

Second Technical Meeting of the EU Internet Forum on Drugs Sales Online: Implementation of the Knowledge Package and next steps

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Summary: The Second Technical Meeting of the EU Internet Forum on Drugs Sales Online: Implementation of the Knowledge Package and next steps took place on Monday 23 September 2024 (online). Participants presented the current situation related to drug trafficking online, reported on the existing legal and policy framework to address this phenomenon at EU and national level, and exchanged on the monitoring policies and tools in place to detect, flag and remove illicit-drug related content on social media platforms, including the Knowledge Package on Countering Drug Sales Online, which was developed by the Commission within the EU Internet Forum.

The meeting was attended by around 60 participants representing the Member States, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries, the General Secretariat of the Council, the European External Action Service (EEAS), Commission services, Europol, the EU Drugs Agency and the representatives of the internet industry that are members of the EU Internet Forum.

The Commission (DG HOME) underlined the importance of cooperation between law enforcement authorities and the private sector, including through the EU Internet Forum to address drug trafficking online. The Commission recalled several initiatives taken at the EU level, which contribute to fighting against drug sales online, including in the context of the EU Roadmap to fight against drug trafficking and organised crime, as well as the Digital Services Act. The Commission presented the Knowledge Package on Countering Drug Sales Online, which was sent to the members of the EUIF in February 2024 to support the online companies in better moderating illicit drug-related content on their platforms. The Commission stressed the importance of receiving feedback on its implementation, notably to identify possible ways of improving and updating it.

Europol presented the trends related to drug sales online and its work in supporting Member States in their fight against drug sales online. Europol highlighted that most sales on the darkweb are related to drugs and traffickers often use encrypted messenger services to carry out their operations. Europol also mentioned the existence of smaller and local markets for selling drugs and underlined the links between the darkweb and surface web.

The EU Drugs Agency (EUDA) mentioned that sales of illicit drugs online are expanding to mainstream social media apps, which facilitates access to drugs to young users, including children. EUDA recognised that the sale of illicit drugs was predominant on the darknet markets, including for synthetic opioids, and highlighted the links between the darknet and social media platforms and the use of multiple platforms for selling drugs. EUDA underlined the importance of the Knowledge Package to feed into moderation policies on social media platforms. EUDA further pointed to other relevant interventions to prevent the distribution of drugs on social media, such as targeted public health messaging and educational content.

The Commission (DG CNECT) presented the horizontal legal framework provided by the Digital Services Act and explained how its provisions can contribute to address drug-related illegal content on online platforms.

Member States presented some of their national approaches to fight against online drug trafficking. They underlined that while the darknet remains significant for drugs, sales are

increasingly taking place on social media platforms and mentioned the interlinkages between the two. They highlighted that the advertising and distribution of illicit drugs on social media creates additional challenges to law enforcement authorities, due to the diversity and magnitude of content, as well as the possibility for traffickers to remain anonymous and to sell drugs in smaller quantities and more locally. Member States mentioned the importance of sharing information with Europol and cooperating with social media platforms, including within the EU Internet Forum. They noted that the Knowledge Package can benefit from the results of completed investigations.

During the Tour de Table, the representatives of the internet industry described their policies to monitor, detect, flag and remove illicit drug-related content on their platforms, using both machine learning and human based strategies. Moreover, some participants raised the issue of the recruitment of young people for drug trafficking through social media and the need to exchange information on this topic.

The Commission (DG HOME) summarised the feedback it received on the Knowledge Package, which was overall positive albeit limited. The companies considered that the Package contributed to improving their capacity to address online drug sales and had used it to inform and train their content moderation tools and staff. During the Tour de Table, Member States and the representatives of the internet industry reiterated the usefulness of the Package and highlighted the importance of the EU Internet Forum to exchange information and practices on issues related to online drug trafficking.

The representatives of the internet industry were invited to share further feedback with the Commission and the Member States to send their updates to the Knowledge Package.