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EUROPEAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT  
ČESKÁ REPUBLIKA CZECH REPUBLIC



# ACADEMIC PREPARATION KIT



13th Regional Selection Conference  
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# INTRODUCTION FROM THE ACADEMIC BOARD

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to Plzeň! This Academic Preparation Kit (APK) will be the first and main preparation document you will need and use for the session. The way it is structured is:

1. This introduction from the Academic Board (President and the Vice-Presidents)!
2. A short explanation of what the European Union (EU) is and how its main institutions work.
3. Summaries of each Topic Overview.
4. The Topic Overviews.

The Topic Overviews (TOs) are meant to give you a grasp of what the topic you will be discussing at the session is about at first glance. While the TO can be a very good starting point, you are encouraged to read and research more about the topic on your own!

Besides reading the overview of your own topic, which is what you should focus on, you are, of course, encouraged to read others, and, therefore, not only be more informed about relevant European issues, but also be more prepared for the General Assembly!

Enjoy reading this document, hopefully, as much as we have enjoyed writing it, and see you in Plzeň!

Best,

**Academic Board of Plzeň 2023**

Gerrard, Kacper, Sophie, and Markel.



# THE EU AND ITS INSTITUTIONS EXPLAINED

The EU's structure and functioning can be quite complex due to its many Member States and areas of competence. This is a very brief summary which is going to be of help during the duration of the session on how the EU and some of its institutions work.

The EU is a political and economic union of 27 European countries that work together in various ways to promote common interests and objectives. The values of the EU are **human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights**. It is built on the concept of countries working together and agreeing to let go of some control over their governments to reach common goals, standards, and laws. Each Member State is recognized as a sovereign nation with the authority to govern its domestic affairs. However, their participation in EU institutions and policies varies. This flexibility is due to the **principle of subsidiarity**, where decisions are made at the most appropriate level of government. Member States may have **exclusive, shared, or national competencies**.

The EU on its own has several institutions. Some of the most important institutions which will be relevant during the session's span are:

## The institutional triangle

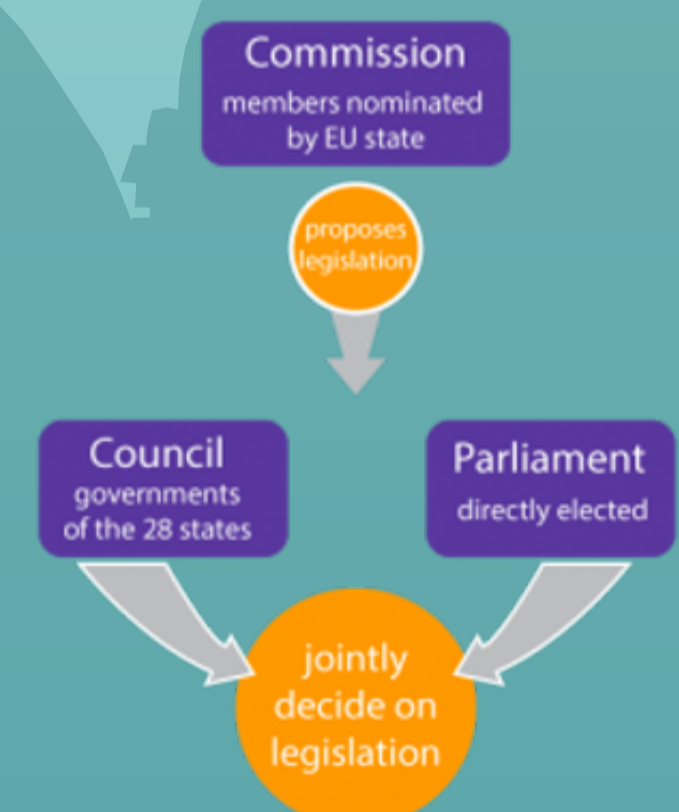
The **European Commission** is the **executive body** of the EU. It proposes laws and policies by drafting legislative proposals, which are then reviewed by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. It also enforces EU laws by monitoring their implementation in Member States and can take legal action against those not complying.

The **European Parliament** is the EU's directly elected legislative branch, where Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) represent the interests of EU citizens. It plays a key role in shaping and approving EU laws, and its members are elected by citizens of each Member State in European elections.

The **Council of the EU** (also known as the **Council of Ministers**) represents the **national governments** of EU Member States and, along with the European Parliament, forms the legislative process. It plays a pivotal role in adopting EU legislation, making decisions on various policies, and coordinating the positions of Member States.

## The European Council

The **European Council** is often confused with the Council of the EU or the **Council of Europe**<sup>[1]</sup> because of their name similarities, however, the two serve two different, vital roles in the functioning of the EU. The European Council is a high-level body consisting of the heads of **State** of EU Member States. It provides the EU with strategic guidance and sets the broad political agenda, making important decisions on major issues like foreign policy, economic coordination, and institutional reforms.



<sup>1</sup> The **Council of Europe** is NOT an EU institution. It is an international organisation that promotes human rights, democracy, and the rule of law throughout Europe. All EU Member States are Member States of the Council of Europe, but there are other European countries that are also a part of it.



EU decisions are made through a complex process of **negotiation and cooperation** among these institutions. Typically decisions involve the European Commission making legislative proposals, the Parliament and Council of the EU reviewing and amending them, and then reaching a compromise with all Member States.

## Other institutions

The **European Central Bank (ECB)** is responsible for **managing the Euro's monetary policy**, including issues related to interest rates and the money supply. Its main aim is to keep prices stable, thereby supporting economic growth and job creation. The use of a common currency within the Eurozone simplifies trade and financial transactions between Member States but also requires coordination on economic and fiscal policies to ensure the stability of the currency.

The EU's **budget** is a financial framework that supports the implementation of EU policies and programmes. It is not set by the ECB but is rather adopted through the budgetary procedure by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. Member States **contribute** a portion of their Gross National Income (GNI) **to fund the budget**, and these funds are used to finance initiatives like agriculture subsidies, regional development, research, and infrastructure projects, promoting economic and social cohesion across the EU.

The **European Court of Justice (ECJ)** is the highest court in the EU and is responsible for **interpreting and ensuring the uniform application of EU law**. It resolves disputes involving EU institutions, Member States, or individuals by providing authoritative legal interpretations. It consists of judges from each Member State, who serve as impartial interpreters of EU law. In cases where EU law interferes with national jurisdiction, Member States should turn to the ECJ for guidance.

The EU conducts a **common foreign policy** in areas where Member States have agreed to pool their resources. While the EU has a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, individual Member States still maintain their **foreign policies in areas that are not under EU competence**, such as national security and defence. This dual structure allows the EU to speak with a more unified voice on certain global issues while respecting the national sovereignty of its Member States in foreign policy.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

## AFCO

Some EU Member States, which tend to have a populist party in their executive branch of government, have attempted to or successfully managed to **influence the judiciary branch** of their country. This act endangered the separation of powers, which is not only one of the key principles of the EU law, but also one of the pillars of democracy itself. Independent judiciaries are part of the *check and balance systems* that keep the executive branches from gaining too much power in the political system. Therefore, it is essential that the rule of law in every Member State is protected and upheld.

## AFET

The Topic Overview goes over some of the most pressing issues affecting the African region of the Sahel, such as **terrorism, European imperialism, and the refugee crisis**; it also recognises and examines the ever-present role of the climate catastrophe. It lays out the measures that have been and are being taken by the governments of both African and European states, hoping to point out the **success stories and failures** in addressing the crisis. Moreover, it strongly encourages the reader to **prioritise the people of the Sahel** when searching for a solution, and provides informative and interesting materials for further research.

## CULT

In recent decades, **Europe** has undergone **massive political transitions**. As **democracy** became the rule for Member States, monuments and historical sites were a stark **reminder of the past**, which sparked a public debate over their value. To this day, some countries are struggling to find solutions for these artefacts that preserve their **cultural value** while respecting the **memories** they evoke.

## EMPL

Taking into account that over **46% of EU workers report labour-related stress**, preventing psychosocial risks in the workplace is vital to preserve employees' mental health and ensure a sustainable economic development.

In view of the **lack of a joint EU resolution** tackling this issue or even an homogeneous definition for psychosocial risks, factors such as 'toxic productivity' culture, digitalisation, or the lack of education on occupational health for employees and employers hinder the path towards safeguarding European workplaces.

For this reason, **cooperation** between the different actors involved is needed in order to **create a feasible solution**, which faces the negative consequences of this problem, such as chronic mental conditions, absenteeism, or mental burnout.

## ENVI I

Recent studies show an **increase in drug usage** in Europe. It is significant that this issue **threatens both individuals and States**, and so far, decision-makers have failed to find an adequate solution. Moreover, it **endangers society** economically, socially, and in terms of security.

The topic can be approached from many perspectives. It can be addressed through **legislative changes** at the national and international levels or by **supporting non-governmental organisations (NGOs)** as they try



to solve this issue in the individual sphere. Is it possible to combine multiple diverse strategies to find the perfect one?

## ENVI II

The ecology, animals, and public health are all negatively impacted by artificial illumination. Artificial light exposure **affects the body's circadian clock**, resulting in sleep-wake difficulties, predispositions to cancer, headaches, and depression. Lighting **disturbs wildlife**, including insects, birds, and sea turtles, **altering** their migratory patterns, routines, and habitats. The Milky Way and many stars are no longer visible at night. Lighting **consumes** 15% of the world's total energy, which makes it a pure energy waste, since bywith using sustainable lighting sources, it could be reduced to one-third. The majority of actions are performed at the national level, despite the fact that the European Commission has identified **light pollution** as one of the **priorities** to address by 2030. The regulations and procedures currently in place appear insufficient, as the globe becomes 2% brighter a year, and scientists are **raising awareness of the potential** harm to human health, animal welfare, and the environment.

## ITRE

In February 2022, the European Commission labelled, **under certain conditions**, nuclear energy activities as **'transitional'** activities and by extension labelled them 'green' for the purposes of switching from **high-carbon-based fossil fuels** to **renewable alternatives**. Several European countries, such as France, Spain, and Sweden, **rely on nuclear energy** to meet their energy needs. This poses a challenge for the EU, which is currently at a crossroads. On one hand, there's a **need for stricter regulations** to ensure safe nuclear energy use. On the other, the EU must transition most energy production to **green and renewable sources**. Finding the right balance is crucial to avoid potential energy crises. The EU's ability to manage this transition will shape its future energy landscape.

## LIBE I

The work of journalists is **essential for the survival of a functioning democracy**. They are offered **many new opportunities** in an increasingly digital world, but the shift to the Internet also poses **many dangers**. It also opens up more ways to attack journalists for those who see free, independent, investigative journalism as a thorn in their side. Recent examples have shown that sometimes, words are followed by real-life actions, further unsettling journalists. However, proper freedom of the press, which democracies must guarantee, also includes a **working environment for journalists in which they can safely conduct their work**.

## LIBE II

The LGBTQIA+<sup>[1]</sup> community faces various problems, from **stigma and discrimination** to the recent **rise of hate crime and hate speech** against the community. Member States have their own individual laws on same-sex marriage and adoption, making family life for the community harder. LGBTQIA+ individuals go through long adoption processes, with low success rates. In most countries, the LGBTQIA+ community's human rights are being violated. Various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and European institutions are working on bettering the situation, but they are not able to realise certain goals.

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<sup>1</sup> LGBTQIA+ is an acronym used to describe an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersexual, asexual, or more.





# COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS (AFCO)

**Rule of which law?** Separation of powers is one of the fundamental pillars of Western democracy. However, interference of the political power in the judiciary system is common in EU Member States like Hungary, Poland, or Spain. Keeping this in mind, how should the EU act in order to ensure the rule of law in all its Member States?

*By: Marek Barbuš (CZ)*

## Introduction

It is the year 2015 and Polish people are waiting impatiently for the **results** of the elections to both Sejm<sup>[1]</sup> and Senate<sup>[2]</sup>. The stakes are high, as the right-wing conservative **PiS** party (pol. *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* - Law and Justice) wishes to form a government. Not long after the results were published, the people realised that by winning **more than 50% of the Parliament's seats**, they could govern alone and the judiciary would remain as the only actor standing in the way of total power. They have been winning municipal, regional, European, and other elections, and **will probably win** the next general elections as well.

The party started then to **influence the judiciary** by appointing PiS-loyal judges and with the help of other parties, even changed some of the constitutional amendments<sup>[3]</sup>, to have a better grip on power.

This shift in democracy started to emerge in other parts of Europe as well, again, with the help of **right-wing populist parties**; given that the European elections are just around the corner, is there a way to prevent even further staining of the **democratic separation of powers**?

## Key Terms

- **Right-wing populism** is a broad political ideology, best described by encompassing various degrees of neo-nationalist, socially conservative, and economically nationalist doctrines.
- The **rule of law** is a democratic principle most commonly understood by perceiving law as supreme and applicable to all.
- The **executive** is a set of institutions which have the power to enforce the law. This branch is usually pursued by the president, prime minister, and the government.
- The **legislative** is a set of institutions which have the power to create and pass laws. This branch is usually pursued by the parliament.
- The **judiciary** is a set of institutions which have the power to enforce laws. This branch is usually pursued by courts and tribunals.
- **Separation of powers** is a democratic principle established by the separation of governance between the executive, legislative, and judiciary. Each of these branches has exclusive powers and influence, while also influencing other branches, thus, preventing the supremacy of one of them over the others.

1 The **Sejm** is the lower chamber of the Polish bicameral parliament; a Polish equivalent of the Czech Chamber of Deputies.

2 The **Senate** is the higher chamber of the Polish bicameral parliament.

3 A **constitutional amendment** is a change to a constitution. These changes can often influence the running of the country.



## Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)** is the highest court in all matters in the European Union. If there is a suspicion that one Member State is breaching EU law, the CJEU can sue it and, if found guilty, prosecute it.
- **The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)** is a body of the EU that monitors and prevents the misuse of European finances by holding audits and investigations.
- **National governments of Member States** are the ones that are most likely to influence their countries' judicial branches. If the Member State is found guilty, the national governments are the ones to be held accountable, since they represent the current political will of the state.
- The **European Commission for Democracy through Law** (most commonly referred to as **The Venice Commission**) is an advisory body of the Council of Europe. It provides legal advice to Member States as well as mediation and arbitration services. Furthermore, it researches constitutional matters and tries to promote a constitutional heritage.
- **European Center for Populism Studies** is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and a think-tank that conducts research on populist political parties, their policies, and their effects on the broader European society.
- The **electorate** is a group of people voting for a specific party or to be loyal to a certain ideology. The number of people in electorates might fluctuate depending on the mood in society and other factors.

## Key Conflicts

### EU law supremacy

The EU law is always supreme, which means that **no national government** can create a piece of legislation that is **stronger than EU law**. Ultimately, if there were a national law that would directly contradict any new piece of legislation created by the EU, the national law would be overpowered and thus **not enforceable**. This goes the other way around as well -- national governments cannot create national laws, if there are already EU laws contradicting this sort of matter.

In practice, Poland **broke the EU law** by appointing PiS party-sided judges to many of the Polish courts, as well as by the complete shuffle of the Polish Supreme Court<sup>[3]</sup> justices. All of this had been done **in accordance with the Polish legislation**. However, the partisan influence can be marked as *staining the separation of powers*. This sort of direct interference is an example of a clear **violation of the EU law**, which dictates that **the separation of powers** and **rule of law** must be in place in all of the EU Member States; a similar case happened in Hungary, where the government led by Fidesz introduced a law that would ban the exposure to any kind of LGBTQIA+ content for minors, which is against EU law, as it puts vulnerable minorities in danger. Both **constitutional** and **societal** violations are thus to be punished, as both countries were strained off some EU funds.

### National elections

Provided that the EU **cannot be involved in the national elections** of its Member States, it is difficult to put measures against the persecuted parties in place. Many Member States' governments are ruled by European

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<sup>3</sup> The **Supreme Court** is the highest national institution of the judicial branch. They are often the last resort for defendants, and they deal with major statesmen as well.



right-wing populist parties, which are eurosceptic<sup>[4]</sup>, so it often aligns with their programmes to try to strain from the EU, which, in consequence, makes them prone to hinder the EU law and misuse the EU funds. The only way for the EU to prevent this sort of issue is to focus on **audits** and other preventive measures under OLAF and to watch the national situation throughby media outlets.<sup>[5]</sup>

However, the popularity of populist parties is **on the rise**. From the results of recent national elections, it can be seen that in many European countries, these parties are **forming governments**. This gives them the perfect opportunity to **broaden their electorate** by passing social -welfare policies<sup>[6]</sup>, without any sort of planning ahead, as well as the possible, but not obligatory hindering of the good political culture, while the civil society enjoys the benefits.

### (Un)transparency and (ir)responsibility

Judicial personnel, such as judges and Supreme Court members, are vital for ensuring constitutional **adherence**; however, they are also **very hard to dismiss**, or pronounce unable to carry out decisions. This gives the opportunity for them to create certain amendments, change other pieces of the judiciary, and enact other political decisions even after the previous government, which they have been appointed by, is **no longer in power**. This is, however, all in the hands of national legislations, which no institution (EU or not) has power over, and thus **cannot be unified**.

## Measures in Place

### The ruling of the CJEU

After the interference of the Polish government in the independent courts of Poland, the EU has sued Poland in the European Court of Justice. It ruled that the Polish government had actually broken European law as the political interference in the independent courts is a violation of one of the key principles of the EU. Poland was fined and cut from EU funds, until amendments were made. The Polish government passed a bill that abolished the previous pieces of interference in 2021, so that they could fully obtain funds from the EU.

### EU network against corruption

The EU has established a community of NGOs that work together to better educate the professional personnel, such as lawyers, to better counter corruption. One branch of corruption, which is often dismissed as a standard practice, is lobbying. Lobbying is the influencing of politicians or other high-ranking state officials to promote their personal interests. While this kind of corruption is completely acceptable in politics, as it helps the civil society to better articulate the problems of their own, it is unacceptable to influence a judge.

## Measures in Place

To put it in simple terms, we are presented with two possible routes to take - should we continue to **persecute** countries with governments that do not let the judiciaries to be independent, or shall there be

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4 **Euroscepticism** is an ideology that advocates for the national governments to “regain control” over their country’s legislatures and economies by ultimately leaving the EU, not joining it, or completely distancing themselves from the EU’s actions. Eurosceptic parties are however often prone to misusing the European funds, undermining the institutions, and overall blocking of the integration process without the condition of leaving the EU.

5 Media is often regarded as a “watchdog of democracy”, thus, when the government tries to take some liberties away from the citizens, the media are the first to inform about it.

6 **Social-welfare policy** is a policy that gives some benefits to the ordinary people. It can be either cheaper public transport, housing subsidies, etc.



a certain **apparatus** that prevents the influence of parties or individuals into juridical matters, should we perhaps find a *melangé* of both? Both of them have their own pros and cons -- does the EU go with persecution that could make it **more strict** or does the EU go with more laws that could make it look **more controlling**? Should the EU try to work **individually** with each State, given the fact that their judiciaries differ on many levels, or should the EU try to create an **universal** solution? Is there a way to mix all the pros together while keeping the con count at a minimum?

## Further Research

1. **Poland's Controversial 'Russian Interference' Law Explained**: A video to get further informed about the Polish government's interference into the judiciary.
2. **Can Italy's Meloni Start an EU Break-Up?**: A video to get further informed about the rise of right-wing populist parties in the EU.
3. **'Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)'**: An article about the powers of the European Court of Justice.



# COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS (AFET)

**Security risk, humanitarian crisis, or potential for change?** For the past decade, Member States such as France and Germany have been present militarily in the Sahel region, emphasising the security and migration risks the regional instability may have for Europe. Keeping in mind Europe's imperialist history in the region, how can Member States efficiently provide humanitarian aid to the Sahel countries and support the building of strong civic societies in the region?

*By: Pulatkhon Rakhimov (CZ)*

## Introduction

The Sahel is a sociogeographical region in Africa spanning from Senegal to Eritrea, although politically it refers to the area between Mauritania and Chad. Regrettably, it is a hotbed of instability, extreme poverty, and the **epicentre of global terrorism**.

Regional challenges will lead (as they already have) to **large migration waves** as material conditions continue to deteriorate. The violence haunting the Sahel will **inevitably expand** if left to its own devices, with Europe being a **very likely destination**. Given the severity of the situation and the role European governments play in many of the issues facing the Sahel today, it is crucial to ask - are we doing enough to help?

## Key Terms

- **Françafrique** is a pejorative term used to refer to the French sphere of influence over West Africa, including the Sahel. It refers more to international relations than it does to geography.
- **CFA franc** is the term for two currencies<sup>[1]</sup> used throughout Africa which are directly pegged to the euro.
- **Operation Barkhane** was a French military operation based in Mali. It was aimed at fighting terrorism in the Sahel region and consisted of around 3,000 troops. It contributed to regional stability, however, it also caused conflict with locals, who did not approve of the French troops' presence.

## Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **G5 Sahel (G5S)** is a group of Sahel nations cooperating on security measures and development policies consisting of Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and up until recently, Mali.
- **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** is an economic community aiming to foster cooperation and integration, drive economic growth and stability, and promote the development of the African continent.
- **The Sahel Alliance** is an intergovernmental organisation that takes action on a local level to address a wide variety of issues. They currently have over a thousand active projects, all tasked with improving the situation in the Sahel.
- **Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State** are jihadist terrorist organisations active in the Sahel region, known to be using techniques of terror such as armed attacks and bombings on civilian and military targets. They are responsible for much of the unrest and security risks plaguing the Sahel.

<sup>1</sup> The two currencies are the **West-African CFA franc** and the **Central-African CFA franc**. They both have the exact same value in relation to the euro.



- The **EU**:
  - The European Commission's<sup>[2]</sup> **Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA)** funds programmes aimed at boosting development and ensuring security abroad. Many of these programmes concern the Sahel in particular.
  - **Member States** such as France and Germany have been active in the region militarily, contributing to a continuation of violence and unrest in many cases.

## Key Conflicts

### The War on Terror

Perhaps the greatest **manifestation of poverty and instability** in the Sahel is the continuous presence of extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. Armed and militant groups control entire swaths of the region like the triple border between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The activities of these groups are **not limited** to merely terror attacks, as perceived in the Western world, but also include **banditry and thievery**, which severely complicate the lives of locals in the Sahel. Armed groups control water supplies and arable land, severely limiting the population's means of subsistence and survival.

To help combat terror in the region, many EU Member States, **most notably France**, have been involved militarily in the Sahel. However, this presence is quickly decreasing. The coups in the region have forced **France to withdraw many of its troops**, most recently from Niger. In the absence of European forces, which the coup governments view as **imperialist and neocolonial**, Mali has turned to the private military company Wagner for support in the fight on terror; the Wagner group of mercenaries has been found to have committed atrocities on Malian soil. Many Sahel countries are now in a position to follow Mali's suit.

### 'Périssent les colonies plutôt qu'un principe!' ('Perish the colonies rather than a principle!')

**France has a long and violent history in the region**, but why do the region's leaders view France as imperialist today over 60 years after gaining independence? Despite the Sahel having formal sovereignty, **France still has a massive influence** on the region, both economically and up until very recently militarily. Due to ill will held by coup governments as well as popular protests, French troops have been pulled from much of the region.

With thousands of French companies operating in Africa, its **foreign investments on the continent amounted to EUR 56 billion** in 2016. Further influence is evident in the popular use of the CFA franc, a currency pegged to the euro. To use the CFA franc, African nations had to **deposit half of their exchange reserves** in the French treasury. These qualities cause countries that use the currency to be dependent on France and the European Central Bank and make the CFA franc a **pillar of Françafrique**.

### 'There's no place like home'

For many, being forced to leave their home is unthinkable. Leaving behind your possessions, your loved ones and your heritage is a **nightmare that is becoming a reality** for more and more people. Over 4.2 million people have been displaced in the Sahel region. **This number will continue to grow** in further years due to instability caused by armed groups, as well as climate change, which is quickly decimating water sources and

<sup>2</sup> The **European Commission** is the executive body of the EU that proposes and enforces legislation. Directorate-Generals (DGs) are administrative departments that act on specific fields.



causing desertification<sup>[3]</sup>. The internal displacement in the region naturally leads to further shortages and instability, and consequently even more displacement.

## Measures in Place

### The Sahel

G5S has contributed to security and development in the Sahel. It has created a **joint military force** with the support of the United Nations and has led to the creation of the Coalition for the Sahel, which further contributes to a collective response to the crisis. ECOWAS is another regional union which encompasses much of the Sahel as well as other countries of West Africa. This regional community seeks to develop the region on **all fronts**, the prime example being their **Vision 2050** - a blueprint detailing their plans regarding **the economy, security and the environment**.

Another important part of the African struggle is the coups that claim to work towards ensuring security in the region, which, however, have **so far been unsuccessful** in achieving these goals. Terrorists are still a menace and retain control of parts of the Sahel.

After the recent coup in Niger, a security pact has been signed between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. It aims to protect member states from **rebellion** and **external aggression**, while also fostering closer military cooperation.



**Figure 1:** 'G5S (purple) and ECOWAS (orange)', European Council on Foreign Relations (2020)

### The EU

The most notable European measure against the crisis was **Operation Barkhane** which **came to an end in 2022**. Despite many successes including the neutralisation of many notable terrorist leaders, **it ultimately failed** in securing the region and eliminating the extremist violence. It had never managed to gain popular support in the region, which led to its end after a Malian coup government expelled the French troops. The Wagner mercenaries that took the place of Barkhane troops in Mali have not had any more luck in the matter. They have however been accused of **committing atrocities** against Malian civilians and found responsible for **massacres** too.

From an economic perspective, the EU has plenty of programmes aimed at boosting development and minimising the crisis. **The Emergency Trust Fund for Africa** is an EU fund focused on managing migration by addressing **root causes of instability and poverty** across Africa. This fund has programmes specifically for the Sahel and is a large source of investment in development.

### What now?

The road forward is not clear. The Sahel is a **disadvantaged region in almost every way imaginable**. The situation is further obfuscated by a fog of **painful history** that makes finding an appropriate solution that much harder. Is it possible to navigate a crisis as broad and complicated as this one **without repeating the mistakes of colonial powers in the past**? If we do not wish to fail the Sahel, we need to focus on **the needs**

<sup>3</sup> The process by which fertile land becomes desert.



**of its people**, not on protecting French businesses or eliminating Russian influence at any cost. The question is, can a solution that **does not prioritise Europe** and that requires **compromises** be agreed on?

## Further Research

1. **How climate change is leading to a rise in violence in the Sahel**: A video laying out the consequences of the climate catastrophe in the Sahel.
2. **Mapping African Regional Cooperation**: An interactive website from the European Council on Foreign Relations allowing you to explore various initiatives to create a common strategy.
3. **Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel**: A map made by the European Council on Foreign Relations showing the presence of armed groups in the region.
4. **New EU strategic priorities for the Sahel**: A document compiled by the European Parliamentary Research Service providing an overview of issues facing the Sahel as well as strategies the EU has been taking to combat the crisis.
5. **Avert catastrophe now in Africa's Sahel**: An analysis of the crisis in the Sahel with a focus on women's wellbeing and comprehensive solutions.





# COMMITTEE ON CULTURE AND EDUCATION (CULT)

**No history, no future:** Since the fall of authoritarian regimes in Europe, many historical monuments and sites reminiscing about those past periods have been destroyed. How can the EU protect the cultural and historical heritage of its Member States, while ensuring there are no steps back in democracy?

By: Maria Inês Folhadela (PT)

## Introduction

The **destruction of historical monuments** is not uncommon, especially in the **aftermath of a war or revolution**. Many countries choose to remove these symbols in an attempt to **distance themselves** from the ideologies, regimes, or people they represent. In Europe, this phenomenon was commonly present post-World War II and upon the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc.

Many elements of cultural heritage to this day provoke **divides in public opinion**, and the debate surrounding this issue is extremely nuanced. It has forced nations to **come to terms with their past**, their heritage, and the **national identity** they want to establish, while still aiming to preserve **irreplaceable historical artefacts**.



**Figure 1:** A statue of the founder of the KGB being destroyed in Moscow, 1991.

## Key Terms

- **Cultural heritage** refers to a collection of tangible and intangible elements of a culture, passed down from generation to generation. It includes **monuments, sites, landscapes**, skills, practices, knowledge, and expressions of human creativity. It can be associated with certain ideologies or regimes due to its content or simply to its time period.
- **Historical memory** is the way in which groups or **nations remember, connect to, and interpret historical periods** or events. It deeply relates to the formation of a **national identity** and is influenced by socio-political factors.
- **Remembrance** can refer to **'the ability to remember'**, or to **'commemoration'** and is often used as an argument in favour of the preservation of historical monuments.
- **Revisionism** is any scholarly practice dedicated to revising an established position. Revisionist historians attempt to **contextualise** events and personalities, considering all surrounding historical factors instead of just accepting their 'reputation'. However, this term is **often used with a negative connotation**, to suggest that someone is trying to erase a part of History just because they find it **offensive** or inappropriate.

## Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **Member States** have **legislative power** over some objects of culture, namely those that are State-owned. **Local governments** in particular are crucial players since they often are responsible for the maintenance and **management of local culture and landscapes**.



- The **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)** adopted the Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage in 2003. This declaration **condemns the destruction of any type of historical monuments and sites**, urging to prevent, avoid, stop and suppress these acts, even in contexts of armed conflict.
- The **European Commission** only has a supporting competence<sup>[1]</sup> in the field of culture. It cannot create or harmonise legislation on this matter, but it can promote and fund related programmes through the **EU Policy for Cultural Heritage**.
- **Cultural associations** can be driving forces in decision-making processes. Some, like Europa Nostra, focus on **raising public awareness**, funding cultural preservation programmes, and **campaigning for policy changes**. Others, such as Hungary's Memento Park, offer alternative settings for the contested monuments, framing them in an **educational exhibition**.

## Key Conflicts

States and people treat the issue around past historical sites very differently across countries. There are three approaches when deciding about the future of these sites and monuments: destruction; maintenance; and recontextualisation, repurposing, and relocation.

### Destruction

After **World War II** and the fall of fascist regimes, a number of European countries were forced to **reevaluate their relationship to the heritage** left behind. **Germany** in particular, operated a process of '**denazification**', removing and forbidding all symbols from the previous regime, which to this day are still illegal. This was done with the intent of **cleansing German society of past influences by erasing all references** to the authoritarian regime.

A similar phenomenon occurred in the final decades of the 20th century, with monuments to the Soviet regime being toppled across former **Eastern Bloc countries**. This was seen as an effort from populations to **distance themselves from their recent past** and from the actions of the former government.

Despite occurring frequently in the aftermath of wars and revolutions, this approach can be **very controversial**. Some accuse it of being too **revisionist**, attempting to erase certain parts of History from public view and memory. There is also the matter of **preserving historical heritage**. UNESCO, for example, advocates for the protection of cultural heritage under all circumstances.

### Maintenance

Many defend that the removal of these pieces **disrespects historical memory**, depriving the nation of a source of **remembrance and recognition**. It is claimed that destroying cultural heritage **will not eliminate harmful ideologies**, but instead create a **void** in a country's historical and cultural heritage. This policy, therefore, prioritises the preservation of historical monuments, whatever their connotation may be, retaining their **integrity and cultural value**.

However, activist groups often oppose the maintenance strategy, stating that they do not wish for their nation to be **associated with authoritarian regimes** or radical politics anymore. The presence of such sites

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<sup>1</sup> In certain policy areas, the EU 'can only intervene to support, coordinate or complement the action of its Member States'. These include, for example, education, tourism and culture.



can also **increase political tensions**, as **extremist groups** are known to convene there in order to ‘**honour**’ the portrayed regimes and persons. This attracts counter-protesters, making the area surrounding the monuments very prone to **demonstrations and confrontations**.

### **Recontextualisation, repurposing, relocation**

Some countries are attempting to conciliate historical memory and cultural preservation by **adding onto the monuments** instead of removing them. This solution can take many forms, depending on the type of monument, its purpose or its location. One proposed possibility is the **addition of signs or plaques** to the site, explaining its significance and providing **historical and political context**. That kind of **recontextualisation** is an alternative that integrally preserves cultural heritage, while still **promoting education** on the topic.

Another alternative is to **repurpose** the site, as was done in Bolzano, Italy. Here, the crypt of the Victory Monument which is considered to be 'the first fascist monument' ever built, was converted into a documentation centre, with **exhibits** dedicated to the city's cultural diversity and historical past. This was called a ‘**neutralisation**’ of the site. Although it stopped the gathering of far-right sympathisers and protesters, this decision was still **contested**, as some claimed that it unnecessarily altered the monument's **original significance**. Others also argued that this strategy is **ineffective** because it does not significantly change the visitor's experience - most will still regard it in its original purpose.

Finally, **relocation** was the chosen solution in several countries. This method consists in the removal of statues and other mobile artwork, placing them in a **different space** dedicated to the preservation of cultural heritage from a certain period. The monuments' **original state is preserved**, but they are **removed from the everyday view** of the locals, and instead can only be seen by those who want to learn about them and their socio-political context.

### **Measures in Place**

The solutions adopted for this situation are quite **varied**. Different countries have adopted different measures depending on their **political legacy**, the **type of monuments** they possess, and even the **time period** in which they are addressed.

In Italy, for example, monuments representing the fascist regime are still quite present. A national institute has created a website which shows where these sites are located, in an effort to **raise public awareness**.

Massive investments are also made in Germany for the **creation of museums, memorials and historical centres** dedicated to the preservation of World War II artefacts and stories. These aim to **educate the public** and provide socio-political and historical context to their showcase pieces.

In other countries, this debate is still **ongoing**. That is the case in Spain, where the discussion on the Valley of the Fallen, a monument built under the regime of Francisco Franco, has spanned over a decade and is **still unresolved**.

Despite this matter being of the competence of each Member State, the EU has also adopted the EU Policy for Cultural Heritage, defining its **preservation and promotion** as the main priorities. Through **funding and specific actions**, the EU advocates for international partnerships, **cultural education**, and **public engagement**.



## Spotlight on the Czech Republic

In 1955, a **statue depicting Joseph Stalin** was built in Letná Park, Prague. This was, at the time, the world's largest monument to the Soviet leader. 7 years later, in the context of the process of **de-Stalinisation**, the statue was **destroyed** using explosives, in a bold rejection of the person it depicted. In 1991, the space where the monument stood was filled with a new piece, the Prague Metronome.

The case of the Stalin Monument is **unique** because its removal was carried out **before the dismantlement of the political regime** it represented. It goes to show how volatile the interpretation of these artefacts can be, and how this issue does not have a set timeline or context in which it occurs..

### What now?

The debate over the destruction of historical monuments is **not static** or limited to a certain period. Some elements of cultural heritage are left unattended for long periods of time, only to be questioned and **looked at through a new lens**. Recent years have shown that a social movement such as Black Lives Matter<sup>[2]</sup> can cause massive **outrage towards historical figures or institutions** and the monuments that portray them. These **socio-political tendencies** can shift quickly, however, they leave a big mark as they deeply influence the public perception of History.

Therefore, it is more important than ever to find a way to **conciliate History with change**, culture with respect and preservation with education. When considering these questions, it is essential to consider all views, and understand the **complexities and motivations** behind them. Only then can a strategy be created to help the EU **reconcile with its past mistakes** and overcome them.

### Further Research

1. **This video** about the **Bulgarian Monument to the Soviet Army** provides an overview of the debate it has generated and the suggested solutions.
2. **This short documentary** examines the approaches to **Soviet monuments** and sites in Eastern Europe, especially in the **context of the war in Ukraine**.
3. **This news article** explains the controversy surrounding **Franco's legacy in Spain**, and the **opposition to the removal** of some monuments.
4. **This article** presents the Roman concept of 'damnatio memoriae' (condemnation to the report), and how it is practised in modern times.

<sup>2</sup> Black Lives Matter was an 'international social movement, formed in the United States in 2013, dedicated to fighting racism and anti-Black violence.



# COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INCLUSION (EMPL)

**9 to 5, what a way to make a living, all taking and no giving:** Psychosocial risks in the workplace, such as high workload or long working hours, have profound negative impacts on workers, employers and the economy. How should the EU enhance its legal framework to explicitly address and regulate psychosocial risks and mental health issues in the workplace, promoting worker well-being and overall occupational safety and health?

*By: Pau Ferrer (ES)*

## Introduction

**Psychosocial risks** in the workplace represent a critical yet often overlooked facet of occupational health and safety. Despite the fact that **mental health** has recently entered the centre of workplace-related policies in the EU, the insufficient resources dedicated towards it, make it **paramount to tackle the problem from its root**. Factors such as excessive workload, work stress, or harassment are the reasons for which over **30% of European employees** have suffered from **at least one mental health problem due to their work**. Thus, it is necessary for the EU to cooperatively adapt to the changing risks of employees in modern-day workplaces, as they have an estimated cost of 4% of the EU's budget due to consequences such as **absenteeism and mental burnout**.

## Key Terms

- **Psychosocial-risks** are aspects of the work environment and the way that work is organised, such as work overload, labour harassment or long working hours, that are associated with a negative impact on mental health. When psychosocial hazards are not effectively managed, they can have negative consequences, including decreased productivity, absenteeism and mental burnout.
- **Mental health** refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, encompassing their ability to manage stress, interact with others, make decisions, and cope with life's challenges. It is an integral component of overall health, impacting one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.
- **Productivity** is the measure of efficiency and output in completing tasks or achieving goals, often quantified by the amount of work accomplished in relation to resources and time expended. Thus, it reflects the ability to generate results or value while minimising waste and effort.
- **Mental burnout** in the workplace is a state of extreme emotional and physical exhaustion, often caused by prolonged and overwhelming job-related stress. It results in reduced performance, increased detachment, and a sense of being unable to cope with work demands, significantly affecting an individual's overall well-being and job effectiveness.
- **Absenteeism** is the habitual or intentional absence of employees from work, often without a valid reason or prior approval. It can lead to disruptions in productivity, increased workload for colleagues, and financial losses for employers due to lost work hours



## Key Actors & Stakeholders

- The **European Commission**, having shared competencies<sup>[1]</sup> when legislating over the prevention of psychosocial risks in the workplace, is a vital organ when protecting EU employees. Despite not having a directive specifically tackling the problem, its main effort when protecting EU employers from psychosocial hazards is the Framework Directive 89/391/EEC, which makes it mandatory for Member States to require minimum working conditions. The specific committee in charge of tackling these matters is the **Directorate General on Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG-EMPL)**.
- **Member States** are key when talking about protecting employees from psychosocial risks. They are in charge of producing national legislation on the matter, being able to tailor policies to the specific and heterogeneous needs of their countries.
- **Trade unions** represent the biggest representational bodies for employees, especially considering the increasing trend of unionisation in the EU. Their main function is to defend and protect workers' rights and interests, playing an important role in the creation of legislation as well as the education and empowerment of workers. The biggest worker union at the EU level is the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).
- **The European Agency for Occupational Health and Safety (OSHA)** is an official organ which plays a crucial role in supporting and proposing legislation related to psychosocial risks in the EU in cooperation with the European Commission. It conducts research, provides guidance, and proposes policies to Member States, promoting the development of legal frameworks and standards to address psychosocial risks in workplaces.
- **The International Labour Organisation (ILO)** establishes global labour standards and guidelines to prevent psychosocial hazards in workplaces. It assists its members in adopting relevant legislation and policies, offering technical expertise and promoting social dialogue.
- **Mental Health Europe (MHE)** is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which, among other things, advocates for the prevention and treatment of mental health in European workplaces. To do so, it actively launches social awareness campaigns such as the Mental Health Week initiative and conducts research as a member of the European Alliance of Mental Health - Employment & Work.

## Key Conflicts

### Psychosocial risks protection vs productivity culture

In the context of a global economy with increasing volatile competition between companies, employees are expected to maintain **higher levels of productivity**. Consequently, there has been an **increase in workload, worked hours, and workplace harassment** in the last years, with over 46% of EU workers suffering from stress. These environments of **'toxic productivity'**<sup>[2]</sup> may pose a hazard towards occupational health, as they tend to **generate mental health issues** which might end up leading to consequences such as mental burnout or absenteeism. It is for this reason that psychosocial risk prevention is ultimately a positive measure for employees, companies and economies.

However, there are still **barriers which hinder the development** of improvements on the matter, such as

1 **'Shared competence'** means that both the EU and its Member States may adopt legally binding acts in the area concerned. However, the Member States can do so only where the EU has not exercised its competence or has explicitly ceased to do so.

2 **Toxic productivity** is a concept which englobes the unhealthy obsession, promoted in certain workplaces, with always being busy and efficient. In the long-term, it may bring mental health issues and a decrease in productivity due to mental burden.



the lack of proper education for employers on occupational safety or the lack of resources required to design internal prevention policies in companies, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) .

## Challenges of digitalisation

The **fast digitalisation phenomenon**<sup>[3]</sup> in European workplaces is making the Union's economy rapidly develop and evolve, **expanding horizons to new opportunities** such as Artificial Intelligence, elimination of menial tasks, and the consequent freeing up of creative work. However, we need to be aware of the possible **increase of psychosocial risks** in the workplace which might arise. With new online business models and platforms, employees are facing **unexplored hazards** to occupational health such as hyperconnectivity<sup>[4]</sup>, fragmentation of work-life balance, or personal isolation, having remote workers report double the stress in comparison to office workers. Moreover, employees in online-based occupations, as in the gig economy<sup>[5]</sup>, are **more likely to suffer from precarious labour conditions and abusive control systems**, such as screen monitoring.

Nevertheless, policies aimed at the rapidly changing menaces to occupational health, the consequence of digitalisation, are still very **vague and lack updation**. This leaves employees in online workplaces unprotected against psychosocial risks due to gaps and loopholes in the legislation.

## Lack of shielding for employees

As it has been previously mentioned, mental health problems in the workplace are among the most discussed topics in the EU. Until now, there have been **great efforts to tackle its prevention and management**, yet, despite the progress made, there are still some factors which render the eradication of psychosocial hazards in the workplace.

Firstly, there is still a **lack of awareness among employees** regarding their labour rights, the dangers of certain practices in the workplace and all the already existing resources available to them, with just 51% of EU workers reporting knowledge on psychosocial matters. This added to the **lack of sufficient labour inspections**, eases the way towards unhealthy occupational practices and labour abuses.

Moreover, there is also a **shortage of resources** aimed at the mental health support of employees both in the public and the private sector. For instance, just 36% of enterprises in the EU supply some kind of psychological support for their workers in order to cope with the possible psychosocial risks in the workplace.

Finally, the fact that there is no unanimous definition of 'psychosocial risks' between the EU countries or even an **EU regulation specifically tackling this matter** obstructs the way towards the equal protection of workers through the Union. For instance, the right to disconnect<sup>[1]</sup>, the recognition of burnout as an occupational disease or the establishment of clear guidelines on the matter for employees and employers are not recognised in all Member States.

3 The **digitalisation phenomenon** of the workplace refers to the implementation of new technologies and systems which are being integrated within traditional working environments, optimising operations, improving efficiency and facilitating remote work.

4 **Hyperconnectivity** refers to the state of being excessively interconnected or linked, often facilitated by advanced technology and digital communication platforms.

5 The **gig economy** is a business model based on short-term contracts and freelance work which is currently getting especially popular for online businesses and remote jobs.

6 The **right to disconnect** refers to a right recognised by countries such as Spain, Belgium, or Portugal which protects employees from working or doing any labour-related activity out of the set schedule or during holidays.



## Measures in Place

Until now, the closest effort in EU legislation to face psychosocial risks in the workplace has been the **Framework Directive 89/391/EEC**, which presents a list of required measures regarding working conditions and their supervision. However, despite it indirectly preventing some occupational health risks from happening, it still **leaves room for legal loopholes** which may leave EU workers unprotected in those areas where national governments decide not to act.

Despite this, several **policies have been developed at a national level** in order to tackle this issue. For instance, trials for a **four-day work-week** have been introduced in Portugal, Belgium, and Spain. This experiment not only improved productivity in some sectors, mainly for online-based jobs, but also proved useful in reducing burdens, workload, and boosting employees' morale.

Moreover, some **national governments** have recently recognised the **right to disconnect** blinding employees from working outside the settled schedule, establishing the right for sick leave days due to mental burnout, as well as offering guidelines and courses for employers and employees regarding occupational health.

Finally, the **ETUC** has aimed to **empower employees around Europe** by establishing awareness campaigns and moderating negotiations between corporations and workers, leading to a cooperative transition towards safer workplaces.

## What now?

Maintaining employees' occupational health should be a priority in modern societies. It not only improves workers' mental health but increases their productivity within companies. Thus, as stated by the EU-OSHA, it is key to work cooperatively within the EU in order to build strong legislation aiming to protect EU employees from psychosocial risks in the workplace. In order to reach this idealistic situation, experts agree that all the nuances of the topic should be brought into the discussion, such as the impact of digitalisation on workers' mental health or the heterogeneous legislation among Member States.

## Further Research

1. **'What are psychosocial risks?'**: A short video from the British Standards Institutions explaining what occupational health hazards in the workplace are, as their impact on employees.
2. **'How to promote mental health in the workplace?'**: An infographic created by MHE addressing psychosocial risks in EU workplaces and measures that can be taken to prevent them.
3. **'Is Europe heading towards the eclipse of 'psychosocial risks' at work?'**: An interesting article written by ETUC which addresses the importance of differentiating psychosocial risks from mental health when taking measures in the workplace.





# COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY I (ENVI I)

**Navigating Europe's Highs:** The European Drug Report 2023, shows alarming data on illicit drug use, addiction rates, and availability of substances among Europeans. With 6 out of 166 overdose deaths involving illicit drugs, what steps should the EU take to prevent the widespread “epidemic” of drug abuse?

By: Gabriel Gombík (CZ)

## Introduction

### Drug abuse, drug trafficking, drug availability...

Do these terms really affect us? The answer is simple. They do!

The trend of consumption and production of illicit substances is spreading throughout the EU. According to the **European Drug Report 2023 (EDR23)**, only in 2021, a total of 434 drug production laboratories were dismantled. Moreover, **the quantity of drugs seized is also increasing** (throughout 2011–2021, the amount of cocaine seized increased by 416%), a direct consequence of an increasing demand. It is unpleasant to see statistics claiming that **around 8% of European adults have tried cannabis and 1.3% use it daily**. These staggering **growths** may in the future **lead to a rise in criminality and violence, a decline in the average living standards**, and might cause **damage to the health** of European citizens in the future.

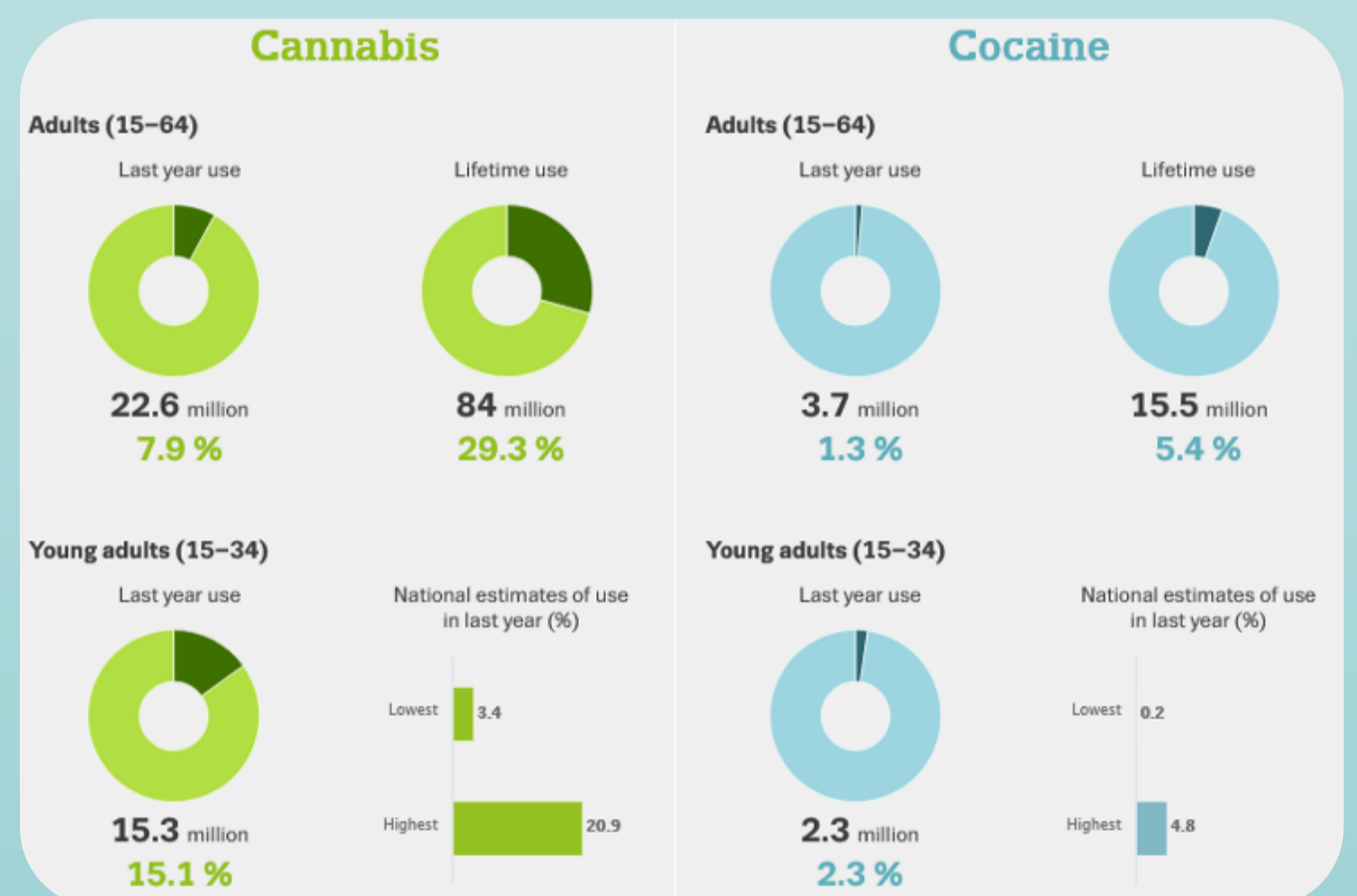


Figure 1: Estimated cannabis and cocaine use in the EU, (EDR23)

## Key Terms

- **Overdose** is the act of taking **an excessive amount of drugs at one time**. In most cases, **hospitalisation is required**. Overdosed patients may continue to burden the healthcare system even after their hospitalisation, as **long-term negative effects** (e.g. organ, neurological, or mental damage) may occur.
- **Increasing drug potency** is a method of **reducing the volume** of the drug but **maintaining** the amount of **active substance**. Producers thus reduce the production cost and transport risk but **increase the chance of overdose**.
- **Harm reduction policy** is one of the ways to fight drug usage, in which **drug possession penalties are reduced or repealed**, and the **State emphasises help** (free accommodation, clean drug equipment, active job search) for addicts and builds support centres. The countries most well-known for using this policy were **Switzerland during the 1980s** and **Portugal in 2001**.
- **Hardline policy**, unlike the previous option, tries to **punish its citizens** as a way to **discourage them from using drugs**. This policy is often associated with the **Balloon effect**.<sup>[1]</sup>

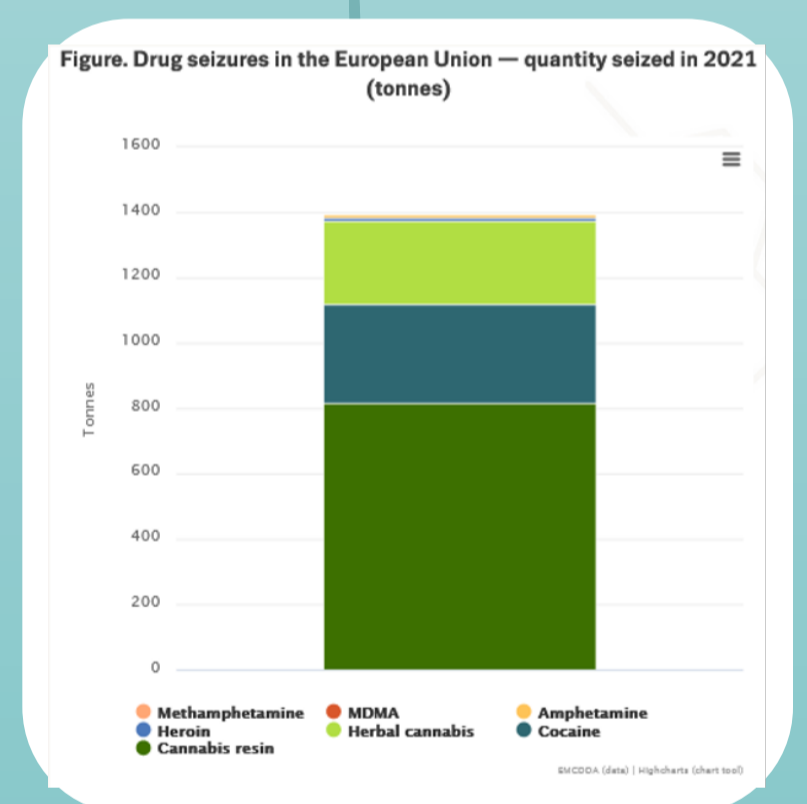


Figure 2: Drug seizures in the EU, (EDR23)

<sup>1</sup> The **Balloon Effect** is a term often used to describe a phenomenon where efforts to reduce drug production or trafficking in one area lead to an increase in these activities in another area. The analogy here is that if a balloon is squeezed or pressed down, the air (representing illegal drug activities) simply moves to another part of the balloon.



## Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** is the leading authority on illicit drugs in the EU. It **provides independent scientific evidence and analysis** on all aspects of this constantly changing threat to individual lives and wider society (known as European drug reports). Its work **contributes to EU and national policies** to protect Europe's citizens from drug-related harm. The agency **does not make policies or recommendations**.
- The **Ministries of Interior and Security of Member States** are responsible for **ensuring public security** (protecting against violence and crime) and **internal border control**<sup>[2]</sup>. They also create **police departments** that detect and investigate **drug-related crimes**.
- The **Ministries of Health of Member States** provide **healthcare services** and **control the manipulation and processing of addictive substances**. Additionally, they can make proposals for laws related to public health.
- **Harm Reduction International (HRI)** is an NGO dedicated to **promoting and advancing harm reduction policies** and practices worldwide. It focuses on **mitigating the negative health, social, and human rights impacts** associated with drug use and drug policies. The organisation **works with a variety of stakeholders**, including governments, NGOs, and the United Nations.

## Key Conflicts

These are significant problems, but why are they here?

### Drugs as an easy way of coping

Drug abuse may seem like the **easiest coping mechanism**, as it does not require much effort. Drugs like alcohol and nicotine are widely accessible in the EU to **help people deal with stress and lack of happiness**. They only provide **short-term relief** though.

It is estimated that there are approximately **84 million people** in the EU **experiencing mental health problems** as of July 2023. The EU has a supporting competence on health, meaning it can only support and complement Member States' national policies. If **Member States cannot provide psychological help for ordinary people**, can they help the addicts for whom drugs are the only way out?

### Legal as a gateway to the world of illegal

Nowadays, **legal drugs are common** in many settings. **Nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol** are an **integral part of many people's lives**. In addition, not-so-well-known

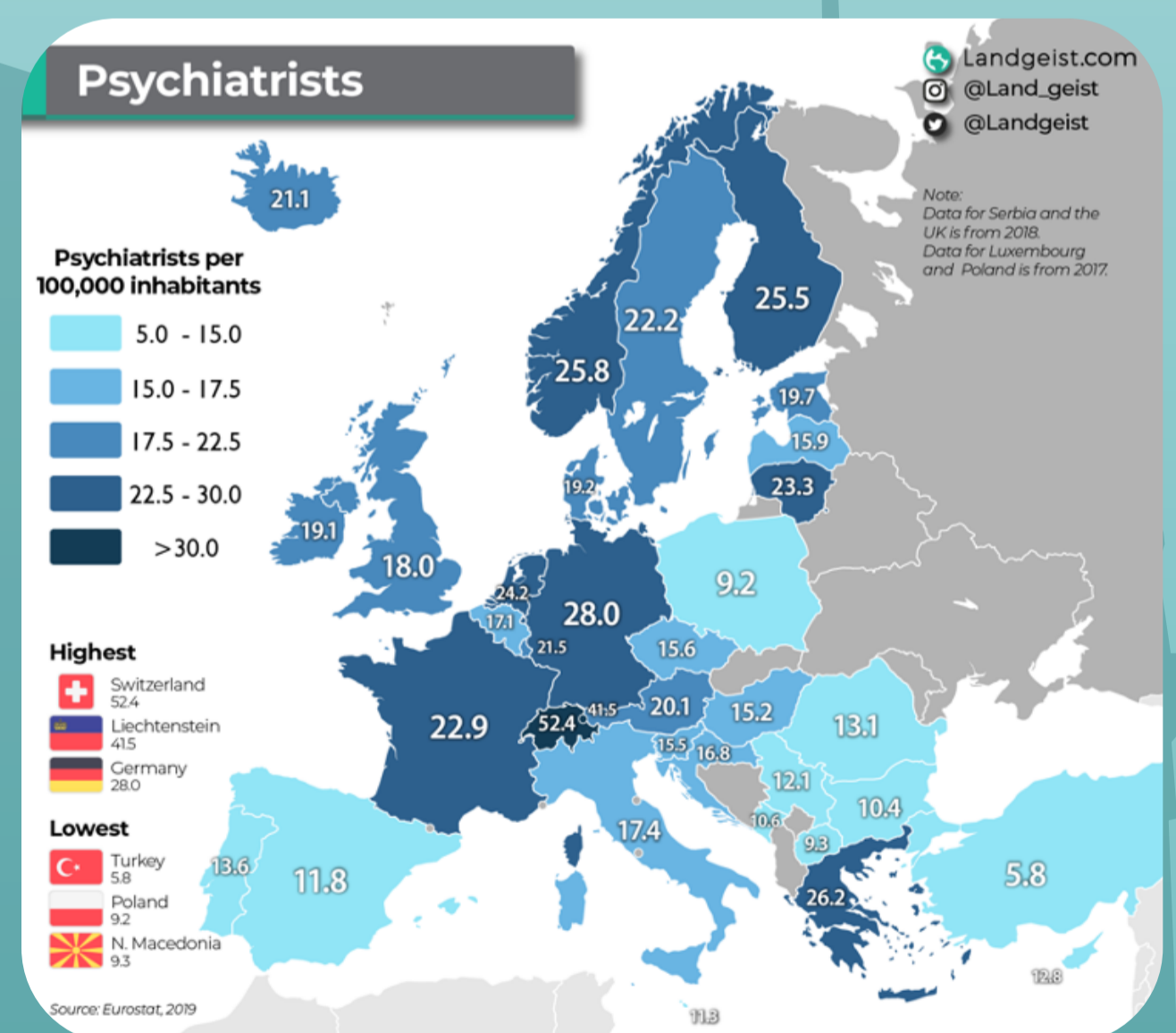


Figure 3: Number of psychiatrists per 100,000 inhabitants

2 Member States have control over their internal borders. Nevertheless, the EU's external borders, the border between an EU Member State and a non-EU country, are an exclusive competence of the EU.



drugs, like kratom<sup>[3]</sup> or hexahydrocannabinol (HHC),<sup>[4]</sup> are slowly making their way in.

In 2019, **73.8% of European adults drank alcohol** and **8.4% of them drank alcohol daily**. The numbers for **cigarettes** were even higher in the same year with **18.4% of the European population aged 15 and over being daily smokers**.

If these percentages are so alarming, we have to ask how it is even possible that people start using drugs in the first place.

According to the **United States National Institute on Drug Abuse**, the **risk of addiction** is higher when drug use begins in adolescence, compared to starting in adulthood. A study shows that adolescents who **began to drink before the age of 15 had two to three times greater risk** of developing **alcohol dependence, compared** to youth who started drinking at **age 19 or later**. As said earlier, drugs help people cope. Many children who went through a **difficult childhood** (for example, people who come from a low socioeconomic status, suffered trauma, or had an incomplete family) are much more likely to take drugs. According to a number of public stories, the availability of marijuana is high, with **23% of young people being able to get marijuana within an hour**.

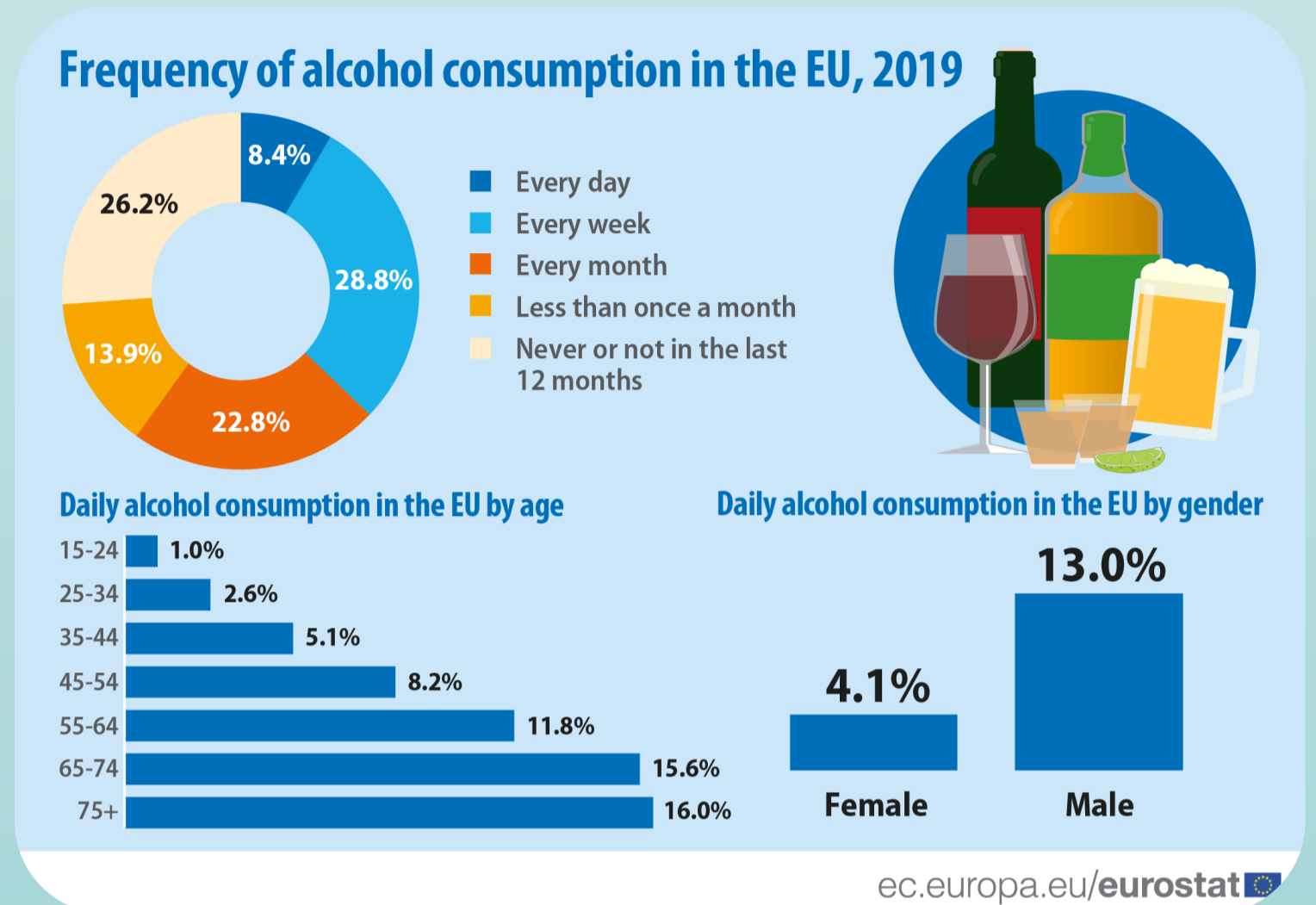


Figure 4: Frequency of drinking alcohol in the EU (Eurostat)

### Hardline policy, hard penalties (for States?)

Let's dive into history to understand **why hardline policies could be ineffective**. The country that has historically been the biggest **supporter of this policy is the United States of America**. The most significant example is **alcohol prohibition** during 1920–1933 when a nationwide **ban on the production, importation, transport, and sale of alcoholic beverages** came into effect. Whether drinking rates **declined at that time is not entirely clear**, since alcohol production became a matter of organised criminal groups or home production. With that being said, the quality of alcohol declined, as the States **could not control the quality and the impact on citizens' health**. Moreover, the States also **lost its revenue from taxes**. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that the level of **corruption and bribery had increased**.

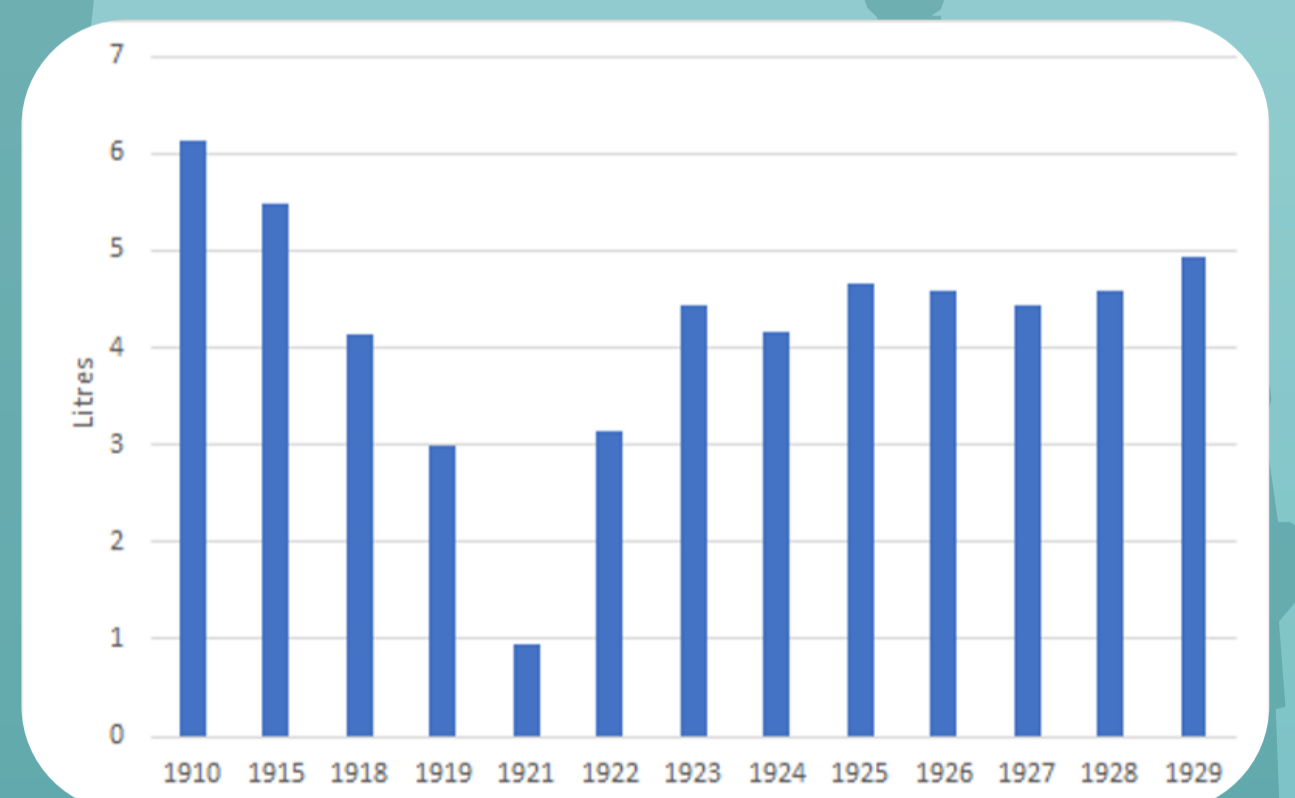


Figure 5: Per capita consumption of alcoholic beverages (self-made graph, with data from Cato institute)

3 Kratom is a drug made out of dried leaves of *Mitragyna speciosa*, classified as an opioid.

4 Hexahydrocannabinol (HHC) is a component of cannabis. It is a theoretical psychoactive substance with effects reportedly similar to that of THC.



## Measures in Place

In the international context, it is crucial to mention the **Four Pillars of Drug Strategy**, which were first enforced in the 1990s and are based on 4 principles – **harm reduction, prevention, treatment, and enforcement**.

A combination of these foundations results in a **decrease in drug usage** on the streets, a reduction in **overdose deaths**, and fewer **cases of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis infections**. **Prevention** aims to prevent first use and reduce the incidence.<sup>[5]</sup> The **treatment** pillar encourages people with addiction to live healthier lives by **offering a variety of interventions and programmes**. **Harm reduction** requires that no harm is done to those suffering from substance addiction and that the focus is on the harm caused by problematic substance use. The last principle is the **enforcement** of the **laws and policies** that support the previously mentioned pillars that acknowledge issues concerning drug misuse.

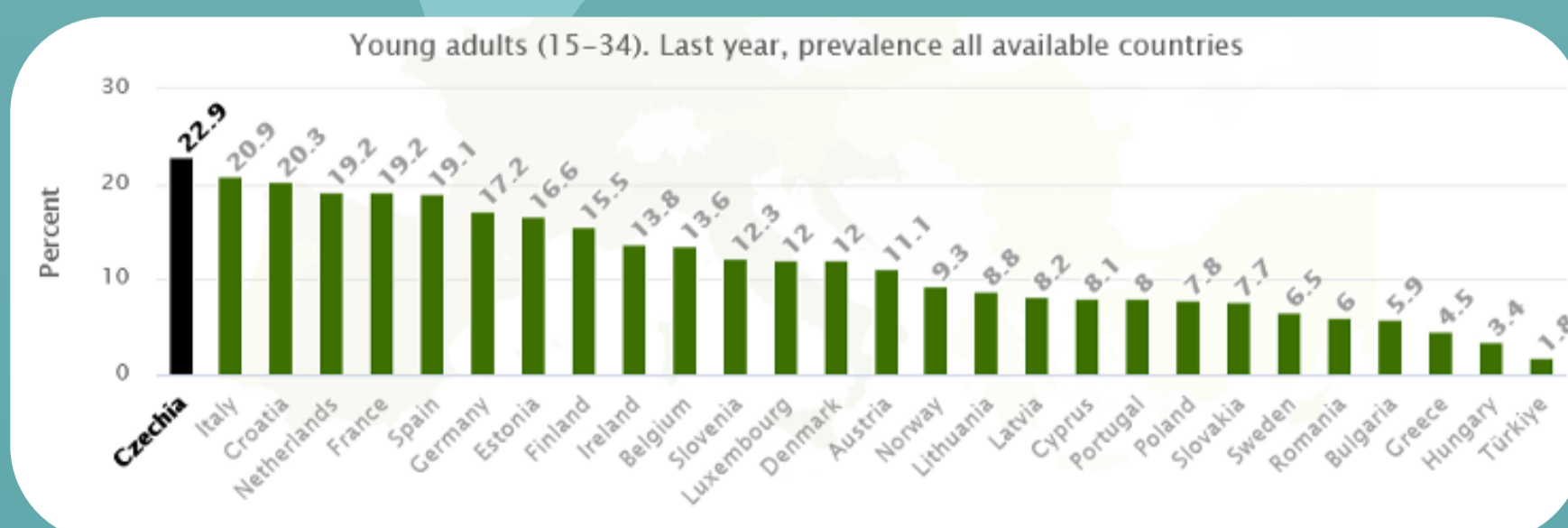
Member States' drug laws often differ. For example, **Poland and the Nordic countries** have very **strict penalties** for possession of small amounts of illegal substances, with Sweden historically emphasising its zero-tolerance policy. On the other hand, some countries, such as **the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Portugal, or Spain**, decriminalised possession or use (mostly of cannabis) **in small quantities**.

At the **national level**, both **governmental organisations and NGOs are involved** in providing help. In most cases, the state operates monitoring and coordination centres and formulates the drug policy. NGOs, which are mostly supported and financed by the state or cities, then provide the actual prevention and aid.

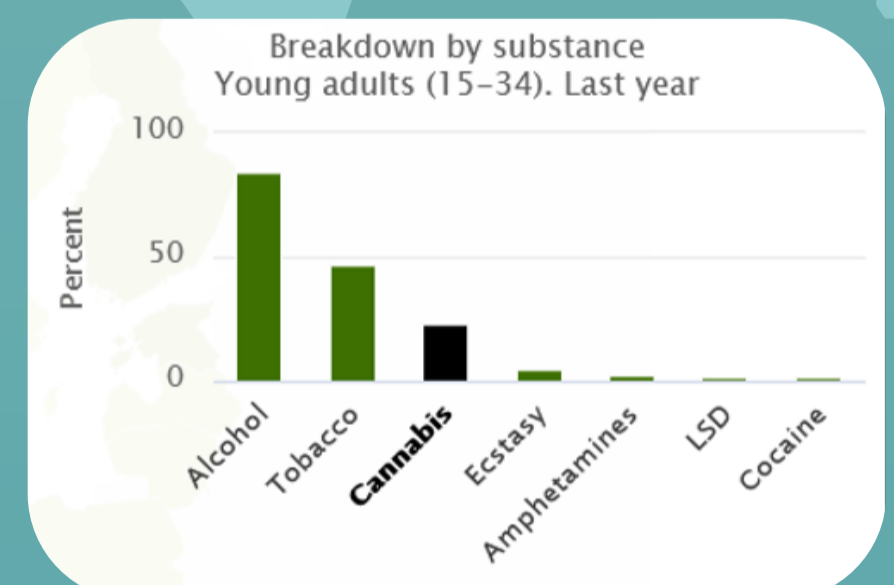
## Spotlight on the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is one of the countries with the **least strict drug laws**. For instance, **possession of small amounts** of a drug is considered a **misdemeanour**,<sup>[6]</sup> **not a criminal offence**.<sup>[7]</sup> The drug will be confiscated, and the culprit will be fined.

Moreover, some dangerous figures are those showing the **consumption of illegal substances**. The monitored group is **young people aged 15–34 years**. **83.8% of them have tried alcohol, 47.1% tobacco, and 22.9% cannabis in the last year**. With these figures, the prevalence of cannabis among the young stands at the **top of the EU**.



**Figure 6:** Percentage of people, aged 15–34, who have consumed the given substances in the last year (EDR23)



**Figure 7:** Comparison of prevalence in the Member States of the EU (EDR23)

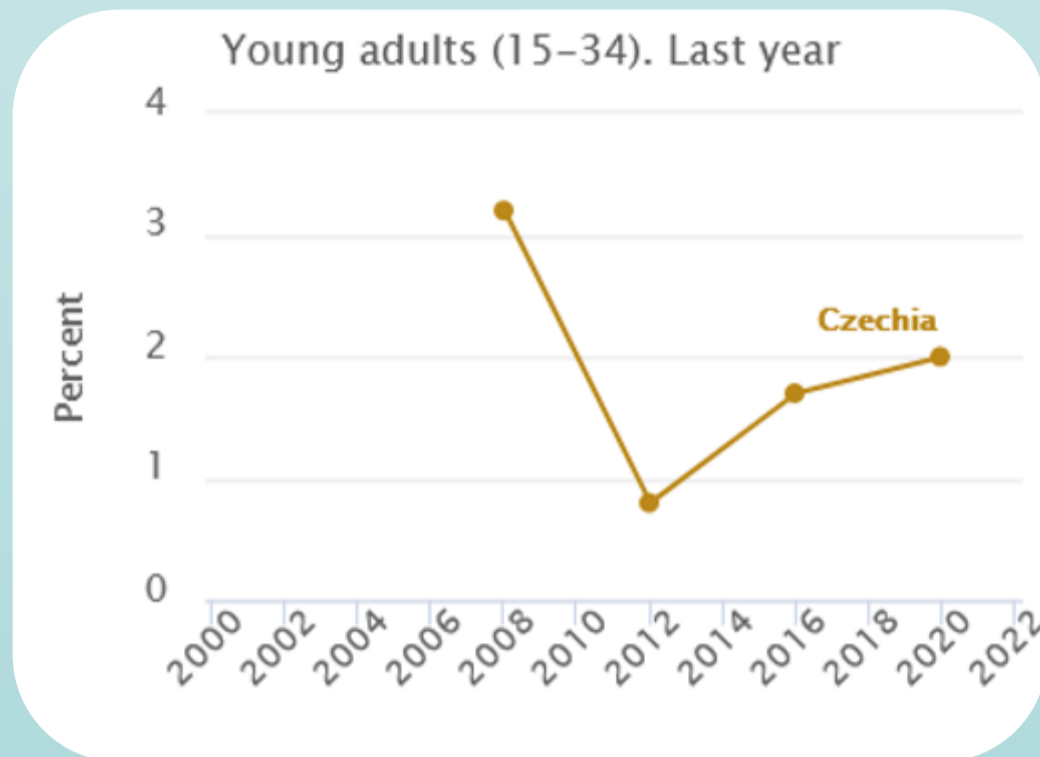
5 **Incidence** is the rate of new cases or events over a specified period of time.

6 A **misdemeanour** is a socially harmful, unlawful action which does not reach the severity of a criminal offence, such as a bad action in traffic or against public order.

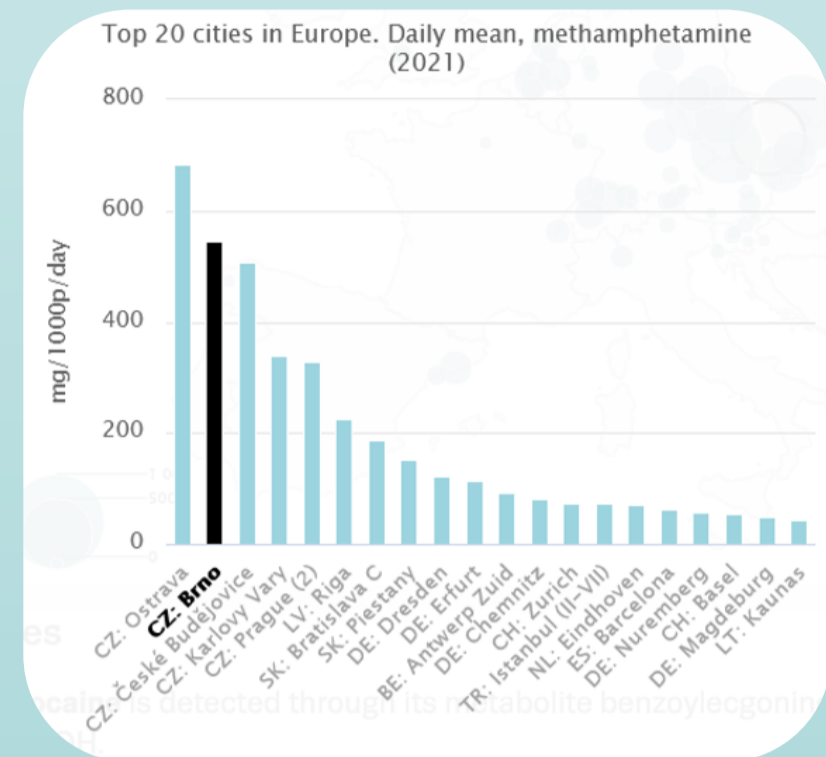
7 A **criminal offence** is an unlawful act as defined by the Criminal Code. The subject could be punished by imprisonment.



The second biggest problem is the slow but steadily **increasing rates of amphetamine abuse**. Above all, the worst statistic of them all is the one which shows the presence of these **illicit drugs in wastewater**. Czech cities ranked in the top five positions in the whole of Europe.



**Figure 8:** Usage of amphetamines in monitored group, aged 15-34 (EDR23)



**Figure 9:** Highest methamphetamine concentration in wastewater in European cities (Wastewater analysis and drugs - EMCDDA, 2021)

## What now?

**Two basic strategies** for approaching the drug abuse problem have been identified, but the essential question is whether it is **possible to combine them effectively**. A hardline drug policy does not always lead to a reduction in drug abuse, furthermore, it could endanger public health and increase crime. Harm reduction strategies, on the other hand, may normalise drug consumption and can potentially increase the number of addicts and even threaten public safety. **Each Member State has its own approach**; is it **possible to set collective rules** for all? Additionally, to what extent should **governments intervene with new legislation**, when the **work of NGOs** is already being **effective** in many aspects?

## Further Research

1. **Kurzgesagt - In a nutshell:** A simple breakdown of marijuana legalisation, drug gateway and potency, hardline and harm reduction policy.
2. **Kurzgesagt - In a nutshell:** A simple breakdown of The War on Drugs. How the States fight drug abuse.
3. **A Lecture On Drugs - Alan Watts:** As the title suggests, a lesson on drugs.



# COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY (ENVI II)

**Marry The Night:** Approximately one-third of the world's population lives in an area where the Milky Way is no longer visible at night due to artificial light. Keeping in mind its negative effects on wildlife, ecosystems, and citizens' health, as well as the potential benefits associated with increased energy efficiency, what steps can the EU take to reduce light pollution?

By: Sarah Benešová (CZ)

## Introduction

Everyone is familiar with one of the greatest human inventions, the lightbulb. But have there ever been considerations regarding its environmental impact as there have been for the effects of plastic or automobile emissions?

Artificial light during the night **affects human health, wildlife behaviour, and our ability to observe stars** and other celestial objects. In 2016, the World Atlas of Night Sky Brightness, a computer-generated map based on thousands of satellite photos, was published and showed how much the Earth lit up.

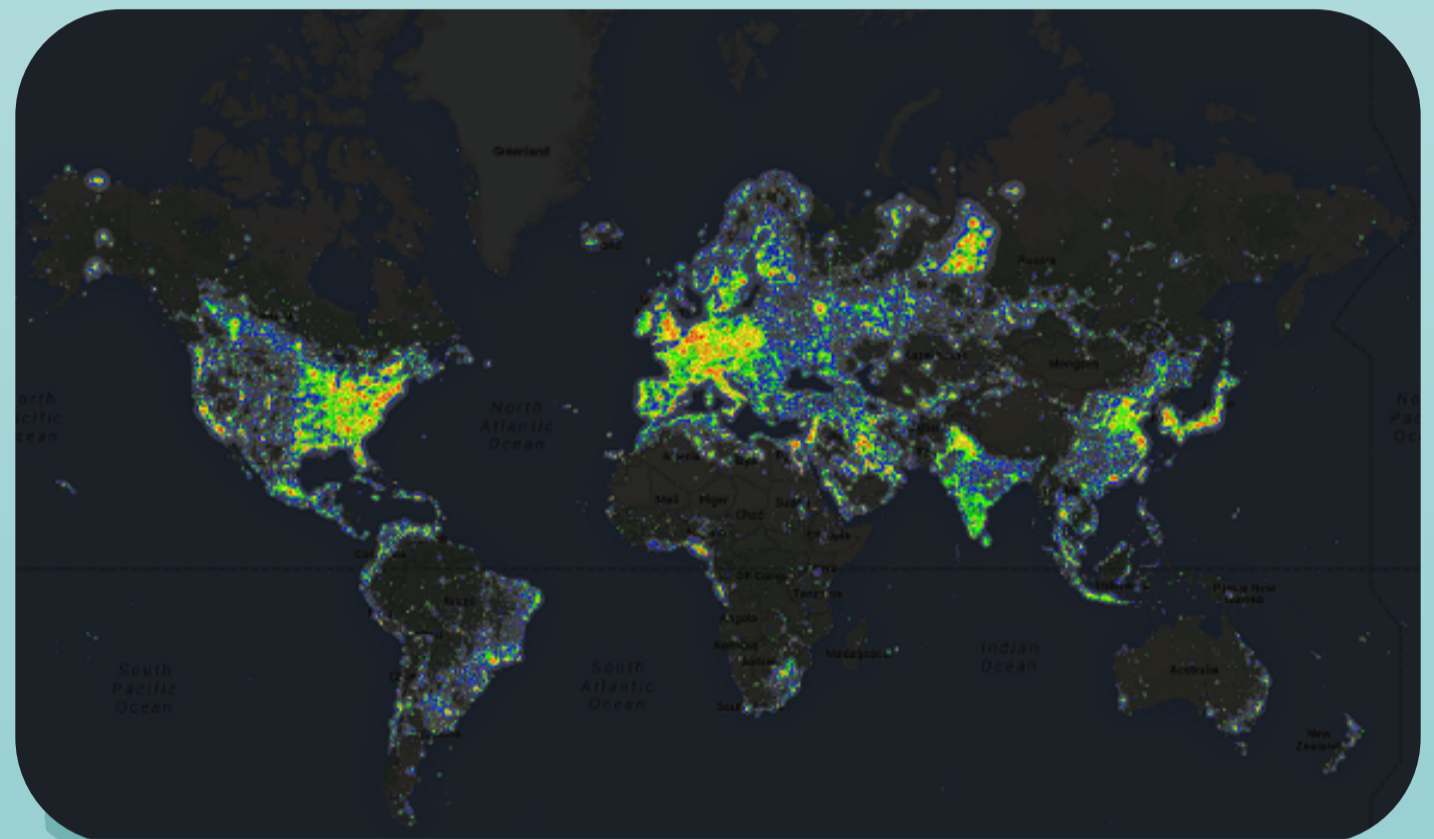


Figure 1: Light pollution map

Around 99% of Europeans and Americans are **living under sky glow**, one of the most pervasive forms of light pollution.

## Key Terms

- **Artificial light (illumination)** is a source and use of light where in nature, at the time, light would be nowhere to be found. Different types of artificial light exist, such as incandescent or Light Emitting Diode (LED) lights.
- **LED lights** are the most energy-efficient and quickly evolving type of lighting technology available. They produce more natural light, which can be 10 times brighter than incandescent light bulbs.
- **Sky glow** is a rise in the perceived brightness of the night sky that has the potential to make the observation of stars difficult.
- **Circadian clocks or rhythms** are a part of the body's internal clock. They are running on the "background" of our body and are based on a 24-hour cycle. They are vital for essential functions and processes, the most important being the sleeping and waking schedule.

## Key Actors & Stakeholders

- The **European Commission** is the executive body of the EU. It is responsible for the Green Deal Strategy that tackles the environment's future, including light pollution. The 8th Environment Action Plan builds up most about light pollution and is a plan for a greener Europe until 2030.
- The **European Space Agency (ESA)** is Europe's space gateway. Its goal is to influence the growth of Europe's space capabilities and ensure that the world and Europe continue to benefit from investments in space.



- **Member States** are each of the 27 countries that are part of the EU. The presidency of the Council of the EU is rotative, and the country presiding at each moment has the competence to bring up relevant issues that affect them or others. Since the environment is a shared competence<sup>[1]</sup>, both the EU and Member States have decision power on the issue.
- **Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)** like the Dark Sky Association are the main advocates for educating about light pollution and promoting sustainable artificial lights. They also try to advocate for protecting dark sky areas<sup>[2]</sup>.

## Key Conflicts

### Tonight, without your night light

Artificial lighting is **vital** for humans nowadays, from institutions functioning at night to fighting against criminality. However, it has been proven to **not have beneficial consequences for human health** and the circadian cycle.

The amount of light entering the eye plays a key role in **guiding our brain** in separating between awake and sleep periods. Since light serves as an external trigger for internal clock control, the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN)<sup>[1]</sup> is **extremely sensitive to light exposure**. Artificial light **interferes** with our internal clock control. When exposed to light, the SCN initiates a transmitting process that lowers melatonin, the hormone that controls our sleep-wake cycle.

Circadian rhythm **sleep-wake disorders** have been related to increased exposure to artificial light. Researchers show that migraines can be triggered by artificial light as well as the risk of depression episodes. Changes in sleep patterns may interfere with the prevention of cancer.

### Moon missing

The ecosystem has **depended on and evolved** by day and night, light and dark, for millions of years. Light and darkness are necessary for photosynthesis, the mechanism by which plants develop.

The existence of artificial light is one of the least commonly discussed effects of human activities on the environment. The activity of insects, birds, and other creatures is disturbed by lighting, as is photosynthesis. Their migration process, habits, and habitat formats are disturbed by light pollution.

Sea turtles and birds using the moonlight to guide them during migration become disoriented, lose their route, and frequently die as a result of light pollution. New research shows that light pollution may be more dangerous than anticipated to insects. Numerous insects, a major source of food for birds and other animals, are attracted to artificial lights and quickly perish upon coming into contact with them.

### Shine bright as LED

Not only does sky glow interfere with astronomical observations, but it also keeps people from getting close

1 **Shared competence** means that either Member States or EU can adopt legally binding acts in the area. However, Member States may only take such measures in cases in which the EU has either officially paused to do so or has not utilised its authority.

2 The **International Dark Sky Places (IDSP)** programme is a global certification programme for villages, parks, and protected places that use public education and appropriate lighting practises to conserve and preserve dark areas of the sky.

3 The **suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN)** is a structure located in the brain that synchronises and coordinates internal rhythms with external cues, such as the daily light-dark cycle.



to the starry sky. The Milky Way is no longer visible at night where around one-third of the world's population lives, owing to artificial lighting. In 1992, UNESCO declared the stars and the night sky a part of the global heritage that must be preserved.

## Key Conflicts

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### Shine bright as LED

Not only does sky glow interfere with astronomical observations, but it also keeps people from getting close to the starry sky. The Milky Way is no longer visible at night where around one-third of the world's population lives, owing to artificial lighting. In 1992, UNESCO declared the stars and the night sky a part of the global heritage that must be preserved.

### The cost of light

Lighting is thought to account for **15% of total global power use**. In this way, light pollution, which is brought on by excessive or unnecessary nighttime lighting, may be viewed as a pure energy waste, costing money, carbon emissions, and raw resources.

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4 **The suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN)** is a structure located in the brain that synchronises and coordinates internal rhythms with external cues, such as the daily light-dark cycle.



## Key Conflicts

### Across Europe

Light pollution has been recognised by the European Commission as one of the priority objects to tackle by 2030. The EU's legally established shared agenda for environmental policy is outlined in the 8th Environment Action Programme, which went into effect in 2022. The action plan restates the EU's long-term goal of 2050 of **promoting healthy planetary living** and lays out the circumstances necessary to accomplish the top priorities for 2030. This plan builds on the European Green Deal and intends to accelerate the shift to a **climate-neutral, resource-efficient economy** while acknowledging that human well-being and prosperity depend on healthy ecosystems.

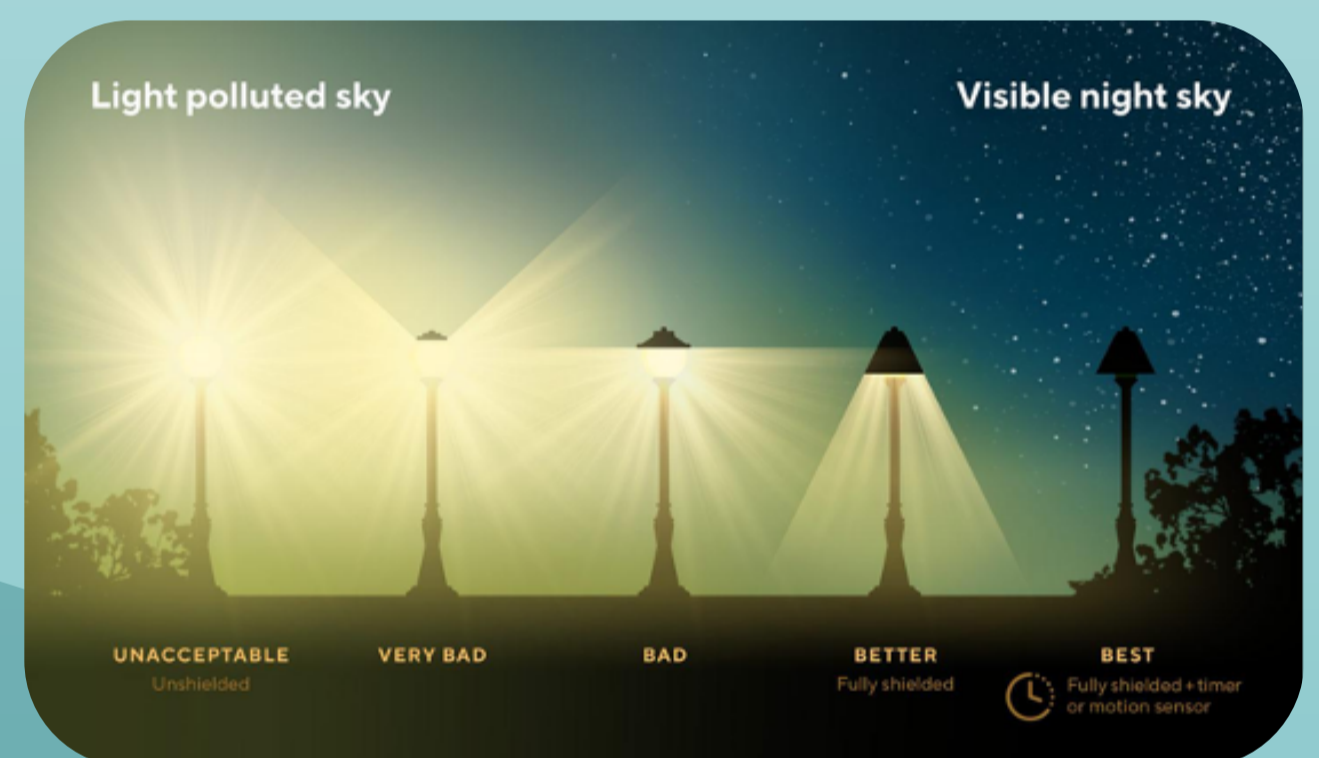
The ESA is mapping the state of lighting pollution from space by capturing and comparing European cities from above. Astronauts recognised the difference that LED lighting made, and it was not as environmentally positive as scientists thought. Without this research, the effect of LED lighting would have been unknown.

### Out of light, out of mind

Despite the initiatives of the EU, most measures are taken on the national level. During the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Ministry of Environment of the Czech Republic compiled a document about light pollution measurements around Europe. The study collected data about individual measures done by each Member State. It states and refers to their legislation, standard procedures, guides, or other initiatives. **Only 18 out of the 27 Member States tackle light pollution in their legislation**; at the same time, almost all of them fulfil the requirement for NGO initiatives or different projects reflecting this issue.

### Many hands make night work

Dark Sky Association is the biggest NGO which educates about the issue. They make lists of preserved night skies worldwide and approve companies and lights that are most sparing and protecting the nighttime.



**Figure 2:** How different types of artificial light pollutes the dark

### Spotlight on the Czech Republic

In 2002, the Czech Republic became the first country in the EU to have a national programme to reduce light pollution. In the Clean Air Act of the Czech law, light pollution is described as artificial light that spreads into places that it is not supposed to, especially if light is emitted over the horizon. Upper limits of light emissions were established, shielding of streetlamps and adjustments to bulbs were made necessary, and local authorities have been required to implement the stated measures to effectively fight light pollution.

In 2017, the Czech Ministry of Environment raised concerns once again. To lessen light pollution, stricter guidelines for installing light sources in national parks were developed. As another example, the Czech State support fund for improving lighting systems currently only covers bulbs with a light output of 2700K or less. A lighting guidebook (here to be found in Czech) for architectural lighting installations, private lighting facilities, and public lighting was released in 2023. New standards to reduce the negative impacts of outdoor lighting are now being developed.



According to several documents, four areas with clear night sky (Bystrická, Manětínská, Jizerská and Beskydská) have been safeguarded in the Czech Republic.

## What now?

The world gets brighter by 2% each year. Nonetheless, knowing this overwhelming fact, the laws and processes now in place seem insufficient. However, researchers know how much light pollution and light at night (LAN) harm the health and well-being of humans, animals, and the environment. The excessive use of light also has a negative financial impact and prevents researchers from discovering space and the night sky.

One of the most revolutionary inventions, the lightbulb, may have bigger side effects than awareness. Light guides society through the night as the cities and people seem never to sleep, but how can we ensure that we all find a new comfort in the dark?

## Further Research

1. **TED Talk** by astrophysicist Kelsey Johnson. In this talk, she explains how light pollution affects almost every species on Earth.
2. **Where are the stars?** A short film by National Geographic describing light pollution and its effects on the night sky.
3. **Podcast** by Science about difficulties in measuring light pollution and the challenges it brings.
4. **Light Pollution** overview by National Geographic tackles and explains the most significant issues and challenges light pollution brings to humans, especially wildlife.



# COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRY, RESEARCH AND ENERGY (ITRE)

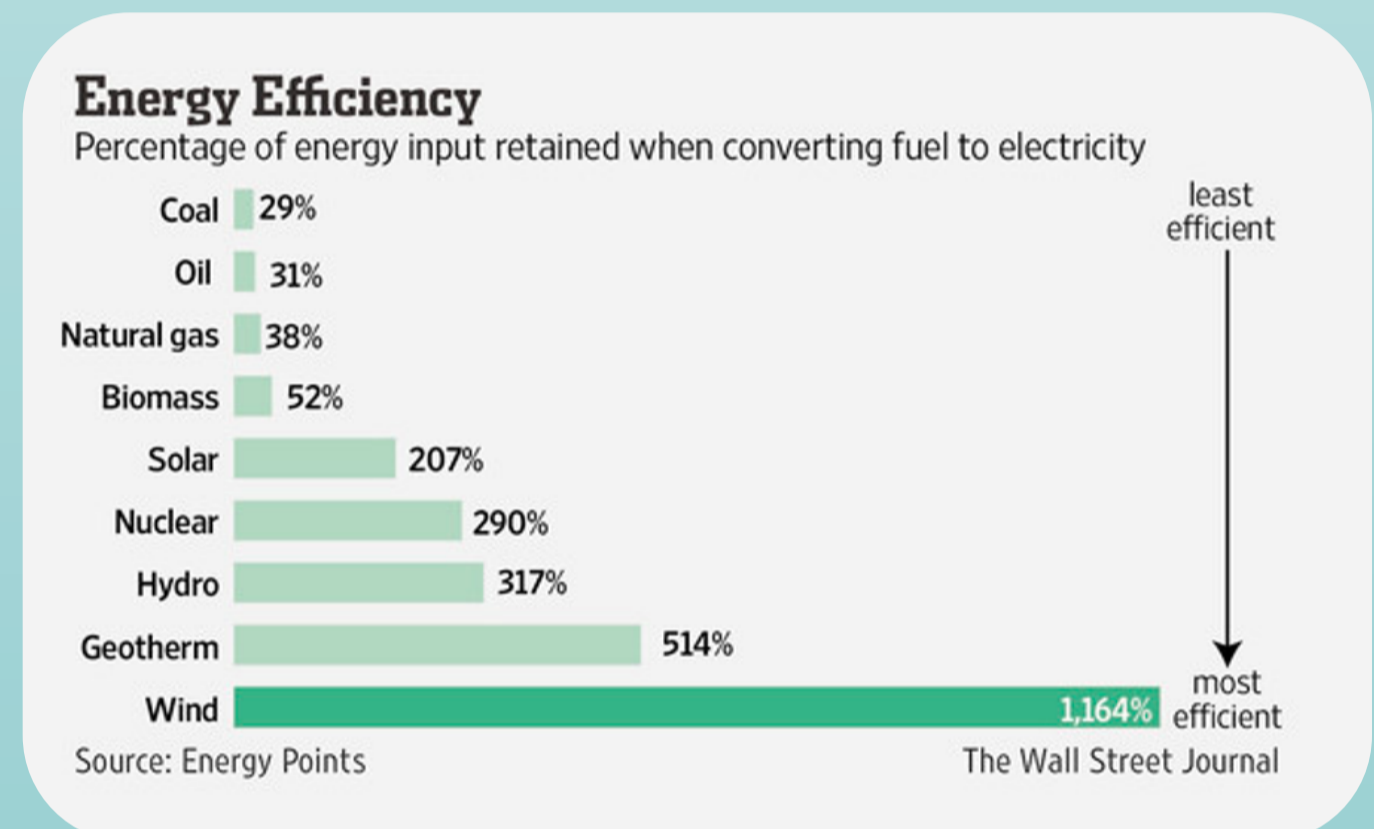
**Nuclear. It's pronounced nuclear.** Nuclear energy has been labelled as "green" by the EU Green Deal. Being mindful of its key role in the green transition, as well as of its risks and long-lasting negative consequences, how should it be regulated within the EU?

By: David Janda and Veronika Vrbová (CZ)

## Introduction

Nuclear policy has been a part of the EU for as long as it has existed. The **Treaty on the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom Treaty)** is **one of the three founding treaties** of the EU. Despite all of that, **each Member State has the right to decide** whether and to what degree to include nuclear energy into their own energy mix.

Nuclear energy is **one of the most efficient** power producers, and it is also **independent of weather or other natural factors**. Nuclear energy poses a green **alternative** for countries with **limited opportunities for hydroelectric or geothermal power generation**.



**Figure 1:** Graph showing how efficient each type of energy is.

## Key Terms

- **Transitional energy** is a term for non-renewable energy which has been accepted as a valid intermediary between renewable and non-renewable energy sources.
- **Non-renewable energy** is a term for a type of energy which uses fuel during the process of generating electricity. This makes these forms of energy reliant on natural resources which are not inexhaustible.
- **Renewable energy** is a term for energy which will not run out in the future. Examples of renewable energy include solar power, wind energy, and hydroelectric energy.
- **Nuclear fuel** is fuel used in nuclear reactors that are currently being used. This fuel needs to be unstable (radioactive) on the atomic level so that through neutron bombardment a controlled chain reaction of nuclear fission can take place. Most commonly this fuel is Uranium-235.

## Key Actors & Stakeholders

- The **European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)** is an international organisation formed by the Euratom Treaty. Its objectives and scope of activities cover a variety of areas connected to nuclear power and ionising radiation, including safeguarding nuclear materials and radiation protection. Euratom is an entity separate from the EU, however, it is led by the European Commission.
- The **Supply Agency of the European Atomic Energy Community (ESA)** is an agency created by the Euratom treaty to ensure supply chain security of nuclear materials and nuclear fuel for all Member States. It caters for the needs of utilities producing nuclear energy, research reactors, producers of medical radioisotopes, and the nuclear supply chain industry.



- The **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** is an intergovernmental organisation that seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy. It was established in 1957 as an autonomous organisation within the United Nations (UN), though governed by its own founding treaty. The organisation reports to both the General Assembly and the Security Council of the UN.

## Key Conflicts

### Dependency on nuclear energy as an energy source

As of 2021, 12 out of 27 Member States are to varying extent dependent on nuclear energy. As a result of this, the EU is faced with a dilemma. A change in the energy mixes of Member States that is implemented too fast may **deepen the effects** of the ongoing energy crisis and cause many households to become very **limited in their energy use**, whereas a change implemented too slowly could be too late to cause an impact on the rapidly declining environment and it also may be outclassed by newly developed technologies such as closed loop or generation IV reactors or fusion generators.

### Dependency on nuclear energy from others

One of the main issues about nuclear energy or any other type of energy is fuel diversity. As shown by the ongoing war in Ukraine, **dependency** on mainly one source of fuel may be extremely detrimental to the industry and with most sanctions directed at Russia focusing on natural gas, Russia's role as a major nuclear fuel exporter is being not openly acknowledged. Other sources of nuclear fuel come from countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Niger, which place lesser importance on **human rights**. Supporting their current governments is **questioned by the public**, due to the harsh living and working conditions<sup>[1]</sup> under which these resources are produced.

### Ecological Impact

Despite nuclear energy being classified as 'green', **the environment is clearly impacted** by nuclear power plants. As nuclear energy is a low-carbon energy activity, its emissions do not come in the form of greenhouse gases but in the form of land used for construction, the methods of **acquisition of materials** to build, the **construction** itself and the repurposing or lack of **radioactive waste**. The land on which nuclear power plants are built is usually away from large cities, which is also the place where nature thrives. Therefore, many habitats are destroyed in the process of constructing the power plants. Construction itself has a problem with waste, as approximately 25% of the material brought to the construction site **ends up as waste**. Radioactive waste currently has no way of being reprocessed or repurposed and as such is currently stored all over the world with no use. This waste however releases radiation into its surroundings and as such improper storage may lead to devastating effects.

## Measures in Place

### Euratom Treaty

The Euratom Treaty serves as a regulator of nuclear energy and enforces nuclear safety throughout the EU. This safety focuses mainly on the people, but safety and protection of the environment is also something that is taken into account.

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<sup>1</sup> Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Niger occupy the 66th, 39th and 21st places in the highest human rights index according to The Global Economy.



The Euratom Treaty remains an entity outside of the EU and as such it is not subject to regulatory control of the European Parliament. It also provides association status to countries outside of the EU. This also means that it is a key factor in promoting international collaboration and cooperation on nuclear energy.

### Complementary Climate Delegated Act to Accelerate Decarbonisation

The Complementary Climate Delegated Act builds on the commitments made in the Commission Communication of 21 April 2022 and on the dedicated assessment of nuclear energy. This document classifies nuclear and gas-related energy activities as ‘green’ under certain conditions. Nuclear energy activities applicable under this Act fall under one of three categories:

- Advanced technology with a closed fuel cycle<sup>[2]</sup>,
- New power plant projects which are built with the newest current technology,
- Modification and upgrades of existing nuclear installations with the purpose of lifetime extension.

### What now?

With the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU limiting competencies and enforcing regulations around the nuclear industry, how can the EU break the current status quo and enforce a smooth transition to renewable energy without causing major energy crises, or is it even necessary to completely phase out the use of fission power<sup>[3]</sup>?

### Further Research

1. **Fact Sheet on Nuclear energy:** A sum up of EU’s activities regarding the nuclear sector.
2. **Fact Sheet on Nuclear energy in the EU:** The history and future of nuclear power in the EU explained.
3. **Fitfor55 Explained:** A short video explaining the EU’s stance toward climate change and environmental affairs.

2 They are also referred to as generation IV reactors. These reactors ‘complete’ their fuel cycle by repurposing used fuel. Currently they are considered an experimental and undeveloped technology.

3 This refers to the current form of nuclear power plants in which an atomic nucleus is split resulting in large amounts of energy.



# COMMITTEE ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS (LIBE I)

**Doxx the messenger:** In 2021, 9 out of 10 fact-checking outlets in Europe were targeted with online harassment and smear campaigns, including stalking and doxxing. What steps should the EU take to enhance media freedoms and protect journalists, media workers and their families from these intrusive and abusive practices?

*By: Luca Gaurieder (DE)*

## Introduction

In a functioning democracy, **freedom of the press is essential**, as it is one of many tasks of the media to identify and denounce threats to our democracy. Furthermore, balanced, independent reporting is necessary so that citizens can form an uninfluenced opinion. But those who uphold this system –journalists– are **increasingly under attack**:

Insults, hate speech, and death threats are a part of a journalist's everyday life. While not part of their job description, their profession is **infamous for the harsh language against them**, which they often have to face online. And this can have a real impact on the affected journalists. While some may find it only unpleasant, some may experience **serious mental health problems**. In the most extreme cases, harassment can lead to consequences in real life. Various journalists across Europe have been **stalked and doxxed** or had to **face strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)**, but most notably two journalists – Daphne Galizia from Malta and Jan Kuciak from Slovakia were **assassinated as a result of their investigative work**.

The roughening of the atmosphere has contributed to an increasing number of **journalists feeling unsafe about practising their profession** and some have left the field altogether. This **endangers in particular the independence of journalism** and thus a cornerstone of our basic democratic order.

## Key Terms

- **Media freedom** is a constitutional right and part of the European Convention on Human Rights that all Member States have signed. It guarantees censorship-free reporting by the press, radio, film and Internet.
- **Stalking** is an obsessive and abnormally prolonged pattern of threats of harassment directed against a specific individual.
- **Doxxing** is the act of non-consensually publishing the personal information of other people on the internet to harm them.
- **A bot** is a social media account that pretends to be human but is in reality controlled automatically. In large quantities bots can be used, for example, to influence opinions on social networks.
- A **Strategic Lawsuit against Public Participation (SLAPP)** is a baseless lawsuit filed to intimidate and silence journalists.

## Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **Journalists** are all people who work in the field of collecting, redacting, and publishing news.
- **Media outlets** are institutions that collect and publish news - among other things. Most journalists are employed on a permanent or freelance basis by these media outlets.



- **Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs)** are the 19 most visited online platforms and search engines in the EU such as Bing, Facebook, Wikipedia and GoogleMaps.

## Key Conflicts

As the fourth power in the state next to the legislative, the executive, and the judicative branches, the media are an **integral part of democracy**. The freedom of the media is a fundamental right that every democracy must grant.

The hatred and incitement that journalists have to endure daily **impair the freedom of the media**, as it can also lead to journalists **withdrawing from the profession** to ensure their safety, or to them not daring to report critically on specific topics out of fear of retaliation from the subjects of their investigations.

Journalists encounter a **wide variety of intimidation techniques** on the Internet. Hate speech against them, for example, can lead to a **deterioration of their mental health**. Doxxing leads to journalists having to deal with **intimidation outside the Internet**. Making their private information public makes it easier for stalkers and others who want to use this privacy breach to harm them. People who want to influence public opinion can use bots, to **deliberately push journalists they dislike out of the public eye** out of fear for their safety.

### Media outlets often unprepared

Having an online presence as a journalist is often either required or heavily **encouraged by their employers**, but media outlets often **lack resources to guide journalists** in building an online presence in a way that is both effective for their professional practice and their safety. Journalists should be able to promote and spread their work while being protected from attacks and harassment.

### Specific targeting of minority groups

Journalists who belong to a minority group that already faces an above-average amount of hate speech online, such as **women, queer people, or people of colour** **face more attacks** than their male, straight, and white counterparts. Disengagement by these disproportionately targeted groups means that **minority voices in turn receive less** attention from society. For members of minorities, however, it is particularly important to be heard in society, as this means they have the opportunity to denounce grievances against them.

### Complications through family and friends

Journalists alerted by the various cases of data misuse will often try to **protect their personal data** online to prevent any kind of misuse. However, their personal data will not only be stored on their own technical equipment. Colleagues, family members, or friends will usually have **stored the data in less secure ways** and are not usually aware that they are risking the safety of the journalist. Furthermore, family and friends of journalists can also become victims of the same hate attacks, because perpetrators often identify them as suitable targets to harm journalists as journalists, who are not intimidated by threats against them, might be more sensitive towards threats against the people they value the most.

## Measures in Place

Since August 2023, the Digital Services Act (DSA) has been in force in the EU, obliging VLOPs – among others –



to take **stronger action against hate speech**. VLOPs are obliged to employ more moderators, take down illegal content, and investigate complaints more meticulously to protect their users. In the event of non-compliance, VLOPs face **severe penalties** as much as 6% of their yearly turnover. Due to the short period of validity, however, not much is known about the effect of the law. Starting 2024 smaller online platforms will also be obliged to abide by similar rules under the DSA.

The DSA is not aimed at specifically protecting journalists, but rather making a safer internet for everyone. Trying to solve many problems with one law often leads to many problems with implementing. Tech experts criticise the law for sloppy implementation and lack of understanding of the subject matter.

The DSA is an EU regulation and therefore applies immediately in the whole EU without having to be converted into national law.

There are little to no pre-existing laws in the Member States specifically concerning the online safety of journalists. Most resources on protecting journalists online are provided by NGOs/ journalists associations such as Safety4Journalists by the European Federation of Journalists.

The European Parliament has voted in favour of new rules to stop SLAPPs in July 2023. The new rules include – among other things – **new protections for journalists** in cross-border cases and **compensation for potential harm** induced by the SLAPP. However, these laws have not yet come into effect.

## What now?

‘The Internet is new territory for all of us,’ said German then-Chancellor Angela Merkel about the process of legislating on Internet matters. Although the Internet is now more than 30 years old, **legislation traditionally lags far behind**. The Internet has developed at a speed that legislative processes, which are often slow in a democracy, have long been unable to keep up with. While this is not unique to online security, it is particularly striking here. How can we **regulate the Internet** in such a way that it is not a much-invoked lawless space, but that basic democratic principles, both online and offline, apply?

## Further Research

1. **UN resolution on the safety of journalists**: A non-binding UN resolution offering insightful ideas on how to tackle the issue on a supranational level.
2. **International Media Support article**: An article about how media outlets can help their journalists.
3. **The Guardian YouTube Video**: A video on the importance of investigative journalism.





# COMMITTEE ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS (LIBE II)

**Marriage for everyone and everywhere:** While the Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination on any grounds, the EU must balance LGBTQIA+ rights with varying Member States' perspectives. As more children grow up with same-sex parents, how can the EU ensure mutual recognition of family relations, especially for same-sex parents, across Member States to uphold their rights and protect their children legally?

*By: Petra Pšeničnik (HR)*

## Introduction

In 2021, the European Parliament passed a resolution stating that same-sex marriages and partnerships should be recognised across the EU. Despite this, **only 15 out of 27 Member States** approve of them as of 2023, with Estonia's new law taking force on January 1st, 2024. Other countries, either recognise LGBTQIA+ couples' rights to have a civil union, or they do not recognise their rights at all.

The same year, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled that a child and its same-sex parents must be recognised as a family in all Member States. Still, these families face many problems, most of them motivated by sexuality-related phobias.

## Key Terms

- A **civil union** is a legal relationship between two individuals that provides some benefits and protections that marriage provides. These depend and vary across countries.
- **Sexuality-oriented phobias** are characterised by fear, hatred, disgust, mistrust of, and discomfort with individuals of different sexual orientations. Homophobia and biphobia refer to gay, lesbian, and bisexual people; meanwhile, transphobia refers to transgender and non-binary or genderqueer individuals, as well as to individuals who do not follow traditional gender norms.
- **Unregistered cohabitation** is defined as a state of living together and typically having a sexual or romantic relationship without being married. In some countries, the concept has a legal status.

## Key Actors & Stakeholders

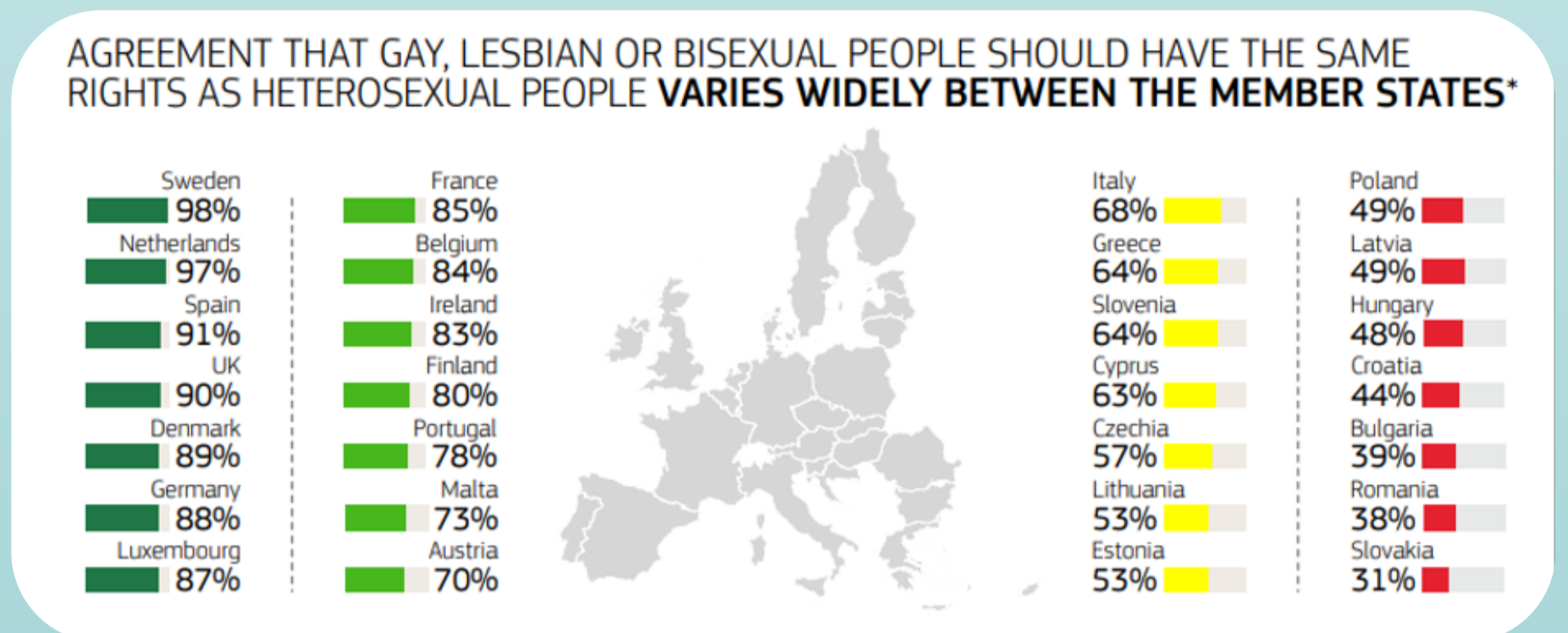
- **The United Nations (UN)** is an international organisation made up of 193 Member States worldwide; committed to promoting social progress, bettering living standards, and human rights. In 2013, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) launched a **global campaign against homophobia and transphobia** under the name **UN Free & Equal**.
- **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)** is an independent centre that promotes and protects human rights in the EU. It works with other stakeholders by sharing evidence-based insights and advice.
- **ILGA-Europe** is the largest non-governmental international umbrella organisation that unites more than 700 organisations from 54 countries. It is fighting for inclusivity, equality, and social justice for the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **IGLYO** is a member-based network dedicated to LGBTQIA+ rights for students and youth. They work closely with their members and partners to further better programmes and initiatives to meet the needs of LGBTQIA+ young people.



## Key Conflicts

ILGA-Europe's 2023 Annual Review shows that 2022 was the **most violent year for the LGBTQIA+ community**. Not only did hate crimes against the LGBTQIA+ community increase, but violence became more severe, with several terrorist attacks taking place outside LGBTQIA+ bars all around Europe. This discrimination is especially increasing towards transgender people, as they are **most likely to experience threats of physical and sexual violence** in the LGBTQIA+ community.

Discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals is more prevalent and visible in Eastern Europe, where **politicians and religious leaders engage** in hate speech. In many countries, the LGBTQIA+ community faces erasure and discrimination through measures like the so-called LGBT-free zones which, among others, ban all LGBTQIA+ events.

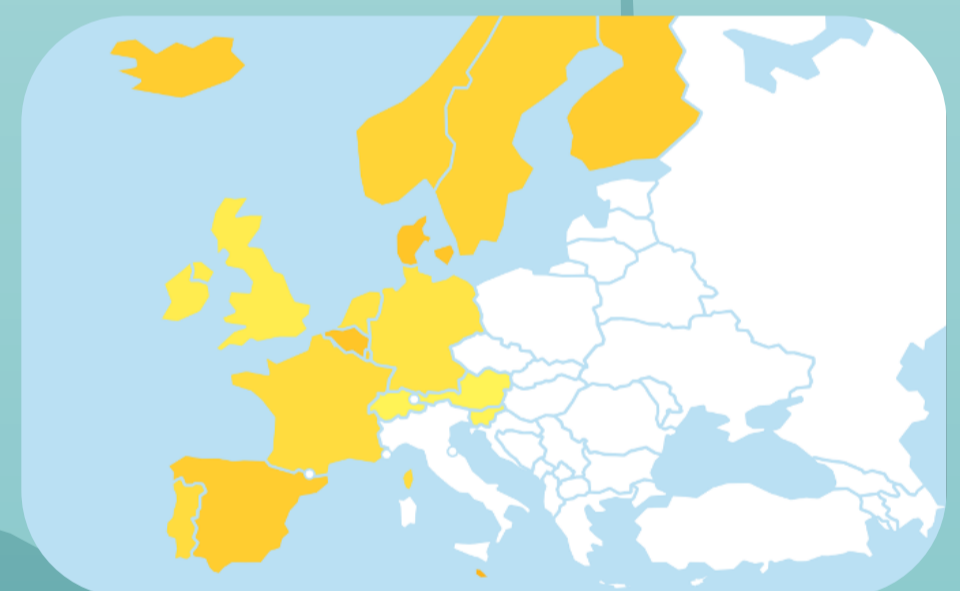


**Figure 1:** An infographic showing the results of a Eurobarometer 2019 survey on discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals in the EU.

In addition to all of this, discrimination is also materialised in the familial context including (same-sex) marriage and the adoption of children. Depending on the country and its legislation, an LGBTQIA+ person could have entirely different experiences when thinking of getting married or adopting children.

### Different views on same-sex marriage

As of September 2023, only 15 out of 27 Member States allow same-sex marriages, with Estonia making it legal in 2024. Some other countries such as Croatia, Hungary, and Latvia **banned same-sex marriages by constitutional law**, although they do offer the right to a civil union. Civil unions do not necessarily grant individuals the same rights they would have if they were married, with some countries having such laws and policies. Meanwhile, some European countries such as Slovakia and Poland only offer the right to unregistered cohabitation for same-sex couples, meaning they **do not have any family rights for LGBTQIA+ people**.



**Figure 2:** Rainbow Europe's map showing the countries in Europe that allow same-sex marriage.

### Inability to adopt children

As different countries have different laws for same-sex marriage, they naturally have diverse laws on adoption as well. All countries which allow same-sex marriage allow joint adoption, but **not all of them allow step-parent adoption** or **medically assisted insemination**. Some countries that allow civil unions also allow joint adoption, meanwhile, countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Italy do not allow for individuals of the LGBTQIA+ community to adopt children at all. Transgender parenthood is recognised only in Malta, Slovenia, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland.

Although some countries allow LGBTQIA+ couples to adopt children, they still face countless problems



during the long and tedious adoption process. Not only do they need to navigate discriminatory adoption laws, but they also face issues such as stigma and discrimination. Children of LGBTQIA+ parents face homophobia in their daily lives, especially from peers.

### **Discrepancies on the legal status of LGBTQIA+ families and difficulties they face when migrating**

The EU Free Movement Directive ensures that if the couple is married in their home country and wishes to move to another EU country which fully recognises same-sex marriages, the partner can do so and **will be recognised as a spouse**. However, this does not apply to countries that do not recognise same-sex marriage, as the partner will not be considered a spouse. When it comes to registered partnerships, it depends on whether the host country offers the same rights for marriage and registered partnerships, and if it does they enjoy the same rights they would if they were married in their home country. Furthermore, unregistered partnerships do not enjoy the same rights as a spouse and they do not necessarily have the right to join their partner in another country, although they can enter if they prove that their relationship is 'durable'.

### **Measures in Place**

**UN Free & Equal** strives to **promote fair treatment of LGBTQIA+ individuals and equality**. The campaign has been active since 2013, and over the years they published impactful infographics, fact sheets, and videos. This medium has proposed actions which can be taken to tackle discrimination and violence and to protect the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. Additionally, the campaign is supported by the UN as it is a part of their organisation.

The **FRA** helps **realise and safeguard LGBTQIA+ rights** by identifying trends, collecting and analysing law and data, strengthening cooperation and ties between stakeholders, and supporting rights-compliant policy responses. Additionally, they published various reports over the years the recent titled '**A long way to go for LGBTI equality**'.

**ILGA-Europe** focuses on **empowering LGBTQIA+ activists and organisations**. It strives to do just that by providing funding, organising training and annual conferences, giving advice to partnered NGOs, publishing news and reports, supporting organisations in documenting and reporting human rights violations and supporting initiatives which ensure the well-being of their own staff and other LGBTQIA+ individuals.

**Rainbow Europe** is one of their tools for data sharing among actors, as well as the public.

**IGLYO** strives to **give LGBTQIA+ youth opportunities to connect** through cross-border and cross-cultural exchange and peer learning. Some of the topics of their thematic research include inclusive education, and how to battle bias-motivated hate speech and crime. They offer a lot of various resources, including various publications, articles, videos and policy briefs. Their **LGBTQI Inclusive Education website** includes a map, a report and an index on the topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. The organisation has collaborated with ILGA-Europe on 'Intersections: The LGBTI II Survey - Youth Analysis'.

### **Spotlight on the Czech Republic**

The Czech Republic introduced **same-sex registered partnerships** in 2006 and banned **discrimination based on sexual orientation** in 2009. Meanwhile, particular challenges still persist, with the registered partnerships not being equivalent to marriages. LGBTQIA+ couples cannot adopt children together, nor can



one partner co-adopt the children of their partner. This means that they do not have any parental rights, such as access to the child's medical information. Additionally, the child has no right of inheritance towards that parent.

On the 29th of June 2023, the Czech parliament proposed two opposing bills, with one supporting same-sex marriage, and the other defining marriage as an union between a man and a woman. The same situation has happened before and without any results for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. NGOs are active in the Czech Republic, with Prague Pride Association and J sme fér being some of the biggest.

## What now?

LGBTQIA+ individuals face various problems, with some of their **rights still not being fully recognised** even in the 21st century. The increase of hate crimes and hate speech against LGBTQIA+ individuals is alarming, and the problem calls for a more immediate response. Going forward, what can the EU continue to do to support the LGBTQIA+ community? How can the EU battle the stigma the LGBTQIA+ community faces on a daily basis and during adoption processes? What can Member States do to improve their efforts in battling hate speech and hate crime?

## Further Research

1. **'Rainbow Europe (2023)'**: A map showcasing the legal index of LGBTQIA+ equality and an overview of the social climate for LGBTQIA+ people in every respective country.
2. **'Anti-lgbti attacks in your own country (2022)'**: An article written by ILGA-Europe that lists hate crimes against the LGBTQIA+ community in various countries.
3. **'ILGA-Europe's glossary (2023)'**: An article written by ILGA-Europe which serves as a glossary of LGBTQIA+ terms.
4. **'European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights LGBTI Survey Data Explorer (2020)'**: An interactive tool showcasing data from the 2020 LGBTI Survey in the form of a map.

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