

## **World Drug Day 2023 in Southern Africa – Growing Engagement and Ownership by State and Local Actors**

**“People first: stop stigma and discrimination, strengthen prevention”**

Pretoria, June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2023

### **World Drug Day in Context**

The world drug problem is a complex issue that affects millions of people worldwide. Many people who use drugs face stigma and discrimination, which can further harm their physical and mental health and prevent them from accessing the help they need. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) recognizes the importance of taking a people-centered approach to drug policies, with a focus on human rights, compassion, and evidence-based practices.

The International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, or World Drug Day, is marked on 26 June every year to strengthen action and cooperation in achieving a world free of drug abuse. The aim of this year’s campaign is to raise awareness about the importance of treating people who use drugs with respect and empathy; providing evidence-based, voluntary services for all; offering alternatives to punishment; prioritizing prevention; and leading with compassion. The campaign also aims to combat stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs by promoting language and attitudes that are respectful and non-judgmental.

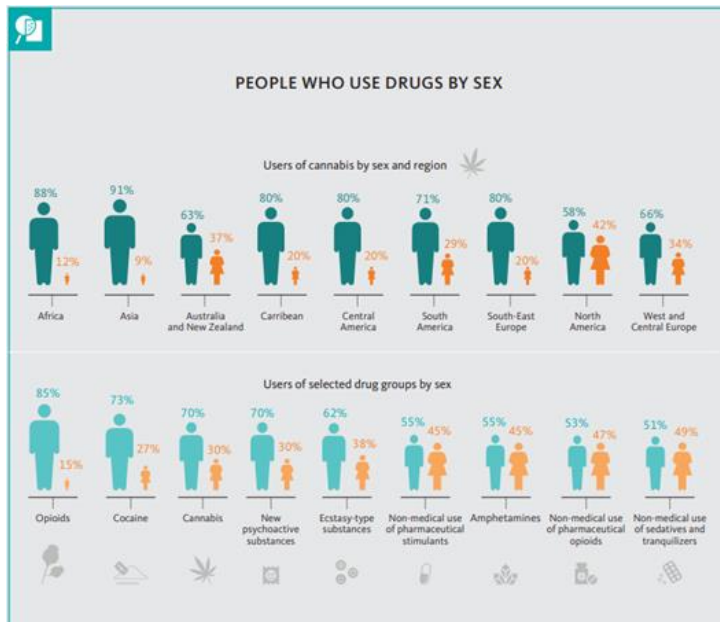
This year’s World Drug Day is a call to:

- Raise awareness about the negative impact of stigma and discrimination on people who use drugs and their families.
- Raise awareness about the AIDS and hepatitis epidemics among people who use drugs and expand and strengthen HIV and hepatitis prevention programmes.
- Promote evidence-based, voluntary services for all people who use drugs.
- Educate about drug use disorders, available treatments and the importance of early intervention and support.
- Advocate for alternatives to imprisonment for drug-related crimes, such as community-based treatment and services.
- Combat stigma and discrimination by promoting language and attitudes that are respectful and non-judgmental.
- Empower young people and communities to prevent drug use and addiction.

### **Africa and the World Drug Problem**

In 2020, 1 in every 18 people aged 15–64 worldwide – an estimated 284 million people (5.6 per cent of the population) – had used a drug in the past 12 months.

The number of people who used drugs (284 million) in 2020 was 26 per cent higher than in 2010, partly because of world population growth. The number of people who use drugs is predicted to significantly increase by 2030, with a 40% rise expected in Africa.



> Africa remains a key transit region for i) cocaine in the west, ii) heroin in the east and iii) cannabis, mostly produced within the region, in the north.

> Africa has a large gender gap in the use of drugs, with 1 woman for 9 men using cannabis.

> Use of cannabis is particularly high in West and Central Africa, with past-year prevalence of use of nearly 10 per cent (28.5 million people), largely reflecting prevalence of cannabis use in Nigeria.

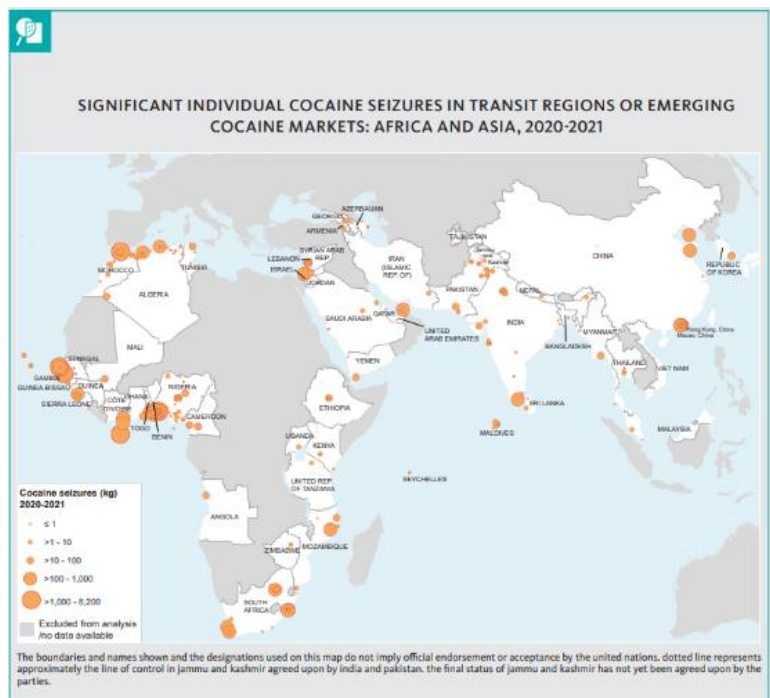
> While the use of khat, a plant-based NPS, is widespread in East Africa, the use of synthetic NPS is mostly reported in

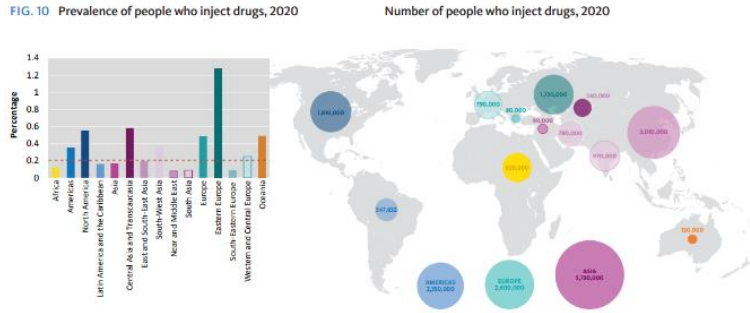
Southern Africa, but data are scarce about both.

> Cocaine use is rather widespread in West and Southern Africa and appears to be generally increasing across the continent, as evidenced by people in drug treatment, though actual data is scarce.

> Most cocaine in Africa is seized near coastlines. The region, in particular West Africa, is used as a transshipment area for cocaine from South America en route to Europe.

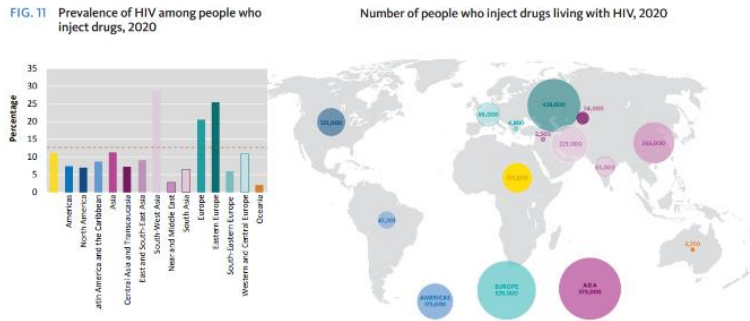
> Heroin from South-West Asia is trafficked through all African subregions, often via East Africa as an entry point, onwards to consumer markets in Western and Central Europe.





> Africa accounted for more than half of global quantities of pharmaceutical opioids seized between 2016 and 2020, largely due to the ongoing tramadol crisis.

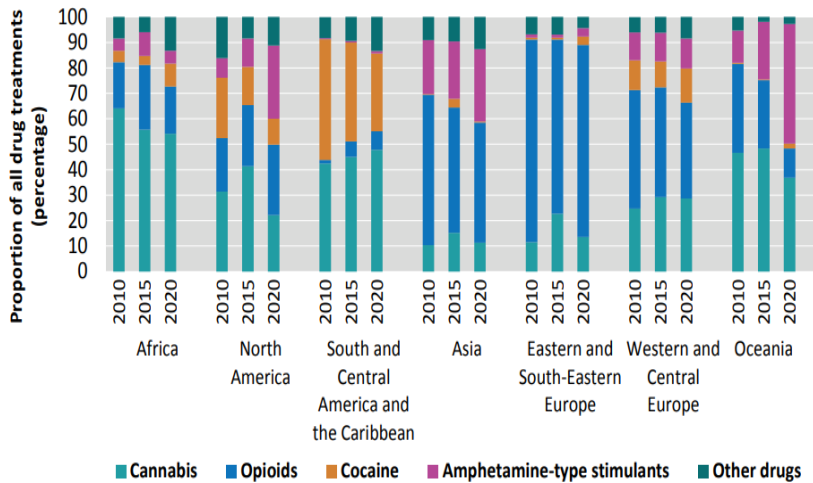
> Non-medical use of tramadol remains a threat, especially in North and West and Central Africa. The majority of opioid users in other parts of Africa are opiate users, mostly heroin and, in a few countries, also codeine and opium.



> The opioid epidemic related to non-medical use of tramadol continues to pose great health risks, with treatment demands for tramadol use disorders increasing in some countries in Africa.

> Of the 920,000 people who inject drugs in Africa, around 100,000 or 11 per cent are living with HIV.

**FIG. 8** Trends in primary drug of concern in people in treatment for drug use disorders



> The majority of people treated for drug use disorders in Africa are under the age of 35.

> Cannabis is the drug for which most people with drug use disorders (more than half) seek treatment in Africa.

Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire.

## World Drug Day 2023 in Southern Africa

Southern African countries and SADC member states are taking increasing responsibility in understanding and addressing their national drug problems.

### Botswana

Local consumption is small but growing in Botswana, as heroin cut with cannabis provides an affordable alternative to pure heroin. Botswana is also growing as a transit hub for Andean cocaine moving through

the country via third-party criminal actors or arriving directly via air routes. Cannabis remains the most widely used drug in Botswana, and most of the cannabis cultivated is consumed in the country. While it is also exported to European countries, the trade appears to be minor. Synthetic drug use is also on the rise, especially synthetic cannabinoids and opioids. While synthetic drugs are not produced in Botswana, the country is a waypoint for mandrax or methaqualone destined for South Africa.



Botswana recently established a new Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) under the auspices of the Ministry of Defense and Security, who will be championing World Drug Day events in partnership with the Ministry of Health in Palapye, Botswana on June 26<sup>th</sup>, with a focus on youth, prevention and rehabilitation.

## Zambia

Drugs, particularly cocaine, arrive in Zambia overland in trucks and on public transport from South Africa, through Botswana and Zimbabwe, as well as through Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi. The Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC) flagged youth as the most vulnerable targets for drug consumption and has consistently drummed the message of prevention and rehabilitation for over a decade, and identified heroin, cocaine and crack cocaine in addition to cannabis as increasingly consumed in the country.



This year's events are under the auspices of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security and the DEC with the participation of the UNODC ROSAF Regional Representative Jane Marie Ongolo.

## Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe similarly to neighboring countries, there is a significant flow of micro-trafficked cocaine into the country by air passengers coming from Brazil. Drugs come also from regional distribution hubs, particularly Angola, Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania. Cocaine for instance enters overland by truck, public transport vehicles and in the baggage of cross-border traders and migrants returning to the country from South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana. Civil society in Zimbabwe reports increased popularity of crystal methamphetamine. In response to these challenges, the country recently launched the Zimbabwe National Drug Master Plan (2020-2025) which aims to provide both a comprehensive and integrated approach to address the rise in substance use in the country.



This year's events are co-organized by civil society organizations: The Accountability Lab Zimbabwe (ALZ) and the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN) who will host a Policy Dialogue on drug use and reflections on the National Drug Master plan on Monday, 26 June. The policy dialogue that will bring together the UN Zimbabwe Resident Coordinator, state and non-state actors, including civil society, Parliament, and the Inter-Ministerial task force on drug abuse.

## South Africa

South Africa's geography, porous borders and international trade links with Asia, Latin America, Western Europe and North America have made it an attractive drug transit country. It is alleged that South African territorial waters are home also to ship-based and container-based shipments of cocaine that regularly transit their maritime waters, often without ever landing ashore. South Africa is also a growing market for designer drugs. Known as 'new psychoactive substances', these synthetic drugs are developed to mimic the effects of established illicit drugs, such as cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy and LSD. The most frequently reported semi-synthetic drug in Southern Africa is nyaope – a cocktail of heroin, cannabis and antiretroviral drugs.



The South African theme this year, organized by the **Department of Social Development** is: *“Leave no one behind: Availability, Affordability and Access to prevention and treatment services”*. The aim is to ensure that stakeholders assist everyone irrespective of gender, race, sex and ethnicity to have access, afford and avail

services to people suffering from substance use disorders, focusing on PEOPLE:

- Protect all people (evidence-based, voluntary services for all)
- Educate yourself and others (understand drug use disorders as a treatable disease)
- Offer alternatives (to punishment)
- Prioritize prevention
- Lead with compassion
- End stigma (avoid stigmatizing language)

## Mozambique

Mozambique remains a key node in the “southern route” connecting cocaine from Brazil to lucrative markets such as South Africa, with its pre-existing heroin and methamphetamine routes also doubling as cocaine trampolines to South African and then European ports. Since the 1990s, large volumes of Afghan heroin have been traveling from Pakistan to East Africa by fishing boat, establishing regional trans-border smuggling routes easily piggybacked upon by South American cocaine, which has transited in Mozambique for at least two decades. UNODC and the National Drug Control Agency developed the Maputo Roadmap, a strategic roadmap focusing on specific areas of policy development and technical assistance related to the priorities of the Government of Mozambique in strengthening its criminal justice system, which are in line with the priorities set by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



This year's World Drug Day events, in collaboration with the Gabinete Central de Prevenção e Combate à Droga (Central Office for Drugs Prevention and Control), consist of an awareness-raising campaign targeting school-age children in Pemba, Cabo Delgado.