



News release

INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING — 26 JUNE

EMCDDA and Europol join EU institutions in dialogue on the impact of COVID-19 on the world drug situation

(26.06.2020, LISBON/THE HAGUE) On the occasion of **International day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking**, the **EMCDDA** and **Europol** are joining representatives of the **EU institutions** today in providing the European perspective on the impact of COVID-19 on the world drug situation. The panel discussion will conclude a special event of the United Nations' Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and is co-sponsored by the European Union and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) ⁽¹⁾.

In a statement marking the day, **European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Ylva Johansson** said: 'The route from drug producer, to distributor, to user, and indeed to money launderer, is becoming ever more sophisticated, more circuitous and more profitable. In recent years, illicit drugs have increased in availability, with technology enabling online trade, postal dispatch, and hidden profits throughout the EU. Modern organised crime needs a modern organised response. We will soon present a robust and ambitious EU action on tackling drug smugglers, improving prevention strategies and targeting those who profit from others' addiction.'

Floriana Sipala, Head of the Organised Crime and Drugs Policy Unit at the European Commission, will present the opening remarks on the CND panel, followed by a speech from **Europol Executive Director Catherine De Bolle**. **EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel** will deliver the closing remarks ⁽²⁾.

The EMCDDA and Europol have been 'taking the pulse' of the impact of COVID-19 on drug use, drug services and drug markets. In a report published last month ⁽³⁾, they explored drug market developments under the pandemic and their impact on public health and security in the EU. The analysis reported higher prices, local shortages and reduced purity for some drugs, while noting continued violence among suppliers and distributors. It also described how organised crime groups have remained active and resilient, by adapting transportation models, trafficking routes and concealment methods during the pandemic.

Speaking today, **Catherine De Bolle** said: 'The pandemic has had a major impact on our lives, and is slowing down our economy. Unfortunately, this downturn has not been seen in international drugs trafficking. While our legal economy is weakening, criminal markets have continued their business and have become even stronger, generating huge profits. The movement of bulk quantities of drugs to the European Union and between EU Member States has continued and seizures of illegal drugs in some EU countries during the first half of 2020 have been higher than in the same months of previous years'.

'More than ever, this worrying trend should motivate us to ensure that any recovery from the pandemic is accompanied by a strong and effective law enforcement response, combined with a sustained public health response. We need to collectively establish that drug traffickers do not benefit from the potential social and economic consequences of the crisis', **Executive Director De Bolle** added.

EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel declared: 'The economic recession that we have in front of us is likely to be harmful in terms of mental and physical health and could result in a significant increase of substance use in the general population. It can be expected that it will amplify the negative consequences of the pandemic for people who are using drugs and for vulnerable groups in general. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to integrate drug-related services into the essential health services at national level, to

provide adequate equipment and tools for frontline workers, and to maintain the funding and functioning of drug-related services in the post-pandemic period.’

Alexis Goosdeel concluded: ‘The way in which the different services and authorities have been working together in the European Union in the times of this pandemic has shown that the “balanced approach” of the EU drugs policy has contributed to care and to protect, rather than to punish’.

Notes

(¹) For more, see [CND event](#) and [programme](#).

(²) [EMCDDA Director’s speech](#) and [EMCDDA event page](#).

(³) [EMCDDA–Europol report: *EU Drug Markets — Impact of COVID-19*](#). See also [COVID-19 and drugs](#).