



emcdda.europa.eu

## MESSAGE

**Wolfgang Götz, Director**  
**European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction**

On the occasion of the launch of the  
*2007 Annual report on the state of the drugs problem in Europe*  
Embargo: 10:00 CET — 22.11.2007

---

Today's *Annual report on the state of the drugs problem in Europe* addresses two fundamental questions: What do we currently know about drug use in Europe? And what have we learnt about responding effectively to drug-related problems?

These questions are important because, regardless of political persuasion or ideological position, policy-makers across Europe now recognise that the way forward in addressing the drugs issue lies in analysing the evidence available both on the size and nature of the problem and the costs and benefits of different approaches. In this light, the report underscores Europe's commitment to balanced and evidence-based policy-making and to sustained, rather than 'quick-fix', solutions.

Europe's drug problem still represents a serious challenge for health and social policy and for law enforcement, and it is never hard to find areas of the problem that arouse particular concern. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge progress where it has been made and to show where intelligent investments are paying dividends.

Today's report reveals that drug use has stabilised in a number of important areas, albeit at historically high levels. In some cases, there are even signs that merit cautious optimism — such as relatively stable levels of heroin and cannabis consumption and mostly low rates of HIV transmission among drug injectors. Also there has been a dramatic increase in countries' investment in prevention, treatment and harm-reduction activities and improved focus and cooperation in supply reduction, such as in combatting dealing and trafficking. And Europe and its Member States are now better-equipped to tackle drug problems than a decade ago, thanks to both EU and national drug strategies and action plans and the concrete measures they generate.

Another positive development is that Europe is playing an increasingly important role in backing global actions to reduce drug problems. A recent European Commission survey suggested that the EU is now funding demand and supply reduction measures in third countries to the tune of at least EUR 750 million. The EU is also the major international donor supporting the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Assessing progress is crucial right now as in Europe — and internationally — we enter a period of reflection on recent achievements: in 2008, the European Commission, with the support of the EMCDDA, will evaluate the impact of the EU drugs action plan (2005–2008) and the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) will debate progress made in meeting the goals set at the 1998 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs. The EMCDDA will also be feeding the UNGASS review process with a detailed assessment of the European situation.

In a global context, it is satisfying to observe that, in many areas, Europe's drug situation looks comparatively positive. A useful insight into the relative size of its drug problem can be gained by comparing the European picture with the drug situation in Australia, Canada and the USA, all of which have robust and comprehensive data on drugs. Cannabis use, for example, is estimated to be considerably lower in the EU as a whole than in these three countries. Levels of methamphetamine use also appear limited in Europe, in contrast to other parts of the world which have seen a growth in the use of this drug in recent years.

Within the EU there are still extensive differences between countries in the nature and scale of their drug problems and how they approach them. However, we agree more and more on fundamental issues, such as the need for drug policies to be balanced, comprehensive and evidence-based and the importance of prevention, treatment and social rehabilitation.

Harm reduction — once a more controversial topic — is also increasingly part of a comprehensive package of demand reduction measures in Europe. A 2007 report from the European Commission on the implementation of the 2003 'Council recommendation on the prevention and reduction of health-related harm associated with drug dependence' <sup>(1)</sup> found that the recommendation had played a part in encouraging countries to develop or expand harm-reduction activities. Opioid substitution treatment is now found in virtually all EU Member States and latest figures show that at least 585 000 substitution treatments are being delivered in Europe. Services geared to other types of drug use are also developing and we report on new and innovative approaches to address cannabis and cocaine problems.

Increasingly, the debate on demand reduction activities focuses on identifying those interventions for which there is evidence of effectiveness. The complexities of assessing such evidence and defining quality control standards are addressed in the *Annual report*. But any intervention, however well founded, will be unlikely to work if poorly delivered. That is why we must also identify and disseminate best practice, a subject given new emphasis in the recast regulation of the EMCDDA, which came into force in January 2007.

As a monitoring agency, we deal in facts and figures and we are committed to being scientifically rigorous and impartial. But while scientific rigour is essential to our work, we must never forget that behind the figures there are real human beings whose lives have been affected and sometimes ruined by drug problems. Behind the dry statistics on treatment demand, drug-related deaths and criminal behaviour are the grieving families, lost potential and children growing up in unsafe communities. To develop effective responses to the drugs problem requires us to be dispassionate about our data, but we must never become dispassionate about the topic.

---

**Notes:**

<sup>(1)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/drug/drug\\_rec\\_en.htm#1](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/drug/drug_rec_en.htm#1)

Information on, and links to, all *Annual report* products, news releases, services and events will be available at 10H00 CET on 22.11.2007 at: <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/events/2007/annualreport.cfm>