A faint, light blue world map is visible in the background of the slide. The map shows the outlines of continents and countries, with a slightly darker blue color for the oceans.

Global Drug Trafficking & Associated Crimes

Awareness • Impacts • Humanitarian dilemmas • A future vision for the next generations

NGO-ready

Evidence-informed

Health + justice + development lens

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1) The global picture: scale & trends

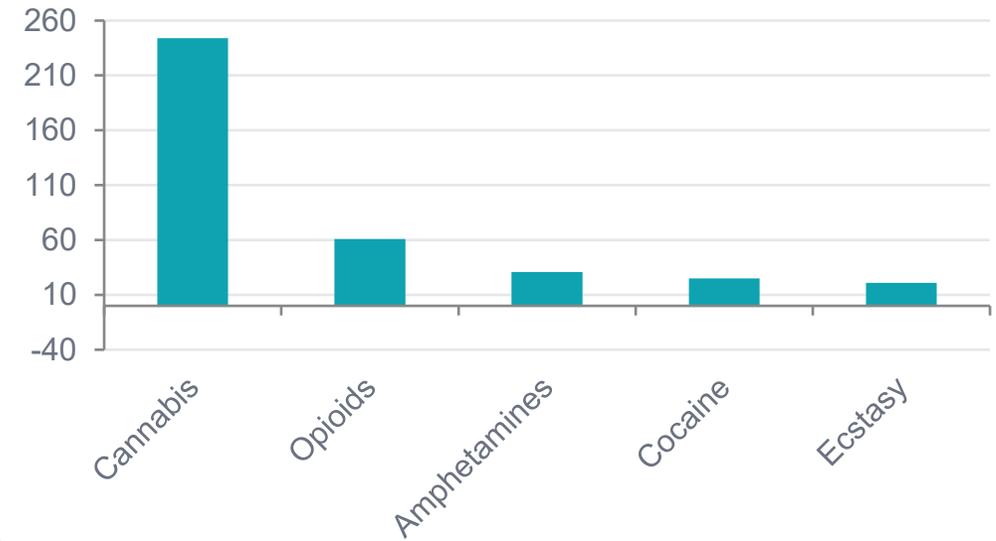
Why this issue matters everywhere

316 million

people used drugs in 2023 (age 15–64)

- Drug markets are increasingly global, adaptive, and profitable.
- Synthetic drugs can be produced closer to consumer markets.
- A large treatment gap persists: only ~1 in 12 people with drug use disorders received treatment (2023).
- Trafficking fuels violence, corruption, and other crimes.

People using selected drug types (2023, millions)

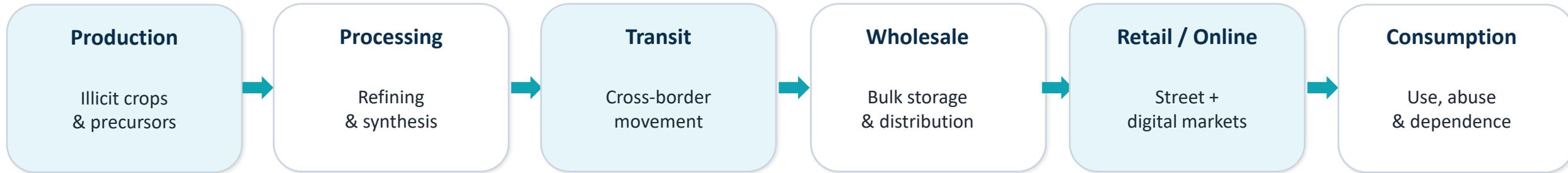


Seizures reflect scale — but also adaptation (routes, concealment, new substances).

2) How trafficking works (high-level)

A simplified supply chain: from production to consumption

Key idea: trafficking is a business system — with people harmed at every step.



Where awareness and prevention efforts fit

Protect people

- Prevention & life skills
- Early identification & referral
- Evidence-based treatment
- Harm reduction to prevent deaths

Protect communities

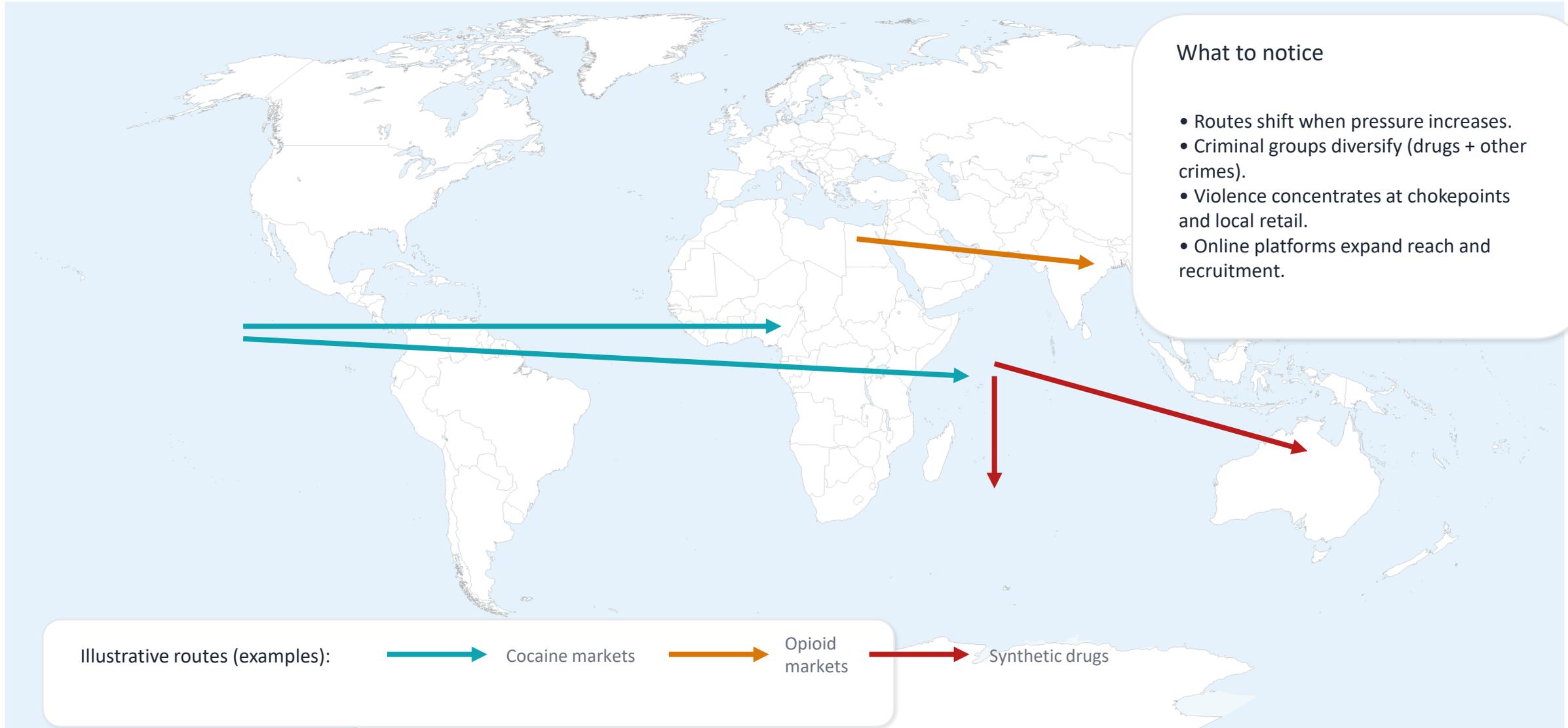
- Reduce violence and exploitation
- Support survivors (incl. trafficking)
- Community policing partnerships
- Build trust and reporting channels

Protect systems

- Anti-corruption & transparency
- Financial integrity / AML awareness
- Youth safeguarding online
- Cross-border cooperation & data
- Politics

3) Trafficking is global (impacts are local)

Illustrative flows, not operational detail



4) Criminal organizations & “mafia” dynamics

How networks maintain power



Common patterns (across regions)

- Diversification: drugs + extortion + fraud + trafficking in persons.
- Corruption: bribery and capture of institutions to reduce risk.
- Violence as governance: intimidation, assassinations, forced compliance.
- Infiltration: using front companies and logistics chains.
- Recruitment: exploiting poverty, displacement, and minors online.

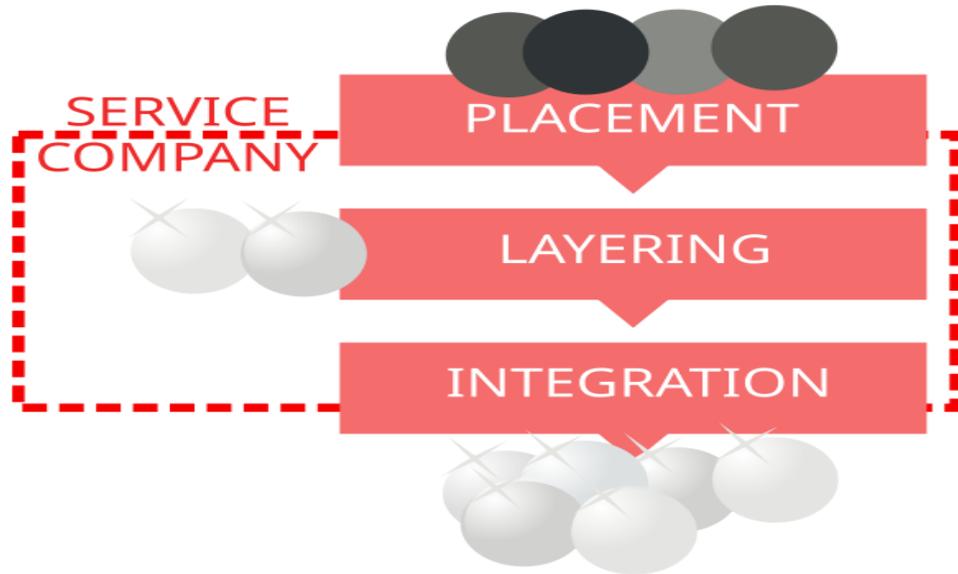
NGO takeaway

Treat the problem as a “system” (health + safety + livelihoods + governance) — not as a single substance or a single crime.

5) Associated crimes & exploitation

Drugs rarely travel alone

Follow the money



Linked harms and crimes

- Money laundering and corruption
- Arms trafficking and territorial violence
- Human trafficking and sexual exploitation (incl. forced prostitution)
- Migrant smuggling and exploitation
- Cyber-enabled fraud and online marketplaces
- Kidnapping, extortion, and forced labour

Humanitarian lens

Victims and survivors need services first: safety, legal aid, shelter, medical care, and trauma-informed support.

6) Social impacts: violence, fear, and instability

When the drug economy becomes the local economy

≥32% of global homicides

are linked to organised crime and gangs (UNODC estimate).

Drug trafficking is a major driver in several high-violence contexts.

Protective factors (what reduces harm)

- Legitimate livelihoods + youth opportunities
- Community-led violence interruption and safe reporting
- Trauma-informed services and survivor support
- Anti-corruption and accountable institutions

How communities are affected

- Murder and targeted killings; intimidation of witnesses and journalists
- Forced recruitment of youth; school drop-out and fear of public spaces
- Gendered violence and sexual exploitation
- Corruption erodes trust in police, courts, and public services
- Displacement and humanitarian strain in “contested” areas

7) Health impacts: addiction, overdose, and disease

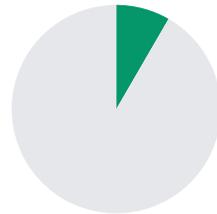
Drug abuse is a health issue — and a preventable cause of death

Key health facts

~600,000 deaths attributable to drug use in 2019 (global).

- Close to 80% of these deaths are related to opioids.
- Naloxone distribution + training can reduce overdose deaths.
- Treatment and harm reduction reduce HIV/hepatitis transmission linked to injecting.
- Stigma and fear of punishment reduce help-seeking — especially for youth.

Treatment gap (illustrative)



~1 in 12
people with
drug-use disorders
received treatment
(2023)



8) Future generations: what's at stake

Prevention is protection



Why children and youth are vulnerable

- Exposure to violence and trauma increases risk of substance use.
- Recruitment by criminal groups can begin in early adolescence.
- Online markets lower barriers (anonymity, delivery, social media).
- Stigma prevents families from seeking help early.

What strengthens resilience

- Safe schools + mentoring + after-school opportunities
- Family support and mental health services
- Skills: coping, refusal, media literacy, conflict resolution
- Youth jobs and pathways away from criminal economies

9) Humanitarian dilemmas

Balancing safety, health, and rights

Common “either/or” traps

Only enforcement

- Mass incarceration
- Stigma and fear
- Displacement of routes
- Community trust collapses

Only “look away”

- Criminal governance grows
- Exploitation increases
- Violence becomes normal
- Public services are captured

Balanced approach (recommended)

- Target the networks: corruption, money flows, violence “brokers” (not only low-level users).
- Invest in health: treatment, overdose prevention, and stigma reduction.
- Invest in livelihoods: alternative development and legal income for farmers and at-risk youth.
- Human rights safeguards: protect due process and victim services.



10) What works (evidence-informed)

A practical menu for NGOs and partners

Prevention

- Life skills and mental health support
- Keep kids in school; mentoring
- Family strengthening programmes

Treatment

- Accessible, affordable care
- Medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder
- Recovery support & reintegration

Harm reduction

- Naloxone access + training
- Sterile injecting equipment & safe disposal
- Drug checking and outreach where legal

Safety & justice

- Focus on violent actors and corruption
- Protect witnesses and journalists
- Community-police trust building

Financial disruption

- Anti-money-laundering capacity
- Transparency in procurement & ports
- Public-private reporting channels

Development

- Alternative livelihoods in crop areas
- Youth jobs and social protection
- Services in fragile/remote areas

Tip for speakers: Emphasize “health-first, rights-respecting, and corruption-resistant” approaches.

Vision 2035+: communities that outgrow the drug economy

- Healthy: addiction is treated early, and overdose deaths are rare.
- Safe: violence and coercion are interrupted; youth are protected online and offline.
- Fair: survivors of exploitation receive justice and long-term support.
- Resilient: legal livelihoods outcompete illicit profits (including in crop areas).
- Connected: countries cooperate on data, finance, and prevention — with communities at the center.

A future worth fighting for = prevention + treatment + justice + development

11) Call to action

What different actors can do — starting now

Individuals & families

- Learn signs of risky use
- Talk early, without stigma
- Store meds safely; dispose properly
- Know local help resources

Schools & youth orgs

- Life skills + mental health
- Safe reporting of coercion
- Digital safety & media literacy
- Mentoring and activities

NGOs & community leaders

- Outreach and referral pathways
- Support survivors of trafficking
- Work with trusted messengers
- Advocate for evidence-based policies

Health systems

- Low-barrier treatment access
- Overdose prevention (naloxone)
- Trauma-informed care
- Data to spot hotspots early

Justice & governance

- Anti-corruption measures
- Protect witnesses/journalists
- Target violent networks
- Financial investigations (AML)

Private sector & tech

- Detect and remove illicit sales
- Report suspicious transactions
- Secure logistics chains
- Responsible platform design

12) Resources & references

Start here for credible information

Core references (global)

- UNODC – World Drug Report (latest edition + data): unodc.org/wdr
- WHO – Opioid overdose fact sheet and prevention tools: [who.int](https://www.who.int)
- Europol – EU Serious & Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA 2025): europol.europa.eu
- UN – Transnational organised crime overview: un.org

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