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ANNUAL REPORT **2025**

CENTRAL DIRECTORATE FOR ANTIDRUG SERVICES





DCSA's offices



The logo of the DCSA

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	5
INTRODUCTION	8
FIRST PART	12
SECOND PART	182
THIRD PART	248
APPENDIX	I

FOREWORD

The **Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services** (DCSA) even in 2025 presents to the readers its usual document that aims to summarize the efforts and commitment of the police forces in the fight against drug trafficking in **2024**.

This **report**, based in particular on information from police activities at national level and from security experts from the main countries of production and transit of drugs, has been integrated with contributions from numerous publications by the main international agencies involved in fighting against the spread and use of drugs, reports from Italian police forces and information from open sources such as specific websites and the Italian and foreign press.

The aim, which the reader will appreciate from the very first pages, is to reiterate the **very actual transnational dimension of drug trafficking**.

Furthermore, all the indicators used in the investigations confirm the **centrality of drug trafficking in organized crime strategies** and the worrying growth of certain related criminal phenomena. Law enforcement in border areas continues to highlight the growing **vulnerability of ports**, because of the complicity and corruption of port operators in the retrieval and help for way out of large shipments of cocaine concealed in containers coming from South America, as well as **new methods adopted by criminals to reduce the risk** of intervention by law enforcement agencies.

In addition to the aforementioned logistical aspects, trafficking dynamics are increasingly based on the use of **encrypted digital communication platforms**, even at the lowest levels of drug dealing, through **online sales sites** or dedicated **phone apps**. This phenomenon needs to be addressed at regulatory level and in terms of human and economic resources for strengthening law enforcement skills.

Finally, even more traffickers use systems for **transferring incomes coming from drug trafficking** based on informal money transfer mechanisms (known as *hawala* or *fei chi'en*), which do not involve the traditional financial circuits; moreover, it has been observed the tendency to reinvest 'dirty money' in cryptocurrencies. This method is another strategy to make investigations more difficult, in addition to encrypted communications and e-commerce for trafficking and dealing drugs.

Regarding **synthetic drugs** and **new psychoactive substances**, figures about seizures and the participation in specific national and international projects suggest that their use in our country is still moderate and that organized crime remains predominantly oriented towards the marketing of traditional drugs. However, it will be a mistake to **underestimate the threat** rappresentata dall'immissione sempre più ampia nel mercato of the increasing availability of synthetic compounds on the global market, given the ease of illegal production and marketing and the enormous **risk to the health** for consumers, who are often young and very young.

The knowledge of the international framework and the possible threats for the immediate future encourage the DCSA to increase its efforts, not only in coordinating investigations at national level but also abroad, through the participation in various Initiatives of **international police cooperation**.

In this context, **Security Experts** located in the most strategic and different geographical areas worldwide for the production and trafficking of drugs play a crucial role.

An adequate action to fight against the ever-increasing interconnection between various criminal groups goes hand to hand with the adoption of targeted strategies for the development of effective cooperation in investigative activities between the police forces of different countries.

Furthermore, the awareness of the widespread illegal distribution of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances in different countries, with devastating effects on the lives of consumers, has forced Italy to continuously monitoring the phenomenon, implementing prevention actions as well as defining a wide-ranging 'proactive' strategy to deepen the knowledge. On **March 12th 2024**, the Italian government launched the "**Drugs and national plan against the misuse of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids**", coordinated by the Department of Anti-Drug Policies (named "Department of Policies against Drugs and Other Addictions" starting from 2025) of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. Among the various institutional subjects involved in the implementation of the "Plan," the DCSA played a very important role in defining the actions of its own competence and that of the police forces as they were coordinated by the same DCSA.

A mention must also be made of the **training** of police provided by the DCSA, which was particularly committing in 2024, both in Italy and abroad, including new educational courses in the field of **prevention** such as those implemented with the **“InFORMARE” Project**. Training continues to be a fundamental part for the professional development of police officers and for making them becoming part of the territorial network of ‘drug surveillance’ involved in a common and necessarily inter-agency mission: the prevention and fight against the global drug trafficking business.

I conclude by emphasizing that the Annual Report is an opportunity to appreciate the daily commitment both of the Italian **police forces** operating in the territory and the **coordination** role of the **Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services**, to prevent, contain and fight the global threat of drugs, also in synergy with other institutional bodies.

It is a **challenge** that requires constant updating of methods and tools of intervention and, consequently, new knowledge, skills, strategies, operational devices and, above all, human resources which really can make the difference, when it is homogeneous at the Interforce level and adequate in terms of quantity and quality.

Director
of the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services

Major General of Carabinieri
Giuseppe Spina

INTRODUCTION

The data collected by the DCSA in 2024 reveals a criminal situation in which drug trafficking continues to represent the main criminal activity committed by criminal organizations, whose structures and groups are characterized by their transnational nature and tendency to forge mutual relationships in order to maximize profits.

Interactions between different criminal cartels are essential to safely address and overcome the logistical difficulties related to the concealment and transportation of drug shipments from production sites to retail distribution in open air drug markets.

More numerous than in the past are the mixed groups that are emerging within the criminal scenario, operating in a drug market that has become increasingly complex and multifaceted. This is due not only to the proliferation of new synthetic and illicit psychoactive substances, but also to the tendency to seek new markets and to diversify drug trafficking routes through safer routes for narcotics transportation.

The DCSA Annual Report is divided into **three parts** and each one is constituted by thematic chapters.

In **First Part**, the **first chapter** describes the main criminal subjects in Italy involved in drug trafficking: various mafia groups ('Ndrangheta, Cosa Nostra, Camorra, Apulian mafias, other Italian and foreign mafias), as well as criminals different from mafia-type organizations, all examined in terms of their groups, territorial structures and international connections.

The trends and operational methods employed by these groups in carrying out drug trafficking activities, which emerged during the investigations coordinated by the DCSA and concluded in 2024, are the subject of **the second chapter**. From the outset, it succinctly outlines the threats identified over the past year, which require continued close monitoring in order to intercept, in a timely manner and with appropriate prevention and counteraction measures, any potentially dangerous developments.

From the **Chapters three to eight** cocaine, heroin, cannabis, synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances and precursors are addressed. These sections present a selection of the numerous investigations carried out by the police in Italy and abroad, as well as an analysis, for each substance, of the relevant statistical data collected nationwide by the DCSA.

In general, the cocaine market, whose levels¹ of supply increase year after year, remains the main focus of criminal groups due to the high profit margins and the ever-growing consumer base. Cocaine processing and manufacturing sites discovered on a large scale in Europe, particularly in Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands, reveal how transnational criminal networks are working together to develop new methods for trafficking cocaine in Europe. Signs of these innovations include the use of specialized equipment and the involvement of expert chemists in concealment and processing activities, which involves the secondary extraction of cocaine incorporated into other materials to reduce the risk of detection when included in commercial shipments.

Another market that is strongly in the spotlight, due to its rapid expansion worldwide, the significant profits and the extremely dangerous effects on health, is that of synthetic drugs. Criminal organizations, which in the past had limited involvement in this area, are now showing increasing interest. The production sites identified range from relatively small 'kitchen-type' laboratories to facilities capable of producing large quantities of synthetic substances. However, the volumes of seized chemical precursors and of intercepted non-regulated alternative chemicals suggest that the large-scale production of synthetic drugs is intended for both the European and non-European markets.

In this context, Europe also remains an important producer of synthetic drugs. In recent years, police forces in the EU have continued to dismantle hundreds of production facilities for a wide range of synthetic

¹ EUDA, Understanding Europe's drug situation in 2024 – key developments (European Drug Report 2024).

drugs, including amphetamines, methamphetamines, ecstasy, synthetic cathinones and cannabinoids. Synthetic cannabinoids represent a growing challenge, as evidenced by the increase in reports of their production and use, although they are still a relatively new class of drugs in Europe. Equally worrying is the increase in trafficking of synthetic cathinones in Europe, both from producing countries such as India and those produced in the European Union, particularly in Poland.

A special mention should be made for new psychoactive substances (NPS)² produced in illegal laboratories: the basic chemical structure of synthetic drugs is modified to mislead antidrug regulations. This poses a serious danger to the health of consumers, who often become unwitting test subjects for the effects of these substances.

In Italy, which is currently less affected by the phenomenon of local production of synthetic drugs and NPS, a number of laboratory seizures are nevertheless illustrative in this regard:

- In February 2024, in a rural dwelling in Zafferana Etnea (CT), the Economic and Financial Police Unit of the *Guardia di Finanza* of Catania discovered and seized a clandestine laboratory, with equipment and precursors, capable of producing amphetamines and MDMA.
- In May 2024, in a dwelling in Tricase (LE), the State Police of the Lecce Police discovered a clandestine laboratory for the production of MDMA, methamphetamines and other psychoactive chemicals.

The other laboratories discovered, although isolated cases, are still symptomatic of the growing interest in synthetic drugs and NPS and the expansion of their trafficking. This calls for continued monitoring on what, even in our country, could become a widespread phenomenon due to the increasingly “smart” methods of commercialization. In fact, the trafficking of synthetic

² The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) as “substances of abuse, in pure form or in a preparation, that are not controlled by the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, but which may pose a threat to public health” (www.unodc.org/drugs). In Italy, a substance is considered a new psychoactive substance when it is not included in the tables pursuant to Articles 13 et seq. of Presidential Decree 309/1990.

drugs and NPS is increasingly carried out through websites operating on the dark web, which can only be accessed using specific software that allows users to browse anonymously, protecting both their identity and privacy in terms of visited site history and the traceability of payments for supplying³.

In the **Second Part**, which contains the outcomes of counternarcotics activities in Italy along with statistical data for the year 2024, the **first chapter** is dedicated to the most significant antidrug operations carried out by the police in 2024, whose investigative activities were coordinated by the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services. More occasional enforcement actions (seizures of drugs and clandestine laboratories, arrests/reports initiated by the police) are described, where appropriate, in other relevant chapters of the Report. The **second chapter** contains data on police investigations at the national level, while the **third chapter** contains the same data at the regional and metropolitan city levels.

The **Third Part**, which represents a new compared to previous Reports, provides a description of the complexity of the work carried out by the DCSA at different levels, from prevention to enforcement, from operational to strategic, from legislative to training activities, at both national and international levels. The **first chapter** contains key data on the various activities carried out by the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services in 2024, while the **second chapter** presents an account of an initiative concerning synthetic drugs and New Psychoactive Substances, as well as the HERMES Project, which came to an end on 31st December 2024.

The 2025 Report contains also an **appendix** with:

- an overview of criminal drug trafficking groups in Central and South America;
- a profiling of the most widespread drugs on the illegal market, designed as an easy-to-use reference handbook.

³ Payments are often made in virtual currency, such as bitcoins or other crypto-currencies, and are distributed by postal services.

FIRST PART



The DCSA stand at the
172nd Anniversary of the
Foundation of the Italian
State Police - Rome

April, 10th 2024

01. CRIMINAL GROUPS ENGAGED IN DRUG TRAFFICKING IN ITALY

The role of organized crime groups in Italy	16
The role of foreign organized crime groups	19
The role of different criminals: Informal relationships	23

02. THE EVOLUTION OF THREAT

Introduction	
Cocaine: alternative methods and routes	24
Cocaine concealment, in particular the chemical one: a technique of experts	26
The increase of crack cocaine consumption	29
Fentanyl, heroin and prescription medicines: diffusion of synthetic opioids	31
Nitazenes: a new growing threat for the health	33
Non-medical use of medicines containing narcotic active ingredients	34
Cannabis: possible diversification of trafficking routes	35

03. COCAINE

The evolution of cannabis markets: the spread of synthetic and semi-synthetic cannabinoids and risks of involuntary exposure 39

Focus:

<< Synthetic cannabinoids seizures and clandestine laboratories For processing cannabis >> 40

Synthetic cathinones: increasingly significant in the market of stimulants 40

Introduction 42

The routes of cocaine: from producing countries to the consumption ones 42

Focus:

<< Alternative concealment methods: the Ukrainians >> 43

Data on the fight against cocaine in Italy 60

Cocaine flows towards Italy: border seizures 65

04. HEROIN

Introduction 70

The routes of heroin: from producing countries to the consumption ones 71

Focus:

<< The maritime route of heroin >> 76

Data on the fight against heroin in Italy 80

Heroin flows towards Italy: border seizures 85

05. CANNABIS

Introduction 88

Constant presence on the illegal market 90

The routes of cannabis: from producing countries to the consumption ones 91

Data on the fight against cannabis plants in Italy 108

Data on the fight against marijuana in Italy 112

Marijuana flows towards Italy: border seizures 116

Data on the fight against hashish in Italy 120

Hashish flows towards Italy: border seizures 124



172nd Anniversary of the Foundation of the Polizia di Stato- 14th April 2024

Speech by Prof. Sabina Strano Rossi on "Rape drugs"

06. SYNTHETIC DRUGS

Introduction	130
Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS): the phenomenon at global level	131
Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS): the phenomenon at European level	138
Sedative, dissociative or depressant substances: the phenomenon at European level	141
National plan for the prevention of misuse of fentanyl and other Synthetic opioids	142
Focus: << Institutional bodies involved in the “Piano Nazionale” >>	144
<< The DCS’s tasks withing the plan >>	146
<< Other bodies’ tasks within the plan >>	147
Data on the fight against against synthetic drugs in Italy	148
Synthetic drugs flows towards Italy: border seizures	153

07. NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

NPSs in Italy and worldwide	158
NPSs in Italia	168

08. DRUG PRECURSOR

Introduction	170
Focus: << Fentanyl’s precursors >>	170
<< Synthetic cathinones’ precursors >>	171
Diversion of precursor substances	171
Law of reference	172
Focus: << New regulations of legislative decree No. 156 of 7 th October 2024>>	173
Classification of precursors, control and authorization rules	174
Focus: << Mix of precursors >>	174
The trade of precursors among States	174
Drug precursors and the role of DCSA	175
Focus: << EUDA (European Union Drug Agency): nuovo mandato su precursori di droghe >>	176
Looking to the future	177
Focus: << International platforms for the control of drug precursors >>	177
<< PPP: public private partnership >>	178



2nd course "synthetic drugs, precursors and clandestine labs"

Rome, 11-15 November 2024

01. CRIMINAL GROUPS ENGAGED IN DRUG TRAFFICKING IN ITALY

The role of organized crime groups in Italy

Cosa Nostra and other mafia-type associations in Sicily

When discussing mafia-type organisations in Italy, it is impossible to ignore those that originated in Sicily and which, for a long period of Italian history, waged a bloody war against the state and its institutions.

The Sicilian landscape has always been characterised by the presence not only of *Cosa Nostra*, but also of the *Stidda*, active in the central-southern area of the island, and of some organised groups referred to as *Paracchi*, which operate in the province of Agrigento independently of the other two groups. In the eastern provinces, on the other hand, 'variable-geometry' criminal groups have established their strongly organised presence in the territory. Engaged in drug trafficking, these groups have continued to oppose the relevant criminal expressions of *Cosa Nostra*.

For each of these groups, however, in recent years, interest in trafficking narcotic drugs has been confirmed over typical Mafia-type crimes (such as extortion), which have been set aside in favour of the greater profits and lower risks of the former.

According to investigations conducted in recent years, especially the *Stidda* has evolved from the agricultural dimension to one with marked military capabilities, currently resulting in a well-established group within the drug trafficking market both independently and as a 'service' for *Cosa Nostra*. This evolution is ascribable to the *pax* with *Cosa Nostra*, as part of a joint

project of alliances between mafia families to foster utilitarian coexistence. Even the *Paracchi* groups, who "have all the distinctive features of a mafia-type criminal organisation and are considered as distinct and autonomous from the *Cosa Nostra* association"¹, are capable of managing the arms and drug market in the territory, as well as all the activities, which are typical for a mafia-type association.

Cosa Nostra is certainly the most solid mafia organisation, with a unified and top-down structure, which continues to be organised according to a hierarchical-pyramidal model, although the balance and structure are influenced, both negatively and positively, not only by numerous arrests and attacks on mafia assets, but also by cooperation with the justice system, the release of prominent members from prison, the emergence of new groups that regenerate its operational capabilities, and close relations with other local organisations in the name of common illegal *business*. It has often been the effective law enforcement action to combat criminal networks linked to narcotic drugs that has fuelled the interest of the main *Cosa Nostra* groups in drug trafficking, which is a driving force for obtaining substantial capital and, at the same time, for gaining and maintaining a significant influence over the territory.

Investigations coordinated by the DCSA have found that certain high-ranking members of the *Cosa Nostra* are directly

¹ OCC no. 15354/2017 RGNR and no. 12734/2017 RG GIP of the Palermo District Anti-Mafia Directorate, issued on 4 January 2021. The Palermo Court of Appeal confirmed the indictment in June 2024.

involved in drug trafficking. In particular, the current drug trafficking scenario in Sicily highlights the tendency of mafia groups to use, for large supply, Calabrian and Campanian drug trafficking organisations, as well as criminal groups which, although not part of *Cosa Nostra* but closely linked to it, are involved in the various stages of the drug business cycle, from its supply to street-level dealing. In this context, the cultivation of Indian hemp is also considered to be of interest to mafia families, in relation to the substantial economic revenues generated by these plantations.

Cosa Nostra is also a criminal interlocutor in extra-regional operational areas, in other parts of the country and abroad: although it cannot rely on the conditions of subjugation and silence that it enjoys in its territories of origin, it can boast connections with members of other criminal groups, also for the purpose of supplying drugs, as part of common criminal strategies aimed at increasing mutual illicit profits.

'Ndrangheta

The *'Ndrangheta* is the most insidious and pervasive Italian mafia-type organisation, characterised by a strong tendency to expand both nationally and internationally. The solid roots in its region of origin, the military force it has demonstrated over the years, its economic reliability and the absence of its members widespread collaboration with the justice system are all elements that have allowed it, over time, to diversify its interests, combining typical mafia criminal activities with infiltration into legitimate economic sectors.

Analysis of the most recent investigative findings confirms its consolidated dominance in drug trafficking, especially of cocaine, in the various countries of production and transit.

The focus of the *'ndrine* on commercial and maritime traffic as well as on national ports of call continues to be pervasive, particularly in Gioia Tauro (RC), which is considered a strategic port due to its geographical location and volume of goods in transit. From another perspective, stable and functional criminal links are emerging in Italy with Sicilian, Campanian and Apulian mafia organisations, as well as with Albanian ones.

Furthermore, the substantial criminal influence acquired, not only on national territory but also on the international drug market, allows the *'Ndrangheta* to operate effectively in certain foreign countries where it has set its branches. In fact, the stable roots of the *'Ndrangheta's* extra-regional and extra-national projections have now been established not only by investigative activities but also by court rulings. In this regard, numerous investigations have confirmed the presence of *'Ndrangheta* branches in many countries in Europe and the Americas, which serve as outposts for illegal trafficking and laundering of illicit capital.

The need to reduce the costs of illegal drug procurement – especially cocaine – continues to be the driving force behind the actions of the fiercest Calabrian organisations, which are committed to bypassing the intermediate levels of the complex international drug trafficking chain, seeking direct contact with global drug trafficking cartels

– obviously through their affiliates in Europe – and with the experienced *brokers* who represent them. The latter are able to match supply and demand thanks to their knowledge of international drug trafficking dynamics, thus providing a reliable image of themselves and the criminal groups they represent, which reassures and convinces

the *'Ndrangheta* to forge partnerships with drug trafficking groups of different origins and cultures across the globe.

Camorra

The *Camorra* continues to manifest itself in Campania as a highly fragmented criminal reality characterised by fluidity and instability in the relationships and alliances between historic clans, smaller groups and emerging criminal organisations. The absence of a hierarchical system capable of coordinating the activities of the fragmented criminal landscape and resolving conflicts, and the extremely unstable balance of power, remain some of the factors that characterise the situation in Campania, including in terms of drug trafficking: control of the distribution of narcotics in the region continues to be the basis of conflicts between criminal factions linked to the *Camorra*.

The wars between clans in certain territories, with repeated criminal incidents occurring in close proximity to each other as a means of intimidation – especially ‘stese’², shootings, and the placement and detonation of explosive devices near the homes of rival clan members – show that *Camorra* groups are fighting over portions of territory, including drug dealing hotspots, which are an inexhaustible source of income.

The glorification of this *modus operandi* through the use of videos on social media, as well as the proximity of some neo-melodic and trap singers, which has already been observed in the past, seems to be a growing phenomenon, aimed not only at spreading ‘promotional’ messages from clan members, including

very young ones, by flaunting the wealth derived from drug trafficking, but also at calling attention to their role in order to acquire new customers/consumers.

Even internationally, Campania-based mafia organisations have achieved a high profile, maintaining relationships with other criminal groups for the supply of narcotic drugs. In particular, they continue to be present in countries that are significant for the production and transit of drugs, such as Spain, the Netherlands, countries along the Balkan route and the Maghreb. In this context, criminals from Campania, some of whom are fugitives, play key roles, acting as *brokers* and also as liaisons between different criminal groups for the supply of large batch of drugs.

Organised crime in Apulia

The Apulian mafia scenario has a fragmented structure, based on a variety of mostly autonomous criminal organisations, marked by a significant dynamism, sometimes divided internally into groups and factions, made up of individuals generally linked by family ties. This structure is a consequence of fluctuating relationships of conflict and alliances and the absence of a single, recognised leadership.

The main criminal interest of this variety of associations is undoubtedly drug trafficking, which supplies all the provinces of Apulia, thanks to the activism of the three macro-structures of mafia crime in Apulia: the ‘mafia foggiana’ based in Foggia, with its three subgroups (‘società foggiana’, ‘mafia garganica’ and ‘malavita cerignolana’); the ‘camorra barese’ based in regional capital Bari; the ‘Sacra Corona Unita’ based in Salento. To this end, they are all capable of establishing alliances for the supply and illicit trade of drugs, both with traditional mafia organisations and with foreign criminal groups present on national territory or active only abroad.

² An explanation of the meaning of ‘stesa’ can be found in the following paragraph ‘The role of other criminal actors: informal partnerships’, with particular reference to street gangs (page 23).

The role of foreign organized crime groups

In order to outline the role of foreign criminal groups engaged in Italy's drug trafficking scene, one needs to start from the same assumption illustrated for local criminal organisations: control of the drug dealing hotspots ensures very high profits and is therefore of paramount importance for criminal groups of all levels and origins. This objective encourages synergies and interactions between sodalities, which are essential for safely addressing and overcoming the logistical difficulties associated with concealing and transporting drug shipments from production sites to the locations where they are distributed.

It follows that also foreign criminal organisations, mostly formed on an ethnic basis, continue being involved in drug trafficking throughout the country. They have consolidated their presence in the provinces of central and northern Italy, especially in metropolitan areas, and southern Italy, demonstrating a significant capacity to infiltrate the national socio-economic fabric thanks to the ample liquid assets derived from a wide range of illegal activities.

The most reputable foreign criminal organisations operating in the drug trafficking sector in Italy and throughout Europe are described in detail below.

Criminal organisations in Albania

Over the years, *Albanian criminal organisations* have evolved their strategies towards more sophisticated forms of crime, marked by their cross-border dimension. In particular, the increasingly specialised management of international drug trafficking throughout its entire supply chain ensures that Albanian criminal organisations, taking their cue from typical mafia structures,

have acquired a level of influence that allows them to be considered reliable and attentive *brokers*, not least because they are skilled at updating their operational tools.

In fact, the constant use of encrypted telephone networks is essential to ensure secure communications between members of criminal groups, who are involved in the supply and sale of drugs, including to other criminal groups. The discovery of the encrypted Sky ECC platform, also used by *Albanian groups* to manage all kinds of illegal trafficking, proved to be of fundamental importance in revealing further details of the typical structure of *Albanian criminal organisations*, which are not pyramidal or hierarchical, but based on concentric circles:

- first circle: this is the position held by the promoters of the organisation, usually two or three people, linked not only by an associative bond but also by a family bond (almost always brothers, cousins or brothers-in-law who very often operate from their country of origin);
- second circle: this is the position held by people from the same city or geographical area in Albania, who have organisational functions in relation to illegal activities;
- third circle: this is the position held by compatriots who live in other cities and carry out operational tasks (couriers, *pushers*).

Thanks to their ability to maintain links with their homeland and operate across national borders *Albanian organisations* are among the most active ones in Italy. The *Albanian mafia* has now stopped committing predatory crimes (theft and robbery in villas/homes), crimes related to the exploitation of prostitution and simple drug dealing, in order to expand their territorial reach in drug trafficking.

This is particularly evident in the illegal trade in marijuana produced in Albania, but also in other drugs, thanks to a solid and increasingly strong interaction with *local mafia organisations*, especially those in Apulia, which have historically been privileged trafficking partners, and with elements linked to important *'Ndrangheta* clans involved in cocaine trafficking, as revealed by major investigations coordinated by the DCSA.

Another feature that has been observed with some frequency is the foothold that *Albanian groups* have gained in the Italian social fabric thanks to their considerable financial resources. Through illegal financial operations, which also involve numerous *Chinese Hawaladars* present on the national territory, as well as through the use of identity changes provided for by Albanian legislation, which allows to avoid police checks as well as criminal and administrative proceedings, we are witnessing, in particular, the takeover, by representatives of the *Albanian mafia*, of companies or shares in companies that can be used for the laundering of illicit proceeds.

At the international level, the role of "service agency" assumed by *Albanian criminal organisations* is confirmed by their control of marijuana and heroin trafficking to Western Europe along the so-called "Balkan route", facilitated by the "advantageous" geographical position of their homeland with respect to the aforementioned flow route.

This role is also confirmed by international dynamics linked to the import and supply of narcotic substances, having established their own contact persons in various European countries (Spain, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and France), who on the one hand manage relations with the emissaries of South American **cocaine**-supplying groups and, on the other hand, have been

significantly involved for some years now in the storage of cocaine destined for the European market in Dutch and Belgian ports.

Albania, as a producer country, is also the epicentre for the distribution of cannabis in Western Europe, particularly in Italy, Croatia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria, France, Germany and, above all, the Netherlands, where *Albanian and Moroccan criminal organisations* actively collaborate in the illegal trade.

As far as the collaboration with foreign criminal groups is concerned, investigative findings show that *Albanian organisations* have gained extensive control over trafficking by maintaining constant contact with: *Turkish criminal groups*, to ensure the transit of heroin via the 'Balkan route', with the complicity of the *Bulgarian underworld*; *Colombian cartels*, for the purchase of large bulks of cocaine directly from the places of production; *Maghreb criminal organisations*, for the marketing and street dealing of narcotic substances; criminals from the *former Yugoslavia and Romanian groups*, for the management of activities related to other types of crimes ancillary to drug trafficking; *Nigerian criminal organisations*, as the most structured, ramified and pervasive foreign criminal component in international drug trafficking, especially cocaine.

Criminal organisations in Nigeria

When referring to *Nigerian criminal associations*, it is necessary to emphasise their strong ethnic aggregation, but above all their magical-religious associations with sectarian connotations, which fuel the bonds between individual members, reinforced by the intimidating power that derives from them, generating a culture of silence among their compatriots. These associations are characterised

on a structural level, by the widespread presence of their 'cells', which effectively create a large intercontinental network in which relatively autonomous local 'nodes' are connected to the headquarters in their homeland; on an operational level, by a marked ability to maintain relationships with transnational criminal networks, with which they exchange information and expertise. With regard to the latter aspect, *Nigerian cult groups* end up operating in the territory that hosts them alongside local criminal organisations, but autonomously, as independent criminal actors, nodes of a single vertical network, thus evidencing their hierarchical organisation.

Nigerian criminal organisations in Italy, which are on the rise, are represented by several major associations, particularly in Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, Emilia Romagna, Lazio, Umbria, Campania and Sicily: the 'S.E.C. – *The Supreme Eye Confraternity*', the '*Black Axe Confraternity*', the '*Maphite*', and the more recently formed group known as '*Viking*', composed of increasingly young and aggressive members. All these associations can count on a continuous flow of individuals who, due to their background and the need to survive, are more inclined to commit crimes, especially drug-related offences. Moreover, well aware of the existence of the *mafia associations* operating in Italy, they have demonstrated an effective ability to adapt, carrying out their activities independently, but at the same time being careful not to undermine the territorial supremacy of the local mafias.

They are, however, among the most active groups in drug trafficking, using 'ovulators' and 'bodypackers' who, although they can only physically transport small quantities, when grouped in 'batches' can guarantee a constant supply of narcotic drugs.

Nigerian criminal confraternities also use ethnic welfare congregations as a cover for illegal activities, with the so-called 'African Shops' serving as meeting points and the epicentre of their illicit activities.

The results of investigations conducted in Italy highlight, however, that the *Nigerian world of crime* is the scene of clashes, sometimes quite violent ones, between members of different confraternities, aimed at controlling the territory but, above all, at consolidating power within the same criminal organisation in order to manage the illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, as well as prostitution and money laundering. With regard to the laundering of money obtained from illegal drug trafficking, the investigation has revealed the use of criminal financial circuits, consisting of illegal money transfer systems for transferring money to Nigeria. This method mainly involves the use of 'clandestine counters' located inside '*African Shops*', where money can be transferred from Italy to Nigeria: fast and sometimes immediate transfer times are guaranteed, as is customer anonymity through the assignment of a code to the transaction, to be indicated at the time of withdrawal - and the transfer of large sums of money.

Chinese criminal organisations

The Chinese community, characterised by a marked ability to operate in the economic and commercial fabric, has adopted a prominent position among foreign communities in Italy. Chinese companies are mainly interested in the manufacturing, services and catering sectors. Import-export activities involving products from their homeland are also growing significantly.

Chinese criminal organisations in Italy have a hierarchical structure, with strong family ties that make the groups impervious to cooperation with the justice system. We are faced with

autonomous criminal groups, composed of individuals from the same family nucleus or people associated according to a common geographical origin, characterised by a remarkable level of impermeability, aggression and control, especially towards members of their own ethnic community. These groups frequently resort to intimidation, violence and a code of silence in order to obtain a sort of 'territorial dominance', preventing the establishment of similar associations of fellow countrymen.

In the area of drug-related offences, the activities of *Chinese organised groups* focus on the trafficking of methamphetamine - known as *ice shaboo* or *crystal meth* - and cannabis, which are also pushed within their own communities.

From another perspective, in synergy with drug traffickers, they support the laundering of drug profits and the movement of capital to finance criminal activities. The process of laundering illicit capital is based on the transfer of money to the home country, mainly through *unauthorised money transfer* agencies, which are managed by compatriots through ad hoc 'parabanking' institutions, or resorting to fellow countrymen who act as currency 'transporters', the so-called "*spalloni*". In addition, *Chinese criminal groups* also carry out money laundering operations on behalf of third parties, in particular for *Italian criminal organisations*: following functional agreements, they make themselves available and are able to provide particularly skilled assistance in moving large amounts of capital, including proceeds from drug trafficking, in return for substantial commissions. The system used is *hawala/fei chi'en*³, an informal money transfer system that guarantees security and anonymity, as it is based

exclusively on a relationship of trust between intermediaries. Once the sums have been collected from customers, the intermediaries instruct their counterparts in other cities or abroad to make the funds available to the recipients, after retaining a commission. In this way, drug traffickers can pay for drugs without having to physically send money to the countries of production or transit, thus avoiding any risk of traceability.

Finally, there is no evidence of this yet, but it cannot be ruled out that *Chinese criminal groups* may, in the near future, also illegally traffic precursors in Italy, given that, on the international stage, China, together with India, is one of the largest producers.

Turkish criminal organisations

Turkish criminal groups continue to play a leading role in Italy in the trafficking of various types of drugs, in cooperation with *local criminal organisations* and other *foreign organisations*.

Unlike other mafia-type criminal associations, the modus operandi of *Turkish criminal organisations* has always been difficult to identify due to their so-called 'satellite' structure: these are normally made up of members of the same family, but also make use of individuals outside the association who deal with sensitive aspects of criminal transactions, such as shipping and laundering illicit proceeds.

With foothold in other European countries, *Turkish criminal 'cells'* are interconnected and able to support each other logistically by supplying men, weapons, vehicles and money. In particular, various channels are used for money: official *money transfer* circuits, unofficial ones such as *hawala*, '*spalloni*'.

With a large supply of weapons available, conflicts are beginning to arise in Europe

3 Fei chi'en means 'flying money', i.e. cash.

over disagreements in the management of criminal activities, including drug trafficking, leading to attacks and murders of fellow countrymen.

North African criminal organisations

North African criminal groups, mainly from Morocco and generally from the Maghreb region, are now, by virtue of their integration into the Italian socio-criminal fabric, of a permanent nature and, having established themselves throughout almost the entire national territory, including areas where *local criminal organisations* are traditionally present, appear to be mainly engaged in drug trafficking.

Increasingly, links are being established with other *ethnic criminal groups* and *Italian associations*, as well as with *mafia-type criminal clans*.

The *modus operandi* of some *criminal groups of North African citizens* involved in drug dealing consists of meeting buyers in wooded areas and setting up a complex system of illegal trade with individuals responsible for cutting and packaging the substance, surveillance and sales, thus guaranteeing customers a 24-hour service.

The role of different criminals: Informal relationships

The production-distribution continuum that characterises drug trafficking involves multiple drug trafficking organisations, each of which tends to focus on one or more stages of this criminal process; rarely does a single organisation engage in the entire chain. Investigative findings show that the supply of drugs is the preserve of informal partnerships and is linked to dynamics that leverage intermediation capabilities. Small, loosely structured groups, on the other hand, seem to predominate in

retail-level distribution. This is a galaxy of criminal actors who, although not part of organised structures, possess the relational, logistical, financial and communication skills typical of mafia-type associations, which allow them to carve out a segment of illicit trafficking and pursue their economic interests.

Mixed groups

In Italy, there is increasing interaction between *Italian and foreign criminal groups*, as well as between *associations of different ethnic origins* that derive their main source of income from the dealing of narcotic substances. These are sometimes actors who, although not part of families or clans, operate with the same caution and attitudes.

Seeking security in communications, eliminating face-to-face meetings, using encrypted smartphones and bug detectors, as well as being active in the production and distribution of synthetic drugs are the hallmarks of these groups, which sometimes use third parties such as ‘money changers’ to move large sums of money.

The “money changer”, belonging to a different criminal organisation, is generally able to transfer large amounts of money anywhere in the world without the physical need to transport it across borders. This actor is comparable to a secret *money transfer*: he receives the money from criminal organisations that need it moved, retains a percentage as his fee and, within a few seconds, allows the recipient of the proceeds, located in third places, to withdraw the transferred sum from another ‘money changer’ belonging to the same ‘service company’. The method of establishing contact and recognition between the ‘money changer’ and the customer is quite peculiar: the customer photographs the serial number of a banknote and

forwards the photo to a third party in contact with the 'money changer', who in turn receives the photograph of the banknote. At the meeting, the customer and the 'money changer' 'recognise' each other by presenting the banknote, which is in the customer's possession, and the photograph of the banknote, which is in the 'money changer's' possession. The banknote is then handed over to the 'money changer' as a deposit receipt.

In Rome, in addition to the activities of groups that are extensions of traditional mafia organisations, there is also a coexistence of *criminals from diverse geographical backgrounds* who, over time, have gained greater autonomy from traditional mafia organisations. These are groups that may be linked to other groups by a common criminal interest, resulting in business alliances without pre-established rules, but which nevertheless have a fluid structure, such that they can be independent of more structured organisations. Although this coexistence between different types of criminal groupings has mostly been peaceful, which is the result of operating methods that preferred 'invisibility' in order to maximise economic returns, there have also been 'bloody incidents' involving affiliates deemed responsible for violating the clan's 'codes'. In Rome, in fact, there have been violent incidents linked to the management of the lucrative drug market, with dealing taking place in the city's squares and nightlife venues.

An interesting scenario in this area is represented by groups belonging to *families of nomadic origin*, who appeared in Rome in the early 1970s but who, over time, have consolidated and stabilised, establishing increasingly close relationships with mafia-type associations. The areas of interest mainly include the southern part of the city of Rome, the Castelli area and the coastline from Ostia to Nettuno. Drug trafficking, but also usury and much more, are the

illegal businesses that allow the huge wealth accumulated to be reinvested in Rome's varied legal economic circuit.

Last but not least, the presence of *drug traffickers among football fans* is becoming increasingly evident from investigative findings, a tangible sign of the contamination that has now spread to one of the most important spaces for social gathering: the stands of football stadiums.

Street gangs

Some investigations have confirmed interactions between ethnic groups and street gangs composed of young and very young people, who derive their main source of income from the dealing of narcotic substances. This is the case with the so-called Latin American-inspired *pandillas*, which involve young people of South American origin and are structured in a rigid hierarchy supported by inflexible discipline, with physical afflictions, initiation rituals and tests of courage. They have territorial divisions in the metropolitan city of Milan and Lombardy, and partly also in Genoa.

In Campania, on the other hand, there are 'stese', intimidating demonstrations, during which young people associated with Camorra groups rampage through a neighbourhood or a specific area, driving around in cars or on motorcycles, shooting into the air or at shop shutters to show that they have ample weapons at their disposal, to settle scores with other groups over drug deals, willing to commit any type of crime because they 'rule' in that territory, and at the same time to intimidate the entire population of the area, so as to obtain obedience to extortion demands and any other type of claim, imposing their control over the drug dealing hotspots, as well as ensuring impunity through the code of silence imposed on residents. In recent years, criminal theatrics have also transcended into pantomimes of '*altarini*' (small

shrines) and murals, which have become, rather than folkloric forms of devotion to emblematic figures of the criminal world, veritable acts of defiance against the state.

Finally, as already mentioned in relation to the Camorra, the proximity to certain neo-melodic and trap singers, publicised

by messages sent by members of street gangs, including very young ones, is a way of flaunting the opportunities and wealth that revolve around the world of drug dealing. Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that the increasing promotion may also be an activity aimed at attracting new customers to the drug dealing areas.

02. THE EVOLUTION OF THREAT

Introduction

Monitoring trafficking and analysing drug dealing areas allows us to outline a constantly evolving drug market which, as a result of new trends in supply and demand, is undergoing significant changes.

In particular, the following trends are becoming increasingly evident:

- an **increased production and supply of cocaine**;
- a **growing spread of crack cocaine use**;
- a **decrease in the amount of heroin in circulation**, with a possible consequent **increase in synthetic opioids**;
- a **proliferation of synthetic drugs** due to the ease of production and marketing, even without intermediaries, accompanied by the **abuse of medicines containing narcotic active ingredients**;
- an **increase in the number of countries that have chosen to legalise cannabis** without this, however, curbing the spread of **synthetic stimulant cannabinoids such as cathinones**;
- the **war in Ukraine**, which has led to a change in the modus operandi of criminal groups and, at the same time, in established **drug trafficking routes**.

Cocaine: alternative methods and routes

Cocaine seizures in Europe, after reaching record levels in 2023, fell sharply in 2024. However, the availability of the substance and its prices remained stable.

Member States of the EU have always

seized record quantities of cocaine. Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain continue to be the countries with the highest seizure volumes, reflecting their importance as entry points for cocaine trafficking in Europe. The **Dutch port of Rotterdam** and the **Belgian port of Antwerp** are still the first and second largest ports in Europe, respectively, and have long been the main gateways for cocaine into the continent. Cocaine seizures across Europe have increased since 2022 as Latin American drug trafficking organisations have begun to exploit the boom in coca cultivation and growing European demand for the drug.

In **2024**, however, although there was a large seizure in Spain - 13 tonnes of cocaine in a single shipment, cleverly concealed in bananas from Ecuador⁴ - **the other main points of entry for cocaine into Europe recorded a sharp decline in seizures in the first few months of the year**, with peaks of 40% less in the Netherlands and 50% less in Belgium⁵. The German authorities also reported a decline in seizures at the **port of Hamburg**⁶.

It is possible that the decline in seizures is due to the **difficulty of circumventing the control and surveillance measures implemented in ports**, which have led

4 <https://sede.agenciatributaria.gob.es/Sede/notas-prensa/notas-prensa/2024/noviembre/6/interceptado-algeciras-alijo-13-toneladas-espana.html>

5 Customs officials in the Netherlands have announced a 40% decrease in cocaine seizures in Dutch ports, from 36 tonnes in the first half of 2023 to 22 tonnes in the same period in 2024. Officials at Belgium's main port, Antwerp, announced a more marked decline in seizures, from 44 to 22 tonnes in the same period.

6 <https://insightcrime.org/news/cocaine-seizures-europe-netherlands-belgium/>

drug traffickers to seek new routes and methods of transport and concealment.

As a **countermeasure**, some authorities have indeed adopted **stricter security measures**. These include the Dutch and Belgian authorities, which often work in tandem: they have improved their anti-drug efforts through the use of the most advanced technology. For example, in the **port of Rotterdam**, all **high-risk containers arriving from Latin America** are now **carefully scanned** and, according to customs authorities, these barriers seem to be having the desired effect. However, all Dutch seaports have become less attractive to criminal drug smuggling networks. The Dutch customs authorities are employing **massive screening technology and specialised teams**, increasing **cooperation with business companies**⁷ and strengthening their **position abroad** for information gathering by sending **liaison officers to Latin America**⁸.

The decline in cocaine seizures, however, could also be due to the fact that traffickers have already **shifted and adapted their routes**, demonstrating their ability to anticipate the authorities' initiatives. It is likely that criminal

groups have gradually responded to the security improvements adopted by the port authorities of the main ports by immediately using smaller and less regulated ports in order to exploit their weaknesses, and favouring less common routes through West and Southern Africa and the Sahel region, sending containers through non-risk areas in order to avoid controls⁹. In recent years, there has been a reversing trend in traffic flows, with more traffic directed towards **secondary European ports** - smaller and less busy ports - where security is not as tight, favouring '**counterintuitive routes**' that offer lower risks in the short term.

Another factor that will significantly transform the methods used to transport drugs will be the **Chinese port of Chancay in Peru**, which is due to open at the end of 2024¹⁰. This infrastructure will revolutionise maritime trade in the Pacific, but also cocaine trafficking, as it will be located in a strategic region for three connections (land, air and river) between the Pacific and Atlantic that are almost complete. This port, according to Peru, will certainly change things in terms of drug trafficking, due to a definite reconfiguration of the same. The hypothesis of a new 'peaceful' cocaine route appears possible, also in light of the **seizure of 460 kg of cocaine in Gioia**

7 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, 'European drug trends monitor', p. 7.

8 Liaison officers have been seconded to South America and customs is working with Brazilian customs to analyse scan images. The possibility of placing contact persons in other countries is being considered and work on the Weerbare Haven Terminals (Resilient Port Terminals) programme will continue in the coming period. As part of this programme, efforts are being made with container terminal operators to shorten the advance notice period for inspections and reduce the number of employees involved in container handling. The aim is to also reduce the risk of criminal infiltration.

9 From <https://insightcrime.org/news/cocaine-seizures-europe-netherlands-belgium/>
In March 2024, the French Navy seized over 10 tonnes of cocaine in the Gulf of Guinea, off the coast of West Africa. In September 2023, local police seized 2.4 tonnes in the same area and another 5 tonnes in April 2024. Similar increases in seizures have occurred in the Sahel region, a stretch of land below the Sahara Desert that is used as a drug trafficking route to North Africa and then on to Europe.

10 The new port will be able to accommodate ships carrying 18,000 containers.

Tauro (RC) in October 2024, hidden inside a container **from Vietnam** in transshipment to Singapore.

Other methods adopted by criminals, already observed in the recent past, with the usual aim of reducing the risk of seizure and loss of cargo, consist of **fragmenting large loads**, contaminating a larger number of containers but with smaller quantities of drugs¹¹.

Furthermore, there are increasing signs of a trend towards **transporting** cocaine shipments **by air with couriers**.

In this regard, Dutch customs authorities report that cocaine is increasingly being found in luggage on flights from countries outside Latin America. Among the significant findings in the first six months of 2024, 60 kg of cocaine was found in sports bags in an air cargo container from Canada. Also significant is the report by the *World Customs Organisation (WCO) Regional Intelligence Liaison Office Western Europe (RILO WE)*, which reports 61 confirmed cases of cocaine shipments hidden in luggage arriving by air from West African countries (10 from Ghana, 16 from Gambia, 14 from Guinea-Bissau, 3 from Senegal, 7 from Guinea, 3 each from Mali, Togo and Sierra Leone, and 2 from Nigeria).

Finally, we must not overlook the tendency of traffickers to ship **liquefied cocaine**, impregnating legal goods, so that it can then be returned to its solid form in clandestine extraction laboratories in Europe. The technique of using liquefied cocaine, which involves dissolving it in solvents to impregnate legal goods being shipped, such as coal, porous materials, fabrics, wood or cardboard, effectively evades traditional

controls and detection by scanners, drug dogs and drug tests.

Cocaine concealment, in particular the chemical one: a technique of experts

There are two methods of **concealing cocaine** that require its **recovery by chemical means in clandestine laboratories**.

The first consists of hiding cocaine by simply mixing or dissolving it in a solid or liquid matrix (carrier material). Chemists working for traffickers impregnate or mix cocaine with natural carrier materials (food, fruit juices and pulps) and non-natural carrier materials (fabrics, cardboard, coal, drinks and liquids).

The second, more sophisticated method involves chemically modifying the cocaine to make it difficult to detect using *routine* instruments.

The technique of **chemical concealment** is one of the greatest challenges facing police forces in combating trafficking. Recovering cocaine through a chemical recovery process requires a certain degree of specialist knowledge, precisely because the purpose of chemical concealment is to prevent the substance from being detected by visual methods, chemical reagents and instruments.

Chemical concealment involves transforming or chemically incorporating cocaine into a different molecule, such as plastic, polymers or metals. These matrices can contain up to 50% of the substance, but little information is available on the process used to conceal cocaine in this way.

The complexity of this method lies in the fact that **the person in charge of extraction holds the 'keys'** to unlock the cocaine contained in the mixture of chemicals that form a **'chemical lock'**.

¹¹ DCSA, Annual Report 2024, pp. 35-39.

This method, in turn, is a two-step process: in the first step, a chemical process is used to prevent detection by devices or tests commonly used during inspections or border controls; in the second step, a deodorant is used to prevent detection by dogs. This explains why South American chemists are present in laboratories in Europe. Here, however, large quantities of cocaine intermediates (coca paste or unrefined cocaine base) have been found in several cases, to be converted into cocaine hydrochloride for subsequent pressing into bars. In the past, these stages were usually carried out in South America. The exact reason for the emergence of this phenomenon in Europe is unclear: it could be linked to the lack of availability of chemicals for processing cocaine in Latin America or to the profitability of quality control of the finished product in Europe, or even to an attempt to avoid the loss of highly pure

cocaine hydrochloride, which is seized by the tonne in European ports.

Since 2018, illegal cocaine processing laboratories have been dismantled in Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain in the European Union. Many of these were capable of producing as much as 150-200 kg of cocaine hydrochloride per day on a large scale.

In **Italy, four cocaine processing laboratories** were dismantled in **2024**, specifically:

- In May 2024, in a private residence in Valle Castellana (TE), personnel from the Teramo Police Headquarters arrested an Italian citizen, seizing 1.4 kg of cocaine, a single-use respirator, a syringe, 7 litres of acetone, 2 litres of hydrochloric acid and 12 litres of 2-propanol;
- in July 2024, in a private home in Lentate sul Seveso (MB), officers from

LENTATE SUL SEVESO (MB) JULY 2024 - SEIZURE OF A LABORATORY WITH MACHINERIES, CUTTING AGENTS AND 700 GR. OF COCAINE



the Milan Police Headquarters arrested three Albanian citizens, seizing 700 g of cocaine, various cutting agents (caffeine, phenacetin, boric acid and paracetamol), hydraulic presses, masks, microwave ovens, electric fans, drying equipment, basins, scales and 20 litres of acetone;

- also in July 2024, in Cesano Boscone (MI), officers from the Milan Police Headquarters arrested a fugitive of Moroccan origin (convicted of drug offences), finding a trolley containing a veritable mobile laboratory for the production/refining/packaging of cocaine/heroin in his car. The various materials seized included precision scales, electric hotplates, cookware, various glassware, sieves, cutting equipment (mannitol) and packaging materials, a hydraulic

press for making one-kilogram bars stamped with the word "Prada", and a 10-litre container of acetone, part of which had been used (residual level of approximately 6 litres). In addition, during the house search, were found and seized € 55,000.00 in cash;

- in August 2024, in Lugo – a hamlet of Voltana (RA), the Economic and Financial Police Unit of the Ravenna Financial Police, following a house search, discovered a laboratory used for cutting and packaging drugs, seizing 6.41 kg of cocaine, 1.32 kg of hashish, a dryer, microwave ovens, a blender, a thermometer, as well as solvents (2.5 litres of petroleum ether, 2.5 litres of toluene, 1 litre of hydrochloric acid, 1 litre of white petroleum, 5 litres of acetone, 1 litre of nitro thinner).

VOLTANA (RA) AUGUST 2024 – DISCOVERING OF A LABORATORY FOR CUTTING AND PACKAGING DRUG



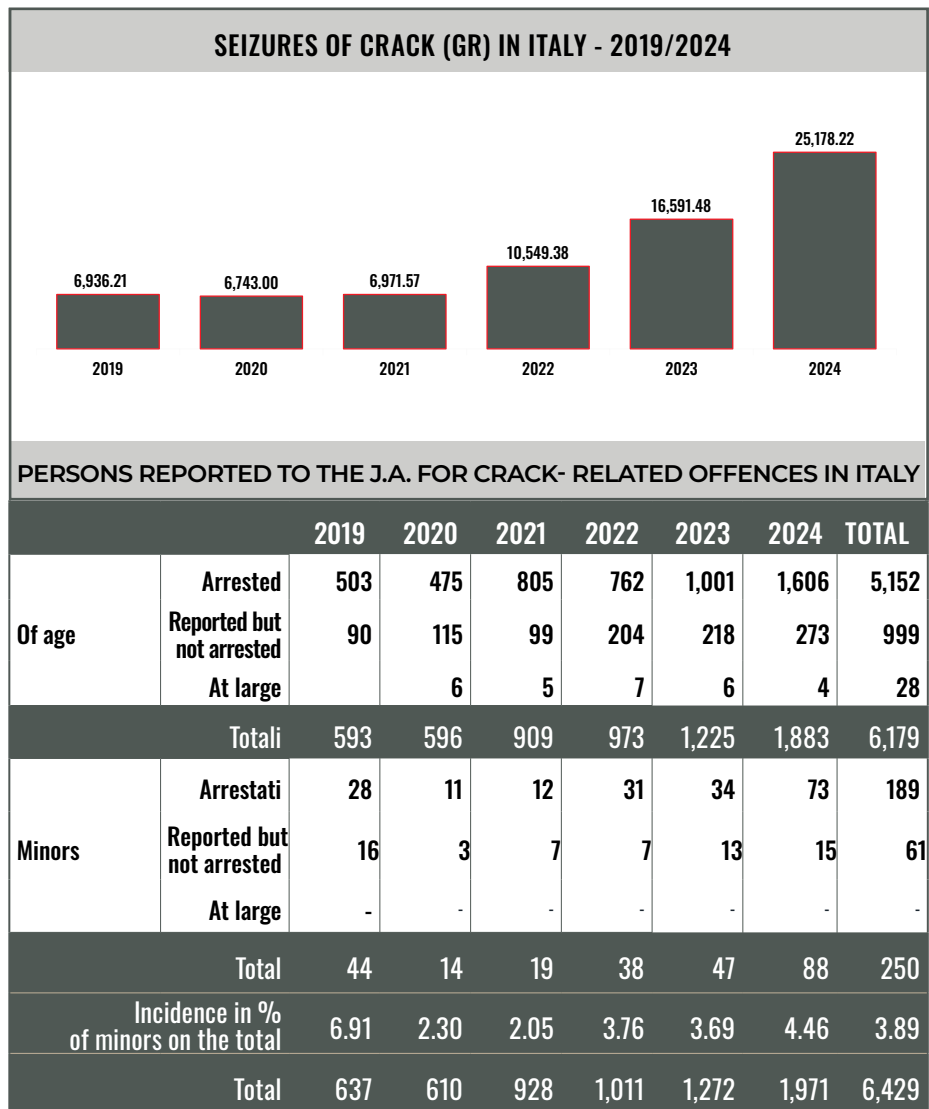
The increase of crack cocaine consumption

Europe is witnessing a complex change in **crack cocaine consumption**, characterised by local consumption hotspots among marginalised communities. Its availability is significantly linked to the presence of powder cocaine, which, as already mentioned, is on the rise on the European continent.

In recent years, there has also been an upward trend in the presence and consumption of crack cocaine **throughout the country**. Historical data for the period 2019-2024 shows that the number of minors arrested for dealing this substance increased by 87.23% in 2024 compared to 2023.

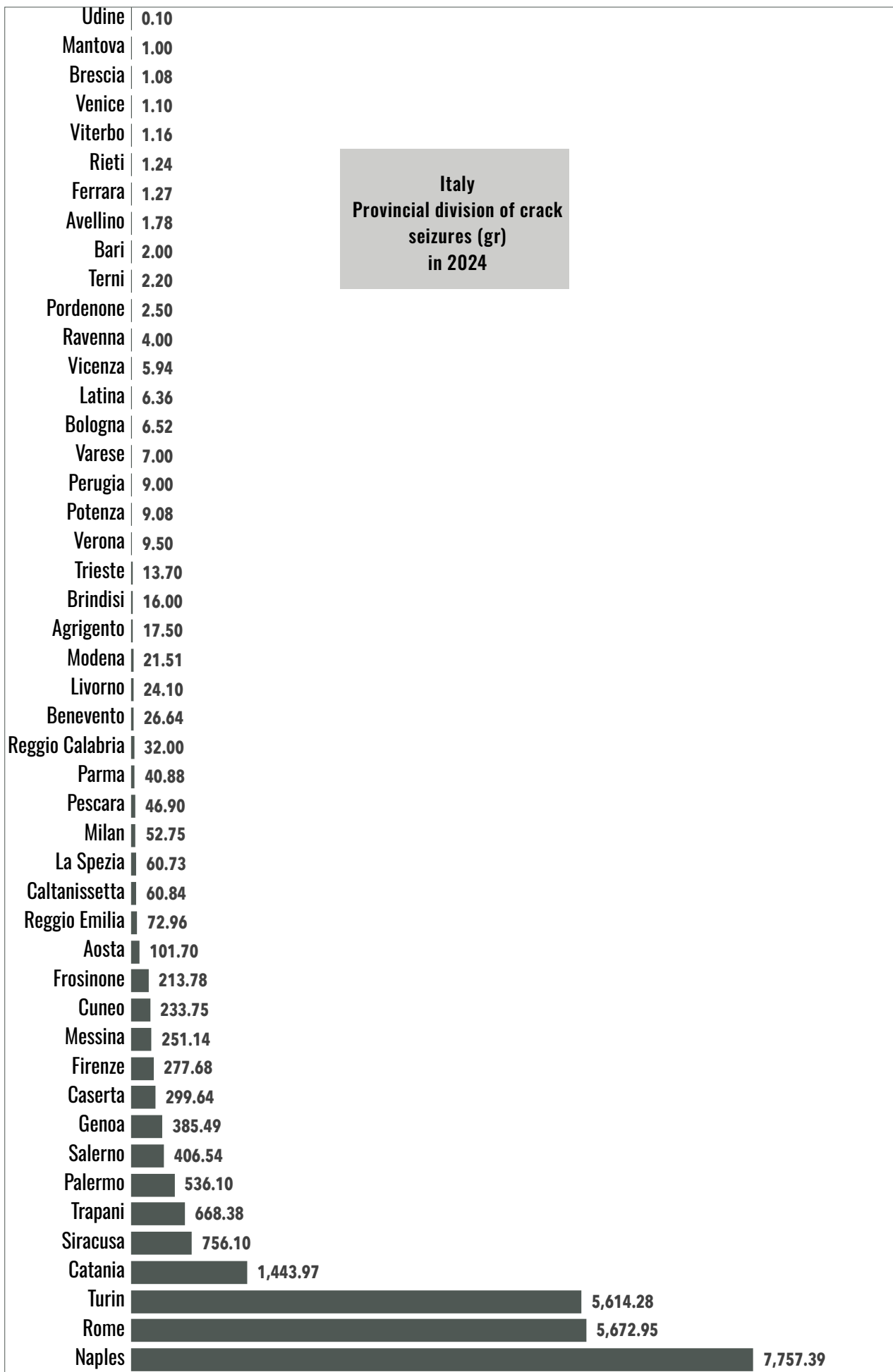
The data reveals that the geographical areas most affected by the phenomenon are definitely those in southern and central Italy. Campania, Lazio and Sicily are the regions where the largest quantities of crack cocaine are seized, while in northern Italy, Piedmont, notably the province of Turin, is particularly affected by the phenomenon.

Crack dealing tends to take place in specific areas of the country, namely



in city suburbs and working-class neighbourhoods, where unemployment rates are high, environmental and social degradation is rife, and *dealers* can operate undisturbed because they are protected by dense networks of lookouts, even when monitored by video surveillance systems illegally installed by the organisations themselves.

In these contexts, organised crime, in managing the sale of cocaine, hashish and marijuana, is already able to produce crack in flats or other premises that are easily accessible to them.



TURIN, NOVEMBER 2024 - SEIZURE OF 1,393 KG OF COCAINE AND 421 GR OF CRACK



This type of narcotic drug, which is cheap to produce and allows multiple crack crystals to be obtained from just a few grams of cocaine, is a real cause for social alarm due to its devastating effects on the physical and mental health of users. Furthermore, crack is addictive from the very first smoke, its effects are very intense and short-lived, and therefore users are compelled to take it several times a day.

Fentanyl, heroin and prescription medicines: diffusion of synthetic opioids

Attention remains high and, to date, there is great concern about the spread of **synthetic opioids** in Europe and Italy.

Among these, demand in Europe for **fentanyl** remains modest and is mainly

limited to drugs containing fentanyl as an active ingredient, diverted from pharmacies and clinics to be placed on the illegal market. These active ingredients have been found available for sale both in drug dealing areas and on social media and online channels, although to date there is no conclusive evidence of organised crime being fully involved in their illegal trade. There are instead precursors of fentanyl in circulation, but there is still no clear evidence of their widespread use in the production of the substance for sale on the black drug market. For example, in the Netherlands, in December 2024, the authorities seized 25 kg of N-boc-4-piperidone, a key ingredient in the production of fentanyl, which could potentially have produced 15 million 2-milligram doses of this analgesic. The destination of the chemical has not been identified, but at

the same time, no indication has been found of its pharmaceutical use.

In **Italy**, investigative findings show that the situation is even more unclear in terms of the abuse of the illegally traded substance, as it cannot be considered a phenomenon.

As far as **heroin** is concerned, it results to be available on the illegal market in both Italy and Europe at a relatively stable (purchase and sale) price. Without a doubt, the relevant market has undergone a **downturn**, which may have sparked conflicts between criminal gangs involved in its trafficking, resulting in inevitable episodes of violence, as evidenced by their reemergence in Europe¹² within Turkish groups, which are the main operators in the heroin market.

The concern that the Taliban ban on opium could lead to a shortage of heroin and could therefore push traffickers to mix the substance with synthetic opioids or even encourage consumers to prefer the latter to heroin is not currently a major issue. In this regard, production in Afghanistan has never completely stopped; on the contrary, there has been a slight increase compared to the latest observations. On the other hand, in Europe, the sale of polysubstances (heroin combined with methadone, cocaine, crack and other stimulants) for parenteral use is beginning to spread, demonstrating that the purity and potency of heroin are considered to have decreased or that it is in short supply, although this has not yet been confirmed.

In addition, combinations of heroin and fentanyl, as well as other opioids belonging

to nitazenes are beginning to be available on *darknet* markets¹³, as evidenced by the shipping announcement from the Netherlands indicated by EUDA (photo of the announcement on the following page).

Particularly worrying is the *online* marketing of new opioids, sold to unsuspecting users as **medicines**, which are subsequently found to be counterfeit because they do not contain the active ingredient indicated. In recent years, reports and public warnings have indeed been published in several EU Member States to alert citizens to this phenomenon, such as tablets sold as oxycodone but containing other more dangerous opioids. The criminal use of the *online* environment for the trade in synthetic opioids or medicines containing or adulterated with such compounds could further increase in the EU as criminal groups begin to see new opportunities for profit in this market.

Nitazenes: a new growing threat for the health

In the illegal market for prescription drugs, it has been reported¹⁴ that **prescription opioids** and **benzodiazepines**, which are readily available in Europe, including on 'virtual drug markets', and which attract little attention from law enforcement and customs authorities, may be increasingly contaminated with **nitazenes**. A highly organised criminal market is emerging on *social media* platforms, which, by opening the door to counterfeit drugs containing potentially lethal substances,

¹² <https://www.occrp.org/en/scoop/spate-of-killings-in-europe-reveal-escalating-conflict-in-turkish-criminal-underworld>

¹³ EUDA, EU Drug Market: Heroin and other opioids - Retail markets, p. 13.

¹⁴ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC), European Drug Trends Monitor, Dec 2024.

UNITED KINGDOM, OCTOBER 2023 - SEIZURE OF 150,000 TABLETS CONTAINING AN UNSPECIFIED OPIOID NITAZENE AND PROCESSING MACHINERY



Tablets containing an unspecified nitazene opioid, along with other drugs and chemicals, a mixing machine and a pill-pressing machine, seized by police in the United Kingdom in October 2023. Source: Metropolitan Police, United Kingdom.

Source: https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/new-psychoactive-substances/distribution-and-supply/new-opioids_en

poses a threat to public health.

Although no data are available on the prevalence of illegal use of prescription opioids, these are widely available and more affordable than heroin and drugs in general.

The use of prescription drugs with controlled and standardised active ingredients is widely considered safer than the use of illegal drugs, which raise serious doubts about their supply chain and composition. Recent investigative developments also show that illegal synthetic opioids have entered Europe not so much to be mixed with heroin

and increase its potency, but to be used in the production of counterfeit prescription drugs that often contain nitazenes. And the contamination is not limited to prescription opioids such as oxycodone; in some cases, it also involves benzodiazepines, which are the most readily available on *Telegram* sales channels. Some of these, even in combination with alcohol, are linked to cases of violence and rape, as well as other crimes such as burglary in the presence of the owner.

In the **United Kingdom**, nitazenes has been found in substances sold as other

opioids, benzodiazepines¹⁵ and cannabis products to consumers unaware of the risks they were facing.

In 2023, six out of seven new synthetic opioids reported for the first time to the EU Early Warning System (NEWS-D) were nitazenes: this is the highest number of nitazenes reported in a single year, with a total of **16 identified in Europe since 2019**.

Nitazenes are sometimes sold as 'synthetic heroin' and have been detected in counterfeit medicines on the drug market. In this regard, seizures in the Netherlands of counterfeit oxycodone pills contaminated with nitazenes could also signal an increase in the spread of nitazenes in Europe.

Synthetic substances such as nitazenes and xylazine are often used to cut fentanyl or other narcotic substances. In particular, between June 2023 and August 2024, **17 deaths** (6 in England, 6 in Scotland and 5 in Wales) were recorded in the United Kingdom alone due to drug mixtures cut with xylazine. Whereas, with regard to nitazenes, there have been records of:

- 37 deaths in **Sweden** between January 2023 and September 2024;
- 264 deaths in the **United Kingdom** (63 in Scotland and 22 in Wales) between June 2023 and August 2024.

In 2023, nitazenes were associated with a marked increase in deaths in **Estonia** and **Latvia** and with localised poisoning outbreaks in **France** and **Ireland**. Generally speaking, it is possible that a higher number of deaths related to the use of synthetic opioids have gone undetected in Europe, due to the low frequency of autopsies and toxicological analyses following an overdose.

¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2520k-vl1wo>

Non-medical use of medicines containing narcotic active ingredients

Medicines containing narcotic active ingredients are defined by the Ministry of Health¹⁶ as medicines based on active ingredients obtained by chemical synthesis or by extraction from plants known since ancient times.

The common feature of these medicines, which contain active ingredients with narcotic effects, is that they **act on the central nervous system** and are intended for the treatment of mental disorders and illnesses. A **medical prescription** is therefore always required in order to prevent the risks associated with misadministration.

Among the best-known substances are morphine and opiates, which are powerful analgesics used in the treatment of pain; benzodiazepines for the treatment of anxiety disorders and as hypnotics; barbiturates, used mainly as anticonvulsants and in anaesthesia; and stimulants indicated for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

For several years now, the UNODC has highlighted the public health risks of the emerging threat of non-medical use of drugs containing active ingredients with narcotic effects.

The European EUDA agency also raises the issue in its reports¹⁷ of the constant abuse of prescription drugs and its harmful effects on health, which are

¹⁶ <https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/medicinali-Stupefacenti/detailNewsMedicinesStupefacenti.jsp?language=italiano&id=6678>

¹⁷ https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/data-factsheet/european-drug-emergencies-network-euro-den-plus-data-and-analysis_en/
https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/drug-profiles/benzodiazepines_en

exacerbated when combined with smoking, alcohol and the use of drugs.

In **Italy**, the **abuse of benzodiazepines** (BZD) is becoming increasingly widespread. This type of addiction, which stems from taking benzodiazepines to improve performance by eliminating anxiety, fatigue and insomnia, is typically observed in people who have stressful and responsible jobs. However, the use of BZDs to enhance cognitive performance is also emerging among the student population. The society in which we live, with its ever-increasing demands for performance, often focuses on achieving results at any cost. This leads to a predisposition to seek substances to enhance *performance*, sometimes even through illegal means.

In addition to relieving pain, opioids also activate those regions of the brain that induce states of euphoria or actual “highs”, which is the basis for the potential misuse and overdose of these drugs. There are several prescription medicines that contain opioids. Among these, those containing **oxycodone** have also been the focus of attention by traffickers. Not only that, but **opiates** such as **codeine** in syrup form, used for analgesia, are also misused in the preparation of the drink ‘*purple drank*’, which has become popular with the rise of certain trap music genres.

With regard to **tramadol** – another synthetic opioid – UNODC reports and seizures carried out also in Italy¹⁸ have confirmed its use in war zones, where it is

used by combatants both as a stimulant and to increase their resistance to physical exertion.

It is similar to Captagon, an amphetamine also used to improve the performance of militiamen. In recent years, there has been a widespread use of tramadol, especially in geographical areas – such as Africa and the Arabian Peninsula – where other more expensive analgesics are not easily available and where it is taken by workers to relieve pain and fatigue and to escape from situations of labour exploitation.

With regard to **Captagon**, following the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s regime in December 2024 and the establishment of a new government headed by Ahmad Husayn al-Shara, international public opinion received confirmation that Syria, under the rule of the Assad family, had effectively become a narco-state. In fact, in Damascus and the surrounding areas, the militias that overthrew the regime discovered numerous laboratories for the production of Captagon and destroyed large quantities of pills containing this narcotic. Given the continuing uncertainty surrounding Syria’s future, it is desirable that the new government, hoping for international recognition, will declare its commitment to banning the production of Captagon and adopting measures to stabilise and pacify the country, attracting Western investment and aid that can also support an embryonic fight against drug trafficking, starting from within.

Cannabis: possible diversification of trafficking routes¹⁹

Available information suggests that

¹⁸ In May 2017, the Customs Agency, in collaboration with the Financial Police, seized 37,500,000 pills of ‘Tamol X’ (tramadol). The seized shipment was in a container in transit from India in the port of Genoa and was bound for Libya, to the ports of Tobruk and Misrata.

¹⁹ https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/euro-pean-drug-report/2024/cannabis_en

cannabis herb is the most commonly available form of the drug in most EU countries. Cannabis herb can be grown outdoors or indoors close to consumption markets, reducing the risk of interdiction by the police.

The **potency** of seized cannabis resin continued to increase in 2022, with an average sample of resin now containing just under 25% THC. This is a very high value compared to historical standards and could pose significant health risks, especially when associated with early onset of use.

In 2022, seizures of cannabis products in Europe continued to remain at historically high levels, demonstrating the high availability of this drug. However, **seizures in the European Union have fallen** significantly in recent times, mainly due to the decline recorded in Spain²⁰. For this drug too, it is possible that the phenomenon reflects an **adjustment in the routes** of cannabis resin from North Africa to Europe.

Some EU Member States have reported trafficking of cannabis through **postal systems** and, increasingly, through commercial **air travel**, sometimes linked to the United States and Canada. There are indications that larger quantities of cannabis herb may be shipped from North America via **maritime routes**.

This trend also appears to be growing in **Italy. Drug trafficking via postal shipments** is a criminal phenomenon that has become increasingly significant in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic

has certainly contributed to this watershed moment. Restrictions on movement and the closure of borders have forced traffickers to seek alternative methods for sorting and distributing illicit substances. This has prompted many dealers, as well as veritable drug trafficking organisations, to use postal services as their primary method for trafficking drugs. Illegal trafficking networks have exploited the efficiency, anonymity and global reach of postal services to conceal and transport drugs around the world. During this period, the exponential growth in online purchases of all kinds has created a favourable cover for drug trafficking, with drugs often concealed inside legitimate parcels.

This situation has facilitated criminal gangs in their illicit trafficking, aware that they face fewer risks, no longer having to physically transport the goods and thus reducing the danger of encountering repressive actions by law enforcement agencies, such as arrests and seizures.

In this regard, investigations coordinated by the DCSA and the operations carried out have highlighted an increase in drug trafficking via postal shipments and even a gradual refinement of trafficking methods and channels, with the involvement of people working in specific sectors, such as some couriers willing to carry out illegal activities in addition to their ordinary job.

It should be noted, however, that the approach to **cannabis in Europe** is becoming more diverse, as some EU Member States are considering or changing their policy stance on recreational cannabis use, creating various forms of **access** to cannabis resin and herbal products.

In December 2021, **Malta** legislated

²⁰ EUDA points out that, in 2022, Spain accounted for 69% of all resin seized, 47% of all cannabis herb seized and 81% of the total number of cannabis plants seized in the European Union, also highlighting its significant role both as a transit country for cannabis and as a production area.

for home cultivation and private consumption of cannabis, as well as for non-profit municipal cultivation clubs.

In July 2023, Luxembourg legislated to allow home cultivation and private use, while in February 2024, Germany legislated to allow home cultivation and non-profit cannabis cultivation clubs.

The **Czech Republic** has also announced plans for a regulated and taxed distribution system.

Additionally, Switzerland, a non-EU country, has begun authorising pilot sales trials or other distribution systems for certain residents in some cities.

The Netherlands is reviewing its approach in this area. The cultivation, sale and possession of cannabis remain criminal offences. However, the sale of small quantities of cannabis, up to 5 grams, to persons over the age of 18 in 'coffee shops' that meet certain criteria has been tolerated for decades, because one of the stated policy objectives was to separate cannabis users from the market for other substances. The problem with this approach is that cannabis is still necessarily supplied by the **illegal market** and criminal groups therefore profit from this trade. To address this problem, the Netherlands is trialling a model for a controlled cannabis supply chain limited to 10 municipalities, with cannabis produced in regulated premises and made available for sale in cannabis coffee shops.

The evolution of cannabis markets: the spread of synthetic and semi-synthetic cannabinoids and the risks of involuntary exposure.

The variety of **cannabis-based products** available in Europe is increasing, with the

emergence of products with low THC or CBD content.

Furthermore, there are concerns that some products sold on the illegal market, such as cannabis, may be adulterated with potent synthetic cannabinoids.

The continuous emergence of new substances in this sector raises concerns that cannabis users may be **at risk of unintentional exposure** to synthetic cannabinoids. Adulterated cannabis may appear similar to unadulterated cannabis and therefore may not be easy to detect; as a result, it may be mistakenly sold as cannabis to unsuspecting consumers. Recently, some **semi-synthetic cannabinoids** have also appeared on the commercial market in some parts of Europe, sold as apparently 'legal' alternatives to cannabis.

The nine new cannabinoids identified, four of which are semi-synthetic cannabinoids, account for about one-third of the new psychoactive substances reported for the first time to the EU Early Warning System in 2023.

The most widespread in Europe is certainly **e-saidrocannabinol** (HHC), but more recently, **hexa-hydrocannabiforol** (HHC-P) and **tetrahydrocannabiforol** (THCP) have also become commercially available in some EU Member States.

Although knowledge about the effects of HHC in humans is limited, concerns have been raised as studies were published, including some reports of intoxication²¹.

Since July 2023, HHC and its derivatives have been included in the list of narcotic

²¹ Between June 2022 and February 2024, the Czech Republic's Toxicological Information Centre recorded over 170 cases of HHC-related interventions, many of which involved young and very young people who had consumed edible products, such as gummy sweets.

SYNTHETIC CANNABINOID SEIZURES AND CLANDESTINE LABORATORIES FOR PROCESSING CANNABIS

Financial Police seized three premises in the municipalities of Sabaudia (LT) and Nettuno (RM), which were used both as clandestine laboratories for the transformation of **low-THC cannabis light** into substances with an increased narcotic effect and as storage depots. Specifically, in addition to seizing 17.17 kg of hashish, 15.97 kg of marijuana and 6.21 kg of wax, laboratory processing equipment was also found.

In December 2024, the Enna Mobile Squad seized marijuana ready to be placed on the illegal market, containing a **synthetic cannabinoid**⁴.

In September 2024, the Fiumicino (RM)

⁴ MDMB - 4en - PINACA, a synthetic cannabinoid included in table 1 of Presidential Decree 309/90.



substances in Italy, and in 2024, 18 other EU Member States have done the same.

Synthetic cannabinoids are very potent substances, which entail the **risks of poisoning**. A further concern is that cannabis-based food preparations (foodstuffs, often in the form of sweets or candies, typically infused with cannabis extract), which have become more widely available on the illicit market in Europe since 2021, are often adulterated with

these substances.

Synthetic cannabinoids also sometimes appear in samples of other drugs; a trend already recorded in Italy.

Synthetic cathinones: increasingly significant in the market of stimulants

Synthetic cathinones have emerged and established themselves as substitutes for stimulants such as amphetamine in some parts of Europe. Large quantities of cathinones, such as 3-CMC and 3-MMC, mostly originating from **India**,

Synthetic cathinones discovered for the first time in Italy between 2022-2024		
2022	2023	2024
2-MMC	α -D2PV	2-CMC
MFPVP	α -PCyP	3,4-EtPV
MDPB		4F- α -PHiP
MPHP		5-DBFPV
N-Ethylpentadron		MDPHiP
		Dipentylone
		Methyl isopropyl ketone

have continued to be seized in Europe, indicating the important role these drugs now play in some countries.

Adding to this concern is the possibility that cathinones are **increasingly being produced in Europe**.

Cathinones are also sold together with other drugs or on their own, potentially increasing the risk of health damage.

In **Italy**, the data paints a picture in which the total quantities seized by the police remain modest. In order to identify the most common distribution mechanisms and trafficking channels, the concealment methods reported in seizure reports show that, in addition to the discovery on individuals, the other most commonly used method is **shipment by courier or postal parcel**.

Information from the **NEWS-D** system shows a significant increase in reports concerning the identification of synthetic cathinones on the national territory: from 52 cases in 2022 to 140 in 2024.

A total of 29 synthetic cathinones were identified, of which 5 were identified for the first time in 2022, 2 in 2023 and 7 in 2024 (as shown in the table). Of particular relevance is the cathinone MDPHP, identified for the first time following a seizure in August 2024, which caused 8 cases of acute intoxication between August and October 2024.

In **cases of intoxication** associated with the consumption of synthetic cathinones in Italy between 2022 and 2024, the main synthetic cathinone detected was the already known MDPHP, taken alone but also in combination with other substances (such as cocaine, benzodiazepines, other cathinones).

Finally, with regard to a possible increase in synthetic cathinones sold erroneously as other drugs or used as adulterants, it is likely that these mixtures may find further space in illegal markets with sales to unsuspecting users.

03. COCAINE

Introduction

In 2022, approximately 23.5 million people, or 0.45% of the global population, used cocaine²². Especially in Europe, the amount of cocaine used in monitored cities²³ went up by 80% in 2023 compared to 2011. Demand for access to treatment and rehabilitation facilities for cocaine addicted also showed a clear upward trend, increasing by almost 60% from 2011 to 2022, while in the United States, demand fell by more than 50% between 2011 and 2021 as a result of increased fentanyl use.

Global cocaine supply reached record levels in 2022, with 2,700 tonnes produced, approximately 20% more than the previous year. This increase was the result of greater exploitation of land in general and, in particular, the decision to devote ever-larger areas of the Amazon rainforest to this crop, which between 2022 and 2023 reached an area of 376,784 hectares.

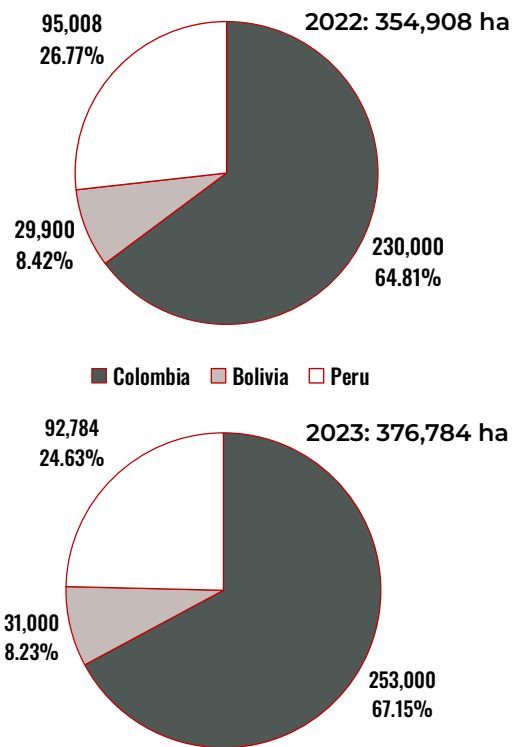
Cultivation activities continue to be concentrated in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, although there are signs of attempts to produce cannabis in Mexico and, more generally, in Central America²⁴.

²² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Drug Report 2024, Special points of interest.

²³ For the EUDA Wastewater Analysis Programme: https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/html/pods/waste-water-analysis_en

²⁴ International seminar on maritime drug trafficking, 15 May 2024, Lima (PERU).

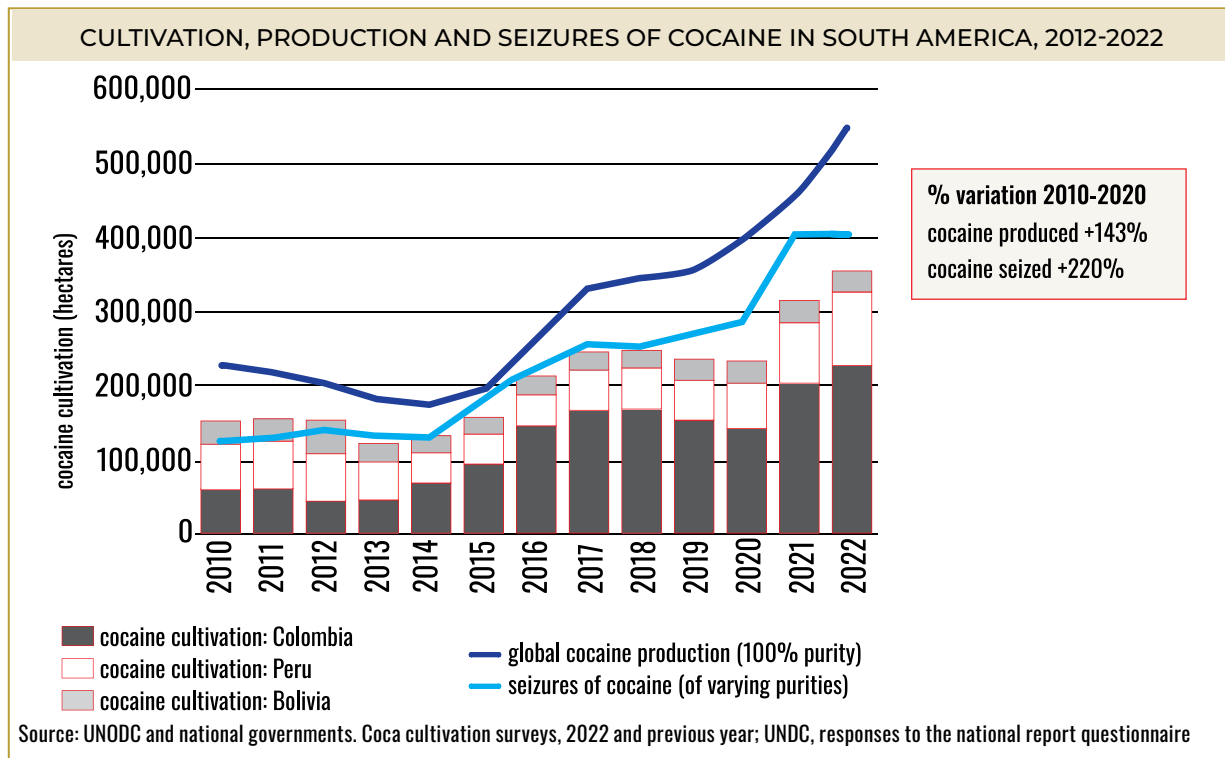
COCAINE: CULTIVATIONS (HECTARES) IN SOUTH AMERICA - 2022/2023



The routes of cocaine: from producing countries to the consumption ones

After years of sharp increases, the amount of cocaine seized globally in 2022 stabilised at just over 2,000 tonnes. The main cocaine trafficking routes continue to branch out from the producing countries, especially in the Andean region, to other countries in the Americas and Europe, the second largest cocaine market after North America.

From the geographical areas of production to the various consumer markets, cocaine is easily transported through South America's 'bioceanic corridors', consisting of a complex road network that extends across the land and river routes of various states, supplemented by air connections



between the numerous clandestine airstrips built by traffickers in the most difficult-to-access areas of the Amazon. Once they reach the first storage and

departure hubs by sea, large loads of cocaine are concealed in containers in various ways, while aircrafts are used to transport smaller loads.

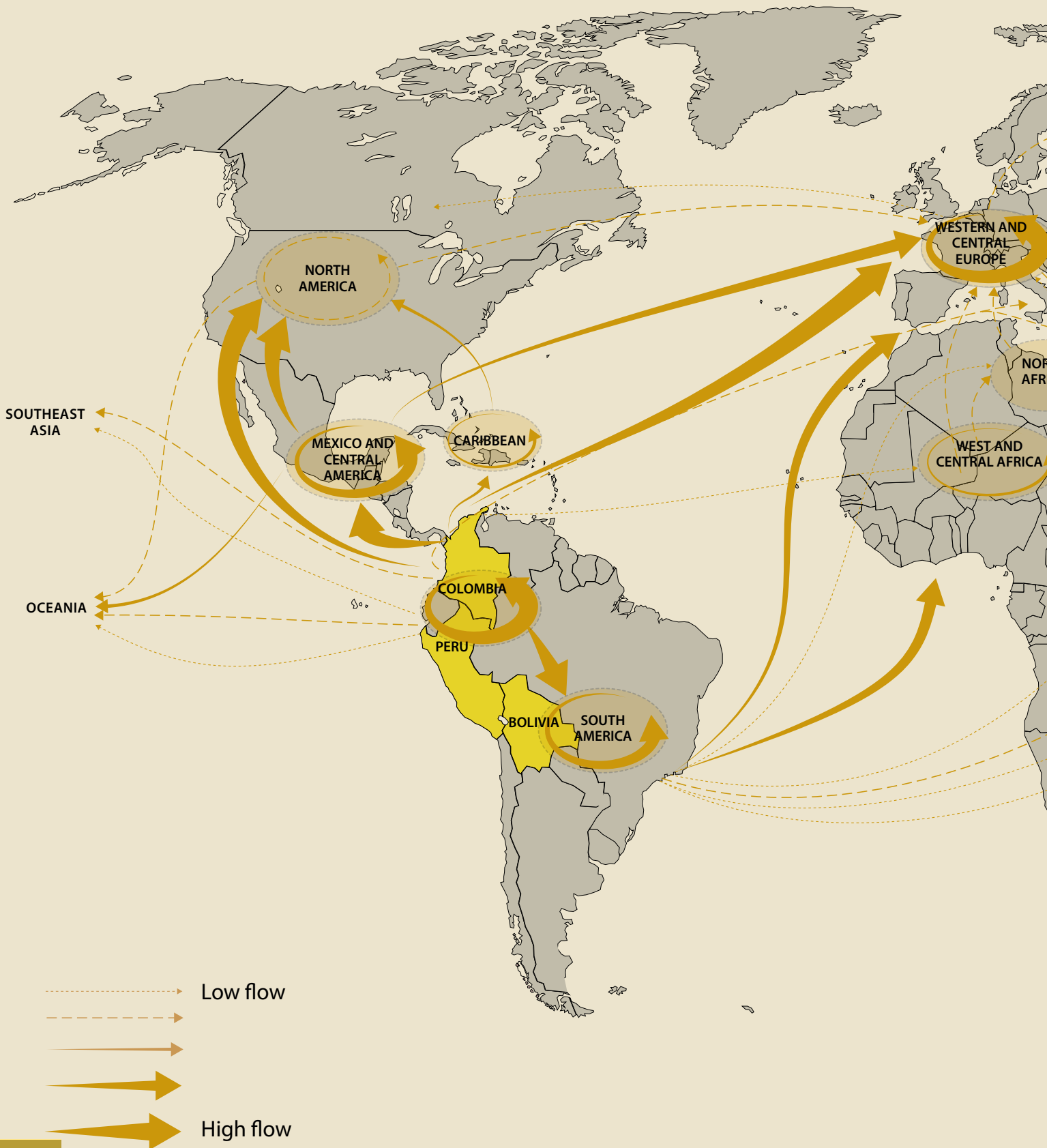
ALTERNATIVE CONCEALMENT METHODS: THE UKRAINIANS

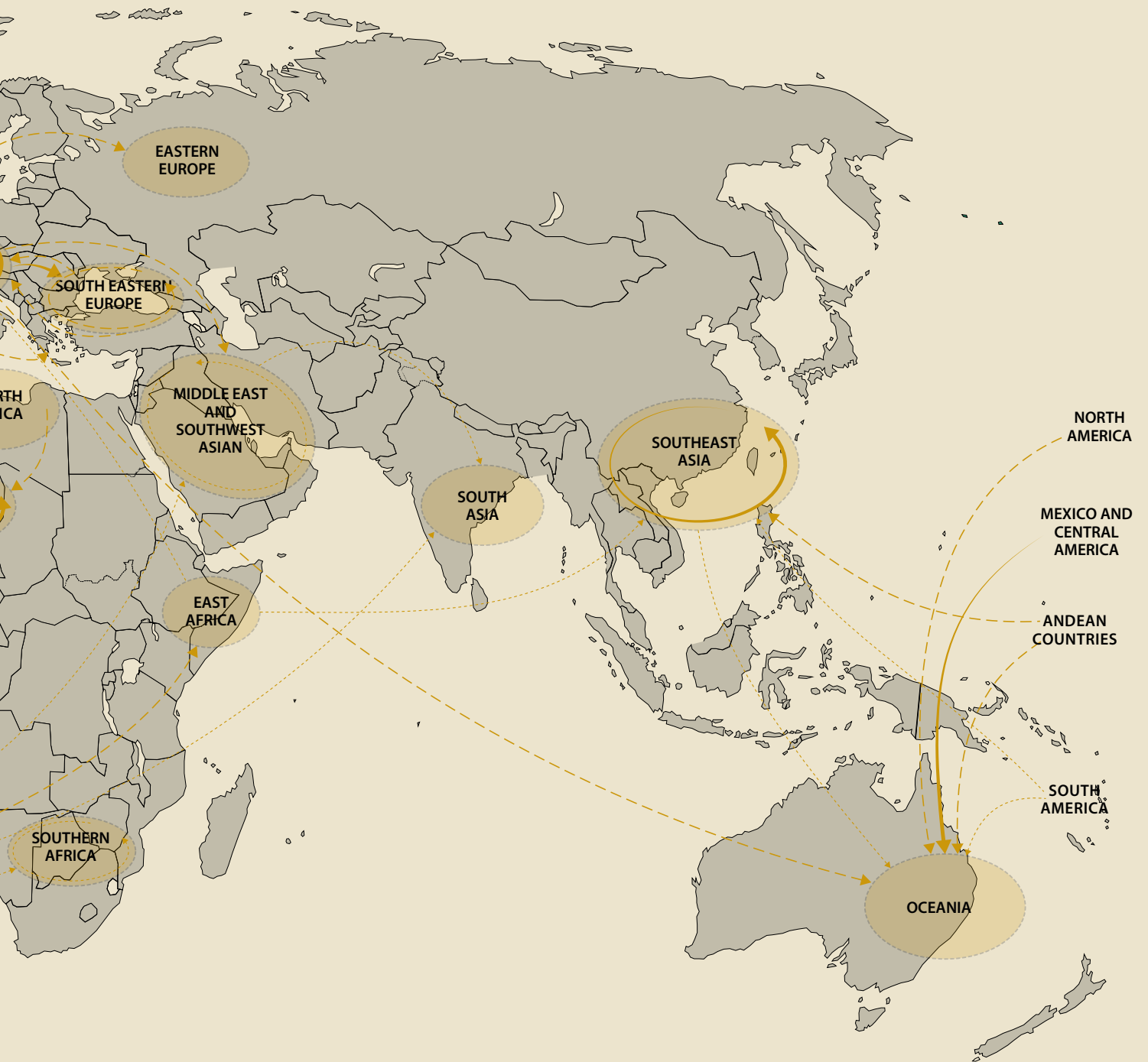
In response to the growing capacity for counteraction and in order to adapt to the new scenarios created by the war, **Ukrainian drug traffickers** have developed **new methods of concealment** to supply the domestic market.

Until recently, for example, cocaine was brought into Ukraine directly from Latin America by sea, concealed in shipments of tropical fruit, particularly bananas. However, in March 2023, the Kiev Police arrested a cocaine trafficker who was transporting a shipment of apples sealed in vacuum-packed polyethylene film. When the apples were opened by the police, several bags of cocaine were found inside.



MAIN COCAINE FLOWS





It is nevertheless clear that the complexity of the relational systems linking the criminal groups involved, which cooperate with each other to manage logistics and maximise profits, encourages the dynamic emergence of a series of diversions from the main trafficking routes, also in order to take advantage of safer routes, which allow them to exploit collusive contacts at the ports of departure and arrival, as well as to have storage areas close to the landing sites.

In general, despite a stabilisation in the quantities seized in South American countries, the negative impact of cocaine trafficking has been felt particularly in **Ecuador**, with a wave of violence linked to both local and transnational criminal groups. In the **Caribbean**, too, the increase in street violence is largely due to growing competition between criminal gangs for control of cocaine trafficking²⁵.

Colombia is showing worrying signs, with reference indicators on the rise for 2023²⁶: +10% of the area under coca cultivation in the country (from 230,000 ha to 253,000 ha in 2023); +53% in cocaine hydrochloride production, currently at a record level (from 1,738 tonnes in 2022 to 2,664 tonnes in 2023); +12% in cocaine seizures (from approximately 659 tonnes in 2022 to over 739 tonnes in 2023); +11% in clandestine laboratories dismantled (from 4,707 in 2022 to 5,242 in 2023).

The increase in cocaine hydrochloride production is associated not only with the increase in cultivated area, but also with the number of harvests, the greater productivity of coca leaf varieties and the greater capacity to extract the alkaloid to obtain cocaine paste, thanks to improvements

in the chemical stage. Half of the coca is produced in production *enclaves*, a total of 15 areas located in six departments that correspond to those with the largest cultivated areas, in addition to Antioquia and Bolívar. These regions continue to be strategically important due to a number of geographical (proximity to external borders and access to trafficking routes), logistical (access to precursors), social and economic factors, which make them more favourable and profitable for increasingly interconnected and collaborative criminal groups²⁷.

Colombian cocaine continues to flood the global market along old and new routes, which mainly branch out by sea and reach illicit markets around the world. It is estimated that approximately 90% of the drug exported from Colombia travels by sea, approximately 3% by air and 7% by land.

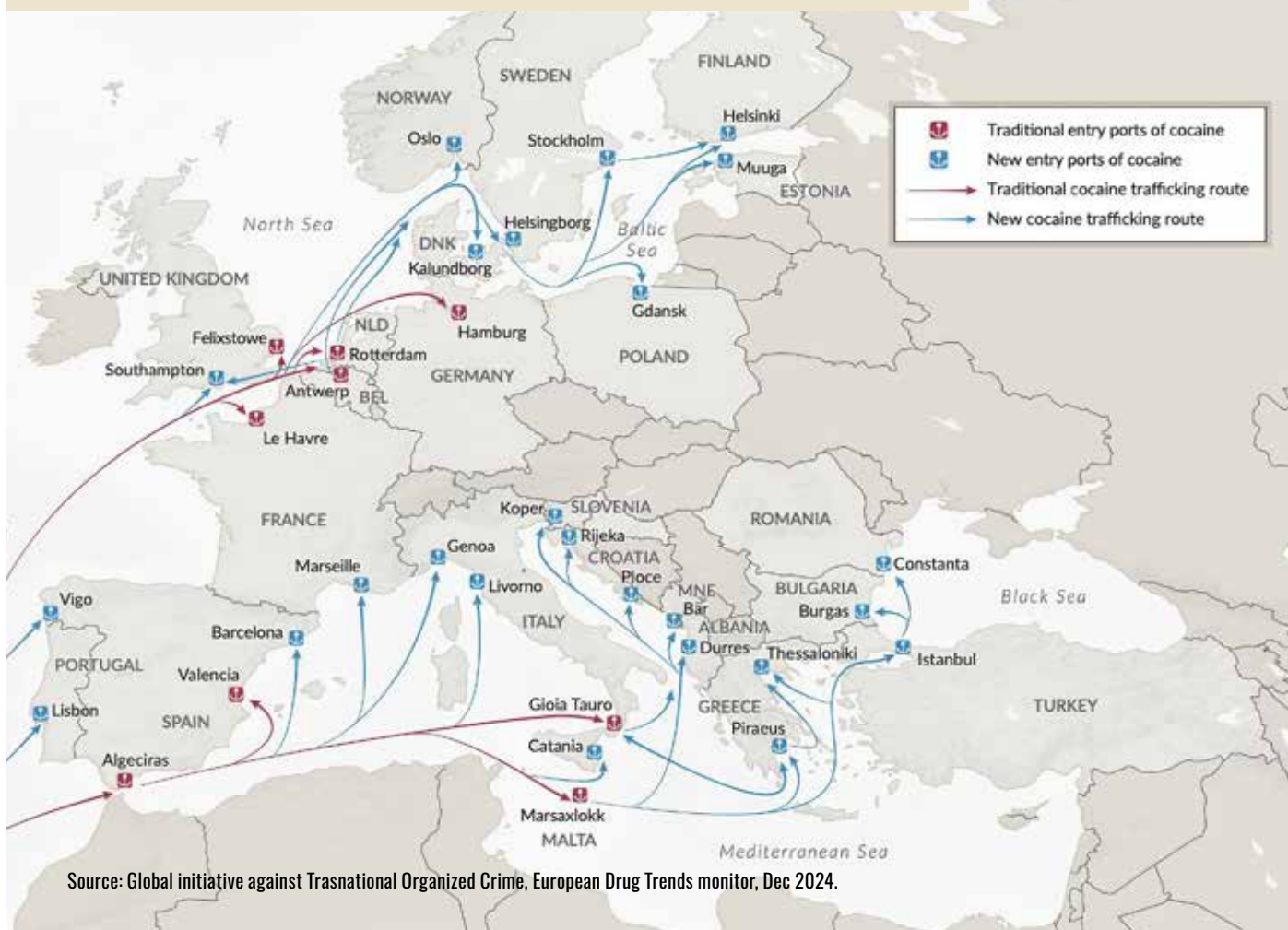
Colombia is the only South American country with direct access to two oceans, the Pacific and the Atlantic. The most important port is *Cartagena de Indias*, on the northern Atlantic coast, not far from two other ports that play an equally important role in drug trafficking by sea: *Barranquilla* and *Santa Marta*. A little further west is another port of great interest, the port of *Turbo*. On the Pacific coast, on the other hand, are the two ports most affected by the phenomenon: *Buenaventura* and *Tumaco*. The largest quantities leave from the ports of Cartagena, Turbo and Buenaventura in 'contaminated' containers intended for the transport of all kinds of materials, from fruit to building materials. The port of Tumaco, on the other hand, is characterised by being the departure point for small speedboats used to transport cocaine to Ecuador, which is now considered the world's main hub for

25 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Drug Report 2024, Key Findings and Conclusions, June 2024.

26 UNODC, Monitoring of Territories with Coca Cultivation 2023, 18 October 2024, pp. 21-22.

27 UNODC, Monitoring of Territories with Coca Cultivation 2023, 18 October 2024, cit. 21-22.

COCAINE ROUTES AND TRAFFICKING TO EUROPE



cocaine trafficking by sea.

According to sources from the *Dirección Nacional Estupefacientes*, 50% of Colombian cocaine is destined for the United States, 40% for Europe and the remaining 10% for the local or Asian market. However, the latest trend shows a downturn in the North American market in favour of growth in the European market. One variable influencing international cocaine trafficking is Colombia's new drug policy, which has abandoned the 'belligerent' approach in favour of voluntary eradication by farmers and a simultaneous conversion to legal crops, with greater attention to the environment, public health and human

rights. This anti-drug policy is part of the broader context of the new peace policy, known as 'Paz Total', and is characterised by proposals for pacification with regard to politically motivated armed groups (such as the ELN) and submission with regard to all other organised armed groups, including criminal ones. This approach could change the criminal balance within the country and consequently have an impact on cocaine production and trade, especially considering that cocaine production and trade now have an impact that goes well beyond Colombian territory, with massive involvement from foreign groups.

In **Peru**, monitoring carried out in 2023

AMOUNT OF DRUGS SEIZED IN PERU IN 2024 COMPARED TO 2023

Drug seized (kg)	2023	2024	Var.% 23-24
Cocaine base paste	43,337.00	75,277.00	+73.70%
Cocaine hydrochloride	22,513.00	41,116.00	+82.63%
Coca leaves	1,170.62	1,584.59	+35.36%
Marijuana	38,704.00	56,326.00	+45.53%
Opium latex	18.70	4.37	-76.63%
MDMA	14.24	49.93	+250.62%
The data only takes into account drugs seized in Peruvian territory and not those seized abroad as a result of special operations of controlled delivery.			

reported a total of 92,784 hectares of land under coca cultivation, compared to 95,008 hectares in 2022. For the first time in seven years there has been a decrease in the area under cultivation.

In terms of countermeasures, according to the information provided by the *Dirección Antidrogas - Policía Nacional del Perú*, 22,600 hectares were eradicated and 73 clandestine airstrips (PAC) located in the departments of Huánuco (55), Pasco (3), San Martín (1) and Ucayali (14) were destroyed in 2023²⁸.

The approximately 3,000 km long coast of Peru is marked by the presence of a dozen ports, among which those of *Callao* and *Paita* stand out in terms of importance, respectively the first and second national ports in terms of commercial traffic. The new port of *Chancay*, inaugurated on 14 November 2024, is an infrastructure owned 60% by the Chinese state-owned company COSCO Shipping and required an investment of approximately \$3.5 billion. Chancay, as the most important port *hub* in the South Pacific, will redefine maritime routes, providing privileged access to the South American market due to its geographical position facing the Pacific and its strategic location with

respect to other countries, such as Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Brazil.

Cocaine is transported within Peru using couriers, known as “*mochileros*”, by land or by river boat (*Lancha Go Fast*). The exit from the country, on the other hand, is mainly carried out via an “air bridge” to Bolivia and Brazil, using light *avionetas* planes that take off from clandestine airstrips, a method considered to be the fastest and most economical: each flight can carry up to 400 kg of coca paste. The logistics (aircraft, fuel, pilots) come from Bolivia and Brazil (*the fuel sold in Bolivia is among the cheapest in South America*). Otherwise, cocaine is transported by sea on classic trade routes through container contamination, using fishing boats or using semi-submersibles for transshipment on the high seas. The use of civil air transport with couriers or postal shipments is residual.

Bolivia is the world’s third largest producer of cocaine, which is transported to Europe and other Latin American countries via various routes, with only a small proportion destined for local consumption.

In December 2023, Bolivian authorities reported having eradicated 10,302 hectares of coca crops, a result consistent

28 DEVIDA, Peru. Monitoring of coca crops 2023, June 2024, p. 120, cit.

with the figure in 2022 (10,260 hectares)²⁹. Monitoring carried out in 2023 showed a total of 31,000 hectares of land under coca cultivation, compared to 29,900 hectares in 2022 (+4%).

Bolivia is also a transit country for Peruvian cocaine. As a crossroads for drug trafficking routes, Bolivian airspace is flown over by numerous light aircraft loaded with cocaine, which shuttle daily between Peru and Bolivia using clandestine airstrips along the so-called '*Campesina route*'. From there cocaine is being carried mainly to Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina and, subsequently, to Africa and Europe along the so-called '*Atlantic route*'. The waterway network known as the *Idrovia*, composed of the Paraná and Paraguay rivers and their tributaries, continues to be extremely useful for drug trafficking, allowing the transport of cocaine paste by river from the production areas to the numerous processing laboratories located in the interior of the country. Lake Titicaca, a veritable navigable giant with a surface area of over 8,500 square kilometres, is another important transport route for traffickers wishing to use the Peru-Bolivia route.

On the enforcement front, in December 2023, Bolivia's *Fuerza Especial de Lucha contra el Narcotráfico (FELCN)* reported that it had destroyed 97 laboratories for processing cocaine hydrochloride and 766 laboratories for processing raw cocaine, an increase of 76% and 24% respectively compared to 2022. The FELCN also seized 11.6 tonnes of cocaine base and 21.3 tonnes of cocaine hydrochloride in 2023, an increase of 14% and 109% respectively compared to 2022³⁰. It has furthermore arrested 3,453

individuals for drug-related offences and 51 aircraft involved in drug trafficking were seized, compared to 99 in 2022. In this regard, the involvement of a greater number of members of the Brazilian PCC (*Primeiro Comando da Capital*) cartel and the Venezuelan *Tren de Aragua* cartel has been reported, demonstrating how the expansion of these cartels knows no bounds and poses new challenges for law enforcement³¹.

As mentioned above, **Ecuador** is the country that has been most affected by the conflict between criminal groups from various geographical areas that are violently competing for control of cocaine trafficking. In fact, in recent years, Ecuador has become the most important South American crossroads for cocaine along the Pacific coast. In particular, the port city of Guayaquil has become the main point of exit for cocaine bound for Europe and North America³², while the coastal provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas are important trafficking corridors used to reach Mexico and Central America. The impact of cocaine trafficking, which has made Ecuador the third country in the world in terms of drug seizures after Colombia and the United States, has led to a wave of violence linked to the various criminal groups operating in the country, with the number of murders increasing fivefold between 2019 and 2022³³.

In October 2023, the Ecuadorian authorities seized 154.9 tonnes of cocaine (more or less consistent with 2022), 212 kg of

Monitoring Coca Cultivation 2023, February 2025, p. 62.

31 United States Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2024, March 2024, pp. 119–120.

32 US Department of State, INCSR 2024, Ecuador, pp. 155–159.

33 UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest, p. 13 and Key Findings and Conclusions, pp. 18–19, cit.

29 Plurinational State of Bolivia, UNODC, Monitoring of Coca Cultivation 2023, February 2025, p. 55.

30 Plurinational State of Bolivia, UNODC,

heroin (a sharp decline, i.e. 113 kg less than in the same period in 2022) and 15 tonnes of marijuana (an increase compared to 11 tonnes in the same period in 2022). In the same period, they also destroyed over 180 tonnes of seized narcotics, mostly by encapsulating them in cement, a faster, cheaper and more environmentally friendly method than incineration; 18,427 litres of liquid precursors (16,150 litres in 2022) and 62.49 tonnes of solid precursors (65.67 tonnes in 2022) were seized; 9,067 people for drug offences (9,483 in the same period in 2022).

Brazil is a country of continental dimensions, with over 16,000 km of land borders, most of which are uninhabited and difficult to access, located in the Amazon region shared with countries that produce cocaine (Colombia, Bolivia, Peru) and marijuana (Paraguay)³⁴. With an impressive infrastructure system for transporting goods and people³⁵, Brazil is a hub for the transit of cocaine to consumer markets around the world³⁶ through its 40 ports on the Atlantic Ocean, with São Paulo being the most important.

The absolute permeability of the 16,000 km of land border forces the Federal Police and Customs to take action, focusing mainly on outgoing routes, through checks on containers, which are identified on the basis of a specific risk analysis. To this end, significant investments have been made to equip the most important

airports with modern technological surveillance and scanning systems for the detection of narcotic substances.

Cocaine trafficking is managed by powerful criminal organisations operating in the territory, including *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC) and *Comando Vermelho*. Brazilian organisations, which now collaborate on a permanent basis with *brokers* belonging to European (Albanian and Serbian) and Italian ('Ndrangheta) criminal groups, are reportedly expanding their interests in West Africa, one of the main transit platforms for cocaine bound for Europe. PCC members are also believed to be present in other areas of Africa (Nigeria and South Africa), from where they send cocaine to emerging Asian markets via new routes³⁷.

In 2024, the Brazilian Federal Police seized 74.5 tonnes of cocaine, in line with the 72.5 tonnes seized in 2023³⁸, with a significant increase in seizures in the port of Santos, which analysts attribute to the massive state investment campaign that makes illegal activities within the port difficult. It is likely that this could, in the short term, lead criminal organisations to change their *modus operandi*, turning to different, smaller ports, considered more permeable³⁹.

34 It has 9,000 km of land border with the main cocaine and marijuana producing countries in South America (Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru); this is equivalent to three times the length of the land border between the US and Mexico.

35 1,700,000 km of road network, more than 10% of which is paved; 50,000 km of navigable waterways; vast uninhabited land borders; a number of airports second only to that of the United States; around forty container ports, in addition to numerous smaller ones scattered along 7,000 km of coastline.

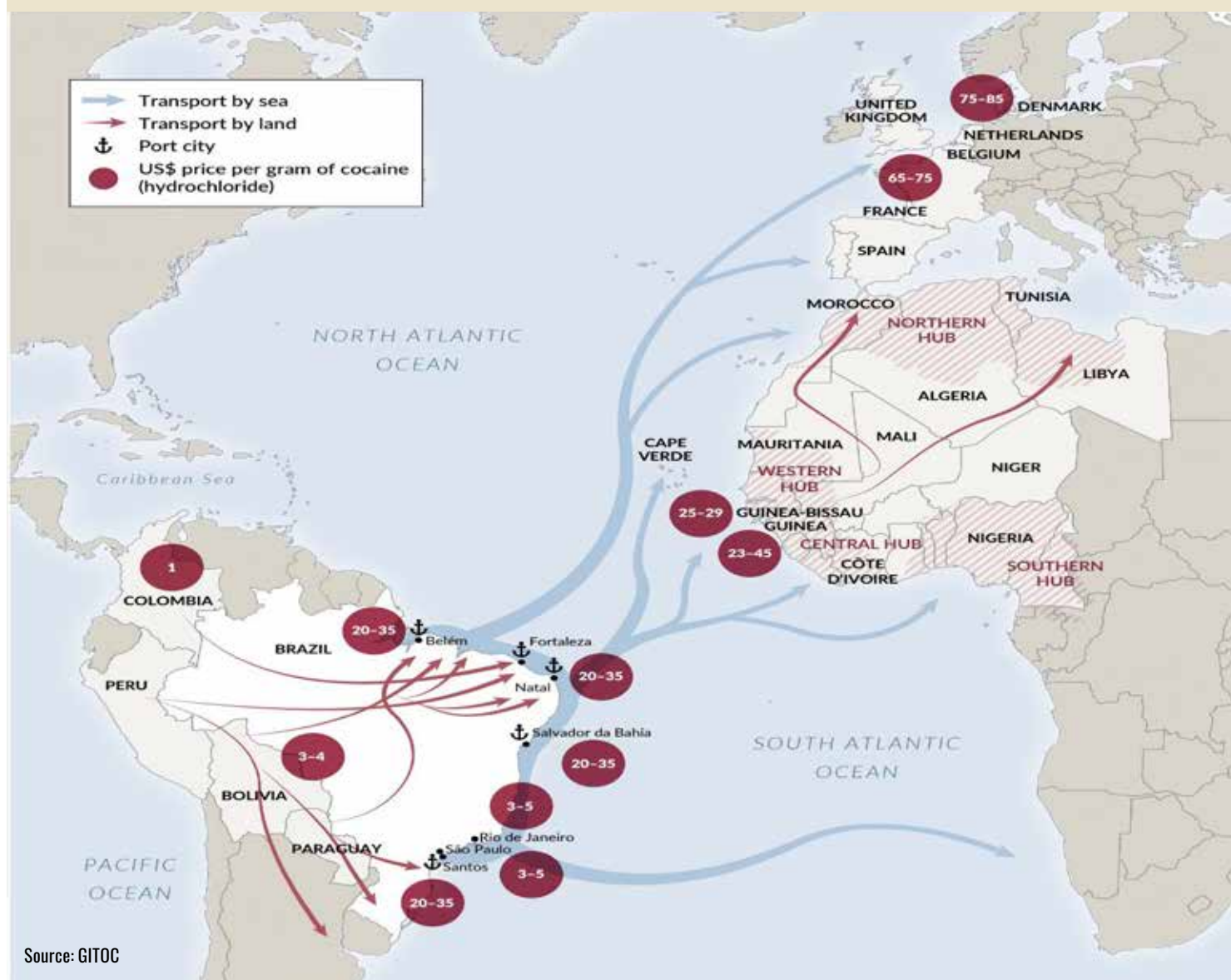
36 United States Department of State, INCSR 2024, Brazil, March 2024.

37 <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2023/11/23/brazils-biggest-drug-gang-has-gone-global>; Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GITOC), Atlantic Connections – The PCC and the Brazil-West Africa cocaine trade, August 2023.

38 <https://www.plenglish.com/news/2025/01/30/confiscation-of-organised-crime-assets-increased-in-Brazil-in-2024/> Article from Prensa Latina dated 30 January 2025; <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/cocaine-seizures-soar-in-Brazil/>

39 Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GITOC), Atlantic Connections – The PCC and the Brazil-West Africa cocaine trade, August 2023.

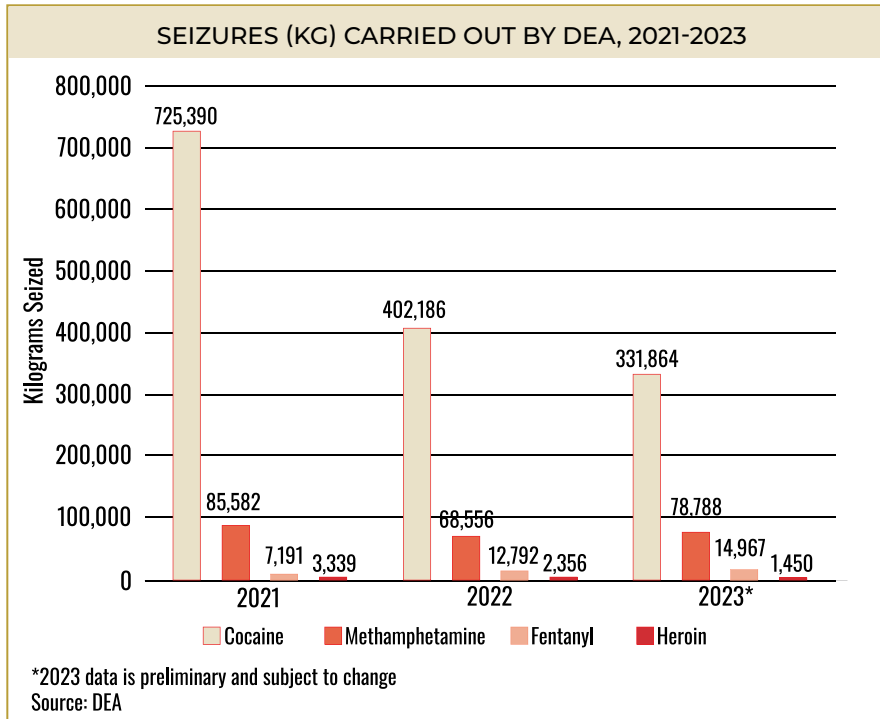
BRAZIL – ATLANTIC ROUTE OF COCAINE AND ITS PRICES IN DIFFERENT PLACES



Mexico, with over 11,500 km of coastline and a network of 102 ports and 15 terminals evenly distributed on both sides of the ocean, is capable of handling approximately 8 million containers per year, with commercial connections to the entire world. It shares approximately 3,200 km of land border with the United States, known as the *Southwest Border*, through which, using the daily cross-border vehicle flow and the network of tunnels dug, the now well-known drug cartels, first and foremost the *Sinaloa*

Cartel (CDS) and the *Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel* (CJNG)⁴⁰, introduce

⁴⁰ In addition to the CDS and the CJNG, there are a multitude of criminal organisations in Mexico, more or less structured, capable of exercising control over certain areas of the country and with a greater or lesser international propensity. Among the main ones are the 'Cártel del Golfo', 'Zetas Vieja Escuela', 'Cártel del Noreste', 'Nuevo Cártel de Juárez' Guerreros Unidos, Los Ardillos, Los Viagras, La Familia Michoacana, Los Tlacos, Los Rojos, Cártel Independiente de Acapulco, Cártel Santa Rosa de Lima and La Unión. These groups are not only involved in drug trafficking,



Africa. In particular, from the ports of West Africa, the cartels diversify the route and then send the shipments to European countries

via the Sahel route. Other shipments of cocaine by container leaving the Pacific ports of Mazatlan and Manzanillo cross the Strait of Panama bound for Western markets.

Recently, the main cartels have also relocated their cocaine storage facilities to other Central American countries (Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador), which are

cocaine and synthetic drugs.

Mexican cartels, particularly the *Jalisco* cartel, have begun experimenting with coca cultivation in Mexico in an attempt to produce Mexican cocaine. Current information suggests that production is on a small scale and, above all, that the purity is much lower. Forensic analyses by the DEA show that Mexican coca leaves produce significantly less cocaine than the varieties grown in South America. However, the very fact that such a large-scale initiative has been undertaken, which had always been considered unlikely due to differences in soil, climate and altitude, demonstrates the dangerous dynamism of Mexican cartels, which will pose a significant challenge for law enforcement.

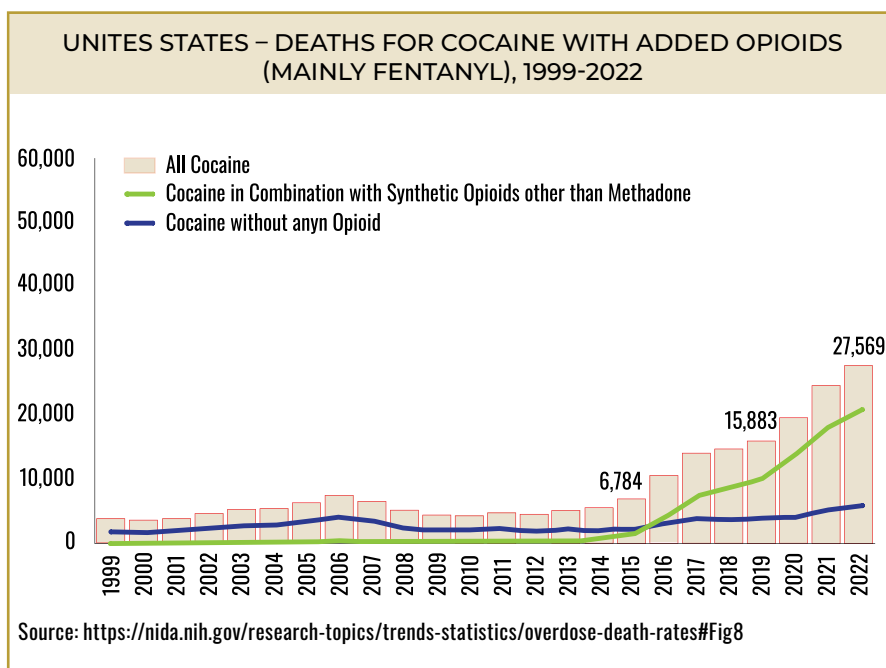
In terms of trafficking, some cocaine shipments are sent by container from the Atlantic ports of Veracruz, Matamoros and Tampico to those of Northern Europe, the Mediterranean or West

more easily accessible by sea, but above all by air, using small *avionetas* planes that can land on clandestine airstrips built on inaccessible terrain far from police controls. From there, the shipments enter Mexico by land and then continue on to the drug dealing markets in the United States and Canada.

Given the constant presence of Mexican cartel members in various Latin American countries, it can be said that Mexican organisations have taken on the role of global *brokers* for cocaine produced in the Andean countries (Colombia, Peru and Bolivia) and destined for global illicit markets. There are various sources reporting of Mexican cartel members operating in some European countries (Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium). Italy does not yet have a consolidated and organised presence of Mexican crime⁴¹.

⁴¹ Europol/DEA, Complexities and Conveniences in the International Trade: the involvement of Mexican criminal groups in the EU drug market, December 2022, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/>

but also in arms and human trafficking, fuel theft, extortion, murder and money laundering.



In the US, the trends in annual cocaine seizures and deaths go in opposite directions: while the quantities of cocaine seized are decreasing, deaths from acute intoxication are increasing, although since 2015 at least two-thirds of cocaine-related deaths have been caused by the unwitting consumption of a mixture with other dangerous substances, such as fentanyl⁴².

The cocaine *business*, as already mentioned,

is expanding and now extends to Africa and Asia.

The growing involvement of **Africa**⁴³, which is now a crucial transit hub to Europe, is justified by its strategic position and the political instability of many countries, particularly those bordering the Atlantic, whose ports lend themselves to receiving contaminated containers and subsequent shipment to Europe. No more direct journeys between South America and Europe are taking place: the 'African route' involves cocaine being sorted in ports in the Gulf of Guinea and West Africa, then transported by land to the Maghreb countries, from where, once sorted onto fishing boats, it reaches the southern coasts of the EU.

Between January 2019 and June 2024, at least 126.4 tonnes of cocaine were seized in West Africa, mainly in the international waters of the Gulf of Guinea (30.8 tonnes), Cape Verde (18.2 tonnes), Senegal (15.7 tonnes) and Guinea (5.6 tonnes). Cocaine, which

The United States remains the world's largest market for cocaine. The Mexican cartels of *Sinaloa* and *Jalisco* control to a large extent the cocaine trafficking corridors from the places of production to Mexico and on to the United States, through a network of routes. Once in the United States, criminal groups and street gangs are responsible for distributing or converting cocaine into crack.

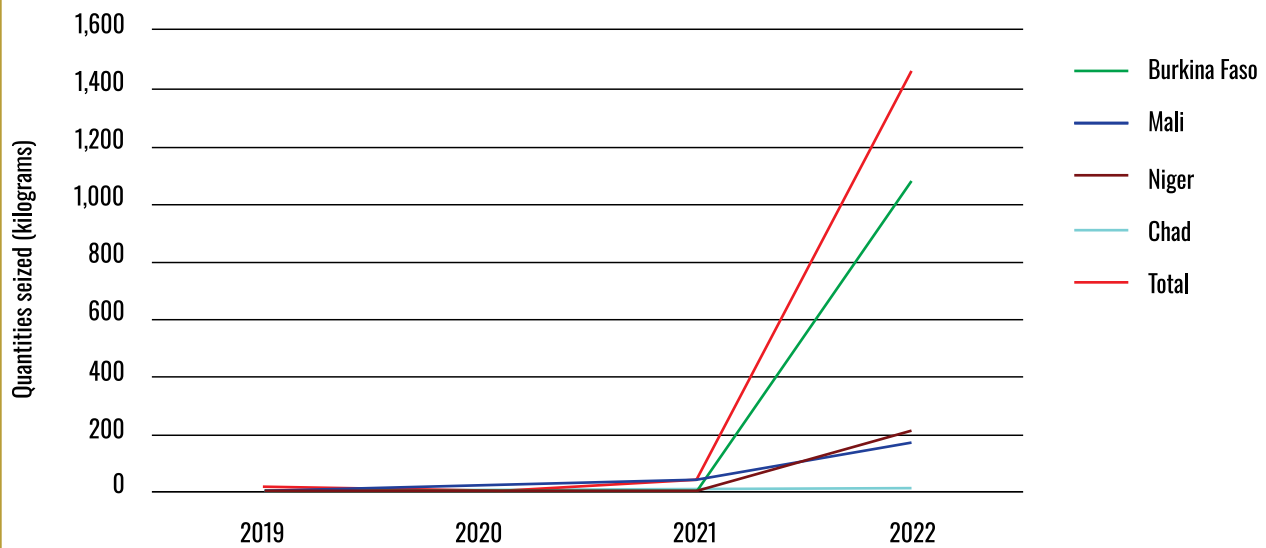
Despite the still very limited introduction of Mexican-produced cocaine, Colombia remains the main country of origin of cocaine seized in the United States.

According to the *Cocaine Signature Programme* (CSP) of the DEA's *Special Testing and Research Laboratory*, which conducts an analysis of cocaine samples obtained from seizures throughout the United States, in 2022 at least 97% of the samples analysed came from Colombia, while the remaining 3% was produced in Peru and Bolivia. According to the CSP, cocaine purity levels in the United States remained high, with an average of 84%.

42 Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), National Drug Threat Assessment 2024.

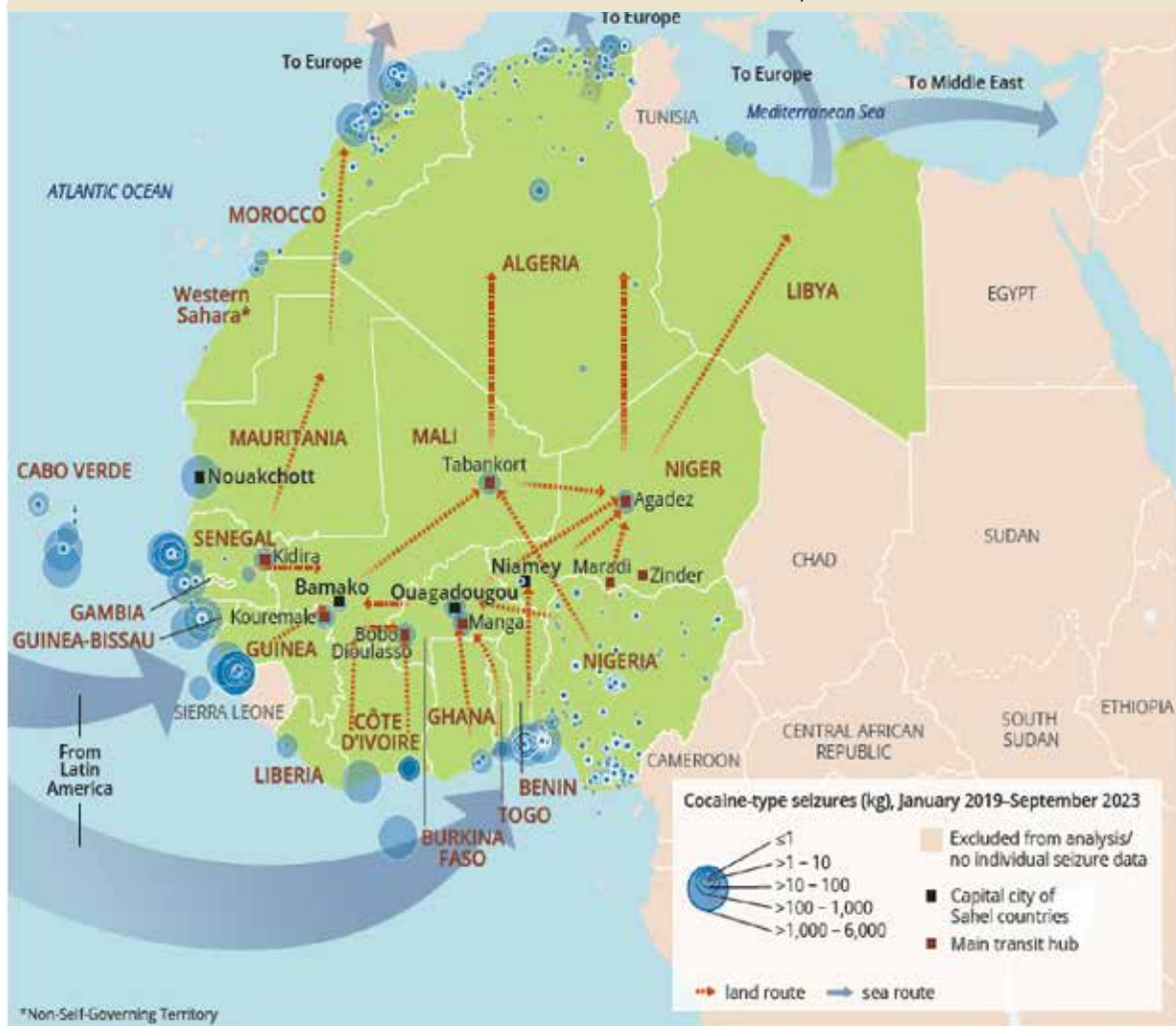
43 UNODC, WDR 2024, cit.

TREND OF COCAINE SEIZURES IN BURKINA FASO, CHAD, MALI AND NIGER, 2019-2022



Source: UNODC/TOCTA Sahel, pag.12

MAIN ROUTES OF COCAINE TRAFFICKING FROM AND TOWARDS THE SAHEL REGION AND COCAINE SEIZURES IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA, 2019-SEPTEMBER 2023



Source: UNODC/TOCTA Sahel

in the past only transited the region, is becoming increasingly widespread and the number of people undergoing rehabilitation programmes is on the rise⁴⁴.

The Ivory Coast, a transit country for cocaine coming from Brazilian ports (Santos in particular), is a place of shipment by air (using tabulators or in hold cargo) or by sea (again using contaminated containers). According to the Ivorian Anti-Drug Office, cocaine trafficking is mostly managed by Nigerian criminal groups, but also by affiliates of Italian organised crime, in particular the *'Ndrangheta* and the *Camorra*, for whose clans the country has, in fact, become a strategic logistics hub in which to manage the investment of profits, thanks to the absence of restrictive legislation in this regard.

Over the last ten years, there has been an increasing number of cocaine seizures in the so-called **Sahel countries**. Data on seizures in **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger** indicate that cocaine continues to be trafficked along land routes, specifically through the Sahel, towards Algeria, Libya and Morocco. In this region, there has been a shift from an average of 13 kg seized per year in the period 2015-2020 to 41 kg in 2021 and 1,466 kg in 2022, with most seizures occurring in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Annual estimates for 2023 are not yet available, although, for example, in June 2023, more than 2.3 tonnes of cocaine were seized off the coast of Mauritania⁴⁵.

However, the final destination markets are not always clear: some of those identified are simply additional transit points for subsequent cocaine shipments. Based on individual cocaine seizures in Sahel

countries between 2020 and October 2023, the main European destination country identified was **France**, followed by **Belgium**, while **Libya** appears to have been the main destination country in Africa⁴⁶.

According to United Nations sources, cocaine trafficking has also developed towards the East, i.e. **Asia**, over the last decade. Some Asian countries have seen a considerable increase in this phenomenon, with very large cocaine seizures, due to increased demand for the drug in some emerging markets in the region⁴⁷.

China and India are key to understanding the evolution of the cocaine market in Asia.

Although very little data is available on cocaine seizures in **China**, according to the Global Organised Crime Index, the country has become an important point for transshipment for the cocaine from Latin America and destined for Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand and other countries in the region. China is the world's largest hub for container handling, which facilitates access and low-cost transport of legal and illegal goods. The increase in drug seizures in Hong Kong, Macao and mainland China seems to confirm this trend⁴⁸. According to the Chinese authorities (*National Narcotics Control Commission - NNCC*), 2,600 kg of cocaine were seized in 2023, an increase of over 1,372% compared to 2022, when approximately 177 kg of cocaine were intercepted. The Hong Kong Police reported that in one case, the

44 UNODC, Press Release WDR 2024, 26 June 2024.

45 UNODC- TOCTA Sahel, Drug trafficking in the Sahel, 2024, p. 14.

46 UNODC- TOCTA Sahel, Drug trafficking in the Sahel, 2024, p. 17, cit.

47 UNODC, WDR 2024, Key findings and conclusions, pp. 20-21.

48 GITOC, OC Index 2023; <https://www.america-squarterly.org/article/why-drug-cartels-are-expanding-to-asia/>

“ORION” OPERATION: SEMI-SUMERSIBLE BOAT INTERCEPTED IN THE PACIFIC SEA HEADING TOWARDS THE COSTS OF AUSTRALIA



Source: BBC News, 28 novembre 2024

cocaine had arrived by ship from South America, left in containers equipped with GPS in territorial waters, and then recovered by small, fast boats. Cocaine arrives in the People's Republic of China mainly through the ports of Hong Kong, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Ningbo, mainly from South America, particularly Brazil, and Africa (Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Uganda). In addition, more than half of the cocaine seized in 2024 entering the People's Republic of China was found to originate in Europe (Amsterdam, Paris and London).

Cocaine smuggling has also developed in **India** in recent years: according to official data, cocaine seizures have increased exponentially and, although the numbers are not yet high, concerns are being raised from many sides.

The Indian police authorities (*Narcotics Control Bureau – NCB*) seized 292 kg in 2023 compared to 218 kg intercepted in 2022 (in 2018 it was only 35 kg), mainly at airports. Cocaine trafficking is mainly carried out by West African criminal organisations operating in the country. Cocaine is frequently concealed in liquid form⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ Narcotics Control Bureau, Annual Report 2023.

South Korea has also become an important hub for cocaine trafficking to China, Oceania and other parts of Asia. The port of Busan plays a key role in the arrival of cocaine from Latin America, given its crucial location in North-East Asia (sixth most important globally) in terms of the number of containers handled⁵⁰. In Australia, cocaine trafficking continued to expand in the period 2022-2023, as evidenced by numerous seizures and cocaine consumption levels, which are among the highest in the world. South American cocaine cartels are increasingly seeking to infiltrate what has been called the last frontier of the cocaine market. In December 2024, Australian police seized 2.3 tonnes of cocaine from an unidentified South American country, hidden aboard a damaged vessel off the coast of Queensland. The shipment, which has a market value of 760 million Australian dollars (over 462 million euros), corresponds to 11.7 million doses, the largest cocaine seizure in Australian history. The operation was carried out a month after the Colombian Navy, as part of Operation

⁵⁰ GITOC, OC Index 2023; <https://www.america-squarterly.org/article/why-drug-cartels-are-expanding-to-asia/>

Orion, intercepted a semi-submersible vessel in the Pacific Ocean in November 2024, which was heading towards the Australian coast with a large cargo of cocaine. According to the Colombian security forces, this demonstrates the existence of a new maritime route from Colombia to Australia⁵¹.

The European Union is the world's second largest market for cocaine, with consumption continuing to rise. Cocaine trafficking is controlled by powerful transnational criminal networks that operate through *brokers* and facilitators in a fluid and interconnected environment, which, however, generates violence, especially in the key access points for this substance. Numerous investigations show that coca paste and cocaine base are now also being trafficked in Europe. It is clear that **the final stages of cocaine production, with the transformation into cocaine hydrochloride, have been relocated to Europe, in clandestine laboratories**. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon.

It is likely that the difficulty in obtaining precursors for cocaine processing in Latin America, at a time of historic cocaine overproduction, has led cartels to transfer this phase to Europe, where these substances are easier to find. Furthermore, new methods for chemically concealing cocaine base in a wide variety of materials require extraction to be carried out in laboratories set up in Europe. Finally, controlling the final stages of the production process in Europe is economically more advantageous for drug traffickers.

Among other things, the importation of cocaine base into the EU is also responsible for the growth in the circulation of crack

cocaine, which is produced directly from cocaine base⁵².

In Western and Central Europe, the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp have consolidated their position as the main entry points for the large European cocaine market and, more recently, have overtaken the Iberian Peninsula as the primary hub for cocaine arrivals⁵³. These European cities are also experiencing rising levels of crime and violence as a result of increasingly fierce competition between criminal groups operating in the ports.

As one of the most involved criminal organisations, the Balkan cartel has gained increasing importance by placing its associates throughout the cocaine trafficking chain, from production sites and ports of departure to European ports of arrival.

Albanian groups are becoming increasingly important in the European criminal landscape, thanks to their brokering activities for the major criminal organisations involved.

After reaching record levels in 2022–2023, **cocaine seizures in Europe decreased significantly in 2024**⁵⁴. In 2022, for the sixth consecutive year, EU Member States seized a record amount of cocaine, totalling 323 tonnes (84,000 seizures), 6.6% more than the 303 tonnes seized in 2021. Belgium (111 tonnes), the Netherlands (51.5 tonnes) and Spain (58.3 tonnes) remained the countries with the highest seizure volumes (68% of the EU total), demonstrating their central role in this type of trafficking⁵⁵.

51 <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyrjng13jlo>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn4x78e-emmpo>

52 Europol/EMCDDA-EUDA, EU Drug Markets Analysis, 2024.

53 UNODC, Global Report on Cocaine 2023, p. 20.

54 GITOC, European Drug Trends Monitor, December 2024.

55 https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2024/cocaine_en#level-8

In 2023, the amount of cocaine seized in Antwerp alone increased for the seventh consecutive year, reaching 116 tonnes, and that seized in Rotterdam, according to journalistic sources, amounted to approximately 45 tonnes.

In 2024, the main points of entry for cocaine into Europe reported a sharp decline in seizures, with a 40% drop in the Netherlands (26 tonnes of cocaine were reportedly seized in Rotterdam), almost 50% in Belgium and 46.99% in Italy. German authorities also confirmed a decrease in the port of Hamburg⁵⁶. This decline could indicate a change in strategy by drug trafficking organisations, which are using new concealment methods to avoid the strengthened enforcement apparatus put in place by the police authorities, such as in the port of Rotterdam, where all containers from Latin America are now scanned⁵⁷. The port of Antwerp, the main gateway for cocaine into Belgium and one of the largest in Europe, also recorded a drastic reduction in cocaine seizures in 2024, with only 44 tonnes, compared to almost 122 tonnes in 2023.

Furthermore, a number of other indicators suggest that cocaine imports from producing countries to Europe are not slowing down. The quantities of cocaine produced, seizures made in 'countries of origin', retail prices and cocaine residues found in wastewater show that consumption and, therefore, international trafficking continue unabated.

56 <https://www.portseurope.com/almost-five-times-less-cocaine-seized-in-hamburg-port-in-2024/>. According to local media, approximately 5 tonnes of cocaine were seized in the German port of Hamburg in 2024, a significantly lower amount than the more than 34 tonnes seized in 2023. The same trend is observed in other German ports.

57 GITOC, European Drug Trends Monitor, December 2024, cit.

The decline in the volumes seized in **Belgium**⁵⁸, as in other EU countries, can be explained by the strategies used by criminal organisations, which are flexible by nature, to evade and circumvent controls: the fragmentation of shipments, with increasingly smaller quantities being sent; changes in the routes used; and chemical concealment within various materials. The use of cocaine processing has been confirmed by the discovery of several clandestine laboratories over the last five years, in particular in Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain⁵⁹. In December 2024, the Portuguese authorities also dismantled what was described as the largest cocaine laboratory ever discovered in **Portugal** and one of the largest in Europe. The facility, a disused warehouse near the capital, was run by locals, a Brazilian cell of the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* and Colombians, and was capable of producing up to 200 kg of cocaine per day, using the port of Leixões to receive large quantities of cocaine base paste. The increase in seizures of ethyl acetate, a substance used in the extraction cycle, is a further indicator of the growing use of chemical concealment of the drug⁶⁰.

58 <https://www.rtbef.be/article/moins-de-cocaine-saisie-en-belgique-les-criminels-dejouent-les-contrôles-11484111> Source: RTBF article dated 6 January 2025; <https://www.portseurope.com/two-third-less-cocaine-seized-in-antwerp-port-in-2024/> Antwerp, Belgium (Ports Europe) 9 January 2025 - The head of the Belgian customs agency, Kristian Vanderwaeren, said that almost two-thirds less cocaine was seized in the port of Antwerp in 2024 than in 2023. The improvement was attributed to more efficient controls on containerised cargo in Latin America.

59 EUDA, European Drug Report 2024, Trends and developments, last updated June 2024, cited; <https://www.rtbef.be/article/moins-de-cocaine-saisie-en-belgique-les-criminels-dejouent-les-contrôles-11484111>

60 Source: EUDA. <https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2024/>

Another aspect to consider is the use of indirect sea routes involving different geographical areas and less controlled ports. In this regard, some Northern European countries, including **Sweden** and **Norway**, reported record cocaine seizures in seaports in 2023, suggesting that all points of entry into the European Union have now become vulnerable⁶¹.

In other cases, cocaine is thrown into the open sea from 'mother ships' in what is known as a 'drop-off', and fishing boats or pleasure craft then recover it, avoiding any customs controls.

Seizures in **Spain** amounted to 67 tonnes in 2024, with two major operations: one conducted in February 2024, with 7,890 kg of cocaine from Suriname, and one in November 2024 in Algeciras, with 13,065 kg of cocaine from Ecuador. However, the quantity is decreasing compared to the 90.30 tonnes in 2023. Recently, it has been observed that the Canary Islands are the Atlantic gateway and storage place for cocaine bound for other Spanish destinations⁶².

France, on the other hand, seems to be bucking the trend, with 47 tonnes of cocaine seized in 2024, a record high: in 2023, the figure was 23 tonnes, representing a tenfold increase in cocaine seizures over the last ten years. In 2024 alone, the port of Le Havre was the scene of record seizures with 13 tonnes of cocaine intercepted, representing 78% of port seizures in the country⁶³.

drug-supply-production-and-precursors_en#-level-4-section2

61 EUDA, European Drug Report 2024, Trends and developments, last update in June 2024.

62 E.S. DCSA in Madrid, Spain Annual Report 2024, February 2025.

63 <https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/societe/drogue-47-tonnes-de-cocaine-saisies-en-2024-en-france-annonce-bruno-retailleau-depuis-le-havre-6043840>; <https://www.portseurope.com/historic-milestone-47-tons-of-cocaine->

Cocaine continues to be one of the most widely used drugs in **Italy**. The current situation highlights a growing phenomenon of consumption linked to various socio-cultural, economic and geographical factors. From a geographical point of view, Italy, given its location, is one of the main destinations and transit routes for cocaine trafficking in Europe. Cocaine trafficking in Italy is supported by powerful criminal organisations, in particular the long-established and well-known '*Ndrangheta*, *Camorra* and *Cosa Nostra*, which play a leading role, working closely with *South American cartels* and, above all, with *Albanian groups*.

we-re-seized-in-france-in-2024/; <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-cocaine-seizures-more-than-double-2024-new-campaign-targets-users-2025-02-06/>

The fight against cocaine in Italy

A comparative analysis of the past two years shows an overall decrease of more than 8 tonnes of cocaine seized in Italy. The decrease seems to be attributable to circumstantial factors or rather to new methods adopted by criminals in order to reduce the risks of seizure and ensure that only part of the original shipment is confiscated. In fact, the number of seizures in 2024 in the 1 to 100 kg weight range increased by 13.72% (456 seizures compared to 401 in 2023). However, if we consider the quantities seized each time, they are smaller than in the past.

It is therefore possible that criminal organisations, with the involvement of port workers in cases of *'rip-on/rip-off'*, have fragmented large loads, affecting and contaminating a higher number of containers, which therefore leave the port with smaller quantities of narcotic substances.

From another perspective, the larger seizures recorded in the ports of Catania, Genoa and Livorno, as well as in Gioia Tauro (RC), indicate that the choice of seaport is independent of the criminal area of interest and the territory controlled by the criminal organisation, but is based on the connections that the latter can guarantee, even abroad, as well as the logistical, control and management capabilities of freight transport companies, not only by sea. Moving on to the examination of the data, in 2024, the volume of action taken by the Italian police forces, also in collaboration with foreign police forces, to combat the illegal trade in cocaine increased, compared to 2023, in terms of completed judicial police operations, 9,502 (+10.26%), and persons reported to the judicial authorities, 14,507 (+8.16%), of which 10,907 were arrested (+10.80%).



This was not the case, however, for the quantities of cocaine seized, which were down, as already mentioned in the phenomenological analysis: 11,082.17 kg (-44.11%), compared to 19,830.23 kg in 2023, and 1,486 doses seized, compared to 2,854 doses in 2023.

This confirms the hypothesis that criminal organisations have taken the necessary precautions to avoid having large quantities of drugs concentrated in a few shipments seized, preferring to divide the quantities into several smaller shipments in order to reduce the likelihood of being intercepted and, at the same time, limit 'losses' in the event of seizure. This mechanism has higher organisational and logistical costs, but reduces the risks.

Among those referred to the judicial authorities for offences related to cocaine, foreigners accounted for 40.80% (5,919) of

the total number of reports (14,507). Over two-thirds of the foreigners reported were arrested (4,226, equal to 71.40% of the total number of people reported), accounting for 38.75% of the total number of people arrested of any nationality (10,907) and 29.13% of the total number of people reported of any nationality.

The most common nationalities other than Italian were Albanian, Moroccan, Tunisian, Egyptian and Senegalese.

Almost all of those reported were male: 13,302 men (91.70%) compared to 1,205 women (8.30%).

Those reported for cocaine-related offences were mostly adults, while minors accounted for only 2.07% (300); of the latter, 138 (46%) were foreign nationals, particularly Tunisian, Senegalese, Moroccan and Egyptian.

SEPTEMBER 2024 - 540 KG OF COCAINE SEIZED, ARREST OF 5 MEMBERS OF A FISHING BOAT CREW INTERCEPTED IN THE TERRITORIAL WATERS BETWEEN CATANIA AND RAGUSA WHILE RETRIEVING VARIOUS FLOATING PACKAGES



The highest percentage (31.63%) of those reported to the judicial authorities were aged 40 or over, while the lowest percentage (0.03%) were under 15 years of age.

85.67% of reports concerned cocaine trafficking/dealing and 14.33% concerned criminal association for the purpose of

cocaine trafficking.

The most significant seizures in terms of quantity took place in the ports of Gioia Tauro in March (1,071.77 kg) and October (460.52 kg), and in Catania in September (499.60 kg).

Cocaine was most often found concealed

SUMMARY TABLE - COCAINE

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Var.% 23-24
Operations	7,839	7,971	7,540	8,618	9,502	10.26
Seizures						
doses	2,022	2,348	2,046	2,745	2,854	-47.93
kg	13,597.39	21,392.08	26,294.18	19,830.23	11,082.17	-44.11
Person reported to the J.A.	13,243	13,571	12,300	13,412	14,507	8.16
Italians	8,608	9,116	7,868	8,567	8,588	0.25
Foreigners of whom:	4,635	4,455	4,432	4,845	5,919	22.17
Albanians	1,335	1,128	1,212	1,268	1,585	25.00
Moroccans	1,350	1,236	1,148	1,333	1,544	15.83
Tunisians	445	515	633	636	943	48.27
Egyptians	94	107	132	193	265	37.31
Senegalese	236	186	185	194	240	23.71
Males	12,053	12,332	11,191	12,287	13,302	8.26
Females	1,190	1,239	1,109	1,125	1,205	7.11
Of age	13,084	13,392	12,094	13,147	14,207	8.06
Minors	159	179	206	265	300	13.21
Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	11,555	11,517	10,426	11,492	12,429	8.15
Conspiracy to traffick (Art. 74)	1,687	2,053	1,874	1,918	2,078	8.34
Other offences	1	1	-	2	-	-100.00
Arrested	9,487	9,828	8,940	9,844	10,907	10.80
Reported but not arrested	3,580	3,607	3,232	3,433	3,488	1.60
At large	176	136	128	135	112	-17.04
< 15	7	3	9	6	5	-16.67
15-19	564	596	639	828	1,023	23.55
20-24	1,907	1,806	1,912	2,119	2,493	17.65
25-29	2,343	2,248	2,044	2,246	2,317	3.16
30-34	2,224	2,328	1,988	2,086	2,196	5.27
35-39	1,899	1,862	1,553	1,701	1,884	10.76
> 40	4,299	4,728	4,155	4,426	4,589	3.68

on persons (2,943 cases) and in homes (1,125 cases), less frequently in vehicles (587 cases), *in corpore* (48 cases) and in containers (41 cases).

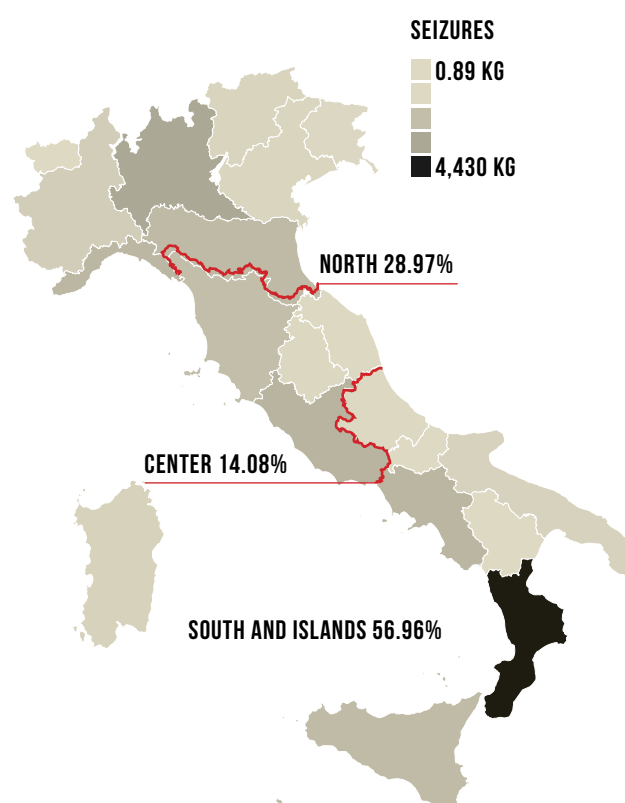
Looking at the macro-areas, 28.97% of seizures were made in Northern Italy, 14.08% in Central Italy and 56.96% in Southern Italy and the Islands.

The regions with the largest quantities of cocaine seized were Calabria, Lombardy and Lazio, while those with the smallest

quantities were Valle d'Aosta, Molise and Basilicata. In percentage terms, however, the most significant increases in the quantity of drugs seized, compared to 2023, were recorded in Friuli Venezia Giulia (+433.78%), Piedmont (+177.13%) and Basilicata (+124.80%), while the largest decreases were observed in Veneto, Sicily and Valle d'Aosta (with fluctuations ranging from approximately 92% to 86% less). In 2024, no seizures were made in international waters, unlike in 2023.

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SEIZURES - COCAINE

Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	148.92	22.49	-84.90
Basilicata	2.87	6.46	124.80
Calabria	4,992.07	4,429.59	-11.27
Campania	893.00	818.39	-8.35
Emilia Romagna	342.83	728.84	112.59
Friuli V. G.	6.38	34.05	433.78
Lazio	808.59	860.37	6.40
Liguria	2,046.99	795.64	-61.13
Lombardy	693.06	1,156.48	66.86
Marche	13.58	17.04	25.49
Molise	1.02	1.50	47.11
Piedmont	103.37	286.47	177.13
Apulia	142.61	160.16	12.31
Sardinia	114.73	169.35	47.61
Sicily	5,644.02	704.19	-87.52
Tuscany	746.39	638.05	-14.52
Trentino A. A.	61.73	111.70	80.97
Umbria	24.28	44.61	83.73
Valle d'Aosta	6.13	0.86	-86.04
Veneto	1,119.59	95.94	-91.43
Regional total	17,912.17	11,082.17	-38.13
International waters	1,918.06	-	-100.00
National total	19,830.23	11,082.17	-44.11



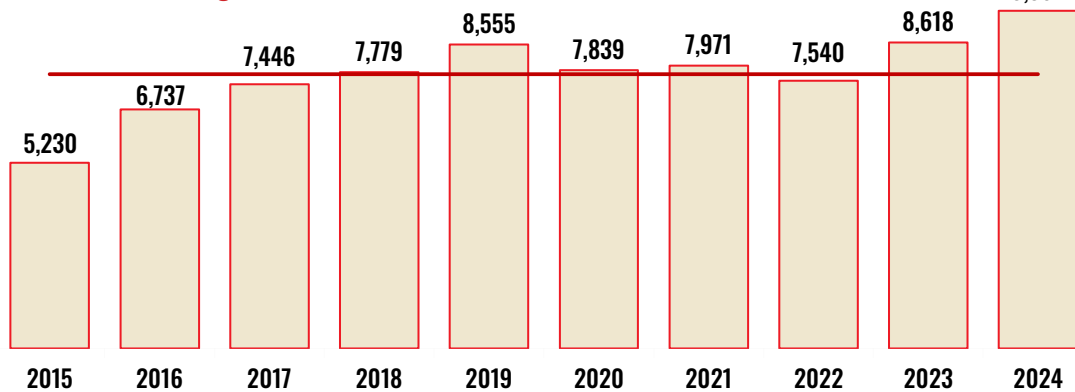
The focus on the ten-year series shows that the average annual number of anti-drug operations in which cocaine was the main narcotic substance was just over 7,700, reaching a peak in 2024 (9,502 operations) and a low in 2015 (5,230). As far as seizures are concerned, until 2019 the

annual average was just under 5 tonnes of cocaine, after which the trend grew steadily, exceeding 26 tonnes in 2022.

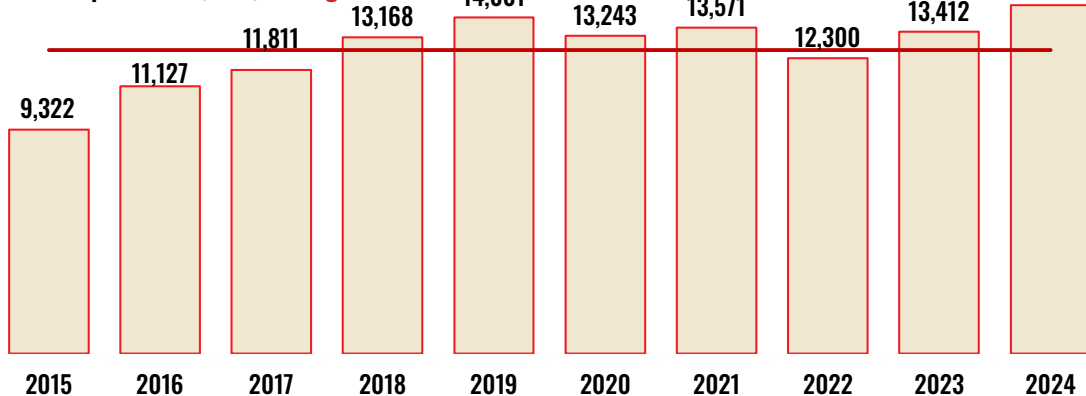
An average of over 12,000 cases were reported to the judicial authorities each year, with the lowest figure in 2015 (9,322) and the highest in 2024 (14,507).

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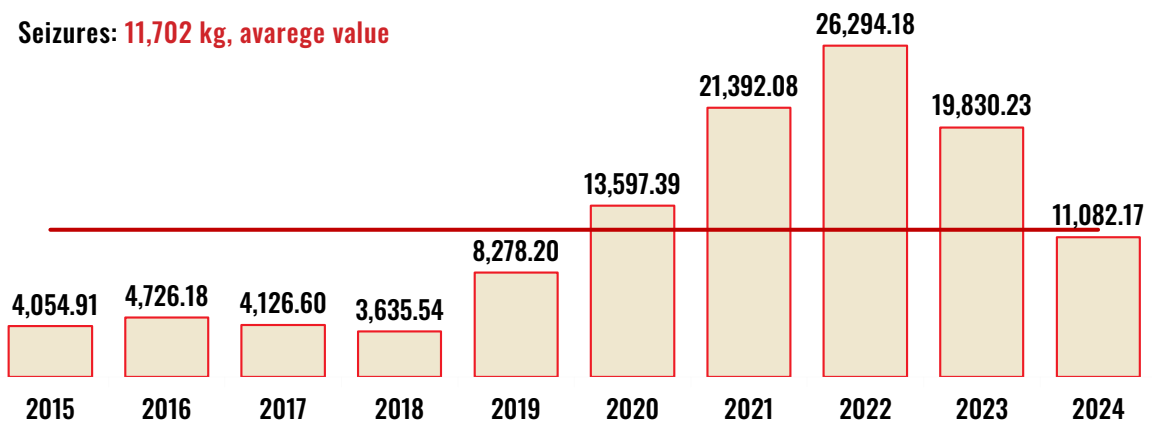
Operations: 7,722, average value



Persons reported: 12,646, average value



Seizures: 11,702 kg, average value





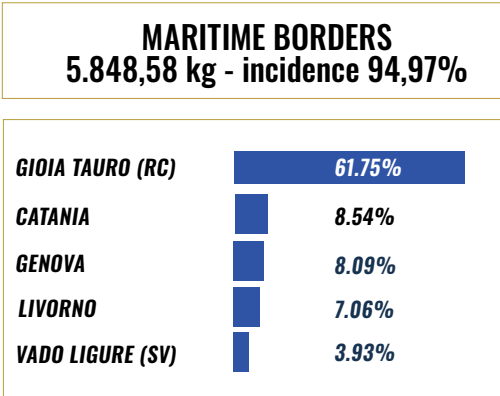
Flussi di cocaina verso l'Italia: i sequestri frontalieri

In 2024, border seizures of cocaine (6,158.89 kg) accounted for 55.57% of total seizures of the same substance on national territory (11,082.17 kg), down from 81.73% in 2023. However, the quantities seized also fell: -61.99% compared to 2023 (16,205.25 kg).

Cocaine originating from South America entered almost entirely by sea (94.96% of the quantities seized), with a residual amount arriving by air (4.73%) and land (0.31%).

The **maritime border**, with 5,849 kg, remained the operational scenario where the largest overall quantities of cocaine were intercepted, although there was a decrease of 63.41% compared to the previous year.

The major incidence of seizures at maritime border crossings occurred in the port of Gioia Tauro (61.75%, equal to 3,611.70 kg), followed by the port of Catania (8.54%, 499.60 kg) and Genoa (8.09%, 473.05 kg).



Over the last ten years, the port of Gioia Tauro, after the record set in 2022 with more than 16 tonnes of cocaine intercepted, has seen a decrease in the annual quantity of drugs seized.

This was not the case for the port of Catania, which in 2024 set a ten-year record (499.60 kg). The port of Genoa also had its second highest figure (473.05 kg) of the decade in 2024, after the exploit of 2019 with over 3 tonnes.

AIR BORDERS 291.35 kg - incidence 4.73%

MALPENSA (VA)	44.05%
FIUMICINO (RM)	27.26%
LINATE (MI)	13.02%
TORINO	5.53%
FIRENZE	5.23%

Other ports involved in anti-drug activities were: Livorno, in fourth place in 2024 (the largest seizure in terms of quantity was in 2019, with 413.09 kg), and Vado Ligure (SV), which, however, saw the amount of cocaine intercepted in 2024 halved compared to 2023.

In operations carried out in 2024 at sea borders, a total of 34 people were referred to the authorities, mainly Italians (20) and Albanians (11).

Cocaine seizures at the **air border** resulted in a total of 291.35 kg being intercepted, an increase of +123.24% compared to 2023 (130.51 kg).

The Italian airport where the largest quantities of cocaine were seized was Malpensa (VA) with 128.34 kg (44.05%), followed by Leonardo Da Vinci in Fiumicino (RM) with 79.42 kg (27.26%) and Linate (MI) with 37.94 kg (13.02%). These three airports accounted for 84.33% of the total cocaine seized at Italian airports.

The countries from which the largest quantity of cocaine arrived by air in 2024 (74.41% of the total seized in Italy) were Peru (76.66 kg), Brazil (75.01 kg) and the Dominican Republic (65.14 kg).

The ten-year series of the main airports involved in cocaine trafficking shows an annual average of 90 kg for Fiumicino, 85 kg for Malpensa and 15 kg for Linate.

LAND BORDERS 18.96 kg - incidence 0.31%

Frejus (TO) road tunnel	89.66%
Railway crossing border of Domodossola (VB)	3.27%
Road border crossing of San Pietro Clivio (VA)	2.95%
Road border crossing of Brogeda (CO)	2.79%

Compared to these averages, 2024 saw a decline for Fiumicino airport (79.42 kg) and well above average for Malpensa and Linate.

In 2024, 86 people were reported at airports, most of them foreigners, particularly Peruvians (25) and Brazilians (20).

In 2024, 18.96 kg of cocaine were seized at **land borders**, -78.78% compared to 2023 (89.36 kg).

The largest seizures were made at the Frejus Pass (TO) with 17 kg (equal to 89.66% of seizures made at national land borders), while amounts of less than one kilogram were recorded at the Domodossola (VB) railway border crossing and the San Pietro Clivio (VA) and Brogeda (CO) road border crossings.

It should be noted that no cocaine seizures were made at the Vipiteno (BZ) motorway barrier crossing, compared to an annual average of 45.39 kg.

A similar fate (no cocaine seizures) befell the Mont Blanc Tunnel (AO) border crossing in 2024, with an annual average of 6.75 kg and a peak of 28.08 kg in 2020, and the Ventimiglia (IM) Autofiori border crossing, with an annual average of 10.17 kg.

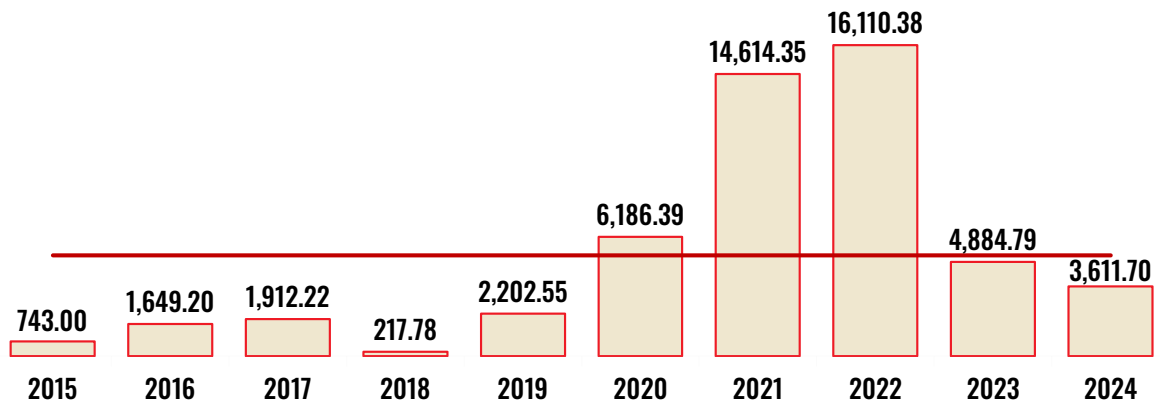
The Frejus Pass (TO), on the other hand, with an annual average of 9 kg (maximum

peak of 46.42 kg in 2015), recorded the highest amount of all land borders, almost doubling its annual average (17 kg).

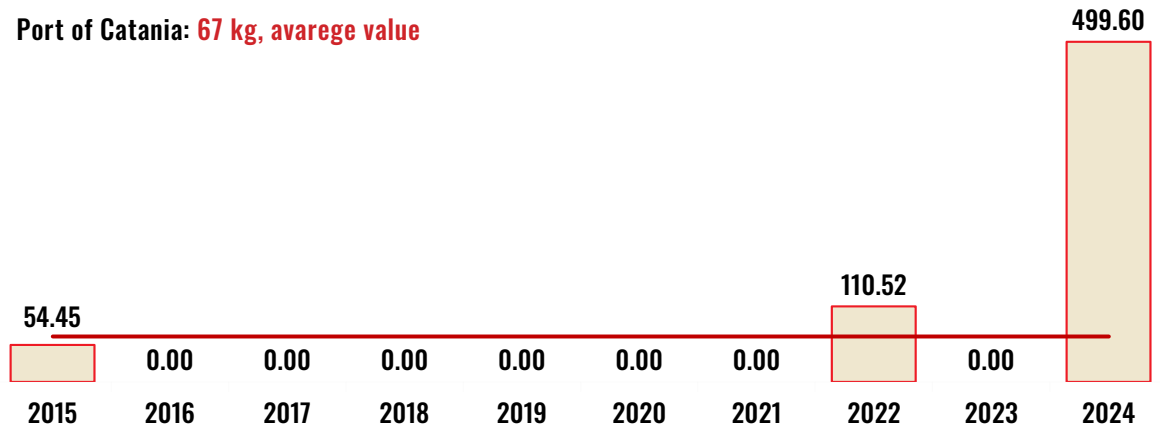
At Italian land borders, 10 people were reported for drug-related offences, mainly Dominicans (3) and Dutch (2).

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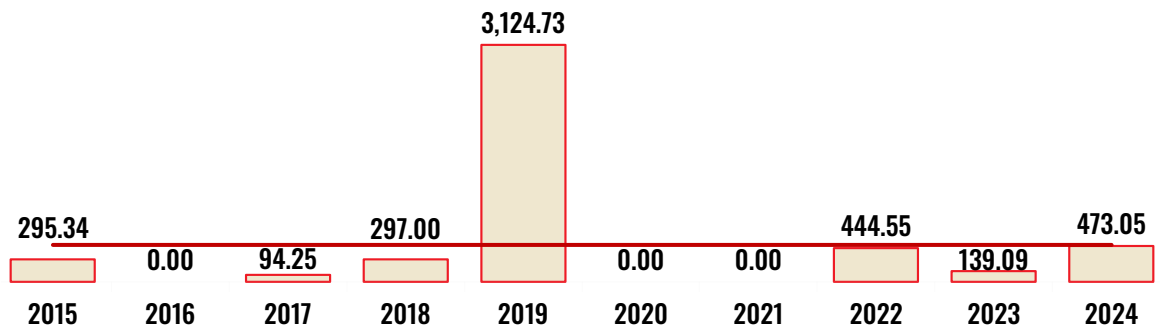
Port of Gioia Tauro (RC): 5,213 kg, average value

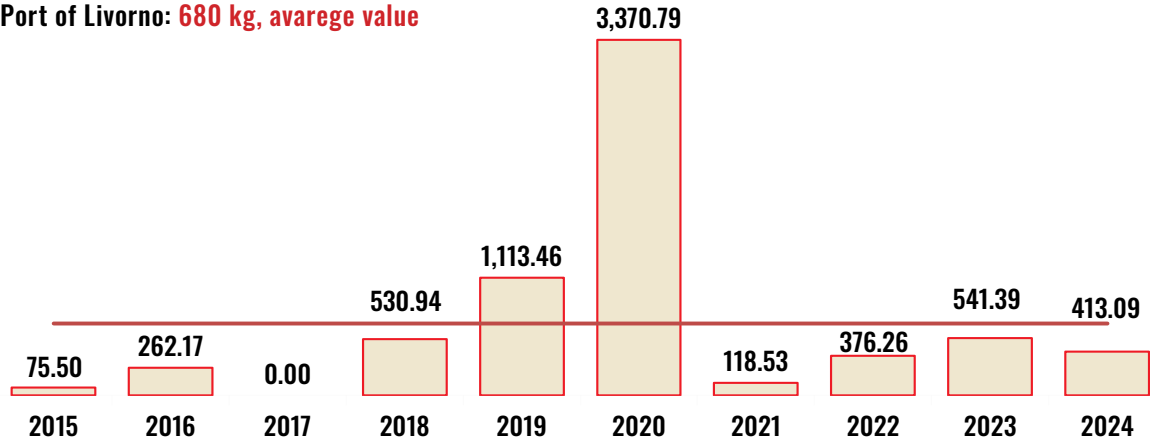
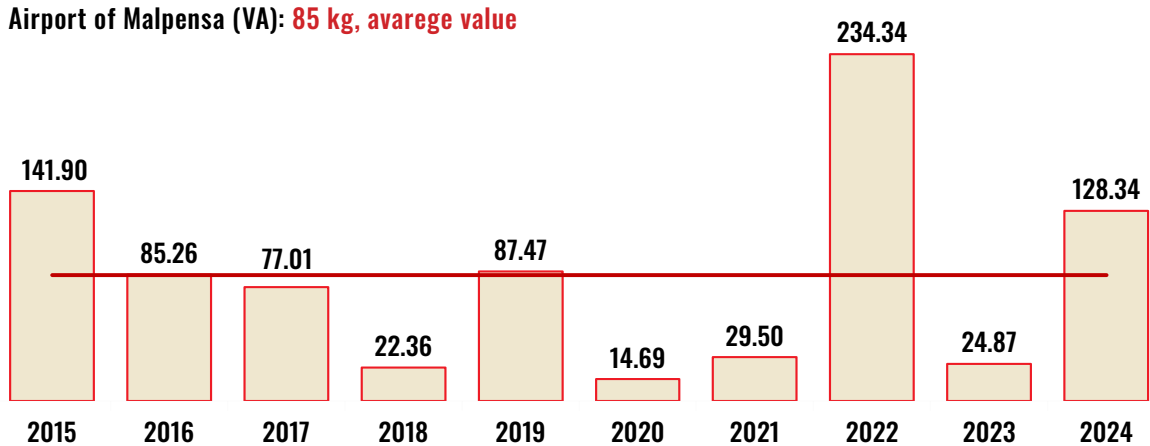
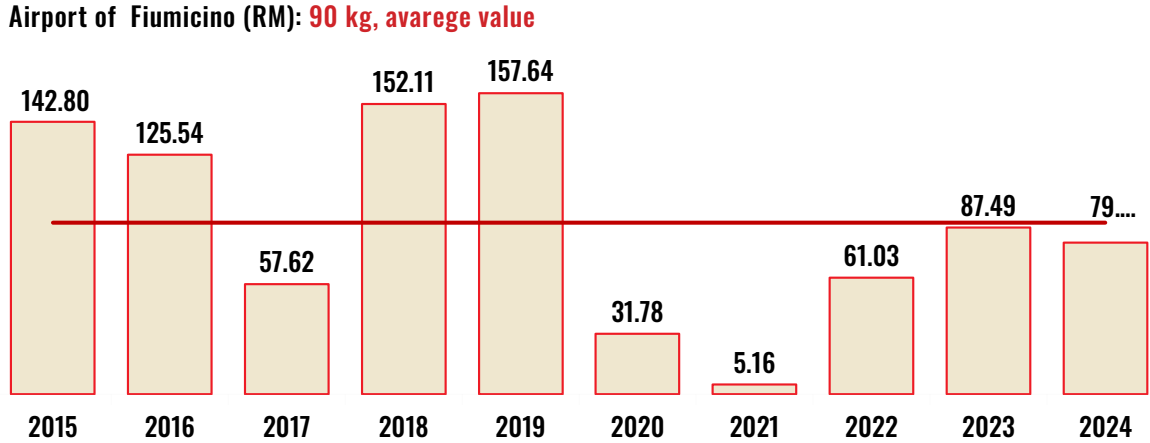
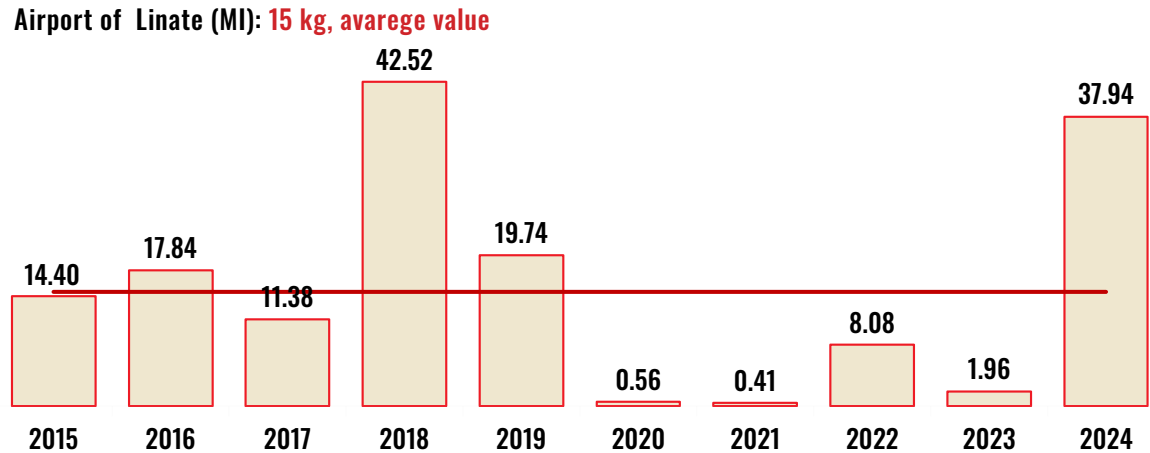


Port of Catania: 67 kg, average value



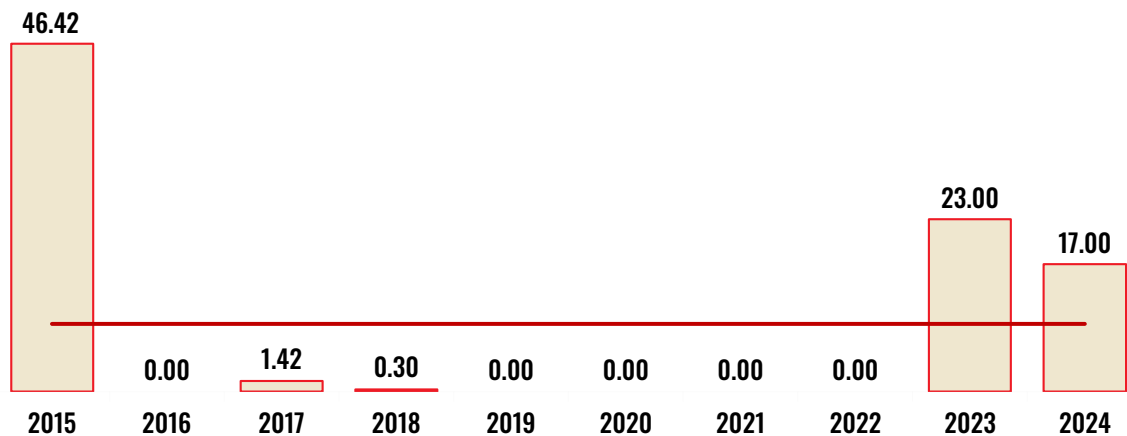
Port of Genoa: 487 kg, average value



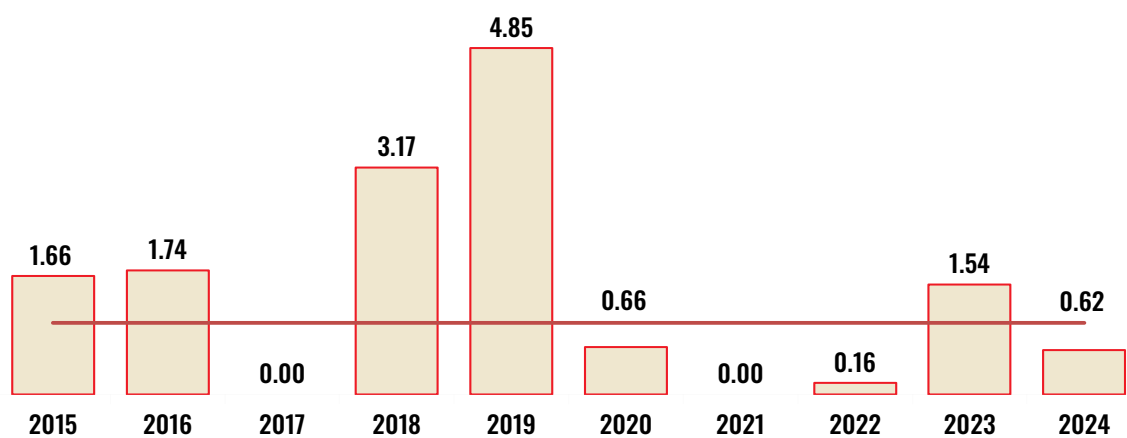
Port of Livorno: 680 kg, avarege value**Airport of Malpensa (VA): 85 kg, avarege value****Airport of Fiumicino (RM): 90 kg, avarege value****Airport of Linate (MI): 15 kg, avarege value**

TEN YEAR TREND

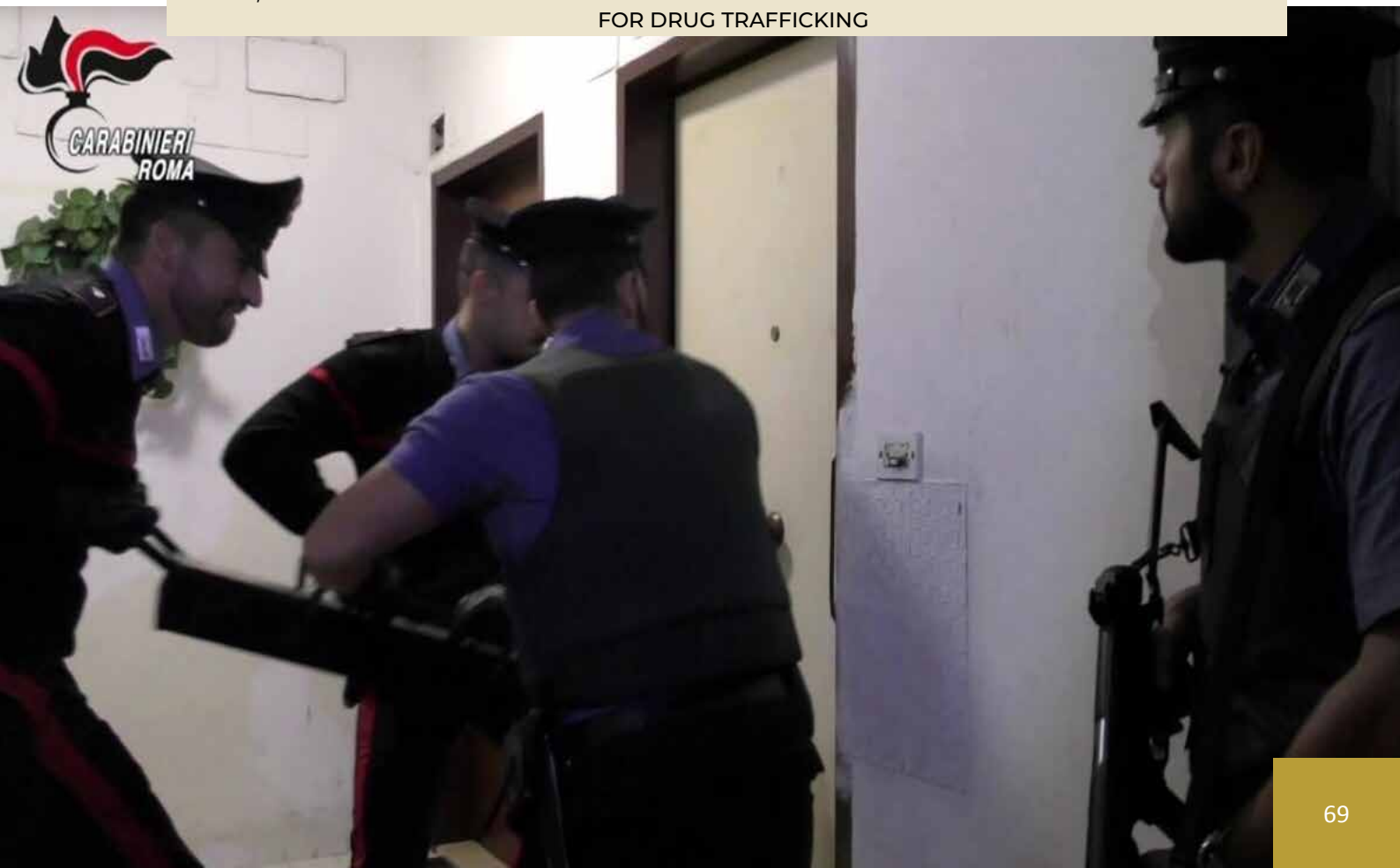
Frejus (TO) Road Tunnel: 9 kg, avarege value



Railway crossing border of Domodossola (VB): 1 kg, avarege value



ROME, JUNE 2024 – DRUG BUST: MORE THAN 1 KG OF COCAINE SEIZED AND 14 PERSONS ARRESTED FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING



04. HEROIN

Introduction

Heroin remains the main opiate used in Europe and contributes significantly to the harm caused by the use of narcotic substances in the European Union. The problem of opiate use is evolving, influenced by geopolitical developments. Political changes in Afghanistan, for years the main producer of heroin, have significantly altered the market. Data for 2023 show a sharp decline in opium poppy cultivation and heroin production, suggesting that the ban on drugs announced by the Taliban in April 2022 has indeed taken effect.

The risk that other drugs, including powerful synthetic opioids, will replace heroin on the market, with far-reaching negative consequences for public health and safety, is therefore being given particular consideration⁶⁴.

As regards heroin entering the European Union, the decrease in quantities seized in recent years would seem to support the hypothesis of a possible 'replacement' of heroin with other substances, including synthetic ones.

In fact, heroin flows into **Europe** decreased in 2022, with a 16% drop in quantities seized in Member States, for a total of 19,000 seizures amounting to 8 tonnes, compared to 9.5 tonnes in 2021. Turkey, on the other hand, alone seized over 8 tonnes of heroin in 2022 (-64% compared to 22.2 tonnes in 2021)⁶⁵.

In 2022, however, two heroin production sites were dismantled in the Netherlands (three in 2021), while a total of 141 litres of

acetic anhydride, a precursor necessary for heroin production, were seized by Germany, Spain and Poland (5,730 litres in 2021)⁶⁶.

However, further confirmation is needed in the near future before we can say that demand for heroin in Europe is falling.

As regards the methods of entry, large shipments of heroin arrive in the **European Union** through various points of entry, given the fluidity of trafficking routes and the diversity of methods of transport and concealment.

Heroin trafficking into the EU increasingly relies on **maritime routes**, particularly global container traffic and ferries departing from Turkey.

These methods allow large quantities of heroin to be transported in single shipments to sorting and transshipment centres, which conceal the origin and nature of suspicious shipments.

Heroin trafficked **by land** is usually concealed in cavities created in vehicles or among goods within legal cargo. Although it is typically transported in powder form, traffickers also dissolve heroin in liquids to better conceal it and minimise the risk of detection. In contrast, heroin transported **by air**, although in smaller quantities than other modes of transport, is carried by couriers travelling on commercial flights mainly from African countries, concealing the narcotic in their luggage or *in corpore*.

Another method used to smuggle heroin into the EU is through **postal shipments** from Africa (in 55% of cases, the origin was South Africa, followed by Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania)

⁶⁴ EMCDDA/Europol, EU Drug Markets Analysis 2024: Key insights for policy and practice, p. 22.

⁶⁵ EMCDDA, European Drug Report 2024: trends and developments. <https://emcdda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2024..>

⁶⁶ EMCDDA, European Drug Report 2024: trends and developments, p. 37, cit.

and the Middle East (Oman and the United Arab Emirates).

The routes of heroin: from producing countries to the consumption ones

There are four routes commonly used for trafficking heroin from **Afghanistan** to **Europe**, sometimes in combination with each other:

- **the Balkan route:** historically the main route for trafficking to Europe from Afghanistan, through Pakistan and Iran, to Turkey and then through Bulgaria, Greece or the Mediterranean Sea;
- **the southern route:** through Iran or Pakistan, transiting the coast of East Africa or the Arabian Peninsula, to Europe by land or sea;
- **the Caucasus route:** from Afghanistan, through Iran, to Armenia or Azerbaijan, to Georgia and then, across the Black Sea, to Bulgaria, Romania or Ukraine;
- **the northern route:** from Afghanistan to Tajikistan and then, through Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan, to Kazakhstan and Russia. Geopolitical issues such as the Russian-Ukrainian war have had an impact on this route, limiting flows in favour of other segments considered safer.

Trafficking is mainly controlled by Turkish, Moroccan, Nigerian and Albanian organisations. Drug dealing in Europe is mainly managed by *Maghreb, Nigerian and Albanian criminal groups*, as well as by *local criminal gangs*. These criminal organisations collaborate with suppliers operating in the main production region and with *partners* in the main

distribution *hubs* in the European Union, using legally established companies that have been acquired or infiltrated along the trafficking routes⁶⁷.

Until 2022, over 80% of global opium production was concentrated in Afghanistan⁶⁸ and from there was directed to markets in neighbouring countries in the Near and Middle East, South Asia, Europe and Africa. The remaining production was located in the countries of the 'Golden Triangle' (Myanmar – formerly Burma – Thailand and Laos), as well as in Iran, Pakistan, Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala.

The heroin produced from opium in the "**Golden Triangle**" was and continues to be destined for markets in East and South-East Asia and Oceania, while the markets in the United States and South America were and continue to be supplied by heroin produced from Mexican, Colombian and Guatemalan opium.

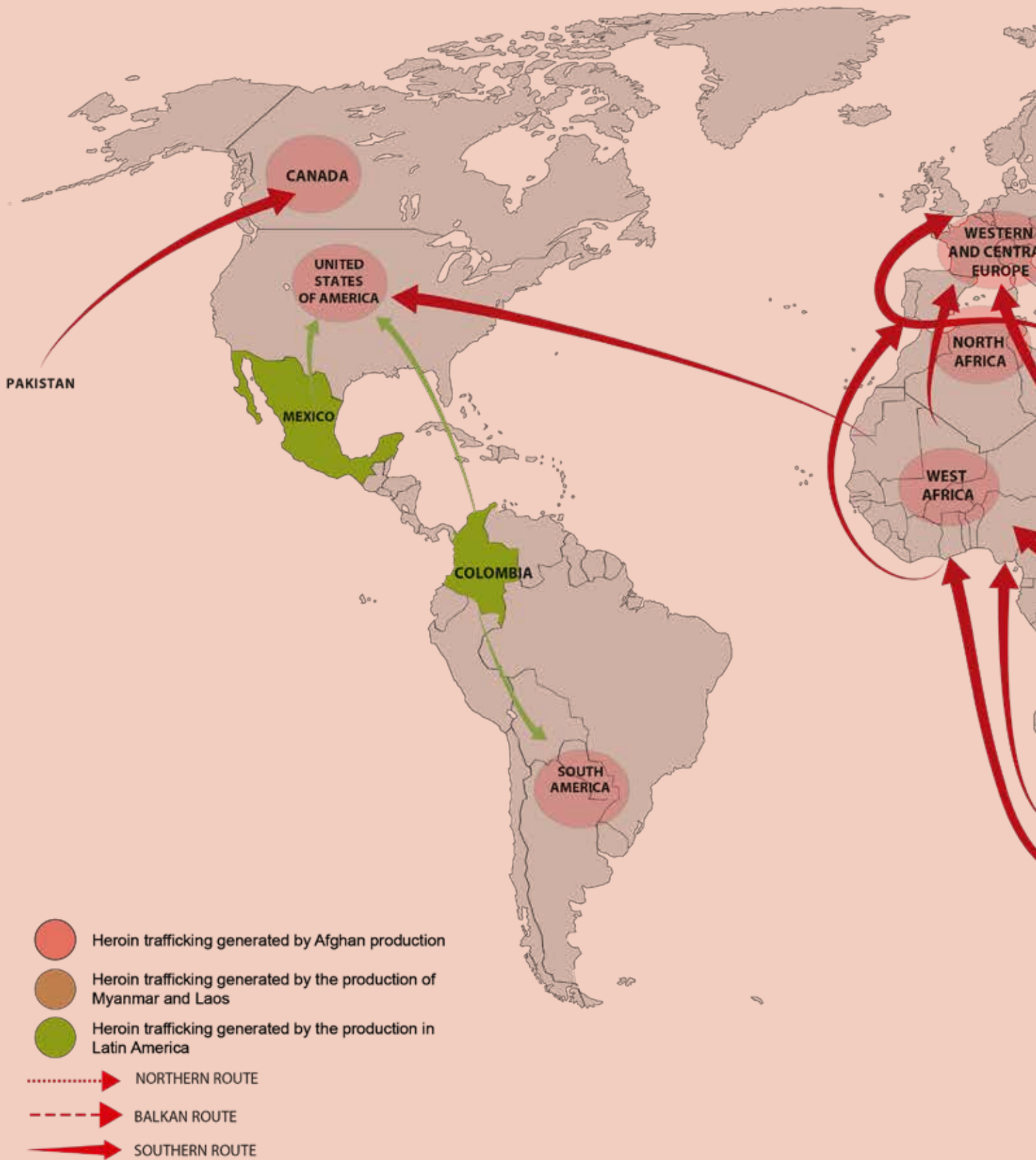
Afghanistan

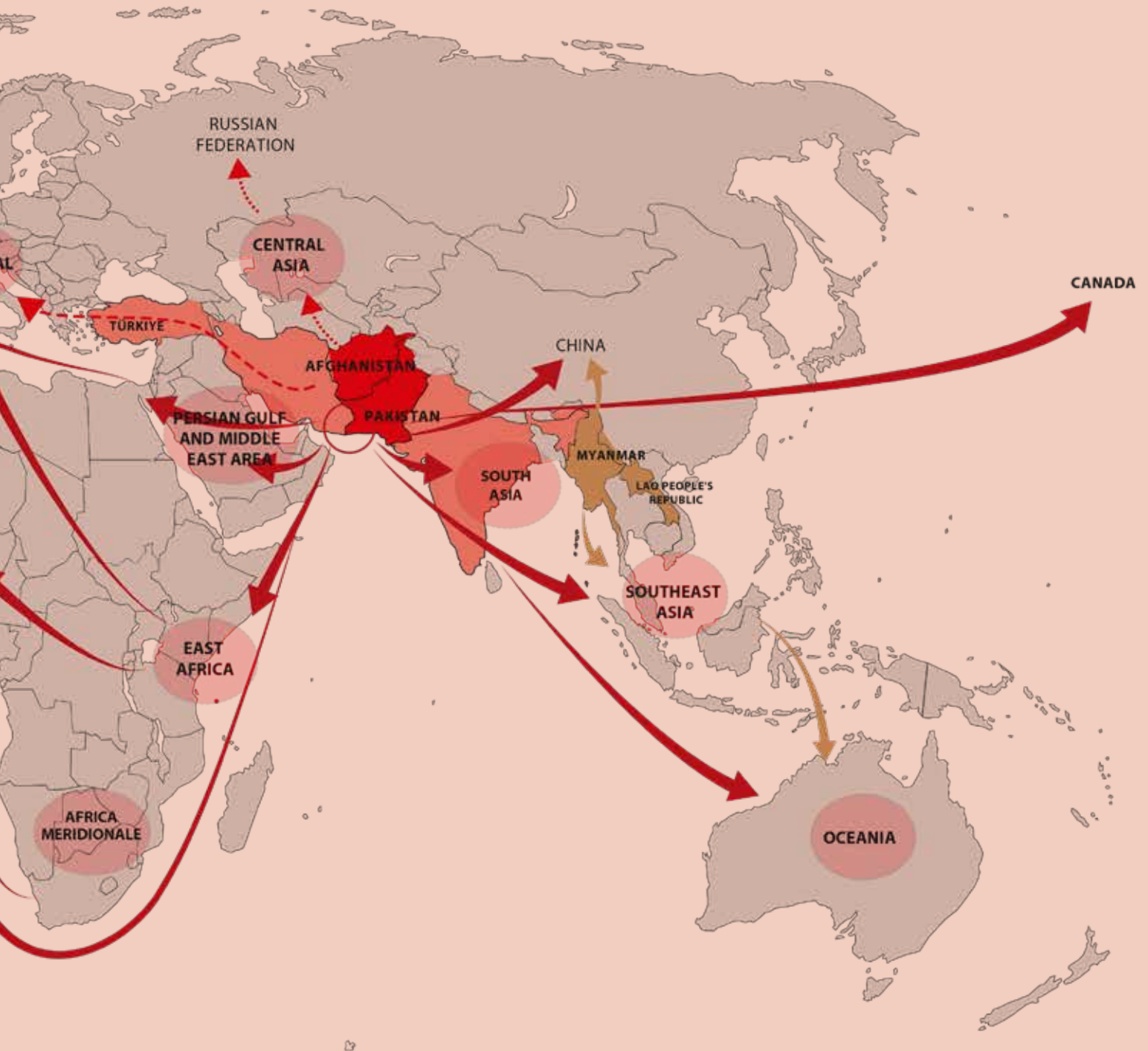
In **Afghanistan**, the illegal drug economy has always been an important source of income for many segments of society, particularly for many rural farming families, who are particularly vulnerable to economic *shocks*. However, starting with the 2023 harvest season, the *de facto* Afghan authorities imposed a ban that virtually eliminated opium poppy cultivation in much of the country, drastically reducing farmers' potential

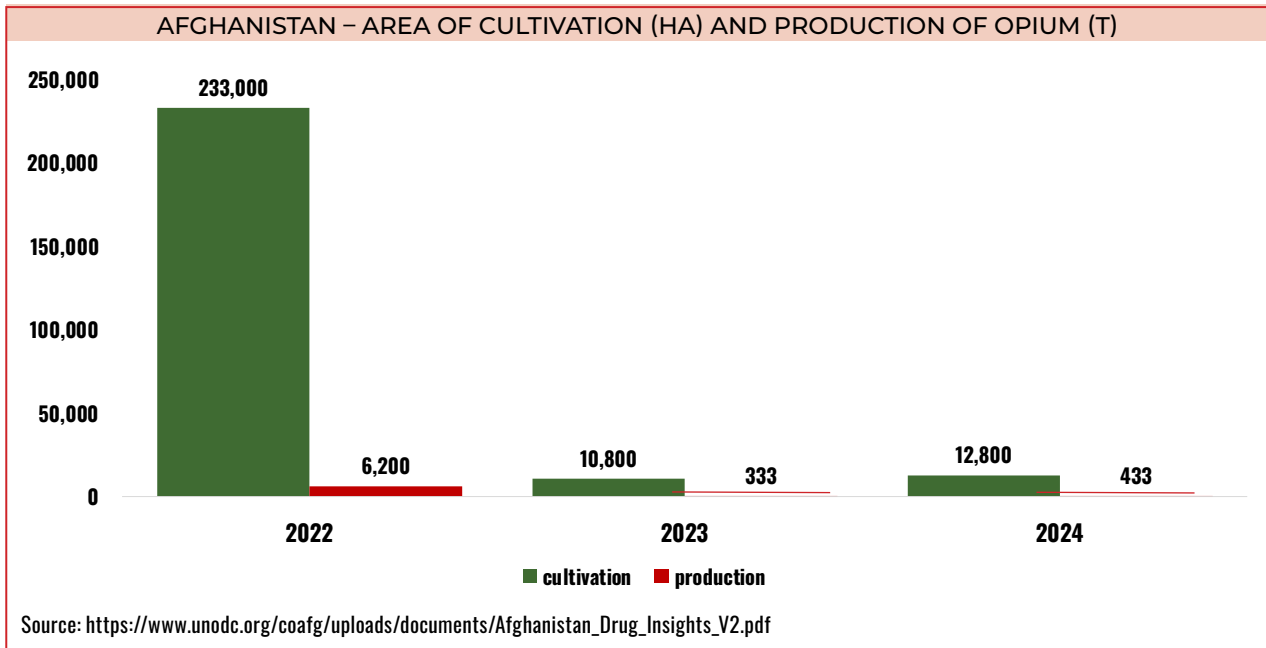
67 EMCDDA 2024 - EU Drug Markets Analysis: Key insights for policy and practice, cit.

68 UNODC, Myanmar Opium Survey 2024, Cultivation, Production, and Implications.

MAIN HEROIN FLOWS







income⁶⁹.

The effect of the ban and the Taliban's crop eradication activities has radically reduced the large-scale cultivation and processing of opium poppies and, therefore, drastically reduced the production of illicit opium in the country, which for years was the world's leading producer, supplying over 90% of global quantities. According to the UNODC, there was a 95% reduction in poppy cultivation in 2023⁷⁰. However, the impact of the ban on the market did not lead to a complete halt in illicit production in Afghanistan⁷¹.

In 2024, the area under poppy cultivation was estimated at 12,800 hectares, which is 19% more than in 2023 (10,800 hectares⁷²),

but still well below the 232,000 hectares cultivated in 2022. Similarly, domestic opium production in 2024 increased by 30% compared to 2023, reaching 433 tonnes⁷³, i.e. approximately 100 tonnes⁷⁴ more: a substantial increase compared to 2023, also in terms of economic value, given the high prices. However, this is still 93% lower than the pre-ban harvest of 2022, which amounted to 6,400 tonnes. Maintaining low levels of opium cultivation and production for two consecutive years is unprecedented in Afghanistan. The first major ban in 2001 saw a sharp reduction in production in the first year, but a rapid recovery in the following year.

Given the scarcity of direct information and the difficulty of obtaining it, what is actually happening in this area can only be the subject of hypotheses, based, however, on the analysis of related

took place before the satellite images were taken. Therefore, the data on the area under opium cultivation in 2024 is only an estimate by UNODC.

69 UNODC, Afghanistan Drug Insights Volume 1 - Opium Poppy Cultivation 2024, cit.

70 UNODC, Afghanistan Drug Insights Volume IV - Drug trafficking and opiate stocks, p. 25, January 2025.t.

71 International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) – Report 2024.

72 The UNODC has not verified the information on hectares eradicated provided by the De Facto Authority (DfA) in 2024. According to these data, however, almost all eradications

73 UNODC, Afghanistan Drug Insights Volume 1 - Opium Poppy Cultivation 2024, cit.

74 UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2023.

AFGHANISTAN – AREA OF CULTIVATION (ha) AND PRODUCTION OF OPIUM (t)									
	2022			2023			2024		
Region	Poppy (ha)	Opium (Tons)	Yield (kg/ha)	Poppy (ha)	Opium (Tons)	Yield (kg/ha)	Poppy (ha)	Opium (Tons)	Yield (kg/ha)
Central	1,236	38	30.7	Poppy free	Poppy free	-	Poppy free	Poppy free	-
Eastern	7,165	268	37.4	1,329	47	34.8	528	23	39.2
Northern	16,415	555	33.8	983	37	35.3	899	34	34.8
North-eastern	4,920	181	36.8	1,573	60	35.4	7,563	286	37.7
Southern	163	6	36.8	Poppy free	Poppy free	-	Poppy free	Poppy free	-
South-western	169,791	4,496	26.5	5,316	158	29.8	1,874	49	25.8
Western	33,059	656	19.8	1,142	25	21.3	1,679	39	22.9
National	233,000	6,200	30.8	10,800	333	32.3	12,800	433	33.9

Source: https://www.unodc.org/coafg/uploads/documents/Afghanistan_Drug_Insights_V2.pdf

DRUG PRECURSORS AND CLANDESTINE DRUG LAB						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Drug precursors seized (kg)	101,106	167,879	259,997	16,083	14,801	297,200
Clandestine drug lab dismantelled (no)	50	33	95	n/a	15	76

Source: PPI - Afghanistan, Mol, CNPA (2017-2019); CARICC; UNODC World Drug Reports; UNODC Country Office Afghanistan

statistical indicators made available by certified international sources, which allow for the reconstruction of a highly reliable overview.

UNODC data on heroin and opium seizures in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries indicate a reduction in opium production, which has led to a decrease in the quantity of opiates leaving Afghanistan; this decline has led to speculation that heroin processing in the country has also decreased. The incidence of opiate seizures in countries bordering Afghanistan has declined since mid-2021. This is particularly true for heroin, which is now seized half as often. The average weight of seizures, for both heroin and opium, has decreased by about 50% since the De facto Authorities (DfA) returned to power. In the first quarter of 2024, opiate

seizures declined further compared to mid-late 2021⁷⁵.

Nevertheless, as the country experienced an unprecedented period of overproduction between 2017, the year with the highest level of production, and 2022, the last year of harvest before the ban came into force, it is estimated that opiate stocks in Afghanistan at the end of 2022 amounted to 13,200 tonnes, which could be sufficient to meet the demand for Afghan opiates until 2027. The situation described above has also affected the price of dry opium in Afghanistan, which has risen several times in recent years. Before the DfA was established, the average price was around \$75 per

⁷⁵ UNODC, Afghanistan Drug Insights Volume IV - Drug trafficking and opiate stocks, p. 5, January 2025.

THE MARITIME ROUTE OF HEROIN

This mode of transport allows traffickers to smuggle larger quantities of heroin in single shipments, compared to the traditional *modus operandi* of routing smaller shipments by concealing them on board vehicles on land routes. A significant quantity of (with an estimated value of at least £4 billion), transported in large container shipments to EU ports, particularly Rotterdam, is destined annually for the British market, the largest illegal market in Europe*.

* EMCDDA, EU Drug Market: Heroin and other opioids – Trafficking and supply, January 2024, p. 8.

kg. In the second half of 2021, until the announcement of the drug ban in April 2022, commercial prices for 1 kg of opium had risen to around \$110. In 2023, prices jumped to around \$300 per kg, and by early 2024, prices had increased tenfold compared to the pre-ban average. Opioid trafficking has therefore become a very lucrative business for Afghanistan as well⁷⁶, making it difficult to imagine that the country has become completely 'virtuous'.

From another perspective, according to data provided by the UNODC's *Paris Pact Initiative* (PPI), in March 2023, seizures of **precursors** in Afghanistan began to rise again, after a drastic reduction in the two-year period 2021-2022, as did the number of **clandestine laboratories** dismantled.

These figures, combined with the gradual increase in methamphetamine seizures and the marked decrease in seizures of heroin and illicit morphine, seem to corroborate the hypothesis of a change in trend in Afghanistan: a shift from poppy cultivation to the extraction of ephedrine (a precursor of methamphetamine) from the ephedra plant, a shrub that grows wild in the country⁷⁷.

These are only hypotheses of a possible change in the structure of illicit production in the country, aimed at preserving the illegal profits derived from the sale of opiates and any 'substitute' narcotic substances.

Nevertheless, opiates produced in Afghanistan continued to flood neighbouring countries and those in the Middle and Near East, Europe, South Asia and Africa via three of the main trafficking routes mentioned above: the 'Balkan', 'northern' and 'southern' routes. The latter also supplied, to a lesser extent, the illicit markets in North America and Oceania⁷⁸.

With regard to the 'southern route', even after the Taliban took power and until the end of 2022, an intensification of heroin trafficking from Afghanistan to the southern coast of Pakistan and the western coast of India was observed⁷⁹. In 2023, India, the world's most populous country, was also the largest market for opioid consumption in South Asia, with the largest increase in heroin seizures in the last decade⁸⁰.

Along this 'route', Bulgaria and Romania reported seizing large consignments

⁷⁶ UNODC, Afghanistan Drug Insights Volume IV - Drug trafficking and opiate stocks, pp. 9-10, January 2025.

⁷⁷ UNODC/PPI, Paris Pact Country Fact Sheet, Afghanistan, updated March 2023.

⁷⁸ INCB, Annual Report 2022, West Asia, p. 101.

⁷⁹ UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform Brief: Update on patterns and trends in heroin and methamphetamine trafficking from 2020 to 2022 for Afghanistan and neighbouring regions, p. 2, September 2023.

of heroin originating in Iran, transiting through the United Arab Emirates and destined for Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands or Romania itself. The United Arab Emirates therefore appears to have established itself as a hub on the 'southern route' for the transshipment of heroin to Europe, as well as a likely storage point.

With regard to the "Balkan route", it has been observed that drug trafficking organisations appear to be increasingly transporting heroin to Turkish ports on the Mediterranean Sea, where ferries and cargo ships move shipments to EU ports. The exploitation of this segment, which involves Turkey, is often "intermodal" and combines land and sea routes, such as lorries transported by ferry across the Mediterranean to EU ports.

Iran

Among the countries bordering to the west, **Iran** is the main transit hub for all narcotic drugs produced in Afghanistan.

The country, geographically located at the centre of the most important route for opium and derivatives from Afghanistan, including via Pakistan, destined for international consumer markets, has historically ranked first in the world for seizures of opium, morphine and heroin⁸¹.

The trafficking of morphine (white heroin) from Iran to European Union countries is particularly active. The port of Bandar Abbas is a strategic point of utmost importance, both for the considerable volume of containers bound for Europe that may be contaminated, and for the arrival of heroin precursors to be transported to opium processing centres in the region.

The table on this page shows data on drug seizures carried out by the Iranian Anti-Narcotics Police in 2024, compared

DRUG SEIZURES (KG) IN IRAN			
Seizures in kg	2023	2024	VAR. %
Heroin	10,275	8,222	-19.00
Morphine	14,091	4,335	-69.00
Opium	445,272	261,096	-41.00
Hashish	93,875	42,898	-54.00
Methamphetamine	37,248	38,501	3.40
Other	61,534	73,200	19.00
Total	662,295	428,252	-35.00

Source: Iranian Antidrug Police

with those of the previous two years⁸².

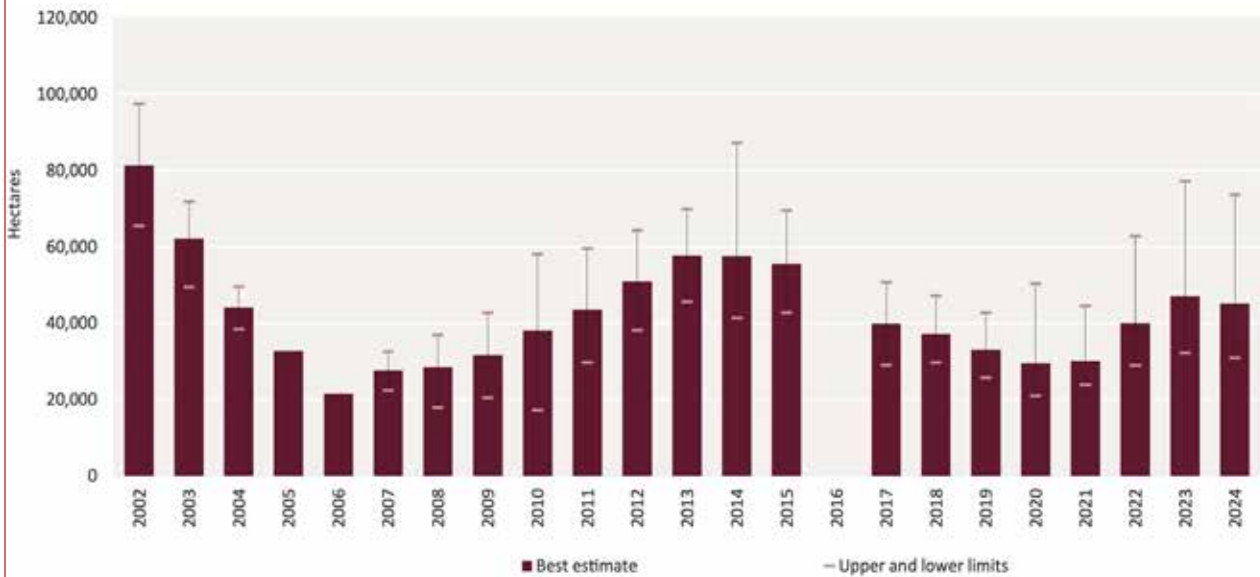
Myanmar

Myanmar is a major player in the global drug trade. It is the world's second largest opium producer, accounting for a quarter of global supply, and is the largest heroin producer in the region. The opium trade is concentrated in regions along the borders with China and Thailand. These areas, characterised by weak rule of law, poverty, food insecurity and conflict, create an environment that allows the illicit drug trade to flourish.

The aforementioned decline in opium poppy cultivation and production in Afghanistan may have led to an increase in opium cultivation and production of its derivatives in Southeast Asia. This could explain the role played by Myanmar, which in 2023 became the world's leading opium producer⁸³.

Opium cultivation in Myanmar remained high in 2024, after three years of growth. The report entitled "*Myanmar Opium Survey 2024: Cultivation, Production and Implications*" reports a moderate decrease in cultivated areas of 4% (from 47,100 to 45,200 hectares) and a similar

AREA OF CULTIVATION (ha) WITH OPIUM POPPY IN MYANMAR



No survey was conducted in 2016. The error bars are the upper and lower limits of the confidence intervals of the sampling uncertainty.

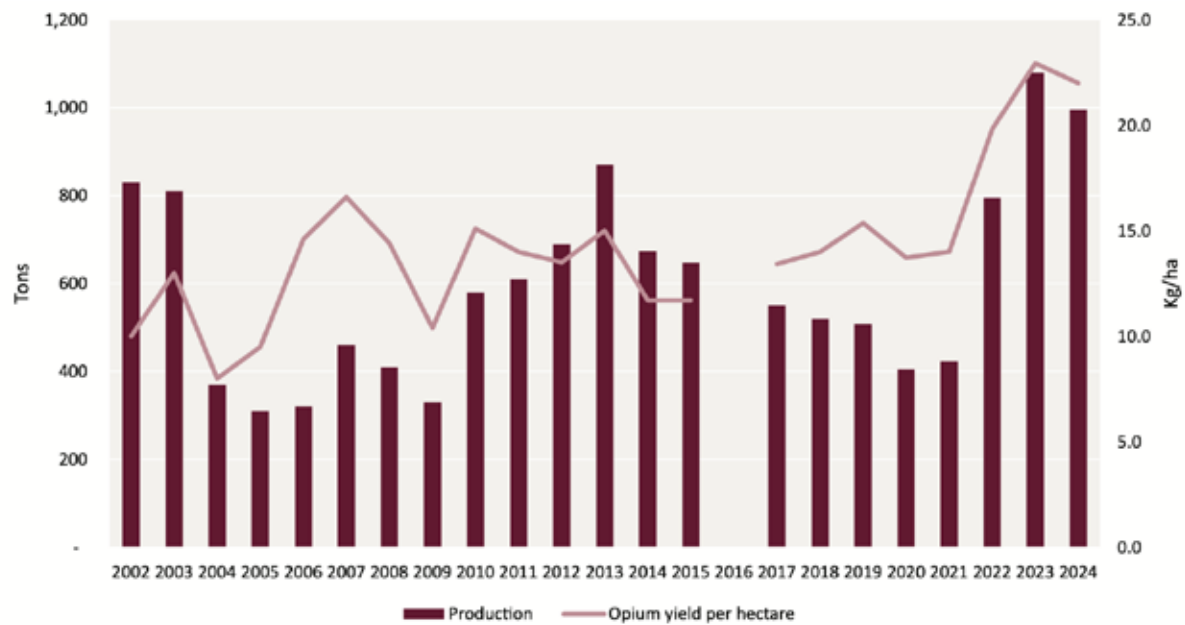
Source: https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Myanmar/Myanmar_Opium_Survey_2024.pdf

decrease in yield per hectare, indicating an initial stabilisation of cultivation, but still at high levels, confirming Myanmar's role as the main source of opium globally⁸⁴.

Shan State remains the area where opium poppies are grown the most: 88% of the country's total. In particular, while the area under opium poppy cultivation in 2024 decreased slightly in the northern and southern part of Shan State, a 10%

increase was recorded in the eastern area of Shan State, which borders the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand. Cultivation in Kachin decreased by 10%, while Chin State, where most opium poppy cultivation is concentrated near the border with India, saw the most significant increase: 18%. Kayah State, where cultivation is generally lower than in other parts of the country, recorded an increase of 8%⁸⁵.

PRODUCTION OF OPIUM POPPY (T) AND YIELD PER HECTARE IN MYANMAR



No survey was conducted in 2016.

Source: https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Myanmar/Myanmar_Opium_Survey_2024.pdf

MYANMAR - AREA UNDER OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION



Source: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144702>

Data on the fight against heroin in Italy

A comparative analysis of heroin trafficking in Italy over the past two years shows a 28.14% decline in operations to combat heroin trafficking in 2024 (858 compared to 1,194 in 2023). The quantities of powdered heroin seized increased from 278.57 kg in 2023 to 347.17 kg in 2024 (+24.91%), while the number of doses seized decreased by 57.26% (162 doses in 2024, compared to 379 in 2023). There was also a clear decrease in the number of reports: 1,194 (-39.14% compared to 1,962 in 2023), 920 of whom led to arrests (77.05%) with the majority being men (1,096 men, equal to 91.79% compared to 98 women, equal to 8.21%).

Those reported to the judicial authorities were mainly foreigners: 617, that is 51.68% of the total number of persons reported (1,194).

Among these, foreigners arrested (493) represented 79.90% of the total number of foreigners reported and 53.59% of the

total number of persons reported of any nationality.

The most common nationalities other than Italian were Nigerian, Moroccan, Tunisian, Albanian and Gambian.

Those reported were mostly adults, with minors accounting for only 1.51% (18 minors). Of the latter, 12 (1.14%) were foreign nationals, mainly from Tunisia, Senegal and Morocco.

The highest percentage (32.33%) of those reported to the judicial authorities for heroin trafficking were aged 40 or over, 40 years of age, while the lowest percentage (0.08%) were under 15 years of age. People between 25 and 29 years of age accounted for 19.26%, those between 30 and 34 years of age accounted for 18.26%, those between 35 and 39 years of age accounted for 13.82%, those between 20 and 24 years old 12.65% and, finally, between 15 and 19 years old 3,60%.

OPERATIONS	858 -28.14%
SEIZURES	347.17 KG +24.91%
REPORTED	1,194 -39.14%

88.27% of reports to the judicial authorities concerned trafficking and dealing, and 11.73% concerned association for the purpose of heroin trafficking.

The most significant seizures took place in January in Voghera (PV), with 22.35 kg, in November in Turin, with 21.61 kg, and in Zibido San Giacomo (MI), with 20.45 kg.

The heroin seized was mostly concealed on persons (334 cases) and in homes (115 cases), less frequently in vehicles (59 cases) and in corpore (18 cases).

Heroin seizures were distributed as follows: 52.10% in the North, 41.44% in the South and on the Islands, and 6.46% in the Centre.

The regions with the largest quantities of heroin seized were Lombardy and Apulia, while Friuli Venezia Giulia and Trentino Alto Adige had the lowest. No heroin seizures were reported in the region

Valle d'Aosta. In terms of percentages, the largest increases were recorded in Lombardy (+178.24%) and Tuscany (+116.08%), while the largest decrease was in Marche (-93.20%).

The ten-year historical series shows that the average annual number of anti-drug operations in which heroin was the main narcotic substance was just over 1,760, reaching a peak in 2016 (2,327 operations) and a low in 2024 (858).

On average, just over 2,700 people were reported over the decade, with the lowest figure in 2024 (1,194) and the highest in 2016 (3,698).

The quantities seized fluctuated, with an annual average of just under 600 kg, peaking in 2018 (979.28 kg) and reaching a low in 2023 (278.57 kg).

PESCARA, APRIL 2024 - SEIZURE OF 6.5 KG OF HEROIN

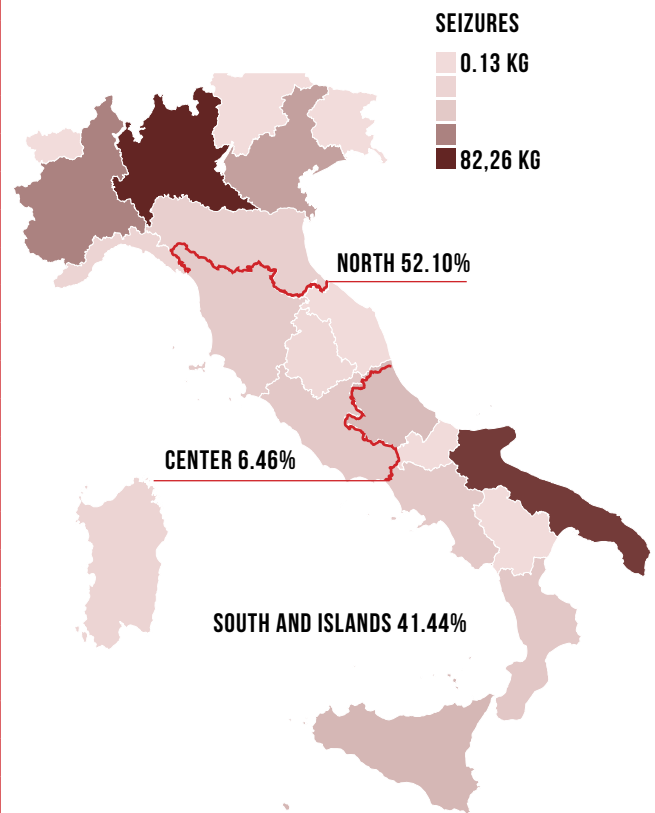


SUMMARY TABLE - HEROIN

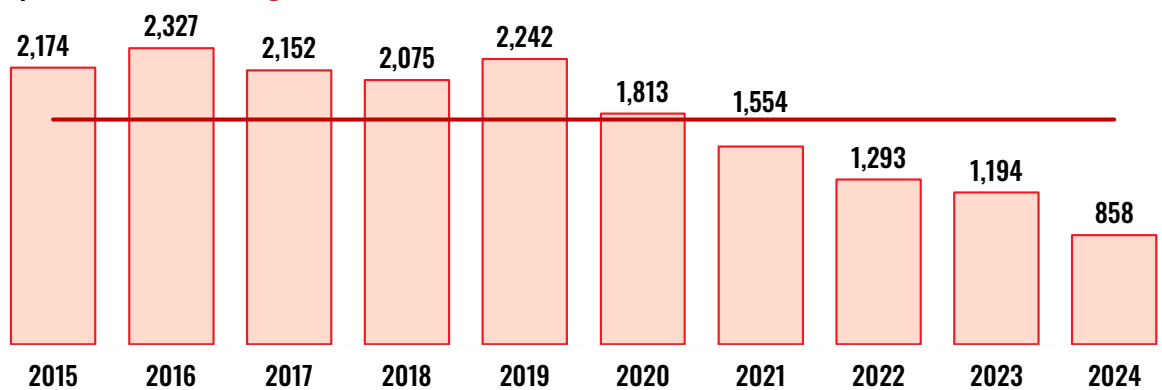
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Var.% 23-24
Operations	1,813	1,554	1,293	1,194	858	-28.14
Seizures						
dosi	349	155	423	379	162	-57.26
kg	513.12	567.58	549.89	278.57	347.97	24.91
Person reported to the J.A.	2,854	2,383	2,013	1,962	1,194	-39.14
Italians	1,491	1,222	990	877	577	-34.21
Foreigners of whom:	1,363	1,161	1,023	1,085	617	-43.13
Nigerians	434	320	286	249	171	-31.33
Moroccans	170	173	186	246	117	-52.44
Tunisians	239	230	180	184	116	-36.96
Albaniansi	90	88	56	103	40	-61.17
Gambians	63	46	58	48	34	-29.17
Males	2,522	2,183	1,800	1,799	1,096	-39.08
Females	332	200	213	163	98	-39.88
Of age	2,838	2,365	1,990	1,928	1,176	-39.00
Minors	16	18	23	34	18	-47.06
Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	2,668	2,055	1,738	1,777	1,054	-40.69
Conspiracy to traffick (Art. 74)	186	327	275	185	140	-24.32
Other offences	-	1	-	-	-	--
Arrested	2,154	1,847	1,424	1,295	920	-28.96
Reported but not arrested	668	521	570	647	249	-61.51
At large	32	15	19	20	25	25.00
< 15	0	1	4	1	1	0.00
15-19	83	72	57	85	43	-49.41
20-24	465	304	248	220	151	-31.36
25-29	512	431	350	372	230	-38.17
30-34	507	419	383	336	218	-35.12
35-39	397	368	311	281	165	-41.28
> 40	890	788	660	667	386	-42.13

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SEIZURES - HEROIN

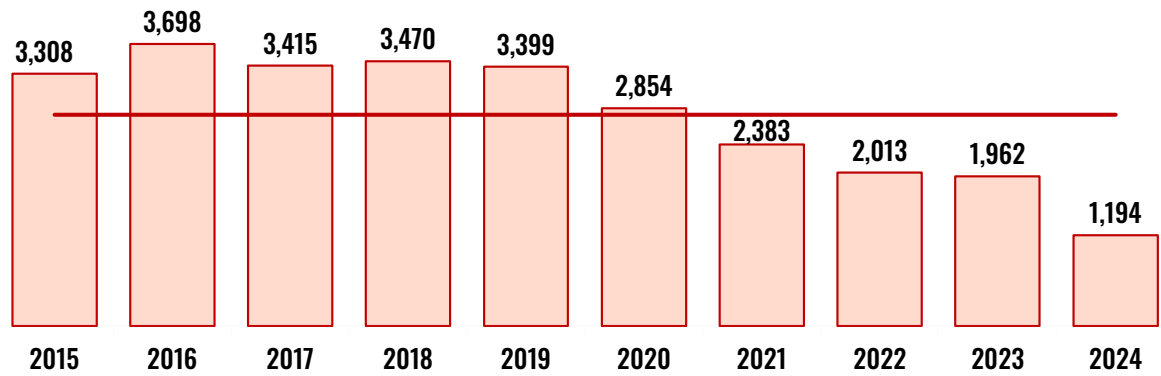
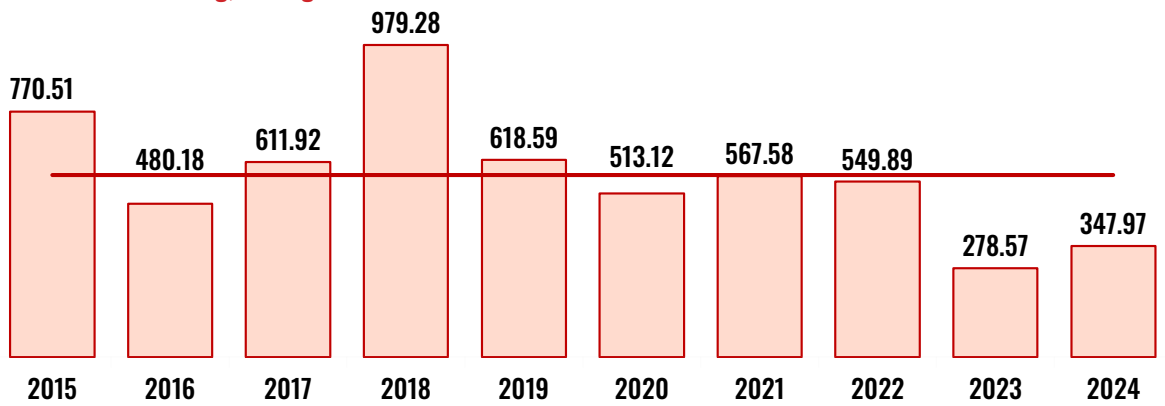
Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	15.42	16.86	9.34
Basilicata	1.94	0.47	-75.58
Calabria	17.33	10.66	-38.49
Campania	10.63	9.97	-6.25
Emilia Romagna	29.61	6.68	-77.43
Friuli V. G.	0.32	0.12	-61.35
Lazio	12.23	9.93	-18.74
Liguria	3.78	3.83	1.30
Lombardy	33.59	93.47	178.24
Marche	8.09	0.55	-93.20
Molise	1.70	0.61	-63.90
Piedmont	26.06	46.16	77.14
Apulia	59.28	82.26	38.76
Sardinia	10.06	4.20	-58.27
Sicily	0.25	19.16	7,446.69
Tuscany	4.30	9.30	116.08
Trentino A. A.	0.65	0.13	-79.71
Umbria	24.44	2.70	-88.96
Valle d'Aosta	0.00	0.00	0.00
Veneto	18.87	30.90	63.78
Regional total	278.57	347.97	24.91
International waters	-	-	--
National total	278.57	347.97	24.91

TEN
YEAR
TREND

Operations: 1,768, average value



TEN YEAR TREND

Persons reported: **2,770, average value**Seizures: **571.76 kg, average value**

ORDONA (FG) - SEPTEMBER 2024 SEIZURE OF 14,3 KG OF HEROIN





Heroin flows towards Italy: border seizures

In 2024, border seizures of heroin (24.87 kg) accounted for 7.15% of total seizures of the same substance in Italy (323.11 kg), down from 14.79% in 2023; this is in contrast to the national increase in heroin seizures.

Similarly, the quantities seized at borders in 2024 (24.87 kg) were also down by 39.64% compared to 2023 (41.20 kg).

Heroin entered Italy mainly by air (91.03%), and to a lesser extent by sea (7.52%) and land (1.45%).

Heroin seizures at air borders resulted in the recovery of 22.64 kg, an increase of 2.46% compared to 2023 (22.09 kg).

The Italian airport where the largest quantities of heroin were intercepted was Malpensa (VA) with 12.61 kg (55.70% of the total seized at air borders), followed by Leonardo Da Vinci in Fiumicino (RM) with 6.72 kg (29.68%) and Guglielmo Marconi in Bologna with 1.34 kg (5.90%).

These three airports accounted for 91.28%

of the quantity of heroin seized during the year at Italian airports.

Pakistan, with 12.61 kg, and Thailand, with 3.34 kg, were the countries from which the largest quantities of heroin arrived by air in 2024. Smaller quantities came from Tanzania (2.18 kg) and the Netherlands (1.34 kg).

Analysing the ten-year series of the main airports affected by heroin trafficking (Fiumicino and Malpensa), 2024 recorded lower values than their annual average, respectively 50.88 kg and 42.74 kg.

In 2024, 86 people were reported in

AIR BORDERS 22.64 kg - incidence 91.04%

MALPENSA (VA)	55.70%
FIUMICINO (RM)	29.68%
BOLOGNA	5.90%
PISA	5.59%
CAGLIARI	3.13%

MARITIME BORDERS

1.87 kg - incidence 7.52%

PORTO TORRES (SS)

100.00%

LAND BORDERS

0.36 kg - incidence 1.43%

Crossing border of Brogeda (CO)

99.58%

Internal Custom Milan

0.42%

airports, mainly Peruvians (25) and Brazilians (20), with a smaller number of Spaniards (9).

In 2024, 1.87 kg of heroin were seized at maritime borders, accounting for 7.52% of all border seizures, a decrease of 63.11% compared to 2023 (5.07 kg).

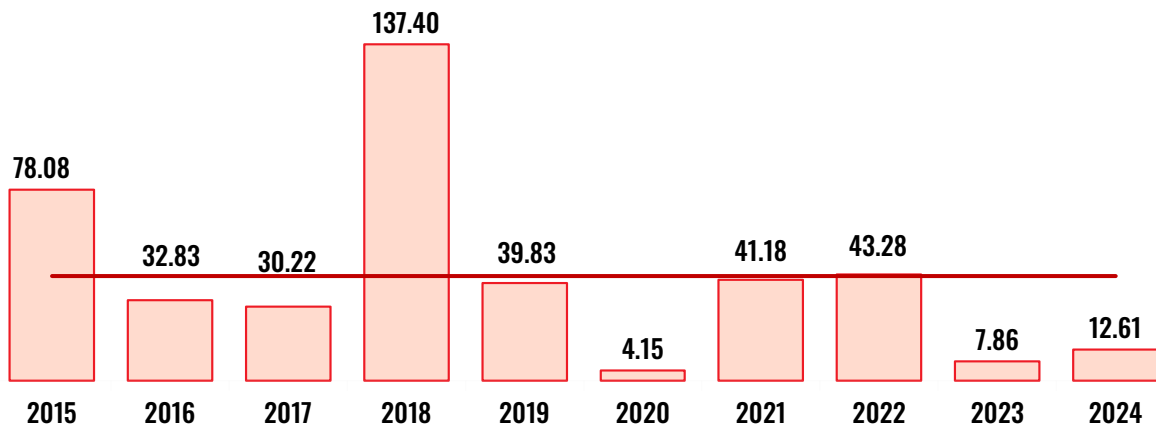
All of the heroin was seized at the maritime port of Porto Torres (SS), where there were no seizures in 2023. In the port

of Ancona, where several quantities had been intercepted in previous years, there were no seizures in 2024.

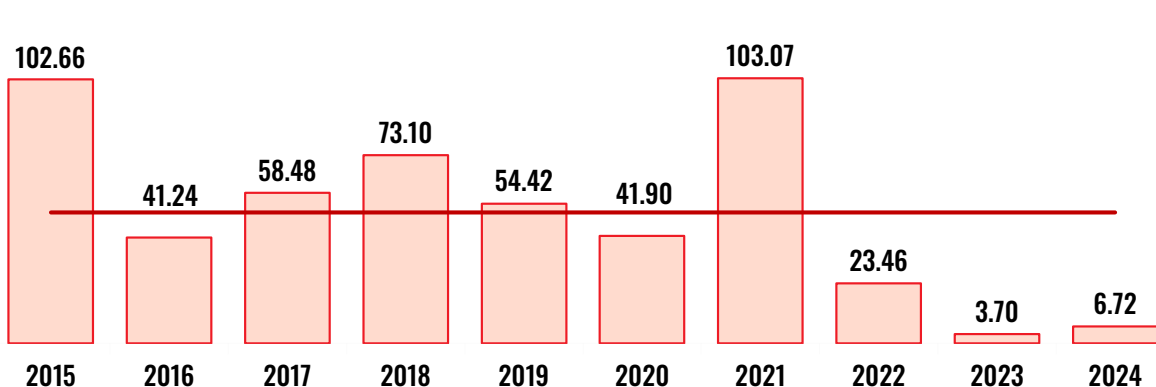
At land borders, 0.36 kg (-97.43% compared to 2023, with 14.03 kg) of heroin was seized, almost all at the Brogeda railway crossing (CO). The Frejus road crossing, which ranked first in terms of quantity seized in 2023, did not record any seizures.

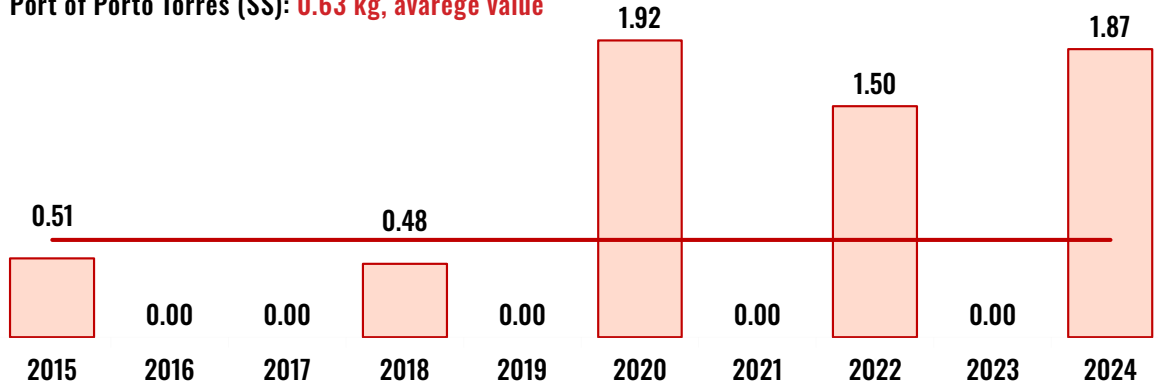
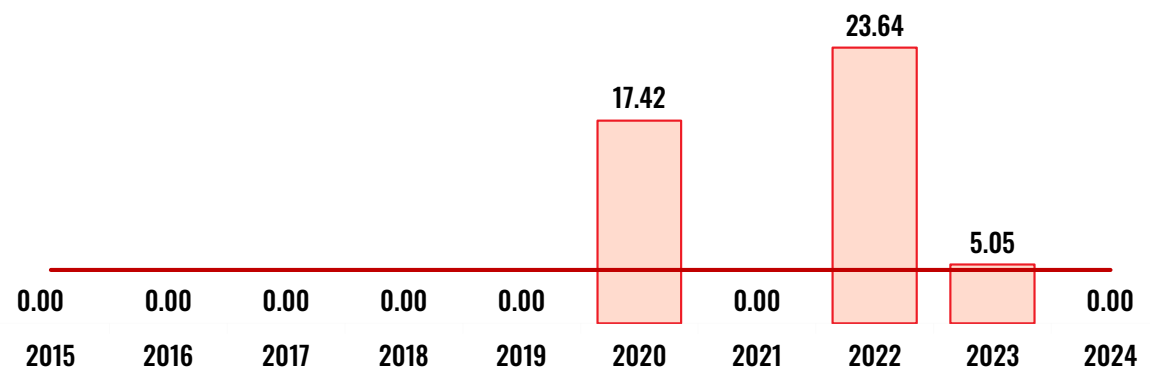
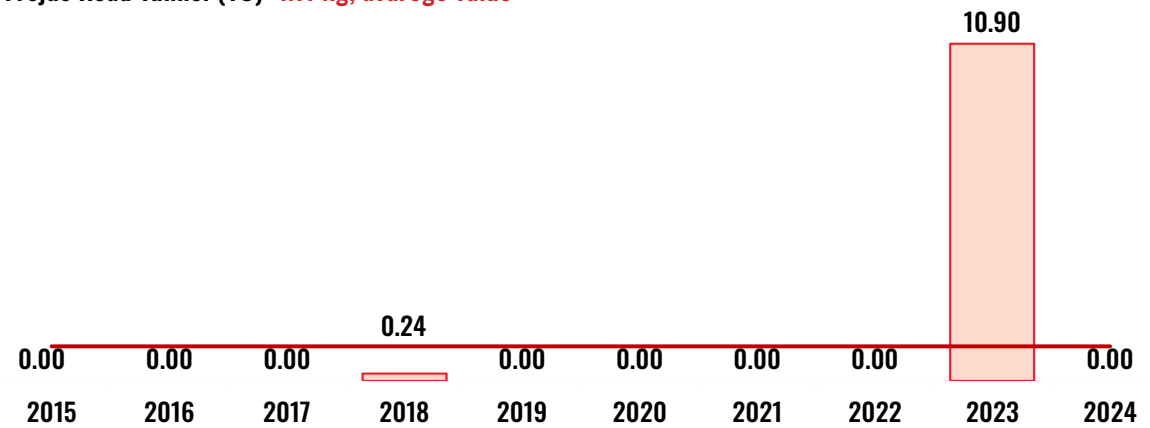
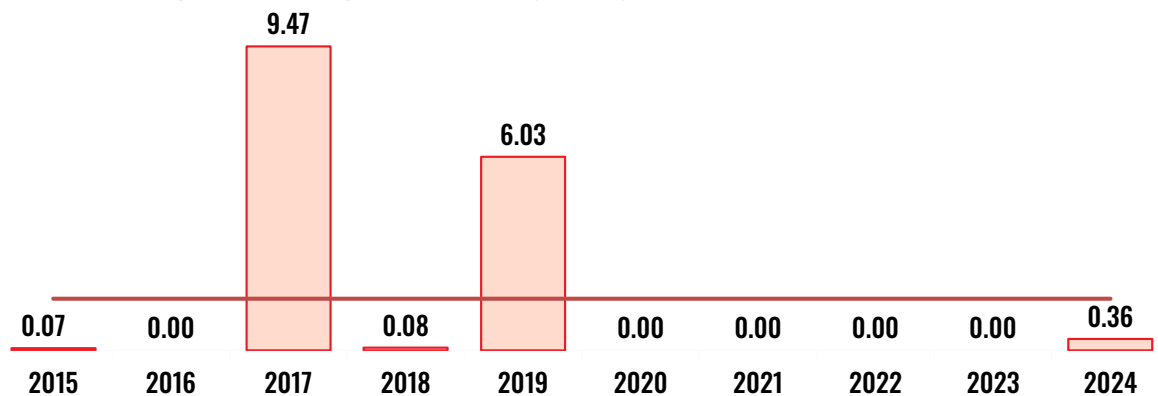
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Airport of Malpensa (VA): 42.74 kg, average value



L. da Vinci airport of Fiumicino (RM): 50.88 kg, average value



Port of Porto Torres (SS): 0.63 kg, avarege value**Port of Ancona: 4.61 kg, avarege value****Frejus Road Tunnel (TO): 1.11 kg, avarege value****Railway crossing border of Brogeda (CO): 1.60 kg, avarege value**

05. CANNABIS

Introduction

Cannabis continues to be the most commonly used drug worldwide.

Unlike other plant-based drugs, whose production is concentrated in a few countries, cannabis is grown in almost all regions of the world and is the most frequently trafficked illegal narcotic substance.

It is estimated that in 2022, 22.8 million people aged between 15 and 64 used cannabis, equal to 4% of the global adult population, with a 20% increase over the last decade. The percentage of female cannabis users in 2022 stands at around 24%, with rates varying from region to region: from 9% in Asia to 45% in North America. Cannabis use remains high in North America, where 19.8% of the population aged 15 to 64 has used the substance.

In recent years, the potency of cannabis has increased, reaching levels above 90% in some cases, due to the spread of so-called *skunk*. This type of cannabis, obtained from a crossing between Cannabis sativa and Cannabis indica, has a higher THC content⁸⁶ and is found in Western and Central Europe, particularly in Albania, Greece and Turkey, where it is produced and consumed - in North America - where seizures increased by 700% between 2017 and 2020 - and in some South American countries such as Peru and Chile - where *skunk* has completely replaced Paraguayan marijuana since 2017. In addition, since 2011, a new variety of Colombian cannabis called *creepy* or *cripa* has been reported, which is genetically modified and also contains high levels of THC (between 15% and 25%) compared to traditional cannabis (5-7%).

⁸⁶ Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the main psychoactive component of cannabis.

The consumption of cannabis with high concentrations of THC carries a greater risk of adverse effects and acute intoxication, which can manifest itself in a series of neuropsychiatric complications, especially in individuals who are not habitual users or who consume high doses in a short period of time. However, not all users react in the same way. People with a predisposition to psychiatric disorders may be more vulnerable, developing acute reactions, more serious than simple anxiety, such as dissociative or more paroxysmal psychotic experiences. It should be noted, that cannabis use among 15- and 16-year-olds worldwide in 2024 was higher than among adults (5.5% compared to 4.4%), particularly in Oceania and Europe. *Vaping* devices, also known as electronic cigarettes, have encouraged this consumption, becoming increasingly popular among adolescents and young people due to their greater accessibility and the promotion of their use on social media platforms. Originally designed to deliver nicotine through vapour as a substitute for tobacco combustion, *vaping* products now typically also contain flavours, other chemicals, CBD⁸⁷ and even THC. In Canada and the United States, cannabis use through these devices has increased twofold or more since 2017. In particular, among the various cannabis products, cannabis oil and those with high THC concentrations appear to be the most commonly 'vaped' products among young people in North America⁸⁸.

⁸⁷ Cannabidiol (CBD) is a chemical component of Cannabis sativa; it has no psychoactive effects, but reduces anxiety.

⁸⁸ UNODC, World Drug Report 2024, Key findings and conclusions, p. 52, cited.

In **January 2024, Canada, Uruguay and twenty-seven US states** have **legalised** the production and sale of cannabis for non-medical use, a process that appears to have accelerated the consumption of this drug and led to the marketing of various cannabis-based products, many of which have a high THC content. In Canada and the United States, there has been an increase in the number of people with psychiatric disorders (including attempted suicide) associated with regular cannabis use, as well as hospital admissions for related disorders, especially among young adults⁸⁹.

Alongside natural cannabis, over the past 15 years the market for narcotic substances has seen the emergence of completely synthetic cannabinoids, most of which are not structurally related to the phytocannabinoids naturally present in the cannabis plant. Synthetic cannabinoids are known by various names, including 'Spice', 'K2' and variants of these: 'Spice Silver', 'Spice Gold', 'Spice Diamond', 'Yucatan Fire' and 'Smoke'⁹⁰. There are also semi-synthetic cannabinoids such as delta-8-THC and HHC, which are derived from the transformation of naturally occurring cannabinoids such as CBD: these are a heterogeneous group of substances that produce psychoactive effects similar to those of cannabis, but with often more serious health risks.

⁸⁹ UNODC, WDR 2024, cit.

⁹⁰ Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), Organisation of American States (OAS) - Information Bulletin: Cannabis with a High Concentration of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Synthetic Cannabinoids in Latin America and the Caribbean, Washington, D.C., 2023, cit.

Probably the most common semi-synthetic cannabinoid in circulation is hexahydrocannabinol (HHC), but more recently hexahydrocannabiphorol (HHC-P) and tetrahydrocannabiphorol (THCP) have also been marketed in some EU Member States. These substances have been marketed as seemingly 'legal' alternatives to cannabis, creating new regulatory challenges for this sector. Although knowledge about the effects of HHC in humans is limited, concerns have been raised as scientific studies have been published, including reports of links to psychosis. Cases of HHC intoxication in children who have consumed foods containing this substance have also been reported⁹¹.

Various products are obtained from cannabis, including:

- **Marijuana:** appears as a herb of various shades, ranging from yellow to pale green to brown. It looks similar to tobacco and consists of a mixture of leaves, flowers and, in part, dried stems and stalks of the cannabis plant. Varieties with a high resin content are sticky and can be compressed into bars or slabs for sale. On the other hand, plants with less resin are left loose and unpressed, sometimes rolled into cones or packaged in small rolls.
- **Hashish:** is a product obtained from the processing and drying of the resin of the female cannabis plant, which contains up to eight times

⁹¹ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA/EUDA), Understanding Europe's drug situation in 2024 – key developments (European Drug Report 2024), p. 10.

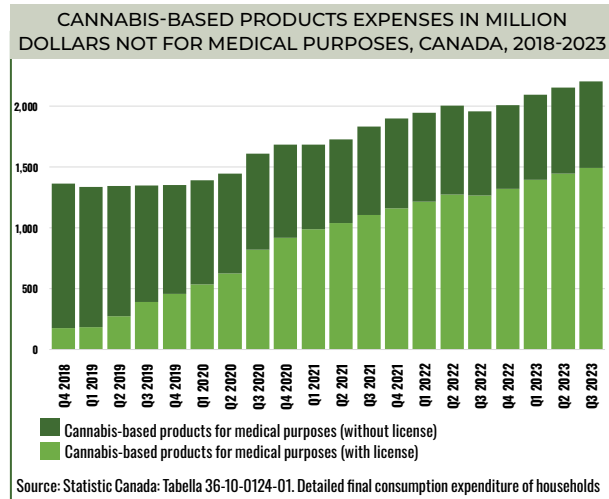
more THC than marijuana. Production techniques vary: in some regions of India and the Himalayas, the inflorescences are rubbed by hand in the fields, while in Morocco the mature plants are shaken to collect the resin. Hashish is then packaged in different forms, such as bars or sticks, and its colour can vary from dark brown to greenish, depending on its origin and processing method.

- **Cannabis oil:** or *hash*, is an oily extract obtained from the resin or vegetal material of the plant. It can come in different shades, from green to dark brown, depending on the source. The substance is particularly widespread in northern Morocco, with THC concentrations ranging from 40% to 80%. In addition, THC percentages of up to 99% have been found in some preparations. This type of cannabis is generally consumed by inhalation, following the evaporation of the substance when exposed to heat, and can be smoked or vaporised in special devices containing solvents or other additives to achieve this effect⁹².

Constant presence on the illegal market

The size of the illicit market that persists after **legalisation** varies from one area to another.

In Canada, in the third quarter of 2023, more than 25% of people reported purchasing cannabis from unauthorised sources, a percentage that continued to decline after the legalisation in 2018 of the production, distribution, sale and possession of cannabis for non-medical purposes, although criminal penalties



for unauthorised cannabis possession were preserved. The average monthly expenditure per cannabis consumer is decreased between 2018 and 2023, although it remained generally stable from 2021 to 2023. Specifically, in 2023, 73% of people in Canada who had used cannabis in the past 12 months reported that they usually purchased cannabis from a legally authorised source.

In the **United States**, the illegal cannabis market exists in various forms in California, Colorado, New York, Oregon and Washington, although most residents obtain cannabis through legal channels. In state jurisdictions where illegal markets persist, so-called 'illegal cannabis' is sold at lower prices than on the legal market. In addition, some retail outlets in states such as California may choose not to apply for a legal licence in order to avoid paying an annual tax, 'while continuing to operate in a shop and presenting themselves as an authorised retailer'. In Colorado, unauthorised cannabis cultivation in national forests and smuggling of the substance to neighbouring states where it is illegal have fostered the development of the underground market.

The illegal market, which often operates alongside legal and quasi-legal markets (known as "grey markets"), attracts consumers

⁹² CICAD/OAS, Information Bulletin: Cannabis with a High Concentration of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Synthetic Cannabinoids in Latin America and the Caribbean, Washington, D.C., 2023, p. 11.

and suppliers for reasons related, among other things, to price, quality, accessibility, licences, taxation, regulations and overproduction⁹³.

The routes of cannabis: from producing countries to the consumption ones

Estimating global levels of illicit cannabis production is extremely complex, mainly due to difficulties in monitoring and reporting.

Data on global seizures reveal the tip of the *iceberg* of its spread. In particular, seizures of cannabis resin, which had been increasing until 2020, declined in 2021 and even more so in 2022, while seizures of marijuana increased slightly in 2022 (6,168 tonnes, +18% compared to 2021), after declining in 2021 in conjunction with the start of legalisation in various jurisdictions, especially in North America⁹⁴. Hashish seizures in 2022, on the other hand, were down (1,194 tonnes, or -41% compared to 2021).

Despite this, **cannabis** remains the **most widely consumed illicit substance worldwide**. Its cultivation, widespread in all regions of the world, varies from small crops for personal use to large-scale plantations, both indoors and outdoors.

The main producers for export are Mexico, the United States, Canada and Paraguay in the Americas; Albania and the Netherlands in Europe; and South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana in Africa. In Italy, the climate is particularly favourable in the south of the country, but indoor cultivation is also emerging elsewhere in abandoned industrial warehouses equipped with lighting, ventilation and irrigation systems.

There are four main global marijuana

routes, divided according to the areas of production:

- **Latin American routes**, which start in Mexico and head towards North America, where they join local production in the United States and Canada, and then towards South America, especially Paraguay;
- **European routes**, with the Adriatic route starting in Albania and arriving by sea on the eastern Italian coast, also supplying the European market; the **Balkan route** has a similar path, starting in Albania, crossing the Balkans or heading towards Friuli Venezia Giulia; the **Dutch route**, which is the focal point of indoor produced cannabis, exported to the European market;
- **African routes**, which start in South Africa, Swaziland, Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana, reaching the Mediterranean by travelling up the African coast (Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Senegal and Morocco) and continuing on to Spain and Portugal;
- **Asian routes**, which include Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey among the main producing and exporting countries.

Latin American routes

Canada

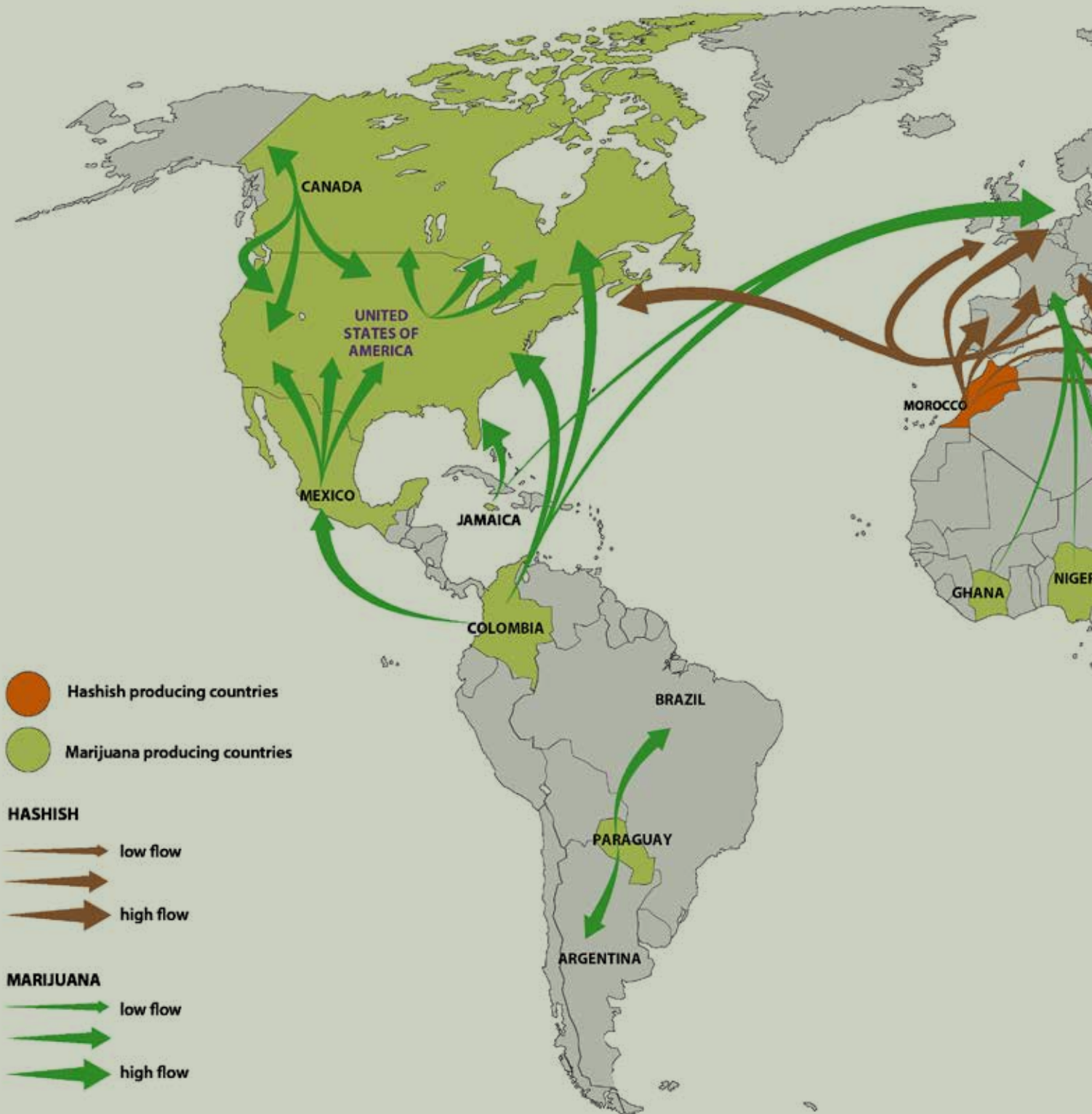
Canada is considered one of the world's leading producers and exporters. In 2023, it exported large volumes of cannabis to all continents, with the largest shipments going to European countries such as the United Kingdom (over 7,600 kg), France (over 4,000 kg), the Netherlands (over 1,000 kg) and Ireland (approximately 612 kg), but also to Caribbean countries (1,032 kg) and Asian countries (461 kg).

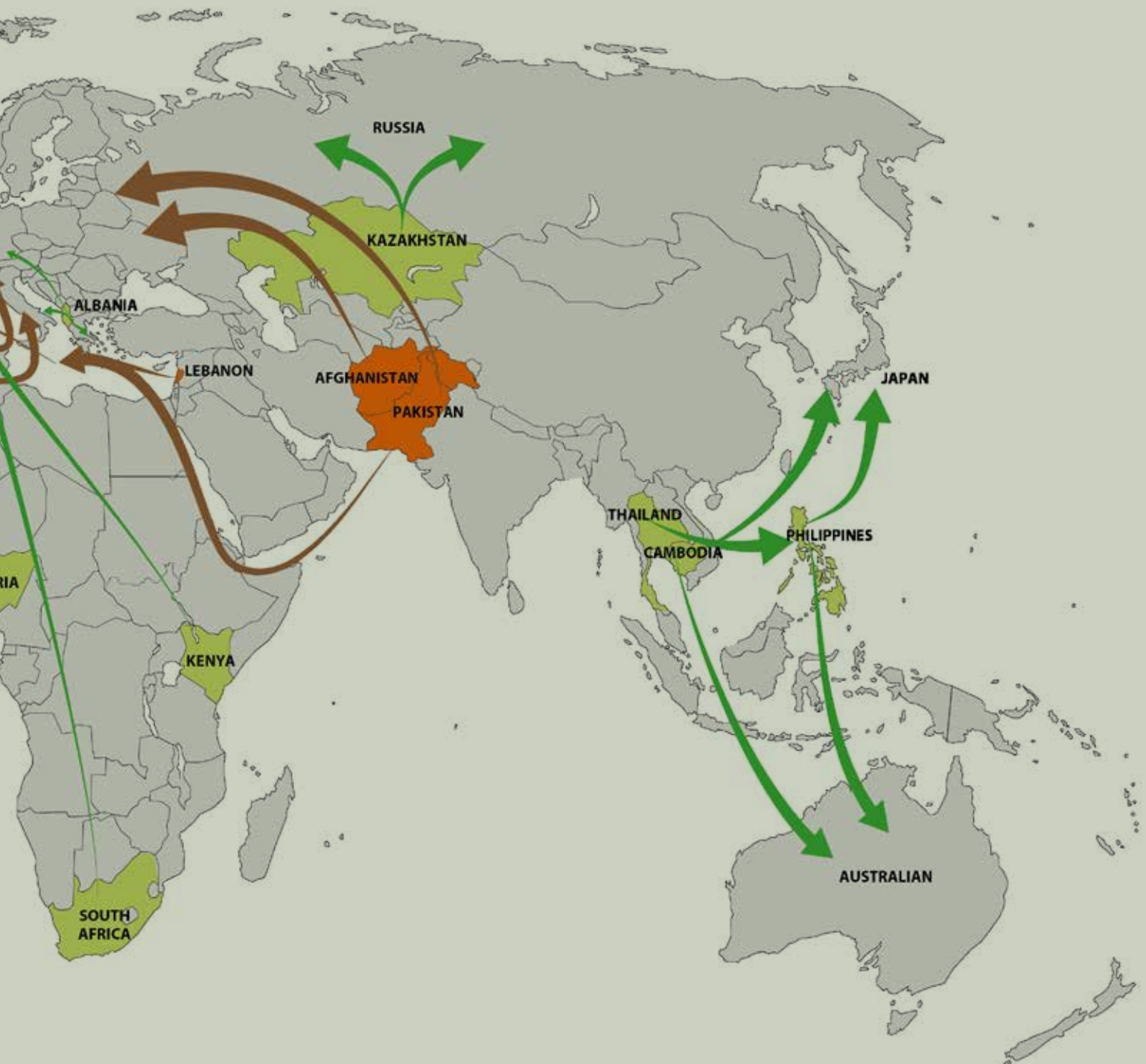
The postal service and air cargo transport were the main methods used to ship cannabis, offering greater concealment

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest, cit.

MAIN CANNABIS FLOWS





within the high volumes of goods transported and also providing easy anonymity.

In this context, new concealment methods have been identified, such as the use of carbon paper and polystyrene, which allow to get past radiation scanner checks.

Latin America and the Caribbean

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the main cannabis-producing countries are Brazil, Colombia and Paraguay (South America); Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras (Central America); Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago (Caribbean)⁹⁵. Several sources have reported cannabis or marijuana preparations with high THC concentrations, exceeding 15%⁹⁶.

The Latin American routes through which the drug is sent to North America originate mainly in Mexico and Paraguay and increase the market in the area, which is already affected by local production in the USA and Canada and, in South America, mainly in Paraguay.

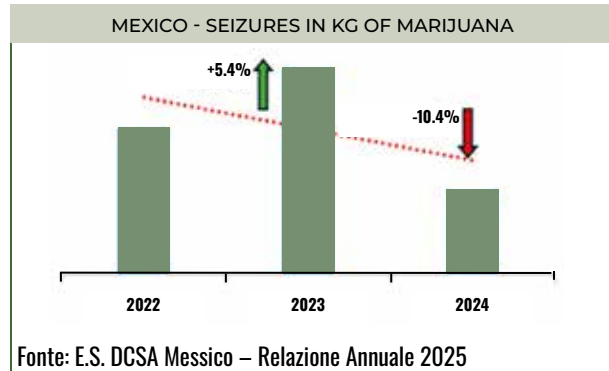
A variety of Venezuelan cannabis known locally as *poppy* or *creepy* has also appeared in Guyana and is very popular on local black markets⁹⁷. Locally produced marijuana, on the other hand, is trafficked to neighbouring countries by sea and then transferred to other territories. Operations to eradicate marijuana crops throughout Guyana by anti-drug agencies led to the seizure of 1 tonne in the first nine months of 2023, a 62% decrease compared to the same period in 2022⁹⁸.

95 CICAD/OAS - Information Bulletin, Washington, D.C., 2023, cit.

96 National Anti-Drug Secretariat (SENAD).

97 Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), Organisation of American States (OAS). Report on Drug Supply in the Americas

98 US Department of State, INCSR 2024, March



Mexico

Mexico, located in the centre of the American continent and sharing a land border of approximately 3,200 km with the United States of America, plays a leading role in the global illicit trafficking scenario and is one of the world's largest producers of cannabis, especially marijuana.

Cannabis continues to be the most seized drug, accounting for 54.93% of the total. The states with the highest number of seizures are Guerrero (17.83%), Veracruz (15.10%), Michoacán (11.06%) and Sinaloa (5.38%).

Over the last three years, marijuana seizures have fluctuated, with a downward trend: +5.4% from 2022 to 2023, -10.4% from 2023 to 2024⁹⁹. Baja California is the region with the highest number of seizures, followed by the border areas of Sinaloa and Durango.

From December 2018 to May 2022, eradication operations led to the destruction of 6,206 hectares of crops, 463 of which were destroyed in 2021 alone.

Marijuana produced in Mexico is transported to the United States and Canada mainly by land, with shipments hidden inside lorries, trucks and cars,

2024, cit.

99 E.S. DCSA Mexico – Annual Report 2025.

or through underground tunnels dug between Tijuana (in the Baja California region) and San Diego, as well at the border with Arizona¹⁰⁰.

Colombia

Cannabis is mainly cultivated in the Magdalena Department, where it is known as 'Santa Marta Golden', and in the Cauca Department, where it is called 'Corinto'. Creepy marijuana, with an above-average THC content, is also very widespread. The area covered by marijuana plantations has remained stable for years at around 1,500 hectares, with a potential production of approximately 500,000 kg. Colombian cannabis is mainly destined for the domestic market, although some of it is exported globally to all consumer countries from the country's major ports (Barranquilla, Cartagena, Santa Marta, Buenaventura, Turbo) or through international airports, transported by human couriers or in parcels and correspondence¹⁰¹.

Paraguay

Paraguay has long been considered one of Latin America's largest marijuana producers. The subtropical climate and availability of large isolated agricultural areas favour the intensive cultivation of cannabis, most of which is destined for the illegal market in neighbouring countries, but also for longer routes to Europe. The plantations are mainly concentrated in the eastern regions of the country, particularly in the departments of Amambay and Canindeyú, where the vastness of the territory and the lack of control infrastructure facilitate illegal activities. These areas are also home to many of the facilities used for processing marijuana, favoured by their location in remote and difficult-to-access

areas, often surrounded by wooded or mountainous terrain: this minimises the risks of transport and interception by security forces. The management of these areas remains a significant challenge for the Paraguayan government, which must balance eradication and control efforts with the need to protect rural communities and offer sustainable economic alternatives to farmers.

With a significant impact on the social and economic fabric of the country, this trafficking generates income for impoverished rural communities and at the same time fuels corruption, crime and violence, undermining the country's social stability.

Estimates of annual marijuana production in Paraguay range from several hundred tonnes to over a thousand tonnes. However, due to the illicit nature of production, accurate data is difficult to obtain. It is estimated that one hectare of land planted with marijuana can produce between 3 and 5 tonnes of dried cannabis per year, depending on growing conditions, techniques used and the climate of the year.

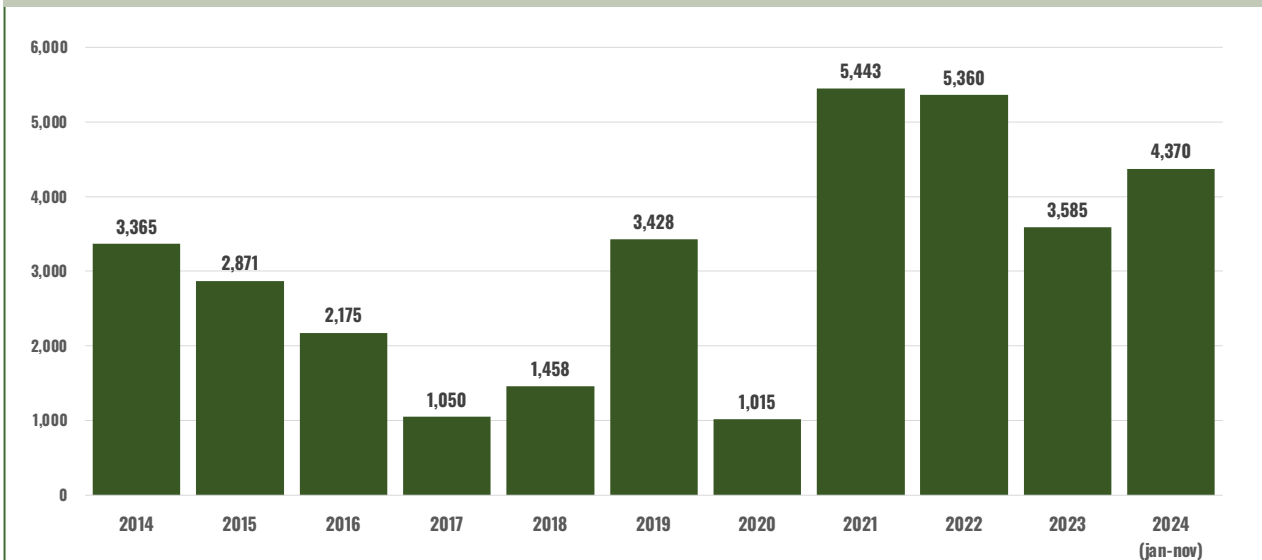
Eradication campaigns conducted by the government can significantly affect annual production, but they only temporarily reduce production capacity without having a long-term impact, as growers simply move to new areas or quickly restore their previous crops.

In this regard, Operation "New Alliance", carried out by the *Brazilian Federal Police in collaboration with the National Anti-Drug Secretariat of Paraguay* (SENAD/PY) and with the support of the Joint Task Force and the Paraguayan Public Prosecutor's Office, had the specific objective of eradicating illegal cannabis plantations: according to UNODC data, approximately 5,000 tonnes of cannabis are seized worldwide each year, and Operation "New Alliance" alone

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ E.S. DCSA in Colombia, note dated 25 November 2024, cit.

PARAGUAY - "NOVA ALIANÇA" OPERATION - CANNABIS PLANTS ERADICATED (t)



Source: CGPRE - PF

accounted for approximately 80% of the total amount seized globally. According to Federal Police data reported in the graph on this page, in 2024, police operations were carried out in Paraguay, resulting in the seizure of 4,370 tonnes of marijuana. During these operations, 394 cannabis fields were also eradicated.

The main routes for transporting marijuana from plantations in Paraguay to neighbouring countries, such as Argentina and Brazil, are by land, crossing borders, or by air, using clandestine low-altitude flights that land on illegal runways or make air drops in locations that are difficult for security forces to reach due to the absence of air radar.

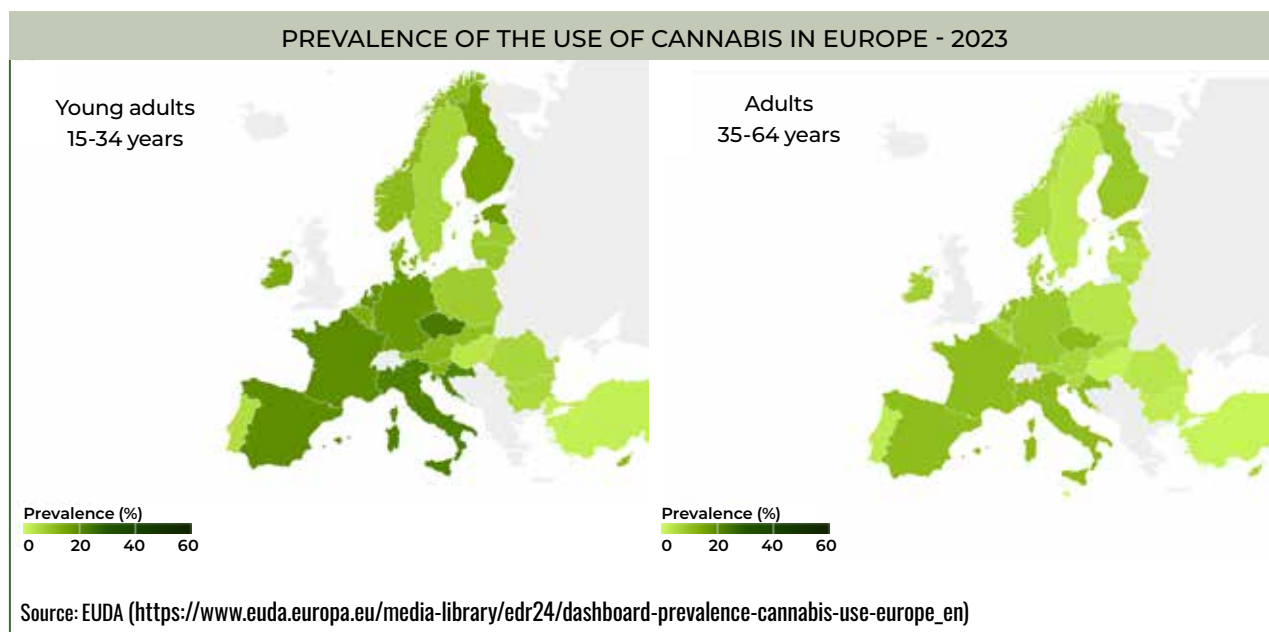
For traffic to Europe, the main route is by sea. Cargo arrives in the “*Triple Frontera*” area and, thanks to the rivers of the “*Hidrovia*”, reaches the coast of the South Atlantic Ocean. Here, in the ‘*Río de la Plata*’ area, there are numerous large commercial ports, including those of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Montevideo (Uruguay). Contaminated containers depart from these ports and, using the ‘rip off’ technique also used for cocaine, reach Europe¹⁰².

European routes

Cannabis remains **by far the most commonly used illicit drug in Europe**. National surveys on cannabis consumption indicate that, overall, around 8% of European adults (22.8 million people aged 15–64) have used cannabis in the last year. Based on the most recent surveys, cannabis use in 2024 among the EU population aged 15–34 is estimated at 15.00% (15.1 million), with males typically twice as likely as females to report use. Among young people aged 15 to 24, an estimated 18.6% (8.8 million) have used cannabis in the last year and 9.7% (4.6 million) in the last month. Approximately 1.3% (3.7 million) of adults (aged 15 to 64) use cannabis daily or almost daily (i.e. they have used it on 20 or more days in the last month). Among young people aged 15 to 34, an estimated 2.0% (2.0 million) use cannabis daily or almost daily. About three-quarters of adult users (aged 15 to 64) are men, and the majority (54%) are under 35 years of age.

EU Member States have reported 98,000 **cannabis plant** seizures, totalling 3.5 million individual plants and 6.5 tonnes in 2022 (4.3 million plants and 32.5 tonnes in 2021). In 2022, nearly 5,700 illicit cannabis crops were dismantled in 14 EU Member States (data obtained from open sources and national partners).

¹⁰² E.S. DCSA Brazil – Annual Report 2024, cit.



Seizures of **cannabis-based products** continued to reach historically high levels in 2022, which is evidence of the widespread availability of this substance. In 2022, EU Member States reported 243,000 seizures of cannabis resin, amounting to 468 tonnes (816 tonnes in 2021), and 234,000 seizures of herbal cannabis, amounting to 265 tonnes (256 tonnes in 2021).

However, due to a 52% decrease reported by Spain (from 673 tonnes in 2021 to 325 tonnes in 2022), the total amount of cannabis resin seized in the European Union decreased by 43%. This may reflect an adjustment in supply routes by those involved in trafficking cannabis resin from North Africa to Europe, in response to anti-trafficking measures taken by the Spanish authorities.

However, although a significant quantity of cannabis is also produced elsewhere in the European Union, **Spain** continues to be a key country for cannabis trafficking, both as a transit point and as a production area. Recent large-scale seizures highlight its role as a transit country for resin destined for the European market. In 2023, for example, the Spanish authorities seized 22 tonnes

of cannabis resin hidden in packages of counterfeit tomatoes, suspected of being destined for trafficking in France. Similarly, this also applies to cannabis leaves, the quantities of which seized in Spain have increased significantly since 2019. Overall, in 2022, Spain accounted for 69% of all resin seized, 47% of all herbal cannabis seized and 81% of the total number of cannabis plants seized in the European Union.

Despite the availability of new cannabis products on the illicit market, cannabis herb and resin remain the most commonly available forms.

Herbal cannabis is widespread in most countries, partly because it can be grown close to the consumer market, thereby reducing the risk of being detected.

However, the quantities of **cannabis resin** seized in the European Union are greater than those of herbal cannabis, probably because resin is more vulnerable to interdiction measures in cross-border trafficking.

In Europe, **hashish** shipments are often hidden inside specially modified vehicles, packaged in bars or sticks, while **marijuana** trafficking is mainly

an intra-regional phenomenon¹⁰³, with most of the marijuana in circulation coming from local cultivation. However, some cannabis seizures in Europe may indicate that trafficking routes are diversifying. These include, for example, the seizure of 4 tonnes of cannabis resin from Pakistan in the port of Antwerp, Belgium, demonstrating that Morocco is not the only source of resin for the European cannabis market. Some EU Member States have also reported cannabis trafficking via **postal systems** and, increasingly, via **commercial air travel**, sometimes linked to the United States and Canada. Furthermore, there are indications that large quantities of marijuana may be shipped from North America via **maritime routes**.

The risk, therefore, is that the regulated cannabis market outside Europe will gain an increasingly dominant position in terms of sales within the European Union in the future¹⁰⁴.

Also, the European political stance on cannabis is becoming increasingly diversified, as some EU Member States are considering or changing their **approach to recreational cannabis use**, creating various forms of access to cannabis resin and marijuana-based products. In December 2021, **Malta** decided to allow domestic cultivation and private consumption of cannabis, in addition to non-profit municipal cultivation 'clubs'. In July 2023, **Luxembourg** enacted a law allowing home cultivation and private use of marijuana¹⁰⁵, as did **Germany**, which in February 2024 enacted a law allowing both home cultivation and non-profit marijuana cultivation 'clubs'.

103 UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest, p. 43, cit.

104 <https://emcdda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2024>, European Drug Report 2024: Trends and Developments.

105 EUDA (European Union Drugs Agency), European Drug Report 2024, Cannabis – the current situation in Europe.

The **Czech Republic** has also announced plans for a regulated and taxed distribution system¹⁰⁶.

On the European continent, the main producing countries are the Netherlands and Albania, generally alongside the entire Western Balkans region.

The Netherlands stands out in Europe for its production of cannabis and its derivatives. Thanks to advances in plant biology and hydroponic cultivation techniques, in the 1990s the Netherlands developed indoor production systems that allow for up to four harvests per year, with very high THC levels. The cultivation, sale and possession of cannabis remain criminal offences in the Netherlands. However, the sale of small quantities of cannabis, up to 5 g for adults (over the age of 18) in coffee shops, has been tolerated for decades. One of the political objectives of this tolerance was to separate the cannabis market from that of other drugs, an approach that has proved unsuccessful as the cannabis sold in coffee shops comes from the illegal market and consequently feeds the business of criminal groups. In an attempt to resolve this issue, the Netherlands has chosen 10 municipalities, where it is experimenting a 'closed' supply chain model for cannabis. According to this model marijuana is produced in regulated and controlled facilities and then sold in coffee shops¹⁰⁷.

Albania is a strategic crossroads along the traditional Balkan route for international drug trafficking and is a country affected by the cultivation of cannabis for the production of marijuana, destined both for the local market and for export to the European Union, as well as by the trafficking of hashish to the illicit markets of other EU countries. Since 2012, an aerial surveillance service

106 Ibid.

107 EUDA, European Drug Report 2024, Cannabis – The current situation in Europe, p. 4.

has been in place in this country in accordance with the **‘Operational Protocol on Drug Trafficking’**, signed between the Department of Public Security of the Ministry of the Interior of the Italian Republic and the State Police of the Albanian Republic on 16 May **2012**. This cooperation, renewed on 16 February **2021** in Rome, consists of a series of aerial monitoring activities carried out with fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft of the Italian financial police (*Guardia di Finanza*), equipped with airborne sensors¹⁰⁸, implemented between May and September¹⁰⁹. The aim is to identify cannabis plantations on Albanian territory in order to subsequently allow their eradication and destruction by local authorities.

The **2024** ‘Overflight Campaign’ [*Italian: Campagna Sorvoli*] was funded by the Italian Ministry of the Interior and enabled **185 hours of flight time** (170 hours of remote sensing and 15 hours of territory screening) between 1 May 2024 and 31 October 2024. The table below shows a summary of the results obtained, highlighting a 0.75% increase in the number of cannabis plants eradicated and destroyed (109,104 plants compared to 108,282 plants in the previous edition).

¹⁰⁸ Optical and hyperspectral sensors.

¹⁰⁹ Time frame for plant maturation.

The results of the 2024 ‘Overflight Campaign’ and the analysis of criminal phenomena occurring during the period under review, **without prejudice to the constant and growing commitment of the Albanian State Police to combating crime**, reveal the following:

- the adoption of different methods of cannabis cultivation, including indoor cultivation, as previously described;
- the adoption of new cultivation methods, such as small plantations scattered in particularly inaccessible areas or areas that are difficult to fly over, for example, in the areas overlooking Rinas Airport. In geographical terms, a change in the choice of areas used by traffickers for illicit cannabis cultivation could be observed, similarly to the previous edition. From the operational evidence acquired, the central-northern part of the country remains the most affected by the phenomenon, rather than the ‘historic’ areas in the south of the country in the districts of Vlora and Gjirokastër;
- the implementation of various methods of drug trafficking on the Albania-Turkey axis via Greece, where marijuana is exchanged for heroin, a substance that is certainly easier to conceal than the bulky packages characteristic of marijuana trafficking, due to its specific weight, compactness

2024 OVERFLIGHT CAMPAIGNS							
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Flight missions	69	82	67	70	63	64	62
Flight hours	187h 42'	225h 10'	185h	182h 20'	182h	185h	185h
Plantations detected	27	1,109	1,607	1,119	1,094	1,793	1,239*
Eradicated and destroyed plants of cannabis	675	25,719	58,423	92,428	40,921	108,282	109,104
Surface area in sq.	8,543	38,515	72,772	376,010	262,593	493,376	185,038
* Among the 1,239 surface areas reported, 595 were actually used for the cultivation of cannabis sativa							

Source: DCPC/SCIP

and volume;

- the possible relocation of cannabis cultivation to countries neighbouring Albania;
- evidence supporting the hypothesis of the so-called 'balloon effect', i.e. the shift in the interests of Albanian criminal organisations towards trafficking in 'hard' drugs such as heroin and cocaine, rather than just the cultivation, production and trafficking of cannabis. This hypothesis is supported by several drug seizures carried out at the Port of Durres, notably shipments of cocaine from Latin American countries in containers, whose cover cargo was, in most cases, exotic fruit¹¹⁰.

Portugal is one of the most important transit hubs and destinations for cannabinoids. Cannabis derivatives arrive directly in Portugal from Morocco - near its southern coast - or via Spain, mainly following sea and/or land routes. In 2024, 7,343.91 kg of hashish were seized, corresponding to a decrease of 80.6% compared to 2023 (when 37,945.48 kg were seized). The number of seizures also decreased, with 1,358 fewer seizures recorded than in 2023 (-23.4%). Of the nearly 7.3 tonnes seized, maritime transport accounts for 68.5% of the total cargo intercepted from Portuguese drug traffickers in terms of quantity. In terms of quantities seized, the district of Faro ranks first, with 4,876.29 kg of cannabis intercepted, representing 66.4% of the total seized, followed by Setúbal with 1,061.20 kg, Lisbon with 376.85 kg and the Azores with 124.06 kg¹¹¹.

¹¹⁰ DCPC/SCIP, Assistance Mission to the Albanian Police. Operational Protocol between the Department of Public Security of the Ministry of the Interior of the Italian Republic and the General Directorate of the State Police of the Republic of Albania, Activity Report for the Year 2024.

¹¹¹ Note dated 2 April 2024, Addendum to the

In **Spain**, cannabis is also the most commonly used drug among the population aged between 15 and 64. In 2024, 43.7% admitted to having used cannabis at least once in their lifetime, continuing the upward trend that began in 2013 and reaching the highest level ever recorded in this edition. The average age of onset of use is slightly above 18 years and has remained stable in all editions. Finally, 2.5% of the population admits to using cannabis on a daily basis.

Extremadura is by far the autonomous community with the highest levels of cannabis use in all periods.

Hashish seizures in 2022 fell to 325 tonnes (-52% compared to 2021), while marijuana seizures reached 144 tonnes (+3.6% compared to 2021). A total of 3,350,969 cannabis plants were seized (+0.5% compared to 2021)¹¹².

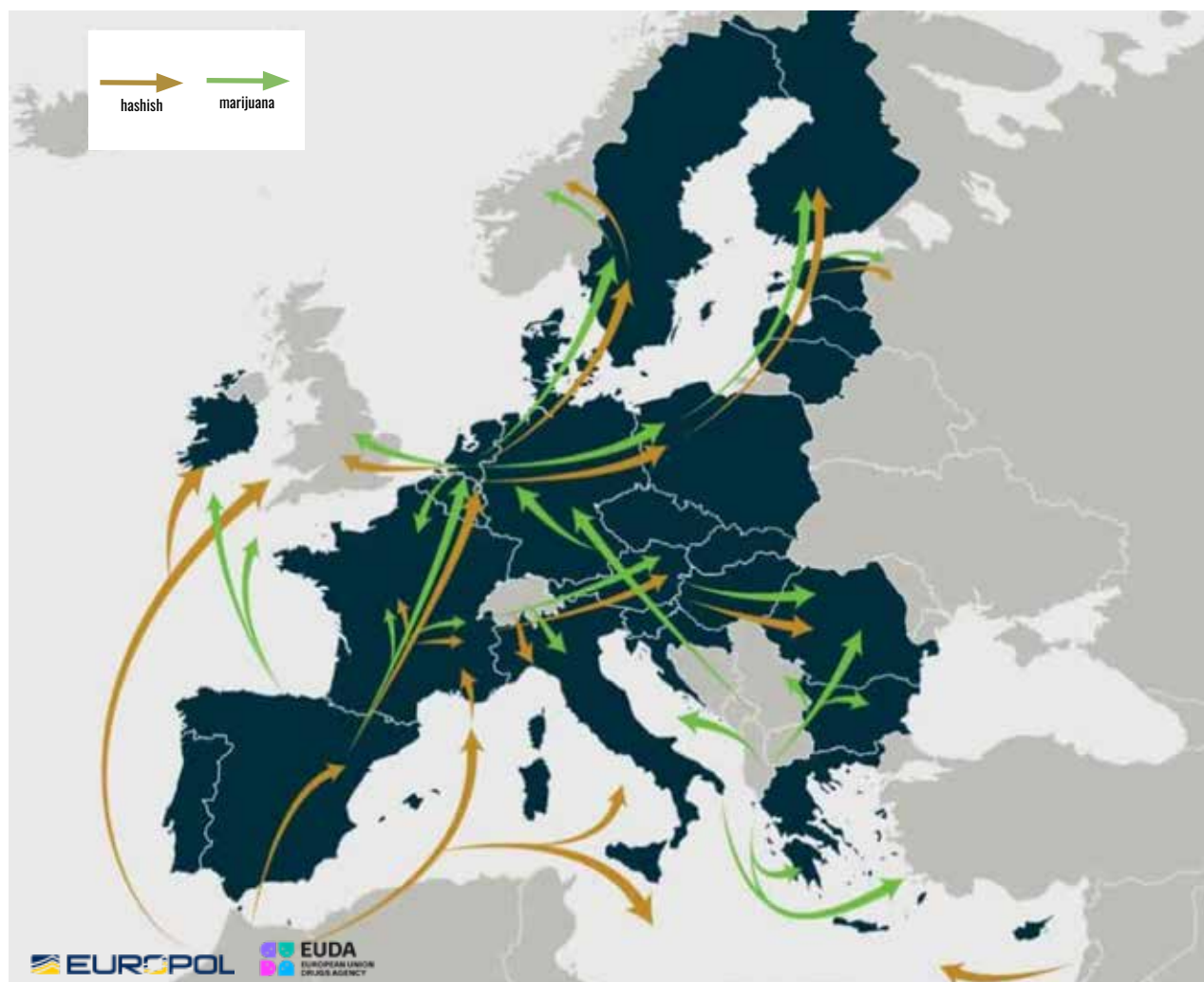
In Italy, hashish mainly arrives from Spain or directly from Morocco, with shipments arriving at ports located on the western coast. There are numerous criminal organisations involved in hashish trafficking in Italy, originating from different geographical areas. Among these, *North African* (Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian) and *Nigerian organisations* are primarily responsible for hashish trafficking. Other organisations involved are *Spanish, Senegalese, Albanian* and *Serbian-Montenegrin*, which have also been collaborating with *Italian organised crime* for several years.

African routes

Cannabis consumption is particularly high in West and Central Africa, with a prevalence of use of 10% in 2022 (approximately 31 million people), mainly in Nigeria. North Africa continues to be

Annual Report for the year 2024 - drawn up by the management in service at the Italian Embassy in Lisbon and at the MAOC (N).

¹¹² E.S. DCSA Madrid, Annual Report 2024.



a hub for interregional trafficking of hashish bound to Western Europe¹¹³.

Morocco is considered by the UNODC to be the world's largest producer of cannabis resin (hashish or *Chira*) and Europe its main export market. The main production area within the country is the *Rif*, which is located in the north and considered one of the poorest areas of the country, inhabited by the Berber ethnic group. In recent years, under international pressure, Morocco has made a concerted effort to reduce the area under cultivation from 139,000 hectares in 2003 to 28,000 in 2024, after carrying out various eradication operations and awareness campaigns,

strengthening support measures for alternative development and, at the same time, targeting the conversion of illegal crops into legal activities.

According to studies carried out by French liaison officers in Morocco, production is estimated to be between 2,500 and 3,000 tonnes per year. The same French experts have ascertained that the stability of production, despite a significant decrease in cultivated areas, is due to the use of more 'high-yielding' crops, obtained through hybridisation with plants from the Benelux countries. Currently, in the *Rif* region, the traditional cultivation of *beldiya*, which gives rise to the production of low-quality resin with a low THC concentration, has been accompanied by the introduction of

¹¹³ UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest, cit.



new plant varieties in recent decades, such as *khardala* ('mixture'), *gaouriya* ('the western'), '*Pakistani*' and '*Mexican*'. These plants allow for high yields (the extraction rate is estimated at around 7%) and produce a resin with a high THC content (up to 25%), which fully satisfies European demand, as it is considered 'super-cannabis'¹¹⁴.

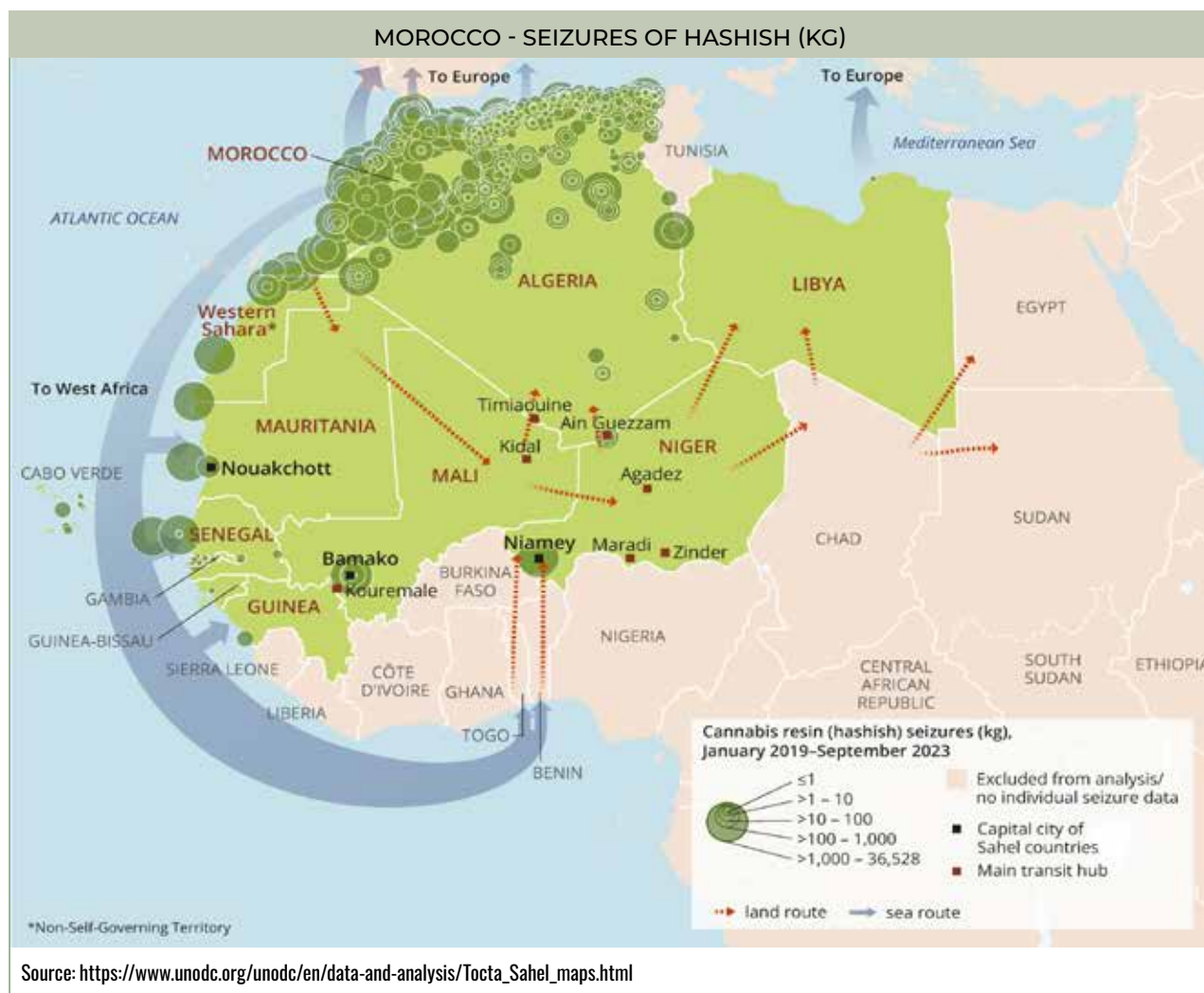
Morocco is undertaking a normalisation process in an attempt to convert illegal cannabis/hashish production into legal and legitimate production for medicinal purposes, cosmetics and industrial products. One of the objectives of normalisation is to improve the lives of historically poor and under-represented communities in the northern *Rif* region.

The country has begun licensing and regulating the first legal cannabis production organisations. However, most of the cannabis grown is used for the production of illegal hashish¹¹⁵.

The investigative activities of the Moroccan police forces show that the final destinations of hashish shipments leaving the Kingdom of Morocco are Europe (Spain in particular, France and Italy) and some Middle Eastern countries (including Turkey). The main methods of access to the most important European ports (Spain in particular) are containers shipped on vessels departing from the ports of Tangier, Tanger-Med, Casablanca, Agadir, Mehdia and international freight trucks, which are also capable of concealing

¹¹⁴ E. S. DCSA (Rabat) Kingdom of Morocco – Information report data 2024.

¹¹⁵ US Department of State, INCSR 2024, March 2024, p. 259



large quantities of cannabis resin inside them. In the north-eastern regions of the country, small 'go-fast' boats, such as dinghies and fishing boats, are used. After reaching larger vessels in the extraterritorial waters off Morocco in the Mediterranean, they head for Italy, Libya, Egypt and Turkey. One phenomenon that is being closely monitored is the trafficking of hashish between Morocco and Spain using new technologies. At the end of November 2024, as part of an investigation coordinated with Europol and the Ukrainian and Polish police forces, the Spanish National Police dismantled a criminal organisation in Algeciras dedicated to smuggling hashish from Morocco into Spain using

small unmanned aircraft¹¹⁶. These so-called 'narcodrones', manufactured in Ukraine and transported by road to southern Spain, were used by local criminal organisations based in Campo de Gibraltar and on the Costa del Sol, exploiting their capacity to carry around 10 kg of cannabis resin per flight and their range of over 50 km. In particular, during the investigation, which resulted in the arrest of 10 people between Algeciras and Marbella and the seizure of three aircraft, it was possible to ascertain that the criminal organisation sent up to 1,000 kg of hashish to Spain by flying drones

¹¹⁶ E. S. DCSA (Rabat) Kingdom of Morocco – 2024 data report, cit.

ALGECIRAS (SPAIN) – NARCO-DRONE SEIZED BY THE NATIONAL POLICE



Source: https://www.policia.es/_es/comunicacion_prensa_detalle.php?ID=16392

over the border¹¹⁷.

According to information obtained from open sources, confirmed by the publication of seizures by the Royal Armed Forces (FAR), the desert route continues to be particularly popular for the use of dromedaries to transport drugs. During the year, several tonnes of cannabis resin were seized at the eastern border of the Kingdom, 70 km south of the city of Rissani (a Moroccan city on the border with Algeria), together with the transport animals. Apart from the direct trafficking route between Spain and Morocco, cannabis resin is typically transported by land from Morocco to Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, and then on to Algeria, Libya and Egypt.

The reconfiguration of cannabis resin trafficking routes in West Africa could have an impact on drug distribution

networks operating between North Africa, the Gulf of Guinea and the Sahel. As also highlighted in the UNODC Report, trafficking of cannabis resin via the so-called Atlantic route appears to have intensified recently, which may also reflect a broader global trend of hashish trafficking to Latin and Central America, possibly in exchange for cocaine. However, as the destination of drugs seized at sea is often unclear, it is difficult to assess the percentage of cannabis resin that will subsequently transit through the Sahel region¹¹⁸.

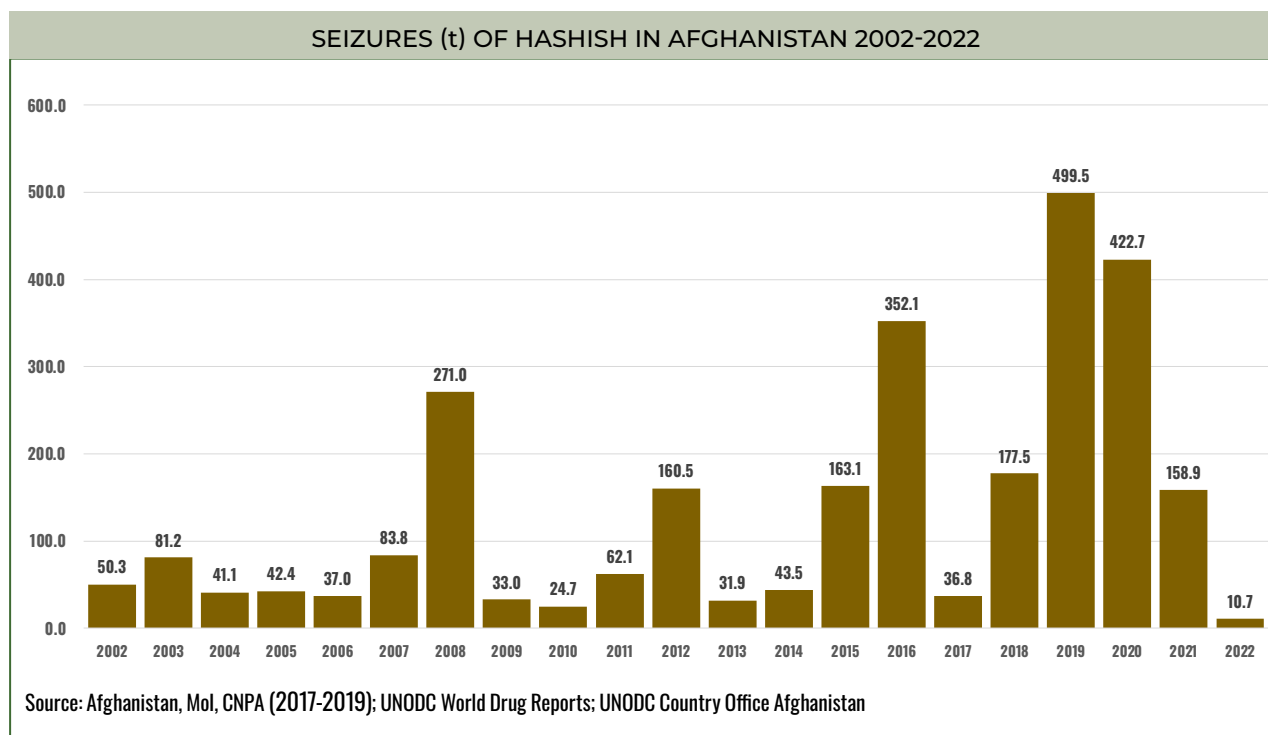
Asian routes

After Morocco, the second largest producer of hashish is **Afghanistan**¹¹⁹, followed by Pakistan and Lebanon. From

¹¹⁷ E. S. DCSA (Rabat) Kingdom of Morocco – 2024 data report, cit.

¹¹⁸ The intensification of the Atlantic route is supported by a series of seizures of several tonnes of cannabis resin, carried out in recent years at sea or in transit in the ports of the Gulf of Guinea.

¹¹⁹ UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest, cit.



these countries, the routes radiate out to Europe:

- the **Indian route**, which crosses Afghanistan, Nepal and India and continues towards Europe and the east coast of Africa;
- the **Syrian route**, which winds its way from Lebanon along two lines, south towards Jordan and Saudi Arabia and west towards the Mediterranean;
- the **Balkan route**, which advances towards Europe from Afghanistan and Pakistan, through Turkey and the Balkan Republics¹²⁰.

Recent studies conducted by the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors (CARICC) have revealed a sharp increase in the number of seizures of drugs originating in Afghanistan¹²¹. In

particular, in:

- **Kazakhstan**: in the first half of 2024, there was an overall 10.3% increase in cannabis seizures (from 3,458.5 kg to 3,815 kg)¹²²;
- **Uzbekistan**: cannabis seizures increased by 73.9%;
- **Tajikistan**: its poorly controlled border with Afghanistan makes it the main transit country along the 'northern route' for opiates, but also for cannabis, both originating in Afghanistan and destined, among others, for the Russian and European markets. As the poorest of the Central Asian states, recreational drug use is minimal but on the rise. According to statistics from Tajikistan's Drug Control Agency (DCA), in the first half of 2023, Tajik law enforcement agencies destroyed 1,324,348 cannabis plants, an increase

¹²⁰ UNODC, WDR 2022, Booklet 3.

¹²¹ E.S. DCSA in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), outcome of meeting between Director and CARICC

leadership, November 2024.

¹²² E.S. DCSA in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), outcome of meeting between Director and CARICC leadership, November 2024.

of 64% compared to 2022¹²³. The total amount of cannabis seized increased by 34.4% (from 2,160.4 kg to 2,903.9 kg).

- **Kyrgyzstan:** cannabis seizures showed an overall increase of 30.2% (from 184.1 kg in 2023 to 239.8 kg in 2024).

Cannabis is the most widely produced and consumed drug in **Turkey**. In addition to legal cultivation, cannabis is grown illegally in almost all regions, although it is more concentrated in certain rural areas of the country, such as the provinces of Diyarbakır and Bingöl in the South-Eastern Anatolia region, where it is also enhanced by modern irrigation systems.

There has been a significant increase in the amount of cannabis, including *skunk*, seized between 2021 and 2023. In 2021 64.125 tonnes of cannabis were seized, rising to 71.967 tonnes in 2022 and 99.294 tonnes in 2023. The amount of *skunk* seized in the same years increased from 5.5 tonnes in 2021 to 8.6 tonnes in 2022, reaching

21.4 tonnes in 2023 (+148% compared to the previous year). In 2023, there was a 43.6% increase in the quantity of cannabis plants seized (157,343,758) compared to the previous year (109,572,459).

Hashish, originating from North Africa, Afghanistan, Iran, Lebanon and Albania, is largely intended to fuel domestic consumption.

As for the local and foreign criminal organisations involved, recognised terrorist organisations in the country, primarily the PKK, play an essential role in all stages of the illicit drug trade: from production to retail sale, which also serves to illegally finance their associations. The PKK imposes a 'tax' on traffickers and other criminal groups involved and forces

people living in Eastern Anatolia to grow cannabis, from which it derives huge profits both from its own crops and those of others, demanding a tax of up to 50% on the proceeds from the cultivation and production of cannabis at the local level. As part of the military campaign against the PKK, the Armed Forces are making a significant contribution to locating and destroying cannabis fields in order to fight the notorious terrorist organisation more effectively¹²⁴.

In **Thailand**, recent legal developments have created uncertainty regarding the status of cannabis use for non-medical purposes. The removal of cannabis from the list of prohibited substances, a form of legalisation, has created a legal vacuum followed by many communications aimed at regulating the non-medical use of cannabis.

Furthermore, many offences related to non-medical cannabis use are still bound by legislation from the 1990s¹²⁵.

Thailand does also subject the inflorescences of the cannabis plant to regulatory control, classifying them as 'controlled herb'. Formal authorisation is therefore required for research, export, sale or processing of this 'controlled herb'. Those who obtain authorisation must comply with the conditions laid down by law, including, but not limited to, a ban on sales to persons under the age of 20, pregnant or breastfeeding women, and students, unless the substance is prescribed by a doctor. Furthermore, the distribution of 'controlled herb' through vending machines, electronic platforms or digital networks is prohibited, as is the commercial advertising of products based on this substance.

Cannabis extracts are regulated as

¹²³ US Department of State, INCSR 2024, March 2024, cit.

¹²⁴ E.S.DCSA Istanbul, Turkey – Annual Information Report 2024.

¹²⁵ UNODC, WDR 2024, cit.

narcotics and require authorisation for production, distribution and use under the Narcotics Act.

This regulatory framework aims to control its consumption for medical purposes, ensuring that producers obtain the necessary authorisation and comply with established standards, in order to guarantee consumer safety and prevent abuse¹²⁶.

It should be noted, however, that over the last three years there has been an increase in cannabis seizures at Italian air borders originating in Thailand, transported by couriers using tourist air routes and through the sending of postal parcels containing the substance.

China is one of the largest producers and exporters of cannabis. Possession is prohibited and severely punished. Cannabis is mainly purchased online and on the dark web, in the form of finished products or cannabis seeds, and shipped using the method of misdeclaring the goods.

Seizures have revealed the following methods of concealment: in packets of biscuits, in books, as soft sweets containing THC or inside travel luggage for small and modest quantities; inside car wheels, in pet food boxes, in plasterboard panels, inside furniture accessories, air compressors for container shipments, on cargo ships, through the ports of Hong Kong and Shenzhen¹²⁷.

There have also been cases of foreign cannabis being imported into China mainly through international smuggling or through international deliveries in small, frequent shipments¹²⁸.

¹²⁶ Official communication to UNODC on 2 April 2024.

¹²⁷ ES DCSA Beijing, People's Republic of China. Annual Report 2024.

¹²⁸ Office of National Narcotics Control Commission (NNCC), China Drug Situation

Data on the fight against cannabis plants in Italy

A comparison of 2024 with the previous year shows an almost identical situation, with two categories in slight decrease: operations - 2.69% (470 compared to 483 in 2023) and seizures -1.12% (154,819 plants compared to 156,577 previously). On the other hand, there was a slight increase, even compared to a previous negative trend, in the number of referrals with +1.41% (505 compared to 498 in 2023), of which just under half (233, equal to 46.14% of the total) were arrested (in line with the 2023 figure of 247 people, or 49.60% of the total).

The cultivation and sale of cannabis plants have mainly been carried out by fellow countrymen. Among those reported to the judicial authorities in 2024, foreigners accounted for a minimal percentage: 9.11% (46 out of a total of 505). Of the 46 foreigners

reported, 28.26% (13) were arrested, but their low incidence (5.58%) on the total number of persons arrested of any nationality (233) continues to highlight the prevalence of Italians in offences related to cannabis plants. Similarly low was the percentage of foreigners arrested out of the total number of persons reported of any nationality: 2.57%.

The most involved nationalities - other than Italian - were Albanian, by far the most prevalent (11 persons), followed by Sri Lankan, Pakistani, Moroccan and Chinese (all with 3 persons); however, the data on other nationalities is not quantitatively significant, confirming the Italian connotation of cannabis plant trafficking.

OPERATIONS	470 -2.69%
CANNABIS PLANTS SEIZED	154,819 -1.12%
REPORTED	505 +1.41%

Almost all of those reported were male: 469 men (92.87%) compared to 36 women (7.13%). Only 0.79% of those reported were minors (4) and none were foreign nationals. More

than half (53.86%) of those reported for criminal offences related to cannabis plants were aged 40 or over, while the lowest percentage (2.57%) concerned individuals aged between 15 and 19. No minors under

SUMMARY TABLE - CANNABIS PLANTS

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Var.% 23-24
Operations	1,199	968	613	483	470	-2.69
Seizures						
Plants (no)	415,298	305,249	209,166	156,577	154,819	-1.12
Person reported to the J.A.	1,353	1,073	721	498	505	1.41
Italians	1,256	990	668	460	459	-0.22
Foreigners of whom:	97	83	53	38	46	21.05
Albanians	19	28	5	12	11	-8.33
Sri Lankans	-	-	-	-	3	--
Pakistanis	-	-	1	-	3	--
Moroccans	9	6	1	2	3	50.00
Chinese	2	1	1	2	3	50.00
Males	1,240	970	657	454	469	3.30
Females	113	103	64	44	36	-18.18
Of age	1,337	1,066	712	492	501	1.83
Minors	16	7	9	6	4	-33.33
Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	1,344	1,059	673	498	504	1.20
Conspiracy to traffick (Art. 74)	9	14	48	-	1	--
Other offences	-	-	-	-	-	--
Arrested	690	602	385	247	233	-5.67
Reported but not arrested	661	468	336	251	272	8.37
At large	2	3	-	-	-	--
< 15	-	-	-	-	-	--
15-19	60	33	26	17	13	-23.53
20-24	188	110	74	40	42	5.00
25-29	187	148	88	52	56	7.69
30-34	197	136	102	78	62	-20.51
35-39	148	130	79	54	60	11.11
> 40	573	516	352	257	272	5.84

the age of 15 were involved.

Almost all reports to the judicial authorities were for trafficking/dealing, while only one person was reported for association with the aim of trafficking cannabis plants.

The most significant seizures took place in Sardinia: in Siamaggiore (OR), in June with 8,000 plants and in October with 20,000, as well as in San Giovanni Suergiu (CA), also in June with 10,556 plants. On the other hand, Sardinia recorded the highest number of plants seized (100,336).

In fact, 89.90% of cannabis plant seizures took place in southern Italy and the islands, 6.25% in northern Italy and 3.84% in central

Italy.

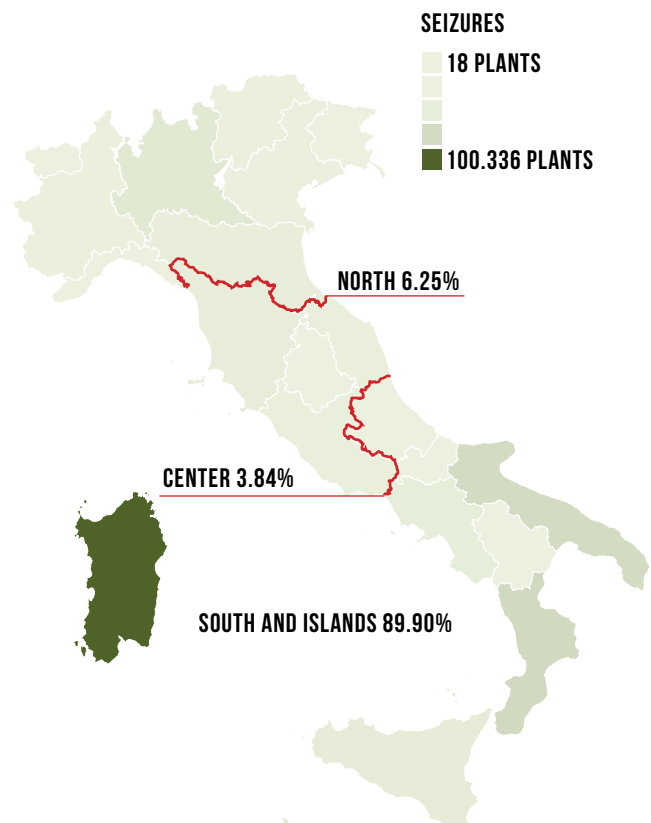
The focus on the ten-year historical series shows that the annual average number of anti-drug operations in which cannabis plants were the main narcotic substance seized was just under 1,000, reaching a peak in 2016 (1,320 operations) and a low in 2024 (470).

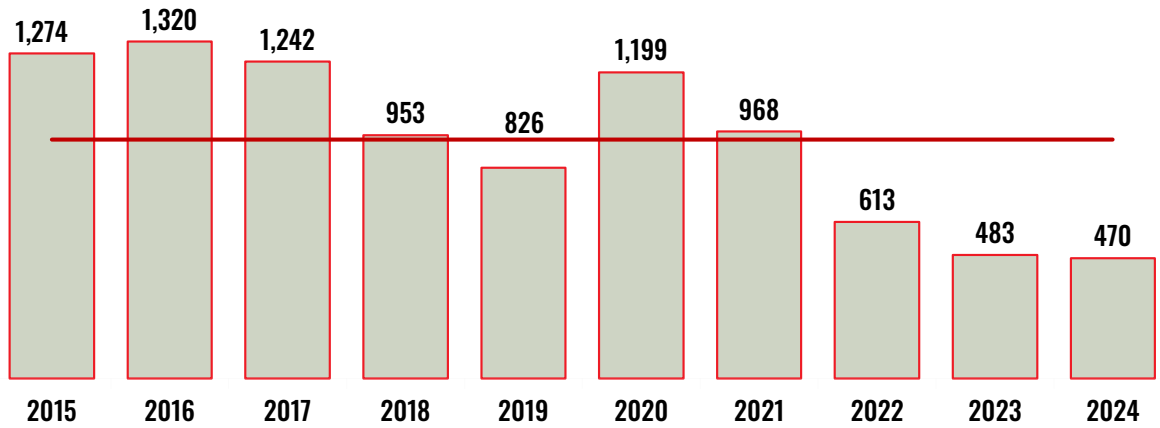
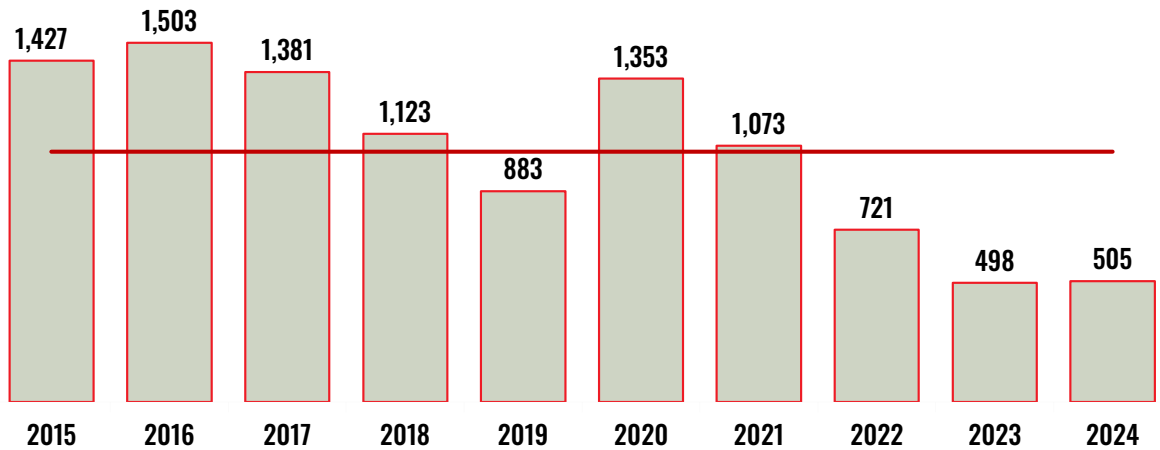
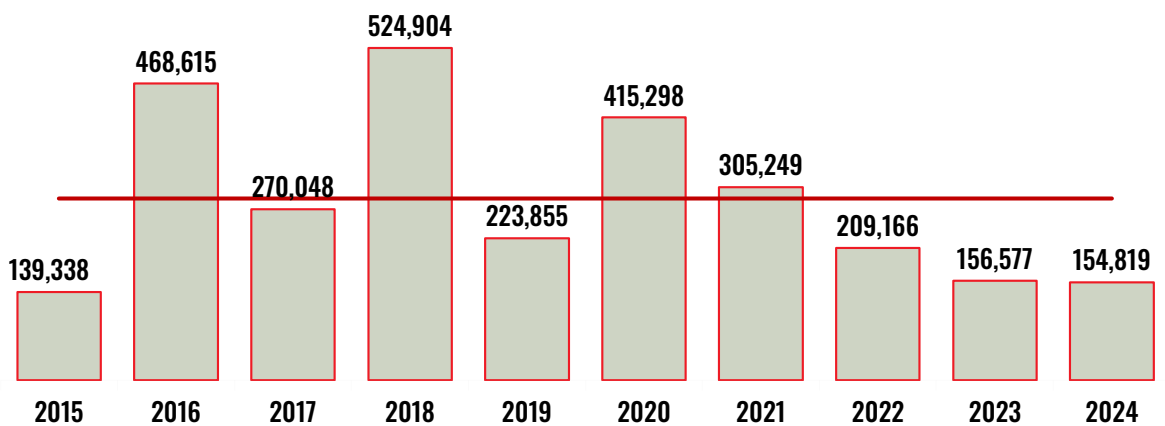
The average number of referrals was just over 1,000, with the lowest figure recorded in 2023 (498) and the highest in 2016 (1,503).

Seizures of cannabis plants, on the other hand, fluctuated, with an annual average of just 290,000 units, peaking in 2018 (524,904 plants) and reaching a low in 2015 (139,338).

CANNABIS PLANTS SEIZURES - REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	2,346	193	-91.77
Basilicata	157	18	-88.54
Calabria	29,430	16,753	-43.08
Campania	5,102	3,049	-40.24
Emilia Romagna	1,463	2,125	45.25
Friuli V. G.	2,001	27	-98.65
Lazio	4,902	1,495	-69.50
Liguria	1,265	143	-88.70
Lombardy	7,505	5,992	-20.16
Marche	304	1,479	386.51
Molise	160	26	-83.75
Piedmont	4,865	343	-92.95
Apulia	10,487	15,495	47.75
Sardinia	72,698	100,336	38.02
Sicily	8,959	3,318	-62.96
Tuscany	3,503	2,877	-17.87
Trentino A. A.	306	345	12.75
Umbria	188	98	-47.87
Valle d'Aosta	4	9	125.00
Veneto	932	698	-25.11
Regional total	156,577	154,819	-1.12
International waters	-	-	--
National total	156,577	154,819	-1.12



TEN
YEAR
TREND**Operations: 935, avarege value****Persons reported: 1,047, avarege value****Seizures: 286,787, avarege plant value**

The fight against marijuana in Italy

A comparative analysis of the two most recent years shows a decrease in all categories in 2024: -9.03% for operations (2,378); -12.71% for persons reported to the judicial authorities (2,336), of whom 54.75% were arrested; -28.97% for marijuana seized (28,752.47 kg, compared to 40,478.51 kg in 2023).

The individuals reported to the judicial authorities in 2024 for dealing and trafficking marijuana were predominantly Italian men of legal age. Only 23.63% (552) of those reported were foreign nationals (mostly Peruvians, Gambians and Albanians), of whom just under half were arrested (271, or 49.09%), accounting for 21.19% of the total number of people arrested of all nationalities (1,279).

Minors (97) accounted for 4.15% of those reported; 11 of them were foreign nationals (11.34% of the total number of minors).

The highest percentage of those referred (29.11%) were aged 40 or over, while the lowest (0.21%) were under the age of 15.

The reports concerned almost exclusively trafficking/dealing (2,305, equal to 98.67%), with a residual amount concerning association for the purpose of trafficking marijuana (1.33%).

The most significant seizures of marijuana took place in October in Sarule (NU), with 3,717 kg, and in December in the port of Brindisi, with 4,687 kg and 3,413 kg.

OPERATIONS	2,378 -9.03%
MARIJUANA SEIZED	28,752.47 KG -28.97%
REPORTED	2,336 -12.61%

SUMMARY TABLE - MARIJUANA

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Var.% 23-24
Operations	6,796	4,608	3,182	2,614	2,378	-9.03
Seizures						
doses	1,336	51,399	1,916	1,839	1,577	-14.25
kg	20,309.60	47,046.93	33,554.59	40,478.51	28,752.47	-28.97
Person reported to the J.A.	7,647	5,418	3,356	2,673	2,336	-12.61
Italians	5,598	4,391	2,657	2,129	1,784	-16.20
Foreigners of whom:	2,049	1,027	699	544	552	1.47
Peruvians	22	23	24	30	64	113.33
Gambians	468	149	63	63	60	-4.76
Albanians	191	129	97	61	42	-31.15
Nigerinans	331	152	113	63	41	-34.92
Tunisians	57	24	23	16	34	112.50
Males	7,169	5,027	3,121	2,492	2,175	-12.72
Females	478	391	235	181	161	-11.05
Of age	7,236	5,148	3,199	2,567	2,239	-12.78
Minors	411	270	157	106	97	-8.49
Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	7,485	5,212	3,311	2,593	2,305	-11.11
Conspiracy to traffick (Art. 74)	162	206	45	77	31	-59.74
Other offences	-	-	-	3	-	-100.00
Arrested	4,560	3,135	1,824	1,501	1,279	-14.79
Reported but not arrested	3,065	2,277	1,519	1,168	1,055	-9.67
At large	22	6	13	4	2	-50.00
< 15	26	15	10	2	5	150.00
15-19	1,085	694	357	260	264	1.54
20-24	1,979	1,225	684	469	419	-10.66
25-29	1,408	911	570	468	401	-14.32
30-34	943	721	457	383	318	-16.97
35-39	670	508	354	295	249	-15.59
> 40	1,536	1,344	924	796	680	-14.57

The marijuana seized was generally hidden in homes (1,051 cases) and on persons (1,049 cases), less so in postal packages (296) and vehicles (166).

Most marijuana seizures took place in the South and on the Islands (64.05%); Northern and Central Italy accounted for 26.94% and 9.01% respectively.

Over the decade, the average annual value of anti-drug operations in which marijuana was the main narcotic substance under investigation was just over 5,000, reaching a peak in 2017 (8,602) and a low in 2024 (2,378).

The average number of persons referred to the judicial authorities was just over 5,800, with the lowest figure in 2024 (2,336) and

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SEIZURES - MARIJUANA

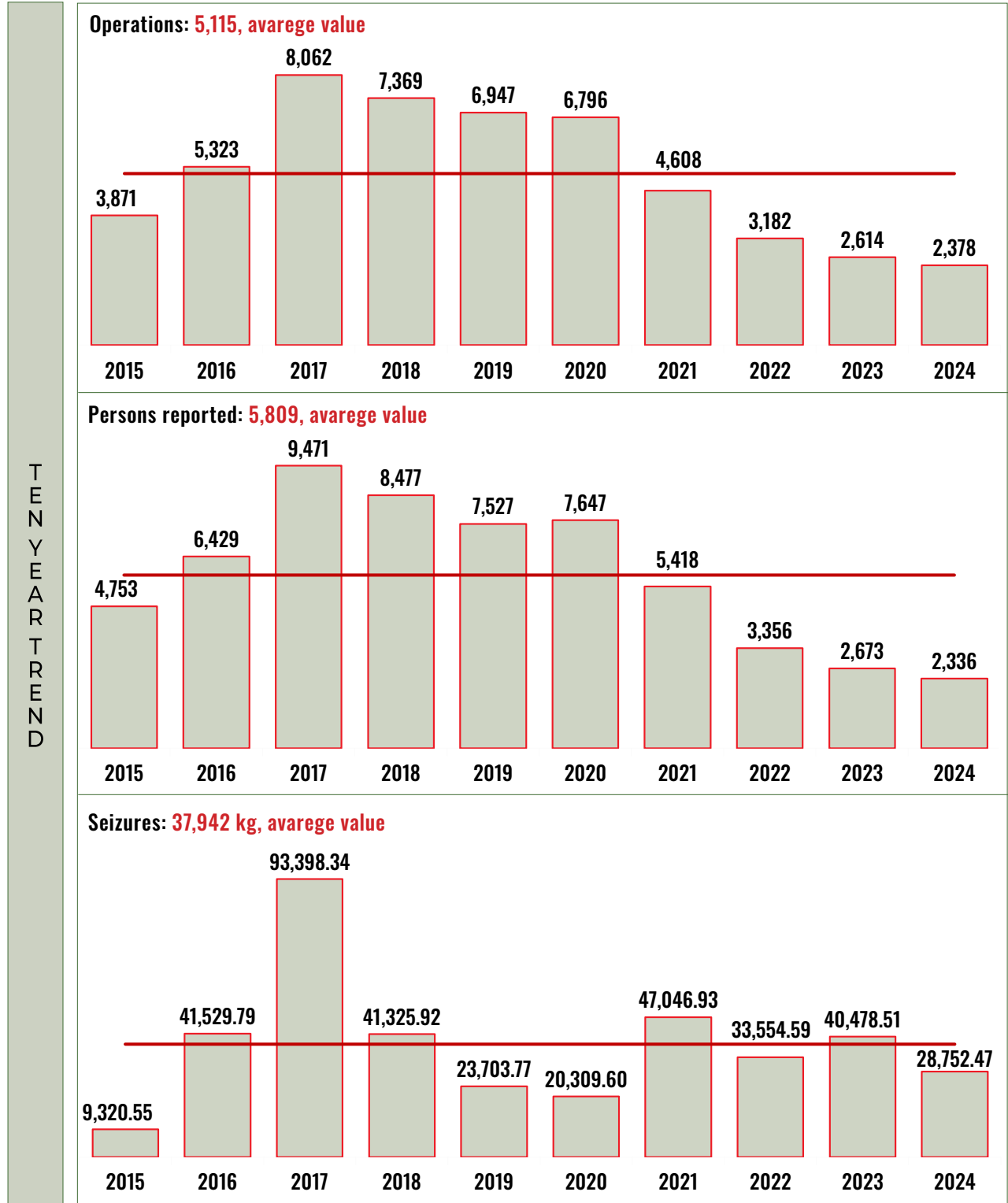
Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	115.73	49.02	-57.65
Basilicata	26.74	16.07	-39.92
Calabria	4,158.46	897.60	-78.42
Campania	1,689.01	474.72	-71.89
Emilia Romagna	162.14	341.64	110.70
Friuli V. G.	214.81	219.99	2.41
Lazio	1,973.43	1,738.57	-11.90
Liguria	818.90	581.50	-28.99
Lombardy	2,588.04	3,325.50	28.49
Marche	752.73	170.54	-77.34
Molise	0.13	56.25	42,592.72
Piedmont	2,562.65	3,030.16	18.24
Apulia	319.62	9,192.01	2,775.91
Sardinia	22,661.44	7,096.33	-68.69
Sicily	1,088.83	633.29	-41.84
Tuscany	511.96	672.18	31.29
Trentino A. A.	39.44	31.39	-20.41
Umbria	19.97	9.95	-50.19
Valle d'Aosta	5.40	0.24	-95.60
Veneto	769.08	215.55	-71.97
Regional total	40,478.51	28,752.47	-28.97
International waters	-	-	--
National total	40,478.51	28,752.47	-28.97



the highest in 2017 (9,471).

Marijuana seizures have shown fluctuating

trends, with an annual average of just under 38 tonnes, reaching a peak in 2017 (93,398.34 kg) and a low in 2015 (9,320.55 kg).





Marijuana flows towards Italy: border seizures

In 2024, there was a 787.86% increase in the quantities of marijuana seized at borders (11,351.49 kg compared to 1,278.52 kg in 2023).

Border seizures of marijuana accounted for 39.48% of the total seizures made on national territory (28,752.47 kg).

Marijuana entered our country mainly by sea (78.66% of the quantities seized), then by air (18.32%) and, finally, by land (3.02%).

The exponential increase in the quantities seized at the **maritime border**, with 8,929.63 kg, was almost entirely due to the large seizures in the port of Brindisi of over 8 tonnes, equal to 90.71% of the total. Seizures at the ports of Civitavecchia (7.84%, 700.36 kg) and Livorno (1.44%, 128.60 kg) had less of an impact.

The country from which the largest quantity of marijuana arrived by sea was Bulgaria (8,100 kg).

MARITIME BORDERS 8,929.63 kg - incidence 78.66%

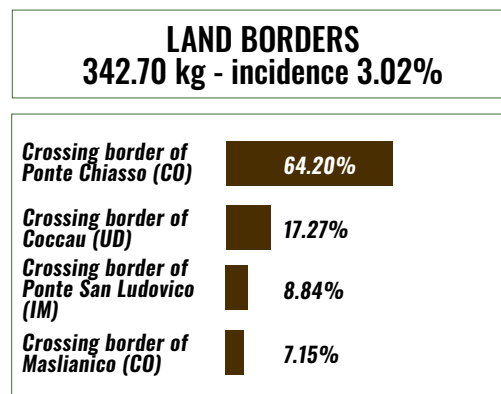
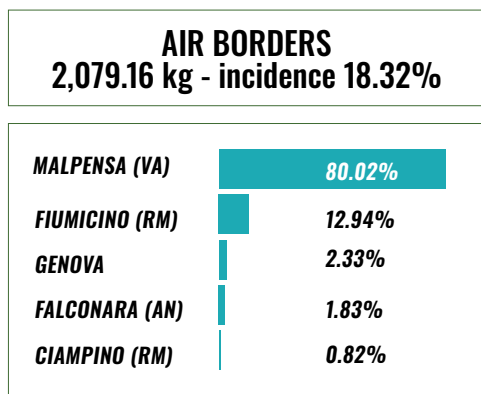
BRINDISI	90.71%
CIVITAVECCHIA (RM)	7.84%
LIVORNO	1.44%

In 2024, operations carried out at the sea border led to the referral of 24 people, including 11 Italian citizens.

The ten-year series saw the port of Brindisi set its record in 2024, with 8,100 kg, compared to previous years with virtually no seizures.

The ports of Civitavecchia (RM) and Livorno also recorded their first and second highest figures in the ten-year series in 2024, respectively.

At the **air border**, 2,079.16 kg of marijuana



were seized, an increase of 537.16% compared to 2023 (326.32 kg). The Italian airport where the largest quantities were seized was Malpensa (VA), with 1,663.68 kg, equal to 80.02% of the total quantity seized at air borders, followed by Fiumicino (RM) with 268.97 kg (12.94%). Both airports saw an increase of more than 900% compared to the previous year.

The countries from which the largest quantities of marijuana arrived by air in 2024 were the United States (1,520.61 kg) and Thailand (242.99 kg). Smaller quantities arrived from Spain (68.71 kg) and Germany (38.23 kg).

At airports, 90 people were referred to the judicial authorities; the nationalities most involved were Italian (17 people), French (10 people) and American, Spanish and Malaysian (9 people each).

The ten-year series of the main airports affected by marijuana trafficking shows an average of 236 kg for Malpensa and 40.09 kg for Fiumicino. Both the Lombardy and the Roman airport recorded their highest figures for the decade in 2024 (1,663.68 kg and 268.97 kg respectively).

Unlike last year, when they ranked first in terms of quantities of marijuana seized, in 2024 **land borders** were the least affected by this illicit trafficking, with 342.70 kg, a decrease of 41.32% compared to 583.99 kg in 2023.

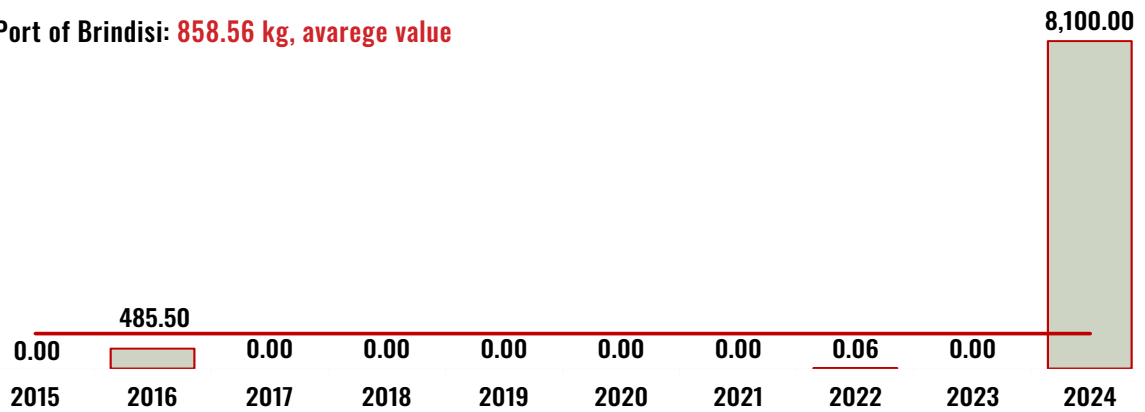
The largest seizures were made at the Ponte Chiasso - CO border crossing (220 kg, equal to 64.20% of the total seized at national land borders), the Coccau - UD (with 59.18 kg, 17.27%) and the Ponte San Ludovico - IM border crossing (30.30 kg, 8.84%).

The majority of the quantities seized came from Switzerland (244.55 kg), the Czech Republic (59.18 kg) and Spain (32.72 kg).

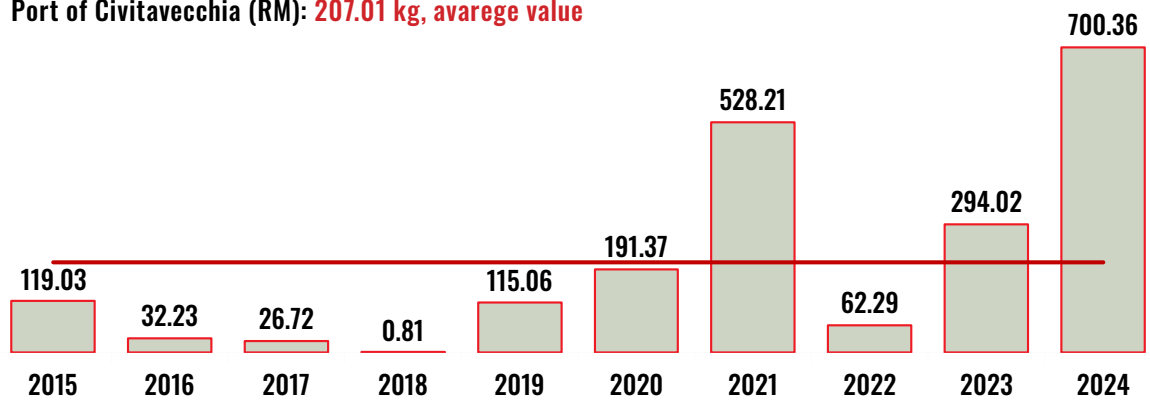
In the same border area, 11 people were reported for drug-related offences, including 3 Italians; among foreigners, Luxembourg nationals were the most involved (4).

In the analysis of the decade, the border crossings of Ponte Chiasso (CO), Autofiori (IM) and Crociale Mulini (CO) were the land border posts with the highest ten-year average in terms of quantities of marijuana seized.

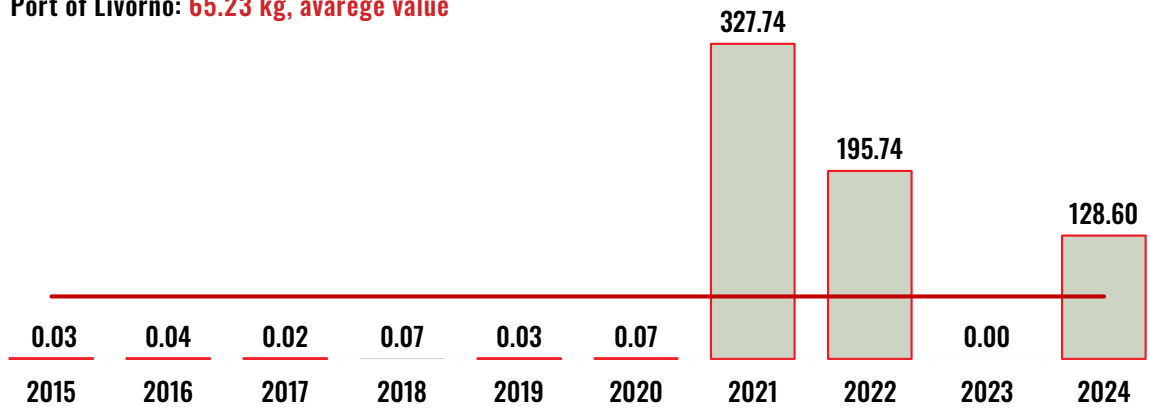
Port of Brindisi: **858.56 kg, avarege value**



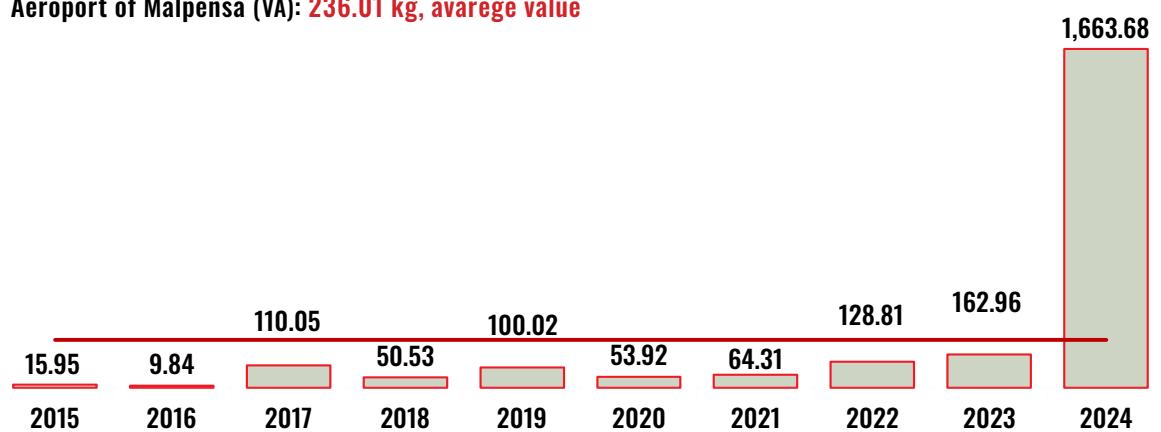
Port of Civitavecchia (RM): **207.01 kg, avarege value**



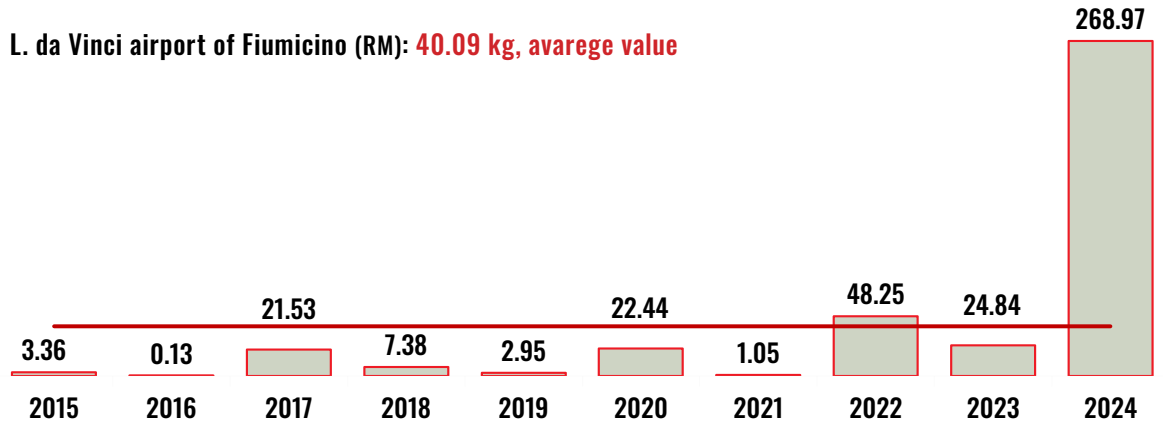
Port of Livorno: **65.23 kg, avarege value**



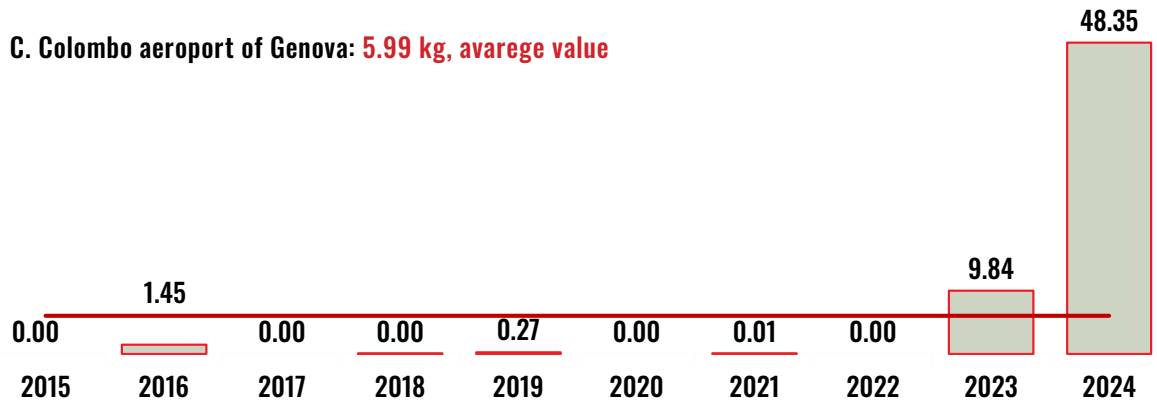
Aeroporto di Malpensa (VA): **236.01 kg, avarege value**



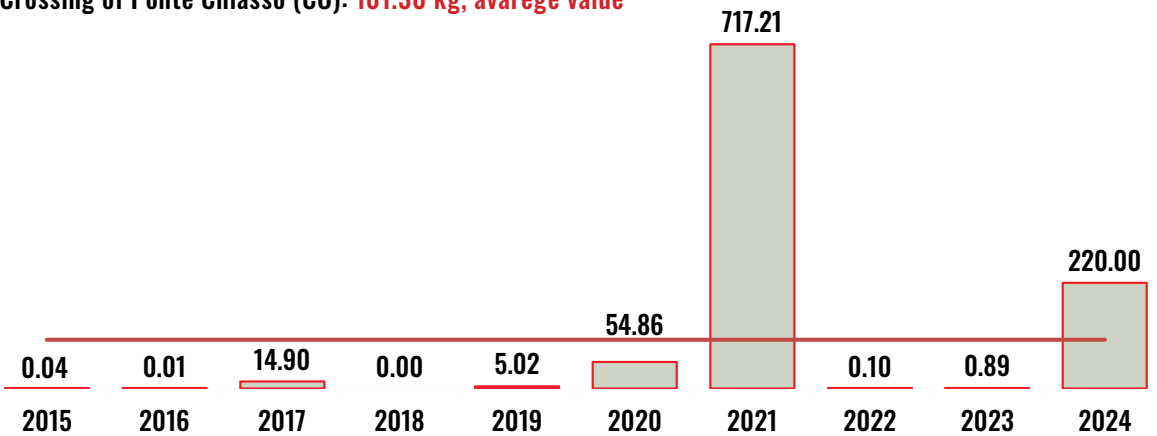
L. da Vinci airport of Fiumicino (RM): 40.09 kg, average value



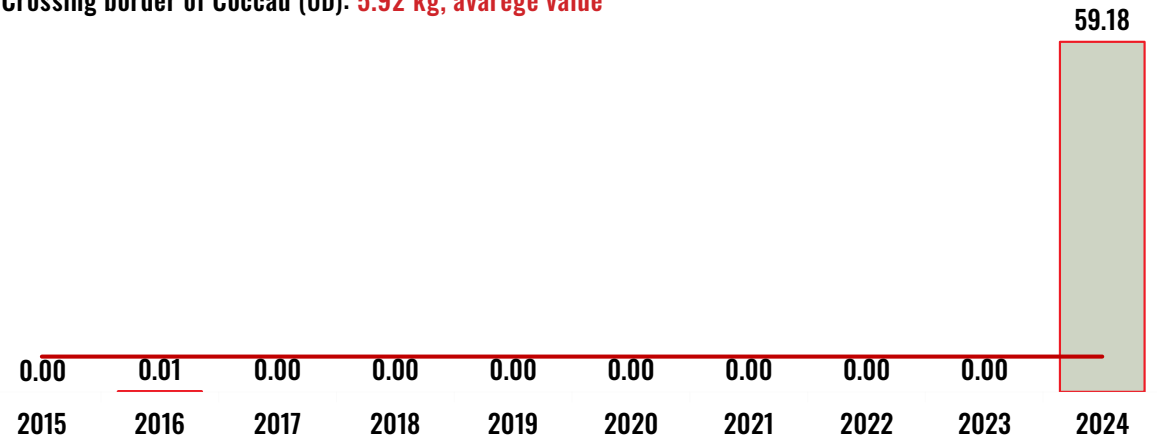
C. Colombo airport of Genova: 5.99 kg, average value



Crossing of Ponte Chiasso (CO): 101.30 kg, average value



Crossing border of Coccau (UD): 5.92 kg, average value



Data on the fight against hashish in Italy

In 2024, police operations to combat the illicit hashish market in Italy increased in terms of both operations and persons referred to the courts, while the quantities seized decreased.

7,095 judicial police operations were carried out (+6.5% compared to 6,659 in 2023), leading to the seizure of 17,395.47 kg (-36.24%, compared to 27,282.04 kg in 2023), to which were added the doses seized in occasional contexts for a total of 3,458 (-50.22% compared to 6,947 doses in 2023), as well as the referral of 7,619 persons (+4.77%), 4,125 of whom were arrested (equal to 54.14%).

The persons reported to the judicial authorities in 2024 for dealing and trafficking in hashish were mainly Italian, with foreigners accounting for 40.87% (3,114) of the total (7,619).

Of the foreigners reported, just over half were arrested (1,646, corresponding to 52.86%), accounting for 39.90% of the total number of persons arrested of any nationality (4,125).

Foreign nationals arrested accounted for 21.60% of the total number of persons of any nationality reported.

The nationalities other than Italian most frequently involved in trafficking this substance were Moroccan, Egyptian and Tunisian.

Almost all of those reported were male: 7,255 men (95.22%) compared to 364 women (4.78%).

Those reported for offences relating to hashish were mostly of legal age, with minors accounting for 9.94% (757), of whom 202 (26.68%) were foreign nationals.

The highest percentage of those referred to the judicial authorities were between 20 and 24 years old (26.92%), while the lowest (0.26%) were under 15 years old.

99.21% of these people were reported for trafficking/dealing offences and 0.79% for criminal association for the purpose of trafficking hashish.

OPERATIONS	7,095 +6.55%
HASHISH SEIZED	17,395.17 KG -36.24%
REPORTED	7,619 +4.77%

SUMMARY TABLE - HASHISH

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Var.% 23-24
Operations	4,137	5,368	5,748	6,659	7,095	6.55
Seizures						
doses	447	1,488	958	6,947	3,458	-50.22
kg	9,764.23	21,092.00	14,981.94	27,282.04	17,395.47	-36.24
Person reported to the J.A.	4,678	6,019	6,639	7,272	7,619	4.77
Italians	3,236	4,033	4,290	4,538	4,505	-0.73
Foreigners of whom:	1,442	1,986	2,349	2,734	3,114	13.90
Moroccans	395	565	686	725	783	8.00
Egyptians	115	110	208	430	604	40.47
Tunisians	147	189	283	374	536	43.32
Gambians	173	214	171	163	164	0.61
Albanians	76	145	138	114	98	-14.04
Males	4,411	5,644	6,256	6,869	7,255	5.62
Females	267	375	383	403	364	-9.68
Of age	4,387	5,556	5,962	6,481	6,862	5.88
Minors	291	463	677	791	757	-4.30
Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	4,467	5,898	6,519	7,012	7,559	7.80
Conspiracy to traffick (Art. 74)	211	121	118	260	60	-76.92
Other offences	-	-	2	-	-	--
Arrested	2,884	3,513	3,549	3,898	4,125	5.82
Reported but not arrested	1,775	2,489	3,078	3,354	3,484	3.88
At large	19	17	12	20	10	-50.00
< 15	11	16	34	38	20	-47.37
15-19	770	1,071	1,478	1,706	1,770	3.75
20-24	1,175	1,500	1,681	1,820	2,051	12.69
25-29	778	946	1,029	1,132	1,305	15.28
30-34	556	706	703	700	775	10.71
35-39	397	514	482	511	505	-1.17
> 40	991	1,266	1,232	1,365	1,193	-12.60

The most significant seizures took place in Rome in April and September, with 966 kg and 1,139.50 kg respectively, and in Treviglio (BG) in February, with 885 kg.

The seized hashish was mostly found hidden on persons (3,039 cases) and in homes (1,460), less so in vehicles (372 cases) and postal packages (168).

Hashish seizures were almost equal in the North (38.85%) and Central Italy (42.24%), while the South and the Islands had a lower rate (18.91%).

The regions with the largest quantities of hashish seized were Lazio, Lombardy, Tuscany, Piedmont and Emilia Romagna, those with the smallest quantities, i.e. less than 50 kg, were, in ascending order, Valle d'Aosta, Molise, Basilicata and Friuli Venezia Giulia. In percentage terms, however, the largest increase in the quantity of hashish

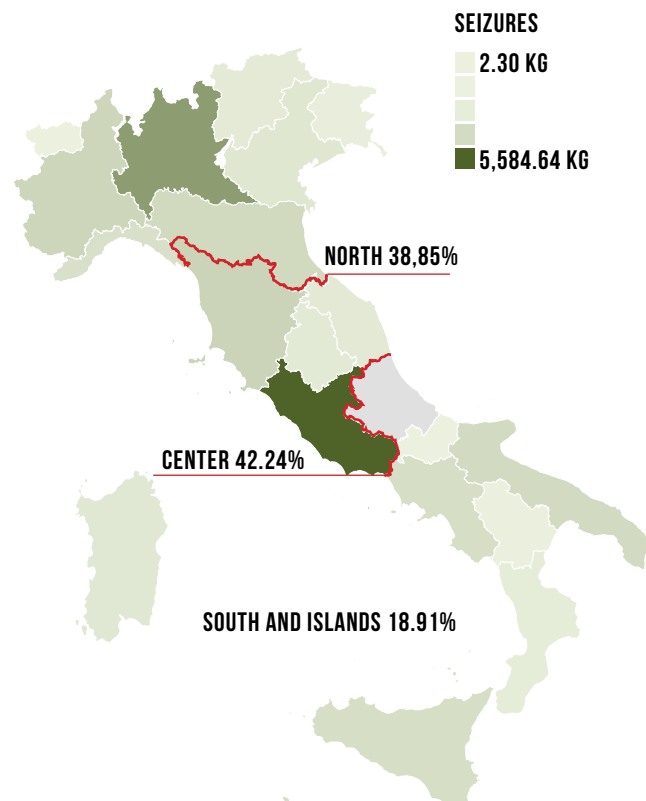
seized was in Valle d'Aosta (+663.99%), although this is not a significant figure in absolute terms, having risen from 0.30 kg to 2.30 kg. Significant percentage increases were also seen in Umbria (+410.63%), Tuscany (+140.93%) and Friuli Venezia Giulia (+133.03%). The largest decreases were observed in Molise, Piedmont, Lombardy and Lazio (with fluctuations ranging from approximately 81% to 43% less).

The focus on the ten-year historical series shows that the average annual number of anti-drug operations in which hashish was the main narcotic substance was just over 6,000, reaching its peak in 2024 (7,095 operations) and its lowest point in 2020 (4,137).

The number of cases reported to the judicial authorities, albeit with fluctuating trends, averaged just over 7,000, with a minimum in 2020 (4,678) and the highest

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SEIZURES - HASHISH

Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	136.24	253.62	86.15
Basilicata	29.90	25.97	-13.15
Calabria	215.93	214.02	-0.88
Campania	975.51	762.99	-21.79
Emilia Romagna	948.35	942.83	-0.58
Friuli V. G.	44.68	104.11	133.03
Lazio	9,877.30	5,584.64	-43.46
Liguria	857.90	649.14	-24.33
Lombardy	6,704.52	3,326.43	-50.39
Marche	260.53	303.94	16.66
Molise	42.26	7.69	-81.80
Piedmont	4,437.80	1,080.73	-75.65
Apulia	606.83	897.16	47.84
Sardinia	240.64	383.53	59.38
Sicily	889.22	743.97	-16.33
Tuscany	474.80	1,143.93	140.93
Trentino A. A.	120.02	259.85	116.51
Umbria	61.70	315.04	410.63
Valle d'Aosta	0.30	2.30	663.99
Veneto	357.62	393.57	10.05
Regional total	27,282.04	17,395.47	-36.24
International waters	-	-	--
National total	27,282.04	17,395.47	-36.24



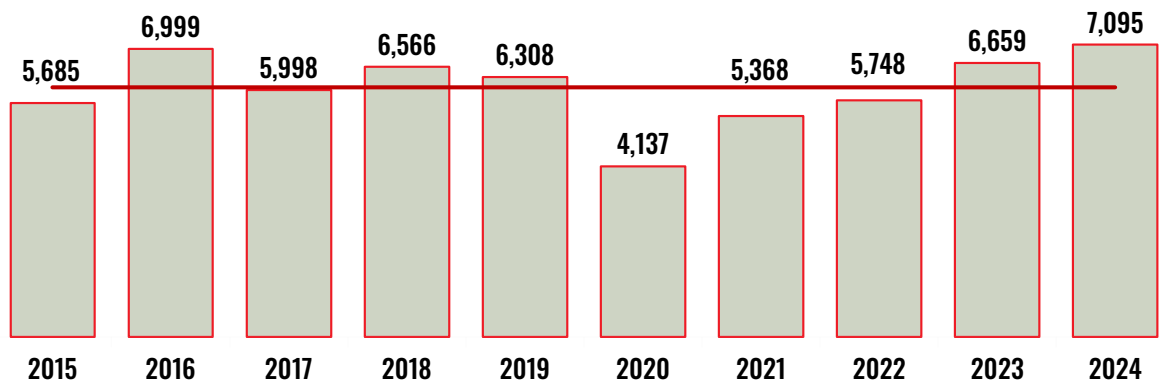
in 2016 (8,502); however, 2024 recorded the third highest value in the series (7,619 persons reported).

Hashish seizures peaked in 2018 and reached their lowest level in 2020, but the

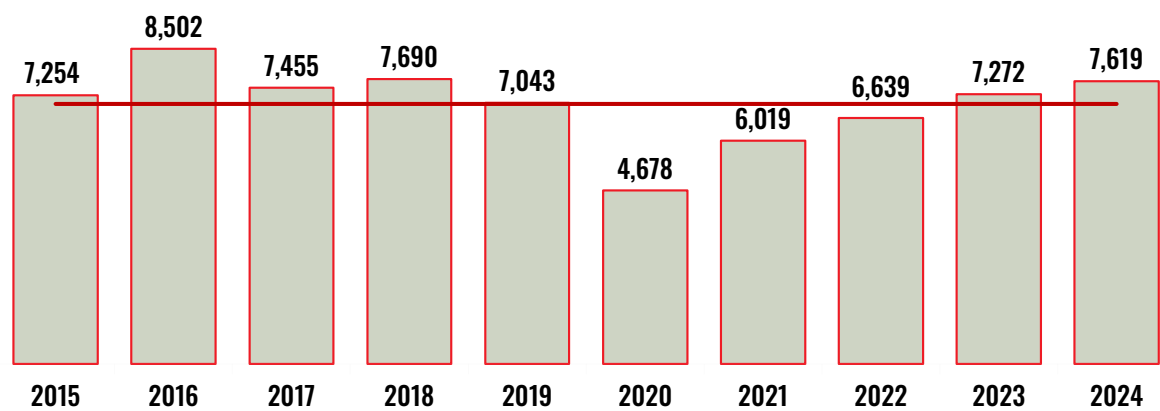
ten-year series showed a different trend in the first five years compared to the last five: from 2015 to 2019, the average was just over 42 tonnes, while from 2020 to 2024 it was just over 18 tonnes.

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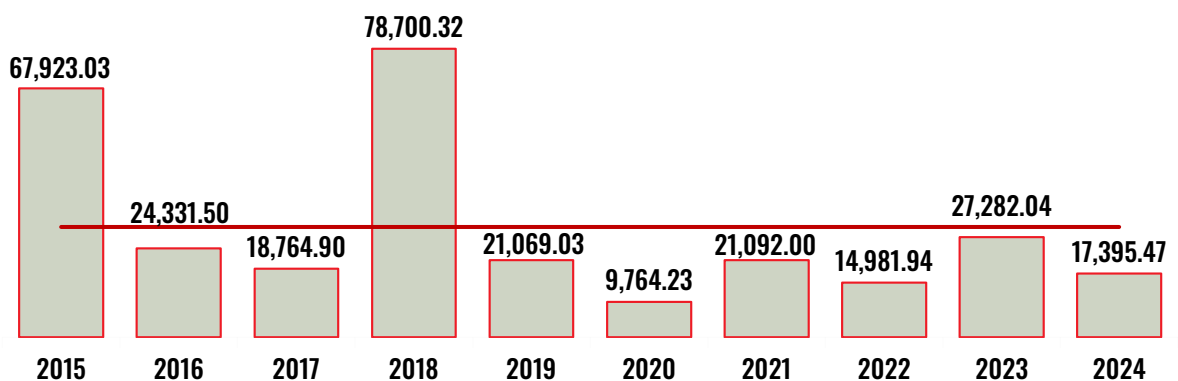
Operations: **6,056, avarege value**



Persons reported: **7,017, avarege value**



Seizures: **30,130.45 kg, avarege value**





Hashish flows towards Italy: border seizure

In 2024, hashish entered Italy mainly by sea (58.42% of the quantities seized), to a lesser extent by air (21.64%) and by land (19.94%). Border seizures of hashish (757.04 kg) accounted for 4.35% of total national seizures of the same substance (17,395.47 kg), which is a decrease compared to 2023 (15.83%).

Similarly, their incidence compared to the quantities of hashish seized at borders in 2023 (4,317.57 kg) also decreased (-82.47%).

The **maritime border**, with 442.29 kg, was where the largest quantities of hashish were intercepted, but with a decrease of 89.37% compared to 2023.

In terms of percentages, the port of Cagliari ranks first as regards the quantity of hashish seized, with 71.88% (317.90 kg) of the quantities intercepted at all maritime borders, followed by the ports of Civitavecchia - RM (18.97%, 83.90 kg) and

MARITIME BORDERS 442.29 kg - incidence 58.42%

CAGLIARI	71.88%
CIVITAVECCHIA (RM)	18.97%
GENOVA	9.08%
ISOLA BIANCA (SS)	0.06%

Genoa (9.08%, 40.16 kg).

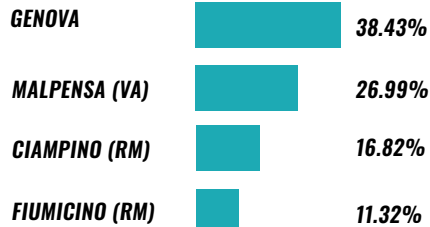
The countries from which the largest quantities of hashish arrived by sea were Spain (83.90 kg) and Morocco (40.14 kg).

During the 2024 operations at the maritime border, a total of 10 people were referred, 5 of whom were Italian citizens.

At the **air border**, 163.81 kg of hashish were seized, 31.47% more than in 2023 (124.60 kg), of which 82.24% was seized at three Italian airports: Cristoforo Colombo in Genoa (62.95 kg),

AIR BORDERS

163.81 kg - incidence 21.64%



Malpensa - VA (44.21 kg) and Ciampino - RM (27.56 kg).

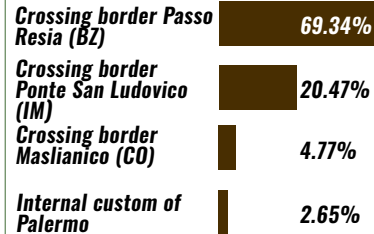
The countries from which the largest quantities of hashish arrived by air were Spain (93.51 kg) and the United States (42.83 kg).

At airport level, 108 people were reported to the judicial authorities, including 28 Italians, 31 Spaniards and 30 French nationals.

At land borders, 150.93 kg of hashish were seized, an increase of 358.16% compared to 2023 (32.94 kg), and 7 people were referred to the judicial authorities.

LAND BORDERS

150.93 kg - incidence 19.94%



The largest seizures were made at the Passo Resia border crossing (BZ) with 104.65 kg (69.34% of seizures at national land borders) and at the Ponte San Ludovico border crossing (IM) with 30.90 kg (20.47%).

The countries from which the largest quantities of hashish arrived by land in 2024 were Germany (104.65 kg) and Spain (36.06 kg).

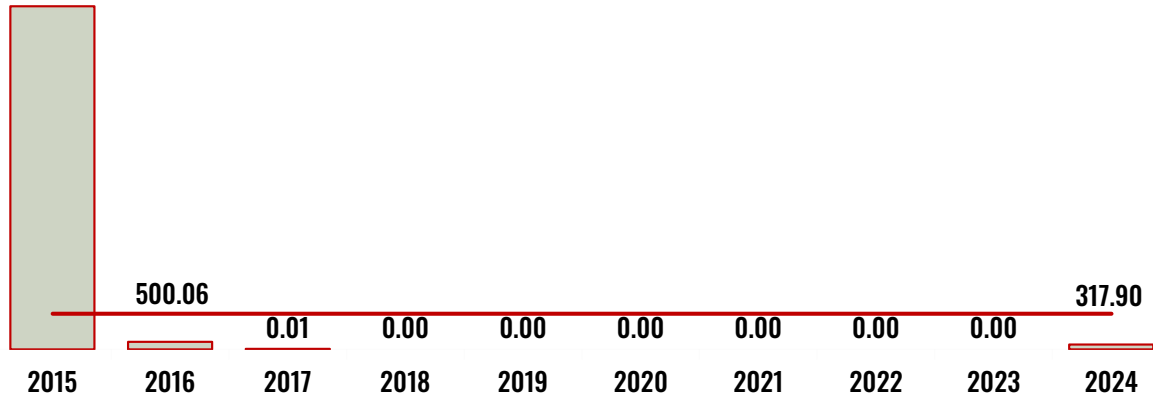
Looking at the ten-year trend in seizures at **land border** crossings with the highest averages, the Autofiori border crossing in Ventimiglia (IM) recorded an annual average of just over 278 kg of hashish seizures, with the highest value in 2021 (766.96 kg) and the lowest in 2024 (0.21 kg), while the Passo Resia border crossing (BZ) ranked third, which was the site of the largest seizure at land borders in 2024 (104.65 kg) and where there had been no seizures in previous years. All other land borders did not exceed an annual average of one kilogram.

DRUG TESTING AT THE AIRPORT OF MALPENSA

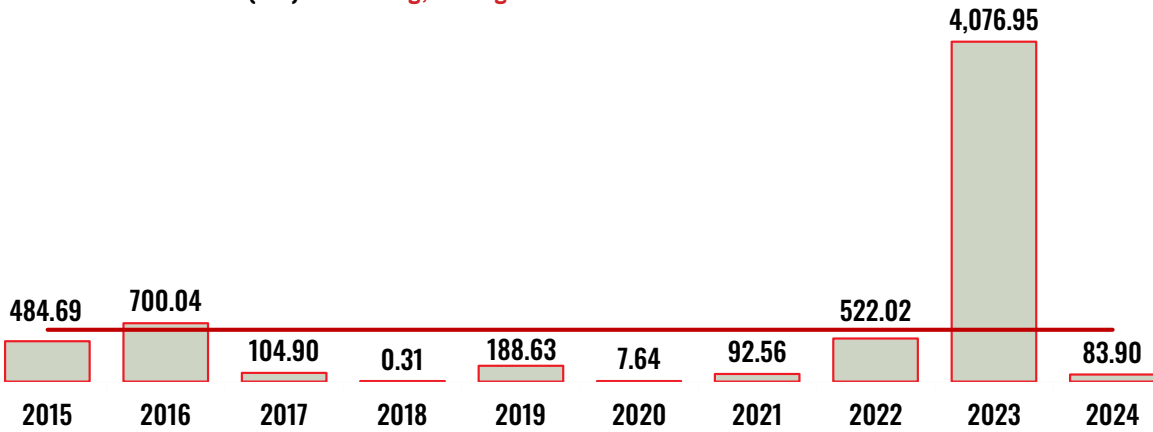


Port of Cagliari: **2,322.40 kg, average value**

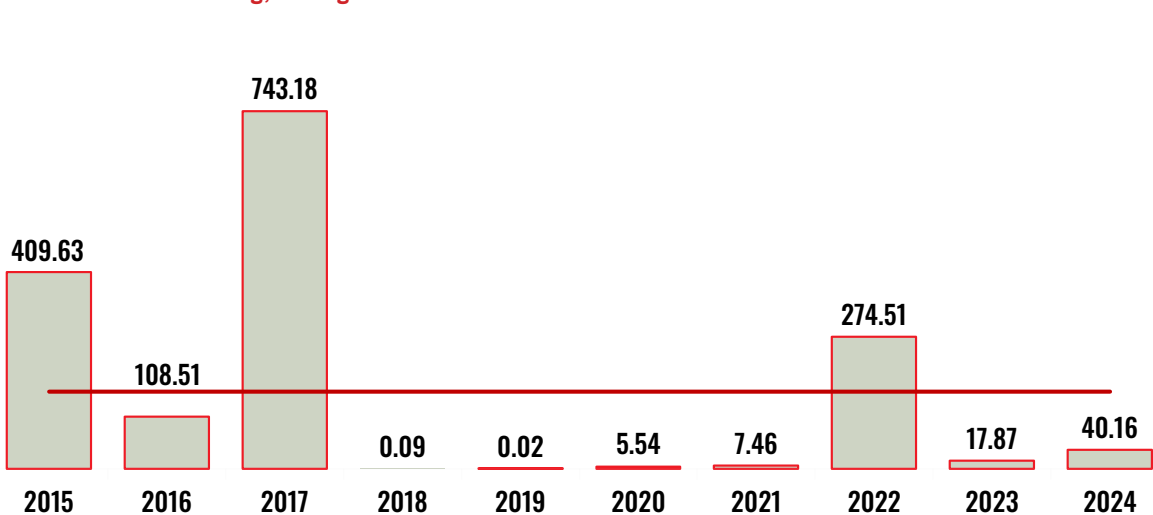
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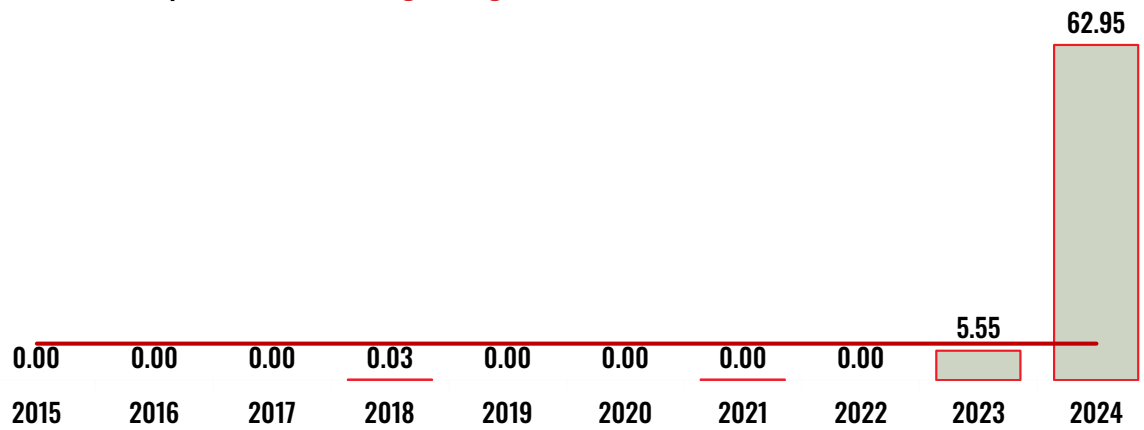
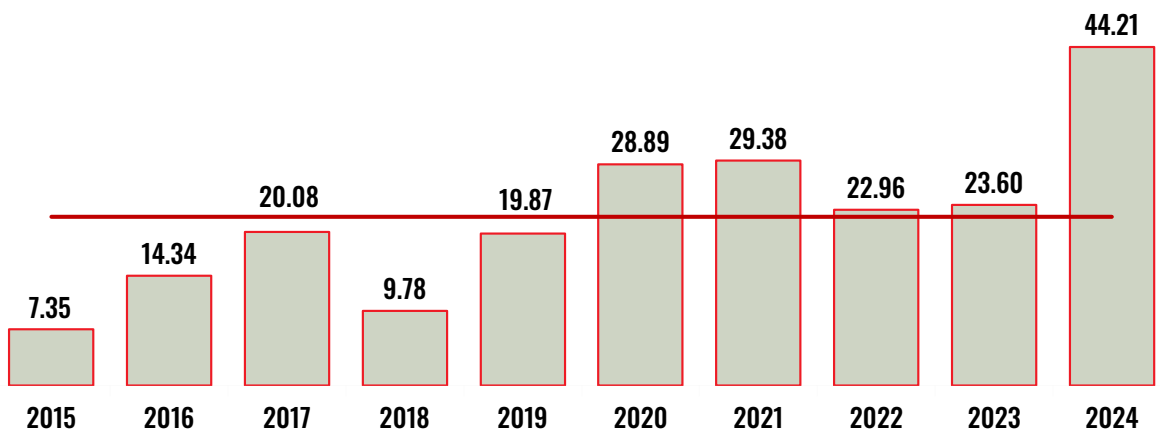
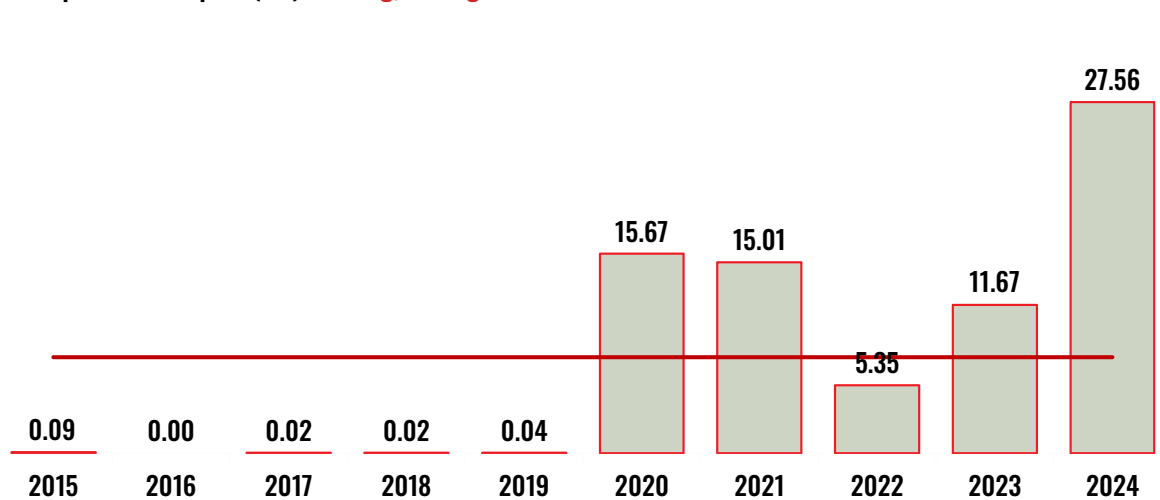


Port of Civitavecchia (RM): **626.16 kg, average value**



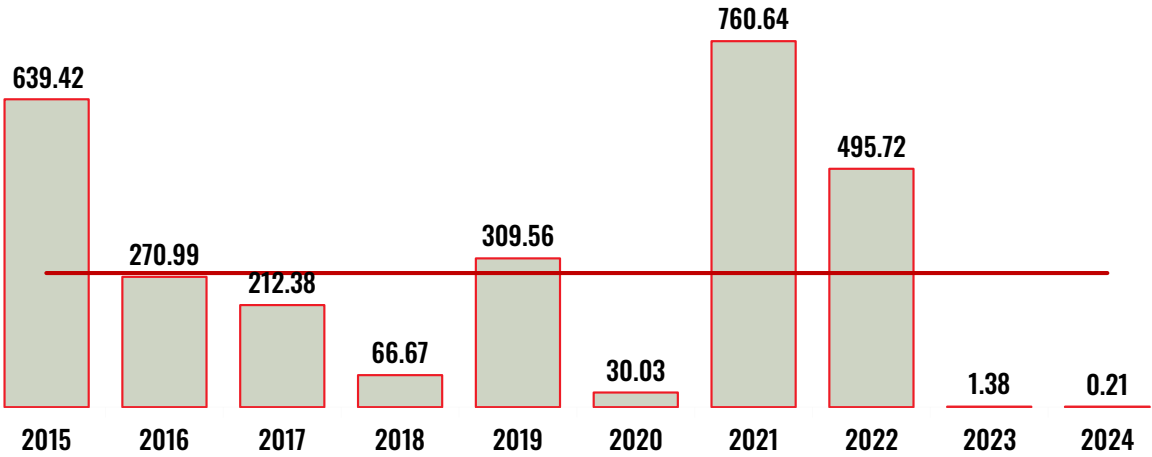
Port of Genoa: **60.70 kg, average value**



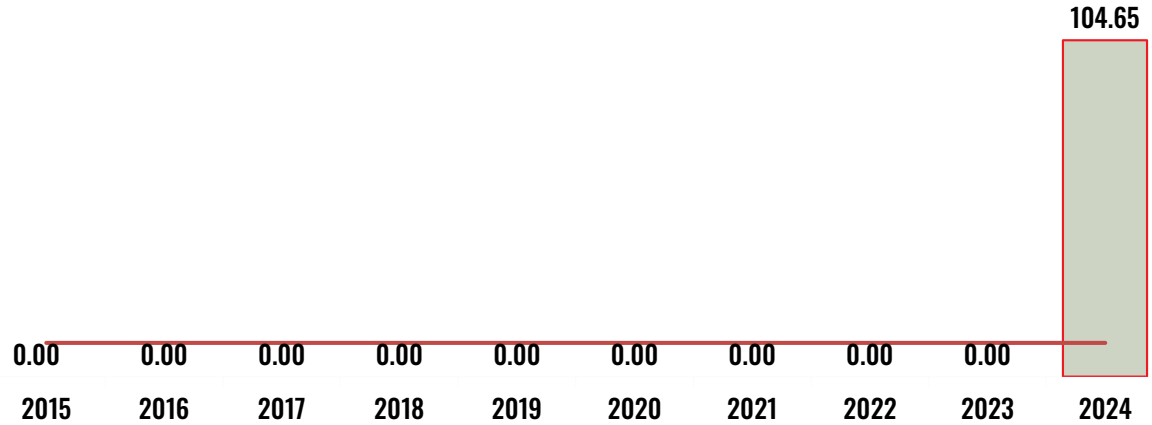
C. Colombo areoport of Genoa: 6.85 kg, avarege value**Aeroporto di Malpensa (VA): 22.05 kg, avarege value****Aeroporto di Ciampino (RM): 7.54 kg, avarege value**

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Highway crossing border “Autofiori” of Ventimiglia (IM): 78.70 kg, avarege value



Crossing border of Passo Resia (BZ): 10.46 kg, avarege value



TURIN, SEPTEMBER 2024 - SEIZURE OF 180 KG OF HASHISH



06. SYNTHETIC DRUGS

Introduction

The last quarter of the past century saw a significant expansion in the global market for synthetic drugs, which includes amphetamine-type stimulants and new psychoactive substances (NPS). ATS (amphetamine-type stimulants) include amphetamines, methamphetamines and ecstasy-type substances (MDMA), synthetic cathinones, synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic opioids, benzodiazepines and hallucinogens (LSD). **After cannabis and cocaine, synthetic drugs and NPS are the most widely used drugs in the world**, with levels of consumption often higher than those of heroin and/or cocaine. Their number continues to increase and has already exceeded the total number of substances under international control. They are widely distributed geographically and pose a risk to public health due to their high toxicity and often innocuous appearance: the most obvious evidence of this is the so-called 'date rape drugs', GHB (liquid ecstasy) and its precursor GBL (gamma-butyrolactone), which are originally used for industrial purposes with prior authorisation, or the notorious fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid used for pain therapy, but also trafficked, for example, in the United States in the form of fake pills, which have recently caused a veritable opioid 'epidemic', leading to almost 100,000 victims per year.

Synthetic drugs are created in illegal laboratories located in almost every country in the world. Unlike cocaine or heroin, which are produced in well-defined geographical areas (South America and Asia, respectively), synthetic drugs can be produced anywhere, in clandestine

laboratories ranging from small 'kitchens' to industrial-scale facilities.

The synthetic drug business has developed rapidly on online platforms, particularly on the dark web, where sellers and buyers operate with a degree of anonymity, in a convenient and relatively safe environment for the sale and distribution of these illicit substances, also using cryptocurrencies that have made transactions even easier and safer.

Synthetic drugs, as well as new psychoactive substances, are sold on the web in the form of food supplements, medicines or legal substances, and are shipped by international post services or private couriers, who unknowingly deliver these drugs directly to individual consumers' homes, as is the case with legal e-commerce.

The proliferation of NPS is also a major concern, as these synthetic compounds are often chemically modified versions of existing drugs, mimicking their effects but at the same time circumventing the legal restrictions imposed by their chemical composition¹³⁰.

Many transnational criminal organisations employ unscrupulous chemists to produce synthetic drugs, such as the Mexican cartels (Sinaloa and Jalisco Nueva Generacion) for the Americas and Oceania, or criminal organisations in Southeast and Southwest Asia, or criminal groups operating in Europe, particularly in Belgium, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Poland and, to a lesser extent, in the Baltic countries, Germany

¹³⁰ GITOC, Jason Eligh, Global Synthetic Drug Markets, The Present and Future, March 2024.

and Hungary. Among the Balkan groups, there are also the *Albanians* who, in order to diversify their illicit trafficking activities, have added both natural and synthetic drugs to their 'portfolio'.

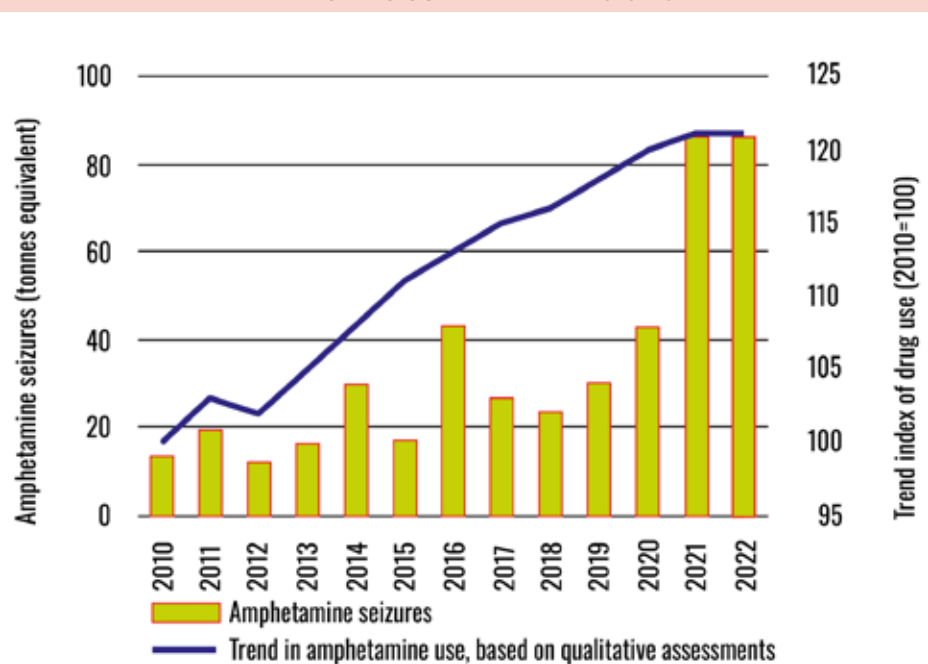
Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS): the phenomenon at global level

The **amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS)** group represents the second largest consumer market worldwide after cannabis. Global **ATS** seizures remain at historically high levels. Despite a slight decline in 2022, preliminary data from some regions of the world in 2023 suggest a reversal of the trend. **Methamphetamine** continues to dominate the ATS market, with global seizures amounting to 367 tonnes in 2022¹³¹. Most of the increases in ATS seizures occurred in East, South-East and South-West Asia, in addition to offshore seizures, particularly in the Gulf of Oman, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. The emerging methamphetamine trafficking markets with the highest growth over the past years are those in the **Near and Middle East/South-West Asia and South-Eastern Europe**.

In addition to methamphetamine, the **Captagon** market in the **Near and Middle East** continues to thrive, with seizures in 2022 remaining at the

record levels reached in 2021. Trafficking in methamphetamine from South-West Asia and Captagon from the Levant converge in the Near and Middle East¹³², which continues to be the world's largest market for the so-called 'fighter's drug', an illicitly manufactured substance containing varying concentrations of amphetamines originating mainly from the Syrian Arab Republic and, to a lesser extent, from Lebanon. Captagon trafficking levels remain high or are increasing in the Gulf countries, which are traditional main destination markets for this drug: in Iraq, for example, Captagon seizures increased 34-fold between 2019 and 2023, from 118 kg to over 4 tonnes. Although all countries in the Near and Middle East are affected by Captagon trafficking, the largest amphetamine seizures in the last five years have been reported by Saudi Arabia, followed by

NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST – SEIZED AMPHETAMINE (MAINLY CAPTAGON) AND TREND OF ITS USE BETWEEN 2010-2022

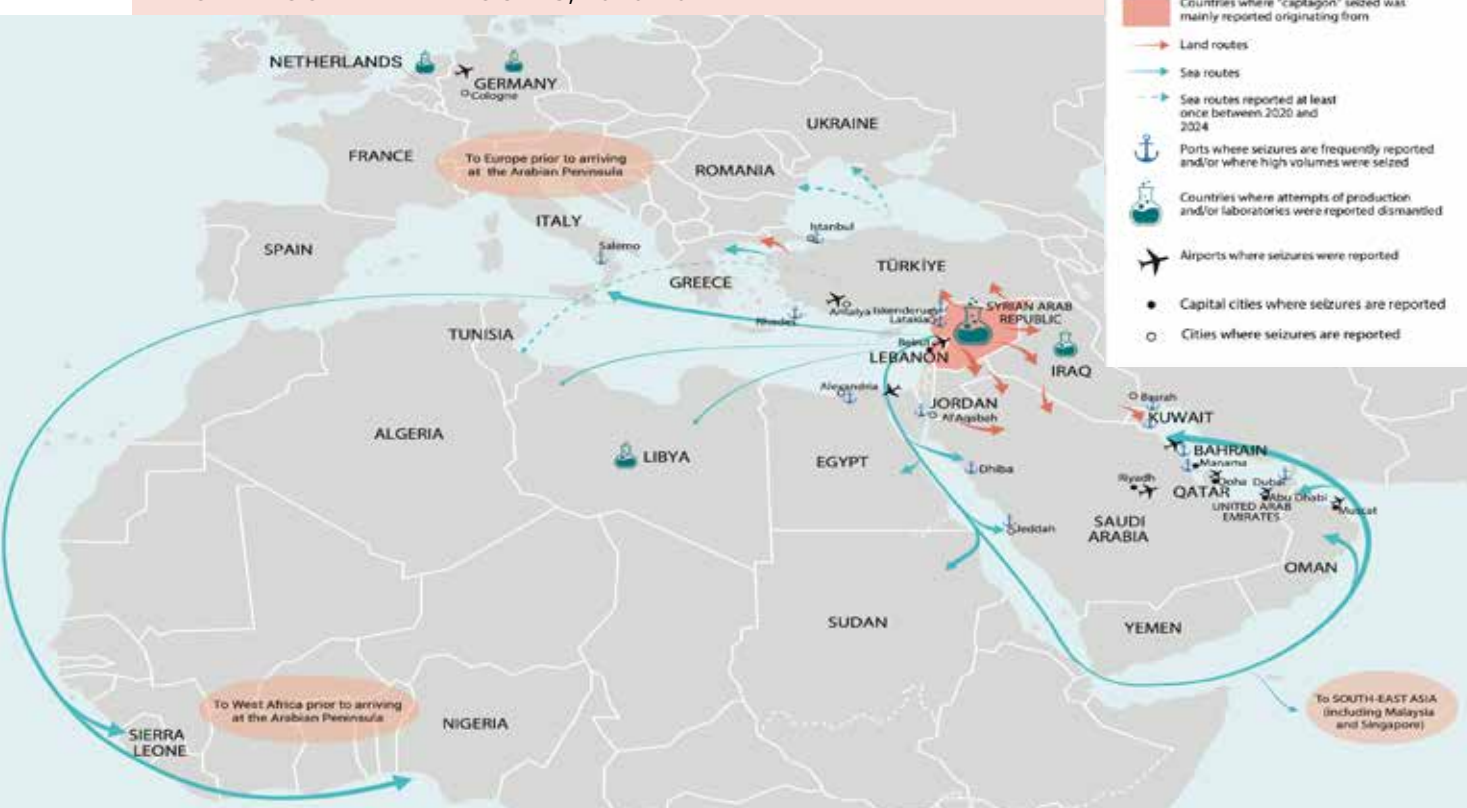


Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire

131 UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest, p. 7, cit.

132 UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest, p. 15, cit.

CAPTAGON – MAIN ROUTES, 2020-2024



Source: UNODC, based on a number of sources, including the following, responses to the annual report questionnaire: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

the United Arab Emirates, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, indicating significant trafficking routes within the region. The main area of departure for Captagon remains the Levant (the Syrian Arab Republic and, to a lesser extent, Lebanon), with destinations in the Gulf countries (particularly Saudi Arabia, followed by the United Arab Emirates), which are reached directly by land (via Jordan and Iraq) or by sea, or indirectly through other regions, such as Southern, Eastern and Western Europe. Furthermore, some seizures indicate that North Africa is a potential destination or transit point, while West Africa is a transit point for Captagon destined for Gulf markets¹³³.

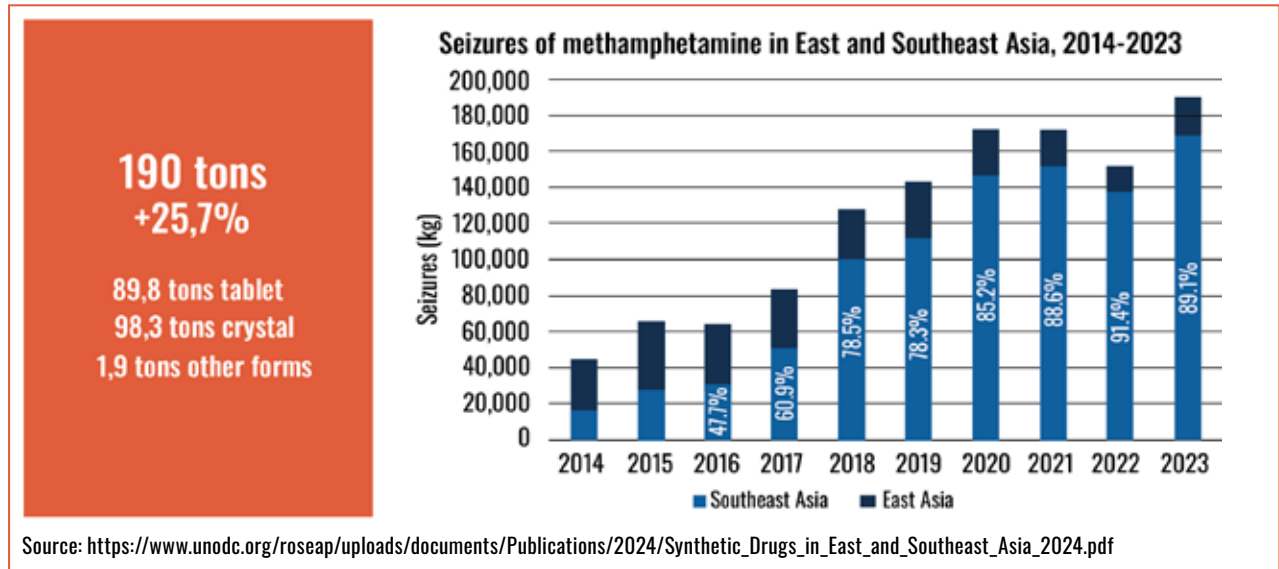
Southeast Asia, formerly known for its large-scale production of opium and heroin, is now characterised by the presence of laboratories for the

production of synthetic drugs, which supply a vast market extending as far as Australia and New Zealand.

In particular, in 2023, a record quantity of 190 tonnes of **methamphetamine** was seized in East and South-East Asia, of which 169 tonnes (89% of the total) in Southeast Asia alone. These are signs that the production and trafficking of methamphetamine in the so-called '**Golden Triangle**' have increased in a significant way. In 2023 and early 2024, authorities in the region carried out numerous seizures of methamphetamine, each weighing one tonne or more, often together with large quantities of **ketamine**. In addition to maritime trafficking routes in the Andaman Sea, criminal groups are increasingly relying on the Gulf of Thailand for the transport of large consignments of synthetic drugs¹³⁴.

¹³³ UNODC, WDR 2024, Key findings and conclusions, p. 30, cit.

¹³⁴ UNODC, Synthetic Drugs in East and South-East Asia - Latest developments and



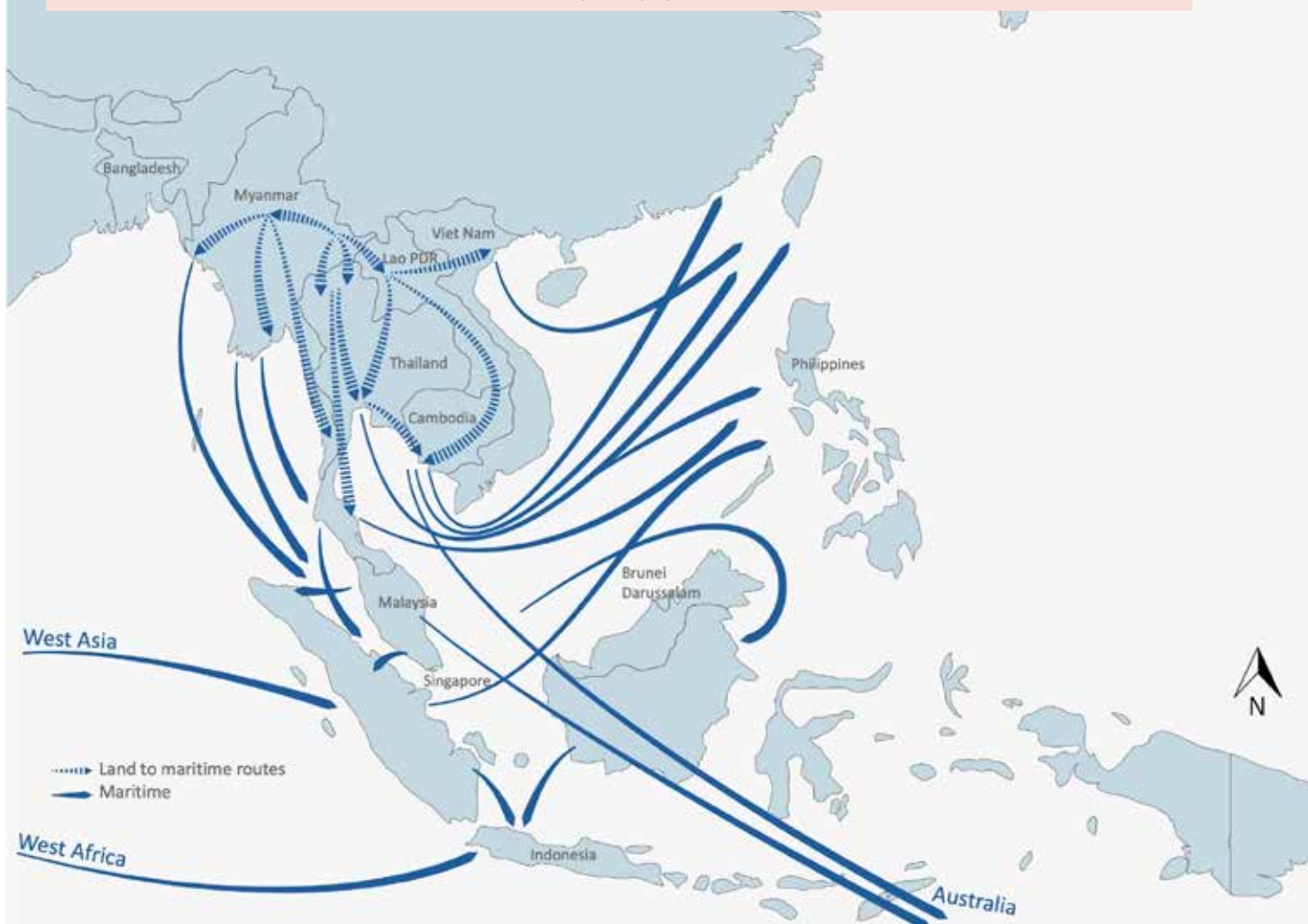
However, the situation regarding the production and trafficking of synthetic drugs in this East Asian region is

increasingly complex.

Myanmar continues to be the predominant location for synthetic drug

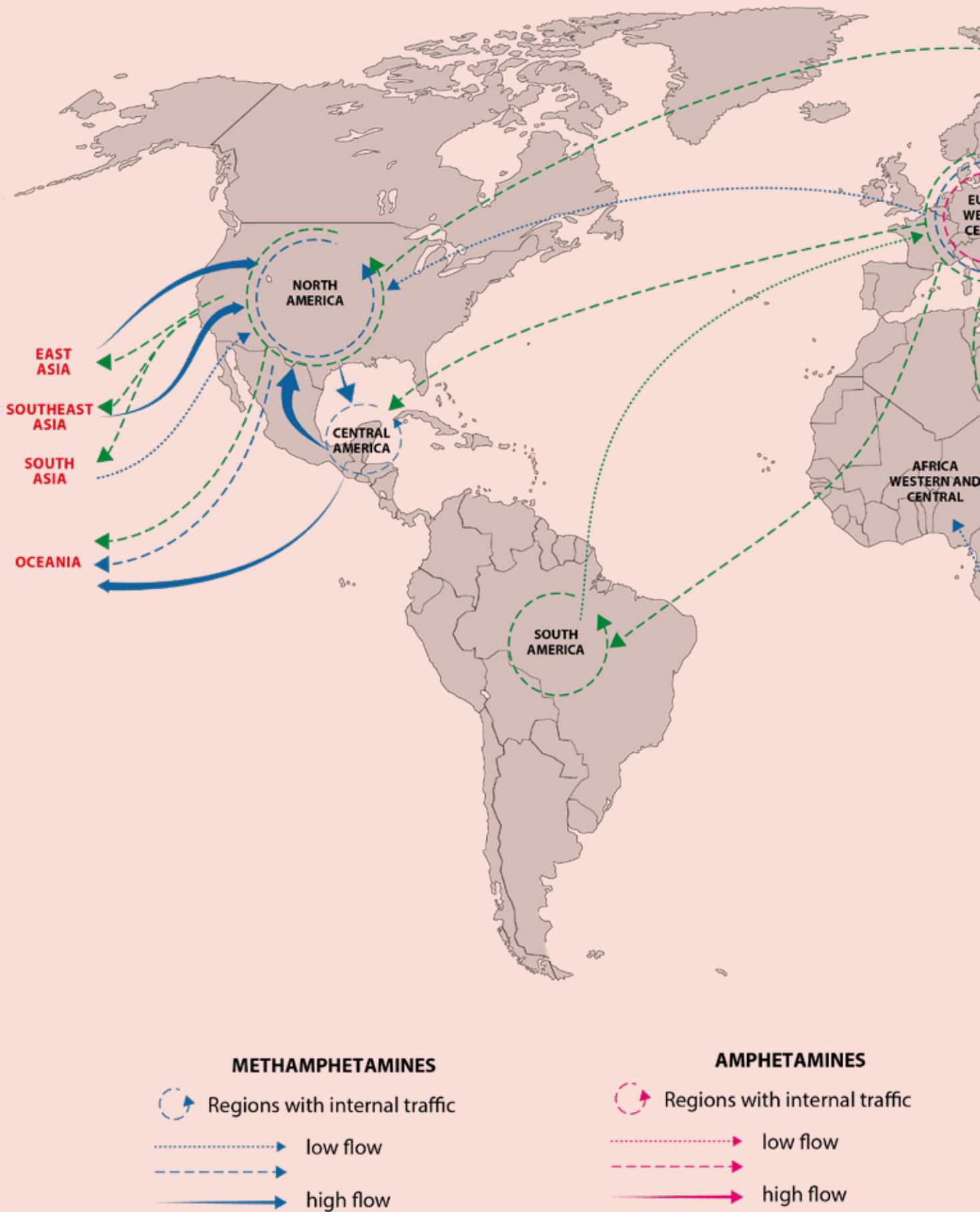
challenges, 2024.

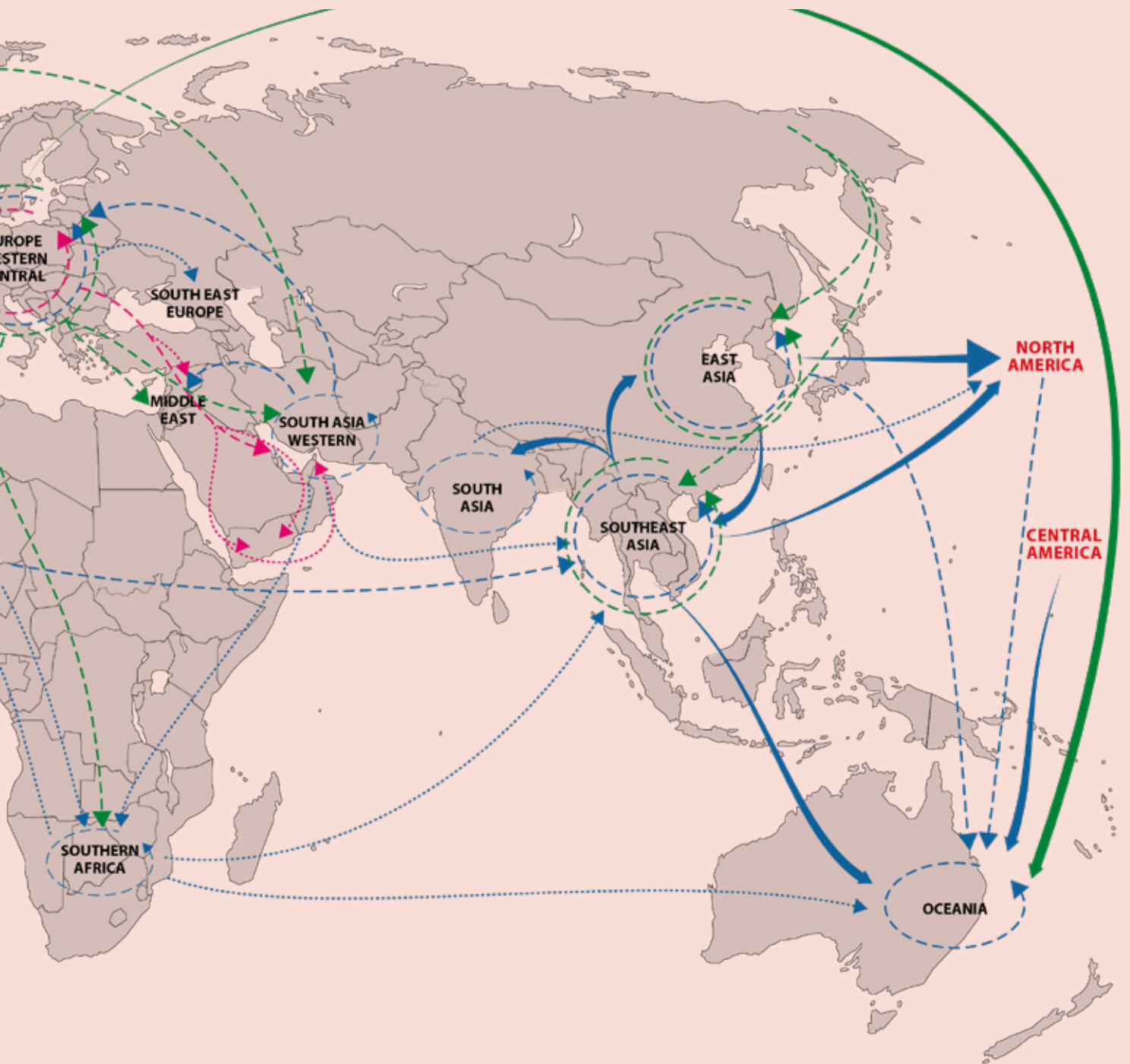
MARITIME ROUTES OF METHAMPHETAMINE IN THE GULF OF THAILAND AND IN THE ANDAMAN SEA 2022-2023



Source: https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/documents/Publications/2024/Synthetic_Drugs_in_East_and_Southeast_Asia_2024.pdf

MAIN STREAMS OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS



**ECSTASY**

Regions with internal traffic

low flow

high flow

production in the region, but there are indications that the illicit production of ketamine and its precursors is expanding to other areas of the lower Mekong. The amount of **ketamine** seized in East and South-East Asia decreased slightly, from 29 to 23.3 tonnes between 2022 and 2023, but remains at a significantly high level compared to previous years.

Ecstasy seizures reached record levels in 2023, amounting to over 26.7 million pills. This increase is mainly due to an exponential rise in **ecstasy** seizures in Malaysia, where most of the drug arriving comes from Europe¹³⁵.

Another country where **methamphetamine** production is reported to have reached record levels is **Mexico**: most of this drug is then placed on the US market and in the remaining part of the sub-region. In 2024, approximately 72 tonnes were seized on the south-western border alone, compared to approximately 55 tonnes intercepted in 2023¹³⁶. The two main Mexican drug cartels at the centre of methamphetamine production and distribution are the *Sinaloa Cartel* and the *Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel*. According to the *US Drug Enforcement Administration* (DEA), production is mainly located in the south-western states (Colima, Michoacán, Jalisco and Guerrero) and in the northern states (Baja California and Sonora), where industrial-scale clandestine laboratories have been discovered. On 12 February 2024, the Mexican Navy discovered the largest drug production laboratory ever found in the state of Sonora, seizing

41.3 tonnes of methamphetamine and 12.7 tonnes of precursors. Mexican producers of this substance have been using the P-2-P (phenyl-2-propanone) method since the Mexican government began restricting the importation of ephedrine/pseudoephedrine in 2005, leading to a ban in 2008. According to Mexican Navy sources, cartels have recently started an 'in-house' production of chemical precursors, such as P-2-P and methylamine, instead of importing them¹³⁷. Given their advanced production capabilities, Mexican cartels export methamphetamine throughout North America, Australia, New Zealand and even Europe. The *Australian Federal Police* (AFP) reported that in 2020, approximately 70% of the methamphetamine seized was of Mexican origin and that this substance was very competitively priced (Mexican methamphetamine costs less than a third of that produced in Myanmar). As with cocaine trafficking, the methamphetamine market in Oceania also appears to be extremely lucrative and profitable for drug cartels due to the exceptionally high street prices for drugs. The logistics of methamphetamine trafficking is complex and relies on the exploitation of global trade routes. Mexican cartels strategically use major ports and airports with high cargo flows to minimise the risk of detection of illicit substances. The ports of Hong Kong (China) and Busan (South Korea) are key due to their robust infrastructure capabilities and strategic positioning, serving as essential hubs for the distribution of goods to global markets and for the transshipment of synthetic drugs to Japan, Oceania, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. The port of Hong Kong is the main channel for methamphetamine produced in

¹³⁵ UNODC, *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia - Latest developments and challenges*, 2024, cit.

¹³⁶ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>. These are seizures made by US Customs and Border Protection.

¹³⁷ Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO) – Asia and the Pacific, *Analysis Report 2024/1*, November 2024, p. 2.

areas adjacent to the Mexican ports of Manzanillo and Lazaro Cardenas¹³⁸.

In 2023, seizures of **methamphetamine** (in crystals, tablets and powder) increased in **China**, following a decline in 2022; only seizures of liquid methamphetamine continued to decline in terms of quantity. The number of illicit drug laboratories seized in China has increased in recent years, with a total of 42 methamphetamine laboratories dismantled in 2023, most of which were small in size.

On the contrary, the quantities of **ecstasy** (MDMA) and **ketamine** seized in the country in 2023 decreased: ecstasy seizures fell from 1,364,667 tablets in 2022 to 233,333 tablets in 2023, and ketamine seizures fell from approximately 1,300 kg in 2022 to 735 kg in 2023¹³⁹. The *Chinese National Narcotics Control Commission* (NNCC) highlights a decline in the number of drug users; in particular, in 2023 there were 455,000 individuals addicted to methamphetamine (-22.6%) compared to 2022 and 30,000 ketamine users (-6.3%). These data are confirmed by the results of wastewater analyses monitored by the *National Narcotics Laboratory*¹⁴⁰.

With regard to **Afghanistan**, **methamphetamine** production continues to increase, posing a high risk to the entire region. In recent years, it has emerged that the use of the **ephedra** plant, which grows abundantly in the region and contains ephedrine, has been the main factor contributing

to methamphetamine production, together with other chemical precursors, including cold medicines containing ephedrine, which are the simplest means of producing these substances, given the complexity of sourcing chemical precursors, especially in light of international sanctions. Furthermore, it would appear that, in recent times, ephedra in Afghanistan, in addition to growing spontaneously in mountainous areas (2,000-2,500 m.a.s.l.), is being cultivated specifically in a rational manner and that laboratories are increasingly located close to the crops.

In fact, Australia and South Africa have recorded an increase in methamphetamines originating in Afghanistan. For its part, Japan - which currently receives this substance mainly from Thailand and Mexico, with a final price of around \$600 per gram - fears that the steady increase in production and the competitive price of the Afghan synthetic product could replace the other two sources of supply. In terms of enforcement, the Afghan police have reportedly seized several hundred tonnes of methamphetamine, ecstasy and methadone, as well as hundreds of laboratories, vehicles and weapons.

According to the *World Customs Organisation* (WCO), at least 950 kg of methamphetamine were seized in Afghanistan in 2024. Despite the difficulty of obtaining information on this subject, it is estimated that the production capacity of this synthetic drug remains very high in the country¹⁴¹. In addition, 590 tonnes of precursors were confiscated in the first nine months of 2023, tripling the amount recorded in 2022. These chemicals are mainly smuggled into Afghanistan

138 Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO)/ World Customs Organisation (WCO) – Asia and the Pacific, Analysis Report 2024/1, November 2024, cit.

139 UNODC, Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia - Latest developments and challenges 2024, p. 57, cit.

140 Office of National Narcotics Control Commission, China Drug Situation Report 2023, June 2024.

141 RILO/WCO – Asia and the Pacific, Analysis Report 2024/2, Methamphetamine from the Golden Crescent, November 2024, cit.

through neighbouring countries¹⁴².

With regard to the price of narcotic substances in Afghanistan, at the end of 2023, methamphetamine was estimated to be \$550/kg, ephedrine (its precursor) around \$200/kg, and the ephedra plant around \$182/kg.

Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS): The phenomenon at European level

In **Europe**, **amphetamine** consumption is gradually giving way to methamphetamine and synthetic cathinones, which are chemically similar to amphetamine but not necessarily equivalent in terms of public health risks, such as overdose, acute and chronic mental health conditions, and infectious diseases. According to the United Nations, amphetamine remains the second most commonly used stimulant in Europe after cocaine¹⁴³.

The number of **amphetamine** production **laboratories**¹⁴⁴ dismantled in **Europe** in recent years has remained constant (102 in 2020, 105 in 2021 and **108** in 2022), while the amount of amphetamine seized has decreased by two-thirds (7 tonnes in 2021 and 2022, compared to 22.3 tonnes in 2020). It is assumed that the decline is linked to the decision to reduce production in favour of other more profitable substances, such as methamphetamine, which is also intended for export. The hypothesis of production capacity for the non-EU market is confirmed by the 242 medium

and large-scale methamphetamine laboratories identified in 2022 (compared to 261 in 2021)¹⁴⁵.

In Turkey alone, however, 5.99 tonnes of amphetamine were seized in 2022 (3.5 tonnes in 2021), including 24 million tablets with the **Captagon** logo (13.8 million in 2021).

Amphetamine trafficking within the European Union is mainly carried out using land transport methods, as well as postal and parcel services. Most of the time, shipments originate from large **production** centres in **the Netherlands**, **Belgium** and **Germany**, and are largely intended for local consumption.

In 2022, **31,256 amphetamine seizures** were made in the European Union¹⁴⁶. *Dutch criminal groups* remain the main producers and traffickers and are active in several EU countries. In addition, there are 'Belgian-Dutch criminal networks' which, according to Europol, like to work together because of their common language, proximity and good road infrastructure between key points, such as the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp, which are crucial for drug trafficking, with drugs then being routed to all EU countries. These criminal networks collaborate with distributors around the world. Other criminal groups in the **Baltic States** are involved in the production of amphetamine on a small and medium scale and are involved in distribution, especially in the Nordic countries. Globalised supply chains and the Internet play an important role in making new substances in Europe. This development is due to the possibility

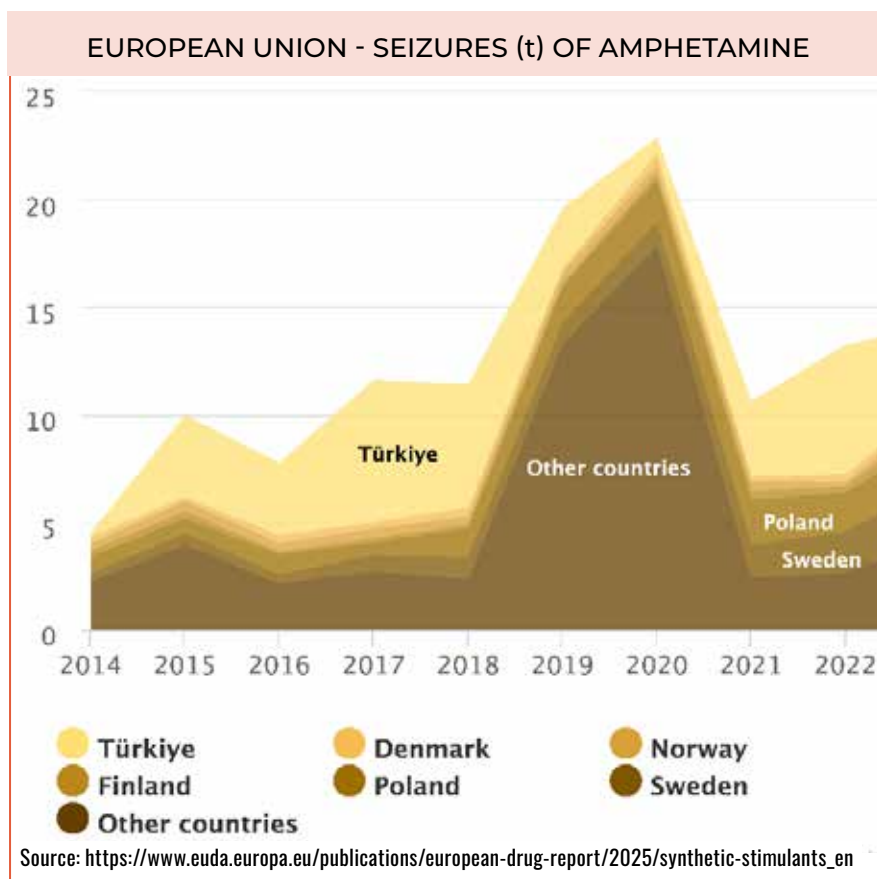
142 E.S. DCSA in Iran, Annual Information Report 2025, 2024 data, January 2025.

143 UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest, cit.

144 UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest: Western and Central Europe remains an important hub for the production of synthetic drugs, particularly ecstasy and amphetamine. There are also signs of a possible expansion in the production of methamphetamine.

145 EUDA, European Drug Report 2024, Synthetic stimulants – the current situation in Europe. https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/eu-ropean-drug-report/2024/synthetic-stimulants_en#edr24-stimulants-figure-4.7

146 https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/eu-ropean-drug-report/2024/synthetic-stimulants_en#level-7



methamphetamine sold in the European Union is produced locally in certain European countries – primarily **the Netherlands, Belgium** and the **Czech Republic** – generating competition with the **Mexican** product and drug-trafficking/other-drugs offering new commercial opportunities to overseas wholesalers. The increase in demand for methamphetamine could lead to the development of local production and/or an increase in imports managed by European groups that already traffic, for example, cocaine, creating a coexistence of the two phenomena.

of ordering large quantities of new substances from Chinese companies and transporting them quickly to Europe by air or sea. Subsequently, the substances are packaged in the EU and marketed openly or illegally. Given the high profits and low risks, *organised crime groups* (OCGs) may become even more active in this field. Indeed, there has been an increase in the production of a number of new substances in Europe¹⁴⁷.

Methamphetamine is a synthetic stimulant which, although less widely used and less visible in the available data, continues to show signs of increasing production in Europe¹⁴⁸. Most of the

Historically, methamphetamine use has been observed in the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and, more recently, in some neighbouring countries. Wastewater analysis data for the period 2022-2023 indicate that 15 of the 67 European cities analysed have seen an increase in methamphetamine residues. EU Member States reported **9,900 methamphetamine seizures** totalling 1.4 tonnes in **2022** (1.2 tonnes in 2021). Turkey reported 77,700 methamphetamine seizures in 2022, amounting to 15.8 tonnes and 383 litres (compared to 5.5 tonnes in 2021), indicating that methamphetamine is being routed along established heroin trafficking routes from Afghanistan through Turkey to Europe. In terms of quality, the average purity of methamphetamine has increased over the last decade, while the price has remained relatively stable,

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/drug-trafficking/other-drugs>

¹⁴⁸ Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO)/ World Customs Organisation (WCO) – Asia and the Pacific, Analysis Report 2024/1, November 2024, cit.

albeit declining in recent years¹⁴⁹.

From the perspective of criminal actors, the most recent investigations related to major methamphetamine seizures in Europe suggest that *Mexican criminal organisations* are expanding into these more lucrative markets¹⁵⁰.

In fact, the investigation that led to the discovery in **2022** of **242** methamphetamine laboratories in the EU has confirmed the presence of *Mexican cartel members*, who have been involved in the production of methamphetamine in the Netherlands, Belgium and **Spain** for some years now. In May 2024, Spanish National Police officers dismantled a clandestine methamphetamine production laboratory belonging to the *Sinaloa cartel* in the province of Alicante and seized 1,800 kg of methamphetamine. The EMCDDA, Europol and the DEA have repeatedly stated that Europe is becoming one of the preferred routes for methamphetamine trafficking to the Australian and New Zealand markets. In fact, while 1 kg of methamphetamine on the Mexico City market sells for a minimum of US\$656, rising to US\$5,000 in the United States, the price of the same substance can reach US\$20,000 in European countries and as much as US\$190,000 in Oceania¹⁵¹.

In **2022**, EU Member States reported

¹⁴⁹ https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/eu-ropean-drug-report/2024/synthetic-stimulants_en#level-7

¹⁵⁰ Insight Crime, Mexican Methamphetamine Increasingly Moving Through Europe, 22 May 2024.

¹⁵¹ <https://www.interior.gob.es/opencms/va/detalle/articulo/La-Policia-Nacional-de-sar-ticula-la-inf-raestructura-en-Espa-na-del-cartel-de-Sinaloa-con-la-interven-cion-de-1.800-kilos-de-metanfetamina/>; Insight Crime, Mexican Methamphetamine Increasingly Moving Through Europe, 22 May 2024.

14,500 seizures of **MDMA** (10,000 in 2021), equivalent to 1.2 tonnes of MDMA powder (1.6 tonnes in 2021) and 2.5 million MDMA tablets (3.5 million in 2021). Turkey seized

5 million MDMA tablets in 2022 (7.6 million in 2021). The number of **MDMA laboratories dismantled** in the EU increased in 2022: **48** MDMA laboratories (25 in 2021) were dismantled by six Member States, led by Belgium with 27 laboratories, followed by the Netherlands (13), Spain (5) and France, Poland and Sweden (1 each). Seizures of precursors for the production of MDMA (ecstasy) also rose to 20.5 tonnes in 2022 (7.1 tonnes in 2021), indicating a thriving international market¹⁵².

Sedative, dissociative or depressant substances: the phenomenon at European level

In addition to the most well-known drugs on the so-called black market, numerous other **substances** with **hallucinogenic, anaesthetic, dissociative or depressant properties** are used in **Europe**, including LSD, hallucinogenic mushrooms, ketamine, GHB and nitrous oxide.

Ketamine accounted for 9% of the total amount of new psychoactive substances seized in the European Union in 2022. The amount of ketamine seized and reported to the EU Early Warning System on New Psychoactive Substances has varied over time, but has remained at relatively high levels in recent years, increasing from just under one tonne in 2021 to 2.8 tonnes in 2022. **Denmark** and **the Netherlands** reported the largest **seizures** in Europe, accounting for two-thirds of the total ketamine seized in **2022**. No ketamine laboratories were reported to have been dismantled in 2022.

¹⁵² https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/eu-ropean-drug-report/2024/mdma_en#level-7

Most of the ketamine intercepted in Europe is believed to originate from **India, Pakistan** and **China**. Available information indicates that **production** of the substance in **Europe** remains **limited**. In recent years, this analgesic-dissociative drug has also been consumed in other drug mixtures in the European Union, including MDMA (ecstasy) powders and tablets, and sold as '**pink cocaine**'. Given the widespread use of ketamine in veterinary medicine as an anaesthetic, theft and diversion of the drug from legitimate channels is a matter of concern.

GHB, although originally developed as a drug for the treatment of alcohol withdrawal syndrome and narcolepsy, together with its precursor **GBL**, commonly used in many sectors of the chemical, pharmaceutical and plastics industries, has become famous in the media as a *chemsex* or 'date rape drug'¹⁵³. In 2022, 17 European countries reported 1,500 seizures of GHB and GBL, totalling 114 kg and 800 litres respectively. GBL has multiple industrial uses, which makes the data difficult to interpret.

In **2022, 1,665 seizures** of **LSD** (lysergic acid diethylamide) were reported in Europe, amounting to 99,687 units (tablets, units, 'stamps') and 2.1 kg.

Twenty-three countries reported 1,439 seizures of **hallucinogenic mushrooms**, totalling 143 kg¹⁵⁴.

Although **nitrous oxide** has been used for almost 250 years, its consumption has increased in some European countries since 2010. This phenomenon became particularly worrying between 2017 and 2018, when the substance became available in more shops and in larger quantities. The popularity of nitrous oxide is due to its easy availability, low price, short-term effects and the general perception among users that it is a relatively 'safe' and socially acceptable narcotic substance. In most cases, small gas cartridges intended for the production of whipped cream are used to fill party balloons, from which the gas is inhaled. These cartridges can be purchased both in traditional shops and online. Adverse effects are generally mild and resolve quickly after the user stops inhaling the gas, although there have been cases of acute intoxication requiring medical treatment with loss of consciousness or fainting and, in some cases, hallucinations. Regular and heavy consumption of the gas can also cause serious damage to the nervous system¹⁵⁵. Several EU countries, including Denmark, France, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Portugal, have restricted the availability of nitrous oxide in recent years. Information on the effectiveness of legislative approaches to restricting access to nitrous oxide is limited¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵³ When GBL is ingested, the human metabolism transforms it into GHB. The investigative difficulty in cases involving the use of this substance is the 'qualitative' analysis in scientific laboratories: a few hours after ingestion, it can no longer be detected in the blood or urine. The danger of the substance to human health is that its administration can cause acute intoxication, which is difficult to trace back to this substance due to the aforementioned difficulty of laboratory analysis.

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/>

[eu-royal-drug-report/2024/other-drugs_en#level-7](https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/eu-royal-drug-report/2024/other-drugs_en#level-7)

¹⁵⁵ EMCDDA, Recreational use of nitrous oxide: a growing concern for Europe, 2022.

¹⁵⁶ https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/eu-royal-drug-report/2024/other-drugs_en#level-8

Drugs and national prevention plan against the misuse of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids

Introduction

Fentanyl is a very powerful **synthetic opioid** used for therapeutic purposes, which in some areas of the world is trafficked illegally for use and abuse as a narcotic substance, causing fatal outcomes even at imperceptible doses.

The main markets include **Canada** and the United States, supplied by transnational drug trafficking organisations, particularly *Mexican, Colombian and Asian* ones.

In the **United States**, in particular, the *Drug Enforcement Administration* (DEA) continues to **seize** record quantities of illicit fentanyl every year: from 6,875 kg of powdered fentanyl in 2021 to almost double that amount (13,176 kg) in 2023, and from 23.6 million fentanyl-containing pills seized in 2021 to approximately 79 million pills in 2023, more than triple the amount.

Fentanyl **poisonings** and fentanyl seizures by law enforcement agencies have also risen steadily since 2013. According to the US *Centres for Disease Control and Prevention* (CDC), **deaths** from synthetic opioids, which remained stable until 2012, have risen sharply since 2013, reaching over 74,000 in 2023, mainly due to fentanyl. Since 2024, there has been a decline in deaths, presumably due to a variety of factors: the free sale of the antidote, naloxone; prevention policies, such as widespread public information and reduction of supply through preventive analysis of substances.

As far as **Europe** is concerned, there is growing concern that high-potency synthetic opioids are increasingly appearing on the drug market. Since

2012, EUDA¹⁵⁷ has reported a significant increase in the availability of **fentanyls**, i.e. both fentanyl and its analogues, which are even more potent than fentanyl itself. These are generally synthesised clandestinely and placed on the illicit market, including through online sales. Mass **production** takes place in **China**, but the production of these molecules has also been reported in clandestine laboratories within Europe.

At the same time, there has also been a significant increase in Europe in the number of **deaths** associated with the consumption of fentanyl among drug users. In **2022**, EU Member States reported **163 fentanyl-related deaths** to the EUDA. A significant proportion of these deaths are associated with fentanyl diverted from legitimate medical distribution channels, rather than illegally produced fentanyl.

It is essential, however, to bear in mind that the **European data** currently available **probably underestimate the phenomenon**. In fact, its detection through clinical analysis is a complex operation for most clinical toxicology laboratories, as fentanyl is often detected in extremely low concentrations in both cases of intoxication and death. Furthermore, presumably because of its high potency, the trafficking of commercially viable doses of fentanyl or its analogues is carried out by transporting small volumes of the product, which hinders its detection and control.

The North American context, although different, is nonetheless a warning about the speed with which trends in opioid use can develop, with dramatic implications for public health. In fact, the lack of heroin on the illegal market, due to the Taliban's announcement in April 2022 that it would halt opium production in Afghanistan - according to estimates by

¹⁵⁷ European Union Drugs Agency.

the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC), opium production fell by 95% in 2023, although there is evidence that considerable stocks of opium remain in Afghanistan - has shifted consumption towards synthetic opioids.

Since 2009, 81 new synthetic opioids have been reported to the EU Early Warning System, with **seven** new substances appearing in **2023**, six of which were highly potent nitazene opioids (nitazenes were first reported to EUDA in 2019).

The illegal circulation of fentanyl in Italy

In **Italy**, pursuant to the Decree of the Ministry of Health of 30 June 2020, in force since 28 July 2020, **fentanyl derivatives** were included in **Table I** of narcotic and psychotropic substances referred to in the Consolidated Law on the regulation of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of related drug addiction (Presidential Decree 309/1990), similarly to **fentanyl**, which had already been previously listed.

Since 2017, the National Early Warning System of the *Department for Policies against Drugs and Other Addictions* of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers has issued **three** communications regarding **deaths** (one in 2017, one in 2018 and one in 2019) to the entire network of Collaborative Centres and relevant institutions throughout the country.

With specific regard to law enforcement action, a total of **71 seizures of fentanyl-based medicines** were carried out in **2024**, for a total of 65 tablets, 4 patches and 2 boxes of medicines. In Italy, too, one of the main markets for fentanyl and new and equally dangerous psychoactive substances is the **internet**, a virtual place for promotion and sale, with subsequent delivery of the substances directly to the buyers' homes in small anonymous postal packages.

The absence of intermediaries between the distributor and the end user exposes the latter to a constant risk of acute intoxication, given the lack of awareness of the concentration and composition of the product purchased, and makes it possible to use the substance in an autonomous and uncontrolled way.

The National Plan

Since fentanyl represents a potential threat capable of significantly affecting European health and safety in the near future, even though its spread in Europe for non-therapeutic use currently appears to be relatively limited, on **12 March 2024**, the Italian Government presented the **Drugs and national prevention plan against the misuse of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids**¹⁵⁸, which is the result of coordinated work by the Department for Policies against Drugs and Other Addictions (DPA) of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, which involved all those actors engaged in the prevention and combating of the spread of synthetic opioids in Italy, in particular fentanyl and its analogues, or their diversion for non-medical use, as well as in the management of a hypothetical emergency to contain damage to public health and avoid fatal intoxication and overdose. The monitoring strategy outlined in the 'Plan' is based on regular information sharing, linked to the activation of the Italian warning network.

The 'Plan' is structured in three parts:

- an introductory part, providing a brief overview of the nature, effects and spread (in the US, Europe and Italy) of fentanyl and its derivatives;
- one devoted to 'prevention activities' developed/to be developed to prevent access to and spread of these substances on national territory;

¹⁵⁸ https://www.politicheantidroga.gov.it/media/jl0lw5lc/piano-in-forma-integrale_comita-to-12-marzo_rev.pdf.

INSTITUTIONAL BODIES INVOLVED IN THE NATIONAL PLAN

Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ministry of Sport and Youth, Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Ministry of Economy and Finance,

Ministry of Education and Merit, Ministry of University and Research, Ministry for Family, Birth Rate and Equal Opportunities, Ministry for Disabilities, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, Information System for the Security of the Republic, Department for Information and Publishing, National Anti-Mafia and Anti-Terrorism Prosecutor's Office, Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services (DCSA), State Police, Carabinieri, Finance Police, Customs and Monopolies Agency, The Permanent Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces, Italian Medicines Agency, National Early Warning System for Drugs (NEWS-D), National Institute of Health (ISS – CNDD), Collaborative Centres of the National Early Warning System for Drugs, Pavia Poison Control Centre, Forensic Toxicology, National Anti-Doping Organisation, Italian Federation of Sports Medicine.

- one devoted to actions to be 'implemented' in the event of 'emergency management'.

The 'Plan' foresees a total number of **17 activities**: 13 prevention and 4 management activities. Each activity in turn includes one or more actions, for which the main and supporting actors are indicated.

The implementation status of the activities related to the National Plan is checked regularly.

As part of the 'Plan', the **DCSA** acts as a "**governing body**" for the implementation of measures carried out by the police forces. In fact, it is involved in the implementation of **eight prevention activities**, covering specific tasks and/or collaborating with other institutions/bodies. Further measures of interest to the police forces involve other administrations, which are responsible for their implementation.

For the time being, however, toxicological tests and analyses **have not detected** the presence of **fentanyl** and, therefore, **its circulation in Italy**.

In the event of an **emergency situation** arising in Italy, the management actions provided for in the National Plan are

aimed at ensuring a prompt response from all institutions responsible for protecting public health and safety.

These actions, like those related to prevention, are the result of coordinated work by the DPA, which involved the same actors, both those engaged daily in activities to prevent and combat the spread of illegal substances in Italy and those who could be involved in the event of an emergency.

This is a stage in which the **DCSA** is once again involved, being responsible for the implementation of **one** of the **four management activities** provided for in the 'Plan', with specific tasks regarding the '*establishment of operational procedures in the event that the substances arrive on Italian territory*'.

In this context, **emergency services** (first aid, intensive care, emergency clinical laboratories) continue playing a key role, as they carry out specific analytical research in cases of acute intoxication not followed by death (the vast majority), in order to identify how many are due to new opioids (fentanyls/nitazens/oxycodone/tramadol/others), taken alone or in combination with heroin and/or other 'traditional' substances of abuse.

Further impacts of the “National Plan”

The ‘Plan’ also provided for regulatory measures concerning Presidential Decree 309/1990, in particular **Article 75**, which the DCSA developed in agreement with the DPA and the Ministry of Health:

- the preparation of the ministerial decree provided for in paragraph 10 of Article 75, for the **identification of the basic public facilities** to be entrusted with toxicological tests on samples of narcotic substances seized by the police from the user (decree not yet issued at the end of 2024);
- the implementation of **toxicological tests on narcotic substances** seized as part of prefectural proceedings, providing for a **special fund** at the Ministry of the Interior, ‘*fund for medical-legal and toxicological-forensic tests referred to in Article 75*’ (included in the **2025 budget law** with a financial allocation of **€4 million per year**);
- the **institutionalisation of the National Early Warning System (NEWS-D)**, after years of de facto operation. This measure provides for a specific primary provision in the **2025 budget law (new Article 14-bis Consolidated Law)**, considered an operational coordination tool for warning information, aimed at preventing phenomena potentially dangerous to public health related to the emergence of new psychoactive substances or the consumption of already prohibited drugs. **The DCSA will play a primary role in feeding the system and collecting data and information for the issuance of ‘alerts’ or ‘notices’** based on the results of laboratory tests on seized drug samples.

Finally, thanks to the ‘Plan’, the 2025 budget law was able to provide independent financial coverage for the

establishment of **three anti-drug offices abroad**, outside Italian embassies, implementing, albeit partially, **Article 11** of the Consolidated Law on Narcotics.

THE DCSA'S TASKS WITHIN THE 'PLAN'

1. *Monitoring of the retail drug market, including synthetic opioids, in 44 provinces, through the local offices of the police forces (Police Headquarters for the State Police and Provincial Commands of the Carabinieri Corps and the financial police 'Guardia di Finanza'), examining prices and purity.*
2. *The launch, in agreement with the DPA and the Italian Forensic Toxicologists Group (GTFI), of the 'FentanylLabNet' project, which involved carrying out a total of 4,500 second-level toxicological tests in 20 provinces in 2024 on the same number of 'street doses' seized by the police from users (Art. 75 of Presidential Decree 309/90). The tests were carried out by 22 university laboratories participating in the initiative and the project was financed with an ad hoc provision within the 2025 finance law.*
3. *Enhancing the ability of operators to identify unknown substances found during roadside checks or at customs areas, using portable RAMAN technology equipment (spectrophotometer)*, 130 to identify various types of synthetic drugs. This technology had already been used by other departments with positive results.*
4. *Strengthening the exchange of information and best practices between the police and the Customs Agency for the identification of international shipments suspected of containing narcotic and psychotropic substances illegally imported into the country.*
5. *The implementation, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Health, of police monitoring and control activities on the legal trade in drug precursors and controlled chemicals, operationally delegated to DCSA personnel. In May 2024, the first inspection was carried out on one of the 14 private companies authorised to market these precursors in Italy, with negative results.*
6. *The periodic collection of data on the trade in fentanyl-based medicines by the Carabinieri Health Protection Command (NAS).*
7. *The sharing of any information that may be disclosed and emerge from the web as a result of investigations.*
8. *Support for the flow of information to NEWS-D, the National Early Warning System in which the DCSA participates as an 'operational unit of the system', a hub for the flow of information with police offices and departments, with the task of coordinating initiatives relating to the system and providing data and information on seizures for the purpose of preparing reports or alerts to be entered into the National System.*
9. *Supplying police force offices with portable kits containing rapid tests (drug tests) that are standardised throughout the country.*
10. *The exchange of information between the Scientific Police Service and the Forensic Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) on synthetic drugs. Furthermore, representatives of this branch of the DEA also attended a meeting of experts from the chemical analysis services of the G7 countries' police forces, which was held in Italy on 15 and 16 October 2024, as part of the initiatives of the Italian G7 Presidency, in order to illustrate the tools used to detect and trace fentanyl.*
11. *The continuation of awareness-raising activities by police forces on the subject of new psychoactive substances in the context of courses/seminars/workshops, included in the*

* Able to identify synthetic drugs and drug precursors quickly and with a high degree of certainty.

broader training program provided for in the 'Plan', also intended for health, social and street workers. The DCSA organised the course 'Synthetic Drugs, Precursors and Clandestine Laboratories' in 2024, which was specifically designed for both national and foreign police forces. The course aimed at broadening sector-specific knowledge in order to increase the effectiveness of activities designed to combat international trafficking in synthetic drugs, chemical precursors and new psychoactive substances, as well as to illustrate operational practices for safe access to and dismantling of clandestine laboratories. A seminar is being organised at the DCSA aimed at 'training the trainers' (two police doctors for each region), who, as competent doctors, will provide training at provincial level to police healthcare personnel on the measures to be taken to reduce the occupational risk of unwitting exposure to fentanyl, for the benefit of police officers engaged in anti-drug and territorial control activities.

12. The provision of nasal sprays containing naloxone (a specific antagonist drug for reducing opioid overdose) to departments most at risk of accidental contact (customs departments, scientific laboratories and operational units specifically assigned to anti-drug activities). With its decision of 30 July 2024, the Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA) changed the supply regime for the naloxone-based drug 'NIXOID' from 'prescription drug' to 'over-the-counter drug'. Given the instability of the drug in relation to storage temperatures, the provision of AMBU self-inflating bags (for manual respiratory support) or other devices with similar effectiveness is being evaluated for patrols responsible for monitoring the territory.
13. Regular exchange of information between DCSA and representatives of the Internal Intelligence and Security Agency (A.I.S.I.) and the External Intelligence and Security Agency (A.I.S.E.).

OTHER BODIES' TASKS WITHIN THE 'PLAN'

Ministry of Health:

- is responsible for periodically providing data on trade in fentanyl-based medicines in order to obtain an overview of abnormal changes in consumption, which could reveal cases of diversion of pharmaceutical products from the legal to the illegal market. At the same time, protective measures are being strengthened in the production, transfer and storage of pharmaceutical preparations containing fentanyl and its derivatives;
- is responsible for monitoring, through pharmacies, the distribution of opioids throughout the country, including through a survey aimed at collecting anonymised and aggregated data on visits to emergency rooms for opioid poisoning, deaths caused by opioids or other narcotic substances, and the dispensing of certain categories of drugs covered by the National Health Service;
- oversees the commitment of Regions/Autonomous Provinces throughout the country to implement the 'Plan' for each area of competence.

The **Regions** are responsible for monitoring 'abnormal' prescription levels of the substance and must define guidelines that take into account the different groups of consumers and the nature, contexts and patterns of consumption of new substances.

The **Ministry of Justice** is responsible for raising awareness among public prosecutors about the trafficking of fentanyl, synthetic drugs and NPS (new psychoactive substances), so that thorough tests are requested in cases of suspected acute intoxication and, in general, for all violent deaths, in order to identify any narcotic substances.

Data on the fight against synthetic drugs in Italy

In 2024, the volume of action taken by Italian police forces, also in collaboration with foreign police forces, to combat the illegal trade in synthetic drugs increased significantly compared to 2023: +12.46% for operations (379), +418.90% for seizures in doses/tablets (101,595), +27.49% for persons reported to the judicial authorities (473), of whom more than half (335) were arrested (70.82% of the total). On the other hand, there was a 36.17% decrease in seizures of synthetic drugs in powder form (89 kg).

Of the 473 individuals reported to the judicial authorities, 39.75% (188) were foreign nationals, of whom more than two-thirds (75.53%) were arrested (142). The latter accounted for 42.39% of the total number of persons arrested of any nationality (335) and 30.02% of the total number of persons of any nationality reported.

The most common nationalities other than Italian were Filipino, Chinese and Turkish. The data on nationalities

confirms the South-East and East Asian origin, i.e. the areas from which the largest quantities of synthetic drugs are distributed on the global illicit market: Filipinos reported (46) account for almost a quarter (24.47%) of all foreigners reported to the judicial authorities (188), followed by Chinese and Turks in equal numbers (21).

Almost all of those reported were male: 435 men (91.97%) compared to 38 women (8.03%), all of whom were of legal age, while minors accounted for only 1.06% (5), one of whom was a foreign national.

The highest percentage (28.54%) of those reported to the judicial authorities for trafficking in synthetic drugs were aged 40 or over, while the lowest percentage (8.03%) were aged between 15 and 19. None were under the age of 15.

The reports almost entirely concerned trafficking/dealing offences (92.60%), with only a residual number (7.40%) concerning criminal association.

OPERATIONS	379	+12.46%
SEIZURES	89 KG	101,595 doses
	-36.17%	+418.90%
REPORTED	473	+27.49%

The most significant seizures of doses/tablets were carried out in April in Naples, with 87,000 doses, and in October in Ferrara, with 5,000 doses, while the most significant seizures in kilograms were carried out in August and November in Rome, with 6.71 and 7 kg respectively.

Synthetic drugs in liquid form were also seized: 1.69 litres of GBL, 0.4 litres of GHB and 0.3 litres of methamphetamine. The most significant seizures were made in Milan for GBL (1,573 ml in March) and GHB (400 ml in September), and in Pistoia for methamphetamine (30 ml in May).

SUMMARY TABLE - SYNTHETIC DRUGS

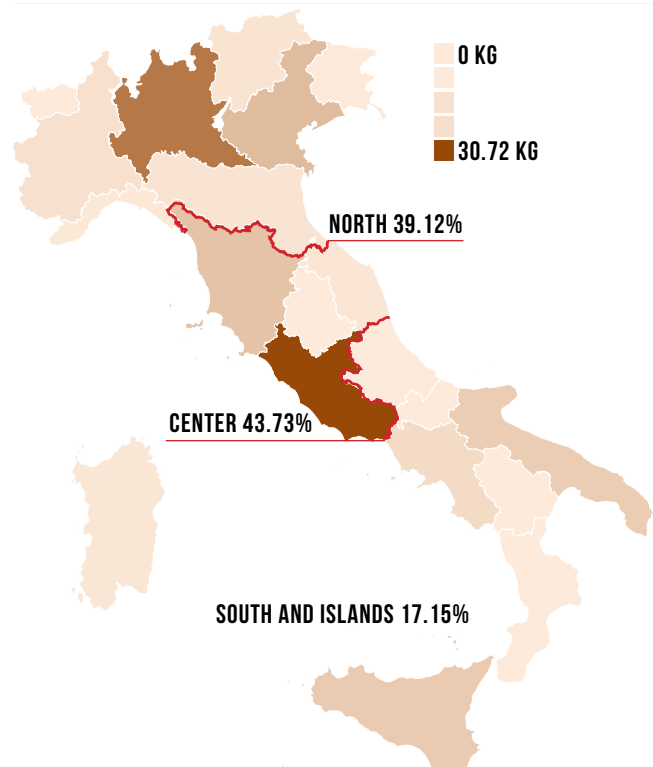
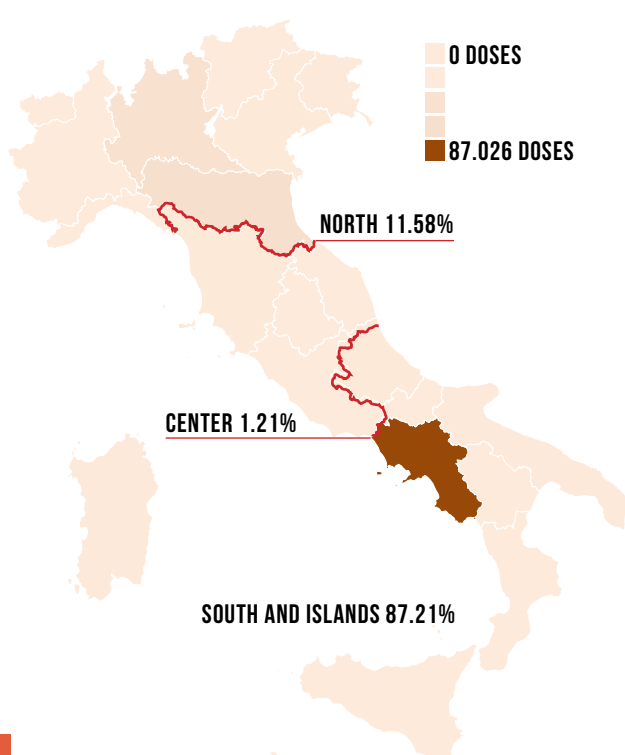
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Var.% 23-24
Operations	314	316	298	337	379	12.46
Seizures						
doses	17,693	15,759	10,722	19,579	101,595	418.90
kg	14,293.68	138.29	103.82	139.44	89.00	-36.17
Person reported to the J.A.	340	342	331	371	473	27.49
Italians	151	178	189	192	285	48.44
Foreigners of whom:	189	164	142	179	188	5.03
Filipinos	82	66	49	78	46	-41.03
Turks	-	-	-	-	21	--
Chinese	46	29	25	26	21	-19.23
Romanian	4	4	5	9	12	33.33
Moroccans	3	2	3	5	12	140.00
Males	306	307	303	329	435	32.22
Females	34	35	28	42	38	-9.52
Of age	336	338	322	365	468	28.22
Minors	4	4	9	6	5	-16.67
Illicit trafficking (art, 73)	340	332	331	363	438	20.66
Conspiracy to traffick (Art, 74)	-	10	-	8	35	337.50
Other offences	-	-	-	-	-	--
Arrested	245	261	246	243	335	37.86
Reported but not arrested	93	78	84	128	136	6.25
At large	2	3	1	-	2	--
< 15	-	-	1	-	-	--
15-19	18	14	14	27	38	40.74
20-24	35	34	34	48	97	102.08
25-29	56	45	52	53	85	60.38
30-34	54	67	55	54	62	14.81
35-39	58	54	47	55	56	1.82
> 40	119	128	128	134	135	0.75

Seizures of synthetic drugs in powder form were most frequent in Central Italy (43.73%) and Northern Italy (39.12%), followed by Southern Italy and the Islands (17.15%),

while seizures in doses/tablets occurred mainly in the South and on the Islands (87.21%), followed by the North (11.58%) and finally the Centre (1.21%).

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION - SYNTHETIC DRUGS

Regions	2023	2024	Var. %	Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	-	704	--	Abruzzi	0.01	0.09	1,328.85
Basilicata	-	-	--	Basilicata	0.00	0.00	--
Calabria	48	62	29.17	Calabria	0.09	0.02	-77.72
Campania	147	87,026	59,101.36	Campania	1.00	2.87	187.26
Emilia Romagna	709	5,649	696.76	Emilia Romagna	2.00	1.07	-46.29
Friuli V. G.	1,947	515	-73.55	Friuli V. G.	0.18	0.14	-26.05
Lazio	127	250	96.85	Lazio	2.24	30.72	1,270.21
Liguria	7,729	189	-97.55	Liguria	2.63	0.35	-86.66
Lombardy	440	4,444	910.00	Lombardy	107.02	21.53	-79.88
Marche	14	27	92.86	Marche	0.13	0.73	443.86
Molise	-	-	--	Molise	0.00	0.00	--
Piedmont	340	193	-43.24	Piedmont	4.91	1.75	-64.40
Apulia	83	317	281.93	Apulia	0.61	5.54	815.74
Sardinia	5	417	8,240.00	Sardinia	0.24	0.83	247.00
Sicily	83	79	-4.82	Sicily	1.87	5.91	216.98
Tuscany	6,285	818	-86.98	Tuscany	14.37	7.39	-48.60
Trentino A. A.	164	51	-68.90	Trentino A. A.	0.19	1.32	583.00
Umbria	1,105	134	-87.87	Umbria	0.15	0.08	-48.99
Valle d'Aosta	-	146	--	Valle d'Aosta	0.00	0.00	--
Veneto	353	574	62.61	Veneto	1.80	8.67	381.22
Regional total	19,579	101,595	418.90	Regional total	139.44	89.00	-36.17
International waters	-	-	--	International waters	-	-	--
National total	19,579	101,595	418.90	National total	139.44	89.00	-36.17



The synthetic drugs seized were mostly concealed on persons (224 cases) and in homes (125 cases), followed by parcels or postal letters (39 cases) and vehicles (22 cases).

The ten-year historical series shows an average annual value of 320 operations involving synthetic drugs as the sole or predominant narcotic substance seized, with the highest peak in 2024 (379) and the lowest in 2018 (281).

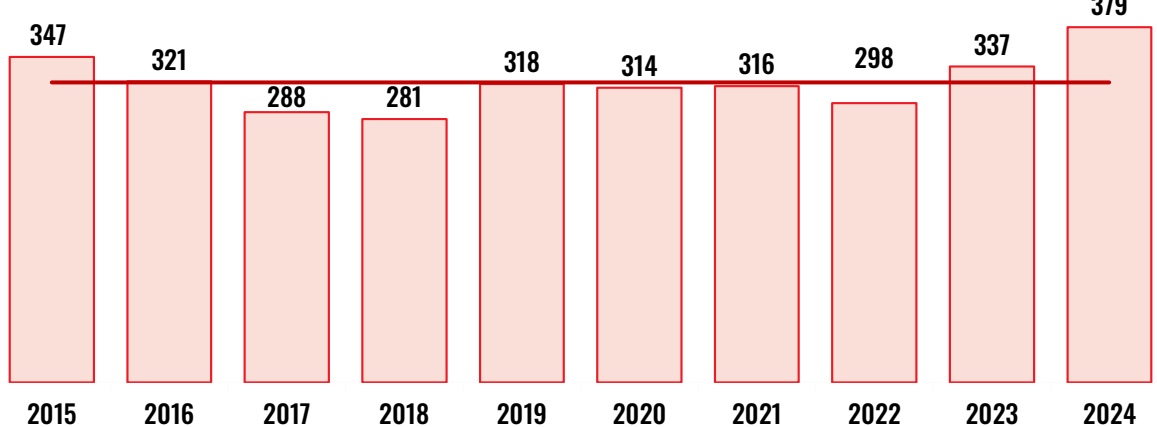
An average of 387 people were reported to the judicial authorities each year, with the highest number recorded in 2024 (473), as in the case of operations, and the lowest in 2022 (331).

Seizures of synthetic drugs followed a different trend depending on whether kilograms or doses/tablets were seized. Seizures in kilograms were influenced, over the decade, by the large seizure in Salerno in 2020 (14,005 kg), without which the ten-year average would be low (123.71 kg), with the maximum value again in 2020 (288.68 kg) and the minimum in 2015 (54.12).

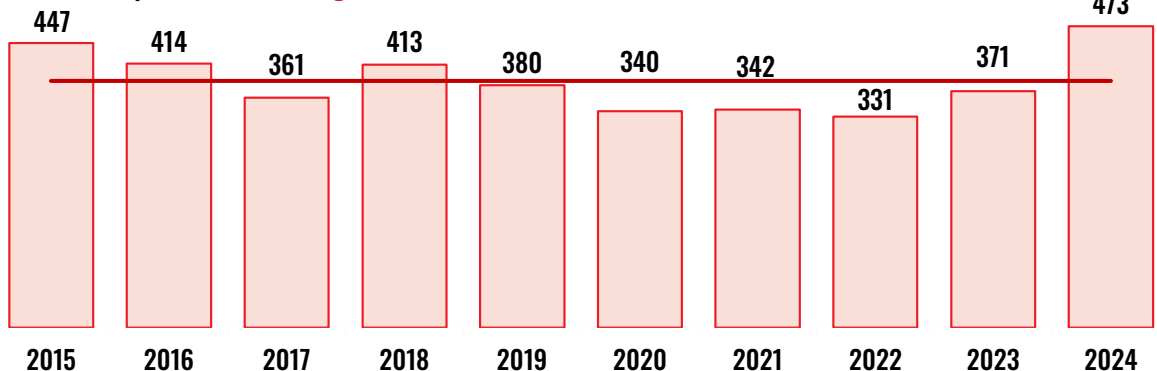
Seizures of synthetic drugs in doses/tablets peaked in 2024 (101,595 doses/tablets) and reached a minimum in 2022 (10,722), with an annual average of approximately 31,500 doses/tablets.

TEN YEAR TREND

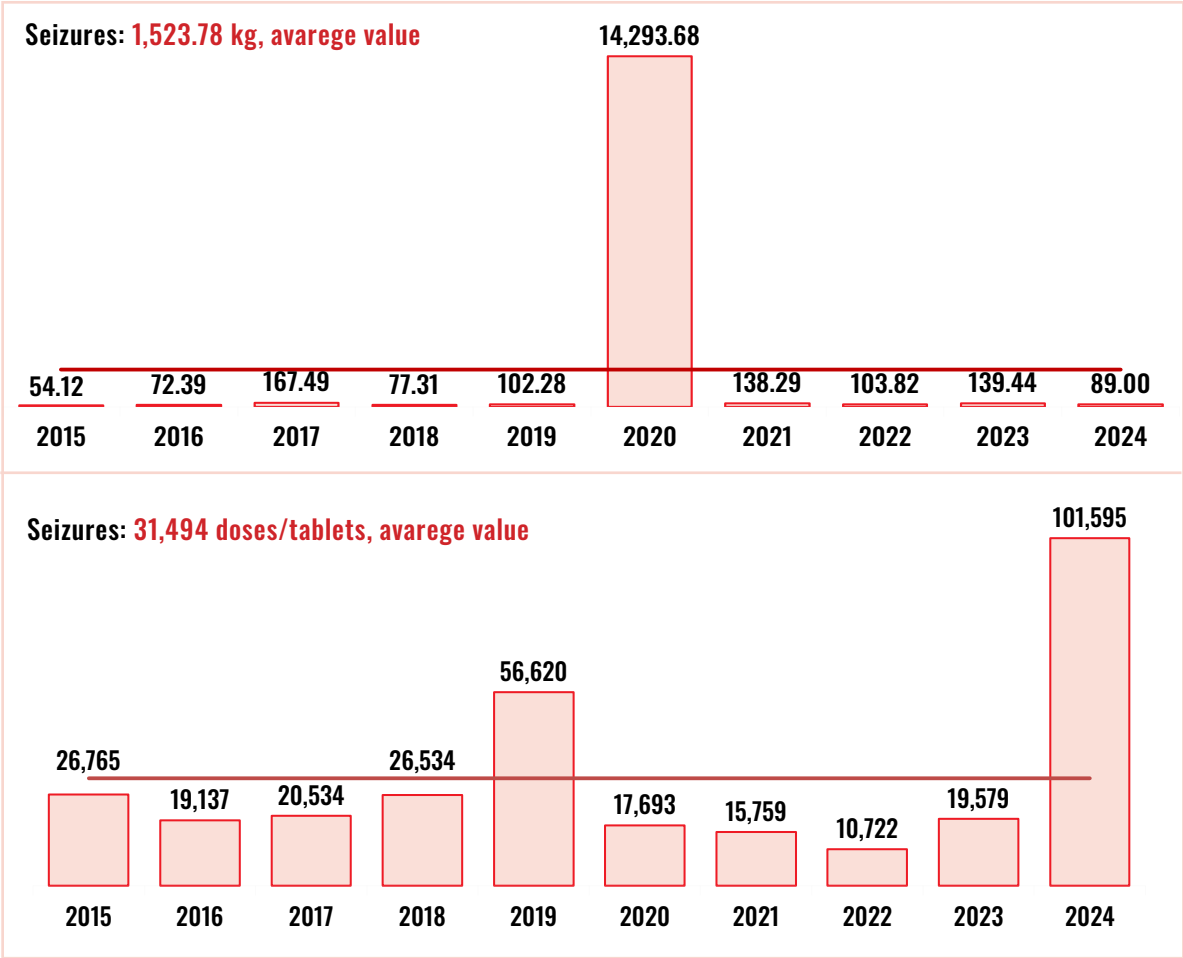
Operations: 320, average value



Persons reported: 387, average value

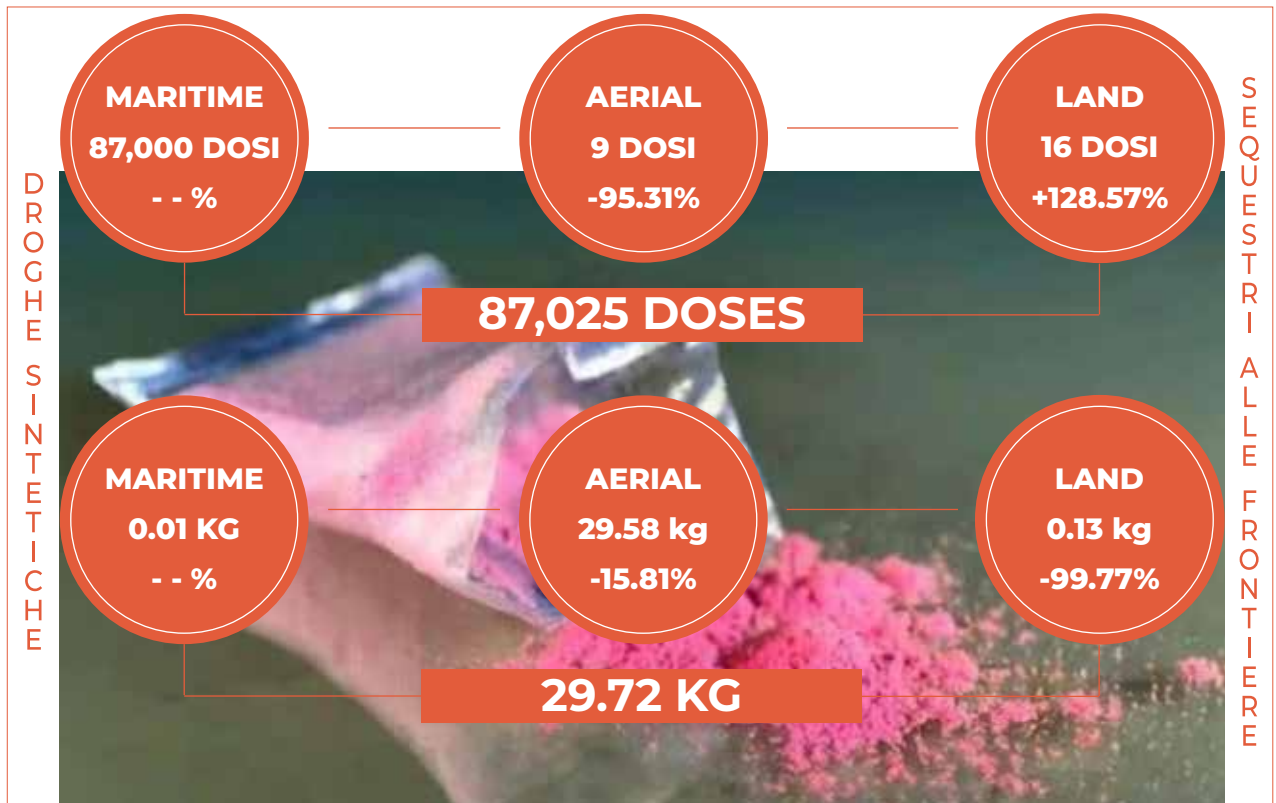


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PESCARA, JUNE 2024 - SEIZURE OF 500 PILLS OF MDMA





Synthetic drugs flows towards Italy: border seizures

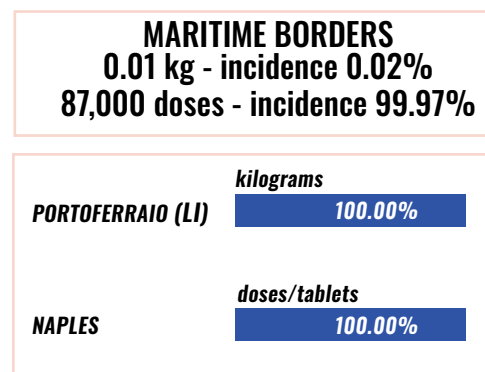
In 2024, synthetic drugs entered our country mainly by sea and air.

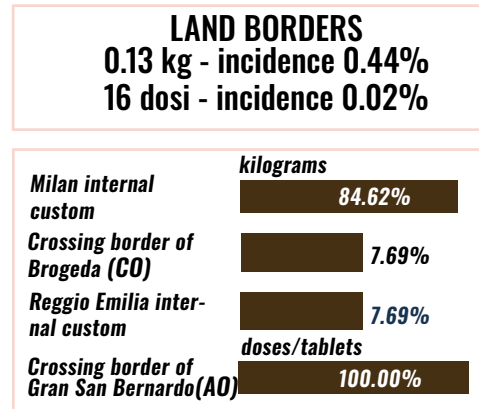
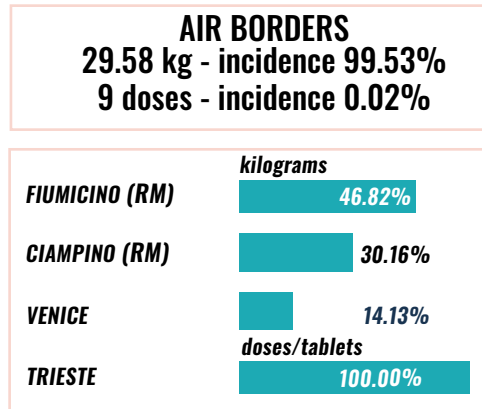
Border seizures of synthetic drugs (29.72 kg and 87,025 doses/tablets) accounted for 33.40% and 85.66%, respectively, in terms of kilograms and doses/tablets, of the total seizures of the same substances carried out on national territory (89 kg and 101,595 doses/tablets). These percentages were higher than those recorded in 2023 for both kilograms and doses/tablets (1.02% and 66.06% respectively).

Compared to 2023, border seizures in kilograms decreased by 67.74% (29.72 kg compared to 92.12 kg), while those in terms of doses/tablets increased from 199 to 87,025 doses/tablets, almost exclusively due to the large seizure in the Port of Naples, corresponding to 87,000 MDMA (ecstasy) pills.

In fact, the **maritime border** accounted for 99.97% of border seizures of doses/pills during the year, thanks to the aforementioned seizure in the port of Naples, while seizures in kilograms (0.01 kg, seized in Portoferraio - LI) were insignificant, accounting for only 0.02%.

Only one Algerian citizen was reported for offences relating to synthetic drugs intercepted at the maritime border.





At the **air border**, 99.53% (29.58 kg) of all synthetic drugs in kg intercepted at the border during the year were seized, decreasing by 15.81% from 35.13 kg in 2023. Doses/tablets, on the other hand, accounted for only 0.01% of all border seizures during the year (9 doses/tablets), decreasing by 95.31% from 192 doses/tablets in 2023.

The Italian airport where the largest total quantities of synthetic drugs were intercepted in kilograms was Fiumicino (RM), with 13.85 kg (46.82% of the total seized at air borders), followed by Ciampino (RM), with 8.92 kg (30.16%), and Marco Polo in Venice, with 4.18 kg (14.13%). The only airport involved in seizures of doses/tablets was Ronchi dei Legionari in Trieste (9 doses).

The United States of America (with 7.00 kg) and Mexico (with 6.75 kg) were the countries from which the largest quantities of synthetic drugs in kg were found to have arrived by air. Smaller quantities came from Spain (4.64 kg) and the Netherlands (4.10 kg).

At airports, seven individuals were reported in 2024, including two Italians.

The ten-year series of the main airports affected by synthetic drug trafficking shows an average of approximately 32 kg for Malpensa (VA), which peaked in 2017

(85.59 kg) and reached its lowest point in 2024 (2.42 kg); Fiumicino airport (RM) leads the way in seizures in 2024 with 13.85 kg, well above its average (4.87 kg). With regard to synthetic drugs trafficked in doses/tablets, the airport most affected was Fiumicino (RM), with an average of just over 1,800 doses: after the record set in 2018 (12,006 doses/tablets) and the significant numbers in 2021 (2,282 doses/tablets) and 2022 (3,978 doses/tablets), in other years and also in 2024, the airport had zero or insignificant numerical indices.

At **land borders**, 0.13 kg of synthetic drugs were seized (0.44% of all border seizures for the year), with a decrease of 99.77% compared to 2023 (56.99 kg), while doses/tablets increased by 128.57%, (16 doses, equal to 0.02% of all border seizures for the year), compared to 7 in 2023.

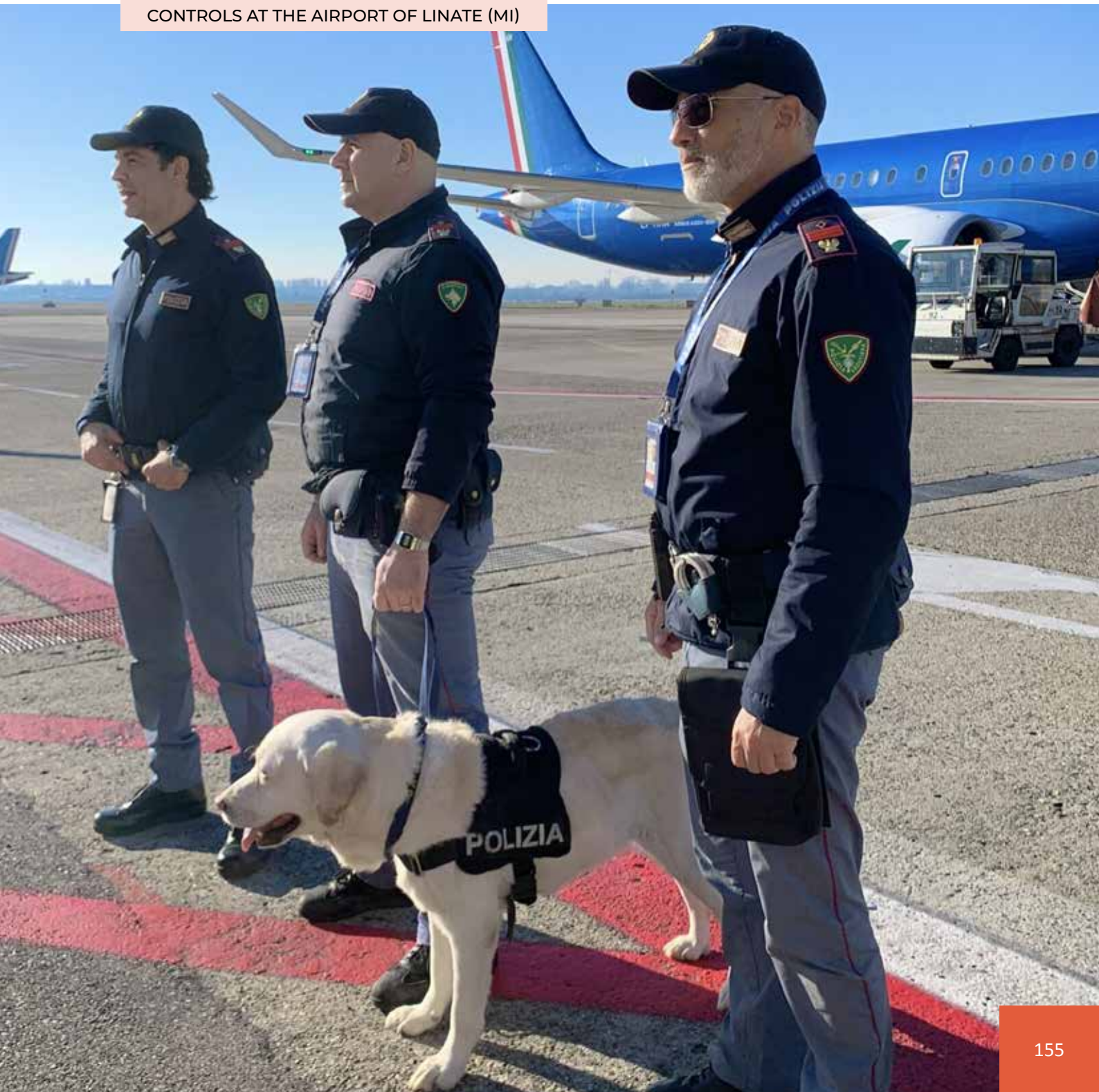
The largest seizures were made at the Milan Internal Customs Office with 0.11 kg (84.62%). The 16 doses were seized at the Great St Bernardo Pass (AO).

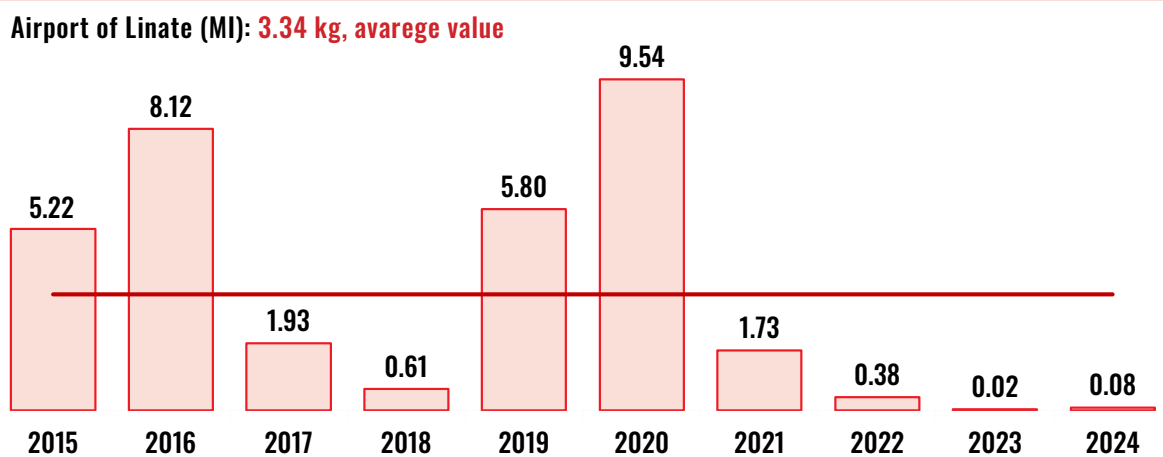
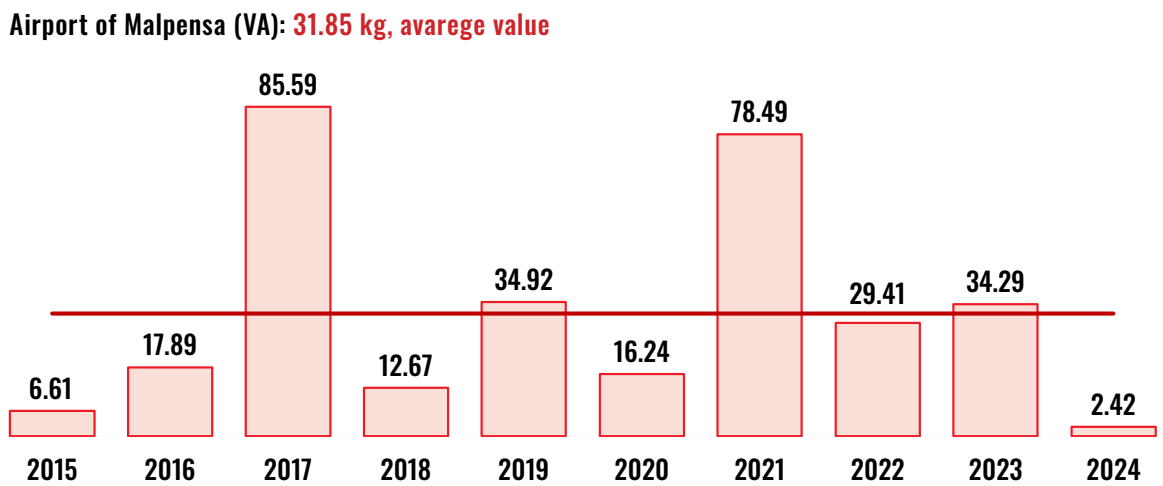
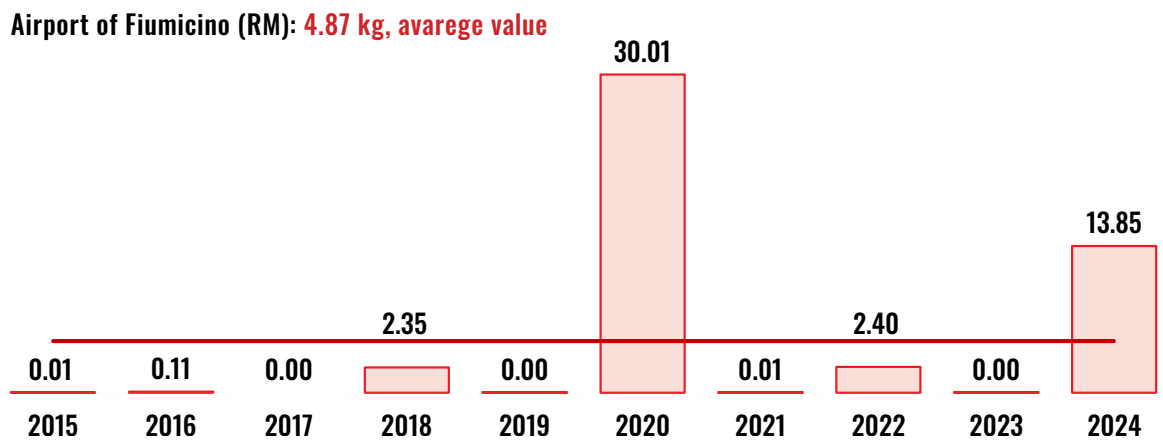
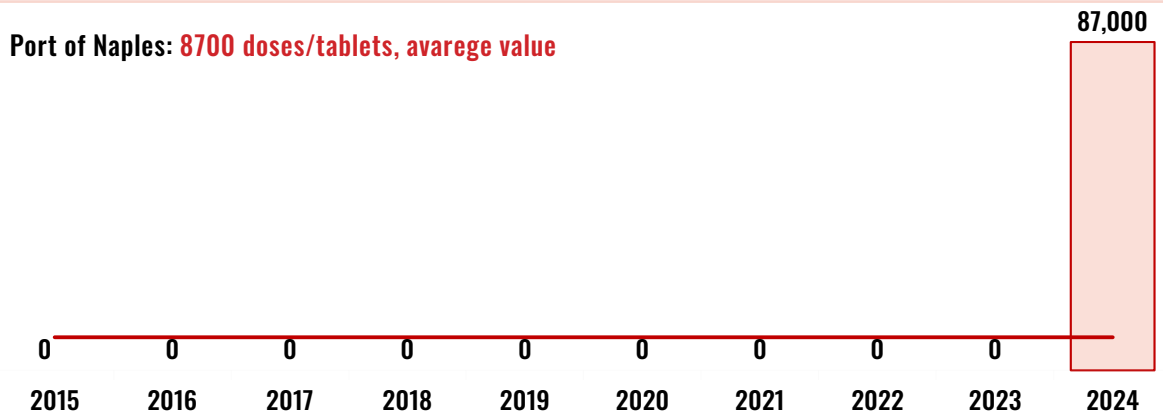
The countries from which the largest quantities of synthetic drugs arrived by land in 2024 were the Netherlands (0.08 kg) and Spain (0.04 kg).

At land borders, only one person (United Kingdom) was reported for offences relating to synthetic drugs.

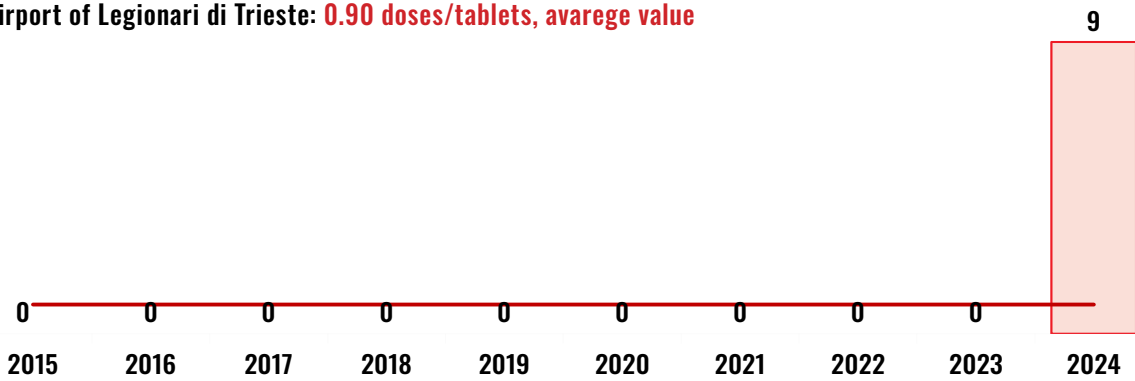
Among the land border crossings with the highest annual averages in the decade, the Brogeda Pass (CO) was the most involved in synthetic drug trafficking, with an average of over 10 kg and a peak in 2023.

CONTROLS AT THE AIRPORT OF LINATE (MI)

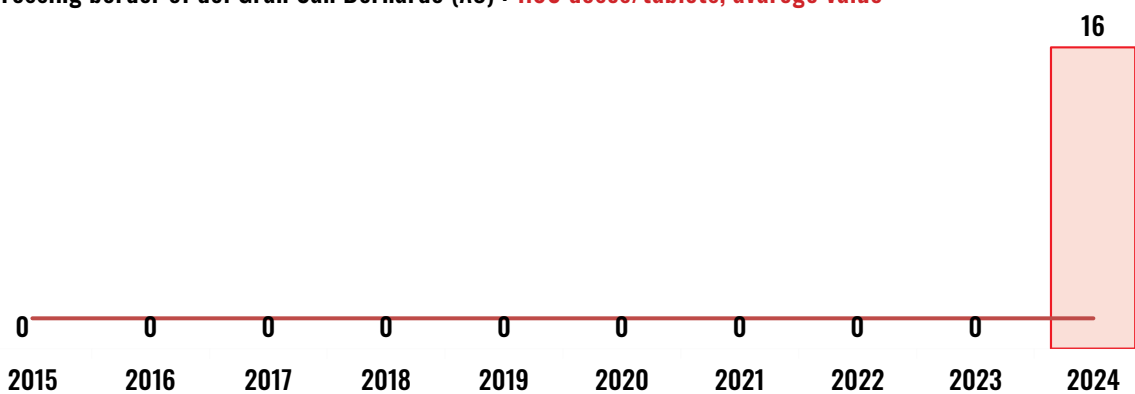




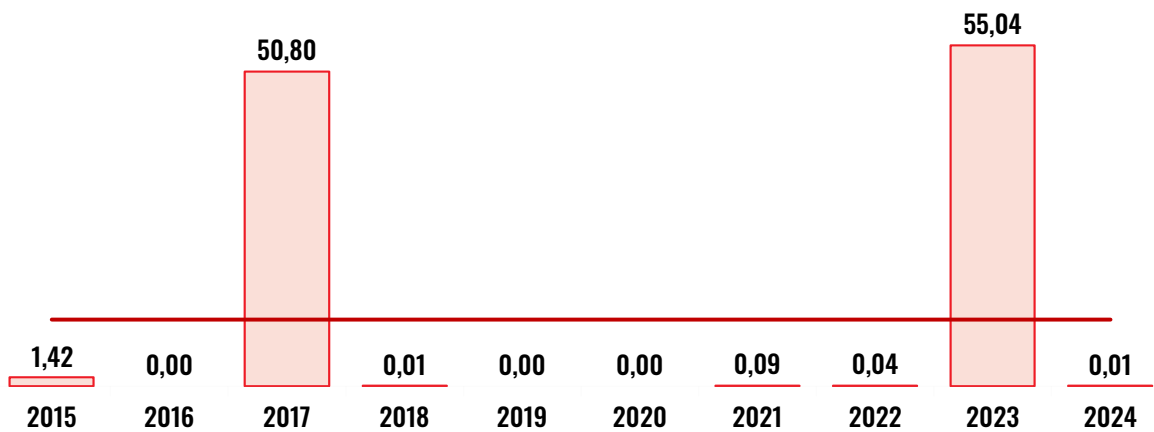
Airport of Legionari di Trieste: 0.90 doses/tablets, average value



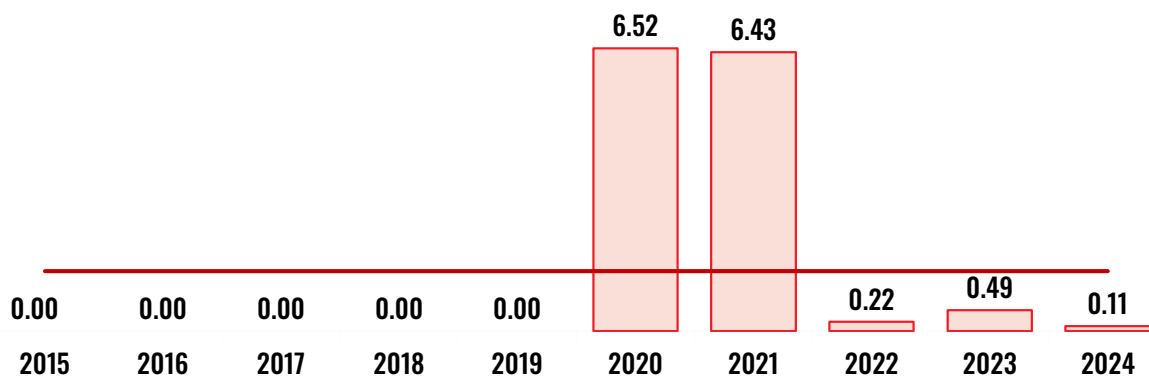
Crossing border of del Gran San Bernardo (AO) : 1.60 doses/tablets, average value



Crossing border of Brogeda (CO): 10,74 kg, average value



Milan internal custom: 1.38 kg, average value



07. NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

NPSs in Italy and worldwide

There is just a fine ‘grey line’ separating synthetic drugs from **new psychoactive substances**, known by the acronym **NPS**. When these substances are included in the tables of national and international drug laws, they can be defined as ‘synthetic drugs’ for all intents and purposes; otherwise, they enter the varied world of NPS.

There are more than 1,000 different **types of NPS**, worldwide, divided into specific classes (synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones, synthetic opioids, tryptamines, piperazines, arylcyclohexylamines, phenethylamines, etc.) based on their chemical similarity to classic narcotic substances (and their effects), which are already subject to control and included in the aforementioned tables.

NPS are created in clandestine laboratories by unscrupulous chemists hired by criminal organisations, who modify the ‘basic’ chemical structure of the narcotic substance. This gives the new NPS different chemical and toxicological characteristics that are completely independent of the original molecules, meaning that they no longer fall under the regulatory control of prohibited substances.

What makes NPS attractive is their **easy availability**, which explains their growing popularity: these substances are not found on the street but in **specialised online ‘shops’**, where they are paid for with **cryptocurrencies** in total **anonymity** and security. **Delivery** is then made directly to the customer’s **home**, giving that sense of harmlessness that has made NPS a real danger to public health. In fact, these new drugs can cause **very serious damage**: only few milligrams can be enough to cause an overdose.

In general, the quantities of NPS and ATS (amphetamine-type stimulants) seized tripled between 2019 and 2022, while seizures of opioids decreased. The highest percentage of **NPS and ATS seizures** occurred in **Eastern Europe, Central Asia** and **Transcaucasia**. Data on individual drug seizures by region indicate that the upward trend in NPS and ATS seizures continued in 2023, albeit at a slower pace than in the past. This may be linked to the dismantling of the dark net market known as Hydra, although several new Russian-language markets (such as Kraken, Blacksprut and Mega) have emerged on the dark web¹⁵⁸.

As regards **Europe**, in 2022 EU Member States¹⁵⁹ **seized a record 30.7 tonnes** of new psychoactive substances, accounting for almost 26.4% of the 38,860 NPS seizures reported in the European Union, Norway and Turkey, corresponding to 30.7 of the 31.8 tonnes seized.

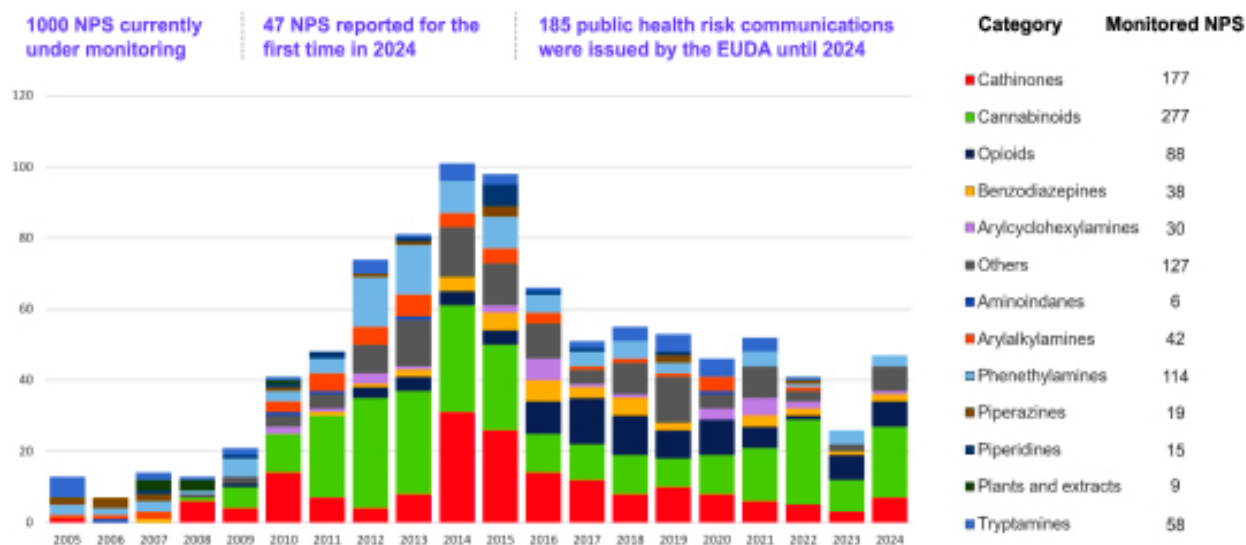
The increase was driven by a small number of large seizures of cathinones (3-CMC, 3-MMC, 2-MMC) and ketamine. In addition, **1,472 litres** of liquids containing new psychoactive substances **were seized**, mainly GBL (1,115 litres) and HHC (96 litres).

In **2024**, the **EU Early Warning System (EWS)** on new psychoactive substances reached an important milestone with the formal notification of the **thousandth substance**, delta-9-THC methyl carbonate. Established in 1997, the EWS

¹⁵⁸ WDR 2024, key findings and conclusions, pp. 32-37, cit.

¹⁵⁹ EUDA, New Psychoactive Substances – the current situation in Europe, 2024. https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2024/new-psychoactive-substances_en

EUROPEAN UNION: NUMBER OF NPS REPORTED FOR THE FIRST TIME BY THE EWS (EU+2)



Source: EUDA, The Early Warning System monitors 1000 NPS

remains a cornerstone of European efforts to monitor and respond to the dynamic and ever-evolving phenomenon of NPS. Recent data highlight the complexity of this challenge: in **2024, 47 new substances were identified**, including a series of nitazene opioids and emerging semi-synthetic cannabinoids¹⁶⁰.

According to the United Nations, the number of NPS has remained stable recently, with a slight decrease in the quantity of opioids identified for the first time.

One of the most notable global changes in drug trafficking and consumption over the last decade has occurred in Central Asia, Transcaucasia and Eastern Europe, where there has been a gradual shift towards **synthetic stimulants** in those regions where trafficking was previously dominated by opiates, mainly from Afghanistan.

It particularly consists in **cathinones**,

such as mephedrone, N-methylphedrone (metamfepramone, also known as dimethylcathinone), alpha-pyrrolidinopentifenone (alpha-PVP), cathinone, metcathinone and 4-CMC (4-chloromethcathinone, also known as clefedrone).

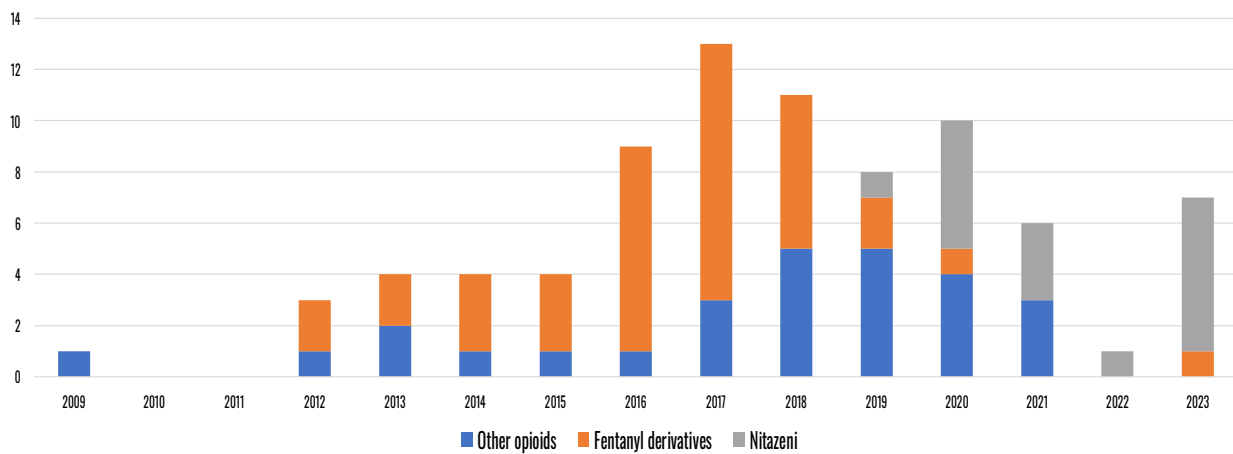
Synthetic cathinones have established in **Europe** as substitutes for amphetamine-type stimulants. In 2022, large quantities of cathinones such as 3-CMC and 3-MMC were seized in some European countries, mostly originating from India, but also produced in Europe.

Cathinones are also sold mixed with other drugs or on their own, which increases the risk of harm. In 2022 and 2023, the EU Early Warning System detected an increase in reports of synthetic cathinones sold erroneously as MDMA or used to adulterate MDMA.

In 2022, just five substances accounted for over 90% of the total quantity of new psychoactive substances seized in EU countries: namely 4 cathinones (3-CMC, 3-MMC, 2-MMC and N-ethylnorpentedrone, totalling 24.8 tonnes) and ketamine (2.8 tonnes,

¹⁶⁰ EUDA, The Early Warning System monitors 1000 NPS, 19.12.2024: https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/poster/eu-early-warning-system-monitors-1000-nps_en

EUROPEAN UNION: NUMBER OF NEW OPIOIDS REPORTED FOR THE FIRST TIME BY THE EWS - 2009/2023



Source: EUDA, data

up from 0.87 tonnes in 2021).

Under other guises, new **synthetic opioids**, often very powerful, continue to spread. This means that a small amount can be enough to produce a large number of doses and may pose a greater risk of potentially fatal poisoning. In **North America**, the synthetic opioid **fentanyl** has been the main cause of a public health emergency that has resulted in a high number of deaths.

In **Europe**, these drugs have not played a major role so far, although there are growing fears that they may be on the rise. Indeed, recent reports from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania indicate that these substances now account for a significant proportion of **overdose deaths**. In **2022**, at least **163** deaths have been linked to fentanyl and its derivatives; many of these deaths have been associated to fentanyl diverted from the medical supply chain for use in the illicit drug market¹⁶¹.

Since 2009, a total number of 81 new synthetic opioids have been identified on the European drug market. This includes **7 new substances** formally notified to

the EU Early Warning System in **2023** (one in 2022 and six in 2021), 6 of which belong to the highly potent group of benzimidazole opioids, i.e. **nitazenes**, which in some cases are hundreds of times more potent than heroin¹⁶² and fentanyl itself.

In **2024**, **seven nitazenes** were identified, the highest number reported in a single year.

As of 31 December 2024, the EUDA had formally reported 23 nitazene opioids identified on the European drug market since 2019. And indeed, since 2019, at least 20 EU countries have reported the presence of nitazene.

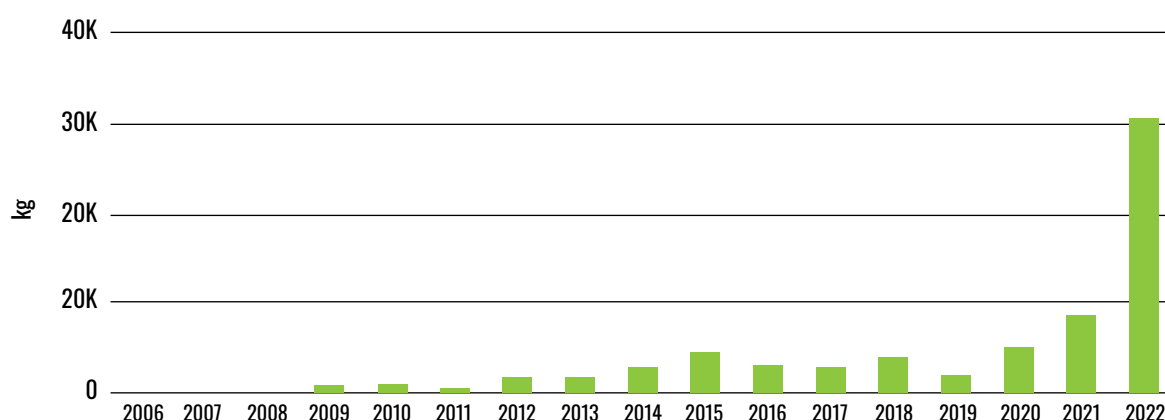
Preliminary reports from 2023 indicate an increase in nitazene-related deaths in Estonia and Latvia, but also in Ireland and France, where localised outbreaks of poisoning caused by nitazenes sold in place of heroin have been reported.

Other reports also suggest an increase in Europe in **fake pills containing nitazene opioids**. In fact, since 2023, there has been a significant increase in the identification of counterfeit drugs containing nitazene

¹⁶¹ https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2024/new-psychoactive-substances_en

¹⁶² https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2024/new-psychoactive-substances_en

EUROPEAN UNION: SEIZURES (KG) OF NEW PSYCHOACTIVE DRUGS - 2006/2022



Source: EUDA, data

opioids¹⁶³.

In light of these data, there is no doubt that nitazenes, which probably emerged as a result of control measures introduced in both producing countries and elsewhere to reduce the availability of fentanyl derivatives, pose significant health risks. It is therefore clear that there is growing concern about the spread of nitazenes in **North America**, but also in **Western Europe, South America** and **Oceania**.

At the end of 2023, the British authorities seized a production site and 150,000 nitazene pills.

In fact, in 2023, high-potency nitazene appeared in the **United Kingdom**, sold as such or mixed with other substances such as opioids, benzodiazepines and synthetic cannabinoids, resulting in deaths.

Most of the nitazene seizures in the UK were made in 2023, resulting in 8 seizures with nitazene coming from Poland, probably trafficked by a single criminal group. Given its rail link with China, it is likely that Poland was used as a transshipment hub. In turn, it is almost certain that the United Kingdom is used

as a transit point for the global movement of nitazene. At the end of 2023, for example, 30 packages of this substance were exported from south-east England to Australia and New Zealand, and in 2024, more than 30 packages were exported to the USA (mainly in pill form rather than powder).

In the UK, nitazene has been found in the form of powders (brown, yellow or white), pills and tablets, mixed with heroin and liquids, including vape liquids. It is assumed that there is local production of nitazene in the United Kingdom, combined with imports from **China** or **India**, both countries with a large supply of precursors and good pharmaceutical production capacity. Dark web forums suggest that etonitazene analogues can be purchased directly online from China.

In the **United Kingdom**, between 1 June 2023 and 9 May 2024, there were 176 confirmed deaths and numerous near-fatal cases related to nitazene mixed with heroin.

In 2024, **Dutch** authorities seized oxycodone pills suspected of being counterfeit and contaminated with nitazene. These synthetic opioids and their precursors are believed to originate

¹⁶³ National Early Warning System – Drugs (NEWS-D), February 2025 note.

from China, Russia and India¹⁶⁴.

Data from the **Baltic countries** show that the introduction of nitazene has rapidly influenced trends in drug-related deaths, with increasing findings of substances such as isotonicitazene, protonitazene and methonitazene in Estonia and Latvia.

The emergence of nitazenes has also been accompanied by other market developments, with **new synthetic opioids** being **found in combination with other substances**. These include **'tranq-dope'**, which appeared in 2021 and combines new synthetic opioids with xylazine, a sedative and analgesic, and **'benzo-dope'**, which appeared in 2022 and combines new synthetic opioids with new benzodiazepines (such as bromazolam).

In particular, **xylazine**, used as an anaesthetic in veterinary medicine, especially on large animals, and approved by the US *Food and Drug Administration* (FDA) for veterinary use only, is added to fentanyl and other narcotic substances to create a mixture ('*tranq*', '*tranq dope*' or '*zombie drug*') that increases the risk of death from fentanyl poisoning. The increasing presence of xylazine in mixtures of fentanyl complicates the treatment of opioid overdoses with **naloxone**, as it is unable to counteract them. Naloxone, in fact, only acts as an antidote for synthetic opioids, while it is less effective in reversing the symptoms of opioid overdose when these are taken together with xylazine. In addition, xylazine is responsible for infections of the tissue surrounding the injection site, as well as necrosis (death of soft tissue with consequent amputations).

Between 1 June 2023 and 9 May 2024, there were 10 confirmed deaths in the **United Kingdom** related to xylazine without the presence of nitazene. However, the number of deaths from

these synthetic opioids is underestimated, probably due to a lack of intelligence and post-mortem toxicological testing.

The same applies to the situation in **Africa**, where new substances and drug mixtures have appeared on the illicit markets, alongside the well-known non-medical use of counterfeit **tramadol** (an opioid not subject to international control). For example, the spread of **'kush'**, **'karkoubi'** or **'nyaope'** is an increasingly worrying phenomenon: these are products that contain harmful substances, including illicit drugs, benzodiazepines, alcohol and solvents¹⁶⁵, in some cases even formaldehyde and powdered human bones, and which in the last

three years have caused an increase in deaths, especially among young people, in Sierra Leone and Guinea¹⁶⁶.

In **2022, 749 seizures of new opioids were reported to the EU Early Warning System**, 40% of which contained carfentanyl and 22% tramadol. In total, 16.6 kg of material was seized, of which 50% (8.2 kg) contained carfentanyl and 31% (5.2 kg) contained tramadol. Most seizures took place in Northern Europe, with **Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden and Finland** accounted for 87% of seizures and 67% of the quantity seized (11.1 kg)¹⁶⁷.

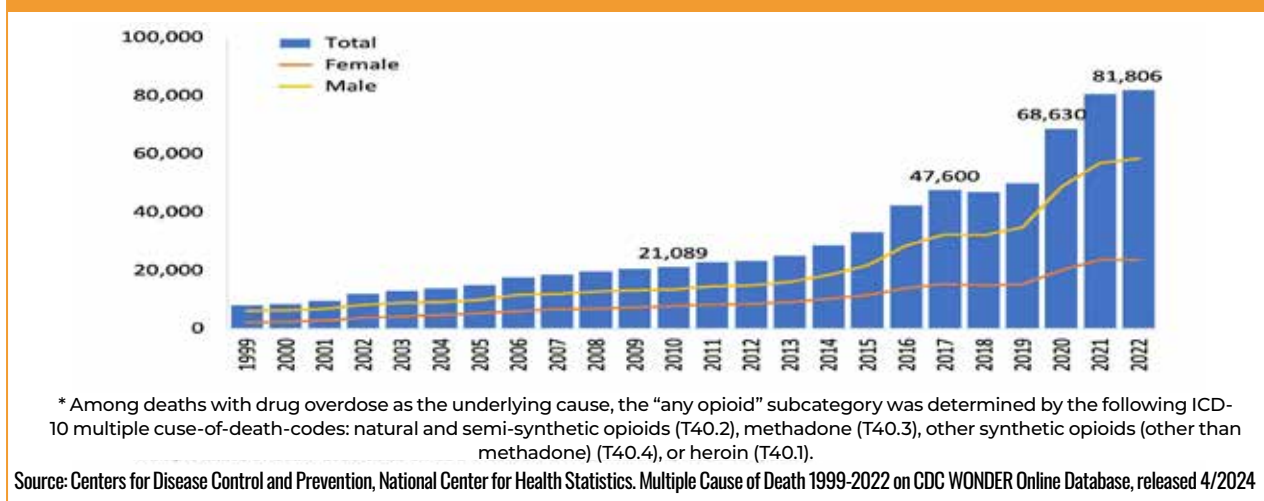
¹⁶⁵ UNODC, WDR 2024, Special Points of Interest, pp. 16-17, cit.; WDR 2024, key findings and conclusions, pp. 32-37, cit.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/kush-synthetic-drug-addiction-epidemic-west-africa/> Source: UK News Website, The Telegraph, Inside the 'zombie' drug epidemic sweeping West Africa, 2 January 2024; <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-01-23/kush-the-dangerous-new-west-african-drug-that-supposedly-contains-human-bones.html#> from El País, Kush, the dangerous new West African drug that supposedly contains human bones, 23 January 2024.

¹⁶⁷ https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2024/new-psychoactive-substances_en

¹⁶⁴ GITOC, European Drug Trends Monitor, December 2024.

USA: OVERDOSE DEATHS DUE TO OPIOIDS*, DIVIDED PER GENDER, 1999-2022



It should be noted that the global market for opioids is closely linked to the market for opiates, which in turn is sensitive to developments in opium-producing countries. In this context, the ban on opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan appears to have played a significant role, leading to a sharp decline in opium production. Although it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions, this **could lead to a reduction in the supply of heroin in Europe**. If this were to happen, there is a risk that **synthetic opioids** could become **substitute drugs for heroin**, potentially increasing the risks associated with higher opioid consumption, as has happened in the US.

In fact, the **United States** has always been one of the largest markets for painkiller consumption. The latest statistics on **deaths from synthetic opioid overdose** (excluding methadone) show a broadly stable picture until 2012 (around 2,600 per year), before increasing dramatically from 49,860 in 2019 to **81,806** in **2022**, when compared to the total number of deaths from acute intoxication by narcotic or psychotropic substances (91,799 deaths in 2020 and 107,941 deaths in 2022)¹⁶⁸. The exponential increase in overdose deaths has been caused by fentanyl and its

derivatives, introduced onto the illicit markets in the United States mainly by the well-known *Mexican cartels of Sinaloa and Jalisco Nueva Generación*, capable of producing fentanyl tablets on an industrial scale at very low prices and then route them through established communication infrastructures along the South-West Border to proven distribution networks in the United States.

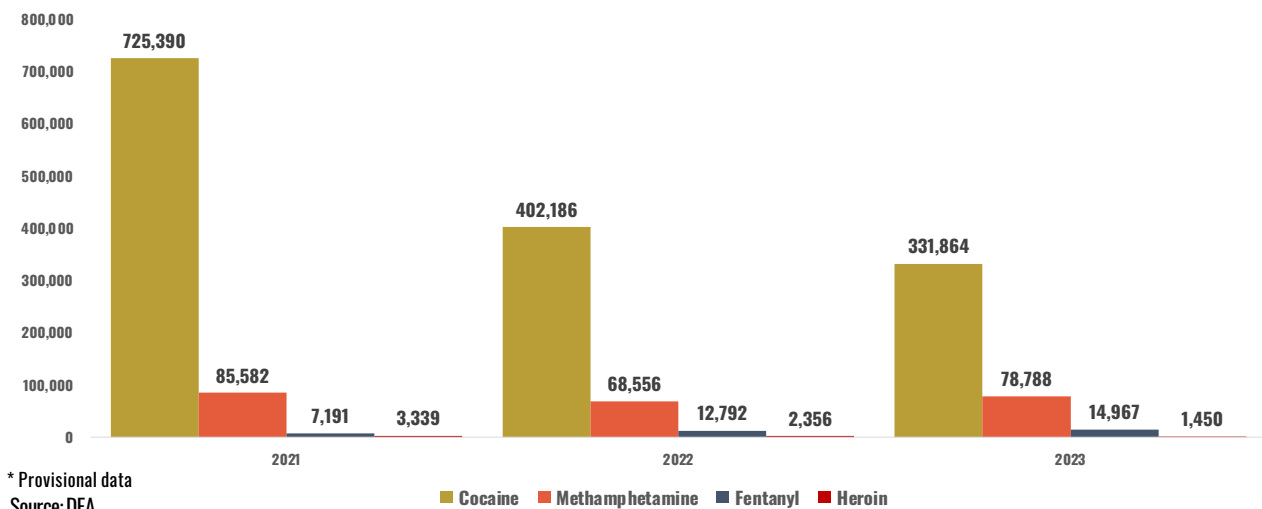
In 2023, the *Drug Enforcement Administration* (DEA) seized more than 80 million counterfeit tablets containing fentanyl and approximately 5.5 tonnes of fentanyl powder, equivalent to over 390 million lethal doses of fentanyl. In **2024**, **fentanyl seizures** amounted to **over 380 million lethal doses**¹⁶⁹. The DEA and various US law enforcement agencies have therefore seized large quantities of fentanyl in tablet and powder form, equivalent to millions of potentially lethal doses.

In 2021, the DEA launched a public awareness campaign called 'One Pill Can Kill' to encourage social media to address the issue and help raise public awareness of the significant increase, at national

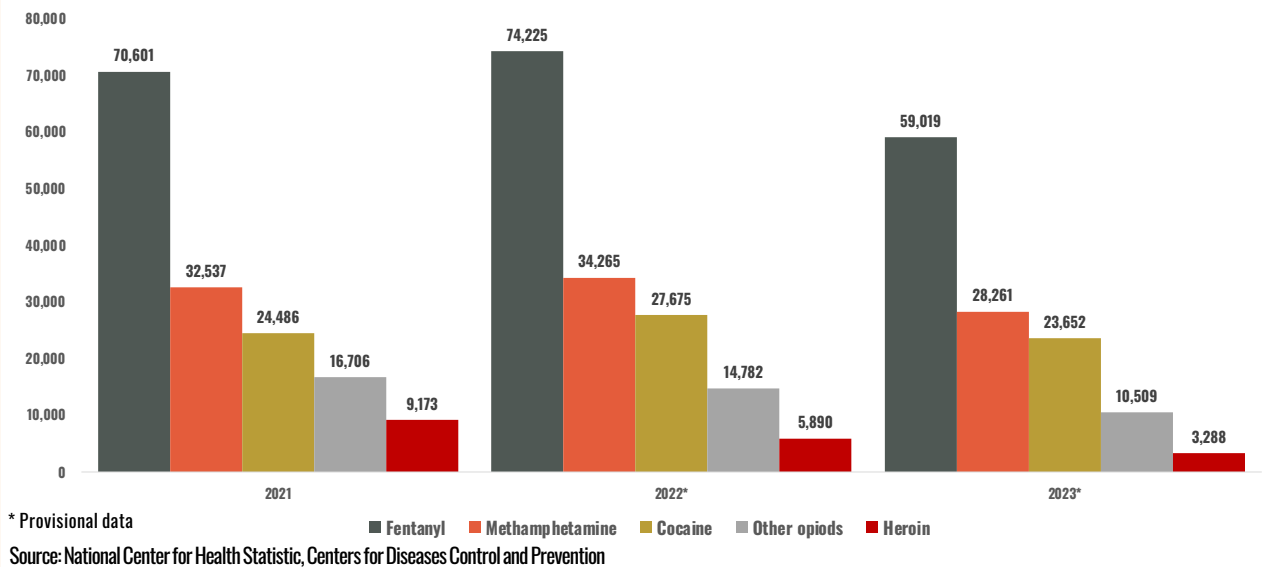
¹⁶⁸ NIDA-NIH: <https://nida.nih.gov/research-to-pi-cs/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>

¹⁶⁹ DEA website - <https://www.dea.gov/>. In 2024, the DEA seized more than 60 million fake pills containing fentanyl and nearly 8,000 pounds (approximately 3,600 kg) of fentanyl powder.

USA: SEIZURES (KG) OF DRUGS 2021/2023*



USA: TOP FIVE SUBSTANCES CAUSING DEATH 2021/2023*



level, in counterfeit pills, produced in a massive manner in laboratories, deceptively marketed as regular medicines and instead killing Americans at an unprecedented rate. Furthermore, in a March 2023 public safety advisory, the DEA stated that xylazine ‘has made fentanyl—the deadliest threat our country has ever faced—even more devastating.’ DEA forensic laboratories report that the number of heroin and fentanyl specimens adulterated with xylazine is increasing in

the United States¹⁷⁰.

Furthermore, since 2021, two other substances have appeared on the illicit market as substitutes for xylazine, mixed with fentanyl: **medetomidine** and **dexmedetomidine**, both diverted from legal channels. Medetomidine is a non-opioid analgesic for veterinary use (for dogs and cats, it facilitates the restraint of animals during clinical examinations), with an efficacy 200-300 times greater than xylazine, which makes opioid overdoses more difficult to

¹⁷⁰ DEA, NDTA 2024, pp. 26-28.



treat with naloxone. Dexmedetomidine is a drug used to induce a relatively minimal level of sedation, during which the patient is able to respond to verbal stimuli. Medetomidine and dexmedetomidine have been found mixed with other drugs in gel capsules, marijuana, fake pills and white powder mixtures. Medetomidine and xylazine are in the same price range, from \$ 10 to \$ 300 per kg.

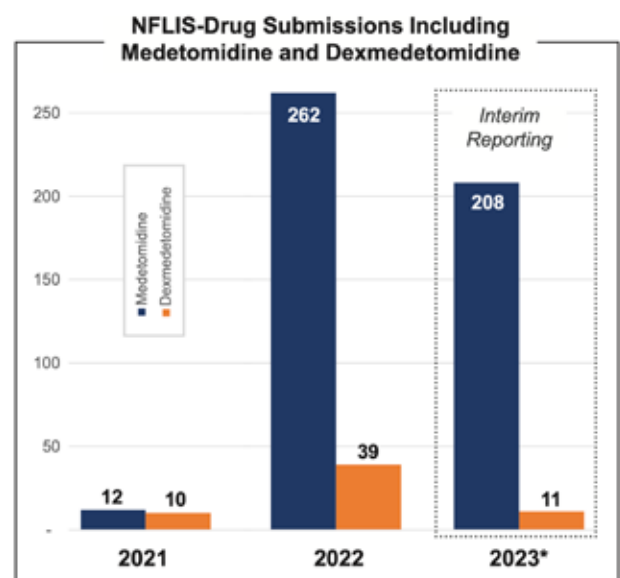
The main countries of origin for these two

substances are **China** and **India**¹⁷¹.

The DEA believes that both of these drugs have the potential to be considered supplements or substitutes for xylazine in terms of mixture with illicit opioids. In the United States, reports of the two substances have increased since 2022, likely due to a change in the use of adulterants by traffickers and/or increased attention from the laboratories involved in their production.

As fentanyl consumption has grown, the US market has seen a gradual decline in the consumption of heroin, mostly originating from Mexico, and a rapid increase in fentanyl seizures between 2019 and 2023, by as much as 451%, reflecting the almost total replacement of heroin available on the market with fentanyl or fentanyl-based mixtures.

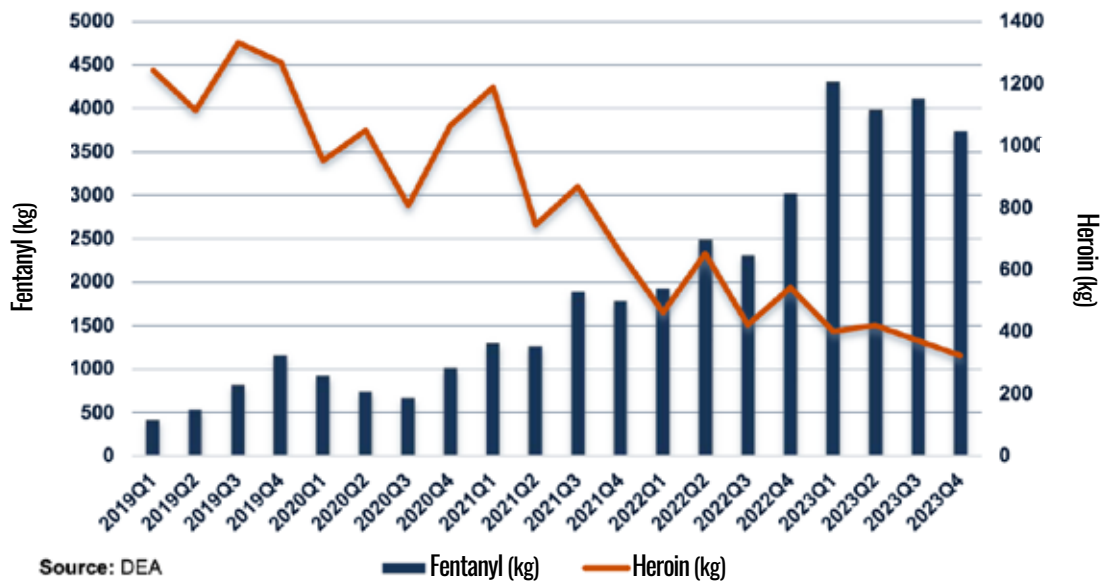
In the **United States**, however, **31%** of drug-related deaths are due to the use of stimulants, especially **methamphetamine**.



Source: DEA NFLIS-Drug, June 7, 2024.

¹⁷¹ DEA, State and Territory Report on Enduring and Emerging Threats/STREET, Medetomidine and Dexmedetomidine Submissions Increase Significantly, October 2024.

USA: SEIZURES OF HEROIN AND FENTANYL AT NATIONAL LEVEL
(EACH YEAR DIVIDED IN THREE MONTHS)



In the first six months of 2023, according to preliminary data from the CDC (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention), there were over 34,265 deaths from methamphetamine overdose, exceeding the record of 34,265 deaths in 2022. Methamphetamine is a synthetic stimulant produced mainly in Mexico by the *Sinaloa* and *Jalisco cartels*, the main suppliers of methamphetamine sold in the United States and operators of the related clandestine laboratories, where large quantities of chemical substances are used, mostly Chinese. Methamphetamine production in the United States, on the other hand, has reached its lowest level in 20 years. In 2004, the DEA's *El Paso Intelligence Centre* (EPIC) recorded 23,700 seizures of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories in the United States. In 2023, however, law enforcement agencies reported only 60 laboratories seized. The *Sinaloa* and *Jalisco cartels* smuggle methamphetamine into the United States via the same routes and entry points on the south-western border, used to smuggle fentanyl and

other drugs. Cartel-linked traffickers use many methods to transport and conceal methamphetamine, including human couriers, commercial flights, shipping services, and buses. Smuggling methamphetamine in liquid form makes it easier to be concealed, although methamphetamine solution is not usable: a 'conversion lab' is needed to extract it and return it to crystal or powder form. Seizures of liquid methamphetamine and conversion laboratories used to recrystallise methamphetamine have increased steadily year on year¹⁷².

However, other synthetic substances have appeared on the illicit market.

In the **United States** and, to a lesser extent, in **Canada**, a significant number of overdoses linked to **etonitazepine** have been reported, a substance also identified in **Belgium, Slovenia** and the **United Kingdom**. In **Ireland**, at the end of 2023, etonitazepine and **protonitazepine** were sold as heroin and caused a wave of overdoses.

¹⁷² DEA, NDTA 2024, p. 32.

Finally, among the dangerous classes of NPS in circulation are **synthetic cannabinoids**, very potent substances that carry risks of poisoning.

In this regard, since 2021, **edible cannabis products** (mainly sweets, typically infused with cannabis extract) have become more widely available on the European illicit market. In addition to the risks associated with their THC content and the possibility that they may be mistaken for regular commercial products – especially by children – **there are concerns that some of them may contain synthetic cannabinoids**. Since 2019, at least five countries have reported the identification of foods containing synthetic cannabinoids in the form of sweets (gummies).

In the **European Union**, there have been cases of serious poisoning after ingesting sweets infused with synthetic cannabinoids. HHC (or hexahydrocannabinol), identified in May 2022 and reported by 23 EU Member States and Norway in December 2023, is one such substance: it has been added to the list of controlled substances in at least 18 EU Member States as of March 2024.

Five other **semi-synthetic cannabinoids** have also been identified on the European illicit drug market:

- HHC acetate;
- hexahydrocannabiforol;
- tetrahydrocannabidiol;
- tetrahydrocannabiforol;
- hexahydrocannabiesol.

Initially, semi-synthetic cannabinoids were imported from the United States. Now there are signs that they are **also being produced in Europe**. Marketed *online* and in shops as ‘legal’ substitutes for cannabis, these cannabinoids include hemp sprayed or mixed with HHC, which looks and smells similar to cannabis, as well as vaping products and edibles.

Twenty-four EU countries reported **seizing** 281 kg (385 kg in 2021) of **synthetic**

cannabinoids in 2024. Low-THC cannabis products accounted for around 30% of these seized materials, totalling 76 kg (242 kg in 2021), reported by 10 countries. The samples were variously described as ‘hemp’ or ‘cannabis’ or containing THC, CBD or CBG.

‘HHC Gummies Cola Cola taste’ (left) containing teddy bear-shaped HHC-infused gummies (right). Seized by Swiss Customs in October 2022



Fonte: <https://www.euda.europa.eu/system/files/documents/2023-04/emcdda-technical-report-hhc-and-related-substances>

NPSs in Italy

In **Italy**, the spread of NPS does not yet appear to be an alarming “phenomenon,” although new substances are circulating which, when intercepted, even as a result of poisoning, are carefully studied by the competent bodies, first of all the “*Istituto Superiore di Sanità*” (National Institute of Health), and enter the valuable information circuit of the National Early Warning System (NEWS-D) for sharing with all subjects in the specific prevention mechanism, including the police forces, as well as being reported to the similar EU alert system.

The extreme danger of NPS alone or mixed compositions suggests that we should always remain vigilant, as evidenced by the ‘National Plan for the prevention of the misuse of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids’.

In this context, in Italy too, the spotlight has been turned on **nitazene opioids**, identified **since 2022**, mainly in material seized by the police (fluonitazene, etazene, fluetonitazepine, protonitazene), but also in

cases of intoxication (protonitazene) or death (etonitazepipne).

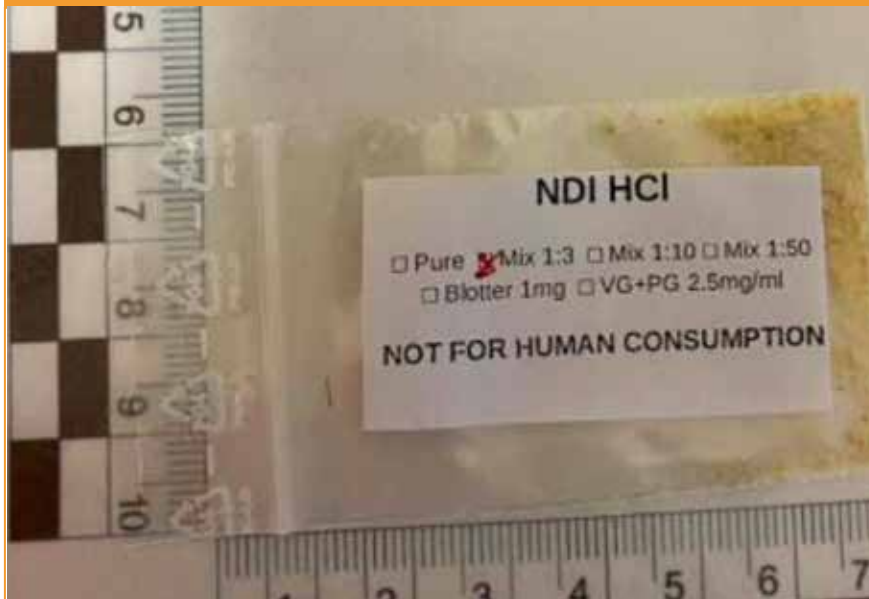
Between December 2024 and January 2025, three additional nitazene opioids identified in Italy were reported to NEWS-D:

- N-desethyl isotonitazene, identified in material seized between November and December 2024 and included in Table I of Presidential Decree 309/90 with Ministerial Decree of 24 July 2024;
- Protonitazepyne N-pyrrolidino protonitazene, included in Table I of Presidential Decree 309/90, identified in material seized between November 2024 and January 2025;
- N-pyrrolidino isotonitazene, identified in material seized between November 2024 and January 2025. At the time of reporting, the substance was not present in the EUDA database. This is presumably the first identification in Europe¹⁷³.

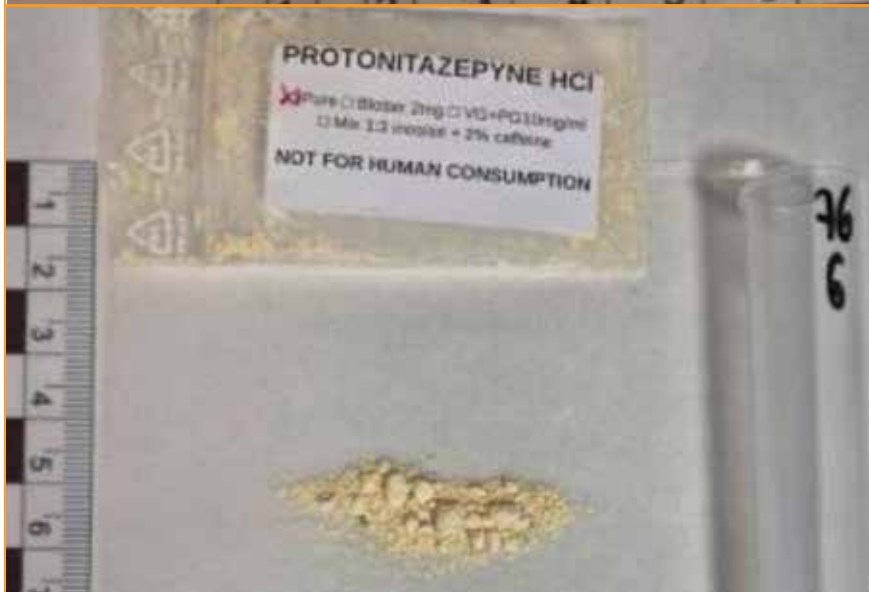
Similar attention has been paid to synthetic cannabinoids, although they still appear to be relatively uncommon.

¹⁷³ NEWS-D, February 2025 note, cit.

OPPIODI NITAZENI IDENTIFICATI



N-desetil isotonitazene

Protonitazepina
N-pirrolidino protonitazeneN-pirrolidino
isotonitazene

08. PRECURSORS

Introduction

'No precursors, no drugs'

That's right, it is not possible to produce narcotics without using chemicals. It does not matter whether you start with a plant product (coca plant, poppy, ergot, ephedra, sassafras root, etc.) or a totally chemical substance (pseudoephedrine, BMK, PMK, APAAN, MAPA, ANPP, etc.). The common denominator is always the same: at least one passage through a clandestine drug production laboratory.

Most drugs, in fact, do not exist in nature and are produced by humans. For some, the production process begins with the extraction of the active ingredient from a plant substance (e.g. coca leaves, papaver somniferum) and continues with the use

of various chemicals to get the finished product (e.g. cocaine/heroin hydrochloride). Other drugs are entirely synthetic and are obtained by combining chemicals (e.g. methamphetamines, cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones). The chemicals used to produce narcotic substances are called **drug precursors or controlled chemicals**.

As with every rule, there is at least one exception: **cannabis** and **hallucinogenic mushrooms**, for example, can be grown and consumed **without the addition of chemicals**. For everything else, however, the use of precursors and basic chemicals is unavoidable.

FENTANYL'S PRECURSORS

The now infamous fentanyl is legally produced by the global pharmaceutical industry for use as an anaesthetic and analgesic in both human and veterinary medicine, since the discovery of its molecule in 1960 by Belgian Dr. Paul Janssen.

There are three main and different methods for producing the drug:

- **The Janssen method**, named after the discoverer of the molecule itself, involves four stages to produce a direct fentanyl precursor known as norfentanyl;
- **The Siegfried method**, widely used by pharmaceutical companies, involves four stages and is based on the pharmaceutical precursor ANPP (4-anilino-N-phenethylpiperidine) and its pre-precursor NPP (N-phenethyl-4-piperidinone);
- **The Gupta et al. method**, dating back to 2009, allows fentanyl to be produced in three stages using the pre-precursor 4-AP (N-phenylpiperidine-4-amine) and the aforementioned direct precursor ANPP.

The international community has decided to control the aforementioned precursors at different stages, based on opportunity assessments.

On 16 March 2017 (Resolution 60/12), the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) placed the pre-precursor NPP and the direct precursor ANPP under international control by listing them in Table I. They were then also included by the European Commission in EU Category 1 as of 7 July 2018.

Subsequently, at the CND on 16 March 2022, with effect from 23 November, the United Nations placed the pre-precursors 4-AP (CND 65/4) and 1-boc-4-AP (CND 65/5), as well as

the direct precursor norfentanyl (CND 65/6), under international control by listing them in Table I. In this case too, the European Commission included the three substances in EU Category 1 as from 20 February 2023.

Subsequently, in the CND of 19 March 2024, the United Nations placed the following precursors under international control, effective from 3 December of the same year, by listing them in Table I: 4-piperidone (CND 67/6) and 1-boc-4-piperidone (CND 67/7). The European Commission is currently evaluating the introduction of these substances into Category 1.

Therefore, within the EU, there are currently five fentanyl precursors listed (including two direct precursors and three pre-precursors), covering all three of the main methods of production of the synthetic opioid currently known.

SYNTHETIC CATHINONES' PRECURSORS

More recently, the **Polish police**, have highlighted the significant revenues generated by local organised crime from the production of **synthetic cathinones**, which have minimal production costs. In fact, local criminal groups mainly use **non-scheduled precursors**,

available on the market at a price of around € 200 per kg, to obtain, through simple laboratory steps, four synthetic cathinones: 4-MMC (mephedrone), 3-MMC (3-methylmethcathinone), 4-CMC (clephedrone) and 3-CMC (clofedrone), which are the best sellers, at a price ranging from €2,000 to €3,500 per kg.

Although legislative procedures have already been initiated at EU and global level to include these substances, which are not yet scheduled, among drug precursors, they are not yet under control and are readily available, often with the help of the internet, especially on Asian markets.

'Why not ban precursors?'

Because drug precursors are normally used for legitimate, wide-ranging and diverse purposes in the chemical, pharmaceutical and even food industries (e.g. in the production of plastics, medicines, cosmetics, detergents and perfumes).

To mention a few substances that are also used to produce drugs, acetic anhydride and potassium permanganate, which are widely used in the chemical bleaching industry, are indispensable for transforming morphine into heroin and coca paste into cocaine, respectively.

Diversification of precursors

Since the marketing of drug precursors cannot be prohibited, their **legal trade**

must be carefully **monitored** in order to prevent diversion.

Precursors that are taken from the legal and controlled market and smuggled clandestinely are defined as **diverted**. This can be done using established techniques such as mislabelling and misdeclaration to bypass international customs, passing precursors off as other commonly used chemicals that are not subject to restrictions. The sheer volume of goods in circulation and the impossibility of checking them all, especially by chemical analysis, make the international smuggling of controlled chemicals a real danger.

The final destination of precursors

removed from control is **clandestine laboratories**, equipped to varying degrees, where the actual narcotic substances are produced.

Some of these precursors (e.g. ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, lysergic acid, piperonal, safrole) are used by traffickers as **starting materials**, the availability of which is essential for obtaining certain drugs of abuse through simple and inexpensive chemical processes. This group of precursors allows, in particular, the production of synthetic drugs such as amphetamines, methamphetamines, ecstasy, LSD, phencyclidine, methaqualone and others.

Other precursors (e.g. potassium permanganate, acetic anhydride) are used by traffickers as **reagents** to transform a natural substance into a drug of abuse, in particular to obtain cocaine and heroin. Substances such as red phosphorus are catalysts in reactions to produce methamphetamines from pseudoephedrine and iodine.

Some **solvents** (e.g. acetone, ethyl ether, hydrochloric acid, MEK) are used for the extraction and purification of natural drugs or for the preparation of synthetic drugs.

Preventing the diversion of drug precursors is therefore an effective strategy for limiting the production of narcotics and, consequently, the supply of drugs of abuse. It is therefore promoted by all international organisations called to combat drug trafficking.

Law of reference

Given the impossibility of banning the legal trade in precursors the United Nations, with a specific **international convention in 1988**, decided to create a **controlled market for drug precursors**, listing them in specific tables (I and II). Subsequently, the states that joined the

convention issued their own regulations to control the legal trade in precursors.

In particular, the global control legislation is based on Article 12 of the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, whose implementation is monitored by the INCB - International Narcotics Control Board, a UN body based in Vienna, Austria.

European legislation on drug precursors is based on two regulatory texts: **Regulation (EC) No 111/2005** on trade in drug precursors between the EU and third countries, and **Regulation (EC) No 273/2004** on trade in drug precursors within the EU.

Both regulatory texts are based on **categories of precursors** for whose production and lawful trade formalities must be complied with in order to facilitate control by the competent national authorities.

At national level, **Article 70 of Presidential Decree 309/1990** (*Consolidated Law on Narcotics*) defines all the **obligations of individuals and companies** that intend to produce or market precursors (and mixtures of precursors) and the penalties/sanctions applicable to offenders. The regulation identifies two main actors responsible for overseeing the control system:

- the **Ministry of Health**, through the Central Narcotics Office, the authority that issues licences/registrations and has control over 'operators', i.e. the companies concerned;
- the **Ministry of the Interior**, through the **Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services** of the Department of Public Security, which collects data on legal transactions and coordinates law enforcement agencies for control/investigation activities to be carried out in the sector.

The **Customs and Monopolies Agency** (ADM) also plays a special role, controlling precursors entering and leaving the country, to and from non-European countries, mainly implementing EU Regulation No. 111/2005, in its capacity as European Customs.

Article 70 of the Consolidated Law on Narcotics outlines all **illegal cases relating to precursors**, establishing both administrative and criminal penalties,

including, among other things, criminal association offences equivalent to those provided for drug trafficking.

Classification of precursors, control and authorization rules

Both EU and national regulations provide for drug precursors divided into **4 Categories**, based on (decreasing) assessments of danger and

NEW REGULATIONS OF LEGISLATIVE DECREE NO. 156 OF 7TH OCTOBER 2024

“Adjustment of the penalties provided for in the consolidated text of the laws on the regulation of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, prevention, treatment and

rehabilitation of related states of drug addiction”, referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309 of 9 October 1990, Regulation (EU) No. 1259/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013, amending Council Regulation (EC) No. 111/2005 laying down ‘Rules for the control of trade in drug precursors between the Community and third countries’. Published in the Official Journal, General Series No. 247 of 21 October 2024 (24G00172) and entered into force on 5 November 2024.

The regulation introduced necessary amendments to the text of **Article 70 of Presidential Decree No. 309 of 1990**, as suggested by the Ministry of Health and the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services, which made the wording of the article more accessible, while at the same time introducing penalties for violators of the regulation concerning Category 4 chemicals (medicines for human or veterinary use containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine) and clarifying the obligations of ‘operators’ with regard to reporting lawful transactions involving precursors to the DCSA (paragraph 15).

In particular, it has been clarified that ‘operators’ are required to report to the DCSA:

- individual commercial transactions involving Category 1 and 2 substances [Reg. (EC) 111/2005 and 273/2004], i.e. imports, exports, transits, as well as commercial transactions in Italy and the European Union, or any movement/transfer of Category 1 and 2 precursors;
- exports of Category 4 substances [Reg. (EC) 111/2005];
- exports of substances in Category 3 [Reg. (EC) 111/2005], only if subject to the Authorisation referred to in paragraph 9 [i.e.: ... Authorisation from the Ministry of Health, relating to substances belonging to Category 3 [Reg. (EC) No. 273/2004 and 111/2005], to one of the countries referred to in Article 10 of Commission Regulation (EU) 2015/1011 of 24 April 2015].

Therefore, there is no obligation to notify the DCSA only for:

- the import and commercial operations within the EU (including Italy) of Category 3 and 4 substances;
- exports of Category 3 substances [Regulation (EC) No 111/2005], unless subject to the authorisation referred to in paragraph 9;
- commercial transactions within the EU (including Italy) involving Category 2 substances not carried out by ‘operators’, as they are below the threshold specified in Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 273/2004.

MIXTURES OF PRECURSORS

National legislation on ‘mixtures’ containing drug precursors, mirroring European legislation, also considers mixtures and natural products containing precursors to be controlled chemicals, while excluding “... *Imixtures and natural products containing scheduled*

substances, mixed up in such a way that the substances themselves cannot be easily used or extracted by readily applicable or economical means, medicinal products as defined in Article 1, paragraph 1, letter a) of Legislative Decree No. 219 of 24 April 2006, and veterinary medicinal products as defined in Article 4, number 1) of Regulation (EU) 2019/6, in accordance with the reference in Article 2 of Legislative Decree No. 218 of 7 December 2023, with the exception of medicinal products and veterinary medicinal products listed in the Annex to Regulation (EC) No. 111/2005.” [Article 70(1)(a) of Presidential Decree No 309/1990].

However, the wording of the legislation contains some elements of uncertainty, which have been partially corrected by the Ministry of Health in note no. 67139 of 6 December 2017: “*where a mixture contains a Category 3 drug precursor, in addition to substances other than antioxidants, stabilisers and preservatives, in a concentration exceeding 70%, that mixture must be treated, legally, as a scheduled chemical, i.e. a full-fledged Category 3 precursor.*”.

Furthermore, the European Commission has tasked its **Expert Group on Drug Precursors** (E01317) with compiling and updating a ‘Catalogue of Mixtures’ containing descriptions of practical cases of mixtures controlled by EU customs authorities, with recommendations from experts, although these are not legally binding.

At national and European level, therefore, the issue of the legal classification of ‘mixtures’ containing drug precursors is significant. Together with the critical issue of new chemicals produced as substitutes for scheduled precursors, pre-precursors and designer precursors, it represents one of the major future challenges in the field of controlling the illicit production of narcotic substances.

substitutability: from Cat. 1 (30 substances), which includes the most dangerous and indispensable controlled chemicals for obtaining synthetic drugs, to Cat. 4 (2 substances), relating to the least dangerous and most substitutable chemicals in the production of narcotics, passing through Category 2 (2 type A substances and 4 type B substances) and Category 3 (6 substances), each with a different authorisation, control and penalty regime.

The trade of precursors among States

It was the globalisation of markets that made it necessary to regulate the movement of precursors internationally, with the consequent cataloguing of these substances.

Within this regulatory framework,

a specific mechanism has been established for import/export operations of precursors: this is the online **PEN (Pre-Export Notification) system**, governed by Article 12, paragraphs 10 and 11, of the 1988 ‘*United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*’, which is the United Nations instrument, managed by INCB on an online platform, for controlling exports of precursors.

Signatory States may require all States intending to send them drug precursors to communicate information on the transaction and the companies involved to the receiving country prior to export. In practice, the competent authorities of the country of departure, to which the exporting company belongs, notify the authorities of the country of destination,

where the importing company is based, in advance, using the IT tool provided by the UN, and transfer all the necessary information. The country of destination may accept the request or ask for additional information in the event of missing documentation, or reject it, blocking the shipment.

This obligation is also included in European legislation, specifically through Council Regulation (EC) No 111/2005, *'Rules for the control of trade in drug precursors between the European Community and third countries'*

National legislation on the subject, summarised in **Article 70, paragraph 9, of Presidential Decree 309/1990**, establishes that *"All exports of scheduled substances listed in categories 1 and 4 of the Annex to Regulation (EC) No 111/2005 and exports of scheduled substances listed in categories 2 and 3 of the same Annex, to the countries referred to in Article 10 of the Commission's Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/1011 of 24 April 2015, shall be preceded by a pre-export notification to be submitted to the competent authorities of the country of destination, in accordance with and within the limits of Regulation (EC) No 111/2005."*

As of 1 November 2024¹⁷³, 34,400 PENS entered by 65 exporting States were recorded in the system.

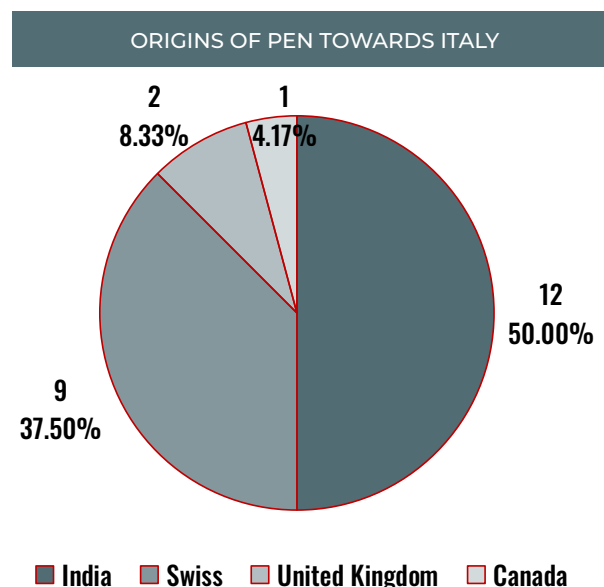
As of 4 March 2025¹⁷⁴, 169 States had access to the PEN system, 145 of which use it on an almost daily basis.

Drug precursors and the role of DCSA

In this particular operational area, Italy has a national reference body, the **Central**

¹⁷³ This is the deadline chosen by INCB to update all data in the "Precursors" publication.

¹⁷⁴ The date indicated is when the INCB's annual "Precursors" document was made public.



Directorate for Anti-Drug Services, which has specific and exclusive powers in this field:

- it participates in various national and international projects aimed at improving analytical knowledge, prevention and enforcement strategies in this sector;
- it collaborates with the Ministry of Health, as well as with the Customs and Monopolies Agency;
- it maintains contacts with other States and participates, through its representatives, in the work of the European Commission, the European Council and other European bodies, such as the Council of Europe, and the of the United Nations, also acting as the national focal point for international projects and IT platforms managed by INCB;
- supports local police forces with reliable information useful for developing investigations into the diversion of precursors and the subsequent production of drugs.

EUDA (EUROPEAN UNION DRUG AGENCY): NEW MANDATE ON DRUG PRECURSORS

On **2 July 2024** the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) in Lisbon (Portugal), evolved

into the EUDA (European Union Drug Agency), transforming itself from an 'observatory' into an 'agency' and acquiring new competences in the field of narcotic substances.

The European Commission has requested a broader and more proactive mandate to better address the growing complexities of the drug phenomenon and the emergence of new substances, transforming it into the new Agency Regulation: Regulation (EU) 2023/1322 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2023 on the EU Drugs Agency (EUDA) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1920/2006. This document states the following with regard to chemical substances: *"Drug precursors are substances necessary for the production of drugs such as amphetamines, cocaine and heroin. As illegal drug production in the Union is increasing, the prevention of diversion and trafficking of drug precursors from legal channels to illegal drug production should be strengthened. To support that effort, the Agency should have a role in monitoring the diversion and trafficking of drug precursors and in assisting the Commission in the implementation of Union law on drug precursors"*.

In particular, in the field of controlled chemicals, the Regulation states:

Article 5 (Specific tasks):

... 1. *The Agency shall..... :*

b) *preparedness tasks that include: ...*

IV) *the monitoring of developments related to the diversion and trafficking of drug precursors and contributing to the implementation of Union law on drug precursors pursuant to Article 14;*

Article 6 (Collection and dissemination of information and data):

... 1. *The Agency shall: ...*

d) *collect and analyse information and data on drug precursors and on the diversion and trafficking of drug precursors;*

Article 7 (Monitoring of the drugs phenomenon and sharing of best practices):

... 1. *The Agency shall monitor: ...*

h) *drug precursors and the diversion and trafficking of drug precursors;*

Article 9 (Initial report):

... 2. *An initial report referred to in paragraph 1 shall contain: ...*

b) *a preliminary indication of the chemical and physical description of the new psychoactive substance and the methods and precursors used to manufacture or extract it;*

Article 10 (Risk assessment procedure and report):

... 3. *A risk assessment report or combined risk assessment report shall contain:*

a) *available information on the chemical and physical properties of the new psychoactive substance or substances and the methods and the precursors used to manufacture or extract it or them;*

Article 14 (Drug precursors):

1. *The Agency shall assist the Commission in monitoring developments related to the diversion and trafficking of drug precursors and in assessing the need to add to, remove from or change the category of listed scheduled and non-scheduled substances in relation to Regulations (EC) No 273/2004 and (EC) No 111/2005, including in identifying and assessing their licit and illicit uses.*
2. *The Agency shall prepare, on its own initiative or at the request of the Commission, a threat assessment report on drug precursors.*

In conclusion, the new Agency has taken up the challenge posed by criminal groups that are constantly searching for designer precursors and non-scheduled precursors in order to circumvent controls and continue to produce drugs in clandestine laboratories. It will be the task of the EUDA to coordinate EU efforts in the field of drug precursor controls, assisting the work of the European Commission's Expert Group on Drug Precursors (E01317), OLAF (Anti-Fraud Office) and Member States, in order to improve the performance of the anti-diversion system.

Diversion of precursors in Italy: data on law enforcement

In **2024**, law enforcement authorities in Italy carried out **17 operations** (incidents¹⁷⁵) to combat the diversion of precursors.

In particular, a total of 291,385 litres and 1,078.535 kilograms of drug precursor chemicals were **seized**, with 25 individuals reported to the judicial authorities.

ITALY - MAIN SEIZED PRECURSORS - 2024		
Chemical substances	lt	kg
Acetone	215	24.53
Hydrochloric acid	23	-
Acetic anhydride	-	0.10
Calcium chloride	-	3.00
Ethyl ether	3	-
Red phosphorus	-	0.10
Butanone	1	-
Toluene	3.5	-

In addition to the precursors listed in the table, numerous non-scheduled chemicals used in the clandestine production of drugs were seized, together with a range of technical instruments and equipment used in drug production/processing laboratories.

Looking to the future

In the preface to the publication **'Precursors' - ed. 2025**, INCB President Jallal Toufiq summarises the global situation regarding drug production in a few lines:

"The illicit drug markets are undergoing a period of dramatic change. Synthetic drugs, including amphetamines, cathinones, opioids, synthetic cannabinoids and other new psychoactive substances are spreading worldwide, altering illicit drug markets. Technological advances are extending to plant-based drugs, with illicit cocaine production occurring both at original production sites in South America and in clandestine laboratories in Western Europe, with a resulting increased production. Illegal laboratories manufacturing or producing these

¹⁷⁵ Term adopted by the PICS (Precursors Incident Notification System) platform – for which reference should be made to the subsequent in-depth analysis on "International platforms for the control of drug precursors" – to indicate seizures, blocked shipments, diversions and attempted diversions, and the identification of illicit laboratories and related equipment.

INTERNATIONAL PLATFORMS FOR THE CONTROL OF DRUG PRECURSORS

The **INCB - International Narcotics Control Board** - is one of the main players within the global strategy against drug and precursor trafficking, which monitors, among other things, compliance with the 1988 *United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*.

The organisation manages the following projects/IT platforms:

- **PRISM**, for monitoring legal chemicals that can be used as precursors for ATS (amphetamine-type stimulants) in the field of synthetic drugs, active since 2003;
- **COHESION**, for monitoring legal chemicals that can be used as precursors for heroin and cocaine, active since 2006;
- **GRIDS** (*Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances*), which aims to measurably reduce the trafficking of dangerous substances globally, with a particular focus on emerging new psychoactive substances (NPS), as well as non-medical synthetic opioids and relevant chemicals and equipment, in order to limit their supply on the markets;
- **PEN On-line** (*Pre-Export Notification*), for monitoring exports of precursors, a key tool for preventing the diversion of precursors legally traded between States that are parties to the Convention;
- **PEN On-line Light** (*Pre-Export Notification Light*), launched in October 2022 to respond to the emergency generated by non-scheduled chemicals, pre-precursors and design precursors, as well as to assist governments in addressing the problem of chemicals that are not under international control but may be listed nationally in one or more countries. Similar to the PEN On-line system, PEN On-line light is a tool that exporting countries can use to voluntarily notify importing countries planned shipments of chemicals that are not scheduled but can still be used for the illicit manufacture of drugs;
- **PICS** (*Precursors Incident Notification System*), active since 2012 to enable and promote the sharing of information between States on diversions and seizures of precursors. As of 1 November 2024, the system had over 700 users belonging to 325 international police and customs agencies in 130 participating countries. Incidents involving precursors reported by Member states from 2012 to October 2024 exceeded 4,800, with over 500 new entries in 2024. A total of 147 different substances are registered in the system, of which only 18 are controlled internationally (12 in Table I and 6 in Table II of the 1988 UN Convention). In addition, 38 substances are included in the INCB's LISSL (Limited International Special Surveillance List), while 76 other substances are not listed and 14 are cutting agents, adulterants, diluents or excipients.

All these tools provide a global overview of licit trade and illicit events involving precursors, making them extremely useful in developing targeted analyses and countermeasures.

drugs are increasingly sophisticated and often industrial in scale, requiring both chemicals and specialised equipment, including pressurised reaction vessels and custom-made glassware. ... The challenges posed by the evolution of illicit drug production and manufacture

therefore require innovative and proactive responses to support and strengthen the objectives of the international control system established by the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances."

Europe also has a long tradition of clandestine production of synthetic drugs such as amphetamines, methamphetamines and MDMA. In addition, new substances such as cathinones and synthetic cannabinoids are constantly appearing, as well as the much-feared synthetic opioids (fentanyl and nitazens). The techniques used to produce synthetic drugs and their precursors are constantly evolving in order to circumvent legislation and sanctions, through the **use of alternative substances to scheduled precursors**.

This phenomenon generates the need to quickly identify new drugs and their precursors and promptly add them to the lists of controlled substances. In fact, the phenomenon of **designer drugs** and, in parallel, **designer precursors** requires an ever-increasing acceleration in the processes of updating the tables of narcotic substances and precursors, generating a strong push for increasingly extensive and effective **Early Warning Systems (EWS)** in order to promptly identify threats to counteract.

European data on seizures of chemicals found in clandestine laboratories confirm the use of classic listed precursors alongside new substitute chemicals or adjuvants, not yet included among those subject to control. For example, for amphetamines and methamphetamines, criminal groups involved in the clandestine production of drugs have sought new alternative molecules that are not yet listed and can be valid substitutes for the main direct precursor, namely BMK (benzyl methyl ketone or P2P).

This mechanism is becoming increasingly rapid, aided by the illicit use of artificial intelligence (AI), which can help organised crime in the search for new chemical molecules to replace existing and listed ones, both in the field of designer drugs

and designer precursors.

The search for alternative chemicals that are not yet listed but can be used to clandestinely produce synthetic drugs has two objectives: to identify **pre-precursors**, i.e. substances from which direct precursors can be obtained, and to find **designer precursors**, i.e. new molecules that replace controlled direct precursors.

This means that global control systems need to keep a close eye on not only precursors, to stop them being used for anything other than their legal purpose, but also designer precursors and pre-precursors, so that they can catch the laboratory creation of unlisted substances early on. In the first case, these substances replace drug precursors because they have a similar chemical makeup and, in the second case, they constitute the 'ingredients' needed to produce, without control, the direct precursors of drugs.

For this reason, **over the last decade, the EU has included the following seven substances in the precursor tables**: in 2014 APAAN (alpha-Phenylacetonitrile); in 2019 APAA (alpha-Phenylacetamide); in 2020 MAPA (Methyl alpha-Phenylacetate); in 2022 EAPA (Ethyl alpha-Acetylphenylacetate) and MAMDPa [methyl 3-oxo-2-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl) butanoate]; in 2023 DEPAPD [diethyl (phenylacetyl) propanedioate]; in 2024 IMDPAM [isopropylidene (2-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl) acetyl)malonate]. These substances have no known legitimate uses other than in laboratories and are therefore all precursors and designer precursors, interchangeable with each other, of BMK (Benzyl Methyl Ketone or P2P), which in turn is the typical direct precursor of amphetamines and methamphetamines. These molecules have been designed in the laboratory with the sole purpose of replacing precursors classified in the clandestine production

of drugs, circumventing current control regulations.

The listing activity is a sign of the utmost attention paid to the sector by the EU institutions, as well as the constantly changing threat posed by the **proliferation of clandestine laboratories**, which use new substances for the illicit production of drugs in a frantic search for alternative ways to circumvent controls.

At the same time, the European Commission has asked Member States to pay greater attention to all substances that have no known legitimate uses, proposing to find solutions to improve the current control system, based on Tables and Categories, as recommended

by the **Working Group** set up to study possible alternatives and **propose, by the end of 2025, new solutions**, including regulatory ones, to combat the problem.

However, this is a constantly evolving scenario, which requires a joint effort by all civilised countries to analyse the problem in all its many facets and identify shared, holistic and proactive solutions that take local needs into account.

The only certainty is that robust **control** of the availability of chemicals, and therefore of drug precursors, is an **indispensable tool** for combating the uncontrolled proliferation of narcotic and psychotropic substances.

PPP (PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP)

12 and 13 December 2024 in Vienna (Austria), the *INCB (International Narcotics Control Board)* organised an international conference entitled “*Engaging the private sector in the fight against illicit drug production - Understanding the industries*”. at its headquarters. In addition to delegates from the Ministry of Health - Central Narcotics Office, also staff from the Ministry of the Interior - DCSA attended the event as national representatives. Over the two days of the meeting, speakers from various public and private organisations from around the world presented their experiences and best practices in the field of joint controls against the **diversion of drug precursors**. At the end of the meeting, it was possible to reaffirm once again the importance **of involving the private sector in anti-diversion controls** in order to make the controlled market for drug precursors safer. In particular, the importance of collaboration between **chemical, pharmaceutical and logistics companies** and the competent state control authorities was emphasised. In order to make the controlled market for precursors safer, it is essential to implement certain practices, such as knowing your customer before trading with them and maintaining constant dialogue with the **control authorities** (the **DCSA** at national level) in order to promptly report any commercial anomalies (such as requests for the sale of precursors by unknown parties). At the end of the meeting, the INCB collected all successful models and approaches shared, as well as best practices that emerged during the conference, in order to draw up a comprehensive document to be disseminated to all participating States, with a view to contributing to the strengthening of drug precursor market control systems.



Operation "Molecola" - 2024

The *Guardia di Finanza* of Varese concluded an investigation that led to the interception of a shipment from China, which in 2022 resulted in the seizure of over 5 tons of drug precursors, including PMK and glycidate, used in the production of methamphetamine.



SECOND PART



Data on the fight against
drug trafficking in Italy

01. THE MAIN ANTI-DRUG OPERATIONS COORDINATED BY THE DCSA

Introduction	184
The operations	184

02. LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Drug operations	193
Persons reported to the Judicial Authority	194
Drug seizures	199
Drug abuse deaths	201
Ten-year trend	203

03. ATTIVITÀ DI CONTRASTO DELLE FORZE DI POLIZIA A LIVELLO REGIONALE E NELLE CITTÀ METROPOLITANE

Generality	208
Piedmont (Turin)	214
Valle d'Aosta	216
Lombardy (Milan)	216
Veneto (Venice)	219
Trentino Alto Adige	221
Friuli Venezia Giulia	222
Liguria (Genoa)	223
Emilia Romagna (Bologna)	225
Tuscany (Florence)	227
Umbria	229
Marche	230
Lazio (Rome Capital)	231
Abruzzi	233
Molise	234
Campania (Naples)	235
Basilicata	237
Apulia (Bari)	238
Calabria (Reggio Calabria)	240
Sicily (Catania - Messina - Palermo)	242
Sardinia (Cagliari)	246

01. THE MAIN ANTI-DRUG OPERATIONS COORDINATED BY THE DCSA

Introduction

The following is a chronological list of the **most significant operations to fight against drug trafficking**, also in relation to the criminal *modus operandi*, concluded in **2024** by the investigative offices/departments of the **police forces** following investigations, some of which lasted several years and were **coordinated** by the **Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services**.

Other significant judicial police activities, not supported by precautionary measures by the Public Prosecutor's Office because they were the result of initiatives, are referred to in other parts of the Report, even if only with pictures.

The operations

In March 2024, the *Carabinieri* of the Investigative Unit of Catanzaro, with the

operation "Maestrale-Carthago 2" hit hard the criminal organisation, consisting mainly of three local '*Ndrangheta* groups (Zungri, Mileto and Stefanaceni), which supplied the drug markets in the province of Catanzaro with cocaine from South America, heroin and marijuana. The 167 total suspects were able to supply large quantities of drugs, to customers in all Italy: several sales were documented in Vibo Valentia, Caltanissetta, Cosenza, Naples, Asti, Tuscany and throughout the north-east.

In **April 2024**, with the operation '**Leon**', the *Carabinieri* of the **Rome** Central Operational Unit arrested six Iranian, Bengalese and Filipino citizens, as they were responsible for importing large quantities of *shaboo*, a methamphetamine imported from Iran, using unwitting tourists who transported

CATANZARO – PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE OPERATION "MAESTRALE CARTAGHO 2"



boxes of food in which the drugs were concealed, subsequently retrieved and placed on the market of Rome with the help of Filipino and Bengalese citizens.

As consequence of coordinated investigations by the SCO (Special Operations Centre) with the DCSA in **April 2024**, the flying squad of the Police Headquarters of **Ravenna**, supported in naval and underwater operations by the military squad from the Rimini Naval Operations Department of the *Guardia di Finanza*, found 139 blocks containing 150 kg of cocaine inside a ballast tank located at a depth of ten metres after an inspection of a cargo ship about 8 miles from the Port of Ravenna.

The operation “**Return**” carried out in **May 2024** by the Flying Squad of the

police headquarter of **Como**, led to the dismantling of a Turkish criminal group consisting of 21 members responsible for armed gang crimes aimed at forming an association for the purposes of terrorism, murder, arms and drug trafficking, money laundering and aiding and abetting illegal immigration. The organization's criminal activities were centered in Turkey and it was involved in arms and cigarette trafficking, drug trafficking and dealing, corruption and racketeering, as well as in the execution, including on European territory, of massacres, murders, attempted murders and bombings a damage to members of rival organizations and commercial operators, using common and military weapons. These aims were pursued using a widespread network of ‘cells’ located in numerous European countries.

RAVENNA – SEIZURE OF 150 KG OF COCAINE



In **May 2024**, at the end of a complex investigation, the *Carabinieri* from **San Vito dei Normanni (BR)** discovered a drug-pushing marketplace run by 10 Italians who, using the **Telegram** app, distributed doses of various narcotic substances (ketamine, methadone and traditional drugs) everywhere, paid by buyers with cryptocurrencies and delivered to them by unsuspecting private postal and courier services.

In **June 2024**, the *Carabinieri* from the **Messina-Sud** and **Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto (ME)** ordered a precautionary measure against 35 Italians and foreigners responsible for a large-scale import and drug-smuggling of spice, a synthetic cannabinoid imported from the Netherlands. The group was skilled at using websites for the sale of legal products, with parcels shipped to fake recipients via international couriers.

In **July 2024**, the *Carabinieri* of the ROS (Special Operations Group) of **L'Aquila**,

together with the Provincial Commands of the *Carabinieri* of **Teramo, Pescara, Fermo, Ascoli Piceno, Brescia, Perugia**, and the DIA, as part of the operation **"Contras"**, ordered precautionary measures against 14 persons (10 in prison, 2 under house arrest and 2 required to report to the police) for international drug trafficking. The investigation, carried out under the coordination of the DCSA, was supported by Eurojust and Europol, as well as the collaboration of the police forces of Germany, Spain, Belgium and Ukraine. The investigations, which began at the end of 2021, led to the seizure of approximately 100 kg of hashish and 1 kg of cocaine and the identification of the members of a ramified criminal organization – operating in Italy, Germany and Spain, with contacts in Belgium and Ukraine – composed by Italian, Spanish, Argentine and Colombian citizens, dedicated to trafficking drugs purchased in Spain and transported by land to drug markets in Abruzzo and Marche.

L'AQUILA – PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE OPERATION "CONTRAS"



In **July 2024**, with the operation **"Alicantexpress"** carried out by the *Carabinieri* of the **Trani (BAT)**, a precautionary measure was ordered against 47 individuals, not involved in high-level criminal organizations, operating on behalf of express courier companies, who, using well-established tricks, had opened a supply channel from Spain for importing marijuana-type narcotics to be subsequently distributed in the markets of Trani and Bisceglie (BAT). Upon arrival of parcels addressed to non-existent persons and announced in advance by a Spanish contact, they intercepted them within some transport companies to take the contents and deliver them to the 'real recipients', it means the local drug dealers.

'**Hole in One**' is the name of the operation, carried out in **August 2024** by the G.I.C.O. of the PEF Unit in **Rome** and the 3rd NOM of the *Guardia di Finanza* in Rome, which originated from the importation of approximately 100 kg of cocaine from Ecuador and mainly involved a couple, an accountant from Rome with no criminal record and his Peruvian partner. The two were found to be working closely with various Roman criminals, belonging to well-known Calabrian *'ndrine* and Neapolitan Camorra clans, who were then tasked with dealing the drugs on the streets of Rome, and with a Chinese businessman based in the capital capable of transferring large amounts of money abroad through the Chinese *'fei ch'ien'* system. The investigation, which has allowed to seize 280 kg of hashish and report 13 people, it also uncovered supplies of Moroccan hashish from Spain in favor of members of the *'Ndrangheta* in Rome and the accountant. The latter,

together with Albanian individuals of international standing involved in drug trafficking in Rome, had set up a marijuana plantation with a complete production cycle (sowing, harvesting, fragmentation, drying and curing) in an uninhabited villa owned by a relative in the municipality of Sacrofano (RM), a marijuana plantation with a complete production cycle (sowing, harvesting, fragmentation, drying and curing), relying on a botanist from Albania and creating an indoor greenhouse equipped with ventilation and irrigation systems as well as ultraviolet lamps.

With the operation **"Tornado"** carried out in **September 2024**, the *Guardia di Finanza* of **Brescia** and the Central Organized Crime Investigation Service (S.C.I.C.O.) ordered a precautionary measure order 61 persons for international drug trafficking in **Italy, Albania, Switzerland and Poland**. The investigations, which began in 2020 and were also conducted through the acquisition and analysis of *chats* between the suspects via the encrypted messaging platform SKY ECC, allowed



to piece together the structure of the criminal group, based in Albania with branches in Italy. They would have imported large quantities of cocaine from South America into Europe. The drug shipments, which arrived via maritime routes in Spain and the Netherlands, were transported by heavy vehicles to Italy and stored in five logistics and operational bases in central and northern Italy. The proceeds of the illegal activity were laundered by a parallel Italian-Chinese association, which allegedly offered a hidden banking service for the transfer of capital abroad. In addition to the aforementioned precautionary measures, other 21 persons belonging to the association were arrested and 360 kg of cocaine were seized during the investigations. If placed on the market, the income would have been approximately €30 million, as well as five guns and related ammunition, eight cars and approximately €2.5 million in cash.

In **September 2024**, the *Guardia di Finanza* of **Fiumicino (RM)** seized three places in the municipalities of **Sabaudia (LT)** and **Nettuno (RM)**, which were used both as clandestine laboratories for the transformation of batches of low-THC cannabis light into substances with an increased 'drug' effect, as well as warehouse depots. In addition to the seized 17.17 kg of hashish, 15.97 kg of marijuana and 6.21 kg of **wax**¹ laboratory processing equipment were also found.

In the operation '**El Loco**' carried out by the *Nucleo di Polizia Economica*

¹ Wax is a cannabis concentrate obtained by processing cannabis buds and scraps with liquid butane gas, which acts as a solvent. The resulting product is similar to wax - hence the name wax - and can contain up to 80% THC.

CATANIA, SEPTEMBER 2024 - OPERATION "EL LOCO"



finanziaria of the *Guardia di Finanza* of **Catania** and concluded in **September 2024** 14 persons were reported, highly sophisticated and linked in various ways to mafia families' criminal organizations were dismantled; these organizations were able to obtain large quantities of marijuana (the *Amnesia* and *Skunk* varieties) from Spain by couriers, which they subsequently sold on the Etna market.

The operation "**The Parcel Game**", conducted in **October 2024** by the *Carabinieri* of **Salerno** allowed to discover an association dedicated to drug trafficking capable of securing stable supplies of cocaine, hashish and marijuana, used for widespread drug dealing in the province of Salerno and in some drug markets in Basilicata and Apulia. A total of 102 kg of hashish was seized and 15 persons were reported.

In **October 2024**, after complex investigations coordinated by the DCSA, the State Police and the *Carabinieri* ordered precautionary measures in **Riva del Garda (TN)** and **Rovereto (TN)** for 33 persons (14 in prison, 8 under house arrest and 11 under compulsory residence in their municipalities of residence) for association with the aim of drug

dealing. The investigations, which began in 2022, led to the identification of two connected criminal groups: the first operating in Rovereto and Riva del Garda, headed by an Italian citizen and involved in the sale of hashish; the second in Riva del Garda led by three Albanians and involved in the sale of cocaine. During the course of the operation, nine individuals were arrested *in flagrante delicto*, a total of 700 grams of cocaine, 4 kg of hashish and 100 grams of marijuana were seized, as well as an apartment approximately worth 200,000 euros which came from criminal activity

.In **October 2024**, police officers from the **Milan-Comasina** Police Station seized a *bazaar* of synthetic drugs: 4 kg of ecstasy, equivalent to about 9,000 tablets and several kilograms of ketamine and amphetamines. Many of the tablets had the characteristic triangular shape, were deep blue or black in color, and had a skull embossed on them: among them, the **Blue Punisher**, one of the most powerful ecstasies in the world, inspired by the name of the Marvel character with a stylized skull on his T-shirt. Several *pushers* supplied from the arrested drug-dealer; afterward, they entered the synthetic drugs in the Milan market where the *Blue Punisher* had already been widely available for several time.

The joint operation carried out in **October 2024** by the Central Operational Service (SCO), the flying team of the Police of **Caserta** and the Investigative Section of the SCO (SISCO) in **Naples**, in collaboration with the *Policia Nacional Colombiana del Grupo Especial de Investigaciones Interagenciales* of the *DIJIN*, led to the arrest in Medellin, **Colombia**, of a well-known Italian drug trafficker,

Luigi Belvedere, a broker from Caserta specialized in the illegal importation of cocaine, included in the Ministry of the Interior's list of the **100 most dangerous fugitives** and on the run since December 2020. The investigation made it possible to track the fugitive's movements in Colombia and reported his activities as an intermediary between Colombian cartels and certain clans of the Casalesi's Camorra cartel.

In **Palermo**, in the Brancaccio area, the flying team of the local Police, in collaboration with the police station of the same name, carried out an investigation which ended in **October 2024** and led to the arrest of 18 local individuals who ran a drug dealing operation, including crack cocaine, in the occupied garages of a public housing complex in the neighborhood, which were also used for illegal commercial activities, such as the unauthorized sale of alcoholic beverages. Drug dealing took place non-stop day and night, with lookouts and *pushers* rotating on a regular basis and being immediately replaced in the event of arrest. The suspects were linked to each other not only by their association but also by family ties, regardless of age: the minor son of one of the members of the criminal group was also involved in crack dealing.

In **November 2024**, the operation "**Cemento**" carried out by the flying team of the Police of **Catania** led to the dismantling of two criminal groups involved in drug trafficking, which shared the same supply channel: a Calabrian courier. The first was involved in the retail sale of cocaine and crack, using private homes converted into *bunkers*, with double iron gates, closed-

circuit video surveillance systems, and continuous 24-hour security provided by *pushers* working six-hour shifts. The second, linked to several well-known mafia clans in Catania, was involved in the sale of cocaine. A total of 17 persons were arrested.

In **November 2024**, with the operation '**Piazze pulite 2023**', the *Guardia di Finanza* of **Vicenza** neutralised a criminal organization involved in drug trafficking and composed entirely of Albanian and Colombian citizens operating in Northern Italy. The cocaine sold came from Albania and Colombia, while the marijuana was produced directly by the Albanian suspects in *indoor* greenhouses inside a property linked to the criminal group. During the investigation, the Albanian-Colombian group's attempt to import a large quantity of cocaine from South America was also documented, which would have allowed the suspects to monopolize the north-eastern market at a very advantageous purchase price. The group enjoyed the connivance of corrupt airport employees, who took care of removing the narcotics concealed in the luggage of the couriers and to store them in safe places, effectively removing them from customs controls. A total of 1,163 kg of cocaine and 43 kg of marijuana were seized; 15 persons were arrested and other 2 were reported while remaining at large.

The operation "**Tom&Jerry**", conducted by the flying team of the Police of Savona in **November 2024**, revealed the existence of a hierarchical criminal organization dedicated to drug trafficking, composed of Moroccan

citizens living in Italy capable of supplying large quantities of various types of drugs, especially hashish and cocaine, which were then sold in Ligurian towns. A total of 1.27 kg of cocaine, 31.47 kg of hashish and 1.71 kg of marijuana were seized, and 16 persons were reported to the authorities.



In **November 2024**, the *Carabinieri* of the **Naples** Investigation Unit, in collaboration with the Spanish Police, ordered a precautionary measure in the Campania region capital and on **Spanish territory** against 33 persons believed to be members, playing various roles, of two separate criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking, importing cocaine and hashish from Spain from the same supply channel.

The operation '**Grecale**', conducted in **November 2024** by the flying team of the Police of **Crotone** and the SCO, revealed the existence of a criminal association which, thanks to the experience and local contacts of its 46 members, who were arrested, moved large quantities of cocaine, heroin and soft drugs, monopolizing the

distribution of narcotics in certain drug dealing areas of the Crotona capital. During the investigation, over 2 tons of cocaine, 10 kg of heroin and 3 marijuana plantations with a total of approximately 1,600 plants were seized.

As part of the '**The Street**' investigation, aimed at dismantling a drug trafficking organization involved in importing cocaine from the Netherlands to **Rome**, Lazio and other regions, the *Carabinieri* of **Ostia** (RM) ordered a restrictive measure against 20 persons (16 in prison and 4 under house arrest). During the investigation, 9 persons were arrested *in flagrante delicto* and a total of over 32 kg of cocaine and €174,000 in cash, proceeds of the crime, were seized.

ROMA-OSTIA, NOVEMBER 2024 - OPERATION "THE STREET"



CROTONE, NOVEMBER 2024 - PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE OPERATION "GRECALE"



In **November 2024**, the investigative activities of the *Nucleo di Polizia Economico-Finanziaria* of **Pisa** and the S.C.I.C.O. of the *Guardia di Finanza*, together with the **Livorno** Naval Station, uncovered a large criminal network involved in importing large quantities of cocaine from South America, sent by an independent criminal organization based between Ecuador and Colombia which imported into Italy through the ports of Livorno, Genoa and Savona, or through other European ports. The 23 persons arrested of Italian, Albanian, Romanian and Ukrainian nationality were members of an association that managed the 'contaminated' containers in the ports of arrival, where special rescue teams removed the cocaine, which was then made available to various criminal groups. The investigation also led to the seizure of over 2 tons of cocaine, 45 kg of hashish and 20 kg of marijuana, which would have represented an income of around €70 million.

The operation "**Occhio di Falco**" carried out in **December 2024** by the *Carabinieri* of **Limbadi** (VV) dismantled a criminal organization composed by 10 individuals, affiliated with the '*Ndrangheta* of Rosarno (RC), which cultivated marijuana with a high THC in Bosco di Mileto in the municipality of **San Calogero** (VV), concealing the illegal activity behind the operations of an authorized farm for producing light cannabis.

The operation "**Samba**" in **December 2024**, carried out by the *Carabinieri* of the ROS in **Turin**, in collaboration with the **Brazilian** Federal Police, led to the arrest of 23 people, 18 in Brazil and 5 in Italy,

and to the dismantling of three distinct and connected groups of '*Ndrangheta* drug traffickers operating on the Brazil-Italy route, capable of sending large quantities of drugs to Europe concealing them in container headed to Italian and northern European ports . The investigations were also conducted with the support of Eurojust, Europol and the General Service for the Suppression of Drug Trafficking of the Federal Police (CGPRE) and the Brazilian *Receita Federal*.



02. LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Drug operations

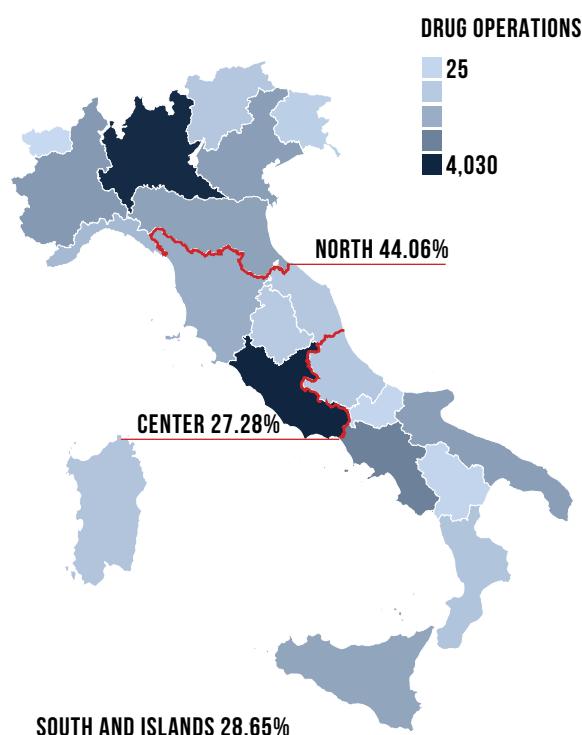
In 2024, police forces' efforts to fight against criminal offences relating to narcotic and psychotropic substances, including the international ones, resulted in 21,299 anti-drug operations (+3.47% compared to 2023), of which 44.06% were in the North, 28.65% in the South (including the islands) and 27.28% in Central Italy.

In terms of regional distribution, Lazio recorded the highest number of operations (4,030, equal to 18.92%, an increase of 8.01% compared to 2023), followed by Lombardy, Campania and Piedmont. The lowest figures were recorded in Valle d'Aosta, Molise and Basilicata.



REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION - DRUG OPERATIONS

Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	412	416	0.97
Basilicata	121	105	-13.22
Calabria	577	504	-12.65
Campania	1,775	1,983	11.72
Emilia Romagna	1,297	1,254	-3.32
Friuli V. G.	278	255	-8.27
Lazio	3,731	4,030	8.01
Liguria	714	729	2.10
Lombardy	3,753	3,916	4.34
Marche	499	430	-13.83
Molise	86	83	-3.49
Piedmont	1,182	1,447	22.42
Apulia	1,329	1,340	0.83
Sardinia	525	490	-6.67
Sicily	1,327	1,182	-10.93
Tuscany	863	997	15.53
Trentino A. A.	407	428	5.16
Umbria	307	354	15.31
Valle d'Aosta	12	25	108.33
Veneto	1,388	1,331	-4.11
Regional total	20,583	21,299	3.47
International waters	1	-	-100.00
National total	20,584	21,299	3.47 %



Persons reported to the Judicial Authority

There was an increase of 0.31% compared to 2023 regarding the “persons reported” for various reasons to the judicial authority: from 27,902 in 2023 to 27,989 in 2024, with a regional distribution where Lazio region recorded the highest number (4,881) while Valle d’Aosta the lowest (43), with reference to the Italian macro-areas, there is a concentration of 40.95% in the North, 25.76% in the Centre and 33.29% in the South (including the islands). Therefore, compared to 2023, the largest increase was recorded in the South and the islands with +8.61% (24.68% in 2023), while in Northern Italy it remained substantially stable.

The most common offence was that provided for in Article 73 of the Presidential Decree 309/1990 “Production, trafficking and illegal possession of narcotic or psychotropic substances” (25,367), while that of the following Article 74 “Association for the purpose of illicit trafficking” concerned only 9.36% of the total number of persons reported (2,619, of whom 453 were foreigners).

With reference to the type of substance, the highest number of persons reported to the Judicial Authorities for drug offences were related to cocaine (14,507 persons, equal to 51.83% of the total number

reported), followed by hashish (7,619 persons, equal to 27.22%), marijuana (2,336 persons, equal to 8.35%) and heroin (1,194 persons, equal to 4.27%).

Compared to 25,928 men, 2,061 women were reported in 2024 (-3.28% compared to 2023), accounting for 7.36% of the total number of persons reported to the Judicial Authorities.

27.76% of those reported were aged 40 or over (-6.55% compared to 2023), 19.42% were aged between 20 and 24 and 16.45% were aged between 25 and 29. Minors of 18 were 4.29% (1,202), which represents a decrease of 4.07% compared to the previous year. Among the minors of 18, 69.05% (830) were Italian and the remaining 372 were foreigners, mainly Tunisian, Egyptian, Moroccan and Senegalese. Compared to 2023, the number of foreign minors increased by 19.61%, while the number of Italian minors decreased by 11.89%. 99.75% of minors were reported for the crime of trafficking/drug-dealing.

38.73% of the 27,989 people reported to the Judicial Authorities were foreigners (10,841, of whom 7,022 equal to 64.77%, were arrested), mostly Moroccans, Albanians, Tunisians, Egyptians and Nigerians, as well as male (10,454, equal to 96.43%). The number of women reported (387) increased by 9.63% compared to 2023.

REPORTED	27,989 +0.31%
FEMALE	2,061 -3.28%
MINORS	1,202 -4.07%

Compared to 2023, the number of foreigners reported to the Authorities increased across all age groups, ranging from 2.12% to 40%. The majority were between 20 and 29 years old, with a percentage above 22% (22.65% for the 25-29 age group and 22.18% for the 20-24 age group). 16.03% were between 30 and 34 and 12.11% between 35 and 39. The youngest (<15) and those between 15 and 19 years old represented respectively the 0.06% and the 10.71% of the total.

In terms of the geographical distribution of foreigners, the North still prevails with 63.31%, followed by the Centre with 28.55% and the South (including the islands) with 8.15%. Lombardy recorded the highest number of foreigners involved (3,045, it means 10.85% more than in 2023), followed by Lazio (1,745), Emilia Romagna (983) and Veneto (890).

Persons reported to the J.A.		2023	2024	Var. %
Type of report	Arrested	18,107	18,645	2.97
	Reported but not arrested	9,589	9,171	-4.36
	At large	206	173	-16.02
Type of offence Law no. 309/90	Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	24,984	25,367	1.53
	Conspiracy to traffick (art. 74)	2,913	2,619	-10.09
	Other offences	5	3	-40.00
Gender	Males	25,771	25,928	0.61
	Females	2,131	2,061	-3.28
Age groups	Of age	26,649	26,787	0.52
	Minors	1,253	1,202	-4.07
Total		27,902	27,989	0.31

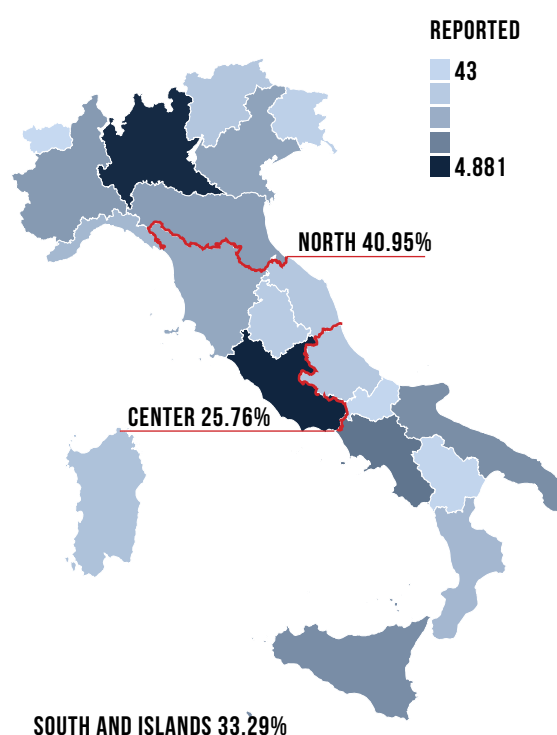
Persons reported to the J.A.		2023	2024	Var. %
Nationality	Italian	18,072	17,148	-5.11
	Foreign	9,830	10,841	10.28
of whom:	Maroccans	2,473	2,606	5.38
	Albanians	1,613	1,842	14.20
	Tunisians	1,251	1,678	34.13
	Egyptians	679	932	37.26
	Nigerian	604	527	-12.75
Age groups	< 15	49	31	-36.73
	15-19	3,008	3,210	6.72
	20-24	4,932	5,436	10.22
	25-29	4,593	4,603	0.22
	30-34	3,866	3,847	-0.49
	35-39	3,138	3,091	-1.50
	> 40	8,316	7,771	-6.55

Minors reported to the J.A.		2023	2024	Var. %
Type of report	Arrested	420	471	12.14
	Reported but not arrested	831	729	-12.27
	At large	2	2	--
Type of offence Law no. 309/90	Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	1,248	1,199	-3.93
	Conspiracy to traffick (art. 74)	5	3	-40.00
	Other offences	-	-	--
Gender	Males	1,201	1,175	-2.16
	Females	52	27	-48.08
Total		1,253	1,202	-4.07

Minors reported to the J.A.		2023	2024	Var. %
Nationality	Italian	942	830	-11.89
	Foreign	311	372	19.61
of whom:	Tunisian	128	159	24.22
	Egyptians	33	55	66.67
	Maroccan	35	43	22.86
	Senegaleses	26	41	57.69
	Romanians	12	10	-16.67
Age groups	14	49	31	-36.73
	15	199	182	-8.54
	16	393	395	0.51
	17	612	594	-2.94

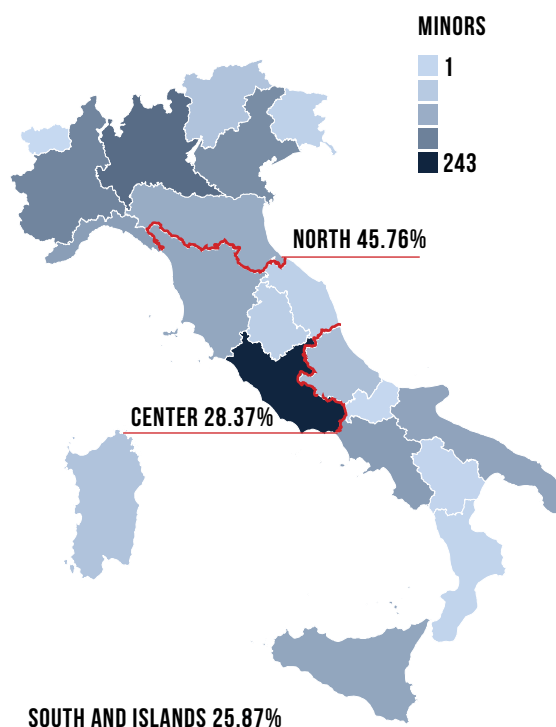
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES - REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Regions: general	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	572	526	-8.04
Basilicata	245	157	-35.92
Calabria	1,279	945	-26.11
Campania	2,573	2,743	6.61
Emilia Romagna	1,728	1,652	-4.40
Friuli V. G.	330	276	-16.36
Lazio	4,737	4,881	3.04
Liguria	867	943	8.77
Lombardy	4,581	4,745	3.58
Marche	605	527	-12.89
Molise	139	123	-11.51
Piedmont	1,606	1,748	8.84
Apulia	2,112	2,071	-1.94
Sardinia	820	671	-18.17
Sicily	2,198	2,082	-5.28
Tuscany	1,084	1,374	26.75
Trentino A. A.	451	553	22.62
Umbria	430	427	-0.70
Valle d'Aosta	19	43	126.32
Veneto	1,526	1,502	-1.57
Regional total	27,902	27,989	0.31
International waters	-	-	--
National total	27,902	27,989	0.31



MINORS REPORTED TO THE JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES - REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Regions: minors	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	24	37	54.17
Basilicata	9	7	-22.22
Calabria	10	8	-20.00
Campania	74	83	12.16
Emilia Romagna	86	62	-27.91
Friuli V. G.	12	12	--
Lazio	217	243	11.98
Liguria	48	80	66.67
Lombardy	174	147	-15.52
Marche	50	13	-74.00
Molise	14	3	-78.57
Piedmont	101	114	12.87
Apulia	74	73	-1.35
Sardinia	32	30	-6.25
Sicily	74	70	-5.41
Tuscany	67	69	2.99
Trentino A. A.	30	30	--
Umbria	26	16	-38.46
Valle d'Aosta	1	1	--
Veneto	130	104	-20.00
Regional total	1,253	1,202	-4.07
International waters	-	-	--
National total	1,253	1,202	-4.07

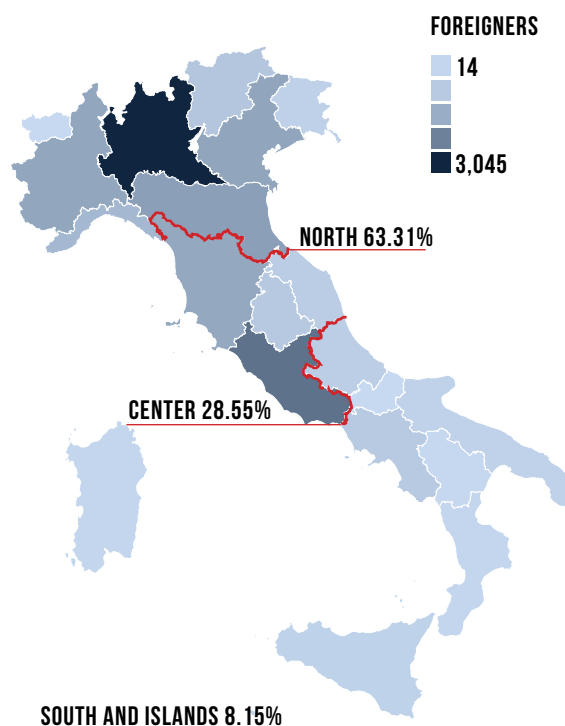


Foreigners reported to the J.A.		2023	2024	Var. %
Type of report	Arrested	6,257	7,022	12.23
	Reported but not arrested	3,423	3,684	7.62
	At large	150	135	-10.00
Type of offence	Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	9,371	10,388	10.85
	Conspiracy to traffick (art. 74)	458	453	-1.09
	Other offences	1		-100.00
Gender	Males	9,477	10,454	10.31
	Females	353	387	9.63
Age groups	Of age	9,519	10,469	9.98
	Minors	311	372	19.61
Total		9,830	10,841	10.28

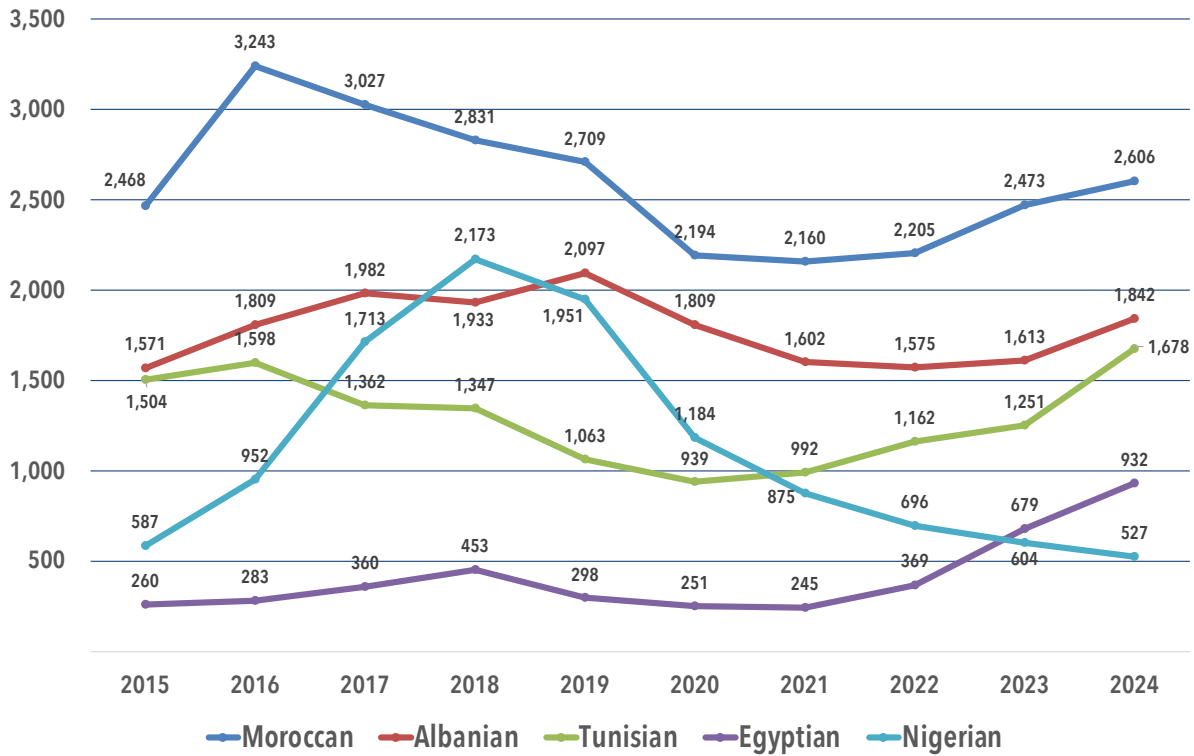
Foreigners reported to the J.A.		2023	2024	Var. %
Nationality	Moroccan	2,473	2,606	5.38
	Albanian	1,613	1,842	14.20
	Tunisian	1,251	1,678	34.13
	Egyptian	679	932	37.26
	Nigerian	604	527	-12.75
Age groups	< 15	5	7	40.00
	15-19	908	1,161	27.86
	20-24	2,068	2,405	16.30
	25-29	2,247	2,456	9.30
	30-34	1,702	1,738	2.12
	35-39	1,223	1,313	7.36
	> 40	1,677	1,761	5.01

FOREIGNERS REPORTED TO THE JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES - REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	173	196	13.29
Basilicata	33	23	-30.30
Calabria	80	57	-28.75
Campania	246	264	7.32
Emilia Romagna	983	983	--
Friuli V. G.	146	143	-2.05
Lazio	1,494	1,745	16.80
Liguria	490	566	15.51
Lombardy	2,747	3,045	10.85
Marche	261	216	-17.24
Molise	3	14	366.67
Piedmont	769	878	14.17
Apulia	110	128	16.36
Sardinia	75	61	-18.67
Sicily	156	140	-10.26
Tuscany	677	847	25.11
Trentino A. A.	279	339	21.51
Umbria	246	287	16.67
Valle d'Aosta	12	19	58.33
Veneto	850	890	4.71
Regional total	9,830	10,841	10.28
International waters	-	-	--
National total	9,830	10,841	10.28



Main nationalities of foreigners reported – Ten-year trend



BRESCIA - MARCHENO, DECEMBER 2024 - SEIZURE OF 60 KG OF COCAINE



Drug seizures

In 2024, the quantities of drugs seized decreased (-34.66%): from 89.175,93 kg in 2023 to 58.267,84 kg, particularly cocaine (-44.11%), hashish (-36.24%), synthetic powder drugs (-36.17) and marijuana (-28.97%). However, there was an increase in seizures of heroin (+24.91%), synthetic drugs in doses/tablets (+418.90%) and other drugs in doses/tablets (+21.05%).

The largest seizures were made in the South and in the islands, accounting for 48.39% of the total, followed by the North with 31.73% and the Centre with 19.88%. Unlike last year, no seizures were made in international waters.

Apulia recorded the highest value of seizures, with over 10 tons, while the lowest values were recorded in Valle d'Aosta and Basilicata.

32.29% (18,816 kg) of the total seizures took place in border areas, mainly at land and maritime borders. In 2024, however, there was a 17.53% decrease in shipments intercepted at borders compared to 2023 (22,816 kg, equal to 25.58% of the total quantity seized in that year). Marijuana was the most seized drug in the border areas.

Drug seizures		2023	2024	Var. %
kg	Cocaine	19,830.23	11,082.17	-44.11
	Heroin	278.57	347.97	24.91
	Hashish	27,282.04	17,395.47	-36.24
	Marijuana	40,478.51	28,752.47	-28.97
	Synthetic Drugs	139.44	89.00	-36.17
	Other Drugs	1,167.13	600.75	-5.15
Total		89,175.93	58,267.84	-34.66
no	Cannabis Plants	156,577	154,819	-1.12
Tablet/doses no	Synthetic Drugs	19,579	101,595	418.90
	Other Drugs	18,631	22,552	21.05
Total		38,210	124,147	224.91

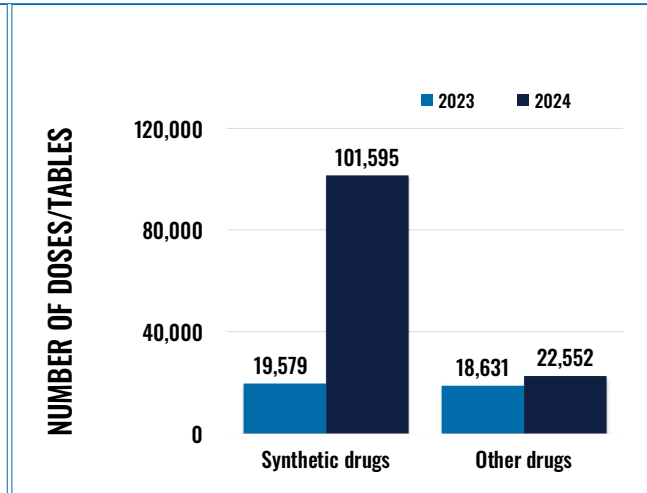
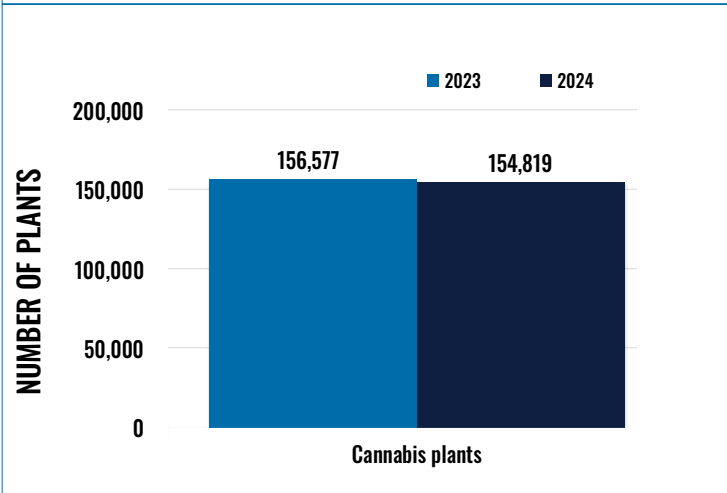
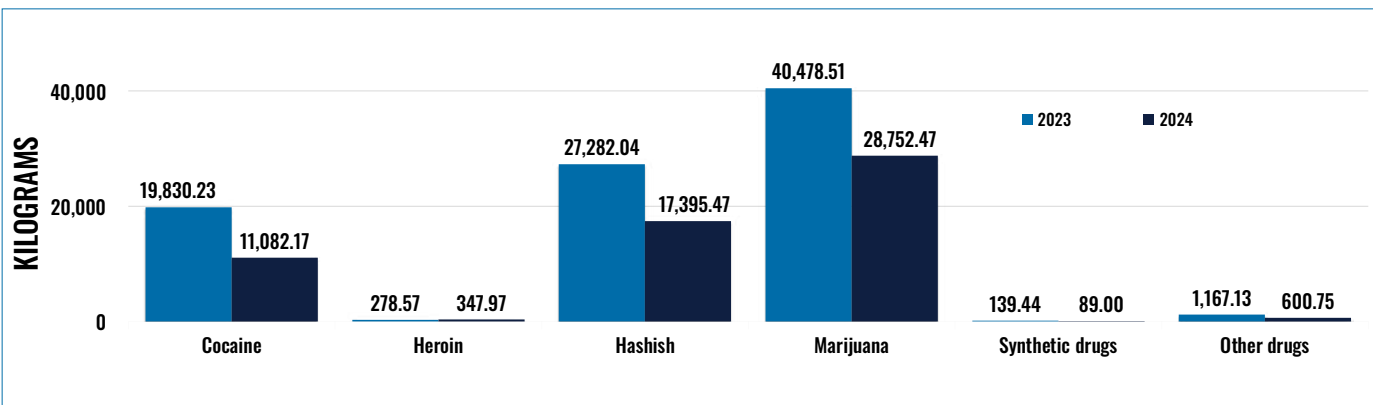
The most significant seizures in 2024 (in terms of quantity)

COCAINE	1,071.77 kg	March 28 th - Port of Gioia Tauro (RC)
HEROIN	22.35 kg	January 8 th - Voghera (PV)
HASHISH	1,139.50 kg	September 10 th - Rome
MARIJUANA	4,687 kg	December 6 th - Port of Brindisi
SYNTHETIC DRUGS	87,000 doses	April 19 th - Port of Naples

NATIONAL TOTAL: 58,268 KG

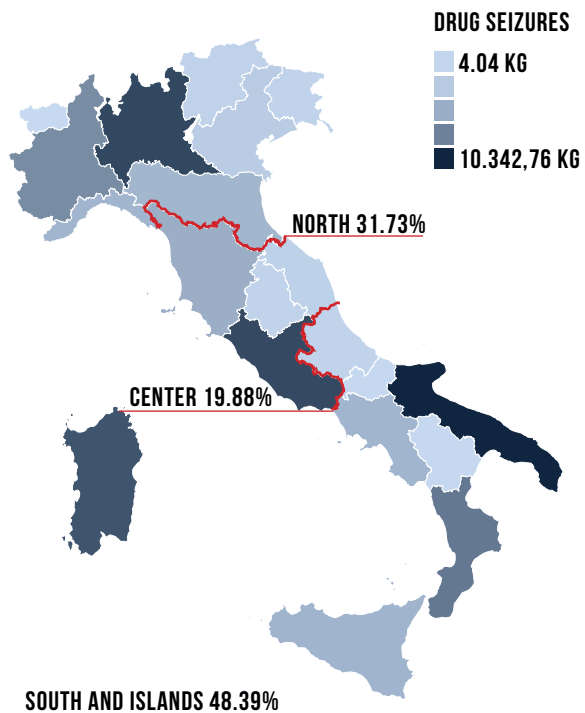
TERRITORY: 39,452 KG

**BORDERS:
18,816 KG**



DRUG SEIZURES (KG) - REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	416.37	342.63	-17.71
Basilicata	61.46	56.83	-7.54
Calabria	9,384.01	5,551.95	-40.84
Campania	3,569.81	2,069.97	-42.01
Emilia Romagna	1,485.67	2,029.80	36.62
Friuli V. G.	336.78	373.08	10.78
Lazio	12,850.28	8,247.52	-35.82
Liguria	3,731.22	2,048.25	-45.11
Lombardy	10,988.04	8,412.61	-23.44
Marche	1,035.34	492.86	-52.40
Molise	45.12	66.06	46.40
Piedmont	7,137.59	4,445.93	-37.71
Apulia	1,130.36	10,342.76	815.00
Sardinia	23,033.84	7,656.65	-66.76
Sicily	7,624.52	2,107.90	-72.35
Tuscany	1,775.65	2,473.53	39.30
Trentino A. A.	222.25	404.64	82.07
Umbria	130.56	372.47	185.29
Valle d'Aosta	11.83	4.04	-65.86
Veneto	2,287.17	768.39	-66.40
Regional total	87,257.87	58,267.84	-33.22
International waters	1,918.06	-	-100.00
National total	26,293.62	17,908.73	-24.59



Drug abuse deaths

In 2024, there were 231 deaths recorded by the police and directly attributed to drug abuse: 191 were men (82.68%), as in 2023, and 40 were women (17.32%), which means an increase of 11.11% compared to 2023 (36 women). The highest mortality rates were recorded in the age groups over 25, with the peak in the age group higher or equal to 40 years old. Deaths are distributed, with reference to macro-areas, as follows: 41.56% in Northern Italy, 33.77% in Central Italy and 24.68% in Southern Italy (including the islands).

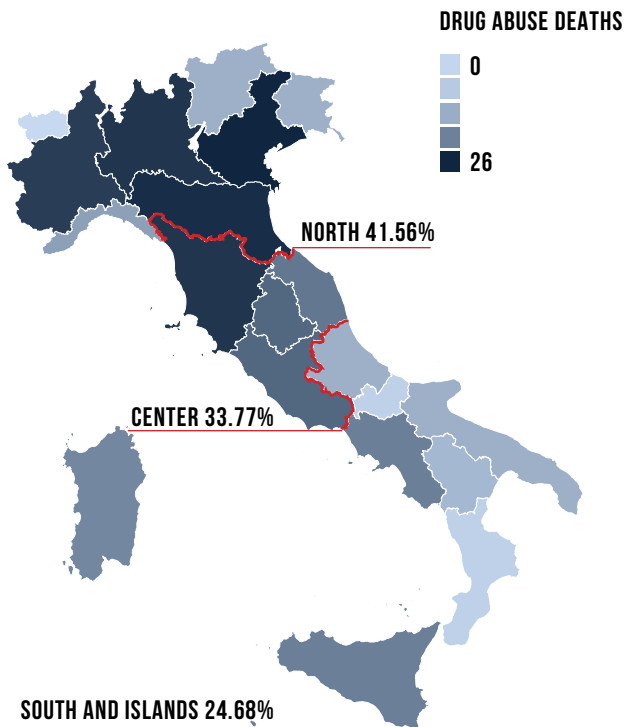
The highest number (26) was recorded in three regions (Lazio, Tuscany and Emilia Romagna), followed by Veneto (25), Campania (21), Marche (18) and Piedmont (15). Compared to 2023, in percentage terms, the most significant increases in deaths were recorded in Campania (75%), Lazio (73.33%) and Friuli Venezia Giulia (50%), while the most notable decreases were in Basilicata and Valle d'Aosta, the only regions where no deaths were recorded.

DRUG ABUSE DEATHS REPORTED BY POLICE FORCES

TOTAL	231 +1.76%
MALE	191 COME NEL 2023
FEMALE	40 +11.11%

DRUG ABUSE DEATHS - REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Regions	2023	2024	Var. %
Abruzzi	6	3	-50.00
Basilicata	5	-	-100.00
Calabria	2	2	--
Campania	12	21	75.00
Emilia Romagna	22	26	18.18
Friuli V. G.	6	9	50.00
Lazio	15	26	73.33
Liguria	8	1	-87.50
Lombardy	21	13	-38.10
Marche	13	18	38.46
Molise	2	1	-50.00
Piedmont	20	15	-25.00
Apulia	6	8	33.33
Sardinia	11	12	9.09
Sicily	12	10	-16.67
Tuscany	21	26	23.81
Trentino A. A.	6	7	16.67
Umbria	15	8	-46.67
Valle d'Aosta	1	-	-100.00
Veneto	23	25	8.70
National total	227	231	1.76



DRUG ABUSE DEATHS- TYPE OF SUBSTANCES

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Cocaine	71	64	64	53	78
Unspecified drug	60	68	75	63	63
Heroin	136	137	127	72	61
Methadone	35	21	22	30	20
Amphetamine	2	1		2	4
Crack cocaine			2		2
Barbiturates	2	1	1	4	2
Methamphetamine	1				1
Buprenorphine			2		
Psychoactive drugs		1			
Morphine		2		2	
Mephedrone	1				
L.S.D.		1			
Ketamine	1		2	1	
Diazepam			1		
Benzodiazepines			2		
Total	309	296	298	227	231

DEATHS – AGE GROUPS AND GENDER

Age	2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U
< 15	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
15-19	2	9	-	6	-	2	1	3	1	-
20-24	7	19	2	12	2	11	1	9	3	9
25-29	6	16	3	18	7	15	3	21	6	17
30-34	6	34	7	28	6	21	3	20	4	17
35-39	3	37	7	31	4	38	5	20	10	24
≥ 40	17	153	11	171	26	165	23	118	16	124
Total	41	268	30	266	45	253	36	191	40	191
	309		296		298		227		231	

Ten-year trend

Since 2015, the annual average number of anti-drug operations has been 22,659, with a peak in 2019 (26,060) and a lowest number in 2015 (19,301).

Reports to the Judicial Authorities for drug-related offences involved an average of 31,343 people per year: the highest peak was recorded in 2018 with 36,073 persons reported, at the end of an upward trend that began in 2016; the lowest number was reached in 2022 with 26,910 persons reported, even in this case at the end of a downward trend that began in 2019. In 2024, the figure (27,989) remained stable compared to 2023 (27,902).

Regarding the nationality of persons reported, the highest and lowest figures for foreigners are still recorded respectively in 2018 and 2022; in 2024, there was a slight increase compared to

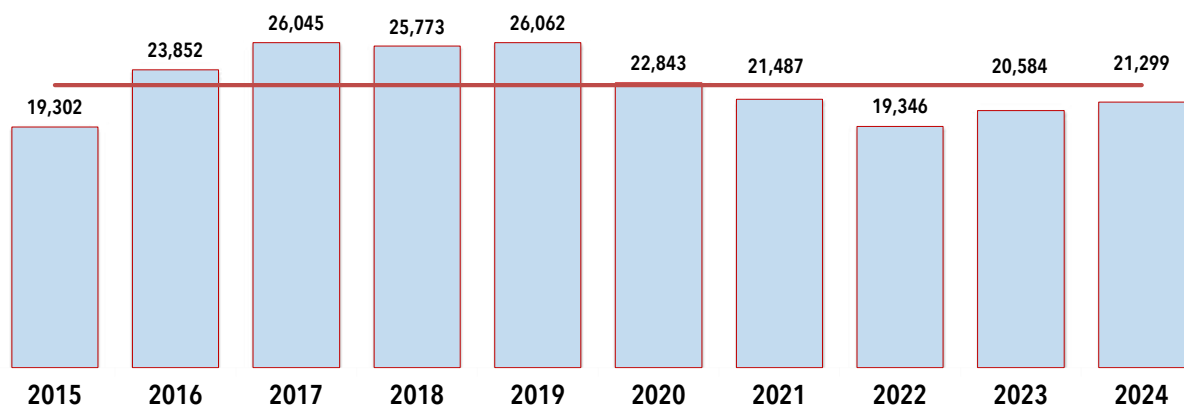
2023.

The average in the ten-year trend of persons reported by gender is 92.58% for men and 7.42% for women.

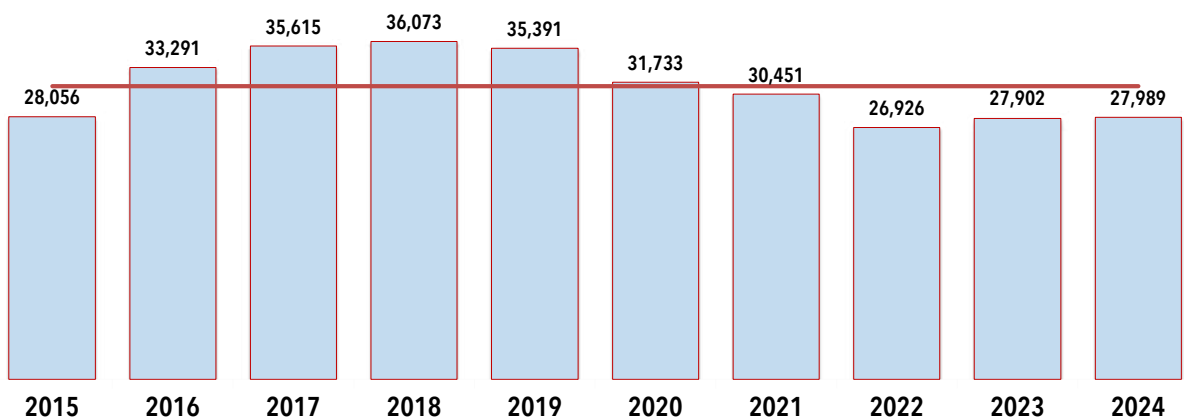
The ten-year trend for minors was different, with an average of 1,196 per year: after fluctuating between 2015 and 2020, with the highest figure in 2016 (1,383) and the lowest in 2020 (926), the trend constantly grew reaching 1,253 minors reported in 2023. In 2024, 1,202 minors were reported to the Judicial Authorities.

With reference to the ten-year trend on foreigners, the highest number of women reported was recorded in 2018 (572), while the lowest was in 2023 (353). Foreign minors recorded the lowest number (175) of the trend in 2021 and the highest (372) in 2024.

Antidrug operations: **22,659, average value**



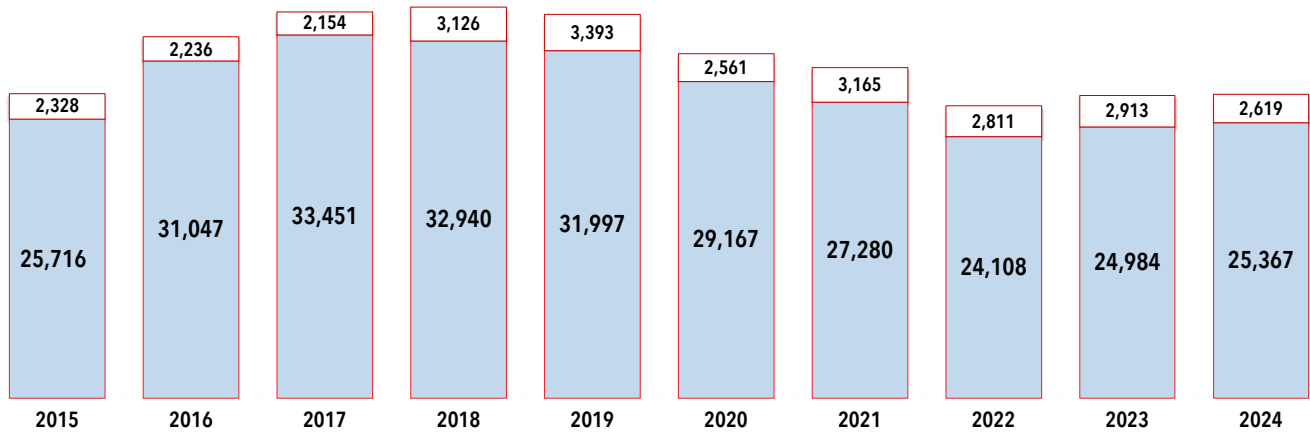
Persons reported: **31,343, average value**



Persons reported for type of offence

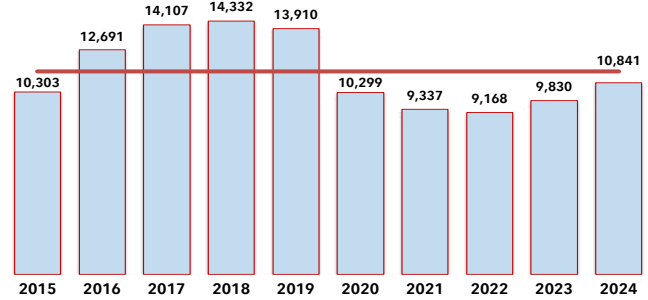
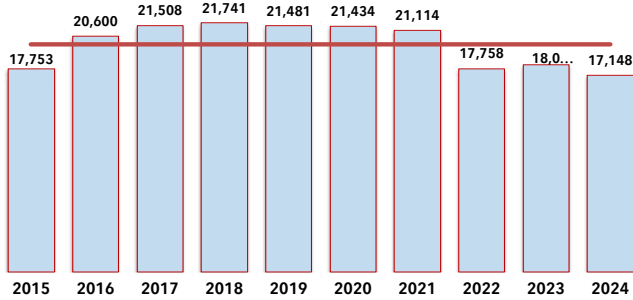
Illicit trafficking (art. 73)

Conspiracy to traffick (art. 74)



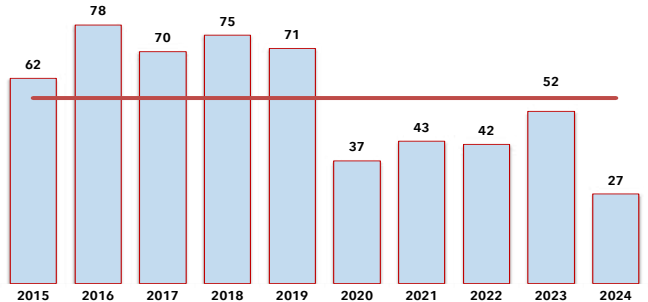
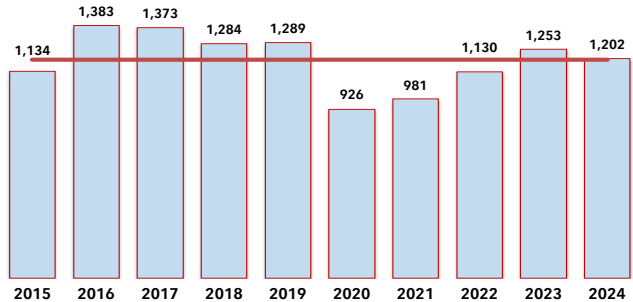
Italians: 19,861, average value

Foreigners: 11,482, average value



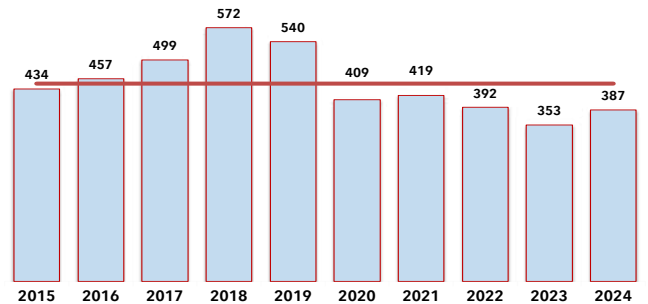
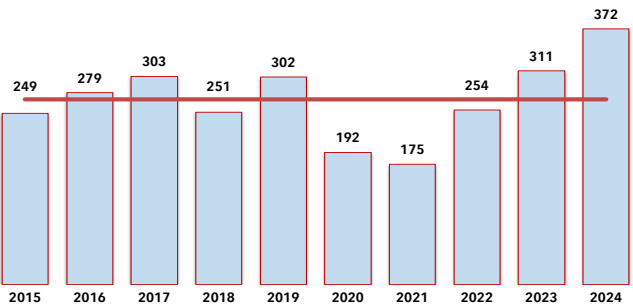
Minors: 1,196, average value

Girls under the age: 56, average value



Foreign minors: 269, average value

Foreign women: 446, average value



Regarding the quantities seized, since 2015 they have always been above

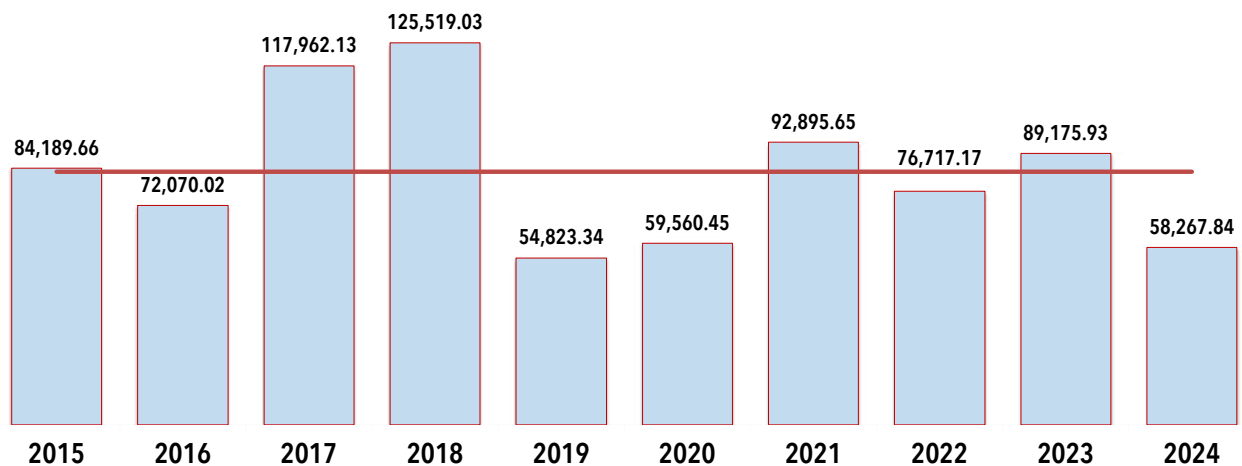
50 tons per year, reaching the peak in 2018 (125,519.03 kg) and the lowest value in 2019 (54,822.34 kg). These significant figures were mainly influenced by seizures of cannabis derivatives: an average of more than 68 tons per year.

Regarding seizures in doses or tablets, the average value was 64,710 doses/tablets, but the index was affected by the large seizures in 2016 (204,530 doses/tablets)

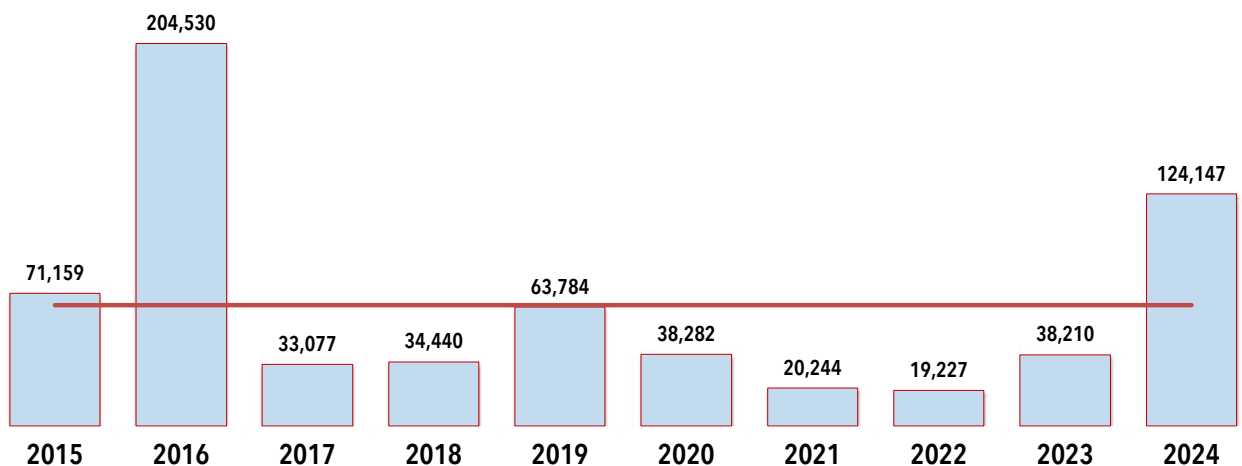
and 2024 (124,147 doses/tablets), fluctuating between 19,227 doses/tablets (in 2022, the lowest value in the historical series) and 71,159 doses/tablets.

Since 2015, seizures of liquid narcotics have averaged over 43 liters per year (precisely 43,241.92 milliliters), with the highest value recorded in 2021 (over 107 liters) and the lowest in 2024 (just over 9.4 liters). For the other years, the value is always below the average, except for 2020 and 2022 (over 69 liters).

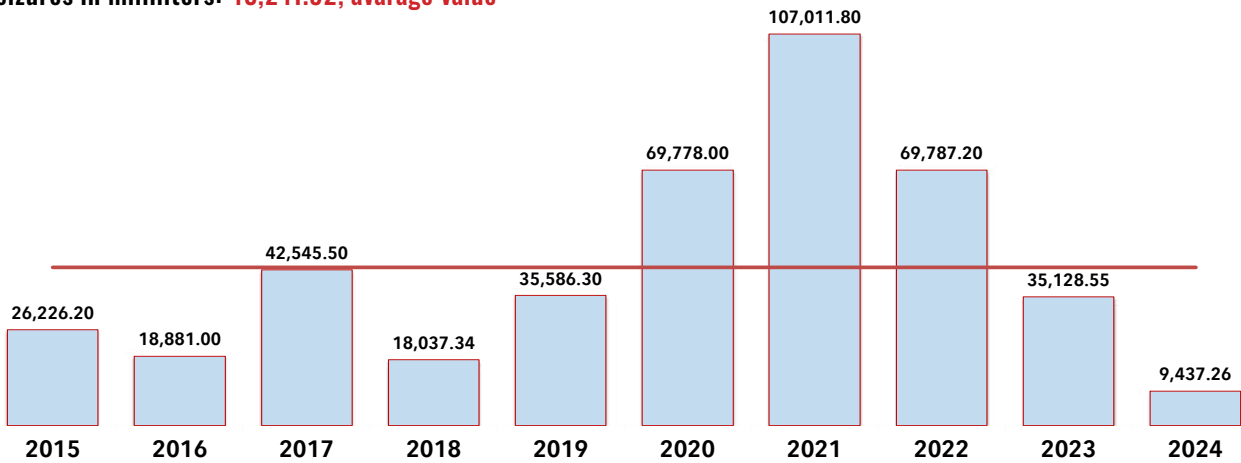
Seizures kg: **83,118**, average value



Seizures doses/tablets: **64,710**, average value



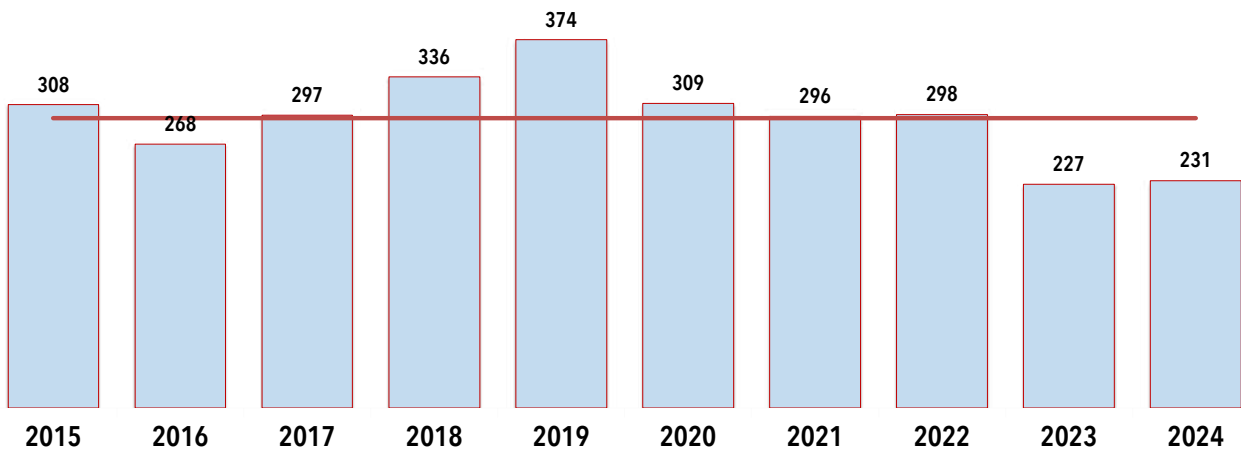
Seizures in milliliters: 43,241.92, average value



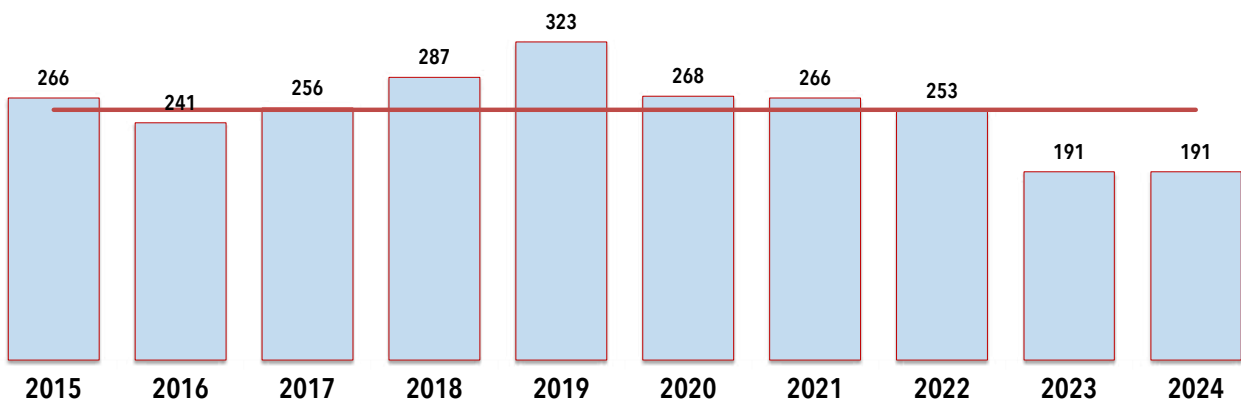
The ten-year series of drug abuse deaths detected by the Police Force includes an annual average of 294 deaths, with a maximum of 374 in 2019 and a minimum of 227 in 2023.

With an average of 254 deaths per year, men record the series high in 2019 (323) and the low in both 2023 and 2024 (191).

Drug abuse deaths: 294, average value



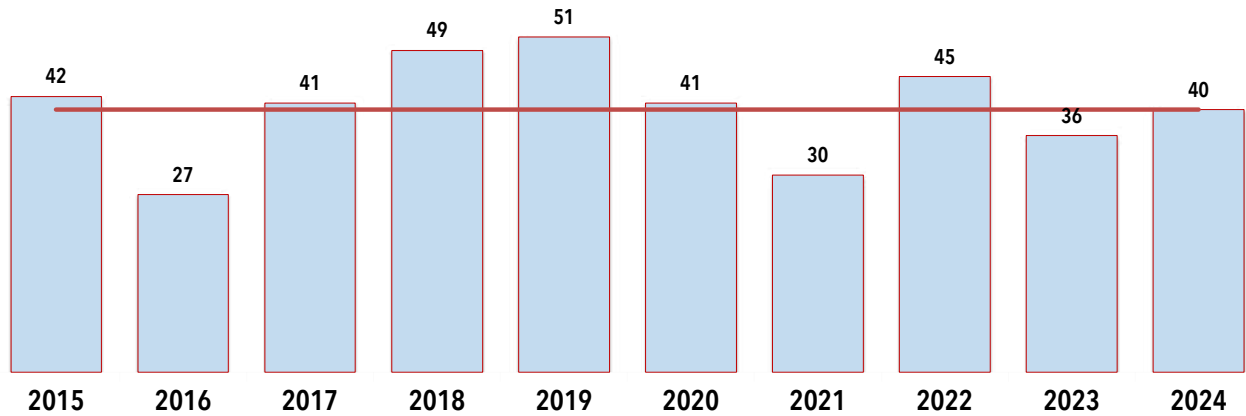
Drug abuse deaths (males): 254, average value



The average of women who died for drug abuse is 40 per year, with the highest

value (51) in 2019 and the lowest in 2016, with 27 deaths.

Drug abuse deaths (females): 40, average value



POSTAL OFFICE OF MILANO MALPENSA - CONTROL WITH THE ANTI-NARCOTICS POLICE DOG



03. LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES AT REGIONAL LEVEL AND IN METROPOLITAN CITIES

Introduction

When comparing one region/province with another, the data in the following tables may show significant inconsistencies, which, however, do not always indicate a greater or lesser resurgence of the phenomenon in a given geographical area. The number of anti-drug operations, reports to the Judicial Authorities and drug seizures is often influenced by various factors, such as the size of the resident population, which guarantees to criminal organizations a greater or lesser extent

of demand, the presence of established drug dealing networks and the existence of strategically important land, maritime or air borders in the area, which are used as points of arrival or transit.

The highest value of **operations**, in relation to the type of narcotic substance seized, was recorded in the Lazio region for cocaine (2,286), in Lombardy for heroin (120), hashish (1,514), marijuana (395), synthetic drugs (145) and other drugs² (142) and in Calabria for cannabis plants (68).

² These include certain other drugs of natural origin and medicines.

**DRUG OPERATIONS
LAZIO REGION**

4,030
+8.01%

**PERSONS REPORTED
TO THE J.A.
LAZIO REGION**

4,881
+3.04%

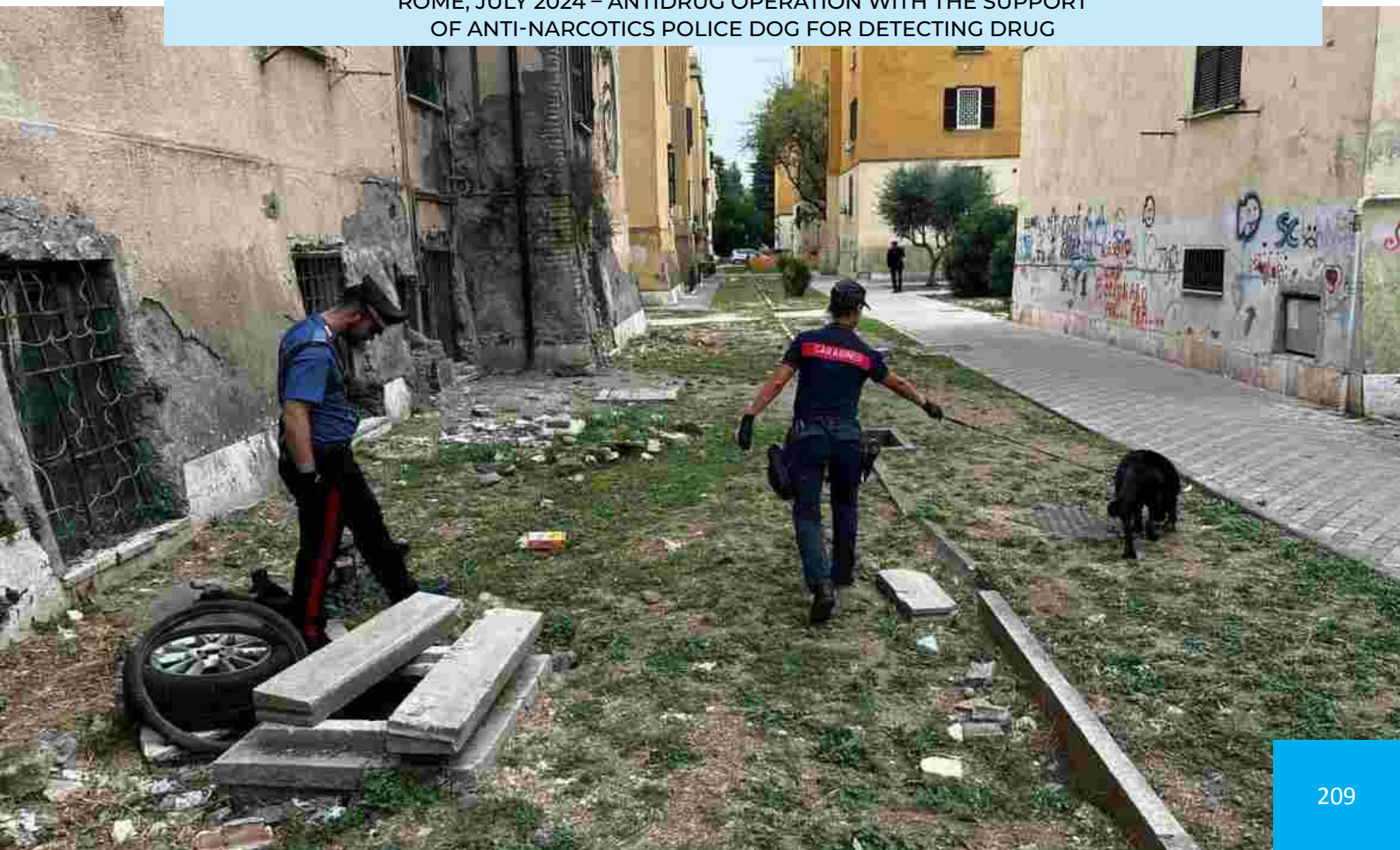
**DRUG SEIZURES
APULIA REGION**

10,343 KG
+815.00%

2024 - DRUG OPERATIONS

Regions	Cocaine	Heroin	Hashish	Marijuana	Cannabis plants	Synthetic drugs	Other drugs	Total	% on '23	Inc. %
Abruzzi	165	25	150	46	16	6	8	416	0.97	1.95
Basilicata	43	14	22	21	2	-	3	105	-13.22	0.49
Calabria	155	28	103	137	68	1	12	504	-12.65	2.37
Campania	944	71	536	307	43	15	67	1,983	11.72	9.31
Emilia Romagna	552	64	461	105	22	19	31	1,254	-3.32	5.89
Friuli V. G.	86	6	104	40	4	4	11	255	-8.27	1.20
Lazio	2,286	68	1,237	281	28	60	70	4,030	8.01	18.92
Liguria	290	21	310	75	6	9	18	729	2.10	3.42
Lombardy	1,560	120	1,514	395	40	145	142	3,916	4.34	18.39
Marche	170	24	169	35	11	6	15	430	-13.83	2.02
Molise	32	18	26	5	2	-	-	83	-3.49	0.39
Piedmont	554	50	601	148	25	23	46	1,447	22.42	6.79
Apulia	652	89	360	162	35	10	32	1,340	0.83	6.29
Sardinia	159	21	46	183	58	7	16	490	-6.67	2.30
Sicily	541	21	309	225	40	17	29	1,182	-10.93	5.55
Tuscany	481	62	337	43	16	16	42	997	15.53	4.68
Trentino A. A.	154	20	192	31	11	6	14	428	5.16	2.01
Umbria	179	38	107	11	9	4	6	354	15.31	1.66
Valle d'Aosta	16	-	3	2	1	1	2	25	108.33	0.12
Veneto	483	98	508	126	33	30	53	1,331	-4.11	6.25
Regional total	9,502	858	7,095	2,378	470	379	617	21,299	-3.48	--

ROME, JULY 2024 – ANTIDRUG OPERATION WITH THE SUPPORT OF ANTI-NARCOTICS POLICE DOG FOR DETECTING DRUG



In 2024, Lazio was the region with the highest number of **people reported to the Judicial Authorities** for violations of

the law on drugs: 4,481 persons reported, equal to 17.44% of the national total.

2024 - PERSONS REPORTED TO THE JUDICIAL AUTHORITY

Regions	Nationality		Gender		Age		Offence - Law n. 309/90			Total	Var. % on 2023	Inc. %
	Italians	Foreigners	Males	Females	Of age	Minors	Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	Conspiracy to traffick (art. 74)	Other offences			
Abruzzi	330	196	474	52	489	37	500	26	-	526	-8.04	1.88
Basilicata	134	23	145	12	150	7	133	24	-	157	-35.92	0.56
Calabria	888	57	861	84	937	8	575	370	-	945	-26.11	3.38
Campania	2,479	264	2,463	280	2,660	83	2,245	498	-	2,743	6.61	9.80
Emilia Romagna	669	983	1,553	99	1,590	62	1,615	37	-	1,652	-4.40	5.90
Friuli V. G.	133	143	258	18	264	12	276	-	-	276	-16.36	0.99
Lazio	3,136	1,745	4,376	505	4,638	243	4,615	266	-	4,881	3.04	17.44
Liguria	377	566	892	51	863	80	874	69	-	943	8.77	3.37
Lombardy	1,700	3,045	4,536	209	4,598	147	4,573	172	-	4,745	3.58	16.95
Marche	311	216	481	46	514	13	515	12	-	527	-12.89	1.88
Molise	109	14	110	13	120	3	116	7	-	123	-11.51	0.44
Piedmont	870	878	1,656	92	1,634	114	1,715	32	1	1,748	8.84	6.25
Apulia	1,943	128	1,923	148	1,998	73	1,808	263	-	2,071	-1.94	7.40
Sardinia	610	61	609	62	641	30	627	44	-	671	-18.17	2.40
Sicily	1,942	140	1,932	150	2,012	70	1,508	572	2	2,082	-5.28	7.44
Tuscany	527	847	1,287	87	1,305	69	1,270	104	-	1,374	26.75	4.91
Trentino A. A.	214	339	512	41	523	30	485	68	-	553	22.62	1.98
Umbria	140	287	393	34	411	16	403	24	-	427	-0.70	1.53
Valle d'Aosta	24	19	40	3	42	1	43	-	-	43	126.32	0.15
Veneto	612	890	1,427	75	1,398	104	1,471	31	-	1,502	-1.57	5.37
Regional total	17,148	10,841	25,928	2,061	26,787	1,202	25,367	2,619	3	27,989	0.31 %	

As for drug **seizures**, the largest amount in 2024 was recorded in apulia 10,342.76 kg of drugs, Sardinia with 100,336 cannabis plants, Campania with 87,026 powder/doses of synthetic drugs and Lombardy with 15,699 powder/doses of other types of

drugs. Considering powdered drugs, Calabria was the region with the largest quantity of cocaine seized, Lombardy with heroin and other types of substances, Lazio with hashish and synthetic drugs, and Apulia with marijuana.

2024 - DRUG SEIZURES

Regions	Kg								Tablet/doses no				Plants no	
	Cocaine	Heroin	Hashish	Marijuana	Synthetic drugs	Other drugs	Total kg	Var. % on 2023	Synthetic drugs	Other drugs	Total	Var. % on 2023	Cannabis	Var. % on 2023
Abruzzi	22.49	16.86	253.62	49.02	0.09	0.56	342.63	-17.71	704	13	717	342.59	193	-91.77
Basilicata	6.46	0.47	25.97	16.07	-	7.87	56.83	-7.54	-	5	5	-80.77	18	-88.54
Calabria	4,429.59	10.66	214.02	897.60	0.02	0.05	5,551.95	-40.84	62	45	107	42.67	16,753	-43.08
Campania	818.39	9.97	762.99	474.72	2.87	1.03	2,069.97	-42.01	87,026	151	87,177	15,275.13	3,049	-40.24
Emilia Romagna	728.84	6.68	942.83	341.64	1.07	8.74	2,029.80	36.62	5,649	1,945	7,594	510.94	2,125	45.25
Friuli V. G.	34.05	0.12	104.11	219.99	0.14	14.67	373.08	10.78	515	132	647	-67.02	27	-98.65
Lazio	860.37	9.93	5,584.64	1,738.57	30.72	23.29	8,247.52	-35.82	250	1,411	1,661	-86.39	1,495	-69.50
Liguria	795.64	3.83	649.14	581.50	0.35	17.78	2,048.25	-45.11	189	120	309	-96.13	143	-88.70
Lombardy	1,156.48	93.47	3,326.43	3,325.50	21.53	489.20	8,412.61	-23.44	4,444	15,699	20,143	369.10	5,992	-20.16
Marche	17.04	0.55	303.94	170.54	0.73	0.05	492.86	-52.40	27	34	61	48.78	1,479	386.51
Molise	1.50	0.61	7.69	56.25	-	0.00	66.06	46.40	-	-	-	-100.00	26	-83.75
Piedmont	286.47	46.16	1,080.73	3,030.16	1.75	0.66	4,445.93	-37.71	193	664	857	-5.41	343	-92.95
Apulia	160.16	82.26	897.16	9,192.01	5.54	5.63	10,342.76	815.00	317	380	697	289.39	15,495	47.75
Sardinia	169.35	4.20	383.53	7,096.33	0.83	2.41	7,656.65	-66.76	417	86	503	2,547.37	100,336	38.02
Sicily	704.19	19.16	743.97	633.29	5.91	1.38	2,107.90	-72.35	79	212	291	125.58	3,318	-62.96
Tuscany	638.05	9.30	1,143.93	672.18	7.39	2.68	2,473.53	39.30	818	495	1,313	-79.52	2,877	-17.87
Trentino A. A.	111.70	0.13	259.85	31.39	1.32	0.25	404.64	82.07	51	61	112	-48.39	345	12.75
Umbria	44.61	2.70	315.04	9.95	0.08	0.10	372.47	185.29	134	1	135	-87.83	98	-47.87
Valle d'Aosta	0.86	0.00	2.30	0.24	0.00	0.64	4.04	-65.86	146	-	146	--	9	125.00
Veneto	95.94	30.90	393.57	215.55	8.67	23.76	768.39	-66.40	574	1,098	1,672	146.97	698	-25.11
Regional total	11,082.17	347.97	17,395.47	28,752.47	89.00	600.75	58,267.84	-33.22	101,595	22,552	124,147	224.91	154,819	-1.12

In the **the 14 metropolitan cities**, where approximately one third of the total Italian population is concentrated, in 2024 the police carried out 11,286 anti-drug operations (equal to the 53.01% of the national

total), 23,661.87 kg of narcotic substances were seized (equal to 40.61% of the national figure) and 14,189 persons were reported (equal to the 50.69% of the national total).

2024 - ANTIDRUG OPERATIONS

Metropolitan cities	Cocaine	Heroin	Hashish	Marijuana	Cannabis plants	Synthetic drugs	Other drugs	Total	% on '23	Ratio 100,000 inhabitants
Rome	2,087	45	1,107	240	14	59	54	3,606	8.75	85.34
Bari	256	42	126	61	6	2	6	499	4.39	40.85
Bologna	142	11	102	31	9	2	7	304	-0.98	29.88
Cagliari	71	8	26	31	7	4	6	153	59.38	36.52
Catania	182	2	23	116	12	6	9	350	5.74	32.65
Florence	150	17	113	15	3	3	6	307	37.05	31.05
Genoa	134	13	201	56	4	5	9	422	3.18	51.61
Messina	59	1	43	30	6	3	2	144	-11.66	24.08
Milan	943	64	1,102	184	11	115	56	2,475	8.55	76.26
Naples	661	57	372	265	31	12	46	1,444	18.26	48.60
Palermo	125	10	113	28	14	2	3	295	-14.24	24.58
Reggio Calabria	47	-	9	29	17	-	2	104	-21.21	20.19
Turin	386	24	396	92	12	20	25	955	36.62	43.31
Venice	84	24	78	25	4	6	7	228	-9.52	27.29
Total	5,327	318	3,811	1,203	150	239	238	11,286	10.09	--

2024 - PERSONS REPORTED TO THE JUDICIAL AUTHORITY

Metropolitan cities	Nationality		Gender		Age		Type of offence Law no. 309/90			Total	Var. % on 2023	Ratio 100,000 inhabitants
	Italians	Foreigners	Males	Females	Of age	Minors	Illicit trafficking (art. 73)	Conspiracy to traffick (Art. 74)	Other offences			
Rome	2,651	1,548	3,761	438	3,999	200	4,053	146	-	4,199	3.12	99.37
Bari	659	69	683	45	703	25	589	139	-	728	3.41	59.59
Bologna	144	258	378	24	389	13	380	22	-	402	-22.24	39.51
Cagliari	285	26	277	34	300	11	269	42	-	311	-11.14	74.23
Catania	639	23	635	27	637	25	435	227	-	662	-0.90	61.76
Florence	143	309	424	28	435	17	351	101	-	452	89.12	45.71
Genoa	215	293	485	23	443	65	469	39	-	508	16.78	62.13
Messina	334	18	310	42	347	5	166	186	-	352	49.79	58.86
Milan	949	1,869	2,724	94	2,727	91	2,787	31	-	2,818	0.43	86.83
Naples	1,692	171	1,690	173	1,811	52	1,507	356	-	1,863	7.38	62.71
Palermo	420	34	429	25	437	17	348	106	-	454	-7.16	37.83
Reggio Calabria	110	9	109	10	118	1	119	-	-	119	-64.90	23.10
Turin	467	582	1,014	35	974	75	1,028	21	-	1,049	11.12	47.58
Venice	110	162	254	18	264	8	247	25	-	272	23.64	32.56
Total	8,818	5,371	13,173	1,016	13,584	605	12,748	1,441	0	14,189	3.17	--

*: Ratio calculated based on the resident population on January 1st, 2024 (Istat data)

In metropolitan cities, Police Forces reported 55 deaths for drug abuse (-9.84% compared to 2023), which represent the 23.80% of the national total.

Rome and Naples were the most affected cities, recording 12 incidents each one and both showing an increase compared to the previous year.

2024 - SEIZURES

Metropolitan cities	Kg								Tablet/doses no				no Plants	
	Cocaine	Heroin	Hashish	Marijuana	Synthetic drugs	Other drugs	Total kg	Var. % on 2022	Synthetic drugs	Other drugs	Total no	Var. % on 2023	Cannabis	Var. % on 2023
Rome	818.28	9.48	5,450.68	1,660.45	30.70	22.97	7,992.55	-33.64	247	1,321	1,568	-86.85	1,196	-46.42
Bari	38.29	35.34	661.06	762.36	5.14	4.77	1,506.95	225.38	45	228	273	702.94	55	-96.90
Bologna	156.06	1.54	442.24	238.07	0.36	4.43	842.69	8.09	45	1,127	1,172	661.04	253	-75.34
Cagliari	48.36	1.22	334.54	264.80	0.72	1.26	650.91	-75.75	354	60	414	13,700.00	19,725	19.99
Catania	518.33	0.00	19.90	173.58	0.60	1.05	713.45	113.07	1	1	2	-96.49	451	58.80
Florence	80.06	0.91	579.73	78.11	0.30	0.54	739.65	140.79	173	27	200	-96.71	794	-3.17
Genoa	493.53	3.58	312.59	56.22	0.33	0.23	866.46	5.21	13	76	89	-98.85	74	-67.97
Messina	19.09	0.27	49.42	29.66	0.09	0.00	98.52	-66.84	43	35	78	1200.00	60	-72.09
Milan	342.77	45.59	1,329.41	387.51	14.38	4.36	2,124.02	-60.79	236	1,952	2,188	159.86	619	-44.83
Naples	281.45	9.26	676.05	241.31	2.73	1.01	1,211.81	-52.76	87,018	127	87,145	27,653.18	1,976	60.26
Palermo	90.34	18.73	281.33	66.64	4.77	0.17	461.98	-34.80	0	0	0	-100.00	1,526	-31.51
Reggio Calabria	4,227.22	1.10	168.65	347.02	0.01	0.00	4,743.99	-43.92	0	3	3	--	5,304	-31.23
Turin	174.80	43.16	816.19	570.84	1.71	0.55	1,607.24	-76.61	152	640	792	66.39	75	-97.81
Venice	23.38	10.69	46.25	17.07	4.19	0.08	101.65	-89.02	39	140	179	47.93	76	31.03
Total	7,311.93	180.86	11,168.03	4,893.62	66.02	41.42	23,661.87	-44.56	88,366	5,737	94,103	239.00	32,184	-17.06

2024 - DRUG ABUSE DEATHS

	Rome	Bari	Bologna	Cagliari	Catania	Florence	Genoa	Messina	Milan	Naples	Palermo	Reggio C.	Turin	Venice	Total
2023	9	3	7	2	-	3	5	-	9	5	4	-	11	3	61
2024	12	2	4	1	-	5	-	-	4	12	3	-	7	5	55
Var. % on 2023	33.33	-33.33	-28.57	-50.00	--	--	-100.00	--	-55.55	140.00	-25.00	--	-36.36	66.66	-9.84

2024 - PIEDMONT

		REGIONAL	TO	AL	AT	BI	CN	NO	VB	VC
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	6.79	66.00	7.12	1.52	3.66	8.91	6.98	3.94	1.87
SEIZURES	inc. %*	7.63	36.15	4.06	0.14	0.35	53.83	2.56	0.30	2.62
PERSONS	inc. %*	6.25	60.01	6.29	4.46	5.03	8.70	8.12	3.83	3.55



* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	TO	AL	AT	BI	CN	NO	VB	VC
DRUG OPERATIONS	no	1,182	1,447	22.42	955	103	22	53	129	101	57	27

			2023	2024	Var. %	TO	AL	AT	BI	CN	NO	VB	VC
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	103.37	286.47	177.13	174.80	58.27	1.28	0.66	3.50	46.42	1.19	0.34
	Heroin	kg	26.06	46.16	77.14	43.16	0.76	0.58	0.30	0.03	1.26	0.08	0.00
	Hashish	kg	4,437.80	1,080.73	-75.65	816.19	59.33	2.80	8.56	22.98	48.43	6.77	115.68
	Marijuana	kg	2,562.65	3,030.15	18.24	570.84	62.28	1.64	5.85	-	17.57	5.06	0.29
	Plants*	no	4,865	343	-92.95	75	26	5	177	36	19	5	-
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	4.91	1.75	-64.39	1.71	-	-	-	-	-	0.03	0.01
		no	340	193	-43.24	152	6	-	-	-	-	-	33.00
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	2.80	0.66	-76.52	0.55	0.04	-	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.02
		no	566	664	17.31	640	-	-	15	9	-	-	-
	Total	kg	7,137.59	4,445.93	-37.71	1,607.24	180.67	6.30	15.38	-	113.69	13.14	116.34
		no	906	857	-5.41	792	6	-	15	11	-	-	33
	plants		4,865	343	-92.95	75	26	5	177	36	19	5	-

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	TO	AL	AT	BI	CN	NO	VB	VC
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	1,527	1,715	12.31	1,028	109	74	88	152	135	67	62
	Art. 74	no	79	32	-59.49	21	-	4	-	-	7	-	-
	Other offences	no	-	1	--	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	837	870	3.94	467	55	62	63	83	53	50	37
	Foreigners	no	769	878	14.17	582	55	16	25	69	89	17	25
	Of age	no	1,505	1,634	8.57	974	99	74	82	142	140	61	62
	Minors	no	101	114	12.87	75	11	4	6	10	2	6	-
	Males	no	1,502	1,656	10.25	1,014	106	64	78	139	133	62	60
	Females	no	104	92	-11.54	35	4	14	10	13	9	5	2
	Total	no	1,606	1,748	8.84	1,049	110	78	88	152	142	67	62
FOREIGNERS	Moroccans	no	208	260	25.00	150	36	7	18	7	26	4	12
	Senegalese	no	125	160	28.00	155	1	-	-	2	2	-	-
	Albanians	no	146	114	-21.92	45	8	3	-	33	18	-	7
	Tunisians	no	25	55	120.00	20	6	3	1	4	21	-	-
	Gambians	no	30	40	33.33	32	-	-	-	8	-	-	-

			2023	2024	Var. %	TO	AL	AT	BI	CN	NO	VB	VC
Drug deaths	no		20	15	-25.00	7	1	-	3	2	2	-	-

METROPOLITAN CITY OF TURIN							
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
OPERATIONS		no	699	955	36.62	4.48	43.31
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	73.65	174.80	137.33	1.58	7.93
	Heroin	kg	21.50	43.16	100.77	12.40	1.96
	Hashish	kg	4,331.10	816.19	-81.16	4.69	37.02
	Marijuana	kg	2,438.13	570.84	-76.59	1.99	25.89
	Cannabis Plants	no	3,429	75	-97.81	0.05	3.40
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	4.87	1.71	-64.86	1.92	0.08
		no	340	152	-55.29	0.15	6.89
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	2.63	0.55	-79.19	0.09	0.02
		no	136	640	370.59	2.84	29.03
		kg	6,871.88	1,607.24	-76.61	2.76	72.90
Total	no	476	792	66.39	0.64	35.92	
	plants	3,429	75	-97.81	0.05	3.40	
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	874	1,028	17.62	4.05	46.62
	Art. 74	no	70	21	-70.00	0.80	0.95
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	471	467	-0.85	2.72	21.18
	Foreigners	no	473	582	23.04	5.37	26.40
	Of age	no	882	974	10.43	3.64	44.18
	Minors	no	62	75	20.97	6.24	3.40
	Males	no	891	1,014	13.80	3.91	45.99
	Females	no	53	35	-33.96	1.70	1.59
	Total	no	944	1,049	11.12	3.75	47.58
FOREIGNERS	Senegalese	no	120	155	29.17	1.43	7.03
	Moroccas	no	126	150	19.05	1.38	6.80
	Albanians	no	44	45	2.27	0.42	2.04
	Gabonese	no	21	34	61.90	0.31	1.54
	Egyptians	no	8	32	300.00	0.30	1.45
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DRUG DEATHS	Italians	no	11	7	-36.36	3.03	0.32
	Foreigners	no	-	-	--	--	0.00
	Of age	no	11	7	-36.36	3.03	0.32
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	8	7	-12.50	3.03	0.32
	Females	no	3	-	-100.00	--	--
	Total	no	11	7	-36.36	3.03	0.32

2024 - VALLE D'AOSTA

		REGIONAL	AO
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	0.12	100.00
SEIZURES	inc. %*	0.01	100.00
PERSONS	inc. %*	0.15	100.00

Aosta

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %
OPERATIONS	no	12	25	108.33

		2023	2024	Var. %
DEATHS	no	1	-	-100.00

			2023	2024	Var. %
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	6.13	0.86	-86.05
	Heroin	kg	-	-	--
	Hashish	kg	0.30	2.30	664.45
	Marijuana	kg	5.40	0.24	-95.59
	Plants*	no	4	9	125.00
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	-	-	--
		no	-	146	--
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	-	0.64	--
		no	-	-	--
	Total	kg	11.83	4.04	-65.86
		no	-	146	--
	Plants		4	9	125.00

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	19	43	126.32
	Art. 74	no	-	-	--
	Other offences	no	-	-	--
	Italians	no	7	24	242.86
	Foreigners	no	12	19	58.33
	Of age	no	18	42	133.33
	Minors	no	1	1	--
	Males	no	18	40	122.22
	Females	no	1	3	200.00
	Total	no	19	43	126.32
Foreigners	Albanians	no	1	7	600.00
	Moroccas	no	-	5	--
	Senegalese	no	1	3	200.00
	Singhalese	no	1	1	--
	Dominicans	no	-	1	--

2024 - LOMBARDY

		REGIONAL	MI	BG	BS	CO	CR	LC	LO	MB	MN	PV	SO	VA
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	18.39	63.20	4.57	5.08	4.49	1.40	1.23	0.74	3.55	2.02	1.99	1.00	10.73
SEIZURES	inc. %*	14.44	25.25	15.42	10.29	4.40	3.29	0.20	0.42	7.70	1.99	2.38	0.04	28.62
PERSONS	inc. %*	16.95	59.39	4.09	9.17	5.04	1.31	1.48	0.59	3.67	2.17	2.63	1.45	9.02

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	MI	BG	BS	CO	CR	LC	LO	MB	MN	PV	SO	VA
OPERATIONS	no	3,753	3,916	4.34	2,475	179	199	176	55	48	29	139	79	78	39	420
		2023	2024	Var. %	MI	BG	BS	CO	CR	LC	LO	MB	MN	PV	SO	VA
DEATHS	no	21	13	-38.10	4	1	1	-	1	-	-	2	3	1	-	-



			2023	2024	Var. %	MI	BG	BS	CO	CR	LC	LO	MB	MN	PV	SO	VA
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	693.06	1,156.48	66.87	342.77	162.22	168.58	16.22	0.34	2.03	0.67	306.02	4.28	10.98	0.68	141.68
	Heroin	kg	33.59	93.47	178.23	45.59	0.99	0.30	5.22	0.03	0.19	0.01	0.61	0.11	25.79	0.01	14.63
	Hashish	kg	6,704.52	3,326.44	-50.39	1,329.41	1,091.37	237.07	25.14	18.01	14.40	31.25	315.27	19.46	159.47	2.54	83.05
	Marijuana	kg	2,588.05	3,325.50	28.49	387.51	42.59	456.11	318.98	257.57	0.13	3.15	24.93	143.27	3.66	0.33	1,687.27
	Plants*	no	7,505	5,992	-20.16	619	626	2,237	117	1,162	3	2	27	463	668	-	68
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	107.02	21.53	-79.88	14.38	0.07	0.11	3.40	-	0.10	0.05	0.47	-	0.52	-	2.44
		no	440	4,444	910.00	236	38	13	29	-	-	2	3,122	960	1	14	29
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	861.79	489.20	-43.23	4.36	0.17	3.88	0.87	0.51	0.13	-	0.70	0.27	0.01	--	478.31
		no	3,854	15,699	307.34	1,952	-	193	206	346	-	7	85	180	1,204	490	11,036
		kg	10,988.04	8,412.61	-23.44	2,124.02	1,297.41	866.04	369.82	276.46	16.98	35.13	648.00	167.40	200.44	3.55	2,407.37
Total		no	4,294	20,143	369.10	2,188	38	206	235	346	-	9	3,207	1,140	1,205	504	11,065
		Plants	7,505	5,992	-20.16	619	626	2,237	117	1,162	3	2	27	463	668	-	68

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	MI	BG	BS	CO	CR	LC	LO	MB	MN	PV	SO	VA
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE I.A.	Art. 73	no	4,387	4,573	4.24	2,787	193	319	239	61	70	28	174	103	104	69	426
	Art. 74	no	194	172	-11.34	31	1	116	-	1	-	-	-	-	21	-	2
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	1,834	1,700	-7.31	949	64	183	110	21	21	16	64	38	57	40	137
	Foreigners	no	2,747	3,045	10.85	1,869	130	252	129	41	49	12	110	65	68	29	291
	Of age	no	4,407	4,598	4.33	2,727	193	426	225	59	67	27	167	102	123	62	420
	Minors	no	174	147	-15.52	91	1	9	14	3	3	1	7	1	2	7	8
	Males	no	4,372	4,536	3.75	2,724	184	410	226	58	68	27	170	91	121	63	394
	Females	no	209	209	0.00	94	10	25	13	4	2	1	4	12	4	6	34
	Total	no	4,581	4,745	3.58	2,818	194	435	239	62	70	28	174	103	125	69	428
Foreigners	Moroccas	no	1,098	1,079	-1.73	543	75	66	57	18	38	2	58	30	46	10	136
	Egyptians	no	454	563	24.01	526	2	2	1	5		1	15	-	3	-	8
	Albanians	no	294	389	32.31	114	17	136	12	4	7	2	16	11	8	7	55
	Tunisians	no	166	237	42.77	130	10	19	6	7	2	2	9	15	6		31
	Gambians	no	118	123	4.24	116	1	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	2

METROPOLITAN CITY OF MILAN

		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
OPERATIONS	no	2,280	2,475	8.55	11.62	76.26	
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	130.76	342.77	162.14	3.09	10.56
	Heroin	kg	14.14	45.59	222.31	13.10	1.40
	Hashish	kg	3,908.49	1,329.41	-65.99	7.64	40.96
	Marijuana	kg	1,346.78	387.51	-71.23	1.35	11.94
	Plants*	no	1,122	619	-44.83	0.40	19.07
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	15.81	14.38	-9.04	16.16	0.44
		no	262	236	-9.92	0.23	7.27
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	1.07	4.36	305.87	0.72	0.13
		no	580	1952	236.55	8.66	60.15
		kg	5,417.06	2,124.02	-60.79	3.65	65.45
Total	no	842	2,188	159.86	1.76	67.42	
	Plants	1,122	619	-44.83	0.40	19.07	

* Cannabis

Cannabis			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	2,694	2,787	3.45	10.99	85.87
	Art. 74	no	112	31	-72.32	1.18	0.96
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	1,050	949	-9.62	5.53	29.24
	Foreigners	no	1,756	1,869	6.44	17.24	57.59
	Of age	no	2,708	2,727	0.70	10.18	84.03
	Minors	no	98	91	-7.14	7.57	2.80
	Males	no	2,703	2,724	0.78	10.51	83.93
	Females	no	103	94	-8.74	4.56	2.90
	Total	no	2,806	2,818	0.43	10.07	86.83
FOREIGNERS	Moroccas	no	559	543	-2.86	5.01	16.73
	Egyptians	no	424	526	24.06	4.85	16.21
	Tunisians	no	82	130	58.54	1.20	4.01
	Gambians	no	107	116	8.41	1.07	3.57
	Albanians	no	142	114	-19.72	1.05	3.51

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	7	3	-57.14	1.30	0.09
	Foreigners	no	2	1	-50.00	0.43	0.03
	Of age	no	9	4	-55.56	1.73	0.12
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	8	2	-75.00	0.87	0.06
	Females	no	1	2	100.00	0.87	0.06
	Total	no	9	4	-55.56	1.73	0.12

2024 - VENETO

		REGIONAL	VE	BL	PD	RO	TV	VI	VR
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	6.25	17.13	2.18	29.15	2.33	10.29	13.00	25.92
SEIZURES	inc. %*	1.32	13.23	1.19	23.80	13.10	11.07	17.67	19.93
PERSONS	inc. %*	5.37	18.11	2.73	29.36	3.79	11.12	13.12	21.77

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	VE	BL	PD	RO	TV	VI	VR
OPERATIONS	no	1,388	1,331	-4.11	228	29	388	31	137	173	345

			2023	2024	Var. %	VE	BL	PD	RO	TV	VI	VR
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	1,119.60	95.94	-91.43	23.38	0.21	12.49	9.45	2.79	4.16	43.47
	Heroin	kg	18.87	30.90	63.78	10.69	-	13.14	-	0.02	0.40	6.64
	Hashish	kg	357.62	393.57	10.05	46.25	6.15	120.37	60.04	43.68	27.08	90.00
	Marijuana	kg	769.08	215.55	-71.97	17.07	2.58	14.32	31.20	36.32	101.93	12.14
	Plants*	no	932	698	-25.11	76	51	77	39	258	144	53
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	1.80	8.67	381.66	4.19	0.15	2.02	-	1.34	0.09	0.88
		no	353	574	62.61	39	1	5	-	340	80	109
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	20.21	23.76	17.55	0.08	0.05	20.55	-	0.94	2.12	0.02
		no	324	1,098	238.89	140	-	10	-	22	40	886
		kg	2,287.17	768.39	-66.40	101.65	9.14	182.90	100.69	85.09	135.77	153.16
Total		no	677	1,672	146.97	179	1	15	-	362	120	995
		Plants	932	698	-25.11	76	51	77	39	258	144	53

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	VE	BL	PD	RO	TV	VI	VR
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	1,495	1,471	-1.61	247	41	437	57	167	197	325
	Art. 74	no	31	31	--	25	-	4	-	-	-	2
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	676	612	-9.47	110	35	140	26	96	90	115
	Foreigners	no	850	890	4.71	162	6	301	31	71	107	212
	Of age	no	1,396	1,398	0.14	264	41	392	57	145	183	316
	Minors	no	130	104	-20.00	8	-	49	-	22	14	11
	Males	no	1,458	1,427	-2.13	254	36	426	53	164	183	311
	Females	no	68	75	10.29	18	5	15	4	3	14	16
	Total	no	1,526	1,502	-1.57	272	41	441	57	167	197	327
FOREIGNERS	Tunisians	no	258	253	-1.94	45	-	181	-	5	3	19
	Moroccas	no	160	198	23.75	13	-	23	13	19	3	127
	Albanians	no	105	147	40.00	44	2	13	16	11	36	25
	Nigerians	no	163	132	-19.02	33	1	34	-	13	37	14
	Romanians	no	15	18	20.00	2	-	11	-	1	-	4

		2023	2024	Var. %	VE	BL	PD	RO	TV	VI	VR
DEATHS	no	23	25	8.70	5	2	4	-	2	8	4

METROPOLITAN CITY OF VENICE

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
OPERATIONS		no	252	228	-9.52	1.07	27.29
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	856.25	23.38	-97.27	0.21	2.80
	Heroin	kg	6.82	10.69	56.85	3.07	1.28
	Hashish	kg	22.04	46.25	109.81	0.27	5.54
	Marijuana	kg	39.64	17.07	-56.94	0.06	2.04
	Plants*	no	58	76	31.03	0.05	9.10
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	1.03	4.19	308.09	4.70	0.50
		no	103	39	-62.14	0.04	4.67
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.00	0.08	3,700.00	0.01	0.01
		no	18	140	677.78	0.62	16.76
		kg	925.78	101.65	-89.02	0.17	12.17
Total	no	121	179	47.93	0.14	21.43	
	Plants	58	76	31.03	0.05	9.10	

* Cannabis

Cannabis			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	220	247	12.27	0.97	29.57
	Art. 74	no	-	25	--	0.95	2.99
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	103	110	6.80	0.64	13.17
	Foreigners	no	117	162	38.46	1.49	19.39
	Of age	no	203	264	30.05	0.99	31.60
	Minors	no	17	8	-52.94	0.67	0.96
	Males	no	213	254	19.25	0.98	30.40
	Females	no	7	18	157.14	0.87	2.15
	Total	no	220	272	23.64	0.97	32.56
FOREIGNERS	Tunisians	no	41	45	9.76	0.42	5.39
	Albanians	no	25	44	76.00	0.41	5.27
	Nigerians	no	24	33	37.50	0.30	3.95
	Moroccas	no	2	13	550.00	0.12	1.56
	Gambians	no	1	5	400.00	0.05	0.60

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	3	4	33.33	1.73	0.48
	Foreigners	no	-	1	--	0.43	0.12
	Of age	no	3	5	66.67	2.16	0.60
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	3	5	66.67	2.16	0.60
	Females	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Total	no	3	5	66.67	2.16	0.60

2024 - TRENTINO ALTO ADIGE

		REGIONAL	TN	BZ
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	2.01	45.79	54.21
SEIZURES	inc. %*	0.69	45.87	54.13
PERSONS	inc. %*	1.98	53.71	46.29

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	TN	BZ
OPERATIONS	no	407	428	5.16	196	232

			2023	2024	Var. %	TN	BZ
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	61.73	111.70	80.96	76.35	35.35
	Heroin	kg	0.65	0.13	-79.79	0.07	0.06
	Hashish	kg	120.02	259.85	116.51	94.74	165.12
	Marijuana	kg	39.44	31.39	-20.41	14.32	17.07
	Plants*	no	306	345	12.75	122	223
	Synthetic (powder/ doses)	kg	0.19	1.32	582.38	0.06	1.26
		no	164	51	-68.90	1	50
	Other drugs (powder/ doses)	kg	0.23	0.25	11.11	0.09	0.16
		no	53	61	15.09	-	61
	Total	kg	222.25	404.65	82.07	185.63	219.02
		no	217	112	-48.39	1	111
	Plants		306	345	12.75	122	223

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	TN	BZ
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	419	485	15.75	229	256
	Art. 74	no	29	68	134.48	68	-
	Other offences	no	3	-	-100.00	-	-
	Italians	no	172	214	24.42	119	95
	Foreigners	no	279	339	21.51	178	161
	Of age	no	421	523	24.23	283	240
	Minors	no	30	30	--	14	16
	Males	no	427	512	19.91	271	241
	Females	no	24	41	70.83	26	15
	Total	no	451	553	22.62	297	256
FOREIGNERS	Tunisians	no	81	127	56.79	73	54
	Albanians	no	40	58	45.00	32	26
	Moroccas	no	37	53	43.24	23	30
	Pakistanis	no	3	17	466.67	12	5
	Nigerians	no	40	17	-57.50	9	8

		2023	2024	Var. %	TN	BZ
DEATHS	no	6	7	16.67	3	4

2024 - FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA

		REGIONAL	TS	GO	PN	UD
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	1.20	19.22	14.90	23.92	41.96
SEIZURES	inc. %*	0.64	8.79	1.04	10.92	79.26
PERSONS	inc. %*	0.99	21.38	8.70	26.45	43.48

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	TS	GO	PN	UD
OPERATIONS	no	278	255	-8.27	49	38	61	107

			2022	2023	Var. %	TS	GO	PN	UD
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	6.38	34.05	433.84	26.99	0.74	5.48	0.84
	Heroin	kg	0.32	0.12	-61.49	0.01	-	-	0.11
	Hashish	kg	44.68	104.11	133.04	3.25	2.55	12.04	86.27
	Marijuana	kg	214.81	219.99	2.41	1.99	0.56	23.08	194.37
	Plants*	no	2.001	27	-98.65	3	-	6	18
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.19	0.14	-25.95	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.05
		no	1.947	515	-73.55	242	273	-	-
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	70.41	14.67	-79.17	0.54	0.02	0.07	14.04
		no	15	132	780.00	3	-	-	129
	Total	kg	336.78	373.08	10.78	32.79	3.88	40.73	295.69
		no	1.962	647	-67.02	245	273	-	129
	Plants		2.001	27	-98.65	3	-	6	18

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	TS	GO	PN	UD
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	329	276	-16.11	59	24	73	120
	Art. 74	no	1	-	-100.00	-	-	-	-
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	184	133	-27.72	34	9	32	58
	Foreigners	no	146	143	-2.05	25	15	41	62
	Of age	no	318	264	-16.98	57	24	71	112
	Minors	no	12	12	--	2	-	2	8
	Males	no	307	258	-15.96	50	24	70	114
	Females	no	23	18	-21.74	9	-	3	6
	Total	no	330	276	-16.36	59	24	73	120
FOREIGNERS	Pakistanis	no	39	37	-5.13	3	2	7	25
	Albanians	no	9	22	144.44	2	1	19	-
	Afghans	no	22	21	-4.55	1	-	6	14
	Dominicans	no	3	8	166.67	-	5	1	2
	Slovenians	no	10	5	-50.00	4	1	-	-

			2023	2024	Var. %	TS	GO	PN	UD
DEATHS	no		6	9	50.00	5	2	-	2

2024 - LIGURIA

		REGIONAL	GE	IM	SP	SV
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	3.42	57.89	8.78	17.28	16.05
SEIZURES	inc. %*	3.52	42.30	18.25	0.86	38.58
PERSONS	inc. %*	3.37	53.87	10.39	14.21	21.53

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	GE	IM	SP	SV
OPERATIONS	no	714	729	2.10	422	64	126	117

			2023	2024	Var. %	GE	IM	SP	SV
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	2,046.99	795.64	-61.13	493.53	9.74	2.59	289.79
	Heroin	kg	3.78	3.83	1.32	3.58	-	0.24	0.02
	Hashish	kg	857.90	649.14	-24.33	312.59	259.26	13.14	64.15
	Marijuana	kg	818.90	581.50	-28.99	56.22	104.88	0.73	419.67
	Plants*	no	1,265	143	-88.70	74	28	7	34
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	2.63	0.35	-86.66	0.33	-	0.02	0.01
		no	7,729	189	-97.55	13	82	94	-
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	1.02	17.78	1,646.76	0.23	-	0.99	16.56
		no	253	120	-52.57	76	43	1	-
	Total	kg	3,731.22	2,048.25	-45.11	866.46	373.89	17.71	790.20
		no	7,982	309	-96.13	89	125	95	-
	Plants		1,265	143	-88.70	74	28	7	34

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	GE	IM	SP	SV
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	769	874	13.65	469	98	134	173
	Art. 74	no	97	69	-28.87	39	-	-	30
	Other offences	no	1	-	-100.00	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	377	377	-	215	29	52	81
	Foreigners	no	490	566	15.51	293	69	82	122
	Of age	no	819	863	5.37	443	95	128	197
	Minors	no	48	80	66.67	65	3	6	6
	Males	no	825	892	8.12	485	93	126	188
	Females	no	42	51	21.43	23	5	8	15
	Total	no	867	943	8.77	508	98	134	203
FOREIGNERS	Moroccas	no	110	133	20.91	38	17	39	39
	Albanians	no	80	104	30.00	37	20	4	43
	Tunisians	no	36	86	138.89	47	20	13	6
	Senegalese	no	74	63	-14.86	59	-	4	-
	Egyptians	no	17	39	129.41	31	2	1	5

			2023	2024	Var. %	GE	IM	SP	SV
DEATHS	no		8	1	-87.50	-	-	-	1

METROPOLITAN CITY OF GENOA

		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
OPERATIONS		no	409	422	3.18	1.98	51.61
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	160.77	493.53	206.97	4.45	60.36
	Heroin	kg	2.65	3.58	34.80	1.03	0.44
	Hashish	kg	438.17	312.59	-28.66	1.80	38.23
	Marijuana	kg	219.41	56.22	-74.38	0.20	6.88
	Plants*	no	231	74	-67.97	0.05	9.05
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	2.37	0.33	-86.23	0.37	0.04
		no	7.524	13	-99.83	0.01	1.59
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.16	0.23	37.80	0.04	0.03
		no	228	76	-66.67	0.34	9.30
		kg	823.54	866.46	5.21	1.49	105.97
Total	no	7.752	89	-98.85	0.07	10.89	
	Plants	231	74	-67.97	0.05	9.05	

* Cannabis

Cannabis			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	411	469	14.11	1.85	57.36
	Art. 74	no	23	39	69.57	1.49	4.77
	Other offences	no	1	-	-100.00	--	--
	Italians	no	179	215	20.11	1.25	26.30
	Foreigners	no	256	293	14.45	2.70	35.84
	Of age	no	397	443	11.59	1.65	54.18
	Minors	no	38	65	71.05	5.41	7.95
	Males	no	420	485	15.48	1.87	59.32
	Females	no	15	23	53.33	1.12	2.81
	Total	no	435	508	16.78	1.81	62.13
FOREIGNERS	Senegalese	no	72	59	-18.06	0.54	7.22
	Tunisians	no	15	47	213.33	0.43	5.75
	Moroccas	no	29	38	31.03	0.35	4.65
	Albanians	no	35	37	5.71	0.34	4.53
	Egyptians	no	16	31	93.75	0.29	3.79

					2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	5	-	-100.00		--	--	
	Foreigners	no	-	-	--		--	--	
	Of age	no	5	-	-100.00		--	--	
	Minors	no	-	-	--		--	--	
	Males	no	3	-	-100.00		--	--	
	Females	no	2	-	-100.00		--	--	
	Total	no	5	-	-100.00		--	--	

2024 - EMILIA ROMAGNA

		REGIONAL	BO	FE	FC	MO	PC	PR	RA	RE	RN
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	5.88	24.26	8.94	5.11	15.48	3.51	10.06	8.62	12.85	11.17
SEIZURES	inc. %*	3.46	41.79	2.66	1.35	15.85	9.27	2.58	13.55	7.05	5.91
PERSONS	inc. %*	5.90	24.35	7.75	4.36	16.29	4.06	10.96	6.12	15.14	10.96

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	BO	FE	FC	MO	PC	PR	RA	RE	RN
OPERATIONS	no	1,297	1,253	-3.39	304	112	64	194	44	126	108	161	140

			2023	2024	Var. %	BO	FE	FC	MO	PC	PR	RA	RE	RN
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	342.83	728.84	112.59	156.06	7.05	2.88	66.35	183.29	30.07	205.33	59.80	18.01
	Heroin	kg	29.61	6.68	-77.43	1.54	3.56	0.03	0.04	0.14	0.21	0.44	0.56	0.19
	Hashish	kg	948.35	931.20	-1.81	442.24	32.18	22.40	241.78	2.03	19.09	26.87	75.38	69.22
	Marijuana	kg	162.14	339.75	109.54	238.07	7.38	1.87	11.10	1.10	2.49	40.40	6.31	31.05
	Plants*	no	1,463	2,125	45.25	253	42	18	16	9	1,040	710	17	20
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	2.00	1.08	-46.28	0.36	0.05	-	0.10	-	0.06	0.21	0.01	0.28
		no	709	5,649	696.76	45	5,078	12	97	-	202	73	39	103
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.74	8.74	1,089.39	4.43	3.33	-	0.15	0.38	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.42
		no	534	1,945	264.23	1,127	-	-	18	770	-	-	30	-
		kg	1,485.67	2,016.28	35.71	842.69	53.55	27.18	319.51	186.93	51.92	273.27	142.07	119.16
Total		no	1,243	7,594	510.94	1,172	5,078	12	115	770	202	73	69	103
	Plants		1,463	2,125	45.25	253	42	18	16	9	1,040	710	17	20

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	BO	FE	FC	MO	PC	PR	RA	RE	RN
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	1,609	1,614	0.31	380	128	72	269	67	181	86	250	181
	Art. 74	no	118	37	-68.64	22	-	-	-	-	-	15	-	-
	Other offences	no	1	-	-100.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	745	668	-10.34	144	68	44	93	29	71	52	109	58
	Foreigners	no	983	983	--	258	60	28	176	38	110	49	141	123
	Of age	no	1,642	1,589	-3.23	389	126	72	240	66	171	101	245	179
	Minors	no	86	62	-27.91	13	2	-	29	1	10	-	5	2
	Males	no	1,630	1,552	-4.79	378	122	66	255	60	168	96	236	171
	Females	no	98	99	1.02	24	6	6	14	7	13	5	14	10
	Total	no	1,728	1,651	-4.46	402	128	72	269	67	181	101	250	181
FOREIGNERS	Albanians	no	252	253	0.40	47	5	13	17	5	45	13	32	76
	Moroccas	no	232	233	0.43	107	9	5	34	15	12	5	43	3
	Tunisians	no	220	204	-7.27	44	7	2	85	2	16	16	16	16
	Nigerians	no	86	119	38.37	29	31	-	24	1	9	1	24	-
	Egyptians	no	28	30	7.14	1	-	1	1	10	2	1	9	5

			2023	2024	Var. %	BO	FE	FC	MO	PC	PR	RA	RE	RN
DEATHS	no		22	26	18.18	4	3	4	-	3	4	3	3	2

METROPOLITAN CITY OF BOLOGNA

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
OPERATIONS			no	307	304	-0.98	1.43	29.88
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	193.91	156.06	-19.52	1.41	15.34	
	Heroin	kg	5.68	1.54	-72.94	0.44	0.15	
	Hashish	kg	553.18	442.24	-20.06	2.54	43.46	
	Marijuana	kg	25.71	238.07	825.97	0.83	23.40	
	Plants*	no	1,026	253	-75.34	0.16	24.86	
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.56	0.36	-35.88	0.41	0.04	
		no	35	45	28.57	0.04	4.42	
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.55	4.43	713.03	0.74	0.44	
		no	119	1127	847.06	5.00	110.76	
		kg	779.59	842.69	8.09	1.45	82.82	
Total	no	154	1172	661.04	0.94	115.18		
	Plants	1,026	253	-75.34	0.16	24.86		

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	426	380	-10.80	1.50	37.35
	Art. 74	no	91	22	-75.82	0.84	2.16
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	200	144	-28.00	0.84	14.15
	Foreigners	no	317	258	-18.61	2.38	25.36
	Of age	no	509	389	-23.58	1.45	38.23
	Minors	no	8	13	62.50	1.08	1.28
	Males	no	477	378	-20.75	1.46	37.15
	Females	no	40	24	-40.00	1.16	2.36
	Total	no	517	402	-22.24	1.44	39.51
FOREIGNERS	Moroccas	no	109	107	-1.83	0.99	10.52
	Albanians	no	58	47	-18.97	0.43	4.62
	Tunisians	no	65	44	-32.31	0.41	4.32
	Nigerians	no	25	29	16.00	0.27	2.85
	French	no	-	6	--	0.06	0.59

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	7	4	-42.86	1.73	0.39
	Foreigners	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Of age	no	7	4	-42.86	1.73	0.39
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	6	2	-66.67	0.87	0.20
	Females	no	1	2	100.00	0.87	0.20
	Total	no	7	4	-42.86	1.73	0.39

2024 - TUSCANY



		REGIONAL	FI	AR	GR	LI	LU	MS	PI	PO	PT	SI
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	4.68	30.79	8.02	6.82	17.15	5.62	7.52	9.23	6.62	5.02	3.21
SEIZURES	inc. %*	4.25	29.90	12.91	12.77	28.65	1.84	0.74	2.92	5.43	4.28	0.56
PERSONS	inc. %*	4.91	32.90	7.71	5.97	14.48	5.75	6.99	8.30	5.75	8.81	3.35

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

			2023	2024	Var. %	FI	AR	GR	LI	LU	MS	PI	PO	PT	SI
OPERATIONS		no	863	997	15.53	307	80	68	171	56	75	92	66	50	32
			2023	2024	Var. %	FI	AR	GR	LI	LU	MS	PI	PO	PT	SI
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	746.39	638.05	-14.52	80.06	79.48	1.07	419.31	5.39	11.35	37.79	1.72	0.78	1.11
	Heroin	kg	4.30	9.30	116.08	0.91	0.73	0.05	1.80	0.02	0.00	5.10	0.52	0.07	0.10
	Hashish	kg	474.80	1,143.93	140.93	579.73	205.15	12.32	152.01	31.11	5.65	21.46	119.92	4.86	11.71
	Marijuana	kg	511.96	672.18	31.29	78.11	32.52	302.32	135.48	8.90	1.30	7.78	4.77	100.11	0.90
	Plants*	no	3,503	2,877	-17.87	794	25	2	65	63	23	189	-	1,703	13
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	14.37	7.39	-48.59	0.30	0.26	0.05	0.03	0.08	0.00	0.04	6.52	0.02	0.08
		no	6,285	818	-86.98	173	111	-	14	2	114	387	8	-	9
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	23.82	2.68	-88.75	0.54	1.11	-	0.03	0.06	-	0.13	0.79	0.01	-
		no	125	495	296.00	27	240	-	20	151	-	50	-	7	-
		kg	1,775.65	2,473.53	39.30	739.65	319.25	315.80	708.67	45.56	18.30	72.30	134.24	105.85	13.90
Total	no	6,410	1,313	-79.52	200	351	-	34	153	114	437	8	7	9	
	Plants	3,503	2,877	-17.87	794	25	2	65	63	23	189	-	1,703	13	

* Cannabis

Cannabis			2023	2024	Var. %	FI	AR	GR	LI	LU	MS	PI	PO	PT	SI
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	1,070	1,270	18.69	351	106	82	199	79	96	114	77	121	45
	Art. 74	no	14	104	642.86	101	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	1
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	407	527	29.48	143	53	43	70	38	50	47	18	40	25
	Foreigners	no	677	847	25.11	309	53	39	129	41	46	67	61	81	21
	Of age	no	1,017	1,305	28.32	435	104	68	193	74	93	104	74	118	42
	Minors	no	67	69	2.99	17	2	14	6	5	3	10	5	3	4
	Males	no	1,019	1,287	26.30	424	97	77	188	70	89	107	74	118	43
	Females	no	65	87	33.85	28	9	5	11	9	7	7	5	3	3
	Total	no	1,084	1,374	26.75	452	106	82	199	79	96	114	79	121	46
FOREIGNERS	Moroccas	no	230	286	24.35	92	4	12	31	20	34	9	31	48	5
	Tunisians	no	152	186	22.37	55	8	19	60	2	2	32	1	-	7
	Albanians	no	127	175	37.80	84	23	1	12	17	4	8	3	20	3
	Nigerians	no	27	33	22.22	7	10	-	1	-	-	2	11	2	-
	Senegaleses	no	20	27	35.00	20	-	-	5	-	-	2	-	-	-

		2023	2024	Var. %	FI	AR	GR	LI	LU	MS	PI	PO	PT	SI
DEATHS	no	21	26	23.81	5	3	-	10	-	1	3	-	2	2

METROPOLITAN CITY OF FLORENCE

		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
OPERATIONS		no	224	307	37.05	1.44	31.05
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	63.61	80.06	25.86	0.72	8.10
	Heroin	kg	1.03	0.91	-12.19	0.26	0.09
	Hashish	kg	121.06	579.73	378.88	3.33	58.63
	Marijuana	kg	116.26	78.11	-32.81	0.27	7.90
	Plants*	no	820	794	-3.17	0.51	80.30
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	3.77	0.30	-92.02	0.34	0.03
		no	6,077	173	-97.15	0.17	17.50
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	1.44	0.54	-62.32	0.09	0.05
		no	-	27	--	0.12	2.73
		kg	307.17	739.65	140.79	1.27	74.80
Total	no	6,077	200	-96.71	0.16	20.23	
	Plants	820	794	-3.17	0.51	80.30	

* Cannabis

Cannabis			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	239	351	46.86	1.38	35.50
	Art. 74	no	-	101	--	3.86	10.21
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	85	143	68.24	0.83	14.46
	Foreigners	no	154	309	100.65	2.85	31.25
	Of age	no	216	435	101.39	1.62	43.99
	Minors	no	23	17	-26.09	1.41	1.72
	Males	no	223	424	90.13	1.64	42.88
	Females	no	16	28	75.00	1.36	2.83
	Total	no	239	452	89.12	1.61	45.71
FOREIGNERS	Moroccas	no	45	92	104.44	0.85	9.30
	Albanians	no	23	84	265.22	0.77	8.50
	Tunisians	no	28	55	96.43	0.51	5.56
	Senegalese	no	10	20	100.00	0.18	2.02
	Gambians	no	9	10	11.11	0.09	1.01

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	3	5	66.67	2.16	0.51
	Foreigners	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Of age	no	3	5	66.67	2.16	0.51
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	3	4	33.33	1.73	0.40
	Females	no	-	1	--	0.43	0.10
	Total	no	3	5	66.67	2.16	0.51

2024 - UMBRIA

		REGIONAL	PG	TR
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	1.66	62.71	37.29
SEIZURES	inc. %*	0.64	20.84	79.16
PERSONS	inc. %*	1.53	66.51	33.49

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	PG	TR
OPERATIONS	no	307	354	15.31	222	132

			2023	2024	Var. %	PG	TR
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	24.28	44.61	83.73	40.47	4.14
	Heroin	kg	24.44	2.70	-88.96	0.39	2.31
	Hashish	kg	61.70	315.04	410.63	27.53	287.51
	Marijuana	kg	19.97	9.95	-50.19	9.10	0.85
	Plants*	no	188	98	-47.87	52	46
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.15	0.08	-48.98	0.04	0.04
		no	1.105	134	-87.87	134	-
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.02	0.10	420.00	0.08	0.02
		no	4	1	-75.00	-	1
	Total	kg	130.56	372.47	185.29	77.61	294.86
		no	1.109	135	-87.83	134	1
	Plants		188	98	-47.87	52	46

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	PG	TR
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	430	403	-6.28	260	143
	Art. 74	no	-	24	--	24	-
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-
	Italians	no	184	140	-23.91	78	62
	Foreigners	no	246	287	16.67	206	81
	Of age	no	404	411	1.73	272	139
	Minors	no	26	16	-38.46	12	4
	Males	no	397	393	-1.01	265	128
	Females	no	33	34	3.03	19	15
	Total	no	430	427	-0.70	284	143
FOREIGNERS	Albanians	no	113	119	5.31	102	17
	Tunisians	no	33	53	60.61	40	13
	Nigerians	no	20	29	45.00	17	12
	Moroccas	no	28	16	-42.86	10	6
	Romanians	no	10	15	50.00	3	12

		2023	2024	Var. %	PG	TR
DEATHS	no	15	8	-46.67	6	2

2024 - MARCHE



		REGIONAL	AN	AP	FM	MC	PU
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	2.02	30.47	11.40	13.49	23.49	21.16
SEIZURES	inc. %*	0.85	13.42	4.47	1.58	57.68	22.85
PERSONS	inc. %*	1.88	29.98	13.28	11.01	18.22	27.51

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	AN	AP	FM	MC	PU
OPERATIONS	no	499	430	-13.83	131	49	58	101	91

			2023	2024	Var. %	AN	AP	FM	MC	PU
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	13.58	17.04	25.48	1.94	1.80	0.60	6.80	5.90
	Heroin	kg	8.09	0.55	-93.20	0.28	0.16	0.07	0.04	0.01
	Hashish	kg	260.53	303.95	16.66	20.86	2.14	6.72	176.78	97.44
	Marijuana	kg	752.73	170.54	-77.34	42.68	17.90	0.39	100.32	9.25
	Plants*	no	304	1,479	386.51	23	31	16	232	1,177
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.14	0.73	443.70	0.36	0.05	-	0.31	0.01
		no	14	27	92.86	-	-	-	-	27
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.27	0.05	-80.97	0.01	-	-	0.04	-
		no	27	34	25.93	3	3	9	4	15
	Total	kg	1,035.34	492.86	-52.40	66.13	22.05	7.78	284.29	112.61
		no	41	61	48.78	3	3	9	4	42
	Plants		304	1,479	386.51	23	31	16	232	1,177

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	AN	AP	FM	MC	PU
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	590	515	-12.71	146	70	58	96	145
	Art. 74	no	15	12	-20.00	12	-	-	-	-
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	344	311	-9.59	119	31	24	63	74
	Foreigners	no	261	216	-17.24	39	39	34	33	71
	Of age	no	555	514	-7.39	150	69	58	95	142
	Minors	no	50	13	-74.00	8	1	-	1	3
	Males	no	557	481	-13.64	143	63	53	88	134
	Females	no	48	46	-4.17	15	7	5	8	11
	Total	no	605	527	-12.89	158	70	58	96	145
FOREIGNERS	Albanians	no	70	80	14.29	11	22	5	10	32
	Tunisians	no	49	35	-28.57	4	3	11	9	8
	Moroccas	no	32	22	-31.25	2	2	3	4	11
	Egyptians	no	7	11	57.14	3	1	1	3	3
	Algerians	no	5	8	60.00	1	1	6	-	-

			2023	2024	Var. %	AN	AP	FM	MC	PU
DEATHS	no		13	18	38.46	6	1	-	3	8

2024 - LAZIO

		REGIONAL	RM	FR	LT	RI	VT
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	18.92	89.48	2.03	3.00	1.91	3.57
SEIZURES	inc. %*	14.16	96.91	0.90	1.21	0.67	0.31
PERSONS	inc. %*	17.44	86.03	4.00	3.91	2.05	4.02

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	RM	FR	LT	RI	VT
OPERATIONS	no	3,731	4,030	8.01	3,606	82	121	77	144

			2023	2024	Var. %	RM	FR	LT	RI	VT
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	808.59	860.37	6.40	818.28	13.98	23.15	0.59	4.37
	Heroin	kg	12.23	9.94	-18.73	9.48	0.03	0.15	0.14	0.14
	Hashish	kg	9,877.30	5,584.64	-43.46	5,450.68	45.35	48.40	32.00	8.21
	Marijuana	kg	1,973.43	1,738.57	-11.90	1,660.45	15.07	27.58	22.82	12.66
	Plants*	no	4,902	1,495	-69.50	1,196	8	141	97	53
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	2.24	30.72	1,270.38	30.70	0.02	-	-	0.01
		no	127	250	96.85	247	-	-	-	3
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	176.50	23.29	-86.81	22.97	-	0.30	-	0.02
		no	12,079	1,411	-88.32	1,321	-	-	12	78
	Total	kg	12,850.28	8,247.52	-35.82	7,992.55	74.44	99.57	55.55	25.41
		no	12,206	1,661	-86.39	1,568	-	-	12	81
	Plants		4,902	1,495	-69.50	1,196	8	141	97	53

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	RM	FR	LT	RI	VT
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	4,560	4,615	1.21	4,053	125	151	100	186
	Art. 74	no	177	266	50.28	146	70	40	-	10
	Other offences	no	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	3,243	3,136	-3.30	2,651	133	167	62	123
	Foreigners	no	1,494	1,745	16.80	1,548	62	24	38	73
	Of age	no	4,520	4,638	2.61	3,999	189	179	91	180
	Minors	no	217	243	11.98	200	6	12	9	16
	Males	no	4,220	4,376	3.70	3,761	180	168	95	172
	Females	no	517	505	-2.32	438	15	23	5	24
	Total	no	4,737	4,881	3.04	4,199	195	191	100	196
FOREIGNERS	Tunisians	no	159	352	121.38	314	-	8	5	25
	Albanians	no	216	238	10.19	180	43	4	3	8
	Moroccas	no	176	203	15.34	172	1	2	18	10
	Egyptians	no	129	193	49.61	189	1		3	-
	Romanians	no	126	127	0.79	109	8	2	2	6

			2023	2024	Var. %	RM	FR	LT	RI	VT
DEATHS	no		15	26	73.33	12	-	8	-	6

METROPOLITAN CITY OF ROME							
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
OPERATIONS		no	3,316	3,606	8.75	16.93	85.34
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	760.31	818.28	7.62	7.38	19.37
	Heroin	kg	11.59	9.48	-18.20	2.72	0.22
	Hashish	kg	9,436.96	5,450.68	-42.24	31.33	129.00
	Marijuana	kg	1,664.88	1,660.45	-0.27	5.77	39.30
	Plants*	no	2,232	1,196	-46.42	0.77	28.30
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	1.91	30.70	1,508.01	34.49	0.73
		no	124	247	99.19	0.24	5.85
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	168.19	22.97	-86.34	3.82	0.54
		no	11,796	1,321	-88.80	5.86	31.26
		kg	12,043.84	7,992.55	-33.64	13.72	189.15
	no	11,920	1,568	-86.85	1.26	37.11	
	Plants	2,232	1,196	-46.42	0.77	28.30	
* Cannabis							
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	3,935	4,053	3.00	15.98	95.92
	Art. 74	no	137	146	6.57	5.57	3.46
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	2,749	2,651	-3.56	15.46	62.74
	Foreigners	no	1,323	1,548	17.01	14.28	36.64
	Of age	no	3,888	3,999	2.85	14.93	94.64
	Minors	no	184	200	8.70	16.64	4.73
	Males	no	3,625	3,761	3.75	14.51	89.01
	Females	no	447	438	-2.01	21.25	10.37
	Total	no	4,072	4,199	3.12	15.00	99.37
FOREIGNERS	Tunisians	no	152	314	106.58	2.90	7.43
	Egyptians	no	115	189	64.35	1.74	4.47
	Albanians	no	170	180	5.88	1.66	4.26
	Moroccas	no	141	172	21.99	1.59	4.07
	Romanians	no	114	109	-4.39	1.01	2.58
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DEATHS	Italians	no	9	12	33.33	5.19	0.28
	Foreigners	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Of age	no	9	12	33.33	5.19	0.28
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	8	11	37.50	4.76	0.26
	Females	no	1	1	--	0.43	0.02
	Total	no	9	12	33.33	5.19	0.28

2024 - ABRUZZI



		REGIONAL	AQ	CH	PE	TE
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	1.95	32.45	11.78	32.45	23.32
SEIZURES	inc. %*	0.59	17.91	3.83	66.01	12.24
PERSONS	inc. %*	1.88	34.60	10.46	29.66	25.29

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	AQ	CH	PE	TE
OPERATIONS	no	412	416	0.97	135	49	135	97

			2023	2024	Var. %	AQ	CH	PE	TE
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	148.93	22.49	-84.90	2.94	1.76	13.25	4.54
	Heroin	kg	15.42	16.86	9.34	0.02	7.11	2.60	7.14
	Hashish	kg	136.24	253.62	86.15	54.41	2.68	179.97	16.56
	Marijuana	kg	115.73	49.02	-57.65	3.96	1.52	29.85	13.68
	Plants*	no	2,346	193	-91.77	70	13	52	58
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.01	0.09	1,350.00	0.03	0.05	0.01	-
		no	-	704	--	1	-	500	203
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.05	0.56	1,018.00	0.02	-	0.50	0.04
		no	162	13	-91.98	-	-	-	13
	Total	kg	416.37	342.63	-17.71	61.38	13.12	226.18	41.95
		no	162	717	342.59	1	-	500	216
	Plants		2,346	193	-91.77	70	13	52	58

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	AQ	CH	PE	TE
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	569	500	-12.13	156	55	156	133
	Art. 74	no	3	26	766.67	26	-	-	-
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	399	330	-17.29	74	46	129	81
	Foreigners	no	173	196	13.29	108	9	27	52
	Of age	no	548	489	-10.77	173	53	137	126
	Minors	no	24	37	54.17	9	2	19	7
	Males	no	497	474	-4.63	171	50	137	116
	Females	no	75	52	-30.67	11	5	19	17
	Total	no	572	526	-8.04	182	55	156	133
FOREIGNERS	Albanians	no	52	63	21.15	39	3	6	15
	Moroccas	no	61	49	-19.67	32	2	7	8
	Tunisians	no	9	18	100.00	6	-	-	12
	Romanians	no	12	15	25.00	3	1	3	8
	Macedonians	no	5	11	120.00	10	-	-	1

			2023	2024	Var. %	AQ	CH	PE	TE
DEATHS	no		6	3	-50.00	-	1	1	1

2024 - MOLISE

		REGIONAL	CB	IS
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	0.39	85.54	14.46
SEIZURES	inc. %*	0.11	14.55	85.45
PERSONS	inc. %*	0.44	89.43	10.57

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory



		2023	2024	Var. %	CB	IS
OPERATIONS	no	86	83	-3.49	71	12

			2023	2024	Var. %	CB	IS
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	1.02	1.51	47.12	1.48	0.02
	Heroin	kg	1.70	0.62	-63.89	0.62	-
	Hashish	kg	42.26	7.69	-81.80	6.87	0.82
	Marijuana	kg	0.13	56.25	-42,511.36	0.64	55.61
	Plants*	no	160	26	-83.75	13	13
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	-	-	--	-	-
		no	-	-	--	-	-
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.01	-	-100.00	-	-
		no	6	-	-100.00	-	-
	Total	kg	45.12	66.06	46.40	9.61	56.44
		no	6	-	-100.00	-	-
	Plants		160	26	-83.75	13	13

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	CB	IS
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	120	116	-3.33	103	13
	Art. 74	no	19	7	-63.16	7	-
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-
	Italians	no	136	109	-19.85	97	12
	Foreigners	no	3	14	366.67	13	1
	Of age	no	125	120	-4.00	107	13
	Minors	no	14	3	-78.57	3	-
	Males	no	116	110	-5.17	98	12
	Females	no	23	13	-43.48	12	1
	Total	no	139	123	-11.51	110	13
FOREIGNERS	Egyptians	no	1	3	200.00	3	-
	Tunisians	no	-	2	--	2	-
	Romanians	no	1	2	100.00	2	-
	Nigerians	no	-	2	--	2	-
	Dutch	no	-	1	--	1	-

		2023	2024	Var. %	CB	IS
DEATHS	no	2	1	-50.00	-	1

2024 - CAMPANIA

		REGIONAL	NA	AV	BN	CE	SA
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	9.31	72.82	2.57	2.82	10.09	11.70
SEIZURES	inc. %*	3.55	58.54	2.00	1.25	8.27	29.94
PERSONS	inc. %*	9.80	67.92	2.19	2.48	11.30	16.11

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	NA	AV	BN	CE	SA
OPERATIONS	no	1,775	1,983	11.72	1,444	51	56	200	232

			2023	2024	Var. %	NA	AV	BN	CE	SA
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	893.00	818.39	-8.35	281.45	6.25	1.25	74.50	454.94
	Heroin	kg	10.63	9.97	-6.24	9.26	0.27	0.02	0.34	0.08
	Hashish	kg	975.51	762.99	-21.79	676.05	11.05	4.80	21.29	49.80
	Marijuana	kg	1,689.01	474.72	-71.89	241.31	23.78	19.73	75.12	114.77
	Plants*	no	5,102	3,049	-40.24	1,976	50	437	523	63
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	1.00	2.87	187.59	2.73	-	-	-	0.14
		no	147	87,026	59,101.36	87,018	-	1	-	7
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.66	1.03	55.69	1.01	0.01	-	-	0.01
		no	420	151	-64.05	127	1	-	-	23
	Total	kg	3,569.81	2,069.96	-42.01	1,211.81	41.37	25.80	171.25	619.75
		no	567	87,177	15,275.13	87,145	1	1	0	30
	Plants		5,102	3,049	-40.24	1,976	50	437	523	63

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	NA	AV	BN	CE	SA
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	2,100	2,245	6.90	1,507	60	68	296	314
	Art. 74	no	473	498	5.29	356	-	-	14	128
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	2,327	2,479	6.53	1,692	58	64	246	419
	Foreigners	no	246	264	7.32	171	2	4	64	23
	Of age	no	2,499	2,660	6.44	1,811	59	65	299	426
	Minors	no	74	83	12.16	52	1	3	11	16
	Males	no	2,305	2,463	6.85	1,690	48	62	282	381
	Females	no	268	280	4.48	173	12	6	28	61
	Total	no	2,573	2,743	6.61	1,863	60	68	310	442
FOREIGNERS	Moroccas	no	10	14	40.00	31	2	-	21	1
	Romanians	no	-	10	--	19	-	-	2	10
	Chinese	no	6	5	-16.67	22	-	1	6	1
	Senegalese	no	3	4	33.33	16	-	-	11	-
	Nigerians	no	11	3	-72.73	11	-	-	1	2

		2023	2024	Var. %	NA	AV	BN	CE	SA
DEATHS	no	12	21	75.00	12	1	1	-	7

METROPOLITAN CITY OF NAPLES

		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
OPERATIONS		no	1,221	1,444	18.26	6.78	48.60
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	343.61	281.45	-18.09	2.54	9.47
	Heroin	kg	9.92	9.26	-6.67	2.66	0.31
	Hashish	kg	820.33	676.05	-17.59	3.89	22.76
	Marijuana	kg	1,390.08	241.31	-82.64	0.84	8.12
	Plants*	no	1,233	1,976	60.26	1.28	66.51
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.87	2.73	212.24	3.07	0.09
		no	102	87,018	85,211.76	85.65	2,928.94
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.40	1.01	155.56	0.17	0.03
		no	212	127	-40.09	0.56	4.27
		kg	2,565.22	1,211.81	-52.76	2.08	40.79
Total	no	314	87,145	27,653.18	70.20	2933.21	
	Plants	1,233	1,976	60.26	1.28	66.51	

* Cannabis

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	1,397	1,507	7.87	5.94	50.72
	Art. 74	no	338	356	5.33	13.59	11.98
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	1,609	1,692	5.16	9.87	56.95
	Foreigners	no	126	171	35.71	1.58	5.76
	Of age	no	1,684	1,811	7.54	6.76	60.96
	Minors	no	51	52	1.96	4.33	1.75
	Males	no	1,561	1,690	8.26	6.52	56.88
	Females	no	174	173	-0.57	8.39	5.82
	Total	no	1,735	1,863	7.38	6.66	62.71
FOREIGNERS	Gambians	no	21	31	47.62	0.29	1.04
	Tunisians	no	10	22	120.00	0.20	0.74
	Moroccas	no	28	19	-32.14	0.18	0.64
	Nigerians	no	10	16	60.00	0.15	0.54
	Ukrainians	no	4	11	175.00	0.10	0.37

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	3	12	300.00	5.19	0.40
	Foreigners	no	2	-	-100.00	--	--
	Of age	no	5	12	140.00	5.19	0.40
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	4	11	175.00	4.76	0.37
	Females	no	1	1	--	0.43	0.03
	Total	no	5	12	140.00	5.19	0.40

2024 - BASILICATA

		REGIONAL	PZ	MT
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	0.49	52.38	47.62
SEIZURES	inc. %*	0.10	48.76	51.24
PERSONS	inc. %*	0.56	49.04	50.96

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	PZ	MT
OPERATIONS	no	121	105	-13.22	55	50

			2023	2024	Var. %	PZ	MT
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	2.87	6.46	124.78	1.93	4.53
	Heroin	kg	1.94	0.47	-75.57	0.07	0.40
	Hashish	kg	29.90	25.97	-13.15	7.96	18.01
	Marijuana	kg	26.74	16.07	-39.92	9.89	6.18
	Plants*	no	157	18	-88.54	11	7
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	-	-	--	-	-
		no	-	-	--	-	-
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.02	7.87	46,182.35	7.87	-
		no	26	5	-80.77	-	5
	Total	kg	61.46	56.83	-7.54	27.71	29.12
		no	26	5	-80.77	-	5
	Plants		157	18	-88.54	11	7

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	PZ	MT
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	160	133	-16.88	77	56
	Art. 74	no	85	24	-71.76	-	24
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-
	Italians	no	212	134	-36.79	61	73
	Foreigners	no	33	23	-30.30	16	7
	Of age	no	236	150	-36.44	74	76
	Minors	no	9	7	-22.22	3	4
	Males	no	227	145	-36.12	69	76
	Females	no	18	12	-33.33	8	4
	Total	no	245	157	-35.92	77	80
FOREIGNERS	Nigerians	no	10	10	--	9	1
	Tunisians	no	1	4	300.00	4	-
	Dominicans	no	-	2	--	2	-
	Ghanaians	no	-	2	--	-	2
	Albanians	no	11	2	-81.82	-	2

		2023	2024	Var. %	PZ	MT
DEATHS	no	5	-	-100.00	-	-

2024 - APULIA

		REGIONAL	BA	BR	BT	FG	LE	TA
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	6.29	37.24	10.30	12.01	10.22	12.69	17.54
SEIZURES	inc. %*	17.75	14.57	79.83	0.46	3.42	0.82	0.90
PERSONS	inc. %*	7.40	35.15	10.00	15.26	11.49	11.59	16.51



* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	BA	BR	BT	FG	LE	TA
OPERATIONS	no	1,329	1,340	0.83	499	138	161	137	170	235

			2023	2024	Var. %	BA	BR	BT	FG	LE	TA
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	142.61	160.16	12.31	38.29	11.60	13.87	59.04	29.38	7.99
	Heroin	kg	59.29	82.26	38.76	35.34	8.08	1.05	32.27	2.58	2.94
	Hashish	kg	606.83	897.16	47.84	661.06	59.52	14.98	61.53	26.11	73.97
	Marijuana	kg	319.62	9,192.01	2,775.92	762.36	8,177.68	17.39	200.16	26.88	7.56
	Plants*	no	10,487	15,495	47.75	55	1	2,638	7,475	5,243	83
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.61	5.54	816.03	5.14	0.02	0.01	-	0.03	0.35
		no	83	317	281.93	45	8	1	-	117	146
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	1.41	5.63	300.36	4.77	0.04	0.06	0.25	0.03	0.48
		no	96	380	295.83	228	-	67	-	5	80
		kg	1,130.36	10,342.76	815.00	1,506.95	8,256.94	47.35	353.24	85.01	93.28
Total	no	179	697	289.39	273	8	68	-	122	226	
	Plants	10,487	15,495	47.75	55	1	2,638	7,475	5,243	83	

* Cannabis

Cannabis			2023	2024	Var. %	BA	BR	BT	FG	LE	TA
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	1,700	1,808	6.35	589	206	316	222	166	309
	Art. 74	no	412	263	-36.17	139	1	-	16	74	33
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	2,002	1,943	-2.95	659	192	301	224	229	338
	Foreigners	no	110	128	16.36	69	15	15	14	11	4
	Of age	no	2,038	1,998	-1.96	703	204	296	236	233	326
	Minors	no	74	73	-1.35	25	3	20	2	7	16
	Males	no	1,941	1,923	-0.93	683	189	292	216	228	315
	Females	no	171	148	-13.45	45	18	24	22	12	27
	Total	no	2,112	2,071	-1.94	728	207	316	238	240	342
FOREIGNERS	Albanians	no	47	48	2.13	26	6	6	7	3	-
	Gambians	no	8	15	87.50	15	-	-	-	-	-
	Romanians	no	12	14	16.67	4	1	5	2	2	-
	Ghanaians	no	-	5	- -	3	1	-	1	-	-
	Tunisians	no	8	4	-50.00	2	-	-	2	-	-

		2023	2024	Var. %	BA	BR	BT	FG	LE	TA
DEATHS	no	6	8	33.33	2	2	1	-	1	2

METROPOLITAN CITY OF BARI							
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
OPERATIONS		no	478	499	4.39	2.34	39.13
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	37.59	38.29	1.86	0.35	3.08
	Heroin	kg	4.36	35.34	711.39	10.16	2.89
	Hashish	kg	295.54	661.06	123.68	3.80	54.11
	Marijuana	kg	125.05	762.36	509.62	2.65	62.40
	Plants*	no	1,774	55	-96.90	0.04	4.50
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.08	5.14	6,168.29	5.78	0.42
		no	-	45	--	0.04	3.68
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.52	4.77	814.97	0.79	0.39
		no	34	228	570.59	1.01	18.66
		kg	463.14	1,506.95	225.38	2.59	123.35
Total		no	34	273	702.94	0.22	22.35
		Plants	1,774	55	-96.90	0.04	4.50
* Cannabis							
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	539	589	9.28	2.32	48.21
	Art. 74	no	165	139	-15.76	5.31	11.38
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	635	659	3.78	3.84	53.94
	Foreigners	no	69	69	0.00	0.64	5.65
	Of age	no	677	703	3.84	2.62	57.54
	Minors	no	27	25	-7.41	2.08	2.05
	Males	no	650	683	5.08	2.63	55.91
	Females	no	54	45	-16.67	2.18	3.68
	Total	no	704	728	3.41	2.60	59.59
FOREIGNERS	Albanians	no	31	26	-16.13	0.24	2.13
	Gambians	no	7	15	114.29	0.14	1.23
	Romanians	no	3	4	33.33	0.04	0.33
	Nigerians	no	-	3	--	0.03	0.25
	Ghanaians	no	-	3	--	0.03	0.25
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DEATHS	Italians	no	2	2	--	0.87	0.16
	Foreigners	no	1	-	-100.00	--	--
	Of age	no	3	2	-33.33	0.87	0.16
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	3	2	-33.33	0.87	0.16
	Females	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Total	no	3	2	-33.33	0.87	0.16

2024 - CALABRIA

		REGIONAL	CZ	CS	KR	RC	VV
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	2.37	21.63	33.13	14.88	20.63	9.72
SEIZURES	inc. %*	9.53	1.73	11.49	0.46	85.45	0.87
PERSONS	inc. %*	3.38	28.57	41.48	14.92	12.59	2.43

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	CZ	CS	KR	RC	VV
OPERATIONS	no	577	504	-12.65	109	167	75	104	49

			2022	2023	Var. %	CZ	CS	KR	RC	VV
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	4,992.07	4,429.59	-11.27	28.83	167.98	2.53	4,227.22	3.03
	Heroin	kg	17.33	10.66	-38.49	0.93	1.57	6.90	1.10	0.17
	Hashish	kg	215.93	214.02	-0.88	16.44	22.57	6.00	168.65	0.36
	Marijuana	kg	4,158.47	897.60	-78.42	50.01	445.99	9.99	347.02	44.59
	Plants*	no	29,430	16,753	-43.08	714	7,140	912	5,304	2,683
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.09	0.02	-78.16	-	0.01	-	0.01	-
		no	48.00	62.00	29.17	11.00	51.00	-	-	-
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.12	0.05	-55.93	0.04	0.01	-	-	-
		no	27	45	66.67	-	41	1	3	-
	Total	kg	9,384.01	5,551.95	-40.84	96.25	638.12	25.44	4,743.99	48.15
		no	75	107	42.67	11	92	1	3	0
	Plants		29,430	16,753	-43.08	714	7,140	912	5,304	2,683

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	CZ	CS	KR	RC	VV
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	627	575	-8.29	133	230	70	119	23
	Art. 74	no	652	370	-43.25	137	162	71	-	-
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	-	-	-	-	-
	Italians	no	1,199	888	-25.94	257	362	138	110	21
	Foreigners	no	80	57	-28.75	13	30	3	9	2
	Of age	no	1,269	937	-26.16	269	390	137	118	23
	Minors	no	10	8	-20.00	1	2	4	1	-
	Males	no	1,174	861	-26.66	243	354	132	109	23
	Females	no	105	84	-20.00	27	38	9	10	-
	Total	no	1,279	945	-26.11	270	392	141	119	23
FOREIGNERS	Moroccas	no	10	14	40.00	-	8	1	4	1
	Romanians	no	-	10	--	1	5	1	2	1
	Chinese	no	6	5	-16.67	-	5	-	-	-
	Senegaleses	no	3	4	33.33	-	3	1	-	-
	Nigerians	no	11	3	-72.73	-	2	1	-	-

			2023	2024	Var. %	CZ	CS	KR	RC	VV
DEATHS	no		2	2	--	-	2	-	-	-

METROPOLITAN CITY OF REGGIO CALABRIA

		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
OPERATIONS		no	132	104	-21.21	0.49	20.19
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	4,936.58	4,227.22	-14.37	38.14	820.57
	Heroin	kg	0.37	1.10	193.83	0.31	0.21
	Hashish	kg	109.72	168.65	53.72	0.97	32.74
	Marijuana	kg	3,412.81	347.02	-89.83	1.21	67.36
	Plants*	no	7,713	5,304	-31.23	3.43	1,029.60
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.02	0.01	-50.00	0.01	--
		no	-	-	--	--	--
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	-	-	--	--	--
		no	-	3	--	0.01	0.58
		kg	8,459.50	4,743.99	-43.92	8.14	920.89
Total	no	-	3	--	--	0.58	
	Plants	7,713	5,304	-31.23	3.43	1,029.60	

* Cannabis

Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	119	119	--	0.47	23.10
	Art. 74	no	220	-	-100.00	--	--
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	327	110	-66.36	0.64	21.35
	Foreigners	no	12	9	-25.00	0.08	1.75
	Of age	no	339	118	-65.19	0.44	22.91
	Minors	no	-	1	--	0.08	0.19
	Males	no	323	109	-66.25	0.42	21.16
	Females	no	16	10	-37.50	0.49	1.94
	Total	no	339	119	-64.90	0.43	23.10
FOREIGNERS	Nigerians	no	-	1	--	0.01	0.19
	Gambians	no	4	1	-75.00	0.01	0.19
	Moroccas	no	3	1	-66.67	0.01	0.19
	Egyptians	no	-	1	--	0.01	0.19
	Romanians	no	-	1	--	0.01	0.19

		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	-	-	--	--
	Foreigners	no	-	-	--	--
	Of age	no	-	-	--	--
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--
	Males	no	-	-	--	--
	Females	no	-	-	--	--
	Total	no	-	-	--	--

2024 - SICILY

		REGIONAL	PA	AG	CL	CT	EN	ME	RG	SR	TP
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	5.55	24.96	5.41	5.84	29.61	1.44	12.18	4.15	10.41	6.01
SEIZURES	inc. %*	3.62	21.92	16.66	3.12	33.85	0.52	4.67	6.77	8.45	4.04
PERSONS	inc. %*	7.44	21.81	3.99	5.62	31.80	2.21	16.91	3.22	8.50	5.96

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

			2023	2024	Var. %	PA	AG	CL	CT	EN	ME	RG	SR	TP
OPERATIONS		no	1,327	1,182	-10.93	295	64	69	350	17	144	49	123	71
			2023	2024	Var. %	PA	AG	CL	CT	EN	ME	RG	SR	TP
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	5,644.02	704.18	-87.52	90.34	38.13	5.52	518.33	0.15	19.09	18.19	5.07	9.36
	Heroin	kg	0.25	19.16	7,471.54	18.73	0.01	0.02	-	-	0.27	-	0.01	0.11
	Hashish	kg	889.22	743.97	-16.33	281.33	126.59	27.53	19.90	2.32	49.42	123.24	82.93	30.73
	Marijuana	kg	1,088.83	633.29	-41.84	66.64	186.43	32.67	173.58	8.39	29.66	1.21	89.82	44.91
	Plants*	no	8,959	3,318	-62.96	1,526	26	-	451	-	60	58	1,113	84
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	1.87	5.91	217.05	4.77	0.01	-	0.60	0.09	0.09	-	0.37	-
		no	83	79	-4.82	-	4	-	1	-	43	-	1	30
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.34	1.38	305.28	0.17	0.05	0.02	1.05	-	-	-	-	0.08
		no	46	212	360.87	-	-	174	1	2	35	-	-	-
		kg	7,624.53	2,107.90	-72.35	461.98	351.21	65.76	713.45	10.95	98.52	142.63	178.20	85.18
Total	no	129	291	125.58	-	4	174	2	2	78	-	1	30	
	Plants	8,959	3,318	-62.96	1,526	26	-	451	-	60	58	1,113	84	

* Cannabis

Cannabis			2023	2024	Var. %	PA	AG	CL	CT	EN	ME	RG	SR	TP
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	1,824	1,508	-17.32	348	83	77	435	46	166	67	176	110
	Art. 74	no	374	572	52.94	106	-	40	227	-	186	-	1	12
	Other offences	no	-	2	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
	Italians	no	2,042	1,942	-4.90	420	64	114	639	44	334	46	174	107
	Foreigners	no	156	140	-10.26	34	19	3	23	2	18	21	3	17
	Of age	no	2,124	2,012	-5.27	437	78	115	637	43	347	65	169	121
	Minors	no	74	70	-5.41	17	5	2	25	3	5	2	8	3
	Males	no	2,026	1,932	-4.64	429	74	106	635	42	310	64	160	112
	Females	no	172	150	-12.79	25	9	11	27	4	42	3	17	12
	Total	no	2,198	2,082	-5.28	454	83	117	662	46	352	67	177	124
FOREIGNERS	Gambians	no	34	25	-26.47	3	6	2	4	1	1	5	1	2
	Tunisians	no	31	22	-29.03	4	4	1	-	-	1	4	-	8
	Nigerians	no	4	17	325.00	16	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	Moroccas	no	7	13	85.71	3	4	-	1	-	3	-	1	1
	Albanians	no	11	9	-18.18	2	-	-	1	-	2	4	-	-

		2023	2024	Var. %	PA	AG	CL	CT	EN	ME	RG	SR	TP
DEATHS	no	12	10	-16.67	3	1	3	-	-	-	2	-	1

METROPOLITAN CITY OF CATANIA

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
OPERATIONS		no	331	350	5.74	1.64	32.65
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	60.10	518.33	762.40	4.68	48.36
	Heroin	kg	0.07	-	-98.48	--	--
	Hashish	kg	11.73	19.90	69.65	0.11	1.86
	Marijuana	kg	262.04	173.58	-33.76	0.60	16.19
	Plants*	no	284	451	58.80	0.29	42.08
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.84	0.60	-29.33	0.67	0.06
		no	36	1	-97.22	--	0.09
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.07	1.05	1,492.42	0.17	0.10
		no	21	1	-95.24	--	0.09
		kg	334.84	713.45	113.07	1.22	66.57
Total	no	57	2	-96.49	0.00	0.19	
	Plants	284	451	58.80	0.29	42.08	

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	460	435	-5.43	1.71	40.59
	Art. 74	no	208	227	9.13	8.67	21.18
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	633	639	0.95	3.73	59.62
	Foreigners	no	35	23	-34.29	0.21	2.15
	Of age	no	641	637	-0.62	2.38	59.43
	Minors	no	27	25	-7.41	2.08	2.33
	Males	no	634	635	0.16	2.45	59.25
	Females	no	34	27	-20.59	1.31	2.52
	Total	no	668	662	-0.90	2.37	61.76
FOREIGNERS	Romanians	no	6	4	-33.33	0.04	0.37
	Gambians	no	2	4	100.00	0.04	0.37
	Colombiani	no	-	3	--	0.03	0.28
	French	no	-	1	--	0.01	0.09
	Moroccas	no	-	1	--	0.01	0.09

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Foreigners	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Of age	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Females	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Total	no	-	-	--	--	--

METROPOLITAN CITY OF MESSINA

		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
OPERATIONS		no	163	144	-11.66	0.68	24.08
		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people	
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	90.48	19.09	-78.90	0.17	3.19
	Heroin	kg	-	0.27	--	0.08	0.05
	Hashish	kg	135.41	49.42	-63.51	0.28	8.26
	Marijuana	kg	70.80	29.66	-58.11	0.10	4.96
	Plants*	no	215	60	-72.09	0.04	10.03
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.22	0.09	-61.36	0.10	0.01
		no	6	43	616.67	0.04	7.19
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.24	-	-98.33	--	--
		no	-	35	--	0.16	5.85
	Total	kg	297.15	98.52	-66.84	0.17	16.47
no		6	78	1,200.00	0.06	13.04	
Plants		215	60	-72.09	0.04	10.03	

* Cannabis

* Cannabis

			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	215	166	-22.79	0.65	27.76
	Art. 74	no	20	186	830.00	7.10	31.10
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	223	334	49.78	1.95	55.85
	Foreigners	no	12	18	50.00	0.17	3.01
	Of age	no	230	347	50.87	1.30	58.02
	Minors	no	5	5	--	0.42	0.84
	Males	no	209	310	48.33	1.20	51.83
	Females	no	26	42	61.54	2.04	7.02
	Total	no	235	352	49.79	1.26	58.86
FOREIGNERS	Moroccas	no	1	3	200.00	0.03	0.50
	Egyptians	no	-	3	--	0.03	0.50
	Albanians	no	1	2	100.00	0.02	0.33
	Romanians	no	2	2	--	0.02	0.33
	Somalis	no	-	2	--	0.02	0.33

		2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	-	-	--	--
	Foreigners	no	-	-	--	--
	Of age	no	-	-	--	--
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--
	Males	no	-	-	--	--
	Females	no	-	-	--	--
	Total	no	-	-	--	--

METROPOLITAN CITY OF PALERMO							
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
OPERATIONS		no	344	295	-14.24	1.39	24.58
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	91.43	90.34	-1.19	0.82	7.53
	Heroin	kg	0.03	18.73	62,346.67	5.38	1.56
	Hashish	kg	538.46	281.33	-47.75	1.62	23.44
	Marijuana	kg	78.53	66.64	-15.13	0.23	5.55
	Plants*	no	2,228	1,526	-31.51	0.99	127.14
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.12	4.77	3,841.32	5.36	0.40
		no	3	-	-100.00	--	--
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	0.02	0.17	962.50	0.03	0.01
		no	-	-	--	--	--
		kg	708.58	461.98	-34.80	0.79	38.49
Total		no	3	-	-100.00	0.00	--
		Plants	2,228	1,526	-31.51	0.99	127.14
* Cannabis							
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	430	348	-19.07	1.37	28.99
	Art. 74	no	59	106	79.66	4.05	8.83
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	469	420	-10.45	2.45	34.99
	Foreigners	no	20	34	70.00	0.31	2.83
	Of age	no	483	437	-9.52	1.63	36.41
	Minors	no	6	17	183.33	1.41	1.42
	Males	no	454	429	-5.51	1.65	35.74
	Females	no	35	25	-28.57	1.21	2.08
	Total	no	489	454	-7.16	1.62	37.83
FOREIGNERS	Nigerians	no	3	16	433.33	0.15	1.33
	Tunisians	no	4	4	--	0.04	0.33
	Gambians	no	2	3	50.00	0.03	0.25
	Moroccas	no	1	3	200.00	0.03	0.25
	Albanians	no	-	2	--	0.02	0.17
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	4	2	-50.00	0.87	0.17
	Foreigners	no	-	1	--	0.43	0.08
	Of age	no	4	3	-25.00	1.30	0.25
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	4	3	-25.00	1.30	0.25
	Females	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Total	no	4	3	-25.00	1.30	0.25

2024 - SARDINIA

		REGIONAL	CA	NU	OR	SS
OPERATIONS	inc. %*	2.30	44.29	17.96	12.86	24.90
SEIZURES	inc. %*	13.14	8.50	69.62	12.62	9.26
PERSONS	inc. %*	2.40	46.35	16.69	15.05	21.91

* Impact of the Region on the national territory and of the Province on the regional territory

		2023	2024	Var. %	CA	NU	OR	SS
OPERATIONS	no	525	490	-6.67	217	88	63	122

			2023	2024	Var. %	CA	NU	OR	SS
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	114.73	169.35	47.61	48.36	0.43	2.04	118.51
	Heroin	kg	10.06	4.20	-58.28	1.22	0.03	0.03	2.92
	Hashish	kg	240.64	383.53	59.38	334.54	0.81	44.23	3.96
	Marijuana	kg	22,661.44	7,096.33	-68.69	264.80	5,329.20	919.89	582.44
	Plants*	no	72,698	100,336	38.02	19,725	29,215	46,183	5,213
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.24	0.83	246.86	0.72	-	0.05	0.06
		no	5	417	8,240.00	354	-	10	53
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	6.73	2.41	-64.17	1.26	0.05	0.06	1.03
		no	14	86	514.29	60	3	0	23
		kg	23,033.84	7,656.65	-66.76	650.91	5,330.52	966.30	708.92
Total	no	19	503	2,547.37	414	3	10	76	
	Plants	72,698	100,336	38.02	19,725	29,215	46,183	5,213	

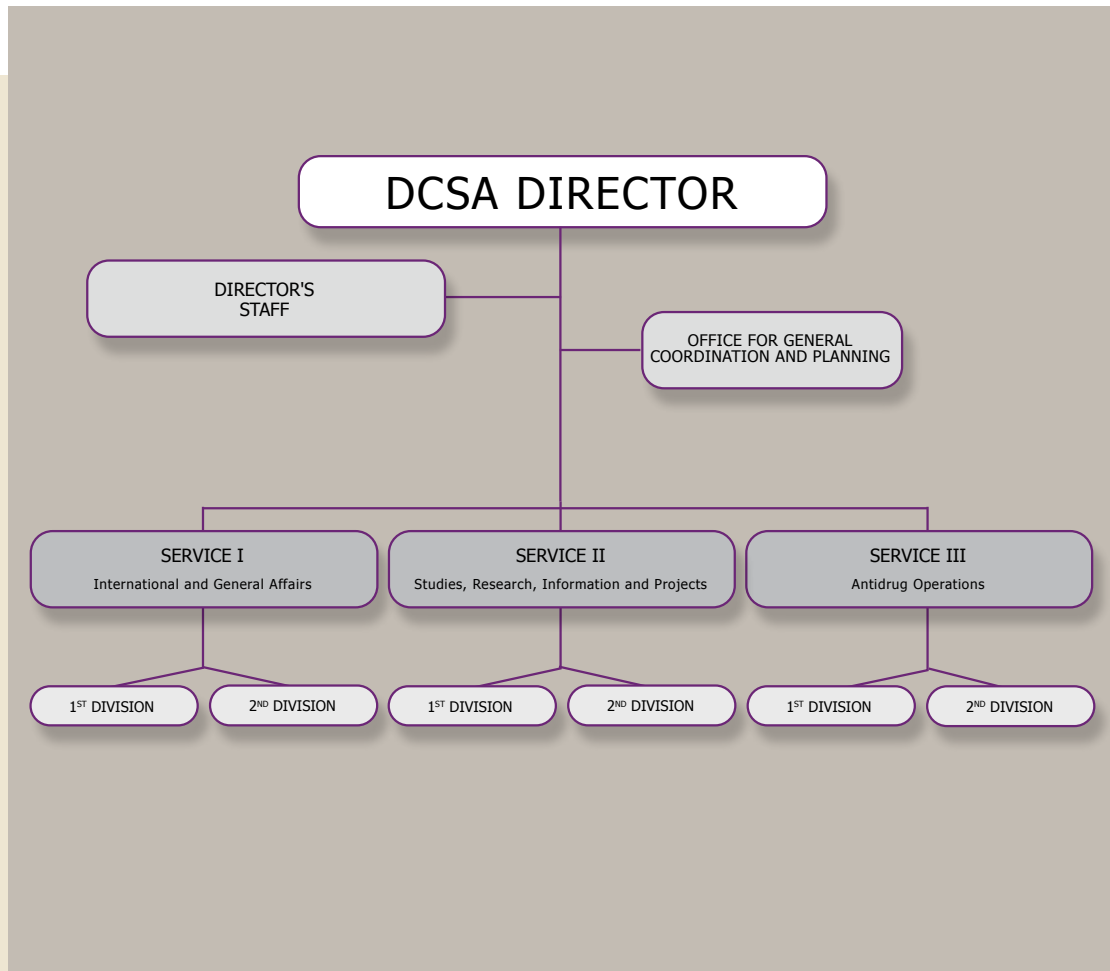
* Cannabis

Cannabis			2023	2024	Var. %	CA	NU	OR	SS	
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	680	627	-7.79	269	112	101	145	
	Art. 74	no	140	44	-68.57	42	0	0	2	
	Other offences	no	0	0	- -	0	0	0	0	
	Italians	no	745	610	-18.12	285	110	94	121	
	Foreigners	no	75	61	-18.67	26	2	7	26	
	Of age	no	788	641	-18.65	300	111	95	135	
	Minors	no	32	30	-6.25	11	1	6	12	
	Males	no	753	609	-19.12	277	106	95	131	
	Females	no	67	62	-7.46	34	6	6	16	
	Total	no	820	671	-18.17	311	112	101	147	
FOREIGNERS	Nigerians	no	13	16	23.08	1	1	3	15	
	Spanish	no	6	9	50.00	7			2	
	Romanians	no	3	6	100.00	2			2	
	Tunisians	no	3	4	33.33	1			1	2
	Colombiani	no		4	- -	2				2

		2023	2024	Var. %	CA	NU	OR	SS
DEATHS	no	11	12	9.09	1	-	-	11

METROPOLITAN CITY OF CAGLIARI							
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
OPERATIONS		no	185	217	17.30	1.02	51.79
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DRUG SEIZURES	Cocaine	kg	32.01	48.36	51.07	0.44	11.54
	Heroin	kg	7.90	1.22	-84.51	0.35	0.29
	Hashish	kg	27.57	334.54	1113.49	1.92	79.85
	Marijuana	kg	2,609.97	264.80	-89.85	0.92	63.20
	Plants*	no	16,439	19,725	19.99	12.74	4708.06
	Synthetic (powder/doses)	kg	0.19	0.72	275.13	0.81	0.17
		no	-	354	--	0.35	84.49
	Other drugs (powder/doses)	kg	6.72	1.26	-81.19	0.21	0.30
		no	3	60	1,900.00	0.27	14.32
		kg	2,684.36	650.91	-75.75	1.12	155.36
Total	no	3	414	13,700.00	0.33	98.82	
	Plants	16,439	19,725	19.99	12.74	4708.06	
* Cannabis							
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
PERSONS REPORTED TO THE J.A.	Art. 73	no	244	269	10.25	1.06	64.21
	Art. 74	no	106	42	-60.38	1.60	10.02
	Other offences	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Italians	no	328	285	-13.11	1.66	68.03
	Foreigners	no	22	26	18.18	0.24	6.21
	Of age	no	345	300	-13.04	1.12	71.61
	Minors	no	5	11	120.00	0.92	2.63
	Males	no	316	277	-12.34	1.07	66.12
	Females	no	34	34	--	1.65	8.12
	Total	no	350	311	-11.14	1.11	74.23
FOREIGNERS	Spanish	no	3	7	133.33	0.06	1.67
	Pakistanis	no	-	3	--	0.03	0.72
	French	no	-	2	--	0.02	0.48
	Romanians	no	-	2	--	0.02	0.48
	Gambians	no	-	2	--	0.02	0.48
			2023	2024	Var. %	Incidence % national data	Ratio per 100,000 people
DEATHS	Italians	no	2	1	-50.00	0.43	0.24
	Foreigners	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Of age	no	2	1	-50.00	0.43	0.24
	Minors	no	-	-	--	--	--
	Males	no	2	-	-100.00	--	--
	Females	no	-	1	--	0.43	0.24
	Total	no	2	1	-50.00	0.43	0.24

THIRD PART



Organization chart of DCSA

01. FIGURES OF DCSA

Introduction	250
International cooperation	250
The fight	251
Technical support to operations	252
Prevention activity	252
Interinstitutional collaboration activity	253
Statistical activity	254
Legislative activity	254
Training	254
Management of the European projects	256

02. HERMES PROJECT 257

01. FIGURES OF DCSA

Introduction

The **Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services** carries out a complex range of activities deriving from the mission outlined in Presidential Decree 309/90.

Without specifying each activity, the **areas of intervention** are summarized as follows, quantifying the significant figures for **2024**, with brief qualitative descriptions, when necessary.

International cooperation

The DCSA's activities are, by definition, of international importance, as **drug trafficking** is a **transnational crime**.

International cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral, is one of the main aspects of the Central Directorate's operational policy, which can be summarized as follows:

- the evaluation of agreements on security and/or international police cooperation and the beginning of negotiations for bilateral agreements, in synergy with the Office for the Coordination and Planning of Police Forces;
- the planning and organization of visits and institutional meetings with foreign counterparts;
- the preparation of specific contributions and the drafting of reports regarding the actual situation for the consultation by the Minister of the Interior and the Chief of Police
- the General Director of Public Security or other bodies at the highest institutional level;
- the exchange of best practices,

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION - 2024

OPERATING MEMORANDUM	28
----------------------	----

OF WHOM:	SIGNED	4
----------	--------	---

IN TRADING	24
------------	----

OTHER BILATERAL AGREEMENTS	34
----------------------------	----

OFFICIAL VISIT OF FOREIGN DELEGATIONS	6
---------------------------------------	---

REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL STATE	93
-----------------------------------	----

INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS	62
------------------------	----

deepening the experience gained with various Authorities, Bodies and institutional representatives, the aim to strengthen the effectiveness of prevention and law enforcement;

- the management of initiatives and projects with the United Nations, the European Union and other international organizations, also with the contribution of the network of **Security Experts**, of which 20 are employees of the DCSA and are located in the areas of interest of the Central Directorate, as well as the **Liaison Offices** at **MAOC-N** and **Europol**.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS OF DCSA 2024



- 67a CND - Commission on Narcotic Drugs (18-22 march 2024), with the Italian delegation led by the Undersecretary to the Prime Minister Alfredo Mantovano:
 - 4 resolutions;
 - 23 new substances under control;
 - 3 side-event (Italy as co-sponsor);
 - Meetings of the DCSA with Iran e Argentina.
- Team of experts on synthetic drugs of UNODC.
- Task Force on Precursors of the INCB (in the UN context).



- Horizontal Drug Group" (HDG) of the EU:
 - *Public-private partnership (PPP)* regarding ports;
 - Strengthening of the cooperation with third countries.
- Dublin Group of the EU: Italian Presidency of the "Mini Gruppo" sull'Asia Centrale (with the security expert in Uzbekistan).
- Other EU Groups: Coalition of 7 European countries to fight against organized crime groups, South-Est Working Group, Pompidou Group, Selec, European Commission Precursors Expert Group, other EU groups.
- EUROPOL:
 - *Programme Board*;
 - 8ª annual conference on drugs (December 2024).
- COPOLAD III Program (UE Cooperation, Latin America and Caribbean).
- MAOC-N: Board of Directors.
- EMPACT meetings.

It should also be remembered that in **2024 Italy** held the Presidency of the **G7**, with a a lot of speech and events that fully involved the DCSA.

G7 PRESIDENCY ITALY - 2024



- **DCSA** experts speeches in various events, including:
 - *G7 Side Event "Meeting of forensic chemistry experts from the police forces of the G7-RLG countries"* (Rome, 15th and 16th October 2024)
- **Joint Italian-US project** "*Fentanyl and international trafficking of synthetic drugs via postal and couriers*"

The fight

Pursuant to Law, the DCSA carries out with its III Service information and investigative coordination activities for anti-drug operations led by police forces in Italy and abroad. These activities also include "special" operations (reported seizures/arrests - controlled deliveries, simulated undercover purchases), Joint Investigation Teams, rogatory commissions and coordination meetings.

LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES - 2024	
INFORMATION AND INVESTIGATIVE CONVERGENCES	2,232
CONTROLLED DELIVERIES	44
NATIONALS	39
INTERNATIONALS	5
UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS	3
JOINT INVESTIGATIVE TEAMS	15
INTERNATIONAL LETTERS ROGATORY COMMISSIONS	6
FROM ABROAD TOWARDS ITALY	2
FROM ITALY TOWARDS ABROAD	4
COORDINATION MEETINGS AND INFO-OPERATIVE MISSIONS	40
IN ITALY	28
ABROAD	12

Technical support to operations

The DCSA **contributes technically** and **operationally** to the **investigative activities** of the police departments and territorial offices involved in fighting against drug trafficking, employing experts from the Technical Means Section of the 2nd Division of the Service I, who also carries out research activities and participate in meetings for the development of technical and technological innovation.

OPERATIONAL TECHNICAL SUPPORT - 2024	
INTERVENTIONS	161
UNDER THE INITIATIVE	63
AFTER OPERATIONS	98
MEETINGS ON TECHNICAL/ TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT	5

Prevention activity

The General Planning and Coordination Office is responsible for holding information meetings on drugs and their dangers to health in lower and upper secondary **schools**.

This activity informed hundreds of students in 2024, despite the small number of staff assigned to the Office.

TRAINING AT SCHOOLS - 2024	
SCHOOLS	STUDENTS
	
→	810

Prevention also includes the monitoring and the report of controls of **legal trade** (import and export) in **precursors**, carried out by companies authorized by the competent Central Narcotics Office of the Ministry of Health: the DCSA may request clarifications from companies and, upon request of the aforementioned Ministry, it may carry out on-site checks, both directly or delegating the local police office,

if the Precursors Section of the 1a Division of the Service II detects anomalies in the documentation.

In particular, in 2024, a company that handles precursors was inspected in order to verify the correct management of fentanyl precursors.

Among the precursors most frequently handled in 2024, including imports and exports, there were acetic anhydride, potassium permanganate and red phosphorus.

MONITORING OF PRECURSORS TRADE - 2024	
TRANSACTIONS	2,187
NATIONALS	1,306
INTERNATIONALS	881
OPERATIONS AND IN-DEPTH INFORMATION	6

The same preventive measures include specialist support to local police forces provided by the New Psychoactive Substances and Synthetic Drugs Section of the 1st Division of the Service II, for the **sampling of seized substances for study purposes**, subject to authorization by the Judicial Authorities, with subsequent delivery to the forensic departments of the State Police and the Carabinieri for laboratory analysis to identify any possible NPS.

SAMPLES OF SEIZED SUBSTANCES - 2024	
	8

Interinstitutional collaboration activity

The core business of the DCSA is the collaboration with institutional, academic, public and private sector representatives, both national and international, with expertise in the chemical, biological, medical, scientific and technological fields.

In 2024, the Synthetic Drugs and New Psychoactive Substances Sections of the 1st Division of the Service II and the Legislative Affairs of the 2a Division of the Service I had:

- drafted the parts of the “**Drugs and national prevention plan against the misuse of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids**” involving the DCSA as well as coordinating with other departments of the Ministry of Public Security and the police forces to define the parts under their jurisdiction [see Part One - Synthetic Drugs];
- implemented the “**Fentanylabnet**” project, with the support of the DPA [see Part One- Synthetic Drugs];
- presented some reflections on toxicological analysis procedures at the **National Congress of the Italian Forensic Toxicologists Group - GTFI** (Naples, 8th and 9th November 2024).

In addition, the New Psychoactive Substances and Synthetic Drugs Section, as focal point of the police forces, contributes to the implementation and revision of documents to be published in the **National Early Warning System (NEWS-D)**, directed by the DPA, which is aimed at the early identification of NPS or new ways of using drug.

DCSA CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE NEWS-D - 2024	
	68
NOTICE	32
WARNINGS	23
COMMUNICATIONS	13

Statistical activity

All criminal seizures of drugs resulting from police anti-drug trafficking activities **must be immediately reported to the DCSA (Art. 87 of the Consolidated Law on Drugs)**. These data are fundamental indicators for the study of the drug phenomenon linked to illicit trafficking, both at national and local level.

The D.A.D.E. Section of the 2nd Division is responsible for collecting the aforementioned data, as pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 322 of 2nd Division of Service II is responsible for collecting the aforementioned data, being, pursuant to Legislative Decree no. 322 of 6th September 1989, the official body for **statistics** produced by **SISTAN** (the National Statistical System headed by ISTAT), to which it has belonged since 1982. For this reason, the Section is the recipient of the aforementioned reports which are used to foster and manage the DASIS (Anti-Drug Directorate Integrated Statistical System) computer archive in which the flow of communications received by the DCSA merges.

In 2024, the Section produced over 500 statistical contributions for institutional needs, including those of top political authorities, journalism, the academic world and research, at national and international level, as well as numerous papers for internal analysis needs of the DCSA.

STATISTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS- 2024

507

FOR NATIONAL AND
INTERNATIONAL
INTERLOCUTORS

Legislative activity

This is another specific feature of the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services, linked to the technical nature

of the particular **legal investigations**, which often have scientific content and require prior consultation between the Legislative Affairs Section of the 2a Division of the Service I and other administrations or bodies in the sector.

NEW LEGISLATIONS - 2024

- 

3

5
- Law No. 207 of December 30th, 2024 (Finance Law for 2025):
- establishment of a fund for toxicological tests on drugs seized from habitual users;
 - creation of the NEWS-D (new Article 14 bis of the Consolidated Law on Drugs);
 - financial coverage for 3 Anti-Drug Offices abroad pursuant to Article 11 of the Consolidated Law on Narcotics [see Part One - Synthetic Drugs].
- 2** The legislative Decree No. 156 of October 7th, 2024 introduces into the Article 70 of the Consolidated Law on Narcotics:
- obligation for “operators” in the field of drug precursors to report related movements to the DCSA (new paragraph 15);
 - penalties for trafficking in Category 4 precursors (various paragraphs) [see Part One - Precursors].

Training

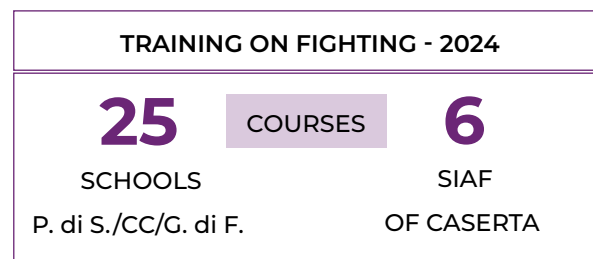
Training courses and initiatives for qualification and updating in the field of anti-drug activities at national and international level are some of the tools used by the DCSA to create a virtuous circle of dissemination of skills and knowledge for **Italian and foreign police officers**, with a view to establishing a genuine network between the various specialists, which will continue over time.

The various training courses are always supported by the involvement of experts in the field, academics and qualified operators from the national police forces.

The training activities in 2024 covered both drug law enforcement and prevention. In particular, the DCSA

has provided addestrative training and educational activities focused on fighting against the crime, which were attended by members of foreign police forces and the international agency UNODC. It also developed teaching programs abroad as part of regional cooperation.

Further training for police officers, including foreign officers, was carried out at the training schools of the Forze di polizia e la *Scuola Internazionale di Alta Formazione per la prevenzione e il contrasto al crimine organizzato* in Caserta (SIAF).



The DCSA also carried out a new training activity focusing on **prevention** for **police officers** responsible for conducting the so-called "**legality meetings**" in schools.

In agreement with the Department of Policies against Drugs and Other Addictions (DPA) of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, as part of a broader project that also includes the Ministry of Education and Merit and the Italian RAI channel, the "**Progetto InFormare**" was developed and launched in 2024. It is run by the DCSA's Office of Planning and General Coordination, with the support of the Service II, using innovative teaching methods, almost exclusively in the form of workshops. The aim is to promote a uniform basic specialist culture for members of various police forces engaged in this sensitive activity and the use of a related common language when approaching young people, in order to raise their awareness, once again, for the best prevention against drug addiction and addiction in general.

TRAINING ON PREVENTION - 2024



SEMINARS

3

ATTENDEES

45

Gestione dei Progetti europei

The DCSA takes care of the investigation of technological, IT and structural re-engineering initiatives, as well as

training, information, exchange of good practices, analysis, also jointly with other countries, **financed** by specific **European Union programs**, with the Projects Unit of the 1st Division of the II Service, coordinating with the “Single Purchasing Center” at the Central Directorate of Technical Logistics Services and Asset Management for the acquisition needs of goods and services.

DCSA EUROPEAN PROJECTS - 2024

6

CONCLUDED

2

18-29 NOVEMBER 2024- 2ND SEMINARS OF THE PROJECT “INFORMARE”



02. PROGETTO HERMES

For some years now, the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services has been analyzing the characteristics of illicit trafficking in synthetic drugs **synthetic drugs (SDs)** e delle **New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)**, given the growing phenomenon of their consumption, which is worldwide monitored due to their particular danger to human health.

These substances are consumed across all sections of the population, particularly young people, who are unaware of the risks associated with their use and are able to use internet, which is the main place where they are sold. Moreover, they are presented in many more forms than traditional drugs: liquids, gases, crystals, tablets, pills, *blotter* paper (stamps/sheets of paper soaked in psychoactive substances and cut into sublingual stamps). Furthermore, they are also consumed in innovative ways, such as electronic cigarettes. They are often cocktails of substances with devastating effects (e.g., 'pink cocaine', a *mix* of 2-CB, ketamine, amphetamine and other substances).

The places of production and trafficking routes are also unique because laboratories producing 'new' drugs can be located in any geographical area and can be on large-scale for international trafficking or on a small-scale for a local market. When their production/sale takes place within the EU, internal Community transit is exempt from customs controls, based on the principle of free movement of persons and goods.

International criminal networks rely on new technologies to produce new psychoactive compounds and re-precursors, as well as on encrypted payment and communication systems.

They are also at the forefront of new trafficking methods, exploiting social media and legal activities.

E-commerce, however, allows consumers to avoid direct contact with the drug traffickers and to purchase from a virtual dealer, using platforms (*vendors*) on the dark web, the open web, social media (Telegram, Instagram, etc.), which offer products that are apparently not for human use (substances for scientific research, air fresheners, bath salts) and therefore not suspicion. Online marketing also allows for fragmented distribution using common shipping methods.

As a result of these new consumption and trafficking patterns, by the end of 2024, **the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** had recorded over 1,200 psychoactive substances, reported by governments and international agencies, while **the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA)** had in charge **over 900**.

In this regard, the **European Union's 2021-2025 Action Plan on combating drugs** has, among its objectives, reducing the demand and supply of drugs and medicines containing psychoactive substances through a strategic, integrated, balanced and evidence-based approach, supporting national policies and the development of coordinated and joint actions, as well as creating the policy framework for the EU's external anti-drug cooperation.

The complexity of the phenomenon, which is a cause for concern and alarm not only in Italy, but also at EU and international level, has prompted the search for new strategies to implement the fight against synthetic drugs and

NPS.

In Italy, this objective has been pursued through the **HERMES Project**, based on the interinstitutional cooperation agreement signed on 20th November 2019 between the Department for Policies against Drugs and Other Addictions (DPA) of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - the national support structure for the promotion and coordination of government action on anti-drug policies - and the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services - responsible for planning and coordinating the police forces in the prevention and repression of illicit drug trafficking - **which ended on 31st December 2024**. The project was named "Hermes" from the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology, which, referring to the postal service, alludes to one of the most frequently used methods for dealing synthetic drugs and NPS: concealment in postal shipments and parcels sent by couriers.

The **operational results** of the project in relation to its **development guidelines** are summarized below.

1. Strengthening of law enforcement tools through technological adaptation

Operational activities in Italy and abroad show that there is currently no equipment that can detect concealed drugs on its own. Large scanners are used to check containers, but only human experience can understand what is concealed inside them. The greatest success in detecting drugs is due to the expertise of the control staff, who generally use technologies such as X-ray scanners (radiographic scanners). This is even more true for synthetic drugs, especially if trafficking takes place via e-commerce, given the extreme difficulty of monitoring a significant number of shipments and deliveries using traditional postal and courier services, in which small quantities can be easily concealed.

However, in order to tackle this new threat, it has been necessary to equip the police forces involved in fighting against the illegal drug market with cutting-edge technology to support their essential human capabilities.

The **testing** of portable Raman technology¹ was carried out in

¹ Raman spectroscopy is a non-destructive chemical analysis technique that provides detailed

ITALIAN POST OFFICE HUB OF LONATE POZZOLO (VA): CONTROL PHASES



THE PORTABLE RAMAN



agreement with the local judicial authorities - Public Prosecutor's Offices of Busto Arsizio (VA) and Milan - and with the collaboration of Poste Italiane hub in Lonate Pozzolo (VA), which moves packages to and from abroad, and at the three international airports of Milan Malpensa (VA), Milan Linate and Rome Fiumicino, where commercial areas for the transit of goods and correspondence from abroad are located. To this end, the departments of *Guardia di Finanza* of the three airports, the flying team of the *Carabinieri* of the Provincial Investigation Unit of Varese were assigned to the task.

With the funding of the project, **eight portable Raman devices** were purchased and **assigned** to the aforementioned **State Police and Carabinieri** departments and the ***Guardia di Finanza***, after completing a

information on the chemical structure of substances. When applied to synthetic drugs, it can determine their type in very few seconds, noticing if they are present in the portable device's "library".

PHASE OF THE CONTROL WITH THE RAMAN



specific **theoretical/practical training course** on synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, precursors, concealment methods, use of technologies and protective measures for operators. The course, which took place at the Provincial Command of the *Carabinieri* in Varese for the theoretical part and in transit areas for the practical part, was held by personnel from the DCSA, the Scientific Investigations Department of the *Carabinieri*, the Scientific Police Service of the State Police, the bomb squad of the State Police as well as the company that supplied the equipment. Three further training sessions on portable Raman equipment, integrated by information on synthetic drugs, NPS, precursors and clandestine laboratories, dedicated to police personnel involved in controls, have been held since 2021.

The control of postal shipments and packages by private courier in the three-year period 2022-2024 led to **the seizure of multiple types of narcotic**

HERMES PROJECT			
CONTROLLED POSTAL SHIPMENTS WITH PRIVATE COURIER	SEIZURES	DRUGS SEIZED (KG)	ANABOLICS/ILLEGAL SEIZED MEDICINE (packs)
20.000	1.657	2.298	3.026

SEIZURE OF 2 SMALL PLASTIC BAGS WITH MDPH



SEIZURE OF ANABOLICS



substances, synthetic and natural² anabolic steroids and illegal drugs.

During the complex international operation called "Molecola", which led to the dismantling of an organization involved in the production of methamphetamines in the Netherlands and their export to the European Union via Milan Malpensa International Airport, the *Guardia di Finanza* intercepted at that airport, with the support of portable Raman equipment, three shipments of drug precursors from China, for a total of 5,276 kg.

The Feedback on the Raman equipment control system, gathered from responses to a questionnaire administered to the operating departments and forensic police, returned positive assessments on the validity of the device as a tool capable of facilitating anti-drug operations in other sectors, in addition to those covered by the "Hermes Project", such as: controlled deliveries, searches carried out on the initiative or on behalf of the Judicial Authorities, administrative seizures of synthetic drugs during road checks.

2. Training.

The professional training of police officers in the specific field of synthetic drugs and New Psychoactive Substances has been essential for acquiring preliminary info-technical

² Amphetamine, methamphetamine, LSD, GHB, GBL, ketamine, MDMA (ecstasy), MDPHP, MAPB, MDPV, MPH, tramadol, oxycodone, 2CB (pink cocaine), DMT, 5-MEO-DMT, synthetic cannabinoids, hallucinogenic mushrooms, poppers, as well as cocaine, heroin, hashish, marijuana, and hashish oil.

knowledge and experience necessary for subsequent monitoring and law enforcement activities by the police. A lack of expertise in this area creates a vulnerability that affects anti-drug activities.

Between 2020 and 2024, **five courses** in total were held at the DCSA, some of which were **also open to foreign police forces**, with a total of **over 170 participating officials/officers**, and **seminars** were held at police force schools for with **over 8,000 attendees during the training courses** (inspectors and agents of the State Police and Penitentiary Police, marshals and non-commissioned officers of the *Carabinieri* and the *Guardia di Finanza*) and **their respective instructors**.

In particular, in 2020, the first course on “*Synthetic Drugs and NPS - Characteristics and Classification, Reference Legislation and Enforcement Systems*” was organized remotely due to COVID-19 restrictions; it were attended by 33 officials/officers from the State Police (Flying Team), the *Carabinieri* (Investigation Unit), the *Guardia di Finanza* (Economic and Financial Police Unit) and the Prison Police, as well as the Anti-Mafia Investigation Directorate and the DCSA itself.

In September 2021 and June 2022, the 2nd and 3rd courses were held, respectively, in person at the DCSA, with the participation of staff from the four police forces.

In November 2023 and November 2024, the 1st and 2nd courses on “*Synthetic drugs, precursors and clandestine laboratories*” were organized at the DCSA, which also included the topic of illegal laboratories for the production of synthetic drugs. In addition to members of the Italian police force, police officers from other

countries also participated³ confirming the considerable interest in the topic and the recognition of the DCSA as a competent international partner in the field. At the end of the courses, follow-up sessions were held for Italian participants only to provide specific insights into national legislation.

From 2022 to 2024, training on all the above topics by DCSA experts was implemented through a series of seminars on the theme “The Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services, synthetic drugs, New Psychoactive Substances, Drug Precursors”, held at the Academies and Training Institutes of the State Police, the *Carabinieri* and the *Guardia di Finanza*, at the presence of course participants and trainers. In particular, in 2024, a total of eight seminars were held at the schools of the State Police, the *Carabinieri* and the *Guardia di Finanza*, for inspectors/sergeants and officers/officials.

As already mentioned, from 2021, police officers from the offices/departments who were assigned with portable Raman devices and responsible for checks, were trained in three successive sessions on the topics during seminars, as well as on the technical functioning of the equipment.

3. Support for the information on the National Early Warning System (NEWS-D)

In order to safeguard the health of drug users, with particular reference to synthetic drugs and NPS, the support for the information on the activities of

³ In the 1st course: Hong Kong, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Serbia, South Africa, Algeria, Slovak Republic and Brazil. In the 2nd course: Austria, Croatia, United Arab Emirates, Greece, Morocco, Panama, Portugal, Romania, Spain and South Africa.

the National Early Warning System (NEWS-D) has been optimized, creating a **permanent risk center**, which is essential for the real-time identification of targets for further investigation.

Every year, the DCSA receives approximately 21,000 reports of drug seizures, which are processed for the coordination of investigations, for statistical purposes, for the analysis of the phenomenon and, last but not least, for information support to the activities of NEWS-D.

The System, directed by the DPA and managed operationally and scientifically by the National Institute of Health, promptly analyses information concerning, above all the emergence of NPS and new methods of consumption of substances already listed, activating as quickly as possible response actions throughout the country aimed at preventing and/or reducing the associated risks to public health.

The DCSA, which by law (Consolidated Law on Narcotics, Presidential Decree 309/1990) is the recipient of information from police channels, both as operating territorial offices and departments and as analysis laboratories (Scientific Police Offices, Scientific Investigation Departments, etc.), participates in NEWS-D as a first-level collaborative center, with the task of providing data and information on seizures and the presence in Italy of criminal phenomena related to substances covered by the report or alert, communications that complement those concerning the EU institutions and the Agencies of the United Nations (INCB⁴ and UNODC⁵).

The purpose observed of the Alert

System is questioned by the lack of the so-called second-level laboratory analyses certifying the molecular composition of the seized substance⁶, or by the results of chemical analyses ordered by the Judicial Authorities and carried out by private laboratories not belonging to the NEWS-D network of "collaborative centres", has led to the strengthening of the System.

Specifically, the specialist unit of the II Service II of the DCSA⁷ analyses all reports of seizures of synthetic drugs by the police, customs and local police forces, verifies whether second-level analyses have been carried out and, if so, by which laboratory. When these present profiles of interest to NEWS-D, it requests (pursuant to Article 88 of the Consolidated Law on Narcotics 'Destination of samples of seized substances') authorization from the Judicial Authorities for sampling; then, with its own trained team carries out the sampling and entrusts the samples to the scientific laboratories of the Police Forces who have access to the results of the tests on the dedicated NEWS-D electronic platform.

The coordinated efforts of the relevant institutional, health and law

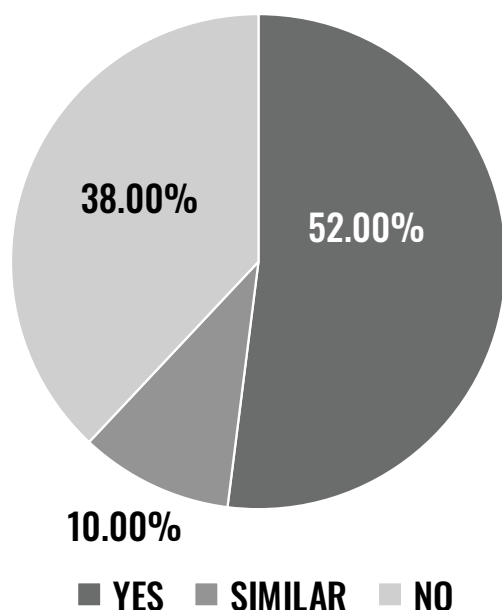
4 International Narcotics Control Board.

5 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

6 Reference is made to the seizure of drugs from unknown persons, with the consequent, identical registration of criminal proceedings for the violation of Article 73 of the Presidential Decree 309/1990: in this case, the Judicial Authorities rarely entrust the qualitative and quantitative laboratory analysis of the substance to the police force, which relies on drug tests for identification, communicating the results to the DCSA. This method has a high degree of reliability for 'classic' drugs (cocaine, heroin and cannabis), but can be inaccurate when it comes to synthetic drugs, due to the numerous variations in molecular structures, without considering the phenomenon of false positives and false negatives.

7 The 3rd Section on New Psychoactive Substances and Synthetic Drugs of the 1st Police Division.

PRESENCE IN THE TABLES OF PRESIDENTIAL DECREE 309/90 AT THE TIME OF REPORTING THE NPS IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE HERMES PROJECT



enforcement bodies have led to the inclusion of many new psychoactive molecules in the lists of illegal substances annexed to the legislation on narcotic substances. In fact, during the three-year period 2022/2024, 29 reports were sent to NEWS-D, concerning 21 New Psychoactive Substances, 5 traditional drugs, 2 methylphenidate and 1 GHB.

Among the NPS identified, 33.3% (7) were synthetic cannabinoids, 19% (4) were synthetic cathinones and 14.3% (3) were phenethylamines. At the time of reporting, 38.1% of NPS were not included in the tables of psychotropic substances of the Consolidated Law of 1990, while the remaining NPS were already included with specific indication (52.4%) or as structural analogues (9.5%).

In addition, 9 NPS were reported to EUDA and they were identified for the first time on the national territory (6 synthetic cannabinoids, 1 phenethylamine and

1 indolylalkylamine) or present on the list of substances under intensive monitoring in Europe (1 synthetic cannabinoid).

4. International cooperation

International activities relating to synthetic drugs and New Psychoactive Substances, including those which accompany the "HERMES Project", have provided important information: expert meetings, training courses and operational meetings on investigative activities which provided opportunities for discussion with foreign counterparts, offering an overview of new trafficking methods, routes, producing countries, best practices in investigations and new consumption trends. Among the various events held, the following are worth to mention:

- *Strategic Meeting 'Trends and developments related to synthetic drugs in the view of COVID-19 pandemic'* (remote), organized by Europol as part of the EMPACT Synthetic Drugs and NPS priority (9th December 2020);
- *Meeting 'Synthetic Drugs and New Psychoactive Substances'*, organized in Brussels (Belgium) by the Polish counterpart as part of a project in partnership with the DCSA and with the participation of Colombia, Spain, Sweden, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Interpol, Europol and the European Commission (1st and 2nd December 2021);
- CEPOL course on *"Illicit Drug Laboratory Dismantling"* in Belgium, at the training center in Ranst (11-14 October 2022);
- International course on *"Improving law enforcement response in the area of drug-related organised crime, with special attention on cocaine and synthetic drugs"*, organized in Poland by the Polish counterpart at the training

center in Legionowo (28th March-1st April 2022);

- CEPOL course on '*Drug Crime and Markets. Strategic analysis*', in Hungary, at the CEPOL headquarters in Budapest (18-21 April 2023);

- *Expert Meeting* on synthetic drug trafficking.

Expert Meeting on precursors trafficking for synthetic drugs
(Rome, 9-13 December 2024)





APPENDIX

01. “CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA”: A GALAXY OF CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS ACTIVE IN DRUG TRAFFICKING



Colombia	IV
Venezuela	VI
Peru	VII
Bolivia	VIII
Ecuador	VIII
Brazil	X
Mexico	XIII

02. PROFILING OF THE MAIN DRUGS



Anelgesics/Relaxants	XVII
Stimulants	XX
Analgesics/Depressants	XXIX
Anxiolytics/Sedatives-hypnotics	XXXIV
Hallucinogens	XXXVII

01. “CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA”: A GALAXY OF CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS ACTIVE IN DRUG TRAFFICKING

COLOMBIA

Although the signing of the peace agreement put an end to the FARC guerrilla war, the internal conflict in Colombia is far from over. The criminal landscape is diverse and is usually divided into:

- **Illegal armies**, which emerged during the 20th century with a purely political connotation of armed struggle against government authorities. Over time, they shifted from using cocaine trafficking merely to finance their armed political campaigns to becoming, today, almost exclusively drug-trafficking organizations. This refers especially to the **ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*)** and to the **‘FARC dissidents’**;
- **Organized groups**, which also emerged in the last century. These groups evolved from private armies initially formed to protect territories from the civil wars sparked by the two opposing political factions, into armed groups linked to major drug cartels. They then transformed into criminal gangs (**BACRIM**), and finally rose to the rank of **Organized groups**. This refers especially to the **Organized Armed Groups (GAOs)**, such as the **AGC Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia**, known as the **‘Clan del Golfo’** and **Organized Criminal Groups (OCGs)**.

- **The ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*)** was founded on 7 January 1965 in the Department of Santander. *The ELN*, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, financed itself through kidnappings, but also benefited from the presence of multinationals extracting oil in its area of influence by extorting them. It reached its peak in the 1990s, with some 5,000 combatants and at least 15,000 members of the urban militia. During the *FARC* disarmament process, *the ELN* began to take over key areas for drug trafficking and smuggling, such as the Catatumbo region. New *ELN* recruits turned their attention to neighboring Venezuela, where the group gradually expanded its area of influence, establishing itself as a binational guerrilla group.

The *ELN*’s structure is based on a pyramidal organization in political terms and a horizontal one in military terms. The Central Command (*COCE*), composed of seven members, makes important decisions, such as the resumption of negotiations with the government. Alongside the *COCE* is the **National Directorate (*DINAL*)**, a sort of parliament where the most important decisions for the life of *the ELN* are made, for this reason, each front participates in the National Directorate with nine members. *The ELN*’s horizontal military structure is confederal in nature, which grants the war fronts and their commanders significant independence of action and decision-making power over the group’s overall strategy. *The ELN* has seven war fronts across the country: the *Manuel Pérez Martínez North-Eastern War Front (FGNO)* with influence in the Department of Norte de Santander; the *Northern War Front (FGN)* with influence in the Departments of La Guajira, Cesar, Magdalena and Atlántico; the *Manuel Vásquez Castaño Eastern War Front (FGO)* with influence in the Departments of Arauca, Boyacá and Casanare; the *Jesús Darío Ramírez Castro War Front (FGJDR)* with influence in the Department of Antioquia and Sur de Bolívar; the *Central War Front (FGC)* with influence in the Departments of Tolima, Risaralda and Antioquia; the *Omar Gomez Western War Front (FGO)* with influence in the Departments of Chocó and Risaralda; the *Carlos Alberto Troches Zuleta South-Western War Front (FGSO)* with influence in the Departments of Nariño and Cauca. Added to these is the more recently consolidated *Camilo Torres Restrepo National Urban War Front (FGUN)*, with a

presence in the country's main cities, such as Medellín, Barranquilla, Bogotá, Popayán, Neiva, Cúcuta, Villa del Rosario, Bucaramanga, Barrancabermeja, Ibagué and Cali.

Currently, there are clashes between eastern and western factions of *the ELN* itself and open disputes with other armed groups such as **the AGC (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia)**, better known as **the 'Clan del Golfo'**.

- The **"FARC dissidents"**⁶. Since 2000, due to the worrying increase in guerrilla fighters, the changed threat posed by narco-paramilitary groups and also driven by commitments arising from the signing of the bilateral agreement with the US, known as *"Plan Colombia"*, the Colombian government attempted to reach an agreement with the guerrilla movement. After four years of negotiations in Havana, on 24 November 2016, representatives of the Colombian government and the FARC reached an agreement to end the conflict that had been raging in the country for over 50 years. However, just as the agreement had caused divisions in Colombian civil society, there were also disagreements within the guerrilla group. More specifically, some FARC fronts refused to hand over their weapons and move from clandestinity to legal life, as stipulated in the agreement with the Colombian government. The FARC and the government began to refer to these guerrillas as 'dissidents', and their decision to remain armed placed them in opposition to the agreement, naturally excluding them from all the benefits reserved for former guerrillas who had submitted to the terms of the agreement. Currently, after the heavy blows inflicted by government forces on guerrilla groups, the 'FARC dissidents' have moved from a phase of atomization to a structure that sees them grouped into three structures: 'South-East Bloc', 'Second Marquetalia' and 'Western Coordination Command'.
- The **AGC (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia)**, or the **'Gulf Clan'** or the **Urabeños** (from the Gulf of Urabá), are groups that emerged from the ashes of the Colombian paramilitary movement AUC (*Las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*) and have become the dominant criminal force in Colombia. However, due to pressure from the authorities, the influence of *the leaders* over each of the cells that make up this national network is weakening, and the group is at risk of splitting into independent factions. It is possible, although unlikely, that this process could be accelerated by the capture of the group's *leader*, Dairo Antonio Úsuga, alias 'Otoniel', by the security forces in northern Colombia in October 2021, but the opposite is more likely. This is evidenced by the unified response given in May 2022 by the criminal organization as retaliation for *Otoniel's* extradition to the US: during this episode, coordinated actions of *paro armado*⁷ (*armed strike*) took place simultaneously in at least 73 municipalities in 11 different departments, which shows that the integrity of the 'Clan' should not

6 The guerrilla organization FARC-EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército Popular) was inspired by Marxism-Leninism. It was founded in the 1960s, not only as a result of Colombian history at that time, but also following the Latin American liberation struggles, fueled by US-Soviet tensions during the Cold War. In its early years, the FARC-EP's military actions had little impact on the functioning of the state regime. It was, in fact, an isolated group with a small force that, at the end of the 1970s, numbered about 900 fighters. Their military capabilities were therefore very limited, as were their chances of gaining power. Everything began to change in the 1980s when the flood of money from drug trafficking increased the guerrillas' resources, allowing them to expand their areas of influence and military capabilities. It is estimated that in the early 2000s, there were over 20,000 guerrillas.

7 The *paro armado* (armed strike) is a common strategy used by armed groups in Colombia as a show of force in response to the assassination or capture of their leaders, in the face of army operations or on the eve of national elections. Armed groups carry out actions that block roads, limiting mobility, closing businesses and suspending classes in schools and universities.

have been particularly affected. On the contrary, it is worrying that an armed group had the capacity to carry out such a large-scale operation, even in areas where no acts of violence had been recorded for many years.

The AGC's organizational model is mixed: about one-third of the local cells are directly controlled by *the leadership*, while the others are local criminal organizations that, having decided to use the name of *the Urabeños*, must be ready to provide services or carry out orders at the request of the leadership. The *Urabeños*' network model requires local cells to be financially self-sufficient. For this reason, in addition to **transnational drug trafficking**, they are active in illegal mining, extortion and **micro-trafficking** in cities.

VENEZUELA

El Tren de Aragua is the most powerful criminal organization in Venezuela and the only one that, from a prison gang limited to the state of Aragua, has managed to become a transnational threat with a broad criminal portfolio. This expansion abroad has come at the expense of the massive Venezuelan exodus. Despite being imprisoned in Tocarón prison in Aragua, the gang benefited from its own cells established in other South American countries. In September 2023, however, 11,000 Venezuelan police and army officers raided Tocarón to apparently take control of what had until then been the center of *Tren de Aragua's* operations. Despite the loss of its operational base, the gang's *leadership* managed to escape, and its transnational cells continued to operate actively.

Tren de Aragua's expansion into Colombia, Peru, and Chile has, in some cases, transformed the local criminal landscape and attracted the attention of authorities in these countries and throughout the region. US concern about the group's potential expansion into the United States led the Treasury Department to include *Tren de Aragua* on its list of transnational criminal organizations in July 2024. In addition, the US State Department has offered millions in rewards for information leading to the arrest of three of its main *leaders*⁸.

The activism of its members on the border between Venezuela and Colombia has led to increased armed clashes with major Colombian criminal groups, including *the National Liberation Army (ELN)* and *the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC)*. The groups have fought for control of clandestine border crossings, known as *trochas*, which host a variety of criminal economies, such as **drug trafficking**, smuggling of goods and migrants.

However, *Tren de Aragua* has carved out a space for itself in the Colombian border town of La Parada, where many Venezuelan migrants, continuing to flee their country to reach Colombia, are forced to pay large sums of money or become victims of sexual exploitation. The group has therefore expanded following Venezuelan migration flows, creating cells in Colombia, Peru and Chile, with further reports of sporadic presence in Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil. As the cells have consolidated, the cartel has permeated local criminal economies, employing selective and conspicuous violence to exclude other criminal groups, posing a serious threat to security.

The ***Cartel de los Soles***, named after the sun insignias, that Venezuelan generals wear on their uniforms, is a non-linear criminal organization that has been operating since the 1990s and is composed of corrupt elements, ranging from high-ranking officers to lower-level personnel of the country's Armed Forces. The group is believed to control important

⁸ The leaders of the group are Héctor Rustherford Guerrero Flores, alias 'Niño Guerrero', Yohan José Romero, alias 'Johan Petrica', and Giovanni San Vicente, also known as 'Giovanny'.

segments of **drug trafficking** in Venezuela. It is a mistake to classify it as a common cartel, in the style of *Sinaloa* or *Jalisco New Generation*. It does not have a single leader and functions as if it were composed of a series of cells tasked with carrying out various specific processes⁹, such as collecting 'taxes' from drug traffickers, through the delivery of a share of the trafficked drugs or through periodic payments to corrupt military personnel. These payments allow for the creation of safe corridors for drug transit or for the use of military vehicles to transport narcotics.

PERU

The criminal landscape in Peru is characterized by the presence of **family clans** operating in the complex **drug trafficking** chain with different roles. There are those who procure raw materials (coca leaves and chemical precursors), associates with scientific expertise who work in clandestine laboratories to produce coca paste and cocaine hydrochloride, and then the actual traffickers who hold large quantities of drugs ready to be placed on international markets and broker wholesale deals with foreign buyers.

Overlaying this domestic framework is an international criminal network that finances drug production. This network is represented by emissaries or *brokers* who act as *the vested interest* of criminal organizations in the countries of origin. They carry out 'mediation' activities in the purchase of cocaine shipments with the United States and Europe as their main destinations, while also 'settling scores' between rival criminal groups within Peru itself.

Crimes such as extortion, kidnapping for ransom, prostitution exploitation, and human trafficking are largely controlled by foreign criminal groups active in Peru, particularly Venezuela's Tren de Aragua and, to a lesser extent, Ecuador's Los Tiguerones. However, international drug trafficking in Peru also involves foreign criminal groups made up mainly of Brazilians (**Comando Vermelho and Primeiro Comando da Capital**), former **FARC** Colombians, and Mexicans linked to the well-known Sinaloa and Tijuana cartels. Organizations involved in illicit drug trafficking are mainly concentrated in the eastern territories of Peru, on the border with Colombia, Brazil and Bolivia, as well as in the central part of the country, namely the VRAEM, the main cocaine production area and a very dangerous zone due to the presence of still active offshoots of **the Shining Path** (Sendero Luminoso) terrorist movement, now effectively converted into the armed wing of Peruvian and foreign *drug traffickers*, if not already directly involved in the drug trafficking system. The Peruvian coast plays a role mainly in the final stage of trafficking, serving as the exit point ('exfiltration') for maritime shipments of cocaine through major ports (Callao and Paíta), while air traffic takes place mainly through Callao airport (air couriers).

The most important criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking operate in the Amazon rainforest (in the eastern part of the country), in alliance with Peruvian family clans that manage coca cultivation and supply *foreign cartels* with raw materials. From here, a dense network of clandestine laboratories has developed near the main river routes, with numerous clandestine airstrips built along the rivers themselves: this is the eastern route, or 'air bridge', to Bolivia and Brazil, which is paired with the western port/maritime route.

⁹ Among the most important documented incidents associated with them are planes full of drugs blocked by foreign customs in 2011, or authorities such as former intelligence chief Hugo Armando Carvajal, accused by the US Treasury Department of providing 'material assistance to the narcotics trafficking activities of the Colombian FARC insurgents' in 2008.

BOLIVIA

Brazilian mafia-style criminal organizations, in particular the **Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC)**, have fought for control of Bolivian and Peruvian **cocaine trafficking** routes, especially in border areas. Recent investigations have revealed the existence of actual branches of *Brazilian criminal groups* and even *Mexican cartels*. Furthermore, numerous findings suggest that drugs are increasingly being transported along a route that uses commercial aircraft from South America to South-East Asia, involving mainly *Bolivian women who are used as couriers* to transport cocaine to these markets. *Venezuelan* criminal groups such as **Tren de Aragua** also profit from drug trafficking and human trafficking and are increasingly active in the border region between Chile and Bolivia.

ECUADOR

Although the country has been progressively involved in **drug trafficking**, it has never been the scene of bloody episodes of violence resulting from disputes between criminal organizations. However, since 2019, Ecuador has experienced an increase in clashes between various criminal organizations seeking strategic positions in the country. The influx of large quantities of cocaine from Colombia has triggered an increase in the circulation of money and weapons in favor of the gangs. Among these, **Los Choneros** (which used to recruit its members from prisons) is considered one of the largest and most powerful in the country: in 2019, it had 12,000 members involved in drug trafficking, contract killings (known as 'sicariato'), extortion, arms trafficking and all sorts of other illegal trafficking.

For greater logistical control, the gang had created, within itself, two other criminal sub-groups: the **Chone Killers**, who controlled the Guayaquil area and its surroundings, and the **Tiguerones**, located in the north, in the province of Esmeraldas. This 'organizational structure' made it possible to move cocaine shipments much more quickly within the country, allowing the drug to travel from the Colombian border to Guayaquil in just six hours: a logistical factor of absolute importance that could not go unnoticed by the major foreign cartels present in Ecuadorian territory - Mexican cartels, but also the Balkan organizations and the Brazilian PCC - who thus decided to exploit this opportunity to locate themselves and manage their trafficking from the Andean country.

What were once sub-groups of *Los Choneros*, the aforementioned *Chone Killers* and *Tiguerones*, but also other groups such as *Los Lobos* and *Los Lagartos*, joined forces in 2021 to form a new structure called **Nueva Generación** - in reference to their drug trafficking relationship with the Mexican *Jalisco* cartel - *Nueva Generación CJNG* - to oppose the main historical core of *Los Choneros*, who remained loyal allies of the Mexican *Sinaloa* cartel.

All of them, however, have important connections with **Balkan criminal groups**, especially **Albanian ones**, which supply cocaine to the crucial European market.

Alongside the groups mentioned above, since at least 1992, the year of its establishment, the gang known as **the Latin Kings** has traditionally operated in the country. Engaged in open conflict with the Chone Killers for many years, it has contributed to fueling a considerable spiral of violence in Ecuador, although its military strength now appears to be limited.

The most recent events that have plunged the Andean country¹⁰ into a security crisis — including the armed and hooded takeover of a television station on January 9, 2024— prompted President Daniel Noboa to issue a decree declaring a "state of internal armed

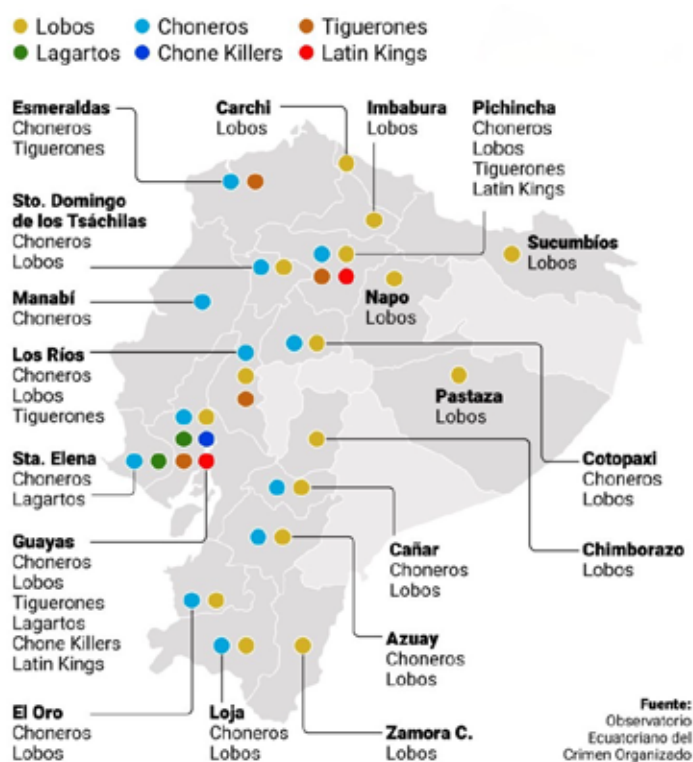
¹⁰ The year 2023 was marked by a dramatic increase in violence in Ecuador, with the homicide rate almost doubling compared to 2022, from 25.32 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants to 46 in 2023.

conflict at the national level” and ordering the military to neutralize illegal armed groups. The decree identifies 22 transnational organized crime groups as terrorist organizations and non-state belligerent actors (*Águilas, Águilas Killer, AK47, Caballeros Oscuros, Chone Killer, Choneros, Corvicheros, Cuartel de las Feas, Cubanos, Fatales, Gánster, Kater Piler, Lagartos, Latin Kings, Lobos, Los p.27, Los Tiburones, Mafia 18, Mafia Trébol, Patrones, R7, Tiguerones*).

Therefore, in addition to the six ‘historic’ criminal groups mentioned above, there are now 16 others.

Alongside these names, other little-known criminal groups have also appeared, such as the Caballeros Oscuros, the Corvicheros, the Cuartel de las Feas and the Kater Piler, whose role in the criminal world is currently.

PRESENZA DI GRUPPI CRIMINALI IN ECUADOR, SUDDIVISI PER PROVINCIA



BRAZIL

In Brazil⁶ 72 active “*fações*” (factions, i.e. criminal organizations) have recently been identified, including the historic *Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC)* and *Comando Vermelho (CV)*, but also the younger *Terceiro Comando Puro (TCP)*.

72 CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING IN THE BRAZILIAN PRISON SYSTEM		
1. Os Mano	25. Cartel do Norte	49. Os Mano
2. Anti Bala	26. Crias da Triplíce	50. Comando Classe A
3. Bala na Cara	27. Revolucionários do Amazonas	51. Amigo dos Amigos
4. Comando Pelo Certo	28. Raio B	52. Povo de Israel
5. Família 33	29. Primeiro Comando de Itabuna	53. Milícias
6. Os Abertos	30. DMP	54. Terceiro Comando Puro
7. Os Tauras	31. Comando da Paz	55. Primeiro Comando de Vitória
8. Os Tauras Pelotas	32. Bonde Dos 13	56. Bonde dos Maluco
9. Primeiro Comando Santamariense	33. Comboio do Cão	57. Bonde dos 40
10. PCS	34. Bonde do Maluco	58. Bonde dos Cachorros
11. Unidos Pela Paz	35. Katiara	59. Família do Norte
12. Conceição	36. Bonde do Ajelta	60. Okaida
13. Primeiro Comando do Interior	37. Primeiro Comando do Panda	61. Trem Bala
14. Alkaida	38. Real	62. Guardiões do Estado
15. V7-RS	39. Bonde do TG	63. Comando Litoral Sul
16. Sindicato do Crime	40. Bonde do Antonio Fal	64. Comando Leal
17. Primeiro Comando da Capital	41. Bonde 8 de Ouro	65. Primeiro Crime Revolucionário Catarinense
18. PCM	42. Bonde do Neginho	66. Irmãos dos Irmãos
19. Bonde do Cangaço	43. Mercado do Povo Atitude	67. Tudo Neutro / Massa
20. Comando Vermelho	44. Primeiro Comando de Eunópolis	68. EUA
21. Amigos do Estado	45. Primeiro Grupo Catarinense	69. Nova Okaida
22. Família Terror do Amapá	46. Máfia Paranaense	70. Bonde do Cangaço
23. Amigos Para Sempre- Aps	47. Ferro Velho	71. Terceiro Comando da Capital
24. União Criminosa do Amapá- Uca	48. Cartel do Sul	72. Comando Revolucionário Brasileiro da Criminalidade

⁶ SENAPPEN (Secretaria Nacional de Políticas Penais), Relatório do Mapa de Ocrim, 2023.

The **Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC)** is Brazil's largest and most organized criminal network. The group is believed to have expanded its operations to other Latin American countries, as well as Europe and Asia. After the October 1992 riot at Carandiru prison in São Paulo, in which Brazilian security forces killed more than 100 inmates, a group of eight inmates transferred to Taubaté prison formed the *PCC*. *Their initial goal was to demand justice for the massacre and to pressure authorities to improve prison conditions.*

Expressing solidarity with another prison gang, the *Comando Vermelho (CV)*, they adopted the slogan 'peace, justice and freedom' and supported revolution and the destruction of the capitalist system. In 1999, the group committed the largest bank robbery in the history of São Paulo, with a loot of around 32 million dollars. In the following years, the Brazilian government's decision to separate the *PCC leaders* and transfer them to prisons across the country allowed them to strengthen ties with other criminal groups and further spread their ideas.

In 2001, the *PCC* coordinated a major prison riot, involving 29 facilities in the state of São Paulo simultaneously, but in 2006 it organized an even larger rebellion. *PCC* members took control of more than 70 prisons across the country and held some visitors hostage. At the same time, the group carried out coordinated attacks outside the prisons, mainly in São Paulo, which left 150 people dead.

In early 2010, the group began expanding abroad, launching **drug** and arms **trafficking** operations in neighboring countries such as Bolivia and Paraguay, but also attempting to influence politics in the state of São Paulo. With more than 11,000 members across much of Brazil and monthly revenues of several million dollars, the *PCC* expanded its criminal portfolio and moved into large-scale international drug trafficking operations. The group developed ties with European mafias and began laundering money abroad, including in countries such as China. In 2015, the association was found guilty of a series of bloody robberies in Paraguay, and in early 2016, a video emerged showing the beheading of a teenager, presumably in connection with a feud between the *PCC* and its former ally, the *Primeiro Grupo da Catarinense (PGC)*.

At the end of 2016, a series of prison riots, which caused hundreds of deaths, marked the end of the *PCC's* long truce with the *CV*. This led to a frantic race to conquer territory, with alliances between multiple groups. During that period, the *PCC* appeared to be expanding, connected to international drug trafficking routes passing through Uruguay, as well as kidnappings and robberies in Bolivia and Paraguay, and attempts to recruit dissidents from the now demobilized *Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)*.

At the beginning of 2020, however, the group faced increasing pressure from Brazilian and international authorities. The group's *leadership* was decimated by investigations, which allowed the interception of encrypted communications, by continuous clashes with rival organizations and by the transfer of its *leaders* to federal prisons.

In recent years, the *PCC* has expanded its activities beyond Brazil's borders, developing cells in almost every South American country, filling a void in Latin American countries where no local organization dominated the criminal landscape. The group has also further diversified its criminal portfolio, engaging in cybercrime, such as money laundering with cryptocurrencies and online scams, and establishing links with European criminal groups.

Comando Vermelho (CV) is Brazil's oldest criminal group. Originally formed in the 1970s inside a Rio de Janeiro prison as a self-protection group for inmates, the *CV* started out with low-level crimes before moving into the **cocaine** business in the 1980s, collaborating with

Colombian drug cartels and assuming a social *leadership* role in many of Rio's marginalized neighborhoods. Since then, although it still maintains its power base in the poorest districts of Rio de Janeiro, it has a strong influence in prisons across the country, with the northern region of Amazonas and the western state of Mato Grosso as secondary strongholds. It is also present in Paraguay and Bolivia, from where it obtains most of its cocaine, and by 2022 is believed to have begun expanding into French Guiana.

The CV was born out of an alliance in prisons between common criminals and left-wing militants during the Brazilian military dictatorship between 1964 and 1985. The terrible conditions in the Candido Mendes prison on Ilha Grande, in Rio de Janeiro, led inmates to unite in order to survive within the system. Initially called "*Falange Vermelha*" (Red Phalanx), the alliance soon abandoned its name and left-wing ideology in favor of greater criminal involvement, and the press began to call it "*Comando Vermelho*". The CV's ideas spread to other prisons, and two decades later, a similar prison movement, the PCC, would arise in São Paulo.

Colombian cartels saw the CV as an ideal *partner* when the cocaine trafficking *boom* began in the 1980s, as it had the structure and organization to receive and distribute large quantities of drugs. Non-incarcerated members were therefore given a clear task: to form armed gangs to conquer drug trafficking territories. The group gained control of many *favelas*, marginalized neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro abandoned by the state, establishing a parallel system of government and offering employment to residents.

In 2005, the CV was believed to control more than half of the most violent areas of Rio de Janeiro. A police pacification program, aimed at increasing the state's presence in high-crime areas, further reduced the group's influence in early 2010 by establishing 'police pacification units' (*Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora - UPP*) in Rio's *favelas*, but the long-term effects of the security strategy have been limited. Most UPPs were closed at the end of 2021, as the program was considered a failure by the authorities.

The CV has a relatively weak *leadership* structure and has been described as a network of independent actors, whose structure resembles a *franchise* organization, with local cells and independent networks operating as allies.

The CV is also believed to have had links with the *Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia* (FARC). As proof of this, one of the CV's *leaders*, Luiz Fernando da Costa, *alias* 'Fernandinho Beira-Mar', was arrested in Colombia in 2001 while allegedly involved in an exchange of arms and cocaine with guerrilla fighters.

At the end of 2016, the breakdown of a long-standing alliance between the CV and the PCC sparked a wave of violence in Brazilian prisons. The conflict between the two groups continued throughout the following year, as the PCC sought to reduce the CV's power by forging alliances with rival gangs and co-opting members of the group to take control of drug trafficking in their areas of influence. Since then, the dispute has spread to neighboring Bolivia, where the two groups are fighting for control of drug trafficking routes between the border province of Santa Cruz and the state of Mato Grosso.

In addition to the PCC, the CV's main enemies are currently militias, composed of retired and serving security forces, and criminal groups in Rio de Janeiro such as the **Terceiro Comando Puro (TCP)**.

Terceiro Comando Puro (TCP) exemplifies how religion is becoming intertwined with crime in the *Morro dos Macacos favela* in Rio de Janeiro.

The TCP did not start out as a religious group. It emerged in the mid-1980s from a split in the CV by members who, thanks to a *leadership* vacuum, sought to carve out significant

shares of Brazil's growing **drug** market. Since then, the *TCP* has become one of *the CV*'s fiercest rivals in Rio, combining a spiritual message with one of struggle to become one of the city's longest-standing criminal groups. Religion serves as a powerful organizing force for criminal gangs in Brazil and much of Latin America, offering a *mix* of legitimacy, social control, internal cohesion and identity. Although it may seem contradictory, the integration of religion into gang culture reflects its deep roots in the social fabric of the favelas, where faith often coexists with violence and survival. In the absence of strong government institutions, gangs often fill the void, in part by creating a parallel community based on demonstrations of strength and faith in a higher order.

In Brazil, for example, Pentecostalism has gained ground in prisons and slums, partly because of its emphasis on health and wealth: it is believed that faith can lead to material success and that God's blessing manifests itself through financial prosperity. For many, humanity is racing towards the apocalypse, which divides the world into believers and non-believers. This black-and-white view makes life easier for Pentecostal criminals, who can frame their battle against rivals in this religious light.

The *TCP*, which specifically combines Pentecostalism with illegal activities, had previously begun to raise a flag with religious symbols at the highest point of the neighborhood to assert its control over the area following violent clashes with rival gangs. The *Morro dos Macacos favela* itself, a hotspot for intense criminal activity and frequent police operations, was the scene of at least 80 shootings linked to criminal disputes in 2024, as well as a full-scale invasion by *the CV*. In response, and in an attempt to impose its hegemonic will on the community, the *TCP* further displayed religious symbols in visible spaces. *The TCP*'s use of religion has attracted criticism from Pentecostal *leaders*, who argue that gangs should not associate crime with God.

But the *TCP* is not the only criminal group that exploits religious principles to promote its activities. The *Tropa de Aarão*, a minor gang in Rio linked to *the TCP*, also aligns itself with evangelical ideals⁷.

MEXICO

Both the *Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)* and the Mexican authorities identify the **Sinaloa Cartel (CDS)** and the **Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel (CJNG)** as the two main players in the Mexican criminal scene.

The Sinaloa Cartel (CDS), considered the largest and most powerful **drug trafficking** organization in the Western Hemisphere, is mainly involved in the international trafficking of fentanyl, methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana and heroin, especially to the United States, but also in human trafficking. In the middle of the last century, in the state of Sinaloa, small groups of farming families living in rural areas and engaged in the cultivation and smuggling of marijuana and poppy heroin moved from smuggling to drug trafficking, particularly marijuana, in the 1960s and 1970s. At the end of the 1970s, they began transporting cocaine for Colombian traffickers, moving their activities to Guadalajara, the capital of the state of Jalisco. Among their *leaders* were Rafael Caro Quintero, Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo and Joaquín Guzmán Loera, alias '*El Chapo*'. During this period, they began working with the Colombian Medellín cartel, establishing the patterns and routes of drug trafficking to the United States, which are still extremely relevant today. The audacity of the Mexican traffickers became evident in 1985 when an *undercover Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)* agent was killed. Pressure from the

⁷ The name of the gang is inspired by the biblical figure of Aaron, brother of Moses.

United States forced the Mexican authorities to take action and its *leaders* fled the country. The remaining factions established bases in various parts of Mexico.

During this period the *Sinaloa Cartel* allied with the Valencia family of Michoacán, forming the organization known as **the Milenio Cartel**. This collaboration not only allowed them to continue to exercise power over their rivals, but also to gain access to key Pacific ports and receive chemical precursors from China to enter the lucrative methamphetamine business.

Clashes between these groups began almost immediately. In November 1992, Guzmán sent 40 armed men to raid a *Tijuana Cartel* party in Puerto Vallarta, killing nine people. The *Tijuana Cartel* responded by attempting to assassinate Guzmán at Guadalajara airport in 1993, but instead killed a Mexican Catholic cardinal. Guzmán fled to Guatemala, where he was arrested two weeks later. He escaped from prison in 2001, regaining full control of the organization and starting more bloody feuds with former allies. During this period, Guzmán became the most visible leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, alongside Ismael Zambada García, alias 'El Mayo', and Juan José Esparragoza Moreno, alias 'El Azul'. In early 2010, further disagreements caused additional divisions within the *Milenio Cartel*, giving rise to the *Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel (CJNG)*, which is now one of the *Sinaloa Cartel's* main rivals. Guzmán was arrested again, this time in Mexico, in February 2014, leaving the *leadership* of the organization in the hands of *El Azul* and *El Mayo*. Guzmán cemented his *status* as Mexico's greatest criminal legend when he escaped from prison again, this time using a tunnel in his cell's bathroom, in July 2015. Guzmán's third capture in 2017 and subsequent extradition to the United States sparked an internal struggle for control of the *Sinaloa Cartel*.

The *Sinaloa Cartel* does not have a hierarchical structure. It is a network of various cells that cooperate with each other, while its operations abroad, and even in Mexico, are generally entrusted to local *partners*. Currently, the *Sinaloa Cartel* has at least two command structures: the first is led by loyalists of *El Mayo*, who was arrested in July 2024 in the United States; the other is composed of *El Chapo's* sons, Joaquín Guzmán López, Ovidio Guzmán López, Iván Archivaldo and Jesús Alfredo, collectively known as the '*Chapitos*'. The four *Chapitos* have become a priority target for Mexican and US authorities. Ovidio Guzmán was arrested by Mexican authorities in January 2023, after a failed attempt in 2019. In September 2023, he was extradited to the United States. Joaquín was arrested in the United States along with *El Mayo* in July 2024.

The *Sinaloa Cartel* has withstood changes in the international drug landscape and the capture and death of its *leaders*, in part thanks to its network structure and entrepreneurial approach.

In addition to fentanyl, the *CDS* maintains its *leadership* in cocaine trafficking thanks to established relationships with South American producers, heroin and marijuana trafficking, directly produced in Mexican territories controlled by the cartel, as well as the manufacture of large quantities of high-potency, low-cost methamphetamine, exported to the United States as well as to Asia, Australia, New Zealand and Europe, the latter markets being particularly attractive due to the enormous profits they can generate. The *CDS* operates in at least 47 countries around the world: in South America, where it relies on *brokers* to intermediary shipments of tons of cocaine to Mexico destined for the US, European and Australian markets; in Central and South America, where it maintains logistics bases for storing cocaine or chemical precursors before they are sent to Mexico; and on the African continent, where part of the cocaine destined for Europe is transported. According to the DEA, Africa could prove to be a worrisome territory where the *CDS* is exporting its *know-how* to set up clandestine laboratories for the production of synthetic drugs. Furthermore,

recent international investigations have revealed the growing interest of Mexican criminal groups in fueling the European drug market, leading to the seizure of large quantities of methamphetamine and cocaine in Spain and the Netherlands. According to Europol, for some years now, 'cooks' from *the Sinaloa Cartel*, together with local criminals, have been overseeing the preparation of methamphetamine and exporting not only the finished product but also their technical and chemical knowledge to teach their European 'colleagues' how to prepare these substances⁸.

The ***Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel (CJNG)*** is a transnational criminal group that emerged directly from *the Millennium Cartel* following fierce internal feuds. It is known for its aggressive use of violence and its public relations campaigns. Despite the capture of some of its main *leaders*, it remains one of Mexico's main criminal threats.

The *CJNG* emerged after the former *leader* of *the Sinaloa Cartel*, Ignacio Coronel, *alias* 'Nacho', was killed in a clash with security forces in July 2010. At the same time, the *leader* of *the Millennium Cartel*, Óscar Orlando Nava Valencia, *alias* 'El Lobo', was captured, causing internal splits within the cartel. The resulting division into the *La Resistencia* and *Los Torcidos* factions allowed the latter to become what is now known as the *CJNG*, founded by former police officer Nemesio Oseguera Ramos, *alias* 'El Mencho', together with Erick Valencia, *alias* 'El 85', and Martín Arzola Ortega, *alias* 'El 53'.

The *CJNG* has always been associated with extreme violence. In the period following its creation, the rate of murders, forced disappearances and the discovery of mass graves increased significantly. In April 2015, the *CJNG* killed 15 police officers in an ambush in Jalisco, one of the most ruthless attacks against security forces in Mexico's history. With its considerable firepower, the cartel was able to shoot down a military helicopter in 2015 and, more recently, has been responsible for several attacks on public officials⁹. Furthermore, with effective media propaganda and social activism, it appeals to Mexican society by promising to rid the territory of other rival criminal groups and, through campaigns to distribute food and toys, aims to gain popular support in areas where conflicts are raging.

Since its founding, the *CJNG* has expanded rapidly and is now present in almost every state in the country. Internationally, the cartel has contacts throughout South America, as well as in the United States, Canada, Australia, China and Southeast Asia.

The fragmentation of various criminal groups has allowed the *CJNG* to gain power in recent years, using different factions to exercise control in the various regions where it is present or where it competes for control with other groups.

Unlike the *CDS*, the *CJNG* has a well-defined command structure with a single, undisputed *leader* who relies on a small group of high-ranking commanders for strategic management, on whom a second level of regional commanders depends. According to a sort of *franchising* model, the various territorial groups enjoy a certain degree of independence in organizing their 'criminal portfolio', depending on their specializations and specific market demands, while always keeping in mind the guidelines dictated by the organization's leadership. The territorial groups are therefore able to operate their illegal trafficking

⁸ EUROPOL – D.E.A., COMPLEXITIES AND CONVENIENCES IN THE INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRADE: the involvement of Mexican criminal actors in the EU drug market, December 2022.

⁹ In May 2018, the group attempted to kill Luis Carlos Nájera, former security secretary of Jalisco. Then, in June 2020, they attacked Omar García Harfuch, security secretary of Mexico City. In the same month, a judge from the western state of Colima, who had prosecuted several cases against cartel members, was murdered along with his wife. More recently, the criminal group is believed to have been behind one of the country's most sensational political murders, the assassination of former Jalisco governor Aristóteles Sandoval in December 2020.

activities autonomously, paying a share of the profits to the central structure.

The *CJNG* has its own supply network of chemical **precursors** from China and India, which it manages to bring into Mexican territory through the Pacific ports of Manzanillo and Lazaro Cardenas and the Atlantic ports of Veracruz and Matamorros, over which it exercises almost exclusive control. In addition to fentanyl, the *CJNG* traffics every other type of **narcotic** nationally and internationally. Its main market is the United States, although Asia, Australia and Europe are increasingly common destinations.

Currently, the *CJNG* is the main rival of *the Sinaloa Cartel*. However, the two organizations have begun to collaborate in certain stages of the drug supply chain, for example by sharing suppliers of chemical precursors for the production of methamphetamine and fentanyl.

In addition to the *CDS* and *CJNG*, Mexico is home to a multitude of criminal organizations, some more structured than others, which are able to exercise control over certain areas of the country and have varying degrees of international reach. Among the main ones are the *Cártel del Golfo*, *Zetas Vieja Escuela*, *Cártel del Noreste*, *Nuevo Cártel de Juárez*, *Guerreros Unidos*, *Los Ardillos*, *Los Viagras*, *La Familia Michoacana*, *Los Tlacos*, *Los Rojos*, *Cártel Independiente de Acapulco*, *Cártel Santa Rosa de Lima* y *La Unión*.

02. PROFILING OF THE MAIN DRUGS

ANALGESICS/RELAXANTS

CANNABIS AND DERIVATIVES

Cannabis (*Cannabis sativa*) is a widely distributed plant that grows in temperate and tropical zones and has been used for its textile fiber, but also for its psychoactive properties for thousands of years. It contains numerous chemical substances, including delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which is the main psychoactive compound responsible for the effects commonly associated with the consumption of this plant. In addition, approximately 170 different phytocannabinoids have been identified, such as cannabidiol (CBD), cannabichromene (CBC), cannabigerol (CBG), cannabinol (CBN), and several biologically active compounds, such as omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, terpenes and flavonoids.

The THC content is highly variable, ranging from 0.2% to about 25%, and is mainly determined by the location and method of cultivation. It also varies depending on the part of the plant, being concentrated mainly in the inflorescences and leaves compared to the stems, roots and seeds, where it is present in minimal quantities.

Along with tobacco, alcohol and caffeine, cannabis is one of the most widely consumed drugs in the world.

What it looks like

Cannabis is generally sold as marijuana, hashish or hashish oil.

Marijuana (also known as 'weed') consists of the dried flowers and leaves of the cannabis plant.

Hashish is the resin extracted from the inflorescences and leaves of the plant, which becomes a compressed solid.

Hashish oil is extracted from the resin.

How it is used

Cannabis is usually smoked, often mixed with tobacco or placed in a smoking device (*bong*). It can also be taken orally, mixed with hot drinks (e.g. tea) or food, but since THC has low water solubility, ingesting cannabis results in poor absorption. It can also be taken with topical products, such as creams and oils.

An average cigarette (joint) contains approximately 0.5 to 1.0 grams of cannabis, with THC levels ranging from 5 to 150 mg.

Psychoactive effects

When inhaled, the substance enters the bloodstream through the respiratory tract and reaches the brain in about 15 minutes, giving rise to physical and psychological effects. These begin to diminish after 2-3 hours, but in some cases can last up to 12-24 hours due to the gradual release of psychoactive substances accumulated in adipose tissue.

When ingested, the effect is slower to manifest: it can begin after 30-90 minutes, with a peak that can occur after 3-4 hours. This delay may lead users to believe they have not taken enough of the substance, thus increasing the intake and the risk of intoxication. The effects generally last 6-8 hours, but alterations in concentration and mental clarity can persist much longer.

The effects of THC on the body are mainly due to its interaction with cannabinoid (CB) receptors in the central nervous system (CNS) and in various peripheral organs and tissues, on which endogenous molecules produced by our body, called endocannabinoids, act. The interaction of THC with CB receptors can cause various effects, including a sense of well-being, euphoria, talkativeness, sedation, relaxation, lethargy, cognitive impairment, psychomotor impairment, sensory impairment, altered state of consciousness, psychosis, intense anxiety, panic attacks, red eyes, increased appetite, dry mouth and increased heart rate.

Long-term health damage

Continued cannabis use can impair coordination, attention, learning ability, memory and reaction time. These effects are much more evident and long-lasting if use begins during adolescence, when the brain is still developing. The duration of these effects and the possibility that some changes may be permanent are still being studied.

Abuse of the substance is also associated with the onset of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts in adolescents or symptoms typical of schizophrenia (such as hallucinations and detachment from reality). These disorders may be temporary, but cannabis can worsen the course of a mental illness or bring forward its onset in people who are already predisposed to it.

Chronic cannabis smokers may be subject to many of the same respiratory problems that affect tobacco smokers, such as habitual coughing and phlegm production, high frequency of acute respiratory diseases, high risk of lung infections and a tendency to suffer from airway obstruction. Smoking cannabis may also promote the development of respiratory tract cancers.

Medical use

Since 2006, doctors in Italy have been allowed to prescribe compounded preparations, to be prepared by pharmacists in pharmacies, using Dronabinol (synthetic THC) or plant-based active substance based on cannabis for medical use, i.e. the active substance obtained from the inflorescences of cannabis cultivated under the authorization of a national cannabis agency. These are dried and ground preparations, to be taken in the form of a decoction or by inhalation with a special vaporizer. Since 2013, neurologists in Italy have also been able to prescribe a product registered as a medicine based on cannabis extracts to reduce painful spasms in multiple sclerosis (SativexR).

The prescription of cannabis for medical use in Italy (Ministerial Decree 9/11/2015) concerns its use for: chronic pain and pain associated with multiple sclerosis and spinal cord injuries; for nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and HIV therapies; as an appetite stimulant in cachexia, anorexia, loss of appetite in cancer patients or those with AIDS, and in anorexia nervosa; in glaucoma for its hypotensive effect; in Gilles de la Tourette's syndrome to reduce involuntary body and facial movements.

The medical use of cannabis cannot be considered a therapy in the strict sense, but rather a symptomatic treatment to support standard therapies where the latter have not produced the desired effects, have caused intolerable side effects, or require increases in dosage that could lead to the appearance of undesirable effects (side effects).

International control

Cannabis and cannabis resin are listed in Schedules I and IV of the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Δ9-THC is listed in Schedule I of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Legal status in Italy

Cannabis (leaves and inflorescences, oil, resin) is included in **Table II of narcotic substances**, while **plant-based medicines derived from cannabis** (plant substances and preparations, including extracts and tinctures) are included in the **Table of Medicines**, Section B and Schedule III-bis referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

Δ9-THC is included in **Table I** referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS

Synthetic cannabinoids are chemicals created in the laboratory, designed to mimic the effects of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive component of cannabis. Unlike natural THC, these compounds are often much more potent and can cause unpredictable and dangerous effects. More correctly referred to as cannabinoid receptor agonists, these substances were initially created with the aim of preserving the therapeutic potential of THC, but without its psychoactive effects and addictive properties.

At the end of 2008, some synthetic cannabinoids were identified in herbal mixtures sold as incense and air fresheners under the name '*spice*'.

There is no single chemical structure that characterizes all synthetic cannabinoids, as they are extremely diverse. This variability is due to the ongoing search for new substances with more powerful or longer-lasting effects, with the aim of circumventing legislative controls.

Families of Synthetic Cannabinoids

There are several families of synthetic cannabinoids, with chemical structures that may be similar or completely different from the structure of THC. Some of the best-known synthetic cannabinoids belong to the following families:

- JWH series - a large and diverse group of synthetic cannabinoids, often used in so-called '*spice*'.
- AM series - another family of synthetic cannabinoids with a chemical structure similar to the compounds in the JWH series.
- Cyclohexylphenols (CP) - initially synthesized as potential analgesics, some compounds in this series have been used for recreational purposes.

The wide variety of chemical structures of synthetic cannabinoids has important implications:

- unpredictable effects: the chemical structure of a substance largely determines its biological effects. The continuous modification of molecular structures makes it difficult to accurately predict the effects of a new synthetic cannabinoid.
- high potency: many synthetic cannabinoids are significantly more potent than THC, increasing the risk of adverse effects.
- toxicity: chemical structure can influence the toxicity of a substance. Some synthetic cannabinoids can cause serious damage to various organs, including the heart and brain.
- Addiction: The ability to induce addiction is closely related to chemical structure. Many synthetic cannabinoids are highly addictive.

What they look like

In their pure form, these substances are liquid (dissolved in solvents). The most common products are mixtures of plant material for smoking, onto which one or more liquid cannabinoids are specially sprayed. The plant material often consists of cannabis with a low THC content. Recently, synthetic cannabinoids have also been identified in liquids for electronic cigarettes, in food products (e.g. sweets), and impregnated into blotter paper.

Methods of use

As with cannabis, herbal mixtures containing cannabinoids are most often smoked. However, some users report that 'spice' can also be taken in the form of an infusion.

Psychoactive effects

Synthetic cannabinoids mimic the effects of THC by interacting with the CB1 and CB2 cannabinoid receptors found in the brain, tissues and peripheral organs. *In vitro* studies have shown that synthetic cannabinoids are more potent than THC because they bind more strongly to these receptors. Little is known about the detailed pharmacology and toxicology of synthetic cannabinoids, and few formal studies in humans have been published. It is possible that, apart from their high potency, some cannabinoids may have particularly long half-lives, which could potentially lead to prolonged psychoactive effects. Furthermore, recent studies show that synthetic cannabinoids can interact with other receptors involved in numerous regulatory pathways in the body, thus leading to a wider range of effects following their consumption.

The chemical structure of synthetic cannabinoids is constantly evolving due to the development of new substances. The complexity and variability of these molecules make it difficult to accurately predict their effects on human health. Although some of the effects are similar to those associated with cannabis use, often more intense and prolonged, agitation, delirium, psychosis, aggressive and violent behavior, convulsions, cardiovascular toxicity, heart attack, respiratory depression and coma have also been reported.

Health consequences

It is essential to understand that the use of synthetic cannabinoids carries significant risks and can have serious health consequences. Hundreds of cases of intoxication or death associated with the consumption of these substances have been reported worldwide.

International control

There are 19 synthetic cannabinoids listed in Schedule II of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Legal status in Italy

There are **99 synthetic cannabinoids** listed in **Table I of narcotic substances**, as referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

STIMULANTS

COCAINE

Cocaine is a substance obtained from the coca shrub (*Erythroxylon coca*), a plant that grows naturally in the hot and humid tropical climates of the Andes and South America (Colombia, Bolivia and Peru).

How it is obtained

The coca leaves are crushed and reduced to a pulp, placed in a barrel or a hole dug in the ground and mixed with a solvent – often kerosene, which is easy to find – to make a

kind of pulpy paste (coca paste). The coca paste is then treated with oxidizing agents and hydrochloric acid to remove impurities and other unnecessary chemicals, thus obtaining **cocaine hydrochloride**, i.e. cocaine in powder form, which is familiar to most people.

Cocaine hydrochloride, in turn, can be boiled in a basic solution of water and ammonia or baking soda or sodium hydroxide; the resulting mixture is filtered or dissolved with ether to obtain 'freebase' cocaine, i.e. a substance that is almost completely free of cutting agents. Ether makes 'freebase' cocaine very dangerous, as it can cause explosions or produce flames and therefore fires.

It is simpler and less dangerous to produce **crack**, using the same process as for cocaine base but without the ether stage: cocaine hydrochloride is boiled in water with ammonia or baking soda and the resulting mixture forms crystals, which constitute *crack*.

What it looks like

Cocaine hydrochloride is a fine crystalline powder, similar to sugar, white and odorless, containing up to 90-100% pure cocaine. In fact, wholesale cocaine hydrochloride has a high degree of purity, while for retail sale, other substances known as 'cutting agents' or 'adulterants', are generally added to cocaine hydrochloride, such as lactose, mannitol and sugar, which are inert, or narcotics or psychotropic substances, such as levamisole (a dewormer), methorphan, phenacetin, lidocaine, benzocaine, procaine, caffeine, paracetamol and sugars, or other stimulants, such as amphetamines.

The addition of a 'cutting agent' serves to obtain more doses (and thus increase the profit of criminal networks) and/or to increase the duration of the substance's effects.

Freebase cocaine comes in the form of small brown or beige lumps or rocks.

Crack, on the other hand, comes in the form of small whitish lumps, which tend to turn yellow when exposed to air.

How it is used

Cocaine hydrochloride is typically snorted (inhaled) after the crystals have been finely ground, so that it is quickly absorbed through the nasal mucosa. Being soluble in water, it can also be taken by injection (intravenous or intramuscular). Cocaine hydrochloride can also be consumed in combination with heroin or amphetamine 'speedballs'.

Freebase cocaine can be smoked after being heated or injected subcutaneously and intramuscularly after being dissolved.

Crack is generally heated and the smoke produced is inhaled, either alone or in combination with marijuana, tobacco or 'speed-rocks' amphetamines, using glass or metal pipes. The name '*crack*' derives from the crackling sound produced when the crystals are heated.

Psychoactive effects

Cocaine is a powerful stimulant and has significant effects on the body and mind.

Physical effects: increased heart rate and, consequently, increased blood pressure and rapid breathing, reduced appetite, dilated pupils. Repeated and chronic use increases the risk of cardiovascular damage (cardiac arrhythmias, ischemia, heart attacks, cardiac arrest), respiratory damage (destruction of the nasal mucosa, lung damage) and brain damage (stroke, convulsions, cognitive and memory disorders). There is also a high risk of *overdose* and sudden death, especially if cocaine is used in combination with other drugs.

Psychological effects: anxiety, hyperactivity, increased irritability and alertness. Repeated and chronic use of cocaine quickly leads to addiction to the substance, resulting in withdrawal symptoms characterized by depression, fatigue, irritability, tremors, insomnia, paranoia and asthenia.

Other substances with similar effects include khat, synthetic cathinones, amphetamine and methamphetamine.

International control

Cocaine is listed in Schedule I of the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Esters and derivatives of ecgonine, which are convertible into ecgonine and cocaine, are also controlled under that Convention. Coca leaf is listed separately in Schedule I and is defined in Article 1, paragraph 1, as: 'The leaf of the coca bush except a leaf from which all ecgonine, cocaine and any other ecgonine alkaloids have been removed'.

Legal status in Italy

Cocaine is listed in **Table I of narcotic substances**, referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

AMPHETAMINE-TYPE STIMULANTS (ATS)

Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) are a class of psychoactive drugs that include amphetamine, methamphetamine, MDA and MDMA (ecstasy). Some of these substances, including dextroamphetamine (Adderall, Amfexa) and methylphenidate (Ritalin, Concerta), are used in clinical settings; In particular, methamphetamine and the related methylphenidate are widely used in medicine for the treatment of attention deficit *hyperactivity disorder* (ADHD), obesity and narcolepsy. This creates a potential opportunity for diversion for illicit use.

The use of ATS can have negative effects on health, including physical and psychological dependence, cardiovascular problems, increased heart rate and blood pressure with the risk of heart attack, stroke, other heart diseases and mental health problems, such as the worsening of pre-existing mental disorders (psychosis, anxiety and depression). Long-term use of ATS can damage the brain, causing memory and learning problems, psychosis with delusions of persecution, feelings of omnipotence or even prolonged depression that can culminate in suicide. An *overdose* can cause tachycardia, hypertension, arrhythmias, chest pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, acute *delirium* and toxic psychosis, stroke, convulsions, hyperthermia (body temperature >40°C), rhabdomyolysis with renal failure and death.

AMPHETAMINE

Amphetamine is a powerful synthetic central nervous system stimulant that causes an increased release of certain neurotransmitters, particularly dopamine and noradrenaline, which are responsible for the effects produced after its intake.

What it looks like

Base amphetamine is a colorless, volatile oil that is insoluble in water. The most common salt is sulphate, a white or off-white powder that is soluble in water. Illegal products are mostly in the form of powders and tablets.

Methods of use

Amphetamine can be ingested, snorted and, less commonly, injected. Unlike the hydrochloride salt of methamphetamine, amphetamine sulphate is not volatile enough to be smoked. A dose for ingestion can vary from a few dozen to several hundred milligrams, depending on purity.

Psychoactive effects

Taking amphetamine induces a wide range of effects, both physical and psychological.

Physical effects: increased heart rate and blood pressure, dilated pupils, sweating and tremors, insomnia, weight loss, tooth damage (with chronic use), increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

Psychological effects: euphoria and sense of well-being, increased alertness and concentration, reduced fatigue and appetite, increased self-esteem and talkativeness, irritability, anxiety and paranoia, hallucinations and psychosis (at high doses or with prolonged use).

Short-term health consequences

After the psychoactive effects described above, users may experience irritability, restlessness, anxiety, depression and lethargy. Severe intoxication causes serious cardiovascular disorders and behavioral problems, including agitation, confusion, paranoia, impulsiveness and violence.

Long-term health damage

Chronic amphetamine use causes neurochemical and neuroanatomical changes. Addiction leads to memory deficits and difficulties in decision-making and verbal reasoning. Some of the symptoms resemble those of paranoid schizophrenia. These effects may continue beyond the period of use, although they often regress. Injecting amphetamine carries the same risks of viral infection (e.g. HIV and hepatitis) as other injectable drugs, such as heroin.

Medical use

Amphetamine is occasionally used for therapeutic purposes in the treatment of narcolepsy and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

International control

The R and S enantiomers (levamphetamine and deamphetamine, respectively) and the racemate (a 50:50 mixture of the R and S stereoisomers) are listed in Schedule II of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Legal status in Italy

Amphetamine is listed in **Table I of narcotic substances**, as referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

Dexamfetamine is listed in **Table I** and in **the Table of Medicines**, Section A, referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

METHAMPHETAMINE

Methamphetamine is also a central nervous system stimulant. It is a methyl derivative of amphetamine, with a slightly more complex chemical structure. This small difference has a major impact on the potency and duration of its effects.

In fact, methamphetamine is generally considered to be more potent than amphetamine because it produces more intense and prolonged effects (up to 24 hours or more), with a faster peak. It is considered to be much more addictive than amphetamine.

MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine)

Commonly known as **ecstasy**, **MDMA** is a synthetic substance belonging to the class of phenethylamines and amphetamine derivatives. It is a central nervous system stimulant: it acts mainly on neurons that produce and release serotonin, but also on dopaminergic neurons.

How it is obtained

MDMA is produced synthetically in laboratories using chemical precursors such as safrole, isosafrole, piperonal and PMK, all of which are listed in Table I of the 1988 United Nations Convention. Production mainly takes place in illegal laboratories, with Europe being a major manufacturing area.

What it looks like

It comes as a white or off-white powder or in water-soluble crystals. Illegal products are mainly in the form of colored tablets, stamped with symbols, and less commonly in the form of white powders or capsules. Base MDMA is a colorless oil that is not soluble in water.

The so-called **pink cocaine**, which is available on the market, is not cocaine but a mixture of MDMA and ketamine, usually in the form of pink powder.

Methods of use

MDMA in tablet form is taken orally, but the powder form can be snorted, inhaled or injected, although the latter method is rarely found in a 'recreational' setting.

Psychoactive effects

Taking MDMA causes physical and psychological effects.

Physical effects: increased heart rate and blood pressure, dilated pupils, sweating and tremors, insomnia, weight loss, tooth damage (with chronic use), increased risk of heart attack and stroke. These are the same effects as amphetamine, as MDMA has a similar structure and action.

Psychological effects: euphoria, increased empathy, heightened sensory awareness and mild hallucinogenic effects.

Since MDMA causes an increase in serotonin levels in the brain, taking an excessive dose of MDMA can cause serotonin syndrome, which manifests itself with physical and psychological symptoms such as excessive sweating, diarrhea, hyperthermia, nausea, vomiting, sleep disorders, tachycardia, ataxia (muscle coordination disorders), anxiety, confusion and even coma.

International control

MDMA is listed in Schedule I of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances, which imposes strict controls due to its high potential for abuse and lack of significant therapeutic uses.

Legal status in Italy

MDMA is included in **Table I of narcotic substances** under Presidential Decree No. 309/90,

which regulates its possession, production and distribution as a substance with a high risk of abuse.

CAPTAGON

Captagon is the trade name of a product based on fenethylamine, a psychostimulant substance formed essentially by the union of theophylline and amphetamine molecules, first synthesized in 1961 as a potential treatment for hyperactivity, depression and narcolepsy, but never approved for clinical use due to its potential for addiction and psychostimulant effects.

Fenethylamine, in the form of Captagon tablets, is one of the most commonly abused substances in Arab countries. In recent years, it has attracted particular interest because it is used mainly by militants in terrorist groups to increase, like amphetamines, *performance* and physical endurance, as well as stamina and aggression in combat.

Fenethylamine occurs as a crystalline solid or, more commonly, in tablet form.

Although fenethylamine is metabolized in the body into amphetamine and theophylline, studies suggest that the substance has its own pharmacotoxicological effects. For example, being more lipophilic than amphetamine and theophylline, it is able to reach the central nervous system more quickly and therefore exert stimulant effects.

The effects include increased alertness, concentration, physical performance, heart rate and blood pressure (but to a lesser extent than that observed for amphetamine).

Adverse effects, which are particularly noticeable with prolonged use, include cardiovascular damage, heart attacks, kidney and liver damage, malnutrition, visual disturbances and psychiatric manifestations, including dissociative states. Chronic use can also be characterized by depression, insomnia, severe anxiety, irritability, suicidal thoughts and psychotic symptoms.

It has recently been reported that so-called Captagon analogues (or counterfeit Captagon) are available on the illicit market, in which fenethylamine is absent - partly due to the difficulty of finding precursors on the black market - and is replaced with amphetamine, methamphetamine, theophylline, procaine, quinine, paracetamol, ephedrine, lidocaine and caffeine.

International control

Fenethylamine is controlled internationally, being listed in Schedule II of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Legal status in Italy

Fenethylamine is listed in **Table I of narcotic substances** in Presidential Decree 309/90 and subsequent amendments.

SYNTHETIC CATHINONES

Synthetic cathinones are a class of synthetic psychoactive substances with a chemical structure similar to cathinone, a stimulant substance found naturally in the khat plant. Among the derivatives are beta-keto (β -keto) analogues, which are very similar to phenethylamines. Since the 2000s, these substances have appeared on the European black market for recreational use: in recent years, they have become increasingly popular,

particularly among young people, despite their significant health risks. The synthetic cathinones most used for this purpose are mephedrone and methyldrone, which were among the most widespread on the market until 2010.

To evade controls, suppliers of synthetic cathinones market them under other names (e.g. Explosion, Blow, Recharge) or as plant fertilizers or bath salts, often labeled with 'not for human consumption'.

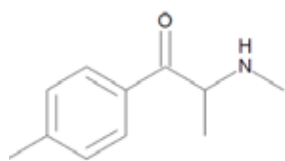
Basic structure of cathinone

Cathinone is a phenethylamine with a ketone group in the β position relative to nitrogen. This basic structure gives it stimulant properties.

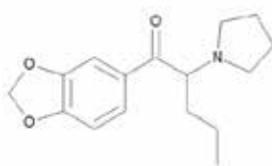
Chemists synthesize new cathinones by modifying the basic structure of cathinone. The most common modifications occur at the aromatic ring, the alkyl side chain and the amine group: modifications to the nitrogen to alter the basicity of the molecule and its interaction with neurotransmitters.

Examples of synthetic cathinones

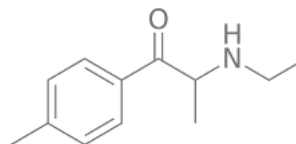
- Mephedrone: has a methyl group attached to nitrogen and a methylenedioxy group on the aromatic ring. It is one of the most well-known synthetic cathinones.
- MDPV (Methylenedioxypyrovalerone): similar to mephedrone, but with a longer side chain.
- 4-MEC: differs from mephedrone in the position of the methyl group on the aromatic ring.



Mephedrone (4-MMC)



MDPV



4-MEC

Structural modifications affect the substance's ability to bind to dopamine and noradrenaline receptors, causing stimulant effects. The chemical structure of a synthetic cathinone also determines the duration of the effects, the speed at which the substance is metabolized and eliminated from the body, and its potency, so that small structural changes can lead to significant variations in potency. The structure influences the toxicological profile of the substance and the likelihood of adverse effects such as tachycardia, hypertension and psychosis.

The continuous evolution of the chemical structures of synthetic cathinones makes it difficult for legal and health authorities to keep up. Furthermore, structural diversity contributes to the unpredictability of effects and increases the risks associated with their consumption.

What they look like

Synthetic cathinones generally come in the form of white or brown powder, exceptionally in tablets. Synthetic cathinones are also used to adulterate MDMA tablets; when in tablet form, they are sometimes passed off as MDMA, due to the ease and low cost of production.

Methods of use

Synthetic cathinones can be taken orally, intranasally or snorted, by insufflation and, due to their water solubility, they can also be injected. These substances are not easily detected by standard rapid drug tests.

Psychoactive effects

The intake of synthetic cathinones induces both physical and psychological effects similar to those produced by cocaine.

Physical effects: increased heart rate and blood pressure, dilated pupils, sweating and tremors, insomnia, weight loss, tooth damage (with chronic use), increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

Psychological effects: like phenethylamines, synthetic cathinones act as central nervous system stimulants, although with less potency due to the β -keto group, which makes the molecule less able to cross the blood-brain barrier. A typical dose of mephedrone is 100-250 mg. Depending on the specific substance, the effects are considered similar to those of cocaine, amphetamine or MDMA. Like cocaine, mephedrone also has a short-lived peak. As a result, users may consume multiple doses in succession, up to 1 g at a time.

Short-term health consequences

From observations of patients with suspected mephedrone intoxication, cathinone derivatives produce sympathomimetic effects similar to those of amphetamine derivatives.

The first fatal case, confirmed from a toxicological point of view, directly linked to the use of mephedrone was recorded in Sweden in 2008.

Long-term health damage

There are currently no data in scientific literature studies on the long-term health damage associated with the consumption of synthetic cathinones in humans.

International control

Methcathinone is listed in Schedule I of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances, while 16 other synthetic cathinones are listed in Schedule II of the same Convention.

Legal status in Italy

45 synthetic cathinones are listed in **Table I of narcotic substances**, as referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

KHAT

The term **Khat** (also known as 'qat' or 'chat') refers to the leaves of *Catha edulis*, an evergreen shrub native to East Africa and the south-western Arabian Peninsula. Its leaves contain cathinone and cathine, alkaloids chemically related to amphetamine and responsible for the psychoactive effects of Khat.

Classification: stimulant – naturally occurring substance.

How it is obtained

Khat is obtained by harvesting the fresh leaves and shoots of the plant, which are then wrapped in banana leaves to preserve their freshness. Only fresh leaves are chewed since cathinone, one of its main active substances, degrades rapidly once the plant material begins to dry out (approximately 72 hours).

What it looks like

Khat is sold in bunches of fresh leaves and shoots, usually wrapped in banana leaves. It has a strong taste and an aromatic smell. Alcoholic extracts of khat (tinctures) have also been reported sporadically, sold mainly in the context of 'herbal high' products.

How it is used

The most common method of consuming khat is to chew the fresh leaves and shoots to form a bolus, which is kept in the cheek and from which a juice is slowly extracted and swallowed, while the plant residues are spat out. Typically, 100 to 300 grams of khat leaves are chewed in 3-6 hours. The cathinone content can vary from 30 to 200 milligrams per 100 grams of fresh leaves, and chewing allows up to 90% to be extracted. Although less common, khat can also be consumed as an infusion.

The use of khat is traditional in Yemen and some East African countries, but it is also sometimes consumed in Europe, especially by immigrants from Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen.

Psychoactive effects

The psychoactive effects of khat involve stimulation of the central nervous system and can last up to 8 hours, after which the cathinone is largely metabolized and disappears from the blood.

Physical effects: increased blood pressure. The most common side effects include insomnia, constipation and urinary retention. Long-term khat consumption has been associated with myocardial infarction, liver disorders and oral cancer.

Psychological effects: euphoria, alertness and excitement. The euphoric effects begin about an hour after chewing starts and reach peak plasma concentration of cathinone within 1.5-3.5 hours. Psychological side effects include depression and irritability. Some studies in the international scientific literature suggest that khat may aggravate pre-existing psychological problems and trigger psychosis and aggressive behavior, especially in predisposed individuals.

Other substances with similar effects include cocaine, amphetamine and synthetic cathinones.

International control

Khat has been examined several times by the WHO, with the latest review in 2006, but currently the *Catha edulis* plant is not under international control. However, cathinone and cathine are included in the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances, in Schedules I and III respectively.

Legal status in Italy

Khat and its main alkaloids, **cathinone** and **cathine**, are included in **Table I of narcotic substances** in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

ANALGESICS/DEPRESSANTS

HEROIN

Heroin (diacetylmorphine) is a narcotic substance obtained from **morphine**, the main alkaloid extracted **from** raw **opium**, the milky latex extracted from the seed pods of the *Papaver somniferum* plant.

How it is obtained

It is obtained through a chemical process that converts morphine, extracted from raw opium, into heroin (diacetylmorphine). The method involves double acetylation of morphine using mainly acetic anhydride. Reagents such as hydrochloric acid are then used to purify it and solvents such as acetone to refine it further. Although it is a relatively simple chemical process, it still requires a rudimentary laboratory environment. Depending on the quality of the process and the substances used, the final heroin can vary in purity and composition.

What it looks like

Heroin usually comes in the form of a very fine or granular powder that can be of different colors: white, brown or reddish, depending on the degree of purity and the cutting agents used.

On the illicit market, the quality of heroin varies greatly, with purity ranging from 20% to 50%. In fact, heroin may contain degradation products such as 3-monoacetylmorphine (3-MAM), 6-monoacetylmorphine (6-MAM) and residues of other chemicals and solvents used during the refining process (such as acetic acid), but also lead or zinc, which may be released from the often rudimentary, homemade containers used during the process. Among the cutting agents that may be added are sugars (such as mannitol, lactose, sucrose, dextrose), caffeine and paracetamol.

Names used to identify the different forms include '*brown sugar*', '*China White*' and '*sugar*'. When mixed with other drugs, it can take on other names, such as '*speedball*' when combined with cocaine.

Cobret or **Kobret** (from 'cobra') is a 'waste' form of heroin, obtained as an intermediate during the refining of heroin, and is therefore of low quality, as it contains residues of the chemicals used, degradation products and less than 20% pure heroin. It resembles brown sugar in appearance, sold wrapped in cellophane or aluminum foil, it is smoked or inhaled, as it is not very soluble for intravenous use (injection).

The so-called *pink heroin* ('pinky', 'U4') is not heroin, but a substance called U-47700, belonging to the synthetic opioid group: it is a laboratory product whose effects replicate those of heroin but with greater potency, capable of causing fatal *overdoses* even in small doses.

How it is used

Heroin can be taken in various ways, depending on its form and the user's preferences. The most common methods are intravenous use, in which the powder is dissolved in water and injected directly into a vein, or inhalation, in which the powder is snorted through the nose. In some cases, heroin is heated on aluminum foil and the vapors are inhaled ('smoke'). Intravenous use produces very rapid and intense effects but also increases the risk of infections and other medical complications.

Psychoactive effects

Physical effects: a few minutes after ingestion, heroin reaches the brain, where it is converted into morphine, causing a wave of pleasant effects (called 'rush' or 'flash') that includes, among other things, analgesia (pain reduction), followed by lethargy and drowsiness. However, it can also cause nausea, itching, constipation and breathing difficulties. *Overdose* can lead to death from respiratory arrest. Repeated use can lead to physical dependence, with severe withdrawal symptoms including muscle and abdominal pain, chills, nausea, diarrhea, tearing, sweating, coughing, general weakness, insomnia and permanent damage to the body, including damage to the liver, kidneys and heart.

Psychological effects: by converting into morphine in the brain, heroin causes the so-called 'rush' or 'flash', i.e. pleasant effects such as euphoria, a sense of well-being and detachment, among others. Repeated use can lead to psychological dependence, with subsequent withdrawal symptoms causing irritability, anxiety and apprehension.

Other substances with similar effects: synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, fentanyl analogues and nitazenes.

International control

Heroin is listed in Schedule I of the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Diamorphine is also included generically in the 1972 Protocol, which revised the 1961 Convention, extending control to the esters and ethers of the scheduled substances. Therefore, diamorphine is the diacetyl ester of morphine (Table 1). Acetic anhydride, an essential precursor in the production of heroin, is listed in Table I of the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. The corresponding EU legislation is Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3677/90 (as amended), which controls trade between the EU and third countries.

Legal status in Italy

Heroin is listed in **Table I of narcotic substances**, as referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS

Synthetic opioids are a class of substances that produce effects similar to those of natural opioids, such as morphine and codeine, but are produced entirely in the laboratory.

There are numerous synthetic opioids, each with specific pharmaco-toxicological characteristics.

Some synthetic opioids are used for therapeutic purposes, such as in pain management, but their use must be carefully monitored by a doctor. Others, although initially developed for potential therapeutic use, were subsequently discarded and placed on the drug market by criminal groups.

Some examples of common synthetic opioids include: fentanyl, tramadol, nitazene, methadone (used in the treatment of heroin and other opioid addiction, as it helps reduce withdrawal symptoms), oxycodone (used to treat moderate to severe pain), hydrocodone (a synthetic opioid similar to oxycodone), U-47700 (7-8 times more potent than morphine and never approved for pharmaceutical use).

The abuse of synthetic opioids is a serious public health problem, linked to an increase in *overdose* and death cases.

Psychoactive effects

Physical effects: synthetic opioids work by binding to opioid receptors in the brain, spinal cord and other parts of the body. These receptors are involved in pain perception, mood regulation and other physiological functions. When an opioid binds to these receptors, it can reduce pain perception and have other effects on the central nervous system. The most serious effect is their action on the brain's respiratory center, which causes a reduction in respiratory rate. In the event of an overdose, the resulting respiratory depression, if not properly treated (e.g. with naloxone), can cause death.

Psychological effects: by reducing pain perception, they generally make the subject calm and sleepy. In some cases, they can also cause euphoria. Side effects include the development of dependence and the onset of tolerance.

Concomitant use with other drugs that have serotonergic effects can trigger serotonin syndrome, which manifests itself with physical and psychological symptoms such as excessive sweating, diarrhea, hyperthermia, nausea, vomiting, sleep disturbances, tachycardia, ataxia (muscle coordination disorders), anxiety, confusion and even coma.

FENTANYL AND ITS ANALOGUES

This is a synthetic opioid developed for analgesic use, with a potency approximately 80 times greater than that of morphine. Its analogues are produced by chemical modifications to the basic structure of fentanyl and their potency can be thousands of times greater than that of morphine and fentanyl.

Fentanyl and some of its analogues are used as anesthetics and analgesics in both humans (alfentanil, sufentanil, remifentanil) and veterinary medicine (carfentanil). However, most fentanyls have no recognized therapeutic use and are synthesized illegally in clandestine laboratories for the specific purpose of being placed on the drug market.

What it looks like

Fentanyl is usually in the form of a white granular or crystalline powder. Pharmaceutical formulations for therapeutic use may be in the form of tablets, transdermal patches, liquids or solutions for injection.

On the illicit market, it is found in powder form, often used to cut other drugs, such as heroin or cocaine, to increase their potency, or in tablet form to mimic legal drugs. Occasionally, it may be used to impregnate thin pieces of paper known as '*paper trips*'. Some of the pharmaceutical formulations, such as tablets and transdermal patches, may be diverted from the legal market and placed on the illicit market.

How it is used

Pharmaceutical formulations of fentanyl and its analogues are intended for intravenous, oral or transdermal administration.

Transdermal patches that end up on the illicit market may be smoked or chewed. Tablets, whether diverted from the licit market or produced illicitly, may be taken orally, powdered and taken intravenously, or snorted. On the illicit market, powders are generally inhaled, injected or snorted. Many users are unaware that fentanyl and/or its analogues have been mixed into other drugs, such as heroin or cocaine, and are at greater risk of *overdose*.

Psychoactive effects

Fentanyl and its analogues act on the central nervous system and therefore have similar

effects to other opioids but are much more potent.

Physical effects: euphoria, analgesia, relaxation and deep sedation. The most common side effects include nausea, dizziness, vomiting, fatigue, headache, constipation, anemia and peripheral oedema. Characteristic withdrawal symptoms (sweating, anxiety, diarrhea, bone pain, abdominal cramps, chills or 'goose bumps') occur when use is discontinued. Serious interactions can occur when fentanyl and its analogues are mixed with heroin, cocaine, alcohol and other central nervous system depressants, such as benzodiazepines. Overdose - the minimum dose is 0.2 mg - causes respiratory depression, which if not treated with the antidote (naloxone), can lead to respiratory arrest and death. For the most potent derivatives of fentanyl, even small amounts can cause lethal intoxication due to respiratory depression. Sudden death can also occur due to cardiac arrest or severe anaphylactic reaction.

Psychological effects: tolerance and dependence develop rapidly after repeated use.

International control

Fentanyl is listed in Schedule I of the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (since 1964). Other fentanyl derivatives added to Table I in 1980 include Sufentanil and Para-fluorofentanyl, while Alfentanil was added in 1984 and Remifentanil in 1999. A total of 14 fentanyls are listed in the 1961 Convention.

Legal status in Italy

Fentanyl and its analogues are listed in **Table I of narcotic substances**, referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

Fentanyl is also listed in **the Table of Medicines**, Section A, and in Schedule III-bis among the medicines for the treatment of severe pain that benefit from simplified prescription procedures.

TRAMADOL

It is a synthetic opioid analgesic, i.e. a painkiller that acts on the central nervous system. Unlike other more potent opioids, such as morphine, tramadol is considered a 'weak' opioid because it has a lower affinity for opioid receptors in the brain. This means that it has a lower analgesic efficacy but also a lower risk of causing serious side effects, such as respiratory depression.

Psychoactive effects

Physical effects: desired effects, such as pain reduction, and undesirable side effects, such as nausea and vomiting, constipation, drowsiness and dizziness, headache, dry mouth, sweating. Less common are tremors and agitation, insomnia, allergic reactions, convulsions, respiratory depression, especially at high doses or in combination with other drugs, especially those that increase serotonin levels (such as SSRI antidepressants), with which serotonin syndrome, a potentially life-threatening condition, may also occur.

Psychological effects: the same as other opioids, such as euphoria, relaxation, and dependence, but less intense.

Legal use

Tramadol is a prescription drug. Its legal use is limited to the treatment of moderate to severe pain, both acute (e.g. after surgery or trauma) and chronic (e.g. neuropathic pain). It must be prescribed by a doctor and the treatment must be monitored to minimize the risk of side effects and addiction.

Illegal use

Tramadol is often abused, both for its analgesic and psychoactive effects (euphoria, relaxation). Illegal use of tramadol carries serious health risks, including addiction, *overdose*, and serotonin syndrome.

International control

Tramadol is not listed in the Schedules of the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Legal status in Italy

Tramadol is included in **Table I of narcotic substances**, in **the Table of Medicines** Section A and Section B, and in Schedule III-bis of Presidential Decree 309/90 and subsequent amendments.

NITAZENES

These are synthetic opioids that appeared on the drug market in 2019. They were originally developed for pharmacological purposes in the mid-20th century but were never approved for medical use due to their high potency and risk of abuse.

What they look like

They are commonly found in the form of white or beige powders or as tablets that mimic legal drugs based on oxycodone or fentanyl. The powders are often used to cut other drugs, such as heroin and fentanyl.

How they are used

The tablets can be taken orally or powdered and taken intravenously or snorted. The powders are typically inhaled, injected or snorted. Many users are unaware that nitazenes have been mixed into other drugs (such as heroin) or are present in counterfeit medicines, putting them at greater risk of *overdose*.

Psychoactive effects

These are similar to those of other opioids, acting on the central nervous system, but are often much more potent, increasing the risk of *overdose* even with very small doses.

The clinical toxicological properties of many derivatives of nitazenes have not been studied directly. There are few reports from *online forums* regarding acute and chronic physical and psychological effects. The adverse effects reported are consistent with those commonly associated with other synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl and its analogues.

Physical effects: analgesia and deep sedation. Overdose causes respiratory depression, which, if not treated with the antidote (naloxone), can lead to respiratory arrest and death. For more potent nitazenes, even small amounts can cause lethal intoxication due to respiratory depression. Sudden death can also occur due to cardiac arrest or severe anaphylactic reaction.

Psychological effects: euphoria, relaxation, dependence.

International control

Eight specific nitazenes (butonitazene, clonitazene, etazene, etonitazene, etonitazepyne, isotonitazene, metonitazene and protonitazene) are listed in the 1961 United Nations Single

Convention on Narcotic Drugs.

Legal status in Italy

At the end of 2024, there were **19 nitazenes** listed in **Table I of narcotic substances**, as referred to in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

ANXIOLYTICS/SEDATIVES-HYPNOTICS

BENZODIAZEPINES

Benzodiazepines are a class of drugs that have sedative, hypnotic, anxiolytic, anticonvulsant and muscle relaxant properties. They are used to treat a variety of conditions, including anxiety, insomnia, convulsions and muscle spasms. They are synthetic substances that act as central nervous system depressants. Chlordiazepoxide was the first to be synthesized in 1957 and was introduced into medicine in 1961. Benzodiazepines are classified according to their duration of action. Short- and intermediate-acting ones are preferred for the treatment of insomnia, while long-acting ones are recommended for the treatment of anxiety. Due to their effects, they are under international control.

Basic structure of benzodiazepines

Their chemical structure consists of a fusion of a benzene ring and a diazepine ring. There are many structural differences between one molecule and another, and these differences are reflected in the affinity characteristics of these drugs with receptors.

Benzodiazepines enhance the effects of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), a neurotransmitter that promotes relaxation and sleep. By increasing GABA activity, benzodiazepines can reduce anxiety, improve sleep and relax muscles.

How they are presented

They come in the form of tablets, capsules, vials for injection (e.g. diazepam, lorazepam, midazolam) and suppositories.

How to use

Benzodiazepines are usually taken in tablet form, but they can also be administered by injection for medical and non-medical purposes. There have also been reports of intranasal abuse (sniffing).

Psychoactive effects

Benzodiazepines belong to the group of central nervous system depressants, which induce feelings of calm (anxiolytics), drowsiness and sleep. Compared to more recently popular drugs such as barbiturates, benzodiazepines are less likely to lead to potentially fatal depression and are therefore widely used in medicine to treat anxiety (anxiolytics) and insomnia (sedatives/hypnotics), as well as other psychological conditions such as panic attacks and disorders. There is no clear distinction between anxiolytics and hypnotics, as most anxiolytics induce sleep when taken in the evening, and most hypnotics have a sedative effect when taken during the day.

Common benzodiazepine-based drugs: Alprazolam (Xanax), Diazepam (Valium), Lorazepam (Ativan), Clonazepam (Klonopin).

Short-term health consequences

The half-life varies among individuals, and older people tend to metabolize these drugs much more slowly, with the result that they are more prone to side effects, including dizziness, ataxia, mental confusion, impaired judgement and anterograde amnesia. There is a significantly increased risk of adverse reactions in older individuals, such as falls, decreased cognitive function, and impaired driving, the latter not limited to this category of people. According to some European studies, apart from alcohol, benzodiazepines, together with cannabis, are the most prevalent psychoactive substances among the driving population. Experimental studies show that these drugs impair driving ability and, when combined with alcohol, significantly increase the risk of being involved in or causing road accidents.

Long-term damage to health

Benzodiazepine intoxication can be associated with disinhibition in behavior, potentially leading to hostile or aggressive behavior. The combined use of alcohol and benzodiazepines also increases the risk of a fatal overdose, as both act as central nervous system depressants. A similar fatal interaction can occur when opioids and benzodiazepines are taken as part of a polydrug pattern. A significant number of problem users ingest, 'snort' or inject high doses of benzodiazepines to enhance the euphoric effects of opioids and minimize the unpleasant effects of psychostimulants. The EUDA's annual report on the state of the drug problem in Europe highlights that the concomitant use of benzodiazepines and opioids is one of the major risk factors in drug-related deaths. There is also a risk of developing cross-dependence on benzodiazepines.

Withdrawal signs and symptoms can be classified as major or minor, similar to those of alcohol withdrawal syndrome. According to this classification, minor symptoms include anxiety, insomnia and nightmares. Major symptoms include perceptual disturbances, psychosis, hyperpyrexia and life-threatening convulsions.

Medical use

Medically, benzodiazepines should only be used as a short-term remedy for anxiety and severe, disabling insomnia, as tolerance and dependence can develop even within weeks of use.

International control

Forty benzodiazepines are listed in the Schedules of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Legal status in Italy

Benzodiazepines are listed in **Table I of narcotic substances**, in **Table IV of narcotic substances** and in **the Table of Medicines** of Presidential Decree 309/90.

GHB and GBL

GHB (γ -hydroxybutyric acid) is a short-chain fatty acid that acts as a neurotransmitter and neuromodulator in the central nervous system. It is classified as a central nervous system depressant, with sedative, hypnotic and amnesic properties. It is commonly known as a **date rape drug** because of its sedative effects.

Gamma-butyrolactone, abbreviated as **GBL**, is a chemical compound that, once ingested, is rapidly converted in the body to GHB.

How it is obtained

GHB is a natural substance produced in GABAergic neurons from GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid). Synthetically, it is produced in the laboratory through specific chemical processes.

GBL is a precursor to GHB and is rapidly converted into GHB once ingested. GBL is commonly used in industrial settings but can be converted into GHB through simple chemical processes.

What they look like

GHB comes in liquid form (colorless, odorless and virtually tasteless) or as a water-soluble crystalline powder. There are also pharmaceutical formulations in which GHB is present as sodium oxide (Xyrem or Alcover) in liquid solutions with specific dosages for therapeutic use.

The precursor GBL is an oily, colorless liquid, often used to adulterate GHB or sold as a standalone substance.

How they are used

GHB and GBL are generally taken orally, often mixed with alcoholic beverages and/or other psychoactive substances.

Psychoactive effects

The effects of GHB appear within 5-20 minutes of ingestion and peak after 30-60 minutes. The duration varies from 1 to 7 hours, depending on the dose and combination with other substances. At lower doses, disinhibition, euphoria, muscle relaxation and increased libido are present. As the dose increases, drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, amnesia, convulsions, bradycardia and respiratory depression occur, leading to cardiorespiratory collapse and death.

The effects are amplified when combined with alcohol, benzodiazepines or opioids, significantly increasing the risk of *overdose* and death.

Other substances with similar effects include benzodiazepines and barbiturates.

International control

GHB is listed in Schedule II of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

GBL is not subject to international control.

Legal status in Italy

GHB and **GBL** are included in **Table IV of narcotic substances** in Presidential Decree No. 309/90.

KETAMINE

Ketamine is a synthetic substance with anesthetic/dissociative properties, used in veterinary medicine and, to a lesser extent, in humans. Since the mid-1990s, recreational use of this substance has become widespread due to its dissociative effects.

What it looks like

Ketamine usually comes in liquid form or as a white crystalline powder. It can also be found in tablets as an adulterant (e.g. in MDMA - ecstasy tablets).

How it is used

In liquid form, it is taken orally or injected, while the powder can be snorted. Its use is often associated with the use of MDMA, cocaine or alcohol.

A mixture of MDMA, ketamine and 2C-B phenethylamine is popular in recreational settings under the name **pink cocaine**.

Psychoactive effects

At low doses, ketamine causes a state of euphoria, often followed by bouts of anxiety or mood swings. At high doses, it induces sedation, amnesia, anesthesia and a state of dissociation, which can become very severe and in which the response to external stimuli is altered, with aggression, ataxia, dysarthria, muscle hypertonia, nystagmus, hyperreflexia and myoclonic jerks. At very high doses, acidosis, hyperthermia, tachycardia, severe hypertension, convulsions and coma may occur. Although rare, there have been reports of deaths following ketamine use. Many users report near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, hallucinations, tunnel vision, *blackouts* and memory lapses (*K-Hole*).

Tolerance, dependence and withdrawal symptoms have been observed in numerous animal studies. Tolerance to the desired effects of ketamine develops rapidly and may lead to increased doses. A risk associated with recreational use of ketamine is the potential for psychological dependence on the drug in some individuals, based on case reports and information provided by users. There is no evidence that ketamine causes withdrawal syndrome in humans.

International control

Ketamine is not listed in the Schedules of the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Legal status in Italy

Ketamine is listed in **Table I of narcotic substances** and in **the Table of Medicines**, Section A, of Presidential Decree 309/90.

HALLUCINOGENS

Hallucinogenic or psychedelic substances are a heterogeneous group of compounds that interact with the central nervous system, causing significant alterations in perception, thinking and mood. Hallucinogens act primarily on neurotransmitters, particularly serotonin, dopamine and noradrenaline, altering communication among neurons. This interferes with the brain processes that regulate perception, thinking and emotion, leading to unique and often intense psychedelic experiences. These substances can be either natural (such as psilocybin found in certain mushrooms) or synthetic (such as LSD).

Among the best-known hallucinogenic substances are:

- **LSD**: one of the most powerful synthetic substances.
- **Psilocybin**: found in hallucinogenic mushrooms.
- **Mescaline**: found in the *peyote* plant.
- **MDMA (ecstasy)**: although it has stimulant effects, it is often classified as a hallucinogen.
- **DMT**: a psychoactive substance found in certain plants and infusions.

Hallucinogens can also be divided into different classes based on their molecular structure:

- **Serotonergic:** similar to serotonin, a neurotransmitter that regulates mood, sleep and other brain functions (LSD, psilocybin, DMT). Mechanism of action: they interact with serotonin receptors in the brain, altering their function.
- **phenylethylamines:** similar to catecholamines, a group of neurotransmitters that include adrenaline and noradrenaline (an example is mescaline contained in *peyote*). Mechanism of action: they act on various receptors, including those for dopamine and noradrenaline.
- **Piperidinic:** similar to piperidine, a cyclic organic compound such as phencyclidine (PCP). Mechanism of action: they block glutamate receptors, a neurotransmitter involved in the transmission of information in the brain.

Methods of use

The methods of use of hallucinogens vary depending on the specific substance; in particular, they can be taken by ingestion, inhalation and injection.

Psychoactive effects

Hallucinogens are a class of substances that cause profound distortions of perception, leading to highly subjective and often intense sensory and cognitive experiences. The effects of these substances vary greatly from individual to individual and depend on several factors, including the substance itself, the dosage, the *set* (the individual's mental state) and the *setting* (the surrounding environment). Common effects can be summarized as perceptual distortions, alterations in time, emotional changes, depersonalization, and derealization.

Health consequences

Hallucinogens can cause a wide range of short-term effects, some of which can be very intense and frightening. It is important to emphasize that the experience with these substances is highly subjective and can vary from person to person, depending on the factors described above.

Some of the most common risks associated with hallucinogen use may include:

- *bad trip*: these are extremely negative and distressing experiences, characterized by intense fear, paranoia, disorientation and a feeling of losing control. A *bad trip* can last several hours and leave deep psychological scars.
- Panic and anxiety: the use of hallucinogens can trigger panic attacks and intensify pre-existing anxiety.
- Perceptual distortions: visual, auditory and tactile hallucinations can be intense and disorienting. The perception of time and space can be altered, creating a feeling of unreality.
- Disorganized thinking: thinking can become confused, illogical and difficult to follow.
- Impulsive and risky behavior: under the influence of hallucinogens, some people may engage in impulsive and dangerous actions.
- Psychotic reactions: in some people, the use of hallucinogens can trigger or aggravate pre-existing psychotic disorders.
- Physical effects: nausea, vomiting, increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, dilated pupils, sweating and loss of coordination.

Medical use

These substances have been associated exclusively with the world of illegal drugs and recreational contexts.

However, recent scientific studies are reopening the debate on their potential therapeutic use. Hallucinogens are believed to act primarily on serotonin receptors in the brain, modulating the activity of different brain areas involved in emotion, perception and cognition.

LSD

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) is one of the most potent semi-synthetic hallucinogenic substances, produced from lysergic acid, which in turn is obtained from ergotamine, a substance derived from the fungus *Claviceps purpurea*, a parasite of rye and wheat.

LSD was first synthesized in a laboratory by Albert Hoffmann for the Sandoz laboratory in Basel in 1938. A few years later, during a re-evaluation of the compound, he accidentally ingested a small amount and described his first *trip*. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sandoz evaluated it for therapeutic purposes and marketed it under the name Delysid.

Recreational use began in the 1960s and is associated with the 'psychedelic era'.

How it is obtained

LSD is produced by chemical synthesis in a laboratory, where it is usually prepared as a tartrate salt, which is soluble in water.

How it looks

Liquid LSD is generally used to impregnate small squares of paper ('*blotter paper*') the size of small postage stamps, often decorated with colorful patterns or designs, each containing a single dose. Less frequently, it can be found in the form of small tablets 2-3 mm in diameter (known as 'micro dots'), capsules, sugar cubes or gelatine squares ('windowpane'). In some cases, it is available directly as a liquid solution in water or alcohol.

LSD is photosensitive when in liquid solution, while it is more stable in doses on paper.

How it is used

LSD is mainly taken orally. The squares of absorbent paper are placed on the tongue, where the substance is quickly absorbed. Tablets or capsules, on the other hand, are swallowed. The effects of LSD usually begin within 30 minutes of ingestion and can last from 8 to 12 hours or even longer, depending on the dose and individual conditions.

Psychoactive effects

LSD is believed to act on the serotonergic system. It is active in extremely small doses (starting at 20 micrograms) and is generally not addictive. Its effects occur approximately 30 minutes after ingestion and can last between 8 and 12 hours. The duration and intensity of the effects depend on the dose.

Physical effects: the first physical effects include dilated pupils, slight hypertension and occasionally mild fever.

Psychological effects: the main effects are perceptual and sensory in nature, including

visual distortions, synesthesia (such as chromesthesia) and altered perception of time.

Short-term health consequences

Episodes of panic reactions, known as 'bad trips', can be intense enough to require medical intervention. Although symptoms usually resolve within a few hours, some individuals may experience hallucinations lasting up to 48 hours and, in rare cases, psychotic states lasting 3 to 4 days. The effect depends largely on the mental state and environment in which the substance is taken.

Long-term health damage

LSD use can be associated with *flashbacks*, meaning sensory memories of experiences under the influence of the drug, which can occur unexpectedly. Extremely rare side effects, such as irrational acts with fatal outcomes, have been documented, but cases of deaths directly attributable to LSD are virtually non-existent.

Medical use

In the past, LSD was used in psychotherapy under the trade name Delysid, but it is not currently used medically.

International control

LSD is listed in Schedule I of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Legal status in Italy

LSD is listed in **Table I of narcotic substances** pursuant to Presidential Decree No. 309/90.



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Graphic design by: Sovrintendente Capo Tecnico Coordinatore della Polizia di Stato Paolo Poggi
Vice Sovrintendente della Polizia di Stato Angelo Bertucci
Assistente Amministrativo (Ministero dell'Interno) Francesco Cenciarelli

Scientific collaboration: Biologist Dott.ssa Silvia Graziano and Chemist Dott.ssa Valeria Buccilli

Translated by: Dott.ssa Federica Loddi



DCSA

Address

Via Torre di Mezzavia 9/121
00173 ROMA
ITALIA

Phone number

+39 06 4651

Certified e-mail

dipps016.0000@pecps.interno.it

Website

antidroga.interno.gov

E-mail

direzione.antidroga@interno.it