

Part 1: Findings and Possible Response

Organized criminal groups association with armed groups exploiting zones with limited governance

In tri-border areas, the 2024 World Drug Report (WDR) noted groups operating across multiple nations that have seized control of regions with limited governance, such as the Golden triangle in South-East Asia (spanning the frontiers of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos) and the triple frontier in South America (Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina).

In South-East Asia, the Golden Triangle has become the center for the production of opium and synthetic drugs. However, due to conflict in the region the production of opium has decreased creating a shift towards Methamphetamine, online crime and cyber scams.

- Methamphetamine has led the number of seizures in recent years, which quadrupled between 2013 and 2022.

Environmental impact:

The conflict in this area has led to displacement and poverty, forcing communities to resort to illegal cultivation and resource extraction. Increased presence of opium cultivation leads to economic and individual dependency perpetuating a cycle of drug use and exploitation.

Illegal activities in the golden triangle have led to environmental harm through deforestation, toxic waste disposal, and chemical contamination.

- Methamphetamine production alone results in an estimated 1,900-3,800 metric tons of waste.
 - o These chemicals are harmful to the environment, particularly if released in to waterways or burned.

Global Cocaine supply:

Supply reached a record high in 2022, with over 2,700 tons indicating a 20% increase from 2021 and stabilized at 2,000 tons in 2022. After a short hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic, demand for cocaine is rapidly increasing.

North America is the largest cocaine market followed by western and central Europe. Traffic mainly emanates primarily from the Andes to other countries.

Since 2019, over 90% of reporting countries have confiscated cocaine.

Several countries in Asia have reported a drastic increase in demand and seizures of cocaine as traffic expands within domestic markets.

In Oceania, domestic markets show expansion according to data on seizures.

- Increased intensity of use is leading to more hospitalizations and treatment demands, including for crack cocaine.
- Fatalities related to cocaine are also increasing.

Criminal organizations are increasingly using Africa as a transit route for cocaine, methamphetamines and heroin between Latin America and Europe, through the west and north of the continent, causing:

- Spillover on domestic markets leading to the emergence of this harmful drug within the region.
- Increase in people entering drug treatment for cocaine disorders

Treatment:

- Women undergoing treatment are more prone to identifying cocaine as the substance used.
- Heroin continues to lead in bringing the largest number of people to drug treatment in North, East, and certain parts of Asia.
- Approximately 64 million people struggled with drug disorders in 2022, which is a 3% increase over the past 5 years. One in every 18 women who suffer from a drug use disorder actually receive treatment, while for men this figure is more hopeful, with 1 in every 7 receiving treatment.
- Men make up the majority of drug users, while women who use drugs encounter more challenges and experience greater barriers when attempting to access treatment services.

Violence

- Increase in cocaine seizures between 2019 and 2022 in the Southern Cone (Colombia, Peru and Ecuador) has more severely affected Ecuador leading to a deadly wave of violence and a **five-fold** increase in homicides and cocaine seizures in coastal zones primed for trafficking to North America and Europe.
- In the Caribbean an increase in violence was also observed due to competing gangs.
- The disbandment of drug gangs in Central America has led to a decrease in drug trafficking.
- Synthetic drugs can be manufactured globally, with illegal production growing across low-, middle-, and high-income nations. However, significant production remains concentrated in regions facing governance issues and instability, such as Afghanistan, Mexico, Myanmar, and Syria.

The Afghan ban on opium production in 2022 led to:

- Decrease production in Afghanistan by 95%
- Increase in Myanmar by 36%
- Global opium fell 74% in 2023
- Increased heroin prices
- Farmer 92% drop in income from opium (from \$1,360million to \$110 million harvest from 2022 to 2023), worsening an already precarious socioeconomic situation.

Expected Impacts due to opium shortage:

- Decline in purity of opiates
- Increased demand for opiate treatment services.
- User switch from heroin to other opioids, which may lead to an increase in overdoses due to the use of potent alternative opioids such as fentanyl analogues, already present in parts of Europe.
- In Afghanistan farmer may struggle to respect the ban if alternative sources of income are not provided. And Afghan drug economy may switch to Methamphetamines.

Growth of the Methamphetamine market

- Despite a slight decrease in 2022, global seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) have generally stayed elevated. Early indications from certain regions in 2023 hint at a potential resurgence in ATS seizures.
- Methamphetamine continues to dominate the ATS market, with trafficking extending into new geographical areas.
- Largest ATS seizures: East and South-East Asia, South-West Asia, and maritime zones like the Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean.
- Largest Methamphetamine emerging markets: Near and Middle East/South-West Asia and South-Eastern Europe.
- The demand for the stimulant “Captagon” has increased in the near and Middle East. The seizures of this drug remain elevated.
 - o Trafficking of “captagon” from Levant and methamphetamines from South-West Asia are coming together in the near and middle east.

NPS: New Psychoactive substances

In 2022, the overall number of new psychoactive substances (NPS) remained steady, with a slight decrease noted in newly identified opioid NPS. However, a significant worry revolves around nitazenes, a type of synthetic opioid that is sometimes more potent than fentanyl. Nitazenes have been increasingly found in markets across North

America, Western Europe, South America, and Oceania, posing a threat to the health of citizens.

The recent emergence of highly potent nitazenes has led to a rise in overdose deaths in certain countries, highlighting their swift impact on public health and safety. Although there is no conclusive evidence linking the surge in overdose deaths from nitazenes to the opium ban in Afghanistan, there is concern about the potential further spread of these potent and dangerous opioids.

Drug cocktails are cause of a growing concern due to the mixture of dangerous substances such as alcohol, pharmaceuticals, solvents, benzodiazepines and other illegal substances.

SOLUTIONS:

A holistic approach with the purpose of:

- Affecting the market dynamics of drug and other illicit economies and their substitutability
 - Investigating and mitigating the origins, recruitment (with a focus on youth), and global networks of criminal organizations.
 - Developing effective tactics to regain authority in regions of low governance where crime is a predominant source of income.
 - Enhancing comprehension of the broad repercussions of organized crime on governance, legal systems, economic growth, the environment, and human rights, emphasizing its frequently underestimated danger.
- Offer alternative sources of income for those within the supply and distribution chain that not only substitute crops but tackle the fundamental structural issues like poverty, lack of development and security.
 - Efficient allocation of law enforcement and criminal justice resources is crucial for effectively dismantling drug supply chains. Rather than concentrating on easily replaceable low-level actors, there should be a strategic shift towards targeting high-level individuals and groups central to the drug trade. This approach requires enhanced strategic analysis, international judicial collaboration, efforts to combat corruption, and the development of proficient law enforcement teams, especially in border regions.
 - Advancements in law enforcement technology are essential to keep pace with the sophisticated technology used in drug supply chains. This involves acquiring new technological skills, appropriate equipment, and maintaining robust scientific testing and forensic capabilities to identify new drugs and emerging health risks.

- To enhance the effectiveness of seizures and law enforcement operations, it is crucial to evaluate their impact and cost-effectiveness. Operations should focus on disrupting shipments and routes that most effectively cripple the drug supply. Given traffickers' ability to adapt to seizures, efforts should aim not just to relocate drugs or routes but to systematically dismantle them. This necessitates strong international cooperation, trust in sharing intelligence, and joint operations, particularly in border regions controlled by organized crime. It is imperative to establish early warning and reconnaissance systems.

Part 2: Drug Use Harms and Impacts

Increase in demand for stimulants

1 in 18 people reported using drugs within the past year.

~30 million used amphetamines

~60 million used opioids in the past year

The increase in the use of these drugs it's due to the resurgence of "ecstasy" and cocaine after the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has been a 3% increase in people worldwide suffering from a drug use disorder, this is approximately 64 million since 2018. Opioids remain the largest contributor to the burden of disease, but marijuana continues to lead people to treatment services.

The expansion in the variety of drugs accessible to the public, has created intricate usage pattern increasing the prevalence of polydrug use.

In 2022, 13.9 million individuals engaged in drug injection, significantly increasing their risk of HIV infection by 35 times compared to non-injectors. Additionally:

- Approximately 1 in 8 people who inject drugs were living with HIV.
- Unsafe drug injection contributed to 2 out of every 100 new hepatitis C infections.
 - o Hepatitis C-related liver disease accounted for over half of all deaths linked to drug use.
- Fentanyl and opioid consumption continued to soar, contributing to persistently high mortality rates across North America.

The closing gender gap disproportionately affecting women

Men:

- Generally, men are more likely to use drugs than women.
- Drug trafficking is predominantly carried out by men.

Women:

- Women account for approximately 25% (1/4) of all drug users globally.
- Women tend to use non-medical pharmaceutical drugs like sedatives, tranquilizers, opioids, and stimulants as much as or sometimes more than men.
- Drug use patterns vary significantly by drug type and geographic region:
 - o In Asia, only 9% of cannabis users are women.
 - o In North America, women constitute 45% of cannabis users.
- Women progress to problematic drug use faster and face greater negative health and social impacts.
- In countries with sex-specific data, around 20% of injectable drug users are women, who are 1.2 times more likely than men to be HIV-positive.
- Women encounter significant barriers in accessing drug treatment and services, including:
 - o Limited awareness about available services.
 - o Stigma associated with seeking help.
 - o Insufficient gender-specific treatment facilities.
 - o Financial constraints hinder access to treatment.

Innovative methods of drug delivery having negative effects on YOUNG adults:

- Concerns about the use and effects of marijuana among youth in North America has grown due to the popularization of cannabis vaping and its negative long-term effects due to its use during critical years of brain development.
- Canada and Colorado have witnessed increased hospitalizations linked to cannabis use, notably for cannabis-induced psychosis and withdrawal, with young adults bearing a disproportionate burden. The availability of vapes, concentrates, and edibles post-legalization may have exacerbated the overall health risks associated with cannabis.
- high-risk group for synthetic drug use: Young Men. Contributing factors:
 - o peer pressure
 - o enhanced performance
 - o ease of accessibility to new synthetic drugs
 - using home delivery and socials media platforms

Proposed solutions:

Preventing drug use involves addressing underlying issues like family disconnection, instability, trauma, poor parenting, negative social norms, peer or familial drug use, mental health issues, and violence. The International Standards on Drug Use Prevention offer evidence-based guidelines for effective, age- and gender-appropriate interventions. Prioritizing children and adolescents is crucial, as this age group is particularly vulnerable due to ongoing brain development.

A key part of a health-based response to drug use is treatment that reduces negative health and social impacts. Drug use disorders, similar to chronic diseases, require continuous care. Evidence-based treatments improve health outcomes and quality of life.

Addressing drug use harm requires effective measures to prevent and reduce negative health and social outcomes, such as overdose and infectious diseases. The WHO, UNODC, UNAIDS Technical Guide and WHO Consolidated Guidelines provide comprehensive interventions. When scaled up, these can significantly reduce HIV and other infections and help manage overdoses among drug users.

Providing drug-related treatment and care services to individuals in prison and those recently released is essential. These services should be customized for specific groups, such as women (especially pregnant women), children, minority groups, and rural communities. Eliminating access barriers like stigma and discrimination and including drug users in decisions about their treatment and care is important.

An approach to drug use centered on human rights:

Addressing drug use from a right to health perspective requires services that are available, accessible, acceptable, and high quality. These services must also ensure non-discrimination, non-stigmatization, full participation, privacy, and dignity. The World Drug Report provides a comprehensive framework for this, covering availability, accessibility, acceptability, quality, non-discrimination, non-stigmatization, and participation. This holistic approach allows for drug use to be addressed effectively and humanely, respecting the rights and dignity of all individuals.

PART 3: DRUG POLICY RESPONSES:

Drug use remains the primary reason for most people’s encounters with law enforcement

7 million people globally were in formal contact with the police for drug offenses

- 4.7 million people for drug use or personal use
- 2.7 million people were prosecuted for drug offenses
- 1.6 million were convicted

There are significant regional differences:

- Globally, prosecution and convictions for drug trafficking arrests are more likely to occur than those for drug use and possession.
 - o However, in Asia and Africa available data indicates the opposite, where prosecution and conviction for drug use arrests are higher than those for trafficking.

Europe	Americas	Regional influences	Demographics
Has the highest rates of arrest, prosecution and convictions for drug trafficking and use or possession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Second highest arrest rate with 144 per 100,000 population - Lowest conviction rate for drug use or possession offences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differences due to size of the drug-using population and levels of interdiction - Higher drug use and interdiction rate lead to more criminal justice system errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Men account for approximately 90% of all drug offence arrests. - Women make up 9% of those arrested for drug trafficking and 12% for drug use possession.

The treatment gap is widening:

- 1 in 11 people with Drug Use Disorder receive drug treatment globally
- This gap is more noticeable in Asia and Africa, where in 2022, only about 1 in every 50 (2.8%) individuals with a drug use disorder in Africa received treatment, and nearly 3 in every 50 (5.1%) received treatment in Asia.
- The coverage for treatment among men and women also varies greatly, with 1 in 18 women receiving drug-treatment in 2022, while the ratio for men was 1 in 7.
- For every 100 men and 100 women who come into formal contact with the law due to drug trafficking, 59 women are prosecuted compared to 55 men. In cases of drug

possession or use, 16% of women are prosecuted compared to 32% of men, and 9% of women are convicted compared to 21% of men

- The following graph further shows gaps in treatment of women vs men by continent, directly from the WDR – points of interest.

	TREATMENT COVERAGE	PRIMARY DRUG	PATHWAY OF REFERRAL
Africa	2.8% of people with Drug Use Disorders in treatment in 2022	Cannabis is most common, followed by Opioids	Referral by friends and family and self referral are most common
Americas	10.7% of people with Drug Use Disorders in treatment in 2022 – 7.5% for women, 13.1% for men	Opioids is most common, but ATS and cannabis are also significant	Varies across subregions but referral from other health care service is more common than in other regions
Asia	5.1% of people with Drug Use Disorders in treatment in 2022 – 1.9% for women, 10.5% for men	Amphetamine-type stimulants most common, followed by Opioids	Criminal justice system is the most common pathway of referral
Europe	25.9% of people with Drug Use Disorders in treatment in 2022 – 13.6% for women, 29.9% for men	Opioids is most common	Self referral and referral by friends and family are the most common
Oceania	14% of people with Drug Use Disorders in treatment in 2022 – 12.5% for women, 14% for men	Amphetamine-type stimulants is the most common, followed by Cannabis	Different pathways of referral observed

Access to opioids for medical use continues to be constrained in developing across the world

Large disparities persist in access to pharmaceutical opioids globally, with 87% of the world's population lacking sufficient availability for pain management and care. Although there has been some improvement in the accessibility of methadone and buprenorphine over the past twenty years, which are used both for pain relief and in treating opioid use disorders, their availability for medical purposes has remained relatively unchanged globally since 2019

Challenges presented due to policy changes

Policy changes and varying approaches across regions highlight the complexities that policymakers encounter, examples of policies:

- Germany legalized social supply of non-medical cannabis.
- Oregon reversed decriminalization of all drug types.
- Some US states allow "quasi-therapeutic" use of psychedelics.

Possible responses:

The essence of effective drug policy lies in adhering to the principles of international drug conventions;

- Ensuring controlled substances are available for medical and scientific purpose
- Preventing their misuse

The promotion of science-based understanding and perception of drugs can help correct the imbalance and uphold the original goal of the international drug convention.

Providing accurate science-based information which can:

- Reduce fear of addiction and misuse, which sometimes limits access to opioids for pain management
- Help young people make informed decisions about the risks and consequences of drug use.

DRUG DEVELOPMENTS BY DRUG:

1. CANNABIS/MARIJUANA

Demand

- Cannabis is the most widely used drug globally
- In 2022 approximately 4% of the world population about 228 million individuals, used cannabis. These numbers show a 28% increase over the past 10 years.
- North America shows the highest usage with 19.8% of the population between 16 and 54 years of age using the drug.
- In Africa, the primary drug of focus is cannabis, especially for those undergoing treatment.
- In 2022, there is a high variation among women usage of cannabis across regions, from 9% in Asia, to 45% in North America

Supply:

- a. Cannabis cultivation:
 - In 2022 the prolonged rise in marijuana farming stopped. However, production remained elevated.
 - Outdoor cultivation decreased, while indoors stayed the same.
- b. Cannabis resin seizures: saw a consistent upward trend until 2020, with a marked decrease in both 2021 and 2022. Reaching lowest levels since 2017.
- c. Cannabis herb seizures: saw a slight increase in 2022, following a small dip in 2021.
 - Legalization efforts in North America appear to have influenced the slight decrease in herb seizures in 2021
 - Trafficking in other regions carried on with an upward trend

Key Issues

- a. Cannabis-related harm:
 - High prevalence of cannabis accounts for a significant share of global-drug related harm
 - In 2019, approximately 41% of the drug use disorders cases were cannabis disorders.
 - In 2022, 49% of the countries identified cannabis as the drug linked to the highest number of Drug use disorders
 - Cannabis was also reported as the main drug of concern for people in treatment in 38% of countries
- b. Medical use of Cannabis

- Evidence supports the effectiveness of cannabinoids in treating a few conditions, but evidence for many other conditions is limited.
- Many countries have provisions for the medical use of cannabis, but regulatory approaches vary widely.

c. Legalization for non-medical use

As of January 2024

- Canada, Uruguay and 27 jurisdictions in the United States allow the production and sale of cannabis for no-medical use.
- Recent legislative advances in Europe including the territories of Malta, Luxembourg, and Germany regulating adult access to non-medical cannabis.
- However, a commercial supply chain for recreational use of cannabis in Europe is not yet established.

2. OPIOIDS

Demand

- In 2022 1.2% of the population approximating 60million people used opioids, half of users were in South Asia and South-West Asia.
- Heroin was the preferred drug of choice for 30 million opioid users
- The global level of opioid use remained stable from 2020 to 2022, after a slight increase between 2017 and 2019.
- In 2022, about 36% of all in drug treatment reported opioids as their primary drug of use.
- Opioids continue to be the most lethal category of drugs, responsible for two-thirds of drug-related deaths, mainly due to overdoses.

Supply

a. Opium poppy cultivation and production:

- In 2023 there was a 70% decrease in opium poppy cultivation compared to 2022. Global production fell 74%
- A 95% decline in opium production following the April 2022 to the Afghan Ban

b. Top Producers:

- In 2023, Myanmar became the world's largest producer of opium, accounting for 54% of the global total
- Afghanistan's contribution dropped to 17% in 2023 from the 82% in 2022.
- Trafficking routes
- The Balkan route remains the primary tricking route for opiates

- There was a drop in heroin seizures linked to Afghan opiates attributed to the anticipation of the Afghan ban
- Meanwhile, heroin seizures in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, indicating an increased traffic along the northern route.
- c. Seizure of pharmaceutical opioids
 - Seizures of pharmaceutical opioids which had sharply increased in 2021 returned to 2020 levels in 2022. This trend does not affect the long-term upward trend in seizures observed.

Key Issues

- a. Opioid use challenges: while global opioid use has stabilized recently, two distinct epidemics present increased health threats:
 - The first involves fentanyl misuse in North America, where unprecedented levels of overdose death linked to fentanyl started an upward trend during the COVID-19 pandemic that persisted in 2022
 - The second centers on non-medical tramadol use in North Africa, West Africa, the Near and Middle East, and South-West Asia.
- b. The impact of Afghanistan's opium ban: the substantial reduction in opium in Afghanistan will affect global consumer markets
- c. Disparities in opioid access: access for palliative care and pain management varies greatly among countries at differing income levels.

3. COCAINE

Demand

- In 2022, approximately 23.5 million individuals worldwide used cocaine, accounting for 0.45% of the world population.
- The primary consumer markets for cocaine continue to be the Americas and Western and Central Europe.
- Over the past two decades, demand for cocaine has increased in Africa and Asia, but data limitations hinder a comprehensive understanding of usage levels in these regions.

Supply

- Manufacturing: production of pure cocaine reached a record high of 2,757 tons in 2022
- Seizures: Despite the ongoing increase in cocaine production, seizures stabilized at a high level in 2022. Seizures near production locations in South America are four times higher than those in North America.

- Cocaine trafficking primarily occurs by sea and across a broader range of routes. Over 80% of cocaine seizures in recent years were linked to maritime trafficking, increasing to 86% in 2022 and exceeding 90% in 2023.

Key issues

- a. Global market trends: Following a pause during the COVID-19 pandemic, the global cocaine market has resumed its expansion. With an increase in both use and supply.
- b. Market expansion: cocaine markets are expanding beyond traditional regions like North America and Western Europe, extending into Africa and Asia. Africa is now increasingly pivotal in the global cocaine supply chain, with new trafficking hubs emerging on the continent.

4. AMPHETAMINE-TYPE STIMULANTS (ATS)

Demand

In 2022, data showed an approximate 30 million people users of ATS, accounting for 0.6% of the world's population.

There has been an increase in amphetamine use in 2022 and over the past 10 years.

East and South-East Asia have the highest number of amphetamine users, followed by North America, which has the highest prevalence of use.

In 2022, approximately 20 million people used “ecstasy”-type substances, amounting to 0.4% of the global population.

Supply

- a. ATS seizures: after record-high seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) in 2021, 2022 saw a slight decline, but levels remained historically high. ATS continues to dominate the global seizures.
- b. Geographical spread: trafficking in ATS, especially methamphetamine, expanded geographically, with significant growth in non-traditional markets.
 - Captagon market: the captagon market in the near and middle east remained robust, with 2022 seizures matching the record level of 2021.
- c. Methamphetamine manufacturing trends: until 2021, there was a shift in methamphetamines manufacturing from using ephedrine and pseudoephedrine to 1-phenil-2-proprone (P-2-P) precursors.

In 2022, this trend reversed, with a sharp decline in P-2-P related seizures and stable levels of ephedrine-related seizures, which accounted for 79% of the total in methamphetamine equivalents.

Key issues

- a. Gender gap: women account for 25% (1/4) of amphetamine users but only 16%(1/6) of those in treatment for ATS-use disorders.
- b. Women and Methamphetamine use: women in treatment for methamphetamine use disorder:
 - Exhibit more severe symptoms and greater psychological burden than men
 - Experience higher levels of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors
 - Are at greater risk of acquiring infectious diseases such as HIV, viral hepatitis, among others.
- c. Spread of methamphetamines: the production of methamphetamines is now found outside of traditional markets (East and south-East Asia, North America) to South-West Asia, the Near and Middle East, Oceania, Europe and Africa.
 - Rise of methamphetamine production and use in Afghanistan is a growing concern, with trafficking continuing to expand beyond South-West Asia.

5. NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)

Demand:

The consumption of these drugs is less prevalent than those regulated by international treaties. However, they were still used in most countries. Emerging trends show novel NPS such as semi-synthetic cannabinoids (delta-8-THC in North America, HHC in Europe) being used by the general population.

Unintentional use and risk: many people use NPS unknowingly, frequently as contaminants or substitutes for other drugs

Common NPS: synthetic cannabinoids and Ketamine.

Supply

Seizure trends: In 2022 there was a decrease of over 40% of the plant-based NPS khat and kratom seizures. Between 2020-2022, 52 countries reported synthetic NPS seizures, up from 43 from 2010-2012, with significant amounts of ketamine seized followed by synthetic cathinones and cannabinoids.

Market diversity: the variety of NPS on the market dropped from 618 to 566, in 2021 to 2022 respectively with most being stimulants.

The variety of Fentanyl analogues did not vary significantly in 2022, but there is an increasing worry about nitazenes.

Key Issues

Control Systems: NPS control measures have effectively limited their spread in high-income countries, but NPS trafficking is expanding to new regions.

Regional problems: Eastern Europe and Central Asia face a significant NPS challenge. With the supply of Ketamine spreading to western and central Europe and Asia.

Nitazenes: this synthetic opioid sometimes more potent than fentanyl, has seen many death reported in North America and Western and Central Europe.

DRUG DEVELOPMENTS BY CONTINENT:

America

Demand: Opioid use remains significant in North America, with 2.7% of adults (9 million people) reporting usage in 2022. South and Central America, along with the Caribbean, have the highest rates of people in drug treatment due to cocaine use and offer the widest variety of cocaine products globally. The Americas lead in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants compared to other regions. North America has seen a marked increase in treatment for methamphetamine use disorder over the past decade, especially in Mexico. About 1% of North American adults (3.4 million people) injected drugs in 2022, but the HIV prevalence among these individuals (nearly 7%) is below the global average.

Supply: Cannabis interceptions have significantly declined in North America even though the market is expanding rapidly, as interdiction efforts have become less of a focus. Cocaine production in South America hit a record high of 2,757 tons of pure cocaine in 2022. Seizures of cocaine have moved closer to production areas in South America, with quantities seized there now being four times larger than those in North America. Most methamphetamine produced in North America is consumed within the region. Seizure data indicate that production labs might be growing in size and output, despite a decrease in the number of dismantled labs. Methamphetamine seizures in North America reached a peak in 2021 but fell in 2022.

Key issues: The opioid crisis in North America, particularly due to illicit fentanyl, has led to record overdose deaths, which surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching unprecedented levels in 2021 and 2022. The gender gap in cannabis use is narrowing in North America, where usage is notably high. The Americas are experiencing a rise in cocaine trafficking, with record production levels in South America. Illicit drug economies, intersecting crimes, population displacement, and conflicts are causing significant environmental damage and human rights violations, especially affecting vulnerable groups in parts of the Amazon Basin. The methamphetamine market in North America is growing, leading to increased hospitalizations, drug treatments, and overdose deaths.

Asia

Demand: Over half of the global opioid users are in Asia, with 1.1% of the region's adults using opioids in 2022, and South-West Asia having one of the highest rates at 3.2%. Methamphetamine is the primary drug issue in East and South-East Asia, while opium and heroin are more common in South-West and South Asia, and "captagon" is prevalent in the Near and Middle East. Methamphetamine use has been increasing in Afghanistan and reports indicate rising use of methamphetamine and "captagon" in the Near and Middle

East and South-West Asia, though recent data is lacking. East and South-East Asia have a long-established market for non-medical ketamine use. Asia has the largest gender disparity in drug use, with 91% of cannabis users being men. Asia also has the highest number of people who inject drugs (5.2 million in 2022), including those living with HIV (779,000) and hepatitis C (2.8 million). South-West Asia has the highest HIV prevalence (29.4%) among people who inject drugs, while East and South-East Asia have the highest hepatitis C prevalence (65%).

Supply: Opiate production in South-West Asia dropped by 74% in 2023 due to a sharp decline in Afghanistan but rose by 34% in South-East Asia. These regions combined accounted for approximately 75% of global opium production in 2023. Heroin seizures decreased across Asia in 2022, though initial data indicates increased trafficking along the northern route in 2023. Despite efforts to curb ephedra collection and sales, methamphetamine production has reportedly risen in Afghanistan. The Near and Middle East saw a booming "captagon" market, with seizures hitting a record high in 2021 and staying high in 2022. Methamphetamine production remains significant in South-East Asia, yet seizures of the drug decreased in 2022. Cocaine seizures between 2019 and 2022 indicate a growing trend of cocaine trafficking into Asia, with several large busts in the region.

Key issues: The April 2022 ban on opium production in Afghanistan led to a 95% drop in opium cultivation and production in 2023. Sustained enforcement may result in heroin shortages, potentially leading to the use of more harmful substances like synthetic opioids. Despite restrictions, Afghanistan's methamphetamine market might be expanding into South-West Asia and beyond, with increased trafficking in the Near and Middle East. Conversely, East and South-East Asia's methamphetamine market appears to be contracting from previously high levels.

Transnational criminal organizations are exploiting instability in the Golden Triangle, branching out from drug trafficking to other illegal activities, including wildlife trafficking, resource extraction, and financial fraud. The use of new psychoactive substances (NPS) in Central Asia and Transcaucasia is reportedly increasing. "Captagon" tablets produced in the Levant continue to be widely consumed in Gulf countries.

The opioid crisis in North and West Africa, primarily due to non-medical tramadol use, may also affect the Near and Middle East. South-West Asia remains among the regions with the highest prevalence of opioid use and HIV among people who inject drugs.

Europe:

Demand: Western and Central Europe are the second-largest cocaine markets globally. After cocaine, amphetamine is the most commonly used stimulant in Europe, with ATS (amphetamines-type stimulants) usage rising over the past decade. Europe also remains a significant consumer of "ecstasy." Opioids are the primary reason for drug treatment in Europe, followed closely by cannabis, especially among first-time treatment seekers.

Recent wastewater data suggest methamphetamine use may be stabilizing in Western, Central, and South-Eastern Europe as of 2023. However, the use of new psychoactive substances (NPS) is on the rise in Eastern Europe, where it is a growing concern. Eastern Europe has the highest rates of people who inject drugs (1.3% in 2022) and those living with HIV (25.6%), and Europe overall has the highest prevalence of hepatitis C among people who inject drugs.

Supply: Cannabis herb trafficking in Western and Central Europe is mainly an intraregional issue, although significant imports of cannabis resin from North Africa continue. This region is also a key center for the production of synthetic drugs, particularly "ecstasy" and amphetamine, with indications of potential growth in methamphetamine production.

Global darknet drug markets were expanding until 2021, driven largely by Hydra Market, the largest Russian-language darknet market. However, after its dismantling in April 2022, smaller darknet markets have emerged to fill the void.

Key issues: The upward trend in cocaine use in Western and Central Europe paused in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but has since rebounded. There has been a long-term increase in treatment for cannabis use disorders in the region, with nearly half of the new drug treatment cases in 2021 being for cannabis.

In Eastern Europe, the NPS (new psychoactive substances) market expanded in 2021, likely due to increased online supply, particularly of cathinones. This trend appears to have continued through 2022 and 2023. Eastern Europe has a high prevalence of people who inject drugs and those living with HIV, while Europe overall has a high prevalence of hepatitis C among people who inject drugs.

Oceania:

Demand: Australia and New Zealand have the highest past-year cocaine use globally. However, wastewater analysis indicates that cocaine consumption is lower than in other regions, suggesting most users are occasional. This subregion also leads the world in past-year "ecstasy" use, corroborated by MDMA levels in wastewater analysis. Cannabis use is significantly above the global average, with over 10% of the population using it. Among

school students aged 15 and 16 in Oceania, 17% use cannabis, compared to the global average of 5.5%.

Supply: In 2022, heroin seizures in Oceania decreased after a spike in 2021, but seizures of cocaine and methamphetamine hit record highs. Methamphetamine is both produced locally in Oceania and imported from East and South-East Asia as well as North America. Data shows a rise in seizures of methamphetamine made from P-2-P precursors over the past decade, highlighting a growing reliance on imports from North America, particularly from Mexico, either directly or through the United States.

Key issues: Between 2010 and 2021, indicators suggest an increase in cocaine use and associated harm in Australia, although the impact is less severe compared to other stimulants. Methamphetamine use is declining among the general population and those who regularly use "ecstasy," but it has become more intense among people who inject drugs, leading to greater harm. Over 40% of individuals in drug treatment in Australia and New Zealand are receiving care for methamphetamine use disorder. The drug treatment population in the subregion, particularly in Australia, tends to be relatively young.