



news release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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2002 Annual report on EU drugs problem: Key trends

EUROPEAN DRUG STRATEGIES NOW HAVE GREATER FOCUS

- ESTIMATES OF PROBLEM DRUG USE ARE BETWEEN 2 AND 9 CASES PER 1000 (POPULATION AGED 15 TO 64)
- RECENT CANNABIS USE WAS REPORTED BY 5 TO 15 % OF YOUNG ADULTS IN THE EU
- ESTIMATES OF INJECTING DRUG USE ARE BETWEEN 2 AND 5 CASES PER 1000 (POPULATION AGED 15 TO 64)
- CONSUMPTION OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS REMAINS A MAJOR CONCERN
- EU COUNTRIES REPORT AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CLIENTS IN TREATMENT
- DRUG-RELATED DEATHS STILL STABLE

Some key points from the *2002 Annual report on the state of the drugs problem in the EU and Norway* from **the Lisbon-based drugs agency, the EMCDDA**. The report, published today, gives an overview of how Europe is responding to the drugs challenge.

[Important note: This news release highlights selected key items from today's report and is meant to be used in conjunction with the report rather than in isolation.]

Key trends

- Cannabis continues to be the most commonly used illegal drug in Europe. Those who have ever taken cannabis range from 10% of adults in **Finland** to 25-30% in **Denmark** and the **UK**. **Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Ireland** and the **Netherlands** all report around 20%. In contrast, latest **USA** data indicate such 'lifetime experience' at 34% of all those aged 12+.
- Most **EU** countries report cannabis use in the last 12 months of 5-10 % but up to 18% among young adults. However, cannabis use seems to be levelling or even falling among young people in some countries, such as **Ireland, the Netherlands, Finland** and **Norway**, despite rises in the other **EU** countries.
- Use of other drugs is much less common, among both the young and generally. Drug use is more common among men than women. But the gap is narrower among the young.

- Amphetamines have been tried by 1-6% of the population, depending on Member State – but 11% in the **UK**. Figures for cocaine and ecstasy are 0.5-4.5%; for heroin generally less than 1%, although may reach 2-3% for young men in some countries.
- Past-year use of amphetamines, cocaine or ecstasy is generally less than 1% of adults.
- Consumption of synthetic drugs remains a major concern. Although users represent less than 3% of the general population, there is a particular and worrying concentration among young people in nightlife and dance settings.

Drugs agency management board chairman Mike Trace notes that the recent improvements in the European Union Member States have articulated the objectives of drug policy and the actions we are taking to achieve them. The challenge now is to successfully implement these actions and honestly review their impact.

The demand for drugs

- Estimates of **EU** problem drug use (see footnote 1) vary from 2-10 cases per 1 000 population aged 15-64. Highest, at 6-8 per 1 000, are in **Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal** and **UK**; lowest in **Austria, Germany** and the **Netherlands**, with about 3 per 1 000.
- In 2000, an **EU**-wide rise in the overall number of people treated for drug problems was reported – in part because of improved data. Numbers seeking treatment for heroin addiction appear stable or falling. Polydrug use is increasingly apparent. Use of cannabis as a secondary drug is marked in those using opiates. Cocaine consumption is reported as an increasing **EU** problem – playing a key role as a secondary drug combined with heroin and alcohol.
- Those seeking treatment have very high unemployment rates – in some countries up to 55% – even where the general rate is under 5%. And up to 66% have only attended primary school.
- HIV prevalence among injecting drug users (IDUs) varies from about 1% in the **UK** to 34% in **Spain**. The overall picture has not changed in recent years. AIDS incidence has dropped in most countries since about 1996. **Portugal** remains the **EU** country with the highest yearly incidence of AIDS among IDUs.
- Each year, 7 000 - 8 000 drug-related deaths are reported by **EU** countries, although the real figure is probably higher. In recent years, the number of such deaths has stabilised or decreased. But some **EU** countries (**Germany, Luxembourg** and **Austria**) still report new increases after previous falls. Opiates are mainly to blame. Most overdose victims are young men.

Trying to reduce the supply

- Cannabis is the most-seized drug in every Member State except **Portugal**, where heroin predominates. Since 1996, **Spain** has been seizing more than half the **EU** total.
- In 2000, almost 9 tonnes of heroin were seized – a third in the **UK**.
- After rising steadily since the mid-1980s in the **EU**, cocaine seizures showed a marked fall in 2000. But seizures of amphetamines and ecstasy were up, the latter markedly – reinforcing **EU** concerns about synthetic drug use.
- The price of all illicit drugs is generally stable or falling **EU**-wide but with some rises reported for brown heroin.

Drug policies and strategies

- All national drug strategies now emphasise effective responses to drugs. Schools are a top priority. So are appropriate responses by the judicial system.
- Judicial authorities across the **EU** are deploying a range of methods at different stages to divert offending drug users to treatment. There is increasing effort to document and evaluate alternative responses and a trend to widen the distinction between drug users and other drug law offenders. A number of **EU** countries have chosen to reduce or remove penalties for personal use or possession of cannabis, as distinct from other substances. Despite this, cannabis remained, in 2000, the most common drug involved in arrests – accounting for 37% of such arrests in **Sweden** and up to 85% in **France**.
- The **EMCDDA** has repeatedly warned of the expanding market in synthetic drugs, especially in the nightlife scene, and is in favour of an open debate on appropriate responses. On the controversial issue of on-site pill-testing, the report says its value has been overshadowed by issues of pharmacological accuracy and legal implications.

Drug Agency executive director Georges Estievenart says: 'The **EU** action plan on drugs has contributed to promoting awareness of the need for coordinated activities in Member States. The trend established over the past few years to translate drug policy frameworks into an action plan, drug strategy or policy document has continued, although a gap between the written strategy and its implementation still remains.'

(1) Problem drug use is defined as injecting drug use or long-duration/regular use of opiates, cocaine and/or amphetamines.

- **For full details and context go now to → 2002 Annual report online:**
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