

Report on Drug Seizures

in Southeast Europe



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Illegal drugs trafficking and consumption impact the social, health, economy and security sectors. Environmental concerns should not be neglected either.

The year of 2020 was undoubtedly marked by the negative effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, that put many people around the world into difficult situations, economically but not only. To face the stress of the situation, negative coping mechanisms like drugs use, or even drugs trafficking for fast financial gains, might look more appealing than before.

The health crisis also meant a dramatic shift in social and buying habits, leaning heavily towards on-line means of communication and shopping.

At the same time, the restrictive measures implemented by all countries in their effort to fight the COVID-19 Pandemic affected all sectors of activity, and while it is too soon to say to what extent, also disrupted drug trafficking, an already very dynamic environment, stimulated by globalization and fast technology advancement.

The 2021 Report on Drug Seizures (further referred to as the “Report”) aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the drugs situation in Southeast Europe in 2020 and to support the Law Enforcement Authorities in completing their understanding of this multifaceted and ever-evolving scenario.

METHODOLOGY

The report is based on statistical data provided by all 11 SELEC Member States through the Annual SELEC Questionnaires on Drug Trafficking for 2020 and previously drafted SELEC reports. Other International Law Enforcement Organizations' reports (ex. UNODC, EMCDDA, etc.) were taken into consideration as well;

AL		Republic of Albania
BA		Bosnia and Herzegovina
BG		Republic of Bulgaria
GR		Hellenic Republic
HU		Hungary
MK		The Republic of North Macedonia
MD		Republic of Moldova
ME		Montenegro
RO		Romania
RS		Republic of Serbia
TR		Republic of Turkey

The Report covers the situation / evolution of the main types of drugs in the period January - December 2020 in the SELEC region. For revealing trends in drug trafficking, data from 2019 have also been used.

It needs to be mentioned that the contribution of some Member States was not detailed enough, while the number of shared seizure notifications was too low to be relevant. Therefore, the findings on the Report may not reveal the complete regional situation on certain topics, the totals presented in the Report should not be considered as absolute values, the accuracy is dependent on the completeness of the available data.

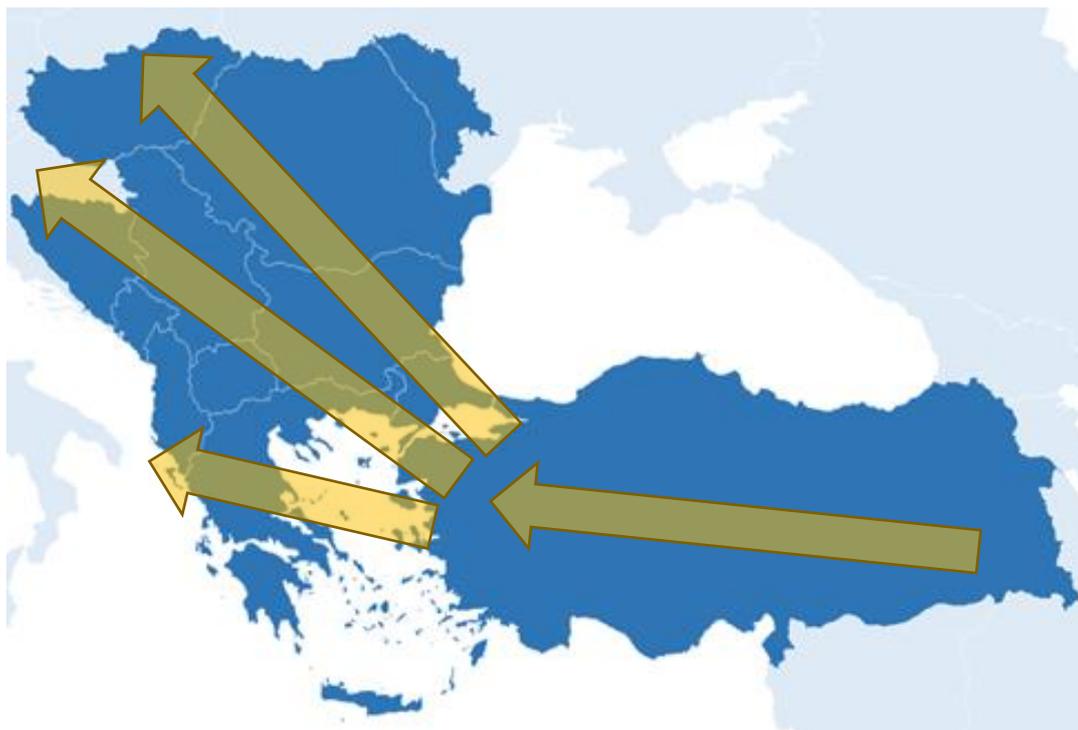
Countries have reported the seizures of synthetic drugs using different units (kilograms, tablets, pills etc.). In order to analyse/compare the data, the following conversion system for ATS tablets (for Europe) has been used to uniform the figures for synthetic drugs, as follows:

- 1 tablet Ecstasy (MDMA or analogue) = 271 mg
- 1 tablet Amphetamine = 253 mg
- 1 tablet Methamphetamine = 225 mg
- 1 tablet Non-specified amphetamine = 250 mg

In order to provide an estimated value of the seized drugs, the average price “at street level” in all the reporting Member States was taken into consideration.

As not all the Member States participated with data on the number of cases, in order to have an average quantity / case representative for the region, only data from countries that reported on both topics were considered.

As graphically represented in the below map, the SELEC region is situated on what is known as the Balkan Route, that is divided into three sub-branches: the Southern branch (Turkey, Greece and Albania), the Central branch (Turkey, Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of North Macedonia and Montenegro¹) and the Northern branch (Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary).



The Northern Black Sea route (Central Asian countries, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russian Federation, and Ukraine), connects with the Northern and Central sub-branches of the Balkan route, via Ukraine, Romania, Hungary.

¹ Republic of North Macedonia or Montenegro can be included both in the Central and Southern branches of the Balkan route.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section of the Report highlights the key findings for the year 2020 for each type of drug and where relevant, comparative analysis with the situation reported in the previous year.

Opium-Based Drugs / Heroin

- The opium-based drugs (opium, heroin and morphine) seized in Southeast Europe –15.6 tons, a **decrease of 32.6%**
- Heroin (almost 14.5 tons) represents 94.5% of the total quantity of opiates, being the most important opium-based drug smuggled.
- Heroin - registered a decrease of 32.2%
- Opium-based drugs were transported mainly by Passenger Cars and Air Freight Consignments / Mail Delivery (by number of cases) or by Maritime Consignments (by quantities)
- The estimated value of the seized heroin: approx. 377 million EUR

Cocaine

- The cocaine seized amounts to 5.8 tons, this represents a **22.3% increase**
- Cocaine is shipped from the Andean countries to Southeast Europe predominantly via maritime containers
- Smaller amounts but in most of the cases are trafficked by passenger cars
- The estimated value of the cocaine: around 281 million EUR

Cannabis

- Cannabis is the most trafficked and consumed illicit drug in the region and in the world
- The total amount of cannabis products (marijuana and hashish) seized – more than 116 tons, meaning an **increased by 4%**
- 64.6% was herbal cannabis (marijuana) and 35.4% hashish
- Illegal plantations: 106,329 kg and 18,520 pieces/plants
- Marijuana - over 75 tons - decline by 1%
- Hashish - over 41 tons - increase by 15.4%
- At regional level, marijuana is transported most often by passenger cars (243 cases) and in largest quantities by trucks / lorries (6,369 kg) and air couriers (6,320 kg)

- The estimated value of marijuana: around 836 million EUR, hashish: around 470 million EUR.

Synthetic Drugs

- Amphetamine: 2674 cases (28% drop) and 2156 kilograms (**78.4% drop**)
- Methamphetamine: 35,028 cases (45% increase) and 4,219 kilograms (**394% increase**)
- MDMA: 6636 cases (31.3% drop) and 12,608 kilograms (**390% increase**)
- 110 million EUR – Amphetamine; 116 million EUR – Methamphetamine; 476 million EUR – Ecstasy
- Not excluded that OCGs or individuals would try to produce NPS in the region.

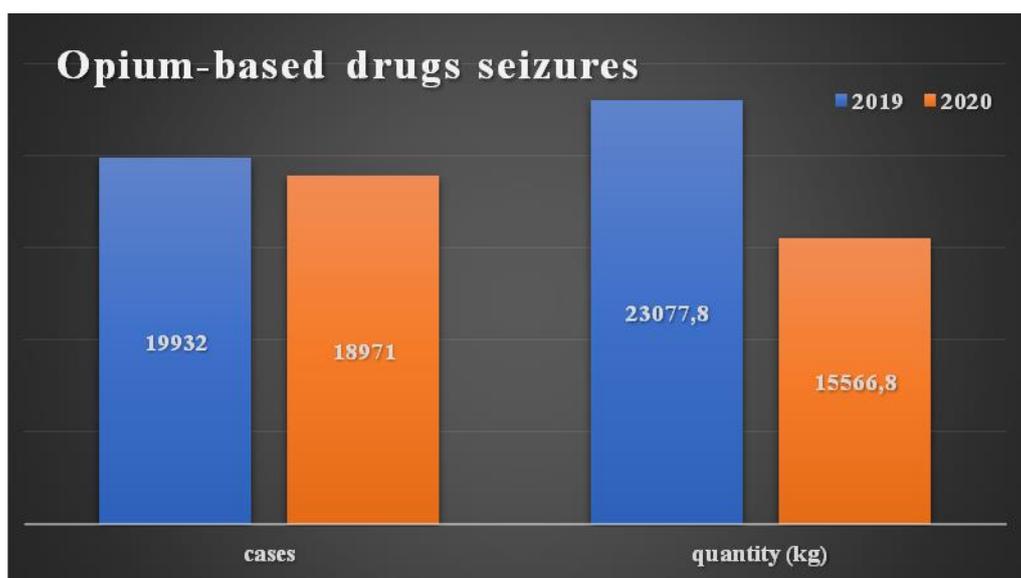
OPIUM BASED DRUGS

While opium poppy is cultivated legally, for medical purposes, in Australia, Hungary, India, France, Spain and Turkey, under the supervision of the United Nations, it is reported as being produced in 50 countries in total. Still, opium poppy production is being accredited mainly to Afghanistan, with an estimated 224,000 hectares (37% increase compared to 2019) and 6,300 tons in 2020².

With 84% of global heroin production in the past 5 years³ taking place in Afghanistan, the drugs have to travel long distance and across multiple borders to the main destination markets in Europe, which spawns a complex supply chain.

Southeast Europe is geographically located on the **Balkan Route**, the most heavily used and shortest way between the source and Western and Central European markets for heroin. This makes it a transit area and also, in various amounts from a country to another, a market for the illegal drugs. Some of the alternative and less used routes, that might gain in importance are the **Northern Route** and the **Southern Route**.

In 2020, the opium-based drugs (including opium, heroin and morphine) seized in Southeast Europe weighted almost 15.6 tons, representing a **32.6% decreased**.



Taking in consideration the seized quantities and the prices reported by SELEC Member States, the total estimated value of the heroin seized in 2020 (street price⁴) is approx. 377 million EUR.

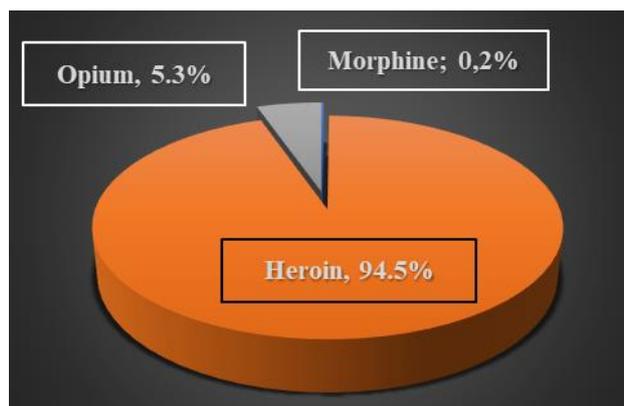
The reported opiate-related seizures for 2020 are referring to 18,971 cases, the vast majority (97.3%) being linked to heroin seizures, namely 18,468.

² UNODC – World Drug Report 2021

³ UNODC – World Drug Report 2021

⁴ Average price: ~25.6 Eur/gram

Heroin represents 94.5% of the total quantity of opiates seized in 2020, being undoubtedly the most important opium-based drug smuggled in the region. Opium (5.3%) and Morphine (0.2%) continue to represent opiates with a lower impact over Southeast Europe. The quantity of Morphine and Opium seized dropped by 42.5% (from 44.3 kg to 25.5 kg) and 27% (from 1,318.9 kg to 807 kg) respectively.

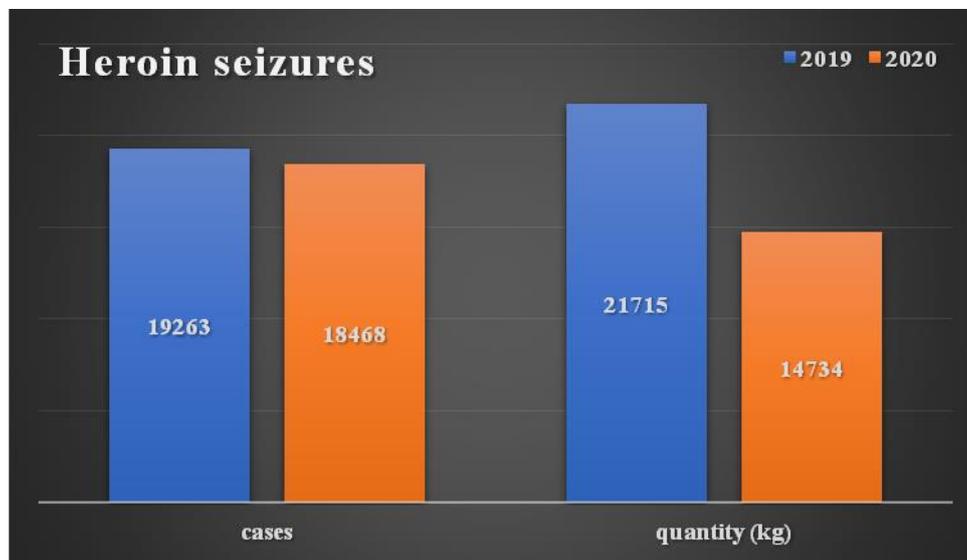


In 2020, Opium-based drugs were transported mainly by Passenger Cars or Air Freight Consignments / Mail Delivery counting the number of cases, and by Maritime Consignments considering quantities.

Three heroin laboratories were dismantled in 2020 with 9 offenders arrested.

HEROIN

Comparing the regional situation with the previous year, the amount of seized heroin in 2020 **decreased by 32.2%** (namely 6,980.3 kg), from 21,714.6 kg to 14,734 kg.



The number of cases recorded in 2020 decreased slightly, from 19,263 seizures in 2019 to 18,468 in 2020. The average quantity / transport was 813 kg, a 29.2% decrease compared to 1,148 kg average in 2019, but bear in mind that not all the countries replied with data on this topic.

Routes

Because of its key geographical position, Southeast Europe plays a major role in heroin trafficking, being located on the Balkan Route, the main supply channel for Afghan heroin.

The heroin coming from Afghanistan is mainly trafficked via Iran (mentioned as departure for the transport for at least 4,976.380 kg in 2018). Turkey then, acts as the first filter for heroin transiting SELEC region towards Western and Central Europe, being a common point for all the subdivisions of the Balkan route. From here, the heroin may be redirected via any of its three branches: The Southern, Central and Northern branch, not be seen as clearly divided, as they are interlocked and pivot on the interests and opportunities of the traffickers.

Considering the mentioned road traffic restrictions due to current health concerns, after transiting Turkey, the sea pathways along the route may gain importance for the heroin continuing the route to Western and Central Europe. Some of the many citizens with navigation skills in the region may be used to transport heroin to European markets by sea.

On its way, heroin may be mixed with other substances to increase the quantity, divided and repacked. The 3 laboratories discovered in 2020 could have served the purpose of cutting and diluting the heroin, before packing it for trans-border transportation, or distributing it to street-level dealers. It needs to be mentioned that in 2019 as well, 9 heroin production laboratories were located and dismantled and 13 offenders were arrested.

The 32.2% drop in the quantity of seized heroin compared to the previous year can be attributed to the heroin being stockpiled in locations along the route, due to the COVID-19 related traffic restrictions, ready to be shipped when restrictions loosen or new methods of transportation or opportunities arise. The old routes may change, their importance may shift, or new routes may emerge.

As the market regulates itself, a drop of the available heroin can lead to the increase in price at street level and / or increased consumption of other drugs, especially synthetic opioids, as a substitute. Also, a wider range of individuals / OCGs might be tempted by the higher profit and reduced competition, especially if the required connections are already in place.

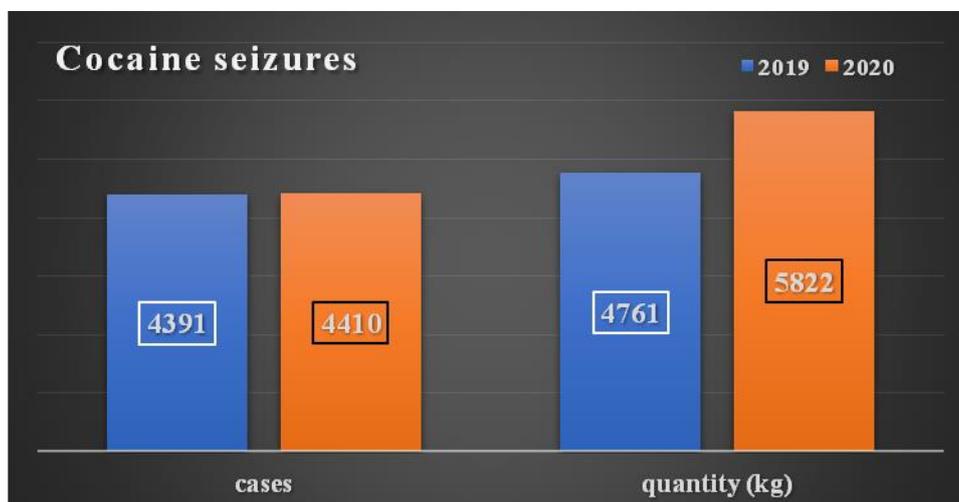
COCAINE

With the coca bush cultivation limited only to the Andean countries, due to geographical constraints, cocaine produced in South America is transported to European markets mainly by maritime containers.

From a global perspective, the Southeast Europe does not play a strategic role in relation to cocaine smuggling, compared to heroin and cannabis. The region represents a transit area to Western and Central European countries and to a lesser extent a destination for cocaine.

Taking in consideration the reported seizures and prices, the total estimated value of the seized quantities of cocaine (street price⁵) in 2020 is more than 281 million EUR.

The cocaine seized in 2020 amounts to 5,821.9 kg, representing a **22.3% increase**.



The number of cases remained almost the same (19 more cases in 2020), resulting in 21.7% larger quantities of cocaine per transport, from 1.1 kgs / case in 2019 to 1.3 kgs / case in 2020, but bear in mind that not all the countries replied with data on this topic.

Considering the Member States contributions, 221 cases with 3,002 kg were directly linked to trans-border trafficking, representing 51.6% of the total quantity of cocaine seized in the region.

Cocaine seizures at the border crossing points represent 48.8% of the total quantity seized and 94.7% related to transborder trafficking.

In terms of seized quantities, pursuant to the annual questionnaires, 63.3% of cocaine quantities were related to maritime consignments and 36% to passenger cars. This is in accordance with the need for cocaine to travel by sea (or to a lesser extent air) from South America where it is produced, to European markets, due to geographical limitations. Countries with sea ports are more likely to be placed on the trafficking itinerary.

Small quantities of cocaine also travel by land in the opposite direction, from ports in Western Europe towards the markets in the region.

Sometimes cocaine is transported mixed with other substances for concealment, requiring local laboratories for chemical extraction, to return it back to pure powder cocaine.

The 22.3% increase in the quantity of seized cocaine can be related to cocaine global production having doubled from 2014 to 2019, reaching an estimated 1,784 tons all-time high⁶.

⁵ Average price: ~93.8 Eur/gram

⁶ UNODC – World Drug Report 2021

Larger and easier availability of the illegal drug, together with its expected result, a drop in price, can lead to the market expanding towards new users. It can also mean an increase in purity of the cocaine available at street level, causing overdoses, especially in the mentioned category.

Higher level of competition between drug traffickers can also escalate into violence.

CANNABIS

Cannabis is clearly the most widely produced and used illicit drug in the world.

Because of its geographic location, the region offers suitable conditions for outdoor cultivation of the cannabis plant.

In addition to that, indoors cannabis cultivation, used world-wide to a lesser extent, it's growing rapidly, especially in Europe. Complete solutions for growing cannabis plants are available online, in a wide variety of options, starting from small "grow tents", usable in apartments (providing "grow lights", irrigation, ventilation and heat control systems) and ending with industrial scale solutions that can be used as is or easily adapted to cannabis growing. Seeds for plants with various characteristics (delta9-THC concentration, or the time required for the crop to mature and be ready for harvest) are available also. According to the UNODC⁷, in Europe, the cannabis herb potency (delta9-THC) increased from ~6% to ~11%, between 2002 and 2019. In the same period of time, its perception between adolescents as being risky dropped by as much as 40%, despite the evidence linking regular use to health problems, particularly in young people. The two aspects combined (increased threat and unrealistic perception) can be a set up for the drug to harmfully impact the young population.

New methods of consuming the cannabis plant, like "vapes" are also emerging. Vapes are hand-held, battery-powered devices that are used to inhale an aerosol (the vapor) containing various chemicals (nicotine, flavours, can contain THC or CBD).

The legalization of non-medical cannabis consumption for recreational purposes in some European countries and other places around the world, as well as cannabis being embraced by the RAP culture, has a significant impact on the perception of the young generation.

Globally, the herbal cannabis (marijuana) is produced and used in almost all countries, whilst the cannabis resin (hashish) production is limited to countries in North Africa, the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia⁸.

According to the information provided by SELEC Member States, taking in consideration the reported prices⁹ for cannabis products, the total value of the quantities of cannabis and its

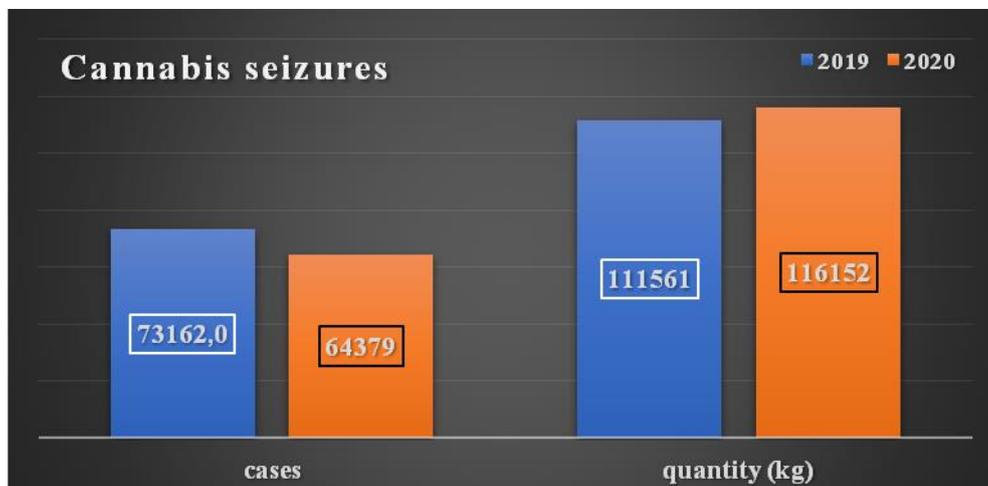
⁷ UNODC - World Drug Report 2021 (1995 to 2019 comparison)

⁸ UNODC - World drug report 2019

⁹ Marijuana average price: ~ 11.1 Eur/gram, Hashish average price: ~ 11.4 Eur/gram.

derivatives seized in 2020 (street price) is around 836 million EUR for marijuana and 470 million EUR for hashish (more than 1.3 billion EUR total).

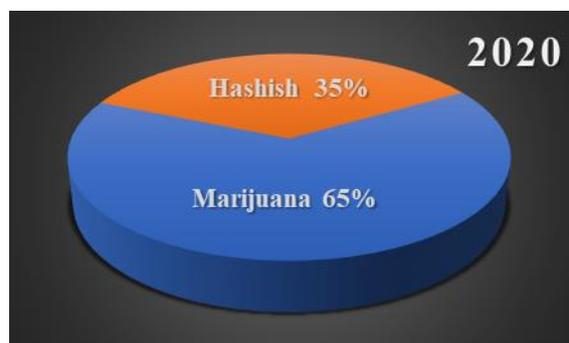
The total amount of cannabis products, including herbal cannabis (marijuana) and cannabis resin (hashish), reported as seized was 116 tons (116,152.1 kg) in 64,379 cases.



This means that in 2020, cannabis remains the first ranked drug, both in terms of value (street price) but also cases and quantities seized. The average quantity seized was 1.76 kg / case, a 26.3% increase comparing to the previous year (1.49 kg / case in 2019).

Compared to 2019, the quantity of herbal cannabis seized in 2020 registered a slight decrease of 1.2% while cannabis resin increased by 15.4%, with an overall **increase** of the seized cannabis products of +4%.

Regarding the type of cannabis products, 64.6% were herbal cannabis (marijuana) and 35.4% hashish. In the last five years, the share marijuana-hashish oscillated from 65% to 95% marijuana, being difficult to accurately assess its future evolution.



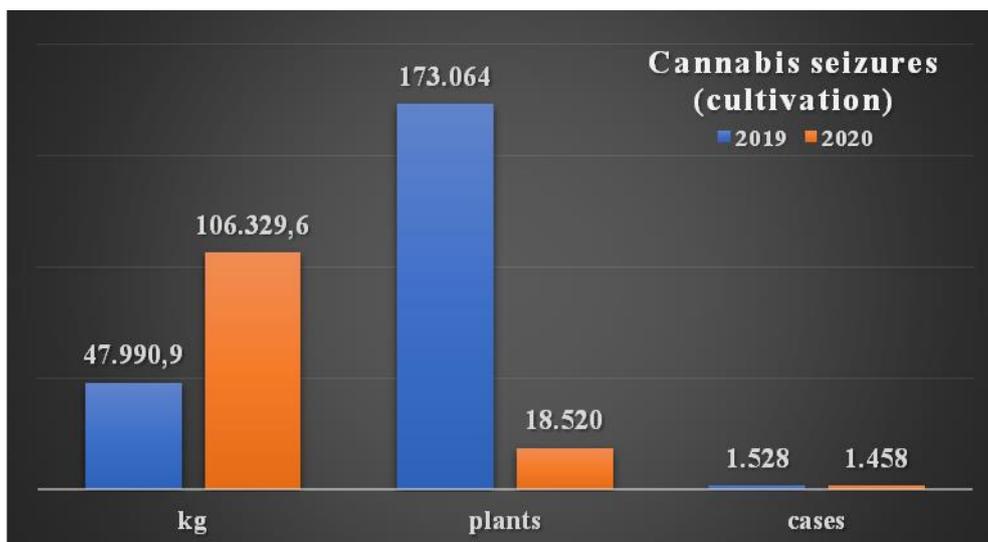
In 2020 8.3 liters of liquid cannabis were seized in 16 cases and 5,794 kg of scank (hybrid cannabis) were seized in 6896 cases.

CANNABIS CULTIVATION

According to the Member States contributions, in 2020, substantial quantities of cannabis were detained from illegal plantations, as follows: more than 100 tons (namely 106,329.6 kg) and 18,520 pieces/plants all within 1,458 cases.

Considering that the quantities were presented by the Member States in different units (e.g., kilograms, pieces, plants, stalks, trees) and there are no accepted/concrete/specific rules to

convert the quantities in only one unit, a general conclusion related to the evolution of quantities cannot be drawn.



In this case, comparing 2020 and 2019, the quantity increased by 122% (58,338.7 kg), while the number of pieces/plants decreased sharply by 89%.

HERBAL CANNABIS (MARIJUANA)

In 2020, over 75 tons (75,018.3 kg) within 55,626 cases of marijuana were seized, a **decrease of 1.2%** (less with 889.4 kg) comparing to the previous year.

The average quantity transported / case in 2020 was 1.14 kg, almost the same (**0.03% increased**) compared to 1.11 kg / case in 2019, but bear in mind that not all the countries replied with data on this topic.

As marijuana is it the most widely used illegal drug in the world, it is transported in bigger conveyance than any other drug.

Out of the total 75 tons of marijuana seized in 2020, just 13.5% (namely 10,090.5 kg) was indicated as directly related to trans-border trafficking; not all the countries provided data in this regard.

Regarding the marijuana seizures directly related to trans-border trafficking, as per the contributions of the Member States, 204 seizures of marijuana were made at the border crossing points and 167 seizures inland.

In terms of quantity, 6204.4 kilograms of marijuana were seized at the border crossing points, while 10,180.2 kilograms of marijuana were seized inland; again, not all the countries provided data on this aspect.

In most of the cases, seized marijuana was being transported by passenger car, while the biggest quantities were found in trucks / lorries and air couriers.

HASHISH

Hashish (41,133.8 kg in 2020) represents 35.4% of the amount of cannabis products seizures made in the region, the total reported quantity **increasing by 15.4%** (from 35,653.6 kg in 2019).

The average quantity of cannabis resin seized in 2020 was 4.54 kg / case, a 13.7% decrease compared to 2019 (5.26 kg / case).

Out of the 41 tons of seized hashish, 3.5 tons (namely 3,553.1 kg, 8.6% of total) were indicated as directly related to transborder trafficking, while 3.4 tons (3,456.1 kg, 8.4%) were seized at a Border Crossing Point; not all the countries provided data in this regard.

Seized hashish was most often being transported by passenger cars, while the biggest quantities were found in maritime consignments.

Marijuana is also reported to travel in both directions between sea ports and airports in Greece and Western Europe, or Turkey.

Having in mind that cannabis can be produced outdoors in the region and indoors anywhere in the world (and easier than ever), the routes are influenced by the links and connections at international level.

SYNTHETIC DRUGS

Amphetamine-type Stimulants (ATS)

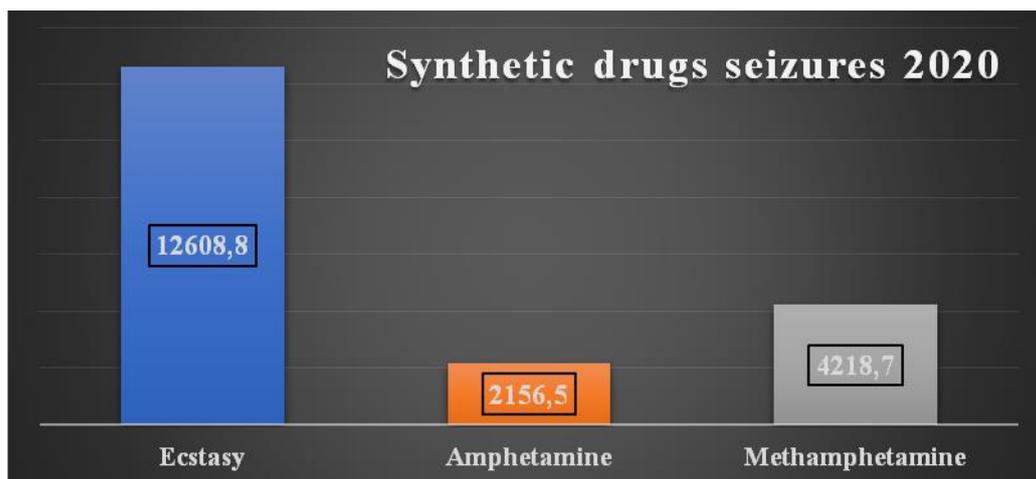
While substances abuse is one of mankind's oldest issues, the level of addictiveness caused by chemically produced drugs like synthetic drugs generate a whole new level of threat.

With the necessary chemical equipment being relatively easy to find (especially on-line), and the fact that the synthetic drugs production is independent of the cultivation of a certain crop, OCGs able to provide the required chemicals can produce ATS anywhere in the world. This means that such laboratories may be set up in the region.

Together with the fact that there is a wide variety of options as substituents, ATS production and trafficking may cause serious problems for countries that are slow to adapt their legislation to the new conditions.

The synthetic drug evolution is difficult to assess due to it being in direct relation with the development in technology, legislation and also the evolution of traditional drugs.

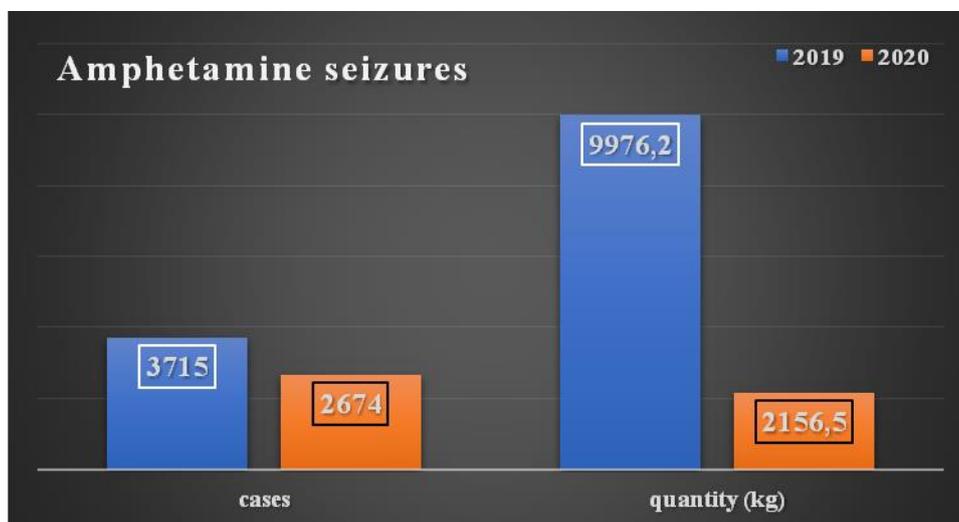
The following quantities of synthetic drugs were seized in 2020:



According to the information provided by SELEC Member States, taking in consideration the reported seizures and prices for synthetic drugs, the total value of the seized quantities in 2020 (street price) is around 110 million EUR¹⁰ for Amphetamine, 476 million EUR¹¹ for Ecstasy and 116 million EUR¹² for Methamphetamine.

AMPHETAMINE

In 2020 amphetamine registered a big **drop of 78.1%** compared to 2019, from 9,976.2 kg in 3,715 cases to 2,156.5 kg in 2,674 cases.



The average quantity / transport also dropped by 72.6%, from 2.69 kg / case in 2019 to 0.74 kg / case in 2020, indicating that drugs traffickers tried to move considerably smaller quantities of amphetamine per transport, but keep in mind that not all the countries replied with data on this topic.

¹⁰ Ecstasy average price: ~ 10.2 Eur/pill

¹¹ Amphetamine average price: ~ 12.9 Eur/pill

¹² Methamphetamine average price: ~ 6.2 Eur/pill

In 2020, 72.8% of the seized quantity of amphetamine was discovered in two maritime containers coming from Lebanon, dissimulated in organic soap and second-hand refrigerator’s parts.

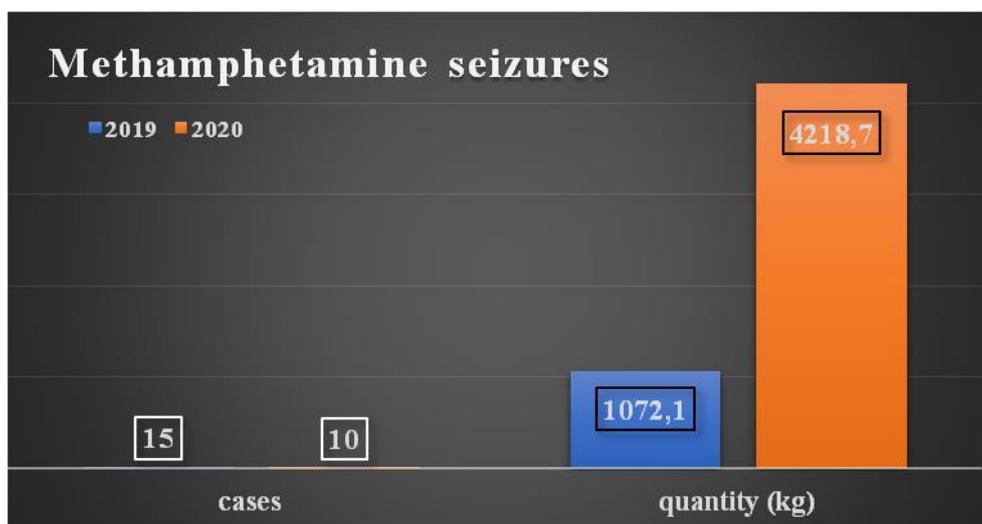
An amphetamine production laboratory was dismantled and one person was arrested in 2020. (3 laboratories were dismantled in 2019).

METHAMPHETAMINE

Related to methamphetamine affecting the region, the main source continues to be Iran. It appears that methamphetamine may be delivered also from India, by sea¹³.

According to Interpol¹⁴, a new trend in methamphetamine trafficking is represented by the emergence of Afghanistan as a mass producer. The discovery in the region of a wild crop, called “**Ephedra**”, allows the productions of **Ephedrine** locally, very cheaply, to further produce methamphetamine. Methamphetamine is being trafficked together with heroin from Afghanistan in increasing ratios.

The seized quantity of methamphetamine in 2020 registered a massive **increase of 394%** compare to the preceding year, from 1,072.1 kgs to 4,218.7 kgs.



Methamphetamine from Iran follows heroin on the Balkan Route, entering the SELEC region via Turkey, then continuing towards Western and Central Europe.

Regarding the methods of transportation, in most of the cases (88.5%), but also the largest quantity (99.8%) of the seized methamphetamine was transported by passenger cars.

¹³ SOCTA Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2017

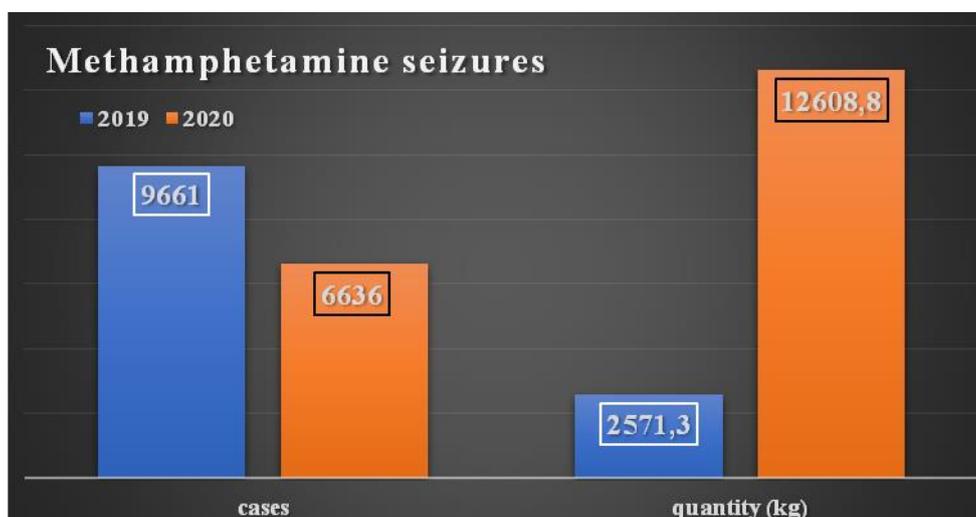
¹⁴ Interpol’s 3rd annual conference on illegal drugs 2021

In the analysed period 9 methamphetamine laboratories were dismantled and 11 persons were arrested. It needs to be mentioned that in 2019 as well 17 laboratories were destroyed and 27 suspects arrested.

During the last several years small quantities of methamphetamine are produced in kitchen-type clandestine laboratories, the drugs being used predominantly for private use or even distribution¹⁵.

MDMA (Ecstasy / XTC)

In 2020 MDMA seizures in the region **increased by 390%** (from 2,571.3 kg to 12,608 kg).



The average quantity / transported also increased by 85%, from 0.27 kg / case in 2019 to 0.49 kg / case in 2020.

In 2020 the Law Enforcement Authorities in the region seized 28,751,182 pills of Captagon in 1,357 seizures.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

The New Psychotropic Substances (NPS) are substances which may pose a public health threat and are not on the list (of substances) monitored by UN's 1961 and 1971 Conventions (on Narcotic Drugs or on Psychotropic Substances).

They are not a single group, but rather various groups of substances, like synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic opioids, synthetic cathinones, but also plant-based substances like Krathom or Kath.

They are known as “designer drugs”, “legal highs”, “herbal highs”, etc and are sold mostly on the internet, not limited to the dark web. Implicitly, the target is the younger population, looking for an alternative to the controlled drugs, with similar effects. On-line availability

¹⁵ SELEC 2018 drug report

gives the NPS a perception of legality and quality control in terms of concentration, effects or duration. After an on-line order, they are sent by mail/postal package delivery using transport companies, while labelled as other goods like bath salts.

According to EMCDDA, the number of new NPS on the global market has dropped over the past years, from 163 in 2016 to 71 in 2019¹⁶. It appears that countries that managed to update their legislation to keep up with the rapid evolution of the NPS sector succeeded in limiting their spread.

The New Psychoactive Substances arriving in the region are externally sourced, mainly from China, but also Belgium, Poland, the Netherlands and Ukraine.

Regarding the methods of transportation, most of the seized NPS were transported by air couriers (92.9% of the quantity) and air freight consignments / mail delivery (91.7% of the cases).

As the seizures are reported in different units (kilograms, tablets, packages) and there is no conversion procedure, a total quantity cannot be provided.

Regarding the risks posed by NPS usage, according to UNODC, “*NPS seem to pose a higher risk to individuals than that reflected in population-level statistics, as NPS use does not account for a significant share of total harm caused by drug use*”.

Organised Criminal Groups (OCG)

In the analysed period, 116 Organized Criminal Groups were dismantled, 55% less than in the previous year (257 OCG dismantled in 2019). 683 OCG members were arrested in 2020, out of which 26.4% were foreign citizens (180 members).

The reported transborder controlled deliveries resulted in seizures of 1156 kg of cocaine, 51 kg of cannabis (herbal & resin), 10.8 kg of Khat, 5.1 kg of heroin, 201 gr of MDMA and various other drugs in smaller quantities. Also 11 suspects were arrested.

As not all the Member States participated with data in this regard, a regional inference cannot be drawn.

¹⁶ European Drug Report 2021, EMCDDA

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The production, smuggling and distribution of illegal drugs are very profitable criminal activities, generating significant gains for OCGs that can adapt to changes, exploiting the opportunities to increase profits and evading detection. This is why most of the multi-crime OCGs have included drug trafficking in their area of business.

Fuelled by globalization, the rapid advancement of technology and innovation in the retail distribution, the drug trafficking environment is extremely dynamic and uses all available tools.

While restrictions on road traffic are in place, alternative sea and air transport options can be used. Drones of various sizes, personal planes, speed boats are just some of the alternatives. Combined together with other imaginative solutions (like mixing the drugs with other substances for concealment purposes and chemically extracting them after transport, closer to the end market), drugs can prove hard or impossible to detect for LEAs unable to keep up with the fast pace of technology.

Increasing quantities of illegal drugs are being delivered by contactless methods, like mail and other delivery services, excluding “the middle man”, cutting costs and hiding in the huge traffic flow of goods.

As users become more accustomed with on-line shopping, again due to health-related restrictions, increasing quantities of drugs are expected to be sold on the internet, but also systems for cultivation (cannabis) or chemical components for production (ATS, NPS).

Globalization also created the opportunity for OCGs to expand and have links across multiple borders and be able to support a multinational supply chain. It also helped them to become better accustomed with legal systems and the exploitable breaches, in their area of interest.

For such a global phenomenon that is drugs trafficking, there can be only one effective answer. One that is also international and planned in coordinated manner, powered by swift exchange of information but also sharing of good practices and useful tools, an answer tailored to the specifics of the region.