food and product safety, and, uniquely, possible alternatives to criminal sanctions (Commission Press Release 11th July 2011).

The Commission also highlights the importance of drug information and prevention programmes.

Few Member States currently have

laws specific to ‘legal highs’ and a range of regulatory measures have been used. These include controlled drug frameworks (often where there is limited scientific evidence on the social harms) as well as medicines, food chemicals and consumer protection laws.

The increased availability of these compounds (presumed to be due to increased demand) has also led to a wider debate on how new regulatory models can be developed which not only protect the health of users, but also try to reduce demand and criminality, and help to ensure that retailers do not sell potentially dangerous substances.

Two areas of ALICE-RAP will look at legal highs:

Work led by **Liverpool’s John Moores University** as part of WP16 (adolescents as customers), will

examine how EU Member States are responding to the increased availability and marketing of legal highs. It will explore the challenges of policy implementation and the development of approaches that seek to provide “alternative options to criminal sanctions”.

As part of WP11 (Impact of Suppliers), in Area 4, researchers at the **Institute of Psychiatry, UK**, are carrying out a semi-systematic review of the internet marketing of illicit drugs and ‘legal highs’ and analysing trends over 5 years. The work, aims to identify 100+ websites and analyse the their marketing practices

This work is important as the consumer demand for new psychoactives is unlikely to diminish in the future, and all indications suggest that potential consumers will have increased opportunity to try novel, and largely untested substances.

Networking



ALICE RAP evaluation - In Autumn 2011, as part of WP21, Tamyko Ysa, from ESADE, will be sending a survey to **all** project partners, asking about your participation in ALICE RAP, anticipated outcomes, communication and networking.

Future Events

[Alcohol Policy Expert Conference](#)

11-12 October 2011

Alcohol Policy in Poland and around Europe: Medical and Economic Disadvantages of Using Alcohol (MEDUSA).

Further reading

- Sumnall, Evans-Brown, & McVeigh (2011) [Drug Test Anal](#)
- Winstock, et al. (2010) [BMJ 2010; 340:c1605](#)
- Evans-Brown, Bellis & McVeigh (2011) [BMJ 2011; 342:d1504](#)