

# Cocaine small-scale dealing in France

**Results of the study of 150 arrests for use, use/dealing and trafficking of cocaine, together with data collected in the context of the TREND device (2004-2005)**

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While the question of the international trafficking of cocaine, in both its criminal and geopolitical dimensions, is relatively well known and investigated, the same cannot be said for local dealing, in close proximity with the end-consumer. Today, there are large gaps in the information on the functioning of the networks placing cocaine at the consumers' disposal. It is indeed difficult to reach a pre-

cise knowledge of the way the traffic is organised in France – the part played by small networks compared to organised crime, what sort of people run this traffic, how they get their supplies, from whom and at what price. The study of the arrests for cocaine use, use/dealing and trafficking pooled by the OCRTIS (Central Office for the Repression of Drug Trafficking) seeks to answer these questions by comparing the data obtained with those collected since 1999 by the TREND (Recent Trends and New Drugs) device. This study does not claim to present an exhaustive and complete picture of cocaine trafficking in France.

Arrests indeed do no more than reflect the activity of the police, customs officials and the gendarmerie. Moreover, the police procedure is not designed to provide a nar-

## Methodologie

With the agreement of the OCRTIS (Central Office for the Repression of Drug-Related Offences), the OFDT (French Observatory of Drugs and Drug Addiction) was able, between 2004 and 2005, to study 150 arrest procedures for the use, use/dealing and trafficking of cocaine. Working within the framework of the Ministry of the Interior and Land Management, the OCRTIS is the French organisation responsible for pooling all information liable to facilitate research, prevention of offences in the fight against the traffic of illicit drugs and for coordinating measures for its repression. Each year, the OCRTIS publishes a report on the state of the use and illicit traffic of narcotic substances as it appears from the arrests and seizures carried out by the police, customs officials and the gendarmerie combined.

This work was undertaken as part of the TREND (Recent Trends and New Drugs) device, itself set up in June 1999 with a view to identifying and describing the trends and emerging phenomena related to illicit substances or misuse of substances. For this purpose, TREND relies on a network of local sites all using the same strategy for collecting and analysing information, and on partners (of which the OCRTIS is one).

The arrest procedures are of precious value as they contain relatively detailed descriptions of the contexts in which the arrests took place, profiles of the users, users/dealers and clients, the organisation of the minor networks (me-

thods of supply, purchase prices -retail-wholesale-, retail prices, and details of sale). The study of these procedures thus yields information which cannot be obtained from the routine observation of TREND's usual areas of investigation. It also constitutes an additional source of information on both the availability and price of the substance.

The procedures were sorted randomly. Three quarters of the 150 procedures involving cocaine as principal or secondary substance come from the regions of Île-de-France, Nord-Pas-de-Calais and PACA, 15 concern trafficking, 60 use/dealing and 75 use only.

### Number and percentage of procedures per type of affair

Type of procedures	Quantities	%
Use	75	50
Use-resale	60	40
Traffic	15	10
Total	150	100

The inclusion of procedures not strictly linked to trafficking offences is deliberate. This type of procedure is useful inasmuch as the users' testimonies help us to find out where the substance was bought, in what context and from what type of dealer.

rative account of the offence but rather to give a legal form to facts and to police action. In addition, the populations concerned by these arrests are often the most vulnerable inasmuch as they are the least organised and professional in drug use and dealing. Lastly, the quality of the information contained in the procedures tends to vary depending on how highly organised the trafficking is. The more sophisticated the organisation, and the more professional the persons involved, the scarcer the information, the law of silence and dissimulation being most often the rule, (not to mention that in this case the procedure itself sheds light only on a small part of the events). In marked contrast, procedures involving the small networks, made up of amateurs, novices or semi-professionals, very often prove to be full of information.

## Cocaine in France

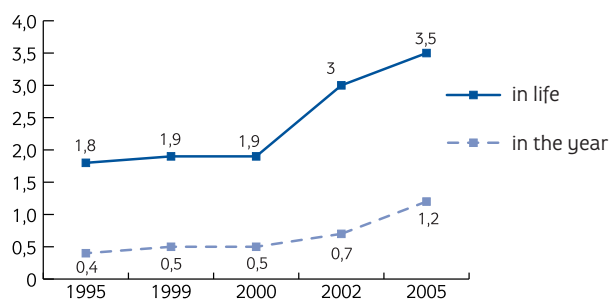
Over the past ten years, there has been a continuous rise in the availability and consumption of cocaine hydrochloride in France. This is corroborated by studies of the general population pointing to a regular increase in the prevalence of consumption, particularly among young people (ESCAPAD - Survey on Health and Drug Uses During Call-up and Preparation

for Defence Day -, Health Barometer), as well as by observations and studies conducted within the framework of the TREND device. Finally, the police data provided by the OCR-TIS show a steady rise of cocaine seizures in the French territory since 2002 as well as an increase in the number of arrests for use and use/dealing of this substance.

In 2005, estimations gave more than 1 million of cocaine experimenters and 250,000 occasional<sup>1</sup> users. Between 2002 and 2005, seizures in France rose from 3.6 to 5.2 tons, and arrests for use from 1,576 to 2,807. As far as traffic is concerned, 2005 turned out to be a record year for arrests with 2,571 cocaine

traffickers arrested (759 international, 1,056 local and 756 user/dealers arrested by the police, the customs and the gendarmerie).

### Trend in the frequency of use among French people in the 15 to 34 age bracket (1995-2005)



Sources : OFDT, INPES

For its part, the TREND observatory device notices a continuous increase in availability over the past five years, accompanied by a continuous fall in the median price of a gram of cocaine. Taken together, these two phenomena contribute to widespread dissemination of use which is increasingly tending to concern a very wide variety of social circles – ranging from the extremely marginalised street user to those who are well integrated socially.

## Cocaine small-scale dealing in France

To understand how small networks fit into the overall setup of cocaine trafficking in France, we need to have a general idea of the organisation of this traffic and of the structures underpinning it. We may distinguish three main types of organisation today. Firstly, there are the networks linked to or-

ganised crime and the underworld. This type of network, particularly present in Île-de-France and PACA (Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur), imports large quantities of cocaine into France via wholesalers established for the most part in Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium. These networks may either organise the retail distribution of the substance themselves by recruiting dealers (but this type of vertical organisation seems to be rare) or sell the cocaine to networks of well-organised retail-wholesalers and/or retailers. These networks of retail-wholesalers and "professional" retailers constitute the second

major category. Generally speaking, they previously specialised in cannabis and heroin and have added cocaine to their range of substances. Given the profitability of cocaine, some of them may even have switched over to dealing exclusively this substance. Established in some working-class districts on the outskirts of major French towns, these networks are usually well organised, with a clear division of labour between buyers, "procurers" and dealers. The third and last type of network consists of small local networks (the subject of this study). Unlike the other two, these networks are often small size, involving no more than ten people, clients included, and are poorly structured. From the police procedures studied, a typology of these small-scale networks could be drawn up. It comprises:

### I - "Semi-professional" networks

The people running these networks are not themselves drug consumers and have begun or switched to cocaine trafficking for purely mercantile reasons. Their outlook is similar to those of networks involved in a more sophisticated organised crime, and is characterised by a pronounced ethnic and/or family dimension. They constitute a small part of the police procedures on trafficking (10% of the procedures studied). When arrested, these people usually refuse to speak or disclose anything about their activities, either because they fear reprisals or because of a strong feeling of solidarity because of ethnic or family ties binding them to the other members of the network. These networks can operate in both an "urban" context, where they are naturally established by virtue of their geographical positioning (peri-urban areas) and a "party" context (night clubs, discos, free parties) (see insert devoted to this subject).

### Dealer networks in the party scene

The organised cocaine-dealer phenomenon in party scenes close to the techno music circle was identified by observers from the TREND unit as early as the year 2000. This is not to say that it did not exist beforehand, but it was from this point onwards that it became more visible, with the presence, in Teknivals and free parties, of dealers hailing from "difficult" quarters and referred to by some ravers as "scum". The phenomenon has spread continuously since 2000 and, on the strength of the observations made since then, it may be stated that part of the cocaine available at major party events like Teknival comes from networks formed along "ethnic" lines and previously specialising in cannabis. In 2005, two TREND units (Paris and Toulouse) reported an increased supply of cocaine in clubs and discotheques provided by young people

from the suburbs. This is a new development and shows that supplies from this kind of network are no longer restricted to major musical events. Of the 150 OCR-TIS procedures analysed, two affairs quite clearly concerned this type of network: "red-handed" arrest of dealers operating in discotheques and with a criminal record of illicit narcotics trafficking. It should be emphasised that only a minority of the procedures studied involved the party scene. In addition to the random way in which the data are collected, this may be connected to the greater discretion and tighter organisation (semi-professional) displayed by the minor networks operating on the party scene. It may also be due to the fact that the users attending this scene are better integrated in society and are thus less likely to attract the attention of the police.

1. Experimentation: at least one use in a lifetime. Occasional use: at least one use per year.

## 2 - "User-dealer" networks

In quantitative terms, these are the networks that loom largest in the police procedures studied. These micro-networks are run by people who initially get involved in the traffic in order to finance their own consumption, and then continue as a means of making money. The latter motivation may subsequently become predominant and lead to the creation of a relatively structured network (albeit very often small in size), with clients recruited among acquaintances and by word-of-mouth. Sixty<sup>2</sup> police procedures concerning use/dealing have been used as a basis for drawing up an identikit of the people at the head of these little cocaine trafficking networks. It appears that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, they tend to come from fairly socially deprived and insecure social backgrounds (45% are unemployed or receiving the minimum benefit allowance (RMI), while 45% of those who are employed declare they have a temporary job). Virtually all of those arrested for use/dealing are men, rather young (average age of 25), and consumers of several drugs, heroin in particular. In most cases they work within a population composed of their own circle of friends and acquaintances or recruited in the same social milieu. As far as social background is concerned, the arrested clients of these micro-networks belong to the same environment as the dealers. The 2005 the OCRTIS data on the social-professional background of the arrested cocaine users, show that more than half of these declare they are "unemployed"; 22.7% they are "workers" and nearly 16% they are "employees". There are very few instances of the higher social strata in the police statistics. The notion of "proximity" is geographical as well as social. Sales are most often made in the places where the dealers live: in 90% of the procedures studied, the sale took place in the dealer's own flat or in the hall of his block of flats. These networks illustrate the trivialization of cocaine use in the popular and highly marginalised social milieus (see insert above).

### A typical case of dealing

*In order to give a practical idea of how a little cocaine dealer network is set up and organised, we include below an "identikit" compiled from various arrest procedures for use/dealing.*

X is a 25-year-old man living with his parents in the suburbs of a large town in the north of France. He left school at the age of about 15 and has alternated between periods of temporary work and unemployment, earning about €700/800 per month. He recently started to sniff 3 grams of cocaine and 2 grams of heroin per week at a cost of about €250. Because his income is insufficient, he visits a Moroccan dealer in Antwerp, Belgium, 2 to 4 times a month in order to buy the substances and to sell part of them. He arranges a meeting with his (retail-wholesaler) dealer on his mobile and meets him in a flat.

The first contact had took place in a motorway filling station near Antwerp. "Procurers" under instructions to look out for French people seeking to buy "substances" had approached him and led him to the dealer's home. One of them got into X's car while the other drove ahead. All X had to do was follow him.

The dealer almost always stocks several drugs, and offers, apart from cocaine, heroin (systematically), even ecstasy and cannabis. The dealer asks what quantities of the product(s) are required. The first time, X asks for 6 grams of cocaine and 5 grams of heroin, enough for his own consumption for about 2 weeks. After giving X some coke "to taste", the dealer offers a deal: €230 all in, i.e. €30 for a gram of coke and €10 for a gram of heroin. X is happy with the deal. In Lille he would have bought the same quantities from a dealer at least at least €400 in Lille (€50 for a gram of cocaine and €20 for a gram of heroin). So he has saved €170. Many of his friends use drugs. At the rate of two or three trips to Belgium per month, X could supply about ten people and thus finance his own consumption.

X has made up his mind. Two weeks later, he calls back the dealer on his mobile: he wants to bring back 25 grams of cocaine and 20 grams of heroin for a total cost of €825. X has just been paid for his job as a warehouseman and has €900 on his bank account. All will be spent. To conclude the affair, the dealer gives him a discount and sells the gram of "coke" at €25 and the gram of heroin at €10. He even offers credit for part of the sum. X puts €900 on the table. The dealer goes out of the room and comes back with two plastic sachets, one containing the cocaine and the other the heroin. The sachets are wei-

ghed on the scales in the presence of X. In order to celebrate the deal, the dealer gives X a little line of coke. With the remaining €75, X buys 20 grams of cannabis resin.

On the way back, X works out the sums: at €50 per gram of coke and €25 per gram of heroin, he stands to make about €900 in pure profit. If he made two trips per month, he could make two thousand euros, etc. Even allowing for his own personal consumption, he will still end up with twice as much as he earns from his temporary job.

The first time, it takes X three weeks to dispose of his entire stock. Then everything moves very fast. After the first clients, friends from the estate contact him via the mobile, bringing in people new to him. X is always available because he is no longer working. The drug is packed in little thermosealed plastic sachets and hidden in his bedroom. When the client is outside X's block of flats, he calls him up on the phone. The transaction takes place in the hall or in the client's car in the car park. In exceptional cases, X delivers to the client's home or a bar in the centre of town. X has adapted to his clients' low purchasing power (many of them are unemployed, in temporary jobs or victims of social exclusion): part of the cocaine is packaged in doses of 0.5 grams sold at the price of €20/25. As from the 10th of the month, he even has to grant credit as his clients' unemployment benefit and minimum welfare benefit have already run out.

X is aware of the risks and deliberately limits himself to about ten clients and four trips to Antwerp per month, bringing back 30 to 50 grams of cocaine and 20 to 30 grams of heroin. His average monthly income comes to at best €10,000 for a net profit of €5,000, once personal consumption, fuel costs, gifts and extras have been deducted. To make the trips less boring, X often brings a friend along with him, paying him in cash or drugs. Sooner or later, X will be caught by the customs as he returns on the motorway. Or perhaps he will be denounced by a neighbour who is jealous of his new lifestyle or fed up with the constant to-ing and fro-ing of his clients. Or again he may be betrayed by an unfortunate client arrested by the Anti-Crime Squad.

### Cocaine dealing in marginalised user circles

As early as 1999, the ethnographic observers belonging to the new TREND device reported the existence of cocaine dealer networks operating in certain districts of Paris and the Paris suburbs (particularly in the Val-de-Marne and the Haute-de-Seine departments). This is a measure of the spread of cocaine use to socially deprived sectors of the population. Areas previously known for cannabis and heroin traffic now included cocaine in the list of substances available. In the 19th and 12th arrondissements of Paris, public cocaine dealing started to appear. An analysis of the procedures shows that, in 2005, the situation described above still prevailed. Some of the users arrested in the Paris area for possessing cocaine stated that they had

obtained the substance on the public highway (particularly at metro exits).

The same process is seen at work in the Lille and Toulouse regions, with dealer networks specialising in heroin and cannabis now taking over the supply of cocaine. Cocaine is, in fact, tending increasingly to take the place of heroin which is coming under greater competition from high-dose buprenorphine (Subutex<sup>®</sup>). Today, networks of dealers-sellers are added to the networks of dealers. In the marginalised urban milieus, at the start of 2006, 90% of users frequenting the front-line structures had experimented with cocaine or crack and 39% had taken the substance over the previous month (with a strong prevalence of intravenous use).

### 3 - "Not-for-profit" networks

These networks are made up of people wishing to finance their consumption directly and as cheaply as possible, but also to help out groups of friends. Here, affinity counts for more than the desire to make a profit, and the cocaine is sold at the purchase price practised by the retail-wholesaler. Depending on their geographical origin, these networks resort, in most of the cases studied, to retail-wholesale purchases in the Netherlands or Belgium.

2. These 60 procedures concern about 107 persons.



## Supplying of the micro-networks

The study of the police procedures allows to distinguish two main methods of supplying the minor networks depending on the geographical origin of the cocaine. One of them uses specialised retail-wholesalers established in France, the other resorts to networks installed in border countries, in most cases Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands. The networks located in the regions of Brittany, Île-de-France and Nord-Pas-de-Calais tend to get their supplies from Belgium and the Netherlands, while those in PACA (Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur) are supplied from Spain. 60 out of 75 affairs of trafficking and use/dealing studied (80%), the head or heads of the networks got their supplies directly from the countries mentioned above. The remaining 20% were supplied by wholesalers or retail-wholesalers located in the same region as the local networks. Out of 60 procedures concerning little networks getting their supplies from abroad, 30 involved the Netherlands and 28 Belgium. Spain was involved in the other two cases, but informations were not precise enough to allow the drawing of a retail-wholesalers profile and to determine what prices were practised.

On the other hand, it was possible to establish the average retail-wholesale cocaine prices practised in the various towns from the procedures on small-scale traffic involving Belgium and the Netherlands. For the purposes of information and comparison, the retail-wholesale price practised for heroin are given, since the study of the procedures shows that, for both retail-wholesalers and dealers, heroin is almost always associated with cocaine.

The declarations of the arrested dealers or users made it possible to reconstitute the retail prices of cocaine per region and to cross-reference them with the results of the TREND device.

### Retail-wholesale price of a gram of cocaine and heroin in Belgium and the Netherlands 2004/2005

Countries and towns	Number of procedures	Cocaine	Heroin
Belgium	28		
Antwerp	15	35	10
Ghent	10	30	10
Mons	2	40	07
Bruges	1	25	15
Netherlands	30		
Amsterdam	15	30	15
Rotterdam	14	35	10
Maastricht	01	40	15

Source : OCRTIS procedures

The comparison of retail-wholesale and retail prices gives us an approximate idea of the profits generated by cocaine trafficking. These prices lie within a range of 40 to 50%, in other words 20 to 30 euros per gram sold (depending on regions). These data suggest that dealing even a few dozen grams per

month could turn out to be extremely lucrative and prove highly tempting for people in extremely insecure social circumstances.

### Retail price of a gram of cocaine in France 2004/2005

Regions	Number of procedures	OCRTIS	TREND (2005)
Nord-Pas-de-Calais	40/45	50	50
PACA	18/23	60	65
Île-de-France	40/45	60	60
Brittany	23/30	65	65
Burgundy	5/7	70	60
	126/150*		

\* 126 of the 150 procedures examined gave the price of a gram of cocaine

Source : OCRTIS procedures

## Conclusion

Cocaine trafficking in France today<sup>3</sup> is extremely heterogeneous. Alongside networks linked to organised crime and gangs of professionalised dealers whose operating methods are relatively hard to penetrate, there is a host of micro-networks headed by user-dealers, or by users only, which supply each one a relatively small client base. The study of the police procedures concerning these micro-networks shows that wholesale and retail-wholesale cocaine is widely available and accessible in countries bordering on France, particularly the Netherlands and Belgium. It is therefore relatively easy for a determined person to set up this kind of network. The modest retail-wholesale price of a gram of cocaine (about 30 euros) means that anyone with a minimum of funds at his disposal (a few hundred euros) can set up in this branch of the drug business. It would therefore seem that the democratisation of cocaine use observed in recent years is connected with a kind of trivialization of the traffic. Moreover, the profit margin on resales of cocaine appears high (40 to 50%) and the current strong social demand means a very high turnover of the invested capital.

While it is true that there are problems attached to the study of data from police procedures concerning highly structured networks involving organised crime and situated close to the frontiers (the "law of silence"), such a study has turned out to be useful in casting light on the practical functioning of the smaller networks of user-dealers. It has also served to confirm the findings of the TREND device concerning the democratisation of cocaine consumption and its long-term penetration – the result of its steadily decreasing price, in the most deprived sections of the French population.

3. The procedures studied cover the years 2004 and 2005. There is no reason to believe that things have changed much since then.

## Références

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