

Drug-Related Crime Annual Report 2024

Reported Violations, Investigations and Seizures

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Seizures

Vienna, 2025

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Foreword

Dear reader,

The fight against drug-related crime represents a complex challenge – both for law enforcement authorities and for society at large. Illegal drug trafficking is a global type of crime that generates billions of euros in revenue in Europe alone and costs the state just as much. Drug-related crime poses a serious threat to security, the economy and social cohesion. Criminal networks operate with a high degree of professionalism, they use violence, corruption and money laundering to assert their interests, thus undermining trust in state institutions.

Last year, trafficking in cocaine and synthetic drugs showed a particular dynamic. Trafficking routes changed frequently, methods were adapted on a regular basis, and a multitude of criminal actors operated on parallel levels. Wherever law enforcement successfully exerts pressure, criminal groups resort to other means and methods. Crypto messenger services are a prime example of this. In this area, law enforcement is at a clear disadvantage due to a lack of capabilities to monitor individual criminals, criminal associations and criminal organisations. As shown in this report, digitalisation is a key driver of developments in the field of drug trafficking. Criminal groups use the darknet, encrypted communication channels and social media to coordinate their activities and evade law enforcement. These digital spaces are difficult to control and require customised and sophisticated avenues of investigation.

Drug-related crime is also closely linked to numerous other offences, ranging from driving under the influence of drugs to murder, arms trafficking and financing of terrorism. Illegal manufacturing processes cause increasing environmental damage and entail new forms of environmental crime. This highlights the need for a holistic approach that goes beyond law enforcement proper to encompass prevention, education and social measures.

An effective fight against drug-related crime can only be achieved through interdisciplinary and cross-border cooperation – between national and international authorities, and with partners from the science, business and civil sectors. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the situation in Austria in 2024, identifies challenges, highlights successes and illustrates the extent to which today's policing is shaped by complex external factors.



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General for Public Security
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General
Andreas Holzer, MA, Director
of Criminal Intelligence
Service Austria
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We would like to express our gratitude to all police officers who work with dedication and professionalism to ensure security in our country, as well as to our national and international partners. Their commitment is an indispensable contribution to the fight against drug-related crime and to the protection of our society.

Franz Ruf, MA,
Director General for Public Security

General Andreas Holzer, MA,
Director of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria

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1

General Information

This chapter describes the methodological approach for drawing up this report, including necessary methodological changes made in 2024.

1.1 Methodology, General Explanations and Definitions

This situation report on drug-related crime is primarily based on the Police-Recorded Crime Statistics as well as on crime-specific experiences and insights gained in the framework of criminal policing. It should be noted, however, that the resources allocated to the fight against drug-related crime also influence the development of drug-related crime.

Until 2014, the narcotic drugs statistics of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior (BMI) were kept independently of the Police-Recorded Crime Statistics, but were merged with them in 2015. This involved automatic quality control and led to an increase in data quality. In addition, it provided the feature to record additional parameters, which enhanced the retrieval of information from the statistics.

Interpreting this data requires special attention and should always be done by considering relevant additional information. Extensive investigations may take months or even years and are integrated into the statistics only after completion. Against this backdrop, monthly or annual fluctuations of the reported violations are not to be considered out of the norm. 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 information.

The chapter „Situation of Drug-Related Crime in Austria’s Provinces“ provides an overview of the situation of drug-related crime based on information provided by the heads of the respective investigative units at the provincial CIDs (called „EB 09“). This chapter describes the development of drug-related crime in Austria’s nine provinces with regard to the number of reported violations, quantities of seized substances, information about criminal groups, transport routes, drug farms, labs, new psychoactive substances, consumer behaviour, online drug trafficking, trends in acquisitive, accompanying and subsequent crime as well as intelligence in the field of money laundering, terrorist financing and asset recovery. Each report for the respective province ends with a short outlook on 2025 and a representative case study. The input from each province is based on a standardised questionnaire with specific questions and guidelines as well as explanations from the Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria (BK/3.3).

The collected information was consequently processed and refined by BK/3.3, and supplemented with statistical data. In some cases, statements and expressions were put into quotation marks to emphasise the observations made in the provinces. The

length of the sub chapters varies depending on the drug-related crime situation and available intelligence.

Definitions

The terms „Verbrechen“ (felony) and „Vergehen“ (misdemeanour) are used as defined in section 17 of the Austrian Penal Code. Felonies are intentional acts that are punished by life imprisonment or terms of imprisonment exceeding three years. All other punishable acts are misdemeanours.

„Prison intelligence“ is used as defined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2015, p. 45). The prison intelligence function seeks, through objective strategic and operationally driven planned collection, to identify those prisoners, visitors, staff and organizations planning to engage in activity, or who are engaged in an activity that may be a threat to the good order, safety and security of a prison before the event occurs.

The term „persons with foreign background“ is used as defined by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2015, p. 136). Persons with foreign background are persons whose parents were born abroad. This group of persons can be divided in first generation (persons who were themselves born abroad) and second generation (children of international immigrants who were born in the host country).

The „Goa scene“ refers to a movement that became a meeting point for the hippie movement in the 1960s. It is still known for its alternative party scene. The Goa scene was characterised by a strong sense of community, spiritual awakening and the consumption of consciousness expanding hallucinogenic drugs, such as LSD, psilocybin mushrooms and cannabis. Ecstasy (XTC) and amphetamine were also commonly used. Today’s Goa scene continues this tradition, but has shifted towards a new musical genre, namely electro trance. Parties are often secret and organised via online platforms and mobile phones to evade police surveillance. Drugs are not only consumed, but also trafficked at these parties. (Schmitt, 2004).

Changes in the Chapter “Key Figures“

A new calculation method has been introduced in 2024 due to the different quantity and format specifications, especially for seized cannabis. In the past, the quantity of cannabis was not only recorded in grams, but also in plants by the piece and millilitres for seized concentrates and oils. Seized quantities for the period 2020 to 2023 are still depicted based on the old calculation method while the seized quantities of herbal cannabis and cannabis resin in 2024 are added up (category „cannabis total“) in grams (see Table 2 and respective tables for each province).

In comparison to previous years, the purity of narcotic drugs has also been recorded differently. The figures in Table 4 refer to the figures that Criminal Intelligence Service Austria has reported to the Österreichische Richterzeitung since 2020. There, the figures are published in the „Science“ section under the headline „Purity of Narcotic Drugs“. Cutting agents are typically recorded only partially or not at all, which means they are not included in statistical evaluations.

Due to legal provisions and consequent changes in gender recording, the category „other gender identities“ has been statistically recorded and included for the first time (see Table 6).

Finally, this chapter also includes a contribution from Herbert Oberacher, PhD, professor at the Institute for Legal Medicine at the Medical University Innsbruck, presenting data from wastewater analyses and monitoring. This data is used to estimate the consumption of selected illicit drugs in Austria.

Changes in the Chapter “Measures Taken by the Police“

This chapter now also includes legislative adaptations by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMASGPK), Directorate General VI – Medical Law and Health Telematics, Directorate A/Department 6 – Narcotic Drugs and New Psychoactive Substances.

Changes in the Chapter „Overview of the Austrian Drug Market“

In addition to the topic of money laundering and financing of terrorism in connection with drug-related crime, the Asset Recovery Office (ARO) at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria submitted information on asset recovery as a state tool to combat drug-related crime. Data on asset recovery is also provided in each province’s chapter.

Changes in the Chapter „Drug-Related Crime in Austria’s Provinces“

The report’s structure of the past few years was changed to improve the readability and clarity. Therefore, contents of similar topics were merged under one heading and information on the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic was cut.

2

Key Figures

This chapter provides statistical data and explanations on reported violations, seizures, black market prices and quality of seized narcotic drugs as well as suspects, drug-related deaths and scientific data from wastewater analyses and monitoring. To guarantee an objective representation of the development of drug-related crime in Austria, certain significant statistics from 2024 are compared to those from the past five to ten years.

2.1 Reported Violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act

Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act showed a pronounced increase in 2024, continuing the upward trend observed in 2022 and 2023. This increase follows a decline beginning in 2019, due in part to changes during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. Compared to 35,445 reported violations in 2023, 2024 marks an increase of 5.3% to 37,310 reported violations.

Specifically, drug-related offences punishable by less than three years of imprisonment increased by 1,561 cases, or 4.8%, compared to 2023. Drug-related offences punishable by more than three years of imprisonment increased by 304 cases, or 10.5%, over the previous year. This increase is due to the results from extensive and complex investigations (see chapter „Crypto Messenger Services As a Challenge – Operation Achilles“) and to the increased number of checks, especially in the course of focused police actions.

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	2,219	2,159	2,873	3,133	3,407	3,194	3,214	2,862	2,908	3,212	+10.5%
Misdemeanours	30,688	34,076	39,737	37,911	39,922	37,105	31,623	32,066	32,537	34,098	+4.8%
Total	32,907	36,235	42,610	41,044	43,329	40,299	34,837	34,928	35,445	37,310	+5.3%

Table 1:
Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Austria between 2015 and 2024, categorised in felonies, misdemeanours and total

2.2 Seized Illicit Drugs

Cannabis products are still the most prevalent drug on the Austrian drug market. This is reflected in the Report on the 2024 Drug Situation by the Austrian National Public Health Institute (GÖG). The GÖG report concludes that cannabis is still the illicit drug of choice (lifetime prevalence) in Austria.

The corresponding consumption prevalence rate of youth and young adults between the ages of 15 to 24 is approximately thirty to forty per cent. According to the majority of representative studies, experiences with ecstasy, cocaine and amphetamine usually range between two and four per cent. However, the latest and most up-to-date survey from 2022 indicates a slightly higher percentage of five to six per cent. Only one to two per cent of the surveyed confirm a lifetime prevalence of use of opioids and new

psychoactive substances (NPS), also known as „research chemicals“ or „legal highs“. (GÖG, 2024a, p. IV)

As in previous years, the largest amount of seized drugs were cannabis products with approximately 2.5 tons in 2024. However, a slight decrease was recorded in comparison to 2023. Herbal cannabis (marijuana) is still the most important constituent of seizures. Decreases were also observed in amphetamine with approximately 56kg (-40.9%), ecstasy with approximately 25,000 pieces (-16.7%) and heroin with approximately 27kg (-52.3%). An increase in seized methamphetamine of approximately 12kg (+35.2%) and in cocaine of as much as 259kg (+68.4%) was seen. This report explicitly refers to data on the seizures of ecstasy (pills in pieces) in connection with synthetic drugs of amphetamine and methamphetamine. Other types of synthetic drugs exist, but are not explicitly mentioned in this report.

Seizures - Amounts	old *)				new**)	Changes compared to the previous year in %
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	
Amphetamine (in grams)	36,838	83,425	29,262	94,068	55,599	-40.9%
Total cannabis (in grams)	2,056,776	2,113,345	1,758,086	2,660,179	2,544,777	-4.3%
Heroin (in grams)	104,272	71,525	102,426	57,012	27,263	-52.2%
Cocaine (in grams)	62,985	80,529	119,193	153,610	258,714	+68.4%
Methamphetamine (in grams)	9,238	10,479	9,730	8,897	12,032	+35.2%
Ecstasy (pieces)	89,148	53,121	20,982	30,363	25,286	-16.7%

*) Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

***) Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Table 2:
Total quantities of drugs seized in Austria between 2020 and 2024

Note that the amount of narcotic drugs seized in a reporting year can be strongly influenced by large seizures. A large-scale seizure of more than 130kg of cocaine in 2024 influenced the mentioned statistics. Consequently, choosing the year-over-year quantities of seized drugs as sole parameter for possible conclusions about trends and development is not considered useful.

Regarding the increase in seized cocaine, similar upward trends have been observed in all of Europe over the past years. Europol's current Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment Report attributes this development to an all-time high in the global cocaine production. (Europol, 2025) International experts explain the decrease in heroin seizures by almost half with the drastic decrease of cultivation areas in Afghanistan. This explanation was also echoed at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in March 2025.

2.3 Black Market Prices

In 2024, wholesale prices per kilogram averaged about 3,300 euros for cannabis (extrapolation for herbal cannabis and cannabis resin), 25,000 euros for heroin, 44,000 euros for cocaine, 9,600 euros for amphetamine and 28,000 euros for methamphetamine. 1,000 ecstasy (MDMA) pills sold for about 10,500 euros. As in 2023, prices for cannabis and cocaine stagnated. While wholesale prices for heroin and methamphetamine decreased on average, the wholesale prices for amphetamine and especially ecstasy rose sharply.

However, it is important to note that the actual wholesale prices may fluctuate highly across Austria. Quality, purity and especially regional availability of narcotic drugs highly influence the development of street prices.

The sums in Table 3 relate to the black market prices for street-level dealings, which would have potentially resulted in illegally generated profits, had the drugs not been seized.

Narcotic drugs	2023 (in EUR rounded)	2024 (in EUR rounded)	Changes compared to the previous year %
Amphetamine	2,351,698	1,528,973	-35.0%
Cannabis (total)	25,481,868	36,899,267	+44.8%
Heroin	2,558,418	1,175,717	-54.0%
Cocaine	13,018,439	22,475,779	+72.6%
Methamphetamine	692,862	684,320	-1.2%
Ecstasy	303,625	236,003	-22.3%
Amount:	44,406,910	63,000,059.00	+41.9%

Table 3:
Sums or potentially illegally generated profits from seized drugs based on street-level prices in EUR in 2024 compared to 2023

The direct comparison to 2023 reveals a decrease in seizures of amphetamine (-40.9%), which leads to a 35% decline in potential illegally generated profits. As in the previous year, despite the decline of 4.3% of seized herbal cannabis (marijuana) and cannabis resin (hashish), a higher profit of 44.8% could have been generated. The decrease of seized heroin by 52.2%, which is mainly due to the limited availability, and the corresponding 54% decline in potential attainable profits is striking as the product shortage apparently did not influence the price stability. An increase of 68.4% of seized cocaine and of 72.6% of potential profits was observed. While the seized amounts of methamphetamine increased by 35.2%, the potential profits declined by 1.2%. This leads to the conclusion that prices sank. Seized amounts of ecstasy decreased by 16.7% and potential profits decreased by 22.3%.

2.4 Purity of the Illicit Drugs

This sub-chapter shows the development of the purity of the seized and forensically examined illicit drugs over the past five years. Due to high fluctuations, the values in Table 4 are the medians of the purity of illicit drugs established by chemical examinations. It should be noted that street quality might differ from the values depicted in Table 4 since forensic examinations are only conducted for substances that presumably exceed the threshold value pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act and thereby constitute an offence under criminal law.

Continuing its downward trend in 2024, the purity of heroin declined by 6.46%, which is almost 50% less than the previous year. Except a slight decrease of purity of cocaine, the purity of other drugs marginally increased.

Narcotic drugs	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine	10.5	10.23	10.3	9.29	10.5
Herbal cannabis (marijuana)	8.22	10.65	10.87	12.04	13.48
Cannabis resin (hashish)	8.29	17.06	30.65	28.13	28.14
Heroin	13.7	12.35	13.25	12.15	6.46
Cocaine	67.63	64.01	75.14	78.88	75.83
Methamphetamine	74.98	76.11	77.24	77.62	78.32
Ecstasy/MDMA	40.63	34.88	32.66	28.33	31.36

Table 4: Median values of purity of the seized and forensically examined illicit drugs in per cent between 2020 and 2024

A comparison of the above-mentioned quality and price development reveals the following patterns:

- amphetamine: higher quality at higher prices
- cannabis products: higher quality at higher prices
- heroin: decreasing quality and stagnating prices
- cocaine: decreasing quality but slightly increasing prices
- methamphetamine: higher quality but lower prices
- ecstasy: higher quality but lower prices

2.5 Suspects

Suspects Broken Down by Age Groups and Gender

Compared to the previous year, the group of persons under the age of 18 saw a continued decline from 4,101 to 3,553 reported violations (-13.4%). After a barely noticeable increase in 2022, the downward trend that started in 2019 continues and can also be observed in the age group of 18 to 20 years. However, this trend did not continue in the age group of 21 to 24 years. Since 2021, the other two age groups of 25 to 39 years and over 40 years continue to show an upward trend.

Reports filed against unidentified offenders have also been steadily increasing since 2021 (1,841): In 2024 (2,865), 368 reports were filed against unidentified offenders, which represents an increase of 14.7% compared to 2023 (2,497).

Table 5:
Distribution of reports according to age group and unidentified offenders in absolute numbers, changes in per cent for the period from 2020 to 2024

Age groups	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
< 18 years	5,381	4,318	4,394	4,101	3,553	-13.4%
18 - 20 years	6,757	5,335	5,201	4,947	4,758	-3.8%
21 - 24 years	7,156	5,862	5,674	5,444	5,626	+3.3%
25 - 39 years	14,258	13,208	13,021	13,628	14,997	+10.0%
≥ 40 years	4,411	4,273	4,461	4,828	5,511	+14.1%
Unidentified offenders	2,336	1,841	2,177	2,497	2,865	+14.7%
Total	40,299	34,837	34,928	35,445	37,310	+5.3%

A comparison of the number of unidentified offenders and the total number of reported violations reveals a continuous increase by 5.3% since 2021 to 7.7% in 2024.

Compared to previous years, no significant changes can be observed in gender distribution. 29,008 (84.2%) men compared to 5,435 (15.8%) women were reported in 2024. Men are reported more frequently than women. Due to a change in the recording of data, the category „other gender identities“ has been added to the statistical data for the first time. However, it is not statistically relevant with only two reports filed.

Table 6:
Distribution of reported violations according to gender and unidentified offenders between 2020 and 2024

Gender – Number of reported violations	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes compared to the previous year in total numbers	Changes compared to the previous year in %
Male	31,935	27,841	27,612	27,659	29,008	1,349	+4.9%
Female	6,028	5,155	5,139	5,288	5,435	147	+2.8%
Other gender identities				1	2	1	+100.0%
Unidentified offenders	2,336	1,841	2,177	2,497	2,865	368	+14.7%
Total	40,299	34,837	34,928	35,445	37,310	1,865	+5.3%

Domestic and Foreign Suspects

Data on the origin of suspects shows a decline in the number of reported domestic suspects from 21,134 to 20,791 (-1.6%) compared to the previous year. The number of reports filed against foreign suspects shows a pronounced increase from 11,814 to 13,654 (+15.6%). 2,023 of those reports (+274) were filed against asylum seekers. (The difference to the total number of reported violations results from the deduction of reported violations against unidentified offenders).

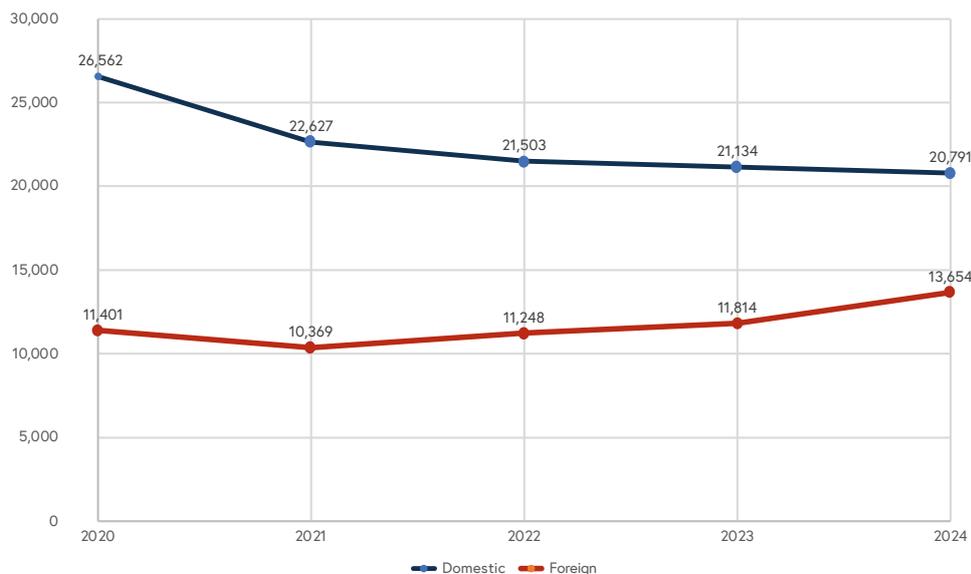


Figure 1: Distribution of reported violations according to domestic and foreign suspects from 2020 to 2024

On closer inspection, the share of misdemeanours committed by foreign nationals rose from 34.5% to 38.7%. Felonies committed by foreign nationals slightly decreased from 51.7% to 49.5%.

Year	Total		Felonies		Misdemeanours	
	Domestic suspects	Foreign suspects	Domestic suspects	Foreign suspects	Domestic suspects	Foreign suspects
2020	70.00%	30.00%	50.30%	49.70%	71.60%	28.40%
2021	68.60%	31.40%	49.80%	50.20%	70.40%	29.60%
2022	65.70%	34.30%	51.10%	48.90%	66.90%	33.10%
2023	64.10%	35.90%	48.30%	51.70%	65.50%	34.50%
2024	60.40%	39.60%	50.50%	49.50%	61.30%	38.70%

Table 7: Distribution of reported violations according to domestic and foreign suspects between 2020 and 2024

Across Austria, Vienna stands out with 56% of foreign nationals among the total number of reported violations (felonies and misdemeanours), followed by Tyrol (43.1%), Salzburg (42.8%) and Vorarlberg (42.7%). They thereby exceed the nationwide average of 39.6%.

However, this trend does not apply to the percentage of asylum seekers among the foreigners: Vienna remains no.1 with 23.4%. Styria (15.6%), Salzburg (11.5%) and Upper Austria (10.2%) are the runner-ups.

As in 2023, Syria, followed by Germany and Serbia, is on the top of the list of the ten most common countries of origin of foreign suspects (see Table 8) in 2024. The number of suspects of Syrian descent shows a stark increase of 43% in 2024.

Top 10 nationalities of foreign suspects	2023	2024	Changes in %
Syrian	1,023	1,463	+43.0%
German	975	1,148	+17.7%
Serbian	960	1,054	+9.8%
Afghanistan	910	977	+7.4%
Turkish	696	847	+21.7%
Romanian	732	819	+11.9%
Hungarian	539	665	+23.4%
Slovakian	376	513	+36.4%
Russian	483	492	+1.9%
Bosnian and Herzegovinian	483	456	-5.6%

Table 8:
Top 10 nationalities of foreign suspects in 2023 and 2024

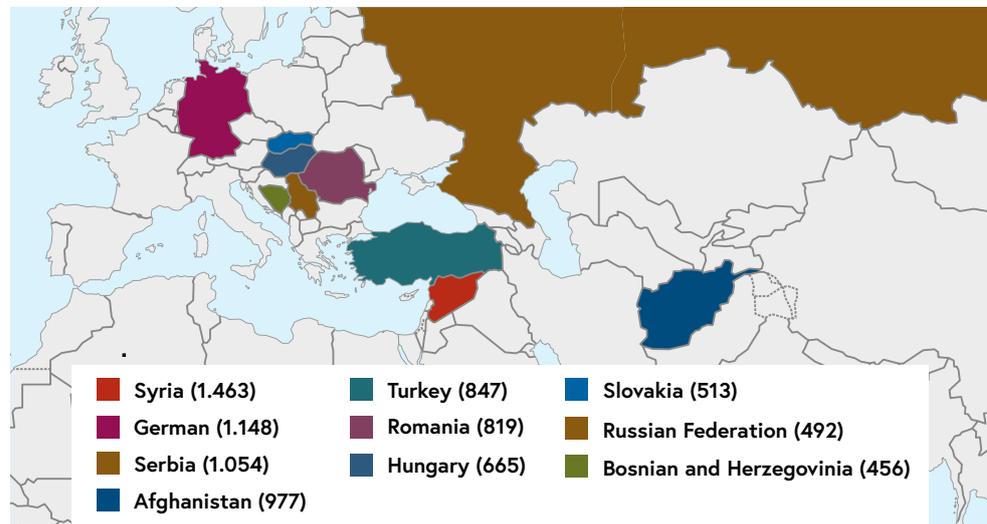


Figure 2:
Geographical illustration

In 2020, Syria was not even among the top 10 countries of recorded suspects, as only 308 Syrian nationals were recorded. The chart in Figure 3 illustrates the development of reported violations committed by foreign nationals from the top 10 countries of origin over the period of the past five years.

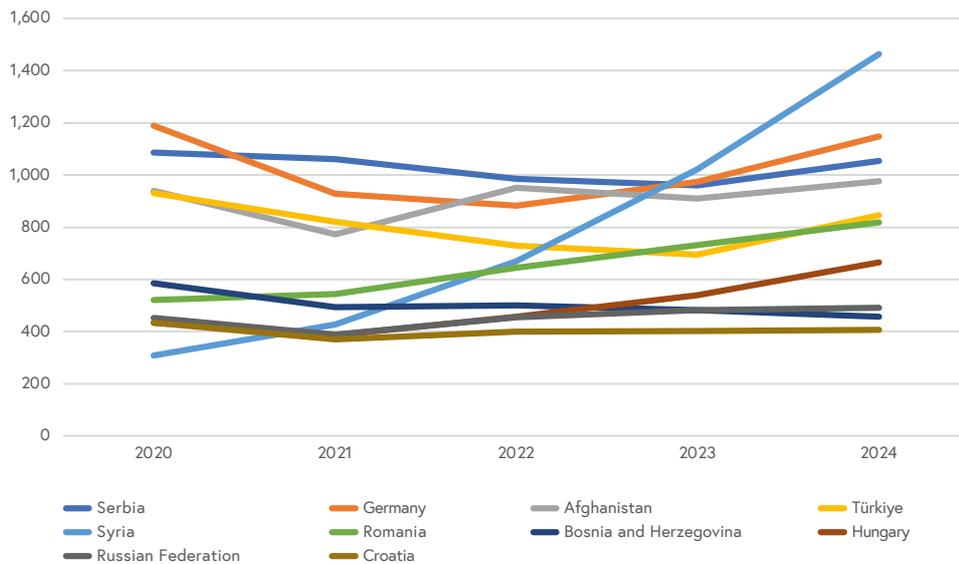


Figure 3:
Five-year average of Top 10 nationalities of foreign suspects in a direct comparison from 2020 to 2024

Nonetheless, in this area of crime, suspects and criminal groups from the Western Balkans represent the biggest threat. These offenders commit a large proportion of felonies and therefore are active in the area of serious drug-related crime.

2.6 Drug-Related Deaths

Every year, drug-related crime and the associated abuse of illegal substances leads to deaths caused by the consumption of illegal drugs in Austria. By order of the BMASGPK, the GÖG sheds light on this issue in its annual publications „Report on the Drug Situation“ (GÖG, 2024a) and „Report on the Epidemic of Addiction“ (GÖG, 2024b). Drug-related deaths are defined in the latter as follows:

“Directly drug-related deaths are deaths following an acute intoxication (overdose). This means that there is a temporal and medical connection between intoxication and death, which is attested by a doctor. However, it should be noted that there are no universally defined thresholds for toxic amounts of narcotic drugs that directly lead to death. In many cases, an interplay of several substances in the form of mixed consumption leads to death; however, each drug in itself does not necessarily have to be present in a lethal concentration. Intoxication with narcotic drugs (section 2 of the Narcotic Drugs Act, BGBl. 112/1997, current version) as well as intoxication with new psychoactive substances pursuant to the New Psychoactive Substances Act entered into force on 01 January 2012 (New Psychoactive Substances Act, BGBl. 146/2011) are taken into consideration.” (GÖG, 2024b, p. 43)

The „Report on the Epidemic of Addiction 2024“ (GÖG, 2024b) counts a total of 256 drug related deaths in Austria in 2023, which is a continuance of increasing numbers since 2020. The statistics for 2024 will be published in next year’s report. 205 of these cases were confirmed by autopsy. 72% of deaths were male victims. The average age of death is 34 years. (GÖG, 2024b, p. 44)

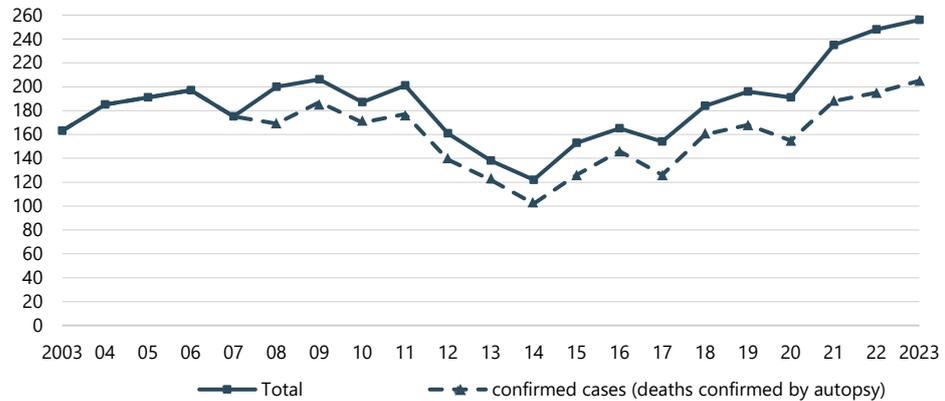


Figure 4:
Total number of directly drug related deaths in Austria, confirmed by autopsy, 2003 to 2023 (total numbers) (GÖG, 2024b, p. 45)

86% of these specialised toxicological analyses revealed polyintoxication with opioids „in connection with alcohol and/or psychoactive drugs and/or narcotic drugs/NPS“ (GÖG, 2024b, p. 50).

It should be noted that the number of court-ordered autopsies including toxicological analyses varied greatly across Austria. Court-ordered autopsies can contribute to rule out potential third party involvement. They may also generate new intelligence on the usage of substances, which can be relevant to planning focused police actions.

2.7 Results from Wastewater Analyses and Monitoring

Wastewater as a Data Source: Estimated Consumption of Selected Illicit Drugs in Austria

(Contribution from Herbert Oberacher, PhD, professor at the Institute for Legal Medicine at the Medical University Innsbruck)

Wastewater-based epidemiology has been a proven method of examining the population’s consumption of illicit drugs and pharmaceuticals for years (Zuccato et al., 2008; Daughton, 2011). This method operates on the basis of detecting consumption markers in samples taken from the incoming flow to a wastewater treatment plant.

After consumption, substances are metabolised in the human body and consequently excreted in urine and faeces. Therefore, wastewater is to be considered a mixed sample

consisting of collected contributions from locals within the catchment area and generates a picture of aggregated data of local consumed substances.

The load of consumption markers in the wastewater correlates with the amount of consumed substances in the catchment area. Repeated analyses of wastewater samples reveal trends over time. By analysing wastewater samples from different wastewater treatment plants, regional differences become evident. An aggregation of these isolated results forms a representative overall picture of the estimated superregional consumption of substances (Quireyns et al., 2025; Oberacher et al., 2025).

In Austria, wastewater samples have been examined for drug residue since 2016 (Reinstadler et al., 2021; González-Mariño et al., 2020). Wastewater is analysed for the following consumption markers: cannabis (11-Nor-9-carboxy-delta9-tetra-hydrocannabinol), cocaine (and benzoylecgonine), amphetamine, methamphetamine and 3,4-Methylenedioxy-N-methylamphetamine (= MDMA). The data is forwarded via Sewage analysis CORE group Europe (SCORE) to EUDA (European Drug Agency), where it is published online (EUDA, 2025).

Wastewater-based epidemiological examinations of heroin are extremely difficult due to the lack of a specific and stable consumption marker. The human body quickly metabolises heroin (chemically: diacetylmorphine) into acetylmorphine and morphine. Heroin and acetylmorphine could serve as specific consumption markers, but their concentration in wastewater is so low that it is not possible to prove its existence, not even with modern analytical techniques.

Morphine, which can be more easily detected in wastewater, is a non-specific consumption marker because it can also come from other sources, for example medical use of morphine. Nonetheless, acetylmorphine and morphine are still examined in Austria in the context of wastewater-based epidemiological studies (Oberacher et al., 2025). Even though this data allows conclusions on the regional consumption of opiates, it is not reliable enough to make estimations on the consumption of heroin in Austria. Therefore, it will not be included here.

In 2024, wastewater samples from 17 Austrian regions were analysed. These analyses led to conclusions on the drug consumption of approximately 3.5 million people (39% of the population). The samples were taken on seven consecutive days and then chemically analysed. The concentration of consumption markers in the wastewater samples was the basis for calculating the load, consumption quantities and quantities of drugs. The load (mg/day) was calculated by multiplying the measured concentration with each day-specific amount of wastewater. The total load of consumption markers (kg/year) is the result of adding up the regional loads and extrapolating them to the entire Austrian

population. The consumed quantities of active substances (kg/year) is derived from the total load by multiplying the substance-specific correction factors that represent the average excretion rate of consumption markers (Zuccato et al., 2008; Gracia-Lor et al., 2016). The amount of narcotic drugs sold in Austria (kg/year) is calculated based on the consumed quantities while taking the levels of purity of each drug from the past few years into account.

Even though these calculations rely on several assumptions (for example, stable excretion rates, average purity of drugs), they are a solid basis for gathering conclusive figures.

Based on figures derived from wastewater analyses (Figure 5), the following amounts of drugs sold in Austria per year are estimated:

- ten to 700 tons of cannabis,
- two to twelve tons of cocaine,
- 0.2 to 3.5 tons of amphetamine,
- 100 to 450kg of methamphetamine,
- 90 to 350kg of MDMA (equals 0.3 to 1.1 million pills per year).

The wastewater monitoring data of 2024 reveals that cannabis has the highest sales volume of the five examined illicit drugs. In regard to stimulants, amphetamine follows cocaine. Methamphetamine and MDMA follow after a considerable gap. It is assumed that the total revenue of the examined illicit drugs in Austria is significantly more than one billion euros per year.

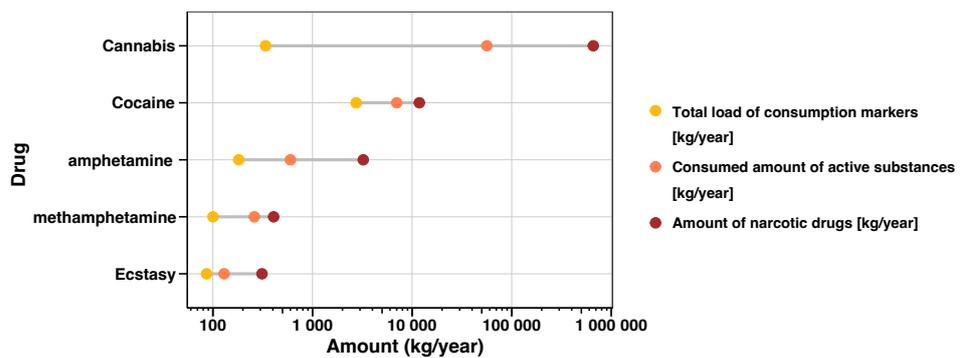


Figure 5: Overview of wastewater analyses derived from the total load, consumed amounts and amounts of selected narcotic drugs in Austria

3

Measures Taken by the Police

This chapter presents the police’s fight against drug-related crime in general as well as measures taken in this context. In particular, an overview of the tasks and measures of BK/3.3 is presented. Information regarding underlying police structures to combat drug-related crime in Austria is also provided. Furthermore, legislative adaptations, developed by BMASGPK and submitted for this report, are included.

3.1 Police Structures Targeting Drug-Related Crime

The fight against drug-related crime in Austria is mainly based on the Narcotic Drugs Act and the New Psychoactive Substances Act as well as related regulations, such as the Narcotic Drugs Regulation, Psychotropic Substances Regulation, New Psychoactive Substances Regulation, Narcotic Drugs Threshold Quantity Regulation and the Psychotropic Substances Threshold Quantity Regulation. In this context, the national security strategies pursued by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and its subordinate entities, such as the partial strategy Innere Sicherheit (BMI, 2015), and the security strategy Sicher.Österreich (BMI, 2021), shall be highlighted. Both of these strategies serve to control crime in general and thereby target drug-related crime.

As far as the police is concerned, about 600 officers across Austria are primarily designated for the fight against drug-related crime. They account for about 2% of the entire police force and are responsible for dealing with roughly 7% (37,310 reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act of total number of 534,193 reports filed) of overall crime in Austria (BMI, 2025). Police officers specialising in drug-related crime are found at three organisational levels.

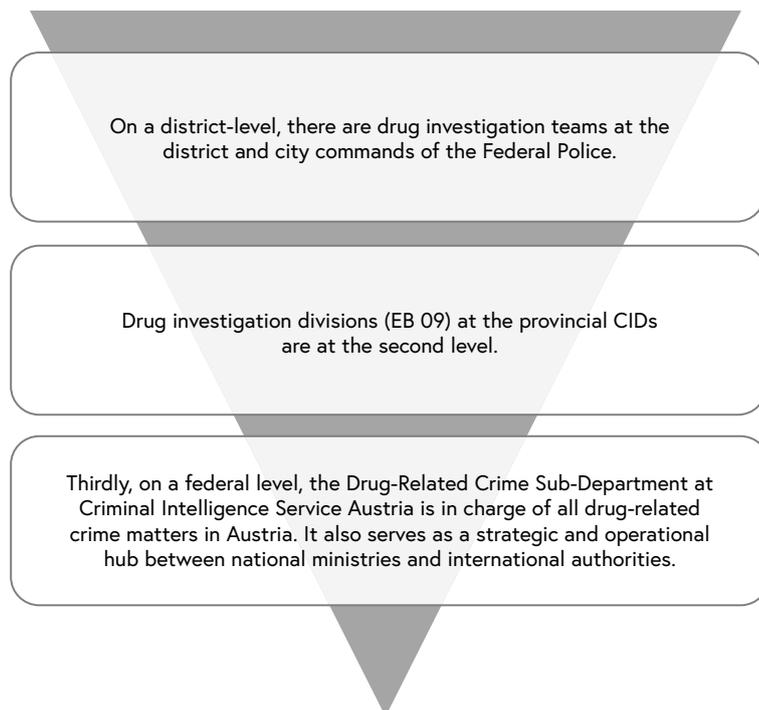


Figure 6:
Hierarchically structured national police force dedicated to combating drug-related crime

In summary, the organisational units operating at these three levels are the main tools of the Austrian police to combat drug-related crime. Additionally, officers at police stations not only deal with security, traffic and administrative issues, but are also involved in all kinds of criminal investigations, making a major contribution to the fight against drug-related crime.

Collaboration is continuously improved and fighting crime becomes more effective and efficient by bilateral agreements, close national and international cooperation with customs authorities, Europol, Eurojust, INTERPOL, INCB and UNODC as well as a network of national and international liaison officers and partners from the private sector.

3.2 Actions and Main Tasks

Fighting general and organised drug-related crime is a big challenge for law enforcement authorities in Austria. Drug-related offences often remain invisible to the public because these illegal activities are hidden within the structures of organised crime. Therefore, the public only notices specific manifestations, such as visible drug deals or consumption, or cases covered by the media. In fact, however, drug-related crime affects society both directly and indirectly on a daily basis. This impact ranges from administrative offences, such as driving a vehicle under the influence of narcotic drugs, to felonies, such as money laundering, corruption, to severe acts of violence including murder, weapons trafficking and even financing of terrorism. Drug-related crime is no longer considered an abstract threat. Every person in Austria can be directly or indirectly affected by drug-related crime.

The modus operandi has changed rapidly with the technology boom, and crime scenes have shifted from the streets to homes through use of the internet, darknet, online platforms and (crypto) messenger services on smartphones.

This highlights the fact that the police constantly face the challenge of adapting to new phenomena and changing societal conditions while being subjected to external influencing factors that are not always within their own area of responsibility. One example for such restrictions is the lack of surveillance possibilities in the area of social media channels and messenger services. In this area, law enforcement authorities are clearly at a disadvantage compared to single offenders or criminal associations.

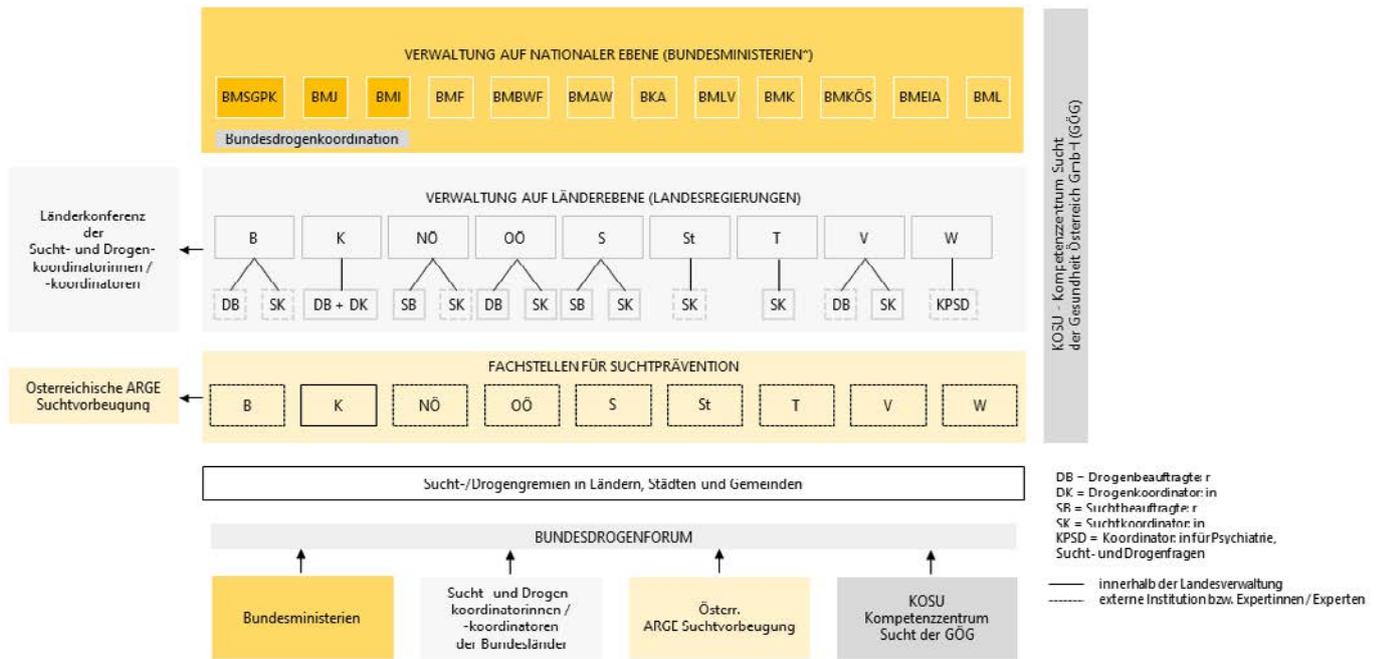
3.3 National and International Collaboration and Participation in Committees

Close collaboration on a European and international level is crucial to effectively fighting organised and cross-border drug-related crime. The geographical location of Austria along the Balkan route as well as the misuse of the Vienna International Airport as a drug-dealing hub have prompted the Austrian law enforcement authorities to show even more commitment. Well-established communication channels via Europol and INTERPOL, the UN network, Austrian liaison officers accredited abroad and foreign liaison officers accredited in Austria have proven successful in the context of international collaboration. Bilateral cooperation is especially important and a network of international contacts has been established, extended and maintained for decades by individual police officers who deliver commendable work.

In this rather broad field of drug-related crime, the police participate in a number of national and international committees. Due to its area of responsibility and strategic function, the Sub Department for Combating Drug-Related Crime within Criminal Intelligence Service Austria (BK/3.3) takes a central role. The head of this sub-department also serves as the Interior Ministry's drug coordinator.

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

The Federal Drug Forum was also established on the basis of the aforementioned Ministers decision and is also led by the BMASGPK. It was renamed „Federal Addiction Forum“ on 07 November 2024 in the course of a constituent meeting. It serves as an interface between the ministries and the provinces, which deal with drug policies at the federal level. Each province is represented in the Federal Addiction Forum, led by the provincial addiction coordinators or provincial drug coordinators. The Association of Towns and Municipalities, GÖG and the Austrian Addiction Prevention Working Group also participate in the Federal Addiction Forum. Experts with a science or practical background are consulted as needed.



Drug-related crime is not only on the agenda on a national level, but also on a European and international level in a number of committees. BK/3.3 also participates in the international committees organised by

Figure 7: Organisational structure in drug policy matters in Austria (GÖG, 2024a, p. 13)

- INTERPOL,
- UNODC, such as the annual CND conferences,
- the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) as well as
- the USA, such as the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, which was initiated due to the opioid crisis in the US.

At an EU level, regular working sessions of

- the Horizontal Working Party on Drugs (HDG),
 - the Standing Committee on Precursors of the European Commission,
 - the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe,
 - the Drugs Programme Board at Europol,
 - the Reference Group with the EU Drugs Agency (EUDA),
 - the EU Ports Alliance (EUPA)
- as well as regular EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats) meetings and their relevant corresponding action plans are participated in.

The Standing Working Group on Narcotics (StAR) at Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office, the working groups AG Südwest of the Baden-Württemberg State Criminal Police Office as well as AG Südost of the Bavaria State Criminal Police Office in cooperation with the American Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) are important regional initiatives.

On a national level, the regular working meetings of the Federal Drug Coordination and the Federal Addiction Forum, the bi-weekly round table of the heads of drug investigation divisions from each provincial CID as well as the annual EB-09-Leadership-Conference play an important role.

3.4 Training Measures

Training events are a decisive factor in the fight against drug-related crime. They serve to further increase professionalism and to coordinate the exchange of experience, which in turn helps address new developments. To live up to these standards, several (recurring and follow-up) training sessions in the field of drug-related crime take place each year on different levels. They include:

- Expert conferences organised by BK/3.3 for EB 09 officers at the provincial CIDs and specialised officers for precursors for manufacturing narcotic drugs and explosives;

- Trainings for employees of businesses in the field of chemical trade regarding the sale of potential drug precursors organised by the Precursor Competence Centre established at BK/3.3 (see next chapter); in 2024, a total of 27 events were hosted;

- Trainings in the context of the Criminal Policing Training Directive, which includes extensive further training in all aspects of drug-related crime to meet the demand for professional combating of this complex form of crime;

- Training measures on the level of the provincial CIDs as well as at the city and district commands of the Federal Police as needed; training measures and lectures for other organisational units of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, customs authorities, etc.

Another important measure was the initiative by BK/3.3 introducing the provision of Naxolon sprays in 2023. The goal was to protect intervening police officers from life-threatening dangers in connection with synthetic drugs. Following training measures developed and conducted by the Chief Medical Service of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, organisational units of the Federal Police and provincial police directorates tasked with fighting drug-related crime were equipped with these sprays. These sprays have been used ever since. A report by the Council of the European Union describes the usage of Naxolon, a „life-saving opioid antagonist“, as „a crucial tool of strategies

to minimise damage“. (Council of the European Union, 2025a) The above-mentioned measures also took place in 2024 and will continue in years to come, as the safety of persons is the highest goal.

3.5 Precursor Competence Centre

Both individuals and criminal networks misuse certain chemicals for manufacturing narcotic drugs. The illegal processing of such chemicals poses a threat to the wider population. In order to prevent the diversion of such chemicals from legal channels for the illicit manufacturing of drugs, Criminal Intelligence Service Austria established the Precursor Competence Centre in the Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department on 01 December 2018.

Businesses in the chemical industry are legally required to report potential suspicious incidents regarding the manufacturing of illicit drugs and shall address their reports to the Precursor Competence Centre.

Another focus of the Precursor Competence Centre is the monitoring of the trade in explosives precursors. Accessible chemical precursors can be used to build improvised explosives for attacks. The Precursor Competence Centre checks reports from businesses for criminal relevance and afterwards sends them to the Directorate for State Protection and Intelligence Service (DSN) for further processing since a terrorist motive cannot be ruled out.

Drug Precursors

Criminal networks and operators of large illegal laboratories in Europe continued the trend in 2024 to source chemicals that are not listed as drug precursors and are of no economic significance. By doing so, they partially evaded existing monitoring mechanisms. These so called „unrecorded drug precursors“, for which basically no legal purpose can be identified and which are primarily used for the illegal production of synthetic drugs, are mainly transported from Chinese and Indian regions to Central and Southeast Europe under false declarations. From there, the precursors are forwarded to other countries, especially the Netherlands. In this clandestine logistics chain, Austria is only affected as a transit country, but in some cases, companies are founded in the country to conceal the further transport routes. In 2024, no companies were detected that contributed to such deliveries.

Following years of monitoring, international panels and institutions regularly add chemicals to the list of drug precursors. Criminal groups, however, react swiftly to these changes or even pre-empt them by using new or modified substances in a bid to maintain production.

Over the past two decades, a fluctuating pattern of diversions and attempted diversions of acetic anhydride was observed in Europe. This chemical plays a central role in the illegal production of heroin. Criminal groups aim to transport large quantities of this substance via Türkiye, mostly to the Afghan region, bypassing existing surveillance measures. In Europe, persons who committed offences focused on Slovenia and Poland; however, there was a slight decrease in smuggling activities in 2024.

In 2024, Austria was not affected by diversions or attempted diversions. Austria was not involved in international investigations into this phenomenon. Austrian businesses did not submit suspicious activity reports that required the initiation of investigations into diversions.

In 2024, 735 distribution channels for non-recorded and sensitive drug precursors were inspected. The BMASGPK reported 53 granted authorisations for importing and exporting drug precursors. However, no suspicious activities were noted. Furthermore, the Precursor Competence Centre received 330 tip-offs from private individuals about possible violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act or New Psychoactive Substances Act, and other offences, such as fraud. After screening these tip-offs, they were forwarded to the respective specialised units of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria or the provincial CIDs for verification and initiation of necessary investigations.

Explosives Precursors

In 2024, 2,667 distribution channels for precursors for explosives were inspected; however, no suspicious activities were identified or investigations initiated. Twenty-nine suspicious activity reports submitted by businesses were received and checked. In some cases of stolen or lost precursors, the Directorate State Protection and Intelligence Service was immediately informed because of suspected criminal offences. However, neither the Directorate State Protection and Intelligence Service nor its subordinate entities identified serious offences or planned terrorist attacks in their investigations.

However, a significant number of violations of the Pyrotechnic Articles Act, Chemicals Act and Explosives Act were identified and reported. These referred mainly to 19 suspicious activity reports from Bavaria (Germany). The offenders manufactured and attempted to manufacture black powder and so-called „flash compositions“ (chemical mixture of potassium nitrate, sulphur powder and activated carbon). They ordered the components online via Amazon, who in turn dutifully filed reports to the Bavarian security authorities.

Please report suspicious activities to:

Criminal Intelligence Service Austria
Precursor Competence Centre
Josef-Holaubek-Platz 1
1090 Vienna
Austria
Fax: +43 1 24836 951223
Email: precursor@bmi.gv.at

3.6 Projects of Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department, Criminal Intelligence Service Austria

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



Project EDSWA: The project *Erkennungs-Dienstliche-Schwellen-Wert-Analyse* (in English: Identification Threshold Analysis) aims to increase the number of solved cases of accompanying and acquisitive crime by consistent recording of identification material of reported accused persons pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act and New Psychoactive Substances Act. The Tyrol Provincial Police Directorate is zealous and has agreed to initiate an accompanying pilot project in cooperation with BK/3.3 who functions as the central project coordinator. The accompanying measures will last the whole of 2025.



Project CARCER: In cooperation with the Directorate General of the Federal Ministry of Justice, this project focuses on CID relevant goals in the field of prison intelligence at institutions of the correctional and forensic detention system. Other organisational units of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, such as BK/3.1 (Organised Crime Sub-Department) and the Directorate State Protection and Intelligence Service, also participate in this project.



Project S.A.L.T.: S.A.L.T. stands for sea, air, land and train. BK/3.3 considers this project to be a proactive and innovative approach to fight drug-related crime since it allows for a holistic examination of transport routes (sea, air, land and train). This is in line with EU priorities, but has not yet been implemented in Austria in this way. To this end, there are close collaborations with national agencies and authorities, such as the Customs Authority Austria, as well as shipping and aviation regulatory authorities, other ministries and private businesses.

3.7 Prevention Work

(Submitted by Crime Prevention and Victim Support Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria)

The Crime Prevention and Victim Support Sub-Department supports investigating officers at the provincial CIDs. In the field of drug-related crime, prevention is mainly directed towards youth between the ages of 13 and 17. The goal is to promote life skills and thereby reduce the demand for illicit substances in the long run.

The prevention programme Look@your.Life is part of the youth prevention programme Under18 (<https://www.under18.at>) and aims to support youth in their development and prevent delinquent behaviour. The programme is designed to strengthen the personality of young people teaching them to act responsibly towards themselves and their environment while effectively resolving conflicts. The focus is on preventing addiction-related delinquency aiming to mitigate harmful behaviours associated with the consumption of both legal and illicit substances. Additionally, threats and addictions in connection with the online world are also addressed. Experts from the police force in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education, education directorates and school psychologists developed this prevention programme.

Across Austria, approximately 450 trained officers carry out prevention measures in the form of workshops. They focus on interaction with young people. The programme includes 19 sessions. A special feature of the programme is the active involvement of parents and teachers to ensure a sustainable approach. To this end, information events are held for parents and teachers. 743 preventive measures were implemented in 2024, reaching 16,504 persons.

3.8 Legislative Adaptations

(Submitted by BMASGPK, Directorate General VI – Medical Law and Health Telematics, Directorate A/Department 6 – Narcotic Drugs and New Psychoactive Substances)

Changes to the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Threshold Quantity Regulations were published in BGBl. II 2024/6 and II 2024/7. These amendments define the threshold quantity for a number of substances that were previously classified as narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances.

Following the decisions of the 66th CND session, the amendment to the Narcotic Drugs Regulation published on 28 March 2024 in BGBl. II 2024/90 adds six substances to the annex of the Narcotic Drugs Regulation. The newly added substances are four synthetic opioids, one synthetic cannabinoid and one cathinone derivative, namely protonitazene, etazen, etonitazepyne, 2-methyl-AP-237, ADB-BUTINACA and Alpha-PiHP. The correspon-

ding threshold quantities have been published in BGBl. II 2024/233 on 30 August 2024 as part of the Narcotic Drugs Regulation.

Following the decisions of the 67th CND session, the amendment to the Narcotic Drugs and Psychoactive Substances regulations published on 19 December 2024 in BGBl. II 2024/394 adds three substances (butonitazene, dipentylone, 2-fluorodeschloroketamine) to the annex of the Narcotic Drugs Regulation and one substance (bromazolam) to the annex of the Psychoactive Substances Regulation.

The addendum to the New Psychoactive Substances Regulation in BGBl. II 2024/106 creates a category of chemical substances for LSD derivatives to prevent the spread of such substances.

4

Overview of the Austrian Drug Market

The following chapter provides an overview of organised illegal trafficking in narcotic drugs based on the most commonly abused substances in Austria. Developments on an international and EU level are taken into consideration when analysing developments in Austria. This shall provide readers with a clear and complete picture of how external factors influence, steer and compromise the situation in Austria. The description of the situation is fuelled by information from relevant reports by UNODC, EUDA and Europol as well as information gathered by participating in conferences, seminars, working groups, national and international committees and intelligence from investigations.

This chapter also includes production of illicit drugs on farms and in labs in Austria, online drug trafficking, crypto messenger services, money laundering and terrorist financing as well as asset recovery as a state instrument to fight drug-related crime. The chapter closes with an outlook for the year 2025.

4.1 Organised Illegal Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs

Illegal trafficking in narcotic drugs is an ever-present criminal threat on a global, European and Austrian level. It is an extremely profitable yet highly competitive criminal business that operates across borders and affects all countries. Drug trafficking networks leverage corruption, violence, increasing readiness to inflict violence and money laundering to destabilise society, undermine the legal economy and destroy the trust in official authorities. This threat posed by drug trafficking networks adapts rapidly and continuously to geopolitical and social changes. The manufacturing of and trafficking in illicit drugs has major impact, especially on health and environment.

Cannabis

Cannabis continues to be the most common illegal substance on the Austria drug market in 2024. At 57.5%, reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in connection with seizures of cannabis account for the largest share of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Austria. 7.6% of these reported violations were classified as felonies, 92.4% were categorised as misdemeanours. The five most common nationalities of suspects reported for violating the Narcotic Drugs Act in connection with seizures of cannabis are Austrian (54.9%), Syrian (5.2%), German (3.3%), Afghan (2.9%) and Serbian (2.4%). The age groups of suspects are ranked as follows: 25 to 39 years (36.1%), 21 to 24 years (16.9%), 18 to 20 years (15.5%), >40 years (12.1%) and 14 to 17 years (11.5%).

The consumption of cannabis is present throughout society. Supply is high and the range of products is increasing. All available national and international sources support this assessment. According to a joint report by EUDA (formerly European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction – EMCDDA) and Europol, cannabis accounts for approximately 75% of drugs on the European drug market. (EMCDDA & Europol, 2022a)

Even though complete, new EU data is not yet available for 2024, it is assumed that this estimation is still valid based on interim reports. As confirmed by the nationwide statistics on seizures (Table 2), Austria follows this trend with high market penetration and diverse consumption patterns.

On a global level, production remained primarily on a regional level. The UNODC World Drug Report (WDR) 2024 and detailed technical studies indicate that large-scale outdoor production is still taking place in North Africa, particularly in Morocco, with an increasing trend towards indoor quality. The products are mainly exported to Europe. The situation in North America is more nuanced: As the export has been legal in Canada since the legalisation in 2018, there are no indications that illegal exports to Europe are still taking place in 2024. Previous reports were more indicative in this aspect, but current confirmations are still outstanding. It should be noted that the EUDA Drug Market Report 2024 had not yet been published at editorial deadline for this report. The US market remains mainly domestically focused with limited external dynamics (UNODC, 2024a).

The situation in Europe is characterised by two main aspects: the increasing diversification of products (herbal cannabis, cannabis resin, concentrate, vapes and edibles) and a pronounced digitalised structure of distribution. The latter was identified as the main structural characteristic in the Drug Trends Monitor by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC, 2025a) and in complementary reports on social-media-based courier supply. Physical street-level drug trafficking has become less and less important giving way to decentralised systems that combine communication platforms, anonymous means of payment and transport by external service providers. This logistics system is most advanced in the context of cannabis.

Austria is structurally connected to these developments via several import routes. The Drug Related Crime Annual Report 2023 (BMI, 2024a) and several analyses conducted by EUDA and Europol (EMCDDA & Europol 2022a; EMCDDA & Europol 2024a), Europol (2021; 2025) and GI-TOC (2022; 2024; 2025a) indicate that cannabis is mainly imported via the Western Balkans and often happens in connection with criminals operating from Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia. The report „Portholes: Exploring the maritime Balkan routes“ by GI-TOC (2022) further establishes that maritime imports via ports at the Adriatic Sea, for example Durrës (Albania) or Bar (Montenegro), and consequent shipment via Italy to Central Europe are on the rise.

There is no concrete proof for cases in connection with these maritime routes in Austria for 2023; however, Austria is still to be considered a part of the European supply infrastructure.

Organised crime plays a central role in Austria's cannabis supply. The 2025 SOCTA describes cannabis networks in Europe as increasingly hybrid in organisation: horizon-

tally connected, technology-savvy, often overlapping with groups who operate in other drug or product segments (Europol, 2025). In Austria, many different actors infiltrate the market; however, criminals from the Western Balkans seem to dominate the market.

Special attention should be paid to the use of legal business structures to conceal illegal trading volumes. According to GI-TOC (2022; 2024; 2025a) and EUDA (EMCDDA & Europol 2022a; EMCDDA & Europol 2024a), legal transport, storage and packaging companies in several member states are used intentionally to ship parcels from Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium to Central Europe. In Austria, there are indications for temporary storage in apartments and intermediate transports in vehicles with inconspicuous goods.

The production in Austria primarily occurs at small cannabis farms, mainly for personal use or regional distribution. The trend of indoor production with professional equipment continues in 2024 (more information in the chapter „Production of Illicit Drugs in Austria“). More and more technical equipment is being seized that allows conclusions on the transfer of know-how. There are indications for a continuous professionalisation of some production groups; however, no superregional organisational structure can be identified at this point.

The proven increase in cases of application of synthetic cannabinoids to cannabis oil (CBD) base material is a noteworthy development. The report „The challenge of New Psychoactive Substances – A technical update“ by UNODC (2024b) shows that up to 44% of analysed samples contained such admixtures in 2023. UNODC information on this phenomenon for 2024 is not yet available and the EUDA Drug Market Report 2024 had not yet been published at time of editorial deadline. The toxicological classification of the substances is difficult; therefore, substances are often not documented, which leads to a regulatory grey area.

The partial legalisation of cannabis in Germany, which entered into force in April 2024, possibly influences the market in Austria. There had been discussions in Austria about potential drug tourism and internal displacements. However, no empirical examinations are available yet. The situation is continuously monitored since corresponding effects have potentially not yet been identified due to the short timeframe. The EU Roadmap to Fight Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime (European Commission, 2023) describes this development as a „regulatory challenge for the common market“. Nonetheless, it highlights the principle of subsidiary law enforcement.

In 2024, there was an increase in smuggling of cannabis, mostly on commercial flights from Bangkok (Thailand) to Vienna. In total, 640kg of herbal cannabis was seized in 23 smuggling flights. These smuggling flights were single transports of twelve to fifty kilograms hidden in luggage, which the smugglers had received at Bangkok Airport (Thailand) in exchange for a smuggling fee. Some smugglers were recruited on site

during their vacation by criminal networks operating in Thailand. Usually these flights were transit flights with final destinations in other countries, such as Great Britain, Germany or the Netherlands. The deregulation/legalisation of cannabis in Thailand seems to influence the increasing number of incidents.

In general, the situational picture in Austria for 2024 is structurally stable yet functionally dynamic. Supply is high. Criminal structures are compartmentalised, adaptive and difficult to target. The market is characterised by technological upgrades, digital organisation and an increasing blurring of the lines between legal and illegal infrastructure. The biggest challenge is not so much the increase in quantities but rather the consolidation of unsupervised micro distribution networks that cannot be systematically identified through traditional measures. Therefore, the cannabis situation is representative for the future underlying problems of the fight against drug-related crime within Europe with diverging legal situations and highly flexible criminal structures. Other reasons for the widespread misuse of cannabis are the constant trivialisation by different media outlets and the sometimes confusing legal situation. For example, cannabis seeds, seedlings, etc. are sold more or less legally in so-called „grow shops“, where they are sold as decorative plants, air refreshers, etc. As soon as these plants bloom, they become illegal. This simplified example serves to illustrate the current legal situation. Furthermore, the legal sale of CBD products is another relevant factor because it is almost impossible for laypersons to know what is legal and illegal due to product presentation.

Heroin

In 2024, heroin is still one of the most relevant illicit substances in Europe in regard to health policy. 4.2% of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act are connected to seizures of heroin.

20.6% of these reported violations were felonies, 79.4% were misdemeanours. The five most common nationalities of suspects of all the reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in connection with seizures of heroin are Austrian (58.2%), Serbian (6.5%), Afghan (5.5%), Turkish (3.6%) and Iranian (2.9%). The age groups of suspects are ranked as follows: 25 to 39 years (56.6%), >40 years (14.5%), 21 to 40 years (14%), 18 to 20 years (7.2%) and 14 to 17 years (3.5%).

Even though heroin is not as common as cannabis or cocaine, it still causes a disproportionately high percentage of drug-related deaths, chronic addiction and socio-medical expenses. The structural disproportionality stems from a complex global dynamic. Its effects on Europe and Austria are evident in the supply situation as well as the critical infrastructure. This can also be observed in 2024.

The global situation is mainly determined by the situation in Afghanistan. As established by the WDR 2024 (UNODC, 2024a), complementary analyses by GI-TOC (2024; 2025a) and

2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025), the opium cultivation in Afghanistan saw a stark nominal decline following the cultivation ban imposed by the Taliban in 2022; however, this decline was not reflected in declining supply or rising prices in 2024. In Austria, a decrease in purity by almost half does indicate a growing shortage.

On a European level, the market remained stable, which confirms the uninterrupted functioning of the supply chains. The Balkan route is still the central connection point; however, in addition to the traditional land route via Türkiye, Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary, the alternative route via the Black Sea, Greece, Southern Italy or Albania is used more and more. These variants serve the purpose of making operations more flexible and reducing risks at border crossing points. The 2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025) explicitly states that heroin networks increasingly use hybrid transport chains combining sections by land and by sea and using legal shipments of goods to conceal illegal shipments.

These routes are supported by criminal structures that are also relevant to the Austrian market. In Austria, groups from the Western Balkans are mainly responsible for the supply of heroin. They are involved in all aspects: import, storage, street-level drug dealing by persons operating in public spaces. These criminal groups operate by dividing tasks and often use transnational concealment.

These organisations are usually structured in smaller, hierarchically structured or family-based groups as described in the 2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025). Violence is not the main enforcement tool in these networks; rather a principle of disciplined and well-established processes with clear division of roles prevails. The high level of professionalism is especially evident in the area of transport: Truckloads of legal goods are regularly used as a means of concealment. Backhauls are used to transport precursors, such as acetic anhydride, from the EU to the Middle East. Crypto messenger analyses in the framework of international investigations also confirmed that groups from Türkiye and the Western Balkans use digital means of communication to coordinate operations and sometimes use legal companies to conceal their activities.

GI-TOC reports (2022; 2024; 2025a) also highlight that in more and more cases heroin is transported as „additional goods“ to weapons, persons or forged documents in transport networks. This multi-purpose structure increases the complexity of investigations and makes the targeted fight against certain fields of criminal activity more difficult.

Regarding the quality of the drugs, there were only a few laboratory analyses in Austria in 2024 indicating added synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl or its derivatives. EUDA's early warning system did not report any major discoveries for Austria. Contrary to developments in North America, heroin remains a plant-based substance on the Austrian market in 2024. There were only isolated cases of confirmed addition of highly potent synthetic opioids.

According to GÖG (2024a; 2024b), consumption remained stable. Figures on drug substitutes and support system access are comparable to the previous year. Heroin is still mainly consumed by inhalation or intravenous administration. There are no indications of new groups of consumers or a shift towards younger consumers.

In general, the situational picture in Austria for 2024 is stable yet structurally complex. Supply remains high. Consumption level stagnates. Underlying criminal structures are increasingly nested, based on division of tasks and difficult to target. The strategic challenge continues to be the structural invisibility of highly professional transport networks whose activities are often outside traditional patterns of criminal activity. The EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 (EU, 2021a) and the EU Roadmap to Fight Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime (EU Commission, 2023) recognise the problem, but only vaguely address the problem of heroin specifically. The fight against these networks requires long-term raising of awareness, international cooperation and targeted access to communication and financial flows. These aspects, specifically in the cases with connections to the Western Balkans and Türkiye, demand close operational coordination. Without additional systematic investigative approaches, especially in the areas of digital communication, financial flows and cross-border logistics, the fight against this phenomenon will not become more efficient.

Cocaine

The cocaine market was one of the most dynamic EU drug markets in 2024. 17.6% of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act are connected to seizures of cocaine. 18.3% of these reported violations were felonies, 81.7% were misdemeanours. The five most common nationalities of suspects of all the reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in connection with seizures of cocaine are Austrian (57.4%), Serbian (4.7%), Turkish (3.1%), Romanian (2.7%) and German (2.3%). The age groups of suspects are ranked as follows: 25 to 39 years (50.3%), >40 years (19.3%), 21 to 40 years (13.7%), 18 to 20 years (8%) and 14 to 17 years (3.5%).

The demand has been growing consistently over the past years. There are no indications that this trend might slow down. On the contrary: Reports by EUDA and Europol (EMCDDA & Europol 2022a; EMCDDA & Europol 2024a) as well as the WDR 2024 by UNODC (UNODC, 2024a; UNODC, 2024c) point out a constant high level of production in South America, especially in Colombia. Despite sporadic state intervention programs, the globally largest amount of cocaine is produced there. Following North America, the EU is the second biggest single market. Cocaine trafficking towards Europe has become more professional in its structure, risk management and market logic. The consequences of this professionalisation can also be observed more and more in Austria, especially when comparing the seized quantities of approximately 260kg with the supposed consumption (see wastewater analysis) of two to twelve tons.

The global situation is characterised by a pronounced expansion of production capacities. According to UNODC, several hundred new cocaine labs were recorded in the period from 2021 to 2023 in Colombia and Peru alone (UNODC, 2024a; UNODC, 2024c). Reports on cocaine (EMCDDA & Europol 2022a; EMCDDA & Europol 2024a) highlight that not only the production volume, but also the efficiency of processing and purity of the final product increased. Based on the national average purity, the latter cannot be confirmed for Austria in 2024 (see Table 4). Further explanations are provided in the respective chapter.

At the same time, trafficking routes have become more diverse. In addition to traditional transatlantic connections via Brazil and the Caribbean, African countries (among others Nigeria, Cape Verde, Senegal) as well as transports via smaller and less controlled ports are gaining importance as a hub.

This development results in a number of structural shifts in the EU. While Rotterdam (Netherlands), Antwerp (Belgium), Hamburg (Germany) and certain ports in France, Spain and Portugal remain the most significant entry points for large quantities, smuggling is moved more and more to so-called „secondary ports“, such as Genoa, Gioia Tauro (Italy), Koper (Slovenia) or Ploče (Croatia). This often happens in close collaboration with insiders in the logistics sector. In addition to the above-mentioned reports, the reports Global Financial Integrity (GFI, 2021) and Dryad Global (2023) also document this shift.

Transport via the Balkan route is also gaining in relevance for trafficking in cocaine. According to the 2025 SOCTA (Europol 2025), there are indications that criminal groups, especially from Serbia, Albania and Montenegro, are increasingly operating interim storage or distribution centres for cocaine imports. GI-TOC reports (2024; 2025a) underline that persons from the Western Balkans establish themselves as service providers within the larger European networks. They are in charge of storage, interim distribution or protective measures without being in control of the whole logistics chain.

However, recent analyses from the GI-TOC report „Cocaine Connections“ show that networks from the Western Balkans not only provide logistics services, but also establish themselves more and more as autonomous large-scale actors with direct access to South American producers. According to the report, a large percentage of transatlantic smuggling routes are organised by groups from Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia. They maintain business relationships with Colombian or Ecuadorian criminals and autonomously create complete supply chains including transport, interim storages and financing (GI-TOC, 2025b).

An exemplary case is the so-called „Group America“, a network operating transnationally with operational involvement in South America, North America and the EU. (GI-TOC, 2025b) These networks use not only well-established ports, but also sea routes via the

Western Balkans, for example Bar (Montenegro), Durrës (Albania) and Piraeus (Greece), to import cocaine on fishing or merchant fleets and then transport them on land.

Even though Austria is not listed as a primary country of destination, it is repeatedly mentioned as a connecting element in the context of the Balkan route and transnational investigations. The post-war years and the consequently established diaspora are „conducive“ factors. Therefore, Austria plays a secondary, yet not to be neglected role, especially regarding its location within the Schengen area and its connection to transfer points in Central Europe (GI-TOC, 2025b).

 Bundesministerium
Inneres



Figure 8:
BK/3.3 Guideline „Crime
Scene: Fruit Trade“

In Austria, cocaine is not the leading drug in terms of quantities, but it is still highly relevant. Compared to 2023, the statistics on seizures rose by 68.4%. However, the aforementioned large-scale seizures need to be taken into consideration. The personnel in cocaine trafficking is highly professional. The 2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025) describes the personnel structures as transnational, characterised by division of tasks and well capitalised.

Networks with connections to Colombian, Ecuadorian, Dominican and Brazilian groups of origin cooperating with European partners are predominant. In this context, criminal groups from the Western Balkans in Austria are once again dominant. The distribution within Europe is usually organised via Dutch and Belgian transfer structures often by using legal companies, for example in the sector of fruit and logistics trade. BK/3.3 developed an information campaign specifically for these companies and created a guideline for awareness-raising measures titled „Crime Scene: Fruit Trade“.

A central characteristic of organised crime structures in cocaine trafficking is the division of tasks with minimal personal contact. Groups are in contact on a project basis, communicate via encrypted channels and conduct business via crypto or cash payment systems. Goods are accessed via intermediaries who are entrusted with container logistics, warehousing and courier systems.

According to GI-TOC (2025b), Austrian groups are not systematically relevant to cocaine trafficking; however, they become more and more involved as a part of the logistics distribution infrastructure. For example, domestic groups work in the fields of courier services, intermediate storage or transport. A growing readiness to inflict violence and violent behaviour is observed in the field of cocaine trafficking. To date, this happens on a small scale or in the shadows in Austria, but concrete plans for attacks have been

discovered. Thanks to coincidence and lacking coordination by the offending person, nobody was hurt.

Cocaine, as all other stimulants, is increasingly sold online. GI-TOC reports (2024; 2025a; 2025b) point out that platforms, such as Telegram, Instagram and even private Discord servers, are used to contact buyers. These structures are present in Austria, too. Investigation results suggest that the Austrian market is part of a Western European micro distribution network.

In general, Austria is mainly a country of consumption, but is more and more involved in a permanently changing infrastructure of globalised drug-related logistics. The groups are complex, flexible, difficult to target and increasingly violence-prone. Their ways of operating are similar to a business with clear risk management, division of tasks and high anonymity. From a strategic point of view, early warning systems and operational connectivity are more important than market control in Austria. The cocaine market is not a local phenomenon, but rather a highly international system with high scalability. Targeting single actors does not weaken the system as a whole. It can only be fought effectively if access to transnational investigation platforms is granted, trade flows are consistently analysed and organisational intersections, such as transshipment, financing or integration of legal infrastructure, are targeted. Without specialised investigative approaches on an EU level, national measures remain surface-level.

Synthetic Drugs

In contrast to plant-based drugs, synthetic drugs refer to all substances that are manufactured chemically in a laboratory without organic precursors. Heroin is categorised as a semi-synthetic opioid (all substances with morphine-like effects) that is made from morphine (opiate). For example, fentanyl is a synthetic opioid. The most well-known synthetic drugs are amphetamine, methamphetamine and MDMA (XTC), which will be described in greater detail.

Amphetamine

Amphetamine was once again one of the main substances on the European drug market in 2024. While methamphetamine is the predominant stimulant on a global level, especially in North America and South-East Asia, amphetamine is prevalent in Europe, parts of the Middle East and North Africa. This classification is also confirmed by the WDR 2024 (UNODC, 2024a), analyses by the DEA (2024) and GI-TOC (2022; 2024). 4.2% of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act are connected to seizures of amphetamine. 16.4% of these reported violations were felonies, 83.6% were misdemeanours. The five most common nationalities of suspects of all the reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in connection with seizures of cocaine are Austrian (66.9%), German (5%), Hungarian (2.8%), Romanian (2%) and Polish (1.7%). The age groups of suspects are

ranked as follows: 25 to 39 years (49%), >40 years (18.3%), 21 to 40 years (10.8%), 18 to 20 years (8.8%) and 10.8 to 17 years (4.4%).

The majority of amphetamine is manufactured in Europe, making Europe not only the main market, but also the origin. Even though there are smaller production regions outside of Europe, for example Lebanon or Sudan, these capacities are not large enough to influence the European market.

The Netherlands, Belgium and Northern Germany are still the most relevant production regions in the EU. The 2025 SOCTA (Europol 2025) points out that the production infrastructure has become more technology-heavy and diverse in recent years. State-of-the-art amphetamine laboratories are nowadays modular, mobile and geared towards maximum concealment.

European organised crime networks, especially in the Netherlands and Belgium, manage these manufacturing and distribution processes. According to the 2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025) and GI-TOC (2025a), these groups consist of loosely connected units with a clear division of roles: Persons specialised in chemistry (often with science background), administrative personnel in the finance sector, logistics employees and distribution units operate in geographically and operationally separate structures. In many cases, legal companies are used for concealment, for example in the field of transport, packaging or storage. Substituting regulated drug precursors with alternative chemical precursors is becoming more and more common, which allows offenders to evade traditional surveillance measures regarding precursors. Compared to other areas, violence is less common in the field of amphetamine – not because of a lack of capacity, but rather due to economic reasons: Disruptions of operations pose a higher risk for these structures than traditional confrontations.

International sources paint a robust, structural picture for Austria that encompasses global trends, European manufacturing and domestic distribution networks. Compared to 94,068 grams in 2023, the seized quantities in 2024 decreased by 40.9% (see Table 2). The supply for the Austrian market comes from imports from production centres. The drugs are mainly imported via land routes within the Schengen area, especially via Germany, the Czech Republic and Italy. No confirmed information on certain transport routes being attributed to specific groups is available for 2024. However, operational intelligence points to logistics structures divided into small sections that intentionally combine delivery services and digital distribution channels.

Criminal groups distributing amphetamine in Austria are heterogeneous. While loosely connected small distributors are predominant in urban areas, networks with connections to Dutch, Polish and Czech actors are present in superregional trafficking. GI-TOC (2025a) describes a pronounced fragmentation of the distribution landscape. Digital

communication channels, such as Telegram or Wickr Me, are used for coordination and cryptocurrencies or anonymised accounts are used for payment. These digital platforms are not only used for coordination, but also more and more for communicating with end users and handling transport, for example by involving ride-sharing services or by using manipulated delivery platforms.

Austria is not a typical production country even though the number of illegal drug laboratories almost doubled after 2023 (see also „Production of Illicit Drugs in Austria“).

No noteworthy changes in product quality or consumption behaviour have been observed compared to 2023. Observations confirm a big range of concentrations of active substances and there are isolated cases of toxicologically relevant cutting agents or added psychoactive substances (see chapter „New Psychoactive Substances“). In other EU member states, combinations with synthetic cathinone were observed, sometimes in form of so-called „speed balls“ consisting of amphetamine and opioids. There are no confirmed cases of this phenomenon in Austria.

According to GÖG (2024b), consumption behaviour remained epidemiologically stable. Prevalence is especially relevant in the age group of 15 to 34 year olds. There are no indications for a structural shift, for example towards chronic consumption or an expansion to a new target group. Amphetamine is a substance specifically used in a performance-oriented manner or episodically consumed for leisure, sometimes in combination with cannabis or alcohol.

The amphetamine market in Austria is functionally stable, yet increasingly complex in its operational structure. Global developments (e.g. substitution of drug precursors), European trends (e.g. technological advancement in production processes) and local effects (e.g. digitalisation of distribution) complement each other. Austria largely depends on imports and is highly affected by EU developments. The structures behind the scenes are professional, based on division of tasks and mostly unaffected by state interventions. From a strategic point of view, there are two challenges: On the one hand, law enforcement encounters conceptual problems due to the blurring of boundaries between the legal and illegal market by using legal business infrastructure. On the other hand, the increasing fragmentation of distribution channels leads to a decentralisation of risks. While traditional networks were vulnerable to attacks on centrally operating actors, newer forms of networks distribute risks to numerous interfaces that are sometimes almost impossible to identify.

Methamphetamine

Despite the increase in seizures by 35.2% (Table 2) over 2023 (8,897), methamphetamine is less relevant in terms of quantities in Austria compared to other illicit drugs. 3.2% of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act are connected to seizures of metham-

phetamine. 17% of these reported violations were felonies, 83% were misdemeanours. The five most common nationalities of suspects of all the reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in connection with seizures of methamphetamine are Austrian (45.9%), Slovakian (8.7%), Czech (4%), Romanian (3.9%) and Afghan (3.7%). The age groups of suspects are ranked as follows: 25 to 39 years (57.1%), >40 years (20.1%), 21 to 40 years (9.8%), 18 to 20 years (5.5%) and 14 to 17 years (1.8%).

The relevance of methamphetamine is growing on a European and global level. The substance is not exclusively produced and consumed in traditional high-risk regions, such as South-East Asia or North America, but has also been becoming more prevalent on the European market for several years. The situational picture for 2024 is characterised by a professionalised European production, new transnational alliances in trafficking and new products. It has limited yet relevant effects on Austria.

The global situation is still dominated by Asian and North American production sites. The WDR 2024 (UNODC, 2024a) names South-East Asia as the biggest region of origin for methamphetamine. Myanmar, Laos and Thailand are considered countries of origin with large scale deliveries. Methamphetamine is transported to Australia, Japan, New Zealand and (more and more) Africa and Europe. At the same time, the US market is still supplied by domestic production and is marked by epidemiologically problematic consumption patterns. Both regions serve as role models in terms of structure for the growing European methamphetamine industry.

The production infrastructure in Europe has changed drastically over the past few years. EUDA and Europol reports (EMCDDA & Europol, 2022c; EMCDDA & Europol, 2024a), the 2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025) and the UNODC report (2025) demonstrate that there are industrially organised methamphetamine laboratories in several EU member states, especially Belgium, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Spain. Their technical standards are comparable to those of Latin American cartels. The transfer of technology from chemistry-proficient actors from Mexican cartels who, according to the 2025 SOCTA (Europol 2025), bring expertise, production procedures and material logistics to Europe is a striking development. This process happens in the shadows, but is still done systematically, thereby successively creating autonomous European production capacities.

The involved organised crime groups have hybrid structures: On the one hand, local groups for chemistry and logistics exist in Europe; on the other hand, Mexican or Dominican groups act as experts, investors or intermediaries. The 2025 SOCTA (Europol 2025) highlights the growing business-like organisation of these alliances. Characteristics are flexible alliances who are project-based and specialised on a submarket with a clear division of tasks and limited visibility on the outside. Violence is avoided and control exerted through capital, information and supply of materials.

In Austria, several cases of production of methamphetamine in seized drug laboratories, more than for amphetamine, have been recorded. Criminal groups in Austria are heterogeneous and only partially organised. In some cases, these groups have connections to Czech, Slovakian and Polish networks, who work as local distributors or flexible suppliers. Goods are usually smuggled via Lower Austria, Burgenland and Vienna towards the South and West. They are often transported in small amounts, packaged for retail sale and are of high chemical quality. Contrary to other drug markets, there are no confirmed cases of large-scale organised crime networks in the field of methamphetamine trafficking in Austria. Methamphetamine is often distributed in urban centres by single offenders or small groups who work via social media networks and courier systems. Several of the aforementioned reports confirm the growing digitalisation of drug trafficking, for example by using encrypted communication channels, cryptocurrencies, parcel deliveries and real-time tracking.

Statistics on consumption patterns are difficult to gather. According to the „Report on the Epidemic of Addiction“ (GÖG, 2024b), the consumption of methamphetamine stagnated on a low level in Austria and is mainly restricted to urban areas and specific milieus. This substance is used episodically as a performance or sex drug, rarely is it consumed on a continuous basis. Available data does not indicate sharply rising consumption rates, new target audiences or a shift towards younger consumers. Drug Checking Offices report sporadic ultra-pure methamphetamine samples, yet no documented addition of synthetic opioids or other active ingredients.

Therefore, the situational picture for Austria for 2024 seems to be uneventful yet structurally volatile. The substance is available in small quantities, consumed occasionally and not yet established throughout the nation. Infrastructure exists on a European level and its connectivity to existing distribution networks is confirmed. This leads to a two-fold risk for Austria: On the one hand, Austria is a potential target market for high-quality methamphetamine manufactured in the EU. On the other hand, Austria may be used as an intermediary stop for transports to the Balkans or Germany. The biggest challenge in the field of methamphetamine is not the current situation regarding quantities, but rather strategic predictability. European production volumes are growing. The know-how is available and technical prerequisites are established. Furthermore, methamphetamine is more often mixed with other illegal substances, especially new psychoactive substances. If demand were to rise, for example due to sinking prices, new forms of consumption or shifts in supply, methamphetamine could quickly become a predominant stimulant. If demand were to shift, the market could scale up within a few months. Methamphetamine is not a high risk at the moment, but it poses a strategic challenge with an infrastructure that can be easily accelerated.

Ecstasy

The market for XTC (MDMA) remained a stable component of the European market for synthetic drugs in 2024. This report refers to data on seizures of XTC (pills in pieces). 2.2% of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act are connected to seizures of XTC. 13.2% of these reported violations were felonies, 86.8% were misdemeanours. The five most common nationalities of suspects of all the reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in connection with seizures of XTC are Austrian (91.5%), Syrian (6%), Afghan (4.3%), German (3.8%) and Hungarian (2.6%). The age groups of suspects are ranked as follows: 25 to 39 years (42.8%), 14 to 17 years (32.6%), 18 to 20 years (27.1%), 21 to 24 years (18.1%) and >40 years (12.9%).

While this substance was historically mainly associated with the party scene, it is nowadays consumed in a plethora of contexts including occasional recreational consumption or controlled microdosing. The supply for the European market comes from a few highly professional production sites. Their influence also extends to Austria. No fundamental turn in trends has been recorded in 2024; however, there are clear signs that the production and logistics infrastructure is being reorganised. There is also a pronounced shift towards modified or highly dosed forms of active ingredients, especially in the form of pills and crystals.

The global situation indicates that MDMA is mainly a European product: While chemical precursors, especially safrol, isosafrol and PMK, mainly originate from China or India, the final product is manufactured mainly in Europe. Contrary to cocaine and heroin, manufacturers in Europe do not depend on non-European countries for base material. According to the 2025 SOCTA (Europol 2025) and a recently published report by EUDA and Europol (2025), the most relevant production sites are still the Netherlands and Belgium. These regions have access to precursors, reactor laboratory technology, synthesis expertise and export logistics.

The report „EU Drug Market: MDMA in-depth analysis“ by EUDA and Europol (2025) also highlights that MDMA laboratories are increasingly mobile and modular. In the span of a few days, the laboratories can be taken and adapted to a new location. The production process is divided according to tasks, namely synthesis, pressing, packaging and loading. Temporary storage locations, encrypted communication and shielding against external contacts guarantee safety. Product quality is high with regularly confirmed percentages of active ingredients of 120 to 250 mg per pill. Purity exceeding 80% is found in crystals.

Highly specialised criminal networks in the Netherlands, Belgium and parts of Northern Germany support product infrastructure. The 2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025) and GI-TOC (2024) highlight that these groups are often homogeneous in terms of ethnicity or language (especially in the case of Dutch, Moroccan and Belgian-Turkish networks), yet operate based on division of tasks, in a business-like manner and adapt to risks. Violence

is not the tool of choice to solve conflicts, rather knowledge, capital and logistics flows are systematically secured. Using crypto logistics systems, where production, transport and payment are handled completely encrypted and anonymised, is growing more popular. Legally operating businesses, for example for packaging or transport, are used as a method of concealment, either by infiltration or as a front.

This results in a clear situation regarding imports for Austria. Domestic production sites were not discovered in 2024, but an increase in seized MDMA products in connection with digitally distributed retail sale was observed. Goods are mainly offered via social media, specific forums or closed group chats. Then they are delivered by parcel delivery services, handed over in person or via „hidden storage“. Criminal groups are divided into small sections, often locally bound and get their goods in medium-sized quantities from distributors from production countries. There are indications that there are small, organised delivery networks in urban areas, especially Vienna, Graz and Innsbruck. These networks are organised around yet to be identified delivery persons.

No drug checking data on the chemical quality in 2024 is available yet. The most recent nationwide examination is dated 2023 and reveals a large proportion of highly dosed pills (more than 200mg) as well as isolated cases of residue of cutting agents including caffeine, methamphetamine and synthetic cathinone. There is no information indicating contamination from dangerous substances, such as PMMA or NBOMe. In Austria, no deaths related to diluted MDMA have been documented yet. This is one difference to developments in Spain, Poland and Great Britain, where this type of phenomenon occasionally occurred.

Consumption stagnated. According to the „Report on the Epidemic of Addiction“ (GÖG, 2024b), MDMA is particularly popular with persons aged 18 to 30 years. The frequency of consumption is relatively low, mostly episodic. No information suggesting a significant shift towards long-term consumption, self-medication or regarding the substance itself is available. The substance is primarily consumed for leisure (at clubs, festivals, private events) with a growing trend towards self-testing via drug checking or rapid tests.

Austria is still a target country with locally active distribution groups with limited access. MDMA continues to be present, readily available and steadily consumed in Austria. The risk of toxic cutting agents is currently low. On a strategic level, this means risks are stable, yet the structure is questionable in Austria. The market offers high quality, is well organised and technically enhanced. At the same time, it is completely dependent on external production capacities. Criminal groups in Austria act operationally, yet do not control the market. The most challenging aspect is not the consumption, but rather the lack of transparency and high mobility of production and supply chains. Effectively combating this risk requires international access to production logistics and not only to the final product.

New Psychoactive Substances

New psychoactive substances, also called NPS, designer drugs, research chemicals or legal highs, are mostly synthetic substances. They have grown in importance in the past few years. Synthetic cannabinoid, ketamine and cathinone are such NPS.

Once again, NPS were a dynamic and difficult to monitor sector of the drug market in 2024. The number of NPS identified on the European market continues to rise if less drastically than in the heyday from 2013 to 2018. According to EUDA (EMCDDA & Europol, 2024b) and UNODC (2024a; 2024c, 2024d), more than 1,200 different NPS have been identified worldwide until the beginning of 2024. 930 of them were recorded in the European Early Warning System. In Austria, several types of substances are still present, in particular synthetic cannabinoid, cathinone and benzodiazepine.

UNODC (2024b) states that East Asia, especially China, remains the main region of origin for the chemical production of NPS, which are consequently exported mostly via intermediaries in South-East Asia, the Middle East or front companies in East Europe. The production is legal in most cases because the manufactured substances are not subject to international monitoring. Chemical structures are continuously modified to adapt to new legal situations. Synthetic opioids with highly potent effects (for example, nitazene) are on the rise again, especially in combination with fake medicine (for example, fentanyl as fake oxycodone).

While the EU is not a main production region, it is an important target and intermediary market. The report by EUDA and Europol (EMCDDA & Europol, 2024b) emphasises the role of online trafficking, especially via Telegram, instant shops and specialised chemistry forums. Roughly 80% of NPS are imported via postal services. It is confirmed that numerous orders come from Spain, Poland and the Czech Republic, which are then re-exported to Central Europe. EUDA and Europol (EMCDDA & Europol, 2024b) observe a more and more professional packaging and shipment infrastructure that uses camouflage systems, aroma bags, fake labels and multilingual communication. Prices remain relatively stable, yet high fluctuations are observed for new substances. The markets for cannabinoid derivatives and benzodiazepine analogues (for example, flubromazolam, clonazolam) are the largest markets.

Criminal structures in the field of NPS are different to traditional drug markets. They are divided into smaller sections, technology-heavy and less violent. The 2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025) describes a model of digital logistics networks consisting of chemistry laboratories outside the EU (mostly Asia or Russia), packaging stations in Eastern Europe, interim storage and distribution centres in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, digital micro shops with anonymised client databases and logistics partners (delivery services, letterbox companies, straw men). NPS are mainly distributed via digital platforms, direct delivery services and international courier networks, which is confirmed

in several reports by the DEA (2024), GFI (2021) and GI-TOC (2024; 2025). Chemistry platforms on the clearnet (for example, forums for allegedly legal laboratory equipment) are increasingly used for covert distribution.

Available information for 2024 indicates that NPS were manufactured in a seized illicit drug laboratory in Tyrol. Nonetheless, Austria remained an import country for NPS, namely in the form of targeted online orders and mixed consumption (for example, with cannabis or XTC). There are connections to interim storages in the border region to the Czech Republic. NPS are distributed online, usually via platforms such as Telegram or so-called „Legal High Shops“ in the legal grey area (CBD, e-cigarettes, flavouring material).

The „Report on the Epidemic of Addiction“ (GÖG, 2024b) establishes that up to 44% of sampled CBD flowers were laced with synthetic cannabinoids. Furthermore, cathinone derivatives were found in mixed preparations of speed and research chemicals. Moreover, investigations revealed mixed preparations of cocaine and ketamine as well as mixtures with 2C-B („pink cocaine“). The lack of information on the composition and dosage presents the biggest challenge. In numerous cases, it is not possible to identify a declared substance structure of samples. Poisoning is seldom intentional, but often caused by incorrect dosing or substitution (for example, synthetic cannabinoid instead of THC, benzodiazepine instead of MDMA).

The observation of an international upward trend towards trafficking and consumption of ketamine was confirmed in EMPACT working group meetings (attended by BK/3.3). Ketamine is shipped in large quantities from pharmaceutical companies from South Asia via fictitious firms to the EU. Large quantities are therefore introduced to the illegal market. This process has also been confirmed on a national level. There is a pronounced increase in the field of transit in Austria. Exports to Australia, New Zealand and the USA appeared stronger in the foreground. The street-level price for ketamine is very low, which makes it attractive to younger consumers. In addition to the low street-level price, its popularity is also due to easy availability via social media or messenger services. The most challenging aspect is not so much the consumed quantities, but rather volatile chemical definitions, frequent substitutions and mostly unregulated market dynamics.

Synthetic Opioids

The worldwide spread of synthetic opioids has become a not to be underestimated challenge for law enforcement authorities, public health and policy-makers. These substances known for their high effectiveness and easy synthesis led to a stark global rise in deaths due to overdose. Synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl and its analogues, not only redefined the drug market, but also worsened public health crises. In a report, the Council of the European Union (2025a) highlights the alarming spread of synthetic opioids and underlines their presence on traditional and emerging drug markets. The 2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025) establishes that only few cases of fentanyl have been reported

in the EU at this time. Nonetheless, the further spread of dangerous synthetic opioids, such as nitazene or fentanyl, must be closely monitored.

Synthetic opioids are especially dangerous due to their extreme potency. For instance, fentanyl is 50 times more potent than heroin and nitazene is supposedly up to 500 times more potent. This high level of potency raises the risk of overdose dramatically because even tiny amounts can be deadly. Furthermore, more and more cases of synthetic opioids mixed with other substances are reported. The consumers are often not aware of this. (Council of the European Union, 2025a) The usage of naloxon, a „life-saving opioid antagonist“, has become one of the most important strategic tools to minimise damage. However, it is still not available everywhere in Europe (Council of the European Union, 2025a).

The market dynamic of synthetic opioids is propelled by high profit margins and low production costs. Contrary to traditional drugs relying on agricultural resources, synthetic opioids are manufactured exclusively in laboratories often by using legally sold precursors. The most relevant production regions for these substances are in China and India. New intelligence points towards production capacities for certain analogues, such as carfentanyl, in Russia. European law enforcement authorities, especially in Eastern Europe, have sporadically discovered illegal laboratories manufacturing fentanyl and methadone. Closing methadone laboratories in the Ukraine and experimental fentanyl laboratories in Denmark highlights the complexity and geographical expansion of production sites for synthetic opioids (Council of the European Union, 2025a).

Trafficking routes for synthetic opioids often overlap geographically with traditional drug smuggling routes. The Baltic states and Eastern Europe have become the most important transit zones that enable the transport of synthetic opioids from production centres in Asia to Western European markets. Spain's role as an entry point for synthetic opioids to Europe is particularly worrisome. There might be connections to criminal groups with connections to Mexico. Furthermore, recent reports raised concerns that disruptions of the Afghan opium production might lead to a growing availability of synthetic opioids on the European market as they are used to compensate for the shortage in heroin (Council of the European Union, 2025a).

Psychotropic Drugs

Psychotropic substances contain active ingredients that affect the central nervous system. Therefore, all common psychoactive drugs as well as illicit drugs, such as cannabinoids, opiates and cocaine, are considered psychotropic substances. Their relevance arises from the issue of concomitant use, especially in the context of opioid replacement therapy for opioid-dependent patients. The relevant active substances from the group of benzodiazepines are categorised as psychotropic substances and subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act.

Time and again, psychotropic substances are the subject of criminal investigations in Austria and appear in the context of problematic concomitant drug use, especially benzodiazepine. The provinces deem this type of substance as not or not especially problematic. In Austria, however, trafficking is mostly limited to small local groups who get the drugs through medical prescriptions and sell unconsumed excess. Thefts of mostly psychotropic substances on production and transportation routes are on a very low level across Austria and were further reduced by several measures.

The „Report on the Epidemic of Addiction“ (GÖG, 2024b) outlines the consumption of not approved benzodiazepine pills (flualprazolam, etizolam) of unknown origin and the sporadic use of tryptamine in substitution drugs or as alleged LSD.

Online trafficking in illegal narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances developed a highly dynamic yet fragmented distribution model that includes all steps of traditional drug trafficking (preparation, payment, delivery) in the digital sphere. The online drug market is not homogeneous. On the contrary, there is a plethora of distribution channels operating in parallel, including darknet markets, social media, encrypted messenger services, sales platforms, instant shops, peer-to-peer structures and cryptocurrency networks. These systems are interwoven and rely increasingly on parcel logistics as the physical point of contact to consumers.

According to EMCDDA and Europol (2024a), UNODC (2024a) and GI-TOC (2024; 2025a), despite constant levels of demand, central darknet marketplaces continue to lose relevance in 2024 because of state interventions and an ongoing shift towards smaller and more secluded platforms. Cryptocurrencies form the economic structure of online drug trafficking. Payments made with bitcoin, monero, ethereum, cryptomixer and smart contracts are commonly used for concealment. Escrow systems, bonus systems and NFT-based access codes are used to secure transactions.

The most drastic change in 2024 was observed in the distribution via social media and (crypto) messenger services. According to GI-TOC (2025a), Europol (2025a) and UNODC (2024a), these distribution channels have become a „digital street market“, in particular for cannabis, MDMA, cocaine, ketamine and NPS. The drugs are distributed via Instagram, Snapchat, Telegram, Signal, Wickr Me, Threema and increasingly also via Discord servers and privately encrypted platforms. Offers are often encrypted and customer contact is established via direct messages or so-called „forward channels“, where information can easily be forwarded to contacts.

This trend has undoubtedly reached Austria. Drug Checking Offices in Vienna and Graz have recorded more and more cases where substances were ordered via messenger services. Investigating officers frequently identify encrypted platforms as operational challenges. Local couriers who deliver within 30 to 90 minutes mostly distribute drugs.

They are either paid in cash or in cryptocurrencies. Criminal groups are small, youth-oriented, sometimes organised in a family-structure or based on language. Violence is not common. Technical adaptability is high.

No matter the distribution channel, delivery by parcel services is the backbone of online drug trafficking. According to GFI (2021), DEA (2024) and UNODC (2024a; 2024c), criminal groups systematically employ parcel services to distribute risks by splitting goods into several parcels, using foreign sender, drop-off points or accomplices in the logistics sector and manipulating addresses. The United States Postal Service, DHL, UPS, DPD and GLS are affected on an international level. In Europe, national postal services are also impacted.

Based on investigation results and international reports (see above), Austria is still a recipient of drug imports from darknet sources, primarily MDMA, cannabis and psychoactive drugs. The goods are typically ordered from the Netherlands, Germany and the Czech Republic and then delivered in neutral packaging by postal services (Österreichische Post, DPD, DHL and GLS). Available information suggests that more and more drug parcels are delivered to parcel boxes, vacant addresses or stolen identities.

An emerging modus operandi of drug deliveries is the so-called „dead drop“. This development has not yet been recorded in the statistics. In these cases, narcotic drugs are no longer sent by post, but are hidden in specific locations. The recipient then receives the GPS coordinates for the drop-off location. In addition to social media, there is a growing number of autonomous online micro shops mostly on the clearnet with sometimes deceptively legal-looking interfaces. These sites offer primarily CBD products with added illegal ingredients, alleged research substances or unapproved pharmaceutical products. The report by EMCDDA and Europol (2024b) shows that many of these sites are hosted on WordPress or Shopify with payment options via bitcoin, ethereum or credit card. Austrian drug consumers gain access to these offers via VPN or redirect domains. Sellers remain mostly anonymous and the servers are located in offshore regions or on virtual cloud knots.

There are recorded cases of orders made with fake or stolen identities in Austria. Domestic criminal groups prefer parcel services that offer parcel tracking and timed drop-off options. In Austria, there is no intelligence indicating a systematic cooperation with delivery personnel, as it has been documented in Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands.

While there are operational cells acting as delivery services, storage personnel or intermediaries in Austria, there is no information suggesting a local group in command. These operational cells complete tasks in the context of larger distribution logistics without strategic commandeering by a larger group. Case analyses establish that such groups act highly autonomously and divide their tasks by function in urban areas. Surveillance measures revealed that there are messenger groups with several hundred members in

Vienna, Linz, Graz and Innsbruck. These groups are used to catalogue substances and coordinate deliveries. The networks are not territorial. Their work is platform-based and to order. Typical digital roles include administration (admins/mods), distribution (courier services, transport services, parcel services), communication (customer service, „drug influencer“), IT (IT operator, encryption, hosting) and proxy actors (pseudo deliveries, allocation of identities).

In 2024, Customs Authority Austria seized a total of 1,179 parcels containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. International partner authorities seized another 237 parcels containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances with Austria as their country of origin or destination. In 2024, a total of approximately 250kg of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in parcels were seized. Approximately 84kg of ketamine and approximately 58kg of herbal cannabis accounted for the largest shares.

Online drug trafficking is a structural risk that largely evades traditional investigative tools. Involved actors are not organised in a hierarchy but according to function. Legal infrastructure is used for deliveries and payments are made via pseudonymous systems. Austria is completely integrated in this large-scale system as a destination country, distribution region and operational playground of individual small digital networks. The EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 (EU, 2021a), the EU Drugs Action Plan 2021-2025 (2021b) and the EU Roadmap to Fight Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime (2023) as well as the 2025 SOCTA (Europol, 2025) recognise the problem and its dynamic, yet remain vague concerning specific measures. Cross-sector investigation teams, technical development standards, cross-border information flow and possibilities for operational actions are required; otherwise, online drug trafficking will remain a market with a largely resilient structure.

4.2 Crypto Messenger Services As a Challenge – Operation Achilles

In April 2021, a specialised working group called „Achilles“ was established at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria. It consists of experts from the sub-departments Organised Crime and Drug-Related Crime. Since then, encrypted data from different crypto messenger services has been systematically analysed. All nine provincial CIDs as well as other organisational units at the Federal Ministry of the Interior are included in investigations. Ever since, the gathered intelligence has led to the discovery of criminal networks across Austria. The extent of the networks exceeded previous estimations of organised crime in Austria.

Processing data from platforms such as ANØM (since April 2021) and Sky ECC (since summer 2021) kicked off a new CID approach to combating organised crime in Austria. With support from US law enforcement agencies, the Federal Bureau of Investigation

(FBI) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) as well as Europol's Operational Task Force (OTF), law enforcement authorities were able to access previously inaccessible communication structures and strategically identify cross-border criminal groups. Criminal Intelligence Service Austria and Croatia are leaders of the OTF Balkan Cartel. Furthermore, Criminal Intelligence Service Austria also actively participates in other task forces coordinated by Europol.

The main finding from these investigations is that criminal groups with connections to the Western Balkans dominate the Austrian narcotic drug market to a considerable extent. The analysis of communication data not only proves large-scale organised drug trafficking but also criminal offences such as trafficking in weapons and serious violent offences. The total data volume at Europol is approximately one billion chat messages. The amount of data far exceeds the normal information volume in criminal police investigations.

There are currently investigations into thousands of known and yet to be identified criminals and criminal groups in different fields of criminal activity. Austrian law enforcement authorities will presumably be dealing with the ongoing analysis and prosecution for years. Investigations in the context of Achilles Working Group have proven to constitute the largest grouping of investigations in the history of criminal policing in Austria. This statement is also confirmed by the fact that Austrian courts have pronounced roughly 1,000 years of imprisonment up to now in relation to these investigations. For the first time ever, a criminal received a life sentence for their activities in drug trafficking in Austria.

4.3 Production of Illicit Drugs in Austria

Austria is not only a transit or consumption country for illicit drugs, it is also a production region for certain drugs. On the one hand, cannabis is cultivated, especially herbal cannabis in indoor and outdoor farms, and cannabis products are manufactured. On the other hand, synthetic drugs are produced in drug laboratories.

Cannabis Farms

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

The number of identified and seized farms has been continuously declining since 2022 (722 seized farms). Compared to the previous year, figures for 2024 show a decrease from 582 to 490 (-92).

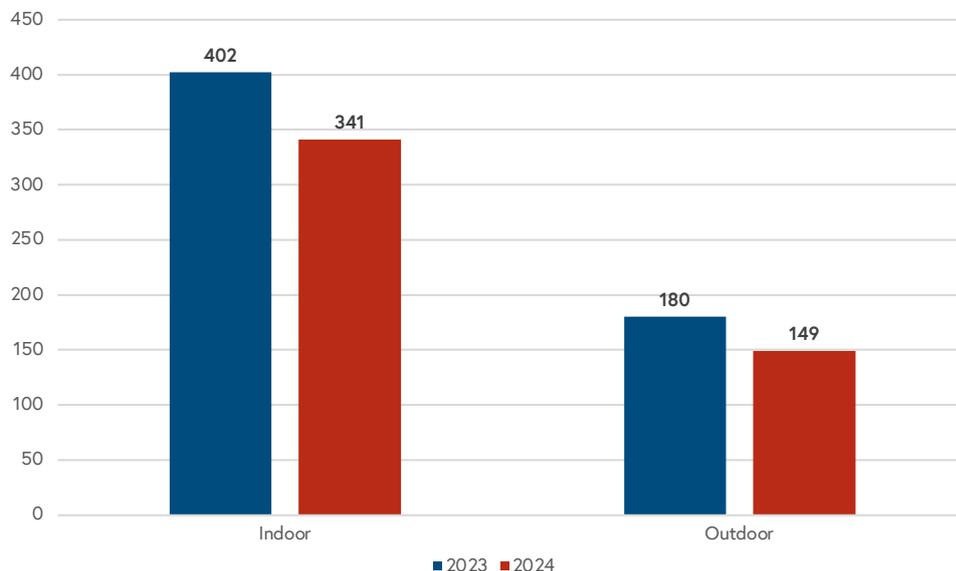


Figure 9: Cannabis farms indoor, outdoor and total in 2023 and 2024

As already stated in the Drug-Related Crime Annual Report 2023 (BMI, 2024a), the explanation for the decreasing number of seized farms is that the number of micro (one to five plants), mini (six to 49 plants) and small farms (50 to 249 plants) went down, but those of medium (250 to 499 plants), big (500 to 999 plants) and industrial farms (more than 1,000 plants) rose. In 2024, the police were especially successful in regard to big cultivations. Since this trend has been ongoing for more than three years, it is safe to assume that this trend toward larger facilities will continue in the years to come.

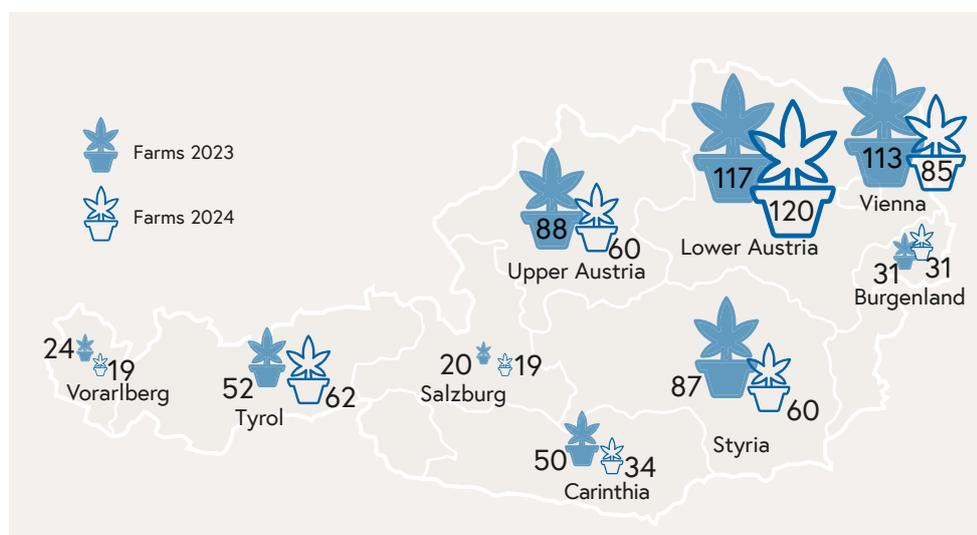


Figure 10: Number of farms discovered in Austria in 2023 and 2024

Clandestine Drug Labs

After a decline in detected drug laboratories in the years 2014 to 2019, there was a strong rebound in 2020 and 2021. Since the cooperation with Austrian businesses, especially in the field of sale of chemicals to private individuals, was reinforced years ago, a large number of incoming disclosures regarding suspicious sales was received. These incoming disclosures often led to the discovery of illegal laboratories. Over the years, suspects changed their modus operandi noticeably in that they purchased chemicals needed for the production of illegal drugs online in Germany or sometimes in neighbouring countries (for example, the Czech Republic and Poland). There were also isolated cases of online purchases in China. Furthermore, it was established that offenders only purchase chemicals in Austria that are not monitored or not specifically under observation. Moreover, sometimes purchases are made by several persons to avoid detection due to purchasing large quantities. Since 2020, several laboratories were identified based on tip-offs or investigations, but there were also so-called chance discoveries.

In 2022, a striking decrease was observed. Potential reasons could be the growing list of substances classified as drug precursors and an alleged lack of available base materials via unknown supply chains.

In 2024, twelve active and/or inactive illicit drug laboratories and production sites for final manufacturing of narcotic drugs were discovered and seized in Austria. One identified and seized production site was only manufacturing explosives. Therefore, 13 illegal laboratories were identified and seized.

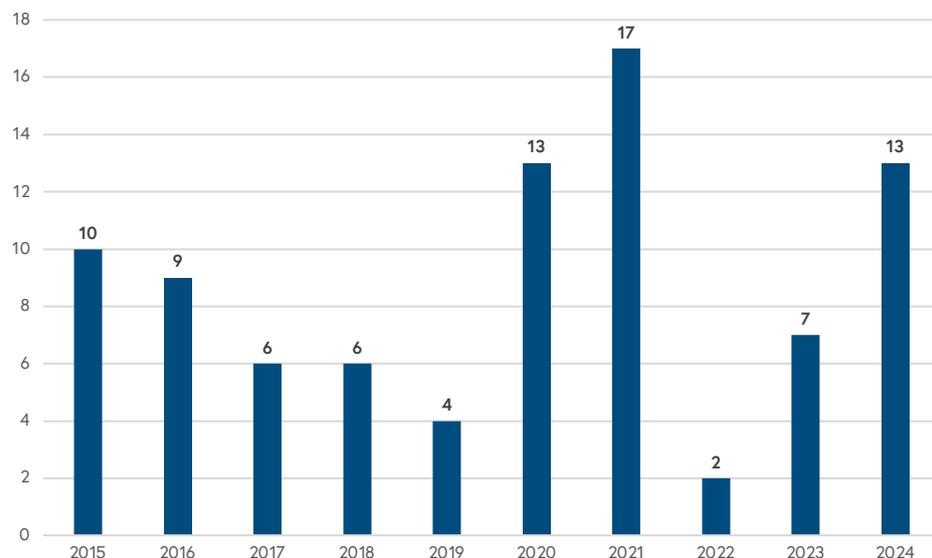


Figure 11:
Number of drug labs discovered in Austria between 2015 and 2024

To Austrian standards, the number of identifications and seizures of drug laboratories has once again risen to a high level with 13 labs in 2024 compared to seven labs in 2023.

Over the period of the last several years, illegal drug laboratories were seized in Vienna, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Styria and in some cases in Salzburg and Tyrol, too. In 2023, a drug laboratory was found in Carinthia for the first time. Burgenland and Vorarlberg are the only provinces where no illegal laboratories have been found yet.

Trends regarding illegal production sites, preferably located in North-Eastern Austria, especially in Lower Austria, continued in 2024. Methamphetamine and amphetamine were mainly produced through the respective chemical synthesis using necessary laboratory equipment. In previous years, cases of the relatively simple process of crystallising amphetamine base or oil, which were procured abroad, into amphetamine sulphate were recorded. This type of final manufacturing was first documented in 2022, two more cases were recorded in 2023. In 2024, two cases in Vienna were identified. While offenders manufacturing in different manners have been almost exclusively Austrian nationals over the past years, criminals using this manufacturing method were mostly of Balkan descent or persons who did not possess Austrian citizenship yet have had their centre of life and activities in Austria for years.

Production capacities for amphetamine were usually higher as the manufacturing of amphetamine requires in-depth knowledge and special equipment. It is assumed that there was at least a regional amphetamine market. In three cases (Vienna, Lower Austria, Upper Austria), amphetamine was produced using a so-called pre-precursor, which was bought online in Poland: phenyl-2-nitropropene (in short: P2NP). This substance is not regulated. No other use for this substance is known. Furthermore, two apartments in Vienna were identified, where amphetamine base of unknown origin was crystallised.

The production of methamphetamine was partly for personal use, partly to supply regional consumers. Operating laboratories to smuggle drugs abroad or to sell them online (for example, on the darknet) were exceptions.

For the first time, a laboratory to manufacture alpha-PVP (alpha-pyrrolidinopentiopnone) was found in a residential building in Tyrol. This substance is subject to the New Psychoactive Substances Act.

There was one case in 2024 in Lower Austria, where a suspect was not manufacturing narcotic drugs but large quantities of explosive substances. In the course of the police intervention, an explosion occurred which killed the suspect.

4.4 Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism in Connection with Drug-Related Crime

Drug trafficking has long ceased to be a domain exclusive to criminal organisations. This has been confirmed in several publications by the Financial Action Task Force, which are available to the general public. For years, criminal and terrorist organisations have been using synergies to achieve their respective goals more efficiently despite their different motivations. In this regard, the Financial Action Task Force's reports are especially indicative. Often very high sums of cash are seized during police interventions, which is underlined in the cases presented in the chapters on developments in the provinces. Individual offenders, but also organised criminal groups attempt to launder the illegal proceeds from the sale of narcotic drugs through countless concealment methods. In this way, they are in a position to give their illicitly acquired assets the appearance of legitimacy and to enjoy the fruits of their criminal activities without any worries.

In Austria, networks of legitimate business models have spread far and wide, making it possible to disguise the origin of illegal money flows. Then there are individuals who used to be very successful in serious drug-related crime on an international level and amassed wealth of dubious origin and moved from their home countries to Austria in order to invest their illicitly acquired funds, for example, in real estate.

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

The „National Risk Analysis of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing“ prepared by the Austrian Ministry of Finance names drug-related crime as one of the most frequently occurring predicate offences to money laundering, whose risk of commission is thought to be high. It should be noted, however, that the Austrian Financial Intelligence Unit (A-FIU) at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria rarely receives disclosures regarding this phenomenon. The number of unreported cases is thought to be high.

The A-FIU's analysis allows to attribute certain types of criminal offences, so called predicate offences, to incoming disclosures. The 2023 Situation Report on Money Laundering (BMI, 2024b) states that as in previous years fraudulent activities (34%) dominated in cases where an attribution to certain criminal offences (=predicate offence) was possible. (BMI, 2024b, p. 29) The 2024 Situation Report on Money Laundering has not yet been released. Fifteen per cent of the reported facts concerned tax offences. The remaining

cases were distributed as indicated in Figure 11. Only one per cent of incoming disclosures was related to drug-related crime.

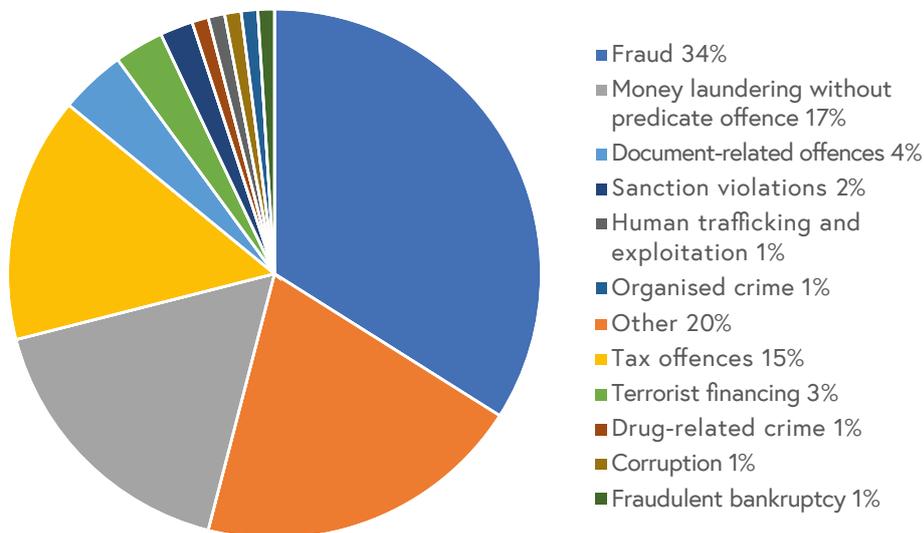


Figure 12: Incoming disclosures categorised by crime area in 2023 (BMI, 2024b, p 29)

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

There are indications that Chinese nationals are involved in money laundering activities on behalf of other criminal groups, for example from the Western Balkans. They seem to be conducting money transportations in Europe and towards South America, for which they receive a commission. The typical rate for transports within Europe is 1.5% and to South America approximately 10% of the transported sums.

Asset Recovery – State Instrument of Asset Recovery to Combat Crime

(Submitted by Asset Recovery Office, BK/7.2)

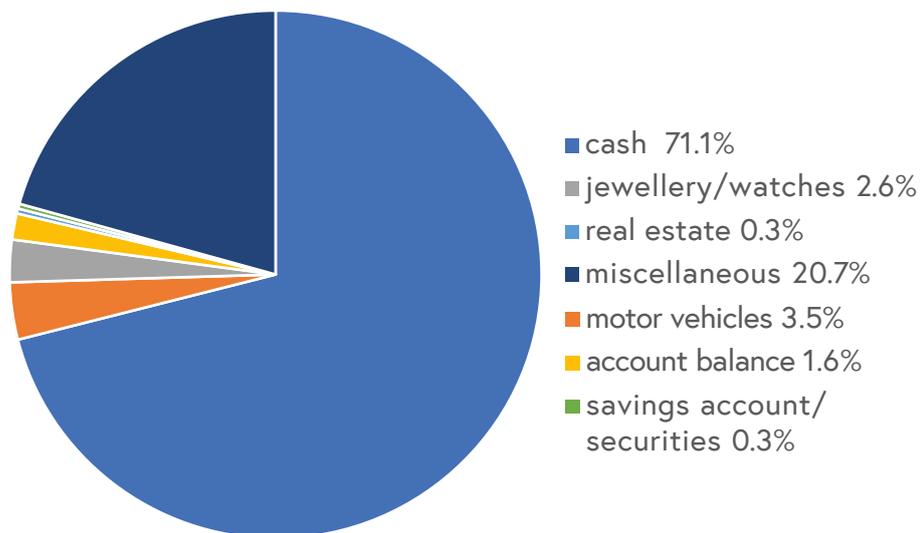
Organised crime is profit-oriented. Its illegal activities generate profits in the estimated amount of at least 139 million euros per year. A large portion of this can be attributed to drug related crime. These profits allow organised crime groups to fund further criminal activities and undermine the legal economy and public institutions.

One of the most effective instruments to combat organised crime is tracing the criminals' money, especially by taking measures to recover assets.

These measures enable law enforcement authorities to uncover and dismantle elaborate networks of criminal organisations operating in Austria, the EU and around the globe. In the course of intensive financial investigations, money flows and financial networks of criminals are uncovered, which in turn allows investigators to trace and seize/recover financial means that were elicited through the illegal sale, trafficking and transport of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Seizures and the permanent deprivation of assets originating from illegal profits serve two purposes: On the one hand, suspects are deprived of their financial means for continuing their activities. On the other hand, their criminal activities are no longer profitable because suspects lose any financial advantage and the funding for their sometimes luxurious lifestyle. This is also relevant when suspects evade law enforcement authorities, for example due to fleeing, a lack of extradition agreements or after a conviction as the suspects' previously „comfortable life“ is no longer attainable. This type of law enforcement is an effective instrument to permanently deprive offenders of their financial advantages originating from criminal offences and permanently dismantle criminal networks.

International police cooperation plays a crucial role in the field of asset recovery since organised crime does not respect borders. Close collaboration with international partners allows for quick exchange of information, cross-border financial investigations and asset recovery measures. There are so-called „asset recovery networks“ within the EU and with third countries, which consist of representatives from police and judicial authorities. These allow for communication and cooperation around the globe. In 2024, a total of approximately 5.5 million euros in 1,173 cases were recovered.

Figure 13:
Percentages of types of recovered assets, criminal offences pursuant to sections 27, 28, 28a and 30 of the Narcotic Drugs Act, analysis period from 1 January to 31 December 2024, dated 07 February 2025 (source: BK/7.2 Asset Recovery Office)



4.5 Outlook for 2025

Based on the geographical location and historical developments, it is safe to assume that as in previous years, Austria will play a key role in fighting international organised drug-related crime in the future. Austria is not only a country of origin and/or destination, but especially a transit country.

Data from wastewater analyses and their conclusions confirmed that the amount of narcotic drugs available on the Austrian market is actually much higher than initially assumed. Frequently changing routes, modi operandi and the high number of criminal actors render trafficking in cocaine and synthetic drugs especially dynamic, which is underlined by the so called „waterbed effect“: Coordinated and focused measures taken by law enforcement authorities in one area create openings or new opportunities in other areas. There is an expulsion or repositioning. This effect leads to alternative routes and modi operandi, which fires up drug-related violence and readiness to inflict violence.

The rapidly progressing digital transformation has deeply changed the dynamics and structures of organised drug-related crime in the past few years. Criminal networks increasingly utilise digital communication channels, such as crypto messenger services, social media and the darknet, to coordinate their illegal activities, act anonymously and evade prosecution. This technological advancement not only provides them with new opportunities but also creates increasingly complex environments that are difficult to penetrate. Investigations in the past years showed that internationally operating criminal organisations have established large networks which led to the never before seen professionalisation of drug trafficking.

In the context of the ACHILLES Working Group, investigations conducted since 2021 into different crypto messenger services showed the organised manner and extent in which criminal groups in Austria act. Investigation results indicate that this trend will continue in the future. The unprecedented scale of international organised crime revealed in the course of the investigations has an additional impact on law enforcement authorities, for example by preparing threat analyses and implementing risk-minimising measures for investigators, public prosecutors and judges.

Since new crypto messenger services are continuously infiltrated and discovered, no end is in sight. Just the processing of already available data will take years.

With regard to available amounts of data, not only the CID but also judicial authorities face growing challenges, especially considering that intensive investigations result in

long proceedings. Many times, deadlines are pushed to the limit, which increases the pressure on the police and complicates thorough investigations. Furthermore, convicted offenders do not cease their criminal activities while in prison. Therefore, it was necessary to strengthen the cooperation with the Ministry of Justice in the context of the project CARCER.

Supply and demand for most drug types were high as well as illicit profits generated by criminal networks. Parallel financial investigations for seizure and recovery of assets as well as raising awareness in this regard among judicial authorities are definitely something to strive for, as mentioned in the submissions by the provinces.

It is likely that innovative chemical processes and new potentially dangerous varieties will emerge. This will in turn further worsen the already diverse effects of drug trafficking. Furthermore, recent reports raised concerns that disruptions of the Afghan opium production might lead to a growing availability of synthetic opioids on the European market as they are used to compensate for the shortage in heroin (Council of the European Union, 2025a).

Moreover, law enforcement authorities in 2025 will be confronted with an increase in illegal purchases of and trafficking in narcotic drugs on the darknet, payment with virtual (crypto-) currencies and drug smuggling by (postal) parcels. Another challenging aspect is the increasing danger of mixed consumption of different narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, which will only gain in complexity due to different production methods.

A not to be underestimated aspect for the security in Austria is the close interdependence between drug-related crime and other forms of crime. Drug-related crime is inter- and multidisciplinary which means it is closely knit with other areas of crime. The immediate threats posed by the illegal trafficking in and consumption of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances go hand in hand with accompanying, acquisitive and subsequent crime. Violent and property offences show a direct causal link to illicit drug trafficking and its criminal surroundings. At the same time, new information indicating detrimental effects of illegal narcotic drugs production on the environment is accumulating. This sparks a discussion on a new type of environmental crime. This intelligence underlines the necessity of a holistic and proactive approach that not only focuses on penal sanctions but also emphasises long-lasting prevention and focused interventions.

In contrast to the Austrian legal framework, whereby the possession and sale of cannabis is illegal, several EU member states have decriminalised or partially legalised the cultivation, commercial sale and use of cannabis. However, in the vast majority of states these acts are still punishable by law. The Federal Ministry of the Interior has consistently pursued a strict line for years and will continue this line of argument, which is in compliance with scientific studies and experiences of affected countries.

Effectively combating this type of crime requires a multi-layered strategy and an appropriate legal framework for the police's work. The legal framework for the police's investigative work has worsened further, which is partially due to restrictive data protection regulations as well as amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure. In addition to consequent prosecution, it is also important to develop innovative solutions in close cooperation with national and international law enforcement authorities and stakeholders from the private sector. Increased interdisciplinary cooperation and exchange of expertise are vital in order to adequately address increasingly complex threats.

5

Drug-Related Crime in Austria's Provinces

This chapter provides an overview of the drug-related crime situation in each province based on the information provided by each provincial CID's competent unit, EB 09. This overview includes the development of drug-related crime in Austria's nine provinces with regard to the number of reported violations, the quantities of seized substances, information about criminal groups, transport routes, drug farms, labs, new psychoactive substances, consumer behaviour, online drug trafficking, trends in acquisitive, accompanying and subsequent crime and intelligence in the field of money laundering, terrorist financing and asset recovery. Each report for the respective province ends with a short outlook on 2025 and a representative case study.

Each province submitted information based on a standardised questionnaire with specific questions accompanied by explanations and a guide to fill out the form. This questionnaire was developed by BK/3.3. The gathered information was consequently processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data. In some cases, statements and expressions were put into quotation marks to emphasise the observations made in the provinces. The length of the sub-chapters vary depending on the drug-related crime situation and available intelligence.

5.1 Burgenland

(The information provided by Burgenland Provincial CID's EB 09 was processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data.)

In comparison to the previous year, the total number of reported drug-related violations saw a slight decline of five reported violations (-0.6%) in 2024. 784 reports (felonies and misdemeanours) were filed in Burgenland. This accounts for 2.1% of all reported drug-related violations in Austria. While reported felonies increased by 20 (+23%), reported misdemeanours fell by 25 (-3.6%).

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	98	113	155	133	133	109	113	86	87	107	+23.0%
Misdemeanours	760	784	847	835	851	766	587	671	702	677	-3.6%
Total	858	897	1,002	968	984	875	700	757	789	784	-0.6%

Of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Burgenland, 58.7% of cases were related to cannabis, 17.2% to cocaine, 2.3% to heroin, 3.6% to amphetamine, 4.2% to methamphetamine, and 4.7% to ecstasy.

Table 9:
Reported drug-related felonies and misdemeanours pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Burgenland between 2015 and 2024

Compared to the seized amounts of the previous year, there is a pronounced increase in 2024 regarding amphetamine, cannabis and methamphetamine, while other substances declined.

Seizures - Amounts	old*)				new**)
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine (in grams)	1,612	792	743	123	2,095
Total cannabis (in grams)	300,226	245,652	34,292	43,933	126,399
Heroin (in grams)	311	30	66	202	27
Cocaine (in grams)	988	314	1,360	8,696	5,559
Methamphetamine (in grams)	702	57	891	33	117
Ecstasy (pieces)	36,189	56	13	315	313

Table 10:
Seizures of main substances in Burgenland from 2020 to 2024

*) Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

***) Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Developments regarding Consumer Behaviour, Illicit Drug Use and Cutting Agents

No significant changes in consumption behaviour have been observed over the previous years. Younger drug consumers smoke more heroin using aluminium foil and consume a significantly higher quantity of heroin. The consumption of ketamine is also on the rise. Other than that, there is no new intelligence on consumption behaviour.

Lidocaine, creatine, paracetamol and soda are commonly used cutting agents. These cutting agents are used for heroin and cocaine.

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

As reported in previous years, different criminal groups are active in different regions in Burgenland. These groups mainly focus on trafficking in one dominant narcotic drug; however, other substances are also seized time and again.

Albanian criminals established themselves in the area of Bratislava (Slovakia) and the close-by area of Kittsee. Albanian and Serbian criminal groups mainly smuggle cocaine from Kosovo, Albania and Serbia to Austria. However, they are also responsible for the smuggling of cocaine from the Netherlands and Belgium to Austria. Parts of these narcotics drugs are then exported to Slovakia. The criminal groups mainly use motor vehicles for smuggling trips.

Young Austrians (with and without foreign background) are active in the middle regions of Burgenland. They mostly procure cocaine, heroin and cannabis products from Vienna and put these substances into circulation in an organised manner.

In the south of Burgenland, the proximity to Graz plays a vital role. Offenders are mostly Austrian nationals who are connected to cases of cocaine.

In regard to new psychoactive substance, ketamine and 1.4-butanediol (BDO) were especially prevalent. The consumption of these substances rose compared to 2023.

Cannabis Farms, Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

Thirty-one cannabis farms (16 indoor and 15 outdoor farms) were identified and seized in Burgenland in 2024. Compared to 2023, more micro farms (one to five plants) and one industrial farm (more than 1,000 plants) were recorded. Suspects were persons who were directly connected to the operated farms, for example house owners or tenants from surrounding areas. However, Hungarian nationals were also involved. Farms were discovered either in the course of autonomous investigations by the police or based on tip-offs from citizens

In 2024, no illegal laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were identified or seized in Burgenland.

Online Drug-Related Crime

In Oberpullendorf District, a darknet vendor was identified and arrested. He used the darknet and other messenger services, such as WhatsApp and Threema. He accepted orders via darknet and shipped narcotic drugs via postal services to consumers in Austria, Italy, Slovenia and Spain. Apparently, he had procured narcotic drugs, such as MDMA, amphetamine, cocaine, LSD, psychotropic drugs and habit-forming prescription medication from the Netherlands.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services

Investigations conducted so far confirm empirical data from previous years: extensive and sometimes extremely complex and therefore time-consuming investigations, high resource consumption, high expenses for interpreting services and resource-intensive judicial proceedings.

Developments in the Area of Acquisitive, Accompanying and Subsequent Crime

In 2024, almost no violent offences were recorded; however, demanding payment played an increasingly important role. Notably, a higher number of handguns and prohibited weapons, such as brass knuckles, was seized from drug dealers who used them to collect debts.

Observations on Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Asset Recovery

The main method of payment for drug deals is cash. Darknet drug trafficking is one exception to this. In these cases, payments are typically made using with cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin.

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

The good cooperation with specialised experts at the Burgenland Provincial CID has proven helpful in cases of asset recovery following seizures.

Outlook for 2025

Due to the developments, the Burgenland Provincial CID expects a continued rise in smuggling and consumption of cocaine, while heroin seems to continue to decline. With regard to heroin, it is assumed that substitution substances, such as fentanyl and NPS, will gain in importance.

Case Study: Burgenland

In cooperation with Criminal Intelligence Service Austria, Styria Provincial CID, investigative authorities in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Belgium, the Burgenland Provincial CID conducted investigations against a multinational criminal group from summer 2022 to spring 2024. This criminal group consists mainly of persons of Albanian descent. They transported and put into circulation narcotic drugs, namely cocaine, from mainly Belgium and the Netherlands to Central Europe. The cocaine was smuggled in hollowed-out car batteries. Investigations revealed that large quantities of cocaine were smuggled to Slovakia, but also the Czech Republic, Switzerland and France. It was proved that this criminal group had imported a total amount of 264kg of cocaine from Belgium and the Netherlands to Austria. Seven members of the group were arrested and imprisoned in Austria. Four more members are still wanted as per European arrest warrant.

Info Box 1:
Case Study: Burgenland

5.2 Carinthia

(The information provided by Carinthia Provincial CID's EB 09 was processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data.)

In comparison to the previous year, the total number of reported drug-related violations saw a slight increase of 349 reported violations (15%) in 2024. 2,676 reports (felonies

and misdemeanours) were filed in Carinthia. This accounts for 7.2% of all reported drug-related violations in Austria. An increase of 43 felonies (+24.4%) and 306 misdemeanours (+14.2%) was recorded.

Of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Carinthia, 54.6% of cases were related to cannabis, 21.5% to cocaine, 9.7% to heroin, 1.4% to amphetamine, 0.7% to methamphetamine, and 1.4% to ecstasy.

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	96	91	123	173	177	151	194	177	176	219	+24.4%
Misdemeanours	1,544	1,568	2,087	2,254	2,672	2,374	2,294	2,239	2,151	2,457	+14.2%
Total	1,640	1,659	2,210	2,427	2,849	2,525	2,488	2,416	2,327	2,676	+15.0%

Compared to the previous year, the statistics on seizures rose for every drug type except cannabis and heroin.

Table 11: Reported drug-related felonies and misdemeanours pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Carinthia between 2015 and 2024

Seizures - Amounts	old*)				new**)
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine (in grams)	602	1,049	228	518	1,961
Total cannabis (in grams)	52,039	168,252	49,055	115,333	96,534
Heroin (in grams)	1,156	4,859	3,284	2,606	1,935
Cocaine (in grams)	1,108	1,192	3,223	2,563	3,363
Methamphetamine (in grams)	22	265	156	48	137
Ecstasy (pieces)	1,115	284	343	540	969

Table 12: Seizures of main substances in Carinthia from 2020 to 2024

*) Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

**) Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

Herbal cannabis, heroin and cocaine were the most popular drugs of drug consumers in Carinthia. The phenomenon of relatively intense consumption of heroin and cocaine is evident. According to officers at Carinthia Provincial CID, it seems to be on a relatively high level, contrary to the situation in neighbouring provinces. Regional fluctuations have always been observed. In the past, opiates have always been more popular in the Eastern regions than in the Western regions of the province.

Caffeine and paracetamol are used as cutting agents for heroin. Milk powder, lidocaine and similar substitution substances are popular cutting agent for cocaine. In a few cases, „fentanyl products“ with cutting agents known in connection with heroin were seized.

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

Due to its geographical location along the Balkan route, Carinthia is known as a transit and destination region for drugs that are imported via Slovenia, mainly cocaine, heroin and cannabis products. However, seizures of and reported violations in connection with synthetically manufactured narcotic drugs, mainly ecstasy and amphetamine, rose in 2024. Intermediary dealers and end consumers in cities and districts gain access to these imported drugs. All border crossing points are used for smuggling trips; however, criminal groups take into consideration whether and at what times these border crossing points are attended by police officers.

The smuggled quantities range from small to large.

However, it was established that low-level drug dealers residing in Carinthia in particular smuggle smaller amounts to Carinthia, but run more smuggling trips. When stopped by the police, offenders declare these trips as procuring drugs for their personal use.

The perception of past years that single groups band together has been confirmed. This dynamic mainly applies to persons with foreign background and mainly occurs in the cities Klagenfurt and Villach. Police interventions were targeted at Romanian and Bosnian-Serbian criminal groups. Apart from several criminal groups of Balkan descent, there is one group of African descent in Klagenfurt. The latter is not established in Villach. While there is a strong Romanian group in Villach, they are a minority in Klagenfurt. The prevalence of Romanian criminals in Villach might be due to the well-established sex industry in Villach and surrounding areas.

Regarding the readiness to inflict violence within the milieu, it has been repeatedly observed during police interventions targeting members of organised crime groups that the members carried handguns or other weapons.

From time to time, violations of the New Psychoactive Substances Act are reported, yet numbers remain low. Organised crime groups have not yet been identified. Psychoactive substances are mostly procured via the darknet.

Cannabis Farms, Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

Thirty-four (-16) cannabis farms (20 indoor and 14 outdoor farms) were identified and seized in Carinthia in 2024. According to the Carinthia Provincial CID, the cannabis farms were usually discovered by chance. It was not possible to attribute them to a certain criminal group.

In 2024, no illegal laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were identified or seized in Carinthia.

Online Drug-Related Crime

The number of identified orders of narcotic drugs via the darknet was high in 2024. It is nearly impossible to monitor this type of drug smuggling with conventional monitoring mechanisms.

Only the processed narcotic drug parcels allow for conclusions on the frequency of this type of crime. In regard to postal items, there was an increase in seizures of chemical, potentially dangerous products that, however, are not subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act or New Psychoactive Substances Act.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services

Investigations conducted so far confirm empirical data from previous years: extensive and sometimes extremely complex and therefore time-consuming investigations, high resource consumption, high expenses for interpreting services and resource-intensive judicial proceedings.

Developments in the Area of Acquisitive, Accompanying and Subsequent Crime

Cross-connections between drugs or drug-related crime and nearly all areas of general crime exist. Especially in the area of drug procurement, the number of robberies and property offences rose compared to 2023. In particular, cases of street robberies or robberies in apartments increased. The suspects were mainly young adults or adults up to the age of 25. Robberies of businesses (gas stations, tobacco shops, bakeries, postal services, etc.) were mainly observed in larger cities.

Furthermore, it was observed that suspects between the ages of 16 and 20 carried knives or knife-like items, which constitutes a „high-risk situation“. Offences, such as resistance to public authority, are often linked to consumption of illegal narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

Observations on Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Asset Recovery

The prevalent payment method is cash. Particularly in the field of cross-border drug trafficking, couriers are used to transport cash. Offenders often use different money transfer providers to send cash to accomplices, who mainly act from abroad. In the context of gambling, it is repeatedly confirmed that foreign criminal groups use casinos abroad, mainly in Slovenia, to launder illegally obtained money through gambling.

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

While the police seizes assets, judicial authorities are hesitant to recover them. Compared to previous years, the Carinthia Provincial CID identified a potential for improvement regarding the readiness for asset recovery.

Outlook for 2025

The Carinthia Provincial CID does not expect significant changes in the situation of cannabis and cocaine. There are first attempts at substituting heroin with other products, such as fentanyl. However, only isolated cases have been confirmed so far.

Case Study: Carinthia

In August 2024, intensive investigations resulted in a search of premises of an Austrian citizen in Klagenfurt. A total of approximately 16kg of herbal cannabis, 1.5kg of cannabis resin and 43,500 euros in cash, which originated from the sale of drugs, were seized. The accused was arrested, reported to the Klagenfurt Public Prosecutor's Office and committed to Klagenfurt Prison. In the course of the police interview, the accused confessed that he had profitably sold a total of 49kg of cannabis products to at least 50 end consumers since 2020. The drug delivery person was identified as an Austrian citizen of Turkish descent residing in Vienna. In cooperation with the Vienna Provincial CID, an indoor cannabis farm, which had already been harvested, was found at his residential address. He was also arrested and committed to Klagenfurt Prison.

Info Box 2:
Case Study: Carinthia

5.3 Lower Austria

(The information provided by Lower Austria Provincial CID's EB 09 was processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data.)

In comparison to the previous year, the total number of reported drug-related violations saw a slight increase of 158 reported violations (+3.8%) in 2024. 4,333 reports (felonies and misdemeanours) were filed in Lower Austria. This accounts for 11.6% of all reported drug related violations in Austria. An increase of 130 felonies (+45.1%) and 28 misdemeanours (+0.7%) was recorded. The increase of felonies was significant.

Of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Lower Austria, 56.4% of cases were related to cannabis, 13.7% to cocaine, 2.5% to heroin, 5% to amphetamine, 6% to methamphetamine, and 2.2% to ecstasy.

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	207	224	345	354	327	318	357	340	288	418	+45.1%
Misdemeanours	3,872	3,964	5,171	4,728	4,788	4,521	4,373	3,975	3,887	3,915	+0.7%
Total	4,079	4,188	5,516	5,082	5,115	4,839	4,730	4,315	4,175	4,333	+3.8%

As in Carinthia, seizures in Lower Austria rose in 2024 for all types of drugs except cannabis and heroin compared to the previous year.

Seizures - Amounts	old ^{*)}				new ^{**)}
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine (in grams)	4,298	3,650	4,806	4,477	5,376
Total cannabis (in grams)	314,785	250,630	261,113	292,406	806,013
Heroin (in grams)	26,100	8,387	6,234	1,297	724
Cocaine (in grams)	5,890	12,104	6,788	10,678	14,967
Methamphetamine (in grams)	468	5,056	875	872	1,282
Ecstasy (pieces)	1,100	1,599	1,289	1,597	2,340

^{*)} Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

^{**)} Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Table 13: Reported drug-related violations, felonies and misdemeanours pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Lower Austria between 2015 and 2024

Table 14: Seizures of main substances in Lower Austria from 2020 to 2024

Developments regarding Consumer Behaviour, Illicit Drug Use and Cutting Agents

The consumption of cannabis (but also certain synthetic drugs) begins as early as adolescence or school age. Drug use is widespread, especially in secondary schools. Young people like to experiment and consume numerous different narcotic drugs, NPS and substitute drugs at once even though they do not know or underestimate the drugs' effects. Older drug consumers stick to narcotic drugs that they have been consuming for years. They know the drugs' effects and can better estimate the dosage than younger consumers can.

In Lower Austria, the number of suspected drug-related deaths rose once again compared to the previous year. In this province, the consumer behaviour is partially reflected in the

statistics on drug-related deaths. Even though most drug-related deaths occurred in the age group 14 to 30 during the pandemic, the age range returned to its pre-pandemic level of 30 to 40 years in 2024. Cause of death was mostly linked to mixed consumption of several different substances in connection with consumption of illegal and legal substitute drugs and psychotropic substances.

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

Compared to 2023, no significant changes were observed in Lower Austria. Serbian criminal groups, who operate several drug farms in Lower Austria, dominate the production, smuggling of and trafficking in cannabis. A unique trademark is the organised crime structure: experts in electrical engineering for the set-up and installation, experts for garden design, harvest helpers, pick-up services and so on.

Nationals from Balkan countries, namely Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia, are conducting and controlling the majority of heroin and cocaine smuggling and trafficking. Those responsible for these organised crime groups steer and control the smuggling and sale from Serbia and Montenegro through drug dealers operating in public spaces. Many drug consumers purchase their drugs in Vienna from Serbian nationals, who conduct their illegal trafficking on the streets.

There were no significant changes compared to 2023 in regard to methamphetamine and amphetamine. Cross-border trafficking and smuggling was organised by various criminal groups from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, but also by criminal groups from Austria, the latter taking advantage of the proximity to these countries and repeatedly importing small quantities for their personal use or for distribution in Austria.

New psychoactive substances were mainly seized in letters and parcels via Vienna International Airport and the Inzersdorf Mail Sorting Centre. There was an increase in seizures of ketamine in parcels and post items. However, the majority of them is not intended for Austria, but shipped from here to other countries.

Side Note: Vienna International Airport

The trend of increasing seizures of herbal cannabis on passenger flights from South East Asia and North America, which was first observed in 2023, continued. In fact, it significantly accelerated with a total amount of 667kg of seized herbal cannabis.

In particular, the airport in Bangkok (Thailand) gained relevance due to its role as a departing airport for „smuggling trips“. In this context, Vienna International Airport is only an intermediate stop for connecting flights to different destinations in Europe, such as Great Britain, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France and Germany.

Cocaine seized at the Vienna International Airport originated mainly from South America.

Over the previous year, the import of khat saw once again a significant increase. Mainly Israeli nationals imported smuggled khat from the airport in Tel Aviv (Israel) to Austria; however, Austria was only meant to be the transit country for transport to France.

In 2024, there were no seizures in freight traffic at Vienna International Airport even though the amount of checked freight loads in import, export and transport continuously increased.

Compared to 2023, the number of seizures of narcotic drugs at the airport forwarding post office clearly decreased. Nineteen postal items were seized in 2024, compared to 92 seized narcotic drug shipments in 2023.

Cannabis Farms, Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

In 2024, 120 (+3) cannabis farms (85 indoor and 35 outdoor farms) were identified and seized in Lower Austria. Lower Austria and Tyrol are the only provinces who saw an increase. While Lower Austria followed the trend observed across Austria of fewer small and more large farms, Tyrol recorded an increase in smaller farms.

According to the Lower Austria Provincial CID, Austrian criminals operated the majority of farms (micro and mini farms) for personal use. However, 31 professionally operated indoor farms were seized. These farms were attributed mostly to Serbian organised crime groups. The largest seizure was a cannabis farm with approx. 2,900 plants in Bruck an der Leitha District.

The premises of these large farms were single-family houses or old farmhouses and farm buildings as well as empty company sites, which were difficult to detect due to their location. Offenders who have been residing in Austria for a long time most often rent these buildings. For the construction of the plantations, Austrian-based professionals with a Serbian foreign background are employed or specialists are temporarily brought to Austria from Serbia. Bosnian or Croatian nationals are often hired as gardeners who come to Austria to tend to the plants and live at the facilities. In general, the criminal groups are structured and hierarchical.

In 2024, six laboratories for the production of amphetamine or methamphetamine were identified in Lower Austria. A methamphetamine laboratory operated by a Polish priest in the vicarage attracted a lot of media attention. It was discovered in the course of an inspection for renovation.

Another clandestine laboratory operated by an Austrian national in Zistersdorf generated a lot of media interest. After committing a murder, the Austrian killed himself. It was confirmed that explosive substances were manufactured in this laboratory. Narcotic

drugs could potentially also have been manufactured, yet only in small amounts. Due to the suicide, no further investigations were initiated.

Online Drug-Related Crime

Compared to 2023, no major changes in drug orders via the darknet were identified. The seized narcotic drugs and NPS were of high quality. The prices online were much lower than on the streets in Austria. Larger quantities of narcotic drugs were seized during several checks of different parcel delivery services located in Lower Austria; however, the majority of the drugs was destined for countries overseas, such as New Zealand, Australia or the USA.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services

Investigations, especially into Serbian organised crime groups, resulted in valuable intelligence and are vital for preservation of evidence. Consequently, it was possible to identify several crime scenes in connection with a number of criminal offences, especially regarding drug-related and violent crime, and to establish connections between criminal groups and crime scenes. The analysis of data and intelligence proves difficult since it is time consuming, which results in problems concerning the handling of present and future police interventions.

Developments in the Area of Acquisitive, Accompanying and Subsequent Crime

Numerous criminal offences, such as theft by breaking and entering, shoplifting or thefts by breaking and entering into basements, as well as criminal offences against life and limb are directly connected to the procurement of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Narcotic drugs play a growing role in almost all types of criminal offences, including violence in the family.

Observations on Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Asset Recovery

Investigations into Serbian organised crime groups revealed that the cash from drug trafficking flows back via couriers. Cash was mostly seized during searches of premises. In many cases, the money is transported by persons or in hiding spots on motor vehicles or trucks involved in the initial smuggling of drugs.

In 2024, there were no significant findings in connection with drug-related terrorist financing.

The competent experts at the Provincial CID evaluate investigations regarding potential seizure and/or recovery of illicitly obtained assets from drug trafficking. A corresponding request is made in the course of reporting to court.

Outlook for 2025

Drug-related crime in Lower Austria is continuously on the rise. In particular, the advantageous location – the proximity to the capital Vienna – allows offenders in Lower Austria to operate internationally. Facilitated by the border to Slovakia and the Czech Republic as well as the location of Vienna International Airport, large quantities of drugs are imported via Lower Austria into Austria. Analyses regarding investigations into crypto messenger services indicate that criminal groups identify and take advantage of low penalties and legal gaps. Consequently more and more criminal groups, especially from the Balkans, move to Austria or coordinate their criminal activities from there. Therefore, no changes are expected for 2025.

Case Study: Lower Austria – Operation Carcoma

In the course of a police intervention led by the Lower Austria Provincial CID and carried out in cooperation with other authorities in Austria as well as other countries, four Serbian nationals were arrested and a total amount of 137kg of cocaine was seized during searches of premises in Vienna and Bratislava (Slovakia) and in a container shipment of tropical wood. These investigations were part of Operation Carcoma. It was possible to attribute the smuggling of cocaine in the total amount of 135kg from Bolivia via Germany to Slovakia and Austria to this internationally operating criminal group. The street value of the seized cocaine amounted to approximately 14,000,000 euros.

Info Box 3:
Case Study: Lower Austria –
Operation Carcoma

5.4 Upper Austria

(The information provided by Upper Austria Provincial CID's EB 09 was processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data.)

In comparison to the previous year, the total number of reported drug-related violations saw a slight increase of 138 reported violations (+2.1%) in 2024. 6,624 reports (felonies and misdemeanours) were filed in Lower Austria. This accounts for 17.8% of all reported drug related violations in Austria. An increase of 94 felonies (+19%) and 44 misdemeanours (+0.7%) was recorded.

Of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Lower Austria, 55.4% of cases were related to cannabis, 14% to cocaine, 7.1% to heroin, 5.7% to amphetamine, 5.1% to methamphetamine, and 2.1% to ecstasy.

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	336	366	581	576	536	623	497	509	495	589	+19.0%
Misdemeanours	4,800	5,694	7,111	7,079	6,642	6,845	5,639	5,964	5,991	6,035	+0.7%
Total	5,136	6,060	7,692	7,655	7,178	7,468	6,136	6,473	6,486	6,624	+2.1%

Table 15:
Reported drug-related violations, felonies and misdemeanours pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Upper Austria between 2015 and 2024

While seizures of methamphetamine and ecstasy declined, numbers for all other drugs rose.

Seizures - Amounts	old*)				new**)
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine (in grams)	8,853	7,833	6,215	10,534	19,381
Total cannabis (in grams)	274,900	126,650	86,623	65,712	111,084
Heroin (in grams)	1,827	4,007	5,476	2,846	3,966
Cocaine (in grams)	4,346	3,580	13,558	6,288	6,679
Methamphetamine (in grams)	696	1,106	2,636	1,652	965
Ecstasy (pieces)	2,074	3,721	2,382	3,130	2,595

*) Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

***) Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Table 16:
Seizures of main substances in Upper Austria from 2020 to 2024

Consumer Behaviour and Illicit Drug Use

Throughout the province, a clear trend towards younger drug consumers („as young as 12 years old“) was observed. The growing illicit use of heroin and cocaine (in combination with other substances) by younger drug consumers stood out, especially in the central area of Linz. Especially young drug consumers seem to lack awareness of the unlawfulness of consuming narcotic drugs. It is not a rare occurrence that cannabis containing THC is intentionally declared and sold as CBD in legal shops.

Cannabis consumption is on the rise across all ethnic, age and social groups. The consumption of soft drugs in everyday life is being trivialised. In turn, it was observed that more and more consumers move towards other more dangerous drugs (speed, ecstasy, heroin).

Heroin was mainly consumed nasally or by inhaling. Consumption by injection has become less frequent. In Braunau District, a clear trend of young people consuming cocaine was

evident, which is due to lower prices compared to previous years. The amount of people consuming methamphetamine remained moderate.

„Unmixed“ consumption was rare, as the „majority of consumers“ prefers mixed consumption. It was observed that very young (sometimes as young as 15 years old) consumers increasingly turn towards mixed consumption of heroin and cocaine. Drug-related deaths in Upper Austria continued to rise in 2024.

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

Kilograms of cannabis products are smuggled in motor vehicles and on trains from Italy, the Czech Republic and sometimes with detours via Germany to Linz. Generally, cannabis products on the market originate in Spain and Albania.

While 2023 was marked by an increasing demand for heroin, this trend shifted in 2024 towards cocaine. Heroin and cocaine is transported ready for sale by criminal groups of Balkan descent from Vienna to Linz. Drug dealers then distribute the drugs by using communication channels on social media platforms and dealing in ever-changing public spaces. Austrian citizens (sometimes with foreign background) primarily sell substitute drugs. Cocaine on the Linz drug market originates mainly in Belgium and the Netherlands. Criminal groups from Serbia, Montenegro and Albania are suppliers for heroin, which is transported via the Balkan route or Greece and Bulgaria. Foreign criminal groups, occasionally also Austrians with foreign background, mostly manage large-scale drug trafficking. Methamphetamine was still imported from the Czech Republic (partly via Germany). Amphetamine was imported from Hungarian or German sources or via the darknet. Street-level drug trafficking was dominated by asylum seekers from Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

In the city Wels, heroin and cocaine was heavily distributed in public spaces by drug dealers from Serbia, Kosovo and North Macedonia, who in turn were controlled by their employers located in Serbia. They maintained contact with drug consumers (fixed client base) and sent drug dealers to public spaces with specific instructions for the hand-overs. In Braunau District, cocaine became the predominant drug, which was mainly procured from the region of Salzburg. In the region of Schärding, drug trafficking or rather the procurement of drugs also took place in border traffic to Germany. Reports mentioned „drug tourism“ towards South Bohemia (Czech Republic) to Vietnamese shops in Urfahr-Umgebung District. In reality, these shops referred to legally operated conventional stores.

In general, the urban areas of Linz and Wels – and partially Vöcklabruck – were places of procurement attracting drug consumers from surrounding rural areas who wanted to purchase drugs. In the region of Braunau, Salzburg plays a similar role.

Drug consumers as well as intermediaries purchase narcotic drugs from the capital Vienna. Furthermore, criminal groups established there send couriers to supply branches in Linz and Wels.

NPS products were almost exclusively purchased via the darknet. Police interventions in connection with NPS, mainly ketamine, resulted from darknet seizures, but also in the course of checks of persons or as a by-product of investigations. In Braunau District, it was established that NPS were consumed at parties in the so-called GOA scene. In the big picture, it seems that the border region to Germany (districts Braunau and Ried im Innkreis) is more strongly affected than the other regions in Upper Austria.

Cannabis Farms, Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

Sixty (-28) cannabis farms (46 indoor and 14 outdoor farms) were identified and seized in Upper Austria in 2024. Compared to 2023, fewer small farms but one large farm (500 to 999 plants) were recorded. The suspects are almost exclusively Austrian nationals, who mainly produce for their personal use (and potentially to supply acquaintances and friends). They are mostly discovered by chance (in the course of another police intervention) or based on tip-offs from neighbours complaining about the smell, confidential tip-offs or on results from targeted investigations. There were isolated cases of outdoor farms. It is often not possible to identify those responsible. A striking discovery were 21 farms in Ried im Innkreis District operated by Austrian nationals as well as Albanian, Turkish, German and Nigerian suspects.

An amphetamine laboratory with 89kg of amphetamine base operated by an Austrian suspect was seized in Linz after Polish authorities had notified the Precursor Competence Centre at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria about suspicious activities related to precursors. This information was then forwarded to Upper Austria Provincial CID. The laboratory was located in an apartment in a residential building. An endangerment of the other residents could not be ruled out. The suspect appears to have been manufacturing approximately four kilograms of amphetamine of high quality in the period of two to three years. However, there were no indications for large-scale sale of the manufactured drugs..

Online Drug-Related Crime

In principle, all substances subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and the New Psychoactive Substances Act are also offered online: via the darknet, increasingly by using messenger services, such as Telegram, and other communication channels on different social media platforms. These offers tend to come from abroad, for example the Netherlands, Spain, Great Britain, Germany, the US and Canada. In addition to easy access, alleged anonymity and the relatively low risk of discovery, these darknet orders are especially popular due to lower prices compared to street-level prices. As in previous years, the initiation of

drug deals is almost exclusively done via messenger services. Suspects are aware that the Austrian police cannot access them due to legal regulations.

The Linz City Command of the Federal Police was able to identify and arrest a nationally operating Austrian who sold heroin. The existence of other domestic sellers seemed likely due to isolated cases of relevant small parcels; however, investigations into this direction did not confirm the suspicion.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services

The analysis of contents of crypto messenger services, which Austrian law enforcement authorities had received from foreign authorities, offered a deep insight into the professionally structured and highly potent criminal groups active in Austria (and on an international level). All investigations led to a high number of arrests, seizures of large quantities and convictions with several years of unconditional imprisonment. It was frightening to what extent and „how unbothered“ these groups were able to operate until their dismantlement.

Developments in the Area of Acquisitive, Accompanying and Subsequent Crime

Drug-related crime is closely connected to offences against life and limb (bodily injury, dangerous threat, coercion, robbery, extortion) and against a third person's property (in urban areas primarily theft by breaking and entering, especially into basements, and thefts of bicycles) as well as counterfeiting of money, resistance to public authority, smuggling of migrants, illegal possession of weapons and document-related offences (forged prescriptions, etc.). Property offences, in particular, mainly serve the purpose of acquiring means to purchase narcotic drugs.

Observations on Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Asset Recovery

Proceeds from the sale of narcotic drugs are often forwarded in partial sums between 500 and 1,000 euros via different financial service providers, for example Western Union, MoneyGram and RIA Money Transfer, as well as via traditional bank transfers.

Different countries are among the recipients, for example Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia, Spain, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Romania, Slovakia, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Colombia, Great Britain and Nigeria. A new development is the use of the transfer platform Aircash. Cash can be withdrawn at specified points of sale without a bank account or bank card. Instead, one only has to type the required sum into an app and then show the generated bar code to a sales person at any Aircash point of sale. After the bar code has been scanned, the selected sum is paid out in cash. Cash couriers using motor vehicles or trains were employed, too. Suspects of Balkan descent also

employed drivers of commuter buses to transport illegally elicited proceeds in cash to their home countries.

Members of groups from the Balkans purchased real estate. Afghan and Syrian criminal groups invested in restaurants or kebab and food stalls. A growing trend of purchasing parking garages was identified. These are often used as meeting points and storage units.

In 2024, there were no significant findings in connection with drug-related terrorist financing.

In more cases, the police suggested the recovery of seized assets and valuable items to the court. Involving police experts at an early point has proven helpful.

Outlook for 2025

Analyses of crypto messenger services conducted so far revealed that the investigating authorities did not have all intelligence available on the actual extent of criminal structures operating in Austria. Continuously increasing consumption suggests that organised crime structures in the background could grow as well.

Case Study: Upper Austria

Elaborate and extensive analyses of data and information on crypto messenger services provided by foreign police authorities led to the identification of members of a criminal group of mainly Albanian and Kosovar descent located in Linz. 15 suspects, some caught in the act, were arrested during a police intervention in spring 2024. 26kg of marijuana and approximately 0.3kg of cocaine were seized as well. In total, the sentences so far amount to 66 years and ten months of unconditional imprisonment. Intelligence gathered from just seven months' worth of crypto messenger service data is evidence of 210kg of marijuana, 60kg of cocaine, 6kg of heroin, 3kg of amphetamine and 1kg of methamphetamine as well as of negotiations for purchasing two handguns and one machine gun.

Info Box 4:
Case Study: Upper Austria

5.5 Salzburg

(The information provided by Salzburg Provincial CID's EB 09 was processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data.)

In comparison to the previous year, the total number of reported drug-related violations saw a slight decline of 300 reported violations (-11.9%) in 2024. 2,217 reports (felonies and misdemeanours) were filed in Salzburg. This accounts for 5.9% of all reported drug-related violations in Austria. While reported felonies increased by 28 (+15.6%), reported misdemeanours fell by 328 (-14%). These developments in Salzburg mirror those of Burgenland.

Of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Salzburg, 57.6% of cases were related to cannabis, 20.1% to cocaine, 1.1% to heroin, 7.8% to amphetamine, 1.9% to methamphetamine, and 2% to ecstasy.

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	117	114	102	156	170	159	180	129	179	207	+15.6%
Misdemeanours	1,646	2,000	2,179	2,241	2,595	2,454	2,006	2,142	2,338	2,010	-14.0%
Total	1,763	2,114	2,281	2,397	2,765	2,613	2,186	2,271	2,517	2,217	-11.9%

Table 17:
Reported drug-related violations, felonies and misdemeanours pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Salzburg between 2015 and 2024

The situation regarding seizures in Salzburg is nuanced. While seizures of amphetamine, heroin and ecstasy decreased, those of other substances rose. The increase of 137kg of cocaine stood out. However, this spike must be attributed to the investigation proceedings by Lower Austria Provincial CID.

Seizures - Amounts	old*)				new**)
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine (in grams)	3,407	6,094	2,434	3,239	1,726
Total cannabis (in grams)	41,198	89,290	30,420	50,784	54,762
Heroin (in grams)	232	1,577	240	557	85
Cocaine (in grams)	1,819	2,133	1,003	3,672	140,999
Methamphetamine (in grams)	331	94	219	211	1,027
Ecstasy (pieces)	6,023	183	377	1,250	263

Table 18:
Seizures of main substances in Salzburg from 2020 to 2024

*) Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

***) Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Developments regarding Consumer Behaviour, Illicit Drug Use and Cutting Agents

In 2024, Salzburg Provincial CID recorded increasing cocaine and cannabis consumption accompanied by an increase in purity of consumed drugs. This statement is not necessarily backed up by the figures in Table 4; however, the explanations in the chapters „Black Market Prices“ and „Quality of Illicit Drugs“ allow a correct interpretation of this data. Sugar, caffeine, lactose and lidocaine (especially for cocaine) are prevalent cutting agents.

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

Due to its advantageous central location, Salzburg is frequented by criminal groups of different nationalities. The countries of origin of dominant organised crime groups in the field of drug-related crime in 2024 have been the same as in previous years, namely Germany and Western Balkan states, such as Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia and Kosovo. There was also an increase in activities by Afghan and Turkish nationals. It is noteworthy that there are no regional differences or hot spots within the province regarding criminal groups or types of narcotic drugs.

NPS play a minor role. NPS were mainly intercepted and seized in the course of checks of postal items at the Wals Mail Sorting Centre.

Cannabis Farms, Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

Nineteen (-1) cannabis farms (14 indoor and 5 outdoor farms) were identified and seized in Salzburg in 2024. Compared to 2023, the number of recorded micro farms (one to five plants) decreased by one. Most farms were located in the offender's personal living area. Austrian criminals mainly operated the farms for personal use or in several cases to supply acquaintances. Not only investigations but also tip-offs from citizens resulted in the discovery of farms.

In 2024, no illegal laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were identified or seized in Salzburg.

Online Drug-Related Crime

Online drug-related crime stagnated in Salzburg. Regular joint checks of the Wals Mail Sorting Centre are conducted in cooperation with customs authorities. The number of intercepted narcotic drugs range from 20 to 40 parcels per check. Parcel delivery services are also checked regularly. Overall, no popular countries of origin or other noticeable patterns or trends have been identified.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services

Analyses of intelligence from crypto messenger services provide a unique insight into the modi operandi of criminal groups. This enabled the police to identify members of organised crime groups, who had previously acted in the dark, as accused persons. An increase in violence was not noticed. However, dealers who were no longer able to pay their commission debts reported personal „pressure“.

Developments in the Area of Acquisitive, Accompanying and Subsequent Crime

In 2024, bodily injury, robbery, theft by breaking and entering, and fraud were recorded as drug-related acquisitive and accompanying crime. However, these offences are generally in the low-threshold range.

Observations on Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Asset Recovery

Payments in cash dominate drug trafficking, bank transfers are isolated exceptions. In the context of narcotic drugs shipped in postal items, cryptocurrencies gain in importance. In 2024, the Salzburg Provincial CID did not conduct any investigations into drug-related money laundering.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not reveal any indications of terrorist financing in 2024.

Cash in the five-digit euro range was seized and recovered in the course of numerous searches of premises ordered by court. In isolated cases, luxury items, such as Rolex watches, were seized.

Outlook for 2025

It is safe to assume that the overall situation will remain stable in 2025. Mixed consumption of narcotic drugs, pharmaceutical drugs and alcohol by young people, sometimes resulting in death, poses a problem. Another issue is the sale of „legal“ cannabis seeds and seedlings, which is then used for the illegal production of narcotic drugs.

Case Study: Salzburg

In the course of police interventions carried out in spring 2024, the Salzburg Provincial CID arrested six persons and conducted eight searches of premises in cooperation with investigating officers from Zell am See District. In total, approximately two kilograms of herbal cannabis, 21,000 euros in cash, small quantities of cocaine, hashish and ecstasy as well as a cannabis farm in full bloom were seized. Furthermore, numerous data carriers, several analytical balances, large amounts of packaging material and several prohibited weapons were seized. It was proven that the accused persons sold 24kg of herbal cannabis, 1.2kg of cocaine and approximately 13kg of amphetamine in a total sale value of approximately 550,000 euros. It was confirmed that the criminals had imported parts of the sold drugs. In addition, 60 drug consumers were identified and reported. Further investigations cleared up other serious violent offences (aggravated coercion, aggravated bodily harm, dangerous threat, and false imprisonment).

Info Box 5:
Case Study: Salzburg

5.6 Styria

(The information provided by Styria Provincial CID's EB 09 was processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data.)

In comparison to the previous year, the total number of reported drug-related violations saw an increase of 324 reported violations (+8.6%) in 2024. 4,086 reports (felonies and misdemeanours) were filed in Styria. This accounts for 11% of all reported drug-related violations in Austria. An increase of 78 felonies (+28.8%) and 246 misdemeanours (+7%) was recorded.

Of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Styria, 62% of cases were related to cannabis, 15% to cocaine, 1.6% to heroin, 4.9% to amphetamine, 1.2% to methamphetamine, and 2.7% to ecstasy.

Table 19:
Reported drug-related violations, felonies and misdemeanours pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Styria between 2015 and 2024

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	224	191	240	266	346	294	367	298	271	349	+28.8%
Misdemeanours	3,032	3,186	4,045	3,874	4,654	3,941	3,396	3,544	3,491	3,737	+7.0%
Total	3,256	3,377	4,285	4,140	5,000	4,235	3,763	3,842	3,762	4,086	+8.6%

Compared to 2023, there was a decrease in substances seized in Styria. Amphetamine and cocaine declined the most.

Seizures - Amounts	old*)				new**)
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine (in grams)	6,850	41,420	4,964	15,824	3,558
Total cannabis (in grams)	239,362	302,462	230,433	158,361	141,750
Heroin (in grams)	5,592	388	402	3,824	1,090
Cocaine (in grams)	4,309	915	2,838	22,061	3,308
Methamphetamine (in grams)	813	285	90	97	96
Ecstasy (pieces)	7,278	33,676	3,730	7,153	958

Table 20:
Seizures of main substances
in Salzburg from 2020 to
2024

*) Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

**) Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Developments regarding Consumer Behaviour, Illicit Drug Use and Cutting Agents

Consumer behaviour in Styria remains unchanged. Illicit narcotic drugs are in demand and consumed by all walks of life throughout the province. Not only the demand and consumption of cocaine and marijuana rose, but the supply increased steadily as well. Youth and young adults generally display a high risk appetite, which is underlined by sometimes lethal mixed consumption of drugs. Concerning opiates and opioids, the predicted decline in heroin on the market is not yet noticeable based on documented demand and consumer behaviour.

In 2024, no seizures of fentanyl or fentanyl derivatives were recorded. However, it is difficult to predict future developments.

The all-time high of seizures of illegally trafficked substitution substances and psychotropic substances in Styria in 2023 was not repeated in 2024.

Demand for NPS was minimal and investigations in connection with NPS were rare.

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

Investigation results confirmed that the most common narcotic drugs (cannabis, cocaine, heroin, amphetamine and MDMA) circulating in Graz, its surrounding regions, the district capitals in the South, Southeast and Western Styria are mainly imported by couriers via Slovenia into Styria from depots of different Balkan clans located in Slovenia, Croatia and other Western Balkan states. Then Austrian customers or on a large scale Afghan, Syrian and Russian (Chechen) criminals operating in Graz systematically put these drugs into circulation. Foreign suspects were often so-called beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and asylum seekers. Intelligence from investigation proceedings prove that in a lot of

cases drug-related contact between suppliers of Balkan descent and their customers did not come about randomly, but can be traced back to the fact that both parties had served time in Styrian prisons at the same time.

In the area of Graz, a well-functioning consumer market has developed, where offer and demand meet and suppliers from Slovenia and consumers from Austria are well connected. Consequently, it is easy to react quickly to market fluctuations caused for example by police interventions against couriers and consumers.

In addition to drugs supplied from Slovenia, there are isolated cases of drug shipments from Vienna and also Spain to Graz and other Styrian regions, which are organised by criminal groups consisting of Moroccan, Romanian and Russian (Chechen) nationals. The drugs imported to Styria are then distributed across the province or transported to Vienna with a view to distributing them to intermediaries and end consumers.

Conclusions drawn from a variety of police interventions indicate that couriers arrested in Styria who import narcotic drugs from Slovenia are connected to the same supply sources for the regions Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Zagreb (Croatia). The drug depots located there are most likely to be attributed to the Kavač clan established in Montenegro. Over the past years, this clan has been establishing itself in this region and controlling drug shipments to Austria and Central Europe through Slovenian couriers.

Drug-related crime is more and more frequently recorded in regions in Upper Styria. Hot spots are still the urban centres in the longitudinal valley between the rivers Mur and Mürz between Judenburg and Mürzzuschlag. Local criminals who had previously loosely cooperated have now formed structured and organised groups who strategically coordinate their criminal activities. These criminal groups either consist of Russian (Chechen) nationals or persons of Balkan descent, for example Albanians. As they are well connected, they get the drugs they circulate in Upper Styria from Graz, Upper Austria, Vienna and occasionally from Salzburg or the Netherlands. The unusually high potential for violence, especially of Russian (Chechen) criminals, is striking. This violence is reflected in numerous violent offences against consumers.

The market in Graz was further consolidated in 2024 by the presence of Balkan cartels, especially regarding cocaine and cannabis products. Afghan, Syrian and Russian (Chechen) criminals, who acted as drug dealers or intermediaries, greatly contributed to the establishment of the Grazer Volksgarten and Metahofpark as profitable points of sale. This development fuelled the decision to introduce protective areas around these two locations per regulation.

While suspects were expelled from the public park „Volksgarten“ by this measure, they now conduct their drug deals in surrounding streets.

Cannabis Farms, Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

Sixty (-27) cannabis farms (37 indoor and 23 outdoor farms) were identified and seized in Styria in 2024. According to the Styria Provincial CID, the suspects were persons operating domestically. In 2023, two independent investigation proceedings in Graz and Leibnitz led to the seizures of industrial farms with almost 1,500 plants each. No such seizure took place in 2024. Seizures of this size were truly exceptions for Styria.

In 2024, no illegal laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were identified or seized in Styria.

Online Drug-Related Crime

Narcotic drug shipments via postal services declined compared to the figures of 2023 (187 seizures). In 2024, only 15 letters and parcels of 141 seized postal items contained NPS. Investigations conducted in Styria in 2024 revealed no evidence pointing to regular or large online orders of narcotic drugs.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services

Since the Styria Provincial CID joined the work on intelligence from crypto messenger services in the context of Operation Achilles in 2022, several persons were arrested, large quantities of narcotic drugs were seized and large amounts of assets were recovered. Investigations also confirmed that organised crime groups have been conducting their illegal businesses for a long time and did not stop after the discovery of several crypto messenger services, but continued using other communication platforms, such as Olvid, Wickr Me or Session, and the same infrastructure. Serious offenders who use such crypto messenger services have significant sway within the police, judicial, political and societal structures in their origin countries in the Western Balkans.

Developments in the Area of Acquisitive, Accompanying and Subsequent Crime

In this context, a significant increase in thefts by breaking and entering and thefts accompanied by seizures of prohibited weapons and handguns was recorded in 2017. Money laundering had also been observed at the time. Since 2018, only isolated cases of thefts and thefts by breaking and entering were recorded. This pattern did not change noticeably until 2024. In 2024, the Styria Provincial CID reports petty robberies (for example, robbed purses and phones), especially in parks in Graz.

Observations on Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Asset Recovery

Time and again, intelligence on criminals from the Western Balkans indicates that the illegally elicited money is immediately laundered in Styria through labour provision agencies, construction companies and restaurants operated by family members or accomplices, or in the form of real estate purchases. There are also observations of people providing money transfer services and transporting cash to Western Balkan states, where the money is then used to purchase real estate.

Several investigations in 2024 generated intelligence on Afghan and Syrian suspects confirming that the illegally elicited money is forwarded to other countries via Afghan businesses usually based on a Hawala scheme. However, it should be noted that investigations into this dynamic prove extremely difficult.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not reveal any indications of terrorist financing in 2024.

Recovery of seized assets is a central aspect of all investigations in Styria. Experiences in cooperation with judicial authorities are similar to those in other provinces.

Outlook for 2025

It can be assumed that in view of the demand for narcotic drugs, smuggling activities will rise in the future. Young people will continue to enjoy experimenting. Since narcotic drug labs have previously been mostly found in residential areas, an increased risk for suspects, police officers and innocent residents needs to be considered due to the used chemicals. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness, offer training measures and ensure effective communication of all parties involved (police, fire brigade, ambulance, etc.) in this specific aspect of combating drug-related crime. Conducting and closing ongoing and future investigations and processing data in the field of crypto messenger services will continue to pose a challenge and further strain personnel resources.

Case Study: Styria

Investigations conducted since October 2023 by the Styria and Vienna provincial CIDs in close cooperation with Criminal Intelligence Service Austria and the Directorate for Special Units of the Federal Ministry of the Interior led to the identification of a criminal organisation consisting of 15 accused persons. This criminal organisation had imported at least 1,550kg of cannabis products and cocaine in the two-figure range from Spain to Austria and then distributed it in Styria, Vienna and its surrounding regions in the period from September 2023 to April 2024. According to preliminary investigation results, the narcotic drugs are transported in travel buses and trucks, and stored in different luxury hotels until they are handed over to end consumers. In the course of a coordinated police intervention by Special Intervention Unit Cobra and Special Operations Unit WEGA in April 2024 and other measures in coordination with the Fugitive Active Search Team at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria, the accused persons were arrested and 85 kg of herbal cannabis, approximately ten kilograms of hashish, 511 grams of MDMA, 237 grams of cocaine, five grams of methamphetamine, 27 pieces of ecstasy, approximately three kilograms of ketamine and cash in the amount of 53,000 euros were seized.

Info Box 6:
Case Study: Styria

5.7 Tyrol

(The information provided by Tyrol Provincial CID's EB 09 was processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data.)

In comparison to the previous year, the total number of reported drug-related violations saw an increase of 359 reported violations (+10.7%) in 2024. 3,718 reports (felonies and misdemeanours) were filed in Tyrol. This accounts for ten per cent of all reported drug-related violations in Austria. An increase of 18 felonies (+6.9%) and 341 misdemeanours (+11%) was recorded.

Of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Tyrol, 57.8% of cases were related to cannabis, 24.6% to cocaine, 0.4% to heroin, 2.8% to amphetamine, 2.1% to methamphetamine, and 1.7% to ecstasy.

Table 21:
Reported drug-related violations, felonies and misdemeanours pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Tyrol between 2015 and 2024

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	200	197	200	244	189	271	232	178	262	280	+6.9%
Misdemeanours	3,770	3,826	3,792	3,538	4,042	4,224	3,109	2,917	3,097	3,438	+11.0%
Total	3,970	4,023	3,992	3,782	4,231	4,495	3,341	3,095	3,359	3,718	+10.7%

In Tyrol, seizures of amphetamine, cocaine and methamphetamine declined. The decrease in amphetamine and cocaine was strikingly sharp. Seizures of other substances increased, especially in the case of cannabis, which almost doubled.

Seizures - Amounts	old*)				new**)
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine (in grams)	4,173	2,762	945	31,921	7,530
Total cannabis (in grams)	155,779	339,398	555,377	95,011	181,265
Heroin (in grams)	216	22	55	20	32
Cocaine (in grams)	7,369	2,959	3,364	18,659	8,237
Methamphetamine (in grams)	194	122	326	638	483
Ecstasy (pieces)	15,901	1,510	2,941	1,071	2,083

Table 22:
Seizures of main substances
in Tyrol from 2020 to 2024

*) Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

***) Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Developments regarding Consumer Behaviour, Illicit Drug Use and Cutting Agents

Compared to previous years, no particularly striking aspects in consumption behaviour were noticed. Cannabis continues to be the most consumed illegal drug, followed by cocaine and amphetamine. However, it should be noted that the demand for cocaine as well as the quality of cocaine rose in comparison to previous years. Only small amounts of heroin were seized. The chapters „Black Market Prices“ and „Quality of Illicit Drugs“ provide explanations for a correct interpretation of this data due to regional differences.

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

In 2024, no significant changes to overall drug-related crime were observed in Tyrol compared to the previous years. Cannabis products are still the predominant drug on the market, followed by cocaine, which is noticeable on the rise.

However, this is not necessarily reflected in the statistics on figures (Table 26).

It was observed that the „North African scene“, which had previously been established in Innsbruck, retreated from public spaces and moved their illegal business to apartments and increasingly also to other establishments (gambling bars). In some cases, the heads of operations and main actors are located abroad (Italy, Spain, and Morocco). They utilise suppliers and drug dealers operating in public spaces who are only residing in Austria for a short time. Furthermore, foreign suspects from the Maghreb states (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and the Western Sahara) no longer operate in Innsbruck, but moved to other regions in Tyrol. Yet the activities are not on the same scale as in Innsbruck. Apart from

Austrians, however, nationals from other countries, especially Germany, Hungary and Türkiye, are pushing into the domestic market and dividing it among themselves. It was observed that Albanian and North Macedonian citizens have become a growing player on the Austrian market. As a rule, narcotic drugs are purchased in countries, such as Italy, Germany and the Netherlands.

Trafficking in NPS only plays a minor role in the fight against drug-related crime in Tyrol.

Cannabis Farms, Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

Sixty-two (+10) cannabis farms (34 indoor and 28 outdoor farms) were identified and seized in Tyrol in 2024. Tyrol and Lower Austria are the only Austrian provinces that saw an increase in discoveries. While Lower Austria followed the trend observed across Austria of fewer small and more large farms, Tyrol recorded an increase in smaller farms. After sourcing the necessary seeds and cuttings on the internet or from grow shops, Austrian nationals establish and operate farms. The herbal cannabis thus produced is of high or very high quality. Most production facilities are fitted with high-grade equipment.

In 2024, two laboratories were identified and seized in Tyrol. An Austrian criminal operated a laboratory in Eastern Tyrol and a Polish national operated a laboratory in Schwaz District. The Polish suspect fled abroad immediately after the discovery of the laboratory. It was not possible to question him about the case. Both laboratories were discovered by chance.

Online Drug-Related Crime

The number of seizures remained on a stable level compared to previous years. It is mainly cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine and MDMA, but also benzodiazepine, that is ordered and shipped. Other narcotic drugs play a minor role. Customs authorities at mail sorting centres across Austria intercept the majority of postal items.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services

In 2024, the Tyrol Provincial CID closed a big case, which resulted in the imprisonment of approximately 20 persons. The accused persons had distributed cocaine and cannabis in a two-digit kilogram range in Tyrol. Some criminals were already sentenced to several years of imprisonment. A few court proceedings are still pending. While processing these cases, it was time and again confirmed how highly complex, extensive and long-lasting investigations into crypto messenger services are and how high the costs for interpreting services are.

Developments in the Area of Acquisitive, Accompanying and Subsequent Crime

Compared to previous years, drug-related acquisitive and accompanying crime stagnated. Offences, such as bodily injury, petty robbery, coercion, theft by breaking and entering, with a causal relation to drug-related crime have been recorded.

Observations on Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Asset Recovery

Large sums of cash, sometimes stored in safes or passbooks, are regularly found and seized during police interventions. In one odd case, the suspect owned a point-of-sale terminal so that consumers could pay with their bank card for the purchased narcotic drugs, namely cocaine and cannabis. It was repeatedly observed that cash couriers are employed to transport the money in motor vehicles from Austria to Türkiye. Even though cash detection dogs were employed during police interventions, no cash storages have yet been found.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not reveal any indications of terrorist financing in 2024.

Outlook for 2025

Tyrol does not expect major changes for 2025 except an increase in indoor and outdoor farms for manufacturing cannabis products.

Case Study: Tyrol

Since October 2022, the analysis of approximately 70,000 chat messages led to the identification of an organised crime group consisting of approximately 20 persons. This criminal group had distributed approximately 26kg of cocaine and approximately 110kg of marijuana in the area of Kufstein from 2020 to 2021. The street value amounted to approximately 3.6 million euros. It was also possible to identify several sources in Austria and other countries that had transported narcotic drugs mainly from Slovenia, Croatia and Northern Germany (due to COVID-19 travel restrictions at the time) in trucks or motor vehicles with local border traffic permits. Users and low-level dealers then sold the narcotic drugs in small-scale drug smuggling. Communication took place solely via encrypted crypto messenger services. From June to December 2024, police officers from the Tyrol Provincial CID and investigating officers from the Kufstein Unit for Combating Drug-Related Crime arrested 17 persons.

More accused persons were arrested in Styria by the Bruck-Mürzzuschlag District Command of the Federal Police and one Croatian national was arrested based on a European arrest warrant. Approximately 2.5kg of cocaine, 15,000 euros in cash, three firearms and jammers were seized during searches of premises..

Info Box 7:
Case Study: Tyrol

5.8 Vorarlberg

(The information provided by Vorarlberg Provincial CID's EB 09 was processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data.)

In comparison to the previous year, the total number of reported drug-related violations saw a slight decline of five reported violations (-0.2%) in 2024. While reported felonies decreased by six (-5.9%), reported misdemeanours rose by one (+0.1%).

Of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Vorarlberg, 66.2% of cases were related to cannabis, 21.3% to cocaine, 0.9% to heroin, 3.9% to amphetamine, 0.7% to methamphetamine, and 0.6% to ecstasy.

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	125	122	151	151	133	126	90	122	101	95	-5.9%
Misdemeanours	1,188	1,405	1,453	1,692	1,938	1,732	1,520	1,659	1,974	1,975	+0.1%
Total	1,313	1,527	1,604	1,843	2,071	1,858	1,610	1,781	2,075	2,070	-0.2%

While seizures of cocaine and ecstasy rose minimally, numbers for all other drugs declined.

Seizures - Amounts	old*)				new**)
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine (in grams)	1,156	2,549	1,638	1,569	433
Total cannabis (in grams)	20,880	27,342	39,786	33,981	25,953
Heroin (in grams)	504	1,421	13	760	613
Cocaine (in grams)	896	685	9,673	1,807	2,381
Methamphetamine (in grams)	121	25	17	122	17
Ecstasy (pieces)	246	1,559	2	3	55

*) Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

***) Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Table 23: Reported drug-related violations, felonies and misdemeanours pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Vorarlberg between 2015 and 2024

Table 24: Seizures of main substances in Vorarlberg from 2020 to 2024

Developments regarding Consumer Behaviour, Illicit Drug Use and Cutting Agents

In line with the overall Austrian trend, cannabis is the most consumed illicit narcotic drug in Vorarlberg. Initial concerns regarding a significant increase or change in trafficking routes due to the legalisation of cannabis in Germany were not confirmed in 2024. As in previous years, cocaine came in second place with a noticeable increase. Methamphetamine also saw an increase, albeit on a much smaller scale and not comparable to cocaine. Overall, drug consumption is much higher in urban centres than rural areas.

In comparison to previous years, the quality of heroin was noticeably lower in 2024. Despite isolated cases of outstanding quality, the overall quality of cocaine also declined. This trend is congruent with the Austrian average as depicted in Table 4.

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

All common narcotic drugs are present on the drug market in Vorarlberg. Due to the province's size, there are no noticeable regional fluctuations. The predominant criminal groups in 2024 consisted of German, Turkish, Syrian, Afghan and Austrian nationals.

Due to the geographical location of the province, drug couriers often travel through Vorarlberg. Drug smuggling routes used by criminals have not changed compared to previous years. Cocaine mainly comes from the Netherlands, while cannabis originates from Spain. This was confirmed by the analysis of crypto messenger services as well as repeated interceptions by surrounding foreign police authorities, highlighting the importance of good cooperation between international and national law enforcement authorities.

NPS only play a minor role in the fight against drug-related crime. As in previous years, only a few violations of the New Psychoactive Substances Act have been reported in 2024. Most seized NPS, which were ordered on the darknet or other platforms, were intercepted at mail sorting centres. Usually the quantities were rather small.

Cannabis Farms, Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

Nineteen (-5) cannabis farms (15 indoor and four outdoor farms) were identified and seized in Vorarlberg in 2024. The cannabis produced in Vorarlberg was mainly for personal use. With a handful of exceptions, mainly domestic suspects operated farms and cultivated cannabis.

In 2024, there was a suspected drug laboratory, which was not subsequently confirmed. Therefore, no illegal laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were identified or seized in Vorarlberg.

Online Drug-Related Crime

No significant changes to previous years were observed in the field of online drug-related crime. In a growing number of cases, drug consumers ordered narcotic drugs to parcel pick-up boxes, which does not require personal particulars but only a client number. Group chats of different messenger services offering narcotic drugs for sale are often used to initiate drug deals. There were several cases of suspects who faked the sale of narcotic drugs with fraudulent intent.

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services

Analyses of intelligence from crypto messenger services confirmed illegal businesses on a rarely seen before level, which led to a number of convictions resulting in several years of imprisonment.

Developments in the Area of Acquisitive, Accompanying and Subsequent Crime

When it comes to drug-related acquisitive and accompanying crime, drug consumers committed a high percentage of pickpocketing and shoplifting as well as thefts by breaking and entering into basements in 2024. Criminal offences against life and limb, especially battery and verbal abuse, violence against police officers (resistance to public authority), as well as robberies often had connections to drug-related offences.

Observations on Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Asset Recovery

In several cases in 2024, criminals attempted to conceal the illegally obtained assets by investing in different legal companies. In several cases, family members were sent to sign purchasing contracts for real estate to conceal the true ownership.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not reveal any indications of terrorist financing in 2024.

In principle, eligible assets are recovered; however, it is not always easy to enforce the recovery due to the above-mentioned circumstances (concealment of true ownership).

Outlook for 2025

One of the challenges for 2025 will be the need for adaptability of law enforcement authorities, for example in the field of IT (new (crypto) messenger services or encryption methods making analyses harder) or legislative matters (e.g. the new regulation on court approvals for analysis of data carriers).

Case Study: Vorarlberg

Joint investigations by the Vorarlberg Provincial CID and Swiss authorities revealed that a 26-year old Austrian, who was at liberty at the time, was trafficking in narcotic drugs despite a pending murder trial against him. After he had ordered approximately 50kg of herbal cannabis in several tranches from Switzerland to Austria, he stored it before distributing it to third persons. In the course of another smuggling trip, a courier employed by the suspect was apprehended with approximately 15kg of herbal cannabis. Before the beginning of the main hearing, the main suspect was held in pre-trial detention for complicity to murder.

Info Box 8:
Case Study: Vorarlberg

5.9 Vienna

(The information provided by Vienna Provincial CID's EB 09 was processed and refined by BK/3.3 and supplemented with statistical data.)

In comparison to the previous year, the total number of reported drug-related violations saw an increase of 847 reported violations (+8.5%) in 2024. 10,802 reports (felonies and misdemeanours) were filed in Vienna. This accounts for 29% of all reported drug-related violations in Austria. While reported felonies decreased by 101 (-9.6%), reported misdemeanours rose by 948 (+10.6%).

Of all reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Vienna, 56.4% of cases were related to cannabis, 17.9% to cocaine, 5.3% to heroin, 3.2% to amphetamine, 3.2% to methamphetamine, and 2.6% to ecstasy.

	2015	2013	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Changes in %
Felonies	816	741	976	1,080	1,396	1,143	1,184	1,023	1,049	948	-9.6%
Misdemeanours	10,076	11,649	13,052	11,670	11,740	10,248	8,699	8,955	8,906	9,854	+10.6%
Total	10,892	12,390	14,028	12,750	13,136	11,391	9,883	9,978	9,955	10,802	+8.5%

Table 25:
Reported drug-related violations, felonies and misdemeanours pursuant to the Narcotic Drugs Act in Vienna between 2015 and 2024

Seizures of narcotic drugs decreased in all areas except methamphetamine and ecstasy. Significant decreases were noted for cannabis (approximately -800kg) and heroin (-26kg)..

Seizures - Amounts	old*)				new**)
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amphetamine (in grams)	5,886	17,276	7,289	25,864	13,537
Total cannabis (in grams)	657,607	563,670	470,986	1,804,659	1,001,017
Heroin (in grams)	68,335	50,834	86,656	44,901	18,791
Cocaine (in grams)	36,260	56,647	77,387	79,186	73,221
Methamphetamine (in grams)	5,892	3,469	4,519	5,226	7,908
Ecstasy (pieces)	19,222	10,533	9,905	15,305	15,711

Table 26:
Seizures of main substances
in Vienna from 2020 to 2024

*) Seized amount „old“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana, cannabis resin/hashish and hashish oil

**) Seized amount „new“ – solely applies to „cannabis (total)“: sum of herbal cannabis/marijuana and cannabis resin/hashish

Developments regarding Consumer Behaviour, Illicit Drug Use and Cutting Agents

Cannabis and cocaine prevail on the drug market in Vienna. Heroin became less prevalent. The development in the field of synthetic opioids and growing risks of overdose raised serious concerns. The trafficking infrastructure grew more professional and Vienna established itself as an import hub for high-quality narcotic drugs. Substitution drugs are trafficked on the black market through the unmonitored distribution of legally prescribed pharmaceutical drugs, especially buprenorphine, methadone and benzodiazepine. These substances are often consumed in combination with alcohol or other narcotic drugs.

Criminal Groups, Types of Drugs and Transport Routes

In 2024, the overall structure of drug-related crime remained stable regarding active criminal groups; however, there were pronounced shifts of impact from some groups. The most important actors in the field of drug trafficking are:

North African criminal groups have specialised in cannabis products and dominate the respective market in the open scene. They are well organised, but are more and more pushed out by Serbian networks.

West African criminal groups are still active in street-level dealing in cannabis, heroin and cocaine. The quality of trafficked drugs declined. Due to the competition from Serbian groups, their market share shrank further.

Serbian-Montenegrin networks dominate organised street-level drug trafficking in cannabis, heroin and cocaine. These highly professional, hierarchically structured organisations with smuggling routes via the Balkan route are increasingly pushing North and West African groups out of the mid-market segment.

Turkish criminal groups are still central actors in the international heroin and cocaine trafficking. They use long-standing connections to Türkiye and are shifting towards trafficking in cocaine due to the predicted decline in heroin.

Afghan criminal groups were prevalent in small-scale trafficking in cannabis products in open drug scenes. They are rather loosely connected groups of asylum seekers without a clear hierarchy. They operate flexibly at urban hot spots.

Syrian criminal groups largely deal in cannabis products on an occasional basis. They are often loosely structured youth gangs without clear hierarchies. They are also active at urban hot spots.

Persian criminal groups faded into the background and mainly came to police attention for personal use of opium. Younger offenders preferably deal in methamphetamine and crystal meth; however, they are not to be considered significant actors in large-scale distribution.

Austrian criminal groups are mainly smaller groups or autonomously acting offenders. They have almost no organisation and increasingly traffick in substitution drugs on the black market and operate small indoor cannabis farms. A trend towards exchanging drugs instead of profitable sale was observed.

A noticeable shift in demand and availability on the drug market was observed in 2024. Cannabis was still the most common illicit narcotic drug and moved into focus due to imports from Spain and Albania. Shipments of cocaine directly from South America via Dutch and Spanish ports increased. Not only the consumption but also the trafficking in heroin decreased. Synthetic opioids rose to become a competitor to heroin, which is still distributed by Serbian-Montenegrin and Turkish groups. Trafficking in methamphetamine and crystal meth, especially by Persian and Eastern European groups, increased. The drugs are produced more and more in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The distribution was more pronounced in Vienna than in other provinces.

The Balkan route is still one of the most important smuggling routes for heroin and cocaine among Serbian-Montenegrin and Turkish groups using cars, buses and trucks. North and West African nationals import cocaine and heroin through the widespread method of „body packing“. Increased checks at airports are conducted to fight this phenomenon. In regard to the domestic production of cannabis, offenders increasingly shift towards indoor cannabis farms.

Cannabis Farms, Drug Labs and Associated Criminal Groups

Eighty-five (-28) cannabis farms (74 indoor and 11 outdoor farms) were identified and seized in Vienna in 2024. Farms of all sizes have been seized. According to the Vienna Provincial CID, the following groups are primarily in control of cannabis production:

Networks from the Western Balkans (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania) dominate large-scale indoor farms, which are run by the leaders of these networks who also recruit the farm workers.

Vietnamese criminal groups are specialised in medium-sized indoor farms (up to 500 plants), which are hidden and operated in residential buildings and warehouses. In this context, a growing number of cases of labour exploitation and human trafficking was recorded.

Austrian criminals (single offenders, small groups) operate smaller farms (less than 50 plants) for personal use or regional low-level trafficking. Sale via social media platforms and darknet platforms increased.

Furthermore, two trends have been observed in Vienna, namely the professionalisation of operations and expansion of farms into industrial farms with more than 1,000 plants. These farms are strategically funded and operated from abroad. This goes in hand with an increased readiness to inflict violence (protection racketeering, internal fights, protective areas with armed guards around farms) within organised crime structures because farms do not only generate high profits but are also connected to high investments.

The reasons for the choice of location are manifold. For example, residential buildings offer high levels of anonymity. Apartments are often rented using fake identities. Industrial regions with hidden warehouses or single-family house in the outskirts of the city without direct neighbours are strategic locations. These locations offer space for mass production and high energy consumption does not raise suspicions.

In 2024, four illegal laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were identified or seized in Vienna: In two laboratories, amphetamine base was crystallised, in one laboratory P2NP was produced and in one laboratory the production of methamphetamine was attempted. The latter case was related to the above-mentioned case of the priest in Gmünd, Upper Austria.

Online Drug-Related Crime

Since 2020, Vienna has established itself as an important darknet ordering hub for Austria. In 2024, orders via darknet marketplaces saw an increase, especially in the field of high-quality cocaine, MDMA and synthetic opioids. Dealers in Vienna use closed and open channels on different messenger services attracting new drug consumers in minutes. There is a shift from pick-ups to delivery by couriers. Many orders are delivered by private courier services to avoid direct contact.

For the first time, cases of advertisements for illegal narcotic drugs in closed groups on platforms, such as TikTok, were recorded. The typical method of shipment via postal and parcel delivery services was prevalent. Narcotic drugs were often hidden in everyday items (books, toys, sweets, etc.).

Trends and Effects of Crypto Messenger Services

The Vienna Provincial CID conducted extensive investigations into discovered crypto messenger services. They led to the identification of previously unknown criminal structures and provided in-depth insights into the *modi operandi* of criminal organisations, especially from the Western Balkans. The encrypted communication channels provided valuable intelligence on criminal groups, structures and criminal procedures, which in turn led to new investigative approaches and several convictions. The analysis and processing of recorded communication requires extreme amounts of resources. Investigative authorities are slowly reaching the limits of technical and personnel resources due to the continuous development of new encryption technology.

Developments in the Area of Acquisitive, Accompanying and Subsequent Crime

When examining the distribution of criminal offences, it becomes clear that the most common type of acquisitive offence in the field of drug-related crime is theft by breaking and entering. Thefts, handling stolen goods, fraud, robberies and other not statistically recorded criminal offences are also common. Offenders mainly steal high-end electronics, tools and expensive bicycles. E-bikes and e-scooters were popular items to be stolen by organised crime groups. Criminals act more and more professionally as they target items stored in underground parking garages or bike storage rooms and break open anti-theft bike locks. Conventional theft by breaking and entering into basement units are being replaced by targeted thefts of bicycles in combination with theft by breaking and entering. When it comes to handling stolen goods, the criminal groups increasingly shifted towards online platforms and social media platforms to sell stolen goods illegally. An increase in robberies of „easy targets“, such as tobacco stores, gas stations and financial services/post offices, was observed. There was also an up-tick in home invasions, which mainly took place in the drug-related crime scene. Criminals tended to be armed (firearms, knives, tear gas).

Observations on Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Asset Recovery

Cash is invested in real estate, luxury products or gambling. Real estate investments in the districts Favoriten, Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus and Döbling stood out. Groups of Balkan and Arabian descent preferred cash transports via couriers. Bank transfers were made in several rounds of transactions using fictitious firms, established mainly in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and offshore accounts. Cryptocurrencies are also used more and more. Criminal groups shift towards mixing services and wallet-to-wallet

transfers. It was also established that cryptocurrencies are also increasingly used to purchase luxury items.

Investigations into drug-related offences did not reveal any indications of terrorist financing in 2024.

In 2024, large amounts of illegal assets had been seized, but often had to be returned upon request.

Outlook for 2025

Based on current trends and available data, it is to be expected that drug-related crime will remain on a high level in Vienna. It is also necessary to cooperate closely with health authorities. The expected increase in readiness to inflict violence gives reason for concern, as the population will at least indirectly experience this violence. This concern also includes other dangers, such as the careless disposal of chemicals from illegal drug laboratories. Criminal groups could also use mobile laboratories more often to enable quick changes in location and thereby evade apprehension by law enforcement authorities. It is also expected that imports of drug precursors from countries with less strict regulations will increase.

Case Study: Vienna – Operation Velosiped 2

In 2024, the Vienna Provincial CID conducted extensive investigations – called Operation Velosiped 2 – into a criminal group of mainly Russian descent, which plays a vital role in the area of acquisitive and accompanying crime. The group operated without a strict structure. The criminals committed thefts by breaking and entering to steal (e-)bikes and e-scooters, which they then sold via intermediaries to end buyers. The involved persons alternately assumed the roles of thief and dealer/receiver in stolen goods. Furthermore, the criminals also committed several thefts by breaking and entering into businesses, such as post offices, mobile phone shops, e-scooter rentals, a cinema, but also thefts by breaking and entering into apartments, basement units and bike storage rooms in and around Vienna. The investigation led to the identification of 24 suspects. The majority of them had already been arrested. 344 cases were solved. The financial loss amounts to approximately 475,000 euros. The stolen (e-)bikes and (e-)scooters were valued at 400,000 euros. Four of the suspects were already convicted with final and binding effect and sentenced to several years of unconditional imprisonment.

Info Box 9: Case Study:
Vienna – Operation Velosiped 2

6

Legal Situation

Info-Box 7:
Fallbeispiel Tirol

6.1 Drug-Related Crime and the Most Relevant Penal Provisions

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

6.2 Statutory Definitions in the Narcotic Drugs Act

Section 27 Illegal Handling of Narcotic Drugs

(1) Anyone who illegally

1. acquires, possesses, produces, transports, or imports a narcotic drug, offers to supply it to another person, passes it on to another person or procures it for another person contrary to regulations,
2. grows opium poppy, the coca bush or the cannabis plant for the purpose of producing narcotic drugs,
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, for financial gain and contrary to regulations, in public transport, a public transport facility, a public traffic area, a public building, an area accessible to the public or under any circumstances suitable to creating a public nuisance, shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding two years.

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

(4) Anyone who

1. commits a criminal act as specified in paragraph 1 (1) or 2 and enables a minor to consume a narcotic drug, provided the offender is of full age and more than two years older than the minor,

2. or who commits such a criminal act as a member of a criminal association shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding three years.

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

Section 28 Preparation of Drug Trafficking

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

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

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

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

Section 28a Drug Trafficking

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

(2) (2) The punishment shall be imprisonment ranging from one to ten years if an offender commits a criminal act as specified in paragraph 1

1. to derive a regular source of income, and has previously been convicted of an offence as described in paragraph 1,

2. as a member of a criminal association,

3. or involving a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity (large quantity).

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

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

1. as a member of a criminal association and has previously been convicted of an offence as described in paragraph 1,

2. as a member of an association of a larger number of people conspiring to commit such offences,

3. or 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 paragraph 1 above and is a leading player in an association of a larger number of people conspiring to commit such offences.

Section 28b Threshold Quantity for Narcotic Drugs

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

6.3 Penal Provisions for Psychotropic Substances

Section 30 Illegal Handling of Psychotropic Substances

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

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

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

1. if a person acquires, possesses, transports, imports or exports a medication containing a psychotropic substance for personal use or for administration to an animal,

2. or offers to supply such a medication to another person, passes it on to another person, or procures it for another person without material benefit.

Section 31 Preparation of Trafficking in Psychotropic Substances

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

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

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

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

Section 31a Trafficking in Psychotropic Substances

(1) Anyone who produces, imports or exports a psychotropic substance or offers to supply it to another person, passes it on to another person or procures it for another

person contrary to regulations in a quantity exceeding the threshold quantity specified in section 31b shall be liable to imprisonment of up to three years.

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

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

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

Section 31b Threshold Quantity for Psychotropic Substances

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

6.4 Penal Provisions for Drug Precursors

Section 32 Unlawful Handling of Drug Precursors

(1) (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 sections 28b and 31b respectively shall be liable to imprisonment of up to two years.

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

6.5 New Psychoactive Substances Act

Section 4 Penal Provisions

(1) (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 regulation pursuant to section 3 or defined pursuant to section 3 as belonging to a class of chemical substance so that the other person or a third party can apply it in the human body with a view to achieving a psychoactive effect shall be punished with a term of imprisonment not exceeding two years.

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

7

Types of Illicit Drugs

This chapter presents a description of the most common illicit drugs in the country, their effects and legal classification. The description of the respective narcotic drugs was provided by *Suchthilfe Wien GmbH* (see: [https:// www.suchthilfe.wien/](https://www.suchthilfe.wien/)). This institution offers a wide range of services: prevention, advanced training, information, drug education, counselling, treatment and support for addiction-prone and addicted persons, promotion of socially acceptable coexistence in public areas, and (re-)integration of addicts into the labour market. (<https:// www.suchthilfe.wien/>).

7.1 Cannabis

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

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

Effects

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

Further cannabinoid receptors are found in the cerebellum, the brain region responsible for automatic movements such as walking. Hence the coordination difficulties that are experienced under the influence of cannabis.

Legal Framework

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

7.2 Heroin

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

Effects

Due to its chemical structure and high fat solubility, heroin enters the brain faster than morphine. The short wash-in rate causes an intense state of intoxication or „kick“. In general, 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, distribution and supply to others (sale) is a punishable offence and may result in fines or imprisonment.

7.3 Morphine and Derivatives

Besides codeine, morphine is the main component of raw opium, which is obtained from the opium poppy (*papaver somniferum*) and is classified as a natural opioid. Morphine is categorised as opium alkaloids and affects the opiate receptors, also called μ receptors. Its activation causes euphoria, respiratory depression, cough suppression, constipation and dependence. Illicit, non-medical morphine is also known as „M“, morph and Miss Emma and is usually distributed as a white crystalline powder with a bitter taste.

Effects

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

Legal Framework

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

7.4 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, namely heroin. Opioids can be classified into natural (morphine, codeine), semi-synthetic (e.g. heroin), synthetic (like methadone) and endogenous opioids (endorphins or enkephalines). Natural opioids are all substances found in the juice of poppy seeds. They are also known as opiates.

Effects

Opioids affect those areas of the brain that contain what is called opiate receptors, no matter whether they are injected, inhaled or taken orally. How long the effects last depends on the dosage, form of consumption and personal variables, such as weight, sex or prior food intake. 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.

7.5 Cocaine

Cocaine is a white, crystalline, bitter-tasting powder made from coca leaves by adding water, lime or sodium carbonate, kerosene and ammonia. On the black market, cocaine is cut with other substances, for example, with common cutting agents such as milk powder, but also with vasoconstrictive, synthetic, analgesic or numbing substances like lidocaine or novocaine. Cocaine is usually snorted, but can also be injected intravenously. Chemical processing can turn it into smokable drugs – crack or freebase. When smoked, the drug's effects set in within a few seconds, but only last ten minutes at most. Crack and freebase lead to a strong psychological addiction more quickly than other forms of cocaine. Crack is a free base form of cocaine that is prepared with baking soda.

Its purity of 80% to 100% makes it more dangerous than „standard“ cocaine. Crack looks like small white to light yellow, sometimes slightly pink, rocks. Its size varies from a grain of sand to a pebble. Due to its strong short-term effect and subsequent misery, the psychological and physical dependence potential is much higher than for other narcotics.

Effects

Cocaine reaches the bloodstream through the mucous membranes of the nose, while crack or freebase enter the bloodstream through inhalation or injection. Cocaine is fat-soluble and can pass the blood-brain barrier to directly affect the brain. Unlike amphetamine, which causes an increased release of the semiochemicals norepinephrine and dopamine in the brain, cocaine prevents these semiochemicals from being absorbed into the nerve cells. However, the result is similar in both cases: Neurotransmitters are accumulated in the synaptic gap, causing dopamine and norepinephrine to permanently stimulate the downstream nerve cells, which is psychologically experienced as euphoria and strength.

After smoking cocaine, it takes the brain a few days to rebuild the neurotransmitters. The consequences are depressive episodes, tiredness and apathy.

Legal Framework

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

7.6 Ecstasy/MDMA

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

Effects

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

Legal Framework

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

7.7 Amphetamine/Methamphetamine (Speed)

Amphetamines are fully synthetic, i.e. artificially produced substances with a chemical structure similar to natural ephedrine found in ephedra (mahuang) plants. Speed is a white or pink crystalline powder, which contains amphetamines or methamphetamines, and is distributed as tablets or, more often, as capsules. The effect of methamphetamine is similar to that of amphetamine except that it is longer and stronger. Speed is taken through the mouth or nose. Smoking or injecting speed is much less common. Crystal meth (ice, crystal) is a crystallised, smokable form of methamphetamine, which causes a „high“ for several hours and is highly addictive. Typically, amphetamine is diluted with other substances before being sold on the black market.

Effects

Amphetamines reach the bloodstream through the mucous membranes (of the mouth or nose), the stomach or through inhalation and injections. Amphetamine is fat-soluble and can consequently pass the blood-brain barrier and unfold its effect in the brain. It causes an increased release of the neurotransmitters noradrenaline and dopamine by pushing them out of the salivary vesicles into the synaptic cleft. Similar to adrenaline, noradrenaline and dopamine are catecholamines. Depending on the dosage, noradrenaline and dopamine cause a number of bodily and mental changes. Once speed degrades in the body, it no longer affects any neurotransmitters.

It takes the brain several days to re-establish the neurotransmitter balance. During this period, the effects of speed are inverted: If you initially felt full of energy, strong and confident, you now feel tired, limp, irritated, unsatisfied and unfocused.

Legal Framework

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

7.8 LSD

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

Effects

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

Legal Framework

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

7.9 Psychotropic or Psychoactive Substances

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

Effects

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

Legal Framework

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

7.10 Drug Precursors

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

Legal Framework

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

7.11 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 Asia-based 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 stimulating. Psychoactive drugs alter mechanisms in the brain that regulate mood, thoughts and memory. It can also have a far-reaching effect on the consciousness and lead to seizures or a coma. All drugs have mind-altering properties and can thereby be classified as psychoactive substances.

Legal Framework

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

8

List of Abbreviations

A-FIU	Austrian Financial Intelligence Unit
ARO	Asset Recovery Office
BGBI	Federal Law Gazette
BK	Criminal Intelligence Service Austria
BK/3.3	Drug-Related Crime Sub-Department at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria
BMI	Federal Ministry of the Interior
BMASGPK	Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection
CBD	Cannabidiol
CND	Commission on Narcotic Drugs
DEA	U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration
DSN	Directorate State Protection and Intelligence Service
EB 09	Drug investigation divisions at the provincial CIDs
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats
EU	European Union
EMCDDA	European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
EUDA	European Union Drugs Agency
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GI-TOC	Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime
GÖG	Austrian National Public Health Institute
HDG	Horizontal Working Party on Drugs
NPS	New psychoactive substance(s)
OTF	Operational Task Force(s)
SCORE	Sewage analysis CORe group Europe
SOCTA	Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
XTC	Ecstasy
WDR	World Drug Report

9

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