



Message from the Director

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon



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What are the lessons to be learnt from the European Drug Report 2022?



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The *European Drug Report 2022: Trends and Developments* arrives at a time when recent major global events have impacted profoundly on all areas of our life and, therefore, also have implications for the drug problems we are facing in Europe today. Our flagship report is designed to help Europe be better prepared to meet these challenges. It does this by analysing both the trends that are shaping the current situation, and by identifying emerging threats that may impact on the drug problems Europe will face in the future.

It is important to note that this analysis does not stand alone but is supported by a large body of recent work. As always, we accompany this year's report with our Statistical Bulletin, which provides access to the underlying data and methodological notes and caveats. This report also draws heavily on recent reviews, conducted in partnership with Europol, of developments in the cocaine and methamphetamine markets. These studies show the increasingly

important role stimulants now play in the European drug problem. This year also marks 25 years of the work of the EU Early Warning System on new psychoactive substances. This milestone is celebrated in an accompanying review of the achievements of this ground-breaking network.

For me, the take-home message that stands out from our analysis of drug trends in 2022 can be summarised as **'Everywhere, Everything, Everyone'**. Today, we face a situation where we can observe the impact of drug problems almost everywhere. Within the European Union, drug problems complicate other important issues such as homelessness, the management of psychiatric disorders and reducing youth criminality. We are also observing greater levels of violence and corruption driven by the drug market in some countries. Internationally, events also have the potential to impact on the drug problems we see in Europe. In this report, we consider how developments in Afghanistan could change drug flows in ways that may have important future implications, and how the humanitarian crisis arising from the war on Ukraine could create new challenges for European drug services.

An overarching conclusion I draw from this year's report is that we are now facing a more complex drug situation, characterised by high availability and greater diversity in patterns of drug consumption. We see from our reporting on the new psychoactive substances phenomenon that almost anything that has psychoactive potential is now at risk of appearing on the market, often mislabelled, meaning that those consuming these substances may be unaware of what they are actually using. In this context, I am particularly worried by reports we are receiving about the adulteration of cannabis products with synthetic cannabinoids; just one example of the new drug-related threats we are now seeing. Another is the increasing production of synthetic drugs in Europe, with particular concerns over the scaling-up of

methamphetamine production. An important development noted in this year's report is the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both drug services and the way people acquire controlled substances. Also noted is the continuing need in many countries to scale up treatment and harm-reduction services for those with drug problems.

Our fundamental mission at the EMCDDA is to support better policies and actions to reduce the harm that drugs cause to individuals, their families and the communities in which they live. I think we have to recognise that today, either directly or indirectly, everyone is in some way impacted by the use of drugs. Directly, we see this in those who develop problems and need treatment or other services. The indirect consequences may be more hidden but are equally important. They include vulnerable young people being recruited into criminality, increased strain on health budgets, and the costs to society of communities that feel unsafe or where institutions are undermined by corruption and criminality. I remain convinced that we can only hope to address the complex health and social policy issues that drug use presents us with by basing our responses on a sound understanding of the nature of the problems we face, together with an analysis of the responses that can be shown to be effective. I am proud that with the release of the *European Drug Report 2022*, the EMCDDA continues to help Europe be better prepared for the current and future challenges we will face in this area.

Finally, this report, like all our work, is a result of co-production, and without the support and input from our partners it simply would not be possible. I would particularly like to acknowledge our Reitox network of national focal points as well as all the other European experts and networks whose work has contributed to this publication. I also note with gratitude the support we have received from the European Commission, other European agencies and international bodies working in this area.

European Drug Report 2022: Trends and Developments — Available in 25 languages at:
www.emcdda.europa.eu/edr2022