

Heroin and other Opioids Flood EU Drug Market



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News

The threat posed by heroin and other opioids to the EU are analysed in a [report](#) published by Europol and the EMCDDA on 24 January 2024. According to the report, opioid use remains a major part of the drug problem in Europe. While heroin is the most frequently used illicit opioid, other opioids such as methadone, buprenorphine, tramadol, fentanyl derivatives, and benzimidazole opioids (nitazenes) are also available illicitly. The number of high-risk opioid users in the EU is estimated at approx. 1 million. Based on data from 2021, the minimum estimated annual retail value of the heroin market is €5.2 billion (with a probable range of €4.1 billion to €6.7 billion based on data from 2021). The quantity of heroin seized by EU Member States more than doubled to 9.5 tonnes in 2021 – the highest amount in 20 years – with large individual consignments being detected at seaports. The EU counts around 1 million high-risk opioid users.

Looking at key areas for action at the EU and Member State levels in order to respond to developments in the illegal heroin and other opioids market, the report identifies the need to take action as follows:

- Improve the strategic intelligence picture;
- Strengthen responses to reduce supply and enhance security;
- Boost international cooperation;
- Invest in capacity-building;
- Strengthen policy, public health, and safety responses.

The report also points out that the trafficking and distribution of heroin is the mainstay activity for some criminal networks operating in the EU; they rely on well-established infrastructure and contacts. As with other drug types, the abuse of legal business structures, money laundering and corruption are among the key enablers of the illicit heroin market.

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