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**Implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of
Action on International Cooperation towards an
Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World
Drug Problem: supply reduction and related measures**

**Promoting international cooperation in addressing the
involvement of women and girls in drug trafficking,
especially as couriers**

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report describes the data reported by Member States to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on women and girls involved as drug traffickers, and highlights some of the conclusions of a gender analysis of drug traffickers. There are two mechanisms by which Member States can report to UNODC information related to women as drug traffickers: (a) the annual report questionnaire; and (b) the individual drug seizure report. For both of these sources, information related to women and girls as drug traffickers is limited to the total number of women and girls arrested for drug trafficking, with no further breakdown provided. Data reported by Member States on individual seizures show that women represent about 20 per cent of the drug traffickers arrested worldwide, and that they represent a decreasing proportion over the past four years. While there is evidence of an increased number of drug-related crimes worldwide, the data suggest that the involvement of women and girls in drug trafficking has not increased disproportionately in comparison with that of men. It will be possible to draw a more comprehensive picture at the global level only when countries improve their national reporting systems and subsequent reporting through the annual report questionnaires

* E/CN.7/2011/1.



and individual drug seizure reports. To that end, countries should be encouraged to expand the information they regularly collect on drug traffickers to include gender and age dimensions and other aspects that can better describe the role, social circumstances and social status of women and men in criminal organizations.

I. Background

1. At its fifty-second session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs adopted its resolution 52/1, entitled “Promoting international cooperation in addressing the involvement of women and girls in drug trafficking, especially as couriers”, in which, noting with concern “the involvement of women and girls in drug trafficking as couriers and recognizing that such involvement poses a danger to the well-being and development of children, families and communities”, it requested the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to carry out scientific research and analysis based on existing information and statistical data received from Member States on activities related to drug trafficking involving women and girls at the national and international levels. The Commission also stressed the importance of collecting and analysing data disaggregated by sex and age and of conducting research on gender issues relating to drug trafficking, especially the use of women and girls as couriers. By that same resolution, the Commission requested the Executive Director of UNODC to report to the Commission at its fifty-fourth session on the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report describes the data reported by Member States to UNODC on women and girls involved as drug traffickers, and highlights some of the conclusions in relation to the gender analysis of drug traffickers.

II. Available statistical data on women and girls involved as drug traffickers, as reported by Member States

3. Data that characterize the gender of drug traffickers are scarce. While there have been an increasing number of media reports and some literature on the expanded role of women and girls in drug trafficking, little scientific evidence can be found in order to undertake a proper gender analysis of drug trafficking worldwide. There are two mechanisms through which Member States can report to UNODC information related to women as drug traffickers: (a) the annual report questionnaire; and (b) the individual drug seizure report. For both of these sources, information related to women and girls involved as drug traffickers is limited to the total number of women and girls arrested for drug trafficking, with no further breakdown of data provided.

4. In the annual report questionnaire, Member States are each year invited to report the number of people arrested for drug trafficking, broken down by the gender and age of the traffickers. Nevertheless, data reported by Member States are very sketchy and often difficult to interpret, owing to the following issues:

(a) Many countries record and report in the annual report questionnaire arrests on the basis of the number of offences rather than the number of people arrested, which makes any analysis of breakdown by gender impossible or unreliable;

(b) Countries that report the number of people arrested do not always report totals with a gender breakdown; alternatively, the gender breakdown, if reported, may not be consistent with the totals. These practices usually reflect the deficiencies

of national drug recording systems, which lack the capacity to record arrests with any demographic breakdown of the arrestees;

(c) In the annual report questionnaires, the age and sex of drug traffickers were reported separately, and no data could be extracted on the number of girls involved as drug traffickers.

5. Owing to the limitations highlighted above, data generated by the annual report questionnaire to date can provide only limited and often inconsistent information on women and girls as drug traffickers, and cannot sufficiently describe the global trends with respect to women involved as drug traffickers. A broader, although still limited, analysis of women and girls who were brought to the attention of national authorities can be undertaken utilizing data reported by Member States in the individual drug seizure report. Although only a limited number of countries (between 30 and 50 every year) report data on individual seizures, the detailed description of each drug seizure¹ includes some demographic characteristics of the traffickers involved in the seizure case.²

III. Analysis of statistical data on women and girls as drug traffickers

6. Data reported by Member States on individual seizures show that women represented about 20 per cent of the traffickers who were involved in drug seizures worldwide. Women younger than 25 years comprised a slightly larger share, but they still remained below 30 per cent, compared with the more than 70 per cent of reported traffickers who were men (see figure below). Analysing the data over time, there are signs of a slight decrease in the percentage of women and girls as drug traffickers among all age groups. After an increase in 2006, the percentage of female traffickers has continued to decrease, reaching between 15 and 20 per cent of detected traffickers in 2009.

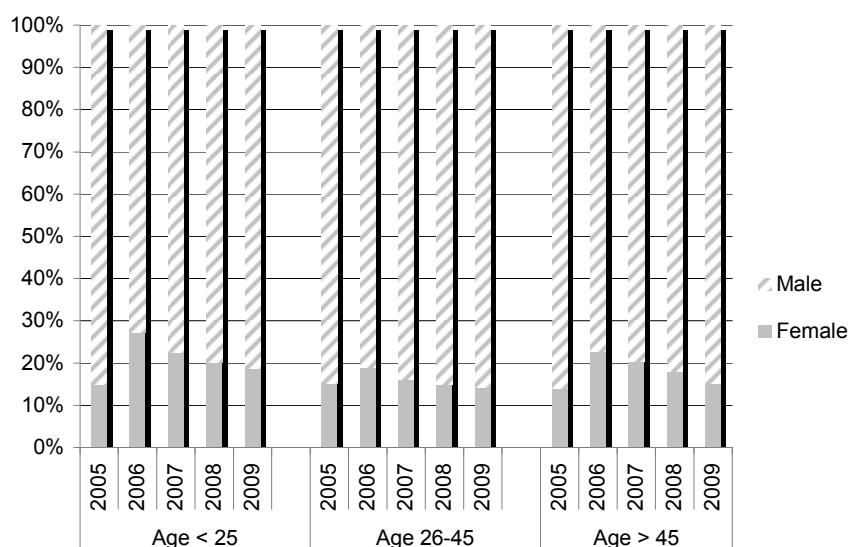
7. The data available in the individual seizure database relate to a limited number of countries, and can be used to analyse the characteristics of drug traffickers worldwide only if one assumes that the demographics of the traffickers in countries reporting data are not different from those in the countries not reporting any detailed data on drug traffickers. The individual seizure database cannot be used to extrapolate a global number of women and girls involved as drug traffickers or trends relating thereto over time. There is evidence, however, of an increased number of drug-related crimes worldwide³ and an increased number of persons arrested for drug trafficking, which may provide a basis for positing that there has been an increase in the number of women and girls involved as drug traffickers. The limited data available to UNODC, however, suggest that the involvement of women and girls in drug trafficking has not increased disproportionately in comparison with that of men.

¹ Only drug seizures above a certain threshold, e.g., over 1 kg, are reported in such reports.

² *World Drug Report 2010*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.XI.13.

³ See A/CONF.213/3.

Trends in the breakdown of drug traffickers by gender, 2005-2009
(Percentage)



Source: UNODC individual drug seizure database.

8. The statistics on women and girl traffickers, based on a review of the individual drug seizure reports, do not comprehensively answer all of the questions related to the involvement of women and girls in drug trafficking. The data relate only to persons who came into formal contact with the criminal justice system. Women may have a higher or lower detection rate than men, though, and the available information may hide different proportions of women or men. There may also be different roles that women play in drug trafficking, different conditions and circumstances that may lead women into drug trafficking and different perceptions of and social consequences resulting from the involvement of women as drug traffickers. The available data do not allow any analysis or provide enough evidence to answer these questions.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

9. The little evidence available from data reported by Member States suggests that the share of women and girl drug traffickers has slightly decreased in the last five years. The percentage of women drug traffickers varies between 15 and 20 per cent, compared with 80 to 85 per cent of men. The total number of women involved as drug traffickers may have increased globally as a consequence of the higher number of drug-related offences observed in the past five years; however, there is no indication of a higher rate of involvement of women than men in drug trafficking.

10. The data reported by Member States provide evidence on the scale of the involvement of women and girls in drug trafficking as compared with men, but do not allow analysis of the circumstances and consequences that lead to their

involvement in drug trafficking. The great majority of national drug monitoring systems do not specifically address these issues and cannot generate relevant statistical information on a regular basis. This makes it impossible at this stage to undertake a global study based on statistical information.

11. It will be possible to draw a more comprehensive picture at the global level only when countries improve their reporting systems. To that end, countries should be encouraged to expand the information they regularly collect on drug traffickers to include gender and age and other aspects that can better describe the role, social circumstances and social status of women and men in criminal organizations.

12. Member States should also be invited to renew their efforts to improve the gender-related data reported in the global drug reporting systems through the annual report questionnaire and the individual drug seizure report. The implementation of the newly approved annual report questionnaire presents an opportunity to support countries in collecting and reporting data, broken down by gender. Overall, countries should be reminded of their obligations stipulated in the relevant conventions to regularly report to UNODC complete drug-related data as included in the annual report questionnaire and the individual drug seizure report.
