



Trends in Drug and Drug Abuse Indicators



**Executive Summary of Volume I of the
Institute on Drugs and Drug Addiction's National Report 2004
to the National Parliament**

PORTUGAL





1. Drug use

Cannabis continues to be the illicit drug most commonly used in Portugal, with an ever-increasing visibility according to certain indicators. By far the illicit substance with the highest prevalence rates of use according to national surveys, hashish is also the main drug reported in drug use-related administrative sanction proceedings.

Heroin, often used in combination with cocaine, emerges however as the main drug involved in problematic drug use, as clearly recorded by treatment demand and drug-related death surveys and indicators.

As far as the use of other substances is concerned, cocaine appears high on the list, showing in recent years an ever-increasing significance according to certain indicators, namely school population survey findings, treatment demand and drug-related deaths. The visibility of other illicit drugs, despite a reported increase in the prevalence rates of use among school children (namely for ecstasy, hallucinogen mushrooms and LSD), is still residual according to most indicators, while the use of certain licit substances appears to be quite significant in the context of problem substance use, as surveys and treatment demand and substance use-related death indicators clearly show.

2004 saw either a levelling off or a slight upward trend in the various drug-abuse treatment supply and demand indicators: while there were no significant changes in the number of specialised treatment settings, slight increases were recorded in the number of clients, both out and inpatients, within the public and the certified networks, as well as in the number of those attending opiate agonist treatment programmes, and also in the number of follow-up appointments within the drug treatment public services. While the downward trend observed since 2000 in the number of first-time appointments persisted, the variation between 2003 and 2004 was however less than that recorded in previous years. As for infectious disease rates among the groups undergoing drug abuse treatment in 2004, generally speaking, HIV, hepatitis B and C and tuberculosis positive results did not vary greatly from those recorded since 2000. The number of drug abuse-related HIV/Aids notified cases continued to decline. As far as fatalities are concerned, the number of positive results in post-mortem toxicological tests

performed at the National Forensic Institute (INML) showed a slight increase compared to 2003. This figure has tended to level off over the past three years, thus countering the downward trend recorded as from 2000.

In what concerns administrative sanction proceedings for drug abuse, for the first time in 2004 the number of cases decreased in comparison with the previous year. For the second consecutive year, all Commissions for the Dissuasion of Drug Abuse (CDTs) dealt predominantly with proceedings relating to the use of hashish alone and with sentences on the provisional suspension of proceedings involving non-addicted consumers, which may reflect, *inter alia*, a wider regional uniformity in drug use patterns and/or a more harmonised intervention on the part of the actors concerned. Reinforcing the trend observed since 2001, there was once again an increase in the weight of punitive sentences, namely those of a pecuniary nature, among all the sentences pronounced.

1.1. Findings of National Surveys

National epidemiological surveys carried out in 2001¹ among the general population aged 15-64, the school population of the 7th to 9th grades of Elementary School and the inmate population, showed that cannabis had the highest prevalence of use among the said groupings. Regarding said school population in particular, and comparatively with previous findings, the surveys suggested an increase and a wider regional spread of the use of several drugs. Research on the estimated prevalence and patterns of problematic drug use in Portugal showed that heroin, often used in combination with cocaine or base cocaine, was the most used drug among problem drug users.

More recently, both the *HBSC/OMS*² survey and the *ESPAD*³ survey, carried out among said target school population in 2002 and 2003 respectively, also found prevalence rates of cannabis use much

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

² 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 in Mainland Portugal, have been published (Matos, Simões, Carvalhosa, Reis & Canha, 2000; Matos & Equipa do Projecto Aventura Social and Saúde (Social Adventure and Health Project Team), 2003).

³ 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 support from 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).

higher than those for other substances. Moreover, compared with the equivalent surveys previously conducted (*HBSC/OMS* in 1998 and *ESPAD* in 1999), both studies showed an increase in the use of several drugs, with the exception⁴ of heroin, which recorded one of the lowest prevalence rates of use. However, it should be noted that, despite such increases, the prevalence rates of use among the school population in Portugal are still lower than the European averages.

A study published in 2003 on problematic drug use among hidden populations⁵ reported that cannabis and heroin are the most used drugs among those target groups, cannabis use being more significant in the up zone and heroin use in the down zone. In the down zone, heroin, alone or in combination with base cocaine, is the main drug involved in cases of long-established problem drug use, cannabis having a higher relevance in the periods before and after opiate addiction. In the up zone, where a much more exploratory type of consumption of a large variety of substances is observed, cannabis and inhaled cocaine are the two most used substances, the use of heroin corresponding to a specific period in the drug-use lifetime experience of the various individuals.

1.2. Indicators on Drug-related Health Effects

As far as drug treatment demand is concerned, in 2004 there were no significant changes in the availability of specialised drug treatment settings.

The drug treatment public services reported 30 266 clients in active treatment, 5 023 of which in first treatment episodes. The number of active clients in the year was slightly higher (+2%) than that recorded in the year before, countering the slight downward trend observed over the two preceding years. Once again, the number of first-time appointments fell compared with 2003 (-4%), reinforcing the decreasing trend observed since 2000, even though this decline was less than that observed over the previous years. Follow-up appointments numbered 374 149, the highest figure recorded over the last five years, accounting for a +4% increase when compared with 2003.

Within the public and certified network, the number of inpatients at the Detoxification Units (2 975) was slightly above that recorded in 2003 (+1%), countering the downward trend observed since 2001. Likewise, the number of clients in Therapeutic Communities (2 975) increased slightly in comparison with 2003 (+1%), reinforcing the growth trend recorded over the previous years. The number of

⁴ The *ESPAD* survey also recorded a decrease in the use of amphetamines, while the *HBSC/WHO* survey recorded an increase in the use of stimulants.

⁵ 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.

clients attending the Day Centres (400) was slightly down from that recorded in 2003 (-3%), similarly to what had happened in the year before.

As for the licensed and non-certified centres, the number of inpatients in Detoxification Units (396) in 2004 fell in comparison with 2003 (-6%), reversing the growth trend recorded since 2001. Inpatients in Therapeutic Communities numbered 1 279, accounting for a +7% increase in relation to 2003 and countering the gradual decline observed since 2001. The number of clients attending the Day Centres (211) once again recorded a slight increase in comparison with the previous year (+2%), consolidating the growth trend observed over the preceding years.

In 2004, drug treatment public services reported 19 260 individuals under opiate agonist therapy programmes (64% of all clients undergoing treatment), accounting for a +14% increase in relation to 2003 and reinforcing the upward trend recorded over the previous years. As at 31/12/2004, 14 581 clients were under treatment in this type of programmes, 72% receiving methadone and 28% buprenorphine, the ratios in 2003 having been 78% and 22%, respectively.

Within the drug treatment services under the responsibility of the prison authorities, the capacity of which has remained stable over the last three years, 216 inmates attended the Drug-Free Units (-33% than in 2003) and 67 attended the Therapeutic Community (+5% than in 2003). 315 inmates were under opiate agonist therapy programmes under the responsibility of the General-Directorate for Public Health (DGSP), accounting for a -9% decrease in relation to 2003.

At regional level, the districts of Lisbon and Oporto, followed by those of Setúbal, Faro, Braga and Aveiro, reported the highest numbers of clients in public drug treatment services in 2004, while the districts of Faro, Beja, Setúbal and Bragança reported the highest rates of these clients per total inhabitants. The Lisbon, Oporto, Faro and Setúbal districts recorded the highest numbers of clients in first-time appointments within the said public network, while the districts of Faro, Beja, Bragança and Lisbon recorded the highest rates of said clients per total inhabitants aged 15-39.

Concerning the use patterns of clients presenting for treatment at the different drug treatment services in 2004, heroin continued to be the substance most commonly reported as the primary drug of use and the main reason for the required inpatient treatment, followed by cocaine, which is gaining increased visibility within these settings. As for the routes of administration of the main drug, the smoked/inhaled route continues to predominate, while references to injecting drug use ranged between 25% and 52% among these populations. The decline in injecting drug use among first-time clients within the public drug treatment service network should be highlighted: in 2004, 25% of new

clients in public services reported injecting drug use in the last month before the first-time appointment, down from 28% in 2003 and 2002 and from 32%, 36% and 45% in 2001, 2000 and 1999, respectively.

Regarding the sociodemographic profile of these individuals, once again they were mostly males aged 25-39; the ageing trend among these populations persisted, namely in the group of first-time clients in public services. Overall, these populations again reported low education levels and precarious job situations.

As far as [infectious diseases](#) are concerned, according to the data provided by the Centre for Epidemiological Control of Infectious Diseases (CVEDT) as at 31/03/05, of the total accumulated HIV-infected notified cases, roughly 48% were associated with drug misuse, a ratio which has declined over the last years. Considering the different stages of the disease, the cases associated with drug dependence accounted for 50%, 43% and 48% of the total accumulated notified cases of AIDS, AIDS-Related Complex and Asymptomatic Carriers, respectively, these ratios having fallen over time. Once again, the decreasing trend in the percentage of drug-addicts among the population diagnosed with AIDS persisted: 62%, 58%, 56%, 54%, 48%, 42% and 39% of cases diagnosed in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004, respectively.

Among the groups of clients who attended the different drug treatment centres⁶ in 2004, HIV positivity rates ranged between 12% and 28%. These rates had ranged between 15% and 25% in 2003, 11% and 21% in 2002 and 14% and 19% in 2001. Over time, first-time clients always recorded the lowest HIV-positive rates, while Day Centre clients always recorded the highest rates. Despite the annual fluctuations observed, HIV positivity rates among these groups have tended to stabilise over recent years, with the exception of the increasing rates recorded among clients attending the Day Centres. In 2004, the rates of HIV-infected drug abuse undergoing antiretroviral treatment among these populations ranged between 19% and 68%, being generally lower than those recorded over the preceding years.

Among these drug abuse groups, positivity rates ranged between 3% and 9% in the case of hepatitis B and between 44% and 62% in the case of hepatitis C. In the previous years, positivity rates for hepatitis B had ranged between 3% and 10% in 2003, 8% and 10% in 2002 and 3% and 9% in 2001. In the case of hepatitis C, they had ranged between 44% and 62% in 2003, 45% and 64% in 2002 and 39% and 58% in 2001. While these developments suggest a slight decreasing trend, particularly in the

⁶ Namely active clients in the year (outpatients), first-time clients in public services and clients in both public and certified Detoxication Units, Therapeutic Communities and Day Centers.

case of hepatitis B, it will be necessary however to view these rates in the context of longer periods of time.

In 2004, positivity rates for tuberculosis among these populations ranged between 1% and 4%, similarly to the pattern observed over the last years (1% - 3% in 2003, 1% - 4% in 2002 and 1% - 3% in 2001).

Concerning drug-related [deaths](#), that is, post-mortem tests with positive toxicological results performed at the National Forensic Institute (INML), 156 cases were recorded in 2004 (against 152 in 2003 and 156 in 2002), countering the continuous downtrend observed since 2000.

Among the cases with positive toxicological results and information on the presumed causes of death, approximately 53% were reported as suspected overdose cases, a figure which is higher than that recorded in 2003 (44%) but lower than those recorded in previous years.

Once again, evidence of opiates use predominated (108 cases), followed by cocaine (77 cases) and cannabis (16 cases), accounting for 69%, 49% and 10%, respectively, of all such fatalities occurred in 2004. Compared to 2003, there were a higher number of deaths involving opiates (+10%) and cocaine (+35%), while the number of cases presenting evidence of cannabis use fell (-52%). Cases involving the use of opiates predominated in almost all age groups, except for the younger ones: among the group aged less than 20 evidence of cannabis stood out, while in the group aged 20-24 evidence of cocaine predominated. Countering the trend observed over the previous two years, deaths involving the use of more than one substance were a majority (62%) in 2004, considering the combinations involving illicit and/or licit substances. The presence of alcohol and medicines was detected in combination with illicit drugs in 33% and 9% of cases, respectively.

Like in previous years, most of these fatalities involved male individuals aged 25-39.

1.3. Indicators on the Legal Consequences of Drug Use

In what concerns [administrative sanctions](#) for drug use, 5 370 episodes leading to the opening of proceedings were recorded in mainland Portugal in 2004, accounting, for the first time, for a decrease (-12%) in relation to the previous year.

At regional level, the districts of Oporto, Lisbon, Aveiro, Faro and Braga reported the highest number of such proceedings, while the districts of Faro and Beja recorded the highest rates of said episodes per total inhabitants.

Of the total cases referred to the Commissions for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction (CDTs), approximately 49% were submitted by the Public Security Police (PSP), 27% by the National Republican Guard (GNR) and 23% by the Courts.

On the date this information was collected, 36% of the proceedings opened in connection with said episodes from 2004 had been closed, 32% were pending and 31% were under provisional suspension. Compared to 2003, there was a decrease in the rate of acquittals (-20%) and provisional suspensions (-23%) and an increase in the number of proceedings pending (+18%).

Of the 3 631 sentences pronounced in connection with cases occurred in 2004, roughly 86% were suspensions, 11% were punitive and 3% were acquittals. Once again, most of the sentences pronounced concerned the provisional suspension of proceedings involving non-addicted consumers (68%), a trend observed for the second consecutive year with all CDTs. Like in previous years, the weight of provisional suspensions of proceedings involving drug misusers who accepted to undergo treatment (18%) decreased among the total sentences pronounced. On the other hand, while the weight of punitive sanctions continued to grow (11%), namely that of pecuniary penalties, non-pecuniary penalties are still a majority, notably the regular presentation at a place specified by the relevant CDT.

Approximately 91% of the proceedings relating to episodes from 2004 involved only one substance, most CDTs having for the second consecutive year dealt predominantly with proceedings involving hashish alone: 66% of the proceedings were associated with the use of only hashish, 17% with heroin only, 6% with cocaine only and 2% with liamba only. As far as proceedings involving poly-drug possession are concerned (9%), once again the combination of heroin with cocaine predominated, but, contrarily to what was observed in previous years, the combination of cocaine with cannabis, instead of heroin with cannabis, came second. Compared to 2003, and considering the fact that the total number of proceedings decreased by -12%, it should be noted that only the number of proceedings involving cocaine alone increased (+11%), while the proceedings involving other drugs decreased.

Of the 4 998 individuals involved in the proceedings opened in 2004 and with no acquittal, approximately 5% relapsed during the year.

Once again, the individuals involved in these proceedings were primarily males in the 16-34-age group, more than half being aged less than 25. The majority had completed the 9th grade of Elementary School or had a higher education level, and almost half of them had a job, although the weight of students was also significant.



2. Markets

In 2004, the downward trend in the visibility of heroin circulation in the domestic market was consolidated in favour of other drugs, namely hashish and cocaine.

For the third consecutive year, hashish was the substance that recorded the highest number of seizures, while cocaine was the only substance recording increases both as regards number of seizures and quantities seized, the latter accounting for the highest figure recorded in the last decade. No significant changes were observed in what concerns the main countries of origin of the drugs seized in the domestic market, but large quantities of hashish and cocaine were seized that were intended for the external market. The average prices of the drugs remained stable in relation to 2003, with the exception of the decreases in liamba and ecstasy prices.

Once again, 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. Concerning the substances possessed by these individuals involved in police interventions and convictions, the downward trend observed over the previous years in the weight of situations relating to heroin alone persisted, mostly in favour of those involving only cannabis and only cocaine.

2.1. Seizures / Quantities / Routes / Prices

For the third consecutive year, hashish accounted for the largest number of seizures (2 439), countering the trend observed since 1990 where heroin seizures had always predominated. Recorded seizures numbered 1 088 in the case of heroin, 1 047 in the case of cocaine, 289 in the case of liamba and 158 in the case of ecstasy. Consistent with the trend observed since 2000, the number of heroin seizures fell once again in comparison with the previous year (-6%), while the number of cocaine and hashish seizures increased, by +6% and +7% respectively, for the second time since said year. The number of liamba (+38%) and ecstasy (+6%) seizures also increased when compared to 2003.

In comparison with the previous year, quantities seized in 2004 fell in the case of hashish (-8%), liamba (-55%) and ecstasy (-31%), but rose in the case of heroin (+37%) and cocaine (+146%). The total quantity of cocaine seized in 2004 was the largest over the last ten years, those of hashish and heroin came third in the decade ranking, and liamba and ecstasy quantities seized in 2004 were the lowest since 2000 and 2001, respectively.

As for the main countries of origin of drugs seized in Portugal in 2004, once again Spain came first in the case of heroin, Brazil in the case of cocaine, Morocco was the main country of origin for hashish, Angola for liamba and, once again, Holland for ecstasy. In 2004, diversely from what was observed over the last years, large proportions of the cocaine and hashish quantities seized were destined to the external market. As in 2003, the district of Lisbon reported the largest heroin, liamba and ecstasy quantities seized. The district of Faro recorded the largest cocaine and hashish quantities seized at national level.

In 2004, the average prices⁷ of drugs seized remained stable in relation to 2003, with the exception of the decrease recorded in the price of ecstasy (which fell for the third consecutive year), and in the price of liamba (bringing it closer again to the price of hashish). For the third consecutive year, the average price of cocaine was below that of heroin.

2.2. Other Traffic-related Indicators

In 2004, police interventions in this area identified 5 159 presumed offenders, 44% of which as traffickers and 56% as trafficker-users. Compared to the previous year, the number of presumed offenders fell slightly (-3%), owing to the decrease in the number of presumed trafficker-users (-6%), for the number of traffickers (+2%) recorded a slight increase.

As in previous years, the largest number of these presumed offenders was reported by the districts of Lisbon (40%) and Oporto (15%). The highest rates per total inhabitants were recorded in the districts of Lisbon, Faro, Beja as well as in the Madeira Autonomous Region.

Compared to 2003, there was an increase in the number of offenders possessing only liamba (+54%), cocaine (+15%), ecstasy (+6%) or hashish (+1%), together with a decrease in the number of those possessing only heroin (-18%) and those in possession of several drugs (-5%). In 2004, 65% of presumed offenders possessed only one drug: 42% hashish, 10% heroin, 8% cocaine, 2% liamba, 1%

⁷ Since 2002, prices concern only the trafficker and trafficker-user markets.

ecstasy and 2% various other drugs. Once again, the trend observed since 2001 towards a predominance of cases involving only hashish persisted, while the weight of those involving only heroin decreased. The proportion of cases associated with cocaine alone remained stable compared to the two previous years, but was considerably higher than that recorded in 1999 and 2001. In cases of polydrug possession (35%), for the first time the “Other” category, involving combinations of substances other than the usual combinations, predominated (evidence of cannabis being predominant in these combinations), followed by the traditional combination of heroin with cocaine.

As in previous years, most of these presumed offenders were males aged 15-39, of Portuguese nationality. The majority had attended the 9th grade of Elementary School or had a lower education level, and more than half were jobless on the date of the police intervention.

On the basis of data from [judicial decisions](#) under the Drug Law, 1 390 criminal proceedings were concluded in 2004 involving 2 235 individuals, the large majority of which were accused of trafficking. Approximately 75% of these offenders were convicted and 24% were acquitted.

Of the 1 669 convicted offenders, 95% were convicted for trafficking, 4% for trafficking-use and 1% for use. Since 2000, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of convictions for 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, Portalegre and Lisbon.

As regards the penalties⁸ applied to these convicted offenders, for the second consecutive year and diversely from the situation in previous years, suspended imprisonment predominated (49%), alternatively to effective imprisonment (45%). About 10% of individuals convicted under the Drug Law were convicted for more than one criminal offence, said proportion being similar to that recorded in the preceding years.

In relation to 2003⁹, there was an increase in the number of convictions related to the possession of only hashish (+12%) and cocaine (+3%), while the number of cases involving the possession of any other substance decreased. In 2004, 69% of convictions under the Drug Law were associated with the possession of only one drug, hashish being for the first time the predominant substance involved

⁸ Penalties relate to the final conviction, which may include more than one criminal offence.

⁹ For comparative purposes in relation to the previous year, 2003 data published last year were considered (data relating to a given year are updated the following year).

(28%), followed by heroin (24%) that predominated so far, and by cocaine (11%) and liamba (5%). In convictions associated with polydrug possession (31%), once again the combination of heroin with cocaine predominated. It should be noted that the downward trend observed in the weight of convictions involving only heroin had already started in 1998, the weight of convictions associated with only hashish and only cocaine having increased in the meantime.

Again, most of these convicted individuals were males aged less than 35, of Portuguese nationality, though an increase in the weight of foreign individuals has been apparent in recent years. The majority had attended the 9th grade of Elementary School or had a lower education level, and almost half were employed at the date of conviction.

As at 31/12/2004, for offences committed under the Drug Law, there were 2 927 convicted individuals in prison, the lowest figure since 1997, accounting for a -18% decrease in relation to 2003. The trend observed since 2000 towards the progressive decrease of the weight of prisoners convicted for offences under the Drug Law among the total population of convicted prisoners was thus reinforced, said convicts accounting for approximately 29% of that total population as at 31/12/2004.

The majority (89%) of these prisoners were convicted for drug trafficking, 8% for minor trafficking offences and 3% for trafficking-use.

As in previous years, these individuals were primarily males aged 25-49, of Portuguese nationality, although the proportion of foreign individuals has tended to grow in recent years.