



INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD



# Report 2023

## Press material

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CAUTION





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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Natural disasters and emergencies related to climate change and conflict resulted in acute humanitarian needs for medicines containing internationally controlled substances in 2023. The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has been urging Governments to ensure unimpeded international availability of these medicines, through the use of simplified control procedures in such situations.

The INCB 2023 annual report presents an analysis of the global availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes, showing persistent regional disparities in the consumption of opioid analgesics for pain treatment. This is due in part to countries not accurately estimating their medical requirements for these substances, many of which are essential medicines. Levels of consumption of affordable morphine in regions other than Europe and North America are insufficient to address medical needs. INCB is supporting Member States in improving their estimates and thus improving the availability of controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes through the [INCB Learning programme](#).

Regarding illicit drug supply, illicit opium poppy cultivation and heroin production in Afghanistan declined dramatically. Alternative livelihoods need to be secured as affected farmers may not have other sources of income. Developments in global illicit markets will need to be closely followed, particularly the grave health threat posed by potential substitution of heroin with highly potent synthetic opioids.

INCB has been focusing on tackling trafficking in synthetic drugs and their precursors. To address this global threat to public health, INCB has rolled out new initiatives within the INCB precursor control and Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) programmes. These are aimed at preventing chemicals and equipment being diverted for illicit drug manufacture, and at supporting public-private partnerships to prevent the chemical industry and Internet-based and postal/courier services being exploited for trafficking in new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids. Further details on recent trends and initiatives concerning precursor chemicals are contained in the 2023 Precursors Report.

The thematic chapter of the 2023 Annual Report explores the role of the Internet, including social media, in drug trafficking and use. It highlights difficulties faced in addressing online drug trafficking due to encryption technologies and jurisdictional issues, as well as exploitation of legitimate e-commerce platforms. INCB is concerned about the increasing use of social media platforms to market drugs, including to children, and at the same time draws attention to the opportunities offered by social media and the Internet for prevention, awareness-raising and improving access to treatment services. Recommended action for Governments includes engagement with the private sector and INCB operational activities, which are enabling authorities worldwide to share information in real time to prevent highly potent substances from reaching the public.





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Safeguarding health and welfare is the overarching concern of the international drug control treaties. The report reviews the functioning of the international drug control system, including INCB support to Member States to improve treaty implementation and promote health and well-being.

INCB resumed its country missions in the past year, and the Board was pleased to work with the Governments of Canada, Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan, the United States and Uruguay, and to meet with representatives of civil society in those countries. INCB looks forward to continuing this dialogue with Member States, including during the Commission on Narcotic Drugs midterm review of implementation of drug policy commitments, to be conducted in March 2024, and in progressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With 2023 being the midpoint to implement the Goals and the 2030 Agenda, insufficient progress has been made towards SDG 3 on health and well-being. INCB urges Governments and international and regional organizations to implement the recommendations set out in the 2023 annual report. It encourages civil society organizations to integrate these recommendations in their work. Every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of health. To make the health and well-being of all a reality, Governments, supported by the international community and civil society, need to translate their political will and policy commitments into concrete action.

**Jallal Toufiq**

President

International Narcotics Control Board



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## **THE INTERNET POSES CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DRUG CONTROL, PREVENTION AND TREATMENT, SAYS THE INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD**

The international community faces both challenges and opportunities for drug control, prevention and treatment in the era of the Internet, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) says in its 2023 Annual Report. The evolving landscape of online drug trafficking presents new challenges. Yet there are also opportunities to use online platforms to prevent non-medical use of drugs, raise awareness about the harms of drug use and support public health initiatives.

The Internet and especially social media have increased the availability of drugs on the illicit market, and criminal groups are exploiting online platforms for drug trafficking. The online presence of fentanyl and synthetic opioids raises serious concerns due to their high potency and the risk of overdose deaths.

Law enforcement authorities face a daunting task monitoring and prosecuting online drug activities due to encryption technologies and innovations. Offenders also exploit loopholes and differences in national regulations.

INCB is at the forefront of efforts to foster cooperation between Governments and online industries to deal with the misuse of legitimate e-commerce platforms for drug trafficking.

Training and information provided by INCB initiatives such as the GRIDS Programme, IONICS and Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS) on suspicious Internet posts have resulted in seizures of drugs and precursors and the dismantling of criminal networks.

### **Drug control treaties still relevant in the Internet age**

Two of the three drug control treaties were adopted before the advent of the Internet and the third before major changes in information and communication technologies became global in reach. The Internet provides opportunities to support the aims of the conventions but also to undermine them.

As early as 2000, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs adopted a resolution on the misuse of the World Wide Web by the illicit drug trade. In 2009 INCB published guidelines for Governments on preventing the illegal sale of internationally controlled substances through the Internet.

The role of the Internet in drug trafficking and in the sourcing of precursor chemicals and equipment for illicit drug manufacture has not yet dramatically changed drug supply chains but it is evolving and could expand further in the future. International cooperation is vital to tackle this growing trend.

### **Opportunities offered by the Internet to prevent non-medical drug use**

Telemedicine and Internet pharmacies illustrate the duality of challenges and opportunities. They both hold great potential for improving access to health care but simultaneously enable illegitimate actors to hide among legitimate providers.

Telemedicine, a fast-growing way of delivering health care, can help reach patients with drug use disorders and there is great potential for the online delivery of drug treatment services.





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Online discussion forums on drug-related topics are used by people to share tips and dosing advice. While this knowledge-sharing can strengthen efforts to reduce the adverse consequences of drug use, it is unlikely to reach the most vulnerable people who use drugs.

Drug checking services, which analyse samples, can communicate warnings using the Internet, reaching more people, when drugs are found to be adulterated with dangerous substances or have unusually high potency. This information can save lives.

However, instructions on how to manufacture drugs can also be shared online. People have posted how to extract precursors for methamphetamine production from processed products that are legal to acquire.

## Challenges to drug control posed by the Internet

Drug traffickers can reach a large global audience by exploiting social media and other online platforms to advertise their products. The sheer scale of communications on these platforms makes it exceedingly difficult for regulatory authorities to monitor, even if the communication leaves digital traces.

It is complicated to take legal action and prosecute trafficking offences conducted online. Offenders can move their activities to territories with less intensive law enforcement action and lighter criminal sanctions or base themselves in countries where they can evade extradition.

Law enforcement agencies have successfully applied novel investigative measures such as setting up fake online advertisements for precursors or non-scheduled chemicals and the use of sting operations to gather information on both prospective buyers and sellers of related chemicals.

Organized criminal groups in Europe have exploited Internet-based technologies to traffic drugs, using modified smartphones, “cryptophones” with enhanced encryption methods. They believed they were communicating confidentially, but law enforcement authorities managed to decrypt their conversations and arrested several high-value targets beginning in 2021. In France alone, the National Gendarmerie collected over 120 million text messages from 60,000 mobile phones, with data tracing back to more than 100 countries.

## Cryptomarkets

Cryptomarkets are online darknet marketplaces located on the Deep Web which allow people to browse the Internet anonymously and use encryption to mask emails and cryptocurrencies for payment. In 2021 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) suggested that the total value of the drug trade on cryptomarkets was around 315 million USD annually.

Buyers have reported that they use these markets because they provide access to drugs with a more predictable quality. Both buyers and sellers perceive the transactions as less risky than street-level exchanges in terms of rip-offs, physical violence and threats. Cryptomarkets mostly serve national markets and buyers can pick up the drugs without ever meeting the seller.

Despite several highly publicized arrests of administrators of cryptomarkets, they have proved resilient, albeit volatile.





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## Increased local availability through social media

Various conventional social media platforms are being used as local marketplaces by small-time dealers for selling illicit drugs and uncontrolled substances. But it is not known exactly how widespread this is, or in which countries it occurs most. What is clear is that this inappropriate content promoting drug use is widely accessible to children and adolescents.

The process of using social media to procure drugs can start with the buyers searching drug-related hashtags or following profiles that advertise drug sales. Using messaging apps with end-to-end encryption and temporary message capabilities, where the communication is deleted after a period, or virtual private networks, sellers can connect quickly and easily with local buyers and sometimes even offer home delivery of the illicit drugs.

This increasingly localized distribution in combination with rapid availability may prove to be more transformative in the longer run than other Internet-driven illicit drug supply models.

## Legitimate e-commerce platforms

In the last few years, INCB global projects have promoted voluntary cooperation between Governments and e-commerce companies to prevent the misuse of their services for the illicit marketing of precursors, new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids. These projects monitor the posting of offers by suspicious vendors and purchase requests by potential buyers on major legitimate e-commerce marketplaces.

By supporting Government cooperation with private sector representatives, the INCB GRIDS programme has created two sets of guiding documents with practical recommendations and easy-to-follow checklists to prevent the online targeting of the most vulnerable industries for trafficking in dangerous substances. The manufacturing, marketing, movement and monetization (4M) industries along with Internet-related services are considered vulnerable to such exploitation.

Practical results include arrests and seizures of high-dosage tramadol and ketamine hydrochloride offered for sale on a major e-commerce platform in a country in Africa. In Latin America multiple suspicious listings of a non-scheduled plant-based substance, kratom, were identified by a major e-commerce company, which led to the identification and arrest of the online seller. Such investigations are resource-intensive and in many cases, the contacted platforms simply delete such listings, usually within 24 hours.

## Internet pharmacies

Prescription drugs are a commonly searched health topic on the Internet and the global trade in illicit pharmaceuticals is estimated to be worth 4.4 billion USD. A further simple online search for pharmacy, 'pharma' or 'pharm' can lead to Internet pharmacy websites advertising drugs for sale. Such sites, which are mostly illegal, offer to sell substances that require prescriptions as well as illicit drugs.





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Illicit Internet pharmacies threaten global patient safety by selling drugs of unconfirmed origins without a prescription directly to the consumer. Recent studies indicate two thirds of countries worldwide do not have laws that explicitly regulate Internet sales of medicinal products.

There is nothing to ensure the quality of products purchased online. It is impossible for consumers to assess whether drugs purchased from Internet pharmacies are counterfeit, unapproved or even illegal. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that half of medicines purchased from illegal sites are counterfeit.

## Recommendations

The Board encourages Governments to use the full range of INCB tools and programmes to assist in their efforts to counter Internet-related illicit drug trafficking. To prevent substance misuse among young people in particular, the Board suggests that Governments conduct drug misuse prevention campaigns, using social media.

The global nature of online drug distribution makes collaborative efforts increasingly important for identifying new threats and developing effective responses. The Board calls for increased cooperation between international organizations, national Governments, regulatory authorities and private companies working in the relevant sectors to meet these evolving challenges.







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## INCB DATA CONFIRM PERSISTENT INEQUITIES IN USE OF OPIOID-BASED MEDICINES FOR PAIN TREATMENT

Data reported to INCB confirm the persistent disparities between regions in the consumption of the main opioid analgesics for pain treatment (codeine, dextropropoxyphene, dihydrocodeine, fentanyl, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, ketobemidone, morphine, oxycodone, pethidine, tilidine and tramadol). Almost all such consumption is concentrated in Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Consumption levels in other regions are often insufficient to meet the medical needs of the population.

### Regional imbalances not a result of shortages of raw materials

These regional imbalances are not due to a shortage of opiate raw materials. Supply is more than sufficient to satisfy the demand reported to INCB by Governments, but INCB finds that the estimated requirements of a large number of countries may not accurately reflect the actual medical needs of their populations.

For comparison purposes, INCB uses an indicator, regional S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, calculated on the basis of the total population of the countries reporting consumption and the overall amounts of opioid analgesics reported as consumed. In 2022, the reported consumption in some countries in North America, Oceania and Western and Central Europe resulted in regional averages of 15,467 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> for North America, 9,720 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> for Western and Central Europe and 5,327 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> for Oceania. North America remains the region with the highest consumption of opioids for pain management in the world. In comparison, average consumption levels in East and South-East Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, Africa and South Asia were less than 220 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>.

### Inadequate levels of consumption of opioid analgesics in East and South-East Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, Africa and South Asia

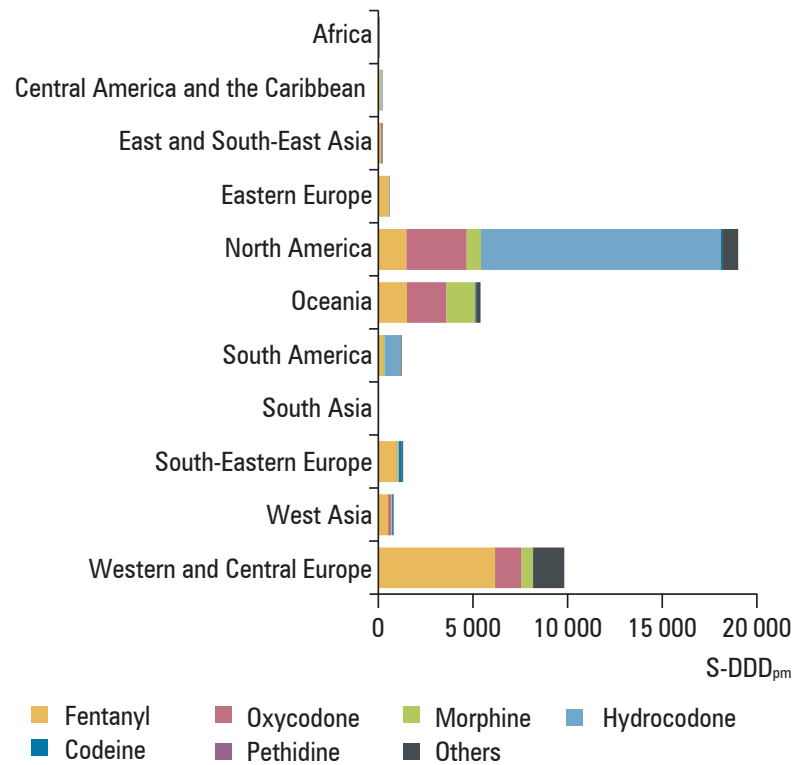
INCB considers levels of consumption of opioid analgesics in quantities between 100 and 200 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> to be inadequate, and in quantities of less than 100 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> to be very inadequate. In this context, the average levels of consumption reported in 2022 in East and South-East Asia (217 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Central America and the Caribbean (170 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Africa (62 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and South Asia (16 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) are of particular concern.

INCB stresses that there is an urgent need to increase the availability of and access to opioid analgesics and to improve their prescription and use, especially in countries reporting inadequate and very inadequate levels of consumption. INCB calls for targeted public policies supported by Governments, health systems and health professionals, civil society, the pharmaceutical industry and the international community.



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## Consumption of codeine,<sup>a</sup> fentanyl, hydrocodone, morphine, oxycodone, pethidine and other opioids, all regions, expressed in S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, 2022



<sup>a</sup> Only codeine used directly for pain relief is considered. Codeine used for preparations included in Schedule III is excluded.

### Limited data on consumption of psychotropic substances hinder the ability to assess availability of medicines containing these substances

There are limited data available on the consumption of internationally controlled psychotropic substances, used in the treatment of mental health and neurological conditions. This makes it difficult to determine the levels of availability in some regions of the world. Where data are available, levels of consumption have fluctuated among countries and for different substances. For example, reported consumption of methylphenidate increased in 2022 in a number of countries. In contrast, the reported consumption of diazepam and phenobarbital decreased, with fewer countries providing data in 2022. Reported consumption of zolpidem is highest in Europe in 2022, although there are notable spikes in consumption in some countries in South America.

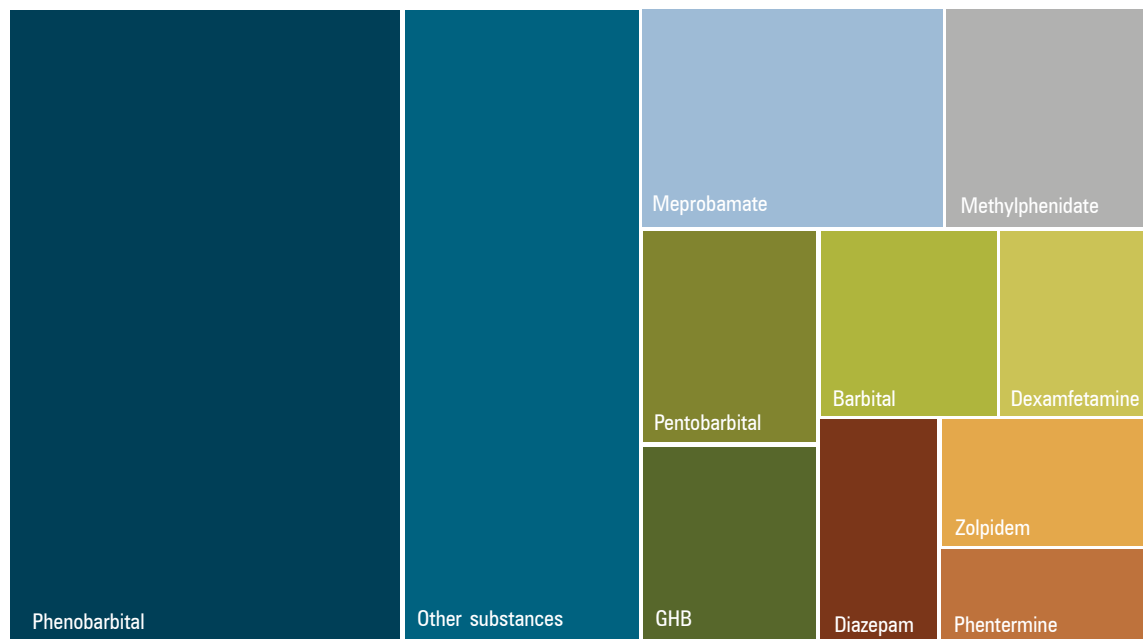
In terms of manufacture, as has been the case for several years, 10 psychotropic substances accounted for 80 per cent of all global manufacture of internationally controlled psychotropic substances by gross weight in 2022. Phenobarbital alone accounted for approximately 35 per cent of all global manufacture,



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at 364 tons. Of the 1,049.3 tons of internationally controlled psychotropic substances manufactured in 2022, 863.8 tons were sedatives, 160.3 tons were stimulants, and 25.2 tons comprised hallucinogens, analgesics and other substances.

### Shares of manufacture of major internationally controlled psychotropic substances by gross weight, 2022



Overall trade in internationally controlled psychotropic substances in 2022 remained at levels similar to previous years, with diazepam, midazolam, phenobarbital, alprazolam and clonazepam being the most widely traded substances, with more than 135 countries and territories reporting imports. However, this information is insufficient to determine whether the quantities traded are sufficient to meet the actual medical needs in these countries.

INCB stresses the need to improve consumption data for psychotropic substances and calls upon Governments to take the necessary steps to enable their respective drug control authorities to collect and provide these data. These data are essential for INCB and the international community to better understand the levels of availability of key psychotropic substances including phenobarbital, diazepam and midazolam in all regions of the world.



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## PRECURSORS REPORT

### Two series of closely related chemicals recommended for international control

INCB assessed and recommended the international control of 16 amphetamine-type stimulant precursors representing two groups of closely related chemicals. Putting into practice resolution 65/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the first-of-its-kind scheduling proposal aims to prevent illicit drug manufacturers from replacing certain controlled chemicals with closely related substitutes. The Report on Precursors for 2023 includes some of the data that the INCB gathered before deciding to recommend these two groups of substances for scheduling. Sources for these data included an international intelligence-gathering exercise codenamed “Operation Backup”, as well as legislative examples from countries that are already controlling closely related substances at the national level.

### Fentanyl precursors: developments in international control and seizure trends

Following a request made by the United States, the Board also assessed and decided to recommend the international control of two fentanyl precursors, 4-piperidone and 1-boc-4-piperidone. The report also analyses the latest available data on the international seizures of fentanyl precursors, reflecting a surge of non-controlled fentanyl precursors in North America in 2023.

*In March 2024, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs will vote on placing all 18 substances (16 amphetamine-type precursors and 2 fentanyl precursors) under international control, through placement in Table I of the 1988 Convention.*

### Measures against diversion of chemicals and equipment

An increasingly broad range of industries need to be sensitized against the possibility of being targeted by traffickers for the diversion of chemicals and equipment that could be used in the illicit manufacture of drugs. INCB is therefore encouraging Governments to analyse their national industry landscapes to enhance knowledge about relevant industries. In its Precursors Report, INCB further recommends that national authorities use PEN Online Light, a platform that enables the voluntary exchange of information on the export of non-scheduled chemicals.

### Conflict zones, free-trade zones, and political changes

This year’s report presents examples of challenges in precursor control due to political developments or the status of various countries and territories around the world. For instance, it describes data gaps on methamphetamine precursors in Afghanistan, as well as the lack of audits and inspections in certain free-trade zones. In the report, INCB recommends several actions to address these challenges.

### Cocaine extraction continues to be reported outside South America

Notable seizures of cocaine precursors outside South America reflect the existence of extraction laboratories of significant scale in Europe, and a trend towards greater sophistication and process optimization.





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## REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

### Africa

**Availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical use in Africa remains a concern.** INCB reiterates the importance of improving the availability of and access to internationally scheduled substances for medical purposes.

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

**Trafficking in and misuse of tramadol are a growing concern in some African countries.** Tramadol is a synthetic opioid not under international control.

**Governments in Africa are making progress in addressing substance use disorders.** Assessing the extent of drug misuse and accurately estimating the number of people receiving treatment on the continent remains a challenge.

### Americas

#### Central America and the Caribbean

**The Central America and Caribbean region suffers from a high level of armed violence and insecurity.** This is often linked to the activities of drug cartels and street gangs and violent competition between them.

**Development of evidence-based drug control policies may be hampered by the lack of recent surveys on the extent of drug use in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean.** In addition, national drug control plans in a number of countries in the region may no longer be up to date.

**Countries in Central America and the Caribbean are increasingly being used for cocaine trafficking to Europe.** Drug trafficking is increasingly linked to trafficking in firearms and represents a major challenge to stability and security in the region.

#### North America

**The opioid crisis continued to have serious consequences in North America.** An increasing number of opioid-related deaths involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, often mixed with other synthetic drugs.

**The United States launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats.** The initiative is aimed at preventing illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs, at detecting emerging drug trends and drug use patterns, and responding to public health impacts.

**Mexico continues to experience high levels of violence, particularly homicides.** This is mostly a result of illicit drug-related activity of cartels and criminal gangs.





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## South America

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

**Record levels of illicit coca bush cultivation were recorded in Colombia and Peru.** The area under cultivation in Colombia rose by 13 per cent to a second consecutive record high of 230,000 hectares. A record area of 95,008 hectares of illicit coca bush cultivation was reported in Peru for 2022, representing an 18 per cent increase compared with 2021; this took place most notably in the Peruvian Amazon.

**The area under illicit coca bush cultivation in the Plurinational State of Bolivia decreased by 2 per cent,** from 30,500 hectares in 2021 to 29,900 hectares in 2022. Sixty-one per cent of the area cultivated was in the Los Yungas de La Paz.

**The Plurinational State of Bolivia requested a review of the control status of coca leaf.** The United Nations Secretary-General received a request from the Plurinational State of Bolivia to activate the process for a critical review of the current classification of coca leaf as a narcotic drug in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended.

## Asia

### East and South-East Asia

**Illicit opium poppy cultivation and methamphetamine manufacture are among the most significant drug challenges facing East and South-East Asia.**

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

**Several countries and territories in East and South-East Asia have introduced regulatory changes related to cannabis.**

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

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





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## South Asia

**South Asia appears to be increasingly targeted for the trafficking of methamphetamine illicitly manufactured in Afghanistan to Europe and Oceania.**

**Proceeds of drug trafficking are being used to fund terrorism, provide support to armed groups and fuel political violence in South Asia.** This has been shown by investigations in the region. Instances of joint trafficking of drugs and weapons have been reported.

**An estimated 1.1 per cent of people aged 16 to 64 in South Asia use opiates.** This prevalence is almost double the estimated global average (0.6 per cent).

**South Asia continues to be the region with the lowest levels of consumption of medically prescribed opioid analgesics worldwide.**

## West Asia

**The 2023 opium harvest in Afghanistan declined significantly due to a reduction in opium poppy cultivation.** This followed the strict application of a ban on illicit drug cultivation announced by the country's de facto authorities in April 2022. Support needs to be provided for alternative development solutions as affected farmers in Afghanistan may not have alternative sources of income.

**Methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan has been increasingly reaching global markets.** Methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan now reaches markets in South-West Asia, East and South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, Africa, Europe and Oceania. Methamphetamine use increased in South-West Asia.

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

**Trafficking in and use of falsified “captagon” continues to seriously affect the Middle East.** This challenge is further exacerbated by political instability and ongoing conflicts in some parts of the subregion.

## Europe

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

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

**The non-medical use of ketamine has increased in several European countries, leading to an increase in the number of people seeking treatment.** There is a need for close monitoring of ketamine and continued international collaboration to counter its illicit distribution.

**In 2021, States members of the European Union encountered an alarming escalation in illicit drug trafficking and interdictions.** The aggregate seizures of cocaine soared to an unprecedented level, totalling 303 tons.





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## Oceania

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

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

**Availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes is insufficient in some countries of the region.** INCB emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, and calls for the non-parties to the international drug control conventions – which are concentrated in Oceania – to take steps towards accession and full implementation of the treaties.







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## INCB INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT MEMBER STATES

### INCB Learning

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, scientific and industrial purposes, in compliance with the three international drug control treaties, with the aim of promoting adequate availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their misuse. The initiative includes five e-modules for online learning (in English, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as Portuguese) as well as virtual and in-person training and seminars.

In 2023, INCB Learning conducted in-person training for 34 officials from six countries in Central America and the Caribbean and virtual training for officials from seven Russian-speaking countries.

As of 1 November 2023, 1,462 officials from 154 countries and territories have enrolled in INCB Learning e-modules, and more than half (54 per cent) were women. The Board encourages Governments to register officials from their competent national authorities for the e-modules.

### INCB global rapid interdiction of dangerous substances (GRIDS) programme

The INCB GRIDS Programme focal point networks form the robust infrastructure that enables the rapid exchange of information and alerts, and the development of intelligence which facilitates operational action to assist in investigations, including the dismantling of organized criminal groups trafficking non-scheduled dangerous substances, such as new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids.

As a result of the expanding network of focal points under the programme, the number of real-time incidents communicated through the INCB IONICS platform exceeded 77,000 in 2023. This has supported Governments in carrying out investigations and analyses that led to seizures of dangerous substances, arrests of traffickers, prosecutions and disruptions of international trafficking networks.

In 2022 and 2023, INCB conducted Operation Knockout to identify global trafficking sources and destinations of shipments of 1,4-butanediol, carisoprodol, flubromazepam, gamma-butyrolactone and ketamine, substances associated with drug-facilitated sexual assault reported in a number of countries. The operation involved 160 law and regulatory enforcement officials from 76 national agencies and organizations and six international partners. This led to 671 seizures, amounting to more than 785 kg and 225 litres of drugs seized during the operational period.

Over the past year, the INCB GRIDS Programme convened 26 training events for more than 500 front-line officers. The training was led by regional technical officers based in Egypt, India, Mexico, Nigeria and Thailand and focused on the safe handling and seizure of opioids, and information exchanges using the IONICS and GRIDS platforms.





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In the past year, five global alerts and special notices were issued under the GRIDS Programme for voluntary action by law and regulatory authorities and their private sector counterparts. This included an alert relating to emerging trafficking in tianeptine – a substance with opioid-like effects – and trafficking in bromazolam and flunitrazolam, both emerging novel triazolobenzodiazepines with no known legitimate use.

## INCB precursor control programme

### Understanding national landscapes of precursor-related industries to prevent the proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals

Building on the Board's tools and resources, INCB cooperates with Governments to enhance knowledge about national precursor industry landscapes, in particular industries that are not yet licensed or otherwise regulated under national precursor laws but that deal in chemicals that might also be used in illicit drug manufacture as alternatives to controlled precursors.

### Operation Insight reveals practices in free-trade zones

Free-trade zones promote trade and industry through simplified and reduced taxation. However, they are also vulnerable to trafficking in drugs and precursor chemicals. Operation Insight, conducted jointly with the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme, helped to advance knowledge regarding free-trade zones and raise awareness among Governments about the need for proper oversight over them, in accordance with the requirement of Art. 18 of the 1988 Convention. The operation provided evidence of the vulnerability of free-trade zones to be exploited for precursor trafficking. Notably, a seizure of a significant quantity of pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine was reported during 2022, linked to one such zone.







## INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is the independent monitoring body for the implementation of the 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.