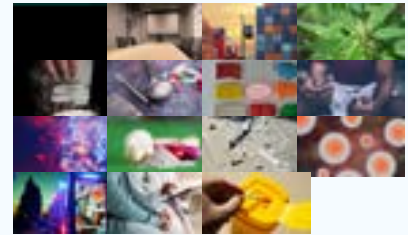


Understanding Europe's drug situation in 2025 – key developments (European Drug Report 2025)

The EUDA's latest analysis of the European drug phenomenon reveals a drug market that is both resilient and influenced by developments taking place at the global level. The continuing health and security problems presented by established and newer illicit drugs, and increasingly the interplay between them, create a challenging policy context for the shaping and implementation of effective responses. The *European Drug Report 2025* provides a snapshot of the drug situation in Europe based on the latest data available. This introductory section provides an analytical commentary on some of the important issues that are currently featuring on Europe's drug policy agenda.



This page is part of the [European Drug Report 2025](#), the EUDA's annual overview of the drug situation in Europe.

Last update: 5 June 2025

Ensuring Europe's preparedness for evolving drug problems

The European drug market is evolving rapidly as both suppliers and consumers are finding ways to adapt to geopolitical instability, globalisation and technological advances. This appears to be resulting in the availability of a more diverse range of substances, often of high potency and purity, which are posing new risks to public health. At the same time global events threaten to push Europe's response capacities to the limit, as the complexity and scale of the problem continue to grow.



The impact of the developments we are seeing means that everyone is in some way likely to be affected by illicit drug use, the operation of the drug market and the problems associated with it. Directly, we see this in those who develop problems and need treatment or other services.

Indirectly, we see it in the recruitment into criminality of vulnerable young people, the strain on health budgets, and the social costs for communities that feel unsafe or where institutions or businesses are undermined by corruption or criminal practices. We cannot avoid the fact that drug issues have an impact almost everywhere. They are manifest in and exacerbate other complex policy problems, such as homelessness, the management of psychiatric disorders and youth criminality. We are also witnessing greater levels of violence and corruption driven by the drug market in some countries. Increasingly, we are observing that almost everything with psychoactive properties can appear on the drug market, often mislabelled or in mixtures, leaving consumers potentially unaware of what they are using, increasing health risks and creating new law-enforcement and regulatory challenges.

The EUDA is committed to increasing Europe's preparedness on illicit drugs and new psychoactive substances, supporting the European Union and its Member States through a new, interconnected service model. The *European Drug Report* supports this work by highlighting the latest trends and emerging threats for policymakers and practitioners in the drugs field, in order to inform their efforts and support the development of evidence-based and timely responses to new and changing drug problems.

The European Union Drugs Agency – supporting the response to a changing drug landscape

In Europe today, sudden shifts in the substances available on local drug markets are now more likely to occur than in the past, leading to greater uncertainty about the harms to which people taking them may be exposed. New substances have become increasingly integrated into Europe's illicit drug market, targeting a wide range of consumers, from the episodic and socially integrated to those with problematic patterns of use and experiencing social marginalisation.

Following the transformation of the EMCDDA into the EUDA in July 2024, the Agency is better equipped to respond to these challenges, its proactive role is enhanced, strengthening its mission to support the preparedness of the European Union and its Member States with a high-quality range of customer-centric services. Under the new mandate, the EUDA will utilise expert analysis to support near real-time assessments and responses to emerging drug problems, whether threats from new drugs, precursors or globally linked drug market and technological challenges.

With potent new synthetic opioids such as nitazenes available in the European Union and creating serious health risks, it is essential to improve Europe's ability to identify new substances, determine the purity of drugs and conduct pharmacological profiling to clarify what substances are being sold. To do this, the EUDA is developing a network of national forensic and toxicology laboratories, supporting the development of quality standards in this important area.

Poisoning outbreaks can escalate rapidly, as has been seen with synthetic cannabinoids and nitazene opioids. The EU Early Warning System on new psychoactive substances remains an

essential support for national and EU-level awareness and responses to new and controlled drugs. It provides information exchange, advisories, alerts, early warning and risk assessments. Complementing it, the European Drug Alert System will support EU and national preparedness and response activities to serious drug-related risks through the rapid exchange of information, targeted alerts and other risk communications.

The EUDA's health and security threat assessment system is currently under development as a new capability to support preparedness and strategic action in response to emerging drug-related threats in the European Union. In late 2024, the Agency completed a pilot threat assessment, which focused on highly potent synthetic opioids in the Baltic region. Threat assessments are developed in close collaboration with national experts and draw on multiple data sources and multidisciplinary input. They provide structured analysis of the situation and propose tiered response options to help mitigate the threat at both national and EU level.

The drug situation in Europe in 2025 – an overview

Resilient illicit drug flows sustain high availability in Europe

Analysis of supply-related indicators for illicit drugs in the European Union suggests that drug flows appear to be resilient to many market changes, with availability remaining high across all substance types. There is widespread availability of a broader range of drugs, often of high potency or purity, where knowledge about health risks is limited. For some drugs, for example cannabis, there is a growing diversification of consumer products available on the market (such as oils, extracts, edibles and vaping products). For cocaine, the levels of reported seizures in Europe have continued to increase year on year. For synthetic drugs, such as amphetamines, MDMA and cathinones, there is evidence of increased production within Europe, and concerns exist that this local production, closer to consumer markets, may trigger more rapid shifts in consumption trends. The increased integration of new stimulants into Europe's illicit drug market, alongside more commonly used illicit substances, poses evolving challenges in terms of the sensitivity of existing monitoring systems to emerging harms and the appropriateness of existing responses.

Commercial cross-border trade exploited by drug trafficking networks

Globalisation has had a significant impact on drug availability in Europe, as criminals exploit the increased opportunities for trafficking provided by more interconnected communication, trade and transport networks. The infiltration of maritime shipping routes and the trafficking of bulk quantities of drugs in commercial intermodal shipping containers continues to fuel Europe's drug market. Globalised trade is exploited to facilitate the purchase of chemicals and equipment used in illicit drug production, with European drug producers and traffickers more closely involved with international criminal networks.

The resilience of illicit drug trafficking via commercial supply chains is reflected in the large drug seizures in Europe's ports. In 2024, Spain reported its largest ever seizure of cocaine in a single shipment – 13 tonnes, concealed in bananas originating in Ecuador. Germany seized 43 tonnes of cocaine in 2023 as large consignments amounting to 25 tonnes were seized in the Port of Hamburg that year, double the quantity reported in 2022. Criminal networks use multiple methods to evade detection. Among these are sophisticated concealment techniques, typically involving shipments of goods, which present logistical processing challenges for authorities; targeting smaller ports; transferring consignments from ship to ship at sea or leaving them floating in the water for collection.

The 2023 [EU Roadmap against drug trafficking](#) outlines measures to enhance customs risk management and the detection of drugs and precursors. These include enhancing the interoperability of customs information systems among EU Member States and supporting the deployment of advanced container-scanning equipment. The Roadmap also supports the European Ports Alliance, a public-private partnership designed to increase the resilience of key logistical centres against drug trafficking and infiltration by criminal networks.

As drug production and trafficking evolves, countering the risks to health and security created by the activities of criminal networks and the operation of the drugs market remains a challenge. Both organised crime and drug-trafficking are among the key topics addressed in the forthcoming external evaluation of the EU drugs strategy and action plan 2021-25. Developed with insights from Europol's annual [Serious Organised Crime Threat Assessments](#), the recently launched [ProtectEU](#) – A European Internal Security Strategy, addresses the evolving threat landscape, including a focus on tackling organised crime and drug-trafficking.

Online platforms are used to facilitate drug trafficking and distribution

A plethora of national and global online platforms are currently used to organise the drugs trade, with an appeal to both suppliers and buyers linked to their immediacy and potential for anonymity. At the retail level, surface websites, including legitimate e-commerce platforms and social media sites, are used to sell new psychoactive substances, illegally produced, fake medicines and, to a lesser extent, established illicit drugs. Surface websites are also used to sell drug precursors and other chemicals used in drug production. Current information suggests retail-level drug distribution is increasingly facilitated through social media platforms and applications, ranging in openness from public profiles to private content and forums for pre-screened users. Retail sales are also facilitated by darknet websites, which provide anonymity through encryption and digital cryptocurrency payments, targeting customers globally, but sometimes in specific countries or language groups.

Research indicates that buyers and sellers view social media as more appealing than darknets because it facilitates fast and convenient transactions, whether in-person, through online payments, direct delivery or using collection points. Criminal networks also use social media to recruit and exploit adolescents to operate as low-level facilitators in various aspects of the drug trade, including retail sales, cross-border trafficking and targeted intimidation and violence.

The attractiveness of darknets has been diminished by their short operational lifespans, exit-scams and law enforcement-led shutdowns. More generally, law enforcement agencies have disrupted digital criminal infrastructures by infiltrating encrypted communication networks used by traffickers.

Intimidation and violence remain a hallmark of Europe's drug market

Alongside making illicit substances widely available in Europe, the illegal production, trafficking and distribution of drugs generates intimidation and violence, undermining Europe's security. The potential profits from selling illicit drugs appeals to criminal networks, resulting in intense competition for the control of sources, routes and markets, and can lead to violence. Concerns have increased not only about the corruption of staff in logistical supply chains or attempts to destabilise institutions through infiltration, but also regarding homicides and the exploitation of juveniles recruited by criminal networks into various aspects of the illicit drugs trade.

Vulnerable young people are targeted, in person and online, and recruited to work as drug couriers, and, in some extreme cases, to take part in violence and drug-related homicides. People can become victims of drug-related intimidation and violence at various levels, with individuals and families targeted for amassing drug debts. With intensifying law enforcement efforts in key transport centres, criminal networks exploit multiple modi operandi to move drug consignments, creating the potential for intimidation and violence to manifest in new locations where drugs are produced, stored, transiting through or sold.

The EUDA has launched a new project to better understand the nature of drug market-related violence in Europe, to provide decision-makers with the best available information on how to tackle this issue. As part of this effort, and in collaboration with the European Commission, the EUDA organised the first European conference on drug-related violence, which was held in Brussels in November 2024. The conference addressed the different aspects of drug-related violence, balancing both health and security concerns, and promoting community safety and public health. This event highlighted the need to improve monitoring and data collection at the European level and to establish a regular forum for exchanging ideas and best practices to support evidence-based policy-making in this area (see also the EUDA and Europol's [EU Drug Markets – In-depth analysis](#) and Europol's [Serious Organised Crime Threat Assessment](#)).

Responding to complex patterns of polysubstance consumption remains challenging

Polysubstance use is associated with higher risks of health and social problems. This term refers to the use of two or more psychoactive substances, licit or illicit, simultaneously or sequentially. Data from a range of indicators including the 2024 European Web Survey on Drugs and syringe residue analysis by the ESCAPE network, suggest that polysubstance use is widespread among people who use drugs. Various factors may be fuelling increasing reports of polysubstance use, including the increasing integration of the markets for new psychoactive substances and illicit drugs. Examples of this include hemp mixed with semi-synthetic cannabinoids, stimulants mixed with synthetic cathinones and ketamine, or new synthetic opioids mixed with or mis-sold as heroin or benzodiazepines.

Whether intentional or not, using drugs in combination, including with alcohol, increases risks and complicates the delivery of interventions, including the response to acute poisoning. The complexity of drug consumption patterns is reflected in the fact that the majority of fatal overdoses involve the use of more than one substance, with opioids usually involved in combination with other drugs. Alcohol and benzodiazepines are present in a significant proportion of fatal overdose cases. Given the growing challenges related to polysubstance use, the EUDA is working to enhance data collection and monitoring of polysubstance use to better support policy and best practice in this area.

Europe's cannabis market continues to evolve

Cannabis product diversity and potency on the increase

Around 1.5 % of adults in the European Union (4.3 million people) are estimated to be daily or almost daily cannabis consumers, and these people are most likely to experience problems from using cannabis. The potency of seized cannabis resin remains very high by historical standards, with the average sample now containing 23 % THC, while the average potency of herb remains at 11 % THC. Although resin and herb continue to be the dominant cannabis products, an increasing range of cannabis-based products are now available to consumers, including high-potency products which have been linked to acute drug-toxicity presentations in hospital emergency departments. Matters are further complicated by the fact that some products sold on the illicit market as cannabis may be adulterated with potent synthetic cannabinoids, while a number of semi-synthetic cannabinoids, such as hexahydrocannabinol (HHC), have also appeared recently on the commercial markets in some European countries. This diversity of products has health risk implications for consumers, and requires greater research and regulatory attention.

Assessing the impact of cannabis policy changes remains key

The European policy approach to cannabis is also becoming more diverse, as some EU Member States are considering or changing their policy approach to recreational cannabis use by adults, creating legal access to cannabis resin and herb products. In December 2021, Malta legislated for limited home growing, possession of small amounts and cannabis use in private, alongside non-profit communal growing clubs. In July 2023, Luxembourg legislated to permit limited home growing and use in private, and in February 2024, Germany legislated to allow limited home growing, possession and use of small amounts, and non-profit cannabis growing clubs.

The Netherlands is also reviewing its approach, but the cultivation, sale and possession of cannabis remain criminal offences. However, the sale of small quantities of cannabis, up to 5 grams, to people over the age of 18 in 'coffeeshops' that meet certain criteria has been tolerated for decades. As cannabis is still supplied from the illicit market, criminal groups benefit from this trade. To address this, the Netherlands is experimenting with a closed cannabis supply chain in 10 municipalities, with cannabis produced in regulated premises available for sale in cannabis coffeeshops.

It is unclear what direction future European policies will take. What is clear, however, is that policy development in this area should be accompanied by an assessment of the impact of any changes introduced. This sort of evaluation requires good baseline data, underlining the need to improve our monitoring of current patterns of use of Europe's most commonly consumed illicit drug.

Wider availability of semi-synthetic cannabinoids with unknown health risks

Following the introduction of legal controls on the production of synthetic cannabinoids in China in 2021, the supply of these drugs to Europe was disrupted, with some production subsequently moving to Europe. Signs of the presence of synthetic cannabinoid manufacturing in Europe include the seizure of a small number of illicit laboratories and the importation of precursor chemicals for their production in 2023.

Despite indications of a significant reduction in the availability of synthetic cannabinoids in 2024, they remain a public health concern among some vulnerable populations, including people in prison.

Semi-synthetic cannabinoids, which first emerged on the European market in 2022, have spread rapidly. While HHC (hexahydrocannabinol) was the first semi-synthetic cannabinoid to appear, over twenty of these substances have subsequently been detected, typically marketed as legal alternatives to cannabis. Although semi-synthetic cannabinoids were initially imported from the United States, European production is now observed. Semi-synthetic cannabinoids are widely available through online and, in some countries, physical retail locations. The main products are flavoured edibles such as jellies and vapes, as well as low-THC cannabis that has been sprayed or mixed with the cannabinoids. Their accessibility and supposed legal status may attract both cannabis users and first-time users, potentially including youth and children. The specific semi-synthetic cannabinoids present – of varying potencies – and their concentrations may differ significantly between products and batches.

The effects of semi-synthetic cannabinoids on humans remain poorly studied. Reports suggest the substances have cannabis-like effects, with risks of adverse reactions ranging from mild to severe poisoning. Given the pharmacological similarity of semi-synthetic cannabinoids to cannabis, clarity is needed about their potential to trigger psychotic episodes and their dependence liability. Overall, this variability and unpredictability poses a potential poisoning risk for consumers.

Rising concern over cocaine and ketamine availability

Relentless production and trafficking fuelling unprecedented cocaine availability

In 2023, for the seventh year in a row, EU Member States reported a record amount of cocaine seized, amounting to 419 tonnes. Cocaine trafficking through Europe's seaports in intermodal commercial shipping containers drives the drug's high availability. As interdiction measures have increased at major entry points for cocaine, traffickers are also targeting smaller ports in other EU Member States and neighbouring countries, which may be more vulnerable to drug trafficking. This shift in drug trafficking routes may be accompanied by drug-related intimidation and violence. In addition to the exploitation of commercial shipping containers, traffickers use a range of other forms of transport and delivery services, combined with innovative concealment methods, to smuggle cocaine into Europe.

The illicit processing of cocaine products continues to take place within the European Union, with multiple cocaine laboratories dismantled each year. Cocaine processing in Europe often involves the secondary extraction of cocaine that has been incorporated into other materials (e.g. chemically concealed in plastics), creating challenges for its detection in commercial shipments. Cocaine base and paste are trafficked in large quantities to Europe for processing into cocaine hydrochloride. Some large-scale facilities for cocaine processing are detected each year. Overall, the trafficking of cocaine to Europe and the production of the drug within the European Union represent a dynamic and resource-intensive challenge for law enforcement and customs.

Growing social and health harms from cocaine and crack

Cocaine remains, after cannabis, the second most commonly used illicit drug in Europe, with 2.7 million young adults (2.7 % of those aged 15 to 34) reporting its use in the last year. The drug's increasing availability and wider geographical and social distribution is evidenced by cocaine residues detected in municipal wastewater, which increased in a majority of cities with data for 2023 and 2022. European drug checking services, although not nationally representative, reported that cocaine was the second most common substance they screened in the first half of 2024. Cocaine is the second most frequently reported illicit drug by first-time entrants to specialist drug treatment, and it is now the most frequently reported substance in acute drug-toxicity presentations to sentinel

hospital emergency departments.

The use of cocaine can result in dependent and compulsive patterns of use and is associated with a number of adverse health consequences, which are exacerbated by polysubstance use, whether with alcohol or other illicit drugs. The combined use of cocaine and alcohol is common, and the presence of the two substances in the body creates cocaethylene in the liver, which is associated with greater health risks. Use of cocaine can induce or precipitate psychotic states, such as stimulant-induced psychosis. The management of psychiatric comorbidity among people with drug use problems remains challenging, as integrated treatment and mental health service responses are often lacking. The available data suggest that cocaine, usually in the presence of opioids, was involved in about a quarter of drug overdose deaths in 2023. As cocaine use can aggravate underlying cardiovascular problems, its contribution to mortality in Europe is likely underestimated.

Cocaine use, and crack cocaine use in particular, appears to be becoming more common, especially among some marginalised communities. Smoking and injecting cocaine are associated with greater health problems, and it is therefore worrying that cocaine injection and the use of crack cocaine are reported by more countries. The number of clients entering treatment for cocaine-related problems for the first time increased by 31 % between 2018 and 2023, while the number of first-time entrants for crack cocaine increased by 35 %. In 2023, drug consumption rooms in 10 cities in 8 EU countries reported crack cocaine use by clients, either alone or with heroin. To address the needs of people smoking crack cocaine, often alongside the use of opioids, harm reduction services may need to adapt their services to support safer smoking practices. This may involve the provision of kits including, for example, pipes and filters.

Increasing risk of harms from wider ketamine availability

Although ketamine is not widely consumed in Europe and is challenging to monitor for several reasons, including its varying legal status across EU countries, current data suggest it is more available and related health harms are more evident. Among respondents to the European Web Survey on Drugs in 2024, 14 % of those who had used drugs within the last 12 months reported having used ketamine, mainly in the context of polysubstance use with other drugs and alcohol. In 2024, relatively low levels of ketamine residues in municipal wastewater were reported by 82 cities in 22 EU countries and Norway.

Ketamine is not widely produced in Europe, but 6 laboratories typically involved in the crystallisation of bulk ketamine powder were dismantled in 2023. Large quantities of ketamine, mostly originating in India, are trafficked into the European Union and have increased recently, with seizures of powders totalling 2.7 tonnes in 2023 reported to the EU Early Warning System. Ketamine is likely to be consistently available on drug markets and may have become an established drug of choice in some settings.

In 2023, Euro-DEN sentinel hospital emergency departments in Europe reported that cocaine was the substance most often reported in combination with ketamine in acute toxicity presentations. Ketamine has been linked to various dose-dependent acute and chronic harms, including neurological and cardiovascular toxicity, mental health problems, such as depression, and urological complications, such as bladder damage from intensive use or the presence of adulterants. The number of clients reported to receive treatment for problems related to ketamine use remains low, but more than doubled between 2022 and 2023, to an estimated 1329.

Treating stimulant use problems remains complex

Our understanding of what constitutes effective treatment for stimulant-related problems is growing, but remains relatively limited. Greater investment is needed to ensure interventions and services are appropriate to the growing needs observed in this area in some countries. Despite some investment in research, there are currently no effective pharmacological treatments for problematic stimulant use approved by regulatory agencies. Psychosocial interventions can be effective, particularly for people who use cocaine (see [Stimulants: health and social responses guide](#)). However, approaches such as contingency management may face implementation challenges within European health systems.

People who inject stimulants are likely to need greater access to needle and syringe provision because they may inject more frequently than people who use opioids. Responses for this group often include some form of outreach and the provision of sterile injection equipment, condoms, information on safer injecting and basic hygiene, vein and wound care, and antibacterial creams and ointments (see the 2025 EUDA publication on [harm reduction equipment](#)). These would appear to be appropriate responses, but a strong evidence base does not yet exist in this area. Drug checking services also play a role in responding to stimulant-related harms in some EU Member States, providing information about the risks associated with high-purity or adulterated stimulants.

Noting the link between stimulant use and risky sexual behaviour, initiatives have been developed specifically for people who use stimulants, including methamphetamine and cocaine, in the context of chemsex. These include multidisciplinary services providing drug and sexual health services as well as efforts to improve the linkage between services (see [Spotlight on... Addressing sexual health issues associated with drug use](#)).

Given that stimulant-related problems appear to be growing, this is an area in need of further research and service development. The EUDA, the UNODC and the WHO are developing a joint initiative named [Scale-up](#) to support the treatment of stimulant problems.

Diversity of synthetic stimulants a growing challenge

Signs of increasing synthetic drug production in Europe

The intensification of synthetic drug production within Europe is evident from detections of high-throughput sites in some countries and increasing seizures of key precursors that are required to manufacture these substances. Some laboratories may also be used to produce multiple substances, such as synthetic stimulants that have similar requirements for chemicals and manufacturing equipment.

Seizures of precursor chemicals have both shifted and risen in response to legal and regulatory controls on common illicit drug production chemicals. In the decade up to the end of 2022, an average of 54 tonnes of precursor chemicals, both scheduled and non-scheduled, was seized annually, but this reached an unprecedented 178 tonnes in 2023. The increase was mainly driven by large seizures of alternative precursors for the manufacture of amphetamine, methamphetamine and MDMA in the Netherlands and Hungary. In recent years, there have been increased seizures of the precursors for manufacturing synthetic cathinones and sites for their production, most notably in Poland. The production by criminal networks of key precursors from alternative chemicals, such as glycidic derivatives of BMK and PMK, for the manufacture of amphetamines and MDMA, represents an evolving challenge for customs and law enforcement. Both the environment and local communities are at risk from the use of hazardous chemicals required for drug production or the reversal of chemical concealment for trafficked drugs, as the by-products are often illegally and dangerously discarded.

European MDMA production increases as high-strength products pose health risks

MDMA is produced in Europe, mainly in the Netherlands and Belgium, for domestic consumption and export to other markets. Reports of increased seizures of MDMA precursors, combined with information about MDMA exports outside the European Union, may reflect an increase in the production of the drug for global markets and a general rebound following a decline related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Also of concern is the possible use of a reverse cocaine trafficking route, from Europe to Latin America, to exchange MDMA for cocaine.

As the MDMA content and purity of batches of pills and powders at the retail level varies, consumers of the drug are exposed to shifting and unpredictable health risks. In addition, the MDMA content of ecstasy tablets has increased markedly, rising from an average of around 84 milligrams in 2011 to between 138 and 158 milligrams, with some tablets containing up to 350 milligrams of MDMA. Higher-strength products potentially increase the risk of adverse health outcomes, including death. These health risks can also be exacerbated by polysubstance use, which data from different sources suggest is common among people using MDMA.

Synthetic cathinones are increasingly integrated into Europe's drug market

Current data suggest that synthetic cathinones, a broad family of stimulants, are continuously available on the drug market in some countries and may be intentionally purchased as affordable stimulants of choice. Data from drug checking services indicate that synthetic cathinones are more likely to be intentionally purchased than in the past. Nonetheless, exposure to unexpected substances was evident from submitted samples sold as 3-MMC often containing 2-MMC instead. In the 2024 European Web Survey on Drugs, 9 % of respondents had consumed synthetic cathinones in the last 12 months. While some indicators may suggest the market for these drugs appears to be growing, monitoring a broad group of compounds is challenging for tools originally designed to track long-established illicit drugs, such as cocaine. The EUDA has recently undertaken risk assessments of three new synthetic cathinones, 2-methylmethcathinone (2-MMC), 4-bromomethcathinone (4-BMC) and *N*-ethylnorpentadronone (NEP) (see [EUDA Risk assessments](#)).

Some synthetic cathinones, such as 4-CMC, have been shown to have effects and potential harms broadly similar to other psychostimulants such as MDMA and amphetamine. However, the synthetic cathinones are a broad group of drugs containing substances that have different effects or health risks that may be more severe as a result of higher potency, such as the pyrrolidino-derivatives, which include alpha-PHiP (α -pyrrolidinoisohexanophenone). The effects of many of these drugs on humans have not been extensively researched.

In 2023, imports and seizures of synthetic cathinones amounted to 37 tonnes, up from 27 tonnes in 2022 and 4.5 tonnes in 2021. Most of this involved a small number of bulk consignments imported from India, primarily through the Netherlands. Significant levels of synthetic cathinone production also occur in Europe, where increasing numbers of drug production facilities are detected, including large-scale sites, and rising quantities of precursor chemicals are being seized.

Risk of European production and trafficking of methamphetamine fuelling use of the drug

There are some signals that methamphetamine consumption, which remains low in most EU countries, is now present in more countries than it was in the past.

The production and trafficking of amphetamine and methamphetamine in Europe continues, both for domestic demand and for export to more profitable non-EU markets. Benzyl methyl ketone (BMK) is a key precursor chemical for the manufacture of both drugs. Other substances that can be used to make BMK are chosen by criminal networks to evade detection, and seizures of these have been increasing in Europe. Large-scale production facilities for making these drugs continue to be detected in the European Union. Multi-drug production sites capable of switching between various substances are being dismantled and likely appeal to criminal networks for producing more valuable products for export, such as crystal methamphetamine, alongside less lucrative ones for domestic consumers, such as amphetamine and other synthetic stimulants. Seizures of tartaric acid, a chemical for retrieval of the most potent and sought-after form of methamphetamine (*d*-methamphetamine, used for 'crystal meth') from mixtures produced by BMK methods, more than quadrupled in 2023, reaching 10.9 tonnes.

In addition, while the quantities of both amphetamine and methamphetamine seized have been relatively stable in recent years, slight increases were reported in 2023. Some large consignments of methamphetamine seized may indicate transshipment of the drug through Europe to other destinations. This may reflect the attractiveness for traffickers of routing shipments through locations less associated with international drug trafficking on their way to their intended destination.

European methamphetamine production and trafficking creates the potential for increased availability of these drugs on local stimulant markets, which can, at times, experience dynamic shifts in the products available to consumers

Increasing concern over environmental damage from illicit drug production

From the high water and energy demands of illicit cannabis cultivation to the deforestation associated with coca cultivation, the environmental footprint of drug production is significant. Regulatory changes regarding cannabis in some countries have facilitated research into the environmental impacts of the drug's production, including its carbon footprint, soil erosion and effects on water reserves.

Environmental damage is strongly linked to the production of synthetic drugs, in particular the dumping of toxic chemical waste, but significant knowledge gaps remain.

The dismantling of large-scale synthetic drug laboratories in the European Union, alongside signals of increasing cocaine processing and production of synthetic cathinones, underscores the urgency of addressing these knowledge gaps. The environmental impact of MDMA production in Europe is significant, with each kilogram of MDMA generating approximately 58 kilograms of toxic waste. Overall, MDMA production in the European Union potentially generates between 1000 and 3000 tonnes of chemical waste each year. Production sites are also prone to accidents, explosions and fires due to the volatile chemicals involved – posing significant risks to surrounding communities.

Little is known about the environmental consequences of drug trafficking, which can involve environmentally destructive practices such as clearing forests to create clandestine airstrips. Similarly, drug trafficking routes through environmentally sensitive areas may accelerate habitat destruction and biodiversity loss. In the context of maritime trafficking, vessels used for drug trafficking may be deliberately sunk or abandoned following deliveries or during interceptions attempts.

The EUDA is supporting efforts to estimate the carbon footprint of cannabis cultivation, analysing groundwater contamination from synthetic drug waste disposal and developing a framework for monitoring the environmental effects of illicit drug production. These initiatives aim to build a clearer picture of how drug production affects the natural environment and to inform evidence-based responses.

Europe's complex heroin and opioid situation

Polysubstance use is linked to most opioid-related deaths

Understanding the factors affecting trends in drug-induced deaths is key for the development of effective responses to prevent and reverse drug overdoses, but limitations remain in the available information. As new drug threats can rapidly emerge, improving the timeliness and completeness of data is central to enhancing preparedness. The available data indicate that an estimated 7500 drug-related deaths were reported in the European Union in 2023, giving a mortality rate of 24.7 deaths per million population aged 15 to 64.

Overall, opioids, usually in combination with other substances, remain the drugs most commonly implicated in drug-induced deaths. However, heroin is no longer found in the majority of overdose deaths except in a few countries, and other opioids and other drugs are now playing an important role. In some countries, a substantial share of overdose deaths is associated with opioids other

than heroin, including methadone and, to a lesser extent, buprenorphine, pain-relief medicines containing opioids, and other synthetic opioids. Alcohol, alongside benzodiazepines, is present in a significant proportion of fatal overdoses involving opioids. Stimulants such as cocaine are also reported alongside opioids in toxicological data.

Overall, co-consumption of different drug classes remains an important, but not sufficiently recognised, factor for understanding and responding to drug-induced mortality. The EUDA will coordinate a network of forensic and toxicological laboratories, increasing the analytical capacity available to monitor how different drugs and drug combinations are impacting on mortality trends.

Preventing opioid overdoses and deaths requires scaling up services

With opioids continuing to be involved in the majority of overdose deaths in the European Union, effective responses targeting these drugs are of particular importance. Interventions in this area may be aimed at preventing the occurrence of overdoses in the first place or preventing death when overdoses do occur. The implementation of naloxone programmes, including pilot projects, to prevent overdose deaths was reported by 15 European countries up to 2023. Changing consumption patterns and the availability of various formulations of both injectable and nasal spray naloxone may now require services to review current delivery protocols and to update them according to the available medicines. Overdoses involving potent synthetic opioids may need, for example, the administration of multiple doses of naloxone to reverse the opioid effects. However, 2024 guidelines for responding to overdoses confirm that the initial management of acute opioid toxicity remains the same, irrespective of whether it is a result of heroin, prescription opioids or new synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl derivatives or nitazenes. It remains important that titrated doses of naloxone are administered to people with acute opioid toxicity. This highlights the value of training people who might respond to or witness an overdose in first aid, including the use of naloxone.

Nitazene opioids increase poisoning risk

New synthetic opioids are highly potent, meaning a small amount is sufficient to produce many retail-level doses and can pose elevated life-threatening poisoning risks. Nitazene opioids have recently entered the illicit drugs market in Europe, where they were the only new opioids reported to the EU Early Warning System in 2023. The availability of these drugs is increasing, creating higher risks for people who use opioids, who may encounter them mixed with other drugs, mis-sold or in fake medicines. In 2023, the quantity of nitazene powders detected in Europe tripled.

Reports to the EU Early Warning System indicate a recent significant increase in the availability of fake medicines containing nitazene opioids in Europe, with at least 8 countries confiscating them in 2023. These products typically mimic legitimate prescription medications, particularly oxycodone and to a lesser extent benzodiazepines. Concerns here include the potential for their spread beyond high-risk opioid users to broader populations without opioid tolerance, including young people.

In Ireland, nitazenes were mis-sold as heroin in 2023 and as benzodiazepines in 2024, resulting in inadvertent consumption and multiple overdoses. Clusters or significant numbers of deaths and acute toxicity linked to nitazenes were reported in 2023 or 2024 in Germany, France, Sweden and Norway. Reports from Estonia and Latvia indicate that nitazenes account for a significant share of overdose deaths in these countries. Due to their high potency and novelty, there are concerns that nitazene opioids may not be routinely detected in procedures commonly used for post-mortem toxicology, resulting in underestimates of their involvement.

China expanded the control of nitazene opioids in 2024 to now cover 10 substances. This may redirect the market away from dominant compounds such as metonitazene and protonitazene and towards novel derivatives or alternative opioid families. For example, since mid-2024, there has been a small but significant increase in detections of substances belonging to the benzimidazole 'orphine' family, with 5 EU countries reporting cychlorphine and 2 detecting spirochlorphine. While no pharmacological data are currently available for these substances, their structural similarity to brrorphine, a potent opioid, suggests a key health risk is likely to be respiratory depression.

Potential impact of heroin production and trafficking shifts remains unclear but preparedness is key

The ban on drugs, including opium poppy cultivation, introduced by the Taliban in April 2022, has greatly reduced the production of opium and heroin in Afghanistan, the main source of the drug in Europe. If sustained, a decrease in opium and heroin production in Afghanistan is likely to affect heroin availability in

Europe, although it is challenging to predict when this might happen and how it might be experienced in different EU Member States. Within Europe, a number of indicators suggest that the heroin market has been shrinking over the past 10 years. Despite wide fluctuations in the amounts seized, the long-term trends in price and purity and in the number of seizures suggest that supply may have increased relative to demand over the period. Beyond supply constraints, market resilience and adaptation remain key considerations for better understanding signals of change in Europe's heroin market. For example, reports indicate that opium stockpiles within Afghanistan may have helped buffer the immediate impact of the ban (see [recent EUDA publication on Afghanistan](#)). In conjunction, the high value of the European heroin market might make supplies to Europe somewhat resilient in the short to medium term. Moreover, trafficking networks are highly adaptable and may be shifting routes as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East. It would, however, be difficult to fully replace heroin from Afghanistan with supplies from other producer countries, such as Myanmar, given the amount of opium and heroin produced and trafficked from Afghanistan prior to the current ban.

In the face of uncertainty, Europe needs to improve its preparedness to address potential challenges emanating from such a market shift. While increased polysubstance use and substance-switching, whether to other opioids or stimulants, among people who use opioids are likely outcomes of any reduction in heroin availability, a key means to pre-empt this scenario would be to expand rapid access to opioid agonist treatment and related supports, as well as needle and syringe programmes. It is also important to provide sufficient access to naloxone to prevent overdose deaths. Monitoring the drugs available at retail level in local drug markets remains important to rapidly identify changes in the substances for sale and the presence of dangerous batches of drugs. The EU Early Warning System will continue to play a key role in this regard, as will the EUDA's new threat assessment system.

Responding to Europe's changing drug problems

Substance use among school students

Monitoring substance use among adolescents remains central to the development of effective future drug policies. The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) provides insights into adolescent risky behaviours across Europe. The [latest round of the survey](#), carried out in 2024 in 37 European countries, reveals that despite long-term declines in substance use among adolescents, emerging trends are raising new concerns.

Cannabis remains the most commonly used illicit drug, although lifetime prevalence has declined to its lowest level since 1995. While boys generally report higher use, gender gaps are narrowing,

with some exceptions where girls surpass boys. Early initiation and high-risk use remain concerns, although overall current use (defined as within the past 30 days) among EU students has dropped to 5.7 %, reflecting a long-term declining trend.

The use of other illicit drugs has declined among ESPAD students, with gender gaps narrowing, although boys still generally report higher use. Meanwhile, inhalant use is rising among girls, while non-medical pharmaceutical use is also increasing.

Cigarette smoking has decreased markedly over the past decades, with lifetime prevalence halving between 1995 and 2024. Early initiation persists, however, particularly among girls, whose daily smoking rates at age 13 or younger have recently increased. Meanwhile, e-cigarette use has risen sharply among adolescents, with increasing rates of early initiation and daily consumption, fuelling concerns over the dual use of traditional and electronic cigarettes and reflecting a broader shift towards alternative nicotine products.

Alcohol consumption has also declined over time, with overall use and binge drinking decreasing. However, this reduction is more pronounced among boys, with girls showing a more stable trend. Despite this progress, alcohol remains widely accessible, and early initiation and heavy episodic drinking remain significant concerns.

In terms of mental well-being, on average 59 % of students report having a good mental well-being. Findings highlight notable regional differences, as well as gender disparities, with girls consistently reporting lower well-being than boys. The lowest well-being scores are recorded in countries experiencing conflict and instability.

Prevention efforts are widespread, with most students having taken part in at least one intervention. Alcohol is the most frequently addressed topic, while illicit substances and behavioural risks receive less attention. Skills-based prevention programmes, which emphasise interactive approaches, are more common in western and southern Europe.

Together, these findings reflect the changing nature of substance use among adolescents and the areas existing responses may need to take account of as they are evaluated.

Implementing evidence-based substance use prevention: local-level focus is important

Substance use prevention aims to avoid or delay the use of psychoactive drugs. It can also help those who have started to use substances to avoid the development of drug use disorders. However, not all approaches utilised in this area are effective, and interest in the identification and implementation of evidence-based prevention interventions has increased. In Europe, strategic policy decisions regarding prevention often may be made at the national or regional level, while financing decisions for prevention programmes may be taken at the local level.

Implementing evidence-based options is challenging where those involved are not sufficiently trained in prevention, but still need to make operational decisions about interventions. One consequence of this has been that the importance of local environmental prevention policies is often not adequately considered. Environmental interventions are designed to change the context in which people make decisions and support healthier choices. This is achieved by utilising regulatory, economic and physical measures that strongly effect risk behaviours and well-being. Changes are sustained by altering social context, such as beliefs, norms and what behaviours are acceptable.

The EUDA implements the [European Prevention Curriculum](#) (EUPC) to train local-level prevention stakeholders and to support the selection and implementation of effective prevention policies and programmes. This work is supported by the EUDA's prevention registry, [Xchange](#), a European online catalogue of evaluated prevention interventions, and the development of the European drug prevention quality standards toolkit. The EUPC covers all psychoactive substances, addressing the underlying behavioural determinants of substance use and other harmful behaviours that share these risk and protective factors, such as youth violence, crime, bullying and risky sexual behaviour.

Polysubstance use and diversity of drugs injected create harm reduction challenges

Although injecting drug use continues to decline in Europe, this behaviour is still responsible for a disproportionate level of both acute and chronic health harms associated with the consumption of illicit drugs. Based on recent data, it is estimated that over half a million people injected drugs in the last year. The ESCAPE network's syringe residue analysis data from 2023 show that a variety of substances are injected in European cities, including opioids, stimulants, medications and new psychoactive substances. Half of the syringes analysed contained residues of two or more drug categories, potentially indicating that people who inject drugs often inject more than one substance or that syringes are reused. In either case, these people are exposed to significant harms.

Over the last decade, Europe has observed at least 7 documented HIV outbreaks in cities driven, at least in part, by injecting stimulant use. High levels of harm reduction service provision are required to prevent acute and chronic harms, but current levels remain inadequate in several EU countries. This is especially true for needle and syringe programmes, with provision levels in many EU countries below the WHO recommendations.

Potential therapeutic uses of psychedelics bring policy questions

Research into therapies assisted by substances such as psilocybin, DMT and LSD for difficult-to-treat neuropsychiatric conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and treatment-resistant depression, is progressing rapidly. While some psychedelics have shown promise in alleviating specific symptoms associated with these disorders, generalising in this area remains difficult, partly because of the large number of substances under review, and partly because of the wide range of conditions that are being studied.

Some jurisdictions outside the European Union have begun regulating the use of psychedelics for medical and therapeutic purposes, bringing significant commercial interest. At the same time, the available data show the presence in all EU countries of unregulated or illegal practices involving psychedelics in wellness, therapeutic or spiritually oriented interventions. These practices typically involve the use of substances such as psilocybin, ayahuasca (*N,N*-dimethyltryptamine or DMT) and 5-methoxy-*N,N*-dimethyltryptamine (5-MeO-DMT). The events often involve group settings led by various facilitators, shamans or coaches. In some countries, they operate relatively openly, but in others they remain underground. While some of these retreats claim to integrate elements of therapeutic support, most operate outside formal healthcare structures, often in illegal, unregulated or legally ambiguous spaces. There are risks involved in these emerging practices, particularly for vulnerable individuals and those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Research-driven best practices or standardised guidelines are lacking.

If organised unregulated psychedelic practices continue to spread, a key challenge for policymakers and health professionals will be to better understand the scope and impact of these activities, as well as the associated health risks and harm reduction responses. Strengthening monitoring efforts will be crucial in addressing the evolving landscape of psychedelics use in Europe. A recent EUDA publication addresses [frequently asked questions regarding psychedelics](#).

Responding to drug problems in Europe's prisons remains a challenge

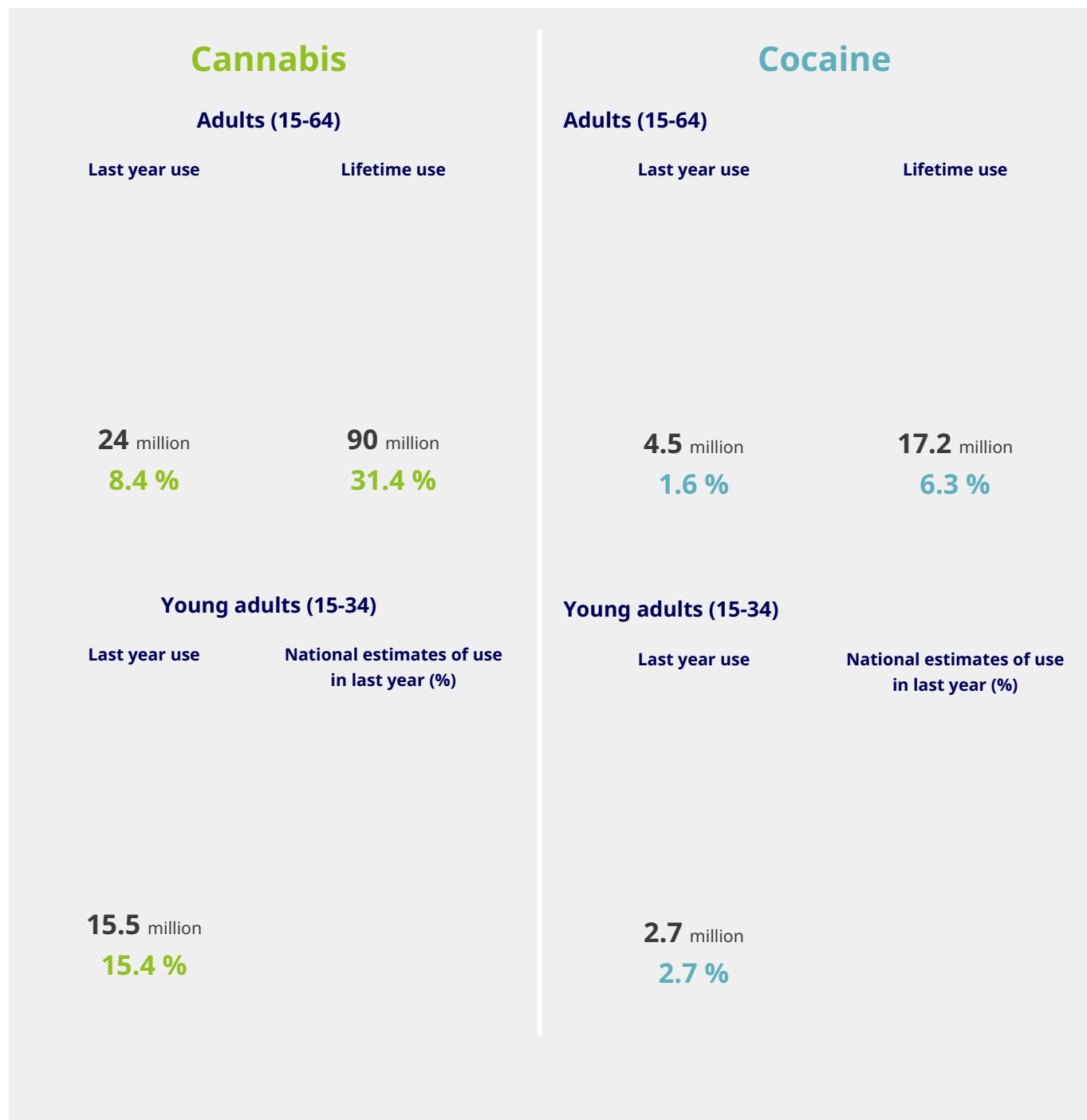
Surveys indicate that people in prison in the European Union report high levels of lifetime prevalence of substance use before imprisonment and increased levels of consumption, especially of heroin, cocaine and amphetamines, compared with the general population. While the range of services for people experiencing drug problems in European prisons has improved in recent years, the need remains for some responses to be scaled up, both during incarceration and post-release.

Drugs are brought into prisons in various ways, including by internal concealment by people in prison, visitors and, in some cases, staff, as well as drone-based trafficking. Potent substances, such as synthetic cannabinoids, opioids and various medicines, may be favoured, as they are more amenable to concealment. These substances pose serious threats to the health of people in prison, including the risk of overdose. During 2024 in Ireland, for example, three poisoning and overdose outbreaks in prisons were reported. Where drugs are injected, in the context of limited access to sterile injecting equipment, the risks of transmission of blood-borne viruses, including HIV and HCV, are increased.

Almost all EU countries report that access to opioid agonist treatment is available in at least some of their prisons. Very few, however, report the provision of needle and syringe programmes, or naloxone programmes to prevent overdose deaths, and linkage to care for infectious diseases remains limited in many EU countries for people in prison. The ECDC and the EUDA toolkit for the elimination of hepatitis in prison supports improving activities targeting infectious diseases among this sub-population.

At a glance

At a glance – estimates of drug use in the European Union



MDMA

Adults (15-64)

Last year use

Lifetime use

3.1 million
1.1 %

14.1 million
5.1 %

Young adults (15-34)

Last year use

National estimates of use
in last year (%)

2.6 million
2.6 %

Amphetamines

Adults (15-64)

Last year use

Lifetime use

2.3 million
0.8 %

9.7 million
4.1 %

Young adults (15-34)

Last year use

National estimates of use
in last year (%)

1.6 million
1.6 %

Heroin and other opioids

High-risk opioid users

860 000

511 000

opioid users
received agonist
treatment in 2023

Drug treatment requests

Principal drug in
about 23 % of all
drug treatment
requests in the
European Union

23 %

Fatal overdoses

Opioids were found
in 74 % of fatal
overdoses

74 %

The [complete set of source data for the European Drug Report 2025](#) including metadata and methodological notes is available in our data catalogue.

A subset of this data, used to generate infographics, charts and similar elements on this page, may be found below.

[View this data in our Data catalogue](#)

Download all files (zip)

- [Table EDR25-At-a-glance-1. Drug use in the EU in 2024, at a glance \(amphetamines, cannabis, cocaine, MDMA\)](#)
- [Table EDR25-At-a-glance-1. Heroin and other opioids in the EU in 2024, at a glance](#)

This PDF was generated automatically on 10/06/2026 from the web page located at this address: https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2025/drug-situation-in-europe-up-to-2025_en. Some errors may have occurred during this process. For the authoritative and most recent version, we recommend consulting the web page.