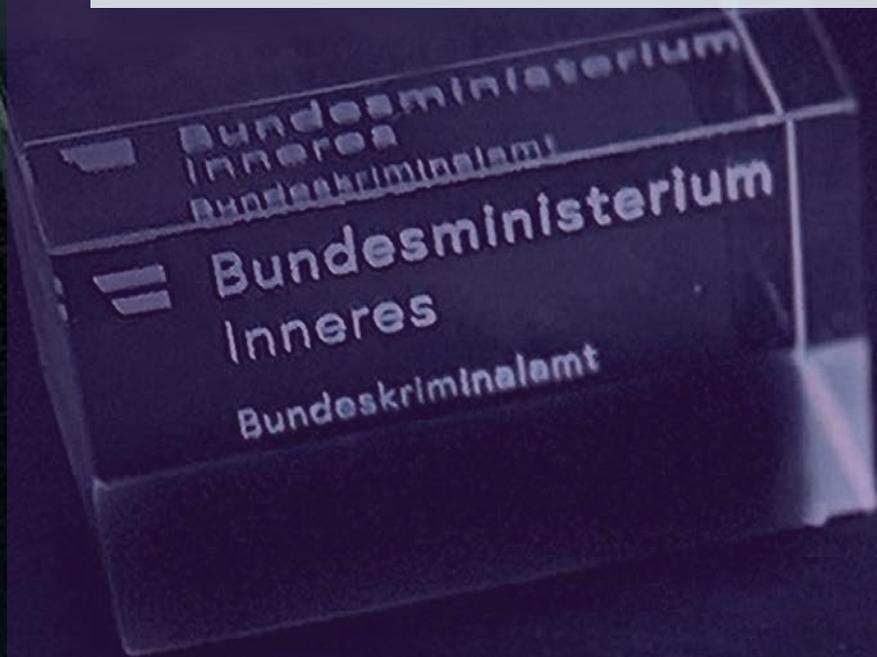


Drug-Related Crime

Annual Report 2023

Reported Violations, Investigations and Seizures



Drug-Related Crime Annual Report 2023

Reported Violations, Investigations and Seizures

Vienna, 2024

Legal Notice

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Foreword

Dear reader,

Combating drug-related crime presents a significant challenge not only for our police force but also for society at large. This type of crime affects public security and has an immediate impact on the public health system. Furthermore, drug-related crime is accompanied by a range of acquisitive and accompanying crime, including property offences and increasingly also violent and financial offences. Since 2021, ongoing investigations into crypto messenger services have revealed an unprecedented extent of organised crime on a national and international level. Apart from other serious offences, organised drug-related crime is in the spotlight. Therefore, fighting drug-related crime requires a holistic approach and close collaboration between national and international partners as well as with the private sector. This need is met by reinforced and regular cooperation among all players.

This report offers a detailed holistic overview of all the observations made in 2022 regarding both general and organised drug-related crime. Illustrative case studies are included to shine a light on the work of the law enforcement authorities. The relentless efforts of our police will continue to be crucial in swiftly responding to new challenges posed by innovative criminal methods or emerging phenomena, thereby preventing future crimes.

We would like to extend our thanks to all members of the police force, our national and international allies and our dedicated partners from the private sector for their commitment and their invaluable contributions for our society!

Franz Ruf
Director General for Public Security

Andreas Holzer, MA
Director of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria



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1

General Information

This chapter describes the methodological approach for drawing up this report and the underlying police structures targeting drug-related crime.

Methodology and General Explanations

This situation report on drug-related crime is primarily based on the Police-Recorded Crime Statistics as well as on crime-specific experiences and insights gained by the police. The statistical data must be interpreted carefully in the context of additional relevant information because it reflects not only general trends in drug-related crime, but also the resources used to combat this type of crime. Interpreting this data requires special attention and should always be done by taking relevant additional information into account. Extensive investigations may take months or even years and are integrated into the statistics only after completion. Against this backdrop, monthly or annual fluctuations of the reported crimes and offences are not to be considered out of the norm. Therefore, it is worthwhile to assess trends not only in comparison to the previous year, but over several reporting years and against a backdrop of additional information.

Until 2014, the narcotic drugs statistics of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior (BMI) were kept independently of the Police-Recorded Crime Statistics, being merged in 2015. This involved automatic quality control and led to an increase in data quality. New parameters were introduced, which made it possible to retrieve more information from the statistics and resulted in a more complete representation of the current situation. The result shows connections between criminal groups, drug types and local distribution. The terms “crime” and “offence” are used as defined in section 17 of the Austrian Penal Code. “Crimes” are intentional acts that are punishable by life imprisonment or terms of imprisonment exceeding three years. All other punishable acts are offences.

Police Structures Targeting Drug-Related Crime

The law enforcement authorities combat drug-related crime in Austria by acting within the scope of the Narcotic Drugs Act and the New Psychoactive Substances Act and related regulations. In this context, the national security strategies pursued by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and its subordinate entities, such as the “Partial Strategy Domestic Security”, and the security strategy “Sicher.Österreich”, shall be highlighted. Both of these strategies serve to control crime in general and thereby also target drug-related crime.

As far as the police is concerned, about 600 officers across Austria are primarily designated for the fight against drug-related crime. They account for about 2% of the entire police force and are responsible for dealing with roughly 7% of overall crime in Austria. Police officers specialising in drug-related crime are found at three organisational levels: On a district-level, there are drug investigation teams at the district and city commands of the Federal Police. Drug investigation divisions at the provincial CIDs are at the second level above them. Thirdly, on a federal level, the Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria is in charge of all drug crime matters in Austria and also serves as a strategic and operational hub between national ministries and international authorities. Additionally, officers at police stations not only deal with security, traffic and administrative issues, but are also involved in all kinds of criminal investigations, making a major contribution to the fight against drug-related crime.

In summary, the organisational units operating at the levels described above are the main tools of the Austrian police to combat drug-related crime. Our collaboration is continuously improved and fighting crime becomes more effective and efficient by bilateral agreements, close national and international cooperation with customs authorities, Europol, Eurojust and INTERPOL as well as a network of national and international liaison officers.

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Key Figures

The following chapter compares drug offences reported in 2023 to the last five to ten years, providing an in-depth outline of the development of drug-related crime in Austria.

Reported Violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act

Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act showed a slight increase in 2023, continuing the upward trend observed in 2022. This follows a decline since 2019, due in part to a shift in personnel resources and tasks in the police force during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. In total, 35,445 violations were reported, which is an increase of 516 reports (approximately 0.3%) in the year under review.

Specifically, drug offences punishable by less than three years of imprisonment increased by 470 cases, or 1.5%, compared to 2022. Drug crimes punishable by more than three years of imprisonment increased by 46 cases, or 1.6%, over the previous year. One explanation for the increase is that numerous investigations into serious drug crimes initiated in 2022 were only completed in 2023 due to their complexity. Consequently, these cases were recorded in the statistics only in the latter year.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	1,785	2,219	2,159	2,873	3,133	3,407	3,194	3,214	2,862	2,908	1.6%
Offences	28,465	30,688	34,076	39,737	37,911	39,922	37,105	31,623	32,066	32,536	1.5%
Total	30,250	32,907	36,235	42,610	41,044	43,329	40,299	34,837	34,928	35,444	1.5%

Seized Illicit Drugs

Cannabis products still occupy the number one spot on the domestic drug market. This is reflected in the Report on the 2023 Drug Situation by the Austrian National Public Health Institute (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, GÖG). The GÖG report concludes that cannabis is still the illicit drug of choice (lifetime prevalence) in Austria. The related consumption prevalence rate is about 30-40% in youths and young adults, aged between 15 and 24 years. The following chapters will provide detailed insight into the reasons for the significant increase in seized cannabis products, which amounted to nearly one ton.

As in previous years, the largest amount of seized drugs were cannabis products (mainly herbal cannabis) with approximately 2.7 tons in 2023. Increases were also evident in the amounts of seized amphetamine (approx. 94 kg), cocaine (approx. 155 kg) and ecstasy

Table 1
Reported Violations of Narcotic Drugs Act, categorised in crimes, offences and total in Austria from 2014 to 2023

(approx. 30,000 pieces). There was a decrease in seized heroin (approx. 57 kg) and methamphetamine (approx. 9 kg).

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	122,214	36,838	83,425	29,262	94,068
Total cannabis (in grams)	1,367,885	2,056,776	2,113,345	1,758,086	2,660,179
Cannabis resin/hashish (in grams)	94,644	104,272	71,526	102,426	57,012
Herbal cannabis/marijuana (in grams)	87,120	62,985	80,529	119,193	153,610
Heroin (in grams)	30,198	9,238	10,479	9,731	8,897
Cocaine (in grams)	77,922	89,148	53,121	20,982	30,363

Table 2
Total quantities of drugs seized in Austria between 2019 and 2023

Regarding the increase in seized cocaine, similar upward trends have been observed in all of Europe over the past years. Europol's current Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment Report attributes this development mainly to an all-time high in the global cocaine production. According to experts, the striking decrease in cultivation area in Afghanistan is responsible for the reduction of seized heroin by almost half.

It should be noted that the quantity of narcotic drugs seized in a reporting year can be strongly influenced by large-scale seizures. Consequently, choosing the year-over-year quantities of seized drugs as sole parameter for possible conclusions about trends and development is not considered useful.

Black Market Prices

In 2023, wholesale prices per kilogram averaged about EUR 3,400 for cannabis (herb and resin), EUR 27,900 for heroin, EUR 45,000 for cocaine, EUR 8,500 for amphetamine and EUR 32,500 for methamphetamine. 1,000 ecstasy (MDMA) pills sold for about EUR 5,500. While prices for cannabis and cocaine stagnated, prices for ecstasy, heroin and methamphetamine increased sharply and prices for amphetamine declined. Actual prices may vary greatly as they depend on quality, purity and availability of the drugs.

The sums in table 3 relate to the black market prices for street-level dealings and were calculated based on drug seizures in 2023 (see table 2) and average prices in Austria.

The prices only serve to illustrate the money involved in drug dealing, but may vary depending on region and purity.

	2022	2023
Cannabis (total)	€ 17,436,869.45	€ 25,481,868.05
Heroin	€ 4,673,693.82	€ 2,558,417.99
Cocaine	€ 10,727,393.40	€ 13,018,439.03
Ecstasy	€ 213,386.94	€ 303,625.00
Amphetamine	€ 676,677.28	€ 2,351,697.50
Methamphetamine	€ 760,194.53	€ 692,861.66
In total:	€ 34,488,215.42	€ 44,406,909.23

Table 3
Comparison of value of seized drugs on street-level dealing in EUR of 2022 and 2023

Purity of Illicit Drugs

The following table shows the evolution of the purity of the seized and forensically examined illicit drugs over the past five years, based on the median purities detected during chemical examinations. While the quality, especially of ecstasy and MDMA, strongly increased in 2022, the quality in 2023 decreased to the levels of 2021. The quality of amphetamine was also significantly lower; however, the most striking increase in quality was noted in cocaine. However, it is important to note that the following figures do not represent the quality of drugs on the street, since not all the seized drugs are also forensically examined. Forensic examination is mainly conducted if the threshold quantities are potentially exceeded or substances cannot be clearly identified during preliminary breath tests.

Narcotic Drugs	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Herbal cannabis/marijuana	7.0%	6.1%	9.1%	9.2%	10.6%
Cannabis resin/hashish	16.5%	16.0%	16.5%	24.8%	23.4%
Heroin	17.7%	17.7%	14.2%	15.2%	16.8%
Cocaine	51.9%	59.7%	53.6%	62.8%	69.0%
Ecstasy/MDMA	41.5%	44.9%	61.1%	72.5%	59.6%
Amphetamine	19.8%	21.8%	16.0%	20.2%	14.4%
Methamphetamine	59.4%	62.7%	64.6%	65.3%	66.7%

Table 4
Quality of seized and forensically examined illicit drugs from 2019 to 2023

Price fluctuations for methamphetamine were especially striking: While prices fell by approximately EUR 9,000 per kilogram despite increasing quality from 2021 to 2022, prices only went up by EUR 5,000 as quality increased in 2023. A similar trend was observed with cocaine: Even though quality rose from approximately 15% to 68% between 2021 and 2023, prices remained relatively stable compared to the previous year. In 2021, prices for products with lower quality were higher than in 2023. It should be mentioned that purity levels of approximately 90% were also detected in street-level dealing.

Suspects

Suspects by Age Groups and Gender

In the age group under the age of 18, reports decreased by 6.7% compared to 2022. After a barely noticeable increase in 2022, this downward trend that started in 2019 continues. The decline of reported violations among those aged 18 to 20 and 21 to 24 since 2019 persists.

The age group of 25 to 39 years still represents the biggest proportion of reports of violation of the Narcotic Drugs Act. The numbers for this age group rose by 4.7%, while there was also a noticeable increase of 8.2% in those older than 40.

The data shows a continued increase in reports against unidentified offenders in 2023. In comparison to 2022, the number of cases increased by 14.7% to 2,497 cases in 2023.

Age group	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
< 18 years	5,901	5,381	4,318	4,394	4,101	-6.7%
18-20	7,667	6,757	5,335	5,201	4,947	-4.9%
21-24	7,519	7,156	5,862	5,674	5,444	-4.1%
25-39	14,883	14,258	13,208	13,021	13,628	4.7%
40+	4,090	4,411	4,273	4,461	4,828	8.2%
Unidentified offenders	3,269	2,336	1,841	2,177	2,497	14.7%

Table 5
Distribution of reports according to age group and unidentified offenders in absolute terms, changes in percent

Compared to previous years, no significant changes can be observed in gender distribution. 27,659 (83.9%) men compared to 5,288 (16.1%) women were reported in 2023. Men are reported more frequently than women.

Gender - Number of reported incidents	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Male	34,160	31,935	27,841	27,612	27,659	0.2%
Female	5,900	6,028	5,155	5,139	5,288	2.9%
Unidentified offenders	3,269	2,336	1,841	2,177	2,497	14.7%
Total	43,329	40,299	34,837	34,928	35,444	1.5%

Table 6
Gender distribution in reports from 2019 to 2023

Domestic and Foreign Suspects

Data on the origin of suspects shows a slight decline in the number of reported domestic suspects from 21,503 to 21,134 compared to the previous year. Conversely, the number of foreign suspects rose from 11,248 to 11,814. In 1,749 of these cases, the suspects were asylum seekers.

Crimes/ Offences	Total		Crimes		Offences	
	Proportion of domestic suspects	Proportion of foreign suspects	Proportion of domestic suspects	Proportion of foreign suspects	Proportion of domestic suspects	Proportion of foreign suspects
2019	67.4%	32.6%	46.9%	53.1%	69.1%	30.9%
2020	70.0%	30.0%	50.3%	49.7%	71.6%	28.4%
2021	68.6%	31.4%	49.8%	50.2%	70.4%	29.6%
2022	65.7%	34.3%	51.1%	48.9%	66.9%	33.1%
2023	64.1%	35.9%	48.3%	51.7%	65.5%	34.5%

Table 7
Proportions of domestic and foreign suspects from 2019 to 2023

A closer examination shows that offences committed by foreigners rose from 33.1% to 34.5% and crimes committed by foreigners increased from 48.9% to 51.7%. Across Austria, the proportion of foreigners committing drug-related offences is especially striking in Vienna, at 52%. Offences committed by domestic suspects declined from 66.9% to 65.6% and crimes committed by domestic suspects fell from 51.1% to 48.3%.

A five-year comparison (2019-2023) reveals that Serbian nationals make up the highest proportion of foreign suspects, followed by Afghan, German and trailed by Turkish, Romanian and Syrian nationals. However, regarding the yearly development, the most

significant increase in numbers was observed in Syrian nationals. These numbers doubled in 2023 compared to the previous year. In 2020, Syria was not even among the Top 10 (table 8) nationalities of recorded suspects, as only 308 Syrian nationals were recorded. In conclusion, suspects or criminal groups from the Western Balkans are the biggest threat in this type of offence since they tend to commit crimes, which marks their participation in serious drug-related crime.

Nationalities	Five-Year Average	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Serbia	1,086	960	986	1,062	1,086	1,336
Afghanistan	1,026	910	952	772	939	1,558
Germany	1,018	975	883	929	1,189	1,115
Türkiye	821	696	730	821	931	928
Romania	596	732	644	544	521	538
Syria	564	1,023	669	428	308	391
Bosnia and Herzegovina	535	483	501	493	586	613
Hungary	454	539	456	387	435	455
Russian Federation	432	483	455	388	452	383
Croatia	398	403	400	370	434	385

Table 8
Five-year comparison and annual development from 2019 to 2023 of top 10 nationalities of foreign suspects

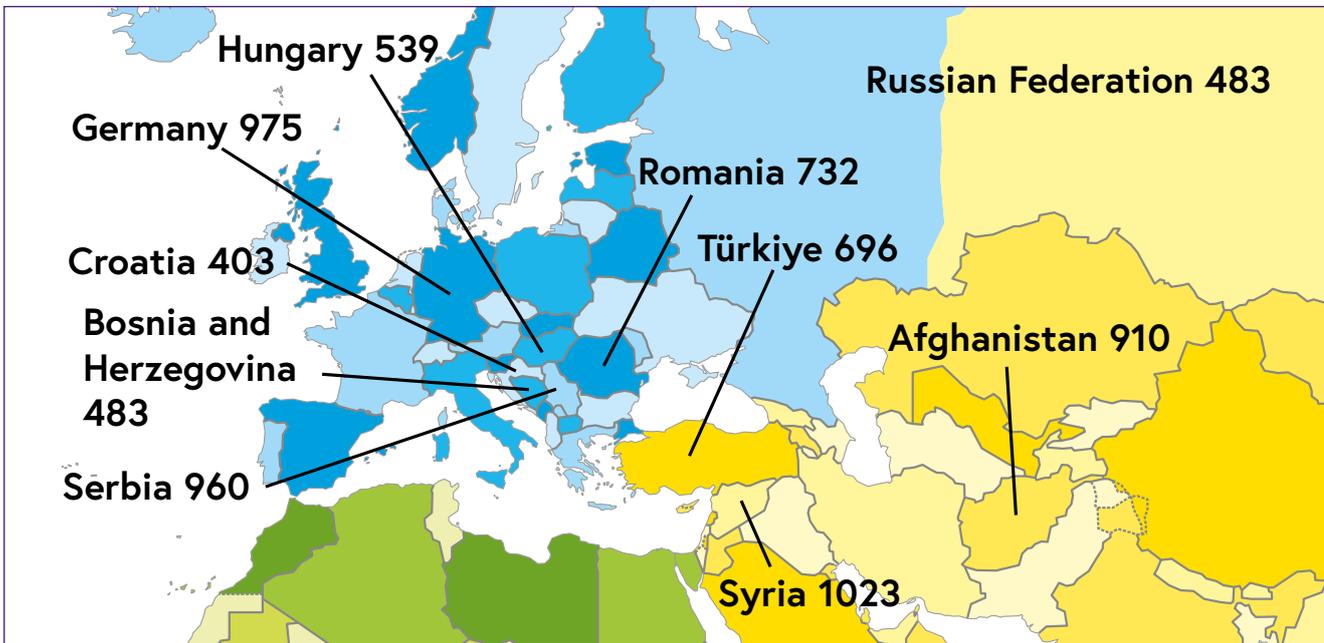


Figure 1
Map of number of identified suspects according to country of origin in 2023

3

Drug-Related Deaths

Every year, drug-related crime and the associated abuse of illegal substances leads to deaths in Austria, too. Directly drug-related deaths are deaths following an acute intoxication (overdose). This means that there is a temporal and medical connection between intoxication and death, which is attested by a doctor. However, it should be noted that there are no universally defined thresholds for toxic amounts of narcotic drugs that directly lead to death. In a lot of cases, an interplay of several substances in the form of mixed consumption leads to death; however, each drug in itself does not necessarily have to be present in a lethal concentration.¹

In its annual publications “Report on the Drug Situation“ and “Report on the Epidemic of Addiction“, the Austrian National Public Health Institute (GÖG) sheds light on this issue. The Report on the Epidemic of Addiction 2023 counts a total of 248 drug-related deaths in Austria in 2022. The statistics for 2023 will be published in next year’s report. 195 of these cases were confirmed by autopsy reports. 79% of the deceased drug victims were male. The average age of all deceased drug victims was about 33 years.² Compared to 2022, the number of drug-related deaths continues to rise. The majority of drug-related deaths were caused by combined drug intoxication with opioids being the most frequently identified substance.

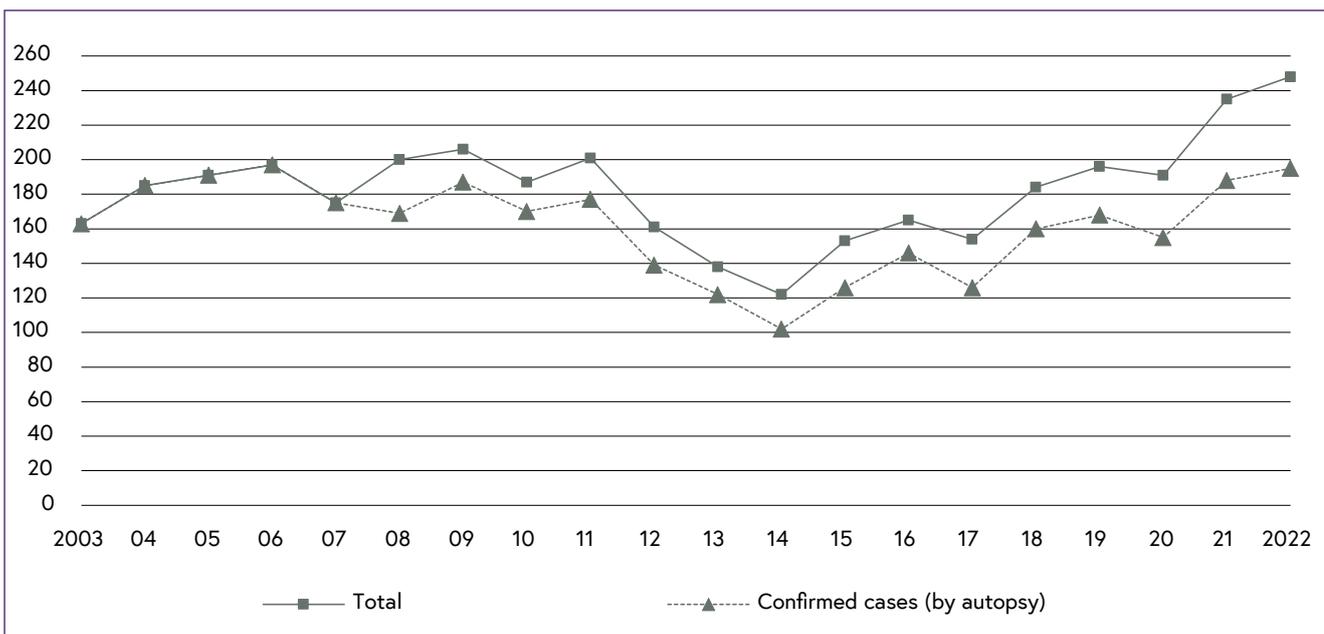


Figure 2
Total of directly drug-related deaths in Austria, confirmed by autopsy, 2003 to 2022 (total numbers) (source: GÖG, 2023b, p 47)

1 See GÖG, 2023, XXI
2 Idem, p 46.

4

Measures Taken by the Police

This chapter presents the police's fight against drug-related crime in general as well as measures taken in this context. This includes an overview of the areas of responsibility and action taken by the Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria.

Actions and Main Tasks

Fighting drug-related crime is a big challenge for law enforcement authorities in Austria. Drug-related offences often remain invisible to the general public because these illegal activities are hidden within the structures of organised crime. Therefore, the public only notices specific manifestations, such as visible drug deals or consumption, or cases covered by the media. In fact, however, drug-related crime affects society both directly and indirectly on a daily basis. This impact ranges from administrative offences, such as driving a vehicle under the influence of drugs, to crimes, such as money laundering, corruption, to severe acts of violence including murder, weapons trafficking and even financing of terrorism. The modus operandi has changed rapidly with the technology boom, and crime scenes have shifted from the streets to homes through use of the internet, darknet, online platforms and messenger services on smartphones. This calls for even more action on the part of the police and lawmakers to address this aspect of drug-related crime comprising new trends and communication platforms, with determination, professionalism and the full force of the law, both nationally and internationally.

National and International Collaboration and Participation in Committees

Close collaboration in Europe and on an international level is crucial to effectively fighting organised and cross-border drug-related crime. The geographical location of Austria along the Balkan route as well as the misuse of the Vienna International Airport as a drug-dealing hub have prompted the Austrian law enforcement agencies to show even more commitment. Well-established communication channels via Europol and INTERPOL, the UN network, Austrian liaison officers accredited abroad and foreign liaison officers accredited in Austria have proven successful in the context of international collaboration. Bilateral cooperation is especially important and were established decades ago by individual police officers who did commendable work. These contacts are carefully nurtured and continuously enlarged.

In the context of drug-related crime, the police actively participate in a number of national and international committees. The Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria plays a key role, having its head serve as the Interior Ministry's Drug Coordinator.

The Federal Drug Coordination is an important national committee, which is in charge of coordinating and implementing Austria-wide drug policy. The Federal Drug Coordination, established on the basis of a Council of Ministers decision in 1997, is led by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, and consists of the national drug coordinators of the Ministries of Health, Justice and the Interior.

The Federal Drug Forum was also established on the basis of the aforementioned Ministers decision and is also led by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health Care and Consumer Protection. The Drug Forum serves as an interface between the ministries and the provinces, which deal with drug policies at the federal level. Each province is represented in the Federal Drug Forum, led by the provincial addiction coordinators or provincial drug coordinators. The Association of Towns and Municipalities, GÖG and the Austrian Addiction Prevention Working Group also participate in the Federal Drug Forum. Experts with a science or practical background are consulted as needed

Drug-related crime is not only on the agenda on a national level, but also on a European and international level in a number of committees.

At an EU level, regular working sessions of

- the Council's preparatory body Horizontal Working Party on Drugs (HDG),
- the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe,
- the Drugs Programme Board at Europol,
- the Reference Group at the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) as well as
- the regularly held EMPACT meetings at Europol and
- the numerous corresponding action plans (Operational Action Plans) are of great importance.

Other committees are, among others, the following regional initiatives

- the Permanent Working Group on Narcotics at Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office,
- the working group AG Südwest of the Baden-Württemberg State Criminal Police Office and
- the working group AG Südost of the Bavaria State Criminal Police Office in cooperation with the American Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

The Drug-Related Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria also participates in the international committees organised by

- INTERPOL and
- the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as well as the yearly conferences held in Vienna by
- the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND),
- the Paris Pact and
- the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

Training Measures

Training opportunities are a decisive factor in the fight against drug-related crime. This serves to further increase professionalism and to coordinate the exchange of experience, which in turn helps address new developments. To live up to these standards, training sessions in the field of drug-related crime are held each year on different levels:

- The Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria organises expert conferences for the heads of investigation divisions for drug-related crime at provincial CIDs and case officers for precursors for drugs and explosives;
- The Precursor Competence Centre held 27 events in the year under review for businesspersons to raise their awareness to the sale of potential drug precursors.
- Every year, trainings are held in line with the Criminal Policing Training Directive, in which the Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department also participates. They cover all aspects of drug-related topics in order to meet demand for professional action against this complex type of crime.
- Training in this field is also conducted regularly or as needed on the level of Provincial CIDs, District and City Commands of the Federal Police.
- In 2023, the Drug-related Crime Sub-Department mandated by decree a training on the application of naloxone nasal sprays, which was implemented by the Provincial Police Directorates in their own jurisdiction. This measure is especially important as it protects intervening persons from life-threatening dangers in case of an incident.

Precursor Competence Centre

Single perpetrators as well as criminal organisations use certain chemicals for the production of drugs, for example synthetic drugs, such as ecstasy or amphetamine. Chemical substances that are produced for legal purposes, but can be misused to manufacture illicit drugs are called drug precursors or precursor chemicals. Monitored drug precursors are listed in the attachment to EU Regulation 273/2004. This list is regularly updated. In order to prevent the misuse of such chemical substances of legal origin for the manufacturing of illicit drugs, a new unit called Precursor Competence Centre was established in the Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria on 01 December 2018. This unit acts as the reporting office for drug precursors and explosives precursors. Businesses in the chemical industry are legally required to report potential suspicious incidents regarding the manufacturing of illicit drugs and shall address their reports to the Precursor Competence Centre.

Drug Precursors

Following years of monitoring, international panels regularly include chemicals in their lists of drug precursors. Criminal groups, however, react swiftly to these changes or even pre-empt them with the use of new substances in a bid to maintain production.

In 2023, criminal networks and operators of large illegal laboratories in Europe continued to source chemicals that were not classified as drug precursors. By doing so, they partially evaded existing monitoring mechanisms. Unrecorded drug precursors, for which no legal purpose can be identified, are mainly transported from China to Central and South-Eastern Europe under false declarations. From there, the precursors are forwarded to other countries, especially the Netherlands. In this clandestine logistics chain, Austria is only affected as a transit country, but in some cases, companies are founded in the country to conceal consequent transport routes. In 2023, however, no companies were detected that would have contributed to such deliveries.

Over the past two decades, a fluctuating pattern of diversions and attempted diversions of drug precursors has been observed in Europe, which play a vital role in the illegal production of heroin. Criminal groups aim to transport large quantities of this substance via Turkey, mostly targeting the Afghan region, while circumventing existing surveillance measures. In Europe, offenders focused on Slovenia and Poland. Recently, a decline of such smuggling activities from Europe was noticeable. In 2023, Austria was not affected by these diversions or attempted diversions; however, Austria was not involved in international investigations into this phenomenon. Austrian businesses have not reported such activities, either. In order to recognise and eventually prevent misuse of chemicals at an early stage, businesses and the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection have stepped up their cooperation and will continue to do so.

In 2023, 504 distribution channels for non-recorded and sensitive drug precursors were inspected. The Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection was notified of 98 granted authorisations for importing and exporting drug precursors. However, no suspicious activities were noted.

Furthermore, the police investigated tip-offs from private individuals about possible violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act or New Psychoactive Substances Act, and other offences, such as fraud. After screening these tip-offs, they were forwarded to the respective specialised units of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria or the provincial CIDs for verification and initiation of necessary investigations.

Explosives Precursors

Another focus of the Precursor Competence Centre is monitoring trade in explosive precursors. Accessible chemical precursors can be used to build improvised explosives for CID relevant incidents or terrorist attacks. After checking CID-relevant reports handed in by businesses, they are immediately forwarded to the Directorate State Protection and Intelligence Service (DSN) for further processing.

In 2023, 13 tip-offs from businesses were received. Eight of these tip-offs reported theft or lost property. If the initial screening could not rule out suspicious incidents, reports were forwarded to the Directorate State Protection and Intelligence Service without delay. In the course of further investigations into the transferred reports, the Directorate State Protection and/or subordinate entities did not establish the presence of a serious offence, except violations of the Pyrotechnic Articles Act, or terrorist activities.

In 2023, 2,540 distribution channels for drug precursors were inspected. On behalf of district authorities, the Precursor Competence Centre also reviewed four applications by private individuals to acquire certain chemicals or chemical concentrations.

To report suspicious activities, please contact:

Criminal Intelligence Service Austria (BK)

Precursor Competence Centre

Josef-Holaubek-Platz 1, 1090 Vienna

Fax: +43 1 24836 951223

E-mail: precursor@bmi.gv.at

Crypto Messenger Services as a Challenge – TASK FORCE ACHILLES

When the Task Force ACHILLES was established at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria on 01 April 2021, Austria entered a new era of CID investigations into and fight against organised crime structures using crypto technology. This development was supported by the FBI and DEA. In the summer of 2021, investigations into Sky ECC marked the beginning of a new phase after the first crypto messenger service ANØM had emerged in Austria. Criminal Intelligence Service Austria sent officers to the Operational Task Forces at Europol to gather information relevant to Austria on site and in coordination with Task Force ACHILLES. These officers were also tasked with maintaining and extending the network with other involved countries. Even then, and especially with the current state of knowledge, the amounts of data exceeded the hitherto usual scope of information on criminal activities in Austria by many times. For example, investigations into Sky ECC

revealed more than one billion chat messages, which were and are important for Austria in many aspects.

Based on the facts of the case, setting up the Task Force ACHILLES at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria and establishing a central coordination office at the Vienna Public Prosecutor's Office have proven to be correct and professional decisions for the past three years. Involving all provincial CIDs as well as other relevant federal investigation agencies made the law enforcement authorities' response more effective. During this period, a large number of suspects were investigated, arrested and bindingly sentenced to high prison terms. A sentencing of December 2023 is of particular importance. For the first time, an accused person was sentenced to the maximum penalty in the form of life imprisonment for a drug-related crime in Austria. In addition to seizing several hundred kilograms of illicit drugs, evidence was found indicating the trafficking of several tons of illegal narcotic drugs. Furthermore, more and more weapons, ammunition and large sums of cash have been seized.

Although investigations into these crimes focus on organised dealing of large amounts of drugs, the level of violence in these cases was found to be extraordinary by Central European standards. Perpetrators document instances of torture and murder, to the point of glorifying violence. Moreover, corruption in all walks of life and professions as well as threats against the police, public prosecutors and judges have also been present in Europe. This was utterly unthinkable in Austria a few years ago, but has prompted resource-consuming measures in the field of close protection and physical security.

To this end, Austrian investigating authorities have been focusing on prioritising actions based on their potential impact. Nonetheless, based on current information it is estimated that processing the data available in Austria will continue to be a resource-intensive challenge for law enforcement authorities in the next ten years. It seems unlikely that there is an end in sight given the discovery of other crypto messenger services and the fast-paced technological progress. The goal and purpose of the Task Force ACHILLES remains solving crimes, thus dismantling organised crime groups and protecting the citizens in cooperation with national and international agencies and authorities.



Projects

The Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria implements up-to-date measures as well as new and innovative projects to stay on top of the ever-growing challenges in the context of drug-related crime. The goals of the projects initiated or implemented in 2023 are as follows:

- Project EDSWA: The project “Erkennungs-Dienstliche-Schwellen-Wert-Analyse“ (in English: Identification Threshold Analysis) aims to increase the number of solved cases of accompanying and acquisitive crime by consistent recording of identification material of reported accused persons pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act and New Psychoactive Substances Act.
- Project CARCER: In cooperation with the Directorate General of the Federal Ministry of Justice, this project focuses on CID relevant goals in the field of prison intelligence at institutions of the penal and preventive detention system.
- Project S.A.L.T.: S.A.L.T. stands for transport by Sea, Air, Land and Train. The goal of this project is to fight drug-related crime along these transport routes and by typical transport vehicles. To this view, there are close collaborations with national agencies and authorities, such as the Customs Authority Austria, as well as shipping and aviation regulatory authorities, other ministries and private businesses.

Prevention Work

In addition to fighting crime, prevention is an essential part of police work. Most drug use prevention programmes in Austria are developed, organised and implemented at a local or regional level. The specialised services in the provinces play a major role in preventing illegal drug use. Addiction prevention institutions and prevention officers within the police force are also involved in the implementation of addiction prevention policies and often work in close cooperation with the competent units. In cooperating with relevant institutions such as schools and clubs, the police is actively working to prevent drug offences among young people. Among the many police prevention initiatives, there is a programme specifically dedicated to addiction prevention. In general, specially trained prevention officers teach these programmes. The Crime Prevention and Victim Support Sub-Department of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria is the central point of contact for prevention measures.

In 2016, the Austrian police launched an Austrian-wide prevention programme called Look@your.Life, which aims at supporting young people in their development and preventing delinquent behaviour. The programme is designed to strengthen the personality of young people in order to teach them to act responsibly towards themselves and their environment. Central aspects are addiction prevention, including legal and illegal substances, and dangers on the Internet and dependencies, which can lead to delinquent behaviour. Police officers with practical experience and academic training developed this prevention programme in order to hold crime prevention to a high standard. The prevention measures are carried out in the form of workshops focusing on interaction with young people. The programme comprises four modules with a total of 19 lessons and is tailored to students aged 13 to 17. A special feature of the programme is the active involvement of parents and teachers to ensure a holistic and sustainable approach. To this end, information events are held for parents and teachers. Since the end of 2017, this programme is part of UNDER18, a holistic concept of crime prevention for young people.

5

Overview of the Austrian Drug Market

The following chapter reviews trafficking in illegal drugs and production of drugs in laboratories and farms, broken down by the most commonly abused substances in Austria. The following reports are based on facts established in the course of investigations, international empirical data and research conducted in this field.

Organised Illegal Trafficking In Narcotic Drugs

Cannabis

Cannabis is the most used drug and with an estimated 22.6 million consumers constitutes the biggest drug market in the EU³. This can also be observed in the consumption behaviour of Austrians since cannabis is still the most consumed illicit drug in Austria. In a European context, the majority of cannabis comes from Spain⁴. The Western Balkans continue to play a big role in the supply of herbal cannabis, while Morocco is still the biggest supplier of cannabis resin.

In 2023, criminal groups imported marijuana from Europe's main cultivation region Albania to Austria. Herbal cannabis from Albania is smuggled via the Balkan route or by sea through Italy. Albanian or Serbian offenders store the drugs in Italy, the Czech Republic, Germany and in Eastern European states along the Balkan route. From there, they export marijuana to Central and Northern Europe.

In 2023, Slovak criminal groups were also active at the Eastern border organising the transportation of drugs from the Netherlands to Austria.

There was an uptick in seizures of herbal cannabis transported in semi-trailer trucks. In these cases, more and more Serbian nationals were involved. The drugs are often transported from Morocco to Spain, where the cargo is reloaded. Then the drugs are transported to interim stops in France, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. In 2023, large amounts of cannabis transported by air to Austria were seized. These cannabis products are mostly of Canadian origin and destined not only for Austria, but also Germany and the Netherlands.

Side Note: Canada

During an event of the Council of Europe Pompidou Group, a representative of the Canadian police explained that the export of cannabis can be directly linked to the legalization of cannabis in Canada in October 2018. While it is positive that organised crime in this field in Canada declined, it significantly increased in connection with other drugs, as illustrated in the serious fentanyl crisis. Organised crime groups now sell the national surplus of cannabis profitably abroad, which only shifts criminal activities to

3 See EMCDA, 2024

4 See EMCDA, 2024

other markets. One of the goals of legalising cannabis in Canada was to reduce the youth’s cannabis consumption. Rising numbers prove that this goal was not attained.

Cannabidiol (CBD)

CBD is one of many components of cannabis plants that are either low or rich in THC. CBD is not subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act, as it is a non-psychoactive cannabinoid derived from the female hemp plant (cannabis). When needed, a chemical analysis determines a material’s exact CBD concentration and a possible unlawful THC concentration.

In 2023, isolated cases of selling CBD cannabis plants that had been sprayed with synthetic cannabinoids were recorded. This is dangerous because consumers cannot identify the concentration of the synthetic cannabinoid applied to the CBD cannabis plants or plant parts, which can lead to serious health issues or to death in case of overdose.

It should be noted that CBD is not covered by the Narcotic Drugs Act or New Psychoactive Substances Act, which means that it is not within the police’s area of jurisdiction. Even though legal regulations exist in Austria, their imposition seems questionable.

Cocaine

Aside from cannabis, cocaine is the second most consumed illicit drug, which is also reflected in the national and international statistics on seizures. On an international level, it seems that cocaine is consumed by all walks of life. It is no longer a drug exclusive to the upper classes. According to the UNODC World Drug Report 2023, the global number of seizures of cocaine have doubled between 2015 and 2021, which seems to be an ongoing trend.

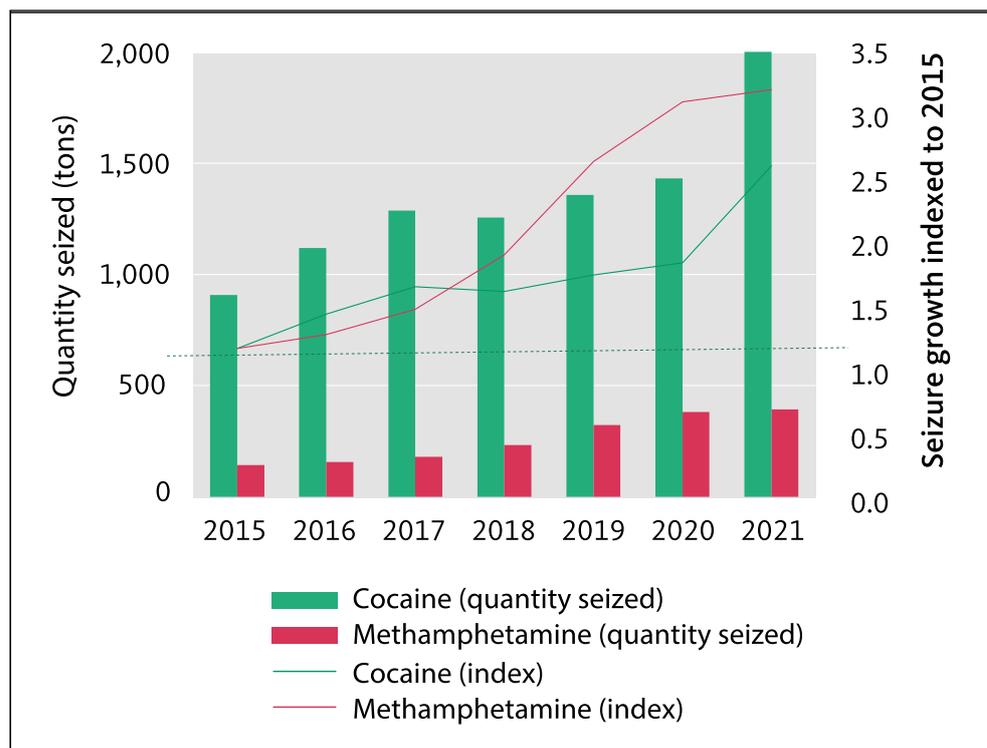


Figure 3
Increase of global seizures of cocaine and methamphetamine, 2015-2021 (Source: UNODC, World Drug Report 2023, Contemporary Issues on Drugs, p 175)

As already mentioned, the Balkan route is the main smuggling route for cocaine. However, it is also evident that organised criminal groups from the Balkans are responsible for the smuggling of cocaine from the Netherlands and Belgium directly to Austria. This cocaine is usually of high quality and is preferably shipped in shipping containers directly from the countries of origin in South America to the big industrial ports in Europe, such as Rotterdam (NL), Antwerp (BE) and Hamburg (GER), and then distributed in the EU.

Case Study no. 1 – Cocaine in Container from Ecuador

In November 2023, a total amount of 167 kg of highly concentrated cocaine were smuggled into the EU in a container of company MAERSK, which was transported on a cargo ship from Ecuador to Hamburg (GER) via Mexico. After the container was unloaded, it was transported by train to Budapest via Austria. During the check of the container, the cocaine was discovered in its floor insulation, which was only accessible from the outside (see pictures in figure 5)



Figure 4
Pictures from the Hungarian
Liaison Bureau for Europol

Cocaine shipments to ports in the UK make their way to the EU. Analyses of crypto messenger services revealed that the cocaine smuggled in containers to the UK were supposed to be transported through the criminal groups' logistics to the Netherlands for processing. Since street prices are higher in the UK compared to the EU, the majority of the cocaine for street-level dealing is re-imported to the UK after processing for street-level dealing.

In Carinthia, Romanian criminal groups primarily working in the red-light scene were observed to be involved in international cocaine smuggling and trafficking. On one hand, the proximity to Slovenia and the lower prices allowed them to cover the supply for the domestic market. On the other hand, it is known that cocaine is transported from Slovenia through Carinthia to the rest of the country. This small-scale drug smuggling by users and low-level dealers for cocaine was also observed in Vorarlberg at the borders to Switzerland and Germany. However, this area is predominantly dominated by Serbian and Albanian criminal groups.

Countries in the South American region are undoubtedly the main producers of cocaine. Smuggling cocaine base as intermediate product for the final manufacturing in Europe is also prevalent, but not on a comparable level with smuggling of cocaine. Furthermore,

it was noticed that cocaine was also smuggled by working it into different objects (e.g. fabrics, wood, etc.), which then requires an extraction through certain chemicals.

Case Study no. 2 – Attempted Production of Cocaine in Lower Austria

A new phenomenon was detected in autumn 2023, when a Serbian criminal group attempted to manufacture cocaine in a laboratory in Lower Austria. In the course of a police intervention, which resulted in the seizure of 137 kg of cocaine base, a search of a storage facility in Kottlingbrunn (Lower Austria) led to the discovery and seizure of chemical materials necessary for the synthesis and production of cocaine.

Side Note: Türkiye

The number of seizures of large quantities of cocaine upon import through the Turkish border has steadily increased. In personal exchanges of information, EGM NARKOTIK, the national Central Office for Drugs of Türkiye, have said themselves that there is a cocaine flooding at Turkish borders.

Heroin

In 2023, the downward trend of the past years regarding crimes in connection with opiates continued on in most European countries as well as in Austria. In Austria, the countries of origin of foreign offenders involved in international heroin trafficking were distributed evenly across the country. According to UNODC, the majority of opiates were seized along the Balkan route (see figure 6).

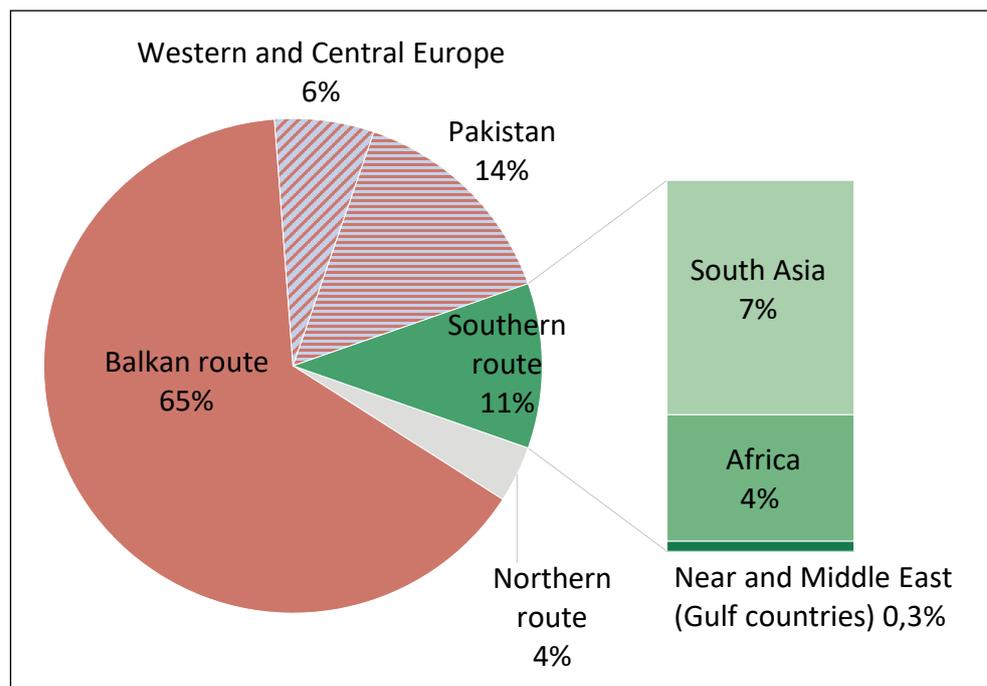


Figure 5
Distribution of Seizures of Opiates coming from Afghanistan in 2021 (Source: UNODC, World Drug Report 2023, Contemporary Issues on Drugs, p 175)

Smuggling is mainly organised by nationals or former nationals from Western Balkan states. In Austria, the smuggled drugs are mostly sold in provincial capitals and urban centres. So-called street runners supply the federal provinces from the federal capital. In particular, Serbian, Montenegrin and Albanian criminal groups act as suppliers, smugglers and street-sellers across Austria. In the East, more and more Slovakian and Hungarian nationals were recorded. It is assumed that heroin was stored in the Bratislava (SK) region and used to supply the heroin market on a low-threshold level.

Analysis of crypto messenger services also revealed that Turkish criminal groups prefer a mixed land-sea route to transport large quantities of heroin to the smuggling via trucks on the traditional Balkan route. For example, heroin packages are hidden among the legal cargo in containers on trucks coming, which is transported via land from Iran across the border to Türkiye. Then this cargo is loaded onto a ferry in a port at the Mediterranean sea and shipped to Italy. Finally, the transport continues to Austria and further towards Germany and the Netherlands. Several hundred kilograms of heroin are transported in this fashion. In order to maximise profit and work efficiently, thousands of litres of drug precursors for heroin, such as acetic anhydride, mostly from the Netherlands are then transported on land to Iran on the way back to avoid empty runs.

Afghanistan, the main producer of heroin for many years, is still the most important supplier of this opiate. Based on international information regarding the decline of poppy cultivation area, a decrease in heroin production is expected. Investigators and experts explain the unwavering availability of heroin with full storage facilities along the smuggling routes. In the past years, there were some cases of heroin base being smuggled as an intermediate product to Europe with view to finish manufacturing there.

Synthetic Drugs

The majority of sold synthetic drugs is still of European origin. Especially amphetamine-based synthetic drugs are mainly produced or processed for sale in the Netherlands and Belgium. Pure production in the Czech Republic and Poland declined. Clephedron is an exception as it was produced in large quantities in Poland for the Polish market. However, this was not relevant to Austria. Furthermore, criminal groups from the South American region with a growing influence on the European market have entered the scene.

Synthetic opioids up to 50 to 100 times stronger than heroin are a marginal occurrence in Austria despite unfounded media coverage. They have only been seen primarily in the illegal trade of substitution medicaments on the local market. These synthetic drugs are at the root of the ongoing opioid epidemic in the USA, especially the drug fentanyl. It is feared that the Taliban's ban on cultivating poppy in Afghanistan will lead to a shortage of heroin and thereby cause a global shift towards synthetic opioids. The situation in and implications for Austria are observed and continuously analysed.

Amphetamine, MDMA and Ecstasy

Amphetamine seized in Austria in 2023 mostly came from European countries known for the distribution and production, mainly the Netherlands. The substance was found in all known forms, such as powder, paste and pills. In regard to amphetamine, it was discovered in 2022 that criminal groups from the Western Balkans transported amphetamine oils into Austria and only made pastes and powder in the target country to render detection at import checks more difficult. The drugs were imported to Austria on road vehicles, trains, planes, coaches, cars and particular through postal and parcel services. End consumers are supplied through the existing street dealership network for heroin, cocaine and cannabis.

Most of the seized MDMA was in the form of tablets, but it was also offered in liquid form and as a powder. Some tablets were offered as ecstasy but contained little to no MDMA. Instead, they contained more of the new psychoactive substances pursuant to the New Psychoactive Substances Act. Despite the slight increase in ecstasy and the decrease in amphetamines according to the case numbers compared to the previous year, the market remains stagnant on a year-over-year basis.

Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine supplied to the Austrian market comes less and less from smaller domestic production sites, while larger seizures originated from laboratories in Europe, for example the Netherlands, and to a lower extent in the Middle East. The import of methamphetamine cannot be traced back to specific means of transportation. Methamphetamine is imported from other European countries to Austria via postal services, by land and by means of small-scale drug smuggling by users. The trend of methamphetamine being produced in large-scale laboratories, especially in the Netherlands, continued. Methamphetamine was offered as powder, crystals or tablets and as in previous years, it was of a high purity. Due to the addictiveness of methamphetamine and increasing supply, consumption of and trafficking in this drug is expected to rise internationally.

The quantities of methamphetamine seized in the provinces remained relatively stable and generally at a low level. Even in Upper Austria, where case numbers and seized quantities had been elevated in previous years, numbers declined to a low level.

Psychotropic Drugs

Time and again, psychotropic substances are the subject of criminal investigations in Austria and appear in the context of problematic recreational use, especially benzodiazepine. In Austria, however, trafficking is limited to small local groups, who get the drugs through medical prescriptions and sell the unconsumed excess. Thefts of mostly psychotropic substances on production and transportation routes are on a very low level across Austria and were further reduced by several measures. However, it is safe to assume that psychotropic substances are prevalent on the black market. The actual

numbers for youths and young adults are higher. Because of the complex categorisation of psychotropic substances, the current data is not conclusive.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

The issue of NPS is continually monitored and analysed in Austria as well as at a European and international level. The trend shows attempts to reproduce almost every conventional narcotic drug and its effect as an NPS. However, as these substances are largely unexplored, they may produce undesirable side effects. When looking at seizures of such products, they often turn out to be mixtures of conventional drugs and several NPS. However, these drugs were sold as conventional drugs or NPS. This lack of information about the possible different effects put consumers' health at risk.

In 2023, the trend for illegal trafficking in ketamine solidified on a national and international level. Ketamine is an anaesthetic, mainly used in veterinary medicine and under certain circumstances used on humans as well. It can strongly alleviate pain and cause unconsciousness. Ketamine is used as a partying drug for its dissociative effects. Ketamine is also known as "K", "Special K", "Vitamin K", "Kate", "Keta" and "Ketamine C". It is consumed in dissolved or crystalline form. One side effect of Ketamine consumption are horror trips (K hole). Chronic misuse of ketamine can lead to irreparable physical harm. Ketamine is shipped in large quantities from pharmaceutical companies, primarily from South Asia, via fictitious firms to the EU. Large quantities are therefore introduced to the illegal market.

A statistical representation of NPS cases does not make sense due to uncertainties in data collection with regard to the large number of different substances. The recurrent amendments of the Narcotic Drugs Regulation are aimed at shifting NPS, depending on their danger to health, to the Narcotic Drugs Act, where there are more effective measures available to counter them.

Currently, about 1,000 NPS are known around the world, and their numbers are growing. For a lack of consistent NPS legislation, distributors offer the substances on the internet (dark or clear web, messenger services). The buyers mainly receive the goods through postal and package delivery services.

Drug Trafficking on the Darknet and via Postal Services

In the past years, trafficking of illicit drugs on online platforms has become a common method for drug-related crime and is an addition to traditional markets. Single perpetrators as well as criminal organisations use these platforms to conduct their organised drug trafficking and to illegally generate their wealth. In 2018, a new unit for investigations into drug trafficking by mail and via the internet was established at Criminal Intelligence

Service Austria to fight this drug-related crime phenomenon. Its activities include investigation of online drug traffickers and organised groups using postal services for drug trafficking based in Austria and coordination of police measures against drug buyers across Austria. Apart from operational investigations, this specialised unit continuously analyses recent developments and creates new drug control strategies, in part through international information exchange in police matters. Therefore, operational investigations are combined and complemented with high-impact checks of postal services, which are organised in cooperation with Customs Authority Austria. Since they are highly successful, these measures will be continued and reinforced in 2024.

Darknet trading platforms are the preferred form of communication platform for initiating and conducting business, processing payments and any related business procedures. Sellers and buyers of drugs appreciate the high degree of anonymity, which is provided for under certain circumstances, the around-the-clock availability and the absence of personal contact on the darknet. This modus operandi became more prevalent during the restrictions of the COVID 19 pandemic, but has become a well-established form of procurement ever since.

Structural investigations into drug trafficking on online platforms revealed that it was mainly used to purchase drugs of high quality, which were then sold profitably on the streets. Generally, online drug trafficking offers a diverse and easily accessible range of products, especially exotic synthetic drugs. Street-level drug trafficking was therefore not replaced, but rather complemented and extended. Recently, it was observed that offenders preferred the clear web and instant messenger apps with end-to-end encryption to the darknet. However, it should be highlighted that surveillance measures regarding messenger services, as it has been common practice for a long time with wiretapping, are not possible in Austria. Therefore, Austrian law enforcement authorities depend on luck and intelligence from other countries.

On the one hand, the extent to which Austria is affected by drug trafficking via online platforms and postal services becomes evident by the regular targeted checks of export letters carried out by the German authorities. In 2023, more than 70 kilograms of drugs from the Federal Republic of Germany alone were seized, which were intended for transport to Austria. On the other hand, joint targeted checks are also carried out within Austria in cooperation with the Customs Authority Austria. In 2023, a total of more than 800 kilograms of narcotic drugs were seized in postal items. The majority of the seized drugs was herbal cannabis (marijuana). Based on the results of the investigation, it was established that two thirds of the seized mail originally came from the Netherlands, which were often not sent directly to Austria, but were only dispatched in Germany to conceal their origin.

In general, an increase in seized parcels, mostly with large quantities of synthetic drugs, from Austria to Oceania and America was observed. In this regard, cooperation with the countries concerned has been strengthened and intensified. However, investigations have shown that Austria mainly serves as a transit country. Offenders take advantage of Austria's reputation as a country of origin.

Especially in the export of ketamine and MDMA, an increase in shipments to Australia, New Zealand and the USA was significant. These parcels mostly carried drugs in the kilogram range. Perpetrators laboriously incorporated drugs into everyday objects in order to conceal them. The amounts of ketamine saw a sharp increase. While the seized quantities amounted to 36 grams in 2022, this number rose to 84 kilograms in 2023. This extreme increase can be partly attributed to seizures of large amounts of drugs from organised criminal groups. However, this development was accompanied by a significant increase in seizures of small quantities of this drug for the personal consumption.

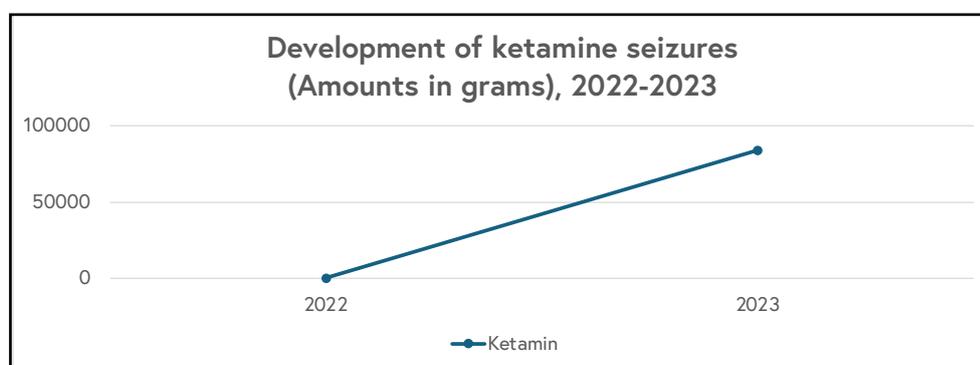


Figure 6
Distribution of Seizures
of Opiates coming from
Afghanistan in 2021 (Source:
UNODC, World Drug Report
2023, Contemporary Issues
on Drugs, p 175)

Production of Illicit Drugs in Austria

Austria is not only used as a transit country for illicit drugs, it is also a production region for certain drugs. On the one hand, cannabis is cultivated and cannabis products are made both indoors and outdoors. On the other hand, synthetic drugs are produced in drug laboratories.

Cannabis Farms

As already mentioned, cannabis products continued to dominate the Austrian drug market in 2023. Similar to 2022, the number of cannabis farms seized in Austria declined from 722 to 582 in 2023. In comparison to 2021, this constitutes a decrease of 43%.

Table 9
Indoor and outdoor cannabis farms in 2022 and 2023

Year	Indoor	Outdoor	Total
2022	525	197	722
2023	402	180	582

Similar to previous years, a large part of the cannabis plants were cultivated in indoor installations. Houses, flats, cellars or mothballed production facilities were rented for cultivation. For personal use, marijuana is often cultivated in so-called grow boxes. These are freely available turnkey systems sold for a few hundred euros. Trade in such equipment is generally legal. However, the sale of cannabis seedlings and cannabis cuttings presents a problem. These products are offered in the open, even though the mature and flowering plants may contain high concentrations of THC. Points of sale take advantage of this loophole in the Austrian Narcotic Drugs Act, even though they are probably well aware of the purpose of the seeds and seedlings.

The explanation for the decreasing number of seized farms is that the numbers of micro (one to five plants), mini (six to 49 plants) and small farms (50 to 249 plants) went down, but those of medium (250 to 499 plants), big (500 to 999 plants) and industrial farms (more than 1,000 plants) rose. In 2023, the police were especially successful in regard to big cultivations. It remains to be seen whether this trend towards bigger cultivation systems will continue in the next years.

2023	Indoor	Outdoor	Total
Burgenland	20	11	31
Carinthia	28	22	50
Lower Austria	75	42	117
Upper Austria	66	22	88
Salzburg	13	7	20
Styria	53	34	87
Tyrol	35	17	52
Vorarlberg	11	13	24
Vienna	101	12	113
Austria	402	180	582

Table 10
Number of seized cannabis cultivations in Austria in 2023

Illegal Drug Laboratories

After the number of investigated drug laboratories fell in the period of 2017 to 2019, it rose sharply in 2020 and 2021. In 2022, a striking decrease was observed. The declining number of discovered illegal production sites may be due to the constant addition of substances to the list of drug precursors. Another reason might be that a supposed shortage of available precursors on currently unknown sales channels led to a decrease.

The downward trend of uncovered laboratories for the production of methamphetamine in so-called “kitchen labs“ is evident because the increasingly difficult access to especially red phosphor makes changes in the production necessary. Operators of these kitchen labs are not able to carry out this change because of a deficiency in chemical knowledge. In 2023, the numbers returned to the range of the average of the past few years.

Laboratories seized in Austria, 2014-2023

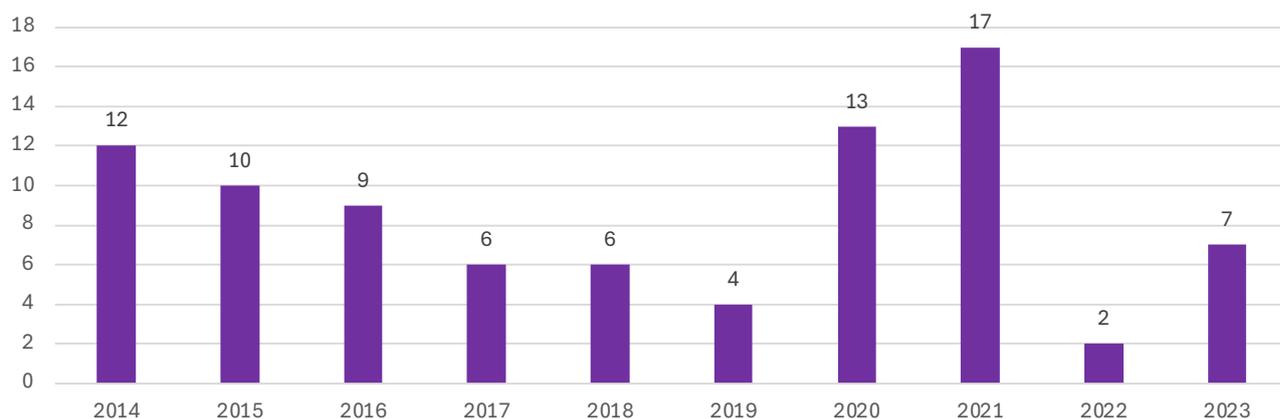


Figure7
Laboratories seized in Austria, 2014-2023

In 2023, seven illegal drug laboratories or production sites for final processing were uncovered in all provinces of Austria except Burgenland and Vorarlberg. The first ever drug laboratory was discovered in Carinthia that year. Burgenland and Vorarlberg are the only provinces where no illegal laboratories have been found yet.

Amphetamine was produced either by chemical synthesis using the necessary laboratory equipment or by crystallising amphetamine base or oil purchased abroad into amphetamine sulphate. After this finalising procedure had first been noticed in 2022, two cases were recorded in Tyrol and Vienna in 2023. In these cases, in contrast to other production types, the perpetrators were mainly from the Western Balkans. In previous years, the suspects were almost exclusively Austrian nationals.

Methamphetamine and large quantities of mephedrone (4-MMC) were produced professionally in Styria. In the past few years, illegal drug laboratories were discovered in Styria; however, these were mainly attributed to two repeat offenders.

Laboratories in Upper Austria and Salzburg were more or less attempts of running drug laboratories or extracting narcotic substances from legal medical drugs. In both cases, explosive substances were produced in the process. Even though the quantities of explosive substances were small, it was necessary to cordon off the venue and initiate a controlled explosion by the IEDD Unit. More details are provided in the following case studies.

In Lower Austria, investigations into international cocaine smuggling led to the discovery of a location and seizures of chemicals, which were probably used for the extraction for final processing of cocaine.

Due to the increased cooperation with Austrian businesses regarding the sale of chemicals to private individuals, which started years ago, the Precursor Competence Centre received many reports on suspicious purchasing activity. Some of these led to the discovery of illegal laboratories. Over the years, suspects changed their modus operandi noticeably in that they purchased chemicals needed for the production of illegal drugs online in Germany or sometimes in neighbouring countries (for example, the Czech Republic). In isolated cases, online purchases from China were noticed. However, there were also cases where several persons made purchases to not raise suspicion because of large quantities.

The production of drugs was partly for personal use, partly for profitable sale to regional consumers. Operating laboratories to smuggle drugs abroad or to sell them online (darknet) were exceptions.

The Netherlands continue to play a key role in the production of amphetamine and MDMA (ecstasy). Note-worthy production sites were also seized in Poland and Baltic countries; however, they are not comparable to those in the Netherlands. It seems that the large-scale production of methamphetamine has reached these countries. Individuals from Latin America are regularly among the identified offenders. However, no connections to South American drug cartels have yet been confirmed.

Mexico has also become an important production site for methamphetamine. Seizures of tons of methamphetamine in the past years in the Netherlands and in Slovakia underline this development. Based on the sheer amount of these drugs and the globally organised sale, there is no doubt that organised criminal groups are in control.

Known especially for being under the influence of Vietnamese criminal groups, the Czech Republic, a years-long traditional production country for methamphetamine, does currently not indicate trends for Austria. At this point in time, it is impossible to foresee how offenders will react to chemicals used for the production there being added to the surveyed category of drug precursors. In some instances, it seems that Vietnamese criminal groups are switching to the cheaper Mexican



methamphetamine from the Netherlands, which would result in decreased production activities in the Czech Republic.

Adding to their role as producing country of heroin, Afghanistan has gained in importance regarding the production of methamphetamine in the past few years. However, the drug precursor ephedrine from the ephedra plant, which thrives in the Afghan highlands, is increasingly replaced by relevant chemicals here.

Drug-Related Crime in connection with Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

Drug trafficking has long ceased to be the domain of organised crime groups. For years, criminal and terrorist organisations have been using synergies to achieve their respective goals. In this regard, the Financial Action Task Force's reports are especially indicative. Very high sums of cash are seized during these interventions, which is underlined in the cases presented in the chapters on developments in the provinces. Individual offenders, but especially offenders in organised groups try to launder the illegal proceeds from the sale of narcotic drugs through countless concealment methods. In this way, they are in a position to give their illicitly acquired assets the appearance of legitimacy and to enjoy the fruits of their criminal activities without any worries. In Austria, networks of legitimate business models have spread far and wide, making it possible to disguise the origin of illegal money flows. Then there are individuals who used to be very successful in large-scale international narcotics crime and amassed wealth, and have withdrawn from their home countries to Austria in order to invest their ill-begotten funds, for example in properties.

Terrorist groups, on the other hand, use their control or monitoring of cultivation areas and transport routes, for example, and collect "fees" from criminal organisations in order to finance their terrorist activities, such as the purchase of weapons and ammunition and their training in dedicated camps. In its Supra National Risk Assessment (SNRA), which is updated every two years, the European Commission also addresses the problem of drug trafficking both in the area of money laundering and in terrorist financing. Drug trafficking is considered the most significant crime area for cash movements.

The "National Risk Analysis of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing"⁵ prepared by the Austrian Ministry of Finance names "addiction-related crime" as one of the most frequently occurring predicate offences to money laundering "whose risk of commission is thus thought to be high". It should be noted, however, that the Austrian Financial Intelligence Unit (A-FIU) at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria hardly receives suspi-

5 See Federal Ministry of Finance, 2021

cious transaction reports regarding this phenomenon. The number of unreported cases is believed to be high.

The A-FIU's analysis allows to attribute certain types of criminal offences, so called predicate offences, to suspicious activity reports. The 2022 Situation Report on Money Laundering states that as in previous years fraudulent activities dominated in cases where an attribution to certain criminal offences was possible. The 2023 Situation Report on Money laundering has not yet been released. In 12% of the suspicious activity reports, the reported facts were related to tax offences, in 4% of the cases there was a suspicion of a document-related offence and 2% of suspicious activity reports concerned terrorism or possible sanction violations. The remaining reports were roughly equally distributed across drug-related crime, fraudulent bankruptcy, organised crime, corruption and trafficking in human beings.

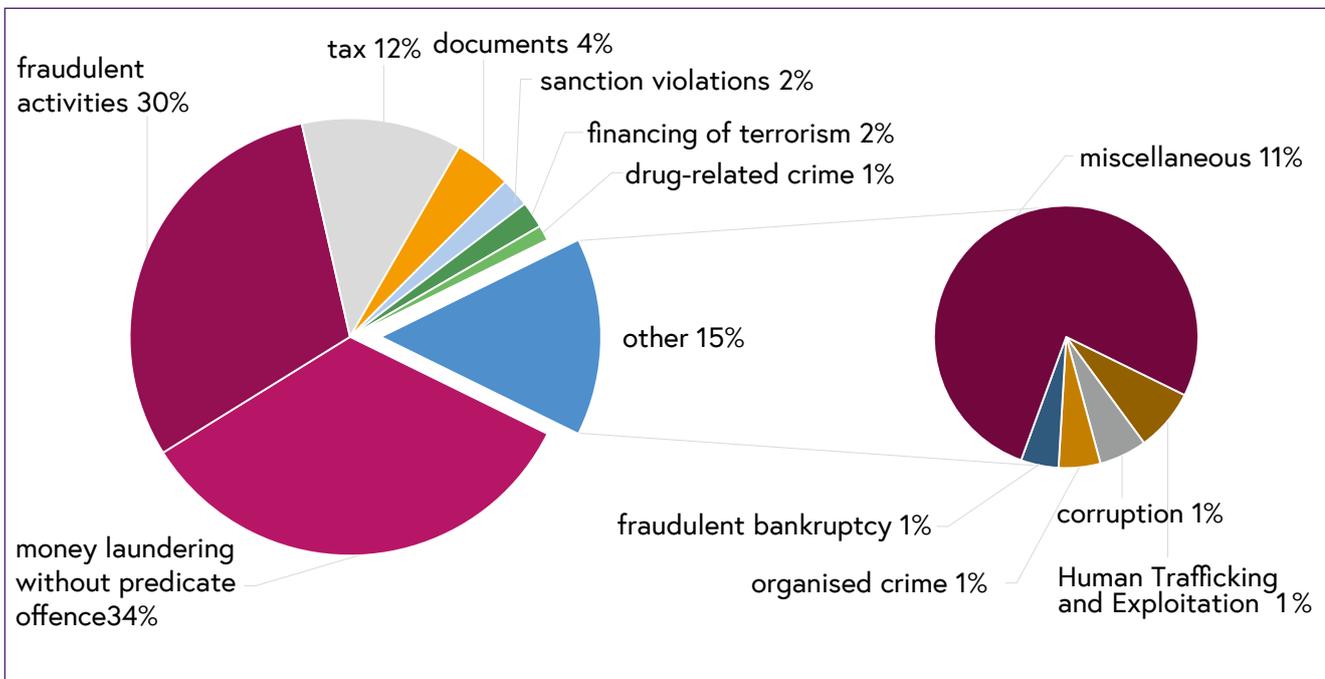


Figure 8
Suspicious activity reports according to fields of criminal activity in 2022 (source: Criminal Intelligence Service Austria, Situation Report Money Laundering 2022, p. 29)

The low percentage of drug-related offences can be attributed to the predominant payment with cash resulting in a high number of unrecorded cases. The cash is often transported to other countries on courier trips. There, it is used to purchase real estate. Often, the money is also used to buy luxury items or is laundered in casinos. The corresponding modi operandi will be illustrated in the following chapter.

Outlook for 2024

Based on the geographical location and historical developments, it is safe to assume that as in previous years, Austria will play a key role in fighting international organised drug-related crime in the future. Austria will continue to be a country of destination and origin and particularly a country of transit for illicit drugs.

In the context of the ACHILLES Working Group, investigations conducted since 2021 into encrypted messenger services revealed that criminal groups of Balkan descent are in the focus. The unprecedented scale of international organised crime revealed in the course of the investigations has an additional impact on law enforcement authorities, for example by preparing threat analyses and implementing risk-minimising measures for investigators, public prosecutors and judges. Violent crime is also more and more influenced by this development. Based on the gathered intelligence, it has become clear that the amount of drugs available on the national and international market is actually much higher than initially assumed. The statistical recording of these cases is difficult, but a solution for future representation in report and seizure statistics is underway. In the years to come, crypto messenger services will pose a significant challenge for law enforcement authorities, demanding continuous analysis and strategic responses. Unprecedented amounts of data and their analysis result in intense investigation proceedings with a long duration. This, in turn, increases the pressure on law enforcement authorities, who are bound to deadlines. Strategies to deal with the complexity of this topic and the corresponding effects are in the making to enable professional and efficient case handling.

On top of this, law enforcement authorities also need to address the increasing illegal purchasing and trafficking in drugs on the darknet, payment by virtual payment methods (crypto currencies), shipping of camouflaged parcels and the increasing dangers of polyintoxication of drugs, which is becoming more complex in face of different production methods.

Since narcotic drugs do not only reach Austria on the traditional routes, such as the well-known Balkan route, close international cooperation with police and judicial authorities and correspondingly coordinated control measures throughout Europe will also be required in the future, both from an operational and a strategic point of view. In this context, the Austrian police is dedicated to pursuing all and any violations of

the Narcotic Drugs Act and the New Psychoactive Substances Act, and is actively involved in projects to combat drug-related crime at a national and international level. The “EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025“ and the “EU Drugs Action Plan 2021-2025“ provide a strategic framework for this. As a result of the “European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats“ (EMPACT), in which Austria continues to participate, Europol coordinates Europe-wide operational measures.

Certain companies from the private industry, which are already supporting law enforcement with expertise and measures in the fight against drug-related crime, have a key position, which is becoming more and more important. In addition to their profit-oriented goals, they are greatly contributing to the protection of citizens. Criminal Intelligence Service Austria hopes to further expand this initiative in the future, especially in the areas of water, air and land routes as well as in the railway network. The relevant parties have already pronounced their support.

In contrast to the Austrian legal framework, whereby the possession and sale of cannabis is illegal, several EU member states have decriminalised or partially legalised the cultivation, commercial sale and use of cannabis. However, in the vast majority of states these acts are still punishable by law. The Federal Ministry of the Interior has consistently pursued a strict line for years and will continue this line of argument, which is in compliance with scientific studies and experiences of affected countries. The Federal Ministry of the Interior embodies the basic belief of “therapy instead of punishment“, which does not contradict the consistent approach. It is assumed that the partial legalization of cannabis in Germany coming into force on 1 April 2024 will negatively impact the Austrian drug market.

In conclusion, drug-related crime is closely interconnected with other types of offences through both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary links, which needs to be monitored in the future. Combating drug-related crime effectively and sustainably requires multidisciplinary cooperation on several levels, not only on police level, but also with the judicial authorities, healthcare institutions and private companies in the context of institutionalised forums. The police will carry on its efforts to counter drug-related crime with determination and full commitment in 2024.

Drugs have never changed anything for the positive in history, but rather destroys lives in different ways. The police’s purpose is to protect citizens by consistently fighting illicit drugs.

6

Drug-Related Crime in Austria's Provinces

The following chapter describes the development of drug crime in Austria's nine provinces with regard to the number of reported violations, the quantities of seized substances, information about criminal groups, transport routes, drug farms, labs, new psychoactive substances, user behaviour, the darknet, trends in acquisitive, accompanying and subsequent crime and intelligence in the field of money laundering and terrorist financing. Each report for the respective province ends with a short outlook on 2024 and a representative case study.

Burgenland

In 2023, Burgenland saw a rise in drug-related police reports by 4.2%. Burgenland accounts for roughly 2.2% of all drug-related police reports in Austria. This came as large music events such as Nova Rock were once again held in 2023, which prompted more checks by the police. Offences and crimes both rose.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	91	98	113	155	133	133	109	113	86	87	1.2%
Offences	689	760	784	847	835	851	766	587	671	702	4.6%
Total	780	858	897	1,002	968	984	875	700	757	789	4.2%

Table 11
Development of all offences
and crimes pursuant to
the Narcotic Drugs Act in
Burgenland

In 2023, seizures of cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine and heroin in Burgenland rose, while amphetamine and methamphetamine significantly fell.

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	908	1,612	792	743	123
Total cannabis (in grams)	30,043	302,357	245,652	34,292	43,933
Heroin (in grams)	2,165	312	30	66	202
Cocaine (in grams)	82	988	314	1,361	8,696
Methamphetamine (in grams)	1,298	702	57	892	33
Ecstasy (in pieces)	2,003	36,189	56	13	315

Table 12
Seizures of main types of
drugs in Burgenland

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

Different criminal groups are active in different parts of Burgenland. Although they specialise in dealing in one type of drugs, other drugs are also found in their possession.

In the past years, criminal groups of Albanian ethnicity and Serbian and North Macedonian descent as well as criminal groups of Slovak descent have established themselves in the far North of Burgenland, close to the border to Slovakia in the region Kittsee and Berg (Lower Austria). These organised criminal groups operate by assigning specific tasks to their members. They profit from the proximity to the border as it allows them to quickly and quite easily move between Austria and Slovakia. Drivers employed by these groups ship cocaine in vehicles registered in the name of fictitious companies in Slovakia from the Netherlands and Belgium to Kittsee or Berg, where the drugs are stored. From there, the drugs are sold to bulk buyers who control the smuggling to and trafficking in Slovakia. Using crystal meth has become more common.

The motorway border crossing point Nickelsdorf, one of the biggest traffic crossing points in Central Europe, is located in the North of the province at the border to Hungary making this point strategically relevant to the traditional Balkan route for the smuggling of heroin from South West Asia and cannabis products from Balkan countries.

It is assumed that the border crossing point Klagenfurt will become another hot-spot for drug trafficking, as it is now possible to take the Hungarian motorway M85 to get almost all the way to this border crossing point. Since the establishment of this motorway, drug-related crime has heavily moved to the region Oberpullendorf between Lutzmannsburg and Deutschkreutz. The motorway runs along the border there. The border crossing point Klagenfurt is mainly frequented by Hungarian and Austrian commuters. The predominant criminal group in this region consisted of Hungarian and Russian nationals, who ran industrial cannabis farms in Austria. Investigations revealed that the cannabis was then smuggled back into Hungary and put into circulation there.

In the South of the province, no organised crime was observed as in the rest of the region. In the Oberwart district, an 18 year old turned heads as he bought amphetamine, ecstasy, cocaine, cannabis and crystal meth from more than 20 different drug dealers from Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and other European countries via postal services and then sold them to consumers, some of them under age, in Southern Burgenland and in Eastern Styria. Furthermore, indoor and outdoor plantations operated by Austrians in their homes or in their gardens were seized in the districts of Güssing and Jennersdorf.

Since offenders often act in several provinces, the Burgenland Provincial CID joins forces with all other provincial CIDs, but works most often with the Styria, Lower Austria, Vienna and Upper Austria Provincial CIDs. On an international level, the Burgenland Provincial CID cooperates via Criminal Intelligence Service Austria with authorities in Slovakia, Hungary and Western Balkan countries.

Cannabis Farms and Associated Criminal Groups

Cannabis farms have been found in all forms all over Burgenland: In the district of Neusiedl am See, a father operated an outdoor plantation in the garden of the single-family house for personal use. His son took advantage of this opportunity and sold cannabis profitably to his friends. Except the above-mentioned big plantation of a Russo-Hungarian criminal group, the majority of plantations seized in Burgenland were operated by Austrians mostly for personal use.

Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, no laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs were identified or seized in Burgenland.

Trend in New Psychoactive Substances

As in previous years, only a small number of violations of the New Psychoactive Substances Act were reported in 2023. Most of these NPS were synthetic cannabinoids destined exclusively for personal use.

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

No significant changes over the previous years regarding consumption behaviour were identified in 2023. Cannabis consumption and medical drug abuse were most prevalent followed by amphetamine. Reported usage of heroin is significantly decreasing. It seems that there is a wide range of traditional drugs available.

Darknet Trends

In 2023, the situation in Burgenland concerning drug purchases or trafficking on the darknet changed in that the number of seized parcels with recipients in Burgenland declined. It is uncertain whether this development is due to changes in the number of checks or to different procurement methods for drugs. A striking trend is that more and more messenger providers such as Telegram, Wickr Me, Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Signal, Session and TikTok are used. TikTok mainly reaches minors and youth.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

Investigations in the field of crypto messenger services are very complex. Most of the time, the correspondence is not in German, which leads to a high workload for translators and interpreters. It is staggering that each analysis resulted in a new case and lead to sometimes highly complex and lengthy investigations due to the extensive intelligence.

Acquisitive and Accompanying Crime

Consumers break into clubhouses, self-service shops, fruit stands, vending machines and constructions sites and steal newspaper cashboxes to get the money to pay for their drugs. Mainly Slovakian and Hungarian nationals, which were identified as offenders in cases of breaking and entering in Burgenland, confessed committing such crimes to pay for drugs. Pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act, these offenders are rarely reported

by investigating officers because the procurement and possession of drugs usually happens abroad.

In addition to drug trafficking, fake cigarettes are sometimes sold. From time to time, different partially prohibited weapons are seized in addition to drugs. In a few cases, violations of the National Socialism Prohibition Act 1947 (sending relevant documents) as well as dangerous threats and bodily injuries were recorded.

Investigating several sexual offences because of child sexual abuse and child abuse material was an extraordinarily shocking case. The main offender, who among other things produced child abuse material, sedated his victims, one of them being his own daughter, with mephedrone and GBL.

Observations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

Usually drugs are paid for with cash, the majority of which couriers then bring into different countries. In some cases, payments were also made via licensed payment service providers, such as PayPal or bank institutes. In the area of online drug trafficking, cryptocurrencies are the preferred payment methods. In connection with ongoing investigations into crypto messenger services, it was possible to trace money flows to various EU countries and to countries outside the bloc. Some of the transactions went through humanitarian organisations. In some cases, it was found that the drug money was invested in properties with the help of "straw men". In some cases, properties were seized by public prosecutors, and an application was filed for the confiscation of these properties. Furthermore, the drug money was also used to buy luxury watches, jewels and jewellery.

In Burgenland, there were no significant findings in connection with drug-related terrorist financing.

Outlook

Cannabis consumers of all age groups, even the youngest among them, lack awareness of the unlawfulness of the procurement, possession, consumption and transfer of cannabis. The fact that cannabis was partially legalised in Germany seems to be a motivation for many to support and advertise legalisation in Austria. The consumers' assumption that they only hurt themselves seems to extend to other drugs as well.

Criminal groups of Balkan origin or criminal groups of other nationality cooperating with aforementioned groups seem to establish themselves more and more in Northern Burgenland. It cannot be ruled out that they expand or move to other parts of the province.

The use of free messenger services, which are not subject to police surveillance, and the growing number of available messenger services will make investigative work even

harder. This also applies to crypto messenger services, as they require complex, extensive and resource-demanding investigations.

Case Study no. 3 - Operation Donkey

From the beginning of 2021 to the end of 2023, the smuggling and dealing of at least 260 kilograms of cocaine and at least 100 kilograms of marijuana were attributed to an organised criminal group in the North of Burgenland, region Kittsee and Berg (Lower Austria), which consists of Albanians of Serbian and North Macedonian descent and Slovakian nationals. Drivers employed by these groups ship cocaine from the Netherlands and Belgium via Austria to Slovakia, where the drugs are profitably sold. The Burgenland Provincial CID conducts investigations in close cooperation with the Styria Provincial CID and Criminal Intelligence Service Austria.

Carinthia

In 2023, Carinthia saw a decrease in drug-related police reports by 3.7% compared to the previous year. Carinthia accounts for 6.6% of all drug-related reports in Austria. Offences and crimes both fell.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	88	96	91	123	173	177	151	194	177	176	-0.6%
Offences	1,917	1,544	1,568	2,087	2,254	2,672	2,374	2,294	2,239	2,151	-3.9%
Total	2,005	1,640	1,659	2,210	2,427	2,849	2,525	2,488	2,416	2,327	-3.7%

Table 13
Development of all reported offences and crimes pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Carinthia

In 2023 in Carinthia, the amount of seized cannabis doubled, while the amounts of amphetamine and ecstasy only increased slightly. However, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine decreased.

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	2,027	602	1,049	229	518
Total cannabis (in grams)	94,226	52,040	168,252	49,055	115,333
Heroin (in grams)	5,859	1,156	4,859	3,284	2,606
Cocaine (in grams)	1,653	1,109	1,192	3,223	2,563
Methamphetamine (in grams)	548	23	265	157	48
Ecstasy (in pieces)	1,150	1,115	284	343	540

Table 14
Seizures of main types of drugs in Carinthia

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

Due to its geographical location, especially as the extension of the Western Balkan route, Carinthia continued to be used for transiting narcotic drugs, mainly heroin, cocaine and cannabis products. However, Carinthia is also a country of destination because of its proximity to Slovenia and the thereby short procurement route, cheap prices and good quality of the drugs. The smuggling of drugs happens equally at all border crossing points. The smuggling route from Slovenia via Italy to Austria is popular. The import via the border crossing point Thörl Maglern stands out.

Slovenian courier drivers or smugglers are dependent of the Bosnian-Serbian criminal groups in the background and usually have a registered address in Carinthia. Frequent procurement trips of smaller quantities of narcotic drugs to Carinthia continue to be particularly popular with individual consumers, as the risk of longer prison sentences remains rather low if only a small amount of drugs is found. Large quantities are more likely to be smuggled to Carinthia by well-organised criminal groups.

Black African criminal groups, especially in the urban area of Klagenfurt, have been successfully combated in recent years, but are still active. They are primarily involved in street-level dealing. For years, criminal groups of Chechen or Afghan descent have been active in urban areas. A specialization into a certain type of drug was not evident. However, Carinthia's red-light scene is dominated by Romanian criminal groups who are involved in cocaine trafficking.

Maintaining a well-organised sourcing and distribution network is possible due to the low cost of narcotic drugs in Slovenia and the potential profit margins on sales in Carinthia. The criminal groups' extensive distribution network have made all common drugs equally accessible throughout Carinthia. No regional differences were identified in drugs sales or consumption patterns.

Cannabis Farms and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, a total of 19 cannabis farms operated by both national and foreign perpetrators were dismantled in Carinthia, with only one being an outdoor farm. Most facilities were classified as micro or mini farms with a maximum of 30 to 40 plants. The majority of plants was cultivated in grow boxes in apartments. Even though the number of seizures declined in 2023, it must be assumed that there are still several undiscovered farms and that supply comes from other provinces or other countries, since the demand for drugs remained at the same level.

Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, the first ever amphetamine laboratory was discovered in Carinthia. An Austrian offender was reported. The laboratory was in the offender's apartment. This single seizure does not allow for conclusions or trends.

Trends in New Psychoactive Substances

New psychoactive substances are mainly ordered online and usually for personal use. The demand for conventional drugs, such as heroin, cocaine and herbal cannabis, is not that big as it is easy to get them from Slovenia. Therefore, it does not seem to be an interesting option for profit-oriented criminal groups. It remains to be seen, how the developments in Afghanistan, where the production of methamphetamine replaces heroin, will affect the consumer market in Carinthia.

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

In Carinthia, the most consumed drugs are (herbal) cannabis, cocaine and heroin. These drugs are clearly the preferred option to synthetic drugs. The open drug scene in several parts of the urban area disappeared with the COVID-19 pandemic. The consumption and sale moved to private locations. Since the end of the pandemic, the access to drugs and substitution substances has become more readily available once again. The trend towards experimenting more with mixing different substances continues, which leads consumers to overstep their physical limits causing unpredictable health risks.

Darknet Trends

Compared to previous years, purchasing drugs on the darknet decreased. Regarding the expected shortage of opiates because of the aforementioned situation in Afghanistan, it is assumed that substitute drugs will be procured on the darknet and increase the sales of new psychoactive substance.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

In the course of very extensive and time-consuming investigations, several offenders were arrested and drugs seized in Carinthia. This phenomenon will be a challenge to police all over Austria and demand a lot of resources.

Acquisitive and Accompanying Crime

In comparison to previous years, street robberies and robberies in apartments related to the field of drug-related crime rose significantly. Offenders are mostly youth, primarily young adults and sometimes adults up to the age of 25.

Observations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

The most common method of payment for drugs remains cash, which is mostly brought to other countries by couriers. Cash couriers are especially employed towards Slovenia, which is confirmed by seizures and border controls. In some cases, offenders use licensed money transfer providers to send cash to accomplices, who are often abroad. Only few cases of payment with crypto currencies were detected and then only for online trafficking.

In the context of gambling, it is repeatedly confirmed that foreign criminal groups use casinos abroad, mainly Slovenia, to launder illegally obtained money through gambling. Therefore, persons with connections to the drug scene are regularly checked at the Austrian border and carry larger sums of cash than before, which they claim allegedly comes from casino winnings.

For foreign drug dealers, it is common to invest illegal drug money into real estate or houses in their home countries. In those cases, apparently uninvolved family members as owners of this real estate are put before the actual beneficiary. Changes in the modus operandi for money laundering of different criminal groups were not observed.

In Carinthia, there were no significant findings in connection with drug-related terrorist financing.

Outlook

Regarding the expected shortage of opiates because of the aforementioned situation in Afghanistan causing a potential shortage of heroin, consumers' behaviour is expected to change. This is dangerous because more and more consumers will buy and use more potent drugs, which may lead to more accidents or deaths.

Case Study no. 4 - DRAGA Working Group

Extensive investigations led to the arrest of 17 primarily Romanian offenders from the red-light scene for suspicion of drug trafficking, exploitation of prostitution, cross-border prostitution trafficking, money laundering and criminal association. This case is especially striking as 600 officers were involved in the operation, conducting several searches of premises and executing numerous arrest warrants in three consecutive days. It was proven that the criminal organisation imported, possessed and sold at least 7.3 kilograms of cocaine in a business-like manner. These drugs were mainly sold in the red-light scene. Furthermore, high sums of cash were seized, which the offenders wanted to use for purchasing real estate in Romania.

Lower Austria

In 2023, Lower Austria saw a decrease in drug-related police reports by 3.2% compared to the previous year. Lower Austria accounted for 11.8% of all drug-related reports in Austria. As in previous years, offences and crimes continued to decline. The number of crimes drastically sank by 15.3%.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	153	207	224	345	354	327	318	357	340	288	-15.3%
Offences	3,519	3,872	3,964	5,171	4,728	4,788	4,521	4,373	3,975	3,887	-2.2%
Total	3,672	4,079	4,188	5,516	5,082	5,115	4,839	4,730	4,315	4,175	-3.2%

Table 15

Development of all reported offences and crimes pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Lower Austria

In 2023 in Lower Austria, the amounts of seized cannabis and ecstasy rose slightly, while the amounts of cocaine increased significantly. Amphetamine and methamphetamine declined slightly, while heroin saw a sharp decrease.

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	4,280	4,298	3,650	4,806	4,477
Total cannabis (in grams)	207,807	314,785	250,630	261,113	292,406
Heroin (in grams)	29,392	26,100	8,387	6,234	1,297
Cocaine (in grams)	11,763	5,890	12,104	6,788	10,678
Methamphetamine (in grams)	5,469	468	5,056	875	872
Ecstasy (in pieces)	6,254	1,100	1,599	1,289	1,597

Table 16

Seizures of main types of drugs in Lower Austria

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

Compared to 2022, no significant changes were observed in 2023. Serbian criminal groups, who operate several drug farms in Lower Austria, dominate the production, smuggling of and trafficking in cannabis.

Nationals from Balkan countries, namely Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia, are conducting and controlling the majority of heroin and cocaine smuggling and trafficking. Those responsible for these mafia-like criminal groups control the smuggling and sale through so-called street runners from Serbia and Montenegro. Many consumers from Lower Austria purchase their drugs from Serbian street runners in Vienna.

There were no significant changes compared to 2022 in regard to methamphetamine and amphetamine. Cross-border trafficking and smuggling was organised by various criminal groups from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, but also by criminal groups from Austria, the latter repeatedly importing small quantities for their own use or for distribution in Austria.

Due to the proximity and the fact that the majority of the narcotic drugs consumed in Lower Austria are procured in Vienna, all interventions were closely coordinated with the Vienna Provincial CID.

In 2023, there were no significant changes in the passenger area at Vienna International Airport. Although passenger numbers have been increasing since the pandemic, seizures of narcotic drugs declined. Despite intensive observation of scheduled flights from the transfer airports previously known for the smuggling of narcotic drugs for flights from South America, Africa and Asia, such as Brussels (BE), Amsterdam (NL), Paris (FR), Frankfurt (DE), Madrid and Barcelona (ES), Lisbon (PT), Doha (QA), Addis Ababa (ET), Dubai (AE), Istanbul (TR), London (UK) and Zurich (CH), no major seizures were conducted in passenger traffic at Vienna International Airport in 2023, except the seizure of 16 kilograms of raw opium by an Iranian criminal group.

The situation was similar in the freight sector. Despite close cooperation with the Airport Customs Office, no seizures were conducted in 2023. Seized quantities of narcotic drugs and substances subject to the New Psychoactive Substances Act were different at the airport forwarding post office, where a sharp increase was recorded. The number of letters or parcels seized remained almost the same compared to 2022. The aforementioned seizures were carried out exclusively in cooperation with the Vienna International Airport Customs Office. A significant increase was observed in the seizures of cannabis. In this context, a Malaysian-Chinese organized criminal group was investigated with regard to the import of herbal cannabis. They imported large quantities of herbal cannabis via parcel shipping from Canada into Austria.

Cannabis Farms and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, a total of 75 indoor and 42 outdoor drug farms were found and seized in Lower Austria. The plantations with the primary purpose of personal use were mainly operated by Austrian perpetrators. Twelve professionally operated indoor drug farms were attributed to Serbian organized criminal groups. The largest seizure involved a drug farm with 1,483 plants and was found and seized in the district of Baden. Especially striking was that the organised criminal group relied heavily on division of labour involving electricians for the set-up and installation, gardeners, harvest helpers and people for pick-ups. For the construction of the plantations, usually Austrian-based professionals with a Serbian migration background are employed or specialists are temporarily brought to Austria from Serbia. The gardeners were mostly Bosnian or Croatian nationals, who come to Austria for the cultivation of the plants and find accommodation at the drug farms. The premises on which these drug farms were operated were single-family houses or old farmhouses and farm buildings as well as company sites, which were difficult to detect

due to their location. The real estate is rented by offenders who have been staying in Austria for a long time and on a permanent basis.

Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, no laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs were identified or seized in Lower Austria.

Trends in New Psychoactive Substances

New psychoactive substances were mainly seized in letters and parcels via Vienna International Airport and the mail sorting centre Inzersdorf. The numbers of seizures remained stable compared to the previous year. Most seizures concerned smaller amounts for personal use.

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

Contrary to the statistical trends, observations suggest a significant upward shift in cannabis consumption patterns. The use of cannabis and synthetic drugs begins as early as adolescence or school age. Drug use is still widespread, especially in secondary schools. While predominantly young people are interested in trying out and consuming different drugs, new psychoactive substances but also substitutes for mixed consumption without knowing or underestimating their effects, older consumers remain true to well-known drugs. The behaviour of young consumers is also reflected in the increase of suspected drug-related cases compared to 2022. The majority of people who died were between 14 and 30 years old.

Darknet Trends

The number of drug orders on the darknet and delivery via postal services remained stable compared to 2022. Most seizures were conducted at the mail sorting centre Inzersdorf and a few were seized at customs at the Vienna International Airport. Large quantities of drugs were mainly seized in the course of drug-related checks at different parcel delivery services. It should be noted that the seized drugs were not destined for the Austrian market, but rather for other countries, such as New Zealand, the USA, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

Extensive investigations into uncovered crypto messenger services continued to provide valuable insights into individual criminal groups in 2023. The gathered intelligence made it possible to identify several illicit production sites for cannabis. These seizures allowed to establish important connections between criminal groups and draw conclusions regarding their structure, modus operandi and organisation.

Acquisitive and Accompanying Crime

Similar to previous years, many cases of theft by breaking and entering, shoplifting, basement break-ins, theft, robbery of mobile phones or wallets were directly related to the procurement of drugs in 2023.

Observations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

Inquiries in the course of the investigations into Serbian offenders revealed that the cash from drug trafficking flows back via couriers. In many cases, the money is transported by persons or in hiding spots on motor vehicles or trucks involved in the initial smuggling of drugs. Depending on the type of police intervention, the possibilities for the recovery of illegally obtained assets from drug trafficking are examined in cooperation with the Provincial CID's Asset Recovery and suggested in court. It is not possible to ascertain whether assets are recovered or how much is recovered and whether these actions sustainably impact the criminals' business.

In 2023, there were no significant findings in connection with drug-related terrorist financing.

Outlook

The borders with Slovakia and the Czech Republic as well as the Vienna International Airport with its strategically advantageous proximity to Vienna, create favourable conditions for international criminal groups to operate from Lower Austria. Therefore, large quantities of narcotic drugs are distributed to all parts of Austria from this province. With these circumstances unlikely to change in 2024, this situation will continue to pose significant challenges to Lower Austria's police.

Drug-related crime is slowly but steadily rising. With regard to the decreasing number of seizures in passenger traffic, the police deepened the collaboration with customs authorities and the A-FIU at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria, and created a corresponding concept for searches and checks based on the intelligence from other European airports. Furthermore, the police regularly participated in international high-value checks within the scope of EMPACT to intensify European and international cooperation with the competent anti-drug units of the customs authorities and police at airports and to gather intelligence on current trends regarding drug smuggling. This shall continue in 2024 and the following years.

Case Study no. 5 - Lower Austria

Extensive inquiries in close collaboration with the Anti-Drug Unit of the Gänserndorf district and the Anti-Street Crime Operational Team led to the identification of a criminal group consisting of at least 12 persons from Serbia and Bosnia. This criminal group had rented two residential buildings in the Gänserndorf district and one residential building in the Baden district since 2018, which were used for cannabis farms. During the intervention in December 2023, seven persons were arrested and committed to Korneuburg Prison. Two cannabis farms were seized and another apartment in Vienna was identified, which served as a stash house. In addition to 1,483 cannabis plants and 30 kilograms cannabis flowers, 1.5 kilograms of amphetamine, cocaine and 14,900 EUR in cash were seized.

Upper Austria

In 2023, Upper Austria saw a slight increase in drug-related police reports by 0.2% compared to the previous year. Lower Austria accounted for 18.3% of all drug-related reports in Austria. While reported crimes slightly fell by 2.8%, reported offences rose minimally.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	304	336	366	581	576	536	623	497	509	495	-2.8%
Offences	4,796	4,800	5,694	7,111	7,079	6,642	6,845	5,639	5,964	5,991	0.5%
Total	5,100	5,136	6,060	7,692	7,655	7,178	7,468	6,136	6,473	6,486	0.2%

Table 17

Development of all reported offences and crimes pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Upper Austria

In 2023 in Upper Austria, only the amounts of seized amphetamine and ecstasy increased. The seized amounts of heroin and cocaine decreased significantly with only half as many seizures compared to 2022.

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	13,694	8,853	7,833	6,215	10,534
Total cannabis (in grams)	122,678	274,901	126,650	86,624	65,712
Heroin (in grams)	1,212	1,827	4,007	5,476	2,846
Cocaine (in grams)	4,862	4,346	3,580	13,558	6,288
Methamphetamine (in grams)	1,893	696	1,106	2,636	1,652
Ecstasy (in pieces)	24,031	2,074	3,721	2,382	3,130

Table 18

Seizures of main types of drugs in Upper Austria

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

All types of narcotic drugs and common new psychoactive substances were widely available throughout Upper Austria in 2023; however, there were regional variations in the distribution networks of criminal groups. Criminal groups from Serbia, Montenegro and Albania primarily supplied Linz and Steyr as well as the surrounding region with heroin from Vienna, which was smuggled via the Balkan route. The drugs were distributed by street runners of Balkan descent. Cannabis was delivered to Linz from Albania via the Balkan route via Vienna or from Italy by vehicle or train.

Investigations revealed that cannabis mainly comes from Spain, while cocaine is acquired mainly from the Netherlands and Belgium. In Wels, heroin and cocaine were extensively distributed by street runners from Serbia, Kosovo and North Macedonia, operating under the supervision and control of criminal groups in Serbia. Generally, it is evident that the percentage of Austrian dealers increases as the distance to urban areas grows.

The sale of methamphetamine, which primarily comes from the Czech Republic and partly from Germany, is dominated by asylum seekers from Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Substitution substances, on the other hand, are mainly distributed by Austrian nationals. A growing presence of crystal meth was recorded in the districts of Schärding and Vöcklabruck. Mostly Hungarian nationals, but also Romanian nationals are involved in the trafficking in amphetamine.

Cannabis Farms and Associated Criminal Groups

A high number of cannabis farms were seized. They were almost exclusively operated by Austrian nationals and primarily for personal use, but sometimes also for profit. In August 2023, a relatively professionally operated indoor cannabis farm of Austrians (father and son) was seized in the basement of a single-family house in the district of Wels. In November, a medium-sized indoor and outdoor cannabis farm operated by an Austrian was seized in the district of Grieskirchen.

Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In March 2023, a chemical laboratory was identified and seized, which was located in a completely neglected apartment in Vöcklabruck. Two Austrians (father and son) lived there. In the course of a search of premises lasting several days, a variety of drug precursors as well as dangerous explosive substances were seized. The latter required professional and controlled detonation on site by the IEDD unit.

Trend in New Psychoactive Substances

Interventions regarding substances subject to the New Psychoactive Substances Act were results of investigations in the darknet, after parcels and letters had been seized by customs authorities. The drug orders were placed almost exclusively abroad and

included substances that were not yet subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act. In 2023, ketamine was prevalent in street-level dealing as in previous years. Its significance seems to be on an upward trend. LSD was once again the subject of investigations into orders on the darknet.

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

A general trend towards younger consumers is noticeable, even though the illegal handling of drugs is present in all ethnic groups, social classes and age groups. Cannabis products remain the most prevalent drug and are often combined with more potent drugs. Mixed consumption and polyintoxication are widely common and bear serious health risks. As previously reported, consumers are not aware of the unlawfulness of consuming cannabis products, which is probably due to the increasing reports on legalisation trends in this domain.

Darknet Trends

Seized letters and parcels containing drugs allow to draw conclusions regarding relevant markets and different sellers, who are mainly established in the Netherlands, Spain, Great Britain and Germany. Amphetamine, methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, LSD, ecstasy, cannabis products and medication categorized as benzodiazepine were seized. The slight decrease in seizures is due to the success of extensive deployment of police and customs authorities as well as the increased number of checks.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

The evaluation of the results from investigations into crypto messenger services provides a fascinating, but also shocking insight into the actual extent of drug-related crime and poses a major challenge for investigations, even for experienced officers in the field of drug-related crime. This leads to the realization and brings certainty that the usual investigative methods have so far only scratched the surface of drug-related crime. Many of the investigated serious offenders had been living relatively freely and without criminal records in Austria.

Acquisitive and Accompanying Crime

Intelligence regarding acquisitive and accompanying crime comes primarily from bigger cities, such as Linz, Schärding and Vöcklabruck as well as from the Linz-Land district. In connection with violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act, criminal offences against life and limb, such as robbery and extortion, against third person's property, such as basement break-ins, theft of bicycles, as well as fraud-related offences and human smuggling were observed.

Observations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

In Linz, criminal groups of Balkan descent and from Nigeria sent money from activities violating the Narcotic Drugs Act via Western Union and RIA Money Transfer to different countries. Cash couriers were employed between Linz and Vienna. In the Wels region, several incidents were recorded where street runners from Wels handed cash over to drivers of regular bus services for transportation towards Balkan states. In one case, members of a criminal group of Balkan descent were recruited to buy an apartment in Valencia (ES).

In 2023, there were no significant findings in connection with drug-related terrorist financing.

Outlook

Due to technological developments, such as crypto messenger services and satellite telephones, future investigative measures are expected to become more complex. To this purpose, special resources, education and training is required for law enforcement. Furthermore, the law must be adapted to enable modern and efficient criminal prosecution. . Due to the legalisation of cannabis in Germany, drug-related tourism is to be expected at least in the border region.

Case Study no. 6 - Upper Austria

A criminal group of Serbian and Bosnian descent had been active since 2019. During a successful police intervention in 2022, several offenders were arrested. New extensive analyses of crypto messenger services uncovered the structure of the criminal group and led to the arrest of further offenders. This led to the substantiated suspicion that the main offender had put more than 220 kilograms of herbal cannabis and more than 23 kilograms of cocaine as well as other drugs into circulation in the period between 2019 and 2021. In May 2023, 17 premises were simultaneously searched in Upper Austria and Salzburg. Large quantities of cannabis and cocaine were seized and other suspects, among those a main offender operating from Slovenia, were arrested.

Salzburg

In 2023, Salzburg saw an increase in drug-related police reports by 10.8% compared to the previous year. Salzburg accounted for 7.1% of all drug-related reports in Austria. Reported offences and crimes rose. The latter saw a significant increase of 38.8%.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	94	117	114	102	156	170	159	180	129	179	38.8%
Offences	1,413	1,646	2,000	2,179	2,241	2,595	2,454	2,006	2,142	2,338	9.2%
Total	1,507	1,763	2,114	2,281	2,397	2,765	2,613	2,186	2,271	2,517	10.8%

Table 19

Development of all reported offences and crimes pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Salzburg

In regard to conducted seizures in 2023, there was a slight decline of seized methamphetamine, constant increases in cocaine and a twofold increase in ecstasy in Salzburg.

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	4,942	3,407	6,094	2,434	3,239
Total cannabis (in grams)	160,003	41,198	89,290	30,420	50,784
Heroin (in grams)	2,140	232	1,577	240	557
Cocaine (in grams)	6,197	1,819	2,133	1,003	3,672
Methamphetamine (in grams)	398	331	94	219	211
Ecstasy (in pieces)	7,908	6,023	183	377	1,250

Table 20

Seizures of main types of drugs in Salzburg

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

No significant changes regarding criminal groups, types of drugs or transport routes were noted in Salzburg compared to 2022. As in previous years, dominant and organised criminal groups consisted of German, Serbian, Albanian, North Macedonian and Kosovan nationals as well as Afghan and Turkish nationals. Due to its location along the Balkan route, Salzburg is frequented by criminal groups of different nationalities in both directions. Cannabis, cocaine and heroin come from the Balkans, while synthetic drugs, such as amphetamine, methamphetamine and ecstasy come from the Netherlands and Germany.

Consumers prefer cannabis, which is partially produced locally. However, large quantities are still imported from other countries, especially the Western Balkans. Afghan and Syrian asylum seekers are prevalent among street runners. Connections to the darknet were observed in connection with cannabis and ecstasy trafficking. Similar to previous years, methamphetamine is mainly imported by couriers from the Czech Republic.

Cannabis Farms and Associated Criminal Groups

Cannabis farms seized in Salzburg were exclusively micro or mini farms with a maximum number of 49 plants. The majority of plants was cultivated indoors with only a few cases of outdoor farms. The farms were mainly established in living areas. The farms were mainly operated by Austrian offenders for personal use or to supply acquaintances.

Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, no traditional drug laboratory was seized in Salzburg. However, in December, components for an experimental laboratory were seized in the apartment of an accused. However, he had produced explosives there, not drugs. The police found a small amount of explosives in the freezer and seized them. Similar to the case in Upper Austria, the IEDD Unit carried out a controlled destruction.

Trend in New Psychoactive Substances

Substances subject to the New Psychoactive Substances Act only play a secondary role in Salzburg. New psychoactive substances were mainly seized in the course of checks of postal items at the mail sorting centre Wals. Consumers had ordered them for personal use on the internet and on the darknet.

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

Consumption behaviour has not changed in Salzburg compared to previous years. As already reported, the use of cannabis products continues to be most common, followed by amphetamine, MDMA, cocaine and various morphine-based drugs.

Darknet Trends

In 2023, during inspections of the Wals mail distribution centre, conducted jointly with the customs authorities twice a month, authorities seized a total of 11.9 kilograms of various drugs pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act and New Psychoactive Substances Act in 409 cases. The senders of these drugs were mainly from the Netherlands, Germany and Spain. A striking trend is that Austrian offenders have frequently been using parcel shops in Freilassing (Germany) as shipping address to pick up their parcels due to its proximity to the border. In general, neither an increase nor a decrease in online drug dealing can be observed.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

Extensive investigations into crypto messenger services have been and will continue to be conducted in Salzburg. Intelligence to date led to the identification of organised criminal groups active in Salzburg and sometimes in all of Austria and in bordering German regions, who dealt with large quantities of drugs.

Acquisitive and Accompanying Crime

In Salzburg, offences, such as bodily injury, robbery, theft by breaking and entering and fraud, were recorded in connection with drug-related crime. However, these offences are generally in the low-threshold range.

Observations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

The most prevalent method of payment in drug dealing is cash; however, orders on the darknet are paid with crypto currency. Analysis of crypto messenger services revealed that cash was transported to other countries, especially Serbia, by couriers and specially prepared vehicles.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not yield indications of terrorist financing in 2023.

Outlook

It is assumed that the majority of material and personnel resources will be dedicated to the processing, analysis and investigations in the field of crypto messenger services in 2024.

Case Study no. 7 - Operation Hermann

The Salzburg Provincial CID and the criminal policing group of the Zell am See district worked on this operation. After extensive investigations, four arrest warrants and eleven searches of premises were executed in Pinzgau and the city of Salzburg by order of the Salzburg Public Prosecutor's Office. One accused had already been in prison. Marijuana, speed, ecstasy, cocaine and magic mushrooms were seized. These drugs were smuggled from the city of Salzburg to the Zell am See district and sold at a profit to numerous consumers, including minors. The total value of the seized drugs amounted to approx. 2.1 million euros. Cash and an indoor cannabis farm about to be harvested were also seized. While working this case, several violent offences, such as aggravated robbery on several accounts, coercion and false imprisonment, as well as pornographic representations of persons under the age of 16 and visual materials violating the National Socialism Prohibition Act 1947 were recorded and confirmed.

Styria

In 2023, Styria saw a decrease in drug-related police reports by 2.1% compared to the previous year. Styria accounts for 10.6% of all drug-related reports in Austria. While reported crimes saw a sharp decrease, reported offences only fell slightly.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	141	224	191	240	266	346	294	367	298	271	-9.1%
Offences	3,139	3,032	3,186	4,045	3,874	4,654	3,941	3,396	3,544	3,491	-1.5%
Total	3,280	3,256	3,377	4,285	4,140	5,000	4,235	3,763	3,842	3,762	-2.1%

In regard to conducted seizures, there was a general increase, except for cannabis, in Styria compared to 2022. While amphetamine, heroin, cocaine and ecstasy rose significantly, the situation of methamphetamine remained stable.

Table 21
Development of all reported offences and crimes pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Styria

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	16,512	6,850	41,420	4,964	15,824
Total cannabis (in grams)	144,470	239,362	302,462	230,433	158,361
Heroin (in grams)	532	5,592	388	402	3,824
Cocaine (in grams)	1,767	4,309	915	2,838	22,061
Methamphetamine (in grams)	5,925	813	285	90	97
Ecstasy (in pieces)	8,279	7,278	33,676	3,730	7,153

Table 22
Seizures of main types of drugs in Styria

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

The declining number of reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act due to personnel changes in Styrian districts and resource-intensive investigation proceedings contradicts the fact that except herbal cannabis all common drugs, especially cocaine, heroin, substitution substances, psychotropic substances and amphetamine, are increasingly available in the Styrian region. This also applies to the number cross-border drug-related cases. The hot spots for drug-related crime are the same as in previous years, namely the provincial capital Graz and its surrounding region, the Leibnitz Basin, the border region to Slovenia, settlement areas between Judenburg and Mürzzuschlag in the Mur Mürz Trench. In the overall assessment, skiing areas in Upper Styria are of marginal importance, even when considering the seasonal nature of this area.

Offenders from the Western Balkans as well as Afghan, Romanian, Syrian and Dominican nationals are major players in the region of Graz and the southern regions in Styria as they have often settled and established themselves economically and on a family basis. In addition to Albanian nationals, more and more offenders from Maghreb and Levant

countries as well as well organised groups of Afghan and Chechen nationals appear in Upper Styria. For Styria, cannabis, cocaine and amphetamine are procured in Graz and Vienna and then transported to Upper Styria via established supply chains.

The demand for substitute drugs and psychotropic substances remains high in 2023. Austrian offenders, often addicted substitute drug consumers themselves, procure these substances in Vienna and sell them profitably from hubs in the city centre of Graz to consumers, who travel there from other Styrian regions, Carinthia and Burgenland. Investigations revealed that the demand for these kinds of substances seems to be much higher than present statistics indicate.

In addition to Graz and urban areas, the district capitals Weiz and Feldbach have become hubs for marijuana and increasingly for cocaine and synthetic drugs in 2023. Asylum seekers accommodated in these cities, Turkish and Romanian nationals living there and more and more Afghan and Chechen groups boost local drug dealing. There were repeated altercations in the fight for the best market spots.

More and more marijuana and heroin is imported from Slovenia. Organised criminal groups from the Balkan region, especially Bosnian nationals from the Republika Srpska, Croatian nationals, ethnic Albanians, Albanians from Kosovo and North Macedonian nationals are responsible for that.

The global upward trend of cocaine was also evident in Styria. However, well-organised criminal groups import cocaine into Styria not only from Balkan countries, but also from the Netherlands and Belgium.

Cannabis Farms and Associated Criminal Groups

Cannabis is mainly produced in the form of herbal cannabis in small and medium, indoor and outdoor farms operated by Austrians. Unlike in previous years, there were two independent investigations in Graz and Leibnitz in 2023. In both cases, industrial farms with approx. 1,500 plants each, both operated by Serbian criminal groups in rented residential buildings, were seized. As in industrially operated farms in other provinces, the offenders worked by dividing their tasks.

Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In June 2023, a drug laboratory was seized in a rented apartment in the city of Graz. In the course of this police intervention, two offenders were arrested and tools and chemicals were seized. The main offender was a man, who had already been known to police records from police interventions and had criminal records for drug production. He and a Romanian accomplice profitably sold large quantities of intermediate drug products, mephedrone and methamphetamine.

Trend in New Psychoactive Substances

Seizures of substances subject to the New Psychoactive Substances Act continue their downward trend. It can be safely assumed that these substances are a marginal phenomenon on the Styrian drug market.

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

Apart from the increasing number of substitute drugs, the situation has not changed compared to 2022. All common types of drugs were consumed in Styria in 2023. Marijuana is still the most popular drug. Not only the demand and consumption of cocaine and heroin rose, but the supply increased significantly as well. Cocaine has reached every social class and every region of Styria due to lower prices per gram. More and more young consumers choose cocaine as an alternative to amphetamine. Furthermore, young consumers have a high risk appetite, which is underlined by the increasing number of sometimes lethal mixed consumption of drugs.

Darknet Trends

Compared to 2022, the number of seized postal items containing drugs ordered on the darknet rose. Investigations confirmed that drugs are not only shipped to but also from Styria. For several years, an Austrian citizen living in Upper Styria ordered amphetamine, ecstasy, MDMA and herbal cannabis from Germany and the Netherlands on the darknet to then sell these drugs on several darknet markets. under the pseudonym "Rauschbad". Investigations revealed more than 600 shipments to national and foreign consumers.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

The analysis of crypto messenger services and its results lead to a re-evaluation of the situation in Styria regarding active organised criminal groups and drug-related crime. Based on the gathered intelligence in Styria, it has become clear that the amount of drugs available on the market is actually much higher than initially assumed. Due to the complexity of involved persons and bureaucratic obstacles, investigations are difficult, take a lot of time and require a lot of personnel.

Acquisitive and Accompanying Crime

Excluding an attempted murder from 2021, accompanying and acquisitive crime remain unchanged in Styria in 2023 compared to previous years. Apart from petty robberies in the parks of Graz, there is no noteworthy intelligence. The above-mentioned attempted murder refers to an incident when an Egyptian cocaine consumer and his Serbian cocaine dealer in Graz got into a fight because of drug debts. The Egyptian severely injured the Serbian with four knife wounds in the back.

Observations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

Almost all major investigations conducted by the Styria Provincial CID, especially against offenders from the Balkan, generated intelligence regarding money laundering.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not reveal any indications of terrorist financing in 2023.

Outlook

Observations and perspectives for 2022 were confirmed for 2023 based on available statistics. It is safe to say that these developments will continue. The offer and availability of drugs will not decline in the future. New drugs on the market will present a challenge.

Case Study no. 8 - Styria

Lengthy investigations ended with the arrest of the main offender in Zagreb, Croatia, who was wanted based on an international arrest warrant. The 40-year-old Bosnian had a criminal record, among other things for several cases of drug-related offences. The Bosnian was a member of a group of at least 15 offenders, who had imported large quantities of cocaine, heroin, amphetamine and herbal cannabis since 2019. Austrian and Slovenian couriers brought the drugs to Austria from depots in Slovenia. Then the owners of the depots and intermediaries sold the drugs profitably to consumers in Graz and its surrounding area as well as in the districts of Leibnitz and Weiz. The investigations were conducted in cooperation with the Graz City Command of the Federal Police and investigators from the districts of Leibnitz and Weiz as well as the Styria Provincial CID.

Tyrol

In 2023, Tyrol saw an increase in drug-related police reports by 8.5% compared to the previous year. Tyrol accounts for 9.5% of all drug-related reports in Austria. Reported offences and crimes rose. The latter saw a significant increase of 47.2%.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	141	200	197	200	244	189	271	232	178	262	47.2%
Offences	3,413	3,770	3,826	3,792	3,538	4,042	4,224	3,109	2,917	3,097	6.2%
Total	3,554	3,970	4,023	3,992	3,782	4,231	4,495	3,341	3,095	3,359	8,5%

Table 23
Development of all reported offences and crimes pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Tyrol

In 2023 in Tyrol, seizures of amphetamine, cocaine and methamphetamine rose significantly. Especially striking was the extreme decline of 556 to 95 kilograms of cannabis. Seizures of heroin and ecstasy declined.

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	10,997	4,173	2,762	945	31,921
Total cannabis (in grams)	83,289	155,779	339,398	555,377	95,011
Heroin (in grams)	158	216	22	55	20
Cocaine (in grams)	5,574	7,369	2,959	3,364	18,659
Methamphetamine (in grams)	1,003	194	122	326	638
Ecstasy (in pieces)	1,957	15,901	1,510	2,941	1,071

Table 24
Seizures of main types of
drugs in Tyrol

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

In 2023, no significant changes to overall drug-related crime were observed in Tyrol compared to the previous year. The drugs are mainly procured from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Vienna and then transported to Tyrol. In addition to Austrian nationals, persons from other nations, particularly German, Hungarian and Turkish citizens, enter the Austrian market and compete for their share. It was observed that Albanian and North Macedonian citizens have been trying to establish themselves on the Austrian market. In Tyrol, cannabis products remain the number one on the drug market, followed by cocaine and amphetamine.

Even though the North African scene in Innsbruck was partially pushed out, it remains present. It should be noted that the high frequency of checks, for example through weekly targeted measures and more deportations, forced them to retreat from public space and move their businesses to apartments, asylum housings and restaurants (gambling bars). Additionally these criminal groups have also moved to other places in Tyrol.

Cannabis Farms and Associated Criminal Groups

Since 2019, the cultivation of cannabis plants in indoor and outdoor farms has steadily declined. The majority of farms are micro, mini or small farms mainly operated by Austrians. The necessary plant seeds and cuttings were purchased on the Internet or in legal grow shops. The herbal cannabis thus produced is of high or very high quality. The facilities were mostly equipped with high-quality equipment.

Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, no laboratories for the production of amphetamine were identified or seized in Tyrol.

Trends in New Psychoactive Substances

New psychoactive substances play a subordinate role in fighting drug-related crime. Most seizures were conducted during interceptions at mail distribution centres for orders on the darknet.

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

Compared to previous years, no particularly striking consumption behaviour was noticed in 2023. The Austrian-wide trend is also prevalent in Tyrol with cannabis being the most consumed drug, followed by cocaine. However, the demand for cocaine and related seizures rose sharply. Only small amounts of heroin were seized.

Darknet Trends

The number of seizures of drugs ordered on the darknet remained roughly on the same level as in 2022. The seized drugs are mainly cannabis, cocaine and amphetamine as well as benzodiazepine, which were shipped and ordered.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

Elaborate investigations in connection with discovered crypto messenger services were conducted in 2023. While a part of the investigations was already concluded and revealed insightful intelligence, they are partly still very difficult and resource-consuming due to their complexity. It will therefore take some time. Due to the nature of these investigations, existing personnel resources will be allocated and therefore influence daily work.

Acquisitive and Accompanying Crime

There were no significant changes in this area compared to the previous year. Offences in connection with drug-related crime, such as bodily injury, small-scale robbery, coercion and theft by breaking and entering, were noticed and handled.

Observations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

The prevalent payment method in drug trafficking is cash. Large sums of cash, sometimes stored in safes or passbooks, are regularly found and seized during police interventions. During one police intervention, it was found that a courier was employed to transport cash to Vienna. If cash, real estate, valuable jewellery, crypto currencies, etc. are discovered during police interventions, it is seized.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not yield indications of terrorist financing in 2023.

Outlook

Based on the international trend to decriminalise or legalise cannabis, no improvements by consumers or offenders are expected due to the lack of awareness of unlawfulness. It remains to be seen in what way the legalisation of cannabis in Germany will impact the drug market in Tyrol.

Case Study no. 9 - Tyrol

In the beginning of November 2022, the Tyrol Provincial CID received hints from the public regarding an Iranian criminal group established in Innsbruck, who supposedly dealt in illicit drugs, in particular crystal meth. In the course of months-long intensive investigations and additional CID measures, a stashing apartment was discovered, where a flourishing trafficking in illegal narcotic drugs was observed. Investigations revealed that the illicit drugs were transported from Vienna to Innsbruck via train, where they were taken over by the criminal group. They weighed and packed the drugs ready for sale in the stash apartment. In return, money packets consisting of low five-figure sums in euros were transported from Innsbruck to Vienna by train. During the police intervention in February 2023, a total of eight persons were arrested and numerous drugs and stolen goods from thefts by breaking and entering into basements were seized. The analysis of the seized drugs revealed an exceptionally high quality, namely a degree of purity of 80 to 90%.

Vorarlberg

In 2023, Vorarlberg saw an increase in drug-related police reports by 16.5% compared to the previous year. Vorarlberg accounts for 5.9% of all drug-related reports in Austria. While reported crimes significantly fell by 17.2%, reported offences rose drastically by 18.9%.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	150	125	122	151	151	133	126	90	122	101	-17.2%
Offences	1,263	1,188	1,405	1,453	1,692	1,938	1,732	1,520	1,659	1,973	18.9%
Total	1,413	1,313	1,527	1,604	1,843	2,071	1,858	1,610	1,781	2,074	16.5%

In 2023 seizures of heroin and methamphetamine rose significantly in Vorarlberg. Amphetamine and cocaine decreased, while cocaine saw a significant fall. Ecstasy does not play a noticeable role in Vorarlberg.

Table 25
Development of all reported offences and crimes pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Vorarlberg

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	1,017	1,156	2,549	1,638	1,569
Total cannabis (in grams)	41,198	20,880	27,342	39,786	33,981
Heroin (in grams)	707	504	1,421	13	760
Cocaine (in grams)	12,215	896	685	9,673	1,807
Methamphetamine (in grams)	1,465	121	25	17	122
Ecstasy (in pieces)	291	246	1,559	2	3

Table 26
Seizures of main types of
drugs in Vorarlberg

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

As in previous years, especially Afghan, Syrian and Austrian criminal groups were involved in cannabis trafficking, while trafficking in cocaine was mainly done by nationals from the Balkan states, Türkiye and Syria. Occasionally, overlaps of Turkish criminal groups with the province of Tyrol were noticed. Primarily Serbian and Albanian nationals deal with heroin. Due to the strategic location of Vorarlberg with borders to Germany and Switzerland, cross-border drug trafficking remained high in 2023.

No significant regional differences were noticed because of the size of Vorarlberg. In larger cities, drug consumption and trafficking was more common than in rural areas.

Cannabis Farms and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, one large, one small, fifteen mini and seven micro cannabis farms were discovered and seized. There were slightly more indoor farms than outdoor farms. The farms were mainly operated for personal use or in several cases to distribute or sell it to close acquaintances. With a few exceptions, the farms were mostly operated by Austrian nationals.

Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, there was a suspected drug laboratory, which was not subsequently confirmed.

Trends in New Psychoactive Substances

The international trend of cultivating CBD hemp with subsequent manipulation through new psychoactive substances was reflected in a few cases. The majority of seizures of substances subject to the New Psychoactive Substances Act were conducted in the context of checks of postal items.

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

Cannabis was once again the most consumed drug in 2023. In the context of general drug consumption, it should be noted that mainly youth and young adults consume cannabis products as well as MDMA, amphetamine, several morphine based medical drugs and LSD, which is purchased online or on the darknet. Over all, there is an increased demand

for cocaine. The average quality of seized cocaine is very good and corresponds with the Austrian average. The amount of consumed heroin was high in 2023.

Darknet Trends

As reported in previous years, investigations in this field are complicated. The names and addresses of recipients are mostly fictitious and investigative work resulting in solid evidence is bound to intense time resources. The majority of drugs ordered via the darknet were for personal use. This type of offences is investigated and reported by the locally competent police station. Intense investigations are consequently not or only possible through extensive additional work by the uniformed police.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

Analysing intelligence from crypto messenger services is difficult and time-consuming. For example, the lack of suitable interpreters delays the analysis of conversations, which makes it harder to set appropriate CID measures and slows down law enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, extensive and time-consuming investigations led to long prison sentences for offenders.

Acquisitive and Accompanying Crime

In 2023, offences, such as bodily injury, robbery, theft by breaking and entering and fraud, were recorded in connection with drug-related crime. Resistance to public authority in connection with alcohol and drug abuse has been increasingly recorded.

Observations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

Investigations have repeatedly illustrated that criminal groups consisting of Serbian nationals or Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs (OMCG), such as the Hells Angels, sometimes use professional money couriers who use specially prepared vehicles for the transport. However, they also use legal payment service providers, such as Western Union, Moneygram or Ria Money Transfer. It has been established that smaller sums were transferred to persons with no criminal record who then followed the criminals' instructions and kept a certain amount as reward. If possible, seized assets are recovered; however, the initially seized assets often have to be returned because of intentional concealment of ownership and the resulting unclear ownership situations.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not yield indications of terrorist financing in 2023.

Outlook

The biggest challenge in 2023 will be the ongoing investigations in connection with crypto messenger services, which require a lot of personnel resources to fight drug-related crime.

Case Study no. 10 - Vorarlberg

Investigations revealed that a Tunisian national made his car repair shop available for preparing vehicles to hide drugs and provided cars for drug smuggling. These investigations then led to accomplices from Croatia, Austria and the Netherlands. In September 2023, a courier, who transported 300 grams of high-quality cocaine from the Netherlands hidden in the headrest, was arrested. An interesting aspect of this case was the previous arrest of an Austrian accomplice in Cologne (Germany), who had 20,000 EUR in cash with him. This was a partial payment for a shipment from the Netherlands. The criminal group from the Netherlands with connections to an OMCG, then kidnapped the Austrian after his release in May 2023. They held him as a hostage in a container for several days to collect the debt and money they lost. He was able to flee on his own.

Vienna

In 2023, Vienna saw a minimal decrease in drug-related police reports by 0.2% compared to the previous year. Vienna accounts for 28.1% of all drug-related reports in Austria. While reported crimes saw a slight decrease, reported offences fell minimally.

Crimes/ Offences	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Changes in comparison to the previous year in %
Crimes	623	816	741	976	1,080	1,396	1,143	1,184	1,023	1,049	2.5%
Offences	8,316	10,076	11,649	13,052	11,670	11,740	10,248	8,699	8,955	8,906	-0.5%
Total	8,939	10,892	12,390	14,028	12,750	13,136	11,391	9,883	9,978	9,955	-0.2%

Table 27
Development of all reported offences and crimes pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Vienna

Compared to the previous year, the seizures of cocaine, methamphetamine and ecstasy rose, while amphetamine and cannabis increased sharply. Heroin saw a decrease of almost 50%. It should be noted that large-scale seizures are responsible for the partly strong fluctuations.

Seizures - Amounts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amphetamine (in grams)	67,837	5,886	17,276	7,289	25,864
Total cannabis (in grams)	485,926	657,607	563,671	470,986	1,804,659
Heroin (in grams)	52,479	68,335	50,834	86,656	44,901
Cocaine (in grams)	43,007	36,260	56,647	77,387	79,186
Methamphetamine (in grams)	12,199	5,892	3,469	4,519	5,226
Ecstasy (in pieces)	26,049	19,222	10,533	9,905	15,305

Table 28
Seizures of main types of drugs in Vienna

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

As in previous years, several multi-cultural criminal groups with different ethnic backgrounds were active in the field of drug-related crime in 2023. Serbian and Montenegrin nationals are still leading street-level drug trafficking of mainly heroin and cocaine, but also cannabis products. These criminal groups are hierarchically and logistically well organised and operate on their first-rate and highly professional connections to the Balkan area.

Afghan criminal groups make up a large portion of asylum seekers. They are increasingly visible in the street-level operations, engaging in small-scale cannabis trafficking. Compared to the other criminal groups, they are not well organised and appear to have looser connections. The same applies to Syrian criminal groups, who are mostly youth gangs and occasional dealers.

Austrian offenders are also rarely structured, often work autonomously and mainly appear in sales of legally prescribed substitution drugs between each other or barbers.

Nationals from Northern Africa concentrate on cannabis products, which they put into circulation on the streets. They are also well organised. Based on the criminal group's professionalism and structure, the establishment of the Maghreb Working Group at Vienna Provincial CID is especially important.

Criminal groups from Western Africa are still active in street-level drug trafficking; however, they have been pushed into the background because of the decreased quality of drugs (heroin, cocaine and cannabis products) and the take-over by Serb-Montenegrin criminal groups. The situation of Persian criminal groups is similar, although they are usually not as well organised anyway. As is practice in their culture, available drugs, such as opioids, are consumed in their proper circles. However, it is noticeable that younger generations tend to focus on the smuggling and sale of methamphetamine and crystal meth. Turkish criminal groups are still well organised in the field of international heroin and cocaine smuggling. They use existing connections to their country of origin. However, activity seems to be slowing down, probably due to the sharp decline in heroin.

No significant changes in transport routes have been noticed compared to the previous years. Serbian and Montenegrin as well as Turkish criminal groups use the Balkan route and transport drugs in cars or buses. Criminal groups from Northern or Western Africa are known to import drugs to Northern Europe and South America through so-called body packers, who hide the drugs in their bodies under pretence of travelling.

Cannabis Farms and Associated Criminal Groups

In regular intervals, cannabis farms are discovered and seized in Vienna. The sizes of the farms vary from micro and mini farms to industrial facilities with highly professional

technical equipment for cultivating thousands of plants. These farms are found in various locations, such as basement compartments, warehouses and rented single-family houses. Most of the time, Serbian criminal groups manage and control the setup and maintenance of farms from abroad. The required personnel is also recruited abroad. Small farms are operated by Austrian nationals for personal use.

Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2023, one laboratory for producing synthetic drugs was found in Vienna. Due to our generally efficient collaboration with the chemical sector in Vienna, the necessary chemical precursors are difficult to procure for offenders. This seems to be the reason for the low number of unprofessional drug laboratories mostly for personal use in Vienna and other places in the past years.

Trends in New Psychoactive Substances

Only small quantities of new psychoactive substances are available on the streets of Vienna. Consumers ordered and bought these products on the darknet, often for personal use or out of curiosity. It is a little bit more common to find and seize new psychoactive substances in the area of Donaukanal at different music events.

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

Consumption behaviour has not changed significantly compared to the previous year. Traditional drugs such as cannabis, heroin, cocaine and amphetamine are an integral part of the drug scene. In the course of the year, there was a stronger decline in seizures of heroin and ecstasy, while amphetamine and cocaine saw a significant increase and cannabis an exceptionally stark rise. Substitution substances, such as subtitol, are mainly traded at substitution sites and in their vicinity on the streets. Opium is mainly present in the Persian-Iranian culture.

Darknet Trends

In 2023, there was a rise in online drug trafficking, primarily on the darknet, in Vienna. This trend has not changed and been ongoing for years.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

In the context of crypto messenger services, the Vienna Provincial CID conducted extensive investigations in 2023, which led to numerous police breakthroughs and noteworthy convictions. Because of the amount of available data and the complexity of criminal structures, the police force in Vienna was and will be pushed to their limits.

Acquisitive and Accompanying Crime

A closer look to the distribution of offences shows that theft by breaking and entering followed by thefts, handling stolen goods, fraud and robbery are the most common offences. Among the thefts, the proportion of higher-priced bikes, especially e-bikes,

as well as e-scooters was particularly striking. Furthermore, there was a subtle increase in robberies. Tobacco stores and gas stations are the primary targets, followed by bank institutions and post offices. In most cases, offenders use firearms. Home invasions, which almost exclusively take place in the drug scene, were recorded.

Observations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

In 2023, money laundering investigations by the Vienna Provincial CID, often in close collaboration with the Anti-Street Crime Operational Team, resulted in seizures of assets, such as cash, life insurances, motor vehicles, jewellery, gold bars and real estate in Austria and other countries. In accordance with the Public Prosecutor's Office, these assets were then successfully recovered. As already mentioned in the section on Vorarlberg, in the majority of cases, the assets initially meant to be recovered had to be returned due to unclear ownership claims.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not yield indications of terrorist financing in 2023.

Outlook

Since the end of the pandemic, drug trafficking in the public sphere is clearly increasing and developing. The new challenge of stopping different criminal groups from establishing themselves at hot spots will be met with targeted measures and intensified patrols. The developments in the field of crypto messenger services will continue to strain the Vienna Provincial CID's resources as it is with other provinces. The high number of drug seizures at the mail distribution centre is an additional strain during already challenging times. A decrease of drugs purchased on the darknet or online is not to be expected.

Case Study no. 11 - Vienna

After several months of investigations and CID measures, the Vienna Provincial CID and Lower Austria Provincial CID were able to identify a criminal group consisting of Austrian, Serbian, Croatian and Czech nationals, who produced a total amount of more than one ton of marijuana in a roughly 2,000 m² large facility in Traiskirchen (Lower Austria). In the course of 16 searches of premises, 13 arrests were made and cash in the amount of 291 EUR was seized.

7

Legal Situation

Drug-Related Crime and the Most Relevant Penal Provisions

This chapter provides an overview of the chief penal provisions laid out in Austria's Narcotic Drugs Act and the New Psychoactive Substances Act, followed by a description of the most common illicit drugs in the country, their effects and legal classification.

Statutory Definitions in the Narcotic Drugs Act

Section 27 Illegal Handling of Narcotic Drugs

(1) Anyone who illegally

1. acquires, possesses, produces, transports, or imports a narcotic drug, offers to supply it to another person, passes it on to another person or procures it for another person contrary to regulations,
2. grows opium poppy, the coca bush or the cannabis plant for the purpose of producing narcotic drugs, offers mushrooms containing psilocin, psilotin or psilocybin to another person, passes them on to another person, procures them for another person or grows them for the purpose of drug abuse, shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding one year or with a fine of up to 360 daily rates.

(2) Anyone who commits such a criminal act exclusively for personal use shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of up to six months or with a fine of up to 360 daily rates.

(2a) Anyone who offers narcotic drugs to another person, passes them on to another person, or procures them for another person, in return for a consideration and contrary to regulations, in a public transport system, a public transport facility, a public traffic area, a public building, an area accessible to the public or under any circumstances suitable to creating a public nuisance, shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding two years.

(3) Anyone who commits a criminal act as specified in paragraph 1, 2 or 2a above as a regular source of income shall be liable to imprisonment of up to three years.

(4) The punishment shall be imprisonment not exceeding three years if

1. the commission of a criminal act as specified in subsection 1 or 2 makes possible for a minor to consume a narcotic drug, provided the offender is of full age and more than two years older than the minor, or
2. if the offender commits such a criminal act as a member of a criminal association.

(5) Anyone who is addicted to a narcotic drug and commits a criminal act as specified in paragraph 3 or 4 (2) chiefly for the purpose of procuring himself a narcotic drugs for

personal use or the means to buy it shall merely be punished with imprisonment of up to one year.

Section 28 Preparation of Drug Trafficking

(1) Anyone who purchases, possesses or transports a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding the threshold quantity specified in section 28b with the intent to distribute it contrary to regulations shall be liable to imprisonment not exceeding three years. The same punishment shall be applied to any person who grows the plants specified in section 27, paragraph 1(2) 2 with a view to extracting a narcotic drug in such a quantity for later distribution.

(2) Anyone who commits the criminal act described in paragraph 1 involving a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity specified in section 28b (large quantity) shall be punished with a term of imprisonment of up to five years.

(3) Anyone who commits the criminal act described in paragraph 1 as a member of a criminal association shall be liable to imprisonment ranging from one to ten years.

(4) If the conditions in section 27, paragraph 5 are met, an offender shall merely be punished with imprisonment up to one year in the case of paragraph 1, imprisonment of up to three years in the case of paragraph 2 and to imprisonment of up to five years in the case of paragraph 3.

Section 28a Drug Trafficking

(1) Anyone who produces, imports, exports a narcotic drug or offers to supply it to another person, passes it on to another person or procures it for another person contrary to regulations in a quantity exceeding the limit specified in section 28b shall be liable to imprisonment of up to five years.

(2) The punishment shall be imprisonment ranging from one to ten years if an offender commits a criminal act as specified in paragraph 1 as a regular source of income and has been previously convicted of an offence as described in paragraph 1 as a member of a criminal association, or involving a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity (large quantity).

(3) If the conditions in section 27, paragraph 5 are met, an offender shall merely be liable to imprisonment of up to three years in the case of paragraph 1 and to imprisonment of up to five years in the case of paragraph 2.

(4) The punishment shall be imprisonment ranging from one to ten if an offender commits a criminal act as specified in paragraph 1 above as a regular source of income and has been previously convicted of an offence as described in paragraph 1 as a member of a criminal association, or involving a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity (large quantity).

(5) The punishment shall be imprisonment ranging from ten to twenty years or life imprisonment if an offender commits a criminal act as specified in paragraph 1 above and is a leading player in an association of a larger number of people conspiring to commit such offences.

Section 28b Threshold Quantity for Narcotic Drugs

The Federal Minister for Public Health shall fix by decree, in agreement with the Federal Minister of Justice, for each narcotic substance a lower limit in terms of pure substance of the active agent capable of jeopardising the life and health of people in larger doses (threshold quantity). In this regard, the aptitude of drugs to incur addiction as well as the impact on addiction behaviours of addicts should be considered.

Penal Provisions for Psychotropic Substances

Section 30 Illegal Handling of Psychotropic Substances

(1) Anyone who acquires, possesses, produces, transports, or imports a psychotropic substance, offers to supply it to another person, passes it on to another person or procures it for another person contrary to regulations shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding one year or with a fine of up to 360 daily rates.

(2) Anyone who commits such a criminal act exclusively for personal use shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of up to six months or with a fine of up to 360 daily rates.

(3) An act as specified in paragraphs 1 and 2 above shall not be prosecuted as a criminal offence, provided that the quantity involved does not exceed the threshold quantity as specified in section 31b, if a person

1. acquires, possesses, transports, imports, or exports a medication containing a psychotropic substance for personal use or for administration to an animal, or
2. offers to supply such a medication to another person, passes it on to another person, or procures it for another person without material benefit.

Section 31 Preparation of Trafficking in Psychotropic Substances

(1) Anyone who acquires, possesses, or transports a psychotropic substance in a quantity exceeding the limit specified in section 31b with intent to distribute it shall be liable to imprisonment of up to two years.

(2) Anyone who commits the criminal act described in subsection 1 above involving a psychotropic substance in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity specified in section 31b (large quantity) shall be punished with a term of imprisonment not exceeding five years.

(3) Anyone who commits the criminal act described in paragraph 1 as a member of a criminal association shall be liable to imprisonment ranging from one to ten years.

(4) If the conditions in section 27, paragraph 5 are met, an offender shall merely be punished with imprisonment up to one year in the case of paragraph 1 above, imprisonment of up to three years in the case of paragraph 2 above and to imprisonment of up to five years in the case of paragraph 3.

Section 31a of Trafficking in Psychotropic Substances

(1) Anyone who produces, imports, exports a psychotropic substance or offers to supply it to another person, passes it on to another person or procures it for another person contrary to regulations in a quantity exceeding the threshold quantity specified in section 31b shall be liable to imprisonment of up to three years.

(2) Anyone who commits the criminal act described in paragraph 1 above involving a psychotropic substance in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity specified in section 31b (large quantity) shall be punished with a term of imprisonment not exceeding five years.

(3) Anyone who commits the criminal act described in paragraph 1 as a member of a criminal association shall be liable to imprisonment ranging from one to ten years.

(4) If the conditions in section 27, paragraph 5 are met, an offender shall merely be punished with imprisonment up to one year in the case of paragraph 1 above, imprisonment of up to three years in the case of paragraph 2 above and to imprisonment of up to five years in the case of paragraph 3.

Section 31b Threshold Quantity for Psychotropic Substances

The Federal Minister for Public Health shall fix by decree, in agreement with the Federal Minister of Justice, for each narcotic substance a lower limit in terms of pure substance of the active agent capable of jeopardizing the life and health of people in larger doses (threshold quantity). Section 28, second sentence, shall apply *mutatis mutandis*.

Penal Provisions for Drug Precursor Substances

Section 32 Unlawful Handling of Drug Precursors

(1) Anyone who produces or transports a drug precursor substance or passes it on to another person with a view to being used in the production of addictive substances contrary to regulations shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding one year.

(2) Anyone who acquires or possesses a drug precursor substance with a view to being used in the production of addictive substances contrary to regulations in a quantity exceeding the threshold quantity as specified in sections 28b and 31b respectively shall be liable to imprisonment of up to two years.

(3) Anyone who produces, imports, exports a drug precursor substance, offers to supply it to another person, passes it on to another person or procures it for another person with a view to being used in the production of addictive substances contrary to regulations in a quantity exceeding the threshold quantity as specified in sections 28b and 31b respectively shall be punished with a term of imprisonment not exceeding five years.

New Psychoactive Substances Act (NPSG)

Section 4 Penal Provisions

(1) Anyone who - with intent to gain an advantage - produces, imports, exports or lets another person have or supplies another person with a new psychoactive substance specified by a regulation pursuant to section 3 or defined pursuant to section 3 as belonging to a class of chemical substance so that the other person or a third party can apply it in the human body with a view to achieving a psychoactive effect, shall be punished by up to two years of imprisonment.

(2)) If the offence results in the death of a person or gross bodily injuries (section 84 para. 1 of the Penal Code) of a large number of persons, the offender shall be punished by one to ten years of imprisonment.

8

Illicit Drugs

On the following pages, the description of the respective narcotic drugs was provided by "Suchthilfe Wien GmbH". This institution offers a wide range of services: prevention, advanced training, information, drug education, counselling, treatment and support for addiction-prone and addicted persons, promotion of socially acceptable coexistence in public areas, and (re-)integration of addicts into the labour market.

Cannabis

Cannabis is the umbrella term for the hemp products hashish and marijuana. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the most important psychoactive agent among the approximately 400 different chemical ingredients of the hemp plant. The highest THC concentration is found in the resin of the female inflorescences. Hashish (dope, shit) consists of the resin of the inflorescences, while marijuana (grass, ganja) consists of a mixture of crushed leaves, flowers and stem pieces of the hemp plant. Aside from marijuana and hashish, hemp is also processed into hashish oil. Despite its high THC content, hashish oil is the least common hemp product. The resin has different names, depending on the colour of the variety. There is Yellow Moroccan, Red Lebanese and Black Afghan. The potency of cannabis is determined by the THC content of the resin, the quantity of resin, age and storage conditions.

It should be noted that the Narcotic Drugs Act covers not only THC, but also its isomers Delta 6a (10a), Delta 6a (7), Delta 7, Delta 8, Delta 9, Delta 10, Delta 9 (11) and their stereochemical variants.

Effects

When marijuana is inhaled hundreds of different substances enter the body. So far, it has not been possible to identify the exact mechanisms of action. THC, the most important psychoactive substance, is absorbed through the pulmonary mucosa when marijuana is smoked and through the intestinal mucosa when it is consumed orally. In the bloodstream THC is transported to all organs, where it accumulates in tissues with a high fat content because of its elevated fat solubility. This is why traces of THC can be detected in the urine even after weeks. Although most effects of cannabis consumption are felt for only a few hours, half of the THC is still in the blood after 20 hours. THC binds to the recently discovered cannabinoid receptors in the brain. Their exact function is not yet known. A large number of cannabinoid receptors are located in a brain structure that is responsible for remembering new information. This explains why people can hardly remember anything under the influence of cannabis and have a different perception of time. Further cannabinoid receptors are found in the cerebellum, the brain region responsible for automatic movements such as walking. Hence the coordination difficulties that are experienced under the influence of cannabis.

Legal Framework

The acquisition, possession, production, import and export, transfer and supply to others (sale) is a punishable offence and may result in fines or imprisonment. Even passing on a joint in a group without taking a puff can technically be criminally prosecuted as possession or transfer. If a complaint is filed regarding the acquisition and possession of a small amount of cannabis for personal use, the public prosecutor's office can put the complaint aside for a two-year trial period. In these cases, the public health authority must check whether health-related measures, such as medical check-ups, urine tests, medical treatment, psychological or psychotherapeutic care is necessary or not. Unless charges of purchase and possession of narcotics have been preferred within the last five years, the public prosecution service may abstain from involving the public health authority and suspend the charges immediately.

Heroin

Heroin, whose chemical name is diacetylmorphine, belongs to the class of semi-synthetic opioids. What is called morphine base is extracted from the juice of the poppy plant (*papaver somniferum*) by distillation. After further chemical processing, including the addition of acetic anhydride, diacetylmorphine is formed. Illegal, non-medical heroin, also called "H", "Smack", "Dope" or "Junk", is usually cut with substances, such as glucose, calcium, powdered sugar or paracetamol, for street-level dealing. Its purity is therefore relatively low between 15% to 45%.

Effects

Because of its chemical structure and high fat solubility, heroin enters the brain faster than morphine. The short wash-in rate causes an intense state of intoxication or "kick". The faster a substance enters the brain, the greater its addictiveness. In the human body, heroin is converted into morphine and eventually excreted through the kidneys.

Legal Framework

Heroin is subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and its penal provisions. In particular, the acquisition, possession, production, import and export, transfer and supply to others (sale) is a punishable offence and may result in fines or imprisonment.

Morphine and Derivatives

Besides codeine, morphine is the main component of raw opium, which is obtained from the sleeping poppy (*papaver somniferum*) and is classified as a natural opioid. Morphine is categorized as opium alkaloids and affects the opiate receptors, also called μ receptors. Its activation causes euphoria, respiratory depression, cough suppression, constipation

and dependence. Illicit non-medical morphine is also known as “M”, morph and Miss Emma and is usually distributed as a white crystalline powder with a bitter taste.

Effects

Morphine is water-soluble and it takes longer to pass the blood-brain barrier than fat-soluble opiates, such as heroin. As with all opiates, the effects are caused by stimulating the opiate receptors and enkephalin receptors, which leads to a dopamine release. Morphine is administered orally, rectally or by intramuscular, subcutaneous or intravenous injection. Administering it intravenously outside of medical treatment comes with great risks, for example the probability of overdose or danger of infection because of non-sterile needles or material. As an illicit street drug, morphine is often smoked or snorted. Morphine is quickly metabolised by the liver and excreted by the kidneys. Its effect lasts for four to five hours.

Legal Framework

Morphine is subject to medical prescription under the Pharmaceutical Act. Any person who simply passes on or sells this medicine, violates the Medicinal Products Act, even if it was originally prescribed by a doctor. Morphine is subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and its penal provisions for psychotropic substances. In particular, the acquisition, possession, production, import and export, transfer and supply to others (sale) is a punishable offence and may result in fines-. So, misusing morphine is liable to criminal prosecution both under the Pharmaceutical Act and the Narcotic Drugs Act.

Raw Opium

The capsules of the opium poppy (*papaver somniferum*), the variety used for producing opium, contain a milky juice which is transformed into a brown mass when exposed to the air: raw opium. Opium contains between 25 and 40 different nitrogen compounds, called alkaloids, with morphine, narcotine and codeine being the most important substances in terms of quantity. Morphine is the basic substance for producing diacetylmorphine, or heroin. Opioids can be classified into natural (morphine, codeine), semi-synthetic (e. g. heroin), synthetic (like methadone) and endogenous opioids (endorphins or enkephalines). Natural opioids are all substances found in the juice of poppy seeds. They are also known as opiates.

Effects

Opioids affect those areas of the brain that contain what is called opiate receptors, no matter whether they are injected, inhaled or taken orally. The duration of the action of opioids depends on the type and amount of substance, the route of administration, and on physical factors like weight or gender and ranges from one hour to more than one day. After several weeks of intensive opioid consumption, the body develops tolerance

to the opioids taken, which means that their quantity needs to be increased in order to achieve the desired effect again. When consumption is discontinued, the body reacts with hot and cold shivers, severe pain in the limbs, depression and hallucinations.

Legal Framework

In 1961, poppy straw concentrate, opium, raw opium, heroin, methadone, morphine and codeine were included in the New York Convention on Narcotic Drugs.

Cocaine

Cocaine is a white, crystalline, bitter-tasting powder made from coca leaves by adding water, lime or sodium carbonate, kerosene and ammonia. On the black market, cocaine is cut with other substances, for example with common cutting agents such as milk powder or vasoconstrictive, synthetic, analgesic or numbing substances, such as lidocaine or novocaine. Cocaine is usually snorted, but can also be injected intravenously. Chemical processing can turn it into the smokable drugs crack or freebase. When smoked, the drug's effects set in within a few seconds, but only last ten minutes at most. Crack and Free Base lead to a stronger psychic addiction more quickly than other forms of cocaine. Crack is a free base form of cocaine that is prepared with baking soda. Its purity of 80 to 100% makes it more dangerous than "standard" cocaine. Crack are small white to light yellow, sometimes slightly pink, rocks. Its size varies from a grain of sand to a pebble. Due to its strong short-term effect and subsequent misery, the psychological and physical dependence potential is much higher than for other narcotics.

Effects

Cocaine reaches the bloodstream through the mucous membranes of the nose, while crack or Free Base enter the bloodstream through inhalation or injection. Cocaine is fat-soluble and can pass the blood-brain barrier to directly affect the brain. Unlike amphetamine, which causes an increased release of the semiochemicals norepinephrine and dopamine in the brain, cocaine prevents these semiochemicals from being absorbed in the nerve cells. However, the result is similar in both cases: neurotransmitters are accumulated in the synaptic gap, causing dopamine and norepinephrine to permanently stimulate the downstream nerve cells, which is psychologically experienced as euphoria and strength. After smoking cocaine, it takes the brain a few days to rebuild the neurotransmitters. The consequences are depressive episodes, tiredness and apathy.

Legal Framework

Cocaine and crack are subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act. The acquisition, possession, production, import and export, transfer and supply to others (sale) is a punishable offence and may result in fines or imprisonment.

Ecstasy/MDMA

Ecstasy is the street name for a series of amphetamine derivatives, molecules that differ from amphetamines (“speed”) in small variations of their chemical structure. In the beginning, only methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) was called ecstasy. Over the past ten years, a number of other amphetamine derivatives with similar effects appeared on the black market. So, nowadays MDA, MDE, MBDB and other substances are also considered ecstasy. However, chemical analyses conducted by international organisations revealed that other substances, such as speed, a number of medical drugs or placebos (so non-psychoactive substances) are also sold as ecstasy. Some samples include substances that present a major health risk such as atropine or methadone. Ecstasy is taken through the mouth or nose in the form of tablets, capsules or powder. How long the effects last depends on the dosage, form of consumption and personal variables, such as weight, sex or prior food intake. The effects of an average dose of ecstasy last between three to six hours, MDA up to twelve hours.

Effects

After being absorbed into the bloodstream, part of the substance enters the brain where it affects specific areas. Ecstasy primarily causes an increased release of the neurotransmitter serotonin, resulting in reduced hunger and thirst, increased alertness, body temperature and blood pressure, as well as intensified feelings such as happiness and euphoria. When ecstasy ceases to affect the serotonin system after a few hours, the physical and psychological states are reversed. Consumers complain about tiredness, exhaustion, confusion, sadness or depressive episodes. It takes the human brain up to four weeks to re-establish its serotonin levels.

Legal Framework

Ecstasy is subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and its penal provisions on psychotropic substances. In particular, the acquisition, possession, production, import and export, transfer and supply to others (sale) is a punishable offence and may result in fines or imprisonment.

Speed-Amphetamine/Methamphetamine

Amphetamines are fully synthetic, i.e. artificially produced substances with a chemical structure similar to natural ephedrine found in ephedra (mahuang) plants. Speed is a white or pink crystalline powder, which contains amphetamines or methamphetamines and is distributed as tablets or, more often, as capsules. The effect of methamphetamine is similar to that of amphetamine, except that it is longer and stronger. Speed is taken through the mouth or nose. Smoking or injecting speed is much less common. Crystal meth (Ice, Crystal) is a crystallized, smokable form of methamphetamine, which causes

a hourslong “high“ and is highly addictive. Typically, amphetamine is diluted with other substances before being sold on the black market.

Effects

Amphetamines reach the bloodstream through the mucous membranes (of the mouth or nose), the stomach or through inhalation and injections. Amphetamine is fat-soluble and can consequently pass the blood-brain barrier and unfold its effect in the brain. It causes an increased release of the neurotransmitters noradrenaline and dopamine by pushing them out of the salivary vesicles in the synaptic cleft. Similar to adrenaline, noradrenaline and dopamine are catecholamines. Depending on the dosage, noradrenaline and dopamine cause a number of bodily and mental changes. Once speed has been degraded in the body, it no longer influences any neurotransmitters. It takes the brain several days to re-establish the neurotransmitter balance. During this period, the effects of speed are inverted: If you initially felt full of energy, strong and confident, you now feel tired, limp, irritated, unsatisfied and unfocused.

Legal Framework

In the 1950s, the WHO demanded prescription requirements for amphetamines. In 1972, amphetamine was included in the Convention on Psychotropic Substances and is now subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and its penal provisions. In particular, the acquisition, possession, production, import and export, transfer and supply to others (sale) is a punishable offence and may result in fines or imprisonment.

LSD

Lysergic acid is a colourless, tasteless and odourless substance. It is a semi-synthetic preparation from the ergot drug. In general, LSD is generally marketed in the form of paper trips (blotting paper), microtablets (“micros“), tablets and capsules. Dosage can vary greatly when it the drug is applied to blotting paper or pills. On average, a paper trip contains 80 micrograms of LSD.

Effects

The chemical structure of LSD is similar to the neurotransmitter serotonin and affects specific serotonin receptors in the brain in a way that disrupts the natural selection mechanism of the brain, This interplay disrupts the brain’s natural selection mechanism, which protects humans from too many and too intense impressions and perception (sensory overload). Therefore, situations can no longer be perceived and assessed naturally. Perceptions, moods and thoughts become more intense or change. The boundaries between reality and fantasy blur.

Legal Framework

LSD is subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act. In particular, the acquisition, possession, production, import and export, transfer and supply to others (sale) is a punishable offence and may result in fines or imprisonment.

Psychotropic Substances

Psychotropic or psychoactive substance is a blanket term for all substances contained in medications and narcotics that act on the psyche through the central nervous system. Such an influence may be subliminal and may be experienced positively as stimulation, relaxation or pleasant change of mood. However, it can also have a far-reaching effect on the consciousness and lead to seizures, disturbances of consciousness, or - in the worst case – coma.

Effects

Due to their different chemical structures, psychotropic substances bind to different receptors in the brain, where they trigger signals. Such an influence may be subliminal and may be experienced positively as stimulation, relaxation or pleasant change of mood. However, it can also have a far-reaching effect on the consciousness and lead to seizures, disturbances of consciousness, or – in the worst case – coma.

Legal Framework

In Austria, handling, including purchase, possession, manufacturing, import, export, of psychotropic and psychoactive substances or substances used as drugs are regulated. The restrictions are regulated in the Narcotic Drugs Act and in the appendant implementing provisions (Narcotic Drugs Regulation, Psychotropic Substances Regulation).

Drug Precursors

Drug precursors are chemicals that are misused for the illicit production of narcotics such as heroin, amphetamine, methamphetamine, cocaine as well as for the illegal production of medications.

Legal Framework

Drug precursors as well as their illegal handling are regulated in section 32 of the Narcotic Drug Act. Drug precursor substances are internationally defined by the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. Businesses are required to contact the competent authority when an order of a recorded substance appears suspicious and it is assumed that it might be misused for the production of narcotic drugs.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

New psychoactive substances are also known as research chemicals, legal highs or designer drugs. Many of them are experimental chemicals or waste products from drug research. What they have in common is that they are produced on a large scale, mainly in Asian laboratories.

Effects

Psychoactive drugs affect the human nervous system. They influence subjective experience and behaviour. Consumption of psychoactive substances results in a distortion of consciousness, mood and thought. These changes may be sedative or activating. Psychoactive drugs alter mechanisms in the brain that regulate mood, thoughts and memory. It can also have a far-reaching effect on the consciousness and lead to seizures or coma. All drugs have mind-altering properties and can thereby be classified as psychoactive substances.

Legal Framework

The New Psychoactive Substances Act (NPSG) came into force on 1 January 2012. In particular, it prohibits the gainful production, import, export, procurement and distribution of many research chemicals.

List of Abbreviations

AG	Working Group
BGBI	Federal Law Gazette
BK	Criminal Intelligence Service Austria
BMI	Federal Ministry of the Interior
BMKUEMIT	Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology
BMSGPK	Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection
CBD	Cannabidiol
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DSN	Directorate State Protection and Intelligence Service
EGS	Anti-Street Crime Operational Team
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats
EU	European Union
GÖG	Austrian National Public Health Institute
NPS	New psychoactive substance(s)
NPSG	New Psychoactive Substances Act
OMCG	Outlaw Motorcycle Gang
PKS	Police-Recorded Crime Statistics
SMG	Narcotic Drugs Act
StGB	Penal Code
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
XTC	Ecstasy

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