

C. Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

Central American and Caribbean countries initiated implementation of the OAS Hemispheric Drug Strategy 2020, which is aimed at assisting member States in adapting to new realities, including those resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

An increase in home deliveries of illicit drugs was observed in the region as a result of mobility restrictions introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Major developments

487. Central America and the Caribbean continue to be exploited by organized criminal groups as a transit and trans-shipment route for drugs being trafficked to North America and Europe. During the period 2020–2021, criminal groups rapidly adapted their activities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns. Although their responses may have varied in the different countries of the region, ultimately, the techniques employed may result in the development of new patterns of trafficking in and distribution and marketing of illicit drugs.

488. Worsening crime and violence fuelled by drug cartels and gangs, along with fragile institutions, increasing inequalities and political turmoil are, according to UNHCR, among the reasons for the increased number of refugees and asylum seekers from the north of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) and Nicaragua in recent years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, criminal groups in Guatemala and gangs in El Salvador appeared to take over State functions by ensuring that residents remained indoors and by enforcing curfews and quarantines, but also providing basic services. Exertion of social control in local communities by organized criminal groups through actions of solidarity and care, rather than the usual violent coercion, at the time of global crises, may indicate an increased interest by criminal groups in becoming more involved in legal activities, which in turn would help them not only to achieve more economic power, but also to increase their social and political power.

489. While regulatory and legislative steps have been successful in stemming the tide of NPS globally, in some low-income countries, the problem is on the rise. This is

demonstrated by a fivefold increase in the amount of synthetic new psychoactive substances seized in South and Central America between 2015 and 2019 (see also paras. 518–520 below).

490. The overwhelming demand placed on health-care infrastructure and systems during the COVID-19 pandemic may have caused disruptions to drug use treatment services in some countries in the region. The Board wishes to encourage Governments of the countries in the region to ensure, despite difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the continued provision of treatment services for mental health and substance use disorders as part of essential services.

491. In 2021, countries in Central America and the Caribbean began implementing the OAS Hemispheric Drug Strategy 2020 and the Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for the period 2021–2025. The strategy is aimed at addressing the transnational drug problem in an integrated manner, with a focus on public health and safety, taking into account gender, age, cultural context and human rights. The strategy promotes the development of drug policies that seek to minimize the adverse public health and social consequences of drug use and promote social inclusion with a treatment and recovery-oriented approach, considering, among other things, the specific needs of at-risk populations.

2. Regional cooperation

492. CICAD, INCB and UNODC continued organizing expert meetings and providing online training for the competent national authorities of countries in Central America and the Caribbean. CICAD training activities focused on issues ranging from counter-drug intelligence, drug use prevention and treatment, drug early warning systems and alternatives to incarceration programmes. Webinars led by INCB, including those provided under INCB Learning and the INCB GRIDS Programme, focused on control of precursor chemicals and trafficking in NPS, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances not currently under international control. Training courses and workshops organized by UNODC addressed, among other topics, activities of organized criminal groups during the pandemic, maritime interdictions, cyber-enabled drug trafficking in Central America and prevention and treatment of substance use disorders.

493. In December 2020, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago participated in Operation New Horizons, an INCB-led, time-bound

global intelligence-gathering activity. The operation, which brought together 164 officers from 70 countries and four international organizations, was aimed at identifying sources and dismantling redistribution points of tapentadol and tramadol, two opioid analgesics that are currently not under international control.

494. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 13 countries in Central America and the Caribbean, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago, have registered for INCB Learning e-modules that cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor control. In January 2021, the GRIDS Programme convened an expert group meeting on trafficking in synthetic opioids, fentanyl and related dangerous substances by means of e-commerce platforms in Latin America and the Caribbean. The meeting was attended by experts from the public and private sectors and was focused on raising awareness about the significant role of e-commerce platforms in preventing the marketing and movement of those dangerous substances. In addition, the meeting promoted regional public-private dialogue and the sharing of best practices to further enhance cross-sectoral collaboration in the region.

495. In 2021, the European Commission and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States presented a new anti-drug programme entitled “COPOLAD III”. On the basis of earlier successes, the programme will promote technical and political dialogue between Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union and support the design, implementation and evaluation of evidence-based public drug policies. During the first stage of the programme, a channel will be established for dialogue with participating countries and the programme and its activities will be defined according to their national and regional priorities.

496. A number of countries from Central America and the Caribbean, including Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago, participated in the Orion VI international naval campaign to combat drug trafficking. Orion VI activities were carried out in the Atlantic, the Caribbean and the Pacific in 2020. In addition to drugs, the operation resulted in the seizure of several semi-submersibles and aircraft used by organized criminal groups for drug trafficking (see also para. 593 below).

497. In October 2020, the Police Community of the Americas held its first meeting of anti-narcotics experts.

Experts from 15 countries in the region participated in the meeting, which was held online, and emphasized the importance of information exchange in assisting them in designing strategies to anticipate and address the modus operandi used by traffickers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

498. In June 2021, under the UNODC global programme on strengthening criminal justice cooperation along drug trafficking routes and the Integrated System for Illicit Crop Monitoring, training was delivered on cocaine manufacture and trafficking investigations to law enforcement officials and prosecutors from Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama and from countries across Africa to support countries’ institutional responses to illicit drug markets. The training provided an overview of cocaine manufacture processes and of specialized field and laboratory techniques used to investigate and prosecute cocaine trafficking.

3. National legislation, policy and action

499. In March 2021, the Parliament of Barbados passed the amended Drug Abuse (Prevention and Control) Act, which provides for the payment of a fixed penalty for persons found in possession of small quantities of cannabis.

500. In December 2020, the National Drug Control Directorate and the National Land Transport Network of the Dominican Republic signed an agreement to continue strengthening cargo security in order to prevent prohibited substances from being concealed within licit consignments during transport.

501. In 2021, the Executive Secretariat of the Committee against Drug Addiction and Drug Trafficking of Guatemala, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, launched its “Summer without drugs” campaign. The campaign informed local communities about the harmful effects of drug use on the health and well-being of individuals, their families and the wider community.

502. According to a study of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on arbitrary detention relating to drug policies that was submitted to the Human Rights Council at its forty-seventh session, held from 21 June to 9 July 2021 (A/HRC/47/40), the number of people incarcerated for drug-related offences as a proportion of the total prison population varies considerably across countries in the region. In Nicaragua, the proportion is

estimated at 68 per cent, which is considerably higher than the global average of 20 per cent. Cuba and Nicaragua are among a number of countries that authorize judicially ordered drug use treatment as a result of a criminal justice proceeding.

503. The statistical yearbook published by the Costa Rican Institute on Drugs drew attention to drug seizures in the country's penitentiary centres in 2020. The findings indicated that, as a result of the dynamics of drug trafficking and of the scarce resources available to prison administrations, overcrowding, drug use and violence have worsened in prisons in the country in recent years, and the efforts of social rehabilitation have been gradually diluted.

504. The 2019 Jamaica National Crime Victimization Survey, the report on which was published in 2021, measured perceptions of safety, community crime and disorder and fear of crime among persons aged 16 years and older living in Jamaica. According to the report, 63.9 per cent of survey respondents had witnessed the use of cannabis in their community during the period September 2018–August 2019.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

505. During the initial COVID-19 lockdown, cocaine originating in South America was increasingly trafficked by sea, in particular to countries in Central America. In the second half of 2020, when some of the restrictions were eased, the amount of drugs seized in Latin America and the Caribbean indicated the resumption of trafficking activities.

506. In a recent study, the International Organization for Migration analysed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration flows in Central America and Mexico involving migrants involved in smuggling activities. The study found no evidence that organized criminal groups had taken control of the smuggling of migrants as a means of transporting drugs or medicines. Instead, the study found that subsistence smuggling continued to be practised by inhabitants of border areas who had been impoverished owing to reduced work opportunities and income loss caused by mobility and commercial restrictions.

507. Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Panama were, according to the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme, the principal countries of origin and transshipment of increasing quantities of drugs destined for

illicit markets in North America and Europe during the first half of 2021.

508. The use of sea containers, semi-submersibles and speedboats, but also of small aircraft adapted for drug trafficking, appeared to have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the use of small aircraft for drug trafficking in Guatemala, Honduras and Panama was reported. According to INTERPOL, aircraft adaptations included alteration of modes of identification (e.g. logos and licence plates), alteration of navigation systems and modifications to fuel systems to achieve a longer flight range.

509. Mobility restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19 resulted in an increased number of home deliveries of drugs in some countries. In El Salvador, such deliveries were carried out by local distributors using online food delivery and transportation platforms. According to police reports, the price of illicit drugs did not change during the time that a lockdown was in force in the country.

510. The quantities of cocaine seized in Central America over the period 2015–2019 increased by 60 per cent, possibly as a result of an increased number of shipments of cocaine transiting the region on the way to Mexico. In the Caribbean, however, the quantities of cocaine seized decreased between 2015 and 2018, before increasing in 2019. In 2019, the amount of cocaine seized in Central America (144 tons) and the Caribbean (14 tons) accounted for 10 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively, of the total amount of the drug seized worldwide.

511. Panama alone seized more than half of the total amount of cocaine seized in Central America (equivalent to 5 per cent of the global total) in 2019. The amounts seized in Costa Rica and Guatemala accounted for 2 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively, of the global total. In the Caribbean, the largest amounts of the substance seized in 2019 were reported by the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and the Bahamas, in that order.

512. In Costa Rica, the amount of cocaine seized significantly decreased, from 31.1 tons in 2019 to 1.9 tons in 2020, before increasing to 13.8 tons during the period January–April 2021. In El Salvador, the amount of cocaine seized plummeted, from 13.8 tons in 2018 to only 0.1 ton in 2019, before rising to 1.9 tons in 2020. In Guatemala, the amount of cocaine seized amounted to 13.6 tons in 2020, 26 per cent less than in 2019 (18.9 tons). In the first half of 2021, authorities in Panama seized a total of 64 tons of cocaine and cannabis herb, compared with 68.8 tons of cocaine and 16.1 tons of cannabis herb in the whole of

2020. In addition to seizures of cocaine, since 2019, authorities in Guatemala and Honduras have also reported the eradication of coca bush on their territories.

513. There are indications of trafficking in intermediary products, most notably cocaine base, from Colombia to other countries in South America, Central America and the Caribbean, suggesting that the final steps in the manufacture of cocaine hydrochloride are increasingly taking place outside Colombia. Since 2015, for example, coca paste has been seized and cocaine laboratories have been dismantled in Guatemala and Honduras.

514. According to UNODC data, in 2019, the amount of cannabis and cannabis resin seized in Central America and the Caribbean increased. In addition to seizures of cannabis, a number of countries in the region, including Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, have reported indoor and/or outdoor illicit cultivation of cannabis on their territories since 2019.

515. In Guatemala, the number of cannabis plants eradicated in 2020 (3.5 million) was slightly higher than that eradicated in 2019 (3.3 million). In 2020, the country reported the eradication of 11.5 million opium poppy plants, a massive increase compared with the previous year (53,000 plants).

516. In Costa Rica, the amount of cannabis seized, which amounted to 16.8 tons in 2019, dropped to 2.0 tons in 2020, before increasing to a total of 9.9 tons in the first four months of 2021. The number of cannabis plants seized in Costa Rica plummeted, from 1.4 million plants seized in 2019 to 500 plants in 2020. In Panama, the amount of cannabis seized in 2020 amounted to 16.1 tons, a 25 per cent increase over the 12.9 tons seized in 2019.

517. During the period 2015–2019, Guatemala, along with Saudi Arabia and Turkey, seized the largest amounts of amphetamine globally, accounting for 45 per cent of the total amount of the substance seized around the world.

518. According to the UNODC *Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment 2020* report, published in November 2020, the quantities of “ecstasy” seized in Central America and some Caribbean countries increased slightly in recent years. The drug mostly originated in Western and Southern Europe. Some “ecstasy” products that were sold in the region may have contained substances other than MDMA, such as NPS. The report also pointed to the increasing non-medical use of tranquillizers, such as benzodiazepines and barbiturates, in Central American countries, in particular among women, secondary school students and university students.

519. Although the data from Latin America and the Caribbean on NPS detected for the first time are less comprehensive than those from other regions, the reports of the emergence of the substances in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Puerto Rico, corroborate concerns about their spread to less-developed regions across the globe. By January 2021, Costa Rica had detected the highest number of NPS of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean.

520. Stimulants and hallucinogens accounted for a significant proportion of all NPS detected for the first time in the region. There are indications that some NPS may have been sold in Central and South America under the name of other drugs, or in mixtures containing other drugs. For example, NBOMe compounds continue to be sold as LSD. Samples of seized 4-bromo-2,5-dimethoxyphenethylamine (2C-B) often contained other substances, such as ketamine, amphetamine, MDMA or NPS.

5. Prevention and treatment

521. The Board notes the lack of recent estimates of the prevalence of drug use in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean. For example, recent estimates from the region are not available to enable the production of estimates of the extent of opioid use. The Board recommends that the countries concerned prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand in order to inform the development of evidence-based drug control policy and encourages bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to this end.

522. In Central America and the Caribbean, the availability of opioid analgesics for medical purposes for 2020 was one of the lowest among all regions and continued to be of concern. The consumption of psychotropic substances in Central America and the Caribbean is difficult to determine as only 8 out of the 20 countries of the region have provided consumption data on any psychotropic substances for the past several years.

523. The use of cannabis and cocaine, the proliferation of NPS and the use of controlled drugs without a medical prescription continue to be issues of concern in Central America and the Caribbean.

524. The past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population in Central America (3.1 per cent) and the Caribbean (3.4 per cent) is lower than that of the global average (almost 4 per cent).

525. According to the Barbados national primary school survey for 2020, which was used to examine drug use among grade 3 and grade 4 students (children aged 9–11), in public and private schools across the country, the lifetime prevalence of cannabis use among the students was 4.3 per cent and the past-year prevalence was 2.0 per cent. The mean age of first use of cannabis herb was as low as 8.2 years; about 12 per cent of the students surveyed believed that cannabis was easy to obtain.

526. In April 2021, CICAD published the findings of a project on NPS, heroin, fentanyl and other opioids, which was aimed at identifying how opioids and other emerging drugs were affecting countries in Latin America. A study that was conducted in two cities in the Dominican Republic as part of the project revealed a high relapse rate among opioid users in participating treatment centres, with most having been in treatment an average of four times.

527. According to the *World Drug Report 2021*, the annual prevalence of the use of cocaine in Central America and the Caribbean is estimated at 0.96 per cent and 0.63 per cent, respectively, of persons aged 15–64 years, which is above the global average (0.4 per cent).

528. The annual prevalence of amphetamine and prescription stimulant use among adults in Central America is estimated at 0.98 per cent (the annual prevalence for the Caribbean was not reported in the *World Drug Report 2021*). The non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants in many countries in Central America is estimated to be more common than the use of other amphetamines. The annual prevalence of the use of “ecstasy” is the lowest among the reported controlled stimulants, and is estimated at 0.17 per cent in Central America and 0.23 per cent in the Caribbean.

529. According to the best estimates from the latest UNODC data, published in 2021, about 20,000 people aged 15–64 in Central America and 90,000 in the Caribbean inject drugs. Among this group, about 600 people in Central America and 13,000 people in the Caribbean were estimated to be living with HIV. The available data on HIV among people who inject drugs, however, covered only a limited portion of that population group. In December 2020, the Centre for Comprehensive Dependency Care of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance of the Dominican Republic provided a workshop for health professionals in the areas of psychology, nursing, social work and psychiatry to improve the care and management of patients using substances, in particular opioids, that are linked to HIV infection.

North America

Families and communities in Canada and the United States continue to be severely affected by increasing numbers of drug overdoses and drug-related deaths, especially those involving synthetic opioids and contaminated stimulants.

Cannabis regulations in North America continue to shift towards the legal regulation of use for non-medical purposes.

1. Major developments

530. Drug overdoses and drug-related deaths in Canada and the United States are an ever-worsening public health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the regional overdose crisis, owing to the increased contamination of drugs with fentanyl and other synthetic opioids and decreased access to treatment and prevention services. The worsening overdose crisis in those countries has been marked by increases in the number of deaths involving psychostimulants, such as methamphetamine.

531. Changes to cannabis regulations and general drug use decriminalization measures continue to be adopted at a rapid pace in North America. The legal and policy landscape with respect to cannabis consumption for non-medical purposes has continued to shift in Mexico and the United States. New regulations for the use of cannabis by adults for non-medical purposes are under development in Mexico on the basis of a Supreme Court decision.

2. Regional cooperation

532. The three countries of North America have continued their close cooperation on drug control, including through cross-border law enforcement operations and efforts to develop collective responses to illicit drug production. For example, Mexico and the United States have been deepening their collaboration on drug control through the adoption of public health approaches. The regional coordination has included efforts to ensure that joint activities to combat drug trafficking adhere to the rule of law and respect human rights.

533. Cooperation efforts between Canada, Mexico and the United States have been enhanced through the North American Drug Dialogue and the North American Maritime Security Initiative to coordinate law

enforcement actions and drug-related public health policy. Bilateral collaboration between Canada and the United States has been undertaken through the Joint Action Plan to Combat Opioids, which was formally launched in 2020. The United States is also working with the Office of the Prosecutor General of Mexico and other agencies in Mexico, including military units that perform counter-narcotics work, to create judicial records of seizures and to establish protocols for reporting incidents in a central database.

534. The Roadmap for a Renewed United States-Canada Partnership, which was announced on 23 February 2021, includes an agreement that the Governments of both countries would strengthen the Joint Action Plan on Opioids, in the light of increases in drug use and the number of overdoses. The two countries agreed to enhance law enforcement collaboration by re-establishing the Cross-Border Crime Forum to facilitate cooperation among law enforcement bodies, including strengthening information-sharing and addressing cross-border law enforcement challenges such as tackling the illegal flows of firearms, drugs and currency.

535. On 13 May 2021, Mexico and the United States held a high-level dialogue on a new security strategy and agreed on mutual security goals and priorities. These include reducing drug trafficking and the violence linked to organized crime and addressing drug use as a public health problem. Both sides agreed to build an intelligence-based framework to address the causes of violence and drug use.

3. National regulation, policy and action

536. During the reporting period, drug control regulations and policies were newly developed or amended at the national and at the state and provincial levels in North America. While new policy developments have primarily been focused on targeting the worsening overdose crisis and countering drug trafficking, there have also been new regulations pertaining to cannabis use for both medical and non-medical purposes in Mexico and throughout the United States.

537. The Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States released its *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment* in March 2021. In that report, the Drug Enforcement Administration reported that overdoses in the United States were being fuelled by illicit fentanyl, while heroin and prescription opioids were also significant challenges for public health and law enforcement

authorities. It also reported that Mexican organized criminal groups had allegedly increased the manufacture and supply to the United States of illicit fentanyl and methamphetamine, leading to a rise in drug-poisoning deaths and seizures of those substances in 2021.

538. In April 2021, the Government of the United States released a statement of drug policy priorities for the first year of its administration. In the statement, the Government prioritized the need to address the overdose epidemic, expand access to treatment and recovery services and enhance support for prevention efforts to reduce youth substance use and the supply of illicit substances. The need to address racial, gender and economic equity issues in drug policy and health care was also stressed.

539. The United States has increased its federal funding to address drug use and the overdose epidemic. Released in May 2021, the National Drug Control Budget for 2022 provides for an investment of \$41 billion for National Drug Control Program agencies, which is an increase of \$669.9 million compared with 2021. The increased funding is expected to support access to critical public health interventions, such as treatment and prevention services. According to the budget description, a record 57.3 per cent of drug control resources will go to demand-reduction programmes, including evidence-based treatment, harm reduction, prevention and recovery services. The American Rescue Plan also includes \$4 billion for mental health and substance use disorders.

540. In March 2021, the Office of National Drug Control Policy of the United States held three consultations with tribal leaders to better inform federal drug policy priorities and ensure that they met the needs of American Indian and Alaska Native individuals, families and communities. The drug policy consultations addressed the opioid epidemic and other challenges related to substance use, including how to decrease barriers to treatment and ways to address the impact of intergenerational trauma in tribal communities with respect to drug use and overdose.

541. On 15 March 2021, the United States Customs and Border Protection and the Department of Homeland Security of the United States started implementing amended regulations based on requirements of the Synthetics Trafficking and Overdose Prevention Act of 2018. The amended regulations provide for new, advanced electronic data requirements for international mail shipments in order to stop the influx of opioids to the United States. The expected benefit of the amended regulations will be more precise identification of suspicious postal

shipments, in advance of their arrival, to disrupt the supply chain of illegal opioids.

542. In June 2021, the INCB GRIDS Programme issued a special notification to all Project Ion and OPIOIDS project focal points about changes in the national legislation of the United States, which included the placing of 14 fentanyl-related substances under schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act. INCB requested that the notice be circulated to appropriate national law enforcement entities and regulatory counterparts and to communicate any suspicious or unauthorized shipments of or trafficking in those substances by means of the IONICS platform.

543. Mexico became the first country in the wider Latin American region to adopt a feminist foreign policy in 2020. The policy, based on the application of a gender perspective across all sectors, helps to promote government actions that will reduce and eliminate structural differences, gender gaps and inequalities. The policy will be implemented over the period 2020–2024. At the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Government of Mexico explained that, in line with its feminist foreign policy, Mexico had articulated three key approaches to drug policy reform, namely the improvement of access to treatment services, prevention and harm reduction, and coordination and cooperation to combat the production, transit and distribution of drugs.

544. In North America, during the reporting period, new measures pertaining to the legalization and decriminalization of drug use, in particular concerning the use of cannabis for medical and non-medical purposes, were adopted.

545. In Mexico, on 19 November 2020, the Senate adopted the Federal Act on the Regulation of Cannabis, which would permit the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. After being approved in general terms by the Chamber of Deputies, the bill was under additional review in the Senate. On 28 June 2021, however, the Supreme Court of Justice declared unconstitutional all articles of the country's General Health Law that prohibit the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes, on the basis of the constitutional right of consumers to freedom of personal development. The Supreme Court decision did not legalize all activities associated with the non-medical use of cannabis, including transportation and commercialization. On 12 January 2021, Mexico also published regulations on the use of cannabis for medical purposes with the aim of controlling, developing and monitoring cannabis raw materials, pharmacological derivatives of cannabis and medicines containing

cannabis for the purpose of production, research or manufacture or for medical purposes.

546. At the federal level in the United States, the use and sale of cannabis continue to be illegal. In December 2020, the House of Representatives passed the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement Act, to remove cannabis from the schedule of controlled substances. Under the legislation, which was not subsequently passed in the Senate, prior cannabis convictions would have been expunged and sentencing review hearings would have been conducted in relation to federal cannabis offences. Included in the findings of the draft legislation was that legal cannabis sales at the state level had totalled \$9.5 billion in 2017 and were projected to reach \$23 billion by 2022.

547. In the United States, despite the continued federal control of cannabis under Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act, as at 1 November 2021, 36 states and the District of Columbia permit the possession and consumption of cannabis by adults for medical purposes. Furthermore, 18 states and the District of Columbia have legalized the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. During the reporting period, Connecticut, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York and Virginia signed cannabis regulations into law to permit the use and possession of cannabis by adults for non-medical purposes.

548. After the federal legalization of “hemp” cultivation through the 2018 Farm Bill, *delta*-8-THC and other THC compounds other than the federally scheduled *delta*-9-THC may be derived from CBD generated from “hemp”. In several states, *delta*-8-THC is being added as a psychoactive ingredient to other products, including for sale in unregulated stores or on commercial websites. Some states, such as Vermont and Michigan, have recently started to ban *delta*-8-THC, clarifying that the production of it from CBD has become a way of creating a psychoactive substance from legally produced cannabis, which does not have high concentrations of psychoactive cannabinoids. The Hemp Rules adopted in Vermont in 2020, therefore, ban the use of synthetic cannabinoids in the production of any “hemp” or “hemp”-infused product. The producers in Vermont, as a result, cannot manufacture the *delta*-8-THC cannabinoid and the use, possession or distribution of *delta*-8-THC may result in federal or state criminal sanctions. In Michigan, as of 11 October 2021, products containing *delta*-8-THC are covered by state law and regulated by the state's Marijuana Regulatory Agency so that all intoxicating substances from the cannabis plant are to be safety-tested through the state-wide monitoring system and in the state's seed-to-sale tracking system. **The Board reminds countries that**

delta-8-THC is an isomer of THC, which is listed in Schedule I of the 1971 Convention.

549. In the State of Oregon, Ballot Measure 109, which was approved by voters in 2020, directs the state's health authority to begin a two-year development period for the licensing and regulation of psilocybin products and the provision of psilocybin services. Psilocybin is listed in Schedule I of the 1971 Convention. The health authority of Oregon will work, from January 2021 until December 2022, to establish the regulations implementing Ballot Measure 109. The state's Psilocybin Advisory Board, established by the ballot measure, will develop a long-term strategic plan for ensuring that the psilocybin services provide safe, accessible and affordable therapy. Applications for licences related to the manufacture, sale and purchase of psilocybin products will be accepted from January 2023.

550. In July 2021, the Governor of Rhode Island signed into law legislation that authorizes a two-year pilot programme to prevent drug overdoses through the establishment of community-based centres where people may consume drugs under the supervision of health-care professionals. With that legislation, Rhode Island will be the first state in the United States to authorize such a pilot programme, although the facilities would need to be authorized by the municipality in which the centre would operate. The law also foresees the establishment of an advisory committee to make recommendations to the state's department of health on maximizing the public health and safety benefits of the centres.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

551. Restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic initially disrupted drug trafficking routes and precursor chemical supply chains in North America. However, alternative routes and methods were quickly adopted by drug traffickers. It was reported in the *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* of the Department of State of the United States for 2021 that there had been an increase in methamphetamine manufacture, trafficking and use, with Mexico continuing to be the primary source of heroin and methamphetamine in the United States, the main transit country for cocaine from South America and a source and transit route for fentanyl. Canada continued to be a primary source of synthetic drugs, cannabis and "ecstasy" trafficked to the United States. Health Canada indicated that, since 2019, methamphetamine and cocaine had become the two most commonly seized substances by law enforcement entities in Canada.

552. On 24 February 2021, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States launched a new comprehensive law enforcement and prevention initiative, Operation Engage, to reduce drug use and overdose deaths. The operation allows field divisions of the Drug Enforcement Administration to focus on the biggest drug threat and resulting violence in their respective geographical areas. The Drug Enforcement Administration announced Project Wave Breaker in April 2021, which is aimed at disrupting the illicit flow of fentanyl into the United States that is driving the record-setting rates of overdose deaths. The project is expected to be focused on interdiction and enforcement efforts and on targeting the activities of transnational criminal organizations.

553. On 24 June 2021, UNODC and the Government of Mexico published a fourth technical monitoring report on opium poppy cultivation, corresponding to a study conducted between July 2018 and June 2019. The study estimated that the area under opium poppy cultivation in Mexico during that period was 21,500 ha, constituting a 23 per cent decrease compared with the previous period in 2017/18. The national average yield of opium gum was estimated at 20.5 kg per hectare, with the increase explained by the improvement in harvesting and crop management techniques by opium poppy farmers. The potential national production of dry opium gum was estimated at 440 metric tons, a 2 per cent decrease compared with the previous monitoring period. The concentration of morphine in opium gum for the reported period was 17.6 per cent.

554. In March 2021, the GRIDS Programme issued a special notification in IONICS on xylazine trafficking following increased communications involving this NPS, which is not under international control. Xylazine is commonly used in veterinary medicine as a sedative and it has analgesic and muscle-relaxant properties. However, there have been recent increases in incidents involving the substance. In 2020, the Drug Analysis Service of Health Canada, which analyses suspected illegal drugs seized by Canadian law enforcement entities, identified 198 samples containing xylazine, of which 197 samples also contained fentanyl or its analogues. In October 2020, an alert was issued by the Center for Forensic Science Research and Education in the United States after xylazine was identified in cases involving fentanyl, heroin or a combination of the two. The risk of fatal overdose may increase with the use of drugs adulterated with xylazine, especially in combination with opioids, owing to increased respiratory depression effects. INCB open net monitoring has found that xylazine is being marketed online.

555. In January 2021, the GRIDS Programme convened a four-day expert group meeting on trafficking in

synthetic opioids, fentanyl and related dangerous substances in the western hemisphere through e-commerce platforms. Online vendors are often present on these platforms offering dangerous substances that have no legitimate uses. The platforms, therefore, can have a significant impact on the prevention of the marketing and movement of these dangerous substances. The meeting facilitated regional public-private dialogue and raised awareness, and participants shared good practices to further enhance cross-sector collaboration in the region and recommended practical steps to ensure safe supply chains. Over 40 Governments and private sector experts discussed current regional trafficking trends and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on them.

556. In 2020 and 2021, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States seized or assisted in the seizure of fentanyl precursors, including 1-Boc-4-piperidone, 4-piperidone and 4-AP (4-anilinopiperidine) (*N*-phenylpiperidin-4-amine). These seizures may illustrate that criminal organizations are using precursors further down the synthesis chain, instead of the immediate and widely controlled precursors ANPP and NPP.

557. From 1 November 2020 to 30 June 2021, officers from North American countries participated in INCB-led training on operational tools that are designed to enhance officer capacity to counter trafficking in dangerous substances. These tools include the secure communications platform IONICS and the GRIDS Intelligence tool, which is a newly launched, state-of-the-art visual analytics tool that allows fast identification of routes and modi operandi to support the strategic and operational work of front-line law enforcement officers. In-depth training was also provided on the safe handling of opioids and other dangerous substances.

558. Domestic production and availability of cannabis has been rising throughout the region. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, in the United States, most states that have legalized cannabis have not placed limits on its potency, resulting in the increase in potency levels of cannabis and cannabis concentrate products sold on those markets. The National Center for Natural Products Research at the University of Mississippi has also reported that the percentage of *delta*-9-THC in cannabis samples from the illicit marketplace submitted for analysis by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration rose from about 4 per cent to 14 per cent over the period 1995–2019. The Sentencing Commission of the United States has reported that, since 2016, the number of offenders sentenced for trafficking in cannabis in United States courts has decreased by 67.3 per cent.

559. Cannabis production, distribution and sale in Canada continue to evolve after the Government's legalization of the use of the substance for non-medical purposes in October 2018 and the legalization of the sale of edible cannabis products in October 2019. According to a study from Statistics Canada on cannabis use published in April 2021, the cannabis industry in Canada is now better equipped to compete with the black market on price, convenience and selection. The data used in the study come from the cross-sectional, voluntary national cannabis survey, using an Internet-based questionnaire, which may have some impact on their reliability. According to the survey results, more Canadians were reporting that they were obtaining at least some of their cannabis from legal sources or growing it, and fewer were relying on friends and family or illegal sources in 2020. Cannabis use was higher in late 2020, at 20 per cent, than in the first quarter of 2019, at 17.5 per cent, and in the first quarter of 2018, at 14.0 per cent. Daily or almost-daily use was, at 7.9 per cent in late 2020, up from 5.4 per cent in the first quarter of 2018, suggesting that growth in daily or almost-daily use was slightly higher than in use over the past three months. The data also show that growth in the daily or almost-daily use among females (51 per cent) was higher than the growth in such use among males (33 per cent), thus resulting in a narrowing of the gender gap over the period 2018–2020.

560. Canada, Mexico and the United States participated in Operation New Horizons, which was aimed at identifying key sources and redistribution points involving tapentadol and tramadol (for further information, see para. 352 above).

5. Prevention and treatment

561. North America continued to be affected by the acceleration in the number of overdose deaths in 2020 and 2021. On 17 November 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the United States reported that there had been an estimated 100,306 drug overdose deaths during the 12-month period ending in April 2021, an increase of 28.5 per cent over the 78,056 deaths during the same period the year before. The estimated number of overdose deaths from opioids increased to 75,673 during the same period, up from 56,064 the year before. The majority of those overdose deaths involved synthetic opioids, primarily illicitly manufactured fentanyl, but the Centers for Disease Control also noted an increase in the number of overdose deaths involving psychostimulants, such as methamphetamine.

562. In December 2020, in response to the increase in the number of overdoses, the Centers for Disease Control issued recommendations that highlighted the need for essential services to remain accessible for people at risk of overdose. On the basis of local needs, the recommendations included calls for an expansion of the distribution and use of naloxone and overdose-prevention education.

563. To help alleviate the COVID-19-related decrease in access to drug use treatment, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs of the United States supported the organization of over 300 online training sessions in 2020, reaching 15,000 medical and treatment experts outside the United States, and supported the provision of technical assistance to improve and develop effective policies aimed at reducing drug use. The Drug Enforcement Administration also finalized measures to improve access to medication-assisted treatment, in particular in rural areas, where those with opioid use disorder may have limited treatment options. On 28 June 2021, a new rule on registration requirements for narcotic treatment programmes with mobile components was published by the Drug Enforcement Administration. The rule eliminates the separate registration requirement for mobile narcotic treatment programmes for those registrants who are authorized to dispense methadone for opioid use disorder. The new rule should help facilitate access to treatment by underserved communities and incarcerated individuals and meet United States drug policy priorities, such as advancing racial equity.

564. In January 2021, the Department of Health and Human Services of the United States announced new practice guidelines for the administration of buprenorphine for treating opioid use disorder in order to expand access to medication-assisted treatment. Eligible physicians would be exempted from certain federal certification requirements needed to prescribe buprenorphine for opioid use disorder treatment. The Department also supported the “Helping to end addiction long-term (Heal) initiative”, investing \$1.5 billion in conducting 500 research studies across the United States with the aim of identifying new therapeutic targets for both pain management and opioid use disorder, reducing the risks of opioid use through non-pharmacological strategies and improving opioid addiction treatment. The Department also launched a project on addressing the opioid crisis in communities of colour, to identify and study the prevalence and impact of substance use disorders, including opioid use disorder, among racial and ethnic minority populations and the policy frameworks, practices and circumstances surrounding treatment for those populations.

565. In July 2021, leaders from the National Institutes of Health published an article on choosing appropriate language to reduce stigma and improve how people are treated. It was noted in the article that, in the United States, nearly 90 per cent of people with substance use disorders do not receive treatment or may receive flawed clinical care owing to stigma-related biases. Similar to the Board’s own analysis in its annual report for 2020, it is explained in the article that using scientifically accurate language and terms that focus on the patient’s experience is a key component to reducing stigma.

566. Canada continues to be affected by a worsening public health crisis owing to opioid overdoses and deaths. There were 21,174 apparent opioid toxicity deaths between January 2016 and December 2020. The Government of Canada has indicated that the increase in such deaths since the onset of the pandemic is likely a result of the increasingly toxic drug supply, isolation, stress and anxiety and limited availability or accessibility of services for people who use drugs. The use of and trafficking in methamphetamine have also increased in Canada since 2018. From January to December 2020, the Government of Canada reported that 47 per cent of stimulant toxicity deaths involved methamphetamine, up from 44 per cent in 2019 and 43 per cent in 2018. There are added concerns about the significant health and safety impacts of methamphetamine use on some indigenous communities across the country. In June 2021, Health Canada issued a report on methamphetamine use, expressing concern about the increase in use of methamphetamine and the risks posed to the health and safety of all communities in Canada.

567. The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released its strategic plan for the period 2021–2026, entitled “Focused on the future”. The Centre’s strategic goals include advancing knowledge by synthesizing research and providing evidence on major issues of concern to Canada, such as the opioid and methamphetamine crises, polysubstance use disorder and concurrent disorders such as the relationship between substance use and mental health. The Centre’s research is expected to respond to intersectional, gender- and diversity-specific impacts or trends in substance use. According to the Centre, over the next five years, the legalization of cannabis use will start to affect consumption patterns and attitudes toward the drug and it expects to provide evidence and advice on cannabis use and its effects on the population.

568. According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, there was a substantial decrease in the availability and capacity of substance use treatment and

harm-reduction services in the early phase of the pandemic because of closures and restrictions on the number of clients allowed at clinics and inpatient facilities. This led to many clients returning to or engaging in higher-risk substance use, and increasing waiting times for services. Even though the delivery of care for substance use treatment shifted rapidly to online platforms, the availability was not equitably distributed and could therefore not completely replace the need for in-person treatment options.

569. The 2020 Health Canada cannabis survey indicated that 54 per cent of people who use cannabis reported using it three days per month or less and 18 per cent reported daily cannabis use. More than half of those who use cannabis choose to obtain it through a legal source, with 41 per cent reporting a legal storefront as their usual source, which was an increase compared with 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on cannabis use, with 56 per cent using the same amount, 22 per cent more and 22 per cent less. Smoking remained the most common method of cannabis consumption, although it declined compared with 2019 and the use of edible cannabis products increased.

570. In January 2021, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction issued the *National Treatment Indicators Report: 2016–2018 Data*. According to the report, after alcohol, cannabis and cocaine were the most commonly reported problem substances among individuals in treatment. More than half of individuals seeking treatment reported at least two problem substances, suggesting a high prevalence rate of polysubstance use.

571. As part of efforts by Canada to reduce the negative consequences of drug use, the country has opened 37 supervised consumption sites since 2017, with more than 2.6 million visits to these sites and over 22,000 overdoses reversed without a single death. Drug checking has also become a more frequently used approach in Canada as a result of the overdose crisis. On 21 April 2021, the drug-checking service in Toronto released its 2020 annual report, in which it indicated that, in 2020, the first full year of operation of its service, 1,657 drug samples had been checked. The report concluded that 53 per cent of the samples checked had been expected to be fentanyl, of which 7 per cent were known to be associated with an overdose; 63 per cent of expected fentanyl substances had contained benzodiazepine-related drugs; and 31 per cent of expected heroin substances had contained fentanyl.

572. In July 2021, Statistics Canada released data from its wastewater survey of five major cities, which suggested an increase in drug consumption since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 14 drugs measured in the

survey, the levels of cannabis, fentanyl and methamphetamine were found to have increased significantly early in the pandemic. At a rate four times higher than in any other city measured, Vancouver, the capital of British Columbia, had the highest fentanyl loads in its wastewater. Methamphetamine loads in the wastewater were highest in Edmonton, capital of the neighbouring province of Alberta, with approximately twice as much as entering the sewers as in Vancouver. According to Statistics Canada, ongoing collection of the samples will help with understanding the shifting landscape of drug consumption across Canada.

573. There have been efforts in the United States to remove state-level, criminal prohibitions on drug-checking tools, such as fentanyl test strips. There are no such restrictions at the federal level. On 17 December 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended the establishment of drug-checking programmes in order to improve the detection of overdose outbreaks. On 7 April 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration announced that federal funding could be used to purchase rapid fentanyl testing to help curb the dramatic spike in drug overdose deaths. In May 2021, Arizona legalized the use of such strips, as narcotic drug-testing products, to the extent that they are no longer considered drug paraphernalia. In the same month, the Governor of Arizona also signed into law Senate Bill 1250, which legalizes needle-exchange programmes as part of state efforts to encourage individuals who inject drugs to enrol in evidence-based treatment.

574. In the United States, a major settlement of \$26 billion dollars was reached in July 2021 in lawsuits filed by nearly 4,000 local governments and states against three major pharmaceutical distributors and one of the largest opioid manufacturers over their role in creating the country's opioid crisis. Most of the settlement money is planned to be spent on opioid treatment and prevention. The agreement is also expected to require changes to prevent a similar opioid crisis from happening again, including through the establishment of a centralized independent body to provide distributors and state regulators with data about where drugs are going and how often. The establishment of such a body is expected to eliminate blind spots in the current systems used by distributors and help detect suspicious opioid orders from pharmacies.

575. The National Institute on Drug Abuse of the United States has published an analysis of substance use behaviours and attitudes among adolescents in the United States, showing that adolescent cannabis use did not significantly change during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This was despite perceived decreases among the students of the availability of cannabis. During the period February to mid-March 2020, the proportion of students who reported “fairly” or “very” easy access dropped by 17 per cent, from 76 per cent in the spring before the pandemic to 59 per cent during the pandemic. The levels of use, however, did not change significantly. Before the pandemic, 23 per cent of students said that they had used cannabis in the past 30 days, compared with 20 per cent during the pandemic.

576. On 24 June 2021, the Ministry of Health of Mexico released a report on mental health and the consumption of psychoactive substances. The report includes the finding that, among drug users, about 40 per cent noted an increase in consumption owing to stress, anxiety or isolation. Besides a worrying increase in the demand for treatment for use of ATS since 2017, most substance-related deaths were also associated with stimulants.

577. On the issue of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected substance use patterns, CICAD invited Mexico to participate in the hemispheric study on patterns of consumption of psychoactive substance and COVID-19. A total of 17,267 people from the 32 states of Mexico participated, 62 per cent (10,677) women, 37 per cent (6,413) men and 1 per cent (177) with unspecified gender. With an average age of 40.9 years, most (78.1 per cent) were employed; 14.7 per cent were students and 4.4 per cent were unemployed. It was a voluntary, online survey designed by CICAD. Participants indicated that, in the previous year, they had used substances at the following rates: cannabis (14.6 per cent), tranquillizers (12.6 per cent), opioids (12 per cent), cocaine (11.8 per cent), methamphetamines (11.5 per cent), “crack” cocaine (11.4 per cent), “ecstasy” (11.4 per cent) and inhalants (11.3 per cent). The consumption of tranquillizers and opioids was higher than is usually reported in national surveys or in the demand for treatment, where they are generally low-prevalence substances. Among the respondents, 59.9 per cent of drug users reported having stopped drug use during the pandemic; however, 33.1 per cent maintained the same use and 3.1 per cent increased their use. Those who increased their use of illicit drugs mainly increased consumption of cannabis (10.6 per cent) and tranquillizers (6.7 per cent). Another aspect that was surveyed was the perception of the effects of illicit drugs. In that regard, 13.1 per cent of users continued to perceive the same effect, 2.2 per cent perceived a more powerful effect, and 3.6 per cent perceived a less powerful effect.

578. UNODC has been working with the Government of Mexico to improve the quality of drug dependence treatment services in Mexico and has drafted a road map

for the adoption of international treatment standards. UNODC has also administered a survey to over 600 treatment centres across Mexico to generate a map of services currently available. As part of the project, the National Commission against Addictions in Mexico formed a technical working group in charge of quality assurance of treatment services across the country, with representatives of four government agencies, UNODC and CICAD and international experts.

579. For Mexico, the main impact of COVID-19 on drug use treatment services was the decrease in demand for treatment at both governmental and non-governmental facilities compared with an average year. With a considerable reduction in the number of cases of treatment for drug use during 2020, social-distancing measures had an impact on access to treatment for people who needed it. For example, in 2019, the national network treated 162,530 people for the use of psychoactive substances, while in 2020, 101,142 people were treated. This decrease was despite the fact that the government units maintained the same capacity for treatment services, implementing preventive measures for COVID-19 in accordance with the epidemiological traffic light of each state.

South America

Larger quantities of cocaine and precursor chemicals were seized in 2020 and 2021 as organized criminal groups increased shipment sizes to compensate for losses during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government of Colombia established the legal basis for resuming the aerial spraying of glyphosate to intensify cocaine-eradication efforts.

More Governments in the region regulated the cultivation and manufacturing of and trade in cannabis for medical, scientific and industrial purposes.

1. Major developments

580. In the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, many developments in South America have been related to how criminal groups, law enforcement institutions and people who use drugs have been affected by the restrictions on the movement of people and goods and by the stricter monitoring of borders as a result of the pandemic.

Moreover, the health emergency has magnified the dominance of criminal organizations in some territories and their role as providers of basic services to some marginalized populations, including through their implementation of public health measures to prevent the spread of the virus that government authorities were unable to enforce. The closure of schools during the pandemic has further aggravated the risk that impoverished youth could be recruited by criminal organizations and turn to criminal activities, such as the illicit cultivation of and trafficking in controlled substances.

581. After a sharp decline in the early months of the pandemic, when movement restrictions hindered buyers from accessing cultivation areas, coca leaf and coca paste prices recovered in late 2020 and in 2021. During the first months of the pandemic, Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia registered a decrease in prices of 20–50 per cent. In Colombia, given the difficulties experienced by coca leaf buyers in reaching growing areas, farmers either processed or hired processing services to produce coca paste for buyers in other markets or for sale at a later time, in order to avoid losses. As mobility restrictions were lifted in the region, cocaine manufacture and trafficking picked up, increasing the demand for precursor chemicals. Owing to the reduction of licit chemical manufacturing during the pandemic, and to meet the demand for cocaine, criminal groups had to rely on the artisanal production of chemical precursors to maintain their manufacturing capacity. By the end of 2020, the cocaine market had started to stabilize, and seizures of increasing quantities of the drug were reported by authorities in the region.

582. Today, over 50 per cent of households in Latin America have access to the Internet, which represents a considerable increase from 10 years ago, when it was 30 per cent. The popularity of the Internet, especially the darknet, for the illicit sale and purchase of internationally controlled substances has been on the rise in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this process, as online purchasing using social media or the darknet and distribution through postal services and couriers allow criminal organizations to continue their activities in spite of border controls and movement restrictions implemented as a result of the pandemic.

583. Air and maritime routes for drug trafficking have become the most suitable alternatives to circumvent restrictions on travel by land. Traffickers have increasingly used small aircraft to transport cocaine between Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Paraguay and Peru. The use of private aircraft to move drugs within the region and to Europe has also been noted in other countries. In

addition, the Paraguay-Paraná waterway system, which consists of 3,400 km of uninterrupted rivers connecting Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay to the Atlantic Ocean, appears to have been consolidated as a gateway for transporting cocaine manufactured in Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru to international cocaine markets through ports in Brazil and Paraguay. This poses a new challenge for the authorities, which were accustomed to the movement of drugs from the Plurinational State of Bolivia mainly by means of air and land routes.

584. In the past two years, trafficking in drugs from South America to illicit markets in Africa and Europe has intensified. Increasing quantities of drugs coming from South America have been reported in Europe, as criminal groups in South America have expanded their markets and criminal groups based in Europe now travel to South America to manage drug shipments to Europe. In late 2020 and throughout 2021, record quantities of drugs arriving in containers shipped from ports in South America were seized by European authorities. Increasing quantities of cocaine from South America are also arriving in Africa, which is becoming a significant transit point for drugs manufactured in South America that are later redirected to the illicit drug markets in Europe and other neighbouring regions.

585. Fluctuations in trafficking in cocaine and coca paste were less pronounced in some border areas, where trafficking in goods and persons appears to have remained active or even increased. Catatumbo, a region in Colombia bordering the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, was one of the few regions in Colombia where trafficking remained stable throughout the pandemic. In Brazil, the quantity of cocaine seized increased by 38 per cent at the borders with Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru, and members of the Primeiro Comando da Capital, one of the largest organized criminal groups involved in drug trafficking in Brazil, were arrested at the border with Paraguay in May 2021.

586. The increasing presence of armed groups in border areas in some countries has also resulted in higher tensions among organized criminal groups and between those groups and military forces. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported that 2,371 anti-drug operations and 27 military operations had been carried out in the States of Apure, Falcón, Guárico, Mérida and Zulia in the first months of 2021. Those operations resulted in the seizure of over 18.5 tons of controlled substances and 71.9 tons of chemical precursors, along with the dismantling of 29 illicit laboratories and eight unauthorized airstrips. In March 2021, clashes

between Venezuelan military forces and criminal organizations engaged in illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, escalated in Apure, which borders Colombia. In Colombia, UNODC reported that, for the past five years, there has been a trend towards the concentration of illicit coca bush cultivation along border areas and in geostrategic zones for cocaine trafficking. Human rights organizations have expressed concerns over possible violations of human rights committed in military operations in the State of Apure, where, according to information from UNHCR, more than 5,800 people had to flee to Colombia to escape armed confrontations that started on 21 March 2021.

587. In October 2021, disputes erupted in the Plurinational State of Bolivia among coca leaf growers and security forces over the control of the main coca market in the country, ADEPCOCA, located in La Paz. In 2019, 90 per cent of the proceeds from the licit sale of coca leaf, corresponding to \$173 million, passed through the market. In recent years, it has been the centre of disputes between two groups of coca growers: one supporting the current Government and the other from the traditional growing area of Los Yungas de la Paz, which feels neglected by the Government. Tensions rose when, in September 2021, the group supportive of the Government removed representatives of the opposing group and took control of the premises. After two weeks of disruptions, it was agreed that elections would be carried out to decide the new ADEPCOCA board of directors. In the meantime, in November 2021, traditional growers from Los Yungas de la Paz inaugurated a new market.

588. Countries in South America have responded to recent increases in drug trafficking by creating special anti-drug military, law enforcement or intelligence units. For example, in February 2021, Colombia launched the Drug Trafficking and Transnational Threats Command, a new military unit consisting of 7,000 elite personnel, to target drug trafficking and terrorist organizations.

589. On 30 July 2021, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela inaugurated the Centre for Strategic Counter-Narcotics Analysis, which will formulate and generate information for high-level decision-making in order to combat drug trafficking and related crimes. Brazil established a centre of excellence for illicit drug supply reduction, supported by UNODC and the United Nations Development Programme, to provide the National Secretariat for Drug Policies with strategic studies and trend analyses relating to illicit drug supply, transnational organized crime and other areas of concern, with a view to improving evidence-based public policy- and

decision-making. As of July 2021, in view of the position of Brazil in the regional and global illicit drug markets, the experts operating the Integrated System for Illicit Crop Monitoring will be providing technical assistance to the centre to develop a price monitoring methodology for the illicit drug market.

590. In September 2021, the Government of Brazil announced the creation of the Rapid Alert Subsystem of Drugs, as a response to the presence of NPS and “ecstasy”-type drugs in the country. The presence of these drugs in Brazil and the wider region has gradually increased since 2015. Between 2018 and 2020, several laboratories manufacturing “ecstasy” were dismantled in the country. The Rapid Alert Subsystem of Drugs was created together with the National Secretariat for Drug Policies and its intention is to allow for inter-agency coordination for the rapid identification of new substances. South America has an extensive network of national early warning systems on drugs (in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay) that cooperate through the regional early warning system established by CICAD.

591. Several Governments in the region have considered the cultivation of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes as a potential source of economic development. Legislation, regulations and policies to allow for the cultivation of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes, as well as for industrial purposes, were introduced or discussed in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. In some of those countries, the establishment of a licit cannabis industry has been presented by Governments as an option for economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Regional cooperation

592. After an initial reduction of activities owing to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, regional cooperation in South America has focused on enhancing collaboration to jointly identify and face the increased challenges posed by organized crime. In this regard, during the sixty-eighth regular session of CICAD, in December 2020, the new Hemispheric Drug Strategy and the Plan of Action 2021–2025 were approved. For more information, see paragraph 491 above.

593. The Orion international naval campaign to combat drug trafficking, led by Colombia and supported by over 30 countries in the Americas and Europe, continued its efforts to combat drug trafficking in the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. During phases VI and VII of the campaign, carried out from 15 September

to 30 October 2020 and from 15 May to 30 June 2021, respectively, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay and Peru provided air and land support for what was considered one of the world's largest multilateral operations against drug trafficking. The results of the Orion VI operation were published in November 2020 and included seizures of more than 90 tons of cocaine hydrochloride, 18.6 tons of cannabis, 33.2 tons of cannabis resin, 3.5 kg of heroin, 28 kg of amphetamines, 110.6 tons of solid chemical precursors and more than 141,500 litres of liquid chemical precursors. In addition, 76 vessels, five submersibles and seven aircraft were seized and 168 clandestine laboratories were dismantled. Orion VII resulted in seizures of 116 tons of cocaine hydrochloride, 95 tons of cannabis, 85 tons of solid chemical precursors, 215,700 litres of liquid chemical precursors, 237 tons of coca seeds and 2 tons of cannabis seeds. In addition, three submersibles and five aircraft were seized.

594. Through its projects, INCB has continued to provide support for competent national authorities in the region on the control and monitoring of internationally controlled substances. On 25 and 26 November 2020, INCB Learning provided training to officials from Colombia, Ecuador and Peru on the control and reporting of narcotic drugs, including cannabis and cannabis-related substances. Drug control officials of competent national authorities from 12 countries in South America, namely, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), have registered to use e-learning modules offered by INCB Learning. The modules cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, and the international drug control framework, and are available upon registration to officials of competent national authorities at no cost. **The Board urges all Governments to register relevant officials of their competent national authorities for the e-learning modules and to provide feedback and suggestions for areas in which the development of further training is needed.**

595. Under the INCB GRIDS Programme, a four-day expert group meeting was convened in January 2021 on trafficking in synthetic opioids, fentanyl and related dangerous substances through e-commerce platforms in Latin America and the Caribbean. Vendors offering synthetic opioids, fentanyl and related dangerous substances with no legitimate use to potential users in the region are often present on e-commerce platforms. Such platforms can therefore play a significant role in preventing the marketing and movement of those dangerous substances. The purpose of the meeting was to facilitate

regional public-private dialogue, raise awareness, share knowledge and best practices to further enhance cross-sector collaboration in the region, and recommend practical steps for future actions to ensure safe supply chains. At the meeting, more than 40 experts from the public and the private sectors discussed current regional trafficking trends and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in synthetic opioids, fentanyl and dangerous substances.

596. The GRIDS Programme also delivered a training webinar to 147 international law and regulatory enforcement officers from 14 Spanish-speaking countries in February 2021.⁵² The objective of the webinar was to provide Governments with information on INCB global approaches and operational tools that enhance the capacity of officers to counter trafficking in NPS, synthetic opioids, precursors and other dangerous substances not currently under international control.

597. The third phase of the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies (COPOLAD III) was initiated in June 2021. In this phase, the programme will focus on facilitating cooperation in different drug policy areas, including the provision of technical assistance and support for drug policy reform in line with international human rights, gender equality, sustainable development and public health standards. For more information, see paragraph 495 above.

598. Governments have also continued with existing or established new bilateral cooperation agreements, especially between countries that share borders. In March 2021, through Operation Alianza 24, Brazil and Paraguay eradicated 490 ha of cannabis cultivation and seized 14,670 kg of cannabis in the Department of Amambay, Paraguay, which shares a border with Brazil. In July 2021, Argentina and Paraguay signed a cooperation agreement to implement new complementary investigation strategies and exchange best practices and experiences on how to address offences related to organized crime.

3. National legislation, policy and action

599. In December 2020, the Government of Peru approved its new 10-year national policy against drugs.

⁵²Drug control officers and international experts from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) participated in the online training course, in compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures.

The implementation of the policy will be supervised by the National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs. Priority areas of the policy include institutional and socioeconomic strengthening, reducing illicit drug production and trafficking in strategic zones and decreasing drug use among vulnerable populations.

600. In February 2021, Decree No. 4432 was published in the *Official Gazette* of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Through the Decree, the National Counter-Narcotics Office became the National Counter-Narcotics Supervisory Authority. The new authority will design and execute public policies and strategies against trafficking in and the illicit use of drugs. The Decree is part of the process of reforming the country's organic law on drugs of 2010, which was initiated in 2019 to broaden the range of actions of law enforcement authorities and competent drug authorities in view of the changes and new trends in drug-related activities. The reform foresees the creation of special commands to address drug trafficking in areas occupied by organized criminal groups.

601. In Paraguay, the list of controlled psychoactive substances and chemical precursors was updated through Decree No. 5282 in May 2021. In June 2021, resolution 114/2021 of the Directorate of Sanitary Surveillance came into force, establishing the requirements and procedure for the registration and re-registration with the Directorate for establishments operating with controlled chemical substances. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, resolution SG 111/2021 was passed to establish the requirements and conditions for issuing emergency authorizations for relevant medicines, including those containing internationally controlled substances.

602. Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia have taken action to intensify their efforts against the illicit cultivation of coca bush. In March 2020, after a meeting between the President of Colombia and the President of the United States, discussions were resumed on the use of aerial spraying to enhance eradication efforts. In April 2021, Decree No. 380 was issued in Colombia, setting out the basis for compliance and limitations on the eradication of illicit coca bush cultivation through aerial spraying of glyphosate, should the National Narcotics Council approve the continuation of those activities. Colombia had suspended aerial spraying in 2015 following a Constitutional Court ruling that was based on the WHO findings that glyphosate was probably carcinogenic to humans and also had a negative impact on the environment.

603. In April 2021, a strategy to combat trafficking in controlled substances and control the expansion of coca

crop cultivation for the period 2021–2025 was published in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The objective of the strategy is to reduce drug trafficking through efficient monitoring of trafficking patterns, sustained reduction of licit and illicit coca bush cultivation, comprehensive prevention of drug use and the regionalization of international efforts within a framework of common and shared responsibility. In addition, the Plurinational State of Bolivia modified its institutional infrastructure for drug control, which had been in place for more than 20 years. On 6 January 2021, Law No. 1358 was adopted, under which the Council for Comprehensive Policies on the Elimination of Trafficking in Controlled Substances and Surplus Coca and on the Prevention of Drug Use was created. The Council is the highest authority for the approval, monitoring and evaluation of anti-drug trafficking policy, surplus coca and drug use prevention.

604. In June 2021, Uruguay presented its national drug strategy for the period 2021–2025. The strategy is divided into five components: (a) institutional strengthening; (b) integral health; (c) measures to regulate and control the market; (d) justice and coexistence; and (e) international relations and cooperation. In the light of the development of the licit cannabis market in the region and the advancement of related laws and policies, the strategy envisions the production of medicinal and industrial cannabis as a way to support scientific research and the local and international cannabis markets. Accordingly, in July 2021, Decree No. 046/2015 on the regulation of the production and commercialization of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes was amended. The new decree is aimed at easing registration and procedures related to the export of cannabis raw material and cannabis-based products of a psychoactive and non-psychoactive nature. The country's Institute for the Regulation and Control of Cannabis can now directly issue export authorizations for cannabis raw material.

605. In recent months, other Governments in the region have taken similar steps to join regional and international cannabis markets. In July 2021, Colombia modified Decree No. 613 of 2017 on safe and informed access to the use of medical and scientific cannabis. The new decree lifts the prohibition of the export of dried cannabis flowers for therapeutic purposes and guarantees better access to cannabis-based medicines.

606. In Paraguay, three companies have been authorized to import seeds for the cultivation and production of industrial cannabis. In June 2021, the National Anti-Drug Secretariat inaugurated a forensic laboratory and evidence centre to further examine industrial and medicinal uses of cannabis.

607. In Argentina, in April 2021, the Ministry of Health and the National Seed Institute signed resolution 5/2021, authorizing the registration of cannabis sativa germplasm in the cultivar registry, with a view to ensuring access to quality seeds of identified origin within the country. In June 2021, the Government presented a draft bill complementing Law No. 27350 on the use of cannabis for medical purposes. The bill is focused on the development of a legal framework for medical cannabis projects and on supporting the emergence of an industrial cannabis market, with special attention paid to the role of small and medium-sized businesses. The bill also provides for the creation of a national regulatory agency for cannabis, as required under article 28 of the 1961 Convention as amended.

608. In June 2021, a special commission of the Chamber of Deputies in Brazil approved bill 399/2015, which would permit the commercialization of cannabis-based medicines in the country. The bill will have to be adopted by the Federal Senate and be signed by the President before it can enter into force. It is expected to make cannabis-based medicines more economical and accessible to patients. To date, the Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency has issued import licences for only a limited number of cannabis-based medicines.

609. In July 2021, the President of Guyana announced that his Government would develop a legislative framework for the cultivation of cannabis for industrial purposes with the aim of generating economic advantages for the country. The announcement came after the submission on 28 January 2021 of a number of amendments to the country's narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances control act to reduce sentences for possession of small quantities of cannabis, with a view to reducing the prison population. Under the amendments, persons convicted for the possession of less than 15 grams of cannabis would be required to attend counselling sessions, and those found with quantities between 15 and 30 grams would have to perform community service in addition to receiving mandatory counselling.

610. In Peru, Law No. 6532 was adopted on 15 July 2021, modifying Law No. 30681 on the use of cannabis and its derivatives for medical and therapeutic purposes. The new law allows patients' associations to register in the official cannabis registry, thus allowing them to cultivate, process, transport and store cannabis and its derivatives for medical purposes.

611. **The Board reiterates that the personal cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes is inconsistent with the 1961 Convention as amended because, inter alia, it heightens the risk of diversion. The cultivation of**

cannabis by individuals for medical purposes does not allow Governments to exercise the supervision required over the production, manufacture, export, import and distribution of, trade in and use and possession of cannabis, the establishment of estimates for medical use, the furnishing of related statistical returns or the implementation of the provisions of articles 23 and 28 of the 1961 Convention as amended.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

612. In 2019, 83 per cent of the cocaine seized worldwide was seized in the Americas, with South America accounting for the majority. Between 2018 and 2019, the quantity of cocaine seized in the region increased by 5 per cent. That increase has been linked to both the rise in illicit cocaine manufacturing and the intensification of law enforcement activities. Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia and Peru reported increases in the quantities of cocaine seized between 2018 and 2019.

613. Despite a significant decrease in the area under illicit coca cultivation in Colombia since 2017, global cocaine manufacture has doubled in output since 2014 and reached the highest level ever recorded in 2019, at an estimated 1,784 tons. While Colombia has reported a reduction in the area under coca bush cultivation, data from Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru point to an increase.

614. Colombia has continued to report reduced areas under coca bush cultivation, with a decrease of 7 per cent, from 154,000 ha in 2019 to 143,000 ha in 2020. Compared with the historic high reached in 2017, the area has decreased by 16.3 per cent. The intensified eradication efforts of the Government could be one reason for the reduction of the area of cultivation. In 2020, the Government reported that 100,000 ha had been eradicated manually. Of the target area of 130,000 ha set for the year, 38,000 ha had been eradicated as of July 2021. Regarding the impact of eradication efforts, only 14 per cent of areas where interventions are taking place have become free of illicit cultivation. This may be understood as further evidence that eradication efforts need to be accompanied by equivalent investments in security, livelihoods and institutional strengthening. Since the signing of the peace agreement in Colombia, programmes for the substitution of illicit crops have progressed at a slow pace; 60 per cent of municipalities have reported a decrease in illicit cultivation, while the remaining 40 per cent have reported an increase. In 2021, two new production enclaves were identified.

615. Following the trend observed in the previous year, the production potential of cocaine hydrochloride in Colombia increased by 8 per cent, reaching 1,228 tons in 2020. This is the result of increased alkaloid yields per hectare and improved capacity to extract alkaloids from the leaves and turn them into coca paste, which is later transformed into cocaine hydrochloride. Cocaine hydrochloride production per hectare of productive land per year increased from 6.5 kg per hectare in 2016 to 7.9 kg per hectare in 2020. This increase can be attributed to numerous factors, including improved extraction techniques, larger laboratories and wider availability of both chemicals and human resources. The quantities of cocaine hydrochloride and coca leaves seized increased in Colombia in 2020, with 472 tons of cocaine hydrochloride and 527 tons of coca leaves seized, representing increases of 17 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively, in relation to 2019.

616. The total area under illicit cultivation of coca bush in Peru has been steadily increasing. Data released by the Government of Peru in November 2020 indicated that the total area under illicit cultivation was 49,000 ha in 2017, increasing to 53,134 ha in 2018 and reaching 54,644 ha in 2019. Additional data released by the Government in October 2021 showed a considerable increase for 2020, when 61,777 ha were under illicit cultivation. This represents an increase of 13 per cent in relation to the previous year. As with other countries in the region, multiple factors could explain this increase, including the suspension of eradication efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing exodus to rural areas as socioeconomic conditions in the cities deteriorate, and political instability. Unlike the illicit crop monitoring reports for Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia, which are undertaken by UNODC in cooperation with the national Governments, the monitoring reports on illicit crops in Peru are prepared by the Government; UNODC has not been in a position to validate the data presented by the Government of Peru. **The Board reiterates its recommendation that, as in Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia, Peru resume the studies and monitoring reports on territories affected by illicit crops that are fully prepared and certified by UNODC. This will allow adequate comparative monitoring among these Andean countries, in addition to ensuring support for the efforts of the Government of Peru in the fight against drug trafficking.**

617. Data released by the Government of Peru in October 2021 indicate an increase in the estimated production capacity of coca leaf in the country, which has been on the rise since 2016. In 2020, the total estimated production of coca leaf in Peru was 146,359 tons, an

increase of 10.5 per cent in relation to the previous year, when the total reported was 132,436 tons. Of the total reported for 2020, 8 per cent was for traditional use and the rest was considered to be for illicit use. The valley of the rivers Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro remains the region with the highest total area under cultivation and the largest production capacity.

618. The Plurinational State of Bolivia reported a 15 per cent increase in the area under coca bush cultivation, from 25,500 ha in 2019 to 29,400 ha in 2020. By law, up to 22,000 ha of coca bush may be cultivated in the country. The main reasons associated with that increase are linked to the political instability of the past years and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have slowed down eradication efforts in unauthorized areas and decreased rationalization in authorized production areas.⁵³ In 2019, the area under coca bush cultivation that was eradicated was 9,205 ha, but the figure dropped in 2020, when only 2,177 ha were eradicated. Eradication activities were suspended between April and June 2020.

619. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the quantity and price of coca leaves on the licit market decreased by 19 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively, from 2019 to 2020. Mobility restrictions and the closure of authorized markets during the national lockdown in order to contain the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an accumulation and an oversupply of coca leaf, causing its price to decline on the licit market. The production of coca leaf was unaffected during the early months of the pandemic. According to the information provided in the UNODC coca crop monitoring report for 2020, restrictions on movement gave producers an opportunity to devote more time to the care and management of their crops.

620. Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Panama are the main countries of origin and transit for cocaine to North America and Europe, according to information reported by UNODC in the framework of the Container Control Programme. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, organized criminal groups have focused on Brazil for the trans-shipment of cocaine to Europe, rather than relying on the usual routes in the Pacific and Caribbean, in order to avoid increased controls. In February 2021, a boat bound for Europe carrying 2 tons of cocaine was intercepted by Brazilian authorities, in cooperation with authorities from Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States. Brazil also appears to be the main departure country for shipments to Africa owing to its trade

⁵³“Rationalization” refers to the process of eradicating coca bush cultivation that exceeds the agreed limit per family in the coca bush-growing areas of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

infrastructure and linguistic links to some African countries. In March 2021, the French Navy seized 6 tons of cocaine on a ship from Brazil in international waters near Côte d'Ivoire.

621. Data reported by Paraguay also reflected an increase in the quantities of cocaine trafficked and transiting through the country on the way to Europe. In February 2021, the largest amount of cocaine ever seized in Europe (16 tons) arrived in Hamburg, Germany, in containers shipped from Paraguay. Organized criminal groups are reportedly trafficking larger quantities of drugs in each shipment in order to compensate for lost business during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the National Police of Paraguay seized the second-largest quantity ever in the country in July 2021, when 3,415 kg of cocaine were seized from a warehouse near the border with Argentina.

622. Ecuador has reported seizures of increasing quantities of controlled substances. In 2020, those quantities rose to record levels in the country, with 128.2 tons of controlled substances seized, a 56 per cent increase compared with the previous year. It appears that 2021 could follow a similar trend; in the first months of the year, the Ecuadorian authorities seized over 35 tons of controlled substances. The country is a major transit point for cocaine bound for international markets, especially North America and Europe. Between 1 April and 4 April 2021, more than 4 tons of cocaine destined for international illicit markets were seized in Operation Odisea I in Ecuador. In August 2021, law enforcement authorities reported a seizure of 9.4 tons of cocaine in the city of Guayaquil, one of the largest in the country to date. In addition, it appears that increasing quantities of cocaine have been shipped from Ecuador to African countries; in January 2021, authorities in the Gambia seized 3 tons of cocaine in a container shipped from the port of Guayaquil.

623. Peru has reported seizures of increasing quantities of precursor chemicals used for the manufacture of cocaine. In February 2021, 100 tons of precursors were seized by the National Police and, in March 2021, 40 tons were seized from an organized criminal group that supplied drug traffickers in the valley of the rivers Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro, the primary coca bush-growing area in the country.

624. An increase in the quantity of cocaine shipped through ports in Guyana has been observed, as highlighted by a record seizure of 11.5 tons of cocaine arriving in Belgium from Guyana in November 2020. It is suspected that stricter counter-narcotic measures in Brazil and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) may have

motivated traffickers operating in those countries to take advantage of the permeable borders with Guyana to ship drugs to international markets.

625. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, a laboratory on the border with Paraguay manufacturing 100 kg of cocaine per day was located and dismantled in March 2021. According to data from the report on the destruction and incineration of seized drugs presented by UNODC in 2020, the illicit cocaine laboratories and factories dismantled in 2020 were concentrated in the Departments of Beni, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, areas in which an increase in coca bush cultivation was observed in 2020.

626. In April 2021, law enforcement authorities in Colombia dismantled an illicit laboratory in the department of Nariño, bordering Ecuador. The laboratory had a manufacturing capacity of 4 tons of cocaine per month, and evidence suggested that the drugs were bound for Mexican cartels. Those cartels are known to have consolidated their positions strategically along various trafficking routes in Colombia to control the cultivation of coca bush and the trafficking of cocaine to international markets.

627. According to the *World Drug Report 2021*, South America accounted for 34 per cent of the cannabis herb seized globally in 2019. Given the lack of illicit crop monitoring activities, it is difficult to establish an estimate of the area under illicit cannabis cultivation in the region. However, an analysis of various indicators over the period 2010–2019 suggests that Brazil, Colombia and Paraguay accounted for considerable illicit cannabis cultivation. Furthermore, in seizures reported in other countries, Colombia and Paraguay were frequently identified as countries of origin and transit.

628. Operations carried out by the security forces of Argentina resulted in the seizure of more than 12 tons of cannabis within a two-week period in 2021. Most of the cannabis seized had entered the country through its borders with Brazil and Paraguay. In May 2021, the National Gendarmerie of Argentina seized over 3 tons of cannabis that had been transported by land through Iguazú, on the border with Brazil.

629. In a new development, Brazil has reported an increase in the amount of cannabis resin seized. In June 2021, the Federal Police of Brazil, with the support of authorities from France and the British Virgin Islands, intercepted a sailing boat arriving from Portugal with 4.3 tons of cannabis resin on board. That was the largest seizure of the substance to date by Brazilian authorities. Cannabis resin, which has a higher psychoactive potency

than cannabis herb and commands a higher price, is mostly produced in North Africa. Drug traffickers based in Brazil and North Africa are reportedly exchanging cocaine and cannabis resin, taking advantage of the difference between the prices that those drugs command on either side of the Atlantic. In January 2021, two major shipments of cocaine destined for Morocco were intercepted in Brazil and Colombia, amounting to 460 kg and 1,539 kg, respectively.

630. Brazil has also reported an increase in the quantities of “ecstasy”-type drugs seized. Domestic illicit manufacture of such substances has been increasing since 2018 and, in December 2020, Operation Bad Trip was launched to counter the trend. According to the latest report of UNODC on synthetic drugs and NPS, between 2015 and 2019, the largest quantities of “ecstasy” were seized by Brazil, followed by Argentina and Chile. “Ecstasy”-type drugs are mainly produced in Europe and reach the region through postal services.

631. According to recent data from UNODC, there has been an increase in the presence of NPS being sold under the name of other drugs in the region. In 2019, Argentina, Chile and Colombia reported seizures of a substance sold as 4-bromo-2,5-dimethoxyphenethylamine (2C-B), also known locally as “cocaina rosada”, or “pink cocaine”, which often contained traces of fentanyl, ketamine and a range of NPS. While the amounts of the substance seized in Argentina and Colombia are still relatively small, the presence of fentanyl in such drugs is uncommon in the region and deserves the attention of authorities.

632. The amount of ketamine seized in Latin America and the Caribbean increased from 60 kg in 2015 to 319 kg in 2019, with the largest annual amounts reported by Argentina and Chile.

5. Prevention and treatment

633. Cocaine and cannabis continued to be the substances most prevalent among people who use drugs in South America. According to data presented in the *World Drug Report 2021*, nearly 3 million people aged 15–64 in the region were estimated to be past-year users of cocaine in 2019. Following the tendency of past years, mixed trends have been reported on such consumption. While the use of cocaine in Argentina apparently doubled over the period 2010–2017, the Plurinational State of Bolivia has reported significant decreases in cocaine prevalence since 2012. A unified pattern in the region is that past-year prevalence is highest for males aged 16–24.

634. While the presence of cannabis herb on the illicit market is high in the region, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use in South America, at 3.5 per cent, appears to be lower than the global average. Whereas use almost doubled in Argentina and Chile between 2008 and 2018, Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia have reported a stable trend at a lower level. However, a lack of consistent data makes it difficult to generate more accurate estimates.

635. In Uruguay, where the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes was legalized in 2013, consumption data are collected and monitored on a regular basis. As of July 2021, over 63,589 people had registered for access to the regulated cannabis market in the country. Of those, 45,500 did so through registered pharmacies, 12,694 for domestic cultivation and 5,395 through membership of cannabis clubs. The overall figure represents an increase of 19 per cent in relation to February 2020. However, the total number of cannabis users who gain access to the drug through the regulated cannabis market is still relatively low compared with the total number of those who use cannabis for non-medical purposes. According to data for 2018, the latest available at the time of writing the present report, 259,000 people reported having consumed cannabis at least once in the past 12 months. In an attempt to prevent consumers from turning to the illicit market, which is still present in the country, the Government plans to allow the cultivation of a cannabis variety containing higher levels of THC. A survey undertaken in the country in 2019 established that 25,500 people were estimated to be daily or near-daily users of cannabis, of whom 16 per cent were showing signs of substance use disorder.

636. **The Board wishes to draw the attention of all Governments to the fact that measures permitting the non-medical use of cannabis are contrary to the provisions of the international drug control conventions, specifically article 4, paragraph (c), and article 36 of the 1961 Convention as amended, and article 3, paragraph 1 (a), of the 1988 Convention.**

637. While the prevalence of NPS in South America is relatively limited, as those drugs account for only a minor market share in the region, it appears that their use could be expanding and becoming popular among certain population groups. For example, the use of “ecstasy”-type substances in the region seems to be more pronounced in countries with higher per capita income and the prevalence of use is higher among men than among women. The rates of use among youth, especially in high school and university, are particularly worrisome.

638. According to data from the *World Drug Report 2021*, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay have witnessed an increase in the use of “ecstasy” among their adult populations in the past 10 years. In Colombia, however, the opposite trend has been reported, with a decrease in use between 2008 and 2019. Data from the UNODC early warning advisory on NPS indicates that the consumption of new forms of ketamine in combination with other substances is increasing in Argentina and Colombia.

639. The prevalence of the misuse of prescription opioids in the region is one of the lowest in the world. A project undertaken by CICAD on the use of NPS, as well as heroin, fentanyl and other opioids, in Argentina, Peru and Uruguay found that the use of opioids is most common among workers in the health sector. In Peru, the low level of consumption of opioids and other psychoactive substances could be linked to a lack of awareness of and knowledge about those substances among the general population. In Uruguay, the prevalence of opioid use is higher in vulnerable populations and may be associated with the use of coca paste. A further finding is the lack of availability of specialized programmes to treat people suffering from opioid use disorder. Usually, the treatments offered to those patients do not differ from those offered for the treatment of disorders related to the use of other psychoactive substances. Patients who suffer from chronic conditions, such as cancer, and who experience severe pain continue to have limited access to medicines for pain management and palliative care. The availability of pain relief medications containing controlled substances in South America is less than 1 per cent of such availability in North America.

640. In South America, as in other regions, it is difficult to establish adequate levels of opioid analgesics without reliable measurement of medical needs related to palliative care and other health conditions. Data reported by Governments in the region show a general improvement in the availability of controlled opioids over recent years. Consumption of opioids for pain management has been rising since 2017; however, availability remains considerably below the average reported by higher-income regions. On the other hand, determining levels of consumption of psychotropic substances for medical purposes for South America is a challenge as only about half of the countries in the region have provided consumption data on any psychotropic substances for the past several years. More details and information are available in the technical publications of the Board on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. **The Board recalls that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient**

availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. Special attention in the region should be paid to availability in rural areas and for vulnerable populations.

641. Regional organizations have been monitoring information on drug use and accessibility to treatment facilities. Facilities to treat patients are generally lacking in the region, in particular in rural areas. In Brazil, the region’s largest cocaine market, with a prevalence of past-year cocaine use of 1.0 per cent in the population aged 15–64 in 2016, the number of available programmes is not yet proportional to the size of the affected population.

642. In September 2019, the Human Rights Council requested the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to prepare a study on the results of drug policies. The Working Group found that in several South American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Colombia), serious violations of human rights occurred in private drug use treatment centres. The Working Group stated that “as in State-run compulsory drug detention centres, the focus in most private drug use treatment centres is on abstinence, normally with little or no evidence-based treatment” (A/HRC/47/40, para. 94). In 2019, the Government of Brazil approved the compulsory hospitalization of people who use drugs, and in July 2020 therapeutic communities, which often rely on abstinence and non-evidence-based approaches, were allowed in the treatment of adolescents.

643. The Board takes note of the recommendation of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention that State-run compulsory drug detention centres should be closed without delay and that legislation, policy and practices should be amended so that all treatments for drug use disorders is evidence-based, voluntary and based on informed consent (A/HRC/47/40, para. 126 (e) and (g)). The Board also recalls the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health submitted to the Human Rights Council at its forty-fourth session, held from 30 June to 17 July 2020 (A/HRC/44/48). **The Board discourages the use of compulsory detention for the rehabilitation of people with drug use disorders and calls upon Governments in the region to implement voluntary, evidence-based treatment services with due respect for patients’ human rights in line with the UNODC-WHO *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders* and Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolutions 46/1 and 59/4.**

644. Some Governments are making progress in improving the treatment and prevention services offered to patients. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela,

Decree No. 4432 of 2021 on the reform of the organic law on drugs establishes the creation of rehabilitation centres to provide support and guidance to people suffering from drug use disorders. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, prevention has been made a pillar of the new drug control strategy 2021–2025, and actions have been taken to find effective approaches to protecting youth and children from drug use.

645. In 2021, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Paraguay and Peru conducted a number of capacity-building activities for health workers and treatment professionals. In Peru, the training was also focused on the specific needs of women and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community. With the support of UNODC, professionals from Ecuador and Peru exchanged good practices, and a regional webinar was held for professionals from Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Peru, who discussed an evidence-based family therapy model.

646. Restrictions related to COVID-19 have posed an additional challenge to the implementation of policies for prevention and treatment. However, some Governments have been able to adapt to the limitations and have continued to provide services to people in need. In Argentina, treatment sessions were conducted over videoconferencing platforms and Ecuador published a protocol to ensure continued access for patients to treatment facilities while maintaining safety measures and regulations.

647. The Board recognizes the efforts made by countries to address the issues related to prevention and treatment in the region. However, the economic recession and the social and political tensions that the region is experiencing as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic are hampering those efforts. Economic difficulties and other social problems could increase the rates of substance use in the region. At the same time, high levels of unemployment, together with low levels of education, may push young people into crime and illicit activities, increasing their vulnerability to the illicit use of controlled substances.

D. Asia

East and South-East Asia

The East and South-East Asia region faces a major challenge in the continued illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of synthetic drugs. In particular, increases in the manufacture of and trafficking in ketamine have been

observed, elevated levels of MDMA have been found in some “ecstasy” tablets, and several new and highly potent synthetic drugs have emerged, posing serious public health challenges.

From 1 July 2021, China started to control synthetic cannabinoids using a generic definition. Controlling groups of substances in this manner, also known as the “generic approach”, enables countries to control a large number of substances at once without necessarily having to name them individually in the legislation. This approach also makes it possible to anticipate controls on new substances that may arise. In 2019, China introduced similar controls over fentanyl-related substances.

1. Major developments

648. Despite the COVID-19-related restrictions that were in place for most of 2020 and 2021, transnational organized criminal groups involved in the manufacture of and trafficking in illicit drugs showed an ability to diversify and adapt, and the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and misuse of methamphetamine continued to exhibit a strong presence in the region.

649. While the purity of methamphetamine on the illicit market in countries of the region has remained stable, oversupply has kept prices at record lows and contributed to availability, potentially increasing demand and use in the region, according to UNODC. Methamphetamine continued to be manufactured predominantly in Shan State, Myanmar. However, according to UNODC, there are growing signs that Cambodia has increasingly been targeted for the large-scale illicit manufacture of the substance.

650. Potentially harmful NPS and “ecstasy” tablets with a high MDMA content, reportedly linked to overdose cases, have continued to emerge in East and South-East Asia. The evolution of the synthetic drug market in the region clearly shows the need to strengthen the role of forensic laboratories in order to ensure the rapid and accurate detection of potent synthetic drugs for early warning purposes at the national and regional levels, as well as the need for trace analysis to determine synthesis routes.

651. Synthetic cannabinoids dominate the regional market for synthetic NPS in East and South-East Asia. China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Viet Nam reported that synthetic