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REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Africa

Availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical use in Africa remains a concern. INCB reiterates the importance of improving the availability of and access to internationally scheduled substances for medical purposes.

The role of Africa, in particular West and Central Africa, as a transit region for cocaine has expanded significantly. Seizures reached an all-time high in 2021.

Trafficking in and misuse of tramadol are a growing concern in some African countries. Tramadol is a synthetic opioid not under international control.

Governments in Africa are making progress in addressing substance use disorders. Assessing the extent of drug misuse and accurately estimating the number of people receiving treatment on the continent remains a challenge.

Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

The Central America and Caribbean region suffers from a high level of armed violence and insecurity. This is often linked to the activities of drug cartels and street gangs and violent competition between them.

Development of evidence-based drug control policies may be hampered by the lack of recent surveys on the extent of drug use in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean. In addition, national drug control plans in a number of countries in the region may no longer be up to date.

Countries in Central America and the Caribbean are increasingly being used for cocaine trafficking to Europe. Drug trafficking is increasingly linked to trafficking in firearms and represents a major challenge to stability and security in the region.

North America

The opioid crisis continued to have serious consequences in North America. An increasing number of opioid-related deaths involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, often mixed with other synthetic drugs.

The United States launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats. The initiative is aimed at preventing illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs, at detecting emerging drug trends and drug use patterns, and responding to public health impacts.

Mexico continues to experience high levels of violence, particularly homicides. This is mostly a result of illicit drug-related activity of cartels and criminal gangs.





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South America

Drug trafficking organizations continue to expand their operations in the Amazon Basin into illegal mining, illegal logging and wildlife trafficking. These activities pose a life-threatening risk to Indigenous populations and have been linked to bribery, extortion, fraud and money-laundering, as well as homicide, violent assault, sexual violence and forced labour in the Amazon.

Record levels of illicit coca bush cultivation were recorded in Colombia and Peru. The area under cultivation in Colombia rose by 13 per cent to a second consecutive record high of 230,000 hectares. A record area of 95,008 hectares of illicit coca bush cultivation was reported in Peru for 2022, representing an 18 per cent increase compared with 2021; this took place most notably in the Peruvian Amazon.

The area under illicit coca bush cultivation in the Plurinational State of Bolivia decreased by 2 per cent, from 30,500 hectares in 2021 to 29,900 hectares in 2022. Sixty-one per cent of the area cultivated was in the Los Yungas de La Paz.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia requested a review of the control status of coca leaf. The United Nations Secretary-General received a request from the Plurinational State of Bolivia to activate the process for a critical review of the current classification of coca leaf as a narcotic drug in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended.

Asia

East and South-East Asia

Illicit opium poppy cultivation and methamphetamine manufacture are among the most significant drug challenges facing East and South-East Asia.

The prevalence of drug use in East and South-East Asia has remained significant. Cannabis is the most used drug, followed by methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances.

Several countries and territories in East and South-East Asia have introduced regulatory changes related to cannabis.

Malaysia formally removed mandatory death sentences and life imprisonment for drug-related offences.

Illicit manufacture of and trafficking in ketamine continues to be an issue of concern in the region. Seizures of the substance, which is not under international control, nearly tripled in 2022 compared with 2021, and there has been a proliferation of clandestine laboratories for the illicit manufacture of ketamine.





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South Asia

South Asia appears to be increasingly targeted for the trafficking of methamphetamine illicitly manufactured in Afghanistan to Europe and Oceania.

Proceeds of drug trafficking are being used to fund terrorism, provide support to armed groups and fuel political violence in South Asia. This has been shown by investigations in the region. Instances of joint trafficking of drugs and weapons have been reported.

An estimated 1.1 per cent of people aged 16 to 64 in South Asia use opiates. This prevalence is almost double the estimated global average (0.6 per cent).

South Asia continues to be the region with the lowest levels of consumption of medically prescribed opioid analgesics worldwide.

West Asia

The 2023 opium harvest in Afghanistan declined significantly due to a reduction in opium poppy cultivation. This followed the strict application of a ban on illicit drug cultivation announced by the country's de facto authorities in April 2022. Support needs to be provided for alternative development solutions as affected farmers in Afghanistan may not have alternative sources of income.

Methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan has been increasingly reaching global markets. Methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan now reaches markets in South-West Asia, East and South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, Africa, Europe and Oceania. Methamphetamine use increased in South-West Asia.

The illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and misuse of synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances and pharmaceutical drugs, continue to pose a significant challenge to countries in West Asia. The Central Asia subregion in particular is affected.

Trafficking in and use of falsified “captagon” continues to seriously affect the Middle East. This challenge is further exacerbated by political instability and ongoing conflicts in some parts of the subregion.

Europe

The quantity and variety of substances available in illicit drug markets in Europe pose a considerable public health concern. They also represent new challenges to law enforcement, regulation, and the provision of treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use.

Several European countries have continued to establish regulated markets for cannabis for non-medical purposes. These programmes do not appear to be consistent with the drug control conventions.

The non-medical use of ketamine has increased in several European countries, leading to an increase in the number of people seeking treatment. There is a need for close monitoring of ketamine and continued international collaboration to counter its illicit distribution.

In 2021, States members of the European Union encountered an alarming escalation in illicit drug trafficking and interdictions. The aggregate seizures of cocaine soared to an unprecedented level, totalling 303 tons.





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Oceania

Pacific island States have transformed from solely transit sites along drug trafficking routes to destination markets for synthetic drugs. This is posing significant challenges to communities and their public health systems. Law enforcement and customs agencies of these countries reported multiple drug seizures, particularly of cannabis and methamphetamine. Transnational organized crime, especially drug trafficking, is recognized as one of the most challenging issues facing the Pacific region.

Transnational organized criminal groups attempted to traffic unprecedented amounts of cocaine to Australia. However, the methamphetamine market remained the predominant illicit drug market. Law enforcement authorities highlighted the need to address organized crime and violence related to trafficking of large quantities of drugs to the region.

Availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes is insufficient in some countries of the region. INCB emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, and calls for the non-parties to the international drug control conventions – which are concentrated in Oceania – to take steps towards accession and full implementation of the treaties.