



## EMCDDA PAPERS

# Drug squads: units specialised in drug law enforcement in Europe

Situation in the EU Member States, Norway and Turkey in 2015

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**Abstract:** In 2014, the EMCDDA took the decision to carry out a limited follow-up study of the EMCDDA Paper *Drug squads: units specialised in drug law enforcement in Europe* (EMCDDA, 2013), with the aim of monitoring possible changes and trends in drug supply reduction resulting from law enforcement activities. An abbreviated version of the data collection questionnaire employed in the original study was used for reporting by reference persons from the 28 EU Member States, Norway and Turkey. The reference persons were also given the opportunity to provide additional information and comments. The European drug law enforcement landscape in 2015 is broadly similar to the situation in 2012. The total number of drug squads in Europe has remained stable (1 187 squads in 2012 versus 1 133 in 2015), as has the number

of staff allocated to drug squads. Although the number of law enforcement officers decreased by 10 % between 2012 and 2015 (from 17 720 to 15 870), the total number of staff employed in European drug squads increased slightly (from 19 490 to 20 515 staff members).

**Keywords** drug supply reduction  
key indicator drug law enforcement  
police customs drug markets

## Background and introduction

The EMCDDA has been collecting datasets pertaining to drug supply and supply reduction since its inception in 1995. Initially, and for many years, these data were viewed merely as providing context for the key epidemiological indicators on drug consumption and its consequences. In recent years, however, a combination of initiatives in the drugs and security fields at European level has highlighted the importance of drug supply issues and the need for them to become a distinct area for monitoring. The primary importance of drug law enforcement as a means to reduce drug supply prompted the EMCDDA to launch a project that comprised a study of units specialising in drug law enforcement in Europe. This study resulted in the EMCDDA Paper *Drug squads: units specialised in drug law enforcement in Europe* (EMCDDA, 2013). In 2014, the EMCDDA took the decision to carry out a limited follow-up study with the aim of monitoring possible changes and trends in drug supply reduction resulting from law enforcement activities. The focus of this limited update is monitoring and analysing changes in the number of specialised drug squads and their staffing levels between 2012 and 2015.

Specialised drug squads have been an inherent part of national law enforcement activities since the adoption of the UN drug conventions of 1961, 1971 and 1988, and their implementation through national legislation. However, although general law enforcement organisations have adjusted their strategies and methods to adapt to changing criminal activities, including in relation to drugs, at the same time skilled personnel within specialised units including drug squads have been redeployed to other criminal priorities.

Recent years have seen such priorities develop as a result of key documents such as the European Agenda on Security and initiatives such as the introduction of the EU Policy Cycle, which commences with the EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) coordinated by Europol (Europol 2017). Many countries, of course, have their own national threat assessment mechanisms in place to determine how law enforcement resources should be allocated. The implementation of this planned intelligence-led approach at EU level leaves room for national drug law enforcement bodies to target other national threats depending on the priorities at any given time.

## Methodology

As a first step in producing this limited update, in July 2015 a request for the appointment of national reference persons to provide updated information on the drug squad situation in their respective countries was sent to the 28 EU Member States, Norway and Turkey. All the countries returned the names and contact details of their reference persons <sup>(1)</sup>.

A shortened questionnaire was then sent to the nationally appointed reference persons, consisting of a selection of key questions that were used to collect information for the original report. The reference persons were given the opportunity to provide additional information and comments.

Because of the absence of a generally accepted definition of a 'drug squad', the original study of 2012 provided a definition of 'drug law enforcement unit', to guide respondents, with the aim of guaranteeing consistency in the data provided by the different countries. For this limited update, the same definition was applied:

*A formally established official, state or governmental law enforcement agency or subdivision thereof (i.e. department, section, unit, etc.), the only or main mission of which is to detect and/or investigate offences to the drug legislation and to bring the offenders to justice. It may be intelligence and/or an operational law enforcement unit with local, regional, national or international jurisdiction. Although most such 'drug squads' are likely to belong to Police or Customs organisations, drug squads potentially active in other institutions including for instance intelligence or military institutions (Gendarmerie, Guardia Civil, Border Guard, etc.) should also be taken into account.*

## Results

In 2015, all 28 EU Member States, as well as Norway and Turkey, participated in the data collection process; four countries (Belgium, Greece, Croatia and Sweden) had not taken part in the previous study. Of these four countries, Belgium retroactively provided a description of its situation in 2012, and this new information has been taken into account in the results presented here. The three countries that could not be included in the comparison reported a total of 24 drug squads in 2015.

<sup>(1)</sup> For a fuller description of the methodology used here and in the original 2012 study, please see EMCDDA, (2013).

From the 30 reference persons nominated to answer the questionnaire in 2012, 12 of them filled in the updated questionnaire and 18 were replaced by new reference persons<sup>(2)</sup>.

It should also be noted that the figures on drug squads and their staff in 2012 presented in this report are those that were originally reported during the 2012 survey. Therefore, suggestions that were made by the national reference persons of Spain and Portugal that their national numbers should be adjusted based on new information reported in 2015 were not taken on board because of methodological reasons. However, the changes suggested by these countries are addressed in the narrative below. As noted above, Belgium retroactively provided data on the situation in 2012, reporting 41 drug squads and 498 dedicated staff, and is therefore included in the comparison. By contrast, Croatia, Greece and Sweden are not included.

## Drug squads in Europe in 2012 and 2015

The reported drug squads are units in police forces, customs authorities and other law enforcement organisations and perform different functions under different mandates and at different administrative and territorial levels.

The total number of dedicated drug squads in the participating countries that responded to both surveys has decreased slightly from 1 187 in 2012 to 1 133 in 2015 (–4.5 %) (Table 1).

Of the 27 countries for which detailed information for both 2012 and 2015 is available, 12 have reduced their numbers of drug squads while five have increased their numbers. The remaining 10 countries reported no changes.

The reported total number of staff has increased from 19 490 to at least 20 515 (+5 %). Of the 22 countries that provided detailed and comparable information regarding the number of drug law enforcement officers and the total number of staff in drug squads for both 2012 and 2015, 10 have increased the total number of staff and nine have decreased it, while three countries reported no changes. More precise information is available in Table 2.

## 2012-2015: what changed and what did not?

Overall, at European level, the numbers of specialised drug law enforcement units and their staff numbers remained relatively stable between 2012 and 2015. That said, the situation in several countries is different from the general European situation, and analysis of some national cases is

TABLE 1  
Change in the number of drug squads by country between 2012 and 2015

Country	2012	2015
Austria	10	10
Belgium (a)	41 (b)	28
Bulgaria	32	10
Croatia (a)	—	20 (c)
Cyprus	1	1
Czech Republic	3	2
Denmark	1	13
Estonia	6	5 (d)
Finland	26	0
France	99	209
Germany	250	250
Greece (a)	—	4 (c)
Hungary	2	1
Ireland	29	57
Italy	41	242
Latvia	3	3
Lithuania	12	12
Luxembourg	8	8
Malta	1	1
Netherlands	5	5
Norway	28	0
Portugal	53	70
Poland	301	149
Romania	44	44
Slovakia	2	1 (d)
Slovenia	13	5
Spain	118	3
Sweden (a)	—	0 (c)
Turkey	4	4
United Kingdom	54	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 187</b>	<b>1 133 (c)</b>

(a) Countries that did not take part in the 2012 study.

(b) Figure retroactively provided in the 2015 update.

(c) Countries provided figures for 2015 only; therefore the number of drug squads was not taken into account in the comparison.

(d) Minimum number that could be extracted from the answer provided; the real number is likely to be higher.

necessary both to understand the changes and to underline some limitations.

Regarding changes in the numbers of drug squads, Denmark, Ireland, France, Italy and Portugal reported increased numbers (Table 1). Portugal explained that the change was the result of missing figures from Portuguese customs in the 2012 data collection exercise.

<sup>(2)</sup> The reasons for appointing a new reference person were retirement, long absence from office, organisational changes and career changes.

TABLE 2  
Staff assigned to drug law enforcement units in European countries

Country	2012		2015	
	Officers	All staff	Officers	All staff
Austria	350	350	225	225
Belgium	498 <sup>(a)</sup>	502 <sup>(a)</sup>	430	430
Bulgaria	50	60	74	77
Croatia <sup>(b)</sup>	—	—	200	200 <sup>(c)</sup>
Cyprus	179	179	182	182
Czech Republic	210	236	195	224
Denmark	—	—	—	—
Estonia	100	100	90 <sup>(d)</sup>	90 <sup>(d)</sup>
Finland	210	250	0	0
France	2 600	3 500 (3 000-4 000)	—	2 500
Germany	2 800	3 000	2 800	3 000
Greece <sup>(b)</sup>	—	—	—	111 <sup>(d)</sup>
Hungary	80	80	27	27
Ireland	390	416	419	428
Italy	500 (200-800)	500 (200-800)	197	1 790
Latvia	67	67	67	67
Lithuania	100	100	110	110
Luxembourg	40	44	45	45
Malta	47	47	56	56
Netherlands	175 (150-200)	175 (150-200)	800 (650-950)	800 (650 950) <sup>(c)</sup>
Norway	—	—	0	0
Portugal	589	589	— <sup>(e)</sup>	— <sup>(e)</sup>
Poland	1 150	1 150	1 705	1 705
Romania	330	330	330	330 <sup>(c)</sup>
Slovakia	85	85	75	75
Slovenia	70	80	50	50
Spain	3 350	3 900	3 743	3 743 <sup>(c)</sup>
Sweden <sup>(b)</sup>	—	—	0	0
Turkey	3 750 (3 500-4 000)	3 750 (3 500-4 000)	4 250 (4 000-4 500)	4 250 (4 000-4 500)
United Kingdom	—	—	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17 720</b>	<b>19 490</b>	<b>15 870</b>	<b>20 515</b>

<sup>(a)</sup> Figure retroactively provided in 2015 update.

<sup>(b)</sup> These countries were not included in the 2012 study and therefore the number of staff was not taken into account for the comparison.

<sup>(c)</sup> These countries reported only the number of law enforcement officers; therefore, the total number of staff is likely to be higher than indicated.

<sup>(d)</sup> Minimum number that could be extracted from the answer provided; the real number is likely to be higher.

<sup>(e)</sup> Portugal reported 3 231 law enforcement officers and 3 685 total staff but indicated that an unknown proportion of these were working full time on drugs; therefore, these figures were not included in the 2015 total.

Spain reported a reduction in the number of drug squads from 118 to 3 between 2012 and 2015. This difference is explained, on the one hand, by different interpretations of the definition of 'drug squad' by the 2012 and 2015 Spanish reference persons and, on the other hand, by the fact that the role of the three central Spanish drug squads as national coordinators has been strengthened. This trend can also be linked to changes in the coordination of international cooperation, such as the implementation of the EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats) projects that have increased the need for harmonisation between central national law enforcement agencies.

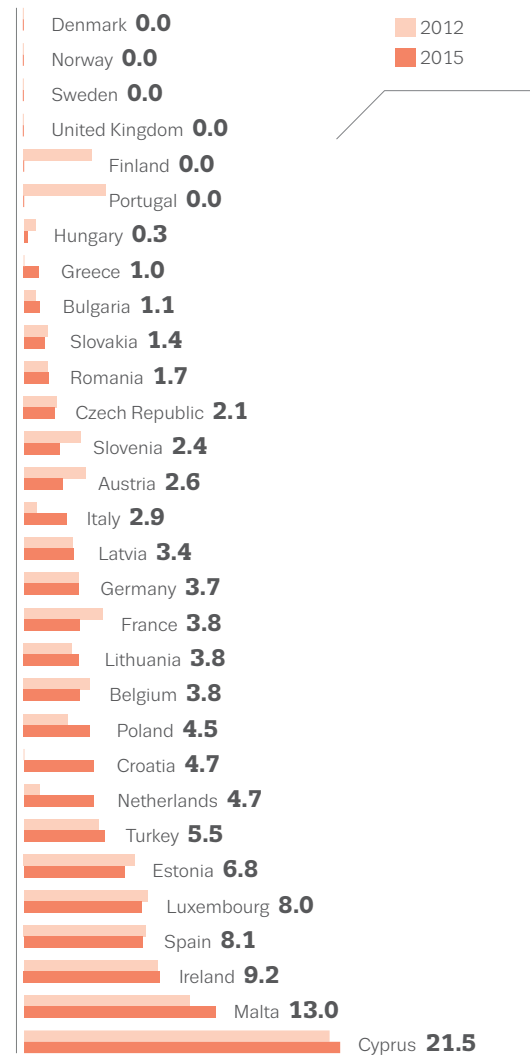
Belgium, Hungary and Slovenia reduced their numbers of drug squads and dedicated staff between 2012 and 2015 (Tables 1 and 2). These countries reported that these changes were related to cuts in police budgets and changes in national priorities. In the case of Belgium, for instance, the adjustment to the number of staff was reported as a way of enhancing flexibility in drug law enforcement in order to adapt to changes in the criminal landscape and reallocate resources to other priorities, including terrorism and illegal immigration.

Austria and Slovakia kept their existing numbers of drug squads but reduced the numbers of dedicated staff. This reduction mainly relates to changes in priority crime areas and the members of staff were in most cases reallocated to general serious and organised crime units (the main task of which remains drug investigations).

Compared with the situation in 2012, the 2015 exercise shows a decrease of almost 2 000 law enforcement officers in the Member States that reported detailed and comparable data. In parallel, an increase of about 700 in total staff members was noted. This nominally represents a decrease in law enforcement officers of about 10 %, and an increase of about 4 % in total staff members. However, some reporting difficulties in the follow-up exercise in 2015 mean that these numbers should be approached with some caution. For example, in 2012 France reported on both the number of law enforcement officers (2 600) and the total number of staff (3 500), but in 2015 the country reported only on the total number of staff (2 500), which had a significant impact on the total number of European drug law enforcement officers reported. Likewise, Portugal reported exact numbers of drug law enforcement officers in 2012 (589), but in 2015 the number of law enforcement officers dedicated to drug cases was not available. This also had an impact on the total number of dedicated European law enforcement officers reported. Further, Italy reported a significant decrease (–60 %) in the number of drug law enforcement officers, but a huge increase in total staff members (+260 %). Given these issues, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions; however, it would seem that

the overall European situation has remained generally stable (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1  
Drug squad staff per 1 000 inhabitants — 2012 and 2015



The Netherlands and Turkey reported their numbers of staff as a range. In Turkey, this was because of exchanges of staff between drug squads and other units, which make it difficult to report detailed statistics on staff. The Netherlands explained that planned operations against drug-related organised crime groups required more staff in certain periods than in others, indicating a more flexible approach to resource deployment.

In Bulgaria, the number of drug squads was reduced from 32 to 10 but the number of dedicated staff increased (from 60 to 77) as a result of new legislation restructuring drug law enforcement in the country. The situation in Poland is similar: a reduction in the number of drug squads (from 301 to 149) was combined with an increase in the number of staff (from 1 150

to 1 705). The main reason given for this change in Poland was the need to allocate more resources to the fight against drug-related organised crime.

Turkey reported that national drug law enforcement became a separate department under the Turkish National Police. This means a strengthened mandate for the unchanged number of drug squads (four) and an increased number of staff (from 3 750 to 4 250). An important reason for the increased number of staff is the implementation of the Narcotim Project, launched in 2014, which aims to suppress drug dealing at 'street level'.

Changes in the numbers of staff between 2012 and 2015 in Ireland, France and Italy show a mixed picture. An increase in the number of staff was noted in Italy (from 500 to 1 790), although no particular reason for this was reported. Conversely, a significant decrease was reported by France (from 3 500 to 2 500) and a minor decrease was reported by Spain (from 3 900 to 3 743) during the same period.

No major changes were reported for either the number of drug squads or the number of dedicated staff by the other countries that participated in the 2012 and 2015 data collection exercises (the Czech Republic, Germany, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania). However, some Member States' reference persons commented that, although the numbers of drug law enforcement units and staff remained stable, a trend has emerged in that an increasing number of drug cases that would previously have been the exclusive responsibility of drug squads are now handled by units dedicated to fighting serious and organised crime. In addition, they also reported that the staff of drug squads may sometimes be used for other, non-drug-related tasks, such as conducting surveillance in relation to and investigations into other serious crimes, such as trafficking in human beings, organised property theft or crimes committed by outlaw motorcycle gangs. This trend is expected to become more pronounced in the case of drug squads acting at central and regional levels, whose duties have become more diversified. Drug squads operating at local level have in many cases dealt with a variety of criminal offences for some time.

### Drug law enforcement in countries without drug squads

The national reference persons from Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Norway indicated that there were no specialised drug law enforcement units in their countries in 2015. Sweden did not participate in the 2012 data collection exercise, but its reference person reported on the situation in 2012 using the 2015 questionnaire. The absence of

specialised drug squads is one of the consequences of recent reorganisations of the police forces in these countries, which resulted in the closure of most specialised law enforcement units, including drug squads. These units now operate as an integrated part of the criminal police. Their tasks include the fight against more serious forms of drug-related crime within general serious organised crime units. In general, minor drug offences are investigated and prosecuted at regional and local levels.

Broadly speaking, these reorganisations were aimed at adopting a holistic approach to specialist police work, facilitating intelligence-led policing and increasing flexibility to perform different tasks within each operational police department. For instance, increasing flexibility has the aim of making it easier to quickly reallocate police resources to serious organised crime activities other than drugs, such as trafficking in human beings, people smuggling and terrorism. Another aim was to increase efficiency and reduce costs. An additional reason may be the interconnectedness between drugs and a range of other criminal activities. Although in practice the former specialised drug law enforcement units also dealt with other forms of crime, often these had a direct connection to the drug scene. At present, the trend is to move away from specialisation in terms of organisational structures or units and towards having specialist officers with the specific set of skills needed for investigating serious organised crime groups who can be deployed in drug operations and investigations as and when required. The countries that have implemented this strategy in their police organisations have kept strategic drug specialists in key positions.

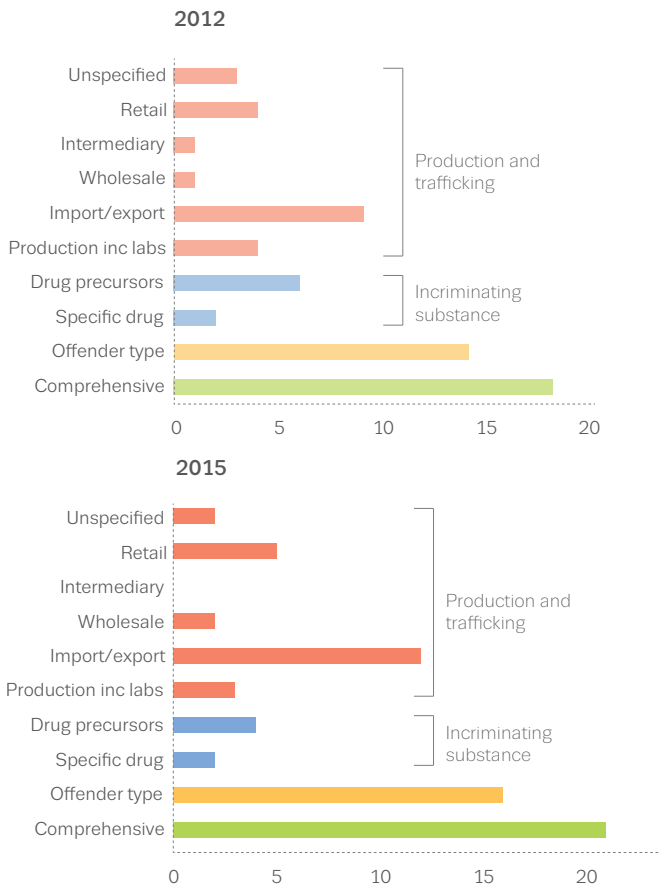
## Changes in the mandates of drug squads

### Technical mandates

The categorisation of the technical areas for drug law enforcement is not standardised and the terminology differs across countries in Europe. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this report the following categories will be used: type of drug law offence (e.g. production, distribution); level in the drug supply chain (e.g. wholesale, retail); type of offender (e.g. organised crime networks); trafficking modus operandi (e.g. container smuggling); type of incriminating substance (e.g. cannabis, precursors); and unspecified matters (e.g. financial investigations).

At European level, no or only minor changes in the technical mandates of specialised drug law enforcement units have taken place since 2012.

FIGURE 2

**Technical mandates assigned to drug law enforcement in Europe**

More than two thirds of the countries (21) report a technical mandate encompassing all possible technical areas; this mandate is comprehensive in that it is not bound by technical limitations. The formal technical scope defined by this type of mandate may be wide ranging, but it is likely that in practice it will be affected by the priorities defined by police managers, which may require drug squads to concentrate a larger proportion of their resources on specific areas of crime (e.g. cocaine trafficking).

Sixteen countries have tasked drug squads with investigating organised drug crime networks. This is a slightly larger number than in 2012 (13). Although in many countries the situation has not changed — the fight against organised drug-related crime continues to be performed within a comprehensive mandate or with a specific organised crime mandate — in Latvia, Hungary, Austria and the United Kingdom, for example, comprehensive mandates have been replaced by specific organised crime mandates or these specific organised crime mandates have been added to what were already comprehensive mandates.

Import or export of drugs continued to be the focus of drug law enforcement units in a significant number of countries in 2015, whereas the remaining identified mandates were reported by a smaller number (one to five) of countries.

**Drug law enforcement in customs organisations**

As in 2012, less information on customs organisations than on other organisations was reported in 2015. However, it is known that most customs organisations in the reporting countries have law enforcement departments with authority to tackle illicit drugs, especially at borders. Some customs organisations, for instance in Germany, Spain, France and Finland, have similar levels of investigative authority to the police and have mandates to operate nationally. In other countries, customs units hand over suspected offences to other organisations, mostly within the police, for investigation.

Drug law enforcement units have a single technical mandate in 11 countries, of which nine are comprehensive (Figure 2); this situation is almost unchanged from 2012.

**Territorial mandates**

In the context of drug law enforcement, 'territorial mandate' refers to the jurisdiction within which the responsibility and operations of a drug squad extend. As was the case in the 2012 data collection exercise, in this update European drug squads may be assigned to one or more out of a total of four territorial mandates: international, national, regional or local.

Information about territorial mandates is key to understanding how drug law enforcement is organised and implemented in Europe, since drug law enforcement is performed differently in different locations. Drug law enforcement is by necessity applied in a specific territory, to its population and to the activities that are carried out there. These dimensions contribute to determining the types of drug offences that are likely to be committed in a particular location. The territorial organisation of national drug law enforcement may also be a reflection, or a consequence, of how law enforcement in general is organised territorially in the country in question.

An international mandate does not confer powers on a law enforcement unit to operate in or enforce its national laws in a foreign country but allows it to collaborate with a foreign authority in order to advance its investigations, usually by requesting the foreign authority to perform an action on behalf of the requesting unit. In this sense, the term 'international mandate' as it is used here has a slightly different meaning from the other types of territorial mandates described in this update. National, regional and local mandates all mean that the organisations that enjoy them can act directly within the territory to which they have been assigned.



TABLE 3  
Territorial mandates of drug squads, 2015

Country	International	National	Regional	Local
Austria	x	x	x	
Belgium <sup>(a)</sup>	x	x		x
Bulgaria	x	x		x
Croatia <sup>(a)</sup>	x	x	x	x
Cyprus	x	x	x	x
Czech Republic	x	x		
Denmark	x	x	x	
Estonia	x	x	x	
Finland	x	x		
France	x	x	x	x
Germany	x	x	x	
Greece <sup>(a)</sup>	x	x	x	x
Hungary	x	x		
Ireland	x	x	x	x
Italy		x	x	x
Latvia	x	x	x	
Lithuania	x	x	x	x
Luxembourg	x	x	x	
Malta		x		
Netherlands	x	x		
Norway	x	x	x	x
Portugal	x	x	x	x
Poland	x	x		x
Romania	x	x	x	x
Slovakia	x	x	x	x
Slovenia	x	x	x	x
Spain	x	x	x	x
Sweden <sup>(a)</sup>	—	—	—	—
Turkey		x		
United Kingdom	x	x	x	

<sup>(a)</sup> Not included in 2012 data collection exercise.

There were no major changes observed between the 2012 data collection exercise and this update. In 26 of the reporting countries, at least one drug law enforcement unit exists with a permanent responsibility for international drug trafficking cases. All countries reporting information on territorial mandates in 2015 indicated that at least one drug law enforcement unit exists with a national mandate. In 2015, national mandates continue to be put into practice in a variety of ways. Alongside approaches involving local field offices of a central unit (such as in the Czech Republic and Cyprus) that is tasked with operating on a local scale within a national

### Drug squads in countries with diversified law enforcement structures

In 2015, as was the case in 2012, specialised drug law enforcement units played a dedicated central coordination role in drug law offence investigations in Spain, France and Italy. The relatively large numbers of drug law enforcement organisations in these three countries, compared with other countries with established specialised drug squads, may explain the need for more coordination and therefore the establishment of a unit with a dedicated central coordination role. These coordinating bodies often have an important role in international investigations that require liaison with foreign law enforcement agencies and international law enforcement organisations, especially Europol and Interpol.

jurisdiction, there are others in which central units task local law enforcement units with taking responsibility

for target localities, as is the case in Turkey. Although the Czech Republic, Cyprus and Turkey officially apply a national centralised approach to drug law enforcement, the above practices suggest an implicit approach that may be regional or local in nature. In most countries, customs organisations perform drug law enforcement with a national mandate.

Finally, in Greece and Turkey, surveillance of territorial waters and coasts is carried out by drug squads with a national mandate. This type of surveillance is also performed in other countries but not by specialised drug law enforcement units.

In addition to international and national mandates, European countries have a range of drug squads officially mandated to operate within regional or local territorial units. Twenty countries have assigned regional mandates to at least one drug squad, which is basically the same situation as in 2012.

Drug squads tasked with investigating drug-related cases locally now exist in 16 countries, whereas only 11 were reported in the 2012 data collection exercise. Firstly, three countries (Belgium, Greece and Croatia) reporting local mandates in 2015 were not included in the 2012 exercise. Secondly, four countries (Denmark, Germany, Hungary and Austria) did not report a local mandate for their drug law enforcement units in 2015 but did so in 2012. Finally, seven countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Cyprus, Slovakia and Norway) reported locally mandated drug squads in 2015, but did not in 2012. The national reference persons of those seven countries did not report any specific reasons for this change.



The 2015 exercise therefore revealed that the 29 European countries that reported information have assigned one (two countries), two (four countries), three (11 countries) or four (12 countries) territorial mandates to their drug squads.

In the 12 countries where drug law enforcement is performed based on all four territorial mandates, different drug squads are empowered to intervene in international, national, regional and/or local cases (Table 3).

International cases may also be pursued by drug squads in a further 14 countries, where both international and national subnational levels. All countries reporting information (29) have established at least one drug squad with a mandate to enforce drug laws across the entire country. At the same time, 23 countries also have drug squads with local or regional mandates. This is exactly the same number that was reported during the 2012 data collection exercise. This means that in Europe specialised drug law enforcement continues in 2015 to be perceived largely as a local response to local problems.

### Drug law enforcement functions

The day-to-day activities of drug law enforcement units can be grouped into three main functions: case management, intelligence management and operations.

Intelligence management is the process by which relevant information is obtained, processed and made available for drug law enforcement purposes. In some cases, the intelligence function is performed in a dedicated unit. Traditionally, however, intelligence management is part of the daily work of every drug squad and is a precondition for the other two functions to be performed.

The term 'operations' is used in this report to describe overt and covert drug law enforcement activities aimed mainly at reducing drug supply by making arrests, seizing drugs, dismantling illicit drug production sites, deploying officers to disrupt local drug markets, etc.

Case management refers to the provision of evidence for prosecution. Typically, this involves drafting and transmitting a written report to the prosecution service or the court. The report usually brings together all the evidence gathered by law enforcement organisations through intelligence or operations and other material necessary for the legal prosecution of the case.

By performing these functions, drug law enforcement units fulfil their technical mandates. In practice, drug squads are usually pursuing multiple targets in parallel, and case

management, intelligence work and operations can all be starting points for investigations. Although some drug law enforcement units perform only one of the three main functions, the majority of units perform multiple functions. Usually, those units that are mandated to carry out operations have a parallel mandate to perform case management. On the basis of their functional orientation, European drug squads can be grouped as follows: (1) drug squads dedicated to carrying out operations and conducting case management; (2) drug squads focusing exclusively on intelligence gathering; (3) drug squads mandated to perform a comprehensive set of functions, that is, case management, operations and intelligence gathering.

Drug law enforcement units that are mandated to carry out all three functions were reported by 26 countries, while fewer countries report units tasked solely with the gathering of intelligence (four countries) and units with a dual focus on case management and operations (five countries) (Table 4). These results are broadly similar to those revealed by the 2012 data collection exercise.

To put these results into perspective, it should be noted that drug law enforcement activities do not always aim to provide conclusive evidence usable for prosecution purposes (case management). Producing solid information on supply and demand structures (intelligence) is given at least as much attention as tackling and controlling illicit drug markets and, ideally, preventing, reducing and stopping breaches of drug legislation (operations). Not every drug offence or offender discovered by drug law enforcement is necessarily reported to the prosecutor or the justice system. Whether or not a detected offence is reported depends on a number of factors, including which legal principle (discretionary or mandatory) governs the law enforcement agency and the priorities set for the unit (EMCDDA, 2013).

An exploration of the range of different types of drug law enforcement units, based on their functional orientation, reveals some diversity, and possibly some reporting artefacts. For instance, similarly to in the 2012 data collection exercise, two thirds of the countries providing information reported only one type of functional orientation. In all of those countries (20), all drug squads were reported to have a comprehensive orientation, fulfilling the three functions.

In five countries, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Poland and Finland, two types of functional orientation were reported for drug squads. Belgium and the Netherlands reported intelligence and comprehensive functions; Bulgaria and Poland reported case management and comprehensive functions; and Finland reported case management and intelligence functions.

TABLE 4  
Drug law enforcement units categorised by the type of function they perform, 2015

Country	Case management/ operational	Intelligence oriented	Comprehensive	Total
Austria	0	0	10	10
Belgium	0	1	27	28
Bulgaria	8	0	2	10
Croatia <sup>(b)</sup>	0	0	20	20
Cyprus	0	0	1	1
Czech Republic	0	0	2	2
Denmark	0	0	1	1
Estonia	0	0	5	5
Finland	17	4	0	21
France	0	0	209	209
Germany	0	0	250	250
Greece <sup>(b)</sup>	2	1	1	4
Hungary	0	0	1	1
Ireland	0	0	57	57
Italy	0	0	242	242
Latvia	0	0	3	3
Lithuania	0	0	12	12
Luxembourg	0	0	8	8
Malta	0	0	1	1
Netherlands	0	1	4	5
Norway	0	0	0	0
Portugal	130	0	19	149
Poland	4	1	65	70
Romania	0	0	44	44
Slovakia	0	0	1	1
Slovenia	0	0	5	5
Spain	0	0	3	3
Sweden <sup>(b)</sup>	—	—	—	—
Turkey	0	0	4	4
United Kingdom	0	0	0	0

Finally, Greece and Portugal are the only countries reporting that each of the three functional orientations is held by at least one unit.

In Europe, based on available data from both data collection exercises, it may be concluded that the majority of countries empower most, and in many cases all, of their drug law

enforcement units with a comprehensive set of functions, with little evidence of specialisation at the level of unit (Table 4).

## Conclusions

The European drug law enforcement landscape in 2015 broadly reflects the situation in 2012, in spite of a slight 4.5% decrease in the total number of drug squads (1 187 squads in 2012 versus 1 133 in 2015). Although the number of law enforcement officers decreased by almost 10 % (17 720 to 15 870), the total number of staff employed in European drug squads increased by about 5% (19 490 versus 20 515 staff members).

As in 2012, the largest proportions of specialised drug law enforcement staff tend to be found in territorially small or sparsely populated countries. Four of the five countries (Ireland, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta; Spain is the fifth country) with the largest proportions of specialised drug law enforcement staff have a population of less than five million inhabitants and the top two countries, Cyprus and Malta, have less than one million inhabitants (Table 3).

However, this limited update of the study on drug squads shows that there have been a number of national developments in relation to units specialised in drug law enforcement in Europe. These developments may be a result of budgetary limitations in law enforcement organisations, requirements to meet changes in the criminal landscape or the implementation of new approaches in law enforcement organisations; in some cases, they may be caused by competing priorities, such as fighting against terrorism and trafficking in human beings.

In some countries (Finland, the United Kingdom and Norway), drug squads operating at national and regional levels have been merged with other specialised squads and have become more general organised crime units. These developments are the results of planned reorganisations to strengthen the fight against organised crime.

In addition, as stated in the 2012 study, drug law enforcement activities in Europe are still overwhelmingly conducted or supervised by the justice system, and only in a handful of countries do other authorities carry out the supervisory function.

As in the 2012 data collection exercise, it was not possible to adequately explore the involvement of customs organisations in European drug law enforcement in this limited update. All customs organisations perform control of goods from third countries as a part of their core fiscal duties to ensure the levy of excise duties. In many European countries, customs organisations are fully mandated to perform drug investigations, while in other countries their mandates are more limited. This makes customs a key player in specialised drug law enforcement in Europe. The same broadly applies to

border police forces and coastguards in the countries where they exist. It is clear that future monitoring efforts should seek to learn more about these services, in order to better understand the impact of their interventions. This is especially important for customs, as their role in European security is likely to increase in the future, especially following the launch of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), which works with all stakeholders in border management, including national customs organisations.

Although this limited update has been performed to support the European key indicator on drug supply reduction, future updates regarding drug squads in the European Member States should focus on standardised elements to enable sound comparisons between the diverse organisations and mandates that exist. In this way, future updates are likely to make a positive contribution also to the development of the other two European key indicators on drug markets and drug-related crime. As stated in the original study, continuously improving the monitoring of law enforcement strategies and practices should be one of the aims of a European network, which can be tasked with reporting qualitative data on drug supply and supply reduction issues. The EMCDDA reference group on drug supply, which is made up of representatives of the 30 countries of the Reitox network, Europol, Eurojust and the European Commission, is already contributing to fulfilling this task. The success of these initiatives in improving our monitoring and understanding of developments in the area of drug supply reduction in Europe will rest on the building of a sound relationship between the EMCDDA and European drug law enforcement professionals.

## References

- | European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2013), *Drug squads: units specialised in drug law enforcement in Europe*, EMCDDA Papers, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- | Europol (2017), *European Union serious and organised crime threat assessment: crime in the age of technology*, The Hague.

## Appendix

TABLE A1

### Technical mandates assigned to drug law enforcement in Europe

2012										
Country	Comprehensive	Offender type	Incriminating substance		Production and trafficking					
		Organised crime network	Specific drug	Drug precursors	Production inc labs	Import/export	Wholesale	Intermediary	Retail	Unspecified
Austria	x									
Belgium		x			x				x	
Bulgaria	x	x			x					x
Croatia										
Cyprus	x									
Czech Republic		x	x	x	x	x				
Denmark	x									
Estonia	x									
Finland	x	x				x				
France	x									
Germany	x	x		x		x				
Greece										
Hungary							x			
Ireland	x					x				
Italy	x									
Latvia	x			x						
Lithuania	x									
Luxembourg	x	x								
Malta	x									
Netherlands		x	x	x	x	x				
Norway		x								
Portugal	x	x		x		x			x	
Poland		x						x	x	
Romania		x				x				x
Slovakia		x		x						
Slovenia	x								x	
Spain	x					x				
Sweden										
Turkey		x				x				x
United Kingdom	x	x								

2015										
Country	Comprehensive	Offender type	Incriminating substance		Production and trafficking					
		Organised crime network	Specific drug	Drug precursors	Production inc labs	Import/export	Wholesale	Intermediary	Retail	Unspecified
Austria	x	x								
Belgium		x							x	
Bulgaria	x	x			x	x				
Croatia	x									
Cyprus	x									
Czech Republic	x	x				x				
Denmark	x									
Estonia	x									
Finland		x								
France	x					x				x
Germany	x	x		x						
Greece	x									
Hungary		x					x			
Ireland	x									
Italy	x									
Latvia	x	x				x				
Lithuania	x					x				
Luxembourg	x	x								
Malta	x									
Netherlands		x	x	x	x	x				
Norway	x	x								
Portugal		x		x		x			x	
Poland	x									
Romania		x		x	x	x				
Slovakia		x				x			x	
Slovenia	x								x	
Spain	x		x			x				x
Sweden		x								
Turkey	x					x				
United Kingdom		x				x	x		x	

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## About the EMCDDA

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction is the hub of drug-related information in Europe. Its mission is to provide the European Union and its Member States with 'factual, objective, reliable and comparable information' on drugs and drug addiction and their consequences. Established in 1993, it opened its doors in Lisbon in 1995, and is one of the European Union's decentralised agencies. The Centre offers policymakers the evidence base they need for drawing up drug laws and strategies. It also helps professionals and researchers pinpoint best practice and new areas for analysis.

## Related publications and web information

### EMCDDA

| *Drug squads: units specialised in drug law enforcement in Europe*, 2013

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