



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE ON DRUGS AND
CRIME (UNODC)**





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Executive Board.....	2
Key Terms and Definitions.....	3
Introduction to the Committee and Agenda.....	4-5
Case Studies.....	6-8
Trade Routes and Distribution	8-11
Existing Challenges	12-14
Existing Policy Measures	14-17
Questions a Resolution Must Answer	18
Bibliography.....	19-20



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear Delegates,

It is an absolute honour to be serving as the Executive Board of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) at Inventure MUN 2021! After careful deliberation, we chose an agenda that we believe is not only compelling but will push you to explore a subject matter that you might not have learned about otherwise. This year, we will be discussing, debating and scrutinizing ***‘Illicit Opioid Production and Trafficking’*** with special emphasis on the **Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent** (p.3).

To assist you, we’ve developed this background guide that highlights key aspects of the agenda at hand. Keep in mind that this guide is merely a starting point for your research. During committee, we encourage you to substantiate your claims and explore the topic far beyond what the following pages will outline for you. We look forward to witnessing you at your very best and nothing less!

Sincerely,

The Executive Board

UNODC



KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The Golden Triangle: Primary opium-producing regions of South-East Asia consisting of parts of Myanmar, Thailand, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Vietnam

The Golden Crescent: Primary opium-producing regions of South-West Asia consisting largely of Afghanistan as well as parts of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan

Opium: An addictive drug prepared from the juice of the opium poppy, used illicitly as a narcotic and occasionally in medicine as an analgesic (*Oxford Dictionary*)

Opioid: Umbrella term for compounds that are extracted from the opium poppy, such as Morphine, as well as semi-synthetic and synthetic compounds, such as Heroin, with similar properties that can interact with opioid receptors in the brain (World Health Organization). Drugs that are derived from the opium poppy, and are thus naturally occurring, may sometimes be referred to as **opiates**

Drug Trafficking: Drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances that are subject to drug prohibition laws (*United Nations*)



INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

AND AGENDA

The UNODC was established in 1997 as a result of the merging of the United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme. Its mission is to contribute to global peace and security, human rights and development by making the world safer from drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism.

The topic of drug production and trafficking plays a major role in the UNODC's work towards global security. Illegal Drug production and trafficking endanger lives, communities and nations on multiple fronts, in both source, transit and consumer countries.

The growing complexities of the world's drug problem, exemplified in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, require a coordinated international response. The resulting rising poverty and unemployment have further deepened vulnerabilities. More people now lack access to proper care and are at greater risk of drug use. This potentially increases the likelihood to turn to drug cultivation or trafficking in desperation to earn a living. Studies from the 2008 financial crisis reveal that in its aftermath, drug use patterns became more



harmful. There was a shift to cheaper drugs and injecting drug use and government budgets to address the drug problem decreased.

According to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, opioids, in particular, continue to claim more lives than any other drug, resulting in 69% of deaths related to drug use disorders. Their production and distribution have become embedded in the workings of certain countries, playing a major role in everything from the economy and employment to terrorism and organised crime. Although there has been a steady increase in opioid seizures across the globe, the production, trafficking and consumption of opioids remain high. The Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent regions are at the forefront of opioid production and trafficking.

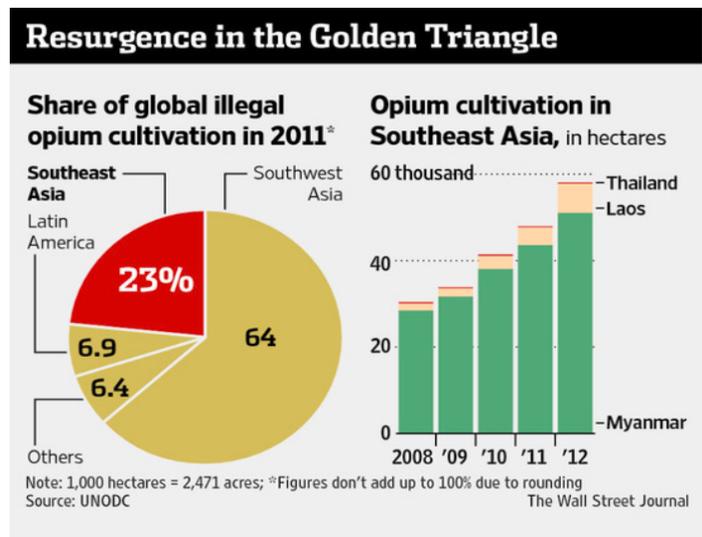


CASE STUDIES

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE:

Since the early 1950s, the Golden Triangle, which refers to parts of **Myanmar, Thailand, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Vietnam**, has been responsible for a significant proportion of the global illegal opioid supply. The region spreads across approximately 950,000 square kilometres, and the illegal drug trade is estimated to be worth more than USD 16 billion. Opium is extracted from vast poppy fields and then trafficked around the region, mostly going through China and all the way to the United States.

Although there has been a decline in the Golden Triangle opioid production, the overall drop is unsubstantial and the threats associated with drug trafficking and consumption continue to persist. With the transformation of drug markets and ineffective coordination between law enforcement agencies, the Golden Triangle is



Source: Wall Street Journal (based on statistics published by the UNODC)

The figure above highlights the Golden Triangle's position as the second highest producer of opium. It further conveys the distribution in the region itself with Myanmar (green) producing the highest amounts by far, and Laos (off-white) and Thailand (pink) contributing, but producing significantly less. (p.10)



plagued with a multitude of problems. This includes an increase in the production of synthetic opioids, the rerouting of opioids from legal to illegal channels, and increased bulk trafficking of opioids, particularly heroin. Additionally, the broader anti-opioid effort continues to be hampered by a lack of government will and agility to take on large narco-trafficking organisations, as well as a lack of genuine commitment against money laundering.

THE GOLDEN CRESCENT:

The Golden Crescent is an opium-producing region comprising parts of **Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan**. Geographic conditions, war, terrorism and a fluctuating political landscape all helped create the ideal setting for opioid production, trade and consumption in the Golden Crescent. The past few decades have seen an increase in both trafficking and addiction amongst the inhabitants of the region, as a result of socio-economic struggle and political unrest.

Of the Golden Crescent, **Afghanistan** is the world's leading producer of illicit opioids and supplies more than 80% of global illegal opium. The country's illicit opioid economy is a large portion of its legitimate economy. The gross output of the illegal Afghan opioid economy correlates to around 6 to 11 per cent of the country's GDP. The gross income from opioids even exceeded the income from its officially recorded legitimate exports of goods and services in 2019.



For many Afghans, partaking in opium poppy cultivation secures their livelihood. In 2018, it was estimated that opium poppy was cultivated in roughly a third of rural villages in Afghanistan, creating approximately 200,000 jobs for local residents.

The Taliban is directly involved with drug trafficking and is estimated to have influence over 85% of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. The consistently high levels of opium poppy cultivation and its illegal trafficking also fuel insurgency and instability in Afghanistan, facilitating a rampant presence of terrorist activity.

Similar to the Golden Triangle, the evolving drug markets are leading to further challenges in the region such as bulk trafficking in opioids (primarily heroin), diversion of opioids from licit to illicit channels, smuggling of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic and psychotropic substances, and poor coordination between various drug enforcement agencies in the region.

TRADE ROUTES AND DISTRIBUTION

Drug trafficking is defined, by the UNODC, as a global, illicit trade involving the cultivation, production, distribution and sale of substances under the jurisdiction of drug prohibition laws.

Opium is illicitly produced in approximately 50 countries worldwide. Afghanistan, South East Asia and Latin America are the regions with the



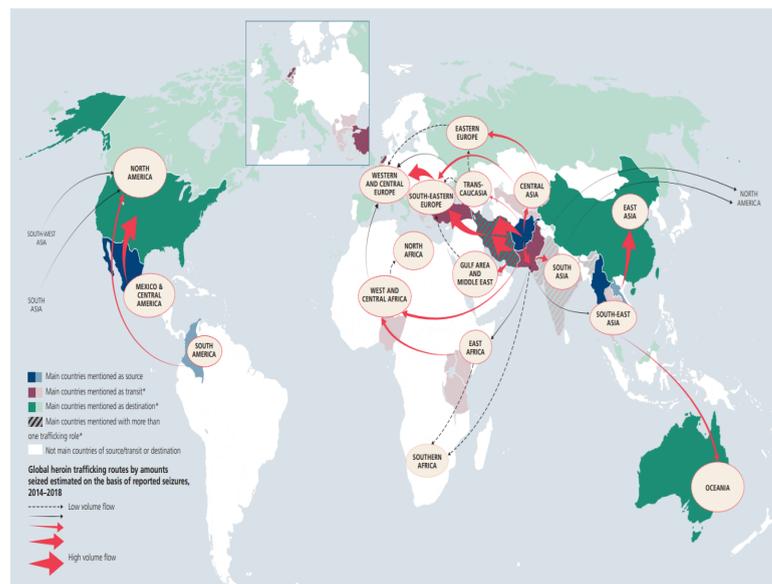
highest output. The percentage of global opium production attributed to each of these regions in the last 5 years is as follows:

- ❖ Afghanistan - approx. 84%
- ❖ Southeast Asia: Myanmar - approx. 7%; Laos approx 1%
- ❖ Latin America: Mexico - approx. 6%; Colombia and Guatemala - less than 1%

The main opioid trade routes begin in the three key production areas:

- Afghanistan supplies markets in neighbouring countries (Iran, Pakistan, countries in Central Asia and India), Europe, the Near and Middle East, South Asia and Africa, with smaller amounts supplied to South-East Asia, North America (primarily Canada) and Oceania;

- South-East Asia supplies markets in East and South-East Asia and Oceania
- Latin America accounts for a majority of the supply to North America (most notably the United States) and also supplies the relatively smaller markets of South America.



Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire, and individual drug seizure database

Opioids originating in Afghanistan are trafficked along three main routes:



- ❖ **The Balkan Route** supplies Western and Central Europe through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey via South-Eastern Europe
- ❖ **The Southern Route** supplies the Gulf region, Africa, South Asia and, to a lesser extent, South-East Asia, Oceania and North America via Pakistan and Iran
- ❖ **The Northern Route** supplies the Russian Federation via Central Asia

Opioids originating in South East Asia (The Golden Triangle) are primarily trafficked as follows:

- There is a significant flow of opioids from the Golden Triangle to countries in the Asia Pacific region like Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam
- Trafficking to Oceania occurs via countries in the Asia Pacific region as well as via Hong Kong
- Trafficking to India occurs with opioids entering India through its northeastern borderline. Some are then further transported to Europe and North America
- Trafficking to East Asia and even North America occurs via mainland China and Hong Kong. As well as functioning as a transit country, China is a major market for opioids from this region

Drug trafficking routes arise due to a number of factors, including, but not limited to; geographic proximity, logistics, profit and risk margins. Often traffickers seek out states with weak administrative structures, law enforcement and customs, to reduce the costs and risk of moving illegal stock.

Non-producing commercial countries with heavy outgoing passenger and cargo traffic are also targeted as intermediate points to avoid destination inspections.



Opioids are trafficked by sea, air and land. Automobiles equipped with concealed compartments, militarized convoys, planes, buses, trains, legitimate delivery services, boats, fishing trawlers, container ships and airdrops are all used for transport. Furthermore, high-level political protection, collusion with government officials, and organized crime also play significant roles in trafficking.

Although associated with violence, drug trafficking routes aren't all conducive to violence. The existence and level of violence are highly dependent on certain changes that produce instability in the balance of power between organized crime groups rather than quantities trafficked. Some factors that can cause such instability, include changes in the size of illicit markets, the death or incarceration of high-profile leaders and law enforcement measures that weaken one group relative to another.

It is also important to note, the Internet has become a major component of the drug trade over recent years. Purchases and sales of drugs over the Internet involve both the open net (using encrypted communication) and the darknet, which forms part of the deep web. Various social media apps (both mainstream ones like Snapchat, Instagram and specialised ones like NestDrop, Weedmaps), are also increasingly being used for purchasing and selling drugs.



EXISTING CHALLENGES

IMPACTS ON HEALTH AND COMMUNITY:

There are several negative effects to drug users, such as severe physical and psychological damage. It can cause diseases such as agranulocytosis (a serious blood disorder) and may also cause premature deaths due to overdoses. Overuse and abuse of drugs can result in a strain on healthcare systems. In fact, according to the National Threat Assessment 2010 by the U.S. Department of Justice, “In 2007, there were approximately 1.8 million admissions to state-licensed treatment facilities for illicit drug dependence or abuse. The highest percentage of admissions reported opioids as the primary drug of choice (31%, primarily heroin) followed by marijuana/hashish (27%), cocaine (22%), and stimulants (13%). Although treatment approaches vary by drug, more than half of the admissions were to ambulatory (outpatient, intensive outpatient, and detox) facilities rather than residential facilities.”

Not only are drug users and the healthcare system directly affected, but users’ families along with the wider community also suffer adverse consequences. According to SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), “combined data from 2002 to 2007 indicate that during the prior year, an estimated 2.1 million American children (3%) lived with at least one parent who was dependent on or abused illicit drugs, and 1 in 10 children under 18 lived with a substance-addicted or substance-abusing parent.”



IMPACTS ON CRIME AND JUSTICE SYSTEMS:

Drug abuse is a large burden on the criminal justice system. Several resources are diverted towards fighting drug-related crimes at every stage of convicting criminals - arrest, adjudication, incarceration, and post-release supervision process. Data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) demonstrate that “12.2 per cent of more than 14 million arrests in 2008 were for drug violations, the most common arrest crime category.” According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), “20 per cent of state prisoners and 53 per cent of federal prisoners are incarcerated because of a drug offence.” Furthermore, a 2004 BJS self-report survey emphasized this, stating that “17 per cent of state prisoners and 18 per cent of federal prisoners had committed their most recent offence to acquire money to buy drugs.”

IMPACTS ON NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY:

The risks of illicit drug use such as severe illness, injury and premature deaths drain public resources and therefore drug misuse has a high opportunity cost. This exorbitant cost may reduce national productivity as resources that may have otherwise been available for policy initiatives in other important sectors such as education and infrastructure are often diverted. In addition, the productivity loss due to drug-related unemployment and drug-related absenteeism can drastically affect a nation’s growth and development progress.



According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health 2008 NSDUH, “19.6 per cent of unemployed adults may be defined as current users of illicit drugs. Based on population estimates from the same study, this translates into approximately 1.8 million unemployed individuals who were current drug abusers.”

IMPACTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT:

The processes involved in the growth and disposal of drug-related chemicals have drastic effects on the environment. The method used to produce methamphetamine leads to the release of toxic chemicals (5-7 pounds of waste per pound of methamphetamine) that are usually negligently disposed of in streams, forests, etc., leading to substantial environmental damage.

Due to the sparsely available research on the improper disposal of pharmaceuticals, the extent of harm to aquatic life and the environment has not been determined yet. However, currently, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, scientists have not discovered evidence proving adverse human health effects caused by the minute residue found in water supplies.

EXISTING POLICY MEASURES

There are three major international drug control treaties:

- 1. Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 (as amended in 1972)*



The convention creates a consolidated framework of control measures to ensure and limit the availability of drugs for scientific and medical purposes, preventing their diversion into illicit channels. It further provides general provisions on illicit drug trafficking and drug abuse. Key points of the Treaty you should be aware of include:

- The International Narcotics Control Board is in charge of enforcing drug production, international trade, and distribution controls.
- The Commission on Narcotic Drugs is the main policy-making body for all things drug-related, including tracking global trends in illicit drug trafficking and abuse.
- The UNODC is tasked with monitoring the situation in each country and working with national authorities to ensure the observance of the Convention
- Provisions for domestic and international drug trade are made
- Nations are to create national opium agencies
- Limits on the quantity of opium that can be produced by nations are outlined
- The prohibition of cultivation of the opium poppy plant if necessary to public health and welfare, by individual nations is called for
- International coordination in the response to illicit traffic is mandated

2. Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971

The convention created an international control system for psychotropic substances or psychoactive drugs. Psychotropic substances are chemical



substances that alter activities in the nervous system. All opioids and opiates fall under this category.

Key points of the treaty you should be aware of include:

- The WHO is tasked with assessing the risk and recommending control measures for newly emerging substances lacking existing regulations
- Restrictions on the import and export of psychotropic substances aimed to limit drug use to scientific and medical are outlined
- Systems of licenses, records and inspection are called for
- National and international coordination against illicit traffic is mandated

3. United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988

This convention outlines measures against drug trafficking. Key points of the treaty you should be aware of include:

- Regulations against the diversion of precursor chemicals into illicit channels are provided
- Provisions against money laundering (which plays a major role in drug trafficking) are made
- Cooperation to trace and seize drug-related assets is mandated
- A legal basis is provided for extradition in drug-related cases even among countries having no other extradition treaties



- Member states are required to provide mutual legal assistance to each other when requested, for purposes including but not limited to searches, seizures and the service of judicial documents
- The responsibility to suppress the supply and demand is placed on both producer and consumer countries

The UNODC also spearheads programs like the Paris Pact Initiative, the Container Control Program and the Global Illicit Crop Monitoring Program that all contribute to curbing the illicit trade and trafficking of drugs. Joint ventures such as AIRCOP and the Global Maritime Crime Programme are also pivotal to safeguarding legal trade while countering transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. In 2018 the UNODC launched the UNODC Opioid Strategy to help nations coordinate responses. In addition, the Annual Report Questionnaire is used to gather data on the national drug situation in each country and is pivotal to coordinating an international response.



QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

- ❖ How can the international community respond to the illicit production and distribution of opioids?
- ❖ How can governments and local authorities be incentivized to prioritize the drug crisis?
- ❖ How have drug markets transformed in recent years? How can existing measures be updated to tackle these changes?
- ❖ How can farmers be incentivized to shift from cultivating opium to other socially and economically desirable crops?
- ❖ What systems can be adopted to strengthen cross-border collaboration in eradicating illicit opioid production, distribution and consumption?
- ❖ How can terrorist groups be restricted from accessing opioid production and facilitating drug trafficking?
- ❖ How do conflicting interests obstruct anti-drug trafficking initiatives or policies? What can be done about this?
- ❖ What can be done to restrict the role of the internet in aiding drug trafficking?

- ❖ What measures can be taken to improve border security?
- ❖ How can civic awareness about opioid trafficking be improved? How important is this?
- ❖ How can the diversion of opioids from legal to illegal channels be monitored and countered?
- ❖ What can be done to equip the international community to effectively adapt and respond to the constant changes in the drug trade



BIBLIOGRAPHY AND LINKS FOR **FURTHER RESEARCH**

- ❖ “Opioids.” *Opioids - Alcohol and Drug Foundation*,
adf.org.au/drug-facts/opioids/.
- ❖ "(U) Impact Of Drugs On Society - National Drug Threat Assessment 2010 (UNCLASSIFIED)". *Justice.Gov*, 2021,
<https://www.justice.gov/archive/ndic/pubs38/38661/drugImpact.htm#:~:text=The%20consequences%20of%20illicit%20drug%20use%20are%20widespread%2C%20causing%20permanent,leading%20to%20sickness%20and%20disease.>
- ❖ "Heroin Trafficking In The Golden Crescent | Office Of Justice Programs".
Ojp.Gov, 2021,
<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/heroin-trafficking-golden-crescent>.
- ❖ "Heroin Trafficking In The Golden Triangle | Office Of Justice Programs".
Ojp.Gov, 2021,
<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/heroin-trafficking-golden-triangle>.
- ❖ "Drug Challenges". *Unodc.Org*, 2021,
<https://www.unodc.org/southasia/en/topics/frontpage/2009/drug-challenges.html>
- ❖ "Drug Trafficking - United Nations And The Rule Of Law". *United Nations And The Rule Of Law*, 2021,
<https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/thematic-areas/transnational-threats/drug-trafficking/>.
- ❖ "UNODC Strategy 2021-2025." *United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime*.
Web. 26 May 2021,
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/strategy/index.html>



- ❖ "World Drug Report 2020." *United Nations: World Drug Report 2020*. Web. 26 May 2021.

<https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/index.html>

- ❖ "Legal Framework." *United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime*. Web. 26 May 2021.

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/legal-framework.html>

- ❖ "The Global Heroin Market." *UNODC WDR Global Heroin Market*. Web.

https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2010/1.2_The_global_heroin_market.pdf

- ❖ "Convention against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances." *United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime*. Web. 26 May 2021.

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/illicit-trafficking.html>

- ❖ "Treaties." *United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime*. Web. 26 May 2021.

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/index.html>