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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.