

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

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

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

## E. Europe

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

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

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

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## 1. Major developments

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

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

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

## 2. Regional cooperation

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

the following three areas: (a) enhanced security (focused on all aspects of trafficking in drugs); (b) increased prevention (of the adverse effects of drugs, including links to violence); and (c) addressing drug-related harms (through access to treatment, risk and harm reduction, and a balanced approach to the issue of drugs in prisons).

702. In view of a wider use of encrypted communications technologies by organized drug trafficking syndicates in the region, a joint investigation team was formed among French and Dutch law enforcement and judicial authorities, Europol and Eurojust to dismantle an encrypted telephone network used by criminal networks. The considerable amount of information obtained by the operation enabled authorities to disrupt planned criminal activities and trigger new criminal investigations into organized criminal groups across Europe and beyond.

703. The INCB secretariat presented updates concerning seizures of newly available fentanyl-related substances in Europe and opioid-related overdose deaths in several OSCE participating States during the OSCE conference on the theme “Evolving threat of synthetic drugs”, held in Vienna on 3 and 4 June 2019. In January 2020, the INCB secretariat also conducted a training workshop in Slovakia to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies in Austria and Slovakia to counter trafficking in new psychoactive substances, chemicals and non-scheduled dangerous substances. In February 2020, an overview of the INCB multi-agency global IONICS platform was provided to nearly 260 law and regulatory enforcement officers from more than 30 European countries during a webinar organized by the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training.

### 3. National legislation, policy and action

704. Since March 2019, Cyprus has permitted the prescription of cannabis by physicians for any medical condition. The related regulations that amend the Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances Law L29/77 also provide the basis for the issuance of licences for the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes, which is expected to be subjected to monitoring and control by a governmental office dedicated to the country’s cannabis programme for medical purposes. According to the official communication received on the matter, this office has yet to be established.

705. Several acts introduced the option of using cannabis for medical purposes in Czechia. The conditions

for prescribing, preparing, distributing, supplying and using the substance for medical use are laid out in Decree No. 236/2015 Coll. In October 2019, the Parliament approved an amendment to the Public Health Insurance Act that allows 90 per cent coverage by insurance companies of cannabis for medical use. The amendment came into force on 1 January 2020 and has set a limit of 30 grams per month for cannabis for medical use covered by public health insurance.

706. In Luxembourg, the two-year pilot programme on cannabis for medical purposes, launched in 2018, the budget for which had been tripled in late 2019, was approaching its first evaluation in 2020. It was expected that the programme would be continued and would include training for medical practitioners on handling cannabis for medical purposes, while also lifting current restrictions that allow only selected hospital pharmacies to sell cannabis for medical purposes, on prescription.

707. In France, a decree providing details of the regulatory framework of an experiment on the use of cannabis-based medical products (approved by the Parliament in 2019) was issued in October 2020. The decree specifies the therapeutic indications or clinical situations under which the cannabis-based drugs can be used, the specifications of permissible cannabis-based drugs and the conditions of their availability. The two-year programme will be implemented by the Ministry of Solidarity and Health. Participating companies are required to supply the products to the patients free of charge, and the products concerned must comply with pharmaceutical standards, including good manufacturing practices.

708. **The Board recommends that Governments that allow the use of cannabinoids for medical purposes should monitor and evaluate the potential for diversion to trafficking or other unintended consequences of those programmes.**

709. In November 2019, the Netherlands passed legislation allowing a pilot programme for the production and commercial distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes, referred to as the “closed cannabis supply chain experiment”. The legislation became effective on 1 July 2020. Under the programme, the local cultivation and wholesale supply of cannabis to “coffee shops” was legalized in 10 municipalities for a trial period of four years, to be followed by an evaluation of the experiment and its effects on public health, public order, safety and crime. Within the 10 selected municipalities (which exclude the 4 largest municipalities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), “coffee shops” will be required to limit sale exclusively to cannabis sourced from

Government-licensed Dutch producers. The official preparation phase of the experiment includes a public tender to select a limited number of producers, which are not required to be from the selected municipalities and will be designated in accordance with specific criteria. The earliest harvest of locally sourced cannabis for non-medical use is expected in 2021. In municipalities that do not participate in the trial, applicable Dutch laws will continue to be enforced. Those laws generally prohibit the cultivation, distribution and use of cannabis, with the option of tolerating (i.e., not enforcing the prohibition of) the sale and purchase of small amounts for personal use in “coffee shops” under certain conditions.

710. In June 2020, Switzerland approved legislation permitting a long-term pilot study to be conducted on the effects of the possible legalization of cannabis for non-medical purposes, with the involvement of several large Swiss cities. As part of the study, the market, both licit and illicit, for cannabis, as well as the anticipated social impact of legalization in a controlled setting, will be examined. In the same month, the Government of Switzerland submitted a draft amendment to the legislation on cannabis for medical purposes, containing a proposal to ease access to the substance by no longer requiring special authorization of prescriptions by the Federal Office of Public Health.

711. Luxembourg continued to explore modalities for the legalization of the production, distribution and use of cannabis for non-medical purposes.

**712. The Board wishes to remind all parties to the 1961 Convention as amended that, under article 4, paragraph (c), of that Convention, the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs are limited exclusively to medical and scientific purposes and that any measures allowing for the non-medical use of cannabis are in violation of the legal obligations incumbent upon parties.**

713. The European Commission approved the inclusion of seven precursors in its list of scheduled substances in annex I to regulation (EC) No. 273/2004 of the European Parliament and the Council and the annex to Council regulation (EC) No. 111/2005, including those precursors recently recommended for international control (3,4-MDP-2-P methyl glycidic acid, 3,4-MDP-2-P methyl glycidate, APAA and MAPA), as well as two additional amphetamine designer precursors (P-2-P methyl glycidate and P-2-P methyl glycidic acid). These chemicals, which can be easily transformed to support the production of amphetamines and “ecstasy”, will be listed in category 1 of the regulations. Red phosphorus, which has

considerable legitimate use but is frequently diverted for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, will be listed in category 2A and will be subject to less stringent control than those substances listed in category 1. The new regulations were to enter into force in December 2020.

714. Legislative changes concerning new psychoactive substances were enacted in some European countries. The United Kingdom revised the generic definitions for a range of synthetic cannabinoids permanently controlled as class B drugs under the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act and as schedule 1 compounds under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001. The definitions came into effect on 15 November 2019. In Hungary, with amendments to the Criminal Code on New Psychoactive Substance, people who commit criminal offences involving new psychoactive substances will face the same penalty as those who commit offences involving other controlled substances. In addition, Governmental Decree No. 22/2012 (on the procedure for listing new psychoactive substances and on licit activities involving narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and new psychoactive substances) has been amended, so as to speed up the listing procedure for new psychoactive substances within the country. In Sweden, the updated 1992 Narcotic Drug Controls Act and the 1999 Prohibition of Certain Goods Dangerous to Health Act have provided the police with the authority to make anonymous purchases of new psychotropic substances on behalf of the Public Health Agency of Sweden or the Swedish Medical Products Agency since 1 January 2019. It is envisaged that such changes will facilitate a faster classification of substances dangerous to health that are or may be made available on the Swedish market.

715. The Russian Federation added 14 new psychoactive substances, as well as kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*), to its national schedules for drug control in August 2019, placing 12 of them on the schedule of prohibited substances (catalogue I) and 2 on the schedule of substances of restricted circulation (catalogue II). An additional 15 substances were added in March 2020 (11 to catalogue I and 4 to catalogue II), and 10 precursors were placed under national control in February 2020.

716. Bulgaria, one of the countries with flexible legislative measures on allowing new substances to be put under control, listed eight new substances under the ordinance on the procedure for classifying plants and substances as narcotic.

717. In 2019, an increasing number of notifications regarding mephedrone were registered by the drug early warning system of Belgium and the new synthetic opioid

isotonitazene was detected. Formal notification was sent to EMCDDA and UNODC.

718. An action plan for the period 2019–2020 to limit the use and spread of drugs was approved by the Government of Latvia in 2019, which paved the way for shifting responsibility for the development and coordination of drug policy from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Health by the end of 2020. The plan is aimed at reducing demand for and supply of drugs and includes 28 measures divided into three areas of action: (a) promoting the quality and availability of drug prevention, addiction treatment, social rehabilitation and harm reduction interventions; (b) reducing drug supply and availability; and (c) promoting effective drug policy coordination, data collection, research and evaluation.

719. In December 2019, the Supreme Court of Italy issued a ruling removing small-scale cultivation of cannabis for private use from the definitions in article 73 of the Consolidated Law included in Presidential Decree 309/1990 that criminalizes illicit activities with controlled substances. In its ruling, the Court declared that the offence of “cultivating narcotic drugs” should not include small amounts grown domestically for the exclusive use of the grower.

720. Italy has taken measures to strengthen cooperation among different stakeholders on drug-related policies. Specifically, the Department of Drug Policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers signed agreements with the police, universities and other institutions to increase monitoring of online activities related to new psychoactive substances and cryptocurrency payments related to international drug trafficking, and to analyse wastewater in major cities to identify the use of drugs among the general population.

#### 4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

721. The latest EMCDDA reports state that some of the recent trends are: (a) growing availability and illicit use of high-purity cocaine; (b) more diverse drug production within the region; and (c) the continuing availability of high-strength MDMA products.

722. Albania, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine reported the eradication of illicitly cultivated cannabis on their territories in 2019. Opium poppy was also illicitly cultivated in all of those countries, with the exception of Albania, but the amount of land affected had decreased (significantly, in the case

of the Republic of Moldova), while illicit cannabis cultivation was reported to be on the rise in Albania and the Republic of Moldova.

723. Despite an overall decrease in the flow of opiates trafficked along the northern route, which goes from Afghanistan, through Central Asia to the Russian Federation and Europe, the Russian Federation observed attempts by international organized criminal groups to use the country’s territory for the transit of heroin destined for European markets. Belarus and the Baltic States were named as possible transit points for cocaine entering the Russian Federation from Latin American countries, through Europe.

724. Belarus reported that the illicit manufacture of amphetamine,  $\alpha$ -PVP and methadone had taken place in its territory during the reporting period, although in significantly lower amounts than in preceding years. Four manufacturing sites set up in private homes had been dismantled by law enforcement agencies, with laboratory equipment and unspecified precursor chemicals seized.

725. Some authorities in the region noticed that the domestic illicit drug markets changed and grew in 2019, driven by greater use of the Internet to share information and to communicate. In Sweden, buyers and sellers using the darknet and social media, together with traditional *modi operandi* for drug distribution, drove a trend of polydrug smuggling. Meanwhile, considerable numbers of online purchases of cannabis seeds and equipment for illegal cultivation were detected in Latvia, as the amounts of cannabis herb seized and unauthorized cannabis cultivation rose. Authorities believe that factors such as the legalization and public tolerance of cannabis use, as well as the ease of online purchase, have promoted this growth. The Republic of Moldova reported that 12 per cent of organized drug trafficking groups operating from within the country were using the darknet for drug distribution, targeting mainly domestic consumers. Fewer than one in four criminal groups were believed to operate internationally. Authorities in Belgium also observed the growing role of the darknet in retail sales and the emergence of “mobile” cannabis plantations, which comprise containers with cannabis planted inside.

726. According to EMCDDA, there was greater activity on the darknet, driven mostly by retail sales of cannabis, in some European countries during the first quarter of 2020. Restrictions on freedom of movement and social-distancing measures reduced access to street dealers, resulting in an increase in drug trafficking activities over the Internet and shipments by post. In mid-2020, Bulgaria noted a considerable decline in drug and precursor

trafficking, as a result of the travel restrictions and social-distancing measures adopted by most European Union countries. The distribution of drugs within the country also decreased, as nightclubs, discos, ski resorts, restaurants, hotels and schools were closed. However, authorities believe that online purchasing and small-scale delivery continued.

727. Spain reported a considerable reduction in the amount of cocaine seized in 2019 (down by 22 per cent compared with 2018). The use of maritime shipping containers remained the main method for cocaine trafficking. Owing to its geostrategic location and proximity to Africa, Spain was once again the European country in which the greatest amount of cannabis resin was seized in 2019 (about 350 tons), mainly originating in Morocco (94 per cent). The majority (85 per cent) of cannabis resin seizures took place in Andalusia, the province closest to Morocco. About 1.5 million cannabis plants, mainly cultivated indoors, were also seized in the same year. The amount of heroin seized (about 230 kg in 2019) remained close to that of the previous year, but the amount of methamphetamine in powder or crystalline form reached historic highs of almost 1.6 tons.

728. The amount of heroin smuggled into the United Kingdom, mainly in air freight, through express courier services and the post and by air travellers, registered a considerable increase in 2019. Meanwhile, authorities noted the continued trend of trafficking on board yachts across the Atlantic and the rising amounts of cannabis seized that originated in North America. Demand for synthetic drugs also expanded further, with increasing imports of chemicals required for their manufacture and greater seizures, alongside a widening geographical market for amphetamine.

729. Considerable amounts of cocaine continued to be seized by some countries, including Portugal (10.5 tons in 2019), Belgium (6.5 tons in 2019), Romania (1.6 tons in 2019) and Finland (223 kg in 2019). Notably, the amount seized in Portugal was twice that seized in 2018. In Finland, one batch of 176 kg of cocaine with purity of between 95 and 100 per cent was found in a container. The container had been sent to the harbour in Helsinki from South America, with the prohibited substances hidden among legal cargo. Authorities indicated that the trafficking of large amounts of cocaine in sea containers originating in South America was a recent phenomenon.

730. One of the most commonly used synthetic drugs in France is “ecstasy”; more than 1 million tablets of the substance were seized in the country in 2019. For the second

year in a row, the total amount of methamphetamine seized in 2019 (562 kg) exceeded that of amphetamine (92 kg).

731. The continued emergence of new psychoactive substances remained a considerable challenge for Europe. Bulgaria identified 18 new psychoactive substances in about 120 cases during 2019, with synthetic cannabinoids being the most commonly identified group and 5F-ADB being the most frequently identified type of synthetic cannabinoid. In 2019, the new psychoactive substances monitoring system in Denmark detected the emergence of new psychoactive substances containing a high content of “ecstasy” and a very small share of amphetamine analogues (a worrying trend given that methamphetamine has been found only rarely in Denmark in the past). In Sweden, about 40 substances were detected for the first time in 2019 and reported to EMCDDA through the country’s early warning system.

732. The Republic of Moldova noted that diversion of clonazepam by medical professionals had taken place during the reporting period. Also during the same period, clonazepam, phenazepam, tramadol and pseudoephedrine had been diverted on a small scale, mainly through friends and family and through the use of falsified prescriptions in Belarus.

733. Cyprus dismantled three clandestine methamphetamine laboratories on its territory in 2020, marking the first discovery of illicit methamphetamine manufacture in the country. Ukraine dismantled six illicit drug manufacturing operations in 2019, among them the biggest clandestine laboratory for the production of psychotropic substances (amphetamine,  $\alpha$ -PVP and mephedrone) in the history of the country, and an interregional drug trafficking network specialized in the manufacture of 1-phenyl-2-nitropropene, a precursor for amphetamine and methamphetamine. Another large-scale methamphetamine laboratory dismantled in Ukraine in 2020 led to the seizure of large quantities of pseudoephedrine. Organized criminal groups said to involve Polish nationals are reported to be involved in the supply of that precursor. Belgian authorities also detected methamphetamine production sites and the first morphine-to-heroin conversion site in the country.

734. The Russian Federation dismantled numerous clandestine laboratories involving amphetamine and  $\alpha$ -PVP, as well as methamphetamine and mephedrone, and reported a marked increase in illicit synthetic drug manufacture using simple synthesis methods with instructions obtained from the Internet.

## 5. Prevention and treatment

735. Most European countries have high-quality data on the prevalence of drug use, which helps the monitoring of trends in the region. According to the *European Drug Report 2018*, in 2018, more than 92 million individuals aged 15–64 (over 25 per cent of the population of the European Union) were estimated to have tried illicit drugs during their lives. Cannabis remained the most commonly used illicit drug in the region, with an estimated annual prevalence of 5.4 per cent in 2018. In Western and Central Europe, the prevalence of past-year cannabis use among the population aged 15–64 has fluctuated around 6 and 7 per cent over the past decade. However, some countries (particularly those with larger populations, such as Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom) have registered an increase in cannabis use in recent drug use surveys. The rise in the prevalence rate over the past decade seems to suggest greater social acceptance of the use of cannabis.

736. Drug-related mortality remained a concern in most European countries during the reporting period. Of concern in several countries, including Cyprus, was the increased presence of opioids other than heroin in cases of drug-related deaths. Some countries, for example, Ukraine, reported a rise in cases of drug-related deaths involving tranquillizers, specifically benzodiazepines and barbiturates, but also unidentified sedatives and anti-epileptic substances. Also in Ukraine, the second-highest number of drug-related deaths was associated with hallucinogens (after opioids and before tranquillizers), representing a marked increase over previous years' figures. In the United Kingdom, large increases in drug-related mortality rates were observed across all drug classes, except cannabis, over the reporting period.

737. Eastern Europe continued to be the subregion with the highest worldwide prevalence of people who inject drugs among those aged 15–64 (1.26 per cent in 2018, roughly 5.5 times higher than the global average). The unsafe use of needles and syringes contributes to the high subregional rates of HIV and hepatitis B infection.

738. Some countries in Europe have reported an increase in the use of substances not under international control. The Netherlands reported that nitrous oxide (“laughing gas”), a substance widely used in the medical and gastronomic fields, was the fourth most prevalent drug used in 2019, particularly among youth (after tranquillizers, cannabis and amphetamine-type stimulants, in that order). The use of drugs containing psilocybin, among other hallucinogens, significantly increased in several countries, such as Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. A new

development during the reporting period was the use of benzodiazepines among youth in Liechtenstein and the United Kingdom. Codeine use was also observed in Liechtenstein and the highest prevalence rate on record to date of ketamine use among adults was registered in the United Kingdom.

739. The increased use of stimulants (such as cocaine and methamphetamine) among drug users was reported by several European countries, including Cyprus, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Ukraine and part of the United Kingdom (England); in the latter, the increase of 4.4 per cent in the estimated number of people who use “crack” cocaine and/or opiates over a two-year period was considered statistically significant. The use of hallucinogens was also reported to have increased significantly in 2019 in several European countries, including Ukraine.

740. According to UNODC, cocaine is the second most-popular illicit drug used in Europe, and Western and Central Europe registered a past-year prevalence rate of 1.4 per cent for cocaine in 2018. The growing number of users receiving specialized treatment also points to an increase in substance use disorder associated with this increased prevalence. Results from wastewater analyses within the region indicated an increase in cocaine use of more than 50 per cent in 136 cities in 29 European countries between 2011 and 2019.

741. Europe was estimated to have a prevalence rate of 0.5 per cent for the use of amphetamines in the past year among the population aged 15–64 (or 2.5 million people) in 2018. Household survey data suggest that Czechia has one of the highest levels of methamphetamine use, and increasing use of the substance is now being reported in Cyprus, Germany, Slovakia, Spain and parts of Northern Europe.

742. While opioid use remains comparatively rare and its prevalence rate was estimated at 0.4 per cent of the adult population of the European Union (about 1.3 million users), the high number of problematic heroin users continues to be of concern. In Europe, opioid use is the main reason for receiving specialized drug treatment and related studies suggest that there is an ageing cohort of opioid users in the region. Meanwhile, greater non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids in Western and Central Europe has been noted, as reflected in the higher share of treatment admissions for the use of those substances. According to UNODC, users of pharmaceutical opioids accounted for 22 per cent of total users entering drug treatment in Western and Central Europe for opioid use disorders.

743. Results from the 2019 school survey on drug use among youth aged 15–16 in five countries (Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden) revealed similar drug use patterns, although considerable differences in prevalence rates. Cannabis was the most commonly used drug, although the lifetime prevalence rate varied from 34 per cent in Spain to 6.3 per cent in Sweden. Identified as the second most-commonly used drug type, tranquilizers and sedatives registered a much higher lifetime prevalence in Latvia and Lithuania (20 per cent) than Sweden (3.8 per cent). Young women reported a higher lifetime prevalence rate of tranquillizer and sedative use, while young men had a higher lifetime prevalence rate of cannabis use.

744. Similar drug use patterns have been confirmed by a series of drug use surveys carried out in 2019 in Romania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. Cannabis was the most commonly used drug, with a lifetime prevalence ranging from 30.3 per cent in the United Kingdom to 17 per cent in Slovakia and 6.1 per cent in Romania. While tranquilizers and sedatives were identified as the second most-commonly used drug type in Slovakia and had a lifetime prevalence of 8.5 per cent, cocaine (10.8 per cent) and new psychoactive substances (6.3 per cent) ranked second in the United Kingdom and Romania, respectively. Men reported a higher lifetime prevalence rate of illicit drug use than women in both countries.

745. Over the last five years, the Russian Federation has significantly increased the domestic availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for pain relief through a variety of measures. These include identifying a range of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs for the diversification of available medicines by 2024; expanding palliative care; and allowing subsidized imports of as yet unregistered foreign medications for children into the country while domestic manufacture is established. As a result, the estimated number of patients receiving adequate pain relief increased sevenfold by the end of 2019. Accordingly, in 2019, 80 per cent of the estimated number of patients in need of pain relief during their last month of life were adequately supplied with medication, compared with only 12 per cent of patients five years earlier.

746. During the reporting period, Belarus was in the process of transitioning from the use of methadone to buprenorphine in its medication-assisted treatment programme. Possibilities for self-drug testing, including the increased availability from pharmacies of express tests, were being expanded in the country. In addition, Belarus introduced several initiatives over the course of 2019

aimed at complementing the existing treatment and reintegration support infrastructure under the country's compulsory social reintegration programme. One such initiative involved the establishment of an "experimental centre" that would provide a combination of medical, psychological and psychotherapeutic support; it is planned that the initiative will be replicated across the country. Also, in 2019, Belarus signed into law an interministerial measure (resolution No. 5/8/2) whereby the social rehabilitation of persons suffering from substance use disorders would entail their obligatory involvement in work. Since 2019, drug users in Belarus have also been required by law to undergo a mandatory preventive psychiatric evaluation.

**747. The Board urges Governments to ensure the continued provision of treatment services for mental health and substance use disorders as part of essential services. Governments are recommended to look at existing best practices and develop effective strategies to ensure that prevention and evidence-based treatment, rehabilitation, aftercare and social reintegration services continue to operate. In that regard, Governments are encouraged to refer to chapter I of the Board's annual report for 2017, entitled "Treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration for drug use disorders: essential components of drug demand reduction", and the UNODC-WHO *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders*.**

748. Several European countries reported on the impact of COVID-19 on illicit drug use in their territories. Luxembourg reported an increase (by 10–25 per cent) in the retail price of cannabis, cocaine and heroin during the lockdown period. More significant changes were observed in relation to the purity of drugs: the ratio of active ingredients to cutting agents was observed to have decreased, in particular in the case of cocaine. The provision of face-to-face health care and other services, in particular, counselling, remained uninterrupted, but was reduced and moved largely to remote means (including, for example, the delivery of medication-assisted treatment doses to patients) on account of the measures introduced to contain the spread of COVID-19. Luxembourg has also launched a study among health-care providers and a survey of drug users to assess the impact of COVID-19 and related measures on the availability of services and the needs of drug users, both retrospectively and with a view to preparing for subsequent outbreaks.

749. A survey of national focal points carried out by EMCDDA during April 2020 suggested that the impact of COVID-19 and related national containment measures appeared to have caused a reduction in the availability

and provision of treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use in most European countries. Specialized outpatient facilities that could not implement the required social-distancing measures were closed in some countries. On the other hand, mobile or online platforms and other innovations, such as greater flexibility associated with medication-assisted treatment service models and the use of telemedicine, were increasingly adopted to provide drug treatment services across the region.

750. Another survey focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on patterns of drug use suggested that there had been some reduction in illicit drug use during the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic (from March to May 2020). Respondents to the EMCDDA online survey provided different explanations, from the lack of social opportunities to reduced drug availability and access to sources of drug supply. Income loss and financial uncertainty were also cited as major reasons for the reduction in illicit drug use.

751. The closure of the night-time economy was commonly considered as the primary reason for decreases in the illicit use of “ecstasy” and cocaine, although increases in the illicit use of amphetamines were reported in some Northern European countries during the lockdown period. On the other hand, cannabis use seemed to be less affected by the lockdown, with occasional users reducing their use and some frequent users consuming more. A reduction in heroin use among high-risk opioid users was observed in Czechia, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovakia. Increased “digitalization” of the drug market and more flexible distribution systems were also cited as some of the adaptations employed for continued access to drugs.

## F. Oceania

Drugs continue to be trafficked in large quantities through Pacific island countries and territories en route to Australia and New Zealand, and there is increased trafficking in methamphetamine from Asia. At the same time, domestic demand for methamphetamine and cocaine is growing in Pacific island countries, and there has been an increase in the number of drug-related offences recorded. However, data on the extent of drug use and treatment demand in Pacific Island countries remain virtually non-existent.

In New Zealand, a proposed cannabis legalization and control bill, which would have allowed people to possess and consume cannabis in certain circumstances, was rejected by voters in a referendum held on 17 October 2020.

In Australia, legislation came into force in the Australian Capital Territory in January 2020 permitting the cultivation of cannabis plants for personal non-medical use; however, the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes remains a criminal offence under Australian federal law.

The 2019 Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey found that the proportion of people who had used codeine for non-medical purposes in the previous 12 months had halved, from 3.0 per cent in 2016 to 1.5 per cent in 2019. Since 2018, medications containing codeine can no longer be purchased from a pharmacy without a prescription.

### 1. Major developments

752. The secretariat of the Oceania Customs Organization noted that measures such as border closures and import and export restrictions taken by Governments of Pacific island States in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had hindered the movement of medical supplies and medical teams needed to assist countries. In a guidance document on COVID-19, members of the Oceania Customs Organization were asked to consider expedited clearance of essential goods and workers to support national responses. They were also asked to consider granting all medical supplies and equipment needed to provide relief in relation to the pandemic first priority to cross borders, where practicably possible.

753. Pacific island countries and territories continue to be used as transit points for drug trafficking; however, they are increasingly becoming destinations for synthetic drugs such as methamphetamine, with domestic demand growing, and becoming locations for illicit manufacture. **Recognizing that national capacities in the region are inadequate to respond to this threat, the Board recommends that the international community provide support to enhance the capacities of Pacific island States to address these new challenges and to safeguard their citizens’ health.**

754. Not all Pacific island States have signed and ratified the three international drug control conventions.<sup>73</sup> The absence of this international legal framework, coupled with growing domestic demand for drugs and the limited national and regional capacities of Pacific island countries

<sup>73</sup>Of the 10 States yet to accede to the 1961 Convention as amended, 7 are in Oceania: Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Of the 13 States not party to the 1971 Convention, 8 are in Oceania: Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Of the seven non-parties to the 1988 Convention, four are in Oceania: Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.