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Research

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTERESTS



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2023 WORLD DRUG REPORT: KEY MESSAGES



2023 WORLD DRUG REPORT: KEY MESSAGES

The year 2023 marks the midpoint of the work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The global drug phenomenon continues to challenge both the implementation of SDG targets and efforts to promote peace, security and human rights.



World drug-related challenges are hindering SDG progress across all areas, from peace and justice to health and human rights, and the environment and equality.

Prevention and access to evidence-informed treatment and HIV and Hepatitis services must be stepped up; otherwise, drug-related challenges will leave more people behind.



Law enforcement responses need to keep pace with astonishingly agile criminal business models, as well as the proliferation of synthetic drugs, which are cheap and easy to bring to market.

Public health must remain the priority in the context of rapidly developing drug control regulation, in particular in relation to medical use, and countries must invest more in research to monitor the effects of policy and inform responses.



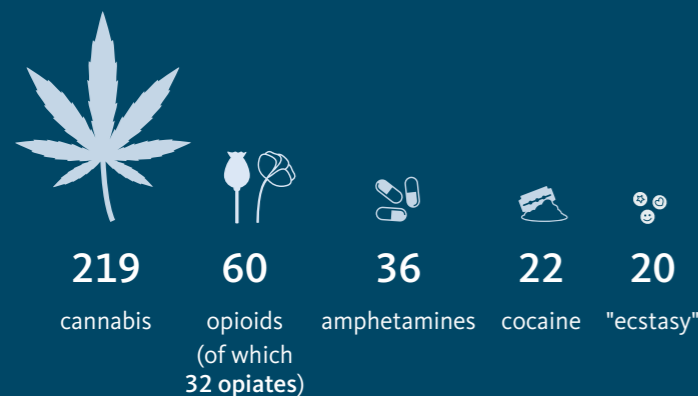


KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE

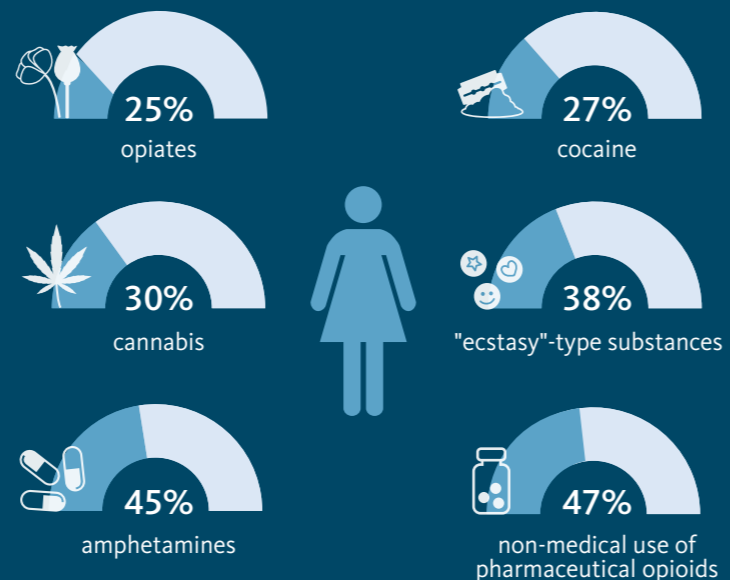
People who use drugs, 2021

296
million people ↑23%
over 10 years

DRUG USE



Women among people who use drugs, 2021



People who inject drugs, 2021

13.2
million people who inject drugs

6.6 million living with hepatitis C

1.6 million living with HIV

1.4 million living with HIV and hepatitis C

People with drug use disorders, 2021

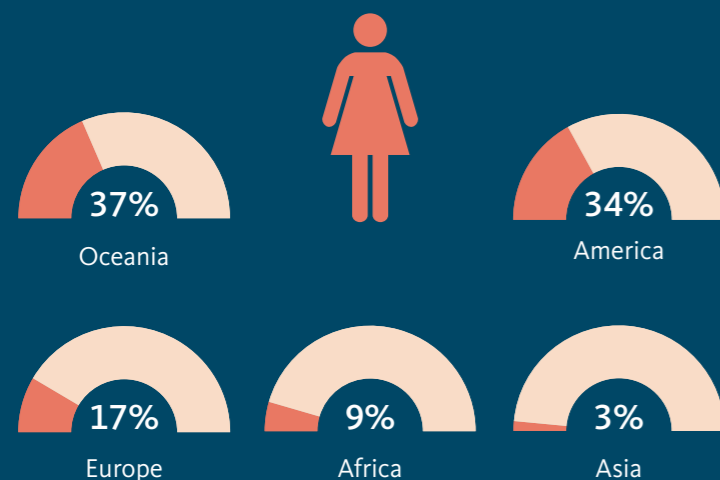
39.5
million people ↑45%
over 10 years

1 in 5
in treatment

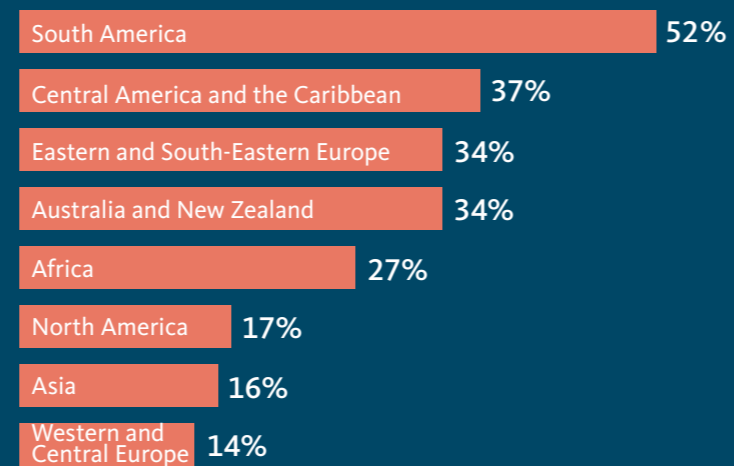


Women in treatment, 2021

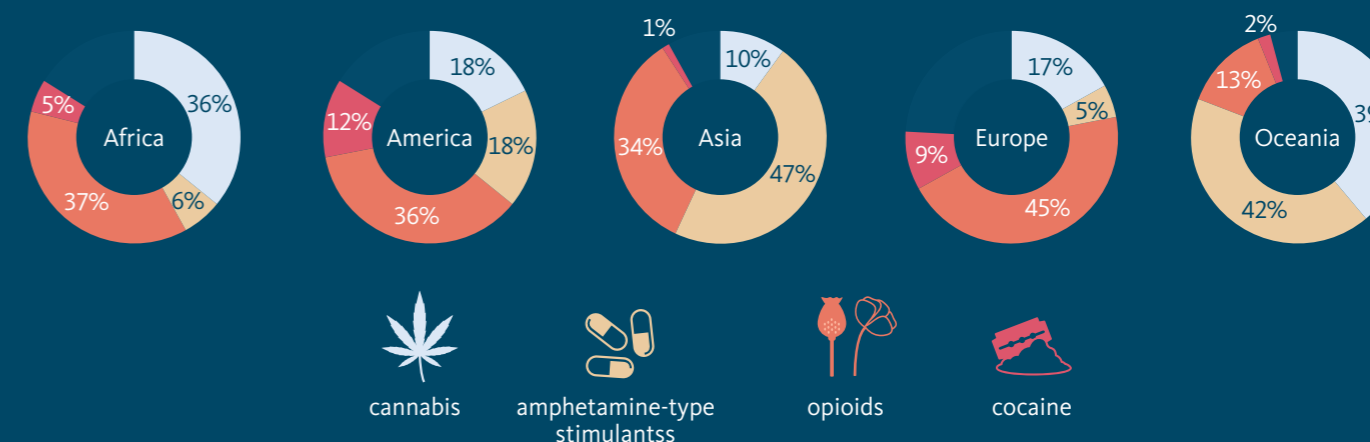
DRUG TREATMENT



People under 25 years old in treatment, 2021



Primary drug of people in treatment, 2021





KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE

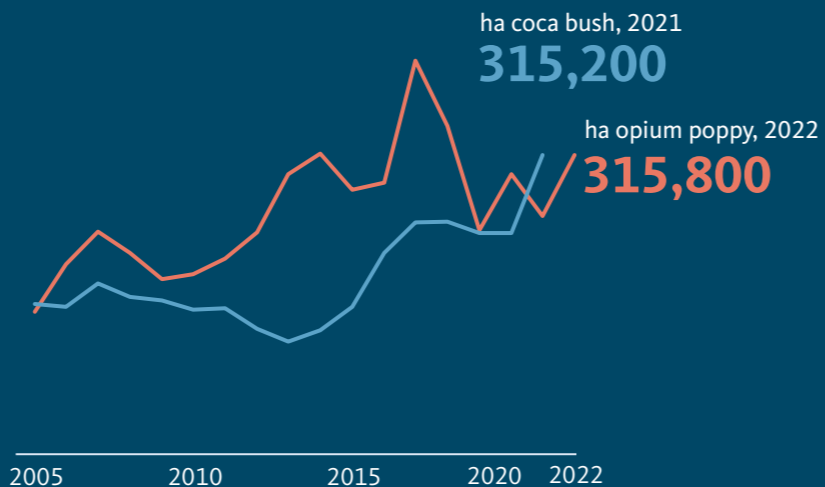
Global cultivation

CULTIVATION

coca bush

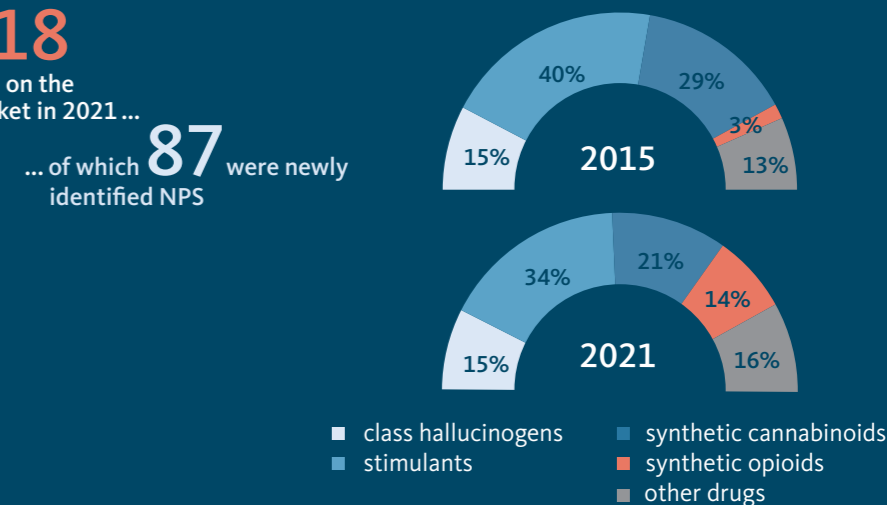
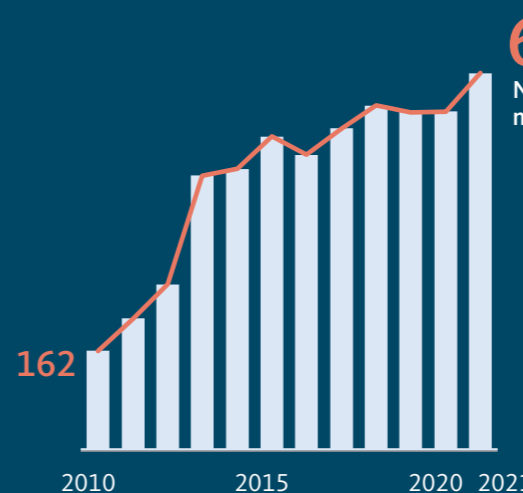


opium poppy



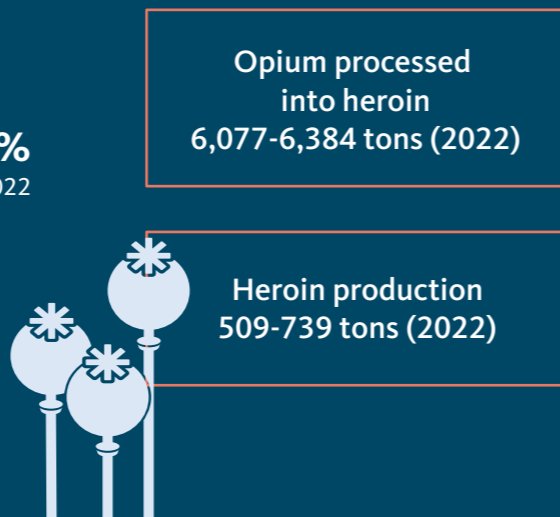
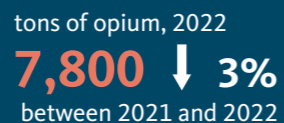
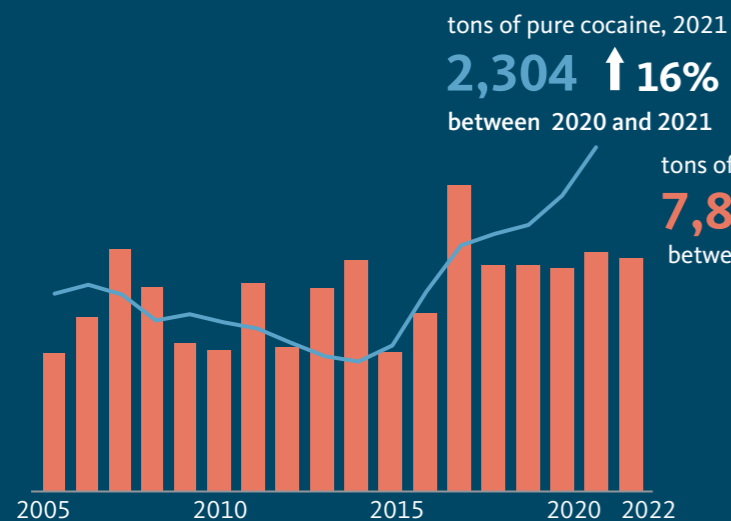
NPS on the global market

NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)



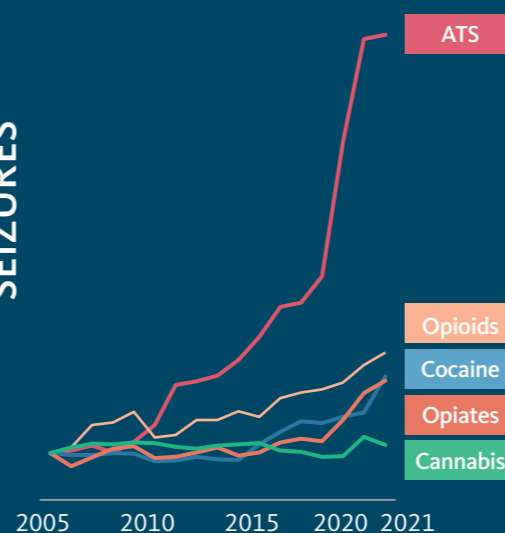
Global production

PRODUCTION

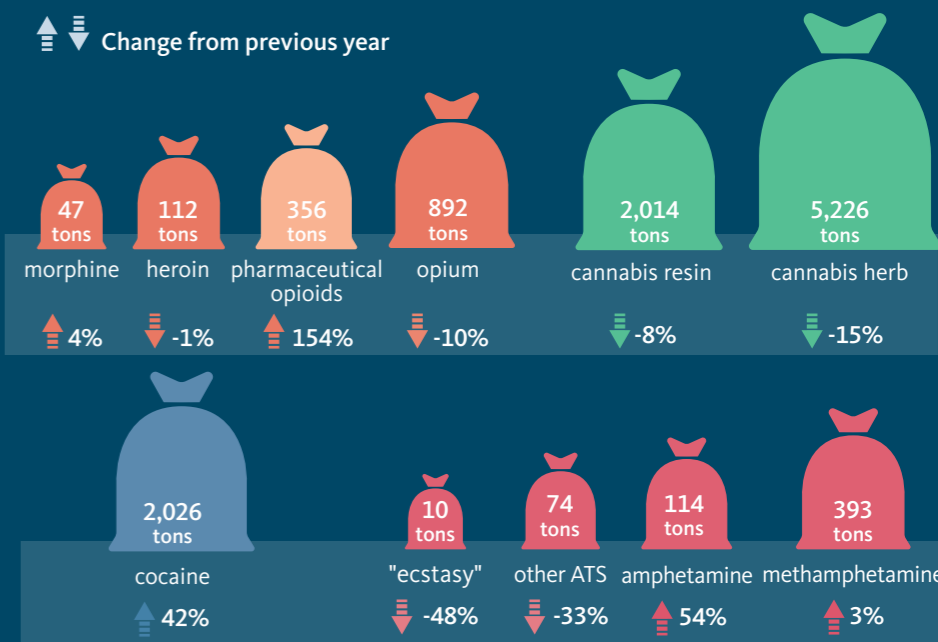


Trends in quantity of drugs seized

SEIZURES



Global quantities of drugs seized, 2021





KEY FINDINGS AND POSSIBLE RESPONSES

INEQUALITIES, DISPARITIES, PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Inequality and social and economic disparities continue to drive and be driven by the drug phenomenon, threatening public health and human rights. Disparities between the global North and South, urban and rural settings, and across subpopulations all contribute to the harms from drugs.

- a. Disparities in **access to and availability of medicines** controlled under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 have remained. In 2021, 86 per cent of the global population lived in countries where availability of pharmaceutical opioids for medical use was below the global average.
- b. Drug use disorders and other **mental health** conditions are closely interconnected: mental health conditions increase the risk of developing drug use disorders, and drugs pose the risk of exacerbating mental health problems if taken outside medical supervision. With an estimated one in eight people globally living with a diagnosed mental health condition, the need to address mental health issues in drug use prevention and treatment has increasingly become a priority.
- c. **Young people** remain the group most vulnerable to using drugs. Globally, in 2021, those aged between 15 and 16 had an annual prevalence of cannabis use of 5.34 per cent, compared with 4.3 per cent for adults. Drug use is also particularly harmful to young people. In some regions, young people are more severely affected by substance use disorder: in Africa, 70 per cent of people receiving drug treatment are below the age of 35.
- d. The **demand for treating drug-related disorders remains largely unmet and disparities in access persist**. Globally, about one in five people with drug use disorders received treatment in 2021, with large disparities across regions and in the type and quality of treatment received. Not all forms of treatment respect human rights or are evidence-based. Women face barriers in accessing drug treatment services: in 2021, 45 per cent of those who used amphetamine-type stimulants in the past year were women, but

only 27 per cent of those in treatment are women. Overall, the lowest proportions of women in drug-related treatment are in Asia and Africa and the highest proportions are in the subregions of Australia and New Zealand as well as in North America.

- e. **Setbacks to service provision during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic** left some without access to treatment or other services. Most countries that reported treatment delivery aggregates to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) before and after the pandemic noted a decline in the number of persons in drug treatment between the periods 2018–2019 and 2020–2021, with further declines within the period of 2020 to 2021.
- f. Different patterns of drug use and unequal access to services exacerbate inequality in **treatment provision**. Although innovations in service provision that started during the pandemic appear to have resulted in early benefits, challenges remain due to the digital divide, especially in certain geographical areas and in certain marginalized populations that are hard to reach, including the homeless and injecting drug users. Other marginalized groups, such as those with a history of incarceration, people displaced by humanitarian emergencies and sex workers, face other barriers in accessing services. Moreover, use of drugs by marginalized populations may be more intense, putting them at greater risk to continued harms, relapse and other related health outcomes. For example, injecting drug use in 2020 was associated with a risk of contracting HIV that was 35 times higher than that associated with non-injecting drug use. Women who inject drugs are 1.2 times more likely than men to be living with HIV.
- g. Different patterns can also be witnessed between **urban and rural settings**. For example, in some rural areas illicit drug cultivation and trafficking create opportunities for other crimes, including crimes that affect the environment, and impoverished and vulnerable populations are trapped in a vicious cycle with uncertain access to resources and the rule of law. For example, in the tri-border area between Brazil, Colombia and Peru in the Amazon Basin, drug trafficking organizations increasingly violate the human rights, safety and well-being of rural populations.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Reducing inequalities and the gap in access to treatment and comprehensive services to minimize the adverse public health and social consequences of drug use in a continuum of care for people who use drugs, especially vulnerable and marginalized populations, is critical.

- » **Large-scale drug-use prevention initiatives** that are school-, family- and community-based are needed to reduce the risk of increasing drug use disorders, in particular in view of the current high prevalence level of mental health conditions. Higher socioeconomic groups have shown a greater propensity to initiate drug use than lower socioeconomic groups but it is the lower socioeconomic groups that pay the higher price, as they are more likely to suffer from drug use disorders.
- » In order to be effective, the approach to treatment service provision must be **voluntary and based on human rights**. As the drug phenomenon continues to evolve, Member States will need to redouble efforts to ensure access to quality services that are shown to reduce drug use disorders, both globally and nationally and across all subpopulations.
- » **Reducing stigma** faced by people who use drugs will make drug-related treatment and interventions more accessible and effective for people who need such services. Gains have been made during the pandemic to **reduce barriers in accessing services**, which have shown promise in attracting and retaining patients.
- » Given the disproportionate levels of harm and the large gap in accessing services experienced by certain populations who use drugs most intensively, additional effort is needed to design and implement **policies and programmes addressing the specific needs of populations**. It is important to tailor programmes to individuals experiencing homelessness, sex workers, those suffering from trauma and others who face barriers in accessing services, including people with additional mental health comorbidities, those currently and formerly incarcerated and women who are pregnant.
- » The importance of **addressing mental health in efforts to prevent as well as treat drug use** disorders needs to be given greater priority. Current scientific research and clinical trials involving psychedelics indicate their potential for treating some mental health conditions, but medical supervision is a critical component to ensuring their benefits while limiting harms.
- » The record high number of displaced persons requires far greater investment in providing drug-use prevention initiatives and drug-related treatment and services to minimize the adverse public health and social consequences in a continuum of care in **humanitarian settings**.
- » Political and financial commitments are needed to scale up interventions that **address structural and economic inequalities, harmful sociocultural norms, gender-based inequalities and gender-based violence** that drive HIV and hepatitis epidemics among people who use drugs.

THE CONTINUUM OF DRUG-RELATED SERVICES





KEY FINDINGS AND POSSIBLE RESPONSES

ILLICIT DRUG ECONOMIES, CONVERGING CRIMES, DISPLACEMENT AND CONFLICT

Illicit drug economies, converging crimes, displacement and conflict are accelerating environmental devastation and degrading human rights, especially in vulnerable groups

- a. Drug trafficking is compounding criminal threats that harm vulnerable communities by degrading their rights to security and livelihood, as well as the right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as recognized by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/300 of 2022:
 - » In the Amazon Basin, drug trafficking and production intersect with, and in some cases even finance, illegal or unregulated activities that are environmentally and socially damaging. These include, in some areas of the Amazon, illegal land occupation and cattle grazing, illegal logging, illegal mining, trafficking in wildlife and other crimes that affect the environment.
 - » **Indigenous Peoples** and other local communities are caught in the criminal nexus in the Amazon Basin, suffering displacement, mercury poisoning and other severe health impacts, as well as increased exposure to violence and victimization.
- b. Drug challenges are posing greater threats in the context of **conflict and displacement**, coupled with economic slowdown, inflation and other intersecting crises. A record number of more than 100 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide in the first six months of 2022:
 - » Preventing and treating drug use disorders among displaced persons have become more challenging. Moreover, forcibly displaced populations are among the marginalized groups that suffer physical and psychological trauma and elevated levels of socioeconomic vulnerability, increasing the risk of developing mental health and substance use disorders;

- » On the supply side, the potential for drug production and trafficking facilitates cycles of instability in conflict-affected areas. The armed conflict in Ukraine has displaced heroin and cocaine routes, but there is an emerging threat of increased manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs. In the Sahel, the illicit drug trade finances non-State armed and insurgency groups through “taxes” in exchange for protection. In Haiti, cocaine and cannabis traffickers take advantage of porous borders, with heavily armed criminal gangs targeting ports, highways and critical infrastructures.



POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Harms to the environment and to remote and vulnerable communities call for more integrated responses to illicit drug economies at the local and national level.

- » Protecting fragile environments that are used or exploited by drug traffickers and other criminal actors adds greater complexity and requires integrated efforts to address the drug-related and environmental challenges faced by Member States, in particular those in the Amazon Basin and other States with significant and endangered ecosystems in their territory.
- » Tailored, community-level interventions for local and Indigenous communities should protect their rights to health and safety and to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, while addressing their needs and providing sustainable alternatives to the illicit economy.
- » Additional resources and strategies are needed to disrupt the cycle of instability and limited rule of law that enable drug traffickers and other criminals to prey on vulnerable populations and regions.
- » Fragile and in conflict countries, such as Ukraine and Haiti, require continued monitoring and support to prevent developing or expanding illicit drug economies from contributing to conflict and instability or hampering recovery.





KEY FINDINGS AND POSSIBLE RESPONSES

SYNTHETICS AND INNOVATIONS IN THE SUPPLY OF PLANT-BASED DRUGS

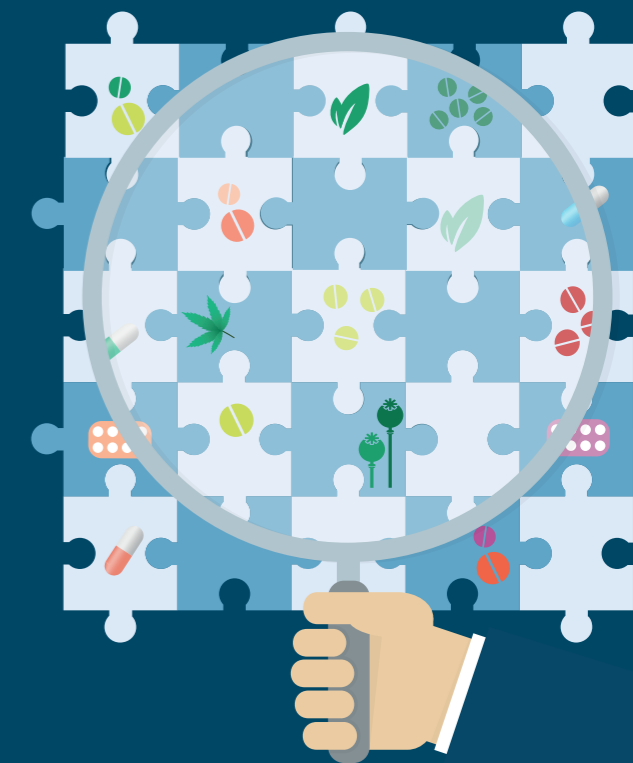
Synthetics and innovations in illegal drug manufacturing and trafficking challenge justice responses

- a. Illegal drug markets are transforming rapidly and, in some regions, radically, with **synthetic drugs** becoming increasingly dominant. Synthetic drug manufacture is cheap, easy and fast. As synthetic drugs are not tied to geographically fixed crops, using instead a wide array of precursors, supply can be relocated closer to consumer markets, and seized products can be quickly replaced, defeating drug law enforcement efforts:
 - » Methamphetamine is the world's dominant illegally manufactured synthetic drug, and criminals are employing novel synthesis techniques, establishing new bases of operation and using non-controlled precursors to circumvent law enforcement and regulatory responses;
 - » Fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid, is transforming drug markets in North America, contributing to high levels of drug overdose among those who use drugs. In 2021, there were almost 90,000 opioid-involved overdose deaths in North America, with the majority of those involving illegally manufactured fentanyl.
- b. After several years of relative stability, an **increase in the number of seizures and amounts seized involving new psychoactive substances** (NPS) of synthetic origin was reported in 2021, increasing by 40 per cent over the previous year to 19 tons. According to preliminary data, 1,184 NPS have now been identified and are being monitored by authorities.
- c. **The availability of precursor chemicals and the use of online communication platforms** reduce barriers to entry for criminals, making illegal drug manufacture more agile, modular and technologically focused. Online information on ways to synthesize synthetic drugs is easily available, enabling more widespread manufacture:
- d. Analysis of transactions on the darknet suggests a shift toward wholesale distribution, and retail transactions appear to be growing on social media platforms. An examination of blockchain transactions on darknet marketplaces suggests that the average transaction has increased in value from about \$100 in 2018 to \$500 in 2021 and, at the same time, there has been a notable decline in the number of active buyers and transactions overall.
 - » Self-reported data from those who use drugs suggest a recent shift towards social media platforms for purchasing drugs, especially for cannabis, cocaine and “ecstasy”, but new psychoactive substances are still bought and sold to a greater degree on darknet forums.
- e. Fragmenting supply chains and loosely connected criminal groups are driving the **expansion of drug supply, notably cocaine**, with new hubs and markets, as well as increasing use in traditional markets. Trafficking groups are less rigid and hierarchical, and more innovative and adaptable. Transformations in the ways that criminal groups are organized or operate may make them less susceptible to traditional law enforcement interventions, as parts of the supply chain or product can be replaced.
- f. **The latest data indicate near-record levels of illicit coca and opium cultivation** but the drug ban in Afghanistan may have an impact on the 2023 opium harvest there, increasing the need for alternative development efforts. Global opium production remained high at 7,800 tons in 2022, mainly driven by high levels of production in Afghanistan. A combination of market dynamics in Western Europe, the second largest cocaine market in the world, and higher efficiency in the production of cocaine at the source has triggered subsequent increases in cocaine manufacturing, which reached a record high of 2,300 tons in 2021.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

The continuously shifting strategies and tactics used by criminal groups and traffickers, away from traditional production methods and modes, require law enforcement strategies that are more targeted and strategic.

- » Drug trafficking groups are increasingly fragmented, managing only parts of the drug supply chain, and law enforcement operations can be effective only if they target the wider ecosystem of illicit markets rather than single cells or single shipments. This requires sophisticated operational analysis and trust-building within and between national law enforcement agencies in order to share intelligence and ensure smooth and prompt national and international cooperation when required.
- » Given the increase in levels of drug trafficking through waterways and maritime routes in containerized shipments, ports continue to be important nodes where drugs are smuggled across borders, warranting more effective control targeting potential chokepoints.
- » Continued expansion of synthetic drug manufacture within new regions using new methods demands redoubled efforts to monitor changes in drug markets and to respond with more targeted policies aimed at reducing access to precursor chemicals and online sourcing.
- » Drug interdiction may have less and less impact on supply, as criminal groups can replace the seized drugs easily and cheaply. The role of law enforcement authorities in assessing the quality and type of drugs sold in markets therefore becomes increasingly important to better understand the ways in which suppliers are shifting their strategies and the risks faced by those who use drugs.
- » Greater focus on access to chemicals, including improving oversight of large industries and efforts to curb corruption, is critical to reducing the supply of the inputs required for the manufacture of synthetic drugs.
- » Alternative development remains a critical pillar of supply reduction policies for farmers in Afghanistan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Peru and other countries where drugs are illicitly cultivated, to enable sustainable livelihoods outside the drug economy.
- » The benefits of a possible drastic reduction in illicit opium cultivation in Afghanistan in 2023 will be global but will be at the expense of many farmers in the country who do not have alternative means of income generation. Shared responsibility calls for donors, in particular those that will benefit most from reduced trafficking of Afghan heroin, to urgently provide support for the people in rural areas of Afghanistan to develop livelihoods away from illicit opium cultivation.





KEY FINDINGS AND POSSIBLE RESPONSES

FRAMEWORKS FOR MEDICAL USE OF CONTROLLED DRUGS

New research on the use of controlled drugs in treating mental health conditions shows that such treatments have potential but regulators run the risk of increasing harm if public health is not prioritized over commercial interests

- a. Clinical trials involving **psychedelics** for the treatment of mental health and substance use disorders are proceeding in some jurisdictions at an unprecedented pace, giving some hope that these compounds could be effective in addressing certain treatment-resistant psychological conditions. However, the **rapid pace of developments** increases the risk that people, in particular young people, will perceive such substances as being “safe” or not harmful, regardless of the context, which in turn could encourage unsupervised, non-medical use.
- b. **Prioritizing public health** concerns remains a challenge in the face of growing commercial interest in developing and profiting from new, legal drug markets. If frameworks for medical use are not well designed and adequately resourced, ensuring access and availability of the drugs for medical purposes, approaches could contribute to the creation of illicit markets through limited supply or diversion of therapies for non-medical use.
- c. Diverse approaches are being taken to regulate the **medical use of cannabis**. The choices that regulators make when defining a medical market determine the porosity of the market. The types of products allowed in the medical market, who gets to produce for the market and who has access to use cannabis under which medical conditions are important considerations and can shape the size and scope of a medical cannabis regime.
- d. Regulatory approaches can be designed to ensure sufficient availability of products with proven safety and efficacy, while at the same time restricting access to legitimate medical needs. Such approaches may also limit potential spill-over into a non-medical or recreational use market.



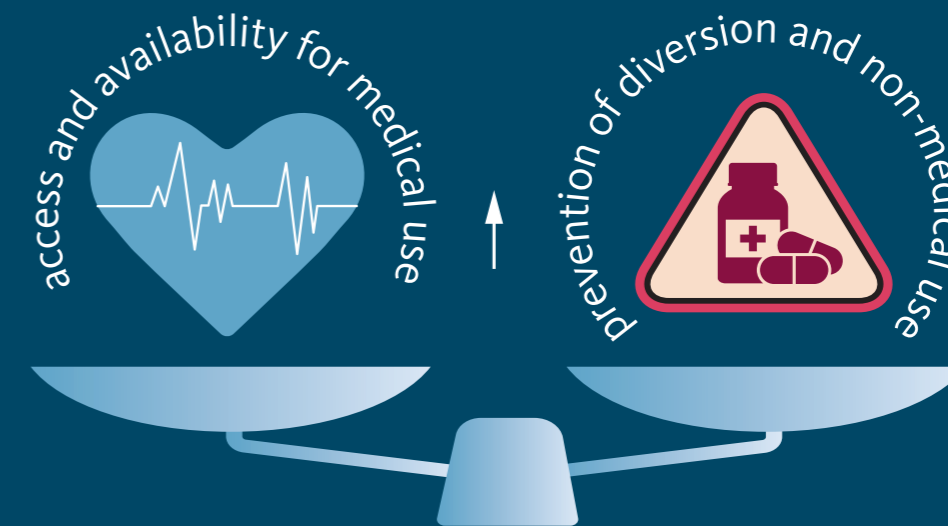
POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Thoughtful regulations can help shape the drug landscape to limit diversion, shrink illicit markets, and reduce public health harms when jurisdictions are considering expanding access to psychoactive substances for a growing range of therapies.

- » A growing body of evidence points to varied outcomes associated with the nature of regulating the access to cannabis for medical purposes.

- » Policies aimed at controlling the type of product sold for specific conditions appear to limit non-medical or recreational access more successfully than those that take into consideration commercial interests.
- » As the research involving psychedelics advances, regulations and policies guiding the appropriate use of novel therapies will be important in preventing unintended consequences of unsupervised use or diversion.

BALANCING ACCESS AND SAFETY WITH INTERNATIONALLY CONTROLLED DRUGS



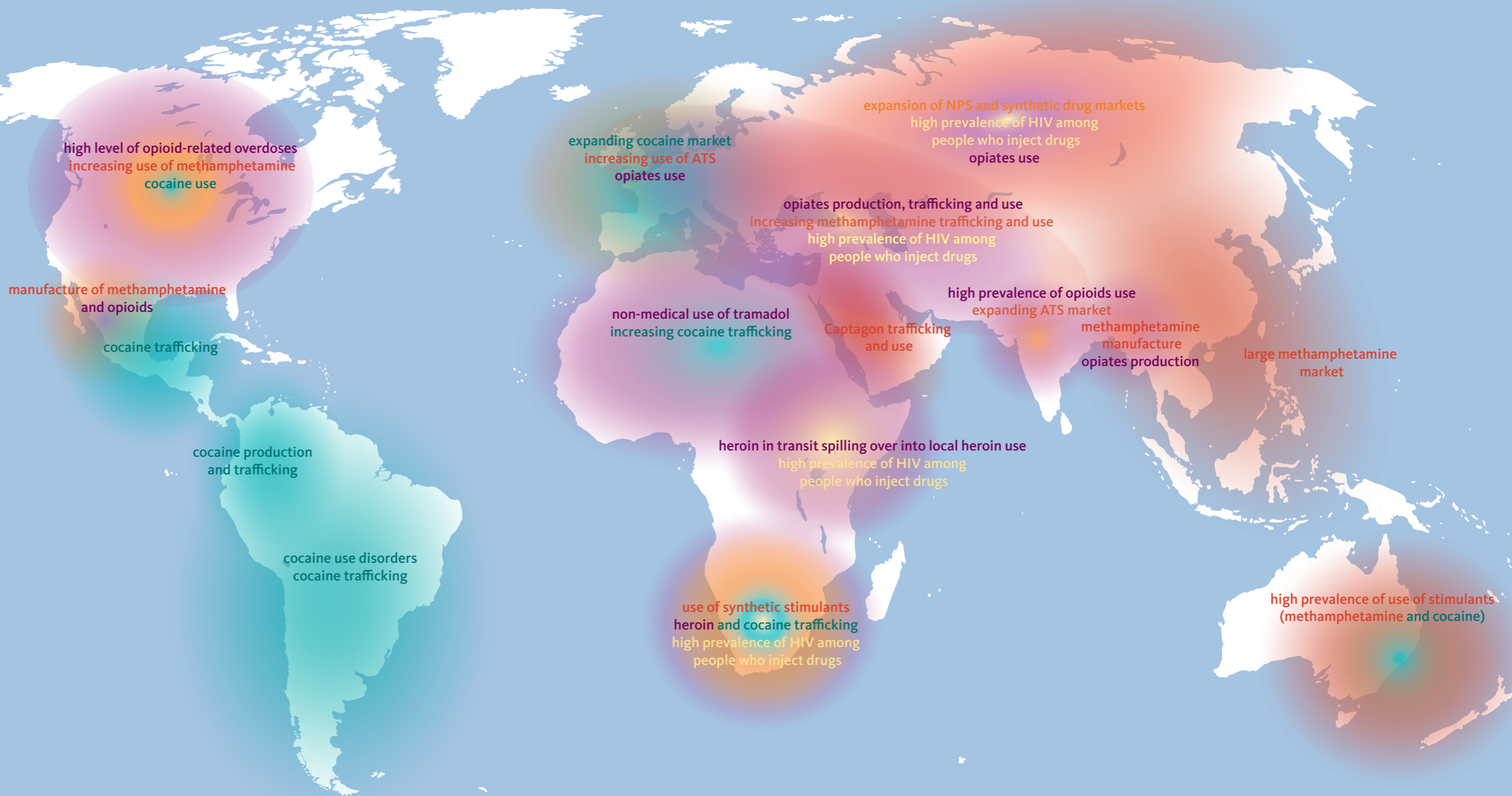
**THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM
COMMON CHALLENGE
LOCAL DYNAMICS**





THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM COMMON CHALLENGE, LOCAL DYNAMICS

While cannabis trafficking and use affect all regions worldwide, other drug issues pose additional threats in different geographical locations.

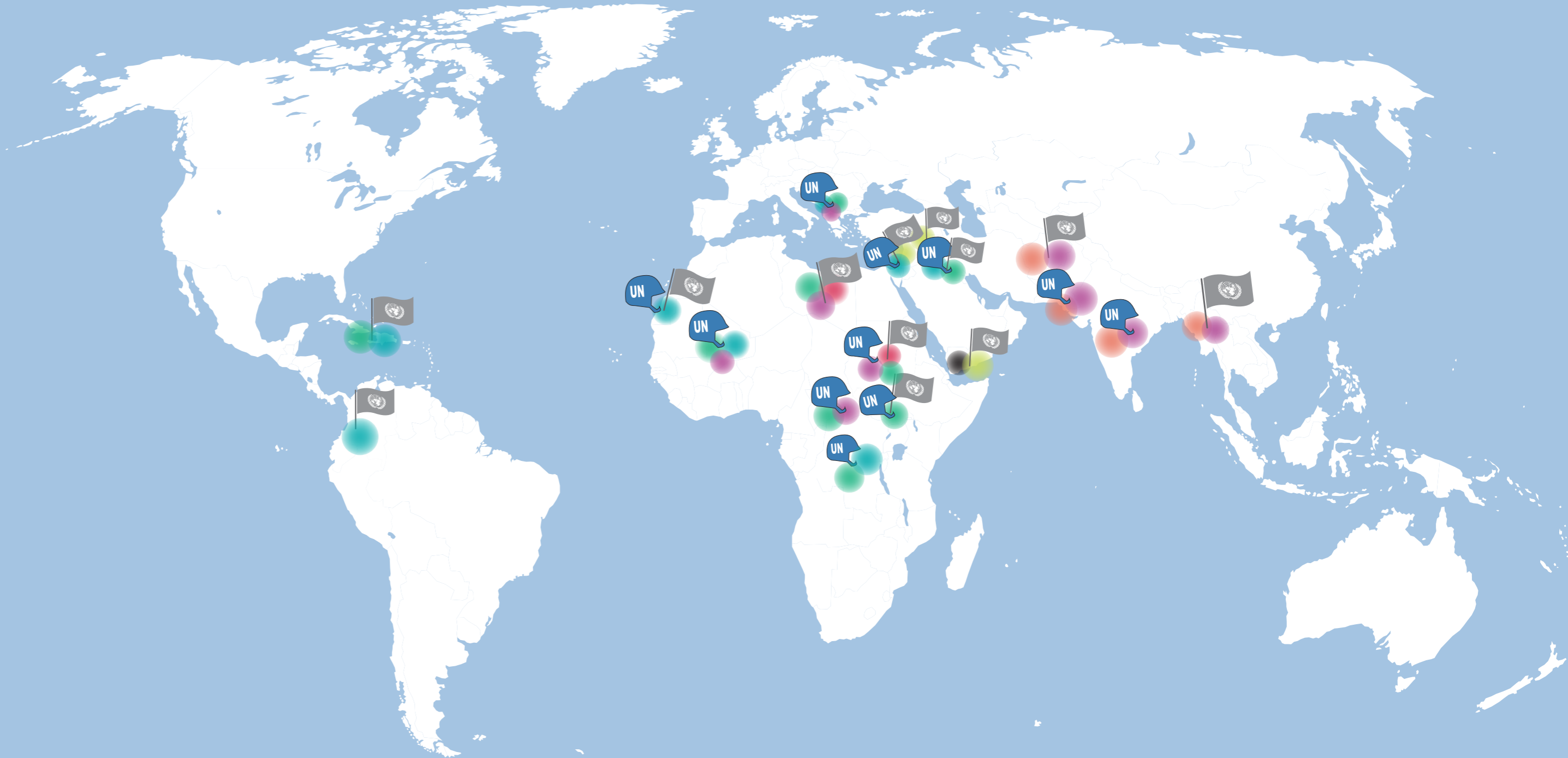




DRUG THREATS IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS

Fragile and conflict-affected areas are noted by the presence of UN peacekeeping and political missions.

- Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS)
- Cannabis
- Captagon
- Cocaine
- Khat
- Methamphetamines
- Opiates/opioids
- UN peacekeeping
- UN political missions



DRUG-BY-DRUG DEVELOPMENTS IN BRIEF

	Demand	Supply	Key issues
CANNABIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Cannabis remains by far the world's most commonly used drug › An estimated 219 million people used cannabis in 2021, representing 4 per cent of the global adult population › The number of people who use cannabis has increased by 21 per cent over the past decade › Cannabis use remains the highest in North America, where 17.4 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 64 used the drug in 2021 › Cannabis remains the main drug of concern for the majority of people in treatment in Africa › The percentage of women among those who use cannabis varies across regions and subregions, from 9 per cent in Asia to 42 per cent in North America (2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Qualitative assessments suggest that cannabis cultivation continued to increase in 2021, although at a lower rate than in 2020 › Seizures of cannabis resin dropped in 2021 after a record high in 2020 but remained the second highest level ever reported › Seizures of cannabis herb declined in 2021, after a substantial increase in 2020, which followed a downward trend over the previous decade driven by large decreases in seizures in North America 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Periods of lockdown during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic drove increases in the use of cannabis, both in terms of the amount used and frequency of use. › Cannabis accounts for a substantial share of drug-related harm globally, owing in part to its high prevalence of use: an estimated 41 per cent of drug use disorder cases globally are cannabis use disorders (2019). In 2021, around 46 per cent of countries reported cannabis as the drug associated with the greatest number of drug use disorders and 34 per cent of countries reported it as the main drug of concern for people in drug treatment › There is evidence of the effectiveness of cannabinoids in treating a few conditions but for many other conditions the evidence is limited. Many countries have made provisions for the medical use of cannabis but the regulatory approaches to medical cannabis differ widely among those countries
OPIOIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › An estimated 60 million people used opioids in 2021, representing 1.2 per cent of the global adult population. Half of those were in South Asia or South-West Asia › Of those using opioids in 2021, an estimated 31.5 million used opiates, mainly heroin › The global level of opioid use remained stable in 2021, having increased slightly between 2017 and 2019 › About 38 per cent of all people in drug treatment in 2021 cited opioids as their primary drug of use › Opioids remain the most lethal group of drugs, accounting for two-thirds of deaths related directly to drugs (mostly overdoses) › The share of women among people who misuse pharmacological opioids in 2021, compared to most other drugs, is notably high (47 per cent), whereas the overall percentage of women among all opiates users is lower: 25 per cent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The global area under opium poppy cultivation increased by 28 per cent in 2022. Opium production decreased by 3 per cent in 2022, but following the drug ban in Afghanistan a substantial decrease may be expected in 2023 › Afghanistan continued to account for the majority (80 per cent) of global illicit opium production in 2022 › The Balkan route remains the main trafficking route for opiates, with individual drug seizures rebounding in 2021 after being affected by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 › Seizures of pharmaceutical opioids increased sharply in 2021, in line with a long-term upward trend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The two epidemics of non-medical use of opioids, one related to fentanyl in North America and the other to the non-medical use of tramadol in North Africa, West Africa, the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia, continue to pose significant health risks › In Africa, there have been signs of increases in the non-medical use of tramadol and related harm in recent years › In North America, overdose deaths, driven by the use of fentanyl, reached unprecedented levels during the COVID-19 pandemic › Access to pharmaceutical opioids for pain management and palliative care continues to vary considerably between low- and middle-income countries and high-income countries
COCAINE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › An estimated 22 million people used cocaine in 2021, representing 0.4 per cent of the global adult population › The Americas and Western and Central Europe remain the two main consumer markets for cocaine › Demand in Africa and Asia has risen over the past two decades, but regional demand remains uneven and lack of data prevents a clear understanding of the level of use in these two regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The level of cocaine manufacture reached a new record high in 2021 of 2,304 tons (pure cocaine) › Seizures are increasingly being carried out closer to production sites in South America, where the total quantity seized is now more than three times higher than that seized in North America › Cocaine is mostly being trafficked by sea and through a wider geography of routes, with around 90 per cent of seizures outside South America linked to maritime trafficking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › After a halt during the COVID-19 pandemic, the global market for cocaine has continued to expand: use has been increasing worldwide over the past decade and trafficking is also on the rise, with record highs in manufacture and seizures › Markets for cocaine are also expanding outside the traditional markets of North America and Western Europe, into Africa and Asia › New cocaine trafficking hubs have emerged with Africa's role in global supply on the rise

	Demand	Supply	Key issues
AMPHETAMINE-TYPE STIMULANTS (ATS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › An estimated 36 million people used amphetamines in 2021, representing 0.7 per cent of the global population › Qualitative assessments suggest an increase in the use of amphetamines in 2021 and over the last decade › The prevalence of use and the number of users of amphetamines are highest in North America, with the second largest number of users being in East and South-East Asia › An estimated 20 million people used "ecstasy"-type substances in 2021, representing 0.4 per cent of the global adult population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Record-high quantities of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) were seized in 2021, dominated by methamphetamine at the global level › Trafficking in ATS, in particular methamphetamine, has spread geographically, with notable growth observed in non-traditional markets › The market for "captagon" in the Near and Middle East continues to flourish, with seizures reaching a record high in 2021 › Seizures suggest a shift in the manufacture of methamphetamine towards the use of precursors of 1-phenyl-2-propanone (P-2-P) and away from the use of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, although the use of the latter two substances remains widespread 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The gender gap in treatment is particularly acute for women who use ATS, as women account for almost one in two users of amphetamines but only one in four people in treatment for ATS-use disorders › Methamphetamine manufacture and use have continued to spread beyond the traditional markets for the drug, namely East and South-East Asia and North America, most notably into South-West Asia, Europe and Africa › The increase in the use and manufacture of methamphetamine in Afghanistan is of growing concern in South-West Asia, where trafficking in the substance is expanding beyond this region
NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The level of use of new psychoactive substances (NPS) is lower than that of drugs under international control › NPS were used in most countries in 2021 › The limited data available, mainly from high-income countries, suggest that the most commonly used NPS are synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists ("synthetic cannabinoids") and ketamine › Use of NPS may be decreasing in North America and Europe, but Eastern Europe, Asia and, possibly, Africa are likely experiencing mid-term increases in use › Many users of NPS use them unknowingly, consuming the substances as adulterants or in place of other drugs, sometimes with fatal consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Seizures of plant-based NPS, dominated by kratom and khat, continued to fall in 2021 from the record high of 2019 › A total of 44 countries reported seizures of synthetic NPS in 2020 and 2021, up from 36 countries a decade earlier. These seizures were small and most commonly involved ketamine, followed by synthetic cathinones and cannabinoids › The number of different NPS on the market increased from 555 NPS identified in 2020 to 618 in 2021, of which 87 were identified for the first time › Increases were reported in almost all categories other than NPS opioids, while the number of fentanyl analogues on the market decreased slightly in 2021 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Control systems have succeeded in containing the spread of NPS in high-income countries but the geographical reach of NPS trafficking continues to expand › In some subregions, such as Eastern Europe and Central Asia, NPS have become a major problem › The use of ketamine, which is still among the most used drugs in East and South-East Asia, may be spreading in several subregions; the drug is used both on its own or as part of drug mixtures, the content of which is largely unknown to users

REGION-BY-REGION DEVELOPMENTS IN BRIEF

	Demand	Supply	Key issues
AFRICA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of cannabis is particularly high in West and Central Africa, with a past-year prevalence of use in 2021 of nearly 10 per cent (30 million people), largely reflecting the prevalence of cannabis use in Nigeria The 2021 estimated prevalence of use of opioids (1.2 per cent) is also high in the subregion. Non-medical use of tramadol remains a threat, in particular in North, West and Central Africa The majority of opioid users in other parts of Africa are opiate users, mostly of heroin and, in a few countries, of codeine and opium Cocaine use appears to be generally increasing across the continent, in particular in West and Southern Africa, as shown by the number of people in drug treatment, although related data are scarce Whereas the use of khat, a plant-based NPS, is widespread in East Africa, the use of synthetic NPS is most commonly reported in Southern Africa but data regarding both instances are scarce Of the 980,000 persons who inject drugs in Africa, over 100,000 (11.3 per cent) are living with HIV. Within the region, Southern Africa has the highest prevalence of persons who inject drugs among the population (0.18 per cent) and the highest prevalence of HIV among persons who inject drugs (21.9 per cent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Africa is a hub for interregional cannabis resin trafficking to Western Europe Africa accounted for half of the quantities of pharmaceutical opioids seized worldwide between 2017 and 2021, largely due to the non-medical use of tramadol Most cocaine in Africa is seized near the coast. The region, in particular West Africa, is used as a trans-shipment area for cocaine from South America destined for Europe Heroin from South-West Asia is trafficked through all of Africa's subregions, often through East Africa as an entry point, onward to other markets in Africa and consumer markets in Western and Central Europe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Africa has a large gender gap in the use of drugs, with one woman for every nine men using cannabis The majority of people treated for drug use disorders in Africa are under the age of 35 Cannabis and opioids are the drugs for which most people with drug use disorders seek treatment in Africa Africa remains a key trafficking region for cocaine in West Africa, heroin in East Africa and cannabis, mostly produced within the region The opioid epidemic related to the non-medical use of tramadol continues to pose significant health risks, with treatment demand for tramadol use disorders increasing in some countries in Africa With an average of eight standard daily doses per million of the population in 2021, West and Central Africa remains the subregion with the lowest access to internationally controlled medicines for pain management and palliative care, compared with 28,868 standard daily doses per million of the population in North America The prevalence of persons who inject drugs living with HIV is of particular concern in Southern Africa
AMERICAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opioid use in North America remains high, with 3.3 per cent of the adult population reporting past-year use (10.9 million users) in 2021 South and Central America and the Caribbean are the subregions with the highest proportion of people in drug treatment owing to the use of cocaine products worldwide Non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants is higher in the Americas than in other regions There has been a significant increase in the number of people in treatment for methamphetamine disorders in North America in recent years, in particular in Mexico The prevalence of persons who inject drugs in North America is high, with 1.0 per cent of the population (3.4 million people) estimated to inject drugs in 2021; however, the estimated prevalence of HIV among persons who inject drugs (7 per cent) is well below the global average 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interceptions of cannabis are declining substantially in North America despite a rapidly growing cannabis market, as cannabis interdiction has become less of a priority The manufacture of cocaine in South America reached a record high in 2021 of 2,304 tons (pure cocaine) Cocaine seizures have shifted closer to production sites in South America, where total quantities seized are now more than three times larger than those in North America Most of the methamphetamine manufactured in North America is for consumption within that subregion. Seizure data suggest that laboratories may be becoming larger and their output increasing, although the number of laboratories is likely decreasing Seizures of methamphetamine in North America reached a record high in 2021, despite the short-term disruptions of the market at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opioid epidemic related to illicitly produced fentanyl in North America has been driving the number of overdose deaths to record highs, with an acceleration during the COVID-19 pandemic The gender gap in cannabis use is closing in North America, where the level of use of the drug is particularly high The Americas are affected by increasing cocaine trafficking, with record levels of manufacture of the drug in South America Illicit drug economies, converging crimes, population displacement and conflict are accelerating environmental devastation and degrading human rights, in particular in vulnerable groups in parts of the Amazon Basin The methamphetamine market is expanding in North America alongside an increase in methamphetamine-related harms, reflected in hospitalizations, drug treatment and overdose deaths

	Demand	Supply	Key issues
ASIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over half the estimated number of people who use opioids globally are in Asia (1.1 per cent of the region's population), with the prevalence of opioid use in 2021 in South-West Asia being one of the highest worldwide (3.2 per cent) Methamphetamine is the main drug of concern in East and South-East Asia, whereas opiates, in particular opium and heroin, predominate in South-West Asia and in South Asia, and "captagon" in the Near and Middle East Methamphetamine use has risen in Afghanistan in recent years and accounts suggest that use of methamphetamine and "captagon" tablets is rising in South-West Asia and countries in the Gulf, although no recent estimates are available East and South-East Asia has a long-established market for the non-medical use of ketamine The gender gap in drug use is the largest in Asia, where 91 in every 100 people who used cannabis in the past year are men Asia accounts for the largest number of people who inject drugs worldwide (5.2 million in 2021) and, within that group, of those living with hepatitis C (2.8 million); the highest prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs is in South-West Asia (29.3 per cent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The production of opiates declined slightly in 2022 in South-West Asia but increased in South-East Asia, with these two subregions accounting for roughly 90 per cent of global opiate production There are indications that methamphetamine manufacture has increased in Afghanistan in recent years The market for "captagon" in the Near and Middle East continues to flourish, with seizures reaching a record high in 2021 There is substantial manufacture of methamphetamine in South-East Asia. Methamphetamine seizures in South-East Asia continued to rise rapidly in 2021 but continued to decrease in East Asia Cocaine seizures suggest a geographical expansion in the trafficking of cocaine to Asia, with large seizures made in the region during the period 2019–2021 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2022 opium production in Afghanistan was at a high level but the effects of the drug ban, announced in Afghanistan in April 2022, including its application and enforcement, remain to be seen for the 2023 opium harvest. Changes in opium production in Afghanistan will have implications for opiate markets in virtually all regions of the world The market for methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan is expanding to South-West Asia and beyond The methamphetamine market continues to expand in South-East Asia NPS use in Central Asia and Transcaucasia appears to be increasing "Captagon" tablets manufactured in the Levant continue to supply large consumer markets in countries in the Gulf The opioid crisis related to the non-medical use of tramadol in North and West Africa also extends to the Near and Middle East South-West Asia has one of the highest levels of prevalence of opioid use and of people who inject drugs living with HIV
EUROPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Western and Central Europe remains the second largest cocaine market worldwide Amphetamine is the second most used stimulant in Western and Central Europe after cocaine Recent trends point to an increase in methamphetamine use in the region Europe remains a major consumer market for "ecstasy" Opioids remain the main drug type for which people are in drug treatment in Europe but cannabis follows closely and is more common among those being treated for the first time Use of NPS, which appears to remain contained in Western and Central Europe, seems to be increasing in Eastern Europe, where it has become a major concern Eastern Europe has the highest prevalence of persons who inject drugs (1.3 per cent in 2021) as well as of persons who inject drugs living with HIV (25.4 per cent) and hepatitis C worldwide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trafficking in cannabis herb remains mostly an intraregional issue in Western and Central Europe; there are substantial imports of cannabis resin into the subregion from North Africa Western and Central Europe remains a hub for the manufacture of synthetic drugs, in particular "ecstasy" and amphetamine, although there are signs of an expansion in methamphetamine manufacture in the subregion Darknet drug markets continued to expand in 2021, largely due to Hydra Market, the world's largest Russian-language darknet market until it was dismantled in April 2022. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The long-term trend of increasing cocaine use came to a halt in 2020 during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic but appears to have rebounded in 2021 and 2022 in Western and Central Europe There has been an increase in the number of people in treatment for cannabis use disorders in Western and Central Europe; almost half of people accessing drug treatment services for the first time in 2020 were being treated for cannabis use In Eastern Europe, the NPS market expanded in 2021, likely owing to the expansion of online supply, in particular of cathinones The prevalence of persons who inject drugs living with HIV and hepatitis C are a key concern in Eastern Europe
OCEANIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Past-year use of cocaine in the subregion of Australia and New Zealand remains the highest worldwide Consumption of cocaine (based on wastewater analysis) is lower than in other parts of the world, suggesting that most users of cocaine are occasional users Past-year use of "ecstasy" in the subregion of Australia and New Zealand remains by far the highest worldwide; this is consistent with MDMA levels found in wastewater analysis Cannabis use is significantly higher than the global average, with prevalence of use exceeding 10 per cent in the subregion of Australia and New Zealand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seizures of heroin, morphine and cocaine increased in Oceania in 2021 Overall methamphetamine seizures declined in 2021 but remained at a high level Methamphetamine is both produced within Oceania and imported to the region from East and South-East Asia and North America. Data up to 2020 suggest that seizure quantities of methamphetamine manufactured from P-2-P precursors increased, suggesting an increase in the importance of imports of the drug from North America 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methamphetamine has become the main drug of concern in Oceania, as over 40 per cent of those in drug-related treatment in Australia and New Zealand are being treated for methamphetamine use disorders The annual prevalence of methamphetamine use in the general population of Australia has fallen but among users consumption has become more intensive and is causing greater harm to health Wastewater analysis data show an increase in methamphetamine consumption in Australia up until April 2020, followed by a decline over the period 2020–2022, possibly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic People in drug-related treatment in the subregion of Australia and New Zealand are relatively young, in particular in Australia, where almost two-thirds are under the age of 35 and a relatively high proportion, about 17 per cent, are aged 19 or younger The prevalence of cannabis uses among school students aged 15–16 is also relatively high in Oceania, at 17 per cent, compared with the global average of 5.3 per cent



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For the first time since its conception, this year the *World Drug Report* presents the latest global, regional and subregional estimates of and trends in drug demand and supply in a user-friendly, interactive online format. The new online segment is designed to both enhance and simplify access to the wealth of information provided in the report by presenting the data in the form of succinct key messages supported by interactive graphs, infographics and maps.

Booklet 1 takes the form of an executive summary that sets out points of special interest and policy implications based on analysis of the key findings of the online segment and the thematic booklet 2 and the conclusions that can be drawn from them.

In addition to providing an in-depth analysis of key developments and emerging trends in selected drug markets, including in countries currently experiencing conflict, booklet 2 focuses on contemporary issues related to drugs. The booklet opens with a look at the challenges posed to law enforcement by synthetic drugs, both in terms of their increasing potency, adaptability and ease of manufacture and their shorter supply chains, reduced risk and lower production costs compared with drugs of natural origin. Other law enforcement challenges are considered in the context of the increasing use of social media for buying and selling drugs online. Booklet 2 also examines approaches to regulating the medical cannabis market in different countries and assesses recent developments surrounding the therapeutic, spiritual and non-medical use of substances known as “psychedelics”. The remainder of the booklet focuses on issues related to drugs in specific contexts, including the Amazon Basin, where the convergence of drug crime and crimes that affect the environment poses a threat to natural and human ecosystems. The risk factors for and vulnerability to substance use disorders among forcibly displaced populations are also discussed in the booklet, and the interim outcomes of innovations and modifications of services for people who use drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic are summarized.

The *World Drug Report 2023* is aimed not only at fostering greater international cooperation to counter the impact of the world drug problem on health, governance and security, but also at assisting Member States in anticipating and addressing threats posed by drug markets and mitigating their consequences.

The *World Drug Report 2023* is published on the UNODC website:
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/world-drug-report-2023.html>

