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THE LEGALISATION OF CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL AND
RECREATIONAL PURPOSES IN EUROPE

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Motion Text

Many policies affect us and everyone around us. As we move forward with pushing for systemic change and more common sense policies it is hard to ignore the impact that the legalisation of cannabis products for medical and recreational use could have on society, from a health, social, and economic perspective. Its legalisation has positive implications both on consumers and the economy, from safety and regulation, to combating organised crime and getting revenues that can be used for better research, prevention, and treatment of cannabis related impacts.

Cannabis is by far the most consumed (currently) illegal drug in Europe, with as much as 11% of the populations of France and Spain having used it over the course of a year. Attempts at prohibition have failed to stop its increased consumption, while it being supplied by the black market makes it more available to groups at risk, and more likely to vary in terms of strength and safety.

The very strict cannabis legislation in most of the EU member states doesn't have an impact only on Western European countries, where cannabis consumption is the highest in Europe. It also has an impact on Eastern countries, especially in the Balkans, where a big part of the incoming Afghan cannabis passes through, before being delivered to France, Germany or the UK, among others. For example Albania is a country that is affected by the illegal trade of cannabis. Mafias and criminalized groups control the cannabis production and distribution. Sometimes, these groups change the raw cannabis by adding potentially harmful substances, without consideration for human health or safety. Human trafficking is also a huge issue often associated with the illegal drug trade, including cannabis.

The current policies regarding the production, possession and distribution of medical and recreational cannabis vary greatly across Europe. We believe that there is great momentum to push for the legalisation of cannabis products in Europe. Luxembourg is one of the first countries aiming to legalise (or to set a legal framework for) the cultivation, sale and consumption of cannabis for medical purposes, and the first aiming to legalise it for recreational purposes.

Policy concerns

It is widely acknowledged that making a substance illegal will not stop people from using it. For example, usage of cannabis is higher in France (8.6 percent annual prevalence) than in the Netherlands (8.0 percent annual prevalence) despite it being illegal in France and tolerated in the Netherlands. Making it illegal will just lead to its consumers being criminalized, but despite that being the case, it has not decreased consumption. In fact, ban-policy has shown that the fight against illegal drugs has just led to them being higher potentized because drug dealers can transport more active ingredients per gram this way. Thus the prohibition of cannabis has not been a highly efficient drug policy. This also means we have to develop a new strategy for it and follow suit to other countries around the world that have legalised and regulated its production and distribution.

Economic benefits

Income from the taxation of cannabis sales can be invested back into the health sectors and prevention and educational programmes. There will be increased opportunities for trade within the single market. Additionally, it can also create new opportunities for rural development from the introduction of cannabis as a legal crop.

Social implications

Furthermore, consumers of illegal drugs are being isolated from society, however not because they consume drugs in the first place, but rather because they get criminalized which leads to society distancing itself from them. Consumers who suffer from social problems can be helped by legalization, since legalized drugs are more accepted in society than illegal ones, while the actual effect of drugs has no measurable effect on their acceptance: Cannabis however is still illegal in many countries and not accepted by society in these countries, while studies have also shown potential that some of its compounds can be used for the treatment of medical conditions and is low risk compared to other legal or illegal drugs.

Health

Regulating the cannabis market will ensure that such products are safer.

With more research and statistics becoming available as a result of the legalisation there is an opportunity to dispel health myths both about its positive and negative impacts and get a better understanding on how to prevent and treat addiction or health conditions that arise out of chronic use. When it comes to its status, it is hard to assess how dangerous or potent the cannabis on the black market can be, but research from 2016 suggests that in this context people are sold higher, more potent strains of the drug.¹

Prevention

Legislation provides an opportunity to increase the level and quality of educational campaigns surrounding cannabis. It also provides more data on the negative side effects from a medical perspective. The restrictive policies currently in place surrounding the use of cannabis make it more difficult for research studies to be conducted and there is a lack of evidence based research which leads to the information available not being conclusive.² For example, one study from 2015 found that cannabis is a 'low' risk drug and its negative impacts have over the course of the years been overestimated, especially compared to other substances that are considered high risk, such as alcohol. According to the UK Office for National Statistics there were 9214 alcohol related deaths recorded in comparison to 24 deaths linked to cannabis use.³ On the other hand, there are also initial studies that list a wide range of health concerns, especially regarding adolescents and heavy users. We believe that the best way to prevent addiction and minimise health risks is to provide the legal basis required for its research. At the same time, sound regulation and high penalties for underage sales could curb youth use. For example, two US studies which looked at youth consumption of cannabis in states where it was legalised showed that while the overall consumption everywhere had increased, the likelihood of teens use had actually decreased by 10% in the states in which it was legalised for recreational use. The author of the study suggested that proof of ID in cannabis shops as well as the increased price could be a factor for this.⁴

What we want to do

Support the full legalisation of cannabis for medical and recreational purposes. The legalisation only for medical purposes would defeat its purpose because it will still make it difficult for patients who need it to have easy access to it. It will also complicate matters for example, people having a prescription in one country might be prosecuted for its possession in another despite them being able to freely move across borders.

Regulating the market from production to consumption so that consumers are aware of what products they buy, avoid contamination with other harmful substances and have control over the strength of the products they want to use, namely the ratio of CBD to THC.

Promoting local cannabis productions as much as possible and, if necessary, importing cannabis from neighbouring countries where cannabis (and its production) is also legal to avoid consumers getting goods from black market and criminal groups.

Campaign for the EU to pass directives that will help member states to harmonise the legalisation and regulation of cannabis for medical and recreational purposes.

Support for more research into the benefits for it being prescribed for various health conditions as well as its potential harmful effects (for example, from smoking cannabis or combining it with tobacco, or the amount that it is safe to ingest, addiction and risks for young people) in order to educate the wider public on both beneficial effects and negative side-effects that are based on scientific evidence.

Using tax revenues from cannabis sales to fund social services such as mental healthcare and addiction facilities and support those who are in need, as well as educational campaigns aimed at prevention.

The establishment of a uniform policy at the EU level on age and maximum amount of cannabis allowed for personal use.

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48921265>
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK425757/>
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-48826510>
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48921265>