

# 2022

## ANNUAL REPORT

REVIEW OF DRUG SEIZURES  
AT EUROPEAN AIRPORTS  
AND MAIL CENTRES

// FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY



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## INTRODUCTION

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The World Customs Organization (WCO) Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Western Europe (RILO WE) prepares the “Annual report - Review of seizures carried out at airports and in mail centres” for the Council of Europe’s Pompidou Group’s Co-operation Group of Drug Control Services at European Airports (referred to hereafter as the Airports Group).

The Airports Group was founded in 1986. Its objectives are to develop a harmonised multidisciplinary strategy for drug detection at international airports and in general aviation, and to enhance subject-related inter-airports co-operation.

The main aims are:

- Develop an annual review of drug seizures in European Airports in cooperation with the Regional Intelligence Liaison Office of Western Europe (RILO/WE);
- Build a network of experts within drug control services in commercial aviation;
- Enhance the use of special law enforcement techniques and tools, such as the restricted Resource Bank on Controlled Deliveries;
- Follow up on new developments and trends in legislative initiatives at national and international level;
- Analyse trafficking trends, routes, risks, seizures, modus operandi, etc.;
- Identify practical arrangements for cooperation among control and security services at international airports, including the private sector

*More information <https://www.coe.int/en/web/pompidou/activities/airports>*

The analysis contained in this report is based on the collection of data from the WCO Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) – a database of worldwide Customs seizures and offences. Submitting data to the CEN is a voluntary process. For this reason this report may not fully reflect drug seizures at European airports and mail centres.

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## WCO CEN DATABASE

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The CEN is a web-based database containing non-nominal worldwide national customs seizure information for the analysis of illicit trafficking, the identification of trends and patterns, and the creation of intelligence products.

Read-only access is available for all customs officers worldwide on request and approval. Its functionalities enables users to retrieve data, which is crucial to defining strategies, preparing risk indicators, and identifying trends.

National cases are entered manually or by batch upload into the CEN database.

### MAIN FEATURES

- A web-based, unique, global database on customs seizures
- Used to define strategies, to prepare risk indicators and to identify trends
- Efficient platform for national threat assessments
- Includes a Concealment Picture Database (e.g. X-ray images)
- Over 1,000,000 cases are available in the CEN database
- The application is available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic, Georgian, Ukrainian and Serbian language

*Please contact [rilowe@zka.bund.de](mailto:rilowe@zka.bund.de) if you are interested in a more detailed analysis of specific commodities/countries/trends/etc. or if you want personal access to the CEN database.*

## MEMBERS COUNCIL OF EUROPE status 01/05/2023

ALBANIA – ANDORRA – ARMENIA – AUSTRIA – AZERBAIJAN – BELGIUM – BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA – BULGARIA – CROATIA – CYPRUS – CZECH REPUBLIC – DENMARK – ESTONIA – FINLAND – FRANCE – GEORGIA – GERMANY – GREECE – HUNGARY – ICELAND – IRELAND – ITALY – LATVIA – LIECHTENSTEIN – LITHUANIA – LUXEMBOURG – MALTA – MONACO – MONTENEGRO – NETHERLANDS – NORTH MACEDONIA – NORWAY – POLAND – PORTUGAL – REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA – ROMANIA – SAN MARINO – SERBIA – SLOVAK REPUBLIC – SLOVENIA – SPAIN – SWEDEN – SWITZERLAND – TURKEY – UKRAINE – UNITED KINGDOM

*Observer States:* CANADA – HOLY SEE – ISRAEL (Observer to the Parliamentary Assembly) – JAPAN – MEXICO – UNITED STATES

\*<https://www.coe.int/en/web/about-us/our-member-states>

## METHODOLOGY

This 2022 edition is based on data, which meet the following criteria:

- Seizures made between 2018-2022 were carried out during passenger controls at airports, or mail centres (including express courier shipments) in member states of the Council of Europe and reported as such to the CEN database
- Seizures had been entered into CEN by 1st April 2023
- For the analysis the following drugs classified as follows in CEN were taken into account
  - > Cannabis (resin and marihuana)
  - > Cocaine
  - > Heroin
  - > Khat (fresh and dried)
  - > Psychotropic substances entered to CEN as amphetamine, benzodiazepines, Gamma Butyrolactone (GBL), Gamma Hydroxybutyrate (GHB), LSD, MDMA (ecstasy) and methamphetamine
  - > New Psychoactive Substances entered to CEN as ketamine & phencyclidine-type substances, phenethylamines, plant-based substances, synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones, tryptamines or other substances
- Substances entered in tablets or pieces were converted to kilograms (kg) with a conversion rate of one gram per four tablets to allow a unified expression of all seizures reported in kilograms (kg). All quantities were rounded to two decimal places
- For analytical purposes only seizures were taken into account that are equal to or exceeding  $\geq 100$  gram

## 2022 SUMMARY

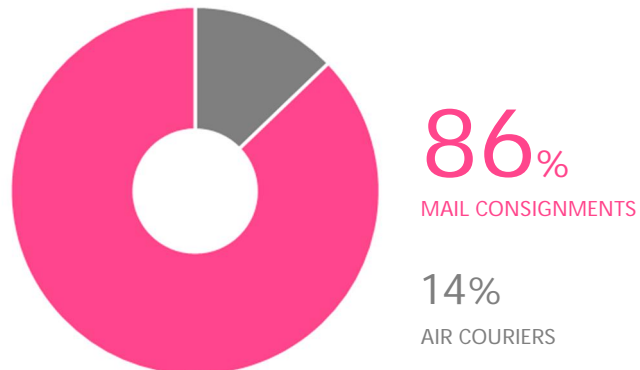
In 2022, a total of more than 59.3 tonnes of illegal drugs reported by members of the Airports Group were taken into account for the analysis – both in mail (including express courier) consignments and carried by drug couriers via airports.

Compared to 2021, there is a slight decrease of 1.5% in the number of reported drug seizures, with a total number of 7,222 reported seizures.

In 86% of all reported cases, the illegal substances were seized in mail consignments. In 2018, the annual quantity seized was distributed almost equally between drug couriers and in mail consignments. As of 2019, there has been a considerable increase in the annual volume of drugs seized in mail consignments along with a dramatic decrease in the amount seized from drug couriers.

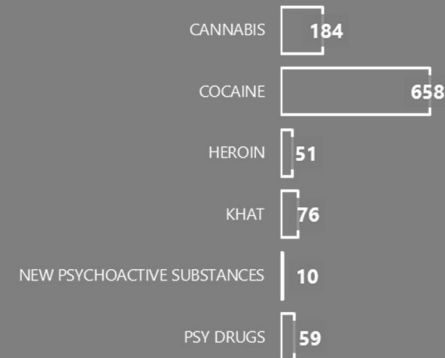
Cannabis seizures accounted the largest share at 30% of all reported cases, closely followed by khat seizures.

65% of all illegal substances were seized during import controls to prevent entry into the European market or to redirect it worldwide. However, the number of controls carried out on departure and transit movements has doubled in 2022 compared to 2019.

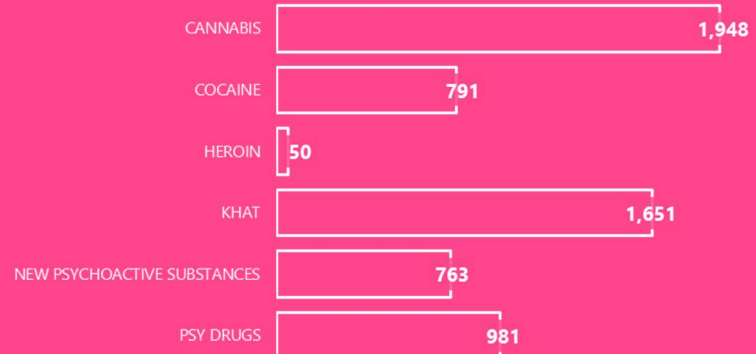


## 2022 NUMBER OF SEIZURES BY DRUGS TYPE

### DRUG COURIERS



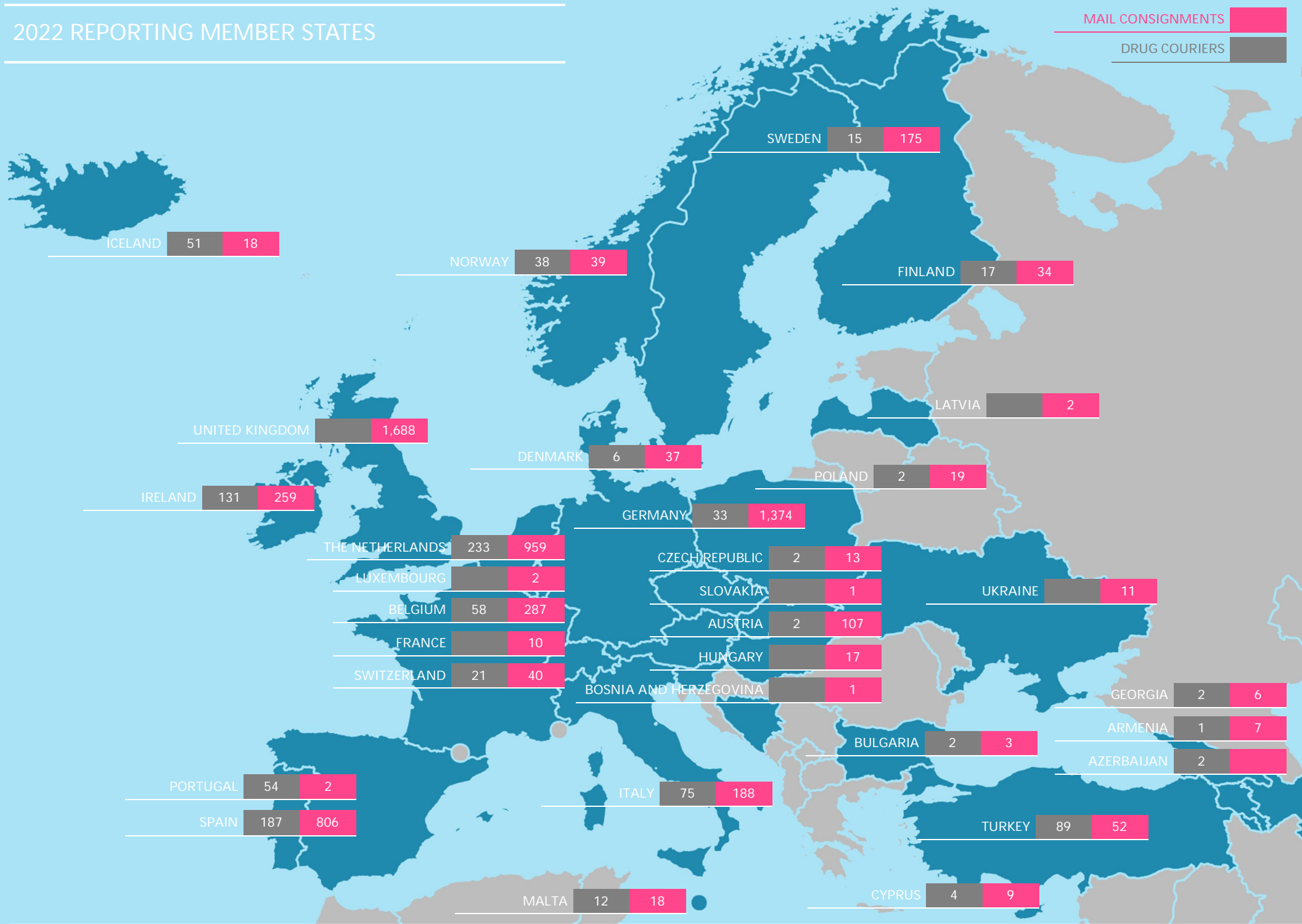
### MAIL CONSIGNMENTS



## 2022 REPORTING MEMBER STATES


MAIL CONSIGNMENTS

DRUG COURIERS



←  **Facturació**  
Check-in  
**Facturación 34<sup>to</sup>**  
**a 21**

↘   **Arribades**  
Arrivals  
**Llegadas**

↓  **Facturació**  
Check-in  
**Facturación 20<sup>to</sup>**  
**a 1**

↓ **Eixida**  
Exit  
**Salida**  

## 2022 DRUG COURIERS

Based on 2022 data, there were 1,038 cases of drug couriers reported at airports. In total, almost 7.6 tonnes of illegal drugs of all kinds were stopped from entering the European market or being diverted worldwide via airports of the Airport Groups member countries.

The number of reported drug couriers reaches again the level of the pre-pandemic year 2019, with a 22% increase from 2021 to 2022.

Customs or police at airports carried out 85% of checks on arrival, 11% during transit and only 1% on departure.

In 58% of the reported attempts, the drugs were hidden in the courier's luggage, whether in false bottoms or walls, between carried effects, or in special concealments discovered by X-ray scanning. This was followed by 19% of the seizures in which the drugs were swallowed or stuffed into the body, and in 14% of the cases the drugs were packed on the body or hidden in clothing/shoes. For the rest (9%) unknown concealment was reported. Since 2018, the number of couriers who swallowed or stuffed the drugs has slowly declined, by 40% from 2018 to 2022.

The majority of drug couriers arrested at European airports reportedly departed from South America (34%; 630 of 922 arrests), followed by intra-European connections (25%) and the Caribbean (16%).

22% of the drug couriers were arrested at Amsterdam Schiphol airport (233/1,038), followed by Madrid (137), Dublin (112) and Istanbul (77) airport.

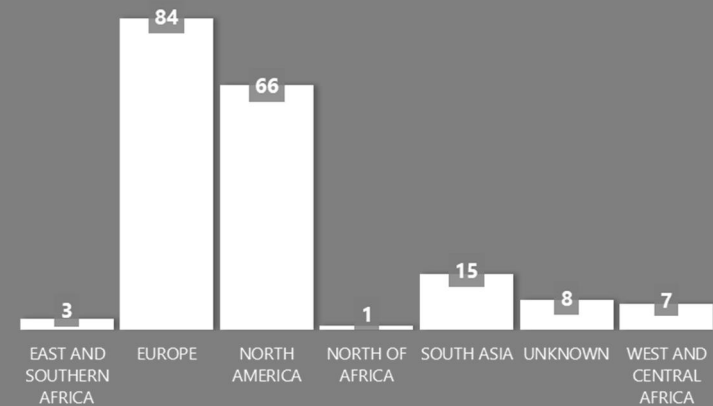
## 2022 CANNABIS

As in previous years, more herbal cannabis (marijuana) than cannabis resin (hashish) is seized during passenger checks at airports. A total of 1,339 kilograms of marijuana and 55 kilograms of hashish were reported.

Spain remains the main secondary supplier of (mainly Moroccan) marijuana seized at European airports. 45 of 173 couriers started from Spanish airports. The more than twofold increase in marijuana seizures in 2022 was due to more couriers bringing marijuana from Canada and United States.

The amount of seized hashish decreased by more than 50% compared to 2021. Based on the 2018-2021 data, hashish originated primarily from Morocco. In 2022, however, no arrests of drug couriers departing from Morocco were reported, but rather new routes from United States, Canada or the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### 2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



15.5 kg Cannabis herbal in the suitcase of a female Argentinian traveller arriving from >> BARCELONA SPAIN

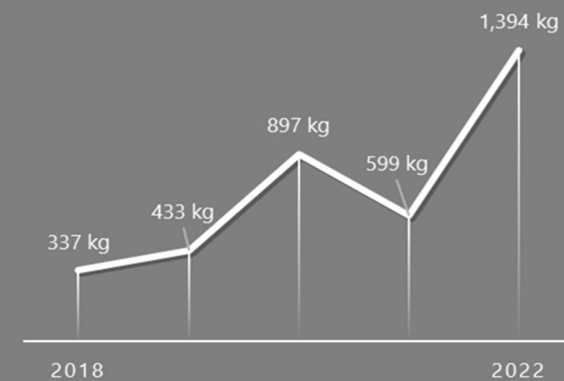
GUDJA - MALTA



15.6 kg Cannabis herbal in the suitcase of a male Argentinian traveller arriving from >> BARCELONA SPAIN

FRANKFURT - GERMANY

### 2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED





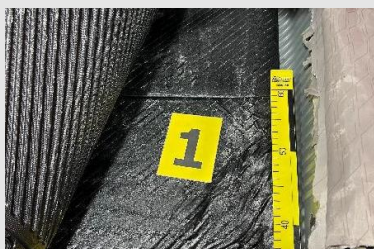
## 2022 COCAINE

As in previous years, cocaine seizures at airport controls continues to account for by far the largest share at 63%. Couriers attempted to smuggle nearly 2.3 tonnes of cocaine from abroad. There has even been a 35% increase in arrests of cocaine couriers compared to 2021, although still not at the same level as in pre-pandemic 2019.

In 2022, most cocaine couriers arrested at airports started their flights in Brazil (25%, 167 of 628 arrests). Most of the Brazilian routing couriers were stopped at Lisbon (41/167), Madrid (30), Istanbul (18) and Frankfurt (15) airports.

The Netherlands remains the main ports of entry for cocaine couriers in Europe (205/628 arrests). It is worth noting that in previous years couriers from the Netherlands Antilles were reportedly only arrested at Amsterdam airport, but in 2022 35 couriers were arrested at Brussels airport.

In the past most of the intra-Europe cocaine couriers departed from the Netherlands or Spain, in 2022 from France (22 of 101 arrests).



3 kg cocaine inside the frame of a suitcase of a female Peruvian traveller arriving from >> LIMA PERU via >> AMSTERDAM THE NETHERLANDS

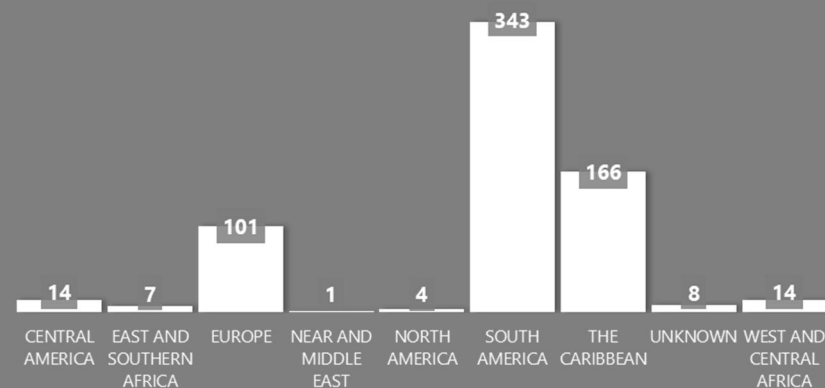
PRAGUE - CZECH REPUBLIC



3.7 kg cocaine hidden at the back of 3 packages of dining sets in the baggage of a traveller arriving from >> ATHENS GREECE

LARNACA - CYPRUS

### 2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



### 2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED



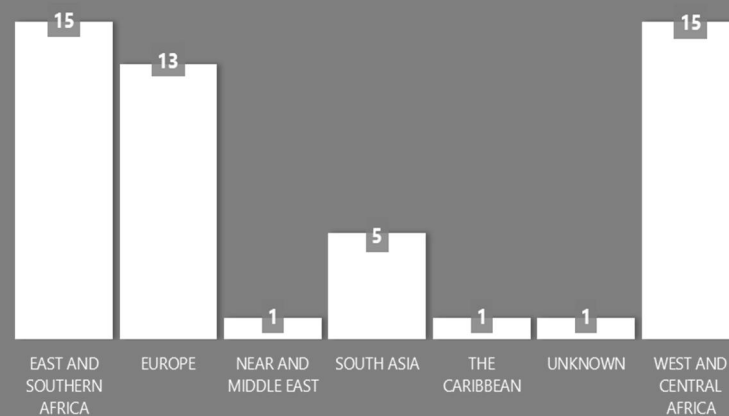
## 2022 HEROIN

In 2022, over 50% less heroin was brought into Europe by drug couriers at airport (minus 35% in terms of total amount).

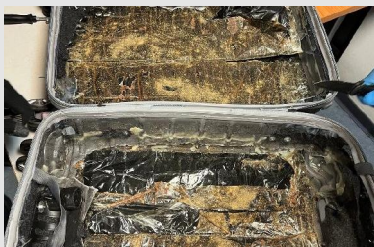
In terms of region of departure, the African continent accounted for 73% of the total heroin seized. Nigeria accounted for 22% of the seizures (11/51) and 25% of the reported quantities seized (55/221 kilograms), followed by South Africa (8 seizures, 70 kilograms). The average quantity per seizure of heroin coming from Africa was 5.5 kilograms compared to an average quantity of 1.7 kilograms for intra-EU trafficked heroin, indicating criminal activity in retail- to medium-seized-markets.

In most cases the heroin was carried in the baggage of the drug couriers; only in 20% of the reported cases was the heroin swallowed or stuffed into the body.

2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED



3.2 kg heroin in double sides of a suitcase carried by a female Bulgarian traveller arriving from >> KIGALI RWANDA via >> DOHA QATAR

SOFIA - BULGARIA



4.2 kg heroin inside the false bottom of a suitcase carried by a female Portuguese traveller arriving from >> PARIS FRANCE

GUDJA - MALTA

## 2022 KHAT

In terms of the total quantity khat is again dominant with a 40% increase ; 3.3 tonnes of seized khat was reported in the passengers' luggage.

For 2022, Switzerland reported the highest total amount of seized khat (531 kilograms, 12 cases), followed by Germany (492 kilograms) and Norway (398 kilograms). The largest seizure in the luggage of a Nigerian travel arriving from Nigeria via Istanbul (Turkey) was made in Hamburg (Germany); German Customs seized 264 kilograms of khat.

In terms of cases and quantities, the East and Southern African region continues to dominate (1.3 tonnes , 31 cases). However, an overwhelming quantity of nearly 1 ton of khat was reported from Israeli origin alone in 2022. Compared to 201, there was even a 72% increase. These facts make Israel the most important source country for khat entering the European market. In comparison, only 471 kilograms of khat was smuggled from Kenya (the main source country in Africa) last year. Senegal was reported as departure country for khat from Africa for the first time based on the 2018-2022 dataset (193 kilograms, 3 cases).



45.2 kg fresh khat in two suitcases of a Somali traveller arriving from >> ADDIS ABABA ETHIOPIA

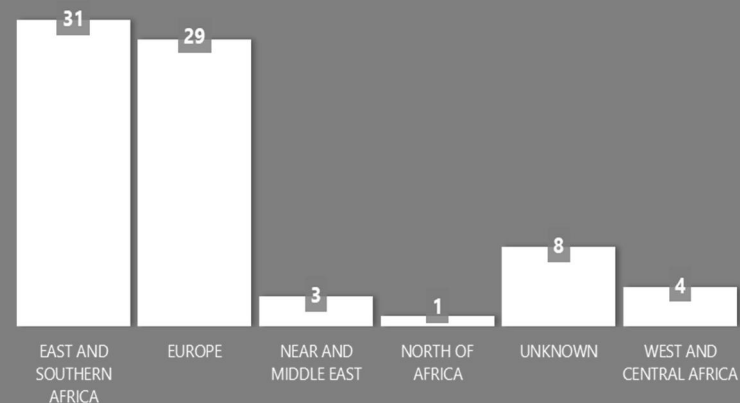
FRANKFURT - GERMANY



67 kg fresh khat in the suitcases of an Israeli traveller arriving from >> ISRAEL

LARNACA - CYPRUS

### 2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



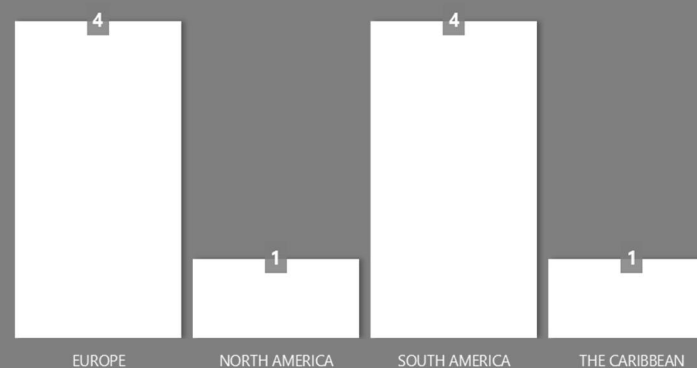
### 2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED



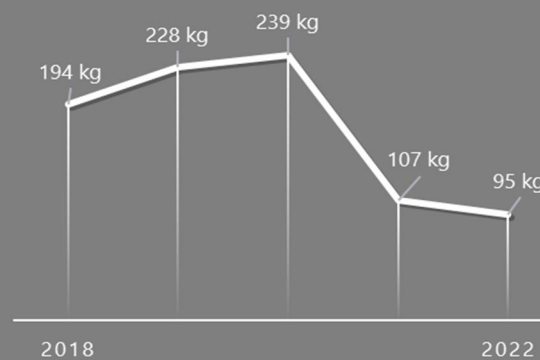
## 2022 NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

In recent years, there have been few reported cases of passengers carrying New Psychoactive Substances on commercial flights. The numbers of reported seizures and quantities steadily decreasing based on the 2018-2022 dataset. During these years Control units at European airports seized mainly Ayahuasca, a herbal hallucinogenic tea containing dimethyltryptamine (DMT), from passengers arriving from South America (Brazil, Colombia or Peru) or *Mitragyna speciosa* (commonly known as kratom) leaves or tea from passengers arriving from the Netherlands.

2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED



## 2022 PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES

As in previous years, psychotropic substances continue to be circulated mainly by mail consignments. The number of reported arrests (up 11%) and the amount (up 39%) increased slightly in 2022.

MDMA (Ecstasy) continues to dominate the area in 2022, accounting for more than 33% of all psychotropic substances detected, followed by methamphetamine (29%) and GBL (20%).

Europe is the main departure region of drug couriers transporting MDMA (Ecstasy) (main country Spain) and GBL (main country The Netherlands) on intra-European flights, while most of the methamphetamine couriers come from West and Central African region (main country Nigeria).



A total of 27,943 tabs of Benzodiazepines (Clonazepam, Alprazolam, Diazepam) in the suitcase of a traveller arriving from >> PRISTINA KOSOVO

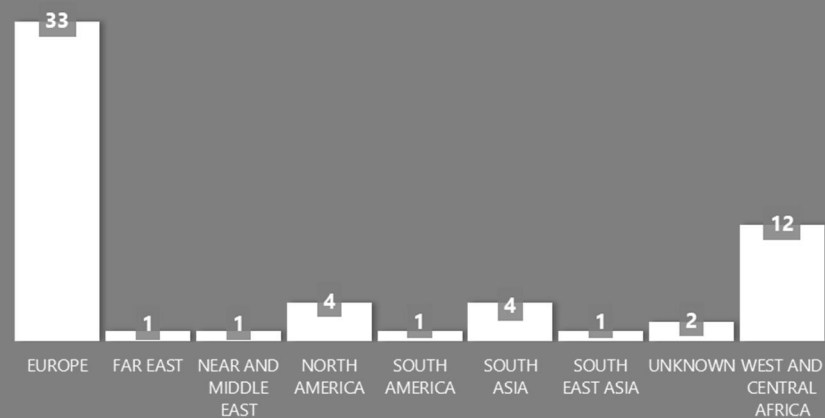
OSLO - NORWAY



10.6 kg MDMA (ecstasy) pills in the suitcase of a Paraguayan traveller departing for >> PARAGUAY via >> ZÜRICH SWITZERLAND

BRUSSELS - BELGIUM

### 2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



### 2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED





## 2022 MAIL CONSIGNMENTS

In 2022, a total of 6,184 cases of drugs in mail consignments were reported at mail Centres in the member countries. A total of 51.7 tonnes of illegal drugs of all kinds were stopped in order to enter the European market, leave it or be diverted worldwide.

The volume of drugs seized in mail is steadily increasing; up 23% compared to 2021. Based on the 2018-2022 dataset, the volume has grown by 42 tonnes since 2018.

Customs or police in mail centres carried out 61% of import controls, 21% in transit shipments and 18% on export controls. Last year, authorities at the following mail centres reported more export/transit controls than import controls on mail items (letters and parcels): Brussel (Belgium), Barcelona (Spain) and in Germany: Frankfurt, Leipzig and Cologne.

Most of the seizures (46%, 2,819 of 6,184 seizures) originated from the intra-European shipments. While by volume most of the illegal drugs came from the East and Southern African region (56%, 29 tonnes of 51.7 tonnes) ; caused by large khat seizures from this region.

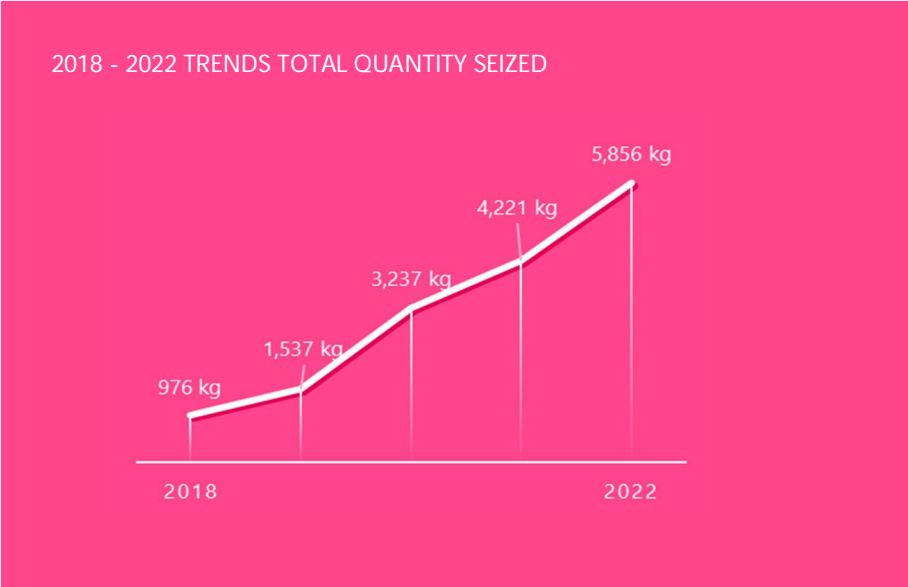
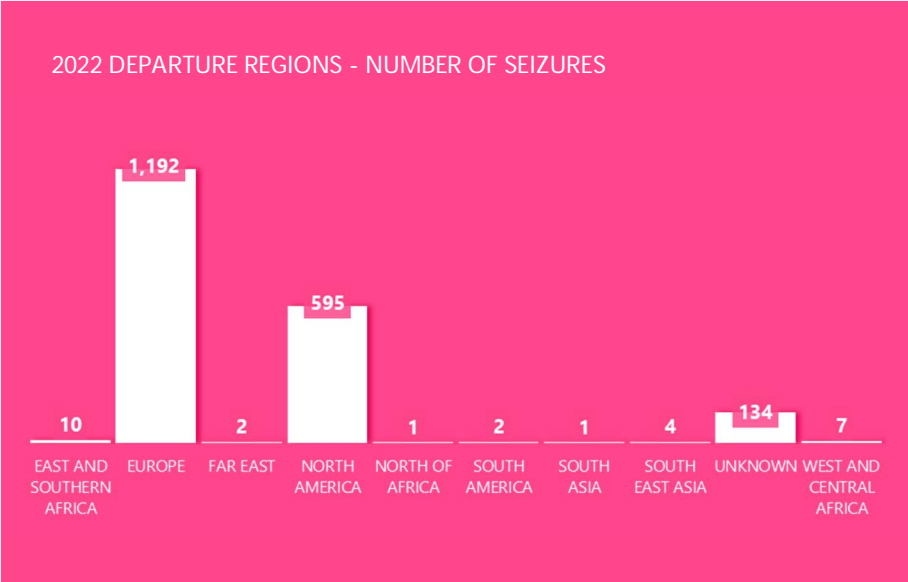
16% of the mail consignments were checked at Amsterdam Schiphol airport/mail centre (959/6,184), followed by London (750), Frankfurt (432) and Barcelona (404) airports/ mail centres.

# 2022 CANNABIS

Seizures of cannabis in mail consignments accounted for the largest proportion at 32% in 2022. As in previous years, more herbal cannabis (marijuana) than cannabis resin (hashish) is sent to/within Europe. A total of 4.6 tonnes of marijuana and 1.2 tonnes of hashish were reported.

Almost 60% of all cannabis was circulated within Europe (on average 3.4 kilograms marijuana and 1.8 kilograms hashish per shipment). Spain remains the main secondary supplier of (mainly Moroccan) cannabis (herbal: 2.1 tonnes, 637 cases; resin: 428 kilograms, 266 cases) seized in parcels, with Germany, Italy, Ireland and France being the main destination countries.

The number of cases and total amount of marijuana from North America region (main dispatch country United States: 1 ton, 515 cases) has more than quadrupled since 2021. Only 7% of the US origin mail items contained more than 5 kilograms of marijuana, the majority contained 1 to 5 kilograms of marijuana with an average of 2 kilograms.



## 2022 COCAINE

Cocaine is one of the two drugs - along with heroin - that are less likely to be smuggled in mail items than carried by drug couriers at airports. In 2022, 1 ton less cocaine was seized in mail consignments than in the passenger channels at airports. In the majority of the reported cases, less than 1 kilogram is mailed (0.3 kilograms on average per shipment), while drug couriers typically carry more than 1 kilograms of cocaine.

There has been a sudden decline of cases and in total volume of cocaine mailed from South America, particularly from Brazil (minus 69% in total amount) and Argentina (minus 54%). Larger consignments of cocaine are sent though mail from Colombia (on average 8.3 kilograms).

Cocaine from the Europe region is sent to Australasia and the Pacific Islands Region (87 kilograms, 91 cases) in 73% of the cases, all in small quantities averaging 0.9 kilograms per shipment. Intra-European cocaine shipments play a minor role and are even declining compared to 2021.



0.3 kg cocaine inside cardboard cylinder  
DHL mail from >> ARGENTINA

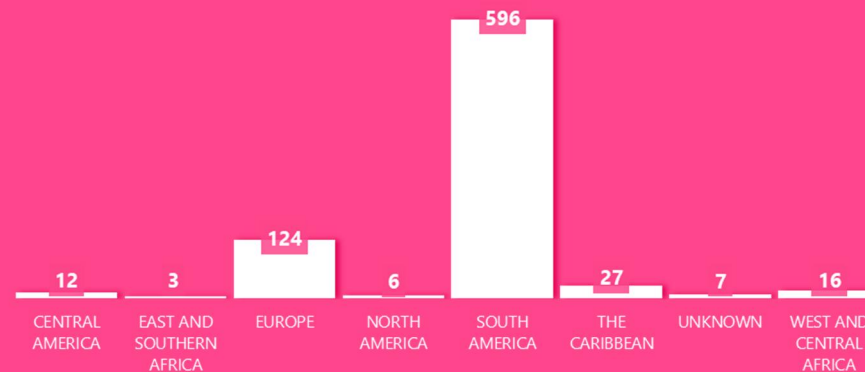
KEFLAVIK - ICELAND



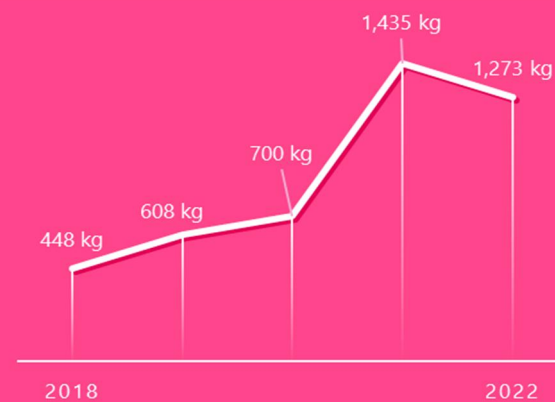
0.7 kg cocaine inside walls of boxes  
UPS mail from >> PORTUGAL

ROOD-SYRE - LUXEMBOURG

### 2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



### 2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED

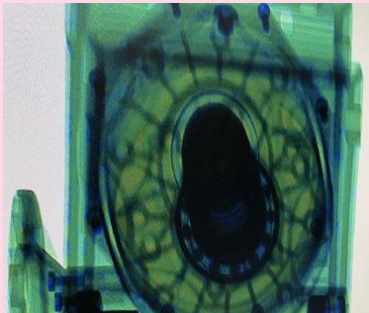




## 2022 HEROIN

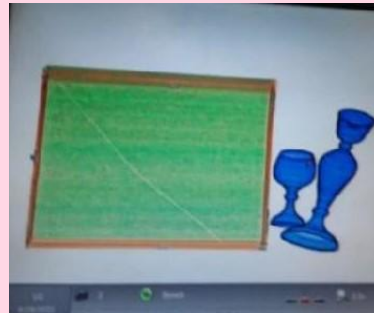
Heroin like cocaine is one of the two drugs that are less likely to be smuggled in mail items than carried by drug couriers at airports. In 2022, 156 kilograms less heroin was seized in mail consignments than in the passenger channels at airports, although the number of cases is almost identical. This can be explained by the fact that drug couriers usually carry more than 1 kilogram of heroin, while mail shipments contain less than this amount.

The East and Southern Africa region remains the most important source region for heroin in mail consignments: in first place South Africa (16 kilograms, 15 cases), followed by Tanzania (5.4 kilograms, 7 cases) and Kenya (4.8 kilograms, 7 cases). It is worth noting that only slightly more than half of these consignments were destined for Europe. 31% were detected during transit controls of German or Dutch Customs en route to Canada (7.7 kilograms, 9 cases) and United States (0.3 kilograms, 2 cases).



3 kg heroin inside gear for elevator mail from >> UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

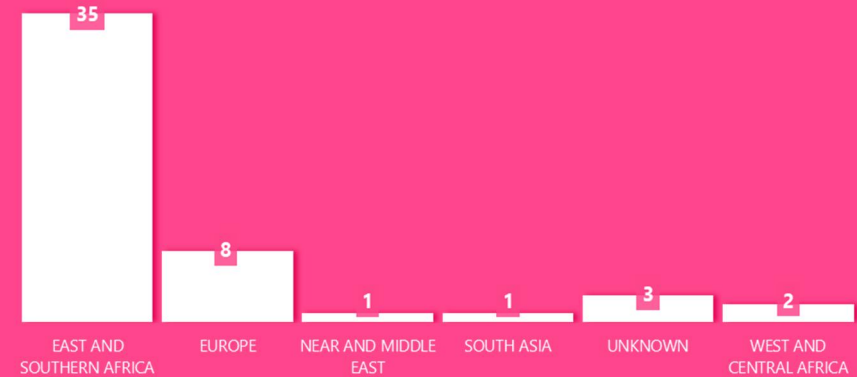
WILER - SWITZERLAND



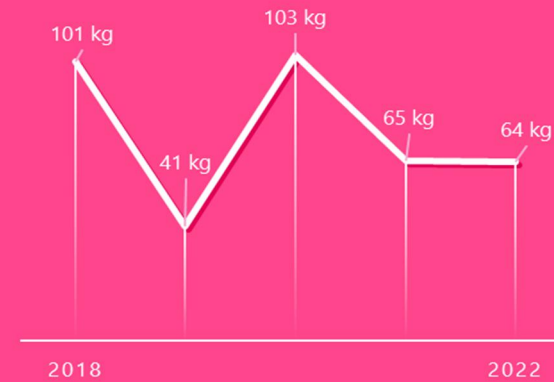
3.9 kg heroin pressed inside packages mail from >> ARMENIA

VIENNA - AUSTRIA

### 2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



### 2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED



## 2022 KHAT

In terms of the total quantity, khat again dominated in mail consignments with an 24% increase over the previous year, with 38.8 tonnes of seized khat reported. Khat seizures in the passenger channels at airports, at only 3.3 tonnes (76 cases) make up only a small percentage of the total volume.

Like for khat smuggled in passengers luggage, the East and Southern African region continues to dominate (2.9 tonnes , 1,212 cases) in terms of cases and quantities with up 68% compared to 2021. For khat sent by mail, Kenya remains the world's top source country, supplying 58% of khat destined for the European market, followed by Burundi (13%) and Israel (13%). More than 85% of all seizures from Kenya contain more than 10 kilograms of khat (with an average of 23 kilograms per shipment), while shipments from Burundi and Israel are usually less than 10 kilograms.



180 kg khat (Ethiopian origin)  
mail from >> ISRAEL  
to >> UNITED STATES

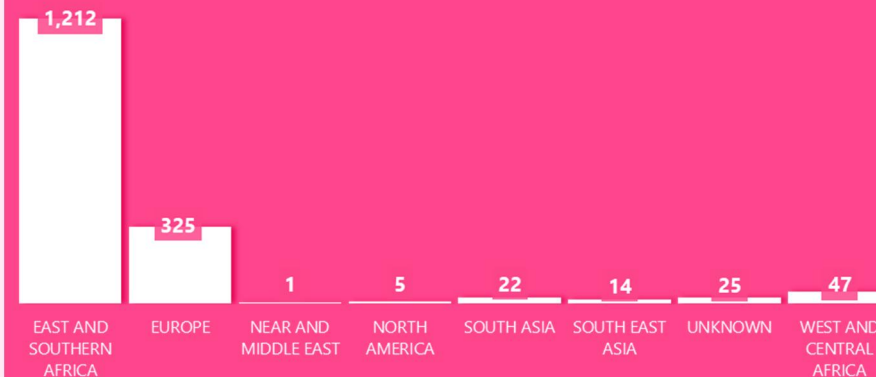
ISTANBUL - TURKEY



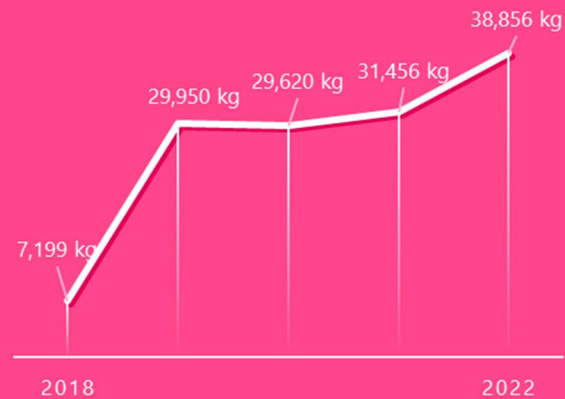
40 kg dried khat (declared as tea)  
mail from >> NAIROBI KENYA

SOFIA - BULGARIA

### 2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



### 2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED



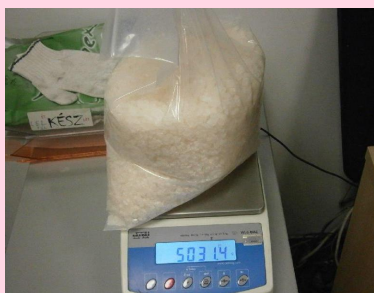
## 2022 NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

The highest increase in the total amount seized compared to the previous year is for new psychoactive substances (up 62%; 2.7 tonnes, 763 cases), in particular for reported seizures of tryptamines and plant-based substance.

In 2022, the most of the new psychoactive substances seized were Ketamine & Phencyclidine-type substances (47%, 1.3 tonnes of 2.7 tonnes). 95% of the Ketamine & Phencyclidine-type substances were of European origin (most important source country Germany: 563 kilograms, 58 cases) and were seized during export or intra-European transit controls in mail consignments mainly to North American region or other European countries.

For *Mitragyna speciosa* (commonly known as kratom) from outside of Europe, India (174 kilograms, 30 cases) is the new main country of origin. As in previous years, tryptamines were sent from South America in 90% of the cases .

In general, half of the new psychoactive substances seized were of European origin, of which 47% were circulated within Europe.



5 kg 3-Chloromethcathinone (also known as 3-CMC and clophedrone) mail from >> THE NETHERLANDS

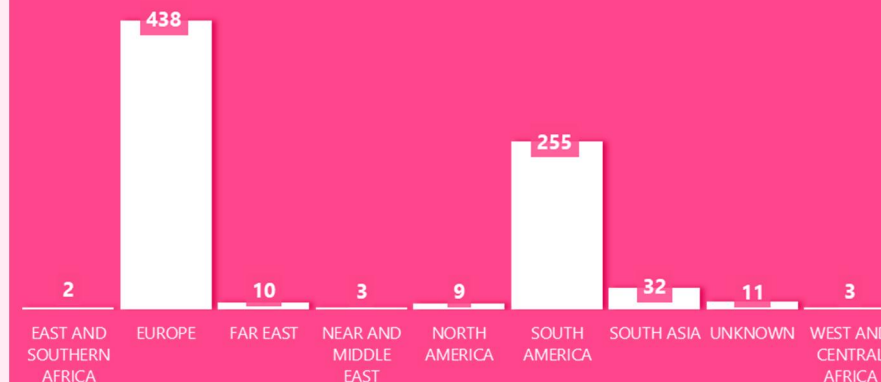
BUDAPEST - HUNGARY



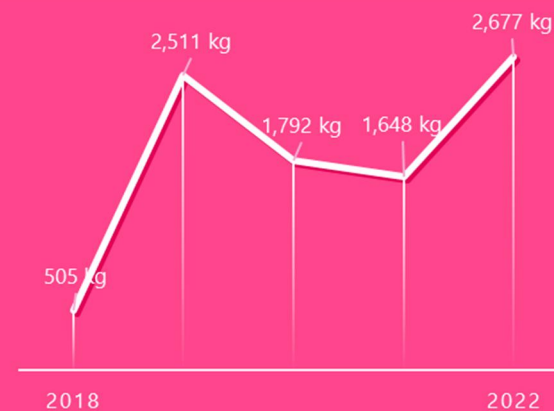
6.8 kg Ketamine inside box walls UPS mail to >> UNITED STATES

GLOSTRUP - DENMARK

### 2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



### 2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED



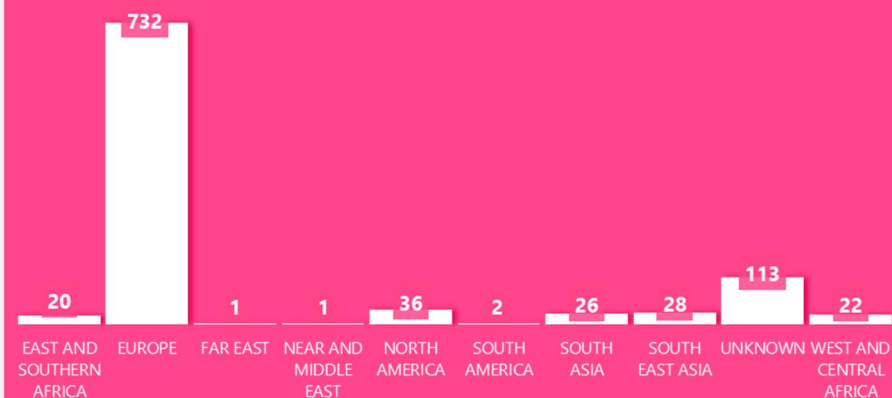
## 2022 PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES

Since 2018 the number of cases and total amount of psychotropic substances in mail consignment has steadily increased. However, in 2022, a decrease in cases (minus 36%) and total amount (minus 5%) can be observed. This is mainly due to a 90% drop in reported seizures of GBL of Dutch origin.

Up to 57% of psychotropic substances of European origin seized were circulated between European countries (most important: benzodiazepines from United Kingdom (79 kilograms, 22 cases, average of 3.9 kilograms per shipment); amphetamines from Germany (50 kilograms, 144 cases, average of 0.3 kilograms per shipment)) followed by shipments to Australasia and the Pacific Islands region (30%; most important: MDMA (ecstasy) from the Netherlands (40 kilograms, 29 cases)).

More than half of the psychotropic substances were seized at European mail centres during export/transit checks of the mail items.

### 2022 DEPARTURE REGIONS - NUMBER OF SEIZURES



24 kg methamphetamine in shoe cleaning machine  
FEDEX mail from >> MEXICO

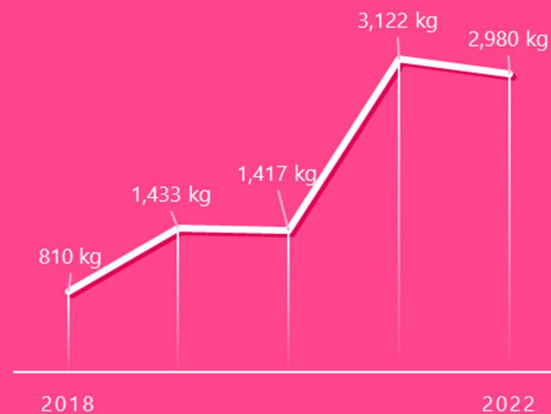
VILLAVICIOSA DE ODON - SPAIN



8.3 kg amphetamine in pedal bin  
DPD mail from >> THE NETHERLANDS

MORA - SWEDEN

### 2018 - 2022 TRENDS TOTAL QUANTITY SEIZED





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By Halina Güldiren, Analyst at RILO WE

© Pompidou Group, 2023  
Strasbourg, France  
Tel. +33 3 88 41 20 00  
DGI-PompidouGroup@coe.int  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/pompidou/activities/airports>  
[twitter.com/Pompidou\\_Group](https://twitter.com/Pompidou_Group)

© Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Western Europe (RILO WE), 2023  
Bergisch Gladbacher Strasse 837, 51069 Cologne, Germany  
Tel. +49 228 303 81039  
[rilowe@zka.bund.de](mailto:rilowe@zka.bund.de)  
[twitter.com/RILO\\_WE](https://twitter.com/RILO_WE)

