

News release

EU DRUG MARKET ANALYSIS FROM THE EUDA AND EUROPOL

Latest study on Europe's ecstasy market reveals new trends in production and trafficking

(27.03.2025 LISBON/THE HAGUE) **EMBARGO 10.00 WET | 11.00 CET** Criminal groups in Europe are adapting and expanding MDMA production, refining trafficking methods and extending their reach to new countries and regions. These are among the issues explored in a new analysis — *EU Drug Market: MDMA* — released today by the **European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA)** and **Europol** ⁽¹⁾.

The joint analysis from the two EU agencies describes the European market for MDMA (ecstasy), 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. The findings draw on data and information from the **EUDA's** drug monitoring system and from **Europol's** operational information on serious and organised crime.

The EU is central in the global synthetic drugs landscape, with EU-based production serving both domestic and international markets. Around 12.3 million Europeans (aged 15-64) have used MDMA at least once in their lifetime. The European retail MDMA market is estimated to be worth at least EUR 594 million annually, corresponding to around 72.4 million MDMA (ecstasy) tablets consumed in the EU.

MDMA production raises safety and environmental concerns

MDMA is primarily produced via the so-called 'high-pressure' method, using large industrial reactors. However, criminal networks are constantly adapting their production methods in response to shortages of equipment or chemicals. For example, changes in the availability of 'high-pressure' reactors have led producers to switch to the 'cold method'. This alternative MDMA production method has been associated with fires and explosions, increasing the risk of harm to local populations, first responders and the areas surrounding production facilities.

MDMA production also generates significant chemical waste. It is estimated that, in the EU, it may have generated between 1 155 and 3 191 tonnes of chemical waste in 2021, typically dumped away from the production sites, causing health hazards, environmental damage and costly clean-ups. The safety and environmental risks associated with MDMA production underline the market's broader societal impacts.

MDMA trafficked from the EU to Latin America: a reverse cocaine route?

Outside the buoyant EU drug market, profitable markets in Oceania and Asia appear to be the main destinations of MDMA shipments from Europe, but there are signs that Latin America is becoming an increasingly important market — a shift requiring close monitoring.

Traditionally, drug trafficking routes between Latin America and Europe have been dominated by cocaine exports. However, there have been reports that these routes are also used to traffic MDMA in the opposite direction. In some cases, criminals based in the EU and Latin America engage in barter deals, where MDMA is exchanged for cocaine, with no monetary exchange.

Innovation in precursor chemicals remains a challenge

The supply of precursors and essential chemicals plays a key role in MDMA production, typically assured by dedicated criminal networks with links to legitimate business. MDMA producers bypass legal controls on the precursor used to make MDMA (PMK) by using alternative unregulated substances that are mainly sourced from China and converted into PMK in Europe. Since 2013, seizures of these alternative chemicals have surpassed those of PMK in Europe, challenging authorities' efforts to control MDMA production in the EU.

High-strength ecstasy tablets still pose risks

Following successive years of rising amounts of MDMA in ecstasy tablets (2011–2019), this trend seems to have reversed, with the average MDMA content falling from 170 mg in 2019 to 144 mg per tablet in 2022. Nevertheless, potent tablets are still circulating.

Social media platforms and instant messaging apps have become particularly dynamic channels through which MDMA is sold to consumers. Mixtures of MDMA, ketamine and additional substances, sold as 'tucibi' or 'pink cocaine' are also increasingly available.

Addressing current threats and boosting preparedness

Today's report takes a threat assessment approach, presenting key issues and recommendations for action at EU and Member State level to address the challenges posed by the MDMA market. The key areas for action include: improving the strategic intelligence picture, strengthening responses to reduce supply and enhance security, boosting international cooperation, investing in capacity-building, and strengthening policy, public health and safety responses.

EUDA Executive Director Alexis Goosdeel says: 'Understanding the evolving MDMA market is essential for developing effective responses. MDMA remains a popular drug in nightlife and music festival settings, so ecstasy tablets that contain high amounts of MDMA, or unexpected ingredients, pose serious risks. Harm reduction measures, like drug-checking services, are crucial to mitigate the dangers. Tailored prevention and treatment services are more critical than ever, as MDMA tablets may contain new psychoactive substances that could have harmful consequences. Today's report also highlights how illicit MDMA production in Europe depends on access to precursor chemicals. Reducing their availability is essential to disrupt production and enhance public safety. That is why the EU Drugs Agency is supporting the European Commission in monitoring drug precursor diversion and trafficking and implementing precursor regulations.'

Europol Executive Director Catherine De Bolle says: 'Europe is a key player in the synthetic drugs market and a global supplier of MDMA, both producing and trafficking for domestic and international markets. Legal business structures are often exploited to obtain chemicals and equipment for drug production, which is characterised by continuous innovation. A further spread of production facilities throughout Europe is also highly likely, posing an additional threat to our societies. That's why Europol identifies drug trafficking as one of the key threats for the EU and prioritises the fight against this sort of serious and organised crime.'

Notes

(¹) This is the final module of the EUDA-Europol [EU Drug Markets: In-depth analysis](https://euda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/mdma_en). It is available in English at https://euda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/mdma_en and <https://europol.europa.eu>. Data relate to the period 2019–22. The module is being discussed at an online event on 27 March (a recording will be made available after the event): https://www.euda.europa.eu/event/2025/03/launch-eu-drug-markets-mdma-euda-europol-webinar_en

This EU Drug Market analysis was produced by the EUDA and Europol with the support of the EU Member States and features in the operational action plans of [EMPACT](#).