

# Global Drug Trends: A Snapshot

## Cannabis

Cannabis widely known as marijuana, is a drug obtained from the plant with the same name. Marijuana contains hundreds of mind-altering compounds. The 2024 World Drug Report shows cannabis as the most commonly used drug worldwide.

### Demand:

- **Most Commonly Used Drug:** In 2022, 228 million people, or 4% of the global population, used cannabis.
- **Increasing Use:** The number of cannabis users has grown by 28% over the past decade.
- **High Use in North America:** 19.8% of people aged 15-64 used cannabis in North America in 2022.
- **Concern in Africa:** Cannabis is the main drug of concern for most people in treatment.
- **Gender Differences:** Women's cannabis use varies from 9% in Asia to 45% in North America (2022).

### Supply:

- **Cultivation Trends:** Cannabis cultivation stabilized in 2022 with high indoor cultivation and declining outdoor cultivation.
- **Seizure Trends:** Cannabis resin seizures dropped to its lowest since 2017, while cannabis herb seizures increased slightly due to legalization efforts in North America.

### Key Issues:

- **Drug-Related Harm:** Cannabis accounts for 41% of global drug use disorders.
- **Medical Use:** Evidence supports cannabis for some medical conditions, with varying regulatory approaches worldwide.
- **Legalization:** Canada, Uruguay, and 27 US jurisdictions have legalized cannabis for non-medical use, with emerging regulations in Europe.

## Opioids

Opioids are types of drugs that can include natural and synthetic substances. These can be highly addictive when abused.

### Demand:

- **Usage Statistics:** 60 million people used opioids in 2022, representing 1.2% of the global population.
- **Heroin Use:** 30 million people used opiates, primarily heroin.

- **Stable Use:** Opioid use remained stable from 2020 to 2022.
- **Drug Treatment:** 36% of people in drug treatment in 2022 cited opioids as their primary drug.
- **Lethality:** Opioids are the most lethal drug group, causing two-thirds of drug-related deaths.

#### Supply:

- **Opium Production Decline:** Global opium poppy cultivation fell by 70% in 2023 due to Afghanistan's opium ban.
- **Heroin Trafficking:** The Balkan route remains the main opiate trafficking route, with a shift in trafficking patterns.
- **Pharmaceutical Opioids:** Seizures of pharmaceutical opioids fell in 2022 but continue a long-term upward trend.

#### Key Issues:

- **Health Risks:** Non-medical use of fentanyl and tramadol poses significant health risks.
- **Overdose Deaths:** Overdose deaths in North America reached unprecedented levels due to fentanyl.
- **Access Disparities:** Access to pharmaceutical opioids for pain management varies significantly between low- and high-income countries.

## Cocaine

Cocaine is a powerful stimulant derived from the coca plant. It has a high potential for abuse and causes severe neurological effects.

#### Demand:

- **Usage Statistics:** In 2022, approximately 23.5 million individuals worldwide used cocaine, accounting for 0.45% of the world population.
- **Major Markets:** The primary consumer markets for cocaine continue to be the Americas and Western and Central Europe.
- **Rising Demand:** 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:

- **Record Manufacture:** Cocaine manufacture 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.

- **Trafficking:** 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:

- **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.
- **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.

## Amphetamine-Type Stimulants (ATS)

ATS encompass a range of synthetic drug stimulants These include amphetamines, methamphetamines and ecstasy-type substances.

#### Demand:

- **Usage Statistics:** 30 million people used amphetamines in 2022, representing 0.6% of the global population.
- **Increasing Use:** Amphetamine use has increased over the last decade, with the highest use in East and South-East Asia.
- **Ecstasy Use:** 20 million people used "ecstasy"-type substances in 2022, representing 0.4% of the global population.

#### Supply:

- **Seizures:** ATS seizures remained high in 2022, dominated by methamphetamine.
- **Geographic Spread:** Methamphetamine trafficking has spread to non-traditional markets.
- **Captagon Market:** captagon also known as fenethylamine is a stimulant used to treat attention deficit disorders. The Near and Middle East's "captagon" market remains robust.

#### Key Issues:

- **Gender Gap:** Women account for one in four amphetamine users but only one in six in treatment.
- **Severe Symptoms in Women:** Women in treatment for methamphetamine use have more severe psychological symptoms and a higher risk of HIV and other diseases.
- **Global Spread:** Methamphetamine manufacture and use have spread beyond traditional markets, notably to South-West Asia, the Near and Middle East, Oceania, Europe, and Africa.

- **Afghanistan:** The increase in methamphetamine production in Afghanistan is a growing concern.

## New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Emerging substances that may pose a public health risk but are not yet controlled by the United Nations Drug Convention.

### Demand

- NPS consumption is less prevalent than regulated drugs but remains significant. Emerging trends include the use of semi-synthetic cannabinoids like delta-8-THC in North America and HHC in Europe.
- **Unintentional Use:** Many people use NPS unknowingly, often as contaminants or substitutes for other drugs.
- **Common NPS:** Synthetic cannabinoids and ketamine are among the most reported.

### Supply

- **Seizure Trends:** Plant-based NPS like khat and kratom saw a 40% decrease in seizures in 2022. Synthetic NPS seizures increased, with significant amounts of ketamine and synthetic cathinones seized.
- **Market Diversity:** The variety of NPS on the market decreased from 618 to 566, with most being stimulants. Fentanyl analogues remained stable, but there is growing concern about nitazenes.

### Key Issues

- **Control Systems:** NPS control measures have limited their spread in high-income countries, but trafficking is expanding to new regions.
- **Regional Problems:** Eastern Europe and Central Asia face significant NPS challenges, with ketamine spreading to Western and Central Europe and Asia.
- **Nitazenes:** Nitazenes, synthetic opioids more potent than fentanyl, have been linked to many deaths in North America and Western/Central Europe.

### References:

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