



# News release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

NEW REPORT FROM THE EMCDDA AND EUROPOL

## Drugs and the darknet: a growing threat to health and security

(28.11.2017, LISBON) (**EMBARGO 12:45 Western European Time/Lisbon time; 13:45 Central European Time**) Illicit trade on darknet markets is one sign of the increasingly complex nature of transnational organised crime in the European Union. In a new report out today — *Drugs and the darknet: perspectives for enforcement, research and policy* — the EU drugs agency (EMCDDA) and Europol present the latest understanding of how darknet markets function, the threats they pose to health and security and how Europe can respond.

The new report is being launched in Lisbon today by: **Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship; Europol Executive Director Rob Wainwright** and **EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel**.

Darknet markets — also known as cryptomarkets — provide a largely anonymous platform for trading in a range of illicit goods and services. It is estimated that around two thirds of the offers on darknet markets are drug-related. Drug sales on these markets, although modest when compared to the overall retail drug market, are significant and appear to be expanding. EU-based suppliers are important players in the darknet ecosystem, accounting for some 46% (around EUR 80 million) of all drug sales globally, on the 16 major darknet markets analysed in the period 2011–15.

A number of potential threats posed by the darknet are identified in the report, including the development of decentralised networks — allowing marketplaces to exist on multiple servers — and new parcel delivery and collection systems.

On this occasion, **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: 'Over the last decade, illegal online markets have changed how drugs are bought and sold. Criminal activity on the darknet has become more innovative and more difficult to predict. We shouldn't be playing catch-up with criminals: we should be one step ahead of them. That is why we are boosting our efforts to fight illegal drugs and step up cybersecurity. Cyberspace has no borders and we should all work together, the Commission, Member States the EMCDDA, Europol and our international partners. Our aim is to stop huge profits from drugs ending up in the pockets of organised crime groups in Europe and beyond, but most importantly to protect the health of our citizens and in particular of young people.'

**Rob Wainwright** added: 'Addressing cybercrime and the use of information technology platforms for criminal purposes has become an important policing priority across the EU. The recent takedown in July 2017 of Alphabay and Hansa, two of the largest darknet markets, is an example of how law enforcement can intervene to disrupt this environment. Despite this positive achievement, those involved in the online drug trade appear to be resilient to such disruption and able to re-organise rapidly. European-level cooperation and intelligence sharing, along with the targeting of high-impact vendors, will be critical in countering this threat'.

According to the report, market disruption should form part of a broader, more integrated set of measures implemented as part of an overall strategy to address drug trade in the darknet ecosystem.

Darknet investigation teams, modelled and promoted by Europol, will be at the heart of such an integrated strategy. Engagement with key industries (e.g. information technology, social media, payment and product distribution services) will be increasingly important for identifying and responding to new threats in this area.

**Alexis Goosdeel** noted: 'In just a few clicks, buyers can purchase almost any type of drug on the darknet whether synthetic drugs, cannabis, cocaine, heroin or a range of new psychoactive substances, including highly potent fentanils. This poses a growing threat to the health and security of citizens and communities across the EU. The new insights provided by this joint analysis make an important contribution to informing and preparing Europe's response to this threat'.

The dynamic nature of online markets, with their ability to evolve to counter threats and exploit new opportunities, means that enhanced monitoring capacity in this area is crucial to ensure that responses keep pace with developments. The analysis presented in the report is forward-looking, as the challenges in this area are constantly evolving.

The online trade in illicit goods and services was recognised as one of the engines of organised crime and a key threat to the safety of EU citizens in Europol's **2017 EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA)**. It is also being tackled as part of the coordinated response to serious and organised crime set out in the **EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime (2018–2021)**.

Today's report covers three areas: key concepts; an EU-focused analysis of drug supply on darknet markets; and law-enforcement perspectives. The analysis provides a policy-orientated review intended to facilitate discussions at EU level on how to respond to the phenomenon. It also presents recommendations in the areas of law enforcement, monitoring and policy.

The report is available in English:

***Drugs and the darknet: perspectives for enforcement, research and policy***  
[www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint-publications/drugs-and-the-darknet](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint-publications/drugs-and-the-darknet)

Audiovisual material available:

**Cryptocurrencies in the darknet**

<https://youtu.be/uJ8lvAc5sr8>

**Darknet markets ecosystem**

<https://youtu.be/u72kp9oT0rc>

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## Press conference

**Venue:** EMCDDA, Palacete do Relógio, Praça Europa 2, Cais do Sodré, 1249-289 Lisbon

**Date:** Tuesday 28 November 2017

**Time:** 12:45 Western European Time/Lisbon time (13:45 Central European Time)

**Language:** The press conference will be conducted in English

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## Press contacts

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Experts at the EMCDDA and Europol will be available for interviews via the press offices.

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