



Drug-Related Crime Annual Report 2020

Reported violations, investigations and seizures

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Vienna 2021



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Foreword

Dear readers,

2020 was in the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic. The crisis also affected drug-related crime, which was particularly apparent during the first lockdown. However, organised crime groups quickly adapted to the new situation and changed their methods accordingly. At the end of the day, the decline in drug-related crime was limited. This also reflects the efforts and effectiveness of law enforcement, particularly the police. Even in these trying times, the fight against drug crime has been constantly stepped up, leading to a large number of successes. Dealing with this type of crime requires more than looking at the offences as defined in Austria's Narcotic Drugs Act, because illicit drugs are widespread and connected to many other criminal offences, ranging from administrative violations such as driving under the influence of illegal substances, to acquisitive and accompanying crime, and even to serious cases of physical violence that may affect bystanders.

The 2020 status report reflects the efforts of law enforcement at a national and international level. Through the plethora of strategic and operational measures, the report highlights the professionalism exhibited by Austria's police services, including individual officers at police stations, district and city commands of the Federal Police, drug investigation departments at the provincial CIDs and centrally at the sub-department for combating drug-related crime at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria.

We offer our gratitude to all staff, as their dedication is instrumental in the tough fight against drug-related crime. They make an important and a most valuable contribution to public security in Austria.

Yours sincerely,

Karl Nehammer
Federal Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Austria

General Andreas Holzer
Director of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria



Austrian Minister of the Interior Karl Nehammer, and Director of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria General Andreas Holzer

1 General information



General information

The next few chapters lay out the methodology behind the statistics outlining drug-related crime in Austria, provide an outlook for 2021 and give insights into law enforcement action against this type of crime.

Explanatory notes

Information included in this report is drawn from data published by the Austrian law enforcement services on punishable offences involving narcotic drugs as defined in the Narcotic Drugs Act (Suchtmittelgesetz – SMG) in the year under review. The statistics contained herein reflect the number of reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act. Data on the reported violations is stored in the database hosted by the Data Processing Centre of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior (BMI) and is prepared for publication by Criminal Intelligence Service Austria (BK). The statistical data must be carefully interpreted 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 crime. Additional information should, therefore, be taken into account. As monthly and annual fluctuations in the number of reported violations are not uncommon, extensive investigations may take months or even years and are recorded in the statistics only after completion. For this reason, it is worthwhile to consider trends not only in comparison to the previous year, but over several reporting years and against a backdrop of additional background information. The addictive drugs statistics compiled by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior underwent a major renewal in 2015. Until then, the drug statistics had been drawn up independently of Austria's Police-Recorded Crime Statistics (PKS). In 2015, the drug statistics were incorporated in the Police-Recorded Crime Statistics. This involved an automatic quality control and thus an increase in data quality. Moreover, it enabled the recording of additional parameters, which in turn made it possible to retrieve enhanced information from the statistics and resulted in a more complete representation of the current situation. It 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 („Strafgesetzbuch” or StGB). „Crimes” are intentional acts that are punished by life imprisonment or terms of imprisonment exceeding three years. All other punishable acts are offences.

The present report is structured as follows: The first part consists of a summary of the situation in Austria and the outlook for the year 2021. The second part consists of the key data on drug-related crime in Austria in 2020. The third part contains a status report on the individual types of narcotic drugs. The fourth part gives an overview of the situation in Austria's nine provinces.

The report concludes with a glossary of crimes punishable under the Narcotic Drugs Act and the New Psychoactive Substances Act, as well as the most common illicit drugs in Austria and their effects.

Summary

Like in previous years, Austria served as an area of consumption, transit and trade of narcotic drugs and as base for various organised crime groups and distribution networks in 2020. There are five main factors influencing these criminal activities:

- The Balkan route along which Austria is situated is used for smuggling heroin and opiate products from Afghanistan towards Europe. This corridor is also utilised to smuggle drug precursors from Europe towards Central Asia and to smuggle cocaine to Europe.
- Vienna International Airport, in particular, is used for smuggling cocaine from South American countries into Austria.
- synthetic drugs produced in European countries
- production of home-made cannabis products in Austria
- online sales on the internet, but also illicit drugs and new psychoactive substances offered on the darknet, which are then mailed to Austria. Moreover, messenger services are increasingly used by drug offenders.

Austrian law enforcement's fight against drug-related crime

In addition to their wide range of tasks, all law enforcement officers in Austria are also in charge of combating drug-related crime. 690 law enforcement officers, posted across the following three levels, are specially designated to deal with such offences: At the ground level, drug investigation departments at the District and City Commands of the Federal Police; at a state level, drug investigation departments at the provincial CIDs. And at a central level and thus with responsibility for all drug crime matters in Austria, the Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria, which also serves as a hub between national ministries and international authorities. This connection between the various organisations and levels forms the foundation of the fight by Austrian law enforcement against drug crime. The effectiveness of this network is further enhanced by close national and international cooperations with entities such as customs authorities.

Outlook for 2021

Due to its geographical location on the Balkan route, Austria continues to play an important role in the fight against international organised drug crime. As a transit country and marketplace for illicit substances and as a base of operations for various multinational criminal groups, Austria is constantly facing the challenge of effectively tackling drug-related crime. In this respect, special attention is paid to criminal groups from the Western Balkans. Trade in illicit drugs on the internet and darknet is booming. This means that illicit drugs are bought on the internet or darknet, and are then sent in letters or parcels. This kind of drug trafficking must be tackled with the help of the multi-agency principle and interdisciplinary cooperation. The use of messenger services in all tiers of criminal organisations also poses a big challenge to the police. Aside from said acquisition channels, illicit drugs continue to be smuggled via traditional pathways such as the Balkan route or Vienna International Airport. It should be noted, however, that illicit drugs can be smuggled into and across Austria from any direction. Heroin continues to pass through Southern Europe, synthetic narcotic drugs tend to come from Northern Europe, while cocaine is smuggled through both Northern and Southern Europe. Street-level drug dealing still requires special attention, as this method of distribution directly impacts the population's sense of security. It should also be noted that the situation with regard to foreign suspects presents a challenge, as they account for a very large percentage, especially in serious drug offences.

2 Key data

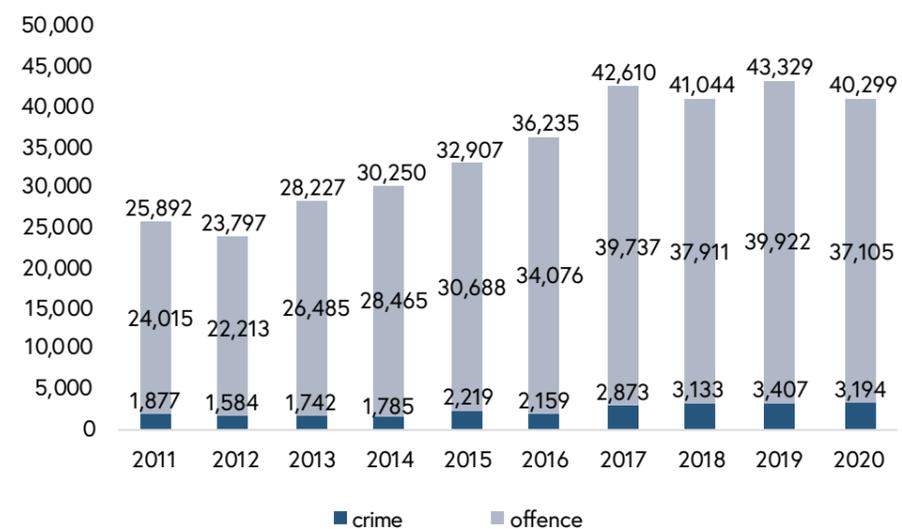


Key data

The following section compares drug-related crime in 2020 to previous years, highlighting the development of these offences in-depth.

Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act

In 2020, the number of reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act fell by 7% to 40,299 from the all-time high of 43,329 in 2019. The dropping numbers are a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and related measures, which forced offenders to adapt their modus operandi.



Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act (crimes and offences) in Austria between 2011 and 2020

Seized illicit drugs

In 2020, about 104 kg of heroin, 63 kg of cocaine, 2,057 kg of cannabis products, 89,000 ecstasy tablets, 37 kg of amphetamine, 9 kg of methamphetamine and 1,095 kg of khat were seized in Vienna. Like in the year before, the seizures clearly show that cannabis products asserted their dominance in the Austrian drug market and in drug-related crime in 2020. Khat seizures more than quadrupled, while synthetic drugs saw a decline.

Seizures of drugs
between 2016 and 2020

Narcotic Drugs	2016	2017	2017	2019	2020
Cannabis	1082,776.6 g	1,659,199.3 g	1,499,633.5 g	1,367,885.0 g	2,056,776.3 g
Heroin	68,916.1 g	69,950.0 g	76,362.4 g	94,644.1 g	104,272.2 g
Cocaine	86,449.2 g	71,425.0 g	74,990.5 g	87,119.9 g	62,985.0 g
Ecstasy	29,485.1 Stk	446,465.0 Stk	83,037.0 Stk	77,922.0 Stk	89,148.0 Stk
Amphetamine	87,649.4 g	50,268.0 g	76,770.7 g	122,214.2 g	36,837.9 g
Methamphetamine	4,800.4 g	5,036.4 g	8,000.0 g	30,197.6 g	9,237.7 g
Khat	451,301.2 g	633,456.4 g	533,992.2 g	272,205.7 g	1,094,770.2 g

Note that the amount of narcotic drugs seized in a reporting year is strongly influenced by large seizures. Therefore, the year-on-year comparison of seized drug quantities by itself is not a suitable parameter for judging the development of drug-related crime.

Black market prices

In 2020, the average wholesale price per kilogram was EUR 3,700 for cannabis (herb and resin), EUR 30,000 for heroin, EUR 51,000 for cocaine, EUR 9,000 for amphetamine and EUR 36,000 for methamphetamine. 1,000 ecstasy (MDMA) tablets sold for about EUR 6,700.

Going by the drugs seized in 2020, the following average street prices in Austria were calculated: The prices only serve to illustrate the money involved in drug trafficking, but may vary depending on region and purity. Systemically, the Covid-19 pandemic was inconsequential for price stability.

Black market value of
seized drugs in 2020

Narcotic Drugs	2020
Cannabis	13,336,695 Euro
Heroin	4,673,052 Euro
Cocaine	8,167,491 Euro
Ecstasy	1,467,531 Euro
Amphetamine	2,978,971 Euro
Methamphetamine	2,094,959 Euro

Purity of the illicit drugs

The following table shows the development of the purity of the seized and forensically examined illicit drugs over the past ten years, based on the median. It shows the mean values in each case. Despite the wide variation, an increase was noticed in the purity of many types of narcotic drugs, especially synthetic drugs.

Narcotic Drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Herbal cannabis/ marijuana	10.70%	9.60%	8.80%	7.00%	6.10%
Cannabis resin/ hashish	15.10%	13.20%	15.30%	16.50%	16.00%
Heroin	13.70%	15.00%	15.80%	17.70%	17.70%
Cocaine	45.90%	51.40%	53.20%	51.90%	59.70%
Ecstasy/MDMA	47.70%	38.30%	47.80%	41.50%	44.90%
Amphetamine	14.50%	13.80%	12.40%	19.80%	21.80%
Methamphetamine	58.70%	57.20%	49.90%	59.40%	62.70%

Drug purity in percent
between 2016 and 2020

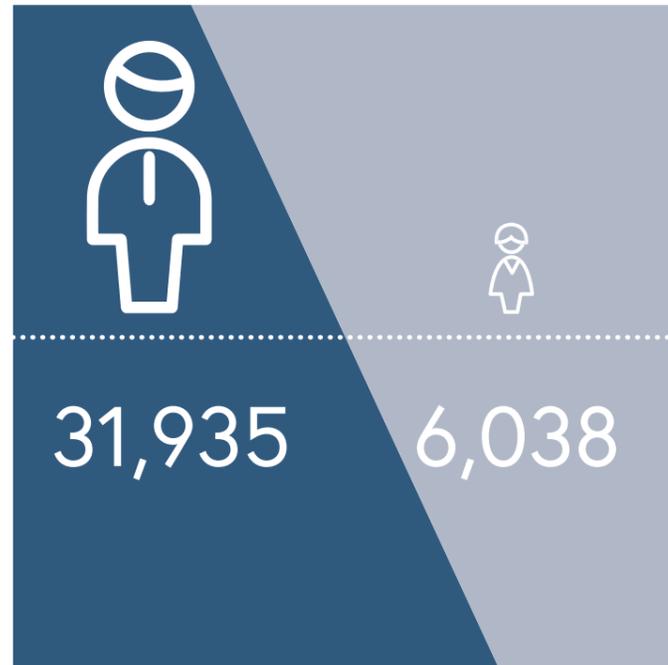
Suspects

Adults ages 18-39 saw a decline in reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act. At -11.9%, this decline was most pronounced in the subgroup of adults ages 18-20. An increase, standing at 7.8%, was only recorded among adults older than 40 years. Most violations are still reported for adults ages 25-39.

Age groups	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Change over previous year
Under 18 years of age	5,226	5,779	5,897	5,901	5,381	-8.8 %
18-20	7,426	8,989	8,154	7,667	6,757	-11.9 %
21-24	6,847	8,061	7,462	7,519	7,156	-4.8 %
25-39	11,462	13,817	13,019	14,883	14,258	-4.2 %
40+	2,495	3,008	3,256	4,090	4,411	7.8 %

Distribution of reported
violations according to
age groups between
2016 and 2020 expressed
in absolute figures and
changes in percent

Distribution of reported violations according to gender in 2020

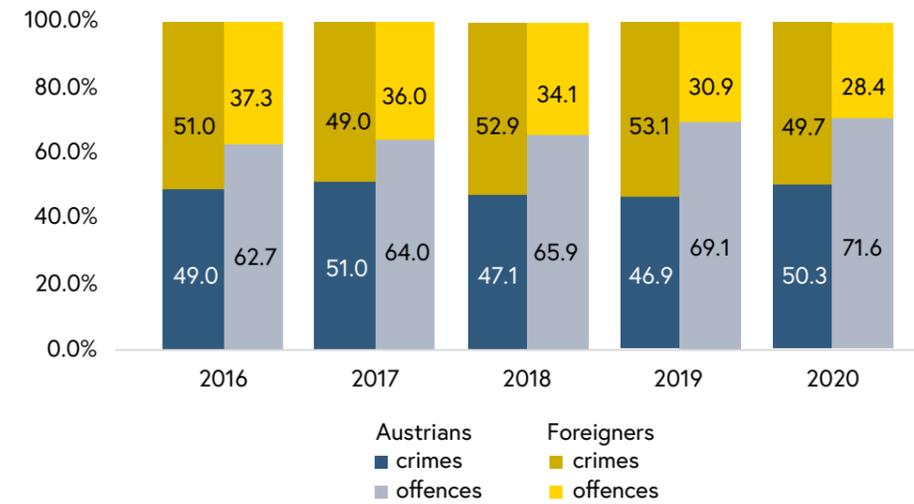


No significant changes were observed year-over-year in the gender ratio. Men (about 84%) continued to be reported much more frequently than women (16%) in 2020. In 2019, the ratio was about 85% to 15%.

Domestic and foreign suspects

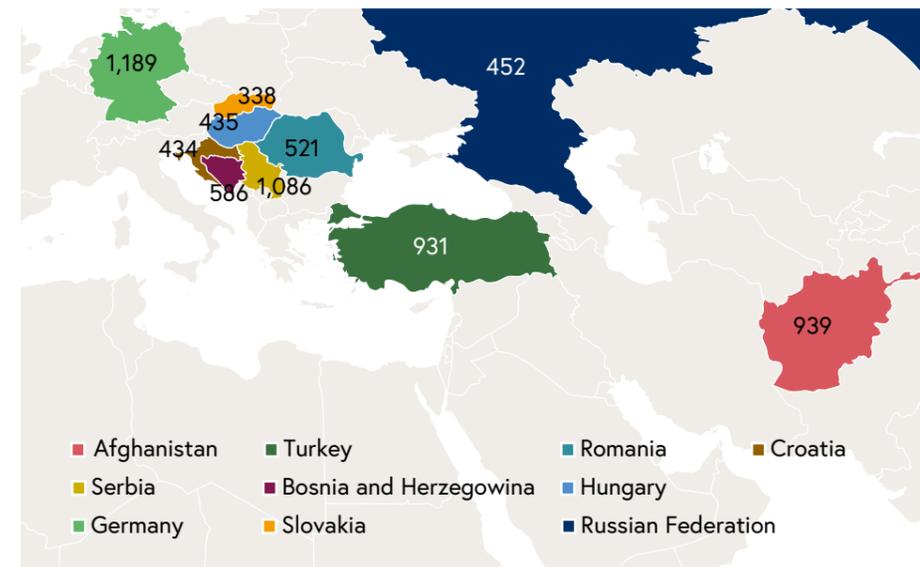
In 2020, a total of 26,562 police reports were filed against domestic suspects and 11,401 reports against foreign suspects of punishable offences that fall under the Narcotic Drugs Act. The number of domestic suspects kept growing at a moderate pace since 2016 to reach a percentage of 70% in 2020. During the same period, the percentage of foreign suspects of both crimes and offences kept dropping since 2016 to reach a percentage of 30% in 2020.

Foreign suspects accounted for 49.7% of crimes, down from 53.1% in the previous year, which was reflected in the percentage of offences, where they accounted for 28.4% (-2.5%).



Distribution of crimes and offences by domestic and foreign suspects between 2016 and 2020

Foreign nationals from Germany and Serbia accounted for most reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act, followed by nationals from Afghanistan, Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania, the Russian Federation, Hungary, Croatia and Slovakia. Like in the past two years, Serbian nationals were by a large margin the most frequent suspects in drug crimes, while suspects from the Western Balkans presented the biggest threat in this area of offences and in poly-criminal actions.



Map with number of suspects identified in 2020 according to countries of origin

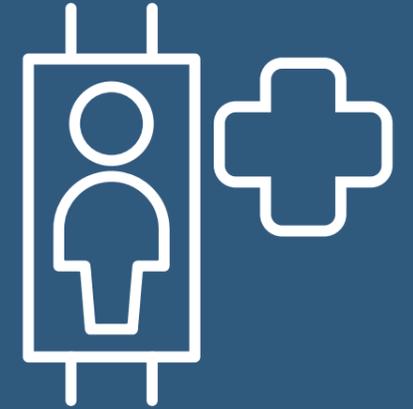
Composition of criminal groups

In terms of nationalities, the distribution of members of smuggling and trafficking networks for the various illicit drugs has been unchanged from previous years. In most cases, these criminals had ties to countries in which the drugs originated, transited or were stored. Notably, offenders originating from the Western Balkans are responsible for many serious cases of drug crime.

Many criminal groups hail from countries situated along the Balkan route, especially Bosnia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. Austrian nationals took the top spot in terms of herbal cannabis production. Illegal drug trafficking on virtual platforms and through messenger services continues to be on the rise. Law enforcement is also faced with the big challenge of illegal trade on the darknet, virtual currencies and drugs sent by parcel delivery services.

3

Drug victims



Drug-related deaths

Along with drug-related crime, there are drug-related deaths every year as a result of the abuse of illegal addictive substances. The following is an overview of the latest case figures in Austria published by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMSGPK) for the years 2015 to 2019. In 2019, no data were available for publication due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Deaths directly related to drugs in the years 2015 through 2019, listed for each province (source: GÖG/ÖBIG, DRD Evaluation 2019, Statistics of the Austrian Population)

Provinces	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Burgenland	3	3	3	2	n/a
Carinthia	9	11	13	24	n/a
Lower Austria	21	15	15	22	n/a
Upper Austria	8	16	19	11	n/a
Salzburg	2	5	8	4	n/a
Styria	9	13	15	13	n/a
Tyrol	14	24	11	24	n/a
Vorarlberg	15	11	6	5	n/a
Vienna	72	67	64	79	n/a
unknown	0	0	0	0	n/a
Austria	153	165	154	184	n/a

4 Law enforcement action



Activities and priorities of the police

Drug-related crime is not only a huge challenge per se for Austrian law enforcement, but also associated criminality, which often occurs in the domain of organised crime and is thus hidden from public view. But once such crimes surface, uninvolved members of the public may also become victims. In secret or in the open, drug crime affects society day in and day out, be it through driving under the influence of drugs, property crime, corruption, severe acts of violence, or even murder. Drug-related crimes have gone far beyond the sale of joints in parks, and have found their way into online platforms, messenger services and poly-criminal organisations. This calls for even more action on the part of the police to address this aspect of drug crime with the full force of the law, both nationally and internationally.

International cooperation and projects

Intense international cooperation is required to be in a position to decisively confront organised cross-border drug-related crime. Austria's location alongside the main drug-trafficking route, the Balkan route, as well as the misuse of Vienna International Airport as drug-dealing hub call for Austrian law enforcement to adopt special measures and show dedicated efforts. International cooperation relies on tried-and-tested communication channels such as Interpol, Europol, Eurojust, the United Nations network and Austrian liaison officers accredited to foreign countries and foreign liaison officers accredited to Austria. Bilateral contacts that have been built over many years and decades have also grown in significance. Moreover, as the central Austrian authority, the Sub-Department Drug-Related Crime at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria participates in numerous national and international boards and working groups at organisations such as Europol, the European Commission, the European Council, the Council of Europe, Interpol and the United Nations.

Projects co-financed by the European Union provide valuable assistance in the fight against crime. With these projects, it is possible to test and implement necessary tactical measures as well as to create new important infrastructure and police information networks. Without this funding, a number of these projects would be very difficult to implement.

In preparation of the years to come, new projects have been initiated and developed, reports on which will follow.

Project “Combating suspects dealing in drugs on the internet – prosecution and prevention“ (CSI-PP)

In February 2019, the Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria together with its partner, the Narcotic Drugs Department at the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office, launched the project “Combating suspects dealing in drugs on the internet – prosecution and prevention (CSI-PP)“, which is co-funded by the European Commission and runs through 2022. The project was submitted and eventually implemented because postal drug deliveries were soaring, existing methods of detection seemed insufficient, legal challenges appeared and drug buyers lacked awareness of the unlawfulness of such acts. This project is aimed to focus on forensics in drug trafficking and combine forensics with operational measures. It is also designed to try out new methods of investigations and test their suitability for everyday use. Other organisations such as the Innsbruck Department for Forensic Medicine, the Forensics Department of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria and of the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office, as well as the customs administration are deeply involved, too. Prevention, which has always been a hallmark of the Austrian approach, and networking between national and international organisations, form the pillars of the project. Of course, the insights gleaned from this project are constantly evaluated and eventually made available to the member states.

Drug trafficking via darknet and postal services

Large parts of the internet, consisting of the deep web and the darknet, are not accessible to conventional search engines. The so-called deep web is the largest part of the internet, can be accessed by authorised users only and consists of corporate networks, databases of libraries, universities and research facilities. By contrast, the darknet is a much smaller area of the internet and can only be accessed by specialised browsers such as Tor (The Onion Router). All data on the darknet is encrypted and transmitted anonymously via various servers in order to leave as few traces as possible and to thwart the identification of the user. Darknet addresses are alphanumeric, i.e. they consist of combinations of numbers and letters. At the end of the transmission, the information is decrypted and thus visible to the recipient.

Originally a tool for journalists threatened by censorship and persons facing political prosecution, the darknet gradually fell into disrepute, as it was also used as a platform for illegal arms and drug trafficking, hacking services and other criminal activities. Both individual offenders and criminal organisations use darknet marketplaces to carry out their illegal activities, especially drug trafficking, which generates large illegal profits. This trend has also created issues for Austria. It was observed that online drug trade has not yet displaced street-level distribution. Rather, high-quality drugs are purchased

online at low prices to be later sold in the streets at a profit. Thus, online trade brings a new level of difficulty to investigators trying to identify all offenders in a criminal group and also complements classic street-level dealing.

The following figures show that Austria, too, is affected by the online drug trade. Since September 2016, German customs officials have made high-impact checks of outgoing post at the postal sorting centre Frankfurt am Main. So far, customs officials have seized about 28,500 letters and parcels that contained a total of about 2,000 kg of narcotic drugs and more than 1.4 million ecstasy tablets. These letters and parcels were addressed to recipients in more than 90 nations. In terms of number of recipients per country, Austria took second place behind the U.S. in late 2019, and was trailed by destinations such as the UK, France and Australia. Since the first half of 2019, Austria has even topped this ranking. The letters and parcels destined for Austria contained a total of about 240 kg of drugs, mainly amphetamines and MDMA, including 38,000 ecstasy tablets and 1,200 doses of LSD. The Netherlands has been identified as a source of many of these consignments.

High-impact checks similar to the ones in Frankfurt am Main are now a key aspect of the approach in Austria. In the period of January 2016 to late 2020, about 13,000 letters and parcels were seized that contained a total of more than 1,200 kg of illicit drugs and new psychoactive substances, including 42,150 ecstasy tablets and about 940 kg of khat. Follow-up investigations established that the drugs in the intercepted parcels had been exclusively ordered on darknet marketplaces. About 75% of parcels seized in Austria had been sent from the Netherlands. Opioids such as Carfentanyl and U-47700 represent a growing danger emanating from the online drug trade, as mere inhalation or skin contact with these designer drugs can damage health or even cause death.

Large volumes of illicit drugs offered on darknet marketplaces were bought in the Netherlands and mailed to Austria.

To address this new phenomenon of drug crime, Criminal Intelligence Service Austria set up a specialised unit as early as in 2018. This unit focuses on investigations into online drug traders residing in Austria and coordinates police action against drug buyers. 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. This led to the realisation that dismantling distribution networks is one of the most effective ways in this endeavour, as most drugs offered on darknet marketplaces are mailed through conventional post. For this reason, operational investigations have been combined with in-depth inspections of mail deliveries since the start of 2020. The checks are carried out in close collaboration with the Austrian customs authority of the Ministry of Finance, so that the criminal police cover a part of the extra effort required. For this reason, the working group "FLAVUS"

was set up within the specialised unit in January 2020. Thanks to the symbiosis of customs and police measures, 3,045 parcels and letters containing a total of about 60 kg of narcotic drugs and new psychoactive substances were intercepted and seized. In conjunction with parallel investigations into Austrian darknet vendors, it was possible to identify, arrest and convict several owners of highly active Austrian drug shops on the darknet over said period.

Intelligence unit for drug and explosive precursors

This section looks into the precursors for producing illicit drugs and explosives, followed by an outline of the national point of contact at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria and its activities.

Drug precursors

Certain chemicals are misused by criminal networks for manufacturing narcotic drugs, for example synthetic drugs such as ecstasy.

The utilised chemicals and illegal chemical processes present a danger to the population. In order to prevent the diversion of such chemicals from legal channels for illicit manufacturing of drugs and explosives, Criminal Intelligence Service Austria set up a Precursor Competence Centre on 1 December 2018. Businesses are legally required to report any suspicion to this unit that chemicals might have been diverted for illegal drug manufacturing. Private individuals may also report such observations.

Explosives precursors

Another focus of the Precursor Competence Centre is the monitoring of the trade in explosives precursors. Easily accessible chemical precursors can be used to build improvised explosives for terrorist attacks. Reports by businesses are checked for any criminal relevance and, where applicable, may then be referred to the Austrian Agency for State Protection and Counter Terrorism.

Suspicious substances reports, sales history checks and tip-offs

In 2020 the Precursor Competence Centre received ten reports of chemicals and substances that were suspected of being used in drug manufacturing. In addition, the Centre analysed the sales history of 239 reported and suspicious chemicals, and received 152 general tip-offs about possible drug offences. As for explosive precursors, the Centre received five reports on suspected precursors and analysed the sales history of 704 reported chemicals.

Contact:

Criminal Intelligence Service Austria (BK)

Meldestelle für Drogenausgangsstoffe (Precursor-Competence-Centre)

Josef-Holaubek-Platz 1

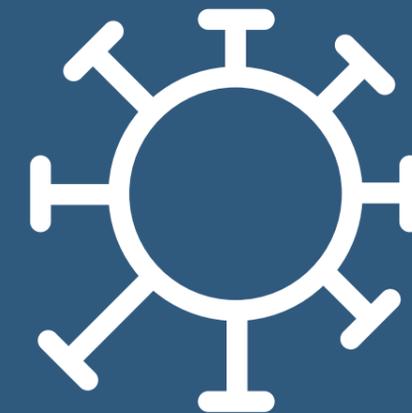
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5 Fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic



Moderate decline in drug crime amid Covid-19 pandemic

No significant changes were observed in drug crime rates in 2020. Availability, price stability and quality saw no widespread and/or structural changes. Somewhat fewer drug crimes were recorded year-over-year due to the Covid-19 crisis. Immediately after lockdown restrictions were lifted, drug trafficking in public spaces, especially in cities, picked up. In some cases, drug crime shifted from public to private spaces such as homes. At the moment, there is no major shift of drug trafficking to the internet or darknet, although online sales of drugs including shipping are still at a high volume. As far as drug trafficking on darknet marketplaces is concerned, it was observed in Austria in 2020 that the number of vendors operating on darknet marketplaces went down. This is apparently a result of stepped-up measures by the police and customs authorities, as well as of the general Covid-19 situation. The vendors that were still residing and active in Austria were gradually shying away from international trade, and most of them supplied domestic customers exclusively. No fundamental changes were seen in sales numbers and the offered types of drugs and new psychoactive substances. Prices remained stable. More drug buyers were complaining that they did not receive their orders or that, if the goods were lost during delivery, they did not get any replacement.

In general, drug buyers were perceived as more discontent, alleging that vendors used the Covid-19 situation as an excuse for undelivered or unsatisfactory drug orders. It is highly likely that supply chain restrictions led to a shortage of precursors for synthetic drugs. This development affected online drug trade the most, as darknet marketplaces predominantly sell synthetic drugs. In summary, the Covid-19 situation did not change online drug crime in a meaningful way. The darknet community merely discussed deliveries that were delayed or not received.

6 Survey of the drug market



Types of illicit drugs

Based on the substances that are most commonly abused in Austria, the following provides an overview of the drug trafficking situation.

Heroin

In 2020, most European countries recorded a small decline in opiate-related drug crimes. The trend was reflected in Austria, albeit to a lesser degree. Opium use in Austria was concentrated among end users of Iranian and Afghan origin. Owing to its rare consumption, opium represents only a miniscule part of the opiate problem. A much wider problem were synthetic opioids, particularly fentanyl derivatives, which spread in the U.S. and Canada like an epidemic. Heroin and morphine continued to be among the most frequent illegal substances identified in drug-related deaths in Austria in 2020.

Heroin was still the most common opioid on the European market. Although the global area under cultivation of illicit drugs tended to rise in general, the area under opium poppy cultivation shrank in 2019 by 30% to an estimated 240,800 hectares. Both in 2018 and 2019, the areas under cultivation also contracted in Afghanistan and Myanmar.

Afghanistan is the world's biggest producer of opium. With an output of about 6,400 tonnes in 2019, this Central Asian country accounted for 80% of global production. Myanmar ranked second in opium production in 2019, at 508 tonnes.

The world's single biggest route for heroin smuggling was still the Balkan route, which accounted for 58% of all heroin seizures outside Afghanistan in 2018. An increase in the period between 2019 and 2020 is to be expected, but valid statistics are not yet available. Austria is situated along this route, which runs from Turkey via Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria to Western Europe. Despite the closure of borders for public health reasons, the supply of heroin and opiates was uninterrupted.

However, smuggling routes can be impaired by restrictions introduced to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the rising number of opiate seizures in the Indian Ocean may indicate that smugglers are increasingly using African sea routes to evade intensified police checks along the Balkan route. In many cases when large amounts of drugs are seized on container ships, it is believed that domestic offenders are involved, who also organise the transport of the drugs for their criminal organisation once the drugs are unloaded in European ports.

Time and again, suspects arrested in Austria can be attributed to international criminal networks, mostly rivaling clans from the Western Balkans. Their well-structured and hierarchies have been adopted by nearly all criminal organisations, regardless of whether they are multicultural or multinational or made up of nationals of just a single country.

There are no indications that „offline” heroin trade shifted to online channels. Rather, drugs supplied on darknet platforms were added to the traditional drug supply. Most of the offering of illegal products was found on websites that were only accessible through the Tor browser. Such listings are attractive thanks to the supposed anonymity of users.

Cocaine

Cocaine was still the second most commonly used illicit drug in Europe. Following a massive upswing in the past few years, the area under coca cultivation seems to have stabilised around 244,200 hectares and production of pure cocaine totalled 1,723 tonnes, according to UNODC. At about 70% of total production, Colombia was the world's biggest cocaine producer, followed by Peru (20%) and Bolivia (10%).

The European Drug Report 2020 shows that drug seizures in Europe hit a record high of 181 tonnes, and that cocaine purity was rising, hinting at a large availability. As before, drugs were transported to Europe by sea and air. Many of the large shipments of cocaine were smuggled on container ships to big ports on the Iberian Peninsula, the Netherlands and Belgium, hidden between legal cargo or through the so-called rip-off modality, which involves clandestinely adding the contraband to a container that has gone through customs. The trafficking did not always originate in the producing countries, but was also increasingly carried out via Brazil, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, the Caribbean and often also via North African countries.

At the same time, cocaine smuggling in ocean-going sailing vessels, private jets and air mail is playing a greater role.

In Austria, cocaine smugglers mainly used Vienna International Airport and occasionally some smaller international airports. The most frequent method of smuggling was body packing, in which persons swallow drug-filled packets or hide drugs in secret compartments of suitcases. For distribution across Austria, smugglers heavily relied on rail and bus infrastructure, and smuggled an average quantity of between 0.3 and 1 kg.

The origin of criminal groups operating in Austria was found to be diverse: groups from the Western Balkan states and West Africa were predominantly observed in the southern parts of the country, while they were also active in eastern Austria along with groups from Central and South America. Networks from the Caribbean and Central America were

advancing in the central region of the country. Criminal groups from the Middle East and Northern Africa were increasingly observed in the west of Austria. Individual Austrian suspects most often purchased the cocaine from foreign gangs in Austria in order to sell the drugs for a profit. There was a decline in trips to Spain or the Netherlands for the purpose of purchasing cocaine.

Prices did not change substantially amid the Covid-19 pandemic, indicating a ready supply of cocaine as well as a high flexibility of criminal groups. Online trade as well as darknet platforms also grew in importance in 2020.

Cannabis

In terms of consumption, trafficking, production and imports into Austria, products made from the cannabis sativa plant topped the 2020 list of illicit drugs, as in previous years. The preferred drug preparations were herbal cannabis, called marijuana, and the resin obtained from the cannabis plant, called hashish. Nearly all of the cannabis resin or hashish was imported, whereas marijuana was increasingly cultivated locally. Austria continued to play an important role in Europe as transit country for the smuggling of cannabis products.

Herbal cannabis (marijuana)

Marijuana in Austria is mainly grown in indoor farms. For personal use, the plant was most often cultivated in freely available grow boxes. Such turnkey systems plus equipment are offered in hemp shops and on the internet. These unrestricted offerings and the sale of cannabis seeds and cannabis cuttings are problematic, as mature plants may contain high concentrations of THC. Sec. 27 of the Narcotic Drugs Act consistently outlaws the possession and consumption of cannabis products, even in small quantities, if their THC concentration exceeds 0.3%. The sale of cannabis seeds and cannabis cuttings is basically legal in Austria, unless the plants blossom and thus exceed the aforementioned THC concentration. Austrian offenders preferred to use grow boxes with a capacity of up to 500 plants. Eastern European groups, and chiefly Serbian offenders, preferred facilities with more than 500 plants. As in previous years, most of the marijuana imported to Austria in 2020 originated in Albania, the main European cultivation area. Herbal cannabis produced in Albania is smuggled along the Balkan route or by sea via Italy. Albanian perpetrators set up caches in Italy, the Czech Republic, Germany and Eastern European countries along the Balkan route and use them to export marijuana to Central and Northern Europe.

Cannabiskraut (Marihuana)

Indoor facilities take the biggest share in the cultivation of marijuana in Austria. So-called „grow boxes“, which are freely available, are the most important instrument for cultivation and personal use. These mostly pre-installed small systems are offered in cannabis shops or via the internet, including the necessary equipment. Openly offering and selling cannabis seedlings or cannabis cuttings poses a problem, as adult plants can have high THC concentrations. In this context, it must also be mentioned that the possession, including consumption, of cannabis products in the sense of Section 27 of the SMG is always prohibited, even in the case of very small amounts, if a value of basically 0.3 percent THC content is exceeded. Selling THC cannabis seeds and seedlings is in principle legal in Austria, as long as they do not flower and thus exceed the stated THC value. Grow boxes with a capacity of up to 500 plants were mainly operated by Austrian offenders. Mostly, plants above 500 are used by Eastern European groups, among them mainly Serbian offenders. Imported marijuana also reached Austria in 2020 from Albania, the main European cultivation area. The cannabis herb originating from Albania is smuggled along the Balkan route or by sea via Italy. Albanian offenders set up depots in Italy, the Czech Republic, Germany and Eastern European states along the Balkan route and export the marijuana from there to Central and Northern Europe.

Cannabis resin (hashish)

Morocco was again the country of origin for most of the cannabis resin smuggled to Austria. Due to the Covid-19 situation and stepped-up surveillance along the Mediterranean coast, criminal organisations shifted large parts of their exports via the sea route to the Atlantic coast. In various configurations, Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy were used as transit countries on the smuggling route from Morocco to Austria. No sizeable volumes of cannabis smuggled by air were detected in 2020.

CBD - Cannabidiol

Cannabidiol (CBD) is a non-psychoactive cannabinoid derived from the female hemp plant (cannabis). CBD, which is not a substance listed in the Narcotic Drugs Act, is just one of many components of hemp plants low or rich in THC. In general, a chemical analysis needs to be conducted on CBD to determine its exact THC concentration. Distribution of hemp or CBD products in Austria is only permitted if

- they are listed in the common catalogue of varieties of agricultural plant species pursuant to Article 17 Council Directive 2002/53/EC of 13 June 2002, Official Journal L 193 , 20/07/2002 P. 1, or
- in the Austrian variety list under sec 65 Seed Act 1997, Federal Gazette No. 72/1997 as amended, and
- if their THC concentration does not exceed 0.3% before, during and after production and
- if they cannot be easily or profitably used for extraction of narcotic drugs suitable for misuse.

Crossbreeding or grafting of cannabis plants listed in the common catalogue among themselves or with plants not listed in the catalogue is prohibited, as this would result in species not included in the catalogue. Such violations were often found in hemp shops, online shops, CBD vending machines or similar points of distribution. Please note that the 0.3% threshold concentration for THC does not apply to hemp for drug use, but only to plant varieties listed in the common catalogue of varieties of agricultural plant species. Thus, such violations are also prosecuted.

Distribution, trade and consumption of cannabis products

No significant changes were noticed with regard to the criminal actors. The market is still dominated by groups from the Maghreb (especially Morocco and Algeria) and West Africa, and Afghan asylum seekers, followed by Austrian offenders. Offenders also included persons from Germany, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey and North Macedonia. Depending on purity and quantity sold, wholesale prices ranged between EUR 4-5 per gram and street prices reached up to EUR 12. Socio-demographic aspects suggest that cannabis was used across all age groups and social strata.

Synthetic Drugs

As in previous years, most synthetic drugs abused or seized in Austria were produced in Europe. The trend from 2019, where production was no longer limited to traditional producing countries in Europe, persisted in 2020. Criminal groups from outside Europe clearly had an impact on certain substances offered on the European market. As usual, the drugs were smuggled on road vehicles, trains, coaches, cars and also through postal and parcel services.

The following principles were found to apply to the quantity of smuggled drugs:

- Small quantities: higher number of smuggling runs – shorter distances – risk minimisation
- Large quantities: remote countries of origin – more profitability

Austria remained an inconspicuous transit country for smuggling synthetic drugs into countries outside the Schengen Area, especially overseas. Smuggling plummeted or came to a halt amid Covid-19 restrictions in air and land travel.

Amphetamine – MDMA – Ecstasy

Most of the amphetamines seized in Austria came from European countries and in the form of powder, paste or tablets, with a very high variance in quality. Going by volumes,

the Netherlands took a top spot. Some of the seized drugs also contained new psychoactive substances. MDMA and ecstasy tablets seized in Austria originated in Europe. MDMA was offered as a powder and as the active ingredient in ecstasy tablets, which, as in past years, contained high amounts of this ingredient. Some of the offered ecstasy tablets contained a low amount of MDMA or even none whatsoever. Instead, they were enriched with, or exclusively made of, a new psychoactive substance, presenting an increase health risk for consumers.

Methamphetamine

Apart from smaller domestic production sites, methamphetamine supplied to the Austrian market was produced in Europe, South America and South Asia, and was offered as powder, crystal or tablets. Like in the previous year, the seized methamphetamine was of a high purity. Due to the addictiveness of methamphetamine and an increase of 45% in newly reported drug users, the situation in Austria is not expected to improve.

Psychotropic substances

Except for a few large seizures, the situation of psychotropic substances in Austria remained stable. New psychoactive substances were found as blotters, powder and tablets, with benzodiazepines as active ingredients. These were mostly ordered online and then mailed to the buyers.

New psychoactive substances (NPS)

Austria and the European market continued to see a rise in substances classed as NPS. All conventional drugs have their NPS counterparts, which produce a similar, yet weaker or stronger, response in the human body. Synthetic cannabinoids, opiates and tryptamines accounted for most of the NPS seized in Austria, with synthetic cannabinoids marking another significant increase. The drugs were seized in their pure form as powder and processed into products such as herbal mixtures and tablets.

Some of the seized drugs turned out to be mixtures of conventional drugs and one or several NPS, even though they were advertised as conventional drugs or NPS. This lack of information about the possible different effects puts consumers' health at risk.

Based on the international exchange of information between police, customs and health authorities, about 1,000 NPS are currently known worldwide. Most of the NPS seized in Europe originated in Asia. That being said, China is spearheading efforts to control NPS through legislation. By contrast, Europe is an area where raw substances are manufactu-

red into products that are ready for market, with offenders preferring countries without legal restrictions on NPS. The majority of substances is offered on darknet marketplaces and on the internet, and are then mailed to buyers through postal and package delivery services. The latest amendment to the Narcotic Drugs Regulation put many NPS on the list of substances prohibited under the Narcotic Drugs Act.

Production of illicit drugs in Austria

Austria is not only used as a transit country for illicit drugs, but also as a place of production. Cannabis is cultivated in indoor and outdoor farms, while most synthetic drugs are produced in clandestine drug labs.

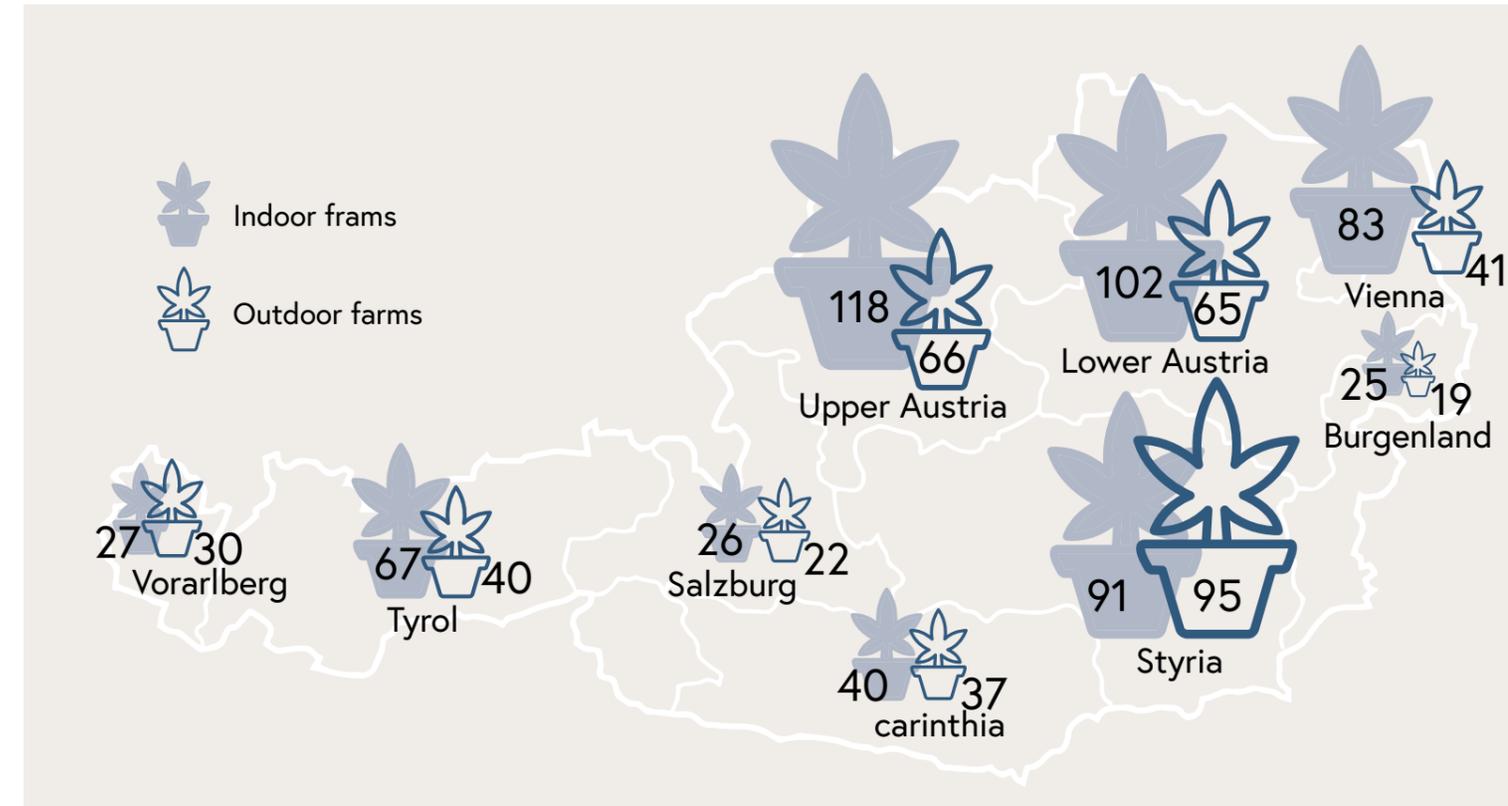
Clandestine drug labs

In 2020, a total of 13 drug laboratories or inactive production sites were detected during police raids – one lab each in Vienna, Styria and Salzburg, two each in Tyrol and four each in Upper Austria and Lower Austria. The drug labs detected in 2020 primarily served to synthesise methamphetamine (crystal meth) and amphetamine. Most production fed the producer’s own addiction, all of whom were Austrian nationals. In two cases, a regional group of buyers were supplied.

Four drug labs did not feature equipment that was in use, but judging by the chemicals found there, (meth-) amphetamine had been synthesised at that site. All methamphetamine (crystal meth) synthesis still went the so-called iodine/red phosphorus route. Like in years past, most labs were located in the provinces of Upper Austria, Lower Austria and Vienna. Intermittently, Styria, Tyrol and Salzburg are affected, too, but not as regularly each year as the provinces mentioned before.

Cannabis farms

In 2020, too, cannabis products dominated the illicit drug market in Austria and the number of discovered cannabis farms rose from 976 in 2019 to 994. The large number of such farms is in part owing to gaps in Austria’s legislation concerning seeds, saplings, equipment and the like.



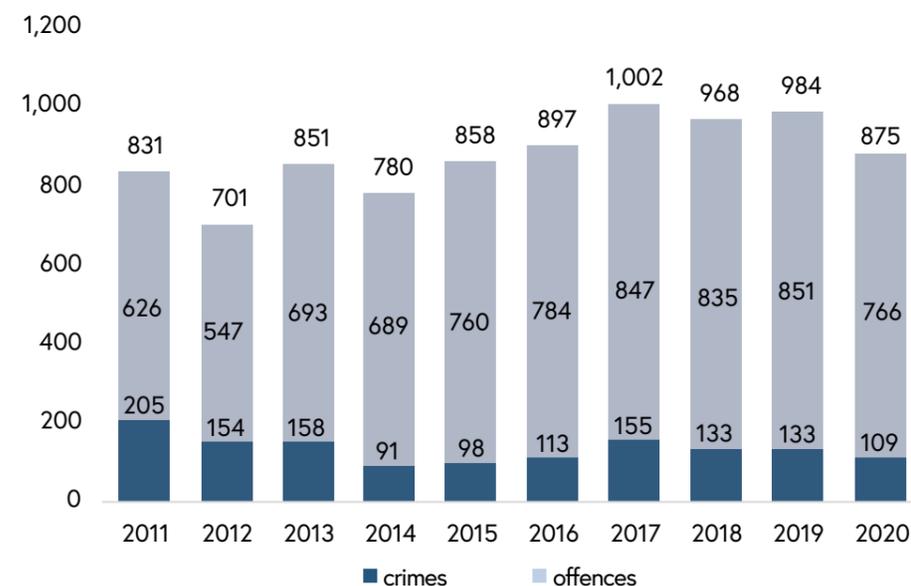
Number of cannabis farms discovered in Austria in 2020

7 The situation in Austria's provinces



Burgenland

Drug-related crime in Burgenland strongly decreased by 11.1% in 2020, from 984 to 875 offences.



Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Burgenland between 2010 and 2020

Approximately 0.3 kg of heroin, 1 g of cocaine, 30.2 kg of cannabis, 36,189 ecstasy tablets, 1.6 kg of amphetamine and 0.7 kg of methamphetamine were seized in Burgenland in 2020.

Narcotic Drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cannabis	44,909.9 g	29,214.7 g	69,361.4 g	28,289.3 g	300,225.8 g
Heroin	1,004.8 g	0.1 g	81.9 g	2,164.5 g	311.5 g
Cocaine	615.6 g	564.4 g	1,553.9 g	82.3 g	987.8 g
Ecstasy	174.0 Stk	43.0 Stk	603.0 Stk	2,003.0 Stk	36,189.0 Stk
Amphetamine	144.1 g	390.6 g	1,653.5 g	908.3 g	1,612.0 g
Methamphetamine	440.8 g	1,612.1 g	867.5 g	1,298.3 g	702.3 g

Drug seizures in Burgenland between 2016 and 2020

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

Nationals from Slovakia, Turkey, the Philippines and to a small extent from Austria and the Czech Republic account for the smuggling of methamphetamine ("meth") from the nearby greater Bratislava area, in most cases to Vienna. Nationals from the Balkans countries, Hungary and in some cases Austria are behind the smuggling of cannabis products, cocaine and heroin along the Balkan route.

It was established that the illegal drugs were not only smuggled from Hungary to Austria across the Burgenland border, but drugs were also smuggled from Western European countries via Austria, or from Austria to Hungary. In isolated cases, small quantities of drugs were brought to Austria on trains. Various smuggling trips were carried out with the help of coaches, trains, passenger cars and taxis. The drugs were often stowed away in hard to find places inside the vehicles, and also on the smugglers' bodies. Cannabis farms were predominantly run by Austrian, and in some cases, Macedonian groups. Police raided both professional farms with several thousands of plants and cultivations with just a few cannabis plants. An increase was noticed in the production and distribution of cannabis products that had high levels of THC and were offered by CBD shops and CBD hemp farmers.

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs

Cannabis products are still the most widely used drug, with a trend of occasional users turning into long-term users. More youths, and in some cases minors below the age of 14, consume and distribute various drugs. Apart from cannabis products, cocaine, heroin, amphetamine and methamphetamine are also common drugs. In individual cases, NPS, LSD and illegally obtained drugs for opioid replacement therapy were seized. Public hot-spots for drug consumption in the greater Eisenstadt area became massively less popular.

Darknet

It was established that drug users relied both on the darknet and on known specialised markets. Cannabis resin ordered on darknet marketplaces saw another uptick.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

In general, only a small presence of NPS was observed.

Developments in the area of acquisitive, accompanying and secondary crime

In the course of a number of arrests made in connection with property crime in the district of Neusiedl, the suspects, many of whom were Slovak nationals, were under the influence of narcotic drugs. Drug investigations often came across property damage and violations of the Weapons and Firearms Act. Conversely, some investigations of robberies and burglaries established a drug-related background.

Outlook

Essentially, no significant changes are expected. Additional patrols of the Bruck an der Leitha railway station and more social workers have been or will be deployed, while the drug coordinator of the province of Burgenland has pledged increased street work for the young generation.

Carinthia

In 2020, drug-related crime in Carinthia plummeted by 11.4% to 2,525 offences from 2,849 in the previous year.



Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Carinthia between 2011 and 2020

In 2020, about 1.2 kg of heroin, 1.1 kg of cocaine, 52 kg of cannabis, 1,115 ecstasy tablets, 0.6 kg of amphetamine and 0.2 kg of methamphetamine were seized in Carinthia.

Narcotic Drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cannabis	29,226.6 g	63,897.6 g	104,900.8 g	94,225.6 g	52,039.5 g
Heroin	836.8 g	2,546.2 g	1,059.9 g	5,858.8 g	1,155.6 g
Cocaine	740.9 g	3,251.8 g	3,608.4 g	1,652.9 g	1,108.5 g
Ecstasy	2,168.3 Stk	384.0 Stk	805.0 Stk	1,150.0 Stk	1,115.0 Stk
Amphetamine	435.5 g	1,487.9 g	4,482.2 g	2,027.4 g	602.2 g
Methamphetamine	34.9 g	189.9 g	166.1 g	548.2 g	22.5 g

Seized drugs in Carinthia between 2016 and 2020

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

Nigerian criminal groups still control cocaine trafficking in the city and outskirts of Klagenfurt. Despite large-scale drug control measures and equally large successes, a renewed gradual increase in the number of these groups and a reshuffling of partly existing structures and hierarchies was observed.

Most of the drugs that found their way into Carinthia were smuggled on coaches or trains from France and Italy.

Cannabis trafficking was predominantly carried out by Afghan groups, who have meanwhile expanded into other drug types such as ecstasy tablets and cocaine. These groups are most active in the cities of Klagenfurt and Villach, but also have close ties to Afghan compatriots in Vienna from whom they buy illegal cannabis products. These products are then transported by rail or through hired drivers from Vienna to Carinthia. The majority of cannabis farms located in Carinthia were attributed to Austrian offenders.

Heroin trafficking, especially in the city of Klagenfurt, was mostly controlled by Chechen groups. These criminal groups have taken over or claimed the trafficking business within a short period of time and are characterised by brutality, extortion and physical abuse. For instance, by using massive threats and violence, they tried to coerce Chechen nationals living in Carinthia into selling heroin.

The problem of Austrian residents buying heroin and cocaine in Slovenia persisted in 2020. Like in previous years, Austrians either purchased the drugs directly in Slovenia or Slovene nationals brought the drugs to Carinthia, often by driving rental cars.

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs

Illegal cannabis products, notably herbal cannabis, were still the most widely used drugs. As seen in previous years, drug consumption shifted towards private spaces. Juvenile users tended to experiment with mixing substances, especially pharmaceuticals with illicit drugs.

Darknet

Ordering illicit drugs on the darknet has become a fixture.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Most NPS were ordered on the internet and darknet, both for personal consumption and for resale. It should be noted that the effectiveness of the drugs kept growing.

Developments in the area of acquisitive, accompanying and secondary crime

No unusual activities were detected. Apparently, these types of crime stabilised at a moderate level.

Outlook

A continuously high demand for opiates, especially heroin, was discernible. The number of orders placed on the internet and darknet continued to go up.

Lower Austria

In 2020, drug-related crime in Lower Austria dropped by 5.4% to 4,839 offences from 5,115 offences in the previous year.

Reported violations of Narcotics Drugs Act in Lower Austria between 2011 and 2020



In 2020, approx. 26.1 kg of heroin, 5.9 kg of cocaine, 314.8 kg of cannabis, 1,100 ecstasy tablets, 4.3 kg of amphetamine, 0.5 kg of methamphetamine and 1,012 kg of khat were seized in Lower Austria.

Seized drugs in Lower Austria between 2016 and 2020

Narcotic drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cannabis	233,899.7 g	222,063.1 g	370,335.9 g	207,806.8 g	314,784.8 g
Heroin	2,150.0 g	1,962.7 g	32,841.0 g	29,392.3 g	26,100.1 g
Cocaine	7,702.3 g	18,274.7 g	16,224.5 g	11,762.9 g	5,889.5 g
Ecstasy	2,518.2 Stk	9,217.0 Stk	2,405.0 Stk	6,254.0 Stk	1,100.0 Stk
Amphetamine	5,814.9 g	6,030.3 g	5,632.7 g	4,279.5 g	4,297.5 g
Methamphetamine	383.9 g	930.2 g	2,856.3 g	5,468.6 g	467.6 g
Khat	71,203.0 g	549,740.8 g	448,689.0 g	89,500.0 g	1,012,000.0 g

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

Serbian groups still dominated heroin trade and indoor cultivation of herbal cannabis in Lower Austria. Serbian pushers distributed the heroin to buyers in Vienna, and to a smaller extent in Lower Austria. As the drugs were of high quality, they often sold the heroin for a profit, thus funding their own addiction.

Afghan groups dominated the street sale of herbal cannabis in St. Pölten and Wiener Neustadt.

International criminal groups, including some from the Western Balkans, regularly smuggled large volumes of heroin and herbal cannabis along motorways from the Balkans to Central and Western Europe, and in the other direction they smuggled cocaine and synthetic drugs. With the help of information obtained from international cooperations, Lower Austria was identified as a growing transit hub for smuggling runs, mostly with articulated lorries, for very large quantities of heroin, cocaine, synthetic drugs and herbal cannabis. From Slovakia and the Czech Republic, dealers of minor importance and to a lesser degree end consumers illegally smuggled methamphetamine in their private cars into the province. However, this influx was apparently dampened by the various Covid-19 measures.

Police raided numerous cannabis farms in Lower Austria in 2020. Small-scale farms and cultivations were almost exclusively run by Austrian nationals, while large-scale farms comprising several hundreds of cannabis plants were operated by groups from Serbia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Police managed to dismantle two meth labs in Lower Austria. In one such raid in the district of St. Pölten, one Austrian national was caught while in the process of synthesising methamphetamine. In the district of Gänserndorf, a mobile lab operated by Austrian offenders was seized.

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs

The number of cannabis users is still at a high level. Illegal consumption of ecstasy tablets kept rising. Several years ago, ecstasy tablets and amphetamines were mostly used as party drugs. By now, it has emerged that such drugs are also used at home and without company, for example to get a better grip on everyday life. Like in past years, the number of meth users is high, although the Covid-19 situation resulted in more inspections at the borders with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, thus hampering access to this drug. The high number of heroin users remained constant, even though the first lockdown caused supply shortages. Serbian groups in particular, who were dominant in the east of the province, managed to supply enough drugs in the course of 2020.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

This crime area increased slightly compared to 2019. Like in other areas, a trend of placing large numbers of online orders for small quantities was observed.

Darknet

In 2020, a total of 390 investigations were conducted in Lower Austria into drug buyers who ordered the drugs online. The majority of the offences were detected thanks to focused checks of the mail sorting centre Wien-Inzersdorf and checks by the provincial CID of parcel delivery services. The decline in solved cases can be attributed to the measures taken during the first lockdown.

Developments in the area of acquisitive, accompanying and secondary crime

No significant changes over the previous years and nor new trends were identified.

Outlook

Online orders are expected to keep climbing, especially of synthetic drugs, not least because an end to the Covid-19 situation is not in sight. There is an expected increase in highly professional indoor cannabis farms operated by Serbian groups, as they already have a functioning infrastructure at their disposal, ranging from buildings to buyers of cannabis products.

Vienna International Airport

The fallout of the Covid-19 situation had a major impact on commercial air travel in 2020. As national and international borders closed and travel restrictions were introduced, air travel almost came to a halt. At Vienna International Airport, this led to a slump in passenger numbers and a strong decrease in seizures from South America and European countries.

Like in 2019, Africa was the predominant region in terms of drug seizures. Bole Airport in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, turned out a major smuggling hub for heroin trafficking to Vienna. For smuggling runs to the final destination Italy, mostly carried out by Nigerian and Spanish nationals, Austria exclusively served as a transit country. The average amounts seized ranged between 1 and 5 kg, but total seizures rose dramatically to about 25 kg compared to roughly 15 kg seized in 2019. By contrast, cocaine smuggling dropped strongly, to about 10 kg from about 16 kg in the previous year. Starting from Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, cocaine was smuggled via Vienna International Airport to Brussels, in most cases by Nigerian body packers. Cocaine seizures from South America fell to almost zero. There was only one interception of a Latvian smuggler carrying about 5 kg of cocaine, who flew from São Paulo via Addis Ababa to Vienna and his intended destination was Marseille. Seizures of cannabis products also went down.

Strict Covid-19 measures on air travel led to the seizure of about 2 kg cocaine smuggled by a Nigerian body packer from Brussels to Vienna. Seizures of khat plants in air travel, totalling more than 200 kg, were up 187% over the previous year. Khat was smuggled to Vienna International Airport from the airport in Tel Aviv, in most cases by Israeli youths or young adults. If it had not been intercepted, this khat, which was not destined for Austria, would have been transported to the Netherlands by land.

In 2020, khat seizures surged in the freight sector of Vienna International Airport. In just two interceptions alone, more than 800 kg of dried khat was confiscated. In both cases, Somalian groups operating out of Vienna were identified as organisers, and the smuggling route was found to lead from Lagos, Nigeria, via Istanbul to Vienna. Parts of the drug shipments were destined for both Austria and Germany.

Moreover, in the course of freight import/export, 82 of herbal cannabis was seized. An attempt by a South African group to smuggle drugs concealed in rubber granulate from Johannesburg to Vienna via Zurich Airport was thwarted at Zurich Airport. The drugs were destined for the UK.

Seizures of narcotic drugs and NPS at the airport re-routing post office rose significantly. The number of seized drug parcels nearly doubled, thanks in part to staff from customs administration in air travel who were available to assist operations in the re-routing post office and freight department.

Upper Austria

In 2020, drug-related crime in Upper Austria rose by 4% to 7,468 offences from 7,178 offences a year earlier.

Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Upper Austria between 2011 and 2020



In 2020, about 1.9 kg of heroin, 4.3 kg of cocaine, 274.9 kg of cannabis, 2,074 ecstasy tablets, 8.9 kg of amphetamine and 0.7 kg of methamphetamine were seized in Upper Austria.

Drug seizures in Upper Austria between 2016 and 2020

Narcotic drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cannabis	104,756.4 g	225,067.6 g	112,857.6 g	122,678.4 g	274,900.5 g
Heroin	1,076.7 g	1,377.0 g	1,032.8 g	1,211.8 g	1,827.2 g
Cocaine	10,698.8 g	6,478.2 g	7,234.0 g	4,862.2 g	4,345.9 g
Ecstasy	5,524.5 Stk	407,407.0 Stk	4,490.0 Stk	24,031.0 Stk	2,074.0 Stk
Amphetamine	13,908.8 g	14,518.9 g	8,209.5 g	13,694.3 g	8,853.2 g
Methamphetamine	347.2 g	516.8 g	294.7 g	1,893.4 g	696.0 g
Khat				8,050.0 g	

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

Hardly any changes were noticed in the composition of active criminal groups in 2020. The scene was dominated by Albanian groups who were mainly composed of Kosovo Albanians, a few North Macedonians and occasionally Albanians. Some individual criminal groups were found to be linked, though they only collaborated in smuggling.

For the most part, cocaine was illegally imported from the Balkans to Austria and Upper Austria in particular, but also from Holland and Belgium. Most illegal cannabis products arrived in Austria in large batches from Albania, some of which were smuggled via Italy. The Czech Republic was no insignificant source of said drugs. Heroin mostly found its way to Upper Austria from Vienna. Coaches continued to be widely used for smuggling drugs. Street trade of heroin and marijuana in Linz and Wels was largely controlled by Afghan refugees with varying asylum statuses. They procured most of the drugs from Afghan criminal groups in Vienna. In addition to these groups of offenders, sub-Saharan Africans, predominantly Nigerian nationals, were active in the street trade in Linz. They shifted dealing to the evening and night hours, thus significantly evading public perception. Illegal cocaine trafficking was still dominated by criminal groups from the Dominican Republic. Stepped up inspections at the airports in Munich and Vienna pushed the smuggling routes towards Eastern Europe. Resales most often went directly to consumers and small-scale buyers. Furthermore, Italian nationals close to mafia-like groups were active in the area of cocaine trade, although their focus was on money laundering and, more recently, property trading in the Linz area.

Illegal cannabis farms reached all-time highs in 2020, most of which were run by groups from Austria and Germany thanks to their big technical knowledge. Investigators faced big challenges, as offenders combined CBD cultivation with illegal hemp cultivation, founded associations or companies, and often received legal advice, thus exploiting legal loopholes. One illegal drug lab was shut down in Linz, the perpetrators being one Austrian and two Czech nationals. Also, there were some suspected cases. No big changes were observed in this area.

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs

A trend was observed by drug users to shift from methamphetamines to cocaine and amphetamines, possibly due to an oversupply of cocaine and the easy availability or the low price of amphetamines offered on the internet and darknet. But the problem of polydrug abuse generally persisted, especially among young people.

Darknet

Following an initial and short-term decline in 2020, the number of orders of narcotic drugs placed on darknet marketplaces rose again and was at a high level, probably due to fewer inspections.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

These substances were slightly more prevalent than in 2019 and were almost exclusively ordered online.

Developments in the area of acquisitive, accompanying and secondary crime

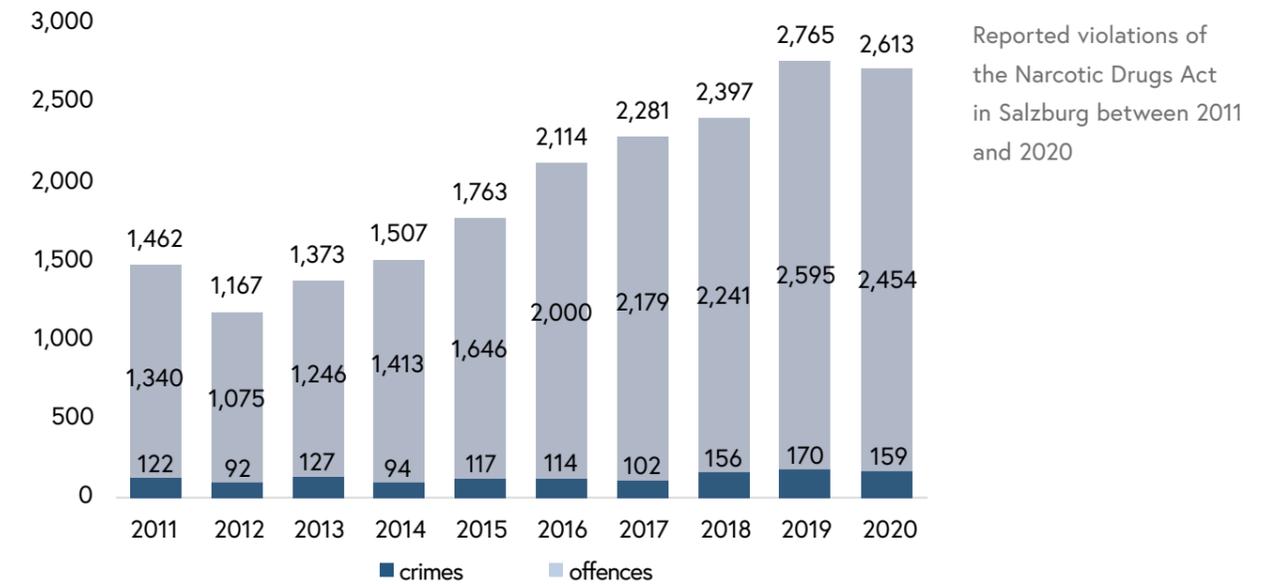
No significant changes over the previous year were detected

Outlook

The constant increase in illegal cannabis abuse in connection with an apparently rising CBD issue is posing a growing challenge, especially to investigating authorities at the base level. Illegal cannabis products are often advertised as CBD products, making it virtually impossible for officers on site to discriminate between those two without chemical analysis, enormously driving up requirements for criminal investigation infrastructure.

Salzburg

In Salzburg, there was a 5.5 % decrease in drug-related crime in 2020 compared to the previous year, from 2,765 to 2,613 offences.



In 2020, drug-related crime in Salzburg dropped by 5.5% to 2,613 offences from 2,765 offences in the previous year.

Narcotic drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cannabis	40,330.0 g	164,636.1 g	82,611.3 g	160,002.5 g	41,198.3 g
Heroin	6,124.4 g	381.7 g	191.7 g	2,140.4 g	232.4 g
Cocaine	3,443.3 g	2,256.5 g	2,857.0 g	6,196.6 g	1,819.2 g
Ecstasy	1,688.7 Stk	1,270.0 Stk	328.0 Stk	7,908.0 Stk	6,023.0 Stk
Amphetamine	3,480.0 g	5,344.1 g	20,187.2 g	4,941.9 g	3,407.1 g
Methamphetamine	12.2 g	83.3 g	100.1 g	398.0 g	330.5 g

Drug seizures in Salzburg between 2016 and 2020

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

Thanks to its geographical location, Salzburg has been a transit country for drug transport and a trading hub for illicit drugs. The criminal groups that were most active or most prevalent predominantly hailed from Bosnia, Serbia, Macedonia and Croatia or from Austria with a migration background from the aforementioned countries.

In most cases, they smuggled illicit drugs from their home countries via the Balkan route (Hungary and Slovenia) to Austria and on to Salzburg. The contraband mainly consisted of illegal cannabis products, cocaine and amphetamine, with a discernible increase in purity. These criminal groups were increasingly armed, be it with firearms or prohibited weapons. Criminal groups from North Africa and Afghanistan were responsible for trafficking in illegal cannabis products, mainly herbal cannabis, in the city of Salzburg and in the countryside. These groups had good connections and purchased their drugs from other criminal groups in Vienna.

It should be noted that the Netherlands, too, was a source of trafficking of cocaine, amphetamine and cannabis products via Germany to Austria. The drugs were transported in private vehicles, taxis, trains, coaches and also airplanes. An increase in both heroin and LSD use was observed. Several indoor and outdoor cannabis farms were dismantled in 2020, and they primarily served to meet the offenders' own demand or to sell the produced drugs among acquaintances. Two small-scale meth labs were also seized, in which the drugs were synthesised for the offenders' own use or for the demand of their acquaintances.

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs

The increasing abuse of illegal cannabis products was largely seen in youths, who also used more cocaine, amphetamine and ecstasy tablets. Youths often worked as subdealers in order to fund their own addiction.

Darknet

More young consumers ordered illicit drugs on specialised darknet marketplaces. The quantities per order climbed, too, suggesting that more of the ordered drugs were passed on or sold.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Most of such substances were bought on the darknet, but hardly played any role in street-level drug trade.

Developments in the area of acquisitive, accompanying and secondary crime

Property crime, in particular robbery, theft and theft by breaking and entering, but also growing numbers of benefit fraud were established in this connection.

Outlook

An increase in drug-related crime is expected, with trafficking over the darknet posing a tougher challenge for all law enforcement engaged in combating drug crime.

Styria

In 2020, drug-related crime in Styria fell sharply by 15.3% to 4,235 offences from 5,000 offences in the previous year

Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Styria between 2011 and 2020



In 2020, about 5.6 kg of heroin, 4.3 kg of cocaine, 239.4 kg of cannabis, 7,278 ecstasy tablets, 6.9 kg of amphetamine and 0.8 kg of methamphetamine were seized in Styria.

Drug seizures in Styria between 2016 and 2020

Narcotic drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cannabis	111,151.7 g	292,471.0 g	123,017.2 g	144,470.0 g	239,361.6 g
Heroin	38,531.8 g	268.4 g	88.5 g	531.9 g	5,591.7 g
Cocaine	8,066.1 g	5,430.9 g	2,344.0 g	1,766.8 g	4,309.4 g
Ecstasy	2,199.9 Stk	2,742.0 Stk	4,751.0 Stk	8,279.0 Stk	7,278.0 Stk
Amphetamine	7,479.0 g	2,323.5 g	5,635.7 g	16,512.4 g	6,850.4 g
Methamphetamine	105.8 g	214.9 g	178.1 g	5,924.7 g	812.7 g
Khat		660.0 g			

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

In all of Styria's 13 districts and in its capital Graz, narcotic drugs were purchased, used and distributed. Substances listed in the New Psychoactive Substances Act were somewhat less prevalent, whereas heroin still accounted for a massive part of the drug scene. Cannabis products continued to rank first on Styria's drug market.

In order to satisfy the large demand, cannabis products were farmed and processed locally, but were also imported from abroad. In terms of prevalence, cannabis was closely followed by cocaine, amphetamine and ecstasy tablets. The hotspot for drug trafficking in Styria continued to be Graz, and an increase was noticed in the greater Graz area and in the Graz Basin, just like the strong connection of the local market to Vienna. Investigations show that neighbouring countries in the east and south were a major source of narcotic drugs. Covid-19-related measures such as the introduction of border checks put a damper on this trend, but not to an extent to cause a significant decline. Due to its geographical location, Styria turned out an international hub for smuggling drugs from the Western Balkan states to Western, Central and Northern Europe, and vice versa, starting from the Netherlands.

Highly active criminal groups came from the Western Balkan states such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo and Albania, but also from Croatia and Slovenia. There were hardly any individual offenders, so organisations, groups and clans gained a lot of importance. Moreover, there was a tendency by offenders and their henchmen to withdraw from international drug crime to Styria, where they invested their criminal funds into assets such as property. A similar development or the formation of a subculture was noticeable with nationals from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Pakistan, where Afghans, in particular, pushed into the market with marijuana or claimed street vending for themselves. This was an observation made in other Styrian districts as well. Against this backdrop, numerous cooperations were traced back to Afghan criminal groups in Vienna, but also in Albania and the Czech Republic, which were able to supply copious amounts of marijuana. Gangs from Chechnya should not be overlooked, as they gained a foothold and entered close cooperations with Afghan and Czech groups. Criminal groups from North and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as individuals from Romania, Turkey and the Dominican Republic became less prevalent, while domestic offenders were rare.

Both indoor and outdoor cannabis farms used for the production of narcotic drugs were successfully identified and dismantled. Most of these farms were small in scale, comprising up to 50 plants, but there were also some large farms comprising several hundreds of plants. A rise in Slovene offenders was noticed near the border around Leibnitz. They rented buildings in order to set up indoor farms, probably in a bid to circumvent stricter legislation and prosecution in Slovenia.

Producers and traders of illegal cannabis products often argue that they only produce or sell CBD hemp, either out of ignorance of the law or as a lie to escape prosecution. The current loopholes in the legal system generally tend to make investigations rather difficult.

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs

Consumer behaviour has hardly changed over the past few years and has not resulted in any novelties. As before, users apparently like to mix drugs. Depending on the target demographic, marijuana, cocaine, amphetamine, methamphetamine and ecstasy tablets are in high demand. Use of replacement drugs containing morphine and benzodiazepine in combination with alcohol resulted in multiple deaths.

Darknet

The darknet has become a major source of illicit drugs in Styria. Thanks to checks abroad and at home, more than 500 letters and parcels that contained illicit drugs and were addressed to all districts of Styria were seized. Most of the mailed drugs were of high quality and sometimes weighed several kilograms.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

As a rule, such substances were only ordered on the internet. On the way to the buyer, many postal deliveries were intercepted. These substances did not seem to be traded openly on the streets.

Developments in the area of acquisitive, accompanying and secondary crime

Acquisitive and accompanying crime remained unchanged in 2020, and surfaced in drug hotspots in the city of Graz – in particular minor robberies, low-level thefts and thefts by breaking and entering. In Styria as a whole, however, no increases were observed.

Outlook

Drug-related crime is not expected to shrink, especially because offenders and consumers lack awareness of wrongdoing, existing penalties are insufficient, and illicit drugs can be easily obtained on darknet markets and on the internet. The problem is expected to be exacerbated as criminal groups act more professionally, be it through communication on encrypted end devices or through close-knit ethnic groups that do not leak information.

Tyrol

In 2020, drug-related crime in Tyrol rose by 6.2% to 4,495 offences from 4,231 offences a year earlier.



In 2020, drug-related crime in Tyrol rose by 6.2% to 4,495 offences from 4,231 offences a year earlier.

In 2020, about 0.2 kg of heroin, 7.4 kg of cocaine, 155.8 kg of cannabis, 15,901 ecstasy tablets, 4.2 kg of amphetamine and 0.2 kg of methamphetamine were seized in Tyrol.

Narcotic drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cannabis	152,058.4 g	106,502.4 g	101,802.0 g	83,288.5 g	155,778.9 g
Heroin	85.8 g	219.1 g	68.5 g	158.1 g	215.6 g
Cocaine	13,211.5 g	1,421.7 g	8,092.4 g	5,574.4 g	7,368.5 g
Ecstasy	1,011.3 Stk	2,080.0 Stk	2,430.0 Stk	1,957.0 Stk	15,901.0 Stk
Amphetamine	5,446.8 g	1,226.5 g	3,393.7 g	10,997.1 g	4,173.4 g
Methamphetamine	168.2 g	159.9 g	255.3 g	1,002.7 g	193.6 g
Khat	98.2 g		40,183.2 g	15,680.0 g	

Drug seizures in Tyrol between 2016 and 2020

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

No significant changes were observed in 2020 compared to previous years. In Innsbruck, North African criminal groups are still on the retreat and are being supplanted by Austrians with a migration background and increasingly by other nationals.

Similar to the trend of previous years, groups from North Africa, mostly illegal residents of Austria, arranged the sale of cannabis products and cocaine. In many cases, these drugs were smuggled from northern Italy and in some instances from Northern Europe to Austria and sold there. The transports on trains and in private vehicles are carried out by relatives of the criminal groups and also by Austrian drug addicts. Due to the intense rate of checks, drug sales apparently shifted towards homes, asylum centres and pubs. It should be noted that the criminal groups increasingly use the municipalities surrounding Innsbruck for their criminal activities. A growing number of asylum seekers from the Russian Federation (Chechnya) entered the “bouncer scene” and then moved into trafficking of cocaine and cannabis products. These groups are characterised by an efficient organisation, networking, a tendency to resort to violence and the use of the greater Vienna area to obtain the drugs. Asylum seekers from Afghanistan, no longer a negligible part of the Tyrolean population, appear to have a well-defined hierarchy, act regionally and are closely linked to each other. Apart from cannabis products, they increasingly sold cocaine and ecstasy tablets, and often trafficked these drugs from Vienna to Tyrol. Cocaine and cannabis trade by German and Italian nationals was also on the rise. Italians banded together into large groups and had ties to mafia-type organised crime syndicates such as the Ndrangheta or Cosa Nostra. Naturalised citizens from Turkey and the Balkan states were increasingly both users and sellers of synthetic drugs, which they often bought from their former home countries. Large-quantity drug smuggling from the Balkans to Austria was mainly the domain of citizens of former Yugoslav countries. Most of this contraband consisted of cocaine and cannabis products, which were then distributed by fellow nationals or Austrians. Remarkably, Austrians often banded together with persons of other nationalities in order to commit drug-related crimes together.

Cannabis cultivation, both indoor and outdoor, saw a rise. These farms were exclusively operated by Austrians. Seeds, cuttings and the necessary equipment were ordered online or purchased in various grow shops.

In 2020, a drug lab run by a chemistry student was shut down in a home which contained various chemicals and drugs such as DMT, LSD, ecstasy and amphetamine.

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs

The most frequently used drugs were cannabis products, followed by cocaine and amphetamine, while demand for cocaine was rising. Heroin use was on the decline, although a growing number of addicts had their doctors write them prescriptions for fentanyl. In this connection, one death was recorded.

Darknet

In spite of only sparse checks, the number of seizures was nearly constant compared to a year earlier. Two large shipments from Austria were intercepted in January 2020: one consisting of MDMA and ecstasy tablets containing MDMA, the other comprising 2,000 units of LSD with the destination New Zealand. This raises the suspicion that Austria may be considered a safe country for mailing illicit drugs, which may give rise to future incidents.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Trade in NPS only plays a minor role in the fight against drug crime in Tyrol. Most NPS were intercepted at postal distribution centres after they had been ordered on the darknet.

Developments in the area of acquisitive, accompanying and secondary crime

Apart from drug crimes, nationals from Chechnya, Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria increasingly committed robberies, thefts, damage to property, coercion, bodily injury and serious bodily injury. It was also noticed that youth gangs committed more criminal acts in this regard.

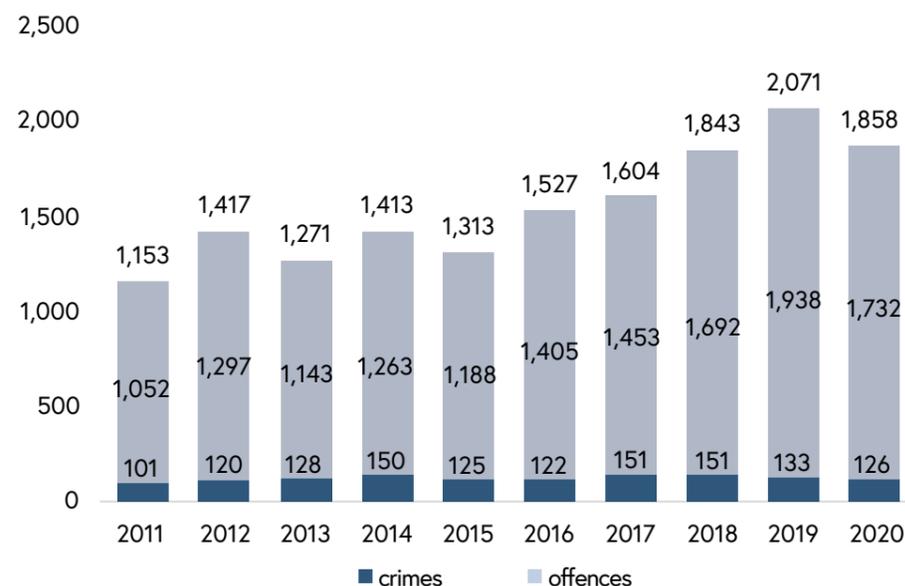
Outlook

Judging by how easy it is to order illicit drugs on darknet marketplaces and on the internet, a strong increase is expected. As mentioned earlier, the number of interceptions stayed the same even though fewer checks were conducted.

Vorarlberg

In 2020, there was a decrease of 10.3 % from 2,071 to 1,858 offences in Vorarlberg compared to the previous year.

Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Vorarlberg between 2011 and 2020



In 2020, about 0.5 kg of heroin, 0.9 kg of cocaine, 20.9 kg of cannabis, 246 ecstasy tablets, 1.2 kg of amphetamine, 0.1 kg of methamphetamine and 8,9 kg of khat were seized in Vorarlberg.

Drug seizures in Vorarlberg between 2016 and 2020

Narcotic drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cannabis	9,752.3 g	24,644.6 g	40,463.4 g	41,198.3 g	20,879.7 g
Heroin	216.6 g	265.6 g	471.4 g	707.4 g	503.6 g
Cocaine	2,444.6 g	3,444.7 g	601.6 g	12,214.6 g	896.1 g
Amphetamine	657.2 g	1,390.7 g	5,278.3 g	1,016.6 g	1,155.7 g
Methamphetamine	27.0 g	49.8 g	226.1 g	1,465.2 g	120.7 g
Ecstasy	409.1 Stk	393.0 Stk	1,360.0 Stk	291.0 Stk	246.0 Stk
Khat				11,350.0 g	8,900.0 g

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

In 2020, smuggling of and trafficking in cocaine and cannabis products was predominantly carried out by Albanian groups that operated in the greater Bregenz and Dornbirn area and across the border into Switzerland. To smuggle the drugs, they preferred using vehicles with special hidden compartments.

Frequently, persons of Turkish descent from the gambling scene turned out to buy drugs from these groups, but also sold them. More homes were rented across Vorarlberg in order to temporarily store cocaine and cannabis products. In some parts, there was a trend to spray CBD products with THC and NPS to raise the concentration above the legal limit of 0.3% and sell it as marijuana. Serbian groups dominated heroin trafficking in and around Bregenz, Dornbirn and Feldkirch. Serbian compatriots were recruited from abroad for the street sale. Cannabis products were mostly produced by Austrians and to a lesser degree by foreigners. They rented buildings in Vorarlberg and Switzerland for indoor cannabis farms and bulk sales of this product. Smaller indoor and outdoor cultivations were also seized.

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs

Consumption of cannabis products, and CBD in particular, was observed to be increasing. Youths and young adults also used MDMA, amphetamine, LSD and ecstasy tablets, most of which were purchased on the internet or darknet. Both cocaine use and purity went up, and heroin was also found to be of a higher quality, while consumption remained at a high level.

Darknet

In 2020, the issue of illicit drug orders on the darknet and its marketplaces was present again, leading to another high number of seizures. Offenders responded very quickly to police action, which is why there is probably a large number of unreported cases. Parcels and letters containing drugs were sent to Vorarlberg from both within Austria and abroad.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

One noticeable trend was to spray CBD products containing low levels of THC with NPS and to sell these altered products.

Developments in the area of acquisitive, accompanying and secondary crime

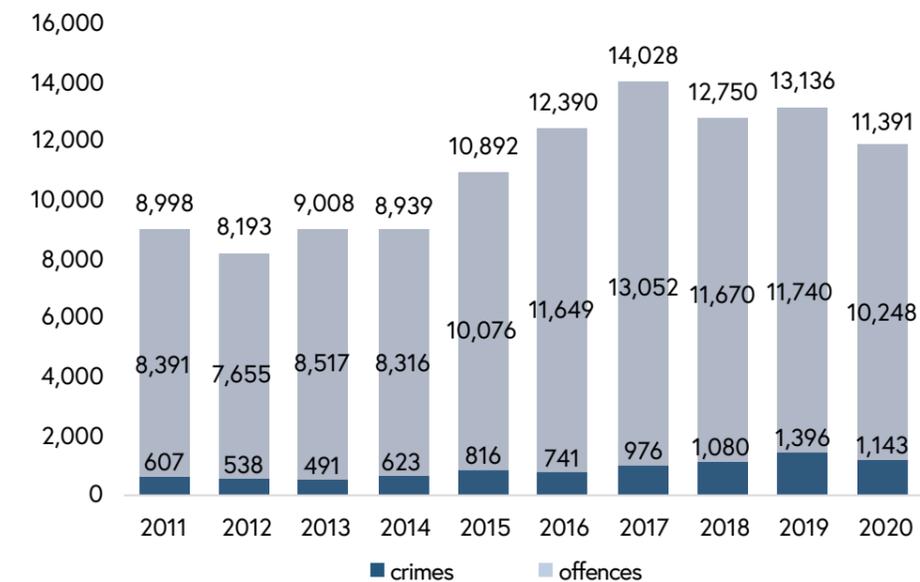
Within the drug scene, repeated robberies and frauds with a significant degree of violence occurred. Unreported cases are believed to be numerous, as victims often shy away from calling the police. It was noticed that drug sellers were increasingly armed. Small dealers carried blank guns, pepper sprays and various prohibited weapons, while big dealers even carried handguns. Time and again, the motive behind property crimes such as theft, burglary and robbery was to fund drug purchases. A new phenomenon was a break-in into CBD greenhouses in Vorarlberg, where the perpetrators focused exclusively on stealing CBD hemp plants.

Outlook

Due to the pervasive campaign to decriminalise and legalise cannabis and the related lack of a sense of wrongdoing, another increase in the consumption of cannabis products is expected, especially among youths and young adults. In particular, the CBD issue will make the work of investigators and authorities massively harder, as these substances were often mixed with THC levels above the legal limit. The number of small cultivations for the production of cannabis products is expected to grow, as seeds and cuttings can be sold legally in Austria and there are no standardised legal provisions at home and abroad. Open borders allow smuggling of illicit drugs nearly without any risks. For instance, in the border region of Vorarlberg, Germany and Switzerland, criminal groups with Albanian roots apparently became established and focused on cross-border cocaine and cannabis trafficking. Offenders behind heroin and cocaine trafficking kept upgrading their equipment so that police forces fell behind, not least because of the legal situation.

Vienna

In 2020, drug-related crime in Vienna plummeted by 13.3% to 11,391 offences from 13,136 offences a year earlier.



In 2020, about 68.3 kg of heroin, 36.3 kg of cocaine, 657.6 kg of cannabis, 19,222 ecstasy tablets, 5.9 kg of amphetamine, 5.9 kg of methamphetamine and 73.9 kg of khat were seized in Vienna.

Narcotic drugs	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Cannabis	356,691.6 g	530,702.3 g	494,283.9 g	485,907.0 g	657,607.3 g
Heroin	18,889.2 g	46,929.2 g	40,526.8 g	52,478.9 g	68,334.8 g
Cocaine	39,526.1 g	30,302.1 g	32,474.7 g	43,007.2 g	36,260.1 g
Ecstasy	13,791.1 Stk	22,929.0 Stk	65,865.0 Stk	26,049.0 Stk	19,222.0 Stk
Amphetamine	50,283.1 g	17,555.5 g	22,297.9 g	67,836.8 g	5,886.4 g
Methamphetamine	3,280.4 g	1,279.5 g	3,055.9 g	12,198.7 g	5,891.9 g
Khat	380,000.0 g	83,055.6 g	45,120.0 g	147,625.7 g	73,870.2 g

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

Among Afghan criminal groups, there was a slightly higher incidence of drug-related crime over the previous year. These groups only operated seasonally in the summer months, in clearly defined localities and exclusively in the trafficking of small amounts of cannabis products and amphetamines in the form of ecstasy tablets.

Drug-related crime was considered by these groups as a side activity. There is no such thing as purely “Afghan criminal groups”, however, as these groups were seen collaborating with individuals of other migration backgrounds such as Turkey, the Russian Federation and so on, in the commission of various criminal activities. In many cases, these drugs were sourced from the Czech Republic, although quantities in cross-border smuggling of cannabis tended to be in the 1-2 kg range.

Criminal groups from Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro still have the leading position in drug-related crime in Vienna. They are also responsible for various criminal activities and accompanying crimes. Criminal groups from Serbia and Montenegro deal in heroin, cocaine and cannabis products throughout the urban area of Vienna. Austrian nationals often act as subdealers for these groups or provide their homes for drug caches or as safe houses. The criminal groups were characterised by a highly professional and strategic approach, excellent connections to the Balkan states, a large network in Europe and ruthless behaviour. The smuggling runs were carried out at least once a week along the main traffic routes across Europe, disguised as food transports. Serbian gangs increasingly used addicts as so-called runners, who only distributed small amounts of narcotics. The quality of the cocaine and heroin sold over the past few years increased steadily. The purity of seized cocaine sometimes exceeded 90% and purity of heroin reached up to 50%. Heroin in relatively small quantities was smuggled from temporary storage sites in the Balkans to Austria, in most cases by car or on coaches. Oftentimes, Austria was used as transit country for large quantities stored in Germany, from where small quantities were brought back to Austria. Cocaine was primarily smuggled from temporary storage sites via Holland to Germany and on to Austria. Cannabis products were still in high demand, and were produced in homes rented for this purpose in Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland. As various criminal groups were involved in the real estate business, they had easy access to such properties. At the same time, large indoor farms operated in warehouses in former Yugoslav countries were detected, from where the contraband was smuggled into various EU countries. Austrian offenders were not structurally organised, but acted alone. Most of them were youths or young adults who exploited digital possibilities that afforded them relatively secure anonymity. Persian and Turkish groups were especially engaged in drug smuggling, were well-organised and had ideal connections to their home countries. Sub-Saharan groups

continued to be on the retreat and were mainly supplanted by Serbian drug runners in street-level trade. This was probably owing in part to the poor quality of the drugs. Sub-Saharan offenders are nevertheless still present at transport hubs and gathering points of the drug scene. Most of the drugs came from South America and were smuggled by body packers to Austria via North European countries and often on trains, coaches or in cars. Criminal groups from the Maghreb dominated street trade of marijuana which, however, declined due to the curfews imposed as part of the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Police and criminal investigations found indoor and outdoor cannabis farms once a month on average. Most of these were small cultivations run by Austrian offenders and comprising up to 50 plants. By contrast, professional and large-scale cannabis farms were operated by Serbian criminal groups.

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs

Consumer behaviour and abuse of illicit drugs did not change significantly in 2020. High-impact checks in gambling establishment merely uncovered a higher prevalence of crystal meth. Heroin replacement drugs continued to be misused or were often sold in order to fund the purchase of heroin. Consumption of and trade in synthetic substances such as amphetamine and ecstasy tablets saw a decline or was perceived less often.

Darknet

An increase in the number of drug orders on the darknet as well as in the quantities ordered was observed in 2020. These platforms offer both users and sellers a source of supply with a low risk of detection. The Vienna Provincial CID interviewed individuals who were identified as possible drug buyers. Due to a lack of evidence and only marginal avenues of investigation, the initial suspicion could often not be corroborated and did not result in criminal charges.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Most NPS were ordered on the internet or darknet and then mailed to buyers. In individual cases, khat shipments were made to Austria that contained NPS and were destined for West African buyers.

Outlook

Street vending declined again, although offenders exhibited a much more professional behaviour. More decentralisation away from hotspots is expected, forcing investigators to adopt new tactics. Online orders of illicit drugs placed on the darknet and internet are on the rise. The numbers are expected to increase, as offenders feel protected by supposed anonymity and get access without much insider knowledge.

8 Legal Situation



The chief penal provisions for drug-related crime

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 ("Suchtmittelgesetz" or SMG)

Sec 27 – Illegal Handling of Narcotic Drugs

(1) Anyone who

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
3. 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 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 or in any other place accessible to the general public, shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding two years.

(3) Anyone who commits a criminal act as specified in para 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 para 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 para 3, 4 (2) chiefly for the purpose of procuring himself a narcotic drug for personal use or the means to buy it, shall merely be punished with imprisonment of up to one year.

Sec 28 – Preparation of Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs

(1) Anyone who purchases, possesses or transports a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding the threshold quantity specified in sec 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 sec 27, para 1 (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 para 1 involving a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity specified in sec 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 para 1 as a member of a criminal association shall be liable to imprisonment ranging from one to ten years.

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

Sec 28a – Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs

(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 sec 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 para 1 above

1. as a regular source of income and has been previously convicted of an offence as described in para 1
2. as a member of a criminal association, or
3. involving a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity (large quantity).

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

(4) The punishment shall be imprisonment ranging from one to fifteen years if an offender commits a criminal act as specified in para 1 above

1. as a member of a criminal association, was previously convicted of an offence as described in para 1,
2. as a member of an association of a larger number of people conspiring to commit such offences, or
3. involving a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding twenty-five times the threshold 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 para 1 above and is a leading player in an association of a larger number of people conspiring to commit such offences.

Penal provisions for psychotropic substances

Sec 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 imprisonment of up to six months or with a fine of up to 360 daily rates.

(3) An act as specified in paras 1 and 2 above shall not be prosecuted as a criminal offence if a person acquires, possesses, transports, imports, or exports a medication containing a psychotropic substance for personal use or for administration to an animal, or

1. offers to supply such a medication to another person, passes it on to another person, or procures it for another person without material benefit
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 provided that the quantity involved does not exceed the threshold quantity as specified in sec 31b.

Sec 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 sec 31b with intent to distribute it shall be liable to imprisonment of up to two years.

(2) The punishment shall be imprisonment not exceeding five years if an offender commits a criminal act as specified in para 1 above involving a psychotropic substance in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity specified in sec 31b (large quantity).

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

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

Sec 31a – 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 sec 31b shall be liable to imprisonment of up to three years.

(2) The punishment shall be imprisonment not exceeding five years if an offender commits a criminal act as specified in para 1 above involving a psychotropic substance in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity specified in sec 31b (large quantity).

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

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

Sec 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 threshold quantity in terms of pure substance of the active agent capable of jeopardizing the life and health of people in larger doses (threshold quantity). Sec 28, second sentence, shall apply mutatis mutandis.

Penal provisions for drug precursor substances

Sec 32 – Illegal Handling of Drug Precursor Substances

(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 narcotic drugs 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 narcotic drugs contrary to regulations in a quantity exceeding the threshold quantity as specified in sec 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 narcotic drugs contrary to regulations in a quantity exceeding the threshold quantity as specified in sec 28b and 31b respectively shall be punished with a term of imprisonment not exceeding five years.

New Psychoactive Substances Act (NPSG)

Sec 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 sec 3 or defined pursuant to sec 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 serious bodily injury (sec 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.

9 Types of illicit drugs



The most commonly abused illicit drugs in Austria

The description of the individual narcotic substances, with the exception of khat plants (source: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, EMCDDA) on the following pages was provided by "Suchthilfe Wien GmbH". This institution offers a wide range of services: prevention, advanced training, information, drug education, counseling, 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 (also called "hash" or "dope") 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.

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. In the brain, THC binds to the recently discovered cannabinoid receptors whose exact functions are yet unknown. 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, import and export of cannabis, the procurement for and handing over to others (distribution and sale) is a punishable offence and may result in monetary penalties and imprisonment. Anyone who passes on a "joint" in convivial company – without taking a single puff themselves - is liable to criminal prosecution for possession or distribution of narcotic drugs. When a crime report is filed for the purchase and possession of a small quantity of cannabis for personal use, it is suspended by the public prosecutor's office for a probationary period of two years. Unless charges of purchase and possession of narcotics have been preferred within the last five years, the public prosecutor's office may abstain from involving the public health authority and suspend the charges immediately. 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. Illicit, non-medical heroin, called "H", "brown", or "poison", is usually diluted by street dealers with substances like glucose, lime, powdered sugar or paracetamol and has, therefore, a relatively low degree of purity (between 15-45%).

Effects

Because of its chemical structure and high fat solubility, heroin enters the brain faster than morphine. The short "approach time" brings about an intensive 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, production, import and export, transfer to and procurement for others (sale) is a punishable offence and may result in fines and 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 an opium alkaloid and acts on the μ -opioid receptor. 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 soluble in water and therefore passes the blood-brain barrier more slowly than fat-soluble opioids, such as heroin. As all other opioids, it stimulates the opioid and the enkephalin receptors and causes release of dopamine. Morphine is administered orally, rectally or by intramuscular, subcutaneous or intravenous injection. Intravenous administration in non-medical use involves major risks such as the likelihood of overdose or the infection from impure syringes and syringe utensils. When illegally consumed on the streets, morphine is often smoked or „pulled“. It is rapidly transformed in the liver and excreted in the kidneys. Its effect lasts for four to five hours.

Legal Framework

Morphine is subject to medical prescription under the Pharmaceutical Act. Anyone who passes on or sells this drug violates the Narcotic Drugs Act, even if it was initially prescribed by a doctor. Morphine is also subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and its penal provisions concerning psychotropic substances. In particular, the acquisition, possession, production, import and export, transfer to and procurement for others (sale) is a punishable crime and may result in fines and imprisonment.

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 enkepha-

lines). 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 diluted with other substances - usually cutting agents such as milk powder, but also vasoconstrictive, synthetic, analgetic or anaesthetic substances like lidocaine or novocaine.

Typically, cocaine is snuffed, but it can also be administered intravenously (injected). Chemical processing can turn it into the smokable drugs crack or freebase. When smoked, the onset of mental effects is within a few seconds, but the effects last for no more than ten minutes. Crack and free base lead to severe psychological addiction more quickly than cocaine administered through different routes. 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 looks like small, white or light yellow (sometimes pinkish) rocks, with grain sizes ranging from that of sand to 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 enters the bloodstream through the nasal mucous membranes, when crack or free base is smoked, or by injection. Cocaine is fat-soluble, i.e. it passes the blood-brain-barrier and affects 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 a 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 intoxication, the brain needs a few days to rebuild the neurotransmitters, bringing about depressive moods, fatigue and apathy.

Legal Framework

Cocaine and crack are subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act. The acquisition, possession, production, import and export, transfers and sale to others is a punishable crime 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. Originally, only methylenedioxymethylamphetamine (MDMA) was named ecstasy. Over the last ten years, a number of additional amphetamine derivatives with a similar effect have emerged on the black market, and today MDA, MDE, MBDB and other compounds are subsumed under the term ecstasy.

Chemical analyses carried out by international organisations have, however, revealed that often completely different substances, such as speed and non-psychoactive substances such as medicines and placebos, are sold as ecstasy. Some samples include substances that present a major health risk such as atropine or methadone. Ecstasy is taken orally or by nasal route in the form of tablets, capsules or powder. The duration of action depends on the dosage, the route of administration and personal factors such as body weight, gender or previous food intake. The effect of an average dose of ecstasy lasts from 3 to 6 hours, the effect of an average MDA dose up to 12 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. Addicts report fatigue, exhaustion, confusion, sadness and depressive moods. The human brain takes up to four weeks to rebuild its natural serotonin level.

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 orally or, less frequently, smoked or injected. Crystal meth (ice, crystal) is a crystalline, smokable form of methamphetamine that produces euphoria for several hours and has a very high addictiveness. Typically, amphetamine is diluted with other substances before being sold on the black market.

Effects

Amphetamine reaches the bloodstream through the mucous membranes (of the mouth or nose), the stomach or through inhalation and injections. Amphetamine is fat-soluble, i.e. it passes the blood-brain-barrier and affects the brain. Amphetamine causes an increased release of the neurotransmitters norepinephrine and dopamine in the brain by pushing them out of the storage vesicles and into the synaptic gap. Both norepinephrine and dopamine belong to the catecholamines like adrenaline. Depending on the dosage, they bring about a number of physical and mental distortions. Once speed has been degraded in the body, it no longer influences any neurotransmitters. The brain now needs a few days to restore neurotransmitter balance. During this period, the effects of speed are reversed: users, who were previously full of energy now feel tired and weak, who were strong and convinced of themselves are now irritated, dissatisfied and lacking in concentration.

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-diethylamide, a semi-synthetic preparation of the ergot drug, is a colourless, tasteless and odourless substance. In general, LSD is generally marketed in the form of paper trips (blotting paper), microtablets ("micros"), tablets and capsules. When the substance is put onto blotting paper or tablets, the dose may vary considerably. 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. Situations in real life can then no longer be assessed in a natural way, as perceptions, voices, thoughts and the line 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.

Khat

Khat or qat is the leaves and fresh tops of *Catha edulis*, an evergreen flowering shrub cultivated in East Africa and in the southwest of the Arabian peninsula. Khat leaves are typically wrapped in banana leaves. The main active agents are cathinone and cathine (norpseudoephedrine). Chewing khat releases these substances into the saliva, and they are quickly absorbed and eliminated. Both cathinone and cathine are closely related to amphetamine, and in terms of quality, the pharmacological effects of cathinone resemble that of amphetamine, though they are weaker. In their chemical structure, both cathinone and cathine are closely related to phenethylamines. Users only chew fresh leaves, as cathinone quickly decays in old or dry parts of the plant.

Effects

Khat consumption has effects similar to that of amphetamine: raised blood pressure, euphoria, enhanced alertness. Once the desired effects subside, users may experience dejection, irritability, lack of appetite and insomnia. Frequent use of high doses may provoke psychotic reactions. As far as the gastrointestinal tract is concerned, constipation and urinary retention may occur. Little is known about the effects of other substances of the khat plant. Euphoria sets in after chewing khat for about one and a half hours. Cathinone levels peak in the blood plasma 1.5-3.5 hours after chewing. Median concentration of the drug (100 ng/ml) is reached after chewing 60 g of fresh khat for one hour. After eight hours, cathinone is almost not traceable in the blood. The first-pass metabolism of cathinone in the liver creates norephedrine. Only 2 % of cathinone is passed unchanged in the urine. Khat consumption has been linked to heart attacks, liver failure and oral cancer, but distorting effects have precluded a definitive correlation.

Legal Framework

In Austria, khat is subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act.

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.

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, the use of psychotropic and psychoactive substances as narcotic drugs, such as their acquisition, possession, production or import and export, is restricted. 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

Sec 32 of the Narcotic Drugs Act defines the illicit handling of drug precursors and contains penal provisions. 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 they detect unusual orders of scheduled substances that 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 alterate mechanisms in the brain that regulate mood, thoughts and memory. Distortion of consciousness may lead up to seizures and coma. So-called intoxicating drugs all have mind-altering effects and can, therefore, be considered psychoactive substances.

Legal Framework

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

