

D. Europe

1. Major developments

719. The European illicit drug market is supplied by both domestically cultivated and manufactured drugs and drugs trafficked into Europe from other parts of the world. In the European Union alone, the illicit drug market is estimated to generate about 24 billion euros in profits per year, meaning that drug trafficking is the criminal activity generating the greatest revenue in the European Union. More than a third of the criminal groups operating in the European Union are engaged in the manufacture, trafficking and sale of illicit drugs; two thirds of organized criminal groups engaged in drug-related crime are also involved in other criminal activities. These criminal groups increasingly rely on new technologies, including the use of online marketplaces and cryptocurrencies for sales of illicit drugs, with a view to increasing the efficiency of their illicit activities and circumventing detection.

720. According to EMCDDA, the number of annual drug seizures in Europe exceeds 1 million. In 2015, seizures of cannabis accounted for 71 per cent of all seizures, followed by cocaine (9 per cent), amphetamines (5 per cent), heroin (5 per cent), MDMA (“ecstasy”) (2 per cent), and other drugs (8 per cent). Regarding illicit activities involving precursor chemicals, the Board noted a large increase in diversion attempts involving acetic anhydride identified by several European Union countries during the reporting period.

721. It is estimated that over a quarter of the general population in the European Union (more than 93 million people aged between 15 and 64 years) have tried illicit drugs at least once in their lifetime. The prevalence of cannabis abuse in the European Union is about five times higher than that for other illicit substances. In the current

reporting period, the availability and abuse of high-potency “ecstasy” products and synthetic opioids continued to increase. European Union authorities are concerned about the increasing number of drug overdose deaths, in particular those related to heroin and other opioids, which has risen in the Union for three consecutive years.

722. The so-called Balkan route dominates the Eastern European drug trafficking corridor. On the Balkan route, opioid drugs are trafficked from their original production sites in, in descending order of amount, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and transit through Turkey and the Balkans onward to Central and Western Europe. The Balkan route has several constantly shifting branches, but the main course runs through Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria, while a smaller branch through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo¹⁰⁷ is used for storage and repackaging. In the opposite direction, synthetic drugs are smuggled from Western Europe. Albanian criminal groups collaborate closely with criminal groups in Greece, Italy, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

723. Trafficking in and abuse of new psychoactive substances, often marketed as “legal” alternatives to controlled substances of abuse, remained a considerable public health challenge in Europe. In 2016, 66 new psychoactive substances were detected for the first time via the European Union early warning system, representing a decrease compared with the 98 substances reported for the first time in 2015. The total number of the new psychoactive substances monitored by EMCDDA by the end of 2016 exceeded 620. According to UNODC, of all new psychoactive substances detected worldwide, since 2009, a group of over 80 of those substances have had an established presence on the global market and continue to be reported annually.

724. With regard to the latest development in drug control, the Board is aware of ongoing discussions among member States of the European Union on issues related to cannabis regulation, including making cannabis available for medical use and permitting cannabis production for non-medical use. In that regard, the Board noted that no legislation in the European Union allows for such non-medical or so-called “recreational” use (see paras. 737 and 738 below).

¹⁰⁷ All references to Kosovo in this report should be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

2. Regional cooperation

725. In November 2016, a regional round table on law enforcement cooperation in combating new psychoactive substances in Eastern Europe took place in Bucharest, with the participation of OSCE countries and INCB and UNODC. Joint investigation techniques and advantages of a common data collection system figured among the topics discussed.

726. EMCDDA has continued its active cooperation with candidates and potential candidates of the European Union, for example, by assisting Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as Kosovo, in the development of their internal early warning systems, in line with EMCDDA guidelines.

727. The Cooperation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs (Pompidou Group) of the Council of Europe continued to contribute to the development of multidisciplinary and evidence-based drug policies in its member States, and to undertake a bridging role, both between European Union and non-European Union countries and between the European Union and neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean region. In 2017, Pompidou Group activities focused, among other things, on securing training for managers from government and public institutions responsible for the development and implementation of drug policies related to reduction of demand for new psychoactive substances.

728. The operation “Channel-Western Barrier” conducted under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organization took place in 2017. More than 30,000 employees of the law enforcement bodies of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan, as well as of the competent bodies of the observer countries Afghanistan, China, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Lithuania and Poland, and financial intelligence units of INTERPOL member countries, CARICC and OSCE participated in the operation. More than 16.8 tons of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were seized, which mostly consisted of 15.5 tons of opium, approximately 647 kg of cannabis resin, 60 kg of cannabis herb, 40 kg of heroin and 220 kg of synthetic narcotic drugs.

729. The Twelfth Meeting of the Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Europe, took place in Vienna on 27–30 June 2017. More than 90 participants from 33 countries discussed the current situation with respect to regional and subregional cooperation in the area of drugs. The meeting covered a wide range of issues and included four working groups on the following topics: (a) use of the Internet for drug-related activities;

(b) alternatives to imprisonment for certain offences as demand reduction strategies that promote public health and public safety; (c) mainstreaming gender perspectives in drug-related policies and programmes; and (d) money-laundering, illicit financial flows and effective countermeasures.

730. The UNODC regional programme for South-Eastern Europe for the period 2016–2019 was launched at the seventh special meeting of the Programme Steering Committee held at UNODC headquarters in Vienna in November 2015. The programme is being implemented in close cooperation and partnership with the Governments of the region, as well as with relevant European Union institutions and regional organizations. The regional programme consists of three pillars: countering organized crime and trafficking, justice and rule of law, and drug demand reduction. One of the UNODC priorities in the region is countering money-laundering and the financing of terrorism, and in the reporting period a regional advisor was posted in Bosnia and Herzegovina to provide support in that area.

731. In February 2017, on the margins of the Munich Security Conference, high-level representatives of the European Union and the Government of Afghanistan signed the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development. The Cooperation Agreement formalizes the European Union's commitment to Afghanistan's development during the "decade of transformation" (2014–2024), and addresses a wide range of economic and political areas such as the rule of law, rural development, health and education, as well as actions to combat corruption, money-laundering and drug-related crime.

3. National legislation, policy and action

732. During the reporting period, EMCDDA published a number of ad hoc publications, technical reports, surveys and overviews that covered a wide range of drug control-related topics, including European Union policies and measures related to drug supply reduction; legislation on cannabis in European countries; penalties for drug trafficking; high-risk drug use and new psychoactive substances; and drug-related infectious diseases in the region.

733. According to the joint publication of the European Union judicial cooperation unit (Eurojust) and EMCDDA, entitled "New psychoactive substances in Europe: legislation and prosecution — current challenges and solutions", published in November 2016, the established drug control laws struggled in recent years to address the ever-growing market for new

psychoactive substances. The legal responses addressing new psychoactive substances in the European Union were based on existing laws that focused on medicinal products or provisions related to consumer or health protection, or were based on new innovative legislation, as introduced by some Governments.

734. In 2016, the Government of Austria adopted the Addiction Prevention Strategy, which aims for a society as free as possible of addiction, treats addiction as a health condition and supports the principle of treatment instead of punishment.

735. In Cyprus, in late 2016, the Parliament adopted three amendments to the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law of 1977 to revise and consolidate the Law's first schedule and replace the term "cannabis" to exclude industrial hemp from the legal definition, and adopted one amendment to the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Regulations of 1979 to include remifentanil in schedule 2 of the Regulations.

736. In 2016, Switzerland added 35 new psychoactive substances to the list of narcotic substances, and Estonia added 7 new psychoactive substances to schedule I of its list of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, namely 4-AcO-DMT, 2C-P, ethylone, 5F-AMB, furanylfentanyl, W-18 and 5F-MDMB-PINACA. In 2016, Estonia added 15 groups of substances to schedule VI of its list of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, namely adamantoylindoles, benzoylindoles, phenethylamines, fentanyl derivatives, phenethylacetylindoles, indazolecarboxamides, indolecarboxamides, cathinones, naphthoylindoles, naphthoylpyrroles, naphthylmethyleneindenes, naphthoylmethylindoles, tryptamines, cyclohexylphenoles and cyclopropylcarbonylindoles.

737. In March 2017, EMCDDA published a report entitled "Cannabis legislation in Europe: an overview". According to the report, over the past two decades at least 15 European countries have amended their legislation in a way that affected penalties for cannabis use. It is not, however, clear whether the legal penalties for cannabis use offences, which were increased or reduced in the countries concerned, have had any effect on the prevalence of cannabis use in those countries. The publication points out that despite the tolerated but not condoned existence of cannabis social clubs in a number of European countries and vocal requests to change national or local policies regarding non-medical use of cannabis, European countries have not sought to legalize non-medical use of cannabis, and there is little evidence that proposals for changes in cannabis policy enjoy majority public support.

738. The Board wishes to reiterate that the 1961 Convention establishes, in its article 4 (“General obligations”), that the parties to the Convention are to take such legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary to give effect to and carry out the provisions of the Convention within their own territories and to limit exclusively to medical and scientific purposes the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in and use and possession of drugs.

739. In March 2017, the European Commission proposed the European Union Action Plan on Drugs for the period 2017–2020. The new Action Plan builds on the findings of the evaluation of the European Union Drugs Strategy for 2013–2020 and the Action Plan for 2013–2016, which were published in December 2016. The Action Plan identified new priority areas, including the monitoring of new psychoactive substances, the use of new communications technology for the prevention of drug abuse and the gathering of evidence on the potential connection between drug trafficking and the financing of terrorist groups, organized crime, migrant smuggling or trafficking in persons.

740. In addition, in April 2017, EMCDDA published its Strategy 2025. The EMCDDA strategic objectives for the coming years include improved understanding of the nature and consequences of drug-related crime and an enhanced capacity to identify new drug-related health threats and a rapid response by the European Union and its member States.

741. MDMB-CHMICA was reported to the European Union early warning system in 2014. In February 2017, the Council of the European Union decided to make MDMB-CHMICA subject to control measures throughout the European Union; the member States of the European Union will have to introduce controls on the substance into their national legislation within a one-year period. In March 2017, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs included MDMB-CHMICA in Schedule II of the 1971 Convention. In early 2017, the EMCDDA carried out risk assessments of two fentanyls (acryloylfentanyl and furanylfentanyl). In April 2017, the European Commission proposed to subject acryloylfentanyl, a potent synthetic opioid, to control measures across the European Union.

742. In Germany, prior to the entry into force of the New Psychoactive Substances Act on 26 November 2016, new psychoactive substances were controlled pursuant to the provisions of the Federal Narcotics Act. The New Psychoactive Substances Act placed under control particular new psychoactive substances listed in its annex. The Act defines new psychoactive substances as any substance or preparation

belonging to the specified generic definitions for synthetic cannabinoids and compounds derived from 2-phenylethylamine. Substances already listed in the Narcotics Act or Medicines Act were excluded. The Act prohibits manufacture, trade and possession of new psychoactive substances and enables the Ministry of Health to amend the definitions of new psychoactive substances based on expert advice, and empowers police authorities to confiscate these substances using their general powers to protect life and health. The Act makes offences involving new psychoactive substances punishable by up to 3 years in prison, and up to 10 years in aggravating circumstances.

743. During the reporting period, the Government of Spain allocated 8.1 billion euros from the national Fund for Assets Seized from Illegal Drug Trafficking to programmes related to the prevention of drug addiction. The Government also adopted Decree No. 129/2017 of 24 February 2017 concerning the control of precursor chemicals and initiated the evaluation of the National Drug Strategy for 2009–2016 and the preparation of a new national drug strategy for the period 2017–2024.

744. In June 2017, the Parliament of Montenegro adopted a law amending the Criminal Code of Montenegro in accordance with the Financial Action Task Force recommendation for the prevention of money-laundering. Article 8 of the Law proposed the amendment of the definition of “property gain” obtained by the criminal offence. This amendment is harmonized with the measures of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism.

745. The number of deaths in the United Kingdom associated with new psychoactive substances increased by 25 per cent, from 163 deaths in 2014 to 204 deaths reported in 2015. The Psychoactive Substances Act, which came into force in the country on 26 May 2016, criminalized the manufacture, supply or possession with intent to supply of any psychoactive substance knowing that it is to be used for its psychoactive effects. From May to December 2016, the competent authorities of the United Kingdom enforcing the new powers stopped over 300 shops across the country from selling the substances, formerly referred to as “legal highs”, and closed down several others.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

(a) Narcotic drugs

746. Accounting for 38 per cent of the value of the illicit drug retail market in the European Union, cannabis remains both the most widely abused and seized illicit drug in the region.

747. The overall potency (THC content) of both cannabis herb and cannabis resin consumed in the European Union remained historically high and ranged from 7 to 11 per cent and from 11 to 19 per cent, respectively. The black market price of both drugs was almost the same, in the range of 8–11 euros per gram and 7–12 euros per gram, respectively.

748. Cannabis herb used in the European Union is both cultivated domestically, mostly indoors, and trafficked from other regions. Albania remains the main source of cannabis herb trafficked to the European Union. In 2016, indoor cannabis cultivation of varying magnitudes was reported by several countries, including Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

749. As indoor cannabis growing equipment and cannabis seeds are now readily available on the Internet and with the expansion of sophisticated growing technologies, the European Police Office (Europol) anticipates further increase of the indoor cultivation of cannabis herb in the European Union in the coming years.

750. Most of the cannabis resin destined for the European Union market was trafficked from Morocco, although there are indications that Libya is becoming a major hub for the trafficking of the drug to Europe and other destinations.

751. In 2015, the amount of cannabis resin seized in the European Union (536 tons) was six times higher than that of herbal cannabis (89 tons), with Spain, Italy and France, in that order, accounting for the largest amounts of cannabis resin seized. In 2016, total seizures of cannabis resin amounting to more than 1 ton were reported by Spain (324.4 tons), Italy (23.9 tons), the United Kingdom (7.2 tons), Denmark (3.8 tons), Norway (3.0 tons) and Germany (1.9 tons).

752. During 2016, in Romania, 75 drug trafficking groups were dismantled, which represents a 17 per cent increase from the previous year, when 64 drug trafficking groups were dismantled. The number of persons

involved in those groups also increased slightly in 2016, from 425 persons in 2015 to 528 persons in 2016. Of the 528 persons arrested in 2016 for involvement in a trafficking group, 521 persons were Romanian nationals.

753. In Albania, during 2016 the cannabis situation was characterized by an increase in the number of cultivated cannabis areas, associated with an expansion of maritime trafficking routes and attempts at drug trafficking via air routes. In 2016, due to increased supply, the retail price of cannabis in Albania decreased to a level of 100–400 euros per kg.

754. Seizures of cannabis in Albania increased by 164 per cent from 2015 to 2016, reaching a total of 30 tons in 2016, compared with 11.3 tons seized in 2015. Over the same period, the farm-gate price of cannabis decreased, from 600–1,300 euros per kg in 2015 to 100–400 euros per kg in 2016. The percentage of THC content in street-level cannabis (retail) is estimated to vary considerably, from 0.1 to 18 per cent.

755. In Romania, in 2016 there was a significant increase in the total quantity of drugs seized compared with 2015. This situation was mainly determined by the increase in the quantity of cocaine seized, from 71.2 kg to 2.3 tons, representing 39.3 per cent of the total amount of drugs seized in 2016. Seizures of cannabis plant increased from 293 kg to 2.8 tons, representing 48.2 per cent of the total amount of drugs seized in the country in 2016, and the most seized illicitly cultivated plant in the country.

756. Heroin is the most commonly trafficked and abused opioid in the European Union. Other opioids, including buprenorphine, fentanyl, methadone, morphine, opium and tramadol, that have been seized in smaller amounts in the region in 2015 might have been diverted from legitimate pharmaceutical supplies or illicitly manufactured.

757. Most of the heroin seized in the European Union originated in Afghanistan, although according to the *European Drug Report 2017: Trends and Developments*, some of the heroin that was seized in Europe could have been manufactured in Iran (Islamic Republic of) or Pakistan. Past detections of a small number of laboratories converting morphine into heroin in Czechia and Spain suggest that limited amounts of heroin could also have been manufactured in Europe. According to Europol, depending on several factors, including the possibility of an increase in demand for heroin in Europe and/or any disruptions to trafficking of the substance from Afghanistan, further illicit heroin manufacture may emerge in the European Union in the future. A seizure of heroin, acetic anhydride and other material containing traces of morphine in an illicit laboratory uncovered in

the Netherlands in 2017 might further corroborate the suspected existence of such illicit manufacture in Europe.

758. There are two main routes that traffickers continued to use extensively for smuggling heroin to Europe: the Balkan route and southern route. About 40 per cent of global heroin and morphine captured in 2015 was seized in countries on the so-called Balkan route, one of the world's principal opiate trafficking routes.

759. The so-called southern route of the Balkan route involves the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. The route has been increasingly used for the smuggling of heroin from Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan to Europe, either directly or via the African continent. In addition to these two trafficking routes, traffickers also use the so-called northern route and a route that passes through the southern Caucasus and across the Black Sea.

760. In 2015, the total of 36,000 seizures of heroin in the European Union amounted to 4.5 tons; this amount was considerably lower than the 8.9 tons seized in the European Union in 2014. In 2016, seizures of heroin larger than 100 kg were reported by the United Kingdom (806 kg), Italy (497 kg), Germany (330 kg), Spain (251 kg), the Netherlands (230 kg) and Croatia (120 kg).

761. The number of reports of the emergence of highly potent new synthetic opioids, mostly fentanyl derivatives, communicated through the European Union early warning system has increased since 2012. These substances, which have sometimes been sold as, or mixed with, heroin, other illicit drugs or counterfeit medicines, pose serious health risks not only to their users but also law enforcement officers responsible for combating their manufacture and trafficking and employees of post offices and express courier services who could unknowingly be involved in their transportation and delivery.

762. Trafficking of heroin mainly uses transport by road to bring the heroin to markets in Central and Western Europe, using trucks, buses and private vehicles. Greece and Italy are the main destinations for the trafficked heroin. Increasingly, some of the heroin trafficked has been retained in Albania for local consumers. According to Government statistics, seizures of heroin in 2016 indicate an increase in the quantity of seized heroin to 57.3 kg (an increase of 55 per cent) compared with 36.7 kg in 2015. Wholesale prices and retail prices remained almost identical to the previous year. The price for 1 kg of heroin ranges from 16,000 euros to 18,000 euros. In 2016, at street level, the average price for 1 gram of heroin was 22 euros. The purity of heroin at street level ranged between 1 and 15 per cent.

763. Cocaine available on the illicit markets in Europe originates in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru. The traffickers continue to use various means of transportation, including maritime containers, yachts, airfreight, private aircraft, passenger flights and postal services to transport the drug to Europe. The Caribbean countries have often been used as countries of departure for cruise ships smuggling cocaine to the European Union countries. Couriers smuggling cocaine to Europe often travelled directly from Brazil.

764. In 2015, four countries (Belgium, France, Portugal and Spain) accounted for 80 per cent of the total 69.4 tons of cocaine seized in the European Union. In 2016, the countries reporting seizures of cocaine hydrochloride of 1 ton or greater were Belgium (39 tons), Spain (15.9 tons), the Netherlands (12 tons), Italy (4.7 tons), the United Kingdom (4.2 tons), Romania (2.3 tons), Germany (1.9 tons) and Portugal (1 ton).

765. Since 2016, some European countries have reported the destruction of "secondary extraction facilities", used by criminal organizations for the recovery of cocaine from materials in which cocaine had been dissolved or incorporated.

(b) Psychotropic substances

766. The synthetic drugs market has continued to be the most dynamic drug market in the European Union. The revival of the MDMA ("ecstasy") market, combined with the increased average content of MDMA in tablets, has been associated with harms and deaths in the European Union. Criminal syndicates in Belgium and the Netherlands continued to play a major role in the manufacture and distribution of MDMA ("ecstasy") and amphetamine in Europe. The MDMA ("ecstasy") and amphetamine manufactured in those two countries, in addition to satisfying the needs of the European drug users, is also trafficked to other countries worldwide.

767. Illicit manufacture of amphetamine is also occurring in Poland, and to some extent, it may exist in Germany, Hungary and Latvia. In 2016, methamphetamine laboratories were dismantled mainly in Czechia, Slovakia and Poland. However, methamphetamine manufacture has also started appearing in Bulgaria, Lithuania and the Netherlands. According to Europol, illicit manufacture of methamphetamine may in future also emerge in other European Union countries, in particular those where the illicit manufacture of amphetamine is already taking place.

768. In Czechia, methamphetamine is mostly manufactured from pseudoephedrine preparations which are often sourced in Poland, Slovakia and Turkey. Most of the methamphetamine is manufactured in small-scale kitchen laboratories. In 2016, the country reported that methamphetamine was also manufactured in large-scale laboratories with a potential manufacture capacity of 10–12 tons of the drug per year. Most of the methamphetamine manufactured in Czechia was intended for the domestic market, but a portion of the drug was also smuggled abroad.

769. One of the recent trends observed has been an increase in the production of synthetic drugs (especially narcotic drugs of the amphetamine and fentanyl groups) in clandestine laboratories within the Russian Federation. In addition, synthetic drugs are supplied to the Russian Federation mainly from Belgium, Czechia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine. Supply routes pass through Belarus, Estonia, Finland, Kazakhstan and Latvia.

770. In 2015, European Union countries reported seizures of 4.7 tons of amphetamine, 0.5 tons of methamphetamine, 185 kg of MDMA (“ecstasy”) and 3.8 million MDMA (“ecstasy”) tablets. In 2016, the dismantling of illicit laboratories manufacturing amphetamine was reported by Austria (4 laboratories), Germany (4 laboratories), Poland (18 laboratories) and Spain (2 laboratories). Methamphetamine laboratories were identified in Austria (5 laboratories), Czechia (261 laboratories), Germany (11 laboratories) and Poland (3 laboratories). The Dutch authorities reported dismantling 59 laboratories manufacturing amphetamine or MDMA (“ecstasy”) in 2016. In 2016, the Polish authorities also reported dismantling two medium-scale illicit laboratories manufacturing mephedrone.

771. Furthermore, in 2016, European Union countries also reported seizures of synthetic drugs, other than amphetamine-type stimulants. For example, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom reported seizures of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD); seizures of GHB were reported by Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Sweden.

(c) Precursors

772. In 2016 and 2017, traffickers seeking supplies of acetic anhydride targeted a number of European Union countries. The number of identified diversion attempts during that period was the highest in the past two decades. In most cases, delivery of the substance was prevented by the countries concerned in cooperation with INCB.

773. Since October 2014, when APAAN was placed under international control, only four countries in the European Union, namely Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, have reported seizures of small amounts of APAAN.

774. In 2016, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany and the Netherlands reported seizures of non-scheduled chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants, such as 3,4-MDP-2-P methyl glycidic acid derivatives, P-2-P methyl glycidic acid derivatives and *alpha*-phenylacetoacetamide (APAA).

775. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the region can be found in the report of the Board for 2017 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

(d) Substances not under international control

776. New psychoactive substances continued to be trafficked to the European region from China, where those substances are manufactured. European users can purchase these new psychoactive substances, often branded as “legal high” products, from specialized conventional stores and on the surface web. In addition, these substances are sold on the darknet and illicit markets, either under their own name, or sometimes sold falsely as being other illicit drugs such as heroin, cocaine, MDMA (“ecstasy”) or benzodiazepines.

777. Although new psychoactive substances are mostly manufactured elsewhere and only packaged and sold in the European Union, according to Europol a limited amount of manufacture of new psychoactive substances may also take place within the region. For example, in 2016, the Slovak authorities dismantled an industrial-scale laboratory illicitly manufacturing two psychoactive substances, namely 3-CMC (3-chloromethcathinone (clophedrone)) and *N*-ethylnorpentadone.

778. In 2015, the total number of seizures of new psychoactive substances reported through the European Union early warning system by the European Union member States, Norway and Turkey reached almost 80,000. This number of seizures was significantly higher than the number reported in 2014 (about 50,000 seizures). In 2015, seizures of cathinones accounted for 33 per cent; cannabinoids, 29 per cent; and benzodiazepines, 11 per cent of all 80,000 seizures. Seizures of phenethylamines, piperazines and other new psychoactive substances

accounted for the remaining 27 per cent of the total number of seizures of new psychoactive substances.

779. The most commonly seized cathinones in the European Union in 2015 were *alpha*-PVP, 3-MMC, ethylone, 4-CMC and pentedrone, and among seized synthetic cannabinoids there were ADB-FUBINACA, AB-CHMINACA, UR-144, 5F-AKB48 and ADB-CHMINACA.¹⁰⁸

780. Twenty-five new opioids, including 18 fentanyl analogues, have been identified on the European drug market since 2009. Eight of those 18 fentanyl analogues were reported for the first time in 2016. Two of those analogues, namely acryloylfentanyl and furanylfentanyl, have been sold on the illicit drug markets in the form of nasal sprays. Although the number of seizures of fentanyl and its analogues (300–400 seizures) in the European Union in 2015 was relatively low compared with seizures of other new psychoactive substances, the very high potency of the fentanyl analogues makes them a serious threat to individuals and to public health.

781. In Romania, the seizures of khat plants in 2016 increased significantly, from 247.7 tons in 2015 to 454 tons in 2016, accounting for 7.7 per cent of the total amount of drugs seized in 2016. In addition, Denmark reported significant seizures of ketamine, amounting to 3.8 tons.

5. Abuse and treatment

782. With an estimated annual prevalence of 7.0 per cent among persons 15–64 years old, and 13.9 per cent among those aged 15–34 years, cannabis remains the most prevalent drug of abuse in the European Union. Almost 1 per cent of adults in the European Union abuse cannabis on a daily or almost-daily basis (i.e., 20 days or more in the past month). The highest annual prevalence rates for cannabis abuse among persons 15–34 years old in the European Union were reported in France (22.1 per cent), Italy (19.0 per cent) and Czechia (18.8 per cent), while the lowest levels, less than 5 per cent, were reported by Cyprus, Hungary and Romania.

783. Monitoring rates of drug abuse among students provides an important insight into current youth risk behaviours and potential future trends. According to the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs report published in 2016, in the 35 European countries covered by the survey, one in three students (15- and 16-year olds) considered cannabis to be easily available. On average, 3 per cent of the students interviewed had

used cannabis for the first time at the age of 13 years or younger; the highest proportion of students initiating cannabis use at 13 years or younger were found in Monaco, followed by France and Liechtenstein.

784. About 17.5 million adults in the European Union countries aged 15–64 years (5.2 per cent of that age group) have used cocaine at some time in their lives, making it the second most prevalent drug of abuse in the Union. The decline in cocaine abuse in the European Union that had been reported in previous years was not observed to have continued in the most recent surveys. Last-year prevalence of cocaine abuse among adults aged 15–34 years old that was greater than 2.5 per cent was reported by Ireland (2.9 per cent), Spain (3.0 per cent), the Netherlands (3.6 per cent) and the United Kingdom (4.0 per cent). Those four countries accounted for about 85 per cent of all reported treatment admissions related to cocaine abuse in the European Union.

785. While heroin remains the most commonly abused opioid, there are indications that licit synthetic opioids, such as methadone, buprenorphine and fentanyl, have been increasingly abused in Europe. Although the latest data confirm that heroin abuse still accounts for the majority (around 80 per cent) of new requests for opioid-related treatment in the European Union, in Estonia, for example, the majority of individuals entering treatment reporting an opioid as their primary drug were using fentanyl. In Czechia, opioids other than heroin accounted for just over half of those entering treatment for opioid abuse in 2015. The average prevalence of high-risk opioid use among adults (aged 15–64 years) is estimated at 0.4 per cent of the European Union population. Of concern is the estimate for drug overdose deaths in the European Union, which has increased for the third consecutive year; opioid overdose accounted for 81 per cent of those deaths.

786. About 1.8 million people in the European Union aged 15–64 years, or 0.5 per cent of this age group have used amphetamines in the past year, and 2.7 million, or 0.8 per cent, of that age group, have used MDMA (“ecstasy”) in the past year. While abuse of amphetamine has been commonly reported by most of the countries of the European Union, the abuse of methamphetamine, mostly reported by Czechia and Slovakia, has recently also emerged in other parts of Europe, including countries in northern Europe and Germany.

787. As of January 2016, a total of 633,409 drug users were registered with specialized medical facilities of the Ministry of Health and the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation, a decrease of 1.6 per cent in the total number of drug users compared with the previous year. Over the same period, the number of persons

¹⁰⁸In the meantime, some of these new psychoactive substances have been put under international control.

who abuse drugs by injection that are registered with the health authorities declined to 298,155.

788. According to UNODC, an increase in amphetamine seizures has been reported during the past year in South-Eastern Europe, which may be related to the expansion of amphetamine trafficked in and through the Near and Middle East. The amount of amphetamine seized in South-Eastern Europe accounted for an 8 per cent share, or almost 4 tons, of global amphetamine seized in 2015. The increase in amphetamine seizures in South-Eastern Europe is primarily due to the increase in seizures reported in Turkey, which went up from 0.2 tons in 2014 to 3.8 tons in 2015.

789. The prevalence of MDMA (“ecstasy”) abuse peaked in the European Union in the early to mid-2000s. Since then abuse of MDMA (“ecstasy”) has shown a declining trend in the Union. The latest data, however, indicate that the use of the substance might have increased again in some countries, as corroborated by an increased presence of MDMA residues in wastewater in about a half of the 32 cities monitored in Europe in 2015 and 2016. In 2016, increased prevalence of MDMA (“ecstasy”) abuse was reported in, for example, Finland, Germany, Lithuania and Slovakia.

790. The prevalence of GHB, hallucinogenic mushrooms, ketamine and LSD abuse in Europe remained low and stable.

791. Although there are not enough comparable data on the prevalence of abuse of new psychoactive substances, that prevalence is considered to be rather low among the European Union’s general population. According to the 2015 report of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs, past-year prevalence of the abuse of new psychoactive substances among 15- and 16-year-old school students in the European Union member States covered by the survey and Norway was 3 per cent. An EMCDDA study entitled “High-risk drug use and new psychoactive substances”, published in June 2017, confirmed that there was some level of use of new psychoactive substances among high-risk user groups in 22 of the 30 countries monitored by EMCDDA.

792. Around 30,000 newly diagnosed HIV infections have been reported each year over the past decade in the European Union and the European Economic Area countries. However, the number of new HIV infections attributed to injecting drug use have continued declining in the European Union since the early 1990s. In 2015, 4 per cent of all HIV diagnoses in the European Union were among persons who abuse drugs by injection. At the conference on HIV organized by the Maltese Presidency of the Council

of the European Union and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in January 2017 European experts deliberated on practical measures such as prioritization of prevention programmes, facilitating the uptake of HIV testing, and easier access to treatment for those diagnosed, which could help the European countries to meet the target of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

793. **The Board recommends that all Governments in the region redouble their efforts to sustain the high level of treatment offered, in particular in countries in Central and Western Europe, and continue to provide necessary treatment for drug use-related disorders, including those involving new psychoactive substances and other substances of abuse not under international control. INCB further recommends strengthening the programmes aimed at the detection of such disorders among the entire population, including migrants, and ensuring appropriate referral to facilities providing treatment services.**