



# 20 years

Monitoring | Communicating evidence | Informing policy

2015

In 2015, the EMCDDA commemorates 20 years of monitoring the drugs problem in Europe. Over the last two decades, much has changed in the extent and nature of the phenomenon and the Centre's work has developed to keep pace with this complexity. When the agency opened in 1995, with a staff of 17, the EU had 15 Member States and was in the midst of a heroin epidemic, with drug policy largely driven by HIV transmissions and AIDS-related and overdose deaths. Today, the range of substances being monitored is far broader, policy drivers have diversified, the EMCDDA has a 100-strong team and the EU has grown to 28 Member States.

One of the agency's key achievements of the first 20 years is the development of Europe-wide surveillance systems, to carry out regular and sustained monitoring of developments in the drugs field, as well as early-warning mechanisms to ensure rapid responses to new substances. These systems mean that the Centre can today talk with confidence on drug problems evolving across the Union, in order to inform policy discussions and responses at national, regional and local level. These developments have been enhanced through joint efforts with our European, national and international partners, in particular the EU institutions and the Reitox network of focal points.

Over the years, the EMCDDA has improved the comparability of drug information across the EU and devised the standards and methods needed to achieve this. Starting from very limited, disparate and incomplete data, we now have a more homogenous, complete view. In particular, the agency's five key indicators allow countries to use a 'common language' when describing drug use, its effects and consequences. To deepen insight and increase the timeliness of information, the agency has broadened its repertoire of monitoring methods in recent years by employing internet monitoring, wastewater analysis and 'trendspotter' methodology to assess new trends and patterns of use.

Central to the work of the EMCDDA throughout this period has been its close collaboration with key stakeholders, including the EU Member States, other European agencies, organisations active in the field of drugs and relevant third countries. This has allowed the agency to create synergies, drive the exchange of knowledge and contribute to developments.

The tough economic climate of recent years has created a new difficulty: how to achieve more, but with fewer funds. Facing this head on has made the EMCDDA stronger and more efficient, ready to embrace the future.

For the last 20 years, the EMCDDA has demonstrated its ability to act as a catalyst for data collection and strategic analysis in a policy area that cuts across crime, health and security issues, both in Europe and worldwide. The agency is now seen as a reliable partner and is an internationally recognised centre of excellence.

As the EMCDDA looks to the future, it will build on the considerable progress made so far. We now have a regional information system that is unique in the world. We must continue to gain a better understanding of the global dimension of the drugs problem we face in Europe, whilst developing quicker responses to emerging challenges through early-warning and threat-assessment activities. The rigour of the agency's work, a core element of its added value, will ensure that the EMCDDA is ready to meet its upcoming challenges.

Through their actions, the agency's highly experienced and multidisciplinary staff will help to make the EU a safer and healthier place to live. Making full use of the new communication channels we have available will be key to creating better engagement with our audiences and maintaining the high standards set by the agency during its 20-year history.

## Selected events from the EMCDDA's history

