

# *Trends in Drug and Drug Abuse Indicators*

## *Executive Summary of Volume I of the IDT's National Report 2003 to the National Parliament*

### *1. Drug use*

Cannabis consumption is clearly increasing in a number of contexts: by far the most used illicit drug, with prevalence rates of use much higher than those for other substances, cannabis has a potential for further spread, particularly among the school population; it has an ever-growing significance within certain indicators, namely drug-related deaths, and is increasingly the main drug reported in administrative sanction proceedings in this field.

Although to a much lesser degree than in the case of cannabis consumption, an increase in the use of other substances is also apparent, particularly cocaine, ecstasy, hallucinogen mushrooms and LSD, especially among the school population.

However, heroin remains the main drug involved in problem drug use, as recorded at the level of treatment demand and drug-related deaths, even though a gradual decrease of heroin evidence in fatalities has been observed over the last years.

In 2003, the downward trends in several indicators relating to the supply and demand of drug-abuse treatment were reinforced: the number of specialized treatment settings decreased and, within the public network, there were no clients on the waiting list as at 31/12/2003; once again, there was a decline in the number of first-time appointments and of clients undergoing treatment in the year. On the other hand, the number of clients in opiate substitution programmes continued to grow. Further declines were also reported, although to a lesser degree than those occurred mainly after 2000, at the level of several indicators related to injecting drug use, HIV infection and drug-related deaths. Generally speaking, however, HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C infection rates among the groups under treatment did not vary greatly from those recorded as from 2000, with a tendency to level off as far as HIV and hepatitis C are concerned and to decline in the case of hepatitis B.

As far as administrative sanction proceedings for drug use are concerned, the trends recorded in the previous year were reinforced, particularly as regards patterns of use by the target population concerned – predominantly, use of hashish and non-drug addicts – and the social and demographic profile – where individuals aged less than 25 predominate -, thus emphasising the differences between this population and that which seeks treatment. In 2003, for the first time, in all Drug Addiction Dissuasion Commissions (CDTs) processes relating to the use of hashish alone were predominant, as well as the provisional suspension of proceedings in the case of non-addicted consumers, which may reflect a wider spread of hashish consumption and/or a more harmonized intervention on the part of the entities involved. As has happened since 2001, once again the weight of punitive decisions increased, namely those of a pecuniary nature, even though these are still of little significance within the overall decisions pronounced.

#### **1.1. Findings of National Surveys**

National epidemiological surveys carried out in 2001<sup>1</sup> among the general population aged 15-64, the school population of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades of Elementary School and the inmate population, as well as research on the estimated prevalence and patterns of problem drug use in Portugal, showed that cannabis has the highest prevalence of use among the said groupings, and that heroin, often used in combination with cocaine, is the most used drug among problem drug users. These surveys also suggested an increase and a wider regional spread of the use of various drugs, namely among the said school population.

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<sup>1</sup> Already published and circulated, *inter alia*, in the *Annual Report 2001* (IPDT, 2002), where specific bibliographic references of those studies are also included.

In 2002, the HBSC/WHO<sup>2</sup> survey found that lifetime prevalence rate of cannabis use among the target school population was 9.2%, a figure much higher than those for other substances (3.5% in the case of stimulants, 2.2% for ecstasy, 1.7% for cocaine and LSD and 1.2% for heroin). Compared to the equivalent survey conducted in 1998, this study points to an increase in the prevalence rates of cannabis and cocaine use and to a levelling off of the prevalence rates of heroin, which in 2002 was reported as the drug with the lowest prevalence rates of use.

In 2003, the *ESPAD*<sup>3</sup> survey also found, among 16-year old students, a lifetime prevalence rate of cannabis use of 15%, a figure much higher than those for other illicit drugs (4% for ecstasy, 3% for hallucinogen mushrooms, 2.9% for amphetamines, 2.6% for cocaine, 2.1% for LSD, 1.8% for heroin and 1.6% for crack). Compared to the equivalent survey conducted in 1999, this study shows significant increases in the prevalence rates of use of these substances, with the exception of amphetamines and heroin. The latter was one of the drugs with the lowest lifetime prevalence rates of use.

A study published in 2003 on problem drug use among hidden populations<sup>4</sup> reported that cannabis and heroin are the most used drugs among those target groups, although the use of cannabis is more significant in the up zone and the use of heroin in the down zone. Heroin, alone or in combination with base cocaine, is the main drug in cases of long-established problem drug use in the down zone, whereas in the up zone, where a much more exploratory type of consumption of a large variety of substances is observed, the use of heroin corresponds to a specific period in the drug-use lifetime experience of the various individuals. In both zones, when taken alone, heroin is most frequently used in the smokable form. Cannabis has a higher relevance in the periods before and after opiate addiction and may occasionally lead to a situation of problem drug use. Inhaled cocaine, as well as hashish, are the two most used substances in the up zone. Base cocaine is more relevant in the down zone, where it shares the same street space as heroin (market and consumption environments), both substances being sometimes used in combination (mixed or one after the other).

## 1.2. Indicators on Drug-related Health Effects

At the level of [drug treatment demand](#), a slight decrease was recorded in 2003 in the availability of specialised drug treatment settings, both public and private.

The public services reported 29 596 clients in active treatment, 5 212 of which in first-time treatment episodes, and no individuals on the waiting lists as at 31/12/03. For the second consecutive year, there was a decline (-7% compared to 2002) in the number of active clients in the year, as well as in the number of new clients (-16%), which recorded the lowest figure since 1994, thus reinforcing the decreasing trend observed since 2000.

Follow-up consultations numbered 355 018, accounting for a slight decrease (-2%) compared to 2002 and for +3% and +18% increases compared to 2001 and 2000, respectively.

The number of clients in public and certified Detoxification Units (2945) also decreased for the second consecutive year, accounting for -6%, -36% and -33% than in 2002, 2001 and 2000, respectively. In public and certified Therapeutic Communities (2948), the number of clients was roughly the same as in 2002 and approximately +2% and +14% higher than in 2001 and 2000, respectively.

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<sup>2</sup> The HBSC/WHO – Health Behaviour in School-aged Children – is a World Health Organization cooperative survey, the main aim of which is to study the lifestyles of youngsters and their behaviours in their various life scenarios. Having joined this project in 1996, Portugal became one of its associate members in 1998. National data concerning the 1998 and 2002 surveys, covering students of the 6th, 8th and 10th grades of regular education, have been published (Matos, Simões, Carvalhosa, Reis & Canha, 2000; Matos & Equipa do Projecto Aventura Social and Saúde (Social Adventure and Health Project Team), 2003).

<sup>3</sup> The *ESPAD* – European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs – is a Project coordinated by the Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN), with the support of the Pompidou Group/Council of Europe. Its main purpose is to provide comparable data on prevalence rates and patterns of use of legal and illegal substances among 16-year old students. Portugal has taken part in the various surveys carried out since the beginning of this project, namely in 1995, 1999 and 2003. National data set in the European context and concerning the 1995 and 1999 surveys have been published (Hibell et al., 1997; Hibell et al., 2000), and some preliminary national data concerning the 2003 survey, not yet set in the European context, have already been circulated (Feijão & Lavado, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> This study (Fernandes & Carvalho, 2003), based on a phenomenological rather than an epidemiological approach, looks into drug uses, the substances themselves and the actors, in two different social spheres: the down sphere, which corresponds to socially marginalised and stigmatised worlds, and the up sphere, which corresponds to the socially and culturally high layers of society.

The opposite situation was recorded in licensed and non-certified centres, which reported increases in the numbers of inpatients in Detoxification Units (421) when compared to 2002 (+4%) and 2001 (+19%), and, on the other hand, decreases in the numbers of inpatients in Therapeutic Communities (1190) in comparison with 2002 (-4%) and 2001 (-27%).

In 2003, drug treatment public services reported 16 877 individuals (57% of all clients undergoing treatment) under opiate substitution treatment programmes, accounting for a +7% increase in relation to the previous year; this increase was lesser than the yearly variations recorded over the last years (+23%, +21% and +76%, in 2002, 2001 and 2000, respectively). As at 31/12/03, 12 508 clients were under treatment in this type of programmes (78% in methadone programmes and 22% receiving buprenorphine), accounting for +3%, +22% and +50% increases compared to identical periods in 2002, 2001 and 2000, respectively.

Once again, within the framework of the expanded methadone administration network, the CATs (Specialised Treatment Centres for Drug Users) recorded a decline in their importance as the preferred place to take methadone, in favour of other settings.

The capacity of drug treatment services under the responsibility of the prison authorities remained stable in relation to the previous year, although there was an increase in the number of prisoners under treatment: 324 inmates in Drug-Free Units (+55%, +31% and -17% than in 2002, 2001 and 2000), 64 in Therapeutic Community (+31%, +45% and -25% than in 2002, 2001 and 2000) and 345 inmates in opiate substitution programmes under the responsibility of the General-Directorate for Public Health (+23%, -9% and +1% than in 2002, 2001 and 2000).

As in previous years, the districts of Faro, Beja and Setúbal reported the highest rates (per total inhabitants) of clients in public drug treatment services; the district of Bragança also stood out in 2003, with higher rates than Beja and Setúbal. In the case of first-time appointments, Faro, Bragança, Lisbon and Portalegre recorded the highest rates.

Individuals who demanded treatment in the different drug treatment services in 2003 were mostly males in the 25-39 age-bracket. An ageing trend persisted among first-time clients in public services. Overall, this population reported low education levels and precarious job situations. Heroin was still the main drug reported by these clients, followed by cocaine. The smoked/inhaled route of administration of the main drug predominated, while references to injecting drug use varied between 30% and 42%. On the other hand, 28% of new clients in public services reported injecting drug use in the last month previous to the first-time appointment, a figure similar to that of the previous year and lower than those recorded in 2001 (32%), in 2000 (36%) and in 1999 (45%).

Regarding [infectious diseases](#), the trend observed over the last years towards a decrease in the percentage of drug-addicts among the population diagnosed with AIDS persisted, as shown by the data provided by the CVEDT (Centre for Epidemiological Control of Infectious Diseases) as at 31/03/04: 62%, 59%, 57%, 54% and 46% of cases diagnosed in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002, respectively. On the said date, the total notified cases associated with drug dependence accounted for 50%, 44% and 50% of all notified cases of AIDS, AIDS-Related Complex and Asymptomatic Carriers, respectively. These percentage figures have fallen in the last years.

Concerning HIV-infection among drug users who, in 2003, demanded treatment in the different drug-treatment centres, namely first-time clients in public services and clients in public and certified Detoxification Units and Therapeutic Communities, the rates of positive results ranged between 15% and 16% among these three groups of clients. Despite the annual fluctuations recorded (these rates varied between 11% and 16% in 2002, 14% and 18% in 2001, and 14% and 17% in 2000), the tendency remains for these rates to stabilize. However, note should be taken that the downward trend observed over the last years among first-time clients in public services came to a halt. In 2003, the rates of patients undergoing antiretroviral treatment among the three said groups of HIV-infected drug-addicts ranged between 28% and 69% (in 2002 they ranged between 33% and 69%, in 2001 between 28% and 76%, and in 2000 between 22% and 69%).

Among these groups, the overall rates of positive results ranged between 3% and 8% in the case of hepatitis B and between 45% and 62% in the case of hepatitis C; these rates were generally lower than those recorded in the previous year and similar to those reported in 2001. Despite some yearly variations, figures recorded since 2000 point to a decline in hepatitis B and a levelling off in hepatitis C infection rates. In 2003, the rates of tuberculosis positive results among these groups ranged between 1% and 3%, similarly to the figures recorded since 2000.

In 2003, there were 152 drug-related [deaths](#), that is, post-mortem tests with positive toxicological results performed in the INML (National forensic Institute). In this context, the downward trend observed since 2000 persisted (156 cases in 2002, 280 in 2001, 318 in 2000 and 369 in 1999), despite the fact that the decline occurred between 2002 and 2003 was rather small (-3%). Similarly, the rate of positive results among the total exams performed has also been declining.

Among the cases with positive toxicological results and information on the presumed causes of death, approximately 44% were cases of suspected overdose, a figure which has decreased over the last years (58%, 73% and 72%, in 2002, 2001 and 2000, respectively).

Of the 152 deaths occurred in 2003, approximately 49%, 39% and 12% were recorded, respectively, in the forensic districts of Lisbon, Oporto and Coimbra.

Like in previous years, most of these fatalities involved male individuals aged 29-35. A higher rate of male deaths was reported in 2003 and a gradual ageing of this population has been recorded since 1998. Once again, evidence of opiates use predominated in this type of deaths (64% of all cases), followed by cocaine (37%) and cannabis (22%). In 2003, there was a reinforcement of the trend observed in previous years towards a decline in the relative weight of opiates among the substances found, and, on the other hand, an increase in the presence of cannabis. Compared to 2002, there were less deaths involving opiates (-8%) and cocaine (-17%), and more cases presenting evidence of cannabis use (+57%). For the second consecutive year and diversely from what happened in previous years, deaths involving only one substance were a majority, a fact which points to possible changes in patterns of use and may reflect the harm-reduction policies implemented in this area.

### 1.3. Indicators on the Legal Consequences of Drug Use

As regards [administrative sanctions](#) for drug use, 6 100 proceedings were opened in mainland Portugal in 2003, accounting for a 9% increase in relation to 2002.

Approximately 47% of the cases were referred to the CDTs (Commissions for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction) by the PSP (Public Security Police), 28% by the GNR (National Republican Guard) and 25% by the Courts. On the date of collection of this information, 40% of those proceedings had been filed, 36% were suspended and 24% were pending. Compared to an identical period in the previous year, there was a decrease in the number of suspended proceedings in favour of those filed.

Of the 4 626 sentences pronounced, 89% were suspensions, 9% were punitive and 2% were acquittals. The growing trend towards the provisional suspension of proceedings involving non-addicted consumers (68% of sentences) was reinforced. For the first time, this type of decision predominated in all CDTs. Once again, the weight of punitive sanctions grew, with pecuniary penalties tending to increase, although non-pecuniary penalties are still a majority, notably the regular presentation at a place specified by the relevant CDT.

As in previous years, most of these proceedings (92%) involved only one substance, particularly hashish (67%). About 17% of the proceedings were associated with the use of only heroin, 4% with cocaine only, 3% with liamba only and less than 1% involved only the possession of ecstasy. Compared to the previous year, the number of proceedings associated with only hashish (+33%) and only liamba (+21%) rose, while those associated only with heroin (-21%), cocaine (-8%) and ecstasy (-7%) decreased. In the proceedings involving several drugs, the number of which tended to remain stable, once again the combination of heroin with cocaine predominated, followed by the combination of heroin with cannabis. Despite some regional differences as regards the substances used by these individuals, in 2003, for the first time, all the CDTs dealt predominantly with processes associated with the use of hashish only.

The districts of Oporto and Lisbon were once again those which reported the highest number of these processes, followed by Braga, Aveiro, Setúbal and Faro. The highest rates per total inhabitants were recorded in the districts of Beja, Portalegre and Faro.

Of the 5 615 individuals involved in the proceedings opened in 2003 and with no acquittal, approximately 6% relapsed during the year. Once again, the highest rates of relapsing were recorded in the northern littoral regions of the country; a high proportion was also recorded this year in the district of Lisbon.

The individuals involved in these proceedings were primarily males aged 16-34 (54% were aged less than 25). For the second consecutive year, this group's average age was slightly less than in the previous year. Mostly of Portuguese nationality, single and without dependant children, about one fourth of these individuals had finished compulsory school, almost half were employed and 17% were students.

## 2. Markets

In 2003, there was visibly a bigger quantity of hashish being circulated in the national market, to the detriment of heroin. Compared to the previous year, hashish was the only substance that recorded increases, both as regards number of seizures and quantities seized. However, apart from the yearly fluctuations, it should be noted that the total quantity of hashish seized was the largest in the last ten years, those of liamba and ecstasy came second in the decade ranking, and those of cocaine and heroin were the lowest since 2000 and 1998, respectively. In relation to 2002, there were no significant changes in what concerns the main countries of origin of the drugs seized in the national market. With the exception of ecstasy, there was an increase in the average prices of the drugs seized, particularly in the case of liamba.

Compared to 2002, the number of individuals involved in police, judicial and prison circuits for offences related to drug trafficking and trafficking-use remained stable and in some cases fell. On the other hand, in what concerns the substances possessed by these individuals, the downward trend in the relevance of situations involving only heroin persisted, mostly in favour of those related to hashish alone. Cocaine too tended to become more relevant in these circuits, particularly as far as convictions were concerned. As in the previous year, the average age of these populations recorded a slight decrease, while the relevance of foreign individuals increased.

### 2.1. Seizures / Quantities / Routes / Prices

For the second consecutive year, hashish accounted for the largest number of seizures (2276), contrarily to what had been observed since 1990, where heroin seizures had always predominated. In terms of number of seizures, hashish was followed by heroin (1154), cocaine (988), liamba (210) and ecstasy (149). As had occurred since 2000, the number of heroin seizures fell once again in comparison with the previous year (-14%), and for the first time since 2000 the number of cocaine and hashish seizures increased, by +2% and +16% respectively. The number of liamba and ecstasy seizures also fell when compared with 2002 (-27% and -22%, respectively).

In comparison with 2002, there was a significant increase in the quantities of hashish seized (+349%), while on the other hand the seized quantities of other substances decreased (-30%, -27%, -25% and -4% in the case of ecstasy, liamba, heroin and cocaine, respectively). The total quantity of hashish seized in 2003 was the largest in the last ten years, those of liamba and ecstasy came second in the decade ranking and cocaine and heroin quantities seized in 2003 were the lowest since 2000 and 1998, respectively.

In 2003, seizures involving significant drug quantities<sup>5</sup> were proportionately identical to those in the previous year (30%, 22%, 7%, 7% and 4% of the total number of ecstasy, cocaine, heroin, liamba and hashish seizures, respectively). The relevance of these seizures has grown over the years, which is due to the decriminalisation of drug use<sup>6</sup>, but also very likely to the reinforcement of traffic-fighting measures and/or

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<sup>5</sup> For heroin and cocaine, quantities above 100g, and for cannabis quantities above 1000g, according to the criteria used by the United Nations. For ecstasy, and according to the criterion used by the Criminal Police, significant seizures involve quantities above 50 pills. As such, only drug seizures expressed in these measurement units were considered for the purpose of the percentage calculations presented herein.

<sup>6</sup> The Criminal Information Integrated System (SIIC) ceased to include data on drug use, and therefore on drug use-related seizures.

measures against the spread of drugs in the country, given that in some cases this trend occurred prior to that legislative change.

The main countries of origin of drugs seized in Portugal in 2003 were Holland and Spain for heroin, Brazil for cocaine, Morocco for hashish, Angola for liamba and, once again, Holland for ecstasy. Most of the quantities seized of all substances were destined to the national market; cocaine recorded once again the highest proportion destined to the external market. In 2003, the district of Lisbon reported the highest quantities of heroin, liamba and ecstasy seizures, the Azores the largest quantity of seized cocaine and the district of Setúbal the largest quantity of seized hashish.

Compared to 2002, with the exception of ecstasy, the average prices of the seized drugs rose<sup>7</sup>, especially that of liamba. For the second consecutive year and contrarily to what had been observed since 1997<sup>8</sup>, the average price of cocaine was less than that of heroin.

## 2.2. Other Traffic-related Indicators

In 2003, police interventions in this area identified 5318 [presumed offenders](#), 42% of which as traffickers and 58% as trafficker-users. Compared to the previous year, there were slight variations in the number of traffickers (-4%) and trafficker-users (+5%), the total number of presumed offenders having remained stable (+1%).

As in previous years, the districts of Lisbon and Oporto reported the largest number of these presumed offenders; the highest rates per total inhabitants were recorded in the districts of Lisbon, Faro, Setúbal and Oporto, as well as in Madeira for the second consecutive year.

Compared to 2002, there was an increase in the number of offenders possessing only hashish (+24%) and only ecstasy (+33%), while the number of those possessing only heroin and only liamba decreased, by -29% and -40% respectively. The number of offenders possessing only cocaine or possessing several drugs remained relatively stable (-3% in both cases). In 2003, 64% of presumed offenders possessed only one drug, once again reinforcing the trend observed since 2001 towards a growing predominance of cases involving only hashish (41% of offenders), to the detriment of those involving only heroin (12%). The proportion of cases associated with cocaine alone (7%) was similar to that recorded in 2002, and that of offenders possessing only liamba (1%) and only ecstasy (1%) was still of little significance. In cases of polydrug possession (36%), the combination of heroin with cocaine was still predominant, although its relative weight has declined since 2000 in favour of other drug combinations, particularly those also involving cannabis.

As in previous years, the majority of these presumed offenders were males aged 15-34, of Portuguese nationality, although the percentage of foreign individuals has increased since 2000. Also, the average age of this group has been decreasing since 2002.

On the basis of data from [judicial decisions](#) under the Drug Law, 1 625 proceedings were concluded in 2003 involving 2 454 individuals, of whom 74% were convicted and 19% were acquitted. Of the 1 828 convicted offenders, 95% were convicted for trafficking, 4% for trafficking-use and 1% for use<sup>9</sup>. Over the last years, and particularly since 2001, there has been a decrease in the total number of convictions for trafficking and trafficking-use.

Once again, the districts of Lisbon and Oporto reported the largest numbers of these convictions, while the highest rates per total inhabitants were recorded in the districts of Faro and Lisbon and in the self-governed region of Azores.

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<sup>7</sup> The prices for the years after 2001 concern only the trafficker and trafficker-user markets, and should not be considered as user market prices (this has to do with the entry into force of Law n° 30/2000, of 29 November 2000, which decriminalised the use of drugs).

<sup>8</sup> Year from which data on this indicator became available.

<sup>9</sup> The planting/growing situation referred to in article 40 of Decree-Law n° 15/93, of 22 January 1993, is still considered a criminal offence.

In 2003, the penalties<sup>10</sup> applied to these convicted offenders were predominantly suspended imprisonment (49%) and effective imprisonment (47%), with or without a fine. About 10% of individuals convicted under the Drug Law were convicted for more than one criminal offence.

In relation to 2002, there was an increase in the number of convictions related to the possession of only cocaine (+20%), hashish (+5%), liamba (+325%) and ecstasy (+67%), while cases involving the possession of only heroin and polydrugs decreased, by -35% and -7% respectively. In 2003, 69% of these convictions were associated with only one drug, heroin remaining the main substance involved (29%), followed by hashish (23%), cocaine (10%) and liamba (6%). In convictions associated with polydrug possession (31%), once again the combination of heroin with cocaine predominated, followed by the combination of heroin with cannabis. Since 1998, the importance of convictions involving only heroin has decreased in favour of other situations, namely those associated with hashish only. In the last three years, an increase in the weight of convictions involving only cocaine has also been recorded, and this year there has been a significant rise in the number of cases associated with liamba only. In 2003, for the first time, the number of convictions associated with cannabis only was very close to that of convictions involving only heroin, the former having actually surpassed the latter as far as the trafficker-group is concerned.

The majority of these convicted individuals were males aged less than 35; since 2001, there has been a slight increase in the weight of individuals aged less than 20. Mostly of Portuguese nationality, single and without dependant children, the majority of these individuals had low education levels and almost half were employed at the date of conviction.

On 31/12/2003, for offences committed under the Drug Law, there were 3 967 convicted individuals in prison, the lowest figure since 1997, representing 35% of the total current population of convicted prisoners.

Compared to 2002, the total number of these prisoners decreased (-10%), thus reinforcing the downward trend, observed since 2000, in the proportion of these individuals within the total number of convicted prisoners (43% in 2000, 42% in 2001 and 41% in 2002), and reversing the progressive rise observed between 1993 and 1999 (from 21% to 44%).

Once again, the majority (90%) of these prisoners were convicted for drug trafficking, 5% for minor trafficking offences, 3% for trafficking-use and 2% for criminal association.

These individuals were primarily males aged 25-49, of Portuguese nationality, but the proportion of foreign individuals has tended to grow over the last years.

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<sup>10</sup> Penalties relate to the final conviction, which may include more than one criminal offence.