



Observatoire français  
des drogues et des  
tendances addictives

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# RAPPORTS

## FRENCH OPINIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF DRUGS IN 2023

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> **This text is a translation of part of the original French text from:** Li D., Philippon A., Le Nézet O., Eroukmanoff V., Janssen E., Spilka S. (2025) Opinions et représentations des Français sur les drogues en 2023. Paris, OFDT, coll. Rapports, 39 p.

## SUMMARY

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- In 2023, cannabis and cocaine remained the drugs most often spontaneously mentioned by the French. While cannabis remains the drug of choice, awareness of cocaine has risen sharply, with 74% of French people mentioning it, compared to 53% in 2018.
- While alcohol and tobacco are perceived as drugs only by a quarter of French people, a majority do consider these two substances to be the main causes of addiction, in the same way as illicit drugs.
- Between 1999 and 2018, the proportion of French people who consider themselves to be well informed about drugs increased from 58% to 68%, but this fell to 63% in 2023.
- The perceived dangerousness of cocaine, heroin and cannabis has fallen over the last 25 years: in 2023, 38% of French people thought that cannabis was dangerous in the case of lifetime use, compared to 54% in 1999. Alcohol and tobacco, on the other hand, are perceived as more dangerous.
- In 2023, negative opinions of drug users continued to shape perceptions. Some nine out of ten French people consider cocaine and heroin users to be “dangerous to those around them”, and more than half believe that they “try to get young people involved”.
- With the exception of cannabis, the proportion of French people who believe that drug users are “ill” has been rising steadily since 2008.
- The proportion of French people who consider it important to inform drug users about the least dangerous way to use drugs has risen from 40% in 2018 to 50% in 2023. Furthermore, the idea of decriminalising the use of illicit drugs, including cannabis, is still rejected by the majority.

# INTRODUCTION

For the sixth time since 1999, the OFDT has drawn up an overview of the French population's opinions on drugs and related public policies via the Survey on Representations, Opinions and Perceptions regarding Psychoactive Drugs (EROPP). In its report analysing the first EROPP data, the OFDT wrote that the aim of the survey was to establish "a snapshot of French people's beliefs and opinions on drug addiction". The aim is both to capture the perceived impact of public policy and to describe the diverse representations, in order to help develop information and prevention initiatives.

This report provides a summary of these opinions and representations on drugs in 2023, a description of the results in the light of the legislative and institutional frameworks in force, and the trends since 1999, the date from which the results are comparable with previous editions. The results of the 2023 edition are based on responses collected from a representative sample of 2 718 adults aged 18 to 75 and living in mainland France. They were surveyed between 22 March and 29 July 2023, and the results are organised as follows.

The first section addresses knowledge about drugs. What are the most commonly cited drugs and addictions? How informed do the French feel about these issues?

The second part describes how the French perceive the dangers associated with use of the main drugs. How dangerous are these practices compared to other practices that are harmful to health? Above what frequency is the use of different drugs considered dangerous to health?

The third part looks at how the French perceive drug users. Are they fully perceived as responsible? On the contrary, are they seen as being ill? Do these representations differ depending on the drug in question?

The fourth section looks at French people's opinions of the public response to drugs. How are harm reduction services perceived by the public? Do the French agree with current drug legislation?

Finally, the last section explores some of the main factors associated with these opinions and representations. To what extent, for example, is the fact of having or not having used cannabis or another illicit drug associated with different opinions on illicit drugs?

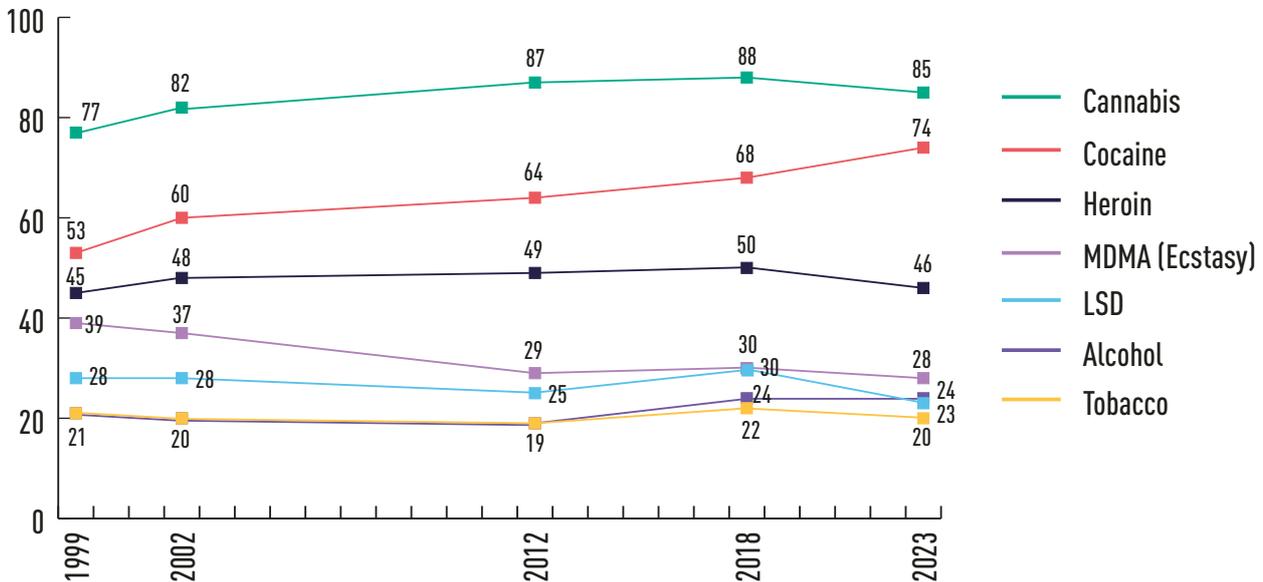
# KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DRUGS

## Drugs cited spontaneously

This open-ended question introduces the module on opinions and representations in the EROPP survey, and aims to monitor the emergence of new substances in terms of public perceptions. One of the underlying ideas is to understand the extent to which alcohol and tobacco are considered to be drugs. The question as it is worded (“What are the main drugs you are aware of, even if you have just heard their name before?”) is generally understood by respondents as relating to illicit drugs such as cannabis, cocaine and heroin, etc. The frequency with which tobacco and alcohol are cited compared to cannabis suggests that in 2023, the French continue to make a distinction between “drugs”, meaning illicit drugs above all, and tobacco and alcohol.

Cannabis and cocaine stand out as the two drugs most people in France think of when they are questioned: 85% mentioned cannabis and 74% cocaine in 2023. Then come heroin (mentioned by 46%), MDMA/ecstasy (28%), alcohol (24%), LSD (23%) and tobacco (20%) (Figure 1). Cocaine is the drug whose citation rate has changed the most between 1999 and 2023, rising from 53% to 74%. This increase should be seen in relation to the increase in cocaine use rates over the period: in 2000, only 0.3% of French people aged 18 to 64 had used cocaine over the year, compared to 2.7% in 2023 (Spilka et al., 2024). The rate of mentions of cannabis also rose by 8 points, that of alcohol by 3 points, while that of tobacco remained unchanged and that of MDMA/ecstasy fell by 11 points.

Figure 1. Change in the proportion of French people spontaneously citing each drug (%)



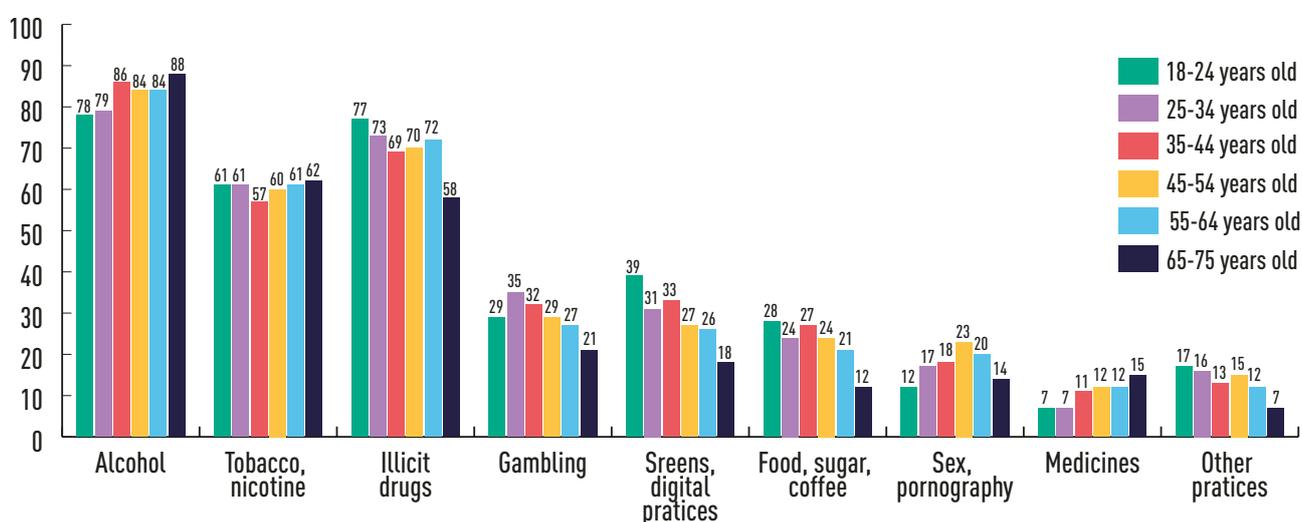
Source: EROPP surveys, OFDT

How to read the figure: in 2023, 85% of French people spontaneously cited cannabis in response to the question: “What are the main drugs you are aware of, even if you have just heard their name before?”

## Addictions cited spontaneously

In 2023, for the first time, respondents were asked about the addictions they could name spontaneously. While the term drug refers to a psychoactive substance, addiction refers to a behavioural disorder that manifests itself as a loss of control over the use of a substance or over a behaviour, despite its negative consequences. The introduction of this new question allows a better understanding of the range of social representations associated with the notion of addiction, beyond drug use alone, and to document the forms of addiction perceived as most salient by the French. The most commonly cited were alcohol (83%), illicit drugs (70%), tobacco/nicotine (60%), gambling (29%), screens or digital practices (smartphone, video games, social networks, Internet, etc.: 28%), food (fatty and sugary products, coffee, etc.: 22%), sex/pornography (17%) and medication (11%) (Figure 4). Unsurprisingly, alcohol and tobacco were very often cited as an addiction, even though they are not always perceived as drugs. Compared to older people, young adults are more likely to mention illicit drugs, screens and digital practices, and food as addictions. Conversely, they mention alcohol, drugs and sex/pornography less often.

Figure 4. Spontaneously cited addictions by age group in 2023 (%)



Source: EROPP 2023, OFDT

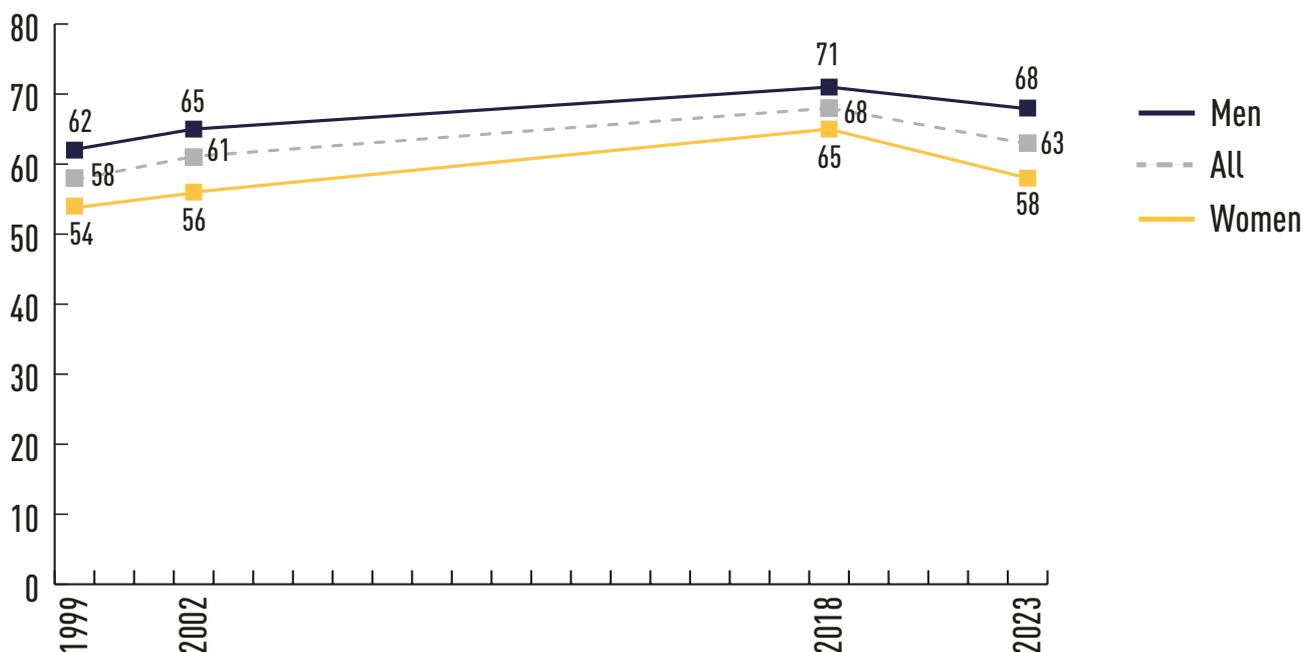
How to read the figure: In 2023, 88% of French people in the 65-75 age group spontaneously mentioned alcohol in response to the question: "What are the main addictions you are aware of?"

## A feeling of being well informed about drugs

This question has been asked since 1999 and looks at how informed the French feel about drugs. In 2023, 13% of 18-75 year-olds considered themselves "very well informed" about drugs, 49% "somewhat well informed", 25% "somewhat poorly informed" and 11% "very poorly informed"<sup>1</sup>. In 2023, the feeling of being well informed was more widespread among men than women (68% versus 58%) (Figure 5). Similarly, it was more prevalent among young adults (74% of 18-24 year-olds versus 56% of 55-64 year-olds) (Figure 6). Between 1999 and 2018, the proportion of 18-75 year-olds who considered themselves "somewhat" or "very well informed" increased from 58% to 68%, but it then fell to 63% in 2023 (Spilka et al., 2019). Trends by gender and age group were similar to this overall trend.

1. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

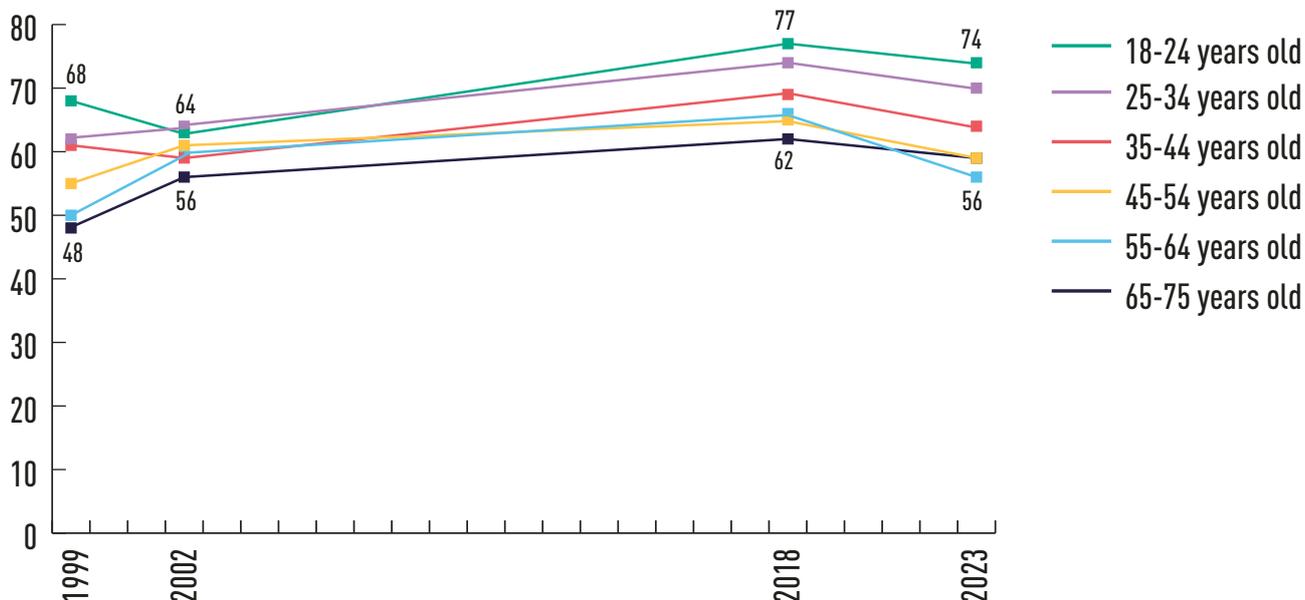
**Figure 5. Changes in the proportion of French people who feel “somewhat” or “very well informed” about drugs, by gender (%)**



Source: EROPP surveys, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 2023, 68% of men felt “somewhat well informed” or “very well informed” about drugs.

**Figure 6. Changes in the proportion of French people who feel “somewhat” or “very well informed” about drugs, by age group (%)**



Source: EROPP surveys, OFDT

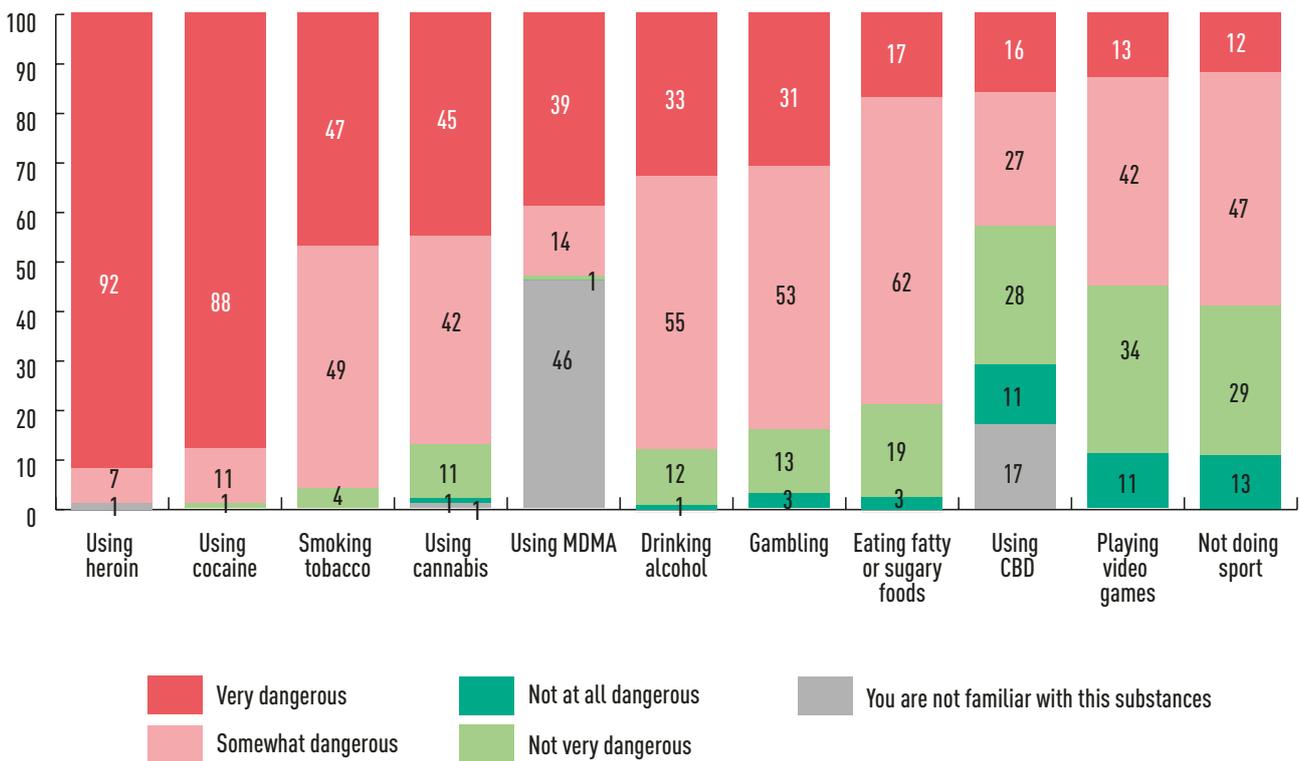
How to read the figure: In 2023, 74% of 18-24 year-olds felt “somewhat well informed” or “very well informed” about drugs.

# PERCEIVED DANGEROUSNESS OF DRUGS

## Comparison of the perceived dangerousness of different behaviours, including drug use, in 2023

The 2023 edition addressed the perceived dangerousness of practices by proposing a wider range of potentially health-damaging behaviours than in previous editions. These included drug use, gambling, eating fatty or sugary foods, taking CBD, not doing sport, and playing video games. Respondents were asked to estimate the level of dangerousness associated with these practices (Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Perception of the dangerousness of various behaviours, including drug use, in 2023 (%)**



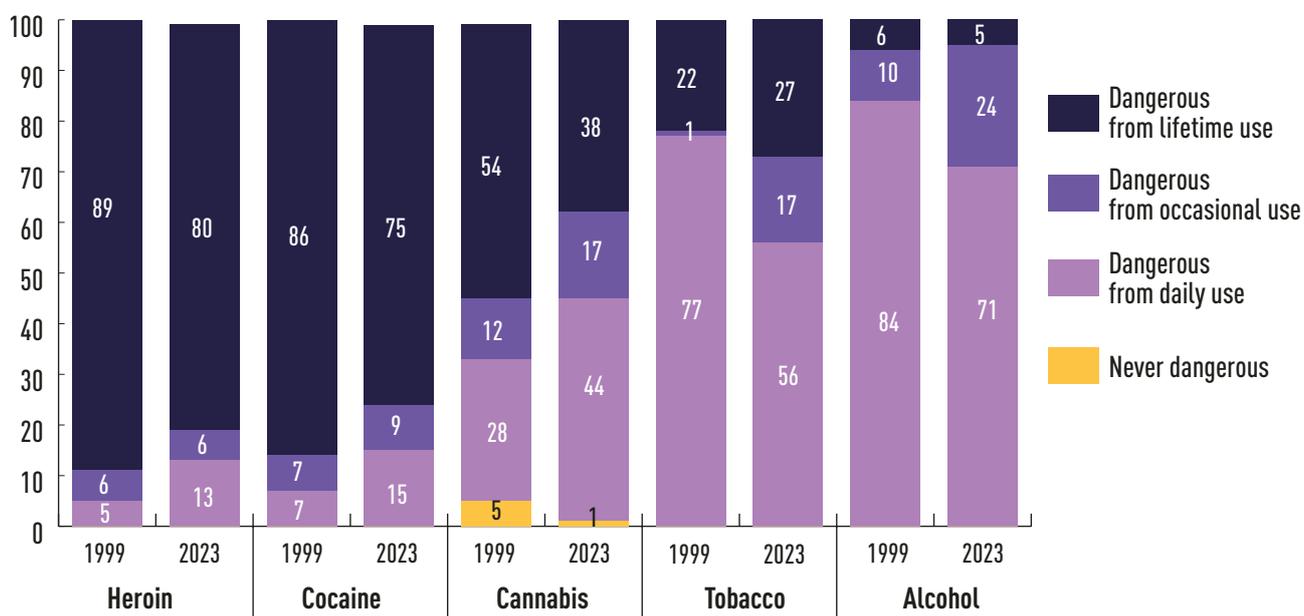
**Source: EROPP 2023, OFDT**

How to read the figure: 33% of French people believe that “drinking alcohol” is “very dangerous”. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Drug use is perceived as being more dangerous than other behaviours that are commonly considered to be harmful to health. Heroin and cocaine topped the list, with around 90% of French people considering them to be “very dangerous”. Consuming alcohol, tobacco and cannabis were perceived as dangerous in a relatively similar way, with the majority judging them to be either “very dangerous” or “somewhat dangerous”. It should be noted that around one in ten people consider alcohol and cannabis to be “not very dangerous” or “not dangerous at all”. The perceived dangers of CBD and MDMA are difficult to compare with those of other drugs, due to the high proportion of people who are unfamiliar with these substances. Among behaviours other than drug use, gambling stands out as a practice perceived as dangerous by most French people, with 84% of them considering it “very” or “somewhat” dangerous.

## Comparison of the perceived dangerousness of the main drugs between 1999 and 2023

Figure 10. Comparison of the perceived dangerousness of different drugs in 1999 and 2023 (in %)



Source: 1999 and 2023 EROPP surveys, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 1999, 54% of French people believed that cannabis was dangerous to health from lifetime use. This proportion had fallen to 38% in 2023.

By asking the French to rate the dangerousness of heroin, cocaine, cannabis, tobacco and alcohol since 1999, using the same set of questions, EROPP can track changes in the perceived dangerousness of the main drugs. There has been a decline in the perceived dangerousness of all three illicit drugs, particularly cannabis: 38% of French people believed that cannabis is dangerous from lifetime use in 2023, against 54% in 1999 (Figure 10). Conversely, the proportion of French people who believe that cannabis is only dangerous if used on a daily basis has risen from 28% in 1999 to 44% in 2023. In other words, in 2023, and for the first time since the first edition of EROPP, there were more adults who consider cannabis to be dangerous when used daily than adults who think that cannabis is dangerous from its first use. These trends could be linked, on the one hand, to the increase in the rates of experimentation and use among adults over the 1999-2023 period as a whole and, on the other hand, to developments in public debate on the legalisation of cannabis, which are helping to shift perceptions of the perceived dangerousness of this drug. As far as legal drugs are concerned, tobacco and alcohol were perceived as more dangerous in 2023 than in 1999. The proportion of French people who believe that tobacco is only dangerous when consumed daily has fallen from 77% in 1999 to 56% in 2023, while the proportion who believe that it is dangerous when consumed occasionally has risen from 1% to 17%. A similar trend can be observed for alcohol: the perception of danger from daily consumption fell from 84% to 71%, while the perception of risk from occasional consumption doubled, from 10% to 24%.

# PERCEPTION OF DRUG USERS

## Are drugs a cause for concern in French society?

Before looking more specifically at drug use, respondents were asked to name the two concerns they felt were most important for French society from the following list (in the exact words given in the questionnaire): unemployment, drugs, pollution/damage to the environment, global warming, poverty/social inequality and AIDS/HIV. For comparability purposes, the reasons for concern have been kept identical since 2002.

In 2023, 20% of French people cited “drugs” as one of the two most worrying issues for French society. The social issues surrounding drug use have still not given rise to any major concern over the last twenty-five years, while other subjects, such as pollution, have increased significantly. Women are more likely than men to rank “drugs” as one of their two major concerns, as are older people.

## French perceptions of alcohol, cannabis, cocaine and heroin users

The OFDT’s EROPP survey provides information on the social representations of alcohol, cannabis, cocaine and heroin users in France. Respondents were asked to express their agreement with various opinions expressed about drug users, some of which were relatively positive and considered drug use to be commonplace and accepted (e.g. “those who use [drug in question] should be free to do so” or “it is possible to live a normal life using [drug in question]”) to the negative or stigmatising (e.g. “those who use [drug in question] are dangerous to those around them” or “those who use [drug in question] try to get young people involved”). The results illustrate how certain types of consumption can be relatively well tolerated, or even normalised, while others draw strong disapproval.

Negative perceptions of drug users predominate in France. For example, around nine out of ten French people consider<sup>2</sup> cocaine and heroin users to be “dangerous for those around them”, and more than half believe that “they try to get young people involved” (Figure 16). Around three-quarters of French people consider heroin users to be “ill”. More than half of French people see heroin and cocaine users as people who “lack willpower”.

These representations differ markedly from French opinions on cannabis use, which seems to be more acceptable. For instance, 53% of French people believe that using cannabis is “a way to relax”, and 40% believe that users “should be free to make this choice”. Note that this proportion is only 30% for those who consume “a lot of alcohol”, even though alcohol is a legal drug. One in three French people “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement that it is “possible to live a normal life” using cannabis, a proportion that is almost non-existent for other drugs. Additionally, only 32% of French people consider cannabis users to be “ill”, compared to 61% for cocaine, 70% for those who drink “a lot of alcohol” and 75% for heroin users. Finally, the idea that cannabis users are dangerous to those around them, although fairly widespread (60% of French people “agree”), is less widely shared than for other drugs. These differences reflect a more ambivalent, or even more tolerant, view of cannabis than of other drugs.

Representations of those who consume “a lot of alcohol” are more similar to those expressed about illicit drugs. While alcohol is generally included among ordinary social practices, the addition of the term “a lot of” without any further clarification marks a symbolic shift that seems to tip users over into the realm of negative representations. Over 90% of French people believe that consumers of “a lot of alcohol” are dangerous to those around them, while 70% see them as “ill” and 55% as “lacking willpower”. Furthermore, almost all French people believe that it is not possible to live a normal

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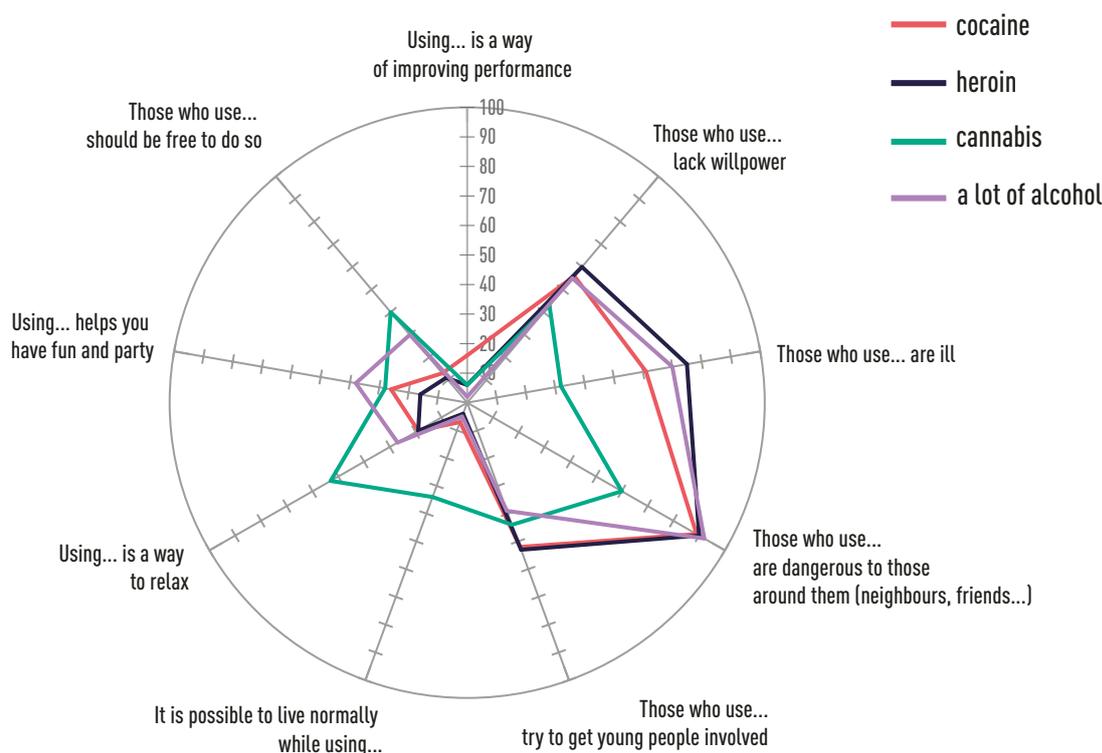
2. Here and throughout this section, “consider” or “agree” or “believe»” mean that respondents answered “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” to the statement in question.

life while consuming “a lot of alcohol”. However, 38% of French people associate this excessive consumption with partying and having fun, a sign of a certain ambivalence in representations where stigmatisation coexists with implicit tolerance in festive or socially supervised contexts.

Overall, the results highlight a hierarchy of drug use, structured around a gradient of social legitimacy and perceived dangerousness. While heroin and cocaine still have a negative connotation, cannabis enjoys a more nuanced, even normalised image. Excessive use of alcohol oscillates between moral stigmatisation and inclusion as a form of sociability that is perceived as legitimate.

**Figure 16. Comparison of French perceptions of alcohol, cannabis, cocaine and heroin users in 2023 (%)**

Percentage of French people who «strongly agree» or «somewhat agree» with the following statements, by substance



Source: EROPP 2023, OFDT

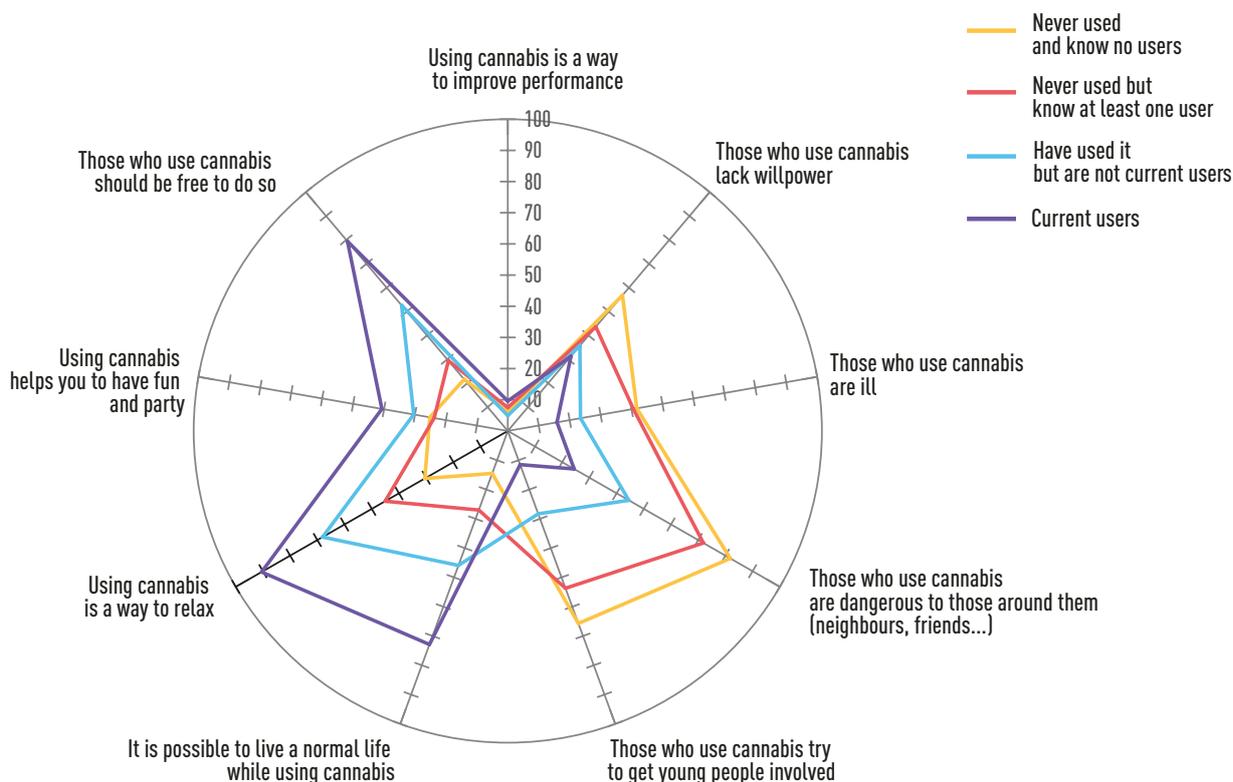
How to read the figure: Each polygon represents the response structure for each drug. At each vertex of a polygon, we can read the percentage of French people who “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” with the statement and the corresponding drug. For example, in 2023, 40% of French people “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” with the statement “those who use cocaine should be free to do so”; 13% of French people “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” with the statement “those who use cannabis should be free to do so”.

## Opinions structured by proximity to drug use

Given the widespread use of cannabis among the French population and the link between opinions and representations and respondents’ proximity to cannabis use, the survey asked a number of questions to describe different facets of this ‘proximity to cannabis’. It was therefore possible to construct a variable indicating proximity to use by dividing the sample into four distinct categories: 1) people who have used cannabis in the last twelve months, known as “current users” (10% of the sample); 2) people who have used cannabis in their lifetime, but not in the last twelve months (37% of the sample); 3) people who have never used cannabis in their lives, but who personally know a cannabis user among those around them (25% of the sample); 4) people who have never used cannabis in their lives and who do not personally know a user among those around them (28% of the sample).

**Figure 17. Representation of cannabis users by proximity to use (%)**

Percentage of French people who «strongly agree» or «somewhat agree» with the following statements, by proximity to cannabis use



Source: EROPP 2023, OFDT

How to read the figure: “Current user”: a person who has used cannabis in the 12 months preceding the survey; “Lifetime but not current user”: a person who has used cannabis in their lifetime but not in the 12 months preceding the survey; “Non-lifetime user who knows at least one user”: a person who has never used cannabis but personally knows at least one person who uses or has used cannabis; “Non-lifetime user who does not know a user”: a person who has never used cannabis and does not personally know a user. In 2023, 82% of French people who had not tried cannabis in their lives and did not know anyone who had used it “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” with the statement “people who use cannabis are dangerous to those around them”. This proportion was 45% among lifetime users of cannabis who had not used cannabis in the year preceding the survey.

Firstly, there is a very large difference in perceptions of cannabis users depending on whether they have already experimented with cannabis (Figure 17). Opinions that “those who use cannabis lack willpower”, “those who use cannabis are dangerous to those around them” or “those who use cannabis try to get young people involved” are mainly shared by people who have never tried cannabis in their lifetime. Conversely, people who have used cannabis in their lifetime are more likely to agree with the statements that “those who use cannabis should be free to do so”, “using cannabis is a way of relaxing” and “it is possible to live a normal life using cannabis”. One in two people who have used cannabis in their lifetime say they “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree”.

Among non-lifetime users, representations also vary according to whether they have a user in their entourage. Knowing someone who uses cannabis reduces negative opinions about cannabis users. Non-lifetime users who know a user are less likely to agree with the opinions: “those who use cannabis try to get young people involved” (54% of non-lifetime users who know a user compared to 66% of non-lifetime users who do not); “those who use cannabis are dangerous to those around them” (72% compared to 82%); and “those who use cannabis lack willpower” (43% compared to 57%). Conversely, again among non-lifetime users, knowing a user reinforces the belief that it is “possible to live a normal life using cannabis” (27% vs 14%).

Among lifetime users, current users are the sub-group with the most positive representations: 91% of current users consider that “using cannabis is a way of relaxing” and 73% that “it is possible to live a normal life using cannabis”. It should be noted, however, that a third of these current users consider that cannabis users “lack willpower”.

French perceptions of consumers of “a lot of alcohol” are influenced by their own level of alcohol consumption. An instance of heavy episodic drinking (HED)<sup>3</sup> during the preceding month (15% of French people) was used as a distinguishing indicator of French drinking behaviour.

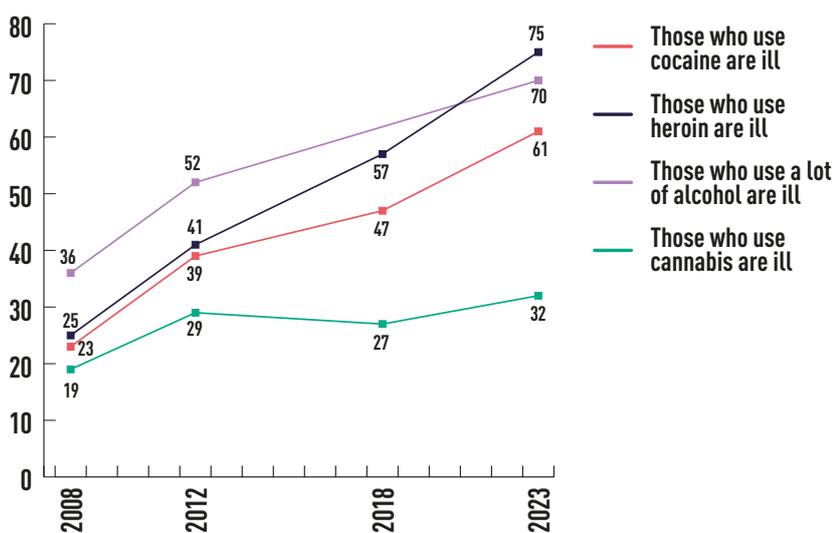
People who declared at least one HED during the month were more likely to “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” with the following statements: “Consuming a lot of alcohol helps you have fun and party”, “consuming a lot of alcohol is a way to relax”, “those who consume a lot of alcohol should be free to do so” and “it is possible to live a normal life while consuming a lot of alcohol”. Conversely, these people are less likely to say that “those who drink a lot of alcohol try to get young people involved”. For the other opinions tested in the survey, there were no statistical differences according to usage behaviour.

When it comes to how the French view cocaine users, once again lifetime cocaine users express different opinions to non-lifetime users. 74% of them (compared to 22% of non-lifetime users) agree with the statement that cocaine use helps “to have fun and party”, almost half (44% compared to 14%) believe that cocaine use is “a way of improving performance” and almost a quarter believe that it is “possible to live a normal life while using cocaine” (24% compared to 6% of non-lifetime users).

## Changes in French perceptions of drug users

The results show that the view that cocaine and heroin users and those who consume “a lot of” alcohol are “ill” is increasingly widely shared over time. Between 2008 and 2023, the proportion agreeing with this statement increased from 23% to 61% in the case of cocaine users, from 25% to 75% for heroin users and from 36% to 70% for those who consume “a lot of” alcohol (Figure 18). This increase reflects a change of perspective in the representations associated with drug users, taking greater account of health issues in the motivations for use to the detriment of moral considerations. However, almost 90% of French people still consider cocaine and heroin users and drinkers of “a lot of” alcohol to be “dangerous to those around them”. So it seems that the persistence of this negative social image does not necessarily stand in the way of the idea that there is a health issue at stake in the care of users.

**Figure 18. Changes in the proportion of French people who “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” with the statement “those who use... are ill” made about users of cannabis, cocaine, heroin and ‘a lot of alcohol’ (in %)**



Source: EROPP surveys, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 2023, 75% of French people “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” with the statement that “those who use heroin are ill”. Data missing for alcohol in 2018.

However, when it comes to cannabis, the picture is much more mixed. The increase in the proportion of French people who consider cannabis users to be “ill” (from 19% in 2008 to 32% in 2023) is much less marked than for other drugs (Figure 18). At the same time, the proportion of French people who believe that it is “possible to live a normal life while using cannabis” more than doubled between 2008 and 2023, rising from 16% to 34%. These developments suggest the emergence of an image of cannabis use more as a personal lifestyle choice than as the sign of a disorder or pathology. Also, while the proportion of French people who consider heroin or cocaine users to be “dangerous to those around them” increased significantly between 2008 and 2023 (83% to 89% for cocaine and 84% to 90% for heroin), the proportion with this view of cannabis users did not change significantly.

3. Heavy episodic drinking (HED) refers to adults who have consumed 6 or more standard drinks on a single occasion.

# FRENCH VIEWS ON THE PUBLIC RESPONSE TO DRUGS

## Limiting alcohol consumption: opinions on health policies

In its Global Alcohol Action Plan 2022-2030 (WHO, 2024), the World Health Organization (WHO) reaffirmed the importance of proposing or adopting high-impact<sup>4</sup> national policies. In France, the Interministerial Strategy for Mobilisation Against Addictive Behaviours 2023-2027 (MILDECA, 2023) includes the following provisions in particular:

- strictly regulate advertising and sale of high-risk products, including a ban on sales to minors;
- act on prices, with price increases unanimously recognised as one of the most effective levers for reducing demand.

In its latest exercise, EROPP asked the French about their opinions on new measures that could be considered: a sharp increase in alcohol prices, like for tobacco, restricting the purchase of alcohol to shops where access is restricted to adults, raising the legal drinking age, banning alcohol advertising, and putting prevention messages on alcohol bottles, like for tobacco.

Prevention and information measures garnered the most favourable opinions (Figure 21). The ban on alcohol advertising was viewed favourably by a large majority of French people: 46% “strongly agreed” with a ban on online advertising and 43% “strongly agreed” with a total ban on alcohol advertising. A majority of French people were also in favour of putting prevention messages on alcohol bottles like those on cigarette packs (62% in favour, including 34% who “strongly agree”). The proposal to restrict the purchase of alcohol to adults-only shops was also viewed favourably by a majority of French people. However, while 61% of French people were in favour of the measure all in all, only a third (32%) said they were “strongly in favour”.

On the other hand, opinions were more divided on the proposal to raise the legal age for the sale of alcohol to 21, as in some northern European countries: while a quarter of the sample said they “strongly agreed”, another quarter were clearly opposed. Lastly, the measure that received the least support was the sharp rise in the price of alcoholic beverages, with 64% of French people expressing an unfavourable opinion, and 36% who “strongly disagree” with this measure.

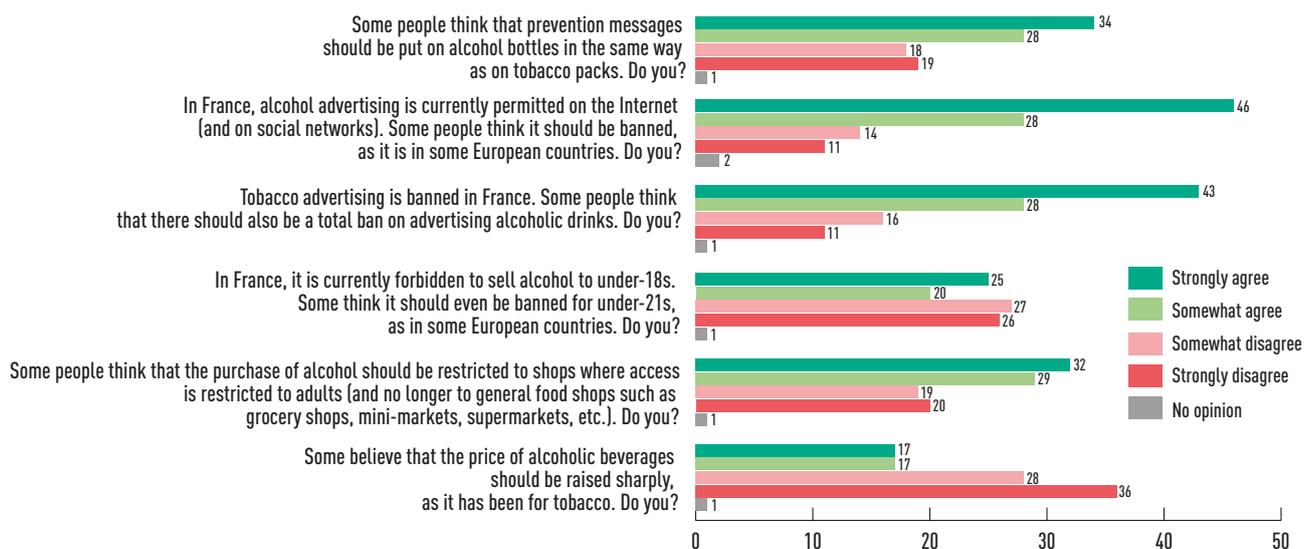
It should be noted that women were more likely than men to be in favour of these measures. These differences in opinion between the sexes are all the more marked when the measure in question is controversial or unpopular: for example, a large majority of women (61%) “strongly agree” with the principle of a sharp increase in the price of alcoholic drinks. Similarly, 61% of them “strongly agree” with raising the legal age for the sale of alcohol to 21.

The respondent’s level of alcohol consumption is a structuring factor in these opinions about the proposed measures: only 10% of weekly drinkers<sup>5</sup> “strongly agree” with a sharp increase in the prices of alcoholic beverages, an opinion shared by 22% of more occasional drinkers and non-consumers. Furthermore, a third (37%) of weekly drinkers said they “strongly agree” with a total ban on advertising for alcoholic beverages, a proportion that rises to 50% among less regular drinkers and non-consumers.

4. Three main areas: a) affordability of alcoholic beverages; b) advertising and marketing for alcoholic beverages; c) availability of alcoholic beverages.

5. A “weekly drinker” is defined as a respondent who reported having consumed alcohol at least once a week over the past 12 months. These respondents represented a third of the total sample.

**Figure 21. Opinions of the French regarding various public policy proposals on alcohol in 2023 (in %)**



Source: EROPP 2023, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 2023, 43% of French people “strongly agreed” with the total abolition of advertising for alcoholic beverages.

## French views on harm reduction measures

The harm reduction policy initiated as part of the AIDS pandemic is enshrined in law (Article L3411-8 of the Public Health Code). Without denying the illicit nature of certain uses, it allows addiction to be considered as a chronic disease. It recognises that it is impossible for some people to stop using drugs at certain points in their lives, and that pragmatic and appropriate measures are needed to improve their quality of life. The provision of syringes and injection equipment is one of the most emblematic measures. In recent years, debate on harm reduction has focused on the introduction of so-called drug consumption rooms (DCRs). These were authorised by a legislative experiment in 2016, then extended in 2022 until the end of 2025, under the name “Haltes Soins Addictions” (HSA, addiction care centres).

Respondents were asked for their views on the distribution of kits with sterile injection equipment and the existence of drug consumption rooms (Table 5). These harm reduction measures have been developed at different times with the common aim of limiting the health and social damage associated with drug use by preventing infections, reducing overdoses, and putting users in contact with drug treatment or social support structures. These measures have been controversial because of the visibility they give to certain transgressive uses, appearing to some to be a form of normalisation of drug use that is prohibited by law.

In 2023, a third of French people considered these two measures to be “a very good thing”, while 10% think the opposite, i.e. that they are “a very bad thing” (Table 5). In addition, a large proportion of French people (73%) are in favour of the idea of opening drug consumption rooms in other French towns. They are more reticent, however, when asked whether they would agree to the opening of a drug consumption room in their own neighbourhood, with only 20% saying they would “strongly agree” and a third (34%) saying they would “strongly disagree”. Among those in favour of opening other rooms, 27% said they were “strongly” in favour of opening a room in their neighbourhood, while 16% were opposed. French’s opinions on addiction care centres did not show any major change between 2018 and 2023.

**Table 5. Opinions regarding the provision of syringes and injection equipment to drug users and addiction care centres (DCRs) in 2018 and 2023 (in %)**

	“Syringes and injection equipment made available to drug users to limit the risks of infection and disease”		“Drug consumption rooms for people who inject drugs, where they can come and use in good sanitary conditions in the presence of staff trained to prevent overdoses, infections and injections in public places”	
	2018	2023	2018	2023
A very good thing	35	30	30	34
A somewhat good thing	47	46	51	44
A somewhat bad thing	8	10	9	10
A very bad thing	8	11	8	10
Don't know	2	3	3	2

Source: 2018 and 2023 EROPP surveys, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 2023, 10% of the French thought that the existence of addiction care centres (DCRs) is a “very bad thing”. Full wording of the questions: “There are now kits with sterile syringes and injection equipment available to drug users to limit the risk of infection and disease transmission. Do you think it is...”; “There are now spaces reserved for people who inject drugs where they can come to use the substances they bring with them in good sanitary conditions in the presence of trained staff to avoid overdoses, infections, and injections in public places. There are currently two in France (in Paris and Strasbourg). Do you think it is...”.

## The issue of drug consumption rooms in EROPP

In opinion questions, wording, respondent knowledge, political context, and halo effects<sup>6</sup> linked to the questionnaire can have a greater impact on respondents’ positioning than when asking factual questions about their behaviour. The question on “addiction care centres” (DCRs) is perhaps one of the most sensitive to these declaration biases because it is one of the measures most present in the public debate.

The question on addiction care centres was included in EROPP in 2008 (the scheme did not yet exist, but the issue was beginning to emerge in public debate in France) (Costes et al., 2010):

*“To prevent health risks, some people think that heroin users should be provided with special premises and equipment so that they can inject their own drugs.”*

At the time, 66% of French people were “strongly opposed” to the idea, with only 5% saying they were “strongly in favour”.

In the 2013 survey - even though the question was asked before the government announced in February 2013 that it had agreed to launch a trial of a drug consumption room in Paris - a majority of French people said they were in favour of the idea of opening drug consumption rooms in France, with 26% strongly in favour: “There are proposals to make premises and clean equipment available to heroin users so that they can inject away from public places, to prevent the risk of overdose and limit the spread of AIDS”. A comparable proportion said they “strongly disagree” (Tovar et al., 2013).

Unlike the 2008 version, this second version reiterated the objectives of the scheme. At the time, the increase in positive opinions about the scheme was interpreted as having more to do with the change in wording than with a change in public opinion.

In 2018, just before the question, there was a paragraph clearly stating the objectives of the scheme:

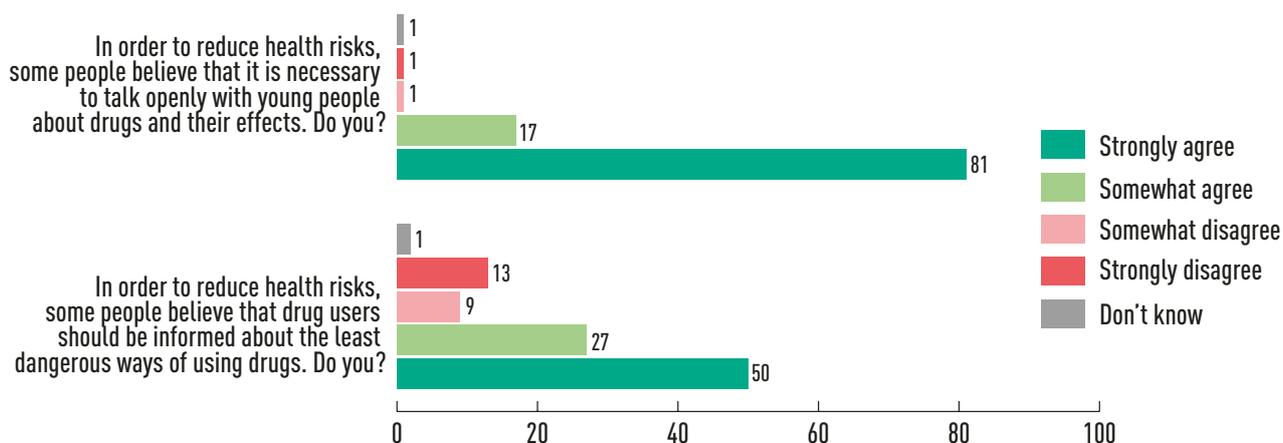
“Now let’s talk about drug consumption rooms. These are spaces reserved for people who inject drugs, where they can come to consume the substances they bring with them in good sanitary conditions, in the presence of trained staff to avoid overdoses and infections, and to prevent them from injecting in public places.” Next, the French were asked a first question about their knowledge of the scheme: “Many European countries now have rooms of this type. Have you ever heard of them?” Only then was the following question asked: “There are currently two in France (in Paris and Strasbourg). Do you think it is [opinion]?” to which 30% of the French responded at the time that they thought it was “a very good thing” (Spilka et al., 2019).

6. In a questionnaire, the halo effect refers to a cognitive bias whereby the answer to a question may be influenced by the general context of the questionnaire or by the wording of previous items.

In EROPP 2023, two questions explored how measures aimed at providing accurate and accessible knowledge about drugs, their effects and the least dangerous ways of using them are perceived: the first concerns the idea of talking openly about drugs and their effects with young people, whether or not they are users; the second concerns the desirability of informing users about the least risky ways of using drugs.

In the light of these measures already implemented, in 2023 the French were still in favour of the principle of talking openly with young people about drugs and their effects: 81% “strongly agree” (Figure 22), a proportion that has remained stable over time. While the same is generally true of the principle of informing drug users about the least dangerous ways of using drugs, only a bare majority (50%) say they “strongly agree”.

**Figure 22. Opinions of the French on two harm reduction principles (in %)**



Source: EROPP 2023, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 2023, 81% of French people “strongly agree” with the principle of talking openly with young people about drugs and their effects in order to reduce health risks.

## French views on drug legislation

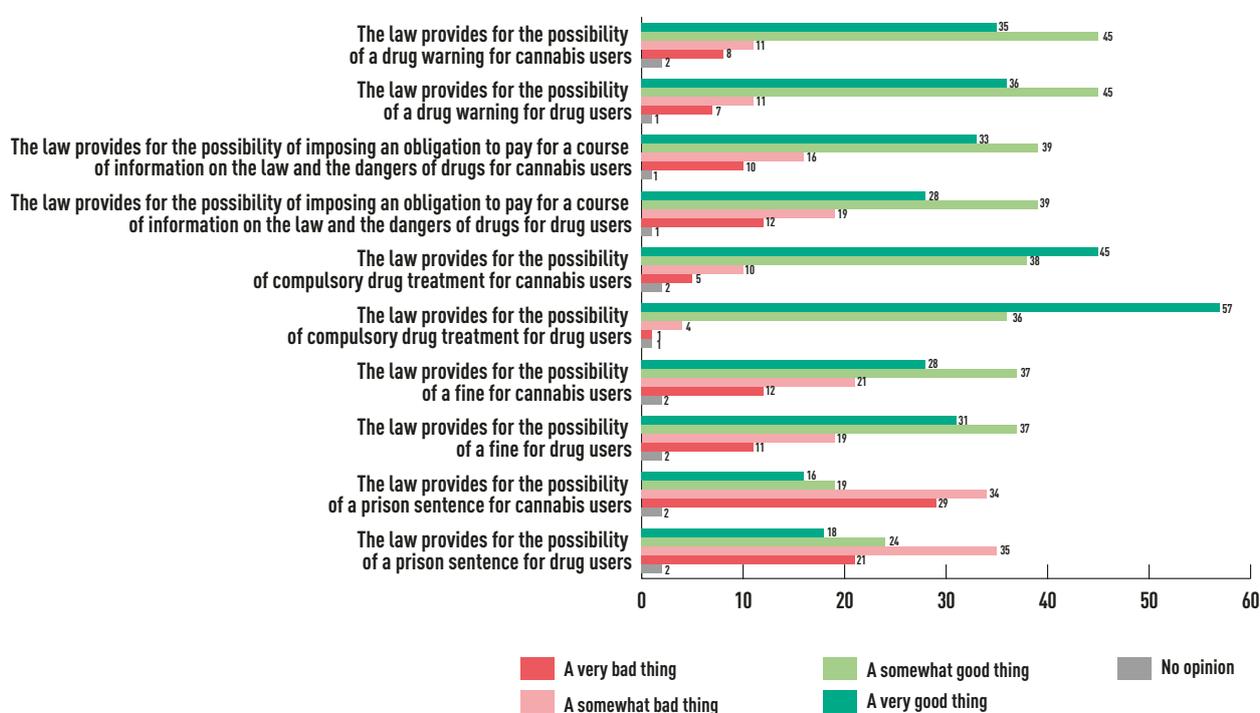
Since the law of 31 December 1970 which established the French framework for the fight against drugs, narcotics use has been considered a criminal offence, punishable by up to one year’s imprisonment, even in the absence of trafficking or a repeat offence. From the outset, however, this repressive framework was ambivalent: the law also provided for the possibility of attaching a compulsory drug treatment to the criminal penalty, thus opening the door to a health-based approach. This initial compromise combined social control with health concerns, and has been the subject of recurrent criticism over the decades. These debates intensified with the rise of harm reduction policies from the 1990s onwards, revealing the limits of a purely punitive approach to the diversity of drug use and the complexity of drug users’ lives. The EROPP survey provides an insight into how the French perceive this legislative framework: the module of questions presented below describes the arrangements provided by law for drug users and asks respondents whether they find these arrangements to be “a very good thing”, a “good thing”, a “bad thing” or a “very bad thing”.

There is a clear preference among the French for educational or therapeutic measures, whether for cannabis or for drugs in general (Figure 24). Compulsory drug treatments are the most widely supported: 57% of French people consider this to be a “very good thing” when it comes to drugs in general, and 45% when it comes to cannabis. An obligation to pay for information courses also meets with broad approval: almost 70% of French people are in favour, regardless of the drug concerned.

French opinions on criminal justice responses are more controversial. The idea of punishing consumers with a prison sentence is highly divisive: 35% of French people consider this to be a “somewhat” or “very good thing” in the case of cannabis, compared to 42% for drugs in general. In both cases, a relative majority is against or reserved. Financial penalties are more favourably received. Around two out of three people view them positively, compared to one in three who do not.

For all the measures proposed, there are slight differences between the judgements made about cannabis and those made about drugs as a whole. These differences are fairly modest, but are in line with a trend already noted in other parts of the survey: cannabis use tends to be perceived slightly less negatively than that of other illicit drugs. Prison sentences for cannabis use are seen by a clear majority of French people as excessively repressive. As far as compulsory drug treatment is concerned, 15% of French people are against this measure in the case of cannabis, whereas the proportion is only 5% for all drugs. This difference in the intensity of responses reflects an implicit hierarchy of drugs in social representations, in which cannabis is perceived as a less transgressive drug.

**Figure 24. French opinions on current legislation on cannabis and all illicit drugs in 2023 (%)**

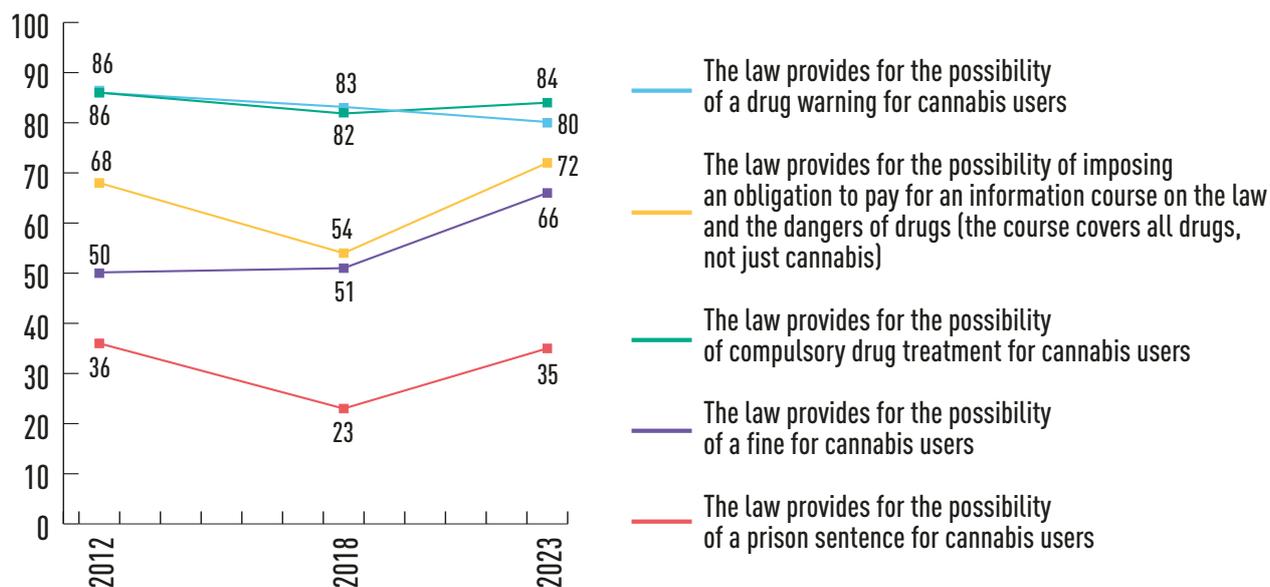


Source: EROPP 2023, OFDT

How to read the figure: 18% of French people think that the fact that the law provides for the possibility of a prison sentence for drug users is “a very good thing”. Questions about cannabis users were asked of the entire sample, while questions about drug users were asked of only half the sample (n = 1 325).

In terms of changes in French opinions on legislation relating to cannabis use, there continues to be a consensus in favour of educational and health-related measures: compulsory drug treatment, drug warnings and paying for information and awareness courses on the dangers of drug use. On the other hand, there has been a shift in support for the principle of prison sentences for users, which, after falling to 23% in 2018, rose to 35% in 2023.

**Figure 25. Change in the proportion of French people who believe that certain legislative measures against cannabis users are a “very good thing” or a “somewhat good thing” (%)**



Source: EROPP surveys, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 2023, 66% of French people believed that the fact that the law provides for the possibility of a fine for cannabis users is “a very good thing” or “a somewhat good thing”.

French opinions on measures to amend the legislation on all illicit drugs and on cannabis alone appeared to be less in favour of proposals to relax the laws in 2023 than in 2018 (Table 6). The proposal that “all illicit drugs could be sold in the same way as tobacco or alcohol” continues to be overwhelmingly rejected: 85% of French people were opposed to this in 2018 (including 62% who “strongly disagree”), and this proportion rose to 87% in 2023 (68% who “strongly disagree”). Similarly, support for abolishing penalties for ordinary drug users is declining: the proportion of people who “strongly agree” fell from 20% in 2018 to 14% in 2023, while the proportion of people who “strongly disagree” rose from 30% to 40% over the same period.

**Table 6. French opinions on proposals to relax the laws on all illicit drugs in 2018 and 2023 (in %)**

	“All illicit drugs could be sold just like tobacco or alcohol”		“All forms of punishment for users of illicit drugs should be abolished, but not the penalties for dealers and traffickers”		“The current law on illicit drugs is appropriate”	
	2018	2023	2018	2023	2018	2023
Strongly agree	4	4	20	14	na	9
Somewhat agree	11	8	28	23	na	28
Somewhat disagree	23	19	21	22	na	28
Strongly disagree	62	68	30	40	na	25
No opinion	0	1	1	1	na	10

Source: 2018 and 2023 EROPP surveys, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 2023, 68% of French people “strongly disagree” with the proposal to make all illicit drugs available over the counter, as tobacco and alcohol. The three questions were asked of only one half of the sample (n = 1 393). na: data not available

In the case of cannabis, as for all illicit drugs, there was a drop in the proportion of respondents in favour of each of the suggestions made for changing the laws in the survey (Tables 7a and 7b). There is still a consensus on medical use, despite a slight decline: 85% of French people were in favour in 2023, compared to 91% in 2018, and the proportion of those who said they “strongly agree” has fallen from 56% to 45%. No other proposal received a majority of favourable opinions in 2023. The proportion of French people who “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” with legalising cannabis fell from 45% in 2018 to 40% in 2023. The proportion of people in favour of cannabis being sold in the same way as tobacco or alcohol also fell, from 38% in 2018 to 29% in 2023. Similarly, support for abolishing penalties for cannabis users fell from 52% to 44% between 2018 and 2023.

**Table 7a. Opinions on some proposed changes to cannabis laws (%)**

	“Doctors could prescribe cannabis for certain serious or chronic illnesses”		“Cannabis could be sold like tobacco or alcohol”		“Cannabis could be sold in dedicated shops where access is restricted to adults”		“All forms of punishment for cannabis users should be abolished, but not the penalties for dealers and traffickers”	
	2018	2023	2018	2023	2018	2023	2018	2023
Strongly agree	56	45	15	11	na	18	27	20
Somewhat agree	35	40	23	18	na	27	25	24
Somewhat disagree	4	5	21	21	na	16	18	19
Strongly disagree	5	8	40	48	na	38	29	35
No opinion	1	2	1	2	na	2	1	2

Source: 2018 and 2023 EROPP surveys, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 2023, 20% of French people “strongly agree” with the proposal to abolish all forms of punishment for cannabis users, but not for dealers and traffickers.  
na: data not available

**Table 7b. Opinions on some proposed changes to cannabis laws (%)**

	Those who wish to do so should be allowed to grow small quantities of cannabis for personal consumption		The current law on cannabis is appropriate		Would you be strongly in favour, somewhat in favour, somewhat not in favour or not at all in favour of legalising cannabis?	
	2018	2023	2018	2023	2018	2023
Strongly agree	16	12	na	8	19	16
Somewhat agree	24	23	na	23	26	24
Somewhat disagree	22	20	na	27	21	21
Strongly disagree	38	42	na	30	33	37
No opinion	0	2	na	12	1	2

Source: 2018 and 2023 EROPP surveys, OFDT

How to read the figure: In 2023, 16% of French people “strongly agree” with the legalisation of cannabis.  
na: data not available

# CONCLUSION

This sixth report from the OFDT's regular survey on representations, opinions and perceptions of psychoactive substances, carried out in 2023 among a representative sample of 2 718 people, provides a new overview of French people's knowledge, representations and opinions on a number of drug-related issues.

The issue of drugs is a major concern for a minority of French people, who generally feel well informed on the subject, although the feeling of being well informed on drugs seems to have declined in recent times. Illicit drugs, such as cocaine which has spread to the general population in recent years, are still perceived as the most damaging to health. However, legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco, which have long been part of social customs, are now considered to be more dangerous, even in low doses.

These developments reflect a growing awareness of the risks associated with even moderate consumption of tobacco and alcohol. In other words, the perception of risk associated with drugs tends not to be related to their legal status. Whether a drug is licit or illicit no longer determines, on its own, how dangerous it is perceived to be. The case of cannabis, which is more often perceived as low-risk when consumed occasionally, is a significant illustration of this. These changes in perceptions can be interpreted as a positive indicator of the effectiveness of the information campaigns and awareness-raising policies implemented over the last two decades, particularly in the areas of smoking prevention and the fight against excessive alcohol consumption. The public health framework has gradually been strengthened, placing greater emphasis on the risks of low levels of consumption, drawing on scientific data that is more accessible to the general public and adopting a less tolerant stance towards these previously commonplace forms of use.

French perceptions of drug users vary from one drug to another, and are largely shaped by their proximity to the drug. While heroin and cocaine users are still associated with highly stigmatising images, opinions about cannabis users are increasingly ambivalent, not least because of the widespread use of this drug among the adult population. Despite this, recent trends in opinions on cannabis legislation and illicit drugs in general have shown little change, with a decline in support for decriminalisation among cannabis users.

As in previous years, opinions and representations are structured according to the age and gender of respondents. For the first time, however, analysis of opinions and representations was also based on the respondents' proximity to drugs, taking into account their own use, as well as knowledge of any users in their circle. This proximity is the main variable structuring representations of drugs, users and the type of public response required. Subsequent editions of the survey will therefore confirm whether the decline in drug use observed among the younger generation during adolescence over the last ten years has led to changes in their opinions on these subjects.

## Methodology

### ■ Survey on Representations, Opinions and Perceptions regarding Psychoactive Drugs, EROPP

The methodology of the 2023 edition of EROPP was similar to that of previous years' Baromètre santé surveys, and consisted of a computer-assisted telephone interview. Due to the preferential use of mobile phones by part of the population, including those with a landline, two random samples were created (randomly generated numbers): one interviewed on landlines, the other on mobile phones.

The field survey was conducted by Ipsos between 22 March and 29 July 2023, and involved a representative sample of the French-speaking population of mainland France aged between

18 and 75. The sample comprised a total of 14 984 people. The questionnaire took an average of twenty-eight minutes to complete. The module on the representations and opinions of the French on drugs, which is the subject of the analysis in this report, was administered to 2 718 people.

The data was adjusted to reflect the structure of the French population as described in the 2022 continuous employment survey, using the following cross-tabulated variables: gender, age, region of residence, urban unit size, household size and level of education.

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