

Pot remains Europe's most used drug, agency report says (Update)

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Marijuana continues to be the European Union's most commonly used drug, with almost 79 million EU citizens estimated to have tried it at some point in their lives, the bloc's drug agency said in a report published Thursday.

That is almost a quarter of the EU's adult population and compares with some 15.6 million who have tried cocaine, the second most popular drug, the Lisbon, Portugal-based agency said.

The annual European Drug Report said marijuana accounts for 80 percent of drug seizures on the continent and 60 percent of all reported drug law offenses.

The European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction also noted that while recent laws allowing the regulated sale of marijuana in some parts of North and South America have drawn wide interest and debate among drug experts, attention in Europe is still centered on the drug's potential health costs.

Organized crime groups are becoming more deeply involved in marijuana production and trafficking, making it a drug of growing importance for law enforcement agencies, the report said.

At the same time, there are increasing cases of serious health problems linked to high-potency cannabis products. The agency has recorded increases in the purity or potency of all the most commonly used drugs in Europe.

Last year, authorities identified 101 new synthetic drugs, up from 80 discovered the previous year. The new substances are not controlled under international law and are commonly sold as "legal highs," often over the Internet. They try to mimic the effects of controlled drugs such as cocaine or LSD.

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