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**Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic  
and Related Matters in the Near and****Middle East****Fifty-fifth session**

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda\*\*

**Current situation with respect to regional and  
subregional cooperation****Current situation with respect to regional and subregional  
cooperation****Report of the Secretariat****I. Introduction**

1. The present report provides an analysis of the situation concerning drugs, crime and terrorism in the Near and Middle East and describes the activities conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in that region since the fifty-fourth session of the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East, held Tashkent in September 2019.
2. According to the *World Drug Report 2022*, Global opium production continued its long-term upward trend in 2021, growing 7 per cent year-on-year, to more than 7,900 tons. The increase in 2021 was largely attributable to an increase in opium production in Afghanistan (8 per cent) resulting from an increase in opium yields in the country.
3. The seizure data indicate that the world's most important heroin and morphine trafficking route continues to run from Afghanistan, through the Islamic Republic of Iran, to Türkiye and then onward through the Balkan countries to Western and Central Europe, with about half of all seizures of heroin and morphine worldwide made in countries along this so-called "Balkan route".
4. Seizures of heroin and morphine increased significantly in 2020 in countries neighbouring Afghanistan, notably in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. The Western Balkan route was confirmed to be the main conduit for trafficking in opiates from Afghanistan destined for the European continent.
5. The Islamic Republic of Iran reported a significant decrease in seizures of all types of drugs, with the exception of methamphetamine, in the first six months of

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\* Available only in Arabic, English and Russian, which are the working languages of the subsidiary body.

\*\* [UNODC/SUBCOM/55/1](#).



2022. That included a 16 per cent decrease in seizures of heroin in the period January–June 2022, compared with the corresponding period in 2021, as well as decreases of 49 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively, in seizures of morphine and opium. The seizures reported in Pakistan in 2020 accounted for close to 29 per cent of all heroin and morphine seized globally in that year. Some seizures were destined for domestic consumption, some for trafficking to the Islamic Republic of Iran and beyond, and some for trafficking along the so-called “southern route” to either South Asia or eastern Africa.<sup>1</sup> Another important route, accounting for about 2 per cent of global seizures of heroin and morphine in 2020, runs from South-West Asia to Central Asia and Transcaucasia and onward to the Russian Federation or Western and Central Europe.

6. Seizures of heroin in Central Asia increased fourfold between 2020 and 2021 and ninefold between the first quarter of 2021 and the first quarter of 2022. In the first quarter of 2022, Tajikistan seized 1,396 kg of narcotic drugs, a 60 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2021. In February 2022, Uzbekistan seized 230 kg of heroin in a single incident, which was eight times more than the total amount of heroin seized in the country in 2020.

7. It should be noted that while the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has not changed the Balkan route’s status as the most prominent heroin trafficking corridor, it did have an impact on trafficking activities during 2020, before they rebounded in 2021. Some traffickers apparently tried to circumvent the Balkan route to ship heroin during the pandemic, shifting flows towards the southern route. That was reflected by the growing number of large seizures of heroin, of up to 1.3 tons, on the Arabian Sea since the onset of the pandemic and the similarly large seizures made on ships arriving from West Asia at a number of European ports, such as in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which was an exception in Western Europe in reporting a marked increase in major seizures in 2020, mainly sourced directly from South-West Asia.

8. Moreover, Afghanistan had seen an exponential growth of methamphetamine manufacture in recent years, with seizures of 30 grams of the substance in 2012, compared with more than 1.2 tons seized in 2019 and 2020, respectively. According to the *World Drug Report 2022*, authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran reported in 2019 that Afghan smugglers had captured a large part of the Iranian methamphetamine market and were using the Islamic Republic of Iran as a transit country to reach markets beyond its borders. Some 90 per cent of the methamphetamine seizures made in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2019 were reported to be of Afghan origin. The seizures of methamphetamine in the Islamic Republic of Iran increased by 51 per cent in 2020 compared with 2019, and increased by 23 per cent in 2021 compared with 2020. The situation was similar in neighbouring Pakistan, where authorities reported that Afghanistan was the most frequently detected country of departure for methamphetamine seized in 2020.

9. Following the first seizures of methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan, reported in 2012, and rapid growth in domestic manufacture, by 2016, the seizure data suggested that methamphetamine was, to a growing extent, also being used to supply markets in neighbouring countries. The trafficking of methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan continued to expand across the region and beyond, and in the period 2019–2021 more than 10 countries, including countries in Asia, Europe and Africa, reported seizures of methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan. Moreover, countries as far afield as Oceania also reported seizures of shipments of methamphetamine sent from countries in South-West Asia.

10. With regard to amphetamine, in the period 2016–2020, most of the substance seized was seized in the Near and Middle East (where it mostly took the form of counterfeit “captagon” tablets). Although seizures of methamphetamine continued to

<sup>1</sup> The southern route runs from Afghanistan, through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, and then by sea or air either directly to Europe or through South Asia, Africa and/or the Gulf States.

account for the largest increases in seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants in the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia, amphetamine once again accounted for the bulk of such seizures in those subregions in 2020, with record quantities seized. Of the total quantity of amphetamine reported seized in those subregions, 99 per cent was in the form of “captagon” tablets. The largest quantities of “captagon” reported seized in 2020 were those reported by Saudi Arabia, followed by the United Arab Emirates and other countries along the main “captagon” trafficking route, which runs from the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon (which continue to be the two countries reported by other countries as the source of seized amphetamine) to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf countries, either directly via Jordan or by sea, or via destinations in Europe (mainly Greece and Italy), as well as to destinations in North Africa.

11. With regard to the work of UNODC, in the Near and Middle East, UNODC promotes integrated strategies to address trafficking in and consumption of illicit drugs, in particular opiates originating in Afghanistan, but also amphetamine-type stimulants and other controlled substances, which are affecting the whole region.

12. In 2021, UNODC launched the new cycle of programmes in West and Central Asia for the period 2022–2025, including the regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, the programme for Central Asia and the country programme for Pakistan.

13. In addition to strengthening national capacities and promoting regional cooperation, UNODC aims in particular to link initiatives and platforms for regional and subregional cooperation in order to address the trafficking of opiates from, and of precursor chemicals to, Afghanistan.

## II. Regional cooperation initiatives

14. Regional cooperation is the most viable way to effectively tackle illicit drug cultivation, production, trafficking and use in the region. UNODC provides a harmonized and integrated approach to strengthening the implementation of the integrated drug control initiatives. UNODC interventions are carried out at the regional and interregional levels by the regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, the programme for Central Asia and the country programmes for Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan.

15. The continued high levels of production and cultivation of opium have created multiple challenges in the region, including increased insurgency, the funding of terrorist groups and the availability of more high-quality, low-cost heroin in consumer markets.

16. On 17 March 2022, in its resolution [2626 \(2022\)](#), the Security Council adopted the new mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for one year, with a focus on coordinating humanitarian assistance, promoting good governance and the rule of law, promoting human rights, and tackling the illicit economy. Following the events of August 2021 in Afghanistan, UNODC developed the Strategic Stability Grid. The aim of the initiative is to address the existing and emerging transnational challenges stemming from drugs, crime and terrorism in and around Afghanistan. The ban on narcotic drugs introduced on 3 April 2022 positioned UNODC in its key role to assess and monitor the country’s intentions and efforts to address narcotic drugs, trafficking and the related illicit economy, including the required international support.

17. During reporting period, countries of the region continued to share their experiences with regard to drug prevention and treatment and HIV prevention among vulnerable members of society, with a view to strengthening networks and mutual support mechanisms. The Families and Schools Together programme and the Strengthening Families Programme for drug use prevention, aimed at protecting children across the region and strengthening the capacity of families and schools to

address potential risks, were further developed and expanded. As a result of support provided by UNODC, countries increased their capacity to deliver scientific evidence-based drug use disorder treatment and care services.

18. UNODC supports countries in the implementation of evidence-based interventions to counter the production of, trafficking in and illicit use of controlled substances, including by conducting research and technical studies on interlinkages among the drug problem, socioeconomic factors and wider concerns about human security, and by providing training to relevant authorities to strengthen their capacity to collect and analyse data.

19. Under the Paris Pact initiative, UNODC continued to facilitate the intergovernmental dialogue on opiates at the expert and policy levels. In that connection, the fifteenth Paris Pact Policy Consultative Group meeting was held in Vienna on 15 and 16 November 2021, with the participation of more than 150 delegates, representing 34 countries and 11 international and regional organizations. At the meeting, the Policy Consultative Group endorsed recommendations emanating from the Paris Pact expert working group discussions in line with the four thematic pillars of the Vienna Declaration,<sup>2</sup> which serves as the road map for the Paris Pact initiative.

20. Following the Policy Consultative Group meeting, UNODC organized a meeting of the expert working group on cross-border cooperation (relating to pillar I of the Vienna Declaration), held in Moscow on 15 and 16 December 2021; a meeting of the expert working group on detecting and blocking financial flows linked to illicit traffic in opiates originating in Afghanistan (relating to pillar II of the Vienna Declaration), held in Vienna on 30 and 31 May 2022; and a meeting of the expert working group on quality assurance in treatment and care of drug use disorders (relating to pillar IV of the Vienna Declaration), held in Islamabad on 18 and 19 July 2022.

21. The Turkish International Academy against Drugs and Organized Crime (TADOC) continued to be a key partner of UNODC, in particular in South-Eastern Europe. Following an operational pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Counter-Narcotics Training Academy now holds the mandate for all counter-narcotics training, while TADOC retains the training mandate for all other law enforcement activities. UNODC has been cooperating with the Counter-Narcotics Training Academy, including in the delivery in 2022 of training courses on risk analysis and trends in narcotic drugs for border law enforcement personnel from the Balkan region.

22. UNODC continued to cooperate with relevant organizations, agencies and frameworks, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, the South-East European Law Enforcement Centre, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and other regional and international organizations, as well as relevant entities of the United Nations.

23. UNODC has developed the Strategic Stability Grid to address intersecting drug, crime and terrorism threats in and around Afghanistan, with a view to protecting people and promoting stability in the region and beyond.

24. UNODC has promoted better regional and international cooperation and information exchange through several platforms, including the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), the Inter-Regional Network of Customs Authorities and Port Control Units under the UNODC-World Customs Organization (WCO) Global Container Control Programme and the Judicial Cooperation Network for Central Asia and Southern Caucasus. These networks support trade facilitation and help to prevent illicit flows of drugs and assets and to address other transnational threats.

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<sup>2</sup> The Vienna Declaration is the outcome document of the Third Ministerial Conference of the Paris Pact Partners on Combating Illicit Traffic in Opiates Originating in Afghanistan, held on 16 February 2012.

25. UNODC continued its cooperation with CARICC on the implementation of two regional operations, Operation Reflex and Operation Substitute, aimed at the coordinated seizure of drugs.
26. To ensure that transport corridors are secured against trafficking in illicit goods, including drug trafficking, a new Port Control Unit was established and fully equipped at the “Farap avtoyollary” border crossing point at the border between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, under the UNODC-WCO Global Container Control Programme.
27. UNODC supported the participation of the Ministry of Narcotics Control and the Anti-Narcotics Force of Pakistan, the Pakistan Customs Service and the Pakistan Coast Guards in a meeting of the Southern Route Partnership held in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, in March 2022. The meeting helped to connect those maritime law enforcement agencies with regional counterparts, such as the Tanzanian police, the Indian Ocean Commission, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security Investigations of the United States Department of Homeland Security, the Counter-narcotics and Transnational Threats Programs Division of the United States Africa Command, the Transnational Crime Unit of the United States Naval Criminal Investigative Service and the National Crime Agency of the United Kingdom.
28. UNODC facilitated the participation of potential trainers from the Pakistan Coast Guards, as well as the Sri Lanka Coast Guard and Special Boat Squadron of the Sri Lanka Navy, in a visit, board, search and seizure training programme held at the Naval and Maritime Academy in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in 2022. The training programme introduced various international best practices, focusing on human rights-based and gender-sensitive law enforcement practices and procedures. It highlighted the existing and emerging challenges posed by illicit trafficking and smuggling in the maritime domain, while keeping in view the capabilities and capacity-building needs of the Pakistan Coast Guards.

### III. Drug supply reduction

#### Trafficking in drugs

29. Afghanistan continued to be the world’s largest producer of opium. In 2021, the area under opium poppy cultivation in the country was estimated at 177,000 hectares, a 21 per cent decrease from 2020. A total of 77 per cent of the opium poppy cultivated in the country was cultivated in the southern region of the country, including Kandahar province, and the total estimated opium production in the country in 2021 was 6,800 tons, an 8 per cent increase compared with 2020. The cultivation of opium poppy is driven by many socioeconomic and security-related factors, including multi-dimensional poverty, lack of opportunities to participate in the licit economy and limited access to markets. Most of the farmers who cultivate opium poppy in Afghanistan live in villages with relatively weak infrastructure and with less advantaged living conditions.
30. According to a report of CARICC, in 2021, compared with 2020, the volume of seized heroin increased in all CARICC member States. That figure includes, inter alia, an increase from 2,341.1 kg to 3,263.2 kg in Azerbaijan, from 70.1 kg to 76.5 kg in Kazakhstan, from 16.5 kg to 449.1 kg (27.2 times more) in Kyrgyzstan, from 118.5 kg to 251.9 kg in Tajikistan, and from 28.3 to 103 kg in Uzbekistan.
31. According to the Drug Control Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, drug seizures in Tajikistan almost doubled in 2021 compared with 2020. Early reports of the Agency for 2022 show a continuation of the upward trend in drug seizures.
32. UNODC is strengthening the capacity of maritime law enforcement authorities in Pakistan to counter illicit trafficking and transnational organized crime through interventions such as national table-top exercises, inter-agency round tables and visit,

board, search and seizure courses, as well as training-of-trainers programmes and the customization of e-learning modules.

**Illicit financial flows, money-laundering and asset recovery**

33. An inter-agency coordination commission on combating money-laundering, the financing of terrorism and the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was established in Turkmenistan in July 2022.

34. UNODC supported the operation of three working groups, in Tajikistan (on enhancing the efficiency of parallel financial investigations), Uzbekistan (on parallel financial investigations and disruption of illicit financial flows related to organized crime and drug trafficking) and Kazakhstan (on a national information technology system for the professional accreditation and development of specialists in the area of anti-money-laundering and countering the financing of terrorism). As a result, the instructional curriculum on parallel financial investigations was approved by competent authorities in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

35. UNODC proactively engaged in discussions on amending laws and legislative acts with a view to further implementing the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force relating to the Central Asian countries. The amendments to the law on banking secrecy and discretion of Uzbekistan and the strategy for the development of the national system for anti-money-laundering and countering the financing of terrorism of Kazakhstan were developed with the support of UNODC experts.

36. UNODC successfully completed the implementation of the goAML software application, in coordination with the Financial Monitoring Unit of Pakistan. The goAML application is a fully integrated software solution developed specifically for use by financial intelligence units and is one of the Office's strategic responses to financial crime, including money-laundering and the financing of terrorism. Financial intelligence units play a leading role in any anti-money-laundering regime, as they are generally responsible for receiving, processing and analysing reports issued by financial institutions or other entities in accordance with the requirements of domestic anti-money-laundering laws and regulations. goAML is now connected to the databases of law enforcement authorities in Pakistan, which will enable the sharing of information in a secure and confidential environment. This connectivity will also enable the Financial Monitoring Unit of Pakistan to improve its knowledge and understanding of the data held by those authorities and contribute to improved reports and sharing of knowledge.

37. UNODC provided support to the Financial Monitoring Unit of Pakistan to facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation with the Netherlands and France and their financial intelligence units.

38. UNODC provided targeted guidance and advice to the Government of Pakistan with regard to addressing the final items of its Financial Action Task Force Action Plan and presenting the Action Plan at the meetings of the International Co-operation Review Group and the Financial Action Task Force.

39. UNODC also provided support to the Government of Pakistan in enhancing its understanding and knowledge of particular topics and by providing recommendations on how to tackle challenging issues. In that connection, a detailed desk review and gap analysis of illegal money value transfer services was developed in collaboration with the Financial Monitoring Unit and the Federal Investigation Agency, as well as other relevant authorities in Pakistan. In addition, another scoping study, on regulatory approaches to virtual currencies and assets and the way forward for Pakistan, was conducted.

40. UNODC developed the concept and basic architectural sketch of an entirely new system for the Terrorism and Anti-Money-Laundering Intelligence Taskforce of Pakistan to ensure a cross-institutional collaborative mechanism, offering the Taskforce the potential to create a shared base of knowledge and understanding of

current and emerging risks related to money-laundering and the financing of terrorism across the public and private sectors.

### **Terrorism and violent extremism**

41. Central Asia continues to face significant security challenges, including as a result of its proximity to regions marked by terrorist activity, illicit trafficking in drugs and arms, vulnerability to terrorist propaganda and recruitment, and risks associated with the widespread reliance on alternative money remittances. Although there have been a relatively limited number of terrorism-related attacks or incidents in Central Asia in recent years, the number of terrorist attacks carried out by nationals of Central Asian countries outside the region has increased. Returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters are also a concern. Border protection and management in both Central Asia and the South Caucasus continues to be hampered by insufficient resources, difficult terrain and unresolved disputes, which also affect regional and international cooperation.

42. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have accounted for a large number of repatriations since 2019, having brought back more than 800 people, including 579 children. Tajikistan conducted a one-time return operation at the end of April 2019, repatriating 84 children from Iraq. In March 2021, Kyrgyzstan repatriated 79 children from Iraq. United Nations country teams across Central Asia have worked with Governments on those efforts, including by supporting the development and implementation of policies and practices that are in line with the best interests of children and that comply with global best practices with regard to children affected by armed conflict, and principles and norms of child protection.

43. In March 2022, the States in Central Asia adopted the updated Joint Plan of Action for the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia, taking into account the existing and emerging challenges in the region, such as those related to cybersecurity, combating the financing of terrorism, border security, the return of foreign terrorist fighters and developments in Afghanistan.

## **IV. Drug prevention and treatment**

### **Prevention, treatment and care**

44. The Afghanistan National Drug Use Survey 2015 indicated that approximately 11 per cent of the population of Afghanistan, or between 2.9 million and 3.5 million people, had tested positive for drugs, out of which 2 million people, including more than 200,000 women and 100,000 children, had been estimated to be regular drug users. Furthermore, the use of amphetamine-type stimulants, in particular methamphetamine, is a serious emerging threat in the country and is spreading rapidly across the country and beyond. In April 2022, the production of opium was outlawed in Afghanistan. Under the decree, the use, trade in or transportation, including exportation and importation, of opium, or of any other narcotic drug or psychotropic substance are strictly prohibited. However, the impact of the decree remains unclear, as it is being implemented without measures to compensate for the cessation of the production of narcotic drugs and despite a shortage of capacities and resources for drug use prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services for those in need.

45. The Islamic Republic of Iran and UNODC cooperated in promoting effective primary drug prevention measures in the key settings of the community, the workplace, educational settings and the prison system. Interventions at the country level included the introduction of methadone maintenance treatment programmes and needle and syringe exchange programmes, in particular in prison settings and among street-drug users. Non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations were empowered through the provision of training on planning and management skills, fundraising, community involvement and voluntary work techniques.

46. The UNODC Country Office in Pakistan, in collaboration with the Ministry of Narcotics Control and the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination of Pakistan, is in the process of implementing the national drug use survey in Pakistan. The survey will cover the population aged 15 to 64 years. There will be two components of the survey: (a) a household drug use survey with a sample size of 111,600 households; and (b) a study on high-risk drug use, with a sample size of 7,000 high-risk drug users interviewed. The survey is expected to be completed by December 2023.

47. Training sessions on the Universal Prevention Curriculum for Substance Use were introduced and conducted by UNODC for the first time in Pakistan, with the objective of putting science into practice, with a special focus on capacity-building on the planning and delivery of evidence-based drug prevention interventions. Under the initiative, UNODC trained 19 professionals from multidisciplinary settings to serve as trainers for four Universal Prevention Curriculum courses. Those trainers subsequently delivered Universal Prevention Curriculum courses to approximately 100 professionals from educational institutions, law enforcement authorities, the media and civil society organizations.

48. In addition, UNODC supported a cadre of substance use treatment professionals by enhancing their knowledge, skills and competence and thereby strengthening the quality of treatment and care for the substance users and their families. To date, 101 drug treatment professionals have completed Universal Prevention Curriculum basic courses 1 to 8, 46 drug treatment professionals have been trained to serve as master trainers for basic courses 1 to 8, and an International Certified Addiction Professional (ICAP-1) certification exam was organized for treatment professionals, among whom 71 examinees passed the examination and received ICAP-1 credentials.

49. UNODC is striving to improve the capacity of the Government of Pakistan to ensure standardized treatment and prevention of drug use disorders. Under this initiative, a mechanism for the quality assurance of drug dependence treatment has been established in line with the international standards for drug demand reduction. For this purpose, a drug demand reduction technical committee for quality assurance was formed at the federal level. Five drug demand reduction quality assurance training sessions were conducted at the federal and provincial levels, involving the participation of relevant stakeholders from across the country. In that regard, terms of reference, special operating procedures, protocols, monitoring tools and other processes and procedures in support of quality assurance were developed.

50. At the request of the Government of Pakistan, UNODC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Narcotics Control and the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination of Pakistan, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme, conducted a study on the feasibility of opioid agonist therapy in Islamabad and the four provinces of Pakistan. On the basis of the results of the feasibility study, plans are being developed to implement opioid agonist therapy programmes in the country.

51. In all countries of Central Asia, national drug strategies and other relevant plans and documents include activities aimed at the prevention of drug use. In practice, these activities mostly involve the organization of various short-term, one-time dynamic activities, such as discussions, round tables and video presentations on the risks and harms posed by psychoactive substances. Although there are a number of institutions in the region with a mandate for drug prevention, their work is poorly coordinated and has little impact on the behaviour of the target groups. Resources are used ineffectively for activities that are not informed by evidence, for example, media campaigns, the dissemination of information materials and the organization of public events to discourage drug use that lack a clearly defined target audience. Drug use prevention activities within school curricula are an integral part of UNODC activities aimed at the promotion of healthy lifestyles through family skills training programmes. At the same time, however, national drug strategies and related practical



interventions lack programmes that refer to evidence-based or science-based prevention, although some positive exceptions do exist.

52. The attention to drug-related issues at the policymaking level in the region is limited in scope, often with a relatively less robust focus on health interventions. Policy decisions are not always based on scientific evidence, particularly with regard to treatment. The coverage of drug dependence treatment services is limited. Medicines for treating addiction in the region have not been adequately developed and are often not managed by qualified institutions. State interventions in the field of drug dependence treatment have been limited, or wrongly driven, by false perceptions and misleading interpretations of the nature of the drug use phenomenon and of addictive behaviour. This misperception has generated denial, stigma and discrimination against drug users and drug use disorders, which in turn have contributed to the exclusion of prevention and treatment from the education and public health systems, and to the undermining of the development of addiction medicine as a medical discipline. To address these issues, UNODC enhanced the skills and capacities of more than 500 addiction professionals in Central Asia to provide evidence-based treatment and care services through a regional workshop on the UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders, a series of training programmes on the Universal Prevention Curriculum training package, and the piloting of a UNODC quality assurance mechanism and related tools.

#### **HIV/AIDS**

53. Decreasing access to traditional drugs and increasing sales of new psychoactive substances and stimulant drugs on the darknet and other shadow marketplaces, including social media channels, have changed patterns of drug use and have led to the increased use of new psychoactive substances and stimulant drugs in the region. New cases of HIV among people who inject drugs decreased from 60 per cent in 2002 to 3.6 per cent in 2019. The needs assessment conducted by UNODC in 2020 revealed a substantial gap in the knowledge and understanding of health risks related to the use of new psychoactive substances and stimulant drugs among people who use drugs, as well as a lack of capacity to meet their needs among service providers. High levels of criminalization and self-stigmatization among people living with HIV often prevent them from using harm reduction services. The access to harm reduction services is limited by criminal sanctions on key populations. Laws, policies and cultural norms do not always allow internationally recognized strategies to be fully implemented. Restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have necessitated the use of new approaches in outreach work undertaken by peer outreach workers and other health workers who deliver recommended low-threshold HIV services, such as services involving education, outreach, community mobilization and the provision of condoms.

54. UNODC has continued its work to advance national dialogues and advocacy relating to the development of targeted HIV programmes that respond to the needs of people who use drugs. UNODC has also continued to support national counterparts and non-governmental organizations in developing their capacity with regard to continuous and sustainable HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services for people who use drugs, and to provide policy support to ensure that the right to health of people who use drugs is protected and respected.