



News release

2023 EU DRUG MARKETS ANALYSIS FROM THE EMCDDA AND EUROPOL

Amphetamine: new analysis on Europe's most common synthetic stimulant highlights sophisticated EU-based production and environmental concerns

(16.10.2023) — **EMBARGO 11:00 CEST/The Hague | 10.00 WEST/Lisbon** Amphetamine is the most common synthetic stimulant available in Europe, constituting a large and stable market worth a minimum of EUR 1.1 billion annually. In a new analysis released today — *EU Drug Market: Amphetamine* — two EU agencies highlight sophisticated EU-based amphetamine production, as well as the impact of production on the environment ⁽¹⁾.

The analysis, from the **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** and the **European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol)**, covers the supply chain from production and trafficking to distribution and use. It also details the processes, materials and criminal actors involved at different stages and levels of the market.

Europe is a major global producer of amphetamine, alongside the **Middle East**. Amphetamine use is also concentrated in these two regions. In **Europe**, amphetamine is largely consumed as powders and paste, whereas, in the **Middle East**, it is mostly used as 'captagon' tablets. Around 10.3 million European adults (15–64 years) have used amphetamines in their lifetime, 2 million having used them in the last year ⁽²⁾.

Amphetamine production in Europe evolves as criminals innovate and adapt

Almost all of the amphetamine consumed in the EU is made domestically. Production is mainly concentrated in the **Netherlands** and **Belgium**, where it occurs typically in large-scale facilities using complex equipment. Production is based on methods that use an internationally restricted chemical (BMK), which is typically produced in Europe from non-restricted 'designer precursors' imported from **China**.

European amphetamine producers are both adaptable and innovative. Traditional amphetamine production methods have been simplified over the years to use fewer chemicals and less equipment, while delivering a similar final product at higher profits.

In some cases, the manufacturing of the consumer product is not completed in the laboratories where it is synthesised. Instead, the amphetamine is exported as base oil and converted into amphetamine sulfate in laboratories elsewhere. This raises concern over the spread of such 'conversion labs' to more EU countries.

Between 2019 and 2021, 337 sites related to illicit amphetamine production were dismantled in the EU. The production of amphetamine on a large scale generates vast quantities of chemical waste that harms the environment, creating risks for human health and high costs for local municipalities.

Will demand for captagon tablets in the Middle East lead to increased production in the EU?

Only a small share of the amphetamine manufactured in the EU is used to produce captagon tablets, which are mainly trafficked to consumer markets in the **Middle East**. This occurs infrequently, mainly in the Netherlands, often on-demand. Drug-related EU criminal networks do not appear to be otherwise involved in the captagon trade and no significant use of captagon is reported by EU Member States. EU countries are mainly involved as transshipment points between captagon-producing countries outside the EU (**Lebanon** and **Syria**) and destination markets in, and around, the **Arabian Peninsula** ⁽³⁾. The analysis raises the

question of whether demand for captagon tablets in these markets may present opportunities for EU-based drug producers to increase amphetamine production for export.

A sophisticated business

Criminal networks involved in the illicit amphetamine trade are business-oriented, cooperative and adaptable, often using each other's resources and infrastructure or participating in joint criminal ventures. Today's analysis shows how logistical support has become a parallel business, with some criminal actors acting as service providers, specialising in providing the chemicals, equipment and expertise needed to set up and operate production facilities. Legal business structures are often misused to facilitate production, trafficking and distribution. Criminals also resort to violence and corruption when needed to meet their aims.

Addressing current threats and boosting preparedness

Today's findings draw on data and information from the **EMCDDA's** drug monitoring system and from **Europol's** operational intelligence on serious and organised crime. Taking a threat assessment approach, the agencies highlight key areas for action at EU and Member State level. These include: improving the strategic intelligence picture; strengthening responses to reduce supply and enhance security; boosting international cooperation; investing in capacity-building; and, reinforcing policy, public health and safety responses.

EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel says: 'Amphetamine is the most common synthetic stimulant drug in Europe today. While its market remains relatively stable, we should not underestimate the impact the drug has on the health and security of Europeans. Not only does it affect individuals, but it also impacts communities around and beyond production areas through environmental damage and public health consequences. Europe is a global producer of amphetamine, and for each kilogram of amphetamine produced, almost 40 kilograms of chemical waste can be generated. This in turn is dumped into our soil and water. To tackle these cross-border challenges, it is vital that Member States cooperate, share knowledge, and enhance preparedness'.

Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle states: 'The market for synthetic drugs runs into the billions of euros each year, and their production is getting more sophisticated. Distribution networks are getting smarter; and the drugs themselves, more harmful. Large amounts of toxic chemical waste generated by chemical synthesis have been released into nature, endangering public health and safety. Europol is constantly monitoring this pernicious threat and providing cutting-edge operational support to investigations in Member States'.

Further modules will be published in 2023 and 2024 to complete the strategic analysis of the EU drug market.

(¹) This latest module of the *EU Drug Markets: In-depth analysis* from the two agencies is available in English at https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/amphetamine_en and www.europol.europa.eu.

The analyses are a unique set of resources for law-enforcement and health professionals, policymakers, the academic community or anyone seeking up-to-date information on drug markets in Europe. Data relate to the period 2019–21.

(²) In some datasets it is not possible to distinguish between amphetamine and methamphetamine, in which case the term 'amphetamines' is used in the plural.

(³) [Captagon trafficking and the role of Europe](#) | News release.