



ERANID

European Research Area Network on Illicit Drugs

A Strategic Research Agenda for Europe in the field of illicit drugs

Priorities for socio-economic and humanities research



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1. Introduction

PURPOSE

The Strategic Research Agenda (SRA) provides a framework for multi-national collaboration in the field of illicit drugs research focusing on socio-economic and humanities research and both supply and demand. Drawn up as part of ERANID, the European Research Area Network on Illicit Drugs, its primary purpose is to identify common research priorities representing the areas of greatest need for society, and that have the greatest potential to improve our understanding of the drug situation and support effective responses to it. The SRA informs the next stage of the ERANID project, namely the launching of common calls in 2015 based on shared research priorities. The SRA is also intended to be a resource for local, national and European governments, funding agencies, non-governmental organisations, researchers and universities and to provide a platform for future identification of research priorities in the field of illicit drugs. Indeed, the research priorities contained within the SRA reflect current priorities and it is essential that these are regularly re-visited to ensure that priorities remain relevant.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The EU Drugs Strategy 2005-2012 underlined the importance of improving the EU knowledge infrastructure in the field of drugs, and the EU Action Plan on Drugs 2009-2012 contained an objective to “expand the knowledge base in the field of drugs by promoting research”. The European Commission’s 2009 paper, *Strengthening EU capacity on illicit drugs* (Commission of the European Communities, 2009) found that there were large differences in the size and quality of drugs-related research capacities between countries, concluding that “...overall coordination between policy, research and practice in the field of illicit drugs is piecemeal and lacks a coherent longer term approach for the identification and funding of new areas of research.”

As a cross-cutting issue, illicit drugs falls across a number of policy areas including health, justice and education, contributing to the fragmentation of research in this area. In addition, research tends to be nationally focused with little collaboration between countries. The Commission, therefore, included stimulating cross-border research cooperation as a proposal for action within their 2009 paper and suggested that the possibilities of establishing an ERA-NET in the field of illicit drugs under Framework Programme 7 be explored.

The current ERANID project responds to the 2012 call to set up an illicit drugs ERA-NET under the socio-economic sciences and humanities programme. A consortium of eleven organisations from six EU countries (Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom), ERANID's overall aim is "to enhance EU research capability and capacity in drug research by improving coordination, cooperation and synergies between national and regional funding programmes".

The current EU Drugs Strategy 2013-2020 continues to prioritise research as one of three cross-cutting issues in combination with information, monitoring and evaluation. Within the associated EU Action Plan on Drugs 2013-2016, ERANID is explicitly mentioned as one of the mechanisms for meeting the strategy's research-related objectives.

DEFINITIONS AND APPROACH

Disciplines

ERANID focuses on research from socio-economic sciences and humanities, reflecting the thematic area under which the project is funded (see above). Where bio-medical research is relevant as part of an inter-disciplinary approach to a specific research question, it may be included. However, it is excluded as a discipline in itself. Overall, the project encourages an inter-disciplinary approach recognising the complexity of the drug issue and the need "to encourage partnerships across disciplines in order to maximise output that is meaningful and impactful at a society level" (Bühninger et al., 2009). This goes beyond projects that merely use multiple disciplines and encourages integration of disciplines. To do so will require a greater understanding of the different methodological and theoretical traditions within disciplines and the development of common language.

Definition of research

It is important to be clear about the definition of research used within the project. The difficulties in defining what constitutes research have been discussed in previous work addressing drug-related research in Europe (Bühringer et al. 2009; EMCDDA, 2012). For the purposes of this project, the definition of research used in the most recent EMCDDA report has been adopted ensuring a consistent approach with previous work in this area:

“Drug-related research involves performing a study on illicit drugs, which may involve a range of disciplines...in order to test a hypothesis or answer a specific question.” (EMCDDA, 2012).

This definition excludes monitoring activities although the importance of epidemiological monitoring systems and the need to continue supporting and improving their quality was a common thread running through the project’s inputs. Research activities within the illicit drug field often rely heavily on the data from monitoring systems and efforts to improve the quality and appropriateness of the data collected will have an impact on the feasibility and quality of research projects. Furthermore, the development of robust, accessible data in a given area, for example drug supply, is likely to increase the quantity of research outputs on that topic. Conversely, research can play an important role in improving data collection by testing the ability of the data to be interpreted in a meaningful and useful way. Methodological research can also help improve the reliability and validity of the collected data. This symbiotic relationship means that despite monitoring activities being excluded from the definition of research, the collection, accessibility, coverage and quality of drugs data remain vitally important for illicit drugs research and the topic of appropriate indicators is addressed within the SRA from a methodological perspective.

Further inclusion criteria are described in the following chapter and a short glossary of terms is provided in Annex 2.

2. The development of the Strategic Research Agenda

The content of the Strategic Research Agenda reflects the findings of a broad programme of work undertaken within the ERANID project, comprising of a series of consultative activities with stakeholders and a study mapping the current situation of illicit drugs research in the ERANID countries and at the EU level. It represents the most comprehensive exercise undertaken to date to identify illicit drugs research priorities, considering both the views of a wide range of stakeholders in the ERANID countries and a detailed assessment of the state of play in relation to research policy, funding and gaps.

The diagram below provides an overview of the work streams feeding into the SRA.



Identifying stakeholder priorities in illicit drugs research

The project adopted an inclusive approach to the identification of research priorities and aimed to collect the views of a wide range of stakeholders rather than restricting input to a limited number of key experts. The generation of priorities was a collaborative process providing opportunities for feedback, refinement and consensus building through a series of consultations, nationally and at ERANID-level.

In order to provide an opportunity for as many stakeholders as possible to contribute, an online survey was conducted. The aim was to collect respondents' views on important topics for future research, both within and outside of their main area of expertise. Project partners identified stakeholders in their country working in both the demand and supply fields and representing each of the ERANID stakeholder types: policy; drug-related professional; civil society; and researcher.

The survey questionnaire is provided in Annex 1.

Analysis of the survey responses at a national level provided input for national consultations, held in each country. Each ERANID country used the consultation findings to draft a National Report and through horizontal content analysis of the reports and a process of drafting and re-drafting of priorities, a document containing European research priorities was provided for participants of the Lisbon International Invitational Consultation (LIIC). Workshops for each of the draft research themes were held during the LIIC and detailed notes from these fed into the drafting of the final research priorities.

Comparative analysis of research into illicit drugs

As part of the ERANID project, a study was undertaken analysing national (ERANID countries) and EU policies, strategies, plans, programming, structures and mechanisms for drug research. The study also created an inventory of recent and current research projects funded between 2010 and 2013. Information was collected through a survey of funding organisations that were identified and contacted by project partners. Policy documents were also examined to provide an overview of their content regarding research.

A final report containing the findings from the study is available and fed into the identification of research priorities for inclusion in the SRA.

Overview of published illicit drugs research in the ERANID countries

As part of the work to map existing research, a study was undertaken using PubMed to identify all social sciences, epidemiological and clinical research on illicit drugs published between 2006 and 2013 in the six ERANID countries. The study used a keyword equation to identify relevant publications through PubMed and undertook an additional search of the main journals in the field of illicit drugs, focussing on social sciences. The funding sources for the identified research publications were

also examined.

The unpublished report fed into the comparative analysis report and the Strategic Research Agenda.

Inclusion criteria for ERANID research priorities

The inclusion criteria for the research priorities are as follows:

- They focus on illicit drugs
- They correspond to research priorities identified by stakeholders across ERANID countries
- They are relevant at European level
- They call for an interdisciplinary approach focusing on the social sciences and humanities

Further methodological information is contained in the accompanying technical report (ERANID 2015).

3. Research priorities in illicit drugs

INTRODUCTION

A vast number of research areas and topics were suggested during the various consultative exercises representing a broad spectrum of interests and perceived research gaps. When combined with the results from the mapping of research programmes, priorities, projects and publications, it is clear that identified research gaps do not always correspond to areas with research shortages. For example, despite treatment responses, continuing to dominate the research agenda, the area is commonly identified as a research priority by stakeholders. This may represent an information gap rather than a research gap or the ongoing desire to discover effective responses within a changing environment. Nevertheless, despite large research efforts in this area, there has been limited success in creating transferable knowledge. This may be the result of the short-term nature of government-funded research and fragmentation between policy areas or due to an over-reliance on disciplines that focus on risks and problems at the individual level rather than at a community or society level, thus failing to take into account the social and cultural context (MacGregor, 2011). It may also reflect the fact that despite focusing on individual behaviour, research tends to omit the perspective of the individual, concerned principally with enumerating rather than understanding.

ERANID attempts to redress the balance by focusing on socio-economic sciences and humanities (SSH) rather than on the medical and biological disciplines that dominate illicit drug research (Bühringer et al, 2009). The SRA takes a strategic view of research needs, adopting a longer-term perspective and situating drug use and associated problems within their social and cultural context. In doing so, it widens the research perspective and prioritises research that is deemed most likely to produce the knowledge for the identification of effective responses not only to today's problems but also to future problems. In an ever-changing environment, it is important to know not just what works now but what may work in the future by

understanding better the causes and mechanisms underlying drug use and intervention success and how the social environment interacts with these. As stated in the Commission's Indicative Strategic Research Roadmap, 2011-2013:

"Research under the SSH programme is intended to be policy and socially relevant i.e. to be able to inform policy and public debate and to identify and examine key issues and options, while not being driven by short-term policy priorities." (European Commission, 2009)

A strong thread running through the project's inputs is the need for a more balanced focus in illicit drug research, be that from bio-medical and epidemiological research to socio-economic and humanities research, from demand to supply, from a focus on only problem drug users to including also non-problematic users, from considering only the negative consequences of drugs to acknowledging also the positive consequences, and from including only desired policy outcomes to considering also the undesired outcomes.

All of the identified research priorities have added value in being carried out cross-nationally, in two or more European countries. The main benefit of carrying out research in different countries is that it provides an opportunity to explore the impact of different cultures and policies, thus giving greater insight into the role of contextual factors and the impact of the social environment. Other benefits for research include the ability to recruit larger samples, giving greater power to study results and the increased access to expertise. Additionally, the pooling of resources can provide cost savings for countries compared to carrying out the research separately.

Within the research priorities, the perceived added value of carrying out research cross-nationally is therefore implicit and is only mentioned when it is of a particular significance for a certain topic or theme.

ERANID focuses on illicit drugs and excludes alcohol and tobacco. Throughout the ERANID process, however, many stakeholders recognised that the distinction between licit and illicit drugs often limits our understanding of important aspects of the phenomenon, such as drug use pathways, the extent of substance displacement and determinants of use. Where relevant, it is important that licit drugs and medi-

cines are considered in combination with illicit drugs and that relevant findings and methods from the alcohol and tobacco field are used.

Regarding individual drugs, this SRA aims to provide lasting knowledge for policy-makers and the public and focusing on certain drugs can restrict the applicability of findings to other situations. The approach taken within the SRA is to focus on drugs in general rather than on individual substances. There are some instances where it will be relevant to mention types of drug, for example when encouraging a widening of focus for treatment responses research away from opiates and towards all types of drug use. In general, this is not the case.

One subject that is worth mentioning is the issue of new psychoactive drugs. During consultations, new psychoactive substances were frequently mentioned. While it is clear that this new phenomenon is of concern to stakeholders, further discussion suggested that recent research funding has disproportionately benefited research in this area. There was also the recognition that, as these substances become a more established feature of the drug situation, it is important that they are not seen as separate from more traditional drugs.

HOW THE RESEARCH PRIORITIES ARE STRUCTURED

The research priorities are structured in a way that broadly reflects existing methods of classifying research:

- Research Area 1** Understanding drug use pathways through the life course
- Research Area 2** Improving wellbeing: responding to drug use and its consequences
- Research Area 3** A better understanding of drug markets, supply and supply reduction responses
- Research Area 4** Policy analysis: Implementation and impact

Within these research areas, the priorities are structured around four common themes that run across each of the research areas providing a more coherent approach to research needs and encouraging synergies between the different research areas. It is hoped that this will prevent a situation where individual projects in different areas are commissioned answering only narrow research questions with

limited ability to improve knowledge outside of the studied area.

The themes are as follows:

- *Measurement and methodology*

This theme focuses on issues of measurement and the development of innovative methodological approaches for improving knowledge on drug issues.

- *Key actor perspective*

This theme takes the perspective of key actors such as drug users and advocates research based on user or individual perspectives.

- *The social environment*

This theme encourages research that situates drug use and its consequences within the context of the social environment.

- *Understanding the impact and opportunities of communication technologies*

This theme aims to further our understanding of how communication technologies influence the drug situation and how they can be harnessed to improve responses to the drug situation, including the improvement of research methodologies.

A summary of the research areas and themes is available in Annex 3.

RESEARCH AREA 1

UNDERSTANDING DRUG USE PATHWAYS THROUGH THE LIFE COURSE

This research area focuses on the natural history of drug use and related consequences throughout the life course adopting a dynamic perspective on the relationship between social, environmental, cultural, biological and behavioural factors and drug use pathways and consequences. The ability of under-researched populations to provide a wider understanding of drug use is recognised within this research area, particularly in relation to protective factors and the level of risk associated with different types of drug use. This necessitates researching drug use across the whole population including non-drug users, those with limited drug use history, frequent drug users and those who have experienced dependence issues without coming to the attention of services.

While research on the prevalence, incidence and patterns of drug use is common (ERANID Comparative Analysis Report), it mainly involves quantitative, cross-sectional surveys and is unable to provide sufficient knowledge on drug use trajectories and how these develop through the life course. There is limited understanding of the factors that impact on drug use escalation and/or reduction, particularly with respect to the influence of social environment and culture. Furthermore, while research exists showing the association between individual risk factors and drug use and drug use and negative consequences, it rarely moves beyond description with little exploration of the developmental processes, interactions or causal mechanisms. This hinders our understanding of the nature of the relationship between drug use and negative consequences such as mental health issues, anti-social and criminal behaviour and leads to policies that focus solely on reducing drug use rather than addressing the underlying factors influencing drug use and the likelihood of experiencing negative consequences of use.

Understanding how drug use develops and the relationship with drug use consequences will help to optimise interventions, programmes and policy and help identify where within the continuum of drug use and dependence, different interventions are most likely to succeed. It should also provide policymakers with knowledge that supports the identification of appropriate outcome measures for policies and interventions (Research Area 2 and Research Area 4).

While epidemiology plays an important role in describing the distribution and ex-

tent of the drug use problem, it has so far, despite significant investment, been unable to provide sufficient explanations for the distribution of drug use problems. A different approach is therefore required that complements existing knowledge by using alternative methods of inquiry and incorporating wider perspectives. The use of disciplines and methods from social sciences and humanities such as sociology, anthropology, ethnography, life history approaches, biographical approaches and qualitative methods can support this. Longitudinal research will allow exploration of the developmental processes involved in drug use pathways and help establish temporality, enabling causal inferences to be made.

1.1: MEASUREMENT AND METHODOLOGY

Longitudinal research

The need for longitudinal research has been stressed repeatedly and the establishment of a prospective longitudinal study focusing on drug use and associated behaviours across the life course in a number of different countries would be an extremely valuable source of information. However, this would require a substantial long-term funding and management commitment making it an unlikely prospect. Research that explores the use of alternative methods to capture the natural history of drug use and the influence of social environmental factors on drug use transitions is therefore a priority. This should focus on the use of existing datasets and how these can be complemented.

The use of sentinel communities

Research should explore how sentinel communities may be used to research drug use pathways and consequences at an individual and community level.

Causal and developmental processes

A further priority is for research that moves beyond a description of observed associations to explore the dynamics of interactions and the establishment of causality and causal mechanisms, particularly in relation to mental health, social functioning and criminal behaviour.

1.2: KEY ACTOR PERSPECTIVE

Motives for drug use

Little is known about individual motives for drug use, non-use and continuation of use. Research exploring the nature of the decision making process and the factors that influence it is required. This will allow a better understanding of the factors that influence drug using behaviours, help policymakers and practitioners to determine the most appropriate response to different types of use and identify opportunities for behavioural interventions. Research should consider aspects such as the perception and actual experience of pleasure and harm, acceptability, legality and perceived level of choice. Exploration of the relative weight of these factors and how they are mediated by age, gender and other socio-demographic factors is also encouraged. A wide range of individuals with different drug use histories should be studied to explore how different motives and decision making processes may affect drug use consequences.

Research should also explore the impact of culture and social norms on drug use. How acceptable are different types of drug use in each country and how does this impact on drug using behaviour? How do attitudes and social norms in relation to licit drugs affect illicit drug behaviours?

Drug user identities

Closely related to the topic of culture and social norms is the topic of drug user identities and the way drug users view themselves in relation to their drug use. How does this differ between individuals, groups and countries and what effect does this have on drug use consequences? Further exploration of the role of stigma is also required studying both the negative and positive consequences. What impact does stigma have on an individual's mental health, self-esteem, personal identity and feelings of belonging to society?

1.3: THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Interaction between individual factors and the social environment within drug use pathways

A priority is to further investigate the complex interaction between individual, socio-economic and environmental factors both in the onset of drug use and in transitions to drug misuse and dependency. Carrying out research across different geo-

graphical areas would better show the impact of socio-environmental factors on drug use, misuse and dependence, and help understand the role of external factors and how they interact with internal factors.

Social capital and social networks

Research is needed on the role of social capital and social networks and how these interact with drug use trajectories across the life course and among different groups.

Social environment and consequences of drug use

Research should explore how social, environmental and economic factors impact on the consequences of drug use and how these factors impact on the life experiences of drug users.

1.4: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

Social media and drug use

With the increasing use of social media, research is needed exploring its role in relation to drug use. This includes researching the role of user forums.

Using communication technologies for drug research

Technological advancements provide new opportunities for research in illicit drugs. Research that utilises these opportunities should be encouraged. This could include using communication technologies to access research subjects that have previously been difficult to identify and reach, such as non-problematic drug users. It could also include methodological research on online methods and how analytical tools on internet traffic can identify new trends and emerging substances.

RESEARCH AREA 2

IMPROVING WELLBEING: RESPONDING TO DRUG USE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

This research area focuses on improving knowledge and understanding of effective health and social responses and how to measure the impact of programmes and interventions. This includes prevention, risk and harm reduction, treatment and social responses.

Health and social responses, particularly prevention and treatment responses are a key research priority in all ERANID countries' national drug policy documents and the EU Action Plan on Drugs. Yet research around the effectiveness of demand reduction responses, particularly prevention and treatment responses dominates the illicit drugs research agenda in Europe (ERANID Comparative Analysis report). Despite large investment in this area, drug demand responses continue to be identified as a research priority. In a dynamic drug situation, new interventions and responses are sought that can deal with immediate issues.

However, to support longer-term decisions on appropriate health and social responses, research needs to move beyond simple measurement of short-term changes in drug use and seek to identify wider outcome measures that measure improvements in the wider domains shown to influence drug use (Research Area 1). Research also needs to explore the mechanisms by which changes occur and the processes involved. This is imperative in order to provide an understanding of how changes in intervention setting, geography, culture, and the social environment may impact on intervention success and to allow consideration of the role of implementation factors. Knowledge in this area would help determine the appropriateness of different interventions and responses for different individuals and populations, and improve the transferability of findings.

Knowledge of the mechanisms underlying intervention effects will also help target interventions to individual characteristics and needs. Research that challenges the 'one size fits all' nature of service provision and explores the suitability of different interventions for different types of user and the optimisation of care is required.

2.1: MEASUREMENT AND METHODOLOGY

Developing appropriate demand reduction outcome measures

There is a lack of consensus around the aims of health and social responses and consequently what appropriate outcome measures for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions are. Assessment of the effects of demand reduction interventions predominantly follow a medical model and measure changes in individual behaviour, predominantly drug use. Research that moves beyond the use of short-term drug use outcome measures is needed. This should incorporate outcome measures that reflect our understanding of the factors that influence sustained wellbeing and recovery in individuals and that take into consideration the impact of interventions and programmes on family members, communities and society.

The development of common outcome measures that can be used to assess the impact of a range of different health and social responses would allow a comparison of their relative effectiveness and cost-effectiveness and support better targeting of resources. Research should include the views of individuals, families and communities on relevant outcomes. Research should also explore concepts such as quality of life, functioning, wellbeing and how to measure them, building on existing instruments.

Understanding the mechanisms of intervention effects

The transferability of research findings on health and social responses is poor and research tends to focus on the description of outcomes at the macro level rather than the explanation for them. This leads to research that has limited use for the design of new interventions or for assessing whether an existing intervention is likely to be effective in a different situation. Research that explores what works for whom, in what circumstances and why could fill this gap.

Research that utilises theory driven methods of evaluation such as realistic evaluation (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) may allow us to link the context and mechanisms or underlying drivers of change with outcomes. To understand the underlying mechanisms, a wider range of disciplines and methods should be employed and the opinions of individuals, families and professionals should be included. Research that develops evaluation theory and method in this area is a priority.

Cross-national research in this area will increase the size of the research sample

providing greater power to the identification of intervention effects. It will also allow exploration of the impact of cultural, socio-environmental, organisational and implementation factors on intervention outcomes. Implementation research is also needed to assess the effect of implementation variance on outcomes.

2.2: KEY ACTOR PERSPECTIVE

Learning from drug users

Despite dependent drug users accounting for only a small proportion of drug users, research tends to focus on this population. Many research subjects are recruited from drug services or criminal justice settings and therefore represent the most problematic users. While the focus is understandable given these users are likely to represent the greatest risk for individual and social harm, it nevertheless skews our understanding of drug use, drug users and drug use consequences.

Research undertaken with drug users who have never been in contact with services due to their drug use could provide valuable information for prevention, harm reduction and treatment responses. What are the protective factors that prevent drug use escalation and moderate negative drug use consequences? How do individuals moderate their use and what supports them in doing so? What are the factors that prevent problems developing? Exploration of the extent to which users attempt to minimise the risks related to their use of drugs and the methods that they employ to do so can provide valuable harm reduction knowledge. In addition, an exploration of where users gain the knowledge for their harm reduction practices – lay knowledge, internet, public information – could help the targeting of responses.

Another priority topic is natural recovery and how individuals who have experienced drug dependency issues recover without the assistance of services. Research should investigate the motives for change, the process and meaning of recovery and the factors that support it including an exploration of the concept of recovery capital.

Access to appropriate services

Related to natural recovery is the need for research that explores the factors that influence treatment-seeking behaviour. Why do some individuals prefer to tackle dependency issues without the help of services and how do perceptions and attitudes towards services differ among groups in society? What is the effect of stigma on clients' willingness to access treatment services and on treatment success?

The choice of intervention is often determined by the services available rather than the needs of the individual. Research that explores the matching of interventions to individual characteristics, motivations and situation and the extent to which this results in better outcomes is required. This should incorporate individuals' views on their needs and expectations and explore the concepts of participatory care and supply driven care.

Research should explore all socio-economic domains, alongside drug use characteristics, type of drug use, and how best to tailor responses. Research into the best treatments for an individual that bears in mind the type of drug used, the nature of their use, their recovery capital, age, ethnicity and gender, the setting (particularly in a custodial setting), motivations, perceptions, beliefs and expectations. A particular priority for research is how to effectively treat individuals with both substance use and mental health issues and how to treat non-opiate users.

2.3: THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Social responses

Research is needed assessing the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of social responses such as employment and housing support. There is a lack of research on the effectiveness of aftercare and its role in supporting longer term recovery including the role of peer support.

Social factors related to intervention outcomes

Research exploring the impact of social factors and social capital on intervention outcomes, and the relative importance of social factors compared to individual factors is required.

2.4: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

Drug information and the internet

Research is needed that explores the role of the internet as a source of drug information, including harm reduction information and drug use advice. For example, the nature of support available on the internet and its role in providing peer support.

How communication technologies can help support drug users

Research should explore how communication technologies can be harnessed to engage drug users in demand reduction activities, particularly groups currently under-represented in services including young users, users of cannabis, stimulants and NPS, socially integrated users and those with occasional and recreational use. What type of user is best suited to interventions utilising different forms of communication technology? There is also a lack of knowledge on how communication technologies can support long-term recovery.

Another research need is for studies that explore the use of communication technologies for self-help purposes and for self-organisation. For example, to what extent do communication technologies give users the opportunity to take control of their own drug use rather than relying on services and interventions provided by others and what is the impact of this?

RESEARCH AREA 3

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF DRUG MARKETS, SUPPLY AND SUPPLY REDUCTION RESPONSES

This research area focuses on improving knowledge of drug markets, supply and supply reduction responses by involving drug users in research and exploring the issue at a local and regional level. This will allow an assessment of the impact of drug markets and supply reduction responses on individuals, communities and society and help improve understanding of the relationship between supply and demand.

Supply reduction is often given the same priority level in drug strategies as demand reduction and accounts for a large proportion of drug-related public expenditure (EMCDDA, 2008). Yet supply and markets and law enforcement responses only feature as research priorities in half of the ERANID countries' policy documents despite there being important gaps in these areas (ERANID Comparative Analysis Report). While there have been a number of large EU funded projects on supply and markets, these tend to focus on the macro or global level, for example on international trafficking or the size of the illicit drug market. There is a lack of research with a local or regional focus, reflecting in part the lack of research on markets and supply at a national level.

The relative lack of research in this area, coupled with the large sums of public money spent on supply reduction suggests that this research area should be a priority for future illicit drug research.

3.1: MEASUREMENT AND METHODOLOGY

Developing improved supply indicators

Research is needed to test the relevance and applicability of current supply indicators and to contribute to the development of improved measures of the drug market and supply. This may include methodological research on the validity of price and purity as proxies of availability or research to determine what the most appropriate measures are. Research should consider the potential of user-driven data in addition to law enforcement data.

Developing measures to understand the dynamics of the drug market

There is a lack of knowledge about local drug markets and research exploring the dynamics of the drug market, particularly research identifying appropriate mea-

asures to understand these dynamics is needed.

Economic theories of the drug market

Research is required that explores economic theories and their applicability to the drug market.

Measuring the impact of supply reduction responses

Research is needed that helps develop a framework for assessing the impact of supply reduction responses. This should move beyond process measures to include the impact on individuals, communities and society particularly in relation to harms, security and violence. Relevant questions may include what the most appropriate aims for supply reduction activities are and whether the assumptions underlying supply reduction responses such as deterrence are valid. Methodological research in this area is encouraged.

3.2: KEY ACTOR PERSPECTIVE

Information on drug markets and supply often relies on law enforcement data and focuses on estimations of the size of the drug market and criminal aspects. As a source of information on drug markets and supply, users remain an under-utilised resource. To understand the nature of the relationship between supply and demand, both in terms of the operation of the market and the effect on drug use, it's important to include drug users in research.

The relationship between availability and drug using behaviours

Priorities include research that tests the assumptions underlying drug supply indicators such as the nature of the relationship between availability of drugs and individuals' drug using behaviour. This requires research among both drug users and non-drug users. Research may focus on the link between availability and patterns of use; availability and drug choice; how drug users behave during shortages in supply and how considerations of price and purity (or expected effect) impact on drug using behaviour.

The extent of drug user choice

Research that explores the degree of user choice within the drug market will provide a better understanding of the relationship between supply and demand. For example, do the types of cannabis available reflect user preferences?

3.3: SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Drug supply as a social phenomenon

Research that explores drug supply from a social perspective rather than from only a criminological perspective has the potential to improve our understanding of the nature of social supply, how drug markets manifest themselves in various countries and how methods of accessing drugs differ across communities and countries.

Impact of drug markets on communities

Research that explores the impact of drug markets on communities both in terms of harms and benefits is required. How are communities affected by drug markets? Why are certain communities more resilient to the negative effects of drugs and drug markets than others?

3.4: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

The role of communication technologies in the drug market

Research that explores the role of communication technologies in drug markets and supply is also required. How are different modes of communication used to gain access to drugs and at what level of the drug market? What are the characteristics of those who use communication technologies to sell and access illicit drugs? How does the internet interact with traditional supply methods and does its role differ for different drugs, for example new psychoactive substances? Research could also include how to monitor online drug markets, particularly the use of advanced analytical methods.

Impact of communication technologies on the drug market, individuals and communities

Research that explores the impact of communication technologies on the drug market and how this affects individuals and communities is needed. Research could include the impact of different modes of communication technologies on availability, levels of individual harms, community harms, and societal harms is, how these differ between countries and what the drivers of these differences are.

RESEARCH AREA 4

POLICY ANALYSIS: IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

This research area focuses on general policy rather than specific interventions. It aims to identify appropriate tools and measures for assessing the impact of policy and to explore issues of implementation and governance.

Research monitoring shows that evaluation studies on policy responses are rare. Where they do exist, they often focus on process measures rather than an assessment of the outcomes of government policy. They also tend to focus on the stated policy aims rather than undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the effect of government policy including unintended consequences. Developing knowledge and capacity in this area is essential in order to fully understand the impact of drug policies and help assess the likely impact of alternative policy approaches. It relies, however, on methodological advancements and a better understanding of the nature of the drug problem, particularly in relation to drug markets and supply; how the market operates, the relationship between supply and demand and the consequences of the drug market (Research Area 3). It also requires an understanding of the interface between drug policy and other policy areas.

Methods and disciplines suggested in relation to this research area are evaluation methods, policy analysis, historical research, political science and economics.

4.1: MEASUREMENT AND METHODOLOGY

Measuring the impact of policy

The success of drug policy is a highly political issue and assessment of policy effectiveness is therefore best undertaken at a country level. Nevertheless, work in this area can be supported by the development of a common framework for assessing drug policy consequences. This could involve the production of common metrics and indicators providing an objective and shared vision of the most appropriate indicators to measure the impact of policy. This may remove the focus from short-term policy goals and enable comparisons to be made across time and place. Comparative analysis of policy aims across countries would support this.

Research will need to test the underlying assumptions of indicators and measures and the logic models that policy is based upon. This will help evaluate the appro-

priateness of policy goals. To fully understand the implications and impact of policy choices, research also needs to map the unintended consequences, explore the mechanisms underlying them and incorporate the findings into assessments of policy success. The identification of relevant consequences such as substance displacement, impact on risk behaviours, quality of life, individual well-being, the contribution towards the stigmatisation of drug users, and overall drug harms and ways to measure these would enable a more rounded policy analysis. A better understanding of the impact of drug policy would support more accurate impact assessments of alternative policy approaches and comparisons of policy options.

Economic analysis

Methodological development in the field of economic analysis is required to help assess the cost-effectiveness of different drug policies and to compare the cost-effectiveness of different approaches. In particular, methods for and studies on assessing the cost-effectiveness of criminalisation and of supply reduction activities are needed. The development of cost-benefit analysis methods is also required.

Research assessing the social costs of government drug policy will provide a clearer picture of the full impact of government policy and to understand better the extent to which policy exacerbates or alleviates the social costs of drugs. This should take into account the costs related to missed opportunities.

4.2: KEY ACTOR PERSPECTIVE

Comparative analysis of drug user experiences

While there is an identified need for research on policy consequences, there is a recognised gap between written drug policy and the realities of implementation. A comparative analysis of the experiences of drug users in different countries would provide a better picture of how policy is implemented and how differences in response impact on individuals.

Attitudes towards drug policy and drug laws

Priorities include research that explores individual attitudes towards drug policy and drug laws including attitudes towards different types of responses and attitudes towards shifting policies in relation to cannabis.

4.3: THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The impact of drug policy on communities and society

Research that considers the impact of drug policy on communities and society is needed including research on the role of drug policy in exacerbating or alleviating social and health inequalities, community cohesion and social and economic costs.

Inclusive policy making

Research is needed that explores the extent to which governments involve society in the formulation of drug policy. Does this differ across country and does the extent of involvement affect policy outcomes?

4.4: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

How policy has adapted to a changed environment

Research that explores the extent to which government policy has adapted to changes in the drug market brought about by new communication technologies is required.

Using communication technologies to widen participation in policy and governance

Research should also explore how communication technologies are or can be used to widen participation in drug policy.

4. Conclusions and next steps

As indicated, the Strategic Research Agenda provides the foundation for the next stage of the ERANID project, the launching of common calls. The criteria for narrowing down the topics will be developed in early 2015 and it is hoped that funders are able to collaborate on topics of interest and commission research projects that address some of the gaps and needs identified within the SRA. The project members will also use the opportunities presented by the Horizon 2020 programme to suggest relevant topics from the SRA to form part of the programme's funding agenda.

In addition to encouraging research in the topics and areas identified within the SRA, ERANID aims to promote sustainable improvements in illicit drug research. Recommendations and future plans will be presented at the end of the project but a number of conclusions and future actions related to the SRA and the work to date are included here.

It has been clear that some of the identified research gaps are in fact information gaps and it's important to prevent this from resulting in the duplication of existing research. Previous work in this area has stressed the importance of conducting gap analyses to identify research priorities (EMCDDA Scientific Committee, 2013). It's imperative to take stock of existing research and determine the added value of proposed research ensuring that it builds upon previous findings.

The work undertaken so far as part of the ERANID project, demonstrates the need to combine stakeholder views on research priorities with an assessment of current and existing research in order to avoid the misinterpretation of information gaps as research gaps. ERANID seeks to promote the establishment of formal priority setting mechanisms, taking into account existing work on priority setting (for example, the EMCDDA's Scientific Committee's contribution to the Annual Dialogue on illicit drugs within the Horizontal Drugs Group). This SRA should form part of an ongoing

process for collaborative priority setting in illicit drugs research across Europe and the priorities should be updated regularly.

In keeping with the approach taken within ERANID, it is recommended that the process of research priority setting is as inclusive as possible and is not just undertaken by a limited number of experts or seen as a government exercise. This is important for two reasons: to expand ownership of the research agenda to all relevant stakeholders, democratising the process and ensuring that priorities are not narrowly focused and better reflect the needs of a wider section of society; and to prevent the over-politicisation of the research agenda, which often results in short-term goals and leaves the research agenda vulnerable to changes in government and policy priorities. Carrying out a comprehensive consultative exercise also supports wider objectives such as facilitating links between research, policy, drug-related professionals and civil society as well as across research disciplines.

Further actions to address the information gap could include better dissemination of research findings both in terms of wider dissemination and in making research findings more relevant and targeted for the needs of different stakeholders.

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ANNEXES

I – Online Stakeholder Survey questionnaire

II - Glossary of terms

III – Table summarising research priorities

ANNEX I: ONLINE STAKEHOLDER SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

IP Address

IDENTIFICATION at Individual Level

Which country do you work in?

Europe: European Union Country

Europe: Non-European Union Country

Other

EU Country – Please specify

Austria	Italy
Belgium	Latvia
Bulgaria	Lithuania
Croatia	Luxembourg
Cyprus	Malta
Czech Republic	Netherlands
Denmark	Poland
Estonia	Portugal
Finland	Romania
France	Slovakia
Germany	Slovenia
Greece	Spain
Hungary	Sweden
Ireland	United Kingdom

Your name(s)?

(Group: please include all names)

Your e-mail(s):

(Group: please insert all)

Name of your Institution(s)/Organisation(s):

What is your job role there?

(Group: information about all participants)

Which city/town do you work in?

(please add the Postal Code)

IDENTIFICATION as Stakeholder

Please specify which group of Stakeholders you belong to.

Policy-field: Policy-maker, Decision-maker, responsible for the implementation of drug related programmes, etc.

Drug related professional field: Law Enforcement (Police and Security Forces, Customs, Courts, Prisons, etc.). Prevention, Treatment, Harm Reduction, Social Rehabilitation, etc.

Civil Society: Parents, Youth, Teachers, School, Work, or Church Religion related Organisations, Recreational Industry, Drug Users Organisations, etc.

Research Field: Human and Social Sciences, Market, Criminology of Law related sciences, other like Medicine, Toxicology, Pharmacology, Neurosciences, etc., and/or Methodological related sciences

FOR NON-RESEARCHERS ONLY:

And to which Category:

Policy Maker (Govern, Parliament, Political Parties, etc.)

Decision Maker (National/Regional Drug Coordinator or Drug Program Manager, etc.)

Police and Security Forces (Police: Criminal, Customs, Civil, etc.)

Judicial area (Courts, Prisons, etc.)

Prevention and/or Dissuasion areas

Treatment area

Harm Reduction and/or Social Rehabilitation areas

Drugs Users Organisations
 Youth Organisations
 Parent Organisations
 School/Teacher Organisations
 Work Organisations (unions, trade, agriculture, etc.)
 Churches Related Organisations
 Recreational Industry Organisations
 Other

FOR RESEARCHERS ONLY:

Please specify which disciplines you use in your research work?

Antropology/Ethnology	Neurosciences
Criminology	Pharmacology
Demography	Philosophy
Economy	Political Sciences
Genetics	Psychology
History	Psychiatry
Law	Sociology
Forensic Sciences	Statistics
Medicine	Toxicology
Methodological Sciences	Other

FOR RESEARCHERS ONLY:

Considering the diversity of the illicit drug field, please specify where the findings of your research (or that of your organisation) can be applied.

Epidemiology (prevalence, patterns of use, types of drug users, etc.)
 Determinants of drug use and addictions
 Consequences of drug use and addictions
 Processes related to the maintenance and remission of drug use and addictions
 Drug related laws
 Law Enforcement responses (police, security and criminal areas)

Prevention responses
Dissuasion responses
Treatment responses
Harm Reduction responses
Social Rehabilitations responses
Supply and Markets
Evaluations (Health, Social of Economic Impacts; Programme Evaluations, etc.)
Governance
Methodological Issues
Other

FOR NON-RESEARCHERS ONLY:

*Considering the diversity of the illicit drug field, please specify your area of work/
interest (or that of your organisation)*

Epidemiology (prevalence, patterns of use, types of drug users, etc.)
Determinants of drug use and addictions
Consequences of drug use and addictions
Processes related to the maintenance and remission of drug use and addictions
Drug related laws
Law Enforcement responses (police, security and criminal areas)
Prevention responses
Dissuasion responses
Treatment responses
Harm Reduction responses
Social Rehabilitations responses
Supply and Markets
Evaluations (Health, Social of Economic Impacts; Programme Evaluations, etc.)
Governance
Methodological Issues
Other

FOR RESEARCHERS ONLY:

Please summarise how your former/current research work was/is linked to the illicit drugs field?

KNOWLEDGE NEEDS/GAPS/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

FOR NON-RESEARCHERS ONLY:

Could you please summarise how your work/interest(s) (or that of your organisation) is/are linked to the illicit drugs field?

KNOWLEDGE NEEDS/GAPS/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

FOR RESEARCHERS ONLY:

Please describe below, with reference to your main area of expertise, knowledge gaps, related to the illicit drugs field, that future research should address.

Feel free to assign priorities, by putting them in order of '1 = most important' and so on.

If possible, add the respective/appropriate research questions and suggest academic disciplines that could contribute towards answering the questions you raise.

(e.g. You might consider any problems you face or doubts you have that could, eventually, be addressed by research).

FOR NON-RESEARCHERS ONLY:

Please detail below, topics or research questions related to the illicit drugs field, that could provide useful knowledge on your main work/area of interest.

Feel free to assign priorities, by putting them in order ('1 = most important' and so on).

If possible, suggest academic disciplines that could contribute towards answering the questions you raise.

(e.g. You might consider any problems you face or doubts you have that could, eventually, be addressed by research).

Can you suggest additional topics or research questions, related to the illicit drugs field, outside your main work/area of interest, that you feel would be useful for future research to address?

Feel free to assign priorities and to suggest academic disciplines that could contribute towards answering the questions you raise.

END

Do you want to be informed about the results of this survey?

ANNEX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND USEFUL LINKS

Socio-economic sciences and humanities

The term socio-economic sciences and humanities is used by ERANID within the context of its use in the European Commission's Framework Programmes for research. Although definitions vary across scholarly institutions and groups, a broad definition is adopted in which the humanities are those disciplines that focus on the exploration and explanation of human experience (including, but not limited to, literature, history, philosophy, religion). The social sciences are closely linked to the humanities, and are fields of study that commonly involve more empirical methods to consider human society and social relationships (including, but not limited to, criminology, economics, anthropology, political science, sociology). For a report on socio-economic sciences and humanities and their integration in the current European research programme, Horizon2020, see below:
http://www.net4society.eu/_media/Net4Society_D3_2_SSH_Integration_inH2020_PU.pdf

Inter-disciplinary

The term inter-disciplinary is used within the SRA to refer to the use of more than one research discipline in an attempt to find shared meanings. This term is deliberately chosen over multi-disciplinary, which is less integrated and refers to the use of more than one discipline often with separate viewpoints. A policy brief on interdisciplinary research design has been published:
http://www.net4society.eu/_media/PB_N4S_FINAL.pdf

Drug-related research

The definition of drug-related research used by the EMCDDA (2012) has been adopted by the ERANID project:

"Drug-related research involves performing a study on illicit drugs, which may involve a range of disciplines...in order to test a hypothesis or answer a specific question."

This excludes routine monitoring and data collection activities.

ANNEX III: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH AREAS AND THEMES

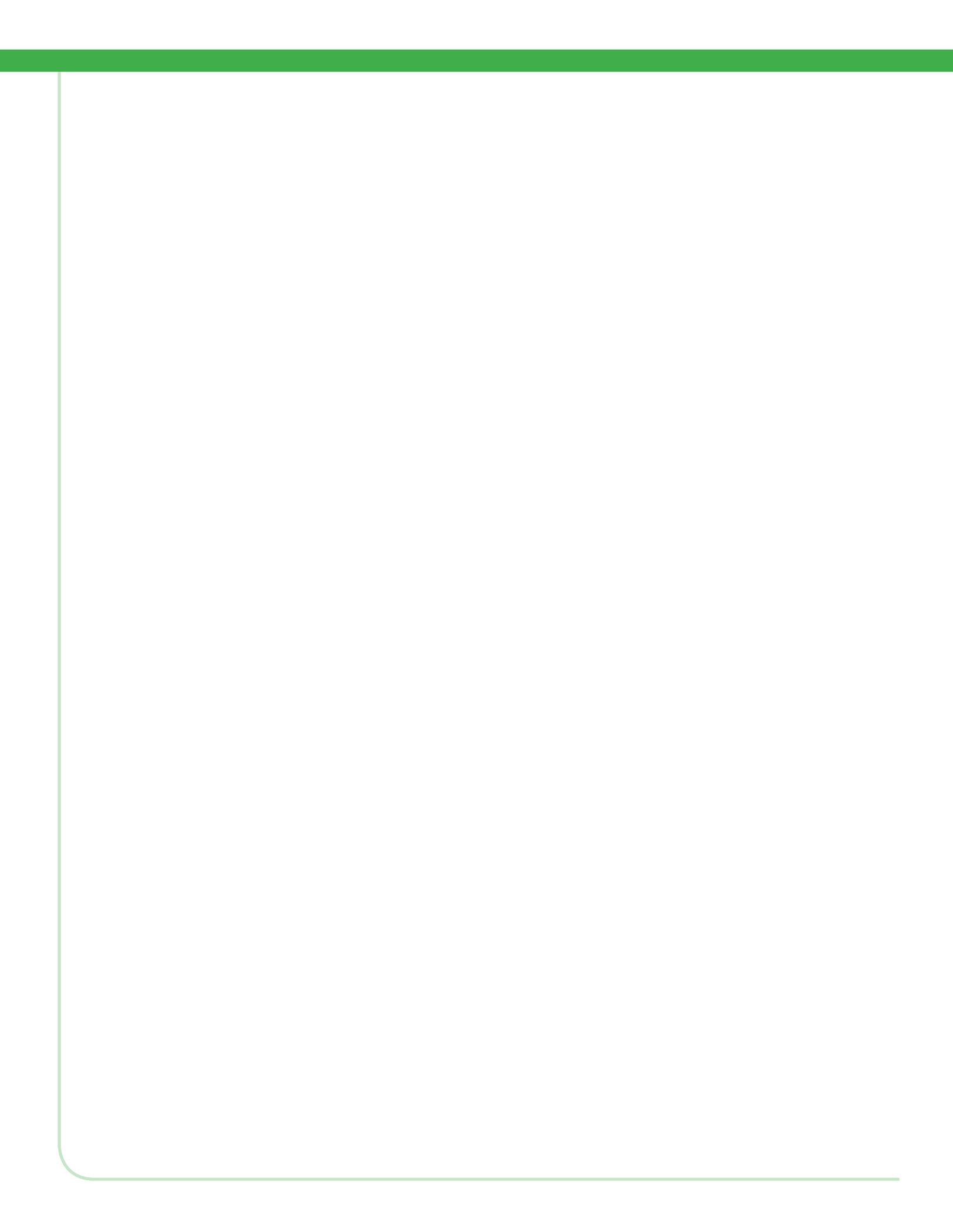
RESEARCH AREA 1	
<i>UNDERSTANDING DRUG USE THROUGH THE LIFECOURSE</i>	
1.1: Measurement and methodology	Longitudinal research
	The use of sentinel communities
	Causal and developmental processes
1.2: Key actor perspective	Motives for drug use
	Drug user identities
1.3: The social environment	Interaction between individual factors and the social environment within drug use pathways
	Social capital and social networks
	Social environment and consequences of drug use
1.4: Understanding the impact and opportunities of communication technologies	Social media and drug use
	Using communication technologies for drug research
RESEARCH AREA 2	
<i>IMPROVING WELLBEING: RESPONDING TO DRUG USE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES</i>	
2.1: Measurement and methodology	Developing appropriate outcome measures
	Understanding the mechanisms of intervention effects
2.2: Key actor perspective	Learning from drug users
	Access to appropriate services
2.3: The social environment	Social responses
	Social factors related to intervention outcomes
2.4: Understanding the impact and opportunities of communication technologies	Drug information and the internet
	How communication technologies can help support drug users

RESEARCH AREA 3***A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF DRUG MARKETS, SUPPLY AND SUPPLY REDUCTION RESPONSES***

3.1: Measurement and methodology	Developing improved supply indicators
	Developing measures to understand the dynamics of the drug market
	Economic theories of the drug market
	Measuring the impact of supply reduction responses
3.2: Key actor perspective	The relationship between availability and drug using behaviours
	The extent of drug user choice
3.3: The social environment	Drug supply as a social phenomenon
	Impact of drug markets on communities
3.4: Understanding the impact and opportunities of communication technologies	Impact of communication technologies on the drug market, individuals and communities
	The role of communication technologies in the drug market

RESEARCH AREA 4***POLICY ANALYSIS: IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT***

4.1: Measurement and methodology	Measuring the impact of policy
	Economic analysis
4.2: Key actor perspective	Comparative analysis of drug user experiences
	Attitudes towards drug policy and drug laws
4.3 The social environment	The impact of drug policy on communities and society
	Inclusive policy making
4.4 Understanding the impact and opportunities of communication technologies	Widening participation in policy and governance
	How policy has adapted to a changed environment





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