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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL**

**on the EU Action Plan against drug trafficking**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Drug trafficking presents a substantial and persistent threat to Europe's security. Over half of the most threatening criminal networks operating in the EU are involved in drug trafficking<sup>1</sup>, exploiting the EU's position as a major consumer market, transit hub, and production area for illicit drugs. Organised crime exploits global trade routes and digital technologies, building sophisticated criminal infrastructures that destabilise EU society through violence, corruption and infiltration in the legal economy.

Cocaine and synthetic drugs, along with their precursors, are particularly dynamic facets of drug trafficking, marked by shifting routes and changing methods. Despite successful law enforcement actions, the production of synthetic drugs like MDMA, amphetamine, and methamphetamine continues at scale within the EU. Criminal networks rapidly adapt, using sophisticated smuggling methods, encrypted communications, darknet platforms, and cryptocurrencies to evade detection.

The lucrative profits from drug trafficking are laundered and reinvested, deepening the hold of criminal networks in legal sectors and often being synonymous with increased violence, notably in port cities and urban markets. With diversification of drug routes and entry points, a further displacement of violence can be expected<sup>2</sup>. These networks increasingly recruit young people, vulnerable individuals, exploiting their social and economic hardship to evade law enforcement. Recruitment through social media platforms sees young people exploited into roles as dealers, couriers, and operational support within trafficking operations, such as collectors retrieving drugs from shipping containers.

To address these evolving challenges, the Commission presents a new **EU Action Plan against drug trafficking**, enhancing the broader EU Drugs Strategy<sup>3</sup>, which is grounded in balanced, evidence-based policy prioritising human rights. While the plan primarily aims to enhance security, it also includes measures to increase preparedness, reduce drug-related harms and reinforce international cooperation and partnerships. Building on the evaluation of the action plan 2021-2025 and the positive experiences of the implementation of the EU Roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime<sup>4</sup>, this action plan focuses on specific priority actions for immediate and medium-term efforts, detailing 19 targeted actions to disrupt drug trafficking operations.

The Action Plan builds on the **ProtectEU Internal Security Strategy**<sup>5</sup> as one of its key deliverables and fosters synergies through platforms like the **European Multidisciplinary**

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<sup>1</sup> Europol (2024), *Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks*.

<sup>2</sup> Europol (2025), *EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (EU-SOCTA) 2025*.

<sup>3</sup> Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on monitoring and controlling drug precursors and repealing Regulations (EC) No 273/2004 and (EC) No 111/2005, COM(2025) 747 final.

<sup>4</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the *EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime*, COM (2023) 641 final.

<sup>5</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on *ProtectEU: a European Internal Security Strategy*, COM/2025/148 final.

**Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT)** and the **European Ports Alliance** public-private partnership, essential for coordinated security measures at strategic transit points.

Global cooperation is central to the action plan, strengthening collaboration with the US, and engaging with partners in Latin America, the Caribbean, West Africa, the Middle East, China, and India. Candidate countries and potential candidates, including the Western Balkans, continue to be vital allies. In this context, cooperation will also support the gradual integration of EU candidate countries into the work of JHA agencies (Europol, CEPOL, EUDA), as well as in the EMPACT context, reinforcing the collective fight against drug trafficking. These partnerships are crucial for dismantling trafficking networks and securing routes.

The EU also commits to enhancing its cooperation within the **European Coalition against Drugs**, launched by the European Political Community in October 2025, uniting efforts against the pervasive threat of drug trafficking.

## 2. PRIORITY ACTIONS

As criminal networks evolve and the drug trade diversifies, coordinated action is essential. Effective implementation relies on strong EU-wide cooperation, close collaboration with international partners, and sustained political commitment.

This action plan focuses on six priority areas for increased action, each with specific measures to address challenges relevant for drug trafficking. Their links to the pillars of the EU Drugs Strategy are indicated below.

1. Adapting to evolving routes and modi operandi (Pillar 3: Strengthening security)
2. Preventing crime and reducing drug-related violence (Pillar 4: Addressing harm)
3. Enhancing cooperation across law enforcement, judiciary and customs (Pillar 3: Strengthening security)
4. Addressing the challenge of synthetic drugs and drug precursors (Pillar 3: Strengthening security and Pillar 4: Addressing harm)
5. Advancing research and development and innovation (Pillar 1: Enhancing preparedness)
6. Strengthening international cooperation and partnerships (Pillar 5: Building strong partnerships)

### 2.1. Adapting to evolving routes and modi operandi

*To effectively respond to evolving threats, the EU and Member States should aim to close loopholes across maritime, land and air transport, taking into account current trafficking routes and anticipating adjustments by criminal networks. This effort needs to focus on creating barriers against criminal infiltration at every step.*

Criminal networks smuggle illicit drugs into the EU primarily by sea, using a wide network of commercial shipping routes as well as non-commercial vessels. Upon arrival, drug shipments typically move through internal EU logistics via road and rail. Air routes are used for high-value, low-volume shipments such as designer drugs or precursor chemicals. The networks quickly adapt to tightened security measures and shift trafficking routes dynamically to less monitored ports and routes to avoid detection. These shifts are guided by organised crime's infiltration into society, corruption of workers, (threat of) violence and ensuing exploitation of logistics vulnerabilities – organised crime spares no effort to safeguard its illicit gains.

### ***Action 1: Make better use of travel intelligence to detect, map and disrupt drug trafficking***

*Main actors: Member States, Europol, Commission*

Organised crime groups exploit commercial and private aviation, as well as land and maritime transport for the smuggling of narcotics across external borders and along intra-Schengen routes. It is crucial that law enforcement agencies including customs authorities are equipped with the necessary tools to detect and intercept illicit flows. Travel intelligence tools, including flight data, Passenger Name Records (PNR), Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR), and Advance Cargo Information (ACI) collected by customs on all commercial means of transport are important tools to help detect, map and disrupt drug trafficking.

**Addressing trafficking via general aviation:** Criminal networks continue to evolve and diversify their trafficking methods. The use of small aircraft for non-scheduled flights has become an increasingly attractive vector for smuggling narcotics across borders. These aircrafts, often operating outside the intensive scrutiny applied to commercial aviation, offer traffickers a discreet, flexible and low-risk means of transporting high-value drug shipments between Europe, North Africa, Latin America and the Western Balkans.

To address this emerging threat, Member States' relevant authorities should receive flight information on non-scheduled flights from EUROCONTROL as of 2026. By combining routine flight plan and tracking data with risk indicators like last-minute route changes, use of remote airfields or opaque aircraft ownership, Member States could improve the future identification of flights that merit closer scrutiny. Since EUROCONTROL does not receive flight plans for aircrafts flying under Visual Flight Rules, Member States should assess possibilities to systematically collect, share and analyse key flight information also for these flights. To support the establishment of such systems, EUROCONTROL has agreed to provide guidance on the processes and data structures. Europol could offer support in developing risk indicators and facilitate the analysis and sharing of information among Member States, in line with its mandate.

**PNR data analysis:** Drug trafficking networks are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their use of international travel routes and intermediaries. The current travel information framework, Advanced Passenger Information (API) and PNR data, is indispensable for law enforcement authorities' efforts to counter serious organised crime and drug trafficking. To fully harness the

potential of PNR data under the EU PNR Directive<sup>6</sup>, Member States' Passenger Information Units, should systematically identify, analyse and share travel patterns and risk profiles relevant to drug trafficking, working in close coordination with and supported by Europol.

Moreover, the Commission, together with Member States and the transport industry, is exploring options to strengthen the current API/PNR framework, which is currently limited to commercial air travel. This includes the potential introduction of measures for other modes of transport, such as maritime, land transport and private flights. Consideration will be given to the results of the feasibility studies on maritime and land transport, published in 2025, and the ongoing study on private flights to be finalised in 2026.

**Effective use of ANPR systems:** When illicit drugs arrive on European territory, drug trafficking networks rely on road transport across the EU, using cars, vans and trucks to move illicit substances around quickly, often going undetected. To counter this, Member States and the EU will evaluate and implement necessary measures to ensure that ANPR systems used by law enforcement and customs authorities effectively consult the Schengen Information System. This would allow for an improved detection of vehicles flagged for their links with drug trafficking and other serious cross-border crimes.

In addition, where appropriate, relevant ANPR location data should be made accessible for follow-up investigations. This would support efforts to trace criminal routes and disrupt trafficking networks more effectively, focusing on key transport hubs such as ports, ferry terminals, rail yards and main roads where drugs are often moved. Finally, the EU should promote harmonised technical standards and system interoperability to ensure seamless information exchange between Member States and EU agencies like Europol. Together, these measures would significantly boost the EU's ability to detect and dismantle trafficking operations on its roads.

**Advance Cargo Information** collected by customs through Import Control System 2 (ICS2) provides granular information about all goods entering the EU prior to their arrival at the external borders. The customs authorities conduct joint real-time risk analysis and targeting of risky consignments. Whereas air and maritime transport is already operational, ICS2 will be fully deployed with the integration of road and rail by mid-2026.

## ***Action 2: Expand the operations of the MAOC-N***

*Main actors: MAOC-N, Commission, Europol, Member States*

The Maritime Analysis and Operation Centre - Narcotics (MAOC-N) has long served as a unique and highly effective multinational coordination hub dedicated to tackling maritime drug trafficking. It brings together liaison officers from law enforcement, customs, military and

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<sup>6</sup> Directive (EU) 2016/681 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the use of passenger name record (PNR) data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime, OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, pp. 132–149.

maritime authorities of participating EU Member States<sup>7</sup>, the United Kingdom as well as observer partners including the United States. Its main mission is to support the detection, interception and disruption of large-scale drug shipments, particularly those transported via sea lanes and increasingly via general aviation. Its strength lies in its operational coordination, its capacity for real-time intelligence sharing and its ability to bridge national jurisdictions and investigative efforts. MAOC-N is most active in the Atlantic Ocean, especially the trans-Atlantic routes into Europe and off the coast of West Africa – an area increasingly used as a hub for transshipment of drugs to Europe. In 2024, MAOC-N achieved significant operational results, supporting international partners in record maritime drug seizures that exceeded 70 tonnes of cocaine across multiple high-profile interdictions.

In light of the evolving landscape of international drug trafficking, particularly the growing use of maritime and general aviation routes, the Commission will step up its collaboration with MAOC-N and Member States. It aims to explore deepening MAOC-N's current operational activities and possible expansion, focusing on extending the operational footprint within the Mediterranean region and encouraging broader participation or membership by Member States.

The possible expansion of MAOC-N's membership base would strengthen its geographic reach and reinforce its intelligence capabilities, particularly in the Mediterranean basin, which is emerging as a critical trafficking corridor for a variety of illicit substances, including cannabis resin, cocaine and synthetic drugs.

A key aspect of this strategy is enhancing cooperation among MAOC-N, Europol and Frontex. MAOC-N's focus is on operational coordination at sea and in the air, while Frontex supports border management and Europol supports criminal investigations across Member States through actions like asset tracing and linking drug interdictions to larger organised crime networks. The proposal to establish a joint-Maritime Counter Narcotics Action Team (J-MCAT) within Europol, involving MAOC-N, Frontex, and Member States, is under consideration. This team would enable real-time coordination of tactical operations and drug seizures, facilitating the development of comprehensive, long-term investigations into criminal networks.

***Action 3: Use Frontex's capabilities to support Member States in detecting drug trafficking at the EU's external borders and strengthen cooperation with Europol and other relevant bodies***

*Main actors: Frontex, EMSA, SatCen, Europol, MAOC-N, Member States*

By leveraging its surveillance capabilities and those of its partners, including aerial assets and high-resolution satellite imagery, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) can more effectively monitor and detect drug trafficking at the EU's external borders. The Agency should enhance its focus on combating this threat, incorporating drug trafficking into its assessments of the availability of Member States' technical equipment, systems, capabilities, resources, infrastructure, and trained staff to ensure efficient border control.

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<sup>7</sup> France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Belgium and Germany (Belgium and Germany joined in 2024). MAOC-N is co-funded by the EU Internal Security Fund.

To boost its efforts, Frontex should strengthen cooperation with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and the EU Satellite Centre (SatCen) within the context of the current Copernicus Security Service and the potential Earth Observation Governmental Service, integrating data and analyses from these partners to gain comprehensive situational awareness. Frontex and the Commission should further develop current synergies and explore new ones with the Secure Connectivity and EU Space Programmes through existing and forthcoming security and governmental services in the field of secured communication, resilient positioning, navigation and timing, and earth observation. Additionally, forming new working arrangements with Europol and MAOC-N will facilitate better information exchange and strategic coordination.

Frontex's capabilities include an expanding suite of surveillance and monitoring tools, allowing enhanced monitoring of EU external borders and pre-frontier areas. By combining surveillance data with Member State information, Frontex should conduct targeted operational activities as part of border management to support host countries and other stakeholders in tackling drug trafficking. Synergies will be explored with existing successful cooperation initiatives with third countries on border management, including the Punto Atenas network with Latin America. In addition, capabilities developed under the Preserving Peace – Defence Readiness Roadmap, notably through the European Drone Defence Initiative, can be adapted for dual use to strengthen border protection and improve detection of drug trafficking.

A new working arrangement is currently being negotiated between Frontex and Europol, and a Frontex working arrangement will be negotiated with MAOC-N<sup>8</sup>. These arrangements aim to strengthen strategic coordination and facilitate better information exchange, enhancing cooperation in combating drug trafficking.

The Agency should reinforce its use of Eurosur Fusion Services to gather maritime data from EMSA, including information from the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE), and SatCen. The gathered information should be promptly transmitted to national authorities for effective operational action and interdiction. In its annual planning, Frontex must explicitly consider drug trafficking threats, ensuring smooth deployment of joint operations in agreement with the host Member States.

#### ***Action 4: Step up civil-military partnerships to counter maritime drug trafficking***

*Main actors: Commission, High Representative assisted by the EEAS, Member States*

Recent law enforcement investigations show that transnational drug trafficking networks actively exploit international waters and complex maritime routes to move large volumes of illicit substances into the EU. These routes pass through regions that are critical transit areas for cocaine and other narcotics destined for Europe, like West Africa and the Atlantic routes more widely. Improving the EU's interception and surveillance capabilities along these trafficking

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<sup>8</sup>Article 68 of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1052/2013 and (EU) 2016/1624, OJ L 295, 14.11.2019, pp. 1–131.

corridors is essential. When vessels involved in drug trafficking are identified, including through the exploitation of space assets. EU Member States with the appropriate military capabilities could play an important role in supporting interdiction efforts, in line with legal mandates and operational frameworks. This includes relaying critical information to law enforcement and customs authorities for action.

The EU is actively working to combat drug trafficking through various initiatives within its Common Security and Defence Policy. One such operation, EUNAVFOR Operation ATALANTA in the Indian Ocean, includes a mandate covering fight against drug trafficking. EUCAP Somalia's mandate is to strengthen maritime governance and capabilities, with an aim to create sustainable maritime law enforcement institutions and agencies, including the coast guards. In the Gulf of Guinea, The European Union Security and Defence Initiative provides security and defence support to West African countries like Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin. This initiative aims to bolster these countries' capabilities against terrorist groups and enhance governance by deploying military and civilian experts and mobile training teams upon the host nations' request.

If these West African countries seek assistance to strengthen their law enforcement against drug trafficking, the Commission and the High Representative, each within its competences, will prioritise this request, potentially proposing support to EU Member States. Additionally, Member States can utilise the Coordinated Maritime Presence tool in the Gulf of Guinea to strengthen coastal states' security capabilities, thereby improving interception efforts. Similar initiatives will be explored in the Western Hemisphere.

Maximising the use of the Common Information Sharing Environment is crucial for facilitating effective information sharing between EU military and civilian stakeholders. EU-funded projects like SEACOP in the Gulf of Guinea and Latin America and CRIMARIO in the Indo-Pacific and Latin America further contribute by enhancing maritime domain awareness, inter-agency coordination, and regional information sharing.

The European Peace Facility (EPF) complements these efforts by providing equipment, training, and expertise to enhance maritime security capacities among partners. Reinforcing these initiatives supports the EU's comprehensive approach to counter maritime drug trafficking.

These actions collectively aim to enhance efforts against drug trafficking at sea, while maintaining the EU's commitment to promoting freedom of navigation and secure sea lanes in accordance with international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

In general, Civilian CSDP missions on the ground, work to strengthen the capacities of host countries. In some cases, they are tasked with enhancing the internal-external security nexus through improved coordination and cooperation between civilian CSDP and JHA actors in third countries, where appropriate, and within their respective mandates and competencies. Countering maritime drug trafficking should be an important part of both the internal and the external security nexus.

### ***Action 5: Identify effective measures to address the misuse of go-fast vessels***

*Main actors: Member States, Europol, Commission*

In recent years, the use of ‘go-fast’ vessels – high-powered, high-speed boats that evade law enforcement – has become a preferred method for transporting illicit drugs across maritime routes, particularly to Spain, Portugal and France. In response to the growing exploitation of high-speed go-fast vessels by organised crime groups, there is a need for a comprehensive and coordinated European approach.

Some Member States have already taken legislative measures to tighten their national rules for such high-speed boats. In response to these stricter regulations, criminal organisations adapt by relocating their operations to other EU countries, where such stringent controls are not in place.

To help combat this phenomenon, the Commission will facilitate the exchange of best practices and lessons learned among Member States through a dedicated expert workshop in 2026. This will include discussions on the effectiveness of national laws governing the use, registration and control of go-fast vessels across the EU, as well as the deployment of new technologies and innovative methods to detect, track and intercept suspicious vessels in real time. The findings will be compiled into a practical guide on the registration, traceability and control of such high-speed vessels.

In parallel, the Commission will initiate structured dialogues with outboard engine manufacturers. Since traffickers often use engines capable of achieving extremely high speeds, industry partnerships should promote responsible distribution and traceability of high-powered equipment. Additionally, integrating smart technologies enabled by global navigation satellite systems and engine monitoring systems can enhance oversight and interception efforts. These capabilities could provide enforcement authorities with new ways to safely disable or restrict the operational range of go-fast vessels used in criminal activity.

### ***Action 6: Build public-private cooperation to disrupt drug trafficking via post and parcel services***

*Main actors: Member States, Europol, Commission*

The rapid expansion of e-commerce and international shipping has provided criminal networks with new avenues to move illicit drugs covertly through postal and parcel delivery services. These services are being widely exploited to distribute narcotics across borders, often in small quantities that are harder to detect, yet cumulatively contribute to large-scale trafficking operations. A whole-of-society approach is needed to address this growing threat, mobilising law enforcement and public institutions but also the private sector.

The Commission will create a dedicated EU-level forum that brings together postal and parcel delivery sector representatives, national regulatory authorities, customs, and law enforcement agencies. This platform will aim to foster structured dialogue, enhance understanding of operational challenges, and strengthen public-private cooperation. The goal is to detect and

disrupt drug trafficking and the flow of prohibited goods in supply chains while complying with legal frameworks like the EU Customs Code.

The cross-border operations of postal and parcel companies underscore the need for structured EU-level cooperation. To enhance prevention of drug trafficking and movement of prohibited goods within intra- and extra-EU flows, The Commission will consider establishing EU-wide Memoranda of Understanding. These agreements would formalise cooperation, define clear responsibilities, and improve information exchange and joint efforts. Such memoranda would support existing and forthcoming information-sharing obligations under EU customs legislation, complementing rather than affecting them.

## **2.2. Preventing crime and reducing drug-related violence**

*The EU and Member States should develop prevention measures, launching an EU-wide platform to stop young people being drawn into drug trafficking. The initiative will equip communities with practical tools, connect experts across Europe and address online recruitment.*

The recruitment of young people by organised criminal networks involved in drug trafficking is a growing concern across the EU. Criminal groups are actively seeking out and attempting to exploit vulnerable minors, often in economically or socially disadvantaged areas, as low-risk, expendable assets. The digital dimension further accelerates this trend, with online platforms and social media being used to groom, manipulate and recruit minors under the guise of quick money or creating a sense of belonging.

### **Action 7: Create a toolbox to prevent minors being recruited into drug trafficking networks**

*Main actors: European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN), the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA), Member States, Commission*

The European Crime Prevention Network will develop a comprehensive toolbox in 2026, while the EUDA will facilitate the work of the European Community of Practice to prevent minors from being recruited into drug trafficking networks. This initiative will combine practical prevention and intervention measures with an EU-wide platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange. The toolbox will provide national authorities, educators, community workers and civil society actors with evidence-based tools for early detection, intervention and resilience-building to prevent minors in at-risk communities from being recruited by criminal groups. In parallel, the Community of Practice will bring together policymakers, practitioners, researchers and law enforcement to share relevant best practices, align strategies and promote innovative and effective interventions.

Recognising the role of the digital dimension, a targeted knowledge package for online platforms will be developed in cooperation with tech providers and child protection experts as part of the EU Internet Forum, supporting the real-time detection and reporting of recruitment attempts.

## **2.3. Enhancing cooperation across law enforcement, judiciary and customs**

*Member States need to further tighten cooperation between customs, law enforcement and justice authorities. Such cooperation should be underpinned by an effective and future-oriented EU legal framework. The deployment of next-generation detection technologies and increased capabilities to counter online and prison-based trafficking will help close the net around drug trafficking networks.*

Effective and coordinated cooperation among law enforcement, judiciary and customs is crucial to the EU's response against drug trafficking networks. Criminal organisations exploit gaps in information exchange and coordination between national and EU authorities and make use of varying legal frameworks to minimise enforcement and prosecution risks. At the same time, these networks leverage digital channels and often continue their operations even from within prisons, posing significant challenges to authorities.

***Action 8: Improve cooperation and information sharing between customs, law enforcement and judicial authorities***

*Main actors: Member States, Commission, Europol, Eurojust, European Public Prosecutor's Office, European Anti-Fraud Office, EU Anti-Money Laundering Authority, Frontex*

Effective and coordinated law enforcement, judicial and customs cooperation requires an efficient information exchange between the various authorities involved. However, the current possibilities for such information exchange are insufficiently used by the relevant authorities. These shortcomings weaken the EU's collective ability to detect and disrupt increasingly complex drug trafficking routes, allowing traffickers to take advantage of loopholes in the system.

Strengthening and fully utilising existing mechanisms is vital to ensure seamless and timely exchanges of information between law enforcement and customs authorities at national and EU level, in accordance with legal frameworks. This includes strengthening analytical capabilities to improve the detection of suspicious patterns, concealment methods and supply chain vulnerabilities by using data collected from various systems such as the EU's Import Control System 2 for incoming flows. This will in turn strengthen the effectiveness of the advance cargo information and risk management systems where EU Member States assess jointly the risks of consignments entering the EU via maritime, air and land routes.

Enhanced coordination will not only improve real-time operational responses but also support the long-term intelligence picture needed to tackle trafficking networks strategically. Key actors, including EU customs, Europol, Eurojust, the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the European Anti-Fraud Office, the EU Anti-Money Laundering Authority and Frontex, should contribute their data to joint analysis.

***Action 9: Deploy innovative detection technologies to combat drug trafficking***

*Main actors: Commission, Member States*

To counter sophisticated drug trafficking methods, it is essential to support the deployment of advanced detection technologies that address evolving cross-border criminal trends and meet the

practical needs of frontline authorities. As traffickers continually refine their concealment techniques and exploit technological gaps, equipping customs, border control, and law enforcement agencies with cutting-edge tools ensures the EU remains one step ahead in tackling these threats.

The Commission and Member States will prioritise funding to deploy advanced detection and monitoring technologies in high-risk areas and transport hubs for maximum impact. Focus will be on advanced scanning systems with AI-powered analytical capabilities and integrating innovative detection equipment from public and private sectors into AI-powered risk profiling tools used by national authorities policing goods and transport means.

Funding should also support the use of tools such as high-resolution satellite imagery, high-altitude pseudo-satellites, geospatial information systems and aerial or semi-submersible drones to detect and map illicit drug production and trafficking activities. These technologies would improve monitoring of trafficking corridors, drug laboratories, drug crop cultivation areas and cross-border hotspots, with strategic input from Europol, the EUDA, SatCen, and other relevant EU agencies. The European Defence Transformation Roadmap<sup>9</sup> also provides a framework that will benefit dual use applications, including in the field of combatting drug trafficking.

#### ***Action 10: Enhance capabilities to address online drug trafficking***

*Main actors: Europol, European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), EUDA, Commission*

Drug trafficking is increasingly digitally enabled. Law enforcement authorities must be equipped with the necessary tools and skills to detect, investigate and disrupt these evolving criminal methods. In response, the EU will prioritise the enhancement of law enforcement monitoring and intervention capabilities online.

Europol should provide expanded operational support to Member States, including to systematically monitor drug markets, analyse and flag suspicious activities, also reflecting analytical and monitoring contributions from the EUDA. In parallel, CEPOL should deliver advanced, specialised training programmes aimed at building national expertise in identifying and combating drug-related activities across digital platforms.

Enforcing the due diligence obligations of online intermediaries under the Digital Services Act (DSA) both by the Member States and the Commission, will be key in addressing the online aspects of drug trafficking. In addition, cooperation with the private sector should be reinforced through the EU Internet Forum. The EU should work towards a Cooperation Protocol with technology companies involved in the EU Internet Forum, establishing points of contact and commitments to include drug trafficking in their terms of reference and content moderation processes.

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<sup>9</sup> COM(2025) 845 final

This multifaceted approach combining enhanced operational capacity, effective supervision and cooperation with the private sector, and high-quality training will empower law enforcement authorities across the EU to counter drug trafficking more effectively in online channels, dismantle digital criminal marketplaces, and keep ahead of rapidly evolving trafficking techniques.

### ***Action 11: Disrupt drug trafficking from and within prisons***

*Main actors: Europris, EUDA, Member States*

Prisons should isolate offenders from criminal networks, yet many high-level traffickers continue orchestrating drug-related operations from behind bars. Misuse of communication channels, exploitation of visitors, and coordination with outside accomplices challenge the integrity of the justice system and public safety. Organised criminal groups sometimes intimidate, bribe, or threaten prison staff, endangering their safety and also undermining institutional integrity and rehabilitation efforts. To tackle these issues, the European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services (EuroPris)<sup>10</sup> will lead an initiative to map current challenges and identify best practices across the EU for disrupting criminal activity within prison systems.

This initiative will provide a comprehensive overview of existing legal, operational and technological approaches used by Member States to prevent and investigate the continuation of drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime from prisons. It will also explore the effectiveness of measures such as secure communications control, intelligence sharing between prison and law enforcement authorities, staff training, and offender risk classification systems.

Complementary to the EU's broader efforts to combat organised crime, EuroPris will facilitate the development and dissemination of practical guidance, helping Member States adopt the most effective tools. To encourage peer learning and strengthen institutional capacity, EuroPris will organise dedicated activities on thematic issues such as mobile phone jamming, managing high-risk offenders, and inter-agency cooperation.

The action aims to prevent prisons from functioning as command centres for drug trafficking, thereby disrupting criminal networks and reinforcing the rule of law inside and outside prison walls.

### ***Action 12: Assess the EU legal framework on drug trafficking***

*Main actors: Commission, Parliament and Council*

Given the evolving nature of drug trafficking across the EU, it is essential that the EU's legal framework remains effective. The Commission is evaluating Framework Decision 2004/757/JHA, which sets minimum provisions on the constituent elements of criminal acts and penalties in the field of illicit drug trafficking, with findings expected in 2026. This evaluation

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<sup>10</sup> The European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services is funded by the EU operating grant and its annual work programme and general functioning is supported by the European Commission.

will assess if EU law effectively addresses the current criminal landscape, where drug trafficking involves not just cross-border smuggling but often systemic violence, corruption, exploitation, and infiltration of legal systems and institutions.

The ongoing 11th round of mutual evaluation<sup>11</sup> is focused on combating cross-border illicit drug trafficking within the EU. Based on the findings of the ongoing evaluation and the results of the Council's mutual evaluation on drug trafficking, the Commission may consider a revision of the existing legal framework.

#### **2.4. Addressing the challenge of synthetic drugs and drug precursors**

*The EU and Member States should step up efforts to combat the growing threat of synthetic drugs by closing legal loopholes exploited by traffickers, improving the identification of emerging substances, and ensuring safe and coordinated responses to dismantle illicit laboratories. These actions are essential to bolster the EU's resilience, protect public health, reduce environmental harm, and strengthen its capacity to counter the rapidly evolving synthetic drug market.*

The growing presence of synthetic drugs in the EU underscores ongoing challenges in preparedness to address new highly potent psychoactive substances that pose serious health risks. These substances evolve rapidly and are frequently produced in concealed laboratories using designer precursors that evade existing controls. Differences in detection capacities and legal frameworks across Member States, along with varying approaches to dismantling illicit laboratories, create further challenges for an effective and coordinated EU response.

##### **Action 13: Close legal loopholes on designer precursors**

*Main actors: Commission, Member States, Parliament and Council*

The sophistication of synthetic drug production in the EU has grown, with criminal networks exploiting legal loopholes through the use of designer precursors. These substances are chemically similar to scheduled precursors but lack legitimate uses beyond research and innovation. By using designer precursors that fall outside existing control measures, traffickers can sustain large-scale production and evade regulatory detection and enforcement.

To address legal loopholes, the Commission calls on the co-legislators to prioritise the adoption of a revised legal framework on drug precursors<sup>12</sup>. This framework aims to overcome the limitations of the current system and better respond to the evolving tactics of criminal networks. It will introduce specific rules for designer precursors, while safeguarding legal trade and supporting legitimate research and innovation involving these substances. An information repository will equip authorities and economic operators with information on substances that may serve as precursors, even if not listed in the Annexes of the new drug precursors regulation,

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<sup>11</sup> Joint Action 97/827/JHA of 5 December 1997 establishing the mutual evaluation mechanism in the fight against organised crime, OJ L 344, 15.12.1997, pp. 7–9.

<sup>12</sup> COM(2025) 747 final.

enhancing national authorities' ability to respond and aiding industry in identifying suspicious transactions.

Simultaneously, the Commission will enhance structured cooperation with the chemical industry, recognising its vital role in detecting and preventing the diversion of legal substances into illicit drug production.

***Action 14: Improve substance identification for effective drug and drug precursor interdiction***

*Main actors: EUDA, Member States*

Accurate and timely identification of illicit substances is crucial for effective drug interdiction efforts at borders and within the internal market. As criminal networks continue to diversify the chemical composition of drugs, especially synthetic ones, customs and law enforcement face growing challenges in detection and classification, including the identification of designer precursors.

To address this, the EUDA will collaborate with its new European network of laboratories to establish a comprehensive, EU-wide substance database for reference materials. This database will contain verified chemical signatures, spectral data, and analytical profiles of both controlled and emerging psychoactive substances, as well as drug precursors and potential precursors.

Once operational, the database will allow law enforcement and customs authorities in Member States to perform quicker and more precise on-the-spot identification of drugs and precursors using electronic detection equipment, including handheld and lab-based technologies. By providing real-time access to harmonised reference data, the substance library will minimise identification delays, enhance forensic precision, and strengthen the evidentiary value in judicial proceedings. Wider deployment of handheld detection devices across the EU to law enforcement and customs personnel will further amplify the impact of this initiative.

***Action 15: Provide a common handbook for dismantling illicit synthetic drug production sites***

*Main actors: Europol, EUDA, CEPOL, Member States*

Dismantling clandestine synthetic drug laboratories poses significant challenges due to the complexity and volatility of chemical substances, along with risks for public health, law enforcement personnel, and the environment. These labs often use improvised equipment and store hazardous precursor chemicals or toxic by-products requiring specialised handling.

To ensure a consistent, safe and effective EU response, Europol, in collaboration with the EUDA, will develop harmonised guidelines for dismantling illicit synthetic drug labs, transporting substances, and securely disposing of related chemicals, in accordance with the Council conclusions on the 2025 Pact addressing synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances<sup>13</sup>. These guidelines will set standard protocols applicable across all Member States,

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<sup>13</sup> Council conclusions on the Pact addressing new synthetic drug and new psychoactive substances threats in the European Union.

regardless of local infrastructure or resource differences. Additionally, Member States are encouraged to leverage Europol's expertise and ensure appropriate training for law enforcement, including through CEPOL.

## **2.5. Advancing research, development and innovation**

*The EU and Member States should close the gap between law enforcement requirements and security innovation. This includes identification of priority technological needs and aligning research and industry efforts. This approach will ensure that cutting-edge tools and solutions directly support frontline action against organised crime and drug trafficking.*

The EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment report from Europol highlights the adaptability of organised crime groups involved in drug trafficking. The networks rapidly adopt new production techniques, concealment methods and emerging technologies to expand their operations and evade detection. Law enforcement and customs authorities face increasing challenges in keeping pace with this technological agility. The gap between criminal innovation and security responses results in vulnerabilities that traffickers can exploit.

### ***Action 16: Align innovation with operational demands to fight drug trafficking***

*Main actors: Commission supported by the Community for European Research and Innovation for Security and the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security, EUDA, Member States*

As drug trafficking networks increasingly leverage emerging technologies and encrypted communications, the need for evolving security solutions that match their agility is paramount. To keep Europe at the forefront of this fight, bridging the gap between law enforcement needs and security industry innovation is crucial.

To achieve this, the Commission, supported by the Community for European Research and Innovation for Security and the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security, will launch a coordinated effort to identify the most urgent technological and operational needs in combating organised crime, including drug trafficking. This effort will gather input from practitioners, law enforcement agencies, customs authorities, forensic experts and intelligence analysts across the EU.

Under the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security, the EUDA, with support from Europol, Frontex and the Joint Research Centre (JRC), is conducting technology foresight analysis. This analysis aims to evaluate the impact of new and emerging technologies on the drug sector, enhancing security and law enforcement efforts.

The current [JRC Border Security Lab initiative](#) has established a valuable network of laboratories to support border and customs control. The network can also assist in identifying requirements for improved detection of drug trafficking.

The resulting needs assessment will foster dialogue with the security and technology industry, aligning research and development with practical challenges. It will also inform the Commission

Security and Innovation Campus, launching in 2026 by the JRC. This campus will unite researchers to accelerate the transition from research to innovation and implementation, while lowering development, testing, and validation costs.

## 2.6. Strengthening international cooperation and partnerships

*To tackle organised criminal networks, the EU and its Member States should lead a coordinated transnational response in close cooperation with international partners. Both strategic and operational cooperation with key third countries is essential to disrupt the most threatening drug trafficking networks. Such cooperation will mainstream the human rights-based approach, promoting full compliance with international human rights law, including the principles of equality and non-discrimination.*

Criminal networks often operate on a global scale, seeking opportunities worldwide. They engage in money laundering and infiltrate legitimate businesses across different countries. In some instances, their leadership is strategically based abroad to complicate investigations and evade arrest.

### ***Action 17: Enhance and expand strategic dialogue and cooperation mechanisms with third countries***

*Main actors: Commission in cooperation with EEAS, Council*

Drug trafficking will be a central focus of the EU's strategic dialogue with third countries, as the EU aims to advance an integrated, balanced, and evidence-based approach to drug policy, aligned with international law and human rights standards. This approach will support the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027<sup>14</sup> and the Council conclusions on human rights-based approach in drug policies<sup>15</sup>, enhancing collective capacity to confront global challenges related to illicit drug production, trafficking, and organised crime.

The EU will maintain and expand drug-related dialogues with partners in the Western Balkans, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Asia, and bilaterally with the United States, China and Colombia. These dialogues will focus on identifying shared threats from drug trafficking and establishing common priorities, transforming them into concrete operational measures and joint actions. Each region or country's specific challenges, such as being key corridors for drug and precursor trafficking, issues related to drug production, and transnational organised crime activities, will shape thematic priorities. Where conditions allow, the EU will explore more advanced and comprehensive political frameworks, such as the EU – Latin America and Caribbean Alliance for Citizen Security. The EU will involve the relevant EU Delegations in these preparations as much as possible.

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<sup>14</sup> EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 – Council Conclusions of 18 November 2020, 12848/20, and Council Conclusions of 27 May 2024 on the alignment of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 with the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, 9508/24.

<sup>15</sup> Council conclusions of December 2022 on human rights-based approach in drug policies, 15818/22.

Additionally, the EU will explore opportunities for new dialogues with other priority countries and regions significantly affected by the adverse impacts of drug trafficking. Through these enhanced partnerships, the EU aims to deepen strategic and operational cooperation, improve information exchange and mutual capacity building, and reinforce international coordination for effective, coordinated responses.

***Action 18: Strengthen port resilience in third countries to disrupt drug trafficking***

*Main actors: Commission in cooperation with EEAS, Europol, Member States*

With drug trafficking networks operating on a global scale, major seaports in third countries have become critical transit points for illicit drug shipments destined for the EU. These logistical hubs are often targeted and exploited by organised crime due to vulnerabilities in infrastructure, oversight and governance. Strengthening the resilience of such ports is essential to disrupt trafficking routes at their source and protect the EU's internal security and integrity of global supply chains.

As part of the ProtectEU Internal Security Strategy and the forthcoming EU Ports Strategy, the Commission, in cooperation with the EEAS, will explore multi-actor partnerships to boost resilience in ports and trade routes, especially on transatlantic routes, and will initiate targeted joint assessments in selected high-risk third-country ports. These ports will be chosen based on a comprehensive threat and risk analysis, incorporating strategic intelligence, geopolitical factors, and the level of trafficking activity. The process will involve close coordination with Europol, EU Delegations, and relevant international partners to ensure targeted and effective actions against drug trafficking. The selection and assessments will also require cooperation with Member State liaison officers in those countries, utilising their insights and operational experience to enhance threat assessments and the overall effectiveness of the joint efforts.

These joint assessments will involve close cooperation with customs, law enforcement, and port authorities in host countries. The aim is to identify trafficking methods, enhance control procedures, and share expertise on recognising suspicious cargo and concealment techniques. The initiative also focuses on building long-term security capacity in partner ports, assisting them in implementing international standards, modernising inspection technologies, and increasing resilience against criminal infiltration. By strengthening the security architecture of key logistical gateways abroad, this action will serve as a forward defence mechanism, disrupting drug trafficking flows before they reach Europe and contributing to safer global trade routes.

***Action 19: Enhance international cooperation through joint investigations and fusion centres***

*Main actors: Commission, Europol, Eurojust, Member States*

Recognising the transnational nature of modern drug trafficking, the EU must enhance international law enforcement and judicial cooperation in full respect of international law to bolster security for itself and its partners. The EU will support Member State authorities in establishing and reinforcing Special Investigative Units in key third countries, as well as Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) with operational support from Europol and Eurojust. These teams

will enable real-time data exchange, coordinated investigations across jurisdictions, and build solid cases against criminal organisations, aiding prosecutions both within the EU and in partner countries. At the same time, capacity-building will remain an important element in strengthening the ability of key partners to conduct intelligence-led investigations.

The EU will also support the creation of joint fusion centres in strategic third countries and within the EU. These centres will act as regional coordination hubs, bringing together EU experts, local law enforcement, and regional security actors to enhance intelligence sharing, analyse criminal trends and trafficking routes, and coordinate enforcement actions swiftly.

Furthermore, the EU will strengthen cooperation with the United States in a joint effort to curb drug trafficking and dismantle the criminal networks behind it, focusing on bolstering operational partnerships and improving information exchange, including activities related to money laundering.

The EU will actively support the objectives of the European Political Community's European Coalition against Drugs initiative, launching concrete operational measures such as enhanced law enforcement coordination and joint investigations targeting major trafficking routes. Recognising the importance of illicit financial flows in drug trafficking, the EU will promote a 'follow the money approach', utilising also its external action tools as needed to support third countries in aligning with international anti-money laundering standards and facilitating cooperation for asset recovery.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Organised criminal networks involved in drug trafficking pose a growing threat to the EU's internal security, social fabric, and public health. These globalised, technologically advanced groups have embedded themselves into supply chains, expanding their reach through violence, corruption, and infiltration of legitimate institutions and business structures.

To address this urgent situation, the EU must act with renewed determination and a unified purpose. As criminal networks continually innovate, so must the EU and its Member States. The collective EU response should be **strategic, intelligence-led and future-proof**, combining operational strength with prevention, digital resilience and international cooperation, all in line with international law, including international human rights law.

A whole-of-society approach is essential, requiring coordination across EU institutions, bodies, agencies, Member States, and their national, regional, and local authorities. Within the EU, enhancing coordination and partnerships with civil society and private actors is necessary. Furthermore, fostering public awareness and engagement will empower communities to participate in and support efforts against drug trafficking, creating a more informed and resilient society ready to confront the challenges posed by organised crime.

This document outlines the key actions necessary at the EU level from 2026 to 2030 to fight drug trafficking and the criminal networks involved. The Commission, taking into account information provided by the Member States and the EEAS, should monitor the implementation

of these actions. Relevant EU agencies, particularly the EUDA and Europol, should support these efforts by contributing to monitoring and reporting on progress.

By reaffirming its commitment to unified, strategic action, the EU aims to protect its societies, ensure a safer future for its citizens, and enhance global security for its partners.

## **Annex: List of actions:**

### **I. Adapting to evolving routes and modi operandi**

**Action 1:** Make better use of travel intelligence to detect, map and disrupt drug trafficking routes

**Action 2:** Expand the operations of MAOC-N

**Action 3:** Use Frontex's capabilities to support Member States in detecting drug trafficking at the EU's external borders and strengthen cooperation with Europol and other relevant bodies

**Action 4:** Step up civil–military partnerships to counter maritime drug trafficking

**Action 5:** Identify effective measures to address the misuse of high-speed 'go-fast' vessels

**Action 6:** Build public-private cooperation to disrupt drug trafficking via post and parcel services

### **II. Preventing crime and reducing drug-related violence**

**Action 7:** Create a toolbox to prevent minors being recruited into drug trafficking networks

### **III. Enhancing cooperation across law enforcement, judiciary and customs**

**Action 8:** Improve cooperation and information exchange between customs and other law enforcement authorities

**Action 9:** Deploy innovative detection technologies to combat drug trafficking

**Action 10:** Enhance capabilities to address online drug trafficking

**Action 11:** Disrupt drug trafficking from and within prisons

**Action 12:** Assess the EU legal framework on drug trafficking

### **IV. Addressing the challenge of synthetic drugs and drug precursors**

**Action 13:** Close legal loopholes on designer precursors

**Action 14:** Improve substance identification for effective drug interdiction

**Action 15:** Provide a common handbook for dismantling illicit synthetic drug production sites

### **V. Advancing research, development and innovation**

**Action 16:** Align innovation with operational demands to fight drug trafficking

### **VI. Strengthening international cooperation and partnerships**

**Action 17:** Enhance and expand strategic dialogue and cooperation mechanisms with third countries

**Action 18:** Strengthen port resilience in third countries to disrupt drug trafficking

**Action 19:** Enhance international cooperation through joint investigations and fusion centres