



## NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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### TREATMENT DATABASE PROVIDES NEW UNDERSTANDING OF DRUG PROBLEM

### Over 20 countries analyse 150,000 drug treatment cases to identify trends and profiles

(26.6.2003) Scientists from over 20 countries in Europe and worldwide met at the **EU drugs agency** in Lisbon this week for their annual meeting to examine the profiles and characteristics of people seeking treatment for drug problems.

Information of this kind is collected via the **EMCDDA's** 'treatment demand indicator', one of the agency's longest established and most comprehensive tools for monitoring the drug problem. Knowing more about who is seeking treatment for drugs, and where, is a crucial measure of trends and prevalence in problem drug use. It also allows countries to assess the potential future need for drug treatment services. And, by studying how demands for treatment are affected by drug epidemics, statistical modelling (mathematical) techniques increasingly offer the potential to track new and emerging ones.

'Data is now available from over 150,000 people across Europe demanding treatment every year for drug problems', says **Georges Estievenart, Executive Director of the EMCDDA**. 'This provides us with a powerful tool for planning responses as it helps us to understand the individual characteristics of these drug users, their drugs of choice and patterns of drug use – this is essential information'.

The significance of data on treatment demand is also attracting increasing international attention. This week's meeting provided a forum for European scientists to meet with their counterparts from the UN, Canada and the US, to focus on how best to improve the quality of data gathered in this area, share experiences and identify common trends in the global problem. It was also the first time that the new EU acceding countries, many of which have serious and developing drug problems, had the opportunity to join the EU treatment demand expert group.

The meeting concluded with an agreement on:

- ways to further develop and harmonise treatment data-collection mechanisms;
- the need to further analyse data by applying statistical techniques;
- ways to work together to identify and explain important emerging trends in problem drug use; and
- a new project to develop a better understanding of the rising demands for treatment for cannabis-related problems.

### Drug treatment demand in Europe

Heroin remains the drug at the centre of most treatment interventions. The proportion of European heroin users who are injecting has fallen, as heroin smoking has gained in popularity. But a worrying trend is that a few countries report in their new data some increased new injecting.

Recent data show, in many European countries, a rise in clients demanding treatment for cannabis-related problems. A number of factors may play a role here, such as the introduction of new treatment facilities aimed at young people; a possible increase in treatment referrals from criminal justice agencies; and changes in patterns of cannabis use, possibly including more intensive use in some groups. The EMCDDA has launched an analytical study to better understand this issue.

In some areas, demand for cocaine treatment also appears to be on the rise, although services for stimulant users are often less well-developed and the number of cocaine users in treatment overall remains low.

### A common language

Improving access to drug treatment in the **EU** Member States is one of the six targets of the **EU** action plan on drugs (2000–2004). Specifically it stresses the need 'to increase substantially the number of successfully treated addicts'.

The EMCDDA's treatment demand indicator is one of five of the agency's key indicators (see notes) allowing drug data to be collected in a uniform way across the EU. The indicators have been endorsed as the foundation of a Europe-wide databank to allow new trends and developments in drug problems to be identified and to provide a sound evidence base for policy-making and action. The instruments offer countries a set of common tools on which to base drug-related policy and to facilitate a European level dialogue on the drug problem.

Commenting on the meeting, **EMCDDA Management Board Chairman, Marcel Reimen** said: 'Increasingly we have an understanding of Europe's drug problem through the five EMCDDA indicators. These provide us not only with a common language for interpreting the nature of our shared problem, but also offer an important tool to assist Member States in developing common responses.'

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### Notes for editors

This year the EMCDDA is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was set up in 1993 to support the EU and its Member States by collecting 'objective, reliable and comparable information on drugs and drug addiction'.

Improving the comparability of data across the Member States is a central task of the EMCDDA. The agency develops and recommends new methods and instruments in order to collect and analyse harmonised, good quality data at European level. The EU action plan on drugs (2000–2004) calls for Member States to provide reliable and comparable information on five key epidemiological indicators according to the EMCDDA's recommended technical tools and guidelines.

The EMCDDA five key indicators are:

- prevalence and patterns of drug use among the general population (population surveys);
- prevalence and patterns of problem drug use (statistical prevalence/incidence estimates and surveys among drug users);
- drug-related infectious diseases (prevalence and incidence rates of HIV, hepatitis B and C in injecting drug users);
- drug-related deaths and mortality of drug users (general population mortality special registers statistics, and mortality cohort studies among drug users);
- demand for drug treatment (statistics from drug treatment centres on clients starting treatment).

For more, see [http://www.emcdda.org/situation/methods\\_tools/key\\_indicators.shtml](http://www.emcdda.org/situation/methods_tools/key_indicators.shtml)