

CND

UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS  
POLICYMAKING BODY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM WITH PRIME RESPONSIBILITY FOR DRUG-RELATED MATTERS



# THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS 2023

**COMPREHENSIVE STOCK-TAKING OF  
PROGRESS MADE IN IMPLEMENTING ALL  
INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY COMMITMENTS  
TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN  
THE 2019 MINISTERIAL DECLARATION**

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime  
Secretariat to the Governing Bodies

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# INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

## BACKGROUND ON THE COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS AND THE THREE INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONTROL CONVENTIONS

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs was established by ECOSOC through resolution 1946/9(I) of 1946 to assist the Council in supervising the application of the international drug control conventions. In 1991, the General Assembly expanded the mandate of the Commission to enable it to function as the governing body of UNODC. Today, the Commission has normative functions under the three international drug control conventions:

- **The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1954 as amended by the 1972 Protocol** (1961 Convention)
- **The Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971** (1971 Convention)
- **The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988** (1988 Convention)

**These conventions have two goals: (1) preventing the abuse of psychoactive substances and (2) ensuring their availability for medical and scientific purposes.** The 1961 Convention was elaborated to regulate drugs that have cannabis-, cocaine- and opium-like effects. With the appearance of new medicines with psychoactive properties that were misused, such as amphetamine-type stimulants (e.g. methamphetamine and later “ecstasy”), LSD, barbiturates and benzodiazepines, Member States deemed it necessary to create a new treaty, and thus the 1971 Convention came into existence. The 1988 Convention places precursors – substances frequently used to illicitly manufacture narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances – explicitly under international control and provides for additional measures against drug trafficking and for international cooperation in relation to the substances scheduled under the three international drug control conventions, including measures against money laundering and promoting the extradition of major drug traffickers. The conventions recognize that effective measures require co-ordinated and universal action amongst countries – with **the “shared” or “joint” responsibility at the heart of international cooperation and at the core of the work of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.**

Recent developments, such as **the COVID-19 pandemic** as a global health emergency, have once more demonstrated the **crucial need for the international community to work together** towards the overarching goals of the three international drug control conventions.



*View of the conference room on January 24, 1961, at the United Nations in New York. UN Photo/MB.*

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<sup>1</sup> This document has not been formally edited.

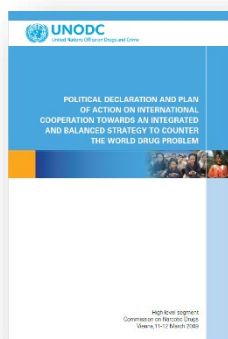
## INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY COMMITMENTS

At its 62<sup>nd</sup> session in March 2019, the Commission adopted by consensus the [Ministerial Declaration](#) entitled “Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem”. In the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States, while acknowledging that tangible progress had been achieved over the past decade, noted with concern the **persistent and emerging challenges** posed by the world drug problem and **committed to accelerating, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, the full implementation** of the [2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action](#), the [2014 Joint Ministerial Statement](#) and the [2016 UNGASS Outcome Document](#), aimed at achieving all commitments, operational recommendations and aspirational goals set out therein.

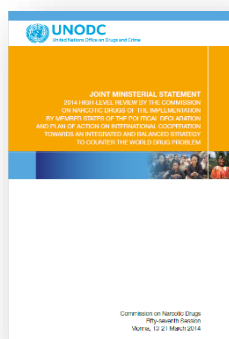
Member States committed, in paragraph 7 of the “Way forward”, to support the CND in **continuing transparent and inclusive discussions involving all relevant stakeholders** on effective strategies to address and counter the world drug problem, including through the sharing of information, best practices and lessons learned.

Member States further resolved to review in the CND in 2029 the progress made in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, with a [mid-term review in 2024](#). The Commission decided in its [resolution 66/1](#) that the **mid-term review** will consist of a 2-day high-level segment in addition to the 5-day regular session of the CND. The 2-day high-level segment will include a general debate and two multi-stakeholder roundtables on the topics of “*Taking stock: work undertaken since 2019*” and “*The way forward: the road to 2029*”.

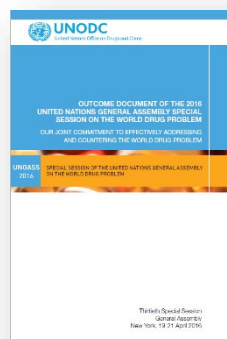
### [Political Declaration & Plan of Action \(2009\)](#)



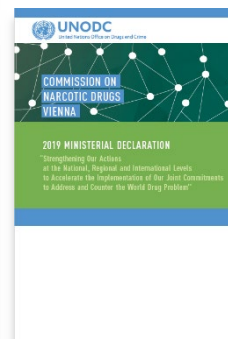
### [Joint Ministerial Statement \(2014\)](#)



### [UNGASS Outcome Document \(2016\)](#)



### [Ministerial Declaration \(2019\)](#)



## FORMAT OF 2023 CND THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

As outlined in the [multi-year workplan](#), following the format used for the [thematic discussions](#) held within the CND since 2016, the Commission has organised interactive meetings, every autumn from 2019 to 2022, focusing each year on selected challenges identified in the “Stocktaking” part of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration. In that 4-year period (2019-2022), all 11 challenges were discussed during the CND thematic discussions. In 2023, immediately preceding the 2024 mid-term review, the thematic discussions will serve to undertake a comprehensive stock-taking of progress made in implementing the international drug policy commitments to address all 11 challenges identified in the Ministerial Declaration.

As indicated in the [organizational arrangements](#), adopted by the Commission by silence procedure [12 May 2023], the **challenges have been clustered thematically** as per the below, with half a day devoted to each challenge. The afternoon session on the last day will serve as a closing with a focus on the way forward.

<p><b>23 October</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Morning:</b> Expanding &amp; diversifying range of drugs &amp; drug markets</li> <li><b>Afternoon:</b> Record levels of drug abuse &amp; illicit cultivation, production &amp; trafficking</li> </ul> <p><b>24 October</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Morning:</b> Increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption &amp; other forms of organized crime</li> <li><b>Afternoon:</b> Low value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money laundering arising from drug trafficking</li> </ul> <p><b>25 October</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Morning:</b> Criminal misuse of information &amp; communications technologies for drug trafficking</li> <li><b>Afternoon:</b> Non-compliance of responses with international drug control conventions &amp; human rights obligations</li> </ul>	<p><b>4 December</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Morning:</b> Increase in drug-related deaths - unmet need for drug treatment and health services</li> <li><b>Afternoon:</b> High transmission rate of HIV, HCV &amp; other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use</li> </ul> <p><b>5 December</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Morning:</b> Adverse health consequences associated with new psychoactive substances</li> <li><b>Afternoon:</b> Health &amp; regulatory challenges posed by synthetic opioids &amp; non-medical use of prescription drugs</li> </ul> <p><b>6 December</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Morning:</b> Low availability of internationally controlled substances for medical &amp; scientific purposes</li> <li><b>Afternoon:</b> Way forward</li> </ul>
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The **present discussion guide** has been prepared by the Secretariat to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to **facilitate dialogue and an interactive exchange** during the Commission’s thematic discussions, while not comprehensively addressing all aspects of the discussions.

This discussion guide **draws from, and should be read together with**, the background notes and Chair’s summaries of the thematic discussions held from 2019 to 2022 (which are [available on the CND Thematic Discussion website](#)), as well as the latest versions of the [UNODC World Drug Report](#). This discussion guide also reflects contributions provided by the UNODC substantive sections, and it **includes suggested discussion questions** for each of the 11 challenges (not a comprehensive list).

Presentations made at previous thematic discussions can be found in [2019 Ministerial Declaration Follow-up Portal](#), developed by the Secretariat to the Governing Bodies.

Presenter	Function	Input 1	Input 2
Abel Basutu	Senior Drug Control Programme Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adriana Templos	N/A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agus Irianto	Head of Research, Data, and Information Centre, National Narcotics Control Board	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alex Chung	N/A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Alfredo Polo	Radiation Oncologist, Applied Radiation Biology and Radiotherapy Section	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amado Philip De Andrés	Regional Representative, UNODC Regional Office for Eastern Africa	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ambassador Umej Bhatia	Group of Friends of UNODC Research	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amrita Devi	Director for Strengthening Community Based Rehabilitation Institutions, the Indonesian National Narcotics Board	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Angela Me	Chief of the Research and Trend Analysis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 23 OCTOBER 2023 MORNING – CHALLENGE: BOTH THE RANGE OF DRUGS AND DRUGS MARKETS ARE EXPANDING AND DIVERSIFYING

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION<sup>2</sup>

#### *(a) The range of drugs is expanding and diversifying*

There has been a **diversification of the substances available** on the drugs markets over the past decade. In addition to **traditional plant-based substances** – including cannabis, cocaine and heroin – there has been an expansion of a dynamic market for **synthetic drugs and the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals**<sup>3</sup>. This has led to an increasing number of substances, as well as their potential combinations, posing a greater risk to public health. The non-medical use of pharmaceuticals often contributes to overall polydrug use patterns and of the adverse health consequences of drug use.

In recent years, hundreds of **new psychoactive substances (“NPS”)**, which mimic substances under international control but are not under international control themselves, have been synthesized. The NPS market is diverse and dynamic, with new substances being synthesized regularly and often sold as “legal highs” – as alternatives to, or mixed with, controlled substances.



Learn more about the UNODC Early Warning Advisory [here](#). UNODC.

According to the World Drug Report 2023, the number of NPS identified by authorities worldwide and reported to the UNODC Early Warning Advisory has already reached a total of 1,184 substances in 2022 according to preliminary data<sup>4</sup>, up from 166 in 2009<sup>5</sup>.

While recent years have seen a decrease in the number of new synthetic cannabinoids arriving on the market, the number of **NPS with stimulant effects** has increased, and the number of newly emerging opioid NPS has risen sharply before stabilizing in 2021. The number of **opioid NPS** found on markets worldwide grew from just one substance in 2009 to 88 in 2020 and 2021.

The emergence of new synthetic opioid receptor agonists (opioid NPS), often fentanyl analogues, is indeed a major concern for authorities in various countries. Since these substances are not under international control, they are labelled as “NPS with opioid effects” or “NPS opioids” and prove to be particularly harmful, leading to growing numbers of NPS-related deaths, in particular in North America, and to a lesser extent, in Europe.

<sup>2</sup> Further details on this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2019 CND Thematic Discussions.

<sup>3</sup> Note: In accordance with the background note of the 2019 CND Thematic Discussions, while the Ministerial Declaration specifically identifies “that ... non-medical use of prescription drugs pose increasing risks to public health and safety, as well as scientific, legal and regulatory challenges, including with regard to the scheduling of substances;” this discussion guide also refers to “pharmaceuticals”, as this term is more inclusive of substances that may not be under control either at the international or national level (e.g. tramadol), but that are being used for non-medical purposes.

<sup>4</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Executive Summary (United Nations publication, 2023), page 50

<sup>5</sup> World Drug Report 2013, <https://www.unodc.org/wdr2013/en/nps.html>

## **(b) Drug markets are expanding and diversifying**

Findings of the World Drug Report 2023 reveal the record levels of **cocaine** production<sup>6</sup> together with a still expanding market for synthetic drugs such as illicitly manufactured fentanyl and its analogues<sup>7</sup>. Annual prevalence of cocaine use remains the highest in Oceania (though with only limited quantities consumed there due to high prices), North America, South America and Western and Central Europe and is increasing worldwide, especially in Europe, Africa and Asia, with a record high in global manufacture in 2021<sup>8</sup>. 90% of cocaine seized was linked to maritime trafficking, with the expansion of new markets and routes in recent years, but still predominantly through the transatlantic route.

**Opioids** remain a significant concern due to their non-medical use and severe health consequences, with overdose deaths driven by the use of fentanyl reaching unprecedented levels in North America during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>9</sup>. The non-medical use of tramadol in North, West and Central Africa, the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia continue to pose great risks<sup>10</sup>.

Record-high quantities of **amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS)** were seized in 2021, dominated by methamphetamine at the global level. Methamphetamine manufacture and use have continued to expand beyond “traditional” markets in East and South-East Asia and North America, notably in South-West Asia, Europe and Africa<sup>11</sup>.

Production and sale of **falsified “captagon” tablets** (containing amphetamine instead of fenetylline) continues expanding in the Near and Middle East and beyond, with production nowadays mostly in the Levant and consumption primarily in countries located on the Arabian Peninsula.

**Fragmenting supply chains and loosely connected criminal groups** are driving the expansion of drug supply, with new hubs and markets, as well as increasing use in traditional markets. Trafficking groups have become less rigid and hierarchical, and more innovative and adaptable. Transformations in the ways that criminal groups are organized or operate may make them less susceptible to traditional law enforcement interventions, as parts of the supply chain or product can be replaced.

During the **2019 CND thematic discussions**<sup>12</sup> several delegations reported on observed **developments in the drug market due to changes in both supply and demand**. On the **supply-side**, new marketing techniques from drug dealers included free or cheap trials of substances, thereby changing use patterns. On the **demand-side**, urbanization led to major shifts in consumption. The internet, the darknet and the use of cryptocurrency also influenced the drug sales structures, mostly for personal consumption, as well as related intertwined crimes, such as money-laundering. Among the **new challenges in the abuse patterns** mentioned were polydrug use and dependencies and dependency of children.

At the **2019 thematic discussions**, participants highlighted several **measures to effectively address the challenge of the expanding and diversifying range of drugs and drug markets**, including<sup>13</sup>:

- Address the world drug problem as a common and shared responsibility, and ensure a comprehensive and balanced approach, based on evidence, comprising both measures to

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<sup>6</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Executive Summary, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 28

<sup>7</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Special Points of Interest, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 12

<sup>8</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Contemporary Issues on Drugs, (United Nations publication, 2023), pages 153-162

<sup>9</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Special Points of Interest, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 22

<sup>10</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Executive Summary, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 46

<sup>11</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Special Points of Interest, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 23

<sup>12</sup> The Chair’s summary with salient points of the 2019 CND thematic discussions, which addressed this challenge, can be found here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_63/CRPs/ECN72020\\_CRP1\\_V2000752.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_63/CRPs/ECN72020_CRP1_V2000752.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Idem

reduce demand and supply, and in line with international law and policy commitments, in particular the international drug control conventions, human rights obligations and the policy commitments reaffirmed in the Ministerial Declaration 2019;

- Strengthen international cooperation, including in the law enforcement and judicial sector, in order to effectively combat the increasingly professionally operating and transnationally connected organized crime groups, including by making use of existing legal instruments such as the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the United Nations Convention against Corruption, and the international drug control conventions;
- Ensure, at the domestic level, cooperation between the different agencies involved;
- Ensure high quality, disaggregated data to facilitate informed policy decisions at the national, regional and international level, for example on drug consumption and market size. This includes streamlining the annual report questionnaires of UNODC<sup>14</sup>;
- Use/develop early warning systems at the national and international level, in particular the UNODC Early Warning Advisory, to recognize and share information on NPS, as trends in the illicit drug market tended to spread to other countries and regions; as well as ensure capacity-building for law enforcement and scientific experts and well-equipped laboratories;
- For national control of NPS, experiences shared included (1) the listing of substances by class to also include salts and isomers and (2) generic listing, meaning the listing of parent molecular structures and specific substitution patterns of structures; as well as temporary seizures until there was scientific evidence for or against possible licit uses of the specific substances;
- To address the challenges in abuse patterns: ensure adequate treatment facilities for people with drug use disorders, thereby using the internet to extend the reach and geographical coverage of treatment programmes as well as using new substitution therapies, following the same principles as for example methadone therapy for heroine; and have in place effective preventive measures, in particular addressing children not yet involved with drugs, such as keeping students in school, strengthening families and parenting technics and addressing socio-economic challenges, including poverty (*these will be addressed in the December thematic discussions*).

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<sup>14</sup> In response, a new ARQ was adopted by the CND in Decision 63/5 - See <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/arq.html>



**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):**

1. How have drug markets evolved in your country in recent years, and what are the key factors driving this expansion and diversification? What are the main modus operandi being used to operate these drug markets?
2. How is law enforcement adapting to address the challenges posed by the diversification of drug markets, and what are the main obstacles encountered? How have you been applying existing legal instruments to address the challenges of cross-border drug trafficking and transnational criminal networks?
3. How can international cooperation and information-sharing, including the early warning systems, be improved to respond effectively to the global expansion and diversification of drug markets?
4. Which methods do you find most effective to stay informed about new drugs markets and new types of drugs and substances? Have you started using innovative methods, such as waste-water analysis? Do you consider the use of “big data” to monitor trends in a timely fashion?
5. Which methods do you find most effective to stay informed about new drugs markets and new types of drugs and substances? Have you started using innovative methods, such as waste-water analysis? Do you consider the use of “big data” to monitor trends in a timely fashion?
6. What NPS have emerged in your region, and how have they impacted drug consumption patterns and public health? What challenges have been observed in your country to identify and collect data and information on NPS?
7. How are you approaching the scheduling and control of NPS amid the rapidly evolving landscape of drug markets? What challenges do you encounter in adapting regulatory frameworks to addressing NPS, and how do you ensure a balanced approach?
8. What are good practices to effectively capture and analyze trends in drug consumption, trafficking and the emergence of NPS, and how can data collection efforts be improved to stay abreast of the rapidly evolving landscape?
9. What are the potential implications of drug market expansion and diversification on vulnerable populations, such as youth, women, and marginalized communities? How to you address those vulnerabilities?

## 23 OCTOBER 2023 AFTERNOON – CHALLENGE: THE ABUSE, ILLICIT CULTIVATION AND PRODUCTION AND MANUFACTURE OF NARCOTIC DRUGS AND PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES, AS WELL AS THE ILLICIT TRAFFICKING IN THOSE SUBSTANCES AND IN PRECURSORS, HAVE REACHED RECORD LEVELS, AND THE ILLICIT DEMAND FOR AND THE DOMESTIC DIVERSION OF PRECURSOR CHEMICALS ARE ON THE RISE

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION<sup>15</sup>



2019 CND thematic discussions. UNODC.

#### *(a) The abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances has reached record levels*

According to the 2023 World Drug Report, in 2021 an estimated 296 million people worldwide aged 15–64 had **used drugs** at least once in the previous year. This corresponds to 5.8% of the global population aged 15–64 and represents a 23% increase since 2011. This is in part attributable to global population growth. **Young people** remain the most vulnerable to using drugs, and drug use is more frequent among males for all drug types, with the highest percentage of women using drugs observed for the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids (47% women)<sup>16</sup>. **Cannabis** continues to be the most used drug, with an estimated 219 million users (4.3% of the global adult population) in 2021, followed by users of opioids (60 million), amphetamines (36 million) and cocaine (22 million)<sup>17</sup>, and in the same year there were 13.2 million people who **injected drugs**.

During the **2019 CND Thematic Discussions**<sup>18</sup>, speakers expressed concerns regarding the increasing consumption of illicit drugs among **young people** and highlighted the importance of awareness raising campaigns on the harm associated with drug consumption. It was observed that peer pressure was a factor for drug consumption, but that vulnerabilities, including poverty, were considered root causes. It was noted that the **aging population** also led to an increasing number of elderly drug users, and that this was creating new challenges for prevention and treatment.

<sup>15</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2019 CND Thematic Discussions

<sup>16</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Executive Summary, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 12

<sup>17</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Special Points of Interest, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 4

<sup>18</sup> The Chair's summary with salient points of the 2019 CND thematic discussions can be found here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_63/CRPs/ECN72020\\_CRP1\\_V2000752.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_63/CRPs/ECN72020_CRP1_V2000752.pdf)

***(b) The illicit cultivation and production and manufacture of narcotic and psychotropic substances have reached record levels***

**Illicit coca and opium cultivation** are at near-record levels, with 315,200 hectares of coca bush in 2021 and 315,800 hectares of opium poppy in 2022<sup>19</sup>. **Global production of cocaine and opium** also remain high. A combination of market dynamics in Western Europe and higher efficiency in the production of cocaine at the source have led to a record high of 2,304 tons of cocaine manufactured in 2021, a 16% increase since 2020. Global production of opium has decreased by 3% between 2021 and 2022, with 7,800 tons of opium produced in 2022<sup>20</sup>. Following the drug ban in Afghanistan, opium production is expected to decrease further in 2023<sup>21</sup>.

**Cannabis** is produced in almost all countries across the world, with both outdoor and indoor cultivation increasing at the global level over the last decade. The increase in indoor cultivation is associated with an overall increase in the potency (THC content) of cannabis in the main markets over the past two decades. As most countries do not have systems in place to systematically monitor the area used for cannabis cultivation, estimating the global area under cannabis cultivation is challenging.

***(c) The illicit trafficking of narcotic and psychotropic substances has reached record levels***

Over the past two decades, there has been a marked **increase in the drugs seized** globally. The quantity of **ATS** seized has increased the most in comparison with the quantities of other drugs seized, even though the largest quantities of drugs seized are for **cannabis and cocaine**<sup>22</sup>.

Trafficking in **ATS**, in particular methamphetamine, has spread geographically, with notable growth observed in non-traditional markets and with seizures reaching a record high in 2021<sup>23</sup>. Criminals are employing novel synthesis techniques, establishing new bases of operation and using non-controlled precursors to circumvent law enforcement and regulatory responses. The number of seizures and amounts seized **involving NPS** increased by 40% to 19 tons from 2020 to 2021, and of the 618 NPS on the market in 2021, 87 were newly identified. The sharp increase in **cocaine seizures**, with a 42% increase in 2021 as compared to 2020, reflects an ongoing expansion of the cocaine market globally.

UNODC's most comprehensive data set is on the **quantities of drugs seized**, comprising data from 203 countries and territories over the period 1998–2021 (an average of 151 countries and territories per year). While the **quantity of cannabis herb and resin** seized in that period grew by 85 per cent, the **quantity of opiates** (expressed in heroin equivalents) tripled; the **quantity of opioids** (opiates and synthetic opioids) **and cocaine seized** quintupled; and the **quantity of ATS** seized increased more than 20-fold. Compared with the amounts of synthetic NPS seized in 2001 when it was first recorded, the **quantities of synthetic NPS** seized in 2021 were more than 200 times larger.

During the **2019 CND Thematic Discussions**, speakers raised specific challenges related to **smuggling via maritime routes** and related to the **use of the darknet** for the illicit trafficking of drugs. An increase in the **illicit trafficking of raw material** instead of refined drugs and the **associated relocation of drug laboratories closer to the destination countries** with the goal to minimize the loss in case of an interception of the shipment, were noted.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., page 6

<sup>20</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Special Points of Interest, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 6

<sup>21</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Executive Summary, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 32

<sup>22</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Special Points of Interest, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 7

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., page 23

*(d) The illicit demand for and the domestic diversion of precursor chemicals may be on the rise, while the number of designer precursors is increasing*

The number of **designer precursors** solely invented to circumvent existing controls, used for the production of mostly synthetic drugs, is increasing, while the diversion of **precursors with licit uses** remains problematic. Non-scheduled chemicals were found to be used for the illicit manufacture of all major semi-synthetic and synthetic drug classes and are now present in all regions of the world<sup>24</sup>. At the same time, the majority of these substances also play an important role in our daily lives, as they are used to produce commodities that are consumed licitly worldwide. Striking a **balance between free trade and circulation for licit purposes and the need to prevent diversion for illicit purposes** is at the core of the international control system established in accordance with articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention<sup>25</sup>. Any control system, whether local or international, must thus be aimed at effectively limiting the availability of such chemicals for operators of clandestine laboratories, while guaranteeing that licit manufacture of trade in and use of such chemicals are not jeopardized.<sup>26</sup>

During the **2019 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted a range of measures to address the record levels of abuse, illicit cultivation and production and manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as of illicit trafficking in those substances and in precursors and the rise in the illicit demand for and the domestic diversion of precursor chemicals, including<sup>27</sup>:

- Implement alternative development programmes as part of a holistic approach in addressing illicit cultivation while addressing the vulnerabilities of communities and security issues to ensure livelihoods. It was considered important for alternative development programmes to take into account environmental impact; the importance of building trust in the State by establishing a minimum level of services (in particular health, education and infrastructure); the need to explore sources of income beyond agricultural products, such as handicraft and tourism; and to ensure the financial sustainability of these programmes through establishing donor coalitions and private sector partnerships in cooperation with communities;
- Take into account the importance of precursor control in cooperation with the International Narcotics Control Board, and of closely observing new techniques used by clandestine laboratories in order to identify precursors used for the production of illicit drugs;
- To address drugs smuggling via maritime routes, strengthen port and maritime control capacities, enhance information sharing amongst countries, and implement the relevant provisions contained in the international drug control conventions, including responding to requests regarding the registration of a ship under article 7 of the 1988 convention in an expeditious manner;
- To address drug trafficking via the internet/darknet, deal with the challenges related to human rights-compliant investigations in the darknet and the gathering of evidence that is valid in court; provide capacity building in the law enforcement sector, inter alia through trainings on darknet investigation and the use of cryptocurrency; gather more data on the use of the darknet for trafficking of illicit drugs, in particular on websites in other languages than English; establish cooperation mechanisms with postal service providers; and strengthen Financial Intelligence Units to disrupt money-laundering channels, in order to intercept illicit trafficking;

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<sup>24</sup> INCB, 2021: Precursors 2021 and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

<sup>25</sup> INCB, 2021: Precursors 2021 and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

<sup>26</sup> UNODC World Drug Report 2014, Chapter 2, pg. 55

<sup>27</sup> The Chair's summary with salient points of the 2019 CND thematic discussions can be found here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_63/CRPs/ECN72020\\_CRP1\\_V2000752.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_63/CRPs/ECN72020_CRP1_V2000752.pdf)

- To address the rise in the abuse of controlled substances, taking into account that drug dependence is a multifaceted health disorder with social causes and consequences. This entailed combining drug demand and supply reduction in an evidence-based, inter-agency driven, holistic approach, and to promote a gender sensitive approach to prevention and treatment.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):**

1. What national data systems inform your assessment of the drug situation? Are there data gaps that prevent more targeted responses?
2. How has abuse, cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking of substances under international control changed in your country? Do you link your national policies with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
3. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected drug use, vulnerability to drug use and drug trafficking trends in your country? What trends do you notice in the post-pandemic time?

*Abuse:*

4. How has the number of people who use drugs and with drug use disorders evolved in your country in recent years? Are specific sub-groups in the population particularly affected? How do you address the needs of these groups?

*Cultivation and production:*

5. Can you share best practices and lessons learnt on successful alternative development strategies reducing illicit cultivation and production of drugs in your country?
6. Looking ahead at the next decade of alternative development, would you like to share any recommendations to further increase the effectiveness of this policy instrument, highlight any opportunities to add new elements or implement alternative development in new contexts?

*Trafficking:*

7. Did you notice any changes in seizures of specific substances under international control? Are new technologies being used for the trafficking and sale of illicit drugs?
8. What successful measures has your country implemented in recent years to address drug trafficking, including wholesale and micro-trafficking, and trafficking via maritime routes?

*Precursors:*

9. How do you address domestic diversion of precursor chemicals? How does interagency cooperation and collaboration with other stakeholders including the private sector work?
10. What can be done to improve international cooperation to tackle diversion of precursor chemicals?

## 24 OCTOBER 2023 MORNING – CHALLENGE: INCREASING LINKS BETWEEN DRUG TRAFFICKING, CORRUPTION AND OTHER FORMS OF ORGANIZED CRIME, INCLUDING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, TRAFFICKING IN FIREARMS, CYBERCRIME AND MONEY-LAUNDERING AND, IN SOME CASES, TERRORISM, INCLUDING MONEY-LAUNDERING IN CONNECTION WITH THE FINANCING OF TERRORISM, ARE OBSERVED

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION<sup>28</sup>

The links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime, including trafficking in persons, trafficking in firearms, cybercrime and money-laundering and, in some cases, terrorism, including money-laundering in connection with the financing of terrorism, have caused increased concern<sup>29</sup>.

During the 2021 CND Thematic Discussions<sup>30</sup>, it was highlighted that **evidence regarding the links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime was limited**, particularly regarding trends at the global level. Several speakers underlined that profit-driven transnational criminal organizations were involved in different forms of criminal activities at the global level, that they networked and cooperated with other criminal groups, thereby impeding the rule of law beyond borders. Some speakers reported that encrypted communication platforms had been deployed by criminal groups, and key crime areas were identified through several investigations on the encrypted platforms, including but not limited to drug trafficking, money-laundering, corruption, terrorism, firearms trafficking, forgery of documents, or extreme violence. Some speakers reported having observed that criminal groups funded with the illicit gains obtained from one type of criminal activity other criminal activities. It was also mentioned that drug trafficking remained the cornerstone of criminal organizations and accounted for the largest proportion of criminal groups' profits. With regards to the **challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic**, some speakers expressed the concern that criminal groups were adept at turning obstacles into criminal opportunities, which would potentially further strengthen the nexus between drug trafficking and other forms of crime. For example, it was reported that due to the reduction of commercial flights, drug traffickers in some countries had expanded the use of smaller “narco-planes” and clandestine landing strips, which posed among others also a serious threat to the environment. It was further noted by some speakers that tools and vehicles employed by criminals for drug trafficking, such as drones and submarines, could also be used for other criminal activities, such as firearms trafficking.

**Corruption, money-laundering and firearms trafficking** are considered **enabling crimes** for drug trafficking and other forms of crime. Links between **corruption** and other forms of crime, including drug trafficking, can range from sporadic or regular bribery of public officials to facilitate criminal acts, eventually leading to the capture of a state's institutions and influence over law-making, law enforcement

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<sup>28</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2021 CND Thematic Discussions

<sup>29</sup> World Drug Report 2017, booklet 5, The Drug Problem and Organized Crime, Illicit Financial Flows, Corruption and Terrorism (United Nations publication, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> The Chair's summary of the 2021 thematic discussions can be accessed here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_65/CRPs/ECN72022\\_CRP1\\_V2200467.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_65/CRPs/ECN72022_CRP1_V2200467.pdf)

and judicial decisions<sup>31</sup>. By involving individuals in political power and enabling criminals to hide their crimes, corruption therefore fosters an environment where drug trafficking and other crimes can thrive, which in turn entrenches and exacerbates corruption itself. **Money-laundering** is crucial to the economic success of organized crime operations, as offenders would be discovered easily if they could not integrate the proceeds of crime into the legal economy

**Firearms** and drug trafficking are also often interdependent and deepen national security dilemmas. Drugs emerge as the most common commodity intercepted in seizures of firearms. Similarly, the countries especially affected by drug trafficking have correspondingly higher shares of firearms seized in this context.<sup>32</sup> Often, drug-traffickers heavily arm themselves with illicitly trafficked firearms to increase their capabilities, posing a significant threat to law enforcement and societies.



*Illustration of organized crime. Cottonbro Studio.*

**Trafficking in persons** is interlinked with drug trafficking to various extents, depending on the scale of the criminal groups involved<sup>33</sup>. Large and well-organized criminal groups that engage in trafficking in persons also regularly commit other crimes, such as drug trafficking, often using the same routes and infrastructure. Victims of trafficking in persons are sometimes forced to become involved in the cultivation and trafficking of illicit drugs. **Smuggled migrants** can also be forced to engage in illegal activities, such as transporting and selling illicit drugs, and can become victims of trafficking in persons. In the criminal justice system, some parallels can be drawn between trafficking in persons and drug trafficking cases. The likelihood that a trafficking investigation results in a conviction seems to have deteriorated over the last decade. In addition, convictions for trafficking in persons recorded globally have also declined since 2017, and convictions for drug trafficking seem to follow the same trend with a steady decline<sup>34</sup>.

**Cyber-enabled drug trafficking** is increasing globally. The links between cybercrime and drug trafficking are increasing, with criminal organizations expanding operations to cyberspace as a way to enlarge revenues and to move illicit flows of money resulting from drug trafficking<sup>35</sup>.

In some cases, links have been identified between drug trafficking and **terrorism, including money-laundering in connection with the financing of terrorism**<sup>36</sup>. Financial disruption is an extremely effective method that can be used to focus on the points of vulnerability within a criminal and/or terrorist organization. UNODC developed a financial disruption training package which provides technical

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<sup>31</sup> Quentin Reed, "Squeezing a balloon? Challenging the nexus between organised crime and corruption", U4 Issue 2009, no. 7, citing Edgardo Buscaglia and Jan van Dijk, "Controlling organized crime and corruption in the public sector", *Forum on Crime and Society*, vol. 3, Nos. 1 and 2 (United Nations publication, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> See *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* (United Nations publication, 2020).

<sup>33</sup> See *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020* (United Nations publication, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> See *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (United Nations publication, 2022, pp.84-87)

<sup>35</sup> *World Drug Report 2021*, booklet 2, *Global Overview of Drug Demand and Drug Supply* (United Nations publication, 2021), pages 75-89.

<sup>36</sup> Report of the Secretary General on Action taken by Member States and United Nations entities to address the issue of linkages between terrorism and organized crime, [S/2020/754](#).

assistance to Member States to significantly reduce illicit financial flows by delivering cost-effective disruptions against the business model of criminal and terrorist organizations<sup>37</sup>.

In addition, it is worth considering the **nexus between drug trafficking and crimes that affect the environment**, including the convergence between illicit drug trafficking, illegal gold mining and illegal deforestation. As shown in the Amazon Basin, drug trafficking may constitute just one of the multiple illicit activities in which organized criminal groups are involved, together with land-grabbing, illegal logging, illegal mining, trafficking in wildlife and other crimes that affect the environment across a region. These organized criminal networks are not just exacerbating deforestation but are also accelerating convergent crime ranging from corruption, tax and financial crimes, to homicide, assault, sexual violence, exploitation of workers and minors, and the victimization of those defending the environment and Indigenous Peoples. The direct impact of coca cultivation on deforestation in the Amazon Basin is minimal but indirectly it can act as a catalyst for deforestation. “Narco-deforestation” – the laundering of drug trafficking profits into land speculation, the agricultural sector, cattle ranching and related infrastructure – is posing a growing danger to the world’s largest rainforest<sup>38</sup>.

During the **2021 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted a range of **measures to address the increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime, including trafficking in persons, trafficking in firearms, cybercrime and money-laundering and, in some cases, terrorism, including money-laundering in connection with the financing of terrorism**, including<sup>39</sup>:

- Improve the collection, analysis, and dissemination of comparable and reliable data at the national, regional, and international levels with a view to increasing the understanding of the links between drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime; share data and submit the completed ARQ to build a comprehensive and factual picture of the situation;
- Use a multi-disciplinary and integrated approach to better understand how to address any links;
- Strengthen bilateral, regional, and international cooperation and the sharing of good practices to address drug trafficking and all other related forms of organized crime and to protect the rule of law, and foster peace and development; and develop partnerships, including with civil society;
- To address the impact of corruption, promote good governance, transparency, and accountability by ensuring that all acts of corruption are investigated independently and impartially and that those responsible are brought to justice, with asset recovery processes to be initiated, where appropriate;
- Take into account the nexus between drug trafficking and crimes that affect the environment, including the convergence between illicit drug trafficking and illegal gold mining and illegal deforestation;

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<sup>37</sup> See <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/es/money-laundering/global-programme-against-money-laundering/training-and-tools.html>

<sup>38</sup> See World Drug Report 2023, Booklet 2 (United Nations Publication, 2023).

<sup>39</sup> The Chair’s summary of the 2021 thematic discussions can be accessed here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_65/CRPs/ECN72022\\_CRP1\\_V2200467.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_65/CRPs/ECN72022_CRP1_V2200467.pdf)



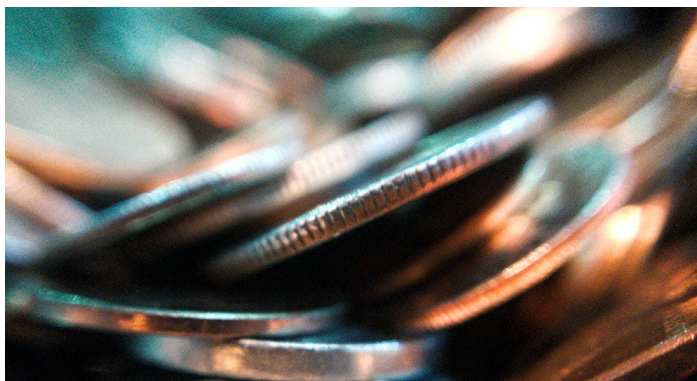
**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):**

1. What are the enabling factors for increasing links between drug trafficking and other offences? What role do factors such as different levels of governance, weaknesses in the rule of law, lack of economic opportunities and conflict play?
2. What challenges have been observed in the detection, investigation and prosecution of drug trafficking linked with other types of crime, for example, relating to the use of information and communication technologies, or international cooperation?
3. Are there successful examples of legislative, institutional, and operational measures taken to address these challenges in your country?
4. Which subregional, regional and international cooperation mechanisms have proven successful in your country to address the links between drug trafficking and other forms of crime?
5. How has the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated conditions conducive to links between drug trafficking and other forms of crime? Have you noticed any trends in the post-pandemic time?
6. What measures can be taken to increase the effectiveness of data collection and analysis in identifying and disrupting the links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime?
7. How can different data systems be linked to inform on the drug and crime convergence?

## 24 OCTOBER 2023 AFTERNOON – CHALLENGE: THE VALUE OF CONFISCATED PROCEEDS OF CRIME RELATED TO MONEY-LAUNDERING ARISING FROM DRUG TRAFFICKING AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL REMAINS LOW

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION<sup>40</sup>

The **confiscation of assets and property** is an important aspect of international commitments to prevent crime from paying off and to disrupt illicit financial flows. The 1988 Convention, the Organized Crime Convention, and the Convention against Corruption contain detailed provisions relating to the identification, tracing, freezing, seizure,



*Image of money. Joshua Hoehne.*

and confiscation of proceeds of crime. However, despite these international frameworks, the value of confiscated proceeds of crime remains low, with estimates suggesting that less than 1% of proceeds of crime are seized and frozen globally, and only a part of that amount is forfeited or confiscated<sup>41</sup>.

Currently, part of those illicit funds flow through **virtual assets**, adding another layer of legal and operational challenges for national authorities. During the **2021 CND Thematic Discussions**<sup>42</sup>, some speakers reported **challenges for financial investigations related to the use of cryptocurrency and blockchain** and emphasized that cryptocurrencies were used by criminals to sell controlled substances and transfer their illicit gains abroad, with the blockchain technology allowing a high degree of anonymity.

The confiscation of proceeds of crime generally follows a **process** starting with the identification and tracing of assets, followed by seizure or freezing, confiscation or forfeiture, and concluding with the final disposal of assets. From the start of criminal proceedings related to drug trafficking, the confiscation of the proceeds and instrumentalities of the crime, along with the conviction of the perpetrators, should be an integral objective of the case strategy.

**International cooperation** through informal information-sharing and formal mutual legal assistance plays a role in many “proceeds of crime”-cases, during the tracing and identification, seizure or freezing, and confiscation and disposal stages. There are **a range of challenges to, and corresponding responses to successful national and international proceedings**, such as the implementation and enforcement of measures to combat money laundering and counter the financing of terrorism; the training of law enforcement personnel in parallel financial investigations; and the need to address obstacles to asset identification, among others. Obstacles to asset identification have been observed, inter alia, in complex structures for the coordination of financial investigations at the national level, especially in

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<sup>40</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2021 CND Thematic Discussions

<sup>41</sup> UNODC. (2011). Estimating illicit financial flows resulting from drug trafficking and other transnational organized crime. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Retrieved from [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Illicit\\_financial\\_flows\\_2011\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Illicit_financial_flows_2011_web.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> The Chair’s summary of the 2021 thematic discussions can be accessed here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_65/CRPs/ECN72022\\_CRP1\\_V2200467.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_65/CRPs/ECN72022_CRP1_V2200467.pdf)

federal States, and in strict bank secrecy laws. During the **2021 CND Thematic Discussions**<sup>43</sup>, it was also mentioned that the long duration of asset forfeiture processes could lead to the loss of assets value, low assets productivity, and high administration costs, highlighting that a possible option could be early disposal, allowing certain assets to be sold, such as assets that were at the risk of destruction.

The **capacity of national authorities for mutual legal assistance** should be sufficient to efficiently request assistance and respond to requests, and differences in legal traditions and evidentiary requirements in the requesting and requested countries (including the use of conviction-based and non-conviction-based confiscation) can also result in challenges. The UNODC [drug control repository](#) was established to facilitate dissemination of national legislation on drug control. The repository encompasses two databases of legislation on drug control and on drug-related offences, as well as a database of the competent national authorities designated under the international drug control conventions.

The confiscation of the proceeds of crime is acknowledged as **one of the most effective strategies to disrupt organized crime**. Despite the recognition of the value of employing such financial investigative strategies to combat various money laundering predicate crimes, including drug trafficking, such approaches **generally remain an afterthought** in such investigations. Effective proactive investigations will significantly benefit from having access to financial intelligence and the skills to exploit and interpret this intelligence in order to use it (combined with other forms of intelligence) to detect proceeds. Effective investigative strategies targeting organized crime groups need to incorporate **parallel financial investigations** identifying assets of the organised crime group and linking these to the proceeds of crime.

During the **2021 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted a range of **measures to address the low value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money laundering arising from drug trafficking at the global level**, including<sup>44</sup>:

- Compare confiscated proceeds of drug crime with drug profits and related financial flows (thereby using a framework to measure illicit financial flows, taking into consideration the value of exported drugs and inward IFFs and the value of imports of precursors and related outward IFFs);
- Strengthen inter-agency cooperation and collaboration, including with the public and the private sector, in order to effectively address drug trafficking and money-laundering, by conducting parallel financial investigations and confiscating criminal profits and related assets and thereby addressing corruption in a more systematic approach;
- Strengthen international cooperation in financial investigations, including those related to the use of cryptocurrency and blockchain, through the establishment of inter-agency and multidisciplinary criminal asset confiscation task forces and the deployment of alternative strategies to investigate suspicious money-laundering and related assets;
- Consider the reuse of confiscated assets from drug trafficking for positive outcomes, such as to compensate victims, to support efforts to undermine organized criminal groups, to strengthen the safety of local communities, to strengthen prevention measures or efforts to address drug trafficking offences.

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<sup>43</sup> The Chair's summary of the 2021 thematic discussions can be accessed here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_65/CRPs/ECN72022\\_CRP1\\_V2200467.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_65/CRPs/ECN72022_CRP1_V2200467.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Idem

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the main challenges for your country in the identification, tracing, seizure, freezing and confiscation of proceeds of drug trafficking?
2. What are the most promising legislative and practical tools in your country to improve international cooperation for the identification, tracing, seizure, freezing and confiscation of proceeds of drug trafficking?
3. Which good practices have been observed in your country in the management and final disposal of proceeds of drug trafficking?
4. What steps has your government taken to address Sustainable Development Goal target 16.4 (by 2030 significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen recovery and return of stolen assets, and combat all forms of organized crime)?
5. What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the confiscation of proceeds of drug trafficking and related international cooperation? Have you noticed any trends “post-pandemic”?
6. Can alternative avenues to criminal law, such as administrative proceedings, tax assessments, private lawsuits or settlements, play a role in the confiscation of proceeds of drug trafficking?
7. What good practices can you share with regards to informal asset recovery networks and other regional and international cooperation mechanisms that your country has relied on?
8. Can you share any experiences regarding the re-use of confiscated assets from drug trafficking for positive drug-related outcomes (such as to compensate victims, to support efforts to undermine organized criminal groups, to strengthen the safety of local communities, to strengthen prevention measures or efforts to address drug trafficking offences)?

## 25 OCTOBER 2023 MORNING – CHALLENGE: THE CRIMINAL MISUSE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES FOR ILLICIT DRUG-RELATED ACTIVITIES IS INCREASING<sup>45</sup>

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Increased internet connectivity has brought about **innovations in how global drug supply chains operate**, with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) increasingly being misused to expand operations and dilute attribution of criminal activity. Developments in encryption, anonymity, and peer-to-peer (P2P) networks have allowed organized criminal groups to expand operations and reach. Global increasing Internet connectivity allows them to expand their operations and change modus operandi in their routes of production and distribution. Organized criminal groups use social media platforms, open forums, dating apps and darknet markets to advertise and sell synthetic drugs and opioids paid with cryptocurrencies<sup>46</sup>.

The online marketing and sale of some synthetic drugs, rather than being restricted to the **dark web**, also occurs on the open Internet, **or clear web**, where such drugs are readily discoverable for purchase on easily accessible platforms. While the online sale of traditional drugs, such as heroin, amphetamine-type stimulants, cannabis and cocaine remains confined to anonymized platforms on the deep web, the clear web is used for selling products that feed the synthetic drug market, including precursors, pre-precursors, and new psychoactive substances. Vendors market their products as “research chemicals” or advertising “customized synthesis”, and profit from anonymity and encryption features of an unruly cyberspace. Persons who use drugs and purchase drugs online continue to be predominantly men.

**Drug markets on the dark web** have emerged in the last decade. Based on a blockchain analysis, sales on the dark web (mostly drug-related) reached \$2.7 billion in 2021 before declining in 2022 by half, mostly a consequence of the dismantling of the Hydra Market platform in April 2022<sup>47</sup>. However, data also indicate that in the second half of 2022 the darknet markets – starting from rather low levels – again showed signs of an increase<sup>48</sup>. According to the World Drug Report 2023, there may be **a shift in darknet markets**, away from primarily retailing drugs to end users towards selling them wholesale as well<sup>49</sup>. The proportion of sales made **directly by vendors in the dark web** (without involving darknet markets) remains small (some 5 per cent of all dark web sales); such sales increased strongly in recent years but declined, however, in the second half of 2022 when darknet markets again showed signs of an increase.

The **use of social media (mostly within the clear web)** for buying and selling drugs appears to be growing, allowing sellers to openly “advertise” their products to unknown buyers by constructing a public profile. Conversely, messaging platforms, both encrypted and unencrypted, including dating apps, facilitate private drug transactions and ease the physical transaction between buyers and sellers. While transactions on the dark web remain, in general, from the beginning to the end anonymous, the final transactions of social media-facilitated transactions are still often conducted face-to-face. The need for face-to-face transactions at the final stage also means that the use of social media for buying and selling drugs is more of a localized phenomenon, in which different social media platforms dominate the scene

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<sup>45</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2021 CND Thematic Discussions

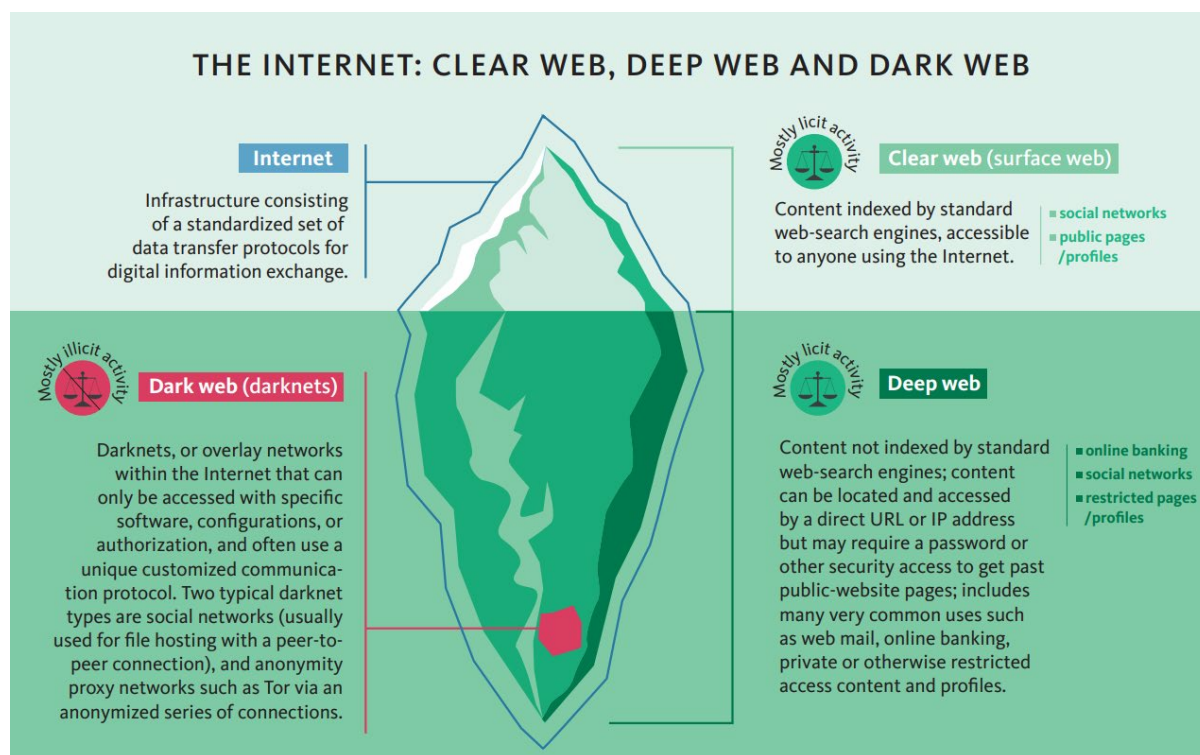
<sup>46</sup> The Online Trafficking of Synthetic Drugs and Synthetic Opioids in Latin America (United Nations Publication, 2022)

<sup>47</sup> World Drug Report 2021, booklet 2, Global Overview of Drug Demand and Drug Supply (United Nations publication, 2021), pages 75-89

<sup>48</sup> World Drug Report 2023, Online Segment, page 22.

<sup>49</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Special Points of Interest, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 12

in different countries and buyers and sellers often live in the same country. In contrast, the use of darknet markets for those purposes is more of a regional and, partly, global phenomenon.



Explanation of the clear web, deep web and dark web. World Drug Report 2023.

During the **2021 CND thematic discussions**<sup>50</sup>, several speakers shared experiences on how drugs were sold online, including **information on the modus operandi used by criminals involved in online drug-related crimes**. It was reported that selling drugs online often had four steps, including advertising online, ordering online, payment through cryptocurrencies and delivering by postal services or drops. It was reported that **during the COVID-19 pandemic**, drug syndicates adopted trafficking ventures, taking advantage of ICTs to assist them in the transportation of bulk cargo, as well as smaller nodes for redistribution across borders by air, land, and sea. Speakers shared that in some countries criminal organizations increased their control measures by carefully monitoring the movement of their containers and parcels online. Several speakers shared **insights of why the internet had gained attractiveness for criminals engaged in illicit drug-related activities**. It was mentioned, among others, that platforms such as online pharmacies, e-commerce marketplaces, social media platforms and encrypted messaging services, would often lower the technical entry thresholds for criminals to commit crimes online, thereby extending traditional drug trafficking business into virtual domains and reach potential customers worldwide. It was underlined by a number of speakers that by resorting to the dark web, postal services and cryptocurrencies, drug traffickers could minimize the costs and risks of transportation and would allow for funds to be moved instantaneously. Many speakers concurred that due to the anonymity of the dark web and the fact that criminal networks were dispersed globally, it was difficult to target and dismantle drug trafficking operations on the darknet.

<sup>50</sup> The Chair's summary of the 2021 thematic discussions can be accessed here: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_65/CRPs/ECN72022\\_CRP1\\_V2200467.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_65/CRPs/ECN72022_CRP1_V2200467.pdf)

During the **2021 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted a range of **measures to address the increase in the criminal misuse of information and communication technologies for illicit drug-related activities**, including<sup>51</sup>:

- Strengthen regulatory systems and harmonize legal and policy frameworks to address the challenge of ICTs misuse for drug-related crime;
- Upgrade equipment and train officers in the conduct of investigations related to the misuse of ICTs and drug crime, including with the support of biometric identification systems, facial recognition and other artificial intelligence technologies;
- Share information and effectively coordinate at the national, regional, and global level, as well as with relevant industry partners, including through public-private partnerships;

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):**

1. What are the main challenges your country encounters in addressing the criminal misuse of ICT for illicit drug-related activities?
2. What good practices can you share regarding research, data collection, analysis of evidence and sharing of information in this area?
3. Which strategies have proven successful in strengthening law enforcement, criminal justice and legal responses to the misuse of ICT for drug trafficking?
4. How can Internet service providers, technology companies, postal and parcel services be better integrated in the government response to drug trafficking? Can you share any good practices on public-private partnerships?
5. What steps can be taken to exchange information among states and private sector to mitigate the risk of virtual assets being misused for criminal purposes and detect suspicious transactions and illicit financial flows from drug trafficking?
6. Have you collaborated with agencies of other countries on intelligence sharing to address criminal misuse of ICT on drug-related issues?
7. What distinctive actions has your country taken in criminal responses to drug trafficking in the clear and dark web? What good practices has your country identified in disrupting online drug trafficking markets and networks?
8. Do you have any experiences regarding the use of artificial intelligence in responding to the criminal misuse of ICT for illicit drug-related activities?

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<sup>51</sup> Idem

## 25 OCTOBER 2023 AFTERNOON – CHALLENGE: RESPONSES NOT IN CONFORMITY WITH THE THREE INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONTROL CONVENTIONS AND NOT IN CONFORMITY WITH APPLICABLE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS POSE A CHALLENGE TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF JOINT COMMITMENTS BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF COMMON AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



*Illustration of shared responsibility. Fauxels.*

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**<sup>52</sup>

Member States have underscored in all their policy documents adopted since 2009 the need to effectively address and counter the world drug problem in full conformity with the **purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, as well as reiterated that the **three international drug control conventions** constituted, with other relevant international instruments, the cornerstone of the international drug control system.

The **three international drug control conventions** were adopted to protect the health and welfare of humankind, with the intention to make essential medications available for the relief of pain and the alleviation of suffering, while protecting the people, particularly the most vulnerable, from the potentially dangerous effects of controlled substances.

During the **2022 CND thematic discussions**<sup>53</sup>, it was explained that, as evidenced by the scheduling mechanism, the drafters of the conventions envisaged a rule-based, but flexible system of control, which

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<sup>52</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2022 CND Thematic Discussions

<sup>53</sup> The Chair's summary of the 2022 CND thematic discussion can be found here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_66/ECN72023\\_CRP1\\_2229110E.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_66/ECN72023_CRP1_2229110E.pdf)



allowed for measures to be reviewed as knowledge and science evolved. In the same vein, the conventions could be implemented in full accordance with human rights obligations. Several speakers recalled the objective of the drug control conventions to protect the health and welfare of humankind, stressing that compliance with human rights obligations was integral to drug policy, and not optional. Several speakers underscored that the **right to health was a fundamental human right**, and that the enjoyment of the right to health of all people, including those who use drugs and those with drug use disorders, was applicable irrespective of the fact of their drug use. Several speakers also highlighted the importance of **balanced evidence-based national drug policies**, which ensured that patients could access controlled medicines, as well as prevention, treatment and care services, while preventing the diversion of controlled substances into illicit channels. In this regard, it was recalled that the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence made scheduling recommendations based on the assessment of the harm and therapeutic use of a substance in the global context.

As contained in the policy documents, implementing drug policies that are **in accordance with international human rights law** can include: promoting the human right to health through the prevention of non-medical drug use, the (voluntary) treatment of drug use disorders and ensuring the access and availability of drugs for medical purposes; promoting proportionate national sentencing policies and providing alternatives to conviction or punishment for appropriate or minor drug-related offenses, especially for children who are in contact with the justice system as alleged offenders; taking into account the specific needs of women, children and youth, and vulnerable members of society; and implementing development-oriented drug control policies, such as alternative development programmes that ensure sustainable livelihoods.

The implementation of the provisions of the drug control conventions and the policy commitments adopted by the Commission since 2009 are crucial to further the **attainment of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development**.

During the **2022 CND thematic discussions**<sup>54</sup>, the issue of **proportionate sentencing for drug-related offences** was discussed as an example of an issue which cuts across drug control and human rights. The goal of proportionate sentencing was to reach an individualized sentence, which takes an offender's specific needs into account; and that to achieve a proportionate sentence, both the sentencing process and outcome had to be proportionate. In terms of process, proportionality entailed considering the seriousness of the offence, including the offender's role in the illicit activity and, for drug-related offences, the quantity of drugs involved; as well as the offender's personal circumstances, including health needs, family and socio-economic situation, and risk and protective factors. In terms of outcome, proportionality entailed moving from imprisonment as the default to considering non-custodial options. In relation to persons with drug use diseases, several speakers highlighted the value of reducing coercive sanctions, including imprisonment, and diverting them to prevention, treatment and care services.

Several speakers stressed the importance of **strong partnerships and an integrated approach** between the justice, health and social sectors at the national and international levels. Many speakers called for **increased training and capacity-building** for policymakers and practitioners involved in drug policy, as well as **participatory approaches** and increased community engagement in policymaking and implementation. In this regard, some speakers highlighted the importance of adopting a **gender- and age-focused approach**, as well as **considering the specific needs and challenges of indigenous communities and marginalized groups**, to avoid drug policies that are discriminatory in design and/or enforcement.

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<sup>54</sup> The Chair's summary of the 2022 CND thematic discussion can be found here: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_66/ECN72023\\_CRP1\\_2229110E.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_66/ECN72023_CRP1_2229110E.pdf)

Several speakers concluded that there was no “one-size fits-all” approach to integrating human rights considerations into drug policy, and that a contextual approach was necessary in determining the appropriate national response to drug-related challenges

During the **2022 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted a range of **measures to address the challenge to the implementation of joint commitments, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, posed by responses not in conformity with the three international drug control conventions and non in conformity with applicable human rights obligations**, including<sup>55</sup>:

- Adopt balanced evidence-based national drug policies, which ensured that patients could access controlled medicines, as well as prevention, treatment and care services, while preventing the diversion of controlled substances into illicit channels;
- Adopt a person- and health-centered approach (including evidence-based prevention, voluntary treatment and rehabilitation and promoting alternatives to conviction or punishment) which could reduce stigma and discrimination of drug users, in turn leading to increased health-seeking behaviour and fewer drug-use-related deaths, as well as reduce prison overcrowding;
- Adopt a gender- and age-focused approach and considering the specific needs and challenges of indigenous communities and marginalized groups;
- Recognize the value of evidence-based prevention and demand reduction interventions, including early education and family skills programmes, in protecting the community, particularly the most vulnerable, including children and young people, from the potentially dangerous effects of controlled substances – thereby addressing root causes, including, among others, poverty and lack of education;
- Recognize drug use diseases as multifactorial and biopsychosocial health disorders and mainstream the treatment of drug use diseases, through increased access to voluntary drug treatment, especially for women, children and persons detained in prison, to close the gap in the treatment of drug use diseases and through improved access to drug treatment services, to address and counter the spread of HIV and blood-borne diseases, as well as drug use-related deaths;
- Improve the availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes (including for pain management, palliative care and the treatment of drug use diseases), while preventing their diversion, including through streamlining the supply chain; easing regulatory restrictions; educating medical professionals on the rational use of controlled medicines; and raising public awareness;
- Support persons involved in the illicit cultivation of drugs and drug crops to transition to sustainable alternative livelihoods, which would - in addition to supply reduction - protect persons from exploitation by organized criminal groups engaged in drug trafficking, in turn leading to reduced drug-related violence and deaths;
- Enhance coordination and cooperation at all levels, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, to address and counter all aspects of the world drug problem (including the sharing of information, good practices and lessons learned; the enforcement and investigation of drug-related offences, in particular drug trafficking; mutual legal assistance; extradition; seizures; and transfer of proceedings);
- Enhance training and capacity-building for policymakers and practitioners involved in drug policy, as well as participatory approaches and increased community engagement in policymaking and implementation;
- Work together with UN entities, international organizations, civil society and other relevant partners, to effectively achieve the aims of the drug control conventions.

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<sup>55</sup> The Chair's summary of the 2022 CND thematic discussion can be found here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_66/ECN72023\\_CRP1\\_2229110E.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_66/ECN72023_CRP1_2229110E.pdf)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):**

1. How can the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, as the main policy-making body in the UN system for drug-related matters, act as the forum to address challenges related to responses not in conformity with the three international drug control conventions and not in conformity with applicable international human rights obligations?
2. What are some good practices to ensure that the implementation of Commission scheduling decisions is in line with the overarching goals of the conventions to protect the health and welfare of humankind?
3. The work of the Commission is based on the principle of common and shared responsibility. Can you share some examples of good practices in cooperating with other stakeholders at the regional or international levels in joint efforts to act against illicit traffic in controlled substances?
4. What concrete initiatives have you implemented to protect children from the non-medical use of controlled substances and/or to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances?
5. When implementing measures to prevent illicit cultivation of and to eradicate plants containing narcotic or psychotropic substances, how do you ensure that these respect fundamental human rights and take due account of traditional licit uses, and the protection of the environment, in line with the provisions of the drug control conventions? What are alternatives to illicit crop cultivation that have proven to be successful?
6. Can you share some good practices that ensure that measures taken to control substances, such as opioids, do not lead to the overly stringent regulation of those with a variety of medical uses (including pain relief and epilepsy control), thus ensuring access while still preventing diversion and misuse?
7. The international drug control conventions call for its Parties to take all practical measures when it comes to demand reduction, and to assist persons whose work so requires gaining an understanding of the problems of abuse of drugs and of its prevention. What are some national good practices implemented to raise awareness and train policymakers and national authorities, such as law enforcement, to ensure that people in need have access to essential services? What are some effective measures promoted to reduce stigma and discrimination of people who use drugs in your country?
8. Can you share examples of national good practices that have been implemented to ensure that the domestic law enforcement of drug-related crime complies with international human rights obligations?
9. Can you share national practices and effective models on how alternatives to conviction or punishment are implemented in line with the international drug control conventions and with human rights law? Do you have any good practices of multi-sectoral collaboration in enhancing a public health approach to provide treatment and care for people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system?
10. What are some good practices or challenges in implementing measures that make use of the flexibility in the determination of responses, while being in line with the three international drug control conventions and international human rights obligations?

## 4 DECEMBER 2023 MORNING – CHALLENGE: DRUG TREATMENT AND HEALTH SERVICES CONTINUE TO FALL SHORT OF MEETING NEEDS AND DEATHS RELATED TO DRUG USE HAVE INCREASED

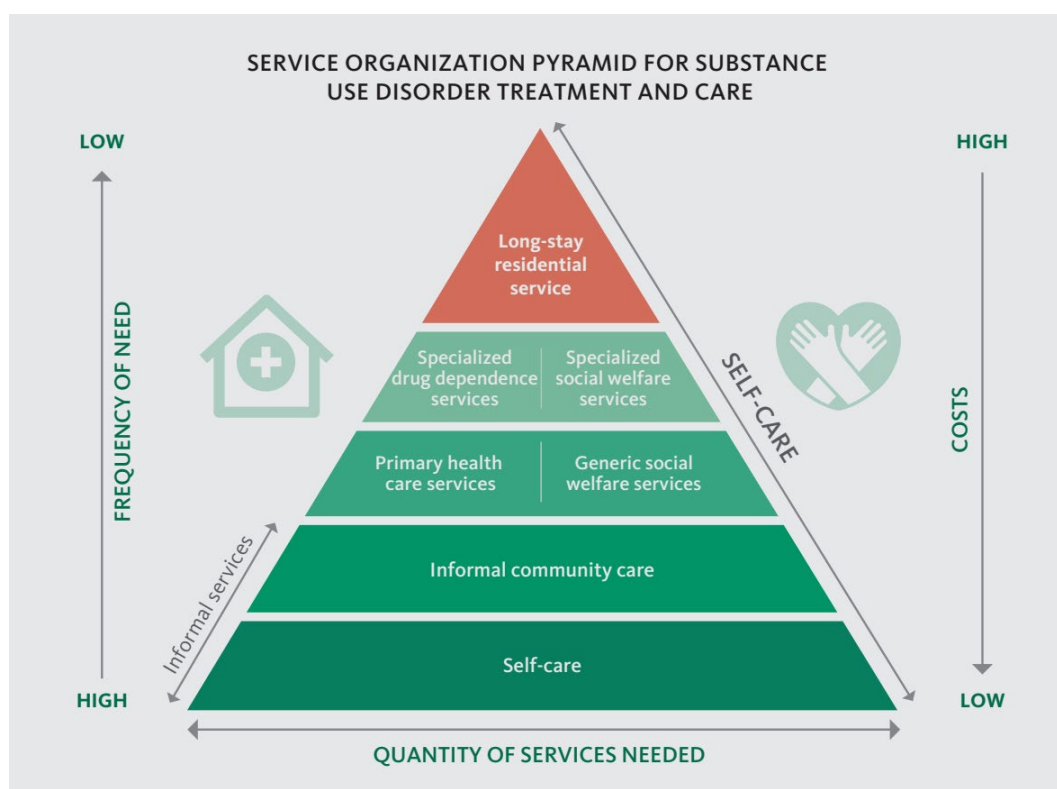
### BACKGROUND INFORMATION<sup>56</sup>

#### *(a) Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs*

According to the World Drug Report 2023, an estimated 296 million people used drugs in 2021, in increase of 23% over the previous decade, with youth populations being the most vulnerable to using drugs and being more severely affected by substance use disorder in several regions<sup>57</sup>. Of the people who used drugs, 39.5 million people suffer from drug use disorders, a 45% increase over 10 years.

The **availability of interventions for the prevention of drug use** is not well-estimated; only a minority of countries report a high-coverage of interventions more consistently associated with evidence-based practice (in schools, families, the workplace and the primary health sector), in line with the guidance contained in the UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders.

The **demand for treating drug-related disorders** remains largely unmet and disparities in access persist across regions, populations and in the type and quality of treatment received. Globally, **about one in five people with drug use disorders** received treatment in 2021. Women face barriers in accessing drug treatment services; in 2021: for example, 45 % of those who used amphetamine-type stimulants in the past year were women, but only 27 % of those in treatment were women.



WHO and UNODC, *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders: Revised Edition Incorporating Results of Field-Testing* (Geneva: WHO, 2020)

<sup>56</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2020 CND Thematic Discussions

<sup>57</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Executive Summary, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 12

**Drug use disorders and other mental health conditions** are closely interconnected; mental health conditions, which currently affect at least one in eight people globally, increase the risk of developing drug use disorders, and drugs pose the risk of exacerbating mental health problems if taken outside medical supervision. During the **2020 CND thematic discussions**<sup>58</sup>, several speakers shared national strategies for evidence-based drug treatment, and the importance of addressing the drug problem from a multidimensional perspective including through prevention, criminal justice responses, and evidence-based drug treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare, was highlighted. Speakers also referred to the UNODC-WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders outlining common principles and good practices for drug use disorder treatment services. Recalling the commitment to “leaving no one behind,” a number of speakers encouraged the adoption of approaches that meet the needs of different groups of people with drug use disorders, particularly vulnerable members of society, underscoring limited availability and access to drug treatment for, among others, women or people in prison-settings. Concerns were expressed by several speakers that the COVID-19 pandemic had further exacerbated health conditions of people with drug use disorders.

***(b) Deaths related to drug use have increased***

**Deaths related to the use of drugs** were estimated at about 500,000 in 2019, 17.5 % more than in 2009. Liver diseases attributed to hepatitis C are a major cause of drug-related deaths, accounting for more than half of the total number of deaths attributed to the use of drugs. Drug overdoses accounted for a quarter of drug-related deaths<sup>59</sup>. The global number of **deaths directly or indirectly attributable to drugs** continues to increase, with 494,000 deaths globally in 2019. From 2010 to 2019, deaths directly attributed to drug use (mainly through overdoses) increased by 45%, and those indirectly attributed to drug use (e.g. through liver disease due to hepatitis, HIV and AIDS, and self-harm associated with drug use), increased by 10%.

**Opioids** remain the leading cause of deaths in fatal overdoses<sup>60</sup>. Opioids accounted for nearly 70 per cent of the 128,000 deaths attributed to drug use disorders in 2019. Opioid use disorders also accounted for the majority (71 %) of the 18 million healthy years of life lost owing to premature death and disability in 2019. UNODC has launched the SOS (Stop Overdose Safely) initiative aiming at providing training and naloxone to individuals likely to witness an overdose.

During the **2020 CND thematic discussions**<sup>61</sup>, some speakers reported record levels of national opioid and stimulant use, and a high mortality rates from overdoses accelerated as a direct result of the global pandemic. It was reported by some speakers that due to the pandemic and the related interrupted supply, people with drug use disorders, potentially seek new, unknown sources that carry a higher risk of adulteration with lethal synthetic opioids. As part of COVID-19 related measures, it was reported that some countries have eased restrictions on the dispensing of methadone, making distribution more accessible with home delivery of opioid antagonist therapy medications or offering dosing at community pharmacies.

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<sup>58</sup> The Chair’s summary of the 2020 CND thematic discussions can be found in [https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_64/CRPs\\_NGO\\_papers/ECN72021\\_CRP1\\_V21\\_02006.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_64/CRPs_NGO_papers/ECN72021_CRP1_V21_02006.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., page 22-23

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., page 14

<sup>61</sup> The Chair’s summary of the 2020 CND thematic discussions can be found in [https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_64/CRPs\\_NGO\\_papers/ECN72021\\_CRP1\\_V21\\_02006.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_64/CRPs_NGO_papers/ECN72021_CRP1_V21_02006.pdf)

During the **2020 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted a range of **measures to address the challenge of drug treatment and health services falling short of meeting needs and the increase of deaths related to drug use**, including<sup>62</sup>:

- Address the drug problem from a multidimensional perspective including through prevention, criminal justice responses, and evidence-based drug treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare;
- Adopt approaches that meet the needs of different groups of people with drug use disorders, particularly of people in vulnerable situations and with limited availability and access to drug treatment, such as women or people in prison settings;
- Enhance coverage of gender and age-sensitive, evidence-based treatment, as well as rehabilitation and social re-integration policies;
- Ensure adequate treatment facilities for people with drug use disorders. The Internet could be used to extend the reach and geographical coverage of treatment programmes, and new, effective substitution therapies could be developed.
- Mobilize partners at all levels to provide a comprehensive set of measures for people with drug use disorders, to promote and protect their health, wellbeing and recovery.

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<sup>62</sup> Idem

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):

### *Prevention*

1. What concrete initiatives is your country undertaking to improve the coverage of evidence-based prevention of drug use? How do these compare to those that have been found to be effective in preventing drug use and other risky behaviours in the UNODC/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention? How do you ensure that quality standards are implemented?
2. Can you share any good example of research on the effectiveness of drug prevention on both boys and girls and what were the results? Do you have a mapping of evidence-based prevention interventions and/or policies addressing different ages of development and social contexts? Have you undertaken school-based surveys documenting prevalence of use of substances among adolescents, as well as their vulnerabilities? How this has been utilized in the planning of drug prevention interventions?
3. Do you have good practices to share on meaningfully engaging and involving youth in drug prevention work, or in policy- or decision-making processes that concern drug policies?

### *Treatment*

4. What concrete initiatives is your country undertaking to provide treatment, health care, social protection and rehabilitation services for people who use drugs and people with drug use disorders? How do these compare to the UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use disorders? How do you ensure that quality standards are implemented?
5. Can you share good practices and effective experiences about closing the gender gap, as well as for other identified sub-populations, in the provision of drug treatment, care and rehabilitation services? How are the good practices adapted to meet the same needs in prison settings, as well as for women in prison settings?
6. How have international programmes and assistance impacted domestic policies related to treatment and health services for people who use drugs?
7. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the availability of and funding for prevention and treatment interventions for people who use drugs? What are the developments “post pandemic”?

### *Deaths related to the use of drugs*

8. What are good practices in your country on preventing and/or managing drug overdoses? Is there any data collection measure in place to track drug overdose cases?

## 4 DECEMBER 2023 AFTERNOON – CHALLENGE: THE RATE OF TRANSMISSION OF HIV, THE HEPATITIS C VIRUS AND OTHER BLOOD-BORNE DISEASES ASSOCIATED WITH DRUG USE, INCLUDING INJECTING DRUG USE IN SOME COUNTRIES, REMAIN HIGH

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION<sup>63</sup>

According to the World Drug Report 2023, the greatest harms to health are those associated with injecting drug use, owing to the **risk of acquiring HIV or Hepatitis C through unsafe injecting practices**<sup>64</sup>. The global epidemics of HIV and hepatitis C continue to be major global public health concerns. The prevalence of HIV and hepatitis C is disproportionately high among people who inject drugs (PWID), and it accounts for a significant proportion of new HIV and hepatitis C infections globally.



*General Assembly Meets on Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and Sustainable Development. UN Photo/ Manuel Elias.*

Globally an estimated 6.6 million people who inject drugs were living with hepatitis C in 2021, or half of all people who inject drugs. Among people who use and inject drugs, liver diseases, including liver cancer and cirrhosis of the liver caused by hepatitis C, are the major contributors to the drug-related deaths and healthy years of life lost due to premature death and disability attributed to the use of drugs. An estimated 1 million people who inject drugs were living with hepatitis B in 2021, or 8% of the total number of people who inject drugs. In 2020, PWID were estimated to have been 35 times more likely than people in the general population to be living with HIV. The number of people who inject drugs and live with HIV amounted to 1.6 million in 2021 (ca. 12% of PWID). In addition, 1.4 million people who inject drugs were living with both HIV and hepatitis C in 2021.

During the **2020 CND thematic discussions**<sup>65</sup>, some speakers shared experiences on preventing and controlling infectious diseases among people who use drugs, including through the distribution of injection equipment and materials; drug dependence treatment; vaccination; testing and treatment of infectious diseases; health promotion; as well as targeted delivery of services. A number of speakers addressed challenges related to COVID-19 and highlighted that the global pandemic had further revealed vulnerabilities in the health care systems and challenges for communities and affected populations, including people who use drugs.

Despite **innovations in service provision** - such as the introduction or scaling up of take-home Opioid Agonist Therapy, community-led HIV service delivery to ensure uninterrupted access to medication or sterile injection equipment and telehealth approaches including in prisons and other approaches - which started during the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in early benefits, **challenges remain** due to the **lack of**

<sup>63</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2020 CND Thematic Discussions

<sup>64</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Executive Summary, (United Nations publication, 2023), page 16

<sup>65</sup> The Chair's summary of the 2020 CND thematic discussions can be found in [https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_64/CRPs\\_NGO\\_papers/ECN72021\\_CRP1\\_V21\\_02006.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_64/CRPs_NGO_papers/ECN72021_CRP1_V21_02006.pdf)



**legislation and regulations**, and to the **digital divide**, especially in certain geographical areas and in certain populations that are hard to reach, including homeless people and people who inject drugs. Other marginalized groups, such as those with a history of incarceration, people displaced by humanitarian emergencies and sex workers, face **other barriers in accessing services**.

During the **2020 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted a range of **measures to address the high rates of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use, in some countries**, including<sup>66</sup>:

- Implement a comprehensive package of services for persons who use drugs, including targeted HIV and hepatitis prevention, low-threshold access to diagnosis, and anti-retroviral treatment as well as accompanying care and support programmes;
- Increase gender-sensitive services to address women's needs appropriately and to jointly progress the implementation of related measures under CND resolutions, including resolution 61/4 on promoting measures for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis among women who use drugs; resolution 59/5 on mainstreaming a gender perspective in drug-related policies and programmes; and resolution 55/5 on promoting strategies and measures addressing specific needs of women in the context of comprehensive and integrated drug demand reduction programmes and strategies;
- Ensure a holistic approach, aimed at long-term recovery, and the need for health and human rights-based service delivery systems for prevention and treatment for people who use drugs.

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<sup>66</sup> Idem

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):**

1. What good practices can you share with regards to increasing access to HIV and Hepatitis C prevention, treatment, care and support among people who use drugs and people with drug use disorders?
2. What needs to be done to increase access to HIV, Hepatitis B and C prevention, treatment, care, and support among people who use stimulant drugs?
3. What measures has your country put in place to address the gender gap in accessing health services by people who inject drugs?
4. Do you have any good practices specifically addressing prison populations?
5. What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the national/international HIV responses among people who use drugs? Have you noticed any trends “post-pandemic”?
6. Service innovations during the COVID-19 pandemic increased access to drug treatment for various population groups in a number of countries. Such innovations in drug service provision included the use of telehealth (e.g. the use of telephone lines and online communication tools) and of various strategies to ensure access to medication and sterile injecting equipment (e.g. increased number of take-home dosages, delivery of medication or sterile equipment), among others. Did such innovative approaches also take place in your country and what has been the experience so far? Have such approaches been continued “post-pandemic”?

## 5 DECEMBER 2023 MORNING – CHALLENGE: THE ADVERSE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES HAVE REACHED ALARMING LEVELS

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION<sup>67</sup>

According to the World Drug Report 2023, the number of **New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)** identified by authorities worldwide and reported to the UNODC Early Warning Advisory has already reached a total of 1,184 substances in 2022 according to preliminary data<sup>68</sup>, up from 166 in 2009<sup>69</sup>. In 2021, there were 618 new psychoactive substances in the market, more than ever before. NPS can have severe adverse health consequences, including death, and their effects remain unpredictable. Patterns of NPS use have been observed among marginalized, vulnerable, and socially disadvantaged groups.



*Image of pills. Roberto Sorin.*

Some NPS are pharmaceutical drugs and **may pose challenges for drug prevention**, as they may be perceived as less harmful. Many NPS present **particular challenges for first responders and emergency health services** due to acute cases of intoxication. Addressing these challenges effectively involves developing response protocols and training first responders and emergency health services on a continuous basis.

**Effective prevention strategies** focus on supporting the protective environment framework, as well as healthy and safe development of children and youth for the prevention of risky behaviours, including drug use, through multi-sectorial cooperation and approaches.

During the **2020 CND thematic discussions**<sup>70</sup>, a major challenge cited by several speakers was the mimicking abilities of the emerging substances and the lack of practitioners' training on treatment for the adverse effects of NPS. A number of speakers suggested that an increased focus on evidence-based research and strengthening of cooperation and partnership were critical to fully understand the adverse effects of the different NPS. The importance of research on the toxic effects, the use of NPS in combination with other controlled substances, and the long-term effects of NPS, was stressed.

It was highlighted by some speakers, that a number of risk factors played a role in the widespread consumption of NPS, and that a variety of vulnerable members of society were affected, many living in impoverished or insecure socio-political environments. A number of speakers expressed concerns regarding the increasing consumption of NPS among young people, the effects on their mental health, and the role of peer pressure.

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<sup>67</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2020 CND Thematic Discussions

<sup>68</sup> World Drug Report 2023 Executive Summary (United Nations publication, 2023), page 50

<sup>69</sup> World Drug Report 2013, <https://www.unodc.org/wdr2013/en/nps.html>

<sup>70</sup> The Chair's summary of the 2020 CND thematic discussions can be found in [https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_64/CRPs\\_NGO\\_papers/ECN72021\\_CRP1\\_V21\\_02006.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_64/CRPs_NGO_papers/ECN72021_CRP1_V21_02006.pdf)

During the **2020 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted a range of **measures to address the alarming levels of adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances**, including<sup>71</sup>:

- To address the identification and reporting of NPS, exchange information to promote partnerships and to prevent the misuse of substances, including through INCB platforms; and
- Acknowledge the importance of the UNODC Early Warning Advisory (EWA) system, keeping the international community informed about developments and helping to identify the most harmful, prevalent and persistent substances for international action;
- Enhance cooperation with the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the World Customs Organization (WCO) to heighten alerts on shipments, as well as training of officers on intelligence sharing and safe handling of NPS;
- Provide training to medical service providers for the provision of quality assistance and counselling as well as tailored support for people using NPS;
- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the harms associated with the consumption of NPS, especially among young people and people living in impoverished environments.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):**

1. How can the international community strengthen the collection and use of relevant, reliable, and objective data as a basis for comprehensive, integrated, and balanced evidence-based drug policies within the framework of the international drug conventions, thereby addressing the adverse health consequences and risks associated with NPS?
2. What measures e.g., early warning systems, have been effective in your country to enhance the ability of Member States to anticipate the health risks due to NPS/synthetic drugs and their preparedness to address such issues?
3. What good practices can you share on increasing the capacity of first responders and emergency health services to respond to acute cases of intoxication by NPS?
4. Have you considered the risks of HIV/HBV/HCV transmission among key populations attributed to NPS use and, if so, do you have any experiences that you could share?
5. Can you share good practices on measures to effectively raise awareness on the harms associated with the consumption of NPS, especially among young people and people living in vulnerable environments?

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<sup>71</sup> Idem

## 5 DECEMBER 2023 AFTERNOON – CHALLENGE: SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS AND THE NON-MEDICAL USE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS POSE INCREASING RISKS TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY, AS WELL AS SCIENTIFIC, LEGAL AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES, INCLUDING WITH REGARD TO THE SCHEDULING OF SUBSTANCES

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION<sup>72</sup>

The **non-medical use of controlled substances** is a major component of overall polydrug use patterns and adverse health consequences. People use controlled substances to self-medicate, intensify the effects of other drugs, overcome side effects, or alleviate withdrawal symptoms. The **two epidemics of non-medical use of opioids**, one related to fentanyl in North America and the other one to the use of tramadol (an opioid which is not under international control) in North Africa, West Africa, the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia, continue to pose significant health risks. In 2021, there were almost 90,000 opioid-involved overdose deaths in North America, with the majority of those involving illegally manufactured fentanyl. Trafficking in fentanyl and its analogues is also expanding in Europe and elsewhere. In Africa, there have been signs of increases in the non-medical use of tramadol and related harm in recent years.

Young people, in particular university students, women, and older persons are amongst the highest affected by misuse and non-medical use of controlled medicines. According to the World Drug Report 2022<sup>73</sup>, while the large majority of people who use drugs continue to be men, women represent now an estimated 45-49 per cent of users of amphetamines and non-medical users of pharmaceutical stimulants, pharmaceutical opioids, sedatives, and tranquilizers. In addition, women tend to progress to drug use disorders more rapidly than men do.

Rational use of internationally controlled essential medicines is essential to optimal health outcomes, but under-treatment of pain due to unavailability represents a fundamental global inequity.

The principle of balance between provision and control of essential medicines listed in the Schedules of the international drug control conventions ensures the **protection and promotion of health and public safety**. A coordinated, multi-sectoral response is required to ensure consistent momentum with resulting positive impact on patients with medical needs. The goal of controlling for diversion and non-medical use should not interfere with, or limit, the rational use of essential medicines for patients with legitimate medical needs.



*Learn more about scheduling in the Commission in the e-learning module at <https://bit.ly/cndscheduling>*

While there are international mandates and policy documents to guide actions at the national level, the complexities of the unique situations in each country make it **difficult to create a “one size fits all step-**

<sup>72</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2019 CND Thematic Discussions

<sup>73</sup> World Drug Report 2022, Booklet 1, (United Nations publication, 2022), page 37

**by-step template”** to increase access to and availability of controlled medicines. However, **three components consistently remain the core areas of focus** and are essential for Member States to simultaneously take action in all three areas with a strategic view to balancing the impact of each, namely (i) systems integration; (ii) education and awareness, and (iii) supply chain management. A **coordinated, multi-sectoral response** is required to ensure consistent momentum with resulting positive impact on patients with medical needs receiving the medication and treatment interventions appropriate for their care.

A **comprehensive system to prevent and manage overdose**, particularly of opioids, includes evidence-based pharmacological and psychosocial treatment of opioid use disorders, continuity of care between the prison settings and the community, as well as access to naloxone and training of potential first responders.

During the **2019 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted several **measures to address the increasing risks posed by synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs to public health and safety as well as scientific, legal and regulatory challenges, including with regard to the scheduling of substances**, including<sup>74</sup>:

- Collect relevant and reliable data in order to have a comprehensive overview of the drug situation worldwide enabling governments to make timely and evidence-based decisions at the national and international levels (including information on the number of deaths and other harmful effects related to the misuse of opioids);
- Develop and implement an integrated and balanced approach to addressing the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals that strikes the right balance between prevention, treatment and measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health and social consequences, on the one hand, and supply reduction measures, on the other hand. Specific measures could include the introduction of prescription guidelines; reducing stigma associated with the use of synthetic opioids; training of first line responders on overdose management; administration of naloxone, (which is an opioid antagonist medication to address overdoses and mortality); provision of rehabilitation and reintegration services; raise public awareness, including among healthcare professionals and law enforcement authorities, to keep all informed about the legal uses of pharmaceuticals;
- Strike a balance between ensuring the availability of controlled substances and drugs for medical and scientific purposes, including for pain relief and management, while avoiding their misuse and diversion into illicit channels. Specific measures to achieve this can include the introduction of centralized electronic registers for the prescription of pharmaceuticals to prevent their misuse and diversion, and capacity building of relevant practitioners on how the misuse of pharmaceuticals can be managed;
- Enhance controls for the trade and distribution of pharmaceuticals through all channels, including through enhanced cross-border cooperation and information-sharing – addressing thereby also the growing role of the Internet and information and communications technologies in facilitating the non-medical use and misuse of pharmaceuticals;
- Cooperate with the INCB as well as enhance cooperation and coordination among different agencies - at the national level as well as across borders - involving academia and civil society.

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<sup>74</sup> The Chair's summary with salient points of the 2019 CND thematic discussions, which addressed this challenge, can be found here:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_63/CRPs/ECN72020\\_CRP1\\_V2000752.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_63/CRPs/ECN72020_CRP1_V2000752.pdf)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):**

1. What challenges do you experience with synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals in your country? How do you address these challenges?
2. How do you address the challenge of the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids as well as NPS opioids and their health consequences including overdose?
3. Do you have specific policies and programmes with regard to preventing and addressing the abuse of synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals? What multisectoral partnerships have been particularly successful?
4. What good practices and lessons learnt can you share on ensuring that controlled substances are available for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion?
5. What experiences can you share in terms of raising awareness among health-care professionals, law enforcement officials and the general public about the risks posed by the non-medical use of prescription drugs?
6. What measures have been implemented to address the disproportionate higher non-medical use of controlled medicines by women?
7. Can you share good practices to assess the magnitude of misuse and non-medical use amongst the geriatric population, including in nursing homes?

## 6 DECEMBER 2023 MORNING – CHALLENGE: THE AVAILABILITY OF INTERNATIONALLY CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES FOR MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES, INCLUDING FOR THE RELIEF OF PAIN AND PALLIATIVE CARE, REMAINS LOW TO NON-EXISTENT IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION<sup>75</sup>

**Medicines containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (controlled medicines)** are important for treating drug-use disorders, mental health and neurological conditions, and play a vital role in the management of pain associated with medical procedures (surgical, intensive care, etc.), as well as severe cancer related pain, including palliative care.

According to the World Drug Report 2023, access to and availability of controlled medicines for pain relief is **unequally distributed globally**, with a clear disparity between high-income countries versus low- and middle-income countries<sup>76</sup>. Most consumption of opioid analgesics remains concentrated in North America, followed by Europe and Oceania. The lowest-consuming regions in the world include Africa, Oceania except Australia and New Zealand, Central America and the Caribbean, South Asia, and East and South-East Asia. In 2021, low- and middle-income countries, representing almost 85% of the global population, consumed only 11% of the global amount of internationally controlled opioids available for medical use, expressed in defined daily doses for statistical purposes (S-DDDs)<sup>77</sup>.



UN Photo/PP

**Barriers regarding access to and availability of controlled medicines** for pain management and palliative care are **complex** and include historical vestiges, legislation and regulatory systems, national supply management systems, and capacity of health systems. Nonetheless, data also showed some positive trends. Opioids available for medical use increased in low- and middle-income countries by more than 50 % between 2017 and 2021. Moreover, data also show a strong increase in the availability of methadone and buprenorphine over the last two decades, rising from just 431 million S-DDDs in 1998 to 3,215 million S-DDDs in 2021, equivalent to a more than 7-fold increase<sup>78</sup>.

Efforts to increase availability of and access to controlled medicines are **often hampered by concerns about diversion and addiction**, therefore, addressing the danger of diversion and non-medical use of controlled medicines are fundamental pillars to overcome the largest barriers to the availability of and access to controlled medicines.

**Legislation and regulatory systems** are important in improving access to and availability of controlled substances, and some countries have reviewed or changed their legislation and/or regulatory systems. **Adequate training of health professionals** to ensure rational prescription practices, safe dispensing of

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<sup>75</sup> Further details in this section can be found in the [background note](#) of the 2020 CND Thematic Discussions

<sup>76</sup> World Drug Report 2023, Online Segment, page 22

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., page 73

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., page 78



medication by pharmacists, efficient information and monitoring of medicines use by patients, in particular older persons, all contribute to increase access and prevent misuse.

**Measure to prevent, detect and report diversion through the establishment of effective national supply chain management systems**, including the implementation of digital solutions, are essential to ensuring adequate access to and availability of controlled medicines, as well as preventing non-medical use of diverted medicines.

During the **2020 CND thematic discussions**, participants highlighted a range of **measures to address the low to non-existence of the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relieve of pain and palliative care, in many parts of the world**, including<sup>79</sup>:

- Ensure the availability of controlled substances drugs for medical and scientific purposes, including for pain relief and management, while avoiding their misuse and diversion into illicit channels, including through the support provided by the INCB in that regard;
- Ensure policy development and coordination, process improvements, and stakeholder engagements to address the barriers to access and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. In the development of policies, take into account vulnerable members of society, including children and adults living with life-limiting illnesses, those suffering from traumatic injuries and violence, post-surgical pain and obstetrical complications; and
- Develop and implement an integrated and balanced approach to addressing the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals that strikes the right balance between prevention, treatment and measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health consequences, including with a view to reducing risks of opioid overdose. Effective measures would include the introduction of prescription guidelines, increased public awareness to reduce the stigma associated with the use of synthetic opioids, education of health care providers, and training for first-line responders.

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<sup>79</sup> The Chair's summary of the 2020 CND thematic discussions can be found in [https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_64/CRPs\\_NGO\\_papers/ECN72021\\_CRP1\\_V21\\_02006.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_64/CRPs_NGO_papers/ECN72021_CRP1_V21_02006.pdf)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KINDLY FOCUS ON UPDATES COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SHARED DURING PREVIOUS THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS):**

1. A precondition for the sufficient availability of opioids for medical use are correct estimates (forecasts) of such requirements to be submitted to the INCB on an annual basis. This would include data on the number of people suffering from various forms of cancer and other serious illnesses causing severe pain. To what extent are the authorities in your country in a position to provide such forecasts, based on scientific evidence, and/or what kind of training would be needed to improve such forecasts?
2. The global COVID-19 pandemic made more visible the gap between countries that have access to controlled medicines and those that do not. How can the international community address this gap and learn from the lessons gained during the pandemic?
3. Could you share experiences in the application of innovation and digitalization throughout the processes related to ensuring the availability of and access to controlled medicines for medical and scientific purposes while preventing misuse, diversion, and non-medical use?
4. How does the fear of addiction contribute to the development, and/or implementation of a national policy for controlled medicines? What are some good practices to address the influence of cultural attitudes towards the management of health conditions, as well as the relief of pain, that impede access to and the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, including palliative care?
5. What are some good practices to address the negative attitudes and concerns of controlled medicines prescribers, and to enhance prescription practices aimed at ensuring rational prescription of controlled medicines?

## 6 DECEMBER 2023 AFTERNOON – THE WAY FORWARD & CLOSING

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The last half-day of the thematic discussions will be dedicated to discussing the way forward, in particular towards the preparations for the [2024 mid-term review](#) and the period from 2024 until 2029.

#### **Acceleration of the implementation of all international drug policy commitments**



The 2024 mid-term review will serve to assess progress made in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments as set forth in the Ministerial Declaration, with an end-of-cycle review in 2029. Through [CND resolution 66/1](#), the Commission decided that the mid-term review would consist of a 2-day high-level segment in addition to the 5-day regular session of the CND, held in March 2024. The high-level segment will include a general debate and two multi-stakeholder roundtables (held in parallel to the general debate) on the topics of “*Taking stock: work undertaken since 2019*” and “*The way forward: the road to 2029*”. The outcome of the roundtables will be a non-negotiated Co-Chair’s summaries.

The Commission agreed to work in good faith towards adopting a concise, action-oriented document at the opening of the high-level segment of its 67th session. This document would focus exclusively on taking stock of the implementation of all existing international drug policy commitments between 2019 and 2023, and on indicating the work to be done to accelerate the implementation of all those existing commitments between 2024 and 2029. Negotiations on the outcome document will start in the intersessional period leading up to the 67<sup>th</sup> regular session (starting after the reconvened session in December 2023).

During this half a day, participants can discuss the preparatory process for the 2024 midterm review; key elements that could be contained in the document to be adopted at the 2024 midterm review; and guiding principles and actions that can be undertaken by the Commission and Member States in the period from 2024 to 2029 to accelerate the implementation of all existing drug policy commitments before conducting the end-of-cycle review in 2029.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What lessons learnt shared during the comprehensive stock-taking of the 2023 CND thematic discussions should guide the Commission’s and Member States’ work in the period from 2024 until 2029?
2. How do you think the 2024 midterm review outcome document should look like?
3. How could the 2029 end-of-cycle review look like?