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EMCDDA at 2015 United nations Commission on narcotic DRUGS — vienna

EMCDDA presents latest update on ‘new drugs’ from EU Early Warning System

(9.3.2015, LISBON/VIENNA) New psychoactive substances (NPS or ‘new drugs’) were detected in the European Union last year at the rate of around two per week, according to an update issued today by the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA)**(1). A total of 101 new substances were reported to the **EU Early Warning System** **(EWS)** in 2014 (up from 81 in 2013), continuing an upward trend in substances notified in a single year (2). This brings the total number of substances being monitored by the agency to over 450, with more than half of that figure being identified in the last three years alone.

The report is released to coincide with the opening of the 58th session of the **UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs** (CND) in Vienna, where the **EMCDDA** is participating alongside the **EU delegation** (3). It is based on an analysis of information collected by the **EWS** from the **28 EU Member States, Turkey** and **Norway**.

In 2014, the list of substances reported was dominated once again by two groups: **synthetic cathinones** (31 substances) and **synthetic cannabinoids** (30 substances) — respectively sold as legal replacements for stimulants and cannabis. These now represent the two largest groups monitored by the EWS and, together, make up almost two-thirds of the new drugs notified in 2014.

Latest data on seizures suggest a growth in the NPS market. Between 2008 and 2013, there was a seven-fold increase in the number of NPS seizures across Europe. Almost 47 000 seizures of NPS, amounting to more than 3.1 tonnes, were reported in Europe in 2013. Synthetic cannabinoids accounted for the majority of these figures (21 000 seizures; 1.6 tonnes), followed by synthetic cathinones (11 000 seizures; 1.1 tonnes). Many NPS are produced in bulk by chemical companies based outside Europe, and shipped to Europe by air freight, where they are processed, packaged and then sold to consumers.

In addition to monitoring new drugs entering the market, the **EWS** also identifies signals of serious harms and responds as necessary. In 2014, serious harms demanding urgent attention led to 16 public health alerts, while six risk assessments were conducted by the agency’s extended **Scientific Committee** (4).

Among the public health concerns highlighted in the report are new synthetic opioids — often highly potent and sold as heroin to unsuspecting users — posing a high risk of overdose. Three of the five opioids reported in 2014 were fentanyls, a family of drugs that have caused hundreds of deaths in **Europe** and the **US**.

**EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz** says: ‘New psychoactive substances can move quickly from obscurity to infamy and cause serious harm. The data presented today show how the growth in the market of these substances will continue to pose challenges for public health and drug policy in the years to come. These challenges relate to the speed at which the substances appear, their open sale and the lack of information on their effects and harms. Strong national and regional early-warning systems will play a central role in the early detection of harms and help to ensure timely public health responses.’

**Notes**

(1) *An update from the EU Early Warning System* available at [www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/2015/new-psychoactive-substances](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/2015/new-psychoactive-substances) (2) 74 in 2012; 49 in 2011; 41 in 2010. (3) [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/58\_Session\_2015/CND-58-Session\_Index.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/58_Session_2015/CND-58-Session_Index.html) (4) Composed of additional experts from EU Member States, the European Commission, Europol and the European Medicines Agency. Risk assessment publications are available at: [www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/risk-assessments](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/risk-assessments)