The year 2023 marks the midpoint of the work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The global drug phenomenon continues to challenge both the implementation of SDG targets and efforts to promote peace, security and human rights.

**2023 WORLD DRUG REPORT: KEY MESSAGES**

World drug-related challenges are hindering SDG progress across all areas, from peace and justice to health and human rights, and the environment and equality.

Prevention and access to evidence-informed treatment and HIV and Hepatitis services must be stepped up; otherwise, drug-related challenges will leave more people behind.

Law enforcement responses need to keep pace with astonishingly agile criminal business models, as well as the proliferation of synthetic drugs, which are cheap and easy to bring to market.

Public health must remain the priority in the context of rapidly developing drug control regulation, in particular in relation to medical use, and countries must invest more in research to monitor the effects of policy and inform responses.
**KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE**

### DRUG USE

- **People who use drugs, 2021**: 296 million people
  - 25% opiates
  - 30% cannabis
  - 45% amphetamines
  - 27% cocaine
- **Women among people who use drugs, 2021**: 23% over 10 years
- **People who inject drugs, 2021**: 13.2 million people who inject drugs
  - 6.6 million living with hepatitis C
  - 1.6 million living with HIV
  - 1.4 million living with HIV and hepatitis C
- **People with drug use disorders, 2021**: 39.5 million people
  - 45% over 10 years

### DRUG TREATMENT

- **Women in treatment, 2021**: 219 cannabis, 60 opioids (of which 32 opiates), 36 amphetamines, 22 cocaine, 20 "ecstasy"
- **People under 25 years old in treatment, 2021**: 25% in Oceania, 34% in America, 37% in Europe
- **Primary drug of people in treatment, 2021**: 52% cannabis, 27% amphetamine-type stimulants, 10% opioids, 6% cocaine

### DRUG TREATMENT BY CONTINENT

- **South America**: 17% Oceania, 34% America
- **Central America and the Caribbean**: 37% Oceania, 34% America
- **Eastern and South-Eastern Europe**: 34% Oceania, 34% America
- **Australia and New Zealand**: 27% Oceania, 34% America
- **Africa**: 9% Oceania, 37% America
- **North America**: 16% Oceania, 34% America
- **Western and Central Europe**: 14% Oceania, 34% America

### DRUG TREATMENT BY DISEASE

- **People living with hepatitis C**: 5% in Oceania, 17% in America, 42% in Europe
- **People living with HIV**: 9% in Oceania, 17% in America, 42% in Europe
- **People living with HIV and hepatitis C**: 2% in Oceania, 17% in America, 42% in Europe
**KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE**

### Global cultivation
- **Cultivation**
  - Coca bush: 35% increase between 2020 and 2021.
  - Opium poppy: 28% increase between 2021 and 2022.

### Global production
- **Production**
  - Tons of pure cocaine, 2021: 2,304 (16% increase).
  - Tons of opium, 2022: 7,800 (3% decrease).

### Trends in quantity of drugs seized
- **Seizures**
- **ATS**
  - 46 tons
  - Change from previous year: +4%.

### NPS on the global market
- **618** NPS on the market in 2021... of which **87** were newly identified NPS.

### Global quantities of drugs seized, 2021
- **Cocaine**
  - 2,026 tons
  - Change from previous year: -2%.

- **Heroin**
  - 112 tons
  - Change from previous year: -6%.

- **Pharmaceutical opioids**
  - 366 tons
  - Change from previous year: -16%.

- **Amphetamine, methamphetamine**
  - 74 tons
  - Change from previous year: +4%.

- **Morphine**
  - 426 tons
  - Change from previous year: +2%.

- **LSD**
  - 82 tons
  - Change from previous year: +1%.

- **Other ATS**
  - 114 tons
  - Change from previous year: +3%.

- **Cannabis herb**
  - 1,316 tons
  - Change from previous year: +5%.

- **Cannabis resin**
  - 1,331 tons
  - Change from previous year: +3%.

- **Opium**
  - 5,226 tons
  - Change from previous year: +9%.

- **Opium poppy**
  - 315,200 ha in 2021.
  - Change from previous year: +3%.

- **Heroin production**
  - 509-739 tons (2022).

- **Opium processed into heroin**
  - 6,077-6,384 tons (2022).

- **Global cultivation**
  - 28% increase between 2021 and 2022.

- **Global production**
  - 2,304 tons of pure cocaine, 2021.
Inequality and social and economic disparities continue to drive and be driven by the drug phenomenon, threatening public health and human rights. Disparities between the global North and South, urban and rural settings, and across subpopulations all contribute to the harms from drugs.

a. Disparities in access to and availability of medicines controlled under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 have remained. In 2021, 86 per cent of the global population lived in countries where availability of pharmaceutical opioids for medical use was below the global target.

b. Drug use disorders and other mental health conditions are closely interconnected: mental health conditions increase the risk of developing drug use disorders, and drug use increases the risk of exacerbating mental health problems if taken outside medical supervision. With an estimated one in eight people globally living with a diagnosed mental health condition, the need to address mental health issues in drug use prevention and treatment has increasingly become a priority.

c. Young people remain the group most vulnerable to using drugs. Globally, in 2021, those aged between 15 and 16 had an annual prevalence of cannabis use of 5.34 per cent, compared with 4.3 per cent for adults. Drug use is also particularly harmful to young people. In some regions, young people are more severely affected by substance use disorder: in Africa, 70 per cent of people receiving drug treatment are below the age of 35.

d. The demand for treating drug-related disorders remains largely unmet and disparities in access persist. Globally, about one in five people with drug use disorders received treatment in 2021, with large disparities across regions and in the type and quality of treatment received. Not all forms of treatment respect human rights and are evidence-based. Women face barriers in accessing drug treatment services: in 2021, 45 per cent of those who usedamphetamine-type stimulants in the past year were women, but only 27 per cent of those in treatment are women. Overall, the lowest proportions of women in drug-related treatment are in Asia and Africa and the highest proportions are in the subregions of Australia and New Zealand as well as in North America.

e. Setbacks to service provision during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic left some without access to treatment or other services. Most countries that reported treatment delivery aggregates to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) before and after the pandemic noted a decline in the number of people in drug treatment between the periods 2018–2019 and 2020–2021, with further declines within the period of 2020 to 2021.

f. Different patterns of drug use and unequal access to services exacerbate inequality in treatment provision. Although innovations in service provision that started during the pandemic appear to have resulted in early benefits, challenges remain due to the digital divide, especially in certain geographical areas and in certain marginalized populations that are hard to reach, including the homeless and injecting drug users. Other marginalized groups, such as those with a history of incarceration, people displaced by humanitarian emergencies and sex workers, face other barriers in accessing services. Moreover, use of drugs by marginalized populations may be more intense, putting them at greater risk to continued harms, relapse and other related health outcomes. For example, injecting drug use in 2020 was associated with a risk of contracting HIV that was 35 times higher than that associated with non-injecting drug use. Women who inject drugs are 1.2 times more likely than men to be living with HIV.

g. Different patterns can also be witnessed between urban and rural settings. For example, in some rural areas illicit drug cultivation and trafficking create opportunities for other crimes, including crimes that affect the environment, and impoverished and vulnerable populations are trapped in a vicious cycle with uncertain access to resources and the rule of law. For example, in the tri-border area between Brazil, Colombia and Peru in the Amazon Basin, drug trafficking organizations increasingly violate the human rights, safety and well-being of rural populations.

Reducing inequalities and the gap in access to treatment and comprehensive services to minimize the adverse public health and social consequences of drug use in a continuum of care for people who use drugs, especially vulnerable and marginalized populations, is critical.

» Large-scale drug-use prevention initiatives that are school- and family- and community-based are needed to reduce the risk of increasing drug use disorders, in particular in view of the current high prevalence level of mental health conditions. Higher socioeconomic groups have shown a greater propensity to initiate drug use than lower socioeconomic groups but it is the lower socioeconomic groups that pay the higher price, as they are more likely to suffer from drug use disorders.

» In order to be effective, the approach to treatment service provision must be voluntary and based on human rights. As the drug phenomenon continues to evolve, Member States will need to redouble efforts to ensure access to quality services that are shown to reduce drug use disorders, both globally and nationally, and across all subpopulations.

» Reducing stigma faced by people who use drugs will make drug-related treatment and interventions more accessible and effective for people who need such services. Gains have been made in reducing the stigma of drug use and barriers in accessing services, which have shown promise in attracting and retaining patients.

THE CONTINUUM OF DRUG-RELATED SERVICES

Measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health and social consequences of drug use

Drugs-related treatment services

Prevention of drug use programmes

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Given the disproportionate levels of harm and the large gap in accessing services experienced by certain populations who use drugs, most intensively, additional effort is needed to design and implement policies and programmes addressing the specific needs of populations. It is important to tailor programmes to individuals experiencing homelessness, sex workers, those suffering from trauma and others who face barriers in accessing services, including people with additional mental health conditions, those currently and formerly incarcerated and women who are pregnant.

The importance of addressing mental health in efforts to prevent as well as treat drug use disorders needs to be given greater priority. Current scientific research and clinical trials involving psychedelics indicate their potential for treating some mental health conditions, but medical supervision is a critical component to ensuring their benefits while limiting harms.

The record high number of displaced persons requires far greater investment in providing drug-use prevention initiatives and drug-related treatment, and services to minimize the adverse public health and social consequences in a continuum of care in humanitarian settings.

Political and financial commitments are needed to scale up interventions that address structural and economic inequalities, harmful sociocultural norms, gender-based inequalities and gender-based violence that drive HIV and hepatitis epidemics among people who use drugs.
Illicit drug economies, converging crimes, displacement and conflict are accelerating environmental devastation and degrading human rights, especially in vulnerable groups.

a. Drug trafficking is compounding criminal threats that harm vulnerable communities by degrading their rights to security and livelihood, as well as the right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as recognized by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/300 of 2022:

» In the Amazon Basin, drug trafficking and production intersect with, and in some cases even finance, illegal or unregulated activities that are environmentally and socially damaging. These include, in some areas of the Amazon, illegal land occupation and cattle grazing, illegal logging, illegal mining, trafficking in wildlife and other crimes that affect the environment.

» Indigenous Peoples and other local communities are caught in the criminal nexus in the Amazon Basin, suffering displacement, mercury poisoning and other severe health impacts, as well as increased exposure to violence and victimization.

b. Drug challenges are posing greater threats in the context of conflict and displacement, coupled with economic slowdown, inflation and other intersecting crises. A record number of more than 100 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide in the first six months of 2022:

» Preventing and treating drug use disorders among displaced persons have become more challenging. Moreover, forcibly displaced populations are among the marginalized groups that suffer physical and psychological trauma and elevated levels of socioeconomic vulnerability, increasing the risk of developing mental health and substance use disorders;

On the supply side, the potential for drug production and trafficking facilitates cycles of instability in conflict-affected areas. The armed conflict in Ukraine has displaced heroin and cocaine routes, but there is an emerging threat of increased manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs. In the Sahel, the illicit drug trade finances non-State armed and insurgency groups through “taxes” in exchange for protection. In Haiti, cocaine and cannabis traffickers take advantage of porous borders, with heavily armed criminal gangs targeting ports, highways and critical infrastructures.

The illicit drug economy accelerates other illegal markets that also harm the environment and human rights:
- Trafficking in wildlife
- Illegal gold mining
- Water pollution
- Illegal logging
- Violence
- Illegal deforestation

Harms to the environment and to remote and vulnerable communities call for more integrated responses to illicit drug economies at the local and national level:

» Protecting fragile environments that are used or exploited by drug traffickers and other criminal actors adds greater complexity and requires integrated efforts to address the drug-related and environmental challenges faced by Member States, in particular those in the Amazon Basin and other States with significant and endangered ecosystems in their territory.

» Tailored, community-level interventions for local and Indigenous communities should protect their rights to health and safety and to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, while addressing their needs and providing sustainable alternatives to the illicit economy.

» Additional resources and strategies are needed to disrupt the cycle of instability and limited rule of law that enable drug traffickers and other criminals to prey on vulnerable populations and regions.

» Fragile and in conflict countries, such as Ukraine and Haiti, require continued monitoring and support to prevent developing or expanding illicit drug economies from contributing to conflict and instability or hampering recovery.
**SYNTHETICS AND INNOVATIONS IN THE SUPPLY OF PLANT-BASED DRUGS**

a. Illegal drug markets are transforming rapidly and, in some regions, radically, with synthetic drugs becoming increasingly dominant. Synthetic drug manufacture is cheap, easy and fast. As synthetic drugs are not tied to geographically fixed crops, using instead a wide array of precursors, supply can be relocated closer to consumer markets, and seized products can be quickly replaced, defeating drug law enforcement efforts:

- Methamphetamine is the world’s dominant illegally manufactured drug, with its global production output including fentanyls.
- North America, with the majority of those involving illegally manufactured fentanyls.
- There were almost 90,000 opioid-involved overdose deaths in 2021, drug overdose among those who use drugs. In 2021, there were about 50 opioid-involved overdose deaths in 2021, at the same time, there has been a notable decline in the number of active buyers and transactions overall.
- Self-reported data from those who use drugs suggest a recent shift towards social media platforms for purchasing drugs, especially for cannabis, cocaine and "ecstasy", but new psychoactive substances are still bought and sold to a greater degree on darknet forums.

b. After several years of relative stability, an increase in the number of seizures and amounts seized involving new psychoactive substances (NPS) of synthetic origin was reported in 2021, increasing by 40 per cent over the previous year to 19 tons. According to preliminary data, 1,184 NPS have now been identified and are being monitored by authorities.

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The continuously shifting strategies and tactics used by criminal groups and traffickers, away from traditional production methods and modes, require law enforcement strategies that are more targeted and strategic.

- Drug trafficking groups are increasingly fragmented, managing only parts of the drug supply chain, and law enforcement operations can be effective only if they target the wider ecosystem of illicit markets rather than single cells or single shipments. This requires sophisticated operational analysis and trust-building within and between national law enforcement agencies in order to share intelligence and ensure smooth and prompt national and international cooperation when required.
- Given the increase in levels of drug trafficking through waterways and maritime routes in containerized shipments, ports continue to be important nodes where drugs are smuggled across borders, warranting more effective control targeting potential chokepoints.
- Continued expansion of synthetic drug manufacture within new regions using new methods demands redefined efforts to monitor changes in drug markets and to respond with more targeted policies aimed at reducing access to precursor chemicals and precursors.
- Drug interdiction may have less and less impact on supply, as criminal groups can replace the seized drugs easily and cheaply. The role of law enforcement authorities in assessing the quality and type of drugs sold in markets therefore becomes increasingly important to better understand the ways in which suppliers are shifting their strategies and the risks faced by those who use drugs.
- Greater focus on access to chemicals, including improving oversight of large industries and efforts to curb corruption, is critical to reducing the supply of the inputs required for the manufacture of synthetic drugs.
New research on the use of controlled drugs in treating mental health conditions shows that such treatments have potential but regulators run the risk of increasing harm if public health is not prioritized over commercial interests.

a. Clinical trials involving psychedelics for the treatment of mental health and substance use disorders are proceeding in some jurisdictions at an unprecedented pace, giving some hope that these compounds could be effective in addressing certain treatment-resistant psychological conditions. However, the rapid pace of developments increases the risk that people, in particular young people, will perceive such substances as being "safe" or not harmful, regardless of the context, which in turn could encourage unsupervised, non-medical use.

b. Prioritizing public health concerns remains a challenge in the face of growing commercial interest in developing and profiting from new, legal drug markets. If frameworks for medical use are not well designed and adequately resourced, ensuring access and availability of the drugs for medical purposes, approaches could contribute to the creation of illicit markets through limited supply or diversion of therapies for non-medical use.

c. Diverse approaches are being taken to regulate the medical use of cannabis. The choices that regulators make when defining a medical market determine the porosity of the market. The types of products allowed in the medical market, who gets to produce for the market and who has access to use cannabis under which medical conditions are important considerations and can shape the size and scope of a medical cannabis regime.

d. Regulatory approaches can be designed to ensure sufficient availability of products with proven safety and efficacy, while at the same time restricting access to legitimate medical needs. Such approaches may also limit potential spill-over into a non-medical or recreational use market.

Thoughtful regulations can help shape the drug landscape to limit diversion, shrink illicit markets, and reduce public health harms when jurisdictions are considering expanding access to psychoactive substances for a growing range of therapies.

» A growing body of evidence points to varied outcomes associated with the nature of regulating the access to cannabis for medical purposes.

» Policies aimed at controlling the type of product sold for specific conditions appear to limit non-medical or recreational access more successfully than those that take into consideration commercial interests.

» As the research involving psychedelics advances, regulations and policies guiding the appropriate use of novel therapies will be important in preventing unintended consequences of unsupervised use or diversion.
While cannabis trafficking and use affect all regions worldwide, other drug issues pose additional threats in different geographical locations.
Fragile and conflict-affected areas are noted by the presence of UN peacekeeping and political missions.
COCAMINT

The Americas and Western and Central Europe

Opioids remain the most lethal group of drugs, directly to drugs (mostly overdoses) of the greatest number of drug use disorder cases globally are cannabis. Cannabis accounts for a substantial share of admissions and 34 per cent of countries reported use of fentanyl, reached unprecedented over the previous decade. In Africa, there have been signs of increases in the use of amphetamine-like substances (NPS) is lower than that of Watkins. Many users of NPS use them unknow-ingly, consuming the substances as part of drug mixtures, the content of which is largely unknown to users.

Cannabis remains the main drug of concern for the global level of opioid use remained stable in 2021, having increased slightly between 2017 and 2019.

A Depressed 31.5 million people used opiates, mainly heroin in 2021, an estimated 31.5 million used opiates, mainly heroin in 2021; having increased since 2017 between 2017 and 2019. About 40 per cent of all people in drug treatment in 2021 cited opioids as their primary drug of use.

Opioids remain the most lethal group of drugs, accounting for two-thirds of deaths related directly to drugs (mostly overdoses) in 2021; having increased since 2017 between 2017 and 2019. About 38 per cent of all people in drug treatment in 2021 cited opioids as their primary drug of use.

The market for "captagon" in the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia, the market for "captagon" in the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia, where trafficking in the substance is expanding beyond this region.

Seizures of plant-based NPS, dominated by kratom and khat, continued to fall in 2021 from 21,000 in 2019.

A total of 44 countries reported seizures of synthetic NPS in 2020 and 2021, up from 36 countries a decade earlier. These seizures were small and most commonly involved ketamine, followed by synthetic cathinones and cannabinoids.

The number of different NPS on the market increased from 555 NPS identified in 2020 to 618 in 2021, of which 87 were identified for the first time.

Control systems have succeeded in containing the spread of NPS in high-income countries but the geographical reach of NPS trafficking continues to expand.

In some subregions, such as Eastern Europe and Central Asia, NPS have become a major problem.

The use of ketamine, which is still among the most used drugs in East and South-East Asia, may be spreading in several subregions; the drug is used both on its own or as part of drug mixtures, the content of which is largely unknown to users.

The gender gap in treatment is particularly acute for women who use ATS, as women account for almost one in two users of amphetamines but only one in four people in treatment for ATS use disorders.

Methamphetamine manufacture and use have continued to spread beyond the traditional markets for the drug, namely East and South-East Asia and North America, most notably into South-West Asia, Europe and Africa.

The increase in the use and manufacture of methamphetamine is growing concern in South-West Asia, where trafficking for the substance is expanding beyond this region.

Cannabis remains the main drug of concern for the global level of use cannabis varies across regions and subregions, from 9 per cent in Asia to 42 per cent in North America (2021).

An estimated 219 million people used cannabis in 2021, representing 1.2 per cent of the global adult population.

The global level of opioid use remained stable in 2021, having increased slightly between 2017 and 2019.

The two epidemics of non-medical use of opioids, one related to fentanyl in North America and the other to the non-medical use of tramadol in North Africa, West Africa, the Near and Middle East and South-East Asia, may be spreading in several subregions; the drug is used both on its own or as part of drug mixtures, the content of which is largely unknown to users.

The prevalence of use and the number of users of amphetamines is highest in North America, with the second largest number of users being in East and South-East Asia.

An estimated 20 million people used "ecstasy"-type substances in 2021, representing 0.4 per cent of the global adult population.

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Use of cannabis is particularly high in West and Central Africa, with a past-year prevalence of use in 2021 of nearly 10 per cent (50 million people) who largely reflect the prevalence of cannabis use in Georgia.

The 2021 estimated prevalence of use of opioids (1.2 per cent) is also high in the subregion. Non-medical use of tramadol remains a threat, in particular, in West and Central Africa.

The majority of opioid users in other parts of Africa are opiate users, mostly of heroin and, in a few countries, morphine. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that seizures of opium continue to occur in the region. However, the most complete data on the use of tramadol are for West Africa. The use of tramadol remains high in Nigeria, Senegal, Benin, and the Cameroons.

Cannabis use appears to be generally occurring across the continent, in particular in West and Southern Africa, driven by the availability of cannabis for use in drug treatment, although related data are scarce

Nevertheless the use of khat, a plant-based NPS, is widespread in East Africa. The use of synthetic NPS is most commonly reported in Southern Africa but data regarding both instances are scarce.

The prevalence of persons who inject drugs in North America remains high, with 3.4 million people (1.3 per cent of the population) estimated to inject drugs in 2021; higher in the Americas than in other regions worldwide.

Within the region, Southern Africa has the highest prevalence of HIV among persons who inject drugs (11.3 per cent) and the highest prevalence of opioid use disorders (10.9 million users) in 2021

Seizure data suggest that laboratories in the region are increasingly focusing their production on cathinones derivatives to supply large consumer markets in countries in the Gulf region. The use of methamphetamine in South-East Asia, with these two subregions accounting for 80 per cent of production, was highest in 2022 in South-West Asia but increased in Western and Central Europe.

The annual prevalence of methamphetamine use in the subregion of Australia and New Zealand remains the highest in the Americas, at 2.6 per cent, are aged 19 or younger

The long-term trend of increasing cannabis use came to a halt in 2020 during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, with global past-year prevalence estimates of cannabis use for the first time in 2020 were being treated for cannabis use.

In Eastern Europe, the NPS market expanded in 2021, likely owing to street drug supply, in particular of cathinones

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For the first time since its conception, this year the World Drug Report presents the latest global, regional and subregional estimates of and trends in drug demand and supply in a user-friendly, interactive online format. The new online segment is designed to both enhance and simplify access to the wealth of information provided in the report by presenting the data in the form of succinct key messages supported by interactive graphs, infographics and maps.

Booklet 1 takes the form of an executive summary that sets out points of special interest and policy implications based on analysis of the key findings of the online segment and the thematic booklet 2 and the conclusions that can be drawn from them.

In addition to providing an in-depth analysis of key developments and emerging trends in selected drug markets, including in countries currently experiencing conflict, booklet 2 focuses on contemporary issues related to drugs. The booklet opens with a look at the challenges posed to law enforcement by synthetic drugs, both in terms of their increasing potency, adaptability and ease of manufacture and their shorter supply chains, reduced risk and lower production costs compared with drugs of natural origin. Other law enforcement challenges are considered in the context of the increasing use of social media for buying and selling drugs online. Booklet 2 also examines approaches to regulating the medical cannabis market in different countries and assesses recent developments surrounding the therapeutic, spiritual and non-medical use of substances known as “psychedelics”. The remainder of the booklet focuses on issues related to drugs in specific contexts, including the Amazon Basin, where the convergence of drug crime and crimes that affect the environment poses a threat to natural and human ecosystems. The risk factors for and vulnerability to substance use disorders among forcibly displaced populations are also discussed in the booklet, and the interim outcomes of innovations and modifications of services for people who use drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic are summarized.

The World Drug Report 2023 is aimed not only at fostering greater international cooperation to counter the impact of the world drug problem on health, governance and security, but also at assisting Member States in anticipating and addressing threats posed by drug markets and mitigating their consequences.