



INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD



Report

2024



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Reports published by the International Narcotics Control Board for 2024

The *Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2024* (E/INCB/2024/1) is supplemented by the following reports:

Narcotic Drugs: Estimated World Requirements for 2025 — Statistics for 2023 (E/INCB/2024/2)

Psychotropic Substances: Statistics for 2023 — Assessments of Annual Medical and Scientific Requirements for Substances in Schedules II, III and IV of the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 for 2025 (E/INCB/2024/3)

Precursors, Chemicals and Equipment Frequently Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances: Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2024 on the Implementation of Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 (E/INCB/2024/4)

The updated lists of substances under international control, comprising narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and substances frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, are contained in the latest editions of the annexes to the statistical forms (“Yellow List”, “Green List” and “Red List”), which are also issued by the Board.

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The text of the present report is also available on the website of the Board (www.incb.org).



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Report

of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2024



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About the International Narcotics Control Board

INCB is an independent and quasi-judicial control organ, established by treaty, for monitoring the implementation of the international drug control treaties. It had predecessors under the former drug control treaties as far back as the time of the League of Nations.

Composition

INCB consists of 13 members who are elected by the Economic and Social Council and who serve in their personal capacity, not as government representatives.

Three members with medical, pharmacological or pharmaceutical experience are elected from a list of persons nominated by WHO and 10 members are elected from a list of persons nominated by Governments. Members of the Board are persons who, by their competence, impartiality and disinterestedness, command general confidence. The Council, in consultation with INCB, makes all arrangements necessary to ensure the full technical independence of the Board in carrying out its functions. INCB has a secretariat that assists it in the exercise of its treaty-related functions. The INCB secretariat is an administrative entity of UNODC, but it reports solely to the Board on matters of substance. INCB closely collaborates with UNODC in the framework of arrangements approved by the Council in its resolution 1991/48. INCB also cooperates with other international bodies concerned with drug control, including not only the Council and its Commission on Narcotic Drugs, but also the relevant specialized agencies of the United Nations, particularly WHO. It also cooperates with bodies outside the United Nations system, especially INTERPOL and WCO.

Functions

The functions of INCB are laid down in the following treaties: Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol; Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971; and United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988. Broadly speaking, INCB deals with the following:

(a) As regards the licit manufacture of, trade in and use of drugs, INCB endeavours, in cooperation with Governments, to ensure that adequate supplies of drugs are available for medical and scientific uses and that the diversion of drugs from licit sources to illicit channels does not occur. INCB also monitors Governments' control over chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs and assists them in preventing the diversion of those chemicals into the illicit traffic;

(b) As regards the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of drugs, INCB identifies weaknesses in national and international control systems and contributes to correcting such situations. INCB is also responsible for assessing chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs, in order to determine whether they should be placed under international control.

In the discharge of its responsibilities, INCB:

(a) Administers a system of estimates for narcotic drugs and a voluntary assessment system for psychotropic substances and monitors licit activities involving drugs through a statistical returns system, with a view to assisting Governments in achieving, inter alia, a balance between supply and demand;

(b) Monitors and promotes measures taken by Governments to prevent the diversion of substances frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and assesses such substances to determine whether there is a need for changes in the scope of control of Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention;

(c) Analyses information provided by Governments, United Nations bodies, specialized agencies or other competent international organizations, with a view to ensuring that the provisions of the international drug control treaties are adequately carried out by Governments, and recommends remedial measures;

(d) Maintains a permanent dialogue with Governments to assist them in complying with their obligations under the international drug control treaties and, to that end, recommends, where appropriate, technical or financial assistance to be provided.

INCB is called upon to ask for explanations in the event of apparent violations of the treaties, to propose appropriate remedial measures to Governments that are not fully applying the provisions of the treaties or are encountering difficulties in applying them and, where necessary, to assist Governments in overcoming such difficulties. If, however, INCB notes that the measures necessary to remedy a serious situation have not been taken, it may call the matter to the attention of the parties concerned, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Economic and Social Council. As a last resort, the treaties empower INCB to recommend to parties that they stop importing drugs from a defaulting country, exporting drugs to it or both. In all cases, INCB acts in close cooperation with Governments.

INCB assists national administrations in meeting their obligations under the conventions. To that end, it proposes and participates in regional training seminars and programmes for drug control administrators.



Members of International Narcotics Control Board.

From left to right: Sevil Atasoy, Pierre Lapaque, Galina Korchagina, César Tomás Arce Rivas, Mariângela Simão, Jallal Toufiq, Pavel Pachta, Jagjit Pavadia, Lu Lin, N. Larissa Razanadimby, David T. Johnson, Zukiswa Zingela, Cornelis de Joncheere.



The International Narcotics Control Board and its secretariat.

Key achievements of the International Narcotics Control Board: ways the Board worked to improve global health and welfare in 2024

In 2024, the International Narcotics Control Board, supported by its secretariat:



Worked with Governments to promote the availability and ensure the supply of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes by:

- Reviewing and approving over 3,800 estimates and establishing 380 annual estimates for more than 1,500 tons of narcotic drugs used in anaesthesia, pain management and opioid agonist therapy
- Processing over 4,000 annual assessments and 500 modifications for more than 2,500 tons of psychotropic substances used in the treatment of neurological and mental health conditions and opioid agonist therapy



Prevented/reduced the illicit manufacture of drugs by:

- Reviewing two fentanyl precursors and 16 precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants for inclusion in the tables of the 1988 Convention and recommending those substances for international control
- Monitoring nearly 28,000 shipments of 32,000 tons and 5 billion litres of controlled precursor chemicals through the PEN Online system
- Tracking over 700 shipments of more than 136,000 tons and more than 3 million litres of internationally non-controlled precursor chemicals through the PEN Online Light system
- Preventing the diversion of nearly 2,600 tons, 500,000 litres and 90,000 tablets of precursor chemicals through PICS
- Reducing the risk of exploitation of industry by drug traffickers through the mapping of industry landscapes in three countries

Promoted public safety by disrupting the trafficking of harmful non-medical synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances by:



- Processing nearly 25,000 incidents involving 850 unique new psychoactive substances in 160 countries through IONICS, bringing the total number of events recorded in IONICS to over 100,000
- Facilitating an international operation (Operation Zodiac) that led to seizures of over 285,000 pharmaceutical preparations
- Coordinating a subregional operation (Operation African Star) in East Africa targeting shipments of falsified, substandard and other illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, leading to the interception of 92 consignments containing diverse pharmaceutical products
- Issuing three operational alerts to assist Governments in launching actions to target the diversion and misuse of veterinary pharmaceuticals
- Conducting 45 events for 1,300 officials to coordinate operational responses through GRIDS regional technical officers in Almaty, Kazakhstan, Bangkok, Cairo, Lagos, Nigeria, Mexico City and New Delhi

Strengthened the knowledge and capacity of national authorities¹ to implement the drug control conventions by:



- Delivering training on the drug control conventions to 1,462 officials from 154 countries through five e-modules, virtual training and in-person training
- Engaging Governments, international and regional organizations and civil society in an ongoing dialogue on treaty implementation in the areas of availability of controlled substances for licit purposes, supply reduction and demand reduction, including by:
 - Conducting meetings during the three regular sessions of the Board with 54 permanent missions and one permanent observer, the Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Executive Director of UNODC, WHO, INTERPOL, OHCHR, UNAIDS, WCO, the Director of EUDA and the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, and by holding meetings with the African Union, CICAD of OAS and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.
 - Publishing a contribution² to the mid-term review of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and participating in the sixty-seventh session of the Commission, including the session's high-level segment and the opening of that segment and the round-table discussion on the topic "The way forward: the road to 2029", as well as intersessional meetings, thematic discussions and side events held during the Commission's sixty-seventh session organized by the Governments of Belgium, China, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, South Africa, Switzerland and the United States, as well those organized by civil society organizations, including the Drug Abuse Prevention Center of Japan, the International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care and the Uganda Youth Development Link, as well as an informal dialogue with the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, and later, the special event to commemorate the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking and to launch the UNODC *World Drug Report 2024*.

¹Owing to the liquidity crisis affecting the United Nations Secretariat, in 2024 the Board was unable to conduct country missions, the purpose of which is to assess needs in order to formulate recommendations aimed at increasing implementation of the drug control conventions to achieve national health and welfare objectives.

²Available at www.incb.org/incb/en/news/press-releases/2024/incb-maps-out-a-way-forward-for-national-health-and-evidence-based-drug-policy-and-takes-stock-of-progress-made-since-2019.html.

Foreword

I am pleased to present the annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) for 2024, which for the first time commences with an illustrated summary of the Board's key achievements over the past year in working to improve global health and welfare. The report has been made more accessible through the move to a single-column format and the inclusion of an introduction to the selected global issues in chapter III. To avoid repetition in the way the Board's recommendations are presented, chapter IV contains a reduced number of recommendations, while standing recommendations are reflected in bold throughout chapters II and III. Information about INCB and its functions has been included in the first pages of the report to improve understanding of the Board and its treaty-based mandates. The Board looks forward to continuing to improve the accessibility of the findings and recommendations contained in its publications and invites feedback from readers in this regard.

Chapter I focuses on possible responses to the rapid expansion of the illicit synthetic drug industry, which represents a major global public health threat with disastrous consequences for humankind. Compared with plant-based drugs, increasingly potent synthetic drugs are more profitable for criminal actors to produce and easier to conceal. Non-medical synthetic drug use and related drug use disorders have quickly become a deadly problem, with hundreds of thousands of people dying every year and untold personal and community harm caused. INCB has been engaging with other international entities and Governments to address this challenge through voluntary multilateral information exchange and coordination, for example through the tools offered within the framework of the Board's Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme and the precursor control programme. Efforts also need to be stepped up in the areas of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, harm reduction, recovery and social reintegration to protect people from the illicit supply of these potentially deadly substances. Consultations were held with civil society on this issue during the Board's 140th session, in May 2024.

In the thematic chapter, INCB provides an in-depth analysis of the evolution of synthetic drug manufacture, trafficking and use, identifying key trends and patterns and forecasting scenarios in which synthetic drugs might proliferate globally. Policy gaps in regulation and supply and demand reduction are identified and followed by a series of policy recommendations for a comprehensive response to this grave public health threat. INCB is committed to supporting Governments in protecting people from the deadly harms of illicitly manufactured and trafficked synthetic drugs, and in this regard invites national authorities to participate in the activities carried out under the GRIDS Programme and the precursor control programme, which are covered in further detail in chapter II, part D.

In chapter II, part B, the unequal access to and availability of internationally controlled medicines for use in pain management, anaesthesia, the treatment of neurological and mental health conditions and opioid agonist therapy are reconfirmed as being a persistent problem. While the supply of opiate raw materials exceeds the quantities reported as being required by competent national authorities to INCB, the estimated requirements submitted by some countries may not accurately reflect their actual medical needs. Through ongoing cooperation with Governments, international and regional organizations and civil society, as well as through the capacity-building work carried out under the INCB Learning programme, the Board is committed to improving the implementation of the drug control treaties with a view to improving the availability of controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes and access to evidence-based and stigma-free services for prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, recovery and social reintegration. In 2024, I was delighted to sign a memorandum of understanding with the International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care aimed at improving the availability of controlled substances through the exchange of research, data and analysis. The need to ensure access and availability also extends to humanitarian emergencies – regardless of whether they result from natural disasters, armed conflict or other anthropogenic causes – where access by patients to essential controlled medicines and treatment services must be guaranteed. INCB reminds affected States and exporting countries of the possibility

of applying simplified control measures during emergency situations as provided for in the conventions. These issues are also covered as part of a set of selected global issues in chapter III.

Ensuring access to internationally controlled medicines and treatment for drug use disorders for all patients, in all locations and at all times is an element of the right to health. Indeed, respect for human rights is inherent to and a prerequisite for the implementation of the international drug control conventions. INCB has repeatedly called for human rights to be respected in the development and implementation of drug policy. Any measure that is adopted with the purported aim of furthering drug policy but that is inconsistent with universally recognized human rights norms is a violation of the international drug control conventions.

Beyond the right to health, other relevant obligations stemming from human rights instruments include the promotion of equality and non-discrimination towards people who use drugs, the prohibition of arbitrary arrest and detention, the right to a fair trial for drug-related crimes, the principle of proportionality, and protection against all forms of cruel and inhuman punishment. The conventions provide States with the possibility of applying alternative measures to conviction, punishment and incarceration, including education, rehabilitation and social reintegration. The need to better safeguard human rights protections and place people at the heart of drug control policies has played a role in the evolution of the terminology surrounding drug control, and INCB has called upon Governments to examine any such terminology that has potentially stigmatizing effects.

Over the years, the Board has devoted the thematic chapters of its annual reports to the need to ensure that the rights of specific population groups, such as children, women and older people, are respected. This includes ensuring access to controlled medicines and evidence-based and stigma-free prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration services but also protection against exploitation by drug traffickers and appropriate safeguards in criminal justice systems. In the interest of furthering these discussions, the Board met with Member States during its 141st session to engage on the human rights dimensions of the drug control conventions and looks forward to continued dialogue aimed at safeguarding health and welfare – the ultimate objective of the conventions.

Saving lives is at the heart of the Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS), which over 10 years of operation has facilitated the exchange of information on 100,000 synthetic drug trafficking incidents. It has enabled law enforcement and regulatory authorities to share critical information on incidents relating to new psychoactive substances, including highly potent non-medical synthetic opioids. Information exchanged through IONICS has led to numerous successful operations – most recently Operation Zodiac and Operation African Star, coordinated at the INCB GRIDS Programme Cybercommunications Centre (GC3) in Vienna – against drug trafficking organizations, disrupting illicit supply chains and reducing the availability of substances on illicit markets worldwide. The System is supplemented by training provided by GRIDS Programme regional technical officers located around the world. INCB will continue to innovate and evolve IONICS to meet the growing challenges of the global synthetic drug problem, with the continued support and collaboration of partners. While chapter I of the report examines the proliferation of synthetic drugs, several selected global issues in chapter III relate to innovative approaches to monitoring chemical precursors through emerging technologies, counter-intelligence techniques employed by drug traffickers and the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems, and one global issue focuses on the increasing threat posed by falsified pharmaceuticals, as identified during the aforementioned operations.

Given that the thematic chapter of the INCB annual report for 2023¹ focused on the role of the Internet, including social media, in drug trafficking and use, the Board welcomed the finalization in 2024 of a new convention on cybercrime and looks forward to its adoption,² ratification and implementation, especially in the context of addressing the opportunities created by technology for drug trafficking.

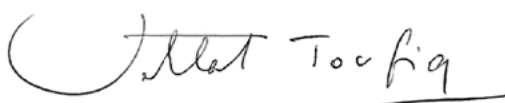
¹E/INCB/2023/1.

²The General Assembly adopted the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime on 24 December 2024, after the completion of the present report.

As the independent treaty body established by the three drug control conventions, the Board continues to engage in close dialogue with Member States, reviewing developments such as those set out in the regional analysis contained in chapter III, part B, with the aim of supporting States in implementing the conventions. This is done by assisting with the identification of implementation gaps and proposing remedial action, including through country missions. Unfortunately, the Board has had to postpone its country missions due to the liquidity crisis affecting the United Nations Secretariat. In the meantime, however, the Board is committed to continuing to cooperate closely with Member States through all means possible, including by supporting the implementation of the recommendations contained in this annual report and in the Board's report on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention.³

The Board's contribution⁴ to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs 2024 midterm review of progress made in the implementation of international drug policy commitments mapped out a way forward for Member States to address the drug control challenges identified by the Commission in the Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of Our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem of 2019. That contribution comprised recommendations made in the Board's annual reports in the period 2019–2023 with the aim of guiding Governments in the development of effective health- and evidence-based drug policies that promote the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing diversion to illicit channels and that take into account the specific needs of their populations, respect human rights and provide for responses to drug-related criminality that are proportional and respect due process.

There is a great need to improve the collection of data on drug use patterns and treatment demand, as highlighted in the report, and the application of evidence- and science-based standards, such as the UNODC and WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders. The full implementation of the conventions and the realization of the political will expressed in the high-level declaration by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the 2024 midterm review, following up to the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, can lead to attainment of the ultimate objective of implementation of the three drug control conventions – to safeguard the health and welfare of all humankind.



Jallal Toufiq
President
International Narcotics Control Board

³E/INCB/2024/4.

⁴Available at www.incb.org/incb/en/news/press-releases/2024/incb-maps-out-a-way-forward-for-national-health--and-evidence-based-drug-policy-and-takes-stock-of-progress-made-since-2019.html.

Explanatory notes

Data reported later than 1 November 2024 could not be taken into consideration in the preparation of this report.

The defined daily doses for statistical purposes (S-DDD) are used by INCB as a technical unit of measurement for the purpose of statistical analysis and are not a recommended prescription dose. This definition, which is not free of a certain degree of arbitrariness, recognizes that there are no internationally agreed standard dosages for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, that they are used in certain countries for different treatments or in accordance with different medical practices, and that therefore amounts expressed in S-DDD units should be considered an approximate measure used for ranking consumption in different countries. For narcotic drugs, levels of consumption, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day (S-DDD_{pmipd}), are calculated by using the following formula: the annual consumption reported by a country or a territory, excluding the amount utilized for the manufacture of preparations listed in Schedule III of the 1961 Convention, is divided by the defined daily dose established for each substance, then divided by the population, in millions, and then divided by 365 days. The result obtained is the S-DDD value for that particular drug for that country or territory.

Countries and areas are referred to by the names that were in official use at the time the relevant data were collected.

References to dollars (\$) are to United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.

The following abbreviations have been used in this report:

ADHD	attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CARICC	Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre
CICAD	Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission
COPOLAD	Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EUDA	European Union Drugs Agency
Europol	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
GBL	<i>gamma</i> -butyrolactone
GHB	<i>gamma</i> -hydroxybutyrate
GRIDS Programme	Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances Programme
ha	hectares
I2ES	International Import and Export Authorization System
INCB	International Narcotics Control Board
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
IONICS	Project Ion Incident Communication System
LSD	lysergic acid diethylamide
MDMA	3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine
MERCOSUR	Southern Common Market

OAS	Organization of American States
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPIOIDS project	global Operational Partnerships to Interdict Opioids' Illicit Distribution and Sales project
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PEN Online	Pre-Export Notification Online system
PICS	Precursors Incident Communication System
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
S-DDD	defined daily dose for statistical purposes
S-DDD _{pmpd}	defined daily doses for statistical purposes per million inhabitants per day
S-DDD _{ptpd}	defined daily doses for statistical purposes per thousand inhabitants per day
THC	tetrahydrocannabinol
UNAIDS	Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UPU	Universal Postal Union
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCO	World Customs Organization
WHO	World Health Organization

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I. Scenarios and possible responses to the rapid expansion of synthetic drug manufacture, marketing and consumption

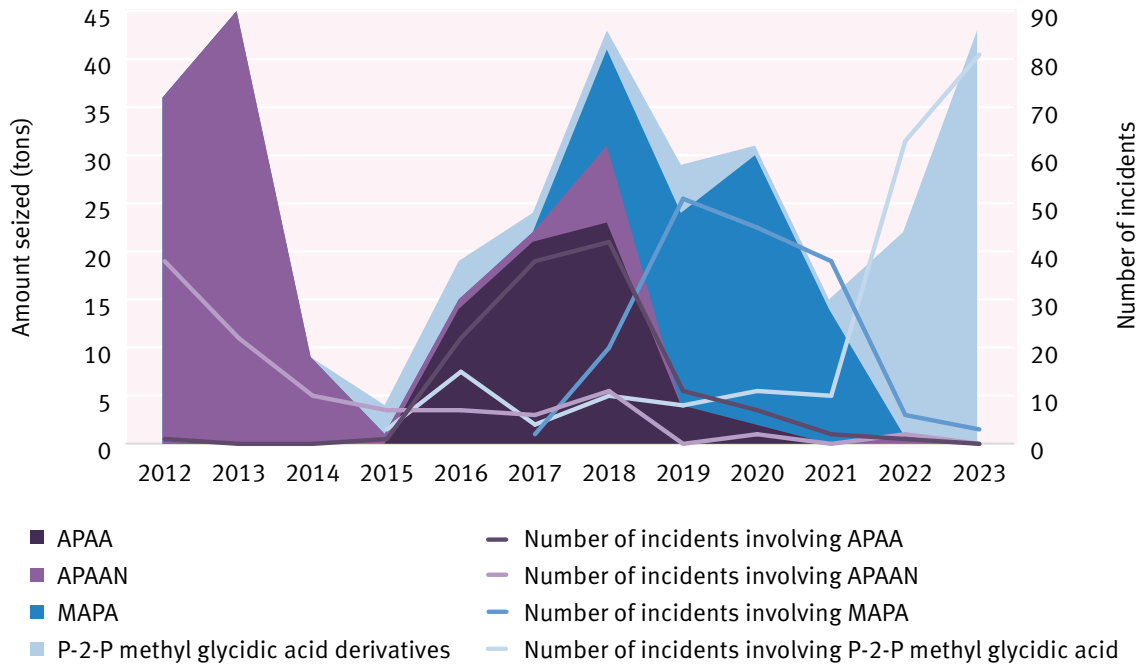
A. Introduction

1. The emergence of the illicit synthetic drug industry and its rapid evolution since the 1970s has brought complex challenges for international drug control, the rule of law and public health. Synthetic drugs can be multiple times more potent, more feasible to produce and easy to conceal in comparison with plant-based drugs. And importantly, the licit use of many synthetic drugs in medicine, along with dual-use chemical precursors that can be easily diverted, have enabled criminal actors to circumvent regulatory controls.
2. Demand for synthetic drugs has sharply risen, alongside prescription opioid dependence and the falsified pharmaceutical drugs that have entered illicit markets. Dependence and misuse of synthetic drugs have quickly become a deadly problem, with hundreds of thousands of overdose fatalities each year as criminal actors have made synthetic drugs more potent and have incorporated new, unknown substances that are difficult to routinely test and identify.
3. In response to the surge in the proliferation of synthetic drugs, international bodies and regulatory authorities have sought to address both supply and demand. INCB has played a major role in fostering a forward-looking, action-oriented approach to address the emergence of new synthetic substances, together with proactive initiatives based on voluntary, multilateral information exchange and coordination. However, more remains to be done not only to effectively address but also to proactively curb harmful implications of synthetic drug manufacture, marketing and consumption.
4. With the aim of assisting Member States in their efforts to address this challenge, the Board, in this present chapter, offers an in-depth analysis of the situation, identifying critical trends and patterns within the illicit synthetic drug industry, including notable changes in manufacturing, trafficking, marketing and distribution, and consumption. Taking these trends into account, the Board explores some forecasted scenarios in which precursors and synthetic drugs spread across international markets, and reviews the existing global infrastructure in place to address these emerging challenges. It also identifies the policy gaps in regulation, interdiction and supply and demand reduction activities that traffickers seek to exploit. The analysis concludes with a series of recommendations for responding to these ever-evolving synthetic drug markets and their implications.
5. In relation to its mandated function under article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988, the Board has for several years drawn attention to the challenges that the proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals, in particular designer precursors, pose to international drug control efforts. Actions to address these challenges have been proposed in various resolutions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, most recently Commission resolution 65/3 of 2022.

B. Evolution of synthetic drug manufacturing, trafficking and use and the threat to health and well-being

6. One of the main macro-level challenges to international drug control is the proliferation of new psychoactive substances, including non-medical synthetic opioids. The emergence of designer and pre-precursor chemicals for the manufacture of uncontrolled new psychoactive substances have been matters of increasing concern for many countries.
7. Synthetic drug manufacture and trafficking offer a comparative advantage to criminal actors over plant-based drug cultivation and trafficking, as well as greater opportunities to constantly develop new practices – often faster than regulatory and enforcement agencies can keep up with. Figures I and II illustrate how producers can shift between the supply of different precursor materials such as APAAN, MAPA, APAA, and 1-phenyl-2-propanone (P-2-P), as well as alternate between one finished synthetic drug, such as tramadol, and another, such as tapentadol, within a matter of months.

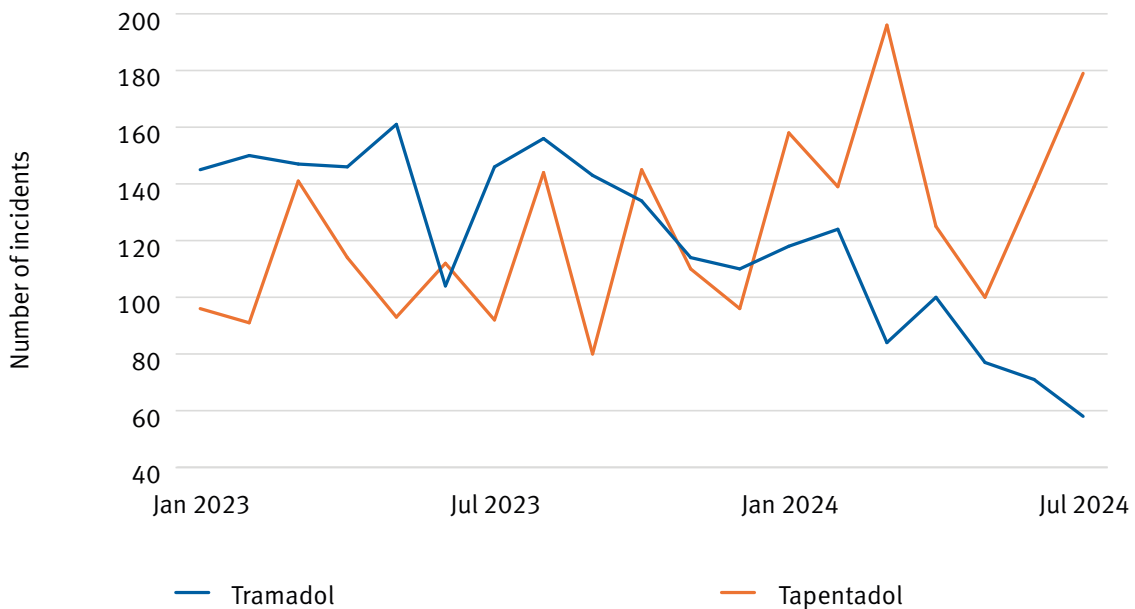
Figure I. Incidents involving APAAN, APAA, MAPA AND P-2-P methyl glycidic acid derivatives communicated through PICS, 2012–2023



Source: E/INCB/2023/4.

^aThe data for 2023 cover only the first 10 months of the year.

Figure II. Tramadol and tapentadol seizures, January 2023 to July 2024



Source: GRIDS Strategic Intelligence, timeline of IONICS notifications of tramadol (left) and tapentadol (right) seized between 1 January 2023 and 31 July 2024.

8. As illicit drug markets have evolved, synthetic substances now present a severe challenge for control and regulation, prevention, treatment, law enforcement and human security. Designed to mimic the effects of plant-based drugs but multiple times stronger in terms of potency and duration of action, the growing spectrum of new psychoactive substances now provides illicit actors with limitless ways to fundamentally reshape drug markets. The European Union Early Warning System on New Psychoactive Substances, operated by the European Union Drugs Agency, formerly known as the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, has identified over 500 synthetic new psychoactive substances, some marketed as replacements for illicitly produced plant-based drugs.¹ In 2023 alone, 34 countries and territories notified the UNODC early warning advisory of 44 newly identified new psychoactive substances, the largest group consisting of synthetic cannabinoids.² Between 1998 and 2017, seizures of synthetic drugs began to outpace seizures of plant-based drugs, with the most significant increase in seizures involving new psychoactive substances.^{3,4} Although the supply of synthetic substances has not yet surpassed global demand for illicit plant-based drugs, synthetic drugs now have systemic, environmental and geopolitical advantages that are remoulding drug markets and may now start to displace traditional, plant-based drugs.

9. There are undisputed, distinctive competitive advantages of marketing synthetic drugs, namely, their ease of manufacture, with little technical or scientific expertise required, their reduced labour and acreage requirements, the ability to flexibly scale up or down the size of operations and their significantly advanced potency-to-weight ratio. Taken together, these qualities improve illicit actors' ability to avoid interdiction and increase their financial returns. This remains true even though recent shifts in manufacturing processes for new psychoactive substances require more specialized expertise and greater resources, driving up traffickers' risks.

10. Planting, harvesting, drying, milling and threshing processes for plant-based drugs require extensive acreage and human resources and are vulnerable to weather conditions, satellite detection and forced eradication. Meanwhile, expanded access to online scientific literature and manufacturing materials, such as tablet presses, has further supported the ability of individuals to manufacture synthetic drugs efficiently. In addition, the absence of a crop-based production system allows traffickers to adjust the size and scope of manufacturing processes to their needs. They can erect either small, makeshift facilities that are challenging for law enforcement authorities to detect or industrial-grade facilities for large-scale manufacture. With synthetic precursors and bespoke, alternative designer drugs, traffickers have been able to massively increase drug potency and profits while maintaining small-sized operations primed for trafficking with a reduced risk of interdiction.

11. However, it is not only the predominance of synthetic substances but also the rapid emergence of new synthetic substances on illicit international markets that should cause concern for public health and human security. Traffickers' ability to divert chemicals from licit markets or generate dangerous alternatives, combined with improved concealment of manufacturing and trafficking, creates an urgent problem for which regulatory and law enforcement authorities and public health sectors are largely unprepared. International organizations, Governments and non-profit organizations have gradually constructed a complex ecosystem of regulatory controls, forums for discussion and supply and demand reduction strategies. However, these systems are not sufficient to tackle the rapidly regenerating, sophisticated synthetic drug industry and its consequences.

12. As the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs continues to expand, evolve and challenge international and national drug control systems, such substances may become the predominant feature of the illicit drug landscape and introduce new challenges for law enforcement, public health and regulatory authorities. Governments should expect that traffickers will identify loopholes in national and international precursor controls and adopt new, bespoke and varied chemical analogues and inputs that prove to be testing for public health monitoring, detection, interdiction and regulation.

¹ Europol, Crime areas, Drug Trafficking, "Synthetic drugs". Available at www.europol.europa.eu.

² UNODC, Laboratory and Scientific Services Portals, "EWA: Number of NPS reported for the first time at lowest level since 2010", October 2024.

³ "The synthetic drug phenomenon", in *World Drug Report 2023*, booklet 2, *Contemporary Issues on Drugs* (United Nations publication, 2023), p. 16.

⁴ UNODC, "An expanding synthetic drugs market: implications for precursor control", *Global Smart Update*, vol. 23 (March 2020) p. 3.

C. Global overview of common threats

1. Manufacture

Trends in the manufacturing process

13. More illicit synthetic drugs are being manufactured owing to reduced operational costs, the geographical flexibility regarding manufacturing facilities, globalization, increased resiliency against laboratory and warehouse seizures, simplified chemical acquisition and synthesis and greater opportunities for diversification.

14. Unlike facilities for plant-based drugs, where supply hubs are determined by climate, topography and geographical location, facilities for synthetic drug are geographically flexible and generally closer to crucial demand hubs, with manufacturing and trafficking hubs sometimes located in the same place. Producers can replace acres of land used for crop cultivation with compact laboratory facilities that yield greater quantities of drugs and financial returns. Further, synthetic drug manufacture presents an opportunity for producers to reduce both labour and manufacturing costs: namely, the absence of the need for crop-based cultivation.⁵ While heroin, cocaine and cannabis production and processing rely upon labour-intensive planting, acres of land and months-long harvesting processes, fully synthetic manufacture provides a simplified alternative. Synthetic drug manufacturing is carried out closer to transit and destination markets – mainly in urban areas. In contrast, the cultivation of plants such as coca bush requires producers to establish farms in remote, concealed areas that are not only conducive to plant growth, with high-altitude and moist weather conditions, but also reduce the risk of interdiction and eradication.^{6,7}

15. Traffickers manufacturing synthetic drugs have also displayed an ability to adjust the size and sophistication of manufacturing facilities to avoid both detection and interdiction. They have hedged against risks, designing manufacturing facilities capable of being shifted across borders when the threat of interdiction is high. Criminal networks often engage a complex business structure of specialists such as chemists, laboratory assistants, brokers, scouts, drivers and couriers to source and synthesize precursor materials, find equipment and scout out possible laboratory locations and transit routes, and transport the products.⁸ To help manage the financial operations of the process and reduce risks, financiers and waste contractors are also utilized.⁹

16. Furthermore, traffickers have employed the same equipment and acquisition process for different synthetic outputs, using the same chemicals but in different combinations to manufacture various drugs with different potencies. Similarly, manufacturers of amphetamine and methamphetamine use precursor chemicals such as P-2-P or other substances such as ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, often sourced or diverted from chemical companies, and can use identical metal reactors, mixing bowls and tablet presses for different kinds of illicitly manufactured drugs.¹⁰ Moreover, traffickers have begun to acquire sophisticated, higher-capacity and commercial-grade manufacturing equipment and technologies that enable industrial-scale manufacture. Access to online e-commerce platforms has also allowed actors to purchase and even design customized reactors that can accommodate thousands of litres of reactants, as well as specialized tablet presses and equipment that can boost yields and are difficult for authorities to disassemble or destroy.

17. Illicit synthetic drug producers have also demonstrated more efficient and simplified manufacturing processes, enabled by compounds that increase potency or extend the duration of the drugs' action. For example,

⁵ "The synthetic drug phenomenon", *World Drug Report 2023*, booklet 2, p. 12.

⁶ Michelle L. Dion and Catherine Russler, "Eradication efforts, the state, displacement, and poverty: explaining coca cultivation in Colombia during Plan Colombia", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 40, No. 3 (August 2008), pp. 399–421.

⁷ Marcela Ibáñez, "Who crops coca and why? The case of Colombian farmers", Discussion Papers, No. 40 (Göttingen, Germany, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Courant Research Centre – Poverty, Equity and Growth, 2010).

⁸ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol, "EMCDDA-Europol webinar: EU drug markets – focus on amphetamine", video, 16 October 2023.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ E/INCB/2023/4, p.16.

tartaric acid is being used by manufacturers to obtain a more potent methamphetamine isomer while still using the same amount of P-2-P precursor materials.¹¹

18. At the same time, the inclusion of fentanyl, carfentanil or nitazenes has increased drug potency – often to fatal levels. The inclusion of more potent synthetic opioids and their decreased potency-to-weight ratio allows trafficking networks to improve their interdiction resiliency because smaller volumes are harder to detect.

Trends in precursor and pre-precursor use

19. The supply chain for usable chemical precursors features prominent precursor chemicals such as 3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl-2-propanone (3,4-MDP-2-P), ephedrine, P-2-P, pseudoephedrine and other inputs.¹² However, restrictions on controlled precursors have incentivized manufacturers to create new compounds by shifting the molecular structure and to adopt new methods and use non-scheduled designer or “masked” chemical additives outside national or international control regimes. An example of this was seen in the emergence of APAAN, APAA and MAPA, which are pre-precursors of amphetamine and methamphetamine that have no legitimate uses. Following the placement of APAAN under international control in 2014, APAA and then MAPA began to emerge, with increases in the number of seizures and amounts seized, as shown in figure I.

20. To further conceal precursor supply chains and exploit regulatory loopholes for dual-use chemicals, synthetic drug manufacturers obtain small batches of different precursor analogues from multiple sources, rather than on an industrial scale, to avoid drawing the attention of regulators or law enforcement authorities.¹³ Many of these chemical precursors, such as pseudoephedrine, present in common cold medicines, are dual-use, since they also have a licit medical purpose. This has posed a challenge for regulators and has offered traffickers a loophole for precursor acquisition. The use of non-scheduled substances and analogues drawn from pharmaceutical industries, in addition to the identification of bespoke, designer or “masking” chemical compounds, have helped traffickers avoid being dependent on more traditional precursor chemicals.¹⁴

2. Movement

Changing patterns in movement, marketing and demand

21. More effective law and regulatory enforcement has forced traffickers to change their modus operandi to avoid detection. Improved mapping of trafficking syndicates, more effective intelligence collection and exchange networks and improved interdiction capacity among law enforcement authorities, combined with more effective controls over chemicals, have shaped a new incentive structure among traffickers. Seeking resiliency against interdiction, reduced operating costs, higher profit margins and increased market power, traffickers have shifted manufacture, movement and marketing tactics to improve yields and reduce risks.

22. Improved manufacturing techniques and new, non-controlled end products have reduced interdiction risks and improved traffickers’ resiliency. Increased potency-to-weight ratios have enabled traffickers to reduce consignment sizes, allowing easier concealment and different transportation methods. Traffickers have also combined shipments of counterfeit or illicitly manufactured drugs and non-scheduled substances, such as cannabis, cocaine, ketamine,¹⁵ methamphetamine, the synthetic cannabinoid known as “K2” or “spice” and amphetamine-type stimulants. This practice has allowed traffickers to add synthetic drugs to pre-existing, established trafficking routes for traditional drug markets while diversifying the range of products available to consumers. The lighter weight of synthetic substances has also opened doors for new means of smuggling such as the use of drones, couriers and postal services.

¹¹ European Union Drugs Agency and Europol, “Main methamphetamine production methods used in Europe”. Available at www.euda.europa.eu.

¹² UNODC, “An expanding synthetic drugs market”, pp. 4–8.

¹³ United States, National Institute on Drug Abuse, “How is methamphetamine manufactured?”, 13 April 2021.

¹⁴ UNODC, “An expanding synthetic drugs market”, p. 3.

¹⁵ Ketamine is a medicine widely used in anaesthesia but is increasingly being used as a recreational drug in East Asia, Europe, North America and Australia owing to its dissociative effects. It is not an internationally scheduled substance; however, it has been put under national control in over 70 countries.

23. Taking advantage of chemicals, precursors or pre-precursors that are not under international control, traffickers have identified new methods of procuring these through encrypted applications, online commerce and business-to-business wholesalers, and shipping by common carriers.¹⁶

3. Health and social consequences

24. The rapid expansion of synthetic drugs has a series of implications for human security, governance and public health. There are increasing concerns about public health given the popularity and growth of the synthetic drug industry. In addition to skyrocketing overdose deaths in some jurisdictions, laboratory analysis and evidence-based research prove that a range of these substances pose a risk to cardiovascular health and can lead to psychological and physical dependence and substance use disorders.

25. Relaxed drug prescription practices, in particular the increase in the prescribing of synthetic opioid painkillers, in licit pharmaceutical markets ushered in a large-scale dependence crisis for synthetic opioids – many of which have serious short- and long-term health implications and, depending on potency, can be immediately fatal upon ingestion. Many people who use synthetic prescription painkillers have developed dependencies that generate an increase in demand that is often satisfied through illicit channels, as people seek out alternatives to expensive prescriptions.

26. While synthetic opioids present the greatest overdose risks, other synthetic drugs also pose severe health risks to people who use these substances. MDMA, commonly known as “ecstasy”, amphetamines, ketamine and substances such as “K2” and “spice” all have acute and long-term health implications, some associated with limited opportunities for rehabilitation and recovery. For drugs such as amphetamine and methamphetamine, which have a particularly high dependence potential, the tolerance of consumers increases over time, meaning that they require ever-larger doses that could pose a greater risk of overdose and death.

27. Synthetic drugs may pose additional increased safety risks and threats to public health because of dangerous manufacturing and trafficking processes. These processes can generate toxic fumes, fires, explosions and environmental damage within a community, jeopardizing the safety of manufacturers, first responders, law enforcement authorities and local civilians. Furthermore, the transportation of synthetic materials by sea, air and ground also poses toxicological risks to nearby passengers, postal workers, customs and law enforcement personnel and even police dogs due to the risk of leakage and airborne exposure.

28. For law enforcement agencies, there are several toxicological risks associated with the handling of synthetic drugs. As many countries do not have a clear legal framework for the responsible and safe disposal or recycling of seized consignments, synthetic drugs are often stored or improperly disposed of, sometimes posing health risks to law enforcement personnel due to spillage, incineration and other incidents.

29. The disposal of residue chemicals from synthetic drug manufacture also poses risks to the health of the local community and to the local environment. Many illicit manufacturers of synthetic drugs such as amphetamine-type stimulants have illicitly dumped their chemical waste in natural and agricultural areas, causing environmental damage and harm to local communities.

4. Legal challenges

30. With traffickers able to rapidly shift to using new precursors and pre-precursors to manufacture synthetic drugs, control and regulatory authorities are in a constant state of catching up. The international scheduling process is a multistep endeavour, and it is challenging to use it to address the rapid emergence of related substances that could soon be used to illicitly manufacture synthetic drugs.¹⁷

31. The precursors scheduling system established under article 12 of the 1988 Convention was conceived with individual substances in mind, which would be placed under international control one by one. However,

¹⁶ Vanda Felbab-Brown, “China, Mexico, and America’s fight against the fentanyl epidemic”, Brookings, 21 March 2024.

¹⁷ INCB, “Proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors: options for global action” (Vienna, 2024).

substance-by-substance scheduling lags behind the speed of innovation of illicit operators. It is reactive, resource-intensive and lengthy, both with regard to the array of procedural steps required to complete assessments substantiating scheduling decisions and to the entry into force of such decisions at the international level only 180 days after a decision by the Commission has been communicated to States by the Secretary-General. In addition, data on the licit uses of designer precursors, which are required for the Board's assessments of whether to recommend scheduling a substance, may not be readily available, and the concomitant requirement under the Convention for evidence of substances having been used in illicit drug manufacture makes proactive scheduling challenging. However, for the first time, in 2024, data reported to the Board on form D and through PICS aided the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to schedule potential precursors used in the manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants and MDMA.¹⁸

32. Although there has been robust collaboration with the scientific and pharmaceutical sectors to identify future chemicals that could be incorporated into illicit synthetic drugs, the use of artificial intelligence by manufacturers will likely limit the effectiveness of those efforts. Traffickers will probably find ways to use artificial intelligence to identify new molecular structures for precursors and pre-precursor chemicals to stay a step ahead of control and regulation regimes.

33. Similarly, the scheduling of new substances pursuant to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 also suffers from the same challenges described above for precursors. As new substances are introduced to markets, the international community is unable to keep pace with the rapid pace of innovation of traffickers.

D. Developments: specific emerging regional threats

1. Evolution of the opioid crisis in North America

34. Carfentanil, fentanyl and nitazenes pose some of the greatest, most immediate risks to public health, primarily in North America, but also threaten new regions. The Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States of America found that in 2021 – a peak year for drug overdoses in the country – 75 per cent of drug overdoses were caused by synthetic opioids.¹⁹ In the United States, there are 150 deaths per day related to synthetic opioid overdoses, with fentanyl accounting for over two thirds of those fatalities.²⁰ Some forms of fentanyl can be up to 50 times more potent than heroin, and researchers estimate that just 3 to 5 metric tons of fentanyl would have been enough to satisfy consumption levels of illegally supplied opioids in the United States in 2016,²¹ considerably less than the 47 tons of heroin estimated to have been consumed in the country that year.²²

35. Illicitly manufactured or diverted fentanyl is often distributed in the form of tablets or powder. However, traffickers may attempt to increase the distribution of diverted, injectable, liquid fentanyl as witnessed already through diverted or stolen pharmaceutical fentanyl citrate injection solutions from hospitals, medical supply storage warehouses and clinics. This scenario of expanded trafficking in and consumption of pharmaceutical fentanyl in this form poses serious challenges to law enforcement and public health. With the emergence of the liquid form, intravenous use will also likely rise, introducing harms associated with needle usage, such as the spread of HIV, and hepatitis B and C.

36. In addition to the introduction of liquid fentanyl to existing and emerging opioid markets, the use of alternative analogues, such as carfentanil and isonitazenes, will also increase as more controls are placed on fentanyl

¹⁸ INCB, “International Narcotics Control Board participates in sixty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, mid-term review process” (21 March 2024).

¹⁹ United States, Drug Enforcement Administration, “New, dangerous synthetic opioid in D.C., emerging in tri-State area”, 1 June 2022.

²⁰ Mbabazi Kariisa and others, “Illicitly manufactured fentanyl-involved overdose deaths with detected xylazine: United States, January 2019–June 2022”, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 72, No. 26 (June 2023), p. 722.

²¹ United States, *Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking: Final Report* (February 2022).

²² Beau Kilmer and others, “How much illegally manufactured fentanyl could the U.S. be consuming?”, *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, vol. 48, No. 4 (2022), pp. 397–399.

manufacture and trafficking. Carfentanil can come in many forms (e.g. blotter paper, powder, tablets, patches and spray) and can be 10,000 times stronger than morphine and 100 times stronger than fentanyl.²³ Just 2 mg of carfentanil can induce an overdose.²⁴ There has also been a proliferation of isonitazenes, commonly called “iso” or “nitazenes” by traffickers and people who use the substances, which are likely to strengthen their foothold in North America as traffickers seek out more potent chemical inputs.²⁵ Nitazenes present a new subclass of opioids that can be modified countless times to bypass scheduling controls and frustrate interdiction efforts. Many forms of nitazenes (metonitazenes, protonitazenes, isotonitazenes and broprhine) have begun to circulate in North America. Some nitazenes, such as *N*-desethyl etonitazene, can be 10 to 20 times more potent than fentanyl.^{26,27} Nitazenes have thus far been identified in less than 1 per cent of seizures in the United States – the current primary destination market – as reported by the Drug Enforcement Administration.²⁸ However, the lack of consistent laboratory analysis of seizures and overdose fatalities could mask rising rates of consumption and misuse in both North America and Europe.

2. Expansion of amphetamine-type stimulant manufacture and trafficking

37. It is highly likely that the manufacture, trafficking and consumption of amphetamine-type stimulants will accelerate in the Middle East and Africa, with the incorporation of amphetamine and methamphetamine into local illicit streams. Such a scenario will place a heavy burden on law enforcement authorities, customs systems, healthcare sectors, treatment and rehabilitation services and policymakers. In the Middle East and Africa, where resources for drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes are already limited, traffickers’ expansion of the market for amphetamine-type stimulants will pose serious, long-term harm to people and considerable problems for the regions’ ill-equipped healthcare sectors.

38. The industrial-scale manufacture of the amphetamine-type stimulant commonly referred to as “captagon” will remain anchored in western and southern regions of the Syrian Arab Republic, where there are established factories and complex criminal infrastructure in place. The high demand for amphetamine-type stimulants in Gulf countries will also likely continue.²⁹ However, traffickers and manufacturing organizations in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic are expected to exploit new opportunities to incorporate new substances into existing supply chains and diversify manufacturing and trafficking sites.

39. Moreover, as the capacity of regional law enforcement authorities to seize “captagon” and disrupt networks has increased, manufacturers have sought to diversify the location of operations beyond the Syrian Arab Republic and expand to Iraq, Kuwait, Türkiye and other countries as the levels of demand in the Gulf stabilize.³⁰ North Africa presents such an opportunity for “captagon” manufacturers and traffickers to tap into existing demand for synthetic substances on the continent and incorporate “captagon” into the flow of cannabis, khat (*Catha edulis*), kush and tramadol. Traffickers in the Levant have mainly concentrated their operations in Africa, using maritime ports in eastern Libya, where there are reportedly storage facilities and smuggling networks in place, with several consignments dispatched to Egypt, Morocco and ports in West Africa and the Horn of Africa.

40. There has also been an increase in crystal methamphetamine flows along the Syrian Arab Republic’s border with Jordan, which are integrated with illicit flows of “captagon” and arms.³¹ Furthermore, demand in Iraq and Türkiye has the potential to expand to Jordan, Lebanon and Gulf States. This scenario would elevate existing public health concerns, as rising levels of amphetamine-type stimulant consumption in the Middle East would

²³ United States, Drug Enforcement Administration, “DEA issues carfentanil warning to police and public”, press release, 22 September 2016.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ United States, Drug Enforcement Administration, “New, dangerous synthetic opioid in D.C.”.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Kerry Breen, “What are nitazenes? What to know about the drug that can be 10 times as potent as fentanyl”, CBS News, 31 December 2023.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Caroline Rose, “Iraq and Turkey: two transit countries to watch in the captagon drug trade”, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 4 April 2023.

³⁰ Caroline Rose and Karam Shaar, “The captagon trade from 2015 to 2023”, New Lines Institute, 30 May 2024.

³¹ Al Arabiya News, “Jordanian army intercepts drone carrying drugs from Syria”, 2 November 2023.

burden the already unprepared healthcare systems with limited capacity to provide prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and recovery services.

41. Amphetamine-type stimulants such as “captagon” could also spread to European markets from manufacturing sites in the Middle East. Although “captagon” had largely been trafficked through European maritime ports, more recently its manufacture and tableting has been reported in Germany and the Netherlands (Kingdom of the Netherlands), where trafficking rings based in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic have set up illicit laboratories and storage facilities. Meanwhile, as much as 10 tons of “captagon” tablets were trafficked from Lebanon via seaports in Belgium to Austria, where they were reshipped to Saudi Arabia.³² These trends indicate that Middle East-based trafficking organizations have viewed both maritime ports and mainland routes in Europe as an opportunity to expand and diversify operations.

42. In addition, MDMA and methamphetamine manufacture may well continue in Belgium and Netherlands (Kingdom of the Netherlands), but the criminal groups involved will also identify new opportunities to globalize trafficking routes and criminal relationships. Cartel networks in Mexico and trafficking syndicates in the Kingdom of the Netherlands will likely build on the collaborative relationships and scientific exchanges made through methamphetamine manufacture and trafficking in the late 2010s and early 2020s.³³ Strengthened relationships between trafficking networks based in Mexico and Europe could lead to a greater exchange of synthetic precursor material and finished drugs such as nitazenes that could fill the gap left by the potential impending global shortage in heroin and carve out new demand markets.³⁴ This would further complicate European and North American synthetic supply chains, introducing a crossover of scientific expertise, knowledge exchange and trafficking methodologies that would make those supply chains challenging for law enforcement authorities to monitor and disrupt.

43. Trafficking in amphetamine-type stimulants, notably methamphetamine, to markets in Southern, East and West Africa has been steadily increasing. In some markets, demand for methamphetamine has begun to surpass demand for cannabis, cocaine, heroin and methaqualone.³⁵ A contributing factor has been local production, with clandestine laboratories established in countries such as Nigeria and South Africa that have reportedly relied upon different manufacturing processes using ephedrine, pseudoephedrine and P-2-P precursors.³⁶ Some of these manufacturing facilities have outsourced expertise and guidance beyond the African continent, as laboratory raids in Nigeria and,³⁷ most recently, South Africa³⁸ have revealed the involvement of Mexican cartel groups in large-scale methamphetamine manufacture. Criminal syndicates based in Southern and West Africa have sought to market methamphetamine to both local and extraregional markets, selling locally at cheap prices and trafficking a large quantity to South and East Asia, Central and Western Europe and Oceania.³⁹

44. In South-East Asia’s Golden Triangle cross-border area, there has been ample evidence of increased methamphetamine production. Organized criminal syndicates based in South-East Asia have pushed a supply-driven approach in expanding the market for methamphetamine, adopting industrial-scale manufacturing facilities and expanding production, processing and tableting from its primary hub of manufacturing, Shan State of Myanmar, into Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Thailand and, to a lesser extent, China, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.⁴⁰

45. It is likely that these criminal networks will seek to diversify manufacturing operations to avoid interdiction and improve the potency-to-weight ratio of methamphetamine, expanding clandestine laboratories into

³² European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, “New report shows Europe as key transshipment area for captagon bound for Arabian peninsula”, 13 September 2023.

³³ The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, “Europe’s emergence as a globally important producer of methamphetamine”, 6 May 2022.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jason Eligh, *A Synthetic Age: The Evolution of Methamphetamine Markets in Eastern and Southern Africa* (Geneva, Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021).

³⁶ *Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment 2020* (United Nations publication, 2020), p. 25.

³⁷ Quentin King, “Four Mexicans arrested in meth ‘super lab’ bust in Nigeria”, InSightCrime, 16 March 2016.

³⁸ Amarachi Orié and Nimi Princewill, “South African police discover multimillion-dollar meth lab on farm”, CNN, 20 July 2024.

³⁹ *Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment 2020*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ UNODC, Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia: Latest Developments and Challenges* (Bangkok, 2023), p. 5.

Central Africa and using synthesis processes reliant on ephedrine powder, benzaldehyde and alternatives.⁴¹ Illicit methamphetamine manufacturers are also expected to continue to seek out collaborative partnerships and opportunities for knowledge exchange with transnational organized criminal groups, such as Mexican cartels, in order to procure new precursor materials and achieve higher-yielding production.

3. Impacts of the Taliban ban on opium poppy on demand for synthetic drugs

46. The 2022 ban by the Taliban on opium poppy cultivation has already led to several market shifts in illicit opiate trafficking. Traffickers prepared for this policy decision by stockpiling opium reserves, which could limit the ban's immediate impact but have few long-term implications. However, synthetic drug traffickers have already begun to identify opportunities to increase the market footprint of synthetic opioids and other synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, exploiting expected shortages in heroin supply and changes in demand.

47. The effect of the ban and the Taliban's crop eradication efforts have sharply curtailed large-scale cultivation and processing of opium poppy in Afghanistan. The country, which had for years served as the world's leading illicit opium producer, supplying over 90 per cent of global quantities, has sharply reduced illicit production. According to UNODC, there has been a striking reduction of 95 per cent in poppy cultivation.⁴² The ban's impact on the market, however, does not mean that all illicit manufacture has come to a halt within Afghanistan.

48. The ban's effects in Afghanistan may prompt an increase in small-scale methamphetamine processing and trafficking in neighbouring border areas. The ban created a negative externality for drug producers in Afghanistan, increasing reliance upon existing, alternative manufacturing processes in the country for methamphetamine. Traffickers operating in the border areas of Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan are strategically situated to sustain methamphetamine markets in the wake of the Taliban ban.⁴³ As a result, there has been a subsequent boom in the consumption of crystal methamphetamine, commonly referred to as "ice" or "shabu" in West and South Asia.⁴⁴

49. The effects of the Taliban ban will also be felt in Europe. The looming deficit in heroin supply will likely create greater space for the market for synthetic drugs to expand on the continent. Bracing for the impact on supply, traffickers have already begun to introduce alternative synthetic opioids to European markets. Nitazenes are being marketed as "synthetic heroin" and incorporated into falsified pain medication, with confirmed overdoses occurring in Estonia and Poland and seizures reported in Ireland and France.⁴⁵ This presents immediate risks to people, given the notable potency-to-weight ratio of nitazenes. The introduction of nitazenes to Europe could also pose severe problems for law enforcement, control systems and public health. While some expansion of the fentanyl-driven opioid crisis from North America to Europe was anticipated, European countries remain generally unprepared for the introduction of nitazenes to their markets. While the fentanyl crisis prompted the United States to improve harm reduction measures, such as increased production of and access to opioid antagonists, European countries have been slow to expand access. Although a number of European countries have made take-home naloxone kits available, only a handful – Denmark, Estonia, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – have taken further measures such as making the nasal spray available as an over-the-counter product or adding them to police kits.^{46,47} Nitazene-induced overdoses can also necessitate the use of up to four times the amount of the opioid antagonist agent naloxone, possibly placing a strain on the supply of that overdose reversal drug. The European Union Early Warning System on New Psychoactive Substances has played a crucial role in warning European countries about 16 types of nitazenes seized since 2019,⁴⁸ however, public awareness and educational efforts lag behind the pace of entry of synthetic opioids to the local market.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴² UNODC, "Afghanistan opium cultivation in 2023 declined 95 per cent following drug ban: new UNODC survey", press release, 5 November 2023.

⁴³ Daud Khattak and Frud Bezhan, "Crystal meth addiction 'rapidly spreading' in Pakistan", Radio Free Europe, 20 May 2023.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Alessandro Ford, "Europe is running out of heroin: the alternatives are much worse", Politico, 11 June 2024.

⁴⁶ Monica Kleja, "Sweden makes naloxone spray an OTC product, to prevent opioid overdose deaths", Euractiv, 25 March 2024.

⁴⁷ Hanneli Rudi, "Prescription drug naloxone to be added to police kit", ERR News, 25 May 2024.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

4. Synthetic drugs in Africa

50. There has been a drastic increase in the proliferation of falsified pharmaceutical synthetic drugs and their non-medical use across Africa. Similar to other markets, such as North America, dependence on medical prescription pain medication in licit markets in Africa helped initiate broader misuse of synthetic drugs, as people flocked to alternative or diverted synthetic substances on the illicit market for reasons of affordability. In particular, there has been a notable prevalence in the non-medical use of tramadol in Africa. According to UNODC, between 2015 and 2019, 22 of 54 African countries reported non-medical tramadol consumption.⁴⁹ The root of tramadol misuse in Africa stems from licit pharmaceuticals, as dependence on medically-prescribed painkillers creates demand for cheaper alternatives, notably the diverted or falsified substances on the illicit market. The effects and dependence potential of tramadol are similar to other synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, making it a key concern for public health and safety. The misuse of tramadol is increasing in West, Central and North Africa because of its psychoactive properties, including its perceived ability to improve productivity, and its affordability. It is often consumed in conjunction with other substances such as alcohol, cough syrups, cannabis, caffeine and other opioids,⁵⁰ is often marketed under brand names such as Trabar, Ultram, Ixprim and Zamadol, and is sometimes obtained illicitly from pharmacies without a prescription.^{51,52} Seizures of tramadol in countries including Egypt, Ghana and Nigeria have also been found to have dangerous levels of potency, with dosages exceeding approved rates of medical use.⁵³ The expansion of tramadol use in Central, North and West Africa poses serious risks to local public health sectors ill-equipped to deal with growing demand for rehabilitation and harm-reduction measures.

51. Alongside the expansion of use of amphetamine-type stimulants and tramadol in Africa, kush will likely strengthen its continental foothold. The substance has been incorporated into existing illicit drug and arms trafficking routes through Africa and marketed as an alternative to cannabis. The composition of kush varies depending on the manufacturer and the consumer market but has been suspected of including additives and adulterants such as fentanyl, formalin (a disinfectant chemical) and tramadol.⁵⁴ Already found in 83 per cent of samples of kush found in Sierra Leone and 55 per cent of samples in Guinea-Bissau, nitazenes are expected to be increasingly used in kush to increase the potency.⁵⁵ This was further confirmed in the special notice of May 2024 issued by the INCB GRIDS Programme that confirmed several kush samples from Sierra Leone had tested positive for nitazenes.⁵⁶ Widespread consumption of the drug has already resulted in an array of potentially fatal health effects, such as swollen and infected limbs, respiratory problems and liver and kidney failure.⁵⁷ Although information on official death tolls among consumers has been difficult to collect, hospital, psychiatric hospital and treatment admission rates related to kush have surged in Sierra Leone.⁵⁸

52. In the light of greater demand for kush and the possibility of enhancing its potency-to-weight ratio, manufacturers will likely seek out new, alternative mixtures to use in the synthetic manufacturing process. The use of kush, which is already established in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, could expand beyond the coast of West Africa into Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania. Such a scenario would have a major impact on underfunded prevention, treatment and rehabilitation programmes.

⁴⁹ *Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment 2020*, p. 21.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵¹ WHO, *Critical Review Report: Tramadol*, forty-first Expert Committee on Drug Dependence Meeting (Geneva, 2018).

⁵² Saidou Sabi Boun, Olumuyiwa Omonaiye and Sanni Yaya, "Prevalence and health consequences of non-medical use of tramadol in Africa: a systematic scoping review", *PLOS Global Public Health*, vol. 4, No. 1 (January 2024).

⁵³ *Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment 2020*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo and Phoenix Mohawk Kellye, "Kush: FTIR spectrometer testing indicates presence of synthetic cannabinoids and nitazenes in Freetown and Bissau", 12 June 2024.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ INCB, GRIDS Programme, "Special notice 2", 23 May 2024.

⁵⁷ Saidu Bah, "Inside the 'zombie' drug epidemic sweeping West Africa", *The Telegraph*, 2 January 2024.

⁵⁸ Umaru Fofana, "Sierra Leone declares emergency over drug kush – made from human bones", BBC News, 5 April 2024.

5. Ketamine manufacture and trafficking in East and South-East Asia and beyond

53. As criminal actors have sought out alternative synthetic substances to introduce to consumer markets, illicit ketamine manufacture and trafficking has steadily increased in East and South-East Asia, and there has been a parallel rise in North American and European markets. Used as a potent anaesthetic for surgical procedures and veterinary medicine, the substance has been diverted from licit markets or illicitly manufactured for non-medical use. The sharp rise in illicit manufacture and trafficking of ketamine has posed challenges for the continued medical use of ketamine for humans and animals, posing potential risks for the drug's licit accessibility.

54. In 2022, countries in East and South-East Asia seized over 27.4 tons of ketamine, an increase of 167 per cent compared with ketamine seizures made the previous year and a figure that surpasses the number of seizures in the last six years combined.⁵⁹ By identifying new analogues for manufacture and combining them with other substances such as diazepam, fentanyl and other synthetic opioids, criminal organizations have been able to enhance the potency of ketamine on illicit markets. Furthermore, criminal actors have shaped new pools of demand in the region, targeting young people in Oceania: in Australia, New Zealand and Pacific island countries.^{60,61}

55. It is likely that manufacturers and traffickers will seek to further diversify and expand manufacturing operations beyond the Golden Triangle border region of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand to countries such as Cambodia, Malaysia and Viet Nam.⁶² Law enforcement authorities have been able to identify clandestine industrial-scale laboratories, processing centres and storage warehouses for ketamine in Cambodia in recent years, where criminal networks have exploited cross-border areas controlled by non-State armed groups, relative weak rule of law and existing transit routes for heroin, MDMA, methamphetamine and opium.⁶³ An increase in trafficking operations has accompanied greater production, as evidenced by a notable rise in seizures in the lower Mekong River basin and criminal partnerships forged between local armed groups in the Golden Triangle and international criminal syndicates that will play a part in expanding ketamine's footprint in local illicit markets.⁶⁴

56. Initially, East and South-East Asia served as the focal points for illicit ketamine manufacture and trafficking, given the industrial-scale manufacture and distribution. However, new markets are being targeted in the European Union, North America and the United Kingdom. In February 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme issued a special alert on global ketamine trafficking, drawing it to the attention of 69 countries and territories – most in Asia, Europe and North America – that were either the origin or destination of ketamine consignments.⁶⁵ Criminal networks have diverted and trafficked veterinary products such as ketamine, along with substances such as xylazine, detomidine and carfentanil on the illicit market, exploiting gaps in monitoring veterinary supply chains and the lower levels of regulation. INCB supported Operation Knockout in 2022, which led to 671 seizures of new psychoactive substances, half of which were ketamine.⁶⁶ Figure III illustrates the steady rise in ketamine seizures in 2023 alone, with many consignments routed through Europe for re-export.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ UNODC, Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia*, p. 32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶¹ Virginia Comolli, "Oceania's spike in synthetic drug markets", Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 21 June 2024.

⁶² Grant Peck, "East, Southeast Asia had record methamphetamine seizures last year: profits remain in the billions", AP News, 28 May 2024.

⁶³ UNODC, Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia*, p. 53.

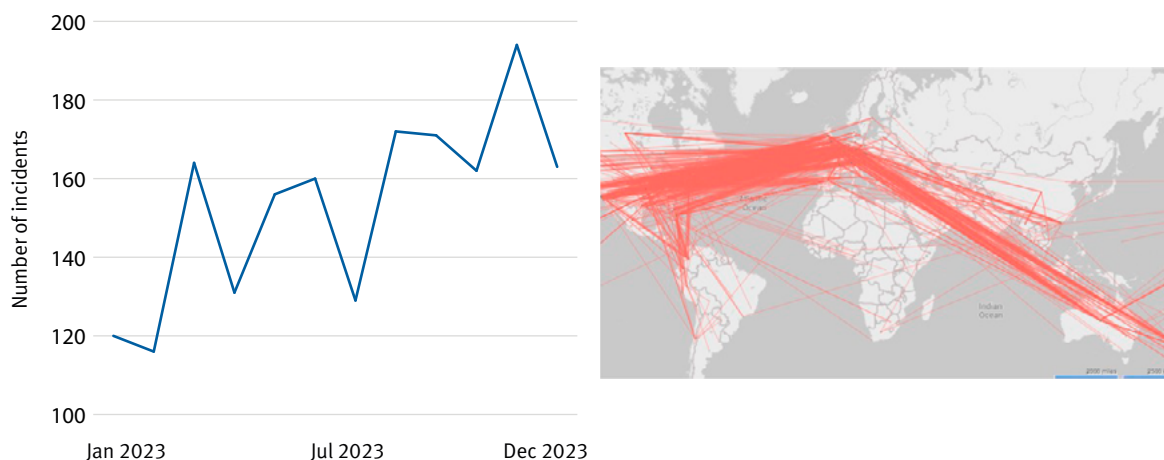
⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ INCB, GRIDS Programme, "Special Alert 1: global ketamine trafficking", 26 February 2024.

⁶⁶ INCB, "International Narcotics Control Board and partners disrupt trafficking networks in Operation Knockout", 26 May 2024.

⁶⁷ INCB, GRIDS Programme, "Special Alert 1: global ketamine trafficking", 26 February 2024.

Figure III. Communications on ketamine seizures shared via IONICS between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023



Source: GRIDS Operational Intelligence HD, timeline of IONICS notifications of ketamine seized between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023.

E. Existing tools and initiatives

57. To address the growing challenges posed by the expansion of the manufacture, trafficking and use of synthetic drugs and in view of the emerging scenarios described above, Governments and international control regimes have an array of tools already in place. Three complementary, mutually supportive United Nations treaties underpin international drug control efforts, namely, the 1961 Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol, the 1971 Convention and the 1988 Convention. These treaties were established to ensure the adequate availability of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and chemical precursors for medical, scientific and industrial purposes while preventing their diversion to illicit streams, thereby setting the stage for proactive action through treaty bodies such as the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, INCB and WHO. Over the last 60 years, these treaties have been complemented by a wide range of resolutions on drug control adopted by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the World Health Assembly, which together form the international drug control framework. Through this infrastructure, United Nations agencies and Member States have cooperated to adopt multilateral strategies, early warning and prevention systems and science-informed health responses, and to increase the capacity to disrupt illicit drug and precursor trafficking.

58. In response to the increasing manufacture of and trafficking in precursor and pre-precursor materials used in the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs, the INCB Precursors Task Force has developed a series of initiatives to gather intelligence and identify capacity gaps in precursor control. INCB has also developed the Pre-Export Notification System (PEN Online), a communication platform, which allows exporting and importing Governments to determine the legitimacy or illegitimacy of suspicious consignments transporting controlled precursor materials. The 2022 launch of the INCB PEN Online Light system, further built upon actionable intelligence exchange by offering Member States the ability to exchange pre-export notifications of alternative, non-controlled chemicals on a voluntary basis. The Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS) has been pivotal in offering real-time platforms for Governments to exchange actionable intelligence on the trafficking and diversion of chemical precursors and associated illegal enterprises. Through the use of the PICS system, registered agencies for national law enforcement receive automated push notifications and special alerts flagging seized precursor consignments, new precursors on the market and insights into the synthetic drug manufacturing process that can help build a more comprehensive understanding of how criminal networks are acquiring, synthesizing and dispatching precursor materials for the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ INCB, Project Cohesion and Project Prism.

59. The INCB GRIDS Programme has additionally developed a suite of tools for the exchange of actionable intelligence between relevant governmental law enforcement and regulatory agencies regarding illicit synthetic drugs. The Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS) is an online communication platform for the exchange of information on suspicious trafficking and the illicit manufacture of new psychoactive substances. The suite of IONICS tools includes strategic risk-profiling (GRIDS Strategic Intelligence), operational visualization (GRIDS Operational Intelligence HD), an emerging synthetic drug lookup reference tool (ChemProfiler) and an online multilingual training tool (ELITE) to build capacity among frontline officers. The INCB GRIDS Programme has convened more than 25 expert group meetings, stakeholder consultations and workshops to build public-private partnerships and facilitate the voluntary exchange of recommendations, technical guidance and expertise to dismantle synthetic drug marketplaces and trafficking organizations. INCB has also issued publications of the Practical Guidance for the Voluntary Cooperation for Industry series for (a) freight forwarders and third-party logistic providers, (b) the express courier industry, (c) e-commerce, including business-to-business platforms, and (d) Internet-related service providers.

60. However, the use of existing mechanisms falls short of bridging the gap, in the capacity of law enforcement and public health responses, between high-income and low- and middle-income countries. Many existing forums and projects have relied on consistent chemical analysis, through inspection by law enforcement authorities and intelligence exchange with regional and extraregional counterparts. These objectives are difficult for low- and middle-income countries to achieve. Many lack the necessary resources for drug-testing laboratories, as well as the capacity to send seized consignments to regional testing centres. Many also lack the personnel and resources to conduct routine inspections that could lead to seizures and actionable intelligence to dismantle trafficking networks. However, the greatest deficit among low- and middle-income countries is in demand reduction and treatment services, with especially limited capacity in demand reduction strategies and awareness campaigns to educate at-risk communities about synthetic drug consumption.

61. Successful programmes to reverse synthetic drug-related overdoses, such as programmes to improve the accessibility of the opioid antagonist naloxone, are also challenging to implement in developing countries owing to product acquisition and distribution costs.

F. Policy recommendations for a comprehensive response

62. States and institutions have built a patchwork of policy mechanisms to simultaneously deal with different elements of illicit synthetic drug industries. However, those efforts will need to be placed into a coordinated framework that results in a balanced, forward-looking approach towards demand and supply reduction.

63. To address policy gaps, the international community should begin to construct a comprehensive, coordinated strategy that accounts for the evolution and expansion of synthetic drug markets. Governments and international organizations should prepare for the increased presence of synthetic drugs in local and regional markets by identifying key blind spots that traffickers can easily exploit. Augmenting interdiction and security programmes, they now need to make greater investments in evidence-based and stigma-free education, treatment and prevention strategies. Importantly, Governments should seek to underpin efforts with consistent knowledge exchange, dialogue, coordination and education about synthetic drugs.

64. To sufficiently prepare for the increasing threat of illicit synthetic drugs, countries and control authorities should consider the following recommendations:

National coordination

(a) Governments should establish national inter-agency task forces to address the increase in synthetic drugs within their jurisdictions, regardless of their country's status as a supplier of precursors, a country of manufacture, a country of transit or a destination market;

Early warning and continuous monitoring

(b) As dangerously potent synthetic substances appear, introducing significant risks to public health, Governments should invest in presumptive testing capacity to better protect their populations, and place a greater

focus on monitoring emerging synthetic substances in circulation and on testing for these substances in overdose toxicology examinations;

(c) Relevant authorities should conduct more thorough, consistent laboratory testing and confirmatory forensic analysis of seized synthetic substances for impurity profiling, enabling better identification of emerging precursor or pre-precursor chemicals and their origin;

(d) Laboratories should work together to develop more sensitive presumptive and confirmatory procedures for potentially toxic adulterating chemical agents such as xylazine and other emerging substances. Countries should also consider implementing tests for these substances in routine laboratory analysis to identify manufacturing patterns and to detect new substances and precursors;

(e) Relevant government agencies should immediately identify suspected new precursor and pre-precursor chemical materials and forecast future chemical alternatives, particularly dual-use items, available on existing licit markets;

(f) Governments and international organizations should use machine learning and structured intelligence tools to help identify potential molecular structures that could be used as alternative chemical inputs and finished synthetic drugs. Agencies should also consult the licit pharmaceutical sector's research on new molecular structures and the role of artificial intelligence to further identify potential emerging substances that traffickers can use;

Information-sharing

(g) Governments that have not yet done so should join existing platforms, for example the Board's PICS, PEN Online and PEN Online Light tools, as well as IONICS, including GRIDS Strategic Intelligence, Operational Intelligence HD, ChemProfiler, ELITE and the new Scanning of Novel Opioids on Online Platforms (SNOOP) and the INTERPOL Drug Analysis File. By joining these systems, Member States can exchange operational information on trafficking in and the seizure of new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids, precursors and equipment. For countries that have already registered, Governments should promote consistent information exchange with INCB platforms. All importing Governments that have not formally requested pre-export notifications should invoke article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the 1988 Convention. Additionally, countries are encouraged to register a greater range of relevant law enforcement and regulatory agencies while engaging the respective healthcare, pharmaceutical, transportation and private sectors in training;

(h) Customs, border control and other law enforcement agencies should be as specific as possible when submitting reports of seized consignments of precursor materials and finished drugs, such as distinguishing between pseudoephedrine and ephedrine or methamphetamine and amphetamine. Countries should also endeavour to carry out impurity profiling of seized samples to identify the method of manufacture and the precursors used;

(i) Law enforcement agencies should seek to promote an approach that balances mandatory and voluntary multilateral engagement in controlling precursors and finished drugs, sustained by proactive, consistent data submission, mutual dialogue, intelligence exchange and partnership in disrupting illicit synthetic drug flows;

Law enforcement

(j) Law enforcement and regulatory authorities should emphasize supply chain management and disruption rather than complete dismantlement when targeting mid-tier leadership within trafficking networks, and explore more effective regulations and controls on industrial precursor manufacturers and suppliers;

(k) Drug control and law enforcement agencies should use interdiction not only as a tool for supply reduction but also to compile a comprehensive intelligence picture of networks, their methods and the nature of their operations that could help trace both drug distribution networks and precursor supply routes;

(l) Law enforcement authorities should use raids on laboratories as a tool to investigate and share information concerning manufacturing patterns and processes, precursor materials and equipment utilized, patterns in the scale and sophistication of manufacturing and business operations, and intelligence and evidence collection for accountability, prosecutions and the targeting of trafficking networks;

(m) Relevant agencies tasked with drug storage and/or disposal should be trained on the safe handling and interdiction of highly potent synthetic drugs, as well as in the responsible disposal of such materials. Governments should implement guidelines outlining standards for safe synthetic drug storage, disposal and/or recycling to protect the lives of law enforcement personnel and surrounding communities;

(n) Governments should seek to emphasize human rights in their interdiction approaches, exploring alternatives to extreme punitive measures such as incarceration and the death penalty, for those identified as being in possession of illicit synthetic drugs, and authorize and empower their front-line law enforcement agencies to play a role in offering resources for harm reduction, treatment and pathways for alternative livelihood;

Public-private partnership

(o) Governments and intergovernmental organizations should foster relationships and partnerships with private sector companies, e-commerce sites and social media platforms to encourage them to take a more active role in identifying criminal activity and sharing actionable intelligence with relevant authorities. Such cooperation should be implemented throughout the four “m”s of the supply chain (manufacture, marketing, movement and monetization);

(p) Governments should also encourage relevant companies to comply with rules and regulations by consistently removing websites and e-commerce platforms that are marketing precursor materials, followed by thorough investigation; introduce regulatory controls on manufacturing equipment exports and synthesis instruction manuals; and dismantle chemical and pharmaceutical companies and trafficking networks;

(q) Governments should collaborate with INCB in its efforts to map their chemical, pharmaceutical, biotechnology, medical and related industries to better monitor markets that are at risk of being targeted by traffickers in their attempts to source new and alternative precursors, adulterants and excipients for synthetic drugs;

(r) As the non-medical use of sedative synthetic veterinary products continues to rise in markets in Africa, Europe, North America, Oceania and South and East Asia, Governments should identify their respective national authorities for veterinary medicinal distribution, as well as potential veterinary associations, clinic networks and research centres that can contribute to a robust exchange of information about veterinary drug supply chains;

Public awareness, prevention, treatment, and recovery services

(s) Governments should implement national and local strategies for synthetic drug demand reduction that implement robust public-private partnerships, engage civil society organizations and target youth populations. It is important that Governments act on multiple fronts to engage at-risk communities – beyond the healthcare sector – that make effective use of psychosocial and educational interventions. This can be done through social media platforms and school awareness campaigns, educators, guardians, family members, community members and medical and psychological service professionals. Such strategies should seek to incorporate UNODC and WHO guidelines. National strategies should produce educational guidelines on healthcare and psychosocial interventions to build knowledge about the signs of drug dependence and on the risks of acute and long-term consumption, symptoms and an action plan for an overdose, available healthcare and psychological resources for aftercare and recovery, and resources, such as anti-overdose reversal kits, that can be administered;

(t) Countries should consider setting up a national emergency alert system, based on mechanisms such as the UNODC early warning advisory and the European Union’s Early Warning System on New Psychoactive Substances, to notify the healthcare, law enforcement and policy sectors of newly identified synthetic substances. The system should rely upon countries’ healthcare sectors, in which data are shared between health departments, coroners, medical examiners and recovery centres to confirm the presence of unknown synthetic substances;

(u) In an effort to decrease misuse and risk of overdose, Governments should highlight the importance of public education and work with relevant partners, such as public health officials, pharmacists and physicians, manufacturers and distributors, civil society organizations, consumer protection associations and law enforcement agencies, to disseminate information about the risks associated with the use of illicitly manufactured synthetic opioids, methamphetamine and prescription drugs;

(v) Given the reality that one of the roots of non-medical synthetic drug demand and misuse is the licit pharmaceutical industry and medical prescription, Governments should carefully review prescription practices related to pharmaceutical opioids and be vigilant about the increasing non-medical use of such substances in many regions and, in that regard, make use of existing material such as the WHO *Guide to Good Prescribing* and “Promoting rational use of medicines: core components”;

(w) To further increase countries’ prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery capacity, Governments should seek to build adequate reserves of opioid antagonist drugs such as naloxone and nalmefene, implement drug-checking practices such as testing strips and syringe services, consider supervised drug injection sites in emergency situations and adopt policies to make overdose reversal drugs more accessible, such as equipping first responders and police units, providing take-home kits and approving antagonist drugs for over-the-counter sale;

(x) Countries vulnerable to a surge in synthetic drug consumption should improve existing treatment infrastructure or build evidence-based drug treatment programmes, hiring and training providers, establishing clinics accessible to the public and educating the public about the services available to address increased demand for rehabilitation;

(y) Governments should launch public awareness campaigns encouraging access to and the availability of multiple doses of overdose-reversal drugs in affected communities, given the greater potency of synthetic opioids. Additionally, Governments should assemble accessible response and prevention guidelines for first responders, family members, educators, youth and the community in order to respond effectively to drug use disorders and overdoses. Those guidelines should highlight the treatment and rehabilitation services that are available, as well as guidelines for harm reduction;

(z) Governments should seek to involve individuals and communities at risk of synthetic drug use disorders and misuse in the exchange of knowledge, expertise and tools and the provision of training services;

International and regional cooperation

(aa) Building on the collaborative momentum achieved through multilateral and transborder forums such as the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies (COPOLAD), the Council of Europe’s Pompidou Group, and the Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Programme, international and regional organizations should, together with national Governments, establish more strategic and operational-level cooperation mechanisms to promote open dialogue, share best practices and encourage information and intelligence exchange.

Conclusion

65. The illicit synthetic drug industry continues to rapidly evolve and introduce new, urgent challenges to the rule of law, international control and public health. While Governments, regional bodies and international organizations have taken steps to address this challenge, gaps in capacity and coordination remain. Criminal actors will continue to exploit regulatory loopholes and emerging demand hubs, diverting or generating new synthetic substances that pose greater harm to people and are harder to detect and challenging to regulate without affecting licit markets. It is therefore important that Governments collectively seek to build proactive, comprehensive strategies that are grounded in consistent communication and knowledge exchange and have a strong emphasis on both supply and demand reduction. Only together can Member States work proactively to counter the evolving, highly complex challenge of illicit synthetic drug manufacture, trafficking and consumption.

II. Functioning of the international drug control system

A. Promoting the consistent application of the international drug control treaties

66. The international drug control legal framework consists of the 1961 Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol, the 1971 Convention and the 1988 Convention, which establishes the primary legal basis for the international control of precursor chemicals. These three instruments are recognized by the international community as constituting the cornerstone of the international drug control system

67. By agreeing to adhere to the international drug control conventions, States parties commit to creating administrative structures for monitoring the production and manufacture of, and trade in, substances scheduled under the conventions and to reporting to the Board on their expected licit requirements, actual consumption, international trade and seizures.

68. The primary objectives of the conventions include promoting the availability of controlled substances for medical, scientific or industrial use while preventing their diversion into illicit channels and limiting the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution and possession of, and trade in, internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to medical and scientific purposes.

69. The conventions also contain the obligation for States parties to establish certain drug-related behaviours as punishable offences in their respective legal systems while providing that criminal justice responses to suspected drug-related crime should be consistent with the principle of proportionality and, accordingly, that crimes of lesser gravity may be subject to lesser penalties and that crimes committed by people who use drugs may be dealt with through alternative measures to conviction or punishment, examples of which include those aimed at fostering treatment, education, aftercare, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

70. States parties to the international drug control conventions are also required to develop strategies aimed at prevention and frameworks for the treatment and rehabilitation of people affected by drug use and dependence.

71. Lastly, in recognition of the transnational nature of the world drug problem, the conventions explicitly provide a legal basis for effective international drug control, including international cooperation, extradition and mutual legal assistance.

1. Status of adherence to the international drug control treaties

72. The three international drug control conventions remain among the most widely ratified United Nations treaties, benefiting from near universal adherence.

73. As at 1 November 2024, the 1961 Convention as amended had been ratified or acceded to by 186 States, with 10 States yet to become parties, namely, the Cook Islands, Equatorial Guinea, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Chad has ratified the 1961 Convention in its unamended form.

74. The number of States parties to the 1971 Convention remained at 184 during the period under review, with 13 States currently not parties, namely, the Cook Islands, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Kiribati, Liberia, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

75. Although there have been no new accessions to the 1988 Convention during the period under review, it entered into force for South Sudan in January 2024, following the country's accession in October 2023. The 1988 Convention remains the most widely ratified of the three international drug control conventions, with 192 parties (191 States and the European Union). Equatorial Guinea, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Somalia and Tuvalu have yet to accede.

76. The Board encourages all States that have yet to accede to one or more of the international drug control conventions to do so without delay and to ensure their comprehensive implementation into national law. INCB stands ready to assist them in this process in whatever manner is needed.

2. Changes to the scheduling of substances under international control

Narcotic drugs

77. On 19 March 2024, at its sixty-seventh session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided, on the basis of the recommendations by WHO, to place butonitazene in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended. The decision of the Commission became effective with respect to each party on 6 June 2024, the date of receipt of the official communication by the Secretary-General.

Psychotropic substances

78. Also at its sixty-seventh session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided, by its decisions 67/2, 67/3 and 67/4, to include 3-chloromethcathinone (3-CMC), dipentylone and 2-fluorodeschloroketamine in Schedule II of the 1971 Convention, and by its decision 67/5, to include bromazolam in Schedule IV of the 1971 Convention, bringing the total number of substances controlled under the 1971 Convention to 174.

79. The scheduling decisions became fully effective on 3 December 2024, namely, 180 days after the date of communication by the Secretary-General.

Precursor chemicals

80. At its sixty-seventh session, in March 2024, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided to follow the Board's recommendation to place in Table I of the 1988 Convention two fentanyl precursors (4-piperidone and 1-boc-4-piperidone), and two series of closely related designer precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants (16 substances in total), namely, P-2-P methyl glycidic acid and eight of its esters (i.e. the methyl, ethyl, propyl, isopropyl, butyl, isobutyl, *sec*-butyl and *tert*-butyl esters), as well as seven esters of 3,4-MDP-2-P methyl glycidic acid (i.e. the ethyl, propyl, isopropyl, butyl, isobutyl, *sec*-butyl and *tert*-butyl esters). The decisions became effective on 3 December 2024, 180 days after they were communicated by the Secretary General to Governments.

3. Submission of information by Governments to the Board

(a) Statistical reports for narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals

81. In accordance with its mandate, the Board publishes its annual report and the report on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention. The Board also publishes technical reports that provide Governments with an analysis of statistical information on the manufacture, consumption, utilization and stocks of and trade in internationally controlled substances, together with an analysis of estimates and assessments of requirements for those substances.

82. The Board's reports and technical publications are produced on the basis of information that parties to the international drug control treaties are obligated to submit. In addition, pursuant to resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Governments voluntarily provide information in order to facilitate an accurate and comprehensive evaluation of the functioning of the international drug and precursor control system.

83. The data and other information received from Governments enable the Board to monitor licit activities involving narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and to evaluate treaty compliance and the overall functioning of the international drug and precursor control system. On the basis of its analysis, the Board makes recommendations to improve the workings of the system with a view to ensuring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical, scientific and industrial needs, while at the same time preventing their diversion from licit into illicit channels.

Narcotic drugs

84. As at 1 November 2024, the Board had received annual statistical reports from 161 States (both parties and non-parties) and territories on the production, manufacture, consumption, utilization, stocks and seizures of narcotic drugs covering the calendar year 2023 (form C), or about 75 per cent of those requested. That number was higher than the number of reports for 2022 received by 1 November 2023 (156).

85. A total of 99 Governments, or 46 per cent of all Governments providing data, submitted their statistical forms on time, that is, by the deadline of 30 June 2024, which was fewer than in 2023 (117 Governments). As at 1 November 2024, 53 Governments (25 per cent) had not submitted their annual statistics for 2023. Of the countries and territories that have not submitted their reports, the majority are in Africa and the Americas (including the Caribbean), followed by Asia and Oceania; two European countries have not provided their annual statistical form.

86. Most countries that produce, manufacture, import, export or consume large amounts of narcotic drugs submitted annual statistics, although of differing quality. Accurate, complete and timely reporting is an important indicator of the effectiveness and efficiency of drug control systems, and the availability of good data is vital for the Board to accurately carry out the monitoring function accorded to it under the international drug control treaties. The quality of some data is a concern for the Board, in particular data from major producing and manufacturing countries, which may indicate deficiencies in national mechanisms for regulating and monitoring internationally controlled substances. The Board urges Governments to continue to strengthen their national mechanisms to monitor the cultivation, production and manufacture of and trade in controlled substances. This may be achieved, in part, by improving and developing national data-collection systems, training staff of the competent national authorities and ensuring close cooperation with companies licensed to deal with internationally controlled substances.

87. As at 1 November 2024, the complete set of four quarterly statistics of imports and exports of narcotic drugs for 2023 (form A) had been received from 158 Governments (143 countries and 15 territories), or about 74 per cent of the 214 Governments requested. In addition, 14 Governments (about 6 per cent) had submitted at least one quarterly report. A total of 42 countries (about 20 per cent) had failed to submit any quarterly statistics for 2023.

Psychotropic substances

88. The number of annual statistical reports on psychotropic substances submitted for 2023 (form P), in accordance with article 16 of the 1971 Convention, increased in comparison with the number submitted for the previous year. As at 1 November 2024, annual statistical reports for 2023 had been submitted by 163 countries and 14 territories. Of the 184 States parties to the 1971 Convention, 156 States parties, or 85 per cent, had submitted their annual statistical reports; and 99, or 63 per cent, of those 156 States parties had submitted their reports by the 30 June deadline. A small number of States parties continued to submit statistics through partner countries. Furthermore, the Board received annual statistics from five States that are not yet parties to the Convention but that submit national data on a voluntary basis.

89. In addition, 110 Governments voluntarily submitted all four quarterly statistical reports for 2023 on imports and exports of substances listed in Schedule II of the 1971 Convention, as requested by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1981/7, and a further 30 Governments submitted at least one quarterly report for 2023.

90. The Board notes that many States parties did not furnish form P. A total of 15 countries and territories in Africa failed to furnish form P for 2023. Likewise, seven countries in Asia, eight countries and territories in Central America and the Caribbean, seven countries and territories in Oceania and one country in Europe failed to furnish form P for 2023. Form P for 2023 was furnished by all countries in North America and South America.

91. The Board takes note of the countries that have provided data regarding their use of psychotropic substances for the manufacture of preparations exempted from some measures of control pursuant to article 3 of the 1971 Convention: 14 countries reported using 31 substances for such purposes in 2023. **The Board recalls recommendation 13 of its annual report for 2019,⁶⁹ in which it called upon Governments to ensure that all aspects of article 3 of the 1971 Convention were correctly implemented if they wished to exempt a preparation from certain measures of control.**

92. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolutions 1985/15 and 1987/30, requested Governments to provide the Board with details on trade (data broken down by country of origin and destination) in substances listed in Schedules III and IV of the 1971 Convention in their annual statistical reports on psychotropic substances. As at 1 November 2024, complete details on such trade had been submitted by 159 Governments (90 per cent of

⁶⁹ E/INCB/2019/1, para. 806.

all submissions of form P for 2023). A further 18 Governments submitted blank forms or forms missing trade data for 2023.

93. The Board notes with appreciation that a high number of countries have already submitted consumption data for psychotropic substances on a voluntary basis, in accordance with Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 54/6.

94. For 2023, a total of 110 countries and territories, or 62 per cent, submitted data on the consumption of some or all psychotropic substances. **The Board appreciates the cooperation of the Governments concerned and calls upon all Governments to report on the consumption of psychotropic substances on an annual basis, pursuant to Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 54/6, as such data are essential for an improved evaluation of the availability of psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes.**

95. The Board notes with appreciation that reports on seizures of psychotropic substances were furnished by the Governments of Algeria, India and Iran (Islamic Republic of). **The Board acknowledges the interdiction efforts of the Governments concerned and reiterates its call for all Governments to furnish directly to the Board any information on interdictions of attempted diversions of psychotropic substances and to keep it apprised of any developments in their trafficking.**

Precursor chemicals

96. In accordance with article 12 of the 1988 Convention, parties are obliged to furnish information on substances frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. That information, provided on form D, assists the Board in monitoring and identifying trends in trafficking in precursors and the illicit manufacture of drugs. It also enables the Board to provide Governments with recommendations concerning remedial action and policies, as necessary.

97. As at 1 November 2024, 115 Governments had submitted form D for 2023. Of those, only 81 submitted the form by the deadline of 30 June 2024. As in the past, a number of forms were incomplete and the level of details on the methods of diversion and illicit manufacture also remained an issue of concern.

98. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/20, Governments are also requested to provide information regarding their licit trade in substances listed in Table I and Table II of the 1988 Convention on a voluntary and confidential basis. As at 1 November 2024, 109 Governments had provided such information for 2023 to the Board, and 95 had furnished data on licit uses of and/or requirements for one or more of the substances listed in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention.

99. As in previous years, information shared through PICS complemented the aggregated seizure data received annually from Governments through form D. Specifically, the real-time communication of information on individual chemical- and equipment-related incidents has provided concrete leads for national authorities to initiate backtracking investigations and engage in cooperation to identify those responsible for diversion and trafficking (see also para. 278 in section D below).

100. The seizure data reported and a detailed analysis of the latest trends and developments in trafficking in precursor chemicals under international control, as well as their non-scheduled substitutes and alternatives, can be found in the report of the Board for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention.⁷⁰

(b) Estimates for narcotic drugs, assessments for psychotropic substances and annual legitimate requirements for precursor chemicals

Narcotic drugs

101. The estimates of annual legitimate requirements for narcotic drugs and the assessments of annual legitimate requirements for psychotropic substances are essential pillars of the international drug control system. They enable both exporting and importing countries to ensure that trade in those substances stays within the limits determined by the Governments of importing countries and that diversion of controlled substances from

⁷⁰ E/INCB/2024/4.

international trade is effectively prevented. For narcotic drugs, the estimates of annual legitimate requirements are mandatory under the 1961 Convention as amended, and the estimates furnished by Governments need to be confirmed by the Board before becoming the basis for calculating the limits on manufacture and import. As at 1 November 2024, the Governments of 167 countries and territories, or 78 per cent of those requested, had submitted estimates of requirements for narcotic drugs for 2025. To ensure that Governments can import narcotic drugs for medical and scientific purposes, estimates are established by the Board for countries that are unable to supply them. In 2024, a total of 33 countries, in all regions of the world, operated on the basis of estimates established for them by the Board.

102. Governments are obliged to comply with the limits on imports and exports of narcotic drugs provided for under articles 21 and 31 of the 1961 Convention as amended. Article 21 stipulates, inter alia, that the total of the quantities of each drug manufactured and imported by any country or territory in a given year is not to exceed the sum of the following: (a) the quantity consumed for medical and scientific purposes; (b) the quantity used, within the limits of the relevant estimates, for the manufacture of other drugs, preparations in Schedule III and substances not covered by the 1961 Convention; (c) the quantity exported; (d) the quantity added to the stock for the purpose of bringing that stock up to the level specified in the relevant estimate; and (e) the quantity acquired within the limit of the relevant estimate for special purposes. Article 31 requires all exporting countries to limit the export of narcotic drugs to any country or territory to quantities that fall within the limits of the total of the estimates of the importing country or territory, with the addition of the amounts intended for re-export.

103. The system of imports and exports continues to be implemented by Governments without major challenges. In 2024, a total of 18 countries were contacted regarding possible excess imports or excess exports identified with regard to international trade in narcotic drugs that had been effected during 2023. As at 1 November 2024, six of those countries had responded. The Board continues to pursue the matter with those countries that have not responded.

Psychotropic substances

104. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolutions 1981/7 and 1991/44, Governments are requested to provide to the Board assessments of annual domestic medical and scientific requirements for psychotropic substances listed in Schedules II, III and IV of the 1971 Convention. The assessments received are communicated to all States and territories to assist the competent authorities of exporting countries when approving exports of psychotropic substances. As at 1 November 2024, the Governments of all countries and territories except South Sudan (for which assessments were established by the Board in 2011) had submitted at least one assessment of their annual medical requirements for psychotropic substances.

105. However, 64 Governments have not submitted a full revision of their legitimate requirements for psychotropic substances for three years or more. The assessments valid for those countries and territories may therefore no longer reflect their actual medical and scientific requirements for such substances.

106. When assessments are lower than the actual legitimate requirements, the importation of psychotropic substances needed for medical or scientific purposes may be delayed. When assessments are significantly higher than legitimate needs, the risk of psychotropic substances being diverted into illicit channels may be increased.

107. As in previous years, the system of assessments of annual requirements for psychotropic substances continues to function well, and most countries and territories adhere to the system. In 2023, there were 310 cases among 101 countries and territories of a substance being imported in quantities exceeding the relevant assessment. There were 59 cases among 35 countries and territories of the import of a substance being authorized without the country or territory having established any relevant assessment. There were 150 cases among 39 countries of exports of a psychotropic substance exceeding the relevant assessment of the importing country, and 29 cases among seven countries of exports of a substance being authorized without the country or territory having established any relevant assessment.

108. The Board recommends that Governments continue to strengthen the capacity of competent national authorities to adequately estimate their medical and scientific requirements for narcotic drugs and assessments for psychotropic substances, including through the use of globally available e-learning modules, and also recommends that Governments enhance domestic data-collection mechanisms so that they can present estimates and assessments that reflect the national requirements used for medical purposes. The

Board further recommends that Governments review and update the assessments of their annual medical and scientific requirements for psychotropic substances at least once every three years.

Precursor chemicals

109. 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. The provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, 3,4-MDP-2-P and P-2-P, as well as, to the extent possible, preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. The estimates are aimed at informing exporting countries about the legitimate requirements of importing countries for those substances, thus preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

110. As at 1 November 2024, 185 Governments had provided an estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for at least one of the above-mentioned precursor chemicals. During the reporting period, 84 Governments reconfirmed or updated their annual legitimate requirements for at least one substance.

111. Governments provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants and their preparations to the Board mostly on form D and can update them at any time throughout the year by means of individual communications. The latest annual legitimate requirements, as submitted by countries and territories, are regularly updated and published on a dedicated page of the Board's website. Annual legitimate requirements are also available to registered users through PEN Online.

112. Further information related to annual legitimate requirements can be found in the report of the Board for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 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. Efforts to prevent diversion from international trade

113. The system of control measures laid down in the 1961 Convention as amended provides for the monitoring of international trade in narcotic drugs to prevent the diversion of such drugs into illicit channels. As a result of the almost universal implementation of the control measures stipulated in the 1971 Convention and the relevant Economic and Social Council resolutions, only one case involving the diversion of psychotropic substances from international trade into illicit channels has been identified in recent years. In addition, the 1988 Convention requires parties to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals from international trade to the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The Board has developed various systems to monitor compliance with that aspect of the 1988 Convention and to facilitate cooperation between Governments to that end.

Requirement for import and export authorizations

114. The universal application of the requirement for import and export authorizations laid down in the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention is key to preventing the diversion of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances into the illicit market. Such authorizations are required for transactions involving any of the substances controlled under the 1961 Convention as amended or listed in Schedules I and II of the 1971 Convention.

115. Competent national authorities are required by those conventions to issue import authorizations for transactions involving the importation of such substances into their country. The competent national authorities of exporting countries must verify the authenticity of such import authorizations before issuing the export authorizations required to allow shipments containing the substances to leave their countries. Information on the use of electronic import and export authorizations for trade in internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances is provided in chapter II, section D, paragraphs 256–259 of the present report.

116. The 1971 Convention does not require import and export authorizations for trade in the psychotropic substances listed in its Schedules III and IV. However, in view of the widespread diversion of those substances from licit international trade during the 1970s and 1980s, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolutions 1985/15, 1987/30 and 1993/38, requested Governments to extend the system of import and export authorizations to cover those psychotropic substances as well.

117. Most countries and territories have already introduced an import and export authorization requirement for psychotropic substances listed in Schedules III and IV of the 1971 Convention, in accordance with the above-mentioned Economic and Social Council resolutions. As at 1 November 2024, specific information had been made available to the Board by 207 countries and territories, showing that all major importing and exporting countries and territories now require import and export authorizations for all psychotropic substances listed in Schedules III and IV of the 1971 Convention. Upon request, the Board makes available, to all Governments, a table showing the import authorization requirements for substances listed in Schedules III and IV pursuant to the relevant Economic and Social Council resolutions. That table is also published in the secure area of the Board's website, which is accessible only to specifically authorized government officials, so that the competent national authorities of exporting countries may be informed as soon as possible of changes in import authorization requirements in importing countries.

118. The Board reiterates its call to the Governments of the few remaining States in which national legislation and/or regulations do not yet require import and export authorizations for all psychotropic substances, regardless of whether they are States parties to the 1971 Convention, to extend such controls to all substances listed in Schedules III and IV of the 1971 Convention as soon as possible and to inform the Board in that regard.

Discrepancies in international trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

119. Discrepancies in government reports on international trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are regularly investigated with the competent authorities of the relevant countries to ensure that there has been no diversion from licit international trade. Those investigations may reveal shortcomings in the implementation of control measures, including the failure of companies to comply with national drug control provisions.

120. Since June 2024, investigations regarding discrepancies for 2023 related to international trade in narcotic drugs have been initiated with 32 countries. As at 1 November 2024, replies had been received from 21 countries. The responses indicated that the discrepancies had been caused by clerical and technical errors in preparing the reports, reporting on exports or imports of preparations in Schedule III of the 1961 Convention as amended without indicating it on the form, or inadvertent reporting of transit countries as trading partners. In some cases, countries confirmed the quantities reported by them, resulting in the initiation of follow-up investigations with their trading partners. The Board encourages the countries that have not yet replied to investigate the discrepancies as a matter of urgency and to inform it of their findings.

121. Similarly, with regard to the international trade in psychotropic substances, investigations relating to 745 cases of significant trade discrepancies for 2022 data were initiated with 114 Governments, out of which 65 Governments have responded. As at 1 November 2024, 685 cases of trade discrepancies involving 117 countries and territories were identified with regard to 2023 annual statistical data.

Pre-export notifications for precursor chemicals

122. Article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the 1988 Convention allows the Governments of importing countries to make it mandatory for exporting countries to inform them of any planned export of internationally controlled precursors to their territory. Since the publication of the annual report of the Board for 2023,⁷¹ the Governments of Morocco, Somalia and Viet Nam have officially requested to be pre-notified of any planned export of substances included in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention to its territory, thus increasing the number of Governments that have invoked that provision to 121. **The Board encourages all importing Governments that have not formally requested pre-export notifications to invoke article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the 1988 Convention.**

⁷¹ E/INCB/2023/1.

123. PEN Online, the secure web-based tool established by the Board, facilitates real-time communication between importing and exporting Governments with regard to international trade in precursors. Since the publication of the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention,⁷² the total number of countries and territories authorized to access PEN Online has remained the same, at 169. **INCB calls upon the Governments that have not yet registered with PEN Online to nominate at least one focal point for that purpose as soon as possible and calls upon Governments to use PEN Online actively and systematically. The Board stands ready to assist Governments in that regard.**

124. To assist Governments in exchanging information on the international movement of non-scheduled chemicals, the Board launched PEN Online Light, a system similar to PEN Online, in October 2022. **Although the sharing of information about planned exports of precursor chemicals not under international control through PEN Online Light is voluntary, the Board encourages Governments to use that system for the export of such substances from their territory. More information on the functioning of PEN Online and PEN Online Light can be found in the report of the Board for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention.**

Article 13 of the 1988 Convention: materials and equipment used in illicit drug manufacture

125. Article 13 of the 1988 Convention requires parties to prevent trade in and the diversion of materials and equipment for illicit production or manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and to cooperate with each other to that end. Since 2019, INCB has conducted a number of activities and disseminated several resources with a view to promoting the use of that article as a valuable complementary tool in addressing illicit drug manufacture.

126. During the reporting period, the Board conducted a survey among Governments worldwide with the aim of gathering information on regulatory and operational aspects related to illicit drug manufacturing equipment, including information about relevant national authorities. The results of the survey will be disseminated to Governments worldwide in 2025. The Board also continued to cooperate with WCO to identify currently applicable Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System codes and establish unique subheadings for the most relevant items of equipment included in the International Monitoring List of Equipment used in the illicit manufacture of drugs. The unique subheadings will allow more effective monitoring of trade in those items and thus contribute to preventing their diversion into illicit channels. Further information on the Board's work related to article 13 of the 1988 Convention can be found in the report of the Board for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention.

B. Ensuring the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes

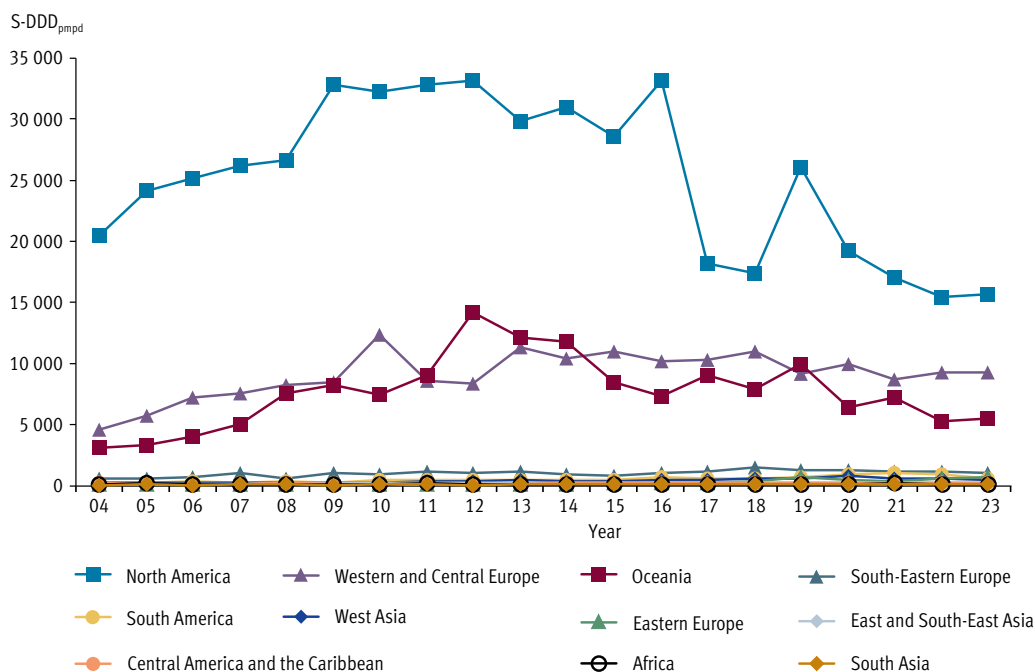
127. An analysis of data on the consumption of opioid analgesics, as reported by Governments to the Board, has reconfirmed that the unequal access to and availability of affordable opioid analgesics, such as morphine, is a persistent problem. One factor contributing to this problem is that a significant portion of the morphine manufactured worldwide is not utilized directly for pain relief but rather for other purposes. The consumption of morphine, along with other opioid analgesics, remains concentrated in developed countries within Europe and North America, and the levels of consumption of the substance in other regions are insufficient to adequately address the medical needs of their populations.

128. The levels of opioid consumption in North America, Oceania and Western and Central Europe, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day (S-DDD_{mpd}), are far higher than in all other regions in the world. A general upward trend in consumption was evident in South-Eastern Europe until 2018, when it reached 1,415 S-DDD_{mpd}, but it has slowly decreased since then, falling to 995 S-DDD_{mpd} in 2023, the lowest level since 2016. In Eastern Europe, opioid consumption reached an all-time high level in 2019, 601 S-DDD_{mpd}, but after that, consumption decreased, falling to 344 S-DDD_{mpd} in 2021. However, it has since increased again, reaching

⁷² E/INCB/2023/4.

588 S-DDD_{ppmd} in 2023. Consumption in South America has seen an overall increase in the past 20 years and peaked at 935 S-DDD_{ppmd} in 2021. However, consumption in the region subsequently dropped to 833 S-DDD_{ppmd} in 2022 and further, to 517 S-DDD_{ppmd}, in 2023. A similar trend is observed in West Asia, where consumption reached an all-time high level (702 S-DDD_{ppmd}) in 2020 but decreased again, to 509 S-DDD_{ppmd}, in 2021 and further, to 373 S-DDD_{ppmd}, in 2023 (see figure IV).

Figure IV. Consumption of opioids for pain management in all regions, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day,^a 2004–2023



^a The regional consumption of a drug is calculated as the average consumption of all countries reporting consumption of the drug in the region.

129. The Board considers levels of consumption of opioid analgesics in quantities between 100 and 200 S-DDD_{ppmd} to be inadequate, and in quantities of less than 100 S-DDD_{ppmd} to be very inadequate. In this context, the average levels of consumption reported in 2023 in East and South-East Asia (220 S-DDD_{ppmd}), Central America and the Caribbean (130 S-DDD_{ppmd}), South Asia (43 S-DDD_{ppmd}) and Africa (42 S-DDD_{ppmd}) are of particular concern.

130. The regional imbalance does not stem from a shortage of opiate raw materials. Apart from opium, the production of which has followed an overall decreasing trend over the last 20 years, the overall utilization of poppy straw and concentrate of poppy straw derived from both the morphine-rich and the thebaine-rich varieties of opium poppy remained high in 2023, and stocks increased. That suggests that the supply exceeds the demand, even though the demand expressed by several countries may not accurately reflect the actual medical needs of their populations.

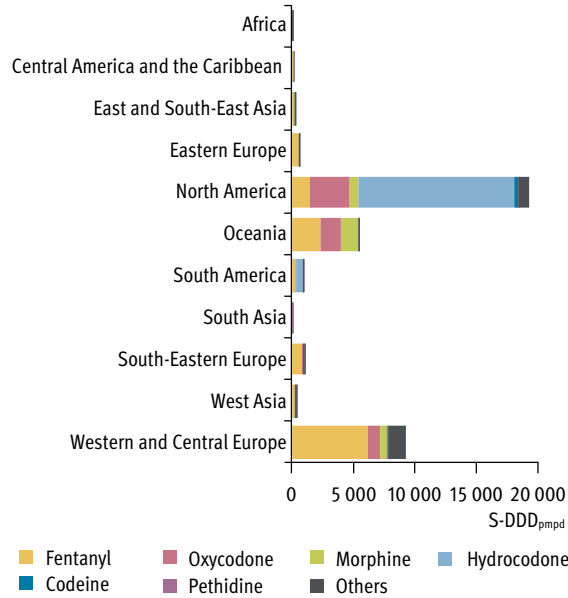
131. In the 20-year period 2004–2023, the global manufacture of morphine initially increased, from 354.8 tons manufactured in 2004 to 475.3 tons in 2012, when global morphine manufacture reached its peak. After 2012, global manufacture decreased, falling to 178.8 tons in 2023, a considerable decrease from the 218.4 tons manufactured in 2022.

132. Only a limited amount of the morphine available globally is used for pain relief. In 2023, the amount of morphine used for direct consumption totalled almost 32.5 tons but represented a notably larger share of the total amount manufactured, 18.1 per cent, as compared with 8.1 per cent in 2004. However, many countries continue to report having difficulties in procuring medications containing morphine, even though opiate raw materials are reported to be available in sufficient quantities. Although most countries and territories reported consumption of morphine in 2023, many people still had limited access to it. The differences in consumption levels between countries continues to be significant. Various factors, such as economic and commercial interests, knowledge

and training, as well as regulatory frameworks, are influencing the ability of countries to procure and administer morphine for the treatment of pain.

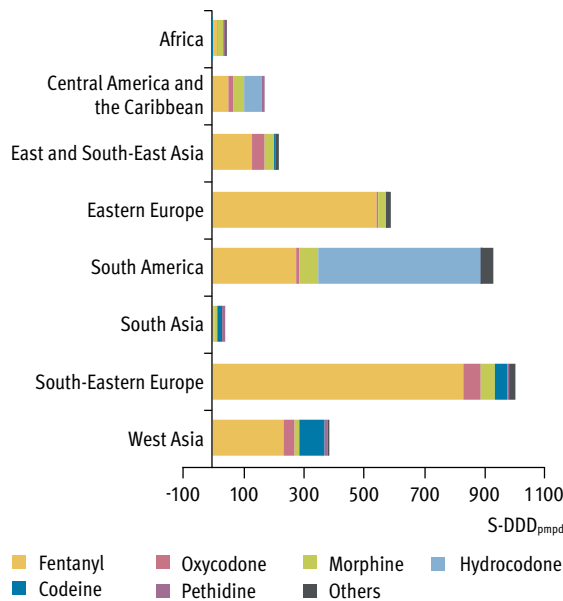
133. Analysis of data for 2023 on the consumption of opioid analgesics, measured in total S-DDD_{ppmd}, by substance and region highlights once again the predominance of fentanyl in most regions of the world. Consumption of oxycodone is highest in North America, Oceania and Western and Central Europe, although the substance is also consumed in other regions. Hydrocodone consumption is significant in the Americas. The share of morphine consumption is less pronounced in most regions (see figures V and VI).

Figure V. Consumption of codeine, fentanyl, hydrocodone, morphine, oxycodone, pethidine and other opioids, all regions, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day,^a 2023



^a The regional consumption of a drug is calculated as the average consumption of all countries reporting consumption of the drug in the region.

Figure VI. Consumption of codeine, fentanyl, hydrocodone, morphine, oxycodone, pethidine and other opioids, by regions with lowest consumption, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day,^a 2023



^a The regional consumption of a drug is calculated as the average consumption of all countries reporting consumption of the drug in the region.

134. The Board reiterates that there is an urgent need to address the availability of and increase access to opioid analgesics, including by strengthening the capacity of competent national authorities to adequately estimate their medical and scientific requirements, and to improve the prescription and use of opioid analgesics in all countries reporting inadequate and very inadequate levels of consumption, and calls for targeted public policies supported by Governments, health systems and health professionals, civil society, the pharmaceutical industry and the international community.

1. Patterns and trends in the production, manufacture, consumption, utilization and stocks of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

Narcotic drugs

135. The production of opium, after decreasing considerably from the level observed in 2004 (847 tons, or 93.2 tons in morphine equivalent), has in recent years been fluctuating between 200 and 300 tons, reaching 288.5 tons (31.5 tons in morphine equivalent) in 2023. Of that amount, 97.8 per cent was produced in India, which continues to report the production of significant quantities of opium, despite having recently started to report the cultivation of opium poppy for the production of poppy straw and despite the global reduction in the demand for opium.

136. Global thebaine manufacture decreased to 101 tons in 2023, well below the record level of 156 tons in 2016. The demand for medicines derived from thebaine has been fluctuating in past years owing to the restrictions on prescription drugs derived from thebaine imposed in the United States, the main market for such medicines, in response to their misuse and the related high number of overdose deaths.

137. Oxycodone has, over the last 20 years, been one of the drugs commonly associated with overdose deaths in relation to the misuse of prescription drugs, in particular in North America. Global manufacture of oxycodone increased after 2004, reaching a record high of 138.1 tons in 2013. Since then, manufacture has followed a decreasing trend, dropping to 69.5 tons in 2022; however, it increased again, to 85 tons, in 2023. The overall decreasing trend in manufacture may be attributable to stricter control measures introduced in some countries where the risk of overdose deaths and misuse of oxycodone is significant. Similar to oxycodone, global manufacture of hydromorphone increased in 2023, to 5.3 tons, from 4.8 tons in 2022. Notably, the United States continues to be the country reporting the highest level of hydromorphone consumption.

138. With regard to synthetic opioids, global manufacture of fentanyl increased rapidly in the period 2000–2010, reaching a record level of 4.3 tons in 2010. After that, manufacture followed an overall decreasing trend, dropping to 1.9 tons in 2018, then further, to 1.1 tons, in 2022. However, it increased again in 2023, reaching 2.6 tons.

139. Over the past 20 years, the global quantity of licitly manufactured heroin averaged approximately 800 kg per year, amounting to more than 1,000 kg in some years. In 2023, a total of 944.1 kg of heroin were licitly manufactured. A number of countries have introduced opioid agonist therapy services aimed at assisting people with long-term opioid dependence.

140. Until 2010, the United States was the only country reporting the licit use of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes. Since 2011, however, an increasing number of countries have started to use cannabis and cannabis extracts for those purposes (in 2023, 27 countries reported such use); global cannabis production has consequently seen an overall increase, amounting to 568.6 tons in 2023. In view of the changes in the requirements for reporting on cannabis and cannabis-related substances (see below), the data on such substances need to be considered with caution.

141. The Board has worked with Governments to achieve greater uniformity in reporting and monitoring standards regarding the cultivation, manufacture, and distribution of and global trade in cannabis and cannabis-derived products for medical and scientific purposes. Since December 2020, the Board held various consultations with experts and Member States to revise the reporting requirements for cannabis and cannabis-related substances with a view to achieving harmonization. As a result of those consultations, the Board introduced new reporting requirements, effective as of 2024. Information on cannabis and cannabis resin must therefore be reported using the forms provided to Governments for reporting under the 1961 Convention as amended. In addition to cannabis and cannabis resin, extracts and tinctures of cannabis are listed in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as

amended. However, INCB now recommends that Governments reporting any preparation or by-product derived from cannabis in terms of the cannabinoids it contains do so using the forms provided for reporting under the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971. Owing to these changes, it is expected that, in the coming years, the data relating to cannabis presented in the reports of the Board on narcotic drugs will change noticeably, as more countries will report data on controlled cannabinoids on separate forms provided for reporting under the 1971 Convention, rather than the forms for reporting under the 1961 Convention as amended.

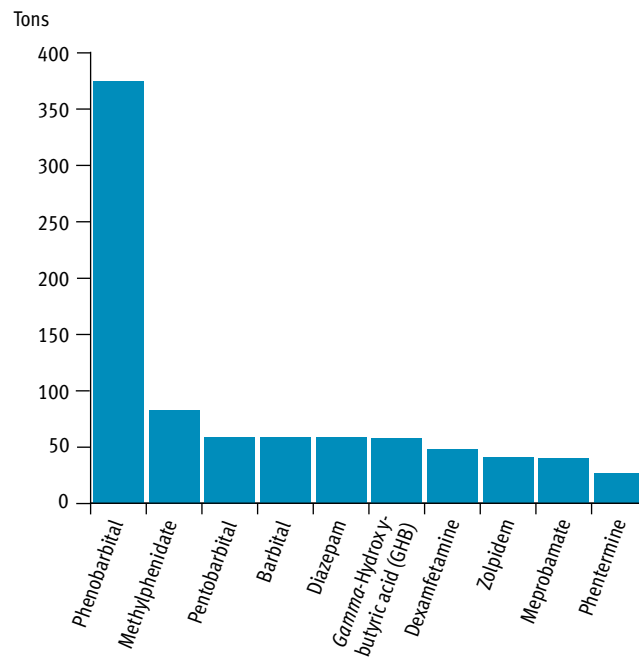
142. For 2023, the Plurinational State of Bolivia reported the production of 25,343 tons of coca leaf obtained from licit coca bush cultivation. Peru reported the production of 1,259.3 tons. Despite having fluctuated for more than 20 years, global licit cocaine manufacture remained relatively stable in 2023, amounting to 50.7 kg, compared with the 47.4 kg reported in 2022. The global licit consumption of cocaine continued to remain relatively stable, standing at 146.5 kg in 2023.

Psychotropic substances

143. The psychotropic substances under international control comprise several drug categories and types and are used to treat an extensive number of health conditions. Most psychotropic substances manufactured and consumed are sedative-hypnotics, anxiolytics and anti-epileptics, including barbiturates and benzodiazepines. The other significant group manufactured comprises stimulants, mostly amphetamines and methylphenidate. The remaining substances that are regularly manufactured – hallucinogens, analgesics and anti-anaemics – account for only a small proportion of the overall manufacture of psychotropic substances.

144. Overall trends in the manufacture of psychotropic substances under international control remained largely consistent in 2023 as compared with 2022. In terms of gross weight, the substance most manufactured globally was phenobarbital, at 374 tons, a far larger quantity than for any other substance (see figure VII). Methylphenidate was the second most heavily manufactured substance globally, at 82.6 tons, which, according to INCB data, was the largest amount of the substance ever manufactured worldwide in a single year. Manufacture of meprobamate had ranked second in 2022 but dropped significantly in 2023, as reported manufacture fell by more than half, to 39.5 tons.

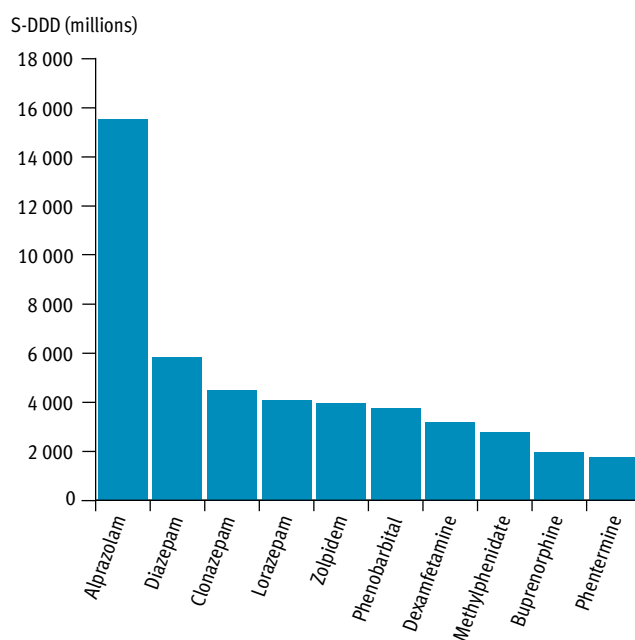
Figure VII. Most heavily manufactured psychotropic substances worldwide, based on gross weight, 2023



145. When considered in terms of doses (S-DDD), the psychotropic substances manufactured in the largest quantities in 2023 present a different picture compared with the ranking by gross weight (see figure VIII). In 2023, alprazolam was the most manufactured substance, at over 15.5 billion S-DDD, nearly triple the 5.8 billion

S-DDD reported for diazepam, which was the second most manufactured substance. The other psychotropic substances manufactured in the highest quantities in 2023 in terms of doses were clonazepam (4.48 billion S-DDD), lorazepam (4.08 billion S-DDD), zolpidem (3.97 billion S-DDD), phenobarbital (3.74 billion S-DDD), dexamphetamine (3.18 billion S-DDD), methylphenidate (2.75 billion S-DDD), buprenorphine (1.94 billion S-DDD) and phentermine (1.77 billion S-DDD). In 2023, another 23 psychotropic substances were manufactured in quantities exceeding 100 million doses.

Figure VIII. Most heavily manufactured psychotropic substances worldwide, based on total S-DDD, 2023



146. The primary countries manufacturing psychotropic substances generally remained the same as in previous years. In terms of gross weight, India was the largest manufacturer in 2023, as it is a primary manufacturer of several barbiturates and benzodiazepines. China was the second largest manufacturer, mostly owing to its role as a major manufacturer of several barbiturates. The United States, Italy and Germany round out the top five manufacturers by gross weight. In terms of S-DDD, the top five countries were the same, but with Italy ranking second and China fourth. Notably, Switzerland, which historically reported much higher quantities of manufacture of psychotropic substances (more than 80 tons in 2018) has reported far less the past few years (7.4 tons in 2023), mostly owing to the country ceasing manufacture of GHB and *N*-benzylpiperazine (BZP).

147. With regard to international trade, six benzodiazepines were among the most widely traded psychotropic substances in 2023 (see table 1). Phenobarbital was the most widely traded barbiturate under international control, while methylphenidate was the most widely traded stimulant. Zolpidem was the most traded non-benzodiazepine non-barbiturate sedative. The number of countries reporting imports of buprenorphine continued to rise compared with previous years, although the volume of trade in the substance was lower in 2023 than in 2022.

148. As in previous years, diazepam was the most widely imported internationally controlled psychotropic substance in 2023, with 159 countries and territories reporting imports of the substance totalling 36.7 tons, the lowest amount since 2017. Similarly, total imports for midazolam, phenobarbital and clonazepam in 2023 were 10 to 30 per cent lower than in 2022. Imports of alprazolam rose by nearly 50 per cent in 2023 compared with 2022. The other most widely traded substances did not see significant changes in the volumes imported in 2023 compared with 2022.

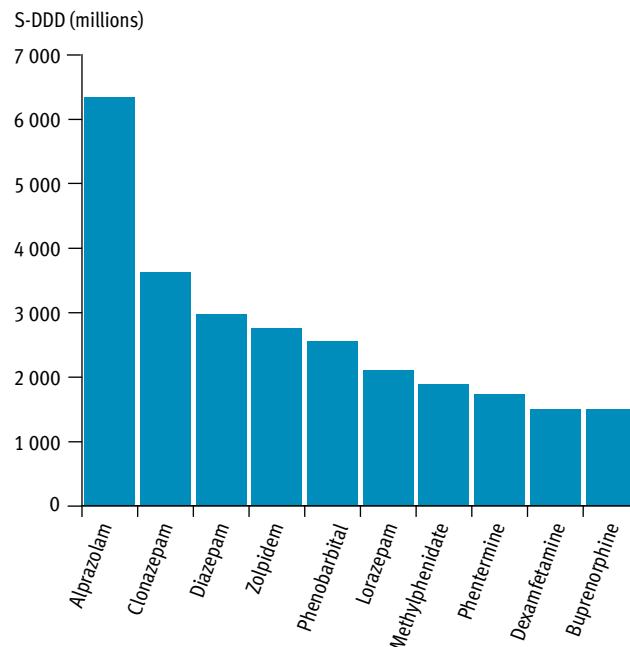
149. A total of 111 countries and territories (63 per cent of those that submitted their annual statistics) provided data regarding the consumption of at least one psychotropic substance in 2023, up from 100 countries and territories in 2022. Reporting rates at the regional level varied widely: data on consumption in 2023 were provided by 20 countries and territories in Africa (35 per cent of the total number of countries and territories in

Table 1. Most widely traded internationally controlled psychotropic substances, 2023

<i>Substance</i>	<i>Total imports (kg)</i>	<i>Number of importing countries and territories</i>
Diazepam	36 698.71	159
Midazolam	8 306.50	153
Phenobarbital	195 853.89	152
Clonazepam	10 662.11	139
Alprazolam	14 532.41	134
Lorazepam	8 342.07	121
Methylphenidate	59 870.74	116
Zolpidem	34 099.47	113
Bromazepam	15 624.58	108
Buprenorphine	9 880.66	95

the region), 25 countries and territories in the Americas (56 per cent), 22 countries and territories in Asia (46 per cent), 35 countries and territories in Europe (81 per cent) and 9 countries and territories in Oceania (41 per cent).

150. As the S-DDD values established for psychotropic substances can vary greatly between different substances, an analysis of consumption data by gross weight would not accurately reflect global consumption trends. Consumption data expressed in total S-DDD better reflect the consumption patterns in reporting countries and lend themselves better to analysis. Figure IX presents the most heavily consumed psychotropic substances worldwide in 2023 in terms of total doses (S-DDD).

Figure IX. Most heavily consumed psychotropic substances worldwide, based on total S-DDD, 2023

151. For 2023, alprazolam was the most heavily consumed substance, at over 6.3 billion S-DDD worldwide, nearly 1.5 billion more than in 2022. Consumption of clonazepam more than doubled, from 1.6 billion S-DDD in 2022 to 3.6 billion S-DDD in 2023. Consumption of diazepam also increased, by approximately 1 billion S-DDD, to nearly 3 billion S-DDD, in 2023. The other most consumed substances in 2023 all saw consumption increases ranging from 5 to 50 per cent. Notably, global consumption of estazolam declined sharply, dropping from more than 3.1 billion S-DDD in 2022 to 1.2 billion S-DDD in 2023.

2. Supply of and demand for opiate raw materials

152. In 2023, there was an overall decrease of 27 per cent in the total harvested area of all varieties of opium poppy for the extraction of alkaloids, the total area decreasing from 51,693 ha in 2022 to 37,447 ha in 2023. In terms of opium poppy varieties, compared with 2022, there was a decrease of approximately 27 per cent in the total area cultivated with opium poppy rich in morphine. The area cultivated with opium poppy rich in thebaine decreased by 7 per cent; the area cultivated with opium poppy rich in codeine decreased by 38 per cent; and the area cultivated with opium poppy rich in oripavine decreased by nearly 68 per cent.

153. As in previous years, the actual production of opiate raw materials in 2024 and 2025 may differ from the projections, depending on the weather and other factors. In the current reporting period, the projections have been affected by missing or incomplete statistics or projections from countries. Overall, there was a 47 per cent decrease in the production of raw materials rich in morphine and a 46 per cent increase in the production of raw materials rich in thebaine in 2023. It is expected that the production both of raw materials rich in morphine and of raw materials rich in thebaine will double in 2024 and continue to increase significantly in 2025, with virtually all the major producers significantly increasing their production. Therefore, there is likely to be no shortage of opiate raw materials in the coming years.

154. Global demand for opiate raw materials rich in morphine (in particular opium) had been decreasing since 2014 but increased sharply from 225 tons in morphine equivalent in 2021 to 305 tons in 2022. In 2023, global demand increased further, to 419 tons, but is expected to decrease to 359 tons in 2024 and stay at virtually the same level (360 tons) in 2025.

155. Similar to the global demand for opiate raw materials rich in morphine, global demand by manufacturers for opiate raw materials rich in thebaine followed a decreasing trend beginning in 2016, with the exception of 2019, when it rose to 164 tons, the highest level in recent years. It has since remained at notably lower levels, amounting to 122 tons in 2021, 105 tons in 2022 and 133 tons in 2023. Global demand for opiate raw materials rich in thebaine is expected to amount to 141 tons in 2024 and 137 tons in 2025.

156. The global supply of opiate raw materials rich in morphine (stocks and production) is expected to continue to be fully sufficient to cover global demand for more than one year.

157. It is estimated that in 2024 and 2025 the global supply of opiate raw materials rich in thebaine (stocks and production) will be more than sufficient to cover the annual global demand.

158. Although the supply of opiate raw materials rich in morphine and thebaine is considered to be sufficient to cover global demand, in view of the statistical data and estimates submitted by countries, the Board highlights that there are significant disparities between countries in the availability of narcotic drugs, as many countries do not accurately estimate their medical need for opiate analgesics or have limited access to them. **Consequently, and in line with the provisions and objectives of the 1961 Convention as amended, the Board reminds Governments of the importance of ensuring sufficient availability at the global level and urges opioid-manufacturing countries to allocate an increasing amount of morphine for utilization in the production of oral morphine preparations to be used for the treatment of pain, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.**

C. Overall treaty compliance

1. New developments with regard to overall treaty compliance in selected countries

159. The international drug control conventions cover a range of areas, including the regulation of the legal production and manufacturing of and trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals. The conventions also address the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and require States to implement laws and policies to combat drug trafficking, prevent non-medical drug use and support the early identification, treatment, education and social reintegration of people affected by drug use.

160. In fulfilling their obligations under these conventions, States have considerable flexibility in choosing the policy, legislative and administrative measures that best suit their unique circumstances and priorities. However,

certain core legal principles must be upheld, such as restricting the use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to medical and scientific purposes only, ensuring respect for human rights and human dignity, providing adequate controlled substances to meet legitimate medical needs and maintaining proportionality in drug-related criminal justice policies.

161. The conventions outline the responsibilities and functions of the Board. Pursuant to article 9, paragraph 4, of the 1961 Convention as amended, the Board is tasked with endeavouring to limit the cultivation, production, manufacture and use of drugs to the quantities needed for medical and scientific purposes, ensure their availability for those purposes and prevent the illegal cultivation, production, manufacture, trafficking and use of drugs. In addition, article 9, paragraph 5, of the same Convention specifies that the Board's actions should be consistent with the intent to promote cooperation between Governments and the Board, fostering ongoing dialogue that supports and facilitates effective national efforts to achieve the Convention's goals.

162. Although the language of the conventions differs slightly, and the 1988 Convention is somewhat more restrictive, all three drug control conventions clearly assign the Board a role in monitoring treaty compliance. The Board's monitoring responsibilities are detailed in article 14 of the 1961 Convention as amended, article 19 of the 1971 Convention and article 22 of the 1988 Convention.

163. As the body responsible for monitoring treaty compliance, the Board reviews the progress made by States in implementing the international drug control conventions with the aim of promoting ongoing dialogue and assisting with effective national actions to achieve the conventions' objectives.

164. The Board's evaluation of compliance by States is informed by a process of continuous communication and information exchange with Governments, including through correspondence, meetings, country missions, participation in INCB initiatives and the submission of statistical reports.

165. The following chapter presents a selection of the Board's assessments of the drug control situation in selected countries.

(a) Australia

166. During the period under review, the Board continued to monitor developments in Australia affecting drug control at the national and state/territorial levels.

167. The Board maintains an excellent working relationship with the Australian authorities and acknowledges the country's active participation in INCB programmes and activities, as well as its capacity-building and outreach activities in the Oceania region.

168. At the same time, the Board has noted with concern proposed changes in New South Wales to laws affecting the legal status of cannabis for non-medical purposes that would legalize the home cultivation of up to six plants for personal use, the gifting of cannabis and the possession of up to 50 grams of the drug.

169. The Board has communicated to the Government of Australia that this measure is inconsistent with the country's international legal obligations as a State party to the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1988 Convention.

170. The Board will continue its dialogue with the Government of Australia and counts on the country's continued support and cooperation.

(b) Canada

171. In monitoring the drug control situation in Canada, the Board has noted with concern the heavy toll that the opioid crisis in the country continues to take on its population, and acknowledges the significant efforts being deployed by the federal, provincial and territorial governments, as well as the country's participation in multilateral efforts, to address the situation.

172. The Board has also taken note of the request by the Province of British Columbia to amend its exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act of Canada, which had decriminalized the use and possession of

drugs in quantities below an established threshold, in order to recriminalize the consumption of drugs in public places and limit use to private residences or other designated areas.

173. A continued issue of concern for the Board has been the existence in Canada of a legal framework for the production, retail distribution and consumption of cannabis for non-medical purposes, contrary to the country's legal obligations under the international drug control conventions that restrict legal activities involving controlled substances to medical and scientific purposes.

174. Following the submission to Parliament by Health Canada of the final report of the legislative review of the Cannabis Act in March 2024, which was prepared by a panel of experts, the Board notes with concern the report's findings that the rate of cannabis use among young people, although remaining stable since legalization, continues to be among the highest in the world and that consumer patterns seem to be shifting towards higher-potency cannabis.

175. The Board will continue its constructive dialogue with the Government of Canada on matters related to drug control and counts on the country's continued cooperation and ongoing support for and participation in INCB initiatives.

(c) Germany

176. During the reporting period, the Board continued to follow drug control developments in Germany and engage with the Government on various aspects of the implementation of the international drug control conventions, including matters related to the legalization of cannabis for non-medical use.

177. The Board has noted the staggered entry into force in April and July 2024 of the law on the controlled handling of cannabis and changes to other regulations (Cannabis Act).

178. The Cannabis Act has legalized the private cultivation by adults of cannabis for their own consumption for non-medical purposes, as well as the communal, non-commercial cultivation of cannabis in "cultivation associations". This measure is recorded in the Government's key points paper of 12 April 2023 for a two-pillar model for the controlled distribution of non-medical cannabis to adults in Germany. Under pillar 1, the Government would allow the private cultivation by adults of cannabis for their own consumption, as well as the communal, non-commercial cultivation of cannabis in "cultivation associations". Pillar 2 would provide for regional model projects with commercial supply chains.

179. With respect to cannabis use by drivers, the Federal Ministry for Digital Affairs and Transport tested and determined limit values for THC in the blood. To that end, an interdisciplinary working group consisting of experts from the fields of medicine, law and transport was set up in December 2023 with the aim of determining a THC limit value. The interdisciplinary working group proposed a legal limit of 3.5 ng/ml of THC in blood serum.

180. In its interactions with the Government of Germany, the Board has reiterated that measures to permit the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes are inconsistent with the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1988 Convention.

181. The Board will continue to monitor changes in the drug control policies of Germany and to engage in constructive dialogue with the Government on matters concerning the implementation of the drug control conventions.

(d) Luxembourg

182. The Board continued to follow the developments regarding drug control in Luxembourg and engage in dialogue with the Government on matters related to compliance with the international drug control treaties, including developments concerning non-medical use of cannabis in the country.

183. The Cannabis Act was adopted on 10 July 2023 and legalized the home cultivation of up to four cannabis plants per household for non-medical use under certain conditions. Consequently, personal consumption in the private sphere was also authorized. The Act further provides for the reduction of criminal penalties for the possession of small quantities of cannabis in public spaces, and a simplified criminal procedure has been introduced

for some forms of behaviour that remain prohibited, including the consumption, possession, transport and acquisition in public of cannabis.

184. The adoption of the Act represents the first stage of the planned “recreational cannabis” project, based on the Government’s Coalition Agreement 2018–2023. The second stage would have been to create a national production and supply chain under government control, but the Government appears to have no intention of pursuing that stage, reflecting the complexities arising from the process of fully fledged legalization.

185. The Board notes that measures to authorize the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes are inconsistent with the commitments of the State parties under the international drug control treaties.

186. Within its mandate, the Board will continue to closely monitor the evolving drug control framework in Luxembourg and engage in dialogue with the Government, particularly in relation to the legislative developments on cannabis use.

(e) Myanmar

187. During the period under review, the Board continued to closely monitor the ongoing developments in Myanmar.

188. The Board notes with serious concern that Myanmar has now become the world’s largest opium producer, as the economic and political crisis following the 2021 coup and widening conflict between the military and armed groups continue to drive farmers towards illicit opium poppy production.

189. The country’s opium output has surpassed that of Afghanistan, where the de facto authorities imposed a ban on its production in April 2023, leading to a 95 per cent drop in cultivation. According to UNODC, the area under opium cultivation in Myanmar in 2023 was estimated to be 47,100 ha, up from 40,100 ha the previous year, while the resulting yield was estimated to be 1,080 tons, 36 per cent higher than the estimate for 2022.

190. The situation in Myanmar has been exacerbated by continued political upheaval and turmoil brought about by armed conflict.

191. In March 2024, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar issued a press release calling for the international community to take action on human rights abuses in the country. He cited the fact that the country’s military junta, driven by significant battlefield losses and widespread citizen opposition, has escalated attacks on civilians.

192. Particularly hard hit are members of the Rohingya community, who are now being subjected to an ongoing bombardment by junta forces.

193. The Special Rapporteur noted that these attacks and other systematic human rights violations against the Rohingya are continuing unabated. He expressed concern over the thousands of refugees who continue to flee into neighbouring countries and reported that international criminal networks have found safe haven in areas controlled by the junta and its allies.

194. The Board will continue to monitor the developments in Myanmar and work with the international community, within its mandate, to identify solutions to the drug-related challenges in Myanmar taking into account the complex realities in the country.

(f) Netherlands (Kingdom of the)

195. The Board continues its dialogue with the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on matters of treaty compliance, in particular those related to control of cannabis in the country.

196. The Board has continued to closely monitor developments regarding the implementation of the “controlled cannabis supply chain experiment” initiated by the Government in 2020, with the adoption of the Controlled Cannabis Supply Chain Experiment Act (Experiment Act), together with the accompanying order in council and ministerial regulations. Under the experiment, the Government authorized the cultivation and wholesale supply of cannabis for non-medical purposes to “coffee shops” in up to 10 municipalities for a trial period of four years, which would be followed by an evaluation of the effects on public health and public order.

197. During the reporting period, the Board was informed that the start-up phase of the experiment had been launched in Breda and Tilburg in December 2023 and would last approximately six months. The Government reported that this period would allow it to gain experience on a small scale with a controlled supply chain and all the processes that encompassed, including the secure transport and sale of cannabis, while giving other growers and municipalities time to complete their preparations to initiate the experiment.

198. The Board wishes to reiterate that the Controlled Cannabis Supply Chain Experiment Act that entered into force on 1 July 2020 is inconsistent with the provisions of the international drug control conventions, which reserve the use of controlled substances to medical and scientific purposes.

199. The Board also continued to monitor developments relating to amendments to the country's Opium Act to prohibit certain categories of new psychoactive substances. The Board was informed that through the bill containing the amendments, a new list would be added to the Opium Act (List I A) consisting of groups of substances rather than individual ones. The bill was adopted by the House of Representatives on 16 January 2024 and has been sent to the Senate for adoption.

200. The Board will continue to closely monitor drug control developments in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, including with regard to control of cannabis in the country, and engage in dialogue with the Government to ensure treaty compliance.

(g) Philippines

201. The Board welcomes steps taken by the Government to advance accountability for human rights violations and acknowledges the continued work of the United Nations Joint Programme on Human Rights as an important step towards strengthening the rule of law and ending human rights violations, including in the name of drug control.

202. INCB notes the Government's positive engagement in the Joint Programme and its stated commitment to undertaking drug policy reform under a human rights-based approach emphasizing community-based treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration, as expressed at the first Philippine Drug Policy and Law Reform Summit, held in April 2024.

203. The Board looks forward to strengthening its collaboration with the Government of the Philippines and expresses its hope that the INCB mission to the Philippines that the Board has been requesting since 2017 will finally be undertaken once the United Nations funding situation allows.

(h) South Africa

204. The Board continued to engage in dialogue with the Government of South Africa on the country's drug control policies in implementation of the international drug control treaties, in particular the legislative and policy developments pertaining to control of cannabis in the country.

205. In September 2018, the Constitutional Court of South Africa ruled that the use of cannabis was legal for both personal and medical use. In its judgment, the Constitutional Court confirmed an order of constitutional invalidity made by the High Court of South Africa, Western Cape Division, Cape Town, which declared legislation criminalizing the use, possession, purchase and cultivation of cannabis by an adult person in a private dwelling for his or her consumption to be inconsistent with the "right to privacy" guaranteed by section 14 of the Constitution.

206. In May 2024, the President of South Africa assented to the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill that had been adopted by both chambers of the Parliament in February 2024 and that would give effect to the aforementioned Constitutional Court judgment. That judgment had been suspended for 24 months to allow the Parliament to amend the legislation to address the provisions that were deemed unconstitutional. The new law regulates the use and possession of cannabis and the cultivation of cannabis plants by adults for personal use.

207. In March 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers of South Africa held a meeting in which it reviewed progress made in the development of the cannabis and hemp sector and the National Cannabis Master Plan as part of the Government's strategy to industrialize the cannabis sector. The aim of the Master Plan is to provide a framework for the establishment, growth and development of the cannabis and hemp industry in South Africa with a view

to contributing to economic growth, poverty alleviation and job creation. The Agricultural Research Council has continued to develop hemp varieties with the support of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development with the aim of making the seeds available for the 2025 planting season.

208. With regard to the medical use of cannabis, the Board wishes to draw the attention of States parties to the requirements of the international drug control treaties pertaining to control of cannabis for medical purposes, including articles 23 and 28 (establishing national agencies in order to control cultivation and manage the resulting crops, and adopting measures to prevent the misuse of and illicit traffic in cannabis leaves), article 31 (requiring export/import authorizations), and articles 1, 2, 12, 13, 19 and 20 (mandatory reporting to the Board) of the 1961 Convention as amended.

(i) Thailand

209. During the reporting period, the Board continued to closely follow drug developments in Thailand and engage with the Government on matters related to treaty compliance, including the control status of cannabis in the country.

210. In July 2024, the Drug Control Committee of the Ministry of Health approved a proposal that would reserve the use of cannabis to medical and research purposes. The Government plans legislative adoption and full implementation of this change by the end of 2024.

211. This was in response to certain loopholes for the non-medical use of cannabis that were created following legislative changes that were introduced in January 2022 and came into effect in June of the same year, whereby the cannabis plant was removed from the list of controlled narcotic drugs under the Narcotics Code. As a result, Thailand witnessed a rapid expansion in its cannabis industry, with some 20,000 registered dispensaries for non-medical cannabis having opened since 2022.

212. The Board will continue to closely monitor the evolving drug control framework in Thailand and engage in dialogue with the new Government to facilitate compliance with the international drug control treaties.

(j) United States

213. In its review of drug-related developments in the United States, the Board has noted with grave concern the continued impact of the synthetic opioid crisis on the public health situation in the country and the unprecedented resources being deployed by the Government to address it, including \$167.2 billion over the past four years.

214. The Board notes that this funding has been accompanied by a series of legislative, regulatory and policy changes to expand access to treatment, facilitate access to overdose reversal medication and counter drug trafficking. The United States has also reinforced its leadership role in the global fight against synthetic opioids by launching the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, bringing together more than 70 countries and international organizations to prevent illicit drug manufacturing, identify emerging threats, interdict drug trafficking and reduce both the supply of and demand for deadly drugs.

215. INCB has also noted the signing into law by the Governor of the State of Oregon of legislation recriminalizing possession of small quantities of drugs for personal use and providing for pre-arrest deflections of persons from the criminal justice system into drug treatment programmes. The Board views this approach as being consistent with the provisions of the international drug control conventions, which provide States with the possibility of applying alternatives to conviction or punishment for drug offences of a minor nature, particularly those committed by people who use drugs.

216. The Board has further noted the proposal to reschedule cannabis from Schedule I to Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act as a means of acknowledging possible medical usages of the drug and removing legal obstacles to medical research.

217. Although control of cannabis under federal law is consistent with the international drug control conventions, the Board is concerned about the incompatibility of legal frameworks in place in several states that allow the production, retail distribution and use of cannabis for non-medical purposes despite the obligation imposed upon States parties to limit such activities to medical and scientific purposes.

218. The Board values its constructive and productive relationship with the Government of the United States, as well as the country's active support for and participation in INCB activities, and will continue to engage with the Government on the implementation of its international obligations under the three drug control conventions.

2. Country missions

219. Under normal circumstances, INCB undertakes several country missions each year, viewing these as a crucial method for assessing how States are fulfilling their obligations under the international drug control conventions.

220. During these missions, the Board engages directly with various national stakeholders, including law-makers, policymakers, regulatory authorities, customs and law enforcement officials, medical professionals, individuals involved in prevention and treatment efforts and civil society representatives. These interactions allow the Board to gain a comprehensive understanding of the country's drug control systems, identify areas in which improvements are required and recognize best practices. The discussions with national stakeholders are conducted confidentially to encourage open and honest dialogue, while meetings with civil society groups are held privately, without government representatives present.

221. On the basis of the information gathered during these missions, the Board formulates a series of recommendations aimed at enhancing compliance with the international drug control conventions. These recommendations are communicated confidentially to the Governments concerned for consideration and implementation.

222. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Board had to suspend its country missions until the global health situation improved. Although the missions briefly resumed in late 2022 and 2023, they were once again halted in 2024 because of broader United Nations budget constraints. As a result, only the mission to Uruguay was undertaken during the period under review. The Board continues to view country missions as an essential tool for maintaining dialogue with States and hopes to resume them as soon as possible.

Uruguay

223. In late October 2023, the Board undertook a mission to Uruguay to examine drug policy developments and the status of implementation of the three international drug control conventions, to which the country is a State party.

224. The INCB delegation engaged in consultations with various drug control stakeholders, including senior officials from several ministries and government bodies, and held meetings with non-governmental organizations working in the field of substance use.

225. An ongoing matter of concern for the Board since its last mission to Uruguay in 2015 has been the continued operation of a legal framework for the licit sale of cannabis for non-medical use, a measure that Uruguay was the first in the world to adopt at the national level.

226. While maintaining that this measure is inconsistent with the provisions of the international drug control conventions, the Board has continued its dialogue with the Government of Uruguay.

3. Evaluation of the implementation by Governments of recommendations made by the Board following its country missions

227. Every year, the Board follows up on developments in countries that hosted INCB missions three years earlier and requests the Governments of those countries to apprise it of any legislative or policy actions taken to implement the Board's post-mission recommendations, as well as any other developments that have occurred in the country since the mission was carried out.

228. In the light of the fact that missions were suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic, no missions were undertaken in 2020.

D. Action taken by the Board to ensure the implementation of the international drug control treaties

1. Action taken by the Board pursuant to article 14 of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol and article 19 of the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971

229. When the Board has objective reasons to believe that the aims of the international drug control treaties are being seriously endangered by the failure of a State party to comply with its legal obligations contained therein, or there is a serious situation requiring cooperative action at the international level, the Board may decide to engage in formal dialogue with the State in question with a view to fostering compliance with the treaties. This action is provided for in articles 14 and 14 bis of the 1961 Convention as amended, article 19 of the 1971 Convention and article 22 of the 1988 Convention.

230. Since its establishment, INCB has invoked these compliance-related provisions with respect to a number of States in order to initiate formal consultations with them with the aim of examining potential issues of non-compliance through active dialogue, requests for additional information and requests for remedial actions to be taken, as deemed appropriate.

231. Pursuant to the relevant provisions of the treaties, the name of the State concerned is not publicly disclosed, unless the Board decides to bring the situation to the attention of the parties, the Economic and Social Council or the Commission on Narcotic Drugs following its consultations with the Government in question or if that Government consents to the invocation of the provisions being publicly disclosed, as was the case with Afghanistan.

2. Consultation with the Government of Afghanistan pursuant to article 14 and article 14 bis of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs as amended by the 1972 Protocol

232. In May 2000, the Board decided to invoke article 14 of the 1961 Convention as amended with respect to Afghanistan, because it determined that the country had become the world's largest illicit producer of opium, which seriously endangered the aims of that Convention. Under paragraph 1 (a) of article 14, the Board proposed the opening of consultations to the authorities of Afghanistan.

233. Those consultations revealed the existence of a serious drug control situation in Afghanistan that called for cooperative action with the Afghan authorities and the support and cooperation of the international community. Therefore, the Board decided to call the attention of the parties, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to the situation in Afghanistan through its annual report, under the provisions of article 14, paragraph 1 (d), of the 1961 Convention as amended.

234. In May 2018, with the agreement of the Government of Afghanistan, the Board decided to invoke article 14 bis of the 1961 Convention as amended in order to call upon the competent United Nations organs and specialized agencies to provide technical and financial assistance to the Government in support of its efforts to carry out its obligations under the Convention.

235. The Board continued to engage with Afghanistan and the international community pursuant to article 14 of the 1961 Convention as amended following the transition to a civilian Government in 2001 until its overthrow by the Taliban in August 2021.

236. There has been no direct engagement between the Board and the de facto authorities of Afghanistan in the period under review. At the same time, in its interactions with its partners, including UNAMA, UNODC, WHO, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Economic and Social Council, the Board has continued to underscore the need to support the Afghan people, including through the provision of alternative livelihoods and the promotion of development, peace and reconciliation.

Situation in Afghanistan and United Nations action

237. Afghanistan has continued to face unprecedented levels of humanitarian needs, with over two thirds of its population requiring assistance. The situation has been further exacerbated by large-scale earthquakes in the western region of the country, as well as the forced return of many undocumented Afghans from Pakistan. There is also uncertainty in the economic outlook, with nearly half of the country's population living in poverty and women and children particularly affected.

238. Even though overall security has improved since the Taliban seized power, security incidents linked to armed attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) have continued. The number of conflict-related security incidents increased during the reporting period compared with the same period in 2022–2023, which is largely attributed to a rise in the number of interventions related to drug control, the majority of which were arrests of small-scale drug traffickers. According to UNAMA, consistent efforts are being undertaken by the de facto authorities to disrupt methamphetamine manufacture in the western region and prevent the drug from being trafficked into neighbouring countries through arrests in the eastern and south-eastern regions.

239. The de facto authorities have continued to consolidate their administration in political, security and economic areas and have managed internal disagreements over key governance issues and community grievances. However, there has been no progress towards greater inclusivity in institutions and decision-making processes, even though the authorities have continued their outreach efforts towards the population at the subnational and national levels. In November 2023, the first official de facto Cabinet meeting was held in Kandahar Province, chaired by the Taliban leader. At the meeting, several decisions were made about appointments and policy matters. The Cabinet commissioned the de facto Deputy Prime Minister to draft a document outlining the general principles of the de facto authorities' domestic and foreign policy approach.

240. The period under review has borne witness to the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in Afghanistan. The de facto authorities have continued to curtail women's rights in all spheres of public life, including by placing severe restrictions on women's access to education and employment. Restrictions imposed on Afghan female personnel working for the United Nations have remained in place.

241. UNAMA has continued its dialogue with the de facto authorities on allegations of human rights abuses. In December 2023, UNAMA published a report in which it found that there were no clear laws and policies to prevent and prohibit gender-based violence against women and girls in Afghanistan, with victims of such violence usually being referred to traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. Journalists and civil society activists continue to face significant risks in conducting their activities. The de facto Office of Prison Administration faces the problem of prison overcrowding, with the prison population reaching more than 19,000 detainees in January 2024.

242. On 18 and 19 February 2024, the Secretary-General convened a second meeting of special envoys on Afghanistan in Doha to discuss ways to increase international engagement in a more coherent, coordinated and structured manner, including through consideration of the recommendations of the independent assessment on Afghanistan mandated by the Security Council in its resolution 2679 (2023). Despite the decision by the de facto authorities not to attend, the meeting stressed that the needs of the Afghan people should remain high on the international agenda and established the group of special envoys as a standing mechanism for the international community that should work towards the benchmarks articulated in Security Council resolution 2721 (2023) to promote peace within Afghanistan and with its neighbours.

243. On 2 February 2024, the de facto Deputy Minister of Interior for Counter-Narcotics declared that, in the past two years, more than 2,000 counter-narcotics operations had been conducted, 1,100 drug production factories destroyed and over 13,000 individuals arrested in the country on charges of illicit drug production, sale and trafficking.

244. According to the UNODC Afghanistan opium survey for 2024, the ongoing enforcement of the Decree on the Prohibition of Poppy Cultivation and All Types of Narcotics has resulted in levels of opium poppy cultivation that continue to be far below 2022 levels. In 2024, the area under cultivation was estimated at 12,800 ha, 19 per cent larger than in 2023, at 10,800 ha. In 2022, the area under cultivation was reported to be 232,000 ha. UNODC explained in the survey that dry opium prices had stabilized in the first half of 2024 to around \$730 per kilogram, which is several times higher than the pre-ban average of \$100 per kilogram.

245. UNODC continued to implement alternative development programmes during the reporting period. The programmes covered 3,791 vulnerable households, including 564 female-headed households, providing technical assistance with improved agricultural practices and training on vocational skills and post-harvest management and marketing. This led to the generation by farmers of income from dairy products and pistachio nurseries.

3. Supporting Governments' compliance with the treaties

(a) INCB Learning

246. INCB Learning is the Board's initiative to enhance the ability of Governments to estimate and assess their requirements for internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes in compliance with the three international drug control conventions. Since its launch in 2016, the programme has been supporting Member States and their competent national authorities in implementing the recommendations contained in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in 2016, and the reports of the Board for 2015, 2018 and 2022 on the availability of internationally controlled substances.

247. The objective of INCB Learning is to ensure the adequate availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances required for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their misuse and diversion into illicit channels. The submission to the Board of timely and accurate national reports of estimated requirements and statistical data for controlled substances and estimates of annual legitimate requirements for precursors is essential to achieving this objective.

248. INCB Learning supports Member States in fully implementing and complying with the international drug control conventions through training and awareness-raising. Capacity-building activities include regional training seminars, availability workshops, e-modules, bilateral consultations and, since mid-2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, online training sessions.

249. An INCB Learning subregional in-person training seminar and an awareness-raising availability workshop for officials from the competent national authorities of Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Cuba, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) were held in Caracas from 4 to 8 December 2023. Over five days, 40 officials participated in 16 training sessions, which were dedicated to expanding knowledge of the provisions of the international drug control treaties and further strengthening capacity for improved treaty implementation. A one-day workshop on improving the availability of internationally controlled substances while preventing their diversion was held on 4 December, with the participation of UNODC and civil society representatives.

250. Both in-person and virtual INCB Learning seminars are evaluated anonymously by participants. In past years, the activities have received high ratings, and evaluations have consistently shown that the content meets participants' expectations, the sessions are highly relevant and the learning materials are of a high quality.

251. E-modules continue to be a valuable tool for closing knowledge gaps. Five e-modules have been developed by INCB Learning to support Governments in their implementation of the international drug control treaties. Available in English, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as Portuguese, the five e-modules offer interactive, self-paced training. The e-modules cover the following thematic areas: (a) the system of estimates of annual legitimate medical and scientific requirements for narcotic drugs; (b) the system of assessments of annual legitimate medical and scientific requirements for psychotropic substances; (c) the system of estimates of annual legitimate requirements for imports of precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants; (d) the international drug control framework and the role of INCB; and (e) ensuring adequate availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

252. Officials from competent national authorities continue to use the INCB Learning e-modules, and as at 1 November 2024, 1,502 officials from 154 countries and territories had enrolled in them. Successful completion of the e-modules is acknowledged with a digital certificate. Participants come from all regions of the world and their countries are home to 95 per cent of the world's population. **The Board encourages Governments to continue to register officials of their competent national authorities for the modules and to provide feedback on the content of existing e-modules and suggestions for areas in which the development of further training is needed.**

253. In its capacity-building activities, INCB Learning works with key partner organizations such as the African Union Commission, CICAD, UNODC and WHO, as well as with civil society representatives, where relevant and appropriate.

254. To further assist competent national authorities in their duties, all training materials have been consolidated and are available on a dedicated page of the INCB Learning website. The page provides links to the text of the international drug control treaties in all six official languages and Portuguese, training materials, guidelines, tools and forms that support reporting to INCB. In addition, the compendium of frequently asked questions provides information on compliance with the provisions of the three international drug control conventions and on the regulatory control and monitoring of the licit trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals. Information on INCB Learning is available on the INCB website, and the Board invites national drug control officials interested in INCB Learning activities and learning tools to subscribe to the newsletter by sending an email to incb.learning@un.org.

255. The Board is grateful for the contributions to INCB Learning made by the Governments of Australia, Belgium, France, the Russian Federation, Thailand and the United States and encourages Governments to consider actively supporting INCB Learning by participating in its activities and providing the resources required to ensure the programme's continuation and expansion.

(b) International Import and Export Authorization System

256. I2ES is an Internet-based electronic system developed by UNODC with financial and technical support from Member States and administered by the Board to allow for rapid paperless trade in internationally controlled substances. Launched in 2015 pursuant to numerous Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolutions, in particular resolutions 55/6 and 56/7, I2ES allows for the secure issuance and exchange of import and export authorizations between countries, reducing the processing time for authorizations and the risk of diversions from forged authorizations. The system is compliant with the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention, and its importance was recognized in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in 2016. I2ES is the only system approved by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs for the issuance and exchange of import and export authorizations pursuant to the provisions of the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention.

257. In the 12-month period ending on 1 November 2023, three Governments registered to use I2ES, bringing the total to 78 Governments that have an active administrator account. The number of Governments actively using I2ES is slowly growing, and the frequency with which Governments use the platform is increasing. During the 12-month period ending on 1 November 2024, authorities from 18 countries uploaded a total of 3,302 import authorizations and 746 export authorizations.

258. Updates to I2ES and PEN Online will be provided in the context of the development of the next-generation international drug control system, the INCB initiative to update and expand the functionalities of the existing database, the International Drug Control System (IDS). IDS contains data that are provided by Governments pursuant to the provisions of the international drug control treaties and other international obligations enshrined in resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, as well as information that is provided voluntarily.

259. The Board wishes to emphasize to Member States the need for continual support, particularly in the form of extrabudgetary resources, to ensure the operation and expand the functionality of I2ES in the context of the Board's information technology initiative, as well as the need to provide training and support to assist countries in their efforts to adopt and implement the system.

(c) Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances Programme

260. Leveraging the Project Ion and OPIOIDS project law and regulatory enforcement focal point networks, the Board coordinated Operation Zodiac, which targeted non-medical benzodiazepines, including those diverted from the legitimate pharmaceutical industry and those that were substandard, falsified or otherwise illicitly manufactured, as well as novel new benzodiazepines with no known legitimate uses. The operation resulted

in 465 seizures over a four-week period, amounting to 286,000 tablets, as well as 30 kg and 300 ml of seized benzodiazepines.

261. The first subregional special operation, known as Operation African Star, targeting shipments of falsified, substandard and other illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, was successfully coordinated from 9 to 15 June in East Africa. Led by the Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Kenya and the National Drug Authority of Uganda, with support from the GRIDS Programme, the international operation synchronized actions by over 20 law enforcement and regulatory agencies and international partners to detect and disrupt the illicit trade in pharmaceutical preparations, health products and equipment transported by postal and air cargo services. Consignments comprising 92 unauthorized, falsified, substandard or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals totalling over 115,000 units and 1.15 kg were seized during the four-day operation.

262. The GRIDS Programme focal point network forms the infrastructure that enables the rapid exchange of information and alerts and the development of intelligence and facilitates operational action to assist in investigations and the dismantling of organized criminal groups trafficking in non-scheduled dangerous substances. As at 1 November 2024, there were 4,402 Project Ion focal points representing 787 agencies from 201 Governments and 25 international organizations, and 4,383 OPIOIDS project focal points representing 777 agencies from 199 Governments and 25 international organizations.

263. As a result of the expanding focal point network, the number of real-time incidents communicated through IONICS has consistently grown over the years, surpassing 100,000 as of 2024. Consequently, Governments have been able to carry out investigations and analyses that have in turn led to seizures of dangerous substances, arrests of traffickers, prosecutions and disruptions of international trafficking networks.

264. A key pillar of the GRIDS Programme is its innovative approach to public-private partnerships, supporting Governments in promoting voluntary collaboration with companies to prevent traffickers from exploiting legitimate services. This work focuses on four critical areas: manufacture, marketing, movement and monetization. In the 12-month period ending on 1 November 2024, expert group meetings and related events were convened, bringing together top global private sector partners from various relevant industries, including e-commerce platforms, social media companies, chemical and drug manufacturers and private postal and courier services. These efforts led to tangible results, with INCB identifying and removing a significant number of vendors of dangerous synthetic opioids from e-commerce platforms, thus reducing the availability of fentanyl and similar harmful substances through law and regulatory enforcement focal points.

265. The President of INCB, Jallal Toufiq, opened the “Tech against trafficking” event in Vienna in March 2024. This four-day global event brought together over 70 officers, experts and officials from Member States, international organizations and private sector leaders to address the role of technology in combating drug trafficking online. The event was focused on challenges related to synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids, with discussions centred on enhancing public-private cooperation, information-sharing and the development of innovative solutions to tackle these issues.

266. From 13 to 15 February 2024, a regional workshop on the prevention and interdiction of synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances through sea freight was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Organized by the GRIDS Programme, the Gulf Cooperation Council Criminal Information Centre to Combat Drugs and the Dubai Police, the workshop brought together 115 participants from 21 countries around the globe.

267. From 13 to 16 February 2024, the first global workshop on advanced targeting was held under the GRIDS Programme in Vienna. This four-day event brought together over 100 participants from 62 Governments, international organizations and private sector partners to discuss efforts to counter trafficking in synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances and opioids. The workshop was focused on enhancing targeting efforts, leveraging data and technology tools and fostering cooperation between the public and private sectors to secure supply chains and strengthen borders against trafficking.

268. Between 1 November 2023 and 1 November 2024, seven global alerts and special notices were circulated to Project Ion and OPIOIDS project focal points for voluntary action by law, regulatory and private sector counterparts. This included one special alert related to global trafficking in ketamine, along with four special notices addressing the increasing prevalence of products marketed as kush in West Africa, strengthened regulations on veterinary medicines in China, new controls over 46 new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids

in China and reports of two new veterinary medicines being detected in North America. The Board invites all relevant government authorities to communicate seizures and suspicious shipments involving these substances through IONICS.

269. Through the GRIDS Programme, in-person training sessions were conducted, supplemented by distance-learning technologies. Between 1 November 2023 and 1 November 2024, 42 training events were held on topics that included raising awareness of new psychoactive substances and emerging opioids, information exchange using IONICS, intelligence development and targeting using the GRIDS Intelligence tool, safe handling of opioids and fentanyl, personal protective equipment, presumptive testing for synthetic opioids and interdiction methods. A total of 902 law and regulatory enforcement officers and postal inspection officers, representing 80 Governments and seven international organizations, took part in these training sessions and were also given access to the eLearning Individual Training Environment (ELITE) platform, which is offered in the six official languages of the United Nations. The Board recognizes the ongoing cooperation with its international partners, in particular UPU, whose 2018 cooperation agreement with INCB has significantly raised the awareness of postal operators worldwide about the safe handling of packages containing dangerous substances.

270. The seventh annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services was convened under the GRIDS Programme. The event brought together over 140 officers from 110 Governments and international organizations in Vienna from 9 to 12 September 2024. Participants identified the latest *modi operandi* for trafficking synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances, exchanged case studies and engaged in multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders.

271. On 20 March 2024, the meeting of the Project Ion New Psychoactive Substances Task Force was held in Vienna on the margins of the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and brought together 32 members from 13 Governments. Later in the year, from 9 to 11 October 2024, a meeting of the Task Force, hosted by the Government of Canada, was held in Vancouver, Canada. The meeting brought together representatives from 13 Governments and two international organizations to address emerging threats posed by new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids, including falsified, substandard and other illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, as well as new dangers arising from veterinary medicines, through information-sharing and operational cooperation. At the meeting in October 2024, the Task Force agreed to pursue the implementation of a time-bound intelligence-gathering operation focused on nitazene-type synthetic opioids towards the end of 2024.

272. The Board reminds Governments of its proprietary state-of-the-art enforcement, communications (IONICS) and targeting (GRIDS Intelligence) platforms, which provide actionable intelligence to stop trafficking in emerging synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, falsified pharmaceuticals, opioids and related chemicals to all law and regulatory enforcement agencies at no cost, and encourages Governments to integrate these tools into national targeting centres, along with training supported by the GRIDS Programme Cybercommunications Centre (GC3) and the INCB regional technical officers, co-located at UNODC offices in seven locations around the world.

(d) Project Prism and Project Cohesion

273. The operational initiatives of the Board with regard to precursors are carried out under the aegis of Project Cohesion (in relation to precursors of cocaine and heroin) and Project Prism (in relation to precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants and other synthetic drugs). The projects are steered by the INCB Precursors Task Force.⁷³ A meeting of the Precursors Task Force was held in Vienna in March 2024 on the margins of the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Participants from 12 countries and three international and regional organizations attended. The regular meeting of the Precursors Task Force, hosted by the Government of Canada, was convened in Vancouver, Canada, in October 2024. Participants from 12 countries

⁷³ The current members of the INCB Precursors Task Force are Australia, China, Colombia, Germany, India, Mexico, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Nigeria, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United States, INTERPOL, UNODC, WCO, the European Commission and CICAD.

and three international and regional organizations attended the meeting and discussed the latest trafficking trends related to precursors of cocaine, heroin, amphetamine-type stimulants and other synthetic drugs. Participants also discussed the latest developments related to non-scheduled chemicals, including precursors of new psychoactive substances, and INCB initiatives related to equipment, the monitoring of virtual markets and industry cooperation to prevent precursor diversion.

274. Over the years, several time-bound intelligence-gathering operations have been carried out under the projects with the aim of identifying weaknesses in the precursor control system and focusing on specific chemicals, trafficking trends or *modi operandi*. The projects are thus aimed at assisting Governments in ensuring the necessary level of alertness and developing specific risk indicators to prevent future diversions and, ultimately, identify the trafficking organizations involved. Project Prism and Project Cohesion focal points are continually alerted to suspicious shipments and actual and attempted diversions of precursors, as well as newly emerging precursors. Alerts take the form of special alerts and automated push notifications via PICS for those focal points registered with the system.

275. Operation Pseudonym was launched in October 2024 and was to be conducted over a three-month period. The Operation was focused on shipments of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, including pharmaceutical preparations containing these substances, traded internationally and domestically, to the extent that it was possible to investigate the latter. Although both substances have legitimate medical applications, being used, namely, in the manufacture of bronchodilators and nasal decongestants, they are also used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine. Instances of diversion of the substances had been noted by the Board, with the Operation being developed as a result of an increasing number of countries reporting seizures of pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine. A total of 60 countries and territories and four international and regional organizations participated in the Operation.

276. During the reporting period, several bilateral and multilateral consultations were organized under Project Prism with countries in Asia, Africa and Europe regarding the suspected and actual diversion of and trafficking in precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants. Furthermore, three alerts were issued under the project. The first related to new controls on precursors in China, including controls over fentanyl precursors and cannabidiol, as well as chemically related groups of precursors of amphetamine-types stimulants, and had effect from 1 September 2024. The second alert related to the theft of a tank container transporting 27,000 litres of acetic anhydride in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the alleged subsequent redistribution of the acetic anhydride using fake labels. The third alert related to seizures of procaine and related crystallization laboratories in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

(e) Precursors Incident Communication System

277. Created in 2012 to enable Governments to share actionable information on incidents and suspicious shipments related to precursor chemicals and equipment used in illicit drug manufacture on a real-time basis, PICS has been continuously upgraded over the years. During the reporting period, a new data visualization function was added to PICS to enhance the user experience and enable more comprehensive analysis regarding precursors and equipment, thereby facilitating investigation. In order to familiarize users of PICS with this update, six virtual or in-person briefing/training sessions were organized during the reporting period with over 120 participants from 40 countries in four continents and three international and regional organizations.

278. As at 1 November 2024, the PICS user base had expanded to more than 700 users from 130 countries and territories and 325 organizations. Information on over 4,700 incidents, including 207 equipment-related incidents, that had taken place in over 80 countries and involved over 300 substances, had been communicated through the system. In the reporting period, information on 514 incidents, 402 of which involved substances and 130 of which involved equipment, were communicated through the platform. There were over 1,400 communications relating to substances, of which 78 were substances in Table I of the 1988 Convention, 163 were substances in Table II of the Convention, 258 were substances on the limited international special surveillance list of non-scheduled substances, 186 were non-scheduled substances not included in that list and 43 involved cutting agents, adulterants, diluents or excipients. Information on 130 cases involving laboratory equipment was also shared through PICS.

279. The information shared through PICS enables not just the conduct of backtracking investigations and the interception of suspicious shipments, but also forms the basis for the conduct of intelligence-gathering operations, for alerts (see para. 274 above) and for the updating of the limited international special surveillance list of non-scheduled substances. **Accordingly, the Board encourages Governments to make greater use of PICS to share timely information on incidents relating to precursor chemicals and laboratory equipment with the requisite actionable details to enable the conduct of investigations by law enforcement authorities in the countries concerned.**

280. Further information on the Board's precursor-related operational activities can be found in the report of the Board for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention.

(f) Pre-Export Notification Online Light system

281. Launched in October 2022 to enable the voluntary sharing of information about legitimate planned exports involving chemicals that are not controlled internationally but that may be under national control in some countries (see also para. 124 in part A above), PEN Online Light continued to be used by Governments. As at 1 November 2024, 15 exporting countries had used PEN Online Light to inform 66 importing countries and territories about almost 1,700 planned shipments of chemicals not under international control. **The Board commends those Governments that actively use PEN Online Light and encourages the authorities of all other exporting countries and territories to consider using it with a view to enhancing knowledge of international movements of substitute and alternative chemicals that may be used in the illicit manufacture of drugs.**

(g) INCB newsletter on precursors

282. To keep stakeholders abreast of developments and initiatives in the areas of precursor control and equipment that may be used in illicit drug manufacture, INCB publishes a newsletter on a quarterly basis, which is disseminated to all Project Prism and Project Cohesion focal points, competent national authorities and relevant partners.

(h) Industry mapping exercise

283. The Board has repeatedly emphasized the crucial role of voluntary cooperation with industry as an effective and sustainable strategy for preventing the diversion and trafficking of chemicals used for illicit drug manufacture. In view of the increasing complexity of chemical supply chains, in 2022 INCB conducted a study and released a global review of categories of industries involved in the manufacture, trade and distribution of chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs to focus the attention of national authorities on the need to improve identification of the possible sources of drug precursors. On the basis of this global review, the Board has launched the "Engage your Industry" initiative, which is aimed at promoting mutually beneficial operational interaction between authorities and industries to prevent the diversion of chemicals for illicit purposes. As a cornerstone of the initiative, Governments are encouraged to map their national industry landscape, and the Board has supported several countries through its industry mapping initiative. The first results from this innovative approach were shared at the Board's international conference on the topic "Engaging the private sector to address illicit drug manufacture: know your industries", which was held in Vienna on 12 and 13 December 2024. More details of the initiative and the meeting can be found in the report of the Board for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention.

III. Analysis of the world situation

A. Selected global issues

Introduction

284. Each year, in analysing the world drug control situation, the Board identifies several specific issues of concern warranting further review and attention. This assessment is based on a variety of factors, including the Board's continuous dialogue with Governments, the annual statistics submitted to the Board in accordance with the provisions of the international drug control conventions, the findings of the Board's operations supporting global supply reduction initiatives, and other interactions with Member States and civil society in various forums, including the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The global issues selected are generally of an ongoing nature and with a scope that goes beyond the regional analysis contained in section B of this chapter.

285. Ensuring sufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes is a key objective of the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention and has been at the heart of international deliberations in recent years, as reflected, most recently, in Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 67/2, in which the Commission called for, inter alia, the promotion of awareness-raising, education, training and data collection as part of a comprehensive approach to ensuring access to and the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. Using the data provided by Member States, the Board has a unique view of trends in the use of narcotic drugs and, as described in the first global issue presented, conducted a longitudinal analysis of the balance between supply of and demand for opioids and opiate raw materials to identify better ways to ensure the sufficient availability of narcotic drugs for medical purposes.

286. Another aspect of availability is ensuring that people suffering from opioid use disorder have access to opioid agonist therapy. In the second global issue presented, the Board examines this matter with a particular focus on the manufacture, stocks and consumption of methadone and buprenorphine and their use in opioid agonist therapy programmes. This topic was discussed extensively at the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and was highlighted in Commission resolution 67/1, entitled "Promoting recovery and related support services for people with drug use disorders", one of two resolutions adopted by consensus at the Commission's session.

287. During its examination of the assessments provided by Governments relating to psychotropic substances controlled under the 1971 Convention, the Board also took into consideration Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 67/2, in which the Commission called for, inter alia, the development and updating of guidelines for the rational use of controlled substances. The Board has long recognized the crucial role of psychotropic substances in managing various health conditions, including ADHD, anxiety, narcolepsy, neurological disorders such as epilepsy, and sleep disorders. Given that, for example, approximately 301 million people worldwide, including 58 million children and adolescents, suffer from anxiety, the Board, in the third global issue, examines the importance of the rational use of psychotropic substances to address mental health conditions.

288. Also on the question of adequate supply to meet medical needs, the fourth global issue examines the availability of controlled substances and the provision of medical care during humanitarian emergencies caused by armed conflict. These emergencies are characterized by widespread suffering, displacement and a severe breakdown in social services, including the provision of medical care and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, and constitute one of the most pressing challenges faced by the international community today.

289. During the year under review, the Board also assisted authorities with supply reduction activities in the areas of precursor chemicals, non-medical synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances. Chapter I of the present report examines the alarming proliferation of synthetic drugs. While that thematic chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the overall situation, the Board decided that certain elements required further attention and has presented them as global issues in order to assist Member States in developing a better understanding of the challenges faced by law enforcement authorities in countering that dynamic illicit market.

290. With the challenges encountered in the control and monitoring of the chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs, the Board has included a fifth global issue, on innovative approaches to the surveillance of chemical precursors through emerging technologies, which is closely related to the sixth global issue: the

counter-intelligence techniques employed by drug traffickers to foil law enforcement actions taken against them. In those two aforementioned sections, the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems is observed to be a common thread, and, accordingly, the Board has dedicated its seventh global issue to that topic.

291. Finally, as also described in chapter II.D.3 (c) above, the eighth and final global issue focuses on the operational activities under the INCB GRIDS Programme, such as Operation Zodiac and Operation African Star, which have highlighted the increasing threat posed by substandard, falsified or otherwise illicitly manufactured pharmaceutical products, prompting the Board to include a section on “shadow pharmacies” and the problem of falsified pharmaceuticals.

292. The Board trusts that Member States, international and regional organizations and civil society will take the analysis of these selected global issues into consideration when planning and carrying out their activities.

1. Longitudinal analysis of the balance between the supply of and demand for opioids and opiate raw materials

Background

293. Among its mandates, the International Narcotics Control Board is tasked with assisting countries in ensuring the sufficient availability of narcotic drugs for medical and scientific purposes while at the same time preventing their diversion into illicit channels. For this purpose, the Board gathers detailed data on the licit use of narcotic drugs from States parties, including data regarding production and manufacture, the conversion of raw materials into finished products, narcotic drugs consumed, narcotic drugs held in stock and international trade, as well as annual estimates.

294. Such comprehensive data collection at the global level affords the Board a unique position to understand trends in the use of narcotic drugs worldwide.

Trends in the production, manufacture, trade and consumption of controlled opioids and opiate raw materials

295. The 1960s marked the consolidation of the international narcotics control system and the monitoring of the supply and demand of opiate raw materials, through the entry into force of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 and the establishment of the Board itself. During this period, opium poppy cultivation was primarily aimed at opium production for use in the manufacture of morphine and codeine. Morphine was the main opiate for severe pain management, while codeine was used as a milder analgesic. The use of poppy straw for alkaloid⁷⁴ extraction was minimal.

296. The 1970s saw a rise in morphine use for palliative care, the increased trade of opiate raw materials and the growing use of poppy straw for alkaloid extraction. The 1980s saw the introduction of synthetic opioids including fentanyl, especially for surgical applications, and the Board asked countries to tighten controls over excessive opiate production and trade to address rising global drug issues.

297. In the 1990s, the use of semi-synthetic opioids such as oxycodone became widespread for chronic pain management, leading to increased prescription rates and growing concerns about dependence. The early 2000s saw the onset of the prescription opioid epidemic in some regions, in particular North America, in response to which the Board stressed the need for tighter regulations and international cooperation to manage the crisis. The 2010s and 2020s were marked by a rise in the use of illicit fentanyl, which led to numerous overdose deaths.

298. Since the 2000s, the global licit production of all opiate alkaloids has significantly increased. Monitoring by the Board has ensured that production has met global demand while preventing diversion. The past two decades have also seen the development of opium poppy varieties rich in specific alkaloids, leading to diversified cultivation. Notably, codeine-rich opium poppy cultivation has increased, reducing reliance on the morphine-rich variety

⁷⁴The term “alkaloid” refers to alkaloids derived from the opium poppy plant (*Papaver somniferum*) that are under international control, namely codeine, morphine, oripavine and thebaine. Abbreviations used by the Board to refer to these alkaloids are, respectively, ACA, AMA, AOA and ATA.

for codeine extraction. At the same time, a significant rise in opiate raw material stocks has been observed, with the Board cautioning against overaccumulation. Recent data highlight the growth in morphine stocks accompanied by a decline in its production.

299. Despite global increases in opioid availability for pain management since the 1990s, significant disparities remain, as shown by recent data. Figures X and XI show the situation related to the production and stocks of various alkaloids since 2001, and showing in particular, in figure XI, the significant growth in the stocks of the morphine alkaloid as compared to other alkaloids and, at the same time, a decline in the production of the morphine alkaloid.

Figure X. Production of alkaloids, 2001–2022

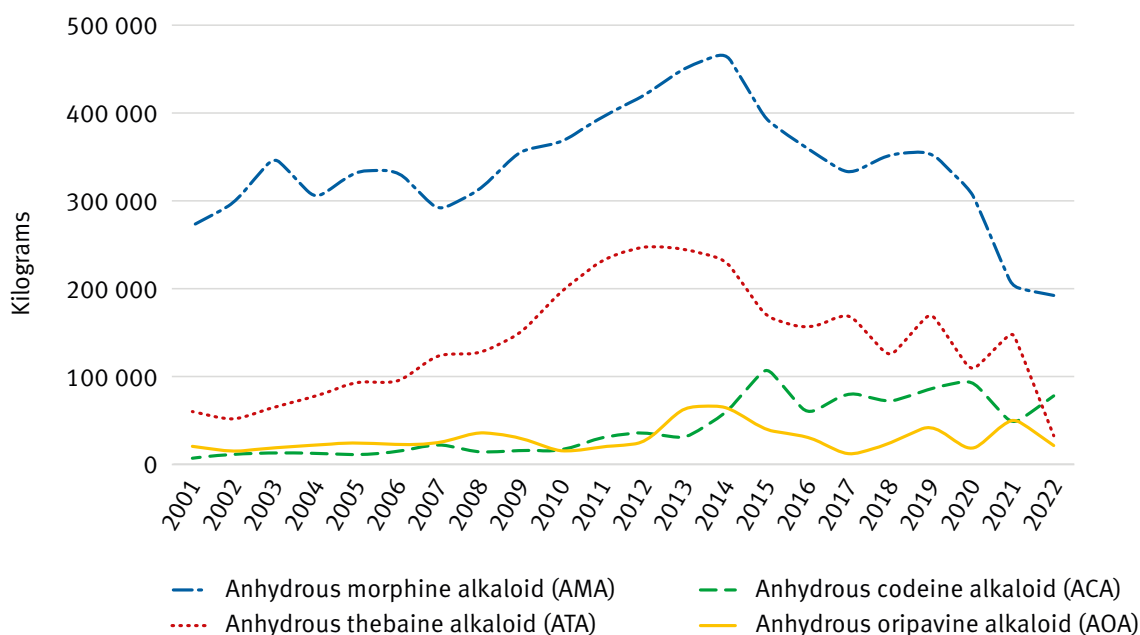
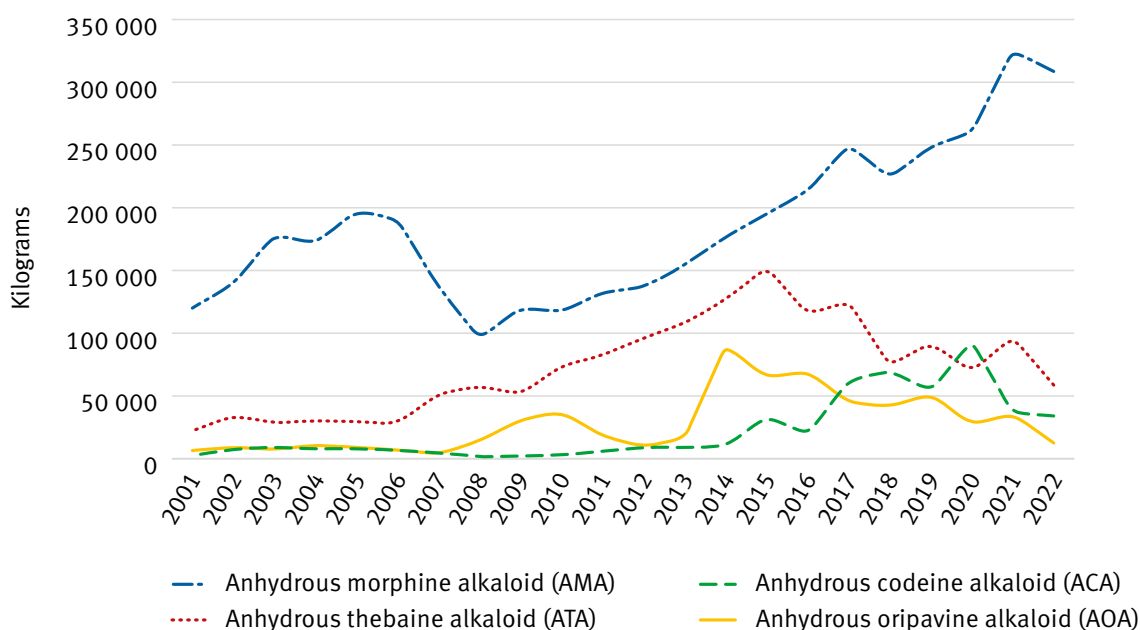


Figure XI. Stocks of alkaloids, 2001–2022



Overview of the balance between supply and demand over the years in relation to the various controlled alkaloids

300. Although a shortage of alkaloids derived from opium poppy was not recorded at the global level, regional disparities in access and availability, particularly of morphine, has been a concern. From the 1970s onwards, the Board noted that there were issues with accessibility, particularly in developing countries where regulatory barriers and economic constraints limited the availability of morphine. During the 1990s, concerns about opioid dependence in high-income countries began to grow, increasing in the 2000s. The Board monitored these trends closely, making recommendations to ensure that licit medical use was not compromised by efforts to control misuse.

301. Production of thebaine increased in the late 1980s and in the 1990s, led by the growing demand for semi-synthetic opioids. The Board took an active role in managing this demand through annual estimates, contributing to efforts to ensure a steady balance between supply and demand.

302. The availability of codeine at the global level has been steady and without any shortages, in particular following the increase in the cultivation of opium poppy rich in codeine. Oripavine was not broadly used until the second half of the 1990s, and the Board made efforts to assist countries in ensuring that the cultivation of opium poppy rich in oripavine met the emerging demand. Over the last two decades, there has been a notable decrease in the trade in morphine-rich opiate raw materials, which has led to a significant increase in the morphine alkaloid stocks.

Policies and practices adopted by producing and manufacturing countries to ensure balance between supply and demand and to prevent diversion into illicit channels

303. Countries have taken various measures by increasing or decreasing the production over the decades to maintain the balance between the supply of opiate raw materials and the demand for opiates while avoiding the excessive accumulation of stocks as a way of preventing the diversion of those substances into illicit channels. The Board has provided assistance in that regard, in particular through its data-gathering and reporting, as well as by highlighting global issues, recommending actions to be taken and facilitating exchanges between countries.

304. Some countries, in the past, adopted measures such as importing particular alkaloids only from certain countries. Measures have also been taken to limit the production and maintenance of stocks on the basis of demand from previous years, and to use the prevailing market conditions to guide setting the levels of stocks and/or production licensing.

305. Pursuant to resolutions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, informal consultations have been established whereby producing and importing countries gather annually in a meeting convened by the Board to present policies and to exchange information on supply and demand needs. Following calls by the Board, measures have been taken to reduce stocks by prioritizing exports and limiting cultivation until stock depletion targets have been reached. This has resulted in a reduction of stocks to levels that remain fully sufficient to cover the expressed demand but that also pose a lesser risk of diversion.

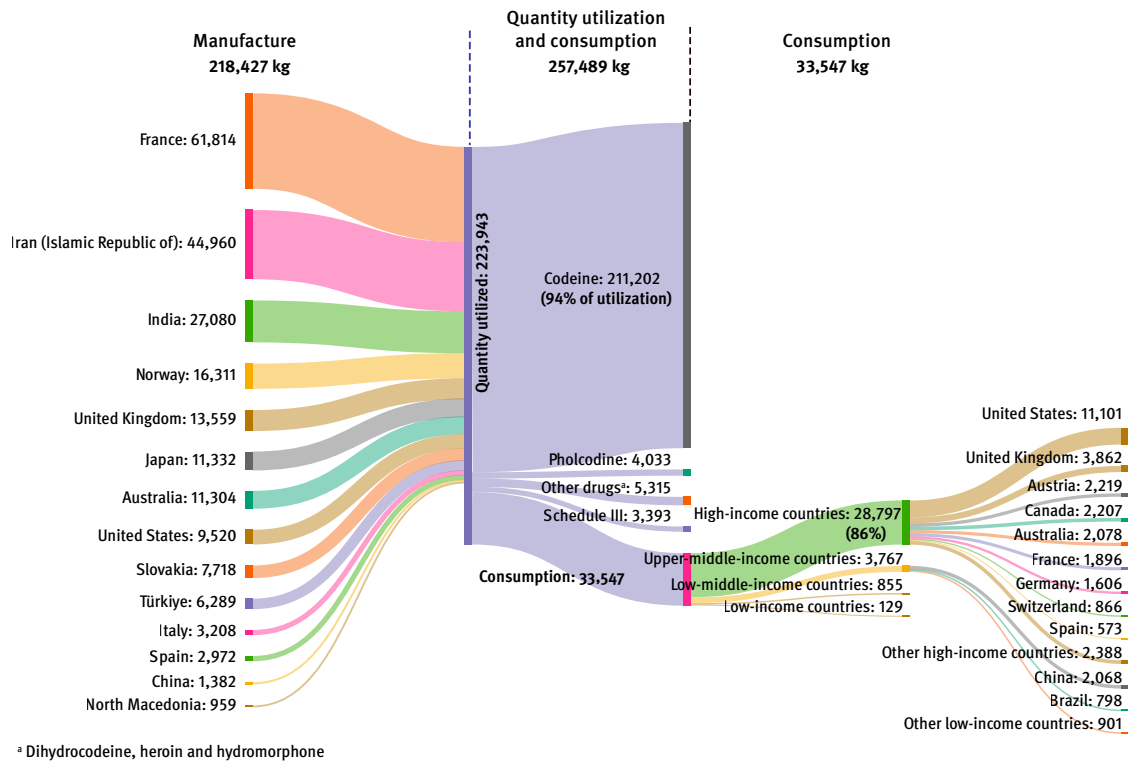
306. In the past decade in particular, the Board has published several specific reports and has collaborated with UNODC and WHO on the organization of multiple high-level and expert events on the issues of availability, affordability and access to narcotic drugs for pain relief. Those events have resulted in multilateral action, as well as regional and national initiatives aimed at improving the situation with regard to the licit use of such substances for pain relief in low- and middle-income countries.

Recommendations

307. These recommendations are made with a view to assisting countries in ensuring more equitable and affordable access to narcotic drugs for medical and scientific use worldwide, bearing in mind that there are significant disparities between countries in the availability of narcotic drugs, whereas at the global level there seems to be a balance between supply and demand.

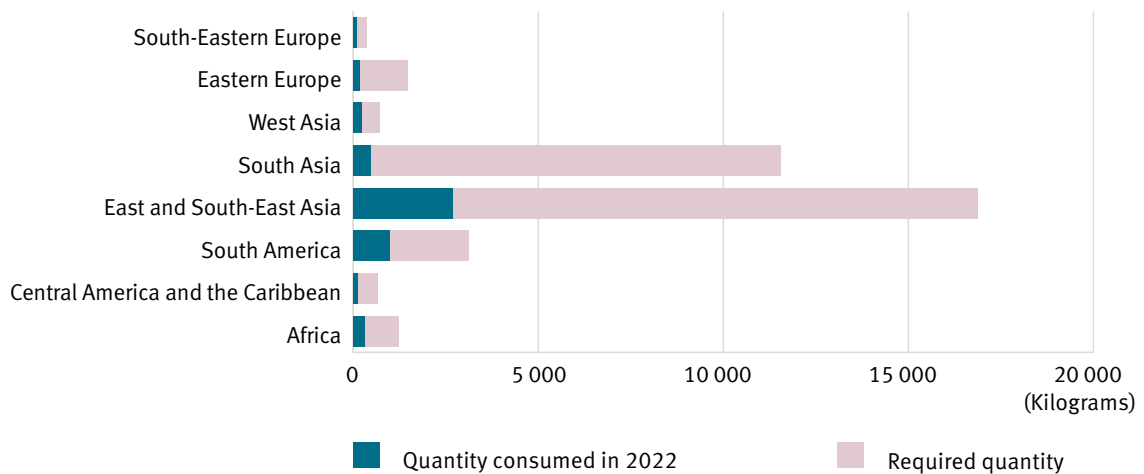
308. While morphine has historically been the most readily available and affordable opioid analgesic for pain relief and palliative care, its distribution has been uneven, and it has largely been utilized to produce other drugs. Figure XII shows that most of the morphine manufactured is utilized for the manufacture of other substances. About 33 tons of morphine are consumed directly for palliative care, and mostly in high-income countries, with only 4.75 tons being consumed in middle- and low-income countries.

Figure XII. Morphine utilization and consumption, 2022



309. At present, the region of Africa and several subregions of Asia, Europe and the Americas have been identified as consuming morphine at levels below those deemed minimally adequate by the Board.⁷⁵ Figure XIII shows that about 43 tons of morphine are required to reach minimally adequate consumption levels in all regions; at the same time, global stocks of morphine-rich opiate raw materials, in 2022, reached 838 tons – more than double the level of demand in 2023 (321 tons).

Figure XIII. Quantity of morphine required to raise availability to 200 S-DDD_{pmpd} in all regions and subregions with low consumption



⁷⁵ INCB considers levels of annual consumption of opioid analgesics in quantities between 100 and 200 S-DDD_{pmpd} to be inadequate.

310. Countries manufacturing opioids are urged to increase the manufacture of morphine preparations to be used for pain management and palliative care. They are further urged to make such morphine more broadly available and more affordable, in particular in low- and middle-income countries.

311. Historically, there have not been shortages of alkaloids derived from opium poppy at the global level. In particular, the morphine alkaloid has been produced in the largest quantities and has led to the accumulation of stocks, offering a safeguard in cases of crop failure or other possible events causing production shortages. The availability of other alkaloids has also been ensured at sufficient levels by producing countries, and the supply of raw materials rich in alkaloids such as codeine, oripavine and thebaine has been sufficient to cover the demand at the global level. The Board's guidelines on ensuring the holding of stocks of raw materials at the level of about 12 months of the demand expressed by major importing countries have largely been followed at the global level.

312. At the same time, the shifting market demands have contributed to fluctuations in cultivation and production patterns. This has been the case for, in particular, the thebaine alkaloid and, to a lesser extent, for the codeine and oripavine alkaloids. Such responsiveness to market needs has resulted in cultivating countries focusing on certain opium poppy varieties. In recent years, this has led to the concentration of the production of certain raw materials, most notably thebaine and oripavine, but also codeine, in just one or two countries. While no risk of shortages has been noted or anticipated, it is possible that in the event of crop failure or other risks to cultivation, in the future a situation leading to possible shortages of opiate raw materials rich in certain alkaloids may emerge.

313. The Board invites producing countries to continue to use the informal consultations on the supply of opiate raw materials and demand for opioids as a forum for exchange with other producing countries and major importers, or use other manners of communication that they find suitable for this purpose.

2. Availability of controlled substances for the treatment of opioid use disorder

314. Opioid use disorder is a chronic condition marked by the persistent use of opioids with severe physical, mental, social and legal consequences. Given the dependence potential of opioids, opioid use disorder is a significant public health issue, with one of the associated risks being overdose, a risk that has escalated owing to the increased non-medical use of potent synthetic opioids in various parts of the world. In addition, opioid misuse contributes to the transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C, posing further health risks to people and communities.

315. One successful approach to addressing opioid use disorder is opioid agonist therapy, which involves the administration of long-acting full or partial opioid agonists such as methadone or buprenorphine. These substances, which are under international control, are proven to be effective. However, in many countries there are significant challenges in the provision of opioid agonist therapy, including the stigmatization of patients, unequal access to treatment and difficulties associated with the need to administer the therapy on a daily basis. Difficulties in accessing treatment relate to circumstances such as travel distances to clinics, treatment costs and the potential disruption to daily life.

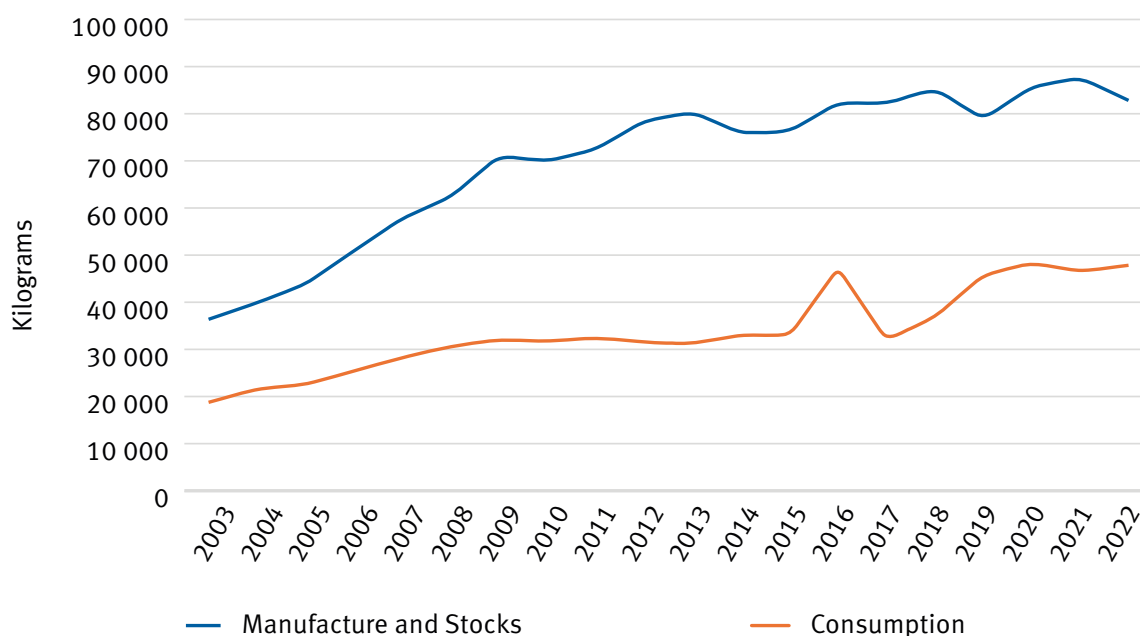
316. Globally, it is estimated that only 10 per cent of people living with opioid use disorder have access to opioid agonist therapy. According to UNODC data from 2022, at least 87 countries have implemented at least one opioid agonist therapy service. Typically, such services are regulated and provided primarily in medical settings, with the controlled substances usually administered through directly observed therapy. However, that approach has been associated with both high and avoidable costs. For example, in one country the cost of procuring methadone accounts for only 10 per cent of the total cost of the opioid agonist therapy programme, while personnel costs account for 86 per cent, and the remaining 4 per cent are recurrent costs, such as dispensing supplies. In addition, the directly observed therapy approach has been linked to lower patient retention rates. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the exploration of alternatives to directly observed therapy, such as allowing doses to be taken home.

317. Methadone and buprenorphine are sometimes used to manage pain but are also used extensively to treat opioid dependence. Although the data reported by countries to the Board do not specify the purposes for which methadone and buprenorphine are to be used, the reason for submitting estimates for those substances is for their intended use in opioid dependence treatment programmes.

318. Trends related to the manufacture, stocks and consumption of methadone point to a steady increase over the 20-year period from 2003 to 2022, despite some fluctuations (see figure XIV). In 2022, global manufacture of methadone reached 41.6 tons, while stocks stood at 39.6 tons. Global consumption was 47.8 tons, an increase from 46.5 tons in 2021.

319. Methadone consumption is concentrated in a few countries, with significant disparities in global consumption patterns. The largest consumers in 2022 were the United States (24.6 tons, or 51.5 per cent of global consumption), followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (5.3 tons, or 11 per cent), Canada (1.8 tons, or 3.8 per cent), Spain (1.5 tons, or 3.2 per cent), France (1.4 tons, or 2.9 per cent), India and Italy (1.2 tons each, or 2.6 per cent), the United Kingdom (1.1 tons, or 2.3 per cent), and Australia, Myanmar, Ukraine and Viet Nam (1 ton each, or 2 per cent). Many other countries consumed less than 1 ton.

Figure XIV. Methadone: global manufacture, stocks and consumption, 2003–2022



^a Figures for the years 2003 to 2012 relate to calculated consumption and for the years 2013 to 2022 to reported consumption.

320. Although UNAIDS estimates of people who inject drugs are incomplete, it is generally clear that levels of consumption of these substances correlate with the incidence of people who inject drugs.

321. However, in some countries with a high prevalence of people who inject drugs and opioid use disorder, the consumption of methadone and buprenorphine and the availability of treatment and opioid agonist therapy services are limited or even non-existent. This can be attributed to political and cultural resistance, inaction by the responsible authorities or a failure to acknowledge the problem. Some Governments do not recognize the use of these substances or the provision of opioid agonist therapy services as effective treatments for opioid dependence, despite scientific evidence to the contrary.

322. In response to a survey carried out by the Board in 2022, 14 per cent of the 96 countries that responded reported having no opioid agonist therapy services in place and 9 per cent reported providing treatment services that did not include methadone or buprenorphine. Thirty-two countries (33 per cent) reported using both methadone and buprenorphine in their opioid agonist therapy programmes; 27 per cent reported using only methadone; and 13 per cent reported using only buprenorphine. The majority of countries that reported utilizing methadone and/or buprenorphine in their opioid agonist therapy services were in the Americas and Europe.

323. In view of the increase in the non-medical use of opioids and the negative health and social consequences associated with it, the Board encourages countries to develop programmes and services to address the problem, including the use of controlled substances such as methadone and buprenorphine for treatment and opioid agonist therapy services.

3. Importance of the rational use of psychotropic substances to address mental health and neurological conditions

324. Psychotropic substances controlled under the 1971 Convention play a crucial role in the management of various health conditions, including ADHD, anxiety, narcolepsy, neurological disorders such as epilepsy, and sleep disorders. In 2019, WHO reported that approximately 301 million people worldwide, including 58 million children and adolescents, were suffering from anxiety. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic further intensified mental health challenges, increasing rates of anxiety and depression by 25 per cent during the first year of the pandemic. In addition, WHO has reported that over 50 million people worldwide have been diagnosed with epilepsy.

325. A variety of treatment options exist to address these conditions, including counselling, psychological therapy and the prescription of controlled psychotropic substances. Of the 167 substances currently controlled under the 1971 Convention, five – buprenorphine, diazepam, lorazepam, midazolam and phenobarbital – are included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines, which identifies medicines that WHO recommends each country and territory make available in their health systems.

326. Article 2 of the 1971 Convention provides that substances that have the capacity to induce a state of dependence must be subject to international control. Although the Convention is intended to prevent diversion and misuse, it is not aimed at reducing availability but rather at ensuring that such substances are used exclusively for medical and scientific purposes. The Convention therefore promotes the rational use of controlled psychotropic substances, outlining several requirements to achieve this goal.

327. The rational use of controlled psychotropic substances requires a delicate balance to be maintained between ensuring access while preventing misuse. In this regard, the 1971 Convention provides a solid framework for the control and monitoring of these substances. Article 9, paragraph 1, specifies that they should be supplied only with a valid medical prescription from a licensed medical practitioner. The 1971 Convention allows for different prescription formats, but those formats must be consistent with the objective of preventing misuse. Although online pharmacies and medical consultations have made it more convenient to access medications, they have also contributed to non-rational prescribing practices with regard to controlled substances. Article 9, paragraph 2, emphasizes that prescriptions should be issued in accordance with sound medical practice in order to protect public health.

328. In the case of methylphenidate and zolpidem, the relaxing of prescription requirements has led to a significant increase in their usage. In some instances, a relaxation in controls has resulted in overconsumption. A case commonly observed by the Board is the overuse by college students of ADHD medications, including amphetamine, dexamphetamine and methylphenidate.

329. Article 10, paragraph 2, of the 1971 Convention prohibits the advertisement of controlled substances to the public. Compliance with this prohibition has become increasingly difficult due to the growing availability of health information on the Internet and social media. Advertisements to the general public may contain misleading information and may lead to increased consumption, such as the overuse of ADHD medications, including amphetamine, dexamphetamine and methylphenidate, by college students. The annual report of the Board for 2023 highlighted the impact of the Internet and social media on drug trafficking and use with the Board drawing attention to the role of social media in spreading misinformation about mental health and promoting self-diagnosis, which can lead to an increase in the non-rational use of medications containing psychotropic substances.

330. Other factors pose a challenge to the rational use of psychotropic substances. Apart from diversion into illicit channels for non-medical use, the Board has also noted a lack of access to essential medicines, stigma surrounding mental health in general and the unbalanced allocation of healthcare resources. The Intersectoral Global Action Plan on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Disorders 2022–2031, published by WHO in 2023, emphasized the urgent need to improve access to medicines for neurological disorders and identified several barriers to access, such as the stigmatization of patients, the limited availability and affordability of medications and the shortage of well-trained healthcare professionals, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

331. The Board reminds Governments that the rational use of psychotropic substances is a key goal of the 1971 Convention and is achievable only through a balanced healthcare system. This requires an effective monitoring system, clear prescription guidelines, a well-trained healthcare workforce and a focus on public health. Furthermore, the Board acknowledges the importance of social media in providing information, creating awareness and highlighting different forms of assistance, such as telemedicine and online therapy, but also acknowledges the negative influence of social media in spreading misinformation and emphasizes the need to combat this.

332. The Board recommends that all Governments ensure that medical practitioners and other healthcare providers have the necessary tools to improve the rational prescribing, use and monitoring of psychotropic substances.

4. Humanitarian emergencies caused by armed conflict: the provision of medical care and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes

333. Humanitarian emergencies resulting from armed conflict are among the most pressing challenges faced by the international community today. These emergencies are characterized by widespread suffering, displacement and a severe breakdown in social services, including the provision of medical care and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.

334. In such crises, the ability to deliver adequate medical services is often compromised by ongoing violence, logistical challenges and political constraints. To address this, international legal frameworks, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and the international drug control conventions, play a crucial role in guiding the provision of medical care and ensuring the protection of those affected by conflict.

335. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Protocols Additional thereto provide the legal foundation for the protection of individuals who are not participating in hostilities, including civilians, the wounded and medical personnel. In the context of armed conflict, they mandate the humane treatment of all individuals, prohibit attacks on medical facilities and guarantee the safe passage of medical personnel and supplies.

336. One of the primary concerns during armed conflict is the protection of medical personnel and facilities. The Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field is focused specifically on the care of the wounded and sick in armed forces in conflict situations. It stipulates that medical personnel, hospitals and ambulances must be respected and protected in all circumstances. These protections are essential for the provision of medical care during conflicts, as they ensure that medical services can continue even amid hostilities. Attacks on medical personnel or facilities are strictly prohibited by the Geneva Conventions of 1949, a fact underscored by the International Committee of the Red Cross and reiterated by WHO and INCB. At the same time, the misuse of medical facilities or medical transport for military operations may cause them to lose their protection under international humanitarian law.

337. Another critical aspect of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 is the safe passage of medical supplies. They recognize that during armed conflict, the availability of medical supplies can be severely limited. Therefore, they require that parties to a conflict allow and facilitate the free passage of all consignments of medical supplies, as well as food and clothing intended for civilians, in particular vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women and the elderly. While the Geneva Conventions of 1949 address the broader aspects of medical care in armed conflict, the international drug control conventions also play a significant role in ensuring the availability of essential medicines in conflict zones.

338. The international drug control conventions are designed to regulate the production, distribution and use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. In the context of armed conflict, these controls must be balanced with the need to ensure that essential medicines, including pain relief and anaesthesia, are available to those in need. The conventions acknowledge the necessity of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and establish a framework for ensuring that these substances can be accessed legally and safely, even in conflict zones.

339. One of the most significant challenges in such zones is the disruption of supply chains for essential medicines, including those regulated under the international drug control conventions. The strict controls imposed by these conventions, while necessary to prevent misuse, can sometimes hinder the timely delivery of medications needed for pain management, surgery and other medical treatments in war-torn areas.

340. To address this, the Board emphasizes that the international drug control conventions allow for the expedited movement of controlled substances for medical use during emergencies. Competent national authorities may permit the export of medicines containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances to the affected areas in the absence of the corresponding import authorization or estimate. Urgent deliveries do not need to be included in the estimates of the receiving country.

341. The Board has also issued guidelines to help States navigate this balance during emergencies. These guidelines emphasize the importance of collaboration between Governments, humanitarian organizations and health authorities to ensure that essential medicines reach those in need without unnecessary delay.

342. The Board calls upon States exercising effective control of foreign territories in the context of armed conflict to take urgent action to ensure unimpeded access to medications, including medicines containing internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. These are essential for ensuring health and well-being and are used in anaesthesia and for pain management and the treatment of mental health and neurological conditions.

343. In addition, the Board calls upon States exercising effective control over territories to continue to provide access to controlled substances for opioid agonist therapy if such treatment was provided prior to occupation.

5. Innovative approaches to the surveillance of chemical precursors through emerging technologies

344. The trafficking of drugs and chemical precursors has grown increasingly complex in recent years, with criminal networks adopting new methods, including disguised advertising, diverse covert transport mechanisms and new payment systems such as cryptocurrencies. Governments require innovative approaches in order to address the challenges posed by these evolving criminal *modi operandi*. Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and advanced detection systems, must be leveraged to enhance surveillance of chemical precursors. These innovations provide advanced capabilities to monitor, analyse and suppress illicit activities related to the production and distribution of chemical precursors through various platforms, including the Internet. Projects such as the Board's Automated Monitoring of Virtual Chemical and Equipment Markets tool and the integration of artificial intelligence-driven algorithms into border security and drug detection efforts exemplify the proactive measures needed to counter the aforementioned new threats. These advances, combined with strengthened international cooperation, are crucial in order to effectively disrupt increasingly sophisticated criminal operations and ensure that law enforcement agencies remain ahead of emerging trends in the illicit drug trade.

345. Tackling attempts to use the Internet (surface web) for trafficking in precursors is a priority area for the Board, as emphasized in chapter IV of the Board's 2022 report on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention,⁷⁶ and in chapter IV of the Board's 2017 report.⁷⁷ This matter has also attracted the attention of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which, in its resolution 60/5, encouraged the international community to collect data, analyse evidence and share information with respect to criminal activities conducted via the Internet relating to precursors, and to continue to strengthen legal, law enforcement and criminal justice responses, based on national legislation, as well as international cooperation, to curb such illicit activities.

346. In 2021, the targeted, time-bound Operation Acronym focused on trafficking in precursors over the surface web. In the course of the operation, INCB helped to identify practical obstacles and legal challenges to investigations related to precursors and cybercrime. Following the operation, INCB also conducted training for Governments on investigating suspicious Internet (surface web) postings related to precursor chemicals. Participants learned how to identify and investigate suspicious online postings and how to request basic subscriber information from online service providers and establish mutually beneficial relationships with such providers. The

⁷⁶ E/INCB/2022/4.

⁷⁷ E/INCB/2017/4.

proactive investigation of suspicious postings on the surface web is an additional tool that can help Governments to prevent precursor chemicals from reaching illicit drug manufacturing laboratories.

347. In order to address the challenges identified through Operation Acronym, in February 2024 INCB began to develop a tool for the automated monitoring of the virtual chemical and equipment market. The tool will assist in identifying suspicious postings of precursor chemicals and equipment used in illicit drug manufacture by leveraging advanced technologies, such as robotic process automation. Through the tool, the Board aims to enable Governments to monitor the Internet-facilitated trade in precursors more effectively.

348. In 2023, the United States Customs and Border Protection agency significantly enhanced its efforts to address trafficking in fentanyl and its analogues and precursors. Its strategy emphasizes increased information-sharing among intra-agency, inter-agency, international and key external stakeholders in order to analyse data related to the shipment of precursor chemicals and manufacturing equipment. By linking real-time data from multiple sources, the agency has generated high-value intelligence that has led to more effective interdiction operations. The agency has made substantial investments in artificial intelligence and machine learning to develop deep learning algorithms that detect chemical precursors and pill presses. These technologies, coupled with advanced surveillance systems and new X-ray technology at ports of entry, have greatly improved the efficiency of enforcement efforts. By analysing prior seizure data and mining open-source information, the agency has enhanced its ability to prevent the diversion of legitimate chemicals into illicit drug manufacture, thus enabling significant seizures of precursor chemicals and equipment used in the manufacture of fentanyl.

349. In 2024, EUDA and Europol focused on the need to enhance preparedness in response to developments in drug markets in the European Union. Key actions to be taken include strengthening the systematic monitoring and analysis of the European drug market, including the precursor chemicals market, by further leveraging advanced methods and technologies such as artificial intelligence and satellite imagery analysis.

350. The European Union is also developing new technologies enabling police and customs authorities to detect illicit drugs and their precursors. Newly developed prototype devices can detect such substances with a 99 per cent accuracy rate. These devices combine electro-sensor technology based on nano-molecularly imprinted polymers with multivariate and pattern data analyses to provide customs and law enforcement agents working at borders with the same accuracy as if they were in a laboratory, thereby allowing the detection of trace amounts of illicit drugs and their precursors.

351. The European Union Artificial Intelligence in Fighting Drugs Production and Trafficking project seeks to implement a framework aligned with the European Union Drugs Action Plan 2021–2025. By utilizing artificial intelligence tools, it seeks to address illicit drug manufacture, including by monitoring chemicals used in drug manufacture, analysing the supply chain and criminal *modi operandi*, and recommending legislative measures and international collaboration.

352. In 2023, INTERPOL launched Project Mayag, a comprehensive initiative that brings together a diverse range of stakeholders in addressing the trafficking of synthetic drugs and the diversion of chemical precursors. The initiative focuses on countries in Asia and the Middle East, and its key activities focus on regional operations, analytical support and capacity-building efforts, such as training on financial investigations, biometrics and the detection of clandestine laboratories, in order to strengthen international cooperation and disrupt transnational criminal networks.

6. Counter-intelligence techniques employed by drug traffickers

353. Illicit drugs are smuggled among the vast numbers of legitimate goods and persons travelling across borders every day. The exponential increase in cross-border flows in recent decades, as well as the reduced time and cost of transportation, have provided an opportunity for drug traffickers to hide illicit drugs inside shipping containers, travellers' luggage and belongings, or even people's bodies (drug mules). More recently, owing to the increasing potency and decreasing weight of drugs such as synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances, traffickers are increasingly exploiting legitimate postal and express courier services to transport illicit substances.

354. Law enforcement agencies employ a wide range of techniques to counter these activities, including the use of radar and communication technologies, cargo, baggage and body scanners and risk analysis, which have

significantly enhanced the capabilities of law enforcement authorities to detect and intercept illicit drug flows. In response, criminals have developed sophisticated countermeasures in order to continue transporting illicit drugs. For instance, the use by such criminals of semi-submersible and fully submersible vessels, also known as “narco-submarines”, has increased in the past decade, presenting a new challenge to maritime law enforcement authorities. In addition, the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems, commonly known as unmanned aerial vehicles or drones, to traffic drugs has been reported with limited but growing frequency by law enforcement authorities. These systems, employed directly by traffickers, typically operate over short distances and possess a limited load capacity of up to a few kilograms. They are equipped with global navigation satellite system (GNSS) technology, allowing traffickers to preprogram specific landing locations for precise and safe package delivery.

355. The use of tracking technology also allows traffickers to maintain better control over their cargo while evading law enforcement authorities. Tracking devices make it possible to monitor the exact location of cargo to ensure that a predetermined route is followed. Furthermore, these devices assist traffickers in dropping and recovering cargo when necessary. One such technique, known as the “torpedo method”, involves attaching GNSS-equipped signal emitters to drug shipments affixed to the hulls of ships. If the primary vessel is intercepted, the shipment can be dropped into the water and recovered at a later stage.

356. Although GNSS technology is the most well-known location tracking technology, reports on the use of Bluetooth devices have been issued by authorities. GNSS trackers offer accurate real-time geolocation information, but Bluetooth devices tend to be smaller and cheaper and have a longer battery life. A wide range of these devices, such as Apple AirTag, are available for sale both in physical markets and online. The devices can be purchased for a low price and registered anonymously.

357. Because criminals are constantly adapting and developing new methods of trafficking, intelligence is a key component of effective drug enforcement. In order for law enforcement authorities to conduct successful operations targeting illicit drug manufacture, marketing and movement, they must collect, analyse and disseminate information – known as intelligence – about trends in international narcotics trafficking, patterns of drug availability and consumption, and criminal enterprises and their *modi operandi*. Intelligence enables authorities to anticipate and counteract the strategies employed by traffickers, thereby disrupting their operations. However, intelligence is equally important for drug traffickers. Firstly, they need insight into the operations of rival criminal enterprises so as to manoeuvre through the competitive landscape of drug smuggling. Secondly, in order to maintain their illicit activities and avoid counter-narcotics efforts, drug traffickers also need to develop counter-intelligence by seeking information about the movements and operations of law enforcement authorities.

358. While drug trafficking organizations do not have the same intelligence-gathering capabilities and infrastructure as State authorities, they engage in counter-intelligence activities in different ways. One of the most common and well-known practices is the infiltration of law enforcement agencies to gather information. Drug traffickers frequently coerce security personnel, by means of corruption or blackmail, into working as informants in order to obtain details about drug enforcement strategies and operations, allowing them to stay one step ahead of the authorities.

359. In addition to the use of informants, drug traffickers have been employing increasingly sophisticated technological tools to conduct counter-intelligence. Although technological progress and the increased availability of new tools have enabled law enforcement agencies to better counter drug trafficking, traffickers have also benefited. Some of the tools include, as already mentioned, remotely piloted aircraft systems, GNSS trackers and various informatics systems. In recent years, there have been increasing reports of tracking devices being found in illicit drug shipments. This technology not only helps criminals to more effectively move their cargo and bypass authorities but also serves as a counter-intelligence tool, providing traffickers with better insight into law enforcement operations. Tracking devices can reveal the locations of law enforcement facilities, identify delays caused by controlled deliveries (thereby indicating interdiction operations) and even capture and record conversations.

360. Remotely piloted aircraft systems serve the dual purpose of providing transportation and surveillance. Recently, the technology has become increasingly sophisticated, incorporating supplementary features such as thermal cameras and heavy-load cargo capabilities. This advancement has provided drug traffickers with enhanced means of conducting surveillance, evading detection and transporting contraband across borders more efficiently. Drug trafficking organizations are also using remotely piloted aircraft systems to conduct aerial surveillance in

order to monitor their territories and the movements of rival groups, as well as track law enforcement activities. (See paras. 364–369 for a more detailed overview of remotely piloted aircraft systems.)

361. The use of counter-intelligence methods, as well as the ability of drug traffickers to adapt and change their operations to evade law enforcement authorities underscores the importance of the use by those authorities of secure, real-time communication channels to coordinate responses and ensure that smugglers cannot predict their actions or find alternative routes to avoid detection. Effective law enforcement action against trafficking in dangerous substances must be extended to public-private partnerships between State authorities and private logistics companies, including postal services, express couriers, air cargo carriers, freight forwarders and other third-party logistics providers.

362. Effective drug control efforts require law enforcement authorities to possess the capability to detect dangerous substances and identify devices used for counter-intelligence purposes. This includes the capability to leverage advanced technologies such as chemical detectors, X-ray scanners and electronic surveillance tools. To counter the use by drug traffickers of tracking devices, it is recommended that law enforcement authorities use devices that prevent transmitter signals from being sent or received (Faraday bags and cages) if the presence of a tracking device is suspected. Moreover, continuous training and development programmes for law enforcement personnel are essential for keeping pace with the evolving tactics of drug traffickers.

363. Auditing and accountability measures are crucial for preventing drug traffickers from infiltrating law enforcement agencies. The implementation of strict vetting processes, continuous background checks and integrity assessments can help maintain the integrity of law enforcement operations. Regular audits and the establishment of internal affairs units dedicated to investigating corruption and misconduct are also vital. Furthermore, efforts to foster a culture of transparency and ethical behaviour within law enforcement agencies can significantly reduce the risk of corruption.

7. Use of remotely piloted aircraft systems in drug trafficking

364. Reports of the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems, also referred to as unmanned aerial vehicles or drones, for drug trafficking have increased in recent years, and such systems may pose a new challenge to law enforcement agencies. These systems are mainly used to carry out surveillance on law enforcement activities so that criminals who facilitate the cross-border transportation of drugs, people and other contraband are not detected. They are also used directly for trafficking by organized criminal groups.

365. Colombia, Mexico and the United States are among the countries in which incidents involving the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems for trafficking have been reported, primarily near borders or correctional facilities. Mexican authorities first issued warnings about remotely piloted aircraft systems being used by drug traffickers as early as 2010, and between 2012 and 2014, authorities in the United States detected 150 remotely piloted aircraft systems crossing the border with Mexico. In 2022, by contrast, 10,000 incursions were reported by the United States Customs and Border Protection agency in the Rio Grande Valley sector, a major trafficking corridor. Seizures of remotely piloted aircraft systems transporting drugs have also recently been made in Europe; such systems are being used to traffic drugs from Morocco to Spain. In addition, in Jordan, between August and September 2023, the Jordanian Armed Forces shot down six remotely piloted aircraft systems carrying narcotics, including methamphetamine. On the border between India and Pakistan, these systems have been employed to smuggle narcotics, with incidents involving the interception of several kilograms of heroin and the hybrid threat of weapons smuggling and terrorism increasing.

366. Remotely piloted aircraft systems employed in trafficking typically operate over short distances and possess a limited load capacity of up to a few kilograms. The systems are equipped with global navigation satellite system technology, which enables traffickers to pre-programme specific landing locations and ensure safe and precise package delivery. The use of such systems to smuggle drugs into correctional facilities has been reported in several countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States. Remotely piloted aircraft systems for direct use in cross-border trafficking, as opposed to their indirect use for surveillance, are often single-use and are unrecoverable.

367. The United States had previously reported that early remotely piloted aircraft systems entering from Mexico had been imported; however, there are reports that traffickers have now shifted towards local sourcing and custom-made systems. Custom-made drones are purportedly capable of transporting up to 100 kg at a time.

368. Some Governments are responding to the potential threats posed by remotely piloted aircraft systems through legislation or new countermeasures, such as radar detection and geofencing technologies, to intercept such systems being used to traffic drugs. In Türkiye, for instance, a law was passed in 2016 requiring all remotely piloted aircraft systems weighing between 0.5 and 25 kg to be registered in an online system. The European Union is working on a comprehensive regulatory framework to address safety and security concerns, including countering illegal activities related to remotely piloted aircraft systems. In general, however, national legislation and regulations regarding drug trafficking using such systems remain uncommon.

369. Despite the increase in the reported use of remotely piloted aircraft systems for trafficking purposes, the amounts of drugs transported using this modality are still negligible in contrast with the amounts transported using more traditional and established modes of transportation, such as by sea, land and air in cargo containers and through the exploitation of express courier services. Although this trend is largely still a regional phenomenon, technological advancements, increased capacity, lower costs and improvements in operational strategies may lead to increases in the total amounts of drugs trafficked using this modality in the future.

8. The problem of falsified pharmaceuticals containing internationally controlled substances or new psychoactive substances

370. Pharmacies that distribute falsified pharmaceutical products containing internationally controlled substances or new psychoactive substances, either in physical locations or online, have become an increasing problem over the last 20 years. Although most medicinal products may be subject to falsification, there is a large market for the falsification of controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, such as opioids and benzodiazepines. Although these falsified products are often indistinguishable from legitimate products, they are hazardous owing to issues such as incorrect dosages or the inclusion in them of dangerous substances that represent a risk to users.

371. A significant danger recently associated with falsified pharmaceutical products is their contamination with potent opioids such as fentanyl or its derivatives. In 2023, over 80 million falsified tablets containing fentanyl were seized in the United States. This rise is reflected in recent overdose statistics, with over 74,000 people dying from fentanyl-related overdoses in the United States in 2022. Similar challenges are being seen in Canada, with numerous cases of falsified products containing lethal amounts of fentanyl contributing to the country's opioid epidemic. The crisis has intensified with the introduction of substances such as nitazenes, designer benzodiazepines (e.g. etizolam) and cathinones. These include new psychoactive substances, which are not currently regulated under international law, a fact that complicates detection efforts by law enforcement agencies, and which pose significant risks owing to their unpredictable potency and potentially lethal effects. These dangerous substances have been compiled into three lists: fentanyl-related substances, non-fentanyl opioids and novel benzodiazepines, all with no known legitimate use.

372. The illicit distribution of falsified pharmaceuticals has been accompanied by the increased misuse of veterinary products. Reports over the last decade show a rise in the illicit manufacture and distribution of substances such as ketamine, medetomidine and xylazine. Although these substances are not necessarily found within falsified pharmaceuticals, they are often consumed with synthetic opioids, including pharmaceuticals such as oxycodone. Xylazine, in particular, has been associated with the "tranq-dope" phenomenon in which the substance has been found mixed with new synthetic opioids. INCB previously notified Governments of the emergence of this substance through its GRIDS Programme in 2021. Detections of and prosecutions for the diversion of legitimate veterinary products, or trafficking in falsified ones, seldom occur.

373. Pharmacies knowingly or unwittingly distributing such products have been reported to operate in physical locations. In northern Mexico, for instance, there have been accounts of pharmacies that cater to English-speaking tourists selling controlled substances without prescription. A study found that 70 per cent of pharmacies surveyed offered these drugs without prescription, 27.5 per cent of which dispensed falsified pills, including methamphetamine mislabelled as Adderall and fentanyl-laced pills sold as oxycodone. Concurrently, such

operations also operate online. Although a significant part of the trafficking of falsified pharmaceuticals remains on the dark web, evidence from INCB online monitoring operations shows that traffickers exploit legitimate e-commerce marketplaces and social media platforms to distribute pharmaceutical preparations.

374. Efforts to counteract this crisis include global regulatory and law enforcement responses taken in collaboration with international organizations and regional drug enforcement agencies to disrupt illicit supply chains and prosecute those involved. For example, in 2022, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States seized more than double the quantity of fentanyl-laced falsified prescription pills as the quantity seized in 2021. These efforts were part of a broader operation that included the confiscation of large quantities of cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine. In May 2021, INTERPOL coordinated an operation involving 92 countries to combat illegal online pharmacies, resulting in the closure of over 113,000 web links and the seizure of more than 9 million illicit medications and medical devices. In Europe, the European Union Drugs Agency has played a crucial role in monitoring trends in and coordinating responses to the influx of illicit substances, including synthetic opioids.

375. The IONICS platform is provided through the INCB GRIDS Programme and allows Governments to share intelligence on new psychoactive substances, including pharmaceutical preparations that may be falsified and contain such substances. Most recently, INCB conducted a global special intelligence-gathering operation, known as Operation Zodiac, which targeted falsified benzodiazepines, including novel benzodiazepines with no known legitimate use, and led to over 460 seizures, amounting to 286,000 tablets, as well as 30 kg and 300 ml of benzodiazepines.

376. Pharmacies that distribute falsified pharmaceutical products containing internationally controlled substances or new psychoactive substances remain a significant issue globally, but nowhere more than in Africa. A 2024 meta-analysis of 26 studies of pharmaceutical products in Africa found that an estimated 22.6 per cent of medicines were falsified, substandard or unregistered. Rates of falsified pharmaceutical products varied significantly depending on the category of substances and is likely even higher for products in unregulated grey and open-air markets than in pharmacies.

377. In June 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme facilitated Operation African Star, the first subregional special operation focusing on pharmaceutical trafficking in East Africa. The operation targeted international mail, express courier and air cargo consignments containing falsified, substandard and other illicitly manufactured pharmaceutical products entering Kenya and Uganda. The four-day operation led to 92 seizures of pharmaceutical products communicated via IONICS. Suspicious shipments were checked in real time using the INCB proprietary global information systems and targeting platforms at the GRIDS Cybercommunications Centre in Vienna to assist in determining the bona fides of companies or products encountered by officers on the ground. With infrequent detections, disruptions and dismantling of groups trafficking falsified pharmaceutical products containing controlled drugs or new psychoactive substances, the risks remain low and profit high for criminal organization, and greater attention from enforcement agencies is required in future operations.

B. Regional updates

1. Africa

Africa continues to be seriously affected by drug trafficking, with significant seizures of cocaine and other drugs in the Sahel evidencing large-scale trafficking through the region.

Despite data being scarce, there is growing evidence of an increase in the use of cocaine and its associated harms in African countries.

The use of kush, a drug mixture, continues to be of concern to African countries, predominantly those in West Africa.

Several countries in Africa have introduced measures to prioritize prevention and treatment programmes over punitive measures. Nonetheless, the number of people receiving treatment for drug use disorders in Africa remains very low.

Africa remains one of the regions of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes.

Major developments

378. On 18 January 2024, the 1988 Convention entered into force for South Sudan, following the country's accession on 20 October 2023. In Africa, two countries, namely, Equatorial Guinea and Somalia, have yet to accede to the Convention. The Government of Somalia has, however, requested the Board's assistance in relation to the modalities for the country's accession to it.

379. In order to address the growing challenge of substance use disorders on the continent, in particular among young people, women and children, the African Union has established its first subregional network of traditional leaders, known as the Southern Africa Network of Traditional Leaders in Drug Demand Reduction. Network members are to be trained in scientific evidence-based methodologies for the prevention and treatment of drug use disorders and the care of those with such disorders to widen the reach of community interventions.

380. According to the *World Drug Report 2024*, there is growing evidence of an increase in the use of cocaine and its associated harms in African countries. This is reportedly due to the spillover effect of the increasing use of Africa as a transit region for cocaine being smuggled to Europe to meet demand there.

381. Owing to its geographical location, trafficking in cocaine has increased in particular through West Africa, a trans-shipment hub for cocaine originating in South America and bound for Europe. Significant inland seizures involving the Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger confirm growing trafficking in cocaine along the land routes through the Sahel. The average amount of cocaine seized per year in the region has increased significantly, from an average of 13 kg per year between 2015 and 2020 to 1,466 kg in 2022.

382. The use of kush, a drug mixture that may contain a number of psychoactive substances, continues to be of concern to African countries, predominantly those in West Africa.

383. Significant progress has been made towards the operationalization of the African Medicines Agency, a specialized agency of the African Union. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has provided technical expertise and financial support to the African Union in setting up the agency and has worked with African, European and other international partners in that regard. The continental technical committees established through the African Medicines Regulatory Harmonization programme, coordinated by the African Union Development Agency, are driving efforts to develop continental technical guidelines and processes. EMA is supporting the technical committees in piloting the continental processes for the approval and listing of medicinal products and the inspection of good manufacturing practices. Once operational, the African Medicines Agency will facilitate patient access to effective, safe and high-quality medicines in Africa. As at 1 November 2024, 29 countries had ratified the Treaty for the Establishment of the African Medicines Agency.

384. The Board continues to provide capacity-building services to countries to assist them in meeting their obligations under the three international drug control conventions and in addressing their national drug control challenges. The initiatives conducted by the Board within the framework of the GRIDS Programme and INCB Learning in Africa can be found in paragraphs 246–272, respectively.

Regional cooperation

385. From 6 to 8 November 2023, capacity-building training was provided to Algerian law enforcement officers in Algiers under the GRIDS Programme. The training was aimed at enhancing the officers' knowledge of different types of non-medical synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances, smuggling methods and the effective use of the GRIDS Intelligence tools and IONICS to support domestic and international trafficking investigations.

386. From 8 to 10 November 2023, the African Union convened a high-level session on addressing substance use and related mental health disorders among young people, women and children, on the theme: "Securing a better future for youth, women and children: building momentum towards the Africa we want". The event resulted in the establishment of an agreed road map for strategic interventions, including the development of an African model drug law, prevention curricula for schools, youth- and gender-specialized treatment facilities and the scaling up of harm reduction programmes.

387. From 14 to 16 November 2023, a cross-border twinning event for law enforcement officers from Jordan and Morocco was convened in Riyadh under the GRIDS Programme. The event was aimed at exchanging experiences and knowledge and fostering international cooperation.

388. From 20 to 22 November 2023, a cross-border training event was held in Dubai under the GRIDS Programme to enhance cooperation between regional postal authorities. The event brought together law enforcement officers from Egypt and Tunisia and was focused on opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances. Training on and access to INCB proprietary tools (IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence) were also provided.

389. On 29 January 2024, the League of Arab States and UNODC convened the first steering and follow-up committee meeting for the Regional Framework for the Arab States 2023–2028 in Cairo. The framework focuses on the following six areas that guide UNODC-implemented programming at the regional and national levels: (a) a balanced approach to drug control; (b) strengthening the response to organized crime; (c) combating trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants; (d) action against corruption and financial crime; (e) preventing and countering terrorism and violence; and (f) strengthening the prevention of crime and violence and criminal justice. The meeting was attended by representatives of the relevant ministries and institutions within the League of Arab States, including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia.

390. On 5 and 6 February 2024, judicial representatives of member States of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, namely, Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, Sao Tome and Principe and Timor-Leste met in Maputo to renew their commitment to strengthening cooperation against crime. The event was hosted by the Office of the Attorney General of Mozambique in collaboration with UNODC and was aimed at strengthening the role of the criminal justice sector in effectively preventing and combating drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime. Although discussions were focused on drug trafficking, participants also examined the use of informal cooperation mechanisms and joint criminal investigations to investigate and disrupt organized and transnational crime, and current and emerging challenges faced by the Community's member States, including a recent surge in new synthetic drugs.

391. From 13 to 16 February 2024, a global workshop on advanced targeting for operational officers and express courier and freight forwarding industry partners was held in Vienna under the GRIDS Programme. The four-day event brought together law and regulatory enforcement officers, international organizations and associations and private sector partners to address the future of activities to counter trafficking in synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, opioids and related substances. The workshop was attended by representatives of six African countries, including Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Tunisia.

392. On 26 and 27 February 2024, a training event for Togolese customs, police and postal officers was held in Lomé under the GRIDS Programme. The training was aimed at raising awareness of new psychoactive substances and INCB proprietary tools.
393. On 4 and 5 March 2024, a training event for Egyptian law enforcement officers was held in Cairo under the GRIDS Programme. The event brought together participants from law enforcement authorities to receive training on awareness of opioids, fentanyl and new psychoactive substances, safe interdiction approaches, basic targeting (GRIDS Intelligence) and secure real-time trafficking communications (IONICS).
394. From 5 to 8 March 2024, an event on practical approaches to countering the cross-platform exploitation of online services was held in Vienna under the GRIDS Programme. The event brought together over 70 participants from Governments, international organizations and private partners. Among them were representatives of the Government of Egypt. The meeting was opened by the President of INCB and participants examined the future landscape of counter-trafficking activities, specifically addressing challenges and advancements related to synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances and, in particular, synthetic opioids and related chemicals.
395. On 7 and 8 March 2024, training was provided to law enforcement officers from Senegal on awareness of opioids, fentanyl and new psychoactive substances and safe interdiction approaches under the GRIDS Programme. Participants also received basic training on intelligence-sharing, as well as targeting via IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD.
396. On 8 and 9 April 2024, a national workshop on public-private partnerships related to trafficking in dangerous substances through express courier, mail and postal services was held in Accra under the GRIDS Programme. Representatives from both the public and private sectors participated in the event. The representatives from the private sector discussed their experiences in ensuring that established security procedures for detecting and intercepting suspicious parcels or packages transported using their services were implemented.
397. The African Union established its first subregional network of traditional leaders, the Southern Africa Network of Traditional Leaders in Drug Demand Reduction, to address the increasing challenge posed by substance use disorders in Africa, in particular among young people, women and children. The network was established during a continental consultation for traditional leaders from countries of the Southern Africa Development Community held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 8 to 11 April 2024. Network members will be trained in scientific evidence-based methodologies for the prevention, treatment and care for those with a drug dependence in order to widen the reach of community interventions.
398. On 19 April 2024, the GRIDS Programme, in collaboration with key stakeholders, conducted a targeted training session in Kampala for law enforcement and regulatory officers from the Uganda National Drug Authority, the Uganda Police Force, the customs authorities and the Uganda Communications Commission. The training agenda was tailored to address critical areas pertinent to the effective interception of illicit substances and the promotion of safety protocols. In addition, in the same month, the GRIDS Programme participated in two events held in Uganda, namely, a postal and courier stakeholder engagement event and a workshop on postal and courier supply chain security and electronic advance data exchange, hosted by the Uganda Communications Commission and UPU.
399. From 23 to 25 April 2024, the Economic Community of West African States convened a West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use workshop to validate the Network's 2023 data and address regional drug use challenges. The event also provided an opportunity to affirm the commitment of the Economic Community of West African States to monitoring and supporting Sierra Leone during its declared drug use emergency relating to kush, which is a drug mixture that is found mainly in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, that may contain a number of psychoactive substances — including synthetic cannabinoids, opioids, cannabis, formalin and other chemicals — and that is usually smoked.
400. On 29 and 30 April 2024, training for border enforcement officers from Côte d'Ivoire on awareness of opioids, fentanyl and new psychoactive substances and safe interdiction approaches was organized under the GRIDS Programme. Participants also received instruction on the use of targeting (GRIDS Intelligence HD) and secure real-time trafficking communications (IONICS).

401. On 24 May 2024, a training event for enforcement officers from the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control was held in Lagos, Nigeria, under the GRIDS Programme. Participants were trained on awareness of opioids, fentanyl and new psychoactive substances and safe interdiction approaches. Participants also received instruction on the use of targeting (GRIDS Intelligence HD) and secure real-time trafficking communications (IONICS).

402. On 10 June 2024, as part of Operation African Star, a one-day pre-operational training event for the Kenya Pharmacy and Poisons Board and for postal and customs officers was held in Nairobi under the GRIDS Programme. The event was focused on raising awareness about opioids and safe interdiction approaches, as well as providing basic training on GRIDS Intelligence and secure real-time trafficking communications through IONICS. Access to IONICS was provided to units participating in Operation African Star, which was conducted in Kenya from 10 to 12 June 2024 and in Uganda from 13 to 14 June 2024 and resulted in seizures of numerous falsified and substandard medicines and enabled officers from both countries to record incidents in IONICS for the first time.

403. On 17 and 18 July 2024, the training of enforcement officers from Tunisia on awareness of opioids, fentanyl and new psychoactive substances and safe interdiction approaches was conducted under the GRIDS Programme. Training was also provided on basic targeting (GRIDS Intelligence HD) and secure real-time trafficking communications (IONICS).

404. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 40 countries and territories in Africa, namely, Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, the Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Saint Helena, the Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The five e-modules developed by INCB Learning cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The e-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

405. From 25 to 27 September 2024, a regional expert group meeting on road transport was convened under the GRIDS Programme with the aim of preventing trafficking in new psychoactive substances in West Africa. The meeting was attended by 22 participants from six countries, nine representatives of the private sector and three representatives of international organizations.

406. From 22 to 25 October 2024, the African Union held a continental consultation in Antananarivo under the auspices of the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats on the theme “Strengthening synthetic drug supply reduction efforts towards addressing drug trafficking and advancing crime prevention, criminal justice and rule of law in Africa.” INCB participated in the event and delivered a statement presenting the Board’s activities and initiatives aimed at reducing the trafficking of precursors and synthetic drugs in Africa, as well as its existing platforms and tools, including PEN Online, PEN Online Light, PICS, IONICS and the Scanning of Novel Opioids on Online Platforms (SNOOP) tool. INCB also presented its GRIDS Programme operational approach, including information on recent trends and threats in Africa. The meeting participants shared best practices and discussed possible assistance that could be provided by international organizations in the areas of capacity-building and technical support. Experts from 36 African countries, UNODC, INTERPOL, WCO, the Indian Ocean Commission, UPU, the African Police Cooperation Organization and the Eastern and Southern Africa Commission on Drugs participated in the event.

Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

407. 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 trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and the availability of these substances for licit medical and scientific purposes.

408. In Africa, over the past 20 years the amount of internationally controlled opioid analgesics available for consumption, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day (S-DDD_{mpd}), has followed a fluctuating trend at a generally lower level of consumption per day compared with other regions.

409. The countries with the highest levels of consumption of opioid analgesics in S-DDD_{pmpd} were South Africa (568 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Seychelles (338 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Mauritius (226 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Cabo Verde (140 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Tunisia (128 S-DDD_{pmpd}) and Namibia (92 S-DDD_{pmpd}). A total of 29 countries in Africa did not provide any data for 2022 on the consumption of medication containing opioid analgesics.

410. Between 2019 and 2023, approximately 66 per cent of countries and territories in the region regularly provided their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances. The rate of reporting was lowest in 2023, with 29 countries and territories providing their report that year. Of those countries and territories that did submit their statistical reports in the five-year period, approximately one third voluntarily provided consumption data.

411. The levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Africa, expressed in S-DDD per thousand inhabitants per day (S-DDD_{ptpd}), are some of the lowest of all regions of the world, and tracking consumption in the region remains a challenge given the low number of countries that provide data. Since 2014, the level of consumption of phenobarbital among countries that provided data has remained under 2.00 S-DDD_{ptpd}, peaking in 2015 at 1.84 S-DDD_{ptpd} and steadily decreasing to its lowest level in 2023, at 0.31 S-DDD_{ptpd}. With regard to diazepam, in the same period, consumption did not exceed 1 S-DDD_{ptpd}, except for in 2018, when consumption stood at 3.85 S-DDD_{ptpd}. The consumption of alprazolam in Africa is limited and between 2014 and 2023 never exceeded 1 S-DDD_{ptpd}.

412. The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. The Board encourages the countries and territories in Africa that have not provided the reports as required under the international drug control conventions to do so as soon as possible and 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 particular the information on consumption of psychotropic substances.

413. With regard to precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3. The provision of such estimates is requested for, among other substances, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which 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. **INCB recommends that Governments review their annual legitimate requirements for individual precursors at least once a year and inform INCB of any necessary changes, on form D or by official correspondence.**

414. Of the 54 countries on the African continent, 43 — or about 80 per cent — have provided at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations to the Board. However, 14 of them, or about 26 per cent, have not updated their estimates for those substances in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of estimates of annual legitimate requirements as a tool for guiding exporting countries with regard to the legitimate requirements of importing countries and thus preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes.

415. Further information can be found in the Board's technical publications for 2024 on narcotic drugs⁷⁸ and psychotropic substances⁷⁹ and report for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention. In addition, the *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.

⁷⁸ E/INCB/2024/2.

⁷⁹ E/INCB/2024/3.

National legislation, policy and action

416. In Algeria, pregabalin, tramadol and trihexyphenidyl were included in the list of products classified as psychotropics in accordance with a decree issued by the Ministry of Health on 14 February 2024 and amended on 28 February 2024. Algeria also promulgated Executive Decree No. 24-112 of 13 March 2024 establishing the conditions and modalities for the classification of narcotics, psychotropic substances and precursors.

417. The Egyptian Drug Authority decided to place GHB, GBL and 1,4-butanediol under national control. This decision, promulgated by Official Gazette issues No. 90 and No. 127, came into force on 25 March 2024.

418. On 29 January 2024, the Senate of Kenya passed the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) (Amendment) Bill, 2024, the objective of which is to exempt cathinone and cathine substances found in the miraa crop (khat or *Catha edulis*) from being classified as psychotropic substances. This would be done by amending the Second Schedule of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act.

419. On 19 June 2024, the National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse of Kenya launched its Strategic Plan 2023–2027, entitled *A Sober and Healthy Nation*, to support the execution of its mandate. The Plan sets out a framework for resource allocation, seeks to guide intervention efforts and envisages a nation free of alcohol and drug use disorders achieved through a multi-agency approach to demand and supply reduction. The ultimate goal of the Plan is to maintain the downward trend in the prevalence of alcohol and drug use, which was reduced from 18.2 per cent to 17.5 per cent between 2017 and 2022, and to achieve a further reduction of 12.5 per cent over the next five years.

420. In Libya, the National Strategy to Address the Impact of Drug Abuse was launched and approved by the Prime Minister of the Government of National Unity on 22 October 2024.

421. On 6 and 7 June 2024, Madagascar held the country's first national symposium on mental health, marking a significant step forward in its partnership with USAID and WHO. The main objective of the symposium was to foster understanding of the mental health landscape in Madagascar, identify key challenges and develop priority strategies and actions. It also contributed to the updating of the national mental health strategic plan. More than 160 participants, including policymakers, researchers, service providers and funders, attended the event.

422. On 5 December 2023, Mauritius passed a regulation under section 60 (2) (b) of the Dangerous Drugs Act to include the veterinary medicine xylazine, including its salts, isomers and salts of isomers, in Schedule II of the Dangerous Drugs Act 2000. In the country, xylazine is now controlled by the same provisions as for narcotic drugs.

423. On 29 March 2024, a new framework was established in Mauritius for combating financial crimes, namely, the Financial Crimes Commission Act 2023. The Act repeals the Prevention of Corruption Act (2002), the Asset Recovery Act (2011) and the Good Governance and Integrity Reporting Act (2015). It contains specific provisions that criminalize the financing of drug dealing (i.e. the direct or indirect financing or collection of funds for the purposes of drug dealing activities). New offences, liabilities and obligations have also been introduced. Notably, the Act creates a list of fraud offences with the aim of targeting more sophisticated schemes. Consequently, the Financial Crimes Commission has been established and is operational, having assimilated the functions of the institutions established under the aforementioned laws, namely, the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Asset Recovery Investigation Division and the Integrity Reporting Services Agency.

424. The National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Treatment of Addiction Disorders for 2024–2030 was validated by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of Morocco. The Plan is aimed at reducing mortality and morbidity linked to substance use disorders and, as a key objective, ensuring universal access to services for the prevention and high-quality treatment of substance use disorders and for the rehabilitation and social integration of people and their reintegration into the labour market.

425. On 29 January 2024, the Government of the Niger promulgated a decree categorizing pregabalin and exol as psychotropic substances.

426. In April 2024, the President of Sierra Leone declared a national emergency over drug and substance misuse, largely due to the surge in consumption of a drug mixture known as kush and the fatalities related to its use. The President ordered the establishment of a national task force on drugs and substance misuse, with a particular focus on combating the growing kush crisis. The aim of the national task force is to implement a strategy for a

drug-free future, which includes the following elements: (a) prevention; (b) care and treatment; (c) social services support; (d) law enforcement; and (e) community engagement.

427. On 28 May 2024, the President of South Africa signed into law the Cannabis for Private Purposes Act. The Act regulates the cultivation, possession and use of cannabis by adults in a private setting, implementing a 2018 ruling by the Constitutional Court of South Africa. The regulatory reforms enabled by the Act, inter alia, entirely remove cannabis from the Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act. This will further enable amendment of the Schedules to the Medicines and Related Substances Act and provide for targeted regulatory reform of the Plant Breeders' Rights Act and the Plant Improvement Act, as well as other pieces of legislation that need to be amended to allow the commercialization of the cannabis sector. The Act also guides the medically prescribed administration of cannabis to children while also protecting them from undue exposure to it. It provides for an alternative manner by which to address the issue of the prohibited use or possession of or dealing in cannabis by children, with due regard for the best interests of the child. In addition, the Government of South Africa has initiated discussions to develop a new master plan, as the current National Drug Master Plan is due to expire in 2024.

428. On 24 March 2024, the United Republic of Tanzania adopted the National Drug Control and Enforcement Policy and its Implementation Strategy of 2024. The Policy focuses on the following key areas: (a) drug supply reduction; (b) demand reduction; (c) harm reduction; (d) strengthening national, regional and international cooperation; and (e) other cross-cutting issues aimed at dealing with the drug problem. The Implementation Strategy addresses drug production and manufacture, transportation, importation and distribution, drug use, drug use disorders and associated diseases, coordination issues, and strategies for cooperation at the national, regional and international levels.

429. On 23 February 2024, the Government of Uganda promulgated the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act, 2024. The Act establishes stringent penalties, including life imprisonment, for trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances; the supply of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to a child; and the cultivation of prohibited plants (listed in Schedule 4 of the Act).

430. On 8 February 2024, the Drug Enforcement Commission of Zambia launched its first National Policy on Drug and Substance Control, covering the period from 2023 to 2027. The Policy's objective is to prioritize prevention and treatment over punitive measures. In particular, the Policy represents the country's comprehensive strategy for combating drug and substance misuse. It emphasizes evidence-based approaches focused on prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and law enforcement. It underscores a multisectoral effort involving the Government, civil society, the private sector and communities. Aligned with global initiatives, the Policy is aimed at protecting vulnerable populations, especially young people, from the harmful effects of drugs. Its launch reflects the commitment of Zambia to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and promoting health-centred drug control supported by international cooperation.

431. On 26 June 2024, the President of Zimbabwe launched the Zimbabwe Multisectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan 2024–2030. It provides a strategic road map for addressing the drug and substance use challenges in the country by engaging various sectors and promoting coordinated action and responses across sectors and stakeholders. It is focused on the following seven pillars: (a) supply reduction; (b) demand reduction; (c) harm reduction, treatment and rehabilitation; (d) community reintegration; (e) policy and legal enforcement; (f) media and communications; and (g) resource mobilization and economic strengthening.

Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

432. There has been a notable improvement in the availability of cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking data for Africa.

433. Although trafficking in cannabis and cannabis resin remains concentrated mainly in North Africa, cannabis seizures are reported by countries across the region. The available data suggest that the quantities of cannabis resin seized, particularly in Algeria and Morocco, continued to decline in 2023. Algeria reported seizing about 44 tons of cannabis resin in 2023 (compared with 58 tons in 2022 and 71 tons in 2021) and Morocco reported seizing about 169 tons in 2023 (compared with 300 tons in 2022 and over 511 tons in 2021). The quantities of cannabis resin seized in Egypt in 2023, at more than 191 tons, increased notably compared with previous years (over 49 tons in 2022, over 28 tons in 2021, over 44 tons in 2020 and over 39 tons in 2019). In contrast, the quantities

of seized cannabis herb reported by the authorities of Egypt continued to decrease, from over 466 tons in 2021 to 368 tons in 2022 and about 240 tons in 2023, while the quantities of cannabis herb seized by Algeria increased to about 26 kg of cannabis herb in 2023 (compared with 5 kg in 2022 and 8 kg in 2021) and in Morocco to over 315 tons in 2023 (compared with 209 tons in 2022). For the first three months of 2024, the authorities of Morocco reported seizing 111 tons of cannabis resin and 21 tons of cannabis herb.

434. Cannabis resin is, after cannabis herb, the second most seized drug in terms of quantity in the Sahel region, which indicates the importance of this subregion for trafficking in cannabis resin and other drugs. The *Impact of Transnational Cross-Cutting Organized Crime on Stability and Development in the Sahel*, Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment: Sahel, published by UNODC, reports that between 2021 and 2022, seizures of cannabis resin in the Sahel accounted for over 52.6 per cent of the total quantity of cannabis resin seized in West and Central Africa.

435. According to the *World Drug Report 2024*, there is growing evidence of an increase in the use of cocaine and in its associated harms in African countries. This is reportedly due to the spillover effect of the increasing use of Africa as a transit region for cocaine being smuggled to Europe to meet demand there.

436. For 2023, seizures of cocaine were reported by a number of countries in Africa, namely, Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The quantities ranged from a few grams to several kilograms.

437. Owing to its geographical location, trafficking in cocaine has increased in particular through West Africa, a trans-shipment hub for cocaine originating in South America and bound for Europe.

438. Significant inland cocaine seizures involving Sahel countries⁸⁰ indicate some large-scale trafficking in cocaine through the subregion. In 2022, nearly 1.5 tons of cocaine were seized, mostly by Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, compared with an average of 13 kg per year between 2015 and 2020. Although the annual data for 2023 from the Sahel countries were not systematically available at the time of the present report, by mid-2023, Mauritania had already seized 2.3 tons.

439. Significant seizures of cocaine were also made in countries bordering the Sahel. In April 2024, the authorities of Senegal seized over 1 ton (1,140 kg) of cocaine, which was reportedly the largest quantity of cocaine intercepted on land in that country. The drug had been concealed in the floor of a refrigerated truck entering the country across a land border. This was just one in a series of seizures in the country that year. In June 2024, customs authorities seized over 100 kg of cocaine from a vehicle in the southern region of the country. Prior to this, in May 2024, a mobile customs brigade in Tambacounda Province seized 264 kg of cocaine that had been hidden in a fuel tank of a truck. This was the second seizure made by the brigade after a seizure of over 90 kg of cocaine in March 2024.

440. In addition to seizures on land, there continued to be significant seizures of cocaine in maritime ports in West Africa, confirming the role of the region in drug trafficking via maritime routes. In December 2023, the Senegalese navy seized 3 tons of cocaine off the coast of Dakar, which was, according to the authorities, one of the largest drug seizures made by the navy. In March 2024, the French Navy seized 10 tons of cocaine on a Brazilian-flagged fishing vessel and 894 kg on another vessel, both in the Gulf of Guinea.

441. Notable quantities of cocaine continued to be intercepted in Libya, one of the main destination countries for that drug.

442. In addition to trafficking by land and sea, trafficking by air continued to present challenges in the region. In June and July 2024, Senegalese authorities made two seizures of 20 kg and 40 kg of cocaine at Blaise Diagne International Airport. Both consignments were reportedly bound for Europe.

443. Operation Lionfish Hurricane, which was coordinated by INTERPOL, was carried out in April and May 2024 and targeted drug trafficking networks, led to significant seizures of drugs and precursors, including in some of

⁸⁰ Namely, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger.

the participating African countries.⁸¹ A trafficking ring exploiting postal shipments was dismantled in Ghana after authorities seized nearly 19 kg of cannabis in parcels bound for Europe. Six tons of cocaine hydrochloride that had passed through Sierra Leone were seized in Antwerp, Belgium, and 1.1 tons of cocaine hydrochloride concealed in a truck bound for Europe were seized in Senegal. According to INTERPOL, the value of the drugs seized in this two-month operation was higher than the GDP of some countries, which indicates the scale of the problem.

444. According to an INTERPOL report entitled “Illicit trafficking of cocaine in Western and Northern Africa”, Nigerian and Moroccan criminal groups are the leading regional players involved in cocaine trafficking, in which they often associate with foreign criminal groups. They are mainly active in North and West Africa. Organized crime, however, also poses a major threat to other countries on the continent.

445. In June 2024, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency of Nigeria dismantled a large drug trafficking organization following the arrest of the organization’s ring leaders and a number of seizures of cocaine and methamphetamine. Consequently, the Agency arrested several other persons across the country, which resulted in seizures of several thousand tramadol tablets, diazepam, flunitrazepam, and undisclosed opioids, codeine syrup, cannabis, a mixture of psychotropic substances (“akuskura”) and various pieces of equipment used in the manufacture of new psychoactive substances.

446. With regard to pharmaceutical opioids, the non-medical use of tramadol remains a concern, in particular in North, West and Central Africa. The *World Drug Report 2024* reveals that more than 90 per cent of the total amount of tramadol seized by law enforcement authorities worldwide in the past five years has been seized in Africa, mostly West Africa. For 2023, Algeria reported seizing over 97,000 tramadol tablets and Egypt reported seizing over 2.9 million tramadol tablets. In 2024, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency of Nigeria intercepted large consignments of tramadol and codeine syrup at Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos, Nigeria. In January 2024, Libyan counter-narcotics authorities dismantled a laboratory in Tobruk and seized tablets of pharmaceutical opioids and amphetamine-type stimulants.

447. Heroin continues to be trafficked through all subregions of Africa, with East and Southern Africa often being the points of entry. For 2023, Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, the Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe reported seizures of that substance.

448. Information regarding seizures of other drugs remains limited; however, several African countries reported seizing benzodiazepines, khat, ketamine, methaqualone, methamphetamine, pregabalin and drug mixtures. According to the *World Drug Report 2024*, Africa is one of the regions experiencing an ongoing expansion of methamphetamine seizures, as evidenced by the dismantling in July 2024 of an industrial-scale clandestine methamphetamine laboratory on a farm in Limpopo Province, South Africa. In total, 408 kg of methamphetamine, with an estimated street value of about \$112 million, large quantities of chemicals, including acids, bases and solvents, as well as lead acetate and tartaric acid, were found. In 2024, a large clandestine laboratory suspected to have been used for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine was dismantled in Kenya.

449. In respect of precursor chemicals, the information reported by countries in Africa to the Board remains very limited. **The Board reiterates its recommendation that Governments provide it with information on seizures of substances scheduled at the international level and of substances not under international control, including their origin, when known, as mandated in article 12, paragraph 12, of the 1988 Convention.**

450. For 2023, seizures of substances listed in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention and of substances not under international control were reported by only a few countries.

451. During the reporting period, a number of notable seizures of chemicals were made in clandestine laboratories and warehouses in South Africa. In the period from January to July 2024 alone, the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation uncovered 10 clandestine drug laboratories and made 34 arrests. The chemicals seized suggest the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine and methaqualone.

⁸¹ Namely, Benin, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

452. Another significant seizure involving 9 tons of lead acetate was made in a warehouse in South Africa in November 2023. Seizures of lead acetate indicate the use of P-2-P-based methods in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, specifically, through phenylacetic acid, a method known to be employed in clandestine laboratories in Mexico.

453. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in Africa can be found in the Board's report for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention.

Prevention and treatment

454. Cannabis, followed by opioids, remain the main illicit drugs for which people with drug use disorders in Africa seek treatment. According to the *World Drug Report 2024*, the estimated prevalence of cannabis consumption in Africa was 6.65 per cent of the population (approximately 53.5 million people). The highest prevalence continued to be reported in West and Central Africa, at almost 10 per cent (approximately 31 million people), mainly due to high prevalence rates of cannabis use in Nigeria.

455. For opioids, including opiates and prescription opioids, the estimated prevalence of consumption stood at 1.3 per cent (approximately 10.1 million people) in 2022. According to the *Impact of Transnational Cross-Cutting Organized Crime on Stability and Development in the Sahel*, Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment: Sahel, the annual prevalence of opioid consumption increased from 0.33 per cent in 2011 to 1.24 per cent in 2021, indicating a considerable growth in opioid use in the subregion. The non-medical use of tramadol remains a concern, in particular in North, West and Central Africa, and it was reportedly the most used opioid for non-medical purposes in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. In the other subregions of Africa, heroin was reported as being the most consumed opioid, while in some countries it was codeine or opium.

456. In 2022, only 2.8 per cent of people with drug use disorders in Africa received treatment. While the majority of people treated for drug use disorders on the continent were under the age of 35, 31 per cent of people in treatment were under 25 years of age.

457. The *Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use Report: Statistics and Trends on Illicit Drug Use, Treatment Demand and Supply in Africa*, published in 2023, reports that between 2016 and 2021, on the basis of the data reported, the number of persons who entered drug treatment in Africa increased significantly. According to that publication, the reported increase could be attributed to the improved reporting of drug data to the Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use and training provided to the focal points responsible for collecting drug data. In the six-year period, alcohol was the most reported substance of misuse, followed by cannabis, opioids, including tramadol and heroin, cocaine and other substances. The report indicates that there was a notable increase in cannabis use, in particular in Southern Africa. Tramadol and heroin were also substances frequently misused during that period. The findings of the report emphasize the importance of enhanced data collection and reporting, of community support and referral systems and of addressing drug use among young people and women, including the need for improved access to treatment for women.

458. In the course of 2023, the National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse of Kenya released the following three publications: (a) The "National guidelines for aftercare and reintegration for persons recovering from substance use disorders", which provide a framework for both State and non-State institutions to effectively facilitate the transition of persons in recovery; (b) the "Code of practice for alcohol and drug use prevention practitioners in Kenya"; and (c) the "National alcohol and drug use prevention system 2023", which is aimed at delivering a range of interventions and policies based on scientific evidence, in multiple settings and targeting relevant ages and levels of risk. The code of practice and the national alcohol and drug use system were developed in line with the objectives set out in the *National Guidelines on Alcohol and Drug Use Prevention*, published in 2021.

459. According to the information provided by Morocco in 2024, the country's care facilities comprise 25 establishments specializing in the treatment of substance use disorders, including 22 outpatient centres and three university hospital departments. Hospitals to be built in Kenitra, Agadir and Beni Mellal will also include treatment units for substance use disorders. In addition, 10 such units have been established in prisons. In 2022, a

total of 27,793 people nationwide received treatment for substance use disorders. Of those individuals, 3,438 (2,559 men and 879 women) received psychiatric counselling, 21,912 (19,421 men and 2,491 women) were treated at specialized centres and 2,443 (2,261 men and 182 women) were admitted to psychiatric facilities for treatment. In 2024, the number of beneficiaries of the methadone programme implemented by the centres was 1,975 nationwide, the average prescribed daily dose of methadone being 54.3 mg.

460. According to the findings of the third round of the Nigeria Corruption Survey, in 2023, about 0.4 per cent of Nigerian citizens (compared with 0.7 per cent in 2019 and 2016) reported that drug misuse and trafficking was the most important problem affecting the country. About 11 per cent of Nigerian citizens (compared with 9 per cent in 2019 and 14 per cent in 2016) reported that corruption was the most important problem. In 2023, corruption ranked fourth, after the high cost of living, crime and insecurity and unemployment.

461. A survey carried out in the United Republic of Tanzania in 2023 to assess the diversion of pharmaceuticals in the country found that, among other substances, diazepam (Valium) and tramadol were being targeted to a large extent. The survey was carried out in four regions of the United Republic of Tanzania, including the Lake Zone (Mwanza and Geita), the Southern Highlands Zone (Mbeya) and the Northern Zone (Arusha), and involved 130 pharmacies and 176 persons receiving treatment from two methadone treatment centres.

462. Also in 2023, the United Republic of Tanzania provided treatment services to more than 903,062 persons (470,324 men and 432,738 women) with various drug use disorders resulting from the use of substances such as illicit drugs, alcohol and tobacco. The country currently runs 16 opioid substitution therapy clinics that use methadone. These clinics, located across the country, provide treatment services to approximately 16,460 people on a daily basis, compared with 11,500 people in 2022. The majority of people receiving the treatment in 2022 and 2023 were men.

463. In 2023 and 2024, UNODC continued to implement the “Youth 4 Impact” programme in the Middle East and North Africa region, including in Algeria, Egypt, Libya and the Sudan. The programme is aimed at helping young men and women, including those who are marginalized and at risk, to become more empowered to face life’s challenges and more resilient against crime, violence and drugs. Under the project, UNODC continued to enhance the capacity of relevant counterparts, as well as young people themselves, to implement prevention programmes and initiatives using tools such as the “Line Up! Live Up!” crime prevention through sports programme, the “Strong Families” family skills programme and the Global Resource for Anti-Corruption Education and Youth Empowerment (GRACE) initiative. In addition, UNODC also piloted the use of the “Unplugged” programme on the prevention of drugs, violence and crime in schools across Egypt.

464. In March 2024, the Ministry of Justice of Tunisia, with the support of UNODC, launched a new project entitled “Improving gender-responsive correctional services for female prisoners in Tunisia, in line with international standards”. The project is aimed at contributing to efforts to improve prison conditions for women and increase their access to targeted health and support services, as well as facilitate the reintegration into society of former female prisoners. Women with drug use disorders are one of the most vulnerable categories of female detainees targeted under the project.

465. In April 2024, UNODC launched the Youth Network for the Middle East and North African region to transform young people from Algeria, Egypt, Libya and the Sudan into proactive agents of change against drugs, violence and crime. The Network empowers young people with UNODC tools for awareness and prevention programmes, ensures their participation throughout the programme management cycle and integrates them into all UNODC initiatives. It also fosters partnerships and exchanges with other youth-led entities to enhance collaboration and impact. Furthermore, UNODC will establish an international network of drug dependence treatment and rehabilitation resource centres (Treatnet)⁸² network and trainers under the “Youth 4 Impact” programme in September 2024, targeting healthcare and young professionals in the region to sustain the programme regionally.

⁸² A training package to help health practitioners and social workers (and related professionals) to better support drug addiction and drug treatment services.

2. Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

Drug trafficking and the resultant decline in public safety are hindering development in the region.

The continued lack of recent surveys on the prevalence of drug use in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean makes it difficult to assess the scope and extent of illicit drug use in the region and hampers the development of effective evidence-based responses.

The percentage of people in treatment for drug use in the region who are under 25 is very high, the second highest of all regions worldwide after South America.

Major developments

466. Central America and the Caribbean continue to be used by drug trafficking organizations for the transshipment of drugs from South America to the main drug markets in Europe and the United States. In 2022, the global potential manufacture of pure cocaine reached a new record high of 2,757 tons, 20 per cent more than in 2021 and three times more than in 2013. The prolonged rise in cocaine supply partly coincided with a rise of violence in some countries along the supply chain, including in the Caribbean.

467. According to the *Global Study on Homicide 2023*, 8 of the 10 countries that had the highest homicide rates worldwide were in Latin America and the Caribbean. Available data indicate that homicide rates in Central America have significantly decreased in the past decade but have increased in South America and the Caribbean. The high homicide rates can be attributed to complex dynamics relating to societal issues including weak rule of law, social inequality and youth unemployment. The social factors are further complicated by illicit drug and firearms trafficking, which fuels competition among criminal groups for control over those illicit markets. In the past few years, several countries in the region, concerned about violent crime and the low trust in the police, have declared a state of emergency to address their public security crises (see paras. 495 and 497 below).

468. The lack of public security is an important factor undermining the rule of law and hindering development in the region. According to the preliminary findings of a study conducted by UNDP in partnership with USAID, the total expenditure on public security, justice and human rights in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras steadily grew between 2010 and 2022, at an annual average growth rate of 8.2 per cent in the three countries.

469. In the Caribbean and Latin America, seizures of firearms are often found to be linked to drug trafficking. In March and April 2023, INTERPOL conducted its largest firearms-related operation, Operation Trigger IX, which corroborated the connections between illicit drug manufacture and trafficking in drugs and firearms. The operation was supported by 15 countries, including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama, and resulted in seizures of 203 tons of cocaine and other illicit drugs with an estimated value of \$5.7 billion, as well as 372 tons of precursors, more than 8,000 illicit firearms and 300,000 rounds of ammunition.

470. In December 2023, CICAD of the Organization of American States published the national evaluation reports of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism covering the areas of institutional strengthening related to drug-related policies and initiatives; research, information, monitoring and evaluation; and international cooperation. The national reports submitted under the Mechanism showed that improvements had been achieved with respect to capacity-building to enhance the collection, management and dissemination of drug-related information. More than half of the States members of CICAD had established national drug authorities at a high level of government and granted their national entity the authority to guide and coordinate the formulation, implementation and evaluation of national drug policies. However, about 40 per cent of the member States indicated having no provisions for adequate financing, or the provision of other resources, for the implementation of national drug policies and programmes.

471. The Board notes that the majority of countries in Central America and the Caribbean (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada,

Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Trinidad and Tobago) participated in the United States-led Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats.

Regional cooperation

472. In February 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme held a global workshop on advanced targeting, for operational officers, express courier and freight forwarding industry partners in Vienna. The event brought together law and regulatory enforcement officers, international organizations and associations and private sector partners to address the future of countering the trafficking of synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, opioids and related substances. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security and Panama.

473. In June 2024, the GRIDS Programme, in collaboration with CICAD, carried out regional training to counter the illicit trafficking of new psychoactive substances. Held at the Trinidad and Tobago Police Academy in St. James, the workshop was attended by law enforcement and regulatory officers from 11 Caribbean countries. Participants received hands-on training and gained access to INCB platforms in order to enhance the participants' ability to address emerging threats posed by new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids.

474. CICAD, INCB and UNODC continued to organize expert meetings and provide training for the competent national authorities of the countries of the Caribbean and Central America. Drug control officials from 16 countries in the region have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules.

475. COPOLAD III continued to be used to promote technical cooperation and political dialogue between the European Union and countries of Latin America and Caribbean in support of the implementation of more effective drug policies in the region.

476. UNODC estimates that countries intercept and recover only 1 per cent of global illicit financial flows. To address the issue, COPOLAD III, together with the European Union project "Bien Restituido", promotes efforts for the recovery of assets in order to support social development projects. Together with the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America, an international seminar on the recovery, administration and distribution for social and community use of assets confiscated from drug trafficking and organized crime activities was held in May 2024. The international seminar was attended by national agencies responsible for administering seized assets, police and judicial authorities from 14 Latin American and Caribbean countries including Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Uruguay, five European Union countries and civil society organizations from countries that receive seized assets for social purposes.

477. A report entitled *Innovative Alternative Development Approaches in Latin America and the Caribbean* was developed under COPOLAD III, aimed at exploring new applications for alternative development beyond traditional rural settings and areas and drug policy settings. In addition to examining countries affected by illicit cultivation in areas of instability, or within Indigenous territories, mainly in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru, the report also examines countries of Central America and the Caribbean where illicit drug cultivation has emerged, such as Guatemala; countries affected by trafficking, including microtrafficking, such as El Salvador and Panama; and countries where regulated cannabis markets have emerged, such as Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

478. The Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of the Caribbean Community continued to assist its member States in identifying and analysing crime and security threats in the region and recommending actions for dealing with them. In November 2023, the Council of Ministers for National Security and Law Enforcement approved its strategic plan for the period 2024–2029, under the theme "Mutual security through partnership", to support law enforcement agencies in securing a safer Caribbean region.

479. A report entitled *Caribbean Gangs: Drugs, Firearms and Gang Networks in Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago*, published by UNODC in July 2024, summarizes drug- and firearms-related dynamics in each of the four countries to illuminate some of the regional characteristics of organized crime. The report underscores the economic ramifications of gang-related crime, in particular in the areas of employment and economic development. A joint publication of the Flemish Peace Institute and UNODC entitled *Firearms and Drugs: Partners in Transnational Crime* indicates that firearms trafficking is often funded through the profits

generated by illicit drug trafficking and that the direct exchange of firearms for drugs takes place in some instances. According to the publication, despite an arms embargo on Haiti, owing to the ongoing instability in the country and its large, porous borders, firearms originating in the United States ultimately arrive in Jamaica via Haiti, having been obtained by means of the guns-for-drugs trade. However, the publication noted that the guns-for-drugs trade between Haiti and Jamaica has been in decline over the past two years.

480. According to regional experts on countering firearms trafficking, the number of incidents of gun-related crimes in some smaller CARICOM member States, which traditionally had lower homicide rates, are starting to surpass the number of incidents in larger States. At a regional meeting on countering the trafficking of firearms to Trinidad and Tobago and other Caribbean States, held in Port of Spain in May 2024, commissioners of police of CARICOM countries and United States authorities discussed, among other things, the restrictions on the export of firearms to non-government entities in high-risk countries that were announced by the United States authorities in April 2024. The Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are among the 36 high-risk countries for which the United States Department of Commerce will restrict the export of firearms to non-government entities; further control measures will be required of civilian dealers, such as proof of end user. The new measures are intended to reduce the risk of legally exported firearms being diverted or misused to fuel regional instability, drug trafficking, human rights violations, political violence and other activities that undermine the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States.

481. In Trinidad and Tobago, 46 per cent of firearm-enabled murders are gang-related, and a further 17 per cent are drug-related. In June 2024, USAID presented the Ministry of National Security of Trinidad and Tobago with the results of a study aimed at assisting national security efforts against criminal gangs in the country.

Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

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

483. Central America and the Caribbean are among the regions of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes.

484. Consumption of opioid analgesics for medical and scientific purposes, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day, has steadily increased in Central America and the Caribbean, with some fluctuations over the past 20 years. Consumption of opioid analgesics above 300 S-DDD_{pmpd} was reported by only a small number of countries and territories in the region, namely Sint Maarten, which reported consumption of 3,251 S-DDD_{pmpd}, followed, in order of greatest consumption, by the Turks and Caicos Islands, El Salvador, Barbados and Costa Rica. The Board considers levels of consumption of opioid analgesics below 200 S-DDD_{pmpd} to be inadequate.

485. Between 2019 and 2023, approximately 75 per cent of the countries and territories in the region regularly provided their annual statistical reports on psychotropic substances. Of those, approximately half voluntarily provided consumption data. The Board urges the countries of the region that do not regularly provide their annual statistical report to do so as required under the 1971 Convention and to provide consumption data as part of their report, if those data are available.

486. The levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Central America and the Caribbean are lower than in some other regions in the world, and tracking consumption remains a challenge given the limited number of countries that provide such data. Since 2014, consumption of phenobarbital in those countries that provided data has remained under 2.00 S-DDD_{ptpd}, peaking at 1.84 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2017 and standing at 0.75 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023. In the same period, consumption of diazepam did not exceed 1 S-DDD_{ptpd} except for 2022, when it reached 2.01 S-DDD_{ptpd}. Rates of consumption of alprazolam in the region are among the highest in the world, reaching a high of 11.83 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2021, dropping to 3.93 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2022 and remaining at the consistent level of 4.1 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023.

487. 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 Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3. The provision of annual

legitimate requirements is requested, inter alia, 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. **INCB recommends that Governments review their annual legitimate requirements for individual precursors at least once a year and inform INCB of any necessary changes, on form D or by official correspondence.**

488. Of the 20 countries in the region, 18 countries, or 90 per cent, have provided at least one estimate of annual legitimate requirements for import of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations to the Board. Five countries among those have not updated their annual legitimate requirements in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of the annual legitimate requirements as a tool for guiding exporting countries with regard to the legitimate requirements of importing countries and thus preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes.

489. Further information can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2024 on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as well as the report for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention. In addition, the *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by the International Narcotics Control Board and WHO for use by competent national authorities as well as 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.

National legislation, policy and action

490. According to the information available, national drug policies and national plans on drug control in a number of countries in Central America and the Caribbean have expired. Moreover, the CICAD Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism national reports released in 2023 indicate that various countries in the region, when formulating or updating their national drug policies and strategies, did not take into account the provisions of the Organization of American States 2020 Hemispheric Drugs Strategy of 2020 and the corresponding Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for the period 2021–2025 or the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Overall, only 40 per cent of countries in the Americas engaged with the private sector to develop innovative approaches to the implementation of national drug policies or strategies, including the exchange of information on emerging substances subject to misuse.

491. To assist countries with the formulation of new national drug strategies, CICAD published the *Universal Training Curriculum for National Drug Strategies*, a manual for trainers in the Americas, in November 2023 and a guide entitled *How To Develop a National Drug Policy* in December 2023. Twenty-five professionals were trained as future trainers using the *Universal Training Curriculum* to support countries of the Americas in the formulation of their national policies on drugs.

492. In 2023, CICAD hosted the second Caribbean Youth Forum on Drug Use Prevention in Nassau. The Forum, attended by youth leaders from 13 Caribbean countries, sought to promote youth leadership in drug use prevention by developing youth-led initiatives.

493. The Inter-American Observatory on Drugs continued to provide training on early warning systems and emerging drugs to the national drug observatories of Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Saint Lucia. Barbados, El Salvador, and Trinidad and Tobago were among the countries in the western hemisphere that shared past data through the early warning system.

494. In 2023, the authorities of Costa Rica reviewed draft Bill No. 23,426, a draft law to promote the scientific analysis of psychoactive substances for the formulation of health policies for prevention in the country. In July 2024, through its decree 301-23, the Government of the Dominican Republic created a special administrative career path for officials of the National Directorate of Drug Control who do not come from the armed forces or national police. The regulation aims to improve the working conditions of all civilians working at the anti-drug agency.

495. In June 2024, the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador approved the twenty-seventh extension of its state of emergency. The state of emergency was first declared in March 2022 to allow the continuation of government efforts to address organized crime, including drug trafficking and criminal activities carried out by street

gangs, and maintain security for the country's population. In 2023, 2.4 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants were reported in the country, compared with 53.1 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2018. The Board noted that the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador initiated the drafting of a new national drug strategy for the period 2024–2029, which will replace the now expired national anti-drug strategy for the period 2016–2021.

496. In March 2024, the national competent authorities of Guatemala signed the Protocol of Action of the country's Inter-Institutional Group for the Control and Inspection of Precursors and Chemical Substances to strengthen their inter-institutional cooperation in precursor control, within the scope of their respective competencies.

497. In Haiti, whose territory is used by traffickers as a transit hub for cocaine from South America and cannabis from the Caribbean, years of political turmoil and devastating economic conditions have led to the proliferation of armed groups. In 2023 and 2024, the security situation in the country, which was already critical, deteriorated further. Criminal gangs took control of large parts of the capital, Port-au-Prince, and expanded their influence into other areas of the country. There were reports of fights between local gangs but also signs of collaboration between certain groups to carry out joint attacks. According to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti and Head of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, approximately 2,500 people were killed or injured in gang violence in the first quarter of 2024. In 2024, the Government of Haiti declared a state of emergency in the country and authorized the Haitian National Police, with the support of the armed forces of Haiti and the multinational mission mandated by the Security Council and led by Kenya, to launch operations in the affected areas with a view to re-establishing rule of law in the country and strengthening political stability and security.

498. Under COPOLAD III, the National Council on Drug Abuse of Jamaica, in cooperation with EUDA, co-organized a series of technical meetings held in Kingston in January 2024. The meetings focused on technical dialogues on cannabis policies, mapping the forensic capacity of Latin American and Caribbean countries and providing technical support to Jamaica on early warning systems for new psychoactive substances.

499. In October 2023, the National Commission for the Study and Prevention of Drug-Related Crimes of Panama participated in the launch of QALAT II, the second phase of the project "Quality assurance in the treatment of drug use disorders in Latin America and the Caribbean". The programme, implemented by UNODC, supports 10 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in their efforts to implement quality assurance mechanisms in their services and treatment systems for substance use disorders.

500. Following the approval by the Government of Panama of the medical and therapeutical use of cannabis and its derivatives in 2021, the Ministry of Health and other relevant ministries, in May 2024, initiated technical exchanges with companies expected to be granted medical cannabis derivatives manufacturing licences.

Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

501. The main cocaine trafficking flows continue to run from the Andean region to other countries in the Americas and onward to Western and Central Europe, the second largest cocaine market after North America. In 2022, the amount of cocaine seized worldwide (not adjusted for purity), after years of marked increase, stabilized at a record level of just over 2,000 tons.

502. According to the *2024 National Drug Threat Assessment*, published by the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States, trafficking of cocaine from South America into Mexico, and from Mexico into the United States, is largely controlled by the Sinaloa and Jalisco cartels of Mexico. These cartels obtain multi-ton shipments of powder cocaine and cocaine base from South American traffickers, then smuggle it by land routes or coastal waterways in Central America, or by sea to Caribbean islands such as Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and finally bring it into the United States. Once in the United States, the substance is distributed by local criminal groups and street gangs.

503. In Europe, cocaine enters the continent by various routes, but transportation of large volumes of cocaine usually involves the use of intermodal commercial shipping containers that arrive in Europe's seaports. According to Europol, traffickers based in South America and Spain also traffic cocaine using the sailboats that travel along the major drug trafficking routes. In Central America and the Caribbean, traffickers keep their sailboats in Barbados, Panama, Saint Lucia or Trinidad and Tobago, ready to sail as soon as the order to transport cocaine is received from criminal organizations. In 2022, States members of the European Union seized over 323 tons

of cocaine, which was more than the amount of cocaine seized in the United States, the country historically considered to be the largest market for this drug.

504. In Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, larger gangs support the procurement, trans-shipment and trafficking of drugs, firearms and also persons from South America to North America and Western Europe. Drug seizures reported in the past few years also indicate that the territory of Saint Lucia is used in a wider transnational drug network, including the trans-shipment of illicit drugs from Saint Lucia to Barbados and onward to markets in the United States and the United Kingdom. In January 2023, the Jamaica Customs Agency reported a seizure of 1.5 tons of cocaine, one of the largest drug seizures in the country's history.

505. In Costa Rica, the amount of cocaine seized continued to decrease, from 47.1 tons in 2020 to 24.8 tons in 2022, and to 21.4 tons in 2023. In the first four months of 2024, 6.1 tons of cocaine were seized in the country.

506. In the Dominican Republic, 25 tons of diverse illicit drugs were seized in 2023, 4.9 tons less than the 29.9 tons seized in 2022. The seizures in 2023 included 18.0 tons of cocaine, 6.9 tons of cannabis herb and smaller amounts of other drugs. A further 5.4 tons of cocaine were seized in the country in the first trimester of 2024. In Guatemala, police eradicated more than 100,000 coca plants in the first two months of 2024. Since 2020, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama have reported the discovery of a small number of illicit laboratories processing coca paste or coca base.

507. According to a national report on the drug situation, published by the drug observatory of El Salvador, seizures of cocaine in the country have fluctuated significantly since 2018: in 2018, 2021 and 2022, seizures of cocaine averaged 12.2 tons per year; in 2019 and 2020 they were an average of only 1.0 tons per year. Most of the seizures were made on maritime routes. In 2022, 63 per cent of cocaine seized in El Salvador had been smuggled from Ecuador and was destined for Mexico.

508. From January to mid-April 2024, police in Guatemala seized 6 tons of cocaine and eradicated 166,000 coca plants, 198,000 cannabis plants and 1.5 million opium poppy plants. The amount of cocaine seized in the country in early 2024 was three times the amount seized in the same period in 2022.

509. In Central America and the Caribbean, major producers of cannabis include Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. According to the CICAD information bulletin "Cannabis with a high concentration of THC and synthetic cannabinoids in Latin America and the Caribbean", published in 2023, the potency of cannabis-derived products has quadrupled since 2010.

510. Between 2016 and 2020, cannabis seizures in Central America and the Caribbean increased slightly. In Costa Rica, a total of 25.1 tons of cannabis herb were seized in 2022, and 21.7 tons of the substance were seized in 2023, which were the two largest annual totals of cannabis herb seizures in that country since 2000. In addition, almost 370,000 cannabis plants were eradicated in Costa Rica in 2023, 273,000 fewer than in 2022. In the Dominican Republic, seizures of cannabis herb more than doubled, from 2.9 tons seized in 2022 to 6.9 tons in 2023. In the first trimester of 2024, a further 0.85 tons of cannabis herb were seized in the Dominican Republic. The total amount of cannabis herb (33.6 tons) seized in Panama in 2023 was slightly higher than in 2022 (29.6 tons). From January to April 2024, the Panamanian authorities seized an additional 11.2 tons of cannabis herb. In El Salvador, seizures of cannabis have decreased over the last three years.

511. The latest seizure data published by UNODC indicate an ongoing expansion of the methamphetamine market in Central America. In Costa Rica, almost 580,000 doses of synthetic drugs, including methamphetamine, were seized in 2023, the highest amount of synthetic drugs seized in the country since 2000. Furthermore, in 2023, the authorities of Costa Rica dismantled a major organization involved in the trafficking of fentanyl. El Salvador has experienced an increase in methamphetamine seizures over the past four years, from 0.1 kg in 2019 to 7.1 kg in 2022, although these amounts are still relatively low. More than 80 per cent of the methamphetamine seized in El Salvador was trafficked from Guatemala. From 2018 to 2022, more than 6,000 methamphetamine tablets, originating in Europe and the United States, were seized in Trinidad and Tobago. In August 2023, law enforcement authorities in Trinidad and Tobago dismantled a clandestine laboratory manufacturing methamphetamine.

512. In 2023, authorities in El Salvador issued a public alert for a pink powder being sold on local markets as "tuci". The results of forensic laboratory analysis confirmed that "tuci" contained a mixture of several substances such as ketamine, "ecstasy" and caffeine. Seizures of "tuci" were also reported in Guatemala in 2024.

513. According to the CICAD information bulletin on online sales of illicit substances in the Americas, released in September 2023, such online sales are a thriving business in the western hemisphere. Cannabis, cocaine and synthetic drugs top the list of sales, according to the local experts. In 2022, a qualitative rapid assessment in Jamaica found that students reported that the Internet was the primary source for obtaining “ecstasy”.

Prevention and treatment

514. The Board notes with concern the continued lack of recent epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of illicit drug use in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean. According to UNODC data, only six countries in the region (Bahamas, Costa Rica, Haiti, Jamaica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago) have provided information on the annual prevalence of use of any illicit drug, prescription medicines, or new psychoactive substances among the general population since 2015. The continued lack of current information on the prevalence of illicit drug use makes it difficult to assess the overall impact of the latest developments in drug control, including the trend towards legalization of cannabis for non-medical use, the increased production of and trafficking in cocaine, and the proliferation of online trade in synthetic drugs on the states and civil society in the region, including youth. **The Board reiterates its call to the countries concerned to prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand in order to inform the development of evidence-based drug policy and encourages bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to this end.**

515. The percentage of people in treatment for drug use in Central America and the Caribbean who are under age 25 (37 per cent) is the second highest of all regions worldwide after South America (49 per cent).

516. According to the *World Drug Report 2024*, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population in Central America was 5.7 per cent and 3.17 per cent in the Caribbean. These estimates are, however, mostly based on older data, and therefore current prevalence rates may have significantly increased in recent years. Since 2015, the highest past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the general population in the region was that reported by Jamaica in 2016 (18 per cent).

517. The region has the highest proportion worldwide of persons in drug treatment who have cannabis as their primary drug. Because of the lack of surveys in the region over the past decade, there is limited information about the use of synthetic cannabinoids in Latin America and the Caribbean.

518. Central America and the Caribbean are among the regions with the largest variety of cocaine products available and among the regions with the highest proportion of people in drug treatment owing to the use of cocaine products. The annual prevalence of the use of cocaine among people aged 15–64 years is estimated to be 0.94 per cent in Central America and 0.19 per cent in the Caribbean.

519. The annual prevalence of use of amphetamine, methamphetamine and pharmaceutical stimulants in Central America (0.99 per cent) was considerably higher than the global average (0.58 per cent). No prevalence data were available for the Caribbean.

520. According to the best estimates, based on UNODC data published in 2024, about 20,000 people aged 15–64 inject drugs in Central America and 100,000 people aged 15–64 inject drugs in the Caribbean. The joint 2022 UNODC/WHO/UNAIDS/World Bank estimate of the global prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs was 11.7 per cent. In Central America and the Caribbean, where data are available for only one third of all people who inject drugs, HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs was estimated to be 0.94 per cent in Central America and 10.8 per cent in the Caribbean. This represents a notable decrease from the statistics published by UNODC in 2020, when HIV prevalence data were also available for only one third of all people in Central America and the Caribbean who injected drugs, and the HIV prevalence rate was estimated to be 3.4 per cent in Central America and 14 per cent in the Caribbean.

North America

The opioid crisis remains a serious challenge for countries in the region. Trafficking in synthetic opioids continues to grow, although the number of overdose deaths related to synthetic opioids has declined slightly for the first time in several years.

Some drug decriminalization measures in the Province of British Columbia, Canada, and the State of Oregon, United States, have been rolled back owing to concerns related to drug use in public spaces and increases in overdose deaths in those jurisdictions.

Major developments

521. The illicit manufacture of and trafficking in fentanyl and other synthetic opioids continues to grow across the region. Although in 2023 Canada and Mexico reported slight decreases in the amount of fentanyl seized, the United States saw a dramatic increase. The amount of fentanyl reported seized by the United States more than doubled from the previous year, totalling more than 25 tons, equivalent to several billion doses. Despite that increase, overall drug-related overdose deaths in the United States declined slightly for the first time since 2018, from 111,029 such deaths in 2022 to 107,543 in 2023.

522. Some measures decriminalizing the illicit possession and use of drugs in some jurisdictions in Canada and the United States were partially rolled back owing to concerns related to drug use in public spaces and increased overdose deaths. In the Province of British Columbia, Canada, the use of drugs in public spaces was recriminalized because of concerns about such use and the ability of law enforcement authorities to address it. In the State of Oregon, United States, the possession and consumption of drugs was recriminalized because of growing drug use since decriminalization provisions were introduced in 2020. The Governor of Oregon stressed that, despite the reintroduction of penalties for illicit possession and use of drugs, measures were being taken to minimize the number of people incarcerated for such drug possession and use and to instead direct people to drug treatment services.

Regional cooperation

523. Countries of the region continued to strengthen their coordination efforts to address drug trafficking through existing regional cooperation mechanisms. Officials from Canada, Mexico and the United States met on 7 and 8 November 2023 for the seventh meeting of the North American Drug Dialogue. The Kingdom of the Netherlands was invited to participate in the seventh meeting with a view to coordinating efforts to address synthetic drug threats. In addition to reviewing progress since the previous meeting in 2022, the three countries reaffirmed their commitment to deepening counter-narcotics efforts, sharing data related to drug use and trafficking, and strengthening substance use prevention strategies through a mental health-oriented approach.

524. Following the seventh meeting of the North American Drug Dialogue, the steering committee of the Canada-United States Joint Action Plan on Opioids met on 9 November 2023. The two Governments reviewed the progress made in their partnership to address the opioid overdose crisis in the two countries. In addition to reviewing their collaboration over the previous years, the countries committed to deepening their efforts to address the supply of illicitly manufactured synthetic opioids by preventing the illicit importation of precursor chemicals used for the illicit manufacture of those drugs through the sharing of best practices and the conducting of joint training activities and joint operations to disrupt the illicit supply chain.

525. High-level officials from Canada, Mexico and the United States met on 7 February 2024 for the fourth meeting of the Trilateral Fentanyl Committee. The countries committed to increasing controls on precursor chemicals and equipment related to illicit drug production, coordinating diplomatic efforts to build on progress made within the framework of the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats and developing a common drug analysis protocol, and made plans for the convening of a forum on strategies to support the long-term recovery of persons suffering from drug use disorders. In addition, the three countries agreed to expand the scope of the Committee in order to address firearms trafficking associated with illicit drug manufacture and drug trafficking.

The expanded scope includes information-sharing, in particular the use of United States firearms databases, to facilitate investigations into the trafficking of firearms across the three countries' shared borders.

526. In February 2024, China and the United States established a joint working group, the United States-China Counternarcotics Working Group, to deepen counter-narcotics efforts between the two countries at all levels, including in the areas of policymaking, law enforcement coordination and the sharing of technical information and best practices. According to the United States State Department, the Working Group complements efforts of the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats.

527. INCB continues to support countries in the region in addressing the prevalence of synthetic drugs through the activities of its GRIDS Programme. From 28 November to 1 December 2023, an interregional twinning event was held for 23 officers from Colombia, Mexico and Spain. Participants gained a thorough understanding of the GRIDS Programme and its strategic initiatives tailored to address the constantly evolving drug trafficking landscape. Representatives from participating agencies shared insights into current national trends in drug trafficking, highlighting recent major seizures in which international cooperation had played a pivotal role and had led to the dismantling of drug manufacturing operations.

528. On 24 January 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme convened in Mexico City a national stakeholders consultation on public-private partnerships for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances through logistics and courier services. The event involved the participation of 25 representatives from various government agencies and private sector partners in Mexico. Participants had the opportunity to discuss existing public-private partnership initiatives in Mexico and to explore plans to expand collaboration through additional activities, such as training sessions to raise awareness about new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids. The discussion also focused on the content of the Board's practical guidance for voluntary cooperation with the express courier and freight forwarding industries.

529. From 13 to 16 February 2024, the GRIDS Programme held a global workshop in Vienna on advanced targeting for operational officers and express courier and freight forwarding industry partners. The four-day event brought together law and regulatory enforcement officers and representatives of international organizations and associations and private sector partners to address the future of efforts to counter trafficking in synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, opioids and related substances. The meeting was attended by over 100 participants, including representatives of Canada, Mexico and the United States.

530. From 5 to 8 March 2024, the GRIDS Programme hosted an event in Vienna entitled "Tech against trafficking: practical approaches to countering cross-platform exploitation of online services". The meeting brought together over 70 participants from Governments, international organizations and private sector partners. Among them were representatives from various United States law enforcement agencies. The event was aimed at discussing the future landscape of efforts to counter drug trafficking and the misuse of online services for such trafficking, specifically addressing challenges and advancements related to synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances and, in particular, synthetic opioids and related chemicals.

531. On 16 and 17 April 2024, the GRIDS Programme and the INCB Precursors Control Section co-organized a training session in Mexico City for officers from the Mexican Navy and other government entities in Mexico. The collaborative initiative was aimed at facilitating knowledge-sharing and capacity-building related to dangerous substances and the secure exchange of real-time intelligence. At the event, government experts provided updates on related trends and challenges, showcasing several successful seizures, including seizures involving fentanyl, precursors and other illicit substances.

532. Beginning in 2023, the Governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States participated in the INCB industry mapping initiative, which is aimed at mobilizing the engagement of national industries in preventing the diversion of chemical substances into illicit drug manufacture. The mapping exercise is currently focused on engaging with Governments in countries that have notable or innovative chemical and/or pharmaceutical sectors in order to identify relevant industries for the purpose of facilitating the development or enhancement of national mechanisms, procedures and frameworks to enable operational cooperation and interaction between authorities and industries with a view to preventing the diversion of chemicals for illicit purposes.

533. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities of all countries in North America have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The five e-modules developed by INCB Learning cover narcotic

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

Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

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

535. North America is the region with the highest levels of consumption of opioid analgesics. In 2022, the United States (27,709 S-DDD_{pmptd}) and Canada (7,625 S-DDD_{pmptd}) were the countries reporting the highest consumption of opioid analgesics, whereas Mexico reported consumption in the amount of only 35 S-DDD_{pmptd}.

536. The levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in North America are higher than those in most other regions of the world. Since 2014, consumption of phenobarbital, expressed in S-DDD per thousand inhabitants per day (S-DDD_{ptpd}), has remained relatively stable, at about 1.00 S-DDD_{ptpd}, and stood at 0.92 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023. With regard to diazepam, in the same period, consumption was highest in 2016, at 2.20 S-DDD_{ptpd}, and lowest in 2021 and 2023, standing at 0.44 S-DDD_{ptpd} in both years. The rate of consumption of alprazolam in the region is among the highest in the world, having reached a high of 44.77 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2014 then dropping to 9.62 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2017. Consumption of alprazolam remained at about 14 S-DDD_{ptpd} from 2018 to 2021. In 2023, consumption of the substance in North America stood at 9.89 S-DDD_{ptpd}.

537. 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, 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 2024, all three countries in the region had provided at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations, and all three have regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

538. Further information and analysis of trends relating to the availability of internationally controlled substances are contained in the technical reports of the Board for 2024 on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and the implementation of articles 12 and 13 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.

National legislation, policy and action

539. In responding to the continued threat posed by trafficking in synthetic drugs, in particular fentanyl, countries in the region have continued to take action to counter the use of novel or designer precursor chemicals and other substances in the illicit manufacture of drugs. Canada put in place controls over the derivatives and analogues of the fentanyl precursor 4-piperidone, already under national control, including 1-boc-4-piperidone. Mexico placed eight fentanyl precursors under national control, along with seven chemical precursors of methamphetamine and four other chemicals. In total, Mexico has placed 15 fentanyl precursors and 29 methamphetamine precursors under national control, along with another 25 chemicals used for the manufacture of drugs. The Government of Mexico also launched a new online platform, the Integrated System of Chemical Substances (SISUS), for strengthening domestic control over the import and movement of precursors and related specialized equipment.

540. In December 2023, the United States Department of Health and Human Services announced new guidelines recommending that all federal facilities in the United States have overdose reversal medications on site, in line with the country's 2022 National Drug Control Strategy for expanding access to overdose reversal medication. The updated guidelines propose that automated external defibrillators in federal facilities be converted to "safety stations" that would enable anyone to respond to an emergency. The guidelines recommend that each station include a defibrillator, an opioid reversal agent and a haemorrhagic control component.

541. In January 2024, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada revised the country's guidelines for drug treatment courts. The revisions are aimed at making drug treatment courts in Canada more accessible to people who use drugs by removing some automatic exclusionary rules, in particular for people who use drugs that have a prior conviction for a violent offence. Such people will now be assessed on a case-by-case basis with respect to the circumstances of the underlying offence. Additionally, people may enter the country's drug court treatment programme at any point during a prosecution. The revisions are intended to give prosecutors flexibility, thereby enabling them to better address the needs of people who use drugs facing prosecution, and to reduce rates of recidivism.

542. Health Canada presented the final report on the legislative review of the Cannabis Act of Canada on 21 March 2024. The report was prepared by an expert panel which conducted the review over a period of 18 months and provides an assessment of the progress made in achieving the objectives of the Act. According to the report, progress had been made towards meeting several key objectives of the legislation, including the establishment of a licensing framework to allow for a legal, quality-controlled supply of cannabis for adults, shifting adult consumers to the legal cannabis market and increasing adherence to rules related to the promotion, packaging and labelling of cannabis products. In addition, the report indicated that between 2017 and 2022 there had been a 95 per cent drop in the number of charges for possession of cannabis, since it was no longer a criminal offence. Some areas of concern were noted in the report, including that the rate of consumption of cannabis among young people in Canada, while having remained stable since the introduction of the Cannabis Act, remained among the highest in the world. In the report, concerns were also expressed about the shift to high-potency cannabis products, engagement with Indigenous populations of Canada on cannabis policy, regulatory challenges for the licit cannabis industry and access to medical cannabis. The report provided 54 recommendations and 11 observations to the Government of Canada with regard to improving the implementation of the Cannabis Act and meeting its stated objectives.

543. On 1 April 2024, the Governor of the State of Oregon signed House Bill No. 4002, which revoked some of the provisions introduced in Ballot Measure 110 in 2020, namely, the decriminalization of the possession of small quantities of drugs. After signing the legislation, the Governor sent a letter to the House of Representatives and the Senate of Oregon stressing that the new bill encouraged a "treatment first" approach and outlining a number of steps she was taking to minimize the number of people facing incarceration as a result of convictions for misdemeanour drug possession charges. House Bill No. 4002, while reintroducing penalties for illicit drug possession, encourages law enforcement authorities to prioritize pre-arrest deflections, including referral to drug treatment programmes, and allows for a county-by-county approach in implementing the provisions of the bill. In her letter, the Governor stressed the importance of ensuring that counties introducing deflection programmes receive sufficient funding to operate them. The classification of drug possession as a misdemeanour took effect in Oregon on 1 September 2024.

544. As required pursuant to the exemption granted to British Columbia under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act of Canada, the province submitted its first report to Health Canada in February 2024 regarding its implementation of the exemption's provisions on the decriminalization of the possession and use of small quantities of controlled substances. According to the report, since the implementation of those decriminalization provisions in British Columbia, health authorities have hired more staff members to engage in outreach work and facilitate connections with drug treatment services among affected groups. The use of such services appears to have risen slightly since the exemption entered into force. In addition, it is noted in the report that law enforcement authorities in British Columbia have been implementing the decriminalization measures as intended and that there has been a 76 per cent decrease in the number of drug possession offences committed in the province overall. Similarly, there has been a 96 per cent decrease in the number of offences committed involving the possession of quantities of controlled substances under the threshold of 2.5 grams, as compared with the average number of all drug possession offences committed in the province between 2019 and 2023.

545. Despite making progress in implementing its decriminalization plan, British Columbia submitted a request in April 2024 to Health Canada for an amendment to the province's exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act that would recriminalize the illicit consumption of drugs in public spaces. Health Canada approved the requested amendment, which came into effect on 7 May 2024. The original exemption decriminalizing the use and possession of small quantities of drugs, which came into effect in January 2023, remains in place but only applies if the drugs are consumed at a person's legal residence or other officially designated sites. According to Health Canada, the request for the amendment was made owing to concerns expressed by officials in British Columbia regarding increasing drug use in public spaces and the inability of law enforcement authorities to address such use.

546. Health Canada announced several funding commitments to support the expansion of palliative care services in Canada. In April 2024, 1 million Canadian dollars were granted to a project implemented by the Roger Neilson Children's Hospice, which is working to expand paediatric palliative care across Canada. In May 2024, 2.4 million Canadian dollars in funding over four years were granted to Lakehead University in the Province of Ontario to support its project to improve access to palliative care services for underserved populations. The announced funding supports the objectives of the country's Action Plan on Palliative Care.

547. On 16 May 2024, the Attorney General of the United States submitted a proposal to formally move cannabis from Schedule I to Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act. The proposal followed from a request from the President of the United States to the Attorney General and the Secretary of Health and Human Services to launch a scientific review of how cannabis is scheduled under federal law. The Drug Enforcement Administration is to make a final determination as to whether cannabis should be moved to Schedule III, following a public consultation process that is expected to conclude in early 2025. Under Schedule I, some cannabis-related research had been permitted but only under strict conditions, and possible medical uses were severely limited. Substances included in Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act are considered to have a low to moderate risk of misuse. The substances and preparations currently listed in Schedule III include preparations containing both paracetamol and codeine, ketamine, anabolic steroids and testosterone.

548. In a statement issued by the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions of Canada on 17 May 2024, the city of Toronto was denied a request to decriminalize the personal possession of controlled drugs and substances for people in that city. The Minister determined that the request did not adequately protect public health and maintain public safety. The city of Toronto had originally requested an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act in January 2022 to decriminalize the personal possession of all drugs and create a system of voluntary referrals to health and social support services for persons found in possession of drugs.

549. On 23 May 2024, the United States Office for National Drug Control Policy announced the provision of \$276 million in new funding for the High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas programme. The programme works to strengthen both public health and public safety efforts to curb the overdose crisis facing the United States. The newly announced funding will be made available to 33 regions served by the programme in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands.

550. On 28 May 2024, the Governor of the State of Delaware, United States, signed House Bill 285, expanding access to the state's medical cannabis programme. The bill removes the requirement by which a patient must have a debilitating medical condition in order to qualify for a registry identification card, instead allowing physicians to make the determination as to whether a patient has a diagnosed medical condition for which the patient would receive a therapeutic or palliative benefit from the use of medical cannabis. It allows for patients over 65 years of age to self-certify their qualification for a registry identification card without written justification from a physician. It also allows for patients holding out-of-state credentials for accessing medical cannabis to acquire a registry identification card in Delaware in order to access medical cannabis in the state.

551. On 9 August 2024, the United States Food and Drug Administration rejected the use of MDMA-assisted therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder, following a recommendation by an independent advisory panel issued in June 2024. The agency cited concerns expressed by members of the panel regarding the use of MDMA and the approach taken in clinical studies of the drug, in particular that participants in the studies could often correctly guess whether they had received MDMA or a placebo.

552. The State of Louisiana, United States, passed legislation decriminalizing the possession of cannabis paraphernalia in June 2024. House Bill 165 removes criminal penalties, including incarceration and fees, for the possession of cannabis paraphernalia. The bill stipulates that the quantity of paraphernalia possessed cannot exceed that required for personal use. The provisions of the bill came into effect on 1 August 2024.

553. On 17 June 2024, the Governor of the State of Maryland, United States, issued an executive order pardoning 175,000 convictions in the state related to the misdemeanour possession of cannabis and certain convictions for the misdemeanour possession of drug paraphernalia. The order sets out the conditions under which a person may be pardoned, including cases in which no charges were incurred other than the misdemeanour use and possession of cannabis and of drug paraphernalia, cases involving probation before judgment and cases in which charges were incurred before 1 January 2023, when the personal possession and use of cannabis was decriminalized in the state. The pardon does not expunge an offence from an individual's criminal record.

554. Two ballot measures were approved by voters in the State of Nebraska, United States, that will permit the use of medical cannabis and establish a regulatory commission for cannabis. The first measure removes criminal penalties for the use of up to 5 ounces of medical cannabis if recommended in writing by a healthcare provider. The second measure removes criminal penalties for the manufacture, distribution, delivery and dispensing of cannabis for medical purposes by registered entities and establishes a commission to regulate those activities.

555. On 15 September 2024, the government of British Columbia announced the opening of highly secure facilities for people experiencing long-term, concurrent mental health and substance use disorders. The facilities were opened to provide long-term involuntary care, pursuant to the Mental Health Act of British Columbia, to persons certified by a physician as requiring such care. According to the Mental Health Act, persons certified as qualifying for involuntary care are to be detained for a fixed period of up to six months and must be recertified by a physician at the conclusion of the period of detention in order to continue receiving the involuntary care.

556. On 8 October 2024, the President of Mexico introduced a new national security strategy intended to curb homicides in the country, most of which are attributed to trafficking in drugs. Under the strategy, which is focused on causes of violence, the role of the National Guard of Mexico in public security is to be consolidated, a new national intelligence system is to be created and coordination among states of Mexico is to be improved.

Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

557. Trafficking in fentanyl and other synthetic opioids continues to be the primary drug-related challenge facing North America, with most of the substances seized in the region being illicitly manufactured in Mexico before reaching destination markets in Canada and the United States. The illicit manufacture of fentanyl in Mexico typically involves the use of chemicals that are not under international control. The situation is similar with regard to methamphetamine, although that drug is also illicitly manufactured in the United States. With respect to other drugs, although large quantities of cocaine and cannabis continue to be trafficked in the region, the quantities seized of those drugs have continued to decline or remain stable. Trafficking in heroin is on the decline, as it is being displaced by fentanyl and other synthetic opioids in illicit markets.

558. The United States continues to experience extensive trafficking in fentanyl, as quantities seized of the drug have grown to record levels. The Drug Enforcement Administration reported the seizure of nearly 15 tons of fentanyl, comprising 13.1 tons in powder form and 79 million pills (approximately 1.9 tons), in 2023. Of the fentanyl powder seized, nearly 30 per cent had been adulterated with xylazine, up from 25 per cent in 2022. Additionally, the total amount of 79 million fentanyl pills seized in 2023 was nearly triple the amount seized in 2021. Similarly, United States Customs and Border Protection seized approximately 12.2 tons of fentanyl in 2023, nearly double the amount seized in 2022, or about 1.2 billion doses of fentanyl, according to the agency's calculations. Canada also continues to experience extensive trafficking in fentanyl and other synthetic and non-synthetic opioids, although the total quantity of those substances seized in 2023 dropped sharply in comparison with previous years. According to the Canada Border Services Agency, approximately 1.7 tons of opioids, including fentanyl, were seized in 2023, down significantly from approximately 4.6 tons in the previous year. The quantity of fentanyl seized in Mexico dropped slightly in 2023, to approximately 1.8 tons, from 2 tons in 2022, but remained significantly higher than the quantities reported seized before 2021. Most seizures of fentanyl in Mexico occurred in states along the country's northern border with the United States.

559. On 25 October 2024, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police dismantled one of the largest clandestine drug laboratories ever found in Canada. The laboratory contained precursor chemicals in quantities sufficient to illicitly manufacture nearly 100 million doses of fentanyl. In addition, authorities seized from the laboratory large quantities of illicitly manufactured fentanyl and methamphetamine, as well as cocaine, MDMA and cannabis.

560. Cannabis trafficked in the United States originates mostly from domestic sources, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration, and is sometimes diverted from licensed growers in states that permit the cultivation of medical or recreational cannabis. This is borne out by data from Customs and Border Protection, which has reported declining seizures of cannabis being trafficked into the United States for the past several years; the total quantity seized decreased from 144 tons in 2021 to approximately 68 tons in 2022 and 67 tons in 2023. The total quantity of cannabis and cannabis products seized in Canada rose in 2023 to approximately 23.5 tons, from approximately 16.7 tons in the previous year. According to data from the Canada Border Services Agency, the quantity seized in 2023 represented a continued increase in seizures of cannabis and cannabis products trafficked to Canada, as only 1.6 tons were seized in 2018.

561. The overall quantity of methamphetamine seized in the United States was slightly larger in 2023 than in 2022. In 2023, the Drug Enforcement Administration seized 78.8 tons of the substance and Customs and Border Protection seized 63.5 tons. The National Guard of Mexico reported a steep drop in seizures of methamphetamine in 2022, reporting 712 kg seized, compared with 4.7 tons seized in 2021.

562. The overall quantity of cocaine seized in the United States continued to fall in 2023. A total of 175 tons of cocaine were seized by the Drug Enforcement Administration in 2023, representing almost half the amount seized by the agency in 2021 and 50 tons less than in 2022. In contrast, the amount of cocaine seized by Customs and Border Protection rose slightly, to 36.7 tons, in 2023 but was nonetheless lower than the 44.2 tons seized by that agency in 2021. Similar to the United States, reported seizures of cocaine in Canada have also declined. The Canada Border Services Agency reported the seizure of approximately 1.8 tons of cocaine in 2023, a sharp drop from the approximately 2.8 tons reported seized in 2022 but nevertheless higher than the approximately 1.3 tons seized each year between 2019 and 2021.

563. According to data from the Drug Enforcement Administration and Customs and Border Protection, seizures of heroin have continued to fall as the presence of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids expands in illicit drug markets in the United States. Customs and Border Protection reported seizures of heroin totalling approximately 680 kg in 2023, down from nearly 2.5 tons reported seized in 2021. The Drug Enforcement Administration reported a drop of 70 per cent in seizures of heroin from 2019 to 2023. In addition, in 2023, most of the heroin seized was found to be combined with fentanyl, and 82 per cent of heroin-related deaths in the United States also involved fentanyl. As in the United States, seizures of heroin in Canada have continued to decline; 89 kg of the substance were seized in 2023, down from 214 kg in 2022, an amount which was itself lower than the 287 kg seized in 2021.

564. On 25 July 2024, one of the co-founders of the Sinaloa cartel was arrested in the State of New Mexico by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation and charged with conspiracy to manufacture and distribute fentanyl. He had previously been charged in the United States with conspiracy to murder, money-laundering and trafficking in cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine, among other drugs. He was indicted on 13 September 2024 and is expected to face trial in 2025. If convicted, he is expected to face a mandatory minimum penalty of life in prison.

565. Mexico has continued to face high levels of violence due to the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in drugs among organized criminal groups, despite a small decline in the number of homicides in the country over the past several years. According to data from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP) of Mexico, the number of victims of intentional homicide in Mexico stood at 29,709 in 2023, the first time the number of such victims has been below 30,000 since 2017.

Prevention and treatment

566. On 30 October 2023, Health Canada announced the provision of 21 million Canadian dollars to support community-based organizations and projects across Canada in efforts to increase access to services for people who use drugs and who are at risk of experiencing substance-related harms. In parallel, Health Canada also

announced that it had renewed the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy. The renewed Strategy seeks to minimize substance-related harms for people who use drugs by focusing on four key priority areas: prevention and education, substance use services and support, evidence and substance controls.

567. According to the 2023 Canadian Cannabis Survey, there was no clear trend in past-12-month cannabis use among young people aged 16 to 19. In 2023, 43 per cent of the survey respondents reported having used cannabis at least once during the previous year. The rate was 44 per cent in 2019 and 2020, although it was lower in 2018, at 36 per cent, and in 2022, at 37 per cent. The survey found that, among the population overall, the daily or near daily use of cannabis has remained stable since 2018, at approximately 25 per cent, and among young people in particular, at approximately 20 per cent. Similarly, the percentage of Canadians considered to be at high risk of developing problems as a result of cannabis use has remained stable since 2018, at approximately 3 per cent.

568. With respect to drug-related overdose deaths in Canada, the number of deaths related to synthetic opioids has continued to rise and the phenomenon remains a major public health crisis for the country. Health Canada reported that there were nearly 44,000 opioid toxicity deaths between January 2016 and December 2023. In 2023, the number of opioid toxicity deaths in Canada rose to 8,049, approximately 7 per cent higher than in 2022. Of those deaths, 82 per cent involved fentanyl and 88 per cent involved non-pharmaceutical opioids, while 61 per cent also involved a stimulant and 75 per cent were of men. In relation to stimulants, Canada reported 3,479 deaths in 2023, 3 per cent fewer than in 2022.

569. For the first time, the United States 2023 Monitoring the Future survey, published in March 2024, included estimated rates of consumption of *delta*-8-tetrahydrocannabinol among adolescents in the United States. The survey is conducted annually among students in the United States in grades 8, 10 and 12. The results of the 2023 survey found that 11 per cent of students in grade 12 reported having used *delta*-8-tetrahydrocannabinol in the past year. With respect to cannabis use overall, 30 per cent of all respondents reported having used the drug in the past year, and the survey found that the prevalence rate did not differ significantly between states with different cannabis policies. With respect to drugs other than cannabis, 7.4 per cent of students in grade 12 reported having used a drug in the past year. Furthermore, the survey found that the percentage of students who abstain from using any drug, including alcohol or nicotine products, was at its highest level since tracking began in 2017. Likewise, the use of cannabis in 2023 among students remained low, continuing the trend observed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

570. According to provisional data available to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in May 2024, drug-related overdose deaths in the United States declined slightly for the first time since 2018, with 107,543 such deaths reported in 2023, compared with 111,029 in 2022. The number of deaths related to opioid consumption, including synthetic opioids, decreased to 81,083 in 2023, from 84,181 in the previous year. However, the number of deaths related to the consumption of cocaine rose from 28,441 in 2022 to 29,918 in 2023. Similarly, the number of overdose-related deaths due to the consumption of psychostimulants, namely methamphetamine, rose from 35,550 in 2022 to 36,251 in 2023.

571. According to the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, in the United States, 16.8 per cent of people aged 12 or older had consumed a drug in the past month. Cannabis was the most used drug, with 21.8 per cent of people aged 12 or older reporting that they had used it in the past year. Consumption of cannabis was highest among people aged 18 to 25, at 36.5 per cent, or approximately 12 million people. With respect to fentanyl, 828,000 people aged 12 or older had misused the drug in the past year, including 627,000 people who had consumed illicitly manufactured fentanyl. In 2023, 48.5 million people aged 12 or older (approximately 17.1 per cent) had a substance use disorder, including those with an alcohol use disorder. With respect to treatment, of the 1.8 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 in 2023 who had a substance use disorder in the past year and did not receive substance use treatment in the past year, 1.6 million did not seek treatment or think they should get it. Similarly, of the 39.6 million adults aged 18 or older in 2023 who had a substance use disorder in the past year and did not receive substance use treatment in the past year, 36.7 million did not seek treatment or think they should get it.

572. In February 2024, the Ministry of Health of Mexico published a study based on an online survey of the use of cannabis and cannabis products among the population in Mexico. Between May and September 2023, nearly 18,000 people in Mexico were selected to participate in the online survey. The survey found that 26.9 per cent of respondents had used cannabis at least once in their lifetime and that the average age of first use was 20.47 years.

Of those who reported having used cannabis, 19.5 per cent reported that they continued to use the drug. The study also found that, of those who continued to use cannabis, 34.7 per cent used the drug daily or almost daily.

573. Demand for treatment services in Mexico due to fentanyl consumption has continued to grow rapidly, primarily in the States of Baja California, Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Sonora, all located in the northwestern part of the country and either on the border with or near to the United States. There had been virtually no demand for treatment services related to fentanyl consumption in Mexico prior to 2018, but demand has grown to several hundred cases a year since 2021 and stood at 430 cases in 2023. This reflects the fact that the country is becoming a consumer market for fentanyl.

574. Centros de Integración Juvenil, a non-profit institution working in the area of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of drug use disorders, among other mental health disorders, in association with the Government of Mexico, reported that, of the more than 80,000 patients treated by the institution in 2023, nearly 60 per cent had sought services related to drug use. In addition, 20,427 people had sought treatment with Centros de Integración Juvenil for the first time, and the mean age of their entry into treatment was 25.5 years. The primary drugs used by those seeking treatment were cannabis, methamphetamine and cocaine.

South America

In Brazil, between 2022 and 2023, there was an increase in drug seizures in the Amazon states, where a reduction in the rate of deforestation was also recorded. These parallel trends are believed to be due to the stronger presence of government actors.

In Peru, according to the UNODC coca crop monitoring report for 2023, a total of 92,784 ha was used for coca cultivation — a 2.3 per cent reduction compared with 2022. Following the record level of illicit coca bush cultivation in 2022, this is the first decrease reported in eight years.

According to the report on coca crop monitoring in Colombia for 2023, illicit coca bush cultivation in that country reached a new all-time high of 253,000 ha, an increase of 10 per cent compared with 2022. An even sharper increase was reported with respect to potential cocaine production, which rose by 53 per cent from 2022 to 2023, reaching 2,664 tons.

Throughout the South American region, illicit drug-related activities and related crimes against the environment continue to generate violence and threaten vulnerable populations and biodiversity, particularly in the Amazon region.

Drug-related urban violence continues to affect South America, and Ecuador has reported a sharp increase in homicide rates linked to the record-breaking level of coca cultivation in Colombia, as well as the use of its territory as a transit area for drug trafficking routes to North America and Europe.

Major developments

575. The main flows of cocaine trafficking continue to be those going from the Andean region to other countries in the Americas and to Western and Central Europe, which is the second largest cocaine market after North America. However, cocaine trafficking reaches all regions of the world. In response to the increased level of interdiction in countries that have historically been cocaine producers, drug trafficking routes have changed, with an increased use of transit countries such as Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil and Ecuador.

576. The impact of increased cocaine trafficking has been particularly strong in Ecuador, which has seen a wave of lethal violence in recent years, linked to both transnational and local criminal groups, including drug gangs. According to the report entitled “UNODC global study on homicide 2023: homicide and organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean”, the driving force behind the increase in violence of roughly 407 per cent between 2016 and 2022 is the record-breaking level of coca cultivation in neighbouring countries, most notably Colombia, as well as the use of the territory of Ecuador by drug trafficking organizations as a transit area for the

trafficking routes to North America and Europe. The homicide rate in Ecuador increased by 94.7 per cent from 2021 to 2022. Since 2014, the highest increases in homicide rates have been observed in the coastal provinces and neighbouring provinces and are due to the competition between criminal organizations over cocaine trafficking routes. According to the report, the increase in drug-related violence started in 2018, mostly among local gangs and in prisons, and has since spread throughout the country as a result of disputes between Mexican criminal groups such as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel and the Albanian Clan Farruku. In January 2024, President Daniel Noboa declared a “state of internal armed conflict” and mobilized the army to counter gang violence. Measures adopted included a night-time curfew and the listing of 22 criminal gangs as terrorist organizations, thus authorizing their prosecution by a military tribunal.

577. Criminal activity is common in remote areas in South America. Border areas are often hotspots for the trafficking of drugs, arms and wildlife, as well as human trafficking. In the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, drug trafficking organizations take advantage of the porous borders to engage in money-laundering and the smuggling of drugs and counterfeit goods.

578. The rise in homicide rates in the Amazon region in the past few years, combined with the increased awareness of local and national authorities of the interconnectedness of drug trafficking and environmental crime, has prompted various actors to further investigate the dynamics and root causes of such phenomena. In July 2024, the Institute of Applied Economic Research of the Government of Brazil published a study on the dynamics of violence and criminality in the northern region of Brazil. The study suggests that the criminal organizations “First Command of the Capital” and “Red Command” have strengthened their presence in the country’s northern region and intensified their alliances, and rivalries, with local criminal groups, which has resulted in increased homicide rates. Although those criminal organizations were initially focused on drug trafficking and taking advantage of the region’s proximity to the cocaine-producing areas in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru, they are increasingly active in the illicit markets already present in northern Brazil, such as illegal logging, mining and trafficking in wildlife species. Recent accounts indicate that drug trafficking organizations have permeated Indigenous and local riverside communities, recruiting young people and fuelling violence and local crime. Similarly, the Ecuadorian Observatory of Organized Crime published a report characterizing organized crime in Ecuador, highlighting that Amazonian border areas are favourable for the trafficking of fuel, which is used in cocaine manufacture on both sides of the border. Organized crime appears to have increased in manoeuvrability in rural and urban areas characterized by stark inequalities, which has led to the proliferation of various illicit economic activities and contributed to rising homicide rates in recent years.

579. In Brazil, the Centre for Studies on Drugs and Community Social Development published in June 2024 a study on drug trafficking in the Amazon and the effects on the environment, with a focus on the possible relationship between drug seizures and deforestation in the Brazilian states in the Amazon region. The study, which analysed data on cannabis and cocaine seizures and their relationship to deforestation rates, showed that, between 2022 and 2023, there was an increase in drug seizures of at least one type of drug in the Amazon states where a reduction in the rate of deforestation was also recorded. These parallel trends are believed to be due to a stronger presence of government actors. The study also notes the proximity of unregistered landing strips to areas with high levels of deforestation and that different criminal groups involved in illegal mining and cocaine trafficking may share such infrastructure for air transport. Regarding new trafficking routes, the report notes that cannabis enters Brazil from Colombia via rivers of the Amazon basin, and that the Federal Police of Brazil report that the highest levels of cannabis seizures are those at the Manaus airport in the State of Amazonas. Lastly, the study draws attention to the impact that drug trafficking is having on the land of Indigenous peoples, as deforestation and unregistered landing strips are often concentrated in those areas. The illegal appropriation or purchase of land for illicit coca bush and cannabis cultivation may also affect Indigenous and protected territories.

580. Evidence linking illicit crops to deforestation was also presented in the coca cultivation monitoring report for 2023 published by the National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs of Peru and UNODC in June 2024. Results show that areas where 20 to 30 per cent of the deforestation can be directly attributed to new coca bush cultivation are mainly located close to border areas. Illicit coca bush cultivation is expanding into the territories of vulnerable communities. The expansion is also aimed at securing access to transnational aerial and fluvial routes. According to the report, 71 per cent of illicit coca bush cultivation in Peru was found in protected natural areas. Moreover, in spite of a decrease in the total area cultivated from 2022 to 2023, cultivation

has increased in the land of Indigenous Peoples, such as in the Kakataibo North and South Indigenous Reserves. The cultivation of coca bush in the area increased by 144 per cent from 2021 to 2023 – from 171 ha to 416 ha – threatening the rights of the Kakataibo population, who live in isolation and are particularly vulnerable.

581. Recent research in Brazil provides further evidence that not only drug trafficking but also drug use is affecting the environment, specifically marine fauna. According to research results published by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in July 2024, sharks tested positive for contamination with cocaine and its metabolite benzoylecgonine. The authors note that the contamination is likely due to the large amount of cocaine consumed in the city, which then enters the sewage system and ends up in the sea. The most recent research presents data from Rio de Janeiro, but the Foundation also makes reference to a study by the University of São Paulo and Santa Cecilia University that detected cocaine in mussels in the port city of Santos.

582. In December 2023, UNODC delivered a report to the Government of Colombia on the measurement of coca crop production and yields. This study was conducted to determine the productivity of coca cultivation and the socioeconomic conditions of coca farmers in the Meta and Guaviare, Orinoco and Pacific regions, providing key inputs for estimating the country's potential cocaine production. One notable finding is that the Pacific region has reached historic levels of coca cultivation yields, at 10.8 tons of fresh coca yielded per hectare per year. This is mainly attributed to both the yield per harvest and the number of harvests per year.

583. In Colombia, despite the historic peace agreement reached in 2016 between the Government and the People's Alternative Revolutionary Force (FARC) of Colombia, internal armed conflict, violence and forced displacement continue. The violence is linked to a power vacuum resulting from the demobilization of FARC, which led to a fragmentation of the criminal landscape, with numerous non-State armed groups and criminal gangs fighting for control of the coca cultivation and drug trafficking markets of Colombia. Despite the peace agreement and the resumption of peace talks between the Government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) on 21 November 2022, there has been no change in the safety of the population living in the conflict area. According to Human Rights Watch and the International Committee of the Red Cross, violence has increased in many remote areas of Colombia, reaching the levels that prevailed before the peace process. More than 1,200 human rights defenders and social leaders have been killed in Colombia since 2016, with 181 social leaders and human rights defenders being killed in 2023, according to the Ombudsman's Office of Colombia.

584. In October 2024, UNODC and the Ministry of Justice of Colombia jointly published the annual illicit coca crop monitoring report with data from 2023. The report draws attention to the links between Colombian illegal armed groups such as the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army), the Ejército Popular de Liberación (People's Liberation Army) and the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia), as well as dissidents from the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army), with organized crime, especially cocaine production and trafficking. This situation has converted regions where illicit drug-related activity has been concentrated to date into strategic areas for other illicit activities, such as illegal mining and trafficking in persons. That process has also led to increased violence against social leaders and increased pressure on vulnerable communities, such as Indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples.

585. The Ombudsman's Office of Colombia continues to issue early warnings with the aim of protecting vulnerable populations in the Amazon region of the country from drug-related violence. Early warnings issued in 2024 included those issued in the Department of Quindío, highlighting the risks posed by the La Cordillera, La Oficina and Los Flacos drug trafficking groups. The threats identified included homicide, massacres, gender-based violence, the forced recruitment of minors, threats, harassment, forced disappearance, extortion, forced displacement, kidnapping, human trafficking and stigmatization. Early warnings also included those issued in the Amazon region in general, which cautioned of the risks faced by human rights defenders and social leaders working on environmental issues in the Amazon biome of Colombia. Those individuals are primarily intimidated by illegal armed groups, such as the Ejército de Liberación Nacional and dissident factions of FARC, which engage in activities such as drug trafficking, illegal mining, illegal logging and smuggling in these areas.

586. On 26 January 2024, WHO responded to the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indicating that the Organization had initiated a critical review of the coca leaf. The President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia had sent a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in June 2023 requesting to begin the process of a critical review of the current classification of coca leaf as a drug in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended,

in accordance with article 3 of that Convention. The country, when reaccessing to the 1961 Convention in 2012, introduced a reservation stating the following: “The Plurinational State of Bolivia reserves the right to allow in its territory: traditional coca leaf chewing; the consumption and use of the coca leaf in its natural state for cultural and medicinal purposes, such as its use in infusions; and also the cultivation, trade and possession of the coca leaf to the extent necessary for these licit purposes”. The Government constitutionally protects ancestral coca as cultural heritage, as a renewable natural resource for biodiversity and as a factor of social cohesion, and does not consider it to be a narcotic drug when in its natural state. The General Coca Law established a production limit of up to 22,000 ha of coca bush and authorized production areas with geo-referenced limits.

Regional cooperation

587. On 4 June 2024, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay held an online meeting to exchange experiences on national drug strategies. Organized by the Secretariat for Comprehensive Drug Policies of Argentina, the meeting also brought together the National Service for the Prevention and Rehabilitation of Drug and Alcohol Consumption of Chile, the Drug Policies and Asset Management Secretariat of Brazil and the National Drug Board of Uruguay.

588. On 9 November 2023, the Brasilia Treaty establishing the Police Community of the Americas as a legal entity was signed by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname and Uruguay. The Community, which has its headquarters in Bogotá, has been operational since 2007, with 36 participating police forces from 30 countries in the Americas. The Brasilia Treaty establishes an organization similar to INTERPOL and Europol and provides for the creation of a system of financial contributions, the professionalization of police staff and greater agility in investigations, for a range of crimes from environmental crimes in the Amazon to drug trafficking, narco-militias, arms trafficking and other transnational criminal activities.

589. On 12 January 2024, an Extraordinary Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Police Community of the Americas was organized with the aim of addressing the serious public security crisis in Ecuador. During the online meeting convoked by the Federal Police of Brazil, currently acting as the executive secretariat of the Community, representatives discussed proposals including the exchange of intelligence, the supply of equipment, support in the identification of prisoners in the Ecuadorian prison system and the offer of specialized courses in asset forfeiture.

590. Similarly, the ministers for foreign affairs, the interior and defence of the countries of the Andean Community (Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) held an urgent meeting to address the issue of cross-border drug-related crime. In addition, owing to the security situation in Ecuador, a 60-day state of emergency was declared in the key northern areas of Peru bordering Colombia and Ecuador.

591. In January 2024, following the declaration of a “state of internal armed conflict”, Ecuador received offers of support from several countries in the Americas, including Argentina, Brazil and the United States. The Federal Police of Brazil offered the establishment of a liaison office in Quito, the deployment of Brazilian federal agents to Ecuador, and training, equipment and support in identifying Brazilian criminals acting on Ecuadorian territory.

592. On 8 May 2024, Bolivian and Peruvian authorities agreed to carry out simultaneous joint anti-drug operations and to exchange information in real time to neutralize criminal organizations. Both countries share more than 1,000 km of border and face similar problems related to illicit cultivation and drug trafficking.

593. On 21 June 2024, the Colombian Naval Force of the Amazon region inaugurated the Amazon Information Fusion Centre with support from UNODC. The purpose of the centre is to integrate naval intelligence and enhance cooperation and capabilities for the exchange of information with authorities from Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru in order to combat drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime in the region.

594. In December 2023, the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America published its mutual evaluation report for the Plurinational State of Bolivia. In general, it was recognized that the country had a good understanding of money-laundering risks; however, mechanisms to address those risks had not always been improved at the practical and operational levels. The Task Force highlighted the good cooperation between the country’s Financial Intelligence Unit, the Bolivian police, customs authorities and the armed forces at the borders. In addition, the intelligence products disseminated are utilized to some extent by the Attorney General’s Office and, of the

507 intelligence reports sent to the Office, 217 were used to open new investigations, accounting for 43 per cent of the total intelligence disseminated, while 57 per cent of the financial intelligence reports were used for ongoing investigations. In general, according to the Task Force, the Plurinational State of Bolivia responds to requests for mutual legal assistance, extradition and international cooperation in a constructive and timely manner, on the basis of multilateral and bilateral agreements and, in cases for which such agreements do not exist, under the principle of reciprocity. Most money-laundering sentences are linked to predicate offences such as drug trafficking and corruption. There are some limitations to the effectiveness of criminal prosecution for money-laundering, such as the number of specialized money-laundering personnel assigned to the Office. Furthermore, owing to legal gaps, it is not possible to use special investigative techniques in money-laundering cases, as they apply only to drug trafficking and human trafficking offences. Moreover, the sanctions applied in cases of money-laundering as a stand-alone offence do not appear to be dissuasive or proportionate.

595. Also in December 2023, the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America published its mutual evaluation report for Brazil, entitled *Anti-Money-Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Measures: Brazil*. It was reported that the National Strategy to Combat Corruption and Money-Laundering of Brazil was a strong national coordination mechanism to address the risks of money-laundering, and that the country had developed a legal and structural framework that widely enabled competent authorities to prevent and combat money-laundering. It was also highlighted that the main national threats of money-laundering in Brazil included corruption, drug trafficking and organized crime. The report stated, however, that the lack of long-term strategies and insufficient resources of the competent authorities hindered effective and coordinated action. This further complicates the production of in-depth financial intelligence and the identification of complex money-laundering schemes, which in turn affects the ability of authorities to track and dismantle criminal financial networks linked to drug trafficking.

596. In December 2023, CICAD of OAS released the thematic national evaluation reports, on drug-related areas of institutional strengthening; research, information, monitoring and evaluation; and international cooperation – as part of the eighth round of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (see paras. 470 and 490 on Central America and the Caribbean for more details).

597. On 24 January 2024, the European Commission launched the European Ports Alliance to fight drug trafficking and organized crime, aiming to secure maritime routes against drug smuggling. In 2023, the Commission started negotiations with regard to international agreements on the exchange of personal data between Europol and several South American countries. International agreements were concluded with Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Ecuador and Peru. In addition, negotiations on international agreements on judicial cooperation between Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation are scheduled to be concluded. Joint investigation teams were also established with the participation of Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador with the support of the Agency.

598. On 22 February 2024, the twenty-fourth high-level meeting of the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs was held in La Paz. The meeting emphasized the fundamental importance of information exchange and technology transfer in the joint fight against illicit drugs.

599. On 4 March 2024, Peru, with the support of the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies (COPOLAD), launched a pilot project to protect Indigenous communities and human rights defenders in the Peruvian Amazon who had been affected by the expansion of illicit coca bush cultivation and drug trafficking. The project is aimed at strengthening coordination and surveillance and at implementing an early warning system in vulnerable regions.

600. At the twenty-fourth Extraordinary Meeting of the Andean Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs, together with ministers responsible for internal security, held in Lima in January 2024, the Andean Community adopted an action plan to tackle the increasing challenge of organized crime along shared borders. The members of the Community are Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Point 5 of the action plan focuses on cooperation in the fight against illicit drug trafficking, establishing bimonthly working group meetings with the relevant authorities and meetings of anti-drug directors every trimester. The specific goals of the meetings include the exchange of information, the identification of priority criminal organizations and their leadership, and mutual support in ongoing investigations.

601. In response to the threats identified at the border between Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Chile, UNODC organized a meeting in March 2024 between prosecutors from both countries to strengthen their fight against drug trafficking. As a result of this dialogue, a joint investigation team, which will be supported by UNODC, was established on 23 August 2024. This meeting was organized in the context of the implementation of an agreement signed in December 2023 between Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Chile to strengthen cooperation against organized crime, including drug trafficking.

602. In Colombia, the UNODC/WCO Container Control Programme conducted 17 training activities for 350 government officials. Those activities strengthened competencies in the use of technological systems for risk management and profiling, the analysis of scanner images, and effective controls for container and cargo inspections.

603. In November 2023, UNODC delivered two specialized workshops to strengthen the technical capacities of 60 operational and interdiction officers from Latin America, the Caribbean, West Africa and Europe. The workshops covered topics related to trends in the manufacture of cocaine hydrochloride, from the cultivation phase to trafficking and commercialization and included experimental exercises demonstrating the transformation of coca leaf into cocaine hydrochloride.

604. On 20 February 2024, more than 175 officials from Latin American, Caribbean and European Union drug policy, public health, security and anti-drug trafficking organizations attended the annual COPOLAD III meeting in La Paz. COPOLAD is a cooperation programme, funded by the European Union, for Latin America and the Caribbean that provides support in the improvement of countries' drug policies. The issues discussed included the needs of vulnerable populations, the control of chemical precursors for the manufacture of illicit drugs, and strategies against drug trafficking and money-laundering by criminal groups. Innovative alternative development approaches, challenges and opportunities for improving proportionality and alternative sentencing for minor drug-related offences were also examined.

605. In June 2024, COPOLAD III provided support for the publication in Uruguay of a guide on the approach to problematic drug use in incarcerated people. The guide was developed in collaboration with the National Drug Board, the State Health Services Administration, the National Rehabilitation Institute and the Ministry of Social Development and is aligned with the National Drug Strategy for the period 2021–2025. The guide systematizes the treatment of people with drug problems within the penitentiary system, improves the quality of care and follows best clinical practices. Using an integrated approach to human rights and gender, it is aimed at enhancing the health and quality of life of inmates.

606. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities in all countries in South America have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The five e-modules developed by INCB Learning cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The e-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

607. In December 2023, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela hosted an INCB Learning regional awareness workshop and training seminar for participants from Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Cuba, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), aimed at increasing the capacity of Governments to comply with the provisions of the three international drug control conventions in the regulatory control of the licit trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and in the monitoring of precursor chemicals. Moreover, the awareness-raising workshop and training had the objective of increasing the capacity of technical officers and decision makers to facilitate the appropriate availability of internationally controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes, and to prevent their misuse and diversion into illicit channels.

608. From 13 to 24 November 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized two regional cross-border training events in Santiago and in Curitiba, Brazil, to bolster the capabilities of front-line officials and provide them with the opportunity to develop networks and skills for cross-agency international cooperation related to the trafficking of new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids in South America. The event was attended by officers from Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Uruguay, as well as by international experts from UPU, WCO, INTERPOL and the United States Customs and Border Protection Container Security Initiative.

609. Other GRIDS Programme activities that involved participants from South America were organized in Vienna, including a global workshop on advanced targeting for operational officers, express courier and freight forwarding industry partners from 13 to 16 February 2024, and the “Tech against trafficking” meeting held from 5 to 8 March 2024.

610. From 12 to 14 March 2024, the GRIDS Programme organized a comprehensive training session focused on awareness-raising, safe handling, interdiction techniques and information exchange via INCB global communication systems for 25 law enforcement officers from Colombia. From 18 to 22 March 2024, the GRIDS Programme also participated in combined training with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration and Colombia on a complex conspiracy and investigations course, covering awareness of opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances; advanced targeting, intelligence development and exchange (GRIDS Intel HD and open-source intelligence); and secure real-time trafficking communications (IONICS).

611. The Federal Government of Brazil confirmed its participation in the INCB industry mapping initiative aimed at mobilizing the engagement of national industries in preventing the diversion of chemical substances to illicit drug manufacture.

612. UNODC is implementing alternative development initiatives in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and, more recently, Peru as a strategy for reducing illicit crops in the region and supporting communities in their transition to licit economic activities. In Colombia, in 2024, 6,300 families in Putumayo received support through forestry programmes. In the first half of 2024, 40 tons of coffee from alternative development programmes were exported to European markets. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, more than 1,500 families are being supported, and 1,900 small producers (32 per cent of whom are women) have been trained. Since 2018, with the support of France, 138 tons of coffee with fairtrade certification have been exported from the municipality of La Asunta to European markets.

Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

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

614. The consumption of opioid analgesics in South America has more than tripled in the last 20 years. In 2022, the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) reported the highest consumption in the region, at 10,673 S-DDD_{pmpd}, which may be linked to the high per capita gross domestic product. Among countries on the mainland, Colombia reported the largest level of consumption at 1,416 S-DDD_{pmpd}, followed by Brazil (848 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Chile (793 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Uruguay (554 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Ecuador (427 S-DDD_{pmpd}) and Guyana (220 S-DDD_{pmpd}). Argentina, Paraguay and Suriname did not report consumption data for 2022, but in 2021 those countries reported 1,672 S-DDD_{pmpd}, 391 S-DDD_{pmpd} and 229 S-DDD_{pmpd}, respectively. Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Peru and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) reported consumption below 100 S-DDD_{pmpd} for 2022.

615. Between 2019 and 2023, nearly all the countries and territories in the region regularly provided their annual statistical reports on psychotropic substances. In 2021, all countries and territories provided the required statistical report. In other years, at most two countries or territories failed to provide the required report. Of those that did submit their statistical reports in the five-year period, approximately two-thirds of those countries and territories voluntarily provided consumption data. **The Board invites the countries of the region to provide consumption data on psychotropic substances as part of their annual statistical report if they are able.**

616. The levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in South America are lower than in some other regions in the world, and tracking consumption in the region remains a challenge as not all countries in the region provide such data. Since 2014, the consumption of phenobarbital among countries that provided data has varied significantly, from a high of 5.18 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2015 to 0.51 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023, the lowest level in a decade. With regard to diazepam, in the same period, consumption peaked in 2016 at 9.45 S-DDD_{ptpd}, but it has been declining since reaching a new low of 0.43 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023. Rates of consumption of alprazolam in South America have fluctuated significantly in the past year, and consumption peaked in 2015 at 17.35 S-DDD_{ptpd}, but has varied between 8 and 10 S-DDD_{ptpd} since then. In 2023, consumption of the substance in the region dropped to its lowest level in 10 years at 2.36 S-DDD_{ptpd}.

617. The Board recalls that there is an insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring the sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. The Board recognizes the efforts of countries in the region to increase availability in their territories, and encourages further measures, with special attention to availability in non-urban areas and for vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the Board encourages those countries and territories that have not provided statistical 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.

618. With regard to precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide their estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as for, to the extent possible, preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. **INCB recommends that Governments review their annual legitimate requirements for individual precursors at least once a year and inform INCB of any necessary changes, on Form D or by official correspondence.** All 12 countries in the region have provided to the Board at least one estimate of annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations. One country (Suriname) has not updated its estimates in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of annual legitimate requirements as a tool for guiding exporting countries on the legitimate requirements of importing countries and thus preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes.

619. Further information can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2024 on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and in the report for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention. In addition, the *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.

National legislation, policy and action

620. In April 2024, the Ministry of Security of Argentina created the Federal Network of Anti-Drug Laboratories through ministerial resolution No. RESOL-2024-307-APN-MSG. The objective of that initiative, which was developed with the support of UNODC, is to promote cooperation among participating laboratories in order to facilitate the exchange of information, experiences and knowledge relevant to investigations related to drug trafficking and associated crimes.

621. In Argentina, Decree No. 8/2024 increased the status of the National Directorate for the Fight Against Drug Trafficking by creating an undersecretary’s office at the ministerial level. The sub-secretariat coordinates the work of the Federal Network of Anti-Drug Laboratories.

622. The Federal Network of Anti-Drug Laboratories is also supported by the Subsecretariat of Criminal Investigation and was designed to promote collaboration among national and international laboratories, both public and private. It aims to promote information exchange and the sharing of experiences and relevant knowledge for investigations of drug trafficking and connected crimes. Furthermore, the Network allows for participating laboratories to implement technical norms and procedures to strengthen their capacity to investigate drug trafficking. This initiative is supported by UNODC.

623. On 24 November 2023, Argentine authorities updated the list of controlled precursor chemicals through Decree No. 606/23. This modification extends the control carried out by the National Register of Chemical Precursors to three new substances: 1-boc-4-anilinopiperidine, 4-anilinopiperidine and norfentanyl, included in Table I of the 1988 Convention effective November 2022. These substances are precursors of fentanyl and several of its analogues.

624. Regarding the control of precursor chemicals, the Ministry of Security of Argentina signed two agreements with the Provinces of Entre Rios and Mendoza, on 22 April and 2 June 2024 respectively. The agreements create mechanisms for assistance, coordination and cooperation on issues related to precursor chemicals and to the implementation of the federal inspections plan, as well as capacity-building. In addition, 18 agreements were signed with provinces to strengthen cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking.

625. In July 2024, the Ministry of Security of Argentina launched the Round Table for the Prevention of Trafficking and Abuse of Fentanyl, an initiative to design and implement policies to prevent the illicit trafficking of this substance. UNODC will support the implementation of this initiative through the regional Project against Synthetic Drugs in Argentina. This project also supports the country's development of a code of conduct on precursor chemicals, which seeks to provide operators with a set of best practices to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals into illicit channels.

626. In June 2024, the Ministry of Security of Argentina signed an agreement with the company MercadoLibre. The agreement allows the Ministry to use the company's technology to search the MercadoLibre platform and to identify and remove listings related to illicit substances and products.

627. In July 2024, the Government of Argentina published Decree No. 635/2024 on narcotic drugs, which updated the list of substances subject to national control by adding 62 synthetic opioids, 31 benzodiazepines, 5 synthetic cannabinoids, 3 cathinones, 2 phenethylamines, 1 tryptamine and 65 substances related to fentanyl.

628. In June 2024, the Early Warning System of Argentina, which maintains updated information for the early detection of new psychoactive substances, emerging drugs and new consumption patterns and practices, published a report on the "State of the situation 2020–2023", with technical support from UNODC.

629. On 25 June 2024, the Supreme Federal Court of Brazil decriminalized the possession of cannabis for personal use. The Court, which is the highest judicial body in the country, ruled that 40 grams of cannabis was to be the maximum amount that a person may acquire, store, deposit or transport for it to be considered personal use. The federal institutions in Brazil are in the process of reviewing the normative and procedural frameworks for the future implementation of the decision.

630. In May 2024, the Brazilian Ministry of Health issued directive GM/MS No. 3.681, establishing the national palliative care policy within the Unified Health System of Brazil. One of the objectives of the Policy is to integrate palliative care into the national healthcare provision network, with an emphasis on primary care. Article 3, paragraph V, of the directive mentions, among its guiding principles, the provision of support to awareness-raising actions for the rational use of opioids. Regarding concrete actions and services, the directive establishes that palliative care services and actions will be offered at all points of the healthcare network to all persons who need such services and as quickly as possible. Moreover, article 6 provides for support to palliative care education to professionals and to the population at large.

631. In June 2024, Brazil launched a series of initiatives with the support of UNODC, including the Centre for Studies on Drugs and Community Social Development, in support of the National Secretariat for Drug Policy and Asset Management of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. The Centre works to produce evidence-based studies and analyses, and seeks to foster social, economic and environmental alternatives that promote the sustainable development of communities affected by drug trafficking in urban and rural areas. The initiative was conceptualized to broaden the scope of the Centre of Excellence for Reducing the Supply of Illicit Drugs and stems from the partnership between the National Secretariat for Drug Policy and Asset Management of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, UNODC and UNDP.

632. The National Secretariat for Drug Policy and Asset Management, in addition to establishing the Centre for Studies on Drugs and Community Social Development, launched the programme "Cria: Prevention and Citizenship" in partnership with UNODC, UNDP, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) and other actors, and presented the Early Warning Subsystem for New Drugs, which had previously been operating on an experimental basis, as a permanent initiative. UNODC is providing technical assistance to the "Cria" programme, including organizing and running a scientific committee to evaluate research on preventive programmes; systematizing multidimensional indicators for monitoring preventive initiatives; building an online platform to monitor prevention programmes, offering a hub of reliable and scientific resources on drug use prevention, and facilitating connections between programme implementers, the scientific community and decision-makers at all levels of

the national Government; adapting international curricula on drug use prevention for local policymakers; and translating and adapting technical materials on drug use prevention for police officers. In this context, UNODC has also been supporting the Ministry of Justice and Public Security of Brazil in implementing the country's National System for Drug Use Prevention.

633. On 14 and 15 December 2023, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security of Brazil organized a technical meeting on prevention of the use of psychoactive substances in an educational context in order to strengthen related activities in schools.

634. On 26 March 2024, the Centre for Studies on Drugs and Community Social Development launched its report entitled "Synthetic cannabinoids: global strategies for prevention and action" at the National Workshop on Drug Observatories and Drug Early Warning Systems, organized by the National Secretariat for Drug Policy and Asset Management of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in partnership with CICAD/OAS in Brazil. This report is the result of the compilation of information from reports carried out by the UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Forensics programme, data from epidemiological bulletins released by the city of São Paulo on people who were treated because of incidents related to the use of synthetic cannabinoids, and bibliographic research in articles published in international scientific journals.

635. In 2024, the Centre for Studies on Drugs and Community Social Development and the National Secretariat for Drug Policy and Asset Management of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security organized the International Seminar on Development-Oriented Drug Policies. The event involved discussions on national and international experiences related to development-orientated drug policies in Brazil and worldwide; on institutional experiences and local actions involving environmental protection and local development to increase the resilience of communities to the impacts of trafficking; and on the importance of social markers in monitoring and developing indicators for drug policies.

636. On 16 May 2024, Chile launched the National Drug Strategy Action Plan for the period 2024–2030. The plan is aimed at preventing and reducing the social and health consequences of drug use, and establishes eight strategic objectives, together with 42 intersectoral measures and 123 actions. The first objective consists of strengthening the country's comprehensive prevention system, ensuring that educational curricula for children and adolescents include the issue of substance use prevention, and implementing risk management and harm reduction strategies for the adult population. Another of its objectives is to consolidate the national treatment network of Chile by improving the competencies and role of primary care in the treatment of problematic substance use. The plan also seeks to strengthen the social integration network, through measures such as the incorporation of integration strategies focused on women with substance use disorders who have been in prison.

637. On 14 May 2024, the National Congress of Chile published an amendment to Decree No. 1358, which establishes control measures for chemical substances and precursors, including xylazine, as well as other designer precursors and chemical substances of interest within the control regime. Consequently, the Agriculture and Livestock Service of Chile increased the requirements for the sale of xylazine in the veterinary field, designating it as a product for which sale requires a veterinary prescription.

638. In July 2024, the National Assembly of Ecuador ratified a law to increase prison sentences related to the crimes of terrorism, financing of terrorism, and drug trafficking and production. Penalties for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances increased from between 7 and 10 years to between 13 and 16 years, and penalties for the illegal production of precursors and controlled chemicals increased from between 3 and 5 years to between 7 and 10 years.

639. On 5 January 2024, Ecuador published its new Mental Health Law through supplement No. 471 to its Official Registry. The law recognizes mental and behavioural issues related to the use of psychoactive substances as public health issues. The country also suspended resolution No. 001 CONSEP-CD-2013, on the maximum admissible quantities of possession of narcotic or psychotropic substances for personal consumption, through an executive decree in November 2023. The suspended resolution contained a table that served as guidance for prosecutors and judges in distinguishing between microtrafficking and possession for personal consumption, which is not a punishable offence in Ecuador. Following the suspension, the National Court of Justice of Ecuador issued resolution No. 14-2023, containing guidance to prosecutors and judges for the investigation and consideration of criminal procedures related to the illicit possession of drugs in the absence of concrete

thresholds. The resolution states that the possession and the quantity of narcotic and psychotropic substances or their preparations are important elements to be assessed, but that they should not determine the difference between consumer and criminal.

640. According to the CICAD/OAS 2023 Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism evaluation report on the drug policies of Guyana, the country has developed and is implementing a plan to promote and strengthen technical assistance and cooperation among member States, and with relevant international and regional organizations, programmes and initiatives. In addition, Guyana participates in regional coordination activities to prevent crimes associated with illicit drug trafficking, such as arms trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, money-laundering and corruption. CICAD also noted that Guyana promoted legislation that established proportional legal penalties for minor drug-related offences, in accordance with national legislation, and has special courts for these offences. The evaluation report also noted that Guyana had mechanisms to collect and analyse information related to the illicit drug supply and had information related to supply reduction, trafficking and associated crimes.

641. In December 2023, the Government of Paraguay launched its action plan against drug misuse, which is structured around three main lines of action: (a) the prevention of drug use; (b) the treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration of people who use drugs; and (c) the combating of drug trafficking. The Government of Paraguay and UNODC formalized an alliance in support of this plan.

642. In December 2023, the Government of Peru formally requested support from the United States to combat drug trafficking. According to statements by the Foreign Minister of Peru, cooperation could be along the lines of the former “Plan Colombia”, whereby the United States would provide Peru with the high-tech equipment that Peru requires to effectively address drug trafficking.

643. According to the CICAD 2023 Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism evaluation report on the drug policies of Suriname, the country has not delegated drug-related responsibilities to local or subnational governments to implement concrete actions related to these policies. Although the national drug authority of Suriname has a central office for the promotion, coordination and provision of technical support and related training to local governments and relevant parties, it does not have coordinators, offices or delegations in subnational territories. The country does not involve the private sector in developing innovative approaches for implementing drug policies or in the exchange of information and best practices. The report recognized the role of the National Drug Observatory, established through the National Master Plan on Drugs, which has the financial and human resources required to carry out its functions, funded by the budget of the National Anti-Drug Council. The Drug Information Network of Suriname has standardized indicators for collecting data on drug supply and participates in training activities to improve these mechanisms.

644. According to the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism, by the end of 2023, Suriname had actively participated in international cooperation programmes at both the bilateral and multilateral levels to strengthen its policies, programmes and institutions related to drug control. Examples of these activities include collaboration with OAS on data treatment, with COPOLAD to strengthen the research unit and the epidemiological network on drugs, and with UNODC for training in supply and demand reduction. Suriname also developed and implemented plans to promote technical assistance and cooperation with other member States and international organizations. In addition, the country participated in regional coordination activities to prevent related crimes associated with illicit drug trafficking, such as the illicit trafficking of firearms, extortion, kidnapping, money-laundering and corruption. Bilateral and coordination mechanisms with other countries include collaboration with the Caribbean Community, the European Union, the United Nations, the United States and OAS. Through these mechanisms, Suriname has formulated a priority action plan that it expects to implement after the approval of the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Justice and Police. Furthermore, a baseline evaluation for the action plan will be conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

645. According to information published by COPOLAD on 6 November 2023, EUDA conducted a technical mission to Uruguay in October 2023 in the context of the European Union-funded programme to support the country in the evaluation of its cannabis policies. During that visit, in addition to field visits to cannabis cultivation areas, a biregional seminar was organized at the offices of the National Drug Board on 26 October 2023, and was attended by civil society, academics, government organizations and other stakeholders working on cannabis policy. Participants discussed cannabis policy models from various countries, including Canada, the United

States, Uruguay and several countries of the European Union. Presentations included preliminary results of the updated study entitled “Monitoring and evaluating changes in cannabis policies: insights from the Americas”, funded by COPOLAD. The seminar concluded with a discussion on the challenges and needs of cannabis policy implementation in Uruguay.

646. On 8 and 9 November 2023, the National Drug Board of Uruguay organized its IV Academic Forum, entitled “Cannabis regulation in Uruguay and the region: progresses and challenges”. The event had the participation of national and international experts on cannabis and was aimed at fostering academic research and producing evidence-based data to support drug policy development. Panellists discussed national and international cannabis regulation policies, the cultivation of cannabis plants with a low THC content (commonly referred to as “hemp”) and the manufacture and consumption of cannabis for medical purposes and the impact of cannabis regulation on adolescents, and hosted an exchange of experiences on cannabis regulation in six Latin American countries. The meeting also provided the opportunity for academics to interact with the technical teams of the National Drug Board.

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

Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

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

649. According to the *World Drug Report 2024*, Colombia remains the world’s largest cultivator of coca bush, at 65 per cent of global production, followed by Peru at 27 per cent and the Plurinational State of Bolivia at 8 per cent. The *European Drug Report 2023: Trends and Developments* ranks cocaine as the second most consumed illicit drug in Europe, after cannabis. In Belgium alone, authorities seized a record 121 tons of cocaine in the port of Antwerp-Bruges in 2023. Most of the cocaine shipped to Antwerp came from Colombia, through the port of Guayaquil in Ecuador.

650. Colombia is also the primary source country for cocaine seized in the United States. The Drug Enforcement Administration’s Cocaine Signature Program of the Special Investigative and Testing Laboratory conducted an analysis of cocaine obtained from multi-kilogram seizures throughout the United States. It was determined that at least 97 per cent of the samples came from Colombia. Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru shared the remaining 3 per cent.

651. In Peru, the coca crop monitoring report for 2023 reported a total of 92,784 ha under coca cultivation, a reduction of 2,224 ha compared with 2022. After the record reported level of 95,008 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation in 2022, it was the first decrease reported in eight years. Of the 13 regions monitored, 5 showed a slight increase in coca cultivation, with Ayacucho having the highest growth, while 8 showed a decrease, especially Ucayali and Loreto, where comprehensive eradication actions were carried out in the areas of Bajo Amazonas, Putumayo, Callería, Aguaytía and Pichis-Palcazú-Pachitea. Reductions were observed in 10 production zones that had previously shown growth, including Marañón (-58 per cent), Camanti (-53 per cent), Alto Chicama (-48 per cent), Yaguas (-42 per cent) and Callería (-37 per cent). Seven zones showed a relative stability, with variation rates of less than 15 per cent. In 2022, by contrast, 15 zones showed an upward trend. In 2023, the Amazonas, Huallaga and Bajo Ucayali zones maintained an upward trend, but there were no growth rates higher than 50 per cent during that period. The report shows that the valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers continues to have the largest share of illicit coca bush cultivation. This share represented 41.2 per cent of the national total, in comparison with 37.6 per cent in 2022. In 2023, the increase in the illicit coca bush cultivation area represented 7.2 per cent.

652. According to the 2023 UNODC report on coca crop monitoring in Colombia, between 2022 and 2023, the area under coca bush cultivation increased by 10 per cent, reaching a new all-time high of 253,000 ha. An even sharper increase was reported with respect to potential cocaine production, which rose by 53 per cent from 2022 to 2023, reaching 2,664 tons. The report draws attention to the historically low prices observed for cocaine base and cocaine paste in the country, as evidence shows that crops continue to be fully harvested, and that derivatives are being stocked or used as currency in some regions of Colombia. With regard to the expansion of illicit cultivation areas, that trend continues to threaten protected cultural and biodiversity areas, as 4 per cent of such cultivation takes place in national nature reserves, 10 per cent in Indigenous reserves, 14 per cent in forest reserves and 20 per cent on Black communities' land. Strategic areas for the cultivation and internal movement of coca and its derivatives are also estimated to account for a combined 82 per cent of the total market demand for precursor chemicals in the country. Moreover, in Cauca Department, the increased trend in illicit coca cultivation has been accompanied by increases in the areas used for illicit cultivation of opium poppy and cannabis.

653. On 25 January 2024, the Minister of the Interior of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and UNODC presented the main findings of the report on the validation of information on the destruction of illicit drugs seized in 2023 in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The projected goal of 80 per cent annual validation has been surpassed, reaching 97 per cent. In 2023, the counter-narcotics police seized and destroyed 30.7 tons of cocaine and 19.3 tons of cannabis. UNODC observed 97 per cent of cocaine destruction (29.8 tons), 97 per cent of cannabis destruction (18.7 tons) and the final disposal of 82,071 MDMA tablets, 16.783 kg of MDMA in bulk, 1,037 doses of LSD and 621 fentanyl vials.

654. In December 2023, Bolivian authorities announced a seizure of nearly 9 tons of cocaine, the largest in the country's history. Data released by the country's anti-drug force show a 62 per cent increase in cocaine seizures compared with 2022. In addition to this seizure, on 19 March 2024, Bolivian police carried out the second largest seizure in the country's history in the Pisiga region, which resulted in the seizure of over 7.2 tons of cocaine. It is believed that the consignment, which had a market value of nearly \$500 million, was destined for Belgium.

655. The Board notes with appreciation the surveys undertaken by Colombia and Peru with UNODC support, which enable adequate comparative monitoring in two of the three Andean countries most affected by illicit crops. The Board urges the Plurinational State of Bolivia to resume publishing the studies and monitoring reports on territories affected by illicit crops that are prepared in cooperation with and fully validated by UNODC. That step will not only ensure support for the efforts of the country's Government in countering drug trafficking but will also facilitate adequate comparative monitoring among the aforementioned countries.

656. In Argentina, the city of Rosario has been the centre of the country's illicit markets for a decade. Cocaine and other drugs arrive in the city from the north of the country or are transported through the Paraguay-Paraná waterway before being trafficked internationally. In 2023, Rosario reported a homicide rate of 22 per 100,000 inhabitants which, according to the Public Safety Observatory of Santa Fe, was five times the national average.

657. On 10 April 2024, in Chile, following a successful operation by law enforcement authorities outside the Taltal commune, a vehicle loaded with 1 ton of cannabis and 2 kg of cocaine was seized. The amount of drugs seized so far this year in the Antofagasta Province has risen to 6.5 tons, which represents 45 per cent of all drugs seized nationwide.

658. On 22 January 2024, Ecuadorian authorities seized approximately 22 tons of cocaine on a farm in Los Ríos Province. According to military authorities, the seizure was valued at \$1.1 billion.

659. In 2023, for the third consecutive year, drug seizures in Ecuador exceeded 200 tons. Between 1 January and 29 December 2023, national authorities seized 219.2 tons of drugs. In the first six months of 2024, national authorities seized 149 tons of drugs, an approximate increase of more than 30 per cent compared with the same period in 2023. Since 2021, UNODC has supported Ecuador in the implementation of the encapsulation process for the destruction of large quantities of drugs, especially those derived from coca. This process allowed the State to destroy 450 tons of drugs in 2023.

660. In April 2024, the National Investigation Unit for Chemical Substances of Ecuador dismantled a heroin laboratory in Esmeraldas Province, which borders Colombia. Following communications with the police of Colombia, the authorities of Colombia dismantled a similar laboratory on their side of the border, where 91 kg

of opiates were seized. According to the *World Drug Report 2024*, the most used opioid in Ecuador, as in some neighbouring countries, was heroin. The last crop monitoring report for Ecuador supported by UNODC was published in 2010. While the report focused on illicit coca bush cultivation and eradication, it also presented data on the eradication of cannabis and opium poppy cultivation.

661. On 9 November 2023, the police and military of Guyana destroyed a large cannabis plantation in the Upper Berbice river region. Police discovered and destroyed approximately 13.6 kg of cannabis seeds and approximately 58,000 cannabis sativa plants, which were planted on 4 ha of land. According to police reports, these drugs had an estimated market value of approximately \$5.9 million.

662. INTERPOL reported record seizures effected in Operation Lionfish Hurricane, which took place in April and May 2024. The operation, which resulted in 206 arrests, targeted criminals from Africa, Europe and South America. As part of the operation, 505 tons of unspecified precursor chemicals were seized, which were intended for use in manufacturing drugs and explosives. In the context of that operation, authorities also seized a semi-submersible vessel in Guyana. Such vessels, referred to by INTERPOL as “narco-subs”, can transport up to 3 tons of cocaine through South American riverways and then across the Atlantic to Western Europe.

663. In July, Paraguay reported the largest cocaine seizure in its history, 4,000 kg of cocaine valued at more than \$240 million.

664. On 20 May 2024, authorities in Hong Kong, China, discovered 225 kg of cocaine that had been smuggled from Suriname. The consignment, with a market value of \$25 million, was discovered during a raid on a warehouse, hidden in containers containing scrap metal from Suriname. Prior to that seizure, in April 2024, the police of Suriname intercepted 50 kg of cocaine hidden in car parts that were to be shipped to Hong Kong, China, via Nigeria.

665. In July 2024, Venezuelan authorities reported the confiscation of 25 tons of cocaine during the first six months of 2024, owing to coordinated work between the National Anti-Drug Superintendence, the Bolivarian National Armed Forces and citizen security agencies.

666. The head of the Venezuelan entity for citizen security reported that the country’s security forces intercepted a vessel in international waters carrying 2,430 kg of cocaine. The head of the National Anti-Drug Superintendence of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela indicated that there was an increase in drug seizures of more than 5 per cent compared to the same period in 2023. He also announced that in 2023, more than 52 tons of drugs had been seized, 10 per cent more than the 47 tons seized in 2022.

667. In July 2024, CICAD of OAS published an information bulletin containing information collected by the Early Warning System of the Americas. Results indicate that new psychoactive substances are continuing to emerge across the Americas. Alerts have also been received for synthetic cannabinoids from Brazil; high-potency cannabis, also known as “creepy”, from Chile and Colombia; synthetic cathinones from across South America; phenidates from Argentina; synthetic opioids from Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay; piperazines from Argentina and Brazil; and kratom and bufotenine from Brazil. In addition, multiple countries in the region issued warnings on amphetamine-type substances, phenethylamines and tryptamines.

Prevention and treatment

668. According to data from the *World Drug Report 2024*, cannabis continues to be the most widely used drug in South America, where there are approximately 10,620,000 people who use cannabis. In relation to cocaine, 4,850,000 people reported past-year consumption in South America, according to data from 2022.

669. In 2022, the global prevalence of opioid use was 1.15 per cent. There is a notable difference between North America and South America. In North America, the prevalence is significantly higher, at close to 3 per cent, reflecting the opioid crisis, particularly in Canada and the United States. In South America, the prevalence is approximately 1 per cent, slightly below the global average. The most used opioid in Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) was heroin, whereas in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay, the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids was reported to be the most common form of illicit opioid use. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the non-medical use of codeine was predominant.

670. The estimated number of people who used amphetamine in South America in 2022 was 2,620,000. That year, there was a predominance of methamphetamine use in Colombia, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, there was a higher prevalence of amphetamine use, and in Argentina, Chile, Peru and Suriname, there was a greater non-medical use of pharmaceutical products containing amphetamine-type stimulants. In addition, the number of people who used “ecstasy” was reported as 700,000, of which 52 per cent were women.

671. According to the IV National Study of Drug Consumption Prevalence and Characteristics in Bolivian Households, published in April 2024 by the Bolivian Observatory of Citizen Security and the Fight against Drugs, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use is at its lowest point since 2007, with past-year use by 1 per cent of the population aged 12–65 in 2023. The past-year prevalence of cocaine was reported to be 0.39 per cent in 2023, a decrease from the prevalence found in the 2018 survey (0.58 per cent), but nevertheless higher than in 2014 (0.32 per cent). In 2023, the past-year prevalence of the consumption of tranquilizers without a prescription (including methylphenidate, phenmetrazine, amphetamines, dextroamphetamine and pemoline) was 3.4 per cent, the highest level found in the study of trends in the period 2007–2023. The past-year prevalence of the consumption of stimulants without prescription (including alprazolam, diazepam and flunitrazepam) was 0.6 per cent in 2023, also the highest level found in the period 2007–2023.

672. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, UNODC developed three guides for the formulation of municipal drug use prevention plans in coordination with the government counterpart. Likewise, in 2023 and 2024, drug use prevention and treatment programmes were implemented to prevent drug use in families with children aged 0–12 years.

673. UNODC supported the Government of Colombia in designing, implementing and monitoring strategies aimed at reducing the consumption of psychoactive substances and associated problems affecting individuals, families and communities. Support was also provided in relation to the implementation of evidence-based programmes for the prevention, treatment and reduction of the negative health and social effects of drug use, and in relation to training over 5,200 people to support strategies implemented in community, institutional, school and family settings.

674. In 2023, in Bogotá, UNODC supported the creation of 63 community networks as a strategy to assist people with psychoactive substance use disorders or who are using drugs for the first time. These networks help people access the necessary public services to address drug use issues, including health, mental health and access to legal services.

675. In March 2024, UNODC launched the first edition of a study on mental health in Bogotá, which includes the examination of drug use disorders. More than 15,000 people between the ages of 12 and 95 were surveyed. By using this information, authorities will be able to make data-driven decisions and update the prevalence and incidence of substance use and the associated mental health problems. Support was also provided to the Santiago de Cali Observatory Network to produce data, information and knowledge on the basis of the capacities of 15 social, institutional and academic observatories.

676. In May 2024, UNODC published the document entitled, in Spanish, “Violet lenses: recommendations for incorporating a gender focus in the drug policy of Bogotá”. The document offers recommendations for the incorporation of a gender approach into the new district policy for the prevention and care of consumption and the prevention of linkage to the supply of psychoactive substances in Bogotá, including the promotion of an approach to drug issues that is sensitive to gender, and suggestions to guide drugs policies through violet lenses.

677. Ecuador is implementing a series of initiatives in the context of the national prevention plan for psychosocial risks in the education system in order to update the country’s protocols and action plans regarding the use and presumed sale of licit and illicit substances in schools. In November 2023, two ministerial agreements were issued by the Ministry of Education, namely the “Protocols and action routes to counter psychosocial risks in the national education system”, and the “Guidelines for approaching school conflicts, problematic student behaviour, faults not covered under the Organic Law on Intercultural Education, and restorative educational processes”. Regarding the latter, article 27 highlights the issue of drug use by students as a psychosocial risk and a public health issue which needs a health and psychosocial approach. Article 28 on the distribution and sale of drugs by students details possible punishments, including expulsion and reporting the student to the competent authorities.

678. In Ecuador, the Government has worked with international cooperation agencies to establish quality standards for mental health treatment services; both UNODC and the Colombo Plan have promoted the adoption of tools to guarantee the quality and accessibility of mental health services.

679. Also in Ecuador, the government of Ibarra formulated a local regulation on prevention and treatment, with UNODC support, to promote the provision of services at the local level. The government of Quito developed an action plan on drugs for the period 2024–2028.

680. The CICAD/OAS 2023 Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism report on drug policies of Guyana found that the country's national drug policies and strategies included a human rights approach, a gender perspective and a social inclusion approach. It was reported that Guyana had an agency that performed functions like those of a national drug observatory, and which had been allocated financial and human resources to carry out its functions. It was also noted that the country did not have an early warning system to identify new psychoactive substances or other emerging drug-related threats.

681. The CICAD/OAS 2023 Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism report on drug policies of Suriname found that the country formulated or updated its national drug policies and strategies by considering the Hemispheric Drug Strategy 2020 of OAS and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations. In relation to Sustainable Development Goal 3, in particular, Suriname promotes well-being by ensuring that people who use drugs are first treated for health or mental issues before addressing substance use disorders. Similarly, the country has a primary prevention network for drug use disorders, which informs governmental and non-governmental organizations about the dangers of alcohol and drug use in relation to health.

682. The Board encourages Member States to improve the collection of data on drug use patterns and, whenever possible, to implement periodic drug use surveys in order to inform the development of evidence-based drug policies.

3. Asia

East and South-East Asia

The illicit synthetic drug market in East and South-East Asia continues to grow at a concerning rate, largely owing to increasing levels of organized crime, gaps in law enforcement, challenges to governance, political instability in Myanmar and increasing levels of illicit manufacture.

Opium production in South-East Asia increased during the 2022–2023 season harvest, with Myanmar leading both regional and global production. In addition, the manufacture of illicit synthetic drugs is accelerating, and seizures of methamphetamine and ketamine have reached unprecedented levels.

In some countries in the region, the prevalence of drug use is high, reaching levels comparable to countries in the regions that have the highest prevalence rates worldwide. Cannabis is the drug most used, followed by methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances.

Some countries in the region are reporting an increasing focus on treatment and rehabilitation approaches that combine treatment by specialized institutions with community integration.

Major developments

683. The illicit synthetic drug market in East and South-East Asia continues to grow at a concerning rate as organized crime groups exploit gaps in law enforcement and challenges to governance in order to expand illicit manufacture and traffic large volumes of drugs.

684. According to a UNODC report published in May 2024, the region's illicit drug markets are no longer defined mostly by opiates, as regional seizures of methamphetamine and ketamine have now reached unprecedented levels. In 2023, a total of 190 tons of methamphetamine were seized in the region, the largest amount ever recorded and accounting for 89 per cent of total drug seizures. The illicit drug market also continues to grow in complexity and extends throughout East and South-East Asia, with the Mekong region at the centre of production and organized criminal groups adapting by adopting alternative methods of and routes for trafficking.

685. Opium production in South-East Asia increased in 2022 and 2023, and Myanmar had the largest production of opium in the region, as well as worldwide. According to UNODC surveys, opium poppy cultivation in East and South-East Asia is closely linked to poverty, a lack of government services, challenging macroeconomic environments, instability and insecurity. Furthermore, the opium and heroin produced in East and South-East Asia is believed to be supplying illicit markets in Asia and Oceania.

686. Positive developments were noted in the region with regard to alternative development projects conducted in collaboration with UNODC. Most notably, coffee cultivation, as a viable alternative to opium poppy, has taken place in several areas of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar.

Regional cooperation

687. Since 2020, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand have conducted a series of trilateral cooperation activities with the aim of preventing an influx of precursors into and the trafficking of narcotics out of the Golden Triangle, the mountainous region spanning parts of northern Lao People's Democratic Republic, north-eastern Myanmar and north-western Thailand. From 26 to 28 March 2024, INCB and UNODC held a joint training course in Bangkok on how to address illicit drug manufacture and prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals to illicit markets in East and South-East Asia. The training showcased the different tools that can be used to improve the monitoring of chemicals, as well as materials and equipment that may be used in illicit drug manufacture, focusing on both controlled precursor chemicals and chemicals not under international control that have been used as substitutes. Furthermore, UNODC delivered four training modules on drug and chemical identification, and on vehicle and container searches, in a new virtual reality platform, allowing Member

States to expand their basic training to remote areas and incorporate it into their own law enforcement curricula in training academies. All modules are available in the six languages of the lower Mekong region.

688. At the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in March 2024, the Government of China confirmed its readiness to participate in the INCB industry mapping exercise aimed at mobilizing the engagement of national industries in preventing the diversion of chemical substances to illicit drug manufacturing. Furthermore, China is one of the main users of PEN Online Light, a specialized platform of INCB for the voluntary exchange of pre-export notifications of chemicals that are not listed in Table I or Table II of the 1988 Convention but which may be nationally controlled owing to their use in the illicit manufacture of drugs.

689. UNODC, in close collaboration with the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, has been implementing alternative development projects in the Houaphan and Phongsali Provinces. These projects promote coffee cultivation as a viable alternative to illicit opium cultivation and address the interconnected issues of opium production, poverty and transnational organized crime in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the broader region.

690. In Myanmar, a UNODC alternative development project has enhanced the livelihoods of local farmers and promoted sustainable practices. In addition to the significant economic benefits, the social component of this collaboration has fostered the establishment of 26 women's groups, empowering 355 members to engage in greenhouse farming and nursery management, thus enhancing community resilience and sustainability in the face of illicit drug challenges.

691. On 28 May 2024, the signatories of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control, namely Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and UNODC, met to strengthen regional cooperation to counter the consumption, production and trafficking of drugs. Representatives provided briefings on the current drug situation in the region, presented the report entitled *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia* of 2024, developed strategies to combat drug trafficking and examined new threats related to the diversion of non-controlled precursor chemicals. Three working groups were established to address the synthetic drug problem in the Mekong region, focusing on the areas of preventive education, chemical control and drug analysis.

692. UNODC has continued to support countries in South-East Asia, including Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Philippines, in their efforts to dispose of seized drugs and chemicals. In January 2024, a risk assessment for seized illicit drug manufacturing facilities and chemical storage sites was completed in Cambodia. Key findings from the assessment were presented to the Government of Cambodia, and follow-up actions were agreed upon. In addition, a Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy handheld analyser was provided to Cambodia in June 2024, and training was conducted for officers involved in disposal matters in July 2024.

693. Six countries of the Mekong region launched the joint operation Safe Mekong 2024 in Yunnan, China. This initiative is aimed at fostering collaboration among Mekong countries in countering drug trafficking, in particular to streamline communication between law enforcement agencies and coordinate resources to create regional synergies in combating drug-related crimes.

694. Since November 2023, the GRIDS Programme of INCB has organized over 20 training events for countries in the region. The training covered topics related to the identification of new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids, and introduced participants to the different tools and approaches currently used to strengthen the capacities of law enforcement and other national authorities, as well as to assist with communications.

695. In addition to the training, the GRIDS Programme also organized two workshops with Viet Nam on public-private partnerships and strengthening inter-agency cooperation. A further workshop on inter-agency cooperation was organized for officials from the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and a regional workshop under the WCO/INCB/UPU Synthetic Drugs Detection Project related to mail channels was held in Bangkok.

696. From 19 to 23 November 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized a three-day working visit to Tokyo for customs and police officers of Viet Nam. The delegation held meetings with representatives of Japan Customs, the Narcotic Control Department of Japan, the National Police Agency of Japan and the Japan Coast Guard. Participants also visited the Tokyo Overseas Mail Sub-Branch Customs to gain first-hand experience in preventing and interdicting trafficking through postal channels.

697. From 27 to 29 February 2024, the GRIDS Programme organized a three-day twinning workshop for 10 customs officers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam (five from each country). The two delegations presented briefings on the latest trends and seizures of new psychoactive substances and emerging dangerous substances of concern in their respective countries and the region.

698. In 2024, the GRIDS Programme organized two international events in Vienna, which countries from the region attended. A global workshop on advanced targeting for operational officers, express courier and freight forwarding industry partners brought together law and regulatory enforcement officers, including from China, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and Viet Nam, to address the future of the counter-trafficking of synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, opioids and related substances.

699. The "Tech against trafficking" meeting brought together over 70 participants representing Governments, international organizations and private partners. Among them were representatives from China, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. The purpose of the meeting was to examine how to counter trafficking and the misuse of online platforms, specifically addressing the challenges related to synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances.

700. On 14 and 15 August 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a public-private partnership meeting on preventing the illicit trafficking of new psychoactive substances through the exploitation of money or value transfer service providers in Bangkok. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the United States, Viet Nam, the Asia-Pacific Group on Money Laundering, UPU and WCO, as well as three private enterprises from Malaysia and Viet Nam, participated in the event. The meeting was the first in-person meeting focused on the prevention of misuse of legitimate money or value transfer services, typically known as so-called "e-wallet services", for the illicit trafficking of new psychoactive substances. Experts from both the public and private sectors shared their experiences and successes in voluntary cooperation to prevent the misuse of legitimate money or value transfer service platforms.

701. 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. The five e-modules developed by INCB Learning cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The e-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

702. At the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2024, States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations reaffirmed the Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of Our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem of 2019 and reiterated their determination to address and counter the world drug problem.

Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

703. The three international drug control treaties require 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 the licit activity of internationally controlled substances and to ensure availability of these substances for licit medical and scientific purposes. Among the countries and territories of East and South-East Asia, the reporting rate has generally been close enough to complete for narcotic drugs controlled under the 1961 Single Convention as amended and 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 regarding narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the last five years.

704. The Board encourages the countries and territories of East and South-East Asia that have not provided the reports as required by 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.

705. East and South-East Asia are 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.

706. The Republic of Korea reported the highest level of consumption of opioid analgesics (1,847 S-DDD_{pmpd}) in the region, followed by Singapore (971 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Japan (937 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Malaysia (369 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Brunei Darussalam (335 S-DDD_{pmpd}) and Macao, China (306 S-DDD_{pmpd}). The rest of the countries in the region reported a level of consumption below 300 S-DDD_{pmpd}.

707. The levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in East and South-East Asia are lower than in some other regions in the world, and tracking consumption in the region remains a challenge as many countries do not provide such data. Since 2014, the consumption of phenobarbital in those countries that provided data has varied significantly, ranging from a high of 2.55 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2017 to 0.5 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023, the lowest level in a decade. With regard to diazepam, consumption was below 0.5 S-DDD_{ptpd} from 2014 to 2021, but increased to 1.18 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2022 and increased slightly more in 2023 to 1.48 S-DDD_{ptpd}. The rates of consumption of alprazolam in East and South-East Asia are among the lowest compared with other regions in the world. Since 2014, they have varied between 0.38 S-DDD_{ptpd} and 1.1 S-DDD_{ptpd}. In 2023, consumption of the substance stood at 0.59 S-DDD_{ptpd}.

708. The Board urges the countries of the region that do not regularly provide their annual statistical reports to do so as required by the 1971 Convention and to provide consumption data on psychotropic substances as part of the report if they are able.

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

710. With regard to precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide their 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. The provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which are 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.

711. All countries of East and South-East Asia provided at least one estimate of annual legitimate requirements for the import of ephedrine, preparations containing ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, or preparations containing pseudoephedrine, P-2-P or 3,4-MDP-2-P to the Board, and have regularly updated their estimates, which contributes to preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels, as well as to ensuring the availability of those substances 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.

712. Further information can be found in the technical reports of the Board on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and in the report of the Board on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention. The *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.

713. In partnership with national regulatory authorities in Fiji, Indonesia and Timor-Leste, UNODC has supported capacity-building on access to controlled substances for medical purposes. The Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section of UNODC worked through the UNODC/WHO/Union for International Cancer Control Programme in three core areas of intervention: firstly, to review and analyse legislation and policies for gaps or barriers; secondly, to build the capacity of healthcare professionals; and, lastly, to provide technical support to address potential issues related to the supply chain.

National legislation, policy and action

714. In October 2023 and July 2024, the scheduling of 60 new narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as of 24 precursor chemicals, entered into force in China. These included etomidate, dextromethorphan and compound preparations containing diphenoxylate. In addition, 46 substances, including bupropion, metonitazene and midazolam, were included in the supplementary list of non-medical narcotic drugs and psychotropic drugs. In August 2024, the Government also announced the placement of additional precursor chemicals under national control, including three precursors for fentanyl and three for amphetamine-type stimulants. In addition, cannabidiol was placed under national control as a precursor for *delta*-8-tetrahydrocannabinol and *delta*-9-tetrahydrocannabinol. Furthermore, the list of precursor chemicals requiring export licences to certain countries was expanded in May 2024 to include additional chemicals that can be used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, ketamine and other drugs.

715. In November 2023, following a legislative review that started in 2021, Japan passed amendments to its Cannabis Control Law for the first time in 75 years. The amendments are expected to boost the use of cannabidiol in various fields for both medical and non-medical purposes. Tetrahydrocannabinol will remain under strict control and will be used exclusively for medical and scientific purposes.

716. The Narcotics Control Board of Thailand has proposed rescheduling cannabis and reinstating controls on it as a narcotic drug to be used exclusively for medical and scientific purposes, two years after Thailand decriminalized its use. A bill to make this effective was submitted in June for approval by the Council of Ministers and must go to Parliament for approval before the end of 2024. If approved, the rescheduling will come into effect in 2025. In an interview in February 2024, the Minister of Health of Thailand stated that any recreational use of cannabis would be banned, that growing cannabis without a licence would carry jail terms and fines, and that the import, export, cultivation and commercial use of cannabis would require permits and be limited to medical and scientific purposes.

717. On 26 May 2024, the National Authority for Combating Drugs of Cambodia launched the “NoDrug” mobile application to increase awareness of the effects and dangers of drug use. The application also enables citizens to report drug-related incidents and contains short educational videos, information on drugs and the effects of drug use, and information on drug treatment and rehabilitation centres.

718. In March 2024, WHO reported that workshops had been conducted with the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority to strengthen the analysis of pharmacovigilance reports and the detection and evaluation of safety signals with regard to the use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. These workshops helped strengthen the capacity of 162 drug vigilance evaluators from the Authority’s central and regional offices and of 170 Authority staff and industry stakeholders to carry out the preparation, development and evaluation of a risk management plan as part of the pre-marketing assessment.

719. On 21 May 2024, UNODC and the Government of Mongolia launched an initiative in Ulaanbaatar to strengthen the country’s law enforcement capabilities, with the aim of improving the resilience of Mongolia in countering transnational organized crime. The initiative, entitled “Mongolia Law Enforcement Training (M-LET)”, is aimed at developing the capacities of law enforcement institutions and creating specialized anti-corruption training in the country. The goal is to counter emerging threats such as drug trafficking, cybercrime and corruption.

720. From 19 to 30 August 2024, under the M-LET initiative, four trainers and lecturers from the University of Internal Affairs and the National Police Agency attended a two-week regional train-the-trainers programme on drug investigation. The primary goal of the initiative was to develop a pool of national trainers with specialized skills to address drug trafficking. These trainers would be crucial for improving law enforcement capabilities across the country by providing high-quality standardized training. Their expertise would enable rapid response to emerging threats, encourage regional cooperation and support the sustainable development of law enforcement skills.

721. From 26 to 30 August 2024, under the same initiative, an assessment was conducted of the current training curriculum related to illicit trafficking and transnational organized crimes, including drug trafficking, and the relevant facilities, at the University of Internal Affairs. On the basis of the findings from the assessment, an international standard curriculum and equipment will be provided to the University to facilitate their efforts to improve training capacities for law enforcement officers.

722. In the past, there were reports of human rights violations in the implementation of drug control in the Philippines. However, the current Administration has taken steps to address the issue. From 10 to 12 July 2024, the Philippine Drug Policy and Law Reform Summit took place in Manila. The Summit convened over 300 legislators, policymakers and stakeholders to develop core recommendations to amend the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 and drug policies to align with the new health-based and human rights-centred approach to drugs of the administration of President Marcos. The event was the culmination of a joint effort supported throughout the United Nations Joint Programme on Human Rights (2021–2024), under the leadership of the Department of Justice and the Dangerous Drugs Board of the Philippines, UNODC, OHCHR and civil society, to move away from an excessively punitive approach to drugs and towards a balanced and people-centred approach, promoting health and human rights, reducing stigma, increasing the focus on addressing organized crime, and supporting alternatives to incarceration when appropriate.

723. On 20 June 2024, the National Narcotics Control Commission of China released a statement reporting that the situation regarding illicit drugs in the country was stable and that drug-related crimes had been reduced to their lowest level in a decade. By the end of 2023, drug consumption had decreased by 20 per cent compared with the previous year. The Commission also committed to deepening anti-drug cooperation with the United States, including through intelligence exchanges and cooperation in anti-money-laundering activities.

724. In 2023, legal amendments by Malaysia removed mandatory death sentences for drug-related offences. Following this, the country commuted the death sentences and natural-life prison sentences to prison sentences of 30 years for 11 people, including foreign nationals, convicted of drug trafficking.

725. While recalling that, under 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 the abolition of 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 drug-related offences.

Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

726. According to the UNODC *South-East Asia Opium Survey 2023*, for which the use of satellite imagery and, where possible, field verification and yield surveys were combined to evaluate the extent of opium poppy cultivation and production, opium poppy cultivation in the Golden Triangle continued to expand in 2023, with a significant increase in Myanmar, where opium production was estimated to be 1,080 tons. The potential yield is at its highest level since 2001. Following the recent decline in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, Myanmar is now the world's largest source of illicitly produced opium.

727. The most significant increase in the illicit cultivation of opium poppy in Myanmar was recorded in Shan State, where cultivation increased by 20 per cent, followed by Chin State, where it increased by 10 per cent. The estimated average yield of opium increased by 16 per cent to 22.9 kg/ha, which is a new record level, above the previous record set in 2022. This is due to more sophisticated agricultural practices and investments in irrigation systems and fertilizers by farmers. The most profitable activity in the illicit opium economy is the production and trafficking of heroin. In 2023, it was estimated that 5.8 tons of heroin were consumed in Myanmar, valued between \$835 million and \$2.2 billion.

728. In Myanmar, higher rates of opium consumption were reported in households involved in opium poppy cultivation. According to a study, 8 per cent of members of households involved in opium poppy cultivation consumed opium, compared with 1 per cent in households not involved in opium cultivation.

729. In 2023, the area dedicated to illicit opium poppy cultivation in the Lao People's Democratic Republic was estimated by UNODC to be about 5,000 ha, predominantly concentrated in Phongsali Province. This represents a slight decrease compared to the last estimates, made in 2015, when there was an estimated 5,700 ha of poppy cultivation. However, in general terms, cultivation practices remain stable. Analysis of poppy plots showed that most cultivation took place outside of protected areas such as national parks and nature reserves, but in close proximity to them.

730. In the course of 2023, Indonesia reported a slight decrease in the amount of crystal methamphetamine seized. Annual seizures remained significant, at 8 tons. Methamphetamine accounts for the largest proportion of drug treatment admissions and drug-related arrests in the country. According to UNODC data, the methamphetamine seized in Indonesia comes predominantly from Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand.

731. The Central Narcotics Bureau of Singapore dismantled 25 drug syndicates in 2023 and made drug seizures worth an estimated \$11.5 million. Among the traffickers arrested were members of a crime syndicate that had been using the Telegram telecommunication platform to sell illicit drugs to young people. Malaysia has also reported success in limiting the scope of operation of one of the country's largest drug syndicates. The action resulted in the arrest of six individuals and in the seizure of nearly 50 kg of various types of drugs worth nearly \$2 million.

732. Record methamphetamine seizures were reported for 2023, the highest since 2017, with a total of 190 tons seized in East and South-East Asia – 169 tons in South-East Asia alone. More specifically, 139 tons were seized in three countries of the lower Mekong basin (Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand), accounting for about three quarters of the total methamphetamine seizures in the region. These data reflect the reality of the consolidation of methamphetamine production in the Golden Triangle region of Myanmar and its impact on the neighbouring countries of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand.

733. In 2023, methamphetamine tablets seized in East and South-East Asia totalled 1.1 billion tablets (98.3 tons), the highest annual total ever reported in the region. Crystal methamphetamine seizures in 2023 also reached a record high, amounting to 90 tons. That the same year, several countries and jurisdictions in East and South-East Asia, including Cambodia; China; Hong Kong, China; Malaysia; Myanmar; the Republic of Korea; Thailand; and Viet Nam, reported increases in seizures.

734. Shan State in Myanmar remains the epicentre of methamphetamine manufacture in East and South-East Asia. Illicit drug manufacturing activities are carried out by various organized crime groups that have partnered with armed groups in Shan State. For decades, methamphetamine trafficking along maritime routes has been ongoing. However, the scale of shipments has increased in recent years. Throughout 2023 and in early 2024, authorities in the region seized individual shipments of 1 ton or more of methamphetamine, often along with large quantities of ketamine. The continued and intensified use of maritime routes to traffic large quantities of methamphetamine from Myanmar confirms that drug traffickers are diversifying crystal methamphetamine trafficking channels from Shan State to countries of the Mekong region.

735. Several special operations and seizures of significant amounts of drugs and precursors took place in Myanmar. Most notably, 14 tons of crystal methamphetamine were seized in 2024, as were 1.3 tons of opium, 838 kg of heroin, over 126 million stimulant tablets and 470 kg of ketamine. One of the most notable cases, involving five tons of crystal methamphetamine seized in Mandalay, was reported in May 2024. The seizure was the largest single seizure of crystal methamphetamine reported from countries in South-East Asia. The value of the seized drugs in the first half of 2024 was estimated at \$178 million. Over 2,000 ha of opium poppy fields were destroyed between October 2022 and June 2023, and over 2,500 ha were destroyed between September 2023 and March 2024 during the planting seasons. Substantial quantities of non-scheduled chemicals were also seized in Myanmar. In one case reported in August 2024, 1,020 litres of propiophenone and 2.35 tons of ammonium chloride were seized in Sagaing.

736. In recent years, wholesale prices of crystal methamphetamine in countries along the major trafficking routes in East and South-East Asia have decreased significantly. This has been evident in countries such as Thailand, where the wholesale price of a kilogram of crystal methamphetamine decreased by two-thirds over the past five years, from between \$8,200 and \$13,115 in 2019 to between \$2,700 and \$5,400 in 2023. In Malaysia, the average wholesale price of a kilogram of crystal methamphetamine has shown a strong downward trend over the past decade, reaching \$6,962 in 2023 compared to \$12,000 in 2019 and \$45,600 in 2014. In Cambodia, the average wholesale price of crystal methamphetamine decreased from \$8,000 in 2019 to \$6,000 in 2023.

737. China has reported a significant increase in cocaine seizures in 2023, when 2.6 tons were seized, almost 14 times the amount seized in 2022. Furthermore, China reported seizures of cannabis originating in Thailand, as well as of various narcotic drugs and new psychoactive substances trafficked via international mail. China has noted increased seizures of drugs trafficked via land, sea and mail routes, as well as of large-scale trafficking

cases and more covert online trafficking methods. Singapore has also reported increased seizures of cannabis originating from Thailand.

738. In addition, China has also reported increases in illicit manufacture and trafficking, in particular of cases of drugs being trafficked by land and water channels, but overall, the number of cases remains low. In 2023, China seized 26 tons of various drugs, which was an 18 per cent increase compared with 2022. Furthermore, China recorded around 200 cases of illicit drug manufacturing (an 8 per cent increase from 2022), 32,000 drug smuggling and trafficking cases (an 18.5 per cent increase) and the arrest of 56,000 suspects (a 43 per cent increase). In terms of curbing the illicit use of chemical precursors that can be used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, ketamine and other drugs, China is actively using INCB tools such as PEN Online and PEN Online Light, and between January and May 2024, a total of 24 new precursor chemicals were placed under the system of licensing control for export to certain countries.

739. According to the “Drug situation report 2023” of Singapore, the level of drug trafficking in Singapore remains stable, but concerns about increasing levels of incarceration were noted, as the number of people arrested for drug use in 2023 increased by 10 per cent to 3,122 compared with 2,826 in 2022. The report found that the most commonly used drugs were methamphetamine, heroin and cannabis, in that order. With a view to ensuring that laws remain effective against emerging drug trends, harsher penalties were introduced for the possession of large quantities of controlled drugs such as morphine, heroin, opium, cocaine, cannabis, cannabis resin and methamphetamine, among others. Furthermore, a new legal framework came into effect in 2024 to address psychotropic substances.

740. The amount of “ecstasy” tablets seized in Indonesia increased in 2023, reaching more than 2 million pills for the first time. On the other hand, seizures of cannabis herb in Indonesia fell significantly, from more than 80 tons in 2022 to just 9.8 tons in 2023.

741. During 2023 and 2024, Japan reported an increase in seizures of crystal methamphetamine, which reached nearly two tons, representing the second highest amount ever recorded in the country. Although the number of methamphetamine-related crimes has been declining since 2015, methamphetamines still account for the largest proportion of drug-related arrests in the country. Likewise, the number of cases and seized quantities of methamphetamine trafficked by air passengers continued to increase, from 43 cases and 108 kg recorded in 2022 to 88 cases and 403 kg recorded in 2023. Preliminary data also indicate that cocaine seizures in Japan in 2023 more than doubled from the previous year, reaching 103 kg in 2023, compared to 42.8 kg in 2022. In contrast, seizures of “ecstasy” tablets decreased from 111,339 tablets seized in 2022 to 36,000 tablets seized in 2023.

742. The Republic of Korea reported some of the country’s highest drug seizures ever. The amount of crystal methamphetamine seized more than doubled in 2023, the second highest amount ever recorded in the country at 405 kg, compared to 175.4 kg seized in 2022. At the same time, a record 2,342,355 methamphetamine tablets were seized by 2023, up from 1,862,247 seized the previous year. Korean authorities noted that the methamphetamine tablet market was mainly for foreign nationals from South-East Asia. Ketamine seizures in 2023, while limited to 42.6 grams, were larger than the combined amount of ketamine seized in the country in all previous years since seizures were first reported in 2015.

743. The trafficking and diversion of chemicals within regions neighbouring the Mekong region continue to fuel the illicit manufacturing of methamphetamine and ketamine in Myanmar. The rapid increase in methamphetamine seizures and the decrease in drug prices in the region suggest that organized crime groups face few difficulties in obtaining precursor chemicals.

744. Authorities in the region have seized increasing amounts of non-controlled chemicals in recent years. In many East and South-East Asian countries, there is little information about the trafficking and use of these alternative chemicals. The forensic capacity to identify and analyse these chemicals is also limited. In addition, law enforcement agencies in the region face new challenges such as the diversion of chemical precursors that are ordered and often paid for through online channels.

745. The illicit manufacturing of ketamine has become consolidated in the lower Mekong basin in recent years. Criminal networks involved in manufacturing and trafficking ketamine have diversified their business models and supply channels, moving from other parts of East and South-East Asia to the Golden Triangle area and, recently, expanding to other countries of the lower Mekong basin. Data from 2023 show a lower amount of ketamine

seized in the Mekong region (23.3 tons) compared with the 29 tons seized in 2022, which was the largest amount ever reported in the Mekong region. However, although there was a decrease in the amount of ketamine seized in Cambodia (from 13.5 tons in 2022 to 1 ton in 2023), significant increases in ketamine seizures were observed in Myanmar, Thailand and Hong Kong, China.

Prevention and treatment

746. China has reported its introduction of a focus on drug prevention publicity and prevention education, including through exhibitions, education programmes in schools and a national competition in this area. In 2023, more than 100 million young students from more than 230,000 schools across the country participated in such programmes and over 40 million watched related television programmes.

747. In terms of drug use prevalence, China is reporting that new patterns have emerged in drug use in China since the COVID-19 pandemic. Drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine are expensive and difficult to find, and people who use drugs have therefore turned to other substances, such as etomidate, tramadol, dextromethorphan, diphenoxylate and nitrous oxide (“laughing gas”), that are easier to obtain, lower-priced and have similar effects to drugs that were previously more prevalent.

748. With regard to prevention and rehabilitation, China has reported that it is delivering a model that integrates physical detoxification, psychological rehabilitation, employment placement and integration into society, and that provides physical and mental rehabilitation and assistance. At present, about 85 per cent of people who use drugs receive rehabilitation services in the community, and there is a dedicated full-time staff member per 10 people with drug use disorders in China. There are more than 770 community methadone treatment clinics in the country. China has also reported a reduction in the number of people who use drugs for a sixth consecutive year, with a total number of 890,000 (a 20 per cent decrease compared to 2022). Furthermore, it was found that over 4 million people did not relapse following three years of abstinence.

749. Nearly 27,000 people receiving treatment for drug use disorders in treatment centres in the government-controlled areas of Myanmar are treated as outpatients and only 422 are treated as inpatients. Of the total number of people receiving treatment as inpatients and outpatients, only 417 are women. Opioid use disorders are mainly treated using methadone maintenance therapy, but a pilot project for buprenorphine maintenance treatment commenced in three major treatment centres, for 90 persons, in September 2023.

750. Singapore reported that the prevalence of illicit drug use over a lifetime and in the past 12 months in the country was 2.3 per cent and 0.7 per cent, respectively. These are low rates compared to other countries. Singapore explained that this was an outcome of its zero-tolerance approach, which has served as a deterrent and which is based on interdiction and supply control, as well as on demand reduction. This is achieved through a combination of law enforcement efforts, national regulations and assistance through governmental entities specializing in substance use disorders and mental health management, support groups, therapy and the provision of community services to people who use drugs.

751. In terms of education programmes, Singapore underlines that preventive drug education is a key component of the harm prevention strategy and the first line of action in the country’s drug control strategy. The focus of the preventive drug education programme is public education and community engagement, combined with strong community support, especially from parents and schools.

South Asia

An estimated 60 million people worldwide used opioids for non-medical purposes in 2022, equivalent to about 1.2 per cent of the global population. About half of them lived in South Asia and South-West Asia. The use of opiates, in particular opium and heroin, is reported mainly by countries in South Asia.

In the decade from 2013 to 2022, seizures of methamphetamine originating in countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including Bangladesh and India, increased significantly, from 7.2 tons to 20.4 tons.

There was an upsurge in drug trafficking incidents across the region during the first quarter of 2024 as compared with the last quarter of 2023, with major seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants reported.

South Asia continues to be the region with the lowest levels of licit consumption of opioid analgesics in the world.

Major developments

752. South Asia remains an important transit area for traffickers smuggling illicitly produced opiates and methamphetamine from Afghanistan to Europe and North America. In addition, the five coastal States in South Asia, namely Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, are exposed to maritime trafficking routes across the Indian Ocean. India, in particular, has noted an intensification of trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan and trafficked eastward, along the southern route.⁸³

753. Countries in South Asia effected the majority of heroin and morphine seizures made on the southern route in most years over the past two decades. An estimated 60 million people worldwide used opioids in 2022, or about 1.2 per cent of the global population. About half of those people lived in South Asia and South-West Asia. The largest number of people reported to use opiates, in particular opium and heroin, is in South Asia.

754. Between 2013 and 2022, seizures of methamphetamine in East and South-East Asia increased nearly four-fold. During the same period, seizures of the drug originating in countries in those regions and in South Asia, including Bangladesh and India, increased significantly, from a total of 7.2 tons to 20.4 tons.

755. Countries in South Asia continued to report seizures of methamphetamine, in both tablet and crystalline form, originating in South-East Asia. Traditionally focused on opiates from Afghanistan, local drug markets are undergoing significant changes, as the substantial increases in methamphetamine seizures in countries in the region indicate that methamphetamine trafficking is expanding rapidly. UNODC data from 2019 to 2022 highlight that trafficking of methamphetamine from Afghanistan has already impacted India and Sri Lanka and could expand to other areas in the region. An analysis of drug cases reveals that a growing amount of methamphetamine seized in countries in and neighbouring South Asia originates in Afghanistan.

756. South Asia remains a significant target for traffickers smuggling opiates from Afghanistan to Europe and North America through the alternate southern trafficking route. According to UNODC, seizures of heroin in South Asia declined by about 20 per cent in 2022 compared to the previous year. This is possibly linked to traffickers holding back heroin shipments in anticipation of higher prices following the opium ban announced by the Taliban in April 2022, which became effective in 2023. Organized criminal groups dominating Asian markets have adapted to new methods of operation, resulting in a notable rise in the maritime trafficking of heroin and other opiates from West and South-East Asia. Major seizures have been recorded in both the Eastern and Western Indian Ocean, indicating a persistent threat of heroin trafficking via maritime routes.

Regional cooperation

757. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities in all countries of South Asia have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The five e-modules developed by INCB Learning cover narcotic drugs,

⁸³ As defined in the *World Drug Report*, the southern route involves trafficking from West Asia to South Asia, the Gulf countries, and other countries in the Near and Middle East and Africa.

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.

758. From 28 to 30 November 2023, the GRIDS Programme of INCB organized a cross-border twinning event for law and regulatory enforcement agency officers from Bangladesh and India. The objectives of the twinning event were to build the capacities of front-line officials in identifying new psychoactive substances, in sharing intelligence and in acquiring techniques for the safe interdiction of dangerous synthetic opioids.

759. From 4 to 6 December 2023, the GRIDS Programme convened a regional cross-border training event for regional law-enforcement cooperation to facilitate trust-building, relationship development and active networking. Ten officers from the Customs Service of Maldives, and from the Narcotics Control Bureau and the Central Bureau of Narcotics of India, participated in the event. Cross-border regional activities included team building, trust-building exercises, the exchange of best practices and informal bilateral case meetings to discuss the trafficking of dangerous substances in the South Asian region. The GRIDS Programme held a similar event from 12 to 14 December 2023, for law enforcement and regulatory officers from India and Sri Lanka. Ten officers from the Customs Service of Sri Lanka, and from both the Narcotics Control Bureau and the Central Bureau of Narcotics of India, participated in the event.

760. From 13 to 16 February 2024, the GRIDS Programme held a global workshop on advanced targeting for operational officers, express courier and freight forwarding industry partners in Vienna. The four-day event brought together law and regulatory enforcement officers, international organizations and associations, and private sector partners to address the future of countering the trafficking of synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, and opioids and related substances. The meeting was attended by representatives of Bangladesh and India from South Asia.

761. From 5 to 8 March 2024, the GRIDS Programme hosted an event in Vienna entitled “Tech against trafficking: practical approaches to countering cross-platform exploitation of online services”. The meeting brought together over 70 participants from Governments, international organizations and private sector partners. The aim was to explore the future landscape of counter-trafficking and, specifically, to address challenges and advances related to synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances and, in particular, synthetic opioids and related chemicals. Officials from India participated in the event.

762. From 16 to 19 August 2024, the GRIDS Programme convened training for officers from the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs India on awareness of opioids, fentanyl and new psychoactive substances; basic targeting (using GRIDS Intelligence); and secure real-time trafficking communications (using IONICS).

763. The Government of India hosted the INCB Precursors Task Force meeting in late 2023. The Task Force reviewed the global trafficking of controlled chemical precursors and new trends in illicit drug manufacture. The Government of India also confirmed its commitment to the INCB industry mapping initiative aimed at strengthening the engagement of relevant industries in preventing the diversion of chemical substances to illicit drug manufacturing. Part of that initiative is a twinning exercise between competent national authorities of Germany and India.

764. In March 2024, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Bhutan Food and Drug Authority, the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India. The memorandum is aimed at promoting the safety and quality of medical products in the region through enhanced cooperation of the parties by sharing pharmacopoeia and reference standards, and by testing methods of medical products, in accordance with international standards and applicable regulations.

765. In May 2024, senior government representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka gathered in New Delhi to launch the UNODC regional programme for South Asia for the period 2024–2028. The Programme provides a five-year strategic framework for national and regional cooperation in building capacities and promoting effective policies to enhance justice and health, and to counter drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption and terrorism in all six countries of South Asia.

766. Through the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme, an assessment was carried out of the maritime domain awareness capabilities of Bangladesh, and recommendations were provided for training and equipment to enhance the operations of the Bangladesh River Police.

767. In 2024, the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme conducted an operational analysis to assess the drug trafficking trends in the southern coastal routes of Bangladesh. The analysis was conducted in cooperation with different Government and maritime law enforcement agencies to establish a foundational knowledge of the operational aspects of drug trafficking via the southern route. The local counterparts of the study included the Bangladesh Navy, the Bangladesh Coast Guard, the Department of Narcotics Control and the Bangladesh Police. The study was completed in September 2024.

768. The UNODC Passenger and Cargo Border Team programme in Bangladesh supported the assessment and risk profiling of sea containers and air cargo by providing digital equipment and personal protective equipment for customs authorities. New air cargo control units were created in Dhaka and Chittagong, and port control units were created in the Port of Mongla, the second busiest seaport in Bangladesh. In addition, two TruNarc devices for customs agencies in Dhaka were provided. The devices enable officers to identify narcotics hidden inside plastic and glass containers. Specialized training on explosives was delivered in 2024 by WCO for customs agencies in Dhaka.

769. In late 2023, the UNODC/WCO Passenger and Cargo Border Team expanded the number of air cargo control units and port control units in the region, resulting in broader data collection and increased capabilities to detect the trafficking of drugs and precursors.

Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

770. The three international drug control conventions require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable INCB to monitor the licit movement of internationally controlled substances and to ensure the availability of these substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes. Countries in South Asia regularly provide most of the required reports for narcotic drugs controlled under the 1961 Convention as amended. A few countries have not provided all the required reports regarding narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances over the past five years. **The Board encourages Governments in the region to prioritize the submission of accurate and timely reports, which will significantly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation of the international drug control system.**

771. South Asia continues to be the region with the lowest levels of consumption of opioid analgesics in the world. Bhutan was the country with the highest consumption in the region in 2022, at 60 S-DDD_{pmpd}, followed in decreasing order by Nepal (46 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Sri Lanka (42 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Bangladesh (30 S-DDD_{pmpd}), India (27 S-DDD_{pmpd}) and Maldives (18 S-DDD_{pmpd}). All countries and territories in the region consistently provided their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances from 2019 to 2023, although only half of them included data on consumption as part of their reports. **The Board invites the countries of the region that do not already do so to provide consumption data on psychotropic substances as part of their annual statistical report if they are able.**

772. The levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in South Asia are lower than in some other regions in the world, and tracking consumption in the region remains a challenge as not all countries in the region provide such data. Since 2014, the consumption of phenobarbital among countries that provided data has never exceeded 1 S-DDD_{ptpd}, and 2023 was the year with the highest level of consumption in reporting countries, at 0.81 S-DDD_{ptpd}. With regard to diazepam, in the same period, consumption has fluctuated significantly, from the lows of 0.28 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2014 and 0.14 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2021, to a high of 2.07 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023. Similar to diazepam, the rates of consumption of alprazolam in South Asia have also fluctuated significantly since 2014, peaking in 2016 at 4.25 S-DDD_{ptpd}, and the lowest level was 0.2 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2014. In 2023, consumption of alprazolam in the region stood at 2.36 S-DDD_{ptpd}.

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

medical uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

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

775. Further information can be found in the technical reports of the Board on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as in the report on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention. The *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. **The Board stresses that there is an insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring the sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.**

National legislation, policy and action

776. In Bangladesh, the UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Forensics programme has assisted the Government in the development of the initiative entitled “Bangladesh national early warning systems on new psychoactive substances”.

777. In Bhutan, the National Drug Task Force, chaired by the Prime Minister, was formed in April 2024 to tackle substance use and substance use disorders. To facilitate its activities, the Task Force directed the Ministry of Education and Skills Development to expedite the establishment of a specialized school in eastern Bhutan by early July 2024. The school will cater to students identified as experiencing substance use-related issues. In addition, the Task Force endorsed the Comprehensive Framework for the National Response to Address Substance Use Issues, together with a referral pathway for people who test positive for drug use.

778. In February 2024, India placed four substances (2-methyl-AP-237, etazene, etonitazepine and protonitazene, including its salts and preparations) under control, in accordance with the recommendation of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-third session. Furthermore, an additional three substances (ADB-BUTINACA, alpha-PiHP and 3-methylmethcathinone, including its salts and preparations) have been added to the list of psychotropic substances. These changes have been included in the respective list of controlled substances of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

779. The Government of India has embarked on its second National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India under the coordination of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. UNODC is a member of the steering committee formed for this task. In July 2024, the Government of India launched the national narcotics helpline called “MANAS” to provide advice on rehabilitation and ending drug use and sharing information on drug trafficking. It also adopted a three-pronged approach as a long-term policy aimed at a drug-free India by 2047, focusing on: (a) strengthening institutional structures; (b) improved coordination among narcotics control agencies; and (c) regular extensive public awareness campaigns against drug use.

780. In June 2024, the Government of Maldives announced plans to establish a new police department, the Drug and Violent Crime Command, as part of the strategic initiatives by the Maldives Police Service to tackle criminal gangs. The new structure is intended to strengthen both central and regional police capabilities, focusing on proactive measures against drug use, trafficking and drug-related violence perpetrated by organized criminal groups.

781. In May 2024, the Government of Nepal announced plans to enable the establishment of a legal framework for the commercial production of cannabis for medical purposes. The announcement was made by the Finance Minister during the presentation of the budget proposed for the fiscal year 2024/25. The announcement follows the results of a study conducted by a working group formed under the coordination of the Ministry of Home Affairs, tasked with examining the feasibility of cannabis cultivation for medical use. Deliberations continued on the possible inclusion of tramadol and tapentadol in the national lists of controlled psychotropic substances under section 3 of the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act, 2033 (1976).

Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

782. The significant expansion of synthetic drugs smuggled from the Golden Triangle (a region covering parts of northern Lao People's Democratic Republic, north-eastern Myanmar and north-western Thailand) into Bangladesh and, more recently, into north-east India, remains a concerning trend in the drug landscape of South Asia, facilitated by transnational syndicates and local armed groups. The Bangladesh-Myanmar border, especially the Naf River and the Teknaf region, has become a major trafficking route for amphetamine-type stimulants, complicating regional security and stability. Despite stringent anti-drug measures, the manufacture and trafficking of these drugs continue to rise, driven by complex international networks and regional instability.

783. According to the Department of Narcotics Control of the Government of Bangladesh, cocaine trafficking organizations are attempting to establish a new market in the country, as evidenced by the seizure of an 8.3 kg cocaine consignment on 24 January 2024, the largest single seizure ever recorded in Bangladesh. The latest statistics from the Department of Narcotics Control reveal that, in 2021, Bangladesh seized a total of 36.38 million methamphetamine tablets ("yaba"), 1.08 million bottles of Phensedyl, 4 kg of cocaine and 210 kg of heroin. In 2021, 47 per cent of drug-related investigations resulted in convictions, an increase from 43 per cent in 2020.

784. According to the annual report of the Office of the Attorney General in Bhutan, the number of criminal cases reported by the Royal Bhutan Police increased by 50 per cent in 2023, with a total of 926 cases involving 1,531 individuals. Drug and substance use offences had the most dramatic increase, increasing by more than 200 per cent from the previous year. This surge is partially attributed to stricter drug enforcement efforts by the police. Of those cases, 351 cases involved the illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, followed by 39 cases involving only the illicit trafficking of cannabis and its derivatives. In addition, the Office reported 27 cases of substance use, 6 cases of the illegal sale of inhaled solvents and 2 cases of possession of cannabis. From January to mid-March 2024, the Royal Bhutan Police registered 352 cases related to drug use and arrested 628 individuals. From those arrests, 533 people were referred to drug use treatment and 92 people were taken into police custody and charged with drug trafficking.

785. In India, the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids has increased steadily over the past two decades. Despite a similar prevalence in use rates (a prevalence rate of 0.96 per cent in 2018 versus 1.14 per cent now, among the population aged 10–75), the reported prevalence of "problem use" of pharmaceutical opioids (0.23 per cent) is less than half the level of the reported heroin use (0.57 per cent). Pharmaceutical opioids, which are frequently trafficked within the country, include codeine (typically contained in cough suppressants), tramadol and buprenorphine.

786. In India, during 2024, the Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad, the Narcotics Control Bureau and the Indian Coast Guard have made three high-value seizures of drugs in joint operations, with a total sale value of \$107 million. Significant seizures involved 78 boxes of heroin weighing roughly 86 kg, worth \$72 million; and the dismantling of illicit laboratories involved in the manufacture of mephedrone, with the value of the seized mephedrone estimated at \$28 million. In addition, on 17 April 2024, a drug factory was identified in Greater Noida, and 26.7 kg of MDMA with a value of \$17 million, was seized.

787. Trafficking continues to pose a major problem in Maldives as considerable quantities of drugs are seized by law enforcement authorities. In April 2024, a joint operation by the Maldives Police Service and the Maldives Customs Service led to the confiscation of drugs worth over \$1.4 million. Previously, in March 2024, a foreign national was arrested at the Velana International Airport for carrying more than 5 kg of heroin in his luggage, estimated to have a value exceeding \$340,000. During the last weeks of 2023, the UNODC/WCO Passenger and Cargo Border Team in Maldives reported seizures of 38 kg of illegal substances, including amphetamine, mephedrone, methadone, methcathinone, cannabis resin, cannabis oil, cocaine hydrochloride, MDMA and 16 kg of heroin.

788. During the fiscal year 2023–24, the police in Nepal seized substantial amounts of illegal drugs, including 1,056 kg of cannabis resin, more than 35 tons of cannabis herb, 83 kg of opium, 29 kg of heroin and more than 19 kg of cocaine. In the same period, 7,300 drug-related crimes were registered, leading to the arrest of 11,000 individuals. Among them were 25 foreign nationals arrested for their involvement in drug-related cases.

789. The Ministry of Public Security of Sri Lanka conducted an operation entitled "Yukthiya" (justice), which resulted in the arrest of more than 111,000 suspects between December 2023 and May 2024. According to the Sri Lanka Police, law enforcement authorities have seized substantial quantities of narcotics, including 41 kg of

heroin, 43 kg of crystal methamphetamine and 300,000 pills of other narcotic drugs. In addition, the operation led to the seizure of illegal assets valued at more than \$5 million.

790. According to the National Dangerous Drugs Control Board of Sri Lanka, more than 162,000 people were arrested by the Police Narcotics Bureau for drug-related offences between January and December 2023, an increase of 7 per cent compared to the previous year. Of those arrests, more than 66,000 (40 per cent) were for heroin-related charges, about 68,000 (42 per cent) were for cannabis, and about 26,000 (16 per cent) were for methamphetamine. In 2023, authorities in Sri Lanka seized more than 850 kg of heroin, 10,200 kg of cannabis, 83 kg of methamphetamine, 25 kg of cocaine and 274 kg of cannabis resin.

Prevention and treatment

791. The UNODC Regional Office for South Asia is assisting countries in the region in addressing HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for people who use drugs and people in prison and other closed settings. In this connection, UNODC has been implementing projects in Bangladesh to help counter HIV/AIDS and to increase access to prevention, treatment, care and support services, including opioid agonist therapy among people who inject drugs.

792. In India, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has recognized the importance of drug demand reduction efforts to reduce the prevalence of substance use and has formulated the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction, which prioritizes primary prevention, early intervention, treatment and rehabilitation, social integration and the reduction of the adverse consequences of substance use for individuals and society as a whole.

793. Under the Action Plan, a nationwide campaign, “Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan”, was launched, engaging 132 million people, including 26.3 million women and 42.5 million youth. Activities are reported to have led to an increase of about 210 per cent in the number of people seeking assistance for drug use disorders at treatment facilities. A mobile app and a portal were developed to gather and collect data on activities and present, on the campaign’s dashboard, information at the district, state and national levels.

794. To enhance the response for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne diseases among people who use drugs, an integrated package was developed, combining a one-stop service centre and a care coordination model that promotes screening, care services, cross-referrals and access to social support in order to reduce social stigma associated with drug use. To build the capacity of trainers, healthcare professionals and other stakeholders, specialized modules have been created and thematic workshops are organized at regular intervals to ensure the quality delivery of drug use treatment services. Further, with the aim of providing teleservices, a national toll-free telephone helpline was created, offering psychosocial support and care to people who use drugs.

795. In late 2023, UNODC conducted a two-day training event for 35 health policymakers and officials in Kolkata, India, on establishing and delivering evidence-based, high-quality opioid agonist therapy services. Held under the Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework mechanism, the training equipped participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to prevent drug use disorders using the operational tool entitled *Establishing and Delivering Evidence-based, High-quality Opioid Agonist Therapy Services*, developed by UNODC and WHO.

796. In February 2024, UNODC, in collaboration with the Institute of Correctional Administration in Chandigarh, India, hosted a training programme on HIV and drugs for law enforcement officers from the States of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. The training enhanced officers’ skills and understanding of the strategies to address the intersecting challenges of HIV and drug use within their communities.

797. In February 2024, UNODC, together with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment of India and the related ministerial departments in Assam and Manipur, conducted a three-day training event for 39 government representatives, social workers, teachers, psychologists and community leaders from Assam and Manipur. The participants received training and skills to effectively empower families and protect young people from the dangers of drugs and crime.

798. In Maldives, the treatment of people who use drugs remains hampered by legal challenges. In March 2024, the President of Maldives acknowledged that the existing procedures under the protocols for methadone

treatment needed to be revisited to prevent unintended consequences such as forced unemployment resulting from the obligatory attendance of court-ordered rehabilitation programmes. In the same context, the President pledged to invest in establishing new rehabilitation centres across the country and highlighted the need to involve communities in the rehabilitation of drug use disorders.

799. In August 2024, UNODC organized a training session on “Nature, prevention and treatment of drug use disorders” for policymakers in India. This training package, developed in 2016, was delivered with the aim of supporting Member States in developing appropriate strategies, policies, programmes and interventions targeted at preventing drug use and increasing the availability of and access to comprehensive systems of care for people affected by drug use and drug use disorders. **INCB encourages countries in the region to improve the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, to prevent drug use and to provide evidence-based prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services.**

West Asia

The area under illicit poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in 2024, at 12,800 ha, was 19 per cent more than in 2023 but still significantly lower than the levels prior to the “drug ban” that was announced by the de facto authorities of Afghanistan in April 2022. There has been a decrease in seizures of opiates originating in Afghanistan along the main routes used for trafficking in such opiates.

The manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic drugs continue to pose serious challenges to the countries in West Asia. Central Asia is facing a growing threat of misuse of synthetic drugs, including synthetic cathinones, various pharmaceutical preparations and new psychoactive substances, a trend that indicates a shift from opiates to those substances.

The manufacture of methamphetamine appears to have continued to increase in Afghanistan, as evidenced by increased seizures of that substance in neighbouring countries in Central Asia, in South-West Asia and in Türkiye.

The instability in the Syrian Arab Republic since 2011 continues to fuel the surge in the availability and industrial-scale manufacture of “captagon”, which has become integrated with the increased trafficking in crystal methamphetamine.

Major developments

800. The UNODC Afghanistan opium survey of 2024 found that opium poppy cultivation in the country is still far below the levels prior to the enactment of the 2023 decree on the prohibition of poppy cultivation and all types of narcotics. In 2024, the area under cultivation was estimated at 12,800 ha, which was 19 per cent more than in 2023, at 10,800 ha. This is in comparison to the estimated 232,000 ha of cultivation prior to the ban. There has also been a geographical shift in the cultivation from the south-western provinces of the country so that now 59 per cent of cultivation takes place in the north-east, in particular in Badakhshan Province. Prices of dry opium stabilized in the first half of 2024 but are several times higher than the pre-ban averages. According to the survey, the high prices and questions about dwindling opium stocks may encourage a resumption in poppy cultivation, particularly outside the traditional centres of cultivation.

801. Fewer seizures have been reported along the major trafficking routes for Afghan opiates, including the Balkan route, which remained the main path for trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan and intended for markets in Central and Western Europe, and the northern route, used to traffic Afghan opiates intended for markets in the Russian Federation.

802. The manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic drugs continue to pose serious challenges to the countries in West Asia. Central Asia, in particular, is facing an increasing number of incidents of misuse of synthetic drugs, including synthetic cathinones, various pharmaceutical preparations and new psychoactive substances, a trend that indicates a shift from opiates to those substances and is attributable to the combined effects of reduced supply of opiates from Afghanistan, the increasing domestic manufacture of synthetic drugs and the lack of

effective regulation and law enforcement. At the same time, the Middle East continues to be seriously affected by the trafficking in and manufacture of falsified “captagon”,⁸⁴ which is manufactured mainly in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon.

803. The manufacture of methamphetamine seems to have continued to increase in Afghanistan, as evidenced by increased seizures of that substance in neighbouring countries in Central Asia, in South-West Asia and in Türkiye.

Regional cooperation

804. On 7 November 2023, Oman and Saudi Arabia reviewed areas of joint cooperation in the area of drug control and agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding aimed at ensuring the safety, reliability and efficiency of medical devices and supplies.

805. On 29 and 30 November 2023, a meeting of the Regional Working Group on Precursors was convened by the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries in Dushanbe. Delegations from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan shared information on regional developments and trafficking trends related to precursors and were trained in the use of the INCB PICS platform.

806. A meeting of heads of the information and analysis departments of national coordinating bodies and leading specialists of drug treatment centres in the Central and South-West Asian countries was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 19 and 20 December 2023. The event was organized under the auspices of the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. Delegations from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan shared information on drug control challenges and measures taken to address those challenges in their respective countries, and agreed to strengthen regional cooperation efforts in that regard.

807. In the second half of 2023 and the first half of 2024, the Ministry of the Interior of Türkiye conducted Operation Cartel and Operation Cage, which targeted national and transnational organized criminal groups and led to the arrest of ringleaders of those groups, most of whom were the subject of blue or red INTERPOL notices.

808. On 29 January 2024, the League of Arab States and UNODC jointly held the first meeting of the Steering and Follow-up Committee on the Regional Framework for the Arab States (2023–2028) in Cairo. The Regional Framework sets out six focus areas for guiding UNODC programming at the regional and national levels: (1) a balanced approach to drug control; (2) strengthening the response to organized crime; (3) combating trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants; (4) action against corruption and financial crime; (5) preventing and countering terrorism and violence; and (6) strengthening criminal justice and the prevention of crime and violence. The meeting was attended by representatives of Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and the State of Palestine.

809. The ministers of the interior of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic held a meeting on 17 February 2024 to discuss collaboration in combating drug trafficking in the region. The meeting concluded with an agreement to set up a joint telecommunications channel for the exchange of information on drug control.

810. On 9 and 10 April 2024, UNODC and WCO conducted a sixth expert-level meeting within the framework of the Passenger and Cargo Border Team Interregional Network of Customs Authorities and Port Control Units. The meeting was attended by representatives of States members of the Network (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and representatives of Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Türkiye, and was aimed at enhancing practical interregional cooperation and information exchange. The participants discussed current trends, challenges and scope for improvement, and outlined further opportunities for cooperation among the customs authorities of Network members and European countries in sharing data on high-risk international consignments of mutual concern.

⁸⁴ Captagon was originally the official trade name for a pharmaceutical preparation containing the substance fenethylline, 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.

811. On 10 April 2024, the Working Group on Afghanistan of the CSTO Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held its thirty-ninth meeting, which was attended by delegations of the States members of the Organization, the secretariat of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly and representatives of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Centre, the Coordination Service of the Commonwealth of Independent States Council of Commanders of Border Troops, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Participants exchanged views on the situation in Afghanistan, noted the associated risks of terrorism and drug trafficking and confirmed their readiness to assist in coordinating the activities of the States members of CSTO aimed at addressing those threats and facilitating the peace process in Afghanistan.

812. From 16 to 19 April 2024, UNODC, together with the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) and the Judicial Cooperation Network for Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, provided prosecutors from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan with training on the investigation of cybercrime cases. Participants discussed best practices, challenges and the importance of cross-border cooperation in combating cybercrime and drug trafficking facilitated by information and communications technologies.

813. An expert working group on cross-border cooperation was convened in Vienna on 17 and 18 April 2024 under the Paris Pact initiative, a partnership of more than 80 countries and international organizations, established in 2003 as a framework to address the trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan. The meeting brought together 115 attendees from 30 countries and 10 international and regional organizations. The main objectives of the meeting were to examine current trafficking trends and challenges with respect to drug trafficking routes from Afghanistan and to identify ways in which cross-border cooperation could be further improved so as to make countermeasures more targeted and impactful. In view of financial constraints and insufficient donor support for the UNODC global programme supporting the Paris Pact initiative, activities ceased on 31 May 2024.

814. A regular meeting of the Council of National Coordinators of the States Members of CARICC was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 19 April 2024. During the event, national coordinators endorsed the CARICC Development Strategy for 2024–2028 and approved a memorandum of understanding between CARICC and the Afghanistan Research Centre of Shanxi University (China).

815. On 12 May 2024, the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq signed a memorandum on cooperation in the area of security following a press conference at which various challenges, including the increase in organized criminal activities related to drug trafficking, were discussed.

816. On 3 June 2024, the drug control authorities of SCO held a videoconference chaired by Kazakhstan and attended by representatives of the SCO secretariat and officials of China, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The heads of the delegations reaffirmed their readiness to support and strengthen the international drug control system based on the three United Nations drug control treaties, and emphasized the need to promote effective cooperation under the SCO Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Their Precursors and the SCO Framework for Preventing the Abuse of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

817. On 4 June 2024, the General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 78/284, sponsored by Uzbekistan and entitled “Central Asia’s unified resolve and cooperation to effectively address and counter drug-related challenges”. In that resolution, the General Assembly underscored that the three international drug control treaties and other relevant instruments constitute the cornerstone of the international drug control system, reaffirmed the treaty-mandated roles of INCB and other international bodies in the area of drug control, and expressed concerns about the serious challenges to the States of Central Asia posed by trafficking in drugs, including opiates and synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine. It invited the States of Central Asia to consider enhancing cooperation among public health, education and law enforcement authorities when developing and implementing scientific evidence-based drug use prevention initiatives. It also called upon the relevant United Nations institutions to assist the countries of the region in countering the illicit production of and trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors, and encouraged Member States to promote bilateral, regional and international cooperation with and the provision of technical assistance to States, including in Central Asia, affected by drug trafficking. On 13 and 14 June 2023, the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, in close collaboration with the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and

Pakistan, facilitated the fourteenth Triangular Initiative Senior Officials Meeting and the ninth Triangular Initiative Ministerial Meeting in Tehran. These events were aimed at engaging the two countries in finding field-oriented solutions to the transnational threat posed by global trafficking in Afghan opiates and the diversion and smuggling into Afghanistan of associated precursor chemicals.

818. The CSTO subregional anti-drug operation “Channel–Far Eastern Raid” was conducted from 24 to 28 June 2024 on the territory of States members of CSTO. The objectives were to dismantle drug trafficking channels, eliminate clandestine drug production facilities and recover the proceeds of related crimes. Law enforcement agencies, border and customs services, State security agencies, financial intelligence units and observers participated in the operation, which resulted in the detection of 522 offences related to trafficking in narcotic drugs, including 154 offences committed by organized criminal groups. In addition, nine cases of laundering of proceeds from drug trafficking were documented, 536 websites offering drugs for sale were identified and 78 firearms, together with almost 5,000 rounds of ammunition, were seized.

819. On 4 July 2024, a meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of State, chaired by the President of Kazakhstan and attended by heads of delegations of the States members of SCO and heads of the Organization’s permanent governing bodies, was held in Astana. The leaders signed a number of key documents, including a resolution on granting Belarus the status of State member of SCO; the Astana Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; the SCO Anti-Drug Strategy for 2024–2029; and decisions relating to the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the SCO secretariat and CARICC and to a plan of cooperation among the States members of SCO in ensuring international information security.

820. 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. The five e-modules developed by INCB Learning cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework, and measures to ensure 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.

821. From 14 to 16 November 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme convened a cross-border training event in Riyadh for five law enforcement officers from Jordan and Morocco. The event provided an opportunity to exchange experience and knowledge and to foster international cooperation.

822. From 5 to 8 December 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme conducted training for law enforcement and regulatory officers from Kazakhstan in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The training covered awareness of and safe interdiction approaches in relation to opioids, fentanyl and new psychoactive substances, basic targeting and intelligence development (GRIDS Intelligence) and secure, real-time trafficking communications (IONICS).

823. From 13 to 15 February 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme convened a regional workshop on the prevention and interdiction of synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances trafficked by means of sea freight. Organized by INCB, the Gulf Cooperation Council Criminal Information Centre to Combat Drugs and the Dubai Police, the event brought together 115 participants from 21 countries across the globe.

824. From 13 to 16 February 2024 in Vienna, the INCB GRIDS Programme held a global workshop on using data for the advanced targeting of traffickers, for customs and postal officers and partners in the express courier and freight forwarding sectors. The four-day event brought together law enforcement and regulatory officers, international organizations and associations and private sector partners to discuss the future of work to counter trafficking in synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, opioids and related substances. The workshop was attended by over 100 participants, including representatives of Jordan, Qatar, Tajikistan, Türkiye and Turkmenistan.

825. From 5 to 8 March 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme hosted an event entitled “Tech against trafficking: practical approaches to countering cross-platform exploitation of online services”. The meeting brought together more than 70 participants from Governments, international organizations and private partners, including representatives of Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. The aim of the event was to examine the landscape of counter-trafficking efforts and the misuse of legitimate online services, specifically addressing challenges faced and progress made in relation to synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances — in particular, synthetic opioids — and related chemicals.

826. From 3 to 4 April 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized an initial consultation with the National Information and Analysis Centre for Drug Control, the Drug Control Committee, the Ministry of Public Health and the customs agency of Uzbekistan in Tashkent. The purpose of the meeting was to brief Uzbek authorities on the work carried out by the GRIDS Programme in support of efforts to combat trafficking in new psychoactive substances and opioids in Central Asia, and to discuss future plans for activities in Uzbekistan, including training for relevant authorities. The Uzbek authorities were also invited to a regional postal security workshop for operators held by UPU in Tashkent from 13 to 16 May 2024.

827. On 11 and 12 April 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme, together with the United States Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, held an initial expert group meeting on the establishment of a national multi-agency targeting centre in Kazakhstan. The meeting brought together stakeholders from all relevant national agencies of Kazakhstan, including the Department on Countering Drug Crimes of the Ministry of the Interior, the Astana Police Department, the Transport Police Department, the Financial Monitoring Agency, the customs authorities, the Border Service and the National Security Committee, as well as experts from Lithuania, the United States of America and the European Union, with the aim of drawing up a road map for future implementation.

828. From 24 to 26 April 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme and the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries jointly held a hands-on multi-agency training event in Astana for Kazakh officials. The workshop was aimed at enhancing the capacity of Kazakh authorities to address trafficking in synthetic drugs, dangerous new psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and related chemicals in the country.

829. On 29 and 30 April 2024, with the support of the INCB GRIDS Programme and the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, a two-day practical training event focused on online investigations targeting the sale, marketing and supply of synthetic drugs and related online payment methods was held in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, for Kazakh officials from various agencies. The workshop was aimed at enhancing the capacity of Kazakh authorities to address trafficking in synthetic drugs and dangerous new psychoactive substances, such as opioids, and the online sale of related chemicals.

830. From 13 to 16 May 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme participated in a UPU postal security workshop for operators on awareness of opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances, the development and exchange of actionable intelligence (GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools; open source intelligence) and secure real-time trafficking communications (IONICS) in Uzbekistan. The event brought together 33 participants from postal agencies.

831. From 27 to 31 May 2024, the INCB GRIDS Programme participated in a UPU postal security workshop for operators in Tbilisi. Attended by 16 participants from postal organizations and international organizations, the event was aimed at raising awareness of synthetic opioids, other new psychoactive substances and basic intelligence-sharing and targeting methods.

832. On 16 and 17 October 2024, the INCB Precursors and Equipment Programme and the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries jointly conducted training on precursor chemicals and equipment used in illicit drug manufacture. Fourteen officials from the five Central Asian republics benefited from the training, which focused on the exchange of intelligence and actionable information through PICS.

Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

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

834. Since 2003, the quantity (expressed in S-DDD_{pmpd}) of opioid analgesics consumed in West Asia has been steadily increasing. The highest level of consumption in 2022 was reported by Israel (16,505 S-DDD_{pmpd}), followed distantly by Türkiye (776 S-DDD_{pmpd}), Kuwait (383 S-DDD_{pmpd}) and Qatar (341 S-DDD_{pmpd}). Consumption below the level of 300 S-DDD_{pmpd} was reported by the remaining countries in the region.

835. Between 2019 and 2022, nearly all the countries and territories in the region submitted their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances for the respective year; in 2023, however, only three-quarters did so. Of those that did submit their reports annually during the five-year period from 2019 to 2023, approximately 45 per cent voluntarily provided consumption data. **The Board urges those countries of the region that do not submit their annual statistical report regularly to do so as required by the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 and to provide consumption data on psychotropic substances as part of the report if possible.**

836. The levels of consumption of some psychotropic substances in West Asia are among the lowest in the world, and the monitoring of consumption in the region remains a challenge, as not all countries provide such data. Since 2014, consumption of phenobarbital in those countries that provided data has consistently remained under 0.4 S-DDD_{ptpd}, reaching a new low of 0.06 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023. With regard to diazepam, over the same period, the level of consumption in the region has been among the lowest across all regions of the world, exceeding 1 S-DDD_{ptpd} only in 2014 (1.27 S-DDD_{ptpd}) and 2019 (1.89 S-DDD_{ptpd}) and falling to 0.47 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023. The level of consumption of alprazolam in West Asia has fluctuated significantly since 2014, peaking at 3.73 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2018 but falling to 0.84 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2021. In 2023, consumption of that substance in the region dropped to its lowest level in 10 years, reaching 0.72 S-DDD_{ptpd}.

837. Since the attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023, during which over 1,250 Israelis were killed and hundreds of Israeli civilians were abducted and taken to Gaza, including women and children, there has been continued military activity by the Israel Defense Forces throughout the Gaza Strip. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, citing the Ministry of Health in Gaza, by November 2024 more than 43,000 Palestinians had reportedly been killed and more than 102,000 injured. The cumulative number of internally displaced people in Gaza by November 2024 was estimated at 1.9 million, with some 70,000 housing units having been damaged or destroyed in Gaza. **INCB remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian emergency resulting from this conflict. In the light of the acute and growing humanitarian needs resulting from this emergency, INCB reminds States of their obligation to ensure the availability of internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes, in accordance with the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention. Urgent action is needed in order to ensure unimpeded access to medications, including medicines containing internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Such medicines, which are used in anaesthesia and for pain management and the treatment of mental health and neurological conditions, are essential in ensuring health and well-being.**

838. As regards precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide – in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs – estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. In particular, the provision of estimates of annual legitimate requirements is requested in respect of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which have medicinal uses, and, to the extent possible, preparations containing those substances that can be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. **INCB recommends that Governments review their annual legitimate requirements for individual precursors at least once a year and inform INCB of any necessary changes, either through form D or by means of official correspondence.**

839. Of the 25 countries in the region, 23 countries, or 92 per cent, have provided the Board with at least one estimate of annual legitimate requirements for the import of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations. Only two of those 23 countries, roughly 9 per cent, have not updated their estimates in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of annual legitimate requirements as a tool for guiding exporting countries with regard to the legitimate requirements of importing countries and thus preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes.

840. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2024 on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and the report for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 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.

National legislation, policy and action

841. On 13 November 2023, Tajikistan adopted a law (Act Amending and Supplementing the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan) establishing new threshold quantities for controlled substances for the purposes of determining the gravity of drug-related offences.

842. On 23 January 2024, Kazakhstan expanded its list of narcotic and psychotropic substances subject to control to include eight new psychoactive substances and one precursor, and established new threshold quantities for those substances for the purposes of criminal procedure. The newly added substances include the narcotic drugs *para*-fluorofentanyl, bupropion and metonitazene, the psychotropic substances 3-methoxyphencyclidine, eutylone, clonazepam, diclazepam and flubromazolam, and the precursor 4-methylpropionophenone, which is used in the manufacture of mephedrone. Those changes were made as a result of a decision of the Eurasian Economic Commission to include the same substances in the list of drugs subject to control in the Eurasian Economic Union.

843. On 6 May 2024, the President of Uzbekistan approved a national strategy for combating drug dependence and drug-related crime in the Republic of Uzbekistan, covering the period 2024–2028. The strategy sets out measures aimed at improving the country's drug control legislation and its national monitoring system for drug-related matters with a view to ensuring public security and protecting public health. In accordance with the same presidential decision, the National Information and Analysis Centre for Drug Control was transformed into the National Centre for Drug Control under the Administration of the President of Uzbekistan, which will focus on research, the identification of drug-related trends and the development of drug policy in the country.

844. On 21 June 2024, the upper chamber of the parliament of Uzbekistan approved a law on amendments and additions to the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Administrative Liability Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan aimed at combating trafficking in narcotic drugs and their analogues, psychotropic substances and potent and toxic substances. The law was adopted in response to increased trafficking in such substances through the use of the Internet and other communication networks, and establishes heavier penalties for the distribution or advertising of materials that illegally promote narcotic drugs or their analogues, psychotropic substances or potent substances, and for drug trafficking via the Internet, and also establishes criminal and administrative liability for certain offences involving the use of information technologies, including offences that involve minors.

845. Capital punishment continued to be imposed for drug-related offences in the Islamic Republic of Iran during the reporting period. The United Nations Secretary-General, in his report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/56/22), expressed concern at the increased application of the death penalty for a wide range of offences in accordance with the Iranian Penal Code, including for drug-related offences. According to the information received by OHCHR, of the total of 834 people who were executed in 2023, at least 471 executions (56 per cent) were for drug-related offences. This is in comparison to the 256 executions for drug-related offences reported in 2022, thus constituting an 84 per cent increase.

846. 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 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.

Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

847. According to the UNODC Afghanistan opium survey of 2024, the area under illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan increased by 19 per cent in 2024, from 10,800 ha in 2023 to 12,800 ha in 2024. This increased level is still far below the estimated 232,000 ha that were cultivated in 2022, prior to the ongoing drugs ban in the country. If the ban is maintained and continues to be strictly enforced, it will have a significant effect both within the country and in the main destination markets for illicit opiates. It has been reported that the quantity of heroin trafficked globally decreased from 350–580 tons in 2022 to 24–38 tons in 2023.

848. According to UNODC, the drastic decline in opium poppy cultivation has impacted vulnerable rural communities in Afghanistan, whose livelihoods were dependent mainly on illicit opium poppy crops. The income

earned by farmers in those communities from the sale of harvested opium poppy to traders dropped by more than 92 per cent, from an estimated \$1,360 million for the 2022 harvest to \$110 million for the 2023 harvest. **The Board reiterates its call for strengthening alternative development initiatives and livelihood programmes for farmers to counter the financial incentives offered by drug trafficking.**

849. It is unlikely that existing stocks in Afghanistan or increased opium production in other countries will compensate in the long term for the shortfall resulting from the ban. As a result, heroin availability is expected to decline and market demand is expected to adapt in different ways, depending on national circumstances. As heroin supplies diminish, people may switch to other opioids, and new, more potent synthetic opioids intended to meet that demand could emerge in the market, significantly increasing the risks posed to people who use drugs.

850. Indeed, there has already been a decrease in heroin seizures along major trafficking routes for Afghan opiates. The Balkan route, which passes through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye and the Balkan countries, continued to be the main route in 2023 for trafficking in opiates from Afghanistan to destination markets in Central and Western Europe. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye reported a significant decrease in the amount of heroin seized in 2023 compared with the previous year. Türkiye seized 3.31 tons of heroin in 2023, the lowest recorded figure in the last six years, representing a 58 per cent decrease compared with 2022, over the course of which 7.9 tons of heroin were seized. Similarly, the Islamic Republic of Iran seized 10.3 tons of heroin in 2023, compared with 17.2 tons in 2022 — a decrease of 40 per cent — and also observed a 17 per cent decrease in seizures of opium on its territory, from 536.4 tons in 2022 to 445.2 tons in 2023.

851. In 2023, the total volume of heroin seized by States members of CARICC, most of which are located along the northern route, decreased by 18.9 per cent (to 3.1 tons) compared with 2022 (3.9 tons). Similarly, the volume of opium seized in 2023 fell by 33.6 per cent, from 1.8 tons in 2022 to 1.2 tons in 2023. Experts in Central Asia believe that the reduced supply of opiates from Afghanistan is due to enforcement of the ban imposed in 2022 by the de facto authorities of Afghanistan and may lead to fentanyl and other synthetic opioids taking the place of opiates in illicit markets.

852. The drug situation in the Central Asian subregion is characterized by continuing attempts by transnational organized criminal groups to establish and diversify trafficking channels for opiates, and more recently methamphetamine, from Afghanistan into and through the territories of the Central Asian States. Other factors contributing to the vulnerability of those States to the traffic in drugs originating in Afghanistan include harsh border terrain and the lack of training or technical means to detect drug and precursor trafficking channels and equipment used in illicit drug production at certain border crossings in northern Afghanistan and at borders between the Central Asian States.

853. The manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic drugs continue to pose serious challenges to the countries in West Asia. Central Asian States reported that the relative ease and low cost of establishing clandestine drug laboratories in remote areas for the production or manufacture of illicit drugs, including synthetic drugs, using existing industrial and agricultural facilities, as well as the low level of risk perception, the lack of clinical research and the lack of effective regulation, are contributing to the spread of synthetic drugs in the subregion.

854. States members of CARICC continued to detect and dismantle clandestine laboratories for the manufacture of synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances such as synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones and phenethylamines. A total of 321 such laboratories were detected in 2023, compared with 320 in 2021; Kazakhstan alone dismantled 81 laboratories in 2023, compared with 68 in 2022, and Kyrgyzstan dismantled 12 laboratories in 2023, compared with 11 in 2022. Experts believe that these developments reflect attempts by organized criminal groups to use Central Asia as a hub for the manufacture of synthetic drugs intended to supply markets both within the subregion and in other States members of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

855. Central Asian States also expressed concern that drug trafficking and drug manufacture on their territories are further facilitated by ease of access to the latest information on techniques for manufacturing illicit substances and the active use of information technologies, including the Internet, social media platforms, the dark web, instant messengers and cryptocurrency wallets, for the marketing of and trade in those substances. Those States continued to undertake efforts to tackle that challenge through the ongoing monitoring and blocking of Internet resources and social media channels.

856. According to UNODC, there has been a gradual shift in the subregions of West Asia, in particular Central Asia and the South Caucasus, in drug trafficking and use over the past decade, from trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan to the manufacture of synthetic stimulants, notably cathinones such as mephedrone, *N*-methylephedrone (metamfepramone, also known as dimethylcathinone), *alpha*-pyrrolidinovalerophenone (*alpha*-PVP), cathinone, methcathinone and 4-chloromethcathinone (4-CMC, also known as clephedrone).

857. The manufacture of such stimulants within those subregions appears to involve the use of precursors that are not internationally controlled, such as valerophenone, a precursor of *alpha*-PVP; 2-bromo-4'-methylpropio-phenone, a precursor of mephedrone; and 2-bromo-4'-chloropropiophenone, a precursor of 4-CMC and of other 4-chloro-substituted cathinone derivatives.

858. The drug ban announced in April 2022 by the de facto authorities of Afghanistan does not appear to have negatively impacted the manufacture of methamphetamine in that country or trafficking in the substance, and methamphetamine seizures in the neighbouring countries up to the end of 2023 did not indicate a slowdown in trafficking. According to UNODC, the manufacture of methamphetamine appears to have continued to increase in Afghanistan in recent years, despite the efforts of the de facto authorities to reduce the gathering and sale of ephedra, which is one of the precursors readily available in the country. There is, however, little information about the starting materials and manufacturing methods used. While limited forensic profiling suggests at least some use of the *Ephedra* plant, which grows wild in the country, it is equally possible that ephedrine or pseudo-ephedrine is smuggled into the country or extracted from cold medications. Given the increasing availability of information about P-2-P-based manufacturing methods, and past seizures of the relevant precursors, it is possible that as yet unidentified chemicals not under international control are also being used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in Afghanistan. **In the light of the increase in seizures of methamphetamine and in its use in the region, INCB encourages Governments to invest in more systematic forensic profiling of seized methamphetamine in order to determine the chemicals from which the substance has been manufactured and thus enable informed regulatory and enforcement action by the international community.**

859. Countries located on the northern route reported an increase in trafficking in methamphetamine of Afghan origin into their territories, in particular Kazakhstan (where 49.7 kg of the substance was seized in 2023), Tajikistan (68.2 kg seized in 2023) and Uzbekistan (23.65 kg seized in 2023).

860. There have been significant increases in methamphetamine seizures in countries of South-West Asia in recent years. The Islamic Republic of Iran seized 37.2 tons of the substance in 2023, compared with 30.4 tons in 2022, which represented a 22 per cent increase. In Pakistan, the quantity of methamphetamine seized increased from 4.4 tons in 2022 to 11.4 tons in 2023, an increase of 156 per cent, while the amount of crystal methamphetamine seized surged from 86.7 kg in 2022 to 589.1 kg in 2023, an increase of 580 per cent.

861. Türkiye has also reported considerable increases in seizures of methamphetamine, a trend observed since 2019. A record 21.9 tons of the substance were seized in that country in 2023, representing a 35.5 per cent increase compared with 2022, when 16.2 tons were seized. Methamphetamine trafficked to Türkiye may be linked to the ongoing smuggling of the substance into the country from or through the Islamic Republic of Iran, possibly from Afghanistan.

862. Central Asian States also continue to express serious concern regarding the ongoing trafficking in and misuse of pharmaceutical preparations containing psychoactive substances such as diazepam, phenobarbital, pregabalin, tramadol, sibutramine, zaleplon, zopiclone and other substances.

863. The Middle East continues to be affected by the trafficking in and manufacture of falsified “captagon”, for which there is ongoing demand in the subregion. The situation has been worsened by continuing conflicts, as well as political instability, economic challenges and corruption, which are fuelled by the presence of armed and organized criminal groups that have an economic interest in trafficking in that substance. Seizures of falsified “captagon” reached a record high in the subregion in 2021, almost double the seizure amounts recorded in 2020, and remained high in 2022.

864. Significant seizures of “captagon” have been reported by Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Seizure data indicate that the drug is trafficked mainly from areas of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to markets in the Gulf countries, to which it is smuggled either directly by land or sea or indirectly by means of shipments that transit other regions, including Europe. UNODC reported in March 2024 that the

surging availability of “captagon” was due to several factors, including war and instability in the Syrian Arab Republic since 2011. Through established factories and the complex criminal infrastructure and organizations in place, industrial-scale manufacture of “captagon” is expected to remain anchored in the western and southern areas of the Syrian Arab Republic.

865. In December 2023, authorities in Germany seized 461 kg of “captagon” in a single consignment that had an estimated street value of \$65 million and was intended to be shipped to Australia, Bahrain and Qatar. While the origin of the “captagon” tablets could not be determined, the organized crime group responsible for the smuggling, comprising several Syrian nationals, was identified following a year-long investigation. According to EUDA, “captagon” tablets are manufactured within the European Union, mainly in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, or are smuggled into the European Union before being rerouted, either directly or after repackaging, to consumer markets in and around the Arabian Peninsula. The reason for this circuitous route is not known, but is probably intended to avoid controls implemented by authorities in the destination countries, as those authorities are unlikely to suspect that “captagon” tablets would be shipped from the European Union.

866. In 2023, Türkiye seized 13.7 million “captagon” tablets, a decrease of 42.5 per cent compared with 2022, when almost 24 million tablets were seized. According to UNODC, seizures of both “captagon” and methamphetamine along similar routes in the Middle East might indicate that the markets for those substances are intersecting in the subregion. The increased flows of crystal methamphetamine along the border of the Syrian Arab Republic with Jordan have become integrated with the illicit flows of “captagon”. The most significant development in the subregion concerns Iraq, where more than 4.1 tons of “captagon” tablets and 1.3 tons of methamphetamine are reported to have been seized between January and December 2023. In May 2024, a clandestine laboratory for the manufacture of both “captagon” and methamphetamine was dismantled in the northern province of Sulaymaniyah in Iraq. Overall, Iraq observed an increase in methamphetamine seizures of nearly 600 per cent between 2019 and 2023.

867. South-West Asia accounted for 27 per cent of global seizures of cannabis resin during the period 2018–2022, remaining one of the world’s subregions with the highest levels of production of and trafficking in that substance. The Middle East accounted for 2 per cent of global seizures of cannabis resin during the same period. There was an overall decline in cannabis resin seizures in both subregions in 2022, largely as a result of significant decreases in Afghanistan (a rapid decline from 159 tons in 2021 to 10.7 tons in 2022), Lebanon (from 15.4 tons to 8.1 tons) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (from 124.3 tons to 76.6 tons) and, to a lesser extent, in Pakistan (from 164.7 tons to 147.8 tons). Similarly, Türkiye reported a decline in cannabis resin seizures from 33 tons in 2021 to 29 tons in 2022.

868. Pakistan was the country in West Asia where the most cannabis resin was seized in 2021 and 2022, followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan, Türkiye and Lebanon. Cannabis resin originating in Afghanistan is trafficked mainly through Central Asia to destination markets within the subregion and in the Russian Federation. Cannabis resin produced in Lebanon is trafficked to other countries in the Middle East and to Europe.

869. It remains challenging to estimate illicit cannabis cultivation accurately, owing to the lack of systematic collection of related data in many countries. However, the limited data available suggest that the scale of such cultivation in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon and Uzbekistan was considerable during the period 2012–2022.

870. Central Asian countries continued to take measures to tackle illicit cannabis cultivation and eradicate large areas of wild cannabis on their territories through ongoing law enforcement efforts, including annual eradication campaigns. Cannabis produced illicitly in Central Asia is destined mainly for the domestic market; limited quantities are trafficked to the Russian Federation and sometimes to Europe. In Kazakhstan in particular, the illicit cultivation of cannabis continued to increase in 2023, over the course of which 307 illicit cannabis cultivation sites were detected, an increase of 11 per cent compared with the previous year, and 20 tons of illicit cannabis crops were destroyed.

871. In the Middle East, Lebanon and Israel were the two countries most frequently mentioned by countries responding to the UNODC annual report questionnaire as countries of origin, departure or transit of cannabis seized during the period 2018–2022, while in South-West Asia, Afghanistan was most frequently mentioned by respondents in that context; in Central Asia, the countries most frequently mentioned were Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

872. States members of CARICC reported that drugs of the cannabis group (cannabis and cannabis resin) continued to represent the largest share (almost 61 per cent, or 59.9 tons) of the total amount of drugs seized in 2023 (96.7 tons), an increase of 75.3 per cent compared with the amount seized in 2022. In 2023, 11.5 tons of cannabis resin were seized in those States, an increase of 60 per cent compared with 2022 (7.2 tons); seizures of the substance increased in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, while decreases were observed in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Cannabis seizures increased in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan but decreased in the remaining States members of CARICC.

873. Türkiye has increasingly been used as a transit corridor for cocaine shipped from Latin America or transiting through Western Africa to destination markets in Europe. That trend could be attributable in part to the efforts of traffickers to avoid ports, such as Rotterdam in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, where security may have been tightened. In 2023, Türkiye seized 2.5 tons of cocaine. While that quantity was lower than the record amount of 2.8 tons seized in 2021, it nonetheless represented an increase of 8.8 per cent compared with the 2.3 tons seized in 2022. More recently, in April 2024, Turkish police seized the third largest consignment of cocaine in the country's history – 608 kg, together with 830 kg of chemicals used to manufacture the drug – in an operation conducted in three of the country's provinces.

Prevention and treatment

874. The majority of West Asian countries continued to implement prevention and treatment measures during the reporting period, including efforts to strengthen policy and institutional frameworks for the provision of healthcare to people who use drugs. Countries in the region also continued to carry out awareness-raising campaigns relating to drug use and its harmful effects, with the involvement of public and non-governmental sectors, the media, local communities and educational institutions.

875. However, the Board notes that countries in the region, especially those affected by conflict and instability, continue to lack the financial, organizational and human resources required for effective monitoring of and reporting on the prevalence of drug use, which are prerequisites for the development of evidence-based drug policies and measures. The Board also notes that there are many diverse challenges in the area of prevention and treatment of drug use in the region, and that some countries are affected by drug use more than others, depending on the resources available to them and the political will to tackle those challenges. In particular, a lack of evidence-based prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services, stigma attached to substance use disorders, and the need to provide equal access to healthcare for all vulnerable population groups, including women, children and persons in detention, were identified as major obstacles in some States.

876. The Board further notes the existence in some countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus of a system of mandatory registration of people who use drugs when they seek the assistance of or are referred to public treatment facilities. There are significant consequences for the human rights of persons included in such registers, including the limitation of travel, employment and other opportunities essential for their reintegration into society. Other persons who use drugs should be encouraged to seek treatment, and the stigma with which they are confronted should be reduced. **The Board calls upon the Governments of those countries to consider abolishing such systems of mandatory registration.**

877. According to UNODC, of the estimated 60 million people worldwide who used opioids in 2022, half were in South Asia and South-West Asia. The Middle East and South-West Asia remained the subregions with the highest levels of prevalence of opioid misuse in the world in 2022 (3.19 per cent for the two subregions combined, compared with a global average of 1.15 per cent). Opiates, in particular opium and heroin, remained the main drugs of concern in South-West Asia, while the non-medical use of tramadol in the Middle East continued to pose significant health risks, including acute toxicity (fatal and non-fatal overdoses) in that subregion.

878. UNODC estimates that methamphetamine use in Afghanistan has increased in recent years, and, although no recent estimates are available, the use of methamphetamine and “captagon” tablets has been rising in the Middle East and South-West Asia. In Türkiye, requests for drug treatment in connection with cocaine as the primary drug of use have increased over the past decade.

879. There was a downward trend in 2023 in the number of persons registered with drug treatment facilities in Kyrgyzstan (6,768 in 2023, compared with 7,672 in 2022) and Tajikistan (4,160 in 2023, compared with 4,381 in

2022). A slight increase in the number of people who use drugs was observed in Azerbaijan, from 35,097 in 2022 to 36,659 in 2023; in Kazakhstan, from 18,085 in 2022 to 18,226 in 2023; and in Uzbekistan, from 5,365 in 2022 to 6,210 in 2023.

880. The number of newly registered people who use drugs who are in primary treatment increased slightly in Azerbaijan (3,796 in 2023, compared with 3,689 in 2022), Tajikistan (298 in 2023, compared with 275 in 2022) and in Uzbekistan (1,622 in 2023, compared with 1,379 in 2022). A decrease in the number of newly registered people who use drugs was recorded in Kyrgyzstan (from 128 in 2022 to 114 in 2023).

881. States in Central Asia and the South Caucasus have been expressing serious concern in recent years about increasing incidents of non-medical use of synthetic drugs, including synthetic cathinones, and various pharmaceutical preparations and new psychoactive substances, a trend that represents an ongoing shift from opiates to synthetic drugs in the subregion.

4. Europe

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, which was established in 1993, has become the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA). Changes to the existing mandates will provide EUDA with increased capacity to help the European Union and its member States to address drug-related challenges.

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

European Union member States reported the seizure of a record amount of cocaine for the sixth year in a row. Cocaine markets remain highly dynamic, as organized crime groups continue to use a variety of trafficking methods to evade detection. The increase in the availability of cocaine has contributed to increased health risks and social harms and a surge in related criminal activities across the region.

Parts of Europe have experienced an increase in the non-medical use of ketamine. Evidence suggests that ketamine is consistently available in several national illicit drug markets across Europe, and thus there is a need for closer monitoring of the substance, combined with enhanced international collaboration to counter its illicit distribution.

Several European countries continue to take steps towards establishing programmes to provide access to cannabis for non-medical purposes, which is inconsistent with the provisions of the 1961 Convention as amended.

Major developments

882. In July 2024, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction became the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA), following a proposal made by the European Commission in 2023, in which the Commission called for a stronger mandate for the agency to help it to address future challenges related to illicit drugs. Focus areas under the new mandate are centred around monitoring, preparedness, and competence development for better interventions.

883. Countries in Europe continue to face growing health risks and to have grave concerns related to the availability of a wide range of drugs throughout the region, which are exacerbated by the infiltration by organized crime groups of global supply chains. In that regard, although the number of new psychoactive substances on the market has stabilized, the recent emergence of nitazenes, a group of synthetic opioids, is increasingly posing major health risks in some countries.

884. In 2024, the European Union reported the seizure of a record amount of cocaine for the sixth consecutive year, which highlights the evolving sophistication of trafficking networks operating in the region. Organized crime groups have increasingly diversified their strategies, employing advanced concealment methods, exploiting gaps in port security measures and leveraging digital communication tools to facilitate their operations.

Notably, the proliferation of alternative trafficking routes, including those involving the use of less extensively monitored transit countries, demonstrates the adaptability of those networks in response to law enforcement pressures. The consistent rise in cocaine availability has paralleled the increase in its purity at street level, making the drug more attractive and accessible to consumers. This trend has significant implications for public health, as the increased frequency of cases of acute intoxication and long-term dependence is placing strain on healthcare systems. Furthermore, the increased availability has led to competition within the illicit market, contributing to gang-related violence and homicides in some countries. These developments underline the urgent need for enhanced regional and international cooperation to effectively address this growing threat.

885. Both EUDA and UNODC have noted that ketamine has become increasingly available in West and Central Europe. Ketamine was detected in wastewater in 12 of 15 cities monitored in the subregion between 2022 and 2023. Cities in Denmark, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom reported the highest concentrations of the substance in wastewater. In addition to ketamine, several Member States reported cases of intoxication related to exposure to the ketamine derivative 2-fluorodeschloroketamine, a substance that was recently included in Schedule II of the 1971 Convention.

886. While many countries in Europe have instituted programmes for the use of cannabis for medical purposes, others are taking steps to establish regulated markets for cannabis for non-medical purposes. The resulting increase in the availability and consumption of a diverse range of cannabis-based products poses significant regulatory challenges to authorities in the region.

887. While most European countries have reliable systems for collecting data on prevalence and treatment, the increasing number of new substances, together with progressively complex patterns of polydrug use, has posed significant challenges to authorities in the provision of prevention, drug checking and treatment services. According to EUDA, coverage of and access to treatment and services to reduce the adverse health and social consequences of drug use remain uneven both within and between countries, and in some cases fall short of the needs of the countries concerned.

Regional cooperation

888. In 2024, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction was transformed into EUDA in order to adapt to the evolving needs of European Union member States. The change included the adoption of a new mandate to enhance the capacity of the Agency in three key areas: monitoring, preparedness and competence development. The Executive Director of EUDA, Alexis Goosdeel, briefed INCB on the change and explained that, in its expanded role, EUDA would develop threat assessment capabilities, issue substance alerts and address polydrug use while fostering collaboration through a network of forensic and toxicological laboratories.

889. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 35 countries in Europe, namely, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The five e-modules developed by INCB Learning cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and measures to ensure 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.

890. In 2023, the Governments of Germany and Switzerland confirmed their participation in the INCB industry mapping initiative, which is aimed at mobilizing the engagement of national industries in preventing the diversion of chemical substances into illicit drug manufacture.

891. From 28 November to 1 December 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme held an interregional twinning event for 23 officers from Colombia, Mexico and Spain. Participants gained a thorough understanding of the GRIDS Programme and its strategic initiatives tailored to address the constantly evolving drug trafficking landscape. Representatives from participating agencies shared insights into current national trends in drug trafficking, highlighting recent major seizures in which international cooperation had played a pivotal role and had led to the dismantling of drug manufacturing operations.

892. From 13 to 16 February 2024, the GRIDS Programme held a global workshop in Vienna on advanced targeting for operational officers and express courier and freight forwarding industry partners. The four-day event brought together law and regulatory enforcement officers and representatives of international organizations and associations and private sector partners to address the future of efforts to counter trafficking in synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, opioids and related substances. The meeting was attended by over 100 participants, including representatives of nine European countries, namely, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

893. From 5 to 8 March 2024, the GRIDS Programme hosted an event in Vienna entitled “Tech against trafficking: practical approaches to countering cross-platform exploitation of online services”. The meeting brought together over 70 participants from Governments, international organizations and private sector partners. Among them were representatives from Austria, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom. The event was aimed at examining efforts to counter drug trafficking and the misuse of online services for such trafficking, specifically addressing challenges and advancements related to synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances and, in particular, synthetic opioids and related chemicals.

894. On 30 April 2024, the GRIDS Programme organized a training event focused on increasing the awareness of Austrian customs and postal officers regarding the latest threats posed by trafficking in synthetic drugs and on enhancing their capabilities to address such threats. Sixteen officers from across Austria participated in the event, in which they were provided with access to IONICS, a tool for real-time information-sharing related to seizures of dangerous substances, and training on the use of GRIDS Intelligence HD, a tool for the development of actionable intelligence for use in daily operations and risk profiling.

895. In May 2024, the UNODC Executive Committee announced that the global programme in support of the Paris Pact Initiative would be discontinued owing to financial constraints. Over the past 21 years, all 58 partner States of the Initiative, along with 23 international and regional partner organizations, have participated in activities aimed at adapting coordinated responses to address evolving threats posed by the trafficking of opiates originating in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. At the time of writing, discussions were under way regarding a new mechanism to enable the operationalization of the recommendations adopted by Initiative partners within the framework of the partnership since 2003.

896. In July 2024, the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation and Europol supported law enforcement authorities in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain and Ukraine in the dismantling of an intraregional cannabis and cocaine trafficking network. During the operation, 13 suspects were arrested, and 1 million euros were seized. Of the 13 suspects, 7 were apprehended in Italy, 3 in Spain, and 1 each in Belgium, Germany and Ukraine. During the operation, law enforcement authorities raided 13 properties and seized significant evidence relating to large-scale drug trafficking and money-laundering operations.

897. Albania has reported that the General Directorate of the State Police of Albania has renewed an operational protocol agreed with the financial law enforcement authority (“Guardia di Finanza”) of Italy for cooperation in aerial monitoring. The protocol was originally signed on 18 February 2021 and enables joint aerial monitoring to, inter alia, identify instances of suspected cultivation of narcotic plants.

Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

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

899. In the European region overall, there has been a considerable increase in the consumption of opioid analgesics since 2003. In recent years, the trends in the consumption of opioid analgesics have varied slightly among the different subregions of Europe. Western Europe accounted for most of the consumption of opioid analgesics in the region in 2021. In 2022, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Iceland, Gibraltar, Switzerland and Greece, in descending order of the amounts consumed, all reported consumption above 10,000 S-DDD_{pmpd}. Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Romania, in descending order of the amounts consumed, reported consumption above 1,000 S-DDD_{pmpd} in 2022. Eastern Europe experienced a similar increase, although at a much lower level.

900. From 2019 to 2023, all countries and territories in the region consistently provided their annual statistical reports on psychotropic substances, although only 75 per cent of them included data on consumption in the reports. The Board invites the countries of the region that have not already done so to provide, if possible, consumption data on psychotropic substances in their annual statistical reports. In Europe, the levels of consumption of many psychotropic substances are some of the highest among all regions of the world. Since 2014, consumption of phenobarbital, expressed in S-DDD per thousand inhabitants per day (S-DDD_{ptpd}), among countries that provided data has varied, from a high of 3.14 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2014 to a low of 0.67 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023. In 2023, consumption of phenobarbital in the region stood at 2.4 S-DDD_{ptpd}. With regard to diazepam, consumption ranged from 2.27 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2014 to 5.5 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2022. In 2023, consumption of diazepam increased significantly and stood at 9.21 S-DDD_{ptpd}. Rates of consumption of alprazolam in Europe have fluctuated significantly, with consumption at its highest in 2019, at 13.14 S-DDD_{ptpd}, and at its lowest in 2014, at 5.67 S-DDD_{ptpd}. In 2023, consumption of the substance in the region stood at 9.06 S-DDD_{ptpd}.

901. 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 2024, 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 for guiding exporting countries on the legitimate requirements of importing countries and thus preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes.

902. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2024 on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, and the implementation of articles 12 and 13 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.

National legislation, policy and action

903. In 2024, the Ministry of Health of Denmark undertook an evaluation of the country’s pilot programme on medical cannabis. The evaluation involved the compiling of experiences from the past three years of the programme and was scheduled to conclude at the end of 2024. A decision on the future implementation of the programme was to be made at that time.

904. In March 2024, lawmakers in Germany approved legislation that partially legalized the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes in the country. The country’s cannabis legalization model is based on two pillars. The first pillar 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 is limited to three plants, and individuals may not have more than 25 grams in their possession in public. Since April 2024, possession for personal use has been legal, and since June 2024, the provision regarding non-commercial cultivation by non-profit associations has been in force. The second pillar, the implementation of regional pilot projects, will allow the distribution of cannabis in specialist shops in specific regions for a limited duration. As implementing the pilot projects regarding commercial cannabis supply chains involves complex legal and technical issues, preparations for the implementation of the legislation on the regional pilot projects are already under way. The legislation is expected to be coordinated with the European Commission and European Union member States as part of a notification procedure.

905. The Government of Switzerland has authorized pilot trials involving the controlled distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes following the amendment of the country’s drug legislation in 2021. The trials are being conducted by 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 under the Narcotics Act. The first results of the pilot trials are not expected before the end of 2024.

906. In May 2024, Albania adopted Law No. 61/2023 to regulate the cultivation, processing and export of the cannabis plant and its by-products for medical and industrial purposes. To support the implementation of the law, Instruction No. 274 was issued jointly by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of the Interior. The instruction sets out the procedures, deadlines, criteria and required documentation for the conducting of background checks on employees of the National Agency for Cannabis Control and licensed entities, thus ensuring compliance with ethical and professional standards.

907. In June 2024, the Kingdom of the Netherlands announced the start of the transition phase of its “cannabis experiment”. As of June 2024, “Coffee shops” in participating cities are allowed to sell regulated cannabis to consumers, along with the previously available “tolerated cannabis” (unregulated cannabis). Regulated cannabis in the Kingdom of the Netherlands refers to legally produced, government-controlled cannabis that is sold in “coffee shops” in participating municipalities under strict quality control measures. Lessons learned in the municipalities of Breda and Tilburg are intended to be used to ensure a smooth transition in all participating municipalities. During the start-up phase, participating municipalities were restricted to a trading stock of 500 grams of regulated products. However, since “coffee shops” had to be supplied several times daily in order to maintain a sufficient stock, a consultation on the matter was held among the parties involved. As a result, the authorities of the Kingdom of the Netherlands decided that, in subsequent phases, “coffee shops” would be allowed to keep a week’s stock. After the transition phase, the next phase, called the “experimental phase”, was to begin on 16 September 2024 and last for four years, during which time “coffee shops” will exclusively sell regulated products.

908. The Board wishes to remind all parties to the 1961 Convention as amended that, under article 4, paragraph (c), thereof, and subject to the provisions of the Convention, the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs are limited exclusively to medical and scientific purposes and that any measures allowing for the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes are inconsistent with the legal obligations incumbent upon parties to the Convention.

909. In May 2024, the Psychomodulatory Substances Act was approved by the lower house of the Parliament of Czechia and subsequently sent to the European Commission for technical notification. The Act introduces a framework for the regulation of substances not under international control, specifically those not controlled under the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention. The aim of the Act is to regulate the classification and sale of newly emerging substances on the market. Under the Act, substances that undergo a scientific evaluation by an expert group and are found not to pose significant health or social risks will be classified as “psychomodulatory substances”. The sale of such substances will be permitted, but only in licensed specialized shops for adult consumers. Through this legislation, Czechia seeks to replace the grey area in the sale of certain substances with a regulated market, thus providing enhanced protections for children and young people.

Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

910. According to the EUDA *European Drug Report 2024: Trends and Developments*, the scale and complexity of illicit drug manufacture in Europe continue to grow. In the region, there is a high capacity for synthetic drug production in general, but also increasing diversification engendered through the use of a wider range of chemicals to create both new substances and different processes for synthesizing more established drugs, which presents a challenge to existing regulation frameworks.

911. The quantity of methamphetamine seized in countries of the European Union amounted to approximately 1.4 tons in 2022, following a peak of 2.3 tons in 2018 resulting from large shipments of the substance from Mexico. During the same period, increasing quantities of synthetic cathinones were trafficked to Europe from India. The increase was due to a small number of large seizures made by customs authorities in the Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Spain.

912. Nine European Union member States reported the dismantling of a total of 242 methamphetamine laboratories in 2022, compared with 224 such laboratories in 2021. The highest number of methamphetamine laboratories were uncovered in Czechia (202 laboratories), followed by the Kingdom of the Netherlands (14), Bulgaria (12), Belgium (6), Poland (4), and Greece, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden (1 each). In the same year, seven

European Union member States reported the dismantling of a total of 108 amphetamine laboratories, compared with the dismantling of 119 such laboratories in 2021. Those laboratories were encountered in the Kingdom of the Netherlands (39), Belgium (35), Poland (22), Spain (5), Sweden (5), Croatia (1) and Romania (1).

913. A record amount of 323 tons of cocaine was seized by European Union member States in 2022. Most of the cocaine seized was seized in Belgium (111 tons), followed by Spain (58.3 tons) and the Kingdom of the Netherlands (51.5 tons), and those three countries accounted for 68 per cent of all the cocaine seized in Europe in that year. The total quantity of cocaine seized in Antwerp, the second largest European port, rose from 110 tons in 2021 to 116 tons in 2022. The trend of traffickers using smaller ports throughout Europe continued to increase.

914. In the United Kingdom, the Home Office released its annual statistics related to seizures of drugs in England and Wales for the reporting year ending on 31 March 2023. Police and border forces made a total of 191,623 drug seizures in England and Wales, representing a 1 per cent increase compared with the previous year (188,929 drug seizures). The total amount of cocaine seized was the largest on record, at 3.36 tons, a 100 per cent increase from the previous year. Similarly, the highest number of cannabis seizures was also recorded, amounting to 20,211 seizures. Moreover, a record amount of 500 kg of ketamine was seized. Similar to the quantities reported seized elsewhere in Europe, the quantity of heroin seized in England and Wales decreased by 33 per cent, from 1.41 tons in the previous year to 0.95 tons. There were also 18 seizures of fentanyl and three seizures of fentanyl analogues, following a trend similar to that in previous years.

915. In June 2024, 39 individuals were arrested in Norway, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom following the seizure in 2023 of a quantity of cocaine worth an estimated \$50 million off the coast of Martinique. Simultaneous operations were carried out in Bulgaria, Colombia, Norway, Panama, Portugal, Spain and Trinidad and Tobago, in which a total of 47 searches subsequently led to a further 11 arrests. The investigation was led by the Spanish National Police, in close cooperation with the police of Norway, the United Kingdom National Crime Agency and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, within the framework of an operational task force established by Europol. The purpose of the task force was to target a drug trafficking organization with links to the Western Balkan region that authorities suspected of shipping large amounts of cocaine to Europe.

916. Also in June 2024, authorities in Germany reported the seizure of approximately 35.5 tons of cocaine with an estimated street value of \$2.9 billion. Under Operation Plexus, several narcotics investigation teams from Germany, in collaboration with Europol, targeted a network suspected of organizing the shipment of cocaine from Latin America to Europe using 10 sea containers. The investigation, which also involved authorities of Colombia, resulted in the confiscation of nearly 3 tons of cocaine in Ecuador, 8 tons in Rotterdam, Kingdom of the Netherlands, and 25 tons in Hamburg, Germany, representing the largest cocaine seizure in German history.

917. In July 2024, authorities of Montenegro arrested nine high-value targets holding key positions in drug trafficking organizations in the Western Balkans. The investigation was initiated after law enforcement authorities intercepted 1.8 tons of cocaine that had been shipped from Europe to Australia between 2020 and 2021. The targeted individuals were closely linked to various Montenegrin criminal cells active within a larger drug trafficking network spread across the Balkan region and beyond. In recent years, Western Balkan criminal networks have increasingly targeted the drug market in Australia, as the illicit proceeds of cocaine trafficking in that country are significantly higher than those in European markets. The supply route used by the networks involves Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, and trans-shipments are conducted via Southern Europe and Africa towards Australia.

918. Cannabis remains the most frequently seized drug in the region; in 2022, European Union member States reported a total of 243,000 seizures of cannabis resin, amounting to 468 tons, and 234,000 seizures of herbal cannabis, amounting to 265 tons. The overall quantity of cannabis resin seized in countries of the European Union in 2022 decreased by 43 per cent, to 816 tons, compared with the previous year, owing to a 52 per cent decrease in the quantity reported seized by Spain.

919. In 2022, a total of 29 cathinone laboratories were dismantled and a total of 355 kg of related precursor chemicals were seized in European Union member States, indicating that large-scale manufacture of cathinone is taking place in Europe. Of the cathinone laboratories dismantled, 23 were in Poland and 6 were in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

920. In 2022, the total amount of heroin seized by European Union member States fell by 16 per cent, from 9.5 tons in 2021 to 8 tons in 2022. In the same year, Bulgaria reported a decrease in the total amount of heroin

seized, from 1.2 tons in 2021 to 0.3 tons in 2022, and Türkiye reported a 64 per cent decrease, from 22.2 tons in 2021 to 8 tons in 2022. As those declining quantities of seized heroin could be a result of the Taliban's ban on opium production in Afghanistan, European countries need to be aware that that ban could be creating conditions contributing to the use of synthetic opioids.

921. In 2022, a record amount of 30.7 tons of new psychoactive substances were seized by European Union member States. One third of the substances reported to the European Union early warning system for the first time were synthetic cannabinoids. With the addition of nine new cannabinoids reported in 2023, the total number of cannabinoids being monitored by the European Union early warning system has increased to 254. At the end of 2023, EUDA was monitoring a total of 950 new psychoactive substances, 26 of which were reported for the first time in Europe in 2023.

922. Since 2009, 81 new opioids have been identified in European drug markets, and in 2023 alone, seven new synthetic opioids were identified. Preliminary data from 2023 suggest that benzimidazole is being increasingly detected in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In 2024, butonitazene, a derivative of benzimidazole, was added to Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended.

923. Notable seizures of controlled precursors and non-scheduled alternative chemicals, including designer precursors, continue to reflect the extent of and innovation in the manufacture of synthetic drugs in Europe, which are often manufactured for global markets. Seizures of those substances in the region in 2022 included 25.6 tons of derivatives of P-2-P methyl glycidic acid and nearly 20 tons of derivatives of 3,4-MDP-2-P methyl glycidic acid, which are precursors of amphetamine and methamphetamine, and of MDMA, respectively. Diethyl (phenylacetyl)propanedioate (DEPAPD) and DEPAPD enolate, two new alternative chemicals that can also be used to manufacture P-2-P, were reported in Europe, and worldwide, for the first time in 2022 and were seized in relatively small amounts, reflecting the level of innovation of illicit operators in the region. Notable seizures of tartaric acid are another indication of the sophisticated, large-scale manufacture of methamphetamine in Europe.

924. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in Europe can be found in the report of the Board for 2024 on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention.

925. In 2022, the Russian Federation investigated 115,141 drug-related crimes and reported the seizure of a total of 32,715 kg of a variety of narcotic drugs. That represented an increase of 23.9 per cent in the total quantity of narcotic drugs seized in the country, in comparison with the previous year. Synthetic drugs accounted for 50.1 per cent (16,394 kg) of all narcotic drugs seized in the country in 2022. *N*-Methylephedrone and its derivatives accounted for 23.3 per cent (7,627 kg) of all narcotic drugs seized in 2022, and the amount of those drugs seized in 2022 was 60.6 per cent more than the amount seized in 2021. Meanwhile, the total quantity of mephedrone seized decreased by 20.8 per cent, to 6,817 kg, and the total quantity of methadone seized (706 kg) accounted for 2.2 per cent of all narcotic drugs seized in the country in 2022.

926. In 2023, customs authorities in France reported a change in trafficking routes related to cocaine. In 2022, the main source countries and territories for cocaine destined for mainland France, in descending order of the amounts illicitly exported, were identified as Brazil, Martinique and Cuba; however, in 2023, the main source countries were identified as Ecuador, Brazil and Colombia. The use of containers in maritime trade remained the primary method for the concealment of trafficked cocaine.

927. In 2023, Albania made significant efforts to prevent and address cannabis cultivation, identifying a total of 3,373 cannabis cultivation sites and recording 662 offences committed in relation to such cultivation, for which 281 people were arrested. In addition, a total of 2,444 criminal offences committed in relation to narcotic drugs were recorded by the country in 2023, for which 3,589 individuals were criminally prosecuted.

928. In March 2023, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (now known as EUDA) released its annual report on wastewater analysis. Data from 88 cities pointed at distinct geographical patterns of use across different European cities. Cocaine use remains highest in cities located in western and southern Europe, in particular cities in Belgium, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Spain. Overall, cocaine consumption continued its long-term upward trend in Europe and reached an all-time high in 2023. Methamphetamine traces were more concentrated in countries and regions where the substance has been historically concentrated, such as Czechia and Slovakia, but traces of the substance were also found in Belgium, eastern Germany, Spain,

Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Türkiye. The highest occurrences of MDMA were found in the wastewater of cities in Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Spain. For the second time, the report included data related to ketamine, and a total of 49 countries reported low levels of ketamine residue in wastewater, the highest amounts having been observed in cities located in Belgium, France, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Spain.

929. In January 2024, a coordinated international operation led by the Ministry of the Interior of North Macedonia with the support of Europol and a joint investigation team comprising members from Belgium, France and Netherlands (Kingdom of the) resulted in significant actions against an international organized criminal group involved in the trafficking of cocaine. The group was responsible for organizing large-scale cocaine shipments from South America to Europe, including two significant shipments of 435 kg from Brazil to the port of Antwerp, Belgium, and 106 kg from Peru to the port of Rotterdam, Kingdom of the Netherlands. As a result of the operation, six individuals were arrested in North Macedonia and one individual was arrested in Spain.

930. In March 2024, Customs authorities in the Kingdom of the Netherlands made the largest seizure of methamphetamine in the country's history when over 3.2 tons of crystal methamphetamine were uncovered during an inspection at the port of Rotterdam. The methamphetamine had originated in Mexico and had an estimated commercial value of \$24.5 million.

931. In May 2024, the police of Germany updated their information on the dismantling of the largest drug laboratory for the manufacture of counterfeit "captagon" tablets encountered in their country. In July 2023, 71 kg of amphetamine, almost 1.3 million "captagon" tablets and over 20 litres of amphetamine base, as well as approximately 2.5 tons of filler material and cutting agents and two tableting machines, were seized. The "captagon" was destined for markets in the Arabian Peninsula, and nationals of the Syrian Arab Republic were arrested and convicted as part of the related criminal proceedings.

Prevention and treatment

932. 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 the development of more effective responses to reduce drug overdose deaths and drug-related poisonings.

933. According to the *European Drug Report 2024: Trends and Developments*, cannabis remains the most commonly used substance in Europe; about 22.8 million adults (8 per cent of adults) reported its use in 2022. The second most commonly used substance is cocaine; about 4 million adults (1.4 per cent of adults) reported its use in the past year. Heroin use remained stable; about 860,000 adults (0.3 per cent of adults) reported use of the substance in 2022.

934. Data from the 2023 Crime Survey for England and Wales suggest similar drug use patterns compared with the previous year, cannabis having been reported as the most commonly used drug in England and Wales. In 2023, 7.6 per cent of adults reported having used cannabis in the past year, and 2.4 per cent reported having used powder cocaine. The prevalence of "ecstasy" use remained at approximately the same level (1.1 per cent) in 2023.

935. In the *World Drug Report 2024*, it is suggested that opioids are the most common primary drugs of misuse among people in drug treatment in most of Europe. Among different subregions, Eastern Europe continues to have the highest estimated prevalence of people who inject drugs (1.3 per cent of the adult population). Eastern Europe also has the highest prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs (25.6 per cent).

936. The latest data available to EUDA suggests that cannabis use was the main reason for first-time entry into specialized treatment for drug use disorders in countries of the European Union. An estimated 58,000 people who used cannabis received their first treatment in 2022, accounting for 43 per cent of new cases. The total number of first-time treatment recipients decreased slightly compared with the number before the COVID-19 pandemic. Most people who used cannabis receiving treatment were male, with an average age of 25. Cannabis was also frequently involved in drug-related emergency cases, usually reported as being in the presence of other substances.

937. Associated with an estimated 29,000 first-time treatment recipients in 2022, cocaine was the second most used drug among first-time treatment recipients in countries of the European Union. Most people who used

cocaine receiving treatment were male, with an average age of 35. Cocaine accounted for 28 per cent of acute poisoning cases in hospital emergency room incidents and was the second most common substance associated with such conditions. An estimated 8,100 people who used “crack” cocaine entered treatment in 2022, which indicates an expansion of the use of that substance within marginalized groups.

938. The number of drug-related deaths in countries of the European Union increased slightly in 2022, owing mainly to new data reported by Germany. While opioids, often used in combination with other substances, are the substances mainly associated with overdose deaths, an increasing number of deaths in the Baltic countries were due to polydrug use involving synthetic opioids, including benzimidazoles and fentanyl derivatives. In Scotland, drug-related deaths remain a critical issue; data show that the country has one of the highest rates of drug-related deaths in Europe, which is driven by overdose cases involving the use of a mix of heroin, methadone and benzodiazepines. Furthermore, a considerable increase in overdose deaths has also been found among older people who use drugs (aged 50 to 64). The growing emergence of new synthetic opioids and their resulting adverse health impacts call for more targeted prevention and treatment services.

939. Although all European Union member States and Norway have needle and syringe exchange programmes, coverage of and access to those programmes remain a challenge. Only 5 of the 17 countries with available data reached their WHO service provision targets in 2022. Opioid agonist therapy is implemented in all European Union countries and has been recognized as crucial in mitigating overdose deaths. Methadone is the most widely used agonist; 56 per cent of clients receive the substance, while 35 per cent receive buprenorphine-based medications. Given the health risks caused by the increasing number of illicit drugs, 16 countries also reported the implementation of drug-checking services, take-home naloxone programmes and supervised drug consumption rooms.

940. Both EUDA and UNODC reported an increase in the non-medical use of ketamine in Europe in recent years. Although the substance is an important anaesthetic and painkiller used in medicine, it is commonly misused, either by snorting or by injection. Sometimes it is also found to be mixed with other drugs. The long-term use of ketamine can cause severe health problems. Data from hospital emergency departments suggest that cocaine was identified as the substance most commonly used in combination with ketamine in cases of acute toxicity. Some countries in Western and Central Europe have also reported an increase in requests for treatment related to ketamine.

941. The use of nitrous oxide, especially among young people, continues to be a growing concern in Europe. 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 relatively low. Cases of poisoning, burns and lung injuries involving nitrous oxide have been reported in some countries, and prolonged use of the substance can result in nerve damage. Therefore, attention should be given to the substance in the context of drug prevention and treatment programmes. Although nitrous oxide is not under control at the international level, some countries have chosen to control it at the national level.

942. A growing interest in the therapeutic potential of psychedelic drugs and the potential risks of their unregulated use has been noted. While registered clinical studies on the use of psychedelics are conducted in Europe and internationally, it has been reported that most of the health, wellness and tourism businesses involving the use of psychedelics operate without regulatory oversight. The unsupervised and experimental use of such substances, even in microdoses as self-medication, may put some vulnerable populations at risk.

943. The preliminary results of an analysis of syringe residues conducted in 2023 suggest that nitazenes continue to be available on the local drug market in Tallinn. Carfentanil was commonly found in syringes in Vilnius and Riga. In addition, preliminary data for 2023 suggest an increase in deaths linked to nitazenes in Estonia and Latvia. Localized outbreaks of poisoning involving nitazenes in France, Ireland and the United Kingdom have also been reported.

944. In 2023, the Croatian Institute of Public Health established a working group to develop national standards for addiction prevention with the aim of aligning the addiction prevention system of Croatia with existing standards. The working group aims to strengthen prevention efforts in nightlife environments by providing guidelines and developing a pilot project in local communities. In addition, the Institute of Public Health, in collaboration with the Croatian Association of Security Managers, started the development of an online survey to collect data on procedures and practices relating to the prevention of drug use disorders.

945. A midterm review of the Addiction Policy Action Plan 2023–2025 of Czechia has shown that ongoing work in the country in the field of drug use prevention and treatment is based on a strong commitment to reducing the negative health and social consequences of drug use. In 2024, Czechia approved a take-home naloxone programme as a routine part of harm reduction interventions after its previous introduction as a pilot programme.

946. Germany has created a legal framework for the implementation of pilot projects on drug checking. The projects will be scientifically monitored and evaluated to ensure that they achieve their goals with regard to improving health education and protection. Drug checking involves the analysis of substances believed to be controlled substances to determine their content, concentration and possible contamination. This practice has proved to be effective in other European countries as a preventative health measure. The projects will also be aimed at providing health, regulatory and safety authorities with better insights into the substances circulating in the drug market.

947. The latest drug strategy of Malta, for the period 2023–2033, has prevention as one of its main pillars. In that regard, it includes the creation of a national body to coordinate drug use prevention efforts. The strategy is fundamentally centred on human rights and human health, and through it, the Government intends to support and care for people who use drugs.

948. In March 2024, Italy presented a detailed plan entitled “National Prevention Plan against the Improper Use of Fentanyl and other Synthetic Opioids”, one of the first such plans to be developed by a European country. The development of the plan was coordinated by the Department for Anti-Drug Policies in collaboration with various ministries and other stakeholders. The plan includes measures for facilitating the rapid detection of new synthetic drugs and increasing the capacity to carry out toxicological tests on seized substances.

5. Oceania

Large-scale shipments of cocaine and methamphetamine continue to be trafficked through the Pacific island States to Australia and New Zealand, driven by increasing demand and higher prices. In 2024, multi-ton seizures were made in Pacific island States, which were increasingly becoming destinations for the illicit manufacture and storage of drugs, with transnational organized criminal groups capitalizing on vulnerabilities.

Drug use in the Pacific island States was reported to be increasing and posed a challenge owing to the very limited capacity for prevention and treatment, coupled with a lack of data on the extent of the situation.

The availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes is inadequate in some Pacific island States.

Non-parties to the three international drug control conventions remain concentrated in Oceania. Accession to and implementation of the conventions would support action to address the drug problem in the region and help improve the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes, as well as facilitate mutual legal assistance to address drug trafficking.

Major developments

949. Large-scale shipments of cocaine and methamphetamine are being trafficked through, as well as destined for, Pacific island States, as evidenced by the seizure in January 2024 of over 4.8 tons of methamphetamine that had been trafficked into Fiji and was believed to be in transit, destined for other countries in the region. Pacific island States are also being targeted by transnational organized criminal groups for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine.

950. As in the previous year, the Pacific Islands Forum “Pacific security outlook report 2023–2024” highlighted transnational organized crime as a priority focus area, with drug-related crime posing the greatest transnational organized crime threat in the region. The report noted that criminal deportations to Pacific island States had risen significantly in the past decade and that there was a causal link between deportees and the growth of transnational crime in the region, including drug trafficking from Asia and North and South America to Australia and New Zealand. Criminal networks were increasingly active in the Pacific, which served as both a transit point and destination for drugs and precursor chemicals. Drug consumption was also reported to be increasing in some Pacific island States. The report recognized that Pacific island States often had limited capacity for prevention and enforcement action, as well as limited data to support policy development.

951. The first Pacific Regional Transnational Organized Crime Disruption Strategy was launched at the meeting of the Pacific Island Forum Subcommittee on Regional Security held in Suva in April 2024. The Strategy, which covers the period from 2024 to 2028, provides a framework for a coordinated regional response to transnational organized crime and is aimed at enhancing cooperation, sharing intelligence and building capacity to prevent, detect and respond to organized crime. The Strategy recognizes the significant socioeconomic impact of increasing drug use on young people in the region, highlighting issues such as mental health problems and gang violence. The Strategy notes how development issues continue to make transnational organized crime attractive to young people and refers to the new challenges posed by the use of digital currency to conceal the origin of illegal proceeds. The Strategy underlines that a number of organized criminal groups have become entrenched in the Pacific, operating in several Pacific island States, and that Pacific island States themselves are increasingly targeted as destination points for drug trafficking, in addition to their established use as transit points.

952. Increasing demand and rising drug prices in Australia and New Zealand have been identified as the factors driving drug trafficking by transnational organized criminal groups through Pacific island States, posing a significant threat to health, security and economies.

953. Among countries in the region for which data are available, Fiji and Papua New Guinea are experiencing rapid growth in the incidence of HIV. According to UNAIDS, between 2010 and 2023, new HIV infections increased in Fiji by 241 per cent and in Papua New Guinea by 104 per cent. The Government of Fiji highlighted

that newly reported cases of HIV had increased by 70 per cent, from 245 cases in 2022 to 415 cases in 2023. From January to June 2024, 552 new cases of HIV were recorded, of which 85 cases were attributed to drug use by injection.

954. As in previous reports, the Board notes the vulnerability of Oceania to trafficking in drugs and precursors owing to its extensive maritime borders and high concentration of States that have not yet acceded to all three international drug control conventions. **The Board reiterates its call upon States not parties to the international drug control conventions to take steps towards accession to and full implementation of those conventions in order to facilitate action against all elements of the drug problem, improve the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes and enable mutual legal assistance under these conventions to address drug trafficking.**

955. The Cook Islands National Security Policy 2023–2026 states that the Cook Islands will give serious consideration to acceding to the 1971 Convention and the 1972 Protocol amending the 1961 Convention. The Policy recognizes that the increasing presence and use of drugs in the country have given rise to potentially serious security concerns involving transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking and money-laundering. It notes that the problem will be addressed through a strengthened, multi-pronged approach involving Government agencies, non-governmental organizations and community groups to ensure that drug use does not become a serious security risk.

Regional cooperation

956. In October 2023, under the maritime capacity-building initiative Critical Maritime Routes Indo-Pacific (CRIMARIO), funded by the European Union, 11 Pacific island States and territories participated in a regional workshop to test the effectiveness of the standard operating procedures of the Indo-Pacific Regional Information-Sharing (IORIS) platform. The workshop concluded with a test hosted on the platform, with scenarios based on drug trafficking and maritime search and rescue. In November 2023, the Oceania Customs Organization held a two-week training programme on the platform for 14 customs officers from French Polynesia, Guam, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, New Caledonia, the Northern Mariana Islands, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu, as well as for participants from the Tonga Police and Tonga Navy. Training focused on the use of the secure platform for maritime coordination and the sharing of information on various risks at sea, including drug trafficking.

957. In December 2023, customs officers and officials from 18 Pacific island States and territories participated in training on drug trafficking co-hosted by the New Zealand Customs Service and the Oceania Customs Organization. The training covered the detection, identification and handling of drugs, as well as relevant legislation and customs operations.

958. With five Pacific island States having joined INTERPOL since 2017, it launched Project Blue Pacific on 1 January 2024 in cooperation with the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police to support participating national police organizations in using INTERPOL resources in a sustainable way for increased information-sharing through capacity-building and training. The project focuses on the development of professional skills, the promotion of INTERPOL policing capabilities and regional cooperation, in particular to enhance the work of the Pacific Transnational Crime Network. The following countries have been identified as beneficiaries of the three-year project: Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

959. In February 2024, the Seaport Border Control Vessel Search Training course was held at the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service headquarters in Suva, supported by the Integrated Border Management Project of UNDP, with the participation of 85 officers from various agencies in Fiji, Palau and Vanuatu. The training yielded immediate results, with participants successfully tracking and intercepting a vessel being used to traffic cannabis.

960. From 13 to 16 February 2024, a global workshop on advanced targeting for operational officers and express courier and freight forwarding industry partners was held in Vienna under the GRIDS Programme. The four-day event brought together law and regulatory enforcement officers, international organizations and associations and private sector partners to address the future of activities to counter trafficking in synthetic drugs, new psychoactive

substances, opioids and related substances. Among the nominated participants was a delegate from Australia and a representative of the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre.

961. In April 2024, training was provided for customs, immigration and fisheries officers from nine Pacific island States at the newly opened Pacific Vessel Boarding and Search Training Facility on the Togalevu Naval Base in Fiji. The training was held in the framework of a regional security partnership established in 2018 between the Oceania Customs Organization, the Pacific Immigration Development Community and the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, and in 2023 extended to the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. The partnership is aimed at enhancing border security in the Pacific, in particular through the Pacific Transnational Crime Network. A second training course was held at the facility in June 2024 for police maritime units of Pacific island States.

962. In July 2024, the Annual Conference of the Oceania Customs Organization was held in Rarotonga, the Cook Islands. Panellists discussed efforts to address illicit trafficking and transnational crime, with a focus on, inter alia, drug trafficking and money-laundering. Participants emphasized the need for coordination, the sharing of expertise, the standardization of processes and procedures and intelligence products.

963. In August 2024, the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders endorsed the Pacific Policing Initiative, which was developed by the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police with the support of the Australian Federal Police, and requested the development of an implementation plan. The Initiative includes the establishment of regional training centres of excellence located in the Pacific, the Pacific Police Support Group, which would offer a multinational response capability, and a hub to support the establishment and coordination of the regional centres of excellence and training and support for the Pacific Police Support Group.

964. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 10 countries and territories in Oceania, namely, Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, have registered to use the INCB Learning e-modules. The five e-modules developed by INCB Learning cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The e-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

965. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor the licit movement of internationally controlled substances, as well as ensure the availability of these substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes. Half of the countries and territories of Oceania provided the required reports for narcotic drugs controlled under the 1961 Convention as amended for 2022. One country in the region, Nauru, has not provided information regarding narcotic drugs in the last five years. For psychotropic substances controlled under the 1971 Convention, just over two thirds of the countries and territories in the region regularly provided their annual statistical reports in the period 2019–2023.

966. In 2022, Australia (6,688 S-DDD_{pmpd}) reported the highest level of consumption of opioid analgesics in Oceania, followed by New Zealand (3,570 S-DDD_{pmpd}), New Caledonia (2,963 S-DDD_{pmpd}), French Polynesia (2,390 S-DDD_{pmpd}) and Norfolk Island (1,903 S-DDD_{pmpd}). Other countries in the region reported lower or no consumption.

967. Of the countries and territories in Oceania that did submit their statistical reports on psychotropic substances in the five-year period from 2019 to 2023, approximately 40 per cent voluntarily provided consumption data. The levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Oceania are higher than in some other regions. However, it remains a challenge to track consumption in the region as most countries in Oceania do not provide such data. Since 2014, levels of consumption of phenobarbital in countries that have provided data, expressed in S-DDD per thousand inhabitants per day (S-DDD_{ptpd}), have been stable, varying only between 0.43 S-DDD_{ptpd} and 0.89 S-DDD_{ptpd}, except for in 2022 when consumption was particularly low, at 0.08 S-DDD_{ptpd}. In the same period, levels of consumption of diazepam varied from a high of 2.93 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2016 to a low of 0.64 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2021. Consumption of diazepam stood at 2.74 S-DDD_{ptpd} in 2023. Levels of consumption of alprazolam in Oceania were consistently below 0.5 S-DDD_{ptpd} from 2014 to 2020. Then, in 2021, consumption of the substance

reached 2.17 S-DDD_{ptpd}. In 2023, consumption of alprazolam in Oceania increased significantly, to a new high of 24.78 S-DDD_{ptpd}, owing to Australia reporting consumption of the substance for the first time.

968. The Board urges the countries and territories of the region that have not provided the reports under the international drug control conventions, in particular on the consumption of psychotropic substances, to do so as soon as possible and to take the necessary steps to ensure that their competent national authorities have sufficient resources and training to prepare the reports in a timely manner. The Board encourages Governments that have not already done so to sign up to the INCB Learning e-modules to further strengthen their knowledge of the collection, analysis and submission of the data required under the international drug control treaties. Such action will significantly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation of the international drug control system. The Board also encourages bilateral partners to provide support, including technical assistance, in this area.

969. The Board emphasizes that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some Pacific island States and stresses the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.

970. With regard to precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3. The provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for, among other substances, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could easily be used or recovered by readily applicable means. **INCB recommends that Governments review their annual legitimate requirements for individual precursor chemicals at least once a year and inform the Board of any necessary changes, on form D or by official correspondence.**

971. Of the 16 countries in Oceania, 8 countries (50 per cent) provided to the Board at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations. However, the remaining 50 per cent of countries in the region have not updated their estimates in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of annual legitimate requirements to act as a tool for guiding exporting countries on the legitimate requirements of importing countries, thus preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels, as well as ensuring the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes.

972. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2024 on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and the implementation of articles 12 and 13 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.

National legislation, policy and action

973. In March 2024, 1,4-butanediol was classified as a border-controlled drug in Australia. Following the change in legislation, as at 30 May 2024, more than 4,200 litres of the substance had been seized in Sydney. There have been official reports of increased harm resulting from use of the substance as a substitute for GHB, which is an internationally controlled psychotropic substance.

974. In April 2024, the first fixed-site drug checking service in Australia opened in Brisbane, Queensland, with a second service established in July on the Gold Coast, Queensland, both funded by the government of Queensland.

975. The Australian Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement inquiry entitled “Australia’s illicit drug problem: challenges and opportunities for law enforcement” highlighted in its report the attractiveness of Australia for transnational, serious and organized criminal groups importing drugs on an industrial scale owing to the exceptional profitability of the illicit drug market, with retail prices for illicit drugs among the highest worldwide. Issued in May 2024, the inquiry report contained a series of recommendations for the Government of Australia, including to re-establish a governance structure bringing together representatives with responsibility for law enforcement and health across Australia to oversee the implementation of the National Drug Strategy

2017–2026 and to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of that Strategy. In addition to recommending the conduct of research into the number of people arrested for drug possession, the impact of decriminalization and the development of roadside cannabis impairment testing, the Committee recommended that future drug awareness campaigns conducted by the Australian Federal Police be evidence-based and subject to evaluation.

976. In May 2024, the Police Drug Diversion Program in Queensland, Australia, which had previously only been open to those who had committed minor drug offences involving cannabis, was expanded to include a wider range of offences relating to drug possession for personal use. The legislated programme allows the police to offer an eligible person the opportunity to take part in a drug diversion assessment programme as an alternative to prosecution.

977. In July 2024, the Narcotics and Misuse of Drugs Amendment Act 2023, including the Narcotics Amendment Regulations 2024 and the Ministry of Health (Pharmacy and Therapeutics) Amendment Regulations 2024, came into effect in the Cook Islands. The Amendment Act permits residents and visitors who have been prescribed medicinal cannabis by an overseas medical practitioner to import and possess that substance, provided that certain stipulations are met. These stipulations include that the prescribed cannabis be used only by the person to whom it was prescribed and that the amount imported or possessed not be greater than the amount that would reasonably be necessary for personal use in accordance with the prescription and not more than one month's worth when used in accordance with the prescription.

978. In June 2024, the establishment in Fiji of an independent narcotics bureau under the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration was endorsed by the Cabinet. The bureau's functions will include law enforcement, investigations, prosecutions, intelligence-gathering and awareness-raising in collaboration with key agencies. Furthermore, the Cabinet also approved the development of a counter-narcotics bureau bill on the roles and functions of the bureau and endorsed the National Counter-Narcotics Strategy 2023–2028. Key areas of the Strategy include demand reduction, supply reduction, harm reduction, legislative reform, data collection and analysis, the establishment of a drug treatment court, and partnership, coordination and international cooperation. The national budget of Fiji for the period 2024–2025 included a drug rehabilitation centre incentive for companies establishing specialized drug rehabilitation centres.

979. In 2024, Nauru amended regulations to permit the use by customs officers, in collaboration with the Nauru Police Force Dog Management Unit, of a handheld Raman device, which can identify and detect over 400 substances. In May 2024, the Nauru Police Force Drug Unit convened the Nauru Police Force Drug Stakeholder's Meeting with various government departments, stakeholders and non-governmental organizations. The meeting focused on drug use in the country and reviewed statistics of drug seizures made in the period 2018–2023 and a recent community outreach programme on drug education.

980. In November 2023, the Minister of Health of New Zealand approved the renewal of temporary class drug orders for bromazolam and ADB-5Br-INACA, MDMB-5Br-INACA and MDMB-INACA for a further one-year period, until 30 November 2024, in order to allow sufficient time to obtain advice about the substances and their appropriate classification.

981. Since December 2023, the New Zealand needle exchange programme has been directly supplied with naloxone in the form of free emergency take-home naloxone kits. This followed changes to regulations aimed at increasing the availability of naloxone without a prescription through needle exchange services and pharmacies. These changes were instituted following reports of serious hospitalizations and overdoses from very potent synthetic opioids being sold illegally in the country and in many cases misrepresented as other substances.

982. The Misuse of Drugs Amendment Regulations (No. 2) 2023 amended the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1977, changing the periods of supply permitted for different controlled drugs depending on the class of drug concerned and the prescriber. In 2024, cold and flu preparations containing pseudoephedrine were reclassified in New Zealand from prescription to restricted medicines (pharmacist-only), which will allow them to be purchased without a prescription following a consultation with a pharmacist, who must record the person's name and address. Border restrictions for pseudoephedrine, which is an internationally controlled precursor chemical, remained unchanged.

983. Vanuatu became the first country in the region to implement the Automated System for Relief Consignments developed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Office for the Coordination

of Humanitarian Affairs with a view to facilitating the importation of humanitarian relief supplies, including medicines, during emergencies.

984. In 2024, the health pharmaceutical module of the Vanuatu electronic Single Window Portal was launched. Importers of pharmaceutical products must first apply online in the system for approval prior to importation and clearance by the customs authorities of Vanuatu.

985. During the high-level segment of the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, held in March 2024 to conduct a midterm review of the implementation of international drug policy commitments, Member States had the opportunity to make pledges for action. Of the countries in Oceania, Australia and New Zealand made pledges. The Government of Australia pledged to join the INCB industry mapping initiative aimed at mobilizing national industries to engage in efforts to prevent the diversion of chemicals to illicit drug manufacture. It also pledged to ensure that a range of prevention, treatment and harm reduction services were available to Australians, prioritizing the tailoring of services and initiatives to populations most affected by drug use, including young people, First Nations Australians and people referred from the criminal justice system. The Government of Australia noted that, to further extend the pledge, it would continue to engage in dialogue with civil society and community-led organizations, researchers and other stakeholders to ensure that drug-related research and data were available, with particular consideration given to the region. Australia also pledged to continue to promote evidence-based and community-driven action to eliminate the transmission of HIV, hepatitis C and other blood-borne diseases and ensure that affected communities could access the full range of interventions and health services, which should be gender-responsive, inclusive, culturally safe and free from stigma and discrimination. Noting that drug treatment and health services continued to fall short of meeting needs and that deaths related to drug use had increased, the Government of New Zealand pledged to develop a national overdose preparedness plan to prevent and reduce harm from overdoses for individuals, families and communities.

Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

986. In the period from July 2022 to June 2023, the Australian Federal Police, with assistance from the Australian Border Force and state and territory agencies, seized more than 26.8 tons of drugs and precursors, compared with the more than 23.1 tons of drugs and precursors seized in the previous 12-month period. Cocaine was being seized at unprecedented levels, with more than double the amount seized than in the previous reporting period. “At sea” imports, where drugs are trafficked into Australian waters on ships and dropped into the ocean for retrieval by local crews, became a prominent method of trafficking drugs, particularly cocaine, into Australia, with a series of plots intercepted in 2023 and 2024. In the period from July 2022 to June 2023, the Australian Federal Police and international law enforcement partners prevented up to 49 tons of drugs from being trafficked into the country through joint operations and investigations. More than 23.6 tons of methamphetamine manufactured in North America and bound for Australia were seized, including 4.36 tons seized in Australia and 19.33 tons seized offshore. The Australian Federal Police estimates that methamphetamine manufactured in North America supplies at least 70 per cent of the illicit market in Australia.

987. In May 2024, the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Border Force issued a joint public warning following an increase in attempts to import nitazenes, with 22 instances of nitazenes being detected in postal packages originating in the United Kingdom in October 2023. Prior to this, there had only been two other instances of the substance being detected. Record quantities of ketamine were seized by Australian authorities, with 882 kg of the substance seized in 2023 – more than double the 415 kg seized in 2022. The trafficking of opium into Australia increased in 2023, with seizures amounting to 155 kg in more than 125 shipments, more than double the amount seized in 2022 and about six times the amount seized in 2021.

988. The volume of drugs being seized at the New Zealand border is rising, with criminals using increasingly sophisticated trafficking techniques. In the period from 1 January to 31 May 2024, overseas border and law enforcement partners stopped more than 1.6 tons of drugs from reaching New Zealand, including 1.2 tons of methamphetamine, 210 kg of cocaine and 92 kg of MDMA seized offshore by overseas jurisdictions. Over the same period, New Zealand customs officers seized 806 kg of methamphetamine, 340 kg of cocaine and 392 kg of MDMA. In 2023, 2.7 tons of drugs were seized by overseas partners, including 1.6 tons of methamphetamine, 894 kg of cocaine and 232 kg of MDMA.

989. Large-scale shipments of cocaine and methamphetamine are being trafficked through and to Pacific island States, which are also being targeted by transnational organized criminal groups for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine. Although limited data are available on aggregate seizures made by customs and law enforcement authorities in Pacific island States, official reports of significant seizures evidence this trend.

990. In January 2024, 4.8 tons of methamphetamine were seized in two separate incidents in Fiji and were identified as being destined for a foreign market. The drugs had entered Fiji by barge, with the exchange of the shipment believed to have been carried out outside of the Fiji Exclusive Economic Zone. Multiple seizures of smaller quantities of cannabis, cocaine and methamphetamine, likely destined for local markets, were also made and a number of illicit cannabis plantations were eradicated. Of the 641 drug-related offences recorded in the first four months of 2024, 505 were related to cannabis and 136 were related to methamphetamine, cocaine or heroin. A joint operation between the Fiji Police Force and the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service resulted in the seizure of equipment from Canada that could be used for illicit drug manufacture.

991. In 2023, 400 kg of cocaine was seized from a yacht leaving Papeete, French Polynesia.

992. Drug trafficking was a growing concern in the Cook Islands, with drugs increasingly present in the country as they were being trafficked to larger markets, as well as destined for local consumption. Illicit cultivation of cannabis was also reported.

993. In Palau, in the period 2019–2023, there were between four and nine cases of drug trafficking per year, between 6 and 20 cases of possession of methamphetamine per year and between 3 and 20 cases of possession of cannabis per year.

994. The customs authorities of Papua New Guinea referred to increasing instances of drug trafficking and the challenges posed by the country's porous borders.

995. In Samoa, 90 per cent of offences related to drugs and alcohol, and the Government referred to increasing cases of drugs being detected within the Pacific region, in particular at sea. There were a number of seizures of small quantities of what was believed to be methamphetamine, as well as cannabis plants, in the country.

996. Tonga faces increasing challenges related to drug offences, with police continuing to seize drugs, in particular cannabis and methamphetamine, across Tongatapu, the main island of Tonga.

Prevention and treatment

997. There continue to be reports of increasing levels of drug use and demand for treatment in Pacific island States, linked with drug trafficking through these countries. However, there continues to be a lack of data on drug use in most countries of the region. **The Board reiterates its recommendation that Pacific island States prioritize the collection of data on the extent and patterns of drug use and demand for treatment for drug use disorders. The Board strongly encourages bilateral partners and relevant international and regional organizations to provide support to this end.**

998. The 2023 *Palau Adult Hybrid/Community Health Assessment Survey* report on non-communicable diseases and mental health notes the increased burden of substance use in the country owing to lifestyle changes and the introduction of many illicit substances. The report notes that the Pacific island States, including the Federated States of Micronesia, have among the highest rates of suicide in the world, closely associated with substance use and mental health disorders, but that very little data have been collected in Palau regarding the risk factors for suicide, including substance use and mental health issues. According to the survey, about one in six adults in Palau reported use of cannabis in the past 30 days, 41.6 per cent of whom reported using cannabis on a daily basis. With regard to other drugs, the most commonly reported substances used were prescription drugs such as tramadol, Demerol, oxycodone, codeine or morphine, with 2.1 per cent of respondents reporting use of these substances without a prescription in the past 30 days. The prevalence of use of heroin, cocaine or methamphetamine in the past 30 days was 0.4 per cent. The prevalence of use of inhalants or hallucinogens in the past 30 days was 0.1 per cent. Among adults with children in their households, 54 per cent reported talking to the children in the past 30 days about the dangers or problems associated with substance use. One of the four recommendations made in the report was to provide appropriate services and support for substance use disorders and mental health

problems. The provision of appropriate cessation services for substance use and the strengthening of mental health services, especially for young adults, were identified as two of six priority areas for improving health in Palau.

999. The Fiji Revenue and Customs Service conducted a series of outreach programmes to educate students and young people about the harmful effects of drug use and trafficking. In view of the growing drug-related challenges in the country, the programmes informed attendees about work to address drug trafficking at the border and within Fiji.

1000. Drug use in Australia has continued to increase and has returned to levels seen prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Drug Strategy Household Survey, conducted between July 2022 and May 2023, found that drug use had increased, driven by increased use of hallucinogens. According to the survey, 7.9 per cent of people in Australia aged 14 and over had used a drug in the past 12 months. Past-year use of hallucinogens increased from 1.6 per cent of people aged 14 and over in 2019 to 2.4 per cent in 2022/23, continuing the increasing trend seen since 2016, when prevalence was 1.0 per cent. Although the most commonly used hallucinogen in 2019 was LSD, the most commonly used hallucinogen in the 2022/23 survey period was psilocybin. Use of ketamine also continued to increase over the same period, from 0.9 per cent of people in Australia aged 14 and over in 2019 to a record level of 1.4 per cent in 2023. Use of “ecstasy” decreased from 3.0 per cent in 2019 to 2.1 per cent in 2022/23, but this was thought to be a temporary reduction caused by a disruption to supply associated with measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, with use of the substance thought to be increasing from 2023. The non-medical use of pain relievers and opioids decreased from 2.7 per cent to 2.2 per cent, with decreases in the non-medical use of codeine, oxycodone and tramadol. Cannabis continued to be the most commonly used drug, with use remaining stable at 11.5 per cent. 1 per cent of people aged 14 and over had reported use of methamphetamine and amphetamine in the past 12 months. Among young people aged 18–24, drug use among women increased from 27 per cent in 2019 to 35 per cent in 2022/23, while drug use among men in this age group remained at 35 per cent during the same period. Cocaine use among women aged 18–24 increased from 8 per cent in 2019 to 11.9 per cent in 2022–2023, reaching a similar level to among men (11.2 per cent). Overall, past-year use of cocaine remained high, at 4.5 per cent of people aged over 14, compared with 4.2 per cent in 2019. During the period between 2019 and 2022/23, non-medical use of synthetic cannabinoids, new psychoactive substances and methadone or buprenorphine declined. For the first time, the National Drug Household Survey asked respondents specifically about the use of pharmaceutical stimulants for non-medical purposes; 2.1 per cent of the sample reported non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants such as dexamphetamine and methylphenidate in the past 12 months.

1001. In 2024, the Australian Secondary Students’ Alcohol and Drug Survey was published for the first time since 2017. Covering the period from March 2022 to July 2023, the survey found that cannabis remained the most commonly used illicit drug among secondary school students, with past-year use at 12 per cent, compared with 14 per cent in 2017. A total of 11 per cent of students had used tranquilizers for non-medical purposes in the past year, with use among students aged 16–17 years significantly lower in 2022/23 compared with 2017. The survey report noted that use among students of substances other than cannabis remained uncommon.

1002. Wastewater analysis conducted in April and June 2024 and covering about 56 per cent of the population of Australia detected a record high level of ketamine consumption both in and outside capital cities and record low levels of consumption of oxycodone and fentanyl outside capital cities. While cocaine consumption had decreased since December 2023, it remained higher than the pre-pandemic levels, which was understood to signal a possible longer-term expansion of the illicit market for cocaine. Methamphetamine consumption remained above long-term average levels but was less than pre-pandemic levels.

1003. The Australian National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2020–2022 found that 1.4 per cent of males and 0.5 per cent of females aged 16–85 had met the diagnostic criteria for and had symptoms of a drug use disorder within the past 12 months. Amphetamines, primarily methamphetamine, remained the most common type of substance other than alcohol for which people sought treatment in the country, with the proportion of closed treatment episodes for these substances in the 12-month reporting period 2022/23 at a level similar to the previous reporting period. The proportion of closed treatment episodes for heroin also remained stable, while there was a decrease in the proportion of treatment episodes related to cannabis.

1004. Treatment arrangements for opioid use disorder were reformed in Australia to improve the affordability of and equitable access to relevant medicines. As at 1 July 2023, medicines to treat opioid use disorder could be

dispensed in the same way as other medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, significantly reducing the out-of-pocket fees previously paid by patients. A new treatment programme for opioid use disorder, the Community Pharmacy Programme, was established to ensure nationally consistent payments for opioid use disorder treatment services delivered by community pharmacies, such as in-pharmacy and take-away dosing of patients, and for the on-site administration by pharmacists of buprenorphine injections. Transitional arrangements were put in place until 30 June 2024 to ensure that patients did not experience any disruptions to their access to the required medicines.

1005. Preliminary data indicated that in 2022, opioids were present in some 60 per cent of drug-induced deaths in Australia. Deaths related to benzodiazepines have been decreasing since 2018, with the substance present in more than 40 per cent of drug-induced deaths in 2022. The preliminary estimated rate of drug-induced deaths in 2022 (7.0 deaths per 100,000 people) was slightly lower than in 2021 (7.1 deaths per 100,000 people), continuing the declining trend since a peak in 2017. In 2022, heroin was the predominant opioid in opioid overdose deaths, unlike in the previous year, when natural and semi-synthetic opioids comprised the largest proportion of opioid overdose deaths. Preliminary data suggest a decline in the rate of overdose deaths involving cocaine, from a record rate of 0.39 deaths per 100,000 people in 2020 to 0.28 deaths per 100,000 people in 2022. The rate of overdose deaths involving amphetamine-type stimulants in 2022 (2.1 deaths per 100,000 people) was similar to 2021 and reflected a decrease compared with the record rate of 2.5 deaths per 100,000 people in 2020.

1006. The New Zealand Health Survey 2022/23 found that the prevalence of drug use among adults aged 15 years and over was at a similar level to 2021/22. However, the survey found that past-year use of cannabis (14.2 per cent), cocaine (1.3 per cent), “ecstasy” (3.6 per cent) and hallucinogens (2.5 per cent) had increased compared with 2017/18. The prevalence of past-year use of amphetamine-type stimulants (1.1 per cent) and sedatives (1.3 per cent) remained at a similar level in 2022/23 compared with 2017/18. In 2022/23, the prevalence of opioid misuse in the past 12 months was 0.4 per cent.

1007. Wastewater monitoring covering about 75 per cent of the population of New Zealand found that consumption of methamphetamine increased in the first quarter of 2024 compared with average consumption in the previous four quarters. The level of consumption of MDMA decreased in the first quarter of 2024 but was at a level consistent with the average quantity consumed in the previous four quarters. Cocaine consumption continued to increase and reached a level of consumption greater than in the previous four quarters.

1008. A report on mental health and problematic substance use, produced on the basis of data collected through the New Zealand Health Survey for the periods 2016/17 and 2021–2023, identified an increase in the prevalence of moderate or high risk of problematic use of illicit substances (from 10.1 per cent to 11.2 per cent) from 2016/17 to 2021–2023. This was driven by an increase in such prevalence among women, from 8.1 per cent to 9.9 per cent, whereas it remained relatively stable for men, at 12.2 per cent in 2016/17 and 12.4 per cent in 2021–2023. During the same period, the prevalence of moderate or high risk of problematic use increased for both amphetamine-type stimulants and hallucinogens.

1009. The New Zealand Illicit Drug Harm Index 2023 found that the total cost of drug harm in the country had increased by 1.95 per cent since 2020. Over this period, the total cost of harm from cocaine had almost doubled, while the total cost of harm from MDMA had decreased. The total cost of harm from methamphetamine was estimated to have increased by 5 per cent but was understood to possibly be higher, as the substance caused the most personal harm. The Index is published by the New Zealand Ministry of Health as a conservative measure of the personal and community harms associated with drug use for which data are available. The Index does not include an estimate of the impact on the children of people who use drugs owing to a lack of information.

1010. Over the past 12 months, the early warning system of New Zealand, High Alert, issued notifications about a substance similar to internationally controlled *alpha*-pyrrolidinovalerophenone (*a*-PVP) being sold as MDMA, 4-bromo-2,5-dimethoxyphenethylamine (2C-B) detected in powder presumed to be MDMA, heroin found in a white powder being sold as ketamine and the detection of a highly potent synthetic opioid, *N*-desethyl etonitazene, in a fake diazepam tablet. In January 2024, the service reported on the increasing detection by drug checking services of a pink powder known as “tuci” or “pink cocaine”, which was commonly found to contain ketamine and MDMA, as well as other substances including cocaine, caffeine and new psychoactive substances. In February 2024, the service shared information about an increase in the harm being caused by synthetic cannabinoids across New Zealand, with testing suggesting the likely involvement of MDMB-4en-PINACA, which

is internationally controlled under Schedule II of the 1971 Convention. Over the summer period of 2023/24, seven new or obscure synthetic cathinones were detected in samples of what was presumed to be MDMA. One of these samples contained either *N*-isopropyl butylone (isoputylone) or *N*-propyl butylone (putylone), detected for the first time in the country. In April 2024, the High Alert system reported increased harm linked to the use of GBL, GHB and 1,4-butanediol in New Zealand, and that industrial chemicals were increasingly being sold as methamphetamine. A notification issued in July 2024 warned that the toxic chemicals phenanthroline and diethylene glycol had been detected in a liquid presumed to be an opioid. In the Australian State of New South Wales, official warnings were issued in November 2023 about a rise in opioid overdoses following use of substances thought to be cocaine or methamphetamine and in January 2024 about tablets sold as MDMA (“ecstasy”) and found to contain nitazenes, a potent group of opioids. Warnings were also issued in New South Wales about nitazenes resulting in severe opioid overdoses, nitazenes contained in drugs thought to be heroin, fake diazepam tablets found to contain other drugs, including bromazolam, and high-dose MDMA tablets.

IV. Recommendations to Governments, the United Nations and other relevant international and national organizations

1011. Following its review of the implementation of the international drug control conventions, INCB would like to present to Governments and relevant international and regional organizations its main conclusions and recommendations, which are set out below.

Scenarios and possible responses to the rapid expansion of illicit synthetic drug manufacture, marketing and consumption

1012. States and institutions have built a patchwork of policy mechanisms to confront different elements of illicit synthetic drug markets. However, those efforts will need to be put into a coordinated framework that results in a balanced, forward-looking approach to addressing synthetic drug demand and supply reduction.

1013. To effectively address these key policy gaps, the international community should develop a comprehensive, coordinated strategy to respond to the evolution and expansion of synthetic drug markets. To respond to the broadening presence of synthetic drugs in local and regional markets, governments and international organizations should identify key blind spots and loopholes that traffickers can easily exploit. Beyond augmenting interdiction and security programmes, they now need to pursue greater investment in education, treatment, and prevention strategies specifically focused on the threat posed by synthetic drugs. Importantly, Governments should seek to underpin these efforts with a coordinated, comprehensive strategy that promotes consistent knowledge exchange, dialogue, coordination, and education about synthetic drugs.

Recommendation 1: To sufficiently prepare for the increasing threat of illicit synthetic drugs, countries, control authorities, international and regional organizations should consider the detailed recommendations contained in chapter I of this report focusing on:

National coordination

(a) Increasing national coordination through the establishment of inter-agency task forces to address the increase in synthetic drugs;

Early warning and continuous monitoring

(b) Investing in early warning and continuous monitoring systems;

(c) Using machine learning and structured intelligence tools to help identify finished synthetic drugs and potential molecular structures that could be used as alternative chemical inputs;

Information-sharing

(d) Using existing platforms to exchange operational information on trafficking in and the seizure of new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids, precursors and equipment;

(e) Submitting detailed specific reports of seized consignments of precursor materials and finished drugs;

Law enforcement

(f) The monitoring of supply chains and the disruption of illicit activities, including the illicit manufacture and smuggling of drugs and precursor chemicals, should be used to compile a comprehensive intelligence picture of networks, their methods and the nature of their operations;

(g) Training relevant agencies tasked with drug storage and/or disposal on the safe handling and interdiction of highly potent synthetic drugs, as well as on the responsible disposal of such materials;

(h) Seeking to emphasize human rights in their interdiction approaches, and exploring alternatives to extreme punitive measures;

Public-private partnerships

- (i) Fostering relationships and partnerships with private sector companies, e-commerce sites and social media platforms to encourage them to take a more active role in identifying criminal activity and sharing actionable intelligence with relevant authorities;
- (j) Collaborating with INCB in its efforts to map their chemical, pharmaceutical, biotechnology, medical and related industries to better monitor markets;
- (k) Addressing the non-medical use of sedative synthetic veterinary products;

Public awareness, prevention, treatment, and recovery services

- (l) Implementing national and local strategies for synthetic drug demand reduction that implement robust public-private partnerships, engage civil society organizations and target youth populations;
- (m) Considering setting up an emergency alert system, such as the UNODC early warning advisory and the European Union's early warning system on new psychoactive substances, to notify the healthcare, law enforcement and policy sectors of newly identified synthetic substances;
- (n) Seeking to build adequate reserves of opioid antagonist drugs (such as naloxone) and adopting policies to make them more accessible and at the same time improve existing treatment infrastructure or build better prevention, treatment and harm reduction programmes;

International and regional cooperation

- (o) Establishing more strategic and operational-level international cooperation mechanisms to promote open dialogue, share best practices and encourage the exchange of information and intelligence using multilateral and bilateral forums.

Availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes

1014. An analysis of data on the consumption of opioid analgesics, as reported by Governments to INCB, has reconfirmed that the unequal access to and availability of affordable opioid analgesics, such as morphine, is a persistent issue. One factor contributing to this problem is that a significant portion of the morphine manufactured worldwide is not utilized directly for pain relief but for other purposes. The consumption of morphine, along with other opioid analgesics, remains concentrated in developed countries within Europe and North America, and the levels of consumption of the substance in other regions are insufficient to adequately address the medical needs of their populations. Many countries continue to report having difficulties in procuring medications containing morphine, even though opiate raw materials are reported to be available in sufficient quantities. The differences in consumption levels between countries continue to be significant. Various factors, such as economic and commercial interests, knowledge and training, as well as regulatory frameworks, are influencing the ability of countries to procure and administer morphine for the treatment of pain.

1015. Despite the important role that internationally controlled psychotropic substances play in the medical environment, assessing their global, regional and national availability remains a challenge as there are neither comprehensive data at the national level nor well-established ways of assessing the appropriate level of use of psychotropic substances to meet demand. However, the data from Governments available to the Board indicate that, for example, while 80 per cent of people living with epilepsy live in low- and middle-income countries, the consumption of related psychotropic substances is concentrated in high-income countries.

Recommendation 2: INCB reiterates that there is an urgent need to increase the availability of and access to opioids and psychotropic substances for medical use and to improve their prescription and use, especially in countries reporting inadequate and very inadequate levels of consumption, and calls for targeted public policies on access and availability supported by Governments, health systems and health professionals, civil society, the pharmaceutical industry and the international community.

Recommendation 3: Consequently, and in line with the provisions and objectives of the 1961 Convention as amended, INCB urges opioid-manufacturing countries to allocate an increasing amount of morphine for utilization in the production of oral morphine preparations to be used for the treatment of pain, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Recommendation 4: INCB recommends all Governments to ensure that medical providers have all necessary tools to better monitor and manage the access to controlled substances by patients ensuring their rational use. INCB calls for further international cooperation to enhance regulations governing access to controlled substances and improve public awareness while reminding Governments that lack of training, misinformation, incorrect self-diagnosis and the unnecessary or excessive use of psychotropic substances pose significant threats to society.

Availability of controlled substances for the treatment of opioid use disorder

1016. Opioid use disorder is a chronic condition marked by the persistent use of opioids with severe physical, mental, social and legal consequences. Given the very high dependence potential of opioids, opioid use disorder is a significant public health issue, with one of the associated risks being overdose, a risk that has escalated owing to the increased non-medical use of potent synthetic opioids in various parts of the world. In addition, opioid misuse contributes to the transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C, posing further health risks to individuals and communities.

1017. One effective approach to addressing opioid use disorder is opioid agonist therapy, which involves the administration of long-acting full or partial opioid agonists such as methadone or buprenorphine. These substances, which are under international control, are proven to be effective. However, in many countries there are significant challenges to the implementation of opioid agonist therapy, including the stigmatization of patients, unequal access to treatment and difficulties associated with the need to administer the therapy on a daily basis. These challenges can arise as a result of factors such as travel distances to clinics, treatment costs and the inevitable disruption to daily life.

1018. In some countries with a high prevalence of people who inject drugs and opioid use disorder, the consumption of methadone and buprenorphine and the availability of opioid agonist therapy services are limited or even non-existent. This can be attributed to political and cultural resistance, inaction by the responsible authorities or a failure to acknowledge the problem. Some Governments do not recognize the use of these substances or the provision of opioid agonist therapy services as effective treatments for opioid dependence, despite scientific evidence to the contrary.

Recommendation 5: In view of the increase in the non-medical use of opioids and the negative health and social consequences associated with it, INCB encourages countries to develop programmes and services for addressing the problem, including through the use of controlled substances such as methadone and buprenorphine for treatment and opioid agonist therapy services.

Use of internationally controlled substances for non-medical purposes

1019. INCB has over the years reminded governments about the fact that the legalization of non-medical use of internationally controlled substances (mainly in relation to cannabis but other substances are also being considered) contravenes the international drug control treaties. The universal adherence to the three international drug control treaties and the commitment to their implementation reaffirmed by Member States at the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016 are impacted by the developments in several countries that have legalized the use of cannabis (and any other internationally controlled substances) for non-medical purposes or that have tolerated its legalization within specific jurisdictions of the country. The actions of those countries and state jurisdictions are not in compliance with the treaties.

Recommendation 6: INCB wishes to draw the attention of all Governments to the fact that measures legalizing the non-medical use of internationally controlled substances are contrary to the provisions of the

international drug control conventions, specifically article 4, paragraph (c), and article 36 of the 1961 Convention as amended, article 5, paragraph 2, of the 1971 Convention and article 3, paragraph 1 (a), of the 1988 Convention.

International drug control conventions and human rights

1020. INCB calls the attention of countries to the human rights dimension of the drug control conventions in view of the false dichotomy surrounding human rights and drug control. INCB has long recognized that respect for human rights is inherent to – and indeed a prerequisite for – compliance with the three international drug control conventions. In carrying out its functions, INCB has unequivocally called for human rights to be respected in the development and implementation of drug policy. Measures adopted with the purported aim of furthering drug control which are inconsistent with universally recognized human rights norms are a violation of the international drug control conventions.

1021. The adoption and application of drug control measures occur in a broader context in which States have concurrent legal obligations, including those stemming from human rights instruments. Specifically, these obligations range from the right to health, the promotion of equality and non-discrimination towards people who use drugs, the prohibition of arbitrary arrest and detention, the right to a fair trial for drug-related crimes, to protection against all forms of cruel and inhuman punishment.

Recommendation 7: The Board urges Governments that when implementing the provisions of the international drug control conventions due consideration be given to the human rights issues such as the right to health including availability of controlled substances for medical purposes, also in emergency situations; the right to access to evidence-based prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration services; the protection from stigmatization and discrimination for women, children and minorities; the application principle of proportionality in criminal justice responses to drug-related offences as prescribed in the 1961 Convention (art. 36, paras. 1 (a), 2 (a)(iv) and 2 (b)(iv)), the 1971 Convention (art. 22, paras. 1 (a) and 2 (a)(iv)) and the 1988 Convention (art. 3, paras. 4 (a), (b) and (c) and 7).

Recommendation 8: While the choice of legislative or policy measures to address drug-related crime, including the determination of sanctions, is the prerogative of States, the international drug control conventions explicitly require that these sanctions should be adequate and proportionate and take into account the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the alleged offender. Accordingly, INCB 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 the relevant United Nations resolutions on the application of the death penalty for the category of drug-related offences.

Availability of controlled substances in emergencies

1022. The last year has been a year of crises. Internal armed conflicts and all out wars between countries have caused unprecedented human suffering. Several thousands of people died, many of them women and children. Large populations have been internally displaced. Humanitarian workers and health staff that have been trying to help others have also been killed at a level unseen in previous conflicts. In addition, natural disasters have continued to take place, requiring humanitarian interventions. INCB remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian emergencies resulting from the various ongoing conflicts and natural disasters. As there are acute and growing humanitarian needs resulting from these different emergencies, internationally controlled narcotics and psychotropic substances are essential for ensuring health and well-being and for use in anaesthesia, pain management and the treatment of mental health and neurological conditions.

Recommendation 9: INCB reminds States of their obligation to ensure the availability of internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes, in accordance with the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention. Urgent action is required to ensure unimpeded access to medications, including medicines containing internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic

substances. To that end competent national authorities are encouraged to use, whenever appropriate, the WHO Model Guidelines for the International Provision of Controlled Medicines for Emergency Medical Care.

Submission of information and data collection

1023. The regular submission of comprehensive and reliable statistical data from Governments to the Board is vital for the overall functioning of the international drug control system and the analysis of global trends.

Recommendations 10: INCB encourages Governments to prioritize the submission of accurate and timely reports, which will significantly impact the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation of the international drug control system.

Recommendation 11: INCB urges the countries and territories that have not provided the reports under the international drug control conventions, in particular on the consumption of psychotropic substances, to do so as soon as possible and to take the necessary steps to ensure that their competent national authorities have sufficient resources and training to prepare the reports in a timely manner.

Recommendation 12: INCB encourages Governments to make use of the INCB Learning e-modules to further strengthen their knowledge about collection, analysis and submission of data required under the international drug control treaties. Governments are also encouraged to provide financial support and technical assistance to countries in need and to activities of INCB in this area.

1024. Many countries lack mechanisms for the collection of data on drug use and treatment demand, which hinders efforts to develop evidence-based prevention and treatment programmes.

Recommendation 13: INCB encourages Member States to improve the collection of data on drug use patterns and, whenever possible, to implement periodic drug use and treatment demand surveys in order to inform the development of evidence-based drug control policies.

Submission of estimates for narcotic drugs and assessments for psychotropic substances

1025. The estimates of annual legitimate requirements for narcotic drugs and the assessments of annual legitimate requirements for psychotropic substances are essential pillars of the international drug control system. They enable both exporting and importing countries to ensure that trade in those substances stays within the limits determined by the Governments of importing countries and that the diversion of controlled substances from international trade is effectively prevented. For narcotic drugs, the estimates of annual legitimate requirements are mandatory under the 1961 Convention as amended, and the estimates furnished by Governments are confirmed by the Board and become the basis for calculating the limits on manufacture and import. Several Governments did not submit estimates to the Board, and some of those submitted are not based on a proper assessment of the national medical and scientific needs. Over the past years, the Board has established estimates for narcotic drugs for an increasing number of Governments.

1026. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolutions 1981/7 and 1991/44, Governments are requested to provide to the Board assessments of annual domestic medical and scientific requirements for psychotropic substances listed in Schedules II, III and IV of the 1971 Convention. The assessments received are communicated to all States and territories to assist the competent authorities of exporting countries when approving exports of psychotropic substances. However, a large number of Governments have not submitted a full revision of their legitimate requirements for psychotropic substances for three years or longer. The assessments valid for those countries and territories may therefore no longer reflect their actual medical and scientific requirements for such substances.

Recommendation 14: The Board recommends that Governments continue to strengthen the capacity of competent national authorities to adequately estimate their medical and scientific requirements for narcotic drugs and assessments for psychotropic substances, including through the use of globally available e-learning

modules. INCB also recommends that Governments enhance domestic data-collection mechanisms so that they can provide estimates and assessments that reflect the appropriate national requirements used for medical purposes. Governments that have their estimates established by the Board are strongly encouraged to review and update those estimates. The Board further recommends that Governments review and update the assessments of their annual medical and scientific requirements for psychotropic substances at least once every three years.

Status of adherence to the international drug control treaties

1027. The three international drug control conventions remain among the most widely ratified United Nations treaties, which benefit from near universal adherence. Nevertheless, some countries have not yet become parties.

Recommendation 15: INCB reiterates its call upon the few remaining States not parties to the international drug control conventions to take steps towards accession to and full implementation of the three international drug control conventions.

Precursor chemicals

1028. INCB, in line with its mandate, continues to provide Governments with a global analysis of the world's precursor situation in its reports on the implementation of articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention. This year's report on that implementation identifies a further increase in diversions, attempted diversions, and seizures of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, including in the form of pharmaceutical preparations, which too often are still not controlled in the same manner as the substances they contain. In addition, the report illustrates the continued widespread use of alternative chemicals not under international or national control, including chemicals specifically designed to circumvent controls, which are often only one or very few steps away from the desired end products. Given that the number of alternative chemicals is potentially unlimited, there is a need for a better understanding of their sources, for early information-sharing on emerging substances and trends, and for a greater focus on voluntary and cross-cutting measures.

1029. INCB has launched the "Engaging with the industries" initiative aimed at promoting a proactive role of industrial sectors in preventing illicit drug manufacturing, and in this regard INCB is in the process of developing the automated monitoring of virtual chemical and equipment markets system, which will assist Governments by providing actionable information and intelligence leads on suspicious Internet posting related to precursors.

Recommendation 16: INCB encourages Governments to make greater and more systematic use of its electronic tools that provide for global cooperation on the monitoring of legitimate international trade in internationally controlled precursors (PEN Online) and non-scheduled chemicals (PEN Online Light) and on sharing actionable information and intelligence on precursor chemicals, regardless of whether they are controlled (PICS).

Recommendation 17: INCB encourages Governments to place greater emphasis on understanding which industry sectors, in addition to regulated operators, manufacture, import, export, distribute or use chemicals that may also be used in illicit drug manufacture, with a view to raising their awareness and preventing them from being unknowingly targeted by traffickers.

Recommendation 18: INCB also encourages Governments to invest in developing national capacity to monitor the surface web with a view to identifying and investigating suspicious postings involving precursors including non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors.

Materials and equipment used in illicit drug manufacture

1030. In the light of the proliferation of synthetic drugs and the increased sophistication of illicit drug manufacture worldwide, the need to look beyond precursors to materials and specialized equipment used in such manufacture is more important than ever before. Article 13 of the 1988 Convention provides a basis for

Governments to address this issue together. However, since article 13 does not contain any specific provisions that define how it should be implemented, there has been limited implementation and operational use of article 13. During 2024, INCB surveyed Governments on the extent of their use of article 13 as a complementary tool in addressing illicit drug manufacture.

Recommendation 19: INCB encourages Governments to make use of article 13 of the 1988 Convention to prevent the trade in and the diversion of materials and equipment for the illicit production or manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Governments are also encouraged to share new trends and developments related to equipment and excipients with a view to enhancing knowledge of the related markets, devising future approaches and further strengthening specialized tools and resources, including those made available by INCB.

Proliferation of highly potent synthetic opioids

1031. INCB continues to be concerned at the number of overdose deaths resulting from illicit fentanyl manufacture and newly emerging highly potent synthetic non-fentanyl opioids that are being encountered in drug markets around the world. These substances are challenging law enforcement agencies because they are increasingly being trafficked in smaller end-use quantities through express logistics and postal services worldwide.

Recommendation 20: INCB encourages all Governments to exchange real-time information through the IONICS bulk communication feature with regard to new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and related drugs that are seized or stopped or are otherwise suspicious shipments and to facilitate backtracking investigations involving such substances. INCB also encourages the law and regulatory enforcement focal points of Governments and international organizations to take advantage of the tools provided by the INCB GRIDS Programme.

(Signed)

Jallal Toufiq
President

(Signed)

Zukiswa Zingela
Rapporteur

(Signed)

Mark Colhoun
Secretary

Vienna, 15 November 2024

Annex I. Regional and subregional groupings used in the report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2024

The regional and subregional groupings used in the report of INCB for 2024, together with the States in each of those groupings, are listed below.

Africa

Algeria	Liberia
Angola	Libya
Benin	Madagascar
Botswana	Malawi
Burkina Faso	Mali
Burundi	Mauritania
Cameroon	Mauritius
Cabo Verde	Morocco
Central African Republic	Mozambique
Chad	Namibia
Comoros	Niger
Congo	Nigeria
Côte d'Ivoire	Rwanda
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Sao Tome and Principe
Djibouti	Senegal
Egypt	Seychelles
Equatorial Guinea	Sierra Leone
Eritrea	Somalia
Eswatini	South Africa
Ethiopia	South Sudan
Gabon	Sudan
Gambia	Togo
Ghana	Tunisia
Guinea	Uganda
Guinea-Bissau	United Republic of Tanzania
Kenya	Zambia
Lesotho	Zimbabwe

Central America and the Caribbean

Antigua and Barbuda	Guatemala
Bahamas	Haiti
Barbados	Honduras
Belize	Jamaica
Costa Rica	Nicaragua
Cuba	Panama
Dominica	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Dominican Republic	Saint Lucia
El Salvador	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Grenada	Trinidad and Tobago

North America

Canada
Mexico
United States of America

South America

Argentina	Guyana
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Paraguay
Brazil	Peru
Chile	Suriname
Colombia	Uruguay
Ecuador	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

East and South-East Asia

Brunei Darussalam	Mongolia
Cambodia	Myanmar
China	Philippines
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Republic of Korea
Indonesia	Singapore
Japan	Thailand
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Timor-Leste
Malaysia	Viet Nam

South Asia

Bangladesh	Maldives
Bhutan	Nepal
India	Sri Lanka

West Asia

Afghanistan	Oman
Armenia	Pakistan
Azerbaijan	Qatar
Bahrain	Saudi Arabia
Georgia	State of Palestine
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Syrian Arab Republic
Iraq	Tajikistan
Israel	Türkiye
Jordan	Turkmenistan
Kazakhstan	United Arab Emirates
Kuwait	Uzbekistan
Kyrgyzstan	Yemen
Lebanon	

Europe

Eastern Europe

Belarus	Russian Federation
Republic of Moldova	Ukraine

South-Eastern Europe

Albania
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia

Montenegro
North Macedonia
Romania
Serbia

Western and Central Europe

Andorra
Austria
Belgium
Cyprus
Czechia
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Holy See
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Latvia

Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Monaco
Netherlands (Kingdom of the)
Norway
Poland
Portugal
San Marino
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Oceania

Australia
Cook Islands
Fiji
Kiribati
Marshall Islands
Micronesia (Federated States of)
Nauru
New Zealand

Niue
Palau
Papua New Guinea
Samoa
Solomon Islands
Tonga
Tuvalu
Vanuatu

Annex II. Current membership of the International Narcotics Control Board

César Tomás Arce Rivas

Born in 1954. National of Paraguay. Retired Director General, Office for National and International Cooperation and Institutional Strengthening of the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (2012–2020); Professor of Organic Chemistry, Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences, National University of Asunción (since 1993).

Doctorate in Forensic Chemistry, Center for Forensic Medicine, Medical University of Vienna (1988–1990); Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences, National University of Asunción (1971–1975).

Previously held positions as Deputy Executive Secretary, National Anti-Drug Secretariat (2008–2012); Laboratory Director, National Anti-Drug Secretariat (1987–2007); Professor of Organic Chemistry I and II, Catholic University, Ciudad del Este, Paraguay (1996–2008); intern, laboratories of the Federal Police of Germany (1990).

Author and co-author of and contributor to numerous publications, including “Drug policy, strategy and action plan on drugs of Paraguay” (2016) and “Study of the interrelation of cannabinoids in marijuana and determination of the storage and harvest time of a marijuana sample, by means of the cannabinoid relation”.

Member of the delegation of Paraguay to the sixtieth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (2017); meeting of drug control and drug administration organizations for the implementation of prevention and treatment courses and the strengthening of health systems, Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States, held in Cancún, Mexico (2017); 12th Specialized Meeting of Drug Enforcement Authorities, Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), held in Buenos Aires (2017); preparatory meeting for the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in Vienna (2016); special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in New York (2016); biregional high-level meetings of the European Union and the Community of Latin and Caribbean States on the problem of drugs, held in Buenos Aires (2017), The Hague (2016), Montevideo (2015), Athens (2014) and Brussels (2012); South American Council on the World Drug Problem, Union of South American Nations, Asunción (2012) (President pro tempore); Specialized Meetings of Drug Enforcement Authorities, MERCOSUR, Asunción (2015 and 2009) (President pro tempore); Twenty-fourth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Asunción (2014) (Chair); international meeting of executives for the control of precursors and essential chemical substances, held in Santiago (1998); tenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth international seminars of forensic chemistry, Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington, D.C. (1987–1995); Meeting of Auditors and Evaluators of the Control of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances in Public Health, Santiago (1992).

Member of INCB (since 2020). Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2020–2021). Second Vice-President and Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2022). First Vice-President (2023).

Sevil Atasoy

Born in 1949. National of Türkiye. Professor of Biochemistry and Forensic Science, Vice-Rector and Director, Institute of Addiction and Forensic Science; Head, Department of Forensic Science; Director, Center for Violence and Crime Prevention, Uskudar University, Istanbul. Director, Institute of Forensic Science, Istanbul University (1988–2010). Director, Department of Narcotics and Toxicology, Ministry of Justice of Türkiye (1980–1993). Expert witness in civil and criminal courts (since 1980).

Bachelor of Science in Chemistry (1972), Master of Science in Biochemistry (1976), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Biochemistry (1979), Istanbul University.

Lecturer in biochemistry, criminalistics and crime scene investigation (since 1982); supervisor of more than 50 master's and doctoral theses in the area of biochemistry and forensic science. Author of over 130 scientific papers, including papers on drug testing, drug chemistry, drug markets, drug-related and drug-induced crime, drug abuse prevention, clinical and forensic toxicology, crime scene investigation and DNA analysis.

Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow, United States of America Information Agency (1995–1996); Guest Scientist at the School of Public Health, Department of Forensic Science, University of California, Berkeley, and the Drug

Abuse Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles; Department of Genetics, Stanford University; Department of Human Genetics, Emory University; California Criminalistics Institute; Federal Bureau of Investigation, Virginia; Crime Laboratories, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, United States; Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), Wiesbaden, Germany; Institute for Physical Biochemistry and Institute of Legal Medicine, Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich, Germany; Center of Human Genetics, Bremen University; Institute of Legal Medicine, Muenster University, Germany; United Nations Drug Laboratory, Vienna; Central Bureau of Investigation, New Delhi.

Member, special commission on preventing drug abuse, Office of the Prime Minister (since 2014). Founding Editor, *Turkish Journal of Legal Medicine* (1982–1993). Member of the scientific board of the *International Criminal Justice Review*. Founding President, Turkish Society of Forensic Sciences; Honorary Member of the Mediterranean Academy of Forensic Sciences. Member of the International Society of Forensic Toxicology; the Indo-Pacific Association of Law, Medicine and Science; the International Association of Forensic Toxicologists; the American Academy of Forensic Sciences; the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors; and the American Society of Criminology.

Member of INCB (2005–2010 and since 2017). Member (2006, 2018 and 2023) and Chair (2017 and 2020) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. Second Vice-President and Chair (2006 and 2021) and member (2007, 2020 and 2022–2024) of the Standing Committee on Estimates. Rapporteur (2007, 2019 and 2022). First Vice-President of the Board (2008). President of the Board (2009).

Cornelis de Joncheere

Born in 1954. National of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Currently Chair of the Netherlands Antibiotics Development Platform and a consultant to WHO on pharmaceutical policies.

Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) and Master of Science (MSc) in Pharmacy, University of Groningen and University of Amsterdam, Kingdom of the Netherlands (1975–1981); Master's in Business Administration, University of San Diego, United States/San José, Costa Rica; Bachelor of Science (BSc). Pharmacy, cum laude (honour student), University of Groningen, Kingdom of the Netherlands (1972–1975).

Previously held positions as Director, Department of Essential Medicines and Health Products at WHO, Geneva (2012–2016), which included work on access to controlled medicines, and the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence; WHO Representative, Kyiv (2011–2012); WHO Regional Adviser for Pharmaceuticals and Health Technologies, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen (1996–2010); National Essential Drugs Programme Coordinator, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/WHO, Brazil (1994–1996); Pharmacist, Essential Drugs Projects Coordinator, PAHO/WHO, Costa Rica (1988–1993); Pharmaceutical expert, PAHO/WHO, Panama (1986–1988); pharmaceutical supply expert in North Yemen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate for International Cooperation, Kingdom of the Netherlands (1982–1985); hospital and community pharmacy in Amsterdam (1981–1982).

President of the WHO Europe Staff Association (2006–2010); member of the WHO Guidelines Review Committee (2007–2011); member of the Royal Dutch Pharmaceutical Society; author and co-author of numerous publications in the fields of pharmaceutical and health sciences.

Member of INCB (since 2017). Rapporteur (2017 and 2023). Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2017–2018, 2021–2022 and 2024). Member (2017–2018 and 2021) and Chair (2022 and 2024) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. President of the Board (2019–2020).

David T. Johnson

Born in 1954. National of the United States. President, SwanJohnson LLC; adjunct faculty member, Arizona State University; retired diplomat. Bachelor's degree in economics from Emory University; graduate of the National Defence College of Canada.

United States Foreign Service officer (1977–2011). Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, United States Department of State (2007–2011). Deputy Chief of Mission (2005–2007) and Chargé d'affaires, a.i. (2003–2005), United States Embassy, London. Afghan Coordinator for the United States (2002–2003). United States Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (1998–2001). Deputy Press Secretary at the White House and Spokesman for the National Security Council (1995–1997). Deputy Spokesman at the State Department (1995) and Director of the State Department Press Office (1993–1995). United States Consul General, Vancouver, Canada (1990–1993). Assistant National Trust Examiner, Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, United States Treasury (1976–1977).

Member of INCB (since 2012). Member (2012–2017 and 2022–2024) and Chair (2014 and 2018) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. Second Vice-President and Chair (2019 and 2024), Vice-Chair (2022) and member (2020–2023) of the Standing Committee on Estimates.

Galina Korchagina

Born in 1953. National of the Russian Federation. Professor, Deputy Director of the National Centre for Research on Drug Addiction (since 2010).

Graduate of the Leningrad Paediatric Medical Institute, Russian Federation (1976); Doctor of Medicine (2001). Thesis based on clinical and epidemiological research dealing with new ways of looking at management of drug abuse in a time of change.

Previously held positions as paediatrician at the Central District Hospital of Gatchina, Leningrad region, and doctor at a boarding school (1976–1979); Head of the Organizational and Policy Division, Leningrad Regional Drug Clinic (1981–1989); Lecturer, Leningrad Regional Medical Academy (1981–1989); Head Doctor, City Drug Clinic, St. Petersburg (1989–1994); Assistant Lecturer (1991–1996) and Professor (2000–2001), Department of Social Technologies, State Institute for Services and Economics; Assistant Lecturer (1994–2000), Associate Professor (2001–2002) and Professor (2002–2008), Department for Research on Drug Addiction, St. Petersburg Medical Academy of Postgraduate Studies; Chief Professor and Head of the Department for Medical Research and Healthy Lifestyles, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (2000–2008); Professor, Department for Conflict Studies, Faculty of Philosophy, St. Petersburg State University (2004–2008).

Member of many associations and societies, including the Association of Psychiatrists and Drug Addiction Specialists of the Russian Federation and St. Petersburg, the Kettel Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol, the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions and the International Society of Addiction Medicine. Head of the sociology of science aspects of medical and biological research section of the Research Council on the Sociology of Science and the Organization of Scientific Research, St. Petersburg Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2002–2008).

Author of more than 100 publications, including more than 70 works published in the Russian Federation, chapters in monographs and several practical guides. Award for excellence in health protection from the Ministry of Health of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1987). Consultant, Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (since 2006).

Expert on the epidemiology of drug addiction, Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe (1994–2003); participation in the WHO cocaine project (1993–1994) as leading researcher; WHO Healthy Cities project (1992–1998) as leading coordinator in St. Petersburg; WHO alcohol action plan, realization on the basis of the city treatment centre, St. Petersburg (1992–1998). Co-trainer, WHO programmes “Helping people change” (since 1992) and “Skills for change” (since 1995); and temporary adviser, WHO (1992–2008). Participant in meetings of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (2002–2008).

Member of INCB (2010–2015 and since 2017). Vice-Chair (2011, 2012, 2017 and 2019) and member (2018 and 2022–2024) of the Standing Committee on Estimates. Member of the Committee on Finance and Administration (2020). First Vice-President of the Board (2013 and 2021).

Pierre Lapaque

Born in 1958. National of France. Master's degree in public law from the University of Toulon and the Var, France.

Previously held positions as Regional Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for the Andean Region and the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay) (January 2022); UNODC Representative for Colombia (2019–2021); UNODC Regional Representative for West and Central Africa, Dakar (2012–2021); Chief, Implementation Support Section, Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch, UNODC, Vienna (2010–2012); Chief, Law Enforcement, Organized Crime and Anti-Money-Laundering Unit, UNODC, Vienna (2009–2010); Attaché for Internal Security at the Embassy of France in Portugal (2005–2009); Senior adviser, Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, Organization of American States, Washington, D.C. (2002–2005); Deputy Director of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (Trinidad and Tobago) (1999–2002); Head of various operational services in the French criminal investigation police (ranks ranging from Inspector of Police to Commissioner General of Police) (1982–1998).

Drafter and contributor to “Le Groupe d'action financière des Caraïbes (GAFIC)”, in the journal of INTERPOL, 2000.

Spoke on drugs, money-laundering, transnational organized crime and the financing of terrorism at several international forums (Financial Action Task Force, Group of Seven under the Presidency of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Dakar Forum on organized crime in Africa) (since 1999); presented the work of UNODC at meetings of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (2009–2022); spoke at meetings of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States (General Assembly and Permanent Council) on developments related to drugs and the laundering of criminal assets in the Americas (2002–2005); and presented, as team leader, 13 mutual evaluations by member countries of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (1999–2002). Honours: Order of San Carlos at the level of Grand Cross (Colombia, June 2022).

Member of INCB (since 2023). Member of the Committee on Finance and Administration (2024). First Vice-President of the Board (2024).

Lu Lin

Born in 1966. National of China. Member, Chinese Academy of Sciences; Professor/Director, National Institute on Drug Dependence, Peking University; Professor/Director, Peking University Sixth Hospital/Institute of Mental Health; Director/Professor, National Center for Mental Disorders, China; Professor/Director, National Clinical Research Center for Mental Disorders, China; President, Shandong First Medical University.

Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Psychiatry, West China University of Medical Science, China.

Previously held positions as Research Scientist, National Institute on Drug Abuse of the National Institutes of Health, United States (2003–2006); Postdoctoral Fellow, National Institute on Drug Abuse of the National Institutes of Health, United States (2001–2003).

Author of and contributor to more than 400 peer-reviewed articles and dozens of textbooks and clinical guidelines, with his research primarily focusing on neurobiological mechanisms, clinical interventions, and public health policies pertaining to drug addiction and psychiatric disorders.

Made substantial contributions to the advancement of addiction research and mental health promotion in China and Asia, and worldwide, as President of the Chinese Society of Psychiatry, Chairman of the Expert Committee on Drug Abuse Prevention and Control of the National Narcotics Control Commission of China, Chairman of the Expert Committee on Psychiatry and Mental Health of the National Health Commission of China, Vice-President of the Asian Association for Substance Abuse Research and as a member of the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence. Presented papers on the control of illegal drugs and the non-medical use of prescription

drugs, as well as on recent progress in and the future direction of mental health care and treatment at international and national conferences, including the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Third World Health Expo, the East Asia Summit Workshop on Mental Health Cooperation, and annual meetings of the Chinese Society of Psychiatry and the International Conference on Progress in Psychiatry.

Honours include: “Healthy China” 2022 Person of the Year (2023); Distinguished Figure in the Overseas Chinese Community (2023); Contribution Award for Returned Overseas Chinese (2022); Chinese Medical Science and Technology Award (2008, 2015 and 2022); National Innovation Award (2020); Academician, Chinese Academy of Sciences (2017); Natural Science Award of the Ministry of Education (2008 and 2013); National Natural Science Award (2002).

Member of INCB (since 2022). Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2022 and 2024). Member of the Committee on Finance and Administration (2023).

Pavel Pachta

Born in 1953. National of Czechia. Retired Director for International Regulatory Affairs, International Cannabis and Cannabinoids Institute (2018–2021).

Master of Science in Foreign Trade (1976), Doctorate in International Economic Relations (1981), Prague University of Economics and Business.

Previously held positions as Deputy Secretary of INCB (2004–2013); Acting Secretary of INCB in 2011; Chief, Narcotics Control and Estimates Section, Secretariat of INCB, UNODC (2001–2013); Chief, Psychotropics Control Section, INCB Secretariat, UNODC (1991–2000); Assistant Professor, Prague University of Economics and Business (1976–1986).

Member of the Scientific Board of the Prague University of Economics and Business (2016–2022) and the International Cannabis and Cannabinoids Institute (2015–2021).

Drafter of and contributor to several publications of INCB, including sections of INCB annual reports (1991–2012), INCB technical reports on psychotropic substances (1991–2000) and INCB technical reports on narcotic drugs (2001–2012). Contributor on behalf of INCB to the following WHO publications: *Guidelines for the Psychosocially Assisted Pharmacological Treatment of Opioid Dependence* (2009), “Guidance on the WHO review of psychoactive substances for international control” (2010), *Ensuring Balance in National Policies on Controlled Substances: Guidance for Availability and Accessibility of Controlled Medicines* (2011).

Member of INCB delegations at the following meetings: Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Vienna, several meetings between 1991–2013; Economic and Social Council, substantive session, New York in 2004, New York in 2008 and Geneva in 2011; high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, New York, 2011; World Health Assembly, Geneva, in 2002, 2003 and 2011; WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence, Geneva, 2006.

Keynote speaker at several international conferences and lecturer at many training events, such as: Challenges for Promotion of the Countermeasures against Amphetamine-type Stimulants Abuse, Tokyo, 2001; Harmonization of Licit Drug Control Laws in Central Asia, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 2004; Worldwide Summit for National Associations of Hospice and Palliative Care, Vienna, 2009; Medical Cannabis and Cannabinoids, Prague, 2015; Medical, Scientific and Industrial Use of Cannabis, Bogotá, 2019; Participant in the INCB expert group meeting on control and monitoring requirements for cannabis and cannabis-related substances, 2021.

Member of International Narcotics Control Board (since 2022).⁸⁵ Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2023–2024).

⁸⁵ Elected by the Economic and Social Council on 7 December 2022.

Jagjit Pavadia

Born in 1954. National of India. Graduate in English Honours (1974), Dhaka University, LLB from Delhi University (1988), Master's Diploma in Public Administration, Indian Institute of Public Administration (1996). Completed dissertation "Forfeiture of property under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985" towards completion of Master's Diploma.

Held several senior positions in the Indian Revenue Service for 35 years in the Government of India, including Narcotics Commissioner of India, Central Bureau of Narcotics (2006–2012); Commissioner, Legal Affairs (2001–2005); Chief Vigilance Officer, Power Finance Corporation (1996–2001); Customs Training Adviser Maldives, deputed by the Commonwealth Secretariat (1994–1995); Deputy Director, Narcotics Control Bureau (1990–1994); and retired as Chief Commissioner, Customs, Central Excise and Service Tax, Nagpur, in 2014.

Recipient of Presidential Appreciation Certificate for Specially Distinguished Record of Service on the occasion of Republic Day (2005), published in the *Gazette of India Extraordinary*.

Member of the Indian delegation to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Vienna (2007–2012); introduced resolutions 51/15 (2008) and 53/12 (2010), adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and organized a side event on the margins of the Commission's 2011 session, presenting issues involved in the illegal movement of opium poppy seeds to producing, importing and exporting countries. As representative of the competent national authority, attended Project Prism and Project Cohesion task force meetings (2006–2012), and coordinated and organized the Project Prism and Project Cohesion meeting in New Delhi (2008). Participated in the Thirtieth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok (2006), and organized the Thirty-fifth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, held in Agra, India (2011). Member of the INCB advisory expert group on the scheduling of substances (2006), and member of the advisory group finalizing the INCB *Guidelines for a Voluntary Code of Practice for the Chemical Industry* (2008). Rapporteur of the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East at its forty-first session, held in Amman (2006); Chair of the Subcommission at its forty-second session, held in Accra, India (2007); organized the meeting of the Paris Pact Initiative Expert Working Group on Precursors, held in New Delhi (2011), and participated in the International Drug Enforcement Conferences hosted by the Drug Enforcement Agency of the United States, held in Istanbul, Türkiye (2008) and Cancún, Mexico (2011).

Member of INCB (since 2015). Second Vice-President and Chair (2015, 2017 and 2020), Vice-Chair (2018 and 2024) and member (2019 and 2023) of the Standing Committee on Estimates. Member (2016–2017 and 2020) and Chair (2019 and 2023) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. First Vice-President of the Board (2016). President of the Board (2021–2022).

N. Larissa Razanadimby

Born in 1988. National of Madagascar. Head of the Division for the importation of products under international control and customs clearance of donated health products, Department of Health Products Management, Directorate of Pharmacy, Laboratories and Traditional Medicine of the Ministry of Public Health of Madagascar (2014–2021).

Pharmacist, Graduate of the Faculty of Medicine, Specialization in Pharmacy, University of Antananarivo, Madagascar.

Previously, manager of the medical products storage warehouse of the Department of Pharmacy, Laboratories and Traditional Medicine, Ministry of Public Health (2014–2015); consulting positions in the Biorama cosmetics laboratory in Antananarivo (2014); acting pharmacist at the Ankadifotsy Pharmacy, Antananarivo (2013).

Appointed Permanent Secretary of the Technical Unit in Logistics Management of the Ministry of Public Health (2016).

Member of the Council of the National Order of Pharmacists of Madagascar; member of the Board of Directors of the Solid Solutes Supply Unit in Madagascar (2019); member of the Commission for the opening and closing

of drug depots intended for human use of the Ministry of Public Health; member of the Logistics Commission of the Ministry of Public Health; member of the Drafting Committee of the National Pharmaceutical Policy and the National Pharmaceutical Master Plan of Madagascar (2016).

Lecturer on pharmacology and therapeutics, Nursing Sciences, Interregional Training Institute for Paramedics.

Consultant for the implementation of the Accredited Drug Dispensing Outlet project (2022) within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Madagascar (2022).

Participant in the subregional workshop for the strengthening of national skills and the improvement of procedures for the selection of essential medicines, including those for mothers and children, by experts from WHO, held in Cotonou, Benin (2018); training on supportive supervision, by USAID, Antananarivo (2018); training of quantifier pools on the need for health inputs, by USAID, Antsirabe, Madagascar (2018); training on supply chain management by Pamela Steele Associates, Nairobi (2017); a seminar on pharmaceutical investment and cooperation by the Government of China, Beijing and Shanghai, China (2017); management training, monitoring and evaluation of the input supply chain, by USAID Deliver Project, Antananarivo (2016).

Publications include the scientific communication presented at the Biomad III conference in Mahajanga, Madagascar, on the theme “Health and biodiversity”.

Member of INCB (since 2022). Member (2022) and Vice-Chair (2023) of the Standing Committee on Estimates.

Mariângela Simão

Born in 1956. National of Brazil. Director-President, Instituto Todos pela Saúde in São Paulo, Brazil, 2023.

Medical Doctor; Diploma in Public Health; MSc, with degrees in Paediatrics and Public Health.

Previously held positions as WHO Assistant Director-General for Access to Medicines and Health Products (2017–2022); UNAIDS Director of the Community Support, Social Justice and Inclusion Department (2010–2017); Brazilian Ministry of Health Director of the HIV/STI/Viral Hepatitis Department (2005–2010); several managerial posts at state and municipal levels in Paraná, Brazil (1983–2003).

Author and co-author of numerous papers in scientific journals, with a focus on primary health care in Brazil, HIV, stigma and discrimination against vulnerable groups, improving access to medicines in general and in particular on palliative care, as well as on public health, drug policy and harm reduction.

Several high-level meetings, including sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, special sessions of the General Assembly on HIV and sessions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the World Health Assembly and its Executive Board. Currently a board member of a range of international organizations, as well as scientific and advisory groups.

Member of INCB (since 2023).⁸⁶ Member of the Committee on Finance and Administration (2024).

Jallal Toufiq

Born in 1963. National of Morocco. Head of the National Centre for Drug Abuse Prevention and Research of Morocco; Director of the Moroccan National Observatory on Drugs and Addictions; Director of the Arrazi University Psychiatric Hospital and Professor of Psychiatry at the Rabat Faculty of Medicine.

Medical Doctor, Rabat Faculty of Medicine (1989); Diploma of Specialization in Psychiatry (1994); lecturer at the Rabat Faculty of Medicine (since 1995). Undertook specialized training in Paris at the Sainte-Anne Psychiatric Hospital and Marmottan Centre (1990–1991) and at Johns Hopkins University, United States, as a research fellow

⁸⁶ Elected by the Economic and Social Council on 15 July 2023.

and Clinical Observer of the National Institute on Drug Abuse of the United States (1994–1995). Conducted research at the University of Pittsburgh, United States (1995); gained clinical drug research certificates at the Vienna School of Clinical Research (2001 and 2002).

Currently holding positions in Morocco as Head of the Harm Reduction Programme, National Centre for Drug Abuse Prevention and Research; teaching and residency training coordinator, Arrazi Hospital; Director of the National Diploma Programme on Treatment and Prevention of Drug Abuse, Rabat Faculty of Medicine; Director of the National Diploma Programme on Child Psychiatry, Rabat Faculty of Medicine, and member of the Ministry of Health Commission on Drug Abuse.

At the international level, Representative of the Mediterranean Network (MedNET) for Morocco (MedNET/Pompidou Group/Council of Europe); former permanent correspondent of the Pompidou Group for Morocco (Council of Europe) on drug abuse prevention and research and former member of the Reference Group to the United Nations on HIV and Injecting Drug Use. Founding member and steering committee member, Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHRRA); Director of Knowledge Hub Arrazi for North Africa, MENAHRRA; member, Mentor International Scientific Advisory Network (drug abuse prevention in youth); former focal point/expert on prevention, United Nations Office on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (local network for North Africa); founding member, MedNET (advisory group on AIDS and drug abuse policies) of the Council of Europe, and member of the Reference Group to the United Nations on HIV and injecting drug use.

Held consultancy roles with the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, UNODC and other international institutions and research fellowships at the National Institute on Drug Abuse of the United States. Published widely in the field of psychiatry, alcohol and drug abuse.

Member of INCB (since 2015). Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2015). Chair (2021) and member (2016) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. First Vice-President of the Board (2018). President of the Board (2023–2024).

Zukiswa Zingela

Born in 1969. National of South Africa. Associate Professor and Executive Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa (since 2021).

Master of Medicine, Psychiatry (University of Pretoria); Fellow of the College of Psychiatrists of South Africa, PhD, Psychology (Nelson Mandela University).

Serves on the Medical and Dental Board of the Health Professions Council of South Africa and is also the Chairperson of the Health Committee of the Medical and Dental Board. Also serves as Deputy Chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Mental Health.

Previously held positions as Head, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences, Walter Sisulu University and Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital, Eastern Cape Department of Health (2015–2021); Leader of the Dean's Advisory Committee in charge of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Walter Sisulu University (2016–2017); Head of Clinical Unit, Dora Nginza Hospital, Eastern Cape Department of Health, and Senior Lecturer at Walter Sisulu University (2011–2015); Specialist Psychiatrist in private practice (2003–2008); Consultant Psychiatrist, Blackpool North Community Mental Health Team, National Health Service, United Kingdom (2003–2008). Duties in the above-mentioned posts included training of undergraduate medical students and postgraduate students in psychiatry with an emphasis on addiction psychiatry and substance use, providing substitution treatment for patients with opioid use-related disorders, neuropsychiatry, consultation liaison psychiatry, child and adolescent psychiatry, old age psychiatry, psychopharmacology and public mental health. Honours: Chairperson of the Board of the Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre (Rehabilitation for Substance Abuse) (2016–2018); Chairperson of the South African Society of Psychiatrists, Eastern Cape Subgroup (2016–2018); Chairperson of Walter Sisulu University Registrar Training and Implementation Committee (2015–2018); Chairperson of Task Team appointed by the Head of Department of the Eastern Cape Department of Health to investigate allegations

of patient abuse in Tower Psychiatric Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre, with the investigative report delivered to Minister of Health in 2018.

Author and co-author of numerous publications, including “First-episode psychosis and substance use” (authors: Thungana and Zingela (supervisor) and van Wyk (co-supervisor)), *South African Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 24 (2018); “Personality and personality disorder” (co-authors: Nagdee, Grobler and Zingela), chapter in *Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry for Southern Africa* (J. Burns and L. Roos, eds.), 2nd ed., 2016).

Member of the steering committee for the establishment of rehabilitation for substance abuse (Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre) (2012–2015); consultant, consultation committee on the implementation of the Prevention of and Treatment of Substance Abuse Act. Advised, on a voluntary basis, the Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre on implementation of the Prevention of and Treatment of Substance Abuse Act and support for starting the rehabilitation programme (2015); established a mental health outreach programme for the Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre offering assessment and interventions (since 2016); facilitated support from the Department of Health to the local drug action committee through the allocation of a multidisciplinary staff member (clinical psychologist) to serve on the committee (2014–2016).

Fifteenth Biannual National Congress of the South African Society of Psychiatrists, 2018 (presented a paper on first episode psychosis and substance abuse (authors: Thungana, Zingela and van Wyk)); substance abuse assessment and intervention: provincial training organized by Walter Sisulu University and Eastern Cape Department of Health, 2017; Seventh African Population Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2015 (presented a paper on school-based substance abuse awareness programmes (authors: Zingela, Bronkhorst and Ngwetsheni) and a paper on the integration of the South African Master Drug Plan Policy and Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan (author: Zingela)); National Substance Abuse Colloquium, 2015 (chaired and presented a paper on aftercare, outpatient and maintenance services for substance abuse); Substance Abuse Colloquium, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in preparation for the opening of the Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre, 2015 (organizer).

Member of INCB (since 2020). Second Vice-President and Chair (2023), Vice-Chair (2021) and member (2020) of the Standing Committee on Estimates. First Vice-President of the Board (2022). Rapporteur (2024).

Annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board

The international drug control treaties require INCB to prepare an annual report on its work. The annual report contains an analysis of the drug control situation worldwide so that Governments are kept aware of existing and potential situations that may endanger the objectives of the international drug control treaties. INCB draws the attention of Governments to gaps and weaknesses in national control and in treaty compliance; it also makes suggestions and recommendations for improvements at both the national and international levels. The annual report is based on information provided by Governments to INCB, United Nations entities and other organizations. It also uses information provided through other international organizations, such as INTERPOL and WCO, as well as regional organizations.

The annual report of INCB is supplemented by detailed technical reports. They contain data on the licit movement of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances required for medical and scientific purposes, together with an analysis of those data by INCB. Those data are required for the proper functioning of the system of control over the licit movement of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, including preventing their diversion to illicit channels. Moreover, under the provisions of article 12 of the 1988 Convention, INCB reports annually to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the implementation of that article. That report, which gives an account of the results of the monitoring of precursors and of the chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, is also published as a supplement to the annual report.

Since 1992, the first chapter of the annual report has been devoted to a specific drug control issue on which INCB presents its conclusions and recommendations in order to contribute to policy-related discussions and decisions in national, regional and international drug control. The following topics were covered in past annual reports:

- 1992: Legalization of the non-medical use of drugs
- 1993: The importance of demand reduction
- 1994: Evaluation of the effectiveness of the international drug control treaties
- 1995: Giving more priority to combating money-laundering
- 1996: Drug abuse and the criminal justice system
- 1997: Preventing drug abuse in an environment of illicit drug promotion
- 1998: International control of drugs: past, present and future
- 1999: Freedom from pain and suffering
- 2000: Overconsumption of internationally controlled drugs
- 2001: Globalization and new technologies: challenges to drug law enforcement in the twenty-first century
- 2002: Illicit drugs and economic development
- 2003: Drugs, crime and violence: the micro-level impact
- 2004: Integration of supply and demand reduction strategies: moving beyond a balanced approach
- 2005: Alternative development and legitimate livelihoods
- 2006: Internationally controlled drugs and the unregulated market
- 2007: The principle of proportionality and drug-related offences
- 2008: The international drug control conventions: history, achievements and challenges
- 2009: Primary prevention of drug abuse
- 2010: Drugs and corruption
- 2011: Social cohesion, social disorganization and illegal drugs
- 2012: Shared responsibility in international drug control
- 2013: Economic consequences of drug abuse
- 2014: Implementation of a comprehensive, integrated and balanced approach to addressing the world drug problem

- 2015: The health and welfare of mankind: challenges and opportunities for the international control of drugs
- 2016: Women and drugs
- 2017: Treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration for drug use disorders: essential components of drug demand reduction
- 2018: Cannabis and cannabinoids for medical, scientific and “recreational” use: risks and benefits
- 2019: Improving substance use prevention and treatment services for young people
- 2020: A hidden epidemic: the use of drugs among older persons
- 2021: Illicit financial flows related to drug trafficking and their impact on development and security
- 2022: Analysis of the trend to legalize the non-medical use of cannabis
- 2023: The role of the Internet, including social media, in drug trafficking and use

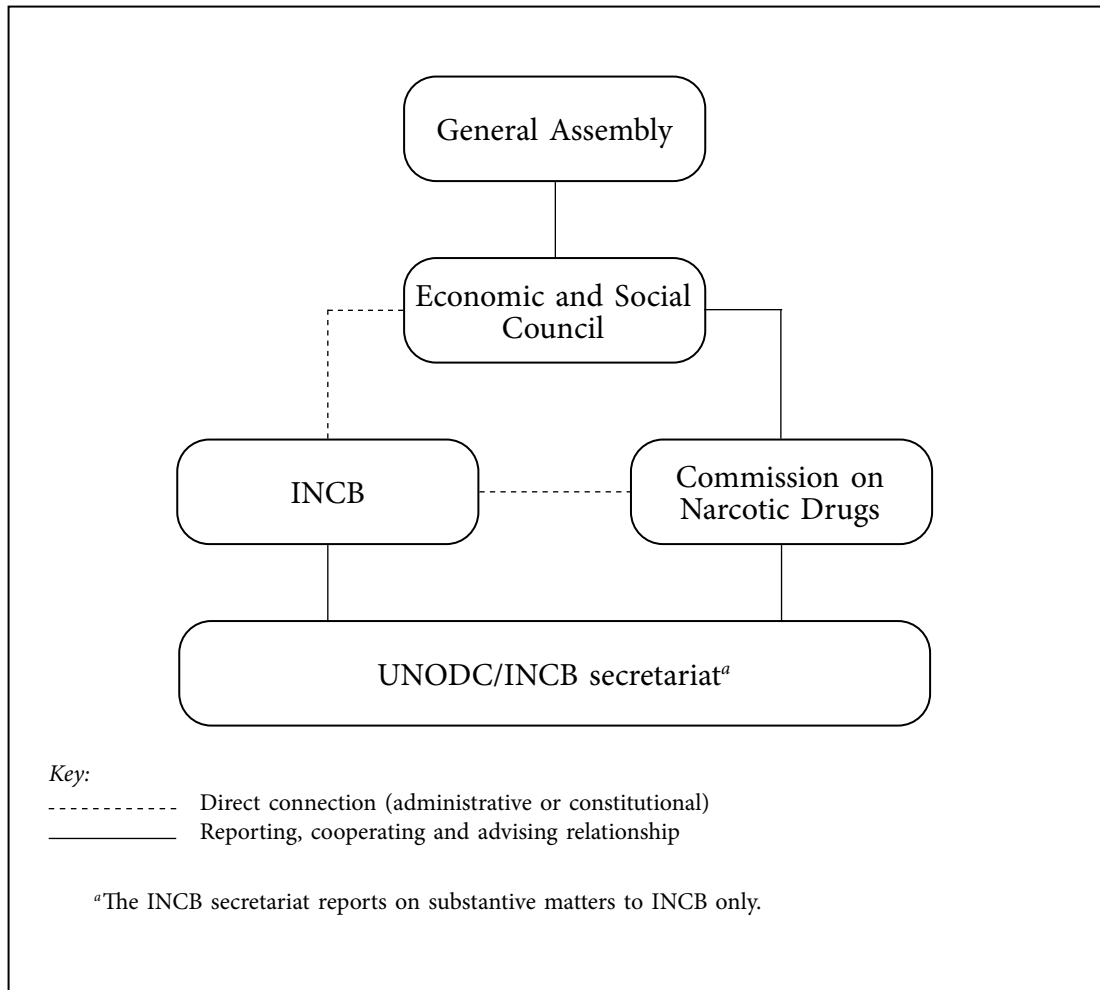
Chapter I of the report of the Board for 2024 is entitled “Scenarios and possible responses to the rapid expansion of synthetic drug manufacture, marketing and consumption”.

Chapter II presents an analysis of the operation of the international drug control system based primarily on information that Governments are required to submit directly to INCB in accordance with the international drug control treaties. Its focus is on the worldwide control of all licit activities related to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of such drugs.

Chapter III presents selected global issues and some of the major developments in drug use and trafficking and measures by Governments to implement the international drug control treaties by addressing those problems.

Chapter IV presents the main recommendations addressed by INCB to Governments, UNODC, WHO and other relevant international and regional organizations, in addition to standing recommendations highlighted in chapters II and III.

United Nations system and drug control organs and their secretariat





INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is the independent monitoring body for the implementation of United Nations international drug control conventions. It was established in 1968 in accordance with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961. It had predecessors under the former drug control treaties as far back as the time of the League of Nations.

Based on its activities, INCB publishes an annual report that is submitted to the United Nations Economic and Social Council through the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The report provides a comprehensive survey of the drug control situation in various parts of the world. As an impartial body, INCB tries to identify and predict dangerous trends and suggests necessary measures to be taken.

