



# Message from the Director

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon



## EMCDDA — THE FIRST 25 YEARS

### **A quarter of a century providing evidence for better policies and actions on drugs in Europe**

(30.1.2020, LISBON) This year, the EMCDDA celebrates 25 years of monitoring the drug situation in Europe. In the quarter of a century since the agency embarked on its first work programme in 1995, we have seen revolutionary changes, both in the extent and nature of the drugs problem, and in the world in which we live. Keeping pace with an increasingly dynamic drug phenomenon, while remaining relevant to policy and practice, requires constant reflection, innovation and agility. This is why we will be developing a new business model as we pursue our vision to contribute to a healthier and more secure Europe.

When the agency first opened in Lisbon, with a staff of 17, the EU of then 15 Member States was in the midst of a major heroin epidemic, with drug policy largely influenced by HIV transmission, AIDS and overdose deaths. Our monitoring at that time centred on a handful of 'traditional' illicit drugs — mainly heroin, cannabis and cocaine. Today, Europe's drug market is far more volatile and complex, driven by globalisation, the internet and rapid changes in technology. As a result, we are also monitoring 780 new psychoactive substances, many of which were unknown when the agency was first established.

The creation of the EMCDDA symbolised a major political decision to build drug-related policies on evidence rather than ideology. By improving the comparability of drug data across the EU, we have given countries a 'common language' with which to describe the extent and effects of drug use. We can now be proud of our internationally-recognised European drug monitoring system, including early-warning mechanisms to ensure rapid responses to new substances and emerging threats. This has contributed to a deeper and broader understanding of the problem, earning the agency the reputation as the trusted reference point on drugs in Europe. And as we expand our reporting to include data from innovative sources, we will build a better and timelier knowledge base to inform drug policies in the years to come.

For the past 25 years, the EMCDDA has provided strategic analysis in a policy area that cuts across health and security. Part of the agency's unique value is its comprehensive coverage of this multifaceted problem. With our Strategy 2025, we are committed to adding value to the work of EU and national drug policymakers and professionals. This will bring about better informed drug policy and action, in line with the EU balanced approach to reduce drug supply and demand.

Our achievements to date would not have been possible without close collaboration with national, European and international partners, particularly the EU institutions, the Reitox network and our host country, Portugal. Working in partnership will continue to be central to our activity, as the European drugs problem becomes increasingly linked to, and influenced by, global developments in the drugs field.

Although today's drugs problem is less visible 'on the streets' than it once was, we are confronted with a rapidly growing and violent drug market, which is increasingly global, joined-up and digitally enabled. Availability of highly potent and pure products at lower prices is a cause for increasing concern and represents a clear wake-up call for policymakers. As we celebrate our first 25 years of monitoring and look to the future, I firmly believe that drugs must, once again, receive the attention they deserve.

**Alexis Goosdeel, EMCDDA Director**