

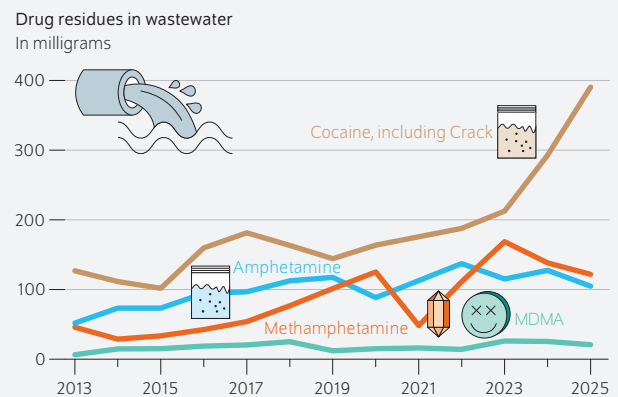
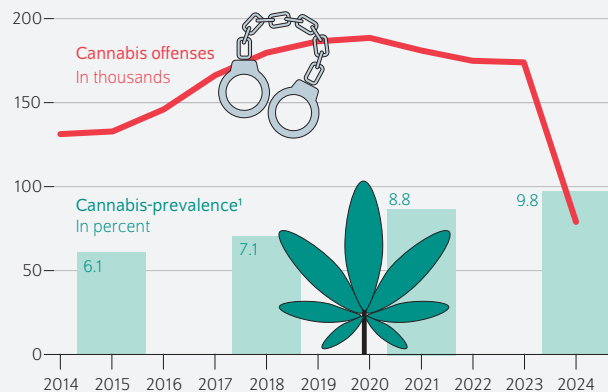
AT A GLANCE

Cannabis use largely stable following partial legalization; cocaine use has been on the rise for several years

By Anna Bindler and Andreea-Maria Stoica

- Cannabis-related offenses drop to about one-third of previous levels following partial legalization in April 2024
- Cannabis use remains stable in the short term – survey and wastewater data show no structural changes following partial legalization
- Cannabis prices remain largely constant – increases in acquisitive and violent crime do not coincide with the reform
- Consumption of cocaine including crack and methamphetamine has been rising substantially for years
- Policy should prioritize prevention and awareness to respond to developments regarding cannabis and other drugs

Cannabis offenses decline following partial legalization in 2024 while cannabis use remains stable; wastewater analyses show rising levels of other drugs



¹ Percentage of respondents who reported having used cannabis in the respective year.
 Quelle: Bundeskriminalamt: Police Crime Statistics, European Union Drugs Agency (2026); Wastewater Analysis and Drugs – A European Multi-City Study; IFT Institute for Therapy Research, Epidemiological Addiction Survey; own calculations.

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FROM THE AUTHORS

“If the political goal is to reduce cannabis use, reimposing a ban is not necessarily the most effective lever. Rather, we should focus on education and prevention. At the same time, we must not lose sight of developments in other drug markets: specifically, the use of cocaine, crack, and methamphetamine has risen sharply in recent years.”

— Anna Bindler —

MEDIA



Audio Interview with Anna Bindler (in German)
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Cannabis use largely stable following partial legalization; cocaine use has been on the rise for several years

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ABSTRACT

Two years after the partial legalization of cannabis, this Weekly Report examines current developments in the German cannabis and other illicit drug markets. The analysis is based on police crime statistics, survey data, wastewater data, and price information. The number of recorded cannabis and drug offenses declined noticeably in 2024, primarily reflecting a statistical effect. Regarding cannabis use, survey and wastewater data show no systematic changes in the short-term. Cannabis prices also remain largely stable. Various indicators point to dynamic increases for other illicit substances, particularly cocaine and methamphetamine, with regional differences. The timing of changes in violent crime or acquisitive crime cannot be directly linked to the reform. Overall, the available data suggest that, in the short term, the partial legalization primarily had legal effects, while developments in other illicit drug markets follow independent trends. Prevention and monitoring of these markets remain key policy challenges.

On April 1, 2024, the law on the partial legalization of cannabis came into effect (“Gesetz zum kontrollierten Umgang mit Cannabis und zur Änderung weiterer Vorschriften, Cannabisgesetz – CanG”). It allows adults to possess limited quantities of cannabis as well as to engage in private and communal cultivation within state-controlled associations, so-called cannabis clubs. Commercial sales remain prohibited. For protection of minors, the law restricts places at which consumption is permitted and prohibits advertising, while providing for various prevention, control, and evaluation measures. New offenses –such as exceeding permitted quantities or unauthorized cultivation –were introduced and have been recorded separately in the Police Crime Statistics (PKS) since 2024.¹

The law was preceded by an intense societal and political debate. Researchers across various disciplines also studied the issue. From an economic perspective, there are theoretical arguments in favor of regulation or prohibition, as well as for decriminalization or legalization of cannabis.² These weigh negative social impacts, health risks, and consequences for the illegal market against the benefits of controlled legalization and the costs of law enforcement.³ This can serve as a basis for exploring possible courses of action in the political discourse.

To date, there is no empirical consensus on whether prohibition significantly reduces drug use and whether societal costs (impacts on public health, safety, crime, or economic productivity) result from drug use or from prohibition

¹ The EU legal framework requires Member States to impose criminal penalties for the production and trafficking of illicit drugs. At the same time, there is some leeway, for example, regarding personal use or medical use, such that national regulations vary within the EU, see Council Framework Decision 2004/757/JHA of October 25, 2004, OJ L 335, November 11, 2004, pp. 8–11.

² Decriminalization means that the possession of small amounts of cannabis is no longer subject to criminal prosecution, while trafficking and cultivation remain prohibited. Legalization goes a step further by also permitting production and distribution under state regulation and transferring them into a controlled market.

³ Justus Haucap and Leon Knoke (2022): Why and how the cannabis market should be legalized in Germany. *Wirtschaftsdienst: Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftspolitik*, 102(1), 32–39 (in German; available online, accessed February 26, 2026. This also applies to all other online sources in this report, unless otherwise noted).

(and associated illegal markets).⁴ Studies from countries that previously implemented reforms provide first insights.⁵ In the U.S., the introduction of regulated legal cannabis markets led to an increase in consumption among adults and a decrease in arrests for cannabis possession. The use of harder drugs, as well as violent and property crime, did not increase.⁶ Following decriminalization of cannabis possession in the London borough of Lambeth, more cannabis-related offenses were recorded there. With a shift in the allocation of police resources, clearance rates rose and crime fell.⁷

The public discourse before the Cannabis Act came into effect in Germany in 2024 reflected these aspects. Two years later, this debate is back in the spotlight. Internationally, the legalization of cannabis is also the subject of controversial debate.⁸ In Germany, statements within the governing parties regarding the Cannabis Act, the pending evaluation (April 2028), and the interim evaluation (2025) range from “a real piece of crap law” to “The question is: Do we want these social changes to happen already or do we want to take countermeasures before social changes occur?” to “that the legalization of cannabis was the right and long-overdue step.”⁹ Public opinion is also divided: In a spring 2025 survey, 38 percent of respondents favored repealing the law and 38 percent favored leaving it as is.¹⁰ Against this backdrop, this Weekly Report examines the current state of developments in the cannabis market and other drug markets and draws implications from them.

Developments in the cannabis market

From the 1990s through 2023, the number of drug offenses recorded in the Police Crime Statistics (PKS, Box) has more than tripled (Figure 1). Drug offenses rose markedly, particularly until the early 2000s and after 2010, but declined slightly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the partial legalization of cannabis in 2024, the number of offenses dropped sharply, which affected the overall trend: While 346,877 drug offenses were recorded in 2023, the figure dropped to just 228,104 in 2024.

⁴ Edward M. Shepard and Paul R. Blackely (2010): Economics of crime and drugs: Prohibition and public policies for illicit drug control. In: Bruce L. Benson and Paul R. Zimmerman (eds.): Handbook on the economics of crime. Edward Elgar Publishing (available online).

⁵ For an overview of findings from the U.S., see, for example: D. Mark Anderson and Daniel I. Rees (2023): The public health effects of legalizing marijuana. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 61(1), 86-143 (available online).

⁶ Joseph J. Sabia et al. (2024): The effects of recreational marijuana laws on drug use and crime. *Journal of Public Economics*, 234, 105075 (available online).

⁷ Jérôme Adda, Brendon McConnell, and Imran Rasul (2014): Crime and the decriminalization of cannabis possession: Evidence from a policing experiment. *Journal of Political Economy*, 122(5), 1130-1202 (available online).

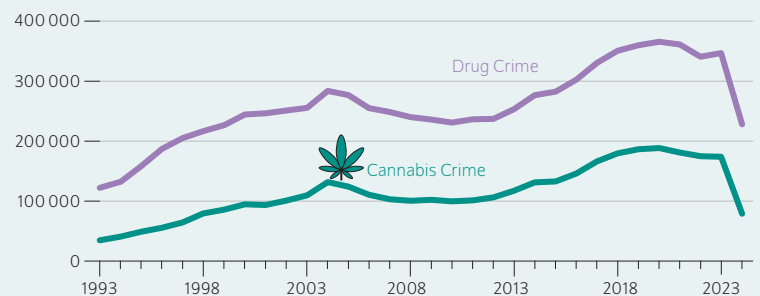
⁸ See *The New York Times* (2026): “It’s Time for America to Admit That It Has a Marijuana Problem.” February 9 edition (available online).

⁹ *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (2025): Bundeslagebild 2024. BKA: Organisierte Kriminalität rekrutiert gezielt Kinder für Gewalttaten. October 24 edition (In German; available online); Deutschlandfunk (2025): Interview of the Week. November 30 edition (In German; available online); Carmen Wegge (2025): Cannabis-Legalisierung wirkt: Weniger Strafverfahren, mehr Jugendschutz (In German; available online).

¹⁰ *Die Zeit* (2025): Umfrage: Keine Mehrheit für Rückkehr zu Cannabis-Verbot. March 30 issue (In German; available online).

Figure 1

Cannabis and Drug Crime in Germany Number of recorded offenses



Note: The Cannabis Act (CanG) on the partial legalization of cannabis came into effect on April 1, 2024; recorded cases for the year 2024 refer to the months before and after partial legalization.

Sources: Federal Criminal Police Office: Police Crime Statistics, own calculations.

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Following implementation of the Cannabis Act, the number of recorded cannabis offenses has fallen considerably.

Cannabis-related offenses decline with partial legalization

Compared to 2023, recorded *cannabis-related* offenses fell to about one-third following partial legalization in 2024 (Figure 1):¹¹ The shift from illegality to legality has, by definition, reduced the number of offenses. Drug-related crime is largely *detection-driven crime*. This means that offenses are primarily detected through controls by police (or other law enforcement agencies) and that the number of unreported cases (i.e., the number of unknown cases) is potentially high. Thus, changes in PKS data may reflect market reactions (supply and demand) or institutional effects (police work and controls). Consequently, changes in the number of drug offenses recorded in the PKS can only be interpreted to a limited extent as changes in the drug market.

No major changes in consumption in the short term

Survey data provide further insight into trends in substance use. The *Epidemiological Survey of Substance Abuse* (ESA, Box) shows the prevalence of various substance use. The 12-month prevalence of cannabis use has been rising moderately since 2012, but without any discernible structural change in the reform year of 2024 (Table). From 2018 to 2021, the prevalence of “heavy” and “irregular” use increased, and from 2021 to 2024, that of “regular” use.¹² Of those who reported in 2024 having used drugs in the past twelve months, about 64 percent used cannabis and about seven percent used cocaine/crack or MDMA (ecstasy).

¹¹ In 2023, 173,945 cases were recorded; in 2024, the figure was 61,670. If the additional violations recorded since 2024 (under KCanG and MedCanG) are included, a total of 78,987 cannabis-related offenses were recorded in 2024.

¹² Heavy use: “almost daily”; regular use: “at least once a month/week”; irregular use: “less than once a month.”

Box

Data Source

The analyses of trends in crime are based on the **Police Crime Statistics** (PKS) provided by the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA).¹ This study examines the following offense categories and their respective clearance rates (CR): drug offenses (unless already covered by another key code), acquisitive crime (main category: drug offences), violent crime, and street crime. The CR indicates, as a percentage, the ratio of cleared cases to recorded cases during the reporting period. The following specific (consumption-related) drug offenses are considered: "General offense involving cannabis and preparations," "General offense involving cocaine including crack," "General offense involving amphetamine and its derivatives in powder or liquid form, as well as in tablet or capsule form (ecstasy)," "General offenses involving methamphetamine in powder, crystalline, or liquid form, as well as in tablet or capsule form," "General offenses involving heroin," and "General offenses involving LSD." The measure used is absolute case numbers (recorded cases).

The price data is based on BKA information as submitted to the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) as part of the **REITOX Report 2025** (data year 2024/2025).² The prices refer to average street prices in euros per gram or unit. Analyses in this Weekly Report are based on street prices only. Since 2011, a harmonized procedure has additionally been used to uniformly classify wholesale quantities into standardized weight categories.

The analyses of cannabis and other psychoactive substance use are based on data from the **Epidemiological Survey of Substance Abuse** (ESA).³ The ESA is a representative population survey on the use of psychoactive substances in Germany that has

¹ Federal Criminal Police Office: Police Crime Statistics (available online).

² Franziska Schneider, Krystallia Karachaliou and Esther Neumeier (2025): Bericht 2025 des nationalen REITOX-Knotenpunkts an die EUDA (Datenjahr 2024/2025). Deutschland, Workbook Drogenmärkte und Kriminalität. Deutsche Beobachtungsstelle für Drogen und Drogensucht DBDD, IFT Institut für Therapieforchung, München (in German; available online).

³ See IFT Institute for Therapy Research, Epidemiological Survey of Substance Abuse (available online).

been conducted regularly since 1980. The survey is conducted every three years. For this report, the survey waves from 2012 (n=9,084), 2015 (n=9,204), 2018 (n=9,267), 2021 (n=9,046), and 2024 (n=7,534) were used. The analyses are limited to individuals aged 18 to 64 to ensure comparability over time. The 2024 survey was conducted between August and December 2024 (after the CanG came into effect). The data for this report were taken directly from ESA publications (with corresponding weighting).

Further analyses of illicit substance use are based on **wastewater data** from the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) and the *Sewage Analysis CORE Group Europe* (SCORE).⁴ Since 2011, wastewater samples have been collected across Europe according to a standardized protocol to compare regional differences in drug use. In 2025, the survey covered 115 cities in 25 EU member states plus Norway and Turkey. In the participating cities, 24-hour composite samples were collected daily over a one-week period between March and May at wastewater treatment plants. Urine biomarkers of specific substances were analyzed: amphetamine, methamphetamine, MDMA, and ketamine, as well as the main metabolites of cocaine (benzoylecgonine) and cannabis (THC-COOH). The reported values indicate the measured residue levels in raw wastewater and are normalized to the connected population (milligrams per 1,000 inhabitants per day). These do not represent directly estimated consumption levels. For cities with multiple wastewater treatment plants, weighted averages are reported. Values below the analytical detection limit are reported as zero. The following cities are included in the measurements for the following years: Berlin (2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2022, 2025), Chemnitz (2017–2025), Dortmund (2013–2024), Dresden (2013–2025), Dülmen (2013–2022), Erfurt (2017–2025), Frankfurt (2017, 2025), Hamburg (2017, 2020, 2024, 2025), Hanover (2017, 2024, 2025), Magdeburg (2017, 2020–2025), Mainz (2017, 2025), Munich (2014–2025), Nuremberg (2017, 2020–2025), Rostock (2017, 2025), Saarbrücken (2017–2024), Stuttgart (2017, 2024, 2025).

⁴ European Union Drugs Agency, Wastewater Analysis and Drugs.

Given that survey respondents may not report their use of legal and illegal substances truthfully or accurately, survey data is not always reliable. This could be relevant following the partial legalization: actual changes in cannabis use could be distorted by a greater willingness to provide honest information. Wastewater data provides an alternative data source that avoids the issues associated with both detection-driven crime and surveys. In selected cities, drug residues (THC-COOH in the case of cannabis) are measured in wastewater.¹³ This provides insight into overall cannabis use, though not

¹³ The main active ingredient in cannabis (THC) is barely detectable in the urine of users and is therefore difficult to detect in wastewater. Instead, a metabolite, THC-COOH, is measured. Jakob Manthey et al. (2025): Evaluation des Konsumcannabisgesetzes (EKOCAN): 1. Zwischenbericht (In German; available online).

into who consumes how much. Initial wastewater analyses were conducted in the months before and after the new law took effect. In the short term, the data did not reveal any systematic impact of the reform on cannabis consumption.¹⁴

Cannabis price stable over recent years

In addition to offenses and consumption, prices for cannabis products are of interest. The street price for cannabis, as determined by the BKA, has risen over the longer term but has remained relatively stable at ten euros per gram in recent years (up to 2024) (Figure 2). The price for medical

¹⁴ Manthey et al., Evaluation des Konsumcannabisgesetzes (EKOCAN) (In German).

cannabis also averages around ten euros per gram.¹⁵ In a survey for the interim evaluation report following the partial legalization (part of the official scientific evaluation of the reform), respondents were asked about prices by source of supply. The results reveal (relatively minor) differences, with lower average prices for home cultivation and slightly higher, albeit comparable, prices for illegal sources, pharmacies, and cultivation associations (calculated from membership fees and charges).¹⁶

Other offenses and crime trends

Changes in drug markets can affect overall crime through various mechanisms. Illegal and legal markets differ fundamentally in how they operate: In the illegal sector, there are no contracts or legally enforceable claims, nor is there any regulation of competition. Violent crime can result—either to enforce claims or in dealing with competitors (for example, competition over “territories” and pricing).¹⁷ This is compounded by property and acquisitive crime to finance drug use. Changes in the legal framework, such as through reforms, can have both crime-reducing effects (fewer violent interactions) and crime-increasing effects (altered consumption patterns). Ex ante, the overall effect cannot be clearly determined.

While a causal analysis is not possible within the scope of this Weekly Report, it instead focuses on descriptive trends. Violent crime increased during the early 2000s, followed by a longer period of declining case numbers. Since around 2021, more offenses have been recorded, but without any sharp change between 2023 and 2024.¹⁸ The number of recorded cases of acquisitive crime fluctuates, with a low point in 2019 (1,598 reported cases) (Figure 3). After that, it rose, with 2,584 cases recorded in 2024.

The partial legalization of Herbal cannabis the potential to free up resources within the police and, consequently, for prosecutors or the courts. This is because cases that were previously subject to criminal prosecution are no longer being pursued. In other contexts, such shifts have allowed these resources to be redirected toward crime control with respect to other types of crime (such as property crimes).¹⁹ Successful policing can be reflected in a higher number of recorded cases. Another measure is clearance rates: these are relatively high for violent crime and comparatively low

Table

Prevalence of drug use in Germany

As a percentage of respondents

Substance	2012	2015	2018	2021	2024
Cannabis					
Overall prevalence	4.5	6.1	7.1	8.8	9.8
Heavy use	0.5	0.7	0.8	1.5	1.6
Regular use	1.3	1.7	1.8	2.0	2.6
Irregular use	2.7	3.7	4.5	5.3	5.7
Prevalence of use by substance¹					
Cannabis					63.60
Cocaine/Crack					7.10
MDMA					6.50
Heroin					5.20
NPS					5.20
Amphetamine					4.50
LSD					4.50
Hallucinogenic mushrooms					3.20

1 of those who reported using drugs

Note: The top panel of the table shows trends in the proportion of respondents who reported using cannabis in the past twelve months (overall and by frequency) for the survey years 2012, 2015, 2018, 2021, and 2024. The lower panel shows the proportion of those who reported having used certain substances in the past twelve months.

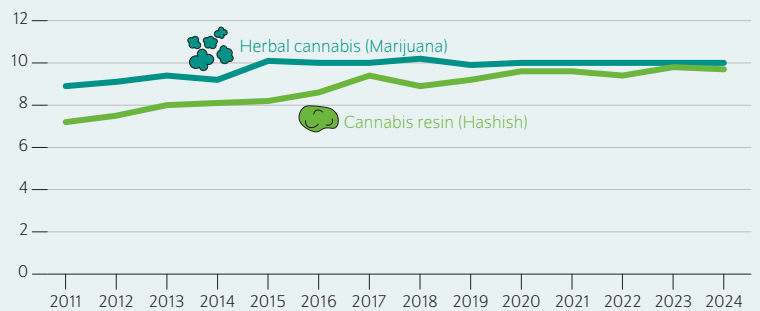
Sources: IFT Institute for Therapy Research, Epidemiological Survey of Substance Abuse.

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Figure 2

Price trends for cannabis

Average street prices per gram in euros



Sources: Franziska Schneider, Krystallia Karachaliou, and Esther Neumeier (2025): Bericht 2025 des nationalen REITOX-Knotenpunkts an die EUDA (Datenjahr 2024/2025). Deutschland, Workbook Drogenmärkte und Kriminalität. Deutsche Beobachtungsstelle für Drogen und Drogensucht DBDD, IFT Institut für Therapieforschung, München (in German); own calculations.

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The price of cannabis, particularly herbal cannabis (marijuana), has remained relatively stable in recent years.

for street crime (Figure 3). Based on the data available up to 2024, at the time of this report’s publication, clearance rates have not increased noticeably for any of the shown types of offenses.²⁰ Yet, such changes may take time to materialize, particularly for time-intensive investigations or structural changes. An important component of police work, namely

²⁰ For drug offenses, clearance rates are very high due to the phenomenon of *detection-driven crime* described above.

¹⁵ Pharmazeutische Zeitung (2024): Cansativa lures pharmacies with bonuses. Issue of April 16 (In German; available online).

¹⁶ The data are based on a survey conducted in June and July 2025. Manthey et al., Evaluation des Konsumcannabisgesetzes (EKOCAN) (In German).

¹⁷ Scott Jacques et al. (2016): Effects of prohibition and decriminalization on drug market conflict: Comparing street dealers, coffeeshops, and cafés in Amsterdam. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 15(3), 843–875 (available online), Jens Beckert and Frank Wehinger (2013): In the shadow: Illegal markets and economic sociology. *Socio-Economic Review*, 11(1), 5–30 (available online).

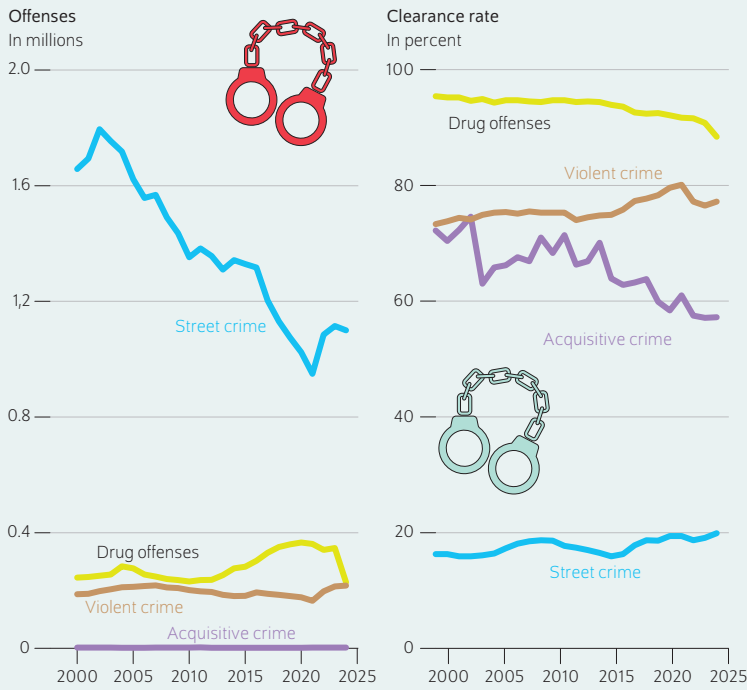
¹⁸ By comparison, the number of cases in other areas, such as street crime (Figure 3), is considerably higher than for drug-related and violent crime. See also: Anna Bindler and Hannah Walther (2025): Social and Regional Inequalities in the Sense of Safety in Germany. *DIW Weekly Report No. 30*, 179–187 (available online).

¹⁹ Adda, McConnell, and Rasul, Crime and the decriminalization of cannabis possession.

Figure 3

Crime trends and clearance rates in Germany from 2000 to 2024

Number of recorded offenses and clearance rates



Sources: Federal Criminal Police Office: Police Crime Statistics, own calculations.

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Clearance rates for acquisitive crimes and drug offenses have declined over the longer term, while those for violent and street crimes have risen slightly.

prevention, is more difficult to quantify with the data at hand: unreported cases and crimes that were not committed cannot be distinguished in the PKS.

Developments in other drug markets

One concern regarding the partial legalization is that cannabis might serve as a “gateway drug,” thus increasing the likelihood of using other illegal substances. With the available data, it is difficult to examine this claim causally. However, it is worth examining illicit drug market developments more closely.²¹

Sharp increase in cocaine-related offenses

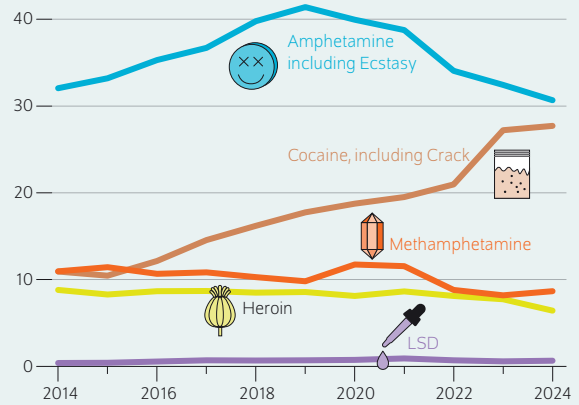
Compared to cannabis, other substances show differential trends: The PKS data reveal a very sharp increase in cocaine-related offenses (including crack), from 20,964 cases in 2022 to 27,224 cases in 2023 and 27,703 in 2024 (Figure 4).

21 For further information and references on the development of drug markets and so-called drug epidemics, see: Timothy J. Moore and Rosalie Liccardo Pacula (2021): Causes and consequences of illicit drug epidemics. In: Klaus F. Zimmermann (ed.): Handbook of Labor, Human Resources and Population Economics. Springer (available online).

Figure 4

Drug-related crime in Germany by substance

Number of recorded offenses in thousands



Sources: Federal Criminal Police Office: Police Crime Statistics, own calculations.

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Recorded cases of drug offenses involving cocaine including crack have risen sharply since 2015 and especially since 2022.

For other substances (amphetamine, including ecstasy, methamphetamine, heroin, and LSD), the PKS data show declines or (relatively) stable figures in recent years.

Considerable increase in drug residues in wastewater

As with cannabis offenses, other drug offenses are largely *detection-driven crime*. The PKS reflects the combination of underlying trends and the intensity of police detection. As described above, surveys can be problematic when it comes to illegal substances and, for many substances, wastewater data again is a (more) suitable data source (Box).²² As in the PKS, participating cities show a strong average increase for cocaine and crack, particularly since 2019/2020 (Figure 5). Compared to 2015, the average quantity detected in 2025 was nearly four times higher. The measured quantities for amphetamine and methamphetamine also increased several-fold.

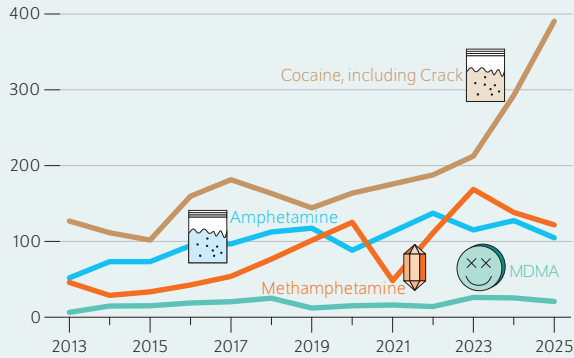
There are regional differences in these patterns. Particularly in major cities such as Berlin, Dortmund, Hamburg, Hanover, Munich, and Stuttgart, cocaine is more prevalent than other substances (Figure 6). In cities located further to the east (Chemnitz, Dresden, Erfurt, and Nuremberg), methamphetamine is more prevalent. The observations for Germany are consistent with European trends:²³ Overall,

22 To date, heroin is difficult or impossible to detect in wastewater. Residues are sometimes below the detection limit or cannot be clearly distinguished from the residues of other opioids that are also used in medical treatment (especially morphine). See: European Union Drugs Agency (2026): Wastewater analysis and drugs – a European multi-city study (available online, accessed March 18, 2026).

23 European Union Drugs Agency, Wastewater Analysis and Drugs.

Figure 5

Wastewater measurements of illicit substances mg per 1,000 inhabitants and per day



Note: Illegal substances in wastewater data from selected cities, average values per year. Not all cities participated every year.

Sources: European Union Drugs Agency (2026): Wastewater Analysis and Drugs – A European multi-city study; own calculations.

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The wastewater data indicate a notable increase in the consumption of cocaine and crack.

there are increases, with higher concentrations of cocaine in cities in Western and Southern Europe, and methamphetamine in Eastern European cities (particularly in Czechia and Slovakia).²⁴

Prices on illegal markets

As with cannabis, price trends are again of interest. Street prices for illicit drugs, determined by the BKA, show varying trends, similar to those observed in consumption. While prices for heroin and cocaine, for example, have remained relatively stable since 2015, methamphetamine prices have fallen slightly and crack has fallen sharply (Figure 7). However, crack prices are based on only a few observations.

Conclusion: Focus on prevention and awareness

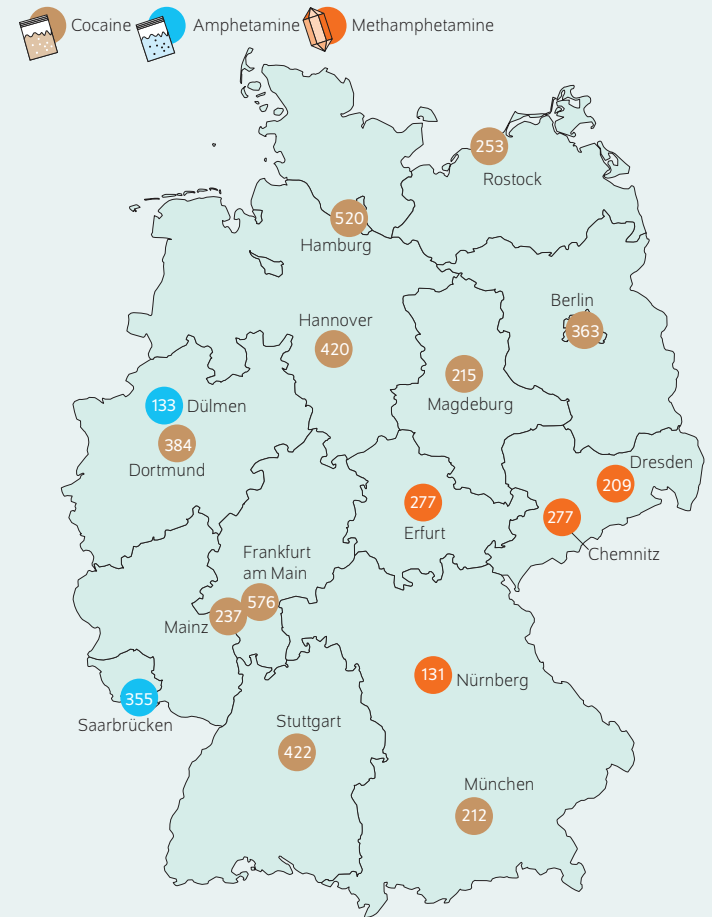
This Weekly Report offers several insights. Based on first available data, cannabis use and prices have not changed noticeably following the 2024 partial legalization; this is also the conclusion of the first interim report on the official scientific evaluation of the reform.²⁵ However, given the current data, only short-term conclusions can be drawn so far; medium- and long-term evaluations will be important. The PKS data show a sharp decline in drug-related recorded offenses following the reform, which is primarily a statistical

²⁴ Czechia has long been considered the main producer of crystal meth in Europe. The geographical proximity of cities in eastern and southeastern Germany to the border (and thus to trade routes) is a plausible explanation for the regional distribution. Other reasons may lie in the demographic and socio-economic composition of users and how they are distributed regionally within Germany.

²⁵ Manthey et al., Evaluation des Konsumcannabisgesetzes (EKOCAN) (In German).

Figure 6

Regional variations in drug residues in wastewater Most prevalent substance



Note: The graph shows the substance with the highest detected concentration in wastewater per location, measured by residue amount per 1,000 inhabitants (in mg). Data are not available for all cities for all years. Population-weighted averages are reported.

Sources: European Union Drugs Agency (2026): Wastewater analysis and drugs – a European multi-city study; own calculations.

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In cities primarily in Western Germany and in Berlin, cocaine is the most prevalent illegal drug in wastewater; in cities closer to the Czech border, it is methamphetamine.

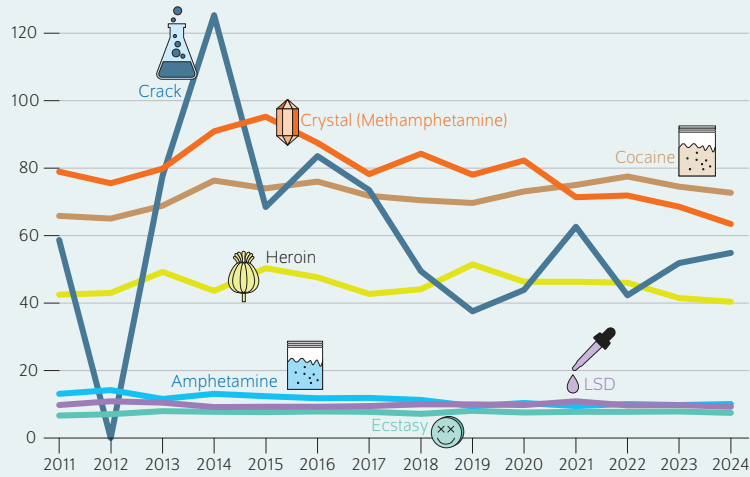
effect of the partial legalization. Increases in acquisitive and violent crime could indicate a more tense situation on the drug market; however, these trends began well before 2024. Indicators of demand for illicit drugs point to an increase, particularly in the use of cocaine/crack and methamphetamine, each with its own dynamics. Here, too, trends began well before 2024.

Two implications for policy and society can be drawn. First, there is the question of whether and how the supply and demand for cannabis should be regulated. Medical research

Figure 7

Price trends for illicit substances

Average street prices per gram/unit in euros



Note: The price for crack is based on limited data (fewer than five federal states).

Sources: Franziska Schneider, Krystallia Karachaliou, and Esther Neumeier (2025): Bericht 2025 des nationalen REITOX-Knotenpunkts an die EUDA (Datenjahr 2024/2025). Deutschland, Workbook Drogenmärkte und Kriminalität. Deutsche Beobachtungsstelle für Drogen und Drogensucht DBDD, IFT Institut für Therapieforchung, München (in German); own calculations.

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Except for the price of crack, most prices have remained relatively stable.

shows that health risks exist and should not be downplayed.²⁶ The number of those who use cannabis has been rising for years. So far, partial legalization has not led to marked changes beyond long-term trends already underway – at least at first glance. Thus, to address the latter, a political approach focused on awareness and prevention (beyond discussions about rolling back the reform) seems particularly important. Second, the current debate focuses heavily on cannabis, while other developments in drug markets receive less public attention. Given limited resources, the question remains where the greatest need for action lies and whether the current discourse reflects this. Given developments regarding illicit substances such as cocaine and crack, methamphetamine, and, in the future, likely also synthetic opioids, there is a need for action. There are not the same regulatory possibilities as there are in legal markets (such as taxes or age restrictions, as with tobacco or alcohol). Instead, public authorities and institutions (such as police or customs) play an important role. International studies show that disrupting supply chains can be effective in the short term.²⁷ In the long term, addiction counseling, prevention through education and awareness, and broad healthcare coverage play a key role on the demand side. The remaining challenge will be to sustainably finance these services and to effectively reach at-risk groups and affected individuals.

²⁶ Adolescents (since the brain continues to develop until the mid-20s), individuals with a history of mental health issues, and people with existing addiction or cardiovascular risks are considered particularly vulnerable to the effects of cannabis use. In these groups, cognitive impairments, the development of dependence, or mental health disorders are more likely to occur. See, e.g.: Marion Sonnenmoser (2008): Cannabis Use: Particularly Risky for Adolescents. *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, Issue 1/2008, 34-35 (in German; available online).

²⁷ See Carlos Dobkin and Nancy Nicosia (2009): The war on drugs: Methamphetamine, public health and crime. *American Economic Review*, 99(1), 324-349 (available online).

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JEL: I12, I18, K32, K42

Keywords: cannabis, drugs, crime, legalization, police

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Volume 15 March 27, 2026

Publishers

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Composition

Satz-Rechen-Zentrum Hartmann + Heenemann GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin

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ISSN 2568-7697