



Summary of major trends and emerging concerns

Methamphetamine

- A record amount of crystalline methamphetamine was seized in the Republic of Korea in 2021, surpassing the amount seized in the past five years combined (table 2). Quarterly seizure amounts in 2021 exceeded the amounts seized in comparative time frames in 2020, particularly in the third quarter of the year (figure 2). Seizure amounts of methamphetamine tablets also increased in 2021 to over double the number seized compared to 2020 (table 2).
- The Republic of Korea continues to be targeted as a transit for methamphetamine trafficking. In July 2021, national authorities seized a record amount of methamphetamine (402.8 kg), which originated in Mexico and was destined to Australia.¹
- In terms of overseas trafficking incidents, Thailand remained the most frequent country of departure for methamphetamine shipments to the Republic of Korea in 2021. Seized shipments originating in the United States had dropped in frequency between 2018 and 2020 but returned as a country of importance in 2021 (figure 5).
- The average purity for crystalline methamphetamine remained high, while prices were stable. Government experts perceived that the use of crystalline methamphetamine has increased for the past three years (tables 1, 4 and 5).

“Ecstasy”²

- The amount of “ecstasy” seized in the Republic of Korea as well as its price in 2021 were comparable to the amounts and prices reported in 2020 (tables 2 and 5).

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) and other synthetic drugs

- The amount of synthetic cannabinoids seized reached a new high in 2021 (table 2).³

Other drugs

- The number of cannabis users brought into formal contact with authorities continued to increase in 2021 (figure 1). Data on the number of drug offenders in the country for cannabis-related offences suggests that the drug is especially prevalent among people in their 20s (figure 3).
- A record amount of cocaine was seized in 2021, which is over four times the amount of the previous record in 2019 (table 2).

1 Korean Customs Service, “Drug trafficking trends for 2021”, February 2022.

2 “Ecstasy” tablets sold in the country may contain a range of substances in varying composition and quantities in addition or instead of MDMA.

3 Supreme Prosecutors’ Office, “Latest situation on synthetic drugs and responses to the threats in the Republic of Korea”, presented at the Global SMART Programme Regional Workshop, November-December 2021.

Key facts and figures

Drug demand indicators

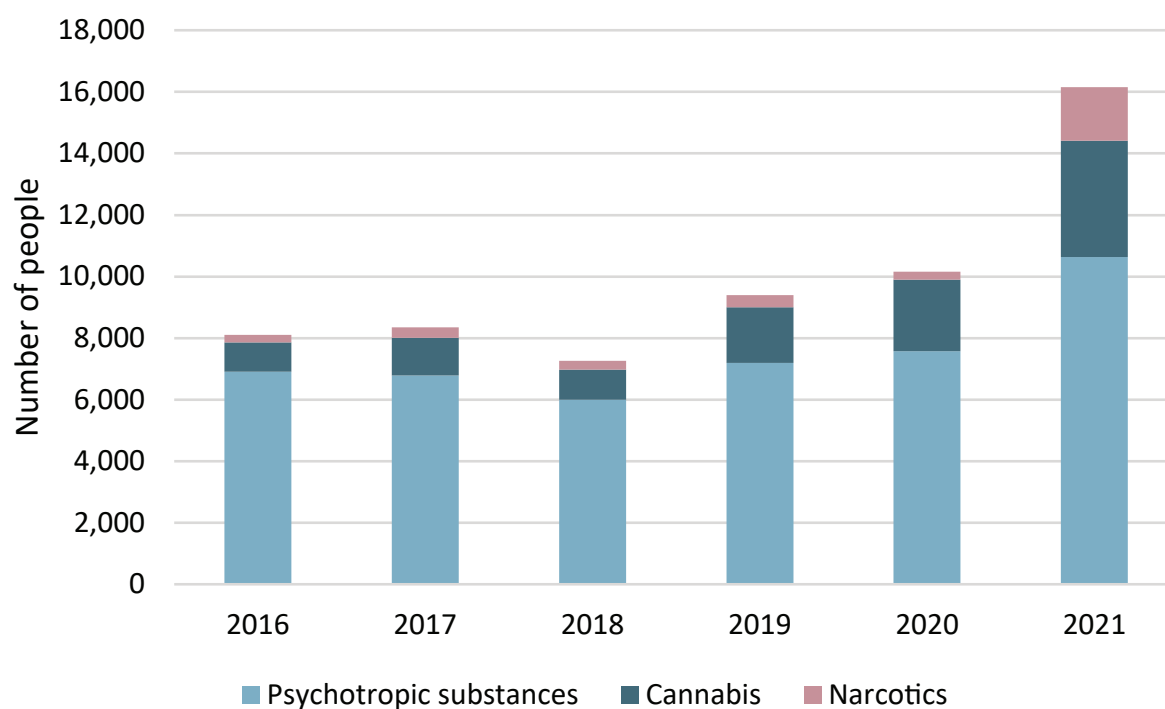
Table 1. Trend in use of selected drugs in the Republic of Korea, 2016-2021

Drug type	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Crystalline methamphetamine	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑
Cannabis herb	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑
Other narcotics	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑

Source: Official communication with the Supreme Prosecutors' Office (SPO), March 2022.

Note: Based on expert perception provided by SPO; other narcotics include heroin, cocaine, and opium; ↑ = Increase, ↓ = Decrease, ↔ = Stable, ● = Not reported.

Figure 1. Number of people who use drugs who are brought into formal contact with authorities in the Republic of Korea, by drug type, 2016-2021



Source: Official communication with SPO, March 2022.

Note: The Government of the Republic of Korea categorises synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, "ecstasy", LSD and NPS as psychotropic substances. Narcotics include heroin, cocaine, and opium.

Drug supply indicators

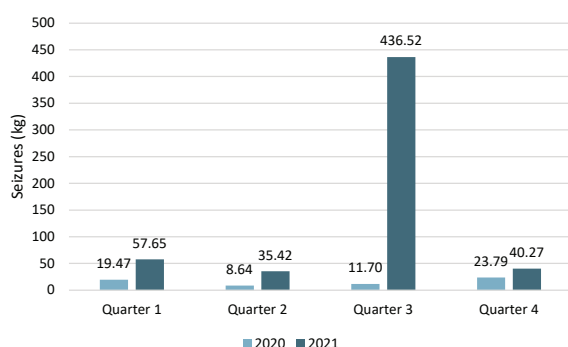
Table 2. Seizures of selected drugs in the Republic of Korea, 2016-2021

Drug type	Unit	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Crystalline methamphetamine	kg	28.7	30.5	188	87.3	63.6	569.9
Methamphetamine tablets ^a	tablets	6,589	28,700	94,869	193,034	253,167	557,075
“Ecstasy” ^b	tablets	1,443	1,647	9,393	10,464	39,714	39,645
Cannabis herb	kg	75.5	40.1	89.1	81.9	37.3	91.2
Cannabis resin	kg	0.11	1.27	0.08	2.7	3.1	0.1
Cannabis seed	kg	1.9	1.2	1.2	0.4	5.9	0.9
Synthetic cannabinoids	kg	0.2	0.2	0.5	1.7	3.2	18.8
Cocaine	kg	10.9	0.13	88.3	106.9	48	435.7
Heroin	g	0	3.7	2	0	8.8	1,213
Raw opium	g	0	537	190	43.5	187.3	8.3
Khat	kg	3,169	0	132.5	0	0	0

Sources: UNODC Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) Republic of Korea for 2020 and previous years; SPO, “Latest situation on synthetic drugs and responses to the threats in the Republic of Korea”, presented at the Global SMART Programme Regional Workshop, November-December 2021; Official communication with SPO, March 2022.

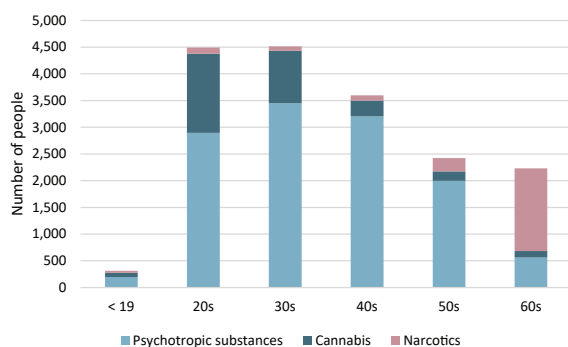
Note: ^a Figures reported other than the number of tablets converted into estimated tablet equivalents at 90 mg per tablet; ^b Figures reported other than the number of tablets converted into estimated tablet equivalents at 300 mg per tablet.

Figure 2. Seizure amounts of crystalline methamphetamine in the Republic of Korea, by quarter, 2020-2021



Source: Official communication with SPO, March 2022.

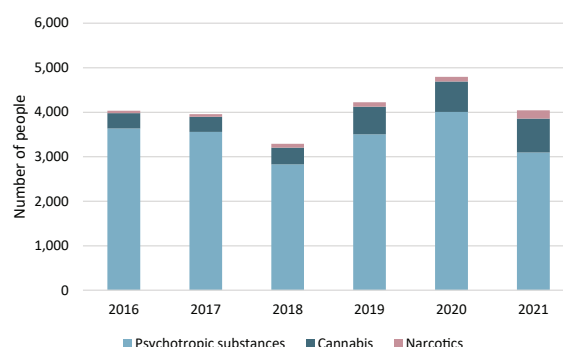
Figure 3. Number of drug offenders in the Republic of Korea, by age group, 2021



Source: Official communication with SPO, March 2022.

Note: The Government of the Republic of Korea categorises synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, “ecstasy”, LSD and NPS as psychotropic substances. Narcotics include heroin, cocaine, and opium.

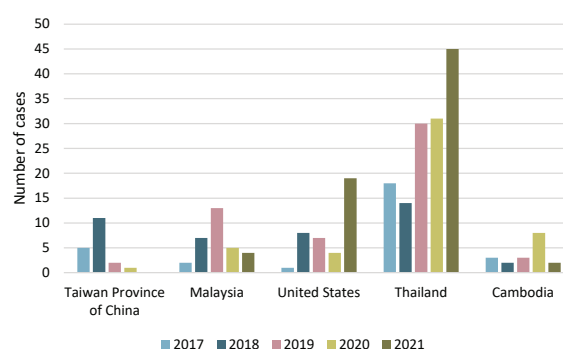
Figure 4. Number of people who are brought into formal contact with authorities for supplying drugs in the Republic of Korea, by drug type, 2016-2021



Source: Official communication with SPO, March 2022.

Note: The Government of the Republic of Korea categorises synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, “ecstasy”, LSD and NPS as psychotropic substances. Narcotics include heroin, cocaine, and opium.

Figure 5. Origins of methamphetamine shipments seized in the Republic of Korea, by number of cases, 2017-2021



Sources: SPO, “Latest situation on synthetic drugs and responses to the threats in the Republic of Korea”, presented at the Global SMART Programme Regional Workshop, November-December 2021; Official communication with SPO, March 2022.

Table 3. Number of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories dismantled and amounts seized in the Republic of Korea, 2016-2021

Year	Number	Methamphetamine (g)	Intermediate products (g)
2016	2	200	0
2017	3	513	0
2018	2	0	660
2019	2	1,320	2,280
2020	1	1.8	0
2021	1	900	0

Sources: SPO, "Latest situation on synthetic drugs and responses to the threats in the Republic of Korea", presented at the Global SMART Programme Regional Workshop, November-December 2021; Official communication with SPO, March 2022.

Table 4. Typical purity of crystalline methamphetamine in the Republic of Korea, 2016-2021

Year	No. of samples analysed	Minimum	Maximum	Average
2016	63	90.1	98.5	95.4
2017	11	90.5	98.5	95.0
2018	62	89.9	98.5	96.4
2019	79	34.7	98.5	91.6
2020	53	80.6	98.5	92
2021	89	87.7	98.5	98.5

Sources: SPO, "Latest situation on synthetic drugs and responses to the threats in the Republic of Korea", presented at the Global SMART Programme Regional Workshop, November-December 2021; Official communication with SPO, March 2022.

Note: Data in this table refer to the weight/weight (w/w) % expressed as the hydrochloride salt of these substances.

Table 5. Retail prices of selected drugs in the Republic of Korea, 2016-2021 (US\$)

Drug type	Unit	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Crystalline methamphetamine	per g	436.3 (145.4-727.2)	370	397.2	399	272	272
Methamphetamine tablet	per tablet	53	53	57	62	60	45.4-63.6
"Ecstasy"	per tablet	72.6 (27.2-118.1)	72.6 (27.2-118.1)	72.6 (27.2-118.1)	95.4 (27.2-163.6)	45.4	45.4-54.5
Cannabis herb	per g	46.3 (1.8-90.9)	50.9 (1.8-100)	86.3 (36.3-136.3)	103.1 (24.5-181.8)	113.6 (90.9-136.3)	90.9-109.1
Heroin	per g	118	118	118	118	118	118.2
Cocaine	per g	•	•	363.6	295.4 (227.2-363.6)	340.8 (318.1-363.6)	318.2-363.6
Ketamine	per g	•	•	•	318	317.9 (272.2-363.6)	227.2-254.5
LSD	per sheet	19.4	19.4	27.8 (19.4-36.3)	28.7 (19.4-38.1)	90.9	90.9

Sources: SPO, "Latest situation on synthetic drugs and responses to the threats in the Republic of Korea", presented at the Global SMART Programme Regional Workshop, November-December 2021; Official communication with SPO, March 2022.

Note: • = Not reported. Values in parentheses are the price range (minimum-maximum) of the substances.