



news release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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KEY ROLE OF EVALUATION IN DRUG PREVENTION

A scientific report out today from the **EU drugs agency, the EMCDDA**, aims at promoting an evaluation culture in Europe to improve drug-prevention practice. The agency says that, despite a growing interest in evaluation, the scope and objectives of drug-prevention programmes still need to be better defined.

Evaluation – says **EMCDDA Executive Director Georges Estievenart** in the report's preface – involves clarifying and defining concepts and methods and assessing the impact of intervention measures. In this way, diverse, unfocused activities prompted more by social anxieties than genuine scientific research can be avoided, and more efficient and targeted interventions introduced.

Today's **EMCDDA** report – *Evaluation: a key tool for improving drug prevention** – is a collection of papers arising from the 2nd European Conference on Evaluation of Drug Prevention, held in December 1999, three years after the first. Since 1997, the demand from **EU** Member States for the **EMCDDA's Guidelines for the evaluation of drug prevention** (1,500 copies distributed) has demonstrated the growing interest of drug-prevention professionals in evaluation.

The concept of evaluation, **Estievenart** explains, lies at the heart of the first Community action programme for the prevention of drug dependence, with information provided by the **EMCDDA** at its core. The new **EU** Drugs Strategy (2000–2004) foresees evaluation of all the programmes and policies it includes as a top priority. For the first time, Member States will have to achieve measurable objectives in tackling drugs.

Margareta Nilson, Head of Demand Reduction at the EMCDDA, says the agency has implemented a number of initiatives to promote the evaluation of drug prevention, the most obvious example being its **Guidelines**. A common question in the drugs field is 'What works?'. Today's report, she explains, attempts to address this key topic and offer a better understanding of this complex field.

EMCDDA officials accept that, unlike statistics on drug use and its consequences, the **EU's** campaign to address the problem at its roots might seem unspectacular; and that a scientific monograph is hardly headline-grabbing. But a combination of measures is slowly and surely gathering momentum. And they see today's report as another significant step in the 'ripple effect'. They are convinced that evaluation of drug prevention must be placed higher on the European political agenda.

* See <http://www.emcdda.org/press/press.shtml>. To order your copy of the report see http://www.emcdda.org/publications/publications_monographs.shtml

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