



INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD



# Report 2021

## Press material

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In 2021 the international community continued to battle with the relentless coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The pandemic has shown no signs of easing, prolonging the immense suffering of individuals, placing an incredible burden on national health systems, slowing the progress made by States on the Sustainable Development Goals and posing an additional challenge to achieving the objectives of the drug control conventions.

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is supporting Member States throughout this difficult period in addressing the drug control challenges that predated the COVID-19 pandemic alongside those that have arisen as a consequence of the pandemic. Examples of the latter were evident in the 2020 Annual Report where INCB analysed both how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the global supply chain of medicines and the increased demand for controlled medicines to treat patients with COVID-19.



In the 2021 Annual Report, INCB addresses traditional topics such as how it has supported Member States to achieve the goals of the drug control conventions and progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The availability of controlled medicines used in the treatment of COVID-19 is also discussed in the report.

This year, the thematic chapter in the 2021 Annual Report focuses on illicit financial flows, how they relate to drug trafficking, and their wider impact on society. INCB considered illicit financial flows worthy of special attention and scrutiny because drug trafficking is a highly lucrative industry for organized criminal groups and these groups rely on illicit financial flows to expand and sustain their criminal activities. Illicit financial flows related to drug trafficking have a wide societal impact as they promote bribery, crime, corruption and inequality and lead to political and social instability. Illicit financial flows also divert precious resources needed for sustainable development. As illicit financial flows know no borders or nationality, collective action is required. To support Member States in addressing the problem, INCB presents a set of recommendations.

Cannabis is another topic of interest discussed in the Annual Report. Numerous Member States have decriminalized and depenalized the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. This has been interpreted by many entities as the legalization of the non-medical use of cannabis. However, the legalization of the non-medical use of cannabis contravenes the drug control conventions. The Annual Report thus examines the important differences in the meaning of terms such as “legalization”, “decriminalization” and “depenalization”.

The role of the Internet in relation to drug use is discussed in the Report, specifically the sale of drugs over the Internet and how social media contribute to drug use. The Annual Report investigates how organized criminal groups exploit the Internet, e-commerce platforms and the darknet to sell drugs. The Annual Report finds that social media not only promote negative behaviours



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related to drug use by glamourizing those behaviours, but also offer users the opportunity to buy cannabis, prescription pain killers and other controlled substances on many platforms. This is of great importance not just because young people are the main users of social media platforms, but also because there is increasing evidence of a link between exposure to social media platforms and drug use. It is therefore imperative that this be addressed not just for users now but for future generations who will come to use social media platforms in everyday life.

INCB remains committed to supporting Member States in implementing the drug control conventions. INCB Learning and the INCB Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme are important examples of that support. Despite the challenges that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic, INCB Learning was able to hold three online training sessions for 95 officials between November 2020 and November 2021. The GRIDS Programme was also able to support Member States in numerous ways, including offering training and access to INCB tools. INCB encourages Member States to make use of all its available programmes to meet the objectives of the drug control conventions.

The fundamental aim of the drug control conventions is to safeguard the health and well-being of humanity, and I take great pride in the work that INCB has been able to accomplish to meet this objective in a period when our collective well-being is being threatened. Collective action is required at all levels of society if we are to meet the objectives of the drug control conventions and make progress on the relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

**Jagjit Pavadia**

President

International Narcotics Control Board



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## ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOWS RELATED TO DRUG TRAFFICKING AND THEIR IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY

### Defining illicit financial flows

The illicit financial flows generated from drug trafficking are posing a great threat to society through corruption, bribery, organized crime and inequality, and they can lead to political and social instability. They increase the wealth of drug cartels and organized criminal groups, which in turn increases their power and influence. Illicit financial flows also divert resources and tax revenues away from initiatives needed to reduce poverty and promote social and economic development.

The term illicit financial flows covers money derived from illegal acts, such as drug trafficking, corruption or tax evasion or funds used for illegal purposes, such as financing crime or terrorism.

A united effort by States is necessary to curtail illicit financial flows since they cross international borders, making it difficult to trace these funds back to their origins and hold owners accountable. It is estimated that millions of dollars are lost annually, particularly from developing countries, to organized criminal groups.

### Drug trafficking, financial flows and the cost to society

Drug trafficking is one of the most lucrative businesses for organized criminal groups due to the increasing use of drugs around the globe. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) World Drug Report 2021, some 275 million people around the world used drugs in 2019 – a 22 per cent increase from 2010. Cannabis is still the most widely used drug with an estimated 200 million users globally. Further, deaths from opioid use disorders have increased by 41 per cent globally over the same period.

The cost to society resulting from drug use and global drug trafficking is high for many countries. Data show that countries with high levels of drug trafficking, cultivation, distribution and consumption also exhibit high levels of instability, violence, violent crime and homicides. To counter the negative effects and human cost, it is essential to address all stages of drug trafficking – from cultivation and production to transportation, distribution and sale.

In addition to limiting the illicit supply of drugs, it is important to minimize the profits that drug traffickers derive from illicit financial flows. Some important elements in the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking are financial transparency internationally, strong anti-money laundering laws and cooperation between Governments to detect illicit financial flows.

### Impact of illicit financial flows on developing countries

The stability and security of many countries as well as their political, economic and social development is threatened by the illicit financial flows from drug trafficking. The illicit outflow of capital is particularly harmful for developing nations, which have a great need for funds to promote economic growth, reduce poverty and inequality, and address the climate crisis. This loss of money



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represents hundreds of millions of dollars collectively in foregone tax revenues, which could have been used to fund public initiatives and government programmes.

Further tipping the scales, illicit financial flows from developing countries often end up in banks based in developed nations. The Pandora Papers in 2021, the FinCEN Files in 2020, the Paradise Papers in 2017 and the Panama Papers in 2016 all revealed how illicit gains were distorting and undermining the international financial system and diverted funds away from development.

In particular, the Pandora Papers of 2021 brought corporate transparency to the forefront by revealing information on offshore mechanisms used by politicians, high-ranking officials and more than 130 billionaires from 45 countries to hide financial information. Opaque corporate structures and the anonymity of account holders pose significant obstacles to investigating and prosecuting crime and exposing illicit financial flows.

## Impact on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

Billions of dollars are estimated to be leaving developing countries illicitly every year. This drains public resources and undermines efforts to mobilize funds to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Indeed, significantly reducing illicit financial flows is part of one of the targets (16.4) of the SDGs.

Corruption related to drug trafficking enables illicit financial flows through bribery and the diversion of legitimate resources. This in turn weakens good governance, encumbers economic development, and worsens inequality, poverty and the environmental crisis.

In Africa, the cost of illicit financial flows is especially high and has a detrimental impact on the development of many States. An estimated 88.6 billion US dollars, accounting for roughly 3.7 per cent of the continent's gross domestic product, is lost to illicit financial flows every year. That is nearly the same as the combined annual inflows of official development assistance and foreign direct investment. Addressing illicit financial flows needs to be a priority for Governments to possess the funds and resources needed to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and to address the health, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Impact of new technologies on illicit financial flows

Globalization has advanced and facilitated the movement of money and capital. The international transfer of funds has become easier and faster due to new technologies, such as digital currencies, mobile payments and e-wallet services. However, they have also anonymized users and processes and created new avenues for illicit financial flows. Organized criminal groups have exploited these technologies to launder money and maximize profits.

New technologies represent a new frontier for organized criminal groups battling for control of criminal markets for drugs, arms and people, but also for authorities trying to detect and trace criminal activities. As more and more financial services use advanced information and communications technologies worldwide, so too grows the threat of illicit financial flows.



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To aid Governments in combating illicit financial flows related to drug trafficking, INCB has held a number of global stakeholder consultations. Further, INCB has raised awareness among Governments and their private-sector partners in the financial services industry through its Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme about the potential generation of illicit financial flows through the manufacture and trade of dangerous substances. The Programme also encourages and supports voluntary cooperation efforts between Governments and financial services providers.

## Recommendations

Collective action by Member States is needed since illicit financial flows cross international borders. To assist countries in combating illicit financial flows, INCB has put forward a set of recommendations. Member States should:

- Establish specialized task forces at the national and international levels to share intelligence, investigate illicit financial flows and identify organized criminal networks
- Adopt more effective transparency laws that provide for appropriate penalties
- Further strengthen anti-money laundering measures
- Focus equally on drug supply- and demand-reduction strategies that also address illicit financial flows
- Promote a culture of accountability and transparency to curb corruption and the illicit economy by including civic and moral values in education curricula from an early stage
- Work with private, non-governmental sectors and public leaders to raise awareness of the relationship between illicit financial flows and drug trafficking and their negative impact on stability and development
- Become parties to and implement all United Nations conventions related to countering transnational organized crime, particularly trafficking in drugs, illicit financial flows and corruption
- Implement the provisions of the International Standards on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation of the Financial Action Task Force
- Take steps to prevent the exploitation of newly emerging financial services and products, such as e-wallet and digital currencies, for trafficking in dangerous substances





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## GLOBAL ISSUES

### Timely access to controlled substances for international humanitarian emergencies

The availability of and access to controlled substances is essential to providing quality care in emergency settings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the effectiveness of simplified control measures in emergency situations – which permit the international trade of controlled substances without the corresponding import authorizations and/or estimates – has been tested.

To help Member States improve their emergency preparedness, INCB published *Lessons from countries and humanitarian aid organizations in facilitating the timely supply of controlled substances during emergency situations*. The document sets out procedures to follow during emergency situations. INCB strongly encourages Member States to review existing national legislation and allow for greater flexibility in the international trade of controlled substances during emergency situations.

### The role of social media in the promotion of the non-medical use of drugs

Social media platforms promote a range of negative behaviours including the facilitation and glamorization of non-medical drug use. Opportunities to buy cannabis, prescription painkillers and other controlled substances are readily available on social media platforms. Young people are the main users of social media platforms and are also the group with high rates of drug use. The link between exposure to social media and drug use should alert Member States to take a more active role in regulating them. INCB recommends that social media companies moderate and self-regulate their platforms and limit the advertisement and promotion of the non-medical use of drugs.

### COVID-19, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

During the COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions in manufacturing key starting materials of active pharmaceutical ingredients, and the ingredients themselves, have affected the global supply chain of medicines in some major manufacturing countries. Border closures and social-distancing policies adopted by some countries have further complicated logistical challenges.

The consolidated statistics on narcotic drugs from 2020 confirm an increase in the consumption, manufacture and stockpiling of substances, specifically fentanyl and its analogues, in some countries. This trend has been largely driven by an increased need to provide pain relief and sedation for patients with COVID-19 in intensive care units.

At the outset of the pandemic, there were reports of shortages of medicines containing the substance midazolam in some parts of the world. Midazolam has proven to be crucial in treating severe cases of COVID-19. The shortages were partially driven by a higher demand for the substance and by delivery and transport disruptions associated with COVID-19 border restrictions. As the pandemic progressed, data provided by Member States indicated that the situation had improved and that countries successfully resumed importing and exporting midazolam across the globe.





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## Regional consumption gaps remain for controlled medicines used for pain management

Regional analyses of the overall consumption of opioid analgesics used to relieve pain confirm that there are still large disparities between regions. Almost all consumption of opioid analgesics is concentrated in the developed countries of Europe and North America while consumption in other regions of the world is often insufficient to meet the medical needs of those populations. Countries reporting the highest average consumption of opioids for pain management in the period 2018–2020 were, in descending order, the United States, Germany, Austria, Israel and Belgium.

At the global level, opiate raw materials used to produce narcotic drugs remain sufficient to cover the reported global needs for 2021 and 2022. Significant regional disparities in the availability of narcotic drugs still exist because many countries do not accurately estimate their medical needs for opioids analgesics or have limited access to them. INCB emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability for all countries and regions and calls on Member States with greater resources to assist States with fewer resources to ensure access to and availability of narcotic drugs.

## Challenges with fentanyl and fentanyl analogues

Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues continue to drive the number of overdose deaths attributed to synthetic opioids upward in Canada and the United States. The problem is probably widespread as the role of fentanyl analogues in overdose deaths is often undetected and thus underreported. This is because identifying such analogues requires specialized toxicology testing.

Fentanyl analogues are very potent and often trafficked in small quantities and in small packages. Vendors have been able to profit by marketing fentanyl analogues on e-commerce platforms and the darknet in an effort to evade screening and detection by platform administrators.

INCB maintains a list of more than 140 fentanyl-related substances with no current medical, industrial or other legitimate uses. INCB invites Member States and industry partners to use the list to facilitate actions that counter the manufacture, marketing, movement and monetization of the substances on the list.

## Article 13 of the 1988 Convention offers great opportunities for monitoring the evolution of illicit drug manufacturing

The rapid evolution of illicit drug manufacturing requires a speedier response to better implement article 13 of the 1988 Convention on matters relating to equipment and materials used in illicit manufacture.

INCB held two expert group meetings on enhancing the operational use of article 13, which led to concrete cases of successful multilateral cooperation to prevent and investigate the diversion of specialized equipment. The contribution of the experts has been consolidated into an awareness-raising and guidance document, which will be reviewed by INCB in 2022 and subsequently shared with the international community.



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## REPORT ON PRECURSORS FOR 2021

### Need to enhance national chemical precursors control and regulatory frameworks

An INCB survey conducted in June 2021 on the implementation of chemical precursor provisions by Governments showed significant shortcomings in controls over domestic manufacture, trade and distribution, including Internet-facilitated trade in precursor chemicals. Without such controls, traffickers may attempt to obtain precursor chemicals by approaching unsuspecting chemical traders. According to the survey, about a third of the responding Governments have not established national control over all substances in Table I and Table II of the 1988 Convention.

### The evolution of illicit drug manufacturing requires global action to address the proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors

Non-scheduled chemicals, which are substances not listed in Table I or Table II of the 1988 Convention and can be used as alternatives to controlled precursors in the illicit manufacture of drugs, have now been encountered in all regions of the world. An analysis of seizure data of recently scheduled designer precursors used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine and methamphetamine showed that seizures decreased significantly after these precursors were scheduled on the international level. At the same time, new alternative non-scheduled precursors appeared on the market.

INCB has supported several initiatives and consultations in 2021 to raise awareness and build consensus on global action on non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors. A compendium of measures and approaches to address the proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors has been compiled by INCB to further strengthen the chemical control system.

### Internet platforms continue to be used for procuring chemical precursors

Operation Acronym, a targeted, time-bound operation conducted in February 2021 by INCB with the participation of 34 Governments and four international organizations, addressed the trafficking of precursors over the Internet and challenges related to their investigation. The Operation found that many anonymizing tools, secure virtual private networks and messenger services were used to procure chemical precursors online. This underscores the need for Member States to emphasize cyber-crime investigations relating to precursors and to work closely with Internet service providers, email and social media services and Internet businesses to combat these challenges. INCB is developing tools, resources and other capacity-building initiatives to support the efforts of Member States.

### Engagement with relevant industries is crucial

The chemical and pharmaceutical industries are critical stakeholders in precursor control efforts due to the use of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors in illicit drug manufacture.



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INCB continued to support and promote initiatives in this area and conducted a survey to compile global best practices and case scenarios related to industry cooperation on precursors.

## The COVID-19 pandemic has had minimal impact on the supply of chemical precursors for illicit drug manufacturing

Global reported seizures of ephedrine confirmed the declining trend observed in recent years. By contrast, reported seizures of MAPA, the latest substance to have been included in Table I of the 1988 Convention, confirmed a continuing shift towards the use of designer precursors. The same development also continued for precursors of fentanyl, fentanyl-related substances and methaqualone. Seizures of potassium permanganate, traditionally the principal precursor used for the illicit manufacture of cocaine, and of acetic anhydride, the key heroin precursor, remained unaffected by COVID-19 restrictions.

## The INCB Precursors Incident Communication System helps share information in real-time

The INCB Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS) provides users with a platform for the secure exchange of real-time information related to the trafficking of precursors. PICS also offers information on internationally controlled precursors and drug manufacturing equipment. In this way, PICS can help authorities identify new trends, trafficking routes and alternative precursors even if the details and circumstantial evidence provided in the annual seizure statistics are insufficient.

## REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INCB ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021

### AFRICA

**If current levels of drug use continue, a higher number of people using drugs is expected due to population growth on the continent over the next decade, according to UNODC.**

**The number of States in Africa permitting the licit cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes continues to grow.** Most of these countries intend to only export cannabis while others allow the use of cannabis for medical purposes domestically.

### AMERICAS

#### Central America and the Caribbean

**No evidence of drug traffickers using human trafficking networks in Central America and Mexico** was found by the International Organization for Migration.

**Lack of availability of narcotic drugs for medical purposes.** The availability of opioid-analgesics used for medical purposes in Central America and the Caribbean in 2020 was one of the lowest among all regions.



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**Lack of data to indicate prevalence of drug use.** Most countries in the region lack recent estimates of drug use prevalence. The use of cannabis and cocaine, the proliferation of new psychoactive substances and the use of controlled drugs without a medical prescription continue to be issues of concern.

## North America

**The number of deaths from drug overdoses continued to rise in Canada and the United States.** In the United States, there were an estimated 100,306 drug overdose deaths during the 12-month period ending in April 2021, an increase of 28.5 per cent on the year before. The estimated number of overdose deaths from opioids increased to 75,673 during the same period, up from 56,064 the year before. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in opioid overdoses and deaths in Canada mainly due to an increasingly toxic drug supply. The worsening overdose crisis in these countries has been marked by increases in the number of deaths involving psychostimulants, such as methamphetamine.

**Changes to cannabis regulations continue to be adopted throughout North America.** In Mexico, new regulations on the use of cannabis by adults for non-medical purposes has been under review based on a Supreme Court decision from June 2021. In the United States, despite federal control of cannabis, regulations have been signed into law at the state level to permit the use and possession of cannabis by adults for non-medical purposes in six more states during the previous year.

## South America

**Larger quantities of cocaine and chemical precursors were seized.** Organized criminal groups in the region increased shipment sizes to illicit markets both inside and outside the region to compensate for the financial losses suffered during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Europe and Africa, authorities have reported an increase in the quantities of cocaine coming from South America.

**The number of routes and networks used by traffickers increased despite COVID-19 restrictions.** Air and sea routes have become the preferred method of transporting internationally controlled substances. Criminal organizations appear to be trafficking cocaine from Bolivia (Plurinational State of) by exploiting the Paraguay-Parana Waterway System, which consists of 3,400 km of uninterrupted rivers connecting Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay to the Atlantic Ocean. There has also been an increase in the use of the Internet, especially the dark web and social media, to sell drugs. These drugs are sold online and are distributed through postal and courier services.

**The area under coca bush cultivation continues to decrease in Colombia, while the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Peru reported increases.** The reduction in Colombia could be due to various reasons, including eradication efforts by the Government. In Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru, the increase could be caused by the suspension of eradication efforts during COVID-19 restrictions, increasing economic uncertainty and political instability.

**Governments in the region prepare to establish cannabis industries.** More Governments in the region regulated the cultivation, manufacturing and trade of cannabis for medical, scientific and



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industrial purposes. Some Governments intend to establish cannabis industries to aid post-COVID-19 economic recovery efforts.

**There has been an increase in ecstasy-like drugs, along with an increase in new psychoactive substances in the region.** Argentina, Brazil and Chile recorded the largest seizures of ecstasy-like drugs between 2015 and 2019. Of particular concern is the rate of consumption among high school and university students. There have also been reports of an increase in new psychoactive substances, which are being sold under the names of different drugs.

## ASIA

### East and South-East Asia

**Illicit manufacture, trafficking and the use of synthetic drugs persists; emergence of new drugs.** INCB is concerned about the increase in the illicit manufacture, trafficking and use of synthetic drugs, in particular ketamine, methamphetamine and synthetic cannabinoids. The drug problem has serious health, human rights, security and economic consequences for the countries of the region.

**China begins using a generic definition to control synthetic cannabinoids.** Following a decision in 2019 to schedule fentanyl-related substances as a class-wide group, which contributed to a sharp drop in the use of those substances, China started to control synthetic cannabinoids using a generic definition in 2021.

**Countries in East and South-East Asia rank low in the availability of the most common opioid analgesics.** Other countries in the region are not adequately reporting on the consumption of psychotropic substances. The Board recalls that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in many countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.

**Data on drug use and treatment demand continue to be lacking in many countries in the region.** INCB encourages Member States in the region to prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand to inform the development of evidence-based decisions in the area of prevention and treatment, and encourages bilateral partners, regional and international organizations to provide support to this end.

**INCB reiterates in the strongest possible terms its view that extrajudicial responses to drug-related criminality are in clear violation of the drug control conventions, which require that drug-related crime be addressed through formal criminal justice responses and strict adherence to internationally recognized due process standards.** In view of the relevant international conventions and protocols and the resolutions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other United Nations bodies on the application of the death penalty, **INCB reiterates its call upon all States to consider the abolition of the death penalty for drug-related offences and to commute death sentences that have already been handed down.**



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## South Asia

**Pharmaceutical opioids continue to be seized in large quantities in the region.** The substances most commonly seized were codeine and codeine-based cough syrups. This is followed by tramadol, an opioid not under international control, fentanyl and methadone.

**The global trend of purchasing drugs on the Internet appears to have spread in the region.** Individuals engaging in this activity exploit darknet trading platforms and use cryptocurrencies to purchase drugs.

**COVID-19 restrictions do not appear to have led to more seizures of heroin in the region.** During the slowdown of the global economy during the pandemic, organized criminal groups adapted their strategies by using new methods of drug trafficking, such as using shipping containers and postal services, and by using the darknet for transferring earnings through cryptocurrency payments.

**South Asia continues to have one of the highest rates of opiate use in the world.** According to UNODC, 1.1 per cent of people between the ages of 15 and 64 in the region use opiates. According to statistics for 2019, there were 21.7 million annual users of heroin and opium in Asia. This constituted nearly 70 per cent of the 31 million past-year opiate users worldwide.

**COVID-19 restrictions were a barrier to accessing drug treatment in some countries of the region.** The lockdowns and lack of access to health care made it difficult for people with substance use disorders from disadvantaged backgrounds to access treatment.

**Technological advances help provide treatment services.** In India, doctors received online training for opioid agonist treatments. Internet-based educational materials on opioid disorders were developed and made freely accessible to health-care professionals.

**Lower levels of availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes in the region.** Countries in South Asia have been reporting low consumption of such substances. INCB reiterates the importance of ensuring adequate levels of availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, particularly for pain management. INCB wishes to remind States in South Asia of the necessity of collecting and regularly providing data and statistics on drug use prevalence rates and of the need to provide affordable and accessible drug treatment services across the entire territory of their countries.

## West Asia

**Afghanistan retains its status as leader in the illicit production of opium.** With potential opium production of 6,800 tons in 2021, Afghanistan remains the country where the highest amount of opium is illicitly produced. Despite the total area of illicit opium cultivation having decreased by 21 per cent in 2021, opium production increased by eight per cent compared to the previous year.

**Central Asian States continue to face increased trafficking and misuse of synthetic drugs.** Central Asian States continue to face challenges in the trafficking and misuse of synthetic drugs, including amphetamines, synthetic cannabinoids and various other new psychoactive substances. Traffickers have turned to the Internet and social media to advertise and sell these substances. The reason for the increasing demand for synthetic drugs in this region appears to be the reduced availability of cannabis and opiates during the pandemic.





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## EUROPE

**Law enforcement agencies gain access to encrypted communications devices revealing important information on the activities of criminal groups.** Several operations by law enforcement agencies resulted in the seizure of encrypted communication devices used for criminal activities. Officials were able to gain access to the encrypted devices and to hundreds of millions of messages giving law enforcement valuable information on the activities of criminal groups. The information led to a clampdown on criminal activities in Europe and other regions and large seizures of drugs and precursor chemicals and the dismantling of illicit laboratories.

**Evolving legislative landscape broadening the use of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes.** The European Court of Justice recently ruled that CBD extracted from the cannabis plant should not be considered a drug under the 1961 or 1971 Conventions. Several States are already in the process of adjusting their laws to align with that ruling. Several European Union member States have enacted legislation to broaden the use of cannabis products for medical purposes. Several countries in the region have either discussed or taken steps to consider widening cannabis use to non-medical purposes, in contravention of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. **INCB reminds all parties to the 1961 Convention that under article 4(c), the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs are limited exclusively to medical and scientific purposes.**

**COVID-19 restrictions have had limited impact on the illicit supply of and demand for drugs.** Levels of synthetic drug manufacture and the availability of cocaine remained stable despite COVID-19 restrictions in Europe. Changes in trafficking routes were also observed, most notably in the shift from land to sea for the trafficking of heroin from West Asia and of cannabis resin from Morocco to Europe. Although levels of most drug use decreased during the initial lockdowns, they increased once restrictions were lifted.

**Patterns of drug use in the region also became more complex due to the availability and accessibility of a variety of drugs.** This increase in availability and variety has led to diverging patterns of polydrug use, where people who use drugs consume more than one type of drug at the same time or different types of drugs sequentially. Another emerging trend is the non-medical use of benzodiazepines, at times in combination with opioids or alcohol, among high-risk people who use drugs, prisoners and other groups.

## OCEANIA

**Transnational crime, including drug trafficking, continues to increase in the Pacific islands.** Organized criminal groups are using small boats to traffic drugs, particularly to Australia and New Zealand. Pacific island States are also emerging as transit points in the trafficking of synthetic opioids to Australia, the United States and countries in Europe.

**The majority of non-parties to the drug control conventions remain concentrated in Oceania.** Of the 10 States yet to accede to the 1961 Convention as amended, seven are in Oceania. Of the 13 States not party to the 1971 Convention, eight are in Oceania. And, of the seven non-parties to the 1988 Convention, four are in Oceania.





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**New Zealand adopts Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Bill (No.2).** This bill replaces a temporary bill that was enacted in December 2020 with the aim of permitting drug and substance-testing services during the 2020–2021 summer festival season.

**INCB GRIDS Programme provides training to the Oceania Customs Organization (OCO) and its members throughout the Pacific** as part of an agreement between INCB and OCO to facilitate the sharing of information and development of actionable intelligence for customs officers.

**National authorities in four countries register for INCB Learning e-modules.** Drug control officials from Australia, Kiribati, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea have registered for the e-modules which cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, and the international drug control framework.

**Low-dose CBD preparations rescheduled from Schedule 4 to Schedule 3 in Australia.** This change will allow a maximum of 150 mg per day of such preparations, approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, to be supplied by a pharmacist over the counter for adult consumption without a prescription.

**Australia and New Zealand account for the largest number of seizures in Oceania.** However, seizures in neighbouring Pacific island States illustrate their exploitation for the trafficking of drugs into Australia and New Zealand.

**Resurgence in the methamphetamine market in Australia.** In April 2021, wastewater analysis covering 56 per cent of Australia's population indicated a resurgence in the illicit methamphetamine market. The analysis also indicated decreases in fentanyl and oxycodone consumption to record low levels.

**Decrease in methamphetamine use in New Zealand.** Wastewater monitoring covering 75 per cent of the population indicates that methamphetamine use in the first quarter of 2021 decreased by 14 per cent from the previous quarter and by 30 per cent compared to the same period in 2020.

**Low levels of availability of internationally controlled drugs for medical and scientific purposes in Pacific island States.** Although the level of opioid consumption in Oceania remains among the highest in the world, primarily due to consumption in Australia and New Zealand, lower levels of consumption are seen in the Pacific island States.



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## INCB INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT MEMBER STATES

### INCB GLOBAL RAPID INTERDICTION OF DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES (GRIDS) PROGRAMME

The GRIDS Programme, including the real-time communication platform IONICS, promotes the sharing of information by law enforcement authorities to prevent dangerous substances from reaching consumer markets. The number of incidents shared through IONICS has consistently increased and more than 100,000 pieces of intelligence have been received and analysed. As a result, Member States have been able to carry out investigations and analyses leading to seizures of dangerous substances, arrests of traffickers, prosecutions, and disruptions of international trafficking networks.

The GRIDS Programme facilitates meetings based on the information made available through the communication platforms and other sources. This has strengthened investigations, expanded operational capacities and facilitated international cooperation. The work of GRIDS on public-private partnerships has also resulted in hundreds of vendors of dangerous substances being removed from e-commerce platforms, thereby reducing the availability of dangerous substances for the end user.

In 2020 and 2021, the GRIDS Programme convened six expert group meetings bringing together representatives of Member States and leading global private sector partners of e-commerce platforms, e-wallet services, chemical reference standards companies, freight forwarders, private postal and express mail operators and express courier services.

The GRIDS Programme supports Member States in their response to the increasing circulation of non-medical synthetic opioids. The INCB list of 152 fentanyl-related substances serves as a practical tool to prevent the diversion and trafficking of these substances and reduce their availability to potential end users. Under the GRIDS programme, a second list of non-fentanyl opioids and other new psychoactive substances has now been developed. INCB invites all Governments and, through them, industry partners to voluntarily refrain from any manufacture, marketing, export, import or distribution of the substances on these lists as these substances have no legitimate purposes.

The GRIDS Programme continued to provide officers worldwide with online access and online training in 2021 related to topics such as intelligence development, awareness of new psychoactive substances and safe handling and interdiction methods for opioids. A total of 750 law and regulatory enforcement officers representing 84 Member States and international organizations took part remotely.

Operation New Horizons brought together 164 officers representing 70 Member States and four international partners (INTERPOL, Oceania Customs Organization, Universal Postal Union and WCO) in 2021. Key sources and redistribution points for consignments of tramadol and tapentadol, which were trafficked primarily through the international post, express mail and courier services, air cargo and freight forwarders, were identified. More than 230 communications were exchanged through IONICS and 113 kg of tramadol (1.1 million tablets) and 194 kg of tapentadol (1.7 million tablets) were seized.



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## INCB Learning

In 2021, INCB Learning held three online training seminars for 95 officials from 21 countries in South America, West Africa, and South-East Asia and the Pacific. The majority of participants (68 per cent) in these training sessions were women.

INCB Learning developed a fourth e-module on the international drug control framework available in English and Spanish. The e-modules are free of charge and available for competent national authorities upon request at [incb.learning@un.org](mailto:incb.learning@un.org).





## INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is the independent monitoring body for the implementation of the United Nations international drug control conventions. It was established in 1968 in accordance with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1954. It had predecessors under the former drug control treaties as far back as the time of the League of Nations.

Based on its activities, INCB publishes an annual report that is submitted to the United Nations Economic and Social Council through the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The report provides a comprehensive survey of the drug control situation in various parts of the world. As an impartial body, INCB tries to identify and predict dangerous trends and suggests necessary measures to be taken.