

**20<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE  
24-25 Nov. 2003, Lisbon**

**Formal opinion on the 2004-2006 and 2004 work programmes  
of the EMCDDA**

**Overall opinion**

The Scientific Committee welcomes the EMCDDA's three-year work programme 2004-2006 and the 2004 yearly work programme. The Scientific Committee considers the priorities and working framework employed in both planning documents appropriate and inline with the EMCDDA's mission and mandate.

The Scientific Committee stresses that there is a need to harmonise the Centre's three-year work programming cycle with the overall EU planning on drugs (e.g. 2005-2009 Action plan on drugs).

The 2004 work programme is particularly ambitious. Financial constraints may limit its fulfilment but they must not compromise delivering the key indicators and core data, which constitute the core of the EMCDDA's mission and are its priority for enlargement. Further prioritisation might be needed during the implementation of the work programmes.

The implementation of the 2004 work programme needs to be highly focussed in order to achieve the defined four priority objectives: enlargement; consolidation of conditions for monitoring and analysis; improved data storage and retrieval; and high quality outputs, notably the Statistical bulletin, streamlined Annual report and other scientific and policy relevant publications.

Given the fact that a well functioning database is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the new REITOX reporting structure, the Scientific Committee recommends that additional human resources are allocated for the establishment of computerised data storage and retrieval system.

The Scientific Committee notes with approval the inclusion of scientific and technical publications as a necessary and central part of the EMCDDA's work in providing reliable and policy relevant information. However, given the extensive tasks foreseen there is a concern that the time and resources constraints may bring certain limitations in this respect.

The first issue of the Statistical bulletin, to be published in June 2004, has a particularly important role in the statistical underpinning not only of the EMCDDA's Annual report but, especially in 2004, for the comparative snapshots of 1999 versus 2002 data, which are the EMCDDA's contribution to evaluating the 2000-2004 EU Action plan on drugs for

current Member States and the first quality assessment of the data from the enlarged EU.

The Scientific Committee recognises that the 2004-2006 and the 2004 work programmes place a great importance on scientific rigour and reiterates its readiness to support the EMCDDA staff in this respect. Cross-programme cooperation and analyses are considered important for improving quality of the activities and outputs.

Enlargement is, however, a challenge to scientific rigour. If the highly focussed objectives of the 2004 work programme are to be achieved additional scientific staff will be needed at the EMCDDA, in particular, to support the establishment of the key indicators and core data in the acceding countries, data management and analysis.

The Scientific Committee stresses also that the Centre has to anticipate the future possible needs in terms of information and analyses of the acceding and candidate countries that might differ from those of the current EU Member States.

High scientific standards are essential for sound evidence-based policy briefings and reporting. Whereas the ideal would be the ability to provide comparable baseline 2002 data for the EU Action plan for 2005-2009 from the acceding countries as well as from the current Member States. The Scientific Committee considers that this objective may have to be amended if the data from the acceding countries or current member states are of insufficient quality or coverage, or if the EU 2005-2009 Action plan on drugs shall modify the present role of the five key indicators and core data. Accordingly, the Scientific Committee considers that a sounder baseline is likely to be provided from the 2003 data that will be available in the following year's Statistical bulletin (i.e. in 2005 when the new Action plan will also have been formulated).

Furthermore, the Scientific Committee appreciates the fact that across programmes analyses of information (P1 to P4) will enhance the scientific quality of the outputs.

A priority for the three-year work programme 2004-2006 and, in particular, for the 2004 is to ensure that EMCDDA's core activities are adequately resourced for the successful implementation of the work programme. Additional posts for data management and statistical analysis are needed if the necessary data retrieval and quality assurance are to be coped with so that quality reporting can be achieved in 2004.

### **Issues by programme**

The Scientific Committee welcomes the approach and the defined four transversal cross-programme priority projects for 2004 and stresses the progress made by all programmes of the Centre to better integrate issues of scientific standards and quality assurance into the work programme. The Scientific Committee takes the opportunity to emphasise the importance of some issues by programme:

#### Programme (P1) - Monitoring the situation

1. Enlargement – for the acceding countries the collection of the key indicators and core data should be established with suitable quality assurance.
2. Consolidation – for the current member states statistically authoritative comparative analyses of the five key indicators and core data, based on data for 1999 and 2002.
3. Data retrieval – streamlining data collection from current Member States and the acceding countries, consistent with the guidelines for the REITOX Focal Points and with pre-planned presentation and analyses.
4. Reporting – launch in June 2004 of a new product, the Statistical bulletin, to achieve: (a) statistical and scientific underpinning for an evaluation of the EU 2000-2004 EU Action plan on drugs through the key indicators and core data from 1999 and 2002 including via snapshots; and (b) first reporting and first quality assessments of key indicators and core data from the acceding countries.

#### Programme (P2) - Monitoring the responses

Together with enlargement, further development and consolidation of the new REITOX reporting system demands special priority for the 2004 and 2004-2006 work programmes.

In view of the increased workload for the integration of acceding and candidate countries and to consolidate the core tasks, the work programme has to be considered carefully, for example, the selected issues could be handled with more flexibility.

Analyses of information across programmes, especially together with P1 and P4, will enhance the scientific quality of the outputs.

#### Programme (P3) – Joint action on new synthetic drugs

In order to make sure that the prior work done by the Centre and the Scientific Committee on new synthetic drugs is preserved and further utilised, the Committee strongly supports the EMCDDA proposal to set up a database on new synthetic drugs. The Scientific Committee recommends that the EMCDDA should consider carefully the need to distinguish between public and restricted areas of the database.

#### Programme (P4) – Strategies and impact

In terms of the outputs of the work programme, the Scientific Committee considers that the credibility and the impact of the work done by the Centre should benefit from a better anticipation, understanding and integration of policy needs in the activities and outputs

In this respect more attention should be paid to thematic policy issues, especially given the important event of enlargement in 2004.

The Committee recommends increasing the transversal links between P2 and P4 and considers that both programmes will mutually benefit from this.

### **Specific issues**

The Scientific Committee wishes to make timely comment in advance on the data provided by the EMCDDA in support of the snapshot exercise (1999/2002) to be provided in June 2004.

Due to budget constraints a balance must be struck between the scientific underpinning of EMCDDA's outputs and their translation into multiple languages.

Concerning the request forwarded by the Management Board on the feasibility for the EMCDDA to 'assess core data related to mental health associated with drug use', the Scientific Committee recommends that this is examined further after the special issue relating to co-morbidity is prepared by the Centre in 2004. Careful resource and scientific consideration should be given to whether this important topic is taken up through the route provided by research, by routine monitoring or specifically through an indicator.

The Scientific Committee acknowledges that synergies with existing European networks and projects on drugs and international organisations should be considered as this can provide an easier and cost-effective access to information.

The Scientific Committee expresses concern on the definition of the scope and some of the procedures in the new draft 'Council Decision on the information exchange, risk assessment and the control of new narcotic drugs and new synthetic drugs' proposed by the Commission to replace the 1997 Joint action on new synthetic drugs.