

EU Youth Attitudes on Drugs

As part of a survey for the European Union to gauge young people's views and experiences of drugs over 12,000 randomly selected young people (aged 15-24) were interviewed across the 27 EU Member States¹.

The authors of the report describing the findings from what the young people said urges some caution particularly when it comes to new substances. They point out that sample sizes at the state level were small and that there isn't as yet a common definition of 'new psychoactive substances'.

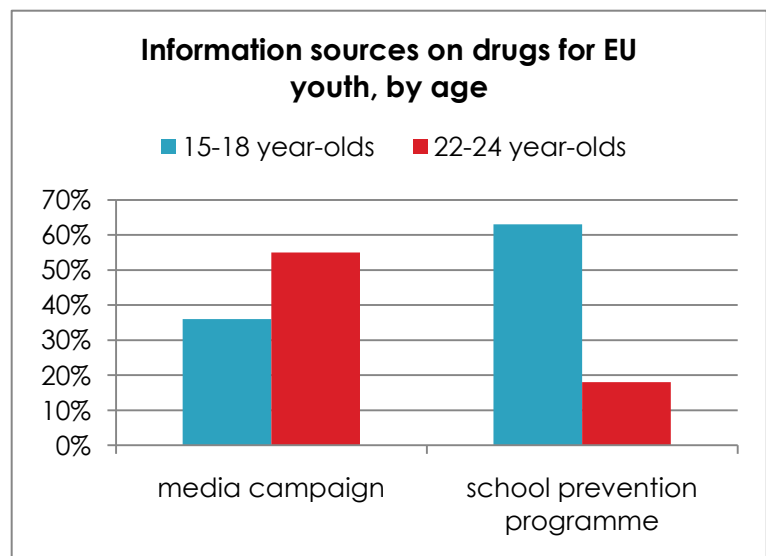
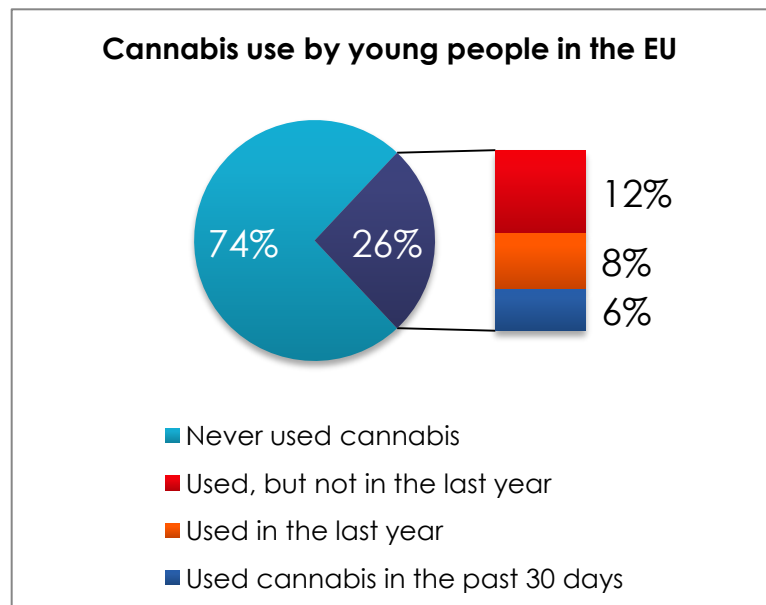
Key Findings

Access and use

- Roughly three quarters of young EU citizens participating in the survey said they have never used cannabis.
- Nevertheless, 57% of young people participating in the survey indicated that they thought it was easy or fairly easy to obtain cannabis within 24 hours.
- 5% of young people participating in the survey reported having used new psychoactive substances (sometimes known as legal highs). Of whom over half got them from friends and only 7% said they accessed them from the internet.

Information Sources

Young people report that the internet (64%) and peers (37%) are the sources they would use to gain information about drugs. However, when questioned about where they had received the most information about the effects and risks



¹ [Youth attitudes on drugs](#), European Commission (2011)

associated with drugs in the past year a different picture emerges.

- 46% said they gained their information from a media campaign
- 41% said they were informed by a school prevention programme
- 39% said that the Internet was their primary source of information

63% of EU Youth aged 15 to 18 say school prevention programmes were where they get information about drug harms

The survey also picked up considerable differences between age groups. For example, unsurprisingly, 15-18 year olds were much more likely to mention school prevention programmes as an important source of information than those aged 22 to 24.

Perceptions of Health Risks

- Over 90% of young people thought that using cocaine or ecstasy on a regular basis would pose a high risk to a person's health.
- Two thirds (67%) think that regular use of cannabis poses a high health risk. Amongst those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months 36% saw regular use as a high health risk.
- Over half (57%) consider regular consumption of alcohol to have high health risks.

The Law and Drugs

- Over 90% of young people believe that heroin, cocaine and ecstasy should continue to be banned in EU Member States.
- Over half (59%) think that cannabis should continue to be illegal.

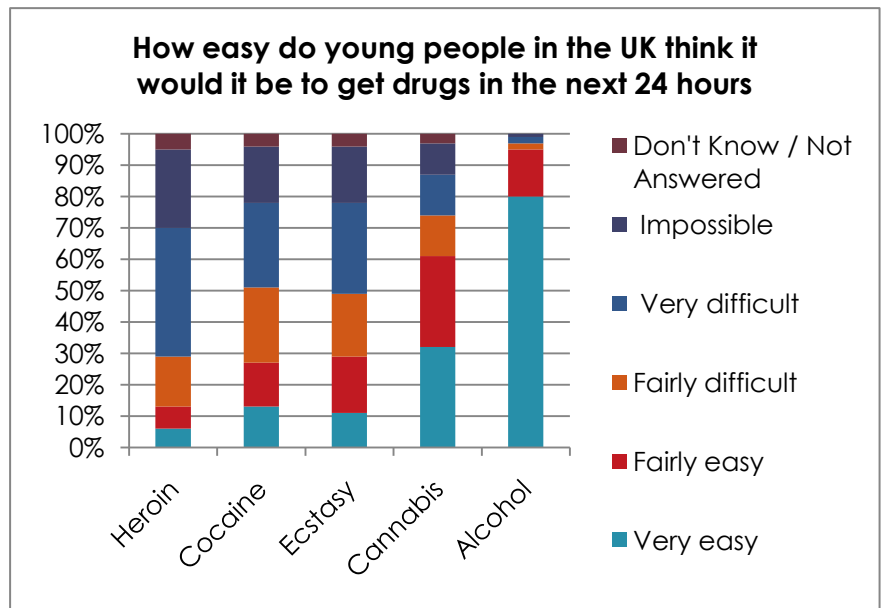
Demand Reduction Responses

- 64% see tough measures against dealers and traffickers as being legitimate activity to tackle drugs.
- About half (49%) of respondents supported prevention and information campaigns as a way of tackling drug problems.
- 37% see treatment as crucial.
- 33% would like to see tough action against drug users.
- 13% selected legalisation of drugs as the approach they would support.

Issues from the UK

Access

The responses from young people in the UK to the questions about how easy it would be for them to get drugs in 24 hours suggests that for heroin, alcohol and tobacco young people would find it slightly harder than the EU average, but that they would find it easier to access ecstasy, cocaine, cannabis than their counterparts in Europe.



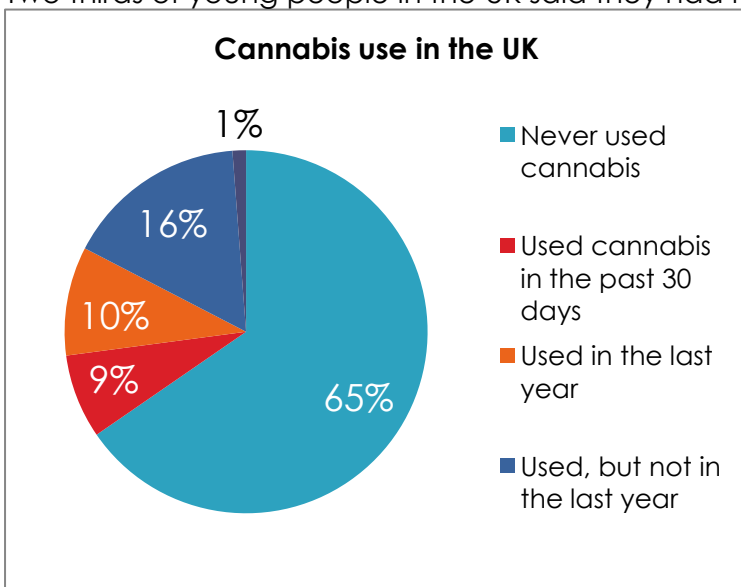
The authors point out that the responses may have been affected by the 24 hour time limit. Equally there may be other localised issues which impact on the answers.

Drug Use

The value of this European survey is in being able to give a comparison between European countries. It is important to remember that we have much more comprehensive surveys which give a more detailed understanding of the prevalence of drug taking by young people and adults. Nevertheless the data is of interest.

Cannabis

Two thirds of young people in the UK said they had never used cannabis, 10% lower than the EU average.



This compares with 59% of young adults (16 – 24 years) who said they have never used illegal drugs in the most recent Home Office funded survey of drug use in England and Wales².

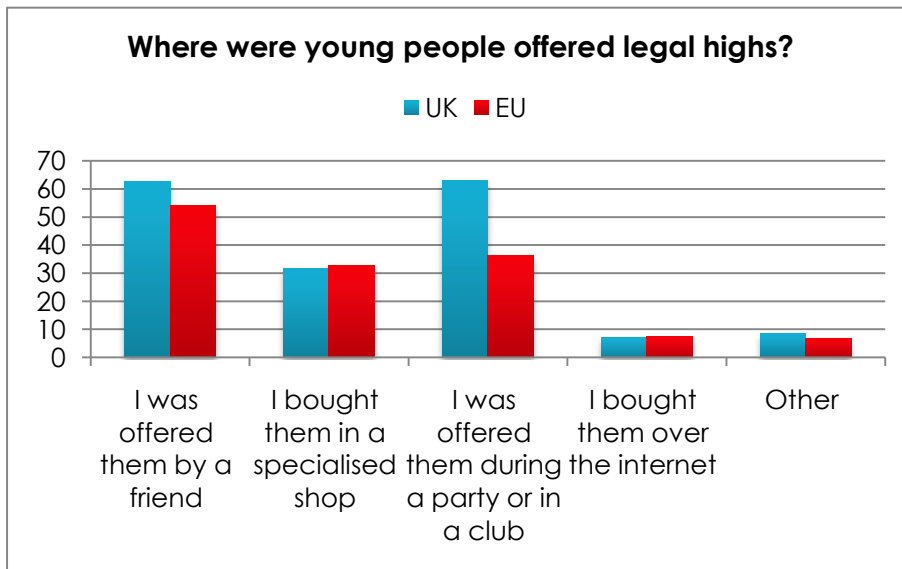
New Drugs (legal highs)

The survey asks specifically about used new psychoactive substances, which in the UK have been commonly referred to as 'legal

² [Drug Misuse Declared: Findings from the British Crime Survey](#), Home Office (2010)

highs'. The survey design recognises that there is the potential for some confusion about what drugs might fall into this category, and as a result urge caution in interpreting the results. In asking about this area the question that was put was

In certain countries some new substances that imitate the effects of illicit drugs are being sold as legal substances in the form of - for example - powders, tablets/pills or herbs. Have you ever used such substances?



It appears that the UK's use of these substances is higher than the EU average.

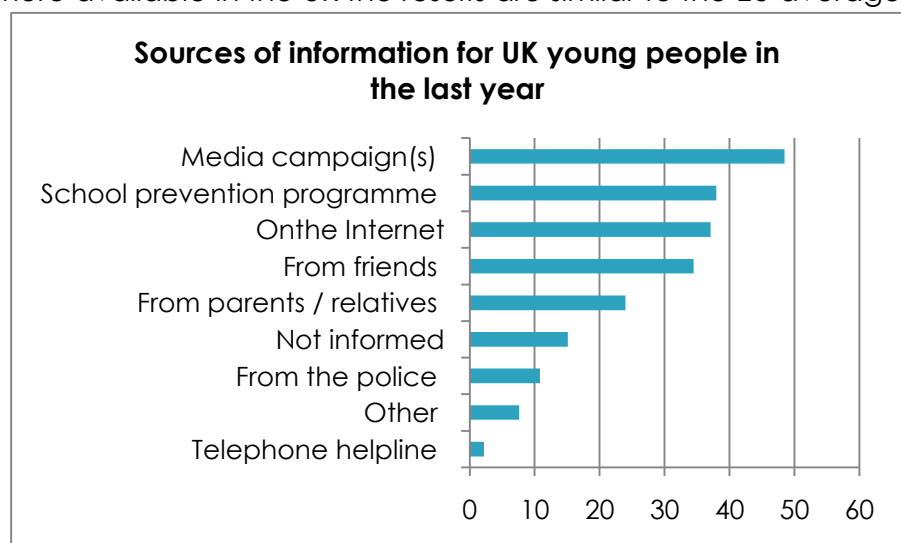
Nearly 1 in 10 (8%) said they had tried one of the new drugs, making the UK's youth the fourth highest country in this category behind Latvia (8.8%), Poland (9%) and Ireland (16%).

There has been some concern that about the role of the internet in marketing and distributing new drugs, but it appears that for those young people who have used them more traditional sources have been the way in which they have been able to access them.

Again it is important to note the need for considerable caution in placing too much emphasis on these findings as they rely on the responses of only 41 young people from the UK. Nevertheless as we can see with the exception of clubs and parties as a venue where these drugs appear to be more available in the UK the results are similar to the EU average.

Information about drugs

Interestingly in a year when the government did not undertake any national media campaigns on substance misuse in England³ media campaigns were still the most highly referenced source of information on drugs. It suggests that



³ [Changing Behaviour, Improving Outcomes A New Social Marketing Strategy for Public Health](#), Department for Health (2011)

there may be a residual memory of previous campaigns or alternative localised campaigns.

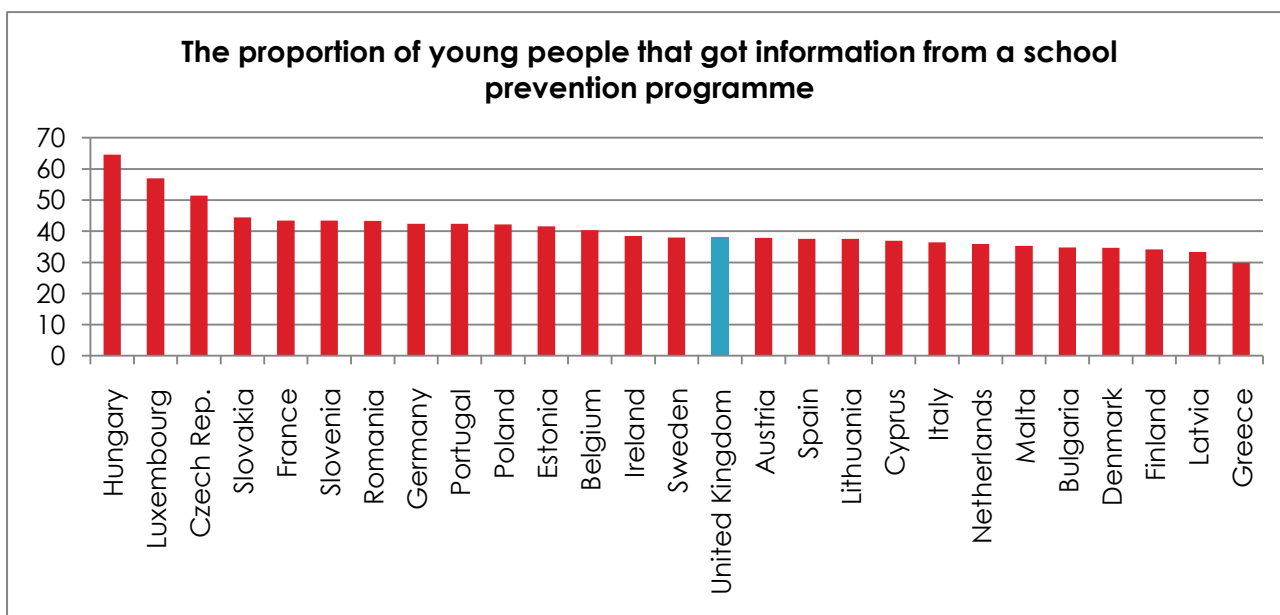
Parents

While a quarter (24%) of young people turned to their parents for advice in the last year it appears that there is a much wider group who would be willing to hear what parents and relatives have to say. UK young people were the most likely of the all the countries to say they would turn to parents for advice about drugs with nearly half (49%) saying this would be a source of information.

School Prevention Programmes

The responses reinforce the continuing importance of structured drug education in school in ensuring that young people get accurate information and advice about drugs. Almost 2 in 5 young people in the UK cited school prevention programmes as the place where they had received information about drugs in the last year.

This figure puts the UK in the bottom half of the countries where school programmes were



cited as a source of information. These figures may reflect that drug education and prevention are not statutory subjects in school education, and that respondents were aged 15 to 24. There is little evidence that further and high education institutions in the UK have structured prevention programmes⁴.

Harms

Young people in the UK appear to have a view that regular drug use has high risks for their health for all illegal drugs, but a more nuanced view about alcohol.

- 96% see regular cocaine use as being high risk.
- 91% see regular ecstasy use as being high risk.

⁴ [Alcohol and Drug Prevention in Colleges and Universities](#), Mentor UK (2007)

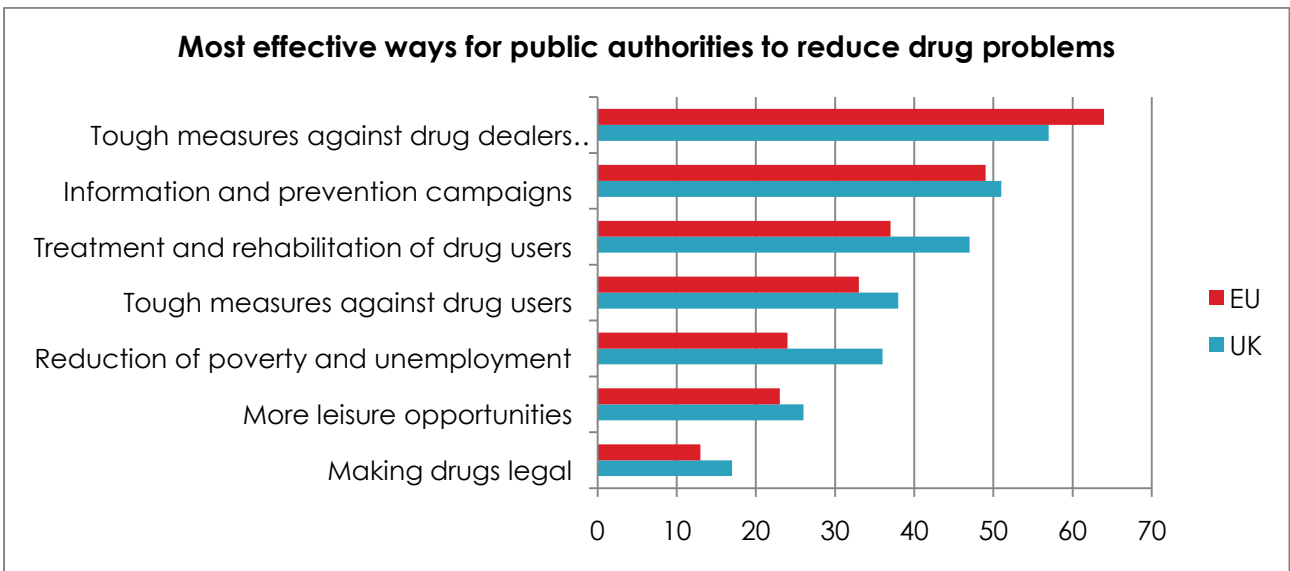
- 63% see regular cannabis use as being high risk. (27% see it as medium risk.)
- 44% see regular alcohol use as being high risk. (42% see it as a medium risk.)

Responses to drug use

The survey asked young people how the authorities should respond to the issues posed by drug use. The UK's young people, like the respondents as a whole, saw being tough on dealers and traffickers as the most effective way to tackle the problem (57%). The next most welcomed response was investment in information and prevention campaigns (49%). This was followed by undertaking treatment and rehabilitation with drug users (47%). Just under 1 in 5 (17%) saw legalising drugs as something the authorities should contemplate.

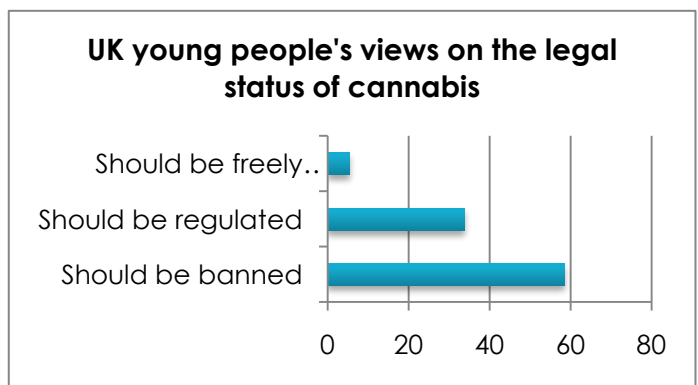
UK young people's three most effective approaches for tackling drug problems:

- Being tough on drug dealers and traffickers
- Information and Prevention campaigns
- Drug treatment



There is however, a more nuanced position about the legal status of cannabis that emerges from the data on how individual drugs should be dealt with a significant minority (34%) of young people in the UK seeing regulation of the drug as an attractive option.

Young people also had mixed views on how to deal with new psychoactive drugs.



- Over half (58%) only want them banned if they pose a risk to health
- A quarter (26%) took the view they should be banned in any circumstance.
- Just over 1 in 10 (12%) said that they would want to see them regulated.
- Only 3% said they wanted no action to take place.