
Drugs: EMCDDA and Europol, trafficking between EU countries has not ceased despite lockdown

The impact of COVID-19 on the drug market has been studied in a report published today by the EU Drugs Agency (EMCDDA) and Europol, who have joined forces to better understand how trafficking has evolved during the lockdown. The report points to higher prices, local shortages and reduced purity for some drugs, while also noting “continued violence among suppliers and distributors”. “Organised crime groups remain active and resilient, by adapting transportation models, trafficking routes and concealment methods” to the pandemic. Disruption is seen mostly at the distribution level, due to social distancing measures. “Consumers and dealers”, however, “are increasingly turning to alternative methods, including the use of darknet markets, social media platforms and encrypted communication apps, with cashless payments and fewer face-to-face interactions”. Also, “the movement of bulk quantities of drugs between EU Member States has not ceased, despite border controls, due to the continued commercial transportation of goods across Europe”. Although smuggling by air has decreased, drug trafficking by maritime shipping has continued at levels similar to the pre-pandemic period. And cocaine seizures in some countries have increased compared to 2019. Heroin trafficking, too, has not ceased along many of the known routes (e.g. Balkan route). There has been, however, a disruption to the cannabis supply chain from Morocco into the EU, which has led to rising prices, and a decrease in the consumption of synthetic drugs used in recreational settings. While “the economic effect of the crisis is likely to make some in our communities more vulnerable to both drug problems and drug market involvement”, EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel remarked, “the growth of online dealing and encrypted communication will place greater strains on law enforcement”.

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