

D. Asia

East and South-East Asia

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

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

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

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

1. Major developments

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

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

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

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

2. Regional cooperation

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

¹⁴²E/INCB/2022/4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. National legislation, policy and action

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

701. In its annual report for 2021, the Central Narcotics Bureau of Singapore reported increases in total seizures of some substances and decreases for others. The greatest increase was of new psychoactive substances, primarily synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones, both with a nearly tenfold increase in seizures over 2020. There was a 150 per cent increase in total seizures of cannabis, an increase of about 30 per cent in seizures of heroin, and a small increase in seizures of crystalline methamphetamine. There was a 174 per cent increase in seizures of “ecstasy” by weight. Cocaine seizures decreased by 95 per cent, and there were significant decreases in the seizures of commonly sold synthetic drugs such as ketamine, methamphetamine tablets with the street name “yaba”, and “Erimin-5” (containing nimetazepam, a benzodiazepine-derivative depressant, and also known as “lavo1”). Singapore reported that in 2021, 25 drug syndicates were dismantled, more than 2,700 drug traffickers were arrested, and the street value of the drugs seized was estimated to be approximately \$13 million.

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

5. Prevention and treatment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

South Asia

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

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

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

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

1. Major developments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Regional cooperation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. National legislation, policy and action

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

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

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁴⁹ E/INCB/2022/4.

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

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

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

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

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

5. Prevention and treatment

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

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

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

West Asia

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁵²Ibid., booklet 4, p. 52.

1. Major developments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Regional cooperation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. National legislation, policy and action

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

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

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

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

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

¹⁵³ A/76/862-S/2022/485, para. 60.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁵⁶ A/76/862-S/2022/485, para. 60.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 21–22.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Prevention and treatment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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