



## NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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### DRUG USE IN RECREATIONAL SETTINGS

#### Surveys find club-goers over 10 times more likely to have tried stimulant drugs

(23.11.2006, LISBON) Surveys of young people in dance music settings find them to be 10 times more likely than those in the general population to have ever tried stimulant drugs. In some cases around two thirds of club-goers\* reported using these substances at least once in their lifetime. 'Developments in drug use within recreational settings' is one of three **Selected issues** <sup>(1)</sup> subjected to an in-depth analysis by the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA)** this year alongside its **2006 Annual report on the state of the drugs problem in Europe** launched today in Brussels.

According to today's review, dance music settings in the EU have become increasingly diverse 'especially since the enlargement of 2004'. Events can range from large-scale commercial music festivals – attracting thousands – to an array of smaller-scale dance parties and clubs. Added to this, settings are also in constant flux: many of the large dance venues popular in the 1990s have now closed down, making way in some parts of Europe for a burgeoning number of small clubs and esoteric festivals.

The **EMCDDA** presents an analysis of drug use recorded through targeted dance music and club surveys carried out across Europe. But such surveys have to be interpreted with caution, says the agency, being only available for some countries and often targeting events where drug use is known to be high <sup>(2)</sup>. Despite these limitations, however, they do provide 'a valuable window on the drug using behaviour of young people in these environments'.

Over 60% of club-goers surveyed in some settings in **France, Italy** and the **UK** said they had tried cocaine at some point in their life. Meanwhile more than half the club-goers surveyed in the **Czech Republic, France, Hungary**, the **Netherlands** and the **UK** reported to have ever used ecstasy — a drug now generally more popular than amphetamines in most settings.

Less widely used than ecstasy, but regularly reported in the club scene, are ketamine and GHB. Some surveys report lifetime use of ketamine ranging from 7% in the **Czech Republic** to 21% in **Hungary** and lifetime use of GHB ranging from 6% in the **UK** to 17% in the **Netherlands**. For hallucinogenic drugs, high figures were recorded in club surveys in the **Czech Republic**, where 45% of those surveyed had ever tried LSD, and in **France** where 55% had ever tried 'magic mushrooms'.

#### Club tourism and holiday drug use

According to the review, drug users in recreational settings tend to be young, socially integrated, in employment or education and with a disposable income. This spending power, along with cheaper travel options and open internal borders within the EU, have all stimulated the development of the club scene and associated tourism.

Research shows that young people are more likely to try drugs, or to use them more often, when holidaying abroad. In **Spain**, recreational drug use is highest near Mediterranean tourist resorts and, in **Sweden**, where levels of drug use are low by European standards, one study found that, of young people who had tried illegal drugs, 23% did so for the first time while outside the country. Interviews conducted with young holiday-makers

returning from **Ibiza**, as part of a **UK** study, found that the frequency of all drug use was higher on holiday than at home — for example over a third of ecstasy users (37%) had taken the drug on five or more days per week while on holiday — a rate at least five times higher than was typical (7% while in the **UK**).

### Long-term risks of alcohol often ignored

Today's review underlines that: 'For the majority of young people across the EU, drug use is still not necessarily an integral element of dance music settings'. For most young people it is the music, social aspects and use of alcohol that are the most central experiences in this environment.

Drinks manufacturers are now tapping into the lucrative dance music market, targeting new drinks at younger age groups, especially young women. This raises important concerns about the health risks of club-goers' often excessive drinking, sometimes combined with illegal drugs (e.g. cocaine is commonly consumed with alcohol, which may increase its toxicity). And while interviews revealed club-goers to be generally aware of the health and legal risks associated with drug use, they were less aware, or concerned about, alcohol-related problems and the related long-term risks.

### Prevention versus lifestyle

There has been 'a paradigm shift' in drug prevention towards focusing on how lifestyle fashions influence young people's recreation and towards challenging their perception that drug use is 'normal'.

Prevention workers increasingly make use of the Internet to reach young drug users and potential users 'in their own world', encouraging them to reflect critically on their drug use habits and assess the related risks. But there is a growing recognition, says the **EMCDDA**, that prevention approaches geared to informing or persuading the individual cannot work in isolation. Broader 'environmental strategies', such as advertising bans, safe-clubbing guidelines<sup>(3)</sup> and targeted event licensing, are thus emerging. These aim to neutralise the aggressive promotion of licit and illicit substances and to erode the perceptions of 'coolness', 'adulthood' or 'rebellion' related to smoking, drinking and taking illicit drugs. Already gaining credence in some countries, such approaches aim to modify the availability of licit drugs and regulate the settings where drugs are consumed.

Commenting on the issue **EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz** says: 'For far too many young Europeans, getting drunk or getting high have become an essential part of a good night out. If we do not break the link in young people's minds between taking drugs and having fun then the health and social costs will be considerable. To do so, we must work with the entertainment industry to ensure that the environments young people frequent are as safe as possible. But we must also connect with young people to ensure that they do not conveniently ignore the long-term damage that drugs and alcohol can do. Above all we need to challenge the insidious belief that excess is synonymous with success — replacing it with an alternative vision that having fun does not depend on chemical enhancements'.

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\* 'Club-goers' — young people attending organised dance music events.

### Notes:

<sup>(1)</sup> 'Developments in drug use within recreational settings', available in English at <http://issues06.emcdda.europa.eu>

<sup>(2)</sup> Due to the heterogeneity of the settings, age ranges and survey methods, comparability between samples is usually poor. Data presented draw on the best available prevalence estimates from a variable selection of countries. These cannot be regarded as representative in any statistical sense.

<sup>(3)</sup> Safe clubbing guidelines aim to create a safe, healthy physical environment for club-goers (e.g. preventing overheating; ensuring free water supplies).

**Graphics:** See Figures 2, 3 and 4 of this *Selected issue*.