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Cocaine seizures in Ireland more than double EU average

By Cormac O'Keeffe - Wednesday, May 05, 2010

MORE than twice as many seizures of cocaine are being made in Ireland per head of population than the EU average.

Figures show there were 59 cocaine hauls per 100,000 people here in 2007, compared to the EU average of 24.

The data shows we have the second highest seizure rate out of the six highest consumers of cocaine in the EU.

Spain – the main entry point for cocaine into Europe – had by far the highest number of seizures per capita (149). But Ireland was higher than Belgium (52) and Britain (51).

Figures for the Netherlands and Portugal, other big importers and consumers, were not available.

This seizure rate, calculated in terms of the population, has not been published before. It suggests either a high interception rate by gardaí and customs or high levels of trafficking into Ireland, or both.

The figure refers to the number of seizures made, rather than the quantity seized, and is seen internationally as a better indicator of the scale of trafficking and the activity of law enforcement agencies.

The details are contained in a special joint-analysis of the cocaine market by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol, the EU police agency.

The report, Cocaine: A European Union perspective in the global context, showed that the countries with the highest seizure rates also tended to have the highest cocaine consumption rates in the EU.

In relation to the latter, the prevalence rate for cocaine use was highest in Spain (3.1%), followed by Britain (2.7%), Italy (2.2%) and Ireland (1.7%).

The report also revealed that a relatively recent adulterant, called levamisole, had been found in half of cocaine seizures analysed in three countries: Ireland, the Netherlands and Britain.

It said levamisole was a veterinary anti-parasitic agent used in the past in human medicine to boost the immune system.

It said that if used over a long period and in higher doses, it could cause serious effects including a severe blood condition that could "lead to rapidly developing life-threatening conditions".

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