

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<sub>pm</sub>, with a peak of 6,225 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> being reported in 2017. The Republic of Korea reported the highest level (1,976 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) in the region, followed by Japan (892 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Brunei Darussalam (432 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and Singapore (419 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). The rest of the countries in the region reported consumption below 300 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. Fentanyl was the dominant opioid consumed (3,738 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by morphine (670 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and oxycodone (600 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>).

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.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>152</sup>UNODC, 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.<sup>153</sup>

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

<sup>153</sup>UNODC, 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.<sup>154</sup>

## 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.<sup>155</sup>

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

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

<sup>155</sup> *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<sub>pm</sub> per million inhabitants, stood at 181 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, which was higher than the level in 2002 (43 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) but lower than the level in 2020 (202 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). Bhutan was the country with highest consumption in the region in 2021 (47 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by Sri Lanka (35 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Nepal (31 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), India (27 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Maldives (26 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and Bangladesh (16 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). Morphine was the most consumed opioid in the region (86 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by fentanyl (73 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and pethidine (22 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>).

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,<sup>156</sup> psychotropic substances<sup>157</sup> and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>158</sup> 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.

<sup>156</sup> E/INCB/2023/2.

<sup>157</sup> E/INCB/2023/3.

<sup>158</sup> 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”,<sup>159</sup> 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.

<sup>159</sup> 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<sub>pm</sub> in 2021. This represents a considerable



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

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,<sup>160</sup> psychotropic substances<sup>161</sup> and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>162</sup> 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

<sup>160</sup>E/INCB/2023/2.

<sup>161</sup>E/INCB/2023/3.

<sup>162</sup>E/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.<sup>163</sup> 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

<sup>163</sup> *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.