



Synthetic Drugs

'We... see a dramatic increase in the number of new, and often highly potent, synthetic substances present on the market.'

European Drug Market Report 2019

Online Module: Executive Summary

Synthetic drugs are entirely manufactured from drug precursors and other chemicals. The main synthetic drugs available in the EU are amphetamine, MDMA (ecstasy) and methamphetamine. There are also the new psychoactive substances (NPS), which are a broad range of products that mimic the effects of the internationally controlled drugs, but which are not controlled under international drug control treaties. Synthetic drugs are contrasted with natural drugs, such as cannabis, cocaine and heroin.

The use of amphetamine, MDMA and methamphetamine is widespread. It is estimated that about 4% of Europeans aged 15-64 have tried amphetamine, and another 4% have tried MDMA. The value of the retail market for these drugs is estimated to be at least EUR 1.5 billion per year.

Europe is also a major producer of synthetic drugs. It produces almost all the drugs used here, as well as being a major producer and supplier for the global market.

This e-learning module is targeted at all law enforcement, judicial and other regulatory officers, including police, customs and prosecutors as well as forensic experts, who are engaged in the fight against drugs crime, and in particular those dealing with the production, smuggling and selling of synthetic drugs. The module aims to give these users an understanding of the main topics and issues related to synthetic drugs.

The module consists of an introduction, 10 topic chapters and a glossary of terms and abbreviations related to synthetic drugs. Users can also check their levels of understanding for each of the topics by considering a selection of quiz questions.

The topic chapters are:

1. **Types of Synthetic Drug:** The main synthetic drugs: amphetamine, methamphetamine and MDMA, as well as some other important types.
2. **New Psychoactive Substances (NPS):** This chapter includes what NPS are, the challenges they present, and how these challenges are being met.
3. **Precursors, Pre-Precursors and other Chemicals:** The various types of substances that are used in the production of synthetic drugs.
4. **Production Processes and Equipment:** The most common manufacturing methods used in the production of synthetic drugs.
5. **Safety Measures:** The hazards related to the production, handling and use of synthetic drugs, and the different measures taken so that law enforcement operatives can work more safely.
6. **Diversion and Trafficking:** The issues relating to the diversion and trafficking/smuggling of synthetic drugs and the raw materials used to produce them.
7. **Internet, Social Media and Communications Apps:** The use of the internet – both surface web and darknet – to facilitate the production, buying, selling and trafficking of synthetic drugs.
8. **Organised Crime Groups:** The mechanisms behind the illicit market of synthetic drugs and the main modi operandi of the organised crime groups (OCGs) involved in their production and distribution.
9. **Investigation:** The various aspects of investigations made into crime related to synthetic drugs, including the agencies involved, the selection and prioritisation of investigations, types of investigation and the techniques used.
10. **International Cooperation:** The cooperation involved in combating synthetic drugs phenomena at EU and international level, including the tools and organisations that support it, forensic laboratory networks and cooperation with the private sector.