

Chapter III.

Analysis of the world situation

A. Global issues

1. The growing threat posed by a surge in illicit cocaine production and trafficking

404. There are few transnational criminal activities with such a high degree of specialization and maximization of efficiency at each stage of production and distribution as the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in cocaine. The starting point for cocaine is coca bush, which is grown on a large scale in only three countries: Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru. While coca bush cultivation is localized, the global networks for distribution of the final product have recently expanded so that cocaine is being trafficked in unprecedented quantities and in countries not previously affected by such activity.

405. According to UNODC estimates, global illicit cultivation of coca bush increased from 156,500 ha in 2015 to 234,200 ha in 2020. In 2020, Colombia continued to be the country with by far the largest area under illicit coca bush cultivation (143,000 ha); it was followed by Peru (61,800 ha) and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (29,400 ha).¹²⁵

406. While the total area under coca bush cultivation increased by approximately 50 per cent from 2015 to 2020, the cocaine manufactured from the harvested coca leaves

more than doubled, increasing from 977 to 1,982 tons¹²⁶ – the highest level ever recorded, indicating increases in yield and in the efficiency of cocaine manufacture. Most cocaine manufacture is also concentrated in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru, but there is increasing evidence suggesting that coca paste (or cocaine base) is being smuggled out of those countries and converted into cocaine hydrochloride in countries in Central America and other countries in South America.¹²⁷ It has been noted that the refining of cocaine base into cocaine hydrochloride is increasing in countries in Europe as well.¹²⁸

407. Annual prevalence of cocaine use was estimated at 0.4 per cent of the world's adult population in 2020, representing only a slight increase since 2010; however, because of the growth in the population over the same period, the number of people who used cocaine rose to 21.5 million in 2020, an increase of 32 per cent over the figure for 2010. There were wide regional variations, ranging from 2.7 per cent in Oceania to just under 2 per cent in North America, 1.6 per cent in South America and 1.4 per cent in Western and Central Europe. Annual prevalence of cocaine use in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, in Africa and in Asia is less than the global prevalence of 0.4 per cent.¹²⁹

408. The movement of cocaine from illicit laboratories in South America to consumers all over the world followed fairly well-defined routes. The major routes are the route

¹²⁵ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 4, *Drug Market Trends: Cocaine, Amphetamine-type Stimulants, New Psychoactive Substances* (United Nations publication, 2022), pp. 15, 16 and 22.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 15 and 16.

¹²⁷ E/INCB/2018/4, para. 172.

¹²⁸ *World Drug Report 2021*, booklet 4, *Drug Market Trends: Cocaine, Amphetamine-type Stimulants* (United Nations publication, 2021), pp. 17–19.

¹²⁹ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 4, pp. 29, 32, 36, 38 and 39 and fig. 13.

leading from Colombia along the Pacific coast to Central America and/or Mexico and then onward to the United States; the transatlantic route, leading from the Andean sub-region to ports in Europe for onward trafficking; and the route passing through Brazil to Europe, via either the Atlantic or West Africa. Similar amounts of cocaine, predominantly of Colombian origin, arrive in Australia through the sea and air cargo streams, Mexico being the primary country of embarkation.

409. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, global seizures of cocaine (not adjusted for purity) have increased exponentially since 2015, reaching a record high level of 1,424 tons¹³⁰ in 2020. South America accounts for most of the cocaine seizures in the world (61 per cent); it is followed by Western and Central Europe (15 per cent), which overtook North America (12 per cent), which is the world's largest consumer market, and Central America (10 per cent). Outside of the major illicit markets, record seizures of cocaine have also been reported in Asia in recent years. In 2019, for the second consecutive year, cocaine seizures in Asia, which accounted for 19 tons, surpassed those in Africa, which for many years had accounted for the largest quantity of seizures outside of the Americas and Europe.

410. While comprehensive data on cocaine seizures are currently not available, seizures in 2021 appear to have followed this upward trend. Several countries in South America continued to record substantial seizures of cocaine in 2021: the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela seized over 45 tons of the substance – the most seized in 15 years; and the Plurinational State of Bolivia seized nearly 20 tons, an increase of 26 per cent over 2020. In Central America, Panama seized 117 tons of cocaine in 2021, Costa Rica seized 44 tons of the substance (the largest amount seized in three decades) and the Dominican Republic reported having seized a record amount of 19 tons. Some national experts in Central America believe that the increased seizures of cocaine are attributable to traffickers moving stocks accumulated after mobility restrictions had been introduced on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, as those restrictions were eased in 2021. The United States Customs and Border Protection alone seized more than 44 tons of cocaine in 2021, compared with 26 tons in 2020. This upward trend may be continuing in the region, with Ecuador seizing in excess of 15 tons in just three operations between January and July 2022.

411. Preliminary figures from a limited number of European countries suggest that the quantities of cocaine seized in Europe increased yet again in 2021 – the amount

of cocaine reported to have been seized (240 tons) was even greater than the record amount seized in 2020 (about 215 tons). The largest cocaine consignments were found in containers on cargo ships. The principal ports for transatlantic trafficking in cocaine are in Belgium (Antwerp) and the Netherlands (Rotterdam), though recent seizures of cocaine have also been made elsewhere in Europe, indicating attempts by traffickers to target places where interdiction measures may not be as strict.

412. The Netherlands has reported cases involving laboratories manufacturing cocaine hydrochloride from smuggled cocaine base or extracting it from material into which it had been incorporated for the purpose of smuggling (see also para. 416). In 2021, however, the number of sites for cocaine manufacture discovered in the Netherlands decreased by 63 per cent compared with the figure for 2020, possibly as a result of successful law enforcement activities targeting criminal networks involved in setting up and operating large-scale manufacturing facilities during 2020 and 2021.

413. In Asia, India reported that seizures of cocaine amounted to 364 kg in 2021. In the previous three years, such seizures averaged only about 40 kg. The record level of seizures in 2021 was attributable to a single seizure involving 300 kg of cocaine discovered in a container that had originated in Panama and transited through Antwerp, Belgium, and Colombo. In March 2022, Sri Lanka Customs at the port of Colombo found 350 kg of cocaine in a container that had arrived from Panama via Belgium and Dubai, United Arab Emirates; the consignment had been destined for India.

414. In Africa, which is used as a transit area for cocaine consignments sent from South America to Europe, multi-ton seizures of cocaine were reported when the COVID-19 pandemic subsided. In April 2022, authorities seized 6 tons of cocaine on a vessel in the territorial waters of Cabo Verde; and in the same month, the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire seized over 2 tons of the substance in Abidjan and San-Pédro.

415. Several factors have contributed to the surge in the manufacture of and trafficking in cocaine in recent years. Regarding manufacture, there has been a substantial shift in the criminal landscape in Colombia and fragmentation in the supply of cocaine. In 2006, the paramilitary organization United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) was demobilized and in 2016 a peace agreement was signed between the Government of Colombia and the armed insurgency group known as FARC-EP. Studies have suggested that the dissolution of AUC and the signing of the 2016 peace agreement led to the creation of splinter groups and the compartmentalization of roles in the supply chain, such as processing of coca leaves, packaging and concealment, transportation

¹³⁰ Includes seizures of cocaine hydrochloride, coca paste and base and "crack" cocaine.

and money-laundering. The splinter groups have also entered into new alliances with drug trafficking operators in Europe, resulting in the development of new and more direct routes leading to distribution hubs in Europe.

416. With regard to trafficking involving major illicit markets, while most cocaine continues to be trafficked in the form of cocaine hydrochloride, seizures of cocaine in base form have been reported in an increasing number of countries, both in the Americas and in Europe, where cocaine laboratories have been identified. Cocaine laboratories outside of areas where coca bush is cultivated are typically conversion laboratories, where cocaine base is converted into cocaine hydrochloride, or “extraction” laboratories, where cocaine is recovered from material into which it was incorporated for the purpose of smuggling.

417. Another major development is an increase in the purity level of seized cocaine. In Europe, the purity level has increased by 40 per cent in the past decade, with a peak in 2020. This is partly attributable to less adulteration in source countries. In addition, cocaine purity is affected by the level of coextracted alkaloid contaminants. Potassium permanganate, a substance in Table I of the 1988 Convention, is the principal oxidizing agent used to remove such contaminants, and forensic profiling analysis has confirmed that more than 99 per cent of samples analysed were highly oxidized. For several years, the largest quantities of potassium permanganate seized have been reported in countries where coca bush is illicitly cultivated. Like global seizures of cocaine, global seizures of potassium permanganate in 2021 were almost twice the figure for 2020.

418. In addition to using the principal oxidizing agent potassium permanganate, traffickers have begun to use other chemicals that enhance the efficiency of illicit cocaine manufacture, such as sodium metabisulfite and calcium chloride. In the past, seizures of sodium metabisulfite were reported only in countries in South America, the bulk of such seizures being accounted for by Colombia. However, seizures of the substance also started being reported in countries in Europe, in particular in countries associated with laboratories manufacturing cocaine (using smuggled coca base). Seizures of sodium metabisulfite have been reported on a regular basis by Spain since 2014 and by the Netherlands since 2016.

419. Over the years, large-scale cocaine trafficking has predominantly relied on maritime routes. Cocaine seized on these routes accounted for 89 per cent of global cocaine seizures in 2021, after having dropped to 78 per cent in 2020, when trafficking by private aircraft from Latin America increased, apparently to overcome impediments resulting from COVID-19 restrictions.

420. These developments have led to diversification of the cocaine supply chain, in particular with regard to Europe, making the supply chain more efficient and resulting in increased supply, a purer product and reduced prices, thereby contributing to increased availability.

421. The manufacture of and trafficking in cocaine, as well as other drugs, are associated with other criminal or illegal activities. According to UNODC estimates, Colombian farmers paid about \$33 million in so-called “taxes” to illegal armed groups in 2019. Cocaine manufactured in Colombia and Peru is being stored in neighbouring Ecuador, prior to being transported to countries in Europe and to the United States, and that may have resulted in increased violence among the local population. Trafficking in cocaine has also contributed to the exploitation of women, as they are used as coca bush growers, coca leaf pickers or drug “mules”, apart from being used to smuggle drugs into prisons. For most women, involvement in such drug-related activity is not a matter of choice.

422. The Board is concerned over the substantial increase in coca bush cultivation and cocaine manufacture, trafficking and consumption and urges Governments to deal with those issues which relate to them by addressing the underlying causes. While reducing the extent of illicit cultivation in the three countries in which coca bush is cultivated has been a challenge, preventing the required precursors from reaching cocaine laboratories is a critical step in curbing cocaine manufacture. For the internationally controlled precursors of cocaine, in particular potassium permanganate, Governments should apply domestic controls as envisaged under article 12, paragraph 8, of the 1988 Convention to address their diversion from domestic distribution channels. For chemicals that are not under international control, such as sodium metabisulfite and calcium chloride, both of which are included in the Board’s limited international special surveillance list of non-scheduled substances,¹³¹ Governments are encouraged to make use of various INCB tools and guidance documents containing recommendations for action at the national and international levels.¹³²

423. Governments are further encouraged to analyse the trafficking flows of containerized cargo along the maritime routes; to develop risk parameters to target suspicious shipments; and to build capacities of front-line officers in new and emerging destination ports to identify and target suspicious shipments. Governments are also encouraged to work with private sector partners in the supply chains along

¹³¹The Board established the list in 1998, pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/29. The list is available as part of the Board’s information package on the control of precursors and is regularly updated.

¹³²E/INCB/2021/4, para. 228.

established cocaine trafficking routes, including with shipping companies and freight forwarders, to prevent the misuse of containerized cargo for such trafficking.

424. What is ultimately needed is a coordinated response at the international level that targets each element of the cocaine supply chain – cultivation, manufacture, trafficking and distribution – in addition to disrupting the related financial flows. The Board wishes to encourage Governments to focus attention on each of these elements, with a view to disrupting the burgeoning manufacture of and trafficking in cocaine.

2. The next generation of emerging dangerous substances: non-fentanyl opioids

425. Annual prevalence data on the global misuse of opioids indicate that such use has nearly doubled over the past decade and that illicit markets for such drugs are expanding. Although global estimates of overdose deaths are not yet available for 2021, there is evidence that synthetic opioids contributed to a rising number of deaths reported in North America; in the United States alone, the number of deaths attributable to the use of synthetic opioids increased from 70,000 in 2020 to over 80,000 in 2021. According to EMCDDA estimates, 74 per cent of fatal overdoses in Europe are opioid-related. Furthermore, since 2009, 73 new synthetic opioids have been detected, six of which were detected in 2021 alone.

426. While the increase in overdose deaths has been attributed mainly to the use of illicitly manufactured fentanyl, an increasing number of deaths appear to be related to other non-medical fentanyl-related substances, as traffickers assess the viability of new opioids by introducing on illicit drug markets analogues not under international control. INCB first established a list of fentanyl-related substances with no known legitimate uses in 2018, to inform Governments and, through them, private sector partners of the threat posed by such substances, and invited them to voluntarily refrain from the marketing, sale and distribution of such substances.

427. In 2019, INCB, through its OPIOIDS project, began monitoring the Internet, scanning for the emergence of novel opioids on various online platforms, such as discussion groups, social media, research chemical sites and business-to-business e-commerce platforms to provide actionable information for INCB focal points. As at 1 November 2022, the OPIOIDS project had helped law and regulatory enforcement focal points and trusted

private-sector security partners to exchange information involving over 1,400 suspicious online vendors.

428. In May 2020, through the OPIOIDS project, an increase was identified in online activity and in the number of incidents shared through IONICS that were related to isotonitazene, and a notice was circulated to the law and regulatory enforcement focal points of the OPIOIDS project. In June 2020, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States placed a temporary order to schedule the substance under the Controlled Substances Act; and, in September 2020, the European Commission initiated the process to place the substance under control in the European Union. In October 2020, the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence reviewed the substance and recommended that it be placed in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention. In April 2021, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs adopted decision 64/1, by which it decided to include isotonitazene in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended.

429. In September 2021, INCB convened in Vienna a second international expert group meeting to review new fentanyls and consider the growing misuse of synthetic non-fentanyl opioids with no known legitimate uses. Following the event, INCB circulated a list of 55 non-fentanyl opioids to all Governments and, through them, their private-sector partners in order to raise awareness and enhance efforts to counter trafficking in such substances.

430. The potency and toxicity of non-fentanyl opioids remain largely unknown, as scientific assessments have not kept pace with the emergence of such new substances. There are indications that, in some cases, the levels of potency and toxicity are significantly higher than those found in other known opioids, precipitating accidental overdoses and fatalities at increased rates. Non-fentanyl opioids appear to be custom-manufactured; they are marketed and sold online and then shipped via international postal services, courier services or air cargo, using a modus operandi similar to the one adopted for fentanyl-related substances.

431. Despite the successes achieved in identifying the emergence of non-fentanyl opioids, there is an increasing need for public- and private-sector partners to exchange operational information and take practical steps to address the growing problems related to trafficking in such substances. In January 2022, INCB issued a special notice under its OPIOIDS project for protonitazene, an emerging synthetic opioid with no known legitimate uses. The notice provided a targeting profile for use by law and regulatory enforcement focal points and private-sector partners based on real-time IONICS communications, government forensic profiles, photographs of seizures, monitoring of online discussion forums and a market analysis.

432. Since January 2022, seven notices have been circulated to law and regulatory enforcement focal points and through Governments to trusted private-sector partners for information and possible action on synthetic opioids. The notices include targeting profiles for protonitazene, etonitazepipne, etonitazepyne and etodesnitazene.

433. Information from special notices and alerts issued through the INCB GRIDS Programme has been incorporated into international and national training programmes for raising awareness about opioids and the safe handling of opioids, including training programmes for front-line law and regulatory enforcement officers and postal security officers, organized under the OPIOIDS project and through cooperative agreements with UPU. Such information has also been circulated through INCB training platforms for focal points and disseminated during global events such as the INCB global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyl, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna in August 2022.

434. The Board's intelligence-led operational projects have proved to be invaluable in supporting fast, timely and effective action taken on a voluntary basis by international partners, Governments and the private sector to prevent the marketing, sale and distribution of emerging dangerous substances. The projects have provided strategic and operational information enabling law and regulatory enforcement officers to take action at the national level to stem the flow of emerging dangerous opioids not yet under international control.

435. At the policy level, the Board's OPIOIDS project has contributed to the information base of discussions on international drug control. In October 2022, the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence reviewed protonitazene, etonitazepyne and etodesnitazene to determine whether they should be recommended for scheduling by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Those non-fentanyl opioids had been the subject of OPIOIDS project special notices in early 2022.

3. Public-private partnerships in the area of drug precursors, non-scheduled chemicals and dangerous substances

436. Rapidly changing trends in trafficking, in particular the use of newly emerging designer precursors or other chemicals not under international control for illicit drug manufacture, together with new methods and routes of diversion, present a global challenge and require a rapid proactive response from authorities, and a regulatory

framework alone cannot provide such a response. Effective engagement with the private sector has proved to be an invaluable supplement to regulatory frameworks, given the flexibility of industry partners to adjust quickly to changing circumstances.

437. The concept of close cooperation between authorities and industry, especially with manufacturers, importers, exporters, wholesalers and retailers, to identify suspicious orders and transactions by monitoring international trade is an integral part of the provisions of the 1988 Convention, in particular, article 12, paragraph 9 (a). This cooperation can be mandatory, where actions are regulated as part of the licensing process, or voluntary, where, for example, mutually beneficial public-private partnerships are established. Over the years, such public-private partnerships have proved their merit, demonstrating their potential for addressing the challenges in international precursor control, and are now a key component of an effective, reliable and sustainable mechanism for addressing the diversion of controlled precursors, non-scheduled chemicals and dangerous substances and for preventing them from reaching illicit laboratories and markets.

438. Crucial to the success of these mechanisms is the identification of, as well as the timely sharing of information on, suspicious requests, orders and transactions between legitimate industry partners and competent national authorities. Furthermore, as diversion can and does happen at any stage of the supply chain, the Board has encouraged the expansion of such voluntary cooperation mechanisms to various sectors and levels of industries, such as the chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturing industries and those sectors engaged in any way with the supply of the substances, including legitimate e-commerce and business-to-business operators, marketing and social media, online financial service providers and shipping companies (express mail and courier services etc.). Such cooperation should be extended to all industries whose products or services may be misused in connection with illicit drug manufacture, including those industries which manufacture or distribute certain kinds of equipment.

439. A detailed overview of categories of industries that might be unwittingly involved in the manufacture of, trade in and distribution of chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs is available on the Board's secure website. In this context, the Board has encouraged and guided Governments in mapping their national industry landscape with the aim of sensitizing the industries concerned.

440. A survey carried out by INCB in 2021 confirmed that the nature, format and scope of cooperation between

Governments and the private sector can vary significantly among countries (and regions), depending on the national context. A summary of the key findings of the survey, together with examples provided by Governments of various national practices and case studies illustrating how cooperation with the chemical industry has been established and implemented in different national contexts, is available on the Board's secure website.

441. The above-mentioned guidance material is the latest addition to the Board's box of tools to support Governments in their efforts to enhance their engagement with industry. As early as 1998, the Board established the limited international special surveillance list of non-scheduled substances, pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/29. The list contains chemicals that are known to have been used in illicit drug manufacture but are not under international control. The aim of this and similar national or regional monitoring lists is to provide Governments and industries alike with a flexible tool to proactively address the problem of newly emerging substances used in illicit drug manufacture and prevent the diversion of such substances. In 2013, that list of non-scheduled substances was expanded to include, in addition to individual substances, generic definitions covering common derivatives and other closely related chemicals that can be converted into one of the controlled precursors; and since 2019, chemicals that do not have any known legitimate use have been highlighted. The list of non-scheduled substances is regularly updated and disseminated to Governments.

442. The guidance material developed by the Board, in particular the *Guidelines for a Voluntary Code of Practice for the Chemical Industry*, published in 2009 and complemented in 2015 by practical notes for implementing the Guidelines and by a template for a memorandum of understanding between Governments and the private sector, has been put in practice through "twinning", a concept whereby counterparts from the public and private sectors in countries that have well-established cooperation arrangements with industry assist the Governments of other countries that are interested in establishing and implementing such cooperation. Such "twinning" has led to tangible results, including the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the public and private sectors in the United Republic of Tanzania in 2021 and the adoption of a voluntary code of practice in that country in 2022.

443. Another area in which the Board has supported Governments is addressing the use of the Internet (surface web) for facilitating precursor trafficking. Specifically, during the reporting period, in the context of the Board's

Operation Acronym, the voluntary sharing of information by online trading platforms assisted the Governments concerned in identifying cases involving the illicit trade in and distribution of several internationally controlled and non-scheduled substances and in seizing the consignments in question in countries in Asia and Oceania.

444. The Board's GRIDS Programme promotes public-private partnerships in the context of preventing trafficking in new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids. Public-private partnership under the GRIDS Programme is not limited to simply encouraging Governments to work more closely with private-sector partners; it provides a focus on the four key areas which are the most vulnerable to exploitation: the manufacture, marketing, movement and monetization of dangerous substances. By providing an analysis of trafficking methods, patterns and trends to Governments, their private-sector partners and relevant international organizations, voluntary activities involving relevant public- and private-sector partners are identified to prevent the exploitation of legitimate industries and their business by those engaged in trafficking in dangerous substances.

445. Since 2018, more than 20 expert group meetings covering the four key areas have been organized through the GRIDS Programme, adopting over 220 practical recommendations to Governments, international organizations and private-sector partners on how the exploitation of legitimate industries should be prevented and responded to. Through the expert group meetings and the sharing of information on attempts to misuse legitimate industries, the GRIDS Programme has reached research chemical manufacturers, e-commerce marketplaces, social media, domain name registrars, postal services, express courier services, freight forwarders, air cargo agents, e-wallet services and virtual asset service providers. These activities have produced operational outcomes, such as the removal of a substantial number of vendors of dangerous substances from leading e-commerce platforms, and enhanced the awareness of postal operators and express courier companies about synthetic opioids with no legitimate uses, thereby reducing the availability of dangerous substances.

446. The Board wishes to encourage Governments to continue their efforts to establish and implement industry-related initiatives with a view to addressing the diversion of chemicals, non-scheduled chemicals and dangerous substances and preventing them from reaching illicit laboratories and markets. The Board also wishes to encourage Governments to utilize the tools and resources available to competent national authorities on its secure website.

4. Mental health and the availability of and access to internationally controlled psychotropic substances

447. According to the definition of WHO, mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.¹³³ Examples of mental health conditions include depression, anxiety disorder, sleep disorder, bipolar disorder and substance use disorder.

448. Fifty years ago, the world recognized that the use of psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes was indispensable and that their availability should not be unduly restricted. The Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 extended, for the first time in history, international regulation over the manufacture of and trade in such substances, some of which (buprenorphine, diazepam, lorazepam, midazolam and phenobarbital) are included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines.

449. More recently, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the General Assembly, Goal 3, on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, was announced, including as targets reducing by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promoting mental health and well-being (target 3.4) and strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse (target 3.5). While the inclusion of mental health in the Sustainable Development Goals has helped to increase global awareness about the issue in recent years, investments in the supply of the necessary services have not matched the demand of the population affected by mental health conditions.

450. Notwithstanding the universally recognized medical indispensability of psychotropic substances, millions of people continue to suffer. According to WHO, at least three quarters of the world's population with mental, neurological and substance use disorders live in low- and middle-income countries, where mental health services are scarce and often difficult to access and the availability of and access to prescribed medicines for the treatment of their conditions are mostly inadequate. Between 76 per cent and 85 per cent of people with severe mental disorders in low-income and middle-income countries receive no treatment for their disorder, including people living with epilepsy, with nearly

80 per cent of those living with that condition residing in such countries. In addition, the vast number of humanitarian crises, resulting from armed conflict, climate change or public health emergencies, have had a major impact on people's mental health in all parts of the world. Some groups, including health and other front-line workers, elderly people, women, children, people with drug use disorders and those with pre-existing mental health conditions, have been particularly affected.

451. Inadequate availability of and access to psychotropic substances in most parts of the world has been a matter of major concern to the international community for years. At the same time, there is growing concern among public health authorities in many countries about overprescription of and self-medication with psychotropic medicines.

452. In efforts aimed at addressing inadequate availability or over-prescription, monitoring of the availability of psychotropic substances for medical purposes is crucial to providing reliable information, and providing training to professionals is crucial to assist Governments in fulfilling their obligations under the 1971 Convention. At the moment, assessing global, regional and national consumption remains a challenge. Comprehensive national data are not available, nor are well-established methods for assessing appropriate levels of use based on demand. Therefore, the Board encourages Governments to assess their annual medical needs, to measure national consumption of psychotropic substances and to submit to it the assessments of their medical and scientific requirements and the annual consumption data, in line with the relevant resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Such data enable the Board to analyse consumption levels of psychotropic substances in an accurate manner and to promote the adequate availability of those substances in regions most in need or to flag potential over-prescription in other regions.

453. An efficient and successful regulatory system that ensures that medicines containing psychotropic substances are obtainable in adequate quantities requires the involvement of the entire community, as well as the commitment of Governments. An analysis of the various impediments to availability and information about the world situation is also contained in the supplement to this annual report, entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes*, which also contains recommendations to assist Governments in designing comprehensive policies.

454. Improving mental health care for all is essential to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3, on ensuring

¹³³WHO, *Promoting Mental Health: Concepts, Emerging Evidence, Practice – Summary Report* (Geneva, 2004), p. 12.

healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. Governments are reminded to ensure that those living with mental health challenges are provided with access to adequate treatment and medications required to alleviate their suffering and thus enable them to participate fully in society with no stigma or discrimination. The Board wishes to stress the importance of including mental health treatment and support services in national health-care systems and ensuring that those services continue to be provided to populations, including during emergency situations.

5. Promoting equality and non-discrimination towards people who use drugs and in the access to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation programmes

455. Respect for human rights is an essential condition for the implementation of the three international drug control conventions by States parties in a manner consistent with their international obligations. In the design and implementation of national drug control policies, States must adopt approaches fully consistent with internationally recognized human rights standards, including equality of treatment and protection against discrimination.

456. The promotion of equality before the law and of non-discrimination in the area of drug control is essential to the full realization of the right to health and Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), as well as target 16.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all).

457. The Board has noted that persons who use drugs continue to be subject to discrimination and stigmatization. In keeping with Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 61/11, the Board calls upon States parties to ensure that their national legislation, policies and implementing practices do not discriminate unjustly on the ground of drug use or dependence, in particular in the criminal justice system, and that they offer protection against discrimination by third parties.

458. The international drug control conventions require States parties to give special attention to, and take all practicable measures for, the prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration of all persons affected by drug use disorders. The Board encourages Governments to take proactive measures to ensure equality of access in the design and implementation of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation

and social reintegration activities for such persons. In this respect, the Board also encourages Governments to take cognizance of the UNODC/WHO *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention* (2nd updated ed.) in order to guide their prevention efforts.

459. As the Board has repeatedly stated, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration services for persons affected by drug use disorders should be evidence-based, be developed with the input and participation of persons who use drugs, be culturally appropriate, accessible to all and administered in a manner free from discrimination and stigmatization and be adapted to cultural and socioeconomic realities.

460. To ensure the accessibility of such prevention and treatment services, the principle of non-discrimination requires Governments to take all practicable measures to provide to vulnerable or marginalized groups services that are suited to their needs. Within the context of such prevention and treatment, the Board notes that mandatory drug-testing should not result in acts of discrimination with respect to other rights, such as housing or public benefits.

461. The Board notes that in some countries, for example, access to treatment for drug dependence is possible only upon registering as a person who uses drugs, that such registration brings with it various limitations on the exercise of civil rights, career prospects, the ability to travel and the enjoyment of other rights and that the prospect of having such limitations imposed and the associated stigma often acts as a disincentive for persons seeking such treatment. The Board encourages Governments to abolish policies that contribute to the stigmatization of drug use and dependence.

462. With respect to criminal justice, the Board recognizes the fact that, in many countries, marginalized groups such as women, children, migrants, refugees and minority and indigenous communities continue to be disproportionately affected by overly punitive responses to drug-related conduct. The Board calls upon States parties to the international drug control conventions to avail themselves of the possibility, provided for in those conventions, of applying alternative measures to conviction or punishment for minor offences, particularly if those offences have been committed by persons who use drugs.

463. The Board encourages all States parties to the international drug control conventions to take all necessary measures to ensure that in the elaboration and implementation of national drug control policies and drug use prevention policies, due consideration is given to the need to develop inclusive policies that offer protection against stigmatization and inequality of treatment.

6. Use of electronic import and export authorizations for trade in internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

464. A key pillar of the international drug control system is the use of import and export authorizations for trade in internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. This system ensures proper oversight by competent national authorities, customs services and other authorities to prevent diversion from licit trade into illicit channels. The framework is laid out in article 31 of the 1961 Convention as amended and article 12 of the 1971 Convention and has evolved pursuant to several resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

465. When the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention entered into force, nearly 50 years ago, Governments used the only reasonable means available for the issuance of import and export authorizations: guilloché pattern or some other security paper, authenticated using stamps and signatures. Those documents would then be sent via express mail using the national postal service or some other mail service to the respective counterpart authorities. It could take weeks before an import or export document was received by the counterpart authorities. This was the sole practice until well into the digital revolution of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

466. Recognizing that exchanging paper documents using mail services was slow, cumbersome and prone to forgery, INCB proposed the development of an international electronic system to complement national systems and further facilitate licit trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in its resolution 55/6, requested UNODC to develop an international electronic import and export authorization system for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control. This led to the creation of I2ES, a web-based tool allowing Governments registered to use the system to securely exchange with other registered users import and export authorizations for trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. INCB was charged with administering the system. Since its launch in 2015, the system has been utilized by a growing number of Governments.

467. The present subsection focuses on the evolution of the use of such electronic import and export authorizations by Governments not registered to use I2ES and the impact of such activity on the implementation of provisions of the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention; and it provides guidance by the Board on possible ways

forward. Further details on the implementation of I2ES are provided in chapter II, section D, of this publication (see paras. 381–387).

468. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, in early 2020, many competent national authorities had to contend with lockdowns, telecommuting and other situations that threatened to disrupt daily operations. To overcome those challenges, some Governments turned to using electronic import and export authorizations for trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. While in some countries I2ES was rapidly implemented, a variety of other modalities were observed, including the use of digital documents with virtual signatures for all transactions, stand-alone national systems and hybrid approaches (using both digital and physical documents). Although many of the solutions were initially intended to be temporary, some have been made permanent.

469. The varying approaches and modalities used for electronic import and export authorizations for trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances have the potential to increase the risk of error or miscommunication between national drug control authorities. This could lead to diversions when national authorities are engaged in trade in internationally controlled substances or it could lead to legitimate trade being hindered if, for example, the authorities in the exporting country are not familiar with the new modality being used in the importing country. Digital documents with virtual signatures can be vulnerable if not properly secured. National electronic import and export authorization systems may transmit documents in a manner that is not compatible with the systems in other countries. Some authorities may lack the capacity to validate a digital document or use some other new modality for electronic authorization. Such gaps in the implementation of electronic import and export authorization systems for trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances could be exploited by criminal groups or delay legitimate trade, for example, if the authorities of the two countries involved do not recognize each other's systems. Several Governments have sought assistance and guidance from the Board in order to reconcile differences in modalities used for electronic import and export authorizations for trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and to understand the implications of using such electronic authorizations in the context of the international drug control treaties.

470. Over the past two years, Governments have communicated their views to the Board on the use of electronic import and export authorizations for trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, provided information regarding their implementation of I2ES and other electronic authorization systems and expressed their concerns

regarding recent developments in this area. With a view to furthering cooperation with and among Governments to meet the aims of the international drug control conventions and addressing the concerns communicated to it by Governments, the Board has prepared recommendations on the use of electronic import and export authorizations for trade in internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Those recommendations are set out in the paragraphs below.

471. The 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention do not specify a modality for the issuance and exchange of import and export authorizations for trade in internationally controlled substances. Governments must ensure that their authorization documents, regardless of how they are issued, are in conformity with article 31 of the 1961 Convention and article 12 of the 1971 Convention.

472. **The Board recommends that Governments wishing to use electronic import and export authorizations for trade in internationally controlled substances should adopt the I2ES system.** I2ES is the only system endorsed by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs for the issuance and exchange of electronic import and export authorizations for such trade.

473. **The Board wishes to emphasize that Governments implementing their own national systems for the issuance and exchange of electronic import and export authorizations for trade in internationally controlled substances must ensure that their systems are in conformity with the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention, as well as the relevant resolutions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.** In addition, Governments implementing their own national systems should make every effort to communicate with their trading partners and make them aware of the validity and functions of those systems.

474. The system of issuing and exchanging (via express mail) paper documents for import and export authorizations for trade in internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, which has been in place since the entry into force of the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention, continues to be valid and acceptable.

7. Responsibilities of transit countries in the licit trade in internationally controlled substances

475. Rapid and efficient legitimate trade in internationally controlled substances is critical to ensuring that medicines reach patients in a timely manner and that chemicals are available for industrial uses. The international drug control

treaties have provisions to make sure that trade in internationally controlled substances is effectively regulated, ensuring the adequate availability of such substances while preventing their diversion for misuse or illicit drug manufacture. In this respect, authorities of countries that either import or export internationally controlled substances, as well as authorities of countries and territories that are used as transit points for the licit trade in such substances, have a role in ensuring the security of supply chains. The obligations that States must carry out when shipments of internationally controlled substances pass through their territory are laid out in various provisions of the international drug control treaties, in particular, article 31 of the 1961 Convention as amended, article 12, paragraph 3, of the 1971 Convention and article 12, paragraphs 9 and 10, of the 1988 Convention, as well as in the provisions of numerous resolutions of the General Assembly, in particular Assembly resolutions S-20/4 A to E of 1998, of the Economic and Social Council, in particular its resolutions 2003/39 and 2004/41, and of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in particular its resolutions 50/10 and 60/5. The present subsection is intended to clarify the requirements related to the role of authorities in securing shipments of internationally controlled substances in transit, as opposed to imports or exports of such substances.

476. Authorities in transit countries must verify that shipments of internationally controlled narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances are accompanied by supporting documents conforming to the requirements of the relevant international drug control convention. It is critical that a copy of the export authorization from the exporting country accompany the shipment so that the relevant authorities in transit countries can confirm that the contents and destination of the shipment match with the information on the relevant transport documents. The copy of the export authorization should be a physical, paper-based document, regardless of whether it was originally issued in paper form or electronically, to ensure that the relevant authorities can easily validate it when inspecting the shipment that is in transit.

477. If a shipment containing an internationally controlled narcotic drug or psychotropic substance has no accompanying export authorization, the authorities in the transit country must detain it. This is a temporary measure to allow the authorities in the transit country to confirm with authorities in the importing and exporting countries if the shipment is legitimate, in order to secure the appropriate export authorization before allowing the shipment to continue. If the shipment cannot be validated, the authorities in the transit country may seize it.

478. In addition to ensuring that shipments of internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

in transit are accompanied by valid export authorizations, authorities in transit countries must also ensure that the packaging of such a shipment is not altered without the permission of the competent authorities. Furthermore, the authorities in transit countries must ensure that the substance being shipped has not been subjected to any process that has changed its nature, such as converting it to another substance or a preparation.

479. For chemicals controlled under the 1988 Convention, Governments must establish a system to monitor international trade in order to facilitate the identification of suspicious transactions. The authorities of transit countries, together with those of exporting and importing countries, share responsibility for the early notification of their counterparts if there is reason to believe that a shipment of a substance may be intended for use in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances; in such cases, the authorities should include in their notification the information about the means of payment and any other essential element that led them to that belief. Under the pre-export notification system established pursuant to article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the 1988 Convention, the authorities of transit countries should be informed in advance by the authorities of the exporting country of any shipment of such substances that is to transit their territory. Some Governments also require transit authorizations to be issued, although such authorizations are not required by the 1988 Convention.

480. With regard to shipments in free zones and free ports, the provisions of the international drug control conventions require that States apply all the relevant control measures to substances under international control, including those applying to shipments of such substances transiting their territory. Free trade zones or free ports do not exempt shipments of internationally controlled substances from any control measures contained in the conventions.

481. Shipments of internationally controlled substances in transit are distinct from re-exports of such substances, as the former are simply using the logistical infrastructure of a country to move along a supply chain while remaining untouched. Shipments in transit may also enter a country under conditions of customs surveillance for departing from a port in that country without any change in the packaging.

482. By contrast, the re-export of an internationally controlled substance entails a series of authorized imports and exports among several countries along a supply chain where some or all of the substance is being either repackaged or processed along the way. A country re-exporting an internationally controlled substance is typically doing so to facilitate activities of its own chemical or pharmaceutical industry

to manufacture products for foreign markets or is allowing an entity to simply resell the substance in an arbitrage. Pursuant to article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the 1988 Convention, any shipment of a precursor chemical in Table I that is destined for re-export requires a pre-export notification to be sent to the authorities of the next importing country.

483. The Board wishes to remind Governments of their obligations under the international drug control treaties and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to ensure the safe and secure trade in internationally controlled substances when shipments of such substances transit their territory.

B. Africa

Available seizure data suggest that trafficking in cocaine remains a major challenge for countries in North and West Africa. Similarly, trafficking in and abuse of cannabis and tramadol remain a challenge for many countries in Africa.

The lack of official data on drug seizures and drug use prevalence hinders the ability of countries in the region to address their respective drug challenges and the ability of the international community to provide support.

Africa is among the regions with the lowest levels of availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes.

1. Major developments

484. Despite a lack of official reporting data from many countries in the region, several countries in West Africa continue to report record-breaking seizures of cocaine being trafficked from South America to Europe. Exceptionally large seizures reported by Cabo Verde and Côte d'Ivoire, along with smaller seizures reported by other countries, suggest that North and West Africa continue to be used as a trans-shipment hub for cocaine trafficking. Trafficking in and abuse of tramadol continue to pose a major threat, in particular for countries in West and Central Africa.

485. Africa is among the regions of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and

scientific purposes. In particular, on the basis of reported consumption of narcotic drugs, the region is among those with the least availability of the most widely used opioid analgesics. Determining levels of consumption of psychotropic substances for Africa remains a challenge as only a quarter of the countries have provided to the Board consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past several years. The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in many countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. Further information on recent developments is contained in the supplement to the annual report of the Board for 2022, entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Drugs for Medical and Scientific Purposes*.

486. The Board continues to provide capacity-building services to countries to assist them in meeting their obligations under the three international drug control conventions, as well as addressing their national drug control challenges. During the reporting period, INCB Learning and the INCB GRIDS Programme conducted several workshops and training sessions for countries in Africa. Additional information can be found in paragraphs 490 and 492–494.

2. Regional cooperation

487. In January 2022, the UNODC Regional Office for West and Central Africa organized a regional workshop entitled “Drug surveillance and information systems: improving drug surveillance and information systems to strengthen the implementation of the Lisbon Consensus in francophone West African countries”. The workshop brought together 34 participants from across those two subregions to collaborate on drug monitoring using indicators developed under the Lisbon Consensus, share information on regional and national efforts, develop coordination strategies to improve the quality of data on the drug situation in countries in those subregions and promote a regional community of specialists to improve drug monitoring and related information systems.

488. In March 2022, the ECOWAS Commission organized a two-day online workshop for experts in the treatment of substance use disorders. Fifty-eight officials from health ministries, hospitals and mental health services from ECOWAS countries participated in the workshop. The workshop raised awareness of the application of international standards of care for patients with substance use disorders and reviewed present resources available to experts to establish effective and coordinated systems for

patient-centred care to mitigate the harmful effects of substance use. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants agreed to establish the West African Network of Addiction Treatment Experts to address substance use disorders in the region.

489. In March 2022, the Nigeria-European Union Partnership project launched the Nigeria Cannabis Survey, the first systematic exercise of its kind in the country. The survey used remote sensing over an area of 4,500 km² in six states to capture 17,185 photos which, combined with data from aerial overflights and structured interviews in those states, provided a baseline assessment of the extent of illicit cannabis cultivation. The survey found that there was an estimated 8,900 ha of cannabis cultivated in those six states. It confirmed that cannabis fields were located deep inside dense forests and thus established a link between cannabis cultivation and deforestation. It was also found that cannabis was cultivated in combination with other crops, either to conceal the cannabis plants or to yield additional profits. Consumption of domestically cultivated cannabis was found to be predominantly for the domestic market, although there was some evidence of trafficking to other countries. There were also indications of the involvement of organized criminal groups in trafficking cannabis to other areas of the country or onward to foreign illicit markets.

490. In April 2022, six African countries participated in an INCB Learning seminar to strengthen their compliance with the three international drug control conventions. Officials from Burundi, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi and Zambia participated in the online capacity-building seminar. Government officials had an opportunity to further enhance their capacity in terms of monitoring and reporting on the licit trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals, and further use I2ES. In total, 145 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 39 countries in Africa¹³⁴ have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules support countries that are expanding their capacity for the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and gaining a deeper understanding of the international drug control framework.

491. In April 2022, the UNODC Regional Office for West and Central Africa, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the Embassy of Spain jointly organized a mini-Dublin Group meeting in West Africa at the

¹³⁴ Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Cervantes Institute in Dakar. Participants shared information and experiences in fighting transnational organized crime in the region, in particular drug trafficking.

492. On 14 and 15 April 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized an online regional workshop for front-line officers in Nigeria to address issues related to challenges and responding to the threat of new psychoactive substances using the IONICS platform. A second workshop, conducted in person from 9 to 11 June 2022, provided training on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals and updates on emerging drug trafficking trends.

493. From 27 to 29 April 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized training in Benin for 15 law enforcement officers focused on awareness-raising and safe handling practices related to new psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances and on strengthening information exchange using the IONICS platform. Attendees from anti-narcotics departments, borders and residency departments and customs authorities participated in the events.

494. On 13 and 14 June 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme delivered an awareness-raising and training workshop on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals for 17 front-line officers from the Ghanaian Food and Drugs Authority and the Ghanaian Narcotics Control Commission, held in Accra. The training workshop was aimed at strengthening information exchange to counter the trafficking of opioids and new psychoactive substances using the IONICS communication platform.

495. In May 2022, the African Union launched the Global Dialogue on Drug Demand Reduction between Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean on the margins of the conference of the International Society of Substance Use Professionals, held in Abu Dhabi. The initiative coordinates and aligns collective efforts by Governments in those regions to address a number of drug issues, including demand reduction, dependency, treatment and care.

496. In June 2022, the African Union held the first ordinary session of the Conference of the States Parties to the African Medicines Agency Treaty, held in Addis Ababa. At the session, the Conference adopted its rules of procedure, considered the assessment report on the Agency's headquarters and selected Rwanda to host it. Representatives of the African Union Commission and the African Union Development Agency participated in the meeting.

497. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyl, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event

brought together over 140 participants from around the world, including 14 participants from Cabo Verde, Ghana, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania, who engaged in practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

498. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 6 to 9 September 2022. The event brought together nearly 60 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including an officer from Nigeria. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

499. The GRIDS Programme hosted the interregional workshop on public-private partnerships for the prevention of trafficking of dangerous substances, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 11 to 14 September 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from 30 Governments, 5 international organizations and 15 Internet-related service providers and their associations, including 24 participants from Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa. Participants exchanged best practices and case examples related to the exploitation of private sector agencies and online platforms for the trafficking of dangerous substances with the aim of strengthening international operational cooperation across borders to prevent future misuse of legitimate Internet-related services.

3. National legislation, policy and action

500. In April 2022, the Government of Mauritius established an online platform to strengthen the controls on licit trade in and use of controlled substances, following the 2021 amendment to its Dangerous Drugs Act of 2000. Under the country's drug control legislation, all entities engaging in trade in and use of substances are required to use the new online platform to register all transactional activity. The establishment of the online platform stems from the implementation of the recommendations issued by the country's Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking in 2018.

501. In April 2022, the Government of Morocco issued decree No. 2.22.159, which implements some of the legal provisions of law No. 13.21 permitting the legal cultivation of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes in the country. The decree designates three provinces of Morocco where it will be legal to cultivate and harvest cannabis. The decree also established a national agency for the regulation of

cannabis-related activities, which will oversee licensing and other administrative procedures related to cannabis production in the country. Finally, the decree sets out specific regulatory requirements that cannabis producers must follow.

502. In March and April of 2022, the United Republic of Tanzania made several amendments to its drug control and criminal laws related to drug trafficking and drug use offences. An amendment to the Drug Control and Enforcement Act of 2015 further extends the powers of the Drug Control and Enforcement Authority to conduct drug searches. An amendment to the Criminal Procedure Act allows plea bargaining for those charged in drug trafficking cases. Additionally, minor drug use offences have been decriminalized, with a focus on health-based approaches for those persons suffering from drug use disorders. However, public use of drugs remains a punishable offence.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

503. An analysis of the drug trafficking situation in Africa is hampered due to the lack of official data in the region. Nonetheless, the limited data available suggest that cocaine trafficking remains a major concern for countries in North and West Africa. Illicit cultivation and seizures of cannabis and cannabis resin occur across the region but are of greatest concern in North Africa. Trafficking in other drugs, including benzodiazepines and MDMA, are sporadic and have been reported by some countries. Determining the extent of trafficking in tramadol is difficult. However, several large seizures of tramadol took place in West Africa, in particular, in Nigeria.

504. The Board encourages all States in the region to strengthen their drug trafficking interdiction efforts and subsequently make available all information and data related to their efforts to counter drug trafficking, in particular seizure data, to United Nations bodies, including UNODC and INCB, as well as other relevant stakeholders. The Board also encourages donor States to include information collection and analysis programmes as part of their assistance programmes for countries in the region.

505. Countries in North and West Africa continue to report record seizures of cocaine, which indicates that trafficking of the drug continues to pose a major challenge in the region. Authorities of Cabo Verde, with the assistance of the United States Navy and INTERPOL, seized 6 tons of cocaine from a vessel in the country's territorial waters in April 2022, which was similar to an interdiction by the French Navy in the Gulf of Guinea, near Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in March 2021. Further, in April 2022, authorities

in Côte d'Ivoire seized more than 2 tons of cocaine in Abidjan and San-Pédro in the course of a one-week operation. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency of Nigeria reported multiple seizures of cocaine ranging from a few kilograms to dozens of kilograms, most of which took place at the country's airports. Authorities of Morocco reported seizing nearly 85 kg of cocaine in the first half of 2022, with no reports of large seizures of the kind seen in 2021, when a total of 1.8 tons were seized.

506. Trafficking in cannabis and cannabis resin continues to be heavily concentrated in North Africa, although cannabis seizures are reported across the region. Quantities reported in the first half of 2022 point to a drop in the quantity of seizures. In June 2022, authorities of Algeria reported seizing 724 kg of "kif" (dried material derived from cannabis) in the western part of its territory, along the country's border with Morocco. In the first half of 2022, Moroccan authorities seized approximately 1.1 tons of cannabis resin and 31.5 tons of cannabis. Additional data on cannabis seizures in 2022 are so far limited, which makes comparisons with previous years difficult. For 2021, many countries reported extensive seizures of cannabis and cannabis resin at levels higher than in previous years. Algeria reported seizing more than 71 tons of cannabis. Burkina Faso reported seizing 12 tons of cannabis. Senegal seized 16.7 tons of cannabis resin and 30 tons of cannabis. The Sudan seized more than 380 tons of cannabis, some of which was cultivated in forests that had been illegally logged.

507. Data regarding trafficking in heroin are limited, but seizures have been reported by several countries in the region. In July 2022, Nigeria reported a seizure of 23 kg of heroin, concealed in baby food, trafficked from Southern Africa. In May 2022, the United Republic of Tanzania conducted a major operation in which more than 174 kg of heroin was seized. Algeria, Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, the Niger, Senegal and Togo all reported heroin seizures in 2021 ranging from several hundred grams to several kilograms, while South Africa reported seizing 158.2 kg of heroin in that same period.

508. Data regarding trafficking in other drugs in Africa are limited. However, several countries have reported some seizures during 2022. Morocco reported seizing small quantities of MDMA, the Niger reported seizing several kilograms of methamphetamine, Burkina Faso reported seizing half a kilogram of methamphetamine, and Nigeria reported seizing 350,000 codeine tablets. For 2021, Morocco reported seizing over 1.6 million tablets of various psychotropic substances, including several benzodiazepines.

509. For 2021, only a few countries in Africa have reported to the Board the mandatory information related to seizures

of substances in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention and of substances not under international control. This has hindered the identification of emerging trends in illicit drug manufacture on the African continent. However, the information available suggests that Africa continues to be affected by trafficking of precursor chemicals and chemicals not scheduled at the international level. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in Africa can be found in the report of the Board for 2022 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹³⁵

510. Non-medical use of tramadol remains a concern, in particular in West and Central Africa. In the first half of 2022, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency of Nigeria and the Nigerian Customs Service reported several large seizures of tramadol, including 1.5 million tablets totalling 886 kg seized in March, 9.1 million tablets totalling 1.3 tons seized in April, 500,000 tablets totalling 407 kg seized in June, and 2.7 million tablets totalling 1.6 tons seized in July. Burkina Faso and the Niger also reported seizures of several thousand tramadol tablets during 2022. For 2021, seizures of tramadol were reported by Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

5. Prevention and treatment

511. Determining the extent of drug use in Africa continues to be impeded by the lack of available information and prevalence data. This lack of data hinders the region's ability to determine the scope and consequences of drug use. It also hinders Governments and the international community as they seek to respond effectively by adopting and implementing evidence-based drug use prevention and treatment programmes.

512. The Board reiterates its call to all States in the region to develop mechanisms to improve the collection of information on drug use prevalence with the aim of developing drug use prevention and treatment strategies that are based on evidence and tailored to each country's specific needs and realities.

513. According to the UNODC *World Drug Report 2022*, the estimated prevalence of cannabis consumption in Africa was 6.54 per cent of the population (approximately 49.2 million people). For opioids, including prescription opioids, the estimated prevalence of consumption of those drugs stood at 1.23 per cent (approximately 9.2 million people). For opiates, mostly heroin, the estimated prevalence of

consumption stood at 0.49 per cent (3.6 million people). The prevalence rates for the consumption of other drugs in Africa did not exceed more than 0.3 per cent of the population in 2020. For many substances, the prevalence data for some subregions of Africa were not available.

514. In 2021, Algeria established two centres offering opioid substitution therapy using methadone, with 100 patients receiving treatment. The Government plans to expand the programme to treat up to 320 patients in total by the end of 2023.

515. In February 2022, Mauritius published the report on a population survey of people who use drugs. The report builds on existing initiatives, such as the National Drug Control Master Plan for the period 2019–2023, to address the country's drug problem. The report contains a number of recommendations to reduce stigma for people who use drugs and discrimination related to drug use disorders, improve treatment services and promote a multisectoral integrated approach to addressing drug use in the country.

516. A 2021 study in Kenya assessing the trends in drug use in the country found that the misuse of prescription drugs is on the rise owing to lower perceptions of harm related to the use of those substances as legal medicines. The substances in question are several types of internationally controlled benzodiazepines, as well as codeine and tramadol, which are sourced from hospitals and pharmacies. Use of cannabis edibles, including cookies and sweets, is also on the rise. The study provides a set of recommendations to address drug misuse, including a recommendation to establish better controls at pharmacies and hospitals in order to prevent diversion of medicines, and a recommendation to sensitize the public to emerging drug trends in the country and the associated harms.

517. Over the course of 2021, the United Republic of Tanzania provided treatment services to more than 890,000 persons with varying drug use disorders. Services were provided in specialized treatment centres and regional and district hospitals that have mental health units. In addition, the country now runs 14 opioid substitution therapy sites that use methadone and buprenorphine, located across the country and which provide treatment services to approximately 11,500 people on a daily basis. In April 2022, the Government released a set of guidelines for trainers on how to raise awareness among children, youth and parents on drug use prevention and the effects of drug trafficking.

¹³⁵E/INCB/2022/4.

C. Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

Several countries in the region reported seizures of large amounts of cocaine, indicating increases in drug trafficking following mobility restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The continued lack of recent estimates of the prevalence of drug use in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean makes it difficult to assess the nature, scope and extent of drug misuse in the region and hampers the tailoring of responses to the problem.

1. Major developments

518. Owing to its geographical location and to the fragility of its governing institutions, Central America and the Caribbean continues to be exploited by both local gangs and international organized criminal groups as a transit and trans-shipment route for illicit drugs originating in South America and destined for consumer markets in North America and Europe. Drug trafficking is increasingly linked to trafficking in persons, trafficking in firearms, money-laundering, corruption and cybercrime, and those criminal groups also take advantage of other destabilizing factors such as health and migratory crises.

519. The region suffers from violence and insecurity. In 2022, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported on worsening violence and clashes in Haiti between rival armed gangs in the capital, Port-au-Prince, that have forced hundreds of people to flee their homes. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, the street gangs Mara Salvatrucha (also known as “MS-13”) and Barrio 18, supply domestic markets with illicit drugs to supplement their main source of income from extortion. However, these gangs are not significantly involved in international drug trafficking.¹³⁶

520. Although comprehensive information regarding total amounts of illicit drugs seized in the region in 2021 was not available at the time of writing, some media and unofficial government reports indicate that the total amounts of illicit drugs, including cocaine, seized in Central America in 2021 could be considerably larger than those reported in 2020. Some national experts have commented that while the illicit

manufacture of cocaine continued during the COVID-19 pandemic, criminal groups were unable to transport the drug due to mobility restrictions until 2021, when drugs were released from storage places as travel restrictions eased. According to preliminary figures, Panama seized 117 tons of cocaine in 2021, 48 tons more than in 2020. In 2021, Costa Rica seized a total of 44.3 tons of cocaine hydrochloride, the largest seizure of the drug in the last three decades. The Dominican Republic also reported record seizures of illicit drugs in 2021, amounting to 25.5 tons, including 19.1 tons of cocaine.

521. In December 2021, CICAD published 33 national evaluation reports on drug policies and measures of prevention, treatment and recovery support in the Americas, which evaluate the adherence of States members of OAS to the OAS Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for the period 2021–2025 (see para. 531 below). Further, CICAD released the executive summary of the *Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2021*, which analyses data in the western hemisphere and provides information on the trends, challenges and emerging issues for policymakers and the general public. CICAD also published a report entitled *Characteristics of Persons Seeking Drug Treatment in the Caribbean* (see para. 557 below). UNODC published a report entitled *Synthetic Drugs and New Psychoactive Substances in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021* (see paras. 532 and 547 below).

2. Regional cooperation

522. CICAD, INCB and UNODC continued to organize expert meetings and provide online training for the competent national authorities of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean. A total of 81 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 16 countries in Central America and the Caribbean have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules support countries that are expanding their capacity for the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and gaining a deeper understanding of the international drug control framework. In December 2021, Cuba and Nicaragua, together with countries of South America, participated in an INCB Learning virtual seminar aimed at strengthening countries’ compliance with the international drug control conventions, including monitoring and reporting on the licit trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals, as well as the use of the I2ES platform.

523. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyl, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event brought together over 140 participants from around the world,

¹³⁶ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 2, *Global Overview of Drug Demand and Drug Supply* (United Nations publication, 2022), pp. 67–68.

including 4 participants from the Dominican Republic and Guatemala, who engaged in practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

524. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, for nearly 60 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of the Caribbean Community. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

525. In September 2022, the Board entered into an operational agreement with the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security to support information and intelligence exchange, training and collaborative strategic efforts to counter trafficking in dangerous opioids, new psychoactive substances and related chemicals.

526. CICAD provided technical assistance to OAS member States and their national drug observatories through online training events and round tables on various drug control-related topics, including early warning systems. In 2021, the early warning system for the Americas received alerts for the first time from El Salvador and Trinidad and Tobago. Training courses and workshops organized by UNODC addressed, among other topics, prevention of drug use in children and adolescents and psychotherapeutic care for substance users and HIV/AIDS patients. In October 2021, in cooperation with UNODC, Colombia, Costa Rica and El Salvador launched the subregional strategy to improve the interdiction of trafficking in drugs and chemical precursors.

527. In December 2021, PAHO launched a project entitled "Universal health care for substance use disorders in Latin America and the Caribbean". The project will run for 18 months and provide technical support to Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Panama and an additional three countries in South America to improve their national capacity to develop and implement health and social responses for substance use-related problems. In particular, the project will assist in improving the abilities of health and social workers to screen for substance use disorders, implement early interventions, better manage at-risk populations and formulate health policies. The project also aims to improve collaboration between national health agencies and drug control agencies.

528. In February 2022, the European Union and Latin American and the Caribbean countries launched a third phase of COPOLAD, which has supported biregional cooperation on drug policies for the past decade. With funding

amounting to 15 million euros, COPOLAD III is being implemented over a four-year period that commenced in February 2021. Countries participating in the programme include Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. The programme focuses on several areas, including drug-dependence treatment programmes and services to address the needs of women and vulnerable populations, the development of national systems for the reintegration of people with drug use problems, the review of proportionality in criminal law, and the use of confiscated goods and assets for social purposes.

529. The UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme continued to operate at seaports in nine countries of Central America and the Caribbean: the Bahamas, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica and Panama. The Programme has assisted port authorities in using modern control techniques to detect illegal goods, including illicit drugs hidden in containers, without disrupting licit trade. In May 2022, WCO organized an online regional workshop on free zones for the Americas and the Caribbean, attended by experts from customs administrations, free zone authorities, the private sector and OAS. The workshop covered the key elements identified in WCO guidance for adequate customs procedures in free zones.

530. Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago were among 40 countries that participated in the international naval operations Orion VII and Orion VIII to combat drug trafficking in 2021. The operation resulted in seizures of a total of 471 tons of illicit drugs, including 145 tons of cocaine hydrochloride.

3. National legislation, policy and action

531. The focus of the eighth evaluation round of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism for countries in the Americas, published in 2021, was on measures of prevention, treatment, and recovery support. The evaluation reports indicate that several countries in the western hemisphere, including those in Central America and the Caribbean, need to make progress in areas such as addressing stigmatization and social marginalization and need to establish or implement regulatory measures including

criteria for the accreditation of prevention programmes and care and treatment services.

532. Information on legal responses to the emergence of new psychoactive substances in Central America and the Caribbean for the most part remains limited. At the time of writing, in the UNODC publication *Synthetic Drugs and New Psychoactive Substances in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021*, information on legal responses to the emergence of new psychoactive substances was available for only nine countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Trinidad and Tobago.

533. In 2021, the National Council on Substance Abuse of Barbados initiated a discussion on establishing a recreational cannabis sector. According to the Council, the discussions would focus on how to balance potential economic profits from the cultivation and sale of cannabis with the provision of support for programmes to prevent cannabis use, in particular among minors and adolescents. The National Council also encouraged debate on the non-medical consumption of cannabis, giving consideration to the issue of economic growth versus the social costs.

534. In March 2022, the Senate of Belize approved the Cannabis and Industrial Hemp Control and Licensing Bill of 2022, which in conjunction with the recently amended version of the Misuse of Drugs Act legalizes the non-medical use, commercial production and sale of cannabis in the country. The laws legalize non-medical cannabis use for adults only and put in place a framework for the roll-out of the industry in Belize, which is to be overseen by a cannabis control commission. While the law has received the support of the Government, the Cabinet suspended its signing into law in order to receive further recommendations and allow religious institutions an opportunity to present their petition for a referendum.

535. In May 2022, the Ministry of Youth of the Dominican Republic and the National Drug Council signed an inter-institutional cooperation agreement to address problems of drug use among young people. The institutions agreed to develop a strategy aimed at reducing the use and distribution of and trafficking in illicit drugs, through the development and monitoring of policies and actions for the health and well-being of Dominican youth.

536. In 2021, the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador published a national report on the drug situation in the country covering the 18-month period from 2020 to mid-2021. Work also commenced on the drafting of a new national drug strategy for the period 2022–2027. In addition, the Board is aware of the Government's initiative to regulate the sale and use of tableting machines with a view

to preventing their diversion and misuse in the illicit manufacture of drugs.

537. The Darién Gap of Panama, a dense strip of forest near the border with Colombia, is known to be exploited for trafficking in arms, drugs and persons. In 2022, the Government of Panama launched a campaign called “Wana humaradá”. The campaign, jointly carried out with the National Border Service, the National Aeronaval Service and the National Immigration Service, will address criminal activities, including human trafficking, drug trafficking and illegal mining in Darién Province.

538. In May 2022, the Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies and the National Commission for the Study and Prevention of Drug-Related Crimes (CONAPRED) of Panama launched the “Therapeutic community” project as a care programme for adolescent users of illicit substances seeking rehabilitation and reintegration into society. In 2022, the Government of Guatemala launched a campaign called “Enjoy a drug-free Guatemala” aimed at preventing drug consumption in the country.

539. In 2021, Trinidad and Tobago became the first country in the Caribbean to follow the case/care management model, which promotes cooperation between the justice system and the health system, as well as with social services, with a view to facilitating access to treatment and social integration programmes as an alternative to incarceration.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

540. The amount of cannabis seized in the Americas is greater than for any other drug, followed by seizures of cocaine and cocaine derivatives. The overall share of the Americas in global cannabis herb seizures has declined, however, from 84 per cent of the global total in 2010 to 58 per cent in 2020.

541. An analysis of various indicators of cannabis cultivation in the region suggests that there was a sizable cultivation of cannabis in Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras in Central America and in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean in the period 2010–2020. For the period 2016–2020, in Central America and the Caribbean, Guatemala, Honduras and Jamaica were among the most frequently mentioned countries of origin, departure and transit for cannabis herb in the region.

542. The authorities of Costa Rica reported record seizures of cannabis herb in 2021 amounting to 21.7 tons, the largest total seizures of the substance since 1990. In the first five

months of 2022, a further 10.6 tons of cannabis herb were seized in the country. Costa Rica and Guatemala reported eradication of 800,000 and 1.9 million cannabis plants, respectively, in 2021. In 2021, 34.8 tons of cannabis herb were seized in Jamaica.

543. Increases in global cocaine seizures, primarily in cocaine-manufacturing countries, have shown a clear upward trend over the past two decades, notably in the period 2015–2020. Available data also show that over the past two decades there has been a shift from the Caribbean to Central America in terms of the greater quantity of cocaine seized, due to increased trafficking of cocaine from Colombia along the Pacific route to Central America and North America, instead of being trafficked via the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean.

544. In 2020, Central America and the Caribbean accounted for 10 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively, of all cocaine seizures worldwide. According to the CICAD executive summary of the *Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2021*, during the reporting period 2016–2019, the average amount of individual cocaine seizures in Central America was roughly 25 kg to 30 kg. In the Caribbean individual seizure amounts fluctuated, with annual averages for seizure weights ranging from 1.5 kg to 16 kg.

545. Most of the cocaine seized in the European Union or in transit to Europe is directly transported by sea, primarily in containers, from the main cocaine-manufacturing countries or their neighbouring countries in South America, Central America and the Caribbean. Some cocaine also enters the European Union by air, primarily by means of commercial passenger flights, cargo aircraft or general aviation (private civilian aircraft). The use of private business aircraft to traffic cocaine directly from South America and the Caribbean to western Europe is expected to increase in the future according to EMCDDA. Disruptions in global air passenger transport during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a significant decrease in cocaine trafficking by that means in 2020.

546. According to the CICAD executive summary of the *Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2021*, Guatemala was the only country in the region that mentioned heroin or opium poppy as a drug of concern during the reporting period 2016–2019. Some countries in the region might, however, be indirectly associated with trafficking of synthetic opioids. In 2022, the United States Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking published a report examining the synthetic opioid threat in the United States, including illegal manufacturing of and trafficking in these substances, as well as deficiencies in countering their illicit manufacture and distribution. The report indicated that a

number of advertisements for fentanyl or its precursors were linked with email domains seeming to originate in China and the United States as well as other countries such as the Bahamas and Jamaica. In that regard, the Board notes that UNODC has continued to provide training focused on cybercrime investigations and prosecution in the region.

547. According to the UNODC report *Synthetic Drugs and New Psychoactive Substances in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021*, Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced an expansion and diversification of the synthetic drug market and the rapid emergence of a wide range of new psychoactive substances, in particular from 2013 onward. In particular, increasing MDMA manufacture in Europe has led to the emergence of “ecstasy” pills containing higher doses of MDMA and crystalline MDMA. From Europe, “ecstasy” was predominantly trafficked to the region using postal services and, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, also by air passengers.

548. Since 2016, seizures of amphetamine and methamphetamine were reported by several countries in the region, including the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama. Seizures of “ecstasy” were reported in Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama. Seizures of LSD were reported by two countries: Costa Rica and Honduras. Costa Rica and Panama have reported seizures of ketamine in recent years.

549. In the same period, the following countries were reported to be linked with the illicit manufacture and/or processing of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances: the Dominican Republic (“ecstasy” and fentanyl), Guatemala (amphetamines) and Panama (new psychoactive substances).

550. As of August 2022, new psychoactive substances were detected in the following countries and territories of the region: Cayman Islands, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago; the highest number of different new psychoactive substances was reported by Costa Rica.

5. Prevention and treatment

551. Central America and the Caribbean is among the regions of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. In particular, on the basis of reported consumption of narcotic

drugs, the region is among those with the least availability of the most widely used opioid analgesics. Determining levels of consumption of psychotropic substances for Central America and the Caribbean remains a challenge, as only a third of countries and territories have provided consumption data to the Board on any psychotropic substance for the past several years. The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in many countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. Further information on recent developments is contained in the supplement to the present annual report, entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes*.

552. The Board notes with concern the continued lack of recent epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of drug abuse in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean. The latest estimates of the annual prevalence of use of cocaine among the general population aged 15–64 are more than 10 years old in a number of countries in the region, including Barbados, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. Recent estimates are not available to enable the production of estimates of the extent of opioid use in the region. **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.**

553. Although the past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population in Central America (3.1 per cent) and in the Caribbean (3.8 per cent) is lower than the global average (4.1 per cent), the gradual increases in the prevalence of cannabis use is considered to be a problem for the health-care systems of some countries in the Caribbean. According to the latest data available, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population in Jamaica in 2016 was 18 per cent.

554. According to the *World Drug Report 2022*, the annual prevalence of the use of cocaine in Central America and the Caribbean is estimated at 0.96 per cent and 0.35 per cent, respectively, of persons aged 15–64 years. Central America and the Caribbean are among the subregions of the world with the highest proportion of people in drug treatment due to the use of cocaine-type substances. For example, according to the statistical bulletin of the Costa Rican Drug Institute, the number of people that entered residential drug treatment in non-governmental entities from January to

May 2022 due to the use of cocaine and “crack” cocaine was four times higher than that due to the use of cannabis.

555. The annual prevalence of amphetamine and prescription stimulants use among adults in Central America was estimated to be 0.98 per cent in 2020, unchanged from 2019. The annual prevalence of amphetamine and prescription stimulant use in the Caribbean was not reported in the *World Drug Report 2022*. The consumption of “ecstasy”, which has traditionally been concentrated among young people in nightlife settings, has apparently shifted to more mainstream use over the past decade in various regions. In 2020, the annual prevalence of the use of “ecstasy” was the lowest among reported controlled stimulants, and was estimated at 0.17 per cent in Central America and 0.23 per cent in the Caribbean.

556. Concerned about the number of persons seeking treatment for drug dependence, the National Council on Substance Abuse of Barbados launched a workplace safety survey in December 2021. Employees of the Ministry of Home Affairs and private sector organizations that the Council has worked with participated in the survey. The survey, together with other ongoing and planned surveys including the national household survey, the “Barriers to treatment: factors hindering women’s access to treatment in Barbados” survey, the National Secondary School Survey and the tertiary level school survey will further assist the Council to develop evidence-based drug education prevention programmes for Barbados.

557. CICAD published a report entitled *Characteristics of Persons Seeking Drug Treatment in the Caribbean*. The report was based on an analysis of intake assessments of 4,500 persons referred to be assessed for treatment in Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as for Guyana and Suriname, for the period 2015 to 2017. Ninety per cent of the assessed persons, who were clients of treatment centres, were male, and 10 per cent were female. Most males, as well as most females, were single. Some 44 per cent of clients were working/self-employed or working and studying. Overall, 49 per cent of clients had been arrested. Half of all clients (51 per cent) reported that they had never received treatment, while about 36 per cent had been treated one to four times in their lives. St Lucia (78 per cent), Suriname (75 per cent), Antigua and Barbuda (66 per cent), and Jamaica (59 per cent) reported the highest proportion of first-time clients. The main substance for which treatment was sought was cannabis (39 per cent), followed by alcohol (27 per cent), “crack” cocaine (27 per cent) and cocaine powder (4.5 per cent). Forty-two per cent of clients in the three-year period had been tested for HIV/AIDS, of whom 2.4 per cent indicated that they had tested positive for HIV.

North America

The drug overdose epidemic in North America worsened in 2022 owing to increased production and trafficking of synthetic opioids, especially illicit fentanyl.

The regulation in North American jurisdictions of cannabis use for non-medical purposes continues to evolve in a manner inconsistent with provisions of the drug control conventions.

1. Major developments

558. The illicit manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic opioids in North America have exacerbated the region's opioid epidemic and drug overdose crisis, resulting in an increase in deaths. More overdose deaths were recorded in Canada and the United States despite the adoption of heightened measures to mitigate the negative consequences of drug use, such as increasing the availability and accessibility of naloxone and the use of fentanyl test strips.

559. In the United States, provisional data from the National Center for Health Statistics indicate there were an estimated 107,622 total drug overdose deaths during 2021, an increase of nearly 15 per cent from the estimated 93,655 deaths in 2020. Overdose deaths specifically involving synthetic opioids increased from an estimated 57,834 in 2020 to 71,238 in 2021. Fewer data are available concerning non-fatal overdoses and the consequences of drug use, underlining the fact that there is an ongoing need to build a comprehensive real-time data system to record non-fatal overdoses in the United States.

560. In Canada, from January 2016 through December 2021, at least 29,052 people died from opioid-related overdoses. The Public Health Agency of Canada has reported that during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a 96 per cent increase in apparent drug toxicity deaths, rising to 7,362 deaths in the period from April 2020 to March 2021, compared with 3,747 deaths in the preceding year. A total of 7,560 apparent opioid toxicity deaths occurred in 2021. The Public Health Agency of Canada has explained that the increasingly toxic drug supply has contributed to the worsening of the overdose crisis, with more deaths caused by the higher level of intoxication/toxicity or poisoning resulting from opioid or stimulant use.

561. Drug trafficking organizations have increasingly infiltrated commercial and economic activity in North America. Criminal drug networks are using social media platforms

to traffic drugs and fake prescription medicines that contain deadly amounts of fentanyl. Governments in the region have established a clear nexus between drug trafficking and associated violence, fuelled by criminal organizations.

2. Regional cooperation

562. Representatives of Canada, Mexico and the United States met virtually in November 2022 for the sixth meeting of the North American Drug Dialogue. The countries reviewed the progress made and actions undertaken to address the production and trafficking of illegal drugs, with particular attention on addressing the ways in which criminals exploit the legitimate commercial supply chain. The three countries agreed on a path forward that expands cooperation and updates strategic objectives to address illegal drugs and related public health and safety concerns. The three countries will enhance their work on addressing the illegal supply chain of illegal synthetic drugs and their precursor chemicals and related equipment affecting North America.

563. At the North American Leaders' Summit held on 18 November 2021, the three countries of the region issued a statement recognizing their close integration at a time of complex global challenges. According to the statement, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the opioid crisis worsened, including an 88 per cent increase in opioid toxicity deaths in Canada from April 2020 to March 2021.

564. The United States and Mexico developed the Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health and Safe Communities, as the two countries enter their two hundredth year of diplomatic relations. In a meeting held on 31 January 2022, the two Governments discussed a common approach to joint objectives, including a focus on evidence-based public health policy; providing comprehensive, community-based care for people with substance use disorders; and stopping criminal groups that traffic illicit drugs and weapons. Included in the goals and objectives of their bilateral cooperation is the prevention of transborder crime and the expansion of regulatory and law enforcement capacity to address the trafficking of synthetic drugs and precursors. As part of the Bicentennial Framework, Mexico and the United States launched the Binational Group against Arms Trafficking, stressing that a reduction in the illicit flow of weapons and ammunition from the United States to Mexico is necessary for building peace and combating organized crime.

565. Within the framework of the Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking, government officials of Mexico and the United States discussed ongoing efforts to jointly prevent the production and trafficking of

synthetic opioids. The United States Administration reconfirmed its commitment to working with its partners, including Mexico, to address the overdose epidemic and reduce the trafficking of opioids that is driving overdoses.

566. On 5 May 2022, Canada and Mexico held a dialogue on human rights and multilateral issues to discuss areas of mutual interest in international forums, good practices and the challenges faced by both countries. The two countries committed to strengthening their strategic partnership and to promoting and protecting human rights. Within this forum, both Governments addressed challenges and opportunities for collaboration on drug policy, exchanging experiences on the regulation of the drug market and on multilateral efforts to curb arms trafficking.

567. A total of 228 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of Canada, Mexico and the United States have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules support countries in expanding their capacity for the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals, and in gaining a deeper understanding of the international drug control framework.

3. National legislation, policy and action

568. In its drug control efforts, the United States continues to prioritize combating the opioid epidemic and responding to increasing drug overdose deaths. On 1 March 2022, the President of the United States described in his State of the Union address a national agenda that calls for increased funding for prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery in response to the 23 million people in drug-related recovery. In 2021, the United States Congress passed, and President Biden signed into law, the American Rescue Plan, which included \$4 billion for mental health and substance use disorders.

569. On 21 April 2022, the United States Administration transmitted to Congress the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy, focusing on untreated addiction and drug trafficking as drivers of the overdose epidemic. The strategy calls for actions to help save lives in the drug overdose epidemic and addresses both drug demand and supply reduction, including by building a stronger substance use disorder treatment infrastructure, reducing the supply of illicit substances through targeted law enforcement actions and disrupting the economic activities of criminal organizations.

570. Further, the National Drug Control Strategy of the United States is focused on improving racial equity and evidence-based harm reduction measures in drug policy,

with collaboration between its public health and public safety sectors. Overdose deaths, while increasing among all racial and ethnic groups, are increasing most rapidly among minority groups. With respect to reducing illicit substance use, the strategy aims to reduce the number of drug overdose deaths by 13 per cent by 2025. A second, related objective is to reduce by 25 per cent by 2025 the percentage of people considered to have, according to established criteria, cocaine use disorders, opioid use disorders and methamphetamine use disorders.

571. In October 2021, the United States Department of Health and Human Services announced a four-part overdose prevention strategy based on primary prevention, harm reduction, evidence-based treatment and recovery support. The strategy, which addresses the overdose crisis in the United States, makes use of public health, health care and human services to provide diverse treatment approaches. The strategy reflects the intention of the United States Administration to maximize health equity for historically underserved populations. The Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, convened the first-ever federal Harm Reduction Summit in December 2021.

572. The President of the United States signed two executive orders in December 2021 to address the core causes and sources of transnational criminal activities fuelling drug overdoses. The orders aim to disrupt those transnational criminal organizations trafficking synthetic opioids. As a result, the United States Administration formally established the Council on Transnational Organized Crime, bringing together six key departments and agencies involved in efforts to combat transnational organized crime. The Department of State will run the Narcotics Rewards Program to assist in identifying and bringing to justice major violators of United States narcotics laws. Since the executive orders on transnational criminal organizations and illicit drug trafficking were issued, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control has designated 26 individuals and 17 entities as narcotics traffickers or enablers.

573. In April 2022, a special temporary scheduling order of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration was issued to schedule seven non-fentanyl synthetic opioids of the benzimidazole class in Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act. The OPIOIDS project of the INCB GRIDS Programme communicated the change to nearly 2,000 law and regulatory enforcement focal points around the world by special notice. In addition, the United States Congress passed, and the United States President signed into law, a temporary extension of class-wide scheduling of fentanyl-related substances until 31 December 2022.

574. As at 1 November 2022, 37 states of the United States had enacted regulations to permit cannabis use for medical purposes. On 2 February 2022, the Governor of Mississippi signed into law the Mississippi Medical Cannabis Act, making it the thirty-seventh state to allow patients to purchase medical cannabis products.

575. On 24 March 2022, the United States Senate passed legislation that expands scientific and medical research on cannabis and its compounds, including CBD. The Cannabidiol and Marihuana Research Expansion Act authorizes the United States Food and Drug Administration to research and analyse CBD and medical cannabis products, changing the stringency of regulations for medical research on cannabis. The legislation aims to ensure that research on CBD is science-based while also reducing the regulatory barriers associated with conducting research. The legislation requires the Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institutes of Health to submit to Congress a report on the potential harms and benefits of cannabis use.

576. On 26 July 2022, the United States House of Representatives passed the corresponding legislation to encourage cannabis research by streamlining the application process for researchers and removing barriers with the Food and Drug Administration. The justification for the legislative changes was based on data indicating that there are 4 million registered medical cannabis patients in the United States and many more individuals who self-medicate. The legislation was therefore designed to promote new research to better understand the cannabis plant and its potential benefits and hazards.

577. In the United States, 21 states, 2 territories and the District of Columbia have enacted measures to regulate cannabis for adult non-medical purposes. On 8 November 2022, voters approved ballot measures in the States of Maryland and Missouri approving the non-medical use of cannabis for adults over the age of 21 through constitutional amendments. Ballot measures to permit and regulate non-medical cannabis use were rejected in the states of Arkansas, North Dakota and South Dakota. On 6 October 2022, the President of the United States pardoned all individuals with prior federal cannabis possession convictions and called on state governors to pardon state-level cannabis possession offences. The President has also requested the Attorney General to initiate the process of reviewing how cannabis is scheduled under federal law.

578. On 25 May 2022, the Governor of the State of Rhode Island signed a new Cannabis Act, which regulates cannabis for non-medical purposes. Under the law, possession and home cultivation of cannabis is permitted for adults

aged 21 and over. Retail sales of cannabis will be permitted starting 1 December 2022. The Act includes automatic expungement of prior civil or criminal cannabis possession charges. The sponsor of the legislation explained that state-level prohibition of cannabis does not stop use of the substance because cannabis can be accessed across state borders or on the illicit market.

579. While cannabis remains a Schedule I substance at the federal level in the United States, the gap with state-level regulations of cannabis for non-medical purposes continues to grow. There is inadequate information available on prevalence rates of cannabis use after the introduction of state-level legalization measures, in particular among youth. There is also a need to examine the potential increase in trafficking between the states that have legalized the sale of cannabis and neighbouring states where cannabis remains controlled, as well as trafficking across international borders.

580. In the United States, there is a growing movement to create new legal frameworks for the administration and use of psilocybin at the state level, predominantly for research and medical purposes. On 8 November 2022, voters in the State of Colorado approved proposition 122, a ballot measure to permit the possession and use of psilocybin for adults over the age of 21 and also allowing home cultivation. As a result, the state will create regulations for the distribution and administration of psilocybin through licensed “healing centers” and not through retail sales. In Oregon, after the ballot measure of 2020 was approved, the state began development of a regulatory scheme for the manufacture, transportation, delivery, sale and purchase of psilocybin products and the provision of psilocybin services starting in January 2023. Some states have started funding research into the medical use of psilocybin. For example, in Maryland, on 1 July 2022, a law established a fund to support the study of the effectiveness of and improving access to alternative therapies for post-traumatic brain injuries in veterans. The alternative therapies to be studied will include use of MDMA, psilocybin and ketamine.

581. With the stated aim of mitigating the negative consequences of drug use, New York City authorized two supervised injection sites run by a non-profit group, OnPoint NYC. New York City was the first city in the United States to authorize injection sites, which it did after more than 2,000 people died from overdoses in 2020. According to the city’s health commissioner, arrangements were made with the police to avoid arrests related to the operation of the sites, where people would be able to inject heroin and other drugs under the care of medical professionals. On 21 December 2021, the Health Department of New York City reported that in the first three weeks of

operation, staff at the two centres averted at least 59 overdoses to prevent injury and death.

582. In Canada, the province of British Columbia has received an exemption from Health Canada under subsection 56(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The exemption permits adults in the province to possess opioids (including fentanyl), cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA in quantities not exceeding 2.5 grams. The exemption will be in effect from 31 January 2023 to 31 January 2026 and will be monitored with respect to intended outcomes as well as any potential unintended impacts. Adults possessing an amount under the threshold amount will not be subject to criminal charges, although the substances will remain controlled. Health Canada granted the exemption in consideration of the lives lost in the drug overdose crisis in the province of British Columbia. The Government's exemption was accompanied by the explanation that stigma associated with substance use can lead people to hide drug use and prevent access to services and support. To implement the policy change, public health and safety indicators will be developed to monitor and evaluate the outcomes. The Government of Canada has explained that it has no intention of legalizing drugs and remains committed to preventing the illegal production and trafficking of controlled substances.

583. On 22 December 2021, Health Canada issued a public advisory of the risk of serious harm if children accidentally consume edible cannabis. The advisory states that Health Canada is aware of several cases of children being hospitalized after consuming products that are illegal and unregulated and which sometimes resemble popular brands of candies, snacks or other food products that are typically sold at grocery stores, gas stations and corner stores. Under the Cannabis Act of 2018, such products are illegal. According to the legislation, edible cannabis products sold in Canada must be wrapped in plain packaging to reduce any appeal to children and avoid confusion with other products. The regulated edible cannabis products must have a health warning message in a yellow box, a red cannabis symbol, an excise stamp and be in child-resistant packaging. Illegal cannabis products may contain high amounts of *delta*-9-THC, which increases the risk of poisoning and other adverse effects. Edible cannabis products in Canada can contain a maximum of 10 milligrams of THC per package.

584. On 5 January 2022, Health Canada issued regulations under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and the Food and Drugs Act to allow doctors to request special access to controlled substances, such as psilocybin and MDMA, for eligible patients for the purpose of dispensing or delivering a restricted drug for the emergency treatment

of a patient and for treating patients with serious or life-threatening conditions when conventional treatments have failed or were unsuitable or unavailable. The Special Access Programme may be used for emergency treatment only, although it allows for the import of drugs that are not legally available in Canada.

585. In its statement in the general debate of the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Mexico pointed to changes in drug policy since the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, on the world drug problem, held in 2016. Mexico indicated that its drug policy had three pillars: attention to social causes; comprehensive prevention; and eliminating elements that increase the power of criminal organizations engaged in the illicit drug market. Mexico is further examining the relationship between criminal organizations and drug traffickers with arms trafficking and illicit finance.

586. In Mexico, legislative and policy changes concerning cannabis use for non-medical purposes continue to be in flux despite the Supreme Court ruling of 2018 which required that personal cannabis use be permitted in the country. The Congress of Mexico has, to date, not passed legislative changes reflecting the Supreme Court ruling requiring the regulation of adult possession and use of cannabis for non-medical purposes.

587. During the reporting period, on 1 December 2021, the Supreme Court of Mexico granted an injunction to a cannabis company by declaring unconstitutional the system of prohibitions for the planting, cultivating and harvesting of cannabis for purposes other than medical and scientific purposes, as provided for in the General Health Law and Federal Criminal Code. The Supreme Court issued the injunction in response to the refusal of the Federal Commission for Protection against Health Risks to grant authorization to the cannabis company to prepare products that would contain THC concentrations equal to or less than 1 per cent. The Supreme Court authorization would require that the company operate under the monitoring, control and security provisions of the competent national authority. The result of the ruling will be the commercialization in Mexico of low-THC content cannabis products. In addition, in May 2022, the Supreme Court of Justice of Mexico ruled that criminal prosecution for cannabis possession was unconstitutional unless the drug was not for personal use. The court ruled that defining personal use of cannabis as the possession of 5 grams or less was not justified. Instead, prosecutors should prove whether an individual was in possession of cannabis for personal consumption.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

588. The United States Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs issued on 1 March 2022 its annual report on drug and chemical control. The report's overview of the drug control situation in the United States explains that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted efforts to curb drug trafficking and had led to altered trafficking routes. Drug overdoses in the United States have reached record highs, with over 100,000 deaths in the 12-month period ending in April 2021. The report highlights that INCB has expanded its activities to disrupt illicit synthetic drug trafficking networks by providing training, increasing private sector coordination, and enhancing global participation in its data-sharing platforms and multilateral operations.

589. In February 2022, the United States Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking, established by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020, released its final report. The Commission outlined a strategic approach to combating the illegal flow of synthetic opioids, in particular fentanyl, into the United States and to reducing the number of overdose deaths. The proposals to create a coordinated approach to the opioid crisis included an examination of foreign policy, homeland security, intelligence and legal and regulatory dimensions of the problem, including the development of an understanding of the demand for the illicit substances.

590. The United States Drug Enforcement Administration has reported that social media platforms are being harnessed to traffic drugs containing fentanyl. A public safety initiative of the entity, which lasted from 29 September 2021 to 14 December 2021, targeted criminal networks that were using the anonymity and accessibility of social media to traffic drugs, leading to an unprecedented level of fentanyl in United States communities, often in the form of counterfeit prescription pills. In 2021, the Drug Enforcement Administration seized 20.4 million counterfeit prescription pills. During the public safety initiative period, 8 million counterfeit prescription pills and more than 680 kg of fentanyl were seized. In 2022, the Drug Enforcement Administration announced the One Pill Can Kill enforcement operation targeting the manufacture, importation, transportation and distribution of counterfeit fentanyl tablets. The subsequent phase of the operation will target the distribution of methamphetamine tablets.

591. In Canada, illicit drug toxicity deaths increased in 2021 and in 2022. According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, polysubstance use is common and is becoming a primary driver of poisoning deaths in Canada, including frequently used drugs of classes such as

fentanyl and methamphetamine. In British Columbia, for example, 17 per cent of cases of drug toxicity deaths in the period November 2021–April 2022 involved extreme concentrations of fentanyl compared with 13 per cent in the period April 2020–October 2021 and 8 per cent in the period January 2019–March 2020. According to information from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General of British Columbia, there has been a shifting trend that began in 2022 of a greater percentage of women dying from toxic illicit drugs. Men had in the past typically accounted for nearly 80 per cent of the deaths in the province due to illicit drugs, but in April 2022 more than 26 per cent of such deaths were of women.

592. The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released in 2022 a report analysing the preliminary impacts of Canada's Cannabis Act of 2018 on how people living in Canada consume and acquire cannabis. According to the report, people who consume cannabis are shifting away from higher-risk, inhalation-based methods of consumption and towards oral ingestion. The number of people buying cannabis through the country's regulated channels has significantly increased year after year. By 2020, the most common avenues for cannabis purchase were State-regulated physical and online dispensaries.

593. In August 2022, Statistics Canada reported on police-reported crime statistics for 2021, in which there were 5,996 opioid-related offences in Canada, a 13 per cent increase from 2020. Opioid-related drug violations, which include possession, trafficking, production and importation or exportation, all increased in 2021. Cannabis offences also increased for the first time in nine years, rising 5 per cent in 2021. The increase in cannabis offences was reported to be due to importation and exportation offences, mainly in British Columbia and Quebec. Overall, however, the rate of police-reported drug offences under Canada's Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and the Cannabis Act decreased 9 per cent in 2021.

594. The Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use issued an alert in July 2022 about xylazine, a non-controlled substance, in the unregulated drug supply. There are indications that people add xylazine to fentanyl to prolong some of its effects. It has therefore become an increasingly common cutting agent in Canada and the United States. Xylazine has been identified alongside cocaine and methamphetamine, increasing the negative and unintentional consequences of drug use. According to the alert, naloxone can reverse opioid effects but has no effect on xylazine.

595. The INCB GRIDS Programme has provided awareness-raising on the threat of non-medical synthetic opioids, emerging benzodiazepine analogues and other new psychoactive

substances found in falsified medicines. The Programme provided a briefing on this threat at the United States Patent and Trademark Office workshop on the investigation and handling of counterfeit medicine cases held from 7 to 9 June 2022. The event, hosted at the Global Intellectual Property Academy, brought together 28 officers from Bulgaria and Romania and experts from the United States National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center, the United States Postal Inspection Service, the Food and Drug Administration Office of Criminal Investigations, the INCB secretariat, INTERPOL and UPU. The workshop addressed transnational threats posed by overseas consignments trafficked through postal and courier channels and provided awareness-raising materials and training guides on the safe handling and interdiction of synthetic opioids and their related chemicals. Following that event, the OPIOIDS Project circulated information to focal points in Bulgaria, who in cooperation with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, identified and dismantled a criminal organization trafficking opioids to the United States.

596. Analysis of the reported data of the IONICS platform of the INCB GRIDS Programme shows an increased number of communications from law enforcement focal points for North America on opioids interdictions. In 2022, there were 2,175 incidents communicated concerning opioids interdictions and seizures.

597. In September 2022, UNODC and the Government of Mexico published the fifth technical monitoring report on illicit opium poppy cultivation, related to a study conducted between July 2019 and June 2020. The study estimated that the area under opium poppy cultivation in Mexico during that period was 24,100 ha, which was a 23 per cent increase from the previous period of 2018–2019. The national average yield of opium gum was estimated at 20.8 kg/ha, indicating that yield has remained stable since the study of 2018–2019 was conducted. The potential national production of dry opium gum was estimated at 504 tons, a 14 per cent increase from the previous monitoring period of 2018–2019.

598. The GRIDS Programme convened two two-day training courses in Mexico in October 2021 to combat the trafficking of new psychoactive substances, emerging synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances for 51 front-line officers belonging to the law and regulatory enforcement agencies of Mexico. The training emphasized capacity-building to enhance communications by authorities of Mexico concerning safe handling and interdiction approaches for opioids and fentanyl-related substances.

599. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of

fentanyls, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event brought together over 140 participants from around the world, including 18 participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States, who engaged in practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

600. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 6 to 9 September 2022. The event brought together nearly 60 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including 9 participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

601. The GRIDS Programme hosted the interregional workshop on public-private partnerships for the prevention of the trafficking of dangerous substances, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 11 to 14 September 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from 30 Governments, 5 international organizations and 15 Internet-related service providers and their associations, including 13 participants from Canada and the United States. Participants exchanged best practices and case examples related to the exploitation of private sector agencies and online platforms for the trafficking of dangerous substances with the aim of strengthening international operational cooperation across borders to prevent future misuse of legitimate Internet-related services.

5. Prevention and treatment

602. In the United States, the Drug Enforcement Administration launched the second year of Operation Engage, a community-level approach to addressing the drug overdose epidemic through prevention strategies, facilitating conversations and collaboration with local partners. The goals of the nationwide expansion of the operation in 2022 are to identify local drug threat enforcement priorities and substance use trends; support and contribute to local substance use prevention efforts; and interconnect local public safety and public health efforts. The Administration's objectives include connecting field offices with local communities and leveraging intelligence to build awareness of local drug threats. Additional aims include changing attitudes to reduce substance use and supporting local drug-free community coalitions and public health and prevention leaders.

603. The United States Drug Enforcement Administration has lifted a decade-long moratorium on opioid treatment

programmes that include a mobile component, permitting methadone administration and delivery of other services through specially equipped vehicles. The regulation has expanded access to mobile narcotic treatment programmes to dispense narcotic drugs at remote locations for the purpose of maintenance or detoxification treatment and expands access to medications for opioid use disorder in rural and underserved communities and in prisons. The expansion of evidence-based treatment in federal prisons is a priority of the current United States Administration.

604. According to the United States 2021 Monitoring the Future study, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the percentage of adolescents reporting substance use decreased significantly in 2021. The findings indicate the largest one-year decrease in overall illicit drug use reported since the survey began in 1975. From February through June 2021, the Monitoring the Future study collected 32,260 survey responses from students across the United States, showing a decrease in 2021 in vaping of cannabis, following previous sharp increases between 2017 and 2019. One noted limitation of the study was that 60 per cent of the students took the survey at home during virtual schooling and may not have been as truthful or as comfortable reporting substance use as were those surveyed in school. The survey findings also noted that students with less engagement in school, which is a known risk factor for drug use, may have been less likely to participate in the survey, whether in person or online.

605. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the United States Department of Health and Human Services extended the measures for flexibility in its methadone take-home services for one year, to be in effect until the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency. The administration had put into place the mechanisms to protect public health by reducing the risk of COVID-19 infections among patients and health-care providers. The main purpose is to allow opioid treatment programmes to dispense 28 days of take-home methadone doses to stable patients for the treatment of opioid use disorder, and up to 14 doses of take-home methadone for less stable patients.

606. The United States Department of Health and Human Services announced new “State Opioid Response” funding for the fiscal year 2022 in the amount of nearly \$1.5 billion for states and territories to help them address opioid addiction and the overdose epidemic. Additional funding is provided through the Tribal Opioid Response programme, which addresses the overdose crisis in tribal communities by increasing access to medications for the treatment of opioid use disorder and supports prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery support services. In 2021, the

Department of Health and Human Services introduced new initiatives and expanded existing programmes to further address the evolving drug overdose crisis, including an effort to exempt eligible medical professionals from federal certification requirements related to training, counselling and other ancillary services that are part of the process for obtaining a waiver to treat up to 30 patients with buprenorphine.

607. On 17 November 2021, the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy released a model law for states of the United States to help expand access to naloxone. The model law provides states with a framework to make naloxone accessible to reduce opioid-related overdose deaths. The model law includes a template of suggested legislative provisions that can be enacted across the country and aims to protect individuals administering naloxone from criminal prosecution. It will require health insurance coverage for opioid antagonists and prohibit discriminatory insurance practices related to the possession of naloxone. The model law provides increased access to opioid antagonists in educational institutions and correctional settings and establishes a pilot programme for public naloxone access for administration by bystanders.

608. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States has released new data showing that less than a third of people diagnosed with hepatitis C receive timely treatment. Overall, less than one in three people with health insurance get treatment within a year of diagnosis. Annual data on hepatitis C in the United States show that the highest rates of new infection are among adults under 40. Within this age group, hepatitis C is most commonly spread through drug use.

609. With respect to prevention and treatment in Canada, on 2 August 2022, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released a report on cannabis legalization. The report documents the impacts since legalization on the country’s cannabis market; for example, fewer people in Canada are reportedly using cannabis. The study found that 46 per cent of youth aged 16 to 19 years and 40 per cent of youth aged 20 to 24 years reported increased cannabis use. Some key points of the report were that the public health sector of Canada should monitor the potential public health implications of the increase in vaping, in particular among youth and young adults; the demand for cannabis edibles and extracts was growing; and cannabis-related emergency department visits and admissions to intensive care units have risen since legalization in 2018.

610. In April 2022, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction published a Canada-wide study on the use of drugs from the unregulated supply during the period

2019–2021. The information collected was from the community urinalysis and self-reporting project to uncover trends in reported and detected use of substances. The study found that the contents of drugs in the unregulated supply are unpredictable in type, potency and quality. The Centre explains that standardized information about drug contents is urgently needed to identify potential risks and inform efforts in Canada to reduce the negative consequences of drug use, such as contamination and accidental drug poisoning. In addition, benzodiazepine use was detected in at least one in three participants, consistent with the finding that benzodiazepines use has increased in the unregulated drug supply since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

611. The Government of Canada has renewed its investment in research to address the health and safety harms of substance use through the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse. The initiative provides funding to inform health policies and practices, including on concerns over the substantial rise in methamphetamine use in many parts of Canada. The funding will address the lack of high-quality data to inform clinical practice and substance use policy related to methamphetamine use disorder.

612. A 2021 report from the Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction provides survey results showing that youth across Canada are experiencing higher levels of anxiety and substance use concerns. According to the poll of 10,000 people across Canada, there has been a disproportionately negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among youth. Almost 45 per cent of youth aged 16–24 report moderate to severe anxiety symptoms. The key findings show that the level of mental health and substance use concerns across Canada remains high, in particular for people with past and current substance use concerns. Stigma remains a significant factor leading people not to access treatment for substance use disorders.

613. In Canada, public health control measures instituted in 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a decrease in direct services, such as drug checking, homeless shelters, community health centres, needle exchange programmes, outreach services and community residential treatment. When services were reopened, there were reports of capacity issues, staff shortages and limited hours, which posed challenges for people seeking treatment and prevented people who use drugs from having access to harm reduction equipment to prevent drug poisoning and infection transmission.

614. The Government of Canada has taken steps to provide access to a range of medications for the treatment of substance use disorder, including injectable opioid agonist

treatments. On 16 February 2022, Health Canada authorized diacetylmorphine (heroin) hydrochloride as a supervised injectable opioid agonist treatment for adult patients with severe opioid use disorder who use injectable opioids.

615. In 2021, the National Commission against Addictions of Mexico released a report on mental health and the consumption of psychoactive substances, providing information regarding the demand for treatment in Mexico. According to the report, use of amphetamine-type stimulants, in particular methamphetamine, has increased from 14.5 per cent of cases in 2017 to 30.3 per cent in 2020. Although the demand for care for opioid use remains at relatively low levels in Mexico, there was an increase from 24 cases in 2013 to 73 cases in 2020.

616. The Liaison and Partnership Office in Mexico of UNODC and the National Commission against Addictions of Mexico presented on 4 November 2021 a road map to advance the development of a national system for quality assurance in health services, relating to drug treatment in Mexico. A primary component of the road map is the development of a technical assistance framework to strengthen treatment services and rehabilitation in line with the WHO and UNODC International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders. The road map is expected to improve care and achieve accessible, professional, evidence-based services that incorporate gender and human rights, based on the wide network of both outpatient and residential addiction treatment centres in Mexico.

South America

Drug trafficking organizations in the Amazon region in Brazil and Peru were observed to be expanding their influence and diversifying their activities into environmental crimes, which has been linked to an increase in murder rates targeting Indigenous populations and environmentalists.

Rising violence was reported in Ecuador as a result of the country's emergence as a storage and distribution centre along cocaine trafficking routes, leading to increased transatlantic trafficking of cocaine.

Coca cultivation and potential cocaine manufacture reached a historical high in Colombia in 2021, with 204,000 ha of cultivation and a potential yield of 1,400 tons of cocaine.

1. Major developments

617. Drug trafficking can lead directly and indirectly to deforestation, either to make space for illicit crops or when

the proceeds of the crime are laundered through cattle ranching and other activities that require vast amounts of land.¹³⁷ That is clearly the case in Brazil, one of the world's leading consumer and transit countries for cocaine, where national and international criminal organizations such as the Comando Vermelho and the Primeiro Comando da Capital are present in the Amazon region, fighting for control of trafficking routes. Most recently, as criminal groups seem to have expanded their influence beyond drug trafficking corridors and diversified into other criminal ventures, the murder rate in rural areas has risen. In this regard, a growing body of evidence from researchers and the Federal Police of Brazil shows a connection between drug trafficking and illegal deforestation: between 2017 and 2021, law enforcement agencies carried out at least 16 major seizures of cocaine in which the drugs were concealed within shipments of timber. In total, the quantity seized amounted to nearly 9 tons of drugs destined for countries across Europe. The link between illegal timber and drug trafficking has also been addressed in a report by the Basel Institute on Governance.¹³⁸ Through its Law Enforcement Assistance Programme to Reduce Tropical Deforestation, UNODC provided authorities with training and technical assistance on addressing financial crimes related to forest crime.

618. In Peru, the National Commission for Development and Life Without Drugs reported in 2022 that drug trafficking organizations had expanded their operations into Indigenous territories and other protected lands, including in the area of the Amazon Trapeze and in the Puno and Ucayali regions, where illegal mining, smuggling and illegal logging also occur. According to the report entitled “Informe de evaluación de resultados 2021: política nacional contra las drogas al 2030”, drug trafficking organizations perpetrated 10 murders in the territory of Peru in 2020 and 2021, mostly targeting Indigenous leaders. During the same period, the scale of drug trafficking in the country increased at an alarming rate, gaining territory and deepening its roots in societal and economic structures, as reflected in the increased area under illicit coca cultivation. Owing to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, protests from organizations of coca bush cultivators and a reduced number of helicopters supporting operations, Peru eradicated less than half of its target for 2021. The total area of cultivation eradicated came to 5,774.68 ha, corresponding to 62.2 tons of cocaine production; the original target was to prevent 196 tons of production.

¹³⁷ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 5, Drugs and the Environment (United Nations publication, 2020), p. 17.

¹³⁸ Basel Institute on Governance, *Wildlife Crime: A Learning Resource*, part 3, “Forest crime and the illegal timber trade” (May 2021).

619. Ecuador is increasingly used by drug trafficking organizations to store cocaine produced in neighbouring Colombia and Peru for onward distribution, mainly to Europe and the United States. That development has resulted in increasing levels of violence perpetrated upon local populations. In August 2022, the Mayor of Guayaquil, the country's most populous city, published an open letter to the President of Ecuador following an explosion in a public square that killed 5 people and left 17 injured. The Minister of the Interior interpreted the act as a declaration of war against the State by criminal gangs, and the Ministry of Government issued a statement referring to the incident as an act of terrorism. Previous episodes of drug-related violence in the city have included decapitations and the public display of dead bodies. In mid-August, drug-related violence resulted in the declaration of a one-month state of emergency in Guayaquil. Earlier, a 60-day state of emergency had been declared for the entire Province of Guayas, of which Guayaquil is the capital, and for the Provinces of Esmeraldas and Manabí.

620. Research published by UNODC in March 2022 shows that women take on a wide range of roles at all stages of the cocaine supply chain, from cultivation and production to international trafficking. Activities may vary from support to managerial roles, but low-ranking positions prevail, with the exception of some women who play prominent roles in the illicit coca leaf economy in parts of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The UNODC report entitled “Cocaine insights 3: women in the cocaine supply chain” highlights risk factors for the involvement of women in criminal activities, such as economic dependence, fewer opportunities to enter the labour market and the need to provide for their families. The data show that cocaine is smuggled into prisons almost exclusively by women and that they are just as involved as men in the international smuggling of cocaine inside their bodies.

621. In July 2022, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report on territorial violence in Colombia that contained a set of recommendations for the new Government. In the report, the Office highlighted the impact that drug-related violence was having in Colombia, in particular on women and children, Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent, community leaders and human rights defenders. The report contained three main recommendations for the new Government: (a) significantly reduce and finally eliminate the presence of non-State armed groups in the territories affected by violence; (b) prioritize the territorial implementation of the peace agreement, in particular integral land reform, consolidate the implementation of development programmes with a territorial focus and reactivate the national illicit crop substitution programme with the participation of the

affected communities; and (c) consolidate the rule of law in the areas most affected by violence and internal armed conflict, reinforcing the presence and capacity of the justice system and law enforcement institutions in the territories. The Government of Colombia issued a response with its own observations, including a response to the first recommendation, noting that in March 2022 the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace of Colombia had been tasked with developing and implementing policies for the dismantling of armed groups, in collaboration with representatives of civil society.

2. Regional cooperation

622. In December 2021, CICAD published a series of country reports on all member States in South America except for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The reports, entitled “Evaluation report on drug policies: measures of prevention, treatment, and recovery support”, were prepared in the context of the eighth round of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism, based on the Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for the period 2021–2025 under the OAS Hemispheric Drug Strategy 2020. In addition, a series of publications will be prepared on the following subjects: (a) measures to control and counter the illicit cultivation, production, trafficking and distribution of drugs and to address their causes and consequences, in 2022; (b) institutional strengthening; (c) research, information, monitoring and evaluation; (d) international cooperation, in 2023; and (e) a comprehensive evaluation based on updated information from all thematic areas, in 2024. Compared with previous rounds, those evaluations are considered more rigorous by CICAD, with countries being requested to present evidence to support the information provided on their compliance under each priority action.

623. In July 2022, the first Intraregional Dialogue Forum on Alternative Development was held in Colombia in the context of COPOLAD III. The meeting was organized by the German Agency for International Cooperation and was attended by representatives of Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay. The meeting focused on good practices in integrated and sustainable alternative development, as well as on the environmental and conservationist aspects of the development of “green” anti-drug policies, such as agroforestry, reforestation and ecotourism, especially in ethnic jurisdictions and protected natural areas.

624. On 23 June 2022, representatives from Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay signed a declaration in Brasilia on strengthening coordination in

the fight against transnational organized crime in South America. The declaration was signed during the first ministerial meeting against transnational organized crime, chaired by Brazil, at which that country also signed bilateral cooperation agreements with Ecuador and Guyana and a joint declaration with Colombia. Those agreements cover the exchange of good practices and technical cooperation between police institutions to combat trafficking in drugs and firearms, money-laundering, counterfeiting, smuggling and cybercrime. The meeting included visits by participants to Brazilian institutions of public security, with the aim of promoting the proposal put forward by Brazil to provide training for security agents of South American countries. The next ministerial meeting will take place in Paraguay in the second half of 2022.

625. On 28 and 29 July 2022, Ecuador hosted the forty-fifth plenary meeting of the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America, during which the mutual evaluation report on Paraguay was approved. At its previous meeting, in December 2021, the Task Force had approved the sixth enhanced follow-up report and first technical compliance rating report on Colombia, which contained a re-evaluation of the country’s compliance with certain recommendations contained in the mutual evaluation report adopted in July 2018. The report approved in December 2021 included recommendations on correspondent banking, wire transfers and higher-risk countries, and the rating of Colombia was revised from “partially compliant” to “compliant”. As the regional arm of the Financial Action Task Force, the aim of the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America is to support member States in preventing and combating money-laundering and the financing of terrorism.

626. The twenty-ninth Specialized Meeting of Drug Enforcement Authorities of MERCOSUR was held on 26 May 2022. The virtual meeting was chaired by Paraguay, which held the pro tempore presidency of MERCOSUR in the first half of 2022. Delegations discussed bilateral cooperation issues, including joint anti-narcotics operations, as well as public health programmes on drug prevention and treatment.

627. In December 2021, officials from Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) participated in an online INCB Learning seminar with the aim of strengthening their countries’ compliance with the three international drug control conventions. Together with officials from Cuba and Nicaragua, the participants further enhanced their capacity to monitor and report on the licit cultivation, manufacture and consumption of and trade in controlled substances, including narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals, and enhanced their skills in the use of I2ES.

628. In total, 388 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of all 12 countries of the region, namely, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules support countries in expanding their capacity for the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals, and in gaining a deeper understanding of the international drug control framework.

629. In July 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme delivered four separate training courses for over 200 law enforcement and regulatory officers in Argentina, Chile and Colombia, both in person and online. Participants received instruction on the appropriate utilization of INCB operational tools and targeting platforms for the interdiction of new psychoactive substances and dangerous synthetic substances. All courses were aimed at enhancing reporting and interdiction activities across Latin America to address this growing challenge at both the regional and global levels. In addition, from 1 to 5 August 2022, several law enforcement officers from Latin American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Colombia, participated in a global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyl, other synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances organized by the INCB GRIDS Programme in Vienna.

630. In 2022, UNODC provided training for Colombian officials and delegates from the Government of Germany on the integrated approach of drug trafficking organizations to cocaine production. In Colombia, UNODC is also working with experts from INTERPOL on drug-related challenges for forensic chemistry laboratories. In addition, the Office delivered an institutional strengthening workshop in Colombia for members of the security forces of Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Panama to assist them in addressing cocaine production and trafficking.

631. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyl, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event brought together over 140 participants from around the world, including 8 participants from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Colombia, who engaged in practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

632. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 6 to 9 September 2022. The event brought together nearly 60 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including

4 participants from Chile and Uruguay and the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

633. The GRIDS Programme hosted the interregional workshop on public-private partnerships for the prevention of the trafficking of dangerous substances, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 11 to 14 September 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from 30 Governments, 5 international organizations and 15 Internet-related service providers and their associations, including 4 participants from Argentina and Chile. Participants exchanged best practices and case examples related to the exploitation of private sector agencies and online platforms for the trafficking of dangerous substances with the aim of strengthening international operational cooperation across borders to prevent future misuse of legitimate Internet-related services.

3. National legislation, policy and action

634. In May 2022, Argentina published Law 27669, on the regulatory framework for the development of the medicinal cannabis and industrial hemp industry. The new legislation created a regulatory agency for that industry within the Ministry of Productive Development, which in the meantime has been dissolved and its functions absorbed by the Ministry of Economy. The agency will be responsible for regulating the import, export, cultivation, industrial production, manufacture and purchase of and trade in cannabis seeds, cannabis plants and their products for medical and industrial purposes. It will also regulate and monitor the storage, transportation, distribution, traceability and use of cannabis seeds, cannabis plants and their products. In addition, the agency has the authority to issue permits and licences, as well as to conduct audits and inspections of licensed actors in the cannabis industry in Argentina. In the legislation, it is recommended that a simplified and differentiated licensing regime be developed in relation to industrial and/or horticultural hemp, defined as seeds, parts of the cannabis plant and its products in which the content of tetrahydrocannabinol is lower than the threshold established by law in Argentina.

635. In Colombia, during a meeting with mayors from cities on the Pacific coast in August 2022, the newly elected President mentioned the possibility of allowing the cultivation of cannabis without the need for licences to be issued, comparing cannabis crops to others, such as corn and potatoes. Those statements were made as part of the President's arguments in favour of ensuring that the profits of a licit

cannabis industry go to Colombian farmers instead of foreign companies. The mayors requested that such measures be included in the upcoming national development plan.

636. In view of the developments in the cannabis industry in the region, the Board wishes to remind Governments that, while the cultivation, production and use of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes are permitted under the 1961 Convention as amended, such activities must be carried out in a manner that is consistent with articles 23 and 28 of that Convention. Moreover, the Board reiterates that the 1961 Convention as amended does not apply to the cultivation of cannabis plant exclusively for industrial purposes (fibre and seed) or horticultural purposes.

637. In 2022, Uruguay made organizational changes in its National Police to strengthen the fight against both micro-trafficking and higher-level drug-related criminal activities. Under Service Order 13/2022, anti-drug brigades were created for the Departments of Montevideo and Canelones. Those measures are expected to allow the Directorate General for Combating Illicit Traffic in Drugs to focus more on criminal organizations supplying illicit drugs in the country instead of street distribution.

638. In June 2022, the Government of Brazil established a five-year national drug policy plan that focuses on addressing the central problems of drug policy and their causes, dividing the intervention into five areas: (a) prevention; (b) treatment, care and reintegration; (c) supply reduction; (d) management, governance and integration; and (e) research and evaluation. The plan establishes strategic objectives, goals and commitments, with defined deadlines for their implementation. In 2022, Brazil published the first two reports of its rapid alert system on drugs through the Centre of Excellence for Illicit Drug Supply Reduction, a partnership between the country's National Secretariat for Drug Policies and Asset Management, UNODC and the United Nations Development Programme. The reports present data and analyses on new psychoactive substances in Brazil.

639. In Colombia, UNODC has supported the implementation of strategies aimed at addressing the problem of illicit drugs within the framework of the peace agreement signed with FARC-EP. Those strategies include the comprehensive national programme for the substitution of illicit crops, through which 46,008 ha of illicit crops have been eradicated voluntarily by rural families with a view to promoting licit economies in 56 municipalities in the country. Between 2017 and 2022, 99,097 families enrolled in the programme, of which 77,002 have received technical assistance and 69,878 have received food security provisions. In addition, 7,353 former coca leaf collectors are

working in community activities, such as road repair and infrastructure maintenance.

640. On 26 July 2022, the National Commission for Development and Life Without Drugs of Peru signed an agreement with the Regional Association of Indigenous Peoples of Selva Central. The objective of the agreement is to promote sustainable development projects and to provide technical assistance to Indigenous communities in support of the prevention and mitigation of damage caused by illicit coca bush cultivation on Indigenous lands.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

641. Cocaine and cannabis continue to be the main controlled crops that are illicitly cultivated, produced and trafficked in and from South America. Coca leaves are illicitly produced mostly in Colombia and Peru, and to some extent in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, while cannabis is illicitly produced in several countries in the region, including Brazil, Chile and Paraguay. Drugs trafficked from the region are destined mainly for Europe and the United States. Traditional *modi operandi* include the trafficking of cocaine by passenger aircraft and by sea using containers on large commercial vessels and using smaller vessels destined for North America through Central America and the Caribbean.

642. In December 2021, the Centre of Excellence for Illicit Drug Supply Reduction of Brazil published a study entitled "COVID-19 and drug trafficking in Brazil: the adaptation of organized crime and the actions of police forces during the pandemic", in which it was pointed out that, while Brazil remained a strategic transit country for cocaine bound for many parts of the world, new trafficking routes may have been created or intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was carried out by the Centre of Excellence using data gathered by the Federal Police, the Federal Highway Police, the Federal Tax Authority and selected State security forces of Brazil. Quantities seized in the period 2018–2020 were destined predominantly for Europe, followed by Africa and Asia. A change in the pattern of cocaine trafficking destinations in 2020 indicated a diversification of routes to include the east coast of Africa, West Asia, South-East Asia and, to a lesser extent, North America, although Europe remained the predominant destination.

643. Paraguay has been increasingly utilized as a transit country for the transit of cocaine to Europe. In January 2022, the National Anti-Drug Secretariat and the Office of the Public Prosecutor of Paraguay dismantled a criminal

organization that had been shipping cocaine across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe, arresting its leader and seizing 947 kg of cocaine.

644. With regard to illicit crops, Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru have not published data validated by the international community for 2021. Both countries had previously worked with UNODC to conduct periodic surveys on the areas covered by illicit crops, as well as on eradication. According to reports by the Bolivian and Peruvian authorities, the two countries eradicated 9,458 ha and 5,775 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation, respectively, in 2021.

645. The Plurinational State of Bolivia reported seizures of 19.7 tons of cocaine in 2021, an increase of 26 per cent in relation to 2020 (15.7 tons). Most of the cocaine seized originated in Peru. According to the Bolivian authorities, drug seizures in the country in 2021 resulted in a loss of \$66 million in total for criminal organizations. In addition, the country reported the destruction of 800 coca leaf processing sites and 26 crystallization laboratories, as well as the seizure of 520 tons of solid precursor chemicals and 799 cubic metres of liquid precursor chemicals.

646. In September 2022, the National Commission for Development and Life Without Drugs of Peru published a report on the coca bush cultivation area monitored in 2021. The report included monitoring results for 19 zones in which coca bush is cultivated illicitly, covering 13 departments, 45 provinces and 169 districts, meaning that five monitored zones were added in comparison with 2020. The total area under illicit coca bush cultivation in 2021 came to 80,681 ha in total, including the five new monitored zones, and 76,158 ha in the 14 zones that were monitored up until 2020, when the area under cultivation was 61,777 ha. The report points to a rising trend in the area under illicit coca bush cultivation in Peru since 2017, when the total area was 49,900 ha. The valley of the Rivers Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro was the zone with the largest area under cultivation throughout the five-year period, with 32,106 ha in 2021, while the largest increases in relation to 2020 were observed in the Contamana (168.4 per cent) and Callería (144.8 per cent) zones. A decrease of 28.9 per cent, to 4,841 ha, in 2021 was reported for the La Convención-Lares zone, which reached its lowest area under cultivation since 2017. The overall area of eradication in Peru also reached a five-year low in 2021, with only 5,775 ha of crops eradicated nationwide, compared with 6,273 ha in 2020 and 25,526 ha in 2019. In the report, the particularly low levels of eradication in 2020 and 2021 are attributed to difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

647. **The Board reiterates its recommendation to the Governments of Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru**

to resume the studies and monitoring reports on territories affected by illicit crops that are fully prepared with and validated by UNODC. This will allow adequate comparative monitoring among these Andean countries, in addition to ensuring support for the efforts of the Governments of Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru in their fight against drug trafficking.¹³⁹

648. During the reporting period, UNODC released its 2021 coca cultivation survey for Colombia, which reported that coca cultivation and potential cocaine manufacture reached a historical high point in the country. In 2021, the area occupied by illicit crops reached 204,000 ha (0.4 per cent of the total agricultural land), an increase of 43 per cent in relation to 2020, while potential cocaine manufacture reached 1,400 tons, an increase of 14 per cent. Of the area where the increased illicit cultivation took place, 32 per cent was inside areas known as “production enclaves” or “coca hotspots”, which are more efficient for drug trafficking organizations. The areas accounting for the rest of that increase were on the periphery of hotspots (33 per cent of the total), in new areas (10 per cent) and other areas (25 per cent). Of the total area of illicit cultivation in 2021, 13 per cent was located close to municipal capitals, where it is easier for drug-related income to enter the legal economy. Coca cultivation and cocaine manufacture are threatening the environment and cultural diversity in Colombia, as 52 per cent of the coca cultivation is located in special management zones, including Afrodescendant communities, forest reserves, Indigenous reserves and national parks. According to UNODC, the following factors have contributed to this situation: increased global demand for cocaine; persistent poverty and lack of market access in areas where coca is produced; expectations raised by the peace agreement; an increased number of illegal drug trafficking groups; and continuing high economic incentives for cocaine production.

649. Countries in South America continue to seize increasing amounts of drugs, chemical substances and precursors used for illicit drug manufacture and are facing serious challenges relating to their temporary storage and eventual final disposal. Large amounts of stored chemicals can pose a severe risk to both the environment and populations living near storage facilities. Safe and efficient disposal is therefore key, not least to prevent the reintegration of seized materials into illicit channels. UNODC, through its Solutions, Training and Advice for Narcotics Disposal regional programme, has developed a national assessment for the safe handling and disposal of seized drugs and chemical precursors and is currently developing national disposal plans for Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru. The Office is working closely with the authorities in those countries to

¹³⁹ E/INCB/2021/1, para. 616.

build capacity in the management and safe handling of seized goods and sustainable mechanisms for their final disposal.

650. Ecuador reported three operations conducted by the country's National Police between January and July 2022, which resulted in the seizure of 15.5 tons of cocaine, the dismantling of two storage sites and the arrest of four Ecuadorian citizens. Criminal organizations used containers of bananas to traffic cocaine to countries in Europe, including Belgium and the Netherlands.

651. In 2021, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela effected its largest drug seizures in the past 10 years, with an overall amount of 51.5 tons seized. Cocaine accounted for the largest share of those seizures, reaching a 15-year high of 45.4 tons, followed by cannabis (6 tons). The operations resulting in the largest seizures were conducted in the area along the border to Colombia. Also in 2021, the country dismantled 60 cocaine crystallization laboratories near the border, neutralized 55 aircraft and destroyed 24 clandestine airstrips. During the first half of 2022, the country conducted military operations in the States of Amazonas, Apure, Falcón, Guárico, Sucre and Zulia and seized 17.7 tons of cocaine, destroyed 37 cocaine crystallization laboratories, neutralized 18 aircraft and destroyed 55 airstrips. According to a statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in March 2022, the presence of criminal groups and armed non-State actors in Venezuelan territory has generated increased violence, in particular along the border with Colombia, a region used by drug trafficking organizations as a transit corridor, as well as in mining regions and urban centres. The High Commissioner for Human Rights made reference to the conflicts in Apure State, which have provoked the displacement of hundreds of Venezuelans, including members of Indigenous populations. Finally, the High Commissioner called for the investigation of all reports of human rights violations and abuses, with special attention to Indigenous Peoples.

652. Uruguay effected a major seizure of methamphetamine in August 2022, with a total of 42,880 kg of the drug found in a container that originated in Antwerp, Belgium, with a final destination of Paraguay. Before stopping in Uruguay, the ship carrying the container had also made stops in Brazil and Argentina.

653. In 2021 and 2022, Paraguay continued its bilateral cooperation with the Federal Police of Brazil, which included the eradication of illicit cannabis cultivation along the border between those two countries. That joint effort resulted in a record level of eradication, reaching 2,100 ha in 2021, corresponding to around 6,300 kg of cannabis.

5. Prevention and treatment

654. According to the *World Drug Report 2022*, up to 2020 the drug groups most frequently reported by people in drug treatment in South America were cocaine- and cannabis-type drugs. The only exception was Ecuador, where opioids, including opiates and synthetic opioids, were the most frequently reported drug group.¹⁴⁰ This is consistent with the types of drugs that are produced and trafficked most heavily in the region.

655. Recent data from the UNODC annual report questionnaire show that other drugs are increasingly being used in the region. Chile reported that the most frequently used drugs in 2021 were cannabis herb, benzodiazepines, pharmaceutical opioids (non-medical use), synthetic cannabinoids, cannabis resin and cocaine.

656. In 2022, Brazil held municipal and State-level conferences on mental health policy and treatment and care services for health problems associated with drug use, in preparation for its fifth national mental health conference, scheduled to take place in November 2022. The conference serves as an instrument for reviewing and improving public policies with the participation of civil society. The previous national mental health conference was held in 2010. Brazil is also preparing the third edition of its national survey on the use of alcohol and other drugs, conducted by the Federal University of São Paulo through an agreement with the Ministry of Citizenship. The national survey will serve to update data and information on drug demand in Brazil.

657. In Colombia, the following national drug demand reduction policies were implemented: (a) a comprehensive policy to address the drug problem; and (b) a comprehensive policy for prevention and care for the consumption of psychoactive substances. As a result of the assistance provided by UNODC, more than 6,400 people have strengthened their capacities to improve prevention strategies in community, institutional, school and family settings. With regard to enhancing treatment and care services in Colombia, training sessions on quality assurance in the treatment of disorders associated with drug use and on the Treatnet Family programme were launched.

658. In the CICAD report entitled "Evaluation report on drug policies: measures of prevention, treatment and recovery support – Guyana", published in December 2021 in the context of the eighth round of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism, it was noted that Guyana had conducted an assessment of the need for care, treatment and reintegration

¹⁴⁰ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 2, map 2.

services at the national level. The action was taken by the country under objective 5 of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism, namely, to establish and/or strengthen government institutional capacities to regulate, enable, accredit and supervise prevention programmes and care, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration services. Regarding specific at-risk populations, it was noted that situational assessments on the specific needs, risks or protective factors for each target population had not been carried out and that the country had not developed or implemented specific drug use prevention strategies or programmes for preschool students, families, LGBTQI+ persons, migrants and refugees, or individuals in the workplace.

659. In the CICAD evaluation report issued for Suriname, it is acknowledged that the country promotes treatment, care, recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration measures and programmes, but it is also noted that Suriname does not promote national standards for those programmes or the use of the UNODC-WHO *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention* and *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders*. The report also found that no situational assessments focusing on specific at-risk populations had been strengthened or carried out, and that Suriname did not promote the exchange of research findings and best practices to improve the effectiveness of drug prevention programmes.

660. The Board wishes to encourage the international community, including OAS, UNODC, WHO and PAHO and partner countries, to work or continue to work with Governments to strengthen their regulatory frameworks and their provision of public health services in drug use prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration, in line with the findings of the CICAD reports issued under the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism, in particular with countries in the region with lower institutional capacities and financial resources.

661. In November 2021, Chile published its fourteenth national study on drugs in the general population, based on a survey conducted in 2020 and 2021 on a representative sample of 16,662 participants aged 12 to 65 years. Chile has been conducting biennial drug surveys since 1994, and the report contains an analysis of trends relating to all drugs, with data disaggregated by age, sex and socioeconomic criteria. The most heavily consumed controlled substance was cannabis, for which the lifetime prevalence in 2020 was the highest in the series (38.2 per cent), but with past-year prevalence (11.4 per cent) decreasing since 2018. Past-year prevalence also decreased for cocaine, reaching 0.5 per cent in 2020, the lowest point in the entire time series. After cannabis, participants reported the highest past-year prevalence for tranquillizers without a prescription (2 per cent),

analgesics without a prescription (1.2 per cent), hallucinogens (0.8 per cent) and synthetic cannabis (0.6 per cent).

662. In July 2022, Uruguay published the results of its substance use survey among schoolchildren aged 13–17 years. The survey involved a representative sample of 5,096 students from 104 public and private schools and technical institutes. Cannabis was the substance most frequently used by students, with a past-year prevalence of 19 per cent, coming in third place overall after alcohol and energy drinks. That figure represents a decrease since the peak in cannabis use by students at 19.8 per cent past-year prevalence in 2016, but points to a long-term increase since 2011, when past-year prevalence was reported at 12 per cent. The proportion of students reporting that they found it easy to gain access to cannabis increased from 53.3 per cent in 2014 to 59.6 per cent in 2021. The non-medical use of cannabis was regulated in Uruguay in 2013. In the latest survey, students also reported a past-year prevalence of 7 per cent for tranquillizers (with and without a prescription), 1.8 per cent for hallucinogens and 1.4 per cent for cocaine. Lower levels of prevalence were reported for “ecstasy”, cannabis resin, stimulants and coca paste.

663. The national drug report of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for 2022 included data from the country’s 2021 report on risk perception and access to drugs, based on a 2020 survey with a representative sample of 2,762 interviewees aged 12–65 years. According to the study, cannabis was the most frequently consumed controlled substance and the fourth most frequently consumed substance overall, after alcohol, cigarettes and chewing tobacco. The past-year prevalence for cannabis was 4.63 per cent, while lifetime prevalence came to 8.4 per cent, and 22.19 per cent of participants stated that they found it easy to gain access to cannabis. Past-year prevalence for cocaine, coca paste and/or crack cocaine came to 2.64 per cent, while lifetime prevalence was 5.03 per cent.

664. In South America, as in other regions, it is difficult to establish adequate levels of opioid analgesics without reliable measurements 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 internationally controlled opioids for medical purposes in recent years. The 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 in South America remains a challenge, as not all of the countries in the region have regularly provided consumption data on any psychotropic substances in the past several years. More details are available in the supplement

to the annual report on availability and in the technical publications of the Board on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

665. **The Board recalls that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region for rational medical use and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. Special attention should be paid to availability in rural areas and for vulnerable populations in the region.**¹⁴¹

D. Asia

East and South-East Asia

Illicit manufacture and use of and trafficking in methamphetamine in the region continue to pose a serious threat to peace, stability and public health in the countries of East and South-East Asia. With illicit markets continuing to expand, record amounts of the substance are being seized, especially in tablet form, throughout the region.

While record seizures of methamphetamine were reported, very small amounts of the precursors required for its illicit manufacture have been seized in the region. Organized criminal groups appear to be increasingly using non-scheduled chemicals as alternatives for the manufacture of methamphetamine and other synthetic drugs.

The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in many countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring the sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. A comprehensive overview of the world situation with respect to availability is contained in the supplement to the annual report of INCB for 2022 entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes*.

The Board notes with concern public reports on the continued use of the death penalty for drug offences in a number of countries of the region.

1. Major developments

666. Illicit manufacture and use of and trafficking in methamphetamine continue to pose a serious threat to peace, stability and public health in the countries of East and South-East Asia. The illicit market has expanded, as demonstrated by the record seizures of the substance, especially in tablet form, throughout the region. According to UNODC, those seizures, mostly originating in Shan State, Myanmar, reached over 170 tons in 2021, with the countries of South-East Asia accounting for nearly 89 per cent of the total.

667. The increases in methamphetamine supply over the past years have kept prices on the illicit market low, while purity has remained high, as shown by analysis of the seized amounts. That combination of continuing low prices and high purity has created a situation of greater risk for communities in the region.

668. Despite record seizures of methamphetamine, very small amounts of the precursors used in its illicit manufacture have been seized in the region. Organized criminal groups appear to be increasingly using non-scheduled chemicals as alternatives for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine and other synthetic drugs. It remains crucial for countries of the region to enhance the capacities of forensic laboratories to ensure the rapid and accurate detection of synthetic drugs for the purpose of issuing an early warning at the national and regional levels, and there is a need for impurity analysis to determine the synthesis routes used. An in-depth analysis of the recent trends and developments observed can be found in the Board's report for 2022 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁴²

669. In 2021, 16 unique new psychoactive substances were reported to the UNODC early warning systems by China, Indonesia and Singapore. The majority of those new psychoactive substances were synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists, possibly developed to circumvent new controls introduced in China. Effective July 2021, China placed synthetic cannabinoids under national control using a generic definition in order to address the growing threat of these substances in the country. To date, China has placed under national control more than 180 new psychoactive substances and the entire fentanyl class, in addition to the synthetic cannabinoids.

2. Regional cooperation

670. While COVID-19-related limitations on travel persisted in various parts of the region, countries continued to

¹⁴¹ E/INCB/2021/1, para. 640.

¹⁴² E/INCB/2022/4.

cooperate at the bilateral and regional levels. Governments continued to implement common strategies and activities, including within the framework of the ASEAN Workplan on Securing Communities against Illicit Drugs for the period 2016–2025 and the ASEAN Cooperation Plan to Tackle Illicit Drug Production and Trafficking in the Golden Triangle for the period 2020–2022.

671. A total of 165 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of countries of Asia, including 15 countries of East and South-East Asia, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules support countries that are expanding their capacity for the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and gaining a deeper understanding of the international drug control framework.

672. In September 2021, the 42nd ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters meeting took place, as well as meetings of airport and seaport interdiction task forces and meetings of the ASEAN Narcotics Cooperation Centre. The fifth meeting of the Advisory Council on Dangerous Drugs of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly was hosted by Cambodia in June 2022.

673. The report entitled *The Mid-Term Review: ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities against Illicit Drugs 2016–2025*, published in September 2021, evaluated progress made in implementation of the workplan. In the report, it was recommended, inter alia, that ASEAN member States enhance multisectoral involvement in drug prevention educational activities, improve access to equitable justice for all individuals while respecting the sovereignty, national legislation and policies of each country, and adopt a transparent approach in the enforcement of drug laws. The report also recommended that countries strengthen access to treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare services, conduct community-based surveys on drug use at least every five years and publish the results on the ASEAN digital platform for regional drug-related information exchange at the Narcotics Cooperation Centre.

674. In October 2021, Cambodia hosted the seventh ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters. Meeting participants expressed concern at emerging trends in the region, including the continued expansion of the synthetic drug market, the smuggling of new psychoactive substances, non-controlled chemicals, the diversion of precursors, the increasing use of the Internet for drug trafficking and the high proportion of drug use among the youth. Participants

reaffirmed the strong commitment of ASEAN to use a holistic approach in addressing the drug issue in the region, including by strengthening inter-agency coordination among ministries, public institutions, the private sector and development partners.

675. Between October 2021 and July 2022, the UNODC Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific organized a series of meetings with various countries in the region, focusing on recent developments in trafficking of chemicals, illicit synthetic drug markets, drug consumption patterns and newly detected new psychoactive substances, with a view to identifying challenges encountered by competent national authorities as well as their technical assistance needs, while also providing an opportunity to explore possible areas of future cooperation. In addition, in cooperation with the Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Asia and the Pacific, UNODC coordinated Operation Mekong Dragon phase IV, from 15 April to 15 September 2022. The operation, in which 24 law enforcement authorities participated, resulted in seizures of drugs from intraregional and interregional drug trafficking groups.

676. In January 2022, UNODC held a virtual meeting with the focal points of the signatories of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on drug control in the Greater Mekong subregion. The objective of the meeting was to review the subregional action plan and its achievements over the previous year and organize the ministerial-level meeting of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding to be hosted by China in May 2023.

677. The GRIDS Programme hosted its first twinning event in Vienna from 14 to 17 June 2022 for 10 front-line officers from Thailand and Viet Nam, facilitated by GRIDS regional technical officers for South-East Asia and the Pacific. The enforcement officers developed cross-border communication and practical skills for international operational cooperation and took part in capacity-building workshops to increase their use of the IONICS secure communication system and the GRIDS Intelligence targeting platform. The event also provided practical training by experts on the identification of opioids, their safe handling and interdiction approaches using personal protective equipment and presumptive field testing for opioids.

678. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyl, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event brought together over 140 participants from around the world, including 15 participants from seven countries in the region, namely Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam, who engaged in

practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

679. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 6 to 9 September 2022. The event brought together nearly 60 officers from 30 countries and international organizations, including 4 participants from Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

680. The GRIDS Programme hosted the interregional workshop on public-private partnerships for the prevention of the trafficking of dangerous substances, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 11 to 14 September 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from 30 Governments, 5 international organizations and 15 Internet-related service providers and their associations including 42 participants from China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. Participants exchanged best practices and case examples related to the exploitation of private sector agencies and online platforms for the trafficking of dangerous substances with the aim of strengthening international operational cooperation across borders to prevent future misuse of legitimate Internet-related services.

681. In July 2022, a joint operation of the Republic of Korea and Viet Nam, supported by information provided by INTERPOL, conducted in Ho Chi Minh City, led to the arrest and extradition of a suspected drug trafficker believed to be the head of a methamphetamine and synthetic cannabinoids trafficking ring. Two other ring members were arrested earlier in Cambodia and the Philippines.

3. National legislation, policy and action

682. The city of Shanghai, China, revised its anti-drug legislation and, for the first time, specified the obligation of online platforms to report trade in medicines covered by national special administrative rules, such as narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as other substances placed under control. The operators of online trading platforms are required to take measures such as keeping records and reporting suspicious activities to regulators and police. The revised legislation came into effect on 1 March 2022.

683. In June 2022, the Government of Malaysia announced it had reached an agreement to abolish the mandatory

imposition of the death penalty for certain categories of offences and encouraged the Parliament to take concrete steps to incorporate that agreement into adopted law. A total of 11 offences carry a mandatory death penalty in the country, including drug-related offences, which make up the majority of death penalty cases.

684. The Board notes with concern public reports of the continued use of the death penalty for drug-related offences in a number of countries of the region, including China, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. The Board notes the step taken by the Government of Malaysia on this matter. **While recalling that, according to the international drug control conventions, the determination of penalties applicable to drug-related behaviours remains the exclusive prerogative of States parties, the Board encourages all States that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences to commute death sentences that have already been handed down and to consider the abolition of the death penalty for drug-related offences in view of the relevant international conventions and protocols and relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other United Nations bodies on the application of the death penalty for the category of drug-related offences.**

685. In April 2022, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand held a high-level meeting with UNODC on the new Narcotics Code of Thailand, which entered into force in December 2021. According to UNODC, Thailand is the first country in South-East Asia to update its drug control legislation in line with recommendations contained in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in 2016, including proportionate sentencing for drug crimes and alternatives to imprisonment. According to the Ministry of Justice, the aims of the new legislation are to focus more on large-scale illicit drug trade and to provide better treatment to individuals with drug use disorders and reduce overcrowding in prisons.

686. The new legislation of Thailand establishes procedures related to classification of drugs, including cannabis. INCB remains in contact with Thai authorities on this matter and continues to monitor relevant developments.

687. As reported by Thailand in its annual estimates of required narcotic drugs for 2023, the country intends to start authorizing the cultivation of cannabis and the manufacture of cannabinoids in line with amendments to the country's laws, with an estimated 65,000 patients to be prescribed cannabis-based medications. Thailand further reported that, under the country's legislation, CBD is not

considered a controlled substance pursuant to the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention, and its use in non-medical and non-scientific industries, such as cosmetics and food, will not be reported to INCB. The Board reiterates that the 1961 Convention as amended limits the cultivation of cannabis to medical and scientific purposes. The cultivation of cannabis plant when intended for the production of cannabis and cannabis resin is subject to international control regardless of the type and concentration of cannabinoids contained in the plant, the intended use of the cannabis and cannabis resin to be produced, and the specific cannabinoids to be extracted; the only exemption is the cultivation of cannabis for industrial (fibre and seed) or horticultural purposes.

688. The International Criminal Court opened an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed on the territory of the Philippines between 1 November 2011 and 16 March 2019 in the context of the so-called “war on drugs” of the Government of the Philippines. In November 2021, the Government of the Philippines requested, pursuant to article 18, paragraph 2, of the Rome Statute, a deferral of that investigation on the grounds that national authorities were investigating, or had already investigated, alleged murders falling within the parameters of the authorization decision. In June 2022, the Court Prosecutor concluded that most of the information provided by the Government of the Philippines related to administrative and other non-penal processes and proceedings which did not seek to establish criminal responsibility, and that therefore it could not warrant deferral of the Court criminal investigation. The Prosecutor added that various proceedings referenced by the Philippines failed to sufficiently mirror the authorized Court investigation, as required by the Rome Statute, and that the Government had failed to provide any documentation to substantiate the statement that the investigations were ongoing or complete or any details regarding concrete investigative or prosecutorial steps that had been taken.

689. **The Board reiterates its view that extrajudicial killings as a response to drug-related activities violate the international drug control conventions, which require that drug-related crime be addressed through formal criminal justice responses with internationally recognized due process of law.**

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

690. Illicit drug manufacture and trafficking remain a major concern for the countries of the region, despite mobility restrictions and the adoption of public health

measures such as lockdowns introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

691. According to the Office of the National Narcotics Control Commission of China, continuous advancement of operation Border Clearing resulted in a reduction of drug trafficking activities in the country in comparison with previous years. Overall, in 2021, 75,000 people suspected of drug-related activity were arrested, and more than 25 tons of drugs were seized. While trafficking using the traditional channels was greatly reduced, potentially due to the COVID-19-related restrictions in place, trafficking by means of postal services and waterways increased.

692. Data from the Government of China indicate that more than 120 clandestine laboratories were dismantled in the country in 2021, with a total of more than 1 ton of drugs seized; in 2021, there were 26 per cent fewer laboratories dismantled and 89 per cent less drugs seized than in 2020. Cambodia reported seizures of two clandestine laboratories and large storage facilities, with a total of more than 200 tons of chemicals being seized in those two locations.

693. Partially as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions in place in many countries over the past two years, drug trafficking using the Internet and social media platforms has increased. In China, there were 5,000 detected cases of online drug trafficking in 2021, with 8,000 suspects arrested, accounting for a little over 10 per cent of drug-related arrests in the country. According to the Office of the National Narcotics Control Commission, the online drug market shifted from mass chat applications to niche social media applications, second-hand trading platforms, gaming websites and the darknet. Drug-related capital transfers expanded from the online banking system to use of virtual and game currencies.

694. Methamphetamine has for some years been the main substance of concern for countries in the region. While Myanmar continues to be the epicentre, methamphetamine manufacture seems to be expanding into other countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic reported an increasing inflow of methamphetamine and other drugs from Myanmar, as well as an increase in outflow across its border with Thailand. In the Pacific region, New Zealand has reported seizures of methamphetamine originating in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

695. In 2021, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine remained the primary precursors used in methamphetamine manufacture in the region, although other precursors, including P-2-P, continue to be identified. Only small amounts of the above-mentioned controlled precursors have been seized in

the region, suggesting the increased use of non-controlled chemicals in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine.

696. Indonesia reported the seizure of 1.7 tons of crystalline methamphetamine, nearly 40,000 “ecstasy” tablets and more than 15,000 piperazine tablets in several law enforcement operations conducted in 2022. Record amounts of methamphetamine have been seized in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, which is considered to be one of the countries most impacted by methamphetamine trafficked from Shan State, Myanmar. In 2021, the authorities of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic seized a record 143 million tablets, a 669 per cent increase over the amount seized in 2020.

697. Cultivation of opium poppy and the production of opium in Myanmar in 2021 increased slightly compared with 2020 (30,200 ha and 423 tons in 2021 compared with 29,500 ha and 405 tons in 2020), ending the downward trend that began in 2014. According to the UNODC *Myanmar Opium Survey 2021: Cultivation, Production and Implications*, the increase is due to rising opium prices and the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Shan and Kachin States continue to have the most extensive cultivation. UNODC has warned of a potential reversal of the decreasing trend in opium cultivation in Myanmar and of an increase in both the availability and trafficking of synthetic drugs and heroin, as evidenced by the increasing number of seizures reported in the region. These developments have been linked to factors such as poverty exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and a surge in synthetic drug manufacture.

698. According to the Royal Malaysia Police, transnational criminal groups involved in drug trafficking quickly adapted to the situation and, despite border and travel restrictions, continued to stockpile illicit inventories to meet demand. While historically, methamphetamine and heroin have been mostly trafficked by land, cannabis by sea and synthetic drugs by air, the supply of drugs by air was nearly completely disrupted. In contrast, trafficking by sea and through courier services increased. From January to September 2021, Malaysian authorities seized nearly 7 tons of methamphetamine, 1.2 tons of heroin, more than 400 kg of ketamine and nearly 250 kg of MDMA.

699. In 2020, customs officers in Japan made over 700 seizures, totalling approximately 2 tons of illicit drugs. While the total quantity decreased by 40 per cent in comparison with 2019, the seized amount nevertheless exceeded 1 ton for the fifth consecutive year. Methamphetamine was the substance most seized in the country in terms of quantity. However, the amount seized in 2020, 800 kg, was a decrease of more than 60 per cent from the previous year. The amount seized in 2020 was

considered to be the equivalent of over 26 million doses, with an estimated illicit market value of nearly \$400 million. In Cambodia, seizures of methamphetamine averaged approximately 100 kg per year in the period 2015–2017. However, in the period 2018–2019, the average amount seized increased to 350 kg per year, and in 2020 seizures reached a record high of over 860 kg.

700. While some countries have noted increased seizures of illicit substances in 2021, others have reported significant decreases. According to UNODC, while the “ecstasy” market in the region is small, there has been continued manufacture of the drug in Cambodia and Malaysia. Nearly a quarter of the samples analysed were found to contain a mixture of substances other than MDMA, in particular methamphetamine and ketamine. Customs officers in Japan seized approximately 90,000 MDMA tablets in 2021, an increase of 48 per cent from the year prior. Increased seizures were also observed in Myanmar, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Thailand. Overall, seizures of “ecstasy” in the region in 2021 fell to just over half the total for 2020, including in the countries previously reporting the largest amounts of seizures, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as China.

701. In its annual report for 2021, the Central Narcotics Bureau of Singapore reported increases in total seizures of some substances and decreases for others. The greatest increase was of new psychoactive substances, primarily synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones, both with a nearly tenfold increase in seizures over 2020. There was a 150 per cent increase in total seizures of cannabis, an increase of about 30 per cent in seizures of heroin, and a small increase in seizures of crystalline methamphetamine. There was a 174 per cent increase in seizures of “ecstasy” by weight. Cocaine seizures decreased by 95 per cent, and there were significant decreases in the seizures of commonly sold synthetic drugs such as ketamine, methamphetamine tablets with the street name “yaba”, and “Erimin-5” (containing nimetazepam, a benzodiazepine-derivative depressant, and also known as “laval”). Singapore reported that in 2021, 25 drug syndicates were dismantled, more than 2,700 drug traffickers were arrested, and the street value of the drugs seized was estimated to be approximately \$13 million.

702. While the number of seizures of cocaine by customs authorities of Japan in 2020 fell to just over half the number of 2019, the quantities of drugs in individual seizures and the total amount of seizures have increased notably, including 722 kg seized in April 2020, the largest single seizure ever reported. In total, Japan seized nearly 820 kg of cocaine in 2020, an increase of approximately 30 per cent compared with 2019.

5. Prevention and treatment

703. East and South-East Asia is among the regions that are of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. In particular, on the basis of reported consumption of narcotic drugs, the region is among those with the least availability of the most widely used opioid analgesics. It remains challenging to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in East and South-East Asia because fewer than half of the region's countries have provided to the Board consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past several years. **The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in many countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.** Further information on recent developments is contained in the supplement to the annual report of the Board, entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes*.

704. Many countries in the region still lack mechanisms for gathering information on the scope and nature of drug use and treatment demand. **The Board encourages the countries of the region to prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand in order to inform the development of evidence-based approaches in the area of prevention and treatment and encourages bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to that end.**

705. Indonesia has reported the ongoing development of a national integrated information system related to data on rehabilitation services from multiple government sources that will aid decision-making and is aimed at increasing the efficiency of public services in the area of rehabilitation.

706. Prevention activities in the region include various outreach activities and awareness-raising campaigns, including by means of television, social media platforms, sports events and the entertainment industry. In 2020, Brunei Darussalam concentrated on conducting activities for its indigenous communities and disseminated prevention material in local dialects.

707. According to the Office of the National Narcotics Control Commission of China, extensive drug prevention education as well as the campaign "Care for drug users" reduced drug use in the country. At the end of 2021, there were 1.49 million registered people who use drugs

nationwide, 17.5 per cent fewer than the previous year. Of those, nearly 800,000 were using methamphetamine, more than 550,000 used heroin, and the remainder used ketamine (37,000) and cannabis (18,000). Wastewater analysis confirmed the substantial reduction in consumption of the three most widely used drugs.

708. The number of people who use drugs in ASEAN countries remained relatively stable, estimated at 64, 77 and 66 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2015, 2018 and 2019, respectively. In 2020, drug treatment admissions in the region increased by 24.8 per cent, amounting to 81.9 per 100,000 inhabitants. Among ASEAN member States, Thailand and Viet Nam had the highest rate of drug treatment admissions in the period 2016–2018, while in the period 2019–2020, it was Thailand with 263 admissions per 100,000 inhabitants in 2020 and Malaysia with 251 admissions per 100,000.

709. Amphetamine-type stimulants have been the most commonly used drugs in the region, followed by opiates/opioids and cannabis. By the end of 2020, amphetamine-type stimulants accounted for more than 80 per cent of all drug treatment admissions in all ASEAN countries. In ASEAN countries as a whole, the number of opiates/opioids admissions have continuously increased. While fewer than 6,000 people were admitted for opiate/opioids use in ASEAN countries in 2017, more than 40,000 received treatment in 2020. Nearly 92 per cent of those treated were people who use heroin, followed by those who use opium, methadone, codeine and morphine.

710. As part of its prevention strategy, Singapore continued to undertake official campaigns aimed at its younger population, such as a dedicated virtual reality video game and an augmented reality mobile game, multimedia competitions and film-making workshops, and online and print resources targeting different age groups. Institutions in Singapore have been using social media to communicate on this issue, and the country's Central Narcotics Bureau released a short film about legislation in Singapore to fight drug trafficking.

711. In terms of treatment and rehabilitation, Singapore has informed the Board that its approach is based on the risk of "recidivism" and the beneficiary's needs and responsiveness to change. Singapore also informed the Board that it has developed a resilience approach (called a "desistance" approach in the country), whereby the focus is on assisting people in recovery to build social support systems, rebuild relationships and set goals for recovery. Singapore also allows individuals incarcerated for drug-related offences to serve part of their sentence in community-based programmes which provide case management support, as well as employment, financial and housing assistance.

712. Over the past decade, the international community has highlighted the need for the voluntary treatment of people who use drugs, adopting health- and people-centred approaches that incorporate human rights concerns. According to the 2022 joint UNODC/UNAIDS report entitled *Compulsory Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation in East and South-East Asia*, the number of compulsory facilities has increased in many countries. The report also notes, however, positive examples of evidence-based treatment in China, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. Those examples include partnerships between law enforcement agencies, government agencies and community-based organizations to provide access to flexible-dose methadone in China, a new treatment model in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, a programme to divert people charged with drug use offences to outpatient counselling instead of incarceration in Thailand, and a pilot programme providing take-home methadone in Viet Nam. **INCB welcomes the implementation by countries of the region of initiatives based on voluntary, evidence-based treatment services that give due respect to patients' rights, and recalls that the Board discourages the use of compulsory detention and rehabilitation for people who use drugs.**

713. Myanmar has provided medication-assisted treatment, drug detox services and opioid substitution therapy at public hospitals. Owing to COVID-19-related restrictions, the number of therapy centres decreased in 2021, from 89 to 79 centres. The number of patients in the programme stood at 25,000 in September 2021. A new buprenorphine maintenance programme has been planned for the future.

714. In the period 2017–2020, the Philippines started a pilot programme to establish voluntary drug treatment and rehabilitation centres offering outpatient services, operating under the Government or non-governmental organizations, and funded through donations and grants from private entities and foreign Governments. By May 2022, in total, there were 76 accredited drug treatment centres, of which 31 were government-run and 45 were operated by non-governmental organizations.

715. In Japan, the number of people arrested for cannabis-related offences has been continuously increasing and reached a record high in 2021. Approximately 70 per cent of those arrested were under the age of 30. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the number of persons arrested under the age of 20 reached 1,000 for the first time. In response, the Ministry has focused on effective public relations and prevention activities for youth, on the possible revision of related laws and regulations and on the promotion of appropriate treatment and rehabilitation.

716. Increased use of new psychoactive substances has also been recorded, with Thailand having the highest number of people using new psychoactive substances, according to available data. Treatment for new psychoactive substances use has been made available in Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

717. Cambodia reported having nearly 21,000 people with drug use disorders, of which nearly 85 per cent are between the ages of 18 and 35. Over 91 per cent were people who used methamphetamine. The statistics have remained relatively stable over the past five years. In Malaysia, the reported number of people with drug use disorders has been decreasing over the past five years, with nearly 26,000 identified in 2019 and nearly 20,500 in 2020.

718. According to the National Narcotics Board of Indonesia, nearly 11,000 people received either inpatient or outpatient rehabilitation services provided by authorities. In addition, over 22,000 people received treatment in community-based centres, and 1,500 people received post-rehabilitation services. Authorities have been working to bring rehabilitation services to rural areas and develop long-distance support through online psychiatric and counselling services and have provided training to counsellors. Authorities have also launched a community-based intervention programme that encouraged the community to actively participate in the rehabilitation of people who use drugs, with over 10,000 people benefiting from treatment within the community and approximately 1,500 people receiving inpatient services. In addition, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia has introduced e-therapy services, which included screening, assessment, primary care and aftercare through the use of electronic media and information technology.

719. Indonesia has also launched a new programme of technical guidance for targeted rehabilitation institutions with a view to standardizing approaches through use of a national standard. Almost 40 rehabilitation institutions have gone through the programme, with an additional 20 to undertake it in the future.

720. The Lao People's Democratic Republic had available 14 standard and non-standard treatment, rehabilitation and vocational training centres, and an additional three are under construction. The Philippines established two new treatment and rehabilitation centres in 2021, launched several public awareness campaigns and created a national framework to increase care for persons who use drugs, including through community-based drug rehabilitation, outpatient centres and advanced services rehabilitation centres.

721. **The Board encourages countries of the region to continue to adopt measures to prevent drug use and to provide evidence-based treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes.**

South Asia

During the reporting period, countries in South Asia made significant seizures of methamphetamine, in both tablet and crystalline form, that had been trafficked from South-East Asia.

Countries in South Asia continue to report high levels of non-medical use of opioids and a large affected population, and South Asia has a higher estimated number of people use opioids than any other region.

Reported total seizures of tramadol, a substance not under international control, increased in 2020, rising from the previous year, with India accounting for almost the entire quantity intercepted in the region.

The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring the sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. A comprehensive overview of the world situation with respect to availability is contained in the supplement to the annual report of INCB for 2022 entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes*.

1. Major developments

722. In South Asia, COVID-19-related restrictions do not seem to have affected seizures of heroin. Initial data reported by countries to UNODC on individual drug seizures indicate an upward trend in the quantities of heroin and morphine seized, a trend which appears to have continued throughout 2020 and 2021. Pharmaceutical opioids were also seized, including codeine and codeine-based cough syrups, followed by tramadol, an opioid not under international control, fentanyl and buprenorphine, which are the most frequently encountered. The largest quantities of pharmaceutical opioids seized in the region in 2020 were reported by Bangladesh and India.

723. Countries in South Asia continued to report seizures of methamphetamine, in both tablet and crystalline form, originating in South-East Asia, which suggests that there has been further integration of the methamphetamine trafficking networks of the two regions.

724. South Asia remains an important transit area for traffickers smuggling illicitly produced opiates from Afghanistan to Europe and North America. In addition, the five coastal States in South Asia, namely Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, are exposed to trafficking because of maritime trafficking routes that cross the Indian Ocean. India, in particular, has noted an intensification of trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan and trafficked eastward, along the southern route.¹⁴³

725. According to UNODC, an estimated 61 million people worldwide used opioids in 2020 – approximately 1.2 per cent of the global population – of which an estimated 31 million used opiates, mainly heroin.¹⁴⁴ Approximately half of the 61 million people worldwide with opioid use problems live in South Asia (21.5 million) and South-West Asia (10.5 million).

726. In 2020, nine countries in Asia reported the seizure of a total of 1.2 tons of tramadol, a substance not under international control, of which India accounted for almost the entire amount intercepted. That was a significant increase over 2019, when India seized 144 kg of tramadol and other countries in South Asia reported combined seizures of 70 kg. The seizure operations in India led to the dismantling of a major international criminal network trafficking tramadol and other psychoactive substances that exploited the darknet.

727. In 2021, intensified international cooperation led to the identification of a global network trafficking tapentadol, a newly emerging opioid analgesic not under international control, which appears to have partly displaced tramadol in some markets.

728. The illicit cultivation of cannabis for domestic consumption and trafficking continues in South Asia. Bangladesh, India and Nepal were the countries most frequently mentioned as countries of origin, departure and transit for cannabis herb originating in South Asia in the period 2016–2020.

¹⁴³The southern route includes trafficking from South-West Asia, notably Pakistan, to South Asia, the Gulf countries and other countries in the Near and Middle East and Africa.

¹⁴⁴*World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 1, *Executive Summary: Policy Implications* (United Nations publication, 2022), p. 26.

2. Regional cooperation

729. A total of 49 drug control officials from the competent authorities of all six countries in South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka) have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules support countries that are expanding their capacity for the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and gaining a deeper understanding of the international drug control framework.

730. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyl, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event brought together over 140 participants from around the world, including 9 participants from three countries in the region (India, Maldives and Sri Lanka), who engaged in practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

731. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 6 to 9 September 2022. The event brought together nearly 60 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including four participants from India. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

732. The GRIDS Programme hosted the interregional workshop on public-private partnerships for the prevention of trafficking of dangerous substances, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 11 to 14 September 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from 30 Governments, 5 international organizations and 15 Internet-related service providers and their associations, including 5 participants from India. Participants exchanged best practices and case examples related to the exploitation of private sector agencies and online platforms for the trafficking of dangerous substances with the aim of strengthening international operational cooperation across borders to prevent future misuse of legitimate Internet-related services.

733. On 30 March 2022, the Fifth Summit of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation took place in an online format, hosted by the Government of Sri Lanka. The primary focus of the summit was to increase cooperation among member countries to combat organized criminal activity, including drug

trafficking, in the region.¹⁴⁵ To date, six meetings of the Bay of Bengal Initiative subgroup on the prevention of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors have been held.

734. In June 2022, the UNODC Regional Office for South Asia co-organized the second discussion forum for strengthening multidisciplinary approaches to countering organized crime, which took place in Sri Lanka. More than 75 senior officials participated in the event aimed at strengthening information exchange related to prosecuting, sentencing, seizures and reporting crimes including drug trafficking and identifying key challenges and opportunities for enhancing law enforcement and criminal justice responses.

735. In October 2022, the Forty-fourth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, took place in Bangkok. The Meeting adopted a set of recommendations to increase international and regional cooperation with the aim of preventing and dismantling supply chains for precursor chemicals, reducing the illicit cultivation and production of drugs and their trafficking, dismantling clandestine laboratories and promoting best practices in alternative development.

736. In 2021, the UNODC Container Control Programme contributed to the establishment in Bangladesh of the air cargo control unit at the Dhaka Custom House and the port control unit at Customs House Chattogram. An assessment mission to the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu was conducted by Container Control Programme experts with a view to establishing an air cargo control unit in Nepal.

737. In 2021, Maldives joined the UNODC South-East Asia Justice Network, a judicial cooperation network facilitating direct contact and communication between central authorities on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. The network is implemented with the support of the secretariat of the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters of ASEAN.

738. The UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) programme held national meetings in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in 2021 and one national meeting in Maldives in 2022 to improve understanding of the growing problem of synthetic drugs in the

¹⁴⁵The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation is a regional organization comprising seven member States located in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal. Five member States are in South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) and two in South-East Asia (Myanmar and Thailand). Leadership of the organization rotates among the member States by alphabetical order of country names. The permanent secretariat of the Bay of Bengal Initiative is in Dhaka.

region and to identify information gaps in each country in order to strengthen national capacities.

3. National legislation, policy and action

739. In 2022, India introduced steps for its licit opium industry to transition from the traditional route of extracting opium gum from poppy capsules to utilizing concentrate of poppy straw. Both methods will continue in parallel under government licence for a five-year period.

740. In July 2022, the Ministry of Health of Maldives issued the “Guideline for rational use of controlled drugs”, which provides updated guidance on reporting to INCB, as well as on procedures, including import, storage, distribution and reporting by pharmacies and health service providers, for promoting the rational use of controlled substances in the country.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

741. UNODC estimates that 4 per cent of all heroin and morphine seizures worldwide in 2020 were effected in South Asia.¹⁴⁶ Some seized drug shipments were destined for domestic consumption, while others were being trafficked along the southern route, in particular to India.¹⁴⁷ Sri Lanka reported seizures of 1.6 tons of heroin in 2020.¹⁴⁸

742. In South Asia, seizures of cannabis herb increased sharply despite the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions, with 86 tons seized in 2021 compared with 32 tons in 2019.

743. During the decade 2012–2021, law enforcement authorities in the coastal States of the region reported over 340 maritime seizures. Among those seizures, a total of 10,600 kg of methamphetamine was seized, a drug that first appeared in the region in 2013 and has been increasingly present since 2017. Trafficking of methamphetamine, in both tablet and crystalline form, from South-East Asia to South Asia continued in 2021. Seizures of crystalline methamphetamine have been reported by India, including the seizure of 154 kg of the drug in December 2021, which originated in Myanmar, as well as 10.5 kg in the State of Nagaland and 12 kg in the city of Guwahati in March 2021. In other countries in South Asia, in 2021, a total of more than 33.6 kg

of crystalline methamphetamine was seized, as well as more than 56 million methamphetamine tablets.

744. In 2021, Bangladesh reported seizing over 53 million methamphetamine tablets (“yaba”), a considerable increase from the 36.4 million tablets seized in 2020. Seizures of methamphetamine, in both tablet and crystalline form, were also reported along the border between India and Myanmar in 2021, with 241,900 tablets being seized in March 2021, a seizure of 1.5 kg of crystalline methamphetamine in October 2021 and three seizures each of 1 kg of crystalline methamphetamine in November 2021.

745. In Bhutan, cannabis continues to be the most commonly trafficked and misused drug in the country, followed by tramadol capsules (brand name Spasmo-Proxyvon Plus). The Royal Bhutan Police reported a decrease in the number of drug-related cases in 2020. In 2019, there were 304 registered cases with 660 arrests, while in 2020 there were 244 cases with 567 arrests, a decrease of 60 cases. Seizures of substances not under international control, such as ketamine and khat (*Catha edulis*), were also reported.

746. As global demand for synthetic drugs such as pharmaceutical opioids and illicitly produced methamphetamine, MDMA and ketamine continues to grow, illicit manufacturing and trafficking organizations are expected to increase their global activities. India, which is home to a large chemical and pharmaceutical industry, has witnessed the rise of commercial chemical factories that have been adapted to illicitly manufacture large quantities of synthetic drugs and their precursors. This development has been driven by the availability of highly qualified but underemployed chemists, who are susceptible to recruitment by criminal organizations. To address that situation, more proactive regulations are being developed and coordination among government agencies is being improved in order to facilitate the early detection and scheduling of new psychoactive substances. In addition, the regulation of online drug sales is being improved, and both traditional and digital investigative capacities are being enhanced. INCB is conducting an exercise for mapping the chemical industry in selected countries. Details of the project are available in the Board’s report for 2022 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁴⁹

747. In India, there has been a significant increase in seizures of drugs over the past five years, with the darknet and maritime routes emerging as the preferred modes of trafficking. In the period 2017–2022, heroin seizures increased from 2,146 kg in 2017 to 7,282 kg in 2021. There has also been an increase of more than 70 per cent in seizures

¹⁴⁶ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 3, p. 85.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁴⁹ E/INCB/2022/4.

of opium, from 2,551 kg in 2017 to 4,386 kg in 2021, and a more than 90 per cent increase in seizures of cannabis, from 352,539 kg in 2017 to 675,631 kg in 2021, according to the information reported by the Narcotics Control Board of India.

748. Port officials in India have reported seizures of large quantities of heroin detected in shipping containers, including almost 3 tons detected in the State of Gujarat, on the western coast, in September 2021, which suggests there has been an expansion of drug trafficking along the southern route and through the Arabian Sea. In May 2022, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence seized 56 kg of cocaine from a container near Mundra port in the Kutch district of Gujarat. In May 2022, 62 kg of heroin was seized at the Air Cargo Complex of New Delhi, preceded by a seizure of 218 kg of heroin seized by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and the Indian Coast Guard from two fishing boats off the coast of Lakshadweep, as well as the seizure of a consignment of 206 kg at Kandla and one of 396 kg at the port of Pipavav.

749. In June 2021, the Narcotics Control Board of India arrested members of a drug trafficking organization using online pharmacies as a front to sell pharmaceutical products and illicit drugs such as amphetamines, cocaine, codeine-based cough syrup, MDMA and tramadol. Additionally, there was an increase in seizures of “ecstasy” in Hyderabad, Karnataka and Kerala in 2022.

750. In 2021, authorities of Sri Lanka reported seizures of 1,594 kg of heroin and more than 348 kg of synthetic drugs, as the country’s sea routes were increasingly being used by local and international drug traffickers. Maritime seizures were mainly effected on the open sea, more than in ports, and the drugs were mostly found on small vessels or untraceable small fishing boats. In February 2021, the Sri Lankan Navy seized 400 kg of heroin and 100 kg of crystal-line methamphetamine in international waters. Investigations indicate that in most recent cases, the heroin originated in Afghanistan and was further trafficked through Pakistan and other countries and into Sri Lanka.

751. In Maldives, heroin and cannabis oil are the most common drugs, but “ecstasy”, LSD and other synthetic drugs have been detected and seized in greater quantities in recent years. In December 2021, the Maldives Police Service seized 119 kg of heroin in an operation in Malé and on the adjacent island of Hulhumalé. In May 2022, Maldives Customs Service seized over 4 kg of cocaine found in a passenger’s luggage in transit at Velana International Airport. In July 2022, the Maldives Customs Service reported seizures of over 2 kg of cocaine from two foreign passengers.

5. Prevention and treatment

752. South Asia is among the regions of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. In particular, on the basis of reported consumption of narcotic drugs for medical purposes, the region is among those with limited availability (in terms of per capita consumption) of the most widely used opioid analgesics. Determining the level of consumption of those substances in South Asia remains a challenge because only a few countries have provided consumption data to the Board over the past several years. The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in many countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. Further information on recent developments is contained in the supplement to the annual report of the Board for 2022, entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes*.

753. According to UNODC, it is estimated that there is a high prevalence of non-medical use of opioids in South Asia. In terms of the size of the affected population, the region with the largest estimated number of people who use opioids is South Asia, with an estimated 21.5 million users.

754. In India, according to the *Annual Report 2021–2022* of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, approximately 23 million people aged 10–75 have used opioids, mainly heroin and pharmaceutical opioids. An estimated 8 million people were registered for opioid use disorders. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is responsible for implementing the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction for the period 2018–2024 and funds over 400 non-governmental organizations that operate integrated drug use disorder awareness, treatment, and rehabilitation centres.

755. India and Nepal were foremost among the countries that reported increased flexibility and relaxed rules on supervision of services for opioid agonist treatment medication.¹⁵⁰ As reported by UNODC, there was a decline in drug treatment delivery in Sri Lanka although the Government reported that it had expanded residential treatment services and built a national-level treatment programme with an additional treatment capacity of 1,000 places.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 2, p. 47.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

756. In Bangladesh, the reported number of people in treatment for methamphetamine use disorders increased significantly from 2016 to 2019.¹⁵² Nevertheless, access to treatment services for people affected by substance use disorders remains inadequate in the region.

757. The Board reiterates its call to all Governments in South Asia to develop mechanisms to improve the collection of information on drug use prevalence with the aim of developing drug use prevention strategies and providing treatment facilities to the entire affected population that are based on evidence and tailored to each country's specific needs and capacities.

West Asia

Afghanistan remains by far the largest source of illicit opium globally, accounting for an estimated 86 per cent of production in 2021. Opium produced in Afghanistan continued to supply markets in neighbouring countries and in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and South Asia, while a smaller proportion was destined for markets in North America and Oceania.

Another major cause of concern is the continued substantial increase in methamphetamine manufacture in Afghanistan, a trend that has been observed since 2012 and that continued in 2021.

The Board stresses the importance of strengthening the capacity of Afghanistan to provide treatment and rehabilitation services to people who use drugs, in particular women.

Central Asian States continued to face major challenges relating to the increased use of and trafficking in psychotropic substances, including synthetic drugs, as well as new psychoactive substances. Countries in West Asia also observed an increase in the use of postal and parcel services, the Internet, social networking accounts and messaging platforms for the marketing of illicit drugs.

The Board notes with concern the insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in most countries of West Asia and stresses the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.

1. Major developments

758. According to the UNODC publication "Opium cultivation in Afghanistan: latest findings and emerging threats", released on 1 November 2022, illicit opium cultivation in Afghanistan in 2022 increased by 32 per cent over the previous year, reaching 233,000 ha. That makes 2022 the year with the third largest area under opium cultivation ever since monitoring began in 1994. At the same time, opium prices were observed to increase, possibly as a result of the announcement of the cultivation ban by the country's de facto authorities in April 2022. While the resulting income earned by farmers from opium sales tripled in 2022 compared with 2021, that did not necessarily translate into an increase in purchasing power due to rising inflation in the country.

759. The Board remains extremely concerned over reports of ongoing large-scale opium poppy cultivation and opium production in Afghanistan despite the announcement by the de facto authorities of a ban on the cultivation of opium poppy, as well as on the production, use, transportation, export and import of and trade in other narcotic drugs in the country. The Board acknowledges that, in order for any prohibition of the cultivation of narcotic drugs to have a meaningful impact on the drug situation in the country, comprehensive efforts must be undertaken to support alternative livelihoods for those involved in cultivation and production, and a range of other measures must be taken to improve prevention and treatment for all groups, including for women, as well as strengthening control and enforcement capacities. The Board also notes that the current political and socioeconomic challenges faced by the people of Afghanistan, exacerbated by the environmental and humanitarian emergencies in the country, create further obstacles to effective drug control. In this regard, the Board calls upon the international community to continue to support drug control efforts in the country to protect public health and as an important component of development assistance to Afghanistan.

760. All three major routes for trafficking opiates from Afghanistan, namely, the Balkan route and the southern and the northern routes supplying markets in neighbouring countries, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and, to a limited extent, North America and Oceania, rebounded in 2021 to reach and in some cases surpass pre-pandemic levels of trafficking.

761. A major cause of concern for the countries in West Asia is the continued substantial increase in methamphetamine manufacture in Afghanistan, a trend that has been observed since 2012 and that continued in 2021. Methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan continues to be seized in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, as well

¹⁵² Ibid., booklet 4, p. 52.

as Central Asian States and the southern Caucasus, Europe, South-East Asia, South Asia and Oceania. In addition, there is a high risk of heroin trafficking routes being used for methamphetamine trafficking, which could result in a supply-driven market for methamphetamine in countries where demand currently remains limited. Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Türkiye have both reported significant increases in methamphetamine trafficking in their territories.

762. Central Asian States reported challenges relating to increased trafficking, including local illicit manufacture in some countries, and the misuse of psychotropic substances and new psychoactive substances. Those countries, as well as Armenia, identified an increase in the use of postal and parcel services, the Internet, social networking accounts and messaging platforms for the marketing of those drugs, and they continued to take measures to address those developments, although the capacities to do so in the region remain limited.

763. Most Central Asian States, as well as Armenia and Iran (Islamic Republic of), observed an increase in the trafficking of cannabis resin, either originating in Afghanistan or illicitly produced domestically.

764. Trafficking in and use of the counterfeit substance “captagon” continued to seriously affect countries in the Middle East, a problem that was exacerbated by continued political instability, economic challenges and ongoing conflicts in some parts of that subregion.

2. Regional cooperation

765. Thirty-eight drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 14 countries in West Asia, namely, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules cover the licit control mechanisms relating to narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors, and the international drug control framework. A new e-module on ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes was launched in August 2022. The modules are available upon registration to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

766. On 15 and 16 December 2021, a meeting of the Expert Working Group on Cross-Border Cooperation of the Paris Pact Initiative was held in Moscow in a hybrid format. The meeting was attended by delegations from Central Asian States, France, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan and Türkiye, as well as by experts from CARICC, the Collective

Security Treaty Organization, the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, UNODC and other international organizations. The participants discussed combating the illicit trafficking of opiates from Afghanistan, practical experience in and methods of suppressing international drug trafficking, issues of coordination among law enforcement agencies and the role of international and regional organizations in the area of drug control.

767. On 7 March 2022, a memorandum of understanding was signed in Doha between CARICC and the Secretariat General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, represented by the Criminal Information Centre to Combat Drugs. Under the memorandum, the parties agreed to exchange relevant information, to assist in organizing, conducting and coordinating activities to combat organized cross-border drug crime, and to participate in joint working meetings, consultations and training courses.

768. On 11 April 2022, CARICC, together with the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, held a debriefing on the results of a regional operation called “Reflex 2021”. The event was attended by representatives of the Central Asian States, Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan, Mongolia and the Russian Federation, as well as Belarus as an observer. The operation had been conducted in those States from 4 October to 30 November 2021, with a view to combating the spread of new psychoactive substances, psychotropic substances and other synthetic drugs. As a result, the competent national authorities of the participating States seized 6.5 tons of new psychoactive substances, other synthetic narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Arrests and prosecutions of persons suspected of drug crimes were also initiated.

769. On 20 April 2022, Uzbekistan chaired the twelfth meeting of the heads of the counter-narcotics agencies of the countries of SCO, held in Tashkent and also attended by representatives of the SCO secretariat. Participants exchanged opinions on the drug situation in SCO member States and discussed the prospects of developing counter-narcotics cooperation. Delegations expressed concern about the global drug problem, in particular the steady increase in the illicit production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in Afghanistan and the rapid spread and misuse of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances. The delegations supported the initiative proposed by the President of Uzbekistan to draft a joint counter-narcotics action plan covering South and Central Asia.

770. From 23 to 27 June 2022, within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the regional

anti-drug operation known as “Channel – Granite Bastion” was organized, with the coordination headquarters located in Dushanbe. Under the operation, a number of measures were carried out with a view to identifying and blocking the smuggling of narcotics and psychotropic substances along the northern route from Afghanistan to Europe and combating money-laundering associated with drug offences.

771. On 19 July 2022, a debriefing was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, to review the results of a number of international operations held between 2020 and 2022, including controlled deliveries from Afghanistan through Kazakhstan to European countries, as well as controlled deliveries of synthetic drugs from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan. The debriefing was attended by the competent authorities of CARICC member States and observers and by representatives of international organizations.

772. In cooperation with their foreign counterparts, the Armenian authorities successfully carried out several controlled delivery operations in 2021. One such operation, conducted jointly with the Georgian authorities, resulted in the seizure of a parcel containing 137 grams of the synthetic stimulant *alpha*-pyrrolidinovalerophenone (*alpha*-PVP) that was being smuggled between the two countries. In another operation, 368 kg of heroin was seized, and an international organized criminal network was identified and dismantled, leading to the arrest of suspects of various nationalities.

3. National legislation, policy and action

773. On 17 November 2021, the Government of Azerbaijan adopted a decree on matters related to the deprivation of liberty for drug offences and on treatment and rehabilitation in lieu of criminal sanctions.

774. On 1 December 2021, amendments to the law of Georgia on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors and drug treatment services of 2021 entered into force. Under the amended law, the thresholds for small, large and particularly large amounts of eight substances (amphetamine, desomorphine, LSD, MDMA, methadone, methcathinone, methamphetamine and heroin) were revised.

775. On 2 January 2022, the new Federal Decree Law No. 30 of 2021 of the United Arab Emirates on combating narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances entered into force. The new law brought about key policy changes in addressing drug trafficking and use in the Emirates, replacing punishment with treatment for first-time offences relating to drug possession and use. The courts have also been granted the

prerogative to send offenders to specialized rehabilitation and treatment centres to be established throughout the country under the law. The new law also provides for stricter penalties for repeat offences and introduces three degrees of penalties for drug use and possession. At the same time, the law maintains the death penalty or life imprisonment for serious offences, including crimes resulting in the death of a victim and serious offences committed by holders of licences to trade in controlled substances.

776. The Board notes with concern public reports of the continued use of the death penalty for drug-related offences in a number of countries of the region, in particular Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Saudi Arabia. **In this regard, the Board wishes to reiterate its position that, although the determination of sanctions applicable to drug-related crime remains the prerogative of the States parties to the conventions, the Board encourages States that have abolished capital punishment for drug-related offences not to reintroduce it and encourages those States that retain capital punishment for that category of offence to commute death sentences that have already been handed down and to consider the abolition of the death penalty for drug-related offences.**

777. In February 2022, the “EMCDDA for Georgia” (EMCDDA4GE) bilateral technical cooperation project began to adapt the EMCDDA European Prevention Curriculum to the Georgian context, including its translation and integration into the national system. The aim of those activities is to enhance national responses to drug-related health and security threats.

778. Also in February 2022, a service was introduced in Abu Dhabi to provide confidential treatment for people who use drugs. The service, which is provided in coordination with the National Rehabilitation Centre, gives people who use drugs the opportunity to apply for treatment services online. According to the authorities, people who use drugs can apply anonymously to enter rehabilitation as part of the initiative called “A chance for hope”, undertaken by regional authorities.

779. The INCB GRIDS Programme conducted a training course for officers from Jordan on the threat of new psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances and on the use of various INCB tools to enhance regional and global information exchange and improve targeting skills for interdicting new psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and fentanyl-related substances. The three-day training course, held in March 2022, was organized in collaboration with the UNODC Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa and the Development Border Management and Security Programme of the International

Centre for Migration Policy and brought together 20 front-line officers from the country's Anti-Narcotics Department, Borders and Residence Department and General Intelligence Department, as well as Jordan Customs.

780. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyl, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event brought together over 140 participants from around the world, including 13 participants from Jordan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates, who engaged in practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

781. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 6 to 9 September 2022. The event brought together nearly 60 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including 5 participants from Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates and the Gulf Cooperation Council Criminal Information Centre to Combat Drugs. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

782. The GRIDS Programme hosted the interregional workshop on public-private partnerships for the prevention of the trafficking of dangerous substances, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 11 to 14 September 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from 30 Governments, 5 international organizations and 15 Internet-related service providers and their associations, including 17 participants from Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and the Gulf Cooperation Council Criminal Information Centre to Combat Drugs. Participants exchanged best practices and case examples related to the exploitation of private sector agencies and online platforms for the trafficking of dangerous substances with the aim of strengthening international operational cooperation across borders to prevent future misuse of legitimate Internet-related services.

783. On 9 March 2022, the Minister of Justice of Israel signed an order decriminalizing cannabis possession and limiting the punishment to the administrative measure of a fine. Under the new regulations, the fine for cannabis possession will be up to 500 Israeli shekels (approximately \$160), supplanting previously applicable criminal sanctions.

784. On 3 April 2022, two months before the illicit opium harvest was to begin, the de facto authorities of Afghanistan

issued a decree prohibiting the cultivation of poppy and other types of narcotic drugs. Under the decree, the use, transportation, export and import of and trade in all types of narcotic drugs and intoxicants, including alcohol, heroin, MDMA tablets and cannabis, were strictly prohibited. The de facto Ministry of the Interior informed the public that a two-month grace period would be granted to enable farmers to harvest opium poppy and sell their 2022 harvest, but noted that during that period, the sale and trafficking of processed heroin and synthetic drugs would be prohibited. It was also announced that selective eradication efforts had already started.¹⁵³

785. Acting upon directives from the Prime Minister of Pakistan, UNODC, in collaboration with the country's Ministry of Narcotics Control and Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, as well as UNAIDS, WHO and UNDP, conducted a study on the feasibility of opioid agonist therapy in Islamabad and the four provinces. Following that study, plans are under way to roll out opioid agonist therapy in Pakistan.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

786. Afghanistan, Mexico and Myanmar together accounted for 97 per cent of estimated global illicit opium production in the period 2017–2021. Afghanistan remained the largest source of opium by far, accounting for an estimated 86 per cent of global illicit production in 2021. Opium produced in Afghanistan continued to supply markets in neighbouring countries and in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and South Asia, with a smaller proportion destined for markets in North America and Oceania.¹⁵⁴

787. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan increased by 32 per cent in 2022, or 56,000 ha, compared with the previous year. The area under opium poppy cultivation in 2022 was estimated to be 233,000 ha, compared with 177,000 ha in 2021.

788. Following the drought in early 2022, opium yields declined from an average of 38.5 kg/ha in 2021 to an estimated 26.7 kg/ha in 2022, resulting in a potential opium harvest of 6,200 tons, which is 10 per cent less than the 6,800 tons produced in 2021. UNODC noted that despite this reduction, Afghanistan still supplies 80 per cent of global opiate demand.

789. Opium poppy cultivation occupied a substantial proportion of the overall agricultural land in some provinces

¹⁵³ A/76/862-S/2022/485, para. 60.

¹⁵⁴ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 3, p. 74.

of Afghanistan, accounting for 20 per cent or more in some districts in 2021, which has led to reduced production of important food crops, including wheat. Coupled with unfavourable weather conditions, that has further exacerbated food insecurity in the country. Opium poppy cultivation remained the main source of income for many people in Afghanistan, in particular in rural areas. In 2019, for example, about a third of rural villages were cultivating the plant, which generated roughly 190,700 full-time jobs. Moreover, the contraction of the legal economy in Afghanistan has made households even more vulnerable to engaging in illicit activities such as opium cultivation and heroin manufacture and trafficking.¹⁵⁵

790. Following the announcement by the Taliban of the ban on narcotic drugs in April 2022, prices increased significantly, in particular for opium.¹⁵⁶ That was the second major spike in drug prices resulting from political and policy developments since the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021.

791. The production of opiates represents the largest illegal economic activity in Afghanistan and was estimated by UNODC to be worth \$1.8 billion to \$2.7 billion in 2021. The total value of opiates, including domestic consumption and exports, was equal to 9 to 14 per cent of the country's GDP, exceeding the value of its officially recorded licit exports of goods and services, which were estimated at 9 per cent of GDP in 2020. However, the estimated revenue from the market for domestic use (\$43 million in 2021) and the income generated by farmers (\$425 million in 2021) were far smaller than the income received by traffickers.

792. After experiencing limited impact from the restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Balkan route appeared to have returned to pre-pandemic levels of opiate trafficking in 2021 and maintained its status as the main route from Afghanistan to destination markets in Central and Western Europe, which runs through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye and the Balkan countries.¹⁵⁷ Trafficking also appears to have intensified along the southern route, which runs through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan and then by sea or air to Europe, either directly or through South Asia, Africa and/or the Gulf States.

793. Türkiye seized a record 22.2 tons of heroin in 2021, representing a considerable increase of almost 70 per cent compared with the 13.2 tons seized in 2019. The Islamic

Republic of Iran observed a decrease of about 8 per cent in the quantities of opiates seized in 2021 compared with 2020; opium was the most commonly seized drug, accounting for 80 per cent of all drugs seized in the country in 2021. The quantity of heroin seized in the country decreased by 18 per cent from 2020 to 2021, while seizures of morphine increased substantially, by 36 per cent, and seizures of opium decreased by 9 per cent.

794. Armenia, which is located along the branch of the Balkan route that runs through the southern Caucasus, reported significant increases in seizures of heroin, which rose from 13 kg in 2020 to 447 kg in 2021. At the same time, seizures of opium in Armenia declined in 2021 compared with the preceding year, dropping from 19 kg in 2020 to 5.2 kg in 2021. Azerbaijan, another country located on that branch of the Balkan route, also reported significant increases in heroin trafficking through its territory, with 3,236 kg of the substance seized in 2021, compared with 2,341 kg in 2020. Azerbaijan also reported an increase in seizures of opium from 278 kg in 2020 to 697 kg in 2021.

795. The northern route, which is used for trafficking opiates from Afghanistan mainly to illicit drug markets in the Russian Federation via Central Asian States, saw a surge in seizures in 2021, after a somewhat stable drug situation due to COVID-19-related disruptions in the previous year.

796. In particular, the volumes of heroin and opium seized by CARICC member States increased by 82.1 per cent and 41.5 per cent, respectively. That development indicates a significant increase in the trafficking of opiates from Afghanistan in 2021, possibly owing to the presence of substantial stocks of illicit opiates in the northern provinces of the country. Compared with the quantities reported for 2020, the volumes of seized heroin increased significantly in all CARICC member States, rising from 16.5 kg to 449.1 kg in Kyrgyzstan, from 28.3 kg to 103 kg in Uzbekistan, from 486.4 kg to 1,431 kg in the Russian Federation, from 118.5 kg to 251.9 kg in Tajikistan and from 70.1 kg to 76.5 kg in Kazakhstan. The quantities of opium seized in 2021 also increased substantially, rising from 58 grams to 53 kg in Kazakhstan, from 9.2 kg to 31 kg in Kyrgyzstan and from 124.1 kg to 342.7 kg in Uzbekistan. The latest data available on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for the period January–March 2022 point to a continued increase in the amounts of opiates seized, with Tajikistan reporting a fifteenfold increase in quantities of heroin seized and a twofold increase in quantities of opium seized, while Uzbekistan reported a sixteenfold increase for heroin and a sixfold increase for opium compared with the same period in 2021.

797. Another issue of major concern relating to the drug situation in Afghanistan is the continuous increase in

¹⁵⁵ UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2021: Cultivation and Production* (March 2022).

¹⁵⁶ A/76/862-S/2022/485, para. 60.

¹⁵⁷ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 3, p. 89.

methamphetamine manufacture that has been observed since 2012 and that continued into 2021, as evidenced by seizures reported both inside and outside the country. The problem has been exacerbated in Afghanistan, where traffickers are able to avoid using difficult-to-obtain imported ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, or over-the-counter pharmaceutical preparations containing those substances, and can instead rely on the ephedra plant, which grows wild in the country.

798. During the period 2019–2021, methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan was seized in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, as well as in Central Asian States and the southern Caucasus, Europe, South-East Asia, South Asia and Oceania. UNODC reported that recent concurrent seizures of methamphetamine and heroin in some of the provinces of Afghanistan suggest that the same networks may be involved in the trafficking of both drugs. That poses a high risk of methamphetamine being smuggled along heroin trafficking routes, which may result in a supply-driven market for methamphetamine in countries where demand for the substance is currently limited.

799. An analysis of *modi operandi* in drug trafficking from Afghanistan conducted through the UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform revealed marked increases in the number of seizures of heroin and methamphetamine concealed in land vehicles starting in 2021; both trends continued throughout the year. Seizures carried out in residences increased substantially from 2020 to 2021, possibly as a result of measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, data on traffickers from other countries who were arrested in the proximity of Afghanistan indicate a diversification of the nationalities involved in drug trafficking since late 2020, including a broader range of traffickers from African countries, which coincided with an increase in the number of heroin and methamphetamine seizures in and around East and Southern Africa. In addition, an increase in the use of postal and parcel services for the smuggling of heroin and methamphetamine was observed in the first three quarters of 2021.

800. The number of methamphetamine seizures at sea grew in late 2020 and in 2021, as did the number of seizures in the Middle East. Seizure events point to an eastward and southward intensification of trafficking from Afghanistan, in addition to the traditional westward movement through the Balkan route. Data on seizures also suggest increased trafficking of both heroin and methamphetamine to India, Sri Lanka and East and Southern Africa in the period from 2018 to 2021, as well as an increase in maritime seizures of heroin on the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea from 2021 onward.

801. A significant development in CARICC member States was the increase in the trafficking of psychotropic substances, including synthetic drugs. In 2021, 5 tons of psychotropic substances were seized in those countries, a full 4.8 times (4.451 tons) more than in 2020. In addition, the number of tablets containing psychotropic substances seized in 2021 increased by 60.9 per cent, to a total of 25,853 (2020: 15,767 tablets). That trend continued into the period January–March 2022, with Central Asian States reporting a twofold increase in the quantities of synthetic drugs seized during that period compared with the same period in 2021. Some of the psychotropic substances seized were stimulants of the amphetamine series, the bulk of which were seized in the Russian Federation. Overall, the data indicate an increase in the volumes of methamphetamine seized in most CARICC member States.

802. CARICC member States expressed serious concern over the increase of trafficking in new psychoactive substances, including synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones, phenethylamines and various other synthetic drugs, in the subregion. The spread of synthetic drugs has been facilitated by lower prices and limited prohibitions in the countries of the subregion. Central Asian States continued to see increased use of the Internet, social networking accounts and messaging platforms for the marketing of illicit drugs, and they continued to undertake measures to address those developments by monitoring and blocking websites, although the capacities to do so in most of those countries are still limited.

803. In that regard, Armenia reported that it had undertaken efforts throughout 2021 to address the extensive use of the Internet for drug trafficking, noting that the Police and Investigative Committee of Armenia had disrupted many complex cases of drug trafficking through the Internet and social media. Another major challenge encountered in Armenia was the increase in drug trafficking through international postal delivery services. In response, the country's State Revenue Committee reinforced its control operations over postal deliveries by introducing more checks with special equipment and detection dogs and by engaging its intelligence and analytical unit.

804. Kazakhstan again observed an increase in the domestic manufacture of synthetic drugs in the country and dismantled a total of 36 laboratories in 2021, compared with 24 in 2020. The country's law enforcement officers noted increased sophistication, including the use of professional laboratory equipment to manufacture mephedrone and *alpha*-PVP in those clandestine laboratories. For the first time, Uzbekistan reported the dismantling of illicit drug laboratories – five in total – on its territory in 2021. Kyrgyzstan detected three drug laboratories in 2021.

805. The total amount of methamphetamine seized in the Islamic Republic of Iran increased by 23 per cent, from 20.5 tons in 2020 to 25.1 tons of the substance in 2021, in line with an ongoing trend since 2016.

806. Türkiye continued to see major increases in methamphetamine trafficking in 2021, a trend that continued from the previous year. In 2019, the country seized about 1 ton of the substance, after which seizures reached 4.1 tons in 2020 and 5.5 tons in 2021. In August 2021, a total of 4.3 tons of methamphetamine in shipments from Hong Kong, China, had been seized at a transit cargo terminal at Istanbul Airport. In the first five months of 2022, the country recorded three more major seizures of methamphetamine. In two consecutive seizures, customs enforcement teams operating at border crossing points intercepted 1.018 tons and 622 kg of liquid methamphetamine concealed in trucks. In May 2022, after a lengthy surveillance operation, the police in Türkiye reported the largest-ever seizure of the substance in a single operation, with 1,117 kg of methamphetamine in liquid and crystal form seized in Istanbul. The operation led to the arrest of members of a criminal group, including its leader.

807. An analysis of seizures undertaken by Tajikistan and Uzbekistan since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 shows an increase in the amounts of opiates and cannabis resin trafficked in each consignment. The overall quantity of opiates and cannabis resin seized by those two countries between August 2021 and May 2022 was reported in seven large batches ranging from 80 kg to 480 kg and amounted to 1.3 tons in total.

808. South-West Asia remains one of the major production, trafficking and consumption areas for cannabis resin, accounting for about one third of the total quantity of seizures reported worldwide in 2016–2020. Most trafficking of cannabis resin from Afghanistan is destined for neighbouring countries in West Asia.¹⁵⁸ According to UNODC, on the basis of the latest available prices (from 2021), the production of cannabis resin remains highly profitable in Afghanistan, as income from cannabis resin was as high as \$7,400 per ha. In comparison, income from illicit opium in the country amounted to \$2,200 per ha, although opium cultivation remains the dominant economic activity by far, possibly as a result of supply and demand or land management factors. Cannabis resin originating in Afghanistan is mainly trafficked to neighbouring countries. Other trafficking routes pass through Central Asia to destinations within the subregion and in the Russian Federation. Another trafficking route for cannabis resin in the wider region is

from production areas in Lebanon to other countries in the Middle East and Europe.

809. In West Asia, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Lebanon were the countries of origin, departure and transit for cannabis mentioned most frequently by other countries worldwide in the period 2016–2020.¹⁵⁹

810. CARICC member States observed an increase of 21.9 per cent (59.4 tons) in the total volume of drugs seized in 2021. Cannabis and cannabis resin accounted for the majority of those seizures, amounting to 37.4 tons. A closer look at that information reveals that seizures of cannabis resin increased to 7 tons, an increase of 94.4 per cent over 2020. Those increases were reported by Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Increased quantities of cannabis seized were also reported by CARICC member States, with the exception of Tajikistan.

811. Central Asian States continued to observe illicit cannabis cultivation and large areas of wild cannabis growth on their territories. Cannabis is mainly produced illicitly for domestic consumption, with a smaller portion trafficked to markets in Europe and the Russian Federation. Each year, those countries take measures to detect and eradicate cannabis fields through air- and land-based surveillance, vehicles and specialized forces. Kazakhstan has reported significant challenges in addressing illicit cannabis cultivation and wild cannabis growth in its southern regions. In 2021, 8 tons of illicitly cultivated cannabis plant and 16 tons of cannabis and cannabis resin were seized. Similarly, the Uzbek authorities eradicated 4,174 square metres of illicitly cultivated cannabis crops in 2021, almost double the area eradicated in 2020. The authorities also eradicated wild cannabis growth in an area of 873 square metres in 2021, compared with 680 square metres in 2020. Kyrgyzstan completed the first stage of its annual eradication campaign in July 2022 in Batken, eradicating some 4.5 tons of wild cannabis over 3.5 ha in the province. Cannabis grows wild in other parts of the country, including the Issyk Kul and Chui provinces, where eradication campaigns continued.

812. The Islamic Republic of Iran witnessed an increase in the trafficking of cannabis resin for the third year in a row, as evidenced by the 15 per cent increase in the quantity seized in 2021. In total, the country's law enforcement authorities seized 124.3 tons of the substance in 2021, up from 108 tons in 2020.

813. Armenia observed an increase in seizures of cannabis and cannabis resin in 2021 in comparison with the previous year. The Armenian authorities seized 107.3 kg of cannabis

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 21–22.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

in 2021, up from 50 kg in 2020, and 838 kg of cannabis resin in 2021, compared with 96 kg in 2020. Armenia also carried out an eradication campaign in August 2021 to address illicit cannabis and opium poppy cultivation in its territory.

814. The manufacture and trafficking of counterfeit “captagon”¹⁶⁰ continued to seriously affect countries in the Middle East, where traffickers are taking advantage of continued political instability, economic challenges and ongoing conflicts in that subregion. While “captagon” was reported to be mainly destined for markets in the Middle East,¹⁶¹ the seizures reported in the subregion in 2021 and 2022 show a diversification of routes and the ability of drug traffickers to adapt quickly in order to reduce the risk of detection. Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be reported as the source countries for “captagon” tablets in the subregion. At the same time, both Jordan and Iraq reported an increasing number of seizures near the border with the Syrian Arab Republic.

815. As observed in 2021, traffickers continued to explore new routes for trafficking “captagon” to potential markets in Europe. Two major seizures of several hundred thousand “captagon” tablets on the Greek island of Rhodes, in January and February 2022, indicate that the trend continued in 2022.

816. Although official data remain scarce, the media continued to report significant quantities of “captagon” seized on a daily basis. Those seizures ranged from several hundred to several million tablets, as well as smaller quantities of amphetamine and cannabis resin. In most cases, the *modus operandi* appeared to be trafficking of the substance using trucks that are heavily modified to avoid detection. Such incidents were reported across the borders between Iraq and Kuwait and between the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan, and were destined for local markets or for those in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and other Gulf countries.

817. The Syrian Arab Republic reported that some 50 million “captagon” tablets and thousands of kilograms of cannabis had been seized in 2020 and 2021. On 29 June 2022, counter-narcotics units in the country seized 2.3 tons of “captagon”, which, according to those authorities, was the largest seizure recorded to date in 2022, bringing the total number of tablets seized in the country in the first half of the year to more than 145 million. Despite those results, the

Syrian authorities emphasized the limited technical capacity that they have for detecting and dismantling the trafficking networks and places of manufacture of the substance in the country. Lebanon reported the destruction of a “captagon” factory in the eastern part of the country in February 2022.

818. Significant quantities of cocaine trafficked from South America to Türkiye have been seized, potentially indicating the increasing use of Türkiye as a transit point for that drug to Middle Eastern and European markets. In June 2022, at the port of Guayaquil, the Ecuadorian authorities seized 850 kg of cocaine in a container of bananas bound for Türkiye. A similar shipment containing over 250 kg of cocaine and originating from the same port in Ecuador was intercepted by Turkish authorities at the port of Mersin, Türkiye, in April 2022. Several other cocaine shipments were seized by authorities in Türkiye, and further shipments destined for the country were seized in Ecuador and Malta, as well as in countries in West Africa, in 2022. According to recent assessments, it appears that organized criminal groups in Türkiye are increasingly turning to cocaine to compensate for falling opiate prices. In 2021, the total amount of cocaine seized in the country amounted to 2.8 tons, breaking the previous year’s record of 1.96 tons.

5. Prevention and treatment

819. Türkiye reported that the misuse of methamphetamine was becoming a major threat to public health. Along with increased trafficking in the substance in recent years, the percentage of methamphetamine-related deaths out of all deaths caused by drug misuse in Türkiye increased from 6.2 per cent (41 out of 657 cases) in 2018 to 31.2 per cent (98 out of 314 cases) in 2020.

820. According to a study published in Türkiye on 11 February 2022, which compared analyses of biological samples from suspected users before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of drugs such as MDMA, cocaine and cannabis significantly decreased during the complete lockdown and followed the same trend once that lockdown was over. In contrast, methamphetamine use increased significantly during that lockdown period and continued to rise thereafter. The number of positive tests for the licit drug pregabalin was noted to have increased, a development that continued after the lockdown. The results showed a significant increase in cases of drug misuse and changes in the associated trends, with the market shifting towards more easily obtainable and lower-priced drugs.

821. Uzbekistan reported that, owing to a continued shortage of traditional plant-based drugs, such as cannabis,

¹⁶⁰ Captagon was originally the official trade name for a pharmaceutical preparation containing the substance fenethylline, a synthetic stimulant. As encountered in seizures across West Asia today and referred to in the present report, “captagon” is a falsified drug compressed into pills or tablets that are similar in appearance but distinct from the earlier pharmaceutical preparation Captagon. The active ingredient in counterfeit “captagon” is amphetamine, which is typically cut with multiple adulterants, such as caffeine.

¹⁶¹ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 4, p. 66.

heroin and opium, an increase had been observed in the use of significantly less expensive and more readily available psychoactive substances, illicitly manufactured injectable opioids, such as “krokodil” prepared from medicines containing codeine, and acetylated opium produced from poppy straw.

822. A range of drug treatment and prevention measures were carried out by the Central Asian States and Azerbaijan in 2021. Activities were aimed at improving the capacities of health-care services through the provision of training to those institutions, as well as through public awareness-raising campaigns on drug use, with the involvement of non-governmental organizations, health-care institutions, law enforcement, media and local communities, and through the introduction of measures to improve employment opportunities for young people and for people who use drugs.

823. In Georgia, as a result of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of cannabis and benzodiazepines increased in 2021, while the use of MDMA, cocaine and amphetamines fell compared with pre-pandemic levels.

824. Available information based on surveys conducted in Afghanistan in 2009, 2015 and most recently in 2020 suggests that cannabis and opiates are the two most misused substances in the country. The 2020 drug use survey, conducted among people aged 13–18 years, showed considerable use of different drugs among secondary school students. Twelve per cent reported that they had used at least one substance (including alcohol) once or more in the past 12 months. The use of cannabis, heroin and opium was reported more frequently by boys than girls, whereas the use of tranquillizers and pharmaceutical opioids was at comparable levels. Past-year use of methamphetamine and “tablet K”¹⁶² was at the same level as heroin among adolescents. Overall, 1.3 per cent of the students reported using heroin, the same percentage had used methamphetamine, and 1.8 per cent had used “tablet K”. There was no significant difference between urban and rural areas in terms of the extent of drug use among people aged 13–18 years.

825. There is a considerable lack of availability of treatment services for people who use drugs in Afghanistan, especially women. The Board stresses the need to continue to strengthen the country’s capacities in providing treatment and rehabilitation services to people who use drugs, with particular attention to women, and the need to conduct

further assessments of the drug misuse situation in the country in order to enable evidence-based approaches to drug treatment policies and efforts.

826. According to a study published in March 2021 on the prevalence of amphetamine-type stimulant use in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the use of those substances has become a health concern in the country. The pooled lifetime prevalence and 12-month prevalence of amphetamine-type stimulant misuse in the country came to 5.4 per cent and 2.4 per cent, respectively, while the global average for past-year use of amphetamines was 0.7 per cent in 2022. The pooled lifetime prevalence of use of methamphetamine, MDMA and non-prescribed methylphenidate in the Islamic Republic of Iran amounted to 6.7 per cent, 5.9 per cent and 16.4 per cent, respectively.

827. UNODC, in cooperation with the Drug Control Headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran, initiated Treatnet Family Therapy as a pilot programme in January 2022 to support family-based treatment for youths with drug use disorders. The country also reported several activities carried out in 2021 to address the drug use situation, including the admission of 1.4 million people to 9,000 treatment and harm reduction centres in the country that year. Those activities were supported by 562 projects carried out by non-governmental organizations in which community-based training for drug use prevention and treatment was implemented. The authorities also strengthened the health insurance system for people who use drugs and introduced job creation schemes.

828. It remains a challenge to obtain comparable and systematically collected data on the prevalence of “captagon” misuse in the Middle East. According to the qualitative data reported to UNODC, some countries in the subregion noted that “captagon” remained the most prevalent drug or was among the most prevalent drugs encountered in their countries. In Saudi Arabia, it appears that amphetamine-type stimulants are the most misused group of drugs and the most commonly occurring group in primary drug treatment. The United Arab Emirates reported that those substances were the second most misused drug group after pharmaceutical products containing such stimulants. Qatar reported that amphetamines were the second most commonly used drug after cannabis. Iraq reported a large increase in the use of methamphetamine and “captagon” across all age groups and for both men and women.¹⁶³

829. According to a study published in February 2020, the most commonly used drug at two of the main civil prisons in the Syrian Arab Republic was cannabis resin, followed by

¹⁶² “Tablet K” is the street name for a drug with (perceived) stimulant effects sold in Afghanistan. The name seems to be used for a range of tablet products sold on the illicit drug market. Tablets sold under the street name “tablet K” may contain methamphetamine, MDMA or a range of other substances.

¹⁶³ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 4, p. 70.

“captagon”. The misuse of diazepam and heroin was also recorded.

830. West Asia is among the regions of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. Consumption of opioid analgesics for pain management is relatively low compared with some regions. The levels of consumption of opioid analgesics in countries in the region, after increasing somewhat in 2020 compared with previous years, decreased in 2021. The number of countries in West Asia providing consumption data on psychotropic substances has been improving over the past several years, with nearly two thirds of those countries providing such data in 2021. Nonetheless, there is a significant disparity in the levels of consumption of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances among countries in West Asia. **The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in most countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.** Further information on recent developments is contained in the supplement to the annual report of the Board, entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes*.

E. Europe

Most drug-related illicit activities in the region rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, resulting in even greater availability and lower prices for illicit drugs. The potency of illicit drugs has also increased.

Increasingly complex drug consumption patterns, an ageing population and growing economic and mental distress call for closer monitoring and more targeted drug prevention and treatment, especially for vulnerable groups.

The Board is concerned by the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and calls for unimpeded access to medications, including those containing internationally controlled substances.

1. Major developments

831. Europe remains an important region for illicit drug manufacture, trafficking and consumption, with most drug-related illicit activities rebounding from temporary changes

caused by mobility restrictions and lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, innovation and adaption to the changing demand in illicit drug markets seem to have resulted in the increased availability of most drugs and lower prices. Drug potency has likewise been increasing.

832. In the European Union, over 350 illicit drug manufacturing sites were dismantled in 2020, according to EMCDDA. Among these were medium- and large-scale laboratories for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine and sophisticated secondary cocaine-processing laboratories, as well as a growing number of illicit cathinone laboratories and some heroin laboratories.

833. Cocaine trafficking has been increasing each year since 2017; cocaine is mainly trafficked to the region, using maritime shipping containers, from South America to European ports, but trafficking by air seems to have rebounded after being heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The European Union is reportedly becoming a transit region for the smuggling of cocaine onward to countries outside the Union, to Eastern Europe, Oceania and likely Asia, according to EMCDDA.

834. Alongside the increased availability of most drugs, the region continues to exhibit increasingly complex drug consumption patterns, with more drug problems associated with medicinal products, non-controlled new psychoactive substances and substances like ketamine and GHB and GBL in some countries. The spread of cocaine use, in particular use of “crack” cocaine among marginalized populations in some cities and countries, has become a growing concern, as has the use of illicit opioids in combination with benzodiazepines and other polydrug use.

835. The Board notes that, faced with the changes in drug consumption patterns, an ageing population of people who use opioids and the growing economic and mental distress experienced by marginalized groups, authorities need to implement more effective monitoring systems and more targeted drug prevention and treatment programmes to reduce the adverse health and social consequences of drug use. Closer collaboration and better coordination among relevant stakeholders, both domestically and with international partners, has the potential to facilitate experience-sharing and generate greater synergies in addressing these concerns.

836. The conflict in Ukraine may result in changes in how people use drugs and in the drug trafficking situation inside and around the country. The Board has expressed its deep concern at the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and called for unimpeded access to medications, including those containing internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and has reminded Governments of the

possibility of applying simplified control procedures for the export and transportation of such medicines to affected areas during emergency situations. Instability may also have an impact on the drug trafficking situation in terms of both potential illicit drug manufacture trends and changes to trafficking routes. Furthermore, EMCDDA cautions that the conflict in Ukraine may exacerbate substance use due to heightened psychological stress, which persons fleeing the conflict are likely to experience, in the absence of adequate health and support services.

2. Regional cooperation

837. A total of 170 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 32 countries in Europe (Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and United Kingdom) have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules support countries in expanding their capacity for the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and in gaining a deeper understanding of the international drug control framework.

838. In January 2022, the Croatian Police and the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance cooperation between the two countries to combat transnational drug trafficking. The memorandum includes provisions concerning technological and information exchange, collaboration on operations targeting drug trafficking and close communication in the prosecution of perpetrators of drug-related offences.

839. In January 2022, the European Commission proposed to strengthen the mandate of EMCDDA, which, if the proposal is adopted, would become the European Union Drugs Agency. The proposed reform would allow the body to improve its monitoring capacities, issue alerts on newly emerging and dangerous substances, develop threat assessments in relation to illicit drugs, establish a network of forensic and toxicological laboratories to enhance information exchange, and develop information and awareness-raising campaigns across the European Union.

840. In March 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme convened a case meeting in Madrid with 20 investigators from the Spanish National Police, Spanish counter-terrorism authorities, Spanish customs authorities, the United Kingdom National Crime Agency, the United States Drug Enforcement

Administration, the United States Customs and Border Protection agency and the United States Postal Inspection Service to take coordinated actions on a global new psychoactive substance trafficking organization identified by the OPIOIDS project via IONICS communications.

841. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyl, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event brought together over 140 participants from around the world, including 22 participants from Austria, Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Serbia, Spain, the United Kingdom, UNODC, UPU and WCO, which engaged in practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

842. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier, and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 6 to 9 September 2022. The event brought together nearly 60 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including 21 participants from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, UNODC, UPU and WCO. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

843. The GRIDS Programme hosted the interregional workshop on public-private partnerships for the prevention of the trafficking of dangerous substances, held in Sharm el-Sheikh from 11 to 14 September 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from 30 Governments, 5 international organizations and 15 Internet-related service providers and their associations, including 7 participants from Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Participants exchanged best practices and case examples related to the exploitation of private sector agencies and online platforms for the trafficking of dangerous substances with the aim of strengthening international operational cooperation across borders to prevent future misuse of legitimate Internet-related services.

844. In June 2022, the authorities of Italy and Montenegro discussed new ways to strengthen and cooperate in their law enforcement activities to prevent drug smuggling. The areas of cooperation will include capacity-building of the police forces of Montenegro and, as part of a European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) mission, the use of Italian helicopters and aircraft to carry out monitoring activities in the coastal area of Montenegro and the Adriatic Sea.

845. In July 2022, EMCDDA signed an agreement to become a partner of the COPOLAD III, which seeks to strengthen cooperation on drug policy between the European Union and countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The contributions of EMCDDA to the programme will target capacity- and institution-building of national drug observatories, cooperation on drug trafficking investigations, and support for drug demand reduction policies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

846. A joint statement was issued by the Governments of Germany, Luxembourg and Malta in July 2022 at the first high-level consultation on the regulation of cannabis for non-medical and non-scientific uses. It expressed the support of those Governments for new approaches concerning policies on cannabis and called for special attention to the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes and its possession in small quantities for personal use, including through a review of regulations and policies and a continuing multi-lateral dialogue.

847. In 2022, Europol coordinated parallel investigations involving law enforcement agencies from various countries (Belgium, Brazil, Germany, the Netherlands, Paraguay, Spain and the United States), which resulted in the dismantling of a criminal organization responsible for trafficking multi-ton shipments of cocaine to Europe. The investigation found that the criminal group trafficked shipments of cocaine from Latin America to Europe every few months, with distribution networks based in Spain. The criminal group was also found to have coordinated its illicit activities through encrypted communications platforms, including the messaging application Sky ECC, which was dismantled in 2021.

3. National legislation, policy and action

848. In December 2021, the European Council adopted reforms of the common agricultural policy, which stipulated that European Union subsidies would be available for farmers cultivating hemp varieties with a THC content of less than 0.3 per cent. The new common agricultural policy will be in effect from 1 January 2023 until the end of 2027.

849. In June 2022, amendments to the Europol Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/794) entered into force, strengthening the capacity of Europol to support European Union member States in tackling organized crime and terrorism. The amendments enhance the legal basis for processing large and complex data sets, introduce changes to how personal data can be handled by Europol, allow the organization to receive data from private parties for the purposes of criminal

investigations and have increased focus on new technologies and innovation.

850. Following the risk assessments conducted by EMCDDA in November 2021, the European Commission adopted measures to control two new psychoactive substances, 3-methyl-*N*-methylcathinone (3-MMC) and 3-chloromethcathinone (3-CMC), on 18 March 2022. All European Union member States have six months to reflect those changes in their national implementing legislation. The legislation entered into force on 18 August 2022.

851. The new European Union Regulation (EU) 2019/6 on veterinary medicinal products, together with related implementing acts and delegated acts, entered into force on 28 January 2022. Aiming to safeguard animal health and reduce administrative burdens for both marketing authorization holders and the authorities, the new legislation encourages innovation enabling more new products to come onto the market and the availability of medicines for veterinary use, including those that contain controlled substances, will be increased.

852. The Government of Luxembourg announced further details of its planned “recreational cannabis” project in June 2022. Individuals aged 18 or older are to be allowed to grow up to four cannabis plants from seeds, per household, for private non-medical use. Outdoor cultivation will be allowed but the plants must not be visible to anyone passing on public roads. It would also be possible to acquire cannabis seeds, with no limits imposed on THC content, in stores in Luxembourg, imported from abroad or purchased online. The Government plans to maintain the ban on cannabis use in public. Criminal proceedings will apply, in case of non-compliance with the place of cultivation, or when the limit on the number of plants grown at home is exceeded. The consumption, possession, acquisition or transport in public of up to three grams of cannabis will be considered a misdemeanour instead of a criminal offence.

853. Following its publication of a white paper on cannabis aimed at strengthening the legal framework on the “responsible use of cannabis” in 2021, the Government of Malta passed the Responsible Use of Cannabis Act (Act No. LXVI) on 18 December 2021. The Act establishes the national authority which will regulate the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes and implement related harm reduction measures to reduce the adverse health and social consequences of drug use in the country. Under the new law, personal cultivation of up to four plants per household for private consumption is to be permitted. Possession of cannabis not exceeding 7 grams for personal use will not constitute an offence. Possession of 7 to 28 grams for personal use, irrespective of purity, will be liable to a penalty of 50 to 100 euros.

854. Following the enactment of the Controlled Cannabis Supply Chain Experiment Act in July 2020, the Government of the Netherlands continued with the preparatory phase of its experimental cannabis programme. Under the experiment, a maximum of 10 growers will produce cannabis, and those who have been selected must set up their businesses in accordance with the Experiment Act and related regulations. The next phase of the experiment, which will last six weeks to allow participating coffee shops to transition their businesses, is expected to start in 2023.

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

856. In order to facilitate access to cannabis for medical use, the Government of Switzerland lifted the ban on cannabis for such use as of 1 August 2022. Patients who are medically prescribed cannabis no longer need to seek exceptional permission from the Federal Office of Public Health. The legislative change also means that the cultivation, processing, manufacture and trade of cannabis for medical use will be under the authority of Swissmedic, the governmental agency for drugs and medical products.

857. In December 2021, the Government of the United Kingdom adopted a new long-term drug strategy entitled “From harm to hope: a 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives”. The plan will involve both national and local partners on three strategic priorities: (a) break drug supply chains, (b) deliver a world-class treatment and recovery system, and (c) achieve a generational shift in demand for drugs. The strategy is underpinned by a record investment of over 3 billion pounds (\$3.6 billion) in the next 3 years.

858. In January 2021, the Minister of State for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy of Ireland announced 850,000 euros (roughly \$850,000) in recurring funding for an initiative to reduce the health-related harms associated with the use of cocaine and “crack” cocaine. The funding will support the development and implementation of better treatment for cocaine use, a training programme for addiction service staff and targeted interventions in disadvantaged communities affected by consumption.

859. In the Russian Federation, the narcotic drug etorphine, a semi-synthetic opioid for veterinary use, was transferred from the list of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors prohibited from circulation in the country (list I) to the list of drugs and substances whose trade is limited (list II) in early 2022, thus broadening access to the substance.

860. In March 2022, the Government of Sweden adopted a new strategy for alcohol, drugs, doping, tobacco and gambling for the period 2022–2025. The new strategy included measures related to controlled medicinal products and strengthened drug prevention, including crime prevention and law enforcement efforts. Availability of syringe exchange programmes in the country is expected to grow following the decision of Parliament to remove, as of 1 August 2022, the residency requirement for a person’s participation in such programmes.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

861. *The European Drug Report 2022* published by EMCDDA, based on information provided to the agency by the European Union member States, Türkiye and Norway, finds that drug availability remained high and the illicit drug markets rebounded from the temporary changes associated with mobility restrictions and lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, cocaine availability has increased compared with pre-pandemic levels. The cocaine price in the European Union has also become more affordable, dropping by 40 per cent between 2015 and 2020. Potency and purity levels have seen an increasing trend; in the case of cocaine, purity increased by 40 per cent between 2010 and 2020. The average THC content of both cannabis resin and herbal cannabis has seen a similar upward trend. Unlike in the past, when the THC content of herbal cannabis was higher than that of resin, the THC content of cannabis resin is now reported to be nearly twice as high as that of herbal cannabis.

862. The European Union remains an important region for illicit drug manufacture. EMCDDA notes that over 350 illicit drug manufacturing facilities were dismantled in the European Union in 2020. The agency highlighted the increasing number of sophisticated secondary illicit cocaine-processing laboratories that have been dismantled by the authorities of Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain. Latin American and European criminal groups are believed to be operating these clandestine cocaine laboratories. Although the illicit manufacture of synthetic cathinones has been limited in the region, EMCDDA cautions that, based on the number of dismantled illicit laboratories and the amount of

precursors seized since 2020, illicit manufacture of this drug group may be increasing. As concerns clandestine heroin laboratories, four sites were dismantled in the European Union in 2020, specifically in Belgium and Czechia.

863. Illicit methamphetamine manufacture has become more sophisticated and large-scale in Europe, affecting global supply and regional consumption. Illicit laboratories using different manufacturing methods that are capable of manufacturing large amounts of methamphetamine continue to be discovered in Belgium and the Netherlands. A total of 35 medium- and large-scale laboratories were dismantled in 2020 according to EMCDDA. This is a departure from traditional, small-scale “kitchen-type” laboratories found in Czechia and neighbouring countries, which relied on precursors diverted from controlled medicines. The region is now becoming more important both for the global supply of the drug, which is then trafficked outside the region, as well as for consumption inside the European Union, with more European Union member States reporting the Netherlands as the source of seized methamphetamine. As occurs with illicit cocaine-processing laboratories, Latin American and European criminal operators often collaborate in operating illicit methamphetamine manufacturing sites in Europe.

864. Europe continues to be an important transit and destination region for different drug classes. Commercial infrastructure and intermodal container shipments are frequently exploited for drug smuggling.

865. A trend analysis of seizures based on EMCDDA data shows that between 2010 and 2020, methamphetamine and amphetamine had the largest percentage increase of seizures in the European Union, increasing nearly fivefold and fourfold, respectively. This was followed by seizures of cannabis herb, which nearly tripled, whereas seizures of cocaine and MDMA in the European Union doubled.

866. Cocaine trafficking has been increasing year-on-year since 2017, with cocaine mainly being trafficked using maritime shipping containers sent from South America to Europe through ports in Belgium and the Netherlands, although seizures have also been reported in other European ports. Apart from trafficking by sea, smuggling to Europe by air seems to have rebounded after a sharp decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions affecting commercial air travel. According to EMCDDA, the use of private business aircraft to traffic cocaine directly from South America and the Caribbean to western Europe is expected to increase in the future. According to UNODC, large amounts of cocaine are now also found to be trafficked from South America to Europe through West and North Africa. Another trend reported by EMCDDA and Europol is that the

European Union is used as a transit point for smuggling cocaine to countries outside the Union, namely to Eastern Europe, Oceania and likely Asia.

867. The illicit market for “crack” cocaine is growing and expanding beyond Western Europe, according to EMCDDA and Europol. This is believed to be due to increased accessibility and the different methods for sourcing the product, including through the Internet as well as encrypted communications tools.

868. The Balkan route, which goes from Afghanistan, through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye and the Balkan countries to Central and Western Europe remains the most significant trafficking route for heroin. However, although half of worldwide seizures of heroin and morphine are effected along this route, seizures in 2020 decreased in the Balkan countries and countries of Western and Central Europe.¹⁶⁴ In this regard, Bulgaria noted the increasing trend of using maritime containers for heroin trafficking in 2021, whereas until then heroin was exclusively trafficked by land. The established heroin trafficking routes to Europe may also be being exploited for smuggling of methamphetamine to the region.

869. Cannabis was the most frequently seized drug, with European Union member States seizing 2.8 million cannabis plants in 2020. According to EMCDDA, a new trend is that cannabis illicitly produced within the region constitutes a more prominent source for the European market. For cannabis sourced outside the region, Spain is the main entry point for the rest of Western and Central Europe.¹⁶⁵ Elaborate trafficking methods were noted when, at the end of 2021, Spanish authorities seized 2.4 tons of cannabis resin and 112 kg of cannabis, and dismantled the criminal network responsible for smuggling the cannabis and cannabis resin from Morocco to Spain on modified helicopters, then smuggled by truck to France.

870. In July 2022, the Spanish National Police also dismantled two large-scale illicit laboratories for processing cannabis resin in the province of Barcelona, the first time such laboratories were found. Also in July 2022, another investigation resulted in the seizure of over 5 tons of cannabis resin and the dismantling of a trafficking organization with arrests in the provinces of Cádiz, Ciudad Real, Huelva, Málaga and Sevilla. The cannabis resin was hidden in cargoes of fish and fruit transported in trucks and was destined for other European countries. According to the Spanish police, the criminal group also used technology to obstruct radio signals to hinder any possible police investigation.

¹⁶⁴ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 3, p. 89.

¹⁶⁵ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 3, p. 21.

871. There is some evidence that the expanding market for cannabis products for medical and industrial purposes is being used for illicit purposes, as another incident in Spain demonstrated, when, in July 2022, 6 tons of cannabis plants and 3.5 tons of cannabis buds were seized. The plantation did not have appropriate permits for licit cultivation, but logos of various Spanish authorities, as well as signs declaring “industrial hemp cultivation” had been posted on the premises to make the plantation appear legal. An advanced security system of over 100 video cameras had been placed in the plantation allowing non-stop surveillance of the plantation by the criminals responsible.

872. More European Union countries are detecting cannabis adulterated with synthetic cannabinoids in seized samples. According to EMCDDA, the most frequently detected synthetic cannabinoid reported in 2021 was ADB-BUTINACA. The agency notes that eight European Union member States have detected such adulterated samples since mid-2020 but that the identification of synthetic cannabinoids in cannabis samples remains difficult because their detection requires more complex forensic analysis.

873. The *European Drug Report 2022*, furthermore, warns that on average one new psychoactive substance is identified every week. The European Union warning system issued notifications for 52 new drugs in 2021, bringing to 880 the total number of new psychoactive substances detected in Europe and monitored by EMCDDA. This is nevertheless a considerable decrease from the peak years of 2014 and 2015, when some 100 new psychoactive substances were identified each year.¹⁶⁶ Those newly notified substances include six new synthetic opioids, six new synthetic cathinones and 15 new synthetic cannabinoids. Of particular concern is the rising availability of synthetic cathinones, currently the second largest category of psychoactive substances monitored by the European Union warning system, after synthetic cannabinoids. UNODC warns that Eastern Europe is particularly affected by the proliferation of new psychoactive substances, suggesting that this may be due to an increased online supply, especially with regard to cathinones.

874. Bulgaria reported that new psychoactive substances continued to enter the country in postal and express courier shipments. A total of 8.5 kg of 10 different new psychoactive substances, mostly belonging to the group of synthetic cannabinoids, were seized in 16 cases during the reporting period.

875. The digitalization of drug markets used to facilitate drug distribution has become a well-known, long-term challenge for law enforcement entities. In this regard, and as

previously reported by INCB, the use of the Internet (clear web), including social media, to facilitate street-level sales and supply of drugs, continues to grow. However, the use of the darknet for illicit drug purposes may have slowed. EMCDDA analysis found that estimated darknet revenues sharply declined from 2020 to 2021, falling from approximately 1 million euros per day (roughly \$1 million) to less than 30,000 euros (roughly \$30,000). This may be due to increased law enforcement activity and decreased consumer confidence. UNODC points out that darknet sites are temporary in nature and disappear regularly. The decline in sales may also be due to the emergence of new darknet markets that are not yet effectively monitored.¹⁶⁷

5. Prevention and treatment

876. Most European countries have robust monitoring capabilities for the timely collection and dissemination of prevalence and treatment data. Although such systems were still in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, given the disruptions to prevention and treatment services during the lockdown periods, recent data should be interpreted with caution. For instance, treatment data on clients entering specialized drug treatment facilities were more affected by the pandemic than were other epidemiological indicators. On the other hand, the rapid introduction of telemedicine and innovative treatment approaches, while continuing to satisfy treatment demand during the lockdown periods, might not be captured and reflected in pre-pandemic indicator data.

877. Bearing in mind these caveats, data gathered by EMCDDA show that the total number of first-time treatment entrants in the region dropped by 14 per cent in 2020 compared with the previous year. Adversely, the latest preliminary national treatment data point towards increases in 2021 (compared with 2020), reflecting the return of services to pre-pandemic levels.

878. According to the *World Drug Report 2022*, cannabis remains the most widely used substance in Europe, followed by cocaine, opioids and “ecstasy”. Notable differences, however, were registered between Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and Western and Central Europe. Opioids and opiates were much more widely used in Eastern and Central Europe; cocaine and “ecstasy” were used more in Western and Central Europe.

879. According to the *European Drug Report 2022*, about 29 per cent of adults (ages 15–64) in the European Union (83.4 million people) are estimated to have used an illicit

¹⁶⁶ E/INCB/2021/1, chap. III.

¹⁶⁷ *World Drug Report 2022*, booklet 2, p. 60.

drug in their lifetime, with more males (50.5 million) than females. Cannabis remains the most widely used substance, with over 22 million (7.7 per cent of adults) reporting its use in the past year. National estimates for the use of cannabis in the past year, however, exhibit considerable disparity and range from 3.4 per cent to 22.9 per cent. An estimated 3.5 million (1.2 per cent of adults) reported using cocaine in the past year, 2.6 million (0.9 per cent of adults) used MDMA, and 2 million (0.7 per cent of adults) amphetamines. Approximately 1 million adults are estimated to have used heroin or another illicit opioid.

880. Cannabis remains the most used drug among young adults (ages 15–34) in the region, with 15.8 million (15.5 per cent of young adults) reporting its use in the past year, which is a much higher percentage than for other substances (2.2 per cent for cocaine, 1.9 per cent for MDMA and 1.4 per cent for amphetamines).

881. Treatment demand for cannabis-related problems is more requested than for any other type of drug. Cannabis was the drug most frequently cited by new treatment clients and accounted for 45 per cent of all first-time treatment entrants in 2020, as noted by EMCDDA. Data from 25 countries indicate that some 80,000 people entered specialized drug treatment for cannabis use, with more than half (43,000) entering treatment for the first time.

882. The use of cocaine, in particular the spread of “crack” cocaine among vulnerable populations, is a major concern in Southern and Western Europe. Recent data from wastewater analysis conducted by EMCDDA suggest that cocaine use in Europe has returned to its pre-pandemic levels. Approximately 15 per cent of all first-time drug treatment requests in 2020 were related to cocaine, alongside the growing use of “crack” cocaine by marginalized groups in more cities and countries. EMCDDA notes that about 7,000 clients received drug treatment for “crack” cocaine in 2020, three times the number in 2016, with Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain reporting considerable increases in treatment cases. Further, a rising trend in use of “crack” cocaine has been reported in France and Germany. The latest data of municipal wastewater analysis in 13 European cities found “crack” cocaine residues in all cities, with the highest amounts in Amsterdam and Antwerp. In Ireland, a report investigating the scope of substance misuse in Tallaght (the largest satellite town of Dublin), concluded that the town had some of the highest rates of substance misuse in 2020; cocaine was reported as the second most used drug, and the number of referrals to services for cocaine use increased by 18 per cent from 2019 to 2020 in the town.

883. Often associated with various health and social problems, the spread of cocaine and “crack” cocaine use calls for

closer monitoring of the situation and more targeted interventions. People who use “crack” cocaine who have made it soluble for injection face higher risks of HIV and hepatitis C virus infection and are more exposed to criminal prosecution as a consequence of violent behaviour and mental health problems, which are often linked to high-frequency consumption of the substance. Greater investment in specialist service responses is therefore required for those experiencing health problems related to “crack” cocaine use, along with measures targeting violence and societal problems related to “crack” cocaine.

884. EMCDDA also notes an increasing complexity in drug consumption patterns within the region, with more drug problems associated with medicinal products, non-controlled new psychoactive substances and substances such as ketamine and GHB and GBL in some countries. The use of opioids, often in combination with other substances, constitutes the greatest share of harm caused by illicit drug use.

885. With an estimated 5,800 overdose deaths involving illicit drugs in 2020, the European Union had an estimated rate of mortality due to drug overdose of 17.4 deaths per million for the adult population. Opioids are present in about three quarters of these deaths, with Austria and Norway reporting an increase in the number of heroin- and morphine-related deaths in 2020. Benzodiazepines are also commonly found in toxicological reports on drug-related deaths, although it is unclear if they were prescribed for therapeutic purposes. Given the considerable increase in the number of overdose deaths in the 50–64 age group (82 per cent increase between 2012 and 2020), greater efforts are required to understand opioid use in that age group and cater to the needs of those with chronic drug and health problems.

886. To reduce the number of deaths due to opioids, the Government of Sweden has commissioned the National Board of Health and Welfare to propose, develop and implement initiatives supporting increased availability of naloxone. In conjunction, the Swedish Medical Products Agency is also leading an ongoing investigation into the possibility of classifying naloxone for over-the-counter availability.

887. Owing to the associated health problems caused by injecting drug use, the relatively limited information available on the latest patterns remain an area of concern, despite the declining trend of injecting drug use in the region over the past decade. Although heroin has long been associated with injecting use in many countries, the latest treatment data indicate that only 22 per cent of first-time clients with heroin as their primary drug reported injecting as their main route of administration, down from 35 per cent in 2013. However, little information is available regarding the patterns of other

drugs being injected, and hence the harm associated with such behaviour. Closer monitoring of the trend in injecting drug use and earlier diagnosis of blood-borne infections, if any, remain an important focus for intervention.

888. Following the disruption of nightlife activity since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of MDMA use in Europe continued to drop in 2020, as evidenced by the considerable reduction in the number of MDMA-related emergency hospital visits. MDMA use in 2021 seemed lower than its pre-pandemic levels, although it remains to be seen whether its use will rise again as countries lift COVID-19 restrictions.

889. Most countries reported the increased use of online platforms for drug treatment and harm reduction services to reduce the adverse health and social consequences of drug use during the pandemic and since then have opted for greater use of telemedicine, appointment-only visits and online outreach and education webinars. Some difficulties in delivering such treatment services were observed, including the need for clients to access digital services as well as reaching out to first-time clients. The long-term effectiveness of online drug treatment and harm reduction services requires further monitoring and evaluation.

890. Since treatment service is a major component of the United Kingdom drug strategy “From harm to hope: a 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives”, additional funding of 15.5 million pounds (\$18.75 million) has been pledged to local councils responsible for commissioning drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services for the period 2022–2023. A corresponding strategy for those working in drug treatment services is being prepared by Health Education England in order to strengthen and complement the implementation of the 10-year plan.

891. In Sweden, the Institute for Health and Medical Care Economics estimated that drug use cost the society of Sweden a total of 38.5 million kronor (\$3.41 million) in 2020. The figure includes the direct, indirect and intangible costs of drug use. In June 2021, the National Board of Health and Welfare published a study about young people who commit drug crimes, the penalties they receive, subsequent care and support provided by the social services. In June 2022, another report focusing on drug-related mortality for different drug types and different population groups, based on 2019 data, was also published.

892. In Croatia, the latest treatment data suggest that about one third of those receiving drug treatment are women, who often face specific challenges including the absence of primary family support, scarce social networks, higher unemployment and lack of housing. Since 2021, a

greater focus has thus been placed on developing treatment services for women with drug use problems and strengthening cooperation among government agencies in the delivery of those services. Meanwhile, a multisectoral commission has also been established to evaluate the effectiveness of various psychosocial rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes, including programmes for women with drug use problems.

893. Iceland experienced a considerable drop in smoking, drinking and drug use among its teenagers through State-funded initiatives that promote healthier alternatives including sports, family-orientated activities and cultural provisions. At the Planet Youth Annual Conference 2022, held in Reykjavik in September 2022, experts were invited to discuss the substance use prevention based on the Icelandic prevention model.

F. Oceania

Increasing use of drugs, in particular methamphetamine, and the activity of organized criminal groups are challenging many communities in the Pacific region, as a spillover effect of increasing trafficking in cocaine and methamphetamine through Pacific island States.

Information on the extent of drug use and treatment demand in Pacific island States remains unavailable. Governments in the region are urged, with the support of bilateral partners and regional and international organizations, to prioritize the collection of such data and the provision of evidence-based prevention and treatment services.

1. Major developments

894. Trafficking in cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine is increasing in the Pacific region, and the methods used to traffic the substances are evolving. The Pacific island States and territories continue to be used as transit areas for cocaine trafficked between Latin America and Australia and New Zealand. In addition, the Pacific islands have become sites of illicit production and consumption, in particular of methamphetamine, and local drug trafficking networks are reported to be working with transnational groups.

895. Trafficking in fentanyl and other dangerous opioids is expanding to markets in Oceania, representing an escalating global challenge. For example, a record seizure of fentanyl was made in Australia in February 2022 and

New Zealand continues to report encounters with emerging non-medical synthetic opioids, as highlighted below.

896. Oceania is characterized by vast and porous maritime borders and remains highly vulnerable to large-scale drug and precursor trafficking and related risks such as money-laundering, domestic drug use and local illicit production of drugs. Moreover, non-parties to the three international drug control conventions remain concentrated in this region. **INCB again calls upon non-parties to take steps towards accession to, and full implementation of, the conventions. The Board also encourages regional and bilateral partners to provide support to this end, so that these States can benefit from adherence to the conventions, particularly in improving the availability of controlled medicines, preventing and addressing drug trafficking, and providing evidence-based prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services.** The Board remains committed to supporting countries in Oceania, including through the implementation of the memorandum of understanding between the Oceania Customs Organization and the Board and activities carried out through the GRIDS Programme and INCB Learning.

897. Oceania is among the regions of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. In particular, on the basis of the reported consumption of narcotic drugs, there is a wide disparity between countries in the region regarding the consumption of opioid analgesics. Australia and New Zealand reported much higher levels of consumption than other Pacific island countries. Determining the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Oceania remains a challenge, as only a third of the countries and territories in the region have provided consumption data to the Board on any psychotropic substance for the past several years. The Board stresses 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 while ensuring the rational use of these substances in countries reporting high levels of consumption. **The Board encourages the international community, relevant regional organizations and bilateral partners to support small island developing States in Oceania and other regions in improving the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.** Further information on recent developments is contained in the supplement to this annual report, entitled *No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes*.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ E/INCB/2022/1/Supp.1.

2. Regional cooperation

898. To help address the expansion of trafficking in fentanyl and other dangerous opioids to markets in Oceania, Australia, New Zealand and, in coordination with the Oceania Customs Organization, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa and Solomon Islands participated in the INCB Operation GAPZ in the period from November 2021 to January 2022. Participating agencies exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical gabapentin, pregabalin, xylazine and zopiclone trafficked through international post, express mail and courier services and related modalities.

899. In March 2022, under the framework of the INCB GRIDS Programme, INCB and partner organizations conducted an interregional stakeholder consultation on public-private partnerships for the prevention of dangerous substance trafficking through the Internet. Front-line officers from Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and the Oceania Customs Organization participated in the event, which was aimed at strengthening the efforts of Governments and, through them, private sector partners, to cooperate in the prevention of the misuse of legitimate Internet-related services for trafficking in dangerous non-medical synthetic opioids.

900. In May 2022, the Oceania Customs Organization, supported by the Australian Border Force, provided training for border enforcement officials of member agencies in maritime border security, including on drug trafficking and use of the Oceania Customs Organization Pacific Small Craft Application, which assists members in the collection of information on the movement of yachts in the region. Officers from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and the Northern Mariana Islands participated. The Oceania Customs Organization highlighted the increase in drug trafficking in the Pacific and also noted that a significant quantity of information was being shared between States in the tracking of yachts around the region. In November 2021, law enforcement officials from Fiji and Tonga received UNODC training on the investigation of maritime crime, including drug trafficking cases.

901. The GRIDS Programme convened the first global conference for operational officers on the interdiction of fentanyls, synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances, held in Vienna from 1 to 5 August 2022. The event brought together over 140 participants from around the world, including five participants from Australia, Fiji, New Zealand and the Oceania Customs Organization, who engaged in practical awareness-raising and capacity-building related to synthetic opioids.

902. The first Pacific Regional Law Enforcement Conference, on the theme “Partnering to disrupt crime in the Pacific”, was held in August 2022 in Denarau, Fiji, in partnership with the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, the Oceania Customs Organization and the Pacific Immigration Development Community. The main aim of the conference was to establish a network of researchers and law enforcement practitioners and develop a body of research on law enforcement issues and practices in the Pacific in view of the growing criminal networks in the region. UNODC participated in the conference, highlighting challenges posed by the expansion of the illicit synthetic drug market to regions neighbouring the Pacific region, its spillover effects, and recommendations to address the situation.

903. The GRIDS Programme convened the fifth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 6 to 9 September 2022. The event brought together nearly 60 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including 3 participants from Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Oceania Customs Organization. Participating countries also conducted bilateral and multi-lateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

904. The GRIDS Programme hosted the interregional workshop on public-private partnerships for the prevention of the trafficking of dangerous substances, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 11 to 14 September 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from 30 Governments, 5 international organizations and 15 Internet-related service providers and their associations, including 4 participants from Australia and the Oceania Customs Organization. Participants exchanged best practices and case examples related to the exploitation of private sector agencies and online platforms for the trafficking of dangerous substances with the aim of strengthening international operational cooperation across borders to prevent future misuse of legitimate Internet-related services.

905. A total of 22 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of five countries in the region, namely, Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The e-modules support countries in expanding their capacity for the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and in gaining a deeper understanding of the international drug control framework.

3. National legislation, policy and action

906. In Australia, reforms relating to pharmaceutical opioids continue to be implemented, including smaller pack sizes for immediate-release prescription opioid products and updated product indications, warning statements in text boxes and warning statements regarding the substance class on packaging and inserts. Regulations are now in place to limit the use of fentanyl patches for the treatment of pain in patients with cancer, patients receiving palliative care and in exceptional circumstances, as well as where other analgesics are not suitable or have been proved not to be effective and where the pain has been found to be opioid-responsive. The indication for fentanyl patches was also updated to reflect that they are not for use in patients who are not already tolerant to opioids.

907. The Fiji Revenue and Customs Service established the Air Cargo Control Unit in Nadi, Fiji, in January 2022 under the framework of the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme and funded by the Australian Border Force. The Unit will profile air cargo consignments in order to prevent, inter alia, drug and precursor trafficking.

908. The Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Act (No. 2) 2021 was adopted in New Zealand in November 2021. The legislation provides a permanent legal framework for drug-checking services that conduct scientific tests on unidentified substances in order to determine their likely identity and composition, interpret results and provide information to persons providing samples, with the aim of reducing risk and harm by helping people to make informed decisions about the use of particular drugs, without promoting their use or claiming that their use is safe. The Act was enacted following the expiration of temporary legislation on drug- and substance-checking services that had been in force in the period from December 2020 to December 2021.

909. The New Zealand Parliament enacted the Land Transport (Drug Driving) Amendment Act in March 2022, establishing a roadside oral fluid testing system to test drivers for recent drug use. Random roadside drug testing is expected to come into force as of 2023 to deter drug-impaired driving, and will follow an approach similar to that of breath alcohol testing, with the establishment of criminal limits and infringement thresholds for 25 drugs. Approximately 30 per cent of all road deaths in the country in 2019 were related to the use of substances other than alcohol.

910. The Misuse of Drugs (Classification and Presumption of Supply) Order 2022 was approved by the Parliament of New Zealand in May 2022, changing the classification of

49 substances in the schedules of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975, including the scheduling of a number of fentanyl analogues, synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic opioids, prescription medicines and precursor chemicals. A temporary drug classification order for the benzodiazepine derivative etizolam was issued in New Zealand, effective as of 17 February 2022. The order was due to expire on 16 February 2023, with the possibility of a one-year extension.

911. In December 2021, the Parliament of Papua New Guinea adopted the Controlled Substance Act 2021, and the Dangerous Drugs (Amendment No. 1) Act 2021 amending the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952, providing for the regulation of controlled substances and establishing criminal offences relating to the use of illicit drugs, precursor chemicals and related implements.

912. Following the amendment in November 2020 of the Illicit Drugs Control Act of Tonga, which was aimed at addressing illicit manufacture, trafficking and use of methamphetamine, the Illicit Drugs Control (Amendment) Act 2021 entered into force in November 2021, introducing, inter alia, a section on offences relating to the supply of drugs to children and the involvement of children in drug trafficking.

913. The Parliament of Vanuatu enacted the Industrial Hemp and Medical Cannabis Act in November 2021 to regulate and control the import and cultivation of hemp and cannabis seeds and the manufacture and export of industrial hemp and medical cannabis. Consequently, the Parliament adopted legislation amending the Dangerous Drugs Act to allow for the cultivation of cannabis for the purpose of producing industrial hemp and medical cannabis.

914. A number of countries and territories in Oceania are taking steps to participate in international organizations and initiatives. In November 2021, the Federated States of Micronesia joined INTERPOL. In March 2022, the Papua New Guinea Customs Service joined the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme in order to train and equip customs and other law enforcement personnel in the identification and prevention of the cross-border movement of illicit goods. In June 2022, the Government of Solomon Islands announced that the country would join WCO.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

915. While Australia and New Zealand continue to account for most of the drugs seized in Oceania, trafficking in cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine is increasing in

Pacific island States, where the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine is emerging alongside the continuing illicit cultivation of cannabis.

916. Between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022, the Australian Federal Police seized 18,789 kg of illicit drugs and precursors, comprising 8,139 kg of methamphetamine, 2,564 kg of khat, 2,044 kg of cocaine, 1,371 kg of precursors, 1,155 kg of cannabis, 857 kg of heroin and 440 kg of GBL. Major operations in the period from July 2021 to June 2022 resulted in large seizures of cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin that had been trafficked to and within various parts of Australia. Australian authorities reported a record seizure of more than 11 kg of pure fentanyl concealed in a sea container that had arrived at the port of Melbourne, Australia, in February 2022. All previous seizures of fentanyl in the country had been of quantities smaller than 30 grams. Police made a record seizure of more than 1,800 kg of methamphetamine concealed in two shipments of marble stone in sea containers arriving in Port Botany, Australia.

917. Cocaine and methamphetamine trafficking increased in New Zealand in 2022. A record seizure of more than 700 kg of cocaine was effected in February 2022, in a shipping container that had departed from South America and arrived in Tauranga, New Zealand. In the same month, authorities made a record seizure of 613 kg of methamphetamine that had arrived at Auckland Airport in an air consignment. The Government of New Zealand reported decreased trafficking in cannabis resin, plants and oil, opium, heroin, morphine, diverted or counterfeit pharmaceutical opioids and MDMA.

918. New Zealand reported a significant decrease in seizures of synthetic cannabinoids, eutylone and etizolam in 2021. However, customs and police authorities in New Zealand communicated incidents through the INCB IONICS platform related to numerous seizures of the non-controlled substances GBL and eutylone during Phase 2 of Operation Skipjack.

919. In Fiji, there was a reported increase in drug-related offences related to domestic cannabis cultivation and the use of the country by drug trafficking networks as a transshipment point for drug trafficking to other countries in Oceania. An increase was also seen in drug trafficking within the country. A joint operation between the customs and police services resulted in the detection of methamphetamine at the airport in Nadi, Fiji.

920. In March 2022, the customs authorities of the Northern Mariana Islands seized 2.2 kg of methamphetamine, representing the largest seizure of the substance made by customs authorities in the territory in the last five

years. A further seizure of 1.8 kg of methamphetamine was made in the territory in June 2022.

921. The law enforcement authorities of Samoa reported the seizure of over 1,100 cannabis plants and the eradication of an illicit cannabis cultivation site in November 2021.

922. Information on the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances can be found in the report of the Board for 2022 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁶⁹

5. Prevention and treatment

923. There are indications of increased levels of drug use and treatment demand in Pacific island States. However, there continues to be a lack of data on the situation. **The Board reiterates its recommendation that these States prioritize the collection of data on drug use prevalence and treatment demand. This will aid the development of evidence-based drug control policies and drug prevention and treatment services. The Board continues to encourage bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to these States in this regard.**

924. Wastewater analysis covering about 56 per cent of the population of Australia showed an increase in consumption of methamphetamine over the period from December 2021 to April 2022. Consumption of cocaine, MDMA, tenamfetamine (MDA), oxycodone, fentanyl, cannabis and ketamine decreased, with record lows seen in the consumption of MDMA, tenamfetamine (MDA), oxycodone and fentanyl. While consumption of heroin in capital cities remained relatively stable over that period, consumption of heroin increased outside of capital cities.

925. Among a sample of adults who had injected drugs at least once monthly in the preceding six months and who resided in capital cities in Australia, methamphetamine surpassed heroin as the preferred drug in 2021 for the first time since monitoring began. Reported cocaine use among the sample remained stable compared with 2020, and recent cannabis use was at the lowest level since monitoring began. Six per cent of the people sampled reported recent use of non-prescribed fentanyl, the same level as in 2020. Surveys in 2021 of a sample of people who regularly used MDMA (“ecstasy”) and other illicit stimulants indicated that recent use of “ecstasy” had declined significantly in 2021 but that use of methamphetamine had remained stable between 2020

and 2021. Recent use of cocaine and ketamine had increased significantly over the same period.

926. Among a sample of adults detained by police in Australia in 2021, 77 per cent had tested positive for at least one type of drug, less than the proportion that had done so in 2020 (82 per cent). About half of the people in the sample had tested positive for methamphetamine (50 per cent) or cannabis (45 per cent). Self-reported past-month use of methamphetamine was stable for most of 2021 until declining in October and November, while past-month cannabis use increased in July and August of that year.

927. Restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic led many treatment services to adapt their practices by offering online services and telehealth appointments. In Australia, following a consistent increase in the number of treatment episodes relating to amphetamines between the 12-month reporting period 2011/12 and the 12-month reporting period 2019/20, the number of such treatment episodes declined in the 12-month reporting period 2020/21. A total of 79 per cent of such treatment episodes in the period 2020/21 were for methamphetamine. Treatment for heroin use continued to decline.

928. The Alcohol and Drug Foundation of Australia developed an evidence-based toolkit, Path2Help, to provide advice and additional support for families and friends of people experiencing harm from alcohol and illicit drugs. The toolkit comprises a national online directory linking to locally available support and information services. Through additional resources to support activities aimed at reducing drug and alcohol use and harms during the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of new prevention initiatives were supported, including the development of a new digital and online support programme entitled “become”, for people who have experienced trauma and who may be experiencing problems with alcohol and drugs, and new factsheets for the Positive Choices online portal to support families, students and teachers in dealing with alcohol and other drug issues during the pandemic. Also under the Positive Choices programme, the “Illicit Project”, for the prevention of drug and alcohol use among older adolescents, was launched. In addition, as part of the “Cracks in the Ice” online toolkit, new factsheets were developed, providing information on COVID-19 and crystal methamphetamine use and harms.

929. Preliminary estimates indicate that there were 1,842 drug-induced deaths in Australia in 2020, with the rate of drug overdose deaths involving amphetamines reaching the highest level since monitoring began. The rate of drug overdose deaths involving cocaine increased fivefold in the period 2014–2020. Heroin was the most commonly identified opioid in opioid-induced deaths in 2020. According to the National

¹⁶⁹ E/INCB/2022/4.

Coronial Information System covering Australia and New Zealand, opioid-related deaths reported to a coroner in Australia more than doubled over the period from 2001 – a year in which drug-related deaths were exceptionally low owing to the low availability of heroin – to 2018, to 1,393 deaths. The most commonly identified opioid drugs contributing to death were morphine, codeine, heroin, methadone, oxycodone, tramadol and fentanyl, and opioid-related deaths frequently involved other types of drugs. Between 2001 and 2019, the number of benzodiazepine-related deaths reported to coroners in Australia more than tripled, to 1,238 deaths in 2019. A total of 307 drug-related deaths were recorded in New Zealand in 2019, representing 8 per cent of all reported deaths that year.

930. The research report entitled “The New Zealand illicit drug harm index 2020” was published in 2022 and estimated the total cost of personal and community harm resulting from the use of illicit drugs in New Zealand at \$1,904.3 million New Zealand dollars, with the largest proportion of personal harm attributed to the use of methamphetamine and the largest proportion of community harm attributed to the use of cannabis.

931. According to the New Zealand Health Survey for the period September 2020 to August 2021, the prevalence of past-year cannabis use among people aged 15 years and above was 15.3 per cent. The prevalence of cannabis use at least weekly among the same age group was estimated at 4.5 per cent. The prevalence of past-year use of amphetamine-type stimulants was estimated at 1 per cent among people aged 15 years and above, and at 1.2 per cent among people between 16 and 64 years of age.

932. Wastewater monitoring covering up to 75 per cent of the population of New Zealand found that the quantity of methamphetamine consumed in the second quarter of 2022 was greater than the average quantity detected over the

previous four quarters and that the methamphetamine consumption detected over the period from July 2021 to June 2022 had settled at a higher level than in previous years. Consumption of “ecstasy” continued to increase in most districts after a period of low consumption and availability in 2021. The quantity of cocaine consumption in the second quarter of 2022 was greater than the average for the previous four quarters.

933. The methamphetamine reduction initiative “Te Ara Oranga”, which had been successfully trialled in the Northland region of New Zealand, was expanded to the eastern Bay of Plenty. The initiative links evidence-based health services with police prevention and enforcement activities and involves community organizations. It is aimed at reducing methamphetamine demand through projects that align the resources of the police, district health boards, non-governmental organizations and the community.

934. In 2022, the early warning system of New Zealand, High Alert, which is aimed at reducing drug-related harm in communities, issued an alert about fentanyl found in white powder sold as cocaine or methamphetamine and linked to instances of serious harm. It also issued an alert about the detection, for the first time in the country, of the opioid metonitazene, which has a greater potency than fentanyl. The service also issued notifications about a new synthetic cathinone detected for the first time in the country, dimethylpentylone; the toxic chemical diethylene glycol being marketed as 1,4-butanediol (1,4-BD); a highly potent opioid, *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene (also known as etonitazepyne), found in fake oxycodone tablets; potential adulteration of GBL and GBL-type substances; and misrepresented MDMA.

935. In Fiji, the use of drugs was seen to be increasing as a spillover effect of the use of the country as a trans-shipment point for drug trafficking to other countries in Oceania.