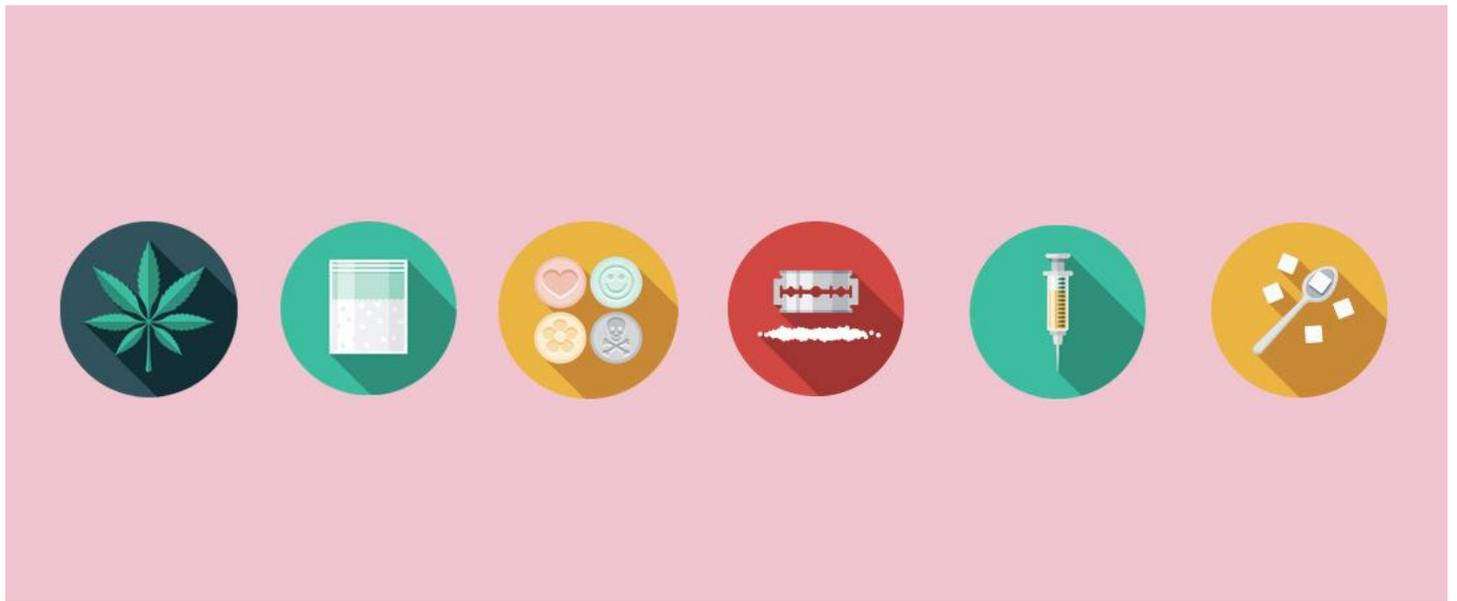


ILLICIT DRUGS IN THE EU: THE SITUATION IS EXPANDING IN SCALE AND COMPLEXITY

11 Dec 2019

[Press Release](#)

3rd international drugs conference at Europol's headquarters in The Hague



On 4 and 5 December, over 150 delegates from EU Member States, third partner countries and 9 international organisations gathered at Europol's headquarters in The Hague for the 3rd annual conference: **Drugs in Europe: tackling top-level drug trafficking organisations and large scale supply**. The conference focused on the fact that the [drugs](#) situation in Europe is unprecedented, expanding in scale and complexity as the supply is increasing across all drug commodities.

Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle said: "The illicit production and trafficking of drugs have always been at the heart of Europol's mandate and will continue to be so, especially given the clear escalation of the situation in Europe. Currently, organised crime poses the highest and most diverse risk to the EU internal security and drug trafficking is the most prolific criminal activity. This situation demands a considerable increase in law enforcement attention and resources devoted to tackling those criminals involved in illicit production and trade."

TRENDS DISCUSSED AT THE CONFERENCE:

- **Organised crime groups:** The number of identified criminal groups operating in the EU in 2019 stands at more than 5 000 and there are new types of organised criminal groups

emerging in Europe, including, among others, street gangs and various groups having their roots outside the EU.

- **Scale of the drugs market:** The drug market is considered to be the largest criminal market in the EU with more than 35% of the criminal groups active in the EU being involved in the production, trafficking, distributing and selling of drugs.
- **Supply and trafficking:** Europol sees a clear increase in drug supply and trafficking activities and the EU is not only a production hub for synthetic drugs but also a key market for cocaine. Trafficking by containers is one of the main methods for transporting cocaine to the EU, with 1% entering as a result of online orders and subsequent parcel post delivery.
- **Violence:** Europol is seeing an increase in violence linked to clashes between criminal groups, such as gang-linked killings. The latest trends linked to organised crime groups involved with drugs include increasing violence (shootings and bombings), corruption and rapid formation of global networks.
- **Terrorism:** There is clear evidence outside the EU of revenue generated by some organised criminal groups involved in drugs trafficking being linked to terrorism.
- **Fatal casualties:** Drug-related deaths in Europe are at an all-time high, mostly affecting younger, more vulnerable members of society.
- **Asset recovery:** Despite comprehensive money laundering legislation in EU Member States, the results of asset tracing in terms of confiscations remain at an extremely low level. Of the billions of euros generated by the illicit drug trade in Europe around only 1% is confiscated and more needs to be done to address this situation. The result is an increasing number of criminal groups with significantly higher profits, which can be used to fund other illicit operations and to infiltrate legitimate business structures.

LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE AND EUROPOL'S STRATEGY 2020+

Law enforcement needs to tackle this development and must invest heavily in supporting drug-related investigations in Europe. This must include an enhanced targeting process against the most prominent criminals, who constitute the highest risk of serious and organised crime in the EU and beyond.

Europol's Strategy 2020+ aims at bringing Europol's operational services closer to the investigative activities of EU Member States, improving the quality of intelligence in Europol's databases and ensuring agile and impactful operational support. Moreover, Europol is currently supporting a large number of investigations into high-risk organised crime groups and their leaders.

THE EU STRATEGY ON SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME

During the conference, delegates discussed the need for having an EU strategy to organised crime

and recommended that this strategy cover the following aspects:

- to prioritise operational law enforcement efforts against high-risk organised crime groups in the EU through a high-value target selection process established by the Member States with the support of Europol;
- to better tackle communication encryption and other new technology-related methods employed by organised crime groups;
- to increase the operational cooperation with South American and other relevant non-EU countries as this is essential to tackle the drugs trafficking in general and cocaine trade in specific;
- to find a solution for inconsistencies with regard to the legal framework and working processes concerning drug trafficking and other international organised crime-related investigations in the EU;
- to put a focus on seizing criminal assets to strengthen the impact against organised crime;
- to focus on drug trafficking and other crime hubs, such as airports, harbours and other geographical locations, identified by the Member States in the EU and in non-EU countries to ensure efficient information exchange and joint investigations;
- to enhance the real-time actionable information exchange and related joint investigations between the Member States with the support of Europol.

3RD INTERNATIONAL DRUGS CONFERENCE AT EUROPOL

Europol organised the annual conference for the third year in a row to increase the understanding of the latest trends in illicit drugs production and trafficking and to agree on bold law enforcement responses to protect the public from the threats posed by illicit drugs. Given the rapid evolution of both crime trends and operational response measures, Europol hosts this drugs conference on an annual basis.

In November, Europol and the [EMCDDA](#) jointly published the [EU Drug Markets Report 2019](#). The report highlights the increasing importance of Europe, both as a target and drug-producing region, and shows how violence and corruption, long seen in traditional drug-producing countries, are now increasingly evident within the EU. Among the wide-ranging consequences of the drug market presented in the analysis are its negative impacts on society (e.g. gang violence, drug-related homicide) and the strain on public institutions and governance.

CRIME AREAS [Drug Trafficking](#) • [Synthetic Drugs](#) • [Cannabis](#) • [Cocaine and heroin](#) • [Other Drugs](#)
TARGET GROUPS [General Public](#) • [Law Enforcement](#) • [Academia](#) • [Professor](#) • [Students](#) • [Researcher](#) •
[Press/Journalists](#) • [Other](#)
SUPPORT & SERVICES [Information exchange](#)

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