

Grassroots revolution: the road to legal cannabis

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Germany is set to join the global cannabis revolution on Monday, with a law coming into effect legalizing recreational use of the drug.

It is the first big European country to legalize the possession and consumption of small amounts of the drug by adults and one of only two among the G7 group of leading world powers, with Canada.

Here is a quick recap of the situation worldwide:

Uruguay the trailblazer

The real pioneer is the small South American country of Uruguay, which in 2013 became the first in the world to legalize the production, distribution and consumption of recreational cannabis.

Residents can buy up to 40 grams a month from pharmacies, grow it themselves or join cannabis clubs where members tend the plants together.

In South and Central America, only Mexico has followed its lead, the country's Supreme Court decriminalizing the recreational use of cannabis in 2021.

Europeans light up

In Europe, Portugal led the way back in 2001 with a radical measure on all drugs, decriminalizing consumption and possession, though users still face fines, unless they agree to be treated for addiction.

In Spain, [cannabis users](#) are allowed to grow pot for private use at home but selling the drug or smoking it in public is banned.

The first EU member to actively legalize recreational cannabis was tiny Malta in 2021, but lighting up a joint in public is still not permitted.

Despite popular belief, it is also restricted in the Netherlands, where the sale and consumption of cannabis is limited to the country's famed "coffee shops".

In December, however, the country began a four-year trial to decriminalize the production and supply of the drug.

California dreaming

Cannabis is a multibillion dollar business, with more than half of all US states having legalized recreational and medicinal cannabis use, including California and New York.

Under federal law cannabis is still illegal, but in practice the law is not enforced.

President Joe Biden has pardoned thousands of Americans convicted of cannabis possession.

Over the border, Canada in 2018 became the second country in the world to allow adults light up with impunity.

Africa's green gold

The tiny southern African country of Lesotho was Africa's first to green-light the cultivation of medicinal cannabis in 2017.

But the real game-changer came in 2018, when South Africa legalized cannabis for personal use.

The South African government has lofty ambitions for the cannabis sector, which it forecasts could create up to 25,000 jobs.

Thai rethink

Thailand had also hoped to cash in on cannabis when it took the drug off its list of banned narcotics in June 2022.

But the proliferation of cannabis shops, particularly in Bangkok, prompted a rethink.

The government last month announced plans to ban the use of cannabis "for fun" over fears it could act as a gateway to other drugs.

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