



Drug-Related Crime Annual Report 2022

Reported violations, investigations and drug seizures

DRUG-RELATED CRIME ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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Preamble

Dear Readers,

Drug-related crime is still a major challenge for our society. Apart from direct consequences for drug users' health and possibly for innocent bystanders, this type of crime impacts public security. It is characterised by accompanying and acquisitive crime, which can materialise as violence and property offences. Add to this that drug-related money transactions are difficult to track. Drug profits are used to fund more criminal activity or attempts are made to launder this money and reinject it into the legal economy. Following the interception of communication from encrypted messaging apps, investigations since 2021 have uncovered an unprecedented extent of organised crime both internationally and in Austria. In addition to other serious offences, the investigations focused on drug-related crime, which has a direct impact on the population at large.

The combat against drug crime requires a holistic approach and close collaboration between national and international partners. In this regard, these players are stepping up their cooperation to develop prevention strategies.

The report at hand offers a detailed overview of the observations made in 2022 about general and organised drug-related crime, and highlights police efforts and successes in controlling drug crime.

Statistical records for 2022 show a slight rise in drug offences for the first time since the pandemic and reflect the challenges faced by the police and the seriousness with which it tackles these issues. This push will need to be unwavering in order to swiftly react to, or prevent, new criminal modes of operation and phenomena.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all police staff for their commitment to this cause and for their valuable contribution to society.

Gerhard Karner
Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Austria

Andreas Holzer
Director of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria



Mag. Gerhard Karner, Minister of the Interior



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Director of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria

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1 General information

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach to the preparation of this report, and of the basic police structures that fight drug-related crime. The chapter closes with an outlook for the year 2023.

1.1 List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	full designation
BK	Criminal Intelligence Service Austria (Bundeskriminalamt)
BMI	Austrian Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministerium für Inneres)
BMKUEMIT	Austrian Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz, Umwelt, Energie, Mobilität, Innovation und Technologie)
BMSGPK	Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz)
CND	Commission on Narcotic Drugs
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DSN	Directorate for State Protection and Intelligence Service (Direktion für Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst)
EMCDDA	European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GÖG	Austrian National Public Health Institute (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH)
KDFR	Kriminaldienst-Fortbildungs-Richtlinien
NPS	New psychoactive substance(s)
SMG	Austrian Narcotic Drugs Act (Suchtmittelgesetz)
SOCTA	Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

1.2 Methodology and general explanations

This situation report on drug crime heavily draws on the Police-Recorded Crime Statistics as well as on the experience and insight gained by police for each type of criminal offence. The statistical data must be carefully interpreted in the context of additional relevant information because it reflects not only general trends in drug-related crime, but also the resources used to combat this crime. Extensive investigations may take months or even years and are integrated into the statistics only after completion. Against this backdrop, monthly or annual fluctuations of the reported crimes and offences are not to be considered out of the norm. 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.

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 made it possible to enhance retrieval of information from the statistics and resulted in a more complete representation of the current situation. It shows connections between criminal groups, drug types and local distribution. The terms „crime” and „offence” are used as defined in section 17 of the Austrian Penal Code (“Strafgesetzbuch” or StGB). “Crimes” are intentional acts that are punished by life imprisonment or terms of imprisonment exceeding three years. All other punishable acts are offences.

1.3 Police structures targeting drug-related crime

Law enforcement combats drug-related crime in Austria by acting within the scope of the Narcotic Drugs Act and the New Psychoactive Substances Act and related regulations. Of note in this context are the national security strategies pursued by the Ministry of the Interior, the “Partial Strategy Domestic Security”, and the Ministry’s security strategy „Sicher.Österreich“. All of these strategies serve to control crime in general, and thus also reduce organised crime and drug-related crime.

As far as the police is concerned, about 660 officers across Austria are primarily designated for the fight against drug crime. They account for about 2% of the entire police force, but are responsible for dealing with roughly 7% of overall crime in Austria, not including accompanying and acquisitive offences.

Police officers specialising in the area of drug-related crime are found at three organisational levels:

1. District-level: drug investigation teams at the district and city commands of the Federal Police;
2. Provincial level: drug investigation divisions at the provincial CIDs
3. Federal and thus top level: the Sub-Department Drug-Related Crime at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria, which is in charge of all drug crime matters in Austria and also serves as a strategic and operational hub between national ministries and international authorities.

Additionally, officers at police stations not only deal with security, traffic and administrative issues, but are also involved in all kinds of criminal investigations, making a major contribution to the fight against drug-related crime.

In summary, the organisational units operating at the levels described above are the main tools of the Austrian police to combat drug-related crime. The effectiveness of this network is further enhanced by bilateral agreements and by close national and international cooperation with customs authorities, Europol, Eurojust and Interpol.

1.4 Outlook for 2023

Due to its geographical location, Austria continues to play an important role in the fight against international organised drug crime. Austria is expected to continue serving as a transit country and trade hub for narcotic drugs, so it will probably keep facing the challenges posed by drug-related crime. Against this backdrop, criminal gangs from the Western Balkans demand special attention. These findings were confirmed by investigations conducted since 2021 into uncovered encrypted messaging services. This revealed an unprecedented extent of organised crime, both nationally and internationally, which is particularly represented in the area of violent crime and organised drug-related crime and consequently has a direct impact on the population. These investigations are set to keep engaging the attention of the police in 2023.

Moreover, law enforcement authorities in 2023 will be confronted with an increase in illegal purchases of and trafficking in narcotic drugs on the darknet, payment with virtual currencies and the clandestine sending of drug parcels.

Since narcotic drugs find their way to Austria both via traditional routes and every other conceivable ways, international cooperation with police authorities and Europe-wide coordinated checks and inspections will remain a necessity. Street-level dealing, which has resumed after the end of the Covid-19 restrictions, as well as the high proportion of foreign suspects in cases of serious drug-related offences will also be key challenges for law enforcement in 2023.

In this context, Austrian law enforcement is dedicated to pursuing all and any violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act, and is actively involved in projects to combat drug-related crime at a national and international level. The „EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025“ and the „EU Drugs Action Plan 2021-2025“ provide a strategic framework for this. As a result of the „European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats“ (EMPACT), in which Austria participates, Europol coordinates Europe-wide operational measures.

For years, trafficking in narcotic drugs has been used to exploit synergies between criminal organisations and terrorist groups in order to facilitate the achievement of their respective criminal goals. Police raids prove that an immense amount of cash is circulating in such activities, which is then laundered through sophisticated concealment methods to make the source of the money appear legitimate. There is also the suspicion that terrorist groups monitor drug cultivation areas and transport routes to collect fees from criminal organisations, which are then used to purchase weapons and ammunition, among other things.

In conclusion, drug crime is, and will continue to be, deeply interwoven with other areas of crime. In order to fight it effectively and sustainably, there is a need for multidisciplinary cooperation on several levels, not only within the police, but also in the judiciary and in health matters. To be sure, the police will carry on its efforts to counter drug-related crime with determination and full commitment in 2023.

2 Key figures

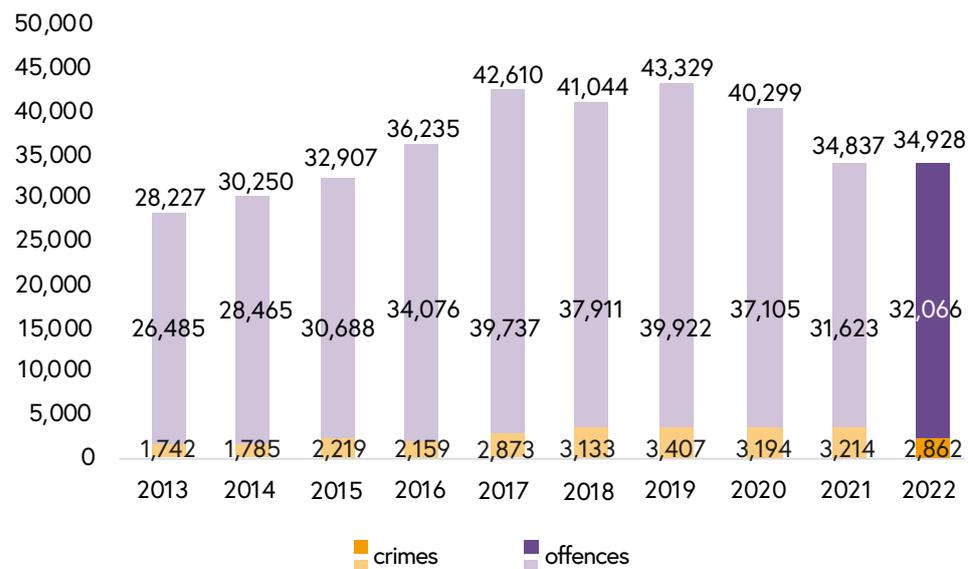
The following chapter compares the drug offences reported in 2022 to the last five to ten years, providing an in-depth outline of the development of drug-related crime in Austria.

2.1 Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act

Violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act reported in 2022 slightly picked up after they had been in decline since 2019, due in part to a shift in personnel resources and tasks in the police force during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. Consequently, reported violations rose by approximately 0.3% to 34,928 in the year under review.

Specifically, drug offences punishable by less than three years of imprisonment increased by 443 cases, or 1.4%, over 2021. Drug crimes, however, which are punishable by more than three years of imprisonment, contracted by 11% over the previous year. One explanation is that numerous investigations were launched into serious drug crimes in 2022 or were still underway since 2021, and due to their complexity, these investigations are yet to be completed and can only then be recorded in the statistics.

Reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act in Austria between 2013 and 2022, divided into crimes, offences, and both crimes and offences



2.2 Seized illicit drugs

As in previous year, cannabis products were the most seized illicit drugs, at 1.8 tons, with herbal cannabis (marijuana) being the dominant product. In addition, roughly 119 kg of cocaine, 102 kg of heroin, 21,000 ecstasy pills, 29 kg of amphetamine, 9.7 kg of methamphetamine and 419 kg of khat were seized.

Narcotic Drugs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	1,499,633.5 g	1,367,885.0 g	2,056,776.3 g	2,113,345.3 g	1,758,085.94 g
heroin	76,362.4 g	94,644.1 g	104,272.2 g	71,525.5 g	102,425.90 g
cocaine	74,990.5 g	87,119.9 g	62,985.0 g	80,528.7 g	119,193.26 g
MDMA	83,037 pills	77,922 pills	89,148 pills	53,121 pills	20,982 pills
amphetamine	76,770.7 g	122,214.2 g	36,837.9 g	83,425.4 g	29,261.72 g
methamphetamine	8,000.0 g	30,197.6 g	9,237.7 g	10,479.0 g	9,730.49 g
khat	533,992.2 g	272,205.7 g	1,094,770.2 g	180,460.0 g	419,383.5 g

Total quantities of drugs seized in Austria between 2018 and 2022

Even though cannabis products saw their first decline since 2020, they still occupy the number one spot on the domestic drug market, which is reflected in the Report on the 2022 Drug Situation by the Austrian National Public Health Institute (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, GÖG). However, initial figures from 2023 indicate that this downward trend has stopped and is actually reversing, though this is yet to be confirmed by the 2023 Report on Drug-Related Crime. The GÖG report arrives at the conclusion that cannabis is still the illicit drug of choice (lifetime prevalence) in Austria. The related consumption prevalence rate is about 30-40% in youths and young adults, aged between 15 and 24 years.

In line with increasing cocaine seizures in Austria, these seizures have expanded in all of Europe over the past few years, as suggested by Europol's latest Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA), which points out the all-time high in worldwide cocaine production.

Note that the amount of narcotic drugs seized in a reporting year can be strongly influenced by large seizures. This is clearly expressed in the quantities of seized khat, cocaine and heroin as shown in Table 2. Consequently, choosing the year-over-year quantities of seized drugs as sole parameter for possible conclusions about trends and development is not considered useful.

2.3 Black market prices

2022, wholesale prices per kilogramme approximately averaged EUR 3,500 for cannabis (herb and resin), EUR 25,800 for heroin, EUR 45,000 for cocaine, EUR 9,000 for amphetamine and EUR 27,500 for methamphetamine. 1,000 ecstasy (MDMA) tablets sold for about EUR 3,500.

street-level dealing, the following black market prices were calculated based on seizures and average prices across Austria. The prices only serve to illustrate the money involved in drug dealing, but may vary depending on region and purity.

Average prices of drugs seized from street-level dealing in 2021 and 2022

Narcotic drugs	2021	2022
cannabis (marijuana and hashish)	21,529,705 Euro	17,436,869 Euro
heroin	3,772,970 Euro	4,673,694 Euro
cocaine	6,945,600 Euro	10,727,393 Euro
MDMA	805,669 Euro	213,387 Euro
amphetamine	1,981,353 Euro	676,677 Euro
methamphetamine	844,869 Euro	760,195 Euro

2.4 Purity of the illicit drugs

The following table shows the evolution of the purity of the seized and forensically examined illicit drugs over the past five years, based on the median purities detected during chemical examinations. Despite a wide range of variation in some instances, an increase was noticed in the quality of all types of narcotic drugs. The following data consists of the medians of examined samples, which can be generally viewed as purity trends. However, street-level purity cannot be inferred per se from this data.

Purity of seized and forensically examined drugs between 2018 and 2022

Narcotic Drugs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
herbal cannabis/marijuana	8.8 %	7.0 %	6.1 %	9.1 %	9.2 %
cannabis resin/hashish	15.3 %	16.5 %	16.0 %	16.5 %	24.8 %
heroin	15.8 %	17.7 %	17.7 %	14.2 %	15.2 %
cocaine	53.2 %	51.9 %	59.7 %	53.6 %	62.8 %
MDMA/ecstasy	47.8 %	41.5 %	44.9 %	61.1 %	72.4 %
amphetamine	12.4 %	19.8 %	21.8 %	16.0 %	20.2 %
methamphetamine	49.9 %	59.4 %	62.7 %	64.6 %	65.3 %

2.5 Suspects

Suspects broken down by age groups and gender

Compared to 2021, the age group below 18 years recorded a slight increase of 1.8% in reported violations, the first rise after three consecutive years of increases.

By contrast, the ongoing decline of reported violations among 18-20-year-olds, 21-24-year-olds and 25-39-year-olds persisted into 2022. The age group of 25-39-year-olds still accounts for most of the reported drug-related incidents.

Following a drop in 2021, the group above 40 years old saw an increase of 4.4%.

Strikingly, more violations involving unidentified suspects were reported than in previous years, marking a 18.3% increase to 2,177 cases from 2021 to 2022.

Age groups	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	% change over previous year
< 18 years	5 897	5 901	5 381	4 318	4 394	1.8 %
18-20	8 154	7 667	6 757	5 335	5 201	-2.5 %
21-24	7 462	7 519	7 156	5 862	5 674	-3.2 %
25-39	13 019	14 883	14 258	13 208	13 021	-1.4 %
40+	3 256	4 090	4 411	4 273	4 461	4.4 %
unknown	3 256	3 269	2 336	1 841	2 177	18.3%

Distribution of reported violations in absolute figures and percentage changes

No significant change over the previous years can be observed in the distribution of gender. At 27,612 (84.3%) vs. 5,139 (15.7%), men continued to be reported much more frequently than women in 2022.

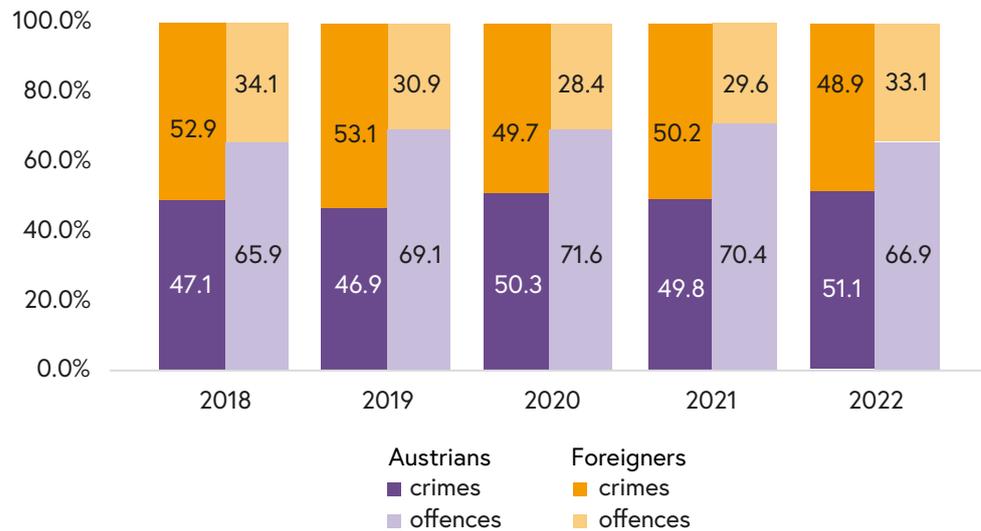
Distribution of reported violations by gender between 2018 and 2022

Gender	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	% change over previous year
total	41 044	43 329	40 299	34 837	34 928	0,3 %
male	32 957	34 160	31 935	27 841	27 612	-0,8 %
female	4 831	5 900	6 028	5 155	5 139	-0,3 %
unknown	3 256	3 269	2 336	1 841	2 177	18,3 %

Austrian and foreign suspects

The share of domestic suspects kept falling in 2022 over the previous year by about 4% to a total of 21,503 reported cases. The number of foreign suspects rose by 3% to 11,248, 1,708 of whom were asylum seekers.

Distribution of reported domestic and foreign suspects between 2018 and 2022



On closer inspection, the share of offences committed by foreigners rose from 29.6% to 33.1%. After the share of crimes committed by foreign suspects increased to 50.2% in 2021, it decreased by 1.3 percentage points to 48.9% in 2022, although this share in relation to the total population is still quite high.

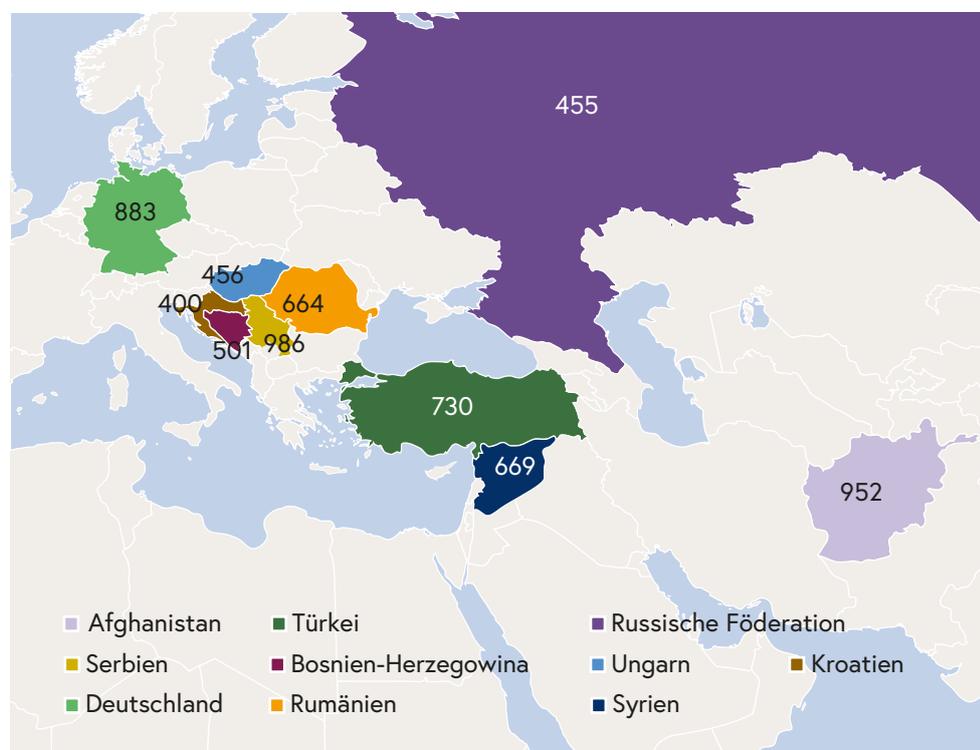
As far as domestic suspects are concerned, they accounted for 51.1% of drug crimes (up from 49.8%) and 66.9% of drug offences (down from 70.4%).

Among foreign suspects, Serbian nationals were the most reported group in 2022, followed by Afghan nationals, who pushed German suspects to third place.

The biggest increases in reported violations came from Afghan nationals (plus 180 over the previous year) and Syrian nationals. Nonetheless, in this area of offences, suspects and criminal groups from the Western Balkans represent the biggest threat. Over a five-year period, the bulk of drug crimes was consistently committed by Serbian nationals.

Nationalities	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Serbia	1.071	1.336	1.086	1.062	986
Afghanistan	2.202	1.558	939	772	952
Germany	910	1.115	1.189	929	883
Türkiye	862	928	931	821	730
Syria	362	391	308	428	669
Romania	479	538	521	544	644
Bosnia and Herzegovina	517	613	586	493	501
Hungary	377	455	435	387	456
Russian Federation	334	383	452	388	455
Croatia	375	385	434	370	400

Top 10 of nationalities of foreign suspects between 2018 and 2022



2.6 Composition of criminal groups

In most cases, criminal groups operating in Austria had ties to countries in which the drugs originated, were transited, or stored. Apart from offenders of Afghan and of Turkish origin, individuals from countries along the Balkan route are responsible for many serious cases of drug crime. Owing to their origin, criminals from Western Balkan countries tend to be in touch with their diaspora in Austria. The strong sense of family and cohesion within the widespread communities in these countries mean that offenders originating from these regions are well-connected in Europe and overseas and can rely on the support of professionals in the diaspora or on returned old-age pensioners from their homeland.

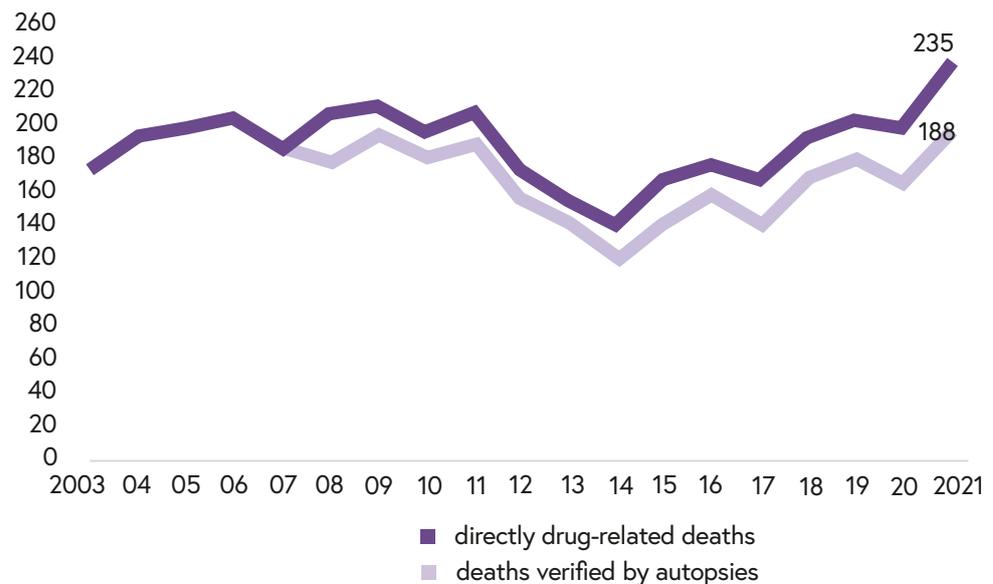
3 Drug victims

Drug-related crime, and the abuse of illicit substances in particular, are causing casualties in Austria each year.

In its annual publications “Report on the Drug Situation” and “Report on the Epidemic of Addiction”, the Austrian National Public Health Institute (GÖG) sheds light on this unfortunate issue. Based on current figures, the 2022 Report on the Epidemic of Addiction established that 235 drug-related deaths occurred in Austria in 2021. 188 of these cases were confirmed by autopsy reports. 85% of the deceased drug victims were male, while the average age of all deceased drug victims was about 34 years. Overall, drug-related deaths climbed compared to 2020. According to GÖG, this may be a result of both an exacerbation of the drug crisis and the temporary effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Most drug-related deaths were caused by combined drug intoxication, with opioids being the most frequently identified ingredient.

Total of directly drug-related deaths and deaths verified by autopsies between 2003 and 2021 (source: GÖG, 2022, p.48)



4 Policing

The following chapter outlines the duties and the measures taken by law enforcement against drug-related crime.

4.1 Activities and priorities of the police

Drug-related crime per se not only presents a huge challenge to Austrian law enforcement, but also the circumstances that come with this type of crime. Such offences are often hidden from public view, as they tend to take place in the background and within organised crime. The public will only take note of this type of crime if it is conspicuous, e.g. if drugs are dealt or used in broad daylight or if the media covers the topic. In fact, however, drug crime affects society directly and indirectly day in and day out, be it through administrative offences such as driving a vehicle under the influence of drugs, or crimes such as money laundering, corruption and even severe acts of violence including murder, weapons trafficking and financing of terrorism. The modus operandi has changed rapidly with the technology boom, and crime scenes have shifted from the streets to homes through use of the internet, darknet, online platforms and messenger services on smartphones. This calls for even more action on the part of the police and lawmakers to address this aspect of drug crime comprising new trends and communication platforms, with determination, professionalism and the full force of the law, both nationally and internationally.

4.2 International cooperation and projects

Intense international cooperation is required these days to resolutely confront organised cross-border drug-related crime. Austria's location alongside one of Europe's main drug-trafficking route, the Balkan route, as well as the misuse of Vienna International Airport as drug-dealing hub have prompted Austrian law enforcement to adopt special measures and show even more commitment. International cooperation relies on tried-and-tested communication channels such as Interpol, Europol, Eurojust, the United Nations (UN) network and Austrian liaison officers accredited to foreign countries and foreign liaison officers accredited to Austria. Last but not least, there are bilateral contacts that have been built over many decades and have grown in significance in these fast-moving times. As the central Austrian authority, the Sub-Department Drug-Related Crime at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria participates in numerous national and international boards and working groups at organisations such as Europol, the European Commission, the European Council, the Council of Europe, Interpol and the United Nations.

Projects co-financed by the EU provide valuable assistance in combating crime. With these projects, it is possible to test and implement necessary tactical measures as well as to create new critical infrastructure and police information networks. Without

such funding, many projects would have only be implemented to a limited extent. In preparation of the years to come, new projects have been initiated and developed, and their progress will be reported annually.

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

In February 2019, the Sub-Department Drug-Related Crime at Criminal Intelligence Service Austria and its partner, the Narcotic Drugs Department at the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office, launched the project „Combating suspects dealing in drugs on the internet – prosecution and prevention“(CSI-PP), which was co-funded by the European Commission and ran through 2022. Most of the motivation to carry out this project came from the fact that postal drug deliveries were soaring in past years and that existing methods of detection seemed insufficient. What is more, legal challenges appeared and drug buyers seemed to lack awareness of the unlawfulness of their acts, based on the high number of reported violations. The aim therefore was to test new methods of investigations and their suitability for everyday use. For an approach that would be as comprehensive and successful as possible, organisations such as the Institute of Legal Medicine (GMI) at the Medical University of Innsbruck, the Forensics Department of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria and of the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office, as well as customs authorities were closely involved in the implementation.

Among other results, the CSI-PP project gained insights that will benefit future forensics and analyses of drug parcels for the purpose of successfully identifying offenders. In addition, flaws in the data workflow and in the (internal) transfer of information were identified and eliminated. Furthermore, the project contributed significantly to cooperation between authorities, organisations and countries. The preventive approach raised private postal service providers' awareness of the issue of mailed drugs.

In summary, the CSI-PP project can be described as very successful in terms of further developing and increasing the efficiency of the fight against drug-related crime.

4.4 Participation in committees

In this rather broad field of drug-related crime, the police participates in a number of national and international committees. Due to its competence and strategic function, the Sub-Department Drug-Related Crime within Criminal Intelligence Service Austria takes a central role. The head of this sub-department also serves as the Interior Ministry's Drug Coordinator. At a national level, Austria established the Federal Drug Forum on 15 July 1997, which is under the supervision of the country's national drug policy coordinator,

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

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

Apart from the national sphere, drug-related issues are tackled by numerous committees throughout Europe and the world. Representatives of the Sub-Department Drug-Related Crime also attend such meetings on a regular basis. This includes 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 U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). At an EU level, the following panels are of importance: the Council's preparatory body Horizontal Working Party on Drugs (HDG), the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe, the Drugs Programme Board at Europol, and the Reference Group at the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). The Sub-Department Drug-Related Crime also participates in these international committees: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and Interpol.

4.5 Training measures

Training events are a decisive factor in the fight against drug-related crime. This serves to further increase professionalism and to coordinate the exchange of experience, which in turn helps address new developments.

To live up to these standards, training sessions in the field of drug crime are held each year on different levels, such as expert conferences organised by Criminal Intelligence Service Austria for narcotics officers and officers knowledgeable about precursors for the production of narcotic drugs and explosives. In addition, regular training events are held in line with the Criminal Investigation Service Training Guidelines. These offer a comprehensive advanced training in all aspects of drug issues in order to meet demand for professional action against this complex type of criminality. Moreover, the provincial

CIDs and the district and city commands of the Federal Police hold regular or on-demand training sessions for these areas of offences.

4.6 Intelligence unit for drug and explosive precursors

Certain chemicals are misused by both individuals and criminal networks for manufacturing narcotic drugs, for example synthetic drugs like ecstasy (MDMA). 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 and explosives, Criminal Intelligence Service Austria set up a Precursor-Competence-Centre on 1 December 2018. In this role, the Centre accepts reports from chemical vendors which are required by law to report any suspected misuse of sold chemicals for illegal drug production.

Another focus of the Precursor-Competence-Centre is the monitoring of the trade in explosive precursors. Accessible chemical precursors can be used to build improvised explosives for terrorist attacks. The Centre checks reports from businesses for any criminal relevance and, where applicable, may refer them to the Directorate for State Protection and Intelligence Service (DSN).

Drug precursors

Criminal networks and operators of large illegal laboratories in Europe continued the trend in 2022 to source chemicals that were not listed as drug precursors and were 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 in the Benelux region, are mainly transported from China to Central and South-Eastern Europe under false declarations. From there, the precursors are forwarded to other countries, especially the Netherlands. In this clandestine logistics chain, Austria is only affected as a transit country, but in some cases, companies are founded in the country to conceal the further transport routes. In 2022, no companies were detected that would have contributed to such deliveries.

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

Europe, after a slight decline in recent years, an increase in diversion and attempted diversion of acetic anhydride (category 2 drug precursor) was observed. This chemical plays a central role in the illegal production of heroin, in which criminal groups aim to

transport large quantities of this substance via Türkiye, mostly to the Afghan region, bypassing existing surveillance measures. In Europe, offenders focused on Slovenia and Poland. Austria was not affected by this issue, except for minor contacts that international offenders had in the country.

order to recognise and eventually prevent misuse of chemicals at an early stage, businesses and the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection will step up their cooperation. No such international investigations with Austria's involvement were conducted in 2022, and Austrian businesses did not submit any suspicious activity reports.

2022, 544 distribution channels for non-recorded and sensitive listed drug precursors were inspected. Furthermore, the Precursor-Competence-Center received 351 tip-offs from members of the public about possible violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act or New Psychoactive Substances Act, and about other offences such as fraud. After screening these tip-offs, they are either forwarded to the respective specialised units of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria or the Provincial CIDs for verification, investigation or processing.

Explosives precursors

In 2022, businesses submitted 14 reports about suspected explosives precursors, with eight cases involving theft or loss. When initial checks could not entirely rule out suspicious circumstances, the cases were immediately referred to the Directorate for State Protection and Intelligence Service (DSN). However, more in-depth investigations by this agency did not reveal any serious criminal activities or planned terrorist acts.

2,641 sales histories of explosives precursors were examined in 2022. On behalf of district authorities, the Precursor-Competence-Center also reviewed 16 applications by private individuals to acquire certain chemicals or chemical concentrations. In consultation with the Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, the Center worked together with the provinces' chemical inspectors to inspect and raise the awareness of 51 businesses across Austria.

Contact in suspicious cases:

Criminal Intelligence Service Austria (Bundeskriminalamt)

Precursor-Competence-Center

Josef-Holaubek-Platz 1, 1090 Vienna

Fax: +43 1 24836 951223

E-mail: precursor@bmi.gv.at

4.7 Drug trafficking via darknet and postal services

The internet consists of the surface web and, for the most part, of the deep web, which is where the dark web (also: darknet) is located. Navigating the darknet requires special browsers. All data on the darknet is encrypted and transmitted anonymously via countless servers in order to leave as few traces as possible and to thwart the identification of users. Originally a tool for politically persecuted persons or journalists trying to avoid censorship, the darknet has gradually fallen into disrepute. Both individuals and criminal organisations use darknet marketplaces for their illegal activities. Drug trafficking is rampant in these marketplaces and generates large illegal profits there.

In 2022, German authorities intercepted parcels containing a total of 45 kg of illicit drugs that were destined for Austrian addresses. Most of these parcels originated in the Netherlands; meanwhile, however, many criminal groups cross the border into Germany and Belgium to dispatch their parcels from there in an effort to circumvent targeted checks and to conceal the origin of the parcels.

High-impact checks, such as the ones performed in Frankfurt am Main, now also take place in Austria on a regular basis. In the period of January 2016 to late 2022, about 17,000 letters and parcels were seized that contained a total of more than 2,000 kg of illicit drugs, new psychoactive substances and other psychotropic substances, including 122,000 ecstasy tablets and 1,061 kg of khat. Follow-up enquiries established that most intercepted drug parcels had been ordered on darknet marketplaces. Illegal online drug trade presents a considerable risk, considering derivatives such as carfentanyl or the substance U-47700, which, when inhaled or just touching the skin, can cause substantial damage to health and even death.

A special unit within the Sub-Department Drug-Related Crime is aimed against drug trafficking via darknet and postal services. Its activities include in-depth investigation of online drug traders based in Austria, and coordinates police measures across Austria against drug buyers. Apart from operational investigations, this specialised unit continuously analyses recent developments and creates new drug control strategies, in part through international information exchange in police matters. This led to the realisation that dismantling distribution networks is one of the most effective ways in this endeavour, as most drugs offered on darknet marketplaces are mailed through conventional post.

One investigation in 2022 shall serve as an example: The investigators, who specialise in tracking down drugs sold on the internet and sent through the post, identified a criminal group that imported drugs from Spain through the mail, processed them into drug-laced sweets in Austria, and finally sold them on the darknet. As part of this operation, 178 kg of drugs and about 10,000 drug-laced sweets were seized.

This led to the arrest of three darknet vendors in Austria who had mailed drugs to Austria and abroad, and to the seizure of more than 61 kg of drugs and EUR 15,151.81, of which EUR 9,476 was in cryptocurrencies.

As mentioned before, online drug crime is not limited to one or two platforms, but many different distribution platforms have to be taken into account, ranging from the “normal” internet to the darknet and a plethora of messaging services, social media and encrypted services.

4.8 Task Force ACHILLES

On 1 April 2021, the Task Force ACHILLES was founded in Department 3 of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria. It was launched with the help of the FBI/DEA during the uncovering of the encrypted messaging service ANOM and marked a turning point in criminal investigation and the fight against organised crime committed by exploiting these messaging services. In the summer of 2021, the next stage was launched with the start of investigations into Sky ECC. In addition, officers of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria were dispatched to the Europol Operational Task Forces (OTF) in order to obtain the most important target data for Austria in direct communication with the Task Force ACHILLES, as well as to maintain the network with the other countries involved. Back then and also with the current state of knowledge, the amount of data has exceeded the usual amount of information on criminal activities in Austria many times over. For example, the investigations of Sky ECC faced more than a billion chat messages, and not a small part of that was also relevant for Austria. Austria placed the focus on an impact-oriented prioritisation. Nevertheless, we can expect years of data processing and investigations, which will pose a great challenge for law enforcement.

Given the facts of the case, it was a correct and necessary decision to establish the Task Force ACHILLES as well as the central interface at the Vienna Prosecutor's Office about two years ago, and it has proven effective ever since. In addition, all provincial CIDs and other relevant federal investigative services have since been integrated into the investigation system. This has decidedly enhanced the effectiveness of law enforcement authorities. In the two-year period in question, a large number of suspects were arrested and in some cases sentenced to long prison terms. Several hundred kilogrammes of illegal drugs were seized and allegations of trafficking several tons of illegal drugs were proven. Furthermore, weapons, ammunition and considerable amounts of money were seized. Finally, various violent crimes were also solved.

So far, most criminal offences involved organised trafficking in very large quantities of drugs, arms and very serious violent crimes. Although investigations into these crimes resulted in big successes, the level of violence in these cases was found to be extra-

ordinary by Central European standards. Furthermore, certain organised crime groups across Europe employ corruption and threats, and do not even shrink back from law enforcement agencies (police, judiciary).

The aim and purpose was and still is to solve crimes and thus to dismantle organised crime groups at home and abroad.

4.9 Prevention work

Apart from enforcement, crime prevention is one of the key tasks of the police. Most drug use prevention programmes in Austria are developed, organised and implemented at a local or regional level. The specialised services in the provinces have a major role in preventing illegal drug use. Addiction prevention institutions and drug prevention police officers are other actors involved in the implementation of drug use prevention and often work in close cooperation with the drug prevention units.

Working with relevant institutions such as schools and clubs, the police is actively committed to preventing drug offences among young people. The various police prevention programmes include a scheme geared towards addiction prevention, and its contents are generally taught by specially trained prevention officers. The Crime Prevention and Victim Support Sub-Department of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria is the central point of contact for prevention measures.

In 2016, the Austrian police launched a nationwide prevention programme called „Look@your.Life“, which aims to support young people in their development and to prevent delinquency. The programme is designed to strengthen the personality of young people in order to teach them to act responsibly towards themselves and their environment. A focus is placed on the topics of addiction prevention, including legal and illegal substances, the dangers posed by the internet and addictions that can lead to delinquency. The prevention programme was developed by police officers with practical experience and university training to elevate crime prevention in this area to a scientific level. The prevention measures are carried out in the form of workshops which focus on interaction with young people. The programme comprises four modules with a total of 19 lessons and is tailored to students aged 13 to 17. A special feature of the programme is the active involvement of parents and teachers to ensure a holistic and sustainable approach. To this end, information events are held for parents and teachers. Since the end of 2017, the programme has been part of the overall concept „UNDER18“ for crime prevention among young people.

5 Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic

As suggested by the statistical data in chapter 2, the pandemic year of 2021 marked a strong drop in reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act. This was owing to several factors such as the implementation of mandated checks during the Covid-19 pandemic, which consumed police resources, shifted priorities and consequently had a negative effect on the number of drug checks that could be carried out compared to previous years.

It was noticeable that drug manufacturers, vendors and consumers adapted to this extraordinary situation, driven by restricted air travel and air cargo transport, which resulted in resource scarcity and depleted drug caches. Drug dealing in the open picked up after Covid-19 restrictions were temporarily lifted, especially in urban areas. No significant changes were observed during the pandemic in terms of prices, purity and availability of drugs.

In the Austrian online drug trade, the number of active and known national vendors on the most common darknet marketplaces appears to have shrunk considerably during the pandemic. It is unclear whether or not that was exclusively a result of the Covid-19 situation or of the successful measures taken by the police and customs since 2016. In any case, it can be assumed that the identification and arrest of Austrian darknet groups has successfully curbed the country's online drug scene and their presence on these platforms.

Internationally, online drug vendors expressed concern on their communication channels about more frequent checks of drug parcels and delivery delays since the onset of the pandemic in 2020. Some vendors preferred shipping ordered products within the confines of their own country. Buyers on darknet marketplaces increasingly expressed their dissatisfaction with vendors because they had used the Covid-19 situation as an excuse for not sending or for unsatisfactorily processing drug orders.

According to GÖG's 2022 Report on the Drug Situation, there is no telling in the medium and long term whether high-risk drug use will change in the aftermath of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the report lists the mental strain caused by the pandemic, especially on addicts, as a temporary effect of the pandemic, especially considering the rise in drug-related deaths.

6 Overview of the Austrian drug market

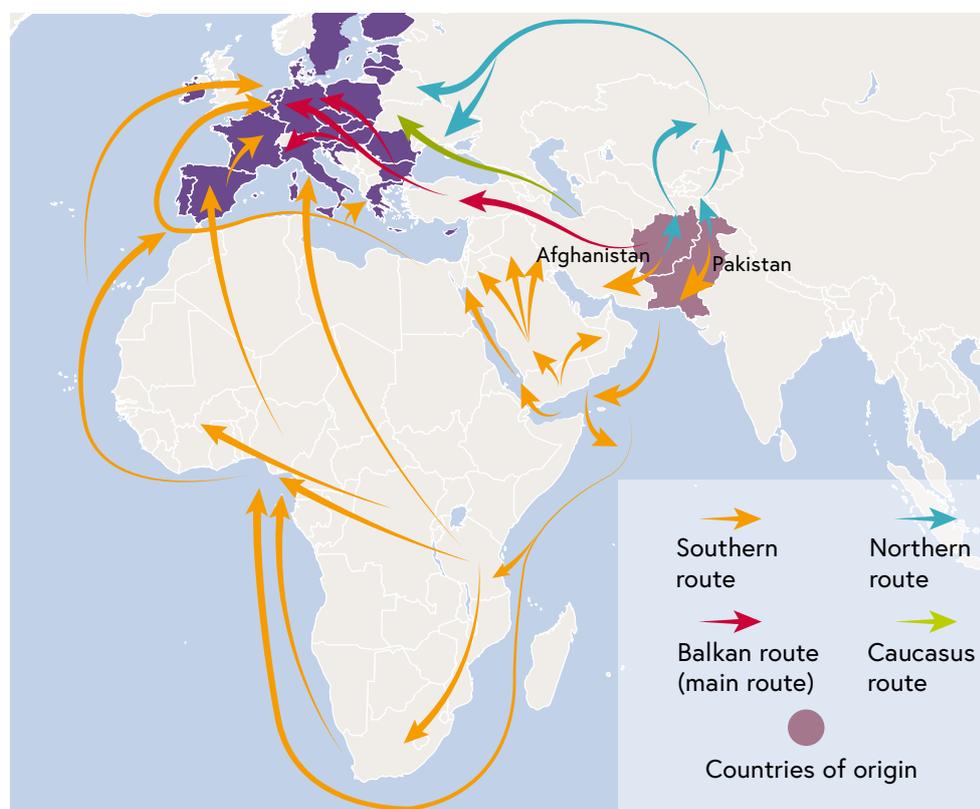
The following chapter reviews trafficking in illegal drugs and production of drugs in laboratories and farms, broken down by the most commonly abused substances in Austria.

6.1 Organised illegal trafficking in narcotic drugs

Heroin

Like in the previous year, most European countries recorded a small decline in opiate-related drug offences in 2022. This downward trend has been visible in Austria since 2020, and reported violations in connection with heroin dropped again compared to 2021. Nevertheless, quantities of heroin seized in Austria expanded again in 2022, mostly due to large seizures.

The availability of heroin and smuggling routes into Europe are of some concern. In its World Drug Report 2022, UNODC noted that availability of heroin and opiates is unabated. Afghanistan is still the world's largest producer of opium, the key ingredient for heroin. Opium production even soared by 32% since the Taliban took over the country in August 2021. Austria is situated along the main route for heroin smuggling to Europe, the Balkan route, which stretches from Afghanistan across Iran, Türkiye, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria to Western Europe. Alternatively, some heroin is smuggled by sea from South Central Asia via East Africa to Europe. Subsequently, most of the heroin is transported from hubs such as the Dutch Port of Rotterdam and the Belgian Port of Antwerp to the major consumer markets in Western and Central Europe.



Heroin smuggling routes into and within the EU (source: Europol SOCTA, 2021, p.50)

Criminal groups originating from the Western Balkans appeared to be most dominant in heroin smuggling to Austria in 2022. In street-level trade, offenders from the Western Balkans, but also Afghan and some African nationals were observed.

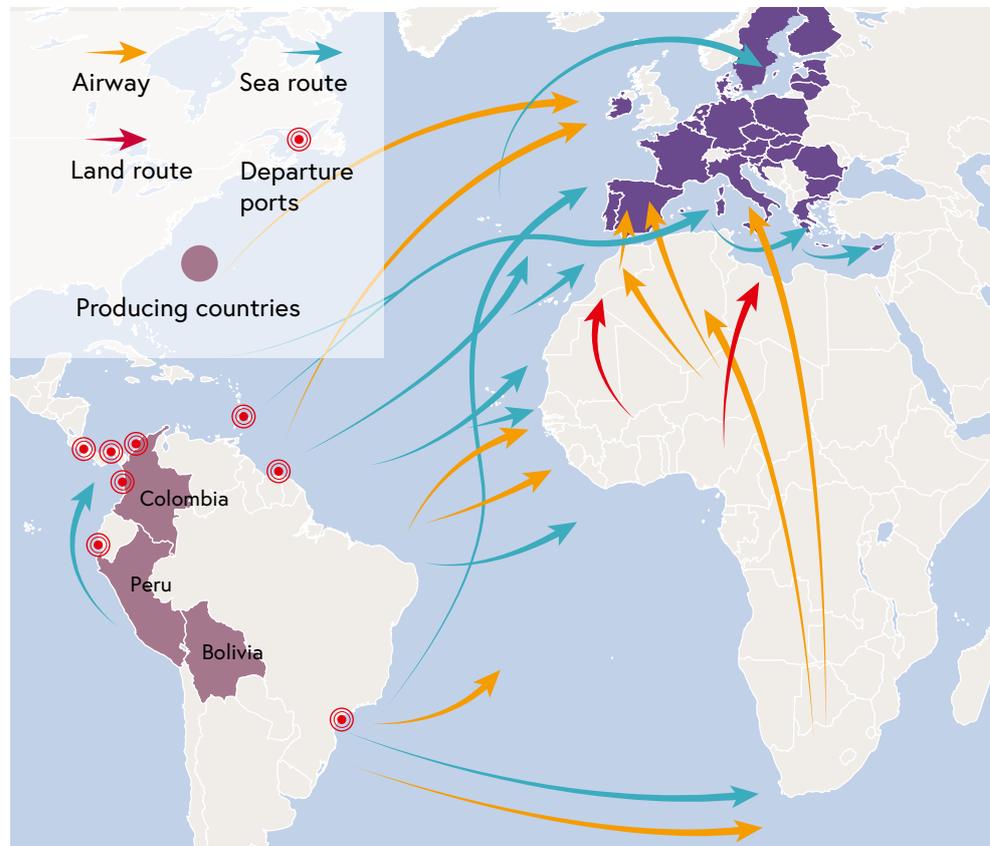
Similar to previous years, black market prices of heroin ranged between EUR 20 and EUR 80 per gram, depending on region and quality.

There was no indication in 2022 that offline heroin trafficking shifted online; rather, drugs supplied on darknet platforms were added to the traditional drug supply in the past few years. Nonetheless, traditional online markets were observed to have moved to various messaging services. Whereas darknet markets had the advantage of being a secure and encrypted communication tool, a growing number of drug users and vendors used simpler messaging services to get into touch.

Cocaine

According to the UNODC World Drug Report 2022, the worldwide area under coca bush cultivation slightly came back to about 234,000 hectares, after it had more than doubled over the past few years. At the same time, cocaine production was stepped up by 11% to 1,982 tonnes (100% purity), reflecting a noticeable productivity gain. The bulk of the area under cultivation is located in Colombia, followed by Peru and Bolivia.

Cocaine smuggling routes into and within the European Union (source: Europol SOCTA, 2021, p.48)



Cocaine is still the second most commonly used illicit drug in Europe, and most of it is shipped to ports in northern Europe such as Antwerp and Rotterdam. Other entry points are Spanish ports and relevant Balkan countries. Recently, self-made submarines were seized that carried cocaine across the sea. Within Europe, most of the drugs are distributed in vehicles to the country of destination.

On a regular basis, so-called body packers are employed, who smuggle the drugs in items or even in their bodies. This type of smuggling is common on flights.

In 2022, reported cocaine-related violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act increased by about 13% over the previous year in Austria, and cocaine seizures rose as well, especially thanks to large seizures.

Cocaine smuggling and trafficking appeared to have been dominated by criminal groups from the Western Balkans who are known for their highly professional and specialised approach. In western Austria, Turkish and Afghan offenders were recorded apart from those from the Western Balkans, but also organised criminals with Dominican roots. In most cases, domestic cocaine dealers obtained the drug from foreign groups operating in Austria. According to available information, smuggling runs made abroad in order to directly purchase the drugs in Spain or the Netherlands, for instance, have become rarer.

Similar to previous years, street prices of cocaine ranged between EUR 40 and EUR 120 per gram, depending on region and quality.

The uptrend in online cocaine trafficking, including on the darknet, did not cease in 2022.

Cannabis

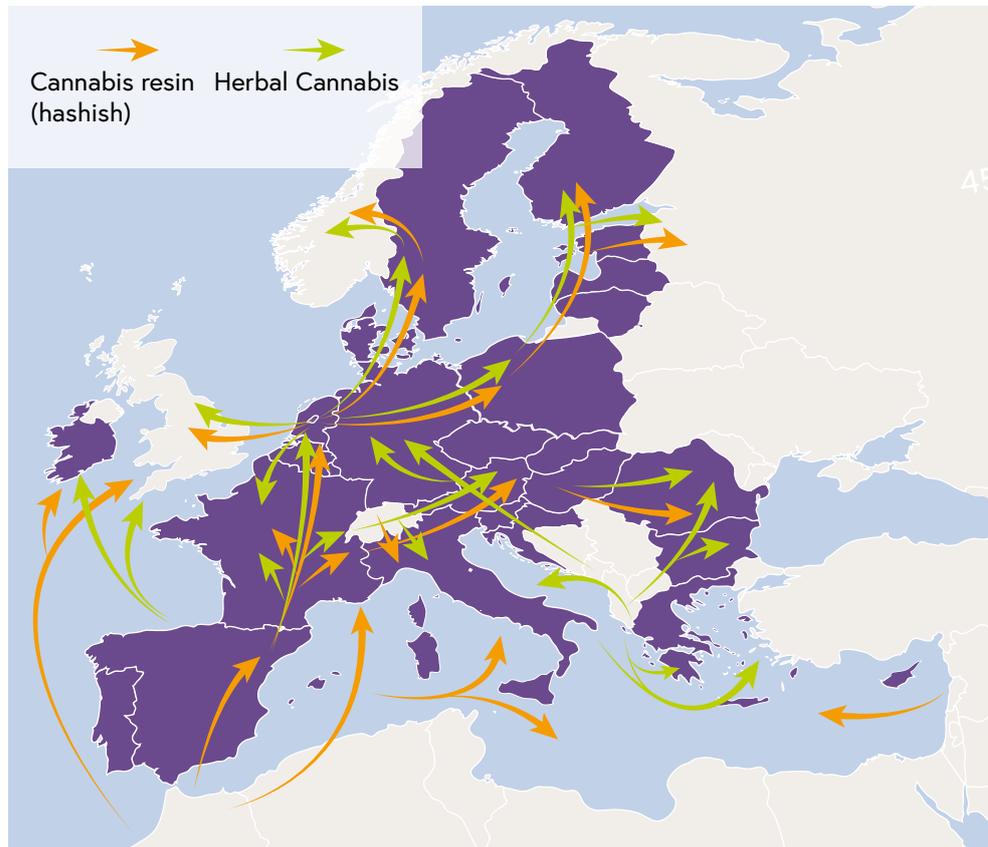
terms of consumption, trafficking, production and imports into Austria, cannabis sativa, and the cannabis herb and resin derived from it, topped the 2022 list of illicit drugs.

2022, 25,293 police reports were made in relation to cannabis products, up roughly 3% from the previous year. Seizures of cannabis products, however, were lower in 2022. Still, cannabis continued to be the most seized illicit drug across all Austrian provinces.

While herbal cannabis (marijuana) is also produced in Austria, nearly all cannabis resin (hashish) is imported, and predominantly from Morocco. Due to its geographical location in Europe, Austria is a significant transit country for the smuggling of cannabis products.

Besides Austrian perpetrators, groups from the Maghreb, especially Morocco, Algeria and West Africa, dominated the national cannabis market. Afghan asylum seekers and groups from the Western Balkans, particularly from Serbia, North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, also established themselves firmly in the business of cannabis trafficking

Cannabis smuggling routes into and within the European Union (source: Europol SOCTA, 2021, p.46)



Regarding cannabis consumption, there were no significant socio-demographic variations in 2022. Cannabis was used across all age groups and social strata, and few users were aware of their criminal wrongdoing. In that regard, so-called grow shops are worth noting, as they deliberately exploit legal loopholes even though the issue of cannabis seedlings and seeds is well understood. This leads to situations where criminals purchase the seedlings or seeds in Austria, take them abroad, cultivate them and bring back the herbal cannabis to Austria for sale.

Herbal cannabis (marijuana)

In 2022, the majority of trafficking in and smuggling of herbal cannabis in eastern Austria continued to be controlled by Serbian groups, and more generally by groups from the Western Balkans. As far as smuggling and, in particular, street dealing was concerned,

criminal groups from Hungary, Slovenia, Chechnya, Syria and Afghanistan also came into play.

With regard to the production, trafficking and smuggling of marijuana in western Austria, groups from Syria, Afghanistan, Türkiye, Slovenia and partly from the Dominican Republic were identified, in addition to perpetrators of Austrian and Balkan origin.

As in previous years, 2022 street prices of herbal cannabis hovered around EUR 10 per gram, depending on region and quality.

Cannabis resin (hashish)

Most of the cannabis resin smuggled to Austria still originated in Morocco. In 2022 as well, Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy were the western transit countries on the smuggling route to Austria. No sizeable quantities of cannabis smuggled by air were detected in 2022.

Persons from North Africa, especially Algeria, Libya and Morocco, and also from Syria and Afghanistan were found to be involved in the consumption of and trafficking in cannabis resin.

As in previous years, 2022 street prices of cannabis resin hovered around EUR 10 per gram, depending on region and quality.

Cannabidiol (CBD)

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

Distribution of hemp or CBD products in Austria is only permitted if

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

It has become a common excuse by now that consumers, producers and dealers call cannabis products CBD hemp without even being aware of the criteria for such classification. In many cases, however, this is a mere claim to obfuscate the actual intent to illegally produce or possess narcotic drugs. In several cases, offenders actually had the intention of producing CBD material with a Delta-9-THC content of no more than 0.3%, but were unsuccessful and exceeded the limit. In a bid to prove conformity with the EU's common catalogue of varieties of agricultural plant species -- a nearly impossible endeavour, according to experts -- some offenders present fictitious certificates.

Meanwhile, companies have officially been launched for the production of CBD, and they cultivate CBD plants not only on company premises, but in private homes. The products are often sold on the internet, including the usual darknet platforms and various chat groups of well-known messaging services such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal.

Apparently, in some isolated cases, CBD cannabis plants were sold that had been sprayed with synthetic cannabinoids. The danger lies in the concentration of the synthetic product applied to the plant parts. Although the handling and checking of CBD products is not the direct responsibility of the police, police intervention is required when CBD products resemble illicit substances. From a police perspective, current legislation concerning CBD products is considered unsatisfactory.

Synthetic drugs

Most of the synthetic drugs sold in Austria were still produced in Europe in 2022. Especially amphetamine-based synthetic drugs are mainly produced or processed for sale in the Netherlands and Belgium. Production in the Czech Republic and Poland appeared to keep declining in 2022.

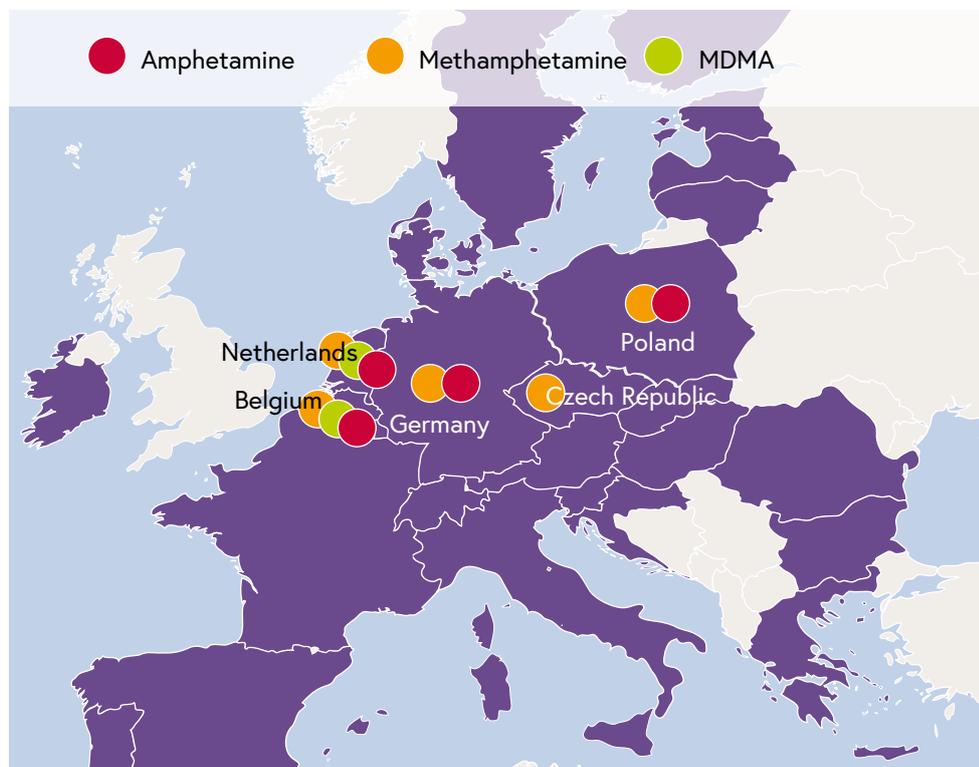
Criminal groups from the South American region are visibly having a rising impact on the European market. One emerging trend is that groups, especially from the Western Balkans, increasingly sell amphetamine-based synthetic drugs and MDMA pills in growing quantities in Austria. As before, the drugs were imported to Austria on road vehicles, trains, planes, coaches, cars and particular through postal and parcel services.

Given that most Covid-19 restrictions on air and land travel were lifted in 2022, an increase in the smuggling of synthetic drugs was again noticeable. In this respect, Vienna and its airport served as a transit hub for the import and export of synthetic drugs on the route between Africa and the Middle East.

Amphetamine, MDMA und Ecstasy

Most of the amphetamine seized in Austria in 2022 came from European countries known for distribution and production, particularly the Netherlands, and in all known forms (powder, paste, tablets). In regard to amphetamine, there are strong indications that

criminal groups from the Western Balkans import amphetamine as amphetamine oil to Austria in order to make it less detectable, and at its destination it is processed into pastes or powders. End consumers are supplied through the existing street dealership network for heroin, cocaine and cannabis.



Smuggling routes for synthetic drugs into and within the European Union (source: Europol SOCTA, 2021, p.52)

Most of the seized MDMA was in the form of tablets, but it was also offered in liquid form and as a powder. Like in past years, MDMA tablets contained very high amounts of the active ingredient. Other than that, some tablets were offered as ecstasy but contained little to no MDMA. Instead, they contained more of the new psychoactive substances.

Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine supplied to the Austrian market in 2022 came from smaller domestic production sites (whose numbers dwindled), laboratories in Europe and to a lower extent from the Middle East. The trend of methamphetamine being produced in large-scale laboratories, especially in the Netherlands, continued. It was offered as powder, crystals or tablets. Just like in previous years, the methamphetamine seized in Austria was of a high purity. Due to the addictiveness of methamphetamine and increasing supply, consumption of and trafficking in this drug is expected to rise internationally.

The quantities of methamphetamine seized in the provinces remained relatively stable and generally at a low level. Upper Austria was the only outlier, with a sharp rise in seizures.

Psychotropic drugs

Time and again, psychotropic substances are the subject of criminal investigations in Austria. In the course of NPS seizures in 2022, benzodiazepines continued to be found and were present as blotters, powder and tablets. From an international point of view, high-risk consumers, prison inmates and occasional users were among those groups who consumed more benzodiazepines, which is thought to be linked to the high availability and low cost of these substances, and to pandemic-related mental health problems.

New psychoactive substances (NPS)

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

Currently, about 1,000 NPS are currently known around the world, and their numbers are growing. Asia remains the top NPS producer for Europe. For a lack of consistent NPS legislation, distributors offer the substances on the internet, especially on darknet marketplaces. The buyers mainly receive the goods through postal and package delivery services.

The recurrent amendments of the Narcotic Drugs Regulation are aimed at shifting NPS, depending on their danger to health, to the Narcotic Drugs Act, where there are more effective measures available to counter them.

A statistical representation of NPS cases does not make sense due to uncertainties in data collection with regard to the large number of different substances. Internationally, however, there is a strong trend towards consumption and distribution of ketamine in powder form. This trend is already noticeable in individual provinces, and a further increase is to be expected nationwide. The ketamine seized came in different qualities and most often occurs in polysubstance use in the Austrian drug scene.

6.2 Production of illicit drugs in Austria

Austria is not only used as a transit country for illicit drugs, it is also a production region for certain drugs. I.e., cannabis is cultivated and cannabis products are made both indoors and outdoors, while most synthetic drugs are produced in clandestine “kitchen labs”.

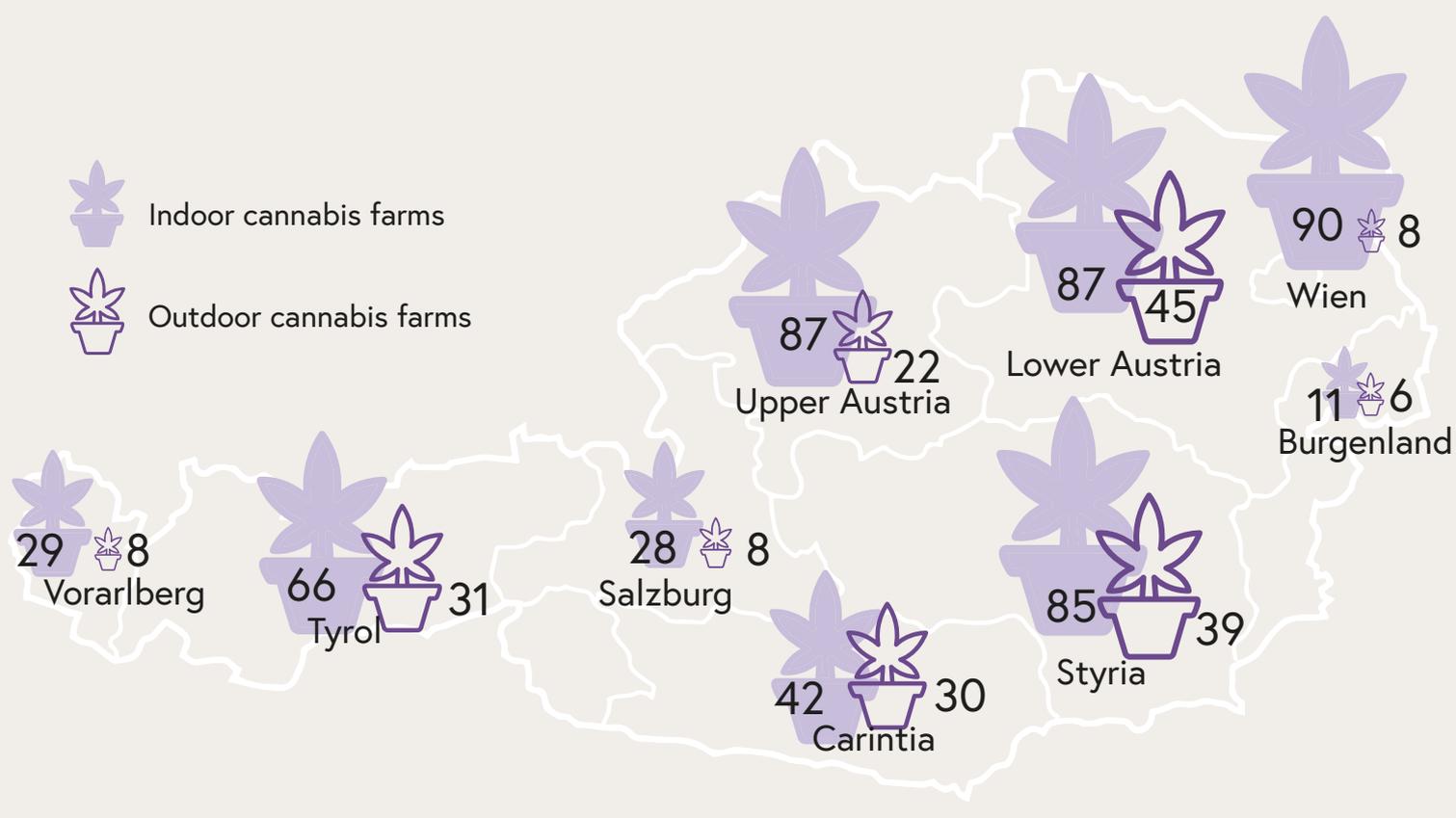
Cannabis farms

As previously described, cannabis products dominated the illicit drug market in Austria in 2022. Nevertheless, the number of detected cannabis farms dropped from 1,028 last year to 722

year	indoor	outdoor	total
2021	679	349	1.028
2022	525	197	722

Indoor and outdoor cannabis farms in 2021 and 2022

Number of cannabis cultivations and farms detected in 2022



Similar to previous years, a large part of the cannabis plants were cultivated in indoor installations. For cultivation, houses, flats, cellars or mothballed production facilities were rented. Cultivation for personal use was often done in so-called grow boxes. These are more or less ready-made systems which are sold for a few hundred euros both in hemp shops and on the internet. Trade in such equipment is generally legal. However, as mentioned before, 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.

Cultivations of between 1 and 50 plants continued to be achieved through grow boxes, mainly by domestic offenders, but also by foreign offenders. The cultivations serve to meet personal use or to sell products to people close to the offender (for a fee). Farms with more than 500 plants were predominantly run by highly professional groups from the Western Balkans.

The decrease in seizures can be explained by the fact that most cannabis produced in Kosovo or Albania is stored in caches in Slovenia and Croatia. This ensures the flow of supply – especially in case of shortages – and offenders feel less exposed to risk with this business model.

Illicit drug laboratories

2022, two inactive illegal drug labs in Austria were discovered and dismantled. In a case that came to light in Lower Austria, recipes for methamphetamine synthesis, solvents and related equipment were found. The suspects were criminally known and previously convicted Austrian nationals.

the second case, which took place in Vienna, police seized and identified amphetamine, chemicals and cutting agents that were key for amphetamine production.

Number of identified drug labs in Austria between 2018 and 2022

year	number of labs
2018	6
2019	4
2020	13
2021	17
2022	2

In the past few years, there has been increased cooperation between the police and businesses specialising in the trade or sale of chemicals to private individuals, with the aim of making these businesses of possible drug production by private individuals. As a

result, suspicious activity reports were regularly submitted to the police, which in turn led to the discovery of numerous illegal drug laboratories.

After a decline in detected drug laboratories in the years 2018 to 2019, there was a strong rebound in 2020 and 2021. In 2022, only two illegal drug laboratories were uncovered, the lowest rate over a five-year period. Required chemicals are often obtained via online orders or directly from abroad, such as the Czech Republic. In addition, chemicals are acquired that are not monitored by law, which means that suspicions are raised less frequently. Nevertheless, as the past shows, illegal laboratories can regularly be detected through tip-offs, suspicious activity reports, chance finds or generally in the course of police investigations.

Another possible reason for the decrease in detected illicit drug laboratories is the frequent inclusion of substances in the list of regulated drug precursors. If certain precursors are not available, illegal, and thus largely unnoticed sales channels are used.

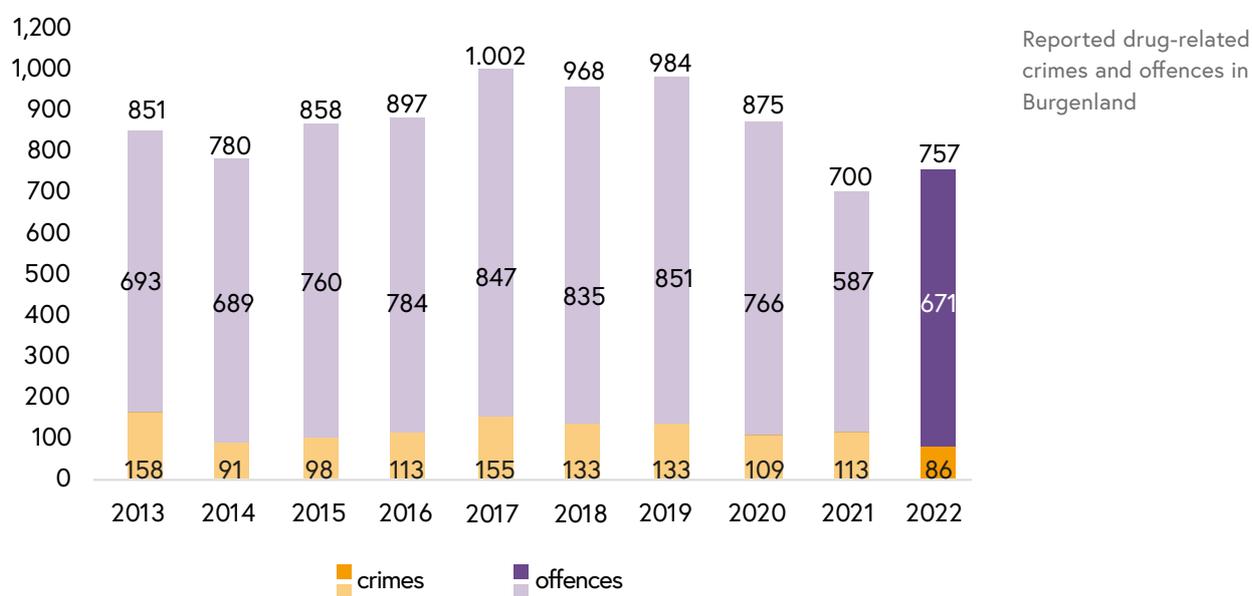
Experience shows that Austrian drug labs mostly produce amphetamine and methamphetamine. The largest part of these drugs are used by the producers themselves, while the rest is supplied to a local, or at most regional, customer base. In the past, professional drug production for the purpose of smuggling the drugs abroad or distributing them online on a large scale via the darknet tended to be the exception.

7 Drug-related crime in Aus- tria's provinces

This chapter describes the situation of drug-related crime in Austria's nine provinces -specifically the total number of reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act, the quantities of seized substances, information about criminal groups, transport routes, drug farms, drug labs, NPS, user behaviour, the darknet, trends in acquisitive, accompanying and subsequent crime and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Each report for the respective province ends with a short outlook on 2023 and a representative case in point.

7.1 Burgenland

2022, Burgenland saw a rise in drug-related police reports by 8.1%. This came as large music events such as Nova Rock returned, which prompted more checks by the police. Reported drug-related crimes plummeted by 23.9%, while reported offences increased by 14.3% from 587 to 671.



2022, more cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine was seized in Burgenland. Quantities of other seized drugs were lower, especially cannabis (about 211 kg less).

Drug seizures in Burgenland

quantities seized	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	69,771.4 g	30,043.3 g	302,356.8 g	245,651.6 g	34,292.4 g
heroin	81.9 g	2,164.5 g	311.5 g	30.0 g	65.8 g
cocaine	1,553.9 g	82.3 g	987.8 g	314.4 g	1,360.5 g
ecstasy	603 pills	2,003 pills	36,189 pills	56 pills	13 pills
amphetamine	1,653.5 g	908.3 g	1,612.0 g	791.8 g	742.9 g
methamphetamine	867.5 g	1,298.3 g	702.3 g	57.1 g	891.5 g

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

Due to its location along the Balkan route, Burgenland is frequented by criminal groups of different nationalities, especially for smuggling heroin and cannabis products. Offenders from the Balkan states, but also from countries such as Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, are mainly responsible for the smuggling. For the transport of narcotic drugs, cars, trucks, vans and buses are used. Small quantities are sometimes smuggled on passenger trains. The vehicles used are often equipped with highly professional hiding spots, which makes it almost impossible to accidentally find the drugs during routine checks. In the area of the border crossing points between Slovakia and Northern Burgenland, various types of smuggled drugs destined for either country are seized on a regular basis. Heroin and methamphetamine are mostly brought from Slovakia to Austria, while cocaine is smuggled through Austria to Slovakia by Slovakian groups. In various districts of Burgenland, multinational gangs operating highly professional cannabis farms were detected in 2022. The southern part of Burgenland hardly shows any smuggling activities from or to Hungary, but minor cross-border drug trafficking from Slovenia was noticed. In the districts of Eisenstadt, Mattersburg and Oberpullendorf, a lively trading and smuggling post for both directions has been established. The players here are Hungarian-Albanian groups, Hungarians or non-Hungarians residing in Hungary who regularly cross state borders and run cannabis farms in Austria. They are encouraged by the fact that these criminal activities carry a lower prison sentence than in their home country. A Kosovar-Syrian-Austrian group was identified in connection with cocaine trafficking in the district of Güssing.

Cannabis farms and associated criminal groups

A total of 17 cannabis farms were raided in Burgenland in 2022. Most of them were micro or mini grows with a maximum of 49 plants. In one case, an industrial farm containing more than 1,000 plants was seized. The majority of cannabis cultivations are indoors.

The operators of cannabis farms were mainly Austrian groups, and in some cases Slovak and Hungarian groups.

Drug labs and associated criminal groups

In 2022, no laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs were identified or seized in Burgenland.

Trend in new psychoactive substances

Only in isolated cases were NPS detected and seized in the districts of Neusiedl am See, Eisenstadt, the greater Eisenstadt area and Jennersdorf. Most of these NPS were synthetic cannabinoids destined exclusively for personal use.

Consumer behaviour and illicit drug use

In the district of Neusiedl am See, a change in consumption patterns was observed in 2022, in that people from all walks of life and ages increasingly used various illicit substances. Of particular concern was that adolescents used and distributed more drugs, especially cannabis. Increased police checks have revealed that young people are also increasingly dealing with drugs at school, as these areas appear to be safe and outside of police control, seemingly conferring a certain immunity to surveillance measures.

A trivialisation of cannabis use is evident in most districts of the province.

The most commonly used drugs are cannabis products, amphetamine and cocaine. Nevertheless, a significant increase in the use of heroin, morphine, opioid replacement medicines, LSD and ecstasy was observed in individual districts.

Die meistverwendeten Suchtmittel sind Cannabisprodukte, Amphetamin und Kokain. Nichtsdestotrotz war 2022 in vereinzelt Bezirken auch ein deutlicher Anstieg beim Konsum von Heroin, Morphin, Substitol, LSD und XTC zu erkennen.

Darknet trends

In 2022, the situation in Burgenland concerning drug purchases or trafficking via the darknet was no different from the year before. Time and again, recipients of drug parcels are investigated and reported to the authorities.

Trends and effects of crypto messenger services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

Data intercepted from crypto messenger services in 2021 prompted the Burgenland Provincial CID to conduct several investigations. Some of these investigations are quite extensive and many of them target criminal groups originating in the Balkans.

Acquisitive and accompanying crime

As in previous years, drug-related cases of burglary, damage to property, dangerous threats, bodily harm and violations of the Weapons and Firearms Act (prohibited weapons) by juveniles were recorded in the northern districts in 2022. In several cases and

in addition to drug-related offences, suspects were also reported for the pornographic depictions of minors.

Furthermore, manipulated power lines were found at several illegal cannabis farms. Several burglaries in veterinary practices and a home burglary could be linked to a person from the drug scene. In the south of the province, smaller thefts were recorded where the proceeds from the sale of the stolen goods were used for the purchase of drugs.

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on drug-related crime

The number of reported violations of the Narcotic Drugs Act dropped in tandem with the cancellation of large music events in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The relaxation of safety measures in 2022, especially since the summer, led to a resurgence of illegal drug use in public spaces. At the Nova Rock Festival, for instance, police issued many cautions and filed reports over drug use.

Especially in the south of Burgenland, the generally existing trend to illegally cultivate cannabis for personal use increased since the onset of the pandemic. In general, drug use was observed to have shifted to private settings, especially during Covid restrictions.

Observations on money laundering and terrorism financing

Drugs are predominantly paid for with cash. In the area of online drug trafficking, cryptocurrencies are the preferred payment methods. In connection with ongoing investigations into encrypted messaging services, it was possible to trace money flows to various EU countries and to countries outside the bloc. Some of the transactions went through humanitarian organisations. Cash was also sometimes sent to the various countries by courier. In some cases, it was found that the drug money was invested in properties with the help of „straw men“. In some cases, properties were seized by public prosecutors, and an application was filed for the confiscation of these properties.

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

Outlook

The age of delinquents, both in terms of drug use and trade, and the locations where these offences apparently take place (schools and vicinity of schools) are cause for concern and will keep investigators on their toes in 2023.

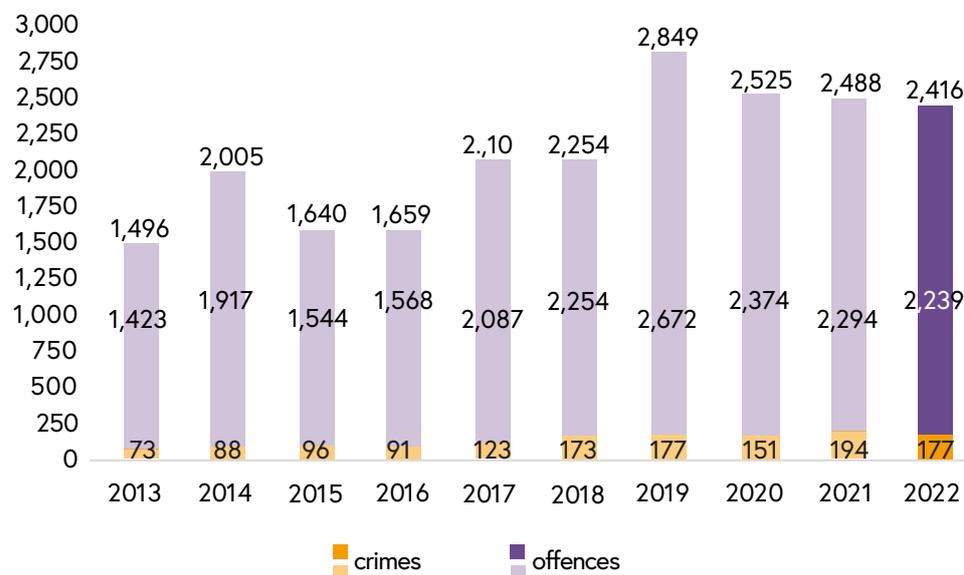
Case in point: Operation Vogue

Following extensive investigations, an Albanian-Kosovar criminal group of perpetrators was identified, which imported large quantities of narcotic drugs, mainly from the Balkans and the Netherlands or Spain, to Austria and other European countries, and distributed them there. The suspects used encrypted messaging services for their drug transactions. Three suspects, as members of a criminal organisation, were found guilty of having imported at least 619 kg of cannabis flowers, 10 kg of heroin and 5.7 kg of cocaine to Austria or having exported them from Austria to other countries such as Germany and Switzerland. Based on intercepted messenger messages, these persons are also suspected of having illegally offered at least 223 kg of cannabis flowers, 100 kg of cannabis resin and 20 kg of heroin for sale in Austria.

7.2 Carinthia

In 2022, reported drug-related violations fell by 2.9% year-over-year in Carinthia, with both crimes and offences heading lower. But like in previous years, the majority of violations were offences.

Development of reported drug-related crimes and offences in Carinthia



Cocaine seizures rose significantly in Carinthia (from about 1.2 kg to 3.2 kg) and slightly in the case of ecstasy. Seizures of all other drugs were lower, however. Comparable to Burgenland, lower seizures of cannabis products (approx. down 119 kg over the previous year) stood out.

Drug seizures in Carinthia

narcotic drugs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	104,900.8 g	94,225.6 g	52,039.5 g	168,252.1 g	49,054.8 g
heroin	1,059.9 g	5,858.8 g	1,155.6 g	4,859.0 g	3,283.6 g
cocaine	3,608.4 g	1,652.9 g	1,108.5 g	1,191.8 g	3,223.2 g
ecstasy	805 pills	1,150 pills	1,115 pills	284 pills	343 pills
amphetamine	4,482.2 g	2,027.4 g	602.2 g	1,049.1 g	228.5 g
methamphetamine	166.1 g	548.2 g	22.5 g	264.6 g	156.5 g

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

Due to its geographical location, large parts of Carinthia continued to be used for transiting narcotic drugs. Regardless, the trend of drug purchases in neighbouring Slovenia continued like in the previous years. Drugs, mainly cocaine and heroin, and to a lesser

extent cannabis products, were still smuggled to Carinthia, reaching the cities and districts for distribution. Similar to the last few years, smaller border crossings were used in addition to the known main smuggling routes via the Loiblpass and the Karawanken tunnel. A growing number of smugglers were Slovenian nationals, some of whom already reside in Carinthia, or Slovenian nationals with a Bosnian-Serbian background who have a close connection to Carinthia. The general tendency to smuggle successively larger quantities continued in 2022. Perpetrators still range from individuals with no ties to organised groups to professionally organised crime groups. Well-organised crime groups mainly consist of persons of Bosnian, Serbian or Slovenian origin. It was confirmed that criminal groups from sub-Saharan Africa, which had been pushed back in the past years by police presence, were regaining control, especially in the Klagenfurt area. Chechen groups formed slowly but continuously and were mainly engaged in heroin trafficking. In Klagenfurt, criminal groups of Afghan origin were connected to the trafficking of cannabis products.

Regarding the distribution and use of substances, there used to be a kind of east-west divide in Carinthia. While heroin was in the foreground in the districts of Wolfsberg, Völkermarkt and partly also in St. Veit an der Glan, cocaine was dominant in the districts of Klagenfurt, the wider Klagenfurt area, Villach and the Villach area, but also in the other western regions of the province. These drug-related “geographical” borders were no longer present in the year under review, owing to criminal groups’ increased mobility and apparently effective police countermeasures.

Cannabis farms and associated criminal groups

In 2022, 72 cannabis farms were seized in Carinthia, 45 of them indoors, 30 outdoors, and most of them were operated by domestic offenders. Most of these farms were identified as micro or mini grows containing a maximum of 49 plants. The farms were located in empty buildings, on rough terrain in the open and other places. The numbers have essentially remained unchanged over the previous years, and no industrial farm was uncovered.

Drug labs and associated criminal groups

In 2022, no laboratories for the production of narcotic drugs were detected or seized in Carinthia.

Trend in new psychoactive substances

NPS were mostly detected in connection with online orders. Problematically, due to the variety of substances, substances may be delivered that are different from those ordered by the consumers, which can have different and sometimes life-threatening effects.

Consumer behaviour and illicit drug use

Open drug use was only marginally observed in the cities of Klagenfurt and Villach, in what appears to be a continuing pandemic-related trend that drug use moved to private spaces. Furthermore, a trend was identified in which users, especially younger ones, increasingly experimented by mixing different substances and testing their tolerance limits.

Darknet trends

In terms of drug purchases and trafficking via the darknet, no significant changes compared to the previous years were found in Carinthia in 2022. Police have to conduct investigations and make reports in this regard on a regular basis. In 2022, however, it was noticed that end users preferred to buy NPS on relevant online platforms.

Trends and effects of crypto messenger services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

Extensive investigations into encrypted messaging services showed that considerable quantities of drugs, especially of cocaine and heroin, were distributed unnoticed in Carinthia by highly professional organised crime groups in past years.

Acquisitive and accompanying crime

In 2022, street robberies of passers-by could be particularly linked to addicts who needed the money for drugs, and this type of crime is seen to be spilling from urban to rural areas.

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on drug-related crime

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, many users felt the need to supply themselves with drugs from neighbouring countries. To that end, sellers collected down payments from buyers and purchased sizeable quantities in neighbouring countries. Due to the pandemic, drug use has increasingly shifted to the private sphere, and this trend seems to continue, as does the tendency to obtain drugs on the internet.

Observations on money laundering and terrorism financing

2022, despite several suspicious activity reports, no concrete connections between money laundering and drug trafficking could be found in Carinthia. A large part of the drug transactions was carried out in cash. Money transfers were mostly made to countries on other continents, for example via Western Union or cryptocurrencies. If assets were found, especially in connection with drug trafficking offences, the assets were frozen or seized.

2022, no findings in Carinthia pointed to drug-related terrorist financing.

Outlook

The central challenges for 2023 will be fresh or deeper investigations in connection with the uncovered encrypted messaging services.

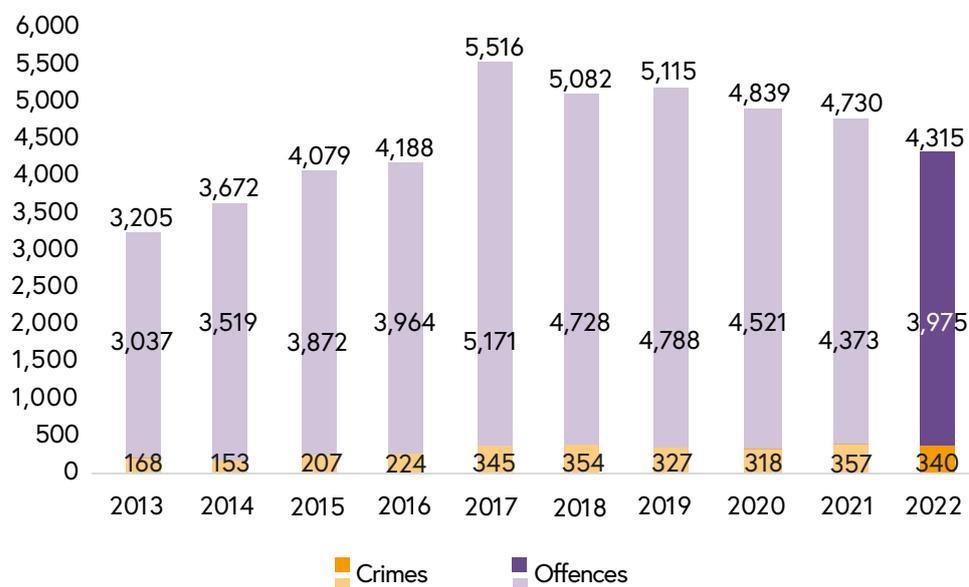
Case in point: Domino Working Group

In the course of initial investigations into international drug trafficking in the area of Slovenia and Austria, a Serbian-Bosnian-Montenegrin criminal group was identified, which intended to „punish“ a former gang member because of alleged drug debts and incriminating witness statements. At times, the victim was observed and regularly intimidated by the perpetrators. When the victim was in a bar in Jesenice (Croatia) in November 2022, he was dragged out of the bar by three masked persons, brutally attacked with a baseball bat and seriously injured. After the attack, the principal perpetrator had his picture taken with the victim who was covered in blood. The picture was then sent to various clan members. As further excesses of violence were possible, the drug trafficking investigation had to be aborted. In November 2022, the police made its final intervention, arresting nine persons on suspicion of intentional serious bodily injury, extortion, dangerous threats, damage to property, deprivation of liberty and participation in a criminal organisation.

7.3 Lower Austria

2022, the total number of drug-related reports in Lower Austria decreased by 8.8% compared to the previous year. Crimes dropped to 340 cases and offences to 3,975 cases.

Development of reported drug-related crimes and offences in Lower Austria



2022, higher amounts of certain drugs were seized in Lower Austria: 261 kg of cannabis, 4.8 kg of amphetamine and 300 kg (+126 kg) of khat. Lower amounts were recorded for the remaining drugs: cocaine seizures fell by about 5.3 kg and methamphetamine seizures by about 4.1 kg.

Drug seizures in Lower Austria

narcotic drugs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	370,335.9 g	207,806.8 g	314,784.8 g	250,629.6 g	261,112.8 g
heroin	32,841.0 g	29,392.3 g	26,100.1 g	8,387.1 g	6,234.4 g
cocaine	16,224.5 g	11,762.9 g	5,889.5 g	12,104.3 g	6,787.8 g
ecstasy	2,405 pills	6,254 pills	1,100 pills	1,599 pills	1,289 pills
amphetamine	5,632.7 g	4,279.5 g	4,297.5 g	3,649.5 g	4,805.9 g
methamphetamine	2,856.3 g	5,468.6 g	467.6 g	5,056.0 g	874.9 g
khat	448,689.0 g	89,500.0 g	1,012,000.0 g	174,600.0 g	300,000.0 g

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

In 2022, cannabis production, smuggling and trafficking was again largely controlled by Serbian criminal groups, which also operated numerous cannabis farms located in Lower Austria. As for the smuggling and trafficking of heroin and cocaine, most of the identified suspects came from Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia. They carried out most of their smuggling runs to Austria from the Western Balkans via Hungary and with HGVs and articulated lorries. As in the past, so-called „drug runners“, who are mostly Serbian or Montenegrin nationals, distributed the drugs to buyers. In this context, it was often found that end users purchased most of their drugs in Vienna.

As in previous years, criminal groups from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland led the smuggling and trafficking of amphetamine and methamphetamine. Due to the proximity to the Czech border, from where most of the drugs were smuggled in cars to Austria, Austrian criminal groups were also identified repeatedly.

Cannabis farms and associated criminal groups

In 2022, a total of 132 cannabis farms were shut down in Lower Austria, of which 87 were indoors and 45 outdoors. Most were micro or mini cultivations with a maximum number of 49 plants. In four cases, „industrial“ farms with more than 1,000 plants were seized, which belonged to professionally structured Serbian criminal groups.

The properties in which the large-scale farms were operated were mostly single-family houses or old farmhouses, which were difficult to peek into due to their location. Two farms were located on the top floor of multi-storey buildings. Most of the properties were rented by foreign perpetrators who had been staying in Austria for a long time and on a permanent basis. The farms were constructed with the help of professionals living in Austria but of Balkan origin or skilled workers temporarily brought to Austria from Serbia. So-called „gardeners“ were employed, most of whom were Bosnian and Croatian nationals who came to Austria specifically for the cultivation of the plants.

Drug labs and associated criminal groups

In 2022, an inactive drug lab apparently used for methamphetamine production was located in St. Valentin. The perpetrators were Austrian nationals.

Trend in new psychoactive substances

In 2022, NPS were mostly identified as part of online drug orders. Most of the seizures of drug parcels and letters destined for Lower Austrian end users were made in and around Vienna International Airport. In general, no increase over the previous years was noticeable. The quantities of intercepted drugs were low and mainly meant for personal use.

Consumer behaviour and illicit drug use

Despite statistical data suggesting an overall decline of drug offences, use of cannabis products in Lower Austria trended higher in 2022. Drug users, especially users of cannabis and synthetic drugs, increasingly started their habits at a younger age, with some students starting using drugs in lower and upper secondary education. While mostly younger users tend to underestimate the effects and thus risks associated with “trying out” a wide range of drugs and NPS, older users tend to stick with the drugs they are used to. Risky user behaviour among the younger Lower Austrian population is reflected by the rise in drug-related deaths, where most victims were aged between 14 and 30. Most causes of these deaths were polysubstance use of legal and/or illegal opioid replacement medicines and psychotropic substances.

Darknet trends

The number of narcotic drugs ordered on the darknet and then mailed as letters or parcels remained at a high level in 2022. As before, many of these deliveries were intercepted by customs checks at the Wien-Inzersdorf and Vienna International Airport mail sorting centres. Additionally, the Lower Austria Provincial CID seized numerous drug parcels during inspection checks of parcel delivery company other than Post AG. It should be noted that the majority of the seized drugs were not destined for Austria but for other markets such as New Zealand or the U.S.

Trends and effects of crypto messenger services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

Extensive investigations into encrypted messaging services obtained valuable intelligence on individual criminal groups in Lower Austria in 2022. In some cases, the information obtained led to the identification of several sites used for the illegal production of cannabis. These seizures also established important connections between the criminal groups and shed light on their organisation.

Acquisitive and accompanying crime

In 2022, addicts committed burglaries, shoplifting and low-level robberies such as mugging in order to obtain money for drugs.

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on drug-related crime

In 2022, addicts committed burglaries, shoplifting and low-level robberies such as mugging in order to obtain money for drugs.

Since the onset of the pandemic, a general increase in drug-related deaths in Lower Austria has been noticed. It is unclear whether this is a direct result of the Covid 19 pandemic. In any case, this trend continued in 2022.

Furthermore, it was found that users maintained their preference to purchase drugs and NPS on online platforms, which started with the pandemic, or even made greater

use of these platforms. Presumably, this may have to do with the good quality and in some cases lower prices of the drugs as opposed to those distributed on the streets.

Observations on money laundering and terrorism financing

In the course of investigations of Serbian suspects, it was established that the cash generated from narcotic drug trafficking is mainly returned to the organised crime groups by couriers, and they were often the ones in charge of smuggling the drugs. In the following case in point called „OP Joker“, cash and gold bars worth millions of euros were seized during house searches. In close cooperation with the white-collar crime department at the provincial CID, illegally obtained assets from drug trafficking were frozen in 2022, and courts were recommended to declare these assets forfeit. In one case, it was possible to confiscate properties, luxury vehicles and cash worth millions of euros.

In 2022, there were no findings in connection with drug-related financing of terrorism.

Outlook

The Lower Austria part around Vienna is of strategic importance to international criminal groups, as this area is close to Vienna International Airport and close to the borders with Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In this way, large quantities of drugs reach Lower Austria and from there find their way into the rest of Austria. These circumstances are not expected to change in 2023 and continue to pose a challenge for the Lower Austrian police.

Case in point – „OP Joker“

In the course of months of investigations conducted in cooperation with Slovakian and Hungarian police authorities, a total of 35 persons were arrested and large quantities of drugs, illegal weapons and assets worth millions were seized. The internationally operating group was proven to have smuggled a total of 60 kg of cocaine, 210 kg of methamphetamine and 17 kg of herbal cannabis via the Netherlands to Austria via Mexican and Romanian smugglers. In the house searches, many illegal weapons, cash and gold bars worth millions as well as 6 kg of methamphetamine were found. The street value of the drugs amounted to about 21 million euros.

Vienna International Airport

2022, passenger numbers at Vienna International Airport rebounded after the pandemic-related restrictions were lifted. Compared to 2021, there were no significant changes in the amount of drug seized from air travellers, despite their increase in numbers. In passenger traffic, some drug seizures were made when searching luggage and so-called body packers; in air freight, inspections of letters and parcels resulted in seizures.

close cooperation with the customs administration and the Passenger Information Unit of Criminal Intelligence Service Austria, a drug smuggling attempt was uncovered as a result of a new search and control concept based on findings from other European airports. In autumn 2022, a total of 2.2 kg of cocaine was seized, which had been imported to Austria from Brazil via Qatar and was destined for the Vienna drug scene.

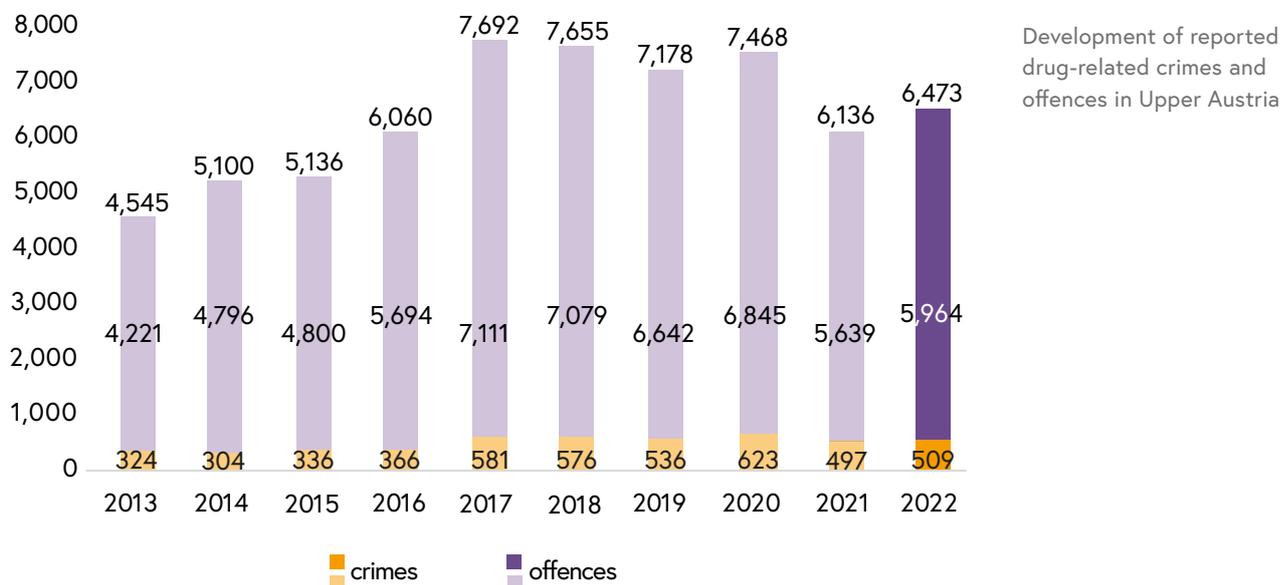
With regard to the import of cannabis products, a total of 16 kg of herbal cannabis was seized in spring 2022, which would have been destined for Norway coming from Canada via Austria.

In the area of air cargo, there was an increase in seizures of khat in 2022, which was discovered during targeted operations in cooperation with the customs office located at the airport. In the course of two large-scale interventions, significant quantities were seized. For instance, a Somali group operating out of Vienna was traced, which imported the dried khat by airfreight from Tel Aviv (Israel) to Austria. In another operation, khat originating from Lagos (Nigeria) via Tel Aviv (Israel) with the final destination of Vilnius (Lithuania) was seized.

Thanks to the cooperation with customs authorities, it was also possible to seize drugs with inspection checks at express parcel services, as in previous years. Compared to the previous year, however, the number of seizures decreased from 140 to 84 drug parcels in 2022.

7.4 Upper Austria

2022, overall drug-related violations rose by 5.5% in Austria over the previous year, with crimes increasing to 509 and offences reaching 5,964 cases.



2022, heroin seizures in Upper Austria surged from about 1.5 kg to 5.5 kg, cocaine seizures increased significantly from 10 kg to 13.6 kg, and methamphetamine seizures more than doubled. At the same time, less of the other narcotic drugs was seized. Particularly, cannabis seizures declined by 40 kg over the previous year.

narcotic drugs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	112,857.6 g	122,678.4 g	274,900.5 g	126,649.7 g	86,623.5 g
heroin	1,032.8 g	1,211.8 g	1,827.2 g	4,007.4 g	5,476.2 g
cocaine	7,234.0 g	4,862.2 g	4,345.9 g	3,580.1 g	13,557.9 g
ecstasy	4,490 pills	24,031 pills	2,074 pills	3,721 pills	2,382 pills
amphetamine	8,209.5 g	13,694.3 g	8,853.2 g	7,832.9 g	6,214.9 g
methamphetamine	294.7 g	1,893.4 g	696.0 g	1,106.1 g	2,635.7 g

Drug seizures in Upper Austria

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

Similar to previous years, nationals of the Western Balkan states (Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo) and also from sub-Saharan Africa, Türkiye and Afghanistan formed the most dominant organised groups in the field of drug-related crime in Upper Austria

in 2022. Linz, Wels, the Innviertel region and Steyr were most affected by drug-related crime. In Linz and Wels, most of the identified drug runners, who mainly sold heroin to users and were supplied from Vienna, were of Serbian origin. Cocaine, cannabis and other drugs were generally trafficked by people of other nationalities. In Upper Austria, the cocaine producers seem to have won back a large part of the customers they had lost to methamphetamine producers. Apparently, the methamphetamine wave has subsided or consumption stagnates below the level seen in the years before the Covid-19 pandemic. This is also reflected in the declining number of reported violations, although seizure figures are largely unaffected.

Members of the Ndrangheta mafia from Italy were linked to cocaine trafficking and related money laundering in 2022.

The transport routes are the same as last years. Illicit drugs are smuggled into the country from all directions. The main conduit is the Balkan route, followed by the postal deliveries and the production of marijuana for personal use.

Cannabis farms and associated criminal groups

109 cannabis farms were seized in Upper Austria in 2022, most of which were operated by domestic offenders. 87 of these farms were indoors and 22 outdoors, and most of them were micro or mini grows with a maximum of 49 plants. No “industrial” cannabis farms were located.

Drug labs and associated criminal groups

In 2022, no labs for the production of narcotic drugs were identified or dismantled in Upper Austria.

Trend in new psychoactive substances

In the sphere of NPS, a worrying rise of ketamine imports to Upper Austria was recorded in 2022. Most of these imports were connected to orders of several kilos of the substance placed on the darknet. In defence of their actions, identified users often cited laws that exempt the use of NPS from criminal prosecution.

Consumer behaviour and illicit drug use

Other than a notable rise in the number of ketamine users in 2022, no significant changes in drug consumption emerged in Upper Austria.

Darknet trends

With regard to the purchase of narcotic drugs and drug trafficking via the darknet, a slight decrease could be observed in Upper Austria in 2022 since the relaxation or lifting of the Covid-19 restrictions. However, there was a striking increase in online orders of ketamine and partly also amphetamine, some of which was sold very cheaply on the

darknet. A trend towards the use of messenger services was noticeable. For example, Telegram was used in several cases for ordering narcotics from Germany. The drugs obtained in this way were either used by the buyers themselves or sold for profit.

Trends and effects of crypto messenger services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

After the crypto messenger services were uncovered, investigations also ensued in Upper Austria in 2022.

Acquisitive and accompanying crime

In 2022, robberies, burglaries, thefts and acts of fraud in Upper Austria were linked to the need to fund drug use. In addition, there were recurring acts of violence among drug dealers.

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on drug-related crime

The Covid-19 pandemic primarily weighed on street-level drug dealing. Buyers and sellers had difficulty getting in touch with each other, and law enforcement drastically reduced checks and monitoring due to other priorities. Drug purchases shifted to on-line orders, while inspection rates in mail sorting centres decreased. The relaxation of restrictions brought about changes of this situation in 2022, which played a big part in the resurgence of reported drug-related crimes.

Observations on money laundering and terrorism financing

2022, perpetrators were identified who used conventional money transfer services such as Western Union to transfer cash obtained from drug trafficking. In a transnational investigation, 1.5 million euros in cash was seized during house searches in cooperation with Eurojust.

the year under review, no findings were obtained in connection with drug-related terrorist financing.

Outlook

The ongoing investigations in connection with the encrypted messaging services are considered key challenges for 2023 in Upper Austria, but also hold the promise of breakthrough this year. The current treatment of addicts with benzodiazepines is seen as a possible problem because side effects are often very strong and can be clearly visible to the rest of the population.

Case in point – vendor named “Alpenmilch”

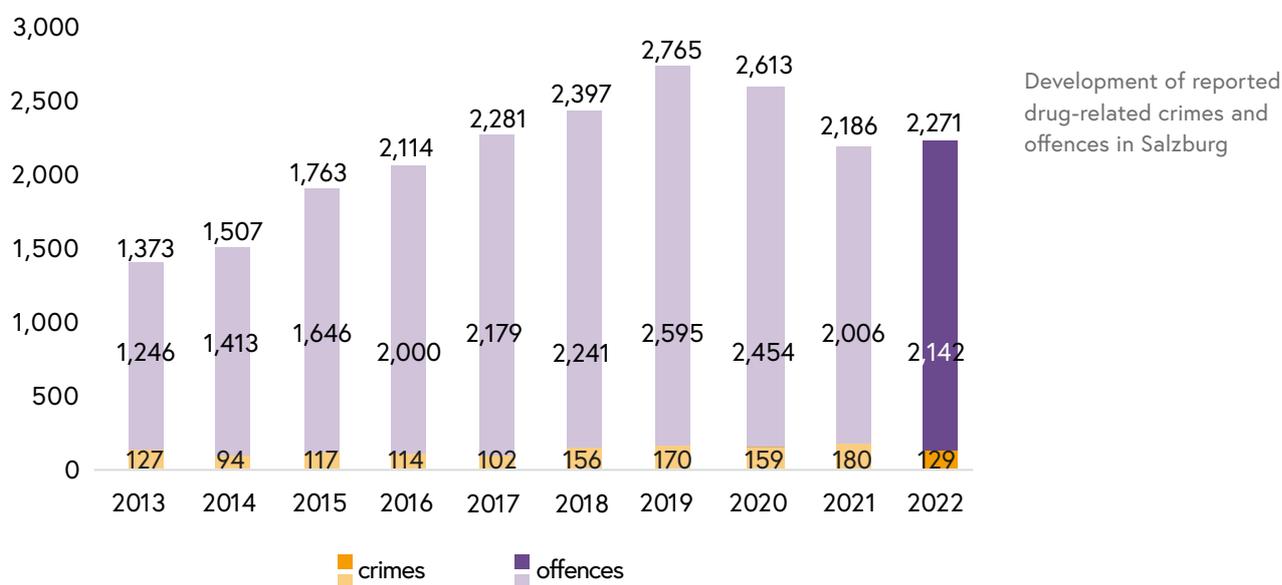
Following the accidental discovery of drugs in a damaged mail item in the district of Urfahr Umgebung, investigations were launched into a previously unknown darknet vendor in February 2022. In the course of the investigation and in cooperation with customs authorities, another 13 parcels were seized that could be attributed to the same vendor, which finally led to the identification of the darknet vendor „Alpenmilch“ as the perpetrator. Another offender turned himself in a short time later on the advice of his parents, who learned of the criminal behaviour of their child.

Further investigations led to the identification and arrest of other offenders, including a money launderer, and additional drugs and nearly EUR 10,000 euros in cryptocurrencies were seized.

The mastermind of the criminal organisation has not yet been caught. However, an intensive search for them is underway. In the course of the investigation, almost 2 kg of cocaine and cannabis as well as about 2,600 ecstasy tablets and various amounts of amphetamine, methamphetamine, ketamine and 4-MMC were seized.

7.5 Salzburg

Reported drug-related violations in Salzburg increased by 3.9% in 2022 over the previous year. Reported crimes were down from 180 to 129 cases, while offences were up from 2,006 to 2,142 cases.



In 2022, Salzburg saw a significant increase in methamphetamine by about 132% to a total of 220 g, and a 106% or so increase in ecstasy to a total of 377 tablets. The quantities of other detected drugs were lower. Particularly, seizures of cannabis (approx. -59 kg) and amphetamine (approx. -3,700 g) were lower than in the previous year.

narcotic drugs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	82,611.3 g	160,002.5 g	41,198.3 g	89,289.8 g	30,420.2 g
heroin	191.7 g	2,140.4 g	232.4 g	1,577.1 g	239.7 g
cocaine	2,857.0 g	6,196.6 g	1,819.2 g	2,132.9 g	1,003.1 g
ecstasy	328 pills	7,908 pills	6,023 pills	183 pills	377 pills
amphetamine	20,187.2 g	4,941.9 g	3,407.1 g	6,094.4 g	2,433.7 g
methamphetamine	100.1 g	398.0 g	330.5 g	94.3 g	219.3 g

Drug seizures in Salzburg

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

In Salzburg, there were no substantial changes in the overall picture of drug-related crime compared to 2021. In addition to Austrian offenders, German, Serbian, Albanian, Slovenian, Afghan and Turkish nationals increasingly entered the domestic market.

Herbal cannabis continued to be the leading product on the market. Some of it was produced locally, but it was also imported in large quantities from abroad, mainly from the Western Balkans. In this respect, a Slovenian criminal group was identified by the end of 2022, which very actively imported large quantities of cannabis products to Salzburg. Nevertheless, Afghan and Syrian asylum seekers, who were mainly active around Salzburg main station, continued to be strongly represented on the cannabis market. Due to the location of asylum shelters, the aforementioned criminal groups were found to actively pursue their illegal business in the other city districts as well.

2022, a higher prevalence of methamphetamine was noticed, especially in the district of St. Johann im Pongau. A criminal group consisting of Austrian and German nationals had settled there. However, police succeeded in dismantling the group. Methamphetamine was mostly imported from the Czech Republic in vehicles.

2022, trafficking in cannabis resin and ecstasy tablets was mostly detected in connection with orders on the darknet.

The main transport routes were largely the same: the Balkan route, where cannabis, cocaine and heroin were smuggled in particular; and the route across the Netherlands and Germany, with a preponderance for synthetic drugs such as amphetamine, methamphetamine and ecstasy.

Due to its location and border with Germany, Salzburg continued to serve as a hub for international drug trafficking in 2022.

Cannabis farms and associated criminal groups

In Salzburg, a total of 36 cannabis farms were seized in 2022, of which 28 were indoors and 8 outdoors. In most cases, „micro“ or „mini“ grows with a maximum of 49 plants were located, which were primarily cultivated in homes. The majority of the farms found were operated by domestic offenders. No „industrial“ farms could be detected.

Drug labs and associated criminal groups

In the year under review, no laboratories for the production of illicit drugs were located or dismantled.

Trend in new psychoactive substances

New psychoactive substances hardly appeared at all in street trading. These substances were mainly ordered on the internet or darknet for personal use, which was reflected by seizures at the Wals mail sorting centre.

Consumer behaviour and illicit drug use

User behaviour and the abuse of illegal drugs remained unchanged compared to the previous year. One problem was polysubstance use, e.g. mixing opioids with pharmaceuticals containing narcotics, which was primarily responsible for drug-related deaths.

Darknet trends

In 2022, the Salzburg Provincial CID again enjoyed an excellent cooperation with Austrian customs. At least one to two joint inspections were carried out monthly at the mail sorting centre in Wals, resulting in 233 seizures of a total of 7.6 kg of different drugs and 96 tablets of narcotic drugs or NPS. Most senders of the drugs were based in the Netherlands, Germany and Spain. Their preferred means of transport were letters or parcels. Generally speaking, online drug trafficking stagnated in 2022, as in previous years.

Trends and effects of crypto messenger services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

In connection with the uncovered encrypted messaging services, extensive investigations were also carried out in Salzburg in 2022, some of which are still ongoing due to their complexity. As for the offenders identified so far, they were generally found to be active in organised drug trafficking for years.

Acquisitive and accompanying crime

As in 2021, crimes such as bodily injury, low-level robberies and in some instances theft and burglaries were connected to drug-related acquisitive and accompanying crime.

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on drug-related crime

The Covid-19 pandemic apparently impacted the transport of drugs in particular. In Salzburg, for example, transports of goods hardly affected by the restrictions were increasingly used for smuggling. In addition, it was noticeable that drug trafficking had shifted from public to private spaces. Drug users significantly placed more online orders for drugs on the darknet. Due to the pandemic and a lack of human resources, police performed fewer postal inspections together with customs in the years 2020 and 2021.

Observations on money laundering and terrorism financing

Cash was still the preferred method of payment in the narcotic drug trade in Salzburg in 2022. Money laundering in the form of property purchases were not recorded. Occasionally, luxury items such as brand-name watches were purchased with drug money. As part of a cooperative investigation with Slovenia, a connection to organised crime was

established. House searches in Slovenia and Austria turned up about 270,000 euros in cash, two luxury cars, a motorbike and several luxury watches.

Investigations that were related to drug offences did not give rise to any suspicion of terrorist financing in 2022.

Outlook

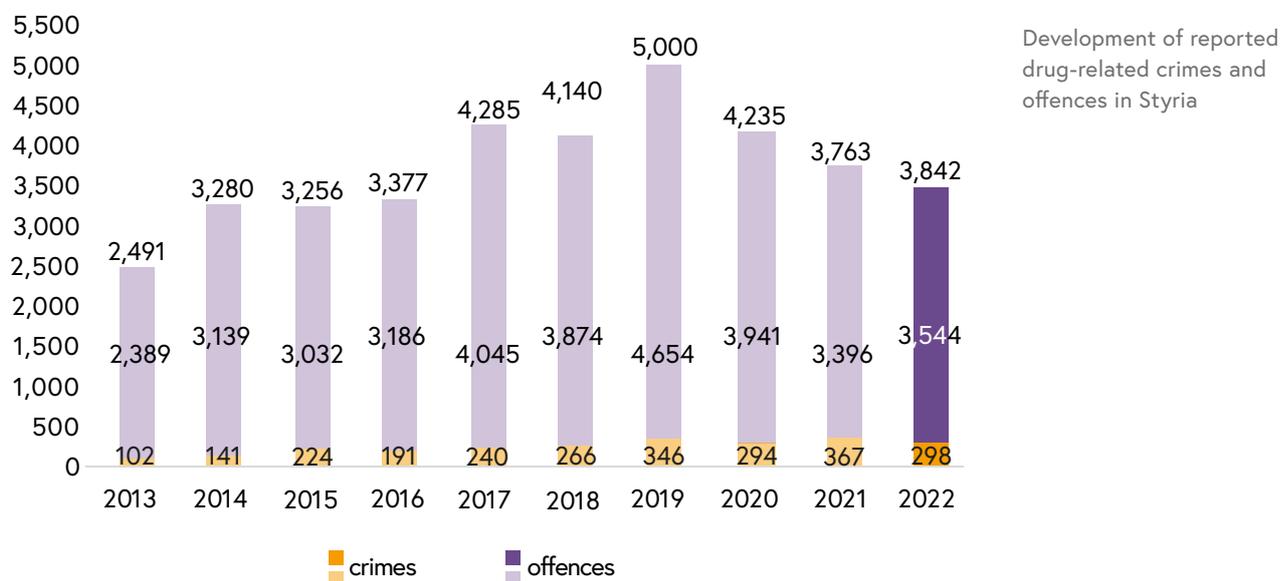
Due to investigations that will continue into 2023, the gradual normalisation of post-pandemic social life, and a general increase in the number of cases related to drug crime, numbers are expected to keep growing in the province of Salzburg in 2023. In 2023, special attention will be paid to online drug trafficking. Younger offenders, in particular, switched to online drug trafficking during the pandemic and the resulting restrictions in public life, where there is a lower risk of detection and drugs are sometimes available in a high purity at lower prices than in street dealing.

Case in point - „OP Point“

Cooperative investigations with Slovenia and the Carinthia Provincial CID made it possible to uncover a Slovenian criminal group which transported narcotic drugs to Austria. When the group was monitored, it was found that the majority of the smuggled drugs, mostly herbal cannabis and cannabis resin, were earmarked for distribution in Salzburg. In the course of a jointly coordinated Action Day, ten arrests and numerous house searches were made in Austria alone. Further, a total of about 20 kg of herbal cannabis, about 800 g of cocaine and numerous assets were seized in Austria.

7.6 Styria

In 2022, reported drug-related violations increased by 2.1% in Styria. Drug-related crimes decreased from 367 to 298 cases, while reported offences climbed by 148 to 3,544 cases (+4.4%).



Cocaine seizures surged by about 210% compared to 2021 and heroin seizures slightly rose by about 3.6% in Styria. By contrast, there were fewer seizures of other drugs. In particular, cannabis seizures dropped by about 72 kg and amphetamine seizures by roughly 36 kg.

Suchtmittel	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	123,017.2 g	144,470.0 g	239,361.6 g	302,462.2 g	230,433.3 g
heroin	88.5 g	531.9 g	5,591.7 g	388.3 g	402.2 g
cocaine	2,344.0 g	1,766.8 g	4,309.4 g	914.8 g	2,837.6 g
ecstasy	4,751 pills	8,279 pills	7,278 pills	33,676 pills	3,730 pills
amphetamine	5,635.7 g	16,512.4 g	6,850.4 g	41,420.0 g	4,964.1 g
methamphetamine	178.1 g	5,924.7 g	812.7 g	285.4 g	90.0 g

Drug seizures in Styria

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

In 2022, Styria saw an increased demand for heroin and especially cocaine. Most cases of drug crime occurred in Graz, the surrounding area of Graz, in the Leibnitz basin, in

the conurbations of Leoben-Bruck-Kapfenberg and Mur-Mürz Furche. Drugs were mainly trafficked along transit routes, sold to consumers in front of pubs and restaurants, in public places and parks, as well as in the context of mail delivery.

Asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Syria, Chechnya as well as resident Dominicans were engaged in the distribution of cannabis and cocaine in the city of Graz. Organised crime groups from the entire Western Balkans, especially Bosnians, Croatians, ethnic Albanians from Kosovo and North Macedonia, controlled imports of narcotic drugs such as cannabis, cocaine and heroin via Slovenia. A considerable part drug demand in southern and eastern Styria and the adjacent area including Graz was met by Slovenian offenders.

The only regional differences in Styria pertained to the short-term availability of drugs. Demand per se, however, is present throughout the province.

Cannabis farms and associated criminal groups

In Styria, a total of 124 cannabis farms were seized in 2022, of which 85 were indoors and 39 outdoors. In most cases, „micro“ or „mini“ grows with a maximum number of 49 plants were located. No „industrial“ farms were found.

Drug labs and associated criminal groups

In 2022, no labs for the production of narcotic drugs were identified or seized in Styria.

Trend in new psychoactive substances

NPS only had a marginal appearance in 2022, and their numbers kept dropping over previous years.

Consumer behaviour and illicit drug use

In 2022, all kinds of common illicit drugs were still used in Styria. Cannabis was still most in demand, but cocaine and heroin were catching up both in terms of demand, consumption and supply. This led to a small dip in demand for opioid replacement medicines.

Darknet trends

Drug parcels linked to Styria dropped to only 149 in 2022. This may have to do with drug buyers returning to their pre-pandemic habits following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. The fact remains, however, that drugs are still ordered on the darknet and delivered by mail to locations in Styria.

Trends and effects of encrypted messaging services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

In connection with the uncovered encrypted messaging services, extensive investigations were underway in Styria in 2022. Some of them were concluded and gathered highly valuable findings, while others are highly complex and difficult in nature and thus will take more time to complete.

Acquisitive and accompanying crime

Compared to the previous year, acquisitive and accompanying crime remained unchanged in 2022. There were isolated cases of petty robberies - mostly within the addict community and in Graz - and also thefts and burglaries.

Effects of the corona pandemic on drug-related crime

During the time of the Covid-19 restrictions, an increase in drug trafficking via the internet and the darknet was observed. In 2022, this development went into reverse, so that drugs were increasingly purchased in public parks, squares, pubs and restaurants.

The Covid-19 restrictions in Styria did not seem to have any effect on cross-border drug trafficking, i.e. the import of narcotic drugs from Slovenia to Austria. This is owing to the fact that border controls primarily verified compliance with Covid-19 protocols.

Observations on money laundering and terrorist financing

In 2022, there were indications of money laundering activities, mainly in connection with the purchase of properties in the city of Graz and the transfer of illegally generated income abroad by means of cash couriers.

There was no intelligence on terrorist financing in connection with drug-related offences in Styria in 2022.

Outlook

Due to its location, Styria will continue to be important in 2023 for the smuggling of drugs, especially cannabis and cocaine via the Balkan route. Overall, the trends identified in 2022 are expected to persist in 2023.

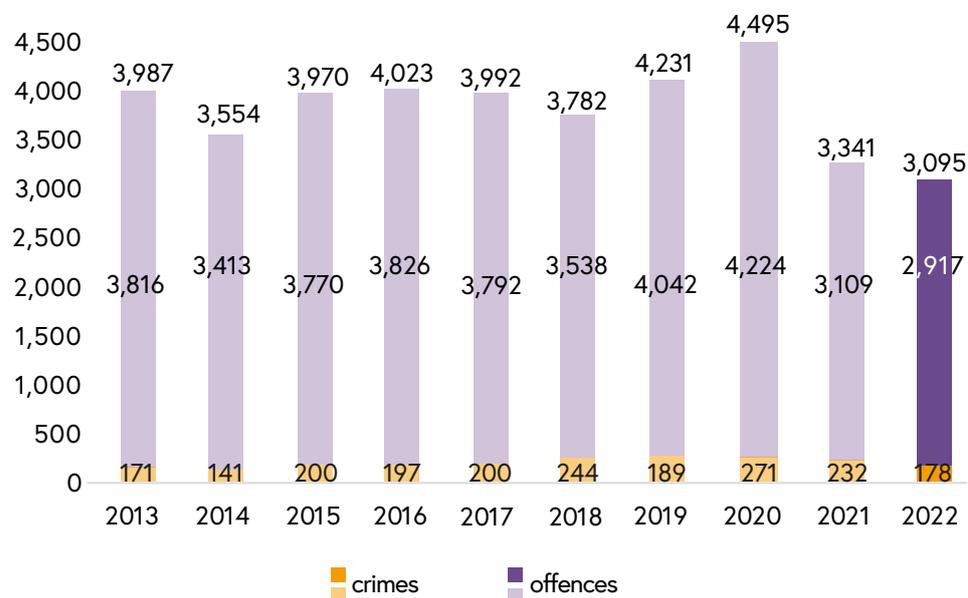
Case in point – „OP FLAVIA“

In 2022, the Styria Provincial CID conducted extensive investigations into the managers of a construction company located in Styria, who were of Balkan origin and allegedly imported drugs, mainly cocaine and cannabis, in considerable quantities via the Netherlands or from the Western Balkans to Austria for several years. Furthermore, it was established that the perpetrators also smuggled weapons, some of them automatic, and war material. The drugs were sold to end users in Graz and southern Styria, but also in other western provinces. The proceeds were transferred abroad or invested in properties. Based on information gained from uncovering encrypted messaging services, investigators eventually managed to arrest one of the main suspects involved, and seized drugs and weapons.

7.7 Tyrol

2022, reported drug-related violations in Tyrol sank by 7.4% over the previous year. Year-over-year, crimes decreased to 178 cases (-23.3%) and offences to 2,917 cases (-6.2%).

Development of reported drug-related crimes and offences in Tyrol



2022, cannabis seizures rose significantly from about 339 kg to 555 kg and ecstasy seizures soared from 1,500 to 2,900 tablets in Tyrol. Increases were also recorded in heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine seizures. By contrast, amphetamine seizures dropped from about 2.8 kg to roughly 945 g.

Drug seizures in Tyrol

narcotic drugs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	101,802.0 g	83,288.5 g	155,778.9 g	339,397.8 g	555,377.1 g
heroin	68.5 g	158.1 g	215.6 g	22.1 g	54.7 g
cocaine	8,092.4 g	5,574.4 g	7,368.5 g	2,958.7 g	3,364.0 g
ecstasy	2,430 pills	1,957 pills	15,901 pills	1,510 pills	2,941 pills
amphetamine	3,393.7 g	10,997.1 g	4,173.4 g	2,762.4 g	945.2 g
methamphetamine	255.3 g	1,002.7 g	193.6 g	122.1 g	326.0 g

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

The North African drug dealer scene in Innsbruck, which used to have a strong presence there, was partly displaced, owing in particular to stepped up police checks and measures taken by the aliens' police. Further, the scene withdrew to private locations such as flats,

shops, (betting) pubs and asylum shelters, primarily for the purpose of drug trafficking. The scene was also found to have moved to other cities in the province.

In addition to suspects of Austrian and North African origin, in 2022 more and more offenders from Germany, Hungary and Türkiye entered the domestic drug market. There was also an increase in suspects of Albanian and North Macedonian origin.

The drugs were obtained in the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, also in Vienna, and smuggled to Tyrol.

Cannabis farms and associated criminal groups

In the Tyrol, a total of 97 cannabis farms were seized in 2022, of which 66 were indoors and 31 outdoors. In most cases, „micro“ or „mini“ grows with a maximum of 49 plants were identified, which were mostly operated by domestic suspects. In several cases, it was found that the necessary plant seeds and cuttings were purchased in the domestic market. Most of the facilities were fitted with high-quality equipment. No „industrial“ farms were located.

Drug labs and associated criminal groups

In 2022, no laboratories for the production of illicit drugs were identified or seized in Tyrol.

Trend in new psychoactive substances

NPS only played a minor part in drug-related crime in 2022. Most of such substances were intercepted in mail inspection checks conducted with customs.

Consumer behaviour and illicit drug use

Consumer behaviour did not appear to be out of the norm compared to previous years. Cannabis continues to be the most widely used illegal drug, followed by cocaine and amphetamine. Judging by the number of intercepted drugs, demand for cocaine soared massively in some places in 2022.

Darknet trends

In 2022, Tyrol saw another decline in seized drug parcels that had been ordered on the darknet.

Trends and effects of crypto messenger services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

In connection with the uncovered encrypted messaging services, extensive investigations were underway in Tyrol in 2022. Some of them were concluded and gathered highly valuable findings, while others are highly complex and difficult in nature and thus will take more time to complete.

Acquisitive and accompanying crime

Compared to the previous year, acquisitive and accompanying crime hardly changed in 2022.

As before, offences directly caused by drug crime such as bodily injury, low-level robberies, coercion and burglaries were solved.

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on drug-related crime

The Covid-19 restrictions indirectly hampered drug trafficking and drug runs. Add to this that an effective control of drug-related crime was very difficult or barely possible due to the pandemic and the resulting restructuring of police resources and police service cuts. In 2022, after restrictions were lifted, offenders regained their mobility in the area of the drug scene.

Observations on money laundering and terrorism financing

Cash was the most common method of payment in drug-related crime. In several cases it was possible to seize large amounts of cash as well as cryptocurrencies.

In 2022, there were no findings in Tyrol about terrorist financing in connection with drug offences.

Outlook

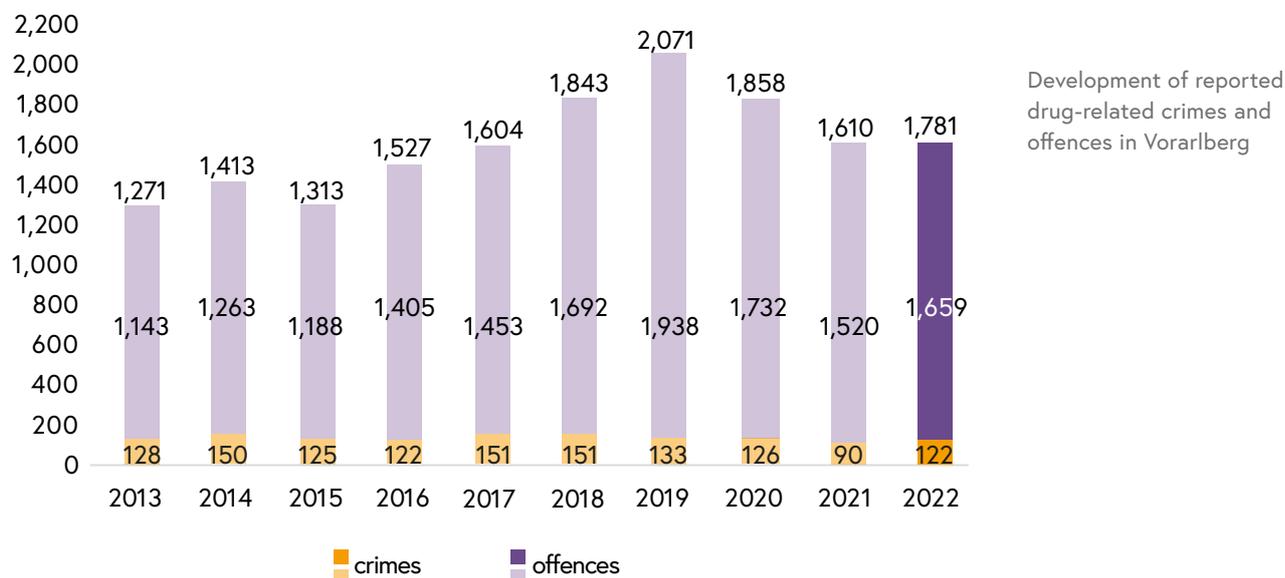
The swift and easy access to drugs via darknet foreshadows a rise in drug-related police reports in 2023. Seeing the lack of awareness of the illegality of drugs, the number of seizures of indoor and outdoor cannabis cultivations is expected to increase.

Case in point

In the spring of 2022, tip-offs from members of the public came in that a large Albanian criminal group in the area of Kufstein/Wörgl and Linz had been trafficking in narcotic drugs. After intense investigations that lasted several months, 13 persons were arrested towards the end of the year. During the house searches, more than 26 kg of cannabis, numerous mobile phones and a car were seized. The members of the group were accused of importing up to 32 kg of cocaine and up to 100 kg of cannabis into Austria and distributing the drugs here over the last two years. One of the principals, an active MMA fighter, also acted as “head of security”, who appeared when persons did not want to pay. Debtors were coerced into further cooperation with serious threats against them or their families. The investigations also identified the perpetrators of several home burglaries in the Tyrolean lowlands, in which large amounts of money, weapons, gold and jewellery had been stolen.

7.8 Vorarlberg

2022, reports of drug-related violations increased by 10.6% in Vorarlberg over the previous year. Reported crimes rose from 90 to 122 and offences from 1,520 to 1,659.



2022, cannabis seizures increased by about 12 kg to about 40 kg, and cocaine seizures surged from roughly 700 g to about 9.7 kg. Seizures of the remaining types of drugs were lower; in particular, amphetamine seizures dropped from 2.5 kg to about 1.6 kg, and ecstasy seizures from 1,559 to just 2 tablets.

narcotic drugs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	40,463.4 g	41,198.3 g	20,879.7 g	27,342.1 g	39,785.8 g
heroin	471.4 g	707.4 g	503.6 g	1,420.7 g	13.3 g
cocaine	601.6 g	12,214.6 g	896.1 g	685.1 g	9,672.7 g
ecstasy	1,360 pills	291 pills	246 pills	1,559 pills	2 pills
amphetamine	5,278.3 g	1,016.6 g	1,155.7 g	2,548.8 g	1,637.8 g
methamphetamine	226.1 g	1,465.2 g	120.7 g	24.9 g	17.3 g

Drug seizures in Vorarlberg

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

In 2022, foreign criminal groups were prevalent in cocaine trafficking in Vorarlberg, many of them nationals of Western Balkan countries, Türkiye and Syria. In cannabis trafficking, Afghan, Syrian and Austrian criminal groups tended to be identified, as in the years before.

Cross-border drug trafficking and smuggling remained at a high level in 2022, which is probably also due to the strategic location of Vorarlberg. In particular, German drug offenders who had been convicted in Germany settled in Vorarlberg and pursued their illegal business there.

Serbian criminal groups again showed highly organised criminal structures, especially in heroin trafficking. In this context, Serbian „runners“ appeared as sellers to end customers. With regard to cross-border drug trafficking, the groups appeared to have connections to Switzerland (St. Gallen) and Germany (Lindau, Kempten and Friedrichshafen). Occasionally, Turkish criminal groups in Vorarlberg extended their activities to Tyrol in cross-border trafficking.

Drug-related hotspots were not located in Vorarlberg in 2022. However, drug use and trafficking was seen to accumulate in urban centres.

Cannabis farms and associated criminal groups

In Vorarlberg, a total of 37 cannabis farms were seized in 2022, of which 29 were indoors and eight outdoors. In most cases, „micro“ or „mini“ grows with a maximum of 49 plants were identified, which were primarily cultivated for personal use and in several cases for distribution to people close to the growers. In most cases, the plants were cultivated by domestic perpetrators. No „industrial“ farms were located.

Drug labs and associated criminal groups

In 2022, there was one case of a suspected drug lab in Lustenau. However, investigations did not corroborate this suspicion.

Trend in new psychoactive substances

NPS only played a minor part in drug-related crime in 2022. Most of such substances were intercepted in mail inspection checks.

Consumer behaviour and illicit drug use

In 2022, cannabis once more took the first place in drug use in Vorarlberg. In terms of general substance use, youths and young adults also used MDMA, amphetamine, various morphine-containing drugs and LSD, which was mainly acquired via the internet or darknet.

Cocaine use was at a high level, and the average quality of the cocaine seized was very good. In 2022, heroin use in Vorarlberg was also at a high level.

Darknet trends

Investigations in this area were still quite difficult. Recipients' names and addresses were mostly fictitious, and investigations that would turn up sufficient evidence took a

significant amount of time. Most of the orders placed on the darknet and sent through drug parcels were meant for personal use.

Trends and effects of crypto messenger services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

In connection with the uncovered encrypted messaging services, the Vorarlberg Provincial CID conducted extensive and time-consuming investigations in 2022, which led to the identification of perpetrators operating in Vorarlberg. On the basis of these findings, conclusions were drawn about organised crime groups such as biker gangs, which apparently distributed considerable amounts of drugs in the Vorarlberg area.

Acquisitive and accompanying crime

Drug-related acquisitive and accompanying crime gave rise to recurring offences such as bodily injury, robberies, burglaries and fraud.

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on drug-related crime

For the first time since the onset of the pandemic, drug-related crime seemed to return to normal in 2022. This was reflected by a growing number of cases and was partly a result of the lifting of restrictions in cross-border traffic and everyday life. As a consequence, drug use and trafficking resumed in many public spaces.

Observations on money laundering and terrorism financing

The analysis of data from encrypted messaging services in 2022 found that criminal groups sometimes hire professional money couriers who drive vehicles that are specially prepared for the transport of cash.

Assets seized by police were handed over to the competent prosecutor's offices and a forfeiture of the money was recommended. However, seized assets often have to be returned due to criminals' efforts to conceal ownership, which results in unclear ownership situations.

There was no intelligence in 2022 that would have pointed to terrorist financing in connection with drug-related offences in Vorarlberg.

Outlook

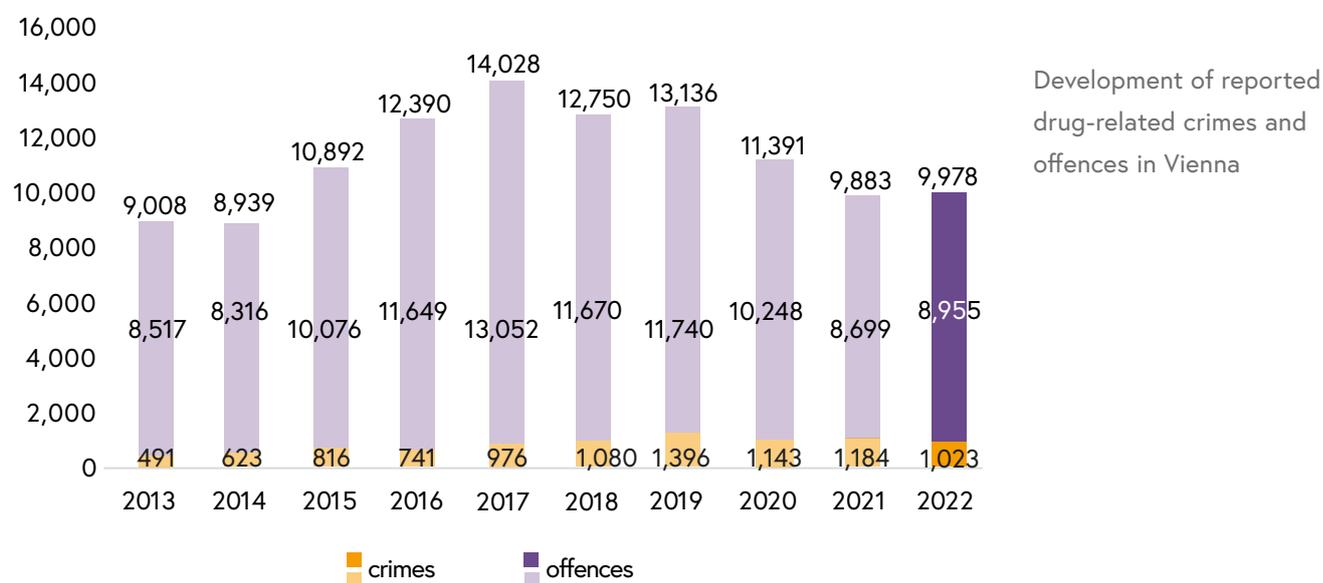
The key challenges for 2023 in Vorarlberg are the ongoing investigations into the uncovered encrypted messaging services, which tie up a lot of human resources in the combat against drug-related crime.

Case in point

While investigating encrypted messaging services, German law enforcement was able to establish a connection to Vorarlberg in 2022. A criminal group was identified, and its German main perpetrator was found to have settled in Vorarlberg. From there, he carried out or coordinated drug trades, especially cannabis and cocaine, in the area close to the border. Searches at several locations in Vorarlberg and Germany allowed German investigators to seize about 30 kg of herbal cannabis, cocaine and weapons. In Vorarlberg, investigators were able to arrest several leaders of the group and seize vehicles, weapons, small amounts of cocaine and cannabis as well as cash.

7.9 Vienna

2022, reported drug-related violations in Vienna rose by 1% over the previous year. Reported drug crimes declined by 161 to 1,023, while offences increased from 8,699 to 8,955.



drug seizures made by the police, heroin quantities increased significantly over the previous year by about 70%, cocaine by about 37% and methamphetamine by about 30%. The quantities of seized khat increased, too, by about 5.9 kg to roughly 96 kg. Lower quantities of seized drugs were recorded for cannabis, down by about 16% to about 471 kg, ecstasy, down by about 6% to 9,905 tablets, and amphetamine, down by about 58% to roughly 7.3 kg.

narcotic drugs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
cannabis	494,283.9 g	485,925.7 g	657,607.3 g	563,670.5 g	470,986.1 g
heroin	40,526.8 g	52,478.9 g	68,334.8 g	50,833.8 g	86,656.0 g
cocaine	32,474.7 g	43,007.2 g	36,260.1 g	56,646.6 g	77,386.6 g
ecstasy	65,865 pills	26,049 pills	19,222 pills	10,533 pills	9,905 pills
amphetamine	22,297.9 g	67,836.8 g	5,886.4 g	17,276.4 g	7,288.8 g
methamphetamine	3,055.9 g	12,198.7 g	5,891.9 g	3,468.6 g	4,519.4 g
khat	45,120.0 g	147,625.7 g	73,870.2 g	5,860.0 g	95,760.0 g

Drug seizures in Vienna

Criminal groups, types of drugs and transport routes

In 2022, as in previous years, numerous criminal groups with different ethnic origins were active in Vienna. These included criminal groups from the Serbian-Montenegrin area, which assumed a leading role in organised drug crime and street trading. Afghan, Austrian, West and North African, Persian and Turkish criminal groups were also on the move.

Similar to previous years and in what is typical of large cities, all narcotic drugs available on the market were generally offered in Vienna, which led to a growing number of seizures of most drug types.

Criminal groups of Western Balkan origin continued to dominate the smuggling of and trafficking in heroin, cocaine and cannabis in Vienna in 2022. These groups are known for their highly professional approach and specialisation into different roles. The drugs were increasingly brought to Austria either by passenger cars or coaches via the Western Balkans or from the Netherlands. Dealers produced some of the cannabis on their own farms, which were operated in Vienna or in the neighbouring provinces, or it was imported via the Western Balkans.

Afghan offenders as well as offenders of West and North African origin were mainly present in street trading, selling cannabis, heroin and cocaine, partly in a worse quality than offered by criminal groups from the Western Balkans. Austrian offenders were linked to the sale of cannabis, amphetamine and opioid replacement medicines, sometimes also using the darknet. In several cases, cannabis was cultivated in Austria and partly mixed with deliveries from Spain and the Western Balkans. Amphetamine was largely imported via the Czech Republic and Slovakia. As for Persian criminal groups, they were found to be engaged in opium trafficking, with a tendency towards methamphetamine trafficking.

Cannabis farms and associated criminal groups

In Vienna, a total of 98 cannabis farms were seized in 2022, of which 90 were located indoors in flats, cellars or warehouses, and eight were outdoors. In most cases, micro- or mini-grows with a maximum of 49 plants were identified. In three cases, industrial-size farms were located, which were operated by criminal groups of Western Balkan origin with professional equipment and whose products were partly traded across borders. In most cases, the installation of and care for these professional farms was controlled and organised by offenders living abroad (Serbia). Identified Austrian perpetrators tended to cultivate cannabis only for personal use and/or to pass it on to friends or acquaintances.

Drug labs and associated criminal groups

In 2022, a laboratory for the production of amphetamine was dismantled in Vienna.

Due to a generally efficient cooperation with the chemical industry and chemical wholesalers and retailers in Vienna, drug precursors are very difficult to obtain. This might be one reason why only a few unprofessional drug labs, most of which were geared for personal use, were detected in the past few years.

Trend in new psychoactive substances

Police in Vienna seized NPS only rarely from street dealers in 2022. Most buyers turn to online vendors via the darknet. In the course of targeted inspections at the Inzersdorf mail sorting centre, NPS were intercepted on a regular basis in 2022. However, the quantities were mostly low and destined for end users.

Consumer behaviour and illicit drug use

The “classics”, heroin, cocaine and cannabis products, continued to be a staple in illicit drug use in 2022. However, abuse of novel substances such as synthetic drugs, methamphetamine and amphetamine grew at a steady rate. A misuse of opioid replacement medicines was observed again in 2022. Patients on this therapy often sold these substances so they could afford heroin or cocaine on the black market for their own use. Synthetic drugs were mainly found in the Vienna nightlife scene, but they were also used to enhance performance or for personal experimentation.

Darknet trends

In 2022, online drug trafficking, especially via darknet, continued to grow in Vienna, in what has been a continuous trend for years.

Trends and effects of encrypted messaging services (ANØM, SKY ECC)

In connection with the exposed encrypted messaging services, the Vienna Provincial CID also conducted extensive investigations in 2022. The information obtained has shed light on leaders of the organised crime groups, their structures and modus operandi. The findings completely changed the view on the situation of the illicit drug market, whose traded quantities had been estimated very conservatively until then. Moreover, previous investigations focusing on criminal groups from the Western Balkans showed that they only represent a fraction of the organised criminal structures that are active in Austria.

Acquisitive and accompanying crime

In 2020, burglaries accounted for the majority of drug-related accompanying and acquisitive crime in Vienna, followed by various thefts, especially of e-bikes, e-scooters and bicycles, as well as robberies. Robberies mostly targeted tobacconists and filling stations. In 2022, Vienna police increasingly included the fencing scene into its investigations, which served as the prime hub for many addicts to turn their illegally obtained items into money. Some of these were official second-hand shops or pawnshops which,

under the guise of conducting legal business, often knowingly buy goods from addicts in order to sell them to third parties for a profit.

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on drug-related crime

In the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, drug-related crime slightly decreased and some drug trading moved off the streets. Compared to 2021, drug offences slowly climbed back to pre-pandemic levels in 2022, and so did drug trafficking in public spaces.

Observations on money laundering and terrorist financing

In 2022, the Vienna Provincial CID processed 713 files with suspected cases of money laundering. With approval of the competent prosecutor's office, assets were also declared forfeit, although some of the forfeited assets had to be returned due to unclear ownership.

Like in the past, large amounts of cash were found to be transferred across Europe by dedicated couriers in 2022.

There were no indications that any drug-related crime was connected to terrorist financing.

Outlook

For the year 2023, online drug trafficking via the internet or darknet will pose a challenge to the Vienna police. This is especially true because substances of good quality and at a low price can be obtained quickly and anonymously. The increased seizures entail an enormous administrative and investigative effort on the part of customs and the police.

The noticeable increase in drug trafficking in public places since the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions will be another challenge for the Vienna Police. It will be necessary to quickly identify potential hotspots and prevent them from becoming cemented by means of appropriate measures. An additional challenge are the extensive investigations into encrypted messaging services, which reveal an unprecedented level of organised crime.

In 2023, the Vienna Provincial CID will continue to strive to put pressure on the open street scene through regular targeted patrols, and at the same time to conduct structural investigations into established organised crime structures in order to identify and dismantle them

Case in point

In the course of investigations of an Austrian offender, and with the help of information from encrypted messaging services and a large number of tactical measures, an address for a drug cache was identified. Following weeks of investigations, a criminal organisation comprising several offenders was broken up thanks to coordinated police intervention in autumn of 2022. The investigators succeeded in seizing about 34 kg of cocaine, 18 kg of cannabis, 700 g of amphetamine, numerous MDMA tablets, and firearms. It should be noted that the cocaine seized had an above-average degree of purity of about 94%.

8 Legal situation

8.1 The chief penal provisions for drug-related crime

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

8.2 Statutory definitions in the Narcotic Drugs Act (“Suchtmittelgesetz“ or SMG)

§ 27 Illegal handling of narcotic drugs

(1) Anyone who illegally

1. acquires, possesses, produces, transports, or imports a narcotic drug, offers to supply it to another person, passes it on to another person or procures it for another person contrary to regulations,

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. if the offender commits such a criminal act as a member of a criminal association.

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

§ 28 Preparation of trafficking in narcotic drugs

(1) Anyone who purchases, possesses or transports a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding the threshold quantity specified in 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, subsection 1, sub-paragraph 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 subsection 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 subsection 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, subsection 5 are met, an offender shall merely be punished with imprisonment up to one year in the case of subsection 1 above, imprisonment of up to three years in the case of subsection 2 above and to imprisonment of up to five years in the case of subsection 3.

§ 28a Trafficking in narcotic drugs

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

(2) The punishment shall be imprisonment ranging from one to ten years if an offender commits a criminal act as specified in subsection 1 above as a regular source of income and has been previously convicted of an offence as described in subsection 1 as a

member of a criminal association, or involving a narcotic drug in a quantity exceeding fifteen times the threshold quantity (large quantity).

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

(4) The punishment shall be imprisonment ranging from one to fifteen years if an offender commits a criminal act as specified in subsection 1 above as a member of a criminal association has been previously convicted of an offence as described in subsection 1 as a member of an association of a larger number of people conspiring to commit such offences, 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 subsection 1 above and is a leading player in an association of a larger number of people conspiring to commit such offences.

§ 28b Threshold quantity for narcotic drug

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). In doing so, the addictiveness of the respective narcotic drug and the habituation behaviour of addicts to that drug shall be taken into account.

8.3 Penal provisions for psychotropic substances

§ 30 Illegal handling of psychotropic substances

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

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

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

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

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

§ 31 Preparation of trafficking in psychotropic substances

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

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

(3) Anyone who commits the criminal act described in subsection 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, subsection 5 are met, an offender shall merely be punished with imprisonment up to one year in the case of subsection 1 above, imprisonment of up to three years in the case of subsection 2 above and to imprisonment of up to five years in the case of subsection 3.

§ 31a Trafficking in psychotropic substances

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

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

(3) Anyone who commits the criminal act described in subsection 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, subsection 5 are met, an offender shall merely be punished with imprisonment up to one year in the case of subsection 1 above, imprisonment of up to three years in the case of subsection 2 above and to imprisonment of up to five years in the case of subsection 3.

§ 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.

8.4 Penal provisions for drug precursor substances

§ 32 Illegal handling of drug precursor substances

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

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

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

8.5 New Psychoactive Substances Act (NPSG)

§ 4 Penal provisions

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

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

9 Types of illicit drugs

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

9.1 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.

Apart from THC, its isomers delta 6a (10a), delta 6a (7), delta 7, delta 8, delta 9, delta 10, delta 9 (11) and their stereochemical variants are also subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act.

Effects

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

Legal framework

The acquisition, possession, import and export of cannabis, the procurement for and handing over to others (distribution and sale) is a punishable offence and may result in monetary penalties and imprisonment. Anyone who passes on a “joint” in convivial company – without taking a single puff themselves - is liable to criminal prosecution for possession or distribution of narcotic drugs. When a crime report is filed for the purchase and possession of a small quantity of cannabis for personal use, it is suspended by the public prosecution service for a probationary period of two years. Unless charges of purchase and possession of narcotics have been preferred within the last five years, the public prosecution service may abstain from involving the public health authority and suspend the charges immediately. Unless charges of purchase and possession of narcotics have been preferred within the last five years, the public prosecution service may abstain from involving the public health authority and suspend the charges immediately.

9.2 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. Illicit, non-medical heroin, called „H“, „brown“, or „poison“, is usually diluted by street dealers with substances like glucose, lime, powdered sugar or paracetamol and has, therefore, a relatively low degree of purity (between 15-45%).

Effects

Because of its chemical structure and high fat solubility, heroin enters the brain faster than morphine. The short “approach time” brings about an intensive state of intoxication or “kick”. The faster a substance enters the brain, the greater its addictiveness. In the human body, heroin is converted into morphine and eventually excreted through the kidneys.

Legal framework

Heroin is subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and its penal provisions.

9.3 Morphine und derivatives

Besides codeine, morphine is the main component of raw opium, which is obtained from the sleeping poppy (*papaver somniferum*) and is classified as a natural opioid. Morphine belongs to the opium alkaloid class of substances and acts on an opiate receptor called the μ -receptor. Its activation causes euphoria, respiratory depression,

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

Effects

Morphine is soluble in water and therefore passes the blood-brain barrier more slowly than fat-soluble opioids, such as heroin. As all other opioids, it stimulates the opioid and the enkephalin receptors and causes release of dopamine. Morphine is administered orally, rectally or by intramuscular, subcutaneous or intravenous injection. Intravenous administration in non-medical use involves major risks such as the likelihood of overdose or the infection from impure syringes and syringe utensils. When illegally consumed on the streets, morphine is often smoked or „pulled“. Morphine is rapidly metabolised in the liver and excreted in the kidneys. Its effect lasts for four to five hours.

Legal framework

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

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

Effects

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

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

Legal framework

Poppy straw concentrate, opium, raw opium, heroin, methadone, morphine and codeine are subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and its penal provisions.

9.5 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 it is diluted with other substances, including milk powder and synthetic substances. Typically, cocaine is snuffed, but it can also be administered intravenously (injected). Chemical processing can turn it into the smokable drugs crack or freebase. When smoked, the onset of mental effects is within a few seconds, but the effects last for no more than ten minutes. Crack and free base lead to severe psychological addiction more quickly than cocaine administered through different routes. Crack is a free base form of cocaine that is prepared with baking soda. Its purity of 80 to 100% makes it more dangerous than „standard“ cocaine. Crack looks like small, white or light yellow (sometimes pinkish) rocks, ranging from sand to pebble size. Due to its strong short-term effect and subsequent misery, the psychological and physical dependence potential is much higher than for other narcotics.

Effects

Cocaine enters the bloodstream through the nasal mucous membranes, when crack or free base is smoked, or by injection. Cocaine is fat-soluble, i.e. it passes the blood-brain-barrier and affects the brain. Unlike amphetamine, which causes an increased release of the semiochemicals norepinephrine and dopamine in the brain, cocaine prevents these semiochemicals from being absorbed in the nerve cells. However, the result is similar in both cases: neurotransmitters are accumulated in the synaptic gap, causing dopamine and norepinephrine to permanently stimulate the downstream nerve cells, which is psychologically experienced as euphoria and strength. After intoxication, the brain needs a few days to rebuild the neurotransmitters, bringing about depressive moods, fatigue and apathy.

Legal framework

Cocaine and crack are subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act.

9.6 MDMA (ecstasy)

Ecstasy is the street name for a series of amphetamine derivatives, molecules that differ from amphetamines (“speed”) in small variations of their chemical structure. Originally, only methylenedioxyamphetamines (MDA) was named ecstasy. Over the last ten years, a number of additional amphetamine derivatives with a similar effect have emerged on the black market, and today MDA, MDE, MBDB and other compounds are subsumed under the term Ecstasy. Chemical analyses carried out by international organisations have, however, revealed that often completely different substances, such as speed and non-psychoactive substances such as medicines and placebos, are sold as ecstasy. Some samples include substances that present a major health risk such as atropine or methadone. Ecstasy is taken through the mouth or nose in the form of tablets, capsules or powder. The duration of action depends on the dosage, the route of administration and personal factors such as body weight, gender or previous food intake. The effect of an average dose of ecstasy lasts from 3 to 6 hours, the effect of an average MDA dose up to 12 hours.

Effects

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

Legal framework

Ecstasy is subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and its penal provisions on psychotropic substances.

9.7 Amphetamine/Methamphetamine (speed)

Amphetamines reach the bloodstream through the mucous membranes (of the mouth or nose), the stomach or through inhalation and injections. Amphetamine is fat-soluble, i.e. it passes the blood-brain-barrier and affects the brain. Amphetamine causes an increased release of the neurotransmitters norepinephrine and dopamine in the brain by pushing them out of the storage vesicles and into the synaptic gap. Both norepinephrine and dopamine belong to the catecholamines like adrenaline. Depending on the dosage, they bring about a number of physical and mental distortions. Once speed has been degraded in the body, it no longer influences any neurotransmitters. The brain now

needs a few days to restore neurotransmitter balance. During this period, the effects of speed are reversed: users, who were previously full of energy now feel tired and weak, who were strong and convinced of themselves are now irritated, dissatisfied and lacking in concentration.

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

Legal framework

Amphetamine is subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act and its penal provisions on psychotropic substances.

9.8 LSD

Lysergic acid-diethylamide, a semi-synthetic preparation of the ergot drug, is a colourless, tasteless and odourless substance. In general, LSD is generally marketed in the form of paper trips (blotting paper), microtablets ("micros"), tablets and capsules. When the substance is put onto blotting paper or tablets, the dose may vary considerably. On average, a paper trip contains 80 micrograms of LSD.

Effects

The chemical structure of LSD is similar to the neurotransmitter serotonin and affects specific serotonin receptors in the brain in a way that disrupts the natural selection mechanism of the brain, Situations in real life can then no longer be assessed in a natural way. Situations in real life can then no longer be assessed in a normal way. Perceptions, moods and thoughts are intensified and distorted and the borderline between reality and fantasy is muddied.

Legal framework

LSD is subject to the Narcotic Drugs Act.

9.9 Khat

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

Effects

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

Legal framework

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

9.10 Psychotropic substances

Psychotropic or psychoactive substance is a blanket term for all substances contained in medications and narcotics that act on the psyche through the central nervous system.

Effects

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

Legal framework

In Austria, the use of psychotropic and psychoactive substances as narcotic drugs, such as their acquisition, possession, production or import and export, is restricted. The restrictions are regulated in the Narcotic Drugs Act and in the appendent implementing provisions (Narcotic Drugs Regulation, Psychotropic Substances Regulation).

9.11 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

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

9.12 New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

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

Effects

Psychoactive drugs affect the human nervous system. They influence subjective experience and behaviour. Consumption of psychoactive substances results in a distortion of consciousness, mood and thought. These changes may be sedative or activating. Psychoactive drugs alter mechanisms in the brain that regulate mood, thoughts and memory. Distortion of consciousness may lead up to seizures and coma. So-called intoxicating drugs all have mind-altering effects and can, therefore, be considered psychoactive substances.

Legal framework

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

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