



NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

EUROPEAN SCHOOL SURVEY PROJECT ON ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS (ESPAD) 'ESPAD, a crucial window onto adolescent substance use', says EU drugs agency

(26.3.2009, LISBON) Use of illicit drugs among 15–16-year-old school students, appears to have stabilised or slightly fallen, according to the latest European study of this group published today by **ESPAD**. The report, which follows a 2007 survey conducted in 35 European countries, also reveals a decrease in last-month rates of cigarette smoking among school students. However, it sounds the alarm over clear rises in the group's 'heavy episodic drinking', and the narrowing gender gap in this behaviour.

This is the fourth data-collection wave conducted by the **ESPAD** project, with multi-national surveys carried out in 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007. Over 100,000 school students took part in the latest survey. Of the countries participating, 25 were EU Member States. The **2007 ESPAD report: substance use among students in 35 countries**, available in English, will be complemented by a multilingual summary produced with the support of the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA)**. The **EMCDDA** includes **ESPAD** data in its annual reporting on the drug situation and the two bodies work closely together under a cooperation framework signed in 2007. One of the aims of this accord is to broaden access to the information and expertise gathered by the project.

EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz said: 'Information collected by the ESPAD project offers us a crucial window onto country differences and changes in adolescent substance use in Europe today. It also provides us with valuable insights into adolescent perceptions about the associated risks and availability of the various substances. The long-term picture we are now able to draw from these repeated surveys supports other indicators which point to stabilising or even falling adolescent cannabis use. Less positively, the report highlights harmful patterns of alcohol use, which call for broad-based health education approaches when addressing the prevention of substance use among young people'.

According to today's report, an average 61 % of school students surveyed in 2007 had consumed alcohol in the past month. And 43 % reported 'heavy episodic drinking' (five drinks or more per occasion) in the past 30 days. Increases in this behaviour were particularly visible among girls between the 2003 and 2007 surveys, with an increase from 35 % to 42 %. While in the 1995 survey this drinking pattern was on average more common among boys than girls, the gap had diminished substantially by 2007.

Some 29 % of those surveyed had smoked cigarettes in the past month. The overall trend in last-month cigarette smoking in the participating countries is one of a decrease or stabilisation. Average prevalence rates in last-month smoking dropped by seven percentage points between the 1999 and 2007 surveys, and the earlier gender gap has now vanished.

The vast majority of the students surveyed in 2007, and who had ever tried an illicit drug, had used cannabis. Lifetime cannabis use was reported by 19 % of the students and last-month use by an average 7 %. ESPAD data show that, overall, the increase in illicit drug use (mainly cannabis) between 1995 and 2003, had come to a halt, if not a decrease, in 2007. And there were no increases in any country for last-month use of cannabis between 2003 and 2007. In 2007, some 7 % had tried in their lifetime one or more other illicit drugs (ecstasy, amphetamines, hallucinogens, cocaine, crack, heroin), although considerable differences existed between countries. Non-prescribed use of tranquillisers or sedatives remained fairly stable between 1995 and 2007 (around 7 % in 2007), with slightly more girls (8 %) than boys (5 %) having done so.