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REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Africa

Trafficking in cocaine, cannabis and tramadol in Africa. Available seizure data suggest that cocaine trafficking remains a major challenge for countries in North and West Africa. The same is true of the trafficking and use of cannabis and tramadol for many countries in Africa.

The lack of official data on drug seizures and drug use prevalence hinders the ability of countries in the region to address their respective drug challenges. It also hinders the ability of the international community to provide support.

Africa is among the regions with the lowest levels of availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. Determining levels of consumption of psychotropic substances for Africa is difficult as only a quarter of the countries have provided INCB with consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past several years.

Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

Seizures of large amounts of cocaine reported by several countries in the region indicate surges in drug trafficking following the easing of mobility restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

New psychoactive substances were detected in eight countries and territories in Central America and the Caribbean. Information on legal responses by countries to their emergence in the region remains limited.

There is a continued lack of recent epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of drug use in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean. This hampers the tailoring of responses to the drug use problem.

Determining levels of consumption of psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes in the region remains a challenge. Only a third of the countries and territories have provided consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past few years.

North America

The drug overdose epidemic in North America has worsened in Canada and the United States. The illicit manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic opioids in North America have worsened the region's opioid epidemic and drug overdose crisis. This has resulted in an increase in deaths. In Canada, the supply of increasingly toxic drugs has exacerbated the already existing overdose crisis. More deaths have been caused by higher levels of toxicity in opioids or stimulants. Despite measures adopted to mitigate the negative consequences of drug use, such as increased availability of and access to naloxone, a higher number of overdose deaths has been recorded.





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In North American jurisdictions, the regulations for the non-medical use of cannabis continue to evolve in a manner inconsistent with the provisions of the drug control conventions. While cannabis remains a controlled substance at the federal level in the United States, there is a growing gap with the state-level regulations for the non-medical use of cannabis. Information available on the use of cannabis after states introduced legalization measures is inadequate, particularly for adolescents.

South America

Drug trafficking organizations in the Amazon region in Brazil and Peru were observed to have expanded their influence and diversified their activities to include environmental crimes. This development has been linked to an increase in murder rates targeting indigenous populations and environmentalists.

Rising violence was reported in Ecuador because the country emerged as a storage and distribution centre along cocaine trafficking routes. This has led to increased transatlantic trafficking of cocaine.

Coca cultivation and potential cocaine production reached a historical high in Colombia in 2021, with 204,000 hectares and 1,400 tons yield, respectively.

Asia

East and South-East Asia

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

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

Criminal groups have adapted to border and travel restrictions. While trafficking by air has gone down significantly, courier trafficking and related exploitation of online platforms has increased.

East and South-East Asia is of particular concern regarding the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. It is among the regions with the lowest amounts available of the most widely used opioid analgesics.

INCB notes with concern public reports on the continued use of the death penalty for drug offences in several countries of the region. It also reiterates that extrajudicial killings as a response to drug-related activities violate the international drug control conventions.





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South Asia

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

Countries in South Asia continue to report high levels of non-medical use of opioids affecting a large portion of the population. The estimated number of people who use opioids is higher in South Asia than in any other region.

There is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical use in South Asia. INCB emphasizes that internationally controlled substances for medical purposes must be sufficiently available.

INCB reiterates its call to all Governments in South Asia to develop mechanisms for improving the collection of information on the extent of drug use in the region. The aim is to develop drug use prevention strategies and provide treatment facilities to people who need it based on evidence and to tailor approaches to each country's needs and capacities.

West Asia

Afghanistan remains by far the largest source of illicit opium in the world, accounting for an estimated 86 per cent of the global production of illicit opium in 2021. Opium produced in Afghanistan has continued to supply markets in neighbouring countries and in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and South Asia while a smaller proportion was destined for markets in North America and Oceania. **The substantial increase in methamphetamine production in Afghanistan is a major cause for concern,** as a trend has been observed since 2012 that continued up to 2021. INCB calls upon the international community to continue to support drug control efforts in **Afghanistan** to protect public health. The Board stresses the importance of strengthening Afghanistan's capacities in providing treatment and rehabilitation services to people who use drugs, particularly women.

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

Europe

Europe remains an important region for illicit drug manufacture, trafficking and consumption of illegal drugs. Most illicit activities related to drugs have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels resulting in greater availability and lower prices for illicit drugs. The potency of these drugs has also increased. Cocaine trafficking, mainly arriving through maritime shipping containers from South America, has been increasing over the past years. The region is also becoming a transit region for traffickers shipping cocaine to countries outside Europe.





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Drug consumption patterns have become increasingly complex in the region. Drug problems are more often associated with medicinal products, non-controlled NPS and substances such as GBL, GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate) and ketamine in some countries. Together with an ageing population of people who use opioids and growing economic and mental distress experienced by vulnerable groups, this calls for closer monitoring and additional targeted drug prevention and treatment.

The Board is concerned about the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and calls for unimpeded access to medications, including those containing internationally controlled substances. Governments are encouraged to apply simplified control procedures for the export and transportation of such medicines to affected areas. The continued conflict may also exacerbate substance use due to heightened psychological stress, which is more likely to be experienced by those fleeing the conflict. Similarly, instability caused by the war may also have an impact on drug trafficking in terms of creating potential for illicit drug manufacture and changes to trafficking routes.

Oceania

Increased use of drugs, in particular methamphetamine, and the activity of organized criminal groups are challenging many communities in the Pacific region. This is a spillover effect of growing drug trafficking through Pacific Island States, which continue to be used as transit areas for drug trafficking to Australia and New Zealand.

Non-parties to the three international drug control conventions remain concentrated in Oceania. This makes the region highly vulnerable to large-scale drug and precursor trafficking and related risks, such as money-laundering, local drug use and local illicit production of drugs.

Trafficking in fentanyl and other dangerous opioids is expanding to markets in Oceania. A record seizure of fentanyl was made in Australia. Emerging non-medical synthetic opioids have been detected in New Zealand.

In some countries of the region, there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes. Australia and New Zealand report much higher levels of consumption of opioid analgesics than other Pacific Island States.

