



PRESS RELEASE

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

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EMCDDA to launch second Annual Report

"In some EU countries, unprecedented numbers of increasingly young Europeans have adopted the use of synthetic drugs such as ecstasy, LSD and amphetamines in the context of a mass youth culture...Users are not concentrated among the marginalised or deprived, but are mostly young, employed or students, and relatively affluent."

The above is among the many findings of the EMCDDA's *Annual Report on the State of the Drugs Problem in the European Union - 1997* which will be launched to the press in Lisbon on 4 November in the presence of His Excellency, the President of the Portuguese Republic, Jorge Sampaio. Over 100 representatives from diplomatic, political and media circles in 15 countries will attend the event to hear new information relating to the situation in 1996.

Cannabis remains the most commonly used illegal drug throughout the European Union. Depending on the country, 5-8% to 20-30% of the population have at least tried the drug at some time in their lives, however, its use is usually occasional or intermittent, rather than frequent, and the drug rarely appears as the primary drug in health and social care indicators. In most EU countries, amphetamines are the second most frequently used illegal drug, generally tried by up to 3% of adults.

However, in most EU Member States, it is heroin that dominates the indicators reflecting the problematic consequences of drug use, such as the demand for treatment, drug-related deaths and HIV infection. In almost all countries, heroin is the main drug among those starting treatment (generally 70-95%) while the proportion injecting the drug ranges from 14% to around 90%, generally lower than the figures reported last year. Cocaine remains relatively rare as the main problem drug.

In the area of demand reduction, this year's report breaks new ground with a special study on interventions in Europe's criminal justice systems. It also shows how harm reduction approaches, which have been expanding, among others, due to public fears over HIV infection, have reduced the spread of the virus, and reports that substitution treatment is now available in all EU countries albeit to a widely varying degree. In recent years, most countries have expanded methadone treatment to cater, in 1996, for perhaps over 200,000 patients.

But underlying the data of this 144-page volume is a process as important as the results. In the words of the Director of the EMCDDA, Mr. Georges Estievenart, referring to progress made in the collection of more reliable and comparable data: "This *Annual Report* is important not only for what it says about drug problems in Europe, but also for the advances it reveals in the Centre's ability to make statements. We are creating a new language which will enable us to talk about drug problems at European level, compare notes and learn from each other. Increasingly, the nations of Europe are speaking this language - a process in which the Centre can claim a major role as instigator and midwife - and the fruits are clearly seen in the report's increased ability to give policy-makers more of what they need to make effective decisions".

Session opens 15h15 and ends 17h30. For more, please contact: K. Robertson, EMCDDA. Tel: (351 1) 811 3000. Fax: (351 1) 813 06 15. Rua da Cruz de Santa Apolónia, 23-25, 1100 Lisbon, Portugal. Highlights of the Report available from 4 November on <http://www.emcdda.org>