European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

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European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) is the central reference point for drug information in the European Union. Set up in 1993, and based in Lisbon, its role is to provide the EU and its Member States with objective, reliable and comparable information on drugs and drug addiction. It is one of the EU's decentralised agencies.

Evidence-based information on drugs is one of the most vital tools at our disposal today to address this global challenge. By offering information of this kind within the EU, the EMCDDA helps policy-makers, researchers and specialists in the field understand the nature of the problem and formulate appropriate responses.

At the heart of the Centre's work are efforts to improve the comparability of drug information across Europe and to devise the methods and tools required to achieve this. As a result of efforts to date, countries can now view how they fit into the wider European picture and examine common problems and goals.

A key feature of the drug phenomenon is its shifting, dynamic nature, and tracking new developments is a central task of the EMCDDA. During its first 10 years (1993–2003), the Centre recorded changes both in the nature of the drug problem and in countries' responses and policies. While the agency identified key differences in this period, it also witnessed the emergence of common patterns and trends.

Providing an accurate and up-to-date picture of this ever-changing landscape forms the cornerstone of the agency's activities under its 2004–06 work programme. Although a great deal has already been achieved, much remains to be done to perfect monitoring instruments and develop a truly 'common language' with which to describe this European and global phenomenon.

Statutory bodies

The EMCDDA's main decision-making body is its Management Board which is composed of: one representative of each EU Member State; two representatives of the European Commission; two persons highly qualified in the field of drugs designated by the European Parliament and a number of observer members, including Norway and international organisations.

This assembly of national representatives guarantees that the interests of all European citizens are fully represented in EMCDDA decision-making. Its Chair and Vice-Chair are elected for a three-year mandate.

The scientific integrity of the EMCDDA is safeguarded by its Scientific Committee which offers formal advice and assistance on all scientific matters which the Director or Management Board may submit to it. Its Chair and Vice-Chair are elected for a three-year mandate.

Core tasks

The EMCDDA's mission statement sets out the agency's four main tasks:

- collecting and analysing existing data;
- improving data-comparison methods;
- disseminating data and information; and
- cooperating with EU institutions, international partners and with non-EU countries.

The information collected, analysed and disseminated by the EMCDDA focuses on:

- the demand and reduction of the demand for drugs;
- national and EU strategies and policies;
- international cooperation and the geopolitics of supply;
- control of the trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors; and
- implications of the drugs phenomenon for producer, consumer and transit countries.

Working teams

The EMCDDA's work is structured around four core programme teams which focus on:

- monitoring and analysing the drug situation;
- monitoring and analysing responses to the drug situation;
- monitoring and assessing new synthetic drugs; and
- monitoring and analysing national and EU strategies and policies and their impact on the drug situation.

Activities in these areas are supported, or promoted, by the following auxiliary programmes:

- Reitox coordination;
- communication and dissemination;
- information technology; and
- support services.

2004–06 work programme

The EMCDDA's 2004–06 work programme is set against a backdrop of political innovation and change, characterised by EU enlargement and a new EU strategy and action plan on drugs.

Key activities under the three-year programme are:

- monitoring and analysing data and improving data quality;
- detecting and synthesising new developments; and
- undertaking scientific and thematic analyses in line with emerging trends and policy interests.

Establishing a comprehensive system for storing and retrieving quantitative and qualitative data on drugs is a major objective of the programme. This system is designed to hold the Centre's accumulating knowledge base on the drug problem, thereby enhancing its status as the repository of sound and comparative information on drugs in the enlarged EU.

The full text of the work programme is available at http://www.emcdda.eu.int

Drug situation

Understanding the scale and nature of the drug problem is a critical requirement for effective policy-making and action. Monitoring and analysing the EU drug situation are therefore primary activities of the EMCDDA.

Collecting reliable, comparable and up-to-date information on drug use and its consequences is both methodologically and practically challenging. The EMCDDA therefore works in partnership with national experts to develop the infrastructure and technical tools necessary for countries to gather data in a uniform way. Such instruments offer countries a 'common language' with which to interpret and compare the nature of their shared problem. They also help policy-makers across the EU identify key issues, take action and assess the impact of their work.

Priorities under the 2004–06 work programme include: improving data quality via key indicators; consolidating data-collection strategies; and fully exploiting the analytical potential of information gathered by the EMCDDA and its partners.

Key indicators

At the heart of the EMCDDA's information system are five key harmonised epidemiological indicators: standard tools for collecting and reporting comparable drug data.

These cover:

- prevalence and patterns of drug use among the general population;
- prevalence and patterns of problem drug use;
- drug-related infectious diseases;
- drug-related deaths and mortality of drug users; and
- demand for drug treatment.

Through these indicators, the agency is gaining an increased understanding of Europe's drug problem and is generating the sound evidence needed for effective decision-making.

Expanding the knowledge base

The EMCDDA is expanding its knowledge base by developing data-collection strategies in new areas of policy concern. In some of these areas, data availability is already substantial, while in others it varies according to the stage of project development.

Areas covered include:

- drug-related crime;
- drug markets and availability;
- youth and vulnerability;
- drug-related social exclusion; and
- patterns of use and new drug trends.

The agency also reviews scientific research reports on these topics to complement and contextualise its own data.

Analysis, assessment and forecasting

Providing an evidence base for timely, methodologically sound and policy-relevant analyses of the drug situation is a core motivation for collecting data. To ensure that maximum value is drawn from its data findings, the EMCDDA carries out in-depth analyses to provide new insight into key policy areas.

Analyses cover:

- emerging new trends in drug consumption, their impact and consequences;
- the scale of drug use and level of associated problems;
- the relationship between patterns of use and their consequences;
- risk/protective factors, individual and social factors, market and economic issues; and
- epidemiological methods for improved understanding of the effects of interventions, and other factors, on the drug situation.

Responses

Knowing which interventions are effective in dealing with a specific drug situation is crucial for policy-makers to design successful response strategies. Monitoring and analysing responses to the drug problem are therefore central tasks of the EMCDDA.

One of the agency's main challenges is providing access to timely, evidence-based information on response options in the health, educational, social and criminal justice spheres. The Centre also helps exploit research and promote scientific knowledge on responses as the basis for decision-making in policy and practice.

Priorities under the 2004–06 work programme include: analysing trends and new developments in the field of responses; developing further structured information-processing techniques; and providing examples both of best practice and quality-management tools.

Key issues

The EMCDDA monitors and analyses the availability, accessibility and quality of responses in the fields of drug prevention, treatment, social rehabilitation and harm reduction. It also covers responses available to drug users in the criminal justice system.

Specifically, it explores interventions which:

- prevent children and young people from initiating drug use;
- prevent the transition from experimental to problem use;
- prevent and reduce drug-use-related health damage and deaths;
- assist drug-using offenders inside and outside prison;
- treat problem drug use and addiction;
- socially integrate problem drug users; and
- prevent money laundering and the diversion of precursors.

Information tools and instruments

Promoting best practice and evaluation in responses to the drug problem receives special attention in EMCDDA work programmes.

The Centre's most specific data-collection tool on best practice is the Exchange on Drug Demand Reduction Action (EDDRA). This multilingual online information system provides details on a wide range of evaluated prevention, treatment and harm-reduction programmes in the EU, while promoting the exchange of professional expertise.

Service evaluation is facilitated through the agency's Evaluation Instruments Bank (EIB). This multilingual online document archive stores standardised methods and tools used by stakeholders to assess their programmes.

The agency also publishes printed and online guidelines to help promote systematic project planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Analysis, best practice and quality

The EMCDDA analyses and interprets a wide range of response options in the field of drugs in order to guide policy-makers and professionals in how to deal with the problem more effectively.

The agency also disseminates information on best practice and quality assurance which have been achieved via careful planning, systematic implementation, adequate monitoring and evaluation and sound scientific knowledge.

Through these activities, the agency hopes to: contribute to a productive and mutually beneficial European exchange of knowledge; increase information on positive response choices; and provide guidance on the optimal use of resources and skills.

Monitoring new synthetic drugs

New synthetic drugs can pose significant health risks and safety problems, particularly for young people. The EMCDDA plays a key role in detecting and assessing these drugs in the European Union under the terms of a joint action adopted by the Council of the EU in 1997 ([1]).

The joint action, concerning the 'information exchange, risk assessment and control of new synthetic drugs':

- establishes an 'early-warning system' to identify new synthetic drugs as soon as they appear in an EU Member State;
- incorporates a mechanism for assessing the health and social risks of these drugs; and
- furnishes a decision-making process through which these products may be placed under control in all EU Member States.

Early warning

The early-warning system on new synthetic drugs constitutes the first phase of implementation of the joint action.

As soon as a new synthetic drug is detected on the European market, data on its production, trafficking and use are sent by the EU Member States to the European Police Office (Europol) and to the EMCDDA, via the Europol national units and the Reitox national focal points.

These data are subsequently submitted to the European Commission and to the London-based European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA) for information.

Finally, a joint EMCDDA–Europol report is drawn up and presented to the Council of the EU on the basis of which a decision may be taken to launch a risk-assessment procedure.

Risk assessment

Risk-assessment activities are carried out at the request of at least one EU Member State or the European Commission.

The EMCDDA Scientific Committee — supplemented by additional experts nominated by the EU Member States, the European Commission, Europol and the EMEA — assesses the possible risks of the newly identified synthetic drug and the implications of placing it under control.

A risk-assessment report, summarising the findings, is presented to the Council of the EU and the European Commission for consideration in the next phase.

Synthetic drugs which have undergone risk-assessment procedures include: MBDB, 4-MTA, GHB, ketamine, PMMA, 2C-I, 2C-T-2, 2C-T-7 and TMA-2.

Decision-making

On the basis of the risk-assessment reports, and at the initiative of the European Commission or a Member State, the Council of the EU may unanimously adopt a decision defining the synthetic drug to be placed under control measures and criminal penalties in all EU Member States.

While the joint action provides the EU with a flexible and rapid mechanism for addressing new synthetic drugs, it does not prevent individual Member States from introducing national control measures they consider appropriate once a new substance has been detected.

The joint action relates to new synthetic drugs which are currently not listed in the Schedules to the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

(1) In the wake of an external evaluation, the European Commission prepared a legal initiative to strengthen the scope and performance of this mechanism.

National and EU drug strategies and policies

Over the years, the EMCDDA has developed a role for itself as the bridge between science, practice and policy. Monitoring and analysing national and EU drug strategies and policies, and their impact on the drug situation, are therefore fundamental aspects of its work.

In this field, the agency examines the legal, institutional and financial frameworks in place, at national and EU level, to address the drug problem. It also briefs policy-makers, through synthesised studies and analyses, of issues of topical concern.

Priorities under the 2004–06 work programme include: developing drug-policy monitoring tools; improving legal and policy analyses; and contributing to the evaluation of EU strategies and action plans on drugs.

Drug legislation

The EMCDDA collects core descriptive data on national and EU drug legislation. An indispensable tool for monitoring and analysing these data at national and EU level is the agency's European Legal Database on Drugs (ELDD).

Hosted on the EMCDDA website, this free public archive provides instant information on drug-related legislation in the EU, Norway and the candidate countries. Among others, it provides access to original legal texts and to country profiles of the legal situation and recent trends.

Also presented are more detailed comparative studies of drug laws covering specific topics of scientific and policy relevance.

Strategies and action plans

National drug strategies and action plans, and national coordination mechanisms, are seen as increasingly vital in confronting the drug problem. The EMCDDA monitors these closely, preparing comparative studies of: targets; coordination arrangements; evaluation; drug information; and policy implementation.

The EMCDDA also helps monitor European drug strategies and action plans and their progress, by providing the European Commission with important technical assistance in developing frameworks for evaluation.

One of the agency's main contributions to this evaluation process is the provision of an information baseline or 'snapshot', offering an overview of the drug situation and policy measures in place at the outset of a given action plan. This is compared with a similar snapshot at the close of the plan, enabling trends and developments to be traced.

Policy studies

Information and analysis are crucial to the success of drug strategies and policies. The EMCDDA therefore aims to contextualise and interpret observed trends and developments through analytical policy studies.

These cover a broad range of issues including: topical aspects of drug law; public expenditure; drug strategies and coordination mechanisms; and EU instruments on drugs.

Through these studies, the EMCDDA offers up-to-date overviews and cross-country comparisons of drug policy issues, with the aim of contributing beneficially to evaluation and decision-making processes.

Reitox

The EMCDDA would not be complete without Reitox, the European information network on drugs and drug addiction. This highly developed mechanism collects and exchanges information on drugs in Europe and comprises drug-specialised focal points in the EU Member States, Norway, the candidate countries and at the European Commission. Reitox forms the very backbone of the Centre's work.

The EMCDDA and its Member States — through representation on the Management Board and the Scientific Committee — facilitate Reitox work processes and are responsible for assuring quality in the network's products and outputs.

Priorities under the 2004–06 work programme include: consolidating and improving Reitox data quality and reporting processes; and boosting capacity building in the enlarged EU.

Focal points

The Reitox national focal points constitute the main information interface between the EMCDDA and its Member States and as such play a dual role. On the one hand, under the responsibility of their governments, they are the national authority providing drug information to the agency. On the other, under EMCDDA guidance, they are 'ambassadors' representing and promoting Reitox at home.

Just as the EMCDDA relies on the focal points as sources of information and expertise, so they in turn rely on their own national networks of drug monitoring units for data provision and know-how.

Outputs and reporting

The focal points submit to the EMCDDA — for EU-level analysis — regular statistics, qualitative information and annual national reports on the main drug trends and developments in their country. They also disseminate European drug information at national level.

Reitox reporting processes and structures increasingly enable the focal points to feed national information electronically into the EMCDDA's data storage and retrieval system.

Quality of information is assured largely by the use of consensually agreed guidelines and data-collection tools. The EMCDDA assesses the quality of all data received from the network and discusses results individually with focal points.

Capacity building

Levels of expertise in certain drug-related domains can vary widely from one country to another. Capacity-building exercises, such as training courses and exchanges, are therefore integrated into Reitox programmes. These enable focal points less specialised in a particular area to draw on the expertise of more experienced partners. Taskforces of focal points proficient in a specific field also operate to conceptualise new indicators, core datasets and new working spheres.

Network management

As network coordinator, the EMCDDA organises regular meetings of the heads of focal points to plan ahead, exchange views and discuss thematic developments. Daily communication between the EMCDDA and the focal points is facilitated through the Reitox extranet, a restricted website for the exchange of information and documentation between the network partners.

A high-quality information service

The EMCDDA works to provide the EU and its Member States with a high-quality information service on drugs and drug addiction in Europe. Communication and dissemination are therefore at the heart of its activity.

Information produced by the Centre is tailored to the needs of various target audiences including:

- policy-makers and their advisors;
- practitioners and drug professionals; and
- researchers working in the drugs field.

Also served are the media and general public.

Increasingly the Centre reaches European citizens in their own language via a high multilingual output.

All products are conceived in line with a clear corporate image.

Publications

The EMCDDA publications programme is one of the principal outlets for the Centre's findings and achievements. Its printed publications take the form of annual reports on the drug phenomenon and specialised scientific and thematic volumes falling into four distinct series. More synthesised information is released through a bimonthly newsletter and policy briefings. The programme strives to achieve balance and complementarity between printed and online products.

Online activities

The EMCDDA website at http://www.emcdda.eu.int is the gateway to all information produced by the agency. Its goal is to bring drug information rapidly to all EMCDDA audiences, using the latest technology. Key features of the Centre's online activities include: extended online annual reports; downloadable publications and press material; drug-related databases; subscription services; presentations of EMCDDA work programmes; and links to partner organisations worldwide.

Media relations

Raising the profile of the EMCDDA as the European reference point on drugs and providing journalists with a high-quality information service, are the two underlying principles of the agency's media programme. Activities include: building sound relations with journalists; providing media-friendly information; and monitoring the press.
A *News and media services* section of the EMCDDA website offers journalists instant access to latest news releases and products.

Marketing

EMCDDA marketing activities run along three axes: dialogue with clients; promotional activities; and distribution. Interaction with client groups, via market-research surveys, helps the Centre tailor products to user needs. A wide range of promotional channels — including brochures, product launches and public relations — publicise outputs, while targeted distribution ensures that the right product reaches the right client promptly and cost-effectively.

Events

The EMCDDA organises high-level conferences on topics of political concern or related to its own work programmes. Such events are an invaluable way for the agency to exchange views and expertise with key players working in the drugs field and to promote itself as a centre of excellence.

Serving national and EU authorities

Serving the information needs of national and EU authorities, particularly policy-makers and their advisors, is a prime concern of the EMCDDA. Here the Centre informs their decision-making process proactively and reactively through tailored briefings and services.

IT and support services

Information technology

The information technology (IT) team is responsible for: developing and maintaining the EMCDDA IT infrastructure; providing IT advice to projects; and managing online services and databases.

Support services

The support services team is responsible for: human and material resources; financial and accounting management; planning and evaluation; and documentation and archives.

The documentation service runs the EMCDDA Documentation and Information Centre (DIC), a specialised library open to the public and housing a comprehensive drug documentation collection. Also offered is an electronic information service catering to the needs of EMCDDA staff and external users via new technologies. This allows access to library catalogues, external drug databases and online periodicals.

Staff and budget

At the outset of its 2004–06 work programme, the EMCDDA employed a team of approximately 80 staff members from across the EU. Staff are headed by an Executive Director proposed by the European Commission and appointed by the Management Board for a renewable five-year period.

The EMCDDA receives stable funding under the general EU budget. The EMCDDA budget is adopted by its Management Board.

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