

providers carefully consider the risk-benefit ratio, safety, adverse drug reactions and the simultaneous use of other drugs before prescribing any medications containing benzodiazepines to older patients. Guidelines for clinical care and training should be made available to health-care providers, in particular in nursing homes and geriatric care facilities. Other measures may involve raising awareness of the risks associated with inappropriate use of benzodiazepines, targeting, in particular, family members of elderly patients, their caregivers, nursing staff and employees at residential facilities for the elderly.

3. New psychoactive substances

286. New psychoactive substances are a very heterogeneous group of substances that, in different forms, continues to grow in every region of the world. As at October 2015, the UNODC early warning advisory on new psychoactive substances, which monitors the emergence of new psychoactive substances as reported by Member States, had identified 602 unique substances, a 55 per cent increase from the 388 substances reported in October 2014.

287. As in the past, the most reported substances continued to be synthetic cannabinoids, which accounted for nearly 40 per cent of all the substances reported, and phenethylamines and synthetic cathinones, which together accounted for about one third of all substances. While the number of new psychoactive substances continues to grow, not all those substances become established substances of abuse. In fact, many may be encountered only once.

288. The definition of “new psychoactive substances” used for the purposes of the early warning advisory encompasses both synthetic and plant-based substances (such as khat (*Catha edulis*), kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*) and *Salvia divinorum*), as well as substances with established medical uses (e.g., ketamine). What all new psychoactive substances have in common is not necessarily that they have recently been invented but that they have recently emerged on the market and have not been scheduled under the international drug control conventions.

289. INCB uses the same definition, except that it focuses on synthetic substances of abuse with little or no known medical or industrial use. The Board believes that these substances pose particular challenges, given the various possible modifications that can be made to them to circumvent existing legislation and the lack of knowledge about their health effects.

290. In the light of the number and transient nature of many of the new psychoactive substances, as has been previously noted,²² INCB is providing Member States with the infrastructure, known as Project Ion (international operations on new psychoactive substances) for real-time information-sharing on incidents involving new psychoactive substances (e.g., suspicious shipments, trafficking, or manufacture or production, for any new psychoactive substance), as well as follow-up between authorities of the countries concerned with a view to assisting investigations and devising practical solutions aimed at preventing those substances from reaching consumer markets. The task force on new psychoactive substances, which steers Project Ion activities, held two meetings in 2015.

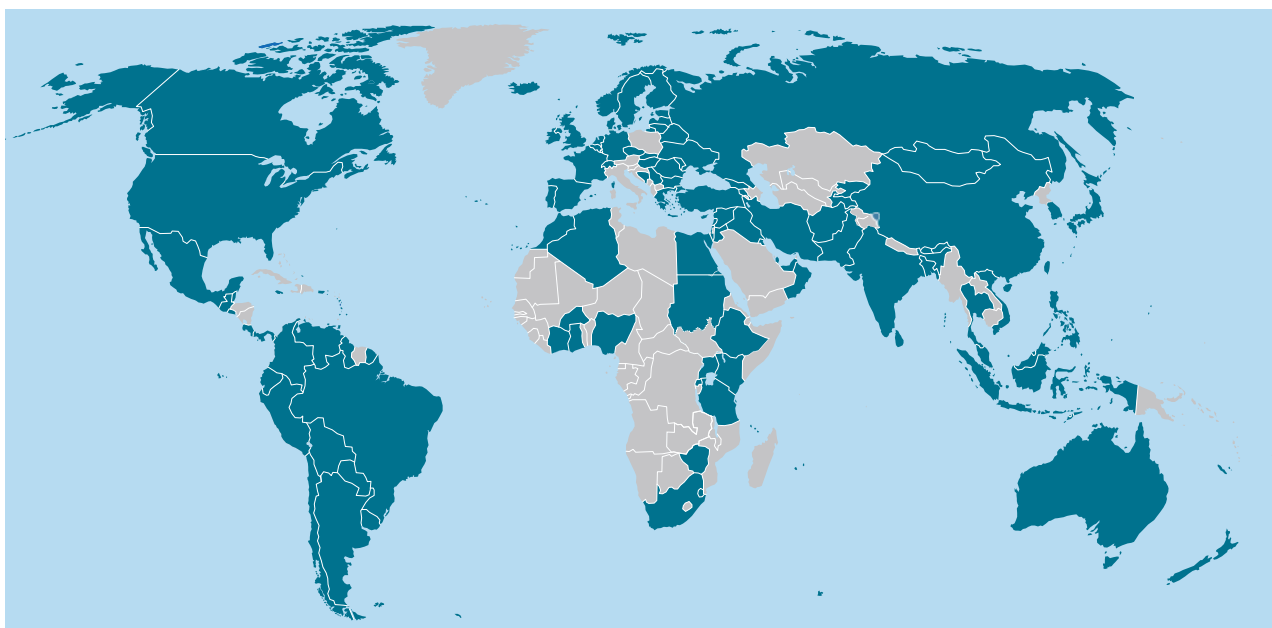
291. Since the Board’s annual report for 2014, the global focal point network on new psychoactive substances for Project Ion expanded to 120 countries, in every region of the world. A special operation, Operation Postman, conducted in March and April 2015, focused on postal and express courier shipments containing non-scheduled synthetic new psychoactive substances. Forty-one countries worldwide participated, resulting in the communication of nearly 200 individual incidents involving some 70 different new psychoactive substances.

292. In December 2014, the Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS) was launched, a secure platform dedicated to the real-time communication of incidents involving suspicious shipments, trafficking, manufacture or production of new psychoactive substances. After just under one year of operation, in November 2015, the system had more than 170 users from 60 countries in all regions of the world (see map below). There have been more than 500 incidents communicated in as little as two days after the incident occurred. The majority of incidents involved synthetic cathinones (e.g., methylone, mephedrone, MDPV, 3-methylmethcathinone (3-MMC)), synthetic cannabinoids (e.g., APINACA), and phenethylamines (e.g., 2C-I-NBOMe).²³ Information communicated through IONICS has triggered follow-up investigations in countries of destination that led to significant additional seizures of new psychoactive substances, seizures of money and arrests of distributors.

²² E/INCB/2014/1, paras. 248-256.

²³ The difference in order of classes of new psychoactive substances compared with the early warning advisory on new psychoactive substances is due to differences in the user bases and the purposes of the two systems, focusing on, respectively, unique substances (reported to early warning advisory) and individual new psychoactive substance incidents (communicated through IONICS).

Map of Project Ion focal point network, as at 1 November 2015



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

293. Other important developments since the last annual report of the Board were the decisions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, at its fifty-eighth session, upon the recommendations of the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence, placing 10 new psychoactive substances under international control, as follows: AH-7921, a synthetic opioid, was added to Schedule I of the 1961 Convention; 25B-NBOMe (2C-B-NBOMe), 25C-NBOMe (2C-C-NBOMe) and 25I-NBOMe (2C-I-NBOMe) were added to Schedule I of the 1971 Convention; and BZP, JWH-018, AM-2201, MDPV, mephedrone (4-methylmethcathinone) and methylone (*beta*-keto-MDMA) were added to Schedule II of the 1971 Convention. Decision 58/3, scheduling AH-7921 under the 1961 Convention, became effective on 8 May 2015, and the other nine decisions, all for substances scheduled under the 1971 Convention, became effective on 4 November 2015.

294. At its thirty-seventh meeting in November 2015, the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence reviewed, among other substances, MT-45, acetylfentanyl, *alpha*-pyrrolidinovalerophenone (*α*-PVP), 4-fluoroamphetamine (4-FA), *para*-methyl-4-methylaminorex (4,4'-DMAR), *para*-methoxymethylamphetamine (PMMA) and methoxetamine (MXE). The Expert Committee's recommendations will be transmitted to the Commission on

Narcotic Drugs, which will decide at its next session on the international scheduling of all or some of those substances. In that connection, the Board acknowledges the cooperation between WHO and UNODC to establish criteria for the prioritization of substances for the Expert Committee's review.

295. In addition to scheduling at the international level, countries also continue to bring new psychoactive substances under national controls. India, often cited as a source of new psychoactive substances, took the important step of controlling mephedrone and its salts and preparations under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, effective 5 February 2015. China had already taken steps to control several new psychoactive substances in January 2014; effective 1 October 2015, 116 substances were placed in a new list of "non-medical narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances". Additionally, since the Board's last report, Project Ion has received information on national controls of various new psychoactive substances in several countries, including Argentina, Armenia, Chile, Egypt, Mexico, Sweden, Turkey and Ukraine. The information was communicated to the Project Ion focal point network with a view to enabling operational cooperation in cases of shipments of a controlled new psychoactive substance known to have

originated in, or be destined for, one of the countries with newly enacted national legislation.

296. New psychoactive substances have also been the subject of an increasing number of meetings, conferences and symposiums in almost all regions of the world; however, effective strategies are still forthcoming. At the same time, the challenges posed by new psychoactive substances and the diversification of the market continue to grow, with a rising number of reports about the role of such substances in hospital emergencies and deaths, and other worrying developments such as the use of new psychoactive substances by injection.

297. At its fifty-eighth session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs adopted a resolution on promoting the protection of children and young people, with particular reference to the illicit sale and purchase of, among other substances, new psychoactive substances via the Internet (Commission resolution 58/3) and a resolution on

promoting international cooperation in responding to new psychoactive substances (Commission resolution 58/11). At a joint INCB/UNODC international conference on precursor chemicals and new psychoactive substances held in Bangkok on 21-24 April 2015, some 200 experts from 37 countries and 9 international organizations adopted an outcome document entitled "Proposed measures against the misuse of scheduled and non-scheduled precursors and new psychoactive substances".

298. INCB encourages all Governments to build on those and previous resolutions and recommendations, regional experiences and the experiences of individual Member States, and use the upcoming sessions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem to devise practical and realistic solutions to protect individuals and the public at large from the adverse consequences of using harmful new psychoactive substances belonging to a wide range of substance classes.