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Drugnet Europe

Newsletter of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

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In this issue...

- 2** Guidelines for estimating the incidence of problem drug use
- 3** New EMCDDA report on drug-related public expenditure
- 4** Feature: *World drug report 2008* — An overview of the global drug situation
- 5** Second civil society forum on drugs in the EU
- 6** Cross-country collaboration in scientific publishing
- 7** New EMCDDA products and services
- 8** Management Board approves panel of scientific experts

EMCDDA publishes cannabis reader

Smoked, eaten, imbibed — or just talked about — it seems the world has a strong taste for cannabis. An estimated one in five European adults has tried it. Over 13 million Europeans have consumed it in the past month. Globally, nearly 50 000 tonnes of cannabis herb or resin are produced for consumption every year. Little wonder, then, that cannabis has become a controversial cultural phenomenon.

On International day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking, cannabis went under the spotlight as the EMCDDA released its largest scientific monograph to date: *A cannabis reader: global issues and local experiences — Perspectives on cannabis controversies, treatment and regulation in Europe*. In two volumes, and over 700 pages, leading European experts provide informed insight into a wide range of cannabis topics: from political, legislative, economic and social developments to prevention, treatment and healthcare.

EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz said: 'While cannabis is Europe's most consumed illicit drug, it can also be a great divider, sparking frequent debates among policymakers, scientists, researchers, law enforcers, drug professionals and citizens. As a result, the public is faced with a daily flood of information on cannabis — some of it well-founded, yet some campaigning in nature and at times misleading. This monograph is designed as an authoritative reference guide on this complex issue to inform research, debate and policymaking'.

A wide variety of laws and procedures exists in the EU Member States addressing cannabis with varying degrees of severity. The monograph describes the concerns expressed, particularly at UN level, that a 'soft line' on cannabis could endanger the overall international effort against drugs. It also traces recent developments in some countries where the balance is 'tipping back' in favour of more restrictive measures.

'A rise in concern is visible at international and national level', say the experts. Possible reasons include the recent reports of stronger strains of herbal cannabis and increased demand in requests for cannabis treatment. In 2005, over a quarter (29 %) of all new treatment demands were cannabis-related. Around 3 million Europeans are estimated to be using cannabis on a daily, or almost daily, basis.

Continued on page 8



Photo: istockphoto

An estimated one in five European adults has tried cannabis.

Young people and drugs

On 26 June, the European Commission published the results of its third Eurobarometer survey studying young people's attitudes to drugs (1). Telephone interviews were conducted in May 2008 with over 12 000 randomly selected young people (aged 15–24) in the 27 EU Member States.

When questioned on the perceived health risks of drug use, the respondents distinguished clearly between the risks of using heroin, cocaine and ecstasy and those of using cannabis. Between 80 % and 94 % of those surveyed thought heroin, cocaine and ecstasy posed a 'high risk', compared with around 40 % for cannabis. Meanwhile, 43 % felt that cannabis use represented a 'medium health risk', similar to the perceived risk of smoking tobacco.

There was a general consensus among respondents that heroin, cocaine and ecstasy should continue to be banned in Europe: 97 % for heroin, 95 % for cocaine and 94 % for ecstasy. However, there were major differences in opinion relating to cannabis. Two-thirds (67 %) of those surveyed were in favour of continuing the ban on cannabis, while 31 % felt it should be regulated in a similar way to alcohol and tobacco.

On the issue of availability, heroin was seen to be the most difficult illicit drug to obtain, followed by cocaine, ecstasy and cannabis. Just under half (47 %) of the respondents from rural areas said it would be 'very difficult' to acquire heroin, compared to 39 % of urban residents and 40 % of metropolitan residents. Nearly two out of three respondents (63 %) thought it would be 'fairly easy' to 'very easy' for them to acquire cannabis.

(1) See Eurobarometer report at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_233_en.pdf

July–September
2008

Drug situation

EMCDDA launches new web application and database, Fonte

On 1 July, the EMCDDA took a major step forward in streamlining and improving its data handling, with the launch of a new web application and database, Fonte. The development of Fonte, in progress since 2006, reflects a core priority of the EMCDDA's three-year work programme (2007–09) 'to consolidate monitoring and reporting structures'.

From now on, the EMCDDA, Reitox national focal points and other key partners will collect, validate and store drug-related data almost entirely through Fonte. Former tools, such as Standard tables and Structured questionnaires, used to gather data for the EMCDDA *Annual report*, have now been incorporated into the application. In addition, entries to the EDDRA database are now validated via Fonte (1).

As well as being a hub for the collection, validation and storage of data, Fonte also acts as a 'memory'. Drug-related data collected from numerous sources since the birth of the EMCDDA, and stored in various systems, have now been migrated into one central repository. This allows easy access to historical data, thereby facilitating scientific analysis.

Although most of the raw data housed in Fonte is invisible to the outside world, the general public can see the results indirectly via products such as the EMCDDA *Annual report* and *Statistical bulletin*. With the creation of such a tool for more efficient data-collection and retrieval, the EMCDDA and its partners will be able to concentrate more on core scientific work and analyses to better inform policymakers.

Ulrik Solberg

(1) <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/themes/best-practice/examples>

Estimating the incidence of problem drug use

Monitoring the incidence of problem drug use * — the rate at which those who will become problem users start using or injecting drugs for the first time — plays an important part in tracing new trends in Europe's drug situation and in helping to shape interventions.

The EMCDDA has recently published guidelines for estimating the incidence of problem drug use (1). The new guidelines use advanced statistical techniques to estimate the numbers of new cases of (future) problem drug use occurring over time, based on available data such as numbers of new drug treatment entries. While these techniques have been around since the 1970s, they have thus far rarely been applied in Europe. Most EU Member States, to date, have estimated only the prevalence of problem drug use — the total number of problem drug users in a given year — and, as a result, have little information on trends over time in first time use.

These guidelines were conceived to address this information gap and form part of the toolset (including guidelines for prevalence estimation) developed under the EMCDDA's key indicator 'Problem drug use'. The new incidence guidelines were developed by a working group of experts from several EU Member States and have already resulted in new estimates of incidence.

Gianpaolo Scalia Tomba, Danica Klempová and Lucas Wiessing

* Problem drug use: injecting drug use or long-duration/regular use of opioids, cocaine and/or amphetamines.

(1) Scalia Tomba, G.P., Rossi, C., Taylor, C., Klempová, D., Wiessing, L. (2008), 'Guidelines for estimating the incidence of problem drug use', EMCDDA, Lisbon. <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/?nnodeid=1372>

Drug use in the general population

The EMCDDA expert group on the key indicator 'Prevalence and patterns of drug use among the general population' held its annual meeting in Lisbon on 26–27 June and focused on the group's latest achievements and innovations. Among these were: a multi-country thematic analysis of cocaine use and a new initiative measuring intensive cannabis use. Four countries took part in the coordinated thematic analysis of cocaine, based on national surveys on its prevalence and patterns of use. Data were analysed by each country following common EMCDDA guidelines. The coordinated analysis provided valuable insights into commonalities and differences between countries that individual analyses usually do not allow.

In a session on psychometric scales (short instruments to assess heavier patterns of drug use), work was presented on measuring intensive (or otherwise problematic) cannabis use. Some countries have recently started to incorporate brief scales into their population surveys to measure this type of use. It was felt that the best approach was to use DSM-IV/ICD-10 criteria (1) or, alternatively, short screening scales, such as the Cannabis Abuse Screening Test (CAST) or the Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS). Following the meeting, a series of validation studies will be drawn up by the group on the use of such scales in population surveys. The EMCDDA will support countries in this pioneering work with small grants for test adaptation.

Finally, the meeting allowed for preliminary discussions on the links between the monitoring of intensive drug use and prevention and treatment. Here, presentations were given by experts from Australia and France where monitoring has led to the establishment of specific interventions for intensive cannabis use.

Danica Klempová, João Matias, Deborah Olszewski and Julián Vicente

(1) <http://www.psych.org/MainMenu/Research/DSMIV.aspx>
<http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en>



Photo: istockphoto

Fonte: a hub for the collection, validation and storage of drug-related data

Responses

New report on drug-related public expenditure

Producing estimates of drug-related public expenditure is one of the many targets set by the current EU drugs action plan (2005–08). In this light, the EMCDDA launched in July its latest Selected issue publication focusing on *Drug-related public expenditure in Europe* ⁽¹⁾.

Testing a new methodology, combining 'labelled' and 'unlabelled' expenditure ⁽²⁾, the report presents preliminary estimates of how much European governments are spending on the drugs problem. While figures should be used with caution (methodology needs refining; data remain patchy), estimates from reporting countries, extrapolated to European level, arrive at a total cost of drug-related public expenditure in 2005 of EUR 34 billion. This represents an average expenditure of EUR 60 per European citizen per year.

A considerable amount of quality information is available in Europe on drug-related public expenditure (mostly labelled). One observation made in the report is that the disbursements identified so far mainly refer to public spending at central government level. The future inclusion of sub-national government expenditure on drugs would therefore certainly result in higher figures.

Luis Prieto and Marie-Christine Ashby

⁽¹⁾ The report (in English) and summaries (in 23 languages), are available at <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu>

⁽²⁾ 'Labelled expenditure' refers to planned spending, reflecting a state's voluntary commitment in the drugs field. It can be traced by reviewing official accountancy documents over a given period. 'Unlabelled expenditure' refers to unplanned spending and is estimated through modelling techniques. The twofold approach aims to provide more comprehensive and accurate estimates of public spending in tackling drugs and drug addiction Europe-wide. See *Drugnet Europe* No 61.

Harm reduction: 'Towards a global approach'

It has been over two decades since the first harm-reduction projects appeared in Europe, Australia and North America. Since then, harm reduction has grown in terms of acceptance, implementation and scientific knowledge, with programmes today operating in a wide variety of cultural, religious and political contexts. While many now support the approach, obstacles to the universal implementation of harm reduction remain. This was the context of the International Harm Reduction Association's (IHRA) international conference, 'Towards a global approach', held in Barcelona from 11–15 May ⁽¹⁾.

In a session on the global state of harm reduction, the participants addressed themes such as: the scarcity of harm reduction in many parts of the world; the need for improved harm reduction for non-injecting drug use (alcohol, cannabis); and the human rights of drug users. This session also launched a major report: *Global state of harm reduction 2008 — Mapping the response to drug-related HIV and hepatitis C epidemics* ⁽²⁾, which contains European data from the EMCDDA. Other key topics covered at the conference were: gender equality in the field of harm reduction; evidence in harm reduction; and alcohol-related harm reduction.

Organised with the support of the Department of Health of Catalonia, the event welcomed over 1 300 delegates. Among these were EMCDDA representatives who contributed in the areas of drug use surveillance and drug overdose mortality in Europe. EMCDDA staff also presented a new data-collection protocol for monitoring harm reduction in low-threshold services and data on trends and availability of responses to drug use in recreational settings in Europe.

Alessandro Pirona

⁽¹⁾ http://www.ihraconferences.com/downloads/HR2008_Conference_Reader_4WEB.pdf

⁽²⁾ <http://www.ihra.net/uploads/downloads/Projects/GlobalStateofHR/GSHRFullReport.pdf>

Expanding collaboration with law enforcers

Over 50 high-ranking police officers responsible for drug squads across Germany attended a national seminar on drug-related crime, hosted by the German Police Academy in Münster from 28–30 May. The seminar, also attended by judges and public prosecutors, focused on information exchange on the trafficking of GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyric acid) and its chemical precursor GBL (gamma-butyrolactone). In recent months, there have been two cases of deaths involving GHB in Germany.

The EMCDDA was invited to the event to present the latest European findings on these substances. Data were presented from its 2007 *Annual report* and from *GHB and its precursor GBL: an emerging trend case study*, released in March ⁽¹⁾ under its E-POD project to track new patterns of drug use in Europe.

Since being placed under international control in March 2001, the previously open sale of GHB has been rapidly curtailed in Europe. However, there are concerns over emerging use of the uncontrolled GBL which is widely sold for legitimate uses (e.g. as an ingredient in cleaning liquids). A national police expert informed that GHB no longer plays a major role on the German illegal market. Police operations in Germany are instead focusing on internet retailers who sell GBL as a 'cleaning liquid' and who are suspected to be supporting the illicit market.

Expanding collaboration with those involved in supply reduction allows the EMCDDA to gain a more complete picture both of drug markets and of individual drugs. Staff at the academy expressed an interest in visiting the EMCDDA in the coming months to learn about its work and to discuss information on, and analysis of, supply-reduction data.

Roland Simon

⁽¹⁾ See study at <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/html.cfm/index50526EN.html>

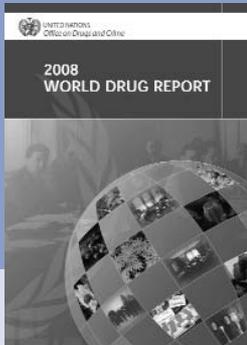


Photo: istockphoto

While many now support the approach, obstacles to the universal implementation of harm reduction remain

Bookshelf

World drug report 2008



The long-term stabilisation of world drug markets continued into 2007, despite notable exceptions in some critical areas. So states the *World drug report 2008*, launched by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on 26 June (see opposite).

On the supply side, despite cultivation increases for opiates and coca, the overall level of cultivation remained below that recorded at the start of the UNGASS process in 1998. Meanwhile, on the demand side, annual prevalence levels remained stable in 2007 in all drug markets, in spite of an apparent increase in the absolute number of cannabis, cocaine and opiate users.

The containment of world drug markets recorded over the last few years 'appears confirmed but under strain', says the report. Further consolidation, in 2008 and beyond, says UNODC, will mean tightening overall market containment and addressing slippage in areas where some expansion was registered in 2007. Among the priorities will be lowering opium poppy cultivation, especially in Afghanistan; and returning to the path of steadily declining coca cultivation registered in the first few years of this century.

Publisher: United Nations Publications
Languages: English (French and Spanish forthcoming).

Date: 26 June 2008

ISBN: 978-92-1-148229-4

Ordering information: unogbookshop@unog.ch

Website: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/WDR-2008.html>

The EMCDDA is responsible for the selection of materials for the Bookshelf and for the text presented. However, responsibility for the content of these materials and the opinions expressed therein lies with the authors themselves.

Feature

World drug report 2008

An overview of the global drug situation

A surge in opium and coca cultivation in rebel-held areas of Afghanistan and Colombia may be threatening the recent stabilisation in the world drug market, according to the *World drug report 2008*, published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The report was launched in New York by UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa on International day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking (26 June).

This year's report refers to Afghanistan's record opium harvest in 2007 which led to almost a doubling of the world's illegal opium production since 2005. Localised in five unstable southern provinces, this harvest also resulted in a market surplus, with twice as much supply as demand, states the report.

Similarly, Colombian coca cultivation increased by over a quarter (27 %) in 2007, with coca leaf and cocaine production highly concentrated in 10 municipalities. These accounted for almost half of all cocaine production (288 tonnes) and a third of the cultivation (35 000 hectares). 'In Colombia, just like in Afghanistan, the regions where most coca is grown are under the control of insurgents,' observed Costa.

The risk of higher drug use in developing countries is also pinpointed in the report as threatening recent progress in drug control. Albeit 'concentrated in a handful of countries', UNODC expresses the hope that 'areas of non-production will increase'.

The report shows that less than one in every 20 people aged 15–64 have tried drugs at least once in the past year. Problem drug users (people with severe drug dependence) are less than one tenth of this already low percentage: 26 million people, or 0.6 % of the planet's adult population. According to Costa: 'Drug statistics show that the drug problem was dramatically reduced over the past century, and has stabilised over the past 10 years'. While illicit drugs kill around 200 000 people a year worldwide, alcohol kills around 2.5 million a year and tobacco around 5 million.

Drug control has undoubtedly helped stabilise the world drug situation, states UNODC. While the problem has not yet been eliminated, the UN agency underlines the 40 % decline in the prevalence of 'hard drugs' over the last 100 years, despite the fourfold increase in the world population over the 20th century.

Pointing out that resources for public security far outweigh those devoted to public health, UNODC calls for a stronger focus on health — the first principle of drug control. 'Drug dependence is an illness that should be prevented and treated like any other,' Costa declared.

Summary in English at http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2008/Executive%20Summary.pdf

Summary in French at http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2008/wdr08_execsum_French.pdf

News releases at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2008-06-26.html>



Photo: istockphoto

Afghanistan, a record opium harvest in 2007

Partners

Second civil society forum on drugs in the EU

The upcoming EU drugs action plan (2009–12) was the focus of discussions at the second meeting of the Civil society forum on drugs, held in Brussels from 20–21 May. The forum was established as a result of an open consultation on the 'Green paper on the role of civil society in drugs policy in the European Union', adopted in June 2006 (1).

The forum provides a platform for dialogue between the European Commission and civil society, ensuring that grassroots experience and expertise are fed into EU policymaking on drugs. The current EU drugs strategy (2005–12) stresses that 'a balanced approach to the drugs problem requires adequate consultation with a broad group of scientific centres, professionals, representative NGOs, civil society and local communities'. This was echoed in a European Parliament report of March 2008 which acknowledges the fundamental role of civil society in supporting the development, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of drugs policies (2).

The latest forum meeting, attended by over 30 representatives of civil society, was organised by the Commission's Directorate-General for Freedom, Security and Justice. It opened with a presentation on the Commission's ongoing evaluation of the current action plan (2005–08), due for completion in the coming months. Working group sessions looked at the action plan's general approach and achievements and raised specific issues to be emphasised in the forthcoming plan. Key points presented were the need for: EU drug policy to be based on the principles of public health and human rights (non-stigmatisation, non-discrimination); greater attention to vulnerable groups and gender issues; and more emphasis on polydrug use. A major point of concern was the shift in recent years from a mainly heroin-based drug problem to one centred on cocaine, other stimulants and the use of multiple substances. This, in turn, requires a shift from homogenous to more specific drug services.

The EMCDDA attended the event as observer and provided information on a number of issues, including data on changing patterns of drug use and related responses. The forum underlined the need for collaboration between the Commission and civil society to further develop the 'European model' of drug policy developed in the last 20 years, based on a balanced approach covering prevention, treatment, harm reduction and repression.

Roland Simon

(1) See final report of first meeting at http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/news/information_dossiers/conference_drogues_07/doc/final_report_en.pdf
See final report of second meeting (forthcoming) at http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/fsj/drugs/forum/fsj_drugs_forum_en.htm

(2) http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/019-27278-112-04-17-902-20080422IPR27266-21-04-2008-2008-true/default_en.htm



Photo: istockphoto

The forum ensures that grassroots experience and expertise are fed into EU policymaking on drugs

International

EMCDDA and CICAD develop framework for new activities

The EMCDDA collaborates with the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) it signed in 1999 with CICAD's parent body, the Organisation of American States (OAS).

In this context, and as part of a regular review of the MoU, the EMCDDA Director and Scientific coordinator visited CICAD in Washington on 17 June. Among others, the meeting resulted in an agreement to develop a technical annex to the MoU to provide a framework for new activities and to aid future cooperation.

Following presentations on the drug situation in the EU and the Americas and monitoring

activities in both regions, joint projects were discussed. One such project, due for completion in 2009, is the EMCDDA–CICAD handbook on the establishment of national drug observatories and drug information networks. Based on the experience of the two bodies in their respective geographical areas, the handbook will present an overview of the most relevant concepts and methodologies required for setting up and assessing such national centres and their data-collection methods.

The handbook will provide the EMCDDA with a valuable manual for training activities aimed at creating or consolidating national focal points in current and potential candidate countries to the EU. It will be

used by CICAD to create, evaluate and develop national monitoring centres in several Latin American countries.

While in Washington, the EMCDDA delegates also visited technical staff at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), where they discussed different approaches to drug monitoring in Europe and the US and the respective drug trends in the two regions. They also attended a fact-finding session at the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), which focused on prevention issues and information exchange.

<http://www.cicad.oas.org>

<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/index.html>

<http://www.nida.nih.gov>

Spotlight

Reitox Academy on sentencing statistics



Statistics on how countries respond to a given drug law offence ('sentencing statistics') can provide a valuable insight into how laws are being implemented in the EU Member States. In preparation for a forthcoming Selected issue publication on this topic, the EMCDDA held a Reitox Academy in Paris on 13 June, hosted by the French national focal point (NFP).

The aim of the meeting was to assist NFPs in drafting country reports which will feed into this pan-European overview on sentencing statistics, to be released in 2009. Among others, the publication aims to provide data on the types of sentence commonly delivered for different offences (e.g. possession for personal use, trafficking, driving after consuming drugs).

Experts from Germany, France, Ireland and Poland gave presentations on the collection of sentencing statistics in their country. While all approached the subject from different angles (e.g. theoretical, pragmatic), they arrived at similar conclusions. The participants found that statistics on sentencing and other criminal-justice outcomes are increasingly available in the EU. But while statistics regarding the types of sanction awardable are collected in the Member States (e.g. fine, imprisonment), figures describing the severity of the sentences given (e.g. amount fined, length of prison term) might be less accessible.

Three working groups looked at common data-collection problems on the topic, such as collecting statistics on administrative sanctions; assessing the level of use of treatment alternatives; and attempting to count the number of cases discontinued at each stage of the criminal-justice system. At present, the most elusive statistic appears to be that relating to the outcome of offenders dealt with by police on the street. Yet these figures could give a crucial insight into how a country's drug policy is really being put into practice.

Brendan Hughes

Networking

Cross-country collaboration in scientific publishing

On 16 May, the EMCDDA hosted a meeting in Lisbon for editorial staff from the journal *Addiction* and leading academics from Spain. The purpose of the meeting was to address how Spanish science can be fully represented in the journal and to recommend actions for future collaboration.

In the period 2004–07, six articles from Spain were accepted by the journal (out of 64 submitted). This was considered a relatively low rate, both for submission and for publication. One possible explanation for the under-representation could be the existence in Spain of a range of national Spanish-language journals in this area. Another could be related to difficulties facing non-native English-speaking authors in writing for anglophone journals and, on occasion, a lack of understanding by those journals of Spanish culture and drug culture (1).



If successful, this collaboration could provide a model for other European countries

Taking these factors into account, *Addiction* is looking at possible ways to stimulate a greater number of successful submissions to the journal from Spain. These include: enrolling more Spanish reviewers; appointing at least one Spanish editorial assistant; commissioning articles and commentaries from Spanish authors; providing training in scientific writing for publication; promoting *Addiction* at national conferences in Spain; and encouraging close collaboration and co-publishing between English- and Spanish-speaking journals.

The EMCDDA will be an active partner in this collaboration between *Addiction* and Spanish scientists, which, if successful, could provide a model for other European countries.

Dominique Lopez

(1) The International Society of Addiction Journal Editors (ISAJE), which promotes excellence in the communication and dissemination of information on addiction and related sciences, has published *Publishing Addiction Science*, which advises potential authors (including professional researchers whose first language is not English) on the opportunities for publishing their work in addiction journals. Among the activities offered by ISAJE are training initiatives for authors and editorial staff and support programmes for non-English language addiction journals. <http://www.parint.org/isajewebsite/isajebook/isajewebbook.htm>. See *Drugnet Europe* No 56.

Update: EMCDDA conference 2009

In 2009, the EMCDDA will commemorate 15 years of monitoring the drug phenomenon in Europe. To mark the occasion, the agency will organise a high-level conference in Lisbon in the spring to reflect on past achievements and future challenges.

The main thrust of this by-invitation meeting will be identifying Europe's future information needs for effective drug policy. Using a mix of plenary sessions and breakout groups, the three-day event will focus discussions and information-sharing on four key topics: information needs for policy; responses; trends; and arising issues. The overall aim is to identify Europe's key concerns and information needs for the next decade. See the EMCDDA website for further details.

Maria Moreira

Products and services

Our publications at your fingertips



From now on, EMCDDA publications will be quicker and easier to access, thanks to a new publications database launched to mark

International day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking. After over a year in the making, the database now offers a collection of the agency's titles, clearly presented with table of contents, summary, related links, downloadable pdf and bibliographic references. Users can search publications by: title; year; series or type; and target group and perform a free text search in summaries and chapter titles. The next step in the project will be to include EMCDDA grey literature in the database, such as working papers and unpublished reports, and to further categorise publications through keywords.



This new section of the website enables users to subscribe to distribution lists of free EMCDDA series. It also facilitates the ordering of publications via the EU Bookshop, the online service providing access to publications from the EU institutions, agencies and other bodies.

Silke Vitt

EMCDDA publications database at <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications>
EU Bookshop at <http://bookshop.europa.eu>

Coming soon: EMCDDA Insights No 8

Drug use, impaired driving and traffic accidents is the title of the next edition in the EMCDDA Insights series to be released in the autumn. The result of an update of the EMCDDA 1999 literature review on this issue, the publication presents a range of studies that have been published on the topic since that date. Together with the Selected issue on *Drugs and driving*, published alongside the EMCDDA 2007 Annual report, the publication provides a comprehensive picture of the European situation regarding driving and the use of illicit drugs and medicines.

EMCDDA Insights, in print and downloadable in English at <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/insights>

Selected issue: drug-related research in Europe

Drug-related research is the title of the second of three EMCDDA Selected issues to be published in 2008. Scheduled for launch in the autumn, the publication provides an overview of the framework within which drug-related research is carried out in European countries. Topics include: the role of drug-related research at national level; coordination and funding arrangements; research and dissemination structures; and major recent research projects.

Selected issues, available in English at <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/selected-issues>

Technical datasheet: heroin trafficking to Europe

The sustainability of a general, stable, or improving situation seen in heroin use in Europe has been called into question by another record opium harvest in Afghanistan (2007). This technical datasheet provides an overview of what is known about the way heroin is trafficked into the European Union. It explores the implications of heroin trafficking on drug consumption levels, with a view to informing policymakers about the actors involved, the routes taken, and the scale of the problem in Europe.

Technical datasheets, available in English at <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/technical-datasheets>

Resources

Useful materials or events on the drugs issue



Drojnet project

The widespread use of the mobile phone and internet among teenagers opens up a whole new opportunity for communication between public administrations and this sector of the public. Drojnet is a European project that evaluates the usefulness of the mobile phone (SMS) and web pages in informing teenagers about drugs and their health effects. The project, which runs until the end of 2008, is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the cross-border project INTERREG-III⁽¹⁾ and three participating regions: La Rioja; Navarra (Spain); and Béarn (France). The results of a recent Drojnet seminar, 'Application of ICT on prevention and treatment of addictions', will be published in the autumn.

(1) <http://interreg3france-espagne.org/sommaire.php3?lang=es>
For more, see <http://www.drojnet.eu>

ELISAD conference

The European association of libraries and information services on alcohol and other drugs (ELISAD) will be holding its 19th annual meeting from 9–11 October in Turin, hosted by Gruppo Abele.

Under the theme 'Addictions information: designing the future', the event will look at the current challenges faced by information professionals (e.g. open source publishing; information literacy; the impact of the internet on scholarship and research; running virtual information services).

The event is open both to ELISAD members and interested public.

For more, see <http://2008elisadmeeting.pbwiki.com/HomePage>

Organisations wishing to publicise their newsletters, magazines, websites, CD-ROMs or any other resources are invited to contact Kathryn.Robertson@emcdda.europa.eu

Calendar 2008

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

EMCDDA meetings

- 2–4 July: EMCDDA Management Board meeting, Lisbon.
- 11–12 September: EMCDDA legal correspondents meeting, Lisbon.
- 15–16 September: EMCDDA expert meeting on treatment demand, Lisbon.
- 7–8 October: EMCDDA expert group on infectious diseases, Lisbon.
- 9–10 October: EMCDDA expert meeting on the prevalence of problem drug use, Lisbon.
- 23–24 October: Heads of EU agencies meeting, EMCDDA, Lisbon.
- 5 November: Presentation of *Annual report* to the European Parliament, Brussels.
- 6 November: EMCDDA *Annual report* press launch, Brussels.
- 17–18 November: EMCDDA Scientific Committee meeting, Lisbon.
- 19–21 November: Reitox heads of focal point meeting, Lisbon.

External meetings

- 15–16 September: 1st global conference on methamphetamine, Prague (<http://www.globalmethconference.com/prague-08/index.php>).
- 9–11 October: 19th annual ELISAD meeting, Turin.
- 20–21 October: ESPAD meeting, Riga (<http://www.espad.org>).

EU meetings

- 29–30 September: Horizontal working party on drugs (HWPPD), Brussels.
- 13–14 October: Horizontal working party on drugs (HWPPD), Brussels.
- 22 October: National drug coordinators meeting, Paris.

Statutory bodies

Management Board approves panel of scientific experts

A panel of experts that will assist the EMCDDA's Scientific Committee in assessing the risks of new psychoactive substances was approved by the Management Board at its meeting in Lisbon from 2–4 July (1). In line with the Council Decision 2005/387/JHA on the information exchange, risk assessment and control of new psychoactive substances, the Scientific Committee may be extended to include experts from scientific fields not (or not fully) covered by the Committee. It may also be extended to include experts from the European Commission, Europol and the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

Also discussed at the meeting was an action plan following up on recommendations made in the report of the latest external evaluation of the EMCDDA, released in December 2007. Finally, in the area of the agency's international relations, the Director was mandated to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding between the EMCDDA and the Ukraine to formalise cooperation.

Monika Blum

(1) Panel details at <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/html.cfm/index35030EN.html>

Continued from page 1

'Overall, recorded cannabis potency has not increased dramatically in Europe in recent years', despite some alarmist reports to the contrary, say the experts. The Δ^9 -tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content of herbal cannabis and cannabis resin imported into Europe has remained relatively stable over the last decade, with an average potency of around 5%.

'But that is not to say that cannabis potency is a non-issue', the experts add. Clearly what has changed since the early 1990s in Europe is the appearance of high-strength herbal cannabis, domestically grown by intensive techniques, often with potencies of over 12%. Home-grown 'sinsemilla', generally stronger than imported herbal cannabis, now comprises approximately half of the herbal market in Ireland, most of it in the Netherlands and almost all of it in the UK.

While media reports have tended to concentrate on the high-potency cases, the monograph stresses the 'wide range in recorded cannabis potency' in Europe. Potency can vary between different cannabis products (herbal, resin, oil), between different samples or even within the same sample. According to the study: 'The evidence from Europe does not support the widespread claims that cannabis potency is now 10 or more times greater than it was in earlier periods'.

For the monograph, promotional flyer, summary and news release, see: <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/events/2008/26june>