



NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

EMCDDA INSIGHTS INTO THE SOCIAL REINTEGRATION OF DRUG USERS

Neglecting the social needs of drug users can undermine chances of long-term recovery

(15.10.2012, LISBON) Over 1 million drug users in the European Union are estimated to be receiving some form of treatment for their drug problems every year. This reflects considerable investments since the 1990s when better access to treatment became a drug policy priority. But while treatment plays a significant role in helping drug users end or, at least manage, their substance use, there are concerns that their ultimate inclusion in society is often neglected. This 'gap' is addressed today in a new 'Insights' study from the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA): *Social reintegration and employment: evidence and interventions for drug users in treatment.***

'The significant number of problem drug users who have accessed European drug treatment services in recent years reflects an important step towards integration', says the report. But, it adds, 'neglecting the social needs of clients can undermine the gains achieved during treatment', as well as the chances of 'long-term success'.

Latest **EMCDDA** data on clients entering drug treatment reveal that over half are unemployed (56 %). Low educational attainment is also common in this vulnerable group, with four out of 10 having completed only primary education or below this level. Meanwhile, around 10 % of drug treatment clients report that they have 'no stable accommodation'. Measures addressing the housing, education, vocational and employment needs of drug users are therefore crucial to overcoming social exclusion.

Today's report reviews recent approaches in this area for problem and recovering drug users, with a particular focus on employment and employability. It shows how social reintegration can benefit the drug user and society as a whole, presents evidence for effectiveness and describes how promising interventions could inspire future research investments. Complementing the study, a new module dedicated to the topic is launched today on the **EMCDDA Best practice portal**, highlighting the benefits of interventions based on motivation and incentive.

The 'Insights' study shows that, while most countries describe the existence of interventions to promote social reintegration — the term is now mentioned in the drug strategies of 22 EU Member States — data indicate that levels of provision fall short of the needs of the drug treatment population.

Included in the report are a set of 'conclusions for practice and policy' designed to assist policymakers and drug practitioners in developing coherent and inclusive strategies to promote social reintegration. These include: further acknowledging this key issue in national drug policies and decision-making on funding and considering data on the topic when monitoring the effectiveness of drug treatment. They also call for the development of evidence-based guidelines once sufficient proof is available on 'what works'.

To date, the majority of research on this topic has been undertaken outside Europe, mainly in the USA. 'Given the crucial role of social reintegration in limiting and overcoming drug-related problems in the long-term, a better understanding of these interventions in Europe is greatly needed', states the report.

EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz says: 'Drug use often exacerbates the already difficult life conditions of excluded individuals, making integration efforts a real challenge for the person concerned and for those providing support. This aspect is particularly relevant during the current period of economic difficulties in Europe, with high levels of unemployment among young European citizens'.

See www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/insights/social-reintegration and www.emcdda.europa.eu/best-practice