European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

Minutes | Scientific Committee
58th meeting

Date	**26–27 October 2023**	**Chair**	**Catherine Comiskey**
Venue	**EMCDDA (room CDS107)**		
Present	See the participants list (Annex 1)		

1. Adoption of the agenda

The Chair of the Scientific Committee, Catherine Comiskey, opened the 58th Scientific Committee meeting and welcomed the Committee members, the spokesperson of the Reitox network (Mateja Jandl) and the EMCDDA staff present. She proceeded to introduce the agenda (Annex 2) that was adopted unanimously.

2. Feedback from the Chair on relevant meetings and documents (for information)

The Chair gave the floor to Fernando Rodriguez de Fonseca to provide feedback from the Management Board meeting on 20 June 2023, which he attended on behalf of the Chair of the Scientific Committee.

Fernando Rodriguez de Fonseca went back on the highlights of the meeting, emphasising the exchange of views on the situation concerning cannabis and amphetamines and, especially, the need to build preparedness on the captagon issue. He also gave updates on the adoption and the preparation of the new European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) Regulation and on the extension of international cooperation work to possibly involve countries such as Ecuador, Colombia or Chile, all for decision.

Fernando Rodriguez de Fonseca then presented the conclusions of the last Swedish and Spanish presidencies as discussed during the Management Board meeting. After the Chair opened the floor to the Scientific Committee to react and exchange, this topic allowed Charlotte Colman, member of the Scientific Committee, to inform the rest of the Committee on the main priorities for Belgium's upcoming Presidency: access to medication, cocaine trafficking to seaports and drugs in prison.

3. Ideas for the end of the current Scientific Committee (for discussion)

The Chair opened the discussion on the ideas for the next Scientific Committee meeting to be organised in Spring 2024 and other activities marking the end of the current mandate. The suggestion was made for this last meeting to take place somewhere close to Lisbon.

In anticipation of the upcoming renewal of the Scientific Committee, the Chair suggested that the current members compile a document to serve as a record of the work undertaken over the past few years. She subsequently invited participants to share their suggestions in a round table discussion. The Scientific Committee agreed on the possibility of providing two distinct documents: one intended for internal use, specifically for the upcoming members of the Scientific Committee, and another for external communication to highlight the accomplishments of the current Committee.

For internal communication, the Committee agreed on the need to convey lessons learned to the next Committee. This involves providing the incoming Committee with valuable insights derived from the current Committee's experiences, outlining major challenges and difficulties encountered.

For external communication, the Committee unanimously recognised the importance of the scientific independence of the Committee and its role in advising the Agency and informing drug policy. The suggestion was to create a concise commentary with selected case studies, illustrating examples of the positive influence on research and policy as well as the challenges, and highlighting future-oriented issues. Additionally, there were suggestions emphasising the importance of obtaining insights from civil society to facilitate a smoother translation of recommendations to policymakers.

The Scientific Committee highlighted the importance of effective communication on this matter, and specifically of communication grounded in scientific evidence. On this topic, several additional ideas were brought forward to be further evaluated and eventually followed up, such as the organisation of a webinar with the Committee, the creation of brief videos, and using the next edition of the Lisbon Addictions conference, in October 2024, as a platform to disseminate the accomplished work. Implementing these proposals would depend first and foremost on the resources and budget available.

Overall, the Scientific Committee unanimously agreed on the critical need to offer independent and evidence-based advice during times of uncertainty.

4. Welcome by the Director and update on the preparatory activities for the launch of the new EUDA (for information and discussion)

The EMCDDA Director, Alexis Goosdeel, welcomed all the attendees and updated the Scientific Committee on the ongoing developments at the EMCDDA, including the preparatory work for the implementation of the new Regulation on the EUDA.

The Director defined the key role of the new Agency as ‘contributing to the European Union’s preparedness on drugs’. To do so, the EUDA’s services were summarised in four words: anticipate, alert, respond and learn. The Director presented some projects destined to fulfil this mission and emphasised the need to have a threat assessment team to support Member States as well as the provision of a network of existing laboratories to participate in the collection of data and support rapid threat assessment. After presenting the timeline of the milestones achieved in 2023, the Director showcased the 13 positions that will be opened soon to fulfil the needs of the Agency’s new mandate.

Following the updates, the Director opened the floor for the Scientific Committee members to share their thoughts and questions. These focused on the challenges of a sudden increase in budget and staff, on the implications of implementing the laboratories network and on the continuity of the relationship between EUDA and other agencies such as Frontex and Europol.

The Chair concluded the discussion by affirming the Committee's full support for the Agency in its new mandate. Emphasis was placed on maintaining health as a primary focus within an Agency regarded by the public as a guiding authority.

5. Preparing for the new Regulation (for discussion)

Roumen Sedefov, Head of the Risks to public safety and security unit, co-chaired this session with Jane Mounteney, Head of the Public health unit, to introduce the main areas of the new Regulation. These are: Monitoring, presented by Jane Mounteney; Preparedness, presented by Roumen Sedefov; and Competency development, introduced by Maria Moreira, Head of the Reitox and external partners unit.

a. Monitoring (Jane Mounteney)

After referring to the structure of the legislation proposal, and in particular Articles 6 and 7, Jane Mounteney presented the steps already ongoing in-house in the matter of monitoring. These involve the establishment of internal and joint working groups with the national focal points, the work on the Single Programming Document (SPD) 2024, and the input of consultants on the new posts that will soon be open for recruitment. The Head of unit emphasised the importance allocated to the

implementation of an EUDA data foundation, to deliver a collection of valid data from different sources.

Overall, Jane Mounteney insisted on the need for the new monitoring approach to focus simultaneously on drug use, harms and consequences, enhanced monitoring of drug-related deaths and the topics of drug supply, markets, crime and new psychoactive substances.

As the floor was open to the Scientific Committee for discussion, the main concerns were directed towards the architecture of the databases and their articulation with new technology such as artificial intelligence, and also on the need for continued cooperation with the Reitox national focal points as primary partners to ensure the quality of the collected data.

b. **Preparedness (Roumen Sedefov)**

Roumen Sedefov introduced his presentation on preparedness reminding the attendees that the legal basis of the EUDA Regulation is Article 168(5) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, therefore public health is the main objective to be achieved through future actions of the EUDA. Roumen Sedefov then presented the different articles of the new Regulation under the preparedness chapter, such as Article 12 on threat assessment capability, Article 13 on the European drug alert system (EUDAS), Article 14 on drug precursors and Article 15 on the new European network of forensic and toxicology laboratories.

Some members of the Scientific Committee reiterated their views that (public) health should remain a key objective. Discussions of the Committee then focused on risk assessment and risk communication.

c. **Competency development (Maria Moreira)**

Maria Moreira presented competency development, the third pillar of the new Regulation, emphasising the cross-cutting aspect of the articles involved (Articles 16 to 21), each one indicating at least one service to be provided by the Agency and at least one reference to participating countries. After describing the work of the ongoing working groups, she highlighted the importance of the new mandate as it makes it possible for the Agency to recommend appropriate and evidence-based actions and engage even more in competence development/training activities. In this section, the new regulation covers evidence-based interventions and best practices, an assessment scheme for national measures, policy support to Member States, training, internal cooperation and research and innovation.

Even though this topic is mostly mentioned in Article 7, the focus was also placed on foresight, as the Agency is exploring transversal areas within the ‘Research, Innovation, and Foresight’ domain. In this area, the chosen priority areas of work will be the identification of knowledge gaps and research priorities, the creation of a research database, the setting up of an innovation lab and a foresight package that will include technology foresight.

The Scientific Committee members commented on the need to integrate recovery and social integration in competency development. The EMCDDA staff supported this statement, affirming that social integration is already a component of the current work.

6. Formal opinion of the Scientific Committee on the EMCDDA SPD 2024–2026

The Chair presented the Formal opinion of the SPD 2024–2026 paragraph by paragraph for the Scientific Committee to comment. While some questions were raised on the issue of the integration of misuse of medicine in the Agency’s mandate and the meaning of a ‘holistic and integrated methodological approach’, the Committee remained consensual on most of the content (Annex 3).

7. Update on 2023 products and outputs (for information)

Before giving the floor to Rosemary Martin de Sousa, Head of the Communication unit, the Chair wished to acknowledge and commend the efforts and involvement of Manteja Jandl, as this 58th meeting marks the conclusion of her two-year term as one of the spokespersons of the Reitox network. This acknowledgement of thanks was supported by all members of the Scientific Committee.

Rosemary Martin de Sousa began by providing an overview of the tools and publications introduced on the Agency's website in 2023, along with those still to be published. She especially mentioned the success of the launch of the first HTML version of the *European Drug Report* 2023 and the multilingual glossary, providing over 200 terms and definitions available in all EU languages, Arabic, Georgian and Russian.

Despite favourable user traffic, Rosemary Martin de Sousa underscored the possibility of enhancing 'Search Engine Optimisation' (SEO), given that the majority of users access the site through Google. She mentioned that SEO would be particularly important for the EMCDDA's transition to the EUDA. Finally, she introduced the branding project for the new Agency, designed as the guiding tool for its new identity and the basis for developing innovative communication strategies.

This information was received positively by the members of the Scientific Committee, especially by the Chair and Vice-chair. They commended the project for its contribution to understanding the values and principles that the Agency stands for, highlighted the work carried out by the communication team and encouraged the general staff of the Agency for the efforts that will be needed to implement this new mandate, with the stated values and principles.

8. Update on the procedures of the new Scientific Committee (2023) (for information)

Klaudia Palczak, principal scientific manager, briefed the Scientific Committee on the rules of procedures and the call for expressions of interest for the appointment of the next Scientific Committee, approved by the Agency's Management Board in June 2023. During the presentation, she reiterated key details about the selection process and the impending submission deadline. The call for expressions of interest will be publicised soon on social media.

9. Procedure to establish a new list of experts to extend the EUDA Scientific Committee for the risk assessment of new psychoactive substances

Klaudia Palczak showcased the distinction between the selection of the Scientific Committee as explained previously and the establishment of another list of experts, acting on the advice of the chairperson of the Scientific Committee, to be appointed for risk assessment on new psychoactive substances. She also highlighted the possibility for candidates to apply to feature on both lists.

Klaudia Palczak and Maria Moreira also reminded the Scientific Committee of the possibility within the current rules of procedure for the Committee to call upon external experts when needed.

10. Contribution of the EMCDDA Scientific Committee for the 2023 Annual Dialogue on Research of the Horizontal Drugs Group (for discussion)

As the Annual Dialogue on Research will take place on 16 November, the Chair presented to the rest of the Scientific Committee the slides that will be shown at the meeting. This presentation will highlight the conclusions and results of the 2022 exercise 'Identification of drug-related future research priorities'. The Chair stressed the importance of this meeting for the Scientific Committee to be heard as an independent scientific stakeholder, especially since research is now fully incorporated in the EUDA mandate.

11. Update on Lisbon Addictions 2024 (for information)

Klaudia Palczak reminded the Scientific Committee of the theme and the dates for the next edition of Lisbon Addictions. After presenting the tracks of the conference and the co-producers involved, she informed the Committee of the recent launch of the call for abstracts and the selection process and

presented the side events already confirmed. She also informed the attendees that the review guidelines will soon be available.

The Scientific Committee sought clarification on the registration procedure, as they proposed to use the conference as a platform to communicate on their current mandate. The EMCDDA staff members remarked on the key role of the Scientific Committee and pointed to the possibility of putting forward proposals for invited sessions to be evaluated by the Programme Committee.

12. AOB

The Scientific Committee engaged in discussions regarding a possible date for the next meeting, leaning towards the period around 29 February and 1 March 2024. The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Annexes:

Annex 1: List of participants

Annex 2: Agenda of the meeting

Annex 3: Formal opinion of the Scientific Committee on the SPD 2024–2026