SOLIDIFY project: a broad European partnership stands for a local drug policy based on the principles of harm reduction and supports the implementation of Supervised Drug Consumption Facilities

On 5 and 6 December 2019, 150 participants took part in the final conference of Efus’ SOLIDIFY project, held in Lisbon, Portugal. Co-hosted with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and the Municipality of Lisbon (CML), the event showcased work produced over two years on how to foster local multi-agency partnerships around Supervised Drug Consumption Facilities (SDCFs) in order to capitalise on the positive impacts they can have for urban security and public tranquillity.

A hub for intense exchange and discussion

The participants – representatives of local, regional and national authorities, civil society organisations, research centres, law enforcement agencies, and initiatives and networks of people who use drugs – discussed a range of key questions relating to the future of European drug policies. These included:

- How to foster local multi-stakeholder partnerships?
- How to improve cooperation between providers of health services, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the police?
- How to better assess the impact of harm reduction on public health and urban security?
- What role can drug checking play in reinforcing prevention and harm reduction at the local level?

These questions were discussed during lively panel discussions, breakout sessions and workshops, but also during 7 study visits to local harm-reduction services. These visits were organised by the Municipality of Lisbon in cooperation with the NGOs CRESCER, Medicos do Mundo, GAT and Ares do Pinhal, as well as the parish of Lumiar and the EMCDDA.
Co-producing balanced drug policies in Europe

In her keynote speech, Ruth Dreifuss, former President of the Swiss Confederation and Chair of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, called on the participants to further intensify and professionalise their efforts in the face of a current global pushback against progressive drug policies: “My experience has led me to believe that cities are the level where reforms are required and can take place, beyond national legislation. This is where professionals from health service providers, law enforcement and policymakers are working together on the ground. We should not wait for a technical organisation with a limited mandate to tell us what to do in order to save lives and ensure the safety of our citizens”.

Alexis Goosdeel, EMCDDA Director, said: “I am particularly pleased to see so many health, security and law enforcement practitioners together at this conference. Multi-sectoral cooperation at the local level is what will make the difference in the future. We must prepare new generations to continue this work.”

Nuno Veludo, advisor for health policy at the Lisbon City Council (CML), stressed the link between harm reduction, drug policy and democracy: “We must reinforce our measures to support drug users and other vulnerable groups and empower them to participate actively in local democracy and public deliberation - all citizens have an equally important place in the public sphere.”

Bernard Rivaillé, Deputy Mayor of Lormont and member of Efus’ executive committee, stressed the need for peer-to-peer support among cities: “Through the promotion and exchange of experiences and successful practices between European cities, we wish to continue to work on this issue by mobilising local elected representatives and all local actors in order to bring out the full potential of drug prevention projects and programmes.”

Harm reduction and SDCFs key to effective local drug policies

The conference delegates agreed on the following principles:

- Drug policies must be pragmatic and seek to reduce the harms drug use causes to the health, social wellbeing and security of individuals, communities and society. They must be designed taking into account the needs on the ground, in each specific city or region.

- Supervised Drug Consumption Facilities (SDCFs) have shown to be efficient tools to improve public health and security locally. They help prevent drug-related deaths, reduce risks that lead to the transmission of blood borne viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis C, and reduce public nuisance. They are an effective means to reach and stay in contact with highly marginalised populations, supporting their access to care and drug treatment. They do not encourage drug use.

- Local authorities have a key role to play in accompanying SDCFs and ensuring their effective management and acceptance in the local community. Together with civil society organisations, organisations and initiatives of people who use drugs, research institutions, governments and national and European agencies, they can create synergies that strengthen their efforts and increase impact.

Through the SOLIDIFY project, Efus and its partners have taken up these challenges, highlighting the fact that local authorities are particularly well placed to coordinate and lead the co-production of policies. An efficient drug policy must combine public health and public security approaches, and municipal departments and services working in both fields should cooperate closely. Furthermore, risk reduction policies must be designed pragmatically, taking into account the specific needs of each territory, seeking the active participation of local
residents, and protecting the fundamental rights of all concerned groups including people who take drugs.

A follow-up event in Strasbourg in April 2021

While the SOLIDIFY project will end in March 2020, the initiative and political momentum it has created will persist: Alexandre Feltz, Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg, invited the conference participants to a follow-up event to be organised in Strasbourg in April 2021 with the support of the city and the European Parliament.
About the SOLIDIFY project

SOLIDIFY – Supervised Drug Consumption Facilities to Instill Harm Reduction and Social Cohesion at Local Levels – is a European cooperation project led by Efus with the following partners: The Hague, Lisbon, Liège, UTRIP, Brussels Prevention and Security, Augsburg, Essen, ABD Association, Mannheim, Barcelona Public Health Agency, Paris and Strasbourg. The partners have worked collaboratively to better analyse the process of setting up SDCFs locally. The project has also strengthened partnerships between local authorities and NGOs and fostered exchange and cooperation at European level. The project partners seek to reinforce the positive impact harm reduction services can have for urban security and social cohesion at the local level.

About the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus)

Founded in 1987 in Barcelona under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus) is the only European network of local and regional authorities dedicated to urban security. Gathering some 250 local and regional authorities from 16 countries, its objectives are to:

- promote a balanced vision of urban security combining prevention, sanction and social cohesion;
- support local and regional authorities in the design, implementation and evaluation of their local security policy;
- help local authorities get recognition for their role in the development and implementation of national and European policies.

www.efus.eu

About the EMCDDA

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) is the central source and confirmed authority on drug-related issues in Europe. For almost 25 years, it has been collecting, analysing and disseminating scientifically sound information on drugs and drug addiction and their consequences, providing its audiences with an evidence-based picture of the drug phenomenon at European level. Based in Lisbon, the EMCDDA is one of the decentralised agencies of the European Union.

www.emcdda.europa.eu

About the CML

The Lisboa City Council is the executive body of the municipality and its mission is to define and execute policies that may promote the development of the County of Lisboa in different areas. The City Council comprises 16 elected Councillors, representing the different political forces, and the Mayor.

Lisbon is a member of Efus since 1998 and currently a member of its executive committee.

www.cm-lisboa.pt/en/city-council
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