

SUMMARY

This study provides insight into the number of coffee shops in the Netherlands. Attention is also paid to changes in the soft drug policies carried out by Dutch municipalities. Furthermore, this study provides insight into the enforcement of municipalities of their policy towards coffee shops. This year's study is the sixth survey in which civil servants of all Dutch municipalities are interviewed.

Coffee shops

At the end of 2004 the Netherlands have 737 official tolerated outlets of cannabis (coffee shops). This is a 2.3 percent overall decrease compared to the situation in 2002 (754 coffee shops). The number of municipalities with coffee shops has decreased from 105 to 103. The slowly decreasing trend seems to continue. Compared with 2003 few changes can be observed with respect to the geographical concentration of coffee shops.

Local policy

In 2004, the majority of the 483 municipalities in the Netherlands have a zero policy (70%) or a maximum policy (21%). Seven percent has not defined a policy to regulate the number of coffee shops, while 2 percent have a different form of policy. Regional engagements concerning cannabis policy have been made in more than half of the municipalities.

Enforcement criteria

To regulate the sales of cannabis products in coffee shops the ministry of Justice introduced five rules, the so-called AHOJ-G criteria. At the same time coffee shops are not allowed to stock more than a maximum of 500 grams. The enforcement of the criteria and the maximum is carried out in 102 municipalities that permit coffee shops, while in 96% of the municipalities the enforcement has been institutionalized. This means that formal agreements have been made about the responsibility, the methods and the frequency of the enforcement.

Violating one of the AHOJ-G criteria is followed by different

types of sanctioning. Two third of the municipalities makes use of a trajectory of sanctioning to enforce the criteria. According to the civil servants the most violated criteria in 2004 were: the youth criterium (J, 38 times), the nuisance criterium (O, 16 times) and the maximum stock (15 times).

Almost half of the municipalities impose additional criteria for the exploitation of a coffee shop, e.g. the prohibition of the sale of alcohol in coffee shops, the distance between coffee shops and schools and different closing and opening hours. A large part (78%) of all Dutch municipalities have a criterion in their policy about the distance between coffee shops and schools. None of the border municipalities with coffee shops has included an extra criterion in their policy concerning the distance between coffee shops and foreign border(s).