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## REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

### AFRICA

**Increase in drug use:** while Africa remains a key transit region for drug trafficking, the use of various types of drugs, including cocaine, opioids, amphetamine-type stimulants, tramadol and emerging new psychoactive substances, is growing.

**Abuse and trafficking of cannabis:** the illicit production of, trafficking in and abuse of cannabis in the African region are major concerns. While cannabis herb is illicitly cultivated in all subregions, illicit cannabis resin production remains limited to a few North African countries.

**Important transit region for traffickers:** Africa's relevance as a transit region for cocaine is growing. While in previous years West African countries played a vital role in the trafficking of cocaine, North African countries are increasingly being used for the transit of cocaine originating in South America destined mostly for Europe. Cocaine reaches Africa directly from South America, via the Sahel and West Africa or, to a lesser extent, via Europe. Opiates originating in Afghanistan are transited through Africa and trafficked onwards to Europe, North America and other regions.

**Improvement of drug dependence treatment services:** several African countries have improved their drug dependence treatment services. However, health-care systems in most countries lack the resources and capacity to determine the extent and patterns of drug use, or to offer adequate drug prevention and treatment services.

### AMERICAS

#### Central America and the Caribbean

**Cocaine trafficking worsening in the region:** in 2016, 76 per cent of the cocaine entering the United States from South America was trafficked through Central America and Mexico. The Dominican Republic was the primary trans-shipment point for cocaine trafficking in the Caribbean. Quantities seized have remained stable since 2015, with over 80 tons seized across the region.

**Governments in the region are strengthening cooperation** to combat cross-border crime, including drug trafficking. El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have formed the Tri-national Task Force to improve their cooperation efforts in this area.

**Cannabis reform in the Caribbean:** Saint Kitts and Nevis has established a commission to review the potential implications of decriminalizing cannabis. In Jamaica, the regulatory changes on the commercial production of cannabis are ongoing.



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**Significant data gaps in the region:** significant information gaps remain regarding the prevalence of drug use, making it difficult for Governments in the region to determine the extent of the problem and to formulate policy responses. INCB recommends that Governments produce and update prevalence studies and use the results to develop targeted drug demand reduction policies and programmes.

## North America

**Deadly opioid epidemic:** the sharp rise in opioid-related deaths is driven by the increasing presence of street drugs mixed with fentanyl. In the United States, the reported number of opioid overdose deaths in 2016 exceeded 64,000.

**Disproportionate number of overdoses among First Nations people in Canada:** in British Columbia, Canada, there was a 194 per cent increase in the number of fentanyl-related drug overdose deaths between 2015 and 2016. First Nations people were five times more likely to experience an overdose event. Ten per cent of all overdose deaths in the province were among members of the First Nations population.

**Legalization of non-medical cannabis:** the legalization of non-medical cannabis is anticipated in Canada in 2018, which may have a considerable impact on that country's treaty obligations. The Board reiterates that the non-medical use of controlled substances, including cannabis, contravenes a fundamental principle of the 1961 Convention, as amended, which allows no exceptions.

**Illicit cannabis use and cannabis use disorders:** research suggests that there is an associated increase in cannabis use and cannabis use disorders in jurisdictions where medical cannabis programmes are available. The United States National Institute on Drug Abuse has warned that easier access to the drug following the passage of medical cannabis laws at the state level could result in an additional 1.1 million adult illicit cannabis users and an additional 500,000 adults with a cannabis use disorder.

**Increase in accidental exposure to marijuana, particularly among children:** there has been an increase in the number of children accidentally exposed to cannabis since the legalization of "recreational" cannabis in some states of the United States of America. In Washington State, the Washington Poison Center reported that in 2016 they received an increased number of calls concerning accidental cannabis exposure and poisoning. The Center received 280 cannabis-related calls, with 49 of those calls concerning children under the age of six.

**Expanding heroin threat:** the increasing and widespread availability of heroin, its adulteration with fentanyl and its analogues, as well as the continued abuse of prescription drugs, remain major public health challenges in some countries in the region. Seizures of fentanyl, a significant contributor to the overdose death epidemic, by the United States Customs and Border Protection increased from just under 1 kg in 2013 to approximately 200 kg in 2016. Most of the heroin available in the United States comes from Mexico and Colombia, with opium poppy cultivation and heroin production in Mexico continuing to rise. Canada is typically at the end of the opiates and heroin trafficking routes from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, with seizures indicating South-West Asian origins.



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## South America

**Peace in Colombia:** the Government of Colombia signed a Peace Accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP). This should have an impact on illicit crop cultivation, which increased significantly between 2015 and 2016.

**Illicit coca bush cultivation on the rise:** Colombia's coca bush cultivation increased by over half to 146,000 ha in 2016 (from 96,000 ha in 2015). To monitor the implementation and effect of Colombia's national policy on illicit crop reduction and the national strategy on territorial and rural development, the Government of Colombia entered a historic multi-year project with the United Nations<sup>4</sup> valued at approximately US\$ 315 million. The initiative is a crucial part of the country's ongoing peacebuilding efforts and is envisioned to significantly curtail illicit coca bush cultivation.

**Bolivia adopts legislation permitting increased coca bush cultivation:** the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia adopted legislation in 2017 allowing it to cultivate up to 22,000 ha of coca bush for traditional purposes, which exceeds the area that, according to a 2013 Bolivian Government evaluation, was needed to meet traditional consumption.

**Uruguay initiated the sale of cannabis for non-medical use in pharmacies in July 2017** contrary to the country's obligations under the 1961 Convention, as amended. The Board has engaged the Government of Uruguay in an ongoing dialogue concerning this measure, which the Board repeatedly emphasized is incompatible with the provisions of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, to which Uruguay is a party.

**Medical use of cannabinoids:** Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru adopted measures that permit the regulation of products containing cannabinoids for medical purposes.

**Lowering perceptions of risk:** the availability of cannabis in the region continued to increase, which together with policies and legislative initiatives regulating cannabis for medical use in some States and non-medical use in others, have lowered people's perception of the risk associated with cannabis use. Cannabis continued to be the most widely available and commonly abused drug in the region.

## ASIA

### East and South-East Asia

**Illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and abuse of methamphetamine pose a significant drug threat:** an increasing number of source countries, more diversified trafficking routes and growing levels of methamphetamine abuse pose serious challenges to supply and demand reduction in the region.

**Illicit opium production and trafficking continue to be a concern:** illicit opium production shows no sign of regression in the Golden Triangle.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).



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**Emergence and increasing use of new psychoactive substances:** growing diversity and widespread use of new psychotropic substances call for countries in the region to pay greater attention to improved monitoring of trends and wider provision of treatment services.

## South Asia

**Drug seizures at a high in the region:** in India, the amount of amphetamine-type stimulants seized increased tenfold compared with the previous year. In November 2016, 23.5 tons of methaqualone were seized in India. In 2016, Bangladesh also reported one of the largest seizures of methamphetamine tablets ever made in that country. In addition, the region continued to be particularly vulnerable to trafficking in opiates, including heroin. The amount of heroin trafficked into Sri Lanka increased almost fivefold in 2016.

**Methamphetamine and the emergence of new psychoactive substances are major concerns:** increases in the illicit manufacture, and the trafficking and abuse of methamphetamine as well as the emergence of new psychoactive substances pose serious drug control and abuse challenges.

**Trafficking in and abuse of cannabis:** cannabis is one of the substances most cultivated, trafficked and abused in the region. Law enforcement agencies in India reported seizures of 100 tons of cannabis per year on average between 2013 and 2015. Trafficking in cannabis from Nepal to India continues to be a major concern.

## West Asia

**Afghanistan's illicit opium production and opium poppy cultivation hit a record high:** in 2017, opium production reached a record high of 9,000 metric tons, which is an 87 per cent increase compared with 2016, according to the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* released by UNODC and the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics on 15 November 2017. The area under opium poppy cultivation also increased substantially, by almost 63 per cent, reaching a record 328,000 ha in 2017.

**Volatility in the Near and Middle East leading to significant increase in drug trafficking and abuse:** reports of drug raids and arrests in Iraq indicate a growing drug problem in the country and, possibly, a shift towards illicit local drug production. In Lebanon, cannabis resin is being produced illicitly. There are indications of increased cocaine trafficking affecting Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates. With the protracted conflict, Yemen is witnessing increased trafficking in drugs.

**Counterfeit "captagon" continues to increase:** instability and conflict in the Middle East, as well as lack of controls, have resulted in an increase in the illicit manufacture of "captagon", which typically contains amphetamine. Several large seizures of "captagon" took place in the region or in transit to it in late 2016 and 2017.



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## EUROPE

**Drug trafficking generates the highest revenue in the European Union:** according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, in the European Union alone, the illicit drug market is estimated to generate approximately 24 billion euros in profit every year. More than a third of the criminal groups operating in the European Union engage in the illicit manufacture, trafficking and sale of drugs.

**Almost 1 per cent of adults in the European Union abuse cannabis on a daily or almost-daily basis:** it is estimated that over a quarter of the general population in the European Union have tried illicit drugs at least once in their lifetime. Cannabis abuse in the European Union is approximately five times higher than abuse of other drugs. Availability and abuse of high-potency “ecstasy” products and synthetic opioids continued to increase. Estimates suggest that over a quarter of the general population in the European Union aged between 15 and 64 years—more than 93 million people—have tried illicit drugs at least once in their lifetime.

**Cocaine is the second-most prevalent drug of abuse in the region:** according to recent surveys, the declining trend in cocaine abuse in the European Union that had been reported in previous years has discontinued.

**Most dynamic synthetic drug market:** Belgium and the Netherlands played a major role in the manufacture and distribution of MDMA and amphetamine. Methamphetamine manufacture has continued in Czechia, Slovakia and Poland. However, illicit methamphetamine manufacture has also started appearing in Bulgaria, Lithuania and the Netherlands, and may in future also emerge in other European Union countries.

**Not all new psychoactive substances remain in the abuse market:** while the number of identified new psychoactive substances (NPS) exceeded 620 by the end of 2016, not all detected NPS remain in the market at all times. However, highly potent new synthetic opioids, mostly fentanyl derivatives, have continued to increase since 2012.

**“Balkan route” dominating the Eastern European drug trafficking corridor:** opioid drugs are trafficked from their original production sites to countries in Central and Western Europe via the Balkan route.

**Overdose deaths rise in the European Union** for the third consecutive year, mainly related to the use of heroin and other opioids.



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## OCEANIA

**Pacific island countries and territories targeted by drug traffickers:** trafficking continues to make the region particularly vulnerable owing to poor adherence to the international drug control conventions and limited resources for monitoring and detecting drugs and precursors. Many countries in the region<sup>5</sup> are not yet party to one or more of the three international drug control conventions.

**Large-scale seizures made at sea:** drugs such as cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine are trafficked through the Pacific island region on recreational vessels such as yachts and commercial cruise ships.

**Growth in seizures at the Australian border:** the amount of new psychoactive substances seized at the Australian border almost quadrupled from 52.7 kg in the period 2014–2015 to 204.7 kg in the period 2015–2016.

**Methamphetamine seizures on the rise:** trafficking in methamphetamine and its precursor chemicals has increased in the Pacific region, with Pacific island countries and territories emerging as transit and destination points.

<sup>5</sup> In the Oceania region, seven countries are not party to the 1961 Convention, eight to the 1971 Convention and five to the 1988 Convention.