



## NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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### TACKLING DRUG PROBLEMS IN PRISON: A CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR EU POLICY-MAKERS **At least half of EU prison population has a drug-use history**

(23.2.2003, LISBON) Addressing the needs of those with drug problems in prison is a critical challenge for both public-health and crime-reduction policy in the **EU**. So says the **EU** drugs agency, the Lisbon-based **EMCDDA**, in the latest edition of its ***Drugs in focus*** series, out today.

Entitled 'Treating drug users in prisons – a critical area for health-promotion and crime-reduction policy', the document aims to focus the attention of **EU** policy-makers on the issues involved in this complex and sensitive area.

Estimates suggest that at least half of the **EU**'s 356 000 prison population has a drug-use history and many of those entering prison have a severe drug problem. 'Prison does not necessarily stop the use of drugs', the paper maintains, 'neither does it necessarily address the therapeutic needs of problem drug users'.

Relatively high rates of HIV, hepatitis, tuberculosis and other infections associated with drug use are also found among the prison population. For many prisoners, a return to problem drug use and regular offending on release, is a far too common outcome.

A critical test for drug services in prisons, concludes the briefing, is the ability to offer continued care at intake and on release. But, the briefing states, many prisoners with drug problems are only poorly prepared for their release and are not given the opportunity to maintain contact with drug and social support services.

A high proportion of those with the most serious drug use and addiction problems are to be found in prisons. Today's publication states that prison administrations need to design responses that both cope with the challenges this presents and make the most of the opportunity to intervene in the cycle of drug addiction and crime.

This is reinforced by Georges Estievenart, **EMCDDA** Executive Director, who states: 'We know that drug use in prisons is a problem in Europe and we know that the costs to individuals and their communities of drug problems are considerable. The challenge for European drug policy is to ensure that our prisons work to make the situation better, not the contrary.'

#### **Policy considerations**

What then does the agency suggest as areas that should be of particular concern to **EU** policy-makers in this field. It comes up with six:

1. In order to understand the scale and nature of drug use within prisons, a clear need exists, across the **EU**, to invest in the research and monitoring necessary for informed policy formation and to facilitate the development, targeting and evaluation of interventions.

2. The complex nature of drugs and crime problems requires complex policy responses. There is therefore an urgent need for a better awareness of what constitutes good practice in this area and to develop and evaluate model programmes.
3. Successfully addressing drug problems in prisons requires the involvement of prison staff, a balancing of control and therapeutic goals and close coordination with health and social support agencies.
4. Reducing the risk of HIV and other injection-related infectious diseases within prisons should be an explicit policy goal. Effective interventions are required to protect the health of prisoners, staff and the wider community. Policy in this area has to consider how to manage prisoners who are infected with HIV and other drug-related infections.
5. A policy commitment to providing equivalence of care in prison to the health and social support available to those with drug problems outside is only meaningful if it is accompanied by the necessary investment in resources.
6. A key test for drug services targeted at prisoners is the ability to offer continued care for prisoners on release. The considerable risk of a rapid relapse into crime and drug use or the risk of drug overdose faced by prisoners on release are only likely to be reduced if contact is maintained with drug treatment and social support services.

#### Notes for editors:

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The four-page briefings, ***Drugs in focus***, are designed to offer policy-makers food for thought on key issues in the drugs field. Each edition includes a brief introduction to the theme at hand; latest findings and statistics; key policy issues at a glance; graphs/tables; policy considerations; web information and further reading. The briefings are published six times per year in the 11 official EU languages plus Norwegian.