

**Forum: United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

**Issue: Strengthening Border Security and Combating Illicit Trafficking**

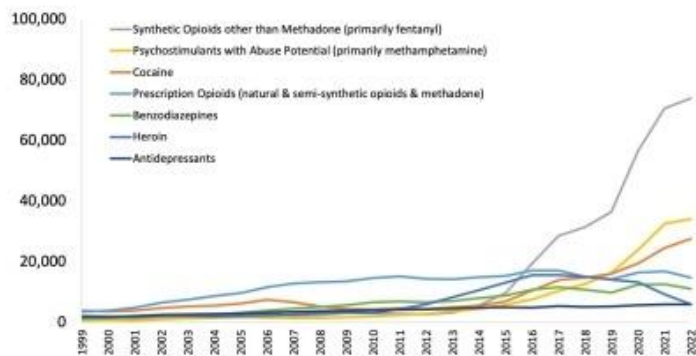
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**Introduction:**

Illicit drug trafficking poses a severe threat to national security, public health, and human rights. It undermines the rule of law, fuels violence and organized crime, and perpetuates socio-economic disparities. In recent years, numerous events highlight the urgency of addressing illicit trafficking and strengthening border security. For instance, the surge in drug trafficking has led to an unprecedented increase in drug-related deaths and addiction rates, affecting communities worldwide. Overall, drug overdose deaths from addiction, mostly illicitly, increased with 107,941 drug overdose deaths reported in 2022.

**Figure 2. National Drug Overdose Deaths\*, Number Among All Ages, 1999-2022**



\*Includes deaths with underlying causes of unintentional drug poisoning (X40-X44), suicide drug poisoning (X60-X64), homicide drug poisoning (X85), or drug poisoning of undetermined intent (Y10-Y14), as coded in the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death 1999-2022 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released 4/2024.

**Figure 1: National Drug Overdose Deaths 1999-2022**

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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 'World Drug Report 2018' has revealed a data of increasing illicit drug users in the world. In 2006 there was an estimated 208 million users while in 2016 this figure has risen to 275 million, a growth rate of 32.2%.

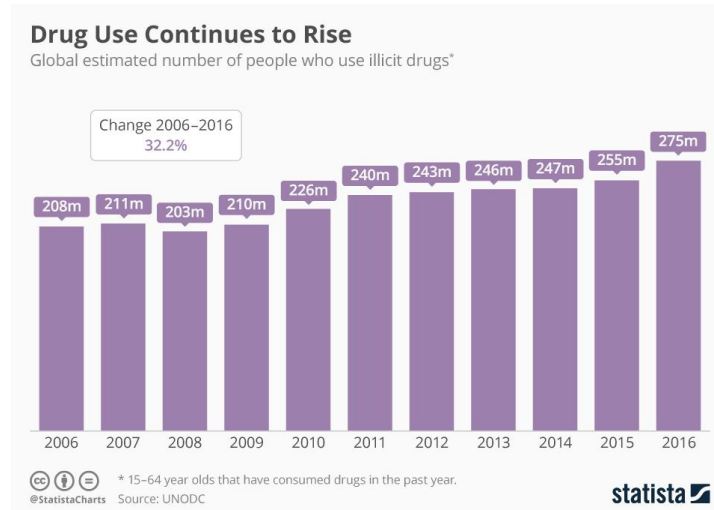


Figure 2: Global illicit drug use rate 2006-2016

This report will probe the background, history, causes, impacts, and considered solutions of the issue on border security and combating illicit trafficking for drugs. Although there were and are ongoing attempts and solutions to help combat this issue, it is still a long-lasting conflict and problem of the world internationally. It is crucial for all delegates to execute more regulations to resolve the problem and help the world go steps forward.

### Key Terminology:

#### National Security:

National Security is the ability of a state to serve the protection and defense of its citizenry. Illicit drug trafficking undermines national security by fueling organized crime, corruption, violence, and destabilizing societies and governments.

#### Public Health:

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Public health refers to the health of the population, especially as the subject of government regulation and support. Illicit drug trafficking negatively impacts public health by contributing to substance abuse, addiction, overdose deaths, and the spread of infectious diseases which could lead to death.

### Human Rights:

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, often in a nation or a society. Illicit drug trafficking violates human rights by contributing to violence and coercion of the population and undermining the right to health and a safe and secure society.

### Socio-economic Disparities:

Socio-economic disparities refer to the differences or inequalities in social and economic conditions and opportunities among different groups of people in a society, often could be caused by illicit drug trafficking within societies.

### Intercommunal Conflict:

Intercommunal conflicts are conflicts that occur between competing groups within a state. Illicit drug trafficking triggers intercommunal conflicts by fueling competition over control of drug routes and markets which leads to social unrest between different groups, communities, or even nations.

## **Background:**

UNODC released the World Drug Report 2023, which emphasizes the increasing worldwide issue brought on by the expansion of the illicit drug trafficking activities across the borders internationally. According to the research, over 296 million individuals took drugs in 2021, a 23% rise over the previous ten years, and 13.2 million people globally used injectable medicines in 2021, which is an increase of 18% above earlier estimates. The number of individuals with illegal drug use problems has increased dramatically to 39.5

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million, a 45% rise in only ten years. The research also emphasizes how drug problems are fueled by social and economic inequality, how illegal drug economies destroy the environment and violate human rights, and how synthetic substances predominate.

To address drug concerns globally, the study also emphasizes the importance of public health, prevention, and access to treatment services. It highlights the necessity for law enforcement to adapt their approaches to both the spread of low-cost drugs and the agility of criminal business models. Ghada Waly, Executive Director of UNODC, underlined the necessity of increase measures against drug trafficking networks that take advantage of international crises and conflicts to grow the production and cultivation of illegal drugs, particularly synthetic drugs, which feed the black market and injure more individuals and communities.

### Opium Trade in the United States:

During the mid-1800s, Chinese immigrants that settled in California introduced Americans to opium smoking. The trading, selling, and distribution of opium spread throughout the region. Then, there were more designated places to buy and sell the drug called the Opium dens, where everyone began to crop up in cities throughout California and soon spread to New York and other urban areas. Soon, in 1914, the Harrison Act outlawed the use of opium and cocaine for non-medical purposes, but the illicit drugs continued to circulate. In 1925, an opium black market opened in New York's Chinatown. At this time, there were around 200 thousand heroin addicts in the United States. The distribution of opiates continued during the Jazz Era of the 1930s and 1940s.

### Mafia Drug Trafficking:

In the early 1950s, the American Mafia families were caught smuggling and selling illicit drugs. These organized groups paved the way for future drug cartels that focused on drugs for their revenue. This involvement of the Mafias in drug trade was also known as the "French Connection" because smugglers in New York City would seize shipments of Turkish opium that arrived from Paris and Marseilles, France.

## Drug Trafficking during the Vietnam War:

The United States' involvement in the Vietnam War led to a rise in heroin use and smuggle to the United States between the years 1965-1970. Drug use among Vietnam soldiers was widespread. In 1971, reports showed 15% of active soldiers were heroin addicts, and many more additionally smoked and used other drugs. The number of people dependent on heroin in the United States soared to 750 thousand during these years.

## Pablo Escobar and the Medellin Cartel:

In the late 1970s, the Medellin cartel, a Colombian drug trafficking organization, emerged for a significant moneymaking opportunity. The “Medellin Massacre,” a retaliation against a drug seized by Colombian police in 1975, led to years of violence and assassinations. The Medellin cartel, led by brothers Jorge Luis, Juan David, and Pablo Escobar, surged to power in the 1980s, generating up to 60 million dollars a day in drug profits. The U.S. and Colombian governments approved a bilateral extradition treaty in 1981, which became a concern for Columbian traffickers.



Figure 3: Wanted poster of the heads of the Medellin Cartel

### The Cali Cartel:

Eventually when the Medellin cartel fell, the Cali Cartel stepped up. This organization emerged in the early 90s and was based in southern Colombia. The founding leaders included brothers Gilberto and Miguel Rodriguez Orejuela, Jose Santacruz Londoño and Hólmer Herrera. At the peak of the Cali Cartel, it was thought to have control over about 80% of the cocaine supplied to the United States. By the mid-90s, the organization became a multi-billion-dollar drug trafficking business. In 1995, top Cali cartel members were captured and arrested.

### El Chapo, Los Zetas and Mexican Drug Cartels:

From the mid 1980s to the late 1990s, the Sinaloa Federation, a prominent Mexican drug cartel, dominated drug distribution in the United States. This cartel, also known as the Pacific Cartel, Guzman-Loera Organization, imported and distributed nearly 200 tons of cocaine and heroin between 1990-2008. The infamous drug lord, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, led Sinaloa from 1989 and was called the "most powerful drug trafficker in the world" by the United States Department of the Treasury in 2003. Then, in 2016, Guzman was recaptured by the Mexican authorities and was sent to the United States in 2017.

### Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel:

Another drug trafficking organization, called the Gulf Cartel, a rival group, emerged in the 1980s. The Gulf Cartel worked with Los Zetas, a group of former military elites, who served as hitmen for the cartel. The split in 2010 resulted in the most violent period in organized crime history in Mexico. Los Zetas was known for ruthless violence, leaving body parts in public places and posting killings online. There are still impacts from this action of Mexican drug cartels violence which continues today, with newer cartels emerging and some breaking with old alliances.

### Marijuana Tax Act:

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In 1937, the “Marihuana Tax Act” was passed. This was a federal law which placed a tax on the sale of cannabis, hemp, or marijuana, and was introduced by Rep. Robert L. Doughton of North Carolina and was drafted by Harry Anslinger. While the law didn’t criminalize the possession or use of marijuana, it included hefty penalties if taxes weren’t paid, including a fine of up to \$2000 and five years in prison.

### Controlled Substances Act:

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon signed the “Controlled Substances Act” into law. This law calls for the regulation of certain drugs and substances. It outlines five “schedules” used to classify drugs based on their medical application and potential for abuse and addiction. For example, Schedule 1 drugs are considered the most dangerous, which pose a high risk for addiction with little evidence of medical benefits. Marijuana, LSD, heroin, and other drugs are included on the list of Schedule 1 drugs. Then, the substances considered least likely to be addictive, such as cough medications with small amounts of codeine, are in the Schedule 5 category.

### Nixon and the War on Drugs:

In June 1971, Nixon officially declared a “War on Drugs,” stating that drug abuse was “public enemy number one.” A rise in drug use in the 1960s led to President Nixon’s focus on targeting some types of substance abuse. As part of the War on Drugs initiative, Nixon increased federal funding for drug-control agencies and proposed strict measures, such as mandatory prison sentencing, for drug crimes. He also announced the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention, headed by Dr. Jerome Jaffe. Then in 1973, Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Administration. This agency is a special police force committed to targeting illegal drug use and smuggling in the United States. At the start, the administration was given 1,470 special agents and a budget of less than 75 million dollars. Today, the agency has nearly 5,000 agents and a budget of \$2.03 billion.



Figure 4: Protest against the war on drugs during the 1970s

### Say No to Drugs:

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan reinforced and expanded Nixon’s War on Drugs policies. In 1984, his wife Nancy Reagan launched the “Just Say No” campaign which was intended to highlight the dangers of drug use. President Reagan’s refocus on passing of severe penalties for drug-related crimes in Congress and state legislatures led increases in imprisonment for nonviolent drug crimes. In 1986, Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which established mandatory minimum prison sentences for certain drug offenses. This law was later heavily criticized as having racist ramifications because it allocated longer prison sentences for offenses involving the same amount of crack cocaine, which is used more often by black Americans, as powder cocaine, which is used more often by white Americans. Five grams of crack triggered an automatic five-year sentence, while it took 500 grams of powder cocaine for the same sentence. Overall, the policies led to a rapid rise in imprisonment for nonviolent drug offenses, from 50 thousand in 1980 to 400,000 in 1997. According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, in 2014, nearly half of the 186 thousand people serving time in federal prisons in the United States had been imprisoned on drug related charges.



## **Major Parties Involved:**

### **Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDEF):**

OCDEF is an independent component of the U.S. Department of Justice. Established in 1982, OCDEF is the centerpiece of the Attorney General's strategy to combat transnational-organized-crime and to reduce the availability of illicit narcotics in the nation by using a prosecutor-led, multi-agency approach to enforcement. They also have been collaborating with the UN since then.

### **International Organization for Migration (IOM):**

IOM is an UN Migration Agency that provides technical assistance and capacity building interventions to help States respond to and mitigate threats at their borders.

### **Major Illicit Drug Producing and Major Drug-Transit Countries:**

Major illicit drug producing countries are countries that produces 1,000 hectares or more of illicit opium poppy is cultivated or harvested during a year, 1,000 hectares or more of illicit coca is cultivated or harvested during a year, or 5,000 hectares or more of illicit cannabis is cultivated or harvested during a year, unless the President determines that such illicit cannabis production does not significantly affect the United States. Major drug transit countries are countries that is a significant direct source of illicit narcotic or psychotropic drugs or other controlled substances significantly affecting the United States, or through which are transported such drugs or substances. Significant countries of these two categories include: Afghanistan, Colombia, India, Mexico, Peru, etc.

### **Major Precursor Chemical Source Countries:**

Major Precursor Chemical Source Countries are countries that have been identified to be major sources of precursor or essential chemicals used in the production of illicit narcotics: Afghanistan, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Germany, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, United Kingdom, etc.

### Major Money Laundering Countries:

Major Money Laundering Countries are countries where financial institutions engage in currency transactions involving significant amounts of proceeds from international narcotics trafficking: Afghanistan, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States.

### **Timeline of Events:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description/Notes</b>
Mid-1800s	Chinese immigrants that settled in California introduced Americans to opium smoking.
1914	The Harrison Act outlawed the use of opium and cocaine for non-medical purposes.
1925	An opium black market opened in New York's Chinatown. At this time, there were around 200 thousand heroin addicts in the United States.
1937	The "Marihuana Tax Act" was passed. This was a federal law which placed a tax on the sale of cannabis, hemp, or marijuana, and was introduced by Rep. Robert L Doughton of North Carolina and was drafted by Harry Anslinger.
Early-1950s	The American Mafia families were caught smuggling and selling illicit drugs. This involvement of the Mafias in drug trade was also known as the "French Connection."
1965-1970	The United States' involvement in the Vietnam War led to a rise in heroin use and smuggle to the United States.
1970	President Richard M. Nixon signed the "Controlled Substances Act" into law. This law calls for the regulation of certain drugs and substances.
1971	Reports showed 15% of active soldiers were heroin addicts, and many more additionally smoked and used other drugs. The number of people dependent on heroin in the United States soared to 750 thousand during these years.
1971 (June)	Nixon officially declared a "War on Drugs," stating that drug abuse was "public enemy number one."
1973	Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Administration. This agency is a special police force committed to targeting illegal drug use and smuggling in the United States

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Late-1970s	The Medellin cartel, led by Pablo Escobar, a Colombian drug trafficking organization, emerged for a significant moneymaking opportunity.
1975	The “Medellin Massacre,” a retaliation against a drug seized by Colombian police.
1980s	The Medellin cartel surged to power, generating up to 60 million dollars a day in drug profits.
1981	The U.S. and Colombian governments approved a bilateral extradition treaty, which became a concern for Columbian traffickers.

### Previous Attempts/Solutions:

Over the past years, the UN has been dealing with this specific topic on strengthening border security and combating illicit trafficking. They have been aiming to support national drugs and precursors control capacities and regional-international cooperation in line with international standards and UN Conventions. The focus was mostly on assisting Iranian counterparts in reducing the flow of illicit drug trafficking to/from Afghanistan, the main illicit drug producing and transit country, by promoting capacity building and developing procedures for operations to disrupt and dismantle transnational drug-related threats. However, it was not limited to Afghanistan and was also attempted and executed in other countries as well.

Additionally, they provided capacity-building and technical training to enhance the capacities and technical knowledge of law enforcement, Anti Narcotic Police, and Customs on border management and interdiction of illicit drugs, precursors, and Amphetamine Type Stimulant control and trafficking. The analytical and scientific capacities of drug testing laboratories were strengthened through facilitating their participation in the International Collaborative Exercise.

The UNODC is also currently working to improve border management and control by enhancing information exchange and strengthening the capacity for prohibition of cross-border illicit activities. Training is organized to enhance cross-border cooperation

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and professional skills of border protection law enforcement officers. The organization will also establish multinational specialized teams to lead coordinated investigations, exchange experience, and build trust among authorities.

### Potential Solutions:

- Strengthening Border Personnel:  
Increasing the number of advanced trained and equipped personnel at border checkpoints of border control efforts, enhancing the capability of border control and law enforcement agencies in identifying and inspecting high risk freight containers, and establishing a regional center for the training of drug detection dogs.
- International Cooperation:  
Collaborating with neighboring countries and international partners to share intelligence, establish treaties, and strengthen border control measures on a regional scale.
- Raising Public Awareness and Education:  
Launch awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the dangers of drug trafficking and the importance of reporting suspicious activities. Also, could conduct educational programs in schools and communities to prevent drug abuse and promote a drug-free society.

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