

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 Intra-regional 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 reporting 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

¹³⁹E/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

¹⁴¹E/INCB/2021/1, para. 640.