

In a glimpse

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Cocaine: a booming market, developments and trends in France (2000-2022)

In the general context of a background of booming global cocaine production, this *Théma* report provides an assessment of the situation in France. Based on all the data available to date, it assesses the developments observed over two decades, from the 2000s until 2022, covering three aspects:

- the boom in cocaine markets across Europe and France;
- the spread of cocaine consumption – in the form of powder/hydrochloride salt or crack or base/free-base cocaine – and the diversification of users;
- the public health issues faced by the public authorities in the absence of medical treatment for addiction or substitution for cocaine.

This overview also addresses the topic of the consumption of crack and freebase cocaine, the distribution of which has expanded, with increased visibility in Île-de-France (Paris region).

The circulation of cocaine within Europe, particularly in France, has increased since the 2010s, mirroring the record level of quantities seized. Europe has become an outlet and transit hub for cocaine. This situation is linked to the expansion of global cocaine production. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that the global cocaine production has doubled in the space of a few years (between 2014 and 2020) and reached a peak of 1 982 tonnes in 2020 – twice as much as in the late 1990s. Production in Colombia, from where most of the cocaine consumed in Europe originates, has quadrupled in ten years to reach 1 400 tonnes in 2021. The boom in production coincided with greater product accessibility in Europe and France, as its retail price fell and its availability increased, reinforced by its presence on social networks and the development of home deliveries by local trafficking channels. The 2010s were characterised by several phenomena that explain the growth of supply in Europe: the proliferation of cocaine supply channels, the diversification of criminal actors and trafficking methods, and the development of cocaine production facilities within Europe itself.

This expanding supply has encouraged the rise in cocaine consumption among adults and exacerbated the health consequences of such use. After cannabis (209 million users worldwide), cocaine is the most widely used illicit product and its distribution dynamics have accelerated over the last 20 years (nearly 21.5 million users at least once a year, compared to 14 million at the end of the 1990s). Within the European Union (EU), its distribution has continued to grow and now caters to 3.5 million users a year. France is also affected by this phenomenon: it is now in the group of countries within the EU where cocaine consumption is highest, with 600 000 users (per year), compared to 5 million for cannabis and 400 000 for MDMA/ecstasy. The consumption of cocaine has been increasing for twenty years among adults (25 years and older), testifying to its solid foothold in the generations born between the 1970s and the 1990s. It reaches an increasingly wide range of age groups and social backgrounds, which is also reflected in the diversification of modes of consumption – whether snorted (cocaine powder), smoked/inhaled (base cocaine or crack) or injected. While social perceptions tend to downplay the dangerousness of the product, the health indicators observed in France are convergent: a tripling of emergency room visits for cocaine use between 2010 and 2022, an increase in hospitalisations and treatment requests for cocaine use.

While the signs indicating exacerbation of the health consequences linked to the use of cocaine are increasing in the EU and in France, public authorities are taking these concerns more and more seriously.

Further reading (in French)

Théma report. [La cocaïne : un marché en essor, évolutions et tendances en France \(2000-2022\)](#), 65 p.