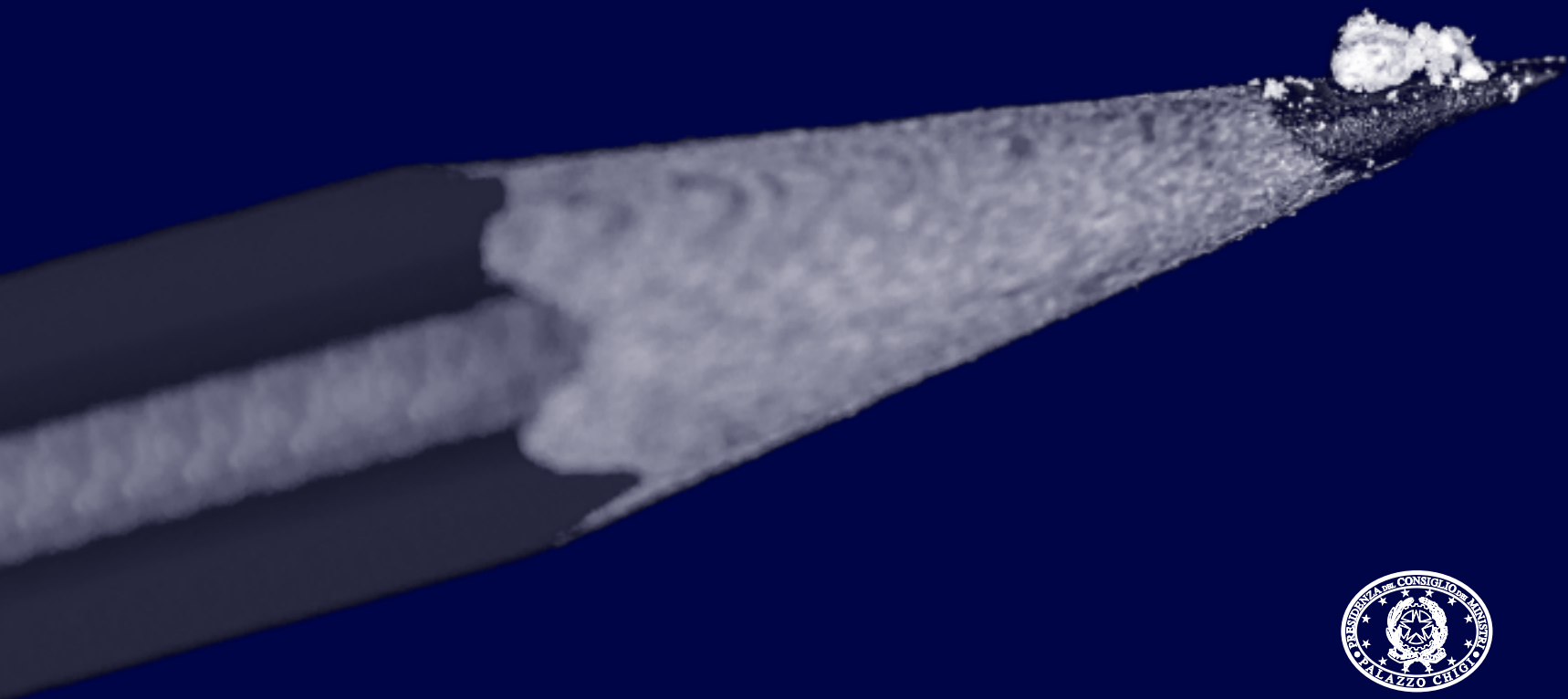


# 2024

## Annual report to the Parliament on drug addiction in Italy



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri  
Dipartimento per le Politiche Antidroga

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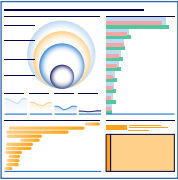


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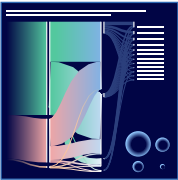


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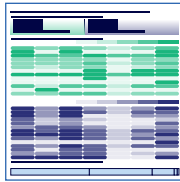


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## Preface

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The Report to Parliament on drug addiction in Italy is presented this year in a completely new layout. It is more user-friendly, without losing anything in terms of its scientific foundation and comprehensive approach. The frequent use of infographics allows for a precise and usable narrative of the complex and articulated network of information and data, which refers to the year 2023, generated by central and peripheral state administrations, public entities in the field and private social organisations.

As a result of the coordination of the Department for Anti-Drug Policies of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the latter have regained their central role, and contribute to addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges of all addictions.

The integrated analysis of direct and indirect indicators allows to identify the most incisive intervention areas - already in place - from institutions:

- a. an increase in the fight against drug trafficking, with a stronger international cooperation, made up of bilateral agreements and efficient exchanges between police and the judicial authorities of the most affected states, starting with Latin American states;
- b. the call for truly effective joint action in the most qualified international venues, primarily in the United Nations Office in Vienna;
- c. the increase in street seizures, aimed at striking each and every link in the drug supply chain;

- d. the relaunch of prevention activities, which is essential in view of the increased use of illegal substances among the very young and the enhanced diffusion of new addictions and risky behaviour linked to the use of the Internet, to *gaming* and to gambling;
- e. the enhancement of correct information, from TV and social advertisement campaigns aimed at promoting and supporting interventions in schools;
- f. clarity in terms of language, to overcome the devastating years of ambiguity and subtle support, and to state once again on scientific grounds that no drug is ever "soft";
- g. focus on private social facilities, an essential frontier for recovery not only in terms of health;
- h. alarm at the introduction into the market of new and dangerous synthetic substances such as fentanyl, regarding which a coordinated action plan has been drawn up, which is already operational and has produced significant initial results;
- i. reporting the failure of "defeatist" policies and attitude, which can be summed up in the harm reduction formula, since deaths attributable to methadone use have increased three-fold in a decade.

This report provides reliable factual elements to continue the work in this direction as summarised and, where possible, to do so with even greater intensity.

Alfredo Mantovano  
*Undersecretary of State to the Presidency  
of the Council of Ministers*

## New trends and emerging challenges

The scenario of the diffusion and use of drugs and psychotropic substances in Italy is characterised, in 2023, by the emergence and consolidation of some **significant trends that are surfacing**. The picture that emerges shows an evolution in market configuration, in a context featuring an overall **upward trend**, both concerning drug use and criminal offences in violation of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990, and the demand for treatment, which is rising once again after the downturn recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **increasing purity of some of the most popular substances** stands out. Laboratory analyses carried out on seizures have shown an **increase in mean THC** (tetrahydrocannabinol) content in cannabis products. There is particular concern about the almost four-fold increase in the mean percentage of the active substance in resin-based products (hashish) from 7.4% to 29% over the period from 2016 to 2023. There is also an increase in **seized substances with a high THC content** (>50%), especially in new-generation substances presented in the form of a light beige powder or amber-coloured or brown pasty gel (known in jargon as Shatter or Butan Hash Oil), or liquid that can be vaporised in e-cigarettes. In the case of hashish, there is also the **appearance of products with a low THC content** (<1%), but adulterated with a synthetic cannabinoid (hexahydrocannabinol).

There is also a significant increase in the amount of active substance in the analysed samples of **free base cocaine**

(**crack**) from 2017 to 2023, with a rise of 30 percentage points (from 57% to 87%). Against this increase, one can also observe the growing impact of cocaine and crack cocaine on the **care and treatment systems**. In 2023, the percentage of people seeking treatment at **SerD facilities** for cocaine/crack has showed an increase from 51% to 55% in just one year. The same applies to those who have embarked on a pathway for primary cocaine/crack use at **private social rehabilitation facilities**, reaching 40% in the last year.

The year 2023 also features **25 Alerts** issued by the **National Early Alert System** to the designated collaborating centres in order to initiate coordinated action and activate the appropriate response procedures. The 2 highest alert levels, regarding a concrete risk of serious harm to people's health, concerned the growing availability of **illicit fentanyl** (a synthetic opioid with more than 80 times the potency of morphine) and **xylazine** (a powerful sedative, usually adopted in veterinary medicine) used on the illegal market as an adulterant.

The **upward trend in the use of psychoactive substances among young people** is confirmed in a similar context, with the exception of cannabis, whose prevalence has declined since 2022. Indeed, the percentages of students aged 15 to 19 years who report having used **cocaine** (from 1.8% to 2.2%), **stimulants** (from 2.1% to 2.9%), **hallucinogens** (from 1.6% to 2%) and **New Psychoactive Substances** (from 5.8% to 6.4%) at least once during the year are increasing. Estimates for 2022 also showed a **rise in expenditure for drugs**, which has returned to

pre-COVID-19 levels with **euro 16.4 billion**, of which 40% is attributable to the use of cannabis derivatives and 32% to the use of cocaine.

Faced with the widespread use among the very young, a sign of greater availability in the territories involved, an important effort was made in 2023 to combat the phenomenon by increasing both **anti-drug operations** (+6% compared to the previous year) and **seizures** by the Police. The latter recorded a 17% increase with 89 tonnes of drugs seized in Italy and in neighbouring international waters, as well as by drawing up more **reports to the Judicial Authority** for criminal offences committed in violation of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990 (+3%).

The **system of public and private services** dedicated to the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of addictions remains widespread throughout the country, although it shows a **strong north-south gradient**, especially in the case of specialised therapeutic facilities. Overall, **132,200 patients** were treated at **SerD facilities** last year, some of whom also underwent treatment and rehabilitation in residential and semi-residential therapeutic facilities. Considering the substances for which subjects were most frequently treated in 2023, it can be seen that in most cases subjects are treated for the same substance of first use.

### Cocaine: expansion and new user trends

Cocaine trafficking and use are growing in Italy. In recent years, the **amount of cocaine seized** by the Police has **increased more than five-fold**, from about 3.5 tonnes in 2018 to almost 20 tonnes in 2023 (or 22% of all seized substances). In contrast to a greater diffusion throughout the country, the mean price at the drug trafficking level (37,000-38,000 euro/kg) and the mean price on the drug dealing market (84 euro/gram)

remain substantially stable over time, confirming its position as the most expensive substance.

**Cocaine use among young people** is increasing. In fact, following a long decline in its use, an upward trend has been recorded from 2021 onwards, reaching values higher than pre-pandemic levels in 2023. Nearly **54,000 youth** aged 15 to 19 report having used cocaine in 2023, with a rise from 1.8% to 2.2% of the total student population in one year. The percentage of students who have used the substance before the age of 14 is also increasing.

The penetration of the territory is confirmed by the increase over the last decade of **reports of cocaine/crack possession for personal use** (art. 75 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990). In 2023 they account for 19% of the total, and mainly involve users aged over 30. In addition, **reports for cocaine/crack-related offences** have increased by 8.6% compared to 2022, reaching the highest percentage ever recorded (46%) for production, trafficking and possession offences (art. 73 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990).

Finally, the **impact on care services** is also growing. Over the last decade, there has been a progressive increase, from 12% to 25%, in the number of **hospital admissions** directly related to cocaine use, making it the drug most commonly reported in the main diagnoses of drug-related hospitalisations. Consistently, **deaths** attributable to acute cocaine/crack intoxication are also on the rise, with more than 32% of directly drug-related deaths with the specified substance in the last year. The figure has been further confirmed by Forensic Toxicology analyses, indicating that this substance is the most frequently involved as a cause of death. There is also an increase in the proportion of **people receiving treatment** for cocaine/crack use at **private social** rehabilitation facilities and at **SerD facilities**.

## Cannabis: analysis of current trends and emerging challenges

Although cannabis products record a decline in their use for the first time since the pandemic, they remain the most impactful, both in terms of diffusion in the various territories and of the law enforcement effort. Cannabis and its derivatives are still the most widely used substances among the very young. In 2023, **550,000 youth** aged 15 to 19, i.e., 22% of the entire student population, used it at least once a year, and 70,000 young people (2.8%) reported using it almost daily (20 or more times in a month). A cause for concern is the increase in the mean percentage of active substance in hashish products. It has increased four-fold, especially in new-generation products and e-cigarette liquids. In addition, the appearance of products with a low THC content (<1%) adulterated with synthetic cannabinoids (hexahydrocannabinol) is alarming.

Confirming the wide availability of the substance, 2023 data show that **76% of reports for possession for personal use** (art. 75 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990) are linked to the possession of cannabinoids, with a growing trend that began in the post-pandemic period.

In 2023, law enforcement agencies achieved important results in combatting trafficking of this substance within national borders. 9,714 police operations seized **more than 67 tonnes of cannabis and cannabis derivatives**, corresponding to 76% of the drugs intercepted in Italy, marking a significant increase compared to the previous year (+21%), and in contrast to the downward trend that had characterised the years from 2018 to 2020. Finally, the figure for **seized cannabis plants** (almost 160,000) confirms the consolidation of Italian production concentrated mainly in Sardinia and Calabria.

Finally, there is a slight percentage increase in **people assisted at SerD facilities** for cannabis use, precisely 12% of those receiving treatment.

## The controversial picture of heroin and other opiates

The picture that emerges in relation to opiates shows a downturn in their diffusion, although they remain the category of substances with the greatest health impact. The year 2023 shows a decline in many of the indicators analysed, both with regard to the market and to the social and health-related consequences. The quantity of **substances intercepted** in 2023 (approximately 260 kg) decreased compared to the previous year, amounting to **0.3% of the total** amount of substances seized by law enforcement agencies. Reports of **possession for personal use** (art. 75 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990) are also confirmed to be decreasing, with a steady and progressive downward trend since 2010. In 2023 they account for 4.1% of the total number of reports. **Heroin-related charges** for trafficking and possession of drugs (art. 73 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990) and, more markedly, those for association for the purpose of illegal drug trafficking (art. 74 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990) are also diminishing.

The level of **diffusion among the very young** was rather stable compared to the previous year, at just over 1% in terms of use during the year. Despite steadily decreasing, opiates continue to exert a **strong impact on the healthcare system**, accounting for more than half of the treatment pathways among users of SerD facilities (60%). They have a smaller but still significant impact on private social facilities, where primary opiate/heroin use stands at around 28%. Heroin and opiates are also the underlying substances in **17% of drug-related hospital admissions**, and remain the leading cause of death from acute lethal intoxication in Italy (63% of deaths with a specified substance). It must be said that, among drug-related deaths, those attributed to methadone have increased substantially since 2013, from 6.6% to 18% of deaths with a specified substance.

## New Psychoactive Substances: the invisible frontier

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) are one of the most dynamic and critical challenges in the field of addiction, with an increasing variability that makes them hard to detect and control. Over the past year, the National Early Alert System (SNAP) identified **70 new psychoactive substances** circulating in the country, mainly belonging to the classes of cathinones (20%), arylcyclohexylamines (16%), synthetic cannabinoids (13%) and benzodiazepines (11%). The spread of NPSs continues to cause alarm among operators in the sector. Indeed, being **easily manipulated synthetic compounds**, they are hard to detect and, since they are not immediately classified in the lists of legally banned substances, they often escape detection. Since these substances are dangerous and potentially lethal, they require very close monitoring, constant follow-up and updates. In 2023, **48 new drugs** were added to the Ministerial Tables.

NPS use, which has been on the rise since the pandemic, mainly affects **young people**, who are more exposed to this particular market. In 2023, **160,000 students** aged 15-19 years report having used at least one NPS in the course of the year, accounting for 6.4% of the student population. The NPSs most commonly used by young people over the past year are **synthetic cannabinoids** (4.6%), **ketamine** (1.3%), **synthetic opioids** (1.3%), **cathinones** (0.8%) and **Salvia divinorum** (0.5%). In 2023, prevalences confirm the upward trend observed after the pandemic. Although it remains, with the exception of synthetic cannabinoids, a rather small market segment, indicators suggest that it will continue to grow over the next few years with an impact on public health that is difficult to calculate.

## Minors and psychoactive substances: a multi-problem phenomenon on the rise

Over the past year, almost **360,000 underage students** used at least **one illegal substance**, or 23% of all underage

school children, confirming the increasing trend observed in the post-pandemic period. This figure is also confirmed by the percentage of **minors reported for possession of drugs for personal use** (art. 75 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990), which in 2023 will be around 12% of reported subjects, returning to pre-pandemic levels, reaching the highest value ever recorded. Almost all reports referred to minors (97%) concerned **cannabis and its derivatives**, confirming the widespread use of cannabinoids among young people.

Another indicator pointing in the same direction is the number of **minors reported to the Judicial Authorities for drug-related criminal offences**, which, compared to 2022, records a **10% increase**: 1,246 young people under 18 years of age, or 4.5% of those reported nationwide. Alongside the increase in use, the involvement of minors in drug production, trafficking and illegal possession is also growing.

But the use of illegal psychoactive substances is not the only cause for concern. In the field of **legal psychoactive substances**, the use among young people is widespread, and is growing particularly among girls. In 2023, **tobacco** use involved over **500,000 students under 18 years of age**, equivalent to 34% of the total, with higher percentages among female students. Alcohol excess also records higher prevalences among girls. Nearly **380,000 very young people** experienced at least one **alcohol intoxication** in 2023, representing 25% of minors in the student population. The picture is completed by **non-prescription psychiatric drugs**, which have reached the highest prevalence ever recorded and have been used by **170,000 minors** during the year (11%), with a more than two-fold prevalence among girls.

## The Prevention Scenario, a world to be strongly supported

**Prevention projects** are ever more emphasised, in terms of information, communication and awareness-raising

effort involving public (mainly Regional Administrations and Departments for Addictions) and private operators (associations and Third Sector organisations). Prevention activities implemented in both **lower and higher secondary schools** are particularly important. They are an opportunity to massively reach the young population, which is most exposed to substance use.

**289 prevention projects targeting the student population** were implemented in 2023, promoted and activated in all regions and autonomous provinces. Most of these initiatives were environmental and universal prevention projects aimed at increasing and transferring knowledge, skills and social skills for the prevention of psychoactive substance use and risky behaviour. In addition, 49% of schools planned study days or activities dedicated to the **prevention of psychoactive substance use** during the

year (a percentage that has risen since 2022), and 81% of schools planned activities dedicated to the **prevention of bullying and cyberbullying** (a phenomenon that affected 45% of students as victims in 2023).

Almost half of the students (46%) took part in activities aimed at preventing risky behaviour or at promoting well-being during the year, addressing topics such as bullying/cyberbullying (82%), the use of psychoactive substances (68%), and the informed use of the Internet (56%), with the result that young people who took part in informative or prevention interventions show **greater awareness** of the risks related to substance use and a **lower propensity to frequent use**. This shows that prevention, information and in-depth study of this phenomenon not only capture the interest of young people, but also produce tangible results.



Anti-drug operations

↑ 20,489 (+6%)

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

Seizures

↑ Kg 88,754 (+17%)

- ⊖ Marijuana 45.3%  
(2022 = 43.4%)
- ⊖ Opiates/opioids 0.3%  
(2022 = 0.7%)
- ↑ Hashish 30.6%  
(2022 = 19.6%)
- ⊖ Synthetic drugs 0.2%  
(2022 = 0.1%)
- ↓ Cocaine 22.3%  
(2022 = 34.5%)
- ⊖ Other drugs 1.3%  
(2022 = 1.6%)

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

↓ 156,575 Cannabis plants (-25%)

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

↑ 38,204 Doses/tablets (+99%)

- ⊖ Synthetic drugs 51.2%  
(2022 = 55.9%)
- ⊖ Other drugs 48.8%  
(2022 = 44.1%)

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

Purity mean % of active substance

State Police		Carabinieri Corps	
⊖ 14% <small>(2022 = 13%)</small>	Marijuana	13% <small>(2022 = 13%)</small>	⊖
⊖ 29% <small>(2022 = 29%)</small>	Hashish	28% <small>(2022 = 29%)</small>	⊖
⊖ 71% <small>(2022 = 68%)</small>	Cocaine	72% <small>(2022 = 70%)</small>	⊖
⊖ 87% <small>(2022 = 87%)</small>	Crack	92%	
⊖ 19% <small>(2022 = 21%)</small>	Heroin	8.3% <small>(2022 = 14%)</small>	↓
⊖ 58% <small>(2022 = 71%)</small>	MDMA (powder)	72% <small>(2022 = 68%)</small>	↑

Source: Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defence.

Note: figures in brackets show the change from the previous year.

Mean price

Traffic (€/kg)		Drug dealing (€/g)	
↓ 2,461 <small>(-835€)</small>	Marijuana	(+0.29€) 10.19	⊖
↓ 2,962 <small>(-53€)</small>	Hashish	(+0.39€) 11.76	⊖
↓ 37,445 <small>(-897€)</small>	Cocaine	(-0.01€) 83.55	⊖
↑ 20,481 <small>(+422€)</small>	Heroin brown	(+0.29€) 41.19	⊖
↑ 29,475 <small>(+283€)</small>	Heroin white	(+0.17€) 53.78	⊖
↑ 7,794 <small>(+566€)</small>	Ecstasy	(+0.72€) 19.85	⊖
↓ 7,810 <small>(-650€)</small>	Amphetamines	(-5.78€) 27.78	↓
↑ 10,052 <small>(+692€)</small>	LSD	(-0.88€) 23.29	⊖

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

SNAP (early drug alert system) activities

↓ 70 NPS reported to EMCDDA (-8%)

of which 21 for the first time in Italy

Source: National Institute of Health (ISS).

Ministerial Tables

48 substances included

Source: Ministry of Health.

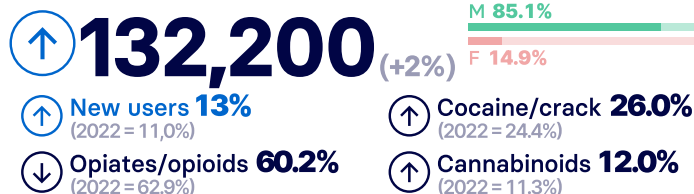
Use of at least one illegal substance in the last year in the student population

	27.6% <small>(2022: 27.9%)</small>	2022	2023	
Cannabinoids		23.7%	22.2%	↓
Opiates/opioids		1.0%	1.2%	⊖
Cocaine		1.8%	2.2%	↑
Stimulants		2.1%	2.9%	↑
Hallucinogens		1.6%	2.0%	↑
NPS		5.8%	6.4%	↑
Synthetic cannabinoids		4.4%	4.6%	⊖
Non-prescription psychiatric drugs (NPD)		10.8%	11.4%	↑

Source: CNR - IFC.

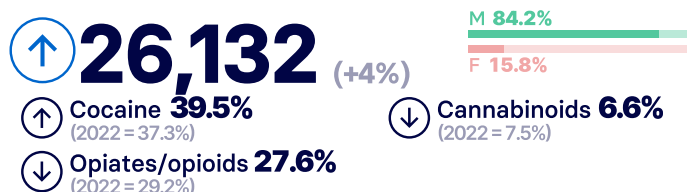


## SerD users



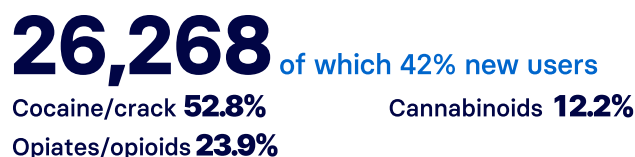
Source: Ministry of Health.

## Users in the community



Source: Ministry of the Interior.

## Prison users



Note: the figure is not compared with the previous survey because the number of subjects feeding the Data Source has increased.  
Source: Inter-regional Technical Group on Addictions.

## Alternative measures to detention for drug addicts

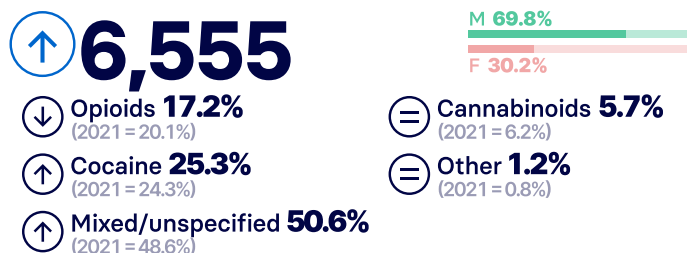


Source: Ministry of Justice.

## Visits to the Emergency Department

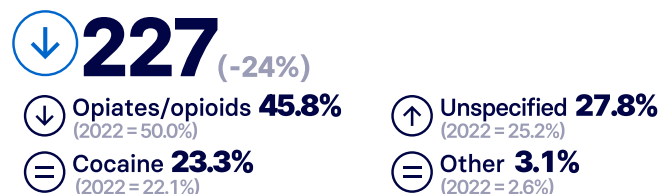


## Admissions



Source: Ministry of Health, ISTAT (year 2022).

## Deaths



Source: Ministry of the Interior.

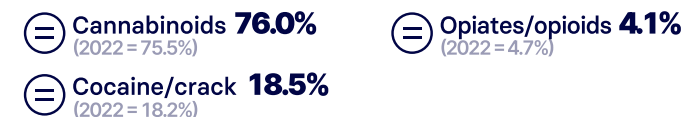
## HIV and AIDS in IDUs



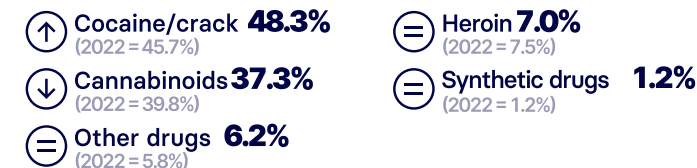
**50.8%** of AIDS late diagnoses

Source: ISS (year 2022).

## Illegal activities as per Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990



The figure is not compared with the previous survey because it is constantly updated.  
Source: Ministry of the Interior.



Source: Ministry of the Interior.



Note: the comparison with the previous year is made on the ratio to the total prison population.  
Source: Ministry of Justice.

# How to use the interactive document

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## Infographic boxes in chapters

In the context of criminal proceedings related to the violation of articles 73 and 74 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990 and, in some cases, of administrative proceedings (art. 75 of the same Decree), the Judicial Authority requires qualitative and quantitative analyses to be carried out on seized drugs to identify the active substance and determine whether the substance is included in the ministerial tables of narcotic substances. The analyses, conducted by the laboratories of the Forensic Police and the Carabinieri, allows to determine the active substance content and the corresponding quantity in grams.

Most of the laboratory analyses carried out on seized drugs concerned **cannabis** products from the drug dealing market, for which an **increase in purity** has been observed in recent years. Indeed, the mean THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) content in resin-based products (hashish) has reached 28-29%, while this value is equal to 13-14% for leaf and inflorescence products (marijuana)<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to the increased mean THC content, both the adulteration of cannabis products with synthetic cannabinoids and an increase in seizures with a very high THC content (over 50%) can be observed, particularly in new-generation products presented in the form of a light beige powder or even an amber-coloured or brown pasty gel, known in jargon as Shatter or BHO (Butan Hash Oil), or liquid that can be vaporised in e-cigarettes. In the case of hashish, there has also been the appearance of low THC products (<1%) adulterated with hexahydrocannabinol (HHC).



See table 1.2.

Drug supply and market characteristics in 2023

The laboratories of both law enforcement agencies found a mean purity level of 71-72% in the **cocaine** samples submitted for analysis, as well as around 90% in the **crack** samples, with no major variations over time. Greater variability is, instead, found in samples of **heroin** and **MDMA**. Forensic Police laboratories report that the mean percentage of active substance is 19% and 58%, respectively, whereas the analyses carried out by the Carabinieri show mean values of 8.3% and 72%.

With regard to the drug trafficking market<sup>3</sup>, the laboratory analyses conducted by the Carabinieri revealed a mean tetrahydrocannabinol content in hashish and marijuana samples of 29% and 12%, respectively, which is quite similar to the purity found in samples seized from the drug dealing market. While analyses performed on samples of cocaine seized in large quantities show a mean degree of purity of 77%, those performed on heroin samples show an average 10% of active substance.

## Interactive buttons



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Anti-drug operations carried out by the Police in 2023

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## Chapter 1

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# Drug supply and market

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In 2023, the Police carried out **20,489 anti-drug operations** in Italy and neighbouring international waters<sup>1</sup>. Anti-drug operations increased by 6%, compared to 2022. During these operations, almost **89 tonnes of drugs** were seized (+17% compared to 2022). About 76% were cannabis products, in particular marijuana (45%), slightly more than 22% were cocaine/crack, 0.3% heroin or other opiates, 0.2% synthetic substances and almost 1.3% other substances. In addition, 156,575 cannabis plants and 38,204 tablets/doses were seized (the latter were almost two-fold those of the previous year). Of the 89 tonnes seized in 2023, 35% were intercepted in island regions, especially in Sardinia, 29% in northern regions, especially in Lombardy, 18% in central regions, especially in Lazio, and 16% in southern regions, particularly in Calabria. Relating the quantity of seized substances to Italian residents in the 15-74 age group, the figure indicates approximately **200 kg per 100,000 residents**, reaching almost 2,000 kg in Sardinia.

In the past year, law enforcement agencies seized **22,808 kg of drugs at border areas**, accounting for 26% of the

total seized substances, a decrease compared to the previous year (32%). Of this amount, just over 71% is cocaine (16,205 kg), almost 19% is hashish (4,318 kg), 5.6% marijuana (1,271 kg), 0.2% heroin (41 kg) and 3.9% other drugs (882 kg). Seizures in border areas occurred mainly in maritime areas (20,541 kg, or about 90%). This is followed by airport areas (1,441 kg or 6.3%) and land areas (818 kg or 3.6%).

Cocaine

In 2023, the Police **conducted 8,581 operations** aimed at tackling the cocaine market, corresponding to 42% of all anti-drug operations conducted during the year (39% in 2022). **Almost 20 tonnes** were seized, accounting for 22% of all seized substances (35% in 2022). Almost 2 tonnes of cocaine (or 10% of the total) were seized in international waters in the stretch of sea off the coast of Portopalo di Capo Passero (Syracuse).

Overall, 82% of cocaine were seized at border areas (approximately 16.2 tonnes), particularly at the maritime border (99%), which remains the operational scenario where the largest overall quantities of cocaine are intercepted.

Considering the population aged 15-74 years residing in Italy, approximately 40 kg of cocaine per 100,000 residents were seized, a figure that in the Calabria region exceeds 300 kg, and 100 kg in Liguria and Sicily.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior - Directorate General for Anti-Drug Services.

## Heroin

**1,186** operations targeted the heroin market in 2023, corresponding to 5.8% of all anti-drug operations carried out during the year, with a gradual decrease from 2019 (8.6%).

In 2023, **260 kg of heroin** were seized, or 0.3% of all seized substances (in 2019 it was 1.1%). Of these, 41 kg were intercepted at customs areas (16% of the total, in line with 2022), of which 22 kg at airports (54%), 14 kg at land borders (34%), and 5 kg at maritime customs areas (12%). For the residing population aged 15-74, at national level, less than 1 kg of heroin was seized per 100,000 inhabitants, a figure that reaches almost 4 kg in Umbria.

## Cannabis

In the last year, Police operations aimed at tackling the cannabis market totalled **9,714**, or 47% of the total number of anti-drug operations carried out at national level, a lower percentage than in previous years (in 2017 it was 59%). In 2023, the quantity of cannabis products seized amounted to more than 67 tonnes, corresponding to 76% of the total drugs intercepted, marking an increase compared to the previous year (63%), inverting the downward trend that had characterised the years 2018-2020. In border areas, 4,318 kg of hashish were seized (16% of the more than 27 tonnes seized in Italy as a whole). The maritime border remains the main entry route, accounting for 96% of seizures in border areas.

Of the 67 tonnes of cannabis products seized, 40% were **hashish** (over 27 tonnes) and 60% **marijuana** (over 40 tonnes). 20% of anti-drug operations to tackle the marijuana market were carried out in island regions, leading to the seizure of approximately 24 tonnes of drugs (mostly intercepted in Sardinia), i.e., 60% of the total quantity intercepted in Italy. Considering the quantities seized from the resident population aged 15-74 years, this results in approximately 91 kg of marijuana per 100,000 inhabitants at national level, a quantity exceeding 300 kg in Calabria and 1,900 in Sardinia. Instead, the quantity of seized hashish is equivalent to approximately 61 kg per 100,000 residents aged 15-74, a figure that is well above 100 kg in Lazio and Piedmont.

**482** anti-drug operations were aimed at tackling the **cannabis plant** market, precisely 2.4% of the total 20,489 operations carried out at national level, a percentage that has been progressively decreasing since 2020 (5.3%). 52% of the operations were carried out in Southern Italy and the Islands, leading to the seizure of 129,338 cannabis plants, or 83% of the total cannabis plants intercepted in Italy in 2023. The figure for seized cannabis plants (156,575) confirms the **consolidation of Italian production**, mainly concentrated in Sardinia (46% of seized plants) and in Calabria (19%). While at national level, almost 353 cannabis plants have been seized for every 100,000 residents aged 15-74, in the regions of Calabria and Sardinia this figure reaches 2,114 and 6,048 plants per 100,000 residents, respectively.

Synthetic drugs

In 2023, there were **308** operations targeting synthetic drugs, 1.5% of the total number of anti-drug operations in Italy. Police operations led to the seizure of **19,577 doses** and **137 kg of substances**, with an

increase compared to 2022 (year in which 10,530 doses and 103 kg of substances were seized). 92 kilograms and 199 doses of synthetic substances were intercepted at border areas, amounting to approximately 67% and 1% of the total powder drugs and doses seized during the year.

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# Qualitative and quantitative analysis of seized drugs

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In the context of criminal proceedings related to the violation of articles 73 and 74 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990 and, in some cases, of administrative proceedings (art. 75 of the same Decree), the Judicial Authority requires qualitative and quantitative analyses to be carried out on seized drugs to identify the active substance and determine whether the substance is included in the ministerial tables of narcotic substances. The analyses, conducted by the laboratories of the Forensic Police and the Carabinieri, allows to determine the active substance content and the corresponding quantity in grams.

Most of the laboratory analyses carried out on seized drugs concerned **cannabis** products from the drug dealing market, for which an **increase in purity** has been observed in recent years. Indeed, the mean THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) content in resin-based products (hashish) has reached 28-29%, while this value is equal to 13-14% for leaf and inflorescence products (marijuana)<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to the increased mean THC content, both the adulteration of cannabis products with synthetic cannabinoids and an increase in seizures with a very high THC content (over 50%) can be observed, particularly in new-generation products presented in the form of a light beige powder or even an amber-coloured or brown pasty gel, known in jargon as Shatter or BHO (Butan Hash Oil), or liquid that can be vaporised in e-cigarettes. In the case of hashish, there has also been the appearance of low THC products (<1%) adulterated with hexahydrocannabinol (HHC).

The laboratories of both law enforcement agencies found a mean purity level of 71-72% in the **cocaine** samples submitted for analysis, as well as around 90% in the **crack** samples, with no major variations over time. Greater variability is, instead, found in samples of **heroin** and **MDMA**. Forensic Police laboratories report that the mean percentage of active substance is 19% and 58%, respectively, whereas the analyses carried out by the Carabinieri show mean values of 8.3% and 72%.

With regard to the drug trafficking market<sup>3</sup>, the laboratory analyses conducted by the Carabinieri revealed a mean tetrahydrocannabinol content in hashish and marijuana samples of 29% and 12%, respectively, which is quite similar to the purity found in samples seized from the drug dealing market. While analyses performed on samples of cocaine seized in large quantities show a mean degree of purity of 77%, those performed on heroin samples show an average 10% of active substance.

<sup>2</sup> Sources: Ministry of the Interior - Anti-Crime Directorate General of the State Police; Ministry of Defence - Carabinieri Corps - Carabinieri Forensic Investigations Group of Rome.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Ministry of Defence - Carabinieri Forensic Investigations Group.



The Directorate General for Anti-Drug Services (DCSA) provides annual estimates of market prices for drugs based on data from 11 sample cities, differentiating costs by sales channel, precisely drug trafficking or drug dealing. In 2023, **mean market prices for drug trafficking** were the following<sup>4</sup>: hashish: euro 2,962 per kg; marijuana: euro 2,461 per kg; *brown* heroin (or diamorphine base): euro 20,481 per kg; white heroin (or diacetylmorphine hydrochloride): euro 29,475 per kg; cocaine: euro 37,445 per kg (being the most expensive substance); ecstasy: euro 7,794 per 1,000 doses; amphetamines: euro 7,810 per 1,000 doses; methamphetamines: euro 11,963 per 1,000 doses; LSD: euro 10,052 per 1,000 doses.

Following an increase observed in 2021-2022, mean prices for marijuana, hashish, cocaine, amphetamines and methamphetamines fell in 2023, while those for *brown* heroin, white heroin and ecstasy increased. The mean price of cocaine has been stable since 2018, at around euro 38,500 per kg.

Mean prices in the drug dealing market were the following: hashish: euro 11.76 per gram; marijuana: euro 10.19 per gram; *brown* heroin: euro 41.19 per gram; white heroin: euro 53.78 per gram; cocaine: euro 83.55 per gram (confirming its position as the most expensive substance on the drug dealing market); ecstasy:

euro 19.85 per dose; amphetamines: euro 27.78 per dose; methamphetamines: euro 28.46 per dose; LSD: euro 23.29 per dose.

Over the last decade, mean prices for drug dealing of marijuana and hashish have presented an upward trend, as well as the price for cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamines and methamphetamines. However, the mean prices per gram of white and *brown* heroin were substantially stable.

According to ISTAT<sup>5</sup> estimates, expenditure for drugs in the country in 2022 amounted to euro 16.4 billion: 40% was related to the use of cannabis derivatives, and 32% to the use of cocaine. Compared to 2021, for which expenditure amounted to euro 15.5 billion, it is noted that in 2022 the expenditure for drugs rose further, approaching pre-pandemic COVID-19 levels, settling at a similar rate than in 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior - Directorate General for Anti-Drug Services.

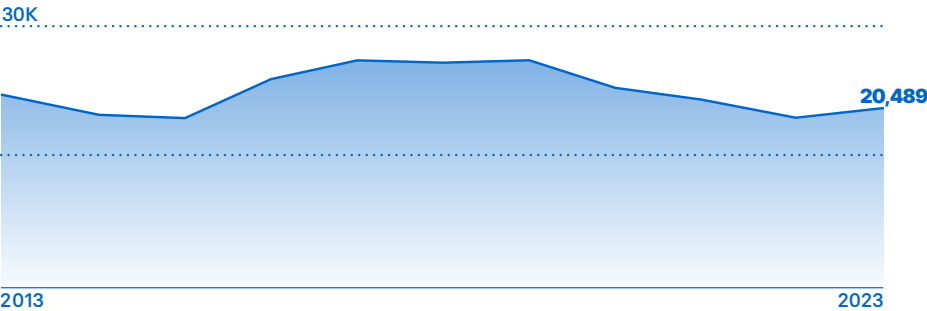
<sup>5</sup> Source: National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) - Department for Statistical Production Directorate General for National Accounting.

Table 1.1.  
Anti-drug operations carried out by the Police in 2023

Anti-drug operations



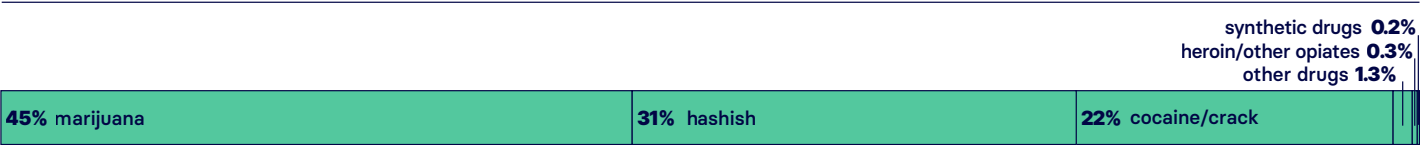
Trend over time



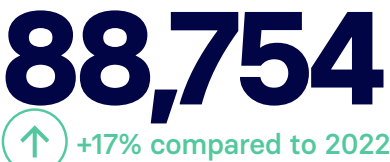
Percentage of operations carried out



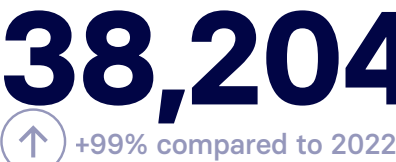
Quantity seized



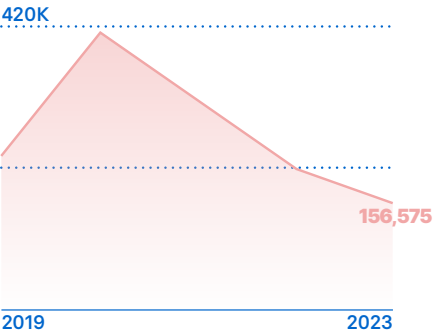
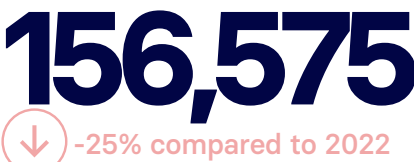
Quantity (kg)



Quantity (tablets/doses)

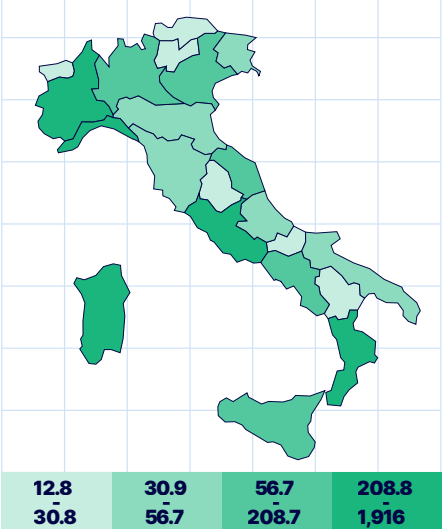


Quantity (cannabis plants)



Sources: Ministry of the Interior - DCSA (Directorate General for Anti-Drug Services) | National Institute of Health - National Addiction and Doping Centre | Ministry of Health - Directorate General for Medical Devices and Pharmaceutical Service - Central Narcotics Office.  
Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.

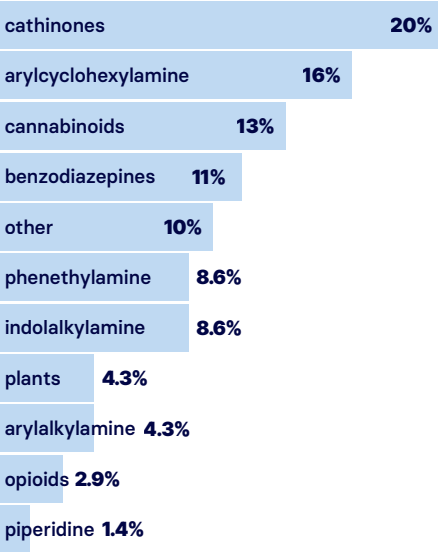
Quantity seized (kg)  
per 100,000 residents (15-74 years)



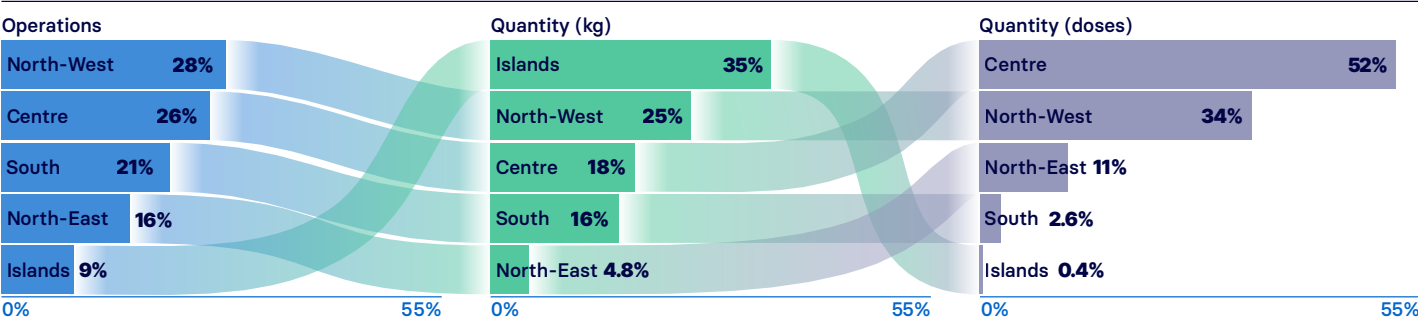
New substances circulating in Italy

**70**  
new substances  
identified by SNAP  
(early drug alert system)

**48**  
substances included  
in the Ministerial Tables



Distribution by geographical area of operations and quantity seized



Quantity seized (kg) in customs or territorial areas



The National Early Alert System (SNAP) is designed to detect potentially dangerous phenomena for public health related to the emergence of new drugs at an early stage. It issues alerts to agencies and facilities in charge of health protection and promotion. In 2023, SNAP identified **70 new psychoactive substances** circulating in the country<sup>6</sup>. These substances mainly belong to the classes of cathinones (20%), arylcyclohexylamines (16%), cannabinoids (13%) and benzodiazepines (11%).

There were 225 **incoming alerts** (input) in 2023. Of these, 99 were issued by law enforcement agencies, 88 by Collaborating Centres, and 38 were alerts from the *European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction* (EMCDDA). 32% of the latter were informative documents of particular relevance to health and social risk, such as the identification of high-concentration ecstasy (MDMA) pills, epidemic outbreaks of acute intoxication associated with the consumption of nitazene opioids in France, the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the consumption of heroin adulterated with synthetic cannabinoids in France.

Reports from Italy and the EMCDDA covered a total of 93 new psychoactive substances belonging to the classes of synthetic cathinones (17), synthetic cannabinoids (15), arylcyclohexylamines (11), phenethylamines (10), benzodiazepines (9), synthetic opioids (9), indolalkylamines

(6), botanicals (3), arylalkylamines (3), piperidines (1) and others (9).

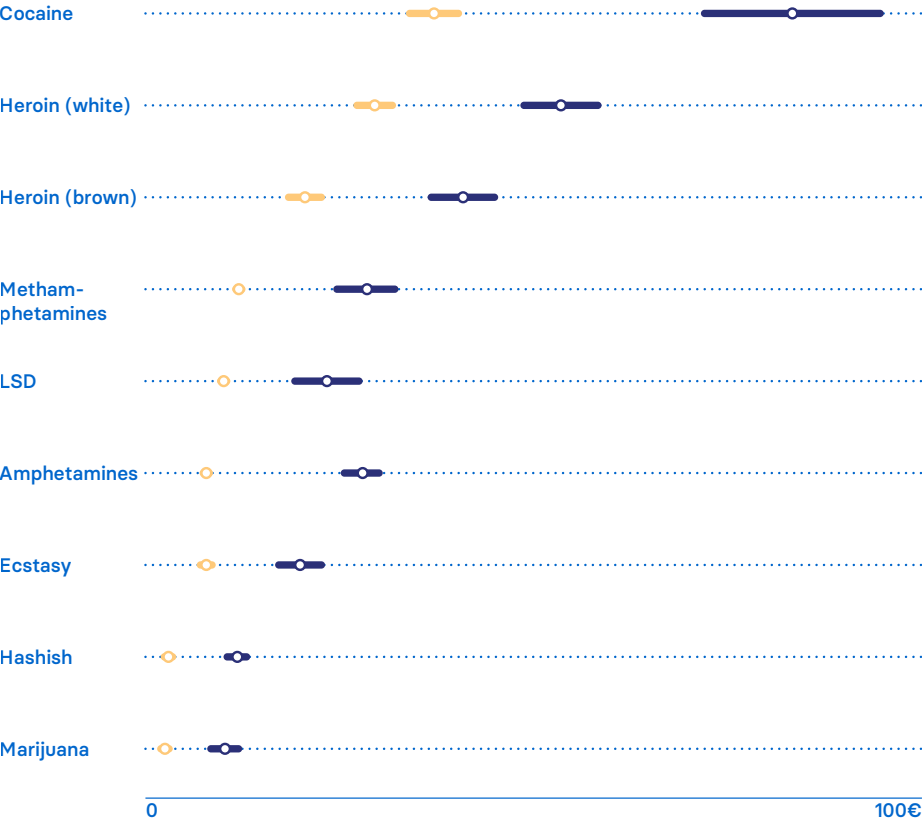
In 2023, of the 73 communications sent to the Collaborating Centres and drawn up by SNAP (output), 13 were **law enforcement reports** about 57 new psychoactive substances circulating in the country, most of which belonged to the classes of synthetic cathinones (14) and synthetic cannabinoids (8). Outputs also include **25 Alerts** (urgent alerts involving coordinated action to activate the appropriate response procedures): 15 Grade I, 8 Grade II and 2 Grade III alerts, respectively. The 2 Grade III Alerts concerned the spread of illegal fentanyl and of xylazine as an adulterant. Reports of substances belonging to the class of synthetic cathinones prevailed among Grade II Alerts, while 7 of the 15 Grade I Alerts came from reports within the country.

The Ministry of Health, on the basis of 51 reports from the National Early Alert System concerning numerous substances, some of which were already under control in Italy, issued **7 decrees for substances not yet listed in the tables** (48 in total), thus updating the tables, including 44 substances in Table I (opium and derivatives, coca leaves and their derivatives, amphetamines and their derivatives, hallucinogens) and 4 substances in Table IV (benzodiazepines). The predominant categories are synthetic/semi-synthetic cannabinoids (19) and synthetic cathinones (8).

<sup>6</sup> Source: National Institute of Health - National Addiction and Doping Centre.



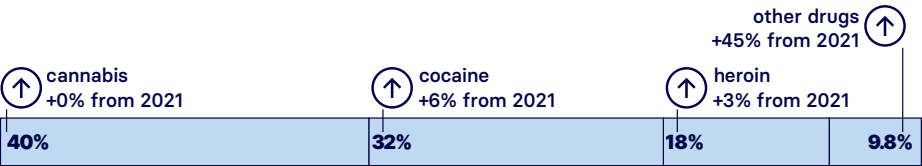
Price per g/dose in drug trafficking or drug dealing



Drug use expenditure in 2022

↑ **16.4 billion**  
(+5.8% compared to 2021)

Expenditure by substance



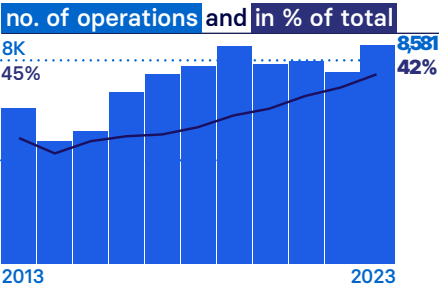
Sources: ISTAT - CNB | Ministry of the Interior - DCSA (Directorate General for Anti-Drug Services) | Ministry of Defence - Carabinieri Scientific Investigations Group.  
Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.

Table 1.2.  
Drug supply and market characteristics in 2023

Cocaine/Crack

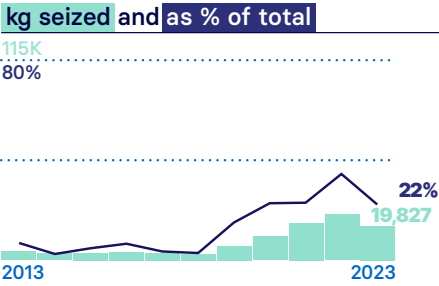
**8,581 operations**

↑ (+14% from 2022)

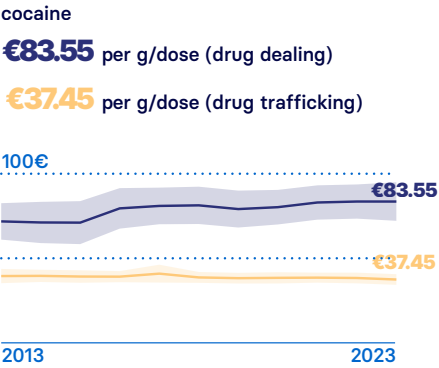


**19,827 kg seized**

↓ (-25% from 2022)



Market prices for drug dealing and drug trafficking



Mean percentage of active substance

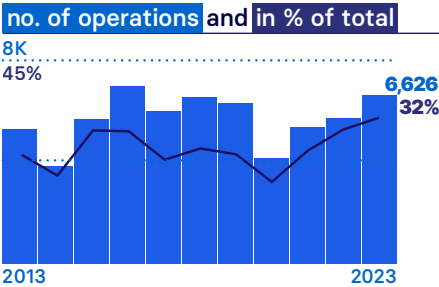
cocaine  
carabinieri, drug dealing **72%** (min.0.04%-max.100%)  
carabinieri, drug trafficking **77%** (min.7.8%-max.99%)

police  
**71%** (min.0.2%-max.89%)

Hashish

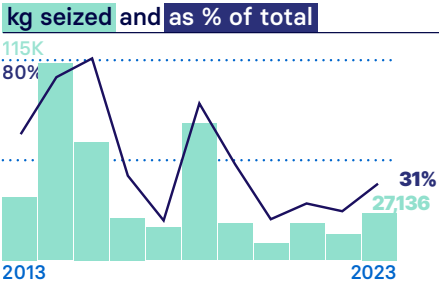
**6,626 operations**

↑ (+15% from 2022)

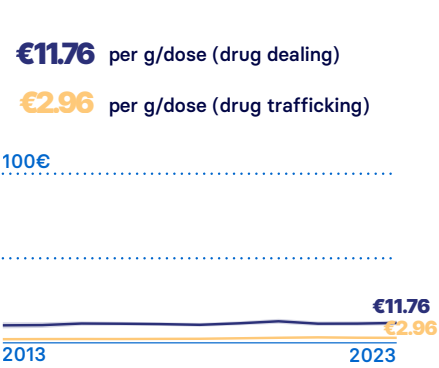


**27,136 kg seized**

↑ (+81% from 2022)



Market prices for drug dealing and drug trafficking



Mean percentage of active substance

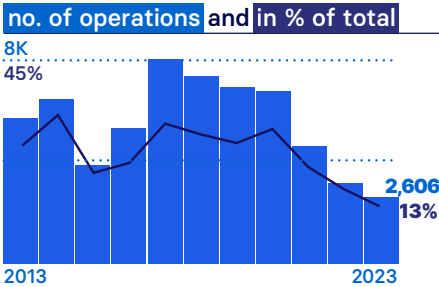
carabinieri, drug dealing **28%** (min.1%-max.60%)  
carabinieri, drug trafficking **29%** (min.1.9%-max.54%)

police  
**29%** (min.0.7%-max.90%)

Marijuana

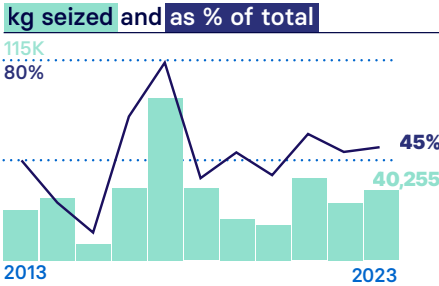
**2,606 operations**

↓ (~18% from 2022)

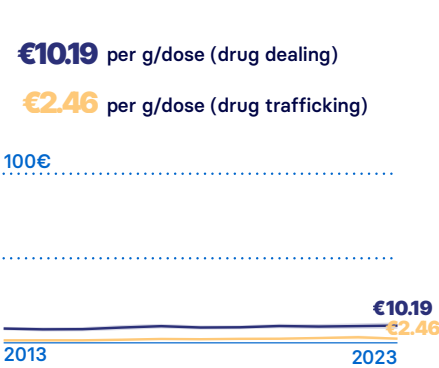


**40,225 kg seized**

↑ (+22% from 2022)



Market prices for drug dealing and drug trafficking



Mean percentage of active substance

carabinieri, drug dealing **13%** (min.1%-max.49%)  
carabinieri, drug trafficking **12%** (min.1%-max.39%)

police  
**14%** (min.0.6%-max.46%)

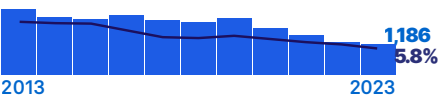
## Heroin/other opiates

**1,186 operations**

⬇️ (-8.2% from 2022)

no. of operations and in % of total

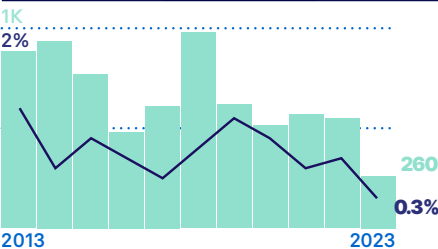
8K  
45%



**260 kg seized**

⬇️ (-53% from 2022)

kg seized and as % of total



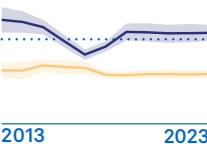
Market prices for **drug dealing** and **drug trafficking**

heroin (white)

**€53.78** per g (drug dealing)

**€29.48** per g (drug trafficking)

100€

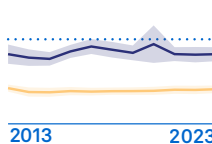


heroin (brown)

**€41.19** per g (drug dealing)

**€20.48** per g (drug trafficking)

100€



Mean percentage of active substance

heroin

carabinieri, drug dealing

**8.3%**

(min.0%-max.46.2%)

police

**19%**

(min.0.4%-max.88%)

carabinieri, drug trafficking

**9.8%**

(min.1.1%-max.23%)

## Synthetic drugs

**308 operations**

⬆️ (+5.5% from 2022)

no. of operations and in % of total

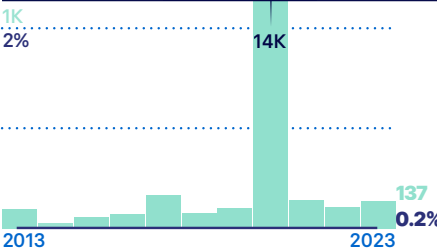
8K  
45%



**137 kg seized**

⬆️ (+33% from 2022)

kg seized and as % of total

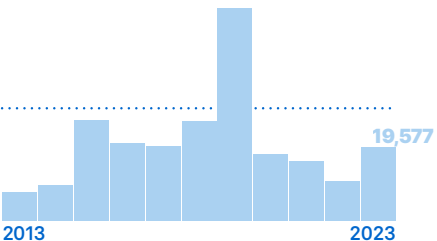


**19,577 doses seized**

⬆️ (+86% from 2022)

doses seized

60K



Mean percentage of active substance

MDMA

carabinieri, drug dealing

**72%**

(min.8.5%-max.98%)

police

**58%**

(min.2%-max.84%)

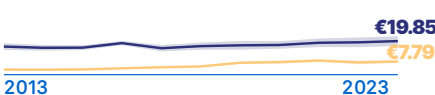
Market prices for **drug dealing** and **drug trafficking**

ecstasy

**€19.85** per g/dose (drug dealing)

**€7.79** per g/dose (drug trafficking)

100€

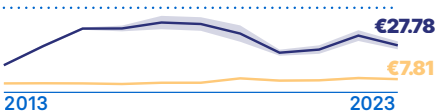


amphetamines

**€27.78** per g/dose (drug dealing)

**€7.81** per g/dose (drug trafficking)

100€



methamphetamines

**€28.46** per g/dose (drug dealing)

**€11.96** per g/dose (drug trafficking)

100€

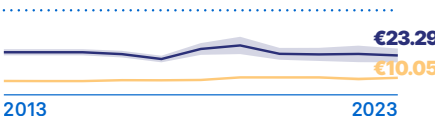


LSD

**€23.29** per g/dose (drug dealing)

**€10.05** per g/dose (drug trafficking)

100€





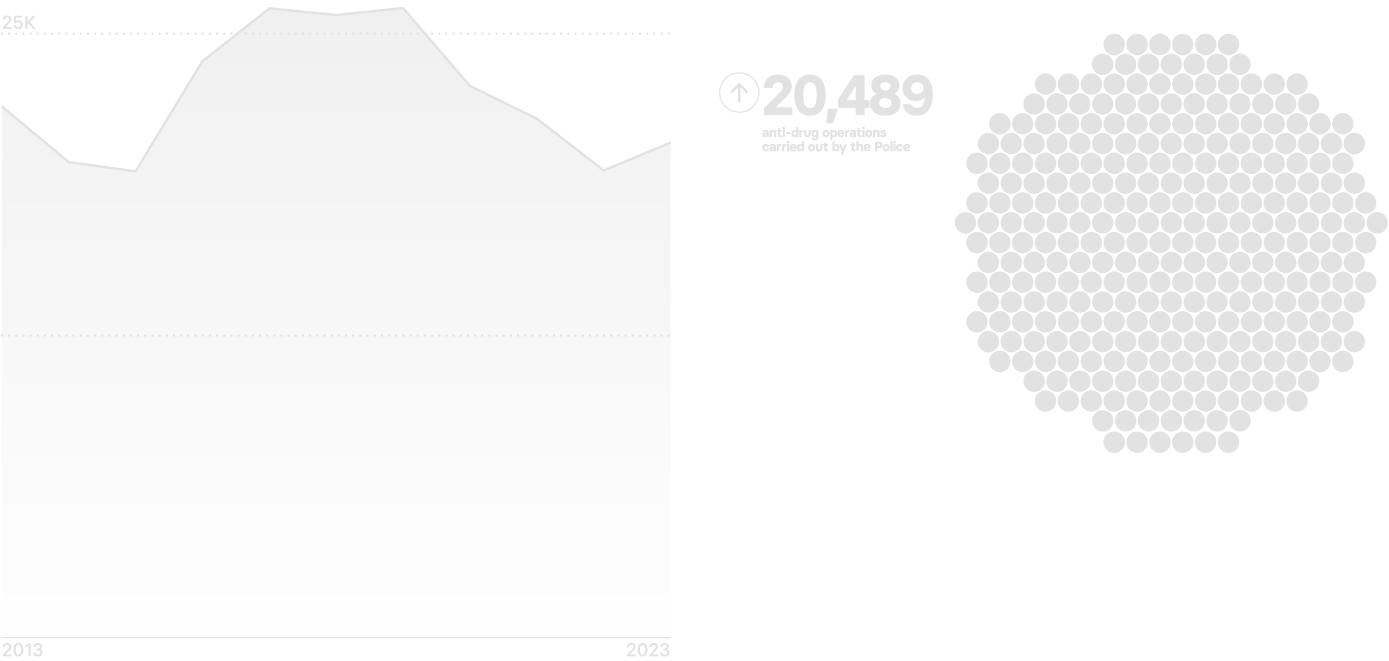


Cannabinoids

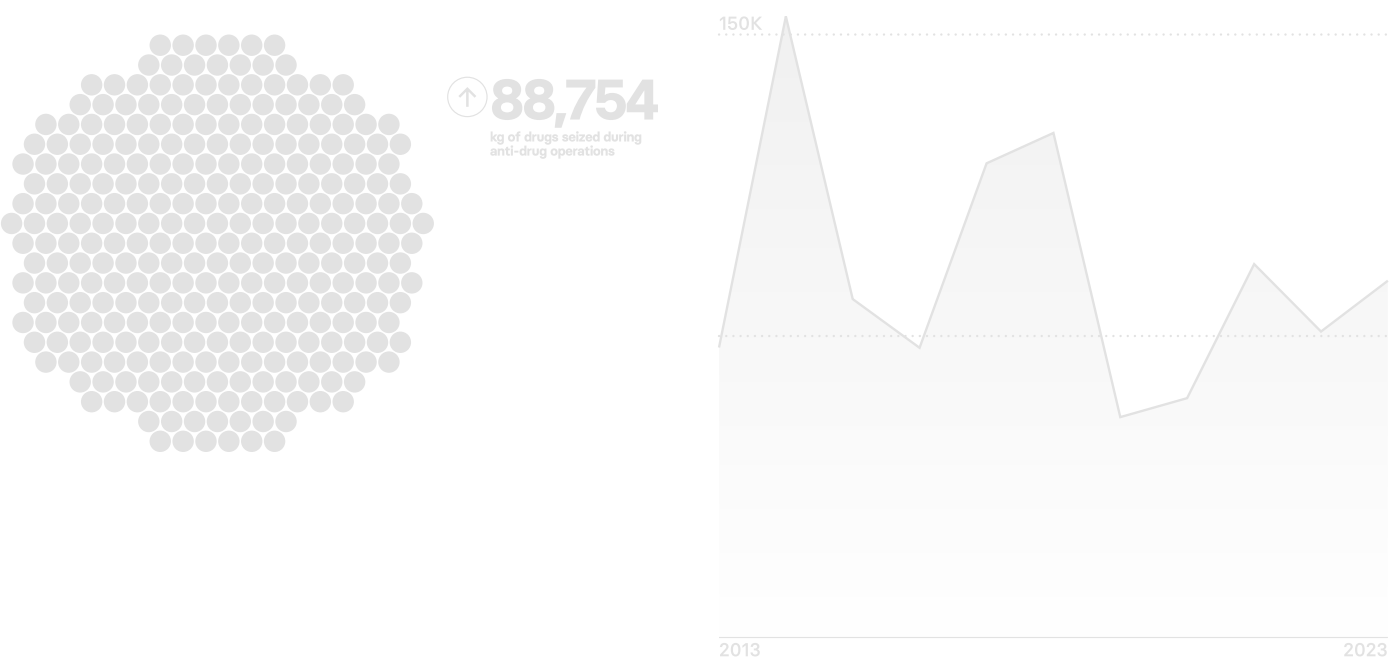
Cocaine/Crack

Heroin and other opiates

Anti-drug operations in 2023



Quantity seized (kg) in 2023



Note: the missing percentage can be attributed to other substances.



## Chapter 2

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# Use and trends among young people

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In 2023, almost 960,000 young people aged 15 to 19, or 39% of the student population, report having used an **illegal psychoactive substance** at least once in their lifetime, and more than **680,000 students (28%)** during the past year<sup>1</sup>. This type of consumption has a **higher prevalence in boys (30%)** than in girls (25%). In addition, the **trend** observed in the post-pandemic period is confirmed, with a return to the values observed in 2019 as early as 2022.

Almost 700,000 students (28%) report having used **cannabis** at least once in their lives, **550,000** report having used it in the last year (**22%**), and almost 70,000 students reported frequent use (20 or more times in a month). Values for use increase with age and show an overall higher prevalence among boys than among girls of the same age. Almost two-thirds of students used cannabis for the first time between the ages of 15 and 17, while 29% used it at 14 years of age or younger. This

figure is lower than in 2022. After the significant increase observed in the post-pandemic period, cannabis use has fallen slightly.

More than 260,000 students (11%) have taken at least one **New Psychoactive Substance (NPS)** in their lifetime, and almost **160,000** during the year (**6.4%**). The most commonly used NPS in life are synthetic cannabinoids (6.9%), ketamine (2%) and synthetic opioids (1.7%). With the exception of synthetic cannabinoids, for which percentages of use tend to increase with age, for the other NPSs use appears to be higher among 16-18 year old students and, with the exception of synthetic opioids, use is higher among men than women. The use of these substances has been on the rise since the pandemic, with the highest values ever recorded for ketamine use in 2023.

Nearly 150,000 youth (6%) report having used **stimulants** (amphetamines, ecstasy, GHB, MDB and MDMA) in their lifetime. Nearly **72,000 students (2.9%)** report having used them in the last year, and 23,000 students said that they used it frequently, at least 10 times in the last 30 days (0.9%). In the past year, mainly youth used stimulants, with a peak prevalence among 17 year olds. Half of the users report first use between the ages of 15 and 17, while just over a third report use before the age of 15. After a downward trend in use that began in 2013, an upward trend is noticed, reaching an all-time high in 2023.

<sup>1</sup> Source: ESPAD®Italia 2023 Study, National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology.

Index	<p>About 100,000 students (4.1%) have taken <b>hallucinogens</b> in their lifetime, almost <b>49,000 (2%)</b> used them in the last year, and 13,000 used them at least 10 times in the last month (0.5%). Even considering hallucinogens, there is an increase in consumption as age increases and, for all age groups, users are predominantly male. Nearly half of the children who have used hallucinogens report having done so for the first time between the ages of 15 and 17, while 37% have done so before the age of 14 (a figure that has risen since 2022). Hallucinogen use has risen significantly since 2021, exceeding pre-pandemic values in 2023.</p>
Infographic index	
Chapter 1	<p>94,000 students (3.8%) report having used <b>cocaine</b> at least once in their lifetime; almost <b>54,000 (2.2%)</b> did so in 2023, and 18,000 used it 10 or more times in the last 30 days (0.7%). Mainly 17-year-olds used cocaine in the past year and, in all age groups, use of the substance is higher in men than in women. Of the students who have used cocaine, about half report first use between the ages of 15 and 17, while 39% have first used the substance before the age of 15 (a figure that has increased since 2022). Again, following a long period of decreasing consumption, an upward trend has been observed from 2021 onwards, reaching values above the pre-pandemic level in 2023.</p>
Chapter 2	<p>Over <b>180,000 students (7.4%)</b> report having used <b>more than one psychoactive substance</b> in 2023 and, of these, 110,000 (4.5%) say that they used two substances. The substances most commonly used by young polydrug users were cannabis (90%), NPSs (75%), stimulants (35%), inhalants and solvents (33%), and cocaine (27%). Significantly higher rates of <b>“risky” behaviour</b> are recorded among polydrug users. For instance, compared to users of one substance, problems with the police, theft, injury and damage to public or private property are two-fold higher. In addition, higher percentages are recorded for frequent intake of alcoholic beverages, <i>binge drinking</i> and drunkenness.</p>
Chapter 3	<p>62 thousand (2.5%) youth have consumed <b>opiates</b> at least once in their lifetime, <b>30 thousand (1.2%)</b> in 2023, and almost 10,000 (0.4%) frequently (10 or more times in the last month). The use of this substance is prevalent among minors, and is mostly reported by boys rather than by girls. Once they become of age, prevalence diminishes and does not show any gender differences. Approximately half of the student users first consumed opiates between the ages of 15 and 17, while 38% have done so before the age of 14 (a figure that is higher than in 2022). After a decreasing trend recorded since 2002, the values observed in the last two years show an increase in opiate consumption.</p>
Chapter 4	
Chapter 5	<p>In general, the <b>perception of risk associated with the use of psychoactive substances is just over 50%</b> in the student population. Between 52% and 59% of students associate a high risk with trying substances such as</p>

cocaine/crack, opiates, stimulants, NPSs and hallucinogens, while 28% of students associate occasional cannabis use with a high risk. Risk perception tends to be significantly lower among substance users.

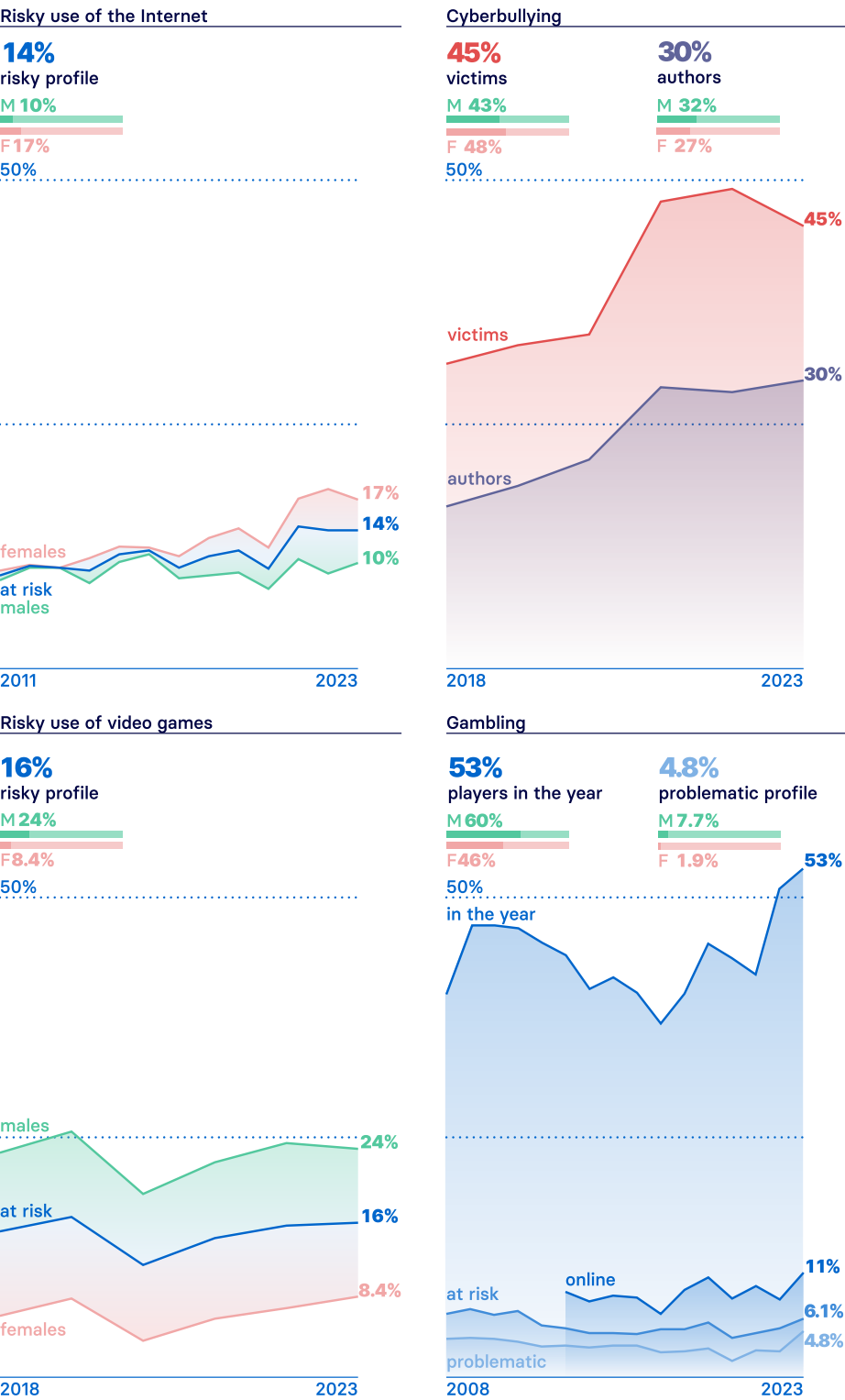
**Cannabis** is considered the **most easily accessible substance**: more than a third of students (35%) say that they can obtain it easily. **Access to other substances** is considerably lower (cocaine is considered easily accessible by 10% of students, hallucinogens by 7.4%, stimulants by 6.8% and opiates by 4.3%), but increases significantly among users. More than one-fourth believe that they can obtain substances on the

street, at friends' houses or at discos. Finally, **drug purchase on the Internet** is indicated by about one fifth of young people who use substances.

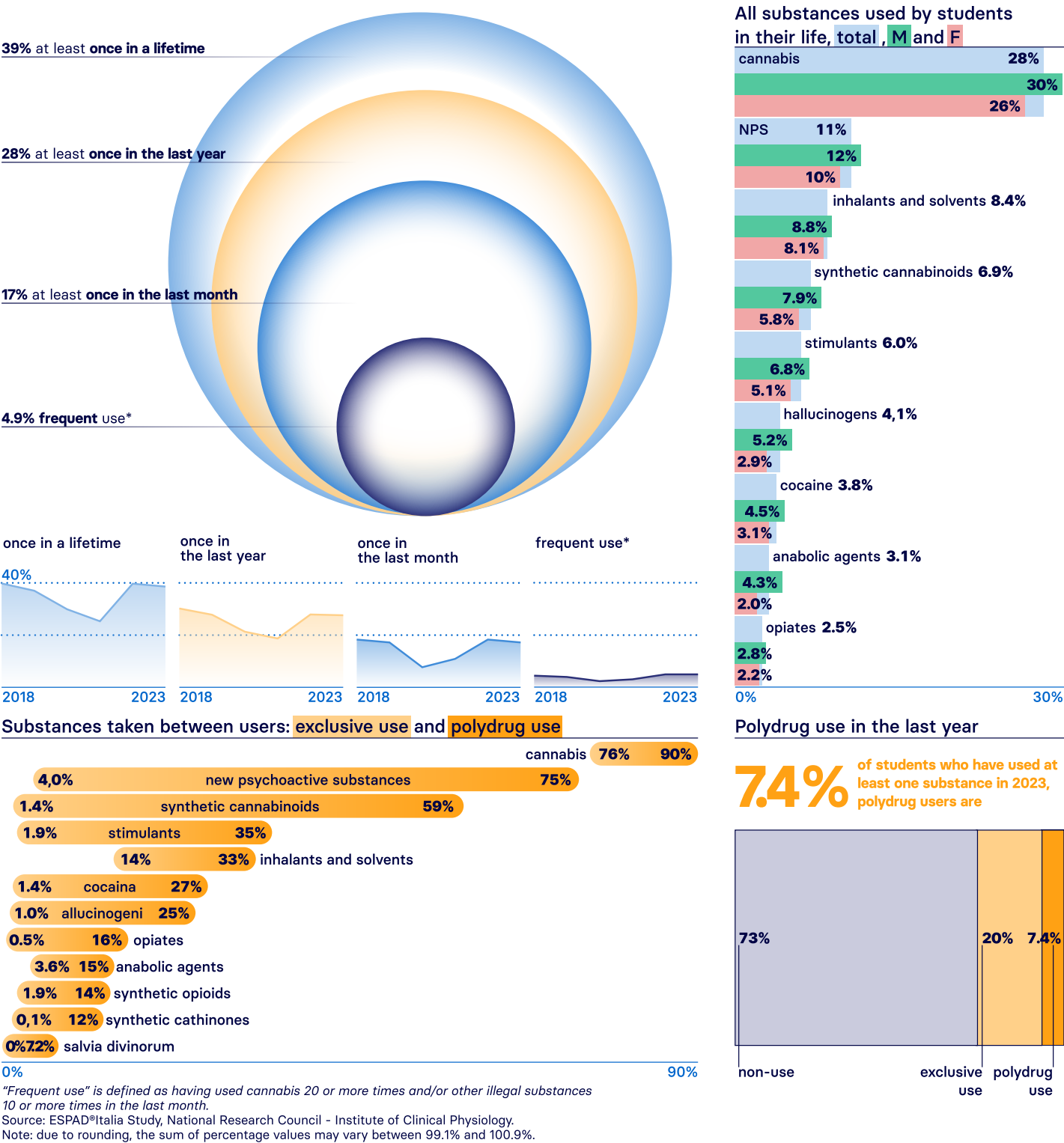
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Table 2.1.  
Use of drugs in the student population (15-19 years) in 2023

New addictions and risky behaviour



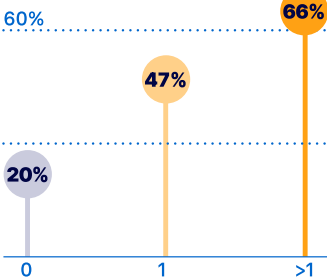
Students who have taken at least one illegal substance



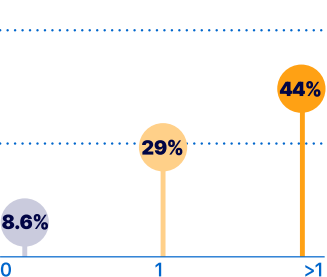


“Risky” behaviour and % prevalence between non-use, exclusive use and polydrug use

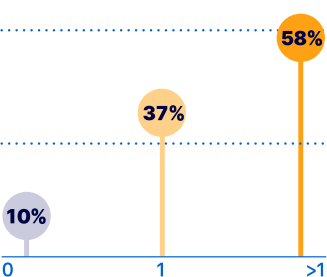
Binge drinking in the last month



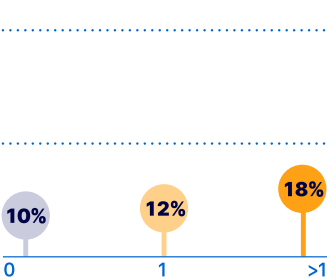
Got drunk in the last month



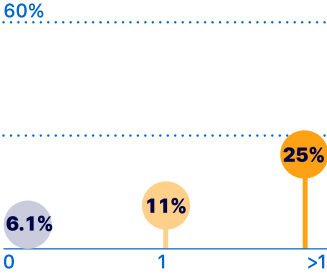
Smoked at least 1 cigarette per day in the last year



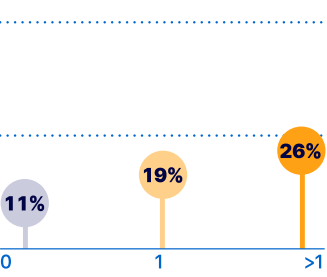
Have a “risky” gaming profile (Sogs-Ra)



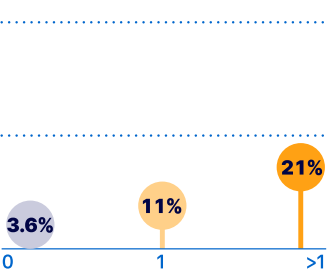
Have a “problematic” gambling profile (Sogs-Ra)



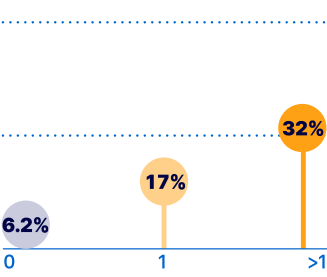
Damaged public/private property on purpose



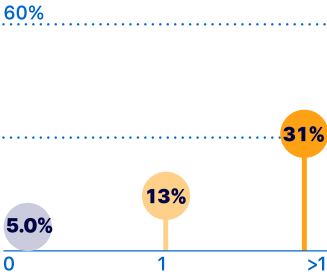
Stole something worth at least 10 euro



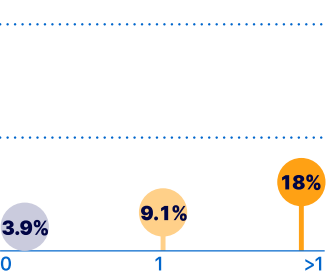
Had problems with the Police/ was reported to the Prefect



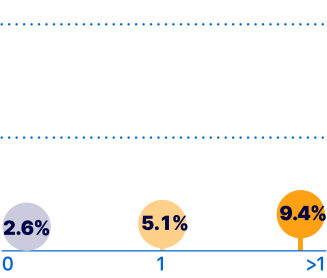
Seriously hurt others causing them to seek medical attention



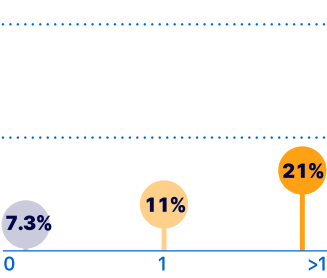
Filmed a violent scene with their mobile phone



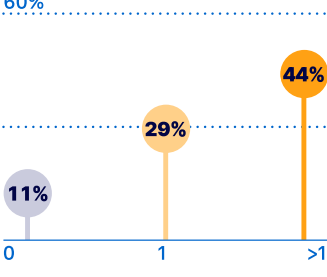
Usually spend at least 45 euro per week without parental supervision



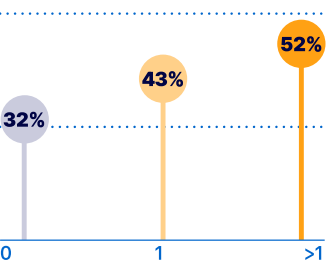
Had unprotected sexual intercourse



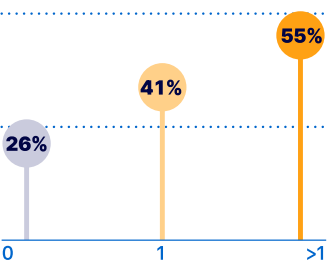
Have had serious problems with friends



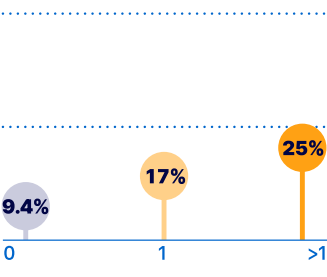
Had problems with teachers



Missed at least 3 days of school for no reason

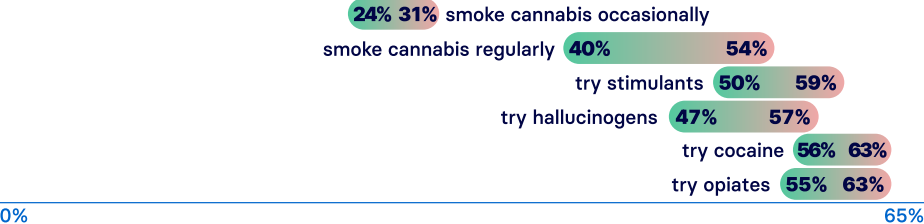


Had an accident while driving a vehicle

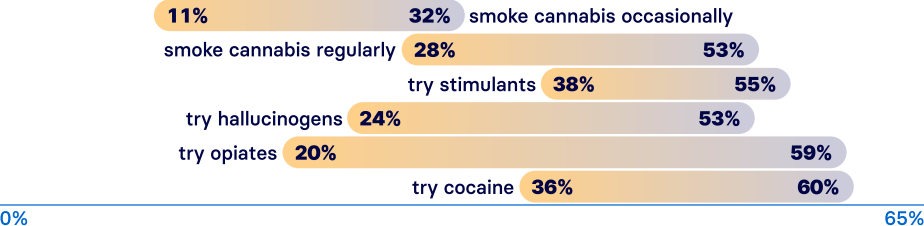


Perception of risk and accessibility of substances

% males and females with a high risk perception



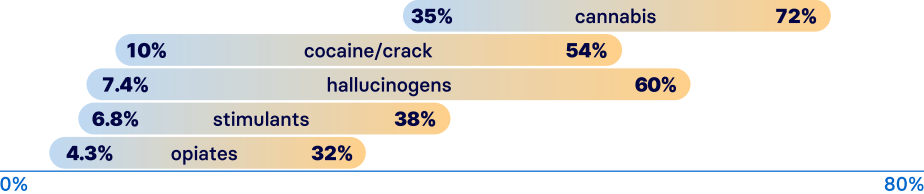
% student users and non-users with a high risk perception



% student users who know where to find a substance in different places

	cannabis	synthetic cannabis	stimulants	hallucinogens	cocaine and/or crack	opiates
in the street/outdoors	58%	57%	37%	26%	40%	18%
school	28%	26%	21%	20%	22%	20%
home of friends	36%	24%	30%	30%	39%	26%
disco/bar	26%	27%	35%	37%	31%	20%
pusher	58%	49%	54%	54%	61%	45%
Internet	14%	23%	22%	22%	26%	26%
public events	19%	15%	23%	27%	21%	10%
home	6.0%	8.3%	9.3%	12%	15%	13%

% total students and users who find it easy to obtain psychoactive substances



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The use among young people of non-prescription **legal psychoactive substances**, such as tobacco, alcohol and psychiatric drugs is analysed, along with the use of illegal substances. With regard to **tobacco** use, more than 1.2 million young people, i.e., 50% of the student population, report having smoked a cigarette at least once in their lifetime, and **950,000 (39%)** during the year 2023<sup>2</sup>: both of these rates of use are higher among female students. In addition, 480,000 students smoked at least one cigarette per day in the last year (19%), with the prevalence increasing with age. Among students who have smoked cigarettes at least once in their lifetime, more than half (57%) did so for the first time before the age of 14, and 40% between the ages of 15 and 17. Overall, the use of traditional cigarettes is rising once again after a slump in 2022.

480,000 students (19%) report having used **combustion-free cigarettes** at least once in their lifetime, and almost **410,000 (16%)** have done so in the past year. The year 2023 shows a reduction in the use of smokeless cigarettes, after a growth trend that peaked in 2022. Other types of alternative nicotine use, such as water pipes and snuff, are much less common. **E-cigarettes** complete the picture: 1,200,000 youth (48%) have used them once in their lifetime, and over **900,000 (37%)** have done so in 2023. In both cases there is a higher prevalence among girls. 54% of the students smoked their first e-cigarette between the ages of 15 and 17, and 40% before the age of 15. The use of electronic cigarettes is on the rise, exceeding pre-pandemic values.

In conclusion, considering the combined use of devices for nicotine use, it can be seen that **59% of students** have used at least one **nicotine product** in the past year.

Analysing **alcohol intake**, the data show widespread use among youth. In fact, 2 million students (81%) report having consumed alcoholic beverages at least once in their lifetime, while over **1.8 million** have done so in the last year (75%), with a slightly higher prevalence among girls, and 140,000 students, predominantly boys, have taken alcoholic beverages at least 20 times in the last 30 days (5.6%). A more in-depth look at this phenomenon shows that approximately 1 million students (41%) have reported excessive alcohol consumption (**drunkenness**) once in their lifetime, **750,000** during the course of the year (30%), and almost 43,000 have done so at least 10 times in the last 30 days (1.7%). With the exception of frequent behaviour, there are always higher percentages among girls. More than 30% report a first experience of drunkenness before the age of 15, 64% between the ages of 15 and 17. While there is a slight decrease in drunkenness in the year and in the month in 2023, frequent drunkenness recorded the highest values ever. Almost **710,000 students (29%)** also reported having taken 5 or more alcoholic beverages in the past thirty days within a narrow time span (**binge drinking**). Prevalence increases with age, and is slightly higher among boys than girls. After the decline observed in 2020, this type of consumption rose again in 2021, while remaining around lower values than those observed before the pandemic.

<sup>2</sup> Source: ESPAD®Italia 2023 Study, National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology.

Finally, looking at the use of **non-prescription psychiatric drugs (npd)**, about 440,000 students (18%) reported using at least one type of npd psychiatric drug in their lifetime; more than **280,000 (11%)** used them in the last year, and 58,000 students used them frequently at least 10 times in the last 30 days (2.3%). After recording a decline in 2020, the use of these substances is also on the rise among students. In 2023, the psychiatric drugs most frequently used by young people were those for sleep and/or relaxation (8.3%), followed by those for attention and/or hyperactivity (3.5%), for weight loss (2.6%) and for mood (2.5%). The use of psychiatric npd drugs records an overall two-fold increase among girls. More specifically, with regard to the use of drugs for sleep, and even more for weight loss, the female percentage is at least three-fold higher than that of their male peers.

With regard to the perception of risk in the use of illegal substances, the perception of risk in the use of legal psychoactive substances shows lower values overall. The behaviour considered most at risk is “smoking 10

or more cigarettes a day”, associated with a high risk by 58% of young people, followed by occasional use of npd psychiatric drugs (51%), *binge drinking* every weekend (50%), drinking 1-2 glasses of alcoholic beverages almost every day (44%), and getting drunk once a week (36%). Awareness of the health risk drops significantly with regard to occasional use, such as smoking cigarettes occasionally (17%) or drinking 1-2 glasses of alcoholic beverages several times a week (14%). Again, the perception of risk decreases considerably among users, as already observed concerning the use of illegal substances.

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# Families and Prevention, pilot study on parental perception and knowledge

The preliminary results of the research “Families and Prevention: a pilot study on parental perception and knowledge regarding consumption of psychoactive substances and alcohol by minors” are based on data collected between **March and April 2024** through an anonymous survey administered to **4,901 parents** of students aged between 9 and 14 years attending 20 primary and lower secondary schools in the Metropolitan City of Rome Capital.

The parents surveyed, predominantly female (76%) and cohabiting, married or in a civil partnership with the other parent (81%), consider themselves capable of **recognising symptoms** resulting from the use of legal substances (alcohol and tobacco derivatives) and cannabinoids (>50%), while less than half of the respondents consider themselves capable of recognising symptoms resulting from the use of other illegal psychoactive substances. The ability to recognise symptoms increases as the respondents' educational qualification increases, and is higher among fathers, with the exception of psychiatric drugs for which a slightly higher maternal competence is noted.

It is precisely with regard to the consumption of legal substances and cannabinoids that greater **tolerance** is observed: two-fifths of the parents are particularly permissive with regard to tobacco and e-cigarettes, and about half believe that the consumption of alcohol and cannabinoids should be contextualised before being judged. Conversely, the use of other illegal substances is considered absolutely intolerable by almost 90% of the respondents. In general, fathers are more permissive. Those with high educational

qualifications are on average more tolerant of alcohol and cannabinoids, whereas they are more intolerant of tobacco and e-cigarette use.

With the exception of drugs and psychiatric medicines, most parents consider all the substances **easily accessible** to their children: more than 70% of respondents consider legal substances easily accessible, more than 60% say this for cannabinoids, and more than 50% for other illegal drugs. **Outdoor areas**, such as streets and parks, are the ones most frequently mentioned as places where all the substances can be found; along with these, **schools and friends' houses** are mentioned, followed by places most frequently visited by their children. If outdoor venues are mainly suitable for obtaining all illegal substances and psychiatric drugs, a friend's house is more suitable for legal substances.

More than 60% of parents believe that legal substances and cannabinoids are **used** by minors in the area where they live, a percentage that exceeds 80% when referring exclusively to tobacco and e-cigarettes; almost 4 out of 10 believe this to be true for all other illegal substances, while more than half of the respondents cannot make a judgement about the prevalence of psychiatric drug use.

If they became aware that their children were using substances, most parents would mainly resort to **information and family involvement**, providing information about the risks. The approach most often adopted in such cases envisaged being close to the child but, at the same time, being firm and steadfast. For all psychoactive substances,

one would keep track of movements and friends, and increase involvement in family activities; especially for illegal substances, with the exception of cannabinoids, one would turn to **specialists** and minimise the availability of money.

While 12% of parents have not yet sought **information** about risks, prevention and treatment of psychoactive substance use, most have done so through television and radio. Newspapers and magazines, specialised websites and social media follow. Only half of the parents are aware of the **health and social care facilities** that provide public services for people with psychoactive substance use problems, the best known being the Addiction Services (SerD), known to 4 out of 10 parents.

The majority of parents believe that their children have not **used** any of the substances investigated, but with regard to legal substances, the percentage of respondents reporting that they do not know whether their children smoke (6.5%) or use alcohol (2.8%) increases.

More than 80% of the respondents are satisfied with their children, while with regard to the **family climate** over the past year, the most frequently used definitions are affectionate (41%) and cooperative (28%). In the family environment, racism, bullying, cyberbullying and sexism are discussed quite often, while topics such as psychoactive substances and sex are approached less often. In 2 out of 10 households, alcohol consumption is never mentioned, and in 3 out of 10 the use of illegal psychoactive substances is never discussed.

Today, in the context of an overall analysis of risky habits among young people, it is impossible not to consider behaviour linked to the use of new digital technologies, the use of video games and gambling, but also the phenomenon of social withdrawal. Starting with the use of the **Internet**, more than **330,000 students (14%)** in 2023 report **potentially risky use of the Web**, neglecting friends, losing hours of sleep in order to stay connected, and reporting a bad mood when deprived<sup>3</sup>. The percentage of students “at risk” is stable compared to the previous two years, but confirms the increase in the post-pandemic period. The same growth was recorded in relation to the **challenges** taken on the Internet by young people, predominantly male, in order to be accepted into a group or community. In 2023, 3.8% of students received an invitation and 1.3% actually participated in a **challenge**.

As for **cyberbullying**, the trend is growing overall, compared to the pre-pandemic period. In 2023, more than **1.1 million young people**, i.e., **45%** of the student population, report having been **victims of cyberbullying**, i.e., having been subjected to violent behaviour online such as abuse, insults or threats, sharing of personal photos, etc. Mainly girls have been victims of cyberbullying, while the **perpetrators** of violent actions - a total of almost **730,000 students (30%)** - are predominantly boys. As for the phenomenon of **ghosting** i.e., suddenly and unexplainedly breaking off all contact with a person, 650,000 students (26%) report having “ghosted” someone in 2023, and almost 610,000 students (25%) report

having been victims of ghosting. Both of these values are slightly higher than in the previous year.

Turning to the world of video games, when it goes beyond the limits of a normal pastime, **gaming** can result in risky behaviour, negatively affecting the psychological functions of a boy or girl, and having a negative impact on social relations and/or school performance. Almost **400,000 students (16%)** presented a **“risky” gaming profile** in 2023, with percentages that were more than three-fold higher among boys, who spent many hours of the day gaming, and getting into a bad mood if they were unable to do so. This behaviour has been largely stable since 2018.

On the other hand, **gambling** is growing strongly. Almost 1,500,000 students, amounting to 59% of the total student population, claim to have gambled in their lifetime, and **1,300,000 (53%)** have done so in the last year. The most popular games are Scratch&Win (74%), football betting (35%), other games such as poker, roulette and dice (28%), and slot machines/videolottery (24%). Compared to female peers, a higher percentage of boys plays almost all the games analysed. **Online gambling** is also on the rise: in 2023, **270,000** youth report having gambled via the Internet, amounting to **11%** of the student population, the highest figure ever recorded. Students with a **“risky” gambling profile** (6.1%) and those with a **“problematic” gambling profile** (4.8%) are also on the rise. These children also show a higher percentage of other risky behaviour than their peers,

<sup>3</sup> Source: ESPAD®Italia 2023 Study, National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology.



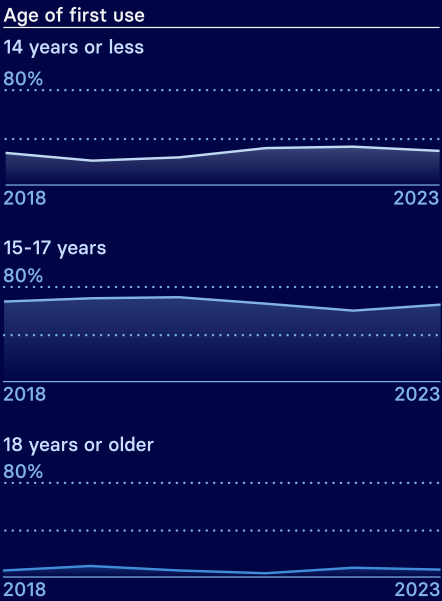
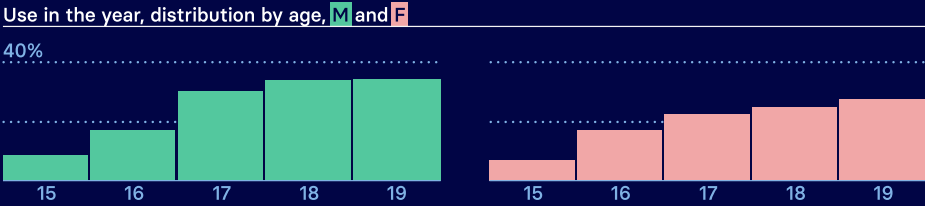


Table 2.2.  
Prevalence of illegal and legal psychoactive substance use in the student population in 2023

Illegal psychoactive substance

Cannabis

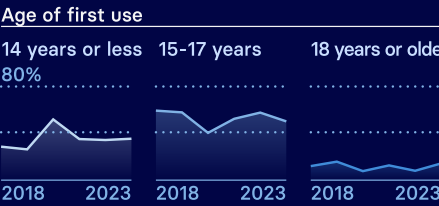
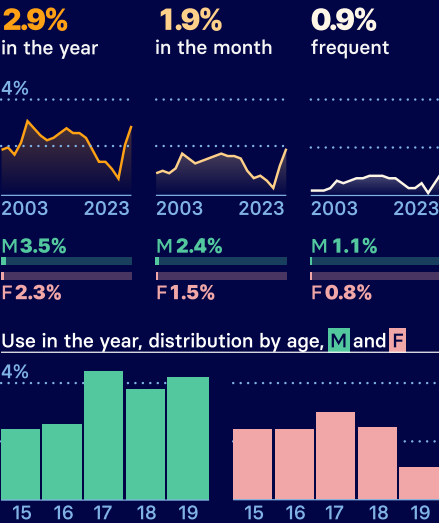
Students who have used it



Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.

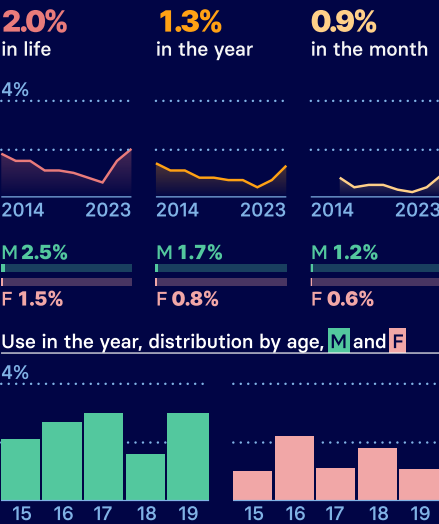
Stimulants

Students who have used it



Ketamine (NPS)

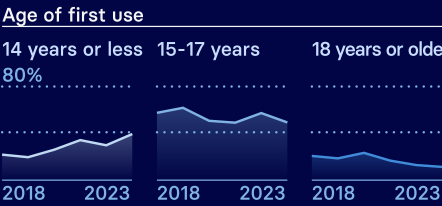
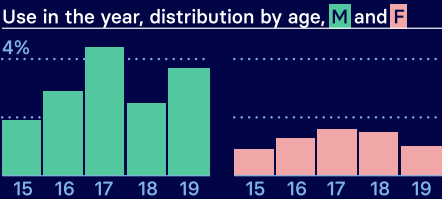
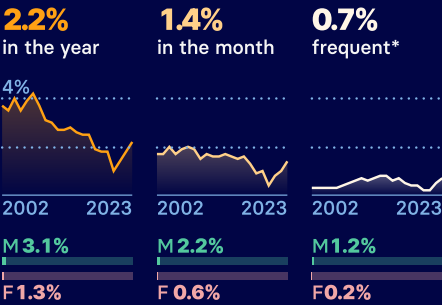
Students who have used it



\*"Frequent use" is defined as having used cannabis 20 or more times and/or other illegal substances 10 or more times in the last month.

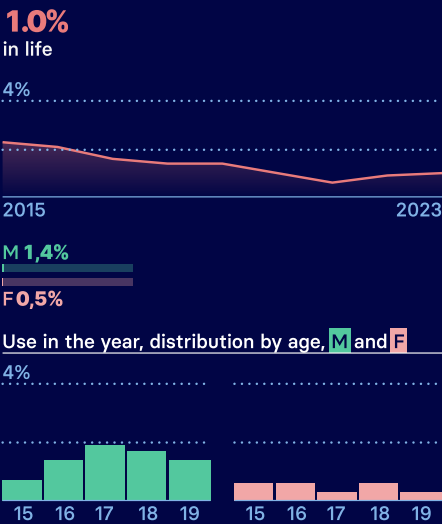
Cocaine

Students who have used it



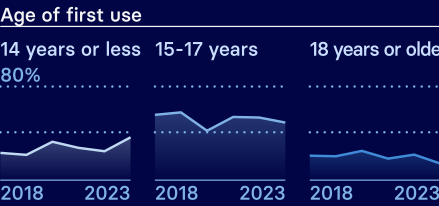
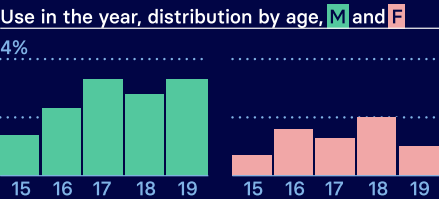
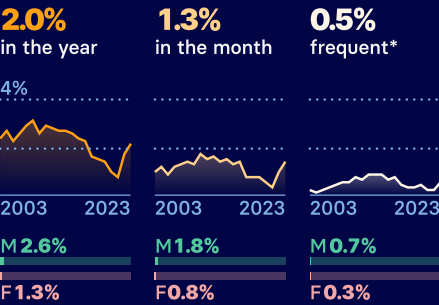
*Salvia divinorum* (NPS)

Students who have used it



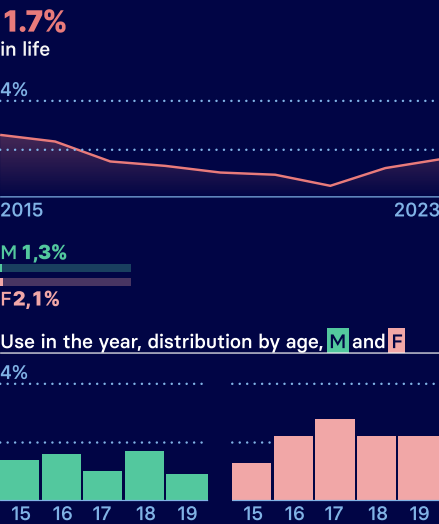
Hallucinogens

Students who have used it



Synthetic opioids (NPS)

Students who have used it



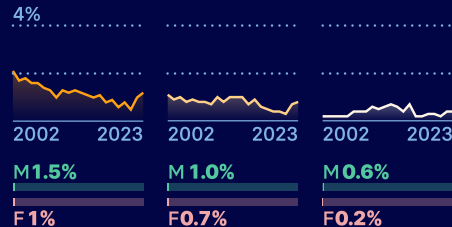


## Legal psychoactive substance

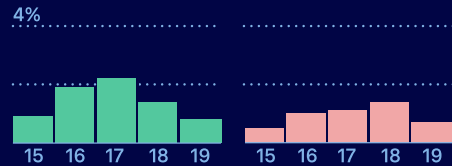
### Opiates

Students who have used it

**1.2%** in the year  
**0.8%** in the month  
**0.4%** frequent\*



Use in the year, distribution by age, **M** and **F**



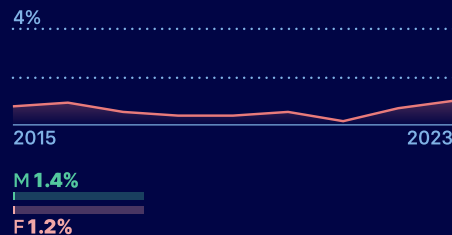
Age of first use



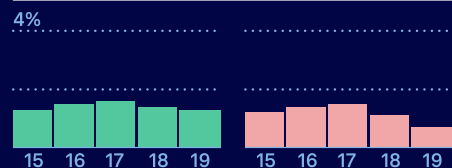
### Synthetic cathinones (NPS)

Students who have used it

**1.3%** in life



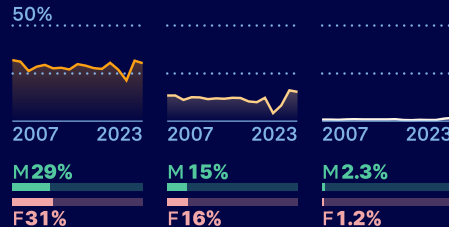
Lifetime use, distribution by age, **M** and **F**



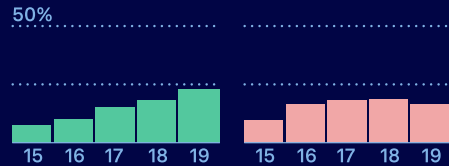
### Alcohol - drunkenness

Students who got drunk

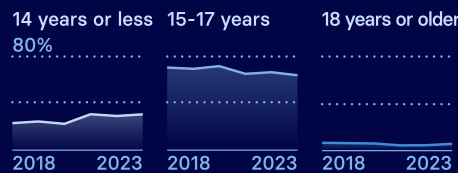
**30%** in the year  
**15%** in the month  
**1.7%** frequent\*



Drunkenness in the month, distribution by age, **M** and **F**



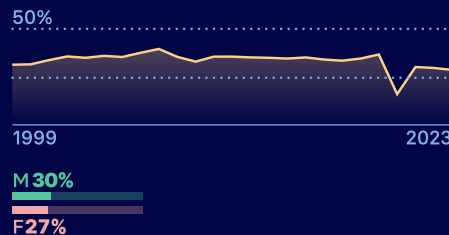
Age of first drunkenness



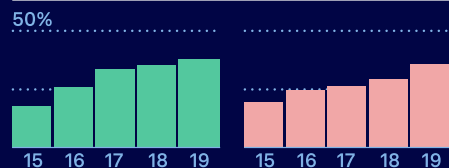
### Alcohol - binge drinking

Students who have practised it

**29%** in the month



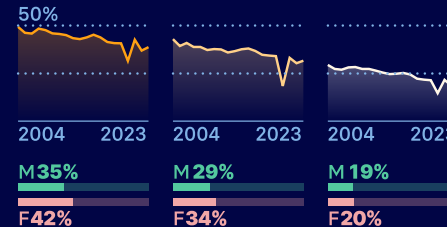
Binge drinking in the month, distribution by age, **M** and **F**



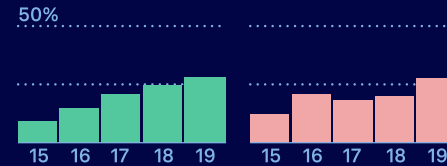
### Tobacco

Students who have used it

**39%** in the year  
**32%** in the month  
**19%** daily



Daily use in the year, distribution by age, **M** and **F**



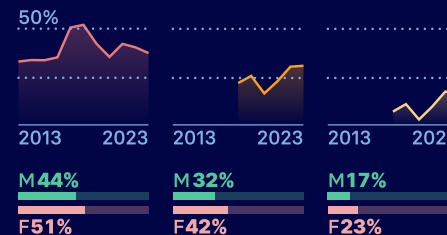
Age of first use



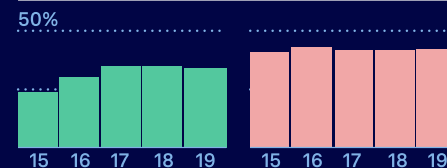
### E-cigarettes

Students who have used it

**48%** in life  
**37%** in the year  
**20%** in the month



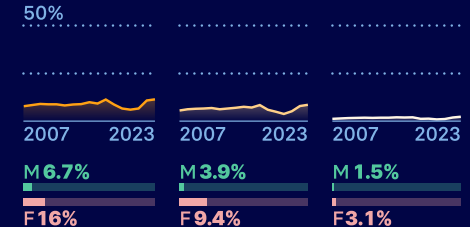
Use in the year, distribution by age, **M** and **F**



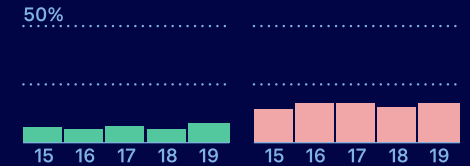
### Non-prescription psychiatric drugs

Students who have used it

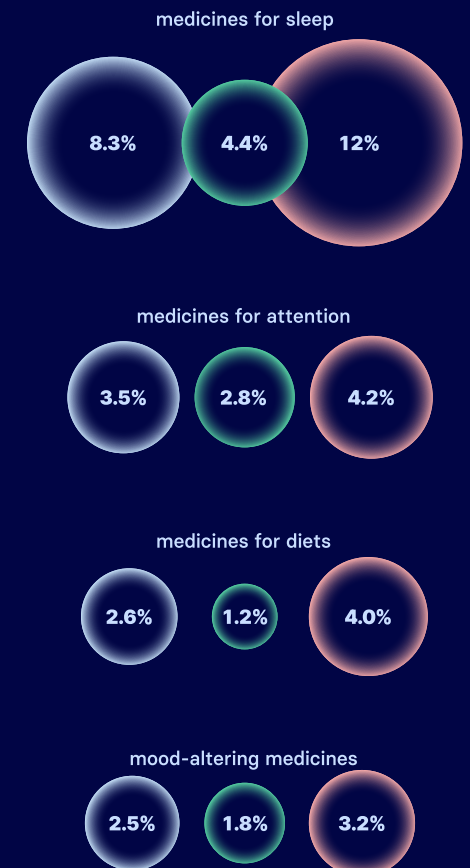
**11%** in the year  
**6.6%** in the month  
**2.3%** frequent\*



Use in the year, distribution by age, **M** and **F**



Type of psychiatric drugs taken, **total**, **M** and **F**





# Territorial offer

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In Italy, **assistance to people suffering from pathological addiction** is guaranteed throughout the country as it is included among the Essential Levels of Care (LEA) provided by the National Health Service, and is ensured by an integrated system of services including Local Health Authorities with their Outpatient Services for Addiction (SerD), authorised and accredited private facilities, Local Authorities, Third Sector and voluntary organisations.

Addiction Services offer assistance both to persons with **psychoactive substance use disorders** and to persons with **psychiatric comorbidity** and **addictive behaviour** (such as gambling, compulsive use of the Internet, *gaming*, compulsive shopping, *sex-addiction*, eating disorders). These services are mainly divided into four levels of care: first-level services, outpatient services, semi-residential and residential services, and specialised services.

**The first-level services** (comprising mobile units, instant/early reception centres, and *drop-in centres*) are characterised by a high degree of accessibility. They mainly address drug-addicted users who are hard to reach and intercept by conventional territorial services. These services provide specialised first aid, socio-educational and counselling interventions, as well as programmes aimed at analysing the problem, initiating rehabilitation pathways, and guiding the person towards more structured care programmes. The total number of first-level services in 2023 was 207<sup>1</sup>, divided into: **127 mobile units**

(60% managed by private social organisations); **53 drop-in services** (77% managed by private social organisations); **27 instant reception centres** (85% managed by private social organisations).

At national level, the incidence of these services is equal to **less than 1 service per 100,000 residents aged 15-64**, and they are mainly available in the central and northern regions. While at national level the rate is 0.6, in the southern regions it stands at 0.2. With regard to the **type of intervention provided** by first-level services, the offer varies considerably on a regional basis: **case management** is offered by more than 75% of first-level services in Piedmont (with the exception of mobile units), Lombardy, Liguria (with the exception of *drop-in centres*), Emilia Romagna, Campania and in the province of Bolzano (with the exception of low-threshold services); **psychosocial counselling** is provided by more than 75% of first-level services in Piedmont, Lombardy, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria (with the exception of low-threshold services), Campania and in the province of Bolzano (with the exception of *drop-in centres*); **screening for psychiatric disorders** is provided by more than 75% of services in Lombardy, Campania (with the exception of mobile units) and the province of Bolzano (with the exception of low-threshold services and *drop-in centres*); the **treatment of persons with a dual diagnosis** is provided by over 75% of the services in the regions of Emilia Romagna and Campania (with the exception of both mobile units) and in the province of Bolzano;

<sup>1</sup> Source: Inter-regional technical group on addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

**early support for placement in therapeutic communities** is provided by over 50% of the services in the region of Lombardy, but also in Emilia Romagna and Campania (with the exception of both mobile units); **substitution drug treatment** is provided by more than 75% of the low-threshold services present in the regions of Piedmont, Lombardy and Campania, and by some of the low-threshold services present in Friuli Venezia Giulia, The Marches, Lazio, Sicily and Sardinia.

**Outpatient services** implement **therapeutic-rehabilitation and pharmacological programmes** for users and provide support for family members, offering **specialised medical and psychological counselling and assistance**. They are either **public** (SerD facilities) or **private** (integrated multidisciplinary services - SMI) and, in some territorial areas, they are also structurally established in **correctional facilities**. Multi-professional specialised teams from the territorial SerD facilities operate in most correctional facilities.

According to data collected by the National Information System for Addictions (SIND) in 2023, there are **570 public outpatient addiction services** (SerD facilities) in the country for the treatment of people with a substance use disorder, available in 614 locations<sup>2</sup>. Overall, the number of outpatient addiction services in the country (excluding specialised teams in prisons) amounts to **1,092**

units<sup>3</sup> (including services for alcoholology and gambling), corresponding to **2.9 outpatient services per 100,000 residents aged 15-64**. These are mainly **SerD facilities (578)**, distributed throughout the territory, plus **13 SMIs** concentrated in the Lombardy region.

**Assistance to drug-addicted prisoners** is guaranteed in all regions and autonomous provinces through **34 structured services in correctional facilities**, available in Lombardy, Liguria, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Lazio, Campania, Apulia, Sicily and Sardinia, and through **145 dedicated multi-professional teams**.

The coverage of specific care services for **alcoholology** and **gambling** is less widespread, although both types of services are present, either in public form or managed by private social services in all regions, with the exception of Liguria and Abruzzo. Concentrated mainly in the north-eastern regions, there are a total of 467 specific services for alcoholology and gambling: **194 for alcoholology** and **273 for gambling**.

With regard to the type of **interventions provided**, all outpatient services in all regions provide **case management** and psychosocial **counselling** and, when necessary, **placement of patients in therapeutic communities**. Furthermore, throughout the country (with the exception of 2 regions), more than 50% of territorial outpatient services provide activities for **screening of psychiatric disorders**, for the **treatment of dual diagnosis users**, and for **substitution drug treatment**. In the regions of Lombardy, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, Lazio, Molise, Campania, Apulia and Basilicata, all the above types of intervention are guaranteed by more than 75% of the structured services in prison.

According to the survey “Annual Account of Public Administration Personnel” conducted by the State General Accounting Office, in 2022 (the last year for which data

<sup>2</sup> Source: Ministry of Health - SIND.  
<sup>3</sup> Source: Inter-regional technical group on addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

are available), there were a total of **6,082 operators in the Public Addiction Services** for the treatment of addictions related to illegal substances (in 2021 there were 6,213 operators)<sup>4</sup>. One of the peculiarities of SerD facilities is the multi-professional composition of teams, a crucial trait to deal with care and treatment pathways characterised by high complexity and changeability. Overall, at national level, 54% of the staff are doctors and professional nurses, 15% psychologists, 14% social workers, 11% professional educators, and the remaining 6% administrative and other professional profiles. In terms of contract types, approximately 93% of the professionals working in SerD facilities are employees, and the remaining 7% are employed under other forms of contract. Moreover, 86% of professionals are “full-time” and 14% are hired on part-time or on flexible contracts.

If we focus the analysis on the **number of employees in relation to the number of users and the resident population**, both indicators show a significant **lack of homogeneity between regions** in terms of staffing. Compared with a national value of almost 23 drug-addicted users per staff unit, this ranges from a minimum of 15 users per operator, recorded in the Valle d'Aosta region, to a maximum value of over 30 users recorded in the services of the province of Trento and the regions of Umbria, Lazio, Basilicata and Calabria. This variability is also noted when considering the number of professionals in service at SerD facilities in relation to the resident population. Indeed, against a national value of 10 operators per 100,000 inhabitants aged 15-74, the range varies from less than 6 operators in the province of Trento and the Calabria region to a maximum of 16 operators in the Valle d'Aosta region.

**The therapeutic facilities** active nationwide in the field of addictions provide **targeted care according to the type of users**, guaranteeing diversified care programmes and integrating with the therapeutic offers of territorial outpatient

services. The system of therapeutic facilities is divided into different types of offers: inpatient residential, semi-residential, residential specialised rehabilitation facilities.

In 2023, a total of **928 therapeutic facilities**<sup>5</sup> were operating in Italy, 60% of which were located in northern regions. Compared to the resident population, there are **2.5 facilities per 100,000 inhabitants aged 15-64**, with values dropping significantly in the southern and island regions. In fact, while the rate per 100,000 residents is around 3 facilities in northern and central regions, a value of around 1 is reached in southern and island regions.

There are a total of **462 therapeutic residential facilities**, i.e., more than **50%** of the 928 therapeutic facilities in the country. The remaining facilities are **36% specialised facilities (338)**, **13% semi-residential and day care facilities (119)**, and less than **1% hospital residential facilities (9)**. Particularly relevant in this sector is the role played by **private social** organisations, which manage a total of **878 therapeutic facilities** (95% of the therapeutic facilities nationwide). With regard to the **provision of treatment**, most residential facilities (over 75%), with the exception of those in Molise and Basilicata, provide *screening* services for psychiatric disorders, treatment of persons with a dual diagnosis, and placement in therapeutic communities, *case management* and substitution drug treatment. *Counselling/psychosocial* treatments are less widespread.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Ministry of Health on data from Annual accounts as at 31/12/2022.  
<sup>5</sup> Source: Inter-regional technical group on addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

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Finally, focusing on the **338 specialised facilities** in Italy, they are divided into four main types: facilities for minors with drug-related problems (13); facilities for drug-addicted parents with children (30); facilities for patients with psychiatric comorbidities (125); and other specialised facilities (170), e.g., facilities offering housing and/or long-term rehabilitation support.

These are mostly **specialised residential facilities** managed, in almost all cases (95%), by **private social** organisations. Although they are predominantly located in the northern **regions** (68%), and particularly in the north-western regions (51%), overall they are present in all regions and autonomous provinces, with the exception of Calabria and Sicily.

Overall, the **928 residential/semi-residential therapeutic facilities** have **13,638 places**, equivalent to an average of **14.7 places per facility**. While residential and semi-residential therapeutic communities (590 facilities) have an average of 17 places per facility, residential specialised communities (315 facilities) have an average of 10 places per facility, and semi-residential specialised communities (23 facilities) have 7.5 places per facility on average.

With regard to the **number of places available in residential facilities per 100,000 inhabitants aged 15-64**, at national level the rate stands at 32, with values falling progressively from north to south and the islands. While the rate in the north-western and north-eastern regions is 41 and 37, respectively, in the central Italian regions it drops to 33, and in the southern and island regions to 21. The distribution, on the other hand, is different with regard to **semi-residential facilities**, with a higher number of available places per 100,000 inhabitants aged 15-64 years in the north-eastern and central Italian regions, with a rate of 7.1 and 6.2, respectively. In particular, the

highest availability is in Veneto, Emilia Romagna, The Marches, Basilicata and Calabria, all regions in which at least 7 places are guaranteed for every 100,000 residents aged 15-64.

Finally, cross-referencing the **offer**, expressed as the number of places available in the facilities, with the **potential demand for care**, which can be derived from the number of users in SerD facilities, reveals an important information about the **availability of places in residential and semi-residential facilities**. Thus, against a national value of 10 places for every 100 users in treatment at SerD facilities, there are 15 or more in the Emilia Romagna, Umbria, The Marches and Calabria regions, and 5 or less in the Friuli Venezia Giulia and Abruzzo regions.

The **private social therapeutic facilities** responding to the information flow of the Ministry of the Interior<sup>6</sup>, as at 31 December 2023, totalled **760** (87% of the 872 existing ones): 75% of them are **residential facilities**, 16% are **semi-residential facilities** and 9% are **outpatient facilities**. About 60% of the facilities are located in the regions of northern Italy, specifically 32% in the north-western regions, especially in Lombardy, and 29% in the north-eastern regions, particularly in Emilia Romagna and Veneto; as for the remaining percentage, 18% of the facilities are located in the regions of central Italy, especially in Tuscany, The Marches and Lazio, and about 22% in the southern and island regions, mostly in Apulia.

The ratio between the number of addiction facilities managed by private social organisations and the resident population stands, at national level, at about 2 facilities per 100,000 residents aged 15-74 years, with values exceeding 3 units per capita in the Valle d'Aosta, Emilia Romagna and The Marches regions. While, in the regions of Lazio, Campania, Sicily and Sardinia, there is less than 1 facility per 100,000 residents.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior - Directorate General for General Administration and Prefectures.



At national level, the residential facilities belonging to the private social sector recorded a mean number of 19 users on 31 December 2023, ranging from 4 users in the Valle d'Aosta region to 70 users in Umbria. The outpatient services, on the other hand, provide services to about 40 users per day.

**Prevention activities** for health risks related to drugs (infectious diseases, infections and sexually transmitted infections, acute intoxications and related deaths) are mainly provided by **low-threshold services, drop-in centres** and mobile units<sup>7</sup>. Individual *counselling*, HIV/AIDS testing and *screening* for hepatitis C are guaranteed throughout the country, and are provided to the majority of people who need them, including those not in the care of SerD facilities, in most geographical areas. Moreover, with regard to HIV, all regions and autonomous provinces (with the exception of Valle d'Aosta and Apulia) provide anti-retroviral drug treatment, and 12 of them provide it to almost everybody who needs it. Also *screening* for hepatitis B is guaranteed in 13 regions and in the province of Trento for most people who need it, while the vaccination campaigns for viral hepatitis B aimed at people at risk ensure good coverage throughout the country, with the exception of the region of Apulia. Finally, pharmacological treatment of hepatitis C is guaranteed in all regions and autonomous provinces, with the exception of Valle d'Aosta and Apulia.

Shifting the focus on the **substance use risk reduction actions**, they are, overall, less widespread and the coverage of the need expressed is on average lower and varies from region to region. Indeed, in 14 regions and in both autonomous provinces there are specific *training*-courses for survival for the safe use of injection drugs; in 15 regions there are interventions aimed at preventing drug-related deaths, at managing acute intoxication, and at using naloxone; in 13 regions there are prevention interventions based on *peer-to-peer* methodologies, albeit with a low coverage; and in 12 regions there are also training courses for *peer support*; needle and syringe exchange programmes are active in 16 regions/provinces (albeit with a very variable degree of response to the need expressed); in 9 regions there are *pill testing/drug checking* activities to reduce risks associated with the use of "uncertain or unknown" drugs, while kits for drug testing on the street are distributed in 11 regions.

The distribution of information material to raise awareness of the risks associated with the use of drugs is carried out in all regions/autonomous provinces, while the distribution of other material useful for the prevention of drug-related diseases (such as naloxone, sterile syringes and needles, disinfectants, condoms, etc.) is much more uneven in geographical terms.

Of the 351 facilities invited to participate in the **Exploratory Study on private social services**<sup>8</sup>, 166

<sup>7</sup> Source: Inter-regional technical group on addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Exploratory Study on private social services conducted by the National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology (CNR-IFC) in cooperation with the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department for Anti-Drug Policies.

**organisations** took part (47% response rate), with **312 services**, divided into **606 supply units**, 68% of which were accredited. Most of the units (72%) are **residential and semi-residential** (therapeutic communities, sheltered housing, *co-housing services*), 16% deal with the **prevention of drug-related diseases** (mobile units, *drop-in centres*, low-threshold and instant reception services), 7.4% are **outpatient units and services available in correctional facilities**, and 4.5% are other types of services. In terms of territorial distribution, 63% of the responding facilities are located in northern Italy (25% in Lombardy), 17% in central Italy, 18% and 3% in southern Italy and the islands.

A total of **2,046 professionals**, including doctors, nurses, psychologists, sociologists, social workers and professional educators, work in the facilities participating in the study. The percentage of **professional educators** is highest in residential/semi-residential services (37%) and in prevention services (39%), while **psychologists** are the most represented professional figure in outpatient services (33%).

Focusing on the type of **treatment offered**, it emerges that residential/semi-residential facilities mainly cater to persons with proceedings for drug-related criminal offences and/or over-40s (about 1/3 of the facilities) and

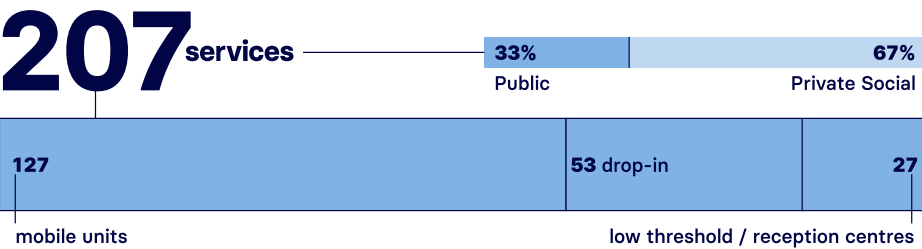
persons with a dual diagnosis (22%); 79% of outpatient services offer care to persons aged 40 years or older, 60% attend to persons with a dual diagnosis, and about half are persons with proceedings for drug-related criminal offences and/or homeless persons. Young people are most commonly referred by outpatient and prevention services, as are transgender, bisexual and homosexual people, and *sex workers*. Families and persons with children are mainly cared for by outpatient services.

With regard to drug-related infectious disease **prevention activities**, a total of **198 services** belonging to the private social sector are mentioned (mobile and *drop-in* units, as well as services within residential, day care and outpatient facilities). About 2/3 of the responding services carry out individual *counselling* activities on the risks of drug-related infectious diseases, almost 1/4 carry out *screening* activities and drug treatment for hepatitis C, 1/5 offers anti-retroviral treatment of HIV infections. In addition, the services participating in the study report specific training interventions, such as courses on the prevention of drug-related deaths, on the management of acute intoxication, and on risks related to substance use. They are involved in the distribution of both information materials and devices that are useful for the prevention of drug-related diseases (condoms, disinfectants, naloxone, etc.).

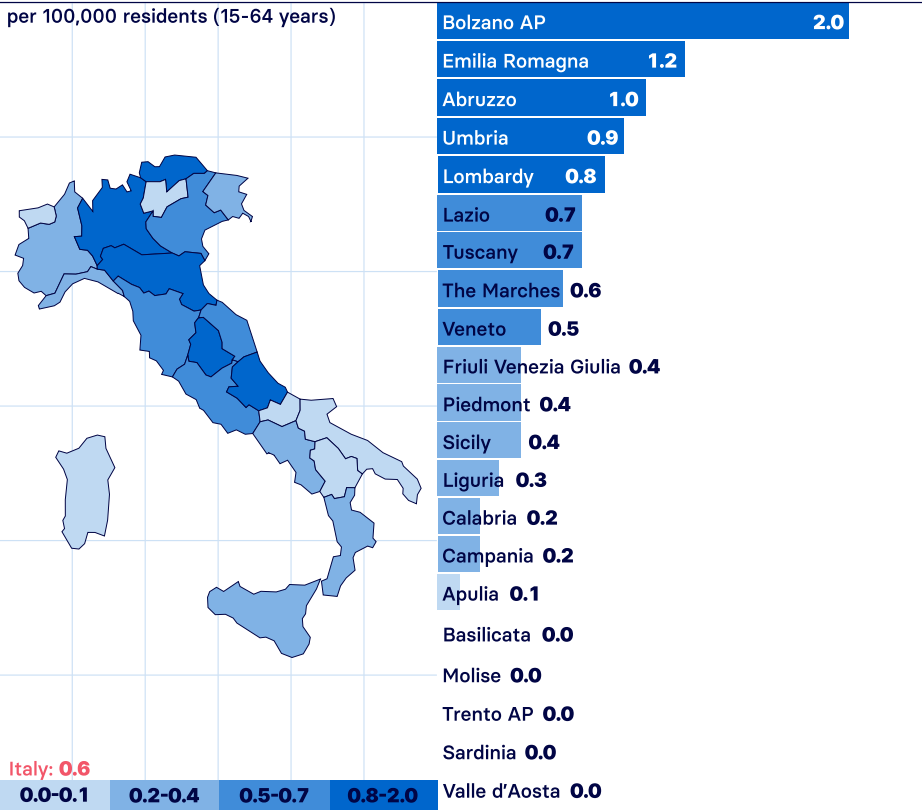


Table 3.1.  
Social and healthcare services for people with pathological addictions in 2023

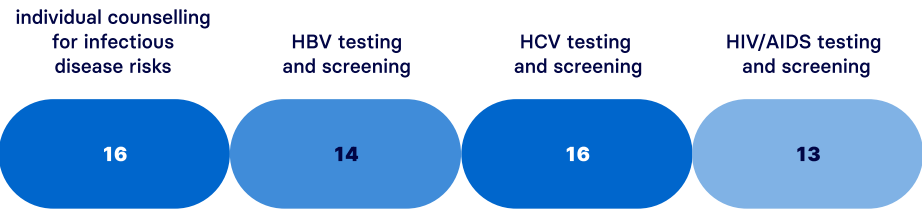
First-level services



First-level services

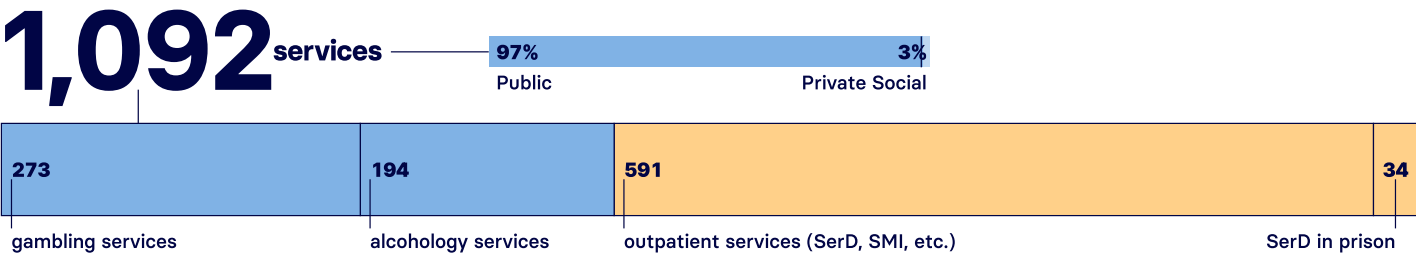


No. of regions providing the following interventions to at least 50% of those in need

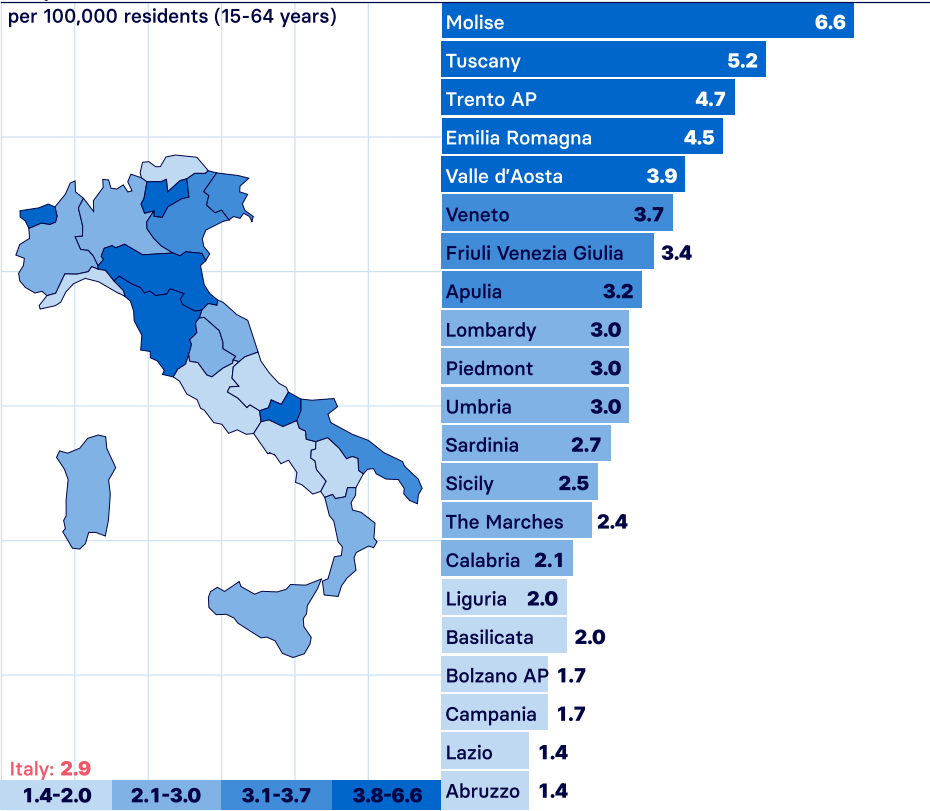


Sources: Inter-regional technical group on addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces. Processed by the National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology | Ministry of Health: Annual accounts as at 31/12/2022.  
Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.

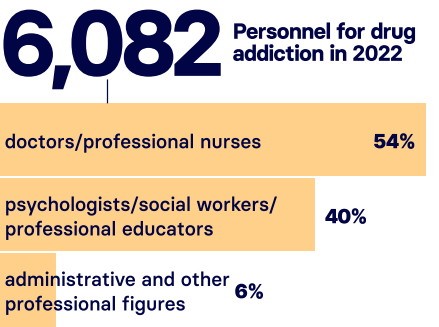
Outpatient services



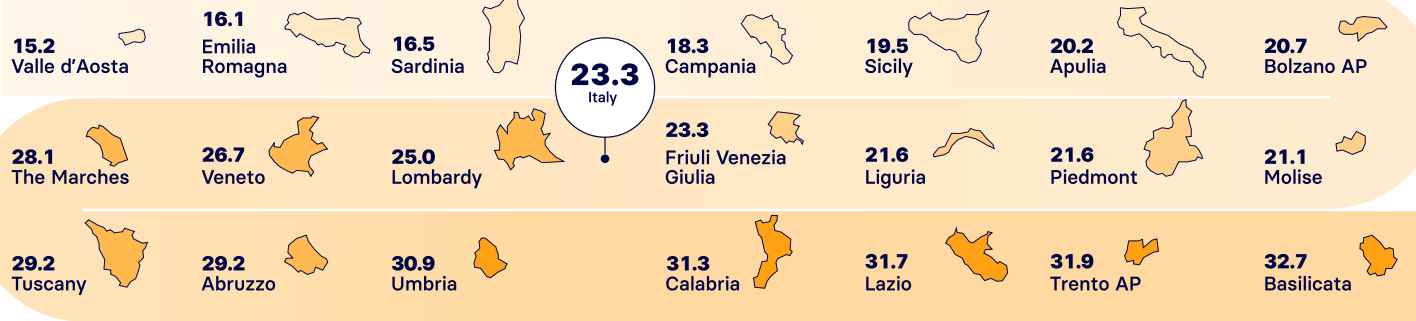
Outpatient services



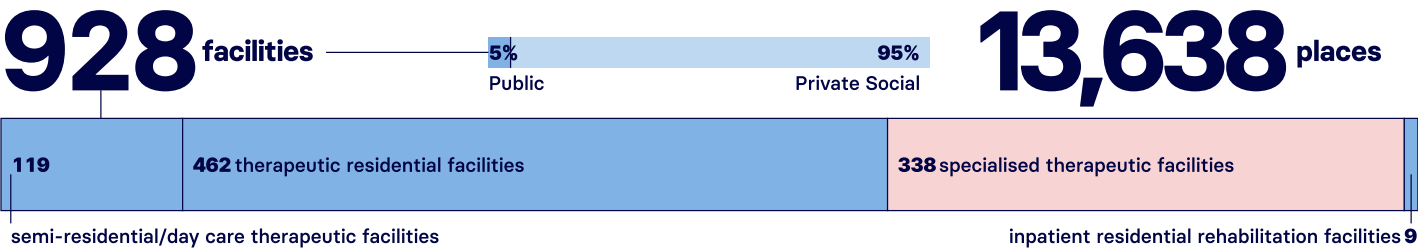
SerD



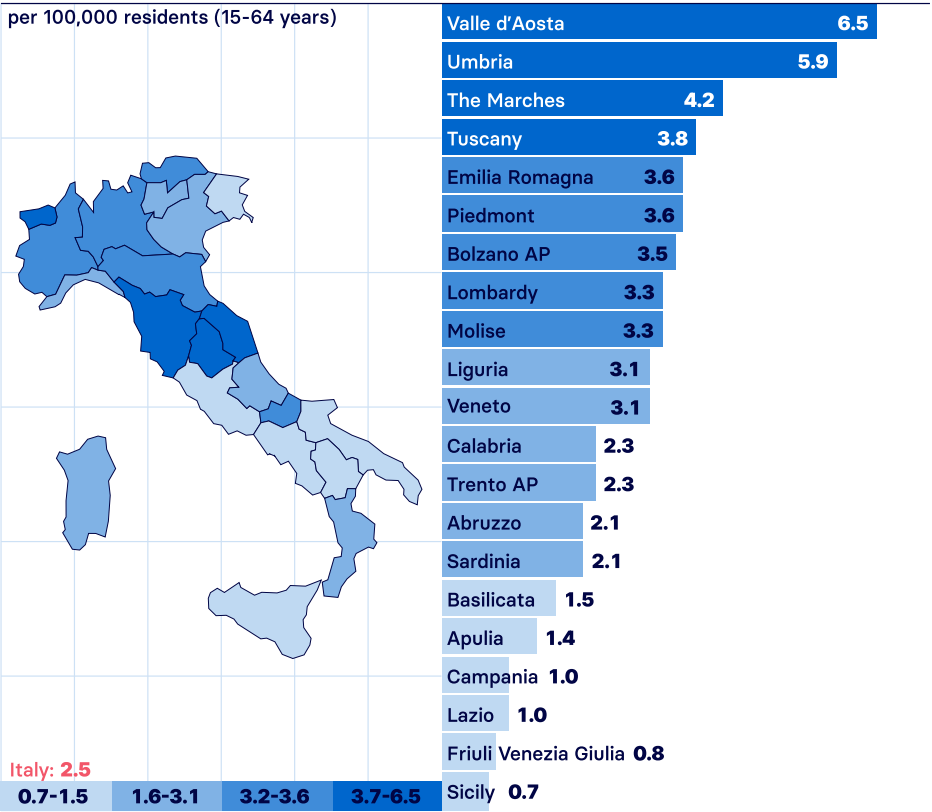
Average number of drug-addicted users in SerDs per personnel units



Residential and semi-residential facilities



Residential and semi-residential facilities



Places



Number of regions in which at least 50% of the services guarantee the following interventions

	case management	psychosocial counselling	therapeutic community placement	screening for psychiatric disorders	treatment of dual diagnosis users	pharmacological substitution treatment
SerD services	21	21	21	20	20	21
SerD services in prison	13	14	13	11	14	15
residential services	15	9	14	17	12	15

342 **prevention projects addressing the general population** were carried out nationwide in 2023, and reported by the Regional Administrations and Departments of Addictions<sup>9</sup>, 56% of them were **selective-indicated**, and 44% were **environmental-universal**. The majority of project initiatives were aimed at the **community context** (83%), while significantly fewer operations were related to strategic, legal and institutional reference measures (5.8%), projects for families (7.6%) and nightlife environments (4.1%). Half of the projects were financed **with regional funds**, 37% were implemented without any funding, and 14% relied on a national contribution.

Most of the **environmental and universal prevention** initiatives reported by the Regions and Autonomous Provinces for the community context were aimed at **informing and raising awareness in the population of substance use and addiction risk behaviour** (81%). Conversely, almost half (46%) of the initiatives for families were aimed at developing parenting skills and at strengthening family relationships.

In almost all cases, **Departments for Addictions** are involved in project organisation and implementation, with the collaboration, in more than half of the initiatives, of social promotion associations and/or voluntary associations. The **issues** most frequently addressed in the context of environmental-universal prevention projects for the general population were risky behaviour in general (53%), alcohol consumption (52%) and gambling

(51%). More than half (59%) of the environmental-universal prevention initiatives were aimed at the **general population**, 47% at the **underage population** and 43% at **young adults** between 18 and 30 years of age. One in three projects was aimed at **families** and **staff of health, social and local authority services**.

**Selective and indicated prevention** projects aimed at specific targets considered to be at higher risk of psycho-active substance use or of other risky behaviour are active in most regional areas and autonomous provinces. More than half of the interventions aimed at the population focused on informing/raising awareness on the issues of substance use, addiction risk behaviour and alcohol- or drug-related diseases (61%), training interventions to increase knowledge, skills and social skills for the prevention of substance use, risky behaviour and alcohol- or drug-related diseases (59%), and educational interventions on the issues of substance use, risky behaviour and alcohol- or drug-related diseases (56%). In addition, 16% of the initiatives were aimed at incentivising the achievement of desired/preferred behaviour, and the aim of intervening in environmental restructuring to facilitate desired behaviour by changing physical and social contexts. Between 5% and 10% of the projects were devoted to drafting/enacting restrictive regulations to prevent risky behaviour, activating inter-institutional programmes between local authorities, health services, prevention services and other agencies for safety in nightlife environments, road safety, etc., as

<sup>9</sup> Source: Inter-regional technical group on addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

well as identifying and engaging at an early stage, with brief interventions, people presenting drug-related risky behaviour.

Within the framework of selective and indicated prevention initiatives, ample space was devoted to **drugs**, an issue addressed by all regions and autonomous provinces that reported prevention activities in this area, but also to **alcohol use and gambling**. Projects devoted to **smoking and addiction risk behaviour in general** are less frequent. In some regions, specific interventions have also been activated for risky behaviour related to the use of **digital technologies** and in the area of **eating disorders**.

In 93% of cases, interventions were organised and promoted by the **Departments for Addictions**, assisted in more than half of the initiatives by associations, in 44% by private social services and in 41% by other services of the Health Authorities. More than half of the interventions regarded the **youth population in risky situations** (such as young people in out-of-school contexts, early school leavers or those with school/social problems, young people belonging to ethnic groups or the homeless), about one third to the **general population**, 24% to **persons assisted by SerD facilities**. In order to reach the target audience, almost all selective and indicated prevention projects were carried out in **highly aggregated contexts** (community centres, events, public

parks and gardens); a further 26% were carried out in the municipal context, and 22% at local health and social service facilities.

In the private social sector<sup>10</sup>, 76 facilities reported **prevention projects** implemented in 2023, equally distributed between those aimed at the general population and those oriented towards the school context. In the area of **environmental and universal prevention**, in line with the previous year, the main objectives pursued were raising the awareness of recipients with regard to the issues of substance use and addiction risk behaviour, and the implementation of initiatives to involve recipients in sports, outdoor activities and alternative leisure time programmes. More than 60% of the environmental-universal prevention projects focused on risky behaviour in general and gambling, while slightly more than half dealt with alcohol consumption and drugs. More than half of the environmental-universal prevention initiatives were implemented for minors and young adults.

Instead, in the area of **selective and indicated prevention**, more than half of the interventions were aimed at raising awareness of substance use, risky behaviour and alcohol and drug-related diseases, and at implementing targeted educational interventions on these issues. Furthermore, 77% of the initiatives focused on drugs, and 67% on alcohol consumption.

In 2023, 289 **prevention projects were promoted and activated for the student population in all regions and autonomous provinces**<sup>11</sup>. In 65% of cases, these were **environmental and universal prevention** projects. Of these activities, slightly less than half concerned the transfer/enhancement of knowledge, skills and social skills for the prevention of psychoactive substance use and risky behaviour, 34% concerned informing and raising awareness of the issues of psychoactive substance use and addiction risk behaviour among

<sup>10</sup> Source: Exploratory Study on private social services conducted by the National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology (CNR-IFC) in cooperation with the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department for Anti-Drug Policies.  
<sup>11</sup> Source: Inter-regional technical group on addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

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participants, while for 27% the purpose was educational (education on legality, informed use of digital technologies, correct behaviour when driving vehicles, etc.). The target group for environmental-universal prevention interventions in schools were, in more than 70% of the proposals, **students** and **teaching staff**, and the majority of interventions were carried out in upper secondary schools (71%) and in lower secondary schools (59%).

As for **selective and indicated prevention interventions** in schools, most of the projects carried out in 2023 focused on topics related to alcohol- or drug-related consequences and diseases: information and awareness-raising on substance use, risky behaviour and its consequences (40%), the implementation of educational interventions on these topics (37%), and the implementation of training interventions to transfer/increase knowledge, skills and social skills for the prevention of use and diseases closely related to risky behaviour (37%). In addition, slightly less than 20% of the interventions were aimed at early identification of youth presenting drug and psychoactive substance use-related risky behaviour, and at approaching students with psychoactive substance use problems or risky behaviour through brief interventions. Unlike environmental-universal prevention projects, selective-indicated prevention initiatives are designed to foster a **synergy between students, family members and teaching staff**.

Also within the framework of the **Exploratory Study on private social services**<sup>12</sup>, the services reported **prevention project initiatives in schools**, with a higher prevalence of environmental and universal prevention interventions (67%) than the selective and indicated type. Most of the prevention courses were implemented in lower and upper secondary schools, although one in four initiatives also involved primary schools.

The most frequently addressed topic area in both prevention areas was **gambling**, followed by **drugs** and **risky behaviour in general**. In addition to raising awareness of risks related to substance use and behavioural addictions, about one third of the **universal and environmental prevention** activities concerned the informed use of digital technologies. In contrast, almost all **selective and indicated prevention** interventions focused on the risks of substance use, addiction risk behaviour and alcohol- or drug-related diseases, and on the implementation of targeted educational interventions related to these issues. In most of the projects, the main target group comprised **students**, but **teachers** and **families** were also involved, particularly in the selective and indicated prevention initiatives.

The **ESPAD®Italia 2023 Study**<sup>13</sup> collected information directly from schools by administering a questionnaire to the **headmasters** of upper secondary schools. 93% of headmasters report the existence of a **regulation governing alcohol and tobacco use and behaviour** within their institutions, and 49% of schools have planned study days and/or activities for the **prevention of psychoactive substance use** (a higher percentage than in 2022, in line with pre-pandemic years). 81% of headmasters planned activities for the prevention of **bullying** and **cyberbullying**, 46% planned activities for the prevention of risky **driving** behaviour, 35% planned activities for the prevention of **gambling**. Moreover, within 82% of the schools that participated in the study, a training plan for **recovering early school leavers** has been implemented, and about 36% also plan on conducting activities for preventing the phenomenon. Finally, 21% of schools have a specific training plan for the remediation of students with a **social withdrawal** certification, and 30% have planned activities for this purpose.

Most of the prevention activities (70%) in schools involved the **Local Health Authorities and/or Departments and Services for Addictions**, while 66% of the initiatives

<sup>12</sup> Source: Exploratory Study on private social services conducted by the National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology (CNR-IFC) in cooperation with the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department for Anti-Drug Policies.  
<sup>13</sup> Source: National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology (CNR-IFC).



involved the **Police** and 46% involved **associations**. In addition, **specific training for teachers** on the prevention of psychoactive substance use is provided in 42% of schools.

Very useful information about prevention activities implemented by schools can be obtained from the answers provided by students to the **ESPAD®Italia 2023** Study. It emerges that **46% of the students** took part in **activities aimed at preventing risky behaviour or at promoting well-being**, such as meetings held by experienced staff within the school. The topics discussed most frequently were **bullying/cyberbullying** (82%), **the use of psychoactive substances** (68%), and **the informed use of the Internet** (56%). Students who have participated in information or prevention interventions on the use of psychoactive substances show a **higher awareness** of the risks involved, and a **lower propensity to use** the substances, compared to their peers who have never participated in specific prevention interventions. 47% report having had the opportunity to use cannabis and choosing not to use it; the percentage drops to 39% among those who have not attended such events.

With regard to **road accidents**, in 2023 the State Police and the Carabinieri recorded **70,950 accidents**, marking a slight increase compared to 2022 (+0.6%)<sup>14</sup>. Conversely, the number of fatal accidents (1,204, -12%), the number of fatalities (1,326, -11%), accidents resulting in personal injuries (28,631, -1%) and persons injured (41,854, -1%) have dropped. One of the most dangerous behaviours, causing serious road accidents, is **driving under the influence of alcohol or impaired by drugs**. To tackle these phenomena, a memorandum of understanding was signed in 2015 between the Department for Anti-Drug Policies (DPA) and the Department of Public Security, introducing **new organisational measures to enhance detection**.

As part of the campaign to prevent and combat road accidents caused by drug and alcohol abuse, during **566 services** carried out in 2023, covering all provinces throughout the country, **824 checkpoints** were organised (deploying 4,503 State Police officers and 1,013 State Police doctors and medical personnel), and 20,726 vehicles and 28,907 people were checked<sup>15</sup>. Overall, **1,926 offences** were recorded for driving in an impaired mental and physical state: 1,548 for driving under the influence of alcohol (of which 153 concerned minors under the age of 21), and 378 for driving impaired by drugs, which led to the withdrawal of 1,651 driving licences.

A total of **22,828** drivers were checked and subjected to an **alcohol test**, 76% of whom were male, while 43% were aged over 32 years, and **1,421** tested positive (6.2%), i.e., with a blood alcohol level above 0.5 g/L. In addition, **3,432** underwent saliva **screening** tests for drugs. **552** of these tested **positive for at least one drug** (16%). After further laboratory tests, positivity for at least one substance was confirmed for **447 drivers** (81%), and **cannabinoids** were found to be the most frequently used substance (326 drivers, mainly in the 18-27 age group); **cocaine** was detected in 223 drivers (mainly aged over 32), 27 people tested positive for **amphetamines** and 6 for **methadone/opiates**.

<sup>14</sup> Source: Istat - Survey of road accidents resulting in personal injuries.

<sup>15</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior - Traffic Police.

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# Request for treatment

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In 2023, **Emergency Department (ED) visits** for directly drug-related conditions were overall **8,596** (+5% compared to 8,152 visits in 2022), accounting for 0.05% of the total number of visits recorded nationwide during the year<sup>16</sup>. The majority of visits involved **men** (67%) and people aged between **25 and 44** (41%) or **between 45 and 64** (24%); almost 10% were minors. While the impact of visits to the ED for drug-related diseases on the resident population at national level is equal to **15 visits per 100,000 residents**, at inter-regional level it varies from values below 5 visits in the regions of Apulia, Calabria and the province of Trento to values above 25 visits in the regions of Piedmont, Emilia Romagna, The Marches and the province of Bolzano.

Considering the **main diagnosis**, it can be noticed that half of the drug-related visits to the ED concern cases of **drug-induced psychosis**, while 44% are for **drug abuse without addiction**, and 6% for **drug addiction**. In the case of female visits, the diagnosis of drug-induced psychosis rises to 63% and the diagnosis of drug addiction falls to 4%; in the case of male visits, the diagnosis of drug abuse without addiction rises to 49% and the diagnosis of drug-induced psychosis falls to 43%. With regard to **minors**, 45% of visits are reported to be for drug-induced psychosis, and 51% for drug abuse without addiction. Of the total number of drug-related visits to the ED, **12%** resulted in **hospitalisation** (1,028), of which about one third (34%) were in psychiatry, 18% in intensive care, and 15% in the general medicine department; the outcome

of almost 4% and 2% of drug-related visits to the ED was admission to paediatrics and child neuropsychiatry wards, respectively.

In 2022 (last available year), **hospital admissions with a main drug-related diagnosis** were **6,555**, corresponding to **8.6 per 10,000 admissions** in Italy in that year<sup>17</sup>. The incidence increased between 2014 and 2018, and has remained stable in recent years. **70%** of directly drug-related hospital admissions involved **male patients** and **10% involved foreign nationals**, percentages that show an increasing trend over the years.

Analysing the **distribution of hospital admissions** by geographical macro-areas, more than two-thirds of hospitalisations with a main drug-related diagnosis occurred in facilities in **northern regions** (41% in facilities in north-eastern regions, and 28% in north-western regions), 16% in **central regions**, and 14% in **southern**

<sup>16</sup> Source: Ministry of Health - Information System for Monitoring Emergency-Urgency Care (EMUR).  
<sup>17</sup> Source: Processed by the National Institute of Statistics - Directorate General for Social Statistics and Welfare (on data from the Ministry of Health).

and island regions. If one also looks at the impact of drug-related hospital admissions on regional hospital systems, it is again the north-eastern area that has the highest rate, equivalent to 17 admissions with a main drug-related diagnosis per 10,000 admissions (23 in Emilia Romagna), compared to a national incidence of around 9. Similarly, the hospitalisation rate, which at national level is equal to about 12 drug-related hospital admissions per 100,000 residents, shows a strong North-South gradient: while in the north-western regions, where 38% of the total number of hospitalised persons reside, the value reaches 17 hospital admissions per 100,000 residents, in the southern and island regions the value is around 6.

With regard to the mean age of people hospitalised for directly drug-related diseases, there has been a gradual decline in recent years: from 41 years in 2012 to 39 years in 2022. The mean age of male subjects hospitalised for directly drug-related diseases in 2022 is 37 years, while the mean age for female subjects is 41. The age group most frequently hospitalised is the 25-54 age group (70%), while the under-24 age group accounts for 17%.

Considering hospital admissions in relation to the specific drug as reported in the main diagnosis, admissions directly attributed to cocaine use accounted for 25%, those related to opiate use for 17%, those to cannabinoid use for 6%, and those related to the use of stimulants or hallucinogenic substances for 1.2%. The remaining percentage (51%) concerned cases with a main diagnosis referring to mixed or unspecified substance use. Moreover, over the 2012-2022 decade, there was a progressive increase in hospital admissions directly related to cocaine use (from 12% to 25%) and to cannabinoids (from 4% to 6%).

65% of directly drug-related hospital admissions reported the main diagnosis of addiction, especially in the case of heroin/opioids, and 32% that of abuse, mainly in the case of cannabinoids. The percentage of hospital admissions with a diagnosis of addiction rises to 72% in men, while that of abuse rises to 47% in women. Finally, the most frequent drug-related diagnoses were mental disorders (61%), and diseases of the nervous system and sensory organs (11%).

Finally, if we look at the total number of diagnoses reported in hospital discharge forms (up to 5 secondary diagnoses in addition to the main diagnosis), the number of drug-related hospital admissions increases considerably to 19,623 cases, which is three-fold the number of admissions with a main drug-related diagnosis. The incidence of drug-related hospital admissions reaches 26 per 10,000 admissions during the year, while the rate reaches 35 admissions per 100,000 inhabitants for the resident population. A different picture emerges when considering all drugs reported in hospital discharge forms: compared to the analysis of the main diagnosis, the percentage of hospital admissions with a diagnosis related to cocaine use reaches 35%, especially in male admissions. The number of hospital admissions reporting diseases related to the use of cannabinoids increased (27%), while the percentage of admissions with diagnoses related to opiate use decreased (19%).

Table 3.2.  
Hospital care for people with drug-related problems

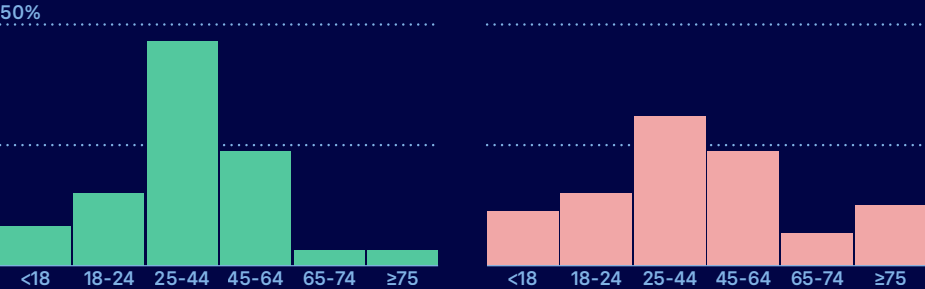
Drug-related visits to the Emergency Department in 2023



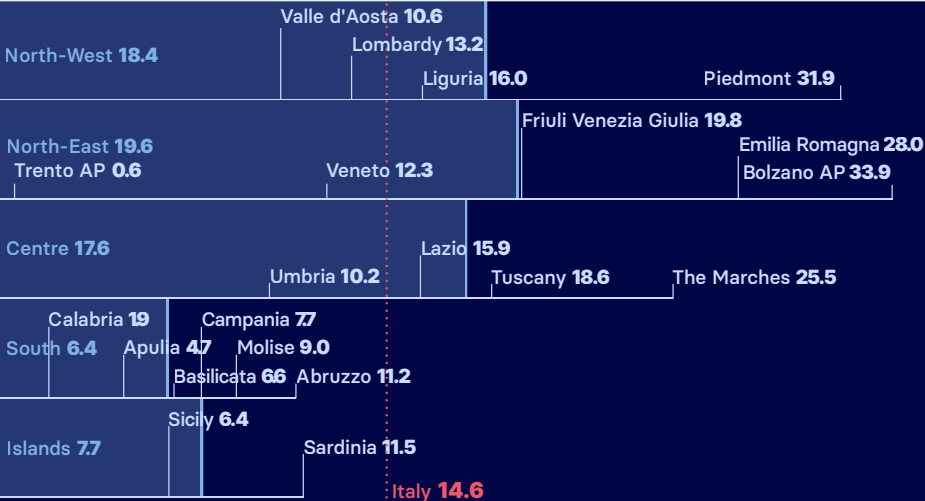
6% of cases had more than one visit during the year



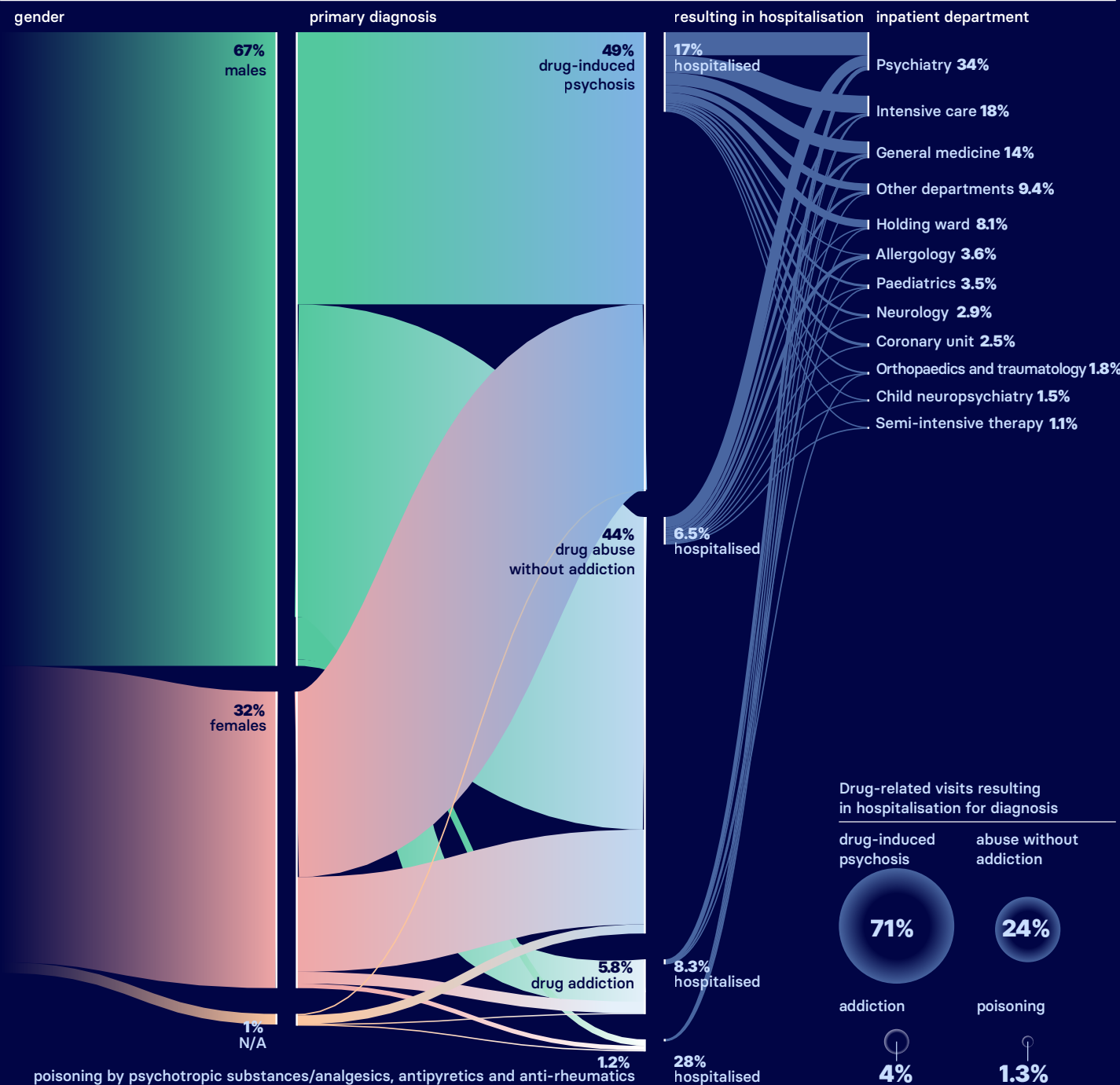
Distribution by age group and gender, M and F



Rate per 100,000 residents



Diagnosis\* and admission department for drug-related visits



Sources: Ministry of Health - Directorate General for Digitisation, Health Information System and Statistics - Emergency-Urgency Information System (EMUR - PS) | Processed by the National Institute of Statistics - Directorate General for Social Statistics and Welfare - Integrated Health, Welfare and Social Security System Service (based on data from the Ministry of Health).

\*Note: diagnoses are defined according to the ICD-9-CM classification, Italian Ministerial Decree of 18 December 2008.

Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.

Drug-related hospital admissions in 2022

Admissions with primary or secondary drug-related diagnoses

↑ **19,623**

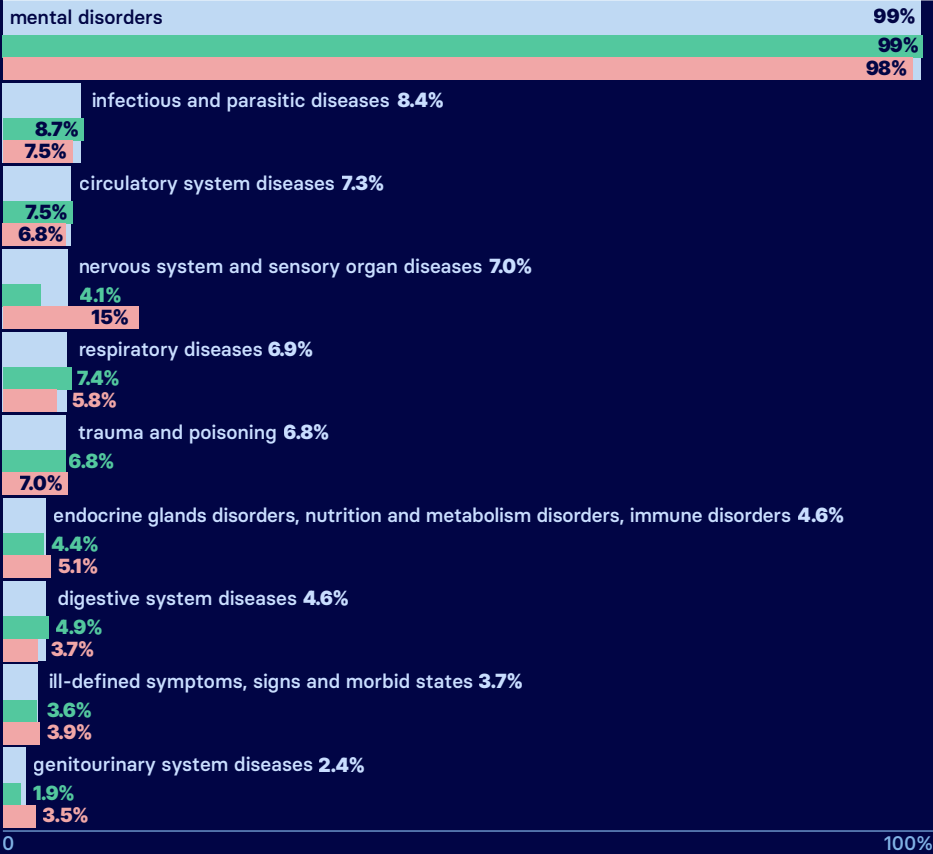
+9.3% compared to 2021  
0.26% of total admissions

Admissions with primary drug-related diagnosis

↑ **6,555**

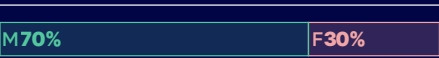
+8.1% compared to 2021  
0.09% of total admissions

Admissions with multiple drug-related diagnoses by diagnostic macro-groups, total and by gender, **M** and **F**

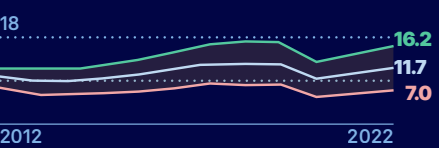


Note: only the 10 diagnostic macro-groups with the highest proportion of drug-related admissions are included.

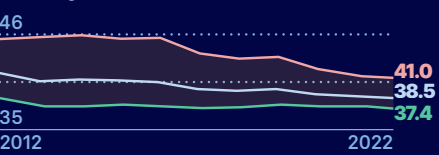
Admissions with primary drug-related diagnosis



Standardised rate per 100K residents

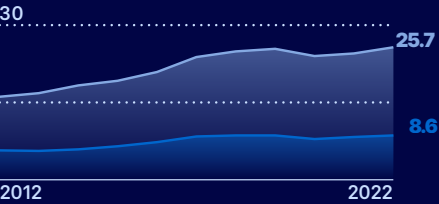


Mean age

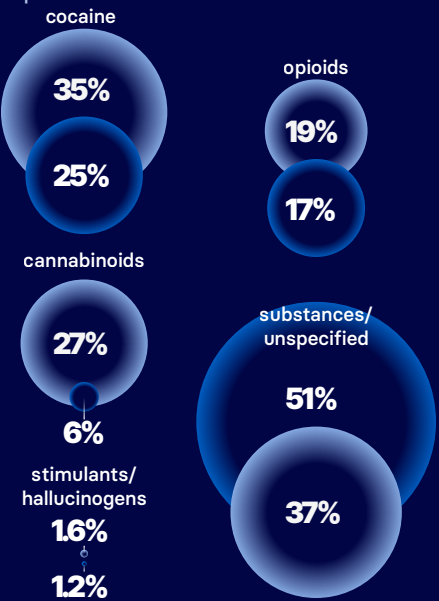


Admissions with primary or primary/secondary drug-related diagnosis

Incidence per 10K admissions

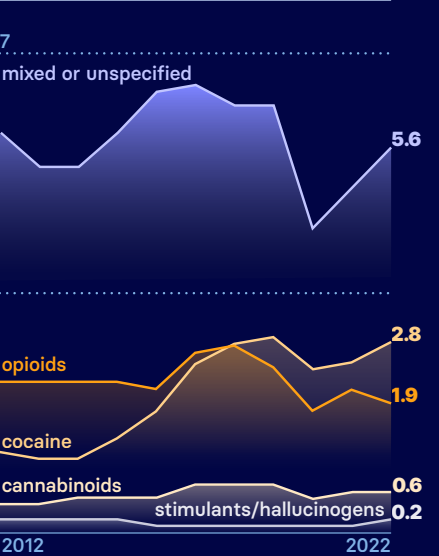


% per substance

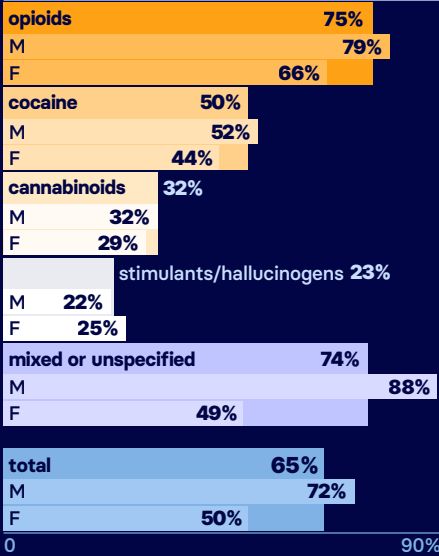


Admissions with primary drug-related diagnosis

Rate per 100,000 residents per substance

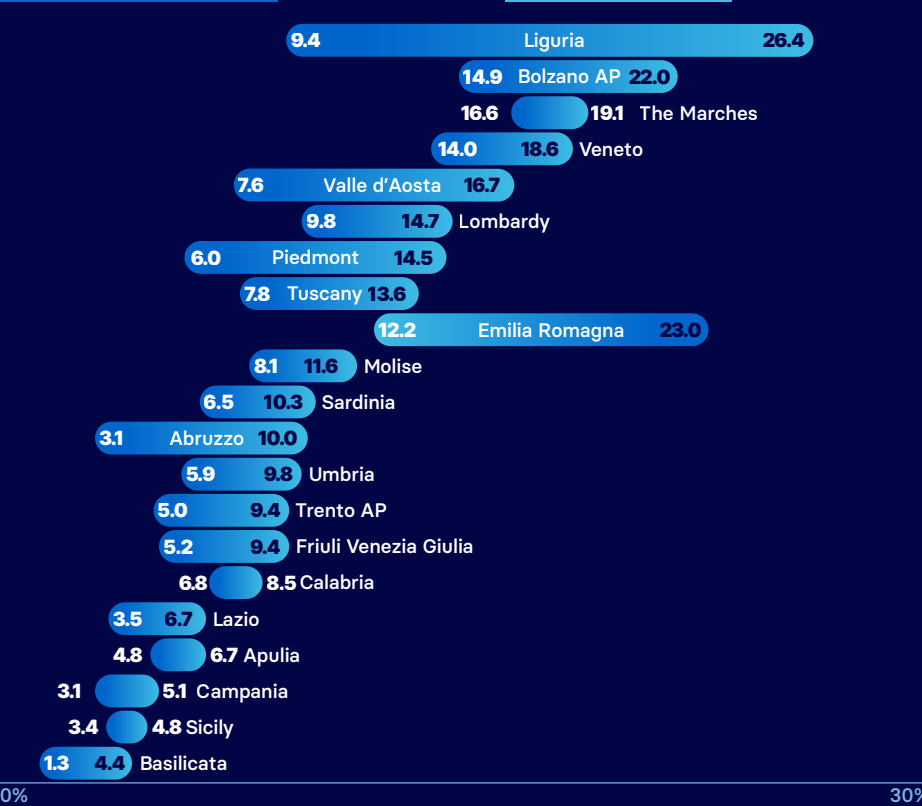


Diagnosis of addiction out of the total by substance



Distribution of admissions with primary drug-related diagnosis

Incidence per 10,000 admissions per place of residence and rate per 100,000 residents per place of residence



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In 2023, SerD facilities provided care for a total of **132,200 drug-addicted users**, the majority of whom (87%) were already in the care of services in previous years and were male (85%)<sup>18</sup>. The national **rate** of people receiving care is approximately **224 persons in treatment per 100,000 inhabitants**, ranging from 270 persons in treatment per 100,000 residents in the central regions to 147 persons on the islands.

**65% of users** are in the **30-54 age** group, 20% are over 54 years old, and 15% are under 30 years. Over the years, there has been an overall **progressive ageing of users** in treatment at SerD facilities. The percentage of users over 39 years of age, which was 11% in 1999, rose to 40% in 2009, reaching 63% in 2023, while the percentage of younger users has dropped. Progressive ageing of users is confirmed, even considering the **mean age of people receiving treatment**. Among new users, the mean age has risen from 28 to 34 years from 1999 to 2023, while it has increased from 31 to 44 years among users already receiving treatment.

Based on the **primary substance of treatment**, in 2023 58% of users were on heroin, 24% were on cocaine, 2% on crack, and 12% on cannabinoids. However, the picture changes if all substances (primary or secondary) are taken into account. Cocaine and cannabinoids increase to 43% and 30%, respectively, while the percentage of those receiving treatment for heroin remains unchanged at 60%.

Focusing the analysis on **male** users, among new users 46% are receiving treatment for primary use of cocaine/crack, 21% for primary use of opiates, 30% for primary use of cannabinoids. Among known users, 65% are receiving treatment for primary use of opiates, 24% for primary use of cocaine/crack, 10% for primary use of cannabinoids. As for **female** users, 27% of new users are receiving treatment for primary use of opiates, 37% for cocaine/crack, 29% for cannabinoids. However, among known users, 71% are receiving treatment for primary use of opiates, 19% for primary use of cocaine/crack, 8% for cannabinoids. Overall, there has been a steady **decrease in the number of people receiving treatment for primary use of opiates** (from 87% in 1999 to 60% in 2023), while there was an increase in the number of people receiving treatment for primary use of cocaine/crack (from 4% to 26%) and primary use of cannabinoids (from 8% to 12%).

<sup>18</sup> Source: Ministry of Health - SIND.



In 2023, 61% of the new users in care for **primary use of opiates** are between 25 and 44 years of age, and 33% are older than 44 years, percentages that reach 35% and 64% among existing users, respectively. Instead, among users in care for **primary cocaine use**, 65% of

new users are between 25 and 44 years, a percentage that drops to 59% among known users. Finally, of those receiving treatment for **primary cannabinoid use**, 40% are under 25 years of age (58% of new users and 31% of existing users).

## Substance of first use

Looking at the substances for which subjects were most frequently treated in 2023, it is clear that in most cases they were treated for the same substance of first use. In particular, 91.3% of those currently treated for cannabinoid addiction started with the same substance; the same goes for 72.4% of

non-prescribed benzodiazepine users, 64.8% of crack users and 62.0% of heroin addicts. For all substances treated in 2023, a substantial percentage of subjects started with cannabinoid use; in particular, this figure was 29.1% among those receiving treatment for primary heroin use. Instead, alcohol and tobacco are substances

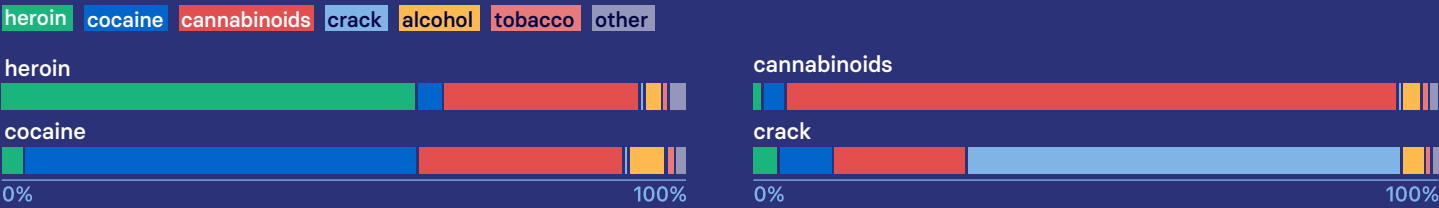
of first use with a low prevalence compared to the main substances, despite a non-negligible frequency. Alcohol was the substance of first use in only 5.1% of cases treated for cocaine dependence, 3.1% of those receiving treatment for crack use, 2.5% of those treated for cannabinoid use, and 2.2% of heroin users.

Subjects in care with SerD facilities according to primary substance of treatment and substance of first use (2023)

Substance of first use	Primary substance of treatment										Total	
	Heroin		Cocaine		Cannabinoids		Crack		Other			
	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
Heroin	47,686	62.0	1,034	3.1	175	1.1	115	3.5	518	10.2	49,528	37.1
Cocaine	2,652	3.5	19,380	58.7	462	3.0	253	7.7	197	3.9	22,944	17.2
Cannabinoids	22,386	29.1	10,069	30.5	13,935	91.3	648	19.6	984	19.4	48,022	36.0
Crack	161	0.2	101	0.3	25	0.2	2,139	64.8	16	0.3	2,442	1.8
Alcohol	1,709	2.2	1,682	5.1	387	2.5	103	3.1	261	5.2	4,142	3.1
Tobacco	415	0.5	310	0.9	94	0.6	15	0.5	28	0.6	862	0.6
Other	1,857	2.4	456	1.4	185	1.2	26	0.8	3,056	60.4	5,580	4.2
Total	76,866	100.0	33,032	100.0	15,263	100.0	3,299	100.0	5,060	100.0	133,520	100.0

Source: Ministry of Health - former DGSISS - SIND information flow.

Distribution of persons in the care of SerD facilities according to primary substance of treatment and primary substance of use (2023)



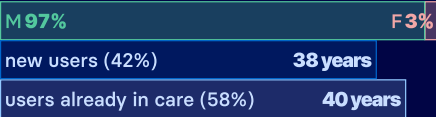
The data provided refer to the SIND information flow survey for the year 2023, the latest available, and concern the primary substance of the current treatment of persons in the care of SerD facilities associated with the substance of first use. In the matrix provided, the primary substances for which the subjects were treated in the reporting year are listed on the header; instead, the rows show the substances of first use.

Table 3.3.  
Care in outpatient services and therapeutic facilities in 2023

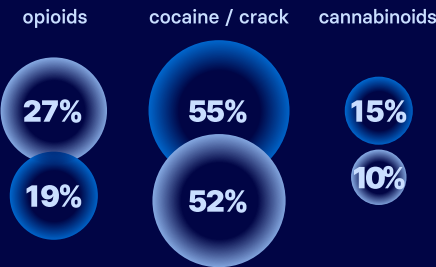
Care in correctional facilities

26,268

Prisoners who received at least one healthcare service from the SerD (Addiction Services)



Primary substance for new users and for users already in care



Alternative measures as at 31/12

↑ 3,901

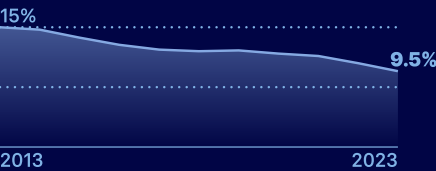
persons on probation with social services for drug/alcohol addiction

↓ 9.5%

out of total users in care for alternative measures to detention



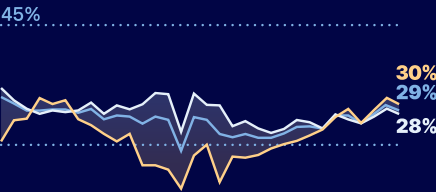
Trend over time



Sources: Ministry of Justice - Department of Prison Administration | Inter-regional Technical Group on Addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces | Ministry of Justice - Juvenile and Community Justice Department.

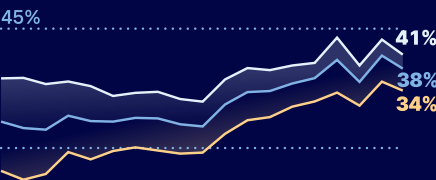
% drug addicts - total and by Italian and foreign nationality

out of total presence as at 31/12



1992 2023

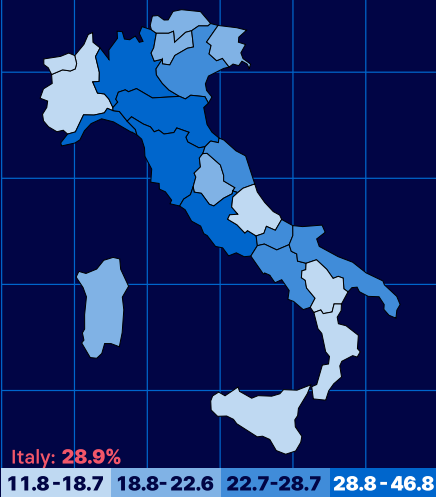
out of new entries from freedom



2005 2023

Percentage of drug-addicted inmates out of total prisoners as at 31/12

by place of detention



Outpatient care

Drug-addicted users

132,200

↑ +1.7% compared to 2022



new users 34 years

users already in care 44 years

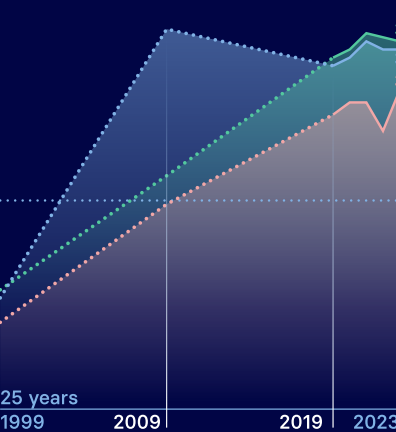
New users

17,243

13% of drug-addicted users

Mean age of new users, total, male and female

35 years

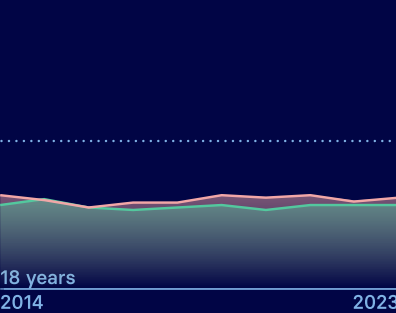


Information on the mean age is available for 1999, 2009, 2019, and for each year from 2019 onwards.

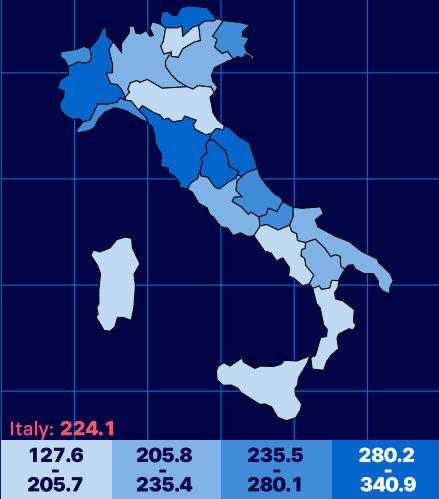
Age of first use and first treatment, by gender M and F

first use

30 years

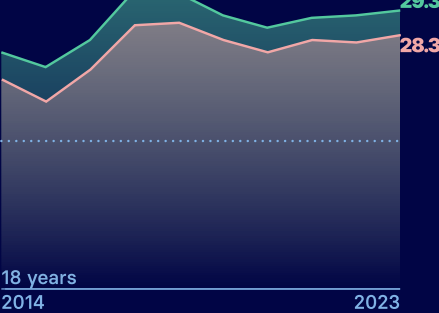


Rate of users in care per 100,000 residents

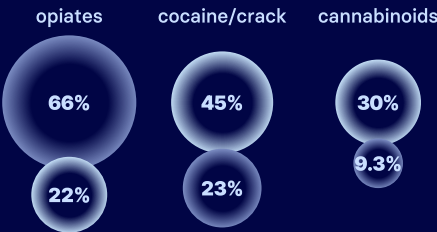


first treatment

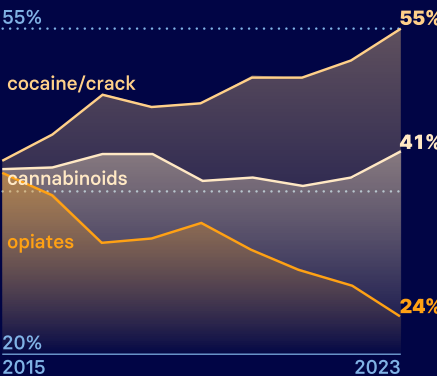
30 years



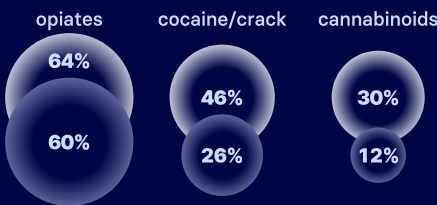
Primary substance for new users and for users already in care



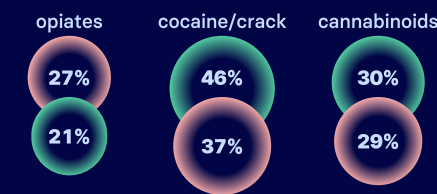
Primary or secondary substance of treatment in new users



Primary substance or primary and secondary substance in total users



Primary substance in new male and female users



Sources: Ministry of Health - Directorate General for Digitisation, Health Information System and Statistics; Directorate General for Health Prevention | Health Commission of the Conference of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces - Subgroup on Addictions - SIND (Addiction Information System) Working Group.  
Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.

17 million  
services provided

Pharmacological 13 million (77%)  
Concerned 56% of treated users

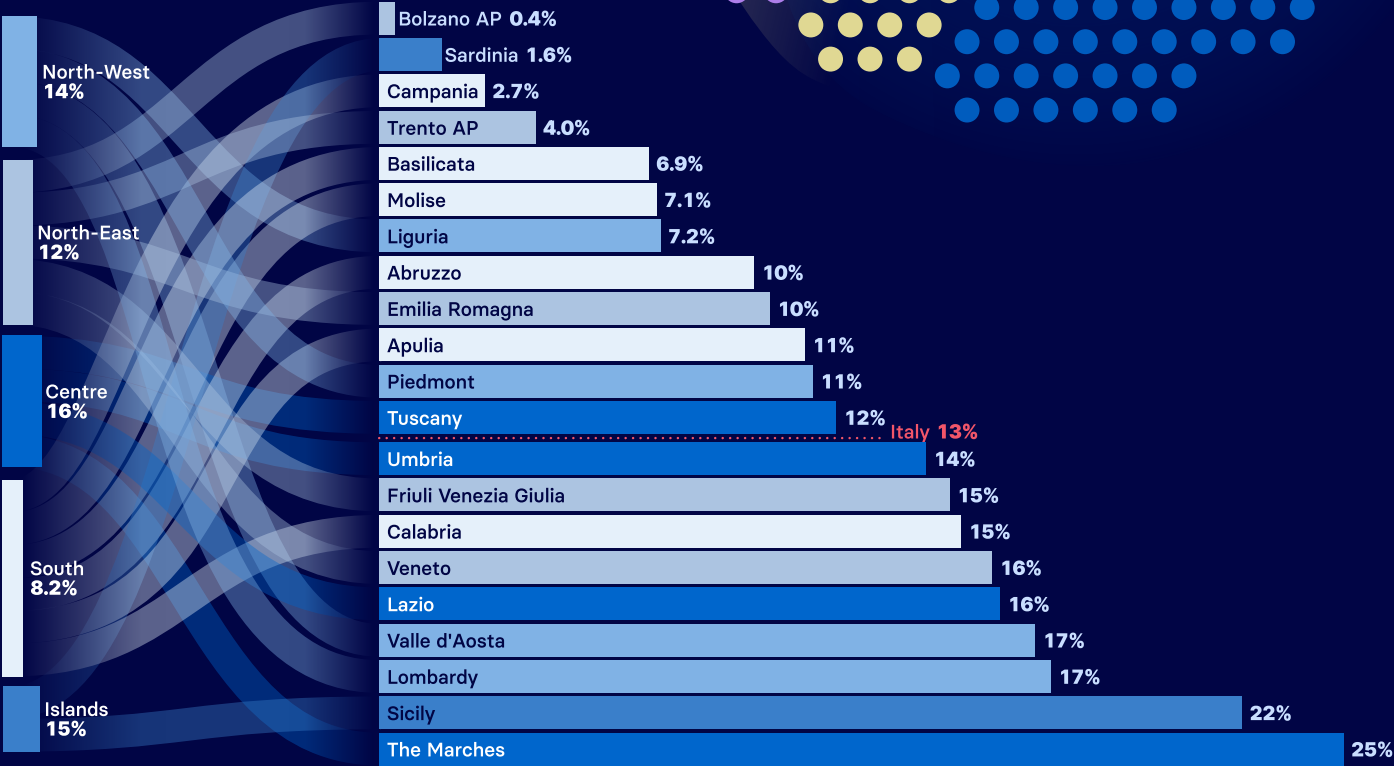
Healthcare 1.9 million (11%)  
Concerned 81% of treated users

Psychosocial 1.2 million (6.9%)  
Concerned 73% of treated users

Other 898 thousand (5.3%)  
Concerned 73% of treated users

Community placement 8.3 thousand (0.05%)  
Concerned 2.3% of treated users

New users out of regional total



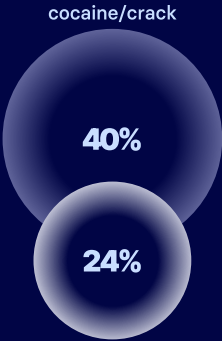
Care in Private Social therapeutic facilities

People treated for drug-related problems

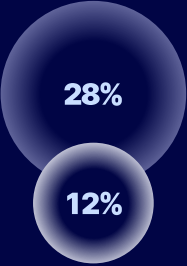
↑ 26,132  
+2% compared to 2022

M 84% F 16%

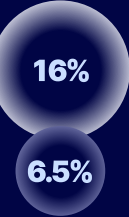
Primary or secondary substance  
in users overall



heroin/other opiates

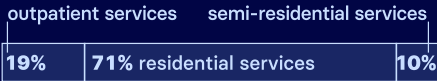


cannabinoids



People by facility type

as at 31/12/2023



Trend over time as at 31 December



User rate as at 31 December



Source: Ministry of the Interior - Department for General Administration, Civil Administration Personnel Policies and Instrumental and Financial Resources - Office V - Studies, Research and General Documentation

With regard to **polydrug use**, analysing persons in treatment according to the primary substance, it is observed that, among cannabinoid users, 57% used only one substance, 15% had also taken another substance, and 28% used at least two other substances. However, among users receiving treatment for primary cocaine use, 46% had not taken any other substances, 18% combined another substance, and 37% used at least two other substances. Finally, 38% of those in treatment for primary opiate use had not taken any other substances, 17% had also used another one, and 44% used at least two other substances. The most commonly used substances are cocaine, cannabinoids and alcohol. 36% of users receiving treatment have injected substances at least once in their lifetime (for 20% the information is not available), a figure that reaches 52% among users receiving treatment for opiate addiction.

In 2023, the **services provided by SerD facilities** to persons receiving treatment for the use of illegal substances and/or non-prescription psychiatric drugs amounted to **16,994,549**, of which 77% were pharmacological services (administration of drugs and vaccines), 11% health-related services (visits, interventions for the prevention of related diseases, examinations and clinical procedures), and 7% were psychosocial services (care interviews, psycho-therapeutic and socio-educational interventions). With regard to the 132,200 users, it appears that: **56% received pharmacological services** (about 177 services per user); **73% received psychosocial services** (with an average of 12 services per user); **81% received non-pharmacological health services** (an average of 18 services per user); **73% received services of a different type** (an average of 9 services per user); about 2% were placed in **residential therapeutic facilities** (a figure that is far below the actual number of patients placed in these facilities).

The **supply level** for the various types of services is **heterogeneous at territorial level**. Indeed, pharmacological services exceed 80% in the regions of Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Tuscany, Lazio, Molise, Campania and Apulia, while they record values below 40% in the regions of Sicily and The Marches. For health services, the percentage range fluctuates between values below 5% in the regions of Valle d'Aosta, Molise and Campania, and values over 25% in the province of Bolzano and in the services of the regions of Lombardy and Sardinia. Psychosocial services are less than 4% in the regions of Tuscany, Lazio and Campania and in the province of Bolzano, while they account for more than 20% of services provided in the regions of Sicily and The Marches. Moreover, more than 15% of the services provided by territorial facilities are of a different nature in the regions of Sicily and The Marches, and in the provinces of Trento and Bolzano.

**45%** of persons in the care of these facilities are on **substitution drug treatment** (51,593 users reported from 14 regions); for 80% of them the drug is methadone, for 11% suboxone, and for 10% buprenorphine/naloxone. The proportion of cases treated with methadone is 85% in women and 79% in men; the opposite is true for suboxone, for which the percentage of users treated is 6% and 11%, respectively.

In 2023, at least one **psychiatric disorder** was recorded in 9,336 patients<sup>19</sup>, which is equal to 7% of the total number

<sup>19</sup> The SIND information system also records information on diseases diagnosed and/or objectively reported for the user, active in the period considered and concurrent with the main diagnosis of addiction (according to the ICD-9-CM classification system - Italian Ministerial Decree of 18 December 2008). However, it should be emphasised that the figure is underestimated (not all services record the information with the same accuracy and completeness) and also affected by the specific territorial offer (e.g., not all services have a psychiatrist on staff).

of users receiving treatment. Overall, 58% were affected by personality and behavioural disorders, 13% by neurotic and somatoform syndromes, 12% by schizophrenia and other functional psychoses, about 3% by depression, and 2% by mania and bipolar affective disorders.

With regard to persons in the care of **private social addiction services**, of the **15,071 users** present on **31 December 2023** in the 760 responding rehabilitation facilities<sup>20</sup>, 71% were in **residential services**, 10% in **semi-residential services**, and 19% in **outpatient services**. Overall, more than half of the users (55%) are being treated in rehabilitation facilities in the northern regions, in particular in the regions of Lombardy (20%), Emilia Romagna (14%) and Veneto (10%); 30% are being treated in facilities in the central regions, mainly in outpatient services in the region of Lazio (17%), and 16% in rehabilitation facilities in the southern and island regions.

The overall number of **people treated** in the year 2023 by the private social addiction services was **26,132** (+2% compared to 25,633 users in 2022), mostly men (84%). At national level, the number of persons in care corresponds to **59 users per 100,000 residents** aged 15-74, with values ranging from 97 users per 100,000 residents in the central regions to 29 and 14 in the southern and island regions, respectively. With respect to **age groups**, it emerges that 45% of those in treatment are over 40 years old, 28% are between 31 and 40 years of age, and 14% are between 25 and 30 of age. Young people under the age of 25 account for 9%.

Focusing the analysis on **substances**, it appears that 40% of users in private social addiction services are receiving treatment for **primary use of cocaine/crack**, mainly male users (41% vs. 34% female users); 28% for **primary use of opiates/heroin**, and almost 7% for **primary use of cannabinoids**, without distinction of gender; 20% for **primary use of alcohol**, with higher percentages among females (24% vs. 20%).

Considering only the number of persons treated with the primary substance responsible for treatment, from 2020 to 2023 there is an increase in the share of persons treated for primary cocaine use (from 36% to 41%), compared to a decrease in those treated for primary heroin/opiate use (from 36% to 29%). The share of persons treated for primary alcohol consumption also rose slightly (from 19% to 21%), while that for cannabinoids showed no significant variations (7%).

The **private social services** that participated in the exploratory study had almost **22,000 users** in their care in 2023, the majority of whom (61%) were in residential or semi-residential care<sup>21</sup>. The majority of users in residential and semi-residential services are male (81%), and more than half (55%) are first-time users; 46% are between 30 and 44 years of age, 31% are in the over-45 age group and the rest of them are under 30.

With regard to **education levels**, most users had a low-to-medium level of education (60%), having obtained at most a lower secondary school diploma. The majority of users had a **fixed place of residence** (71%) prior to intake, while 12% lived in a correctional facility, and about one third lived either with their family of origin or alone. With regard to **employment status**, 66% of users were unemployed, 13% had regular employment, and 11% occasional employment.

<sup>20</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior - Directorate General for General Administration and Prefectures.  
<sup>21</sup> Source: Exploratory Study on private social services conducted by the National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology in cooperation with the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department for Anti-Drug Policies.



36% of service users are in treatment for **primary use of cocaine/crack** (predominantly smoked or inhaled, 45%), 23% for **primary use of alcohol**, 19% for **opiate/opioid use** (predominantly injected, 62%) and 13% for **cannabis use**. Furthermore, 1.7% of users are in care for gambling, and 2.3% for other behaviours. 72% are polydrug users, and the secondary substances taken in a higher percentage are cocaine/crack, alcohol and opiates/opioids.

Focusing on **care pathways**, it emerges that the majority of users in residential and semi-residential services have received **psychological support** (64%), and more than half participate in **group therapy** (52%). 42% had attended individual psychotherapy sessions, and more than one third had participated in self-help groups (36%). 22% of patients are on **integrated treatment** and, of these, 35% are on **substitution treatment**. Finally, 20% are undergoing drug treatment for **psychiatric conditions**.

Healthcare for **drug-addicted prisoners** is provided by the local **health authorities** and by the 154 **Addiction Services/Teams** present in the 189 correctional facilities throughout the country<sup>22</sup>. On 31 December 2023, there were **17,405 drug-addicted prisoners** in Italy, or 29% of the total prison population (60,166). 97% of the drug-addicted prisoners are male and 1/3 are foreign nationals. At the **regional level**, 44% of drug-addicted prisoners are found in correctional facilities in northern regions, while 25% and 32% are in those in central and southern regions and islands, respectively.

A total of **15,492 drug-addicted users entered prison** in 2023, amounting to **38% of total admissions** (40,661). At **regional level**, this value falls below 20% in the correctional facilities of the Friuli Venezia Giulia and Calabria regions, and in the province of Trento, and is above 50% in the correctional facilities of the Lombardy region and the province of Bolzano. Compared to the total number of **foreign nationals** entering prison, more than one third

(34%) are drug-addicted users, compared to 41% of the incidence recorded among **Italian nationals**, with percentages that have dropped in both cases, compared to the previous year.

The number of **drug-addicted prisoners** who received at least one **service in 2023** from Addiction Services<sup>23</sup> was **26,268**, of whom **97% were men**, **42% were new users** and **34% were foreign nationals**. New persons assisted in 2023 have a **mean age** of 38 years, persons already assisted are 40 years old. Overall, men and women have the same mean age (39 years). The proportion of foreign prisoners under 40 years of age is significantly higher (69%) than that of Italian prisoners (43%), and decreases considerably in the over-44 age group. In fact, the mean age of assisted Italian nationals is higher (41 years) than that of assisted foreign nationals (35 years).

More than **half of the drug-addicted prisoners** are in the care of Social Services for **primary cocaine/crack use** (53%), a percentage that rises to 55% for new users. 24% are assisted for primary opioid use (a percentage that rises to 39% among female prisoners and 27% among those already known to the services), and 12% for cannabinoid use. Primary cocaine use is significantly higher than the percentage recorded nationwide in Lombardy (64%), Campania (59%) and Sicily (63%).

Considering the information on **treatments**, it appears that **28,058 treatments** were provided in 2023, corresponding to slightly more than one treatment per patient (1.3). Almost **half of the users** (47%) benefit from **integrated treatment** (pharmacological and psychosocial), one-fourth from psychosocial-only interventions (26%), and 11% from pharmacological-only treatment. In addition, 7% of assisted persons are placed in **therapeutic communities** as an alternative measure to prison. Among prisoners assisted for primary opioid and cocaine use, the most frequently administered treatment is integrated

<sup>22</sup> Source: Ministry of Justice - Department of Prison Administration.

<sup>23</sup> Source: Inter-regional technical group on addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

pharmacological treatment, followed by psychosocial support. Pharmacological treatment was administered to 20% of prisoners with opioids as their primary substance, while the highest number of placements in rehabilitation facilities as an alternative to prison detention (14%) can be observed among prisoners assisted for primary cocaine use. Psychosocial and educational treatments are those most frequently provided to prisoners assisted for primary cannabis use, while among those assisted for primary use of other unspecified substances the treatment profile is similar to those assisted for primary opioid use.

Of the 40,872 persons in **alternative measures to detention** as of 31 December 2023, **3,901** were on **probation to the specific Social Service for drug/alcohol addiction** at the Offices of External Criminal Execution (UEPE) (10% of the total). 47% of the probation measures with specific Social Services for drug/alcohol addicts were granted to persons from detention, 20% to persons as a provisional measure instead of detention, 23% to persons on parole.

The **percentage of probation measures**<sup>24</sup> for people addicted to alcohol or drugs is **gradually decreasing** (it stood at 15% in 2013), while the number of alternative measures granted to non-specific people addicted to alcohol or drugs is increasing (from 35% in 2013 to 59% in 2023). 95% of the specific measures were granted to men and 85% to Italian nationals. 34% of people addicted to alcohol or drugs on probation are between 40 and 49 years old, and 30% are between 30 and 39 years old.

In the year 2023, the number of people addicted to alcohol or drugs in UEPE's care for **alternative measures** was 6,270 (9% of the total number of persons in care

during the year for alternative measures to detention; the number includes persons in care at the beginning of the year from previous periods).

In 2023, the main reason for **withdrawals** of probation granted to people addicted to alcohol or drugs concerned the **negative trend of the measure**: the incidence is 91% in the case of measures granted in a state of freedom, and 82% for those in a state of detention.

**Community sanctions** are a substitute criminal measure, which is generally granted to persons in a state of freedom. It is applied in specific cases of violation of the Law on drugs (art. 73 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990) and of the Highway Code. In 2023, of the 10,287 people who benefitted from this measure, **855** committed **drug-related offences**, marking a 23% increase from the previous year. Overall, the incidence of granting this sanction to drug-related offenders increased from 5% of total community sanctions to 8% in the 2013-2023 period. Approximately 50% of the recipients of community sanctions for committing drug-related offences are aged between 30 and 49 years, 16% are under 30 years of age.

<sup>24</sup> Source: Ministry of Justice - Department for Juvenile and Community Justice.

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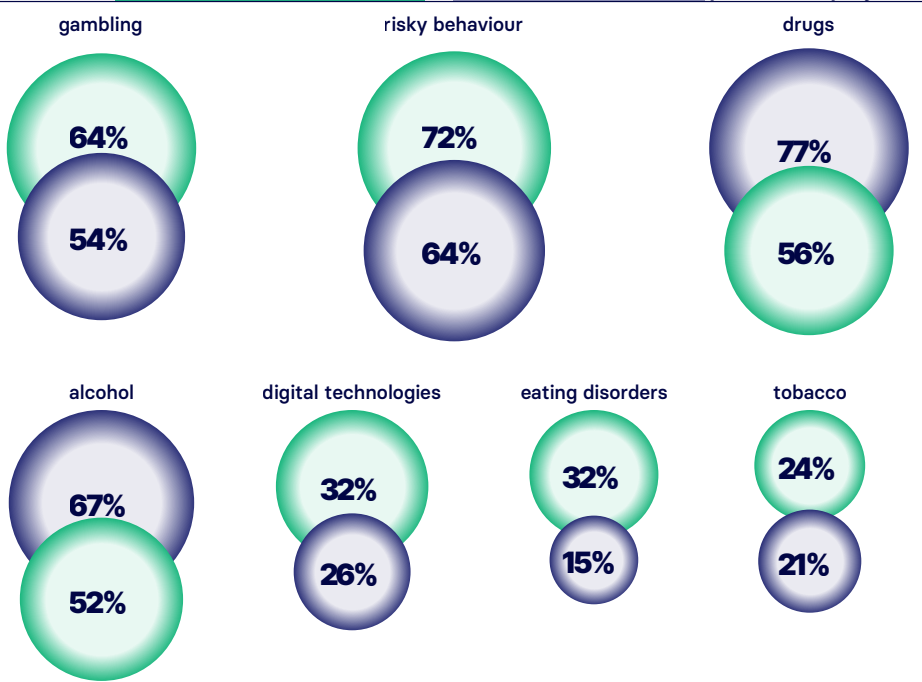
Table 3.4.  
Prevention activities and interventions in 2023

In the population

Initiatives carried out by private social facilities



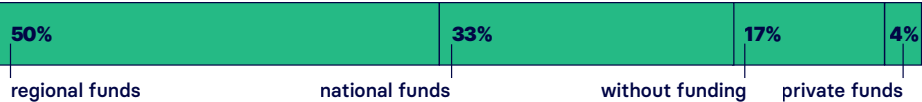
Themes of environmental and universal or selective and indicated prevention projects



Sources of funding for prevention projects

The total is higher than 100% because some projects received different types of funding by more than one source.

environmental and universal prevention



selective and indicated prevention

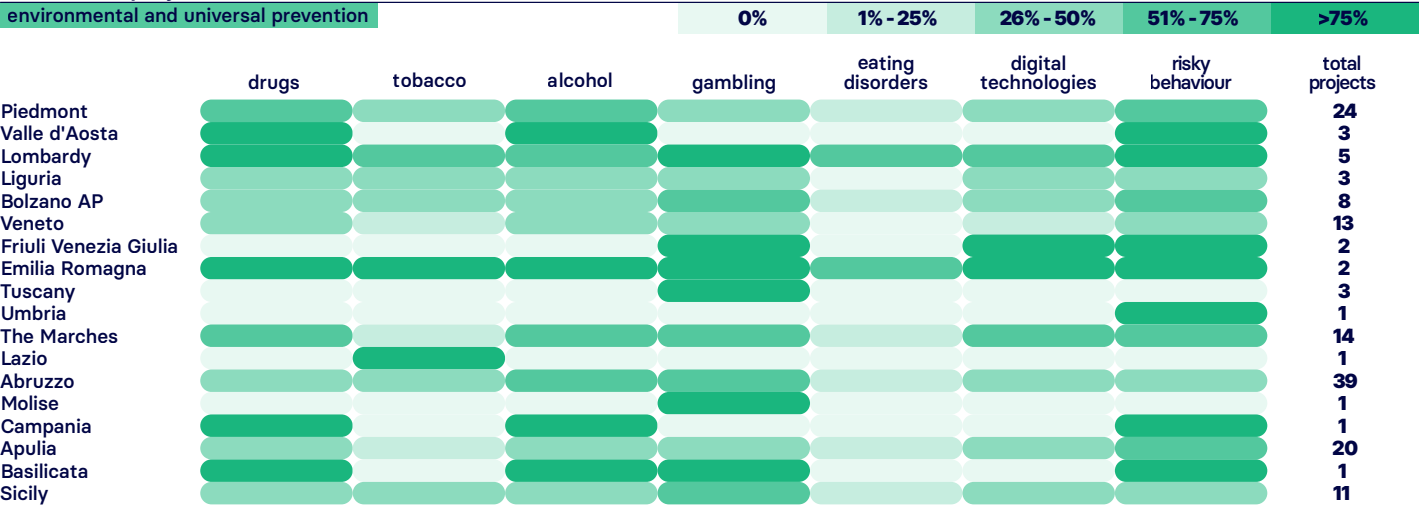


Source: Exploratory Study of private social facilities for Addictions. Processed by the National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology.  
Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.

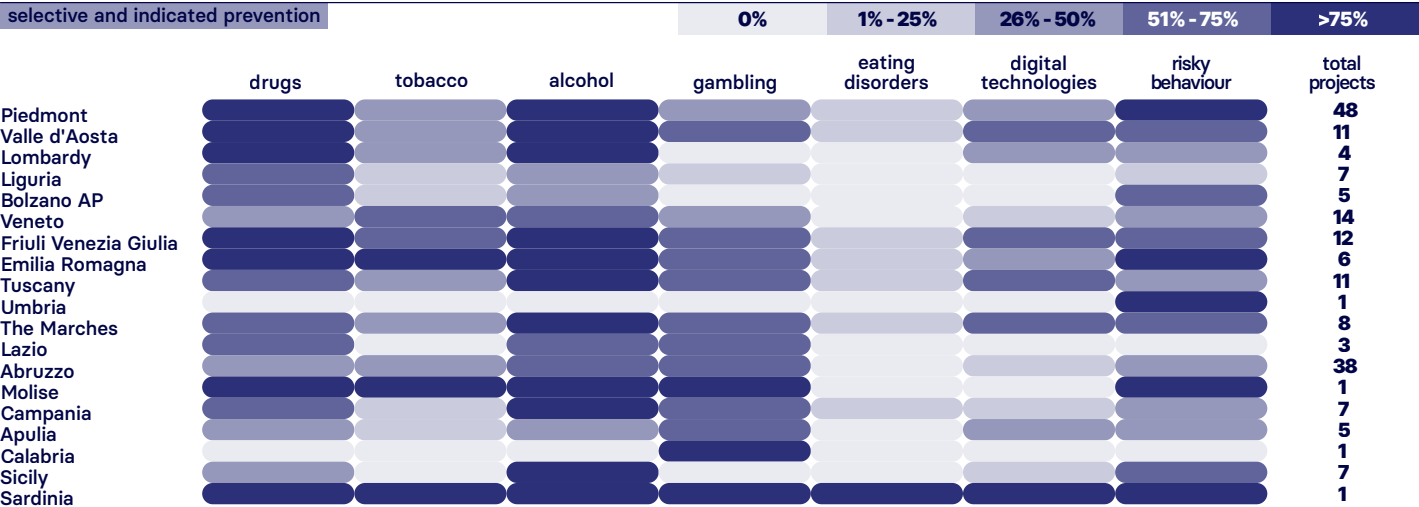
Initiatives reported by Regions/APs and by Departments for Addictions



Prevention project themes



The regions and APs not included in the list did not implement specific projects on thematic areas. These are: Trento AP, Calabria, Sardinia.



The regions and APs not included in the list did not implement specific projects on thematic areas. These are: Trento AP, Basilicata.

Sources of funding for prevention projects

The total is higher than 100% because some projects received different types of funding by more than one source.



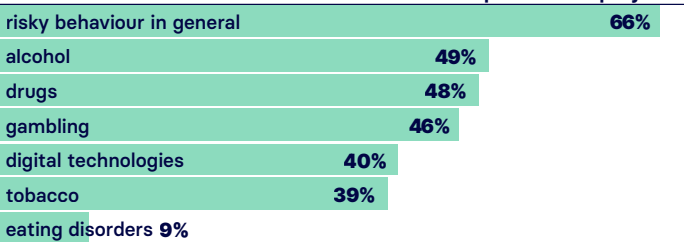


In schools

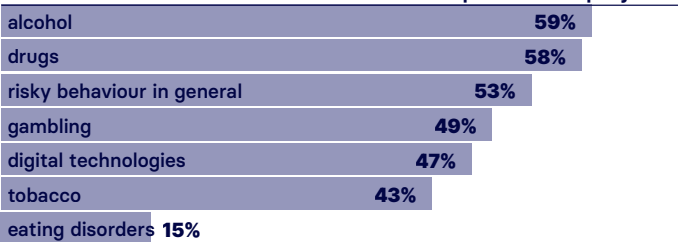
Initiatives reported by Regions/APs and by Departments for Addictions



Thematic area for environmental and universal prevention projects

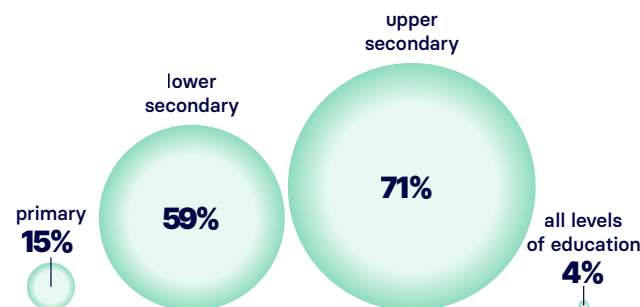


Thematic area for selective and indicated prevention projects

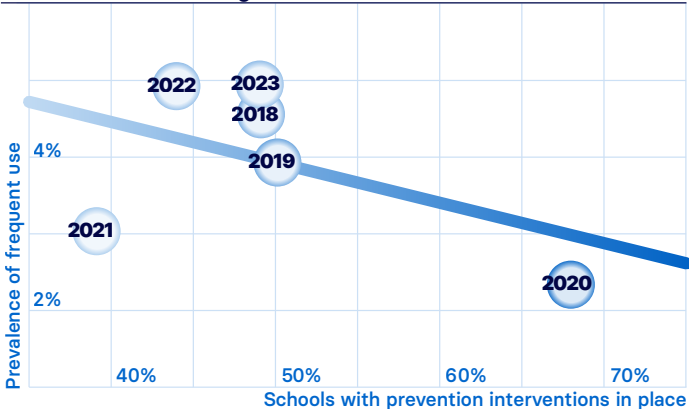


Places where environmental and universal prevention projects are implemented

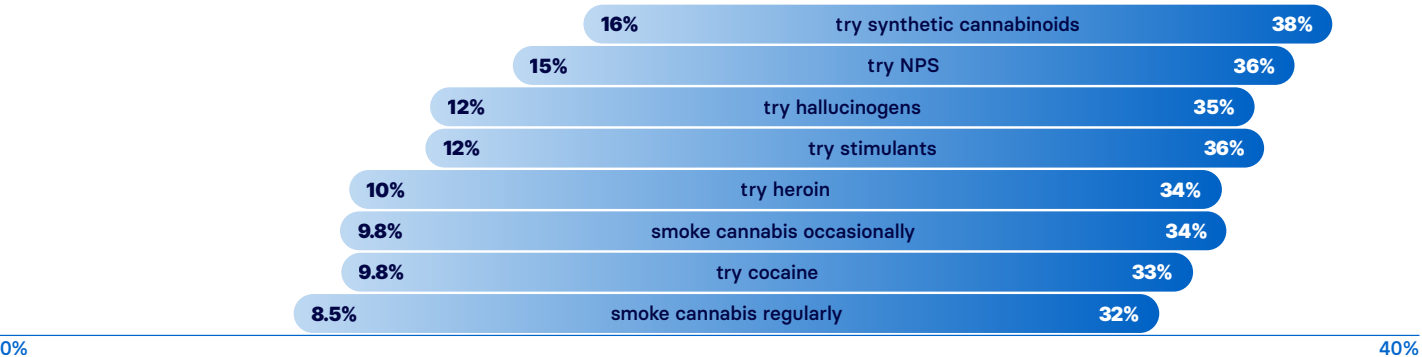
Regions/APs and Departments for Addictions



Prevention in schools and prevalence of frequent substance use among students

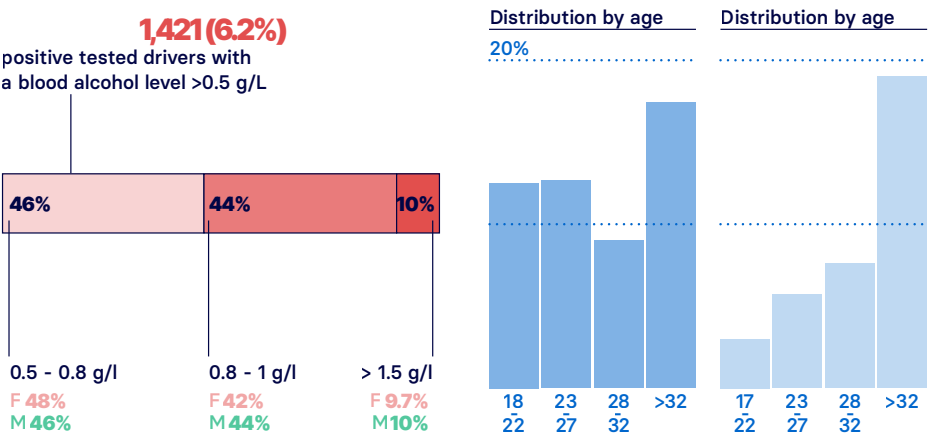
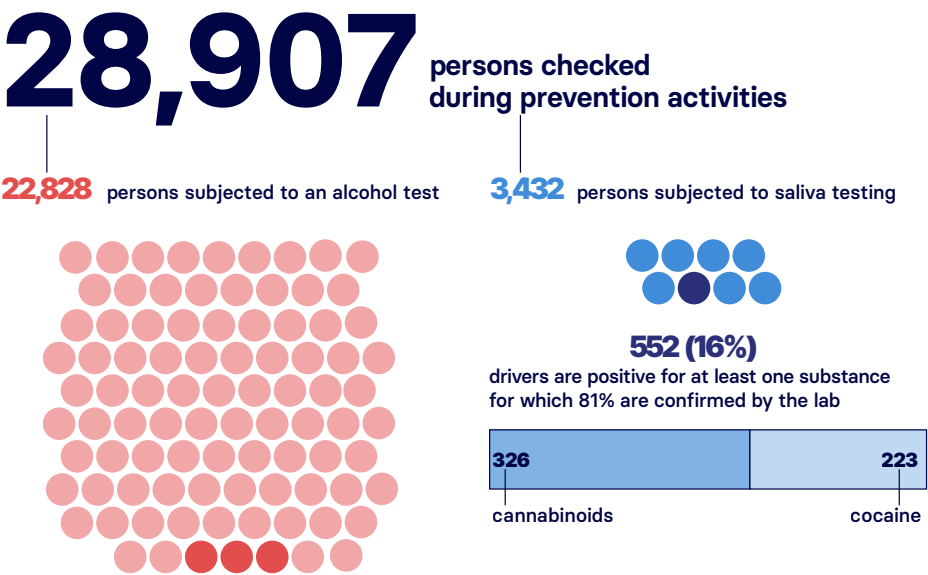


Students who have participated in prevention projects in schools answer “Don't know” less frequently to questions about the perception of risk associated with substance use, compared to students who have not participated in such projects



Sources: Inter-regional technical group on addictions established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces. Processed by the National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology | ESPAD®Italia Study, National Research Council - Institute of Clinical Physiology.

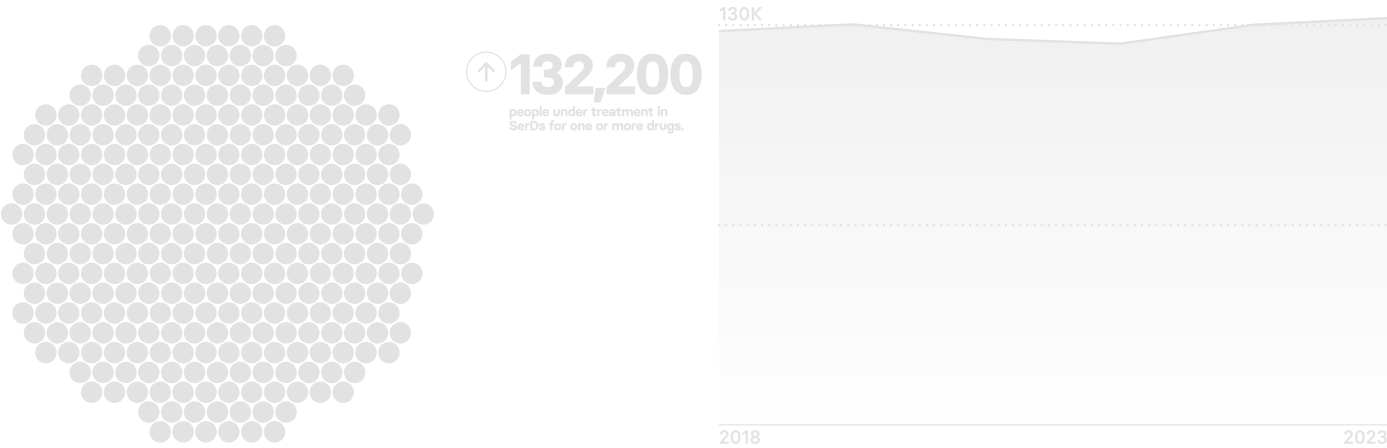
Prevention of drug-related road accidents



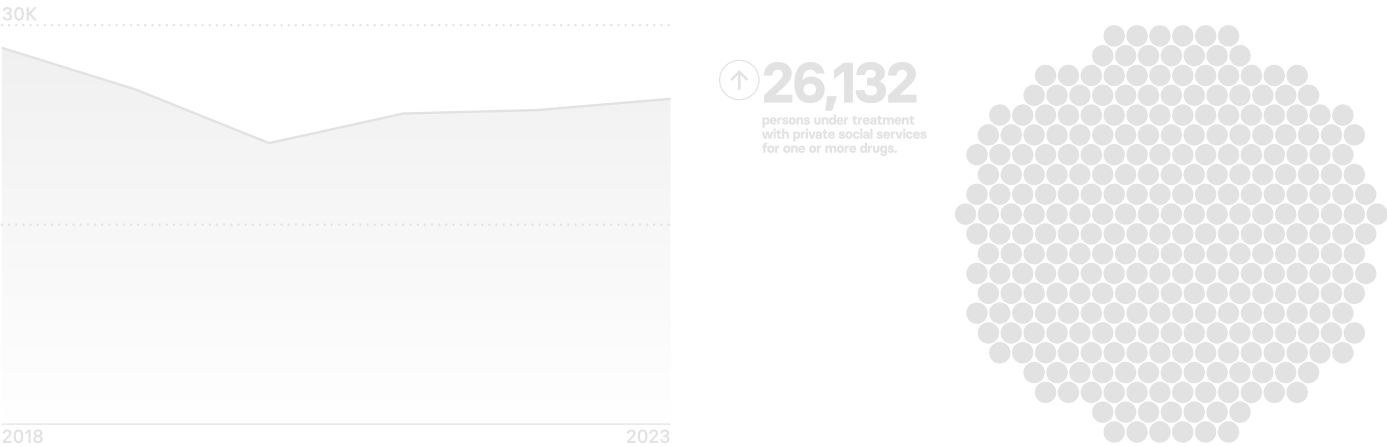
Source: Ministry of the Interior - Department of Public Security - Traffic Police Service.



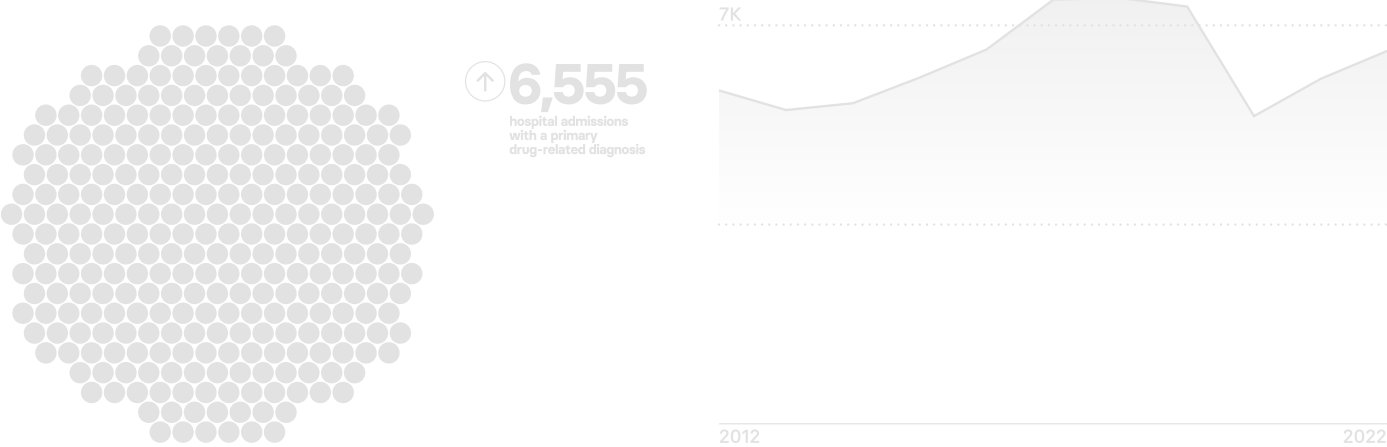
Drug users in SerDs in 2023 and primary substance of treatment



Drug users in private social Services in 2023 and primary substance of treatment



Hospital admissions with a primary drug-related diagnosis in 2022



Note: the missing percentage can be attributed to other substances.



# Health implications

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In 2023, **34,444 users of the Public Addiction Services** (SerD facilities)<sup>1</sup>, equivalent to 26% of those in treatment, were tested for **HIV serology**, and 1.3% of the total number of patients, corresponding to 4.8% of those tested, were **positive** (no. 1,667). At regional level, the proportion of HIV-positive users out of the total number of treated persons is within a range of 0.5 or less, found in the central, southern and island regions, with the exception of Umbria and Sicily, and 2 or more in the northern regions. The extreme variability in the percentage of users tested results from failure to collect this type of information, due to criticalities during the registration on computer systems.

Referring only to tested subjects, the percentage of positive users in the north-western regions reaches 6%, while in the southern regions it drops to 1.4%. The percentage of tested users, out of the total number of treated persons in 2023, has dropped (26%) compared to the previous five-year period, when it was stable at around 30%, while the percentage of positive users, out of those tested, is basically stable (4-5%).

**30,819 users in the care of SerD facilities were tested for hepatitis B**, or 23% of the total number of those treated, and 0.5% of the total number of users, or 2.3% of those tested, were **positive** (no. 716). At regional level, the percentage of positive users out of the total number of tested subjects is highest in the regions of Veneto (6%) and Sicily (3%), and lowest in the southern and

central regions (1.5%). This variability is probably due to differences in the implementation and recording of the HBV vaccination in the different regions. 2023 showed a drop in the number of tested subjects, compared to the previous year (from 26% to 23%), while the percentage of positive users has remained essentially stable over time since 2018.

Patients **tested for hepatitis C** were **24%** of those undergoing treatment (no. 31,318), and **9.6%** of the total number of those treated, corresponding to 40% of those tested, were **positive** (12,637). The percentage of positive users among the tested subjects shows significant territorial variability, with a peak value of 41-42% in the northern geographical macro-areas, and a minimum value of 30% in the southern regions. Similarly to what was observed for HBV, there was also a decrease in HCV in the number of users tested in 2023, compared to the previous year (from 26% to 24%), while the percentage of positive users remained basically stable over time.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Ministry of Health - SIND.

Considering the analysis performed on clients who used **injecting drugs**, the so-called *Injecting Drug Users* (IDU), the percentage of **tested users** increases and reaches approximately 28% for both HBV and HCV testing. Analysing the users according to the main injected substances<sup>2</sup>, among those who use heroin the percentage of subjects tested for HBV and HCV is 30% and 29%, respectively. The proportion of IDU users tested for HIV and HCV is also quite similar among primary cocaine users.

Out of the **1,888 diagnoses of HIV infections**<sup>3</sup> received by the **AIDS Operational Centre** (AOC) of the National Institute of Health in the year 2022, there were **82 new HIV diagnoses with regard to IDUs**, of which 85% involved **males** and 23% **foreign nationals**. At national level, new HIV diagnoses reported in IDUs totalled 1,092 between 2013 and 2022. From 2013 to 2017, the percentage of IDUs in the total number of new HIV diagnoses decreased from 4.7% to 2.9%, while this value increased in the following years, reaching 4.3% in the 2021-2022 two-year period. Over the years, new cases of HIV infection reported in IDUs have had a higher male prevalence: between 2013 and 2022, the percentage of new **male** cases remained stable at around 80%, with the exception of 2019, when male diagnoses exceeded 94%. Instead, the percentage of new diagnoses in **foreign nationals** varies between a minimum value of 10% in 2017 and a maximum value of 23% in 2022.

New HIV diagnoses in IDUs in 2022 mainly concerned the **40-49 years** and **50-59 years** age groups, which together account for 54% of cases. An increase in age at first diagnosis has been observed over time: since 2013, the **median age** of diagnosis increased from 40 years to 43 years in 2022. The figure for the foreign population describes a lower age of diagnosis (median age: 36 years). From 2013 to 2022, 30% of IDUs newly diagnosed with HIV were tested due to explicit or suspected

HIV symptoms; 24% were referred by SerD facilities, therapeutic communities or correctional facilities, and 14% for engaging in risky behaviour (sexual and/or unspecified).

Now, with regard to new AIDS diagnoses, it emerges that compared to 403 new cases diagnosed in 2022, there were a total of **32 new AIDS diagnoses for IDUs**. At national level, 72,556 AIDS cases were notified to the COA from 1982 to 2022, and about half of them were IDUs (no. 35,383). A steady decrease in new AIDS cases in IDUs has been observed over the last two decades.

Over the years, the percentage of IDU males diagnosed with the disease remained stable at around **79-80%**, while the percentage of **foreign nationals** increased from 2% to 16% in 2021-2022. The **median age** of diagnosis also increased significantly, from 32 years in the pre-2005 period to 50 years in the last year. With respect to **diseases indicative** of AIDS, 23% of the new cases diagnosed in IDUs in 2021-2022 were **fungal infections**, and 14% were **viral infections**.

Overall, an increasing number of people are being diagnosed with AIDS, having only recently discovered their HIV status. Indeed, considering the time between the first positive HIV test and the AIDS diagnosis, it emerges that the proportion of IDU patients with a **recent HIV diagnosis** (less than 6 months) is steadily and progressively increasing, rising from 9% in 1996 to 51% in the 2021-2022 two-year period.

From 1983 to 2020, there were **28,509 AIDS deaths in IDUs**, or 60% of the 47,408 AIDS deaths in Italy, with a significant decrease: from 68-69% in the years 1988-1992 to about 50% in the years 2005-2009, reaching 38% in 2020 (the last year available). The total number of IDUs with AIDS alive in 2020 is 6,822, corresponding to 28% of the 24,297 cases of people living with AIDS in Italy.

<sup>2</sup> A subject may be counted several times if he/she uses several substances for injection.  
<sup>3</sup> Source: National Institute of Health - Department of Infectious Diseases - AIDS Operational Centre.



In **2022**, the Sentinel Surveillance System<sup>4</sup> was notified of **70 new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in IDUs**, accounting for 2.6% of the total number of STI cases reported in the year. 84% were diagnosed in males, with a median age of 34 years, and 13% in foreign nationals. The age of diagnosis is lower in the female population, with a median age of 30. A **viral** STI was diagnosed in 44% of cases, and a **bacterial** STI in 56% of cases.

From 1 January **1991** to 31 December **2022**, the Surveillance System recorded a total of **3,053 new STI cases in IDUs**, representing 2.9% of all reported STI cases. The period from 1991 to 2008 was marked by a sharp decrease in STI reports in IDUs, whereas reports have been steadily increasing since 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Source: National Institute of Health - Sentinel Surveillance System for STI based on clinical centres.

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132,200

SerD users under treatment in 2023

HBV

23% of users tested

= 2.3%

of tested subjects  
are positive (716)

HCV

24% of users tested

↓ 40%

of tested subjects  
are positive (12,637)

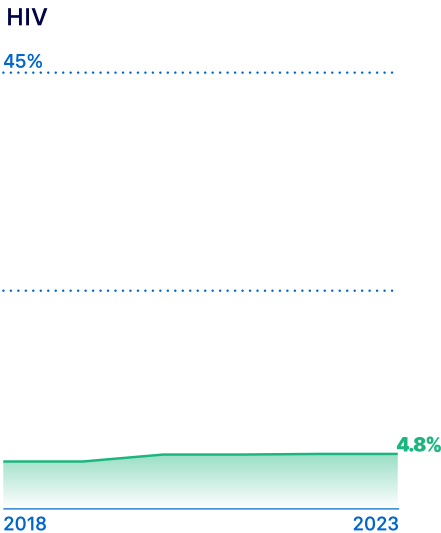
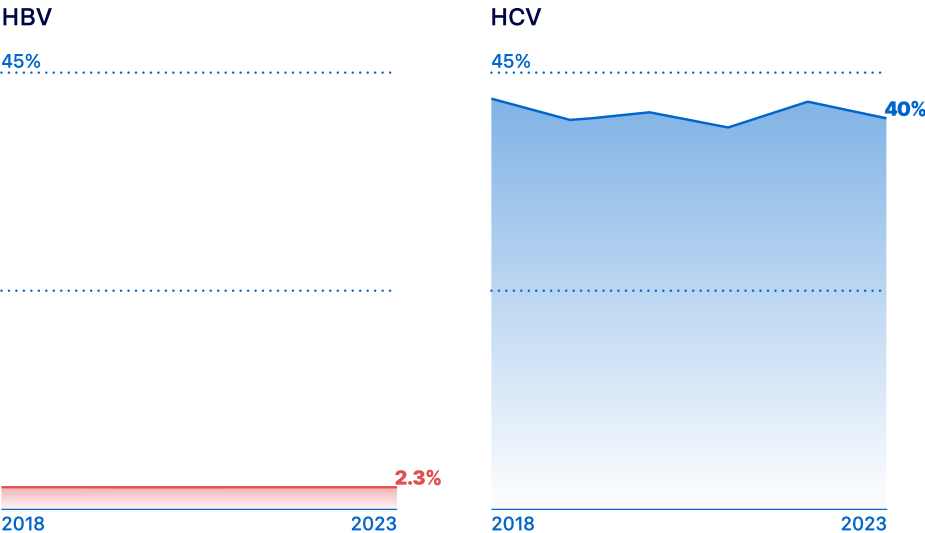
HIV

26% of users tested

= 4.8%

of tested subjects  
are positive (1,667)

Trend over time in the percentage of users tested positive

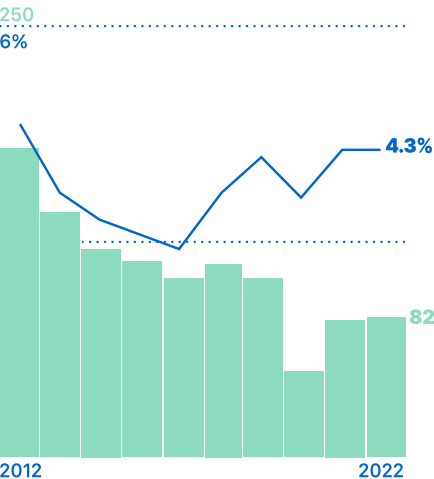


Sources: Ministry of Health - Directorate General for Digitisation, Health Information System and Statistics; Directorate General for Health Prevention | Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces - Subgroup on Addictions - SIND (Addiction Information System) Working Group | National Institute of Health - Department of Infectious Diseases - AIDS Operational Centre.  
Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.

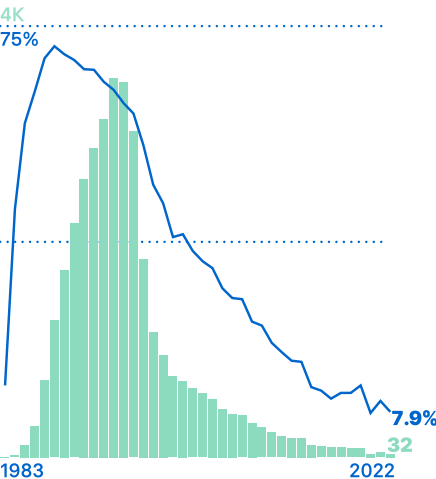
Prevalence of HIV and AIDS among IDUs (injecting drug users)

Annual total among IDUs and IDU percentage of total diagnoses or deaths

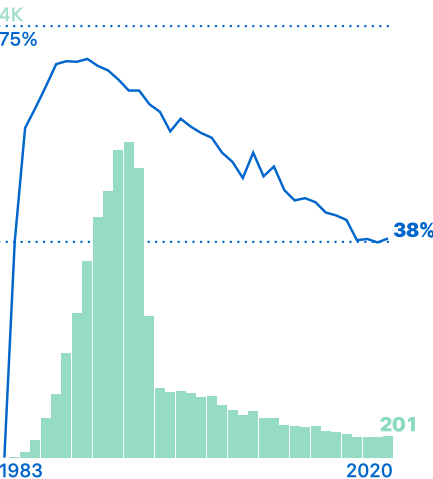
New HIV diagnoses in IDUs



New AIDS diagnoses in IDUs



AIDS-related deaths in IDUs



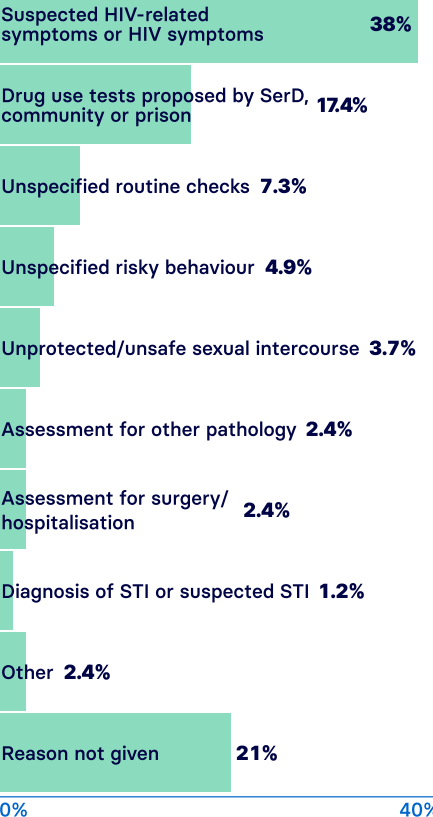
New HIV diagnoses in IDUs in 2022

**82**  
= or 4.3% of total new HIV diagnoses

New AIDS diagnoses in IDUs in 2022

**32**  
↓ or 7.9% of total new AIDS diagnoses

Reason for HIV testing for new diagnoses



**85%**  
newly-diagnosed males

**79%**  
newly-diagnosed males in 2021-22

**43 years**  
median age of new diagnoses

**50 years**  
median age of new diagnoses

**50%**  
with a long-standing undiagnosed infection (CD4 lymphocytes less than 350 cells/L)

**51%**  
diagnosed with AIDS less than 6 months after a positive HIV test in 2021-2022 was 9% in 1996

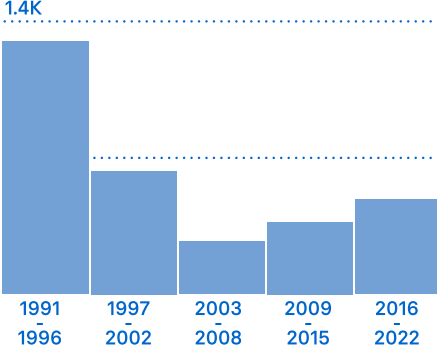
Spread of STIs (sexually transmitted infections) among IDUs

New STI diagnoses in IDUs in 2022

**70**  
↓ or 2.6% of total new STI diagnoses

**84%**  
newly-diagnosed males

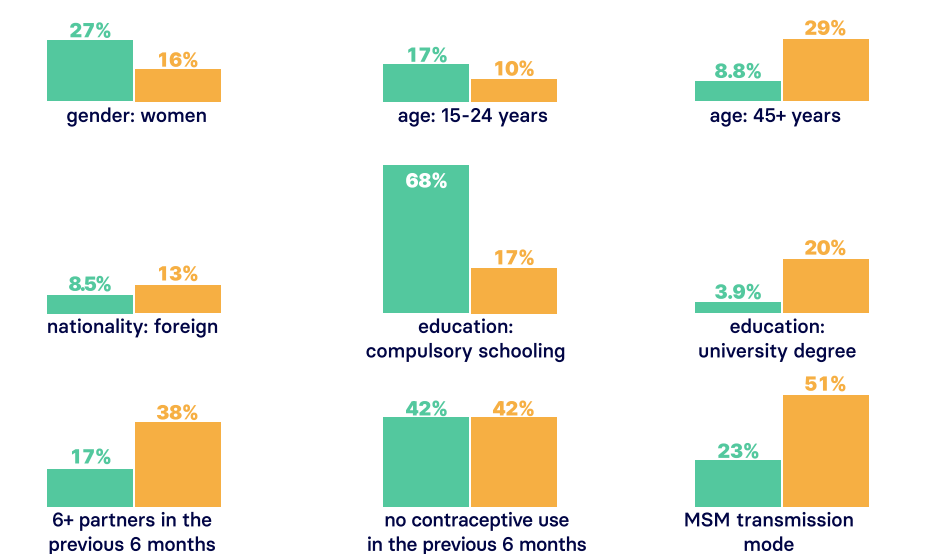
New STI diagnoses in IDUs



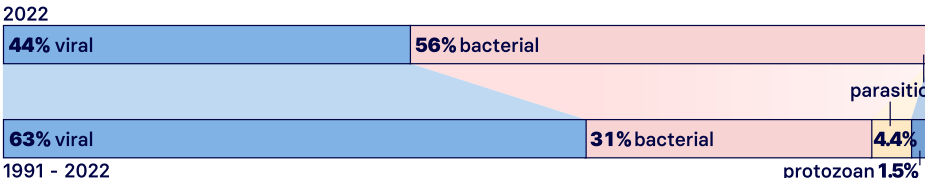
**34 years**  
median age of new diagnoses, males

**30 years**  
median age of new diagnoses, females

Characteristics of new STI diagnoses in IDUs in the 1991-2022 period and in 2022



Type of STI among new diagnoses in IDUs



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In 2023, there were **227** deaths from **acute drug intoxication**<sup>5</sup> (detected on a circumstantial basis by the Police), which was lower than the previous year (298). A total of **26,976 deaths** have been recorded since 1973: the number of drug-related deaths was very high until the 1990s, while a gradual and steady decline has been observed since 2000.

In 2023, 84% of deaths involved **men** and 10% were **foreign nationals**. Most of the deaths (58%) involved persons between 25 and 49 years of age, and 36% were aged 50 or older; 6.1% of the deaths involved young people under 25 years of age. Over the last decade, the **mean age** of deaths has progressively increased **from 38 to 43 years**.

In 2023, the mortality rate for acute drug intoxication was around **6 deaths per million residents aged 15-64 years**, with values around 8-9 in the north-eastern and central regions, and around 4 in the southern regions. Over the last decade, northern regions show an increase in the share of deaths, from 36% to 47%.

With regard to the **type of substance**, in 2023 46% of deaths were attributed to acute lethal intoxication by **opiates**, mainly heroin, 28% by **unspecified substances**, and 23% by **cocaine** (a percentage that has increased considerably over the years). Opiates remain the main cause of death by intoxication, although the percentage of deaths known to be caused by a specific substance

shows a decrease from 82% to 63% over the past decade. Conversely, the proportion of deaths attributable to methadone increased from 6.6% (no. 13) to 18% (no. 30) of the total number of deaths with a specified substance in 10 years, recording the highest percentage value.

Other useful information on the relationship between drugs and deaths can be obtained by analysing the results of the toxicological-forensic investigations<sup>6</sup>. Since the data refer to deaths due to violent causes or suspected drug intoxication for which a toxicological-forensic investigation was ordered by the judicial authorities, and concern deaths from 85 provinces, it should be specified that the figure is certainly underestimated. In **2023**, toxicological-forensic investigations recorded **822 deaths** in which **one or more narcotic and/or psychotropic substances** were detected, mostly involving males (79%) and persons between 31 and 60 years of age (67%). The main causes of death in the

<sup>5</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior - Directorate General for Anti-Drug Services.  
<sup>6</sup> Source: Forensic Toxicology related to the Scientific Association Italian Forensic Toxicologists Group.

cases assessed were, with substantially stable percentages over the last four years, **acute lethal intoxication** (38%), **organ damage** (17%), **road accident** (14%), **suicide** (10%), and **accidental trauma** (8%).

While overall the most frequently detected substances are **alcohol** (38%), **cocaine** (37%), **benzodiazepines** (24%), **psychiatric drugs** (20%), **heroin** (16%), **methadone** (15%) and **cannabinoids** (10%), without substantial variations over the four-year period, in cases of acute lethal intoxication (no. 314), the percentage of deaths attributable to cocaine rises to 42%, and that attributable to heroin rises to 33%. In addition to the “traditional” classes of substances of abuse, 5 cases in 2023 could be attributed to exposure to new psychoactive substances; synthetic cathinones (no. 3) and GHB (no. 1) were identified in other deaths from other causes and, finally, fentanyl was identified in 4 fatal acute intoxications. In deaths attributable to organ damage (no. 136) and in road accidents (no. 112), instead, the most frequently detected substance was alcohol, with percentages of 45% and 64%, respectively, followed in both cases by cocaine (34% and 30%).

By using a different source to observe this phenomenon, namely ISTAT's General Mortality Register, it is possible to detect the initial cause of death and the other conditions that contributed to the death. This figure refers to 2021 (the last year available due to the time needed for data collection and validation).

During this year, there were **324 deaths with an initial drug-related cause**, accounting for 0.5‰ of the 706,969 deaths in Italy during the year<sup>7</sup>. 88% were male and 8% were foreign nationals. The national drug-related mortality rate is **5.3 deaths per million residents**, ranging from 3.4 in the southern regions to around 6-7 in the northern regions. The national rate shows an increasing trend compared to the 2010-2016 period, during which the value was around 4 deaths per million.

In 2021, **63% of deaths** from an initial directly drug-related cause were in the **35-54 age** group, while 18% were aged 35 years or less. Overall, the **mean age** stands at **45 years**, and shows a **progressive increase over the 2009-2021 period**: in males, the mean age of deaths rises from 38 to 45 years, while in females it increases from 39 to 48 years.

The majority of deaths (80%) are attributed to the use of **multiple or unknown psychoactive substances** as the initial cause, 15% to **opioid** use (a percentage ranging between 10% and 15% since 2015), and 5.2% to the use of **drugs other than opioids** (a percentage that shows no substantial variations since 2018).

Moving on to consider **all causes** reported in the mortality tables (multiple causes), the number of **drug-related deaths** rises to **820** (+9.6% compared to 2020). 85% were male and 6% were foreign nationals. At national level, the **mortality rate** from multiple drug-related causes has progressively increased over the years. Indeed, while in 2011 the value was around 7, in 2021 it reached **13 deaths per million residents**. At territorial level, the mortality rate in 2021 shows values between 10, recorded in the southern geographical macro-area, and 15, recorded in the north-western macro-area. **68% of deaths** for multiple drug-related causes were in the over-45 age group, and a gradual and steady increase

<sup>7</sup> Source: Istat - Survey of deaths and causes of death.

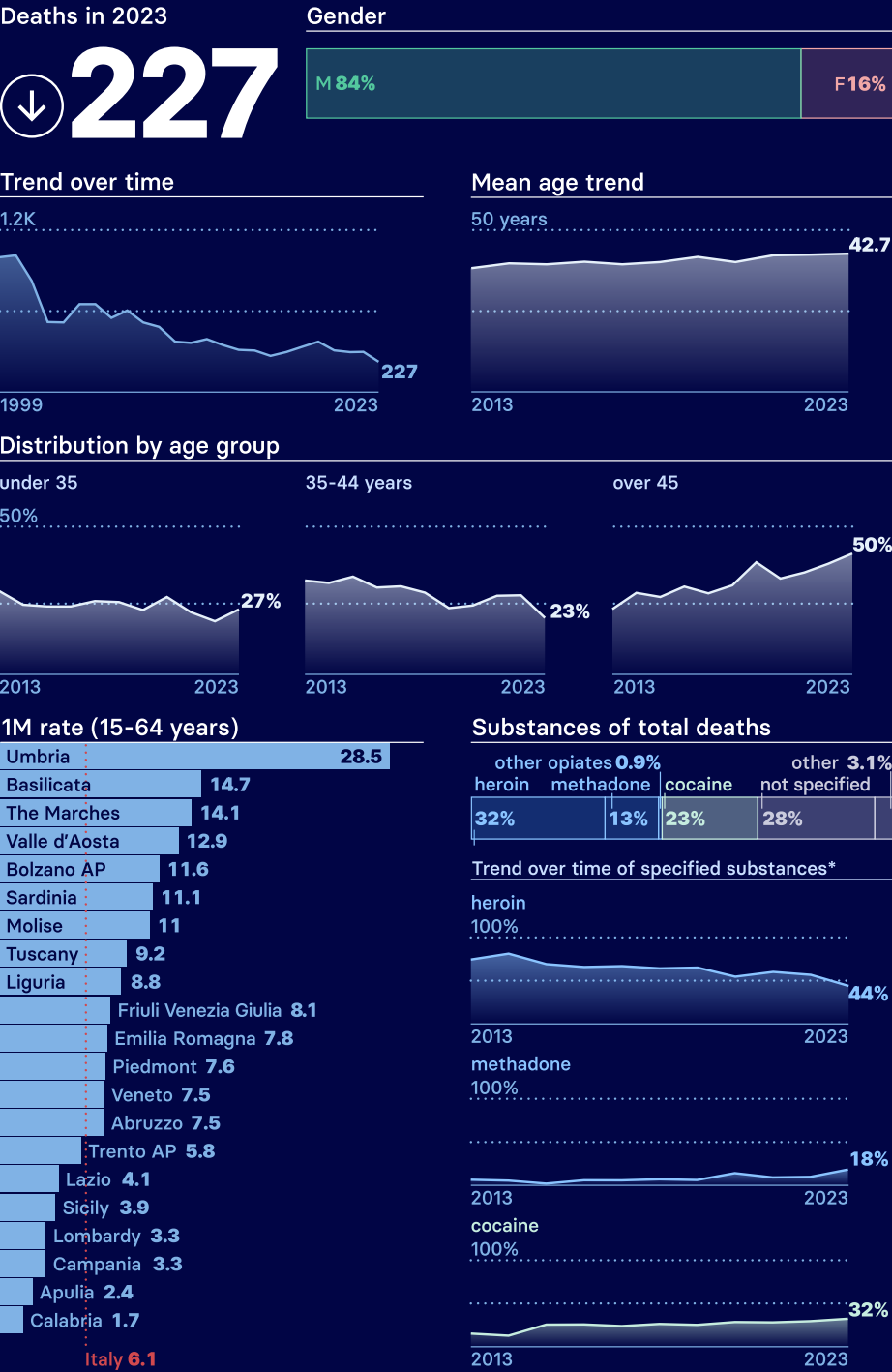
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in this specific proportion of deaths can be observed between 2009 and 2021 (in 2009 it was 31%). As the age increases, the number of deaths with multiple drug-related causes rises, compared to the number of deaths with an initial drug-related cause. This ratio is three times and four times higher in the 45-54 and 55-64 age groups, respectively.



Table 4.2.  
Deaths from drug-related causes

Deaths from acute drug intoxication (AI)





Deaths with initial cause and deaths with drug-related initial cause or concomitant cause in 2021

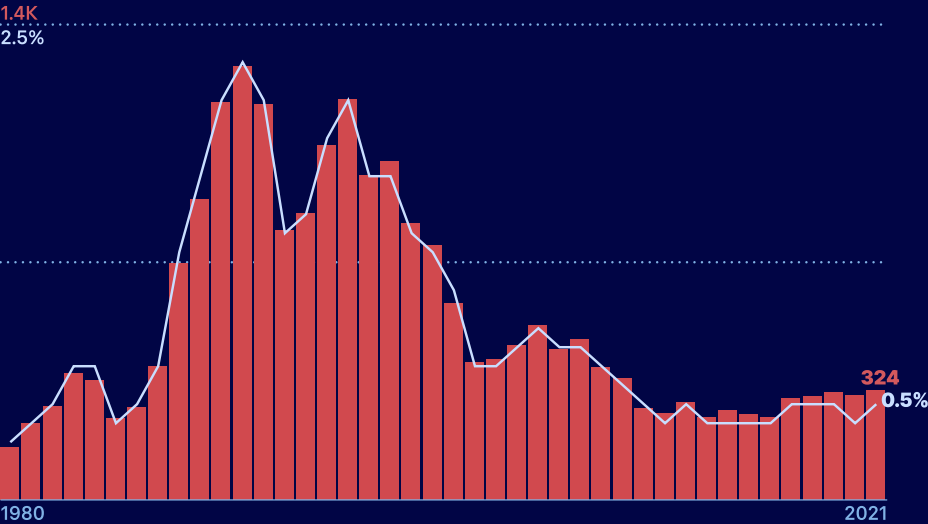
Deaths with drug-related initial cause

↑ **324**  
+4.9% compared to 2020  
of which 88% males

Deaths with drug-related initial cause or concomitant cause

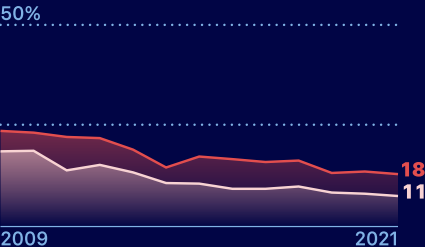
↑ **820**  
+9.6% compared to 2020  
of which 85% male

Deaths with drug-related initial cause, absolute value and % of total deaths

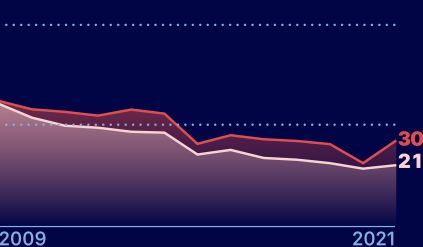


Distribution by age group

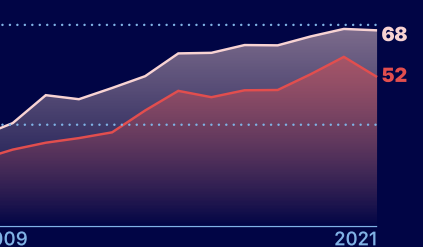
under 35



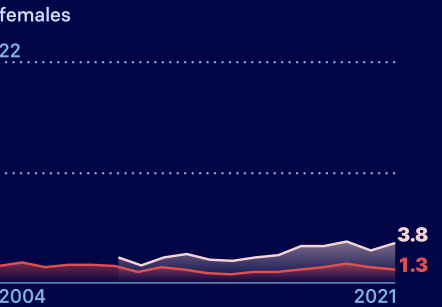
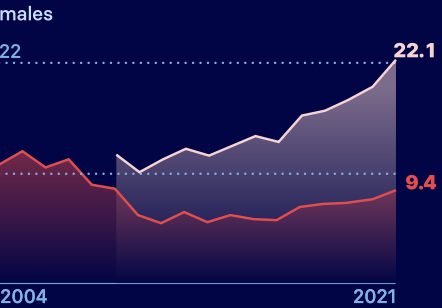
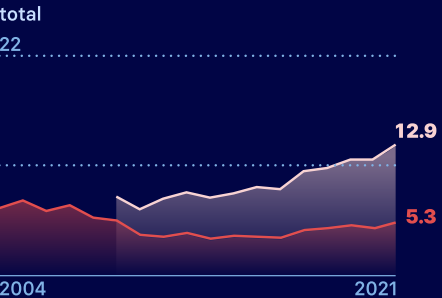
35-44



over 45

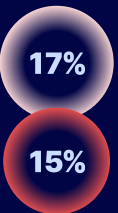


Mortality rates per 1M residents

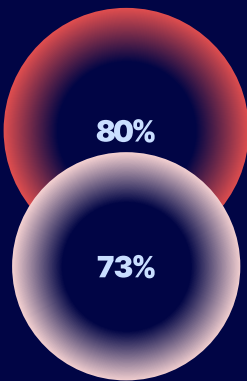


Substances

opiates/opioids  
(with other substances)



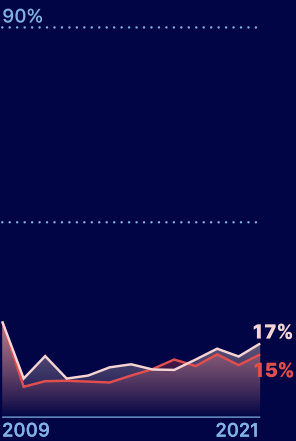
multiple, uncertain or  
unknown substances



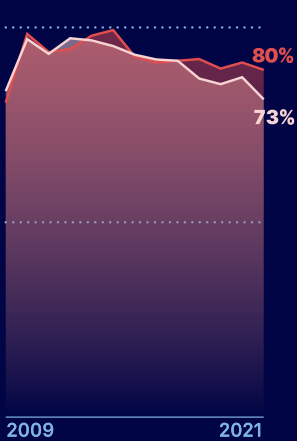
other substances  
(without opiates)



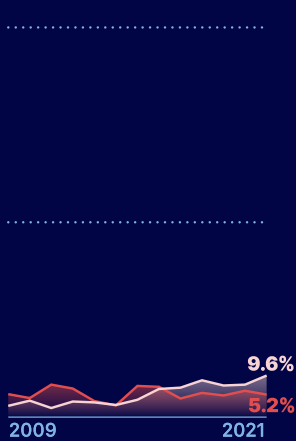
Trend over time



Trend over time



Trend over time

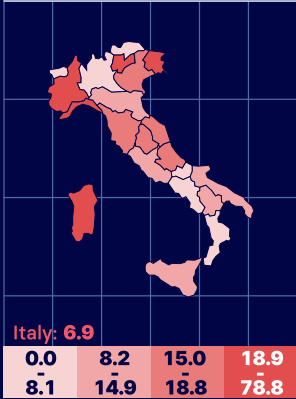


Mortality rates per 1M residents, multiple drug-related causes

Standardised rates by age group and geographical area

	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64
North-West	6.7	9.8	28.2	29.4	30.5
North-East	3.6	13.5	19.8	38.5	18.7
Centre	6.4	8.4	21.5	33.3	23.0
South	1.4	6.5	22.0	29.0	9.7
Islands	0.0	11.3	21.0	39.3	14.8
Italy	4.0	9.6	23.0	33.0	20.3

Rates by area



Source: National Institute of Statistics - Directorate General for Social Statistics and Welfare - Integrated Health, Welfare and Social Security System Service.  
Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.



# Offences and violations

---



**217,527 road accidents** resulting in personal injuries were recorded in 2022, marking a 10% increase compared to the previous year<sup>1</sup>. Road accidents linked to an **impaired mental and physical** state have increased over the years: accidents due to driving under the influence of **drugs** has risen from 0.1 per 100 road accidents in 2001 to 1.5 in 2022, while those linked to driving **under the influence of alcohol** have risen from 1.2 to 4.6. This increase might also be due to the enforcement of new road traffic regulations and tools.

For exhaustive information on the causes of accidents, it is also useful to consider the data on offences charged by the Traffic Police and the Carabinieri Corps, as well as violations reported by ACI (Italian Automobile Club) at the Local Police Stations of provincial capitals. In 2022, the Traffic Police, Carabinieri and Local Police of the provincial capitals recorded a total of **4,608 offences for driving under the influence of drugs** (art. 187 of the Highway Code), and **37,678 offences for driving under the influence of alcohol** (art. 186 of the Highway Code), with increasing values compared to the previous year<sup>2</sup>. In fact, after the drastic drop in the number of fines in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, values have been rising again since 2021. However, in the period from 2014 to 2022, the percentage of fines for driving in an impaired mental and physical state out of the total number of fines for behavioural offences was basically stable at around 0.5%. From the data provided by the Traffic Police, it emerges that those fined for driving

under the influence of alcohol or driving under the influence of drugs are **predominantly young drivers**: in 2022, the 18-32 age group accounted for 46% of fines for driving under the influence of alcohol, and 47% of those for driving under the influence of drugs. It also emerges that the majority of fines were issued at night (between 10.00 pm and 6.00 am): 76% of fines for driving under the influence of alcohol, and 45% for driving under the influence of drugs.

Finally, an analysis of the data provided exclusively by the Carabinieri General Headquarters and the Traffic Police Service, entities that record approximately one-third of all **road accidents resulting in personal injuries**, reveals **1,840** road accidents in which at least one of the drivers of the vehicles involved was under the influence of drugs, and **5,147** accidents under the influence of alcohol, out of overall 56,284 accidents in 2022. Hence, it turns out that **3.3%** of accidents are **drug-related** and **9.1%** are **alcohol-related**, with a slight downward trend compared to the previous year.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Istat - Directorate General for Social Statistics and Welfare.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Istat processing of data from the Ministry of the Interior, Traffic Police, Carabinieri, ACI survey.

**Offences for possession of drugs for personal use** (art. 75 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990) in 2023 totalled **34,679**, involving **32,346 people**<sup>3</sup>. While a considerable increase in the number of offences was observed in the 2014-2019 period, this figure has decreased considerably in recent years, reaching its lowest level in the last four years, mainly because the data is constantly updated.

Approximately 92% of reported subjects in 2023 are **male** and 19% are foreign nationals. One third of reported subjects are aged over 40, while around 12% are minors, with the percentage reaching 14% among girls, marking a **return to pre-pandemic levels** after a decline during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic. At national level, the rate of 15-17 year old people reported in 2023 is around 197 per 100,000 residents of the same age.

Of the substances reported, 76% concerned **cannabis and its derivatives**, a percentage that reaches 97% among minors and 78% among foreign nationals. 19% of reported substances refer to **cocaine/crack**, and about 4% to **heroin/opiates**, substances mainly listed in reports concerning women and adults. While heroin/opiates appear to have been steadily decreasing since 2010, cocaine records a significant increase from 15% to about 19%. Instead, cannabinoids show a gradual decrease from 2014 (when Law no. 79/2014 came into force) until 2021, rising again during the last two years. With regard to substances listed in reports of **minors**,

the percentages of cannabinoids (97%) and of cocaine/crack (2%) have been substantially stable since 2011, while heroin and opiates levels are gradually dropping. 64% of the interviews carried out (20,395) by social workers of the Operations Units for Addictions in 2023 ended with a formal invitation from the Prefect to stop using drugs, while 34% resulted in an administrative fine.

Analysing **drug-related offences** (articles 73 and 74 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990), a total of **27,674 people** were reported to the Judicial Authorities in 2023, marking an increase of almost 3% compared to 2022 (the data is constantly being updated) after a downward trend since 2018, when 36,073 people were reported<sup>4</sup>. Almost half of the reports were made in central and southern regions, in particular Lazio, Campania and Apulia, 40% in the northern regions, and the remaining 11% in the islands. 92% of reported persons were **male** and more than one-third (35%) were

<sup>3</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior - Department for General Administration, Civil Administration Personnel Policies and Instrumental and Financial Resources.  
<sup>4</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior - Directorate General for Anti-Drug Services.

**foreign nationals.** Almost half of them are in the 20-34 age group (49%), while 4.5% are minors. Since 2003, the percentage of foreign nationals reported has progressively increased from 28% to 39-40% in 2017-2019, amounting to 34-35% in the last two years.

In 2023, about 48% of the reports concerned **cocaine/crack**, 37% cannabis and its derivatives, 7% **heroin/opiates**, 1.2% **synthetic substances**, while the remaining 6.3% involved other drugs. Overall, 90% of the reports concerned the offence of **illegal production, trafficking and possession of drugs or psychotropic substances** (art. 73 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990), while the other 10% involved association for the purpose of illegal trafficking of drugs or psychotropic substances (art. 74). These figures have not shown substantial variations since 2003. As for **possession for the purpose of drug dealing**, in particular, 40% of offences are related to trafficking and possession of cannabis and its derivatives (a percentage that has been steadily decreasing since 2017), 46% to cocaine (highest percentage since 2003), 7% to heroin/opiates (this percentage is steadily decreasing). However, two-thirds of the reports for **association for the purpose of drug trafficking** are related to cocaine/crack, a percentage that has been steadily increasing since 2007.

As for reports of **cocaine/crack-related** offences recorded in 2023 (13,357), 92% of reported offenders were men, 36% were foreign nationals, and almost half (48%) of them were in the 20-34 age group. However, with regard to **heroin/opiate-related** criminal offences (1,924 reports), almost half of reported offenders (49%) are over-35, and 30% are 20-29 years, 92% are male, and 55% are foreign nationals. Instead, those reported for **cannabis and synthetic substance-related** offences are younger. Considering the 10,322 cannabis-related reports in 2023, 58% are under-29, 94% are male, 32% are foreign nationals. As for **synthetic substance-related**

criminal offences (339), almost two thirds of the reported offenders are under-40 (36% under-29), 89% are male, and half are foreign nationals.

**Pending proceedings** for violation of **art. 73 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990**, as at 31 December 2023, are 81,904 against **170,292 persons** (4.7% of whom are minors), while those for violation of **art. 74** are **4,620** against **45,285 persons** (0.4% of whom are minors)<sup>5</sup>. Each criminal proceeding for the offence of production, trafficking and possession of psychotropic substances (art. 73) is against 2 people on average, a figure which, in the case of proceedings for association for the purpose of illegal drug trafficking (art. 74) increases to 10 offenders, with no variations over the years. Since 2015, pending proceedings have been **on the rise**, with an 8% increase for art. 73 and a 12% increase for art. 74. Less than half of the proceedings (47% for art. 73; 35% for art. 74) are at the stage of first instance trial. 37% of criminal proceedings for the offence of **illegal production and drug trafficking** are pending in judicial offices in the **northern regions**, mainly Lombardy, while most of the pending proceedings for the offence of **drug trafficking** are concentrated in the **southern regions and islands** (61%), mainly Campania, Apulia and Sicily.

In 2023, **overall persons convicted with a final sentence** for drug-related offences in violation of articles 73 and/or 74 were **12,963**, or 11% of the convicted persons recorded in the Criminal Records Information System<sup>6</sup>, ranking, as in the case of theft, with one the highest number of convictions in the last five years. The figure shows a downward trend since 2019, although it does not present the actual situation, as it is significantly affected by the constant updates of the information system. In 2023, 97% of convictions were for violations of art. 73, a number that has gradually increased over the past five years. 92% of the convicted persons are male, and 40% are foreign nationals. 62% are in the

<sup>5</sup> Source: Ministry of Justice - Department for Justice Affairs, Directorate General for Internal Affairs - Office I.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Ministry of Justice - Department for Justice Affairs, Directorate General for Internal Affairs - Office III.

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25-54 age group, and about 2% are minors. 27% of those convicted with a final sentence are cases of recidivism. 66% of convictions were issued at first instance proceedings. The time between the date of the crime and the final conviction has lengthened. Indeed, in the last two years, the latency period for most drug-related offences is around three years, compared to two in the previous two years.





Table 5.1.  
Offences and violations related to psychoactive substances

Offences and road accidents for impaired driving in 2022

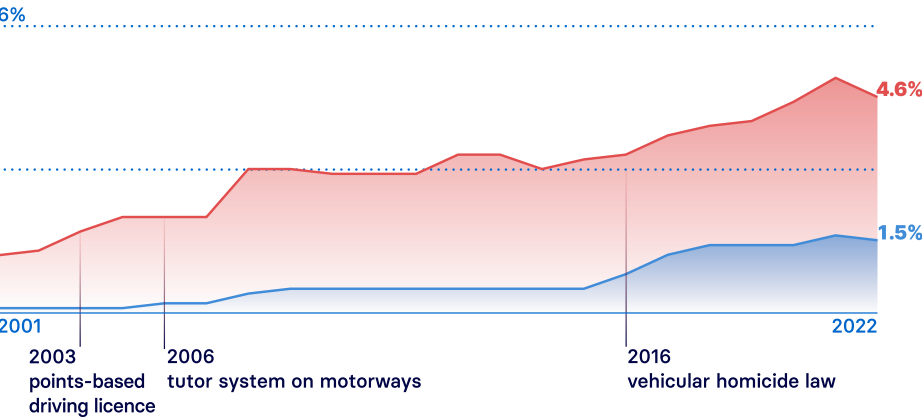
Impaired driving accidents out of total accidents involving 1 or 2 vehicles



Art. 186 of the Italian Highway Code  
driving under the influence of alcohol

Art. 187 of the Italian Highway Code  
driving under the influence of drugs

Trend over time



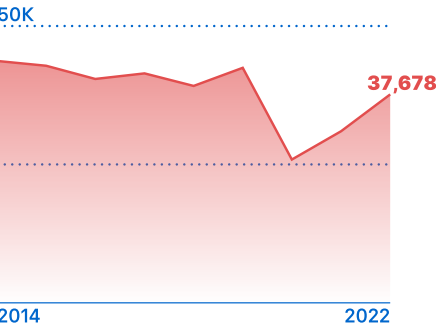
Fines issued by the police for impaired driving out of the total number of fines for behavioural offences



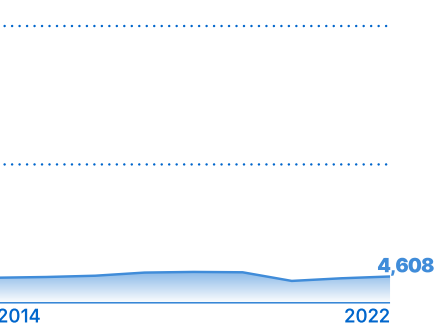
Art. 186 of the Italian Highway Code  
driving under the influence of alcohol

Art. 187 of the Italian Highway Code  
driving under the influence of drugs

Trend over time



Trend over time



Source: ISTAT - Directorate General for Social Statistics and Welfare - Integrated Health, Welfare and Social Security System Service.

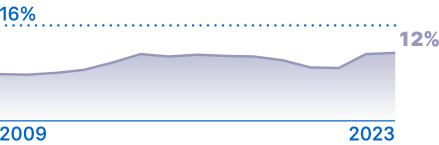
Reports of possession of drugs for personal use in 2023 (Art. 75 of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990)



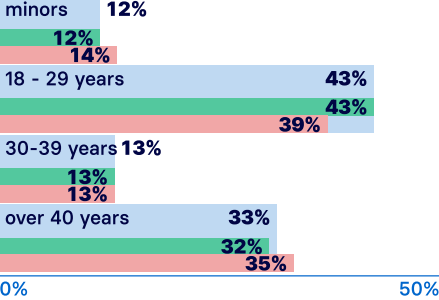
Minors



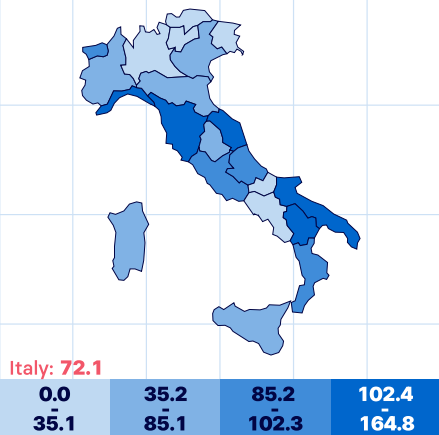
Minors



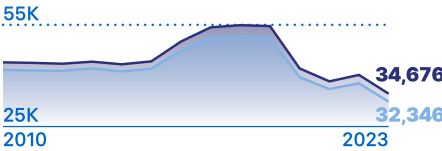
Distribution by gender, **M** and **F**, and age



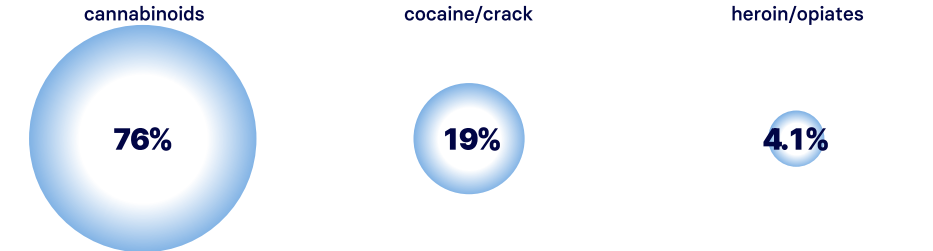
Rate for 100,000 residents (15-74 years)



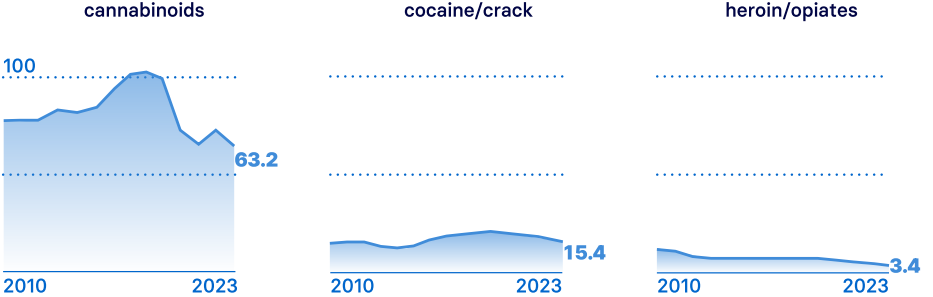
Trend over time



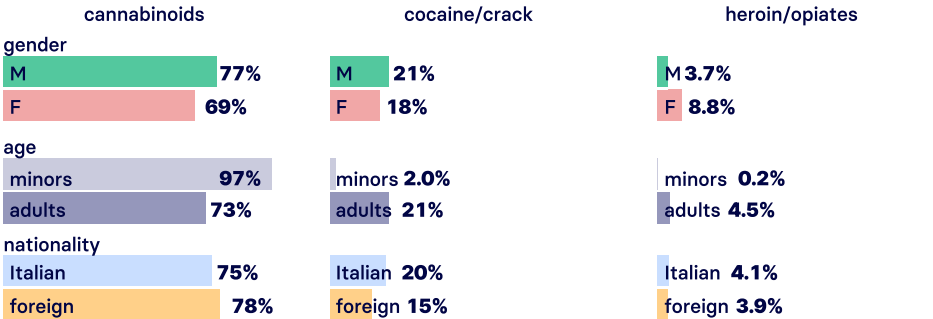
Distribution of reported substances



Rate for 100,000 residents aged 15-74 years



Distribution of reported substances by gender, age and nationality



Sources: Ministry of the Interior - Department for General Management, Civil Administration Personnel Policies and Instrumental and Financial Resources; Directorate General for Financial and Instrumental Resources - Office II - Technological Innovation for General Management; Directorate General for General Administration and Prefectures - Territorial Government Offices - Office V - Studies, Research and General Documentation.  
Note: due to rounding, the sum of percentage values may vary between 99.1% and 100.9%.

27,674

↑ persons reported  
+2.8% compared to 2022

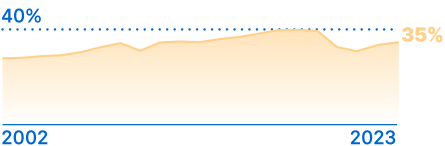
M 92% F 8%

90% 10%

Art. 73  
illegal drug production,  
trafficking and possession  
Art. 74  
association for the  
purpose of illegal  
trafficking

Persons of foreign nationality

35% 95% Art. 73 Art. 74 5%  
total

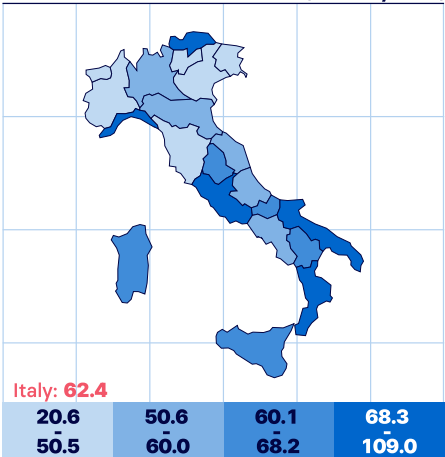


Minors

4.5%  
total  
40%

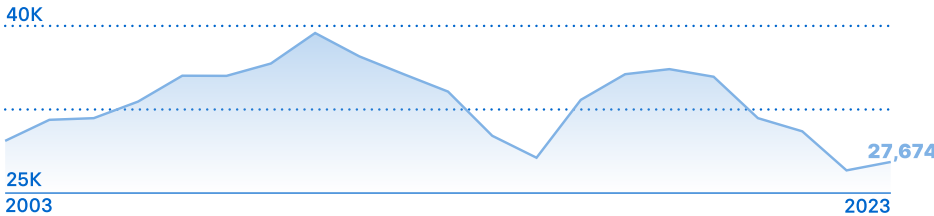


Rate for 100,000 residents (15-74 years)



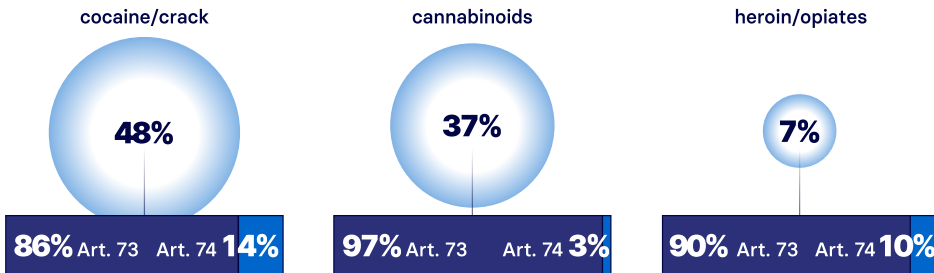
Source: Ministry of the Interior -  
Directorate General for Anti-Drug Services.

Trend over time

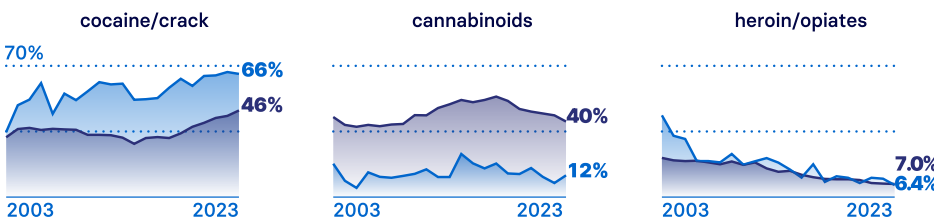


Distribution of substances in reports by offence type

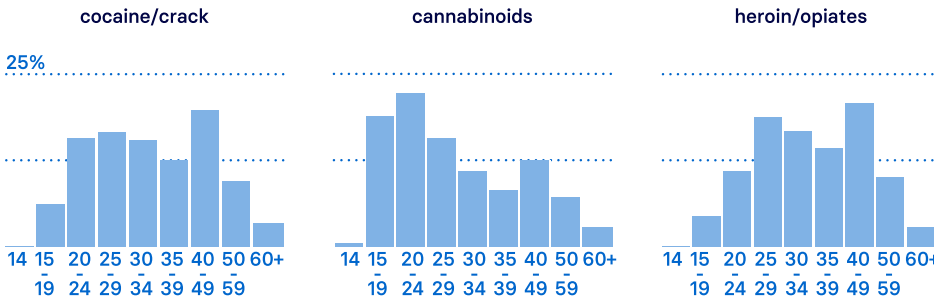
total Art. 73 Art. 74



Distribution of complaints by substance type Art. 73 Art. 74



Distribution by age group



↓ 86,524

pending proceedings

95% Art. 73 Art. 74 5%  
minors 7.8% minors 2.5%

↓ 215,577

persons with pending proceedings

79% Art. 73 Art. 74 21%  
minors 4.7% minors 0.4%

12,963

persons convicted with  
a final sentence

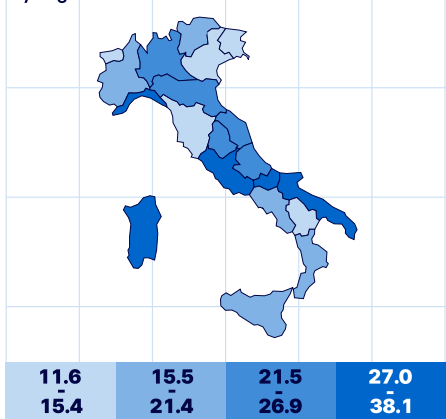
M 92% F 8%

11%

out of the total number of  
persons sentenced in the year

Rate per 100K residents (14 years)

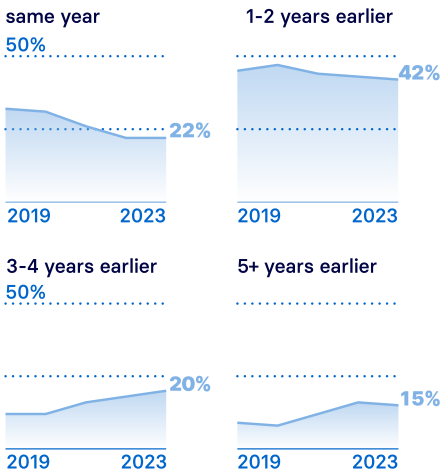
by region where the offence was committed



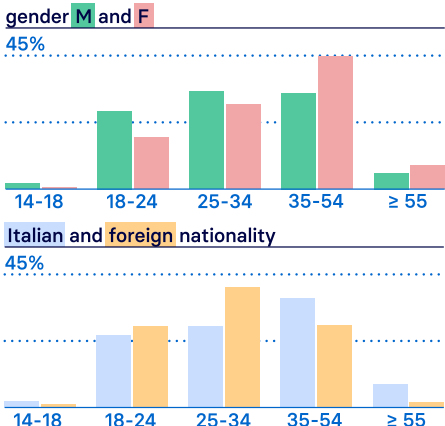
Minors

1.8%

Convicted in 2023, by offence year



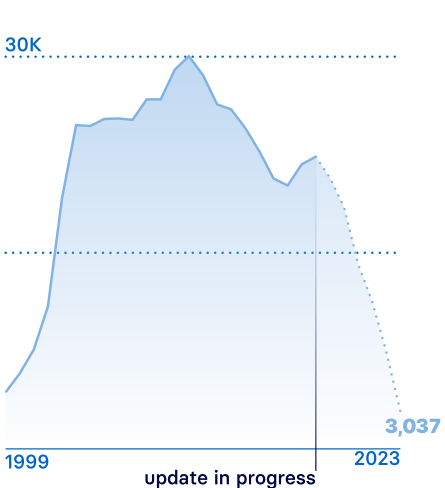
Distribution by age group



Persons of foreign nationality

40%

Convicted in 2000-23, by offence year



Sources: Ministry of Justice - Department for Justice Affairs - Directorate General for Internal Affairs:  
Office I; Office III - Department I Criminal Records and Civil Penalties Register.

# Consequences of drug-related offences

Index	
Infographic index	
Chapter 1	<p>On 31 December 2023, there were <b>20,515 prisoners</b><sup>7</sup> in correctional facilities for offences committed in violation of drug laws, representing <b>34%</b> of the total number of prisoners, a percentage that has remained stable since 2015. While over the past five years the percentage of people in prison for violation of art. 73 has been decreasing (from 68% to 63% of the total number of prisoners for violation of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990), and the percentage of people in prison for violation of art. 74 has been substantially stable (around 5%), the percentage for violation of both articles has been increasing (from 27% to 32%).</p>
Chapter 2	<p>Since the entry into force of Law no. 79/2014, the <b>number of prisoners for offences in violation of art. 73</b>, compared to the total prison population, has remained stable at around 33%. On 31 December 2023, there were <b>19,521</b> prisoners for offences committed in violation of art. 73. Little less than half (47%) of them are in correctional facilities in the southern regions and islands, and almost one third (32%) are in those in the northern regions.</p>
Chapter 3	
Chapter 4	<p><b>Foreign nationals</b>, a figure that has been steadily decreasing since 2008 (48%), are slightly less than one-third (31%). The fact that 56% of foreign prisoners for violation of art. 73 are confined to correctional facilities in the northern regions (18% in correctional facilities in the southern regions and islands) shows that foreign criminal organisations are involved in drug</p>
Chapter 5	<p>dealing to a greater extent in these regions than in the southern regions and islands, where indigenous criminal organisations prevail.</p> <p>In 2023, <b>10,697 people entered the prison circuit</b> for offences committed in violation of art. 73, or 26% of the total number of entries from freedom. This percentage has been declining since 2020 (31%). 41% of new entries for drug production, trafficking and possession offences are <b>foreign nationals</b>, a percentage that has gradually decreased since 2016 (51%).</p> <p>In 2023, there were <b>3,674 young people aged 14-25 years</b>, who committed a crime before their coming of age, with <b>drug-related charges</b>, or 17% of people in the care of <b>Juvenile Social Services</b>: 96% of them were male, 18% were foreign nationals, and 29% were in care for the first time<sup>8</sup>. The percentage of young people in the care of Juvenile Social Services for drug-related offences has gradually increased from 17% to 20%</p>

<sup>7</sup> Source: Ministry of Justice - Department of Prison Administration.  
<sup>8</sup> Source: Ministry of Justice - Department for Juvenile and Community Justice.

over the 2013-2020 period, and then decreased during the past three years. With regard to **the percentage of young** foreign nationals taken into care for drug-related offences, from 2016 to 2020 it showed no significant variations, remaining around 16-17%, and increasing to 18% in the last two years. In 2023, approximately **98%** of the juvenile offenders in care for drug-related offences were charged with the sole offence of **drug production, trafficking and possession** (art. 73), **0.4%** with the more serious offence of **association for the purpose of illegal drug trafficking** (art. 74), and the remaining percentage with both offences. These figures have showed no significant variations over the past five years.

The number of young people aged 14-25 years undergoing **community-based criminal measures/alternative measures to detention** for drug-related offences was 77 in 2023. The figure is consistent with the previous year, showing that 13% of young people benefitting from these measures. Almost all of them are male, 21% are foreign nationals, over 90% are adults. In 2023, 1,267 young people in the care of Juvenile Social Services for drug violations were placed on **suspended trial and probation** (MAP), to give them an opportunity to make amends for their offence. The measure accounts for 19% of the total number of MAPs issued, a percentage

that has been gradually diminishing since 2018 (28%). 96% of the beneficiaries are male, 14% are foreign nationals, and 41% are minors.

The proportion of minors and young adults placed in **correctional facilities for minors** for drug offences (167 out of 1,142), i.e., 15% of total placements, was slightly higher than in the previous three-year period (13%). 67% of entries were minors, 35% foreign nationals, almost all were males. The percentage of **community placements** for drug-related offences, at around 18%, has showed no significant variations over the last four years. Of the 305 young people placed in community facilities in 2023, 97% are male, 26% are foreign nationals, and 69% are in the 16-17 age group.

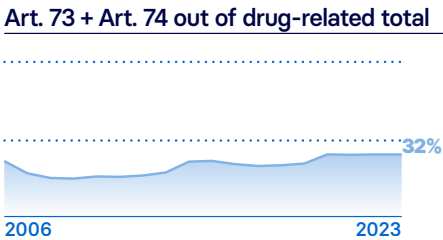
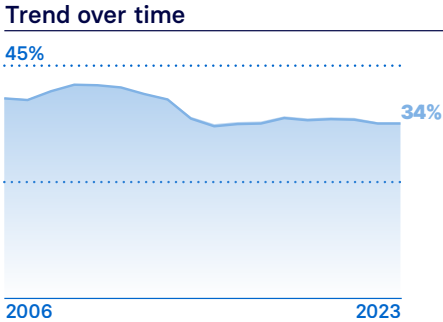
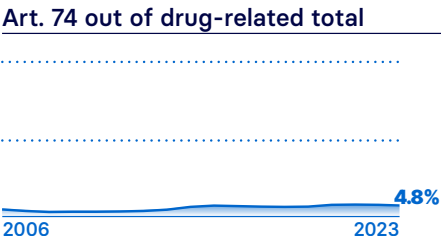
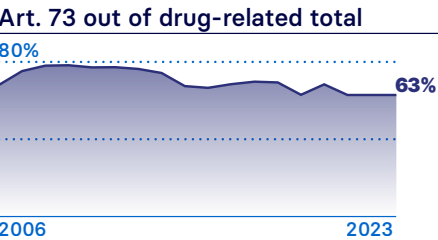
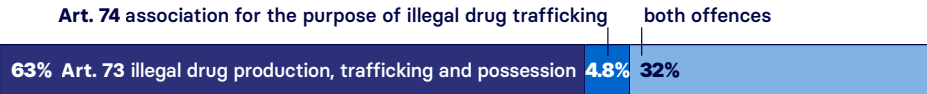
Index	Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
Infographic index					

Table 5.2.  
Persons in the criminal justice system for drug-related offences in 2023

Prisoners in correctional facilities for violations of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990 as at 31 December

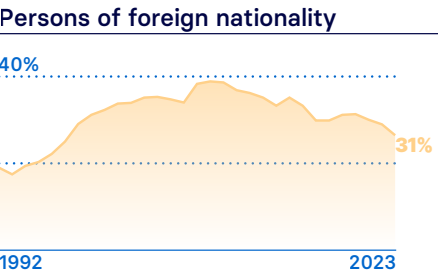
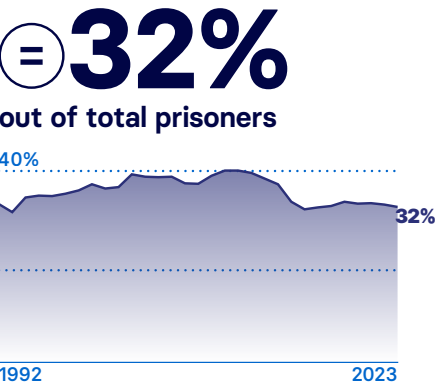
**20,515**  
prisoners for drug-related offences

**= 34%**  
out of total prisoners



Prisoners for offences in violation of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990, Art. 73

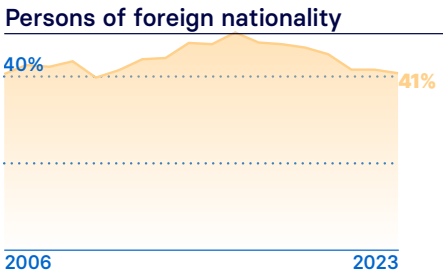
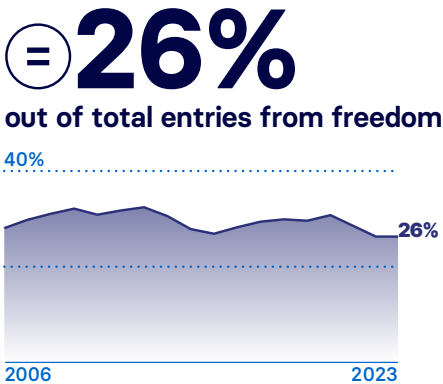
**19,521**  
prisoners for violations of Art. 73



Percentage of prisoners for violations of Art. 73 out of the total



**10,697**  
entries from freedom for violations of Art. 73



Minors and young adults (14-25 years) in the criminal justice system for violations of Italian Presidential Decree no. 309/1990

3,674

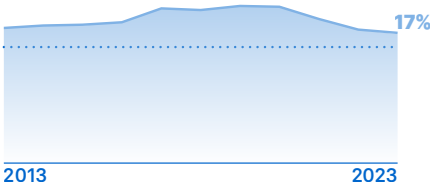
persons in care with Juvenile Social Service Offices for drug-related offences

= 17%

out of total persons in care

Trend over time

30%



98% Art. 73 illegal drug production, trafficking and possession

both offences 1.7%

Art. 74 association for the purpose of illegal drug trafficking 0.4%

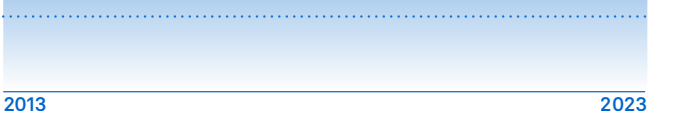
Foreign nationality

40%



In care for the first time

40%



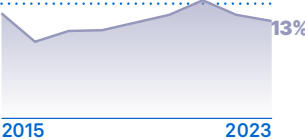
In community criminal measure/alternative measures to detention

for drug-related offences

77

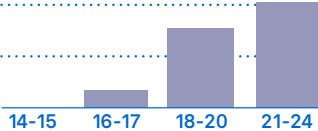
equal to 13% of the total

30%



Distribution by age group

50%



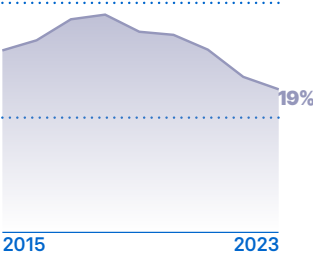
Suspension of trial and probation

for drug-related offences

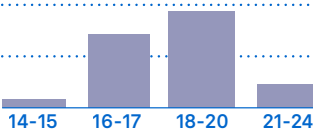
1,267

equal to 19% of the total

30%



Distribution by age group



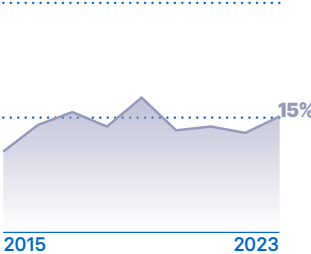
Admissions to juvenile correctional facilities

for drug-related offences

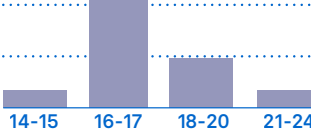
167

equal to 15% of the total

30%



Distribution by age group



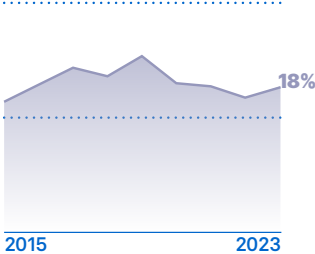
Community placements in the criminal area

for drug-related offences

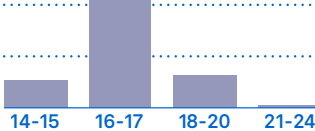
305

equal to 18% of the total

30%



Distribution by age group





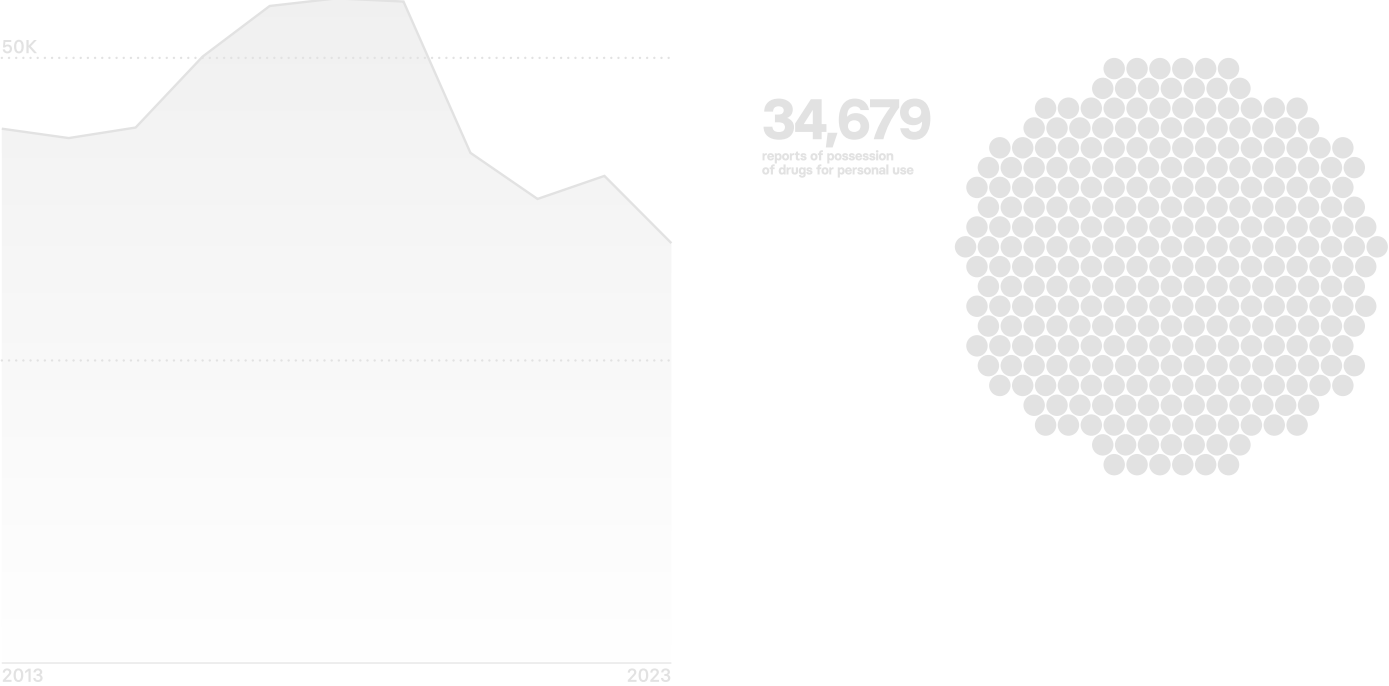


Cannabinoids

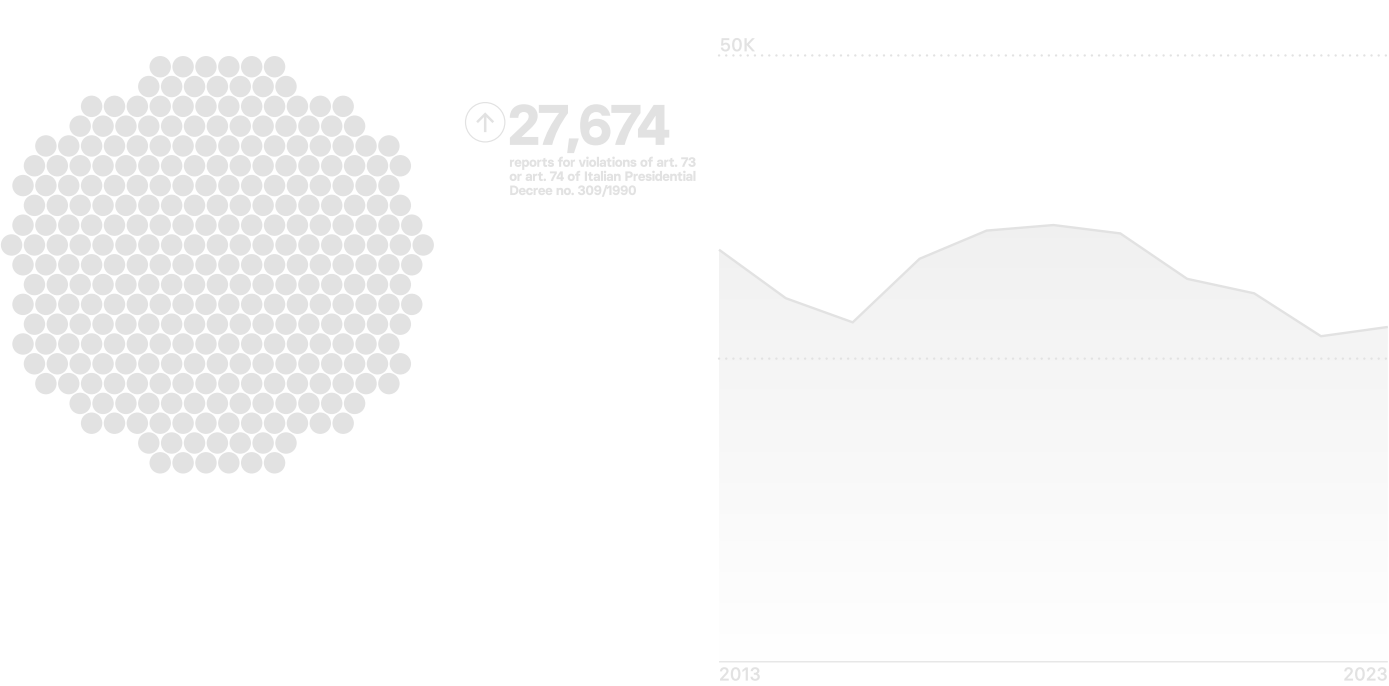
Cocaine/Crack

Heroin and other opiates

Administrative offences in 2023



Criminal reports in 2023



Note: the missing percentage can be attributed to other substances. The figure on administrative offences is not compared with the previous survey because it is constantly updated.

# Acknowledgements

---

We wish to thank the following entities for their contribution and support in drawing up the Report:

## Ministry of the Interior

Directorate General for Anti-Drug Services  
Department of Public Security - Anti-Crime Directorate General of the State Police - Forensic Police Service - Psychotropic and Narcotic Substances Unit  
Department of Public Security - Traffic Police Service  
Department for General Management, Civil Administration  
Personnel Policies and Instrumental and Financial Resources - Directorate General for Technological Innovation for General Administration - Office II - Telematic Networks, Information Systems and IT Security  
Department for General Administration, Civil Administration  
Personnel Policies and Instrumental and Financial Resources - Directorate General for General Administration and Prefectures - Territorial Government Offices - Office V - Studies, Research and General Documentation

## Ministry of Justice

Department for Justice Affairs - Directorate General for Internal Affairs - Office I  
Department for Justice Affairs - Directorate General for Internal Affairs - Office III - Department I Criminal Records and Civil Penalties Register  
Department of Prison Administration  
Department for Juvenile and Community Justice

## Ministry of Health

Directorate General for Medical Devices and Pharmaceutical Service - Central Narcotics Office  
Directorate General for Digitisation, Health Information System and Statistics  
Directorate General for Health Prevention

## Carabinieri General Headquarters

Carabinieri - Carabinieri Forensic Investigations Group

## National Institute of Statistics

Department for Statistical Production - Directorate General for

National Accounting, Final Demand Services, Labour and Capital Inputs, Environmental Accounts - CNB  
Directorate General for Social Statistics and Welfare - Integrated Health, Welfare and Social Security System Service

## National Institute of Health

National Addiction and Doping Centre  
Department of Infectious Diseases - AIDS Operational Centre

## National Research Council

Institute of Clinical Physiology

## Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces - Subgroup on Addictions - SIND (Addiction Information System) Working Group

## Inter-regional Technical Group on Addictions Established within the Health Commission of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces

## Departments and Public Addiction Services of the Health Authorities of the Autonomous Regions and Provinces

## Scientific Association Italian Forensic Toxicologists Group - GTFI

## Organisations and private social addiction services participating in an Exploratory Study

4EXODUS società cooperativa sociale; A Steano Casati; Accoglienza e Lavoro società cooperativa sociale ONLUS; AFET Aquilone Aps; AMA Aquilone cooperativa sociale; Arca di Como società cooperativa sociale; Arnera cooperativa sociale; Associazione Airone ONLUS; Associazione Aliseo ONLUS; Associazione Amici Del Progetto Uomo2 Odv; Associazione Casa Famiglia Rosetta ONLUS; Associazione Centro d'ascolto Madonna del Rosario; Associazione Centro Le Ali ONLUS; Associazione Comunità Alfaomega; Associazione Comunità Emmanuel ETS; Associazione Comunità in Dialogo ETS; Associazione

Comunità Mondo Nuovo Odv; Associazione Comunità Nuova ONLUS; Associazione Comunità Progetto Sud; Associazione Comunità sulla strada di Emmaus; Associazione Comunità terapeutica La Tempesta ONLUS; Associazione Comunità terapeutica Nikodemo; Associazione Famiglie San Filippo Neri per l'aiuto ai ragazzi tossicodipendenti; Associazione FIDES ONLUS; Associazione Genitori Antidroga; Associazione Il Sentiero; Associazione Insieme ONLUS; Associazione L'Arcobaleno ETS; Associazione La Centralina ETS Odv; Associazione La Loppa; Associazione La Tenda ETS; Associazione Leo ONLUS ONG; Associazione Narconon Astore di promozione sociale Aps; Associazione Trentina Insieme Verso Nuovi Orizzonti Odv; Associazione Voce Amica ETS; Atipica cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Bassa Soglia; Borgorete società cooperativa sociale; C.A.P.S. cooperativa sociale; C.A.T. (Centro Animazione Triccheballacche) società cooperativa sociale; C.E.R.T. Nuova Vita ONLUS; C.I.P.A. - Centro di Informazione Prevenzione e Accoglienza Odv -ETS; Carebbio società cooperativa sociale ONLUS; CART ONLUS; Casa del giovane cooperativa sociale a R.I.; Casa Emmaus società cooperativa sociale; Casa Miriam; Cascina Verde Spes ONLUS; Ce.Re.So.- Centro Reggino di Solidarietà Odv; CEIS A.R.T.E; CEIS Centro di Solidarietà San Crispino Viterbo Odv; CEIS GENOVA; CEIS società cooperativa sociale; Cento fiori cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Centro Accoglienza Buon Pastore; Centro Calabrese di Solidarietà; Centro di Solidarietà Associazione Gruppo Solidarietà Odv -ETS; Centro di Solidarietà F.A.R.O. (Fraterno Aiuto Riabilitazione ed Orientamento); Centro di Solidarietà l'Ancora cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Centro di Solidarietà Pratese ONLUS; Centro Gulliver società cooperativa sociale A R.I.; Centro Italiano di Solidarietà di Belluno ONLUS; Centro Italiano di Solidarietà Don Mario Picchi ETS; Centro Terapeutico Salute, Cultura e Società; Centro Torinese di Solidarietà società cooperativa sociale; Centro Trentino di Solidarietà ETS; Centro Vicentino di Solidarietà CeIS ONLUS; CO.M.E.S. cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Comunità Aperta SCS ONLUS; Comunità EMMAUS-3; Comunità La Tenda; Comunità Marco Riva - Odv; Comunità Monte Brugiana società cooperativa sociale; Comunità Oasi2 San Francesco ONLUS società cooperativa; Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII cooperativa sociale a R.I. ONLUS; Comunità San Francesco ONLUS; Comunità San Maurizio; Comunità San Patrignano società cooperativa sociale; Comunità Terapeutica Casa Shalom; Comunità Terapeutica Diurna L'Argine Aulss9 Scaligera; Comunità Terapeutica L'Angolo; Comunità terapeutica La Nostra Casa, unità operativa di cooperativa sociale ACLI - società cooperativa ONLUS; Comunità Terapeutica Tenda di Cristo 2; Congregazione delle

Pie Suore della Redenzione - Comunità Villa Regina Mundi; Contina cooperativa sociale; Cooperate società cooperativa sociale - ente gestore Progetto Terapeutico Fratello Sole; Cooperativa di Bessimo ONLUS a R.I.; Cooperativa Giovanni Paolo II; Cooperativa Lotta Contro L'Emarginazione; Cooperativa Magliana 80; Cooperativa P.G. Frassati; Cooperativa sociale A.E.P.E.R.; Cooperativa sociale Acquario 85 a R.I. ETS; Cooperativa sociale Alice ONLUS; COSMO SCS; Crest S.R.L.; CUFRAD; Delta Solidale società cooperativa sociale; Dianova cooperativa sociale a R.I.; Famiglia Nuova società cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Fermata d'Autobus Associazione ONLUS; FOLIAS ONLUS cooperativa sociale a R.I.; Fondazione Arca Centro Mantovano di Solidarietà ONLUS; Fondazione di Partecipazione San Gaetano ONLUS; Fondazione ERIS ETS; Fondazione Gruppo Abele ONLUS; Fondazione La Ricerca ETS; Fondazione San Germano ONLUS - Comunità Sanpietro; Fondazione Villa Maraini E.T.S.; Fratello Sole società cooperativa sociale; Gineprodue cooperativa sociale di solidarietà ONLUS; Giobbe cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Giuseppe Olivotti società cooperativa sociale; Gruppo Abele di Verbania ONLUS; Gruppo Arco società cooperativa sociale; Gruppo Incontro società cooperativa sociale; Gulliver cooperativa sociale; Il Borgo ONLUS; Il Calabrone cooperativa sociale ETS; Il Cammino cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Il Cuore Di Crema Fondazione Opera Diocesana San Pantaleone Comunità d'accoglienza per tossicodipendenti; Il Ginepro cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Il Mago di Oz società cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Il Ponte Centro di Solidarietà Odv; Il Progetto; Il Punto cooperativa sociale; Il Sorriso cooperativa sociale ONLUS; Istituto Suore Buon Pastore; La Casa del Sole cooperativa sociale; La Casa sulla Roccia Centro di Solidarietà Odv; La Genovesa cooperativa sociale ONLUS; La Pineta; La Svolta - Le Virage società cooperativa sociale; La Vigna cooperativa sociale; La Zolla Odv; LELAT; Mastropietro&c. Aps; Movimento Fraternità Landris Onlus; Nefesh società cooperativa sociale; Nuova Vita società cooperativa sociale; Nuovo Villaggio del Fanciullo Celso e Anna Frascali; OpenGroup; Opera Santa Maria della Carità; Parsec cooperativa sociale; Phoenix cooperativa sociale - Comunità Specialistica Doppia Diagnosi Workshop Phoenix; Piccola Comunità ONLUS impresa sociale; Polo9 società cooperativa sociale impresa sociale; Progetto N ETS; Progetto Villa Lorenzi Organizzazione di Volontariato; Progetto Vita Società cooperativa sociale; Proteo società cooperativa sociale; Querciambiente società cooperativa sociale; R.E.D. 7 novembre; Rinnovamento cooperativa sociale ONLUS; San Benedetto cooperativa sociale ONLUS; SAT - Servizio Assistenza Tossicodipendenti; Servizi per l'accoglienza società cooperativa sociale

ONLUS; Sette ONLUS società cooperativa sociale - Comunità Il Molino;  
Soggiorno Proposta Aps; Solco Dai Crocicchi cooperativa; Solidarietà  
Dicembre '79 ETS; Teseo società cooperativa sociale a R.l.; Tetto  
Fraterno cooperativa sociale; Un fiore per la vita cooperativa sociale.

#### **Experts from the Department for Anti-Drug Policies:**

Andrea Fantoma, Massimo Gandolfini, Giulio Maira,  
Antonio Pignataro, Massimo Polledri

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