



Formal opinion of the Scientific Committee on the EMCDDA 2022–24 single programming document, including the 2022 work programme

1. General overview

The Scientific Committee welcomes the single programming document (SPD) of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) for the period 2022–24. We are pleased that the document is in line with taking forward the long-term priorities defined by the EMCDDA Strategy 2025 and is consistent with the current mandate of the EMCDDA. We also note that SPDs are rolling documents and therefore necessarily high-level in outlining the future work of the agency against a background of some uncertainty. Nonetheless, the document in our view provides a good structure for developing the necessary annual priorities for the agency's work over the next 3 years. In addition, the greater detail provided for the 2022 work programme includes both the core tasks of the agency and some innovative new elements.

The Scientific Committee highlights the enormous effort made by the agency in response to the pandemic and the impressive adaptability and rapid turnaround — noting the health and security outputs to update the field on the impact of COVID-19 and the webinars reaching practitioners with the latest updates on topical issues. The Committee invites the EMCDDA to consider what lessons can be learnt from the experience of the current pandemic to inform how drug policies and responses, as well as the work of the agency, can be better prepared for possible future major disruptive events.

The Scientific Committee notes with concern that the implications of continued budget constraints and the unknown level of future funding are worrying and are already adversely affecting the EMCDDA and Reitox and limiting capacity to carry out developmental work. The Committee invites the EMCDDA to focus resources on its key areas of responsibility to ensure the fulfilment of its mandate and that its high level of scientific quality continues to be met.

2. Specific comments

The SPD for the period 2022–24 is based on the two pillars of EMCDDA core areas of work: 'Health' and 'Security', as defined in the EMCDDA Strategy 2025. In addition, four business drivers form the third main area of work, of which the 'scientific capacity' driver specifically concerns the areas of expertise of the Scientific Committee.

The Scientific Committee welcomes the EMCDDA flagship publications planned for this period: the annual European Drug Report package, the second edition of the Health and Social Responses to Drug Problems and the fourth edition of the European Drug Markets Report (EDMR).

This SPD outlines innovative and novel data collection approaches, such as open source information and internet monitoring including darknet monitoring. The Committee notes that these methods may



become more necessary as the drug situation diversifies and invites the EMCDDA to increase EU wide rapid analysis based on mixed methods and multiple data sources while continuing to carefully assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection and on data quality.

The Scientific Committee welcomes the increasing role of the EMCDDA in supporting, where relevant and possible, the EU Drugs Action Plan (EUDAP). The Committee appreciates that the EMCDDA will have to align its work with the need to contribute to the evaluation of the EUDAP and highlights that providing information on overarching indicators and creating statistical dashboards has the potential to contribute to the long-term objectives of moving towards digital transformation and improving stakeholders' access to EU and national data.

Whenever resources allow, the EMCDDA should continue to make full use of synergies with the scientific community and to increase options for the agency's scientific staff to acquire further competencies and experience, especially in developmental areas. This can be achieved through training, further education and other appropriate learning opportunities, including via partnerships with universities and research centres.

The Scientific Committee emphasises the crucial role played by the EMCDDA in shaping the programme of Lisbon Addictions, notes this opportunity for the agency to engage with the scientific community and welcomes the preparatory work for the fourth and fifth conferences that will take place under this SPD.

In the main area of *Health*, the Scientific Committee welcomes the planned new publications and thematic summaries, including the Health and Social Responses to Drug Problems mini guides.

An increase in mental health problems and comorbidities linked to COVID-19 lockdowns and the ensuing economic crisis may be expected. The Committee recommends that the EMCDDA continues to look 1) at the need to develop tools to support the standardisation of detection and prevention strategies across Member States; and 2) into issues and harms related to the use of stimulants (including methamphetamine and crack, in addition to cocaine, amphetamine and new stimulants) and the misuse of prescribed and non-prescribed medicines while considering the need to balance the focus on individual and public health.

Other challenges and opportunities exist in this area, with a need for evidence-based information — including the monitoring of treatment outcomes, patient-reported outcomes, and the assessment of how new e- and m-health, online and digital services options can be harnessed to support the delivery of interventions — to support new and flexible approaches to recovery and reintegration. In this respect, the opportunities offered by digital media to facilitate the involvement of communities and stakeholders may be further explored by the EMCDDA to consider options for increased cooperation with civil society groups and user organisations.

The Scientific Committee encourages the EMCDDA to continue to proactively inform the public policy debate and support the efforts of Member States to evaluate their drug strategies and different policy approaches.



The Committee also welcomes that the EMCDDA is attentive to challenges around the increasing migration flow into the EU and its potential impact on drug use in Europe and is committed to monitoring drug use among migrant groups and supporting the development of targeted interventions for those in need and the professionals who support them.

The Scientific Committee congratulates the EMCDDA on the Early Warning System on new psychoactive substances and risk assessments as a scientific basis for supporting the decision on control measures at European level. The European Database on New Drugs is an extremely useful resource in terms of analytical and seizure data and, where available, resources should continue to be allocated to make sure it remains updated and fit for purpose.

In the main area of *Security*, the Scientific Committee welcomes the modular approach to the EDMR and the focus on methamphetamine production and the work developed by the EMCDDA around four strategic areas: data collection (drug supply indicators), analysis and reporting (drug-related threats, open source monitoring), development (drug-related crime) and policy support (institutional requests).

The Committee fully supports the organisation of the Third European Conference on Drug supply, postponed to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which may offer opportunities for all relevant stakeholders to agree on findings, recommendations and actions to further develop the area of drug markets and drug-related crime with additional indicators in order to improve Europe's understanding of the situation and related threats.

Where resources allow, the EMCDDA should continue to support work around 1) monitoring already identified new psychoactive substances (currently voluntarily undertaken by three independent research groups); 2) the conceptualisation of a framework to analyse drug-related homicides; 3) looking into drug-related acquisitive crime and financial flows.

The Scientific Committee highlights the importance of cannabis as the most used illicit drug in Europe and invites the EMCDDA to 1) support the work of independent researchers looking into aspects such as innovation in cannabis products, the role of social media and developments around cannabis legal frameworks; and to 2) contextualise European data by looking at international data.

3. Conclusions

The Scientific Committee is confident that, subject to the availability of adequate resources and within the restrictions currently posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the EMCDDA will successfully implement its SPD for 2022–24, including the 2022 work programme, and expresses its full support and endorsement to it.