EMCDDA releases report on European environmental prevention measures to limit unhealthy and risky substance use behaviours

There is a growing recognition of the important role environmental factors play in health-related behaviour. Traditional substance use prevention approaches in Europe have predominantly focused on warning or informing about the risks of use or on skills-based interventions. In contrast, environmental prevention policies aim to limit unhealthy behaviours by changing the environment in ways which influence people's substance use choices. In a new report published today – Environmental substance use prevention interventions in Europe – the EMCDDA offers a first operational definition of the concept and an initial overview of where and how such interventions are being used in the region. The definition identifies three categories of environmental prevention measures: regulatory, economic and physical.

Drawing on the expertise of leading experts in the field, today's report contributes to the debate on this emerging issue. Based on the results of a survey of European prevention practitioners in 2016, the publication paints a first picture of the types of environmental prevention interventions being used in the substance use field in Europe and the extent to which such measures are being implemented.
Although the survey has limitations, the publication provides a useful starting point for future research and identifies gaps in provision.

Many behaviours we perform every day are automatic and are generally reactions to common and familiar stimuli. Therefore, environmental and social cues and automatic processes are important influences on behaviour and there is growing recognition of the potential public health benefits to be obtained from interventions that take advantage of such automatic processes (which require little or no effort on the part of the individuals in the target group) to change behaviour.

Environmental prevention policies and interventions build on current interest in these approaches and seek to provide a stimulus that evokes healthier decisions. This can occur through altering the design of the environment, or aspects of it, to influence choice ('choice architecture')([1]). For example, physical changes may include bars providing glasses for alcohol that are taller and narrower, but with smaller volumes, tending to make people drink less. Similarly, changes to the economic environment, such as increasing the price of tobacco, may discourage smokers. Regulatory changes can include legislation to constrain undesirable behaviours, such as cannabis use in public places, under-age drinking or drinking and driving.

The web-based questionnaire at the heart of the publication generated responses from 117 subjects (from 27 countries) with knowledge of substance use environmental prevention measures. It contained questions on measures covering illicit drugs, alcohol and tobacco and enquired whether measures were available nationally or locally. Of the 49 measures presented to the professionals answering the survey, 39 concerned regulatory and economic environmental prevention measures and 10 referred to physical environmental measures. Regulatory and economic measures were identified as available more often than the physical environmental measures.

National-level availability of a variety of regulatory measures related to illicit drugs was reported on average by 83% of respondents. For regulatory or economic measures relating to alcohol and tobacco, an average of 52% and 60% of respondents respectively indicated national-level availability. Physical environmental prevention measures were less commonly reported at the national level: for drugs, alcohol and tobacco combined they were only reported by 19% of respondents. However, local availability of these physical measures was higher, reported, on average, by 56% of respondents.

While environmental prevention approaches are currently less well-known than traditional forms of prevention, this may change. Globalisation and rapid technological change may increase substance use opportunities and pressures and environments may become riskier. In these circumstances, environmental interventions are likely to be needed, in addition to skills-based interventions, in order to sustain protective behaviour. Such interventions impact behaviour differently and create complementary ways of achieving positive socialisation.

EU’s future R&I programme should build on territorial connections and be backed by strong cohesion policy

The elaboration of the EU’s next R&I framework programme succeeding Horizon 2020 is currently under way against the backdrop of negotiations for the post-2020 EU budget. In a conference organised by the European Committee of the Regions on 20 February, local and regional representatives called for research and innovation funds to be oriented towards connecting regional innovation ecosystems in close synergy with cohesion policy instruments.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has already called for the overall expenditure ceiling to be raised to 1.3% of GNI , in order to ensure adequate financing for cohesion policy and research and innovation. The institution’s First Vice-President **Markku Markkula** said: “The R&I programmes of the EU are not only designed to promote scientific excellence and the global competitiveness of Europe, but are also instrumental for sustainable growth and rendering our regions and cities smarter and more liveable.

Ecosystem thinking and partnering between different cities and regions must therefore be one of the major guiding principles for the new framework programme."

Christophe Clergeau (FR/PES), rapporteur of a recent **CoR opinion** on EU's R&I programmes, pointed out the crucial role of structural and investment funds in the field of research and innovation. According to the Member of Pays de la Loire Regional Council, EU's future R&I policies should aim for improved synergies with different regional and European funding instruments and take greater account of smart specialisation strategies to build on excellence rooted in regions and cities.

"The next framework programme should be based on a place-based approach of R&I where regions and cities are recognised as full policy-makers and stakeholders at every level. Recognition of local collective initiatives and ecosystems, coherence of political objectives, complementarity of public policies, compatibility between financial instruments and co-construction of policies are key to implementing successful synergies with structural and investment funds", Mr Clergeau said.

He also suggested that the next framework programme should include new "territorial connections" action to recognise and fund regional excellence along the lines of the Vanguard Initiative. It would promote the complementarity of regional innovation ecosystems by creating consortia between regions that share their smart specialisation strategies and want to advance together towards commonly agreed goals.

The CoR's **SEDEC commission** adopted on 21 February a **draft opinion** which points out that future smart specialisation strategies should be based on interregional strategic cooperation and on a "regional discovery process" in which regions pool their smart specialisation strategies to create sustainable links between regional ecosystems in the priority areas of smart specialisation.

"Promoting the cross-border dimension by creating interregional investment opportunities will facilitate the expansion of regional and local innovation in Europe. However, it is necessary to tackle the complexity of fund management and introduce appropriate and flexible ad hoc financing instruments that help to create an interregional cooperation ecosystem", stressed rapporteur **Mikel Irujo** (ES/EA), delegate of the Government of Navarra in Brussels.

Participants of Tuesday's conference also highlighted the importance of more cohesion and convergence in the field of research and innovation. In her intervention, **European Parliament rapporteur** **Soledad Cabezón Ruiz** (ES/S&D) stated that "we need more regions of excellence in Europe". She also called for Member States and regions to increase the share of R&I funding to reach the commonly agreed goal of 3% of GDP.

José Ignacio Ceniceros (ES/EPP), chair of the SEDEC commission and President of the Government of La Rioja, concluded: "It is important to set out concrete measures to reduce and if possible reverse the talent drain in our regions and to bridge the innovation gap both between Member States and between regions. We also call for a better sharing of research results between regions and the opening of the research infrastructures to the needs of local actors, in particular in the field of agriculture, energy efficiency and smart urban transport and infrastructures."

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Statement by Commissioner Vestager on

Commission decision to fine seven companies for participating in four cartels

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The Commission has today fined seven companies a total of 546 million euros for taking part in four different cartels relating to cars. Three other companies involved in these cartels escaped a fine, because they came to us to reveal the cartels. All companies acknowledged their participation in these cartels and agreed to settle the cases.

Maritime car carriers cartel

The first of those cartels was about the transport of new cars, trucks and other large vehicles by sea.

In 2016, almost ten million vehicles were transported between Europe and other continents on specialised large ships – known as roll-on/roll-off ships. That includes nearly three and a half million imported cars, and nearly six and a half million exported cars.

Five of the companies involved in this transport business participated in the cartel – CSAV, "K" Line, MOL, NYK and WWL-EUKOR. Between them, they transported almost half of those ten million vehicles.

For almost six years, between October 2006 and September 2012, sales managers from these companies met at each other's offices, in bars, restaurants and other social gatherings. They were also in contact over the phone on a regular basis.

In those discussions, the five companies coordinated prices, divided up customers between them and exchanged commercially sensitive information that could help them align their prices. Instead of competing, they gave each other a free hand on certain routes or with certain customers, by deliberately quoting high prices or not quoting at all in tenders by carmakers.

MOL avoided a fine because it revealed the existence of the cartel to the Commission. The other four companies have been fined a total of 395 million euros – all four benefited from a reduction because they cooperated with the Commission.

Spark plugs cartel

The other three cartels that we have dealt with today are the latest in a series of cartels involving a whole range of different car parts. These latest cartels relate to spark plugs and brakes.

Spark plugs are used to ignite the petrol in a car engine. For more than eleven years, three suppliers of spark plugs – Bosch, Denso and NGK – formed a cartel that involved each company avoiding the others' traditional customers, and keeping the status quo in the spark plug industry.

This cartel was based on two-way contacts between NGK and each of the other two companies involved, where commercially sensitive information was discussed.

But at times, the companies also specifically agreed not to compete for each other's customers. That meant agreeing on the prices that each of them would quote, so they could be sure the existing supplier would offer the best price to a specific customer. It also involved agreeing on the share of supplies to certain customers, and on sticking to the shares that they had in the past.

We have fined Bosch and NGK a total of 76 million euros for taking part in this cartel. Both fines were reduced to reflect the fact that the companies cooperated with the investigation.

Denso, meanwhile, avoided a fine altogether by revealing the cartel to the Commission.

Braking systems cartel

The last of today's decisions is about hydraulic and electronic braking systems. It involves two cartels, one between Bosch, Continental and TRW, and one involving only Bosch and Continental.

The first cartel relates to discussions of general sales conditions from 2007 to 2011. The second is about a specific tender during 2010 and 2011.

In both cases, the suppliers coordinated their behaviour in the market via exchanges of confidential information. Those exchanges, including on pricing elements, happened through bilateral meetings, as well as phone conversations and email exchanges.

Our decision fines Bosch and Continental a total of 75 million euros. Both companies had their fines reduced for their cooperation with the Commission. TRW avoided a fine altogether for disclosing the cartel that it was involved in, and Continental also avoided a fine for disclosing the other cartel.

Conclusion

These decisions are just part of the work we've been doing recently to defend fair competition in the markets for cars and trucks. We've already imposed fines of over six billion euros in ten cases involving the car and truckmarkets. And we will be active in this area as long as we keep finding companies that hope to make higher profits by colluding instead of competing.

Today's decisions are unrelated to our investigation regarding concerns that several German carmakers might have broken EU competition rules. That investigation is still ongoing.

Today’s cases are about collusion at the expense of car makers. But in the end, any extra costs these car makers may have incurred could potentially be passed on to final consumers when they buy a car. So our work today will help to make sure that those markets work fairly for consumers.

Car manufacturing is also a major European industry, one that supports a large number of jobs across Europe.

In 2016 alone, the EU exported more than 190 billion euros worth of cars. So a cartel like the one between the maritime car carriers, which raised the cost of exporting European cars, is a threat to European industry and jobs.

What today’s cases have in common is their relation to a key sector for European industry and consumers – cars and trucks. And if we do find that companies have broken the competition rules in this sector, we will take firm action – as we have done today.