

Summary

The present report contains both the most recent statistical data on Governments' implementation of article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 and related resolutions by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and information on the extent and level of utilization of the tools for information exchange made available by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). The report also contains an overview of major trends in the licit movement of and trafficking in precursors under international control, as well as information on internationally non-scheduled chemicals that can be used in the illicit manufacture of drugs.

In March 2017, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in decisions 60/12 and 60/13, unanimously decided to follow the Board's recommendation to include two precursors of fentanyl and of a number of fentanyl analogues, ANPP and NPP, in Table I of the 1988 Convention. Those decisions brought the number of substances controlled under the Convention to 26.

The Board is pleased to note that some Governments have already added ANPP and NPP to their national lists of controlled substances. In addition, to respond to current challenges, a number of Governments have amended their legislation on precursors. The Board observed that, during the reporting period, several countries, such as Argentina, Bangladesh, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Georgia, Switzerland and the United States of America, introduced various measures to strengthen their national precursor control systems and that the 28 States members of the European Union further enhanced their monitoring of non-scheduled "designer" precursors.

INCB also observed increasing discrepancies between official precursor seizure information shared by Governments through different mechanisms, including form D, country reports and presentations at meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and annual report questionnaires and individual seizure reports. It is important to reduce those discrepancies and ensure that Governments are in a position to generate, gather and consolidate national precursor seizure data and report the most comprehensive data possible to INCB. From the data available, the following major trends are discernible in precursor trafficking.

With regard to acetic anhydride, the key chemical for heroin manufacture, there was a substantial worldwide increase in incidents. The number of incidents involving the substance was the highest in more than two decades and involved quantities that would be enough for up to three and a half years of potential global illicit heroin manufacture. While investigations in many countries are still ongoing, INCB-facilitated cooperation between Governments has helped to establish links between incidents that originally appeared to be isolated cases and has improved knowledge of the current *modi operandi* of traffickers.

Increased demand over the Internet for acetic anhydride was also observed, namely in the form of suspicious requests for supplies of sizeable amounts of the substance on online trading platforms. The requests for supplies ranged from one-time shipments of several hundreds of litres to monthly supplies of container-sized shipments. An analysis of available information on Internet-facilitated trade in precursors is contained in chapter IV of the present report.

With regard to cocaine precursors, although there is evidence of illicit manufacture of potassium permanganate, the main oxidizing agent, and of use of substitute chemicals, the extent of such activities is unknown. What is known is that most of the chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of cocaine were diverted from within the countries in which they were seized, indicating a need to address the situation domestically.

With regard to synthetic drugs, pre-precursors and substitute chemicals continued to constitute a challenge for established precursor control systems. International operations conducted as part of Project Prism provided, for the first time, evidence of the use of APAAN in the illicit manufacture of the amphetamine found in fake “captagon” tablets in countries in the Middle East. Under those operations, seizures were made of non-scheduled amphetamine and methamphetamine “designer” precursors of the methyl glycidic acid family for the first time outside Europe.

There is also evidence of significant illicit manufacture of certain chemicals that are not controlled internationally but are controlled at the national level in some countries. Such manufacture occurs for methylamine, a key chemical in the illicit manufacture of a number of amphetamine-type stimulants, the precursor ephedrine, and new psychoactive substances. Seizures of precursors of new psychoactive substances also indicate the occurrence of the illicit manufacture of such substances, in particular synthetic cathinones and substances that have recently been scheduled under the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971.

In the light of those developments, the Board calls on national competent authorities to review their domestic control mechanisms, in particular the procedures for granting or refusing registration of chemical operators, and the system and requirements for end-user declarations, as well as any related thresholds, that may be exploited by traffickers. It has also become clear that there is a need to better integrate monitoring of legitimate trade with law enforcement follow-up, such as through the investigation of incidents, including shipments objected to through PEN Online, before they become criminal cases, in order to extract important intelligence.

The integrity of controls on a Government’s territory also remain of concern to the Board, in particular with regard to the increasing number of territories where conflict, unresolved territorial disputes or other circumstances hinder the exercise of effective governmental control, thus increasing the risk of such territories being exploited by traffickers for the diversion of chemicals.

The collaborative work during the reporting period has shown that a willingness to cooperate across geographical and institutional borders and acting in the spirit of the 1988 Convention, i.e., preventing illicit drug manufacture through chemical diversion control, are important elements for success in the area of international drug control. PICS and the international initiatives conducted under Project Prism and Project Cohesion provide the framework for such cooperation at the global level, by allowing for *modi operandi* to be identified and links between otherwise isolated incidents to be established. They also prevent traffickers from replicating diversion schemes by targeting the weakest links.