



PRESS RELEASE

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

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EMCDDA's 1998 *Annual Report*: new findings

Amphetamine use is rising and may well become more significant than ecstasy use. Hepatitis C infections remain extremely prevalent (an estimated 500 000 in the European Union), while new AIDS cases are strongly decreasing as a result of new treatments delaying the disease. The prevalence of HIV infection is stable or declining in most countries, despite continued transmission in young and new injectors.

These are among the findings of the EMCDDA's **1998 *Annual Report on the State of the Drugs Problem in the European Union*** (relating to the drug situation in 1997) launched to the press at 10H00 on 18 December at the Federal Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, Vienna. Speakers include: Lore Hostasch, Austrian Federal Minister for Labour, Health and Social Affairs; Marcel Reimen, Vice-Chairman of the EMCDDA Management Board; Georges Estievenart, Director of the EMCDDA; and Peter Hacker, Co-ordinator for Drug Affairs of the City of Vienna.

The 120-page *Annual Report* reveals that trends in supply, use and dependence on heroin and other opiates appear relatively constant although there is some evidence of a new generation of heroin smokers. Between 0.2 and 0.3% of the EU population are addicted to opiates, lower than for many other illicit drugs, but create disproportionate social costs in terms of treatment, criminal justice and social welfare. Some evidence shows that heroin use is moving from cities to rural areas. Cocaine use has risen steadily but prevalence is still low.

In the prevention field, a two-pronged strategy has developed: broad education and health promotion targeting the general population; and specific actions aimed at vulnerable groups. Increases in substitution programmes in many EU countries have created the need for consistency and indications of effectiveness. Throughout the EU, increasing harm-reduction approaches focus on groups experimenting with ecstasy and other drugs in the dance scene. Achievements in prevention in 1997 emphasised the need for community partnerships, with evaluation becoming increasingly important.

In a new chapter on the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs), the *Report* reveals that the political changes in the early 1990s led to an increase not only in drug trafficking through much of the region, but also in the domestic consumption of imported drugs. Since the early 1990s, many CEECs have seen an increase in heroin consumption, and more recently the injection of imported heroin. The use of pharmaceutical drugs in combination with illicit drugs has become more common and cocaine seizures point to a rise in trafficking. Almost all countries report increased seizures of synthetic drugs.

In another new chapter covering public spending on drugs, the *Report* notes that the drug budget as a proportion of GDP is similar in three European countries studied (UK, France and the Netherlands) but substantially higher in the United States. In a chapter on actions taken by the EU, the *Report* reveals that in 1997 more than MECU 53 were spent on drug-related activity – 62% on internal actions within the EU and 38% on external. Within the EU, 55% was spent on rehabilitation, while outside the EU, most was spent on the African and CEEC regions. This represents a slight decrease on the total of MECU 61 spent in 1996.

Contact: K. Robertson, EMCDDA. Tel: (351 1) 811 3000. Fax: (351 1) 813 06 15. O. Gumhold, Federal Ministry for Labour Tel: (43 1) 71100 2029. Fax: (43 1) 71100 6469. The full *Report* and its highlights will be available from late 17 December on <http://www.emcdda.org>

