



## NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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### RELEASED TODAY: NEW EMCDDA POLICY BRIEFING ON KHAT

#### **Khat use in Europe: update and policy implications**

(4.7.2011, LISBON) 'The number of khat users in Europe appears to be growing, yet the scale and nature of the problem is poorly understood'. This is according to a new publication on the subject released today by the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA)**. '*Khat use in Europe: implications for European policy*' is published in the EMCDDA's policy briefing series *Drugs in focus* <sup>(1)</sup>.

Khat refers to the young leaves and shoots of the khat tree (*Catha edulis*), cultivated in the **Horn of Africa, Southern Arabia** and along the **East African coast**. The leaves have been chewed for centuries for their mildly stimulating properties and, for many, are part of their cultural legacy and social life. Migration from the Horn of Africa has been associated with the spread of khat use to neighbouring countries, Europe and the rest of the world. The drug goes by many names: 'qat' (Yemen), 'chad' (Ethiopia, Somalia), 'miraa' (Kenya) or 'marungi' (Uganda, Rwanda).

Khat contains stimulant substances that have amphetamine-like properties (e.g. cathinone) which, in their pure forms, are internationally controlled substances. The leaves, however, are not controlled and no consistent approach exists to khat in the EU (it is treated as an illegal drug in 15 of the 27 EU Member States and in Norway).

'The fact that khat is controlled in some, but not all, countries is reflected in both legitimate and criminal transportation networks', states **EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz**. 'European khat markets appear to be growing, but data sources remain weak. More research is needed, not only to assess this market, but also to monitor evolving patterns of khat use and the extent of any socio-economic and health consequences'.

According to today's briefing, the two main entry points for khat into Europe are the **UK** (London) and the **Netherlands** (Amsterdam), where it is imported, traded and consumed legally as a vegetable product <sup>(2)</sup>. Khat has also been seized on flights to **North America**, indicating **Europe's** role as a transit point to other destinations. And some countries have reported a doubling in khat seizures in the last five years.

Over the last three decades, khat has become a major source of employment, income and revenue in producing countries around the Horn of Africa. Given its resistance to drought and low labour requirements, it is now an attractive choice for producers. The briefing notes that 'development and drug control policies for such countries require coordination and an awareness of the potential impact of European control measures.'

'Exact numbers of regular khat users on a worldwide scale do not exist', states the briefing, 'however, estimates range up to 20 million'. In Europe, the substance is primarily used by migrant communities. Despite concern that use might diffuse into the general population, there is no significant evidence that this has occurred.

Today's briefing describes how mental health problems have been associated with the excessive use of khat and how users and health workers need to be better informed about its potential health, social and legal consequences. 'Among migrant communities from sub-Saharan Africa, khat use is both common and commonly overlooked', says **Chairman of the EMCDDA Management Board, Dr João Goulão**. 'We must ensure that people working with these communities are aware of the need to identify and respond to any negative consequences that can result from the use of this substance'.

<sup>(1)</sup> *Drugs in focus* No 21, available in 25 languages at [www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/drugs-in-focus](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/drugs-in-focus)

<sup>(2)</sup> The UK's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) has reported that 5–7 tonnes of khat were imported into UK per day in the first six months of 2005. Much of this was in transit to non-EU destinations.