

10 years of drug decriminalization in Portugal has reduced addiction, crime

by HAL AMEN on JULY 1, 2011 · 1 COMMENT

More evidence that treatment beats incarceration when it comes to drug crimes.

TEN YEARS AGO TODAY, [Portugal](#) instituted a law that decriminalized the use of drugs, including cocaine and heroin.

Now, on the anniversary, they're reporting some very positive results.

The law stipulated that people caught using or possessing illegal substances would be sent before a panel of psychologists and social workers instead of a judge in a criminal court. Depending on the offender's use history and level of addiction, he/she would be prescribed treatment rather than jail time. 40,000 drug users are currently being served by this system in Portugal.

Since 2001, incidence of drug-related crime has dropped, as has the estimated number of "problematic" addicts (the latter has been cut in half compared to the early '90s.) These figures are some of the best in Europe.

With this long-term, wide-scale experiment producing such a favorable outcome, will other countries follow Portugal's lead?

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by **JULIE SCHWIETERT**

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Let's stop for a second and look at this purely by the numbers.

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