

Mobilizing Social Research for Policy Advice on Drug Demand Reduction in Central and Eastern Europe

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The rapidly changing political situation in Central and Eastern Europe has brought about a raising number of related economic and social problems, among them the immense problem of the increase of drug trafficking and drug use in these countries. The problems of the breakdown of social security systems and the raising number of poor and vulnerable people call for the creation of new legislation, effective monitoring systems and the increase of preventive measures. Evidently, also researchers had to shift their focus to the new situation and pay attention to, among others, the social aspects of drug use.

At the International Expert Meeting entitled *Mobilizing Social Research for Policy Advice on Drug Demand Reduction in Central and Eastern Europe*, 35 social scientists from 14 countries concentrated in their contributions on this social dimension of drug use. The actual situation of drug demand in the different countries of Central and Eastern Europe was discussed in relation to the assessment of the needs for the development of social research in this area as well as of the dissemination of sociological concepts, methodologies and concrete research results.

In this respect, contributions were presented on a variety of issues:

- country studies, in which major information was presented on the actual drug situation, the development of policy action so far, problems in this respect and scientific research carried out or under way;
- primary prevention, containing activities and programmes in general and for some specific groups;
- secondary prevention, which also included the institutional care setting in the different countries;
- gender in relation to the drug demand situation, in view of the feminization of the problem and the importance of women to undertake activities to reduce the demand for drugs;
- activities to reduce the demand for drugs particularly for young people, especially related to primary prevention.

The participants of the meeting achieved general agreement on the role that social research could and has to play to tackle the drug use problem. It was stipulated that social research results should be considered not only as a mere input to the policy-making process, but that this research should be translated in concrete policies. The transformation of social research into policy advice should be one of the major goals of research programmes and activities. In this respect it was considered that especially social and legal aspects of drug demand and its reduction should be worked out. Analysis of actual policies, and comparative research as to new concepts and strategies to confront the problem will provide an opportunity to tune policy formulation in the direction of needs and demands of societies.

At the programme level, the main focus should be directed towards primary prevention activities. Based on the assessment of needs of different risk groups, it will be possible to detect the kind of primary prevention activities which are particularly relevant in different contexts and the conditions under which different model programmes can be introduced and adapted.

The wish to continue the debate on social research for illicit drug demand and its reduction, asks for a continuous platform of communication and information. A newsletter could be the medium to structure this platform and can include information on developments in the countries of the region, as well as other information related to the social aspects of drug abuse.

In view of the need for future cooperation and exchange of research results on the social dimensions of drug use, a network of social researchers as well as NGO representatives of Central and Eastern European countries was established, which would concentrate particularly on these three main areas of interest.

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