

## Safe Community

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### Drug trafficking – the global village

Have you ever wondered when you read reports of the arrest of a person with say 60 doses of hashish and 20 of cocaine in a back street of the town closest to you or a village in a rural area – how it fits into the global picture of drug trafficking. Where do the drugs come from? How do they get here? These are some of the interesting questions I am sometimes asked.

One of the interesting aspects of monitoring the news of police arrests and seizures of illicit drugs, is establishing drug trafficking trends and how Portugal sits within that bigger picture. Certainly from reading individual GNR, PSP and PJ press releases there appears to have recently been a number of high profile successes, where significant amounts of drugs, mainly cocaine and hashish, have been seized and couriers and others responsible arrested. Often this involves close cooperation between the police here, their counterparts in Spain as well as other law enforcement agencies overseas.



Some of the more significant cases were: 600 tons of cocaine seized by the PJ on a yacht some miles of the coast of Sagres in October; 4.7 kgs of heroin and 30 kgs of cocaine seized by the PJ and Spanish police in the Algarve the same month and a massive 1300 kgs of cocaine seized on a boat in the waters off Vila Real San Antonio in September and 1060 kg of hashish seized on the Rio Guardiana in April. However it is not just trafficking by sea. A few days ago four persons were arrested at Lisbon airport carrying 4.5 kgs of cocaine in their luggage having arrived on a flight from Sao Paulo, Brazil.

#### The Big picture

Drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws.

Globally, it is estimated that in 2012, between 162 million and 324 million people, corresponding to between 3.5 per cent and 7.0 per cent of the world population aged 15-64, had used an illicit drug — mainly a substance belonging to the cannabis, opioid, cocaine or amphetamine-type stimulants group — at least once in the previous year.

The global area of illicit opium cultivation in 2013 stood at 296,720 hectares — the largest area since 1998, when estimates became available.

At current levels, world heroin consumption (340 tons) and seizures represent an annual flow of 430-450 tons of heroin into the global heroin market. Of that total, opium from Myanmar and the Lao People's Democratic Republic yields some 50 tons, while the rest, some 380 tons of heroin and morphine, is produced exclusively from Afghan opium. While approximately 5 tons are consumed and seized in Afghanistan, the remaining bulk

of 375 tons is trafficked worldwide via routes flowing into and through the countries neighbouring Afghanistan.

The Balkan and northern routes are the main heroin trafficking corridors linking Afghanistan to the huge markets of the Russian Federation and Western Europe. The Balkan route traverses the Islamic Republic of Iran (often via Pakistan), Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria across South-East Europe to the Western European market, with an annual market value of some \$20 billion. The northern route runs mainly through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (or Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan) to Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. The size of that market is estimated to total \$13 billion per year.

Whilst cocaine manufacture and trafficking have had a serious impact in the western hemisphere, there are indications that overall global availability of cocaine has fallen and is the lowest since the beginning of available estimates in 1990. Global cocaine seizures however increased to 671 tons in 2012, the main increases of that seized were in South America, Western and Central Europe.

Cultivation and production of cannabis herb (marijuana) remains widespread while production of cannabis resin ("Hashish" remains confined to a few countries in North Africa, the Middle East and South-West Asia.

### **How does Portugal fit into this?**

Portugal is both a transit point for illicit drugs as well as a destination in terms of serving the local drug addict population. Much of the cocaine seized is destined for Spain, Belgium and Holland. For example that seized off the coast of Sagres recently was not actually destined for Portugal, but was intercepted by local law enforcement on the high seas. When this occurs the vessel is escorted to the nearest land, in that case Portimao, where the seizure, arrests and subsequent legal action rests with the national authorities here.

There is close cooperation between the police here and Spain which means that cocaine originating from South America and is heading to Spain via Cape Verde, is often seized in waters off the coast of the Algarve before its arrival in Spain. Interestingly if we study the breakdown of nationalities of those arrested for serious drug offences in 2013, the highest by far is those from Cape Verde (242) followed by those from Spain, Guneau Bissau and Brazil. Nearly 20% of those in prison here are for serious drug offences.

In the Algarve in 2013 some 2.4 tons of cocaine was seized in this way and recorded in the Algarve's crime figures – it is likely this year the figure will be higher.

By far the largest drug seizures are however hashish which mainly originates from Morocco. In 2013, 8.6 tons of this drug were seized in Portugal, 5.7 tons of that being in the Algarve. Although the figure seems high this is much lower than the 34.7 tons seized in Portugal in 2010.

Such figures alone however, do not tell the whole story in terms of the availability of drugs and drug demand in recipient countries. Moreover it is often the case of increased police intelligence and close collaboration through law enforcement agencies that dictates the level of drug seizures. Certainly my impression is the latter is a major factor in some of the cases so far this year.

### **Local consumption and drug laws in Portugal.**

Illicit drugs that are destined for Portugal for local consumption upon arrival are then passed to local traffickers who repackage these and distribute them to local dealers. These are the ones that are arrested with relatively a small number of doses sufficient to meet the needs of their clients. Street values for illicit drugs vary on supply and demand but for Cocaine this is normally in the €45 - €50 range; for heroin €23-27 and Hashish around €5 per gram. The most popular drug used here is hashish followed by cocaine and heroin. Amphetamines such as ecstasy is comparatively rare although there is a growing use of this drug amongst the younger population.

Drug cultivation in Portugal is mainly confined to cannabis usually in the Algarve and often for individual consumption or distribution/selling to friends. This is often found in the Western and Eastern Algarve as well as the Monchique area, those responsible being mainly foreigners from northern Europe.

Portugal decriminalized personal drug possession in 2001 and it is now treated as an administrative offence. When people are caught with less than 10 days personal supply and there is no evidence of trafficking they are referred to local commissions for dissuasion of drug addiction, comprising a lawyer, doctor and social assistant. They decide what penalty the person should receive and/or the best form of treatment.

This appears to have had a beneficial effect as drug related deaths have decreased from around 80 in 2001 to 16 in 2012. New HIV and AIDs cases from those who inject drugs has decreased from over 1016 to 56 and from 568 to 38 respectively during the same period. Despite the decriminalization of drug possession, rates of drug use haven't skyrocketed like some predicted and "past year" prevalence in the 15 – 64 age group stand at 2.7% of the population in that age group in 2012 compared with 3.4% in 2001.

In the context of school populations, the results of national studies have shown that the use of drugs that has been increasing since the 90's, declined for the first time in 2006 and 2007, rising again in 2010 and 2011, alerting to the need for investment in prevention. In all studies carried out in 2010 and 2011, cannabis remains the drug preferentially used (prevalence of lifetime use i.e. use of a drug at least once in a lifetime) ranged from 2.3% in students from 13 years old and 29.7% in 18 years old).

On 29<sup>th</sup> October 2014 a highly controversial report released by the Home Office in the UK has stated that decriminalising drugs would have little effect on the number of people abusing illegal substances.

The landmark study triggered a major row in the Coalition as it indicated that decriminalising drugs – even Class 'A' substances such as heroin and cocaine - could have some benefits in the criminal justice system. The study includes Portugal's experiences following the decriminalisation of illegal drugs.

### **Why reporting drug dealing is important**

Drug addicts are often unemployed with little source of income which leads to crime in order to sustain their addiction. This mainly falls in the categories of petty thefts, burglaries or street crime such as snatching/robbery. Drug trafficking in some villages appears to be ignored but it should not be as it increases the risk of such crimes in the neighbourhood. Information concerning selling points etc, information should be passed to police or through the Safe Communities Algarve "suspicious activities" link on [www.safecommunitiesalgarve.com](http://www.safecommunitiesalgarve.com)