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Sophisticated cocaine smuggling techniques a cause for concern

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Increasingly innovative and sophisticated methods of smuggling cocaine into Europe are causing concern according to a report published this week.

The market analysis report, Cocaine: A European Union perspective in the global context, from Europol and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), provides insight into how cocaine is produced and trafficked into the EU, the people involved, routes taken and the scale of the problem in Europe, as well as looking at supply reduction methods.

One innovative technique identified in the report involves incorporating cocaine base or hydrochloride (HCI) into other materials (eg, beeswax, plastic, clothing), then extracting it in special laboratories set up inside EU borders. Around 40 of these cocaine "secondary extraction laboratories" were seized in the EU in 2008, says the report, an issue of increasing concern to the two EU agencies. Advanced techniques such as this are a cause for concern for EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz.

"I am particularly concerned by our latest analysis, which illustrates the growing sophistication and innovation of cocaine traffickers in circumventing the law and the potential for the supply-led diffusion of cocaine into central and eastern European countries," he said.

With a significant proportion of the global cocaine output now destined for Europe, new cross-Atlantic trafficking routes have emerged. The report describes the three main Europe-bound cocaine smuggling routes – Northern, Central and West African. It also shows how law-enforcement data points to shifting landing points within Europe's main gateway regions in the Iberian Peninsula and the Low Countries (Belgium and the Netherlands) as well as to the spread of trafficking networks eastwards. According to the report, this increases the risk of cocaine use diffusing into central and eastern European countries which have to date been relatively unaffected.

According to the report, there is a need to boost cocaine interception efforts, as well as providing complementary initiatives to address the underlying causes that encourage cocaine production and trafficking.

Europol Director Rob Wainwright said: "Europol is working closely with law enforcement agencies in the EU member states, providing on-the-spot assistance to investigations, dismantling cocaine laboratories and supporting operational analysis. Through Project Cola, Europol helps countries prevent or combat criminality by collecting intelligence on suspected criminal organisations involved in the production, processing or trafficking of cocaine. In so doing, we keep law enforcement agencies in the EU up-to-date on new methods of cocaine smuggling and heighten awareness of global drug-trafficking trends."

By [Gemma Ilston](#)

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