

550. Taking note of the heavy toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the most vulnerable sectors of society, especially people suffering from drug use disorders, Argentina and Uruguay developed action plans to assist those populations. In Argentina, the Secretariat for Comprehensive Drug Policies activated a contingency plan to guarantee the provision of essential services through community structures and call centres that are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In Uruguay, the National Drug Board started the implementation of Project Paradores, which offers places in daytime shelters to people living on the street who have a high risk of marginalization and social exclusion. National data from Uruguay show that 87 per cent of its citizens living on the streets consume some type of illicit drug. As such, Project Paradores has been promoted as part of a comprehensive initiative: while focusing on the prevention and containment of the transmission of COVID-19, trained personnel assist people with drug dependence issues.

551. While the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to lead to an increase in rates of substance use disorder, spending on drug prevention and treatment services is in long-term decline in the region. Access to drug treatment services might be disrupted as Governments divert their attention to address the economic crisis in the aftermath of the global pandemic.

D. Asia

East and South-East Asia

The continued increase in the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine in increasingly purer forms, remained a major concern for East and South-East Asia. The drug problem has had serious health, human rights, security and economic implications for the countries of the region.

It seems that the decision by China in 2019 to schedule fentanyl-related substances as a class-wide group has, over the course of the year, resulted in a sharp drop in the amount of those substances of alleged Chinese origin seized globally. However, it also seems that traffickers have now moved to fentanyl precursors as a way of manufacturing these substances, which calls for greater collaboration to deal with this trafficking challenge.

The Board has repeatedly expressed its concerns over serious human rights violations, especially with regard to extrajudicial actions, committed in purported pursuit of drug control objectives. These violations contravene internationally recognized human rights standards and are inconsistent with the obligations of Governments under the three international drug control conventions.

1. Major developments

552. More than any other part of the world, the countries in East and South-East Asia continue to see an increase in the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine. The price of methamphetamine decreased to its lowest in a decade, while purity remained stable or increased. UNODC estimates that the manufacture of and trafficking in methamphetamine and heroin in the region generated annual revenues of more than \$54 billion, with methamphetamine accounting for \$44.9 billion.

553. In early 2020, major seizures of synthetic drugs took place in a number of countries of the region, including China, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand.

554. In its annual report for 2019, the Board noted that, to further strengthen its drug control system, China had decided to schedule, as a class-wide group, all fentanyl-related substances as of 1 May 2019. Available data by the end of 2019, including as reflected in presentations by representatives of national agencies at INCB-hosted seminars for subject-matter experts, suggested that the number of interdictions of fentanyl-related substances of alleged Chinese origin had dropped markedly.

555. Effective regulatory mechanisms, as well as border management and control and forensic capacity with regard to precursors and other chemicals frequently used in illicit drug manufacture, continue to be of particular importance given that the chemical industry has a substantial presence in the region and the region's increasingly improved infrastructure has further enhanced connectivity among countries. Effective regional cooperation among the countries of the region through collaboration, joint operations and the sharing of information remains crucial. In particular, given the apparent effectiveness of the decision by China to schedule fentanyl-related substances as a class, traffickers have moved to precursors as a way of continuing to provide those substances to illicit markets, a development described in the Board's report on precursors for 2019, which gives even greater impetus to the need to work regionally to deal with this trafficking challenge.

556. Most countries continue to lack comprehensive drug use prevalence data and evidence-based drug dependence treatment programmes. In particular, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, attention should be paid, and resources devoted, to continued drug use prevention and treatment efforts, in order to sustain progress made and to prevent an increase in additional vulnerabilities among the region's population.

2. Regional cooperation

557. The countries of the region have a long-standing history of cooperation, bilaterally as well as regionally. In November 2019, signatories to the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on drug control (Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and UNODC) endorsed the Bangkok Declaration on effectively responding to the drug problem in the Mekong. In addition, the signatories endorsed their eleventh subregional action plan on drug control (May 2019–May 2021), in which the joint commitment of signatory countries to addressing the subregion's drug problem was reaffirmed. The action plan comprises four key areas of cooperation: drugs and health; law enforcement cooperation; legal and judicial cooperation; and sustainable alternative development.

558. In December 2019, ASEAN agreed to add the Food and Drug Administration of the Philippines to its current list of inspection services, which also includes similar authorities in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Under the ASEAN Sectoral Mutual Recognition Arrangement for Good Manufacturing Practice, certificates on good manufacturing practices are mandatory for the registration of medicinal products in each ASEAN member State.

559. To complement the Board's treaty-mandated programme of work on precursors, which is further described in the Board's 2020 report on precursors, countries in the region agreed to increase cooperation on precursor control. In December 2019 and February 2020, with the assistance of UNODC, intelligence specialists from East, South and South-East Asia, as well as Australia, Canada and the United States, met in China and Myanmar, respectively, to exchange information on recent diversion and trafficking cases.

560. In Hanoi in December 2019, INCB hosted its second international workshop on public-private partnerships preventing exploitation of legitimate e-commerce. Participants discussed voluntary partnerships with industry to make the marketing and sale of non-medical

fentanyl and other dangerous substances more difficult throughout the region. Seventy participants from 21 countries and territories and four international organizations and nine representatives from private-sector partners exchanged experiences and practical advice on building legitimate e-commerce while addressing trafficking in dangerous substances over the Internet. In addition, in-person and online training was delivered to law and regulatory enforcement officers in the region on countering trafficking, including through awareness-raising on emerging new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and safe handling approaches to fentanyl, and on information exchange, in partnership with international partners.

561. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of regional meetings were postponed. Others, such as the third meeting of the Advisory Council on Dangerous Drugs of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, were held online. Countries participating in that meeting adopted a resolution entitled "Turning words into actions towards a drug-free ASEAN community", defining the scope of future activities within the Council.

3. National legislation, policy and action

562. In 2020, the Government of Thailand initiated a legislative amendment to the Narcotics Act which would remove kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*), a plant-based psychoactive substance not under international control, from category V of the country's list of narcotics. In contrast, Indonesian authorities are considering whether to place kratom under national control as a category I narcotic, which would make it illegal in the country. Before taking such a decision, during the period 2020–2024, Indonesia will undertake further research on the issues, including health, sociological, socioeconomic, ecological and alternative development considerations, surrounding such a scheduling decision.

563. The Government of Thailand is considering a proposal to remove cannabis from the narcotics list by means of a ministerial regulation of the Ministry of Public Health, under which research would be conducted on the effects of cannabis in medicines, cosmetics and herbs, in line with the Government's policy of boosting the country's competitiveness in the production of cannabis-based products. This regulation would allow for the cultivation of the cannabis plants specified in the regulation by individuals and corporations, subject to conditions on trade and possession. The Food and Drug Administration of Thailand joined the country's national network of medical

cannabis cultivators to organize a training course on planting techniques for farmers, community enterprise groups and agricultural cooperatives.

564. The President of Indonesia mandated the National Narcotics Agency to implement a new national action plan for the prevention and eradication of narcotic drug abuse and circulation for the period 2020–2024. The action plan builds upon the previous one, which was implemented during the period 2018–2019. Actions included in the plan are the provision and dissemination of information related to the dangers of drugs, the establishment of an anti-drug task force and the inclusion of relevant topics in educational materials and training materials for officials. The plan is to be implemented in cooperation with various ministries and authorities in the country.

565. In January 2020, the Government of Indonesia adopted a 15-action point resolution addressing the drugs situation in correctional facilities in the country. The action points include the provision of medical assistance and social rehabilitation to over 21,000 prisoners who use drugs, as well as addressing overcrowding in order to prevent the circulation of illegal drugs within prisons.

566. The Ministry of Home Affairs of Indonesia issued ministerial regulation No. 12, 2019 (replacing a previous regulation from 2013), pursuant to which provincial and local governments and village heads are permitted to conduct demand-reduction activities within their jurisdictions. Such activities may be focused on raising awareness, early detection, community empowerment or providing medical treatment and/or rehabilitation services.

567. In the Philippines, allowing the use of cannabidiol-based medications with no more than 0.1 per cent THC content is being considered for the treatment of certain forms of epilepsy, such as Lennox-Gastaut and Dravet syndrome. The national Dangerous Drugs Board informed the public that cannabis use remained illegal in the country for both recreational and medical use.

568. In June 2020, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 41/2, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a comprehensive report on the situation of human rights in the Philippines (A/HRC/44/22). In the report, the High Commissioner concluded that the heavy focus on countering national security threats and drug use in the country had resulted in serious human rights violations, including killings and arbitrary detentions, as well as in impunity for those killings, and a failure of domestic mechanisms to ensure accountability thus far. Also in the report, the High Commissioner stressed the need for independent, impartial and effective investigations

into all allegations of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in The Hague is undertaking a preliminary examination of the situation in the Philippines, analysing crimes allegedly committed in the country in the context of its “war on drugs” since 1 July 2016.

569. The Board reminds all Governments that extra-judicial action, taken in purported pursuit of drug control objectives, is inconsistent with their obligations under the three international drug control conventions. All drug control actions taken to comply with these obligations should be taken with full respect for the rule of law and due process of law.

570. In February 2020, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam announced measures to address the drug situation in the country, outlining nine key tasks. As part of those measures, attention and priority should be given to drug use prevention, including at the family, commune and district levels and among high-risk groups. Viet Nam will focus on enhancing the detection of large-scale, transborder drug trafficking, preventing Viet Nam from becoming a transit country, and will introduce strict controls on the import, export and manufacture of controlled substances and precursors. Viet Nam intends to collect data on the number of people with drug use disorders in order to prepare resources for early intervention and improve the effectiveness of treatment and rehabilitation programmes, as well as to draft legal documents on drug prevention and control and related legislative amendments. Cooperation among the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and other relevant agencies was outlined as crucial.

571. In line with that, in March 2020, the Ministry of Public Security of Viet Nam introduced amendments to the national law on drug prevention and control, with a view to improving the effectiveness of the State’s management of drug prevention and control, as well as of compulsory and voluntary rehabilitation. Other aims of the amendments were to improve and ensure safety in society and decrease the number of deaths and illnesses caused by crime and drug use. The Ministry of Health requested its agencies to enhance the implementation of activities for drug prevention and control and to set up plans and programmes in that regard. June was declared the national action month for drug use prevention and control.

572. The Government of Myanmar adopted a new national strategic plan for the period 2020–2024 and is in the process of developing a two-year action plan for

the states and regions of the country in order to implement the national drug policy that was formally approved in 2018. The national policy was seen as a move from a law enforcement to a health-oriented approach, with areas covering supply reduction and alternative development, demand reduction, international cooperation, research and analysis, and compliance with human rights. For the first time, the Government of Myanmar formally included in its national policy measures to reduce the negative consequences of drug use.

573. Effective in May 2020, Singapore expanded the national list of controlled substances by adding 17 new psychoactive substances to its schedules. Currently, Singapore classifies 12 generic groups of new psychoactive substances and 160 individually listed new psychoactive substances as class A drugs. In addition, three non-fentanyl novel synthetic opioids were added to the country's national schedules of controlled substances on the basis of literature reviews from overseas science journals in which the presence of those substances on illicit drug markets and their structural similarities to substances shown to be liable to abuse and with limited licit use had been highlighted. In April 2020, seven precursors were put under national control in Myanmar.

574. Following reports of increased drug trafficking in Cambodia, in 2020, the Government adopted a seven-point strategy to combat illegal drugs. The strategy includes education and dissemination of information related to the negative consequences of drug use among the population, monitoring drug use and continued construction of treatment and rehabilitation centres. The strategy is also aimed at encouraging private sector support for the country's national movement to combat drugs and drug-related crime, including in its border areas.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

575. The illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of heroin, which is reported as the second most-frequently trafficked drug in South-East Asia, continued to pose challenges for most countries in the region, although most illicit manufacture of heroin in the region takes place in northern Myanmar.

576. In the UNODC Myanmar opium survey for 2019, the total area under opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar in 2019 was estimated at 33,100 ha, representing a decrease of 11 per cent in comparison with 2018, continuing a downward trend that started in 2014. Despite decreasing demand for opiates, the estimated domestic

heroin consumption of 6 tons was valued at between \$152 million and \$290 million, while exports to neighbouring countries were estimated to have generated \$1 billion.

577. Countries of the region have been seizing an increasing amount of methamphetamine over the last 10 years, more than in any other part of the world. According to UNODC, marked increases in the amounts seized were seen in Thailand, although they also decreased in China, where wastewater analysis showed a significant decline in methamphetamine consumption.

578. The quantities of methamphetamine seized annually by the Republic of Korea remained high in 2019, and nearly 80 per cent of the total amount seized was being trafficked by air travellers. The amount of crystalline methamphetamine seized was the second largest on record in 2019, while seizures of methamphetamine tablets and cocaine reached a record high in that year.

579. Also in 2019, a record amount (2.3 tons) of crystalline methamphetamine was seized in Japan, driven mainly by maritime interdictions by the national authorities of large amounts. Similarly, seizures of "ecstasy" tablets increased sixfold between 2018 and 2019, reaching a record high. In 2018, over 71 per cent of arrests for alleged drug-related offences were related to methamphetamine and over 63 per cent of all smuggling cases were cases of smuggling by air travellers. The number of cannabis-related arrests in 2018 in Japan reached a record high, accounting for over 25 per cent of all drug-related arrests in the country.

580. Methamphetamine in its crystalline form has been more persistent recently on the illicit market, with higher purity and a lower price. In Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam, retail prices of methamphetamine more than halved while, at the same time, the purity of the drug rose to around 95 per cent in 2019 in Thailand. Similar developments were seen in other countries of the region.

581. The discrepancy between the amount of methamphetamine seized and the comparatively low amount of key precursors and pre-precursors seized continues to characterize the situation in the region. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

582. **The Board expresses its concern over the continuous increases in the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and**

use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine, and urges countries of the region to take further action at the domestic and regional levels to address this alarming situation.

583. According to UNODC, by the end of 2019, a total of 461 different new psychoactive substances had been reported by countries in East and South-East Asia, almost half of the total number reported at the global level. Japan reported the largest number (366 substances), followed by China (201), Singapore (118) and the Republic of Korea (93).

584. In Viet Nam, during the first half of 2020, over 11,000 drug-related cases were investigated, with nearly 16,000 arrests and 235 kg of heroin seized, in addition to nearly 1.6 tons and 850,000 tablets of synthetic drugs, according to the Counter-Narcotics Police Department of the Ministry of Public Security. While the quantity of drugs seized decreased in comparison with the same period in 2019, there was an increase of nearly 10 per cent in the number of drug-related cases, despite the lockdown in place over part of the period owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

585. According to the Government of China, Yunnan Province remained the main transit point for overseas drugs being trafficked inland, commonly through express delivery services, owing to the low costs and low risks. Online drug trafficking has been emerging, with a total of nearly 7,000 drug-related cyber cases in 2019. The increasing use of the Internet for illicit trade and drug-related activities has also been reported by other countries of the region. The Government also reported that new forms and new types of drugs had been emerging. In the course of 2019, 41 new psychoactive substances were detected in the country, of which 5 were newly detected.

5. Prevention and treatment

586. Many countries in the region continue to lack a mechanism for gathering information on the scope and nature of drug use. Systematic and quantitative data would allow for the development of an evidence-based drug policy tailored to each country's specific needs.

587. For a number of years, the primary drug of use within the region has been methamphetamine. According to the *World Drug Report 2020*, in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, the majority of people seeking treatment for drug use sought such treatment for the use of crystalline methamphetamine, while in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and

Thailand, the majority were primarily seeking treatment for the use of methamphetamine tablets. Overall, people receiving treatment for the use of methamphetamine account for more than three quarters of those in treatment in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

588. The Government of China estimated that, in 2019, there were 2.14 million drug users registered in the country, accounting for 0.16 per cent of the total population of China, slightly less than the year before. Methamphetamine remained the primary drug of use (accounting for 55.2 per cent, or 1.18 million drug users), followed by heroin (37.5 per cent of users) and ketamine (2.3 per cent of all drug users). The number of cannabis users remained stable in comparison with 2018. In 2019, the Government reported that 220,000 persons had undergone compulsory treatment and that 300,000 persons had received community-based treatment and rehabilitation.

589. In Indonesia, according to the 2019 national survey on drug abuse and illegal trafficking, which had been undertaken by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences in cooperation with the National Narcotics Agency and covered all 34 provinces of the country, the rate of past-year drug use in the country reached 1.80 per cent, equivalent to approximately 3.5 million people aged 15–64, of whom 3.2 per cent were students. The most widely used drugs were crystalline methamphetamine, cannabis, amphetamine-type stimulants and other psychotropic substances.

590. In 2020, the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand opened a series of cannabis clinics, providing patients with access to cannabis oil for medical treatment. Four types of preparations, containing different combinations of CBD and THC, were given to patients to treat migraine, insomnia, neck pain and muscle stiffness.

591. In 2019, a total of 232 patients underwent inpatient treatment at the Al-Islah Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre, the only approved centre for the treatment of drug use disorders in Brunei Darussalam. Of those, 201 (87 per cent) were men. Of the total patients, 209 were first-time patients, 50 per cent of whom were admitted on the basis of a minister's order following a failed urine test, 34 per cent on the basis of a court order and 16 per cent on a voluntary basis.

592. According to the National Anti-Drugs Agency of Malaysia, the most-used drug in the country in 2019 was methamphetamine (nearly 60 per cent), followed by heroin

(28 per cent) and other amphetamines (10 per cent). The majority of users were people aged between 19 and 39. Approximately 4,000 cases of crystalline methamphetamine use were recorded in the country in 2014, but nearly 14,000 were recorded in 2019. In addition, the use of amphetamine-type stimulants more than doubled, from 1,152 cases registered in 2018 to 2,872 in 2019.

593. In June 2020, the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs of Viet Nam issued a plan for the review of detoxification and post-detoxification management activities undertaken during the period 2016–2020. The plan was aimed at reviewing the implementation and outcomes of measures put in place during that period, with a view to proposing new measures for the period 2021–2025. According to the Ministry, as of November 2019, there were over 200,000 people with a drug use disorder, representing an increase of more than 10,000 in comparison with 2018. As of April 2020, a total of 97 public treatment facilities and 16 centres for treatment on a voluntary basis had been licensed to operate, providing treatment for nearly 35,000 people. The existing opioid substitution therapy programme, using both methadone and buprenorphine, has provided services for 54,000 patients to date. In addition, opioid substitution therapy programmes using methadone have been implemented in compulsory settings in two provinces and piloted in a prison setting.

594. The National Authority for Combating Drugs of Cambodia, in cooperation with relevant ministries and provincial drug control committees, continued to work on reducing the negative consequences of drug use and provided opioid substitution therapy with methadone maintenance services to 108 people, including 17 women, in two hospitals. In addition, the national programme on the exchange of syringes was used by 668 people who inject drugs in 2019. Cambodia had 20,091 registered drug users, a small increase in comparison with 2018. The increase was attributed by the national authorities to an increase in admissions to treatment centres on a voluntary basis.

595. In 2019, the 29 treatment centres and 56 clinics in Myanmar treated over 10,000 people, over 80 per cent of whom were using heroin. Altogether, 11 treatment centres, operating under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, provide services to reintegrate people who have undergone treatment for drug use.

596. The Drug Dependence Treatment and Research Unit of the Ministry of Health and Sports of Myanmar has taken measures to ensure the continuity of medically assisted treatment services for people who use drugs since March 2020, including the provision of take-home doses

of methadone for extended periods of time, the provision of hygiene measures at centres and education for service providers and the use of online communication tools by clinicians. In 2019, over 7,000 drug users were provided opioid substitution therapy with methadone.

597. As part of a campaign launched by the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand in June 2020, free HIV tests are being made available, including for youth under the age of 18. Under the new measures, people can voluntarily request free HIV testing twice a year at all hospitals that provide services under the national health coverage scheme.

598. Drug use in Singapore continues to be measured by the number of people arrested for using drugs. In 2019, the Central Narcotics Bureau arrested 3,526 people for drug use (representing 41 per cent of all arrests), of whom 62 per cent were aged under 30. While there was a decrease in the number of persons arrested for heroin use, there was an increase in those arrested for use of new psychoactive substances (12 per cent of arrests) and methamphetamine (63 per cent of arrests). Throughout the year, the Central Narcotics Bureau has continued to enhance preventive drug education efforts, using augmented reality technology, social media, schools, parents and anti-drug advocates to reach out to the country's young people.

599. The 2019 nationwide survey on the nature and extent of drug abuse in the Philippines was undertaken by the Dangerous Drugs Board, in cooperation with the Department of Social Welfare and Development. Altogether, 55 facilities (53 residential and 2 outpatient) participated in the survey, and reported a total of nearly 5,300 admissions for 2019, representing a decrease of 4 per cent compared with 2018. The decrease could be attributed to the community-based drug rehabilitation programme in place. A total of 89 per cent of the patients were men, with a mean age of 32. According to the survey, the most commonly used drug was methamphetamine hydrochloride, which was the main drug of use for 94 per cent of the patients.

South Asia

South Asia continued to experience a rise in drug trafficking over the reporting period, as evidenced by significant increases in the amounts of opiates and cannabis herb seized in the region, as well as an increase in the use of methamphetamine pills (“yaba”). From early 2020, the challenges related to combating such trafficking and use were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Internet, in combination with postal and courier parcel services, is being exploited more and more for drug trafficking within South Asia, in particular for trafficking in psychotropic substances.

Trafficking in heroin and methamphetamine is increasing, in particular along the maritime routes in South Asia.

1. Major developments

600. Major drug-related challenges facing South Asia include increased trafficking in heroin and methamphetamine, especially along maritime routes. During the reporting period, a shift from trafficking in narcotic drugs to trafficking in synthetic drugs, including amphetamine-type stimulants, and chemical precursors was reported. The smuggling of heroin from Afghanistan over land and subsequently along maritime routes continued. An increased use of courier services, as well as the darknet and Internet pharmacies, was also reported.

601. South Asia has been identified as a major supplier of pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which are substances that are diverted and used in the clandestine manufacture of methamphetamine within the region and in other countries in Asia.

602. In the UNODC *World Drug Report 2020*, a global rise in substance use disorders was noted, both in overall numbers and in the proportion of the world’s population. Drug use increased more rapidly in developing countries over the period 2000–2018. Adolescents and young adults account for the largest share of those using drugs and are also the most vulnerable to the negative health effects of drugs. This trend is mirrored in South Asia, where youth constitute about 50 per cent of the region’s population.

2. Regional cooperation

603. In October 2019, UNODC convened a regional workshop in Manipur, India, for senior drug law enforcement officials and policymakers from South Asian

countries, to foster collective action and develop recommendations to counter trafficking in opiates and amphetamines in South Asia. The consultation was attended by officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

604. In December 2019, UNODC participated in and presented key areas of concern on drug trafficking and money-laundering at the regional customs enforcement meeting attended by customs administrators from 21 countries of the Asia-Pacific region and by representatives of INTERPOL.

605. In February 2020, the high-level National Conference on Combating Drug Trafficking and Abuse of Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation⁷¹ was held in New Delhi. UNODC was invited to convene a special session on interdictions related to drug trafficking involving the darknet and postal and courier services.

606. In May 2020, the UNODC Regional Office for South Asia organized an online training session for doctors and technical staff from Bangladesh and India on preventing and responding to drug overdose.

3. National legislation, policy and action

607. Addressing challenges in the prison sector in Sri Lanka, UNODC provided materials to support the refurbishment of a specialized voluntary drug rehabilitation centre designed to reduce concentration in the overall prison population. On 26 June 2020, the UNODC Regional Office for South Asia participated in an event to mark the launch of the Nawadiganthaya drug treatment facility in Colombo, which was also attended by high-level representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the National Dangerous Drugs Control Board, the Sri Lanka Navy, the Sri Lanka Police and the State Intelligence Service.

608. Also on 26 June 2020 (International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking), the Ministry of Social

⁷¹The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation is a regional organization comprising seven member States located in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal. Five member States (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) are located in South Asia and two (Myanmar and Thailand) are located in South-East Asia. The Initiative provides a communication platform for countries in South and South-East Asia and enables the sharing of information and techniques to counter the drug problem affecting countries of those regions.

Justice and Empowerment of India launched a campaign called “*Nasha Mukta Bharat*” (Addiction-free India). The campaign was aimed at providing information regarding drug use and related problems across the 272 districts of India that had been identified by the Narcotics Control Bureau of India, on the basis of the findings of the most recent national survey on substance use, as the districts most affected by drug use.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

609. Methamphetamine remains the main drug of concern in many countries in the region. In 2020, Bangladesh continued to see significant seizures of “Yaba” tablets, which are a mix of methamphetamine and caffeine and come in different flavours and colours, despite a ban on pseudoephedrine, the main substance used to manufacture them, being in place since 2017. According to UNODC, the average annual quantity of amphetamine-type stimulants, mainly methamphetamines, seized in South Asia during the period 2014–2018 was 2 tons.

610. South Asia, in particular, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka, has seen an increase in the number of seizures and the amount of heroin seized owing to the growing use by drug traffickers of the southern route, which goes from Afghanistan, through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan and then by sea or air either directly to Europe or through South Asia, Africa and/or the Gulf States: 218 kg of heroin were seized along the western coast of India in May 2019; 155 kg were seized in Sri Lanka in July and August 2019; 70 kg were seized in Maldives in October 2019; and 224 kg were seized in Sri Lanka in November 2019. All of those seizures were made on boats, some of which were on their way from Pakistan, as part of maritime operations that were largely joint operations by law enforcement agencies of India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. During the reporting period, a considerable increase in maritime trafficking in heroin was reported by South Asian countries.

611. Law enforcement authorities in India seized more than 3,212 kg of heroin in 2019, mostly in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, along the southern route. Areas close to the international borders in the north-western and north-eastern parts of India have reported a far higher prevalence of heroin use than the national average.

612. Another concerning trend in the reporting period was the increase in trafficking in heroin from Myanmar to India. In March 2019, 44.5 kg heroin sourced from

Myanmar was seized in Delhi and, in April 2019, 50 kg of heroin, also sourced from Myanmar, was seized in Delhi.

613. Trafficking in methamphetamine tablets from Myanmar to Bangladesh and India was reported during 2019. In September 2019, the Indian Coast Guard intercepted a boat in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands that had come from Myanmar and had 1.1 tons of methamphetamine onboard. Another seizure of 370 kg of methamphetamine and ketamine took place in December 2019 in the same area, from a boat also coming from Myanmar. Methamphetamine precursor trafficking flows from India into Myanmar have also been reported. In June 2020, about 78 kg of crystalline methamphetamine washed ashore in the State of Tamil Nadu, in southern India. The methamphetamine in its crystalline form had been concealed in packaging bearing the label of a Chinese tea brand and sealed inside a drum.

614. A large amount of methamphetamine originating in Myanmar was seized in Bangladesh during 2019, by virtue of the two countries being neighbours and the regular movement across their shared border. According to the Government of Myanmar, about one third of all methamphetamine tablets seized in 2019 were found in Rakhine State, indicating large flows of the drug from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

615. Recent ketamine manufacturing and trafficking cases indicate that Indian drug trafficking organizations may be playing an increasingly large role in the ketamine market in the East and South-East Asian regions. For instance, in June 2020, Indian authorities dismantled a synthetic drug laboratory in Chennai and seized about 110 kg of ketamine destined for Malaysia, together with 55.5 kg of pseudoephedrine.

616. The greater use of land routes and improved connectivity between Myanmar and north-east India has led to a rise in methamphetamine trafficking in the region. Indian police reported a seizure of 3.9 million tablets in February 2020. In February 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs reported increased use of digital platforms and darknet markets. Through further investigations following the seizure of 55 kg of cocaine, which had been trafficked to Australia concealed in a plasma cutting machine shipped from India, Australian authorities were able to seize another 200 kg of methamphetamine in Australia and Indian authorities were able to seize 20 kg of cocaine in India.

617. In 2019, in India, a total of 3,212 kg of heroin was seized, compared with 1,258 kg in 2018. Similarly, in 2019, the total amount of opium seized was 4,542 kg, which was marginally more than the 4,307 kg recorded

in 2018. In addition, an increase in the amount of cocaine seized, from 35 kg in 2018 to 62 kg in 2019, was recorded.

618. In 2019, 70 kg of heroin were seized from a vessel inside the Maldives exclusive economic zone during a controlled delivery operation. In March 2020, the Maldives Police Service seized 61.06 kg of heroin and arrested 11 Maldivians during one operation. Heroin worth approximately 72 million rufiyaa (\$466,900) was confiscated from a fishing vessel docked at Male in March 2020.

619. In Sri Lanka, 7,071 kg of cannabis herb, 15.16 kg of cannabis resin, 1,741 kg of heroin, 10.84 kg of cocaine and 35.45 kg of methamphetamine were seized in 2019. The total number of persons arrested for drug-related crimes was 89,321 in the same year. Of those, 45,923 persons (51.41 per cent) were detained for cannabis possession, 40,970 persons (45.87 per cent) for crimes related to heroin possession and trafficking and 2,073 persons (2.32 per cent) for methamphetamine trafficking. The amount of drugs seized between 1 November 2019 and 30 June 2020, as reported by different law enforcement agencies in Sri Lanka, totalled 1,713 kg of heroin, 7,088.7 kg of cannabis, 1,389 kg of cocaine, 2,295 kg of cannabis resin and 775.2 kg of synthetic drugs (in capsule and tablet form).

620. During the 12-month reporting period 2019/20, seven export consignments, including 20.8 million tablets of tramadol, an opioid analgesic not under international control (equivalent to 2,980 kg of tramadol base), in four consignments were stopped by Indian authorities following the identification of forged import certificates.

621. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in South Asia can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

5. Prevention and treatment

622. Approximately 20 per cent of the world's population aged 15–64 live in South Asia and the region accounts for more than one third of the estimated number of opioid users worldwide. According to UNODC, in South Asia, among the population aged 15–64, the average annual prevalence in 2018 was 2.82 per cent for cannabis use, 2.04 per cent for opioid use, 0.1 per cent for cocaine use and 0.18 per cent for amphetamine and pharmaceutical stimulant use.

623. South Asian countries have also seen an increase in the use of inhalants among street children. This is a particularly concerning trend as abusing inhalants or other solvents in early stages of life increases vulnerability to the use of other illicit drugs later in life. As shown in the 2019 national survey on substance use in India, inhalants were the only category of substances for which the prevalence of current use among children and adolescents (1.17 per cent) was higher than that for adults (0.58 per cent). At the national level, an estimated 460,000 children and about 1.8 million adults need support for inhalant use disorders. Similar problems have been reported in Bangladesh and Nepal. In Bhutan, the use of solvents, particularly among school children, has been on the rise.

624. In South Asia, health systems and providers of substance use disorder treatment face challenges posed by the emergence of new drugs and polydrug use, for which treatment is not always readily available. Furthermore, there are difficulties in tackling comorbidities, such as HIV and hepatitis C, associated with drug use. The most noteworthy development in terms of data on drug use prevalence in South Asia during the reporting period was the publication of the results of the 2019 national survey on substance use in India. The survey was a combination of household sampling and respondent-driven sampling and had over 500,000 respondents from all states in the country. The survey found that there were 31 million cannabis users in the country among those aged 10–75, which translates into an annual prevalence of 2.83 per cent. The number of opiate users in that age group was reported to be 23 million (annual prevalence of 2.1 per cent). However, “problem use” was associated with opiates (7.7 million persons) more than cannabis (7.2 million persons).

625. India has a multipronged National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction. During the 12-month reporting period 2019/20, India conducted more than 1,300 awareness-raising programmes for 150,000 young people and conducted capacity-enhancement programmes for more than 1,500 specialized staff. School-based interventions, under the name “*Navchetna*”, or “New Awakening”, with a primary role given to teachers, peers and parents, were also created.

626. In Sri Lanka, the total number of reported drug users who received treatment in 2019 was 70,862; 2,497 people received treatment for cannabis use disorder and 2,769 people received treatment for opioid use disorder. During the reporting period, 869 beds were available in inpatient treatment facilities in Sri Lanka.

627. Also in Sri Lanka, cannabis use among youths increased during the reporting period. An estimated total of 301,898 Sri Lankans are registered as cannabis users. Cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug, with an annual prevalence of 1.9 per cent among the total population aged over 14. In Sri Lanka, an estimated 92,540 persons, or 0.6 per cent of the population aged over 14, are heroin users. Of those, 70,862 persons, or 77 per cent, are regular heroin users. The prevalence of heroin use among males aged over 14 is estimated at 1.2 per cent. A total estimated 178,643 persons are regular cannabis users and the total number of persons who received treatment for cannabis use in the country in 2019 was 3,613, a 19 per cent decrease compared with 2018. Of the total number of those with drug use disorders in the country, 19 per cent were living in prison settings.

628. Initial data from the latest drug use survey in Nepal, launched in June 2020, showed that the average age of first use of inhalants in Nepal was below 19. In Nepal, the number of people receiving drug treatment for opioid use disorder increased from 902 in February 2020 to 936 in April 2020.

629. On 26 June 2020 (International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking), the Government of Maldives confirmed its decision to return to providing opioid substitution therapy with methadone in its State-run rehabilitation programmes, after a gap of almost three years.

630. In 2019 and 2020, UNODC successfully implemented the universal family skills training programme in Bangladesh. The main objective of the programme is to decrease the risk of drug use and other negative health and social outcomes among young people through evidence-based prevention focused on improving family functioning, bonding and communication. The programme reached and benefited 80 families and 83 adolescents in Bangladesh. UNODC-trained facilitators presented a report on the implementation of the initiative, in the presence of the Education Minister and senior officials from the Ministry of Education, in Dhaka on 1 January 2020.

631. The non-medical use of tramadol has been reported by Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, about 0.2 per cent of the population aged 14 and older are estimated to have misused pharmaceutical preparations in the past year. The non-medical use of tramadol is the most common, although the misuse of morphine has also been reported. The Board notes the growing problem of methamphetamine trafficking and use and the increased use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the region. A central component in the design of effective

prevention and treatment programmes throughout South Asia remains the collection of drug-related data by centralized agencies mandated to assess that information. Although the amount and quality of information regarding drug use patterns in the region have greatly improved, more research on consumption patterns and trends is needed to tailor treatment initiatives to local needs. The Board reiterates the need for capacity-building in the field of treatment and rehabilitation of people with drug use disorders in the region.

West Asia

In Afghanistan, despite the decrease in the area under opium poppy cultivation in 2019, the production of opium in the country remained almost the same in 2019 as in 2018, with Afghanistan remaining the country in which the vast majority of the world's illicit opium poppy cultivation and opium production take place.

The measures introduced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting drug shortages on the illicit market reported in countries of South-West Asia may have resulted in increased consumption of harmful domestically produced substances and pharmaceutical drugs, and other more harmful patterns of drug use by people with drug use disorders.

1. Major developments

632. The area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan decreased for the second year in a row in 2019, declining by almost 47 per cent, from 263,000 ha in 2018 to 163,000 ha in 2019. However, UNODC has estimated that the production of opium in 2019 remained at almost the same level as in 2018, possibly owing to higher yields. The low price of opium during planting time was one of the main drivers of the decline in cultivation. Afghanistan has accounted for almost 84 per cent of global opium production over the past five years and, to date, there have been no indications of a reduction in the supply of heroin of Afghan origin to consumer markets globally. The Board notes with concern that continued large-scale opium poppy cultivation and opium production in Afghanistan, coupled with limited eradication efforts, further undermine the efforts of Afghanistan and its partners to promote peace, security and sustainable development in the country. The Board reiterates its call for further technical and financial assistance to address the drug control challenges in the country.

633. Trafficking in opiates has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic along the traditional northern, Balkan and southern routes, and the transportation of commercial goods is in many cases used as a cover-up for transporting opiates. However, air travel restrictions and border controls introduced as a result of the pandemic may have had a strong impact on heroin trafficking by land and air, with a shift towards increased trafficking using maritime transport.

634. The substantial increase in 2019 in trafficking in methamphetamine in Afghanistan, continuing an upward trend observed in the country since 2014 and potentially resulting from increased manufacture of the substance in Afghanistan, has become a matter of great concern to the countries of the region and the global community.

635. Afghanistan continued to be one of the main sources of cannabis resin globally; it was cited as a source of the substance by 19 per cent of the countries worldwide that reported seizures of cannabis resin in the period 2014–2018.

636. The Board reiterates its concern with regard to the trafficking in and manufacture of “captagon”⁷² affecting the countries of the Middle East, which are not only destination markets for that substance, but are also increasingly becoming a source for it.

637. Central Asian countries continued to report an increase in trafficking in synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances, which are increasingly sold online or through social media platforms.

638. The Board shares the concern raised by others that the measures introduced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting drug shortages on the illicit market reported in countries of South-West Asia, including shortages of illicitly manufactured heroin, may have resulted in an increase in the consumption of harmful domestically produced substances and pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and/or psychotropic substances, and other harmful patterns of drug use.

⁷²Captagon was originally the official trade name for a pharmaceutical preparation containing the substance fenethylamine, a synthetic stimulant. As encountered in seizures across West Asia today and referred to in the present report, “captagon”, is a falsified drug compressed into pills or tablets that are similar in appearance but distinct from the earlier pharmaceutical preparation Captagon. The active ingredient in counterfeit “captagon” is amphetamine, which is typically cut with multiple adulterants, such as caffeine.

2. Regional cooperation

639. In line with the Anti-Drug Strategy for 2018–2023 of SCO and the programme of action to implement the Strategy, an international counter-narcotics operation named Web was conducted in SCO member States (China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) in July 2019. The operation, which was coordinated by staff based at CARICC in Almaty, Kazakhstan, was aimed at suppressing the channels of supply and distribution of new psychoactive substances and synthetic and other drugs, including those involving the use of the Internet and electronic payment systems. Representatives of counter-narcotics agencies, internal affairs and public security bodies, national security agencies, and customs and border services of the SCO member States, as well as an SCO observer State (Afghanistan) and international organizations (UNODC and CARICC) contributed to the conduct of the operation.

640. In accordance with the plan for the main organizational activities for 2019 of the Coordination Council of Heads of Competent Authorities for Countering Drug Trafficking of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, in cooperation with the CSTO secretariat, conducted a subregional counter-narcotics operation named Channel-Caucasus Redoubt in September 2019, during which 18 tons of drugs were seized.

641. In addition, in August 2019 in Balykchy, Kyrgyzstan, special units of the anti-drug agencies of CSTO member States conducted a tactical exercise named Thunder-2019 to identify and investigate transnational criminal groups; seize and destroy places of storage, production and packaging of drugs; and destroy drug laboratories.

3. National legislation, policy and action

642. On 26 February 2020, the Parliament of Uzbekistan adopted amendments to the Law on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1999 permitting legal entities with a relevant licence to cultivate and trade in cannabis for industrial purposes. In accordance with the amendments, cannabis may be grown, processed and sold only for industrial purposes that are not related to the production or manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Another condition set out in the legislation is the THC content of the varieties of cultivated cannabis, which should not exceed 0.2 per cent. The varieties of cannabis permitted for cultivation by legal entities are to

be determined by the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan. Prior to the adoption of the amendments, section 6 of the Act on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances had provided for the maintenance of a State monopoly over cultivation and other activities involving plants containing narcotic drugs, which could be undertaken only for scientific purposes.

643. On 3 October 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan adopted a resolution aimed at improving measures to prevent, diagnose and treat diseases related to drug use, strengthening the material, technical and human capacities of drug treatment services and enhancing the effectiveness of the work of drug treatment institutions. In the resolution, the Cabinet of Ministers provided for the construction and renovation of buildings and premises, the provision of medical equipment, tools and other inventory for those institutions, the introduction of modern methods and technologies for prevention, diagnosis and treatment, and related scientific research.

644. On 21 April 2020, the Parliament of Lebanon adopted a law allowing for the cultivation of, trade in, study and use of cannabis for medical purposes. The law allows for the cultivation of cannabis with a maximum THC content of 1 per cent. In addition, it provides for the establishment of an authority for managing the cannabis industry, namely, the Regulatory Authority for the Cultivation of Cannabis Plants for Medical and Industrial Use, and for a committee responsible for the review of licensing applications and compliance with the law and for developing instructions issued by the Regulatory Authority.

645. In December 2019, the mini-Dublin Group for Afghanistan, which is dedicated to the fight against drug trafficking, held a meeting that was hosted by the French Embassy in Kabul and was attended by the acting Interior Minister of Afghanistan, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, and representatives of 19 countries and organizations, including the European Union, NATO and UNODC. In their statement, the members of the mini-Dublin Group reiterated that they remained committed to continuing to work in close cooperation with the Afghan authorities and would take actions to enhance the effectiveness of the fight against drugs.

646. One of the factors defining the situation with regard to drugs in Kazakhstan is the influx of new types of synthetic drugs into the illicit drug market. Legislative amendments were adopted in 2019 to improve State control over the circulation of new psychoactive substances and counter trafficking therein. As a result of the

amendments, the Government is now empowered to approve the list of controlled substances and to determine the threshold quantities that define criminal liability. Previously, any changes to that list and the threshold quantities of drugs could be introduced only through a legislative process. In July 2019, the Government adopted a resolution in which it approved the updated list of narcotic drugs, thereby increasing the number of controlled synthetic drugs in the country, including fentanyl and its possible analogues. The measures adopted also allowed for the rapid inclusion of new types of drugs in the list and the timely establishment of State control over them.

647. During the reporting period, Kazakhstan introduced amendments to its Criminal Code to classify the sale of and inducement to use drugs over the Internet and other electronic information resources as particularly serious offences. Criminal liability for the sale of drugs in public places by an official misusing his or her official position was increased, the advertising and promotion of drugs was introduced as a new category of crime and the definitions of drug advertising and drug promotion were amended in the legislation in order to exclude unintentional acts.

648. Kyrgyzstan reported that it was currently developing a new draft law on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their analogues and precursors. In addition, measures were being taken to update the existing national Anti-Drug Programme, including by developing an action plan for the coming five-year period.

649. To prevent violations of its rules on the legal circulation of controlled substances, the Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan held seminars in Dushanbe and in the country's regions for employees of State agencies, organizations, institutions and enterprises whose activities were related to the legal circulation of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors. Participants in the seminars discussed the requirements of the legislative framework of Tajikistan regarding licit drug control in the country.

650. To address problems relating to the availability of and access to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and to ensure that sufficient stocks are available in the case of a complete closure of its borders in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population of Tajikistan officially applied for permission from the Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan to import such drugs and substances by air. In 2019, the Islamic Republic of Iran launched several drug control strategy documents, including the "Comprehensive document to combat the drug supply" and the "Comprehensive

document to adopt a community-based approach", which served as strategic and scientific road maps to counter the illicit use of drugs and psychotropic substances.

651. With a view to addressing the increasing challenges of trafficking in and consumption of new psychoactive substances, in 2019, Turkey placed 69 such substances under national control.

652. From 2 to 4 December 2019, as part of the INCB Learning project, specialized training on the requirements of the three international drug control conventions relating to the regulatory control and monitoring of the licit trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals was provided in Moscow to 38 drug control officials from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The participants also received hands-on training on the Board's global online tools, including I2ES, the PEN Online system, PICS and IONICS. These systems are available free of charge to Member States.

653. Following the aforementioned training, on 5 December 2019, the INCB Learning project held an awareness-raising workshop on the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. The event was co-organized with and hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and brought together participants from national authorities, international organizations and civil society to discuss the importance of ensuring access to medicines containing internationally controlled substances.

654. Initiated by UNODC, a meeting of experts from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was held in Vienna on 29 and 30 January 2020. The meeting was attended by independent scientific experts and by representatives of CARICC and UNODC. The participants discussed the current drug situation and recent trends in opiate trafficking along the northern route. In addition, concern was raised about increased trafficking in synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances in CARICC member States.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

655. According to UNODC, the area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan decreased for the second year in a row in 2019, declining by almost 47 per cent in 2019 compared with 2018. Despite that decline, UNODC has estimated that the production of opium in 2019

amounted to 6,400 tons, almost the same amount as reported in 2018. That could be explained by the higher yields reported in the main opium-producing provinces in Afghanistan, which were attributed to favourable weather conditions. The low price of opium during planting time was one of the main drivers of the reduction in cultivation. In the main opium production areas in Afghanistan, the price of opium declined by an average of 37 per cent in 2018 and 24 per cent in 2019. Prices for high-quality heroin also declined in those areas, by 11 per cent in 2018 and 27 per cent in 2019.

656. Afghanistan has accounted for about 84 per cent of global opium production (global opium production was estimated at approximately 7,610 tons in 2019) over the past five years, supplying illicit drug markets in neighbouring countries, in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and Africa, and to a limited extent in North America and Oceania. To date, there has been no indication of a reduction in the supply of heroin to consumer markets globally, despite a decrease in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

657. According to UNODC, the key months for the opium poppy harvest in Afghanistan are March to June; the 2020 opium poppy harvest was thus under way during the COVID-19 crisis. This suggests that the opium harvest would be affected if the labour force needed for harvesting was not able or willing to travel to the areas where opium poppy is grown in the country owing to mobility restrictions imposed by the Government or non-State actors, or to the spread of COVID-19 itself. A shortage of opium poppy lancers has been observed in the western and southern provinces of the country, mainly attributed to the closure of a border crossing with Pakistan. However, women in opium poppy-growing households and persons who lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic appear to be increasingly engaged in the opium poppy-lancing process.

658. The largest quantities of opiates seized globally in 2018 were seized in Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, which together accounted for 98 per cent of opium seized globally, 97 per cent of morphine and 38 per cent of heroin. In total, 690 tons of opium, 42 tons of morphine and 37 tons of heroin were seized in those three countries in 2018. The Islamic Republic of Iran accounted for more than half (53 per cent) of the amount of opiates seized globally, when defined in common heroin equivalents; it was followed by Afghanistan (12 per cent), Turkey (9 per cent) and Pakistan (5 per cent).

659. When the total amount of heroin and morphine seized in countries of Central Asia is combined with the

total amount of those substances seized in Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, the resulting total represents more than 56 per cent of the global combined quantity of heroin and morphine seized in 2018.

660. According to CARICC, the amount of heroin seized in the territories of its member States, namely, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, increased by 69.6 per cent in 2019, compared with 2018, whereas the amount of opium seized decreased by 41.3 per cent. In total, 5.7 tons of opiates were seized in 2019, compared with 5.3 tons in 2018. The amount of heroin seized increased most significantly in Kazakhstan, from 58.6 kg in 2018 to 1,522 kg in 2019. The amount of heroin seized also increased in Azerbaijan, by 73 per cent, and in Uzbekistan, by 98.5 per cent, in 2019, compared with 2018. In the other CARICC member States, decreases in the amounts of heroin seized ranged from 27 per cent to 39 per cent. In 2019, the amount of opium seized increased only in the Russian Federation, from 1.3 kg in 2018 to 7.6 kg in 2019, while the remaining CARICC member States observed decreases ranging from 12 per cent to 89 per cent.

661. Analysing the current and potential impact of COVID-19 on drug trafficking in and through the Central Asian region, the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan, CARICC noted that the closure of State borders and the resulting restrictions on the movement of people and goods had somewhat weakened the ability of transnational organized criminal groups to smuggle drugs and precursors, as well as cash proceeds from drug-related crimes, across borders. However, CARICC is of the view that further research on the topic is required, as, during the initial months of 2020, an increase in the amounts of drugs seized overall, including drugs originating in Afghanistan, in the entire CARICC region was observed, which may have been a result of an increase in measures to counter drug trafficking, including measures by States to control the movement of cargo at borders, and not necessarily a result of an increase in activities of organized criminal groups as such. Transnational drug-related criminal groups could also be exploiting deliveries of food supplies to the populations of those countries during the pandemic in order to traffic drugs.

662. CARICC observed that, although trafficking in heroin of Afghan origin to illicit markets in the Russian Federation and beyond via Central Asian States had become more challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk of opiate trafficking continued to exist, as commercial cargo and food products continued to be transported, albeit in accordance with certain additional sanitation requirements. That was evidenced by a number

of major seizures made in March 2020 in countries located at the beginning of the northern route and the beginning of a sub-branch of the Balkan route that passes from the Islamic Republic of Iran to the countries of the southern Caucasus and then onwards to Ukraine via the Black Sea into Eastern Europe. Two major seizures of drugs smuggled from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Azerbaijan were recorded in March 2020: more than 43 kg of heroin, 500 grams of opium, 1.6 kg of cannabis and 2 kg of methamphetamine were seized during the first operation, and a combined total of 61 kg of heroin, opium and cannabis were seized during the second. Two criminal gangs involved in trafficking in drugs from the Islamic Republic of Iran into Tajikistan were also identified in Afghanistan, resulting in seizures of 10 kg of methamphetamine and 2.11 kg of heroin. In addition, at the end of April 2020, 40 kg of heroin were seized from a criminal trafficking group that had smuggled the drugs by car from Armenia to Georgia with the intention of smuggling them onward into Europe.

663. During the pandemic, trafficking in heroin also continued along the main Balkan route, which runs from Afghanistan, through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey and the Balkan countries, towards destination markets in Western and Central Europe. Similar to the situation along the northern route, the transportation of commercial goods was, in many cases, used as a cover. EMCDDA reported that seizures of significant amounts of heroin had been made along the Balkan route despite the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, a joint operation between authorities in Bulgaria and Turkey led to the seizure of 72 kg of heroin in Bulgaria at the end of March 2020. In addition, several seizures of large amounts of heroin reported in Turkey in the first months of 2020 and a further two seizures of more than 100 kg each in eastern Turkey in late April 2020 suggest that opiates have continued to flow from Afghanistan to Turkey. Moreover, a joint police operation at the end of February 2020 between authorities of the Netherlands and Turkey led to several significant seizures of heroin, with a total of 2,384 kg seized across five countries (1,105 kg in Kazakhstan, 703 kg in Germany, 350 kg in Poland, 171 kg in the Netherlands and 55 kg in Turkey).

664. Although no conclusive evidence is yet available concerning the overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in opiates along the southern route, which is used for trafficking in opiates to Europe by means of shipments from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan by air or sea, either directly or transiting through Gulf States and East Africa, air travel restrictions introduced as a result of the pandemic may have had a significant impact on heroin trafficking by air. In addition,

a recent increase in seizures of heroin in the Indian Ocean could support the conclusion that traffickers are using maritime transport and routes increasingly frequently to traffic heroin to Europe, which would indicate a major shift in the trafficking strategies of organized criminal groups. A recent seizure of heroin in the port of Rotterdam also demonstrates that trafficking in heroin by means of maritime transport continued during the pandemic.

665. According to a preliminary analysis of available data, the volume of methamphetamine seized in Afghanistan substantially increased, from 182 kg in 2018 to 1,251 kg in 2019, which continued the upward trend observed since 2014. This emerging trend, possibly resulting from the increasing manufacture of methamphetamine in Afghanistan, is of great concern to the countries of the region and the global community. Rapid increases in recent years in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in Afghanistan have also been inferred by the substantial amounts of methamphetamine of Afghan origin seized by other countries. In particular, the Islamic Republic of Iran reported that most of the methamphetamine seized in its territory in 2018 had originated in Afghanistan. In addition, authorities in Sri Lanka expressed concern regarding an emerging trend whereby methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan was being trafficked along the already well-established southern route for heroin trafficking, after having seized at sea, in February 2020, 100 kg of crystalline methamphetamine, which they believed had originated in Afghanistan. According to UNODC, the extent of clandestine methamphetamine manufacture in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the bulk of methamphetamine continues to be seized, appears to be declining.

666. **The Board reiterates its concern with regard to trafficking in and production of falsified “captagon”, which continue to have a negative impact on the countries of the Middle East, which are not only destination markets for “captagon”, but are also increasingly becoming sources of the substance.** This can be explained in part by the continued political instability and unresolved conflicts in some parts of that subregion. In several notable seizures in the Middle East in 2019 and early 2020, “captagon” seized was believed to have been manufactured in Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic. During the first half of 2020, the Anti-Narcotics Department of Jordan seized 11.5 million “captagon” pills, with most of the seizures being made in the northern governorates of Jordan, near the border with the Syrian Arab Republic, or in the Governorate of Aqaba, near the borders with Israel and Saudi Arabia. In addition, from June 2019 to June 2020, 2.1 kg of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in four seizures in Amman. Between July 2019 and

June 2020, Lebanon seized about 1.8 million “captagon” pills and 2,990 “ecstasy” pills. Most of the seizures were accompanied by arrests of individuals from Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic. In one case, the “captagon” seized was destined for the Sudan, in another, for the United Kingdom, and in several other cases, for Saudi Arabia or other Gulf States. In June 2019, the Internal Security Forces of Lebanon dismantled a “captagon” smuggling network and arrested a prominent drug trafficker in the Bīqā’ Valley. He was suspected of smuggling large shipments of “captagon” to at least six countries (Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen). Kuwait and Oman also reported seizures of “captagon” pills during the first half of 2020. The countries of the subregion continued to face challenges related to trafficking in and use of tramadol, although official data in that regard remain scarce.

667. In July 2020, the police in Italy seized a record quantity of 14 tons of amphetamines, including more than 84 million “captagon” tablets with a value of over \$1 billion, which the authorities of Italy suspect were manufactured in the Syrian Arab Republic and destined for European markets, with the proceeds to be used for financing Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The tablets had been hidden in large paper and steel cylinders and transported to the port of Salerno in southern Italy, where they were seized by the police. According to the media statements of the Italian authorities, COVID-19 may have brought the manufacture and distribution of synthetic drugs in Europe to a halt, leading many traffickers to turn to the Syrian Arab Republic, where such manufacture does not seem to have been affected by the pandemic. Although it is too early to reach any definitive conclusions, restrictions on the movement of persons, goods and services across borders related to COVID-19 may have disrupted the supply of precursors used for the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs in the subregion, including in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

668. Turkey, which is on the route used for trafficking “captagon” to different parts of the Middle East and the Gulf States, reported that there had been a significant decrease in the amount of “captagon” seized in its territory in recent years. Cross-border operations and increased security measures to eliminate security threats to Turkey stemming from the civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic were believed to be the reasons for that decrease, which had led smugglers to opt for alternative routes. At the same time, Turkey, which has observed a continued increase in the amount of methamphetamine seized since 2016, saw a sharp increase (almost twofold) in the amount of the substance seized in 2019, compared with 2018. The largest

amount of methamphetamine seized ever in Turkey was in 2019; it totalled almost 1 ton. Experts in Turkey believe that the substance will become the biggest near-term threat to the country. Crystalline methamphetamine, which is the most common form of methamphetamine found in Turkey, is mainly seized in the regions bordering the Islamic Republic of Iran. Most of the methamphetamine seized in Turkey is believed to originate in the Islamic Republic of Iran and countries in Europe.

669. In 2019, in the territories of the CARICC member States, the total amount of cannabis and cannabis resin seized continued to represent the majority of overall drug seizures in terms of weight. Despite the travel restrictions and other protective measures implemented in CARICC member States as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, CARICC experts believe that cannabis and cannabis resin will continue to comprise the majority of the drugs seized in the region in 2020. Of a total of 66.3 tons of drugs seized in 2019, 55 tons were cannabis and cannabis resin. In 2018, about 52 tons of cannabis and cannabis resin were seized by CARICC member States. In Azerbaijan and Tajikistan in 2019, opiates accounted for the majority of seized drugs in terms of weight, while drugs of the cannabis group accounted for the majority in the other CARICC member States.

670. A total of 4.4 tons of cannabis resin were seized in CARICC member States in 2019, representing a 3.8 per cent decline compared with seizures in 2018. The amount of cannabis resin seized decreased significantly in Tajikistan, from 1.3 tons in 2018 to 608 kg in 2019. In 2019, seizures of cannabis resin also decreased in Azerbaijan (from 89 kg in 2018 to 23 kg in 2019), Kazakhstan (from 839 kg in 2018 to 709 kg in 2019) and Kyrgyzstan (from 205 kg in 2018 to 170 kg in 2019) but increased in Uzbekistan (from 61 kg in 2018 to 112 kg in 2019).

671. Among CARICC member States, seizures of cannabis decreased in 2019 in Kazakhstan (from 17 tons in 2018 to 9.6 tons in 2019), Kyrgyzstan (from 2.3 tons in 2018 to 1.3 tons in 2019) and Tajikistan (from 496 kg in 2018 to 60 kg in 2019) but increased in Azerbaijan (from 756 kg in 2018 to 822 kg in 2019) and Uzbekistan (from 600 kg in 2018 to 736 kg in 2019).

672. Afghanistan remains one of the main sources of cannabis resin globally, and was reportedly a source for cannabis resin in 19 per cent of the countries worldwide that reported seizures of cannabis resin in the period 2014–2018. Afghanistan is, in particular, the country of origin of cannabis bound for Central Asia, the southern Caucasus and Europe. Other countries reported as source countries were Lebanon and Pakistan. Cannabis resin

originating in the Bīqa' Valley of Lebanon is mainly found in the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, in Western and Central Europe.

673. The Islamic Republic of Iran reported that the cannabis resin seized in its territory originated mainly in Afghanistan and, to a lesser extent, in Pakistan. In 2018, about 65 per cent of the cannabis resin smuggled out of the Islamic Republic of Iran was destined for countries on the Arabian Peninsula and 15 per cent for the southern Caucasus. Twenty per cent of the cannabis seized in the Islamic Republic of Iran was intended for domestic consumption.

674. Turkey reported that, as a result of successful operations carried out by law enforcement units in the country in recent years, a significant decrease had been observed in the availability of cannabis within Turkey, with the exception of “skunk”, a highly potent form of cannabis. That development had led drug traffickers to start trafficking in “skunk” in order to meet domestic demand. The amount of smuggled “skunk” seized increased by approximately 14 times in 2019 compared with 2017 and by 1.5 times compared with 2018.

675. Central Asian States continued to report increases in trafficking in synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances, within their territories. From 21 October to 21 November 2019, the CARICC member States carried out an international operation, called Reflex-2019, aimed at countering the spread of new psychoactive substances and other synthetic drugs. As a result of the operation, a laboratory for the manufacture of synthetic drugs was dismantled and members of a transnational organized criminal group engaged in distributing new types of drugs over the Internet in the Central Asian subregion were arrested.

676. Tajikistan reported the emergence of new approaches to the sale of new psychoactive substances, including without hand-to-hand transfer by putting drugs in caches and effecting payment over the Internet. The assessment of Tajikistan is that, over the last two years, new psychoactive substances and other illicitly manufactured synthetic drugs have originated mainly in Europe, as well as in Afghanistan.

677. Kazakhstan reported that 2019 and the first three months of 2020 were characterized by a substantial increase in the proliferation of synthetic drugs. Since the beginning of 2019, Kazakhstan has recorded about 380 criminal offences related to trafficking in synthetic drugs in its territory, where nearly 40 kg of such substances have been seized, equivalent to 75,000 single doses. In 2019,

111 grams of fentanyl, 500 grams of MDMA and 6.9 kg of pyrovalerone were seized in Kazakhstan.

678. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in West Asia can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

5. Prevention and treatment

679. During the reporting period, with the support of the United Nations, the Drug Demand Reduction Department of the Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan opened five drug treatment centres in the country. The centres provide services for the prevention and treatment of drug use disorders among children and their families.

680. In 2019, the Islamic Republic of Iran continued to carry out a range of measures for the prevention and treatment of drug use disorders and the rehabilitation of people with such disorders. The Helping Hands project was implemented under the auspices of the Drug Control Headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the aim of creating and strengthening the sense of individual and social responsibility and participation in drug use prevention efforts. Under the project, various activities have been implemented, including cultural and sports events, seminars on the role of non-governmental organizations and vocational training programmes.

681. In Dushanbe in November 2019, UNODC, within the framework of its Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, and in recognition of World Children's Day, convened a three-day training workshop entitled "Treatment of children with drug use problems, with special attention to synthetic drugs". The workshop highlighted the importance of introducing scientific evidence-based interventions in relation to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. During the workshop, participants from Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan enhanced their knowledge of treatment for children with drug use disorders.

682. Also within the framework of the Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in December 2019, UNODC conducted a regional expert group meeting on sharing experiences in the implementation of the strengthening families programme and best practices in the prevention

of drug use among youth. Representatives from the law enforcement, education and health sectors in Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan discussed and shared experiences in programme delivery in relation to family and evidence-based interventions. The participants highlighted the need for data collection, monitoring and analysis relating to the implementation of evidence-based prevention interventions.

683. In February 2020, Uzbekistan conducted a month-long campaign focusing on drug prevention among youth. As part of the campaign, thematic sessions involving representatives of competent authorities, students and teachers were organized, sporting events under the motto "We Are Against Drugs!" were held, visual aids were published, awareness-raising videos and television programmes were broadcast and relevant articles were published in print media. During the campaign, representatives of the National Information-Analytical Centre on Drug Control and the Ministry of the Interior, together with regional drug control commissions, local bodies of the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education conducted more than 16,000 prevention interventions in educational institutions, covering more than 2.2 million people.

684. With the support of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, the Service for Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, together with Kyrgyz educational institutions, within the framework of a month-long campaign dedicated to the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, held competitions among schoolchildren on the theme "We are for a healthy Kyrgyzstan!". Because schools and higher educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan were closed in March 2020 in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, drug use prevention events have been held online since that time using social media networks.

685. According to UNODC, countries in South-West Asia have reported shortages of drugs on the illicit market attributed to the measures introduced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, including shortages of heroin at the retail level, which could potentially result in the increased consumption of harmful domestically produced substances, as well as more harmful patterns of drug use among people with drug use disorders.

686. The Central Asian subregion also witnessed impacts of COVID-19 on drug use patterns. For example, UNODC found that, in Uzbekistan, the use of pharmaceutical drugs had increased significantly. The subregion

also saw an increase in the use of homemade opium alkaloid, which is extracted from poppy seeds that are legally available and widely used by the food industry for decoration and flavouring. In general, as a result of the pandemic, drug users have actively sought alternatives, such as alcohol, pharmaceutical drugs, extracted opium and synthetic substances, to common illicit substances.

687. According to UNODC, the COVID-19 pandemic and related response measures in Central Asia have resulted in changes in the patterns of acquisition of illicit substances. The Internet and related technologies, including messaging platforms and e-wallets, have been used increasingly frequently to purchase psychoactive substances. An increase in drug prices has led drug users to join groups to purchase such substances. There has also been an increase in the frequency of illicit drug use at home, potentially provoking serious conflicts within families. However, UNODC has reported that some people who use substances have reduced such use out of fear that their family and friends might become aware of it.

688. Possibly as a result of significant reductions in the supply of drugs that have traditionally been commonly used in Central Asia, as well as reductions in their purity and increased costs, countries in Central Asia have witnessed an increase in the demand for treatment. At the same time, measures related to COVID-19, such as restrictions on movement, the repurposing of beds in drug use treatment facilities and the limitation of hospital admissions to emergency cases, have resulted in limited availability of treatment options for drug users. There have also been reductions in the range of services provided in the context of drug treatment and programmes to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use, and an increase in online counselling services. These challenges have resulted in increased demand for the training of relevant staff in the provision of online drug-related services and, owing to the increased prevalence of synthetic drug use disorders, for medical and non-medical interventions to treat those who use synthetic drugs.

689. In 2019, a downward trend in the number of people registered with drug treatment facilities continued in almost all CARICC member States, except Azerbaijan. The number in Kazakhstan decreased by 12 per cent (from 22,748 persons in 2018 to 20,003 in 2019), in Kyrgyzstan by 1.4 per cent (from 8,564 in 2018 to 8,448 in 2019), in Tajikistan by 11.3 per cent (6,059 in 2018 to 5,375 in 2019) and in Uzbekistan by 7.2 per cent (6,142 in 2018 to 5,698 in 2019). In that same year, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan reported a decrease in the number of newly registered drug-dependent persons in

comparison with the previous year, while Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan reported increases.

690. Tajikistan reported that about 55 per cent of the registered drug-dependent persons in the country were injecting drug users. The number of drug-dependent persons in Tajikistan has been decreasing in recent years.

691. A similar decreasing trend in the number of injecting drug users was observed in Uzbekistan. Among the registered drug users in the country, persons dependent on cannabinoids represented the largest group (3,982 persons, or 69.9 per cent of registered drug users in 2019, and 4,169 persons, or 67.9 per cent of registered drug users in 2018); the number of those who were dependent on opiates amounted to 1,418 persons, or 24.9 per cent of registered drug users in 2019, and 1,684 persons, or 27.4 per cent of registered drug users in 2018. The number of heroin users decreased by 1.8 times and amounted to 536 persons in 2019, compared with 979 persons in 2018, and represented 9.4 per cent of the total number of registered drug users in 2019, compared with 15.9 per cent in 2018. Uzbekistan also reported an increase in recent years in the consumption of synthetic cannabinoids and pharmaceutical preparations containing opioids.

692. Turkey reported its serious concern about the increasing use of new psychoactive substances, in particular among youth in recent years, and tackling that emerging threat has become one of the priority areas in the country's national efforts to combat the drug problem. Turkey also noted the increased use of the Internet for the commission of drug-related crimes.

693. UNODC found that the subregional prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs continued to be the highest by far in South-West Asia (29.5 per cent). In South-West Asia and the Middle East, the past-year prevalence of opiate use, amounting to 1.8 per cent, was higher than the global average of 0.6 per cent.

694. The use of methamphetamine in Afghanistan appears to be increasing and, similarly to the situation observed in the Islamic Republic of Iran, methamphetamine is frequently used in Afghanistan concurrently with opiates in order to mitigate the negative side effects of opiate use.

695. Iraq has witnessed an increase in the use of crystalline methamphetamine in recent years, in particular in the Province of Basrah. The types of drugs most used in Iraq are amphetamine-type stimulants, with methamphetamine (32 per cent of all amphetamine-type stimulants) and fenethylamine (14 per cent) being the most

prevalent. Several reasons have been identified for the prevalence of drug use in Iraq, among which are the psychological pressures and severe stress suffered as a result of security threats and the unstable social and economic conditions facing the Iraqi population.

696. Trafficking in and use of tramadol, an opioid analgesic not under international control, continued to occur in the State of Palestine, especially in Gaza, in addition to trafficking in and use of synthetic opioids on the West Bank. To address those challenges, the Palestine National Rehabilitation Centre for drug users was established in 2019. The Centre provided services to about 260 drug users during the reporting period. UNODC continued to support the work of the Centre, including through the provision of training. In addition, UNODC continued to support the Opioid Substitution Treatment Centre, opened in 2015, which currently serves about 230 drug users in community and closed settings.

697. In February 2020, the President of Afghanistan convened and chaired the first meeting of the High Commission for Counter-Narcotics and Intoxicants. During the meeting, the President identified action against drug trafficking and use as one of the five priorities of his Government, emphasizing the need for synergies to be developed among the health, justice and security sectors. The need for greater regional cooperation was also highlighted during the meeting.

E. Europe

Several countries in Europe took steps towards the legalization of the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes, in contravention of the provisions of the international drug control treaties.

Evidence points to synthetic drug manufacture taking place increasingly in Eastern Europe, with both small- and large-scale operations dismantled in several countries.

A rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 indicated increasing use of the Internet and the darknet to illicitly buy drugs. It also indicated lower availability of treatment services for persons using drugs within the region; those services were subsequently partly supplemented by telemedicine and other innovative treatment service models.

1. Major developments

698. The Netherlands is in the process of launching its four-year trial programme for the production and distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes in the country by adopting relevant domestic legislation, thereby becoming the first European country to legalize, on a temporary basis, the cultivation and sale of an internationally controlled narcotic drug for non-medical purposes in parts of its territory. Switzerland approved a long-term study to examine the possible effects of introducing a similar approach. Luxembourg continued to work on draft legislation to the same effect.

699. Beyond the traditional origin countries for amphetamine-type stimulants in Northern and Western Europe, countries in Eastern Europe are increasingly detecting illicit synthetic drug manufacture in their territories. Ukraine disrupted half a dozen sizeable illicit drug manufacturing operations in 2019, among them two large-scale methamphetamine manufacturing sites and trafficking networks. Belarus detected four small-scale clandestine laboratories, while the Russian Federation eliminated a few small- to medium-scale methamphetamine manufacturing sites and discovered numerous others, involving a variety of end products such as mephedrone, methadone and *alpha*-pyrrolidinovalerophenone (α -PVP). Cyprus dismantled a clandestine methamphetamine laboratory for the first time in 2020.

700. Based on data gathered through an online survey and intelligence received from law enforcement authorities, EMCDDA and Europol produced a joint paper containing a rapid assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the drug market in the European Union, entitled “EU drug markets: impact of COVID-19”. Travel restrictions and other social-distancing measures seemed to have resulted in shortages of and higher prices (mostly noted at the retail level) for some drugs. Trafficking activities related to the wholesale supply of drugs, however, did not seem to have been interrupted. Adaptations made by organized criminal groups to ensure uninterrupted supply encouraged the growth of online drug dealing through encrypted communications, posing additional challenges for law enforcement entities.

2. Regional cooperation

701. The European Commission adopted the European Union Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs for the period 2021–2025 on 24 July 2020, in which the political framework and priorities for action for the coming five years are set out. Eight strategic priorities are outlined, under