

2019 EU Drug Markets Report



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European Law Forum: Prevention • Investigation • Prosecution

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News

On 26 November 2019, Europol and the EMCDDA published their joint [EU Drug Markets Report](#) for the year 2019, looking at impact and driving forces behind drug markets, the main drug markets in the EU, and how to respond to drug markets. The report finds that the drug market is a major source of income for organised criminal groups (OCGs) in the EU, at a minimum estimated retail value of €30 billion per year.

The report also identifies the following:

- Illicit drugs represent the most valuable market for criminal organisations operating in the EU;
- About two thirds of those engaged in the drug trade are also involved in other criminal activities;
- There are signs of increasing competition between groups, leading to escalating violence within the EU drug market;
- Overall, drug availability in Europe, for both natural and synthetic drugs, remains very high;
- The European drug market is increasingly characterised by consumers having access to a wide variety of high-purity and high-potency products that, in real terms, are usually equivalent in price or even cheaper than they have been over the past decade;
- Developments in the area of precursors have been an important driver in the expansion of drug production;
- The drug market is becoming more globally connected and technologically enabled;
- OCGs are becoming more internationally connected, and they exploit the gaps/differences that exist in regulatory and drug control environments;
- The main drivers of market changes and new threats stem from opportunities arising from the existence of global commercial markets and the associated logistical developments and digitalisation within these markets.
- The drug market has become increasingly digitally enabled. Both the surface web and darknet markets are used for online drug sales, as are social media and mobile communication apps. Encryption and anonymised services are also being increasingly used by OCGs for secure communication in the trafficking and sale of illicit drugs.
- Levels of production, globally and in the EU, are very high;
- Cocaine production in South America and heroin production in Afghanistan are estimated to be at historically high levels;
- China has gained in importance as a source country for drug precursors and new psychoactive substances;
- Africa has grown in importance due to its growing role as a trafficking and transit area;
- Europe is also a major producer of cannabis and synthetic drugs for the EU market and is, to some extent, a global supplier of MDMA (ecstasy) and amphetamines;

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- In some neighbouring countries, OCGs are closely linked to ethnically-based groups residing in the EU, which is changing the dynamics of drug supply.

To tackle the identified problems, the report sets forth the following main targets for action:

- Strengthen efforts to target top-level OCGs active in the global drug market;
 - Reduce vulnerabilities at external borders;
 - Focus on key geographical locations for trafficking and production;
 - Invest in forensic and toxicological capacities;
 - Address links to other important security threats;
 - Raise awareness about the cost of drug-related violence and corruption;
 - Develop response to digitally enabled drug markets;
 - Act at the global level.
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