NEW FLASH EUROBAROMETER REPORT RELEASED

Survey results: youth attitudes to drugs

(11.7.2011, LISBON) The European Commission released today the results of its fourth survey exploring ‘Youth attitudes on drugs’. This ‘Flash Eurobarometer’ is based on telephone interviews conducted in May 2011 with over 12 000 randomly selected young people (aged 15–24) in all 27 EU Member States. It builds on three earlier Eurobarometer surveys carried out in 2002, 2004 and 2008.

Among the issues covered by the survey are: perceptions on the health risks of drug use; attitudes to banning or regulating substances; views on the availability of drugs; and opinions on the effectiveness of policies. For the first time, questions were included on new psychoactive substances (‘legal highs’).

On average, around 5 % of the young respondents said that they had used ‘legal highs’, with Ireland (16 %), Poland (9 %), Latvia (9 %) and the UK (8 %) among countries at the upper end, and Malta, Italy and Finland (all 1 %) at the lower end. These substances were mainly obtained through friends (54 %), at parties and/or in clubs (37 %), in specialised shops (33 %) or over the Internet (7 %).

The survey shows that young people’s attitudes to drugs remain substance-specific. Occasional drug use (used once or twice) was perceived as a ‘high risk’ to health by 23 % of respondents regarding cannabis, compared with 59 % for ecstasy and 66 % for cocaine. Regular drug use was rated as a ‘high risk’ by 67 % of respondents for cannabis and by over 90 % for cocaine or ecstasy. Those who had already used cannabis had a lower perception of its health risks than never-users.

Around a quarter of those surveyed (26 %) reported having used cannabis at least once in their lifetime and perceived it to be the easiest illicit drug to obtain. Over half (57 %) of the respondents believed that obtaining cannabis within 24 hours was ‘fairly easy’ or ‘very easy’, against 22 % for ecstasy or cocaine (96 % for alcohol, 95 % for tobacco). The survey revealed that 64 % of young people would use the Internet as their main source of information on drugs, while 37 % would talk to friends and 28 % to family. But when asked how they had been informed about drugs issues in the past year, the Internet came in third position (39 %), behind media campaigns (46 %) and school prevention programmes (41 %). (However, figures show that the Internet has become a more significant drug-related information source than in 2008).

In terms of drug control and regulation, the majority of respondents (59 %) still support cannabis prohibition, but this number has declined from 67 % since 2008. Regarding new psychoactive substances, respondents indicated that these should be banned only if they pose a risk to health (47 %) or be regulated in similar ways to alcohol or tobacco (15 %). Around one third of respondents (34 %) felt that these substances should be banned under any circumstances.

Also released today is a European Commission assessment of the EU’s mechanism for addressing new psychoactive substances entering the European market. Set up in 2005, this mechanism sets out a three-step approach encompassing: information exchange/early warning; risk assessment and potential Europe-wide controls. The EMCDDA contributed to this assessment.

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(2) http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/news/20110711_en.htm