

# In a glimpse

JANUARY 2023

## **Psychoactive substances, users and markets in France in 2021. Assessment of developments in use and access to care, marked by the health crisis linked to Covid-19**

---

Since 1999, the Emerging Trends and New Drugs (TREND) scheme of the French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT) has made it possible to describe the populations that are particularly dependent on psychoactive substances and to identify emerging phenomena in the field of illicit drugs and diverted medicines. The scheme's observations relating to 2021 are presented in issue 154 of *Tendances*, along with the publication of the analyses of local situations produced by the 9 TREND coordinating bodies located in Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Metz, Paris, Rennes, Toulouse and Reunion Island.

This issue looks back on the development of freebase cocaine use among the most vulnerable drug users and their difficulties in accessing care during a year marked by the measures taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It reports on the distribution processes of 3-MMC and ketamine within techno party environments, then examines the evolution of consumption in the context of chemsex and its social and health-related consequences.

### **Marginalised users: reduced access to care, increased freebase cocaine use**

In line with the previous year, the measures taken in the context of the state of health emergency in 2021 have increased the difficulties for vulnerable users of access to sanitation, healthcare, harm reduction schemes, social benefits, accommodation and economic resources. The lack of staff in harm reduction facilities (CAARUD) and services specialised in addiction and psychiatry, also explains this situation. In some regions, waiting times for a consultation and access to opioid substitution treatment or withdrawal treatment are therefore several months.

In addition, the development of freebase cocaine consumption among marginalised drug users who have developed a severe addiction is still a significant feature of the investigations in all regions covered by the TREND scheme. While this phenomenon, favoured by the freebase cocaine (or crack cocaine) trade, may be particularly visible in Paris because of the existence of scenes of consumption in public areas, it also exists in the other cities covered by the TREND scheme. This type of use does not only concern people in very vulnerable situations but is also observed among more integrated individuals who live in smaller towns, or even in rural areas.

### Drug use in party environments: distribution of ketamine and 3-MMC

The intensification of drug use in party environments, reported both by certain “partygoers” and by harm reduction workers, is a significant trend for 2021. This phenomenon is partly linked to adaptation strategies in the face of measures taken in the context of the state of health emergency, in particular the closure of nightlife establishments. Parties in private spaces were more frequent and longer because they were tied to curfew times, and proved to be more conducive to the consumption of psychoactive substances.

In addition, two substances were particularly noted in the observations and interviews carried out in techno party environments: ketamine and 3-MMC. Confined a few years ago to restricted and specific circles (free party amateurs, men having sexual relations with other men), the consumption of these substances today concerns people with more diverse socio-cultural affiliations and whose intentions of use are somewhat different from those of their predecessors. Several factors explain these dynamics: the circulation of users between different party environments and easier access to substances.

### Drug users in the context of chemsex: more visible socio-health consequences

The information collected through interviews with people who practice chemsex is in line with findings from previous years. 3-MMC, GHB/GBL and poppers still occupy a key place among the substances consumed but in 2021, ketamine was more frequently cited by respondents. Another significant element is that although it is not possible to quantify their development, injection practices (“slamming”) seem to be more rarely the object of stigmatisation between chemsexers, giving rise to more numerous experiments. Observers of the TREND scheme point out that the socio-sanitary consequences of these uses have been more visible in 2021, in particular the damage caused by repeated and uncontrolled injections of 3-MMC, making access to information related to injection a central issue according to the professionals in contact with these people. Finally, as for all drug-using populations, a certain psychological suffering created or aggravated by consumption has sometimes been amplified by successive periods of confinement and curfews.

### Further reading (in French)

*Tendances* no. 154, [Substances psychoactives, usagers et marchés : tendances récentes \(2021\)](#), 8 p.