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DRUG POLICY EVALUATION IN EUROPE  
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for Drugs and Drug Addiction

## Drug policy evaluation in Europe

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## Definitions

### Drug policy Following Kilpatrick (2000)

*A system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action and funding priorities concerning (illicit) psychoactive drugs and promulgated by a governmental entity or its representatives*

### Evaluation European Commission

*« Evaluation is a judgment of interventions according to their results, impacts and the needs they aim to satisfy. It is a systematic tool which provides a rigorous evidence base to inform decision making »*

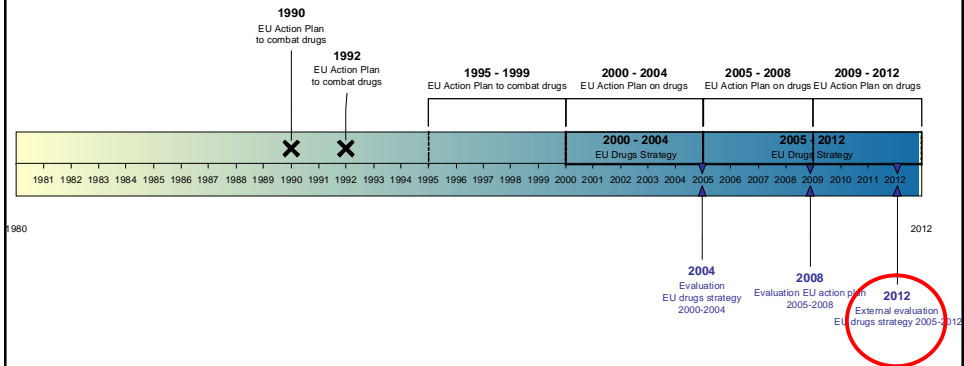


Area under review:

27 Member States of  
the European Union,  
+ Croatia, Turkey  
and Norway



# Drug strategies and action plans of the European Union



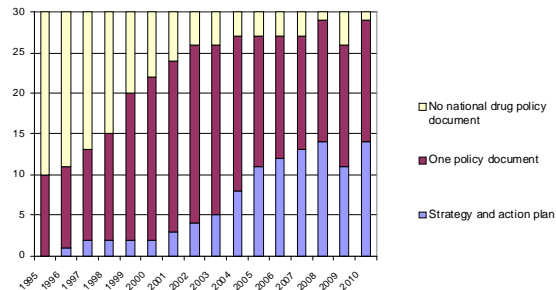
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# Drug strategies and action plans in Europe

National drug strategies and action plans in the EU-27, Croatia, Turkey and Norway



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## National drug strategies and action plans

- Comprehensive
- 50 - 200 actions, sometimes very detailed
- Duration: 3-8 years
- Implementation supervised by a national drug coordination body



## But....

- Sometimes long lists of (unclear) wishes
- Not always linked with budgets
- Sensitive to government change in some countries



## Final evaluations: what for?

- Reviewing achievements
- Preparing a new strategy and action plan
  - Adapting the policy to the current drug situation and existing responses
  - Improving the policy implementation and reallocating resources
- Identifying data gaps



## The situation

- An increasing number of evaluations
- Quite a few “lost in complexity”
- Some very bad science and some self congratulation exercises
- A few evaluations that stand out because they have a sound and pragmatic approach
- No single best practice



## Why?

- Complexity of policies
- Needs and requests of stakeholders
- Data availability (e.g. law enforcement)
- Understanding impacts



## Stakeholders have different questions.....

- **Policy makers**
  - does the intervention improve the overall social/health situation of the population?
- **Sponsors/Funding agency**
  - is the money well invested?
- **Project/services managers and teams**
  - are we doing the right things?
- **Evaluators**
  - does it allow the development of new methods and instruments, the publication of articles, etc.?
- **Public opinion**
  - does the government do something to protect me and my children?



## Stakeholders have different interests.....

- Policy makers
  - is it politically profitable?
- Sponsors/Funding agency
  - does it please policy makers?
- Managers and staff of projects/services
  - will we receive additional funds?
- Evaluators
  - will it pay the mortgage and allow me to do other more interesting research?
- Public opinion
  - does it fit our values?



## Data availability

- Differences between health and law enforcement
- Monitoring cannot be decided ex-post
- Accessibility of data
- Delays



## So, why evaluate?

- An opportunity to look backwards...and forward
  - Adapting the policy to the current drug situation and existing responses
  - Improving the policy implementation and reallocating resources
- Identifying data gaps



## EMCDDA guidelines for the evaluation of national drug strategies

- Guidelines based on:
  - A multi criteria analysis of a sample of 25 evaluation handbooks and manuals
  - A questionnaire survey on evaluation and progress reviews of drug strategies in European countries
  - A review of evaluation reports of drug strategies published by European countries





## Plan it well!

- Involve stakeholders and clearly delimit the rules of the game
- Define scope of evaluation (limit it whenever possible)
- Define a limited set of clear evaluation questions
- Take into account the available resources for evaluation (time, money, data)
- Whenever possible, choose joint or external evaluations



## Don't miss the obvious: assess the evidence base and the appropriateness of the strategy

- What scientific evidence did the strategy rely on?
- Was the strategy appropriately planned considering the drug situation and the service needs?
- Have there been major changes during the time of the strategy that would have required an update?



## Understand the implementation: not an audit!

- Use existing annual progress reviews
- Focus on key elements of the strategy
- What was achieved?
- What was not achieved?
- Why? What should be done differently?



## Discuss the impact issue

- Focus on specific elements of drug policy
- Compare trends in the drugs situation with other (neighbouring) countries
- Consider delays due to data sensitivity or availability



## European Drug Information Network: REITOX

27 EU Member States, Croatia,  
Turkey and Norway

+ 6 countries from the Western  
Balkans

...preparing for an extension to  
Eastern and Southern  
Neighbouring Countries of the  
EU



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## Crucial role of National Drug Observatories

### “EVIDENCE-COLLECTORS/PRODUCERS”

- Data collection
- Analysis and interpretation
- National networks of experts/institutions
- Quality control
- Reliability - Credibility
- More Science - Less Ideologies and beliefs

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