



E.M.C.D.D.A.
European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

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EU STEPS UP USE OF THE INTERNET TO SPREAD DRUGS AWARENESS

What are the main drugs used in the EU today?
What is the most harmful drug currently available in the EU?
How many drug addicts are there in the EU?

The **EU's Lisbon-based drugs agency (EMCDDA)** is stepping up use of the Internet in its effort to boost awareness of the drugs problem. Answering questions like those above rates high on the new agenda (see page 2 for answers).

A new web site, to be launched next month by the Agency, will address people's key questions on the European drugs phenomenon.

EMCDDA Director Georges Estievenart says: "Newsweek wrote recently that for a whole generation in Europe drug use is normal. So is the use of the Internet. We must enlist the latter in facing the challenge presented by the former.

"President Chirac said when he visited the **EMCDDA** that 'Europe must become aware of the [drugs] drama with which it is confronted and be equipped with a coherent means to fight this problem'."

Mr Estievenart adds: "We see reaching out to the Internet generation as a vital part of our strategy. Knowledge is a formidable weapon in helping Europeans face the challenge of drugs; ignorance is a dangerous enemy."

The new drugs web site will be launched at **Online Information 99**, the biggest international conference and exhibition in the field, to be held in London from 7–9 December. The event will offer delegates the chance to hear 125 experts from 20 countries provide insights into the latest information trends.

The **EMCDDA's** new drugs web site will offer fast, easily accessible and comprehensive information on all aspects of the Agency's activities, products and partners:

- detailed information on all aspects of drug use in Europe
- downloadable publications in all **11 EU** languages plus full ordering details for all printed publications
- links to national drug-information centres across Europe
- free access to the **EMCDDA's** specialised drug-related databases
- e-mail contacts to all staff members
- links to a host of drug-related organisations and sites at European and international level.

The drugs web site will be on-line at <http://www.emcdda.org> from **7 December 1999**.

Contact: Kathy Robertson, Press Officer, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
Tel: ++ 351 21 811 3000 • Fax: ++ 351 21 813 1711 • E-mail: Kathryn.Robertson@emcdda.org
EMCDDA, Rua da Cruz de Santa Ap6lonia 23–25, PT-1149-045 Lisbon, Portugal

ANSWERS TO THOSE QUESTIONS...

Q. What are the main drugs used in the EU today?

A. Cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug in the EU, followed by amphetamines and ecstasy. Cocaine and LSD are less common, and heroin is only used by a small minority. A tentative extrapolation from recent surveys suggests that over 40 million people in the EU (about 16% of the population aged 15–64 years) have used cannabis. Of these, at least 12 million (about 5% of people in the same age range) have used it in the last 12 months. These proportions are higher among young people. On average, about one in every five adolescents aged 15–16 has tried cannabis, and by the time they reach their mid-twenties the proportion probably approaches one in every three. However, only a minority of those who have taken cannabis use it regularly, and certain legal drugs – such as alcohol, tobacco and some medicines such as tranquillisers – are more widely and more frequently used than any illegal drug.

Q. What is the most harmful drug currently available in the EU?

A. In almost every EU Member State, the illegal drug associated with the most serious health consequences (in terms of addiction and other problems requiring treatment, drug-related diseases like AIDS or hepatitis, or deaths from overdose) as well as the one with the most serious social problems (such as drug-related crime) is heroin. This is despite the fact that the number of heroin users is only a small proportion of the total population. However, the total number of deaths and diseases related to alcohol and tobacco use are considerably greater than those related to heroin.

Q. How many drug addicts are there in the EU?

A. There are no accurate statistics on the number of drug addicts because drug use is largely hidden. Instead, the figure can only be estimated using various statistical techniques. The end result is usually presented as a 'probable range' and should therefore be interpreted with caution. At present, most estimates for individual EU countries are between two and ten addicts per 1,000 population aged 15–54. The total number of heroin addicts in the EU is estimated to be about 1 million. If use of other drugs such as amphetamines and cocaine were included, and the definition broadened to include those who are not strictly dependent (addicted) but who regularly use illegal drugs in sufficient amounts to be at high risk of experiencing serious problems, then the number would be considerably higher.

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Tel: ++ 351 21 811 3000 • Fax: ++ 351 21 813 1711 • E-mail: Kathryn.Robertson@emcdda.org
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