

C3 A harm reduction approach to drug policy

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Text

1 In many European states, narcotics policy springs from the view that drugs
2 should never be present in a society. Based on this ideology, the goal becomes a
3 simplistic one: minimising the demand for narcotics. This is typically done by
4 stigmatising people who inject drugs and other addicts, believing that less
5 people will use narcotics if you make them suffer for it.

6 This type of policy is neither morally defensible nor efficient. In for example
7 Sweden, which is one of the most extreme countries practicing the war on
8 narcotics, drug related deaths have been rising since 2006. They are currently
9 the second highest among European states. Clearly the restrictive strategy has
10 proven to be a failure.

11 The Federation of Young European Greens advocates a more scientific debate on
12 drug policies. Our political platform calls for a legalisation of all drugs in
13 order to repeal the stigma, reduce the health risks and minimise drug-related
14 crimes. We refuse however to remain passive in countries where this goal
15 currently looks out of reach. We need solutions that save lives today.

16 Harm reduction is an alternative to a restrictive and morally laden narcotics
17 policy. The term refers to a set of practical strategies aimed at reducing the
18 negative consequences associated with drug use. This approach is often in
19 conflict with the idea of a society free from drugs, as many harm reduction
20 measures are accused of "normalising" drugs.

21 As greens, we realise that fighting the suffering that drug addicts endure is of
22 greater importance than fighting the narcotics themselves. When handling the
23 politics of narcotics, we always see the humans behind the numbers and
24 ceaselessly fight for every person's right to proper health care.

25 Several measures exist that are based on harm reduction. The most common one is
26 the use of needle exchange-programs, where people who inject drugs get free
27 access to clean syringes. This is an evidence based-approach to decrease the
28 spread of infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C, and prevent life
29 threatening infections.

30 A more radical measure is the use of staffed injection rooms, which exist in for
31 example Germany, Norway and Denmark. Injection rooms decrease and prevent
32 overdoses while giving people with an addiction the dignity they deserve. They
33 also establish a non-judgemental contact between the abusers and the health care

34 system.

35 Reports from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
36 (EMCDDA), a reference agency within the European Union, shows that syringe
37 programs and injection rooms neither coincide with an increased usage of drugs
38 nor with a higher crime rate in the surrounding neighborhood. Their conclusion
39 is simple: harm reduction saves lives.

40 **Based on the above, FYEG advocates:**

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1. that all European states practice a harm reduction approach to drug policy

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2. that needle exchange-programs are made available in all European states

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3. that staffed injection rooms are made available in places with a high prevalence of injection abuse