

## **Decriminalising use and possession of all illicit drugs: An international review of models, impacts and moderators from 13 countries**

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**Introduction:** Faced with high criminal justice, social, health and economic costs of criminalisation, many countries are considering decriminalising drug use and possession. But this topic remains hotly contested and there remain gaps in knowledge about the types of models that can be adopted and likely impacts (intended and unintended), particularly for reforms involving possession of drugs other than cannabis e.g. methamphetamine.

**Methods:** This paper consolidates the latest evidence-base from 13 countries that adopted drug depenalisation or decriminalisation (Czechia, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, United Kingdom, Canada, USA, Costa Rica, Colombia, Uruguay, Australia). A realist review of 153 studies and interviews with 17 drug policy experts and practitioners from the reform countries was used to elucidate the public health, public safety and justice impacts and the key design considerations that moderated or influenced the outcomes from each reform.

**Results:** The research showed decriminalisation of use and possession of all illicit drugs led to many criminal justice, health and social benefits particularly reducing the burden on police and courts; reducing stigma and discrimination and increasing access to health services. But it showed added benefits in some models. Conversely, other models were associated with unintended outcomes e.g. increased public consumption or increased policing. It also brought to the fore design considerations and moderators affecting the outcomes realised including the type of model adopted (e.g. therapeutic, civil penalty or no sanction model), threshold quantities, what offences were in scope, infrastructure readiness, policy processes and clarity of reform objectives.

**Discussion and Implications for Policy:** The research reinforces that decriminalisation can lead to many positive benefits when applied to all illicit drugs, but it also shows important design considerations and trade-offs that ought to be considered by would-be reformers. Using this research can foster more robust decision-making and aid effective decriminalisation expansion.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** This research was funded by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health.