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

**on the EU Drugs Strategy**

## INTRODUCTION

Europe faces significant security, health and social challenges linked to the trafficking and use of illicit drugs. This profoundly impacts the safety and security of our towns, cities, and local communities. Growing, sophisticated and violent drug markets contribute to increased crime, dependency, overdoses, the spread of infectious diseases<sup>1</sup>, and environmental degradation, destabilising communities<sup>2</sup> and straining public resources.

Illicit drug production, trafficking and distribution is a **growing and evolving global criminal business**. In the EU, half of the most dangerous criminal networks engage in drug trafficking, and over two thirds use violence<sup>3</sup>. **Flows of cocaine to European ports**, either directly from Latin America or via West Africa, have increased dramatically in recent years<sup>4</sup>. **Criminal networks use information technologies and adapt their modi operandi** to avoid detection and adapt to controls. They diversify trafficking operations to less controlled routes and expand their presence online, using e-commerce platforms and social media, anonymisation and encryption tools to their advantage. They divert and traffic drug precursors, including designer precursors, to produce synthetic drugs. These criminals are infiltrating our society **using violence, including by minors**, exacerbating public insecurity, and destabilising communities, families, and economies.

Drug use continues to pose serious **health challenges in the EU**, with young people particularly affected. With cocaine consumption rising and new psychoactive substances emerging, the **risks of poisoning** and drug-related fatalities increase, totalling nearly 7 500 in 2023<sup>5</sup>. These developments strain monitoring systems and **hinder effective treatment and harm reduction efforts**. Even socially integrated groups increasingly use stimulants like cocaine, risking severe health impacts and long-term harm. Drug use threatens the health and social stability of various groups, especially those already in vulnerable situations.

Finally, **drug production and trafficking damage the environment** via the dumping of toxic chemical waste and the destruction of habitats, impacting local communities' living space and challenging law enforcement in the safe dismantling of drug laboratories and waste dumps.

These threats are being felt across Member States by citizens in their everyday life. In a recent Eurobarometer, four out of 10 respondents reported that drug trafficking and drug use were serious problems in their areas, and over a third thought that problems had increased in recent years<sup>6</sup>.

To address the rising challenges of drug use and trafficking, the European Union needs an ambitious drug policy approach. With this strategy, the Commission is setting a way forward that is aimed at **safeguarding citizen's well-being, enhancing public health, and ensuring security**, while promoting **multidisciplinary approaches to prevent harm and foster resilient, thriving communities and protect the environment**. It is a strategy that will strengthen **EU preparedness and response to current and future drug-related challenges**.

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<sup>1</sup> European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) (2025), *European Drug Report 2025. Trends and Developments*.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2024), *Eurobarometer survey on the impact of drugs on local communities*.

<sup>3</sup> Europol (2024), *Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks*.

<sup>4</sup> UNODC, *World Drug Report* (2025).

<sup>5</sup> EUDA (2025), *European Drug Report 2025. Trends and Developments*.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2024), *Eurobarometer survey on the impact of drugs on local communities*

## THE DRUGS STRATEGY FRAMEWORK: OBJECTIVES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

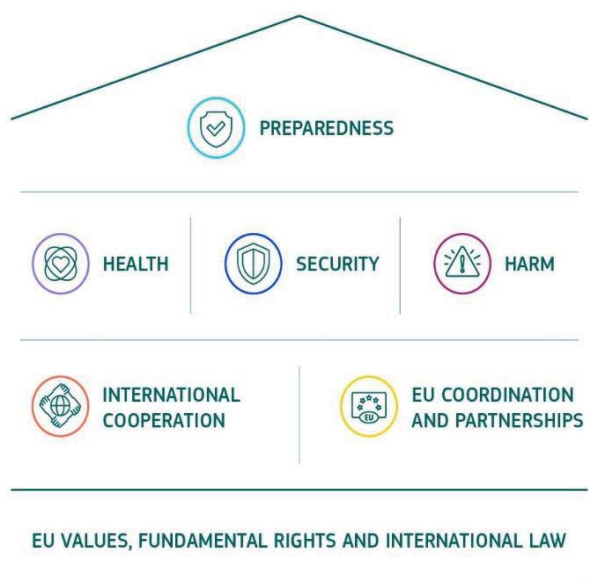
Reaffirming the EU's commitment to a **balanced and multidisciplinary approach**, the Strategy aims to curb drug use and combat organised crime by reinforcing health, social, and security measures grounded in **scientific evidence**. Organised crime groups exploit legal gaps and policy variations, with the **drug** landscape rapidly changing. The strategy therefore promotes an **integrated approach** to drug policy, advocating for coordination at EU, national, regional, and local levels. It intertwines security, health, and social responses to shield against potential drug crises, ensuring citizens and communities are protected and harm reduced.

The strategy promotes comprehensive stakeholder collaboration through a **whole-of-society approach**, strengthening sectoral and partner cooperation and actively engaging civil society.

Recognising the interconnected nature of drug production, trafficking, and consumption, and acknowledging that the challenges associated with the drug situation transcend national borders, the Strategy promotes **coordinated international responses** in collaboration with global partners. The objective of the strategy is to shape drug policy at EU and **national** levels and inform EU engagement **internationally**.

It is based on **five pillars** aiming to:

- 1) **enhance EU and national preparedness to anticipate and respond** to drug-related health and security threats;
- 2) **protect public health** via evidence-based preventive approaches and treatment;
- 3) **improve security and protect society** by addressing drug production and trafficking and combatting criminal infiltration;
- 4) **address drug-related harm** to protect individuals and society with measures that address individual health as well as social and environmental damages; and
- 5) **build strong partnerships** to address the drug situation, in particular with third countries and regions.



The strategy is **anchored in EU values<sup>7</sup> and the fundamental rights enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>8</sup>**. It is based on international law, especially international drug control conventions, the Charter of the United Nations, and implemented in accordance with international human rights law. It aligns with global commitments such as the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session outcome document<sup>9</sup>, the 2019 Ministerial Declaration<sup>10</sup>, the

<sup>7</sup> Notably those laid down in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union.

<sup>8</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, OJ C 326, 26.10.2012, pp. 391.

<sup>9</sup> Outcome document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the world drug problem 'Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem'.

<sup>10</sup> Ministerial declaration of 2019 on strengthening our actions at the national, regional, and international levels to accelerate the implementation of our joint commitments to address and counter the world drug problem.

high-level Declaration on the 2024 mid-term review<sup>11</sup> and the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>12</sup>.

The strategy builds on the evaluation of the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025<sup>13</sup>, which highlighted its value while emphasising the need for a result-oriented approach. It relies on the monitoring of the drug situation by the relevant EU agencies, especially the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA), widely recognised as a hub of scientific excellence on the drug-related issues and entrusted with a new key role in enhancing the Union's preparedness through its strengthened mandate<sup>14</sup>, and Europol which provides robust intelligence-led analyses to support law enforcement efforts. It incorporates substantial contributions from continuous dialogue with Member States and dedicated workshops in the Council preparatory body in charge of drug policy, as well as valuable input from civil society groups like the Civil Society Forum on Drugs. The strategy is a key deliverable of the European Internal Security Strategy (ProtectEU)<sup>15</sup> and aligns with the Preparedness Union Strategy<sup>16</sup>, the European Health Union<sup>17</sup>, including the reinforced EU health security framework<sup>18</sup>, and the Commission's proposal on new rules on drug precursors<sup>19</sup>.

Noting the results of the evaluation which highlighted the need to propose an **operational response** to the drug situation, the Commission is complementing the strategy with a dedicated **EU action plan against drug trafficking**, to disrupt organised criminal networks behind drug trafficking, targeting their routes and criminal methods. Building on the priorities identified in the strategy, the action plan outlines urgent concrete actions to undertake at the EU level between 2026 and 2030. This action plan includes 19 operational actions that will primarily deliver on the strategic commitment to strengthen EU's security, but also to enhance preparedness, address the harms caused by youth recruitment, and to build strong partnerships to address drug trafficking.

## I. ENHANCING PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

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<sup>11</sup> High-level declaration by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the 2024 midterm review, following up to the Ministerial Declaration of 2019.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations General Assembly, UN General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Commission Staff Working Document – Executive Summary of the Evaluation of the EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 and EU Drugs Action Plan 2021-2025, SWD (2025) 188 final; Commission Staff Working Document – Evaluation of the EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 and EU Drugs Action Plan 2021-2025, SWD (2025) 187 final.

<sup>14</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fi/ip\\_23\\_1936](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fi/ip_23_1936)

<sup>15</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.

<sup>16</sup> Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the *European Preparedness Union Strategy*, JOIN/2025/130 final.

<sup>17</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *The European Health Union: acting together for people's health*, COM (2024) 206 final.

<sup>18</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 on serious cross-border threats to health and repealing Decision No 1082/2013/EU (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 314, 6.12.2022, pp. 26–63.

<sup>19</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.

The dynamics of illicit drug supply and demand are evolving rapidly, driven by influential global criminal networks and spurred by geopolitical and technological developments<sup>20</sup>. New, potentially more toxic and addictive psychoactive substances are rapidly emerging, increasing the risks of poisoning and drug-related fatalities. Enhancing Europe's preparedness in health, social and security aspects related to drugs is crucial.

### **Strategic priority 1 – Strengthen EU preparedness to address drug-related threats**

*The EU must step up the monitoring of the EU drugs situation, updating its data collection, analysis and dissemination systems and networks to better anticipate and respond to new drug challenges, including through preparedness measures and other evidence-based responses.*

#### ***1.1. Stepping up risk awareness and the EU's forward-looking approach***

Strengthening the EU's situational awareness means improving its ability to rapidly analyse and share data on emerging trends. The EUDA provides essential tools such as the European network of forensic and toxicological laboratories, which must be effectively rolled out to enhance the EU's readiness.

EU agencies, in particular the EUDA and Europol, should **improve the timeliness of EU-level monitoring of the drug situation** in close cooperation with the Member States. The EUDA will assist Member States in improving unified data collection, using sources such as the EU statistical office (Eurostat) geospatial intelligence tools and data from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). It will use innovative approaches to identify early signals that point to changes in the drug situation, building on their existing analyses of data from hospital emergencies, syringe residues or municipal wastewaters.

Given the rapid and continuous emergence of new substances, **sharing information swiftly across the EU** is key. To that end, the EUDA will upgrade the EU Early Warning System to quickly identify new psychoactive substances, monitor their composition and potency, assess their harm and provide Member States this information systematically. The European network of forensic and toxicological laboratories will support this information exchange and provide EU specialist expertise. Furthermore, in certain cases of a serious cross-border threat to health, the Member State authorities or the Commission are to notify an alert in the Early Warning and Response System<sup>21</sup> in order to guarantee a more effective response.

Finally, the EU and Member States should strengthen their **foresight capabilities** by leveraging new and existing data systems. This will help anticipate medium- and long-term developments in drug trends, like the impact of digitalisation, risks to young people, and the rise in synthetic drugs. The EUDA will boost its horizon scanning and foresight activities to identify shortcomings in drug markets, including the effect of digitalisation, the potential impact of new synthetic drugs, and challenges arising from policy changes.

#### ***1.2. Enhancing the EU's response capacity***

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<sup>20</sup> Europol (2025), *European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment - The changing DNA of serious and organised crime*.

<sup>21</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 on serious cross-border threats to health and repealing Decision No 1082/2013/EU, OJ L 314, 6.12.2022, p. 26.

The EU needs to be better prepared to respond to emerging drug-related threats. To this end, the EUDA, working with national experts, will **develop threat assessments on new drug-related health and security threats**. The assessments will include clear response options to help mitigate the threats at both national and EU level<sup>22</sup>. The EU's preparedness must cover the rise of new potent synthetic drugs. The EUDA will therefore initiate a threat assessment dedicated to highly potent synthetic opioids in Europe.

Furthermore, complementing EU efforts as part of the Union prevention, preparedness and response plan for health crises<sup>23</sup>, Member States should develop **national preparedness and response measures**. Member States should ensure their systems can anticipate, prevent, and mitigate threats, including by swiftly deploying medical countermeasures and harm reduction supplies.

The EUDA will also issue targeted rapid health and security alerts on serious drug-related risks, such as highly potent synthetic drugs, through the **European drug alert system**<sup>24</sup>. This alert system will contribute to efficient and timely risk communications, linking in with national alert systems and directly reaching health practitioners and law enforcement officers.

### ***1.3. Bringing together research efforts***

Efforts at EU and national levels should focus on enhancing the understanding of research gaps related to drug behaviour, treatment options, polysubstance use, mental health disorders, and the societal impact of drug trafficking. Through research dialogues<sup>25</sup>, the EU aims to facilitate **knowledge sharing and establish research priorities**. The EUDA will create a drug-related research database and a community of knowledge, bringing together policymakers, scientists, civil society, and field experts to bridge critical knowledge gaps. In order to foster security industry innovation that directly benefits to law enforcement, the European Commission will map the urgent technological and operational needs of law enforcement to combat organised crime, including drug trafficking.

Innovation remains central to addressing emerging health and security threats posed by drugs, such as new psychoactive substances and new forms of use, including vaping. Leveraging new technologies and artificial intelligence, the EU and Member States should ensure adequate funding for innovation, enhancing detection technologies that integrate AI to rapidly identify precursors at EU borders and assist law enforcement in dismantling drug production. The Commission, supported by Europol and the EUDA, will coordinate the dissemination of innovative practices to actors in the drug sector. Innovative tools to **map rural production areas, trafficking corridors, and environmental risk zones need scaling up** to enhance the intelligence picture. Training should be provided to improve law enforcement's technical skills, complemented by ongoing

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<sup>22</sup> In synergy with the assessment of prevention, preparedness and response planning under Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 on serious cross-border threats to health.

<sup>23</sup> Commission Staff Working Document introducing the Union prevention, preparedness and response plan for health crisis, SWD (2025) 393 final.

<sup>24</sup> Regulation (EU) 2023/1322 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2023 on the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1920/2006, OJ L 166, 30.6.2023, pp. 6, Article 13.

<sup>25</sup> Annual exchange on drug-related research within the framework of the Horizontal Group on Drugs to strengthen policy-research links and collaboration at EU level established following the Council conclusions of December 2009 on strengthening EU research capacity on illicit drugs, 17177/09.

research to refine the intelligence picture, ensuring a comprehensive understanding and effective response to drug-related challenges.

Through the EU's research and innovation funding programmes, the Commission will boost research to understand drug use disorders and behavioural patterns, while also advancing innovative therapies for stimulant use and harnessing opioids and psychoactive substances safely for medical purposes. Promoting digital tools and healthcare applications is essential to optimise healthcare and social systems.

In this context, the European Health Data Space (EHDS) will facilitate secured access to electronic health data across Member States, supporting research, innovation and public policy making on drug-related health trends, treatment outcomes, and the impact of new psychoactive substances<sup>26</sup>.

### **Key priorities**

**The Commission and Member States, with the support of relevant EU agencies, should:**

- **facilitate knowledge sharing and the identification of research priorities via research dialogues;**
- **coordinate operational support and dissemination of innovative practices and solutions to relevant actors in the drug sector.**

**In line with its extended mandate, the EUDA will:**

- **upgrade the EU early warning system to identify swiftly and systematically new psychoactive substances and disseminate this information to the Member States;**
- **implement a European drug alert system to issue targeted rapid health and security alerts on serious drug-related risks;**
- **develop threat assessments on new drug-related health and security threats and carry out a specific threat assessment on highly potent synthetic opioids in Europe;**
- **improve the timely monitoring of the drug situation by scaling up EU-wide data collection, notably building on rapid reporting from the Reitox National Focal Points<sup>27</sup>.**

**Member States are encouraged to:**

- **develop national preparedness and response measures with actions to anticipate and mitigate new and emerging drug-related threats.**

## **II. PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH**

Public health is heavily impacted by the growing availability and use of diverse and potent illicit drugs. **Demand reduction therefore remains at the forefront of the EU's response to illicit drug use.** In conjunction with harm reduction efforts, a comprehensive range of measures should

<sup>26</sup> Regulation (EU) 2025/327 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 February 2025 on the European Health Data Space and amending Directive 2011/24/EU and Regulation (EU) 2024/2847, OJ L, 2025/327, 5.3.2025.

<sup>27</sup> The European Information Network on Drugs and Drug Addiction (the 'Reitox network').

work together to achieve three main goals: reduce drug use, provide accessible treatment for everyone, and support the recovery and social reintegration of people with drug use disorders.

## **Strategic priority 2: Implement evidence-based prevention and risk awareness**

*The EU should actively engage in preventing and reducing drug use through the implementation and expansion of robust prevention and awareness raising activities across Member States, while scaling up evidence-based and effective health interventions.*

### ***2.1. Strengthen effective prevention activities***

Evidence-based prevention should be central to the EU's public health approach to reduce the risks of drug dependence and drug-related harm. Member States should therefore **step up universal prevention activities**. Early prevention programmes should build resilience, increase health literacy and promote life skills and healthy lifestyles. **Environmental prevention** activities to reduce individuals' exposure to substance use and dependence should be implemented<sup>28</sup>. To significantly strengthen the resilience of citizens, drug prevention activities must be integrated with interventions that address other critical health factors, such as tobacco use and harmful alcohol consumption, along with comprehensive health promotion initiatives.

The Commission will step up its work on preventive health through initiatives on cardiovascular diseases and mental health under the Healthier Together - EU non-communicable diseases framework<sup>29</sup>. This approach aids in reducing drug use and bolstering mental health resilience against substance use disorders. The Commission supports Member States with a comprehensive approach to mental health through a dedicated Communication<sup>30</sup>, focusing on vulnerable groups and health inequalities. Key initiatives include capacity building for Member States in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>31</sup>, and the establishment of EU PROMENS<sup>32</sup>, a training and exchange programme on mental health with a focus on supporting vulnerable groups.

At the same time, we need to improve citizens' perception of the risks to health and to security linked to drug use and drug production and trafficking. A serious concern is the rising use of stimulants like cocaine, which not only presents significant challenges to public health, including long-term health risks<sup>33</sup>, but also triggers security concerns related to violence and crime linked to the cocaine market<sup>34</sup>. The EU should therefore promote evidence-based awareness communications. To address these issues more effectively, the EUDA will help Member States **develop effective awareness-raising activities** targeted at priority areas, including cocaine use and potent new synthetic drugs.

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<sup>28</sup> Environmental interventions are regulatory, economic and physical measures designed to change the cultural, social, physical and economic context in which people make decisions (about drug use) and support healthier choices.

<sup>29</sup> [Healthier together – EU non-communicable diseases initiative - Public Health](#).

<sup>30</sup> [Mental health - Public Health - European Commission](#)

<sup>31</sup> [who.int/europe/activities/partnering-with-the-european-union-\(eu\)-to-tackle-mental-health-challenges](https://who.int/europe/activities/partnering-with-the-european-union-(eu)-to-tackle-mental-health-challenges)

<sup>32</sup> [EU-PROMENS Project Page - EU-PROMENS](#)

<sup>33</sup> EUDA (2025), *European Drug Report 2025. Trends and Developments*.

<sup>34</sup> EUDA and Europol (2024). *EU Drug Markets Analysis: Key insights for policy and practice*.

Additionally, Member States should focus on creating and promoting **targeted prevention measures** specifically designed for groups that are particularly vulnerable to exposure to illicit drugs. These include young people at risk of or already experimenting with drugs and people with acute and chronic mental health disorders. Targeted prevention activities should be rooted in science and tailored to specific socio-economic and cultural contexts and implemented across a variety of settings such as schools, sports, nightlife, internet, and social media platforms, as well as prisons.

### *2.2. Disseminate evidence for effective prevention activities*

The EU should promote the implementation of **evidence-based awareness and prevention programmes**, monitoring new interventions, reviewing their effectiveness, and disseminating best practices.

Implementation of existing **quality standards** for prevention should be strengthened across Member States. The Minimum Quality Standards in demand reduction, the European Drug Prevention Quality Standards, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention and the European Prevention Curriculum provide practical guidance for effective prevention. National efforts should be strengthened to improve the quality of prevention, treatment, and care activities by developing training modules for practitioners, health professionals, social workers, law enforcement and decisionmakers.

### **Strategic priority 3: Enhance treatment, recovery and reintegration**

*Member States should ensure that people who use drugs have access to health and social care by providing affordable treatment aligned with reintegration and social inclusion activities.*

### *3.1. Ease access to voluntary, integrated, and adapted treatment options*

People who use drugs should have easy and timely **access to affordable, quality and adapted treatment**, in line with the right to care laid down in the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>35</sup>. With a variety of illicit drugs in circulation, insufficient availability and uptake of treatment negatively impacts health.

As a result, national and regional healthcare systems should strive to improve their ability to provide effective people-centred treatment and recovery services for drug use disorders throughout Europe, including in less developed regions, rural and remote areas and the EU outermost regions. Recognising that individuals' needs vary, Member States are encouraged to offer a **broad range of evidence-based treatment options**, within a continuum of care. This includes integrated services for individuals facing polysubstance use and those with concurrent drug and mental health issues<sup>36</sup>. Additional treatment options are needed to address stimulant use, like cocaine. Integrated drug treatment services should combine health, social, and, when appropriate, law enforcement services to reflect the interconnectedness of health, social well-being, and safety.

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<sup>35</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights, COM/2017/0250 final.

<sup>36</sup> Council conclusions of December 2023 on people having drug use disorders that co-occur with other mental health disorders, 16112/23.

Furthermore, Member States should scale up drug-related prevention, treatment, and care in prisons to address the higher prevalence of drug use in prison settings compared to the general population. Treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery need to continue, both during incarceration and upon release.

Access to treatment in Europe should be **voluntary** and of high quality. Member States should **improve the quality of treatment delivered** to match the latest scientific evidence and evolving societal needs. Member States are therefore encouraged to update and implement the minimum quality standards in drug demand reduction adopted by the Council in 2015<sup>37</sup> and engage with civil society organisations and peer groups. The EUDA will support those efforts, assessing the quality of interventions at national, regional, and local levels (EU-Quality) and developing **EU-wide comprehensive guidance on quality standards**.

### *3.2. Promoting reintegration and social inclusion*

Drug treatment services should be complemented by activities that stimulate recovery and social reintegration, promoting a whole-of-society approach. To prevent individuals from slipping through the gaps, it is essential to encourage active collaboration among health, social, employment, youth, and harm reduction services.

Drug use can be both a consequence and a cause of social exclusion. Member States need to improve **reintegration of people** with drug use disorders into the community and the labour market. This helps to reduce drug use and the risk of relapse after treatment. To contribute to those efforts, the Commission will promote the socio-economic integration of people in vulnerable situations including people using drugs, through current and future EU spending instruments, such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or the proposed national and regional partnership plans beyond 2028.

Social measures can also make a real difference for people using drugs, in particular for those also at risk of poverty, social exclusion, or homelessness. Member States are encouraged to **implement social support measures aimed at people using drugs**, including via community and peer-led projects linked to recovery, housing, mental health assistance, and job opportunities. The Commission will strengthen measures to address the multiple dimensions and structural causes of exclusion and strengthen access to social and support services, also in the context of the forthcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. Furthermore, as part of the **European Platform on Combating Homelessness**, the Commission will establish the needs of vulnerable groups, including people using drugs, and combat homelessness in all policies.

Integrating security and social policies is essential. Alternatives to pre-trial detention<sup>38</sup> and to coercive sanctions<sup>39</sup> can assist in the socio-economic reintegration of individuals with drug-related offences, help aid to reduce recidivism, lessen stigma, and potentially lower judicial costs while improving security outcomes. Member States should **strengthen and expand the availability of**

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<sup>37</sup> Council conclusions of September 2018 on the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Drugs 2013-2016 regarding minimum quality standards in drug demand reduction in the European Union, 11985/15.

<sup>38</sup> Commission Recommendation (EU) 2023/681 of 8 December 2022 on procedural rights of suspects and accused persons subject to pre-trial detention and on material detention conditions, OJ L 86, 24.3.2023, pp. 44.

<sup>39</sup> Alternatives to coercive measures are defined as measures that have some rehabilitative element or that constitute a non-intervention (for example, deciding not to charge or prosecute), and those used instead of prison or other punishment (for example, a suspended sentence with drug treatment).

**such alternatives** to better connect criminal, social and health systems, in particular for young people.

To disseminate scientific evidence and best practices to a wider range of professionals, the EUDA will roll out a new learning platform – PLATO 2.0 – under which expanded and tailored e-learning possibilities on social reintegration will be made available.

#### **Key priorities**

##### **The Commission will:**

- **step up efforts on preventive health, rolling out the Healthier Together - EU non-communicable diseases initiative;**
- **take forward its flagship projects under the Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health.**

##### **The EUDA will:**

- **support Member States in designing effective awareness-raising activities on the impact of drug use and drug trafficking;**
- **develop and promote EU-wide comprehensive guidance on minimum quality standards and advise Member States on implementing effective prevention and treatment.**

##### **Member States are encouraged to:**

- **step up universal and environmental health prevention and develop and implement evidence-based prevention activities specifically designed for groups in vulnerable situations and young people;**
- **strengthen the availability of evidence-based treatment options integrated in a continuum of care and addressing increased stimulant use;**
- **promote the integration of people using drugs, via social support measures, as well as strengthen and expand the availability of alternatives to pre-trial detention and coercive sanctions for drug-related offences.**

### **III. IMPROVING SECURITY AND PROTECTING SOCIETY**

Drug trafficking networks operate globally and bring with them violence, corruption, infiltration of the legal economy and harm to society. Trafficking networks are bringing unprecedented amounts of cocaine into the EU, as well as other illicit drugs. Preventing and disrupting drug related crime is essential to break up criminal networks, disrupt trafficking routes and dismantle drug production facilities.

The strategy offers a comprehensive framework to address the drug situation, focusing on key issues related to drug trafficking. It is complemented by a dedicated action plan that defines specific priority actions needing further development or increased efforts. The action plan aims to enhance security in response to the current drug situation and can be complemented with additional measures depending on the evolution of the drug situation.

## **Strategic priority 4: Enhance law enforcement and judicial cooperation**

*The EU will intensify its efforts to break up high-risk criminal networks that contribute to the proliferation of illicit drugs across its territory. This involves proposing stricter rules to tackle organised crime, reinforcing the capabilities of law enforcement and judicial authorities in investigation and prosecution, recovering proceeds from criminal activities, and disrupting criminal operations within prison systems.*

### ***4.1. An effective legal framework against drug trafficking***

The Commission will propose **revised rules against organised crime** in 2026, which will reinforce options to dismantle the organised crime networks behind drug trafficking. In addition, it will evaluate the Framework Decision on drug trafficking<sup>40</sup> to assess whether it remains fit for purpose, assessing in particular the contribution it makes to effective cross-border cooperation. The Commission will also assess the need to strengthen the European Investigation Order to improve the cross-border gathering of evidence in criminal matters.

### ***4.2. Strengthening capabilities of law enforcement and judicial authorities***

Investigating organised crime and drug trafficking operations within the current criminal landscape is challenging. Effective dismantling of these networks requires coordinated efforts by law enforcement and judicial authorities, supported by robust cross-border cooperation and information exchange. As criminal networks grow more sophisticated, law enforcement and judicial responses must adapt, using new technologies and AI. Member States should prioritise enhancing the capabilities of these authorities to effectively detect, investigate, and prosecute drug trafficking, employing improved legal and operational tools.

The **strengthened European Multi-disciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT)** will boost operational, cross-border collaboration. The new EMPACT cycle has identified key priorities for fighting drug trafficking and identifying and disrupting the most threatening criminal networks<sup>41</sup>.

**EU agencies and bodies** will support national authorities in the fight against drug trafficking. Europol's activities on drug trafficking provide a framework for operational cooperation. Its mandate will be reinforced, as announced in the ProtectEU internal security strategy, offering strengthened support to Member States in countering drug trafficking. Eurojust supports national judicial authorities in efficiently prosecuting drug trafficking networks. Its strengthened mandate will also serve the fight against drug trafficking by increasing Eurojust's ability to support the investigation and prosecution of drug-related offences. The new EU Customs Authority and the EU Customs Data Hub will better equip customs to perform risk analysis at EU level and further improve the cooperation between customs and other law enforcement bodies.

The EUDA's updated mandate increases its capacity to monitor drug market development and provide evidence-based responses to counter them. CEPOL, the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training, will boost its support to Member States via capacity building and training. The planned

<sup>40</sup> Council Framework Decision 2004/757/JHA of 25 October 2004 laying down minimum provisions on the constituent elements of criminal acts and penalties in the field of illicit drug trafficking, OJ L 335, 11.11.2004, pp. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Council conclusions of June 2025 on the enhancement of EMPACT and on EU crime priorities for the next EMPACT cycle 2026-2029, 9397/25.

reinforcement of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, will provide it with advanced surveillance technology and situational awareness tools. This will enhance Frontex's capacity to detect, prevent, and combat cross-border crime at external borders, including drug trafficking. Further synergies with the Secure Connectivity and EU Space Programmes should be developed to strengthen Frontex capabilities in the fields of secured communication, resilient positioning, navigation and timing, and earth observation.

#### ***4.3. Follow the money to fight criminal organisations***

Following the money is crucial for combating organised crime and drug trafficking networks. In 2024, the EU reinforced the legal framework on anti-money laundering<sup>42</sup> as well as on asset recovery and confiscation, underlining the importance of financial investigations for disrupting criminal organisations. Member States should incorporate the strengthened rules **on asset recovery and confiscation**<sup>43</sup> into national law without delay and use them to their full potential.

To protect local communities and legitimate businesses, the EU and Member States should step up efforts to detect and prevent criminal **infiltration into legal businesses**, pursuing the administrative approach<sup>44</sup>. To trace and seize criminal assets, the EU needs to explore innovative practices to detect money laundering and track organised crime profits. As highlighted in the ProtectEU internal security strategy, the Commission is exploring the feasibility of a new EU-wide system to track terrorist financing. To respond to the organised crime threat, it will expand the assessment to also cover organised crime profits.

Additionally, efforts will be directed towards enhancing the use of technologies such as advanced analytics and AI to track crypto asset transactions, focusing on the financial operations of criminal organisations, particularly in crime-as-a-service scenarios.

Corruption fuels every stage of the drug trafficking, undermining the licit economy and often goes hand in hand with intimidation. Tackling corruption remains a key priority for dismantling organised crime and drug trafficking. Through the upcoming EU anti-corruption strategy, the Commission will strengthen measures to address the threat and use of corruption by organised crime. In addition, the Commission will work with the co-legislators to allow for a swift adoption of the directive on combating corruption<sup>45</sup>.

#### ***4.4. Addressing drugs trafficking in custodial environments***

Drug trafficking does not stop with incarceration. Criminal networks exploit communication channels and use visitors to smuggle drugs into prisons and to coordinate drug operations outside. Prison staff can face intimidation, bribery attempts or direct threats. The EU needs to protect public

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<sup>42</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 May 2024 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, OJ L, 2024/1624, 19.6.2024.

<sup>43</sup> Directive (EU) 2024/1260 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 April 2024 on asset recovery and confiscation, OJ L, 2024/1260, 2.5.2024.

<sup>44</sup> Council conclusions of June 2016 on the administrative approach to prevent and fight serious and organised crime, 9935/2016.

<sup>45</sup> Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating corruption, replacing Council Framework Decision 2003/568/JHA and the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of Member States of the European Union and amending Directive (EU) 2017/1371 of the European Parliament and of the Council, COM/2023/234 final.

safety and the integrity of justice systems against this threat. Alongside Member States, the EU should promote evidence-based solutions and share best practices for **disrupting criminal activity within prison systems**.

### **Strategic priority 5: Disrupt drug trafficking routes**

*The EU is committed to disrupting drug trafficking networks by targeting trafficking routes across sea, land, and air. A concentrated effort will be made to combat drug trafficking in online spaces to dismantle these illicit operations and significantly hinder the activities of criminal networks involved.*

#### ***5.1. Identify and dismantle drug trafficking via maritime routes***

Criminal networks smuggle drugs into European seaports on a large scale. Maritime drug trafficking routes are highly diversified including through the EU's outermost regions, and reports show a shift in the modus operandi, with drug shipments arriving to a wider range of smaller European ports. To conceal these shipments, criminals use new methods often undetectable by law enforcement and maritime authorities. Europol will **strengthen the strategic analysis of maritime trafficking** to identify the operational needs for disrupting new methods of transporting and concealing drugs.

The **Maritime Analysis and Operation Centre (MAOC-N)** should further intensify its activities, notably the monitoring of vessels carrying illicit drugs in high seas.

As the main EU framework for public-private cooperation against drug trafficking, the Commission will share best practices through the enlarged **European Ports Alliance**, improving the resilience of ports across the EU. The upcoming EU Ports Strategy will put an emphasis on security, drawing on strategic dialogue with government officials, port authorities, private sector, and other key stakeholders. The aim is to enhance the security and preparedness of EU ports.

#### ***5.2. Addressing drug trafficking through land, post and parcel, and aviation***

The increased production of synthetic drugs, combined with the rapid expansion of e-commerce, offers ample possibilities to smuggle illicit drugs through postal and parcel delivery services. Post and parcel trafficking of smaller quantities, which are harder to detect, cumulatively fuel large-scale trafficking operations. To improve the detection of illicit drug flows, the EU will promote public-private cooperation between the **postal and parcel delivery sector, customs, and law enforcement authorities**. The action plan against drug trafficking includes concrete steps to take this cooperation forward.

High-value, low-volume shipments containing designer precursors<sup>46</sup> or drug precursors are increasingly being smuggled via air routes. In addition to their use of commercial aviation via the exploitation of human couriers, criminal networks increasingly use private planes, small aircraft, and non-scheduled flights to smuggle drugs undetected. The EU will work to **increase the monitoring and security controls of general aviation**, including increased information exchange between relevant civil aviation and law enforcement authorities, including customs.

#### ***5.3. Improving the monitoring and interception of drugs distributed online***

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<sup>46</sup> A close chemical relative of a drug precursor which does not have any known legitimate use except research and innovation

Criminals use both the open and dark web to promote, sell and distribute illicit drugs. Law enforcement agencies need enhanced capabilities and operational support to effectively detect and investigate these online activities, including those on the dark web and social media. To improve safety, protect minors and combat the dissemination of illegal content online, online service providers and authorities must fully comply with the **Digital Services Act (DSA)**. The Commission will continue to monitor and enforce the due diligence compliance of very large online platforms and search engines under the DSA. Additionally, the **EU Internet Forum** will leverage voluntary cooperation with online platforms to address challenges and share best practices for disrupting online drug sales and preventing the recruitment of minors by criminal networks, building on the measures included in the Commission Guidelines on measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety and security for minors online, pursuant to Article 28(4) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065<sup>47</sup>. As part of the EU Internet Forum, this activity will enhance social media platforms' role in drug use prevention, with a particular focus on reaching young people, in cooperation with the EUDA<sup>48</sup>.

### **Strategic priority 6: Combat the production of synthetic drugs and precursors**

*To address the challenge posed by increased production, import and trafficking of synthetic drugs, the EU will boost operational efforts to detect and safely dismantle clandestine laboratories and stop the inflow of drug precursors.*

#### ***6.1. Strengthening operational capabilities to detect and dismantle clandestine laboratories***

Detecting and dismantling clandestine laboratories producing and exporting synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances remains a significant challenge. These substances are an important EMPACT priority, where police and customs work together to achieve results. With the support of EMPACT, the EUDA will contribute to an improved understanding of criminal drug production on the EU territory by developing a **European database on drug production incidents**, in collaboration with affected Member States.

Dismantling drug production laboratories is complex and poses serious health risks to the public and law enforcement, alongside environmental risks. To address this, the Commission and Member States will provide guidelines and protocols to help law enforcement detect and dismantle clandestine **synthetic drug labs** using advanced detection technologies and specialised training programmes. This approach aims to reduce risks for law enforcement and environmental harm. Additionally, Europol and CEPOL will create instructions for the safe transport and disposal of seized chemicals and equipment, outline best practices for safely dismantling laboratories, and enhance training and capacities in this area.

#### ***6.2. Tackling the diversion and trafficking of drug precursors and designer precursors***

Drug precursors are often misused to produce synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances, posing a significant threat to public safety. The Commission's revision of legislation concerning precursors is essential for enhancing the monitoring and control of drug precursors and designer

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<sup>47</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, pp. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Building on the measures included in the Commission Guidelines on measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety and security for minors online, pursuant to Article 28(4) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065.

precursors<sup>49</sup>. This proposal aims to empower enforcement authorities and economic operators to more effectively identify suspicious transactions, thereby enhancing cooperation and vigilance in preventing illegal drug production. To assist implementation, the EUDA will monitor developments related to the diversion and trafficking of drug precursors. It will also contribute to implementing the EU law on drug precursors by developing a Drug Precursors Information Repository, containing information on precursors facilitating information sharing for their identification. Alongside, the EU should step up work with international partners to monitor and subsequently disrupt the illicit production, diversion, and trafficking of drug precursors, including designer precursors. To facilitate forensic investigations at national level, the EU will step up its support to detect precursors used in drug production facilities.

### **Key priorities**

#### **The Commission will:**

- **implement, in close collaboration with Member States and relevant EU agencies, the dedicated EU action plan against drug trafficking;**
- **evaluate the existing Framework Decision on drug trafficking in 2026;**
- **deliver an EU Ports Strategy with a strong focus on port security;**
- **will work with the co-legislators to advance the swift adoption of the new rules on precursors;**
- **assess the feasibility of establishing a new EU-wide system to track financing related to both organised crime and terrorism.**

#### **The EUDA, with support of EMPACT, will:**

- **develop a European database on drug production incidents.**

#### **Member States are encouraged to:**

- **reinforce national authorities' capacities to detect, investigate and prosecute drug trafficking;**
- **incorporate into national law and implement the strengthened rules on asset recovery and confiscation;**
- **detect and prevent criminal infiltration into legal businesses through the administrative approach.**

## **IV. ADDRESSING RISKS AND HARM**

The potential impact of illicit substances on people who use drugs, public spaces, and society is a growing concern. The rise of potent new psycho-active substances escalates the risk of overdose deaths, while drug trafficking introduces violence and environmental harm to local communities.

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<sup>49</sup> COM(2025) 747 final.

To address these issues, the EU must focus on significantly reducing drug-related risks and harms, alongside enhancing preparedness.

### **Strategic priority 7: Reduce individual drug-related harm**

*In a continuum of care with prevention and treatment, the EU and Member States will increase the availability of effective harm and risk reduction interventions to protect the people who use drugs from harm.*

#### ***7.1. Increase the availability and coverage of evidence-based harm and risk reduction interventions***

As new drugs bring new risks, Member States need to expand and adapt harm reduction interventions. Close collaboration between health and social professionals, civil society and peer groups is crucial. Interventions should be integrated with other health promotion activities to reach high-risk populations, for instance via rooms for safe and supervised drug consumption, drug checking facilities or mobile units that provide health and social support. Risk and harm reduction measures, including actions supported through cohesion policy funds, must be embedded in regional and local policies and realities, with actors working together to promote community-based health, safety, and security.

Harm reduction interventions that seek to prevent or reduce the risks of overdose, infectious diseases, and life-threatening infections need specific focus. Member States are urged to take measures to prevent or reduce the risk of **drug overdose and death**, particularly related to opioids, by increasing access to evidence-based interventions like opioid agonist treatments and naloxone, including take-home naloxone programmes. Innovative strategies are also vital for addressing the risks associated with new drugs, such as synthetic cannabinoids, and new usage methods like vapes.

Additional efforts should focus on preventing, treating, and reducing drug-related **blood-borne infections**, especially HIV and hepatitis C (HCV), as well as vaccine-preventable diseases like hepatitis A and B. People who inject drugs should have access to life-saving interventions informed by the EUDA and ECDC guidance on preventing and controlling infectious diseases<sup>50</sup>. Widely available needle and syringe programmes alongside voluntary HIV and HCV testing and treatment are crucial. The Commission will collaborate with the Civil Society Forum on Drugs to **identify systemic barriers affecting vulnerable populations**, including people using drugs.

In addition, Member States should consider developing and implementing dedicated **harm reduction interventions** for specific at-risk groups. These include people with mental health disorders, people in custodial settings, LGBTIQ+, migrants, as well as young people in recreational settings such as nightclubs or festivals.

#### ***7.2. Disseminating the evidence on effective harm reduction interventions***

While various risk- and harm-reduction measures exist to reach high-risk populations, further innovative measures should be made available as drugs and drug use evolve. The EUDA will

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<sup>50</sup> European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) (2023), Prevention and control of infectious diseases among people who inject drugs.

review the effectiveness of new interventions and share best practices via a harm reduction database. These efforts will ensure information is widely available to **support the development of quality standards** on harm reduction.

Building on the success of the European Prevention Curriculum, the EUDA will develop a dedicated training programme to improve the implementation of evidence-based harm reduction measures. The **European Harm Reduction Curriculum** will help Member States build capacity for harm reduction across Europe.

### **Strategic priority 8: Mitigate social and environmental impacts**

*The EU will increase crime prevention efforts to counter the growing violence associated with illicit drug trafficking, with particular attention to protecting young people from recruitment into crime and reducing the harm illicit drugs cause to society, local communities and the environment.*

#### ***8.1. Addressing drug related violence and stepping up crime prevention***

Drug-related violence is becoming more complex, often linked to organised crime creating cycles of harm which impact the safety and security of our towns, cities, and local communities. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable as they can be victims, perpetrators, and recruits for these groups. To tackle drug violence, the EU aims to disrupt criminal networks and promote community-based policing that integrates community safety with public health initiatives. Under the **EU agenda for cities**, the Commission will support local authorities by promoting innovative local projects and facilitating best-practice exchanges. This support aims to enhance community resilience and cohesion to address security and social integration challenges, including those associated with drug-related issues. In addition, the EUDA will conduct research and monitoring to better understand **drug-related violence** at various levels.

The EU will also step up efforts to prevent the recruitment of young people into organised crime, including online measures and **evidence-based prevention measures**. Member States are encouraged to strengthen protective environments for young people, using best practices available through the EU Crime Prevention Network Knowledge Centre. These efforts require collaboration among law enforcement, social workers, health professionals, and civil society. The European Crime Prevention Network will develop a **dedicated toolbox to address the recruitment of minors by criminal networks** to support these efforts.

In addition, to protect children from all forms of crime, including related to drugs online and offline, the EU will propose an **Action Plan on the Protection of Children against Crime**, as announced in the ProtectEU internal security strategy.

#### ***8.2. Addressing drug-related stigma and discrimination***

Europe must tackle the **stigma** associated with drug use and related disorders<sup>51</sup>, as it negatively impacts the mental and physical health of individuals. It can hinder their ability to seek support and integrate into society, potentially leading to school dropout among young people. Policies should integrate experiences of individuals affected by drug-related stigma, particularly through

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<sup>51</sup> Council conclusions of December 2022 on human rights-based approach in drug policies, 15818/22.

on-going engagement with civil society, including people who use drugs and clients of drug-related services. The EU will enhance awareness, promote information sharing, and foster mutual learning via the EU Health Policy Platform, the EU Best Practice Portal on Public Health, and Horizon Europe-funded research projects. Additionally, investment from ESF+ and ERDF should synergise with other EU funds and programmes to support social inclusion comprehensively.

### ***8.3. Taking a gender-responsive approach to the drug phenomenon***

The drug situation affects men and women differently, with women representing about a quarter of those with serious drug problems, but only a fifth of those entering treatment. Overdose deaths among women in the EU rose by 76% from 2013 to 2023, indicating additional barriers women face in accessing health and social services.

Member States should implement **gender-responsive** measures within all strategy pillars to ensure non-discriminatory, barrier-free access to services, particularly for treatment and harm reduction. Tailored services should include women-only options, childcare, and specialised trauma-informed support.

Additionally, sexual orientation and gender identity can affect access to health services. LGBTIQ+ individuals often face higher risks of mental health challenges and violence, as noted in the Commission's LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030<sup>52</sup>. Addressing discrimination and barriers for LGBTIQ+ people is crucial to reduce negative health impacts and ensure equitable access to services.

### ***8.4. Addressing the risks posed by drug-impaired driving***

It is estimated that up to a quarter of road deaths in the EU, totalling over 19 940 in 2024, are linked to alcohol and/or drugs<sup>53</sup>. To support Vision Zero<sup>54</sup> and the aim of zero road fatalities by 2050, the EU should implement measures to prevent drug-impaired driving and accidents caused by drivers under the influence of drugs.

With the new Driving Licence Directive<sup>55</sup>, Member States have committed to **zero-tolerance policies on driving under the influence of drugs**. Member States are encouraged to introduce generally applied zero-tolerance schemes in their national law.

Given the high incidence of novice drivers, mostly young people, in road traffic accidents related to drink-driving and drug use, Member States are also encouraged to apply stricter rules on novice

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<sup>52</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Union of Equality: LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030, COM/2025/725 final.

<sup>53</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, Modijefsky, M., Janse, R., Spit, W., et al., Prevention of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs : final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2832/284545>

<sup>54</sup> Commission staff working document, EU Road Safety Policy Framework 2021-2030 - Next steps towards 'Vision Zero', SWD (2019) 283 final.

<sup>55</sup> Directive (EU) 2025/2205 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2025 on driving licences, amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Directive (EU) 2022/2561 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Directive 2006/126/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Regulation (EU) No 383/2012; OJ L, 2025/2205, 5.11.2025

drivers in line with the Directive. This should be supported by targeted national **awareness efforts highlighting the dangers of driving under the influence of drugs**, specifically aimed at young adults. Furthermore, the new Driving Disqualification and revised Cross-Border Exchange of Information Directives will enable the sharing of information on drug-related traffic offences between Member States, preventing dangerous behaviours linked to drug-impaired driving from going unaddressed.

### ***8.5. Addressing drug-related harm to the environment***

Drug cultivation and production causes significant environmental harm both in Europe and globally. Organised crime dumps toxic chemical waste originating from the production of synthetic drugs, involving serious risks to the environment and local communities. For example, the production of one kg of MDMA generates approximately 58 kg of toxic waste. Cannabis production drains water and energy but also impacts water and air pollution<sup>56</sup>.

Illicit drug laboratories must be dismantled in a manner that ensures the safety of law enforcement agents and considers environmental impacts. The EU will develop and apply methods for the **safe handling, transport, disposal and destruction of seized illicit drugs**, precursors, chemicals, waste, and equipment that are environmentally friendly. In line with the EU Pact addressing new synthetic drug threats<sup>57</sup>, CEPOL and the EUDA will enhance training for law enforcement on the security and health risks involved in dismantling these facilities. EMPACT will strengthen operational cooperation to boost the capacity for dismantling synthetic drug laboratories.

The Commission is aiding Member States in implementing the **new Environmental Crime Directive**<sup>58</sup>, which addresses offences like pollution, unlawful waste management, habitat destruction, and illegal water abstraction.

The Commission encourages Member States to explicitly link environmental crime with other criminal activities, like drug production and trafficking, in the national strategies they are required to develop by 21 May 2027. This integration aims to enhance the effectiveness of strategies by addressing the interconnected nature of these crimes.

To produce illicit drugs, organised crime often employs environmentally destructive practices such as deforestation or intense water use. Improving the detection of these practices is crucial due to the role they play in exacerbating drought, habitat destruction, and biodiversity loss.

#### **Key priorities**

##### **The Commission will:**

- **develop and disseminate, through the EU Crime Prevention Network, a dedicated EU toolbox to address the recruitment of minors by criminal networks;**

<sup>56</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol (2022), *EU Drug Market: Cannabis — In-depth analysis*.

<sup>57</sup> Council conclusions of June 2025 on the Pact addressing new synthetic drug and new psychoactive substances threats in the European Union, 10265/25.

<sup>58</sup> Directive (EU) 2024/1203 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on the protection of the environment through criminal law and replacing Directives 2008/99/EC and 2009/123/EC, OJ L, 2024/1203, 30.4.2024.

- leverage the strengthened EMPACT framework for operational law enforcement cooperation to tackle illicit drug production facilities as part of the implementation of the action plan against drug trafficking.

The EUDA will:

- develop the European Harm Reduction Curriculum to support capacity-building on harm reduction interventions across the EU;
- work closely with Member States to develop and implement their crime prevention measures in support of local communities and young people.

Member States are encouraged to:

- increase the availability of harm and risk reduction interventions and coverage to reduce drug overdoses, deaths, and blood-borne infections across the EU;
- adopt zero-tolerance policies for driving under the influence of drugs, in line with the Driving Licence Directive, and make full use of available cross-border tools to enforce these rules;
- make full use of the new Environmental Crime Directive to respond to the environmental challenges arising from drug production and trafficking.

## V. BUILDING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Drug-related policies in third countries significantly affect Europe's illicit drug situation, as criminal networks within the EU cooperate with international counterparts to expand trafficking operations. Hence, international partnerships are crucial for an effective EU drug policy. Within the EU, enhancing coordination and partnerships with civil society and private actors is necessary. This promotes mutual learning and facilitates joint operational actions, supporting a comprehensive whole-of-society approach.

### **Strategic priority 9: Strengthen international cooperation**

*Recognising the global nature of the phenomenon, the EU will strengthen its cooperation with key international partners through impactful dialogues, capacity building and enhanced operational cooperation.*

#### ***9.1. The EU's international cooperation objectives***

The ProtectEU internal security strategy calls for an EU that actively defends its security interests by addressing external threats, disrupting trafficking routes and safeguarding strategic corridors. The EU remains committed to being a strong ally to partner countries, collaborating to improve global security and strengthen mutual resilience, particularly against drug trafficking threats.

The EU's external relations in the field of drugs emphasise shared responsibility, multilateralism, and a development-oriented approach, respecting human rights, dignity, and the rule of law. The EU remains committed to these principles, advocating for an evidence-based, integrated, balanced, and multidisciplinary drug policy approach. It supports third countries' efforts, aligning with international drug control conventions and human rights obligations, as outlined in the Council

conclusions on the human rights-based approach in drug policies<sup>59</sup>, the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027<sup>60</sup>, and relevant UN instruments on drug policy. Additionally, the EU maintains a strong stance against the death penalty in all situations, affirming its commitment to human rights.

The EU will collaborate with **enlargement partners** to align strategies against organised crime networks, improve drug information systems, and strengthen operational cooperation. This includes supporting the development of national drug observatories and early warning systems for new psychoactive substances, in line with EU law; and promoting evidence-based, integrated, and balanced drug policies, with support from EUDA. To ensure an accelerated integration of candidate countries into EU's security architecture, the EU should systematically involve and support enlargement partners ensuring their access to tools, guidance, and capacity-building opportunities. Similarly, the Commission will explore cooperation with candidate countries on port security, such as including them as observers in European Ports Alliance meetings.

In cooperation with **Southern Mediterranean partners**, the EU will promote further monitoring and assessment of drugs trends, judicial and law enforcement cooperation, and integrated border management to respond to cross-border drug trafficking more efficiently, in line with the "Security, preparedness and migration management" of the Pact for the Mediterranean. Closer operational cooperation of the EUDA, EUROPOL, CEPOL, Eurojust and MAOC-N with regional partners is essential. Operational cooperation with North Africa, the Middle East, and the Gulf will be strengthened, in particular on drug production and trafficking, with a focus on captagon.

The EU aims to enhance **international alliances against synthetic drug** threats by working with key third countries like the United States, Mexico, China, and India to dismantle illicit drug production, stop the flow of drug precursors, and boost preparedness against synthetic drugs challenges. Cooperation will focus on disrupting drug trafficking routes, bolstering the **resilience of logistic hubs** globally, and countering exploitation of major seaports by organised crime, particularly in Latin America, West Africa, and the Western Balkans.

Restrictive measures are an important instrument in the EU's external toolbox, and they can complement a well-balanced policy mix to effectively disrupt and reduce transnational organised crime. The Commission is currently exploring options for a **horizontal sanctions' regime** targeting individuals and organised criminal groups involved in migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Given that drug trafficking often nurtures transnational organised crime groups and that drug trafficking relies on the same money launderers, cryptocurrency traders and other service providers for the entirety of their operations, consideration may be given to extending the scope of such a regime, subject to discussions with Member States. EU Delegations in all relevant countries and sub-regions will identify focal points among their staff for the fight against organised crime, with the possibility of Member States deploying liaison officers for this purpose.

Targeted operational responses will involve customs, law enforcement, and relevant authorities in key third countries, including initiatives like investigative units and intelligence fusion centres. The EU will also build **stronger partnerships** on justice and security with key third countries and

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<sup>59</sup> Council conclusions of December 2022 on human rights-based approach in drug policies, 15818/22.

<sup>60</sup> 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.

regions, enhancing cooperation on mutual legal assistance, extradition, asset recovery, and confiscation, especially with countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Mediterranean region.

Additionally, the Commission will collaborate with Member States and partner countries to strengthen anti-drug trafficking efforts, advancing the newly launched **European Coalition against Drugs**, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of shared objectives and strategies.

### *9.2. Strengthening dialogues with third countries and regions*

Engaging in dialogues with third countries is key for promoting an integrated and balanced drug policy approach. The EU will continue dedicated dialogues on drugs with partners in the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central Asia, and bilaterally with the USA, China, and Colombia. These dialogues aim to strengthen strategic and operational cooperation, fostering impactful responses. New dialogues should be initiated with other priority countries or regions heavily affected by drug issues. Security dialogues may address drug policy issues, particularly trafficking, and thematic exchanges and expert meetings will facilitate information sharing and activity coordination, such as with India to prevent the diversion and trafficking of drug precursors.

The EU will leverage diplomatic, political, and financial instruments within its foreign policy framework to bolster these efforts. The whole range of EU's instruments, including the NDICI and Common Security and Defence Policy missions, can be employed to enhance law enforcement capacities in third countries and support a whole-of-government approach to drug policy.

### *9.3. Operational cooperation*

As drug trafficking networks worldwide become interconnected, the EU will **boost its operational response** through partnerships with candidate and key third countries and regions. JHA agencies play a key role in this effort. Europol's role in strengthening strategic and operational capacities in key third countries is crucial to disrupt transnational criminal networks. Therefore, Europol is expanding external partnerships to facilitate strategic and operational information exchange, ensuring investigations are coordinated across jurisdictions. Eurojust's role in building strong cases against criminal organisations and facilitating prosecutions is vital for effective legal action against transnational crime.

The EUDA, following its new mandate, is committed to improving international cooperation and monitoring drug situations in third countries, supporting the development of evidence-based, integrated, and balanced drug policies. The Commission, as part of the ProtectEU internal security strategy, will pursue additional agreements between the EU and third countries for cooperation with Europol and Eurojust, particularly extending efforts to more Latin American countries and advocating for the inclusion of more third countries in the EMPACT framework.

The EU will maintain **technical assistance and capacity building** initiatives and cooperation programmes to help third countries address drug issues in a manner consistent with human rights obligations, tackling challenges across public health, development, safety, and security sectors. The EU and its Member States emphasise **development-oriented drug policies and alternative**

**and sustainable development measures**<sup>61</sup>, offering a pathway to reduce drug supply, protect the environment, and boost socio-economic development of impacted regions.

#### ***9.4. Reaffirm the EU's leading role in shaping the international drug policy agenda***

The EU remains committed to a multilateral system grounded in international law and the principles of the UN Charter<sup>62</sup>. **It will maintain a leading role in UN drug policy development processes**, actively participating in the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and other UN bodies focused on health, human rights, and development. This approach extends to engaging in multilateral venues like the Council of Europe.

The EU will continue strengthening strategic cooperation with international organisations, particularly with UNODC, which is the leading body within the UN system for addressing global drug issues, the International Narcotics Control Board, as well as the WHO and the World Customs Organization. The EU will also support coordination across relevant UN bodies to comprehensively and consistently address the drug situation.

#### **Strategic priority 10: Enhance EU coordination and strategic partnerships**

*Acknowledging the cross-cutting nature of drug policy, the EU commits to implementing such policies, including this strategy, through a unified whole-of-society approach. This requires close coordination among EU institutions, bodies, agencies, and Member States, while actively involving civil society and private sector actors. This collaborative effort aims to strengthen collective actions, maximise impact, and ensure an inclusive approach to drug-related challenges.*

##### ***10.1. Strengthen coordination among EU institutions, bodies, agencies, and Member States***

EU institutions, bodies, and relevant agencies must **coordinate their activities** related to illicit drugs, ensuring complementarity within their respective mandates. Member States are encouraged to align their actions with this strategy, allocating targeted resources accordingly. Recognising local and regional differences in the drug situation, Member States should involve **regional and local authorities** in strategy implementation. These authorities play a vital role by tailoring interventions to community needs, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, such as health services, law enforcement, and community organisations to enhance prevention, treatment, and harm reduction efforts. At the EU level, the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee play an important role on drug-related developments.

Coordination across sectors, particularly health, security, and justice, is crucial at both EU and national levels. Integrated grassroots approaches, involving law enforcement, judiciary, social and healthcare services, medicines agencies, and authorities in sectors like civil aviation and maritime, can improve health and security outcomes. This cooperation across diverse sectors is key to developing comprehensive solutions to drug-related challenges.

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<sup>61</sup> Council conclusions of November 2018 on Alternative Development: “Towards a new understanding of Alternative Development and related development-centred drug policy interventions – contributing to the implementation of UNGASS 2016 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals”, 14338/18.

<sup>62</sup> Council Conclusions of June 2025 on EU priorities at the United Nations during the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 2025 – September 2026, Doc. 10491/25

The successful implementation of this Strategy depends on effective governance and coordination. Therefore, as the strategy is reviewed and future directions are outlined, the Council of the EU, with support from the Commission, is invited to develop an **implementation framework**. This framework should clearly identify the stakeholders involved in implementing the various priorities and foster synergies and consistency across drug policies at EU, national, and local levels. Furthermore, it should explore ways to ensure that each Member State maintains a national overview of drug-related issues through a whole-of-government approach. This will improve coordination and maximise policy impact at EU, national and local levels.

The Commission and the Council of the EU should regularly review the strategy implementation, maintaining exchanges with Member States. EU agencies like the EUDA and Europol will assist in monitoring strategy implementation. Effective monitoring of drug measures requires data collection and impact indicators, and the EUDA will scale-up its Policy Evaluation Toolkit for precise tracking of progress and outcomes, facilitating timely strategy adjustments for maximum effectiveness.

### ***10.2. Reinforce meaningful engagement with civil society***

Effective policy responses require the inclusion of those directly affected by drug-related issues, utilising their experiences to inform grounded and practical solutions. Civil society is essential in developing drug policies at national, EU, and international levels. At the EU level, the Civil Society Forum on Drugs will remain an integral part of the strategy's implementation. Additionally, the EUDA will enhance its regular collaboration with civil society as part of its new mandate.

Nationally, civil society's firsthand knowledge of emerging trends and effective responses should be harnessed to shape and implement policies and measures. Ensuring appropriate resource allocation for all drug services and fostering civil society involvement is crucial across all levels to support comprehensive and inclusive policy development.

### ***10.3. Scale up public-private partnerships on drug policy***

Illicit drugs affect all aspects of society, including the workplace, and organised crime often infiltrates the legal economy to sustain drug trafficking. Member States are encouraged to cooperate with the private sector to reduce drug supply and demand and address drug-related harm. The Commission will build on the success of the *European Ports Alliance* by establishing **closer ties with private operators**.

Developing public-private partnerships is crucial for countering drug trafficking, criminal infiltration, and the diversion of precursors, especially with sectors like the postal services. These partnerships should also be strengthened in health and social reintegration, fostering collaboration with private actors who can innovate in health solutions. This comprehensive approach aims to integrate efforts across sectors to effectively tackle drug-related challenges.

## **Key priorities**

**The Commission, in cooperation with the Council of the EU and Member States, will:**

- **strengthen international dialogues on drugs with third countries and regions, including efforts to reinforce and expand international alliances against synthetic drugs;**
- **continue to lead EU participation in UN drug policy processes and promote a human rights and balanced approach to drug policy.**

**The Commission, with the support of EU agencies, will:**

- **strengthen operational cooperation to address drug trafficking with candidate countries and key third countries and regions;**
- **join efforts with Member States to drive forward the European Coalition against Drugs.**

**The Commission and Member States should:**

- **step up engagement with the Civil Society Forum on Drugs;**
- **promote public-private partnerships on drug policy.**

## **Conclusion**

In today's unpredictable drug landscape, the EU must proactively anticipate threats, prevent harm and act decisively to safeguard health and security.

Organised crime and drug trafficking undermine global security, fuelling violence, corruption, and instability within communities, while potent new synthetic drugs present major health challenges. A robust, integrated response is essential, emphasising readiness and prevention.

Strengthening public health structures focused on prevention, treatment, social reintegration, and harm reduction within a continuum of care is essential. Equally important is enhancing law enforcement while fostering partnerships that prioritise human well-being. Delivering sustainable solutions is crucial to protect our social fabric and help set global standards for our partners.

The Commission's strategy provides a comprehensive framework to address illicit drug challenges cohesively, guiding stakeholders to protect citizens and communities from organised drug crime and its harm. This strategy's integrated and whole-of-society approach connects health and security policies, bolstering health benefits and enhancing security measures. The Commission looks forward to discussing these critical issues with the European Parliament and the Council.

Aligning security and health efforts is vital for a comprehensive response, ensuring a safer, healthier future for all.