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Commission on Narcotic Drugs Background Guide 2025

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NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2025 National Model United Nations Washington DC Conference (NMUN•DC)! We are pleased to introduce to you our committee, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND). Your committee's work is facilitated by volunteer staff. This year's committee staff are Director Steven Vanhulle and Assistant Tammy Nguyen. Steven holds a Master of Arts in Global Economic Affairs and works at a community college in Aurora, CO. Prior to this, Steven worked for a decade in law enforcement with the United States Army and has experience processing crime scene investigations and forensics. Tammy is an undergraduate studying International and Global Studies with a focus on Criminal and Human/Civil Rights through a Pre-Law track. The preparation of these materials was supported by Under-Secretary-General Emma Bott, and Secretary-General, Alliyah Edwards.

The topics on the agenda for this committee are:

1. Creating Effective Drug Policy in Transit Countries
2. Addressing the Impact of the Global Trade in Opiates

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) is a functional commission of ECOSOC and the central policy-making body on drug control. It is composed of 53 rotating Member States elected for four-year terms. CND monitors the implementation of the drug control conventions, analyzes global drug trends, and recommends balanced measures that uphold public health, human rights, and alternative development while combating illicit production and trafficking.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the conference, each delegation should submit their Position Papers by 11:59 p.m. (DC Time) on 15 October in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [DC Position Papers page](#).

Two resources, available to download from the NMUN website, serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

- The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions.
- The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for this committee, please contact Under-Secretary-General, Emma Bott at usgemma.dc@nmun.org or the Secretary-General, Alliyah Edwards at secgen.dc@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Steven Vanhulle, Director
Tammy Nguyen, Assistant Director



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Committee Overview

Introduction

Established in 1946 by Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 9(1), the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) is the central drug policy-making body of the United Nations.¹ CND advises on drug policy and the control of narcotic drugs through monitoring the application of international drug control treaties.² In addition to being a functional commission of ECOSOC, CND is one of the governing bodies of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).³ Its work is guided by the 1961 *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs* (Single Convention), the 1971 *Convention on Psychotropic Substances*, and the 1988 *Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*.⁴

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are complementary to CND's work to address the world drug problem effectively.⁵ In particular, SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) in part seek to minimize the suffering that results from the world drug problem and the use or trafficking of illicit narcotics.⁶

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

CND is a functional commission of and reports directly to ECOSOC.⁷ The commission's original mandate was to assist in monitoring the application of international drug control treaties.⁸ CND's mandate has since evolved significantly, and the commission currently uses research from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) to decide whether narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, and their precursors, should be placed under or released from international control and if the level of control on these substances needs to be changed.⁹ CND then establishes strategies to control these illicit narcotics and provides recommendations to Member States and UNODC on countering the world drug problem.¹⁰ CND is also mandated to approve the budget for the Fund of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, which receives the majority of the United Nations' drug control resources.¹¹ CND's role was further clarified and formalized by ECOSOC resolution 1999/30 on "*Review of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme: strengthening the United Nations machinery for international drug control within the scope of the existing international drug control treaties and in accordance with the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations*," which structured CND's agenda into two distinct sections: a normative section and an

¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Resolution on the Establishment of a Commission on Narcotic Drugs (E/RES/9(1))*. 1946.

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs*. N.d.

³ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 20223-234*. 2023. p. 146.

⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs*. N.d.

⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. N.d.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Mandate and Functions*. N.d.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 20223-234*. 2023. p. 146.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.



operational section.¹² Under the normative segment, CND focuses on policy issues and the upholding of treaties, while under the operational segment, CND exercises its role as the governing body of UNODC.¹³

One of the most notable expansions of CND's mandate came with the adoption of the *Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem* (the Plan) at CND's 52nd session in 2009.¹⁴ CND is responsible for encouraging and assisting Member States in implementing the Plan and for developing new "indicators and instruments" to measure the extent of the global drug problem.¹⁵

While the following list is not exhaustive, CND's mandate can be summarized as:

- **CND will generally:** supervise the application of narcotic treaties; advise ECOSOC on all issues related to the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, and their precursors; monitor national, regional, and international commitments to implement joint commitments aimed at countering the world drug problem; make recommendations to Member States and other bodies.¹⁶
- **CND will not generally:** make binding decisions on drug policy; unilaterally direct Member States, NGOs, and other United Nations bodies to implement actions; enforce action against Member States not complying with international drug control treaties.¹⁷

Governance, Funding, and Structure

CND has 53 members, with 11 seats each for African and Asian States, 10 for Latin American and Caribbean States, six for Eastern European States, 14 for Western European and Other States, and a rotating seat between the Asian and Latin American or Caribbean States every four years.¹⁸ Members must be party to the 1961 Single Convention, and there must be "adequate representation" for Member States that are important producers of opium or coca leaves, Member States where illicit narcotics are manufactured, and Member States where the use of illicit narcotics is particularly concerning.¹⁹ Members of CND are elected by an organizational session of ECOSOC.²⁰

¹² United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Review of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme: strengthening the United Nations machinery for international drug control within the scope of the existing international drug control treaties and in accordance with the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations (E/RES/1999/30)*. 1999.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation Towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem*. 2009. p. iii.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Mandate and Functions*. N.d; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 20223-234*. 2023. p. 146.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 146.

¹⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Membership and Bureau*. 2023.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs et al. *Fact sheet on elections and membership*. N.d.



CND is led internally by a Bureau and Extended Bureau.²¹ The Bureau is composed of a Chairperson, three Vice-Persons, and a Rapporteur, who are elected at the end of each CND session for the following session.²² The Bureau works with the United Nations Secretariat to prepare CND sessions and undertake organizational work between sessions.²³ The Extended Bureau consists of representatives from the five regional groups, the European Union, and the Group of 77 and China.²⁴ CND has five subsidiary bodies to advance cooperation in drug law enforcement activities at the regional level.²⁵ ECOSOC established four Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies (HONLEA) in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and Africa.²⁶ In addition, the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East provides CND with a regional perspective on illicit drug activity in the Near and Middle East.²⁷

CND meets twice annually, with a regular session in which CND adopts decisions and resolutions, and a reconvened session to discuss budgetary and administrative issues as part of CND's role as the governing body of UNODC.²⁸ CND also regularly convenes intersessional meetings to provide policy guidance to UNODC.²⁹

²¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Membership and Bureau*. 2023.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *CND Subsidiary Bodies - Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies and Subcommission*. N.d.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Events*. 2023.

²⁹ Ibid.



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https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/Resolutions/resolution_1999-07-28_1.html

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Retrieved 21 October 2023 from: <https://www.unodc.org/documents/ungass2016/V0984963-English.pdf>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Events*. 2023. Retrieved 21 October 2023 from:

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/Events.html>

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[https://www.unodc.org/res/commissions/CND/Mandate_Functions/scheduling-elearning-tutorial_html/Brochure on the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/res/commissions/CND/Mandate_Functions/scheduling-elearning-tutorial_html/Brochure_on_the_Commission_on_Narcotic_Drugs.pdf)



1. Creating Drug-Effective Policies in Transit Countries

"[...] People who use drugs and those living with substance abuse disorders are victimized again and again: by the drugs themselves, by stigma and discrimination, and by the heavy-handed, inhumane responses to the problem [...]"³⁰

Introduction

In the development of drug policies, countries have varying roles in global networks based on factors such as geographic location, political stability, and law enforcement capacity, which can influence their involvement as transit points within international drug trafficking routes. A transit country refers to a country through which an individual or group passes during a journey either toward a country of destination, and in this context, transit states function as critical points within broader international drug trafficking networks, enabling the transshipment of illicit drugs across borders and between nations.³¹ Consequently, drug policies are government policies that address issues related to the use of illicit drugs, with a specific focus on health outcomes.³² In international drug control, a "drug" refers to substances in Schedules I and II of the 1961 *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs* medicinally and in pharmacology, where it encompasses any chemical agent that alters biological processes.³³ The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) is a policymaking body of the United Nations on drug-related matters, guiding international efforts to address the world drug problem through evidence-based strategies, respect for human rights, and adherence to international drug control treaties.³⁴ Furthermore, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) fosters a balanced, evidence-based approach to drug control, focusing on treatment, rehabilitation, medical access, and legal frameworks while upholding human rights and international agreements.³⁵

Although overall usage is stable, widespread usage has contributed to a rising number of drug-related deaths as rising non-medical use of fentanyl and Tramadol in several regions poses serious risks, including overdose, addiction, and limited access to pain relief in low-income countries.³⁶ In response to these dynamics, CND has supported a more balanced and evidence-informed approach to drug control.³⁷ This includes promoting the integration of law enforcement measures with health-centered strategies such as treatment programs, prevention education, and harm reduction services.³⁸ Special attention has been placed on transit countries, where the combination of drug flow routes and limited institutional

³⁰ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Secretary-General's Message: International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking*. 2024.

³¹ Figueroa. California State University San Bernardino. *Identifying Markers of Transit States Embedded in International Drug Trafficking Networks*. 2020. p. 5.

³² Gstrein. *International Journal of Drug Policy*. *Ideation, social construction and drug policy: A scoping review*. 2018.

³³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Terminology and Information on Drugs: Third Edition*. 2016. p. 63.

³⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs*. N. d.

³⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Peace, Dignity and Equality on a healthy planet: Drugs*. 2025.

³⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2024: Key Findings and Conclusions*. 2024. p. 38.

³⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs*. N. d.

³⁸ *Ibid*.



capacity often places additional pressure on already vulnerable populations.³⁹ Therefore, increasing support for policy approaches that integrate enforcement mechanisms alongside comprehensive drug control efforts, including treatment, prevention, and harm reduction in transit countries, has been the key in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.⁴⁰

International and Regional Framework

The *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs* (1961) was passed by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and provided the first unified international framework for combating illicit drug use and aimed to create controls on drug production.⁴¹ In particular, Article 39 reinforces demand reduction by urging Member States to develop treatment, education, and reintegration programs that address the root causes of drug abuse and the needs of affected populations.⁴² By 1971, CND focused on the role of transit countries in Article 12 of the *Convention on Psychotropic Substances*, which required transit countries to treat rerouted drug shipments as if they were exported in that country using standard export procedures.⁴³ Building on this foundation, the 1988 *United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* extended CND's efforts by addressing measures necessary to monitor certain substances, including precursors, chemicals, and solvents used in the manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.⁴⁴ The *Doha Declaration* (2015) was adopted in Qatar to serve as a key update to international drug control by linking criminal justice reform, rehabilitation, education, and sustainable development.⁴⁵ Furthermore, CND emphasizes the importance of alternatives to incarceration and support towards rehabilitation and social reintegration programs.⁴⁶

In line with the growing complexity of global drug trafficking, UNODC developed the *UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy 2021-2025*, targeting the emerging threats posed by synthetic drugs and novel psychoactive substances and their responses to synthetic drug challenges as it aims to strengthen international cooperation that enhances law enforcement capabilities, improves drug prevention programs, and develops treatment services for those affected by substance abuse.⁴⁷ In Southeast Asia,

³⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2024: Harms of world drug problem continue to mount amid expansions in drug use markets*. 2024.

⁴⁰ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Illicit Transnational Networks Making Sustainable Development Elusive, Speakers Say as Third Committee Discusses Ways to Tackle Drugs, Organized Crime*. 2017.

⁴¹ United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (as amended by the 1972 Protocol amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961)*. 1961.

⁴² Ibid. p. 20.

⁴³ United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Protocol on Psychotropic Substances. *Convention on Psychotropic Substances*. 1971. p. 8.

⁴⁴ United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. *United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*. 1988. p.1.

⁴⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Doha Declarations: On Integrating Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice into the Wider United Nations Agenda to Address Social and Economic Challenges and to Promote the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels, and Public Participation*. 2015. p. 4.

⁴⁶ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *Supporting the collaboration of public health and justice authorities in pursuing alternative measures to conviction or punishment for appropriate drug-related offences of a minor nature*. (E/CN.7/2015/15). 2015. p. 21.

⁴⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy*. 2021.



the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has developed regional strategies, such as the 2016–2025 Work Plan, that align with UNODC's Synthetic Drug Strategy by addressing synthetic drug trafficking, particularly cross-border movement, and emphasizing stronger regional cooperation on border control and demand-reduction programs.⁴⁸ ASEAN's approach integrates supply reduction, demand reduction, and the promotion of alternative livelihoods for those involved in the drug trade.⁴⁹ UNODC's *Ministerial Declaration on the Implementation of All International Drug Policy Commitments* (2019) outlines the international community's commitment to ensuring that drug control efforts are comprehensive and tailored to specific regions' needs.⁵⁰

Outlined in General Assembly (GA) resolution 70/1 on “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (2030 Agenda) (2015), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) guide international cooperation across sectors.⁵¹ SDG 3 (good health and well-being) promotes access to physical and mental healthcare, SDG 4 (quality education) ensures inclusive education for all, SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) calls for the inclusion of marginalized groups like drug offenders, and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) supports justice reform and alternatives to incarceration, advancing equitable and health-centered drug policies.⁵² The development of regulations and policies reinforces SDG Target 3.5 efforts to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic and alcohol use, and Target 3.8, which focuses on achieving universal health coverage and access to essential health services, including mental health and addiction recovery.⁵³ As of 2022, only 1 in 11 individuals globally with drug use disorders received treatment care, with coverage decreasing 2% since 2015.⁵⁴ In addition, SDG Target 4.4 emphasizes the need to substantially increase the number of youth and adults with relevant technical and vocational skills for employment and entrepreneurship, an essential demand reduction strategy that helps mitigate the socio-economic conditions contributing to drug use and trafficking.⁵⁵

Role of the International System

CND plays a central role in supervising the implementation of the international drug control treaties by providing guidance and technical assistance to Member States on drug policies.⁵⁶ CND serves as a vital forum for fostering dialogue and cooperation on evolving drug-related challenges, working closely with

⁴⁸ Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs (2016-2025)*. 2017. p. 6.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Ministerial Declaration on the Implementation of All International Drug Policy Commitments*. 2019.

⁵¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

⁵² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The 17 Sustainable Development Goals*. N.d.

⁵³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages: Targets and Indicators*. N.d.

⁵⁴ United Nations. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*. 2024. p.16.

⁵⁵ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 4 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages: Targets and Indicators*. N.d.

⁵⁶ United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (as amended by the 1972 Protocol amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961)*. 1961.



UNODC, which aids in the implementation of the Commission's mandates by acting as their operational arm at the international and domestic levels.⁵⁷ As part of this commitment, UNODC has worked to foster partnerships with regional organizations, supporting the adaptation of international frameworks to local contexts and providing targeted support for countries struggling with unique drug-related challenges.⁵⁸ UNODC's Precursors Control Program enhances the ability of transit countries to track and intercept precursor chemicals, disrupting the manufacturing of illicit substances at early stages.⁵⁹ The Precursor Control Program supports transit countries by providing technical training to customs and law enforcement officials and enhancing cross-border information sharing to help identify, track, and stop the movement of chemicals used in illegal drug production.⁶⁰

UNODC has partnered with regional bodies such as the ASEAN Narcotics Cooperation Center and the Global SMART Programme to produce region-specific assessments like the *Synthetic Drug Trends in East and Southeast Asia* report.⁶¹ These publications analyze laboratory seizure data, emerging trafficking routes, and newly detected substances to help national governments develop targeted law enforcement responses, early warning systems, and health-focused interventions grounded in regional realities.⁶² The ASEAN Policing Strategy facilitates intelligence sharing among Member States, joint border patrols, and the use of advanced technologies to detect synthetic drugs at checkpoints, capacity-building programs for law enforcement, and the establishment of a regional drug monitoring system to track production and abuse trends.⁶³ It further supports the objectives of CND and UNODC by enhancing regional cooperation through intelligence sharing, capacity-building for law enforcement, and establishing monitoring systems that align with international drug control efforts.⁶⁴

The World Health Organization (WHO) shapes global drug policy by providing scientific, medical, and public health expertise that informs evidence-based approaches, particularly in its advisory capacity to CND.⁶⁵ Furthermore, WHO plays a significant role in supporting regional drug control efforts by providing guidance on treatment and rehabilitation for those affected by drug use.⁶⁶ WHO and UNODC jointly lead the *UNODC-WHO Programme on Drug Dependence Treatment and Care*, which operates in over 30 countries, focusing on capacity building, providing technical support, and implementing community-based programs for drug dependence treatment and rehabilitation.⁶⁷ WHO's *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders (2020)* offer a framework for improving drug treatment services worldwide, ensuring accessibility, effectiveness, and evidence-based practices, while WHO's regional

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Ministerial Declaration on the Implementation of All International Drug Policy Commitments*. 2019.

⁵⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Drugs and Precursors*. N.d.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Ministerial Declaration on the Implementation of All International Drug Policy Commitments*. 2019.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs (2016-2025)*. 2017.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ United Nations, World Health Organization. WHO's role, mandate and activities to counter the world drug problem. 2015. Page 1.

⁶⁶ World Health Organization. *WHO remains firmly committed to the principles set out in the preamble to the Constitution*. 1948.

⁶⁷ World Health Organization. *UNODC-WHO Programme on Drug Dependence Treatment and Care*. N.d.



offices collaborate with UNODC tailor to drug prevention and treatment programs to the specific needs of different regions, particularly those facing rising synthetic drug use.⁶⁸

Recognizing the limitations of punitive approaches, UNODC has promoted rehabilitation and social reintegration as central pillars of effective drug policy.⁶⁹ The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), an independent and quasi-judicial body under the United Nations, oversees the implementation of global drug control treaties that turn high-level enforcement strategies into practical, on-the-ground measures to combat synthetic drugs, illicit chemicals, and trafficking networks.⁷⁰ To track and intercept suspicious chemical shipments across borders, the INCB's *Online International Notification System for Precursor Chemicals* (IONICS system) enables real-time information exchange between national authorities.⁷¹ Through IONICS, Member States can quickly share alerts about suspicious shipments of precursor chemicals, request verification from exporting States, and coordinate interdiction efforts.⁷²

Building on these priorities, many civil society organizations and regional programs actively support the implementation of alternative and inclusive drug policies that align with the goals set by the CND.⁷³ The *International Drug Policy Consortium* (IDPC) plays a key role globally by advocating for drug policies rooted in human rights and public health, emphasizing harm reduction and rehabilitation efforts in regions heavily affected by drug trafficking.⁷⁴ IDPC has also recommended Member States explore decriminalization and new regulations to face the unique challenges from rising criminality, overcrowded prison systems, and social instability.⁷⁵ Complementing this, the *Global Youth Network on Drug Policy* (GYNDP) empowers young people around the world to engage in policy discussions, promoting prevention and treatment programs tailored to the specific vulnerabilities youth face in transit countries.⁷⁶ At the regional level, the *European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction* (EMCDDA) provides comprehensive data and analysis, which supports evidence-based policymaking and aligns with international drug control efforts.⁷⁷ Together, these organizations and regional programs support CND's initiatives by combining global advocacy, youth engagement, regional data expertise, and local action that work collaboratively to address the complex challenges of drug trafficking, social instability, and vulnerable populations.⁷⁸

⁶⁸ World Health Organization and United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crime. *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders: Revised Edition Incorporating Results of Field-Testing*. 2020.

⁶⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UNODC Strategy 2021–2025*. 2021.

⁷⁰ International Narcotics Control Board. *The Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme*. 2024.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and International Narcotics Control Board. *Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS) User Guide*. 2015. p. 2.

⁷³ International Drug Policy Consortium. *The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs has fundamentally changed - for good*. 2025.

⁷⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Global Youth Initiative on Drug Policy*. 2024.

⁷⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Promoting Alternative Development-Oriented Drug Control Strategies (A/RES/66/4)*. 2023; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Cooperation to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem (A/RES/76/188)*. 2021. p. 22.

⁷⁶ EU Monitor. *European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA)*. N.d.

⁷⁷ Global Commission on Drug Policy. *Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy*. 2009.

⁷⁸ Vienna and New York NGO Committees on Drugs. *Global Civil Society Report: for the 2024 mid-term review of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs*. 2024. p. 31.



The Effects of Different Drug Policies in Transit States

CNDs proposes a two-pronged approach to drug policy that emphasizes enforcement and rehabilitative measures equally to solve the challenges of drug trafficking and use.⁷⁹ Enforcement efforts have achieved measurable successes when applied strategically in line with CND's priorities, particularly in transit countries vulnerable to trafficking. In regards to enforcement measures related to trafficking and public safety, WHO has seen a return on investment that appears limited in terms of long-term impact on drug use.⁸⁰ A study done by the *National Institute on Drug Abuse* (NIDA) found that each \$1 spent on drug treatment saves society \$7.50 in reduced crime and regained productivity.⁸¹ In contrast, the savings from treatment programs are larger than control costs: an additional cocaine-control dollar generates societal cost savings of \$7.48 if used for treatment.⁸² In this context, a "cocaine-control dollar" refers to any money spent on efforts to manage cocaine-related issues, such as enforcement, prevention, or treatment programs.⁸³ Moreover, this emphasis on enforcement can strain criminal justice systems and potentially divert resources away from public health approaches that address underlying factors such as poverty, mental health, and social exclusion, with enforcement costs exceeding \$100 billion annually.⁸⁴ Despite such expenditures, global drug use continues to rise, sustaining a \$330 billion illicit drug market.⁸⁵

Enforcement has yielded measurable successes when applied in contexts aligned with CND's policies toward balanced, integrated approaches.⁸⁶ In 2001, Portugal pursued alternatives to incarceration by decriminalizing drug possession and investing additional resources in rehabilitation efforts, leading to an approximately 80% reduction in drug-related deaths.⁸⁷ In addition, the Portugal decision resulted in a decrease in new HIV infections among people who inject drugs, from over 1,000 cases in 2001 to fewer than 60 by 2012.⁸⁸ However, the success of these initiatives has varied depending on the strength of public health infrastructure and availability of support services.⁸⁹ For instance, the state of Oregon's 2020 decriminalization law received mixed evaluations due to limited treatment access and continued increases in overdose deaths, demonstrating that decriminalization without support services can be ineffective.⁹⁰ These cases illustrate how enforcement can be aligned with CND's dual focus on supply and demand

⁷⁹ World Health Organization. *Programme on Substance Abuse: Approaches to Treatment of Substance Abuse*. 1995.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Doug McVay. Justice Policy Institute. *Treatment or Incarceration? National and State Findings on the Efficacy and Cost Savings of Drug Treatment Versus Imprisonment*. 2024. p. 8.

⁸² Ibid. p. 8.

⁸³ Ibid. p. 8.

⁸⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *The Alternative World Drug Report: Counting The Costs of the War on Drugs*. 2011. p. 7.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 2.

⁸⁶ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *Plenary: Item 10. Implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem*. 2019.

⁸⁷ Greenwald. Cato Institute. *Drug Decriminalization in Portugal: Lessons for Creating Fair and Successful Drug Policies*. 2009.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Moniruzzaman et al. *The Relationship Between the Legal Status of Drug Possession and Health Outcomes: A Review of the Evidence*. Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being. 2020.

⁹⁰ Humphreys et al. *Why Oregon's Drug Decriminalization Failed*. The Atlantic. 2024.



reduction, but only when public health and rehabilitation measures are tailored to the specific conditions of different regions.⁹¹

CND emphasizes the need for transit countries to adopt comprehensive, health-focused drug policies that balance enforcement with effective rehabilitation and prevention.⁹² This guidance includes strengthening institutional capacity, implementing harm reduction strategies, and improving access to treatment services tailored to local needs.⁹³ For example, in response to the synthetic opioid crisis, studies estimate that about 19% of individuals who use fentanyl may develop a substance use disorder, highlighting the importance of additional safeguards in places facing the synthetic opioid crisis.⁹⁴ In Thailand, the collaboration between WHO and UNODC has led to significant success in addressing drug use through the country's National Strategy on Drug Control.⁹⁵ This strategy incorporates WHO's *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders (2020)*, focusing on harm reduction, community-based treatment, and prevention programs, which align closely with CND's recommendations for sustainable and inclusive drug policies.⁹⁶ The collaboration strengthens Thailand's capacity to address drug-related health issues while maintaining compliance with international drug control frameworks, demonstrating how UN and regional efforts can support transit countries when faced with complex drug challenges.⁹⁷

While these approaches have shown potential in improving public health outcomes, their success has varied depending on the availability of treatment infrastructure and support services, as seen in cases like Oregon.⁹⁸ CND has acknowledged the role of harm reduction within a broader framework that prioritizes both supply and demand reduction, encouraging countries to develop responses that are proportionate, health-oriented, and rooted in their specific legal and institutional contexts.⁹⁹ From CND's perspective, enforcement efforts are not solely focused on substance use itself but rather on addressing the broader social and behavioral consequences, such as crime, trafficking, and public safety threats that result from unregulated drug markets.¹⁰⁰ In this context, harm reduction policies can complement enforcement

⁹¹ National Library of Medicine. *How we understand fully the supply, demand, and harm reduction in drugs policy in Vietnam?*. 2024.

⁹² United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *Preventing and responding to drug overdose through prevention, treatment, care and recovery measures, as well as other public health interventions, to address the harms associated with illicit drug use as part of a balanced, comprehensive, scientific evidence-based approach (E/CN.7./2024/64)*. 2024.

⁹³ Ibid. 2024.

⁹⁴ National Institutes of Health. *Substance Use and Mental Health: A Guide for Health Professionals*. National Center for Biotechnology Information. 2018.

⁹⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Thailand and UNODC brief on the regional drug situation and the importance of preventive strategies*. 2020.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Drug Policy Provisions from the International Drug Control Conventions*. 2013. p. 6.

⁹⁹ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *Preventing and responding to drug overdose through prevention, treatment, care and recovery measures, as well as other public health interventions, to address the harms associated with illicit drug use as part of a balanced, comprehensive, scientific evidence-based approach (E/CN.7./2024/67/4)*. 2024.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *CND Thematic Discussions // Session 3 – Increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption & other forms of organized crime*. 2023.



measures when implemented in a way that aligns with international standards and supports rehabilitation, prevention, and institutional stability.¹⁰¹

The Rise of “Narco-Culture” and Its Influences in Transit Countries

In Thailand, the phenomenon of drug tourism highlights the intersection of narco-culture and local economies.¹⁰² Drug tourism refers to the practice of foreign tourists traveling to specific locations where illicit drugs, such as heroin and methamphetamines, are more readily available.¹⁰³ Thailand's status as a destination for drug tourism is not only a result of the availability of illicit drugs but is also deeply intertwined with the region's cultural and economic context, particularly in the Golden Triangle, an area historically associated with opium production.¹⁰⁴ Local communities in this region, for decades, have been economically dependent on the illicit drug trade due to economic, geographic, and political factors that leave local communities with few viable alternatives to the illicit drug trade and relying on the financial returns from narcotics to sustain their livelihoods.¹⁰⁵ This dependency makes alternative development like offering sustainable legal livelihoods a major focus of international drug policy, a directive CND and UNODC often emphasize in their guidance to transit and producing countries.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the nature of local cultures, economies, and the illicit drug trade further complicates solutions, as any policy to curb drug tourism would need to address not only the illegal trade but also the broader social issues that fuel it, such as poverty, lack of education, and limited access to legitimate economic opportunities.¹⁰⁷

As of 2025, more than 63.9% of the world's population uses social media, averaging daily use of 2 hours and 21 minutes.¹⁰⁸ 2.8% of those are youths ages 13-17, further accentuating the big role social media plays in teen culture.¹⁰⁹ Narco-culture, the cultural phenomenon that glorifies drug cartels through music, media, fashion, and social structures, is an increasingly significant force in shaping public perception, particularly in transit countries where individuals involved in drug trafficking are often portrayed as figures who have acquired wealth, power, and social mobility through their resourcefulness, leadership, and ability to overcome systemic barriers.¹¹⁰ In presenting a narrative that romanticizes drug trafficking and criminal activities, these portrayals can distort perceptions, especially among vulnerable youths, and further encourage their participation.¹¹¹ UNODC has recognized the impact of media and digital platforms on youth attitudes toward drug use and trafficking through initiatives such as the Listen First Campaign

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Douglas. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Policing One of the World's Biggest Drug Trafficking Corridors*. 2023.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Alternative Development: Overview*. N.d.

¹⁰⁷ Douglas. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Policing One of the World's Biggest Drug Trafficking Corridors*. 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Sage. *How Many People Use Social Media 2025 [Statistics]*. 2025

¹⁰⁹ SocialPilot. *Social Media Statistics*. 2025.

¹¹⁰ Sánchez. Routledge. *Narco-culture and Youth: The Impact of Media on Drug Perception in Latin America*. 2020.

¹¹¹ Ibid.



(2016), where it promotes early prevention efforts by encouraging evidence-based communication strategies targeted at children, parents, and educators.¹¹²

Additionally, discussions within CND have acknowledged the growing influence of online content, addressing Member States to strengthen public awareness campaigns and media literacy programs that address drug-related behavior.¹¹³ These portrayals can particularly resonate in communities experiencing economic hardship or limited state infrastructure, where such figures may be perceived not only as successful role models but also as providers of informal governance or social services that depict criminals as multidimensional, often sympathetic protagonists.¹¹⁴ Narco-themed music, such as narcocorridos in Mexico, funk proibidão in Brazil, and globally streamed series such as *Narcos* in the United States, frequently focuses on the daily lives, personal choices, and perceived honor codes of individuals involved in the illicit drug trade.¹¹⁵ While these cultural expressions do not necessarily advocate criminal behavior, they can contribute to an environment in which such lifestyles appear normalized or even aspirational.¹¹⁶ UNODC's Education for Justice (E4J) initiative (2018) provides a comprehensive framework designed to address the normalization of crime and violence among youth by promoting media literacy, crime prevention, and education on the risks associated with illicit activities.¹¹⁷ The initiative collaborates with organizations such as UNESCO, UNDP, and other international and regional partners to implement targeted educational programs that are both evidence-based and context-specific.¹¹⁸ A key aspect of the E4J initiative is its focus on media literacy, helping youth critically analyze portrayals of crime and violence in media, while collaborating with civil society organizations, educational institutions, and governments to adapt programs to local contexts.¹¹⁹

In response, initiatives have emerged to address these cultural narratives through education, media literacy, and content redirection.¹²⁰ In 2024, President Claudia Sheinbaum encouraged musical artists to move away from narcocorridos by promoting competitions that reward alternative lyrics reflecting non-violent values and social responsibility, supporting CND's call for culturally sensitive prevention strategies that consider local contexts.¹²¹ Similarly, UNODC, through its *Strategic Vision for Latin America and the Caribbean (2022–2025)*, supports efforts to reduce the cultural appeal of drug trafficking by promoting community resilience and responsible storytelling.¹²² With responses that reflect cultural policy,

¹¹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *New campaign on science-based drug prevention calls for people to #ListenFirst*. 2016.

¹¹³ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *CND Thematic Discussions / Session 7 – Increase in drug-related deaths – unmet need for drug treatment and health services*. 2023.

¹¹⁴ Sánchez. Routledge. *Narco-culture and Youth: The Impact of Media on Drug Perception in Latin America*. 2020.

¹¹⁵ Sneedl. Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison. *Machine Gun Voices: Bandits, Favelas and Utopia in Brazilian Funk*. 2003.

¹¹⁶ Ruiz Vega. Journal of the Royal Musical Association. *The Influence of Narco-culture on Popular Music: A Critical Look at Reggaeton's Narco-Messages and Narco-Representations*. 2022.

¹¹⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Education for Justice (E4J) Initiative*. 2018.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Global Media and Information Literacy for SDGs*. N.d.

¹²¹ Mexico News Daily. *Move Aside 'American Idol': Mexico launches binational singing and composing competition*. 2025.

¹²² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UNODC Executive Director launches Strategic Vision for Latin America and the Caribbean for 2022-2025*. 2022.



when paired with CND's emphasis on balanced and preventive approaches, governments can play a critical role in reducing the long-term social impacts of drug-related narratives.¹²³

Conclusion

To more effectively combat drug abuse and trafficking in transit countries, it is essential to balance punitive measures with rehabilitation-focused policies, particularly in transit states.¹²⁴ Furthermore, social phenomena like narco-culture are deeply interconnected with the socio-economic conditions and vulnerabilities of affected populations.¹²⁵ Effective solutions require a comprehensive approach integrating law enforcement with rehabilitation and social support systems.¹²⁶ UNODC addresses that by highlighting the need for strengthened prevention programs, providing rehabilitation services for drug users, and promoting alternative livelihoods, transit states can disrupt the cultural normalization of drug-related crime.¹²⁷ Multilateral cooperation, guided by frameworks like the UNODC's guidelines for drug use prevention, is essential in creating sustainable, rights-based approaches to reduce the appeal of drug cartels and prevent the spread of narco-culture.¹²⁸ Through the combined efforts of education, social services, and targeted rehabilitation, a more holistic and long-term solution can be achieved to protect vulnerable communities from the devastating impact of the drug trade.¹²⁹

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: What international frameworks and strategies have proven most effective in curbing drug-related crime in transit countries? What role can community-based interventions play in mitigating the social and health consequences of drug trafficking in transit regions? How can transit countries balance their need for enforcement with providing adequate treatment and rehabilitation resources to individuals affected by drug use disorders? What role can community-based interventions play in mitigating the social and health consequences of drug trafficking in transit regions? What guidance and positions has CND provided to transit countries, and how can Member States better align their national policies with CND's balanced approach to enforcement and rehabilitation?

¹²³ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Promoting Evidence-Based Prevention Strategies to Mitigate the Harms of Drug Use: The Role of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*. 2024.

¹²⁴ Amnesty International. *The Impact of Punitive Drug Policies on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. 2024.

¹²⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention*. 2018.

¹²⁶ McLendon et al. Center for American Progress. *Improving Public Safety Through Better Accountability and Prevention*. 2024.

¹²⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Sustainable Livelihoods: A Broader Vision*. 2011.

¹²⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention*. 2018.

¹²⁹ Ibid.



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World Health Organization. *UNODC-WHO Programme on Drug Dependence Treatment and Care*. N.d. Retrieved 1 February 2025 from: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/joint-unodc-who-programme-on-drug-dependence-treatment-and-care>



2. Addressing the Global Trade in Opiates

Introduction

Since 1946, the supervision of international controls for opioids, including for legal medicinal purposes, has been administered through the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND).¹³⁰ Opioids and opiates are a group of psychoactive drugs derived from opium poppy or synthetic sources that mimic its effects.¹³¹ Opiate trade flows are a form of drug trafficking when the controlled substance is prohibited under existing drug laws and traded illegally, and includes all phases of production from cultivation and harvesting to processing, manufacturing, and distribution along supply lines to their sale and consumption by end-users.¹³² In many regions where opium poppy is sourced, like Afghanistan and the Golden Triangle, persistent conflict has prolonged political instability and economic hardship, driving participation by rural farmers to cultivate the drug.¹³³ The Golden Triangle refers to a region in Southeast Asia where the borders of Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand, and Myanmar meet along the Mekong River.¹³⁴ CND and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has shown support for alternative development, which is a drug prevention strategy that identifies socioeconomic vulnerabilities in a community related to illicit opium cultivation and provides rural farmers with alternative sources of income that are sustainable and contextually appropriate.¹³⁵

The emergence of synthetic opioids has introduced new challenges for existing drug control treaties, particularly in regulating the illegal diversion of pharmaceuticals that enter a country legally and are introduced into illicit markets through theft or fraud.¹³⁶ These compounds are cheaper to produce than natural sources and their higher potency contributes significantly to long-term dependency and overdose deaths.¹³⁷ The use of transnational global supply lines to quickly transport and distribute synthetic opioids has contributed to escalating geopolitical tensions between countries like the United States, Mexico, and China over responsibility for the growing synthetic opioids crisis.¹³⁸ In addition, new transit routes in emerging markets have made it easier for organized crime to launder illicit funds and evade enforcement.¹³⁹ Increasingly, these factors have blurred the line between legitimate and illegitimate use,

¹³⁰ United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 (as amended by the 1972 Protocol amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961)*. 1961. p. 1.

¹³¹ World Health Organization. *Opioid overdose*. 2023.

¹³² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Drug Trafficking*. N.d.

¹³³ Mueller et al. International Growth Center. *The cost of violence: Estimating the economic impact of conflict*. 2016. p. 4; United Nations, Security Council. *Report of the independent assessment pursuant to Security Council resolution 2679 (S/2023/856)*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2024: Contemporary Issues on Drugs*. 2024.

¹³⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *INTERVIEW: Policing one of the world's 'biggest drug trafficking corridors'*. 2023.

¹³⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2015*. 2015. pp. 77-78.

¹³⁶ Office of the Inspector General. U.S. Department of Justice. *Review of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Regulatory and Enforcement Efforts to Control the Diversion of Opioids*. 2019. pp. 1-2.

¹³⁷ Ibid. pp. 2-6; World Health Organization. *Opioid overdose*. 2023.

¹³⁸ Reuters. *Live: UN agency presents annual report on synthetic drugs in Asia*. 2023; Rae Baker. SANS Cyber Defense. *Investigating Fentanyl Supply Chains: An OSINT Analysis of Chinese Biotechnology Companies*. 2025.

¹³⁹ Waly. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UNODC Executive Director's Remarks Opening of the 68th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs*. 2025. p. 4.



exacerbating public health crises and creating complex challenges that CND must solve to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in General Assembly resolution 70/1, on “*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” (2030 Agenda) (2015).¹⁴⁰

International and Regional Framework

International control over opiates was first established by CND through the *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs* (1961) (Single Convention) by aligning national drug policies to more effectively curb illicit trafficking and use.¹⁴¹ Articles 24 and 25 focused on limiting and controlling opium production and Article 35 focused on actions against illicit trafficking by creating a foundation for regulating opiates in trade.¹⁴² In 1988, the *United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* was adopted to address legal gaps on illicit financial flows, including through the seizure of assets, and the illegal diversion of chemicals for drug production.¹⁴³ Alternative development was first introduced as a drug control strategy in General Assembly resolution 68/196 on “United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development” (2013).¹⁴⁴ This framework supports a comprehensive, integrated, and complementary approach that addresses the root causes driving opium cultivation by promoting social inclusion, the alleviation of poverty, and political and social stability.¹⁴⁵

To support CND’s efforts towards international controls for synthetic drugs, UNODC’s *UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy 2021-2025* outlines their plan for the synthetic drug crisis across four spheres of action.¹⁴⁶ To disrupt trafficking, Sphere 4 calls for the development of law enforcement’s counternarcotics capacity, especially for forensics and chemical diversions.¹⁴⁷ In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNODC partnered with Global Affairs Canada to train forensic specialists on synthetic drug crime scene management and the protection of the evidentiary chain of custody.¹⁴⁸ Supporting the *UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy 2021-2025*, CND resolution 60/9 on “Enhancing the capacity of law enforcement, border control and other relevant agencies to counter illicit drug trafficking through training” (2017) encourages cross-border cooperation between law enforcement and counter narcotic experts to improve training and

¹⁴⁰ United Nations Office at Vienna. *INCB Report Launch 2024. 2025*; Waly. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UNODC Executive Director’s Remarks Opening of the 68th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. 2025*; Reuters. *Live: UN agency presents annual report on synthetic drugs in Asia. 2023*.

¹⁴¹ United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 (as amended by the 1972 Protocol amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961)*. 1961. pp. 3-5.

¹⁴² United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 (as amended by the 1972 Protocol amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961)*. 1961. pp. 12-13, 18.

¹⁴³ United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. *United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*. 1988. pp. 1, 5, 13-15.

¹⁴⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (A/RES/68/196)*. 2013.

¹⁴⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (A/RES/68/196)*. 2013. pp. 5-7.

¹⁴⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy*. 2021.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 8.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Cracking the Case: UNODC strengthens investigation capacity of crimes involving synthetic drugs*. 2025.



reduce technical shortfalls.¹⁴⁹ To address gaps in synthetic drug education, CND encouraged UNODC to create the United Nations Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs (UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs).¹⁵⁰ The toolkit is a web-based platform that consolidates resources and guidance across the United Nations system, tailoring modules to the needs of law enforcement, forensics, health, and research experts.¹⁵¹

The global trade in opiates undermines progress towards the 17 SDGs outlined in the 2030 Agenda.¹⁵² Illicit drug trafficking negatively impacts SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions).¹⁵³ For opiate trafficking, SDG target 3.5 on strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, SDG target 16.4 on curtailing illicit financial flows from organized crime, and SDG target 16.5 on substantial reductions in corruption are important indicators.¹⁵⁴ To evaluate progress, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) produces an annual report that outlines current efforts and areas for improvement towards achieving the SDGs.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, General Assembly resolution 79/1 (2024) on “The Pact for the Future” is an international agreement that outlines a comprehensive plan to address emerging issues for sustainable development.¹⁵⁶ The *Pact for the Future* supports CND’s mandate to balance the need to safeguard legitimate medicines with policies that reduce illegitimate use by reaffirming the right to safe, affordable, and effective medicines, including pharmaceuticals like fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.¹⁵⁷

The framework for governing trade on chemicals is detailed in the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction* (Chemical Weapons Convention) (1992).¹⁵⁸ In particular, Articles VI and XI protect States parties to the Convention’ right to possess, process, and use chemicals for medical contexts, including for precursors.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Part VI and VII of the “Annex on Implementation and Verification” in the Chemical Weapons Convention provides detailed technical and safety guidelines for the production of Schedule I and II

¹⁴⁹ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *Enhancing the capacity of law enforcement, border control and other relevant agencies to counter illicit drug trafficking through training (RES/60/9)*. 2017. pp. 3-4.

¹⁵⁰ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *Advancing effective and innovative approaches, through national, regional and international action, to address the multifaceted challenges posed by the non-medical use of synthetic drugs, particularly synthetic opioids (RES/62/4)*. 2019.

¹⁵¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs: About*. N.d.

¹⁵² United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. pp. 3-6.

¹⁵³ Ibid. pp. 14-16, 19-20, 25-26.

¹⁵⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages: Targets and Indicators*. N.d; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels: Targets and Indicators*. N.d.

¹⁵⁵ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Home*. 2025.

¹⁵⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *The Pact for the Future (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 55.

¹⁵⁸ United Nations, Conference on Disarmament. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (A/47/27)*. 1992.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. pp. 17, 38.



chemicals and their facilities.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, the *Pact for the Future*'s Global Digital Compact supports CND's efforts to exert control over chemical precursors by introducing regulatory oversight for online markets and guidance for applying a rights-based approach to new and emerging technologies.¹⁶¹

Role of the International System

Established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), CND supervises the implementation of the international drug control treaties and monitors the global drug situation by developing evidence-based policies and strategies that reduce the supply and demand for drugs.¹⁶² CND reports directly to ECOSOC and holds bi-annual meetings each March and December to adopt resolutions that inform Member States on changes to international drug control policies.¹⁶³ At the most recent session, CND explored ways to improve control and enforcement mechanisms by focusing on contemporary issues that synthetic opioids pose to global health and security.¹⁶⁴ To solve this new challenge, CND adopted six resolutions, calling for consistent international standards on chemical precursors acting as the main ingredient for synthetic drug production and improved cooperation between Member States, law enforcement, and research laboratories on new trends.¹⁶⁵ CND also promoted alternative development as a poverty reduction strategy and suggested the creation of an expert group tasked with modernizing the guiding principles.¹⁶⁶

Given the high-level policy focus of the committee, CND must work with other United Nations organizations like UNODC to carry out their guidance.¹⁶⁷ To fulfill the operational functions of its mandate, CND acts as the governing body for UNODC.¹⁶⁸ UNODC provides education on the harmful effects of drug abuse and works to strengthen cooperation to curb illicit drug production.¹⁶⁹ To do so, UNODC publishes an annual World Drug Report that helps keep countries up-to-date on emerging trends through

¹⁶⁰ United Nations, Conference on Disarmament. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (A/47/27)*. 1992. pp. 123-135.

¹⁶¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *The Pact for the Future (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024. pp. 22-23, 45, 55.

¹⁶² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs: Policymaking Body of the United Nations System with Prime Responsibility for Drug-related Matters*. N.d.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Shaping Global Drug Policies: CND opens its 68th Session in Vienna*. 2025.

¹⁶⁵ Garcia. InSight Crime. *Making Synthetic Drugs: A Primer*. 2023; United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *Safe handling and disposal of synthetic drugs, their precursors and other chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs (E/CN.7/2023/L.4/Rev.1)*. 2025.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *Complementing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (E/CN.7/2025/L.4/Rev.1)*. 2025.

¹⁶⁷ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Review of the United Nations International Drug Programme: strengthening the United Nations machinery for international drug control within the scope of the existing international drug control treaties and in accordance with the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations (E/RES/1999/30)*. 1999; United Nations Office at Vienna. *The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)*. 2025.

¹⁶⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Review of the United Nations International Drug Programme: strengthening the United Nations machinery for international drug control within the scope of the existing international drug control treaties and in accordance with the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations (E/RES/1999/30)*. 1999.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations Office at Vienna. *The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)*. 2025.



in-depth case studies and tailored recommendations.¹⁷⁰ The *World Drug Report 2024* is split into four parts — a web-based analysis of drug market trends, an overview of key findings and conclusions, contemporary issues, and an analysis of special points of interest.¹⁷¹ Of particular note, the contemporary issues section examines the impacts of conflict and regime change in Afghanistan on drug markets and global opiate trade flows.¹⁷² Likewise, UNODC's 2023 report focused on the role of cheaper inputs, factory manufacturing, and technological innovations in driving synthetic opioid production and informed CND on the benefits and downsides of profit maximization by organized crime from these changes.¹⁷³

Created by the Single Convention, INCB is an independent and quasi-judicial monitoring body that amends international drug classifications and is required to produce an annual report on the global drug situation to CND.¹⁷⁴ *Precursors Report 2024* is an INCB report that evaluated progress towards implementing Articles 12 and 13 of the *United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* (1988), recommending the development of a monitoring instrument for suspicious postings on online e-commerce platforms and a greater focus on illicit transactions for inputs like pill presses and chemical glassware.¹⁷⁵ In addition, INCB helps Member States identify weaknesses in existing control measures and offers them technical and implementation assistance.¹⁷⁶ The Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) programme was developed by INCB to support efforts to align drug reduction policies by enhancing law enforcement capabilities and focusing on non-medical synthetic opioids.¹⁷⁷ To do so, the GRIDS programme facilitates information exchange and learning through an open-source database of resources and publications and by fostering public-private partnerships (PPP) with industries affected by synthetic opioids production.¹⁷⁸

At the regional level, UNODC has partnered with governments and civil society to carry out CND's policy guidance through more effective collaboration.¹⁷⁹ Comprised of 58 countries and 22 organizations, including UNODC, the Paris Pact Initiative seeks to reduce illicit opiate trade flows in Afghanistan by strengthening counter-narcotic linkages on a global scale across four different thematic areas known as pillars.¹⁸⁰ Pillar II focuses on disrupting illicit financial flows resulting from opioids trafficked by organized crime in accordance with relevant national legislation; Pillar III seeks to reduce the diversion of chemical precursors for synthetic drug production by providing forensic and technical expertise and monitoring

¹⁷⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2024*. N.d.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2024: Contemporary Issues on Drugs*. 2024. pp. 13-31.

¹⁷³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2023: The Synthetic Drug Phenomenon*. 2023. pp. 11-15, 20-21.

¹⁷⁴ International Narcotics Control Board. *Mandate and Functions*. 2025; United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 (as amended by the 1972 Protocol amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961)*. 1961. pp. 5-6.

¹⁷⁵ International Narcotics Control Board. *Precursors Report 2024*. 2025; United Nations Office at Vienna. *INCB Report Launch 2024*. 2025.

¹⁷⁶ International Narcotics Control Board. *Mandate and Functions*. 2025.

¹⁷⁷ International Narcotics Control Board. *GRIDS*. 2025.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Triangular Initiative*. 2025; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Paris Pact Initiative*. N.d.

¹⁸⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Paris Pact Initiative*. N.d; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Third Ministerial Conference of the Paris Pact Partners on Combating Illicit Traffic in Opiates Originating in Afghanistan*. 2012.



suspicious transactions, particularly online.¹⁸¹ UNODC provides an annual progress report to CND on their work and emerging issues; for example, in 2024, the Paris Pact annual report focused on intersectional challenges in curbing opium cultivation in Afghanistan and highlighted the important role of Border Liaison Offices (BLOs) in assisting Member States to meet their reporting requirements on drug seizures through the Drug Monitoring Platform.¹⁸² In addition, UNODC routinely conducts surveys in Afghanistan and the Golden Triangle to monitor opium cultivation and provide policymakers with evidence-based insights on the evolving drug situation in these countries.¹⁸³ As a result of these surveys, UNODC was able to accurately predict a shift in opium cultivation in Myanmar as a consequence of the drug ban in Afghanistan.¹⁸⁴

Opium Cultivation in Afghanistan and the Golden Triangle: Supply, Demand, and Conflict

Illicit opium cultivation and trade continues to undermine peace and security, particularly in conflict-affected areas.¹⁸⁵ Conflict can degrade a country's productive capacity by eliminating jobs, displacing labor, and increasing production costs.¹⁸⁶ Over time, these added costs result in chronic underperformance in the formal sector and depresses economic growth within a country; in turn, the destruction of institutions and security limitations limit foreign investment capital flows.¹⁸⁷ For rural farmers in these countries, opium cultivation often offers a way to support their families when legitimate opportunities are insufficient or unavailable.¹⁸⁸ As such, there is growing support within CND to develop policies that balance drug reduction efforts with a greater focus on underlying socioeconomic conditions that drive participation and reduce incentives through alternative development.¹⁸⁹ Alternative development is a drug prevention strategy that identifies economic and social vulnerabilities in a community to reduce participation in the cultivation of illicit drugs like opium and providing rural communities with alternative sources of income that are sustainable and contextually appropriate.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Pillar II - Illicit Financial Flows*. N.d; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Pillar III - Precursors*. N.d.

¹⁸² United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *Strengthening international cooperation in combating illicit opiates originating in Afghanistan through continuous and reinforced support to the Paris Pact initiative (E/CN.7/2024/CRP.5)*. 2024. pp. 3-5.

¹⁸³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Afghan Drug Insights Volume 1: Opium Poppy Cultivation 2024*. 2024.

¹⁸⁴ Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand. *2023.01.26 Briefing on the opium situation in Myanmar*. 2023; Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand. *2023.12.12 UNODC Southeast Asia Opium Report 2023*. 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand. *2023.01.26 Briefing on the opium situation in Myanmar*. 2023; United Nations Office at Vienna. *INCB Report Launch 2024*. 2025; United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Rise in Afghan opium cultivation reflects economic hardship, despite Taliban ban*. 2024.

¹⁸⁶ Mueller et al. International Growth Center. *The cost of violence: Estimating the economic impact of conflict*. 2016. p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. pp. 4-5.

¹⁸⁸ International Narcotics Control Board. *Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2002: Chapter I Illicit Drugs and Economic Development*. 2002. p. 1.

¹⁸⁹ Waly. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *CND Event: 10 Years of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development: Past, Present and Future*. 2024.

¹⁹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2015*. 2015. pp. 77-78.



In 2022, around 80% of the global opium supply was cultivated and sourced from Afghanistan, but following the drug ban, opium farming in the country plummeted by 95%.¹⁹¹ While new cultivation in Afghanistan has decreased precipitously, existing stockpile reserves of opium were valued at around one-fourth of the total economic output in the country and has concentrated illicit trade within transnational criminal organizations.¹⁹² The most significant effects of the drug ban were passed on to rural farmers, where income levels fell by 92% and generated economic losses of around \$1.25 billion dollars for the country as a whole.¹⁹³ The loss of income has not yet been mitigated by producing alternative crops like food goods; in part due to the rapidly increasing price for opium, cultivation of the drug generates 60X the revenue of wheat.¹⁹⁴ By 2024, market pressure and economic hardship had caused opium cultivation to rebound by 19%.¹⁹⁵ Along with this, the drop in opium supply had spillover effects for other countries in Asia, especially among producers in the Golden Triangle.¹⁹⁶

In Myanmar, the 2021 military takeover coincided with the drug ban in Afghanistan, incentivizing opium cultivation in the rural countryside that was most affected by the conflict and led to an 88% increase in production.¹⁹⁷ By 2023, opium cultivation had risen by 20% in some parts of Myanmar and had surpassed Afghanistan as the largest producer of opium.¹⁹⁸ In part, cultivation in Myanmar reflects a spike in the price for one kilogram of opium, which has risen to \$356.00 dollars and is a 122.5% increase since 2021.¹⁹⁹ High price levels for opium have also had effects on heroin markets.²⁰⁰ In Thailand, UNODC estimates the revenues from heroin markets generates significant revenues for drug traffickers operating throughout Asia and Oceania.²⁰¹ For the illicit drug economy, there is widespread debate on its impacts and ability to stimulate economic development in the short-term, but there is some evidence that long-term dependence and growth in the sector produces similar harmful effects.²⁰²

¹⁹¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2024: Contemporary Issues on Drugs*. 2024. p. 17.

¹⁹² United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Afghanistan: Opium prices approach historic peaks, crime syndicates benefit*. 2025.

¹⁹³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2024: Contemporary Issues on Drugs*. 2024. p. 17.

¹⁹⁴ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Afghanistan: opium production remains 93 per cent below pre-drug ban levels, says UNODC*. 2024.

¹⁹⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Afghan Drug Insights Volume 1: Opium Poppy Cultivation 2024*. 2024. pp. 5, 10-11.

¹⁹⁶ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition*. 2023. p. 45; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2024: Contemporary Issues on Drugs*. 2024. pp. 14-16.

¹⁹⁷ Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand. *2023.01.26 Briefing on the opium situation in Myanmar*. 2023.

¹⁹⁸ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Myanmar overtakes Afghanistan as world's top opium producer*. 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand. *2023.01.26 Briefing on the opium situation in Myanmar*. 2023; Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand. *2023.12.12 UNODC Southeast Asia Opium Report 2023*. 2023.

²⁰⁰ Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand. *2023.01.26 Briefing on the opium situation in Myanmar*. 2023.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² International Narcotics Control Board. *Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2002: Chapter I Illicit Drugs and Economic Development*. 2002. pp. 3-8.



Given these challenges, CND's guidance to promote alternative development and interagency cooperation is increasingly important.²⁰³ For example, UNODC and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have worked together on the Community-Based Agriculture and Rural Development (CBARD) project in Afghanistan. Under UNDP's leadership, CBARD has helped support rural farmers by helping them overcome startup costs and lost income by providing farming inputs, skill development training, and strengthening localized community efforts to build capacity at the lowest level, while UNODC monitors progress towards effective compliance with international drug controls and reports their findings to CND at regular sessions.²⁰⁴ To date, CBARD has helped over 38,000 small farmers transition away from opium cultivation and has helped build new irrigation structures and other necessary infrastructure.²⁰⁵ The Triangular Initiative is a UNODC partnership with Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to coordinate law enforcement and border control efforts to reduce illicit opium flows and promote information sharing about best practices.²⁰⁶ Since 2007, UNODC has worked with counternarcotic experts in these three countries to foster trust through periodic meetings and joint planning at the operational level, resulting in the creation of BLOs at strategic border crossings.²⁰⁷ In the Golden Triangle, UNODC has advocated for a similar approach by partnering with the governments of Thailand and Laos to create 120 new BLOs that bolstered law enforcement capacity, supporting CND's ongoing efforts to control cross-border opiate flows.²⁰⁸

Organized Crime and Synthetic Opioids

The substantial growth in synthetic opioid production has created many new problems for countries and law enforcement entities while providing lucrative new revenue streams for organized crime.²⁰⁹ For example, UN DESA found that cross-border drug flows between the United States and Mexico had generated \$12.1 billion dollars per year for Mexican cartels from 2015-2018.²¹⁰ Since 2018, synthetic opioids have continued to contribute to rising political tensions between the United States, where demand for pharmaceuticals like fentanyl is high, and supply countries like China and Mexico, where chemicals

²⁰³ United Nations Development Programme. *Community-based Agriculture and Rural Development (CBARD)*. N.d.

²⁰⁴ United Nations, Commission on Narcotic Drugs. *CND Intersessional Meeting, 24 October 2018: Alternative development and crop control strategies*. 2018; United Nations Development Programme. *Community-based Agriculture and Rural Development (CBARD)*. N.d; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Global Programme GLOU34 Trends Monitoring and Analysis Programme Support (Trends MAP): Monitoring, Verification, Evaluation, and Impact Assessment of (1) UNL-UNDP "Community-Based Agriculture and Rural Development (CBARD)" and (2) the INL-UN Women "Service Points" Projects*. 2024.

²⁰⁵ United Nations Development Programme. *Community-based Agriculture and Rural Development (CBARD)*. N.d.

²⁰⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Triangular Initiative*. 2025.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *INTERVIEW: Policing one of the world's 'biggest drug trafficking corridors'*. 2023.

²⁰⁹ Eligh. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. *Global Synthetic Drug Markets: The Present and Future*. 2024.

²¹⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition*. 2023.



can be sourced to manufacture pharmaceuticals cheaply.²¹¹ In Europe, demand for synthetic opioids has lagged behind North America, but increasingly, the presence of heroin contaminated with fentanyl and nitazenes have begun to be seen in online markets.²¹²

While naturally sourced opium requires farmland and time for the crop to be ready for harvest, synthetic drugs can be quickly produced in a factory using easy-to-use technology like a pill press.²¹³ The scalability of synthetic drugs has made it easy for organized crime to oversaturate markets, creating downward pressure on price from oversupply and allowing them to push out competitors and capture a larger share.²¹⁴ Likewise, in consumer countries like the United States, the combination of overprescribing and drug potency have had negative impacts on critical economic indicators like labor force participation.²¹⁵ A survey conducted by the National Safety Council found that an estimated 12.6% of the labor force has received a prescription for opioids in the past year.²¹⁶ In addition, around 75% of employers have been directly affected by opioids, which is consistent with long-term drops in labor participation rates as a result of dependence on synthetic opioids.²¹⁷

For CND, the growing volume of synthetic opioids and the rise of internet-based commerce have exposed vulnerabilities in existing drug control frameworks by bringing together drug traffickers.²¹⁸ To evade law enforcement, organized crime has begun to use online platforms to secure precursor chemicals, especially on the dark web.²¹⁹ In addition to offering users anonymity, the use of cryptocurrencies further protects buyers and sellers by concealing financial flows.²²⁰ Similarly, in Ukraine, the low price for synthetic opioids and injuries from war have made it one of the fastest growing markets for synthetic opioids, which are purchased using the Telegram app and supplied through cooperation by organized crime from Russia and Ukraine.²²¹ While synthetic opioid use remains low in Asia-Pacific, the global chemical trade is concentrated there, meaning producers must source this input from the region, usually from China, India, or Russia.²²² Currently, CND depends on partners in civil society like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to establish international standards to reduce illicit financial flows related to

²¹¹ Reuters. *Live: UN agency presents annual report on synthetic drugs in Asia*. 2023; Rae Baker. SANS Cyber Defense. *Investigating Fentanyl Supply Chains: An OSINT Analysis of Chinese Biotechnology Companies*. 2025.

²¹² Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. *European Drug Trends Monitor*. 2024. pp. 3-5.

²¹³ Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand. *2023.01.26 Briefing on the opium situation in Myanmar*. 2023.

²¹⁴ Paris et al. Brookings Institution. *The economic impact of the opioid epidemic*. 2023.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Cross-cutting issues: new challenges, threats and realities in preventing and addressing the world drug problem in compliance with relevant international law, including the three drug control conventions; strengthening the principle of common and shared responsibility and international cooperation*. 2016. pp. 1-8.

²¹⁹ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. *European Drug Trends Monitor*. 2024.

²²⁰ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. *Global Synthetic Drug Markets: The Present and Future*. 2024.

²²¹ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. *Drugs on the front line: The war in Ukraine is fuelling drug use among soldiers, particularly of synthetic substances*. 2024; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. *Global Synthetic Drug Markets: The Present and Future*. 2024.

²²² Reuters. *Live: UN agency presents annual report on synthetic drugs in Asia*. 2023.



organized crime activities, including drug trafficking.²²³ For synthetic opioids, the FATF has published reports on current trends related to money laundering, including the use of online platforms like Telegram to conceal transactions.²²⁴

In China, the government is working with UNODC to reduce the supply of opioid products at entry points like Yunnan from the Golden Triangle by strengthening border security measures; early returns show a significant decrease in product coming in, suggesting these efforts have had a positive effect in curtailing illicit flows.²²⁵ Similarly, the UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs' tailored course modules are available in all six languages recognized by the United Nations and cover the most important topics in the global drug trade.²²⁶ For example, one module in the UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs is a 2020 collaboration between the World Health Organization and INCB that educates users on responsible prescribing practices for effective pain management to reduce illegal diversions and ways to strengthen international drug controls.²²⁷ To combat synthetic opioids trafficking in the Americas, the GRIDS programme partnered with Canada and Mexico to provide a workshop on employing PPPs to counteract the manufacture, distribution, transportation, and monetization of synthetic opioids by cartels.²²⁸

Conclusion

Opioids are a significant threat to peace and security, jeopardizing progress towards the SDGs.²²⁹ CND plays a crucial role in addressing the global trade in opiates by monitoring the global drug situation and supervising progress towards implementation of the international drug control treaties.²³⁰ Conflict-affected areas continue to be plagued by low governance and limited economic alternatives as a result of job loss, violence, displaced labor, and increasing production costs.²³¹ As a result of conflict and instability, new transit routes for organized crime to launder illicit funds and evade enforcement.²³² Increasingly, organized crime has begun to use online platforms to secure precursor chemicals, sell opioids, launder revenues, and evade law enforcement.²³³ Alternative development is a strategy to address underlying drivers or root causes that push rural farmers into drug cultivation by providing sustainable alternative sources of income

²²³ Financial Action Task Force. *The FATF*. 2024.

²²⁴ Financial Action Task Force. *Money Laundering from Fentanyl and Synthetic Opioids*. 2022.

²²⁵ Baker. SANS Cyber Defense. *Investigating Fentanyl Supply Chains: An OSINT Analysis of Chinese Biotechnology Companies*. 2025; Reuters. *Live: UN agency presents annual report on synthetic drugs in Asia*. 2023.

²²⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs: About*. N.d.

²²⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs: Access and Diversion Prevention*. 2020.

²²⁸ International Narcotics Control Board. *First INCB GRIDS and Mexican Government National Stakeholder Consultation on Combating Synthetic Drug Trafficking Through Public-Private Partnerships*. 2024.

²²⁹ Reuters. *Live: UN agency presents annual report on synthetic drugs in Asia*. 2023.

²³⁰ United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 (as amended by the 1972 Protocol amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961)*.

²³¹ Mueller et al. International Growth Center. *The cost of violence: Estimating the economic impact of conflict*. 2016. p. 4.

²³² Waly. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *UNODC Executive Director's Remarks Opening of the 68th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs*. 2025. p. 4.

²³³ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. *European Drug Trends Monitor*. 2024.



that are contextually appropriate.²³⁴ Strategic partnerships like UNDP and UNODC's CBARD project in Afghanistan supports CND's drug reduction strategies by helping rural farmers overcome startup costs and lost income through the provision of inputs, skill development training, and by fostering community resilience.²³⁵

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: How can CND bridge the funding gap to support programs that reduce opioid trafficking? What is the best set of policies to protect the availability of necessary medications while also safeguarding against misuse or illegal diversions? Has the drug ban in Afghanistan been a positive development for the region in addressing the supply of opium poppy? Why or why not? How does the scalability of synthetic drug production affect drug prevention and reduction strategies? Is a global drug strategy feasible, or should enforcement be kept at the national or regional level? How can countries better apply alternative development principles in areas affected by conflict or weak governance? What is the best course of action to reduce drug trafficking by transnational criminal organizations? How should countries evaluate precursors like chemicals that are inputs for synthetic drug production?

²³⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2015*. 2015. pp. 77-78.

²³⁵ United Nations Development Programme. *Community-based Agriculture and Rural Development (CBARD)*. N.d.



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