

World Drug Report: Drug markets stable but consumption of synthetic and prescription drugs rises

New York/Vienna. 23 June 2011. While global markets for cocaine, heroin and cannabis declined or remained stable, the production and abuse of prescription opioid drugs and new synthetic drugs rose, according to the World Drug Report 2011 (www.unodc.org/wdr). Illicit cultivation of opium poppy and coca bush remained limited to a few countries. Although there was a sharp decline in opium production and a modest reduction in coca cultivation, overall, the manufacture of heroin and cocaine was still significant.

The flagship report was launched today at United Nations Headquarters by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); Joseph Deiss, President of the General Assembly; Gil Kerlikowske, Director, White House Office of National Drug Control Policy; and Viktor Ivanov, Director of Russia's Federal Service for Drug Control.

Globally, some 210 million people, or 4.8 per cent of the population aged 15-64, took illicit substances at least once in the previous year. Overall drug use, including problem drug use, (0.6 per cent of the population aged 15-64) remained stable. However, demand soared for substances not under international control, such as piperazine and cathinone. The effects of cannabis are also being mimicked by synthetic cannabinoids, or “spice”.

Less opium in Afghanistan, slight increase in Myanmar

Global opium poppy cultivation reached some 195,700 hectares (ha) in 2010, a small increase over 2009. Opium production declined, however, by 38 per cent to 4,860 tons due to a blight that wiped out much of the opium harvest in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the bulk of opium production still took place in Afghanistan (3,600 tons or 74 per cent of the global total). While cultivation in Afghanistan remained stable, the global trend was mainly driven by increases in Myanmar, where cultivation rose by some 20 per cent from 2009. Consequently, opium production in Myanmar increased from 5 per cent of global production in 2007 to 12 per cent in 2010. Global opium production declined by 45 per cent between 2007 and 2010, particularly as a result of poor yields in 2010, but this trend is unlikely to continue. “Though the area under poppy cultivation may have remained stable this year, our preliminary findings indicate that Afghan opium production will probably rebound to high levels in 2011”, warned Mr. Fedotov.

Global cocaine cultivation lessens due to decline in Colombia; US cocaine market shrinks

The global area under coca cultivation shrank to 149,100 ha in 2010, an 18 per cent drop from 2007. During that time, potential cocaine production fell by about one-sixth, reflecting the significant decrease in cocaine production in Colombia. Consequently, this decline was not offset by small increases in Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

The US cocaine market has witnessed massive declines in recent years. Nevertheless, the US continues to be largest cocaine market, with an estimated consumption of 157 tons of cocaine in 2009, equivalent to 36 per cent of global consumption. The second largest cocaine market is Europe, notably West and Central Europe, where consumption is estimated at 123 tons.

Over the past decade, cocaine consumption in Europe has doubled (though over the last few years it has remained largely stable). It is estimated that about 21 tons of cocaine were trafficked via West Africa to Europe in 2009. This is down from two years before, when the total could have reached as high as 47 tons.

Meanwhile, market prices for cocaine have dropped appreciably since the mid-1990s. Just a decade ago, the North American market for cocaine was four times larger than that of Europe. Today the estimated value of the European cocaine market (US\$ 36 billion) is approaching that of the US market (US\$ 37 billion).

Cannabis – the world’s drug of choice

Cannabis remains by far the most widely produced and consumed illicit substance globally, although data on cannabis are limited. In 2009, between 2.8 per cent and 4.5 per cent of the world population aged 15-64 – between 125 and 203 million people – had used cannabis at least once in the past year.

While cannabis herb (marijuana) production is widespread, notably in the Americas and Africa, cannabis resin production (hashish) continues to be concentrated in just two countries: Morocco, supplying the West European and North African markets, and Afghanistan supplying the markets in South-West Asia. Cannabis resin was a far more profitable crop than opium poppy in 2010 in Afghanistan.

Synthetic drugs – South-East Asia and Africa under the radar

Soaring production, trafficking and consumption of amphetamine-type stimulants accompanied by a resurgence in opium cultivation and heroin trafficking are a big concern in South-East Asia. “The gains we have witnessed in the traditional drugs markets are being offset by a fashion for synthetic ‘designer drugs’ mimicking illegal substances,” said the Executive Director.

“The Golden Triangle is not just about opium anymore; it’s a business that caters to consumers. The international community seems to have taken its eye off the ball on drug control in South-East Asia.” he said. “We have to be proactive on all fronts before the region again becomes a major drugs hub.”

Many unregulated substances are marketed as ‘legal highs’ and substitutes for illicit stimulants, such as cocaine or ecstasy. Methamphetamine, a highly addictive substance, is sweeping across East Asia and has started to increase again in North America in 2009, following several years of decline. In fact, 2009 was a record year for seizures of synthetic drugs, largely driven by interceptions of methamphetamine – which rose by more than one third in 2009 (15.8 tons) from 2008 (11.6 tons) – mostly in Myanmar. Although Myanmar is one of the primary sources of methamphetamine pills in South-East Asia, Africa is also emerging as a source of methamphetamine destined for East Asia.

Towards a stronger multilateral response to illicit drugs

Mr. Fedotov stressed the principle of ‘shared responsibility’ and the need to build national, regional and international efforts in a comprehensive strategy on the cultivation, production and trafficking of drugs. UNODC has spearheaded a number of regional mechanisms to confront the problem of Afghan opium, including the Paris Pact, the Triangular Initiative and the Central

Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre. These approaches could be models for other regions, such as South-East Asia or Central America, he said.

“Drugs cause some 200,000 deaths a year. Since people with serious drug problems provide the bulk of drug demand, treating this problem is one of the best ways of shrinking the market,” he said.

In 2009, Member States reaffirmed the validity of the international drug control regime during the High-Level Segment of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. “This year is the 50th anniversary of the keystone of the international drug control system: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Its provisions remain sound and highly relevant, as does its central focus on the protection of health”, said Mr. Fedotov.

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