



NATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA (NCEU-MK)

16th SESSION OF WORKING GROUP 4: JUSTICE, FREEDOM, AND SECURITY (CHAPTER 24)

Topic: “Challenges and Perspectives in National Policies on Drugs and Psychoactive Substances: Aligning Macedonian Legislation with European Standards”

11 June 2025 (Wednesday), 09:30 – 14:00

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Strengthening institutional preparedness and the role of the National Drug Commission in cannabis regulation

With the ongoing processes of legalization and/or decriminalization of *Cannabis sativa*, social tolerance toward its use is expected to increase. This change presents significant challenges for law enforcement institutions, which must be adequately prepared to implement new regulations and policies.

It is recommended that:

1. Law enforcement institutions (MoI, Customs, Prosecutor’s Office, Judiciary) develop operational protocols and capacities to ensure effective application of the new legal framework governing cannabis production and use.
2. The National Drug Commission assumes a central and coordinating role in managing reforms, monitoring implementation, and aligning institutional responsibilities within the National Drug Strategy 2021–2025.
3. Action plans and risk assessments are regularly updated in line with legislative changes and societal dynamics.
4. Public information and education campaigns clarify the differences between medical, industrial, and recreational use, and inform citizens about their rights and responsibilities under the new regulations.

Recommendation 2: Improved oversight of marketing and export of cannabis from licensed producers

As the licensed cannabis market grows, there is a real risk that some legally produced high-quality cannabis may enter the illegal drug market. This undermines market integrity and contributes to organized crime and artificial price manipulation.

Institutions, particularly the Ministry of Interior and regulatory authorities, are recommended to:

1. Establish a “seed-to-sale” tracking system to monitor every stage of production, processing, storage, export, and final use.
2. Mandate reporting of sales and export contracts, including details of partners, quantities, and intended use (medical, industrial, etc.).
3. Conduct regular inspections and cross-checks between reported quantities and physical stock, involving financial police and customs authorities.





4. Create an interoperable data exchange system among producers, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, and Customs, similar to the model in the Czech Republic.

Recommendation 3: Preparing law enforcement for organized crime risks linked to increased medical cannabis production

With rising medical use of *Cannabis sativa*, the number of controlled cultivation laboratories and processing facilities is expected to grow. This trend increases the risk of legal capacities being misused for illegal purposes, including organized crime activities.

It is recommended that:

1. Law enforcement agencies (MoI, Prosecutor's Office, Financial Police, Customs) establish specialized teams to monitor and prosecute organized crime groups potentially abusing medical cannabis regulations.
2. Provide training and specialization for inspection and investigative services to identify unregistered facilities, unauthorized production and trade, and assess risks associated with disguised criminal activities within legal businesses.
3. Enhance institutional coordination between regulatory bodies (Ministry of Health, Medicines Agency) and enforcement authorities to ensure timely data exchange and traceability of each product.
4. Strengthen the use of financial intelligence to monitor suspicious investments, money laundering, and financial flows related to licensed entities.

Recommendation 4: Developing a targeted strategy to prevent heroin trafficking in exchange for cannabis

Current trends indicate a real risk that organized crime groups (OCGs) may trade Balkan-produced cannabis for heroin in Turkey. This “drug-for-drug” exchange model increases the risk of illicit trafficking networks, transnational criminal links, and escalation of violence between criminal groups.

It is recommended that:

1. MoI develop and implement a proactive strategy to prevent and prosecute heroin trafficking, based on analysis of trade routes, communication patterns, and financial flows of OCGs.
2. Establish specialized operational teams to identify and dismantle drug exchange networks.
3. Strengthen regional and international cooperation with Turkey and other countries along the “Balkan route” through intelligence sharing and joint investigations.
4. Conduct risk analysis within customs and transport systems, especially in border and transit areas, using advanced profiling and technological tools.
5. Introduce early-warning indicators for potential cannabis-for-heroin exchange schemes, involving financial institutions and mobile operators as part of broader operational monitoring.



Recommendation 5: Strengthening the institutional response to illicit synthetic drug production and trafficking

Advances in technology and increased availability of chemical precursors are driving organized crime groups toward illegal production of synthetic drugs. These groups already have advanced skills, enabling the use of non-controlled precursors easily obtained online or via distribution networks.

It is recommended that:

1. Establish an early-warning center to register new synthetic drugs and maintain a controlled substances list based on generics.
2. Enhance forensic and investigative capacities to detect and analyze synthetic drug laboratories, with a focus on non-controlled precursors.
3. Develop mechanisms to monitor online and cross-border trade in chemical substances with potential use in synthetic drug production.
4. Promote inter-institutional cooperation among police, customs, Medicines Agency, Ministry of Health, and financial institutions to track suspicious purchases and movements of chemicals and equipment.
5. Conduct proactive intelligence and trend analysis to anticipate and prevent new forms of illegal production and distribution.
6. Encourage regional and international information exchange on new substances and production methods, participating in joint investigations and operations.

Recommendation 6: Strengthening regional and international cooperation against drug-related organized crime in line with EU practices

Following European Commission, Europol, and EMPACT (*European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats*) guidelines, Western Balkan countries, including North Macedonia, are encouraged to intensify cooperation and align legal and operational frameworks with EU security standards. Drug-related organized crime is a key priority in the EU Strategic Cycle for combating serious and organized crime.

It is recommended that:

1. Align national legislation with EU directives on drug trafficking, money laundering, and terrorism financing, including adopting EU definitions of organized crime structures, membership, and operational schemes.
2. Establish and systematically use Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) in partnership with Eurojust and Europol for transnational drug investigations, particularly along multimodal routes in the Western Balkans.
3. Integrate national police and intelligence agencies into EMPACT activities through working groups on drug trafficking and organized crime to access operational tools, analysis, training, and EU funding.



4. Strengthen intelligence capacity and develop national Focal Points for Drugs in cooperation with Europol for proactive data exchange on criminal actors, trafficking routes, smuggling patterns, financial flows, and emerging trends (including drug-barter exchanges, synthetic drugs, crypto channels, etc.).
5. Operationalize regional cooperation through joint training, thematic conferences on emerging threats, expert working groups on hybrid challenges, and participation in EU regional networks such as SEESAC and IPA II & III internal security instruments.
6. Encourage countries to establish National EMPACT Focal Points to support EU priorities in drug control.

Recommendation 7: Establishing systematic monitoring and evaluation as a basis for effective drug policy

Monitoring and evaluation are essential tools for designing, adjusting, and improving drug policies. Without systematic monitoring, it is impossible to develop strategies, programs, and plans aligned with the context. Without evaluating existing strategies and programs, it is impossible to determine what works, what doesn't, and where reforms should head.

It is recommended that:

1. Establish regular monitoring of drug-related indicators standardized by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), including drug-related deaths, treatment demand, seizures, etc.
2. Conduct regular evaluation of all national strategies and action plans in accordance with EU and EMCDDA standards.
3. Use clear indicators and measurable objectives during policy design to enable tracking and objective assessment of results.
4. Engage independent experts or institutions for external evaluations.
5. Use evaluation findings to revise existing policies and design new ones.

Recommendation 8: Treating drug use and addiction as a public health issue within drug policy

Addressing addiction as a disease rather than a crime allows for an effective, sustainable, and humane approach that protects both individuals and society. European experience shows that countries prioritizing public health in their drug policies achieve better outcomes in reducing drug use, crime, mortality, and morbidity, while lowering treatment costs and burdens on the justice system.

It is recommended that:

1. Integrate a health-based approach in the national drug strategy, emphasizing prevention, early detection, intervention, treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration of people with substance use disorders.



2. Strengthen the role of healthcare institutions, particularly addiction treatment centers, as key actors in addressing drug use.
3. Ensure access to evidence-based treatments for disorders caused by opioids, psychostimulants, cannabis, other psychoactive substances, and non-medical use of prescription drugs, as well as behavioral addictions (online/offline gambling, video games, problematic internet use), with psychosocial support, mobile teams, and harm reduction programs in line with EMCDDA and WHO recommendations.
4. Ensure access to medications for overdose prevention.
5. Provide specialized programs for children using drugs, women (including pregnant women), migrants, and marginalized groups (e.g., homeless).
6. Ensure availability of treatment programs in prisons, detention centers, and juvenile facilities, recognizing that prison health is public health.
7. Incorporate drug-related education into accredited programs in medical, psychology, sociology, social work, security, law, and related faculties, following best European practices (e.g., Czech Republic).
8. Provide continuous training for professionals working with people who use drugs (doctors, judges, prosecutors, police, teachers, social workers, and policymakers).
9. Reduce stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs through public campaigns and education to ensure free, inclusive, and dignified access to healthcare.
10. Promote multisectoral coordination among health, social protection, education, law enforcement, justice, and probation services, based on the principle of “treatment instead of punishment,” with alternative measures wherever applicable, especially for problematic drug users.
11. Focus on youth and vulnerable populations through evidence-based prevention programs (universal, selective, indicated, school- and community-based, and early interventions), psychological support, and early risk identification tailored to the national context.