

# Illegal or misused substances: recent trends (2013-2014)

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This issue of *Tendances* focuses on the key results of the fourteenth annual TREND (Emerging Trends and New Drugs) survey and the scheme's seven sites (see box on page 5). This issue is divided into two main sections: the first focuses on the highlights of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, with the increasing precariousness of a portion of users, the ecstasy tablet «comeback» in parallel with a more visible MDMA presence, an upsurge in the purity of the heroin circulating in France and the report of two new supply methods. The second section describes consequential phenomena that have been identified in the last few years, but are continuing to develop, and especially the rise in commercial herbal cannabis cultivation, the spread of ketamine use and the increasingly frequent use of morphine sulphate. There is also discussion on the entrenchment of new psychoactive substances. In addition to the TREND and SINTES (National detection system of drugs and toxic substances) observations, this issue benefited from the ethnographic research driven by the I-TREND (Internet Tools for Research in Europe on New Drugs) project. Finally, there will be special attention paid to cocaine, whose developing market and use is always closely observed given the drug's prominent place among illegal substances in France.

## ■ Striking aspects

### Signs of drug user impoverishment

It is often difficult to observe trends on the precariousness of drug users due to the diversity of their situations and the existence among these users of especially vulnerable homeless or wandering populations. However, it seems that in 2013 there was more evidence of increased precariousness in social environments that could not be explained solely by the most marginal of the population.

An especially substantial element of this trend is the adaptation of supply to this new situation. Subsequently, nearly all TREND sites mention the reorganisation of supply to offset the problems posed by the impoverishment of some users, such as socially-integrated or semi-integrated populations<sup>1</sup>, clearly weakened by the economic crisis that began in 2008. Re-

Summary report on the TREND scheme and site observations on illegal drugs and misuse of prescription drugs.



gardless of the substance, this reorganisation is evidenced by the increasing supply of split doses that are then sold at more affordable prices. This splitting up of doses is based on weight (1/10, 1/5, 1/2 gram), for cocaine especially, or on available resources (€10 or €20), or even by the rail<sup>2</sup> or line. The decline in purchasing power of cocaine users is combined with a relatively high mean retail price per gram (€70 to €80 in 2013), which has been on the rise in the last three years (Table 1). As a result, the practice of purchasing a single gram by groups of low-income users is spreading, especially among the most disadvantaged of the party scene users. It seems that this “low threshold” accessibility leads to the maintenance of an already-existent clientele, but attracts new users as well.

The direct observation of deteriorated living conditions for the working class and middle class, which is especially visible among drugs users, is particularly evident at the Marseille site. This highlights a new physical proximity between this population and street or squat users. This proximity leads mainly to the adoption of a “poor user” profile based on the use of prescription drugs and psychotropic substances that can be obtained at a lower cost. Hence, the resale of prescription drugs has increased to meet the heightened demand and prescriptions of Artane<sup>®</sup> (trihexypfenidyl) seem to be taking off again. Misuse of Artane<sup>®</sup> in the French Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region is tightly related to high precariousness among users. Other elements may also bear witness to the in-

1. There are people who are socially integrated, but who are having trouble becoming professionally integrated or stable.

2. A “rail” or “line” is the separation of a drug powder into a line to be snorted.

creasing fragility of some users, such as the testimony by professionals, reported at several TREND sites, that there is increasing crime for the purposes of funding drug use and such as a report from the Rennes site of a shift from snorting to injecting<sup>3</sup> in semi-integrated cocaine users; there was also a report in Metz of the increasing presence of young people living in poverty in city centres.

An increase in amphetamine (“speed”) use and the drug’s increased visibility at certain sites may also be related to the impoverishment of some drug users. Long considered by users as a “poor man’s cocaine” due to its moderate mean price per gram (€13 to €14) and stimulant effects, which are deemed effective and sustainable, speed is very commonplace on the party scene. However, it seems to have been more frequently consumed in 2013, and to have represented an alternative to cocaine against a background of increased impoverishment of users. At the same time, it appears to be a substance that is less and less frequently linked with the party scene. This is due to its status (more pronounced in 2013) as a “substance of choice” among certain vulnerable urban users, who tend to use it in combination with buprenorphine.

The same observation can be made for freebase cocaine use<sup>4</sup> [1]. Some socially-integrated freebase users, who tended to manufacture their substance themselves but no longer have the means to purchase cocaine hydrochloride, source the substance directly at deal sites in northeastern Paris. In this way, these socially-integrated freebase users mix with the highly marginalised population usually encountered at these deal sites.

### Ecstasy tablets making a comeback, MDMA use continues

During the 2000s, ecstasy tablet use declined due to the increasing circulation of samples that did not contain the expected molecule<sup>5</sup>, a period of significant supply shortage in 2009 and an image of the substance as outdated. This phenomenon led to a drop in the use of the drug, which was observed in general population surveys<sup>6</sup>. On the party scene, some users switched to powder and crystal MDMA, which was simply called “MDMA”, because the quality was determined to be better. Even though, in 2013, MDMA was still as popular in the commercial and alternative dance-event setting, where younger generations viewed it as a new drug, different from ecstasy, there was a confirmed comeback of the tablet form that began in 2011. This was characterised by especially high doses and a substance presentation intended to attract young users: a coating in bright colours and sometimes non-traditional 3D shapes (grenade, diamond, ghost). Mean contents per tablet increased from 50 to 60 mg of MDMA in the 2000s to nearly 100 mg in 2012, with some contents reaching as high as 200 mg. This increase in content is related to the purity as well as the increase in the mean mass of circulating tablets: around 300 mg in 2012–2013 versus 200 to 250 mg in the 2000s [3].

At the same time, all of the TREND sites reported an increase in MDMA use in 2013, which grew again in 2014, both on the alternative party scene and in the commercial dance-event setting. Users mentioned the drug’s wide availability in both settings and very good value for money despite persistent fraud. This trend was seen mainly in a young population (16 to 25 years

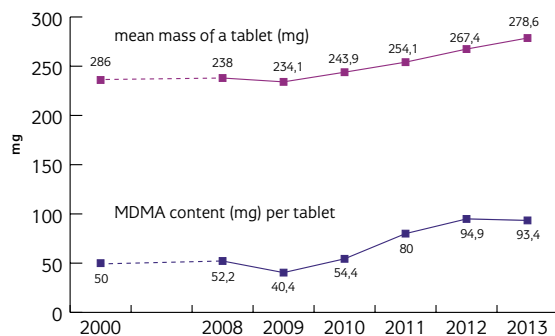
of age). MDMA in powder or crystal form is mainly ingested “*en parachute*” (rolled in a sheet of cigarette rolling paper and then swallowed) in repeated doses throughout an evening or mixed with drinks. Some snort it despite the irritation it can cause to the nasal mucosa. There has also been an observed rise in the inhalation of the fumes of heated MDMA (“chasing the dragon”). Combining MDMA use with alcohol use is very widespread on party scenes. Although this new cycle of widespread MDMA use is seen among older generations of party goers as well as new party going generations, in younger users it is very frequently accompanied by a total underestimation, or even lack of awareness of the risks related to use: despite the high mean purity of samples seized in the last two years (approximately 60%) [4], MDMA almost never has the image of a drug in the environments in which it circulates.

This practice is cause for worry. These very attractive, high-dose tablets are reaching a generation of users with little awareness of the risks they run and negligible harm reduction education. This happens in a context where the number of potential lifetime users is widening due to the distribution-dilution of the techno party scene. In 2013, the TREND scheme and SINTES data collectors reported more frequent bad trips, which were also generally more severe since they were likely to last for several days following substance intake. During the summer of 2014, there were four deaths reported with suspected MDMA intake<sup>7</sup>.

### An increase in mean heroin purity

The years 2010 and 2011 were characterised by a shortage of heroin in Europe [6]. In France, this was evidenced not by a decrease in supply, but rather, by a significant drop in mean content, which declined from 13% in 2010 to 7% in 2012 according to police laboratory data. In 2013, INPS data revealed a significant rise in mean purity to the

**Graph 1 - Evolution of mean MDMA content per ecstasy tablet and total mean mass of a tablet (from 2000 to September 2013)**



Due to the decline in tablet availability, the latest means were calculated using limited data. Source: INPS, STUPS file, 2008-2013, SINTES (2000-2007)

3. For regular users who had been snorting, injection frequently indicates the need to stretch out a purchased substance because the doses needed are higher than what available income can purchase.

4. Cocaine hydrochloride, which is the acidic chemical form of cocaine, can be transformed into its base chemical form by adding ammonia or bicarbonate. When transformed in this way, it is known as freebase cocaine or crack cocaine, depending on whether it was transformed on a commercial scale (such as for the Paris crack market) or an artisanal scale (freebase).

5. MDMA, the molecule in ecstasy

6. The number of last-year ecstasy users decreased from 0.5% to 0.3% in the period from 2005 to 2010 [2].

7. In 2012, the data from the DRAMES (Drug and Substance Abuse-related Deaths) registry of the ANSM (French National Agency for Medicines and Health Products Safety) noted nine deaths in which MDMA use was involved, alone or in combination with other substances. However, there were no details on the dosage form or purity of the substance [5].

levels seen in 2010 (13%) [3]. This rise was accompanied by a doubling in the proportion of seized samples with over 30% heroin (from 4% to 8%). However, it will be necessary to wait until the next available data to determine if this rise was a simple fluctuation or an indication of a turnaround in the trend. If the increase continues, there may be a concomitant rise in heroin overdose, like there was from 2006 to 2009 [5]. Nevertheless, since this mean content masks very marked regional disparities, it is uncertain whether this phenomenon also exists nationwide [7]. Subsequently, for the Bordeaux, Toulouse and Rennes sites – the most geographically removed from the Netherlands and Belgium (Europe’s source markets) – the quality of brown heroin as perceived by users is generally poor. Of course, the substance is still available, including in rural areas where supply comes from user-dealer micro-networks, but the poor quality encourages a switch by many users to morphine sulphates like Skenan® [8]. In addition, the SINTES monitoring system has identified white heroin<sup>8</sup> in geographic areas where it is usually absent. Representing approximately 6% to 7% of seizures, depending on the year, white heroin is generally limited to the West of Paris and the Marseille conurbation, where it circulates in confidential networks. However, from February 2013 to June 2014, the collection of 10 samples through the SINTES scheme bears witness to the presence of the drug in the Île-de-France region, as well as in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Lorraine, Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées regions.

### Supply innovations

The year 2013 notably saw the development of supply via the postal service

for traditional illegal drugs, which used to only be reserved to new psychoactive substances (NPS) ordered on the Web (see the second section). Although currently relatively marginal, this emergent type of trafficking is only of small quantities. This kind of trafficking is mainly used for cocaine and cannabis coming from the Antilles and French Guiana, as well as for MDMA, which French customs officers are more frequently identifying in packages sent via the postal service. At the same time, orders of illegal substance on the deep web<sup>9</sup> are developing, as was indicated by the ethnographic research conducted during the I-TREND project and by the TREND scheme information collected from certain users. Analyses of products purchased on the deep web were performed in 2014 as part of the SINTES scheme. Two of these samples were of methamphetamine, a substance whose arrival on French territory is regularly announced. As is generally the case when there is a confirmed presence of the molecule<sup>10</sup>, methamphetamines were acquired for personal use and not for trafficking purposes. Also new is the local production of amphetamines in France, as evidenced by the dismantling in rural Toulouse of two amphetamine “laboratories”. Although reports of individuals in Bordeaux and in Metz beginning to manufacture the molecule have been documented, they still need to be confirmed. In Marseille, an especially pure (98%) sample of MDMA analysed through SINTES was also allegedly locally produced. In all cases, the production in question was for personal use or occasional dealing. These practices, which until now have been rare in France, are apparently related to the more extensive exchange of online psychoactive substance information facilitated by, among others,

the discretion of the deep web and the greater possibilities afforded to French users during exchanges (translations, French-language platforms or forums).

## ■ Sustainable trends

### A sharp rise in cannabis purity

In the last few years, there has been a clear increase in the mean purity of the cannabis sold in France, whether in the herbal form or in the resin form. The purity of the resin form, which was 17.4% in 2013, rose by 50% in two years, after doubling over the previous decade. The purity of herbal cannabis increased by 20% at the same time, doubling over a five-year period to reach 12.6% [4].

These changes occurred within the context of a market with intense competition between local production with short distribution circuits and extra-European cannabis. In the last few years, the French cannabis market, as in the rest of Europe, has been affected by the rise in herbal cannabis production led by structured criminal groups, self-growers and individuals who are starting-up in large-scale commercial growing. In 2013, all sites reported this phenomenon as being more intense. The dismantling of plantations with several dozens or several hundreds of plants is occurring with increasing frequency. Plant seizure statistics reached an historic high in 2013 (141,000 plants were seized [9]). This trend may be a sign of the increasing instability of certain aforementioned fringes of the population, since cannabis cultivation can prove to be a highly lucrative enterprise. These plantations benefit from the development of online commerce for hybrid varieties of herbal cannabis coming from the Netherlands (Amnesia, Sinsemilla, Skunk), which some users enthusiastically qualify as “chemical” since their purity level is so high. The presence of these varieties explains the significant rise in mean contents observed in France in the last 10 years. In response, it seems that the Moroccan resin manufacturers reacted by increasing their quality. This increase in “quality” had an impact on the mean price of herbal cannabis, which was ap-

Table 1 - Prices of the main substances as observed by the TREND scheme

	2000*	2009*	2010*	2011**	2012**	2013**	General trend 2011-2013
Heroin (g)	59	45	42	40	43.4	46.5	↗
Cocaine (g)	84	62	67	68	70.6	76.6	↗
Ecstasy (tablets)	15	6.8	7.7	7	10.0	8.2	↔
MDMA powder/crystal (g)	NA	65	60	63	56.3	54.7	↘
Cannabis resin (g)	NA	5	5	5.4	6.9	6.6	↗
Herbal cannabis (g)	NA	7.5	8	8	9.6	10.4	↗
Amphetamines (g)	15	14	16	15.5	14.3	13.8	↘
LSD (blotter)	8.5	11	10	10	10.0	9.8	↔

\* TREND ethnographic data

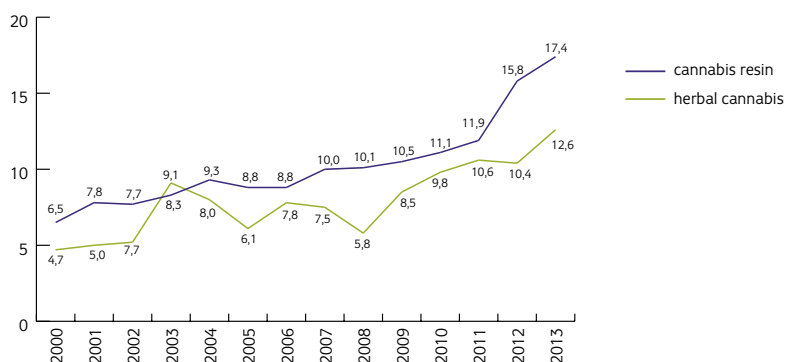
\*\* TREND data from the half-yearly “prices” Barometer.

Source: Prices Barometer/TREND/OFDT

8. White heroin is the acidic chemical form of heroin. Heroin usually circulates in its base chemical form (known as the “brown” heroin form). White heroin does not have paracetamol among the cutting products, the mean purity of samples collected or seized is higher (approximately 27% to 29% [2, 4]) and white heroin batches are more frequently of higher purity.

9. The deep web, or for illegal activities, the dark net, is constituted of sites or parts of sites that are not referenced by search engines and therefore can only be accessed by users who know the URL. Dark net sites generally sell illegal items, such as weapons, forged identity papers and, more recently, illegal drugs.

10. Substances sold as methamphetamine, especially on the party scene, very often contain high amphetamine contents.

**Graph 2 - Trend in THC content in cannabis resin and herbal cannabis seizures analysed in France from 2000 to 2013**

Source: INPS, STUPS file (2000-2013)

### Cocaine: no visible ebbing

The observations from 2010 to 2011, which took into consideration a change in image for cocaine and were put into perspective with the decline in use observed in the European states with the highest levels of use (Spain, the United Kingdom), revealed a decline in the attractiveness of this substance. Yet, the lesser popularity of cocaine revealed in the last two years by the TREND scheme was related mainly to the quality of the substance circulating in France and less to the health consequences arising among experienced users. In 2013, these trends continued, but cocaine remains a festive, positively-regarded substance with low perceived risks, especially among young people. The substance remains highly sought-after and the Rennes and Metz sites seem to perceive a strong increase in its use in the commercial dance-event setting despite the competition from MDMA (powder form) or even amphetamines, and this while its mean price per gram continues to rise. At the same time, users who suffer from the negative consequences of cocaine use become more visible and in 2013, health professionals at several sites reported an increase in demand for treatment for addiction to cocaine, which is sometimes used on its own (without concomitant cannabis, tobacco and alcohol use). Also reported is the increasingly frequent occurrence of cocaine injection, especially among increasingly precarious user. Furthermore, according to the DRAMES network of CEIPs (Centres for evaluation and information on pharmacodependence) in 2012 cocaine was involved in 12% of fatal overdoses [5].

This apparent continued spread, which is accompanied by a renewed positive perception of the drug, is supported by the return of access to purer cocaine for some users against a background of higher substance availability in all settings. The year 2013, like 2012, was characterised by a clear increase in mean purity, which, for seizures of less than 10 grams ("street cocaine", which is similar in composition to what is consumed) increased from 32% to 43% after a period of marked decline during the 2000s [4]. Furthermore, this trend is evidenced by increasing numbers of opportunities for users to procure "properly dosed" substance from certain networks (particularly in Marseille and Lille). In contrast, outside of these networks, where accessibility is limited to certain users, there is still much uncertainty regarding the purity of purchased samples given the high disparity among dealer practices. This rise in mean cocaine purity should not make people forget that dangerous cutting products are still used. The levamisole<sup>12</sup> that has appeared in the composition of circulating cocaine since 2008 and is present in three quarters of the seizures since 2011 led to cases of vasculitis in 2013 [18, 19]. It represents a mean of 10% of the total mass of the samples containing it. In contrast, phenacetin<sup>13</sup>, which in 2013 was identified in only one third of analysed seizures, represented over one quarter (29%) of the mean mass [4].

This availability is shored up by a highly dynamic supply organised by vectors that range from housing estate dealer networks (Marseille, Toulouse, Paris) to small user-dealer networks. Other modalities were reported in 2013, mainly by the Bordeaux and Toulouse sites, like the development of trafficking through the postal service coming from the Antilles and French Guiana [20]. Furthermore, the segmentation of the market, with the development of a supply accessible to the most precarious users - in whom there are more frequent purchases by groups of young users from dealers facilitating access to the substance despite the increase in mean price - is all the more worrying when one considers that, for certain users, the price is the only barrier to use.

proximately €10 per gram in 2012 and 2013, while the mean resin price was approximately €7 in 2012 and 2013 versus €5 until 2010. In 2013, despite the competition from herbal cannabis, the cannabis resin market remained very dynamic in France. Seventy-one (71) metric tonnes were seized in France that year, which was the highest level since 2008 [9].

The potential health impact of the rise in the purity of cannabis circulating in France has not been well documented yet. In 2013, few problems were mentioned, with the exception of the Toulouse site, which identified a higher frequency of health professional reports on cannabis psychosis. It seems that users adapt to the situation by fractionating their cannabis doses. In the most recent mortality data (DRAMES 2012), there were several alleged deaths for which cannabis was claimed to be responsible, and according to the authors of the study, this resulted from an improvement in the data collection approach<sup>11</sup> [5].

### New psychoactive substances (NPS), a kaleidoscope

Since the arrival of new psychoactive substances in France in 2008 [10], 97 new substances have been identified by toxicological analyses laboratories and 36 of these were identified in 2013 alone. Since 2010, the rate of identification of new substances has increased, with three new substances analysed every month (one per month in 2012). In 2013, cannabinoids were what was most frequently identified (31 from 2008 to 2013, and 13 in 2013 alone), but for the first time, the number of phenethylamines identified exceeded the number of cathinones (seven versus four) [11]. Molecules belonging to new chemical classes are appearing: mainly arylcyclohexylamines<sup>14</sup> (structurally similar to ketamine, like methoxetamine) and arylalkylamines<sup>15</sup> [12].

11. On the one hand, health professionals would attempt to consider the potential role played by taking drugs, and particularly cannabis, when faced with an acute problem, such as a heart attack or vascular incident. On the other hand, the method used by the DRAMES scheme has changed: the concept of «primary substance involved» has evolved into «involved substance», so that molecules present in physiological liquids at contents compatible with the health event leading to the death or contributing to the death can be considered.

12. Antiparasitic medication

13. An analgesic that, today, is no longer authorised due to its nephrotoxic effects.

14. Arylcyclohexylamines are both hallucinogenic psychotropics and dissociatives (i.e., leading to a feeling of dissociation between the body and the mind).

15. Arylalkylamines have effects similar to those of phenethylamines (hallucinogenic, stimulant, empathogenic). The best known of these molecules are 6-APB, bromo-dragonfly or 2C-B-Fly.



The digital market is developing quickly, not only in terms of substances but also with respect to its organisation. Although distribution of territorial references for a given network (Website hosting, site of substance dispatch, source of bank withdrawals) is still the rule, strategies are changing. First, the sites are becoming more readily available to users by improving their accessibility on the Web (language, referencing) or seeking local relays (they approach regular clients to determine packaging and deal sites). Subsequently, the year 2013 was characterised by the first ever discovery in France of an NPS packaging laboratory in Brittany [13]. Moreover, the sites tend to protect themselves by developing systems to screen users that include procedures involving registration prior to purchase. Above all, the ethnographic research conducted at virtual and physical sites bears witness to dynamic deep web sales. At the same time, users continue to organise their community through websites displaying approval of products or designating substance “testers” [14]. Few NPS were observed on the face-to-face deal markets by the TREND-SINTES scheme, despite greater accessibility on the party scene through dealers operating on physically existent markets. In 2013, packages seized via the postal service continue to have higher volumes than before

(increasing from 500 g to 5 kg), likely attesting to purchases for the purposes of trafficking.

Methoxetamine (MXE) supply continues to stand out on the online market and on the traditional market due to its long existence, and despite its classification in August 2013<sup>16</sup>. It is one of the NPS that has had the most success in spreading beyond groups of users that frequent dedicated forums. On the alternative party scene, there are circulating NPS with stronger hallucinogenic effects (in addition to MXE, NBOMes, 2C-X, DMT and DOC); those whose effect is more like that of stimulants seem to be more present in the commercial dance-event setting (4-MEC, methylone) [14].

A large proportion of illegal NPS seizures only concern a very small number of molecules. In 2013, 59% of illegal NPS seizures included one of the three following substances: methylone, 3-MEC or 4-MEC and a lesser-known substance, 4-FA [15]. Although the observation of forums confirms the popularity of 3- and 4-MEC and of 4-FA since 2013, the disinterest for methylone however is marked. In addition, keep in mind that the customs seizures of postal freight that are not part of a random process are not necessarily representative of the total flow, and only represent a small portion. Hence, the situation to date of the most consumed NPS in France is still unclear.

Knowledge of products consumed is still largely a characteristic of small groups of experienced users. The majority of the population that purchases NPS is ill-informed and observers frequently see the casualness with which certain young users on the party scene approach the use of an unknown substance. Most importantly, users can be victims of fraud, and dealers may distribute NPS instead of the products they are supposed to imitate. This is the case for MXE, whose effects mimic those of ketamine [16], as well as for 2C-P and 25x-NBOMe, which are sold for LSD. The molecules related to the pyrovalerone family also seem to have great interest as cocaine or MDMA substitutes.

Outside of the party scene, the use of NPS emerged among some “former”, more integrated heroin addicts receiving substitution treatment. These people have housing and discover new drugs that they purchase directly online. Access to these substances may incite drug users, who had stopped, to use again.

NPS use by the most disadvantaged users via dealers remains, however, limited compared with that of traditional drugs, especially because these users regard NPS as being of inferior quality to those they are intended to replace.

#### **Ketamine and morphine sulphate use continue to spread**

These two substances were each the subject of a specific report in 2014 [8, 17]. The network of TREND sites has observed increasingly visible ketamine use with accompanying health effects [10], particularly in the Southwest of France on both the alternative party scene and beyond (clubs and discotheques) and in urban settings (marginalised users), due to the improved image of a substance that elicits less and less fear.

Moreover, the marked expansion of morphine sulphate demand and use outside of the strict therapeutic setting also drew the attention of the health authorities in 2013 and 2014. Primarily in the centre and south of France, this trend has shed light on the vulnerability of certain general practitioners when confronted with pressure from sometimes violent users.

The demand results from several phenomena. On the one hand, it seems to be a response by active drug users to the degradation in the quality of heroin observed until 2013, and on the other hand, it reflects the demand of people seeking an injectable substitute that will enable them to feel a signifi-

#### **The building blocks of the TREND scheme**

TREND (Emerging Trends and New Drugs) is a scheme established by the OFDT in 1999. TREND endeavours to detect emerging phenomena in illegal drug use, including trends in substances, supply, routes of administration and user profiles.

To fulfil its observation mission, TREND relies first and foremost on a network of seven local coordinating sites (Bordeaux, Marseille, Lille, Metz, Paris, Rennes, Toulouse) with a common information collection and analysis strategy based mainly on the triangulation of data coming from independent sources. The data collection tools used are mainly qualitative: continuous ethnographic observations conducted in urban areas and on the party scene, qualitative questionnaires are administered to structures or associations in contact with drug users (CAARUDs), focus groups («health», «law enforcement») that aim to rapidly establish overviews of the situation with professionals in the field.

Against this background, thematic investigations are also conducted to acquire more information about a particular subject and retail selling prices of the main illegal drugs («price» Barometer) are regularly collected.

TREND also relies on:

- SINTES (National Detection System of Drugs and Toxic Substances), an observation system geared towards detecting and analysing the toxicological composition of illegal substances and an early warning system;
- recurrent quantitative surveys, such as the ENa-CAARUD survey (national survey of CAARUDs' clients) which has been conducted among drug users seen in French low-threshold structures certified as CAARUDs (Support Centre for the Reduction of Drug-related Harms) every two years since 2006;
- the qualitative elements mentioned by CAARUDs in their activity reports;
- the use of the results of information systems supervised by the CEIP network (Centre for Evaluation and Information on Pharmacodependence) and the ANSM (National Agency for Medicines and Health Products Safety), the OCRTIS (Central Office for the Repression of Drug-related Offences) and the INPS (National Forensic Science Institute) and finally, other OFDT surveys.

Furthermore, since 2010, the scheme has endeavoured to build appropriate tools for conducting observations in virtual Internet spaces, where approaches already used in real settings are being applied (e.g., ethnographic analyses of forums and “measurements” of substance popularity, surveys among users and purchases of substances online).

16. Legislative order of 5 August 2013 modifying the legislative order of 22 February 1990 establishing the list of substances classified as narcotics.

cant effect (a “high”) that they are not willing to give up.

Finally, the impoverishment of some users leads them to turn to prescription drugs because they do not have access to heroin.

## ■ Conclusion

As alluded to in the previous survey, it has been confirmed that the economic crisis has affected the practices of so-called integrated users who are in a socially vulnerable situation. The continuation of this trend and its consequences on use and treatment will be particularly closely monitored in the years to come. The local markets seem to be evolving, with notably, in 2013, an increase in the contents of several substances: cannabis, MDMA, but also cocaine and heroin, which is a new. Add to this a more intense diversification of sourcing methods that trickles down to affect

traffic and use in France and each year brings more innovation: distribution through the postal service and ordering of traditional drugs from the deep web. Market fluctuations influence the choices of polydrug users and are likely to affect the distribution of use per substance. Users are clients that juggle an increasingly competitive supply: cocaine or amphetamines, heroin or morphine sulphates, cannabis resin or herbal cannabis, dealers or the Web, traditional or new psychoactive substances etc. The current cocaine market segmentation, which aims to maintain or obtain more market share among the most disadvantaged users, the design of new ecstasy tablets along with the attractiveness of NPS packaging and the retail sites targeting a young population, are all evidence of a situation that is becoming increasingly complex.

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## methodological reference points

### The specific areas observed by TREND

Since its inception, the TREND scheme has been focusing on observing the French urban setting and the techno party scene. The French urban settings defined by TREND primarily refer to low-threshold harm reduction centres (“drop-ins”, needle exchange programmes that became CAARUDs in 2006) and open spaces (e.g., streets, squats and dealing sites). Most of the people encountered in these settings are problem users of illegal drugs living in highly precarious conditions.

Techno party settings refer to places where events are organised around this music. They encompass the so-called “alternative” scene (free parties, “teknivals”, alternative party areas within more general festivals) as well as commercial or more conventional locations (clubs, discotheques, private parties). This setting now tends to cover the general party scene in line with the spread/dilution of the techno movement into the more general population.

These two social settings were originally chosen due to the high likelihood of finding new or never-before-seen phenomena, even though these two settings do not characterise the full reality of drug use in France. Nevertheless, the observations that are conducted there have enabled TREND, for the last decade, to target the spread of drug use beyond these settings towards ever-wider, more varied social spheres (such as socially integrated populations) and ever-larger geographic areas (rural or suburban areas). These settings, and particularly the urban one, are transit areas for a significant population of drug users, which includes socially integrated users. It is particularly frequent for “hidden” users\* to visit the party scene, which TREND tries to cover, despite its constantly changing scope.

The ability to purchase online for several years now, first of new psychoactive substances and more recently of much more traditional drugs, is likely to increase the number of “invisible”, dispersed users and special use practices. A third, so-called “virtual” space, is already being investigated by the I-TREND project, to access socially integrated users hidden from the scheme.

\*The so-called “hidden” users are those who have no contact with healthcare structures (i.e., no contact related to their use of psychoactive substances at least) or law enforcement services.

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