SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

FINDINGS

Cannabis is more potent but fewer young people see it as harmful

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

» Combat misinformation about the potential impact of the increased strength of cannabis.

» Use fact-based information to raise awareness of the potential harm from non-medical use of cannabis.

» Prioritise public health over private business through a comprehensive ban on advertising.

» Increase investment in research both into the harm cannabis use poses to health and the possible medical uses of the drug.

» Monitor the cannabis markets and the perception of risks associated with cannabis use.

Rising web-based sales could transform global drug use patterns

» Improve government response to drug trafficking on the internet by forging public/private partnerships with internet service providers, tech companies, shipping and mailing companies.

» Control the drug supply chain on the Internet by removing drug adverts and listings and sharing information with law enforcement.

» Regulate cryptocurrency markets and monitor electronic payments to detect suspicious transactions and illicit financial flows from drug trafficking.

» Enhance expert access to the dark web in order to take down online markets and platforms.
Implement an integrated, people-centred and human-rights based approach to empowering African societies to develop sustainable solutions to drug use.

Help African States define and apply innovative and cost-effective assessment systems for regular monitoring of the drug situation on the continent.

Cultivate strong partnerships between African Member States and the United Nations system to stem the expected increase in the number of people who use drugs and the possible negative impact on health and security.

Number of drug users in Africa is projected to rise by 40 per cent by 2030.

- **North America**: 66 (2018) to 68 (2030)
- **Latin America and Caribbean**: 12 (2018) to 19 (2030)
- **Europe**: 42 (2018) to 39 (2030)
- **Africa**: 60 (2018) to 86 (2030)
- **Asia**: 80 (2018) to 83 (2030)

**40% Growth in the Number of People Who Use Drugs in Africa**
COVID-19 has triggered innovation in drug prevention and treatment services

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- Maintain COVID-19 adaptations to the delivery of drug-related services in order to increase accessibility and coverage of services.
- Continuously update scientific standards to keep abreast of the acceleration of Internet-based services.
- Prioritize people who use drugs and with drug use disorders for COVID-19 screening and vaccination because of their health vulnerability.
Drug markets quickly recovered after the onset of the pandemic, but some trafficking dynamics have been accelerated during Covid-19.

**COVID-19 HAS ACCELERATED SOME DRUG TRAFFICKING PATTERNS**

- Larger shipment size
- Increased use of private aircraft
- Increased use of waterway routes
- Contactless methods to deliver drugs to end-consumers

**POSSIBLE RESPONSES**

- Foster international cooperation for fighting the enduring problem of drug trafficking.
- Exchange and transfer law enforcement intelligence and effective interdiction approaches and best practices.
- Develop international accountability mechanisms and practices for shipping and railway companies, postal services, and air cargo.
- Implement real-time data monitoring systems for promptly detecting and addressing drug market changes.
SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST
IMPACT OF COVID-19

FINDINGS

Non-medical use of cannabis and sedatives has increased globally during the pandemic

» Allocate sufficient funding in national post-COVID-19 budgets for drug prevention and treatment to prevent the acceleration of increasing drug use patterns.

» Prioritize scientific evidence-based prevention of drug use in post-pandemic investment.

» Pre-empt further increases in the number of people who use cannabis, and the harm arising from its increasing non-medical use, through cost-effective measures such as prevention.

COVID-19 fallout is likely to be felt in drug markets for years to come

POST-COVID-19 ECONOMIC CRISIS WILL HAVE GREATEST IMPACT ON DRUG MARKETS

POST-COVID-19 ECONOMIC CRISIS predicted

Expanding drug cultivation and trafficking

Food insecurity may intensify illicit drug cultivation and production

More drug use

A protracted economic crisis may accelerate progression to drug use disorders

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

» Support parents and young people in vulnerable circumstances to face the stresses of the pandemic without resorting to negative coping mechanisms.

» Alleviate the negative consequences for vulnerable and marginalized population groups through post-pandemic recovery plans that include housing, food supply, economic assistance and health insurance.

» Increase the effectiveness of alternative development interventions to improve the conditions of rural households.
THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM

COMMON CHALLENGE

LOCAL DYNAMICS
While cannabis trafficking and use affect all regions worldwide, other drug issues pose additional threats in different geographical locations.

- High level of opioid-related overdoses
- Increasing use of methamphetamine
- Cocaine use
- Manufacture of methamphetamine and opioids
- Cocaine production and trafficking
- Cocaine use disorders
- Cocaine trafficking
- HIV among PWID
- Opioids/Opiates
- Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS)
- Cocaine
- Manufacture of methamphetamine and opioids
- Cocaine trafficking
- Cocaine production and trafficking
- Cocaine use disorders
- Cocaine trafficking
- HIV among PWID

**THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM COMMON CHALLENGE, LOCAL DYNAMICS**
high level of opioid-related overdoses
increasing use of methamphetamine
cocaine use
manufacture of methamphetamine and opioids
cocaine production and trafficking
cocaine use disorders
cocaine trafficking
expanding cocaine market
increasing use of ATS
opiates use
non-medical use of tramadol
increasing cocaine trafficking
heroin in transit spilling over into local heroin use
high prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs
high prevalence of opioids use
expansion of NPS and synthetic drug markets
high prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs
opiates use
high prevalence of use of stimulants (methamphetamine and cocaine)
large methamphetamine market
 Captagon trafficking and use
methamphetamine manufacture and use
high prevalence of use of stimulants (methamphetamine and cocaine)
### Demand

- **CANNABIS**
  - Roughly 200 million people used cannabis in 2019 representing 4 per cent of the global population.
  - The figure is highest in North America (14.5 per cent) and lowest in Asia (2 per cent).
  - The number of cannabis users has increased by nearly 18 per cent over the past decade.

- **COCAINE**
  - An estimated 20 million people used cocaine in 2019, corresponding to 0.4 per cent of the global population.
  - The prevalence rate of use was the highest in Oceania (2.7 per cent), mainly reflecting the situation in the sub-region Australia and New Zealand, and the lowest in Asia (0.07 per cent).

- **OPIOIDS**
  - Around 62 million people used opioids for non-medical purposes in 2019, corresponding to 1.2 per cent of the global population.
  - North America (3.6 per cent) has the highest prevalence, Europe the lowest (0.8 per cent).
  - The number of users worldwide has nearly doubled over the past decade, with the increase in the last few years mainly driven by new estimates in Asia and Africa.

### Supply

- **CANNABIS**
  - No data are available on the global illicit cultivation of cannabis but qualitative information suggests an overall expansion between 2010-2019.
  - Between 2009–2019, quantities seized fell by 35 per cent, largely because of dramatic declines in North America partly linked to legalization of non-medical cannabis in some jurisdictions.
  - Excluding North American data, global seizures were 36 per cent higher in 2019 than in 2009.

- **COCAINE**
  - Global manufacture doubled in output between 2014 and 2019 to reach an estimated 1,784 tons, the highest level ever recorded.
  - The quantity seized more than doubled in the same period, with the Americas accounting for close to 83 per cent of global quantity intercepted in 2019.
  - Following an upward trend over the period 2013–2017, illicit coca cultivation stabilised in 2018 and then declined for the first time in years by 5 per cent in 2019.

- **OPIOIDS**
  - Following a decline in the area under illicit cultivation of opium poppy from a peak in 2017, it rebounded in 2020, rising by 24 per cent compared with the previous year, to reach 295,000 ha.
  - Global opium production has stabilised since 2018, amounting to 7,410 tons in 2020.

### Key Issues

- **CANNABIS**
  - Diverse cannabis products have becoming more potent yet the number of adolescents regarding the drug as harmful is declining rapidly, a trend that risks increasing the negative impact of cannabis on younger generations.
  - An increase in cannabis use has been observed in many countries during the pandemic.

- **COCAINE**
  - Cocaine manufacture was disrupted during the initial stages of the pandemic but returned to its typical level shortly afterwards.
  - The cocaine trafficking route between South America and Europe is evolving, with greater competition between traffickers pushing up the quality and reducing prices, which is likely to continue to widen the potential harm caused by the drug in Europe.

- **OPIOIDS**
  - Roughly 50,000 people died from opioid overdoses in the United States in 2019, more than double the 2010 figure. Fentanyl and its analogues now are involved in most of the deaths.
  - North America has seen a spike in opioid overdose deaths since the onset of the pandemic.
  - As the result of the economic downturn triggered by the pandemic, fragile communities in areas of illicit cultivation of drugs are now increasingly vulnerable, especially in Afghanistan, where the appeal of illicit crop cultivation of opium poppy is likely to rise.
  - Access to pharmaceutical opioids in low- and middle-income countries is a tiny fraction of the availability in high-income countries.
### Demand

**AMPHETAMINE-TYPE STIMULANTS (ATS)**

- An estimated 27 million people used amphetamine type stimulants in 2019, corresponding to 0.5 per cent of the global population.
- The figure was highest in North America (2.3 per cent) and lowest in Africa (0.4 per cent), though the data from Africa was patchy.
- Nearly 20 million people globally are estimated to have used “ecstasy” in the past year.
- Use of amphetamines varies by region. Non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants and methamphetamine is the most prevalent in North America, methamphetamine in East and South East Asia and amphetamine predominates in Western and Central Europe and in the Near and Middle East.

### Supply

- More than 95 per cent of ATS laboratories uncovered between 2015 and 2019 were used to manufacture methamphetamine, and the drug accounted for 72 per cent of the total quantity of ATS seized in the same period.
- The quantities of ATS seized rose by 64 per cent between 2018 and 2019 to record levels, capping an almost sixfold increase in the past decade while methamphetamine showed a tenfold increase over the same period.
- Ecstasy and amphetamine seizures doubled between 2015 and 2019.
- Roughly 85 per cent of amphetamine laboratories dismantled worldwide between 2015 and 2019 were in Europe, along with more than half of ecstasy laboratories.
- Most methamphetamine was seized in North America (49 per cent) and East and South-East Asia (43 per cent); most amphetamine was seized in the Near and Middle East and South West Asia (49 per cent) and in Europe (26 per cent); and most ecstasy was seized in Europe (43 per cent) and North America (21 per cent) over the period 2015–2019.

### Key issues

- Seizures of precursor chemicals under international control used in the manufacture of methamphetamine have strongly declined in the past decade, as manufacturers continue to change the chemicals they use to bypass interdiction.
- Injecting and use of stimulants is driving HIV outbreaks among people who use drugs in some sub-regions.

### New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

- There are some declines in the use of NPS in North America and in Europe, but NPS use continues among some marginalized population groups.
- The use of NPS appears to be rapidly emerging in some low- and middle-income countries.
- The harms from NPS use, though may vary according to the type of substance, are observed/visible more at the individual rather than at the population level.

### Demand

- The number of NPS found at global level has been stabilizing in recent years at slightly more than 500 substances (541 in 2019) while the actual number of new psychoactive substances identified for the first time at global level declined from 213 to 71 between 2013 and 2019.
- The number of NPS with opioid effects (often fentanyl analogues) have been growing strongly over the past decade and continued growing in 2018 and in 2019, though at a lesser pace than before.
- Quantities of synthetic NPS seized have declined markedly, including of synthetic cannabinoids.

### Supply

- National and international drug control systems have succeeded in containing the spread of NPS in high-income countries where different types of legislation have been applied.
- NPS markets are emerging in countries where control systems may be weaker.
- The limited capacity of forensic, law enforcement and health experts to identify different NPS and their use makes it challenging for countries to adequately address the threat of NPS.
Consisting of five separate booklets, the *World Drug Report 2021* provides an in-depth analysis of the global drug markets and paints a comprehensive picture of the measurable effects and potential impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the world drug problem.

Booklet 1 summarizes the four subsequent booklets by reviewing their key findings and highlighting their policy implications. Booklet 2 offers a projection of the impact of population growth on drug use by 2030 and gives a global overview of the supply of and demand for drugs, including their health impact and the trafficking of substances over the Internet. Booklet 3 provides an analysis of the global markets for cannabis and opioids, both in terms of supply and use, and includes an overview of the latest developments in countries with measures regulating the non-medical use of cannabis; it also discusses the overlaps between the various opioids and looks at access to pharmaceutical opioids for medical use. Booklet 4 contains the latest trends in and estimates of the markets for stimulants – cocaine, methamphetamine, amphetamine and “ecstasy” – both at the global level and in the most affected subregions. Booklet 5 presents an early assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on drug markets by looking at how it has affected drug supply and demand dynamics, including in terms of health consequences and how drug service provision has adapted to the new situation in many countries; the booklet closes with a look at how the pandemic may influence long-term changes in the drug markets.

The *World Drug Report 2021* 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, with its special focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, at assisting Member States in anticipating and addressing challenges that may arise in the near future.