Executive Summary

The key findings, conclusions and recommendations from the study 'Evaluation of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction' are summarized below. The assignment was carried out in 2007 for the European Commission's Directorate-General Justice, Freedom and Security (DG JLS) by the Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (CSES).

1. Evaluation Aims and Methodology

The aims of this assignment were, in summary, to evaluate the:

- Utility and European added value of the EMCDDA;
- Coherence of the EMCDDA objectives and activities with regard to relevant objectives and activities and Community/Commission level;
- Consistency of the results/outputs with the EMCDDA mandate, objectives, and tasks defined in the founding regulation;
- Ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the EMCDDA.

The Commission's terms of reference set out a number of more specific questions to be addressed by the evaluation and these are examined in the report. The overall purpose of the evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the EMCDDA intervention for accountability and allocation of budgetary resources purposes, and to examine ways of improving and enhancing the EMCDDA intervention as an active party in exercising an executive mandate at Community level. The evaluation covers the period 2001 to the present.

2. Overall Conclusions

2.1 Utility and European added value of the EMCDDA – feedback from the EMCDDA's target groups indicates that the relevance, utility and added value of its scientific outputs are generally high[1]. The Annual Report package, which is the EMCDDA's flagship publication, is especially well received. More generally, the evaluation suggests that the EMCDDA demonstrates Community added value by helping to develop national monitoring systems based on common methodologies and standards, and secondly, by providing the objective, reliable and comparable information that is needed as an evidence base by policy-makers at a national and European level. Some aspects of drugs monitoring and the indicators used to do this need further improvement.

2.2 Coherence of the EMCDDA objectives and activities with regard to relevant objectives and activities and Community/Commission level - the EMCDDA's approach to defining priorities has been closely aligned with wider EU policy aims. During the earlier part of the period under review, its work programme

[1] It should be noted that only the target audiences survey included a direct question concerning the relevance of scientific outputs. The issue was further discussed during the interview programme with NFPs and key stakeholders.

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and organisation were structured around the priorities set out in the 2000-04 Action Plan on Drugs. More recently, the emphasis has switched to a more integrated approach to drugs issues with stronger horizontal functions which reflects the EU's Drugs Strategy for 2005–2012 and its emphasis on promoting an integrated, multidisciplinary and balanced approach to the drugs problem by combining and concentrating on the two policy fields of demand and supply reduction.

2.3 Consistency of the results/outputs with the EMCDDA mandate, objectives, and tasks defined in the founding regulation – overall, the research suggests that the EMCDDA is performing well in fulfilling the mission assigned to it of providing the Community and its Member States with 'objective, reliable and comparable information at European level concerning drugs and drug addiction and their consequences'. The development across EU Member States of harmonized data collection mechanisms for information on drugs would not have taken place, at least in the same timeframe, without the EMCDDA. Moreover, this has taken place against the backdrop of two EU enlargements with the consequent need to provide substantial and on-going support for capacity building.

This process of harmonisation, and the comparative information generated, has also contributed to the development and implementation of the EU Drugs Strategy, and has, according to the research at national level, had a positive impact on participating countries' drugs policies and practices, providing an incentive for action and contributing to evidence-based decision-making. Overall, the EMCDDA has performed well, particularly since around the mid point in the period under review. The research does, however, point to various ways in which the EMCDDA's performance as a provider of information on the drugs situation in Europe could be further improved.

3. Specific Conclusions and Recommendations

Below we summarise key findings and conclusions from the evaluation and where appropriate make recommendations.

3.1 Scientific Activities and Outputs

3.1.1 The challenge the EMCDDA faces in achieving consensus and joint action on key indicators to monitor the drugs problem and responses to it has been and remains formidable. From a methodological perspective, the comparison of national survey data that has been collected using standard tables and structured questionnaires provides a good overview on population patterns of drug use, although there is still scope to improve the quality of data, as the next point argues.

3.1.2 The quality of the key indicator (and more widely, 'core') data on the drugs situation is clearly dependent on the quality of the national data gathered and there is still a considerable variation in this. The system for data collection has been fully operational since 2003, but it is currently only implemented to the extent of 60-70% at Member State level. Continued methodological work is needed to improve ways of measuring size of the problem drug use population. The indicators on infectious and blood borne disease is also problematic because of the

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difficulty of gathering reliable data on injecting drug users in a systematic manner than enables good cross-national comparisons. The same applies to the treatment demand indicator. Clearly, these and other shortcomings need to be addressed if the EMCDDA is to fully achieve its mission of providing policy-makers and others with 'objective, reliable and comparable information at European level on drugs and drug addiction and their consequences'. This means working with NFPs to improve data collection, further strengthening internal quality assessments and - from a strategic perspective - ensuring that the EMCDDA gives priority to its core business tasks.

3.1.3 Some information collected by NFPs on the drugs situation is not used by the EMCDDA although it is collected for national purposes. Member States often have different data collection needs and methodologies from those of the EMCDDA. The national monitoring needs not only pre-existed the EU's needs, in many cases, but they also take priority over these as they feed into national policy-making. NFPs therefore often have to collect the data for the EMCDDA in addition to the data collected at national level.

3.1.4 There are aspects of the drugs situation that are not currently being monitored by the EMCDDA and where comparable information is needed. For example, drugs-related crime and other aspects of crime statistics are important measures for assessing progress in implementing drugs strategies. However, as noted in the evaluation of the EU's 2000-04 Drugs Strategy, these indicators are not part of the EMCDDA's key indicators - at least partly due to the complex and varied manner with which crime statistics are collated and reported on in different countries. The fieldwork has shown that many NFPs and key stakeholders also feel that the level of drugs consumption should be monitored in terms of quantities, although again there are complications with regard to methodologies and data availability. However, priority should be given to maximizing the quality of existing information that is collected on the drugs situation, and ensuring that Member States fully implement key indicators.

3.1.5 Looking ahead, there is a need to achieve the same degree of harmonization in methodologies and data collection tools that now exists for the EMCDDA's five key indicators to cover other aspects of the drugs situation in Europe and ways of addressing it. This depends of course on the willingness of Member States to invest in developing the capacity to provide the EMCDDA with harmonized information sets since the Agency itself can only define standards. From an operational perspective, the research highlights a number of possible ways in which both the process of delivering information and its added value to users could be enhanced.

3.1.6 The EMCDDA's various publications and other scientific outputs are generally very well regarded. There is some variation in the extent to which different EMCDDA scientific outputs are used. Apart from the Annual Report and its various components (Selected Issues, Statistical Bulletins and Country Profiles), the outputs that are the most extensively used are the Drugnet Europe newsletter, Drugs in Focus and the EMCDDA website. There are also varying perceptions of the quality of the various publications and other forms of information. NFPs were

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generally the most positive of the surveyed groups. Some argued that the provision of high quality data was more important than quantity and that more might be done to tailor information products to particular target groups. The quality assessment carried out by an academic expert panel broadly confirmed the survey and interview feedback although it was argued that several products had methodological limitations from a scientific point of view, mainly as a result of being based on material differing in data collection methods, reporting format and quality.

3.1.7 The Annual Report package is particularly well received but various options could be considered to improve the publication and to ensure that it is made available more quickly. The EMCDDA has periodically reviewed the structure and style of the Annual Report. This, for example, led to a decision two years ago to adopt an essentially thematic structure and to shorten the main document with 'Selected Issues' now published separately. At present the process of producing the Annual Report is spread across at least nine months each year including a lengthy review process involving many different groups. The evaluation suggests various ways in which this process might be speeded up and made less resource intensive. This includes a more limited translation of the Annual Report and streamlined quality assurance procedures so that fewer people are involved in this process than at present.

3.1.8 Over the years the number of EMCDDA scientific outputs has grown and there are currently around 20 different types of reports, publications, on-line products and databases. Although there is no direct evidence that the number of publications adversely affects their use, and there are advantages in using different publications to address different issues, a simplification exercise should nevertheless be considered with a view to making the EMCDDA publications more coherent and transparent. The relatively high proportion of 'don't knows' among survey respondents in relation to the quality of scientific outputs also suggests that a simplification of the EMCDDA's products would be helpful. An exercise of this kind should, however, be driven by target audience preferences. Overall, the feedback in relation to scientific outputs appears to indicate that such a simplification exercise should be combined with a further strengthening of the internal quality control in order to enhance the 'reliability' of EMCDDA information products, which is especially important in relation to target audiences such as decision-makers.

Recommendations – Scientific Activities and Outputs

- Continue efforts to improve the quality of key indicators and information generally on the drugs situation in Europe.
- Consider replacing existing approach to reviewing the Annual Report, which involves extensive consultations, with a working group representing the EMCDDA statutory bodies, NFPs and key staff.
- Include an executive summary in the Annual Report, preferably aimed at policy-makers to be translated into all EU languages and consider translating

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the main Report into only a few languages (perhaps initially for a trial period).

- To speed up its availability, consider distributing the English language version of the Annual Report when it is ready in the early summer, and the other language versions later. Alternatively, release the Annual Report's 'Commentary' and the 'Statistical Bulletin' when they are available in June with the full package then following in the autumn.
- Keep under review the need for hard copy distribution to reduce the number of Annual Reports that are printed if the trend towards electronic dissemination continues.
- Consider reducing the scope of some 'Selected Issues' to allow them to address aspects of the drugs situation that are of only interest to only a few countries to enhance their usefulness. More generally, consider simplifying the range of EMCDDA scientific outputs.
- Ensure that internal quality control systems are in place that maximise the reliability of scientific outputs.

3.2 Effectiveness in reaching target audiences

3.2.1 The research suggests that the EMCDDA is seen as effective in reaching target audiences, particularly at a European level. Over two-thirds of the survey respondents (78.6%) considered that the EMCDDA is either 'very effective' or 'quite effective' in communicating with target audiences (it should be noted that there was a high proportion of 'don't know' responses on this issue, possibly attributable to the fact that survey respondents are less likely to be aware of how effectively the EMCDDA communicates with other target audiences than themselves or similar organisations. Furthermore, the EMCDDA's scientific outputs are specialised and many recipients only make use of some outputs. The fact that most of the valid responses fell into the 'quite effective' category suggests that there is scope for improvement in the way the EMCDDA communicates with target audiences. As the survey responses also suggest, the priority is this respect lies mainly at the national rather than European level. According to the survey work, the proportion of those stating that the EMCDDA is relatively ineffective in reaching target audiences is generally higher in the 'old' EU Member States which is quite surprising since the mechanisms for communicating with target groups should be better established in these countries than in newer Member States. There is no obvious explanation for this other than that it could be that over time perceptions become more critical.

3.2.2 The EMCDDA has invested heavily in developing its website and this now offers access to a very wide range of on-line products. The website includes a very large amount of information on drugs and drug addiction including a wealth of detail on the situation in different EU Member States and at a European level, access to a large number of publications and reports, statistical information, and online databases. The research nevertheless suggests that a number of improvements might be considered.

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Recommendations – Effectiveness in Reaching Target Audiences

- Work with Management Board and Scientific Committee members, NFPs, etc. to review practices with regard to defining target audiences to help ensure that key contacts are being reached.
- Consider the scope for reducing the number of different scientific outputs and publications and ensure that these are presented in a way that corresponds with target group needs and increases transparency of the available information.
- A number of improvements to the EMCDDA's website should be considered - a more integrated on-line presence, improved navigability and signposting, more interactive tools allowing users to independently interrogate on-line statistical data, and more translation of the content into different languages.

3.3 EMCDDA organisation and resource efficiency

3.3.1 Overall, feedback from the research suggests that the EMCDDA's current organisational set up works well. The developments following adoption of the Internal Reform Plan and changes since the 2005 'Strategic Reflection' have led, amongst other things, to a more integrated approach to scientific activities and a stronger focus on communicating with target audiences. From the perspective of operational efficiency, the EMCDDA's organisational restructuring has helped to break down rigidities that previously existed and a tendency towards the compartmentalisation of different activities. The effort to improve management systems is continuing with the EMCDDA having implemented in the last two years an action plan to further improve administrative and financial processes

3.3.2 During the period under review, the EMCDDA's revenue and expenditure increased at an average rate of 7.6% p.a., from €8.2m in 2000 to €12.6m in 2006. Although this is above the average inflation rate for the period, EU enlargement in 2004 largely accounts for this increase. Although not straightforward because they have different functions, as a measure of resource efficiency, a comparison can be made between the EMCDDA and other EU-supported agencies. The EMCDDA is positioned towards the middle of the range in such a comparison in terms of the percentage increase in its revenue and expenditure during the period 2000-06.

3.3.3 The research suggests that the composition of the Management Board strikes a reasonable balance between the need to retain an effective decision-making body and the need to ensure stakeholder representation. A factor that does reduce efficiency is the relatively high turnover of members. However, there is probably very little that the EMCDDA can do to influence this beyond requesting that Member States strive to achieve greater continuity in their representation on the Management Board.

3.3.4 The Scientific Committee has played a useful role in advising on the EMCDDA's scientific priorities but it has not been used to the full extent envisaged. The opinions given by the Scientific Committee have been helpful in

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confirming the appropriateness of scientific priorities but also in drawing attention to organisational, and financial and human resourcing issues and their implications. Overall, the survey and other feedback indicate that the Scientific Committee has reacted competently to the tasks it has been asked to address. At the same time, it seems that the Scientific Committee has been underused. Changes to the Scientific Committee that are designed to ensure the full range of scientific know-how is available should help address this shortcoming and ensure that the quality of scientific advice is improved.

3.3.5 So far, the EMCDDA has had sufficient analytical capacity to cope with the objectives set out in the last two three-year work programmes. However, looking ahead, additional human resources may be needed in addition to those already planned. The need for specific expertise in the fields covered by the EMCDDA's five key indicators, the greater emphasis foreseen in the recast Regulation on issues such as best practices, the need to develop the capacity to monitor fields such as drugs-related crime and the supply side more effectively, and a more developed role in the international field, could mean a need to recruit additional scientific staff. Some of the EMCDDA's existing scientific capacity could be freed up by encouraging more mobility across work areas but also by employing junior researchers on short-term contracts. There is also a strong case for greater flexibility in deciding how to undertake scientific activities with, in particular, more resources being made available for the contracting out of tasks to external experts. Similarly, some additional recruitment is already foreseen under the EMCDDA's staffing plan. A combination of this and more efficient use of existing human resources may be sufficient to meet future challenges but it is clearly important that the situation is kept under review in light of changing circumstances and priorities.

3.3.6 From a human resources management perspective, a majority of the EMCDDA's staff consider that there is a generally favourable working environment at the Agency. Staff turnover at the EMCDDA is currently estimated to be around 5-7% which is not particularly high compared to other organisations including the Commission itself. More emphasis could, however, be placed on developing the EMCDDA's intellectual capital.

Recommendations – Organisation and Resource Efficiency

- Encourage Member States and institutional partners to reduce the turnover of Management Board members.
- Ensure that full use is made of the Scientific Committee as a source of expert advice on activities undertaken by the EMCDDA.
- Ensure that the EMCDDA's future staffing levels provide sufficient scientific capacity to undertake future tasks.
- To this end, consider ways of utilizing existing scientific capacity more ef freeing up senior staff by recruiting junior researchers on short term (1 contracts, facilitating greater cross-unit staff deployment.

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- Consider contracting out more scientific tasks to external experts, both to free up time for other tasks but also to tap into available expertise. The Scientific Committee could help manage an external studies programme.
- To help develop intellectual capital, consider introducing a policy to encourage scientific staff to pursue their own research, as long as this is linked to EMCDDA priorities and does not interfere with operational needs. Consider introducing a scheme for visiting academics.

3.3.7 The REITOX network has played a key role in helping the EMCDDA to fulfil its mission, both in collecting information on the drugs situation in Europe and helping to disseminate the EMCDDA's scientific outputs. The resources available to NFPs vary considerably. This reflects a number of factors, most notably institutional set-ups in the different Member States for drugs monitoring and the willingness of national authorities to go beyond match funding the EMCDDA's financial assistance. Since 2001 the EMCDDA has done much to rectify earlier shortcomings in the Reitox network.

3.3.8 Quality assurance mechanisms are generally effective but these vary across EU Member States and there is a need for a uniform adoption of best practices. At a national level, in some countries advisory committees or other quality control mechanisms have been set up to review national reports and other information before they are officially approved and transmitted to the EMCDDA. Elsewhere, however, there is still scope for improved quality standards and systems to be developed.

3.3.9 The EMCDDA's grant is an important form of support for most NFPs but it only demonstrates partial additionality and consideration should be given to linking it more closely to national needs. The EMCDDA has devoted some 20% of its budget to supporting NFP activities. One benefit of the EMCDDA's grant to NFPs is that it places them under a contractual obligation to fulfil a number of specified tasks. The grant also demonstrates a leverage effect insofar as co-financing is provided by the national authorities. However, given the research feedback (17% of responses to the survey suggested absolute additionality, 63% partial additionality with the remainder indicating deadweight or having 'no opinion') there is a case for linking at least some of the grant more closely to different national needs. In particular, most newer EU Member States still need support to develop their capacity to monitor the drugs situation effectively.

3.3.10 In general, there are strong links between NFPs and their national partners. There is a generally a strong relationship between NFPs and host organisations and national authorities (often the same) and, reflecting this, with Management Board members. However, the relationship between NFPs and politicians and political bodies is often weaker. This could be because the institutional positioning of NFPs in government structures is generally quite remote from politicians and, more generally, because the role of the EMCDDA is to simply provide information rather than to influence decision-makers.

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Recommendations – Reitox Network

- Periodically review NFP quality assurance systems to ensure that these are based on best practices and uniformly applied across EU Member States.
- Consider extending the Reitox quality standards system to include factors relating to the wider NFP role, for example with regard to the definition of target audiences and methods of reaching them.
- In due course, review the NFP grant scheme and the case for linking the amount of funding more closely to national needs. At the same time, if the EMCDDA grant to certain NFPs is reduced, the Member States concerned should be encouraged to increase their contribution to NFP costs to ensure that the necessary funding levels are maintained.
- Encourage more networking between NFPs on their own initiative to share good practices and undertake joint initiatives.

3.3.11 Most key recommendations made in the previous external evaluation have generally been followed up. Amongst other things, the changes introduced have led to the stronger concentration on core tasks called for in the 2000 evaluation with organisational restructuring, a project and activity-based approach to corporate planning. Similarly, weaknesses noted in the earlier evaluation with regard to the Reitox network and the support provided by the EMCDDA to NFPs have largely been rectified. But certain recommendations have taken longer than might have been expected to be implemented, such as changes to the Scientific Committee. In some other respects, the conclusions of the 2000 evaluation remain valid, for example the need to keep the amount of time and effort required to produce the EMCDDA's Annual Report under review and preferably to free up resources for other tasks.

3.4 EU enlargement and wider the international dimension

3.4.1 During the period under review, a number of activities have been undertaken at the request of the Commission and as part of pre-accession strategies to help new EU Member States and candidate countries prepare for integration into the Reitox network and EMCDDA activities. This has been achieved through a variety of initiatives including the organisation of seminars with inputs by experts on particular issues concerning the monitoring of the drugs trends, twinning projects, the Reitox Academy, and direct technical assistance from the EMCDDA. By and large, a fully functioning Reitox network is now in place in the newer Member States although there is a need for continued support and capacity building in many countries to improve the quality of information.

3.4.2 In the wider international field, the EMCDDA has successfully developed close links with a range of European and international organisations that are involved in combating drugs and illegal trafficking. The recast Regulation also introduced a new condition, namely that the Commission has to give an opinion on those working arrangements which have to be adopted by the Management Board. A particularly close working relationship has been set up with a group of 'priority partners' (Europol, the Pompidou Group, UNODC, WHO etc)

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with whom the EMCDDA has signed either cooperation agreements or memoranda of understanding to provide a legal framework for collaboration. Given the international nature of the drugs problem, and the need to tackle both demand and supply side issues, these relationships are important and seem to work well.

3.4.3 Overall, the EMCDDA's activities in the international field have been important in supporting the EU's efforts to monitor and combat the drugs problem. More particularly, the EMCDDA's role in promoting the sharing of information with European and international partners, its support for capacity building in pre-accession and candidate countries, and the role played in working with national authorities and agencies in other regions outside the EU, have all helped to improve the quality information on the drugs situation and hence the ability to devise effective responses at a European and international level. The EMCDDA's work in third countries (except candidate countries and Western Balkans) is conducted as part of the Commission's external policy and approved by the Management Board. As such, the focus and wider strategy is not decided by the Centre itself. However, it is clearly important that the Centre's efforts are not dispersed too much or distracted from core tasks.

3.5 Impacts and Community added value

3.5.1 The utility of EMCDDA information is highly rated by target audiences. According to the survey work, overall, the utility of EMCDDA information is highly rated with over two-fifths (42.8%) of the target audiences and stakeholders rating it as 'very useful' in understanding the drugs situation and a further 47.4% saying that it is 'quite useful'. A key feature of the EMCDDA's scientific output is that it provides a European perspective on the drugs situation at a national level, enabling the situation and trends in different countries to be compared in relation to each other and with the EU-wide position. Much of the EMCDDA's rationale as an EU agency is derived from fulfilling this role.

3.5.2 The EMCDDA's work has also had a direct impact on EU Member States' drugs policies and practices. This has been achieved by encouraging a higher degree of coordination and the adoption of comparable structures. More specifically, the European perspective provided by the EMCDDA's Annual Report and other scientific outputs is widely considered to be important in understanding the drugs situation and actual/likely trends at a national level, and in putting the nature and scale of the problem into context. From a more operational point of view, EMCDDA interventions have been important in capacity building and ensuring that a harmonized approach to data collection is developed across Member States. This has also had benefits across a wider range of drugs monitoring activities at a national level.

3.5.3 At an EU level, the EMCDDA has provided useful information to support the 2000-04 and 2005-08 Drugs Action Plans. During the first period, apart from drafting a number of snapshot reports, thematic papers and other material used to help evaluate progress towards the EU's various targets, the Agency introduced a range of initiatives to improve the availability and quality of data and

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information on the drug situation for the Action Plan targets. Together with Europol, the Centre also helped to ensure that the exchange of information on emerging trends in drug use was improved as a result of the successful development of an early warning system in the framework of the Joint Action on synthetic drugs. Similarly, in relation to the 2005-12 EU Drugs Strategy's first Action Plan, the EMCDDA has provided supporting information for around 30% of the 88 actions. Overall, the research suggests that EMCDDA contribution to the monitoring and evaluation of the EU Action Plans has generally been of a good quality although there have also been some shortcomings.

Recommendations – Impacts and Added Value

- Continue to develop performance indicators that can be used to monitor progress towards key EMCDDA objectives. This should include additional ways to obtain feedback from target audiences.
- Further develop methodologies to help assess the impacts – both in relation to the EMCDDA's activities and also in relation to the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plans.

3.5.4 Overall, the research suggests that the EMCDDA demonstrates Community added value in various ways. In terms of its core function, it has successfully developed ways of obtaining harmonized and comparable data, and exchanging expertise, thereby increasing recognition by national authorities inside and outside the EU. More generally, from an EU perspective, the EMCDDA has the advantage of being politically independent and is almost certainly providing a more cost-effective way of monitoring the drugs situation in Europe than could be undertaken by the Commission itself. Moreover, because the EMCDDA is working at some distance from policy and politics, it is easier to separate the task of policy-making from that of assembling the information required to support policy-making with less consequent risk of political considerations influencing the analysis and interpretation of scientific data.

Thirdly, from the national perspective, it has helped to develop national monitoring systems based on common methodologies and standards in line with its mission to provide objective, reliable and comparable information at a European level. Last but not least, there is considerable added value in having a European perspective on drugs and drug addiction with benefits through supporting national authorities to take action, whether in their own countries or through EU institutions. Some of these benefits could probably have been achieved through purely bilateral networking. However, the existence of the EMCDDA means that networking between countries can be much more efficiently conducted.

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Methodological Note

The study, which was carried out in three phases, involved a combination of desk research, survey work and an interview programme. Key stakeholders, 'Drugnet Europe' readers (treated as a sample of the EMCDDA's target group), National Focal Points and EMCDDA staff were all surveyed. Face-to-face interviews were carried out at a national level in 25 countries with Management Board representatives, Scientific Committee members and National Focal Points (in the remaining countries these interview were undertaken by telephone). In addition, CSES undertook interviews with the Commission, EMCDDA staff and a range of key stakeholders including the UNODC, Europol, Eurojust, WHO, WCO and others. Other research activities included a benchmarking exercise to compare the EMCDDA with a number of other EU-supported agencies and a quality assessment of scientific outputs which was undertaken by an academic panel.