



INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD



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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The rapid expansion of the illicit synthetic drug industry represents a major global public health threat with potentially disastrous consequences for humankind. Non-medical synthetic drug use and related drug use disorders have become a deadly problem, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths and untold personal and community harm. The thematic chapter of the 2024 Annual Report provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of synthetic drug manufacture, trafficking and use, identifying key trends and patterns as well as potential scenarios for the global proliferation of synthetic drugs.



The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is supporting Governments in addressing this challenge through voluntary multilateral information exchange and coordination in the framework of the INCB Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme and the precursor control programme. The chapter identifies policy gaps in both regulation as well as in supply and demand reduction initiatives, which can be addressed by implementing the recommendations of INCB for a comprehensive response to this serious public health threat. There is also an urgent need to step up efforts in the areas of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, harm reduction, recovery and social reintegration to protect people from these extremely harmful substances.

Treaty-based data reported to INCB reconfirm persistent inequalities in the availability of internationally controlled medicines for use in pain management, anaesthesia, the treatment of neurological and mental health conditions, and opioid use disorder. While the global supply of opiate raw materials exceeds the national requirements reported by Governments to INCB, these may not accurately reflect actual medical needs in some countries. INCB is supporting countries in improving their implementation of the three international drug control treaties, in particular through the INCB Learning programme, with a view to improving the availability of controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes and access to evidence-based and stigma-free services for prevention and treatment, while preventing diversion to illicit channels and misuse. In 2024, I was pleased to sign a memorandum of understanding with the International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care aimed at improving the availability of controlled substances through the exchange of research, data and analysis.

Critically, the need to ensure access and availability also extends to humanitarian emergencies – regardless of whether they result from natural disasters, armed conflict or other human causes – where access by patients to essential controlled medicines and treatment services must be guaranteed. INCB is reminding affected States and exporting countries of the possibility of applying simplified control measures during emergency situations as provided for in the conventions.

Ensuring access to internationally controlled medicines and treatment for drug use disorders for all patients, in all locations and at all times, is part of the right to health. As respect for human rights is inherent to and a prerequisite for the implementation of the drug control conventions, INCB has



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repeatedly called for human rights to be included in the development and implementation of drug policy. Any measure adopted with the purported aim of furthering drug policy but that is inconsistent with universally recognized human rights norms is a violation of the international drug control conventions.

Human rights obligations also encompass the promotion of equality and non-discrimination towards people who use drugs, the prohibition of arbitrary arrest and detention, the right to a fair trial for drug-related crimes, the principle of proportionality, and protection against all forms of cruel and inhuman punishment. INCB continues to remind States that the conventions provide for the application of alternative measures to conviction, punishment and incarceration, including education, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

2024 marked ten years of operation of the Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS), which has facilitated the exchange of information on 100,000 synthetic drug trafficking incidents. It has enabled authorities to share critical information on incidents relating to new psychoactive substances, including highly potent non-medical synthetic opioids which has led to numerous successful operations – most recently Operation Zodiac and Operation African Star, coordinated at the INCB GRIDS Programme Cybercommunications Centre (GC3) in Vienna. These operations have disrupted illicit supply chains and reduced the availability of substances on illicit markets worldwide. 2024 also saw the adoption by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs of the INCB recommendation to place two fentanyl precursors and 16 precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants under international control.

INCB welcomed the finalization and adoption in 2024 of a new United Nations convention on cybercrime and looks forward to its ratification and implementation, especially in the context of addressing the exploitation of Internet-based technologies for drug trafficking.

Jallal Toufiq

President

International Narcotics Control Board





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THE SURGE IN THE PROLIFERATION OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS IS RESHAPING ILLICIT MARKETS AND DISPLACING SOME PLANT-BASED DRUGS SAYS THE INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

The rapid expansion of synthetic drug manufacture and consumption in recent years is posing considerable challenges to public health and the international drug control system says the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in its 2024 Annual Report. INCB, which has been at the forefront of efforts to address the spread of new synthetic substances, says more action is needed.

Synthetic drugs can be much more potent than plant-based drugs and have quickly become a deadly problem with hundreds of thousands of overdose fatalities every year. With demand rising, synthetic drugs are being manufactured and trafficked with ease and criminal actors are making greater quantities of drugs and financial returns.

The INCB Annual Report offers an analysis of the current situation, identifying critical trends and patterns within the illicit synthetic drug industry. The Report also reveals the policy gaps in regulation and interdiction that traffickers seek to exploit and makes a series of recommendations to address both supply and demand.

Trends in synthetic drug manufacturing and trafficking

Designed to mimic the effects of plant-based drugs but many times stronger in terms of potency and duration of action, synthetic substances can be easily manufactured, with little technical or scientific expertise required and with reduced labour and operational costs.

The proliferation of these psychoactive substances, including non-medical synthetic opioids, provides illicit actors with virtually limitless ways to fundamentally reshape drug markets.

For criminal actors, manufacturing synthetic drugs has some advantages over plant-based drug cultivation and trafficking with the possibility of using different precursor materials, often faster than regulatory and enforcement agencies can keep up with.

Plant-based drugs require extensive acreage and human resources for planting, harvesting and processing and are vulnerable to weather conditions, satellite detection and forced eradication. Coca bush, for instance, requires producers to establish farms at high altitude in remote, concealed areas to lower the risk of interdiction and eradication.

For the manufacture of synthetic drugs, there is a reduced need for labour or land for cultivation. The illicit production of synthetic drugs can be done in small makeshift facilities that are difficult for law enforcement authorities to detect or industrial-grade facilities for large-scale manufacture.

The manufacturing can be located anywhere and is often placed closer to transit and destination markets. The same equipment can be used for different synthetic outputs, using chemicals in different combinations to manufacture various drugs with different potencies.





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The inclusion of fentanyl, carfentanil or nitazenes in synthetic drug manufacture has increased drug potency – often to fatal levels. With the more potent synthetic opioids having an increased potency-to-weight ratio, smaller volumes are trafficked which are harder to detect. While the global illicit demand for plant-based drugs still exceeds the current supply of synthetic substances, seizures have begun to outpace some of those of plant-based drugs.

Trends in precursor and pre-precursor use

Restrictions on controlled precursors give an incentive to manufacturers to create new compounds by shifting the molecular structure or to use non-scheduled designer or “masked” chemical additives outside national or international control systems.

To conceal precursor supply chains, synthetic drug manufacturers obtain small batches of different precursors from multiple sources, rather than on an industrial scale, to avoid drawing the attention of regulators or law enforcement authorities. Many of these chemical precursors, such as pseudoephedrine, present in common cold medicines, are dual use, since they also have a licit medical purpose which is a challenge to regulate without affecting licit markets.

Changing patterns in movement, marketing and demand

Traffickers shift manufacture, movement and marketing tactics to keep operating costs down and profit margins up as well as to reduce risks of interdiction. This can be in response to more effective law and regulatory enforcement.

Smaller consignments of lighter weight synthetic drugs are possible, which are easier to conceal, and different smuggling methods are being used, such as drones, couriers and postal services.

Traffickers have also combined shipments of counterfeit or illicitly manufactured drugs and non-scheduled substances, such as cannabis, cocaine, ketamine and methamphetamine. This allows the use of established trafficking routes for traditional drug markets while diversifying the range of products available to consumers.

Health and social consequences

In addition to skyrocketing overdose deaths in some places, laboratory analysis and research shows that some of these synthetic substances pose a risk to cardiovascular health and can lead to psychological and physical dependence and substance use disorders.

Synthetic opioids present the greatest risk of overdose but other synthetic drugs also pose severe health risks to people who use them. MDMA, commonly known as “ecstasy”, amphetamines, ketamine and substances such as “K2” and “spice” all have acute and long-term health implications. For drugs such as amphetamine and methamphetamine, which are particularly addictive, the tolerance of consumers increases over time, meaning that they require ever-larger doses that could pose a greater risk of overdose and death.





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Synthetic drugs may pose additional increased safety risks and threats to public health because of dangerous manufacturing and trafficking processes. Toxic fumes, fires and explosions can jeopardize the safety of manufacturers, first responders, law enforcement personnel and other people. Dumping of chemical waste by illicit manufacturers can cause environmental damage and harm to local communities.

The transportation of synthetic materials by sea, air and ground also poses toxicologic risks to nearby passengers, postal workers, customs and law enforcement personnel and even police dogs due to the risk of leakage and airborne exposure.

Legal challenges

With traffickers able to rapidly shift to using new precursors and pre-precursors to manufacture synthetic drugs, control and regulatory authorities are constantly trying to catch up. The reactive and multistep international scheduling process is challenged by the rapid emergence of substances that could be used to illicitly manufacture synthetic drugs.

In the future, traffickers will probably find ways to use artificial intelligence to identify new molecular structures for precursors and pre-precursor chemicals to stay a step ahead of control and regulation regimes.

Specific emerging regional threats

In North America primarily but also in other regions, carfentanil, fentanyl and nitazenes pose some of the greatest, most immediate risks to public health. There are 150 deaths every day related to synthetic opioid overdoses in the United States, with fentanyl accounting for more than two thirds of those fatalities.

In the Middle East and Africa, the manufacture, trafficking and consumption of amphetamine-type stimulants is accelerating. Resources for drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes in the region are already limited, so there could be serious, long-term harm to people and considerable problems for the regions' ill-equipped healthcare sectors.

Trafficking in amphetamine-type stimulants to markets in Southern, East and West Africa has been steadily increasing and demand for methamphetamine has begun to surpass demand for cannabis, cocaine, heroin and methaqualone in some places.

In South-East Asia's Golden Triangle cross-border area, methamphetamine production has increased with organized criminal syndicates based in the region expanding production and adopting industrial-scale manufacturing facilities.

Afghanistan, which was the world's leading illicit opium producer, supplying over 90 per cent of global quantities, has sharply reduced illicit production. The 2022 opium poppy cultivation ban and eradication efforts by the de facto authorities have already led to drug traffickers beginning to identify opportunities for other synthetic drugs.





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The looming deficit in heroin supply in Europe will likely create greater space for the synthetic drug market to expand on the continent. Nitazenes are being marketed as “synthetic heroin” with confirmed overdoses occurring in Estonia and Poland and seizures reported in France and Ireland. European countries remain generally unprepared for the introduction of nitazenes to their markets.

In Africa there has been a drastic increase in the proliferation of falsified pharmaceutical synthetic drugs and their non-medical use. As in North America, dependency on medical prescription pain medication in licit markets in Africa led to broader misuse of synthetic drugs, as people sought out affordable alternatives.

The misuse of tramadol is increasing in West, Central and North Africa because of its psychoactive properties, and represents a key concern for public health and safety.

In East and South-East Asia illicit ketamine manufacture and trafficking has steadily increased. Used as an anaesthetic and in veterinary medicine, the substance has been diverted from licit markets or illicitly manufactured for non-medical use, posing a risk for the drug’s licit accessibility.

Actions and initiatives being taken to address synthetic drugs

Using the three drug control conventions which underpin international drug control, United Nations agencies and Member States have cooperated on early warning and prevention systems and science-informed health responses, and increased the capacity to disrupt illicit drug and precursor trafficking.

A series of initiatives have been developed by INCB to respond to the increasing manufacture of and trafficking in precursor and pre-precursor materials used in the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs.

Various INCB online communication platforms and tools allow exporting and importing Governments to determine the legitimacy or illegitimacy of suspicious consignments transporting controlled precursor materials, designer pre-precursors and manufacturing equipment. They also offer Member States actionable intelligence exchange on the trafficking of non-medical synthetic opioids and chemical precursors and associated illegal enterprises.

Many low- and middle-income countries have inadequate drug-testing laboratory capacity and lack the personnel and resources to conduct routine inspections that could lead to seizures and to the dismantling of trafficking networks. There are limited demand reduction and treatment services in many countries and little in the way of awareness campaigns to educate at-risk communities about synthetic drug consumption.

Policy recommendations for a comprehensive response

While States and institutions have built a patchwork of mechanisms, there needs to be a comprehensive, coordinated strategy to sufficiently prepare for the increasing threat of illicit synthetic drugs.

The INCB Report has a range of recommendations for Governments and relevant authorities on national coordination, early warning and continuous monitoring, law enforcement, public-private partnership, public awareness, prevention, treatment and recovery services.





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The recommendations could lead to more thorough, consistent laboratory testing to better protect people, improved information sharing and a more comprehensive intelligence picture of synthetic drug networks, their methods and the nature of their operations.

Better private-public partnerships could encourage e-commerce sites and platforms to take a more active role in identifying criminal activity and sharing actionable intelligence with relevant authorities. Public awareness campaigns by Governments could help to reduce the demand for synthetic drugs and decrease misuse and risk of overdose from synthetic drugs.

As the illicit synthetic drug industry continues to rapidly evolve, there are new, urgent challenges that need to be addressed. Otherwise, criminal actors will continue to exploit regulatory loopholes and generate new synthetic substances that pose great harm to people. By working together, Member States can take effective measures to counter the highly complex situation of illicit drug manufacture, trafficking and consumption.



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INCB DATA RECONFIRM INEQUITIES IN ACCESS TO MEDICINES CONTAINING CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES

Unequal access to and availability of affordable opioid analgesics, such as morphine, is a persistent problem, according to analysis of treaty-based data reported by Governments to INCB.

Levels of consumption of opioids for pain management remain far higher in Western and Central Europe, North America and Oceania than in all other regions. Levels of consumption in other regions are insufficient to adequately meet the medical needs of the populations. In 2023, this was of particular concern in East and South-East Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, South Asia and Africa.

The regional imbalances do not stem from a shortage of opiate raw materials with global supply exceeding the demand reported to INCB by Governments. However, the estimated requirements of several countries may not accurately reflect actual medical needs.

INCB urges opioid-manufacturing countries to increase the manufacture of morphine preparations for use in pain management and palliative care, and also to make them more broadly available and more affordable, in particular in low- and middle-income countries.

Only an estimated ten per cent of people with opioid use disorder have access to opioid agonist therapy. In some countries with a high prevalence of people who inject drugs and opioid use disorder, consumption of methadone and buprenorphine and the availability of opioid agonist therapy services are limited or non-existent. In view of the increase in non-medical use of opioids and the associated negative health and social consequences, INCB encourages countries to develop programmes and services to address the problem, including use of controlled substances such as methadone and buprenorphine for treatment and opioid agonist therapy services.

Medicines controlled under the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 play a crucial role in managing various health conditions, including ADHD, anxiety, narcolepsy and neurological disorders such as epilepsy and sleep disorders. While online pharmacies and medical consultations have made access to medications more convenient, they have also contributed to non-rational prescribing practices. At the same time, there is a lack of access to essential medicines, stigma surrounding mental health in general and the unbalanced allocation of healthcare resources.

The 2024 Report highlights challenges in providing access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes during humanitarian emergencies caused by armed conflict. The drug control treaties allow for the expedited movement of controlled substances for medical use during emergencies. INCB is calling upon States exercising effective control of foreign territories in the context of armed conflict to take urgent action to ensure unimpeded access to medications, including those containing internationally controlled substances. INCB also calls upon such States to continue to provide access to controlled substances for opioid agonist therapy if such treatment was provided prior to occupation.





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PRECURSORS REPORT

International control of two additional fentanyl precursors and two groups of amphetamine-type stimulant precursors enters into force

On 3 December 2024, two fentanyl precursors and two series of closely related designer precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants (16 substances in total) were added to Table I of the 1988 Convention. The 16 precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants are all designer (custom-made) precursors with no known legitimate uses and no regular trade. The scheduling decisions by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs based on recommendations by INCB were the first of their kind as they involved several closely related chemicals which could all be used in illicit manufacture in the same manner.

Major trends in licit trade and trafficking of precursors

- The global quantity of ephedrines (i.e. ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in all forms) seized, at over 15 tons, surpassed the quantities seized in the previous two years combined. Ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are precursors with legitimate medical uses that can be diverted for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine.
- Illicit methamphetamine manufacturing methods first observed in Mexico are now being encountered in South Asia and Southern Africa.
- Large quantities of amphetamine-based “captagon” have been seized in West Asia but no seizures of the required precursors were reported in the region.
- Canada, Mexico and the United States of America are the only countries that have reported notable seizures of fentanyl precursors. In October 2024, the Netherlands reported the first seizure of a fentanyl precursor in Europe.
- Trafficking in the heroin precursor acetic anhydride destined for Afghanistan continues, although on a smaller scale.
- Seized cocaine precursor potassium permanganate has predominantly been sourced from within the country in which the seizure has been made.
- More reports are being received of seizures of precursors and the illicit manufacture of synthetic cathinones.

Monitoring equipment and excipients used in illicit drug manufacture becomes key

INCB continued to promote the implementation of a strategic approach to address the use of equipment, such as tableting machines and excipients in illicit drug manufacture. A worldwide survey was conducted among Governments to better understand national action and international cooperation on the control of equipment. This led to INCB convening the fourth expert group meeting on illicit drug manufacturing equipment and article 13 of the 1988 Convention.





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During the reporting period, relevant authorities of different countries exchanged 130 equipment-related incidents through the Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS). The incidents involved seizures of new or second-hand custom-made or modified equipment. The majority of incidents (115) involved tableting machines, followed by punches and dies, reaction vessels, distillation apparatus, industrial mixers and glassware. Most of the incidents (109) were communicated by the United States with all the seizures being made at borders.

Preventing diversion of chemicals through the “know your industries” principle

INCB has continued to reiterate the crucial role of cooperation with the private sector as an effective strategy to prevent the diversion of and trafficking in chemicals used for illicit drug manufacture. In the reporting period, the Board conducted several national “mapping exercises” in cooperation with pilot countries. The mapping exercise is a national analysis, carried out under the guidance of INCB, of the different categories of industries that might be targeted by drug traffickers seeking to divert both controlled precursors and non-scheduled chemicals. The mapping exercises also include the identification of key partners in the private sector, such as industry associations and is one of the initial steps for establishing or strengthening public-private partnerships to prevent the diversion of chemicals and equipment into illicit drug manufacture.



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REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Africa

Africa continues to be seriously affected by drug trafficking. Significant seizures of cocaine and other drugs in the Sahel are evidence of large-scale trafficking through the region.

Evidence shows an increase in cocaine use and associated harms in African countries, probably a spillover effect from the use of Africa as a transit region for cocaine trafficking to Europe. Data however remain scarce.

The use of kush continues to be of concern in West Africa. Kush is a drug mixture that may contain a number of psychoactive substances.

Several countries in Africa have introduced measures to prioritize prevention and treatment programmes over punitive measures. However, the number of people receiving treatment for drug use disorders in Africa remains very low.

Africa remains a region of particular concern in terms of the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes.

Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

Development in the region is being hindered by drug trafficking and the resultant decline in public safety.

There is a lack of recent surveys on drug use in most countries in the region. This hampers assessment of the extent of drug misuse and the development of evidence-based responses.

A very high proportion of people aged under 25 are in treatment for drug use in the region, representing the second highest level globally, after South America.

North America

The opioid crisis remains a serious challenge for countries in North America although the number of overdose deaths related to synthetic opioids declined slightly for the first time in several years.

Some drug decriminalization measures in the Province of British Columbia, Canada, and the State of Oregon, United States, were rolled back due to concerns related to drug use in public spaces and increases in overdose deaths.





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South America

Drug seizures in the Amazon states in Brazil increased between 2022 and 2023 in parallel with a reduction in the rate of deforestation. This is believed to be due to the stronger presence of government actors.

The first decrease in illicit coca bush cultivation in Peru in eight years was recorded. The UNODC coca crop monitoring report for 2023 recorded a 2.3 per cent reduction in the area of coca cultivation in Peru in 2023 (92,784 ha) compared to the record level recorded in 2022.

Illicit coca bush cultivation in Colombia reached a new all-time high of 253,000 ha in 2023, representing an increase of 10 per cent compared with 2022. **Potential cocaine production in the country rose by 53 per cent from 2022 to 2023,** reaching 2,664 tons.

Illicit drug-related activities and related crimes against the environment continue to generate violence and threaten vulnerable populations and biodiversity throughout South America, particularly in the Amazon region.

Drug-related urban violence continues to affect South America. A sharp increase in homicide rates in Ecuador was linked to the record-breaking level of coca cultivation in Colombia and the use of Ecuador as a transit area along drug trafficking routes to North America and Europe.

Asia

East and South-East Asia

The illicit synthetic drug market in East and South-East Asia continues to grow. This is largely owing to increasing levels of organized crime, gaps in law enforcement, challenges to governance, political instability in Myanmar and increasing levels of illicit manufacture.

Opium production in South-East Asia increased during the 2022–2023 harvest. Myanmar led both regional and global production. Seizures of methamphetamine and ketamine reached unprecedented levels.

There are high levels of drug use in some countries in the region. Cannabis is the drug most used, followed by methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances.

An increasing focus on treatment and rehabilitation approaches that combine treatment by specialized institutions with community integration was reported by some countries in the region.

South Asia

South Asia and South-West Asia are home to about half of the estimated 60 million people worldwide who used opioids for non-medical purposes in 2022. The use of opiates, in particular opium and heroin, is reported mainly by countries in South Asia.

Seizures of methamphetamine originating in countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including Bangladesh and India, increased significantly in the decade from 2013 to 2022. Seizures increased from 7.2 tons to 20.4 tons.





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An upsurge in drug trafficking incidents across South Asia was recorded during the first quarter of 2024 as compared with the last quarter of 2023. Major seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants were reported.

South Asia continues to be the region with the lowest levels of licit consumption of opioid analgesics in the world. INCB stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries in the region.

West Asia

Illicit poppy cultivation in Afghanistan increased in 2024 but was still lower than the levels prior to the “drug ban” announced by the de facto authorities in 2022. At 12,800 ha, the area of illicit cultivation was 19 per cent more than the previous year. Along the main opiate trafficking routes there was a decrease in seizures of opiates originating in Afghanistan.

Central Asia faces a growing threat of misuse of synthetic drugs, including synthetic cathinones, various pharmaceutical preparations and new psychoactive substances, a trend that indicates a shift from opiates to those substances.

Methamphetamine manufacture appears to have continued to increase in Afghanistan. This is evidenced by increased seizures of the substance in neighbouring countries in Central Asia, in South-West Asia and in Türkiye.

Instability in the Syrian Arab Republic since 2011 continued to fuel a surge in the availability and industrial-scale manufacture of “captagon”, which has become integrated with increased trafficking in crystal methamphetamine.

Europe

The volume and range of substances available in illicit drug markets in Europe pose a considerable risk to public health. They also create new challenges for law enforcement, regulation and the provision of treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use.

European Union member States reported the seizure of a record amount of cocaine for the sixth year in a row. Cocaine markets remain highly dynamic, as organized crime groups continue to use a variety of trafficking methods to evade detection. The rise in the availability of cocaine has contributed to increased health risks and social harms and a surge in related criminal activities across the region.

Parts of Europe have seen an increase in the non-medical use of ketamine. Evidence suggests that ketamine is consistently available in several national illicit drug markets across Europe. There is a need for closer monitoring of the substance, combined with enhanced international collaboration to counter its illicit distribution.

Several European countries continue to take steps towards establishing programmes to provide access to cannabis for non-medical purposes. This is inconsistent with the provisions of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended.





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Expanded mandates of the European Union Drugs Agency will result in increased capacity to assist the member States of the European Union in addressing drug-related challenges. The agency was formerly known as the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

Oceania

Large-scale shipments of cocaine and methamphetamine continue to be trafficked through the Pacific island States to Australia and New Zealand, driven by increasing demand and higher prices. In 2024, multi-ton seizures were made in Pacific island States, which were increasingly becoming destinations for the illicit manufacture and storage of drugs, with transnational organized criminal groups exploiting vulnerabilities.

Drug use in the Pacific island States was reported to be increasing and posed a challenge owing to the very limited capacity for prevention and treatment. This is coupled with a lack of data on the extent of the situation.

The availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes is inadequate in some Pacific island States.

Non-parties to the three international drug control conventions remain concentrated in Oceania. Accession to and implementation of the conventions would support action to address the drug problem in the region and help improve the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes, as well as facilitate mutual legal assistance to address drug trafficking.





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INCB INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT MEMBER STATES

INCB Learning

INCB Learning is the Board's initiative to enhance the ability of Governments to estimate and assess their requirements for internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, in compliance with the three international drug control treaties, with the aim of promoting adequate availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their misuse. The initiative includes five e-modules for online learning (in English, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as Portuguese) along with virtual and in-person training and seminars.

In December 2023, INCB Learning conducted an in-person subregional training seminar in Caracas for 40 officials from Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Cuba, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

As of 1 November 2024, 1,502 officials from 154 countries and territories have enrolled in INCB Learning e-modules. The Board encourages Governments to register officials from their competent national authorities for the e-modules.

INCB Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme

The INCB GRIDS Programme focal point network enables the rapid exchange of information and alerts and the development of intelligence which facilitates operational action to assist in investigations and the dismantling of organized criminal groups trafficking in non-scheduled dangerous substances, such as new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids.

The number of real-time incidents communicated through the INCB IONICS platform has consistently grown over the years, surpassing 100,000 exchanges as of 2024.

Leveraging the Project Ion and the global Operational Partnerships to Interdict Opioids' Illicit Distribution (OPIOIDS) project law and regulatory enforcement focal point networks, INCB coordinated Operation Zodiac. This targeted non-medical benzodiazepines, including those diverted from the legitimate pharmaceutical industry and those that were substandard, falsified or otherwise illicitly manufactured, as well as novel new benzodiazepines with no known legitimate uses. The operation resulted in 465 seizures over a four-week period, amounting to 286,000 tablets as well as 30 kg and 300 ml of seized benzodiazepines.

The first subregional special operation, "African Star", targeting shipments of falsified, substandard and other illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, was successfully coordinated from 9 to 15 June in East Africa. Consignments comprising 92 unauthorized, falsified, substandard or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals totalling over 115,000 units and 1.15 kg were seized during the four-day operation led by the authorities of Kenya and Uganda with the support of the GRIDS Programme.





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Over the past year, 42 training events were held through the GRIDS Programme for more than 900 law and regulatory enforcement officers and postal inspection officers from 80 Governments and seven international organizations.

In the past year, seven global alerts and special notices were circulated to Project Ion and OPIOIDS Project focal points for voluntary action by law, regulatory and private sector counterparts. This included one special alert relating to global trafficking in ketamine, along with four special notices addressing the increasing prevalence of synthetic opioids marketed as kush in West Africa, strengthened regulations on veterinary medicines in China, new controls over 46 new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids in China and reports of two emerging veterinary medicines being detected in North America.

INCB precursor control programme

Monitoring of licit trade

The INCB PEN Online system continued to provide an effective mechanism for monitoring trade in internationally controlled precursors under the 1988 Convention, with the tool now regularly used by 145 countries. In addition, the analogous PEN Online Light system, another of the Board's initiatives to prevent chemicals not listed in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention from reaching illicit laboratories, is currently being used by 42 exporting and importing Governments.

Law enforcement operations and intelligence sharing

The INCB Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS) is a platform that allows law enforcement and other relevant authorities of different countries to exchange information about precursor and equipment seizures. At the time of drafting of the 2024 Precursors Report, PICS had more than 700 active users from 130 countries and territories, representing 325 agencies in all regions. Over 4,800 incidents relating to precursors and equipment had been communicated through the system since its inception.

Other tools and resources

To assist Governments in addressing the diversion of non-scheduled chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of drugs and the proliferation of designer precursors, INCB developed and disseminated to all competent national authorities a list of substances that fall within the extended definitions described in the limited international special surveillance list (ISSL) of non-scheduled substances. The Board also amended the list to include two new sections on the following: (a) frequently seen precursors of substances recently scheduled under the 1961 Convention and the 1971 Convention and of new psychoactive substances; and (b) frequently seen cutting agents, adulterants and excipients. Moreover, INCB disseminated the most recent information on control measures applied by Governments to chemicals that are not in Tables I or II of the 1988 Convention but that may be used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, controlled precursors or new psychoactive substances.





INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is the independent monitoring body for the implementation of the United Nations international drug control conventions. It was established in 1968 in accordance with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961. It had predecessors under the former drug control treaties as far back as the time of the League of Nations.

Based on its activities, INCB publishes an annual report that is submitted to the United Nations Economic and Social Council through the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The report provides a comprehensive survey of the drug control situation in various parts of the world. As an impartial body, INCB tries to identify and predict dangerous trends and suggests necessary measures to be taken.