

D. Asia

East and South-East Asia

The expansion of illicit manufacture, trafficking and use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine, continued to be of major concern for East and South-East Asia.

1. Major developments

590. The expansion of illicit manufacture, trafficking and use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine, continued to be of great concern in most countries of East and South-East Asia. Effective border management and control over precursor chemicals have become particularly important for countering this phenomenon, given that the chemical industry has a substantial presence in the region and the increasingly improved infrastructure has further enhanced connectivity among countries.

591. In a region that has historically adopted drug control policies that relied heavily on deterrence through severe penal sanctions and compulsory treatment, some Governments are reviewing their drug policies, adopting proportionate sanctions for minor drug-related offences and a health-based approach to addressing drug use.

592. In 2019, the Republic of Korea and Thailand legalized the cultivation and use of cannabis for medical purposes.

593. Most countries continue to lack comprehensive drug use prevalence data and evidence-based drug treatment protocols. Greater attention should be given and more resources devoted to demand reduction, treatment and social reintegration in order to improve quality of life, help reduce the burden on the health-care system and remove the stigmatization of drug use.

2. Regional cooperation

594. Various meetings to enhance regional cooperation took place in 2019. The 42nd and 43rd meetings of the Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, took place in October 2018 and October 2019, respectively. In April 2019, ministers and high-level officials of the ASEAN region gathered in Bangkok for a meeting entitled “Synchronizing trade and security plans in support of ASEAN 2025”. Providing a platform for

decision-makers to discuss challenges stemming from the closer regional integration, the meeting paved the way for a common ASEAN border management strategy, to be presented in Bangkok before the end of 2019.

595. Signatories to the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on drug control (Cambodia, China, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam and UNODC) agreed to a draft subregional action plan to guide activities to be conducted under the Memorandum of Understanding in the period 2019–2021. The Mekong Memorandum of Understanding is an agreement between the signatory countries to work together and provide a platform to address the threat of illicit production, trafficking and use of drugs in the Mekong region. According to UNODC, the 11th version of the subregional action plan was expected to be endorsed during the ministerial meeting of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding, to take place on 15 November 2019.

3. National legislation, policy and action

596. A number of legislative and policy changes took place in 2018 and 2019, relating to, among other things, legislative changes regarding the use of cannabis for medical purposes, the application of the death penalty for drug-related crimes, extrajudicial responses to suspected drug-related acts, the national scheduling of substances not under international control and partnerships promoting alternative development.

597. On 19 February 2019, Thailand became the first country in South-East Asia to legalize the use of cannabis for medical purposes. Under the Narcotics Act (No. 7) B.E. 2562, State enterprises, scientific institutions and faculties of pharmacy in public and private universities that have obtained a licence from the licensing authority can cultivate, produce, manufacture, import, export and possess cannabis for medical purposes. The Food and Drug Administration is the national agency mandated to control the cultivation of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes. Patients with certain serious debilitating diseases or indications who cannot be treated satisfactorily using an approved medical product can obtain cannabis through the country’s special access programme by first consulting their doctor and then applying to the Food and Drug Administration. The Narcotics Act also legalized, in some administrative regions, the licensed medical use of kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*), a plant-based psychoactive substance not under international control that had been banned in the country since 1943, although

reportedly it had long been used by rural populations for its stimulant and analgesic properties.

598. The Republic of Korea, at the end of 2018, became the first country in East Asia to legalize the use of cannabis for medical purposes. Since 12 March 2019, patients have been able to import cannabis products after receiving authorization from the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety. To obtain authorization, individuals are required to submit to the Ministry their medical records and a note from a physician stating that there is a lack of alternative treatment.

599. On 15 March 2018, the Government of Malaysia amended section 39B of the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 to remove the mandatory death penalty for those convicted of drug trafficking and replaced it with a discretionary power of the court to commute death sentences to life imprisonment and not less than 15 strokes of the cane if certain conditions are met. One such condition is that the court is satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt that the accused assisted the enforcement agencies of Malaysia in disrupting further drug trafficking in or outside the country. The other conditions allowing the commutation of death sentences are the following: if there was no evidence that at the time of arrest the individual was buying or selling a substance categorized as a dangerous drug, if there was no involvement of an agent provocateur (e.g., an undercover agent), and if the accused individual's involvement is restricted to transporting, carrying, sending or delivering a dangerous drug.

600. The Philippines officially withdrew from the International Criminal Court on 17 March 2019, after the Court had decided to conduct a preliminary inquiry into accusations that the President of the Philippines and other officials of the country had committed crimes within the Court's jurisdiction in carrying out the country's drug control policies.

601. Following reports of human rights violations over the previous three years in the Philippines, the Human Rights Council adopted its resolution 41/2, in which it took note of the allegations of the killing of thousands of people allegedly involved in drug-related activities and/or offences. In its resolution, the Council called on the Government of the Philippines to cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and requested the High Commissioner to prepare a comprehensive report on the situation of human rights in the country.

602. **The Board reminds all Governments that extrajudicial action, purportedly taken in pursuit of drug**

control objectives, is fundamentally contrary to the provisions and objectives of the three international drug control conventions, as well as to human rights instruments to which all countries are bound. All drug control actions should be undertaken in full respect of the rule of law and due process of law.

603. The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act of Singapore, aimed at strengthening drug control and rehabilitation, came into effect on 1 April 2019. The amendment criminalizes behaviour that facilitates or promotes drug use, such as introducing a person to a drug trafficker or providing drug-related information to someone who intends to carry out those activities. The amendment also criminalizes the act of exposing children to drugs or allowing them to consume drugs. Further, the use of drug detection methods, in particular hair analysis and saliva screening, was expanded through the amendment. In addition, the Government increased the maximum detention period for a drug user in a drug rehabilitation centre from three to four years and the maximum duration of post-release supervision from two to five years. **The Board discourages the use of compulsory detention for rehabilitation of people affected by drug use and calls on Governments in the region to implement voluntary, evidence-based treatment services with due respect for patients' rights.**

604. Effective 1 May 2019, the Central Narcotics Bureau of Singapore rescheduled five new psychoactive substances⁷⁷ from the Fifth Schedule of the Misuse of Drugs Act to the First Schedule of the Act. The substance lisdexamfetamine (l-lysine-d-amphetamine) was also added to the First Schedule. The rescheduling of these new psychoactive substances means that trafficking, manufacture, import, export, possession or consumption of these substances will constitute an offence and will result in a minimum of five years' imprisonment and five strokes of the cane. In addition, the Central Narcotics Bureau listed two new psychoactive substances⁷⁸ in the Fifth Schedule, which will allow them to be seized so that circulation can be restricted while further research and consultations are conducted.

605. To further strengthen its drug control system, the Government of China decided to schedule as a class-wide group all fentanyl-related substances on the national

⁷⁷Adamantyl-CHMINACA, 3,4-dichloromethylphenidate (3,4-DCMP) and its dichloro positional isomers in the phenyl ring, 5-fluoro-CUMYL-PICA and its phenylpropyl isomers and their respective fluoro positional isomers in the pentyl group, 5-fluoro-SDB-005 and its fluoro positional isomers in the pentyl group, and SDB-005.

⁷⁸5-Fluoro-CUMYL-PeGACLONE and its phenylpropyl isomers and their respective fluoro positional isomers in the pentyl group and CUMYL-PeGACLONE and its phenylpropyl isomers.

control list, effective as of 1 May 2019. The National Narcotics Control Commission of China clarified the legal definition of “fentanyl-related” and emphasized that the definition would be scientifically determined on the basis of the chemical structure of the substance in question. The Commission stated that if, at a later stage, any of the affected substances were found to have legitimate pharmaceutical, industrial, scientific, research or other legal use, they would be treated accordingly.

606. Over the course of 2018, the Government of Thailand has continued to promote and implement its alternative development programme, both within the country and through various international partnerships, by providing assistance in community development, agricultural knowledge, techniques and marketing strategies. Working closely with the Government of Myanmar, Thailand has been expanding such aid and activities to further drug-affected areas in Myanmar. In addition, in January 2019, the drug authorities of Thailand and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic agreed to promote a pilot project in Borikhamxay Province of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

607. According to UNODC, the amount of methamphetamine seized in the region increased eightfold between 2007 and 2017 and reached a record high level in 2018. Data received indicated that Thailand alone accounted for more than half of the methamphetamine seized in the region in 2018.

608. Preliminary data for 2019, in particular the data for methamphetamine tablets, indicated a geographical shift in the manufacture and trafficking from China to other countries in the region. Targeted law enforcement in China seems to have pushed organized criminals to move their illicit methamphetamine manufacture to neighbouring countries including Myanmar, contributing to the slight reduction in methamphetamine seizures in China but also to increases in Myanmar and its neighbouring countries.

609. With the continuing growth of illicit methamphetamine manufacture in Myanmar, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic has become an important transit country for methamphetamine destined for other countries in the Mekong region. In 2018, more than 21 million methamphetamine tablets and 1.8 tons of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, compared with an annual average

of less than 100 kg of crystalline methamphetamine between 2013 and 2017. In comparison, authorities in Indonesia seized over 8 tons of crystalline methamphetamine in 2018, by far the largest seizure ever reported in that country.

610. While the wholesale and street prices of illicit methamphetamine in Thailand fell in 2018 to their lowest levels in the past decade, UNODC estimated the illicit methamphetamine market in East and South-East Asia to be worth up to approximately \$45 billion annually. Japan and the Republic of Korea accounted for almost one fifth of that estimated value, mainly because of the significantly higher wholesale and retail prices in those countries.

611. The illicit manufacture, trafficking 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.

612. Most illicit manufacture of heroin in the region takes place in northern Myanmar. The area under illicit opium poppy cultivation in that country in 2018 was estimated at 37,300 ha, down from its recent peak of approximately 60,000 ha in 2014. Compared with 2017, there has been a reduction in illicit cultivation in almost all regions of the country, with considerable decreases in Shan and Kachin States (the two main producer states).

613. However, heroin seizures have moved in the opposite direction: total seizures of heroin in Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam increased in 2018, with Viet Nam being a major destination. Viet Nam accounted for more than one third of all heroin seized in South-East Asia from 2013 to 2018. Malaysia also reported an increasing amount of heroin being trafficked through its territory with the final destination of Australia.

614. In their latest national report, authorities of China expressed concern at the continuous increase in cocaine seizures in 2018 and the considerable rise of cannabis being trafficked into the country by post. Similarly, up to 170 cases of attempted smuggling of drugs through the postal system were detected in Indonesia in 2018. Trafficking by sea has been identified as an increasingly popular modus operandi among large-scale drug traffickers.

615. Substantial quantities of precursor chemicals have been diverted from the region’s sizeable chemical industry and trafficked for the manufacture of methamphetamine, as the region has an increasingly lucrative illicit market for synthetic drugs. Limited forensic data suggest that ephedrine and pseudoephedrine remained the main precursor chemicals used for the illicit manufacture of

methamphetamine, although there is also growing use of P-2-P. 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 2019 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

616. Countries of East and South-East Asia continued to account for most of the ketamine seized worldwide. The latest data from UNODC indicated that more than 90 per cent of the ketamine seized worldwide between 2013 and 2017 had been seized in Asia, and most of that had been seized in East and South-East Asia.

617. With respect to ketamine, which is not under international control, the latest data indicate a displacement of some ketamine manufacture from China to other countries in the region. While ketamine seizures declined in China, including Hong Kong, China, after 2015, seizures in Myanmar and Thailand have increased significantly since 2017.

5. Prevention and treatment

618. The region continued to lack systematic and quantitative information on drug use. Although data are limited, some regional studies suggest that cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug in the region. The Philippines reported the highest prevalence of past-year cannabis use in 2016, a rate of 1.64 per cent for respondents aged 15–64, and Japan reported that the prevalence of past-year cannabis use increased to 1.4 per cent in 2017, with an estimated total of 1.33 million cannabis users in the country.

619. Qualitative information provided to UNODC indicated that methamphetamine was the main drug of concern for treatment admissions, and other recent data pointed to high rates of annual prevalence of use of the substance (between 0.5 and 1.1 per cent).

620. Data from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017, as cited in the UNODC *World Drug Report 2019*, show that the region has a much bigger health loss (in terms of years of healthy life lost) compared with other world regions, mainly as a result of the number of people who inject drugs (28 per cent of the global total) and alarming rates of blood-borne illnesses among people who inject drugs.

621. Authorities of China estimated there were 2.5 million drug users in the country in 2018, slightly less than

the year before. Methamphetamine remained the primary drug of use (1.35 million, or 56 per cent of the total), followed by heroin (an estimated 890,000, or 37 per cent) and ketamine (an estimated 63,000, or 2.6 per cent). The number of cannabis users in 2018 was reported to have reached 24,000, an increase of 25 per cent over the previous year.

622. The total number of reported drug users in Hong Kong, China, dropped to 2,033 in the first quarter of 2019, slightly less than in the previous year. Heroin remained the primary drug of use (1,056 users), followed by methamphetamine (435 users).

623. Authorities of Singapore remained concerned at the increase in the number of drug users in 2018 (around 3,500 users), a considerable proportion of which were new drug users under the age of 30. Methamphetamine remained the primary drug of use (75 per cent of drug users).

624. According to the official report of Cambodia, there were over 20,000 drug users in the country in 2018 that were seeking or receiving some form of treatment through a private or public health system or drug centre. Authorities of Malaysia reported that in 2018 an estimated 25,000 drug users were receiving treatment or in rehabilitation with the National Anti-Drugs Agency, slightly fewer than the previous year, mainly because there was a smaller number of new users. The total number of crystalline methamphetamine users, however, increased to over 16,000 users in 2018, and users of amphetamine-type stimulants more than doubled, to over 1,000 users. In Indonesia, over 7,500 users of methamphetamine were receiving treatment in 2018, compared with roughly 2,000 users of cannabis.

South Asia

Seizures of methamphetamine tablets are increasing at an alarming rate in the region, in particular in Bangladesh.

New legislation in Bangladesh extended the death penalty to the possession of 200 grams of methamphetamine. Sri Lanka expressed the intention to reinstate the death penalty for drug-related offences.

1. Major developments

625. Drug trafficking is widespread throughout South Asia, particularly in the border areas of the subregion. Trafficking in heroin, cannabis, methamphetamine and

pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotics and psychotropic substances pose major challenges in South Asia. The trends observed show that synthetic drugs are now replacing the natural and semi-synthetic drugs that have been abused for decades. The rapid advance of Internet availability and information and communications technology infrastructure has fostered Internet-driven drug trafficking, illustrated by recently reported seizures of drugs sent through postal services.

626. The proximity of South Asia to three major drug-producing and drug-trafficking countries (Afghanistan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar) continued to pose a challenge for drug control in the subregion. Furthermore, the coastal States of South Asia are vulnerable to maritime drug trafficking as a result of their exposure to trafficking routes across the India Ocean.

2. Regional cooperation

627. In response to the trafficking of opiates from Afghanistan, heads of law enforcement agencies of South Asia, from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, met in Chandigarh, India, in October 2018. The key themes of the meeting included how to use existing bilateral and regional cooperation mechanisms between countries to better control drug trafficking.

628. A meeting of the Paris Pact initiative's expert working group on detecting and blocking financial flows linked to illicit traffic in opiates originating in Afghanistan was held in New Delhi on 27 and 28 June 2019. Representatives of financial intelligence services, counter-narcotics agencies and customs authorities of 15 countries participated in the meeting, as well as six international organizations and UNODC, and deliberated on new trends and challenges related to illicit financial flows and trafficking of opiates. Participants highlighted the need to unite their efforts in developing information exchange and best practices on methods for identifying shadow financial transactions.

3. National legislation, policy and action

629. In Bangladesh, the Narcotics Control Act 2018, which is an amendment to the Narcotics Control Act 1990, came into force in December 2018. The new Act repeals the existing law relating to drug control, drug supply and demand reduction, the prevention of abuse and the smuggling of drugs, treatment and rehabilitation for drug users and related matters. Under the Act of 2018, the

application of the death penalty or life imprisonment in Bangladesh has been expanded to include the production, possession, distribution and trafficking of methamphetamine or its principal ingredient amphetamine, which has been moved to the category of class A under the Act.

630. At a meeting held in Sri Lanka in March 2019, on drug trafficking and abuse prevention programmes, the President of Sri Lanka announced that a process for reinstating the death penalty was under way. In his speech, the President commended the current, strengthened law and regulations for combating illegal drugs and announced the decision to impose the death penalty for drug smuggling, which, if carried out, would be the first time the death penalty has been imposed since 1976. On 26 June 2019, the President signed death warrants for four people who have been convicted of drug-related offences. On 29 October 2019, prior to the finalization of the present report, it was reported that the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka had further extended, until 9 December 2019, the interim order staying the implementation of the death penalty for prisoners sentenced to death for drug offences. The Board continues to encourage all States that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences to consider abolishing the death sentence for those offences.

631. In line with the international drug control conventions and the existing national legislation and policies, India adopted the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction for the period 2018–2023 to address drug and substance abuse. The National Action Plan employs a multi-pronged strategy involving the education, de-addiction and rehabilitation of affected individuals and their families to address the issue and focus on preventive education, awareness-raising, counselling, treatment and the rehabilitation of drug-dependent users, in addition to training and capacity-building for service providers through collaborative efforts between the Government and non-governmental organizations.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

632. Illicit cultivation of cannabis continued to be a challenge for law enforcement agencies in South Asia, in particular in India. An analysis of data from 2010 to 2017 shows that India is among those countries worldwide with the greatest extent of illicit cannabis cultivation and amount of production. Indian drug enforcement authorities eradicated 1,980 ha of illicit cannabis cultivation in 2018, which was substantially less than the 3,446 ha of eradication in 2017. The estimated area of illicit cannabis cultivation in Sri Lanka in 2018 was 500 ha, similar to

the amount in the previous year. Bhutan reported that 100,000 cannabis plants taken from 12 cultivation sites were destroyed in 2017.

633. Total cannabis herb seizures in South Asia declined to 336 tons in 2018, compared with 434 tons in 2017. In 2018, the largest total quantity of cannabis herb seized by a country in South Asia was that of India (266.5 tons or 79 per cent of the subregion's total seizures), followed by Bangladesh (60.3 tons or 18 per cent). Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka accounted for the remaining 3 per cent of cannabis herb seizures (9.1 tons). Cannabis resin seizures in South Asia increased in 2018 to 5.2 tons from 3.2 tons in 2017. India and Nepal confiscated almost 100 per cent (5.2 tons) of the total cannabis resin seized in the region.

634. India is the only country in the subregion that has consistently reported eradication of illicit opium poppy cultivation. India has increased its illicit opium poppy eradication over four consecutive years beginning in 2015 (1,400 ha in 2015, 2,635 ha in 2016, 3,076 ha in 2017 and 3,508 ha in 2018). In addition, the country seized a considerable quantity of poppy straw in 2018 (16 tons). That amount was 70 per cent greater than the amount of poppy straw seized in 2017 (9 tons).

635. The amount of opium seized in India increased to 4.1 tons in 2018, up from 2.6 tons in 2017. Opium seizures followed an upward trend starting in 2015 (1.7 tons in 2015, 2.3 tons in 2016, 2.6 tons in 2017 and 4.1 tons in 2018). Overall, the increasing trend in both the amount of illicit opium and poppy straw seized and the area eradicated underline the severity of the problem in the country.

636. South Asia, in particular Sri Lanka, has experienced an increase in seizures of heroin due to the growing use of the southern route by drug traffickers. Most of the heroin that is smuggled through the so-called "southern route" to reach South Asia (from Afghanistan to Pakistan and then to South Asia) is of Afghan origin and has the final destination of North America. In Sri Lanka, heroin seizures continued to increase in 2018, reaching 732 kg, compared with 315 kg in 2017. However, heroin seizures in the region decreased to 2.4 tons in 2018 from 2.9 tons in 2017. India seized the largest amount (1.2 tons), followed by Sri Lanka (0.7 tons) and Bangladesh (0.45 tons) accounting for 99 per cent of the total seizures in the subregion.

637. South Asia reported record low cocaine seizures of 59.5 kg in 2018, which is less than in the past four years (309 kg of seizures in 2017, 1.6 tons in 2016, 124.7 kg in

2015 and 327.9 kg in 2014). The amount of seizures of this drug fluctuated from year to year, as shown in the reported data of all countries in the subregion.

638. Codeine-based preparations, particularly Phensedyl, continued to be seized in the region. In Bangladesh, Phensedyl seizures declined to 715,529 ampoules in 2018, compared with seizures of 720,843 ampoules in 2017. India also reported, through the monthly drug reports of the Narcotics Control Bureau, that the country's authorities seized more than 51,821 bottles of Phensedyl in 2018. Drug traffickers now tend to smuggle pharmaceutical drugs rather than illicitly manufactured drugs such as hashish and heroin because of the more lenient penalties imposed for the smuggling of controlled pharmaceutical drugs.

639. South Asia is being targeted by transnational organized criminal groups in Myanmar that manufacture and traffic methamphetamine in both crystalline and tablet form into the subregion. Methamphetamine is the most prevalent substance of abuse among the amphetamine-type stimulants in South Asia. South Asia accounted for 1 per cent of the total seizures of methamphetamine at the global level.

640. In Bangladesh, methamphetamine seizures continued to increase, as 53 million tablets were seized in 2018, compared with 40 million tablets in 2017, an increase mainly due to a nationwide anti-drug operation undertaken by the Government. Methamphetamine was smuggled into Bangladesh from East and South-East Asia, predominantly from Myanmar. Sri Lanka seized 147.83 kg of methamphetamine in the first quarter of 2019. The Department of Narcotics Control of Bangladesh raided a clandestine drug laboratory and confiscated, for the first time, crystalline methamphetamine and MDMA, in February 2019.

641. In India, seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants peaked again in 2018, at 931 kg. The highest total annual seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants in India was in 2016, when there was a record 1.7 tons of seizures, before falling sharply to 95 kg in 2017. Seizures of methaqualone in the country decreased to 99 kg in 2018, compared with 124 kg in 2017. The highest single seizure of methaqualone, on 25 June 2018, was of 30 kg, which was destined for the United States. Buprenorphine also continued to be seized in India in both injectable and tablet forms.

642. In Bangladesh, the quantity of buprenorphine seized in 2018 (128,708 ampoules) was 18 per cent higher than in 2017 (109,063 ampoules). Total seizures of buprenorphine in Nepal also increased significantly in

2018, to 58,963 tablets, up from 31,567 tablets in 2017. Nepal seized 66,430 tablets of diazepam in 2018, which was more than the quantity seized in 2017 (49,304 tablets). Bhutan seized 3,947 tablets of nitrazepam in 2018.

643. The diversion of controlled precursors, in particular ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, from licit to illicit channels has continued in India. According to the Narcotics Control Bureau of India, 1.8 tons of pseudoephedrine were confiscated in Noida, India, in a single seizure conducted on 11 May 2019. This was the largest seizure on record in the country. There continued to be reports of seizures of pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine trafficked from India to Myanmar for the purpose of precursor extraction.

644. There was an exceptionally large total quantity of acetic anhydride seizures (8,998 litres) in India in 2018. That amount was substantially higher than the total seizures of acetic anhydride in the four previous years (23 litres in 2017, 2,464 litres in 2016, 4 litres in 2015 and 93 litres in 2014). Of the total seizures of acetic anhydride in 2018, 8,937 litres were confiscated in a single seizure effected in Noida and New Delhi on 20 October 2018. The chemical was destined for a consignee in Afghanistan. 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 the region can be found in the report of the Board for 2019 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

645. Globally, most of the tramadol, which is not an internationally controlled substance, that was seized from 2013 to 2017 was reported to have originated in India. Available data indicate that the tramadol being used for non-medical purposes in Africa is illicitly manufactured in South Asia. Further, India was the source of 87 per cent of the tramadol seized in Ghana in 2017. Available data suggest that in recent years India has emerged as the centre of manufacturing of tramadol destined for clandestine markets. However, in April 2018 India placed tramadol among the nationally controlled substances under its Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985. Control under the Act gives more powers to law enforcement authorities and, in particular, enables authorities to enter the premises of tramadol laboratories and prosecute those who are engaging in the unauthorized manufacture of tramadol.

646. Bangladesh is also closely monitoring substances that are not under control internationally such as ketamine, nalbuphine and tramadol, among which ketamine is under control at the national level. In Bhutan, Spasmo

Proxylon Plus, which contains tramadol, is the most common trafficked non-controlled substance. In 2018, 68,685 capsules of Spasmo Proxylon Plus were seized in Bhutan, a significant decline from the seizure of 130,316 capsules in 2017.

5. Prevention and treatment

647. According to the UNODC *World Drug Report 2019*, 1.8 per cent of the adult population of South Asia, or 19 million people, are past-year users of opioids, thus comprising 35 per cent of the estimated number of past-year opioid users worldwide. Drug abuse prevalence studies have been lacking in the region for the past few years. However, India and Sri Lanka have conducted surveys to assess the prevalence of drug abuse in their respective countries. **The Board commends such initiatives and encourages countries to allocate adequate resources to drug abuse prevention and treatment and to conduct prevalence studies to inform the adoption of evidence-based public health policies.**

648. A national survey on the extent and pattern of substance use in India was conducted between December 2017 and October 2018. According to the resulting report, *Magnitude of Substance Use in India 2019*, cannabis and opioids are the most frequently abused substances in the country, after alcohol, with rates of past-year use of 2.8 per cent and 2.1 per cent respectively among the population aged 10–75. Heroin was reported to be the most commonly used opioid in India, with a 1.1 per cent prevalence rate, followed by pharmaceutical opioids, with a prevalence rate close to 1 per cent among the population aged 10–75. The survey also indicated that existing treatment programmes in India, which are heavily focused on inpatient treatment, are inadequate given the large number of people affected by substance abuse. The report indicated the need to enhance treatment services in outpatient clinics, which need resources to meet requirements in the areas of human resources, infrastructure and supply of medicine.

649. In Sri Lanka, according to the report *National Prevalence Survey on Drug Use 2019*, cannabis was the most commonly abused drug in 2017/18, with a prevalence rate of 1.9 per cent (301,898 people) followed by heroin, for which the prevalence rate was 1.2 per cent among the population aged 14 and older (92,540 people). The misuse of pharmaceutical tablets has increased. Based on the statistics on treatment admissions provided by the Government, the number of drug-addicted people seeking treatment in 2018 was greater than in the previous three years; however, only 7 per cent of drug users in

Sri Lanka have been admitted to treatment and rehabilitation centres. Psychotropic substances such as diazepam and other substances that are not under control (tramadol, pregabalin and gabapentin) are abused to a lesser extent in the country.

650. According to the *Annual Drug Report of Bangladesh for 2017*, drug abuse is becoming a national concern in the country. Methamphetamine tablets (“yaba”) are now abused to a greater extent in Bangladesh. People seeking treatment for abuse of methamphetamine made up 35.5 per cent of all patients seeking treatment for drug abuse in 2017, an increase of 12 per cent from the previous year. According to the data from treatment services, the number of patients seeking treatment for Phensedyl addiction is decreasing, as those affected by drug use disorders are shifting to abuse of “yaba” because it can be more easily obtained. Drug-using populations are also consuming a combination of different pharmaceutical drugs (for example, buprenorphine and diazepam).

West Asia

In 2018, Afghanistan continued to be the country where the vast majority of the world’s illicit opium poppy cultivation and opium production took place.

The Middle East and South-West Asia are the subregions with the highest annual prevalence of opiate use (opium, morphine and heroin) globally, at 1.6 per cent of the population.

1. Major developments

651. Afghanistan remained the country of origin of nearly all opiates seized in Europe, Central Asia and Africa.⁷⁹ It was the country responsible for the vast majority of the world’s illicit opium poppy cultivation and opium production in 2018. The country also continued to be one of the major sources of cannabis resin worldwide. Furthermore, Afghanistan continued to experience an increase in trafficking of synthetic drugs on its territory. While recognizing the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to address those challenges through its National Drugs Control Strategy and the National Drug Action Plan, the Board reiterates the need to prioritize measures to address the illicit drug economy in the

⁷⁹The subregion of Central Asia as referred to in this report comprises Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

country, which should be part of the overall effort to build peace, establish security and achieve sustainable development in the country. Moreover, the global community, in the context of global and shared responsibility, needs to be part of this process through comprehensive, multifaceted and concerted local, national, regional and international assistance efforts.

652. The Balkan route, which passes through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey and the Balkan countries on the way to destination markets in Western and Central Europe, remained the main route for the trafficking of opiates originating in Afghanistan. In recent years, several branches of the Balkan route have gained prominence, including the branches transiting the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq and the countries of the Southern Caucasus.

653. The manufacture and trafficking of counterfeit “captagon”⁸⁰ continued to seriously affect the countries of the Middle East, which not only are destination markets for those drugs but are also increasingly becoming a source of counterfeit “captagon”. The subregion also continues to witness trafficking in, and abuse of, tramadol, a synthetic opioid not under international control. Political instability and unresolved conflicts, poverty and the lack of economic opportunities in some parts of the subregion have contributed to increased trafficking in tramadol and “captagon”.

654. The emergence of a growing number of new psychoactive substances continued to be reported by almost every country of Central Asia. Proximity to several countries with developed markets for synthetic drugs, such as China, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and the Russian Federation, has increased the potential market for new psychoactive substances in the Central Asian subregion.

2. Regional cooperation

655. Through a decision of the Council of Heads of State of SCO of 10 June 2018, the Organization approved its Anti-Drug Strategy for the period 2018–2023 and the programme of action to implement the Anti-Drug Strategy, as well as the SCO Concept to Prevent the Abuse of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. The

⁸⁰“Captagon” was originally the official trade name of a pharmaceutical preparation containing fenethylamine, a synthetic stimulant. As encountered in seizures across West Asia today and as referred to in the present report, “captagon” is a counterfeit drug compressed into tablets that are similar only in appearance to the original trademarked Captagon. The active ingredient in counterfeit “captagon” is amphetamine, which is typically cut with multiple adulterants, such as caffeine and other substances.

Strategy is aimed at stepping up multilateral cooperation to prevent and combat drug-related threats affecting SCO member States.

656. At an expert group meeting of the Afghanistan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan (AKT) Initiative held in Bishkek on 28 and 29 November 2018, representatives of law enforcement agencies and Ministries of Foreign Affairs of those three countries reviewed the current situation on countering narcotics in their respective countries and discussed the role of their drug liaison officers in planning and conducting joint counter-narcotics operations. Participating experts adopted a draft memorandum of understanding on the placement of drug liaison officers and the standard operating procedures for their activities, which is to be signed at the next ministerial meeting of the countries of the AKT Initiative.

657. At the thirteenth senior officials' meeting of the Triangular Initiative, held in Islamabad on 12 and 13 December 2018, counter-narcotics authorities of Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan discussed means of strengthening cooperation to combat trafficking in Afghan opiates. At the meeting, the three parties agreed to strengthen their border liaison offices and to plan and conduct more joint patrolling and intelligence-led interdiction operations. They also expressed interest in utilizing one another's counter-narcotics training academies with a view to sharing knowledge and strengthening coordination.

658. With a view to addressing the channels of entry and illegal distribution of new psychoactive substances and other synthetic drugs, opioids and cannabis, a joint multilateral counter-narcotics operation, Operation Kanal-Centre, was conducted by the States members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, namely Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan, from 26 February to 1 March 2019. The operation was hosted by CARICC. Representatives of competent national authorities of China, France, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Mongolia, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, INTERPOL, OSCE, SCO and UNODC, also took part in the operation as observers. The operation resulted in seizures of more than 11.4 tons of various drugs, including more than 8.8 tons of opium, more than 1.8 tons of cannabis resin, more than 220 kg of heroin, almost 127 kg of cannabis and more than 205 kg of synthetic drugs; the arrest of 579 individuals; and the dismantling of one illegal laboratory manufacturing synthetic drugs.

659. On 2 and 3 May 2019, the 11th Review Meeting of the Memorandum of Understanding on Subregional Drug Control Cooperation was held in Tashkent. High-level officials, including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Turkmenistan, the Chief Executive Officer of the Aga Khan Development Network and the Secretary-General of SCO, as well as high-level international partners and donors such as UNODC, the United States, the European Union and OSCE, attended the event. The parties to the Memorandum of Understanding agreed on common strategic priorities and targets in order for the region to address emerging drug-related threats and related criminal behaviour, including illicit financial flows and the financing of terrorism, trafficking in precursors and new psychoactive substances, the darknet, health and development, as set out in a ministerial declaration reiterating the parties' commitment to strengthening multilateral cooperation within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding.

3. National regulation, policy and action

660. In December 2018, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of Afghanistan launched the first call centre for farmers as part of its alternative development activities under the National Drug Action Plan. The service, which provides free advice and information to farmers, is intended to establish contacts between local farmers and agricultural experts of the Ministry. The Government of Afghanistan continued to implement measures to mainstream the economic empowerment of women in the alternative livelihood sector. Ten small and medium-sized enterprises led by women participated in a jobs fair and exhibition held to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 2019 in Kabul, at which over 80 companies and organizations exhibited alternative development products.

661. Following a presidential decree which came into effect in April 2019, the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics of Afghanistan was dissolved. Several joint committees were established to complete the restructuring process. The resources, responsibilities and activities of the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics were transferred to the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock and the Ministry of Public Health.

662. To promptly respond to the worsening situation with the illicit drug market, in December 2018 Kazakhstan adopted a law amending some legislative acts related to

controlling trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their analogues and precursors. The law provides for the elaboration of mechanisms instituting State control over trade in new psychoactive substances and scheduling their analogues, and it empowers the Government to approve (a) the list of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors subject to control in Kazakhstan; and (b) the aggregate table establishing threshold quantities of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and their analogues and precursors for classifying the gravity of offences involving those substances.

663. Kazakhstan reported that there was an increasing use of the Internet, instant messaging services and e-wallets to trade illicitly in new psychoactive substances. In 2018, the law enforcement agencies of Kazakhstan detected 4,700 websites retailing illicit drugs (compared with 430 websites in 2017) that were blocked by the Ministry of Information and Communications upon notification by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Over 2,540 graffiti inscriptions advertising websites that distribute illicit substances were removed throughout the country.

664. In February 2019, the federal Cabinet of Pakistan approved the National Anti-Narcotics Policy of 2019, which had been formulated by the Ministry of Narcotics Control in consultation with federal and provincial stakeholders. The policy was designed to strengthen the efforts of Pakistan in the area of anti-drug trafficking operations. The policy provides for stronger enforcement measures, increased international cooperation and more effective drug demand reduction strategies.

665. In January 2019, the first drug treatment and rehabilitation centre in the State of Palestine was opened, in Bethlehem, as a result of the joint efforts of the Ministry of Health of the State of Palestine and UNODC to develop a comprehensive system for drug dependence treatment and care in the State of Palestine. The centre will benefit from the UNODC-developed Treatnet package, which provides comprehensive expert guidance and advice in the areas of drug use prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

666. Operation “Black poppy”, an annual anti-drug law enforcement operation, was conducted in Uzbekistan from 1 May to 30 June and from 1 August to 30 September 2018. As a result, 904 cases of illicit cultivation were detected (compared with 895 cases in 2017), and 2,644 square meters of illicit drug cultivation were destroyed (compared with 3,306 square metres in 2017). That illicit cultivation that was eradicated included 385 cases of illicit cultivation of opium poppy (compared with 277 cases in 2017) on a

total area of 1,381 square meters (compared with 1,757 square metres in 2017) and 519 cases of cannabis cultivation (compared with 618 cases in 2017) on a total area of 1,263 square meters (compared with 1,503 square metres in 2017).

667. On 22 October 2018, Uzbekistan adopted amendments to its drug-related legislation, which stipulated criminal and administrative sanctions for illicit trade in analogues of narcotic drugs and the illegal sale of medicines outside pharmacies. Furthermore, amendments were introduced to improve procedures for the import, export and transit through the territory of Uzbekistan of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors through the scheduling of synthetic cannabinoids, tramadol, nalbuphine preparations, zopiclone and baclofen, all of which have been associated with many cases of abuse.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

668. Afghanistan was the country of origin of nearly all opiates seized in Europe, Central Asia and Africa in the period 2013–2017. Afghanistan accounted for 100 per cent of all mentions of “country of origin” for opiates seized in Central Asia, 96 per cent of mentions of country of origin for opiates seized in Europe and 84 per cent of mentions for opiates seized in Africa in that period.

669. UNODC confirmed that Afghanistan remained the country responsible for the vast majority of the world’s illicit opium poppy cultivation and opium production in 2018. The area under cultivation in Afghanistan amounted to 263,000 ha in 2018, the equivalent of 76 per cent of the estimated total area devoted to illicit opium poppy cultivation worldwide (346,000 ha). As a result of the very high levels of production in previous years, opium prices in Afghanistan dropped in the period 2016–2018. Opium production on such a massive scale continues to pose substantial challenges for Afghanistan, the neighbouring countries through which the drugs transit and the countries that serve as destination markets. Impacts include the further deterioration of the drug-related and security situation in Afghanistan and the potential for increased consumption and associated negative developments in transit and consuming countries.

670. The Balkan route, running through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey and the Balkan countries towards destination markets in Western and Central Europe, continued to be the main path for the trafficking of opiates originating in Afghanistan. In recent years, a new branch

of the Balkan route involving the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq has gained importance.

671. In addition, seizures in Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation suggest that heroin and other opiate products may be entering the Russian Federation through a variant of the Balkan route that runs along the border between Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation. From Afghanistan, that sub-branch of the Balkan route transits the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Southern Caucasus, notably Azerbaijan, from where it goes northwards into the Russian Federation, or, transiting Georgia, it crosses the Black Sea to Ukraine and the European Union. That route has also been reported by the authorities of the Russian Federation, who noted that part of the opiates originating in Afghanistan were being trafficked into its territory through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Azerbaijan, by means of a possible extension of the Balkan route.

672. This extension of the Balkan route running through the Southern Caucasus was initially detected following three large seizures of heroin (totalling 1.7 tons) made by the countries of the Southern Caucasus in 2014. Heroin seizures in the Southern Caucasus decreased sharply the following year, in 2015 (83 kg seized), but there were later surges in heroin seizures in 2016 (1.2 tons seized, mainly by Azerbaijan) and in 2018 (1.26 tons seized by Azerbaijan).

673. The so-called “southern route” continued to be used for the trafficking of opiates to Europe by means of shipments from Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan by air or sea, either directly or transiting through Gulf countries and East Africa. Most of the morphine and heroin seized in 2018 in the Islamic Republic of Iran entered the country from Pakistan. Seizures of opium and heroin in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2018 saw an increase compared with 2017 levels, as 643.6 tons of opium was seized in 2018 compared with 630.5 tons seized in 2017, and 25.4 tons of heroin seized in 2018 compared with 23.7 tons seized in 2017.

674. In addition, opiates and other illicit substances continue to be trafficked from Afghanistan to India and other countries in South Asia, destined for markets in Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America. Air routes were increasingly being used to smuggle heroin and other illicit substances from Afghanistan. Although the substances were mainly bound for New Delhi, there have been several attempts to traffic Afghan opiates to Dubai, United Arab Emirates and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. In the period from November 2018 to June 2019, the airport interdiction unit at Hamid Karzai International Airport seized 150 kg of heroin, 17 kg of methamphetamine and 16 kg

of cannabis resin, along with substantial amounts of cash, and the unit arrested 154 suspected traffickers. During the same period, a similar unit at Kandahar International Airport seized 93 kg of heroin and 1 kg of methamphetamine and arrested 150 suspected traffickers.

675. According to UNODC, as in years past, the vast majority of opiates seized worldwide were seized in the countries of the Middle East and Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan. In 2017, that group of countries accounted for 79 per cent of global opiates seized as expressed in common heroin equivalents, in particular opium (97 per cent of global opium seizures) and morphine (99 per cent of global morphine seizures). Moreover, the quantities of morphine and heroin seized in those countries continued to increase in the period 2016–2017 as a consequence of a combination of the marked increases in Afghan opiate production during that period and the ongoing law enforcement operations in those countries.

676. In 2017, the largest quantities of opiates (as expressed in heroin equivalent) continued to be seized in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which accounted for 39 per cent of the global total, followed by Afghanistan (26 per cent), Pakistan (14 per cent) and Turkey (7 per cent).

677. States of Central Asia located along the so-called “northern route” continued to be used for opiates trafficked from Afghanistan to the Russian Federation and elsewhere in Europe. The main modes of transportation used in trafficking heroin from Central Asia into the Russian Federation remain road, rail and air traffic. According to UNODC, seizures in the region indicate that opiates are primarily trafficked from Afghanistan into Tajikistan and, to a lesser extent, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and then on to Kazakhstan. The largest quantities of opiates seized in the region were being trafficked by land routes from Tajikistan to Kyrgyzstan, then to Kazakhstan and into the Russian Federation. Heroin is also occasionally trafficked into the Russian Federation by air from States of Central Asia, but this mode of transportation is less common than is trafficking overland.

678. Seizure data for the period 2014–2018 suggest that opiate trafficking along the northern route has been steadily declining. In 2018, heroin seizures amounted to 58.61 kg in Kazakhstan, 73.57 kg in Kyrgyzstan, 282.18 kg in Tajikistan and 20.60 kg in Uzbekistan. Tajikistan accounted for most of the opiates seized in Central Asia. According to law enforcement agencies in Central Asia, opiate trafficking from the region to the Russian Federation continued to decrease, which Central Asian authorities attribute to successful law enforcement operations. At the

same time, further studies are needed to analyse data on average purity, prices and daily consumption of heroin, estimated number of opiate users and trafficking methods, in order to accurately determine the extent of opiate flows through the northern route.

679. Opium seizures in the countries of Central Asia remained stable at approximately 2.2 tons per year over the period 2014–2018, which may indicate that there is a continuing demand for opium. In 2018, Kazakhstan seized 6.96 kg of opium, Kyrgyzstan seized 5.42 kg, Tajikistan seized 1,606.79 kg, and Uzbekistan seized 254.70 kg. Although not fully indicative of actual prevalence of use, the number of registered opium users in the countries of Central Asia decreased by 33 per cent from 2014 to 2018. According to information provided by the Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan, the 33 per cent growth in opium seizures in Tajikistan in 2018 was related to the increase in cultivation of opium poppy in Afghanistan.

680. There are no indications or reports that opium is being processed into heroin in Central Asia. Opium poppy cultivation and opium production in Central Asia continue to be minimal, since, according to Central Asian national law enforcement agencies, over 99 per cent of the opiates in the subregion originate in Afghanistan, and there are no production facilities located in the subregion. Therefore, all opiates transiting Central Asia are thought to be either processed in Afghanistan or remain in the form of opium and are later processed elsewhere.

681. Afghanistan continues to be one of the major sources of cannabis resin worldwide. Afghanistan was reported as being the source of 20 per cent of all cannabis resin reported seized worldwide in the period 2013–2017, in particular for seizures reported in Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus and Europe. Other countries reported as source countries were Lebanon (6 per cent) and Pakistan (6 per cent). Cannabis resin from Lebanon is mainly destined for markets in the Middle East and to a lesser extent markets in Western and Central Europe.

682. The Islamic Republic of Iran reported Afghanistan as the main source of cannabis resin found on its market. According to UNODC, in 2017, about 90 per cent of cannabis resin entered the Islamic Republic of Iran via Pakistan and 10 per cent entered directly from Afghanistan. Most of the cannabis resin was trafficked by land and some was trafficked by sea from Pakistan. In 2017, about 55 per cent of the cannabis resin smuggled out of the Islamic Republic of Iran was destined for countries on the Arabian Peninsula and 25 per cent was destined for Turkey and the Southern Caucasus.

683. The quantity of cannabis seized in Afghanistan decreased by 90 per cent from 2016 to 2017. Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan also reported a decrease in cannabis seizures, of 6 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively. Similar trends were also observed in countries of the Middle East, which taken as a whole reported a 53 per cent reduction in cannabis seizures.

684. According to UNODC, the law enforcement agencies of countries of Central Asia reported seizures of more than 20 tons of cannabis and more than 2 tons of cannabis resin in 2018. Since information on seizures of cannabis and cannabis resin of Afghan origin is limited, it is difficult to estimate the exact scale of trafficking of these substances via the northern route. The share of cannabis resin seizures that were made in Tajikistan in 2018 was 54 per cent of total cannabis resin seizures in Central Asia, which may indicate a large demand in countries along the northern route for cannabis-based drugs originating in Afghanistan. In 2018, as in the previous year, the share of cannabis and cannabis resin seizures in the total volume of seized drugs was highest in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, while in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan the bulk of seized drugs were opiates.

685. There continued to be small-scale illicit cannabis cultivation and large areas of wild cannabis growth in Central Asia. Cannabis is mainly illicitly produced for domestic consumption, with a smaller portion trafficked to markets in Europe and the Russian Federation.

686. Seizures of cannabis in the countries of the Southern Caucasus continued to increase over the period 2014–2018, while seizures of cannabis resin in that same period continued to decline. Those statistical trends are based mostly on the statistics on drug seizures reported by Azerbaijan.

687. An increase in trafficking of cocaine by air (including by use of “mules” and parcels) was reported in Lebanon. The most important cocaine seizures at the airports were those reported by Lebanese authorities in August 2018, when authorities at the Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport seized more than 60 kg of cocaine that had been hidden inside personal care items imported from Brazil. More recently, in June 2019, Lebanese Customs seized 10.5 kg of cocaine at the Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport on a flight that had departed from Brazil.

688. Afghanistan continued to witness an increase in trafficking of synthetic drugs on its territory. The amount of methamphetamine seized continued to increase, with 657 kg seized in the first six months of 2019 compared

with 61 kg seized during the same period of 2018 (representing an almost tenfold increase). In 2018, a total of 182 kg of methamphetamine were seized in Afghanistan, while in 2017 total seizures for that substance amounted to 121 kg. Afghanistan also seized 35,763 MDMA tablets in the first six months of 2019, compared with 24,587 tablets in the entire year of 2018, and 2,322 tablets in 2017.

689. Continuing the trend reported in the previous year, the Islamic Republic of Iran witnessed an increase of approximately 25 per cent in methamphetamine seizures in 2018, a total of 2.9 tons, compared with 2.3 tons in 2017. In 2018, law enforcement authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran dismantled 133 laboratories for manufacturing amphetamine-type stimulants in the country.

690. Manufacture and trafficking of counterfeit “captagon” continued to seriously affect drug control efforts in the Middle East, especially given the continued political instability in many parts of the subregion. There are indications of the existence of clandestine laboratories manufacturing counterfeit “captagon” in the subregion, in particular in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, for domestic consumption as well as for illicit markets in Saudi Arabia and several other Gulf States. Some of those “captagon” tablets were also smuggled into Turkey or smuggled from the Syrian Arab Republic to Lebanon for onward trafficking to various countries in the Middle East. Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Jordan have also been identified by other countries in the subregion as possible countries of origin of amphetamine shipments.

691. While there are only limited official data available on trafficking of counterfeit “captagon”, certain notable seizures covered by the media may provide an indication of the extent of trafficking in the subregion. In June–July 2019, authorities of Greece seized three containers containing substantial amounts of “captagon” (5.25 tons, in the form of 33 million tablets) worth an estimated \$660 million, which was believed to have been shipped from the Syrian Arab Republic. Earlier, in December 2018, authorities of Greece detained a Syrian-flagged freight ship in the Mediterranean carrying about 3 million “captagon” tablets, believed to be destined for Libya. In two separate attempts to smuggle “captagon” from the territory of Lebanon, Lebanese authorities seized 142 kg of “captagon” from a refrigerated truck in April 2019 in an operation coordinated with the authorities of Saudi Arabia, and seized 10 kg at the Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport in May 2019. Approximately 250,000 “captagon” tablets were seized at the Istanbul Atatürk Airport in March 2019, from a passenger on a flight bound for Saudi Arabia. In May 2019, Dubai Customs of the United Arab Emirates seized 5.7 million

“captagon” tablets that were hidden in a foodstuff container, bringing the total amount seized by Dubai Customs to about 11 million “captagon” tablets in the first five months of 2019. There have also been several reports of seizures of substantial amounts of “captagon” tablets by the authorities of Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic.

692. Central Asian countries continued to experience trafficking in psychotropic substances on their territories even though the amount of trafficking continued to be at lower levels than for other types of drugs. In particular, Kazakhstan seized 9.7 kg of psychotropic substances, including 2.6 kg of MDMA, compared with the 12.2 kg of psychotropic substances it seized in 2017, which had included 2 kg of MDMA. Kyrgyzstan seized 21 kg of psychotropic substances in 2018, which included small amounts of methamphetamine and MDMA, compared with almost no officially reported seizures of such substances in 2017. Tajikistan seized 1.8 kg of psychotropic substances in 2018, compared with 7.6 kg in 2017. Countries in the region also continue to face the problem of a lack of comprehensive data collection and forensic analysis with respect to such substances.

693. Large quantities of precursors are needed for opium processing in Afghanistan, and those precursors cannot easily be trafficked across the multiple mountainous borders and so must be transported on established roads and by railway. In 2018, the most widely seized precursor in Central Asia was hydrochloric acid, followed by acetic anhydride and potassium permanganate. The largest total quantity of hydrochloric acid and sulphuric acid seized in 2018 was that seized in Kyrgyzstan, where authorities seized a total of 3.2 tons of those precursors.

694. According to information provided by CARICC, in the period 2014–2018, only Tajikistan and Uzbekistan reported seizures of acetic anhydride (Uzbekistan in 2017 and Tajikistan in 2018). Tajikistan reported five seizures of precursors totalling 284 kg, including three seizures of acetic anhydride that totalled 266.5 kg. Afghanistan was suspected of being the country of destination for one of these seizures. According to CARICC, there is no evidence that any other seized substance was bound for Afghanistan. Uzbekistan seized 20 litres of acetic anhydride in 2017. Uzbekistan also reported seizures of 0.8 kg of potassium permanganate in 2018.

695. The position of Azerbaijan and Georgia along the opiate trafficking route means that their territories are also attractive as a route for trafficking in precursors, in particular acetic anhydride, which is used to manufacture heroin. Law enforcement authorities of Georgia seized

5 tons and 9.8 tons of acetic anhydride, respectively, in two operations conducted in February and April 2018 at the port of Poti, Georgia, on the Black Sea; they were the largest seizures of precursors in the country's history. The chemicals were destined for Afghanistan. According to UNODC, Azerbaijan reported only on seizures of potassium permanganate: 20.8 kg seized in 2017 and 5.5 kg seized in 2018. In 2017, less than 50 grams of ephedrine was seized in the entire Southern Caucasus, and all of it was seized in Georgia.

696. In 2018, law enforcement authorities of Afghanistan dismantled 33 heroin-manufacturing laboratories, compared with the dismantlement of 50 heroin-manufacturing laboratories and 3 methamphetamine-manufacturing laboratories in 2017. One methamphetamine-manufacturing laboratory was dismantled in the first six months of 2019.

697. There continues to be limited information available on trafficking and abuse of new psychoactive substances in most countries of West Asia due to the lack of monitoring and analysis capacities in those countries. The Board reiterates that although the countries of West Asia continue to adopt the necessary legislation and take the necessary steps to improve their law enforcement and forensic capabilities in order to counter new psychoactive substances, there is a strong need for a comprehensive regional approach to address the challenge.

698. The emergence of a growing number of new psychoactive substances continued to be reported by almost every country in Central Asia, which may suggest that the region is linked to international trafficking of both amphetamine-type stimulants and new psychoactive substances beyond the subregion. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan reported an increase in total seizures of new psychoactive substances from 338 grams in 2017 to 18,928 grams in 2018. Uzbekistan reported a decrease in new psychoactive substance seizures, from 362 grams in 2017 to 166 grams in 2018.

699. There is limited information available on trafficking in new psychoactive substances in the Southern Caucasus. Although Azerbaijan reported an increase in seizures of psychotropic substances in 2018 (1,545.4 kg of powdered substances and 1,615 tablets) compared with 2017 (0.4 kg of powdered substances and 1,918 tablets), no information was reported on seizures of new psychoactive substances in the country. Georgia reported on the emergence of and increase in trafficking in new psychoactive substances, as it seized 6.5 kg of new psychoactive substances in 2018, while in 2017 it seized 1.5 kg. Police in Armenia reported on the seizure of 27 grams of new psychoactive substances in 2018, compared with 1.1 kg in 2017.

700. Countries in the Middle East continued to be affected by trafficking in and abuse of tramadol, a synthetic opioid not under international control. During the reporting period, there were several media reports on seizures of tramadol in the subregion, including in Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, the State of Palestine and the United Arab Emirates. The countries of the subregion need to effectively prevent illicit manufacture and trafficking of tramadol while ensuring sufficient supply of this substance for medical needs. The countries of the subregion would benefit from more effective international law enforcement and criminal justice cooperation.

5. Prevention and treatment

701. The Board notes with concern that in some countries of the region access to treatment for drug dependence is possible only upon registration as a drug user, that registration as a drug user brings with it various limitations on that individual's career prospects, ability to travel and enjoyment of other rights, and that the prospect of having such limitations imposed is often a disincentive to seeking treatment. In many cases, registration as a drug user also results in serious social stigmatization that impedes recovery and social reintegration.

702. In addition, most countries in West Asia have difficulties finding the resources for conducting comprehensive and regular drug abuse studies and surveys, which hinders efforts to fully grasp the true extent of drug use and dependency in the subregion. Countries still lack the test and reference samples needed to carry out effective drug testing and analysis.

703. UNODC estimated that the Middle East and South-West Asia were the subregions with the highest past-year prevalence of opiate use (opium, morphine and heroin), at 1.6 per cent of the population in each subregion. South-West Asia was the subregion with the highest prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs, 2.3 times the global average, and South-West Asia also had a higher than average proportion of injecting drug users.

704. Over the past decade, there has been a decline in the number of registered opiate users in Central Asia, which may be a result, at least in part, of the overall reduction in trafficking of those substances along the northern route. In 2018, there were 43,511 registered drug users in Central Asia, excluding Turkmenistan, for which no data were available. Of that total, 51 per cent were opiate users, of whom 86 per cent were heroin users and 14 per cent were opium users. Injecting drug users accounted for 56 per cent of registered drug users. Data

disaggregated by gender showed that 5 per cent of all drug users registered in 2018 were female drug users. UNODC estimated that the full scope of opiate use in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus was likely much larger than what was suggested by the number of registered users, as the prevalence of use of opiates in those subregions combined was estimated to be 0.9 per cent.

705. In Azerbaijan, there were 30,131 registered drug users in treatment centres in 2017. Injecting remained the most frequently used method of administering opiates (70 per cent of users). Of those who registered as drug users in 2017, about 2 per cent were women.

706. Countries of Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus continued to witness an overall decline in injecting drug use, an increase in the prevalence of cannabinoid abuse, and an increase in abuse of psychoactive medicines as part of polydrug use. It should be noted that alcohol addiction remained more prevalent than illicit drug addiction. The most used types of stimulants in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, in order of greatest prevalence, are amphetamine, methamphetamine and “ecstasy”.

707. According to UNODC, the proportion of the population aged 15–64 who inject drugs remains relatively high in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, with rates that are 3.4 times the global average (i.e., more than triple). UNAIDS found that in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, people who inject drugs accounted for more than one third (39 per cent) of new HIV infections in 2017. Other research found that in Central Asia, approximately one in five people held in prison have injected drugs at least once while incarcerated.

708. Opioid consumption patterns in the countries of South-West Asia remain diverse. UNODC found that in Afghanistan, nearly 70 per cent of opioid users reported using opium and there was also significant abuse of heroin and pharmaceutical opioids. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, nearly 90 per cent of opioid users reported using opium or the condensed extract of smoked opium ashes. In Pakistan, according to the most recently available data, for 2012, excluding polydrug use among opioid users, of the estimated 2.7 million opioid users, 1.6 million also reported the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids, whereas over 1 million people were estimated to be regular opiate users, of whom the majority were heroin users (860,000) while one third were opium users (320,000). While the use of opiates (heroin and opium) was much higher among men than among women in Pakistan, almost equal percentages of men and women in that country reported the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids.

E. Europe

Record amounts of high-purity cocaine seized, together with the increasing prevalence of cocaine use among adults, suggest that cocaine use is on the rise in Europe.

The discussion of different approaches to regulating cannabis has figured prominently in the policy debate on drug control across Europe.

1. Major developments

709. A recent surge in the availability of high-purity cocaine across Europe, now also including Eastern European countries that had been targeted to a lesser extent in the past, appears to have made the drug an affordable commodity and the preferred stimulant for many drug users in the region. Record seizures of cocaine in several European countries in 2018 and 2019 may also indicate an increasing trend in cocaine trafficking, with European overseas territories increasingly being used as transit points, according to EMCDDA.

710. An increasing number of European countries were in the process of exploring regulatory approaches to the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes during the reporting period, or had already set up cannabis agencies and instituted medical cannabis programmes by 2019. In a few countries, there were indications of steps being taken towards legalization of the non-medical use of cannabis at the national level. However, the majority of European countries allow cannabis to be used only for medical and scientific purposes, in keeping with their obligations under the 1961 Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol, while many continue not to permit medical uses of the substance at all. An EMCDDA paper entitled “Developments in the European cannabis market”, published in 2019, presents the diverse range of cannabis-based products available in Europe and highlights the complexity of regulatory frameworks necessary to manage their appropriate distribution.

711. The Russian Federation, in July 2019, passed legislation authorizing the cultivation on its territory of opium poppy plants (*Papaver somniferum*) for the purpose of extracting alkaloids. More specifically, the new law allows for the cultivation of varieties of opium poppy rich in morphine, thebaine and codeine and the processing of poppy straw for the purpose of manufacturing pharmaceutical or veterinary preparations containing these opiates.