

EU DRUG MARKETS REPORT

A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

Case study 3

New psychoactive substances: 73 detected in 2012

New psychoactive substances are a diverse group of drugs that are not controlled under international law.

They are emerging at an unprecedented rate: 73 substances were notified in 2012, up from 49 in 2011 and 41 in 2010. More than 200 new substances have been notified across the EU since 2005.

Often marketed as 'legal highs', the substances are sourced legally as powders from China and India in bulk quantities. They are then imported into Europe and turned into final products. These in turn are sold on the open market as replacements for controlled drugs using aggressive and sophisticated marketing strategies.

Some new psychoactive substances are sold directly on the illicit market as drugs in their own right or deceptively as MDMA (ecstasy), amphetamine or cocaine.

The Internet plays a key role in reshaping the 'new drugs' market: a growing number of Internet shops have been identified by EMCDDA monitoring with almost 700 identified in 2012.

A recent EU survey in young people aged 15–24 found that lifetime use of 'legal highs' in most Member States was 5 % or less, with use in the United Kingdom, Latvia, Poland and Ireland being 8 %, 9 %, 9 % and 16 % respectively.

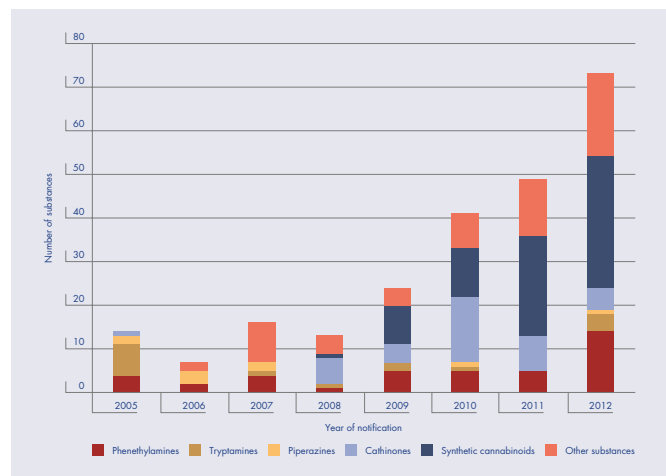


Tablets resembling 'ecstasy' found to contain 5-(2-aminopropyl) indole (5-IT).
Photo: Hungarian national focal point.



'Annihilation': a so-called 'legal high' that led to hospitalisations in Europe. Analysis of samples found different combinations of synthetic cannabinoids, some of which are controlled drugs in some countries.
Photo: Simon D. Brandt, Liverpool John Moores University.

Number of new psychoactive substances notified to the European Early warning system, 2005–2012



Source: EMCDDA/EWS.

