



NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE AND DRUGS: CONCLUSIONS

'There is no simple or universal solution – tailored policy responses to specific challenges are needed'

(3.11.2003 LISBON) There is no simple or universal solution to young people's use of drugs and alcohol. Instead, policy responses must be tailored to a range of specific challenges presented by this sensitive issue.

This was among the key conclusions of a European conference to consider the pressing topic of **drug use and young people**, held in **Malaga** from 30–31 October.

The event was organised by the **European Parliament (EP)** in collaboration with the Lisbon-based **EU** drugs agency, the **EMCDDA**; the **Spanish Government Delegation for the National Plan on Drugs**; the **Regional Government of Andalusia**; and the **Malaga Town Council**.

It was the first time an **EP** delegation had met information-providers and experts in the drugs field to help identify information needs and priorities for formulating and assessing drug policies targeting young people at a European level. Some 130 policy-makers, scientists and experts in the drugs field attended the event.

Delegates concluded that the drug problem is strongly influenced by the prevailing youth culture and wider factors in society, and linked to problems such as unstable family life, truancy and marginalisation. This means that, to be successful, messages and interventions to combat drugs must target a wider set of themes than mere substance use itself.

Closing the conference, **Jorge Salvador Hernández Mollar**, Chairman of the Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs (**EP**), declared: 'More than anything this conference has demonstrated the value of an open debate on this complex issue. It has provided the rare opportunity to bring together people who share a common objective, but who have a wealth of experience and perspectives to bring to the debate'.

For **Marcel Reimen**, Chairman of the **EMCDDA** Management Board: 'The conference showed a clear need for better coordination and synergy between local initiatives in this field, national policies and strategy at **EU** level'.

Key conclusions

The conference reached seven specific conclusions.

1. There is a critical need for more comprehensive action to allow better monitoring of developing patterns and trends of drug use among young people as they become adults. This is especially relevant given that the years after school are those when drug use is most common and where data are currently limited.

2. Understanding how young people view drugs and how drug information is exchanged, offers a key insight into how to target prevention and what new media of communication are likely to be required to do this. The Internet allows the free dissemination of drug information. There is a need to consider how to use it to discourage rather than promote drug use. Also required is better monitoring of the availability of different drugs within our communities.
3. There is strong evidence to suggest that young people are not equally vulnerable to developing drug problems. Psychological, social and neurobiological factors make some more susceptible to drug problems than others. This implies the need, not only for universal prevention, but also for targeting prevention activities among those most in need.
4. The wealth of data available on drug use among Spanish young people reflects the great investments made in Spain nationally, regionally and locally to ensure that drug policy is based on a sound comprehension of the drug situation and informed by an understanding of the effectiveness of responses.
5. Developing a comprehensive drug strategy that clearly acknowledges the different needs of some groups of young people is particularly valuable. Drug interventions must be sensitive to local conditions and based on a partnership of different agencies working with young people locally.
6. Strategies can be realistically translated into action through good communication across and between different levels of public administration. There is little value of a national strategy on drugs if it does not support the targeting and delivery of better interventions. It is important to develop the right coordination mechanisms if policy objectives are to be achieved in practice. A strong dialogue between the different levels of administration to ensure synergy between local, regional, national and even supra-national activities is critical. Evaluation of strategies, coordination mechanisms and legal interventions, to allow us to reflect better on their impact, is essential.
7. A strong European strategy on drugs is necessary, especially given the growing challenges posed by the evolving drug problem in an enlarged **EU**. Member States must identify common goals and priorities and share experiences on what constitutes effective action if we are to respond effectively to the needs of young Europeans who are perhaps now more than ever before faced with exposure to drug use and its consequences. There is a need for more coordination at **EU** level. Throughout this process the **EMCDDA**, in collaboration with the European institutions and national, regional and local government bodies, has a role to play, by lending fundamental support to the monitoring and analysis of the drug situation, responses to the drug situation and by supporting the evaluation of policy.

Finally **Georges Estievenart, Executive Director of the EMCDDA**, reiterated the sentiment of the conference stating: 'The EU should be granted its own competence in this area, taking advantage of ongoing discussions on the draft text of the Constitution in the context of the Intergovernmental Conference'.

Notes to editors

For more on drugs and young people see **2003 EMCDDA Annual reports**:

<http://annualreport.emcdda.eu.int>

<http://candidates.emcdda.eu.int>

See also **news release** No 13:

<http://www.emcdda.eu.int/data/docs/55en.pdf>

For further details on the **conference** and programme see: <http://www.emcdda.eu.int>