



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS
AND CRIME

STUDY
GUIDE

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

DEAR DELEGATES,

WELCOME TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME. AS MEMBERS OF THIS VITAL BODY, YOU WILL BE STEPPING INTO THE SHOES OF DIPLOMATS ENTRUSTED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY TO UPHOLD GLOBAL JUSTICE AND CONFRONT THE EVOLVING THREATS OF ORGANIZED CRIME, ENSURING THAT SAFETY AND THE RIGHT TO HEALTH REMAIN THE CORNERSTONES OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD. THROUGH RIGOROUS DEBATE, COLLABORATION, AND DIPLOMACY, YOU WILL EXPLORE COMPLEX GLOBAL ISSUES, STRIVE TO BUILD CONSENSUS, AND WORK TOWARD REALISTIC RESOLUTIONS.

THIS YEAR, OUR AGENDA WILL FOCUS ON:

“ADDRESSING THE GLOBAL SPREAD OF ULTRA-POTENT AND CONTAMINATED DRUGS THROUGH ILLICIT SUPPLY CHAINS.”

WE EXPECT EVERY DELEGATE TO COME PREPARED WITH A SOLID UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR ASSIGNED COUNTRY’S STANCE, RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, AND THE BROADER INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK. WHETHER YOU ARE A SEASONED DELEGATE OR NEW TO MUN, WE BELIEVE THAT THIS COMMITTEE WILL OFFER YOU A SPACE TO LEARN, GROW, AND CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFULLY TO GLOBAL DISCOURSE.

AS YOUR EXECUTIVE BOARD, OUR GOAL IS TO FOSTER A DYNAMIC, RESPECTFUL, AND INTELLECTUALLY ENRICHING ENVIRONMENT WHERE DIPLOMACY THRIVES. WE ARE HERE NOT ONLY TO MODERATE THE FLOW OF DEBATE BUT TO ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY, CRITICAL THINKING, AND CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC SPEAKING.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR REQUIRE ASSISTANCE, PLEASE DON’T HESITATE TO CONTACT US. WE ARE EXCITED TO MEET EACH OF YOU AND LOOK FORWARD TO A PRODUCTIVE AND MEMORABLE SESSION AHEAD.

WARM REGARDS,

THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF UNODC,

CHAIRPERSON- GAURIKA AGARWAL

CHAIRPERSON- STUTI SINHA

VICE- CHAIRPERSON- STHITODHI SEN

MODERATOR- VIDISHA FIRAKE



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INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME (UNODC) IS THE PRINCIPAL UNITED NATIONS ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR ADDRESSING ILLICIT DRUGS, CRIME, CORRUPTION, TERRORISM, AND ORGANIZED CRIME. ESTABLISHED IN 1997 BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL THROUGH THE MERGER OF THE UNITED NATIONS DRUG CONTROL PROGRAMME (UNDCP) AND THE CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION (CICP), IT OPERATES UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AND REPORTS TO BOTH THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC).

COMPOSED OF A SECRETARIAT HEADQUARTERED IN VIENNA, AUSTRIA, WITH A GLOBAL NETWORK OF FIELD OFFICES, THE UNODC PROVIDES A MULTILATERAL FORUM FOR MEMBER STATES, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND EXPERTS TO TACKLE TRANSNATIONAL THREATS. IT SUPPORTS COUNTRIES IN DEVELOPING POLICIES, LEGISLATION, AND INSTITUTIONS TO PREVENT AND COMBAT THESE ISSUES, WHILE PROMOTING JUSTICE, RULE OF LAW, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. THE OFFICE ADOPTS RESOLUTIONS, STRATEGIES, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS DURING SESSIONS OF ITS GOVERNING BODIES, SUCH AS THE COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS (CND) AND THE COMMISSION ON CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE (CCPCJ), SIGNALING INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENT AND PROMPTING NATIONAL ACTIONS.

OBJECTIVES

AS A DISTINCT ENTITY FROM OTHER UN BODIES, UNODC WORKS DIRECTLY WITH STATES TO PREVENT ORGANIZED CRIME, TERRORISM, AND CORRUPTION; PROMOTE ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION AND REHABILITATION AND ENHANCE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS. ITS CORE OBJECTIVES ARE:

- COORDINATE UN-WIDE EFFORTS TO COMBAT ILLICIT DRUGS AND CRIME
- PROVIDE NORMATIVE SUPPORT THROUGH CONVENTIONS AND STANDARDS
- DELIVER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING TO MEMBER STATES
- CONDUCT RESEARCH, ANALYSIS, AND TREND MONITORING (E.G., GLOBAL REPORT ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS)
- PROMOTE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS
- MAINSTREAM HUMAN RIGHTS, HEALTH, AND DEVELOPMENT IN ANTI-CRIME RESPONSES
- PREVENT AND INVESTIGATE LINKS BETWEEN CRIME, TERRORISM, AND CORRUPTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

RISE OF SYNTHETIC AND CONTAMINATED DRUGS

THE GLOBAL PROLIFERATION OF ULTRA-POTENT AND CONTAMINATED DRUGS THROUGH ILLICIT SUPPLY CHAINS REMAINS ONE OF THE BIGGEST TRANSNATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES. IN RECENT YEARS, SYNTHETIC OR DESIGNER DRUGS SUCH AS FENTANYL, NITAZENES, METHAMPHETAMINE AND OTHER CHEMICALLY ENGINEERED SUBSTANCES HAVE OVERSHADOWED CONVENTIONAL SUBSTANCES, DRASTICALLY CHANGING THE GLOBAL DRUG LANDSCAPE. MOREOVER, THE RISE OF COUNTERFEIT PHARMACEUTICALS AND ADULTERATED STREET DRUGS HAS INTENSIFIED THIS CRISIS, AS MANY SUBSTANCES ARE MANUFACTURED WITHOUT ANY QUALITY CONTROL AND ARE MIXED WITH HIGHLY TOXIC CHEMICALS. MONITORING THE TRAFFICKING OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT AS MANUFACTURERS CONSTANTLY ALTER THE CHEMICAL COMPOSITIONS TO EVADE LEGAL RESTRICTIONS.

ROLE OF TRANSNATIONAL CRIME AND TRAFFICKING NETWORKS

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS EXPLOIT GLOBALIZATION, WEAK GOVERNANCE, CORRUPTION AND LACK OF REGULATION TO SUSTAIN THEIR HIGHLY PROFITABLE ILLICIT SUPPLY CHAINS. THE NETWORKS ARE TYPICALLY ORGANIZED INTO DECENTRALIZED, MULTI-LAYERED SUPPLY CHAINS ACROSS DIFFERENT JURISDICTIONS, MAKING IT DIFFICULT TO COORDINATE AN INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE. ADDITIONALLY, THE ADVENT OF DARK WEB MARKETPLACES AND ENCRYPTED COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES HAS ENABLED TRAFFICKERS TO OPERATE WITH MUCH MORE EASE ACROSS MULTIPLE CONTINENTS. THIS HIGH LEVEL OF ADAPTABILITY AND SECRECY ALLOWS THESE CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS TO CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVE, WHICH MAKES EFFORTS FOR REGULATION EXTREMELY COMPLEX FOR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AUTHORITIES.

GLOBAL STRUCTURE OF ILLICIT SUPPLY CHAINS

VARIOUS REGIONS IN SOUTH AMERICA, WEST AND SOUTH ASIA AND NORTH AFRICA, INCLUDING THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE AND COLOMBIA, ARE PLAGUED WITH DRUG PRODUCTION CENTERS. CHINA AND INDIA ARE ALSO IMPORTANT SOURCE COUNTRIES FOR NPSS, WHERE PRECURSOR CHEMICALS ARE EASILY OBTAINED. THE REGIONS OF CENTRAL AMERICA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, WEST AFRICA AND PARTS OF THE MIDDLE EAST ARE CONDUCIVE FOR THE TRANSPORT AND SMUGGLING OF DRUGS. THE LARGEST CONSUMER MARKETS ARE LOCATED IN NORTH AMERICA, EUROPE, ASIA AND OCEANIA.

WHY THIS AGENDA MATTERS?

THE WIDESPREAD CIRCULATION OF CONTAMINATED AND ULTRA-POTENT DRUGS POSES SEVERE RISKS TO PUBLIC HEALTH, CRIME, SAFETY, GOVERNANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY. THE INCREASING AVAILABILITY OF SYNTHETIC SUBSTANCES HAS LED TO RISING OVERDOSE RATES AND PREVENTABLE DEATHS WORLDWIDE. BEYOND THE HEALTH IMPACTS, ILLICIT NETWORKS ARE INVOLVED IN NARCOTERRORISM, ORGANIZED CRIME AND CORRUPTION. THE LIMITED ACCESS TO TREATMENT FOR DRUG USE DISORDERS FURTHER EXACERBATES THE CRISIS. THEREFORE, ADDRESSING THIS ISSUE IS CRUCIAL TO SAFEGUARD PUBLIC HEALTH, GOVERNANCE AND CURB THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL NETWORKS.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

- 1. NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPSS): CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES DESIGNED IN LABORATORIES TO MIMIC THE EFFECTS OF NATURAL ILLEGAL DRUGS LIKE CANNABIS, COCAINE OR ECSTASY. THEY ARE ALSO KNOWN AS “DESIGNER DRUGS” OR DRUG “ANALOGUES” CHEMISTS CONSTANTLY CHANGE THEIR CHEMICAL STRUCTURE TO BYPASS DRUG LAWS, HENCE, THEY ARE CONSIDERED “LEGAL HIGHS.”
- 2. ULTRA-POTENT DRUGS: ULTRA-POTENT DRUGS GENERALLY REFER TO SYNTHETIC SUBSTANCES THAT POSSESS EXTREME STRENGTH AND TOXICITY. THESE SUBSTANCES POSE A SEVERE RISK TO PUBLIC HEALTH BECAUSE THEY ARE OFTEN MIXED INTO THE UNREGULATED DRUG SUPPLY, MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR INDIVIDUALS TO KNOW THEY ARE CONSUMING.
- 3. ADULTERATED STREET DRUGS: ADULTERATED STREET DRUGS ARE ILLICIT SUBSTANCES MIXED WITH PHARMACOLOGICALLY ACTIVE ‘CUTTING AGENTS’ OR ‘INACTIVE DILUENTS’ (SUCH AS CAFFEINE, BATH SALTS, ACETAMINOPHEN, PHENACETIN, LEVAMISOLE, XYLAZINE) TO INCREASE DEALER PROFITS, MIMIC THE DRUG’S EFFECT, OR FACILITATE DELIVERY.
- 4. TRANSITIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS (TOCs): SELF-PERPETUATING, BORDERLESS GROUPS OPERATING ILLEGALLY TO GENERATE IMMENSE PROFITS, PRIMARILY THROUGH DRUG AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING, ARMS SMUGGLING, MONEY LAUNDERING, AND CYBERCRIME. THEY FUNCTION MUCH LIKE GLOBAL CORPORATIONS, UTILIZING COMPLEX SUPPLY CHAINS, CORRUPTION, AND VIOLENCE ACROSS MULTIPLE JURISDICTIONS TO MINIMIZE RISK AND MAXIMIZE REVENUE.
- 5. DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION (DTOS): DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS (DTOS) ARE COMPLEX, OFTEN TRANSNATIONAL GROUPS THAT SPECIALIZE IN THE PRODUCTION, TRANSPORTATION, AND DISTRIBUTION OF ILLEGAL NARCOTICS. WHILE MANY ARE SMALL, LOOSELY STRUCTURED NETWORKS CONSISTING OF A FEW DOZEN MEMBERS, OTHERS OPERATE AS HIGHLY HIERARCHICAL, “PARA-MILITARY” ENTITIES WITH SOPHISTICATED COMMAND-AND-CONTROL SYSTEMS SIMILAR TO LEGITIMATE CORPORATIONS.

- 6. DARK WEB MARKETPLACES : DARK WEB MARKETPLACES (DARKNET MARKETS) ARE HIDDEN ONLINE BAZAARS ACCESSIBLE ONLY VIA SPECIALIZED BROWSERS LIKE TOR. OPERATING SIMILARLY TO CONVENTIONAL E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS, THEY FACILITATE THE ANONYMOUS TRADE OF ILLICIT GOODS, MAJORLY NARCOTICS, USING CRYPTOCURRENCIES AND ESCROW SYSTEMS TO AVOID LAW ENFORCEMENT.
- 7. ENCRYPTED COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES: ENCRYPTED COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES ENCODE MESSAGES INTO UNREADABLE CIPHERTEXT USING CRYPTOGRAPHIC ALGORITHMS AND KEYS. THEY GUARANTEE DATA CONFIDENTIALITY, INTEGRITY, AND AUTHENTICATION DURING TRANSMISSION. PRIMARY METHODS INCLUDE SYMMETRIC ENCRYPTION (SHARED KEYS) AND ASYMMETRIC ENCRYPTION (PUBLIC-PRIVATE KEY PAIRS), SECURING EVERYTHING FROM EVERYDAY CHATS TO ENTERPRISE NETWORKS.
- 8. NARCOTERRORISM: NARCOTERRORISM REFERS TO THE INTERSECTION OF DRUG TRAFFICKING AND TERRORISM, WHERE VIOLENT ACTIONS BY DRUG TRAFFICKERS ARE AIMED AT INFLUENCING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS THROUGH INTIMIDATION AND VIOLENCE.



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TIMELINE

HISTORY OF GLOBAL DRUG CONTROL MEASURES

THE SINGLE CONVENTION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS OF 1961 MARKED A TURNING POINT IN THE HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONTROL MEASURES. NARCOTICS LIKE OPIUM, MORPHINE, COCAINE AND HEROIN WERE WIDELY TRADED ACROSS INTERNATIONAL MARKETS. COLONIAL TRADE NETWORKS ALSO PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE EXPANSION OF THE GLOBAL NARCOTICS ECONOMY, PARTICULARLY THROUGH OPIUM TRADE IN ASIA. BY THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY, TRANSNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING NETWORKS WERE RAPIDLY EXPANDING AND THERE WAS A GROWING CONCERN OVER DRUG ADDICTION.

SEVERAL DRUG TREATIES, INCLUDING THE 1909 SHANGHAI OPIUM COMMISSION AND THE 1912 HAGUE OPIUM CONVENTION, DID ATTEMPT TO REGULATE THE PRODUCTION AND TRADE OF NARCOTICS. HOWEVER, THESE AGREEMENTS HAD A LIMITED SCOPE AND LACKED STRONG MECHANISMS FOR ENFORCEMENT, MAKING THEM DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT ACROSS COUNTRIES. THE 1961 CONVENTION CONSOLIDATED THE PREVIOUS TREATIES INTO A SINGLE UNIFIED GLOBAL FRAMEWORK FOR REGULATING THE PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND USAGE OF NARCOTICS, THEREBY LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE MODERN GLOBAL DRUG-CONTROL SYSTEM ADOPTED BY THE UNITED NATIONS. HOWEVER, THIS CONVENTION WAS DESIGNED TO REGULATE TRADITIONAL PLANT-BASED NARCOTICS AND IS NO LONGER EFFECTIVE IN ADDRESSING THE PROLIFERATION OF SYNTHETIC AND ULTRA-POTENT DRUGS.

RISE OF TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED DRUG TRAFFICKING

NETWORKS

WITH THE ADVENT OF GLOBALISATION IN THE EARLY 1990S CAME AN EXPLOSIVE GROWTH IN TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISED CRIME NETWORKS. AFTER THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SOVIET UNION, THE ENTIRE GEOPOLITICAL SCENARIO CHANGED, WITH SOFTER BORDERS AND WEAKER GOVERNANCE IN MANY COUNTRIES. THESE CONDITIONS WERE EXPLOITED BY DTOs. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE GROWTH OF OPEN MARKETS, LIBERALIZED TRADE POLICIES AND GLOBAL TRANSPORT NETWORKS ALLOWED REGIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS TO EXPAND THEIR OPERATIONS ACROSS THE GLOBE. IT ALSO ENABLED THEM TO CREATE COMPLEX SUPPLY CHAINS THAT SPAN MULTIPLE CONTINENTS.

ADDITIONALLY, RAPID DEVELOPMENTS IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND ADVANCEMENTS IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION, FACILITATED CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS TO COORDINATE THEIR TRAFFICKING OPERATIONS ACROSS MULTIPLE COUNTRIES. DARK WEB MARKETPLACES EMERGED ON THE INTERNET, WHICH GAVE DRUG SUPPLIERS AND BUYERS EVEN MORE ANONYMITY AND GLOBAL REACH. DIGITAL PAYMENT SYSTEMS AND CRYPTOCURRENCY FACILITATED MONEY LAUNDERING AND ANONYMOUS CROSS-BORDER TRANSACTIONS. THESE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE MADE TRAFFICKING NETWORKS MORE ADAPTIVE AND DECENTRALIZED, AND HAVE HENCE COMPLICATED LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS. DUE TO THE EASE OF DRUG TRADE, DRUG TRAFFICKING IS NOW A MAJOR SOURCE OF INCOME FOR TOC GROUPS, AS IT GENERATES BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF INCOME ANNUALLY.

THIS RAPID PROLIFERATION OF ILLICIT DRUGS PROMPTED MANY COUNTRIES TO ADOPT AGGRESSIVE “WAR ON DRUGS” POLICIES, WHICH INVOLVED STRICT CRIMINALISATION, MILITARY ENFORCEMENTS AND STRICTER ANTI-NARCOTICS LAWS. IN THE UNITED STATES, PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON FORMALLY LAUNCHED THE WAR ON DRUGS IN 1971, LEADING TO INCREASED DOMESTIC POLICING AND BORDER CONTROL MEASURES. SIMILAR HARDLINE POLICIES WERE ADOPTED IN LATIN AMERICAN AND ASIA, WHERE MILITARY ENFORCEMENTS WERE USED TO DISMANTLE CARTELS. WHILE THESE POLICIES DID RESULT IN MAJOR DRUG SEIZURES AND THE DISRUPTION OF MANY CRIMINAL NETWORKS, THEY ALSO SPARKED CRITICISM REGARDING MASS INCARCERATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS. FOLLOWING THIS, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS LOOKING FOR MORE BALANCED APPROACHES THAT INVOLVE REHABILITATION AND HARM-REDUCTION, RATHER THAN JUST BRUTAL AND RUTHLESS ENFORCEMENT.



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REGIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANISATIONS

BETWEEN THE 1970S-1990S, THE ANDEAN REGION OF LATIN AMERICA EMERGED AS A GLOBAL CENTRE FOR COCAINE PRODUCTION AND TRAFFICKING, MANUFACTURING OVER 2000 METRIC TONS IN 2023, WITH COLOMBIA ACCOUNTING FOR 70% OF GLOBAL COCAINE PRODUCTION. MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE MEDELLÍN AND CALI CARTELS HAVE BECOME VERY POWERFUL. THEY WERE ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED INSURGENT GROUPS AND INTRODUCED A NEW LEVEL OF VIOLENCE INTO THE GLOBAL DRUG SCENE. EVEN AFTER THE DISSOLUTION OF THESE GROUPS, NUMEROUS MEXICAN TRAFFICKING ORGANISATIONS CONTINUE TO DOMINATE COCAINE TRADE IN NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE.

IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE (MYANMAR, LAOS, THAILAND) AND THE GOLDEN CRESCENT (AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, IRAN) ARE MAJOR CENTRES OF HEROIN PRODUCTION, WITH GROUPS SUCH AS THE UNITED WA STATE ARMY FACILITATING THE PRODUCTION IN WEAKLY GOVERNED AREAS. IN EUROPE, THE DRUG TRADE SCENE IS DOMINATED BY ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS SUCH AS THE ITALIAN MAFIAS AND THE BALKAN NETWORKS, WHICH DO NOT PRODUCE ANY SUBSTANCES LOCALLY, BUT ARE INVOLVED IN MAJOR COCAINE IMPORTS FROM SOUTH AMERICA AND MONEY LAUNDERING. THESE DTOs ARE ALSO INVOLVED IN NARCO-TERRORISM, WHERE THEY USE DRUG PROFITS TO FUND INSURGENCIES AND INSTABILITY.

EMERGENCE OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS

FROM THE 1990S ONWARDS, THE PROMINENCE OF TRADITIONAL DRUGS SUCH AS HEROIN, CANNABIS, COCAINE, ETC. BEGAN DECLINING. THESE DRUGS, WHICH ARE OBTAINED FROM CULTIVATED PLANTS, DEPEND ON GEOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS AND VISIBLE TRAFFICKING ROUTES. MOREOVER, THEY ARE VERY WELL-DOCUMENTED AND EASILY DETECTABLE. DESIGNER DRUGS, ALSO KNOWN AS NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPSS), ARE PRODUCED IN LABORATORY ENVIRONMENTS, AND CAN MIMIC THE EFFECTS OF TRADITIONAL DRUGS WHILE EFFECTIVELY OVERCOMING THE SETBACKS THAT TRADITIONAL DRUGS BRING.

GROUPS AND CAN BE DISTRIBUTED AT A MUCH FASTER SPEED. THIS DECENTRALIZED PROCESS HAS MADE REGULATION SIGNIFICANTLY MORE DIFFICULT.

SINCE THEIR CHEMICAL COMPOSITION IS DISTINCT, THEY CAN OFTEN AVOID CLASSIFICATION UNDER THE EXISTING INTERNATIONAL DRUG CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS. THEY ARE ALSO CHEMICALLY VERY ADAPTABLE AND MANUFACTURERS FREQUENTLY ALTER THEIR MOLECULAR STRUCTURES TO RAPIDLY PRODUCE NEW VARIANTS THAT ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY ILLEGAL UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW. THUS, REGULATORY SYSTEMS CAN OFTEN ONLY ACT IN A REACTIONARY WAY - WHERE SUBSTANCES ARE IDENTIFIED, ASSESSED AND BANNED ONLY AFTER THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN CIRCULATED IN ILLICIT MARKETS.

RISE OF ULTRA-POTENT SUBSTANCES

A LARGE SUBGROUP OF NPSS CONSISTS OF ULTRA-POTENT SYNTHETIC SUBSTANCES, INCLUDING FENTANYL, METHADONE AND SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS, WHICH POSE A MUCH MORE SIGNIFICANT THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH. UNLIKE TRADITIONAL NARCOTICS, THEY ARE EXTREMELY POWERFUL EVEN IN SMALL QUANTITIES. FENTANYL IS ESTIMATED TO BE AROUND 50 TIMES MORE POTENT THAN HEROIN AND UP TO 100 TIMES MORE POTENT THAN MORPHINE. CERTAIN ANALOGUES OF FENTANYL, SUCH AS CARFENTANIL, ARE EVEN MORE DANGEROUS AND CAN BE LETHAL IN SMALL QUANTITIES. DUE TO THE HIGH POTENCY, TRAFFICKERS CAN TRANSPORT LARGE DOSES IN SMALLER SHIPMENTS, MAKING DETECTION DIFFICULT.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF ULTRA-POTENT DRUGS IS SEVERE. AS SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS SPREAD FROM THE UNITED STATES TO EUROPEAN AND ASIAN MARKETS, THE RISK OF OVERDOSE ALSO INCREASES. FENTANYL ACCOUNTS FOR NEARLY 50,000 DEATHS IN THE UNITED STATES ALONE. SLIGHT MEASUREMENT ERRORS DURING THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS CAN LEAD TO VASTLY INCONSISTENT POTENCIES BETWEEN BATCHES. AS A RESULT, USERS MAY CONSUME CONCENTRATIONS FAR STRONGER THAN EXPECTED, INCREASING THE RISK OF ACCIDENTAL OVERDOSE OR DEATH.

CONTAMINATION OF DRUG SUPPLY CHAINS

CONTAMINATION IS ANOTHER FEAR THAT COMES ALONG WITH THE EXPANSION OF ILLICIT DRUG SUPPLY CHAINS. AS NPSS ARE USUALLY PRODUCED IN CLANDESTINE, UNREGULATED ENVIRONMENTS, THEY ARE OFTEN MIXED WITH HEROIN, COCAINE, METHAMPHETAMINE AND OTHER TRADITIONAL SUBSTANCES. THIS IS DONE TO REDUCE THE PRODUCTION COSTS AND DISCREETLY ENHANCE THE POTENCY. FENTANYL CONTAMINATION IS GROWING INCREASINGLY PREVALENT AS SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS ARE COMMONLY DETECTED IN COUNTERFEIT PHARMACEUTICAL TABLETS THAT ARE DESIGNED TO RESEMBLE PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS, INCLUDING PAINKILLERS AND SEDATIVES. AS A RESULT, INDIVIDUALS MAY UNKNOWINGLY INGEST HIGHLY POTENT SUBSTANCES, INCREASING THE RISK OF ACCIDENTAL OVERDOSE. ADDITIONALLY, ADULTERANTS AND CUTTING AGENTS USED DURING ILLICIT MANUFACTURING MAY SOMETIMES BE HIGHLY TOXIC. CERTAIN CHEMICALS ARE LINKED TO SEVERE LONG-TERM NEUROLOGICAL, CARDIOVASCULAR AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES. SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH PSYCHOSIS, PARANOIA, HALLUCINATIONS AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOURS. SINCE NPSS ARE NEW, POORLY RESEARCHED AND OFTEN LACK DOCUMENTATION, HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS STRUGGLE TO ADMINISTER THE APPROPRIATE TREATMENTS.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

SINCE 2020, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE RESTRICTIONS TO PREVENT IT HAVE AFFECTED GLOBAL DRUG MARKETS. MEASURES SUCH AS LOCKDOWNS, BORDER CLOSURE AND RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENTS DISRUPTED THE TRADITIONAL TRAFFICKING ROUTES AND MECHANISMS. THIS FURTHER INTENSIFIED THE SHIFT TOWARDS DECENTRALIZED SUPPLY CHAINS, SYNTHETIC DRUGS AND ONLINE DISTRIBUTION.

A LOT OF COUNTRIES EXPERIENCED DISRUPTIONS IN HEALTHCARE SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS, INCLUDING REDUCED ACCESS TO TREATMENT, REHABILITATION AND HARM-REDUCTION PROGRAMS. MOREOVER, THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE PANDEMIC, INCLUDING UNEMPLOYMENT AND RISING POVERTY LEVELS, PUSHED SOME COMMUNITIES TOWARDS ILLICIT ACTIVITIES SUCH AS ILLEGAL CROP CULTIVATION. THIS EXACERBATED THE ISSUE AND CONTRIBUTED TO HIGHER LEVELS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE NEAR THOSE COMMUNITIES.

CURRENT STATUS

THE PUBLIC HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF THE RECENT PROLIFERATION OF DRUGS HAVE BEEN CATASTROPHIC. ACCORDING TO THE UNODC WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025, APPROXIMATELY 316 MILLION PEOPLE USED DRUGS IN 2023 (AROUND 6% OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION AGED 15–65) REPRESENTING A 28% INCREASE OVER THE PAST DECADE. DRUG USE DISORDERS AFFECT AN ESTIMATED 64 MILLION PEOPLE WORLDWIDE, YET AS OF 2023, ONLY 1 IN 12 OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS ACCESSED ANY FORM OF TREATMENT, A RATIO THAT HAS NOT MEANINGFULLY IMPROVED DESPITE THE GROWING SCALE OF THE CRISIS. OPIOIDS ACCOUNT FOR APPROXIMATELY 69% OF ALL DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS GLOBALLY, ACCORDING TO THE WHO. THE GLOBAL ILLICIT DRUG MARKET CONTINUES TO GENERATE HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS OF DOLLARS ANNUALLY, AND IT IS ONE OF THE LARGEST INFORMAL ECONOMIES ON THE PLANET.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES THE CURRENT ERA FROM PRIOR DRUG EPIDEMICS IS NOT MERELY THE POTENCY OF INDIVIDUAL SUBSTANCES, BUT THE ADAPTABILITY OF THE SYSTEMS PRODUCING AND DISTRIBUTING THEM. TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS HAVE SYSTEMATICALLY EXPLOITED REGULATORY BLIND SPOTS BY INTRODUCING NOVEL ANALOGUES ALLOWING NEW PRODUCTS TO REACH CONSUMERS BEFORE ANY HARM DATA EXISTS. A SINGLE KILOGRAM OF FENTANYL CONTAINS ENOUGH DOSES TO KILL APPROXIMATELY HALF A MILLION PEOPLE, YET CAN BE CONCEALED IN AN ENVELOPE. THE UNODC'S EARLY WARNING ADVISORY HAS NOW RECORDED 1,342 NPSS ACROSS 151 COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES BETWEEN 2013 AND 2025. NEW COMPOUNDS ARE ENTERING CIRCULATION FASTER THAN AGENCIES CAN CLASSIFY, SCHEDULE, OR DEVELOP DETECTION PROTOCOLS FOR THEM.

THE TRAFFICKING INFRASTRUCTURE UNDERPINNING THIS TRADE HAS BECOME MORE DECENTRALIZED, TECHNOLOGICALLY SOPHISTICATED, AND GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED THAN AT ANY PRIOR POINT IN HISTORY. MEXICAN CARTELS, PRIMARILY THE SINALOA AND JALISCO NEW GENERATION CARTELS, CONTINUE TO DOMINATE FENTANYL PRODUCTION, SYNTHESIZING THE DRUG FROM PRECURSOR CHEMICALS SOURCED PRIMARILY FROM CHINA AND PROCESSING IT IN CLANDESTINE LABORATORIES BEFORE SMUGGLING IT ACROSS THE US BORDER. IN 2023, DEA LABORATORY TESTING FOUND THAT 7 IN 10 FENTANYL PILLS CONTAINED A POTENTIALLY LETHAL DOSE AND THAT 30% OF FENTANYL POWDER SEIZED THAT YEAR ALSO CONTAINED XYLAZINE, THE VETERINARY SEDATIVE. DARK WEB DRUG MARKETS GENERATED AN ESTIMATED \$850 MILLION IN REVENUE IN 2022, AND ENCRYPTED PLATFORMS SUCH AS TELEGRAM, HAVE BECOME PRIMARY STOREFRONTS FOR DRUG DISTRIBUTION OPERATING WELL AHEAD OF PLATFORM GOVERNANCE RESPONSES.

NO REGION HAS BEEN LEFT UNTOUCHED, THOUGH THE CRISIS HAS TAKEN DISTINCT AND MEASURABLE FORMS SHAPED BY LOCAL GEOGRAPHY, ECONOMICS, AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY.

IN THE UNITED STATES, TOTAL DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS FELL FROM A PEAK OF APPROXIMATELY 110,000 IN 2022 TO LESS THAN 80,000 IN 2024, DRIVEN PRIMARILY BY A SHARP DECLINE IN FENTANYL-INVOLVED DEATHS. PROVISIONAL CDC DATA THROUGH AUGUST 2025 ESTIMATED APPROXIMATELY 73,000 DEATHS IN THAT 12-MONTH PERIOD, REPRESENTING A CONTINUING BUT SLOWING DECLINE. CRITICALLY, WHILE FENTANYL DEATHS ARE FALLING, DEATHS INVOLVING METHAMPHETAMINE ROSE FROM 29,456 IN 2023 TO 37,096 IN 2024, AND COCAINE-INVOLVED DEATHS INCREASED TO 30,833 — SIGNALING A SHIFT IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE OVERDOSE CRISIS RATHER THAN ITS RESOLUTION. THE ECONOMIC BURDEN REMAINS ENORMOUS: THE CDC ESTIMATES THE TOTAL COST OF THE OPIOID CRISIS AT OVER \$1.5 TRILLION ANNUALLY.

IN CANADA, THE CRISIS HAS FOLLOWED A SIMILAR BUT DISTINCT TRAJECTORY. BETWEEN JANUARY 2016 AND SEPTEMBER 2025, CANADA RECORDED 55,032 APPARENT OPIOID TOXICITY DEATHS. BRITISH COLUMBIA RECORDED 2,511 UNREGULATED DRUG TOXICITY DEATHS IN 2023 — 6.9 PER DAY — WITH FENTANYL DETECTED IN OVER 85% OF TOXICOLOGICAL TESTS. BY 2024, A 17% DECLINE IN OPIOID DEATHS WAS RECORDED NATIONALLY — THE FIRST SUSTAINED DROP SINCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC — THOUGH DEATHS REMAIN FAR ABOVE PRE-CRISIS LEVELS. THE ARRIVAL OF NITAZENES IN CANADA'S ILLICIT SUPPLY BY 2024 HAS INTRODUCED A NEW LAYER OF RISK THAT HARM REDUCTION SERVICES CALIBRATED FOR FENTANYL ARE NOT YET EQUIPPED TO ADDRESS.

IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, THE UNODC WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025 CONFIRMED THAT NITAZENES WERE DETECTED IN 458 DEATHS BETWEEN JUNE 2023 AND JANUARY 2025 — A FIGURE NEARLY THREE TIMES HIGHER THAN THE 180 PREVIOUSLY REPORTED THROUGH MAY 2024 — ESTABLISHING THE UK AS THE PRIMARY EUROPEAN FOCAL POINT FOR NITAZENE FATALITIES. SCOTLAND'S DRUG DEATH RATE OF 23.5 PER 100,000 REMAINS THE HIGHEST IN EUROPE AND NEARLY THREE TIMES THE EU AVERAGE. THE CHALLENGE IS COMPOUNDED BY THE FACT THAT NITAZENES ARE MORE POTENT THAN HEROIN, WERE INITIALLY UNDETECTABLE BY STANDARD IMMUNOASSAY TESTS, AND REQUIRE HIGHER NALOXONE DOSES THAN EXISTING SERVICES WERE DESIGNED TO PROVIDE.

ACROSS EUROPE MORE BROADLY, NITAZENE-LINKED DEATHS HAVE NOW BEEN DOCUMENTED WELL BEYOND THE UK. IN 2023, 61 OF 117 DRUG-RELATED DEATHS IN ESTONIA (52%) AND 101 OF 154 DRUG-RELATED DEATHS IN LATVIA (66%) WERE ASSOCIATED WITH NITAZENES, ACCORDING TO UNODC WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025 — FIGURES THAT REPRESENT AN EXTRAORDINARY CONCENTRATION OF NOVEL SYNTHETIC OPIOID HARM IN SMALL-POPULATION COUNTRIES WITH LIMITED SPECIALIST TREATMENT INFRASTRUCTURE. IRELAND REPORTED 77 NITAZENE-LINKED DEATHS IN JUST TWO CITIES IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2023 ALONE. THE EMCDDA DOCUMENTED SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS IN OVER 250 DRUG SEIZURES ACROSS 22 EU MEMBER STATES IN 2023, A THREEFOLD INCREASE FROM 2019.

AUSTRALIA, DESPITE ITS GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION, RECORDED A 40% RISE IN SYNTHETIC OPIOID DETECTIONS BETWEEN 2021 AND 2024. THE AUSTRALIAN CRIMINAL INTELLIGENCE COMMISSION ESTIMATED THE ILLICIT DRUG MARKET COSTS THE COUNTRY AUD \$11.3 BILLION ANNUALLY, AND UNODC'S 2025 REPORT CONFIRMED THAT GOLDEN TRIANGLE METHAMPHETAMINE TRAFFICKING ROUTES NOW EXTEND DIRECTLY INTO AUSTRALIAN MARKETS THROUGH EXPANDING MARITIME CORRIDORS VIA MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA.

IN THE MIDDLE EAST, SYRIA'S CAPTAGON TRADE — VALUED AT AN ESTIMATED \$5.7 BILLION IN 2023 — HAS CONTINUED TO FLOW TOWARD THE ARABIAN PENINSULA DESPITE THE FALL OF THE ASSAD REGIME IN LATE 2024. UNODC'S WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025 CONFIRMED THAT 2024 AND 2025 SEIZURE DATA SHOW CAPTAGON CONTINUING TO CIRCULATE, SUGGESTING EITHER STOCKPILE RELEASES OR CONTINUED PRODUCTION UNDER NEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES. JORDAN ALONE SEIZED OVER 1.2 BILLION CAPTAGON TABLETS BETWEEN 2020 AND 2023, AND THE DRUG'S DOCUMENTED USE BY COMBATANTS ACROSS REGIONAL CONFLICT THEATERS ADDS A SECURITY DIMENSION THAT EXTENDS FAR BEYOND CONVENTIONAL DRUG ENFORCEMENT.

IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE HAS REACHED WHAT UNODC DESCRIBED IN MAY 2025 AS "UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS" OF SYNTHETIC DRUG PRODUCTION AND TRAFFICKING. A RECORD 236 METRIC TONS OF METHAMPHETAMINE WERE SEIZED IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA IN 2024 — A 24% INCREASE FROM THE 190 METRIC TONS SEIZED IN 2023, WHICH ITSELF FOLLOWED 151 METRIC TONS IN 2022. THAILAND ALONE BECAME THE FIRST COUNTRY IN THE REGION TO SEIZE MORE THAN 100 METRIC TONS OF METHAMPHETAMINE IN A SINGLE YEAR, INTERDICTING 130 METRIC TONS IN 2024. CAMBODIA REPORTED ITS LARGEST METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURES IN HISTORY THAT SAME YEAR. IN JUNE 2025, INDONESIA SEIZED TWO METRIC TONS OF METHAMPHETAMINE FROM A SINGLE FISHING VESSEL — THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST-EVER DRUG BUST, WITH AN ESTIMATED STREET VALUE OF \$200–400 MILLION — WITH THE CARGO CONFIRMED TO HAVE ORIGINATED IN MYANMAR'S SHAN STATE.

IN WEST AFRICA, SIERRA LEONE'S "KUSH" CRISIS TRIGGERED A NATIONAL EMERGENCY DECLARATION IN APRIL 2024, WITH THE DRUG — BELIEVED TO CONTAIN SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS AND FENTANYL DERIVATIVES — OVERWHELMING HOSPITALS AND REHABILITATION FACILITIES IN FREETOWN. THE CRISIS REFLECTS A BROADER REGIONAL PATTERN: WEST AFRICA HAS BECOME BOTH A TRANSIT CORRIDOR FOR COCAINE DESTINED FOR EUROPE AND AN EMERGING END-MARKET FOR SYNTHETIC DRUGS, OPERATING WITH FORENSIC AND PUBLIC HEALTH CAPACITY SO LIMITED THAT THE SUBSTANCES DRIVING OVERDOSE DEATHS OFTEN CANNOT EVEN BE IDENTIFIED.

INDIA PRESENTS A CRISIS OF CONSUMPTION, TRANSIT, AND PHARMACEUTICAL DIVERSION THAT IS ONLY BEGINNING TO RECEIVE COMMENSURATE INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION. THE UNODC ESTIMATES OVER 23 MILLION INDIANS ARE DEPENDENT ON OPIOIDS, AND METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURES SURGED FROM UNDER 100 KILOGRAMS A DECADE AGO TO OVER 3,000 KILOGRAMS IN 2023. INDIA'S PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR — THE WORLD'S THIRD-LARGEST BY VOLUME, SUPPLYING OVER 60% OF AFRICA'S GENERIC MEDICINES — HAS BEEN REPEATEDLY IMPLICATED IN THE DIVERSION OF TRAMADOL, CODEINE SYRUPS, AND PRECURSOR CHEMICALS INTO ILLICIT MARKETS ACROSS AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST, A STRUCTURAL VULNERABILITY THE INCB HAS FLAGGED IN MULTIPLE SUCCESSIVE ANNUAL REPORTS.

ACROSS ALL REGIONS, THE CENTRAL CHALLENGE REMAINS UNCHANGED: SUPPLY CHAINS ARE EVOLVING FASTER THAN THE REGULATORY, FORENSIC, DIPLOMATIC, AND ENFORCEMENT INSTITUTIONS DESIGNED TO CONTAIN THEM. THE UNODC WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025 FRAMES THE CURRENT MOMENT EXPLICITLY AS ONE SHAPED BY GLOBAL INSTABILITY — CONFLICT, GOVERNANCE FAILURE, AND GEOPOLITICAL FRAGMENTATION — ACTIVELY EMPOWERING ORGANIZED CRIMINAL NETWORKS AND COMPOUNDING THE ALREADY SEVERE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND SECURITY COSTS OF THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM.



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CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: AFGHANISTAN, THE GOLDEN CRESCENT, AND THE HEROIN–SYNTHETIC DRUG TRANSITION (2020–2026)

FOR DECADES, AFGHANISTAN DOMINATED THE GLOBAL HEROIN TRADE, ACCOUNTING FOR APPROXIMATELY 80% OF THE WORLD'S ILLICIT OPIUM PRODUCTION. THE GOLDEN CRESCENT — ENCOMPASSING AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, AND IRAN — DISTRIBUTED THIS SUPPLY ACROSS THREE DEFINED CORRIDORS: THE BALKAN ROUTE THROUGH IRAN AND TURKEY INTO EUROPE, THE NORTHERN ROUTE INTO RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA, AND THE SOUTHERN ROUTE THROUGH MARITIME CHANNELS INTO AFRICA AND THE GULF.

THE TALIBAN'S APRIL 2022 OPIUM BAN FUNDAMENTALLY DISRUPTED THIS ARCHITECTURE. CULTIVATION COLLAPSED FROM 232,000 HECTARES IN 2022 TO 10,200 HECTARES IN 2025 — A REDUCTION OF OVER 95% — WITH OPIUM PRODUCTION FALLING A FURTHER 32% IN 2025 ALONE TO AN ESTIMATED 296 METRIC TONS. FARMERS' INCOME FROM OPIUM SALES FELL 48% IN A SINGLE YEAR, FROM \$260 MILLION IN 2024 TO \$134 MILLION IN 2025. OPIATE STOCKPILES AT THE END OF 2022 WERE ESTIMATED AT 13,200 TONS — ENOUGH TO POTENTIALLY MEET DEMAND FOR AFGHAN OPIATES UNTIL 2027 — AND BOTH HEROIN AND OPIUM SEIZURES GLOBALLY FELL APPROXIMATELY 50% IN WEIGHT SINCE 2021. DESPITE LOWER VOLUMES, HIGH PRICES PER KILOGRAM ENSURE MASSIVE PROFITS CONTINUE FLOWING PRIMARILY TO HIGH-LEVEL TRAFFICKERS AND ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS, NOT TO FARMERS.

THE MARKET HAS ADAPTED RATHER THAN COLLAPSED. PURITY-ADJUSTED HEROIN PRICES IN MAJOR EUROPEAN DESTINATION MARKETS HAVE INCREASED DRAMATICALLY SINCE 2024. SYNTHETIC DRUG SEIZURES IN AND AROUND AFGHANISTAN WERE 50% HIGHER BY LATE 2024 COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS YEAR, AS ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS PIVOT TOWARD METHAMPHETAMINE, WHICH IS EASIER TO PRODUCE, HARDER TO DETECT, AND LESS VULNERABLE TO CLIMATE SHOCKS THAN OPIUM. HEROIN CONTINUES TO BE TRANSPORTED ALONG TRADITIONAL BALKAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN PATHWAYS, AS WELL AS LESS CONVENTIONAL ROUTES, SUSTAINED BY ABUNDANT STOCKPILES AND ALTERNATIVE SOURCES INCLUDING MYANMAR.

INDIA'S EXPOSURE WITHIN THIS CORRIDOR HAS DEEPENED SIGNIFICANTLY. THE 2021 MUNDRA PORT SEIZURE OF 2,998 KILOGRAMS OF AFGHAN HEROIN — CONCEALED AS SEMI-PROCESSED TALC AND ROUTED THROUGH BANDAR ABBAS — AND OPERATION KHOJBEEN IN 2022, WHICH INTERCEPTED 218 KILOGRAMS VALUED AT ₹1,526 CRORE OFF THE LAKSHADWEEP COAST, DEMONSTRATED INDIA'S VULNERABILITY AS A TRANSSHIPMENT NODE. OPERATION RAGEPILL IN MAY 2026 THEN CONFIRMED INDIA'S EXPANDING ROLE IN SYNTHETIC DRUG TRANSIT, SEIZING 227.7 KILOGRAMS OF CAPTAGON WORTH ₹182 CRORE DESTINED FOR GULF MARKETS — ILLUSTRATING HOW TRAFFICKING NETWORKS ARE ACTIVELY REPURPOSING ESTABLISHED INDIAN MARITIME CORRIDORS FOR SYNTHETIC DRUG CATEGORIES AS TRADITIONAL OPIATE FLOWS CONTRACT.

CASE STUDY 2: THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE AND THE SYNTHETIC DRUG SURGE (2020–2026)

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE — WHERE MYANMAR, LAOS, AND THAILAND CONVERGE — HAS UNDERGONE A STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION THAT UNODC DESCRIBED IN MAY 2025 AS PRODUCING “UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS” OF SYNTHETIC DRUG MANUFACTURING AND TRAFFICKING. WHAT WAS HISTORICALLY AN OPIUM-PRODUCING REGION HAS BECOME THE WORLD’S DOMINANT SYNTHETIC DRUG MANUFACTURING ZONE, EXPLOITING THE SAME GEOGRAPHIC REMOTENESS AND ARMED GROUP INFRASTRUCTURE PREVIOUSLY USED TO PROTECT POPPY FIELDS, NOW REDIRECTED TOWARD INDUSTRIAL-SCALE CHEMICAL SYNTHESIS.

A RECORD 236 METRIC TONS OF METHAMPHETAMINE WERE SEIZED IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA IN 2024 — A 24% INCREASE FROM THE 190 METRIC TONS SEIZED IN 2023, WHICH ITSELF FOLLOWED 151 METRIC TONS IN 2022. THAILAND ALONE BECAME THE FIRST COUNTRY IN THE REGION TO SEIZE MORE THAN 100 METRIC TONS IN A SINGLE YEAR, INTERDICTING 130 METRIC TONS IN 2024, WHILE CAMBODIA REPORTED ITS LARGEST METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURES IN HISTORY — NEARLY 10 METRIC TONS — AS THE TRAFFICKING ROUTE CONNECTING IT TO MYANMAR VIA LAOS EXPANDED RAPIDLY. IN JUNE 2025, INDONESIA SEIZED TWO METRIC TONS OF METHAMPHETAMINE FROM A SINGLE FISHING VESSEL — ITS LARGEST-EVER DRUG BUST, WORTH AN ESTIMATED \$200–400 MILLION — CONFIRMED AS ORIGINATING IN MYANMAR’S SHAN STATE.

THE MANUFACTURING HEARTLAND IS SHAN STATE, WHERE MYANMAR’S FEBRUARY 2021 MILITARY COUP DESTROYED WHATEVER LIMITED STATE AUTHORITY REMAINED, LEAVING THE UNITED WA STATE ARMY, THE SAM GOR SYNDICATE, AND MULTIPLE ARMED FACTIONS IN CONTROL OF LARGE-SCALE FACILITIES BEYOND ANY GOVERNMENTAL REACH. CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE SHOWN REMARKABLE ADAPTABILITY — RAPIDLY EXPANDING OVERLAND ROUTES THROUGH CAMBODIA AND LAOS, AND INCREASINGLY EXPLOITING MARITIME CORRIDORS THROUGH MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA, WITH SABAH IN MALAYSIA NOW EMERGING AS A MAJOR MARITIME TRAFFICKING HUB. IN VIETNAM, AUTHORITIES DISMANTLED AN INDUSTRIAL-SCALE KETAMINE FACILITY IN MARCH 2025, ILLUSTRATING THE SPREAD OF PRODUCTION SITES INTO MOST LOWER MEKONG COUNTRIES.

AVERAGE METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURE WEIGHTS BY END OF 2024 WERE MORE THAN TWICE WHAT THEY WERE IN MID-2021 — SUGGESTING THAT UNLIKE HEROIN, METHAMPHETAMINE SUPPLY REMAINS ALMOST COMPLETELY UNAFFECTED BY AFGHANISTAN’S OPIUM BAN, AND IS ACTIVELY EXPANDING TO FILL THE OPIOID SUPPLY GAP IN MULTIPLE MARKETS SIMULTANEOUSLY. UNODC’S 2025 REPORT CONFIRMED THAT GOLDEN TRIANGLE TRAFFICKING ROUTES NOW EXTEND INTO SOUTH ASIA, AUSTRALIA, EAST AFRICA, AND GULF MARKETS, WITH THE CONVERGENCE OF DRUG MANUFACTURING WITH ONLINE FRAUD, CASINO MONEY LAUNDERING, AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING CREATING COMPOUND CRIMINAL ECOSYSTEMS MORE ENTRENCHED THAN ANY SINGLE INDUSTRY ALONE.

CASE STUDY 3: THE NETHERLANDS AND EUROPE'S SYNTHETIC DRUG MANUFACTURING NETWORKS (2020–2026)

THE NETHERLANDS HAS FUNCTIONED AS THE UNDISPUTED CENTER OF SYNTHETIC DRUG MANUFACTURING IN EUROPE — A ROLE EMBEDDED IN ITS CHEMICAL INDUSTRY INFRASTRUCTURE, THE PORT OF ROTTERDAM'S POSITION AS EUROPE'S LARGEST MARITIME GATEWAY, AND CRIMINAL NETWORKS THAT HAVE OPERATED AT INDUSTRIAL SCALE FOR DECADES. WHAT MAKES THE DUTCH CASE PARTICULARLY INSTRUCTIVE IS HOW THE MANUFACTURING NETWORK HAS ADAPTED IN 2025 WHEN FACED WITH ITS FIRST SIGNS OF CONTRACTION.

IN 2025, DUTCH POLICE DISMANTLED 142 DRUG LABORATORIES — A 23% DROP IN SYNTHETIC DRUG LABS SPECIFICALLY — THE FIRST DECLINE IN FIVE YEARS, ATTRIBUTED PARTLY TO STRICTER CHINESE REGULATIONS LIMITING RAW MATERIAL AVAILABILITY AND PARTLY TO DUTCH CRIMINAL NETWORKS RELOCATING OPERATIONS TO BELGIUM, GERMANY, AND SPAIN, WHICH ALL REPORTED RISING LAB NUMBERS WITH DUTCH INVOLVEMENT. CRITICALLY, 64% OF ALL LABS DISCOVERED IN 2025 WERE IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS — UP FROM 58% IN 2024 — CREATING SERIOUS RISKS OF EXPLOSION, FIRE, AND CHEMICAL EXPOSURE IN DENSELY POPULATED NEIGHBORHOODS. A ROTTERDAM LAB EXPLOSION IN FEBRUARY 2024 HAD ALREADY KILLED THREE PEOPLE, ILLUSTRATING THESE RISKS IN PRACTICE.

THE PEAK YEARS SET THE CONTEXT. IN 2023, THE NETHERLANDS ACCOUNTED FOR 32 OF THE 36 MDMA LABORATORIES DISMANTLED ACROSS THE ENTIRE EU, 38 OF 93 AMPHETAMINE LABS, 29 OF 250 METHAMPHETAMINE LABS, AND 10 OF 14 HEROIN CUTTING AND PACKAGING SITES — MAKING IT THE DOMINANT PRODUCTION LOCATION ACROSS EVERY MAJOR SYNTHETIC DRUG CATEGORY SIMULTANEOUSLY. SYNTHETIC CATHINONE SEIZURES ACROSS EUROPE REACHED 37 METRIC TONS IN 2023, UP FROM JUST 4.5 TONS IN 2021, WITH THE NETHERLANDS SERVING AS A PRIMARY IMPORT AND DISTRIBUTION NODE FOR BULK CATHINONE SHIPMENTS FROM INDIA.

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT RECENT DEVELOPMENT IS OPERATION FABRYKA, COORDINATED BY EUROPOL AND CONCLUDED IN JANUARY 2026. THE YEARLONG OPERATION, RUNNING FROM FEBRUARY 2025 TO JANUARY 2026, INCLUDED OVER 20 ACTION DAYS, 85 ARRESTS, 100 SEARCHES, AND THE DISMANTLING OF 24 INDUSTRIAL-SCALE LABORATORIES ACROSS BELGIUM, CZECH REPUBLIC, GERMANY, NETHERLANDS, AND POLAND. SEIZURES INCLUDED 1,000 METRIC TONS OF PRECURSOR CHEMICALS — ENOUGH TO POTENTIALLY PRODUCE 300 METRIC TONS OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS — AND OVER 120,000 LITERS OF TOXIC CHEMICAL WASTE. THE NETWORK HAD USED SEVEN LEGAL POLISH COMPANIES AS FRONTS TO IMPORT AND DISTRIBUTE PRECURSORS. THAT EUROPOL ITSELF DESCRIBED THIS AS "THE LARGEST-EVER OPERATION AGAINST SYNTHETIC DRUG PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION" UNDERLINES BOTH THE SCALE OF WHAT WAS DISMANTLED AND THE SCALE OF WHAT CONTINUES TO OPERATE AROUND IT.

CASE STUDY 4: CANADA'S PUBLIC HEALTH AND SYNTHETIC OPIOID CRISIS (2020–2026)

CANADA'S OPIOID CRISIS IS ONE OF THE MOST THOROUGHLY DOCUMENTED DRUG EMERGENCIES IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD — DISTINGUISHED NOT ONLY BY ITS SCALE BUT BY THE DEGREE TO WHICH IT HAS BECOME A LABORATORY FOR CONTESTED HARM REDUCTION POLICY EXPERIMENTS WHOSE OUTCOMES ARE NOW BEING ACTIVELY REASSESSED.

BETWEEN JANUARY 2016 AND SEPTEMBER 2025, CANADA RECORDED 55,032 APPARENT OPIOID TOXICITY DEATHS, WITH 4,162 DEATHS IN THE FIRST NINE MONTHS OF 2025 ALONE — 96% OF THEM ACCIDENTAL. BRITISH COLUMBIA, ALBERTA, AND ONTARIO TOGETHER ACCOUNT FOR 78% OF ALL FATALITIES, WITH MALES REPRESENTING 74% OF DEATHS AND INDIVIDUALS AGED 30–49 THE MOST HEAVILY AFFECTED DEMOGRAPHIC. AS OF APRIL 2024 TO MARCH 2025, MORE THAN 18 PEOPLE WERE STILL DYING EVERY DAY FROM OPIOID TOXICITY IN CANADA.

BRITISH COLUMBIA HAS BEEN GROUND ZERO SINCE DECLARING A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY IN 2016. BY EARLY 2026, THE PROVINCE HAD ACCUMULATED NEARLY 18,000 DRUG-RELATED DEATHS SINCE THE EMERGENCY DECLARATION, WITH APPROXIMATELY FIVE PEOPLE STILL DYING PER DAY FROM UNREGULATED DRUGS — MORE DEATHS THAN FROM HOMICIDE, SUICIDE, MOTOR VEHICLE INCIDENTS, DROWNINGS, AND FIRES COMBINED. THE PROVINCE'S DECRIMINALIZATION PILOT — WHICH ALLOWED ADULTS TO POSSESS UP TO 2.5 GRAMS OF ILLICIT DRUGS FROM 2023 — WAS EFFECTIVELY REVERSED BY EARLY 2026, WITH PREMIER DAVID EBY PUBLICLY STATING IT "DIDN'T WORK." BC'S SAFER SUPPLY PROGRAM, WHICH PROVIDES PHARMACEUTICAL-GRADE OPIOIDS TO PEOPLE AT OVERDOSE RISK, PEAKED AT NEARLY 5,200 PATIENTS IN MARCH 2023 BEFORE DECLINING TO FEWER THAN 3,900 BY DECEMBER 2024 AMID POLICY PRESSURE.

CANADA'S DECEMBER 2025 GOVERNMENT ANALYSIS IDENTIFIED BEHAVIORAL CHANGES — PARTICULARLY A SHIFT FROM INJECTING TO SMOKING OPIOIDS, WHICH CARRIES LOWER OVERDOSE RISK — AS ONE FACTOR IN THE MODEST RECENT DECLINE IN DEATHS, ALONGSIDE EXPANDED NALOXONE DISTRIBUTION AND PEER-BASED OVERDOSE PREVENTION. THE ARRIVAL OF NITAZENES — MORE POTENT THAN FENTANYL AND REQUIRING MULTIPLE NALOXONE DOSES — HAS ADDED A NEW LAYER OF RISK THAT INFRASTRUCTURE BUILT FOR FENTANYL IS ONLY PARTIALLY EQUIPPED TO MANAGE. CANADA'S EXPERIENCE ILLUSTRATES THE FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGE OF ANY HARM REDUCTION FRAMEWORK: EACH EVOLUTION OF THE TOXIC DRUG SUPPLY DEMANDS A CORRESPONDING INSTITUTIONAL ADAPTATION THAT CONSISTENTLY LAGS BEHIND THE PACE OF CHANGE IN THE ILLICIT MARKET ITSELF.

CASE STUDY 5: INDIA — CONSUMPTION, TRANSIT, AND PHARMACEUTICAL DIVERSION (2020–2026)

INDIA'S POSITION IN THE GLOBAL DRUG CRISIS IS UNIQUELY MULTIDIMENSIONAL — OPERATING SIMULTANEOUSLY AS A MAJOR CONSUMPTION COUNTRY, A CRITICAL TRANSIT CORRIDOR BETWEEN THE GOLDEN CRESCENT AND GULF MARKETS, AND AN INADVERTENT STRUCTURAL ENABLER OF ILLICIT DRUG PRODUCTION THROUGH ITS PHARMACEUTICAL AND CHEMICAL MANUFACTURING SECTOR. THIS COMBINATION MAKES INDIA ONE OF THE MOST CONSEQUENTIAL AND UNDEREXAMINED ACTORS IN THE INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRADE.

ON CONSUMPTION, THE SCALE IS SIGNIFICANT. THE UNODC ESTIMATES OVER 23 MILLION INDIANS ARE DEPENDENT ON OPIOIDS, ONE OF THE LARGEST SUCH POPULATIONS GLOBALLY. PUNJAB HAS HISTORICALLY RECORDED SOME OF THE HIGHEST PER CAPITA HEROIN DEPENDENCY RATES IN ASIA, A DIRECT LEGACY OF AFGHAN TRAFFICKING ROUTES THROUGH PAKISTAN. THE NORTHEASTERN STATES — MANIPUR, MIZORAM, NAGALAND — FACE A DISTINCT AND GROWING METHAMPHETAMINE THREAT FROM GOLDEN TRIANGLE NETWORKS MOVING WESTWARD, WITH INDIAN AUTHORITIES SEIZING OVER 3,000 KILOGRAMS OF METHAMPHETAMINE IN 2023, UP FROM UNDER 100 KILOGRAMS A DECADE EARLIER.

THE TRANSIT DIMENSION HAS BEEN DOCUMENTED REPEATEDLY THROUGH LANDMARK INTERDICTIONS. THE 2021 MUNDRA PORT SEIZURE OF 2,998 KILOGRAMS OF AFGHAN HEROIN — ROUTED THROUGH BANDAR ABBAS AND CONCEALED IN DECLARED CARGO — REMAINS ONE OF THE LARGEST SINGLE HEROIN SEIZURES IN INDIAN HISTORY. OPERATION KHOJBEEN IN 2022 INTERCEPTED 218 KILOGRAMS VALUED AT ₹1,526 CRORE FROM FISHING VESSELS OFF THE LAKSHADWEEP COAST. OPERATION RAGEPILL IN MAY 2026 CONFIRMED INDIA'S EXPANDING SYNTHETIC DRUG EXPOSURE, WITH 227.7 KILOGRAMS OF CAPTAGON WORTH ₹182 CRORE SEIZED EN ROUTE TO GULF MARKETS — ILLUSTRATING THAT INDIA'S TRANSSHIPMENT ROLE HAS EXPANDED WELL BEYOND TRADITIONAL OPIATES INTO SYNTHETIC STIMULANTS TRACKING NEWER TRAFFICKING CORRIDORS.

THE PHARMACEUTICAL DIMENSION IS THE MOST STRUCTURALLY SIGNIFICANT. INDIA'S PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY — THE WORLD'S THIRD-LARGEST BY VOLUME, SUPPLYING OVER 60% OF AFRICA'S GENERIC MEDICINES AND APPROXIMATELY 40% OF GENERIC DRUGS CONSUMED IN THE UNITED STATES — CREATES A CORRESPONDING VULNERABILITY THROUGH THE LEGITIMATE PRODUCTION OF TRAMADOL, CODEINE-BASED SYRUPS, AND KEY PRECURSOR CHEMICALS. THE UNODC WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025 IDENTIFIED TRAMADOL AS A MAJOR AND WORSENING THREAT IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA AND THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST, WITH INDIAN PHARMACEUTICAL SUPPLY CHAINS PLAYING A DOCUMENTED ROLE IN ITS DIVERSION. IN 2022, INDIAN AUTHORITIES DISMANTLED OVER 15 CLANDESTINE MANUFACTURING UNITS LINKED TO DIVERSION NETWORKS. THE INCB HAS RAISED SUSTAINED CONCERNS ABOUT PRECURSOR CHEMICAL MONITORING GAPS IN SUCCESSIVE ANNUAL REPORTS — A VULNERABILITY THAT REQUIRES INSTITUTIONAL REGULATORY REFORM RATHER THAN ENFORCEMENT ACTION ALONE TO ADDRESS MEANINGFULLY.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

MEMBER STATES:

UNITED STATES : THE UNITED STATES REMAINS THE WORLD'S LARGEST CONSUMER MARKET FOR ILLICIT SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS, THOUGH 2025 MARKED THE SECOND CONSECUTIVE YEAR OF SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN OVERDOSE DEATHS — THE LONGEST SUSTAINED DROP IN DECADES. TOTAL DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS PEAKED AT APPROXIMATELY 110,000 IN 2022, FELL TO 105,007 IN 2023, DROPPED SHARPLY BY 27% TO 79,384 IN 2024, AND PROVISIONAL CDC DATA RELEASED IN MAY 2026 PROJECTS APPROXIMATELY 69,973 DEATHS FOR THE FULL YEAR 2025 — A FURTHER 13.9% DECLINE. IN 2025, THE DEA SEIZED OVER 47 MILLION FENTANYL PILLS AND NEARLY 10,000 POUNDS OF FENTANYL POWDER — EQUIVALENT TO OVER 369 MILLION LETHAL DOSES. NOTABLY, THE SINGLE LARGEST FENTANYL PILL SEIZURE IN DEA HISTORY OCCURRED IN APRIL 2025, WHEN AGENTS IN ALBUQUERQUE CONFISCATED 2.7 MILLION PILLS IN A SINGLE OPERATION. A NATIONWIDE DEA SURGE IN AUGUST 2025 TARGETING SINALOA CARTEL NETWORKS ACROSS 23 DOMESTIC FIELD DIVISIONS AND 7 FOREIGN REGIONS RESULTED IN 617 ARRESTS AND \$11 MILLION IN DRUG SEIZURES IN A SINGLE WEEK. CRITICALLY HOWEVER, THE CRISIS IS SHIFTING RATHER THAN RESOLVING: A NATIONWIDE TREND HAS EMERGED IN WHICH CARTELS ARE MOVING AWAY FROM PILL PRODUCTION TOWARD FENTANYL POWDER, WHICH IS CHEAPER TO PRODUCE AND EASIER TO MIX INTO OTHER SUBSTANCES INCLUDING METHAMPHETAMINE, COCAINE, AND HEROIN — A DEVELOPMENT THAT IS COMPLICATING BOTH DETECTION AND TREATMENT ACROSS ALL 50 STATES.

RUSSIA : RUSSIA'S DRUG CRISIS IS STRUCTURALLY UNLIKE ANY OTHER MAJOR ECONOMIES — DEFINED NOT BY FENTANYL OR HEROIN BUT BY A SYNTHETIC CATHINONE EPIDEMIC DISTRIBUTED ALMOST ENTIRELY THROUGH A DARKNET "DEAD DROP" ECONOMY. RUSSIAN DARKNET MARKETS — LED BY KRAKEN, MEGA, AND BLACKSPRUT — CONTROL 93% OF GLOBAL DARKNET DRUG MARKET SHARE, GENERATING APPROXIMATELY \$1.5 BILLION IN REVENUE IN 2023. BY 2024, RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE PLATFORMS ACCOUNTED FOR OVER 97% OF ALL CRYPTOCURRENCY-BASED ILLICIT DRUG SALES GLOBALLY, WITH KRAKEN ALONE RECEIVING ROUGHLY \$737 MILLION ON-CHAIN THAT YEAR. THE DOMINANT SUBSTANCE IS MEPHEDRONE — A SYNTHETIC CATHINONE — WHICH HOLDS APPROXIMATELY ONE-THIRD OF RUSSIA'S ENTIRE DRUG MARKET, WITH RESEARCHERS ESTIMATING UP TO 700,000 PURCHASES PER MONTH ACROSS MAJOR PLATFORMS. IN 2024, RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES DISMANTLED OVER 138 MEPHEDRONE LABORATORIES — ROUGHLY ONE EVERY TWO TO THREE DAYS — ACCOUNTING FOR APPROXIMATELY HALF OF ALL DRUG LABS CLOSED THAT YEAR. AS OF 2025, THE TRADE IS FURTHER DECENTRALIZING AWAY FROM DARKNET MARKETS AND TOWARD ENCRYPTED MESSAGING PLATFORMS, COMPLICATING ENFORCEMENT SIGNIFICANTLY. RUSSIA'S NEAR-TOTAL ABSENCE OF HARM REDUCTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROHIBITION ON OPIOID SUBSTITUTION THERAPY LEAVE MILLIONS OF USERS WITH ESSENTIALLY NO STATE-SANCTIONED TREATMENT PATHWAY — MAKING IT SIMULTANEOUSLY ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST SYNTHETIC DRUG MARKETS AND ONE OF THE LEAST EQUIPPED TO ADDRESS THE CONSEQUENCES

MEXICO : MEXICO IS THE PRIMARY PRODUCTION AND TRANSIT HUB FOR FENTANYL ENTERING THE UNITED STATES, WITH THE SINALOA AND JALISCO NEW GENERATION CARTELS SYNTHESIZING THE DRUG USING PRECURSOR CHEMICALS SOURCED FROM CHINA AND PROCESSING IT IN CLANDESTINE LABORATORIES BEFORE SMUGGLING IT ACROSS THE BORDER IN SMALL, CONCENTRATED QUANTITIES. MEXICAN AUTHORITIES SEIZED 2,329 KILOGRAMS OF FENTANYL IN 2023, THOUGH THIS COLLAPSED 94% IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2024 — A DROP ANALYSTS ATTRIBUTED TO DELIBERATE POLITICAL DECISIONS AROUND ENFORCEMENT TIMING. IN DECEMBER 2024, UNDER US TARIFF PRESSURE, MEXICO ANNOUNCED ITS LARGEST-EVER SINGLE FENTANYL SEIZURE: OVER ONE METRIC TON OF PILLS INTERCEPTED IN SINALOA. DEA REPORTING FROM SEPTEMBER 2025 NOTED THAT SOME CHINA-BASED CHEMICAL SUPPLIERS HAVE GROWN MORE RELUCTANT TO SUPPLY CONTROLLED PRECURSORS INTERNATIONALLY, REFLECTING CHINA'S UPDATED COMPLIANCE WITH UN COUNTER-NARCOTICS TREATIES — THOUGH THE IMPACT ON CARTEL SUPPLY CHAINS REMAINS TO BE SEEN. STRUCTURAL CORRUPTION ACROSS LAW ENFORCEMENT INSTITUTIONS REMAINS THE PRIMARY CONSTRAINT ON SUSTAINED INTERDICTION.

CANADA : BETWEEN JANUARY 2016 AND JUNE 2025, CANADA RECORDED 53,308 APPARENT OPIOID TOXICITY DEATHS, WITH A FURTHER 2,787 DEATHS RECORDED IN JUST THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 2025. IN 2024, TOTAL OPIOID OVERDOSE DEATHS FELL TO 7,146 NATIONALLY — A MEANINGFUL DECLINE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR — WITH BRITISH COLUMBIA, ALBERTA, AND ONTARIO ACCOUNTING FOR 78% OF ALL FATALITIES. FENTANYL WAS INVOLVED IN 57% OF APPARENT OPIOID TOXICITY DEATHS IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2025, AND 83% OF DEATHS INVOLVED NON-PHARMACEUTICAL OPIOIDS. DESPITE A CAD \$800 MILLION INVESTMENT IN OPIOID RESPONSE BETWEEN 2018 AND 2023 AND OVER 40 SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES, THE CRISIS CONTINUES TO CLAIM THOUSANDS OF LIVES ANNUALLY. CANADIAN GOVERNMENT DATA PUBLISHED IN DECEMBER 2025 IDENTIFIED SHIFTING DRUG USE BEHAVIORS — INCLUDING A RISE IN SMOKING RATHER THAN INJECTING OPIOIDS — AS ONE FACTOR IN THE MODEST RECENT DECLINE, THOUGH DEATHS REMAIN FAR ABOVE PRE-CRISIS LEVELS.

UNITED KINGDOM : DRUG-RELATED DEATHS IN ENGLAND AND WALES REACHED A NEW RECORD HIGH OF 5,565 IN 2024 — THE HIGHEST SINCE RECORDS BEGAN IN 1993 — WITH NITAZENE-INVOLVED DEATHS NEARLY QUADRUPLING FROM 52 IN 2023 TO 195 IN 2024. THE NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY HAS LINKED NITAZENES TO 278 DEATHS ACROSS THE UK, WITH SOME NITAZENES ESTIMATED TO BE UP TO 500 TIMES STRONGER THAN STREET HEROIN. SCOTLAND RECORDED 1,172 DRUG MISUSE DEATHS IN 2023, WITH AN AGE-STANDARDISED MORTALITY RATE MORE THAN TWICE THAT OF THE OTHER UK NATIONS. THE UNODC WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025 CONFIRMED 458 NITAZENE-LINKED DEATHS ACROSS THE UK BETWEEN JUNE 2023 AND JANUARY 2025 — A FIGURE THAT HAS GROWN SUBSTANTIALLY WITH EACH SUCCESSIVE REPORTING PERIOD AND THAT PARLIAMENT HAS DESCRIBED AS MARKING "THE BEGINNING OF A NEW STAGE IN THE DRUG-RELATED DEATHS CRISIS."

INDIA : INDIA'S ROLE IN THE GLOBAL DRUG CRISIS SPANS CONSUMPTION, TRANSIT, AND PHARMACEUTICAL DIVERSION SIMULTANEOUSLY. THE UNODC ESTIMATES OVER 23 MILLION INDIANS ARE DEPENDENT ON OPIOIDS, WHILE METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURES SURGED FROM UNDER 100 KILOGRAMS A DECADE AGO TO OVER 3,000 KILOGRAMS IN 2023, REFLECTING DEEPENING PENETRATION BY GOLDEN TRIANGLE NETWORKS. MAJOR INTERDICTIONS — INCLUDING THE 2021 MUNDRA PORT SEIZURE OF NEARLY 3,000 KILOGRAMS OF AFGHAN HEROIN, THE 2022 OPERATION KHOJBEEN MARITIME INTERCEPTION OF 218 KILOGRAMS VALUED AT OVER ₹1,526 CRORE, AND THE 2026 OPERATION RAGEPILL SEIZURE OF 227.7 KILOGRAMS OF CAPTAGON — ILLUSTRATE INDIA'S GROWING EXPOSURE AS A MULTI-CATEGORY TRANSSHIPMENT NODE. MOST STRUCTURALLY, INDIA'S PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR — THE WORLD'S THIRD-LARGEST BY VOLUME, SUPPLYING OVER 60% OF AFRICA'S GENERIC MEDICINES — HAS BEEN REPEATEDLY IMPLICATED IN THE DIVERSION OF TRAMADOL, CODEINE SYRUPS, AND PRECURSOR CHEMICALS INTO ILLICIT MARKETS ACROSS AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST, A VULNERABILITY THAT THE INCB HAS FLAGGED IN MULTIPLE SUCCESSIVE ANNUAL REPORTS.

COLOMBIA : COLOMBIA REMAINS THE WORLD'S DOMINANT COCAINE PRODUCER, WITH GLOBAL ILLEGAL COCAINE PRODUCTION REACHING RECORD HIGHS IN RECENT YEARS. ACCORDING TO UNODC 2024, COLOMBIA ACCOUNTS FOR APPROXIMATELY 61% OF GLOBAL COCA CULTIVATION, WITH GLOBAL COCAINE PRODUCTION REACHING 3,708 METRIC TONS IN 2023 — A 34% INCREASE FROM 2022 — WHILE GLOBAL SEIZURES HIT A RECORD 2,275 METRIC TONS, A 68% RISE OVER 2019. THE UNODC WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025 FURTHER CONFIRMED THAT COCAINE MARKETS HAVE SEEN SIGNIFICANT GROWTH PARTICULARLY ACROSS AFRICA AND ASIA, WITH RELATED TREATMENT DEMAND RISING IN TANDEM. THOUGH COLOMBIA'S PRIMARY ROLE HAS BEEN IN COCAINE RATHER THAN SYNTHETICS, ITS CRIMINAL NETWORKS ARE INCREASINGLY INTERSECTING WITH SYNTHETIC SUPPLY CHAINS, WITH COCAINE EXPORTS MORE FREQUENTLY FOUND ADULTERATED WITH FENTANYL ANALOGUES BEFORE LEAVING SOUTH AMERICA.

UNODC

SYRIA : SYRIA'S CAPTAGON TRADE CONTINUES TO DOMINATE THE REGIONAL SYNTHETIC STIMULANT MARKET, WITH SEIZURES OF AMPHETAMINE-TYPE STIMULANTS REACHING A RECORD HIGH IN 2023, ACCOUNTING FOR ALMOST HALF OF ALL GLOBAL SEIZURES OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS. VALUED AT AN ESTIMATED \$5.7 BILLION IN 2023 AND EXCEEDING SYRIA'S ENTIRE LEGITIMATE EXPORT SECTOR, CAPTAGON PRODUCTION WAS CONCENTRATED IN REGIME-CONTROLLED TERRITORIES AND HEZBOLLAH-LINKED AREAS. JORDAN ALONE SEIZED OVER 1.2 BILLION TABLETS BETWEEN 2020 AND 2023. FOLLOWING THE FALL OF THE ASSAD REGIME IN LATE 2024, LARGE CAPTAGON MANUFACTURING SITES WERE UNCOVERED INSIDE SYRIA, YET THE LATEST SEIZURE DATA FROM 2024 AND 2025 CONFIRM THAT CAPTAGON CONTINUES TO FLOW PRIMARILY TO COUNTRIES OF THE ARABIAN PENINSULA — POSSIBLY INDICATING THE RELEASE OF PREVIOUSLY ACCUMULATED STOCKPILES OR CONTINUED PRODUCTION IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS.

AUSTRALIA : AUSTRALIA HAS PROVEN UNABLE TO INSULATE ITSELF FROM THE GLOBAL SYNTHETIC DRUG SURGE DESPITE ITS GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION AND STRINGENT BORDER CONTROLS. SYNTHETIC OPIOID DETECTIONS ROSE 40% BETWEEN 2021 AND 2024, WITH THE AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE REPORTING A MARKED INCREASE IN FENTANYL ANALOGUES CONCEALED IN INTERNATIONAL MAIL — A TRAFFICKING METHOD THAT BYPASSES TRADITIONAL MARITIME AND AVIATION INTERDICTION ENTIRELY. THE AUSTRALIAN CRIMINAL INTELLIGENCE COMMISSION ESTIMATED THE ILLICIT DRUG MARKET COSTS THE COUNTRY AUD \$11.3 BILLION ANNUALLY, AND UNODC'S MAY 2025 REPORT CONFIRMED THAT GOLDEN TRIANGLE METHAMPHETAMINE TRAFFICKING ROUTES NOW EXTEND DIRECTLY INTO AUSTRALIAN MARKETS THROUGH RAPIDLY EXPANDING MARITIME CORRIDORS VIA MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA — THE SAME ROUTES THAT PRODUCED INDONESIA'S LARGEST-EVER DRUG SEIZURE OF TWO METRIC TONS OF METHAMPHETAMINE FROM A SINGLE VESSEL IN JUNE 2025.

UNODC

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME (UNODC) THE UNODC IS THE PRIMARY INTERNATIONAL BODY FOR MONITORING AND COORDINATING THE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ORGANIZED CRIME, OPERATING WITH AN ESTIMATED BUDGET OF \$913.6 MILLION FOR 2024–2025 ACROSS MORE THAN 150 COUNTRIES. ITS WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025 — DRAWING ON DATA FROM 192 MEMBER STATES — DOCUMENTED THAT APPROXIMATELY 316 MILLION PEOPLE USED DRUGS IN 2023, A 28% INCREASE OVER THE PAST DECADE, WITH DRUG USE DISORDERS AFFECTING 64 MILLION PEOPLE GLOBALLY WHILE ONLY 8.1% ACCESSED ANY TREATMENT. IN 2025, UNODC DOCUMENTED RECORD METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURES OF 236 METRIC TONS IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA — A 24% INCREASE OVER 2024 — AND CONFIRMED THAT THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE HAS REACHED WHAT IT DESCRIBED AS "UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS" OF SYNTHETIC DRUG PRODUCTION AND TRAFFICKING.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) THE WHO LEADS THE INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO THE DRUG CRISIS, ESTIMATING APPROXIMATELY 600,000 DRUG-RELATED DEATHS ANNUALLY, WITH OPIOIDS ACCOUNTING FOR ROUGHLY 69–80% OF THAT TOLL. IT HAS BEEN CENTRAL TO ADVOCATING FOR EXPANDED NALOXONE ACCESS GLOBALLY AND TO DOCUMENTING THE TREATMENT GAP: AS OF 2023, ONLY 8.1% OF PEOPLE WITH DRUG USE DISORDERS RECEIVED ANY FORM OF TREATMENT — AND THE GAP IS SIGNIFICANTLY WIDER FOR WOMEN, WITH ONLY 1 IN 18 WOMEN WITH DRUG USE DISORDERS ACCESSING TREATMENT COMPARED TO 1 IN 7 MEN. THE WHO HAS ALSO FLAGGED THAT 1.4 MILLION PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS ARE CURRENTLY LIVING WITH HIV, A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF INADEQUATE HARM REDUCTION INFRASTRUCTURE GLOBALLY.

INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD (INCB) THE INCB MONITORS COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONVENTIONS AND REGULATES THE LEGITIMATE TRADE IN PRECURSOR CHEMICALS. ITS ANNUAL REPORTS HAVE CONSISTENTLY IDENTIFIED THE DIVERSION OF LEGALLY MANUFACTURED PRECURSORS — PARTICULARLY FROM CHINA AND INDIA — AS THE FOUNDATIONAL ENABLER OF SYNTHETIC DRUG MANUFACTURING AT SCALE. IN ITS 2023 REPORT, THE INCB NOTED THAT GLOBAL SEIZURES OF ACETIC ANHYDRIDE — THE KEY HEROIN PRECURSOR — WERE AT THEIR LOWEST SINCE 2005, SUGGESTING EITHER SUPPLY REDUCTION OR INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED EVASION. MORE RECENTLY, DEA REPORTING FROM SEPTEMBER 2025 NOTED THAT CHINA-BASED SUPPLIERS ARE SHOWING GREATER RELUCTANCE TO SUPPLY CONTROLLED PRECURSORS INTERNATIONALLY, REFLECTING UPDATED UN TREATY COMPLIANCE — A DEVELOPMENT THE INCB HAS LONG ADVOCATED FOR.

INTERPOL: INTERPOL COORDINATES CROSS-BORDER DRUG ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS ACROSS ITS 196 MEMBER COUNTRIES, PROVIDING INTELLIGENCE-SHARING INFRASTRUCTURE THAT NATIONAL AGENCIES CANNOT INDEPENDENTLY SUSTAIN. IN AUGUST 2025, A JOINT INTERPOL-EUROPOL-ICE OPERATION DISMANTLED MAJOR DARKNET DRUG NETWORKS ACROSS MULTIPLE JURISDICTIONS, SEIZING OVER \$200 MILLION IN CURRENCY AND DIGITAL ASSETS, OVER TWO METRIC TONS OF DRUGS INCLUDING 144 KILOGRAMS OF FENTANYL, AND OVER 180 FIREARMS, WITH 270 ARRESTS ACROSS TEN COUNTRIES. INTERPOL HAS ALSO MAINTAINED A DEDICATED FOCUS ON MARITIME PRECURSOR CHEMICAL TRAFFICKING, RECOGNIZING THAT DISRUPTING CHEMICAL SUPPLY CHAINS UPSTREAM IS STRUCTURALLY MORE IMPACTFUL THAN TARGETING FINISHED DRUG SHIPMENTS AT THE POINT OF DISTRIBUTION.

EUROPEAN UNION DRUGS AGENCY (EUDA): REBRANDED FROM THE EMCDDA IN 2024, EUDA SERVES AS EUROPE'S PRIMARY ANALYTICAL AND EARLY WARNING BODY FOR DRUG TRENDS. ITS EUROPEAN DRUG REPORT 2025 CONFIRMED RECORD DRUG POISONING DEATHS ACROSS MULTIPLE MEMBER STATES AND DOCUMENTED THAT SPAIN REPORTED ITS LARGEST-EVER COCAINE SEIZURE IN 2024. EUDA HAS BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF WARNING ABOUT NITAZENE DIFFUSION INTO CONTINENTAL EUROPE — CONFIRMED BY UNODC DATA SHOWING THAT 52% OF ALL DRUG-RELATED DEATHS IN ESTONIA AND 66% IN LATVIA IN 2023 INVOLVED NITAZENES — AND HAS FLAGGED THAT EUROPEAN HARM REDUCTION INFRASTRUCTURE REMAINS SYSTEMATICALLY UNPREPARED FOR THE SPEED AND TOXICITY OF EMERGING SYNTHETIC OPIOID CONTAMINATION.



UNODC

PRIVATE SECTOR

PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY: THE GLOBAL PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY INTERSECTS WITH THE ILLICIT DRUG TRADE THROUGH TWO MECHANISMS: DIVERSION OF LEGALLY MANUFACTURED CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES, AND EXPLOITATION OF LEGITIMATE CHEMICAL SUPPLY CHAINS FOR PRECURSOR PROCUREMENT. INDIA'S PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR HAS BEEN REPEATEDLY IMPLICATED IN DIVERTING TRAMADOL AND CODEINE PRODUCTS INTO ILLICIT MARKETS ACROSS WEST AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST, WITH INDIAN AUTHORITIES DISMANTLING OVER 15 CLANDESTINE MANUFACTURING UNITS LINKED TO DIVERSION NETWORKS IN 2022 ALONE. SEPARATELY, COUNTERFEIT PILL PRESSES CAPABLE OF PRODUCING THOUSANDS OF FENTANYL-LACED TABLETS PER HOUR — VISUALLY INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM LEGITIMATE PHARMACEUTICALS — REMAIN A DIRECT AND GROWING PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERN; AS OF JANUARY 2025, MEDETOMIDINE WAS FOUND IN 87% OF PHILADELPHIA DRUG SAMPLES, ILLUSTRATING HOW RAPIDLY ADULTERANT PROFILES SHIFT WITHIN A SINGLE CITY'S SUPPLY.

CHEMICAL MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY: THE CHEMICAL MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY IS THE UPSTREAM ENABLER OF THE SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE. PRECURSOR CHEMICALS FOR FENTANYL AND METHAMPHETAMINE ARE LEGALLY MANUFACTURED AT SCALE IN CHINA AND INDIA, MOVING THROUGH LEGITIMATE TRADE CHANNELS BEFORE BEING DIVERTED BY TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS. THE DEA HAS IDENTIFIED CHINESE CHEMICAL COMPANIES AS PRIMARY FENTANYL PRECURSOR SUPPLIERS TO MEXICAN CARTELS, AND THE US TREASURY HAS DOCUMENTED THE ROLE OF CHINESE MONEY LAUNDERING ORGANIZATIONS IN REPATRIATING CARTEL PROCEEDS. AS OF SEPTEMBER 2025, DEA REPORTING NOTED THAT SOME CHINESE SUPPLIERS ARE GROWING MORE RELUCTANT TO SUPPLY CONTROLLED PRECURSORS TO INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMERS, REFLECTING CHINA'S UPDATED COMPLIANCE WITH UN COUNTER-NARCOTICS TREATIES — THOUGH ANALYSTS CAUTION THIS HAS NOT YET MATERIALLY DISRUPTED CARTEL PRODUCTION CAPACITY.

TECHNOLOGY AND CRYPTOCURRENCY PLATFORMS DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE HAS BECOME INDISPENSABLE TO MODERN DRUG TRAFFICKING AT EVERY LEVEL. DARK WEB DRUG MARKETS GENERATED AN ESTIMATED \$850 MILLION IN REVENUE IN 2022, WITH SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS AMONG THE MOST ACTIVELY TRADED CATEGORIES. IN JANUARY 2026, EUROPOL — DESCRIBING IT AS "BY FAR THE LARGEST-EVER OPERATION" AGAINST SYNTHETIC DRUG PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION — DISMANTLED A EUROPE-WIDE NETWORK SPANNING BELGIUM, CZECH REPUBLIC, GERMANY, NETHERLANDS, POLAND, AND SPAIN, WHICH HAD BEEN IDENTIFIED IN 2024 IMPORTING VAST QUANTITIES OF PRECURSOR CHEMICALS FROM CHINA AND INDIA VIA ENCRYPTED COORDINATION. ENCRYPTED PLATFORMS SUCH AS TELEGRAM, WITH OVER 900 MILLION ACTIVE USERS, CONTINUE TO FUNCTION AS PRIMARY DRUG DISTRIBUTION STOREFRONTS, OPERATING WELL AHEAD OF PLATFORM GOVERNANCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSES.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION (DEA) THE DEA IS THE UNITED STATES' LEAD FEDERAL AGENCY FOR DRUG ENFORCEMENT, OPERATING ACROSS FIELD OFFICES IN 69 COUNTRIES. IN 2024, IT SEIZED MORE THAN 60 MILLION FENTANYL PILLS AND NEARLY 8,000 POUNDS OF FENTANYL POWDER — EQUIVALENT TO OVER 380 MILLION POTENTIALLY LETHAL DOSES. IN 2025, IT SEIZED A FURTHER 47 MILLION FENTANYL PILLS AND NEARLY 10,000 POUNDS OF POWDER BY YEAR-END, REPRESENTING OVER 369 MILLION ADDITIONAL LETHAL DOSES. IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2025 ALONE, THE DEA MADE OVER 2,105 FENTANYL-RELATED ARRESTS AND SEIZED NEARLY 65,000 POUNDS OF METHAMPHETAMINE AND OVER 201,500 POUNDS OF COCAINE. A SEPTEMBER 2025 DEA OPERATIONAL SURGE SPECIFICALLY TARGETED SINALOA CARTEL NETWORKS WORLDWIDE, REFLECTING THE AGENCY'S CONTINUED STRATEGIC FOCUS ON DISMANTLING CARTEL LEADERSHIP AND PRECURSOR SUPPLY CHAINS SIMULTANEOUSLY.

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (FBI): THE FBI'S ROLE IN DRUG ENFORCEMENT HAS EXPANDED SIGNIFICANTLY AS TRAFFICKING HAS MIGRATED TO DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE. IT LEADS FEDERAL INVESTIGATIONS INTO DARK WEB MARKETPLACES, CRYPTOCURRENCY MONEY LAUNDERING, AND CYBER-ENABLED DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS. IN AUGUST 2025, IT CONTRIBUTED TO A JOINT OPERATION WITH EUROPOL AND ICE THAT SEIZED OVER \$200 MILLION IN CURRENCY AND DIGITAL ASSETS AND RESULTED IN 270 ARRESTS ACROSS TEN COUNTRIES TARGETING DARKNET FENTANYL NETWORKS. THE FBI ALSO LED THE FIRST-EVER FEDERAL PROSECUTION OF CHINESE NATIONALS FOR SUPPLYING FENTANYL PRECURSOR CHEMICALS DIRECTLY TO MEXICAN CARTELS — A LANDMARK CASE THAT ESTABLISHED NEW LEGAL PRECEDENT FOR CROSS-BORDER PRECURSOR ACCOUNTABILITY.

EUROPOL: EUROPOL COORDINATES DRUG ENFORCEMENT ACROSS THE EU'S 27 MEMBER STATES. IN APRIL 2025, OPERATION BULUT — COORDINATED BY EUROPOL — LED TO NEARLY 300 ARRESTS ACROSS BELGIUM, FRANCE, GERMANY, THE NETHERLANDS, AND SPAIN, TARGETING DRUG SMUGGLING NETWORKS THAT MADE EXTENSIVE USE OF ENCRYPTED COMMUNICATIONS. IN JANUARY 2026, EUROPOL COORDINATED WHAT ITS OWN HEAD OF SERIOUS ORGANISED CRIME DESCRIBED AS "BY FAR THE LARGEST-EVER OPERATION AGAINST SYNTHETIC DRUG PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION" — A YEARLONG INVESTIGATION THAT DISMANTLED A NETWORK SPANNING SIX COUNTRIES, WITH LABORATORIES UNCOVERED IN BELGIUM, CZECH REPUBLIC, GERMANY, NETHERLANDS, AND POLAND. EUROPOL'S OWN ANALYSIS DOCUMENTS THAT 50% OF THE MOST DANGEROUS CRIMINAL NETWORKS IN THE EU ARE INVOLVED IN DRUG TRAFFICKING, AND THAT DRUG TRADE PROFITS DIRECTLY FUEL 50% OF ALL HOMICIDES IN EUROPE.

NARCOTICS CONTROL BUREAU (NCB): INDIA'S APEX DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY OPERATES AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE GOLDEN CRESCENT AND GOLDEN TRIANGLE TRAFFICKING CORRIDORS — TWO OF THE WORLD'S MOST ACTIVE DRUG PRODUCTION ZONES. MAJOR OPERATIONS INCLUDING THE 2021 MUNDRA PORT SEIZURE (2,998 KG OF HEROIN), OPERATION KHOJBEEN IN 2022 (218 KG OF HEROIN OFF THE LAKSHADWEEP COAST VALUED AT ₹1,526 CRORE), AND OPERATION RAGEPILL IN 2026 (227.7 KG OF CAPTAGON WORTH ₹182 CRORE) ILLUSTRATE THE NCB'S GROWING OPERATIONAL REACH ACROSS MULTIPLE DRUG CATEGORIES. PHARMACEUTICAL DIVERSION MONITORING HAS BECOME AN INCREASINGLY SIGNIFICANT COMPONENT OF ITS MANDATE AS INDIA'S LEGITIMATE PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR FACES SUSTAINED INTERNATIONAL SCRUTINY FROM BOTH THE INCB AND UNODC.

MEXICAN SECURITY FORCES MEXICO'S SECURITY FORCES — THE ARMY, NAVY, NATIONAL GUARD, AND FEDERAL POLICE — OPERATE AGAINST CARTEL ORGANIZATIONS THAT COMMAND PARAMILITARY CAPACITY, DEEP CORRUPTION NETWORKS, AND REVENUES THAT DWARF STATE ENFORCEMENT BUDGETS. FENTANYL SEIZURES OF 2,329 KILOGRAMS IN 2023 COLLAPSED 94% IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2024, BEFORE SURGING DRAMATICALLY IN DECEMBER 2024 — WHEN MEXICO ANNOUNCED ITS LARGEST-EVER SINGLE SEIZURE OF OVER ONE METRIC TON OF FENTANYL PILLS IN SINALOA, WIDELY ATTRIBUTED TO US TARIFF PRESSURE. DEA REPORTING FROM SEPTEMBER 2025 NOTED ONGOING OPERATIONAL SURGES AGAINST SINALOA CARTEL NETWORKS, THOUGH SECURITY ANALYSTS CONSISTENTLY NOTE THAT INSTITUTIONAL CORRUPTION — RATHER THAN OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY — REMAINS THE BINDING CONSTRAINT ON MEXICO'S COUNTER-NARCOTICS EFFECTIVENESS.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

1. SINGLE CONVENTION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS (AS AMENDED 1972)
2. UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST ILLICIT TRAFFIC IN NARCOTIC DRUGS AND PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES(1988)
3. CONVENTION ON PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES (1971)
4. UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME (UNTOC) (2000)
5. UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST CORRUPTION (UNCAC) (2003)
6. COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS (CND)
7. POLITICAL DECLARATION AND PLAN OF ACTION ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED AND BALANCED STRATEGY TO COUNTER THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM (2009)
8. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs), PARTICULARLY SDG 3 AND SDG 16
9. PARIS PACT INITIATIVE
10. UNODC GLOBAL SMART PROGRAMME
11. 2016 UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION (UNGASS) OUTCOME DOCUMENT ON THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

1. HOW CAN THE COMMITTEE DEFINE “ULTRA-POTENT DRUGS” TO INCLUDE EMERGING SYNTHETIC DRUGS WITHOUT BECOMING OBSOLETE AS NEW VARIANTS ARE INTRODUCED?
2. HOW CAN THE COMMITTEE STANDARDIZE CHEMICAL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS TO ENSURE UNIFORM REPORTING OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS ACROSS MEMBER STATES?
3. HOW CAN MEMBER STATES INCREASE INTERNATIONAL REGULATION OF SYNTHETIC DRUG PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION WITHOUT DISRUPTING LEGITIMATE PHARMACEUTICAL RESEARCH?
4. HOW CAN AREAS IN FREE TRADE ZONES BE REGULATED WITHOUT UNDERMINING THEIR PURPOSE?
5. WHAT MECHANISMS CAN BE ADOPTED TO TRACK DESIGNER DRUGS WHOSE CHEMICAL COMPOSITIONS ARE CONSTANTLY CHANGING?
6. TO WHAT EXTENT SHOULD PRIVATE LOGISTICS COMPANIES BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING SUSPICIOUS CHEMICALS?
7. WHAT STEPS CAN BE TAKEN TO DISMANTLE DECENTRALIZED TRANSNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING NETWORKS?
8. WHAT REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS CAN BE IMPOSED TO MONITOR CRYPTOCURRENCY TRANSACTIONS LINKED TO DRUG TRADE WITHOUT VIOLATING FINANCIAL PRIVACY?
9. HOW CAN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DISMANTLE DARK WEB MARKETPLACES EFFECTIVELY?
10. WHAT ROLE SHOULD PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES PLAY IN THE REAL-TIME MONITORING OF SYNTHETIC DRUG CONSUMPTION?



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CONCLUSION

IN CONCLUSION, THE GLOBAL SPREAD OF ULTRA-POTENT AND CONTAMINATED DRUGS THROUGH ILLICIT SUPPLY CHAINS REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST URGENT TRANSNATIONAL CHALLENGES. THE RAPID EMERGENCE OF SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS, DESIGNER DRUGS AND COUNTERFEIT PHARMACEUTICAL TABLETS HAS EXACERBATED THE PUBLIC HEALTH CRISES. TRAFFICKING ORGANISATIONS CONTINUE TO EXPLOIT WEAK REGULATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY TO STRENGTHEN THEIR NETWORKS. THUS, TRADITIONAL DRUG CONTROL FRAMEWORKS ARE NO LONGER SUFFICIENT.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY CANNOT AFFORD FRAGMENTED OR OUTDATED RESPONSES. TO TAKE EFFECTIVE ACTION, A COORDINATED INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE INVOLVING STRONGER MULTILATERAL COOPERATION WILL HAVE TO BE CARRIED OUT. MEMBER STATES MUST WORK TOGETHER COLLECTIVELY TO IMPROVE CROSS BORDER INTELLIGENCE SHARING, TO REGULATE THE TRADE OF PRECURSOR CHEMICALS AND ALSO TO IMPROVE REHABILITATION AND HARM-REDUCTION PROGRAMS. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY MUST ENSURE THAT THE MEASURES TAKEN AGAINST TRAFFICKING DO NOT HAMPER LEGITIMATE SCIENTIFIC OR PHARMACEUTICAL ACTIVITIES AND DO NOT INFRINGE ON THE RIGHT OF FREEDOM OF CITIZENS OF THE STATES.

THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLICIT DRUGS IS NOT ONE THAT STATES MUST FACE ALONE, RATHER, IT IS A FIGHT FOR MILLIONS OF LIVES AND FUTURE GENERATIONS THAT DEPEND ON THE WORLD STANDING TOGETHER.

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