

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

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

E. Europe

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

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

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

1. Major developments

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

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

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

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

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

2. Regional cooperation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. National legislation, policy and action

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

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

¹⁶⁴E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁶⁵E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁶⁶E/INCB/2023/4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Prevention and treatment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

F. Oceania

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

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

1. Major developments

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

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

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

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

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