

Chapter III.

Analysis of the world situation

A. Global issues

1. Precursor control in countries of conflict

335. The diversion of precursors from licit trade can happen at any stage along the distribution chain. While no country is immune from attempts by traffickers to obtain chemicals for illicit purposes, territories whose status is unclear or contested or, at any given time, is not effectively within the scope of control of an internationally recognized entity's competent national authorities are at increased risk of being targeted by traffickers. The scenarios that give rise to vulnerabilities vary in nature and include political instability, conflict and unresolved territorial disputes in various forms, and civil war or prolonged civil unrest, and the scenario in a given country may change over time. Places in which such scenarios exist are referred to as countries of conflict or conflict areas.

336. INCB has, on several occasions, expressed its concern about the implications such scenarios have for international precursor control and the risk of the territories concerned being targeted by traffickers for the diversion of precursor chemicals and/or activities associated with, or carried out in preparation for, such diversion. In addition to the outright diversion of precursors from companies located in conflict areas, past incidents involving conflict areas have included the placing of orders for precursors using the names of such companies as a front, the channelling of diverted shipments of precursors through the territory of countries of conflict, and the forging of import authorizations.

337. International trade in precursors outside the PEN Online system, which has become the central global system for the exchange of pre-export notifications pursuant to article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the 1988 Convention, also brings about a higher risk of diversion. This applies to importing countries not using the system actively to monitor incoming notifications. It also applies to exporting countries not using the system, or not using it systematically, to notify importing countries of every planned shipment prior to dispatch. Of particular concern is the trade in pharmaceutical preparations containing scheduled precursors, especially ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which the Board and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs have recommended be monitored in the same manner as is the trade in the precursors that those preparations contain.

338. With regard to the trade in precursors destined for countries of conflict, INCB is aware of a number of practical challenges experienced by exporting countries. In particular, owing to the lack of integrity of controls in a disputed territory, the authorities of exporting countries are often unable to send pre-export notifications to and interact with an officially recognized counterpart who has both the legal authority and the capacity to provide adequate oversight and assurance regarding a shipment's end purpose or destination. There may also be a lack of compliance with the pre-export notification mechanism, namely, the practical requirement for the authorities of importing countries to view incoming notifications, a limited ability to verify the legitimacy of a shipment and/or insufficient clarification of the reasons for objecting to a shipment. All these factors leave the exporting country in a difficult position when deciding whether or not a proposed export can proceed.

339. INCB has observed that, as a result of economic considerations, shipments are being allowed to proceed more often than not, even when only the minimum requirements of article 12 of the 1988 Convention are being fulfilled. In a few notable cases in the past, the authorities of exporting countries have requested the exporting company to ensure the secure transportation and handling of the substances in the destination country up to their receipt by the importing company. **INCB commends all efforts that contribute to ensuring the availability of controlled precursors for legitimate purposes in all regions of the world, irrespective of a country's situation or a territory's status, while managing the risk of diversion. INCB further invites all Governments to work with the Board to devise appropriate ways and means of monitoring trade pursuant to article 12 of the 1988 Convention and handling pre-export notifications with a view to enabling the trade in chemicals to and from high-risk areas in a regulated manner.**

2. Ketamine: an update on recent developments and status of national controls

340. Ketamine belongs chemically to the phenyl cyclohexamine class of drugs, and like other drugs in this class, functions as a dissociative anaesthetic. First synthesized in 1962 and patented in Belgium in 1963, the substance has been used as a general anaesthetic in human and veterinary medicine. At sub-anaesthetic doses, ketamine is also used in selected conditions for the management of pain and depression. Given its affordable price and flexible modes of administration, its use as an anaesthetic is particularly important for developing countries and in emergency medicine. Ketamine, which is included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines and the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines for Children, is not under international control.

341. Discussions on the control status of ketamine at the international level started in the early 2000s, with the substance first being pre-reviewed by the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence in 2002, then critically reviewed by the Committee in 2006, 2012, 2014 and 2015. While WHO recommended that ketamine not be placed under international control, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in its resolutions 49/6 of 2006 and 50/3 of 2007, expressed concern over the widespread abuse of and trafficking in ketamine and encouraged Governments to consider placing it on the list of substances controlled under national legislation and adopting a system of precautionary measures for the timely detection of its diversion.

342. To facilitate international trade in ketamine while ensuring compliance with national legislation, INCB sent a questionnaire on the national control status of the substance to all Governments in August 2008. Information on the import and export authorization requirements for ketamine from 123 countries and territories was then published and disseminated through the INCB Secure Portal for Governments (www.incb.org/incb/en/secured/governments.html).

343. In view of recent developments in the medical use of ketamine and increasing non-medical use and seizures reported by some Governments in recent years, the Board decided to request updated information on the national control status of the substance. Consequently, a questionnaire was sent to all Governments in April 2023. Replies from 88 countries and 6 territories had been received as at 1 November 2023.

Updates on national control status and licit use

344. Responses giving information on legislative updates on the control status of ketamine were provided to INCB by 101 Governments in 2023, in comparison with the 128 that provided such information in response to the INCB questionnaire of 2008–2010.

345. Among those responding to the questionnaire sent by INCB in 2023, around 70 per cent reported that they had placed ketamine under national control. The level of control to which the substance is subject, however, varies from relatively strict control regimes under narcotics laws to weaker reporting or licensing requirements under medicines acts. Regardless of the control status, most respondents (70 countries and 3 territories) require import and export authorizations for international trade in the substance. A list of the countries and territories that require such authorizations for ketamine is updated regularly and is available to all Governments on the INCB Secure Portal for Governments. **The Board encourages importing Governments to issue a letter of no objection or other proof of the legitimacy of the import in cases where ketamine is imported from countries where it is controlled.**

346. Although only seven countries reported the licit manufacture of ketamine, almost all respondents import the substance for medical and scientific use, with some noting increases in trade volume in recent years. In addition to using ketamine as an anaesthetic for surgical and diagnostic procedures, several countries have also approved its medical use in controlled programmes as a treatment for patients with treatment-resistant depression. Some respondents

also reported ongoing projects and clinical trials to further explore the therapeutic potential of ketamine in practice.

347. Alongside its expanding medical use, more than 20 countries reported greater use of ketamine for recreational purposes and increasing seizures of the substance in recent years. Often consumed in small quantities together with other drugs at dance events, some Governments detected greater recreational use of ketamine at more party venues, and the emerging practice of ketamine injections and its use in chemsex¹³³ since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic as a public health emergency. Increases in both the number of seizures and the volume of ketamine seized were also reported. One country reported the emergence of ketamine analogues in response to the placing of ketamine under national control.

Illicit manufacture of and trafficking in ketamine

348. More than 30 per cent of respondents to the INCB survey carried out in 2023 reported ketamine seizures or trafficking in ketamine involving their territory. This included both trafficking in pharmaceutical preparations and illicitly manufactured ketamine. Individual seizures typically involved small amounts, in the range of a few grams, although occasional bulk seizures of a few kilograms, and one seizure of 500 kg, were reported. The largest quantities were reported by countries in Asia, namely, Malaysia (2.6 tons seized in 2022), Myanmar (2.3 tons seized in 2022) and Thailand (nearly 1.8 tons seized in 2022), as well as China, with seizures amounting to almost 1.8 tons since 2021, with the alleged countries of origin being Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar. India has also been identified as the country of origin of a bulk seizure in Europe. Shipments were often seized at land border crossings or among international postal packages at airports.

349. In South America, diverted ketamine is trafficked for refinement into mixtures known regionally as “tuci” (or “tucibi”, “fake 2C-B” or “*cocaína rosada*”), which consist of varying combinations of ketamine, MDMA, amphetamine and/or various new psychoactive substances. Similar products are known in South-East Asia as “happy water” and “k-powdered milk”. Cases of “tuci” and “pink cocaine” have also been reported in Europe and North America.

350. Globally, ketamine seizures peaked in 2015, and have been increasing again since around 2018, both in terms of frequency of trafficking incidents and the amounts seized.

¹³³The term “chemsex” refers to intentional sex under the influence of psychoactive drugs, mostly among men who have sex with men.

Given the resurgence of ketamine trafficking and non-medical use, the substance has also been one of the target substances in two INCB time-bound intelligence operations, Operation Trance and Operation Knockout, which were conducted in 2020 and 2023, respectively. In these operations, 50 and 224 ketamine incidents were reported, respectively, with over 517 kg seized in the most recent operation. In both operations, Western Europe and Central Europe were the main source regions of seized consignments of ketamine, accounting for some 80 per cent of the incidents reported. In 2023, more countries were identified in relation to ketamine trafficking compared with three years previously, with each continent having been identified at least once as either a place of origin, destination or transit. As at 1 November 2023, Governments had communicated 1,400 incidents involving a total of 5 tons of seized ketamine through IONICS.

351. Previously, seized ketamine had typically been diverted from licit markets. While diversion, and sometimes theft, from legitimate channels continue to be significant sources of supply for illicit uses, increasingly sophisticated illicit laboratories have enabled illicit operators to synthesize ketamine from various internationally non-scheduled chemical intermediates, a trend that started in Asia some 10 years ago. Since then, illicit ketamine laboratories have been dismantled in Belgium, Cambodia, Canada, China, including Hong Kong and Taiwan Province of China, India, Malaysia and the Netherlands (Kingdom of the). Some of the laboratories, in particular those in East and South-East Asia, were industrial in scale, and sometimes used legitimate front companies to import the necessary chemicals and equipment.

352. Despite an increase in reports of illicit ketamine manufacture, in their responses to the Board’s survey of 2023, only five countries reported that they were aware of seizures of ketamine in which the substance was suspected to have been illicitly manufactured; four of them reported illicit manufacture on their territories.

353. Similarly, information about ketamine precursors is scarce and not systematically reported, given that these chemicals are not under international control. Nevertheless, some countries submit such information to INCB. Reported seizures of ketamine precursors have predominantly involved two chemicals. Both substances are intermediates in the synthesis of ketamine and can readily be converted into the substance. The substances can be considered designer precursors, that is, they are made specifically to circumvent existing legislation. Seizures of the two substances peaked in 2014, around the time that China proposed that ketamine be placed under control in Schedule I of the 1971 Convention. China has also been the country that

most systematically reports the largest seizures of ketamine precursors. **The Board commends the Governments that voluntarily report seizures of ketamine precursors, their sources and related contextual information. Similarly, the Board commends Governments that use forensic profiling analysis to determine whether seized ketamine has been illicitly manufactured and from which chemicals. These efforts help to provide the evidence to prevent illicit ketamine manufacture while protecting legitimate supply chains, thus ensuring the availability of ketamine for legitimate purposes.**

3. Data collection and analysis practices of the Board

354. The regular submission of comprehensive and reliable statistical data from Governments to the Board is vital for the overall functioning of the international drug control system and the analysis of global trends. Good-quality data provide information that is necessary to not only ensure the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes but also to uncover diversions of controlled substances for illicit purposes.

355. The Board issues technical reports that provide Governments with statistical analyses on the manufacture, consumption, utilization and stocks of and trade in internationally controlled substances. Those reports are based on data that parties to the international drug control conventions are obligated to submit and data that Governments provide voluntarily pursuant to resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. On the basis of its analysis, the Board makes recommendations to competent authorities to ensure the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific needs while preventing their diversion from licit sources.

356. For narcotic drugs, the submission of estimates of annual licit requirements is mandatory under the 1961 Convention as amended, and the estimates furnished by Governments need to be confirmed by the Board before becoming the basis for calculating the limits on manufacture and import. To ensure that Governments may import narcotic drugs for medical and scientific purposes, estimates are established by the Board for countries that are unable to supply them. More information about the obligations of Governments to comply with the limits on imports and exports of narcotic drugs can be found in paragraph 104.

357. With regard to psychotropic substances, States parties to the 1971 Convention provide to INCB their annual statistics on psychotropic substances, as well as voluntary quarterly statistics on imports and exports of psychotropic

substances. INCB provides and updates the list of psychotropic substances under international control (“Green List”), forms (P, A/P and B/P) and training material to help competent national authorities to meet the requirements of the international drug control treaties and the requests contained in the relevant resolutions for the reporting of data.

358. With regard to precursors, the 1988 Convention, in its article 12, paragraph 12, requires Governments to provide to the Board information on the amounts seized of internationally controlled precursors and their origin, on any substance not included in Table I or Table II of that Convention which is identified as having been used in illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, and on methods of diversion and illicit manufacture. Furthermore, pursuant to resolutions subsequent to the adoption of the 1988 Convention, Governments are requested to provide to INCB, on a voluntary basis, annual information on the licit trade in and use of substances listed in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention, as well as estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of selected precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants. The 1988 Convention requires the Board to report annually to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the implementation of article 12.

359. To support Governments in complying with the provisions of article 12 of the 1988 Convention with regard to the monitoring of legitimate international trade in internationally controlled precursors, the Board developed a secure web-based tool, PEN Online. Since 2006, the PEN Online system has facilitated real-time communication between importing and exporting Governments regarding planned shipments of precursor chemicals in international trade, thus contributing to preventing the diversion of such chemicals into illicit channels.

360. The Board’s Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS) provides Governments with a platform for the exchange of real-time information on chemical-related incidents such as seizures, shipments stopped in transit, diversions and uncovered laboratories used for the illicit manufacture of substances and their equipment. PICS has provided leads for national authorities to initiate backtracking investigations and, on several occasions, the timely communication of details of precursor incidents has led to further seizures or has prevented diversions. PICS also serves as an early warning mechanism for the identification of emerging precursors and the *modi operandi* used for diversion, thus informing the Board’s scheduling assessments. Over the past year, a complementary focus of PICS has increasingly been the exchange of incident information on equipment used for illicit drug manufacture, with a view to enhancing the implementation of article 13 of the 1988 Convention (for more details on PICS, see paras. 329–331).

361. The statistical reports and other data provided by Governments pursuant to their reporting obligations under the three international drug control conventions and the voluntary information provided pursuant to the relevant resolutions are managed under the INCB International Drug Control System (IDS), PEN Online and I2ES, the latter two being web-based platforms that enable countries to engage in the trade in internationally controlled substances securely and rapidly.

362. These three systems are currently being updated to enhance their functionality, in order to better serve the needs of Member States. One of the main new features of the updated version of IDS, Next Generation IDS, will be a web-based portal that will enable Governments to provide reporting data more rapidly and accurately, track reporting errors and review historical data. Next Generation IDS, which will provide a protected and secure web environment for Governments, will also have a multilingual interface and deepened integration with PEN Online and I2ES.

363. In addition to carrying out its mandated functions under the international drug control treaties, the Board also assists Governments, through its GRIDS Programme, in addressing the public health threats posed by the increasing misuse of non-medical synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances. Under the GRIDS Programme, backtracking investigations are supported through IONICS, which provides national law enforcement agencies with a secure communication platform for the exchange of real-time information on seizures, stopped and suspicious shipments and diversion attempts involving new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances. A further tool available under the programme is the GRIDS Intelligence HD targeting platform, which enables the development of actionable intelligence for use by national authorities in conducting targeted interventions. Both tools have, in numerous international investigations, produced results that have directly contributed to the dismantling of drug trafficking organizations around the world. The usefulness of IONICS, GRIDS Intelligence HD and PICS, however, depends largely on whether actionable information is provided through those tools in a timely manner and in an amount sufficient to ensure that immediate follow-up can be initiated to identify the traffickers involved.

364. The Board urges Governments to enhance their national mechanisms for monitoring the cultivation, production, manufacture, and trade of controlled substances. Recognizing the challenges posed by the poor quality, irregularity, and often the lack of comprehensive data, the Board emphasizes the need for robust improvements in national data collection systems.

4. Free trade zones and trafficking in drugs and precursors

365. Free trade zones, also known as free zones or free ports, have played a pivotal role in promoting international trade and economic development across the globe. These designated areas, often exempt from many of the usual customs, import and export regulations, facilitate the movement of goods, foster foreign investment and create employment opportunities.

366. However, the very factors that make free trade zones attractive for investment and economic activity also make them susceptible to misuse for illicit activities, including the distribution and manufacture of counterfeit goods, money-laundering and trafficking in tobacco products.¹³⁴ While, on the one hand, the limited supervision, if any, exercised by customs authorities over shipments of goods from abroad into free trade zones, or from such zones to foreign countries, provides for the faster movement of goods, thereby lowering transaction costs, on the other hand, it allows contraband to move undetected through those zones. In general, softened customs controls in free trade zones have made the zones increasingly vulnerable to a wide range of abuses by criminal actors.¹³⁵

367. Trade involving narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors carried out within and through free trade zones is governed by the international drug control conventions and related resolutions of United Nations bodies and by the revised Kyoto Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures.

Free trade zones and the international drug control conventions

368. The inherent vulnerability of free trade zones to serving as fertile grounds for trafficking in drugs and precursors is recognized in the three international drug control conventions. To address situations where limited control or a lack of control would make it possible for traffickers to use such zones as convenient depots for their contraband goods and to smuggle drugs across uncontrolled or insufficiently controlled borderlines, the 1961 Convention as amended, in its article 31, paragraph 2, and the 1971 Convention, in its article 12, paragraph 3 (a), require parties to exercise the same supervision and control in free trade zones as in other

¹³⁴Kenji Omi, “‘Extraterritoriality’ of free zones: the necessity for enhanced customs involvement”, WCO Research Paper, No. 47 (September 2019).

¹³⁵International Chamber of Commerce and Business Action to Stop Counterfeiting and Piracy, “Controlling the zone: balancing facilitation and control to combat illicit trade in the world’s free trade zones” (May 2013).

parts of their territories, provided, however, that more drastic measures may be applied. The commentaries to the two conventions suggest that the conditions often prevailing in free ports and free zones that may render such zones convenient for the operations of traffickers indicate the need to apply even stricter control measures in them than in other areas.

369. Article 18 of the 1988 Convention contains similar provisions regarding the application by parties of measures in free trade zones that are no less stringent than those applied in other parts of their territories, including with regard to substances in Tables I and II of that Convention, that is, precursor chemicals. Article 18, paragraph 2, of the 1988 Convention provides for additional measures that require more intervention by Governments in free trade zones. These include monitoring the movement of goods and persons in such zones; empowering competent authorities to search cargoes and incoming and outgoing vessels, and when appropriate, to search crew members, passengers and their baggage; establishing and maintaining a system to detect consignments suspected of containing narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals; and establishing and maintaining surveillance systems in harbour and dock areas and at airports and border control points in free trade zones and free ports.

370. The experience since the adoption of the 1988 Convention has revealed the need for attention to be devoted to preventing the diversion of precursors within free trade zones. Reflecting the depth of that concern, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1992/29, underlined the importance of applying suitable regulatory measures, in accordance with the provisions of article 18 of the 1988 Convention, to every stage of the receipt, storage, handling, processing and delivery of precursor and essential chemicals in free ports and free trade zones and in other sensitive areas such as bonded warehouses. Furthermore, in its resolution 1995/20, the Council urged Governments to ensure, as far as possible, that shipments entering or leaving such zones be subject, where permitted, to the controls necessary to safeguard against diversion.

Free trade zones and the revised Kyoto Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures

371. Free trade zones represent an important means for facilitating trade. The revised Kyoto Convention defines a “free zone” as a part of the territory of a contracting party (to the Convention) where any goods introduced are generally regarded, insofar as import duties and taxes are concerned, as being outside the customs territory.

372. Although the revised Kyoto Convention states that customs authorities shall have the right to carry out checks at any time on the goods stored in a free zone, there is little consistency in the application of that provision among free zones globally. This is perhaps due to misinterpretation of the aforementioned definition of a free zone, which appears to confer extraterritorial status on such zones, leading to the limited involvement and authority of customs authorities.¹³⁶

373. Other provisions of the revised Kyoto Convention, however, provide sufficient evidence to address this misconception. The fact that the Convention provides for the involvement of customs authorities in relation to requirements for the suitability, construction and layout of free zones, and that those authorities retain the right to carry out checks at any time on the goods stored in such zones, indicates that it is only for purposes of duties and taxes that goods located in the zones are considered as being outside the customs territory.

374. Furthermore, WCO has issued a publication entitled “Practical guidance on free zones” to ensure the adequate global application of customs procedures and surveillance in free zones. The core elements of the guidance include, inter alia, the full involvement of customs authorities in free zones, reporting to customs authorities and the use of data and information technology systems, customs audits in free zones, and the authority of customs officials to seize illegal goods and conduct on-site checks inside free zones.

375. A uniform application of the provisions of the international drug control conventions and the revised Kyoto Convention would greatly reduce the chances of free trade zones being misused for illicit activities. However, few countries have implemented the provisions of the revised Kyoto Convention, even though the number of contracting parties to the Convention has reached 129.

Operation Insight

376. To increase the awareness of the control processes and procedures of free trade zones, and to better protect them from being misused for the diversion of and trafficking in precursor chemicals, INCB, WCO and the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme jointly implemented Operation Insight in the period 2022–2023. Designed as an exercise to understand the processes whereby precursor chemicals enter and exit through free zones, the joint operation was conducted at a limited number of locations.

¹³⁶Omi, “‘Extraterritoriality’ of free zones”.

377. The preliminary findings of the operation revealed a lack of uniformity among the participating countries with regard to the territorial status of free trade zones and whether and how customs procedures are applied in them. In some countries, free trade zones were considered to be part of the customs territory, while in others they were not. The customs authorities in some countries conducted risk-based background checks on companies applying for tenancy in free trade zones and checks on their admissible activities, key employees and compliance records, while in others they did not. Similarly, divergent practices were reported regarding the authority of customs officials to conduct inspections, audits and investigations and to seize goods within the free trade zones. With regard to the submission of declarations and related data, the customs authorities of all participating countries reported having access to such data, although there were disparities in the quality of the data. Half of the locations reported that they had not implemented any cooperation mechanisms with operators and companies.

378. Although the joint operation was only conducted on a limited scale, the findings confirm the need for strengthening transparency in procedures and mechanisms in free trade zones. The divergence of practice among countries with regard to controls over free trade zones and the lower level of oversight by customs authorities in such zones, compared to the rest of the territory in which the zones are located, continue to be reasons for concern, as such factors make free trade zones vulnerable to exploitation by criminal organizations, enabling them to traffic drugs and precursor chemicals through the zones more easily. **Accordingly, the Board reiterates that States parties to the international drug control conventions are required to apply drug control measures in free ports and free zones that are no less stringent than those applied in other parts of their territories, and have the option of applying more stringent measures, as outlined in the conventions.**¹³⁷ **Ensuring that drug control measures are upheld in free ports and free zones is imperative to preventing trafficking in internationally controlled narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals.**

¹³⁷Article 31, paragraph 2, of the 1961 Convention; article 12, paragraph 3 (a), of the 1971 Convention; and article 18 of the 1988 Convention.

5. Practices and challenges in the implementation of measures applied nationally to control non-scheduled precursor chemicals

379. One of the effects of scrutiny of data on the international trade in precursor chemicals is the greater attention given by illicit drug manufacturers to the possibility of sourcing the same chemicals in domestic markets. The Board drew attention to this trend in specific chapters of the INCB reports on precursors for 2020 and 2021.¹³⁸

380. In an effort to take stock of existing precursor control measures applied to domestic markets, the Board conducted a survey in June 2021 and a follow-up survey in March 2023. By November 2023, 78 Governments and the European Commission had responded. Of those respondents, 62 provided detailed information on specific control measures. The survey also extended questions about domestic controls to other internationally non-scheduled chemicals found to have been used in the illicit manufacture of drugs.

381. Almost 80 per cent of the responding Governments reported that they had placed other non-internationally scheduled chemicals under national control, ranging from 1 up to more than 70 chemicals. The Board is also aware that some countries generically extend the definitions of chemicals under control by including entire families of derivatives of listed chemicals and other substances closely related to them. For example, Canada has applied such an approach to analogues and derivatives of 4-AP, which became subject to criminal prohibitions under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act of Canada in 2022.

382. The survey provided information about the number of non-scheduled chemicals that have been placed under international control. The survey revealed that 28 countries have placed 1 to 10 internationally non-scheduled chemicals under national control. In addition, three countries have enacted national controls for 11 to 20 such chemicals, and four countries have done so for 21 to 30 chemicals.

383. On the basis of the findings of the survey, the Board identified four key areas for preventing the domestic diversion of non-scheduled precursors from licit to illicit channels, namely: (a) manufacture; (b) distribution; (c) end uses; and (d) Internet-facilitated trade involving (non-scheduled) precursor chemicals.

384. The information provided in national responses assists the Board in updating its information package on the control

¹³⁸E/INCB/2020/4 and E/INCB/2021/4.

of precursors, enabling enhanced dialogue with Governments and contributing to policy discussions on measures to address the proliferation of chemicals not included in Table I and Table II of the 1988 Convention. **The Board commends all Governments that have responded and provided important information on the scope and extent of their national legislation, including domestic controls over substances in both Table I and Table II of the 1988 Convention and additional chemicals that are not included in Table I or Table II but that are under national control.**

385. The use of non-scheduled chemicals, including designer precursors, in illicit drug manufacture is clearly a major challenge in international precursor control. In order to increase Governments' awareness, the Board has produced several resources and guidance documents, including the limited international special surveillance list of non-scheduled chemicals, which is updated annually, the Precursor Chemical Monographs and a guidance document to address the proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals. This latest document is the result of extensive consultations and a series of events convened or supported by the Board since 2020, and provides a full range of policy and enforcement options that Governments can choose to address the challenge of the use of such non-scheduled chemicals in illicit drug manufacture. Every year, as part of the information package circulated to all parties to the 1988 Convention, the Board also disseminates a compilation of national/domestic measures that Governments have adopted to control substances.

386. Lastly, in October 2022, the Board also launched PEN Online Light, an electronic platform similar to PEN Online that has been designed to allow the sharing of information about planned exports of precursor chemicals not under international control. PEN Online Light operates exclusively on a voluntary basis. Additional information can be found in paragraph 333.

387. Various industrial sectors that use chemical substances – whether they are internationally controlled or not – might, often unknowingly, be exploited by drug traffickers to source precursors for illicit drug manufacture. Voluntary cooperation with relevant industries is therefore a key element of effective precursor control. While industries dealing with known and controlled drug precursors are generally licensed/regulated by authorities, the categories of industry dealing with non-scheduled alternative or substitute chemicals not under international control are less known and may not be licensed/regulated. In 2022, the Board published a booklet containing a global review of categories of industry involved in the manufacture and distribution of and trade in chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs. The booklet aims to call the attention of Governments to the need to expand voluntary cooperation with industry to many more actors. In

this connection, the Board is also engaged with partners in developing methodologies that allow Member States to map their national industry landscapes, identify potential areas of intervention and strengthen the proactive and responsible participation of industry in preventing diversion.

6. Challenges and opportunities in promoting drug treatment and rehabilitation according to the UNODC and WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders after the COVID-19 pandemic

388. With the slowing down of the global COVID-19 pandemic and with WHO declaring the end of the disease as a public health emergency in May 2023, Governments around the world are striving to resume the provision of public drug use treatment and rehabilitation services to the most vulnerable populations. Considering the impact of the pandemic on treatment delivery and services, analysis of the persisting challenges and innovative approaches to treatment and rehabilitation can provide valuable input for the development of future public policies and approaches.

389. The Board has discussed the issue of the provision of effective treatment services in previous annual reports. It recently devoted specific chapters to the following topics: women and drugs (2016); treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration for drug use disorders as essential components of drug demand reduction (2017); improving substance use prevention and treatment services for young people (2019); and the hidden epidemic of the use of drugs among older persons (2020).

390. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the delivery of treatment services. The strain on health-care systems and the restriction of movement have disrupted the conventional methods of treatment in many national settings. Even before the pandemic, the global landscape of drug use treatment and rehabilitation services was marked by disparities, challenges and limitations that necessitated comprehensive, evidence-based responses. UNODC highlighted a substantial gap between the demand for treating drug-related disorders and actual treatment provision, with just one in five affected individuals receiving care in 2021. The pandemic has further exposed these inequities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable demographics.

391. In 2012, a joint statement was issued by 12 United Nations agencies and programmes, calling on States to close compulsory drug detention and rehabilitation centres and

implement voluntary, evidence-informed and rights-based health and social services in the community. Over 10 years later, however, many of these centres remain operational. In some cases, they operate as private clinics with the collaboration of patients' families, as observed in some parts of South America, or as prison-like facilities run by the State, outside the control and monitoring of the justice system, as seen in parts of Asia. In some countries in Africa, they can be found in hospital settings, and as the result of administrative and financial constraints. A report issued by UNODC and UNAIDS in 2022 indicated that compulsory drug treatment facilities in East and South-East Asia have not been closed as planned.

392. The shift in drug use patterns observed in many regions might have left Governments and communities unprepared. As a result, owing to the limited availability of proper treatment services, an increased number of patients have been directed to compulsory treatment facilities, where deteriorating conditions have been observed in some countries. Similarly, overcrowding and inadequate rehabilitation programmes in prison settings compound challenges, affecting both physical and mental well-being.

393. The provision of non-evidence-based treatment is not limited to compulsory settings. Many treatment and rehabilitation facilities around the world continue to employ interventions such as physical exercise, forced labour, excessive use of sedatives, forced religious conversion and punishment in isolation cells under the guise of "therapy". This includes facilities that have been licensed by Governments but that do not provide their staff with proper training or undergo monitoring in line with the UNODC and WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders.

394. According to UNICEF, the pandemic has underlined the need to strengthen mental health and psychosocial support for vulnerable populations, especially young people. In 2022, UNODC reported that young people were using more drugs than the previous generation, which could be particularly detrimental to their mental health. For example, national mental health plans in Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Thailand all emphasized the need to shift service delivery from institutional, specialized clinical treatment to strengthened community-based services and to place greater emphasis on rehabilitation, recovery, and social integration and support.

395. Remarkably, the pandemic has not only highlighted challenges in treatment and rehabilitation, but has also acted as a catalyst for innovation in treatment services. For example, the integration of telehealth and technology has emerged as a promising solution, especially in North America, overcoming traditional barriers to care and

enhancing patient engagement. Telehealth, shown to be feasible and acceptable, has the potential to provide evidence-based treatment and support remotely, increasing patient satisfaction.

396. Advancements in personalized and alternative treatment that have improved the rehabilitation process have also been observed. Initiatives such as the court diversion programme of Thailand underscore the importance of alternatives that prioritize rehabilitation over punitive measures. Such evidence-based programmes align with UNODC and WHO recommendations for effective drug disorder rehabilitation.

397. The successful adoption of quality standards was observed in many countries, reflecting Governments' efforts to improve the lives and dignity of patients who use drugs, as well as the readiness of the United Nations system to support and promote such endeavours. For example, from 2020 to 2021, two treatment centres in Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and the Dominican Republic took part in the UNODC initiative "Quality assurance: facilitating drug dependence treatment in accordance with the International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders in Latin America". In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, an assessment confirmed that the evaluated institutions met an average of 86 per cent of the key quality standards. In the Dominican Republic, 58 per cent of the facilities had medical doctors specialized in addiction medicine or addiction psychiatry on staff, with some (48 per cent) offering services for specific population groups, such as LGBTI individuals.

398. Elsewhere in the Americas, Ecuador has introduced treatment facilities that offer social support services, including education and vocational training assistance (74 per cent), employment and income generation support (48 per cent), and housing support (29 per cent). In Guatemala, most facilities provide motivational enhancement therapy, group counselling, individual counselling and twelve-step facilitation, as well as Internet- or web-based therapy. In Mexico, over half of facilities receive funding from the Ministry of Health, although only a small number cater to homeless people (8 per cent), Indigenous groups (6 per cent), or migrants, displaced persons and refugees (5 per cent). Overall, capacity for dealing with various types of drugs has increased, but the provision of specialized medical care and nursing support remains challenging, as does gender mainstreaming.

399. In Africa, the scarcity of comprehensive information and prevalence data continues to hinder efforts to gauge the full extent of the drug use problem and the availability of appropriate treatment. According to the latest field test report in French-speaking African countries prepared by

UNODC, in West and Central Africa, treatment systems for substance use disorders take the form of Government-run care centres within the health-care system, outpatient addiction treatment facilities and various types of hospitalization centres. These centres and facilities are mostly lacking in or provide inadequate opioid agonist treatment, except for in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo. A number of positive developments have also been identified, such as the newly established Interministerial Committee for Combating Drug Abuse and Psychotropic Substances of Benin. However, the development of services for specific populations, such as women, children and prisoners, is still urgently needed in the region.

400. The Board urges Governments to ensure access to voluntary, evidence-based treatment services, in line with the UNODC and WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders. In doing so, Governments should address systemic disparities and ensure inclusivity in treatment services, with special attention given to vulnerable groups. The Board also encourages Governments to continue to focus on initiatives to combat stigma and discrimination in relation to people who use drugs.

401. The Board supports the call by UNODC for Governments to close compulsory treatment facilities and to shift efforts and resources towards the provision of evidence-based treatment services and alternatives to imprisonment.

402. The Board encourages Governments to continue collaborating with the international community to strengthen management and monitoring capacities, as well as data collection and data-sharing, to inform and improve public policies and the provision of treatment and rehabilitation services.

403. Lastly, the Board urges Member States to implement continuous review mechanisms directed at licensed treatment facilities in their territories, with the aim of ensuring compliance with the UNODC and WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders.

7. The impact of drug-related crimes on the environment

404. The intricate interplay between illicit drug economies and environmental degradation has emerged as a pressing concern, demanding comprehensive scrutiny and concerted action. The impact of illicit drug-related activities on the environment takes different forms around the

globe, including deforestation, contamination of rivers and soil, and animal and human poisoning. Indirectly, the illicit production, manufacture and trafficking of drugs can also be linked to other environmentally damaging activities, such as illicit mining. The impact of those activities often affects local communities most adversely, as it may destroy livelihoods and introduce violence and drug use to populations in remote areas. While the connection between illicit drug-related activities and environmental consequences still requires further research, there is growing evidence showing that there are significant linkages at play.

405. The illicit cultivation of drug crops occurs predominantly in remote and ecologically fragile areas, resulting in significant impacts on local ecosystems and biodiversity. According to UNODC, the tropical forests of Nigeria have become hubs for illicit cannabis cultivation, causing profound shifts in their ecological dynamics. Similarly, the Andean region has witnessed the expansion of illicit coca cultivation leading to substantial deforestation, soil degradation and loss of floral and faunal diversity. The Amazon basin, a biodiversity hotspot, faces threats due to illicit coca cultivation, with varying degrees of forest loss occurring across countries. In the Golden Triangle of South-East Asia, illicit opium poppy cultivation has played a pivotal role in forest degradation. In certain areas of Afghanistan, such as the southern province of Helmand, opium poppy cultivation has resulted in salinization because of poor drainage during irrigation.

406. Illicit drug production makes use of noxious chemicals that percolate into the environment, yielding widespread and harmful contamination. For instance, methamphetamine synthesis involves the use of hazardous chemicals, such as anhydrous ammonia, that are often disposed of in the environment without being properly treated. Within the relatively small geographic area comprising the southern areas of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the northern areas of Belgium, the concentration of dumping sites associated with synthetic drug production has led to significant soil and water contamination. Similarly, cocaine production in the Andean Amazon region employs substances such as sulfuric acid and kerosene, triggering ecological disruptions. Although the risks posed to public health and biodiversity by such activities may be relatively small in global terms, they may be significant at the local level.

407. The carbon footprint of illicit drug production has alarming implications for climate change. For example, according to statistical data provided by UNODC, the manufacture of cocaine produces significant carbon emissions, an estimated 8.9 million tons of carbon dioxide per year. It takes more than 300 litres of gasoline to produce 1 kg of cocaine, with legacy impacts ranging from water pollution to soil degradation, which have implications for both

animal and human health. The process of illicit drug production, characterized by inadequate waste management in remote locations, exacerbates its carbon emissions impact. In Cambodia and Myanmar, the utilization of precursor chemicals in the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs has created a specific negative impact on the fragile ecosystems of those countries due to the large amount of wood required in the process. Additionally, illegal gold mining and cryptocurrency mining (involving massive energy consumption for computing), often intertwined with drug trafficking, play a pivotal role in increasing deforestation and augmenting carbon emissions within the Amazon region.

408. Drug trafficking is connected to various forms of environmental exploitation. In Central America, drug cartels seamlessly diversify into illegal logging, illegal mining, and trafficking in wildlife. Notably, those activities are frequently accompanied by a range of convergent crimes, from bribery to violent crimes. Research in Central America indicates that drug trafficking can indirectly drive land-use changes by facilitating deforestation through illicit capital and land control practices, potentially resulting in greater environmental impacts than those caused by the direct actions of drug trafficking networks.

409. In Ecuador, the deterioration of the environment and the degradation of natural resources due to coca bush cultivation and cocaine production pose threats to vulnerable livelihoods at the northern border with Colombia, especially for those who depend economically on the harvest of shells and crabs. This situation has the potential to push local vulnerable populations into the illicit economy, including the activities of cocaine smuggling or smuggling subsidized gasoline to cocaine traffickers in the department of Nariño in Colombia for use in cocaine manufacture.

410. In Mexico, the confluence of illicit cannabis and opium poppy cultivation converges with the unlawful logging trade, particularly afflicting the Sierra Madre Occidental region. Across the Amazon basin, violent disputes between local communities and drug traffickers are routinely reported, often a result of complaints over land speculation and illegal occupation. The triple border area of Brazil, Colombia and Peru is a hotspot of illicit deforestation, driven by the illegal timber trade, as well as drug trafficking.

411. In Africa, increased law enforcement activities along traditional drug supply routes have shifted distribution patterns, with West Africa emerging as a significant hub. For instance, in Nigeria, outdoor cannabis cultivation processes involve labour-intensive tasks such as clearing, planting and harvesting, potentially resulting in greenhouse gas emissions from fuel and electricity use. Additionally, armed groups associated with drug trafficking also engage in illicit

activities such as elephant poaching and ivory trafficking, further impacting on the continent's landscapes and wildlife.

412. Efforts to eradicate illicit drug crops often have unintended environmental consequences. Aerial spraying of herbicides, such as glyphosate, can harm non-target species and result in soil and water contamination. In its report on human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem,¹³⁹ issued in August 2023, OHCHR confirmed that risks are posed by the aerial spraying of pesticides and other chemicals to the environment and the health of the affected population, and recommended that States and relevant stakeholders avoid aerial spraying for crop eradication and ensure that the eradication of illicit crops does not negatively affect the environment or the health of individuals.

413. In the report, OHCHR further recognized that some of the most prominent effects of illicit drug economies, such as deforestation, monocultures, pollution of waters and soil, and the high carbon footprint of in-house cultivation, pose a risk to access to a clean and healthy environment, which was recognized as a universal human right by the General Assembly in 2022.¹⁴⁰ This is evidenced, for example, in Colombia, where drug-related violence and displacement are intertwined, and eradication efforts can trigger further deforestation due to land-use changes, and in Myanmar, where analogous efforts aimed at eradicating opium poppy cultivation have caused soil erosion and the concomitant loss of indigenous agroforestry practices.

414. Striking a balance between addressing drug-related crime and minimizing environmental harm remains a complex challenge. Addressing the environmental impact of the illicit drug trade requires a holistic approach. International cooperation is essential, given the potential of drug-related crime to undermine ecosystems and human well-being. Coordinated responses encompass comprehensive law enforcement efforts, environmental protection measures and sustainable development strategies.

415. The Board calls on Governments, with the support of the international community, to take urgent action to address such threats, prioritizing the safety and well-being of local, native and vulnerable populations, as well as the protection of the environment. Furthermore, the Board urges Governments to collaborate with the international community and with the United Nations system in improving the available research and data on the dynamics of illicit drugs and the environment and the related impacts across all regions of the globe.

¹³⁹ A/HRC/54/53.

¹⁴⁰ General Assembly resolution 76/300.

B. Africa

The Board notes with concern the insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical use in Africa and reiterates the importance of improving the availability of and access to internationally scheduled substances for medical purposes.

The role of Africa, in particular West and Central Africa, as a transit region for cocaine has expanded significantly, as corroborated by seizures, which reached an all-time high in 2021.

Trafficking in and abuse of tramadol, a synthetic opioid not under international control, are of growing concern in a number of African countries.

While assessing the extent of drug misuse and accurately estimating the number of people receiving treatment on the continent remain a challenge, the Board recognizes that Governments in the region are making progress in addressing substance use disorders.

1. Major developments

416. Drug control efforts and the availability of and access to internationally scheduled substances for medical purposes in countries in Africa continued to be affected by political instability, economic challenges and ongoing conflicts in parts of the region.

417. The role of Africa, in particular West and Central Africa, as a transit region for cocaine trafficking from South America to Europe has expanded significantly. In 2021, seizures of cocaine in Africa reached an all-time high in terms of both quantities of the drug seized as well as the number of seizures. While West Africa accounted for most of the cocaine seized, there are indications that other parts of the continent have also been affected.

418. The number of countries in Africa that permit the cultivation of cannabis for medical or scientific purposes has been growing in recent years. Some of the countries permit cultivation only for export, while others allow the use of cannabis for medical purposes domestically. For 2024, 12 countries in Africa submitted their estimates to the Board for the cultivation, production or consumption of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes.

419. The African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019–2023), the fifth strategic framework that guides drug policy development in Africa, has been extended by Heads of State to 2025. The action plan is aimed at improving the health, security and socio-economic well-being of the people of Africa by addressing drug trafficking and problematic drug use in all its forms and manifestations and preventing the onset of drug use.

420. The Board continues to assist countries in meeting their reporting obligations under the three international drug control conventions, as well as in addressing their drug control challenges. The initiatives conducted by the Board within the framework of INCB Learning and the INCB GRIDS Programme can be found in paragraphs 422–425, 427–428, 430–432 and 434–437.

2. Regional cooperation

421. Since 1 November 2022, the Conference of the States Parties to the African Medicines Agency Treaty, the highest policymaking body of the Agency, has convened several extraordinary sessions to further accelerate the Agency's operationalization. In particular, the meetings considered the staffing structure of the Agency and the contribution by States parties to its budget. The meetings also adopted the revised terms of reference of the Agency's Director General and appointed the members of the Governing Board.

422. On 7 and 8 November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme, in partnership with the UNODC Container Control Programme, organized a training event in Morocco for customs officers on awareness-raising and safe handling practices related to new psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances. The training also strengthened information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools. In addition, it covered precursors-related aspects and platforms, including PEN Online, PEN Online Light and PICS.

423. On 8 and 9 November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a training event in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for postal and customs officers. The training focused on awareness-raising and safe handling practices related to new psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances, and also strengthened information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools.

424. From December 2022 to January 2023, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Zambia participated in the Board's Operation Knockout and exchanged

intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

425. From 23 to 27 January 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme delivered an awareness-raising and capacity-building workshop on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals for frontline officers from Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and the Niger, in partnership with the UNODC Nigeria Organized Crime: West African Response to Trafficking project. The workshop was aimed at strengthening information exchange in the region to aid in counter-trafficking efforts related to synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools.

426. In February 2023, the Eastern and Southern Africa Commission on Drugs was established, following the model of the West Africa Commission on Drugs, to review current policies, promote science-based drug policies and mobilize public awareness of drug issues in Eastern and Southern Africa.

427. From 21 to 23 February 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized an online stakeholder consultation on voluntary cooperation between Governments and freight forwarding services for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances. The event was attended by representatives from the public and private sector, including Kenya, and international organizations. Participants exchanged best practices and shared case examples related to the exploitation of legitimate ancillary logistics services, and discussed the next steps for promoting voluntary cooperation between Governments and their private sector partners.

428. On 21 and 22 March 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme, in partnership with the UNODC Container Control Programme, conducted capacity-building training in Tunisia for 20 customs officers on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals and on strengthening intelligence exchange using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools. A second course was conducted by the INCB GRIDS Programme on 23 March 2023 for nine health regulatory officers at the headquarters of the Tunisian Ministry of Health.

429. On 26 March 2023, the UNODC Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa signed its new Regional Framework for Arab States (2023–2028) in cooperation with the League of Arab States and its 18 member States, including the following African countries: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. The regional framework

focuses on the following areas: (a) taking a balanced approach to drug control; (b) strengthening the response to organized crime; (c) combating trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants; (d) taking action against corruption and financial crime; (e) preventing and countering terrorism and violence; and (f) strengthening crime and violence prevention and criminal justice. On the same occasion, the Arab Plan for Prevention and Reduction of the Dangers of Drugs to Arab Society: Towards Effective Handling of the Issue from a Social Perspective was signed, representing a regional social framework for combating drugs in the Arab States.

430. On 26 and 27 April 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme hosted a capacity-building training course in Morocco for enforcement officers from the police, the customs administration, the Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie and the Directorate of Migration and Border Surveillance. A second course was held on 29 April 2023 at the Moroccan Post headquarters. Both events focused on enhancing knowledge and skills to identify and safely interdict dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

431. From 12 to 16 June 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized an interregional twinning event for trust-building, relationship development and active networking for officers from police, customs and regulatory agencies of Ghana, Nigeria, Thailand and Viet Nam, as well as the regional World Customs Organization (WCO) Regional Intelligence Liaison Office.

432. From 4 to 7 July 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a twinning event for police, customs and postal security officers from Cameroon and the Congo, held in Yaoundé. The event focused on trust-building and networking for officers, and provided them with practical knowledge and skills to identify and safely interdict dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

433. From 19 to 22 July 2023, the African Union held the Continental Technical Experts' Consultation on Synthetic Drug Supply Reduction in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, with the participation of some 70 experts from about 35 countries. The meeting was aimed at enhancing knowledge of current trends in synthetic drug trafficking in Africa, promoting inter-agency collaboration and strengthening mechanisms for real-time intelligence exchange. Experts were given information about the Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use supply reduction data-collection tool and about sharing best practices for information exchange for

interdiction operations. The INCB President participated in the event and delivered a statement, stressing the opportunities afforded by enhancing efforts for coordination, timely data-sharing and use of existing systems and platforms, including those offered by the Board, such as PEN Online, PEN Online Light, PICS and IONICS.

434. From 2 to 4 August 2023 the INCB GRIDS Programme conducted a regional expert group meeting on the prevention of trafficking in new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids through freight forwarding and third-party logistics services in Central and West Africa. The event took place in Lagos, Nigeria, and was attended by participants from the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal, as well as the Universal Postal Union, and WCO.

435. From 11 to 15 September 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized in Vienna the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services. The event brought together officers from 32 Governments and international organizations, including participants from Nigeria and South Africa. Several participating Governments also conducted bilateral and multilateral case meetings – facilitated by INCB – to enhance cooperation across borders.

436. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 39 countries in Africa, namely Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, the Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. There are now five e-modules that have been developed by INCB Learning, covering narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and methods for ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. E-modules are available to officials of competent national authorities at no cost upon registration through INCB Learning.

437. From 20 to 22 September 2023, a twinning event for trust-building, relationship development and active networking to increase awareness on trafficking in synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances in West and Central Africa was held in Côte d'Ivoire. The event also included training on intelligence development and sharing through the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools and brought

together officers from the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Western and Central Africa, WCO national focal points from Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo, as well as the Cameroon postal service.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances (including reporting to the Board)

438. The three international drug control treaties require the States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor the licit commerce of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as well as monitor availability of these substances for licit medical and scientific purposes.

439. Over the last 20 years, the level of consumption of internationally controlled opioid analgesics in Africa, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has followed a fluctuating trend at a generally lower level as compared with other regions, ranging between a low of 1,355 S-DDD_{pm} in 2013 and a high of 4,514 S-DDD_{pm} in 2020. However, the amount reported decreased to 2,556 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021. Of that amount, about half (1,238 S-DDD_{pm}) related to fentanyl, 1,115 S-DDD_{pm} to morphine, 135 S-DDD to pethidine, 51 S-DDD_{pm} to oxycodone and smaller quantities to other less common opioids. The data on consumption are not provided on a regular basis by all countries in the region and therefore one country not reporting one year could significantly impact the regional total. Most probably, the fluctuation in the data is due to gaps in reporting rather than large fluctuations in actual consumption. The countries with the highest consumption of opioid analgesics in S-DDD terms were South Africa (827 S-DDD_{pm}), Tunisia (545 S-DDD_{pm}), Seychelles (239 S-DDD_{pm}), Mauritius (231 S-DDD_{pm}), Egypt (174 S-DDD_{pm}) and Cabo Verde (103 S-DDD_{pm}). More than 29 countries in Africa did not provide any data on the consumption of medicines containing opioid analgesics.

440. About two thirds of the countries and territories of Africa have regularly provided their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances as required under the 1971 Convention. Of the remaining countries and territories in the region, some have provided the required report at least once in the past five years, with the remaining failing to provide their statistical report at all in the past five years.

441. It remains challenging for the Board to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Africa as approximately half of the countries and territories

in the region have not provided consumption data to the Board on any psychotropic substance for the past five years. Determining availability is also hampered by the significant proportion of countries in the region failing to regularly provide their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances.

442. **The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. The Board encourages the countries and territories in Africa that have not provided the reports as required under the international drug control conventions to do so as soon as possible and take the necessary measures to ensure that their respective competent national authorities have sufficient resources to prepare the reports in a timely manner, in particular on consumption of psychotropic substances.**

443. As regards precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide – in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs – their estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirement estimates is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which are substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

444. Out of the 54 countries on the African continent, 41 (76 per cent) provided the Board with at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations. However, approximately 17 per cent of them have not updated their estimates for the above-listed substances in the past 10 years; this undermines the potential of annual legitimate requirement estimates as a tool to guide exporting countries as to the legitimate requirements of importing countries in order to prevent oversupply and diversion into illicit channels as well as ensure the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes. Six African countries have provided annual legitimate requirement estimates to the Board for the first time in the last five years. Those countries are Gabon, Lesotho, the Niger, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Togo.

445. Further information can be found in the technical reports of the Board on narcotic drugs,¹⁴¹ psychotropic

substances¹⁴² and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁴³ The publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

4. National legislation, policy and action

446. The Government of Algeria enacted Law 23-05 of 7 May 2023, amending and supplementing Act No. 04-18 of 25 December 2004 on preventing and combating the use of and trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The law provides penalties for various drug-related offences. It also provides for the development of a national strategy.

447. In January 2023, Botswana established a new Drug Enforcement Agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence and Security. The agency is mandated to collect and disseminate information on the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as well as to receive and investigate any complaints of an alleged or suspected breach of the law. The agency will also advise Government ministries and departments, public bodies, institutions, companies, statutory bodies and corporations on ways and means of preventing prohibited activities relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

448. On 26 June 2023, the Government of Ghana launched the National Drug Control Master Plan. The plan seeks to conceptualize and develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing the challenges associated with the production, cultivation, trafficking, sale, distribution and use of narcotic drugs in the country. The plan is built on six strategic pillars: (a) supply reduction; (b) demand reduction; (c) harm reduction; (d) cooperation and collaboration; (e) research; and (f) capacity-building.

449. On 12 July 2023, the Parliament of Ghana passed the Narcotics Control Commission Amendment Bill 2023, introducing changes to the controls that apply to the cultivation of cannabis for industrial and medicinal purposes. The amended bill granted the Ministry of Interior the authority to issue licences for the cultivation of cannabis in the country.

¹⁴¹E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁴²E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁴³E/INCB/2023/4.

450. On 18 November 2022, the Government of Mauritius amended the Dangerous Drugs Act 2000. The amendment contains provisions on how medical cannabis will be regulated and dispensed. It also contains provisions related to alternatives to conviction or punishment as well as rehabilitation of drug users.

451. On 21 March 2023, the Senate of Nigeria passed amendments to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency Act. The amendments aim to strengthen the operations of the Agency, empower it to establish laboratories to carry out scientific investigations and analysis of controlled substances, update the list of dangerous drugs, review penalty provisions, enhance the power of the Agency to prosecute drug-related offences and issue subsidiary legislation on related matters. On 6 June 2023, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (Amendment) Act, 2023, was read the third time and passed into law.

452. In 2022, as a result of the Board's twinning initiative aimed at promoting industry cooperation in the area of precursor control, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania adopted a voluntary code of practice to further enhance the concept of public-private partnership in the country. The voluntary code of conduct complements the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the competent national authorities in the United Republic of Tanzania and members of the industry, including two pharmaceutical associations and a number of companies, in 2021.

453. On 14 December 2022, the Government of South Africa enacted the Drugs and Drug Trafficking Amendment Act No. 14 of 2022, amending the Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act No. 140 of 1992. The amended act criminalizes the manufacturing and supplying of any substance included in Schedule 1 to the Act ("substances useful for the manufacture of drugs"); and the use, possession and dealing in any drug included in Schedule 2 to the Act ("dependence-producing substances" as well as "dangerous dependence-producing substances"). The Cabinet member responsible for the administration of justice, the Minister, may, by notice in the Government Gazette, amend Schedules 1 and 2 to the Act.

454. On 22 August 2023, the Parliament of Uganda passed the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Bill, 2023, following an annulment by the Constitutional Court on 5 May 2023 due to the lack of a quorum. The bill allows cultivation of cannabis and khat strictly for medical and other authorized uses and sets penalties for a multitude of offences related to substances abuse.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

455. The number of countries in Africa that permit cultivation of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes has been growing. Some of the countries permit cultivation only for export, while others allow the use of cannabis for medical purposes domestically. For 2024, 12 countries in Africa submitted their estimates to the Board for the cultivation, production or consumption of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes, compared with 10 countries that submitted such estimates for 2023.

456. The role of Africa as a transit region for trafficking in drugs as well a target market has grown significantly in recent years. The following paragraphs illustrate this phenomenon for different drugs and different countries.

457. Trafficking in cannabis and cannabis resin remains concentrated in North Africa, although cannabis seizures are reported from countries across the continent. The available data suggest that the quantities of cannabis seized, particularly in Algeria and Morocco, continued to drop in 2022. For 2022, Algeria reported seizing 58 tons of cannabis resin (compared with 71 tons in 2021) and 5 kg of cannabis herb (compared with 8 kg in 2021). For the same period, Morocco reported seizing over 300 tons of cannabis resin in 2022 (compared with over 511 tons in 2021) and about 209 tons of *kif*, a dried material derived from cannabis (compared with 328 tons in 2021). The quantities of seized cannabis herb reported by the authorities of Egypt also decreased, from over 466 tons in 2021 to 368 tons in 2022, while the quantities of cannabis resin seized in the country in 2022 were higher than in the previous years (over 49 tons in 2022, 28 tons in 2021, over 44 tons in 2020, and over 39 tons in 2019).

458. In 2023, countries in North Africa continued to seize high volumes of cannabis in transit to Europe or destined for the North African market. In March and April 2023, the authorities of Algeria reported seizing over 2.5 tons of *kif*. In the first trimester of 2023, the Moroccan authorities reported seizing 24 tons of cannabis resin and 49 tons of cannabis herb. One incident in the port of Tangier involved nearly 5.5 tons of cannabis seized, along with 60 kg of cocaine; the substances, which were discovered hidden in a refrigerated container, were destined for Europe. Additional data on cannabis seizures for 2023 have so far been limited, which makes comparison with previous years difficult.

459. In 2022, trafficking in cocaine was reported across the continent. Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea,

Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia reported seizures of the drug in quantities ranging from a few grams to several tons. The largest quantities – over two tons each – were reported by Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Nigeria, all located along the Gulf of Guinea.

460. In the first half of 2023, countries in Africa continued to report large seizures of cocaine, thus indicating that trafficking in this drug remains a major challenge in the region. In April 2023, the Guinean navy seized more than 1.5 tons of cocaine from a Sierra Leone-flagged vessel. The drug was believed to be ultimately destined for markets in Europe. The authorities of Senegal seized over 800 kg of cocaine on a vessel 335 km off Dakar in January 2023. In February 2023, Libyan customs officers seized in the port of Al-Khoms 269 kg of cocaine that had been hidden in a container originating in Brazil. According to the Libyan authorities, this was one of the country’s largest seizures of cocaine. In February 2023, the authorities of South Africa seized 380 kg of cocaine in Durban harbour. In addition to maritime seizures, South African authorities also reported cocaine seizures at the airport, including 140 kg of cocaine found on business premises situated in an industrial area close to the airport.

461. The UNODC *Global Cocaine Report 2023: Local Dynamics, Global Challenges* commented that the role of Africa, in particular West and Central Africa, as a transit region for cocaine trafficking from South America to Europe has significantly expanded. This development has reportedly contributed to increased demand for cocaine on local markets; however, the lack of official data from the countries in the region continues to present an impediment to a clear understanding of the precise extent of use of that drug in Africa.

462. According to a transnational organized crime threat assessment for Nigeria, conducted by UNODC, Nigeria remains a transit hub for transnational cocaine and heroin trafficking. The report also indicates that criminal networks from Nigeria play an important role in drug trafficking and smuggling activities on the African continent as well as globally.

463. In 2022, the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme in Eastern and Southern Africa reported 204 seizures, including 10 kg of heroin, 20 kg of khat and 4,605 litres of chemical precursors. The Container Control Programme units in West Africa made 34 seizures, including 216 kg of cocaine and 9,462,110 pieces of unspecified medical products.

464. While trafficking by sea continues to be the primary means of arrival for illicit drugs entering or transiting across the continent, trafficking by air also presents challenges in the region. From 2021 and up until 1 June 2023, the joint airport interdiction task forces in Africa seized 413 kg of cocaine, 293 kg of khat, 782 kg of cannabis, 178 kg of heroin, 127 kg of psychotropic substances and 102 kg of precursors, as well as 297.6 kg of falsified medicines. Airports in Kenya and Ethiopia are also believed to have been targeted as stop-overs points for cocaine from Brazil destined for Europe.

465. Trafficking via international postal services, observed in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic, continues to be an important trend in the region, notably for cocaine bound for Europe.

466. As regards trafficking of pharmaceutical opioids, the UNODC *World Drug Report 2023* indicates that Africa accounted for half of the quantities seized worldwide between 2017 and 2021. This was reportedly mainly due to the non-medical use of tramadol, a synthetic opioid not under international control which remains a threat, in particular in North, West and Central Africa, including the Sahel region. Trafficking in tramadol continued in 2022 with Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania all reporting seizures of the substance. Data for 2023 have so far been limited. In the first half of 2023, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency of Nigeria reported some large seizures of tramadol, including over 3 million tablets seized in January 2023 in a warehouse and more than 1.2 million tablets seized during two operations in March 2023.

467. Trafficking in heroin continues to pose a challenge in the region. While the East African subregion is mainly used as an entry point for heroin from South-West Asia, the drug is trafficked through all subregions to reach consumer markets. For 2022, Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, the Gambia, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania reported seizures of the substance. In particular, South Africa continues to report large seizures of heroin. In July 2023, the Trilateral Planning Cell established by the authorities of Mozambique, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania to counter heroin trafficking through the southern route seized 250 kg of the substance at the border with Mozambique. The quantity of this single seizure is more than double the amount of heroin seized in the country in 2022 (over 106 kg). The drug was hidden in a concealed compartment of a truck.

468. Information regarding trafficking in other drugs is limited. However, several countries in the region reported seizing amphetamine, ketamine, khat, MDMA, methaqualone or methamphetamine in the course of 2022.

469. Although the information from the region is limited, the Board is aware that some countries in the region have recently been targeted by traffickers seeking alternative sources of supplies of amphetamine-type stimulant precursors, in particular pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine. To address the situation, the Board has facilitated the exchange of actionable information and notes the efforts of the countries concerned in this regard.

470. More generally, and as in previous years, only a few countries in Africa have submitted to the Board the mandatory information for 2022 related to seizures of precursor chemicals, both the substances in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention and chemicals not under international control. Such information is crucial for identifying emerging trends in precursor trafficking as well as weaknesses in precursor control systems.

471. The Board wishes to remind Governments of their obligation under the 1988 Convention to provide it with information related to seizures of substances scheduled at the international level and of substances not under international control, including, when known, their origin.

472. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in Africa can be found in the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁴⁴

6. Prevention and treatment

473. Assessing the extent of drug abuse and accurately estimating the number of people in treatment on the African continent remains a challenge as detailed and reliable information and prevalence data provided from the region are scarce.

474. However, based on the information available, cannabis remains the main drug of concern for the majority of people in treatment on the African continent. According to the UNODC *World Drug Report 2023*, the estimated annual prevalence of cannabis consumption in Africa was 6.85 per cent of the population (approximately 53.6 million people). The prevalence was particularly high in West and Central

Africa, almost 10 per cent, reportedly owing to the prevalence of cannabis use in Nigeria. For opioids, including prescription opioids, the estimated prevalence of consumption stood at 1.24 per cent (approximately 9.67 million people). For opiates, mostly heroin, the estimated prevalence of consumption stood at 0.50 per cent (3.9 million people). The prevalence rates for the consumption of other drugs (i.e., cocaine, amphetamines and prescription stimulants and “ecstasy”) in Africa were below 0.4 per cent of the population in 2021. For many substances, including cannabis, the prevalence data for some subregions of Africa were not available. Africa is among the regions with the lowest proportions of women in drug-related treatment.

475. According to UNODC, Africa, where the population is young, is one of the regions where youth are the most vulnerable to using drugs. The annual prevalence of the use of cannabis in the population aged 15–16 (6.4 per cent) was similar to the prevalence of the general population aged 15–64 (6.85 per cent). The report estimates that 70 per cent of people in treatment in Africa are under the age of 35.

476. In 2023, the African Union launched the report of the 2023 Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use, which aims to improve health security and the socio-economic well-being of people in the region by addressing substance use and treatment.

477. The 2022 West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use report entitled *Statistics and Trends on Illicit Drug Supply and Drug Abuse*, validated during an Economic Community of West African States Commission workshop in May 2023, identified cannabis, tramadol, amphetamines and cocaine as the most consumed drugs in the region. It further pointed to an increase in drug use among unemployed persons aged 15–25, compared with 2021 data.

478. The National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse of Kenya released a report on the 2022 national survey on the status of drugs and substance use in the country. The survey, which is conducted every five years, was undertaken in all 47 counties and involved 3,797 households and 3,314 individuals aged 15–64 years. Of that group, 44 per cent were 36 years old and above and the majority (54.5 per cent) were female. The survey found that the prevalence of cannabis use had almost doubled over the previous five years; according to the report, that could be attributed to the low perception of harm due to misinformation. The highest prevalence of lifetime use of cannabis was reported in Nairobi (6.9 per cent). Alcohol was identified as the most widely misused substance in the country, with an estimated prevalence of 19 per cent.

¹⁴⁴E/INCB/2023/4.

479. In November 2022, the National Authority launched a framework for community engagement in the management of alcohol and drug abuse, the first such framework in Kenya. The main objectives of the framework are: (a) to reduce alcohol and drug use in the community; (b) to leverage joint initiatives and resources for alcohol and drug use prevention and management; and (c) to standardize and harmonize community efforts towards the reduction of alcohol and drug use.

480. A drug use survey conducted in the framework of the Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment for Nigeria found that 14.4 per cent of Nigerian adults (aged 15–64) had used at least one illicit drug in the previous year. In addition to the over 12.9 million cannabis users, the findings estimated 5.6 million non-medical users of pharmaceutical opioids and another 2.9 million non-medical users of codeine cough syrup in the country. The widespread non-medical use of opioids is a further major concern in Nigeria. The results of the survey are based on responses from 38,850 households and 9,344 high-risk drug users. In 2022, Nigeria published *Standard Operating Procedures: Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Dependence in Nigeria – Methadone and Buprenorphine*, in preparation for implementing opioid-assisted therapy in the country.

481. A national school survey on substance use and associated patterns to assess the level of tobacco, alcohol, medicines and drug use among schoolchildren aged 15–16 in Senegal found that 9 per cent of students reported had smoked cigarettes, 10.4 per cent had consumed alcohol in their lifetime and 7.8 per cent had taken a tranquillizer or painkiller. The survey also found that the use of drugs is less frequent than the use of tobacco, alcohol or prescribed medicines, with 3.5 per cent of young people reporting a lifetime prevalence of psychoactive substances. The findings were based on 3,303 questionnaire responses from Senegalese students aged 15–16 in public and private secondary schools. The survey was conducted by UNODC.

482. In the course of 2023, the United Republic of Tanzania provided treatment services to at least 854,134 persons (434,847 men and 419,287 women) with varying drug use disorders. The country currently runs 15 opioid substitution therapy sites that use methadone and buprenorphine. These clinics, located across the country, provide treatment services to approximately 14,500 people on a daily basis, compared with 11,500 people in 2021. The majority of people receiving the treatment are men.

483. A third survey on the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs in schools, conducted in 2021 in Tunisia as part of the

Mediterranean School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (MedSPAD), revealed an increase in the use of drugs since the second MedSPAD survey in 2017.

484. Countries in North Africa, including Egypt, Libya and the Sudan, have continued implementing the UNODC Youth 4 Impact programme, which had been launched in 2022. In May 2023, UNODC launched the initiative in Algeria. The programme aims at helping young men and women, including those who are marginalized and at risk, to become more empowered to face life's challenges and to be more resilient against crime, violence and drugs.

485. On 3 January 2023, the Transitional Sovereignty Council in the Sudan launched the national campaign “Save your son” to tackle drug consumption, specifically the use of methamphetamine, which has dominated the market since the Sudanese revolution in 2019. Alongside government institutions, numerous non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations have participated in the campaign.

486. Algeria rolled out opioid agonist treatment programmes with the support of UNODC and Egypt in 2023. In Algeria, UNODC also assisted in the development of national guidelines for methadone agonist treatment, standard operating procedures for opioid agonist treatment and the finalization of the National Drug and Harm Reduction Strategy. As of June 2023, five centres are providing opioid agonist treatment programmes, with over 300 clients enrolled in methadone maintenance treatment.

487. In 2022, UNODC supported the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the national opioid agonist treatment programme in Egypt. The framework is being used for monitoring clients enrolled in such treatment and will also support the future evaluation of the programme. In 2023, UNODC delivered two training courses on the delivery of harm reduction services, particularly opioid agonist treatment, in Egypt.

488. In 2022/23, UNODC conducted a first-of-its-kind rapid situation assessment for women who use drugs in Egypt. The assessment provided valuable insights into the extent of substance use among women, as well as associated risk factors. The assessment offers governmental as well as non-governmental institutions a more comprehensive understanding of the services needed by women who use drugs, enabling them to prioritize the appropriate services.

C. Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

Central America and the Caribbean suffers from a high level of armed violence and insecurity, which is often linked to the activities and violent competition of drug cartels and street gangs.

In a number of countries in the region, the national plans on drug control may have expired. The persistent unavailability of recent epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of drug use in most countries in the region may be hampering the development of evidence-based drug control policies.

Countries in Central America and the Caribbean are increasingly being targeted by traffickers attempting to smuggle cocaine to markets in Europe.

1. Major developments

489. Because of its geographical location at the crossroads of the main coca-producing countries and the consumer markets in North America and Europe, the region of Central America and the Caribbean continues to be used as a transit area for the large-scale trafficking of illicit drugs. Drug trafficking is increasingly linked to trafficking in firearms and poses a major challenge to stability and security in the region and the western hemisphere.

490. In November 2022, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) of OAS published the *Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*. The report, covering the period 2016–2020, provides statistical information from 30 OAS member States on the illicit supply of drugs, including on trends in drug and laboratory seizures, illicit crop eradication and arrests. According to the report, the primary drug of concern varies by country, reflecting the variety of the illicit supply of drugs across the region. Cannabis stands out as the only drug in relation to which illicit supply was mentioned by all OAS member States that provided data for the report.

491. In December 2022, CICAD released the thematic national evaluation reports of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism for 2022, on measures to control and counter the illicit cultivation, production, trafficking and distribution of drugs and to address their causes and consequences. The reports indicated that, among the countries evaluated, there was a high level of compliance with the priority actions relating to drug supply reduction outlined

in the CICAD Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for the period 2021–2025, including with regard to improving access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and strengthening the exchange of information related to drug interdiction and border control measures to prevent drug trafficking. However, the reports also emphasized the need for further efforts in several areas, including the control of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances. For example, more than 60 per cent of countries in the Americas had not made progress towards establishing and/or strengthening early warning systems, and more than 70 per cent of such countries had not developed adequate regulatory approaches to enhance national control over the use of new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids for non-medical purposes. Regarding the trafficking of drugs in small quantities, about one half of the countries that participated in the evaluation had only a limited range of programmes and strategies to prevent, at the national and international levels, the exploitation of at-risk populations by drug trafficking networks.

492. According to the study entitled *Weapons Compass: The Caribbean Firearms Study*, published by the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of the Caribbean Community in 2023, the Caribbean region suffers from some of the world's highest rates of violent death, with firearms used in the majority of homicides. The study reviewed some of the factors that underlie gun violence in the Caribbean region, including gang violence, drug trafficking and access to illicit firearms. Information provided in the study regarding trafficking in firearms and their trade for cannabis involving Haiti and Jamaica corroborates the concerns of some regional experts regarding the links between drugs and trafficking in firearms. In its latest annual report on global trends, entitled "Global trends: forced displacement in 2022", the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees asserted that armed conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing the public order were among the reasons why there were more than 108 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, including refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, at the end of 2022. More than 40 per cent of a total of 2.6 million new individual asylum applications in 2022 were filed by nationals of Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Cuba, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua.

493. The UNODC report entitled "The online trafficking of synthetic drugs and synthetic opioids in Latin America and the Caribbean", published in 2022, analyses diverse aspects of the rapidly evolving phenomenon of the online trafficking of those substances in the region. According to the report, one estimate of the online drug trade suggested the likelihood that in mid-2021 about 30 organized criminal groups controlled the darknet synthetic drug markets in

Latin America and the Caribbean. The report concluded that further monitoring of the Internet and additional surveys on the online marketing of drugs are required to better estimate the magnitude of the illicit online market for synthetic drugs and synthetic opioids. The report also advocated for enhanced cooperation between anti-drug agencies and specialized cybercrime units to investigate this increasingly complex issue.

2. Regional cooperation

494. CICAD, INCB and UNODC continued to organize expert meetings and provide training for the competent national authorities of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean. Drug control officials from 16 countries in Central America and the Caribbean have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. An INCB Learning regional training seminar and an awareness-raising availability workshop, for officials from competent national authorities of Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama, were held in February 2023 in San Salvador. The officials participated in the two training events, dedicated to the implementation of provisions of the international drug control treaties. The one-day awareness-raising availability workshop brought together specialists from Governments, PAHO/WHO and civil society to find ways to improve access to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical use in the region. Both activities were organized in close collaboration with the Government of El Salvador and CICAD.

495. In Central America and the Caribbean, Container Control Programme units and AIRCOP task forces under the UNODC Passenger and Cargo Border Team are now operational in the Bahamas, Barbados, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. The Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama participated in Operation Insight, a global operation launched in 2023 by INCB in cooperation with the Passenger and Cargo Border Team. The operation was designed to suppress the illicit trafficking of precursors of drugs and explosives through free trade zones and to raise the awareness of national control authorities regarding the vulnerability of such zones (see the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention).¹⁴⁵

496. In November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme held a training event in the Dominican Republic for law enforcement and regulatory officers focused on awareness-raising and safe handling practices related to new

psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances. The event was also aimed at strengthening information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD targeting tools. The event included field visits to the customs facilities at the international airport in Santo Domingo and a forensic laboratory.

497. In December 2022, the GRIDS Programme conducted a capacity-building training event in Guatemala for officials from law enforcement and regulatory agencies on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances and on strengthening intelligence exchange using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD. The event also included field visits to a forensic laboratory and the headquarters of the anti-narcotics police.

498. In August 2023, the GRIDS Programme conducted a capacity-building training event in Trinidad and Tobago for officers from the Regional Intelligence Fusion Centre of the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances and on strengthening intelligence exchange using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD. The event also included a field visit to the Trinidad and Tobago Forensic Science Centre. In the same month, the GRIDS Programme conducted a similar training event in Barbados for officers of the Joint Regional Communications Centre of the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security.

499. The sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held by the GRIDS Programme in Vienna in September 2023, brought together participants from 31 Governments and five international organizations. Several participating Governments also engaged in bilateral or multilateral case meetings facilitated by INCB that were held on the margins of the meeting. In addition, the GRIDS Programme, in collaboration with the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Central America, hosted its first "twinning" programme, in the form of an event to provide opportunities for trust-building, active networking and training on real-time trafficking incidents. The event was held in Central America in October 2023 and included the participation of law and regulatory enforcement officers from El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama. The officers developed practical skills for international operational cooperation, cross-border communication, and awareness-raising related to synthetic opioids.

500. UNODC continued to cooperate closely with inter-governmental organizations in the region, including the

¹⁴⁵E/INCB/2023/4.

Caribbean Community, its Implementation Agency for Crime and Security, and the Central American Integration System. For example, officials from Guatemala and Honduras participated in several activities conducted in the framework of the UNODC programme entitled “Safe handling and disposal of seized drugs and precursor chemicals”. Officials from Costa Rica and Panama were among those participating in a regional training event on the investigation of cryptocurrency-enabled crime, organized in Panama in June 2023 within the framework of the UNODC Global Programme on Cybercrime. In addition, the UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) programme continued to strengthen the capabilities of forensic laboratories in the detection and analysis of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances in Latin America and the Caribbean, including in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

501. Over the course of 2022, the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs of CICAD continued to provide technical assistance to OAS member States and their national drug observatories through online and in-person training events, including webinars, training courses and round tables on a variety of topics related to research methods, drug information networks and early warning systems. The Early Warning System for the Americas (SATA) continued to collect, analyse and disseminate alerts on emerging drug threats issued by El Salvador and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay.

502. Building on earlier progress, the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies, in its third phase (COPOLAD III), continued to promote technical cooperation and political dialogue between the European Union and countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region in support of the implementation of more effective drug policies in the region. Countries participating in the programme included Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. In 2022 and 2023, the programme supported a wide range of activities, including training for national drug observatories on early warning systems, the exchange of experiences on care practices for people with drug-related problems, in particular women and vulnerable populations, the exchange of best practices regarding the use of special drug-related investigative techniques and expert meetings on the chemical concealment of cocaine.

503. A joint operation targeting firearms trafficking, Operation Trigger VII, conducted in September 2022 by

19 countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago, and supported by INTERPOL and the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of the Caribbean Community, led to seizures of more than 300 weapons, ammunition and 12.6 tons of drugs, thus highlighting the convergence of trafficking routes and the use of firearms to control the illicit drug trade in the Caribbean. Several countries reported the trafficking of illicitly produced cannabis from Canada and the United States of America into the Caribbean subregion.

504. In May 2023, Antigua and Barbuda, the Dominican Republic, Grenada and Jamaica participated in Operation Caribe, a pilot operation of the fifth phase of the Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP V). SEACOP V is aimed at combating maritime trafficking and criminal networks in the Caribbean, Latin America and West Africa. The operation, which lasted for two weeks, was focused on leisure and commercial craft, and resulted in, inter alia, seizures of a total of more than 1.1 tons of cocaine in the Dominican Republic.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

505. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. The reports enable the Board to monitor licit activities involving internationally controlled substances and ensure the availability of those substances for medical and scientific purposes.

506. The consumption of opioid analgesics for medical and scientific purposes, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has gradually increased in Central America and the Caribbean, with some fluctuations over the last 20 years, reaching a regional total of 10,631 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021, triple the level in 2002. Fentanyl accounted for most of the consumption of opioid analgesics in the region in 2021 (7,053 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by morphine (1,680 S-DDD_{pm}), oxycodone (1,211 S-DDD_{pm}), pethidine (616 S-DDD_{pm}) and hydrocodone (70 S-DDD_{pm}). Consumption of opioid analgesics above 300 S-DDD_{pm} was, for example, reported by the Bahamas, Barbados, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The Board considers levels of consumption of opioid analgesics below 200 S-DDD_{pm} to be inadequate.

507. Of the countries and territories of Central America and the Caribbean, approximately three quarters have regularly provided their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances, as required by the 1971 Convention. Of the remaining countries and territories in the region, nearly all have failed to provide any statistical reports in the past five years, which hampers efforts to determine the availability of psychotropic substances in the region. It also remains challenging to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Central America and the Caribbean, as only a third of the countries and territories in the region have provided consumption data on any psychotropic substance to the Board for the past five years. The Board emphasizes the importance of ensuring the sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes in all countries worldwide, including in Central America and the Caribbean.

508. With regard to precursor chemicals, in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

509. Out of the 20 countries in the region, 17 (85 per cent) had provided the Board with at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations. Of the countries that provided those estimates, five prohibited imports of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine (as a raw material or in the form of pharmaceutical preparations) into their respective territories. Two countries have not updated their estimates of annual legitimate requirements for ephedrine in all forms in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of those data as a tool to inform exporting countries of the legitimate requirements of importing countries for those substances. Updating the estimates of annual legitimate requirements assists Governments in preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes. In the last five years, three countries in Central America and the Caribbean, namely, the Bahamas, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago have provided estimates of annual legitimate requirements for ephedrine for the first time.

510. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical

reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,¹⁴⁶ psychotropic substances¹⁴⁷ and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁴⁸ In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

4. National legislation, policy and action

511. Antigua and Barbuda is drafting a new drug strategy, covering the period 2024–2028, which will replace the current national anti-drug strategy, covering the period 2019–2023. The Ministry of Justice of Cuba, in accordance with its resolution 635 of November 2022, updated the institutional plans on drug control that serve as the methodological bases for the development of the national programmes of each competent national authority. According to the information available, national drug policies and/or national plans on drug control in a number of countries in the region have expired.

512. In March 2022, the Government of El Salvador declared a state of emergency to address the deteriorating security situation in the country. Amendments were made to legislation in July 2023 which increased the duration of imprisonment for those found to be street gang leaders and permitted group trials of a larger number of people if they are accused of being in the same criminal group.

513. According to a report prepared by the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador on the security and drug trafficking situation in the country, young people between 15 and 29 years of age have accounted for the highest incidence of arrests for drug-related crimes in recent years. In 2020, of the young people between 15 and 24 years of age in the country, about 340,000 (26 per cent) were neither students nor employed. Those young people, mainly from low-income backgrounds, became easy targets for organized criminal groups seeking to recruit them for criminal activities.

514. Haiti acts as a transit country for trafficking in illicit drugs, primarily cocaine and cannabis, which are mostly shipped onwards to the Dominican Republic, the United

¹⁴⁶E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁴⁷E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁴⁸E/INCB/2023/4.

States and Western Europe. In 2023, gang violence in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, expanded at an alarming rate in areas of the city that had previously been considered relatively safe. Heavily armed criminal gangs targeted critical infrastructure, including ports and police stations, and gained control of major highways to the capital. According to government officials, 80 per cent of the cities in the country were under the control or influence of armed groups. Compared with the first quarter of 2022, criminal incidents, including homicides, rapes, kidnappings and lynchings, more than doubled in the corresponding period in 2023.

515. UNODC, in its assessment entitled “Haiti’s criminal markets: mapping trends in firearms and drug trafficking”, expressed concerns regarding the increased trafficking of sophisticated, high-calibre firearms and ammunition into Haiti by land, air and, most frequently, sea. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2645 (2022), in which the Council requested the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti to work with UNODC to support Haitian authorities in combating illicit financial flows, as well as trafficking and diversion of arms and related material, and in enhancing management and control of borders and ports, the Government of Haiti and UNODC agreed to improve cooperation between all relevant institutions, with a view to strengthening the national capacity to combat illicit trafficking, organized crime and terrorism and to increasing revenue collection.

516. The law enforcement authorities in Jamaica have expressed concern about the influence of the illicit production of cannabis on the environment, including in relation to the demand for water and pollution. While legally licensed cannabis production in the country must comply with environmental protection standards, illicit cannabis production continues to be a problem because of its impact on land and the availability of water for legitimate agricultural production in the country.

517. In 2023, the competent national authorities of Panama initiated the implementation of national legislation regulating the production of cannabis and its use for medical purposes in the country.

518. According to the annual report of the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme for 2022, published in January 2023, seven new port control units were recently established worldwide, including one in Santiago, Cuba, and three in the Dominican Republic, in Manzanillo and Puerto Plata and at the border with Haiti.

519. In 2022, Trinidad and Tobago and UNODC signed a memorandum of understanding on the country’s

participation in the Airport Communication Programme (AIRCOP), which is a multi-agency programme implemented by UNODC in partnership with INTERPOL and WCO in more than 40 airports in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, South-East Asia and South-Eastern Europe. AIRCOP is aimed at strengthening the capacities of international airports to target and intercept high-risk passengers, cargo and mail, as a contribution to, inter alia, the fight against illicit drugs and trafficking in persons. Since 2010, AIRCOP task forces have seized a combined total of more than 20 tons of illicit drugs, new psychoactive substances and khat, in addition to precursors, counterfeit medicines, weapons and currency.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

520. According to the *CICAD Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*, the total amount of cocaine seized in the western hemisphere rose from about 911 tons in 2016 to 1,091 tons in 2020. While, in Central America, the amount of cocaine seized steadily rose from 51 tons in 2016 to more than 71 tons in 2020, in the Caribbean, the amount seized decreased from 13 tons to 9 tons over the same period. The record level of illicit manufacture of cocaine in South America, which in 2021 reached a high of 2,304 tons of pure substance, has resulted in a further increase in cocaine trafficking affecting the Americas as a whole. According to UNODC, in 2022, customs and other law enforcement agencies participating in the efforts of AIRCOP and the Container Control Programme under the UNODC Passenger and Cargo Border Team seized more than 275 tons of cocaine, over 100 tons more than in the previous year.

521. Cocaine manufactured illicitly in Colombia is usually trafficked to North America either directly from ports on the Pacific or Caribbean coasts or through Brazil and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) northward towards the Caribbean and Central America.

522. According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, most of the cocaine seized in the European Union or in transit to Europe is concealed in cargo ships and shipped directly from the main cocaine-manufacturing countries, in particular Colombia; neighbouring countries in South America, in particular Brazil and Ecuador; or countries in Central America and the Caribbean. A route that runs through the Caribbean, involving other forms of sea transport, as well as air transport, also runs through North and West Africa, including the islands off the coast of West Africa. Cocaine hydrochloride

trafficked to Europe is often concealed in carrier materials and later extracted in Europe in dedicated extraction facilities.

523. In Costa Rica, the amount of cocaine seized decreased from 44.3 tons in 2021 to 24.8 tons in 2022, a decrease of 44 per cent. In the Dominican Republic, 31.1 tons of diverse illicit drugs were seized in 2022, about 5 tons more than the 25.9 tons seized in 2021. The seizures in 2022 included 27.7 tons of cocaine and 3.3 tons of cannabis herb. A further 2.8 tons of cocaine were seized the country in the first trimester of 2023. In Guatemala, 1.6 tons of cocaine were seized and 3.7 million coca plants were eradicated in 2022. In recent years, Guatemala and Honduras have reported the discovery of small coca plantations and a limited number of illicit cocaine laboratories.

524. In 2022, according to media reports, El Salvador registered the second largest cocaine seizure (12 tons) in the last 34 years, reportedly due to the Government's efforts to curtail gangs operating in the country. Moreover, in mid-July 2023, the Government stated that it had reached more than 290 days without a homicide in the country since the state of emergency was introduced.

525. In Panama, a total of 138.4 tons of drugs were seized in 2022, most of which was cocaine (108.8 tons), followed by cannabis herb (29.5 tons), representing a decrease of 6.8 tons in comparison with the amount of drugs seized in the country in 2021. In January 2023, a further 5.6 tons of cocaine and 2.3 tons of cannabis were seized in Panama. In Trinidad and Tobago, the amount of cocaine seized ranged from 130 kg to 380 kg per year in the period 2018–2021, with a decline being observed in 2022, when only 17 kg of the substance were seized.

526. According to the *CICAD Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*, increased cannabis cultivation and trafficking was reported by eight countries in the Caribbean in the period 2016–2020. Overall, from 2016 to 2020, the amount of cannabis seized in Central America and the Caribbean slightly increased. There were reports of innovations in cannabis trafficking in Central America, such as trafficking in liquid cannabis or cannabis suspended in wax. In Jamaica, the authorities noted a high international demand for cannabis cultivated illicitly in that country, due to its perceived superior quality.

527. In 2022, Costa Rica reported the largest total amount of cannabis herb seized in the country (25.1 tons) since 2000. In addition, more than 600,000 cannabis plants were eradicated and 13.5 tons of cannabis herb were seized in the country in the first half of 2023. Two tons of cannabis herb were seized and 5.3 million cannabis plants were

eradicated in Guatemala in 2022. In Honduras, cannabis seizures have been reported in all regions of the country in recent years.

528. While cannabis is locally produced in Trinidad and Tobago, the substance is also trafficked into the country from Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). In 2022, 580 kg of cannabis were seized in Trinidad and Tobago, a decrease from what was reported in the period 2018–2021, when, on average, 2,950 kg of cannabis were seized annually in the country. In the same year, 6,900 fully grown cannabis plants were eradicated, a decrease from what was reported in the period 2019–2021, when, on average, 163,000 cannabis plants were eradicated annually in the country.

529. Across Central America and the Caribbean, the number of arrests involving cannabis did not surpass 10,000 per year in each subregion in the period 2016–2020. According to CICAD, the relatively low number of arrests may have been due in part to the decriminalization of the possession of small amounts of cannabis, especially in the Caribbean, as well as the overall low number of countries in the Americas that provided such information (15 countries).

530. In Trinidad and Tobago, in the period 2020–2022, there was an average of 470 arrests per year for the possession of cannabis, which was a significant decrease from the previous period of 2018–2019, in which there was an average of 3,200 arrests per year. That decrease could in part be attributed to the amendment of the country's Dangerous Drugs Act in December 2019, which decriminalized the cultivation and possession of small quantities of cannabis.

531. Illicit opium cultivation and heroin manufacture and trafficking do not appear to be of concern for the countries in the region, except for Guatemala, which reported the eradication of almost 10 million opium poppy plants in 2022, and the Dominican Republic, which has reported a low-level prevalence of heroin use in recent years.

532. In August 2023, according to an open source of information, the competent national authorities of Trinidad and Tobago dismantled the first methamphetamine laboratory in the country. Since 2017, seizures of amphetamine and methamphetamine have been reported by several countries in the region, including the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. Seizures of "ecstasy" have been reported by the Bahamas, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. Seizures of LSD have been reported by Costa Rica and Honduras. Costa Rica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago have reported seizures of ketamine in recent years.

6. Prevention and treatment

533. The Board has noted with concern the continued lack of recent epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of drug misuse in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean. In many countries of the region, the latest estimates of the annual prevalence of use of illicit drugs among the general population are more than 10 years old. For example, within the region, the most recent estimates of the prevalence of use of cannabis, cocaine and amphetamines among the general population aged 15–64 were made in 2018, in Haiti, and the most recent estimates of the prevalence of use of “ecstasy”-type substances and prescription stimulants among the general population were made in 2015, in Costa Rica and Panama. There are no recent estimates available to enable the production of estimates of the extent of opioid use in the region. **The Board reiterates its call to the countries concerned to prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand in order to inform the development of evidence-based drug control policy and encourages bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to this end.**

534. As estimated by UNODC in 2021, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population was 3.1 per cent in Central America and 5.7 per cent in the Caribbean. In Jamaica, in 2016, the most recent year for which data are available, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population was 18 per cent, which was, for purposes of comparison, higher than the global average of 4.3 per cent for 2021. According to the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador, the most common combinations of substances for which patients in the country received treatment for polydrug use in 2022 were, in order of prevalence, cannabis herb with cocaine hydrochloride, cannabis herb with benzodiazepines and cannabis herb with “crack” cocaine or freebase cocaine.

535. According to the *World Drug Report 2023*, the annual prevalence of the use of cocaine among persons aged 15–64 years in Central America and in the Caribbean, as estimated in 2021, was 0.96 per cent and 0.19 per cent, respectively, and considerably lower than that in North America (1.88 per cent) and South America (1.62 per cent). According to the same source, the annual prevalence of the use of amphetamines and prescription stimulants among adults in Central America was 0.99 per cent, and that of “ecstasy” was 0.17 per cent. The annual prevalence of the use of those substances in the Caribbean was not provided. With regard to new psychoactive substances, Costa Rica and El Salvador reported the use of ketamine, mephedrone and synthetic cannabinoids among the general population aged 15–64 years in their territories in the period 2015–2018.

536. The percentage of people under 25 years of age in treatment for drug use in Central America and the Caribbean (37 per cent) is, according to UNODC, the second highest among all regions worldwide, after South America (52 per cent).

537. According to the best estimates from the latest UNODC/WHO/UNAIDS/World Bank data, published in 2023, among the population aged 15–64, about 20,000 people in Central America and about 100,000 people in the Caribbean inject drugs. The best estimate of the global prevalence of HIV among injecting drug users was 11.9 per cent. In Central America and in the Caribbean, where HIV prevalence data were available for one third of all people who inject drugs, this prevalence was estimated at 0.95 per cent and 10.8 per cent, respectively. Data from PAHO indicate that, while the number of new HIV cases in Latin America is estimated to have increased by 4.7 per cent from 2010 to 2021, with approximately 110,000 new cases in 2021, the number of new cases in the Caribbean decreased by 28 per cent over the same period, from an estimated 19,000 per year to 14,000 per year. It is estimated that 18 per cent of people with HIV in Latin America and in the Caribbean are unaware of their condition.

North America

The opioid crisis continued to have serious consequences in the countries of the region. An increasing number of opioid toxicity deaths over the period under consideration involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, often mixed with other synthetic drugs, including stimulants or benzodiazepine analogues.

The United States launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, which is aimed at preventing the illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detecting emerging drug trends, and drug use patterns, and responding to public health impacts, in partnership with Governments, as well as the private sector, civil society, hospitals and public health stakeholders.

Illicit drug-related activity by cartels and criminal gangs in Mexico continues to result in high levels of violence, in particular homicides, in the country.

1. Major developments

538. The opioid crisis resulting from an increasingly adulterated illicit drug supply continued to have serious consequences in North America. Drug overdose deaths in the United States have risen fivefold over the past two decades, with over 106,000 such deaths in 2021 alone. In Canada, there were more than 36,000 apparent opioid toxicity deaths between 2016 and 2022. An increasing number of opioid toxicity deaths over the period under consideration involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, often mixed with other synthetic drugs, including stimulants or benzodiazepine analogues, reflecting the polysubstance nature of the crisis.

539. In response, all three countries of the region have strengthened their legislation related to precursor chemicals. In particular, Canada permanently scheduled a group of novel fentanyl precursors, which are analogues and derivatives of *N*-phenyl-4-piperidinamine (4-AP) and its salts, under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. This measure came into effect on 30 August 2023 and is intended to enable law enforcement authorities to continue acting against any illegal importation, distribution and use of those precursor chemicals. Derivatives or analogues of fentanyl precursors are also being placed under national control in the United States, including certain derivatives of 4-piperidone and halide analogues of 4-AP, effective 30 November 2023.

540. The President of the United States extended the national emergency with respect to global illicit drug trafficking, which had first been initiated by an executive order issued on 15 December 2021, beyond 15 December 2022. Under the order, international drug trafficking, including the illicit production, global sale and widespread distribution of illegal drugs, the rise in high-potency drugs such as fentanyl and other synthetic opioids and the growing role of Internet-based drug sales are considered to continue posing an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the country.

541. During a ministerial-level meeting, which was held virtually on 7 July 2023, the United States Secretary of State launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats. The Coalition, formalized through a joint ministerial declaration signed by 81 Governments, is aimed at preventing the illicit production and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detecting emerging drug trends, and drug use patterns, and responding to public health impacts, in partnership with civil society, hospitals and public health stakeholders, as well as the private sector, including chemical manufacturers, shipping companies and social media platforms. The Coalition is expected to reconvene at the political level on the margins of various high-level political events.

2. Regional cooperation

542. Effective cooperation in law enforcement matters and in combating illicit drug manufacture and trafficking continued to be promoted through various regional mechanisms. At the 2023 North American Leaders' Summit, held on 9 and 10 January 2023, Canada, Mexico and the United States committed to coordinating actions and strategies to combat arms and drug trafficking that represent a shared threat to the three countries. The countries also agreed to continue their collaboration within the North American Drug Dialogue under an updated strategic framework to address illegal drug threats and strengthen public health approaches to substance use. That included increased distribution of overdose reversal medications and information-sharing on chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of fentanyl and other synthetic drugs.

543. Mexico and the United States continued to cooperate within the Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health and Safe Communities. On 9 March 2023, a second phase of the framework was launched, and the two countries agreed to further increase cooperation to combat the illicit manufacture and use of fentanyl, as well as arms trafficking, across the region. On that occasion, approximately \$25 million in funds stolen by criminal actors through embezzlement and fraud that were seized and forfeited by the United States Department of Justice were returned to the federal Government of Mexico. The funds were earmarked to be used to advance the goals of the Bicentennial Framework. On 13 April 2023, further collaboration was announced within the Framework, including public awareness campaigns and commitment to continued cooperation to dismantle the fentanyl supply chain on both sides of the border between the two countries.

544. On the same day, the first meeting of the senior-level Trilateral Fentanyl Committee was convened. The Committee, comprising senior-level officials from Canada, Mexico and the United States, recognized synthetic opioids, in particular fentanyl, as the foremost drug threat in North America, and the three countries agreed to work together to disrupt the global transfer, facilitation and supply of illicit fentanyl and the precursor chemicals and equipment used in its illicit manufacture before they reach North America. The Committee also pledged to coordinate international actions to mobilize other countries impacted by synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, "captagon" and tramadol. The formation of the Committee was agreed during the North American Leaders' Summit in January 2023.

545. INCB has been supporting countries of the region in addressing the emergence of highly potent synthetic drugs through the activities of its Global Rapid Interdiction of

Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme, including through the use of tools such as IONICS, which facilitates the exchange of real-time information between national authorities. As of July 2023, over 2,200 incidents had been communicated concerning interdictions and seizures of opioids through the platform by law enforcement focal points for North America. On 9 December 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme provided in-person support for 33 law enforcement and regulatory officers from the Technical Group for Synthetic Drug Control of Mexico, focused on strengthening information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence targeting tools.

546. Between December 2022 and January 2023, Mexico and the United States participated in the INCB Operation Knockout and exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical 1,4-butanediol, carisoprodol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through international postal, express mail and courier services and related modalities.

547. From 21 to 23 February 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized an online stakeholder consultation on voluntary cooperation between Governments and freight forwarding services for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances. The event was attended by more than 44 representatives from 10 Governments, three international organizations and six industry associations, including 13 participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States. Participants exchanged best practices and shared case examples related to the exploitation of legitimate ancillary logistics services and discussed the next steps for promoting voluntary cooperation between Governments and their private sector partners.

548. The GRIDS Programme convened, in Mexico City in June 2023, the second regional expert group meeting on the exploitation of Latin American and Caribbean e-commerce platforms for the marketing and sale of dangerous substances. The meeting was aimed at engaging stakeholders in discussions regarding the current trends in regional trafficking in synthetic drugs, fentanyl and related chemicals, challenges confronting e-commerce platforms and promising practices to prevent future exploitation by traffickers. More than 29 stakeholders, including representatives from the Governments of Mexico and the United States, international organizations, regional industry associations and leading private sector companies, participated in the event.

549. In Vienna in September 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on counteracting trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals

through postal, courier and air cargo services. The event brought together over 100 participants from 30 Governments and international organizations, including participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States. Several participating Governments also engaged in bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

550. Also in Vienna in September 2023, the GRIDS programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding the INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate uses and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals. The event brought together nearly 45 participants from 20 Governments and international organizations, including participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States.

551. A total of 228 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of the three countries in North America have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The existing e-modules cover the topics of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

552. The Board acknowledges the timely and thorough reporting of data by the competent national authorities of all three countries of the region, as required by the international drug control conventions and requested in the relevant resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, including the voluntary reporting of data on the domestic consumption of psychotropic substances.

553. According to the reported data, Canada and the United States have maintained a high level of availability of opioid analgesics, peaking in 2014 with a total of 75,408 S-DDD_{pm} for the two countries. However, availability has been steadily decreasing, falling to the levels of 20 years ago, at 48,867 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021. In 2021, the United States reported the consumption of 31,860 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021, with Canada reporting the consumption of 17,007 S-DDD_{pm} the same year. With regard to Mexico, the availability of opioid analgesics in the country has been much lower, as consumption has never exceeded 200 S-DDD_{pm}, the threshold considered adequate by the Board, between 2013 and 2020. In 2021, Mexico exceeded the Board's threshold of

adequacy for the first time as it reported the consumption of 277 S-DDD_{pm}. Among all countries in North America, the most consumed opioid in 2021 was hydrocodone (mostly consumed in the United States), followed by oxycodone, fentanyl, hydromorphone and morphine.

554. Psychotropic substances, used for the treatment of a wide range of mental health and neurological disorders, have been manufactured and traded throughout the region for decades. The consumption of those substances as reported by Governments indicates that they are generally available for legitimate medical purposes.

555. The Board highlights the importance of ensuring that narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are available for legitimate purposes, while putting in place adequate policies and practices to prevent their overprescription and misuse. The Board reminds Governments of the need to foster responsible prescription practices and controls on distribution to avoid diversion into illicit channels and overconsumption resulting in dependence and associated harms.

556. With regard to precursor chemicals, in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. As at 1 November 2023, all three countries in the region had provided at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations, and all three have regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

557. Further information and analysis of trends relating to the availability of internationally controlled substances are contained in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,¹⁴⁹ psychotropic substances¹⁵⁰ and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁵¹ In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent

national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

4. National legislation, policy and action

558. In support of the implementation of the National Drug Control Strategy and to address the illicit fentanyl supply chain, in April 2023, the President of the United States requested the United States Congress to approve the allocation of an historic sum of \$46.1 billion for National Drug Control Program agencies in 2024. The budget request for the fiscal year 2024 represents a significant increase in comparison with previous years. In addition to leading a coordinated global effort to disrupt the illicit trade in synthetic drugs, the budget foresees greater funding to support the expansion of prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery support services in the country.

559. The overdose crisis continued to have a significant impact across Canada, with health-care and social services being overburdened owing to the high toxicity and unpredictable content of illicit drugs being consumed. Since 2017, the Government of Canada has allocated more than 1 billion Canadian dollars to increase access to evidence-based treatment and services, as well as to raise awareness and prevent drug use and associated stigma. In the 2023 federal budget, a significant amount was allocated to support a renewed Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy and strengthen the public health-care system, including by increasing access to mental health and substance use services and implementing harm reduction, treatment and recovery strategies for people who use drugs.

560. On 17 November 2022, Bill C-5, amending the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act of Canada, received royal assent. The amendment repeals mandatory minimum penalties for all drug-related offences, aiming to increase the use of conditional sentences and require prosecutors to consider alternatives to laying or proceeding with criminal charges for simple possession of drugs. One of the stated motivations behind the amendment was to promote fairer and more effective responses to criminal conduct and address systemic racism and discrimination in the criminal justice system of Canada, while maintaining public safety.

561. On 21 January 2023, an exemption from parts of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for the Province of British Columbia came into effect. The three-year exemption allows the province to not bring criminal charges against

¹⁴⁹ E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁵⁰ E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁵¹ E/INCB/2023/4.

adults (aged 18 years and older) for the possession of a combined total of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA. The exemption does not apply in certain circumstances, including if adults in possession of any quantity of those substances are found on the premises of schools, at licensed childcare facilities or in airports, where they could be charged with a criminal offence. The province is monitoring implementation, early outcomes, public awareness and unintended consequences, and the federal Government is carrying out assessments through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

562. In March 2023, in response to the overdose crisis in Toronto, Canada, the city's public health authority, Toronto Public Health, updated its submission to Health Canada for an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to decriminalize possession of drugs for personal use in the city. If granted, the exemption would remove criminal charges for possession for personal use without use of any alternative sanctions. The exemption would apply to all drugs and substances listed in the Act, to all people, including young people (people aged 12 to 17) and to all areas of Toronto, except for childcare facilities, schools and airports. The exemption would also create a system of voluntary referrals to health and social support services. The original request for an exemption has been pending with Health Canada since January 2022.

563. A number of companies received approval from Health Canada amending their dealer's licence, allowing them to legally possess and produce limited amounts of controlled substances, such as psilocybin, cocaine, coca leaf, opium, morphine and diacetylmorphine, and to sell and distribute them in limited amounts to licensed dealers, such as pharmacists, practitioners, hospitals or holders of an exemption for research purposes under section 56 (1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

564. The Health Department of the Province of Alberta put in place a regulatory framework for the medicinal use of psychoactive substances (psychedelics), becoming the first province in Canada to introduce requirements and medical oversight for such use. As of 16 January 2023, service providers are required to hold a licence under the Mental Health Services Protection Act, except if taking part in an approved clinical research trial, and must meet quality and safety requirements under provincial regulations. In addition to Alberta, clinics providing psychedelic-assisted therapy have also opened in the Province of British Columbia.

565. In view of the lack of federal clinical practice guidelines, Health Canada issued information on its expectations regarding risk-management measures for clinical trials involving psychedelic-assisted therapy in December 2022,

based on some best practices emerging in literature. Measures included adequate training of therapists, the requirement to report any serious unexpected adverse drug reactions to Health Canada and the existence of written informed consent from every person and every product used in the trials, in order to meet good manufacturing practices.

566. Developments regarding access to some psychedelic substances have also taken place in the United States. In April 2023, Bill No. 5263, relating to access to psilocybin services by individuals 21 years of age and older, was passed by the legislature of the State of Washington. However, the Governor of the State partially vetoed the bill because of provisions conflicting with other regulations, including federal law obligations. This limits the scope of the bill to research in the medical use of psilocybin and, potentially, to a pilot programme pending the release of a final report by the Washington State Health Care Authority expected in December 2023. Bills related to psilocybin have been introduced in an additional 18 states in the country.

567. In May 2023, the Governor of the State of Colorado signed the Natural Medicine Legalization and Regulation (Bill SB23-290), which establishes the regulatory framework for licensing the cultivation, manufacture, testing, storage, distribution, transport, transfer and dispensation of natural medicine and natural medicine products. The licensing of facilitators, healing centres and other licensees is to begin no later than 31 December 2024. The legislation concerns psilocyn and psilocybin only, however, the range of substances will be expanded to dimethyltryptamine, ibogaine and mescaline (excluding *lophophora williamsii* ("peyote")) after 1 June 2026.

568. In May 2023, the Oregon Health Authority issued the first psilocybin service centre licence, in implementation of the state's Psilocybin Services Act. Under the Act, upon completion of a preparation session with a licensed facilitator, persons 21 years of age or older may access psilocybin services without prescription or referral from health-care providers. In addition, service centres will sell psilocybin products.

569. In Mexico, a commission to fight trafficking in illicit synthetic drugs, firearms and ammunition was created pursuant to a presidential decree issued on 12 April 2023. The commission aims to improve coordination among government entities of Mexico to support the investigation and arrest of individuals involved in the production and trafficking of fentanyl.

570. On 29 May 2023, Mexico established the National Commission on Mental Health and Addictions

(CONASAMA), a decentralized administrative body of the Ministry of Health. The Commission merges activities previously carried out by the Technical Secretariat of the National Mental Health Council (STCONSAME), the Psychiatric Care Services (SAP) and the National Commission against Addictions (CONADIC). The Commission develops policy, strategies and programmes for the prevention and treatment of mental health disorders, including drug use disorders. It is also responsible for the operation of the Observatory of Mental Health and Addictions of Mexico, which collects, analyses and interprets information on mental health and the consumption of drugs, with the aim of obtaining reliable national- and state-level data for decision-making. The Commission was established in implementation of the health policy priorities of the General Health Law, adopted in May 2022.

571. In May 2023, the Federal Law for the Control of Chemical Precursors, Essential Chemical Products and Machines for the Manufacture of Capsules and Tablets of Mexico was amended. The amendment strengthens actions aimed at controlling the production, preparation, disposal, acquisition, import, export, transportation, storage and distribution of chemical precursors, essential chemical products and related equipment through inter-agency coordination.

572. Following the launch of the review of the Cannabis Act by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions of Canada in September 2022, an expert panel was formed to undertake an assessment of the legislative framework governing cannabis, engage with stakeholders to gather perspectives to inform the review, and provide expert advice on aspects of the legislative framework and its implementation that the Government could prioritize for improvement or reform.

573. The expert panel received a series of recommendations from various stakeholders, including the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and industry representatives, as part of the consultation process for the review mechanism. The recommendations submitted to the panel incorporated issues related to improving competition within the cannabis industry, including the review of the licensing process and related costs; adjustments to THC limits; the review of cannabis promotion, packaging and labelling; surveillance of online cannabis distribution; and research on the equitability of access, the availability of the legal supply and pricing.

574. On 2 December 2022, amendments to the Cannabis Act and its regulations concerning cannabis research and testing and beverages containing cannabis came into force in Canada. The amendments increase the public possession

limit for cannabis beverages from 2.1 to 17.1 litres, a level similar to that of other cannabis products, such as edibles. Existing controls aimed at mitigating the risks of over-consumption and accidental consumption, such as child-resistant packaging and strict limits on the amount of THC per container, remain unamended. The amendments also facilitate non-therapeutic cannabis research involving human participants and allow analytical testing licence holders and federal and provincial governmental laboratories to produce, distribute and sell reference standards and test kits.

575. In April 2023, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the provisions of the provincial law banning the possession and cultivation of cannabis plants in Quebec for personal purposes are valid and operative under the Constitution of Canada. While the Federal Cannabis Act allows people to possess or cultivate four cannabis plants at home, the Cannabis Regulation Act of Quebec prohibits such possession and cultivation. In a unanimous ruling, the Court ruled that banning the possession of cannabis plants and their cultivation at home is a means of achieving the provincial law's public health and security objectives and such legislation is within the provinces' jurisdiction over property and civil rights and residual jurisdiction over matters of a local or private nature.

576. In the United States, as at 1 November 2023, 38 states, three territories and the District of Columbia allowed the medical use of cannabis products. On 31 March 2023, the Governor of the State of Kentucky signed into law Senate Bill 47, authorizing the medical use of cannabis in the state. The use of cannabis for medical purposes would be allowed for registered patients with qualifying medical conditions, such as cancer, epilepsy or post-traumatic stress disorder. Some provisions of the bill will not become effective until 1 January 2025.

577. In July 2023, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs issued Directive 1315, on access to Veterans Health Administration clinical programmes for veterans participating in State-approved cannabis programmes. Under the directive, health-care providers under the Department discuss relevant clinical information regarding cannabis use with veterans who request information or report cannabis use and document such information in the veteran's electronic health record. Clinical treatment decisions in relation to cannabis use must be made on a case-by-case basis and take into account the health and safety of veterans. Furthermore, veterans must not be denied Veterans Health Administration services solely because they are participating in a State-approved cannabis programme or because they acknowledge that they use cannabis. However, to comply with federal law, Veterans Health Administration health-care providers are prohibited from

recommending or registering veterans for participation in a State-approved cannabis programme, completing forms for them to that end, or making referrals to such programmes.

578. As at 7 November 2023, 24 states, two territories and the District of Columbia had enacted measures to regulate the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Most recently, the State of Delaware passed Bills HB1 and HB2. Both bills became law on 23 April 2023, without the signature of the Governor of the state, owing to his reservations regarding legalization. Persons over the age of 21 are allowed to possess, use, display, purchase or transport cannabis without penalty, and the legislation also establishes a regulated, taxed market for cannabis for recreational use similar to that for alcohol. Bill H.F.100, establishing a regulatory framework for the use by adults of cannabis for non-medical purposes, including a regulated market with taxation on cannabis products, was enacted in the State of Minnesota on 30 May 2023. The “issue 2” ballot initiative in a referendum held in the State of Ohio on 7 November 2023 was approved by voters. The initiative modifies Ohio law and allows for the possession and personal cultivation of cannabis as well as the licensing of cannabis growers and retailers.

579. **INCB underscores that article 4 (c) of the 1961 Convention requires States parties to take such legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary, subject to the provisions of the Convention, to limit exclusively to medical and scientific purposes the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs, and that article 3 of the 1988 Convention requires States parties to adopt such measures as may be necessary to establish as criminal offences under its domestic law, when committed intentionally:**

(a) The production, manufacture, extraction, preparation, offering, offering for sale, distribution, sale, delivery on any terms whatsoever, brokerage, dispatch, dispatch in transit, transport, importation or exportation of any narcotic drug or any psychotropic substance contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention, the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention;

(b) The cultivation of cannabis plant for the purpose of the production of narcotic drugs contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention and the 1961 Convention as amended.

580. The proclamation by the President of the United States, who announced on 6 October 2022 a full, unconditional and categorical pardon for prior offences of simple possession of cannabis under federal law and the law of the District of Columbia, is being implemented by the United States Department of Justice. While the presidential pardon

does not expunge the existing conviction, it removes civil or legal restrictions, such as on the rights to vote, hold office or sit on a jury, and lifts barriers to housing, employment and educational opportunities.

581. As of March 2023, a cannabis company was authorized to import and acquire cannabis seeds and cultivate, produce and sell cannabis products with low levels of THC in Mexico. This is the first authorization related to commercial cannabis issued by the Federal Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS), the health regulatory agency of Mexico. The authorization was granted by the Commission in response to a decision by the Supreme Court of Mexico. In a public statement, the Commission emphasized that it did not have enough information to determine that future products would be safe for the purposes for which the company intended them to be used. In addition, the Commission, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, filed complaints and non-conformity appeals seeking to reverse and invalidate the authorization in order to protect public health.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

582. According to the 2022 *Public Report on Organized Crime in Canada*, cocaine remained the primary commodity trafficked in Canada, and organized crime involvement in the markets for methamphetamine and fentanyl continued to increase. More than 350 organized crime groups were involved in the illicit market for fentanyl in Canada, while 21 such groups were involved in its illicit manufacture.

583. In December 2022, the Canada Border Services Agency seized nearly 2.5 tons of opium in Vancouver, British Columbia, the largest opium seizure by the agency to date. In addition, between 13 April and 14 May 2023 alone, the Agency made 15 seizures of ketamine, amounting to 89.8 kg, with a street value of over 6 million Canadian dollars. All the seizures were made at the Léo-Blanchette Mail Processing Centre.

584. There have been significant seizures of fentanyl by various law enforcement agencies in the United States. In 2022, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration seized a total of more than 57 million fentanyl-laced counterfeit prescription pills and nearly 6,000 kg of fentanyl powder. An additional 6,800 kg of fentanyl was seized by the United States Customs and Border Protection. The Drug Enforcement Administration estimated that the seizures amounted to over 379 million deadly doses of fentanyl. The United States Postal Inspection Service seized approximately 150 per cent more fentanyl in 2022 than in the previous year

and the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the United States Department of the Treasury designated nearly 100 individuals and entities for their role in the illicit drug trade, including trafficking in fentanyl and precursor chemicals.

585. According to data from the High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas programme, between the last quarter of 2021 and 30 September 2022, law enforcement officials seized more than 11 tons of fentanyl, nearly 3 tons of heroin, more than 150 tons of methamphetamine and nearly 170 tons of cocaine, representing nearly \$9 billion in street value. The programme oversees 33 regional areas in all 50 states of the United States, as well as Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands and the District of Columbia.

586. In the United States, seizures of illicit ketamine by drug enforcement agencies rose by 349 per cent between 2017 and 2022. In 2023, the United States Customs and Border Protection seized over 6 tons of ketamine, compared with 4.9 tons in 2022.

587. Fentanyl and methamphetamine seizures in Mexico increased in 2021, in comparison with 2020. The National Guard seized 168 kg of fentanyl in 2021, whereas less than 50 kg of the substance were seized in 2020. The quantity of methamphetamine seized reached more than 4.7 tons in 2021, compared with 1.36 tons in 2020. On the other hand, seizures of cocaine, cannabis, heroin and other psychotropic substances decreased.

588. Seized equipment and illicit narcotic drugs have been continuously destroyed in various regions in Mexico, often in large quantities. On 25 June 2023, the Office of the Attorney General of Mexico, through the Specialized Regional Control Prosecutor's Office (FECOR), in its Sinaloa Delegation, destroyed nearly 36 tons of various narcotic drugs and precursor chemicals and over 735,000 fentanyl pills, in addition to drug manufacturing equipment.

589. The illicit manufacture of and trafficking in drugs among cartels and criminal gangs continue to contribute to high levels of violence in Mexico. According to UNODC data, although intentional homicide rates in the country have fallen slightly over the past several years, the homicide rate remains one of the highest among countries worldwide, with more than 28 homicides per 100,000 people in 2021. Available data for 2022 and 2023 suggest that the rates of violence and homicide in the country have remained at the levels of 2021.

6. Prevention and treatment

590. According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drug overdose deaths in the United States have risen fivefold over the past two decades. In 2021, there were over 106,000 deaths due to overdose of drugs, including illicit drugs and prescription opioids. The number of drug overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids other than methadone continued to increase, reaching more than 70,000 deaths in 2021, while deaths involving heroin declined from nearly 13,200 in 2020 to nearly 9,200 in 2021. In comparison, provisional data for 2022, published in May 2023, show that the overall reported number of drug overdose deaths occurring in the United States slightly decreased from 2021 to 2022. However, drug overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids (including fentanyl but excluding methadone) and stimulants with abuse potential (such as methamphetamine) continued to increase in comparison with 2021. The Board stresses the importance of the availability of and access to overdose-reversing medications, such as naloxone, which, if administered in a timely manner, have life-saving effects.

591. According to data released by Health Canada, there were a total of nearly 7,400 apparent opioid toxicity deaths in Canada in 2022, with over 2,200 such deaths in the Province of British Columbia alone. That was the second largest number of suspected deaths ever recorded in a calendar year in that province, after the more than 2,300 deaths recorded in 2021. Of all accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths in 2022, 81 per cent involved fentanyl and more than half also involved a stimulant (cocaine or methamphetamine), reflecting the polysubstance nature of the crisis in the country.

592. In the United States there has also been an increasing concern over overdoses involving opioids laced with other substances, including stimulants and benzodiazepines or analogues. In March 2023, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration issued a public safety alert on the sharp increase in the trafficking of fentanyl mixed with xylazine. The Administration reported that it had seized xylazine and fentanyl mixtures in 48 states and that, in 2022, approximately 23 per cent of the fentanyl powder and 7 per cent of the fentanyl pills it had seized contained xylazine. On 12 April 2023, the Government of the United States officially designated fentanyl adulterated or associated with xylazine as an emerging threat to the country, owing to the associated significant and rapidly worsening negative health consequences, including fatal overdoses and severe morbidity. Xylazine is a sedative approved for veterinary use in Canada and the United States.

593. Xylazine has also been identified in an increasing number of samples taken by law enforcement agencies across

Canada. According to Health Canada, the proportion of fentanyl samples that also contained xylazine increased from 1.4 per cent in January 2020 to 9 per cent in April 2023, with a peak near 12 per cent in June 2022. In addition, a number of provinces across Canada have issued toxic drug alerts about bromazepam having been detected in blood samples taken in investigations into sudden deaths; in some cases, the bromazepam had been laced with fentanyl. Bromazepam is a benzodiazepine not under international control. It is not approved for medical use in Canada. Naloxone, which is commonly used to counteract the effects of opioids and prevent overdose, does not reverse the effects of xylazine or benzodiazepines.

594. In implementation of its National Drug Control Strategy, the Government of the United States has accelerated a series of public health initiatives, in addition to actions targeting drug supply reduction. The initiatives include expanding the availability of and access to opioid overdose reversal products, including through the first approval of naloxone as a non-prescription drug, on 29 March 2023, by the United States Food and Drug Administration and by delivering naloxone to communities adversely affected by fentanyl. On 6 April 2023, the Government launched a national campaign to educate young people about the dangers of fentanyl and the life-saving effects of naloxone and has been working to make treatments for opioid use disorders a part of routine health-care delivery, including in prison settings.

595. On 22 May 2023, the United States Food and Drug Administration approved the first nalmefene hydrochloride nasal spray for the emergency treatment of known or suspected opioid overdose in adults and paediatric patients aged 12 years and older. It is the first approval of the substance for use in health-care and community settings in the United States. The approval was supported by safety and pharmacokinetic studies and the nasal spray was subject to a priority review, which allows approval within 6 months, instead of the 10 months required under standard review procedures.

596. To further address the drug overdose crisis in the United States, the National Institutes of Health has established a research network that will test harm reduction strategies, such as the distribution of naloxone and fentanyl test strips, in different community settings and will examine the efficacy of bringing harm reduction services and tools into communities by means of, or in the form of, mobile vans, peer support specialists, Internet- and smartphone-based tools and other types of outreach. The initiative is expected to provide a total of approximately \$36 million over five years and represents the largest pool of funding to date for that purpose.

597. The National Institute on Drug Abuse awarded New York University Langone Health and the Brown University School of Public Health with a grant to conduct research to measure the impact of some of the first publicly recognized overdose prevention centres in the United States, located in New York City and Providence, Rhode Island. As part of the research project, the first of its kind, the three sites are being evaluated between 2023 and 2027 in terms of fatal and non-fatal overdose rates and emergency department visits. In addition, the project is examining the community impact of the sites and estimating their operational costs and the potential cost savings they provide to health-care and criminal justice systems.

598. According to the United States 2022 Monitoring the Future survey, published in June 2023, levels of adolescent cannabis use in the United States decreased after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and remained relatively stable in 2022, with 31 per cent of 12th-grade students reporting cannabis use in the past 12 months. The use of narcotic drugs other than heroin increased slightly among 12th-grade students between 2021 and 2022, with 1.7 per cent reporting such use within the past year. Among the same group of students, the prescribed use of medications for attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder increased from 11 per cent in 2021 to 15 per cent in 2022. Building on results from the Monitoring the Future survey, the University of Michigan and Columbia University undertook a study that showed that young adults aged 19 to 30 years had nearly doubled their past-year use of non-LSD hallucinogens between 2018 and 2021, with past-year use at 3.4 per cent in 2018, compared with 6.6 per cent in 2021.

599. The 2022 Canadian Cannabis Survey results were published in December 2022. Most of the findings did not differ significantly from those of 2021. A new parameter on accidental consumption of cannabis was introduced in the 2022 survey. Among people who had used cannabis in the past 12 months, over 30 per cent indicated higher THC and lower CBD consumption, and over 60 per cent had obtained cannabis from a legal storefront, an increase from 53 per cent reported in the 2021 survey. Five per cent of respondents reported always obtaining cannabis from illegal or unlicensed sources, with online illegal markets remaining attractive owing to the ease of payment and the appearance of being a legal source. Most respondents also indicated that the occasional use of alcohol and cannabis posed no or only a slight risk, whereas the occasional smoking of tobacco and use of e-cigarettes with nicotine posed moderate or great risks.

600. In a report released on 29 March 2023, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction concluded that substance use had cost the Canadian economy over 49 billion Canadian dollars in 2020, up from 11 billion Canadian

dollars per year between 2007 and 2020. Lost productivity, including the value of work lost due to premature deaths and long- and short-term disability, had cost over 22 billion Canadian dollars in 2020, with opioid use having cost over 7 billion Canadian dollars in 2020, higher than in any other year. The report also analysed the related costs of health care and criminal justice and other direct costs.

601. In Canada, between April 2018 and March 2023, the “Know more” opioids awareness programme engaged in more than 1,300 in-person and virtual sessions at high schools, 68 events at post-secondary institutions, 43 events and festivals and more than 175,000 interactions with people, and placed awareness products such as posters and wallet cards in high-traffic areas of 16 post-secondary educational institutions. The programme raises the awareness of teenagers and young people across Canada about the facts surrounding the opioid overdose crisis, opioids, fentanyl, signs of an overdose, naloxone, the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act and the impacts of stigma on people who use drugs.

602. As of June 2023, there were 38 supervised drug consumption sites operating in Canada, and an additional 10 sites were awaiting approval by Health Canada. The sites provide health, social and treatment services, including access to clean drug use equipment, drug checking, emergency medical care in case of overdose, testing for infectious diseases, referrals for drug treatment and access to social services such as housing. Since 2017, there have been over 4 million visits to the sites and over 40,000 overdoses have been reversed at the sites. As possession of controlled substances is prohibited under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, an exemption under section 56 (1) of the Act is required to operate a supervised consumption site for medical purposes.

603. To facilitate access to prevention and health services for people who use drugs, the Inter-Institutional Committee for Risk and Harm Reduction was established in Mexico City in January 2023. The Committee comprises members from the National Commission against Addictions (CONADIC), the Psychiatric Care Services (SAP) and the Technical Secretariat of the National Mental Health Council (STCONSAME) of the Ministry of Health, the government of Mexico City and the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City, and is supported by civil society organizations. The purpose of the Committee is to ensure that prevention and treatment services for people who use drugs in the city are undertaken with respect for human rights and aim to decrease associated stigma.

604. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico, in 2021, the Attorney General charged over 3,200 adolescents with alleged drug-related crimes, of which 90 per cent were charged for simple

possession of controlled substances, in particular cannabis and methamphetamine. Drug-related crimes represented a total of 14.4 per cent of the total number of criminal charges against adolescents in that year and were the third most common type of crime among that population, after robbery and various injuries. In comparison with 2015, the number of adolescents charged with alleged drug-related offences decreased by 23 per cent.

605. According to the Observatory of Mental Health and Addictions of Mexico, Mexico is going through an epidemiological transition in terms of the demand for treatment for use of methamphetamine, experiencing an increase in admissions for treatment in a greater number of states. In 2017, six states noted admissions for use of methamphetamine, which increased to 21 states in 2022. Between those years, the use of methamphetamine, ecstasy and stimulants increased by 218 per cent. In 2022, those substances accounted for over 46 per cent of requests for treatment.

606. According to the “Online survey on the use of cannabis and derivatives” carried out in Mexico in 2023, which was taken by nearly 13,500 people between the ages of 12 and 75, 28.3 per cent of survey respondents had used cannabis at some time in their lives and one in five identified herself or himself as a current user. The main reasons given for use included sleep and performance enhancement, stress reduction, socialization and experimentation.

South America

Drug trafficking organizations continue to expand their operations in the Amazon Basin into illegal mining, illegal logging and wildlife trafficking, resulting in life-threatening risks to Indigenous populations. Such activities have been linked to bribery, extortion, fraud and money-laundering, as well as homicide, violent assault, sexual violence and forced labour in the Amazon.

The area under illicit coca bush cultivation in Colombia rose by 13 per cent to a second consecutive record high of 230,000 ha, while a record level of 95,008 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation was reported in Peru for 2022, representing an 18 per cent increase compared with 2021 and taking place most notably in the Peruvian Amazon.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations received a request from the Plurinational State of Bolivia to activate

the process for a critical review of the current classification of coca leaf as a narcotic drug in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended.

1. Major developments

607. South America is one of the three regions in the world that suffer the highest economic impacts of armed conflict, including between militias and drug cartels, together with the Middle East and North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the effects of drug trafficking on the environment and the life of Indigenous communities are increasingly visible in the region.

608. Most notably, in the Amazon regions in Brazil, Colombia and Peru, which combined account for 79 per cent of the Amazon basin, drug trafficking organizations continue to expand their operations into illegal mining, illegal logging and wildlife trafficking. In the *World Drug Report 2023*, UNODC described the nexus connecting drug-related crime, crimes that affect the environment and convergent crime, which includes bribery, extortion, fraud and money-laundering, as well as homicide, violent assault, sexual violence and forced labour. This complex set of challenges affects the environment through a phenomenon known as narco-deforestation, which poses a significant threat to the world's largest rainforest and disproportionately affects Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent and other vulnerable populations through forced displacements, mercury poisoning and increased exposure to violence.

609. In Colombia, the presence of dissident factions of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP), namely, the Carolina Ramírez First Front and the Armando Ríos First Front, has been linked to numerous accounts of homicides, threats, extortions, forced recruitment of minors, internal displacements and other violent crimes. The violence is connected to disputes for territory and internal control of the factions, as well as the social control imposed by the organizations on local communities, and it affects mostly Indigenous populations. The violence is further fuelled by the presence of the Brazilian criminal organizations Red Command and First Command of the Capital, which collaborate with the Colombian organizations in order to traffic illicit substances and illicit mining spoils across the border. The Colombian Ombudsman issued *alerta temprano de inminencia* (early imminence alert) No. 0-17-23 in May 2023, demanding the prioritization of exceptional preventive humanitarian support to Indigenous communities in the Colombian Amazon, including the Yaigojé Apaporis Reserve in Vaupés Department, and the communities in the non-urban areas of La Pedrera, La Victoria, Mirití-Paraná and Puerto Santander

in Amazonas Department. According to the Ombudsman, these communities are at risk of violations of their right to life, freedom, integrity and security, including violations of international human rights law.

610. Drug-related crime and other forms of organized crime continue to affect politics in South America to different degrees, as illustrated by recent developments and ongoing investigations related to Ecuador and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). In July 2023, Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios, former director of the military intelligence agency of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, was extradited by Spain to the United States for allegedly participating in drug-trafficking activities. He is charged with participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy; conspiring to import cocaine into the United States; using, carrying and possessing machine guns and destructive devices in connection with narco-terrorism and cocaine importation conspiracies; and conspiring to use, carry and possess machine guns and destructive devices in connection with narco-terrorism and cocaine importation conspiracies.

611. In Ecuador, presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was murdered on 9 August 2023 after participating in a campaign rally. The violent act also left nine other people injured, including a candidate for the legislature and two police officers. Villavicencio held strong positions against drug cartels, criminal organizations and corruption. The homicide was declared a political crime by Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso, who also declared three days of national mourning and 60 days of state of exception.

612. In January 2023, the Attorney General's Office of Colombia announced the arrest of Margareth Chacón, a Colombian national accused of planning and financing the murder of a Paraguayan public prosecutor, Marcelo Daniel Pecci Albertini, who successfully pursued several high-profile organized crime cases. The homicide was committed in Colombia and Chacón had met with drug trafficking organizations in Mexico before leading the assassination in Cartagena, Colombia, and subsequently fleeing to El Salvador, where she was arrested.

613. In Brazil, the Brazilian directory of public security was published in July 2023. The report tracks violent intentional deaths at the national and state levels and analyses police lethality as well as casualties among the police forces. Data provided in the report also cover disappearances, violence against children and youth, domestic and sexual violence, firearms and public security spending. The report presents a trend of intentional violent deaths in Brazil since 2011, which peaked in 2017 with 67,078 deaths, decreasing in 2018 and 2019, falling to 47,765 deaths, and then remained relatively stable until 2022, when 47,398 such deaths were recorded.

Regarding the regional distribution of intentional violent deaths, the highest violent homicide rates were registered in Amapá, with 50.6 deaths per 100,000 population, Bahia (47.1) and Amazonas (38.8), in the north and north-east regions of the country. The report also presents an analysis linking the widespread violence in the country to the expansion of activities of the rival drug trafficking organizations – Red Command and First Command of the Capital – from their original territories in south-eastern Brazil (namely in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) into other states.

614. During the fifty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in September and October 2023, the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela presented its third report (A/HRC/54/57), focusing on two areas: (a) the State apparatus and its mechanisms of repression and restrictions on civic and democratic space; and (b) the establishment of the Directorate of Strategic and Tactical Actions as part of the Bolivarian National Police in July 2022 as the continuation, in terms of structure, command and modus operandi, of the Special Action Forces (FAES). In the report, it is stated that the mission remains concerned about the great number of allegations of extrajudicial executions by security forces in the context of security operations against organized crime.

615. On 26 June 2023, the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia sent a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations requesting to begin the process of a critical review of the current classification of coca leaf as a drug in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended, in accordance with article 3 of the Convention. In accordance with the same article, the request was brought to the attention of the parties, WHO and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs by the Secretary-General. The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia will be notified once the review by WHO has been completed. The Plurinational State of Bolivia has a reservation to the 1961 Convention that allows the chewing of coca leaf for cultural purposes in its national territory. The Government constitutionally protects ancestral coca as cultural heritage, a renewable natural resource for biodiversity and a factor of social cohesion, and does not consider it to be a narcotic drug when in its natural state. The General Coca Law establishes a production limit of up to 22,000 ha of coca bush, as well as the authorized production areas with geo-referenced limits.

2. Regional cooperation

616. In 2022, cooperation between Brazil and Colombia was promoted through a pilot project for monitoring the illicit drug market in Brazil, implemented by UNODC in collaboration with the Integrated Illicit Crop Monitoring

System of Colombia, the National Police of Colombia and Brazilian law enforcement agencies. The project has held five technical workshops and trained around 300 representatives from security forces in four states of Brazil. The project aims to build a broader and more diversified monitoring system for the illicit drug market, with a focus on price and purity information. The initiative is part of the Centre of Excellence for the Reduction of the Illicit Drug Supply, a partnership between UNODC, the Brazilian National Secretariat for Drug Policy (SENAD) and UNDP.

617. Moreover, in 2022, the Global Programme on Cybercrime, in cooperation with the UNODC Laboratory and Scientific Service published, under the UNODC opioid strategy, a report entitled “The online trafficking of synthetic drugs and synthetic opioids in Latin America and the Caribbean”. This report has provided information on how organized criminal groups have used social media platforms, open forums and darknet markets for all phases of trafficking, from acquiring the precursors needed to manufacture synthetic drugs to selling the final products and monetizing revenues mainly through cryptocurrencies.

618. During 2022 and 2023, UNODC supported Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru in addressing the whole cycle of drug trafficking investigation in cyberspace, from the initial phases of a case to the trial. In this regard, 14 training courses were delivered focusing on legal aspects of the implementation of investigative techniques in cyberspace, challenges from the theory of the case to trial, blockchain, cryptocurrencies, the darknet, and forensic analysis in all its phases, with practical exercises and live demonstrations.

619. In January and April 2023, UNODC facilitated the exchange of best practices on asset forfeiture between Bolivian prosecutors, counter-narcotics police and officials of seized assets (Directorate for the Registry, Control and Administration of Seized Assets) and the Colombian Police and Prosecutor’s Office. In August 2023, 40 officers of the Special Force against Drug Trafficking and the Regional Centre for Anti-Narcotics Intelligence, based in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, participated in an international course on investigation and financial analysis. The training was conducted by the Federal Police of Brazil and strengthened participants’ skills in the use of financial analysis techniques and technologies in the fight against organized crime related to drug trafficking.

620. UNODC promoted a bilateral meeting between prosecutors from Argentina and Bolivia (Plurinational State of) in May 2023. The meeting was aimed at facilitating interaction among border prosecutors and making progress in the formation of joint investigation teams. This activity was a

continuation of the border visit made by UNODC to the city of Yacuiba, Plurinational State of Bolivia, in 2022.

621. On 13 December 2022, the Centre of Excellence of Brazil, jointly with the Integrated Illicit Crop Monitoring System of Colombia, published the study entitled “Dynamics of the illicit drug market in Brazil: comparative analysis of the prices of cannabis herb, cocaine and other drugs” in four States in Brazil. The study found that risks associated with each stage of the process, such as conflicts in the territory, customs controls and police action, could contribute to variations in drug prices. The study also found that disputes between different organized criminal groups, as well as the hegemony of an organization, could also influence price variation. For example, it was found that the price of cocaine base in Brazil increased as the product was transported further from the drug-producing countries.

622. In December 2022, Argentina hosted the forty-sixth plenary meeting of the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America, which supports countries in strengthening measures to tackle money-laundering and terrorist financing. The Task Force’s member States are Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. During the meeting, the mutual evaluation report on Ecuador was approved. Among the key findings, the report highlighted that, considering the country’s risk profile, although the work of the Economic and Financial Analysis Unit was outstanding, the number of disseminated financial intelligence reports was not appropriate given the seriousness of the threats identified, such as drug trafficking and smuggling. The plenary also approved the “Seventh enhanced follow-up report and second technical compliance re-rating report of Colombia”. The report recognizes the important progress being made by the country in addressing the compliance deficiencies identified in its 2018 mutual evaluation report. The country has been re-rated from partially compliant to largely compliant for two recommendations on customer due diligence.

623. The UNODC-INTERPOL-WCO Passenger and Cargo Border Team units made record seizures of precursor chemicals in South America. As a result of the coordinated work between Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Chile, 690 tons of chemical precursors intended for the production of cocaine were seized in November 2022 in 41 abandoned containers. That was the largest seizure of chemical precursors by a Passenger and Cargo Border Team unit since the programme’s inception in 2005 and constitutes approximately 80 per cent of the total chemical precursor seizures by the Passenger and Cargo Border Team for the entire year (over 830 tons).

624. In 2023, the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies (COPOLAD III) continued to support regional and international cooperation in drug control matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. Activities included a workshop for the exchange of information and intelligence and the improvement of chemical management and disposal systems, held in Quito in April 2023; a seminar on drugs, vulnerabilities and urban territories, held in Fortaleza, Brazil, in April 2023; a meeting organized by EMCDDA on the analytical capacity of national early warning systems and national drug observatories, including updates and new perspectives, held in Santiago in April 2023; and the workshop “Road maps for quality care, social inclusion and the fight against drug use stigma”, held in Montevideo in June 2023.

625. In December 2022, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Uruguay participated in the Board’s Operation Knockout and exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

626. In April 2023, the GRIDS Programme held capacity-building training for 32 enforcement officers from police, customs and postal security in Uruguay, followed by training for 26 Paraguayan officials. Both events covered the safe identification and interdiction of dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

627. In May 2023, the GRIDS Programme delivered two training courses in Brazil for 39 law enforcement and regulatory officers. Participants received instruction on the appropriate utilization of INCB operational tools and targeting platforms, IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition, to aid in intelligence exchange and investigation efforts.

628. In May 2023, the GRIDS Programme delivered an awareness-raising and capacity-building workshop on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals for 25 Peruvian front-line officers in Lima. The training emphasized capacity-building to enhance communications by authorities in Peru concerning safe handling and interdiction approaches for dangerous substances.

629. In September 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, in Vienna.

The event gathered law and regulatory enforcement focal points and forensic laboratory, chemical and toxicology experts, including from Argentina and Chile, to assess the latest intelligence on dangerous substances with no known legitimate use. Several participating Governments also conducted bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders.

630. Also in September 2023, the GRIDS Programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate use and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals in Vienna. The event brought together representatives from Governments and international organizations, including from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay. Special attention was given to the efforts and outcomes of INCB Operation Knockout to stop trafficking of new psychoactive substances used to facilitate sexual assault.

631. A total of 338 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of all 12 countries in South America, namely, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. There are now five e-modules developed by INCB Learning, which cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. E-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

632. UNODC provided training on the safe handling and disposal of seized drugs and precursor chemicals for authorities in Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru. Though the Regional Programme for the Secure Management and Disposal of Seized Drugs and Chemical Precursors (STAND), UNODC also delivered national and regional training on the control and inspection of precursor users and promoted information exchange at the subregional level to identify emerging trends and modi operandi of precursor diversion.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

633. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor

the licit activity of internationally controlled substances and assess the level of availability of these substances for licit medical and scientific purposes.

634. In South America, as in other regions, it is difficult to establish adequate levels of opioid analgesics without the reliable measurement of medical needs related to palliative care and other health conditions. According to data reported to the Board by Member States, the consumption of opioid analgesics in South America, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has almost tripled in the last 20 years, from 6,239 S-DDD_{pm} in 2002 to 16,824 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021. In 2021, Chile was the country reporting the highest consumption (2,224 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by Colombia (1,780 S-DDD_{pm}), Argentina (1,672 S-DDD_{pm}), Uruguay (962 S-DDD_{pm}), Brazil (704 S-DDD_{pm}), Peru (397 S-DDD_{pm}), Paraguay (392 S-DDD_{pm}), Ecuador (302 S-DDD_{pm}) and Suriname (230 S-DDD_{pm}). The remaining countries reported S-DDD_{pm} below 200: the Plurinational State of Bolivia reported 173 S-DDD_{pm}, while the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Guyana reported the lowest consumption in the region, with 25 and 0 S-DDD_{pm}, respectively. Among the various opioids, fentanyl was the most consumed in 2021 (14,456 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by morphine (1,009 S-DDD_{pm}), hydrocodone (981 S-DDD_{pm}) and oxycodone (193 S-DDD_{pm}). The availability levels of narcotic drugs, excluding those listed in Schedule III of the 1961 Convention as amended, expressed in S-DDD, are calculated by dividing annual availability by 365 days. The result obtained is divided by the population, in millions (S-DDD_{pm}), of the country or territory during the year in question, and then by the defined daily dose.

635. In recent years, countries in South America have demonstrated varying levels of commitment to submitting their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances as required by the 1971 Convention. While there have been years with full compliance or near full compliance, some years have seen a slight decline in the number of submissions. The region continues to strive for consistent reporting from all its members. Determining the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in South America poses challenges because only between half and three quarters of the countries in the region have provided consumption data on any psychotropic substance over the past five years. Efforts to determine availability are also hampered by the significant proportion of countries in the region failing to regularly provide their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances.

636. **The Board recalls that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to**

internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. The Board recognizes the efforts of countries in the region to increase availability in their territories, as evidenced by their increased consumption, and encourages further measures, with special attention to availability in non-urban areas and for vulnerable populations.

637. With regard to precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. In the last five years, all countries in South America except Paraguay provided at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations to the Board and have regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes. Suriname provided annual legitimate requirements to the Board for the first time in the last five years in 2019.

4. National legislation, policy and action

638. On 13 December 2022, Ministry of Security of Argentina approved new “Intervention Guidelines for Police and Security Forces in situations involving people with mental health crises and/or problematic consumption in public space” through resolution No. 843/2022. According to the guidelines, the ultimate goal of an intervention is risk reduction until the arrival of health services, preserving the safety of the people involved and the security forces on the ground, facilitating access to health and social services.

639. On 8 November 2022, through resolution No. 760/2022, the Ministry of Security of Argentina created the national precursor chemicals observatory to support the Implementation Authority of the National Registry of Chemical Precursors, created by Law No. 26.045. The observatory will centralize, process, systematize, analyse and monitor available information on precursor chemicals, with the goal of strengthening the State’s capacity to prevent and investigate illicit trafficking in precursor chemicals by strengthening the linkages between the various

governmental agencies as well as with private sector entities involved in the control of the use of precursor chemicals.

640. In 2023, UNODC launched a programme to counter synthetic drugs and the diversion of chemical precursors in Argentina. The programme focuses on strengthening interdiction of illicit drugs, with an emphasis on synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances, including synthetic opioids, and also focuses on the control of chemical substances, criminal justice responses to drug trafficking on the Internet, and criminal justice responses to corruption associated with drug trafficking. The programme is being implemented in three provinces of Argentina: the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires Province and Santa Fe Province. UNODC also supported Argentina in the drafting of a code of good conduct for chemical precursors operators, which constitutes a useful tool for promoting the joint control of chemical precursors in the public and the private sectors. The code highlights the importance of consensus between both sectors with respect to good practices in the use of chemical precursors to prevent their diversion to illicit markets.

641. Between March and July 2023, UNODC conducted several technical workshops and training sessions to increase the capacity of police officers, prosecutors and judges at the national and subnational levels in Argentina in the following areas: (a) identifying illicit mechanisms for obtaining chemical substances and precursors by organized crime; (b) the strategic criminal investigation and prosecution of drug trafficking cases and associated corruption; (c) the production of narcotic drugs (including synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances) and the chemical substances and precursors used for their illicit manufacture; (d) the introduction to synthetic drugs, synthetic opioids and chemical substances in the illicit production of drugs; and (e) the inspection and safe handling, transportation and temporary storage of chemicals and precursors.

642. On 18 April 2023 an Early Warning System for New Psychoactive Substances was created by joint resolution No. 1/2023 of the Argentine Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and the Secretariat for Comprehensive Drug Policies (SEDRONAR). The Early Warning System collects, produces, systematizes and communicates reliable information on new psychoactive substances, emerging drugs and new modalities of consumption and commercialization in Argentine territory, in order to prevent and reduce possible negative effects on people and for public health, on the basis of early detection, risk assessment, communication and the development of timely responses.

643. On 30 December 2022, the Plurinational State of Bolivia approved the National Plan for Drug Demand Reduction for the period 2023–2025 through ministerial resolution No. 0765. The Plan has a community and public health focus, giving special attention to vulnerable populations. It includes a plan of action along the following lines: prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, reintegration and multisectoral coordination. The institutional actors that will be involved in the implementation of the Plan are the Ministry of Health and Sports, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Government, the autonomous departmental governments and the autonomous municipal governments.

644. On 29 August 2023, the Minister of Interior of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and UNODC signed an agreement for a project entitled “Support in the fight against corruption in the Special Force to Fight Drug Trafficking (FELCN)”. The project will strengthen good governance by developing risk management, promoting ethics and integrity and strengthening the capacities of the counter-narcotics police.

645. In Brazil, SENAD has been restructured by decree No. 11.348, of 1 January 2023. The decree restores the institution’s mandate as related to drug demand and prevention and creates a General Coordination of Special Projects on Drugs and Racial Justice. SENAD is divided into three directorates: prevention and social reintegration; research, evaluation and information management; and asset management and justice. On 6 April 2023, SENAD restructured the National Council for Drug Policy through presidential decree No. 11.480. The main changes refer to the establishment of social participation, with an equal composition between representatives of the Federal Government and civil society, and the introduction of an electoral process. SENAD plans to carry out its activities through five cross-cutting strategic pillars, with a special focus on vulnerable groups: (a) the national strategy for access to rights for women in drug policy; (b) the strategy for mitigation and reparation of the impacts of drug trafficking on indigenous populations and ethnoterritories; (c) the national strategy for racial justice in drug policy; (d) the strategy for attention to children and adolescents in drug policy; and (e) the inter-institutional articulation strategy for homeless people in drug policy. The first two strategies targeting women and Indigenous Peoples have been launched in 2023 and are under implementation.

646. The Early Warning System on Drugs of Brazil, which aims to rapidly identify the emergence of new psychoactive substances through cooperation between different Brazilian institutions, published three reports in 2022 that presented data and analysis on new psychoactive substances. In November 2022, it published its third thematic bulletin on

the diagnosis of forensic chemistry and toxicology laboratories of scientific policies in Brazil. The report contained recommendations, including to establish a minimum number of experts needed according to the volume and level of demand for analysis in each laboratory, to provide continuous training for the experts and to establish parameters for prioritizing equipment purchases. In 2023, the Early Warning System on Drugs published one report on fentanyl and one on synthetic cannabinoids. The report on fentanyl alerts the public to the global threat posed by the substance and reports modalities of intoxication observed in Brazil, as victims have unknowingly ingested fentanyl-laced synthetic cannabinoids and LSD. The report contains recommendations that naloxone be made available for emergency services and that monitoring of the situation be strengthened. With respect to synthetic cannabinoids, the report shows an increase in seizures and cases of intoxication, especially in the south-eastern states of Brazil and recommends further monitoring by the institutions involved.

647. In September 2023, Colombia launched its National Drugs Policy for the period 2023–2033. In preparing the policy, 25 territorial consultations were conducted so that the policy would include a community perspective. The policy document contains a diagnosis of the drug problem in Colombia, including details on the relation between the National Drugs Policy and the peace agreement with FARC-EP. Furthermore, one of the policy’s objectives is to establish a regulatory framework for the adult use of cannabis with a focus on human rights, public health, social and environmental justice.

648. **The Board wishes to draw the attention of all Governments to the fact that measures permitting the non-medical use of cannabis are contrary to the provisions of the international drug control conventions, specifically article 4, paragraph (c), and article 36 of the 1961 Convention as amended, and article 3, paragraph 1 (a), of the 1988 Convention.**

649. On 18 May 2023, Ecuador launched three new security strategies: the Emerging Strategy to Prevent and Contain Criminal Violence 2023–2024, the National Strategy against Organized Crime 2023–2030 and the Specific Strategy against International Trafficking in Scheduled Substances Subject to Control 2023–2030. The latter serves as an operational instrument of national policy to counter drug trafficking in a strategic and coordinated manner within the different public security mechanisms. This strategy seeks not only to reduce the supply of drugs but also to strengthen institutional processes of intelligence, investigation and multimodal interdiction, improve international cooperation and fight corruption, money-laundering and organized crime.

650. On 26 June 2023, the Government of Uruguay announced a national plan for mental health and addictions. The estimated budget for the plan, which will start implementation on 1 January 2024, was the equivalent of \$20 million. The plan has two pillars: on prevention and promotion; and on treatment, inclusion and rehabilitation. The first pillar, on prevention, incorporates the Integral Prevention Plan for the period 2021–2025 (“Uruguay previene”), focusing on social inclusion and preventing use among adolescents and youth. The second pillar is the expansion of mental health and drug treatment services of the National Integrated Health System, including the provision of psychotherapy and the creation of new drug addiction treatment centres.

651. Regarding the control of precursor chemicals, the Plurinational State of Bolivia approved two supreme decrees on 12 April 2023 to strengthen precursor control within the country and along its borders. Decree No. 4910 strengthens mechanisms for the regulation, control, monitoring and inspection of the trade in gasoline and diesel. Decree No. 4911 improves the administrative work of the General Direction of Controlled Substances, establishes the requirements and procedure for licit activities involving controlled chemical substances and strengthens mechanisms of monitoring. The Government has also prepared draft legislation to modify law No. 913, including in its list V eight new substances to be controlled as precursor chemicals: sodium permanganate, sodium metabisulfite, sodium bisulfite, jet fuel, ethyl acetate, butyl acetate, isopropyl alcohol and calcium chloride. This is in addition to the 42 other precursor chemicals already under control in the country. The draft legislation is currently being examined by the country’s Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

652. Coca bush, cocaine and cannabis continue to be the main controlled crops and substances to be illicitly cultivated, produced or manufactured and trafficked in and from South America. Coca leaves are illicitly cultivated mostly in Colombia and Peru, and to some extent in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, while cannabis is illicitly grown in several countries in the region, including Brazil, Chile and Paraguay. The diversification of some traditional drug trafficking routes and modalities has been observed, including in the Amazon region, which may be linked to recent restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

653. In June 2023, Peru reported a record level of 95,008 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation in 2022, an 18 per cent increase from 2021 and which took place most notably in

the Peruvian Amazon. The most significant increase in illicit cultivation from 2021 to 2022 occurred in the departments of Ucayali (from 10,151 ha to 14,531 ha), Loreto (from 10,348 ha to 13,844 ha) Cusco (from 13,642 ha to 16,009 ha) and Junín (from 6,701 ha to 8,063 ha). The valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers continued to account for the largest share of the illicit cultivation in 2022: 37.6 per cent. From another perspective, 19 per cent (18,076 ha) of the total area of cultivation was in territories of Indigenous or original communities and 16 per cent (14,865 ha) in natural protected areas and bordering areas. The country also reported increased levels of crop eradication, reaching 21,628 ha in 2022. Although the area of eradicated crop cultivation is still below the amounts achieved in 2018 and 2019 (25,107 ha and 25,565 ha, respectively), it is well above the amounts reported for 2020 and 2021 (6,237 ha and 5,557 ha, respectively).

654. The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia reported to the Board that, from 2021 to June 2023, the country implemented 24,961 interdiction operations, resulting in the seizure of 52 tons of cocaine, 515 tons of cannabis herb, 1,643 tons of solid chemicals, 1,753 litres of liquid chemicals and 837 tons of coca leaf, as well as the destruction of 135 crystallization and recycling laboratories and 1,737 factories. The operations have led to the arrest of 8,193 people. The Plurinational State of Bolivia also reported the eradication of 24,537 ha of surplus coca crops from 2021 to July 2023.

655. On 28 February 2023, the Bolivian Minister of Government and UNODC presented the main findings of the report on the validation of information on the destruction of illegal drugs seized in 2022 in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The projected goal of 80 per cent annual validation has been surpassed, reaching 87 per cent. In 2022, counter-narcotics police seized and destroyed 19.3 tons of cocaine and 11.1 tons of cannabis. UNODC participated in 88.5 per cent of cocaine destruction (17.1 tons), 84 per cent of marijuana destruction (9.4 tons) and final disposal of 17,489 MDMA tablets, 645 grams of MDMA in bulk and 527 doses of LSD.

656. During the reporting period, UNODC released its 2022 coca cultivation survey for the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The document reported a decrease of 2 per cent in the area under illicit cultivation in the country, from 30,500 ha in 2021 to 29,900 ha in 2022. Out of the total area cultivated, 61 per cent was concentrated in the Los Yungas de La Paz region; 38 per cent in Cochabamba; and 1 per cent in Norte de La Paz. Furthermore, UNODC also reported seizures of 331 tons of coca leaves in the Plurinational State of Bolivia for 2022, a 12 per cent increase in relation to 2021. The report estimated a potential production of coca

leaves of between 44,400 and 55,700 tons, with an estimated value between \$229 million and \$279 million. Furthermore, coca paste seizures decreased 15 per cent from the previous year, to 10.13 tons in 2022, while cocaine seizures increased 31 per cent to 10.21 tons.

657. In September 2023, UNODC in cooperation with the Government of Colombia published its annual report on coca cultivation. For a second consecutive year, Colombia saw a record high in the area of illicit coca cultivation, with an expansion by 13 per cent to 230,000 ha (in parallel with a decline of 33 per cent in the areas eradicated, falling to 69,000 ha) and an increase of 24 per cent in the potential quantity of cocaine manufactured, reaching 1,738 tons, which is the highest level for that metric ever reported for the country. The area of illicit cultivation rose, compared with 2021, by 21.5 per cent in national natural parks, 18 per cent in Indigenous protected territories, 4 per cent in land of black communities and 2 per cent in forest reserves. In parallel, between 2021 and 2022, the number of dismantled laboratories fell by 18 per cent to 4,707. Cocaine seizures and manual eradication have also decreased since 2021, by 1.5 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively.

658. The largest increases in the area under coca cultivation in Colombia in 2022 were reported from the Putumayo-Caquetá region (88 per cent), located in the south of the country, close to the border with Ecuador. Of concern was that 50 per cent of the increase is within 10 km of the border. Meanwhile, the report shows an increase in drugs seizures in Ecuador, to 201 tons in 2021, 90 per cent of which was cocaine, from 128 tons in 2020 and 82 tons in 2019. Other border areas with high concentration of illicit coca cultivation include Nariño, at the border with Ecuador, Norte de Santander, at the border with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, Chocó, at the border with Panama.

659. Peru previously worked with UNODC to conduct periodic surveys of the area of illicit crop cultivation and area of illicit crop eradication. The country issued joint crop monitoring reports with UNODC from 2002 to 2018, and from 2019 to 2022 the country has produced data on illicit crops independently. UNODC is currently working with the Government of Peru and technical experts with a view to issuing a joint report in 2024 on the basis of data for 2023.

660. The Board reiterates its recommendation that Peru resumes the studies and monitoring reports on territories affected by illicit crops that are prepared in cooperation with and fully certified by UNODC. This, in addition to ensuring support for the efforts of the Government of Peru in the fight against drug trafficking, will allow adequate comparative monitoring among the three Andean countries most affected by illicit crops. Moreover, reports certified by

UNODC will introduce stronger, evidence-based data to enable the development of more effective crop reduction strategies. In this connection, the Board notes with appreciation the surveys undertaken by Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia with UNODC support.

661. While cannabis herb seizures decreased in the region in 2021, largely due to decreases in Brazil and Paraguay, according to the OAS/CICAD *Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*, transnational cannabis trafficking in South and Central America is on the rise. This trend could reflect increased trafficking of cannabis from regional producers, more effective interdiction by the security forces and/or a greater focus by law enforcement agencies on cannabis. CICAD highlighted that several countries reported an increased prevalence of a more potent strain of cannabis originating in Colombia called “creepy”. The presence of this strain in domestic markets was reported by Chile and Peru to the extent that, in some cases, it displaced the longstanding domination of cannabis from Paraguay. According to the report, Guyana also noted the appearance of “poppy”, another name for “creepy”, from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which became popular in the local market. The presence of “creepy” in other parts of the Caribbean was also reported by the Bahamas.

662. In the annual report of the Drugs Early Warning System of Uruguay, issued in July 2023, the National Drug Board reported the issuance of two alerts in 2022. The first, issued in August 2022, related to “pink cocaine”, “tuci” or “tucibi”, and its dangerous composition which includes the combination of ketamine with different psychoactive substances. In an emblematic case, the Drugs Early Warning System was notified of a drug sample that included ketamine, methamphetamine, MDMA, tramadol and caffeine. “Pink cocaine” was first detected in Uruguay in 2020, and its presence in the country has increased since then. The second alert was issued in November 2022 on the dangers of ingesting pills with an “EA Sport” logo. Based on reports from the Toxicology Information and Support Centre (CIAT), the analysis of the laboratory of the Technical Forensic Institute identified 74 mg of MDA in the pills. MDA is methamphetamine, a psychoactive substance of the phenylethylamine family, derived from amphetamine and is an analogue of MDMA (“ecstasy”), and produces similar effects in the body.

663. In Uruguay, the most seized drug continues to be cannabis, which made up 38.2 per cent of the total of drug seizures in 2022. Cannabis was followed by cocaine base paste (36.1 per cent) and cocaine (16.8 per cent) for that year. Synthetic drugs accounted for the fourth highest amount of seizures, at 3 per cent. Although percentage shares of the total varied throughout the years, this ranking

of most seized drugs by number of seizures has remained constant since 2018. However, the percentage related to cannabis has been decreasing (from 47.5 per cent in 2018), while the percentage of cocaine base paste has been increasing (from 26.6 per cent in 2018). Moreover, the number of seizures of synthetic drugs has had the sharpest increase, from 62 in 2018 to 169 in 2022, followed by cocaine base paste, from 789 in 2018 to 2,056 in 2022. The most seized synthetic drugs in 2022 were MDA, MDMA, methamphetamine, 2C-B-NBOH (25B-NBOH), LSD, “pink cocaine” and ketamine, by number of seizures.

664. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the most seized drug in 2022 was cocaine, at 32.67 tons, followed by cannabis, at 14.54 tons. Most drug seizures took place in the states of Apure, Bolívar, Falcón and Zulia. Of 8,223 operations, the largest number of operations were linked to cannabis herb seizures (6,379), followed by cocaine and derivatives (1,636), ketamine (11), heroin (8), “ecstasy” (8), “poppers” (4), amphetamines and methamphetamines (3), alprazolam (2) and LSD (1). Security forces destroyed 58 crystallization laboratories close to the western border with Colombia, neutralized 45 aircrafts and destroyed 57 illegal air strips. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela also reported the eradication of 40 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation along the border with Colombia in 2022. The main countries of destination for seized drugs were the United States, Spain, Australia, Guinea, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Italy and South Africa, in order of significance. In 2022, the country recovered 341 vehicles, 25 boats, 44 buildings, two aircraft and 437 miscellaneous objects.

665. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported the implementation of joint counter-narcotics operations with law enforcement officials of France in Caribbean international waters. On 11 December 2022, an operation in Martinique interdicted a vessel containing 1.5 tons of cannabis, leading to the arrest of 11 Venezuelan citizens. On 25 January 2023, another Venezuelan vessel was intercepted in the same area, resulting in the seizure of 324 kg of cannabis and the arrest of 10 Venezuelans and 1 Colombian. On 6 March 2023, this collaboration led to the interception of a vessel 250 miles east of Barbados, with the seizure of 1.8 tons of cocaine and the arrest of 8 Venezuelan citizens.

6. Prevention and treatment

666. According to the latest data published by UNODC, cannabis has the highest regional past-year prevalence in South America (3.58 per cent), followed by cocaine (1.62 per cent), amphetamines and prescription stimulants (0.88 per cent), opioids (opiates and prescription opioids) (0.30 per cent), and “ecstasy” (0.24 per cent).

667. Ecuador is implementing a project for the development of a strategy for a comprehensive approach to the socioeconomic phenomenon of drugs and the strengthening of mental health for the period 2022–2025. The following surveys and studies are planned as part of that project: a national survey on drug use and mental health problems (2023–2024); a national survey on drug use and consumption among students of ninth year of basic education and first and third year of baccalaureate (2024); a survey on use and consumption among university students (2024); research in treatment centres (2023–2024); 24 provincial situational diagnoses (2024–2025); and research on violence associated with drug use or sales (2024). The most recent official national surveys of drug use among the general population date from 2016, those surveys on use among people in higher education date from 2015, and 2014 for those in secondary education. Official national surveys on treatment issues will be carried out for the first time in the country. The Ministry of Public Health of Ecuador registered 70,062 visits for mental and behavioural disorders due to the consumption of psychoactive substances classified according to ICD10 (F10–F19) during 2022. **The Board welcomes the efforts of Ecuador in the implementation of surveys and data collection in the area of mental health, drug use and treatment.**

668. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported preliminary results of its national drug survey entitled “Study of perception, risk, consumption and ease of access to drugs 2022”. The survey was conducted in 2022 and interviewed 12,160 persons between 12 and 65 years old. Cannabis herb was the most consumed controlled substance among the population, with a past-year prevalence of 1.41 per cent, followed by cocaine (0.82 per cent) and “crack” cocaine (0.72 per cent). Similarly, the statistical bulletin from the National Public System for Addiction Attention and Treatment reported that out of the 2,382 persons who received treatment for drug dependence in 2022, 89.3 per cent consumed cannabis herb, 1.6 per cent consumed “crack” cocaine, and 0.6 per cent consumed cocaine.

669. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported 9,631 drug prevention activities in the first half of 2023, providing support to 1,094,325 beneficiaries. The country also implemented the “Safe school” programme in primary and secondary level educational centres, in order to expose and address, from a preventive and awareness-raising approach, the risks of drug use and micro-trafficking. This initiative has been relaunched together with the “School for parents” programme, based on co-responsibility in the care and supervision of their children in the face of the risks of drug use and crime.

670. In 2023, UNODC supported the national seminar on prevention research held by SENAD in Brazil, at which

was launched the virtual platform of the project to support the implementation of the national system for prevention of alcohol and other drug use. The event aimed to promote prevention strategies in Brazil and had the participation of government representatives as well as researchers in the prevention area. The project is a partnership between SENAD, UNDP and UNODC. It seeks to integrate a comprehensive set of interventions and evidence-based strategies to systematize, at the national, state, and municipal levels, access to information, initiatives in prevention and management of policies, actions and to strengthen programmes to prevent the use of alcohol and other drugs.

671. In July 2023, Chile launched the first activities for the establishment of a social innovation laboratory to tackle the issue of drug use among minors under the custody of the State. The initiative is supported by COPOLAD programme and the Agirre Lehendakaria Centre, a social innovation laboratory associated with the University of the Basque Country. Authorities and institutions such as the Ministry of Health, the National Specialized Protection Service for Children and Adolescents and UNICEF participated in the initiative, together with relevant community groups.

672. **The Board wishes to encourage Member States to improve the collection of data on drug use patterns and, whenever possible, to implement periodic drug use surveys.**

D. Asia

East and South-East Asia

The illicit cultivation of opium poppy and manufacture of methamphetamine are among the most significant drug challenges facing East and South-East Asia.

The prevalence of drug use in East and South-East Asia has remained significant, with cannabis being the most used drug, followed by methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances.

Several countries and territories in the region have introduced regulatory changes related to cannabis.

Malaysia formally removed mandatory death sentences and life imprisonment for drug-related offences.

Illicit manufacture of and trafficking in ketamine, a substance not under international control, continues to be an issue of concern in the region. Seizures of ketamine nearly tripled in 2022 compared with 2021, and there has been a proliferation of clandestine laboratories for the illicit manufacture of the substance.

1. Major developments

673. The epicentre for the illicit production of opium and manufacture of methamphetamine and, increasingly, of ketamine in the region remains Shan State in Myanmar, owing to continued political instability in the country. The illicit cultivation of opium poppy and trafficking in opium is also centred in Shan State. Between 2021 and 2022, the cultivation of opium poppy in the country rose by 33 per cent and the production of opium by 88 per cent. Approximately 790 tons of opium were estimated to have been produced in 2022 in Myanmar.

674. Seizures of methamphetamine in Myanmar totalled 38.9 tons in 2022, up 22 per cent from the year before. Countries in the region as well as in neighbouring regions of South Asia and Oceania report that most seized methamphetamine originates in Myanmar. As is the case with opium, methamphetamine is trafficked across East and South-East Asia and continues to pose a major challenge for countries in the region.

675. In June 2023, Malaysia amended part of its penal code and drug control legislation formally removing mandatory death sentences for various criminal offences, including drug-related offences. Transitional measures were also introduced to allow the country's courts to review existing death penalty sentences and possibly commute them to life imprisonment.

676. The prevalence of drug use in East and South-East Asia has remained significant. The most used drug in 2021 was cannabis. Methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances, which are heavily trafficked in the region, were the second most used group of substances. There is also an established market for the non-medical use of ketamine in the region.

677. Several countries and territories in the region have introduced regulatory changes related to the scheduling and use of cannabis. Hong Kong, China, included CBD under the strictest levels of control in the territory, with trafficking in and the illicit manufacture, possession and consumption of CBD being liable to severe prison sentences, including life imprisonment, and high monetary fines. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has regulated the cultivation and use

of cannabis for medical purposes, with a licensing scheme for medical products containing CBD with not more than 1 per cent THC by weight or 0.2 per cent for raw and processed products, and for the registered sale of cosmetics, beverages and aromatic oils containing CBD.

2. Regional cooperation

678. Indonesia established an early warning system for synthetic drugs, which currently does not exist anywhere in South-East Asia, and Malaysia and Thailand are in the process of establishing a similar system. National-level consultative dialogues were held in each country, with the support of UNODC, from December 2022 through March 2023. These dialogues brought together experts from the forensic, health, law enforcement, regulatory and academic sectors to discuss the necessary initial steps for creating early warning systems for synthetic drugs in their respective countries. In September 2023, UNODC organized a national consultative dialogue on early warning systems with the Philippines, which is also in the process of establishing such a system.

679. In September 2023, ministers and senior officials from Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam and from UNODC gathered in Beijing for the 14th Ministerial Meeting of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control. This year's Ministerial Meeting endorsed the Beijing Declaration, which recognizes the extent of the drug challenges in the Mekong area and supported a regional action plan outlining practical actions that countries and the United Nations would take to address the drug problem. The Ministerial Meeting was followed by a meeting of its Senior Officials Committee. The senior officials agreed on a new plan of action that envisages greater focus on strengthening prevention and treatment initiatives, enhancing law enforcement cooperation, strengthening international judicial cooperation and promoting sustainable alternative development programmes.

680. To respond to the ongoing challenges and the evolution of the regional synthetic drug market, the UNODC SMART programme held a regional meeting in August 2023 that gathered law enforcement, public health and drug forensics experts from member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and East Asia, including China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, as well as the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Asia and the Pacific. Participants shared the latest developments and discussed strategies to address the drug situation in the region. The Programme will provide science-led capacity-building in such areas as drug detection, analysis, early warning and chemical disposal, as well as enable more

rapid communication on emerging global and regional drug-related threats.

681. In July 2023, law enforcement and regulatory authorities of Malaysia and the Philippines participated in bilateral meetings with UNODC to coordinate improvements in precursor control, share information and discuss methods to disrupt the trafficking of precursor chemicals used for the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs. While authorities in the region have pointed to the growing use of non-controlled chemicals in illicit drug production, it was noted that the current understanding of many of these substances remains limited. The discussions with Malaysia focused on sharing information regarding regulatory updates and the evolution of substances being leveraged by organized criminal groups in the region together with the latest trafficking trends, while the discussions with the Philippines focused primarily on domestic precursor control challenges relating to inter-agency coordination as well as the growing importance of strengthening both regional and inter-agency collaboration.

682. In July 2023, Myanmar hosted the 44th ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Drug Matters, which also included participants from China, India, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation as well as UNODC. The Meeting's five working groups on preventive education, treatment and rehabilitation, law enforcement, research and alternative development also met. The meetings focused on the preparation of an ASEAN ministerial meeting on drugs and other international forums on drug policy to be held in the future.

683. A total of 168 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 15 countries in East and South-East Asia, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. INCB Learning has developed five e-learning modules that cover regulatory and policy issues related to narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursor chemicals, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The modules are available at no cost to officials of competent national authorities by contacting INCB Learning.

684. During the reporting period, the INCB GRIDS Programme engaged in an extensive number of workshops, seminars and other capacity-building activities for countries in East and South-East Asia in order to address the proliferation of and trafficking in new psychoactive substances and other non-controlled substances.

685. From 7 to 11 November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme carried out a second twinning mission in South-East Asia for 15 front-line officers from customs and regulatory agencies in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. The event developed networking, communication and practical skills for international operational cooperation in conjunction with capacity-building workshops to increase use of the Board's IONICS secure communication platform and the INCB GRIDS Programme. Officers also received practical training from the INCB GRIDS Regional Technical Officer for East and South-East Asia and the Pacific in opioids identification, safe handling and interdiction approaches using personal protective equipment and presumptive field testing for opioids.

686. On 15 and 16 November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a training event to raise awareness and develop communication capacity utilizing INCB IONICS and INCB GRIDS targeting tools in Vung Tau, Viet Nam, for 19 officers from the Counter-Narcotics Police Department and the Anti-smuggling and Investigations Customs Department.

687. The INCB GRIDS Programme conducted an interregional workshop on public-private partnerships between Governments and logistics companies operating in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries from 28 to 30 November 2022. The workshop was held in Istanbul, Türkiye, and brought together 42 participants; it built upon the success of previous meetings held by INCB since 2018 related to the prevention and misuse of logistics services for trafficking in dangerous substances and promoting cooperation between Governments and logistics companies.

688. On 6 and 7 December 2022, two case meetings between the Narcotics Control Department of Japan and the Counter-Narcotics Police Department and General Department of Viet Nam Customs were organized by the INCB GRIDS Programme to discuss cases related to trafficking in ketamine, new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids following the arrest of traffickers from Viet Nam in Japan.

689. From December 2022 to January 2023, China, Indonesia, Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam participated in the Board's Operation Knockout. The operation focused on the exchange of intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

690. The INCB GRIDS Programme organized an online stakeholder consultation on voluntary cooperation between Governments and freight forwarding services for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances from 21 to 23 February 2023. The event was attended by 44 representatives from 10 Governments, three international organizations and six industry associations, including five participants from China and Singapore. Participants exchanged best practices and shared examples related to the exploitation of legitimate ancillary logistics services and discussed the next steps for promoting voluntary cooperation between Governments and their private sector partners.

691. In March 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme conducted a series of training events in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and neighbouring countries for 85 officers from drug law enforcement and regulatory agencies from each country. The training aimed to enhance reporting and interdiction activities across South-East Asia to address the growing global challenge posed by synthetic drugs using INCB intelligence tools, such as IONICS and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools. Participants also received practical instruction on opioids identification in the field, safe handling and interdiction approaches using personal protective equipment and presumptive field testing for opioids.

692. In May 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized two train-the-trainer workshops for 30 officers from the Viet Nam Customs School, the People's Police Academy and the Counter-Narcotics Police Department. The training focused on utilization of the INCB GRIDS Programme's IONICS platform and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools, awareness-raising and safe interdiction approaches for synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances.

693. On 23 May 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme convened a national expert group meeting in Bangkok on ways for freight forwarders and third-party logistics providers to prevent trafficking in dangerous non-scheduled substances. Stakeholders discussed current regional trafficking trends alongside challenges confronting logistics providers and exchanged promising practices to prevent future exploitation by traffickers. Thirty representatives from government agencies, international organizations and private sector companies participated in the event.

694. On 24 May 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme hosted a training event for 20 law enforcement officers from Thailand. The training focused on enhancing knowledge and skills to identify and safely interdict dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on the use

of the IONICS platform and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

695. From 12 to 15 June 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a joint twinning event between the West Africa and the South-East Asia regions in Lagos, Nigeria, for 13 drug law enforcement and regulatory officers from Ghana, Nigeria, Thailand and Viet Nam. The event provided an opportunity to further enhance participants' capacity to use the INCB IONICS platform and the INCB GRIDS Intelligence tools and to develop networks and skills for international operational cooperation related to new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids.

696. On 25 and 26 July 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme hosted a national training event in Da Nang, Viet Nam, for 21 customs officers. This event included awareness-building on opioids, fentanyl substances and new psychoactive substances as well as safe interdiction modules. Additionally, training was conducted on basic targeting and intelligence-gathering using the IONICS and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition platforms to enhance counter-trafficking efforts in the region.

697. On 1 and 2 August 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a national-level workshop in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, on public-private partnerships for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances through express courier, mail and postal services. Participants discussed current trends and challenges that they were facing to protect their areas of operation from being exploited by traffickers. More than 25 representatives from Government agencies, international organizations and the private sector participated in the event.

698. The INCB GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 11 to 15 September 2023. The event brought together over 100 officers from over 30 Governments, private sector partners and international and regional organizations, including from China, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

699. The INCB GRIDS Programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate use and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, held in Vienna from 18 to 22 September 2023. The event brought together over 40 representatives from over 20 Governments and international organizations, and the private sectors, including from China, Singapore and Thailand. Participants discussed

the latest intelligence on dangerous substances with no known legitimate use, and demonstrated state-of-the-art approaches for the rapid detection of suspicious packaging and falsified and illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals.

700. From 30 October to 3 November 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized two training events for 30 officers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic. These events included modules on awareness and safe interdiction of opioids, fentanyl and new psychoactive substances as well as basic targeting and intelligence training using the INCB IONICS and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition platforms to enhance counter-trafficking in the region.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances (including reporting to the Board)

701. The three international drug control treaties require the States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis and in some cases on a quarterly basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor licit activity involving internationally controlled substances as well as ensure the availability of these substances for licit medical and scientific purposes. Among the countries and territories of East and South-East Asia, reporting performance has generally been fully compliant for the narcotic drugs controlled under the 1961 Single Convention, as amended, and the psychotropic substances controlled under the 1971 Convention, and most countries and territories provided the required reports for the last five years. A few countries have not provided any of the required reports for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the last five years.

702. The Board encourages the countries and territories of East and South-East Asia that have not provided the reports as required under the international drug control conventions to do so as soon as possible and to take the necessary measures to ensure that their respective competent national authorities have sufficient resources to prepare the reports in a timely manner. In this regard, INCB offers the possibility of training, including through its INCB Learning programme, to support capacity-building in the area of reporting.

703. East and South-East Asia is among the regions that are of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. In particular, on the basis of the reported consumption of narcotic drugs, the region is among those with the lowest availability of the most widely used opioid analgesics.

704. In 2002, East and South-East Asia countries reported a total consumption of opioid analgesics of 1,281 S-DDD per million inhabitants. Twenty years later, in 2021, the region reported consumption at 5,281 S-DDD_{pm}, with a peak of 6,225 S-DDD_{pm} being reported in 2017. The Republic of Korea reported the highest level (1,976 S-DDD_{pm}) in the region, followed by Japan (892 S-DDD_{pm}), Brunei Darussalam (432 S-DDD_{pm}) and Singapore (419 S-DDD_{pm}). The rest of the countries in the region reported consumption below 300 S-DDD_{pm}. Fentanyl was the dominant opioid consumed (3,738 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by morphine (670 S-DDD_{pm}) and oxycodone (600 S-DDD_{pm}).

705. Determining the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in East and South-East Asia remains challenging because fewer than half of the region's countries and territories have provided the Board with consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past five years. The Board will continue monitoring the situation in this area and communicating to Governments the importance of furnishing data on psychotropic substances.

706. The Board stresses its concern that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in many countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.

707. As regards precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide – in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs – their estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the estimated annual legitimate requirement is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

708. As at 1 November 2023, all countries in the East and South-East Asia region had provided the Board with at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations, and they had regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes. Two countries in East and South-East Asia, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, have provided annual legitimate requirements to the Board for the first time in the last five years.

709. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention. In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board's website.

4. National legislation, policy and action

710. In December 2022, the Lao People's Democratic Republic amended its legislation to permit the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes and regulations have been established to authorize persons and businesses to engage in those activities. The country also put into place a licensing system for medical products containing CBD with not more than 1 per cent THC by weight or 0.2 per cent for raw and processed products. Additionally, the sale of cosmetics, beverages and aromatic oils that contain CBD and are registered with the Laotian Food and Drug Department is permitted in the country.

711. In January 2023, Hong Kong, China, included CBD in Schedule I of its Dangerous Drugs Ordinance, which places the substance under the strictest levels of control in the territory. According to the Narcotics Division of the Hong Kong, China, Security Bureau, trafficking in and illicit manufacture of CBD and related products are liable to a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and a fine the equivalent of \$640,000. Possession and consumption of CBD is subject to a maximum penalty of seven years in prison and a fine the equivalent of \$125,000.

712. On 26 January 2023, Pre-Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court granted the request of the Court's Prosecutor to resume the investigation of alleged crimes against humanity on the territory of the Philippines between 1 November 2011 and 16 March 2019 in the context of the so-called “war on drugs” of the Government of the Philippines. The Government of the Philippines had earlier requested a deferral on the grounds that national authorities were investigating the alleged murders being investigated by the Court. According to the Chamber, the permission to resume the investigation was given because it had concluded that the various domestic initiatives and proceedings relied on by the Philippines did not amount to tangible, concrete and progressive investigative steps being

carried out with a view to conducting criminal proceedings in a way that would sufficiently mirror the Court's investigation as authorized in its decision pursuant to article 15 of the Rome Statute.

713. The Board reiterates its appeal to Governments to take all measures necessary to prevent the extrajudicial targeting of persons suspected of involvement in drug-related offences. The Board also reiterates in the strongest possible terms that extrajudicial responses to drug-related criminality are in violation of the drug control conventions and fundamental human rights, which require that drug-related crimes be addressed through formal processes adhering to due process of law. Governments are called upon to investigate and prosecute all instances of extrajudicial action purportedly taken in the name of drug control.

714. In March 2023, the Parliament of Singapore passed the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill 2023, and certain provisions of that law entered into effect in June of that year. Among those provisions are the introducing of more stringent penalties, including caning, for the possession of certain drugs (morphine, diamorphine, opium, cocaine, cannabis, cannabis resin, cannabis mixture and methamphetamine) in quantities above defined weight thresholds. The bill also introduced a new legislative framework that will apply as from 2024 whereby substances will be controlled based on their capacity to produce a psychoactive effect, rather than their specific chemical formula.

715. According to the 2022 annual report of the Central Narcotics Bureau of Singapore, of the 2,826 persons arrested for drug use in 2022, 1,451 had used methamphetamine and 994 had used heroin. A total of 236 persons were arrested for cannabis use, and there were a few dozen arrests related to other drugs. The number of users of methamphetamine was down slightly from the year before, when 1,595 persons had been arrested for use of the drug. Arrests related to heroin use were higher in 2022 in comparison with 2021, when 778 persons had been arrested. Cannabis arrests were up in 2022, from 138 in 2021.

716. In April 2023, the Republic of Korea established a special investigative unit for drug-related crimes comprising 840 officials, including prosecutors, police and customs officials. The unit will investigate any drug-related crimes in the country, with a special focus on Internet-facilitated drug smuggling and distribution.

717. In June 2023, the Abolition of the Mandatory Death Penalty Act 2023 and the Revision of the Sentence of Death and Imprisonment for Natural Life (Temporary

Jurisdiction of the Federal Court) Act 2023 received royal assent in Malaysia and entered into force in the country. The Abolition of the Mandatory Death Penalty Act 2023 amends the country's penal code and drug legislation by removing the mandatory death penalty and life imprisonment for several offences, including drug-related offences. The Revision of the Sentence of Death and Imprisonment for Natural Life (Temporary Jurisdiction of the Federal Court) Act 2023 additionally allows the country's courts to review death and life sentences already imposed, including those for drug-related offences, and instead apply sentences of 20 to 40 years of imprisonment.

718. The Board notes as a positive development the legislative changes in Malaysia removing the mandatory death penalty and life imprisonment for drug-related offences, and encourages other countries in the region to follow suit.

719. While recalling that, according to the international drug control conventions, the determination of penalties applicable to drug-related behaviours remains the exclusive prerogative of States parties, the Board encourages all States that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences to consider abolishing the death penalty for drug-related offences and to commute death sentences that have already been handed down, in view of the relevant international conventions and protocols and relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other United Nations bodies on the application of the death penalty for the category of drug-related offences.

720. In its reporting of annual estimates for narcotic drugs, Thailand's competent national authority informed the Board of policy measures and tools in the country related to the control of cannabis. Namely, Thailand has introduced a mobile application for notifications about the cultivation of cannabis, and a dedicated website, managed by the Food and Drug Administration. The Ministry of Public Health provides a cannabis use disorder monitoring programme through a digital platform, has developed clinical guidelines for the treatment of cannabis poisoning in the emergency room, collects and monitors data on drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation including cannabis use, and has developed a monitoring and reporting system for cannabis acute poisoning events. The Ministry also leads public awareness campaigns and guidelines on the medical use of cannabis. The Ministry ensures full control and licensing of cannabis cultivation, trade and imports, except in the case of what it defines as "herbal products for medical use by government agencies and for the benefit of clinical studies", which are licensed by the Food and Drug Administration.

721. Earlier, Thailand had also reported that, under the country's legislation, CBD is not considered a controlled substance pursuant to the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention, and its use in non-medical and non-scientific industries, such as cosmetics and food, will not be reported to the Board. The Board reiterates that the 1961 Convention as amended limits the cultivation of cannabis, from which CBD is extracted, to medical and scientific purposes. The Board remains in contact with the authorities of Thailand on this matter and continues to monitor relevant developments.

722. China has put into place special measures to ensure the safe trade of non-controlled and internationally controlled precursor chemicals. The country now issues special permits for the export of precursor chemicals to countries it has identified as vulnerable to the illicit manufacture of drugs, in particular, Afghanistan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

723. The illicit cultivation of opium poppy, illicit production of opium and illicit manufacture of methamphetamine are among the most significant drug challenges facing East and South-East Asia. Trafficking is centred around northern Myanmar, though illicit production and manufacture of these drugs also occurs in other countries across the region. Seizures of these drugs increased substantially from 2021 to 2022, and regions neighbouring East and South-East Asia report seizures of methamphetamine and opium originating in the region.

724. The area of illicit cultivation of opium poppy in Myanmar is estimated to have increased by 33 per cent from 2021 to 2022 for a total area of 41,000 ha, predominately in Shan State. This reverses the trend of a consistent decline in the area under opium poppy cultivation noted in the country since 2014. Opium yields also increased from 2021 to 2022, by 41 per cent, to 19.8 kilograms per hectare. As a result, the estimated production of opium rose by 88 per cent, from 420 tons in 2021 to 790 tons in 2022. Seizures of raw opium and heroin in Myanmar were lower in the period between January and end of October 2022 at 1 ton and 1.2 tons, respectively, which was approximately half the quantity seized the year before.¹⁵²

¹⁵²UNODC, Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, *Myanmar Opium Survey 2022: Cultivation, Production and Implications* (Bangkok, 2023).

725. As with opium poppy, Shan State in Myanmar continues to be the main source of illicitly manufactured methamphetamine trafficked across East and South-East Asia as well as Southern Asia and Oceania. Approximately 38.9 tons of the substance was seized in 2022 in Myanmar, which was up 22 per cent from the previous year. Approximately 58.4 tons of methamphetamine were seized in Thailand, a drop of 22 per cent from the previous year. The seizures were mostly in areas along the border with Myanmar. The illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, particularly in Indonesia, has also expanded, with the number of laboratories detected in the country increasing from 1 in 2021 to 22 in 2022. Overall seizures of methamphetamine tablets in East and South-East Asia were down slightly in 2022, at approximately 900 million from approximately 1 billion in 2021. Similarly, seizures of crystal methamphetamine in the region stood at approximately 65 tons in 2022, a drop from approximately 79 tons in 2021.¹⁵³

726. According to information published by the Office of the National Narcotics Control Commission of China in June 2023, most drugs used in the country originated outside the country; illicit domestically produced drugs account for a small proportion of what is trafficked in the country. In 2022, a total of 11.7 tons of drugs – mainly heroin, methamphetamine and ketamine – were seized, which represented a decrease of 32 per cent from the previous year. Nearly all the heroin seized (1.29 tons) originated in northern Myanmar, with only a few dozen kilograms trafficked from other regions. Similarly, nearly all of the methamphetamine seized (9.1 tons) originated in northern Myanmar. According to Chinese authorities, the majority of cannabis seized in 2022 (200.6 kg) originated in North America. The Office of National Narcotics Control Commission of China further stated that the diversion of precursor chemicals overall was on the decline, with 660.2 tons seized in 2022, representing a decrease of nearly 50 per cent from 2021.

727. In March 2023, Japan made its second-largest single drug seizure ever in the port of Tokyo, confiscating over 700 kg of methamphetamine powder from a container ship in a joint operation with Dubai Customs of the United Arab Emirates.

728. Seizures of ketamine, a substance not under international control, rose drastically in 2022, with nearly 27 tons of the substance having been seized across the region; this was up sharply from the approximately 10 tons seized in 2021. The huge increase was driven by seizures in Cambodia of approximately 13.5 tons, which accounted for 60 per cent

¹⁵³UNODC, Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, *Synthetic Drugs in East and South-East Asia: Latest Developments and Challenges* (Bangkok, 2023), map 2.

of all ketamine seizures in South-East Asia. According to UNODC, the proliferation of clandestine labs in the country enables the illicit manufacturing of ketamine on an industrial scale. This coincided with the Cambodian authorities having seized in 2022 over 500 tons of various precursor and pre-precursor chemicals used for the illicit manufacture of ketamine. Beyond Cambodia, seizures of ketamine are also on the rise in Shan State, Myanmar, where the substance is increasingly being illicitly manufactured. Nearly 2.4 tons were seized in 2022, more than three times the 760 kg seized in 2021. Similarly, illicit production of ketamine is also on the rise in Malaysia, with authorities reporting the dismantling of five clandestine ketamine labs and seizures of 2.9 tons of the substance in 2022, up from approximately 475 kg the year before.¹⁵⁴

6. Prevention and treatment

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

730. The prevalence of drug use in East and South-East Asia has remained significant according to data presented in the UNODC *World Drug Report 2023*. Across multiple drug categories, the annual prevalence of drug use in the region was largely unchanged from 2020 to 2021. The most used drug in 2021 was cannabis, with 1.21 per cent of the population aged 15–64 using the drug, or approximately 19.2 million people. Methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances were the second most used group of substances, with a prevalence rate of 0.61 per cent, or 9.8 million people. The prevalence rate for the use of other drug categories stood at or below 0.23 per cent.¹⁵⁵

731. According to the official summary of the recently published 2019 Drug Survey in the Philippines, the Government’s policies in reducing drug use have been successful and a trend reversal has been observed by the Government in this respect. The summary underscores that the annual user prevalence rate for 2019 in the Philippines was 2.05 per cent, notably lower than the 2018 global estimate of 5.3 per cent published in the UNODC *World Drug*

Report 2020. The most used drugs in the Philippines are cannabis and methamphetamine.

732. The 2022 Health and Lifestyle Survey, conducted by the Singapore Institute for Mental Health, found that the overall prevalence of drug use in the last 12 months among respondents stood at 0.7 per cent. Furthermore, 41.8 per cent of respondents that had consumed drugs did so before the age of 18, with a mean age of onset of 15.9 years old.

733. According to the Office of the National Narcotics Control Commission of China, its drug prevention education efforts, including the “Care for drug users” campaign, resulted in a further decline of 24.3 per cent of registered people who use drugs in the country, from 1.49 million people in 2021 to 1.12 million by the end of 2022. Among those registered in 2022, 588,000 were using methamphetamine, 416,000 were using heroin and 32,000 were using ketamine.

South Asia

There are increasing signs that South Asia is being targeted by traffickers smuggling methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan into markets in Europe and Oceania.

Investigations in the region have shown that proceeds of drug trafficking are being used to fund terrorism, provide support to armed groups and fuel political violence in the region, and instances of the joint trafficking of drugs and weapons have been reported.

1. Major developments

734. South Asia, located between the two largest opiate production areas in the world, South-West Asia and South-East Asia, is the largest consumer market for opiates worldwide. The proportion of the total number of opiate users worldwide who reside in South Asia increased from about 20 per cent in 2002 to about 39 per cent, equivalent to 12 million people, in 2021. Other regions with significantly large numbers of opiate users are the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia, which together accounted for 19 per cent of the global total, followed by Europe, which accounted for about 10 per cent.

735. Narco-terrorism appears to be an increasing problem in the region, and investigations have indicated that

¹⁵⁴UNODC, Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, *Synthetic Drugs in East and South-East Asia*.

¹⁵⁵ *World Drug Report 2023*, Statistical annex.

proceeds of drug trafficking are increasingly being used to fund terrorism, support armed groups and instigate political violence. Five instances of the joint trafficking of drugs and weapons were reported in the reporting period, two by Bangladesh and one each by India, Malaysia and Myanmar.

736. In 2021, the prevalence of opiate use among those aged 16–64 in South Asia was estimated at 1.1 per cent, almost double the estimated global average (0.6 per cent). Most opiates found in South Asia originate in South-West Asia and the largest opiate market in South Asia is India, which was projected to become the world's most populous country in 2023. In 2021, with an estimated 11 million opiate users, India accounted for nearly 90 per cent of the estimated number of opiate users in South Asia, equivalent to 34 per cent of the total number of opiate users worldwide. India also accounted for the largest share (two thirds) of the heroin seized in South Asia in the period 2017–2021, followed by Sri Lanka, at 23 per cent, and Bangladesh, at 7 per cent. Seizures of heroin in South Asia have seen an overall increase in the past decade.

737. The production of opium for the licit pharmaceutical industry in India declined for two decades and, since 2018, has stabilized at between 200 and 300 tons per year. As reported to authorities by licensed opium farmers, the overall average quantity of opium produced per hectare increased from an average of 47 kg per ha in 1995 to about 64 kg per ha in 2021. The authorities in India reported that most of the opium seized in the country had not been sourced from licit sources.

738. Opium continues to be illicitly cultivated in India, primarily in the north-east of the country. In the period 2020–2021, authorities in India reported the eradication of about 4,400 ha of illicitly cultivated opium poppy, which was an area of almost the same size as the total area under licit opium poppy cultivation in the country in 2020 (4,941 ha) and in 2021 (5,406 ha). Most of the heroin found in South Asia in recent years appears to have originated primarily in South-West Asia, having been manufactured from opium produced in Afghanistan, the world's largest producer of the substance. UNODC has reported that traffickers from Myanmar, which accounted for some 6 per cent of global illicit opium production in 2021, regularly supply some of the north-eastern states of India with heroin.

739. The average annual seizures of heroin in South Asia along the southern route have increased to the extent that the total quantities of heroin and morphine originating in Afghanistan that are seized along that route are now larger than those seized along the northern route, which mainly supplies markets in the Russian Federation, via Central Asia.

740. In South Asia, methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan reaches both India and Sri Lanka. Most users of amphetamine-type stimulants (mainly methamphetamine) in India are found in the country's western states, while the prevalence of methamphetamine use is highest in its eastern states, close to Myanmar. As individual seizures suggest, India is increasingly being exposed to the expansion of methamphetamine trafficking from both South-West and South-East Asia (mainly originating in Myanmar), which poses a high risk of significantly increasing the availability and use of the drug in the country.

2. Regional cooperation

741. A total of 49 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of all six countries in South Asia, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. There are now five e-modules, covering narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The e-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

742. In November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme conducted an interregional workshop on public-private partnerships between Governments and logistics companies operating in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The workshop was held in Istanbul, Türkiye, and brought together 42 participants from around the world, including four from India and Pakistan. The workshop built upon the success of previous meetings held by INCB since 2018 related to the prevention and misuse of logistics services for the trafficking of dangerous substances and to promoting cooperation between Governments and logistics companies.

743. In December 2022, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka participated in the INCB Operation Knockout and exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical 1,4-butanediol, carisoprodol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through international post, express mail and courier services and related modalities.

744. In February 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized an online stakeholder consultation on voluntary cooperation between Governments and freight forwarding services for the prevention of dangerous substance trafficking. The event was attended by more than 44 representatives from

10 Governments, three international organizations and six industry associations, including six participants from India. Participants exchanged best practices and shared respective case examples related to the exploitation of legitimate ancillary logistics services and discussed the next steps for promoting voluntary cooperation between Governments and their private sector partners.

745. In Vienna in September 2023, the GRIDS Programme convened the sixth annual operational meeting on counteracting trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services. The event brought together 100 officers, experts and industry leaders from over 30 Governments, private sector partners and international and regional organizations, including participants from India and the Maldives. Several participating Governments also engaged in bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders.

746. The GRIDS Programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding the INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate uses and on novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, held in Vienna from 18 to 22 September 2023. The event brought together 45 representatives from over 20 Governments and international organizations, including participants from India. Participants discussed the latest trends, threats and approaches for the rapid detection of suspicious packaging of falsified substances.

747. To better understand the threat posed by opiate trafficking in South Asia, UNODC held a two-day expert working group meeting on opiate trafficking along the southern route, in New Delhi on 10 and 11 May 2023. The meeting gathered representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Mozambique, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The participants held intensive deliberations on a range of issues, including key trends in Afghan opiate trafficking, and country-focused situational analysis, and conducted a review of the supply of and demand for opiates in the region. The need for collective regional efforts to strengthen law enforcement and health responses was emphasized during the discussions.

748. In July 2023, a five-day training event on drug law enforcement was held in Faridabad, India, for senior officials from Antigua and Barbuda, Bhutan, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Maldives, Seychelles and Tanzania (United Republic of). The event was co-organized by the Government of India and UNODC. Aimed at South-South capacity-building, it provided a further platform for countries to foster cooperation and share insights on combating drug trafficking. The training included presentations on the impact of

cryptocurrency on drug trafficking and emphasized the significance of technological advancements for law enforcement agencies involved in the disruption of drug smuggling operations.

749. In October 2023, the Forty-fifth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, was held in Bali, Indonesia. The Meeting adopted a set of recommendations to increase international and regional cooperation with the aim of preventing and dismantling supply chains for precursor chemicals, reducing the illicit cultivation and production of drugs and their trafficking, dismantling clandestine laboratories and promoting best practices in alternative development.

750. The Global Conference on Cooperation in Enforcement Matters, organized by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence of the Ministry of Finance of India, was held from 30 October to 1 November 2023 in New Delhi, under the overarching theme “It takes a network to fight a network”. The objective of the conference was to promote cooperation and the exchange of information between national and international law enforcement agencies for the purpose of combating transnational crime, including drug trafficking.

751. On 30 November 2022, the Government of India informed INCB that a memorandum of understanding on public-private partnership with the chemical industry in India had been signed between the Central Bureau of Narcotics of India and the Indian Chemical Council. The memorandum is intended to prevent the diversion of chemicals from licit distribution channels and includes a voluntary code of conduct to ensure coordination within the Council.

752. The seventh meeting of the subgroup on the prevention of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation was held in Chiang Rai, Thailand, from 7 to 9 December 2022 and involved the participation of representatives from all the Bay of Bengal Initiative member States. Progress achieved during the meeting included steps towards developing the Bay of Bengal Initiative Plan of Action on Drug Control.

753. In 2023, the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme continued to deliver regional training programmes for maritime law enforcement officers in Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Among the topics covered in the training was visit, board, search and seizure tactics, the discussion of which provided participants with an opportunity to acquire and share knowledge on best practices in performing maritime interdictions.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

754. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. Those reports enable the Board to monitor the licit movement of internationally controlled substances and ensure the availability of those substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes. Most countries in South Asia regularly provide their required statistical reports on narcotics drugs controlled under the 1961 Convention as amended. A few countries in the region have not provided all the required reports regarding narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the past five years. **The Board encourages Governments in the region to prioritize the submission of accurate and timely reports, as doing so will have a significant impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the international drug control system.**

755. South Asia continues to be the region with the lowest levels of consumption of opioid analgesics worldwide. In 2021, the level of consumption of opioid analgesics in the region, expressed in S-DDD_{pm} per million inhabitants, stood at 181 S-DDD_{pm}, which was higher than the level in 2002 (43 S-DDD_{pm}) but lower than the level in 2020 (202 S-DDD_{pm}). Bhutan was the country with highest consumption in the region in 2021 (47 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by Sri Lanka (35 S-DDD_{pm}), Nepal (31 S-DDD_{pm}), India (27 S-DDD_{pm}), Maldives (26 S-DDD_{pm}) and Bangladesh (16 S-DDD_{pm}). Morphine was the most consumed opioid in the region (86 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by fentanyl (73 S-DDD_{pm}) and pethidine (22 S-DDD_{pm}).

756. Determining the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in South Asia remains challenging because the countries in the region have failed to consistently provide the Board with consumption data on psychotropic substances for the past five years. The Board will continue to monitor the situation and will continue its dialogue with the Governments of the region, emphasizing the importance of regularly furnishing data on the consumption of psychotropic substances.

757. **The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.**

758. With regard to precursor chemicals, in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual

legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

759. As at 1 November 2023, all six countries in South Asia had provided the Board with at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations, and all six have regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

760. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,¹⁵⁶ psychotropic substances¹⁵⁷ and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁵⁸ In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

4. National legislation, policy and action

761. In November 2022, the Parliament of Sri Lanka enacted the Poisons, Opium and Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Act, No. 41 of 2022. The Act provides amendments to the schedules of controlled substances to include narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals recently added to the schedules and tables of the international drug control treaties. The Act, amending the Poisons, Opium and Dangerous Drugs Ordinance, includes further legal provisions for monitoring and addressing emerging trends in methamphetamine misuse in Sri Lanka, as well as legal provisions to refer persons who are alleged to have committed an offence under the Act for voluntary admission to medical treatment for addiction and to rehabilitation.

¹⁵⁶ E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁵⁷ E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁵⁸ E/INCB/2023/4.

762. In late 2022, the Government of Bangladesh approved the Drug and Cosmetics Act 2022. The new law follows the guidelines of WHO related to the legitimate manufacture of medicines and provides for heavier monetary penalties and imprisonment terms of up to a lifetime sentence for manufacturing and commercializing adulterated and fake medicines.

763. In May 2023, officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka gathered in New Delhi for the second meeting of the steering committee of the UNODC regional programme for South Asia for the period 2023–2027. The regional programme provides a strategic roadmap for focused national and regional cooperation in building capacities and promoting effective policies to promote justice and health and prevent and counter drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption and terrorism in the six countries of South Asia. The steering committee, established on 1 February 2023, serves as the governing body for the regional programme. Its responsibilities include reviewing the Office's annual work plans for the region, assessing successes and challenges in the Office's operations, providing guidance and advice, and facilitating communication with national Governments.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

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

765. Data on seizures effected on the southern route suggest that trafficking in Afghan opiates has increased markedly towards South Asia and Africa, to the extent that the total quantities of Afghanistan-related heroin and morphine seized on that route are now larger than those seized along the northern route, which mainly supplies markets in the Russian Federation, via Central Asia. Traffickers from Myanmar, which accounted for some 6 per cent of global illicit opium production in 2021, regularly supply some of the north-eastern states of India with heroin.

766. In 2021, about one third of the heroin and morphine seized on the southern route was seized in Africa, while two thirds were seized in South Asia. Although most of the heroin shipped to Africa has been for domestic consumption

or re-export to Europe, some of it is now being trafficked to South Asia, reversing the traditional trafficking route, which involves the transport of heroin from South-West Asia to Africa, via India. African countries that have been identified as major transit points for heroin consignments to India include Kenya, South Africa and Uganda. The trafficking has mostly been carried out by human couriers, as well as through parcel post. The diversification of this route is possibly due to an increase in heroin trafficking from the Islamic Republic of Iran detected by Indian authorities in 2021.

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

768. In 2022, drug-related crimes accounted for almost 20 per cent of all criminal activity in Bhutan, with substance misuse making up an estimated 78 per cent of all drug crime, followed by trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, at 15 per cent. The total number of drug crimes recorded in the country in 2022 was 761, showing a significant increase of 162 per cent compared with 2021, when 291 drug crimes were reported. These findings demonstrate a concerning rise in drug-related offences, highlighting the need for effective measures to address and combat drug misuse and trafficking in Bhutan.

769. According to a report published by the Royal University of Bhutan, for people in Bhutan, the porous border with India has emerged as a major gateway to obtaining marijuana and prescription drugs, with respondents to a survey conducted by the Royal University citing proximity and affordability as key drivers for obtaining drugs in India. Additionally, the availability of drugs through social networks, such as friends and neighbours, has further facilitated access.

770. In Bangladesh, in 2022, a total of more than 43.7 million methamphetamine tablets ("yaba") were seized. A major trafficking route running from Myanmar to Bangladesh across their shared border has been identified. Apart from the influx of drugs via land routes, maritime routes also pose a significant threat, as evidenced by multiple seizures of a range of drugs from boats in the vicinity of Cox's Bazar. According to the data available, cannabis remains the most prevalent drug type in Bangladesh. Among the districts identified by the Department of Narcotics Control of Bangladesh as the most drug-prone in the country are Dhaka, Cox's Bazar, Chottogram, Comilla and Brahmanbaria. Several sources have noted a rise in drug trafficking activities in the country in recent years, associated with the influx of Rohingya refugees.

771. The Narcotics Control Bureau of India shared real-time actionable information generated during its Operation Samudragupt with the authorities of Maldives and Sri Lanka. The information resulted in seizures of 286 kg of heroin and 128 kg of methamphetamine and the arrest of 19 drug traffickers in two operations conducted by Sri Lankan Navy, and further seizures of 4 kg of heroin and the arrest of five drug traffickers by the Maldives Police Service.

772. It appears that the domestic cocaine market in India is usually supplied by small shipments. While amounts of cocaine seized in South Asia are typically small, a change in the methods of cocaine trafficking has been observed. In 2019, seizures of cocaine consignments destined for India, amounting to 33 kg in total, were mainly effected along air and land routes, with none reported along sea routes. In 2020, the restrictions on international air travel may have spurred an increase in the use of mail services, which accounted for more than one third of inbound cocaine consignments by weight. In 2021, sea transport was the predominant mode of transport used to traffic cocaine into India, accounting for 95 per cent of inbound cocaine seizures in terms of weight.

773. As part of the “Drugs Free India” campaign of the Narcotics Control Bureau of India, which continued during 2022, more than 1,300 kg of heroin were seized in operations in the State of Gujarat and the cities of Delhi and Kolkata, and more than 75,000 kg of drugs were destroyed.

774. In July 2022, law enforcement authorities in Nigeria seized about 22 million tramadol tablets from shipping containers originating in India. Preliminary investigations indicated that the consignments had been ordered from online pharmacies apparently operating from India. The operators were believed to be supplying narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, including substances not under international control, such as tramadol and tapentadol.

775. Customs authorities in Maldives reported the seizure of over 118 kg of drugs in 2022, which was a notable increase from the 50 kg seized in 2021. The seizures indicate that the trafficking of drugs into Maldives is mostly carried out through mail or courier services. During the first quarter of 2023, the Maldives Police Service recorded seizures of various drugs, including more than 8 kg of cannabis, more than 3 kg of cocaine and more than 2 kg of heroin. In the same period, 314 Maldivian nationals and 17 foreign nationals were detained for drug-related offences.

776. Heroin and cannabis oil are the most commonly used illicit drugs in Maldives, but LSD, MDMA (commonly known as “ecstasy”) and other synthetic drugs have also been seized in recent years.

777. Sri Lanka reported that most of the heroin arriving on its territory in 2019 and 2020 had transited through the Islamic Republic of Iran (68 per cent in 2019) and that a much smaller quantity had transited through Pakistan (11 per cent in 2019). Sri Lankan sea routes are increasingly being used by local and international narcotics traffickers. In 2021, Sri Lankan authorities reported seizures of 1,594 kg of heroin and more than 348 kg of synthetic drugs. Maritime seizures were effected more often on the open sea than in ports, and the drugs were mostly found on small vessels, such as untraceable fishing boats.

778. In Bangladesh, it was reported that a small proportion of the heroin seized in 2019 had originated in Myanmar (5 per cent), while the vast majority had entered the country through India (95 per cent).

779. The illicit manufacture of ketamine, a substance not under international control but used as an anaesthetic in medicinal practice in many countries, has diversified geographically. Trafficking in the substance has spread beyond countries in East and South-East Asia and its non-medical use has recently increased in a few countries in South Asia. Traffickers have begun exploring new ways to promote ketamine on the illicit market, with mixtures containing ketamine and other ingredients that are often unknown to users appearing in marketed products.

6. Prevention and treatment

780. In South Asia, opioids are the most frequently reported primary drug of use among people in drug treatment, and their misuse remains the leading cause of fatal overdoses both in the region and globally; in 2019, their misuse accounted for nearly 70 per cent of the 128,000 deaths attributed to drug use disorders worldwide.

781. In Bangladesh, UNODC developed a training module on drugs, crime and HIV/AIDS in collaboration with the Bangladesh Police Academy, delivered at Dhaka, which provided training for 50 police officers of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police. This follows the implementation by UNODC of a pilot intervention on HIV/AIDS and mental health in 2022 in collaboration with the Bangladesh prison authority, together with the Dhaka Ahsania Mission, a non-governmental organization.

782. At about 2.1 per cent, India had the highest prevalence of opioid use in South Asia in 2018, according to the country’s latest national household survey of drug use, conducted across India in 2018. Opioid use in the country is still mainly a male phenomenon, with more than 95 per cent of all opioid users in India being male.

783. A detailed analysis of opioid use in India, based on the same national household survey of drug use, reveals that rates of opioid use vary widely within the country. Among the population aged 10–75, overall rates of opioid use range between 0.2 and 25.2 per cent, and rates of opioid use disorders range between 0.1 and 6.9 per cent. The highest prevalence of people with opioid use disorders is found in the eastern parts of the country, while the largest numbers of people with opioid use disorders are found in states in north-western India (Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana), as well as in some of the central-western states (Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh). Traditionally, the prevalence of opiate use has been high in the country's north-eastern and north-western states. However, the high level now also found in Maharashtra seems to be linked to the increasing quantities of opiates being trafficked to India from South-West Asia.

784. According to the same household survey, the estimated annual prevalence of cocaine use among the general population is 0.11 per cent. Although that estimated prevalence is well below the global average, as the same study points out, it nevertheless represents 1.1 million past-year users, or 5 per cent of the global number of cocaine users.

785. In Sri Lanka, UNODC conducted training for policymakers on the nature, prevention and treatment of drug use disorders, as part of its support for Sri Lanka's efforts to create humane, effective and evidence-based drug use prevention and drug dependence treatment and care services. In 2022, Sri Lanka completed three assessment reports: (a) a review of the national legal framework relating to the control of drugs in Sri Lanka; (b) a situational and needs assessment report on drug use, treatment and rehabilitation and the status of drug prevention; and (c) the mapping of drug demand reduction initiatives.

786. In 2023, UNODC conducted in India training on HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for people who use stimulant drugs, with the participation of over 40 government, civil society and health representatives from across India. In June 2023, training was also delivered on establishing and administering opioid substitution agonist therapy.

787. UNODC, in collaboration with the Academy of Prisons and Correctional Administration of India, organized a three-day regional consultation on health rights in prisons with over 75 high-level prison and health officials, as well as non-governmental organizations, participating.

788. **INCB encourages countries in the region to improve the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, prevent and address drug trafficking and provide evidence-based prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services.**

West Asia

A significant drop in the 2023 opium harvest in Afghanistan was reported, which was due to a reduction in opium poppy cultivation following the strict application of a ban on illicit drug cultivation that had been announced by the country's de facto authorities in April 2022. As affected farmers in Afghanistan may not have alternative sources of income, support needs to be provided for alternative development solutions.

Methamphetamine manufacture in Afghanistan has been increasing over recent years, and methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan now reaches markets in South-West Asia, East and South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, Africa, Europe and Oceania. South-West Asia also observed an increase in methamphetamine use.

The illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and misuse of synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances and pharmaceutical drugs, continue to pose a significant challenge to countries in West Asia, in particular in the Central Asia subregion.

The Middle East continues to be seriously affected by trafficking in and the use of falsified "captagon", a challenge that is further exacerbated by political instability and ongoing conflicts in some parts of that subregion.

1. Major developments

789. The *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2023*, released by UNODC on 5 November 2023, reported a dramatic decline in opium poppy cultivation across Afghanistan. The area under cultivation declined by 95 per cent, from 233,000 ha in 2022 to a total of just 10,800 ha in 2023, with opium production seeing a similar 95 per cent decline, from 6,200 tons in 2022 to just 333 tons in 2023. In terms of the supply of heroin from Afghanistan to global illicit markets, this translates into a reduction of export quality heroin (with 50–70 per cent purity) from 350–580 tons in 2022 to 24–38 tons in 2023. The international community will need to monitor the situation closely to determine how illicit markets around the world will respond to this development.

790. This significant drop in opium production in Afghanistan is due to a reduction in opium poppy cultivation following the strict application of the ban on illicit drug cultivation that had been announced by the country's de

facto authorities in April 2022. At the same time, the ban will have a significant impact on portions of the rural population in Afghanistan who have relied on opium poppy cultivation for their livelihoods and do not have alternative sources of income, and whose situation is being further exacerbated by the overall economic downturn and humanitarian crisis in the country.

791. In terms of global illicit opium poppy cultivation, this reduction places Afghanistan behind Myanmar, where, it was reported by UNODC, 40,100 ha were cultivated in 2022.

792. While illicit opium and heroin production declined in Afghanistan, trafficking from the country continued, possibly owing to the sale of opium inventories stockpiled from past record harvests. The Balkan route remained the main path for trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan and headed to markets in Central and Eastern Europe. A noticeable increase in trafficking in opiates via the southern route was also observed, with volumes appearing to have surpassed those trafficked via the northern route, which supplies markets in the Russian Federation.

793. The increase in illicit methamphetamine manufacture in Afghanistan is also of serious concern to the Board, as this substance now reaches markets not only in South-West Asia but also in East and South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, Africa, Europe and even Oceania. Afghanistan itself observed an increase in methamphetamine misuse, as did other countries in South-West Asia.

794. The illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances and pharmaceutical drugs, continue to pose a significant challenge to public health and law enforcement in countries in West Asia, in particular in the Central Asia subregion.

795. The Middle East continues to be seriously affected by trafficking in and use of falsified “captagon”,¹⁵⁹ as this region remains vulnerable to trafficking in this substance due to political instability and ongoing conflicts in some parts of the subregion. Seizures of this substance reached a record high in the subregion in 2021, almost double the amount recorded in 2020. In addition, the subregion is witnessing the development of a methamphetamine market as seen from a rise in seizures of that substance.

¹⁵⁹ Captagon was originally the official trade name for a pharmaceutical preparation containing the substance fenethylamine, a synthetic stimulant. As encountered in seizures across West Asia today and referred to in the present report, “captagon” is a falsified drug compressed into pills or tablets that are similar in appearance but distinct from the earlier pharmaceutical preparation Captagon. The active ingredient in falsified “captagon” is amphetamine, which is typically cut with multiple adulterants, such as caffeine.

2. Regional cooperation

796. The sixteenth Policy Consultative Group meeting of the Paris Pact Initiative was organized by UNODC in Vienna on 5 and 6 December 2022; it was attended by 135 participants representing 37 countries and 13 international and regional organizations. The meeting discussed current and emerging drug trafficking patterns and trends, recent operational developments in Afghanistan, the progress made by the Paris Pact programme, and the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The operational priority recommendations stemming from the expert meetings held in 2022 in relation to the four pillars of the Vienna Declaration were reviewed and endorsed by the Group.

797. In accordance with the 2022 action plan of the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), the regional anti-drug law enforcement operation “Reflex-2022” was carried out by CARICC member States from 3 to 22 December 2022. As a result of the operation, various amounts of new psychoactive substances and other synthetic narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were seized, and several clandestine drug laboratories were dismantled.

798. From December 2022 to January 2023, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates participated in the Board’s Operation Knockout, during which they exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through post, express mail and courier services.

799. On 15 February 2023, India chaired a virtual meeting of the Expert Working Group on Law Enforcement and Drug-Related Crimes of the Meeting of the Heads of the Competent Authorities for Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Participants shared experiences in carrying out activities to implement the Organization’s Anti-Drug Strategy 2018–2023 and discussed the challenges and successes in addressing drug trafficking in the region.

800. On 27 April 2023, the 37th meeting of the Working Group on Afghanistan at the Ministerial Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was held. The event was attended by delegations from CSTO member States (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan), the CSTO Deputy Secretary General, the Chargé d’affaires of Afghanistan in the Russian Federation, representatives of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central

Asia, the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Centre, the Coordination Service of the Council of Commanders of Border Troops of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Participants discussed the situation in Afghanistan, including the humanitarian, economic, security and drug trafficking challenges faced by the country.

801. A meeting of the Foreign Ministers Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization took place on 4 and 5 May 2023, in Panaji, India, chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of India. At the meeting, the ministers of foreign affairs of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Director of the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, agreed to deepen cooperation on security matters and to step up their combined efforts to fight terrorism, extremism, separatism, drug trafficking and cybercrime. Special attention was accorded to Afghanistan and ways in which the Organization could assist the country in its efforts to stabilize and rebuild its economy. Memorandums granting Kuwait, Maldives, Myanmar and the United Arab Emirates dialogue partner status with the Organization were signed during the meeting.

802. On 26 May 2023, in Yerevan, the Chair of the Coordinating Council of the Heads of the Competent Authorities for Countering Illicit Drug Trafficking of the CSTO member States, the Deputy Minister of Interior of the Russian Federation and the Minister of Interior of Armenia discussed preliminary results of the CSTO sub-regional anti-drug operation “Channel-Arax”. The operation, which involved CSTO member States, as well as observers from China, the Syrian Arab Republic, CARICC, UNODC, the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, and the Council of Financial Intelligence Heads, was conducted from 22 to 26 May 2023 on the territory of CSTO member States with the aim of disrupting illicit channels supplying controlled drugs and new psychoactive substances. As a result of the operation, which included a number of international controlled deliveries, large amounts of controlled substances were seized, including cannabis, cannabis resin, heroin, mephedrone and MDMA, and three clandestine drug laboratories were dismantled.

803. On 8 and 9 June 2023, INCB Learning held a two-day virtual workshop focused on raising awareness about the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes as part of the Board’s ongoing efforts to support Member States in ensuring that essential medicines are available while preventing their diversion and misuse. The

event brought together officials from the competent national authorities of seven Russian-speaking countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – and a diverse group of stakeholders which included representatives from palliative care associations, experts in drug control and public health, and members of the international community. Throughout the two days, participants discussed various themes related to improving access to controlled substances for medical purposes, including regulatory frameworks, barriers to access and the importance of national and international cooperation.

804. A total of 38 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 14 countries in West Asia, namely, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, have registered to use INCB learning e-modules.

805. The Paris Pact Expert Working Group meeting on the diversion of precursor chemicals, linked to the third pillar of the Vienna Declaration, was held on 13 and 14 June 2023 in Sofia in hybrid format. The meeting, which was attended by over 140 participants representing 34 countries and 10 international and regional organizations, reviewed the latest trends, existing gaps and challenges, and shared their recent operational actions in tackling trafficking in controlled substances and their precursors along the main drug trafficking routes from Afghanistan. Delegates also noted with concern the increase in trafficking in methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan and the trafficking flows of related precursors. The meeting proposed 10 priority operational recommendations to be further reviewed and endorsed at the 17th Policy Consultative Group Meeting, which was scheduled to be held in Vienna on 11 and 12 December 2023.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances (including reporting to the Board)

806. The three international drug control treaties require the States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor licit activity involving internationally controlled substances as well as ensure the availability of these substances for licit medical, scientific and industrial purposes.

807. Since 2002, the level of consumption of opioid analgesics in West Asia, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has been steadily increasing and reached a total of 23,884 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021. This represents a considerable

increase compared with the level of 2,985 S-DDD_{pm} in 2002. The highest consumption in 2021 was reported by Israel (18,340 S-DDD_{pm}), which was followed at a distance by Bahrain (2,007 S-DDD_{pm}), Türkiye (711 S-DDD_{pm}), Qatar (531 S-DDD_{pm}), Kuwait (477 S-DDD_{pm}), Saudi Arabia (342 S-DDD_{pm}) and Oman (312 S-DDD_{pm}). Almost no consumption was reported by the remaining countries, with Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan reporting nil or 1 S-DDD_{pm}. Consumption was greatest for fentanyl (19,004 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by oxycodone (4,023 S-DDD_{pm}), morphine (574 S-DDD_{pm}) and pethidine (178 S-DDD_{pm}).

808. Among the countries and territories of West Asia, reporting performance has generally been good for the psychotropic substances controlled under the 1971 Convention; nearly all countries have provided the required reports for the last five years.

809. Despite satisfactory submission of reports, West Asia is among the regions that are of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. It remains challenging to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in West Asia as approximately half of the countries in the region have not provided to the Board consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past five years.

810. **The Board notes that, while the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances has been improving in some countries in the region, there remains an urgent need to address this matter and ensure that licit requirements for medical and scientific purposes are met.**

811. Out of the 25 countries in West Asia, 22 have regularly provided the Board with updated annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations. This information is essential for preventing the oversupply and diversion into illicit channels of such substances, as well as for ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

812. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,¹⁶⁰ psychotropic substances¹⁶¹ and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁶² In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO

for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

4. National regulation, policy and action

813. Within the framework of the INCB GRIDS Programme, INCB and partner organizations conducted an interregional workshop from 28 to 30 November 2022 on public-private partnerships between Governments and logistics companies operating in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The workshop was held in Istanbul, Türkiye, and brought together 42 participants from around the world, including eight private sector participants from Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Kazakhstan. This workshop built upon the success of previous meetings held by INCB since 2018 related to the prevention and misuse of logistics services for trafficking in dangerous substances and promoting cooperation between Governments and logistics companies.

814. In January 2023, the Head of State of Oman approved the National Strategy for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances for 2023–2028, which identified policies, programmes and organizational activities to address trafficking in and the use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, including through youth-centred initiatives as well as targeted specialized programmes for treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

815. On 10 January 2023, with a view to addressing the increased threat to public health posed by the misuse of pharmaceutical preparations containing controlled substances, the President of Turkmenistan adopted a decree adding new preparations to the national list of controlled substances, including pregabalin, zopiclone and tapentadol.

816. In February 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme delivered two back-to-back awareness-raising and capacity-building workshops on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals for 10 front-line officers in Armenia and 17 customs and regulatory officers in Georgia. The training emphasized capacity-building to enhance communications by authorities of both countries concerning safe handling and interdiction approaches for dangerous substances.

817. On 8 March 2023, the de facto authorities of Afghanistan issued a decree banning cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan and stating that, in case of a violation, the

¹⁶⁰E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁶¹E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁶²E/INCB/2023/4.

plants would be destroyed and violators would be punished according to sharia laws. This decree, as well as the earlier decree of 3 April 2022, which banned illicit drug cultivation, including opium poppy, comprise a series of legislative acts adopted by the de facto authorities aimed at eradicating illicit drug cultivation and production in the country.

818. In March 2023, Türkiye adopted the “7th Justice Package” containing several changes to national legislation, including the Penal Code, the Criminal Procedures Act and the Control of Narcotic Substances Act. The changes introduced by this legislative package include such measures as pretrial destruction of drugs, modification of penalties applicable to drug-related offences, strengthening of procedures for release and probation, and improvement of the drug-treatment referral system within the criminal justice process.

819. On 29 June 2023, the Government of Kazakhstan approved the Comprehensive Plan to Combat Drug Addiction and Drug Trafficking for the period 2023–2025. The plan consists of a series of activities aimed at addressing drug use and criminality, with particular attention accorded to the illicit production of synthetic substances, the misuse of prescription drugs, cannabis trafficking and the issue of opiates. The activities include equipping border checkpoints with inspection equipment to detect drugs, precursors and equipment for drug laboratories, strengthening forensic examination bodies for the accelerated study of new synthetic drugs, introducing screening to identify drug addiction at an early stage and analysing the drug situation together with the development of adequate drug prevention measures.

820. The Board notes with concern the public reports over the continued use of capital punishment for drug-related offences in some countries of the region. **In this regard, the Board wishes to reiterate its position that, although the determination of sanctions applicable to drug-related crime remains the prerogative of the States parties to the conventions, the Board encourages States that have abolished capital punishment for drug-related offences not to reintroduce it, and it encourages those States that retain capital punishment for that category of offence to commute death sentences that have already been handed down and to consider abolishing the death penalty for drug-related offences.**

821. In June 2023, the Council of Ministers of the United Arab Emirates approved the formation of the Anti-Drug Council. The Council will develop an integrated national strategy for drug control, including drug use prevention, awareness of forms of harm associated with drugs, and promotion of early detection of drug use. The Council is

also responsible for following up on the implementation of plans to combat trafficking in drugs through its ports, land borders and coasts.

822. The INCB GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 11 to 15 September 2023. The event brought together over 100 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including 10 participants from Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates. Several participating Governments also conducted bilateral and multilateral case meetings – facilitated by INCB – to enhance cooperation across borders.

823. The INCB GRIDS Programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding the Board’s lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate use and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, held in Vienna from 18 to 22 September 2023. The event brought together 45 representatives from over 20 Governments and international organizations and the private sector, including four participants from Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates.

824. The INCB GRIDS Programme and the Precursors Control Section jointly organized training on GRIDS Intelligence tools and chemical precursors for officers from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in Vienna from 2 to 5 October 2023. The training was attended by 14 participants from four member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

825. The area under illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan declined by 95 per cent, from 233,000 ha in 2022 to a total of just 10,800 ha in 2023. A similar 95 per cent decline was observed for illicit opium production, which fell from 6,200 tons in 2022 to just 333 tons in 2023.

826. The impact on global drug markets of the ban announced in April 2022 by the de facto authorities of Afghanistan on the cultivation of opium poppy and other types of narcotic drugs, as well as the more recent ban on the cultivation of cannabis issued in March 2023, remains to be seen.

827. In the areas visited by its field teams, UNODC observed that the opium poppy ban was being strictly enforced. For example, land cultivated with opium poppy

was ploughed under at the farmers' cost, with the farmers paying for the fuel and providing labour as punishment. Some farmers were trying to clandestinely grow poppy on private premises, in greenhouses, in vineyards or in remote areas, but when the de facto authorities discovered such instances, the plants were destroyed and in some cases the farmers were arrested.

828. The farm-gate price of illicit opium dramatically increased from late 2022 into 2023, with the average price in August 2023 being \$408, which was nearly five times the price in the 24-month period prior to the takeover by the Taliban.

829. In 2022, the Balkan route, which passes through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye and the Balkan countries, continued to be the main route for trafficking in opiates from Afghanistan to destination markets in Central and Western Europe. According to recent seizure data, trafficking in Afghan opiates has increased markedly along the southern route, which runs through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan and then by sea or air to Europe, either directly or through South Asia, Africa or the Gulf. In fact, the total quantities of Afghanistan-related heroin and morphine seized along the southern route are now larger than those seized along the northern route, which passes through Central Asia and primarily supplies markets in the Russian Federation.

830. The total volume of opiates seized by CARICC member States, most of which are located along the northern route, decreased by 16 per cent in 2022 (6.4 tons) as compared with 2021 (7.6 tons). In particular, the volume of heroin seized by these States decreased 30 per cent, from 5.5 tons in 2021 to 3.9 tons in 2022, while seizures of opium increased slightly by about 6 per cent, from 1.7 tons in 2021 to 1.8 tons in 2022.

831. Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Türkiye, which are both located at the forefront of the Balkan route, with the former serving also as one of the entry points for the southern route, reported a significant decrease in the amount of heroin seized in 2022 compared with previous years. Türkiye seized 7.9 tons of heroin in 2022, the lowest recorded seizures in the past five years and representing a 64 per cent decrease compared with 2021 when 22.2 tons of heroin were seized. Similarly, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the amount of heroin seized decreased by 32 per cent (17.2 tons seized in 2022) compared with the previous year (25.4 tons seized in 2021). The authorities of both countries explain that this decrease could be due to strengthened law enforcement activities at the borders as well as efforts by traffickers to seek alternative routes, including use of maritime trafficking over the southern route.

832. The Islamic Republic of Iran also observed a 36 per cent decrease in opium seizures in 2022 (536 tons) as compared with 2021 (835 tons) and an almost threefold reduction in morphine seizures in 2022 (12.5 tons) compared with 2021 (36.5 tons).

833. The manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic drugs continue to pose significant challenges to the countries in West Asia, in particular in the Central Asian subregion, which has seen an increase in the number of drug-related offences involving these substances. CARICC member States observed a 24 per cent increase in the number of clandestine laboratories detected and dismantled that had been used for the manufacture of synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances such as synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones and phenethylamines, on their territories: 323 laboratories detected in 2022 compared with 260 in 2021. Kazakhstan dismantled 70 such laboratories in 2022 compared with 37 in 2021, and Kyrgyzstan dismantled 11 laboratories in 2022 compared with 3 in 2021.

834. Some contributing factors to the increase in the manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic drugs appear to be the relative simplicity and low cost of manufacturing these substances, the lack of effective regulation and the ease of access to the latest information on manufacturing techniques for these substances, as well as the active use of information technologies, including the Internet and social media platforms, for open and closed marketing and trade in those substances. Frequent use of postal services for the dispatch of synthetic drugs has also been reported by Central Asian States.

835. In this regard, the Board noted that a very low number of countries in Central Asia are making active use of the IONICS and PICS online platforms for communicating incidents involving illicit drugs and new psychoactive substances and their precursors. **The Board would like to encourage all countries concerned to strengthen the active use of these tools developed by INCB for the development and exchange of both strategic and operational intelligence related to latest trafficking trends and modi operandi used by traffickers involved in the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in these substances.**

836. Central Asian States also expressed concern regarding the threat of trafficking in pharmaceutical preparations containing controlled substances affecting their territories, such as tramadol, zopiclone, pregabalin, zaleplon and other substances.

837. Central Asian States and Azerbaijan reported an overall increase in seizures of psychotropic substances in 2022 compared with 2021. In particular, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan

and Uzbekistan reported some increases in amphetamine seizures. Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan observed an increase in methamphetamine seizures, while Kazakhstan also reported an increase in MDMA seizures.

838. A significant reduction in opium cultivation in Afghanistan could shift traffickers towards synthetic drug manufacture as the country is already becoming a major producer of methamphetamines in the region. According to UNODC, it appears that methamphetamine in Afghanistan is produced from the ephedra plant, which grows wild in the country; from pharmaceutical ephedrine extracted from over-the-counter cold medications; and, potentially, from ephedrine trafficked into the country. With a view to developing effective responses to the threat posed by the manufacturing of methamphetamine in Afghanistan, the Board wishes to encourage UNODC and other partners working in the region to support efforts to conduct detailed chemical analysis of methamphetamine samples in order to identify manufacturing methods and the nature of the chemicals used in that process.

839. Illicit methamphetamine manufacture in Afghanistan has increased and trafficking in that substance from Afghanistan now reaches markets beyond South-West Asia, namely East and South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, as well as in Africa, Europe and Oceania.¹⁶³ In May 2023, an estimated record amount of 2.5 tons of methamphetamine, worth approximately \$1.45 billion on the illicit market, was seized in Indian territorial waters jointly by the Indian Narcotics Control Board and the Indian Navy as part of an operation targeting maritime trafficking in drugs originating from Afghanistan.

840. South-West Asia saw a marked increase in methamphetamine seizures in 2022. In particular, the Islamic Republic of Iran has continued to record substantial increases in methamphetamine (crystalline) seizures in recent years. In 2022, it seized 30.4 tons of that substance, compared with 25.1 tons in 2021, for an increase of 21 per cent. Pakistan saw a large increase in methamphetamine seizures in 2022 (4.4 tons seized in 2022, compared with 1.7 tons in 2021).

841. Türkiye has observed considerable increases in seizures of methamphetamine since 2019, with the highest ever annual seizure recorded in 2022, when 77.7 tons were seized, representing a more than twofold increase since 2019. This may be linked to the ongoing smuggling of methamphetamine (potentially of Afghan origin) into the country from or through the neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran. While the drug may be transiting through on its way to markets in

East and South-East Asia, Central Asia, Europe and North Africa, some of it may also end up in the domestic market in Türkiye. While methamphetamine in crystal form is frequently seized in the country, significant amounts of liquid methamphetamine are also seen in Türkiye. The Turkish authorities have expressed concern that criminal groups are venturing into trafficking in liquid methamphetamine as it could provide more opportunities for concealment from law enforcement detection. In some provinces, especially in Istanbul, facilities have been identified where liquid methamphetamine is converted into crystalline form.

842. Türkiye also reported that synthetic cannabinoids, used in the form of cigarettes, and more recently electronic cigarettes, continue to be the largest new psychoactive substances category detected in the country, despite control measures including generic classification approaches taken at the global and national scale. However, their seizures decreased in Türkiye by 53 per cent in 2022 (about 1 ton) compared with 2021 (about 2.2 tons).

843. The manufacture of and trafficking in falsified “captagon” continued to seriously endanger public health and security in countries in the Middle East, a subregion that remains vulnerable to trafficking in this substance due to continued political instability, economic challenges, ongoing conflicts and established demand for the substance. Seizures of this substance reached a record high in the subregion in 2021 (86 tons), almost doubling the seizure figures recorded in 2020. Significant seizures during the reporting period were reported by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Individual seizures also indicate increased use of the territory of Iraq and Jordan for trafficking the drug from the Syrian Arab Republic.

844. In general, “captagon” tablets manufactured in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic continue to supply large consumer markets in countries in the Gulf by means of smuggling directly by land or sea or indirectly with shipments through other regions, such as Southern Europe. Seizure data suggest that there appear to be new destinations for this substance in North and West Africa. In addition, Türkiye reported continued significant increases in “captagon” seizure incidents and quantities in 2022 (almost 24 million tablets), when seizures of that substance increased by 73.6 per cent compared with 2021 (almost 14 million tablets) and almost tenfold compared with 2020 (2.8 million tablets).

845. UNODC notes that, in parallel to “captagon” trafficking, a methamphetamine market seems to be developing in the Middle East, as shown by a rise in seizures of that drug. In 2020, total seizures of methamphetamine

¹⁶³ *World Drug Report 2023*.

reported in the subregion amounted to 25.67 tons, while the total in 2021 amounted to 34.2 tons.

846. South-West Asia remains one of the major production and trafficking subregions for cannabis resin, accounting for 35 per cent of total global seizures in the period 2017–2021. The Middle East appears to be affected less significantly by trafficking in this substance, accounting for 2 per cent of global seizures during that period. There has been an overall decline in cannabis resin seizures in both subregions in 2021, the trend being mainly affected by a major decline in Afghanistan (from 422 tons in 2020 to 159 tons in 2021) and Pakistan (from 354 tons in 2020 to 165 tons in 2021). Although the Islamic Republic of Iran saw an increase of 15 per cent from 2020 (108 tons) to 2021 (124 tons), in 2022 there was drastic decline in seizures of cannabis resin in that country (77 tons seized, representing a 46 per cent decrease from 2021).

847. Within West Asia, Afghanistan remained the country where most of cannabis resin was seized in 2020 and 2021, followed by Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye and Lebanon. Cannabis resin originating in Afghanistan is trafficked through Central Asia, mainly to destinations within the subregion and the Russian Federation. Cannabis resin produced in Lebanon is trafficked to other countries in the Middle East and Europe.

848. Although it is challenging to have an accurate estimate of illicit cannabis cultivation due to the lack of systematic data collection in most countries, the limited data available during the period 2011–2021 suggest that there is sizeable illicit cannabis cultivation in West Asia, in particular in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon and Uzbekistan.

849. Central Asian countries continued to take measures to address illicit cannabis cultivation and conduct yearly eradication campaigns. Cannabis produced in Central Asia is mainly destined for domestic markets, with limited amounts being trafficked to the Russian Federation and sometimes to Europe. Kazakhstan continued to observe an increase in the cultivation of cannabis in 2022, with 276 instances of illicit cannabis cultivation being detected for an increase of 16 per cent from the previous year. Increases in cannabis cultivation were also identified in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, while Uzbekistan observed some decline.

850. Countries in West Asia, South-West Asia and the Middle East reported combined seizures of 62 tons of cannabis in 2021 compared with 15 tons in 2011, indicating an overall increase in trafficking over that period. On the other hand, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus combined

witnessed a decline, with seizures totalling 14 tons of cannabis in 2021 compared with 34 tons in 2011. In the Middle East, Israel and Lebanon were the two countries most frequently mentioned by countries responding to the UNODC annual report questionnaire as being the countries of origin, departure and transit of cannabis seizures during the period 2017–2021, while in South-West Asia, Afghanistan was mentioned most frequently, and in Central Asia, it was Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan that were mentioned most frequently.

851. In CARICC member States, drugs of the cannabis group (cannabis and cannabis resin) continued to maintain a prevailing share (almost 53 per cent, or 28.8 tons) in the total amount of drugs seized in 2022 (55 tons). In 2022, 21.6 tons of cannabis were seized in CARICC member States, which was 30 per cent less than in 2021 (30.4 tons); a decrease was observed in Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan, while Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan witnessed some increase. In 2022, 7.2 tons of cannabis resin were seized in CARICC member States, which is 2.6 per cent more than in 2021 (7 tons). Seizures of cannabis increased in Kyrgyzstan by 14.1 per cent, in Tajikistan by 20.3 per cent and in Uzbekistan by 25 per cent; in other States, there was a decrease in the range of 11–33 per cent.

852. Trafficking in “skunk”, a highly potent form of cannabis, represents a challenge in Türkiye. The country reported that while there had been a decrease in the overall amount of cannabis seizures in the period 2020–2022, “skunk” seizures saw significant increases during that period. In particular, the total amount of cannabis seized in 2022 was 63.3 tons and represented a decrease of 28 per cent compared with 2020. At the same time, “skunk” seizures reached 8.6 tons in 2022, representing an increase of 56 per cent compared with the previous year.

853. Yemen, a country that has endured extreme conflict in the past several years, continued to see widespread cultivation and use of khat (*Catha edulis*), a plant-based substance not under international control. It appears that farmers in Yemen cultivate khat mainly for domestic consumption, although some of it is smuggled to Saudi Arabia. Continued conflict appears to have further contributed to increases in the cultivation and use of khat as people are attempting to sustain their livelihoods. Consumption of the substance appears to have remained stable despite the conflict. At the same time, since khat is a water-intensive crop, increased cultivation might further contribute to overall water scarcity in the country. Limited information available suggests that Yemen is also affected by trafficking in other drugs, including cannabis resin, methamphetamine, “captagon”, heroin, cocaine and mephedrone.

854. Türkiye is increasingly being used as a transit country for cocaine arriving from Latin America or transiting through Western Africa towards destination markets in Europe via the Balkan route. Since 2014, the amount of the drug seized in the country has increased sevenfold to a record 2.8 tons in 2021. Some cocaine transiting Türkiye is also destined for markets in the Middle East. In 2022, Türkiye seized 2.3 tons of cocaine, representing an 18 per cent decrease from 2021. On 24 March 2023, the Peruvian authorities reported that they had seized 2.3 tons of cocaine disguised as ceramic tiles destined for Türkiye via an expanding maritime trafficking route; they believed this was the first-ever instance of cocaine departing from a Peruvian port with a destination of Türkiye. Another major incident involving cocaine trafficking was the seizure by Dutch customs of 1.1 tons of cocaine from a container that arrived from Türkiye on 16 May 2023 at the port of Rotterdam.

855. Israel and Lebanon appear to be the most prominent domestic markets for cocaine in West Asia region. Israel identified Egypt, Libya and Lebanon (in that order) as the main transit countries for cocaine entering its territory. Since 2019, Brazil, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Panama, Paraguay and Ukraine have identified Israel as the destination for certain cocaine consignments seized in those countries.

6. Prevention and treatment

856. Most countries in the region continued to carry out a wide range of drug treatment and prevention measures in 2022, including policy, institutional and capacity-building work to improve health-care services, and public campaigns to raise awareness on drug use involving the governmental and non-governmental sectors, media and local communities. However, many countries directly affected by conflict in the region continue to face challenges with financial and human resources in order to carry out effective monitoring and reporting on the prevalence of drug use to ensure the development of evidence-based drug policies for their populations.

857. Out of an estimated 60 million people who used opioids for non-medical purposes in 2021, representing 1.2 per cent of the global adult population, half lived in South Asia or South-West Asia. The Middle East and South-West Asia remained the subregions with some of the highest levels of prevalence of opioid use in 2021 (3.19 per cent vis-à-vis a global average of 1.2 per cent). The main drugs of concern in South-West Asia are opiates, namely opium and heroin, while the non-medical use of tramadol continues to pose a major threat to public health in the Middle East.

858. Central Asia continued to be the subregion with high prevalence of opiate use (0.9 per cent, compared with a global average of 0.6 per cent).

859. South-West Asia had the highest prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs (29.3 per cent, or 225,000 people, compared with the global average of 11.9 per cent).

860. In 2022, a downward trend in the number of people registered with drug treatment facilities was observed in Kazakhstan (18,136 compared with 18,782 in 2021), Kyrgyzstan (7,672 compared with 8,226 in 2021) and Tajikistan (4,381 compared with 4,749 in 2021). A slight increase in that number was seen in Azerbaijan (35,097 compared with 34,602 in 2021) and Uzbekistan (5,365 compared with 5,035 in 2021).

861. The non-medical use of synthetic drugs, including prescription drugs and new psychoactive substances, is becoming of increasing concern in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus. Uzbekistan reported that in 2022, 40.5 per cent of those who received in-patient treatment were synthetic drug users, including pharmaceutical preparations with psychoactive effects, while cannabinoid users were the second most common (17.8 per cent), followed by polydrug (16.8 per cent) and heroin users (15.5 per cent).

862. According to a recent study conducted in Türkiye among persons who had been investigated for drug-related offences during 2022, cannabis remained the most commonly used drug (49.2 per cent), followed by methamphetamine (24.9 per cent), heroin (6.8 per cent), synthetic pharmaceuticals (5.9 per cent) and synthetic cannabinoid (also locally called *bonzai*, accounting for 4.3 per cent). Türkiye also reported that among the total number of patients who received treatment in health facilities in 2022 (a total of 302,911 outpatient and 18,187 in-patient applicants), 37.4 per cent were treated for heroin use (representing a reduction from 43 per cent in 2021), 37.8 per cent were treated for methamphetamine use (significant increase from 25.6 per cent in 2021), 7 per cent were treated for cannabis use (down from 11.6 per cent in 2021), 1.3 per cent were treated for synthetic cannabinoids use (reduction from 5.8 per cent in 2021), 7 per cent were treated for opiates use (increase from 4.2 per cent in 2021), 2.9 per cent were treated for cocaine use (2.7 per cent in 2021) and the rest were treated for “ecstasy” and other drug types.

863. Even though it continues to be a challenge to obtain accurate data on the prevalence of “captagon” use in the Middle East, record seizures of this drug in 2021 and various qualitative data suggest that this substance remained among the most prevalent drugs used in that subregion.

864. There has also been an increase in methamphetamine use in Afghanistan and in the wider South-West Asia region in general in recent years.

865. Türkiye continued to face an increasing threat from methamphetamine use to its population's health, as trafficking in this substance has increased over the past years and record seizures of this substance were recorded in 2022. The share of methamphetamine-related deaths out of all deaths caused by drugs in Türkiye continued to increase over the past several years from 6.2 per cent (41 out of 657 substance-related death cases) in 2018, to 31.2 per cent (98 out of 314 cases) in 2020, to 46.3 per cent (125 out of 270 cases) in 2021 and finally to 56.9 per cent (140 of 246 cases) in 2022. To address this threat, various drug use prevention programmes were carried out in 2022, including a project to increase awareness on harm and deaths caused by methamphetamine as well as the implementation of training modules for law enforcement in addressing the methamphetamine threat in the context of the Methamphetamine Action Plan launched on 2 August 2022.

E. Europe

The quantity and variety of substances available in illicit drug markets in Europe pose a considerable public health concern and create new challenges to law enforcement, regulation, and the provision of treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use.

Several European countries have continued to establish regulated markets for cannabis for non-medical purposes. These programmes do not appear to be consistent with the drug control conventions.

Several European countries have experienced an increase in the non-medical use of ketamine, which has led to an increase in the number of individuals seeking treatment. This emphasizes the need for close monitoring of ketamine and continued international collaboration to counter its illicit distribution.

1. Major developments

866. Countries in Europe continue to face growing health risks and concerns because of the rapid emergence of a wider range of substances and an increasingly complex pattern of

drug use. Limited knowledge about the health risks of new synthetic drugs, particularly the more novel ones when used in mixtures, has posed significant challenges to the provision of treatment and services aimed at reducing the negative health and social consequences of use of such drugs. Greater support should be provided to law enforcement and health authorities in monitoring the situation and educating users on the health risks of polydrug use.

867. The increasing availability and consumption of a diverse range of cannabis-based products in Europe poses significant regulatory challenges to authorities in the region. While most countries have instituted medical cannabis programmes, some continue to take steps to establish regulated markets for cannabis for non-medical purposes. Malta has adopted the National Drug Policy 2023–2033 and hosted the second ministerial conference with four other European countries to discuss regulations on the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Luxembourg has passed a bill allowing the home cultivation of cannabis for recreational use, and Germany has provided further details of their pilot legislative projects for the limited cultivation and distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes. The Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands has initiated the start-up phase of its “cannabis experiment” and further pilot trials have been conducted in Switzerland.

868. In 2021, States members of the European Union encountered an alarming escalation in illicit drug trafficking and interdictions. The aggregate seizures of cocaine soared to an unprecedented level, totalling 303 tons. This marked increase was particularly evident at smaller European ports. Additionally, seizures of new psychoactive substances reached 8.5 tons, with the substances seized being predominantly synthetic cannabinoids and new synthetic opioids. This notable upsurge in both the volume and diversity of illicit drugs represents a significant and evolving challenge for drug control within the European Union.

869. EMCDDA and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have noted an increase in the non-medical use of ketamine across Europe, which has prompted concerns over potential severe health implications. Belgium, France, Italy and Spain have reported an increase in the number of individuals seeking treatment for such use of the substance, underscoring the need for close monitoring of both usage and its impact on public health. In 2022, EMCDDA published data on ketamine detected in wastewater, the highest amounts being found in cities in Denmark, Italy, Portugal and Spain. From December 2022 to January 2023, several European countries participated in INCB Operation Knockout, the aim of which was to combat illicit manufacturing and distribution of several substances, including ketamine, which was being trafficked via various postal and courier services.

2. Regional cooperation

870. From December 2022 to January 2023, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom participated in INCB Operation Knockout. The operation focused on the exchange of intelligence with the aim of identifying and dismantling illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

871. In January 2023, EMCDDA updated its memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Health of Ukraine. The new arrangement will enable enhanced cooperation in the collection, processing, summarizing and analysis of information on the drug and alcohol situation and will facilitate comparability between the drug data of the European Union and those of Ukraine.

872. In February 2023, 20 suspected money-launderers and drug traffickers were arrested in Spain as a result of a joint investigation supported by Europol. The operation involved units of the Civil Guard of Spain and the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services of Italy and resulted in the seizure of more than €5.5 million in criminal assets and over 2 tons of drugs.

873. In June 2023, INCB Learning held a two-day virtual workshop focused on raising awareness about the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes as part of the Board's ongoing efforts to support Member States in ensuring that essential medicines are available while preventing their diversion and abuse. The event brought together officials from the competent national authorities of seven countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – and a diverse group of stakeholders, which included representatives of palliative care associations, experts in drug control and public health and members of the international community. Over the course of the two days, participants discussed various themes related to improving access to controlled substances for medical purposes, including regulatory frameworks, barriers to access, and the importance of national and international cooperation.

874. A total of 171 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 35 countries in Europe have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. INCB Learning has now developed five e-modules, which cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the

international drug control framework and how to ensure the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. E-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

875. In June 2023, the Paris Pact expert working group on precursors was held in Sofia. Participants from 34 countries and 10 international and regional bodies joined the event. A total of 10 recommendations were formulated for review and endorsement at the seventeenth Policy Consultative Group meeting to be convened in Vienna on 11 and 12 December 2023.

876. In May 2023, Serbia, in cooperation with Europol and Belgium, France and Netherlands (Kingdom of the), dismantled one of the biggest drug trafficking organizations in the Balkan region. During the operation, a total of 23 individuals were arrested, including the three leaders of the organization, who were considered high-value targets by Europol. A total of 15 vehicles and €3 million were seized.

877. In June 2023, Eurojust and Europol supported law enforcement authorities in Germany, Italy and Netherlands (Kingdom of the) in the dismantling of an international drug traffickers' network. During the operation, 35 suspects were arrested and €1 million was seized.

878. In June 2023, Europol supported Bosnia and Herzegovina in identifying and dismantling a large-scale criminal network involved in the trafficking of drugs and weapons, money-laundering and corruption. The investigation focused on the activities of a criminal network involved mainly in the production and trafficking of drugs in the Western Balkans, the European Union and South America. During the operation, 38 suspects were arrested and over 300 kg of cannabis, together with real estate and cash, with a total combined value of more than €6 million, were seized.

879. In June 2023, the European Council approved the creation of a new European Union drugs agency. The new agency, the European Union Drugs Agency, will replace EMCDDA. The agency's mandate will be strengthened and will include such tasks as developing security threat assessments, enhancing cooperation with national focal points and developing evidence-based interventions.

880. In July 2023, the INCB Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme participated in capacity-building training in Budapest for law enforcement officers from police, customs administration and postal security agencies. The training event was organized by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration and focused on enhancing the knowledge and skills

needed to identify and safely interdict dangerous substances. Participants received instruction on IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD targeting tools to improve global intelligence-sharing.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

881. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor licit activities involving internationally controlled substances and assess the level of availability of those substances for licit medical and scientific purposes.

882. There has been a considerable increase in the availability of opioid analgesics in Europe over the past 20 years, the level of consumption of opioid analgesics rising from 73,944 S-DDD_{pm} per million inhabitants in 2002 to 221,959 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021. However, the pattern is slightly different in various parts of the region. Western Europe accounted for most of the consumption in 2021 (212,696 S-DDD_{pm}, or 95 per cent of the total). Austria, Belgium, Germany, Gibraltar, Iceland, Spain, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Switzerland all reported consumption above 10,000 S-DDD_{pm}. Consumption in South-Eastern Europe increased from 2,056 S-DDD_{pm} in 2002 to 8,410 in 2021. Croatia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia reported a consumption level of 1,000 S-DDD_{pm}. Eastern Europe also experienced an increase, albeit a smaller one (from 344 S-DDD_{pm} in 2002 to 851 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021). Among the various opioids, fentanyl was the most commonly consumed in 2021 (156,159 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by oxycodone (26,478 S-DDD_{pm}) and morphine (21,372 S-DDD_{pm}).

883. Adopted in 2011, Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 54/6 encourages Member States to report consumption of psychotropic substances to the Board. Although some European countries have consistently reported such consumption over the past 10 years, the proportion of European countries doing so decreased from 41 per cent in 2011 to 32.5 per cent in 2021.

884. As regards precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal

uses, and, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. As at 1 November 2023, of the 45 countries on the European continent, 40 (89 per cent) had provided at least one estimate of annual legitimate requirements for the import of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations to the Board. However, two (or approximately 5 per cent) of them have not updated their estimates in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of annual legitimate requirements as a tool to guide exporting countries on the legitimate requirements of importing countries and thus prevent the oversupply and diversion of such substances into illicit channels, as well as ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

885. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,¹⁶⁴ psychotropic substances¹⁶⁵ and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁶⁶ In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

4. National legislation, policy and action

886. In December 2022, the Pompidou Group adopted a new work programme for 2023–2025, establishing four priorities, namely: (i) promoting sustainable drug and addiction policies in conformity with human rights principles; (ii) safeguarding democratic societies by addressing addictions that impact human autonomy; (iii) protecting the rights of persons belonging to vulnerable and risk groups with drug use and addiction problems; and (iv) reducing the availability of illicit drugs and preventing the diversion of precursors. The new programme sets out relevant action items relating to each priority, and the expected results are to be delivered and acted on according to set timelines for each activity.

887. Several European countries have placed the cannabinoid hexahydrocannabinol (HHC) and its derivatives under national control owing to its increasing availability

¹⁶⁴E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁶⁵E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁶⁶E/INCB/2023/4.

in Western Europe and the severe health impact associated with its use. Since 13 June 2023, the production, sale and use of HHC, HHC-acetate (HHCO) and hexahydrocannabinophorol (HHCP) have been prohibited in France. Similar measures have been implemented in other countries, including Belgium, Cyprus and Sweden.

888. Albania adopted a law to regulate the production of cannabis for medicinal and industrial purposes in July 2023. Under the proposed legislation, all cultivation and production of, and trade in, cannabis for medicinal and industrial purposes would be for export only, and a national agency for the control and monitoring of those activities would be established. There would be no limit on the THC content of cannabis for medicinal purposes, while the maximum permitted THC content of cannabis for industrial purposes would be 0.8 per cent.

889. In June 2023, Malta adopted the National Drug Policy 2023–2033, aimed at reducing the demand and the supply of illicit drugs in the country. In September 2023, the country also hosted its second ministerial conference with four other European countries (Czechia, Germany, Luxembourg and Netherlands (Kingdom of the)) to discuss developments related to regulations and laws regarding the use of cannabis for non-medical or non-scientific purpose.

890. The Government of Luxembourg passed a bill allowing the home cultivation and possession of cannabis for non-medical purposes in June 2023. Under the new law, adults will be allowed to grow up to four cannabis plants per household for private non-medical use provided that the cultivation is not visible from the outside.

891. In April 2023, the Government of Czechia approved the Addiction Policy Action Plan for 2023–2025. The action plan establishes five priority areas: prevention and treatment of addiction; regulated market for substances with addictive potential; tax collection according to the level of risk of products with addictive potential; promotion of a balanced addiction policy; and minimization of the impact of the crisis in Ukraine on the national addiction situation. One of the specific activities to be carried out under this plan is to develop a model for the regulated market of cannabis for non-medical use and submit it for discussion in the country.

892. Following an announcement in 2022 relating to the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes in Germany, the Government of that country approved a draft law regulating the availability of the substance in August 2023. The law will be implemented on the basis of two pillars, the first of which enables private cultivation by adults for their own consumption, as well as communal, non-commercial cultivation by

non-profit associations, or “social clubs”, of up to 500 members. Private cultivation will be limited to three plants and individuals may have less than 25 grams in their possession in public. The second pillar will allow the distribution of cannabis in specialist shops in specific regions for a limited duration. The effects of a commercial cannabis supply chain on health and youth protection in the relevant pilot projects will be investigated and evaluated. The draft law on the first pillar is expected to enter into force at the end of 2023.

893. In February 2023, the Kingdom of the Netherlands announced its decision to initiate the start-up phase of its “cannabis experiment” following its enactment of the Controlled Cannabis Supply Chain Experiment Bill in July 2020 and the subsequent preparatory phase of the experiment. During the start-up phase, which is expected to begin in December 2023, cannabis growers in the municipalities of Tilburg and Breda will be able to deliver cannabis to coffee shops on a small scale. The start-up phase is restricted to participating municipalities, a trading stock of 500 grams of regulated products and a maximum duration of six months.

894. Pilot trials involving the controlled distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes have been authorized in Switzerland following the amendment of the country’s drug legislation in 2021. The trials are being conducted by the cantonal and communal authorities, not at the federal level, and the non-medical use of cannabis other than for the purposes of the pilot trials remains prohibited by the Narcotics Act. As at June 2023, pilot trials in five major cities (Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich) had been authorized and cannabis for non-medical purposes was to be distributed in pharmacies, cannabis social clubs and non-profit stores and through other channels. The evaluation results of the pilot trials are not expected until 2024.

895. The Board wishes to remind all parties to the 1961 Convention as amended that, under article 4, paragraph (c), thereof, the parties are required to take such legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary, subject to the provisions of the Convention, to limit exclusively to medical and scientific purposes the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs.

896. Switzerland amended its regulations concerning the prescription of diacetylmorphine in April 2023, taking into account the special needs of older, less mobile patients with comorbidities. The amendment provided for the possibility of delegating the administration of diacetylmorphine to appropriate external institutions such as pharmacies, and of providing patients with several take-home doses for treatment in specific, strictly supervised cases.

897. The Kingdom of the Netherlands amended its Opium Act to put nitrous oxide under national control, in response to the adverse health impact associated with its use and as recommended by the Coordination Centre for Assessment and Monitoring of New Drugs. Since 1 January 2023, the production and possession of and trade in nitrous oxide has been restricted for the food industry and for medical purposes.

898. In February 2023, the Parliament of Croatia adopted a new national strategy on addiction policies. The new strategy defines priorities, special goals and measures with respect to addictions and behavioural addictions (to alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gambling or betting and use of the Internet and social networks), and is aimed at reducing demand for and the availability of illegal substances in the country by 2023. The strategy will be implemented through two operational action plans.

899. In March 2023, France adopted an interministerial strategy for mobilization against addictive behaviour for the period 2023–2027, which is aimed at treating all addictive behaviour as an overarching problem. Under that framework, prevention and education are a priority in providing everyone with the scientific knowledge and psychosocial skills to avoid drugs and other addictive behaviour. Measures to prevent addictive behaviours in different social establishments will be stepped up and integrated into service projects.

900. In May 2023, the Parliament of Lithuania adopted a national agenda on drug, tobacco and alcohol control, consumption prevention and harm reduction. Aimed at establishing the objectives, areas of focus and impact indicators of a long-term policy, the national agenda focuses on reducing demand for and supply of drugs, tobacco and alcohol and harm to the individual, society and the State.

901. Slovakia is currently rolling out a new drug strategy for the period up to 2030. One of the pillars of the strategy is increased national and international cooperation. Several ministries will be cooperating to achieve common goals, while the Slovak Police Force will focus on the detection of organized groups at both national and international levels. The detection of laboratories manufacturing new psychoactive substances, the detection of cross-border crime and prioritization of the protection of entry points into the country will be key tasks for the police force.

902. In December 2022, Montenegro enacted a rule book on methods of drug disposal and keeping records of drugs that have been seized and disposed of. The rule book was published in the Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 132/2022 of 5 December 2022, and entered into force on 13 December 2022.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

903. According to the EMCDDA European Drug Report for 2023, the scale of complexity of illicit drug manufacture in Europe continues to grow. In 2021, a total of 434 synthetic drug manufacturing laboratories were dismantled in the European Union. Some of those production sites were large-scale facilities. Capacity for synthetic drug production is high in general, and production processes are increasingly diversified, as evidenced by the recent seizure of preprecursors used to manufacture the precursor chemicals needed to produce amphetamine, methamphetamine and MDMA, thus circumventing existing controls.

904. In October 2023 the Spanish National Police and the Tax Agency reported dismantling in Barcelona a clandestine laboratory that had been producing dangerous new psychoactive substances, using information provided through the INCB GRIDS programme. Three people have been arrested, and materials for the production of more than 7,500,000 doses of new psychoactive substances, such as the stimulant known as “monkey powder”, the synthetic cannabinoid ADB-BUTINACA and the synthetic cathinone *alpha*-PiHP, have been seized. These synthetic drugs were shipped worldwide, including to Europe, North America and Oceania by parcel post.

905. In 2021, the number of dismantled clandestine laboratories producing cocaine and methamphetamine increased in European Union countries. Illicit manufacture of amphetamine remained stable, while the detection of MDMA manufacturing sites decreased by a quarter, most likely reflecting the shift to the production of other substances.

906. A total of 12 European Union member States reported the dismantling of a total of 261 methamphetamine laboratories in 2021 – an increase of 23 per cent in comparison with 2020 (when 213 laboratories were dismantled). Those laboratories included various medium- and large-scale facilities in the Kingdom of the Netherlands (15) and Belgium (9). Small- to medium-scale methamphetamine manufacturing sites were dismantled in Czechia (188).

907. A total of 723 kg of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine (tablets and powder) were seized in 15 European Union countries. In comparison, 955 kg were seized in 2021 (a decrease of 24 per cent compared with 2020) in 12 countries (an increase of 25 per cent, compared with the 8 countries where such seizures were effected in 2020). Additionally, 5,100 litres of BMK, 9.7 tons of MAPA (used to make P-2-P) and 4.5 tons of MAMDP (used to make 3,4-MDP-2-P) were seized in the European Union in 2021.

908. A record amount of 303 tons of cocaine was seized by European Union member States over the course of 2021. Belgium (96 tons), Netherlands (Kingdom of the) (72 tons) and Spain (49 tons) accounted for three quarters of all the cocaine seized. Seizures in the second-biggest European port (Antwerp) rose from 91 tons in 2021 to 110 tons in 2022. The recent trend is that increasingly smaller ports throughout Europe are being targeted. In the United Kingdom, cocaine seizures by police and border forces increased by 68 per cent, from 11,141 kg in the year ending March 2021 to 18,767 kg in the latest year (fiscal year ending March 2022), the highest seized quantities on record. This was due to an increase in the number of seizures of 100 kg or more by the United Kingdom Border Force.

909. The unprecedented expansion of the global cocaine market has followed significant changes in both source and destination markets. Around 2012, the increasing involvement of groups from the Balkan region, which directly procure cocaine from Latin America, increased competition among traffickers supplying markets in Western and Central Europe, the second largest destination market for the drug, triggering improvements in the efficiency of the supply chain, increasing purity and lowering prices and paving the way for a steady increase in consumption.

910. Cannabis remained the most frequently seized drug in European Union member States in 2021. Member States of the European Union recorded a total of 202,000 seizures comprising 816 tons of cannabis resin, marking an increase from 588 tons in 2020. Concurrently, there were 240,000 incidents involving the confiscation of cannabis herb, the total amount of which was 256 tons, in contrast to 157 tons in the previous year. Separately, Türkiye accounted for 9,800 seizures (33 tons) of cannabis resin and 52,500 seizures (31 tons) of cannabis herb.

911. According to Italian authorities, since 2020, Italian ports, mainly the southern port of Gioia Tauro, have been increasingly used as trans-shipment points for cocaine being trafficked eastward to ports on the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea. At those ports, large shipments of cocaine from South America are received by Balkan criminal groups, who ensure its wholesale distribution and transportation to markets and stockpiling areas in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and (prior to the armed conflict) Ukraine. Significant developments have also been observed in Türkiye, where seizures almost quadrupled between 2014 and 2017 (from 393 kg to 1,485 kg), and Romania, where the number of cocaine seizures – likely reflecting the domestic retail market – began to increase in 2015, a similar increase in Bulgaria beginning two years later.

912. In May 2022, EMCDDA released its annual wastewater analysis publication. The publication included data from 104 cities and pointed at distinct geographical patterns of use across different European cities. Usage of cocaine remains high in cities located in western and southern Europe, in particular Belgium, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Portugal and Spain. Detection of amphetamine in wastewater showed that that substance was found at a much lower level in cities in the south of Europe, although an increase was observed. At the same time, the highest quantities were detected in northern European countries (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Sweden). Methamphetamine traces were more concentrated in regions where the substance has been previously encountered (Belgium, Czechia, eastern Germany, Slovakia, Spain and Türkiye). While the presence of methamphetamine remains very low in other regions, an increase in southern and central European countries has been observed. The highest occurrences of MDMA were found in Belgium, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Spain and Portugal. For the first time ever, data related to ketamine were published and the highest occurrences were observed in cities in Denmark, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

913. In July 2023, the police of Germany seized around 300 kg of amphetamine and dismantled the biggest drug laboratory for the manufacture of counterfeit “captagon” tablets in German history. In addition to 300 kg of the active ingredient, 2.5 tons of cutting agents, a tablet-making machine and several pairs of punches with the “captagon” logo were seized. In a joint report, the police of Germany and EMCDDA examined the role of Europe in “captagon” trafficking. The report highlighted that while the overall quantity of amphetamine seized in the European Union was relatively stable, large amounts of “captagon” tablets were seized in the European Union in transit to the Arabian Peninsula. Türkiye seized more amphetamine than the entire European Union in 2017 and 2018 as a result of large seizures of “captagon” tablets (6.6 tons and 5.7 tons, respectively). According to the report, there may be a connection between the decrease in seizures in Türkiye and the increase in seizures in the European Union, probably owing to a change in trafficking routes.

914. In 2021, a record 8.5 tons of new psychoactive substances were seized by European Union member States. The substances reported include synthetic cannabinoids, hexahydrocannabinol, synthetic cathinones, new synthetic opioids and benzimidazole opioids. Half of the substances reported by the European Union early warning system were synthetic cannabinoids (24), representing an increase of 60 per cent compared with 2020, when 15 new synthetic cannabinoids were detected. The increased diversity is likely owed to illicit drug producers’ attempts to circumvent the

2021 class-wide ban on synthetic cannabinoids imposed by China. National estimates of the use of new psychoactive substances (excluding ketamine) among young adults (aged 15 to 34) range from 0.1 per cent in Latvia to 5.1 per cent in Romania. At the end of 2022, EMCDDA was monitoring a total of 930 new psychoactive substances, 41 of which were reported for the first time in Europe in 2022.

915. Since 2009, 74 new opioids have been identified on the European drug market. However, in 2022 only one new opioid was identified. Preliminary data for 2023 suggest that benzimidazole opioids are increasingly being detected in Latvia, while Estonian police also reported seizing multiple mixtures containing metonitazene mixed with bromazolam and the animal tranquillizer xylazine. Metonitazene has been added to Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended, while bromazolam and xylazine are not currently under international control.

916. Cyprus reported that in 2022, a total of 1,017 cases relating to illegal addictive substances – involving 1,084 people – had been recorded, including 136 instances involving cannabis plants, 166 instances involving MDMA pills, and the seizure of approximately 348 kg of cannabis herb, 39 kg of cannabis resin, 38 kg of cocaine, 1.5 kg of synthetic drugs, 3.5 kg of MDMA and 4.4 kg of methamphetamine.

917. Estonia reported that the number of drug-related fatalities related to fentanyl-like synthetic opioids or benzimidazoles rose sharply in 2022. While those substances are still trafficked mainly by land using vehicles, including trucks, or by post, in some instances trafficking using drones was observed. Large-scale trafficking in Estonia seems to be linked to the sale by vendors of multiple substances, using legal business structures, and money-laundering networks. Encrypted social media platforms are increasingly being used for the sale of such substances.

918. The Russian Federation reported that in 2022, law enforcement agencies recorded over 177,000 crimes related to illegal drugs. Of that total, 110,895 crimes were related to the trafficking of those substances and 829 involved seizures related to the manufacture of drugs. Additionally, 82,800 websites and links to resources containing information on drug trafficking were blocked.

6. Prevention and treatment

919. While most European countries have rigorous systems for the collection of the latest prevalence and treatment data, the increasing number of new substances, together with increasingly complex patterns of polydrug use, has posed significant challenges to authorities in terms of the provision

of prevention, drug identification and treatment services. According to EMCDDA, coverage of and access to treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use remain uneven both within and between countries, and in some cases fall short of countries' needs.

920. An increasingly complex pattern of polydrug use, together with the expanded availability of synthetic opioids and synthetic stimulants, emphasizes the need to review the distribution and administration of the opioid antagonist naloxone and to develop more effective responses to reduce drug overdose deaths and drug-related poisonings.

921. According to the European Drug Report 2023, cannabis remains the most commonly used substance in Europe, some 22.6 million adults (8 per cent of adults) reporting its use in 2021. The second most commonly used substance is cocaine, approximately 3.7 million adults (1.3 per cent of adults) reporting its use in the past year. Heroin use remained stable, around 1 million people (0.3 per cent of adults) reporting use of the substance in 2021.

922. Data from the 2022 Crime Survey for England and Wales suggest a similar drug use pattern, cannabis being reported as the most commonly used drug in England and Wales. In 2022, about 7 per cent of adults reported having used cannabis in the past year, a further 2 per cent reporting having used powder cocaine. Prevalence of "ecstasy" use dropped to its lowest level (0.7 per cent) in 2022, which may be the result of government restrictions on social contact during the COVID-19 pandemic.

923. The Russian Federation reported that as at 1 January 2023, the number of patients receiving treatment for drug use disorders remained at the same level as the previous year (229,700), of the 391,700 patients registered in specialized medical institutions of the Ministry of Health. The number of people who use drugs who registered in such institutions for the first time totalled 14,000.

924. Similarly, the World Drug Report 2023 suggests that opioids are the most common primary drugs of misuse among people in drug treatment in most of Europe. Among the different subregions, Eastern Europe continues to have the highest estimated prevalence rate of people who inject drugs (1.3 per cent of the adult population) and the highest prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs in Europe (25.4 per cent).

925. According to UNODC, Ukraine is among the countries with the highest prevalence rates of people who inject drugs and are living with HIV. During the period 2018–2020, there were around 350,000 people who inject drugs in the country (1.17 per cent of the adult population). The opioids

injected include heroin and methadone sourced from illicit markets. An estimated 20.3 per cent of people who inject drugs are living with HIV and more than half are living with hepatitis C. Disruption of basic services in the country since the beginning of the current crisis in 2022 suggests that challenges are faced by people who use drugs in receiving timely HIV diagnosis and uninterrupted antiretroviral treatment.

926. While all European Union member States and Norway have needle and syringe programmes, coverage and access to those programmes remains a challenge. Only 5 of the 17 countries with available data reached WHO service provision targets in 2021. Opioid agonist treatment is implemented in all European countries and has been recognized as crucial in mitigating overdose deaths. Methadone is the most widely used agonist, 56 per cent of clients receiving that substance, while 35 per cent receive buprenorphine-based medications. In view of the health risks caused by an increasing number of illicit drugs, a considerable number of countries also reported the implementation of drug identification services, take-home naloxone programmes and supervised drug consumption rooms.

927. The latest data available to EMCDDA suggests that cannabis use was the main reason for first-time specialized treatment. An estimated 55,000 cannabis users received their first treatment in 2021, accounting for 45 per cent of new cases. Most cannabis users receiving treatment were male, with an average age of 26. While the total number of first-time treatment recipients decreased slightly when compared with the level before the COVID-19 pandemic, a recent EMCDDA review revealed an increase in the availability of treatment options, some of which are delivered through telemedicine or digital applications.

928. With an estimated 25,000 first-time treatment recipients in 2021, cocaine was the second main drug of use among first-time treatment recipients within the European Union. Available mostly as cocaine powder, but sometimes also as “crack” cocaine, it accounted for 27 per cent of acute poisoning cases in hospital emergency room incidents and was the substance most commonly associated with such conditions. Most cocaine users receiving treatment were male users with an average age of 33. An estimated 7,500 “crack” users began treatment in 2021, which indicates the expansion of the use of that substance within marginalized groups.

929. The number of drug-induced deaths in the European Union increased slightly in 2021, reaching more than 6,000 (around 5,800 in 2020), mainly because of new data reported by Germany. While opioids, including heroin and its metabolites, often used in combination with other substances, are associated mainly with overdose deaths, an increasing number of deaths in the Baltic countries were

due to polydrug use involving synthetic opioids such as benzimidazoles and fentanyl derivatives. Furthermore, a considerable increase in overdose deaths has also been observed among older drug users (50 to 64-year-olds). The growing emergence of new synthetic opioids and their adverse health impact call for more targeted prevention and treatment services.

930. Both UNODC and EMCDDA have highlighted an increase in the non-medical use of ketamine in Europe in recent years. Ketamine is included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines. It is used in human and veterinary medicine mainly as an anaesthetic but also for the treatment of short-term, acute pain. However, it is also commonly misused, either by snorting or by injection. Sometimes it is also found added to other drugs. The long-term use of ketamine can cause severe health problems. Since some European countries (Belgium, France, Italy and Spain) have reported a recent increase in the number of people receiving treatment for the non-medical use of ketamine, its use and health impact should be closely monitored.

931. A special report released by EMCDDA draws attention to the use of nitrous oxide as a growing concern for Europe, especially among young people. As the substance has become more accessible and cheaper over the past few years, its popularity has grown, partly also because of a general perception that the health risks associated with its use are low. Cases of poisonings, burns and lung injuries have been reported in some countries, and prolonged use of the substance can result in nerve damage. Much greater attention should thus be given to this substance in drug prevention and treatment programmes.

932. A growing interest in the therapeutical potential of psychedelic drugs and the potential risks in their unregulated use has also been noted. While clinical studies on the use of psychedelics are conducted in some countries, most of the health, wellness and tourism businesses involving the use of psychedelics have been operating without much regulatory oversight. Unsupervised and experimental use of those substances, even in microdoses as self-medication, may put some vulnerable populations at risk.

933. The latest national reports on health behaviour in school-aged children provide updates on drug use patterns among young people in some European countries (Austria, Greece, Greenland, Finland, Italy and Scotland). Cannabis remained the most popular drug among 15-year-olds in 2021 and 2022; Sweden reported increasing cannabis use among boys, and Austria recorded increasing use among girls.

934. In the United Kingdom, recent surveys among secondary school pupils reveal a decrease in the prevalence

of lifetime and recent illicit drug use, the proportion of pupils who reported taking any drug falling from 24 per cent (2018) to 18 per cent (2021). There was a similar trend among those who reported taking any drug in the past year, the proportion of such individuals decreasing from 17 per cent (2018) to 12 per cent (2021).

935. In Estonia, studies on syringe residues from used syringes have been conducted since 2021 as part of the provision of treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use, enabling a better understanding of the use of injectable drugs in different regions and locations where treatment and services are provided. In 2022, more than half of the syringes contained amphetamine (66 per cent), followed by methamphetamine (28 per cent) and other substances. Isotonitazene and other synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, furanylfentanyl and carfentanil were also found.

F. Oceania

Pacific island States have confirmed the transformation of their countries from solely transit sites along drug trafficking routes to destination markets for synthetic drugs, posing significant challenges to communities and their public health systems. Law enforcement and customs agencies of these countries reported multiple drug seizures, particularly of cannabis and methamphetamine. Transnational organized crime, especially drug trafficking, has been recognized as one of the most challenging issues facing the Pacific region.

Transnational organized criminal groups were attempting to traffic unprecedented amounts of cocaine to Australia, although the methamphetamine market remained the predominant illicit drug market. Law enforcement authorities highlighted the need to address organized crime and violence related to trafficking in large quantities of drugs to the region.

1. Major developments

936. The Pacific Islands Forum “Pacific security outlook report 2022–2023” highlights transnational organized crime as one of the region’s priority focus areas. The report noted that transnational organized criminal groups had adapted to COVID-19-related border closures, resulting in increased channels and platforms for illicit activity, with a surge in

transnational criminal activity expected with the reopening of borders across the region. The import, trans-shipment, sale and possession of drugs, together with precursor trafficking, were the most prevalent transnational criminal activities in the region. While Pacific island States had mainly been affected as transit points in the past, domestic illicit drug markets had grown across the region over the past 10 years, leading to increases in drug use disorders and mental health issues. Some countries also reported increases in crimes related to drug trafficking, such as burglary, violence, intimidation and extortion, and, in larger countries, increasing use of firearms. In countries such as Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand and Tonga, non-medical drug use had been observed to harm families, with an increased risk of sexual violence, child neglect, and poor health, educational and employment outcomes. The report also noted that a causal relationship between illicit drug use and child labour had been identified in Kiribati.

937. The Pacific Islands Forum *Second Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2022* noted that only four¹⁶⁷ of the Forum’s member States were party to all three international drug control conventions and that, as a result, drug-related legislation across some Pacific island States was outdated and ill-equipped to address emerging issues. The region faced rising levels of crime and drug misuse and, despite commitments made by Pacific island States to address trafficking and transnational crime, there continued to be a lack of information on drug trafficking. However, efforts were under way among regional customs and law enforcement bodies, such as the Oceania Customs Organization and the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, to enhance data collection on and analysis of transnational crime.

938. In previous reports, the Board has highlighted that non-parties to the international drug control conventions are concentrated in Oceania, which remains highly vulnerable to drug and precursor trafficking in view of its extensive maritime borders. **INCB reiterates its call upon non-parties to take steps towards accession to, and full implementation of, the international drug control conventions to facilitate action against the drug problem in all its forms. The Board also encourages regional and bilateral partners to support countries in the region to this end, with a view to ensuring that these States can benefit from the implementation of the conventions, in particular in improving the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, preventing and addressing drug trafficking, strengthening international cooperation in criminal matters and providing evidence-based prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services.**

¹⁶⁷ Fiji, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of) and Tonga.

939. Although the methamphetamine market remained the largest illicit stimulant market in Australia, transnational organized criminal groups were attempting to traffic unprecedented amounts of cocaine to Australia. Wastewater analysis found that over the 12-month period from September 2021 to August 2022, at least 3.3 tons of cocaine were consumed in Australia; less than the 5.6 tons consumed in the 12-month period ending in August 2020. In 2022 and 2023, large seizures of cocaine were made in Oceania.

940. In 2023, UNODC launched a new transnational organized crime programme based in Fiji and aimed at supporting Pacific island States in addressing cybercrime, money-laundering, environmental crime and trafficking.

2. Regional cooperation

941. Security leaders from 25 countries attended the fourth meeting of the Joint Heads of Pacific Security in Nadi, Fiji, in November 2022. The participants agreed to establish a partnership for the sharing of information to enhance regional maritime security, with a view to mitigating the security issues faced by Pacific island States as a result of climate change, illegal fishing, drug trafficking and other threats.

942. In November 2022, a UNODC regional workshop on synthetic drugs was held in Nadi with the participation of law enforcement, public health and forensic experts from Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. At the workshop, participants confirmed that their countries had become destinations for synthetic drugs, in addition to being points of transit for drug trafficking between East and South-East Asia and the Americas. Cannabis remained a major concern in the region, but several countries, including Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, reported that methamphetamine had now become the primary drug of concern and was causing a strain on public health systems. The lack of drug-related data within the region and its implications were acknowledged by participants, as was limited forensic testing capacity.

943. From 28 November to 9 December 2022, the Oceania Customs Organization, in partnership with INCB, the Universal Postal Union, the Australian Border Force and the United States Postal Inspection Service, held a two-week training activity in Hagatna, Guam, for the Northern Pacific subregion. The first week of training focused on the use of the Oceania Customs Organization Pacific Small Craft mobile application and All Partners Access Network technology, which provide a secure platform for the exchange of information. The second week focused on the detection and interdiction of suspicious parcels arriving through air freight, courier and post, focusing on new psychoactive substances, opioids and fentanyl-type substances, as well as controlled

drugs. The GRIDS Programme delivered an awareness-raising and capacity-building workshop on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals and on the interregional and intraregional exchange of intelligence and cross-border cooperation for 19 senior customs and postal security officers. The training focused on capacity-building to enhance communications among the authorities of the Northern Pacific subregion concerning safe handling and interdiction approaches for dangerous substances.

944. From December 2022 to January 2023, the authorities of Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, Micronesia (Federated States of), New Zealand, the Northern Mariana Islands, Solomon Islands and Tonga participated in the GRIDS Programme's Operation Knockout, aimed at identifying and dismantling illicit manufacturing and distribution points for non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, GBL and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

945. From 20 to 31 March 2023, the Oceania Customs Organization held a two-week workshop in Tonga, with the support of INCB, the Universal Postal Union, the Australian Border Force and the United States Postal Inspection Service. Customs officers from the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu attended the workshop, which focused on small craft intelligence, including the use of the Oceania Customs Organization Pacific Small Craft mobile application. The application was now used by more than 300 officials, who had recorded over 2,000 movements leading to the apprehension of 1,200 vessels. During the second week of the workshop, training on postal inspection and the use of intelligence-gathering tools was led by the GRIDS Programme for 32 enforcement officers from police, customs and postal security authorities from 14 countries and territories in the South Pacific subregion. Subsequent training was held by the GRIDS Programme for the authorities of Samoa on 4 April 2023. Both INCB training activities followed a practical curriculum covering the safe identification and interdiction of dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

946. In March 2023, UNODC held regional multi-agency training on cryptocurrencies and darknet investigations in Nadi. The training focused on the new Internet-based technologies being exploited to facilitate trafficking in opioids and synthetic drugs.

947. In May 2023, the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme, in partnership with the United States Navy, held a one-week training activity on maritime crime scene

management for the Maritime Police, Navy and Customs Enforcement Division of Fiji in Suva. Building upon virtual training conducted in 2021 and 2022 for participants from Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, the activity was aimed at creating a more secure maritime environment by countering illicit activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking and illegal fishing.

948. The first Transnational Serious Organized Crime Global Summit was held in Sydney in June 2023 and was attended by senior law enforcement officers from 46 countries. The event focused on partnerships for disrupting the illicit drug trade and addressing transnational crime.

949. The GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 11 to 15 September 2023. The event brought together over 100 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including three participants from Fiji and the Oceania Customs Organization. Several participating Governments also conducted bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

950. From 18 to 22 September 2023, the GRIDS Programme held a twinning event in Nadi for Pacific island States on regional law enforcement cooperation, trust-building, relationship development and active networking, awareness of opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances, and access to and training on intelligence development (GRIDS Intelligence high-definition) and secure real-time trafficking communications (IONICS).

951. Customs and law enforcement officers of the region completed training on the detection and prevention of transnational crimes in the Pacific by the Australia Pacific Security College in Nadi in May 2023. Oceania Customs Organization participants were from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Micronesia (Federated States of), Samoa and Solomon Islands. In 2023, the Australian Federal Police provided forensic and crime scene training for members of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force on, inter alia, drug seizure and preliminary drug testing.

952. A total of 26 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of nine countries in Oceania, namely, Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. There are now five e-modules developed by INCB Learning, which cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The e-modules are available upon

registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost. At the global level, as at 1 November 2023, 1,462 officials from the competent national authorities of 154 countries and territories had been granted access to INCB Learning e-modules.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

953. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor the licit movement of internationally controlled substances, as well as ensure the availability of these substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes. Most of the countries and territories of Oceania provided the required reports for narcotics drugs controlled under the 1961 Convention as amended for 2021. For psychotropic substances controlled under the 1971 Convention, approximately three quarters of the countries and territories provided the required reports for the last five years, including most of the required information. A few countries have not provided any of the required reports regarding narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the last five years.

954. In 2002, the level of consumption of opioid analgesics in Oceania, expressed in S-DDD_{pm} per million inhabitants, stood at 14,974 S-DDD_{pm}. It had doubled by 2021, reaching 29,167 S-DDD_{pm}. The largest amounts in 2021 were consumed in Australia (7,675 S-DDD_{pm}) and New Zealand (6,508 S-DDD_{pm}). However, a number of small territories also reported high levels of S-DDD_{pm} (Norfolk Island, 7,565 S-DDD_{pm}; New Caledonia, 3,176 S-DDD_{pm}; and French Polynesia, 1,946 S-DDD_{pm}) owing to the fact that the amounts of opioid analgesics reported is standardized in daily dose per capita and therefore, given the limited populations, small actual amounts of opioids translate into a high level of S-DDD_{pm}. Wallis and Futuna Islands reported 721 S-DDD_{pm}, followed by Palau (463 S-DDD_{pm}), Christmas Island (459 S-DDD_{pm}), Samoa (209 S-DDD_{pm}) and Fiji (170 S-DDD_{pm}). Other countries in the region reported smaller or no amounts. The majority of the consumption in Oceania was of fentanyl (16,893 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by morphine (5,850 S-DDD_{pm}), oxycodone (5,518 S-DDD_{pm}), pethidine (225 S-DDD_{pm}) and hydromorphone (159 S-DDD_{pm}).

955. It remains challenging to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Oceania, because fewer than half of the region's countries and territories have provided to the Board consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past five years.

956. **The Board encourages the countries and territories of Oceania that have not provided the reports under the international drug control conventions, in particular on consumption of psychotropic substances, to do so as soon as possible and to take the necessary measures to ensure that their respective competent national authorities have sufficient resources and training to prepare the reports in a timely manner. This will significantly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation of the international drug control system. The Board encourages bilateral partners to provide support, including technical assistance, in this area.**

957. **The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.**

958. With regard to precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3. The provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for, among other substances, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

959. Out of the 16 countries in Oceania, eight (50 per cent) provided to the Board at least one estimate of annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations. However, three, or 38 per cent, of those eight countries have not updated their estimates in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of annual legitimate requirements to act as a tool to guide exporting countries with regard to the legitimate requirements of importing countries, thus preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels, as well as ensuring the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes. Two countries in Oceania, namely, the Marshall Islands and Micronesia (Federated States of), have provided annual legitimate requirements to the Board for the first time in the last five years.

960. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,¹⁶⁸ psychotropic substances¹⁶⁹ and the implementation of article 12 of

the 1988 Convention.¹⁷⁰ In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

4. National legislation, policy and action

961. In November 2022, nine detector dog teams graduated from the New Zealand Police and New Zealand Customs Pacific Detector Dog Programme. The teams were from law enforcement and customs authorities of Fiji, French Polynesia, New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga.

962. The Australian National Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs published its first communiqué in June 2023, outlining discussions that covered, inter alia, options for addressing addiction medicine workforce shortages, the potential benefits of developing a national research agenda on alcohol and other drugs, and implementation of the National Quality Framework for Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services, an update of which had been published in April 2023.

963. In July 2023, the police force of the Australian State of New South Wales announced the creation of a new task force to coordinate investigations and operations related to recent shootings that had taken place in public places in Sydney and that were believed to be related to organized crime and illicit drug supply. The task force was also to take a proactive approach to hindering potential future activity, with a view to restoring a sense of safety in the community. Organized crime-related homicides increased in New South Wales during the 2021/22 reporting period, and the significant decline in sea and air freight to Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by increased competition between organized criminal groups over drug trafficking networks. The near doubling of the price of cocaine compared to pre-pandemic prices also provided a substantial financial incentive for organized criminal groups.

964. From 1 July 2023, medicines containing psilocybin and MDMA could be prescribed by authorized psychiatrists in Australia for the treatment of, respectively, treatment-resistant depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. For these specific purposes, the substances will be listed as Schedule 8 (Controlled Drugs) medicines in the Poisons Standard. For all other purposes, the substances will remain in Schedule 9 (Prohibited Substances), which limits

¹⁶⁸ E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁶⁹ E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁷⁰ E/INCB/2023/4.

their use to clinical trials. In order to prescribe MDMA or psilocybin for the aforementioned conditions, psychiatrists must be registered under the Authorised Prescriber Scheme and must obtain approval from a human research ethics committee. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists released guidance for psychiatrists to help prevent adverse outcomes for patients prescribed these substances. The advertising of psilocybin and MDMA to Australian consumers remained illegal. In 2023, the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration announced that it was prioritizing action to stop the unlawful advertising of these substances, as well as medicinal cannabis, through measures including education, intelligence-gathering and use and compliance action.

965. The Australian Capital Territory Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022 came into effect on 28 October 2023. Under the amendment, people found with small quantities of specific drugs may be issued with a simple drug offence notice, which can be discharged by paying a fine of 100 Australian dollars or participating in an illicit drug diversion programme assessment and harm reduction session, instead of facing a potential prison sentence. The amendment defines small quantities of amphetamine, cocaine and methamphetamine as 1.5 g, and of other substances as follows: 1.5 g of MDMA; 50 g of dried cannabis; 150 g of harvested cannabis; 1 g of heroin; 0.001 g of lysergic acid or LSD; and 1.5 g of psilocybin.

966. Raising awareness about drugs in schools and tertiary institutions was highlighted as a priority for policing in Fiji, with activities held in schools in July 2023. In April 2023, a proactive narcotics workshop was held by the Narcotics Bureau in Labasa, Fiji, for police officers.

967. In December 2022, temporary class drug orders under the New Zealand Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 were issued for one-year periods for the benzodiazepine derivative bromazolam and the synthetic cannabinoids ADB-5Br-INACA, MDMB-5Br-INACA and MDMB-INACA as Class C1 controlled drugs. These substances are currently not under international control.

968. Amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1977 that came into effect in December 2022 expanded the New Zealand ePrescription Service so that prescribers could issue signature-exempt prescriptions for medicines containing controlled drugs. This was aimed at reducing the administrative burden for prescribers and pharmacists, as there was previously a requirement for the prescriber to provide a signed hard copy of any prescription for a medicine containing a controlled drug. The ultimate goal of the amendments was to improve access to Class B controlled drugs for people in palliative care or with chronic conditions

such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and cancer. The amendments would also allow prescriptions for Class B controlled drugs to cover a period of up to three months when issued through the system, which was expected to improve access for patients. Subsequently, a Cabinet decision was taken in July 2023 to reduce the maximum limit for opioid prescriptions from three months to one, to apply to both Class B and Class C opioids, bringing the prescribing limit for Class C opioids (such as codeine) into line with that for Class B opioids. The changes were made to reduce the risk of harm associated with opioid prescribing while ensuring regular clinical review and continued access to these medicines. The changes were planned to come into effect in late 2023. In addition, a number of interim safeguard measures were implemented to manage risks associated with opioid prescribing, including regulations setting out who could prescribe opioid medicines, monitoring of prescribing practices, clinical guidance, professional sanctions in cases of inappropriate prescribing and the Pharmac Pharmaceutical Schedule, which provides criteria limiting the amount of Class B opioids that may be prescribed and dispensed.

969. In 2022, Palau released its National Security Strategy, comprising six pillars, one of which was transnational crime. The Government noted that although illicit drug markets in the country were fairly limited, they continued to operate counter to the laws, culture and values of the country. The Strategy outlined the negative impact of illicit drug abuse on public health and the national health-care system, and highlighted the significant negative socioeconomic impacts of methamphetamine. In February 2023, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Bureau of Public Safety, the Ministry of Justice, the Palau Bureau of Customs and Border Protection and the Ministry of Finance with a view to advancing cooperation in law enforcement and border management in the country.

970. In November 2022, the Samoa Police, Prisons and Corrections Services met with the Scientific Research Organization of Samoa to discuss future collaborative work on drug testing to support police investigations and court prosecutions.

971. In February 2023, training was held in Tonga for law enforcement officers on the operation of a drone acquired through the Illicit Drugs Response Fund.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

972. Seizures of drugs and precursors at the Australian border increased by 18.1 per cent between 1 July 2022 and 28 February 2023 compared with the period between

1 July 2021 and 28 February 2022, with cocaine being seized at unprecedented levels. Operation Tin Can, conducted from 14 November to 9 December 2022, was organized by WCO, UNODC and the Australian Border Force in cooperation with members of the World Shipping Council, with the participation of enforcement agencies of 58 countries. The Operation, which focused on tackling organized crime and insider threats exploiting the container supply chain, resulted in the global seizure of 98.7 tons of cocaine and 314 kg of cannabis. On the basis of wastewater analysis, it was estimated that only up to a quarter of the drugs that reached the border were seized.

973. Methamphetamine is trafficked into Australia from the Mekong region of South-East Asia and Mexico and other countries, with around 70 per cent of the methamphetamine seized in Australia sourced from Myanmar. The amount of methamphetamine concealed in tea packages, or “tea packet methamphetamine”, seized in Australia has increased since 2019. Tea package designs have been used by criminal groups over the past decade to conceal and market methamphetamine illicitly produced in South-East Asia. In 2022, the Australian Federal Police seized more than two tons of such methamphetamine, with Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Viet Nam and Indonesia identified as the top five countries contributing to its importation. The Australian Federal Police were targeting outlaw motorcycle gangs involved in trafficking in methamphetamine from Afghanistan to Australia. Since 2021, more than 250 kg of methamphetamine produced in Afghanistan had been prevented from arriving in Australia, with the majority intercepted offshore, including in Pakistan. In 2022, the Australian Border Force seized 26 kg of methamphetamine produced in Afghanistan in 19 separate imports, primarily concealed in packages sent by international mail.

974. Preliminary data indicated that seizures of methamphetamine by New Zealand Customs increased from 844 kg in 2021 to 1,819 kg in 2022. January 2023 saw a record seizure of 713 kg of methamphetamine at the New Zealand border, concealed in a shipment of maple syrup from Canada. In March 2023, a seizure of 83 kg of methamphetamine was made at Port Napier, New Zealand, destined for the local market; it represented the first major drug seizure arriving from South Africa via sea freight. For the first time, in March 2023, New Zealand Customs seized 15.24 kg of crystal methamphetamine trafficked directly from Afghanistan by mail in three consignments.

975. A large increase was seen in cocaine trafficking to New Zealand. In January 2023, a joint police, customs and defence force operation resulted in the seizure of 3,348 kg of cocaine in the Pacific Ocean north-east of New Zealand, believed to have been destined for Australia.

976. A record seizure of 174 kg of ketamine, a substance not under international control, was made in Australia in July 2023, including 80 kg of ketamine concealed inside liquid cement shipped from Spain, together with 25 kg of MDMA. In May 2023, the Australian Border Force seized 84 kg of ketamine concealed inside new commercial vans imported to the country. In New Zealand, it was reported that the amount of ketamine seized from January to April 2023 was significantly larger than in the same period in 2022. March 2023 saw the largest monthly amount of MDMA seized in New Zealand since January 2019, primarily made up of one large seizure of almost 20 kg.

977. In February 2023, the Australian Federal Police issued a warning about synthetic drugs, in view of the import of a new synthetic stimulant, dimethylpentylone, into the country, first detected in Australia in October 2021. Forty-four consignments of the substance were detected by the Australian Border Force in 2022. Seizures by the Australian Federal Police of the substance in parcel post and air cargo ranged from around 100 g to 10 kg. In New Zealand in 2022, there was a significant increase in the detection of the new psychoactive substances dimethylpentylone and bromazolam, which had replaced eutylone and etizolam on the illicit market. In addition, the following new psychoactive substances were identified for the first time in New Zealand in 2022: deschloroetizolam, flubrotizolam, flubromazepam, etonitazepine, metonitazene, 2-Fluorodeschloroketamine, 25B-NBOH, MDMB-5Br-INACA, MDMB-INACA, 3,4-methylenedioxy-N-tert-butylcathinone, N-cyclohexylmethylone, ADB-FUBIATA, gidazepam and fluorexetamine.

978. The use of Pacific island States to traffic drugs to Australia and New Zealand continues, as evident in a number of seizures, such as 247 kg of cocaine seized from a yacht moored in Townsville, Australia, which had sailed from Vanuatu, and methamphetamine trafficked to Australia via Fiji.

979. Seizures of cannabis, cocaine, ketamine and methamphetamine were reported by the police and customs authorities in Fiji in 2023, both in the country and at the borders. Cannabis cultivation continued in Fiji, with the law enforcement authorities reporting the eradication of over 6,000 cannabis plants on the island of Kadavu and in the Vunikoko Highlands in May and July 2023. In June 2023, the Nauru Police Force reported the seizure of 15 cannabis plants in Anibare district.

980. In March 2023, an attempt was made to traffic 52 kg of methamphetamine from Papua New Guinea to Australia on a “black flight” that had departed from and returned to central Queensland. A black flight refers to a light aircraft

for which no or false flight plans are logged, that flies at a very low altitude, or that turns off flight monitoring systems in order to avoid detection by law enforcement authorities or aviation monitoring systems.

981. The Samoa Police, Prisons and Corrections Services expressed deep concern over the growing trend in the use of electronic devices for the exchange of drugs, particularly methamphetamine. In 2023, numerous seizures of cannabis and methamphetamine were reported in the country.

982. In Tonga in April 2023, over 1 kg of methamphetamine trafficked inside a shipment from the United States was intercepted by customs officers with the assistance of Tonga Police detector dogs. Small quantities of methamphetamine and cannabis were seized domestically in the country on a regular basis.

983. Information on the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances can be found in the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁷¹

6. Prevention and treatment

984. There continue to be indications that Pacific island States are experiencing increased levels of drug use and treatment demand, including as a consequence of drug trafficking through the region. However, data on the drug use situation in the region are still not available. **The Board reiterates its recommendation that Pacific island States prioritize the collection of data on the extent and patterns of drug use and the demand for treatment of drug use disorders. Such data will aid the development of targeted, evidence-based drug control policies and drug prevention and treatment services. The Board also urges bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to support Pacific island States to this end.**

985. In Solomon Islands, the use of a new substance, “copen”, was becoming a serious concern in schools. The substance was made up of tobacco and other substances such as toothpaste and coral lime, and was reported to have a psychoactive effect, as well as side effects such as vomiting and headaches. It was reported to negatively affect concentration and lead to dependence. A survey of school students aged 8 to 20 found that “copen” use was highly prevalent among teenagers. In response, the Royal Solomon Island Police Force (RSIPF) and the RSIPF-Australian Federal Police Policing Partnership Programme, in cooperation with

the National Community Police Department of RSIPF, conducted a “copen” awareness-raising programme in schools in Honiara. The programme comprised interaction between facilitators and students, and informative presentations aimed at educating students about the dangers of “copen”, the identification of risks and protective factors, and how to respond to peer pressure. A reduction in the use of the substance was observed after the implementation of the programme.

986. Wastewater analysis covering about 55 per cent of the population of Australia between August and December 2022 found that consumption of heroin, oxycodone and cannabis had decreased, while consumption of methamphetamine, cocaine, MDMA, tenamfetamine (MDA), fentanyl and ketamine had increased. The increase in cocaine consumption followed a record low recorded in August 2022. Fentanyl consumption had been increasing since April 2022 and exceeded oxycodone consumption for the first time since April 2021. Record lows were seen in oxycodone consumption in December 2022 (outside capital cities) and in February 2023 (in capital cities).

987. In a sentinel group of adults residing in capital cities in Australia who had injected drugs at least once monthly in the previous six months, prevalence of use in the past six months of heroin (53 per cent), methamphetamine (81 per cent), non-prescribed morphine (14 per cent) and non-prescribed fentanyl (5 per cent) had remained stable in 2022 relative to 2021. Over the same period, the use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products within the past six months had increased significantly, from 67 per cent in 2021, the lowest level since monitoring began, to 72 per cent in 2022. Half of the respondents who had recently used these products reported daily use, as in the previous year. A survey of people who used MDMA and other stimulants on a regular basis found that recent use of MDMA had decreased significantly, from 95 per cent in 2021 to 88 per cent in 2022, reaching the lowest level since monitoring commenced in 2003. Recent use of methamphetamine had increased significantly in 2022 (31 per cent) compared with 2021 (26 per cent). Recent use of cocaine had remained stable in 2022; however, weekly use had increased to 11 per cent (up from 7 per cent in 2021). Recent use of cannabis among the sample had declined from 84 per cent to 79 per cent over the same period.

988. In Australia, the most common type of drug for which people sought treatment continued to be amphetamines, primarily methamphetamine, followed by cannabis and heroin. However, the number of treatment episodes relating to amphetamines continued to decline in the 12-month reporting period 2021/22, after having almost tripled between the 12-month reporting periods 2012/13

¹⁷¹E/INCB/2023/4.

and 2019/20. The number of treatment episodes related to pharmaceutical opioids fell to 4,700 in the 12-month reporting period 2021/22, compared with a peak of 7,700 episodes in the 12-month reporting period 2013/14. The number of treatment episodes related to benzodiazepines increased to 3,200 in the 12-month reporting period 2021/22.

989. On the basis of preliminary estimates, there were 1,788 drug-induced deaths in Australia in 2021, accounting for 1 per cent of all registered deaths in the country that year. The estimated rate of overdose deaths involving opioids, which were the most commonly identified type of substance, was lower in 2021 than in 2020. The rate of overdose deaths involving amphetamine-type stimulants was lower in 2021 than in 2020, when it had reached a record high.

990. According to the New Zealand Health Survey for the period July 2021 to July 2022, 14.7 per cent of adults had used cannabis within the past 12 months, compared with 15.3 per cent in the period from July 2020 to July 2021. Weekly use of cannabis was estimated at 4.3 per cent of adults, similar to the previous year (4.5 per cent). Past-year cocaine use was estimated at 1.1 per cent of adults, a similar level to the previous year (1 per cent). Past-year “ecstasy” use among adults declined from 4.8 per cent to 4.3 per cent, while use of amphetamine-type stimulants increased from 1 per cent to 1.3 per cent of adults. Past-year non-medical use of opioids among adults had doubled over the past year to 1.2 per cent. The annual prevalence of non-medical use of sedatives and hallucinogens had also increased compared with the previous year, from 0.9 per cent to 1.2 per cent, and from 1.9 per cent to 2.5 per cent, respectively.

991. Analysis of wastewater covering about 75 per cent of the population of New Zealand found a reduction in consumption of methamphetamine and MDMA in the fourth quarter of 2022 compared with average consumption in the previous four quarters. Cocaine consumption was found to have increased compared with average consumption detected over the previous four quarters. Heroin was not detected in reportable quantities in 2022, and fentanyl was only detected at a reportable level in the third quarter in two districts.

992. Over the past year, the early warning system of New Zealand, High Alert, issued notifications about a dangerous batch of synthetic opioids linked to serious hospitalizations, the potent stimulant *alpha*-PV detected in a white powder misrepresented as MDMA, and the synthetic cannabinoid MDMB-4en-PINACA detected in a yellow powder presumed to be N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT). The service also reissued a notification about serious harm linked to metonitazene, a highly potent opioid, and fake oxycodone tablets found to contain metonitazene, possibly linked to one death and a series of serious hospitalizations. It appeared that the non-medical use of ketamine was increasing in New Zealand, and in the first half of 2023, an increase in ketamine analogues was observed in the country. In the Australian State of Queensland, an official warning was issued in April 2023 about fake Xanax tablets found to contain protonitazene, a highly potent opioid, and bromazolam, a non-medical benzodiazepine. Two deaths were linked to the use of the tablets.