



NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

EVALUATION OF THE EU STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN ON DRUGS (2000–2004)

'Snapshots' shed light on EU targets

(26.10.2004) When European leaders endorsed the EU drug strategy (2000–2004) they committed themselves to six targets addressing the drug phenomenon. As the **European Commission** presents its Communication on the evaluation of the EU strategy and action plan on drugs in **Luxembourg** ⁽¹⁾, the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA)** and **Europol** present two 'snapshots' of the drug situation at the plan's start and close (1999, 2004). The snapshots were designed to help the Commission trace trends between the two study points and shed light on the progress of the EU targets.

The six targets are as follows:

- o **Target 1:** *To reduce significantly over five years the prevalence of illicit drug use, as well as new recruitment to it, particularly among young people under 18 years of age*
- o **Target 2:** *To reduce substantially over five years the incidence of drug-related health damage and the number of drug-related deaths*
- o **Target 3:** *To increase substantially the number of successfully treated addicts*
- o **Target 4:** *To reduce substantially over five years the availability of illicit drugs*
- o **Target 5:** *To reduce substantially over five years the number of drug-related crimes*
- o **Target 6:** *To reduce substantially over five years money-laundering and illicit trafficking of precursors*

'These "before" and "after" pictures allow us to make some important observations on the general nature and direction of trends in this dynamic, evolving European drug situation' says **Marcel Reimen, EMCDDA Chairman**. 'Not only do they help answer questions such as "Has prevalence of drug use among young people increased?" or "Is treatment more available?", but they also provide us with valuable information with which to determine future strategic actions on drugs in the EU'.

Today's snapshot report says that the overall analysis of data reveals both positive and negative conclusions, and evidence on the extent to which the EU targets have been achieved is mixed. However, data suggest that both the strategy and its action plan have been a catalyst for increased and better-coordinated actions on drugs at European level and a useful vehicle for the future coordination and evaluation of European responses to drugs. (The analysis – of data available in 2004 – is restricted to the former **15 EU Member States** and findings do not necessarily reflect current trends in the enlarged EU).

Highlights from today's Snapshot report

Prevalence

- o The report says that, viewed simplistically, available data do not point to a 'significant overall reduction' in drug use prevalence. However they do show the following: levels of heroin use and injecting appear to have stabilised following epidemic rises in the 1980s to mid 1990s and less people are starting these behaviours (EU 15). Generally there has been a levelling off in the upward trend in drug use prevalence observed in the 1990s, although levels remain historically high and specific analyses by country, sub-group or drug type show both rises and falls. But there is concern around rising levels of

polydrug use and signs of new problems linked to the intensive use of cannabis, cocaine and other stimulants. Those most at risk of suffering adverse consequences from their drug use now represent a more heterogeneous group than they did in the 1990s.

- There is no convincing evidence of an overall reduction in the number of young people starting to use drugs and, in some areas, an increase of drug use by young people can be observed. But there are some 'positive elements'. Around half of the reporting countries state that primary prevention programmes now reach more people and have become more structured and evidence-based.

Drug-related health damage and deaths

- Today's data show that in the 15 EU Member States 'a small but statistically significant reduction in deaths' was detectable between 2000 and 2001', possibly due to a stabilisation in heroin use and interventions directly targeting risk behaviour. This trend seems to continue in 2002 although remaining at historically high levels. But stimulant-related deaths may be on the rise in some countries.
- On the whole, findings show that incidence of HIV among injecting drug users has stabilised or is even falling, although rises have been noted in some sub-groups and localities. There is concern that progress in some countries may lead to a deprioritisation of the issue on the public-health agenda, exposing some vulnerable sub-groups to the risk of new infection. Hepatitis B and C infection rates remain consistently high. There have been considerable increases both in the number of syringes distributed and in the coverage achieved by syringe-exchange programmes of the target population.

Treatment

- No tool exists to directly measure at EU level the extent to which drug users are successfully treated. Data point to an overall rise in the number of reported treatment demands between 1999 and 2002 as well as some changes in the profiles of treatment clients (fewer heroin users, more diverse patterns of use/polydrug use). Most countries report increases in treatment availability during the snapshot period. There is good evidence to suggest that service provision has not only expanded (primarily substitution treatment) but also diversified. Although not all those seeking help will be successfully treated, the increase in overall treatment provision is likely to be reflected in more numbers being so.

Drug availability*

- Drug seizures – an indirect indicator of availability – are reported to have increased in most countries in the reporting period, both in number and volume. More positively, there have been considerable activities to improve the coordination and diversity of supply-reduction initiatives, which demonstrates the potential for improving the effectiveness of international co-operation.
- Data on price and purity of illicit drugs – also indirect indicators of availability – show a stabilisation or fall in retail prices in most countries and for most drug types during the study period. (Simplistically it is assumed that the lower the price or the purer the drug, the higher the availability). Also stable were the purities of heroin, cocaine and amphetamine at retail level.
- Cross-indicator analysis does not suggest that the availability of drugs in the EU has been reduced substantially.

Drug-related crime*

- Between 1997 and 2002, the number of reports of offences against national drug legislation (use, possession, trafficking, etc.) increased in most EU countries. There were decreases in some countries in 2002 but data should be interpreted with caution as they might represent short-term fluctuations.

Money-laundering and illicit trafficking*

- The report says that it is impossible to estimate the extent of the proceeds gained from money laundering, but information is available on specific anti-money laundering measures undertaken at EU and national level. Information from money laundering investigations in Member States (EU 15) and reports of suspicious financial transactions and cross-border currency movements provide a crucial prerequisite for a consistent strategy to fight money laundering and reduce its impact in the EU. There was a general increase in number of suspicious transactions during the reporting period.
- In 2001 and 2004 respectively, Europol set up specific projects to target criminal organisations involved in money laundering and related offences and to target money launderers (particularly money couriers) and disrupt criminal cash flows out of the EU to high-risk destinations and source countries. In the context of the action plan, the European Commission and Member States (EU 15) assessed the Community monitoring system of trade in drug precursors. This led to a number of recommendations which are taken on board in two Council Regulations to be applied from August 2005.

Towards a new EU strategy and action plan on drugs

As leaders look forward to the next EU strategy and action plan on drugs post 2004, **EMCDDA Director Georges Estievenart** stresses the essential role that information plays in the definition of policy and evaluation of actions:

‘There are no better means of shedding light on decision-making on drugs than by making available objective information and complementing it with the findings of evaluation’ he says. ‘Evaluation is an essential condition for the transparency and legitimacy of public action and, in the controversial and complex field of drugs, it is a key tool in improving policy’.

Notes

(¹) The ‘Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the results of the final evaluation of the EU drugs strategy and action plan on drugs (2000–2004)’ is presented this week by the European Commission at the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg. The full Communication is available at <http://europa.eu.int>

(²) Today’s **Snapshot report** and a series of **10 EMCDDA Thematic papers** designed to inform the European Commission in its evaluation of the EU strategy and action plan are also released today on the agency’s website. For further details, see <http://snapshot.emcdda.eu.int>

* Targets where **Europol** and the **European Commission** acted as primary data producers with the EMCDDA as secondary producer.