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Drugnet Europe

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EMCDDA–Europol amphetamine review

Increased capacity and sophistication in the illicit amphetamine market are among the developments reviewed in the latest EMCDDA–Europol analysis *Amphetamine: a European Union perspective in the global context* (1). Published on 15 December, the report describes changing patterns and trends in the production and trafficking of this widely used synthetic stimulant as well as the chemicals used in its manufacture. The report looks at the people and organisations involved and the scale of the problem in a global context.

According to the report, amphetamine can be termed a ‘European drug’, with data suggesting Europe to be the world’s number one producer of the substance and a major consumer market. While, globally, methamphetamine is more widely used, amphetamine has stabilised as the most widely consumed stimulant drug in Europe today after cocaine. And in many countries, especially in the north and east of Europe, it is the second most widely used illicit drug after cannabis. This suggests that, although the drug attracts much less attention in the media and policy circles than cannabis, cocaine or heroin, it should not be treated as a ‘secondary issue’.

Around 12.5 million Europeans have used amphetamines in their lifetime, some 2 million having used it in the last year. European amphetamine markets are therefore ‘highly profitable business opportunities’ for organised crime, states the report.

Distinct production and trafficking areas (‘criminal hubs’) are outlined in the study. Large-scale production and organised crime involvement are found mainly in northern Europe, notably in the ‘north-west criminal hub’ (centred on the Netherlands and to a lesser extent Belgium), where there are signs of increased yield and professionalism. Significant production and trafficking of the drug also occurs in the ‘north-east hub’, notably in Poland, where production is reported to be on the rise. Meanwhile, the south-east hub (Bulgaria, Turkey) is thought to be the main source of ‘captagon’, although there are signs that manufacturing could be relocating closer to established consumer markets for this product in the Near and Middle East.

Commenting, EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz said: ‘Amphetamine is a drug warranting careful



ECDC and EMCDDA launch enquiry into HIV outbreaks.

HIV rapid risk assessment

‘There is a continuous need to keep public health and sufficient preventive services on the agenda in challenging economic times’. So states an EMCDDA–ECDC rapid risk assessment report published in January: *HIV in injecting drug users in the EU/EEA* (1).

In 2011, Greece and Romania witnessed a significant increase in HIV case reports and prevalence among injecting drug users (see *2011 Annual report*). On 15 November, the European Commission called on the agencies to conduct a joint rapid enquiry, among their HIV surveillance and drug focal points, into whether such increases had also occurred elsewhere.

The assessment, undertaken on 29 November, revealed that most European countries reported no changes in the rate of newly diagnosed cases of HIV or HIV prevalence in injecting drug users in 2010/2011. Six countries, however, documented slight increases, while others reported rises in injecting risk behaviour or low coverage of prevention services among IDUs. Combined, these factors may indicate a risk for increased HIV transmission and future outbreaks. The report concludes: ‘These countries would benefit from critically reviewing their national prevention and control programmes’.

From 25–27 January, the EMCDDA hosted a workshop on regional HIV monitoring, organised by ECDC and international partners (UNAIDS, WHO). This aimed to provide countries with technical support for monitoring their HIV responses and reporting progress to regional and international bodies. The EMCDDA will contribute to the reporting exercise with drug-related data from the Reitox network in a move to reduce countries’ reporting burden.

(1) www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint-publications/hiv-injecting-drug-users2011

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January–March

2012

New psychoactive substances

Range of tools needed to counter threat of emerging drugs

'The speed at which new psychoactive substances can appear and be distributed now challenges the established procedure of passing legislation to control a substance in each country'. This is according to *Responding to new psychoactive substances*, the latest EMCDDA *Drugs in focus* briefing launched on 14 December (1). The briefing describes how policymakers are demanding 'new, faster and effective ways of drug control' that will protect public health and deter suppliers from circumventing controls. It notes that drug laws are not the only means available to meet the challenges posed by these substances.

New psychoactive substances are defined as narcotic or psychotropic drugs that are not controlled by United Nations Conventions, but which may pose a public health threat comparable to that posed by controlled drugs. The briefing describes some of the practical and legal obstacles facing Member States when responding to such new substances. Testing products can be time-consuming and expensive which can hinder timely and targeted responses by legislators. New drugs may pose health and other risks to individuals and the general public, yet hard data on these may initially be lacking. Legislative procedures to bring a substance under the control of the drug law can take over a year in some countries. And controlling a substance may have unintended consequences, such as the emergence of a more harmful, non-controlled replacement.

'Member States require the capacity to rapidly identify and scientifically evaluate the

increasingly diverse and complex new substances appearing on the market,' said EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz. 'Their response mechanisms should be optimised to act effectively and efficiently to protect public health with the minimum adverse consequences; control under drug law is one of various options that can achieve this'.

Underlined in the briefing is the importance of national early-warning systems in detecting and identifying new substances as the first step towards assessing the risks of, and ultimately controlling, potentially dangerous new drugs. National risk-assessment systems are described as lending key support to the legislative process by sending 'accurate and credible messages' to the public about potential threats.

The briefing illustrates how faster processes have been introduced in some countries to overcome procedural delays in placing a new drug under control. These include establishing emergency systems, that enable a substance to be placed under temporary controls, or fast-track systems placing substances under permanent control by shortening the consultation periods in the law-making process.

'Speed of reaction may be more important than severity', states the briefing. Existing laws in areas such as consumer protection or medicines might also be considered as options and have already been used to stop the open distribution of new drugs.



Photo: istockphoto.com

Speed of reaction may be more important than severity

'Striking the right balance between swiftness of response to new substances, on the one hand, and sufficient scientific evidence and legislative supervision, on the other, is an important policy goal', it concludes.

Looking to the future, the European Commission, in cooperation with EU Member States, the EMCDDA and Europol, is working on new legislation to better address the control of new psychoactive substances throughout the EU.

Brendan Hughes

(1) *Drugs in focus* No 22, available in 25 languages at www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/drugs-in-focus

Second international forum on new drugs

The EMCDDA and the United States National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) are joining forces to host the Second international forum on new and emerging psychoactive substances, to be held in Palm Springs (CA) from 8–9 June (1). The rapid emergence of new drugs and the global nature of the phenomenon highlight the importance of international cooperation in this area.

The First international multidisciplinary forum on new drugs, organised by the EMCDDA in May 2011, gathered experts from a wide range of disciplines to review global developments in the new drugs and 'legal high' phenomenon. Participants from 40 nations discussed how

a broad range of new drugs had begun to be used in their countries and how policies had been developed in response (2). This year's forum will focus on new and emerging synthetic and natural drugs, such as synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists (e.g. Spice) and stimulants (e.g. cathinones). It will be held in conjunction with the 74th NIDA annual meeting.

Liesbeth Vandam and Roumen Sedefov

(1) 2012 NIDA international forum <http://international.drugabuse.gov/>

(2) See conclusions at www.emcdda.europa.eu/news/2011/new-drugs-forum-conclusion and www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/drugnet/online/2011/75/article8

ReDNet–EMCDDA conference



The 'Ever-changing world of psychoactive drugs' is the focus of an international conference to take place in Budapest from 12–13 March (1). The event is an initiative of the EU-funded Recreational Drugs European Network (ReDNet) project and the EMCDDA. This conference will offer an opportunity to share scientific knowledge on the nature of new compounds and the clinical and legal challenges faced by multidisciplinary professionals today.

(1) For more, see: www.rednetproject.eu/conference/

Responses

First European quality standards to improve drug prevention in the EU

'Prevention' is one of the first issues to be mentioned in the public debate on drugs, but evidence of what works in practice to prevent drug use is often overlooked. On 9 December, the EMCDDA launched the first European 'how to' guide on conducting high-quality drug prevention. Entitled *European drug prevention quality standards: a manual for prevention professionals*, it was presented at the 2nd International Conference of the European Society for Prevention Research (EUSPR), hosted by the EMCDDA in Lisbon (1).

Developing and implementing best practice in drug prevention in Europe are goals set by the current EU drug strategy and action plan. In line with these goals, the manual is the culmination of a two-year project to assess existing guidance in this area and to meet the need for a commonly agreed European framework to improve drug prevention in the EU.

With support from the European Commission, the project is the fruit of collaboration between the seven organisations of the 'Prevention Standards Partnership', working closely with the EMCDDA (2). Bridging science, policy and practice, over 400 international, European and national experts and stakeholders contributed to developing the standards via a dynamic process involving focus groups, consultations and studies.

EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz said: 'The new manual summarises current evidence on how to conduct good drug prevention in the EU. The aim of the quality standards is not to standardise prevention



New manual summarises current evidence on how to conduct good drug prevention in the EU

practice across Europe, but rather to achieve a similar level of high quality, while acknowledging diversity of practice'.

'Implementing prevention measures correctly with evidence-based components will help ensure effectiveness and efficiency of funding and avoid unintended harmful effects', he adds. 'The manual will provide valuable guidance in this respect and allow preventive interventions to reach their full potential'.

Gregor Burkhardt

(1) For more, see www.emcdda.europa.eu/news/2011/10 and www.emcdda.europa.eu/news/2011/11

(2) See project website www.cph.org.uk/drugprevention

EMCDDA–WCO cooperation

'We are facing a growing challenge to the way we protect our citizens from drug trafficking and the collateral damage that it brings with it', said EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz in Brussels on 25 January on the eve of International Customs Day (1). Addressing participants at the opening of the World Customs Organization's 'Global forum on combating illicit drug trafficking and related threats', he spoke of the 'many opportunities' but also the 'new threats' brought by our modern joined-up world. 'Drug trafficking

and the trafficking of precursor chemicals, together with the related issues of money laundering and corruption, are foremost amongst these', he said. The EMCDDA contributed to the debate with a presentation entitled: 'The patterns of supply and demand for narcotics are constantly evolving, requiring sustained monitoring and dynamic responses in Europe'.

(1) For more, see www.emcdda.europa.eu/news/2012/speeches/WCO and www.emcdda.europa.eu/about/partners/wco

Best practice portal: bridging the gap

One of the added values of the EMCDDA's Best practice portal is the synthesis of available evidence on the effects of drug demand reduction interventions. Having developed a systematic process for updating and grading the quality of evidence in the portal, the EMCDDA will take another step forward in 2012, with a new project to identify knowledge gaps and highlight topics for further investigation in this area.

This 'gap-analysis project' will proactively garner unanswered questions arising from the day-to-day experiences of decision-makers, practitioners and clients. It will also identify topics for the development of guidelines.

The project, which is now in its protocol phase, encompasses a literature review and exploratory interviews with individual practitioners and clients from across Europe. The project will result in a structured overview of available information and recommendations for bridging the identified gaps. Preliminary results will be presented to the EMCDDA Scientific Committee in May.

Marina Davoli and Marica Ferri
(bestpractice@emcdda.europa.eu)



EUFAS visit to EMCDDA

Professor Karl Mann, President of the European Federation of Addiction Societies (EUFAS), visited the EMCDDA in December to discuss with Director Wolfgang Götz the potential for future collaboration between the two bodies. The EMCDDA and EUFAS share a number of interests with regard to treatment and prevention, best practice and addiction research (1). Areas of possible coordination and mutual assistance will now be drawn up for further consideration. The EMCDDA will participate in the third EUFAS annual meeting to be held this autumn in Berlin.

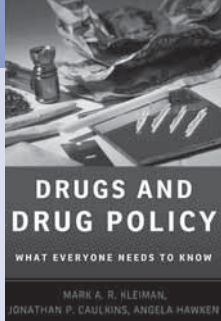
Roland Simon

(1) For more, see www.eufas.net

Bookshelf

Drugs and drug policy

What everyone needs to know



Drugs and drug policy is a recent edition in the 'What everyone needs to know' series from Oxford University Press. Written by

three noted authorities on the subject, the book opens by defining 'drugs', exploring how they work on the brain, discussing the nature of addiction and examining the damage they do to users. The book then moves on to policy, answering questions on legalisation, the role of criminal prohibitions and the relative legal tolerance for alcohol and tobacco.

In further sections, the authors dissect the illicit drug trade, from street dealers to kingpins, and show the precise nature of the relationship between drugs and crime.

They also examine treatment and discuss the beneficial effects of some abusable substances. Finally, the book pans outward, looking at the role of drugs in foreign policy and their relationship to terrorism.

Written in the form of a question-and-answer guidebook, the work provides an up-to-date overview of the subject.

Authors: Kleiman, M.A.R., Caulkins, J.P., Hawken, A.

Publisher: Oxford University Press, New York

Language: English

Date: June 2011

ISBN 13: 978-01-9976-451-8

ISBN 10: 0199764514

Price: USD 16.95 (paperback)

Ordering information:

www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/series

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.

2012 work programme

New developmental areas supplement core analysis

The EMCDDA's 2012 work programme, adopted by the Management Board in December 2011, is designed to achieve two objectives. On the one hand, it seeks to ensure delivery on commitments detailed in the agency's three-year strategy and work plan (2010–12). On the other, it helps lay sound foundations for the agency to meet the challenges of the next triennial period (2013–15). 2012 is therefore an important year for both planning and substantive activities.

The work programme is structured around seven substantive areas aimed at monitoring and reporting on the drugs problem in Europe. A number of new developmental areas have also been introduced this year, supplementing the core analysis provided through the EMCDDA's annual reporting exercise. These include the further development of cross-indicator analysis and the exploration of potential new data sources on drug treatment and harm reduction. Also proposed is the analysis of existing information on prevention services for minorities.

2012 — an important year for both planning and substantive activities

In 2012, particular attention will be paid to the further improvement of quality assurance mechanisms related to data collection and analysis. Also, a new key indicator assessment will be carried out to evaluate progress and support further methodological developments. To ensure a better understanding of the availability, accessibility and quality of responses to drug use in Europe, several thematic publications will be released.

Technical work started in 2010 (in close cooperation with the European Commission) to develop European key indicators in the area of drug supply and supply reduction will reach a final stage in 2012 with the joint organisation of the second European conference on supply indicators. This event should allow a consensus to be reached at European level on key indicators to be developed and implemented from 2013 onwards.



In 2012, attention will be paid to the further improvement of quality assurance mechanisms related to data collection and analysis

Another priority for 2012 will be the ongoing implementation of the European early-warning system on new psychoactive substances and its supporting database and tools. One important aspect is the further scaling-up of activities that will improve Europe's capacity to monitor and evaluate drug policies. Work in this area will be structured around three linked themes: the legal basis for drug policies and how laws are implemented; monitoring policy development and supporting policy evaluation; and understanding better the economic aspects of European drug policies.

Finally, in the area of governance, a central activity will be the development of the next three-year strategy and work programme (2013–15). To be considered in this exercise will be the findings of the external evaluation of the agency (due in April 2012), as well as the implications of the future policy framework that will supersede the current EU drug strategy and its action plans. The Management Board adopted a total budget of EUR 16 065 709 for the EMCDDA in 2012.

Monika Blum and Narcisa Murgea

Available in English at:
www.emcdda.europa.eu/work-programmes/2012
(see also page 7).

International

EMCDDA IPA 3 project in Serbia

A new Country overview, EMCDDA publications in Serbian and enhanced stakeholder engagement are among the many outcomes of the EMCDDA's technical assistance project in Serbia, which came to a close in November 2011. Serbia was one of eight candidate and potential candidate countries to the EU which received EMCDDA assistance under a two-year project (IPA 3) to establish national drug information systems in line with EU standards (1). Under the project, representatives of EU national focal points (NFPs), or 'Reitox coaches', assisted 'national correspondents' in running activities in their country according to EU norms. In the case of Serbia, this coaching function was carried out by the Cyprus NFP.

In the course of IPA 3, seminars organised by the Serbian Ministry of Health and supported by the EU looked at ways to strengthen cooperation between the EMCDDA and Serbia and explored perspectives for setting up a national drug information system. In 2011, Serbian experts participated in Reitox training activities, while a Serbian study visit to the Cyprus NFP offered key insights into the functioning of a Reitox focal point. By the end of the project, 1 000 Serbian prevention and treatment experts had been informed on the importance of cooperation with the EMCDDA. At the IPA 3 closing seminar in Brussels in October, national representatives presented the country's drug situation and methodological advances.

*Biljana Kilibarda, IPA 3 national correspondent for Serbia
Neoklis Georgiades, Reitox coach, Cyprus NFP*

(1) http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/instrument-pre-accession_en.htm

Partners

Enhancing EMCDDA–ESPAD cooperation

The EMCDDA and the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) are scaling up their cooperation in monitoring substance use among 15- to 16-year-old school students. Their commitment was underlined in a joint statement adopted at the 2011 ESPAD project meeting, hosted by the EMCDDA in Lisbon (27–29 November) (1).

ESPAD data provide crucial information on substance use among school students of this age and are routinely included in the EMCDDA's annual reporting on the drug situation in Europe. In the statement, the partners agreed to boost technical cooperation to enhance understanding of long-term drug use trends in Europe.

Cooperation between the EMCDDA and ESPAD began in the mid-1990s and was formalised by a 'cooperation framework' agreed in 2007. Based on the encouraging experiences to date, the two partners reaffirmed in November the long-term value to be achieved through close collaboration and the sharing of expertise. Among others, they agreed to: develop an enhanced dissemination strategy for ESPAD findings and work together to ensure harmonisation of methods and support methodological developments. In 2012, the partners will be collaborating, for the second time, in a joint multilingual publishing project to disseminate the key results of the latest ESPAD survey (2011). This summary, in 23 languages, is scheduled to be released before summer.

Deborah Olszewski

(1) See joint statement at www.emcdda.europa.eu/about/partners/espada and Fact sheet at www.emcdda.europa.eu/news/2011/fs-6

Drugs-Lex

Romania passes law to curb distribution of new psychoactive substances

Laws which make distributing or advertising new psychoactive substances a criminal offence have been passed in a number of European countries in recent years (e.g. Ireland and Poland in 2010). Meanwhile, other Member States (e.g. Italy, Finland) have used existing consumer safety or medicines legislation to prevent their open sale.

In February 2011, as a rapid response, a Romanian government order set up multidisciplinary teams to target environments where 'harmful unregulated psychoactive substances' were being distributed or consumed (1). Bringing together representatives from ministries (e.g. health, interior, agriculture) and health and consumer protection agencies, the group was tasked to enforce all existing laws in their respective fields to stem the distribution of these substances.

These included health laws banning smoking in public places and consumer safety laws prohibiting the inaccurate labelling of products. The government order also foresaw a law that would better define the substances detected and grant the authorities more legislative power to control them.

Responding to the continued rise in the consumption of new psychoactive substances, Romania passed this expected law at the end of 2011. Under this law, a specific permit is required to sell any product likely to provoke psychoactive effects similar to those caused by substances controlled under drug laws (2). These effects are defined as those provoking 'changes in functions and mental processes and behaviour', or 'causing dependency'. Unlike the earlier government order, the new law makes no specific reference to 'harmful' substances.

Under the new legislation, the distribution of an unregulated psychoactive substance without a permit (particularly if consumption was likely), could result in 1–3 years in prison when the psychoactive effects are unknown but likely. The sentence increases to 2–8 years when the psychoactive effects are known. Advertising the psychoactive effects of the substance is punishable by 1–3 years in prison. Claiming that the products are lawful is punishable by 3–10 years, perhaps in response to the popular misnomer 'legal highs'. There is no penalty for the possession of these substances for the purpose of use.

Brendan Hughes and Bogdan Iasnic

(1) Government order of 16 February 2011 www.dreptonline.ro/monitorul_oficial/monitor_oficial.php?id_monitor=8243

(2) Law 194/2011 of 10 November 2011 www.dreptonline.ro/legislatie/legea_194_2011_combaterea_operatiunilor_produce_susceptibile_efecte_psihoactive.php

Spotlight

European summer school on illicit drugs



Photo: istockphoto.com

The Lisbon-based *Instituto Superior das Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa* (ISCTE) and the EMCDDA are currently collaborating on a summer school programme entitled: 'Illicit drugs in Europe: supply, demand and public policies'. Registration opened on 15 December for the course, which will take place in Lisbon from 2–13 July.

During the two-week programme, EMCDDA scientific experts, ISCTE-professors and policymakers will prepare participants to meet the complex policy challenges in this field. They will do so via a multidisciplinary and inclusive approach to the study of the drugs problem, both in Europe and beyond.

Week 1 of the summer school focuses on 'Defining the problems' and will feature lectures on 'Problem drug use in Europe', 'Drug supply in Europe' and 'Detecting new drugs'. Week 2 explores 'Understanding drug policies and interventions' with lectures on '(Inter)national drug policies', 'Prison health', 'Preventing drug use' and 'Harm reduction'.

The target audiences for the summer school are university students (undergraduate and graduate), researchers, professionals and administrators interested or working in the drugs field. ECTS credits will be given for the courses and students can transfer credits to other European universities using the ECTS-system.

Further information on the summer school programme, fees and location is available at www.drugsummerschool.cies.iscte-iul.pt

Registration, Phase I: 15 December–15 March (discount); Phase II: 15 March–15 June.
See Fact sheet at www.emcdda.europa.eu/news/2011/fs-7

Wastewater analysis

EMCDDA launches new multicity project

The EMCDDA has recently launched a multicity 'demonstration project' to investigate the potential of wastewater analysis as an indicator for estimating community drug use levels. By the end of 2012, the project will have generated comparable data from at least 15 European cities, thanks to an agreed common sampling approach designed to ensure maximum comparability. The project partners met in Lisbon on 19 January to establish a project work plan and key deliverables (1).

By sampling a known source of wastewater — for example, a sewage influent to a wastewater treatment plant — scientists can now obtain estimates of the total quantity of drugs consumed by a community by measuring the levels of illicit drug metabolites excreted in urine (2). This demonstration project will provide comparable information in real time on weekly patterns of use, trends and changing consumption habits in the participating cities.



Photo: istockphoto.com

Wastewater analysis: a useful complement to existing methods for studying drug use trends in Europe

Wastewater analysis is an emerging science. While its methods do not provide the type of detailed consumption data currently yielded by drug surveys, its ability to provide timely estimates of illicit drug consumption in a given population make it a useful complement to existing methods for studying drug use trends in Europe.

Liesbeth Vandam and Ana Gallegos

(1) The project is being undertaken by a consortium of researchers from over 10 European countries.

(2) For more, see www.emcdda.europa.eu/wastewater-analysis

Cooperation with CICAD

Student drug use in the Caribbean

The latest data on drug use among secondary school students in 12 Caribbean countries has recently been published by the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs (OID) (1). The report, launched at the fourth biennial meeting of Caribbean Drug Observatories in Port of Spain (2011), offers a comprehensive, regional analysis of drug use in this group.

The findings demonstrate that, although the participating nations share similar histories and cultures, the dimensions of drug use are quite unique to each country. While alcohol and marijuana are the main drugs of use, patterns still vary widely from country to country. Compared to other regions, the prevalence of marijuana use in the school population in the Caribbean is high, and in some countries, higher than that of tobacco use.

The biennial meeting was hosted by the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) and the Government of

Trinidad and Tobago (2). The EMCDDA participated in the event, providing a refresher course on how to build a national drug observatory and set up a drug information system. Key topics from the EMCDDA and CICAD–OAS joint handbook *Building a national drugs observatory* were illustrated via examples of collaboration between the EMCDDA and the Reitox network and the European experience in data collection on drugs.

In some countries, marijuana use is more prevalent than tobacco use

Sandrine Sleiman

(1) The OID is CICAD's statistical, information and scientific research branch www.cicad.oas.org/oid
Report available at www.cicad.oas.org/Main/pubs/StudentDrugUse-Caribbean2011.pdf

(2) www.cicad.oas.org/oid/caribbean/2011/Report%202011%20Obs%20Meeting.pdf

Products and services

EMCDDA work programme 2012



The EMCDDA's 2012 work programme takes forward activities begun in 2010 to implement the EMCDDA's three-year strategy (2010–12). This strategy seeks to: consolidate and deepen the analysis of core data sets held at the EMCDDA; invest in more complex and policy-relevant analysis; and develop a small number of new areas of strategic importance. Now available online, this year's work programme sets out the agency's specific objectives accompanied by their related activities and expected outcomes. This new structure is the result of the ongoing rationalisation of planning processes and procedures taking place at the EMCDDA.

Available in English at www.emcdda.europa.eu/work-programmes/2012

Kratom added to online 'drug profiles'

The EMCDDA released in February the latest in its series of online drug profiles. The new profile is of kratom, the name given to tree and leaf preparations of the South-east Asian tree *Mitragyna speciosa*. The main psychoactive components in the leaves are mitragynine and 7-hydroxymitragynine. Traditionally, the leaves are chewed or made into tea but are seldom smoked. At a low dose, kratom has stimulant effects and is used to combat fatigue during long working hours. At high dosages, it can have sedative-narcotic effects. Kratom is used in traditional medicine and as an opium substitute. It was the most commonly found substance sold through online new drugs/'legal highs' shops in an EMCDDA assessment ('snapshot') carried out in July 2011.

Drug profiles in German, English and French at www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/drug-profiles (see Online snapshot at www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/scientific-studies/2011/snapshot).

New Insights on heroin-assisted treatment — coming soon



Supervised injectable heroin (SIH) treatment has emerged over the last 15 years as a potentially important second-line treatment for entrenched heroin addicts for whom previous orthodox treatments (i.e. oral methadone maintenance treatment or residential rehabilitation) have produced little benefit. This treatment, by its very nature, attracts attention and controversy. The EMCDDA examines the evidence base for the effectiveness of this treatment in an upcoming edition in its Insights series: *New heroin-assisted treatment: recent evidence and current practices of supervised injectable heroin treatment in Europe and beyond*. The publication will offer a historical overview of SIH, including related international policy and

legislation, before moving on to examine the research evidence and clinical and policy experience with this new treatment.

Available in English at www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/insights

Thematic paper on 'drug mules' — coming soon

The latest EMCDDA thematic paper aims to determine whether a common definition of 'drug mules' can be developed in the European context. The implications of this for data gathering and future research are assessed in the document.

Available in English at www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/thematic-papers

Resources

Events and materials on the drugs issue

HIV in Europe

'Working together for optimal testing and earlier care', is the focus of the third 'HIV in Europe' conference to be held in Copenhagen from 19–20 March. 'HIV in Europe' is a pan-European initiative launched in 2007 to inform processes, share knowledge and improve the evidence base around important issues of earlier testing and care in relation to HIV. The event, which will gather around 300 European stakeholders, will include discussions on the implementation of European and national testing guidelines.



For more, see www.hiveurope.eu

ISSDP annual conference

The sixth annual conference of the International Society for the Study of Drug Policy (ISSDP) will take place in Canterbury (UK) from 30–31 May. The event, hosted by the University of Kent, will discuss a wide range of drug policy issues, with a particular focus on: 'How can and do empirical studies influence drug policy?'. A plenary session will be devoted to discussions on the report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy.

For more, see www.issdp.org/conferences.php

International AIDS conference

'Turning the tide together' is the title of the XIX International AIDS conference to take place in Washington DC from 22–27 July 2012. The AIDS 2012 programme will present new scientific knowledge and offer opportunities for structured dialogue on the major issues facing the global response to HIV. The event will include a variety of session types, from abstract-driven presentations to symposia, bridging and plenary sessions. Other related activities include a 'Global village', satellite meetings, exhibitions and affiliated independent events.

For more, see www.aids2012.org

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

Calendar 2012

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

- 25–27 January: Workshop on global and regional HIV monitoring, ECDC/EMCDDA, Lisbon (ecdc.europa.eu/en/press/events/Pages/Events.aspx).
- 22–23 February: Reitox Academy on 'Residential treatment for drug users in Europe', Lisbon.
- 12–13 March: International conference 'The ever-changing world of psychoactive drugs', ReDNet/EMCDDA, Budapest (www.rednetproject.eu/conference).
- 24 April: EMCDDA expert meeting 'Monitoring the uptake of HCV treatment among IDUs in Europe', Lisbon.

External meetings

- 9 February: Heads of EU agencies meeting, coordination of the agencies, Brussels.
- 9–10 February: ESPAD steering group meeting, Stockholm (www.espad.org).
- 16 February: 3rd Ministerial conference of the Paris Pact on combating the Afghan illicit opiate trade, UNODC, Vienna (www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2012/unisinf436.html).
- 7–9 March: EFCAP Congress 2012, Berlin (www.efcap2012.de).
- 12–16 March: Fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Vienna (www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND).
- 19–20 March: 'HIV in Europe' conference, Panum Institute, Copenhagen (www.hiveurope.eu).
- 27–29 March: New methodology tools for policy and programme evaluation, University Rome Tor Vergata, Rome.

EU meetings

- 6 February: Horizontal working party on drugs, Brussels.
- 5 March: Horizontal working party on drugs, Brussels.
- 6 March: EU–LAC technical meeting, Brussels.
- 18 April: Horizontal working party on drugs, Brussels.
- 19 April: EU–LAC technical meeting, Brussels.

Statutory bodies

Quality of EMCDDA outputs commended

The EMCDDA's continued commitment to improving the level and quality of its scientific outputs was commended by the agency's Scientific Committee which met in Lisbon from 14–15 November. At the meeting, the Committee endorsed the EMCDDA's 2012 work programme, welcoming its references to improved planning and risk-management processes in the light of the current economic climate.

The role of the EMCDDA in promoting research and monitoring in Europe was also discussed at the meeting, as was the ongoing external evaluation of the agency being undertaken by the Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (UK). In the margins of the meeting, and on the eve of the 2011 *Annual report* launch (14 November), the EMCDDA and Scientific Committee hosted the 2011 EMCDDA Scientific paper award. Five scientific papers judged to enhance understanding of the European drugs problem were acclaimed at this inaugural event.

Maria Moreira

EMCDDA–Europol amphetamine review

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attention, despite the fact that its use has remained relatively stable in most European countries over the past decade. With this publication, we hope to enhance the understanding of an often overlooked, but nevertheless key, component of the European scene for stimulant drugs'.

Amphetamine can be produced at relatively low cost, close to consumer markets. More problematic for the illicit producer, however, is obtaining the precursor chemicals required to manufacture the drug (e.g. BMK). The report notes how increasingly effective international efforts to control the trade in precursors have prompted some illicit manufacturers to bypass regulations by synthesising, rather than purchasing, precursors from so-called 'pre-precursors', or by masking them as other non-controlled chemicals before importation. Seizures of the pre-precursor phenylacetic acid (a precursor of BMK), rose sharply in 2009, with a total of almost 42 tonnes confiscated worldwide (160 kg in 2008). While amphetamine is often seen as a 'poor man's cocaine', being the cheaper of the two drugs, the lower price in times of recession could increase its appeal to potential users.

'This joint report comes as a strong reminder of the growing threat posed by synthetic drugs', said Cecilia Malmström, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs. 'A better understanding of the amphetamines market — production, trafficking and use — seems crucial for a more effective and intelligent policy response'.

Laurent Laniel

(1) See news release at www.emcdda.europa.eu/news/2011/13