



news release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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Latest EU drugs agency policy briefing

RAPID SPREAD OF ‘FUN’ DRUGS IN EU NIGHTLIFE SCENE DEMANDS INNOVATIVE RESPONSES

Mainly a problem of the young and affluent

Innovative responses are required to tackle the failure to reduce widespread availability of recreational drugs in Europe’s nightlife scene, says the EU drugs agency, the Lisbon-based EMCDDA, in the latest edition in its *Drugs in focus* series, out today.

Entitled ‘Recreational drug use – a key EU challenge’, the document aims to focus the attention of EU policy-makers on the issues involved in this controversial area. It states that ‘reducing the risks run by the growing numbers of mainstream young people in the EU who consume such substances in such settings is a key concern of policy-makers at local, national and international levels’.

It says dance music and ecstasy have ‘spread throughout the EU with the speed and intensity you would expect in the digital age’.

As EMCDDA Management Board Chairman Mike Trace puts it: ‘Recreational drug use, especially of synthetic drugs, is increasingly common. Notably, those using them are not found predominantly among the marginalised or socially deprived but among the young, studious, employed and relatively affluent. Such trends appear to have been established rapidly across the EU.’

Key link with alcohol

Today’s briefing says: ‘Although recreational drug use among the general population is low, use among people in nightlife settings is much higher.’ Rough calculations suggest that between 3 and 3.5 million adults in the EU have tried ecstasy at least once. Of these, some 400 000–500 000 have used it once a week or more over a period of time.

And, adds the drugs agency, ‘The main reasons people give for taking ecstasy are to enjoy dancing and have fun. Other recreational drugs are also taken to boost confidence and energy, or offer new experiences.’ There is, it points out, a ‘key link between drugs and alcohol, which remains the psychoactive substance most frequently used for recreational purposes’.

Policy considerations

This briefing comes up with six areas that, it suggests, should be of particular concern to **EU** policy-makers:

1. The relatively high level of drug use in recreational nightlife settings requires targeted and specific responses. In turn, these demand targeted research into patterns and contexts of use, risk perception and responses.
2. The entertainment and alcohol industries should be monitored and involved in measures to curtail the supply and promotion of, and demand for, harmful psychoactive substances, including alcohol, to young people.
3. The consequences and risks of recreational drug use should be scientifically assessed. Appropriate responses should be made by the social and health sectors. We need to know more about the long-term risks of drug use.
4. To reduce individual and public health risks, realistic responses in nightlife settings need to focus on providing personalised, evidence-based and balanced information, especially about the possibility of long-term health damage.
5. Safety in recreational settings is a matter for legislation and for the organisation of such events. Safe-clubbing guidelines provide the most promising and politically-feasible measures to reduce acute risks.
6. The **EU** and individual Member States need to continue to have a high degree of cooperation and information exchange, with the close involvement of the **EMCDDA**, to maintain a clear focus on this important issue – and arrive at realistic and effective solutions.

Notes for editors:

Drugs in focus

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The four-page briefings, ***Drugs in focus***, are designed to offer policy-makers food for thought on key issues in the drugs field. Each edition includes a brief introduction to the theme in hand; latest findings and statistics; key policy issues at a glance; graphs/tables; policy considerations; web information and further reading. The briefings are published six times a year in the 11 official **EU** languages plus Norwegian.

<p>Press contact: Kathy Robertson, Media Relations, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Rua da Cruz de Santa Apolónia 23–25, PT-1149-045 Lisbon, Portugal. Tel: ++ 351 21 811 3000 • Fax: ++ 351 21 813 1711 • E-mail: Kathryn.Robertson@emcdda.org</p>
