

DRUG TRAFFICKING IN THE SAHEL

TOCTA
Sahel

Transnational Organized
Crime Threat Assessment



Drug Trafficking in the Sahel

**Transnational Organized Crime
Threat Assessment – Sahel**



Acknowledgements

This report is part of a Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment (TOCTA) on the Sahel. It was prepared by the UNODC Research and Trend Analysis Branch (RAB) and the UNODC Regional Office for West and Central Africa (ROSEN), under the supervision of Angela Me (Chief, RAB) and Amado Philip de Andrés (Regional Representative, ROSEN), and the coordination of François Patuel (Head of the Research and Awareness Unit, ROSEN). The project was funded by the Federal Republic of Germany.

Content overview

Amado Philip de Andrés, Angela Me

Research, analysis and drafting

François Patuel, Cecilia Rossa

Data management

Hernan Epstein, Natalia Ivanova, Francesca Massanello, Andrea Oterová, Umidjon Rakhmonberdiev, Markus Schwabe

Mapping

Coen Bussink, Cecilia Rossa, Irina Tsoy

Editing

Jonathan Gibbons

Graphic design and production

Martina Hejduk, Suzanne Kunnen, Maria Moser

Administrative support

Arame Barry, Iulia Lazar

Contributions

The preparation of this report would not have been possible without the data and information reported by Member States to UNODC and other international organizations. UNODC is particularly grateful to government and law enforcement officials, as well as health practitioners, contacted during research undertaken in the Sahel, in particular the drugs data focal points.

The TOCTA Sahel team would also like to extend heartfelt thanks to all those who agreed to be interviewed. Their generosity, time and willingness contributed greatly to this research. Invaluable research support, input and guidance were received from Julie Astoul, Chloé Carpentier, Mame Seyni Dieye Cisse, Cristina Iampieri, Vanessa Fleming, Theodore Leggett, Kameldy Neldjingaye, Kamran Niaz, Matthieu Pellerin, Thomas Pietschmann, Anna Quarrey, Elena Rincón-Romero Pichon and Anselme Sanou, including for data-collection and peer-reviews.

Disclaimer

This report has not been formally edited. The contents of this publication can in no way reflect the views or policies of UNODC or contributory organizations, nor do they imply any endorsement. The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of UNODC concerning the legal status of any country, territory or city or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit purposes without special permission from the copyright holder, provide acknowledgement of the source is made. UNODC would appreciate a copy of any publication that uses this publication as a source.

Contents

6

Key takeaways

11

Nature of the market

Cocaine

Cannabis resin

Pharmaceutical opioids

26

Main actors involved in drug trafficking

27

Principle enablers of drug trafficking

Corruption

Money-laundering

30

Impact of drug trafficking in the Sahel countries

33

Conclusions and policy implications

Key takeaways

► Cocaine, cannabis resin and pharmaceutical opioids are the internationally trafficked drugs most seized in the Sahel. In terms of quantity, cannabis herb is actually the most commonly seized drug in the Sahel countries, but it seems to be produced locally and trafficked mostly for local consumption. Cannabis is also the principal substance for which people seek treatment in the region.

► The geographical location of West Africa renders it a natural stopover point for cocaine produced in South America en route to Europe, one of the largest consumer markets for cocaine after North America. In a context of increasing cocaine production in South America and increasing demand for the drug in Europe, flows of cocaine trafficked through West Africa have intensified. The re-emergence of large cocaine seizures since 2019 suggests a surge in large shipments of the drug to the coastal countries of West Africa, with 9.5 tons being seized in Cabo Verde.

► Although the majority of the cocaine reaching West Africa typically continues northwards towards North Africa and Europe via maritime routes along the African coast, an increasing number of significant cocaine seizures involving Sahel countries has provided evidence of large-scale cocaine trafficking through the region. From an average of 13 kg per year in the period 2015–2020, the quantity of cocaine seized in the Sahel countries increased to 41 kg in 2021 and 1,466 kg in 2022, with the bulk reported by Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. Annual estimates were not available for 2023, but at the time of writing over 2.3 tons of cocaine had already been seized in Mauritania in 2023.

► Cannabis resin is the second most seized drug in the Sahel countries after cannabis herb, with 24.8 tons seized in the period 2021–2022. Representing over 52.6 per cent of the total quantity of cannabis resin seized in West and Central Africa in the same period, this illustrates the importance of the Sahel route for cannabis resin trafficking. According to data from the Sahel countries, the cannabis resin trafficked in the region generally originates in Morocco, where an increase in cannabis resin production has been reported, reaching an estimated 901 tons in 2022. It is typically destined for countries in Western Europe and North Africa.

► Aside from the direct trafficking route between Spain and Morocco, cannabis resin is typically trafficked overland from Morocco to Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, the Niger and Chad, then onwards to Algeria, Libya and Egypt. Since 2020, the Sahel countries have reported that cannabis resin is being transported by sea via an alternative maritime route, mostly from Morocco down the coast of West Africa to ports on the Gulf of Guinea, in Benin and Togo in particular, before being transported north to the Niger and then on to North Africa. The reconfiguration of the cannabis resin trafficking routes in West Africa is likely to have an effect on the drug distribution networks

operating between North Africa, the Gulf of Guinea and the Sahel. For example, Moroccan drug traffickers are likely to become less reliant on Malian organized crime groups, while traffickers in the Gulf of Guinea are likely to be increasingly exposed to cannabis resin, enabling them to diversify their trade and the markets to which they have access.

► Between 2011 and 2021, the annual prevalence of opioid use (including opiates) increased from 0.33 to 1.24 per cent in Africa. The non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids appears to have grown considerably, from just two countries (the Niger and Togo) citing tramadol as the principal drug of concern by people entering drug treatment in 2017, to five countries (Burkina Faso, Liberia, Mali, the Niger and Sierra Leone) in 2019. Indeed, the non-medical use of tramadol remains a threat in North, West and Central Africa in particular. Tramadol is the most used opioid for non-medical purposes in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Moreover, in 2022, Tramadol was the second most common drug for which female patients sought treatment in Mali and Mauritania.

Historically, South Asia, primarily India, was one of the main sources of tramadol. With its major commercial seaports and roads to and through the Sahel countries, West Africa has emerged as a principal destination for pharmaceutical opioids, in particular tramadol, as well as a transit area for other drugs destined to North and Central Africa. Africa accounted for half of the total quantity of pharmaceutical opioids seized worldwide during the five-year period 2017–2021 and for 97 per cent of the total quantity of tramadol seized worldwide in 2021. Some of the tramadol unloaded in West African seaports, primarily located in Benin, Nigeria and Togo, makes its way to the Sahel countries on buses, trucks and motorcycles both along main roads and back roads.

One of the most significant enablers of drug trafficking in the Sahel is corruption, which can include members of the political elite as well as leaders of armed groups and community leaders. Recent seizures, arrests and detentions in the Sahel countries shed light on how drug trafficking is facilitated by a wide range of individuals, such as politicians and members of the security forces and judiciary, including when circumventing controls and avoiding arrest and judicial proceedings.

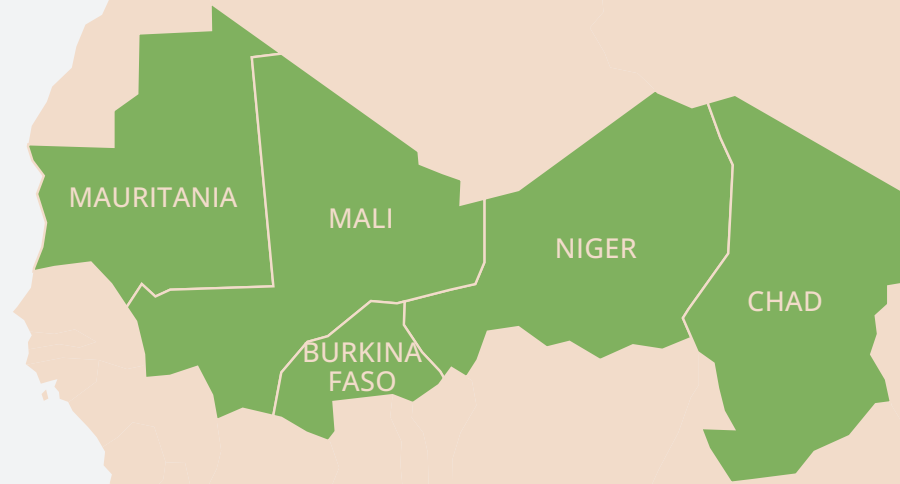
The challenges posed by drug trafficking in the Sahel countries are compounded by the fact that traffickers use the region to launder their criminal proceeds, including through trade-based money-laundering. This practice makes financial transactions more difficult to track while creating additional income opportunity, giving traffickers greater economic leverage and a veneer of legitimacy. Drug traffickers tend to invest their illicit proceeds in growing sectors, including gold and real-estate, relying on West Africa's cash-based informal economy.

Drug traffickers based in the Sahel countries seem to operate independent, fluid networks held together by ties of kinship, including among Arab, Tuareg and Tebu communities. While communities in Northern Mali, the Niger and Chad tend to consider the smuggling of commercial goods and fuel as licit activities, drug trafficking is generally considered illicit and morally reprehensible. That said, the higher commercial value of drugs means that drug trafficking has been used to challenge traditional power structures within and across these communities and led to the emergence of powerful traffickers.

► Although there is overwhelming evidence of the continued involvement of armed groups in drug trafficking across the Sahel countries, there appears to be less evidence of violent extremist armed groups, such as the Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) or the Islamic State-affiliated Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), playing an active role in drug trafficking. The fact that there appears to be limited evidence of the involvement of violent extremist armed groups in drug trafficking in the Sahel countries does not mean that such groups are not involved, and evidence of their involvement may yet emerge. Violent extremist armed groups are also likely to benefit indirectly from drug trafficking, such as through the payment by traffickers of *zakat*, a form of wealth tax imposed by JNIM and ISGS in areas where they operate, or by taxing convoys that cross areas under their control.

► Organized crime and drug trafficking in the Sahel help undermine the stability and development of the region. As in other conflict-affected areas of the world, the drug economy and instability in the Sahel are linked through a vicious cycle in which weak rule of law facilitates the expansion of the drug economy, which can, in turn, provide financial resources for maintaining or expanding the conflict, while undermining the state response. Drug trafficking provides financial resources to armed groups operat-

ing in the Sahel, including Plateforme des mouvements du 14 juin 2014 d'Alger (Plateforme) and Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) in Mali, enabling them to sustain their involvement in conflict, in particular through the purchase of weapons. Competition over drug trafficking routes in the Sahel and interceptions of drug convoys by competing armed groups have led to violent clashes and reprisals, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries among those groups, perpetuating the cycle of violence. Corruption and the perception that drug traffickers, including members of armed groups and individuals under sanctions by the United Nations Security Council, carry out their criminal activities with relative impunity, undermine the credibility and legitimacy of state institutions, as well as electoral processes. Drug trafficking also undermines economic development in the Sahel countries and has a direct and growing impact on people's health as local drug markets expand.



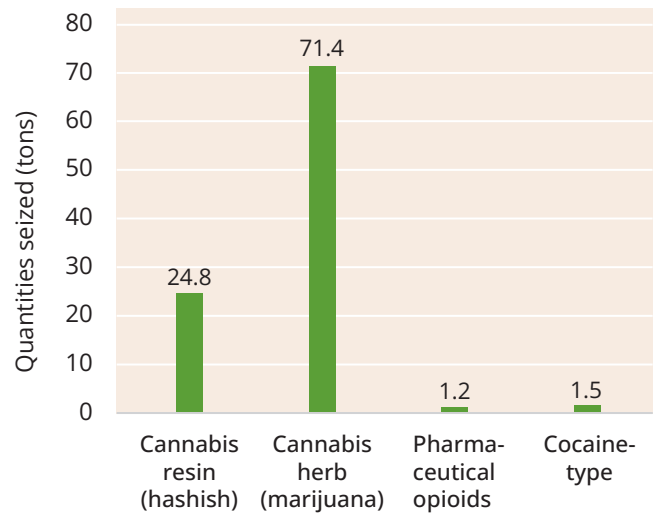
For the purpose of this report, "Sahel countries" refers to Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger.

Drug Trafficking in the Sahel

Nature of the market

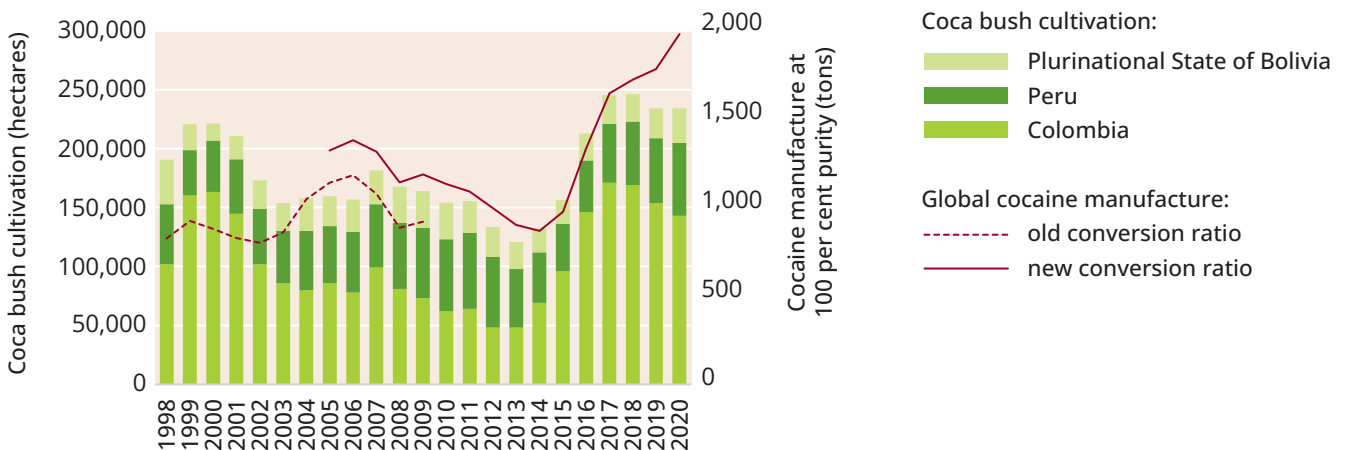
The focus of this report is on trafficking in cocaine, cannabis resin and pharmaceutical opioids in the Sahel countries.¹ In terms of quantity, cannabis herb is actually the most commonly seized drug in the Sahel countries, with the largest annual seizures of the drug in 2021 being reported by Mali (18 tons), Burkina Faso (12 tons) and the Niger (5 tons).² However, cannabis herb seems to be produced locally and trafficked mostly for local consumption, whereas cocaine, cannabis resin and pharmaceutical opioids are the internationally trafficked drugs most seized in the Sahel (figure 1).³ Cocaine and cannabis resin pose specific threats owing to their trafficking patterns, which include the involvement of armed groups, while pharmaceutical opioids raise specific public health concerns. That said, cannabis is the principal substance for which people seek treatment in the region.⁴

FIG 1. Drug seizures in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger, 2021–2022



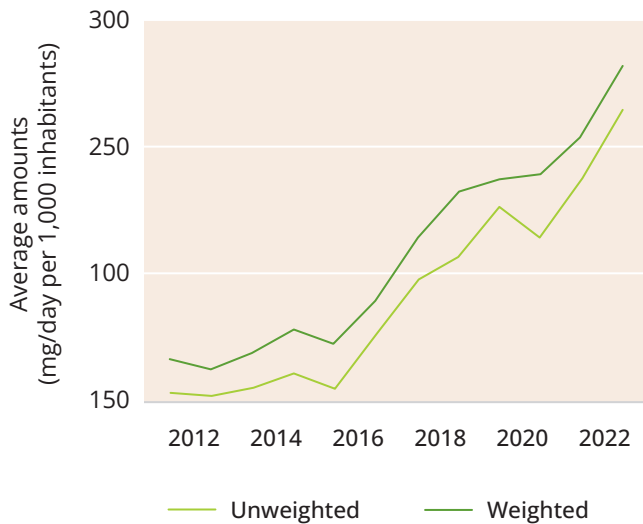
Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2021 and 2022 from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger. Mauritania is excluded from this analysis as sufficient data were unavailable.

FIG 2. Global coca bush cultivation and cocaine manufacture, 1998–2020



Sources: UNODC calculations based on UNODC data and data from the respective Governments, and coca bush cultivation surveys carried out in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru in 2020 and previous years; and United States of America, Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, various years. See the methodological annex of the *World Drug Report 2023* for more information on the “old” and “new” conversion rates.

FIG 3. Illustration of the increase in cocaine use in Europe based on cocaine metabolite found in wastewater, 118 cities in Western, Central and South-Eastern Europe, 2011–2022



Source: UNODC calculations based on wastewater data provided by the Sewage Analysis CORe group Europe.

Note: Average quantity of benzoylecgonine found in wastewater in 118 cities in 25 countries, unweighted and weighted by the population of the sites. The calculation includes estimates for missing data based on an assumption of gradual increase or decrease in years in which no analysis took place in a city and there was no change since the latest available data. Owing to the change in the number of cities and sites, the information presented here is not comparable with that presented in the previous editions of the World Drug Report.

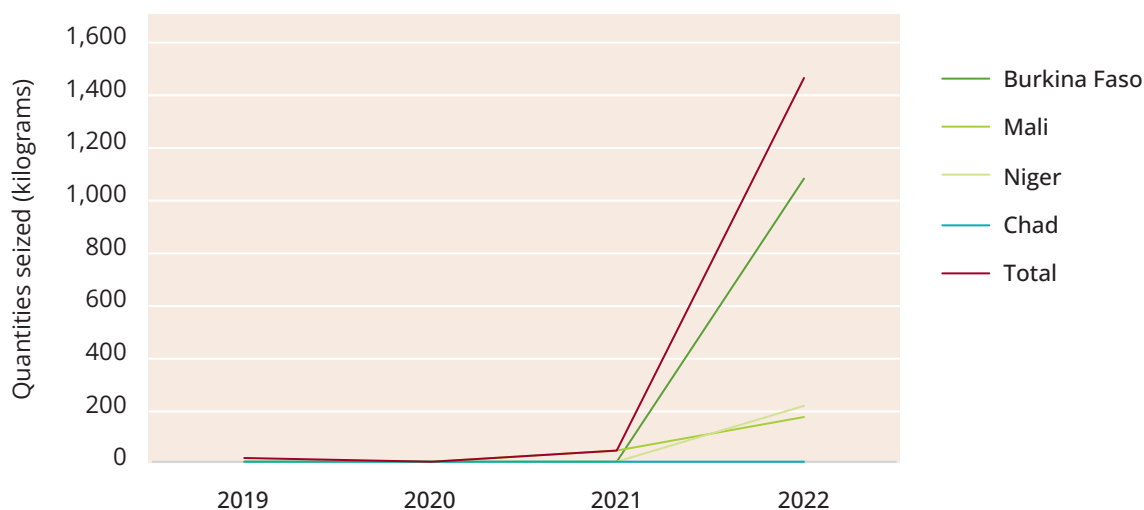
Cocaine

Its relative proximity to South America renders West Africa a natural stopover point for cocaine produced in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru en route to Europe, one of the largest consumer markets for the drug after North America. At roughly 2,850 km, the shortest distance between the South American and African landmasses lies between the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte and the Atlantic coast south of the Casamance River, close to the border between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal.⁵

In a context of increasing cocaine production in South America (figure 2) and increasing demand for the drug in Europe (figure 3), flows of cocaine trafficked through West Africa have intensified (figure 4). The re-emergence of large cocaine seizures since 2019 suggests a surge in large shipments of the drug. Some of the largest individual seizures of cocaine have been made in, or in the vicinity of, Cabo Verde, where 9.5 tons were seized in February 2019, 2.3 tons in August of the same year and 5.7 tons in April 2022.⁶ Six tons were also seized in Côte d'Ivoire in March 2021, 4.6 tons off the coast of Sierra Leone in November 2022 and 3 tons in the Gambia in January 2021.⁷

The majority of the cocaine that reaches West Africa is typically trafficked northwards towards North Africa and Europe via maritime routes along the African coast.⁸ However, data on seizures made in or bound for Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger indicate that cocaine continues to be trafficked along land routes through the Sahel towards Algeria and Libya.⁹

FIG 4. Trends in cocaine seizures in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger, 2019–2022



Sources: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2019, 2021 and 2022 from Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Chad, and government data for 2019, 2020 and 2021 from Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Chad. Mauritania is excluded from this analysis as sufficient data were unavailable. The data on cocaine seizures include marginal seizures of “crack” cocaine.

BRIEF HISTORY OF COCAINE TRAFFICKING THROUGH WEST AFRICA SINCE THE 2000s

Prior to the mid-2000s, cocaine does not appear to have been widely trafficked through the African continent. Between 2005 and 2008, however, a series of significant cocaine seizures were made in, or en route to, West Africa, many involving multiple tons of the drug.^a

There was evidence of high-level political involvement in the cocaine trade in the region and it became apparent that conflict over access to drug-generated revenues had the potential to destabilize some West African countries.^b In 2010, both the chief of staff of the air force and of the navy of Guinea Bissau were named as drug kingpins by the United States of America.^c The navy chief of staff, José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto, was later indicted,^d convicted and imprisoned for drug trafficking in the United States.^e In 2013, the chief of staff of the armed forces was also indicted for drug trafficking by the United States, and a reward of 5 million United States dollars (\$) was offered for information leading to his arrest.^f

Guinea-Bissau is not the only country in which there was high-level political involvement in the cocaine flow. In Guinea, after the death of President Lansana Conté in 2008, his son was named a drug kingpin by the United States and many members of his family were implicated in drug trafficking.^g The disappearance of large quantities of cocaine following the seizure of the vessel MV Benjamin in 2006 caused a national scandal in Ghana that continues to receive media attention today.^h Elsewhere in the region, in Mauritania, close relatives of a former president were found to have been involved in several drug trafficking cases.ⁱ

Although the magnitude of the cocaine flow through West Africa that transited the Sahel is unknown, the existence of the flow can be seen in the number of air couriers from Mali detected in Europe. Between January 2006 and May 2008, at least 254 kg of cocaine were

seized in 177 interdictions from flights departing Mali.^j In addition to these small seizures, the media reported that larger quantities of cocaine were being transhipped through the Sahel and the Sahara and that this was providing funding to terrorist groups such as the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC), later Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb,^k although very little evidence of this trade emerged. In 2009, a Boeing 727 airliner suspected of carrying cocaine crashed in the desert outside Gao, Mali. The contents of the plane were never definitively publicly determined, but similar decommissioned commercial aircraft carrying large loads of cocaine had been seized previously.^l This incident involved individuals close to armed groups signatory to the Peace Agreement in Mali, most notably the Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad (MAA),^m although the link between the incident and terrorist groups was never made clear.ⁿ

a UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment* (Vienna, 2013), pp. 9–17.

b *Ibid.*, p. 9.

c United States Department of the Treasury, "Treasury designates two narcotics traffickers in Guinea-Bissau treasury targets emerging West African narcotics transit route", Press release, 8 April 2010.

d United States District Court, Southern District of New York, United States of America v. Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchuto, Papis Djeme, and Tchamy Yala, S1 12 CR. 972, 2015.

e Reuters, "Guinea Bissau's ex-navy chief sentenced in prison in U.S. drug case", 4 October 2016.

f United States Department of State, "Antonio Indjai – new target", 19 August 2021.

g United States Department of the Treasury, "Kingpin Act designations", 6 January 2010.

h Ghanaweb, "MV Benjamin: We under-declared parcels of cocaine arrested – ex-police detective", 16 November 2021.

i West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD), "Challenging the myth of the drug-terror nexus in the Sahel", WACD background paper, No. 4 (2013), p. 8.

j UNODC, *Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat in West Africa* (Vienna, 2008), p. 15.

k Reuters, "Al Qaeda linked to rogue aviation network", 13 January 2010.

l UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment* (Vienna, 2013), p. 13.

m United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para 58.

n WACD, "Challenging the myth of the drug-terror nexus in the Sahel", WACD background paper, No. 4 (2013); Erik Alda and Joseph L. Sala, "Links between terrorism, organized crime and crime: the case of the Sahel region", *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, vol. 3, No. 1 (September 2014).

Cocaine trafficking through the Sahel

Recently, a number of significant cocaine seizures involving the Sahel countries have provided evidence of increasing large-scale cocaine trafficking through the region (figure 4 and box on significant cocaine seizures). From an average of 13 kg per year in the period 2015–2020, the quantity of cocaine seized in the Sahel countries increased to 41 kg in 2021 and 1,466 kg in 2022,

with the bulk reported by Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.¹⁰ Although annual estimates were not available for 2023, at the time of writing over 2.3 tons of cocaine had already been seized in Mauritania in 2023.¹¹ Moreover, other countries in West Africa and in South America have reported seizures of cocaine bound for the Sahel.¹²

SIGNIFICANT COCAINE SEIZURES IN, TO OR FROM SAHEL COUNTRIES, 2015–2023 (in reverse chronological order)

- ▶ On 18 June 2023, Mauritania seized 2.3 tons of cocaine hidden in a ship intercepted off the country's coast. Several Mauritians and people of other nationalities were arrested.^a
- ▶ In March 2023, Côte d'Ivoire seized 21 kg of cocaine concealed in food packages in a shipping agency in Abidjan. The investigation revealed that the drugs came from Kidal in Northern Mali and were destined to France. Malian and Franco-Malian nationals were arrested in relation to the case.^b
- ▶ In December 2022, Senegal seized 25 kg of cocaine in a pick-up truck in Kaolack with licence plates from Guinea and Mali.^c
- ▶ In October 2022, 300 kg of cocaine were seized in a refrigerated truck in Kidira, Senegal, on the border with Mali.^d
- ▶ In September 2022, 373 kg of cocaine were seized in Manga, Burkina Faso, a town between the capital, Ouagadougou, and the border with Ghana.^e
- ▶ Also in September 2022, the mobile unit of the customs office in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, seized 596 kg of cocaine on the road between Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso. According to the subsequent investigation, the drugs were concealed in the floor of a vehicle en route from Guinea to the Niger. A national from the Niger was arrested in relation to the case.^f
- ▶ In August 2022, 160 kg of cocaine were seized in Kourémalé, a border station between Guinea and Mali. The drugs were concealed in special compartments in a vehicle expressly fitted for the purpose.^g
- ▶ In May 2022, 115 kg of cocaine hidden in a vehicle were seized in Burkina Faso, on the main road linking the south-western city of Bobo-Dioulasso to Ouagadougou. The vehicle had been loaded in Sierra Leone and driven through Guinea and Mali before crossing into Burkina Faso, with its final destination being Ghana.^h
- ▶ In January 2022, 215 kg of cocaine were seized in the official vehicle of the Mayor of Fachi, a remote settlement north-east of Agadez, the Niger, en route from Mali to Libya.ⁱ
- ▶ In November 2021, 20 kg of cocaine were seized at Kourémalé, the border station between Guinea and Mali, from a Malian national attempting to transport the drugs to Mali.^j
- ▶ On 7 November 2021, Malian law enforcement agencies seized 34 kg of cocaine concealed in two handbags at Modibo Keita Senou international airport, Bamako. A passenger of dual Malian and Guinean nationality was arrested. The drugs were destined for France.^k
- ▶ On 24 February 2021, more than 1 ton of cocaine was seized in Cote d'Ivoire, but a Malian suspect in the case escaped to Mali.^l An interview conducted by UNODC with a Malian drug enforcement official confirmed that the destination of the shipment was Mali.^m
- ▶ In December 2019, authorities in the port of Cotonou, Benin, seized 755 kg of cocaine in a container en route from Brazil to the Niger via Burkina Faso.ⁿ It appears that the final destination of the drugs may not have been the Sahel countries, however. According to a drug enforcement official from Benin working on the case,

In principle, a surge in drug seizures can reflect changes in both supply and law enforcement interventions, but a couple of elements suggest that the recent increase in cocaine seizures is a clear sign of increased cocaine trafficking through the Sahel. Cocaine seizures made outside the region with Sahelian countries as countries of origin or destination have increased at the same time as the seizures made within the region, where the same increasing pattern could be observed in more

than one country. These common trends together with the global increase in cocaine supply point to an important change in cocaine trafficking through the Sahel rather than a sudden change in law enforcement capacity across the Sahel countries. Now that this new trafficking pattern has been recognized, however, action by law enforcement on cocaine trafficking through Africa could be more targeted.

subsequent investigations led to the arrest of a Dutch national who was deported from Nigeria to Benin and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. It is highly likely that the cocaine was to be stored in Benin and then re-exported to the Kingdom of the Netherlands.^o

- 】 In May of 2019, the United Nations Panel of Experts on Mali reported that 1 ton of cocaine had been flown from Bamako to Gao in a military aircraft and then seized in Tabankort, further north in the country.^p
- 】 In April 2019, Senegalese authorities seized 72 kg of cocaine in a car driven by a Malian man en route from Guinea-Bissau to Bamako, Mali.^q
- 】 In March 2019, a shipment of 789 kg was seized in Guinea-Bissau from the false bottom of a truck loaded with frozen fish.^r The truck had been purchased by a Malian national and the load was intended to be trafficked through Mali. This seizure led to the arrest of a Malian national who held a pass from the National Assembly of the Niger.^s According to the Panel of Experts on Mali, the Malian national was associated with the network of a major Malian drug trafficker who was under United Nations sanctions for having supported the terrorist group Al-Mourabitoun and who was alleged to have been in Guinea-Bissau just before the seizure.^t
- 】 In June 2018, 83 kg of cocaine were seized in the port of Lomé, Togo, en route from Brazil and to Burkina Faso.^u
- 】 In March 2015, almost 6 tons of cocaine were seized in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, which were to be exported to Burkina Faso via the port of Tema, Ghana, concealed in 840 sacks of fertilizer.^v An Ecuadorian, believed to be the mastermind behind the scheme, was arrested in

Bolivia and two Ghanaian businessmen were arrested in Ghana, including a port official who also managed an import company, according to media sources.^w

a UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.

b Ibid.

c Ibid.

d Ministère des Finances et du Budget, "Communiqué de presse relatif au 300 kg de cocaïne saisis par la Douane de Kidira", 31 October 2022.

e UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.

f Ibid.

g Ibid.

h Ibid.

i UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform; see also Agence Nigérienne de Presse, "Niger : Plus de 200 kg de cocaïne, d'une valeur de 11 milliards de FCFA, saisis dans le véhicule de fonction du Maire de Fachi (Bilma/région d'Agadez)", 5 January 2022.

j UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.

k Ibid.

l UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, annex XIII.

m Interview with a drug law enforcement official, Bamako, Mali, October 2021.

n UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.

o UNODC interview with a drug law enforcement official, September 2023.

p UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 72.

q Ibid., para. 171.

r UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.

s UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and extended pursuant to resolution 2432 (2018), S/2019/636, 7 August 2019, paras. 109–111.

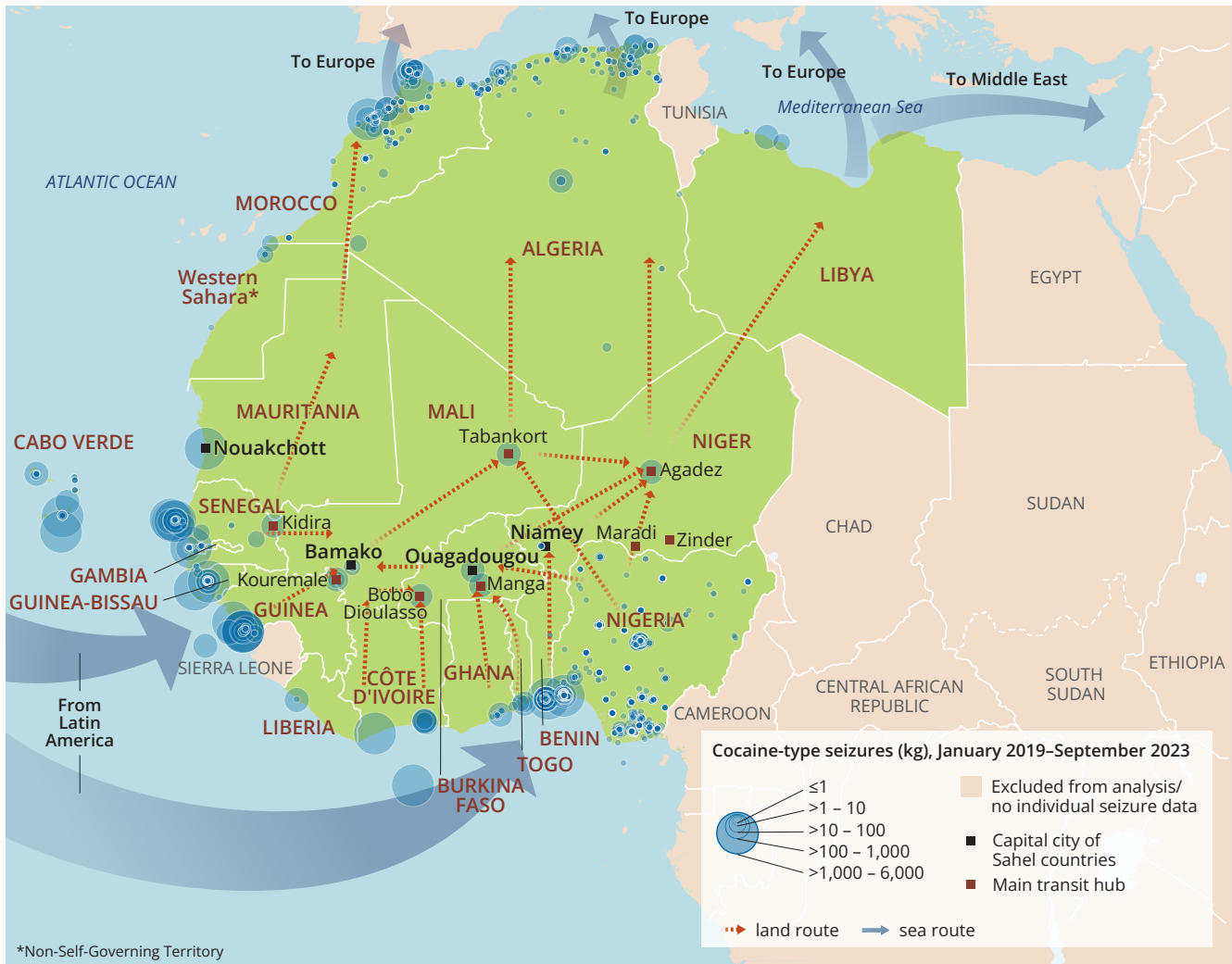
t Ibid., para. 110.

u UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.

v Ibid.

w Reuters, "Two Ghanaians in court over six tonne cocaine bust", 15 April 2015.

MAP 1. Main cocaine trafficking routes to and from the Sahel countries and territories with individual cocaine seizures in West and Central Africa, January 2019–September 2023



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Sources: UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform; annual report questionnaire; and interviews with law enforcement officials.

In addition, there have been several significant seizures in which nationals of the Sahel countries have been detected trafficking drugs in other West African countries. In January 2021, for example, the anti-drug authority of the Gambia made a seizure of almost 3 tons of cocaine from a sea container originating in Ecuador, in which a person bearing a Malian passport was implicated.¹³ Moreover, on 2 September 2019, the Government of Guinea-Bissau seized 1,947 kg of cocaine hidden in rice sacks and arrested several suspects, including a Malian national.¹⁴

As mentioned in the box on significant cocaine seizures, cocaine is also trafficked by air through the Sahel countries or with the involvement of nationals of those countries. Between January 2017 and September 2023, 12 interceptions totalling over 100 kg of cocaine carried by couriers from the Sahel countries were made in European airports.¹⁵ Nine of them involved Malian nationals, six of whom were in transit from Bamako airport.¹⁶ Although the majority of the seizures were of less than 6 kg, on 1 October 2021, 39 kg of cocaine were seized from a passenger of Franco-Malian nationality at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, who had taken a direct flight from Bamako, Mali, with the drugs in his hand luggage.¹⁷ Prior to that, on 4 June 2019, 46 kg of cocaine were seized at Orly airport, also in Paris, from the luggage of a French passenger en route from Bamako.¹⁸

Cocaine seizures have also been reported at the principal international airports in the Sahel countries. Since 2018, five cocaine seizures totalling over 40 kg have been reported at the airports of Bamako (Mali), Niamey (Niger) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso),¹⁹ including 34 kg of cocaine found on 5 November 2021 at Bamako Airport in the hand-luggage of a drug courier of dual Malian and Guinean nationality who was travelling to France.²⁰

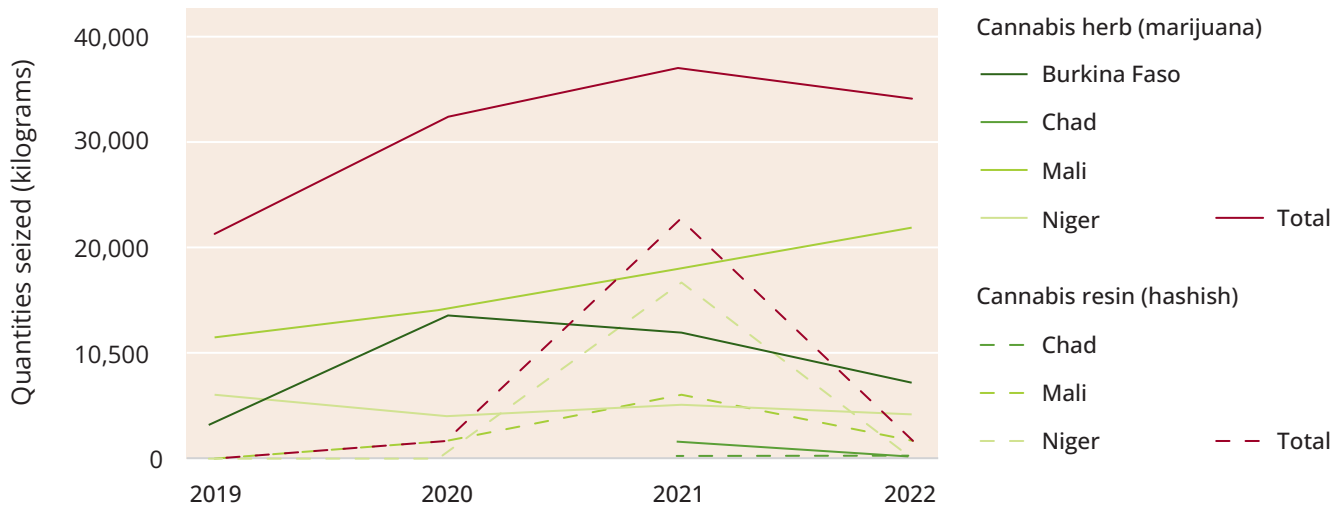
Destination of cocaine trafficked through the Sahel

Most of the cocaine that enters the Sahel countries is moved overland to countries in North Africa, including, Algeria, Libya and Morocco, en route to its final destination markets, mostly in Europe, although Algeria has reported a few cases in which the final destination was Oceania (Australia and New Zealand).²¹ Although most of the cocaine trafficked through Morocco arrives directly by sea,²² the Moroccan authorities estimated that 23 per cent of the cocaine seized in 2021 had entered the country by land.²³ Algeria has also made a number of significant recent cocaine seizures at its ports, indi-

cating that cocaine is mainly trafficked into the country by sea. The Algerian Government has reported that some cocaine transits Nigeria, Mali and the Niger before entering Algeria on the way to Europe.²⁴ In 2021, according to official Algerian government reports, just 4.5 per cent of the cocaine seized had entered Algeria by land (roughly 23 kg).²⁵

The final destination markets themselves are not always clear, however, as some of those identified are simply further transit markets for onward cocaine shipments. Based on responses to the annual report questionnaire over the period 2020–2021, the principal final destination of cocaine seized in the Sahel countries would have been France. Similarly, the main European destination country identified based on individual cocaine seizures made in the Sahel countries over the period 2020–October 2023 was France, followed by Belgium, while Libya seems to have been the main destination country within Africa.²⁶

From a different perspective, countries in Western Europe report that the main cocaine seizures reaching their territory from Africa involve countries in North Africa, although small quantities of cocaine seized en route from Senegal have been reported by the United Kingdom and Belgium, en route from Mali by France, Portugal and Spain, and en route from Burkina Faso by Italy.²⁷

FIG 5. Trends in cannabis seizures in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger, 2019–2022

Sources: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2019, 2021 and 2022 from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger; and government data for 2019, 2020 and 2021 from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger. Mauritania is excluded from this analysis as sufficient data were unavailable.

Cannabis resin

With 24.8 tons seized in the period 2021–2022 (figure 5) – far more than in previous years – cannabis resin is the drug most seized in the Sahel countries after cannabis herb. Representing over 52.6 per cent of the total quantity of cannabis resin seized in West and Central Africa in the same period, this illustrates the importance of the Sahel route for cannabis resin trafficking (figure 6).

Four of the Sahel countries report that the origin of the cannabis resin trafficked in the Sahel is primarily Morocco, where an increase in cannabis resin production has been reported, reaching an estimated 901 tons in 2022.^{28, 29} Cannabis resin trafficked in the Sahel is principally destined for countries in Western Europe and North Africa.³⁰ Indeed, according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), European Union countries alone seized 816 tons of cannabis resin in 2020, with Spain reporting the seizure of over 461 tons.³¹

Cannabis resin trafficking overland

In terms of trafficking routes, aside from being trafficked directly from Morocco to Spain, cannabis resin is typically trafficked overland from Morocco to Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, the Niger and Chad, then onwards to Algeria, Libya and Egypt.³²

The following major seizures recorded in recent years are illustrative of the cannabis resin trafficking route through the Sahel:

Morocco and Western Sahara*

- On 10 April 2019, Moroccan law enforcement agencies seized almost 12 tons of cannabis resin in Guerguerat. The drugs were being transported in a truck and hidden in boxes containing plastic plates. The freight was destined to Mali and the United Nations Panel of Experts on Mali documented the involvement of the network of a major Malian drug trafficker who was under United Nations sanctions at the time.³³ In 2020, the Gendarmerie Royale continued to make other large seizures of cannabis resin in Guerguerat, including 8.8 tons on 24 December, 6.3 tons on 15 May and 7 tons on 3 March.³⁴
- Media outlets have also reported the seizure of cannabis resin in Gueltat Zelmour, including 3.7 tons in January 2019.³⁵

Mauritania

- An investigation by the National Police Force of Mauritania into a trafficking network led to the seizure of 357 kg of cannabis resin on 21 June and 752 kg on 23 June 2021 in Nouakchott.³⁶

* Western Sahara has been on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories since 1963.

- The Mauritanian armed forces regularly intercept drug convoys on the border with Mali, such as an armed convoy of three pick-up vehicles carrying 2.5 tons of cannabis resin on 10 April 2020.³⁷

Mali

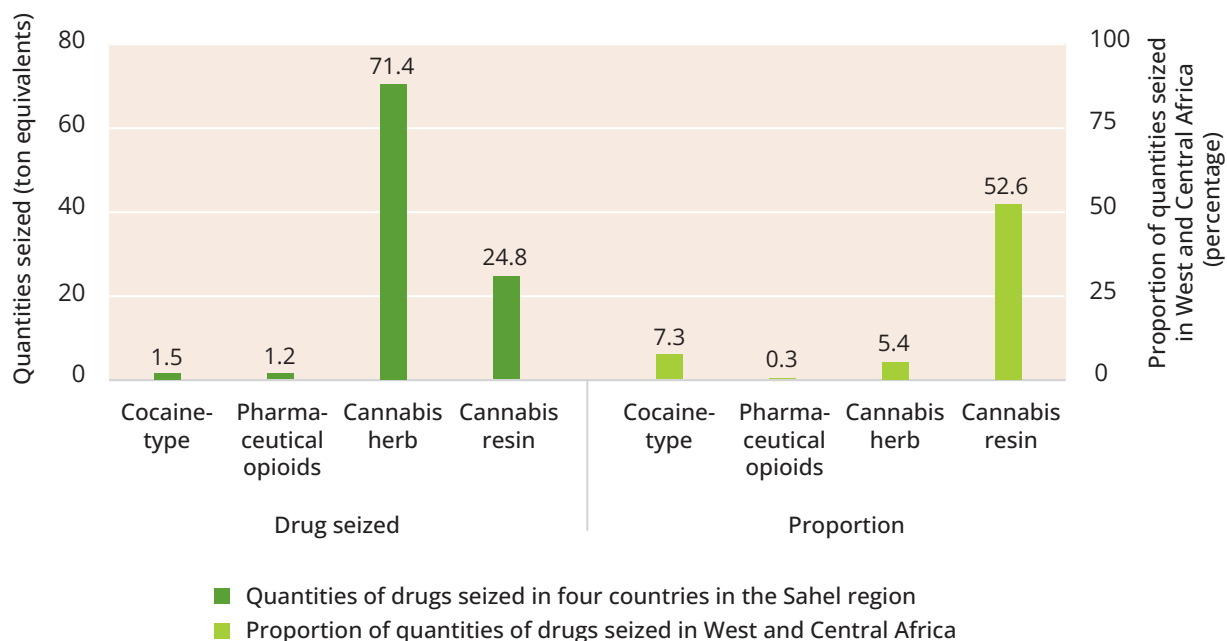
- On 5 November 2021, the National Police Force of Mali seized 400 kg of cannabis resin concealed in plastic wrapping in a vehicle in the capital, Bamako. Two men were arrested in relation to this seizure.³⁸
- On 4 May 2021, Malian customs officials seized roughly 3.7 tons of cannabis resin in a warehouse in Bamako. The drugs were packaged in layers of cellophane and plastic film and concealed in rice bags.³⁹

- On 4 December 2020, the Malian police seized 10,800 bricks of cannabis resin, weighing an estimated 1 ton, hidden in a truck carrying charcoal en route to Timbuktu.⁴⁰ According to the Panel of Experts on Mali, the drugs seized were part of a larger 3-ton shipment involving a major drug trafficker from the Timbuktu region.⁴¹

The Niger

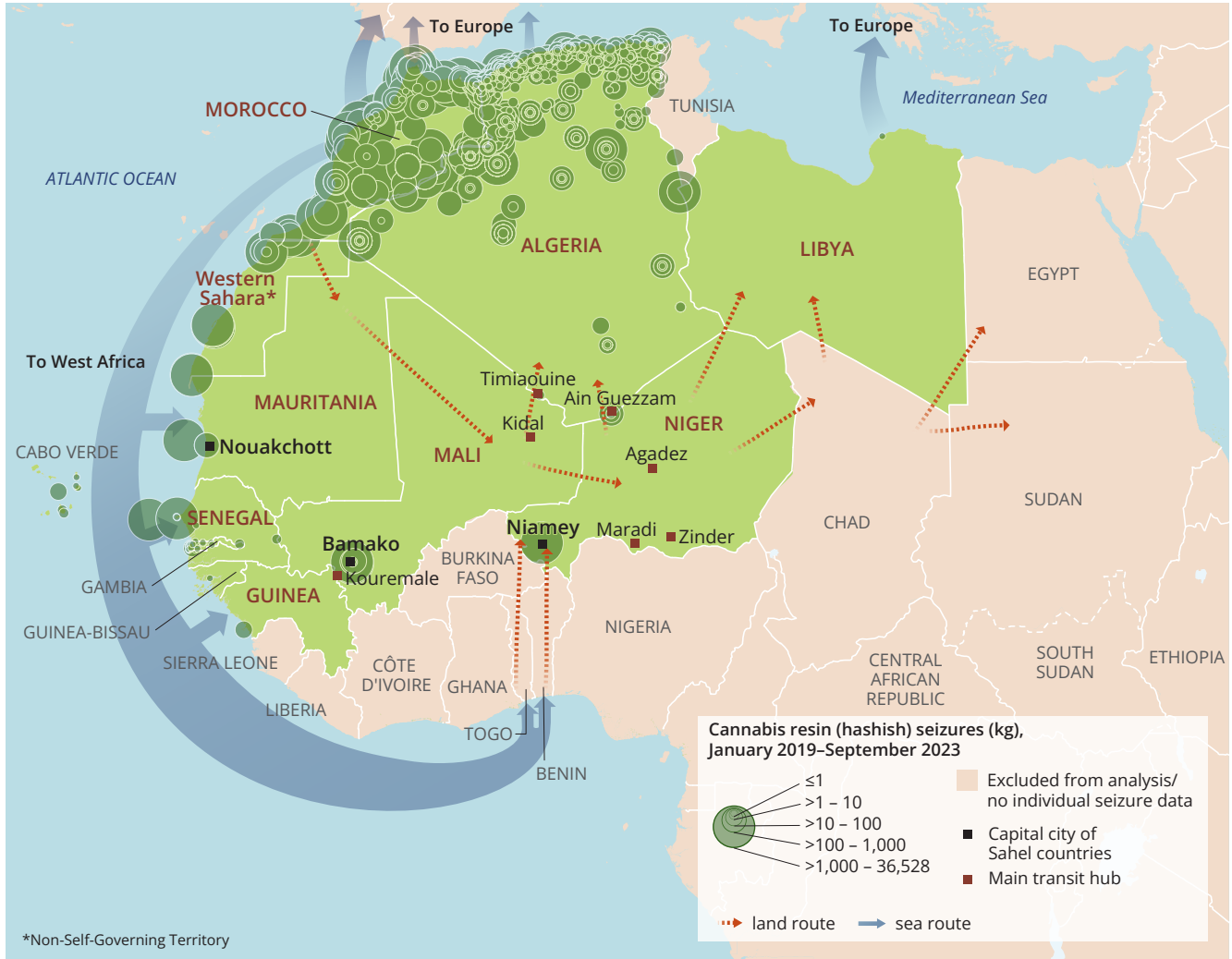
- On 11 June 2018, 2.5 tons of cannabis resin were seized in a garage in a suburb of Niamey.⁴² Originating in Morocco, the drugs had transited Mauritania, Mali and Burkina Faso before reaching the Niger. According to the Panel of Experts on Mali, they were part of a larger shipment of 10 tons destined for Libya.⁴³

FIG 6. Drug seizures in four of the Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, the Niger and Chad) and the proportion they represent of the overall quantities of drugs seized in West and Central Africa, 2021 and 2022



Sources: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2021 and 2022 from Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo. Sufficient data were unavailable for Cabo Verde, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritania, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, and Sierra Leone.

MAP 2. Main cannabis resin trafficking routes to and from the Sahel countries and territories with individual cannabis resin seizures in West and Central Africa, January 2019–September 2023.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Sources: UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform; annual report questionnaire; and interviews with law enforcement officials.

Emergence of the Atlantic route

Since 2020, the Sahel countries have reported that cannabis resin is being transported by sea via an alternative maritime route (“the Atlantic route”), mostly from Morocco down the coast of West Africa to ports on the Gulf of Guinea, in Benin and Togo in particular, before being transported north to the Niger and then on to North Africa.⁴⁴

Recently, trafficking in cannabis resin via the Atlantic route appears to have intensified, which could also be a reflection of a broader global trend in which cannabis resin is being trafficked to Latin and Central America,

possibly in exchange for cocaine.⁴⁵ As the destination of the drugs seized at sea is often unclear, however, assessing the proportion of the cannabis resin that will subsequently transit the Sahel is challenging.

The intensification of the Atlantic route is illustrated by a series of multi-ton seizures of cannabis resin, made either at sea or having transited ports on the Gulf of Guinea:

- In the period 2020–2021, Senegal made three major seizures of cannabis resin at sea: 8.3 tons on 28 June 2021; 8.3 tons on 6 June 2021; and 5.1 tons on 27 April 2020. The individuals arrested were

nationals of Colombia, India, Libya, Mauritania, Spain, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye.⁴⁶ According to the Senegalese drug enforcement agency, the drugs originated in Morocco and were respectively en route to Guinea Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, although their final destination remains unclear.⁴⁷

- On 2 March 2021, the Niger seized 17 tons of cannabis resin wrapped in cloth and plastic in a depot in the Kalley neighbourhood of the capital, Niamey.⁴⁸ According to the drug enforcement agency of the Niger, the drugs had been transported by sea to the port of Cotonou, Benin, and to the Niger by truck on their way to Libya.⁴⁹ In the absence of laboratory analysis of the resin its origin remains unclear, but based on transportation data, the drug enforcement agency concluded that the resin had been produced in and shipped from Lebanon, an unusual route to Libya that would include a considerable detour.⁵⁰ It is also possible that the drugs had been produced in Morocco and loaded onto a ship during a stopover in Morocco. The drug enforcement agency also found evidence of a previous shipment that had transited the port of Lomé, Togo, in October 2020.⁵¹ Fourteen people were arrested in relation to the shipment, including two Algerian nationals and a former leader of an armed group who was described by the Panel of Experts on Mali as a well-known drug trafficker operating between Mali and the Niger.⁵²
- On 26 September 2020, the Spanish Navy boarded a ship that was carrying 4.5 tons of cannabis resin in international waters off the coast of Mauritania.⁵³ The final destination of the drugs remains unclear.

Although the fact that cannabis resin is transiting the Gulf of Guinea reflects a diversification of the trafficking routes for the drug, the seizures mentioned above show that cannabis resin still transits Mali.⁵⁴ This intensification of the Atlantic route may be the result of a number of factors, including trade disruptions caused by roadblocks on the border between Morocco and Mauritania, an increase in seizures of cannabis resin in Mauritania since 2020 and traffickers' perceptions that the routes through Mali are less safe than before because of the presence at different points in time of international troops and banditry.^{55, 56, 57}

The reconfiguration of the cannabis resin trafficking routes in West Africa is likely to have an effect on the drug distribution networks operating between North

Africa, the Gulf of Guinea and the Sahel. For example, Moroccan drug traffickers are likely to become less reliant on Malian organized crime groups, while traffickers in the Gulf of Guinea are likely to be increasingly exposed to cannabis resin, enabling them to diversify their trade and the markets to which they have access.

Pharmaceutical opioids

Pharmaceutical opioids such as tramadol are synthetic opioids and analgesics used for the management of moderate to severe pain.⁵⁸ When they are consumed in higher than recommended doses, their dependence profiles mirror those of other opioids such as morphine. The non-medical use of tramadol has garnered attention internationally, leading several countries to classify the drug as a nationally controlled substance. The World Health Organization (WHO) has considered tramadol for review on multiple occasions since 1992,⁵⁹ acknowledging, in 2018, that while tramadol misuse was a concern, it was crucial not to restrict the medical availability of the drug because of the lack of alternative analgesics in a number of countries⁶⁰ and excessive restrictions in many others on access to other opioids for pain management such as morphine.

A number of factors have fostered the non-medical use of tramadol in West Africa and the Sahel, including stereotypes and misconceptions about tramadol being a medicine that does not cause harm, even when not prescribed by a doctor or taken without following medical advice, the low cost of tramadol and its multiple effects. Some non-medical users take tramadol for its calming and analgesic effects, to improve their intellectual, physical or work performance, or to reduce their need for sleep or decrease their appetite. Others use tramadol as a recreational drug on account of its pleasurable and euphoric effects, or to improve sexual stamina.⁶¹ Some communities or professional groups are particularly affected, such as people who work in physically demanding and difficult conditions, including herders, farmers, taxi and lorry drivers, itinerant traders, market sellers, security personnel and sex workers.⁶²

As a large proportion of the tramadol seized in the Sahel exceeds the dosage recommended by national regulatory authorities, it creates dependency patterns that fuel the non-medical markets for the drug. Misuse of tramadol is not limited to high-dosage tablets, however, as pharmacists and street vendors may unlawfully sell legally manufactured tramadol without a prescription or proper authorization.⁶³

Between 2011 and 2021, the annual prevalence of opioid use (including opiates) increased from 0.33 to 1.24 per cent in Africa (box on drug use in the Sahel and West Africa).^{64, 65} According to the West Africa Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (WENDU), the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids appears to have grown considerably, from just two countries (the Niger and Togo) citing tramadol as the principal drug of concern by people entering drug treatment in 2017, to five countries (Burkina Faso, Liberia, Mali, the Niger and Sierra Leone) in 2019.⁶⁶ Indeed, the non-medical use of tramadol re-

mains a threat in North, West and Central Africa in particular.⁶⁷ According to the *World Drug Report 2023*, tramadol is the most used opioid for non-medical purposes in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.⁶⁸ Moreover, in 2022, Tramadol was the second most common drug for which female patients sought treatment in Mali and Mauritania.⁶⁹ Chad also reported an increase in tramadol consumption in 2022.⁷⁰

DRUG USE IN THE SAHEL AND ELSEWHERE IN WEST AFRICA

In the past two decades, Africa has emerged as a transit area both for cocaine en route to Europe from the west and heroin from the east. The repercussions of this drug trade extend beyond transit, as increased availability of these substances and others, in particular cannabis and pharmaceutical opioids, has intensified local drug consumption.^a

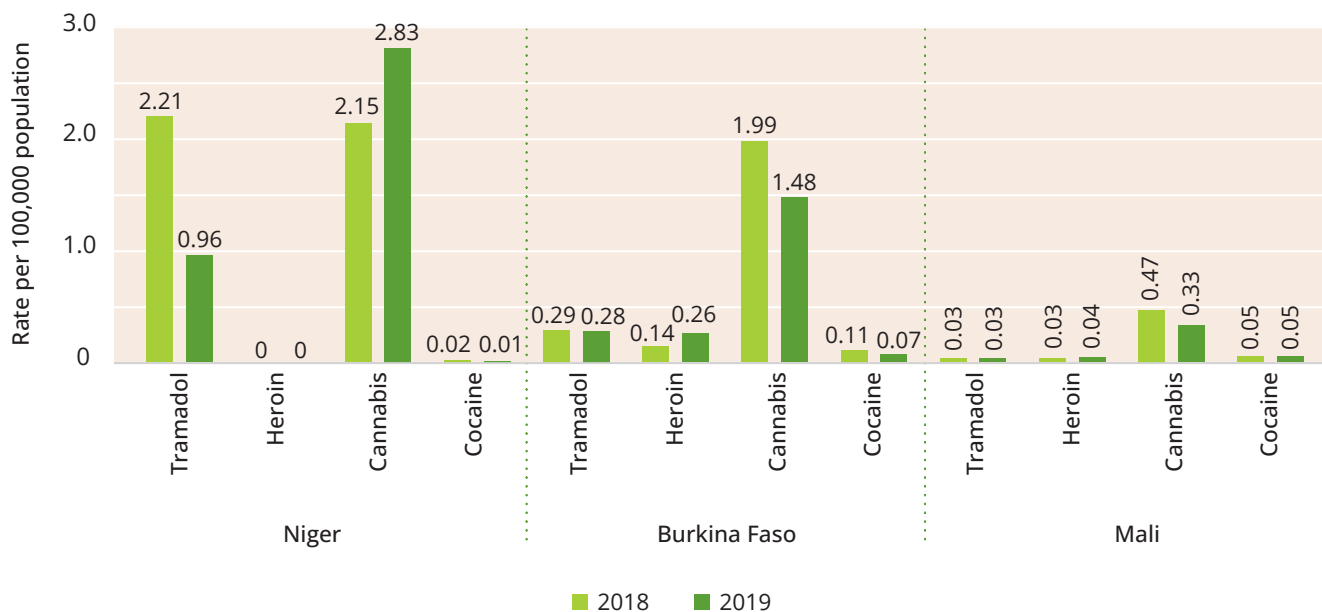
One of the significant challenges in understanding the scope of this problem is the lack of population-scale national data on drug use, which can be partly compensated for by the production of regional estimates. For example, use of cannabis is particularly high in West and Central Africa, with a past-year prevalence of use in 2021 of almost 10 per cent (30 million people), largely reflecting the prevalence of cannabis use in Nigeria.^b In the Sahel countries, Burkina Faso, Chad and the Niger reported a large increase, of more than 10 per cent, in the prevalence of use of cannabis herb in 2022.^c

Although there are no gender-disaggregated data on cannabis use in the Sahel countries, regional-level data on Africa point to a large disparity between male and female use of cannabis, with 88 per cent of users of cannabis in 2021 being male and 12 per cent female. Of the roughly 12 per cent of women who used cannabis in the last 12 months in Africa, 10 per cent were in treatment for cannabis-related use.^d

Although most of the Sahel countries provide medical services for treating drug use disorders, there are significant gaps in the geographical coverage and accessibility of those services, as they are often concentrated in the capital cities, leaving individuals in rural or remote regions with limited and difficult access to care. This issue is exacerbated by hindrances such as transportation and financial constraints, especially when public services are unavailable and private treatment options are unaffordable. The challenge is further intensified by the shortage of qualified personnel in drug treatment facilities across the Sahel countries.^e The inaccessibility of treatment and care services makes it particularly challenging for people with drug use disorders to recover from addiction. In West and Central Africa, it is noteworthy that methadone maintenance treatment for opioid dependence is currently only available in Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo.^f

As elsewhere in West Africa, cannabis is the main drug for which people undergo treatment in the Sahel countries.^g The number of people per 100,000 population treated for cannabis use disorder in 2019 was 2.83 in the Niger, 1.48 in Burkina Faso and 0.33 in Mali, while the number treated for cocaine use disorder per 100,000 population was 0.01 in the Niger, 0.07 in Burkina Faso and 0.05 in Mali. The number of people per 100,000 population treated for tramadol use disorder in 2019 was 0.96 in the Niger, 0.28 in Burkina Faso and 0.03 in Mali.^h

In Chad and Mauritania, there is a lack of data from health institutions on treatment for drug use disorder.

FIG 7. People in treatment for drug use disorders in Sahel countries, 2018–2019

Sources: WENDU, “Statistics and trends on illicit drug use and supply 2018–2019”, 2021; and UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023). No data were available for Mauritania and Chad.

ders. Mauritania has just one health facility for treating drug use disorders, in the capital, Nouakchott.ⁱ Most drug treatment is carried out by religious associations and civil society organizations in these countries.^j

The lack of reliable data on drug consumption in the Sahel significantly hinders the formulation of effective, evidence-based policy responses. Policymakers often have to rely on skewed or incomplete data,^k usually from a limited number of countries, to shape their strategies. The unreliability of the data obscures the true extent of the problem, rendering it virtually “invisible” and thus not a priority for resource allocation or targeted interventions. Without reliable statistics and studies for examining the extent and patterns of drug use, determining the impact of drug consumption on stability and development is a challenge. In addition to existing treatment facilities in West Africa often being inadequately funded and staffed,^l the stigmatization of people who use drugs further exacerbates the issue, as it discourages investment in essential services. In a region where drug consumption is perceived to be on the rise, the absence of

dependable data perpetuates a cycle of inadequate policy responses, leaving the Sahel countries ill-equipped to tackle the escalating drug problem.^m

a West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD), *Not Just in Transit: Drugs, the State and Society in West Africa* (2014), p. 8.

b UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023*, “Special points of interest” (United Nations publication, 2023), p. 24.

c UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2022 from Burkina Faso, Chad and the Niger.

d UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023).

e UNODC, *Cartographie des structures de prise en charge des troubles liés à l’usage des substances dans les pays francophones de l’Afrique de l’Ouest*, 2023.

f Ibid.

g WENDU, “Statistics and trends on illicit drug use and supply 2018–2019”, 2021, p. 22.

h Ibid., pp. 22–24.

i UNODC, *Cartographie des structures de prise en charge des troubles liés à l’usage des substances dans les pays francophones de l’Afrique de l’Ouest*, 2023, pp. 65–70.

j UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2022 from Chad.

k WACD, *Not Just in Transit: Drugs, the State and Society in West Africa* (2014), p. 40.

l UNODC, *Cartographie des structures de prise en charge des troubles liés à l’usage des substances dans les pays francophones de l’Afrique de l’Ouest*, 2023.

m WACD, *Not Just in Transit: Drugs, the State and Society in West Africa* (2014), p. 8.

Source of tramadol

Historically, South Asia, primarily India, was one of the main sources of tramadol.⁷¹ In response to the escalating misuse of and trafficking in the drug, India tightened regulations on tramadol production in 2018 under its Narcotics and Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985. This gave greater powers to law enforcement and, in particular, enabled authorities to enter the premises of tramadol laboratories and prosecute those manufacturing the drug without permission, which effectively reduced exports of tramadol to West Africa.⁷² It seems that tramadol is also produced in countries in West Africa, with significant evidence pointing to the existence of clandestine laboratories in the region, although none have yet been officially dismantled.⁷³

Tramadol trafficking in the Sahel countries

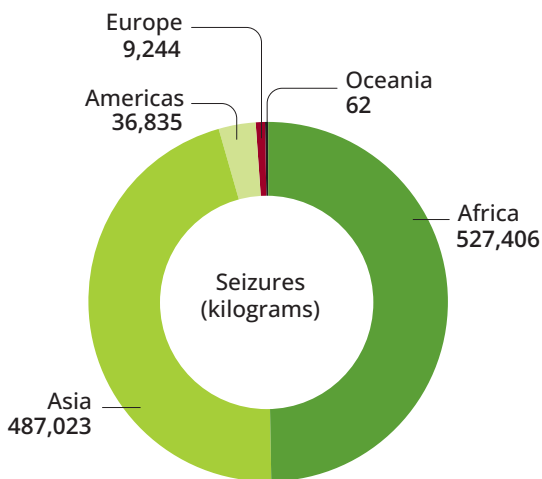
With its major commercial seaports and roads to and through the Sahel countries, West Africa has emerged as a principal destination for pharmaceutical opioids, in particular tramadol, as well as a transit area for other drugs destined to North and Central Africa. Africa accounted for half of the total quantity of pharmaceutical opioids seized worldwide during the five-year period 2017–2021, with West and Central Africa alone

accounting for 97 per cent of the total quantity of tramadol seized worldwide in 2021 (figures 8 and 9).⁷⁴

Some of the tramadol unloaded in West African seaports, primarily located in Nigeria, Benin⁷⁵ and Togo,⁷⁶ makes its way to the Sahel countries on buses, trucks and motorcycles both along main roads and back roads. Benin, which reported the seizure of more than 10 tons of tramadol in 2022,⁷⁷ identified India and Nigeria as the main countries of departure of pharmaceutical opioids seized on its territory, and the Niger and Burkina Faso as countries of destination.⁷⁸ The Niger also identified India as the main country of origin of the tramadol seized within its borders, and Burkina Faso and Mali as countries of transit.⁷⁹

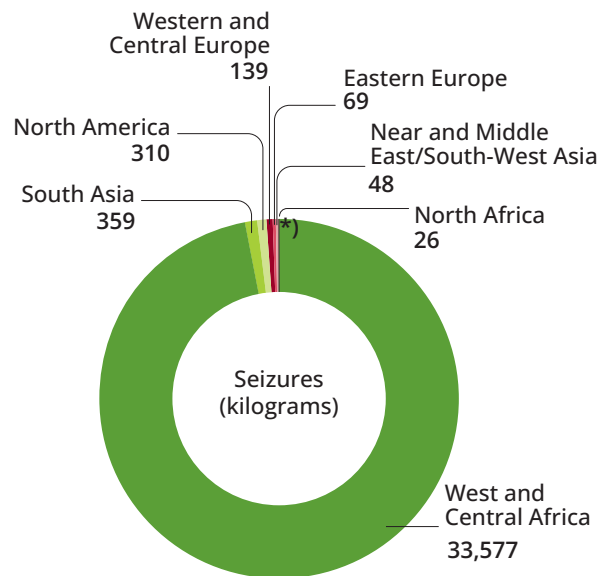
Major seizures carried out by law enforcement agencies confirm the existence of the drug flow from the Gulf of Guinea to the Sahel countries. On 2 May 2023, for example, law enforcement officials in the Niger seized 100,000 tablets of Royal 250 mg tramadol, 105,000 capsules of pregabalin and five vehicles, including three vehicles in the village of Tsamiya Garin Bori, 15 km from Maradi. They also arrested nine people of Nigerian nationality in Arlit.⁸⁰

FIG 8. Distribution of global quantities of pharmaceutical opioids seized, by region, 2017–2021



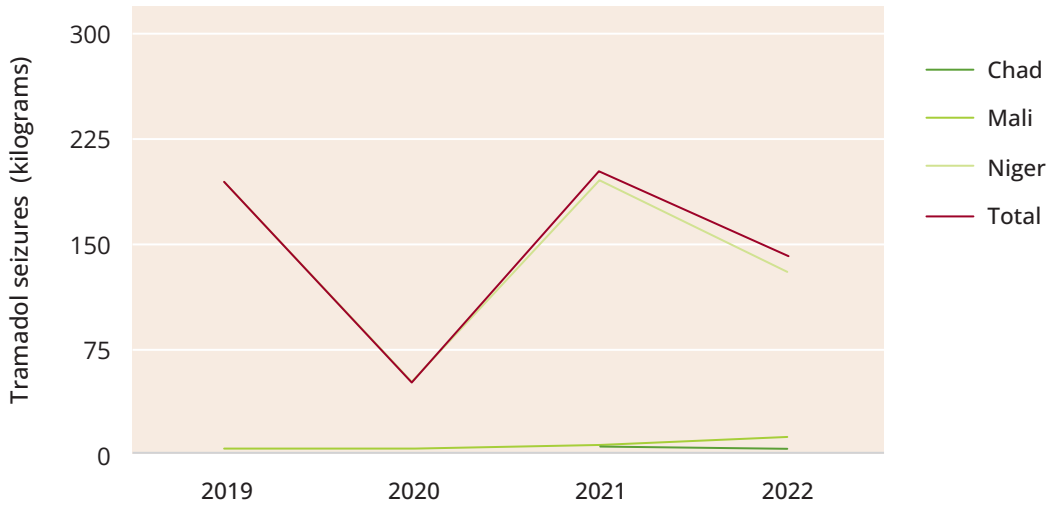
Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire.

FIG 9. Distribution of quantities of tramadol seized, by region, 2021



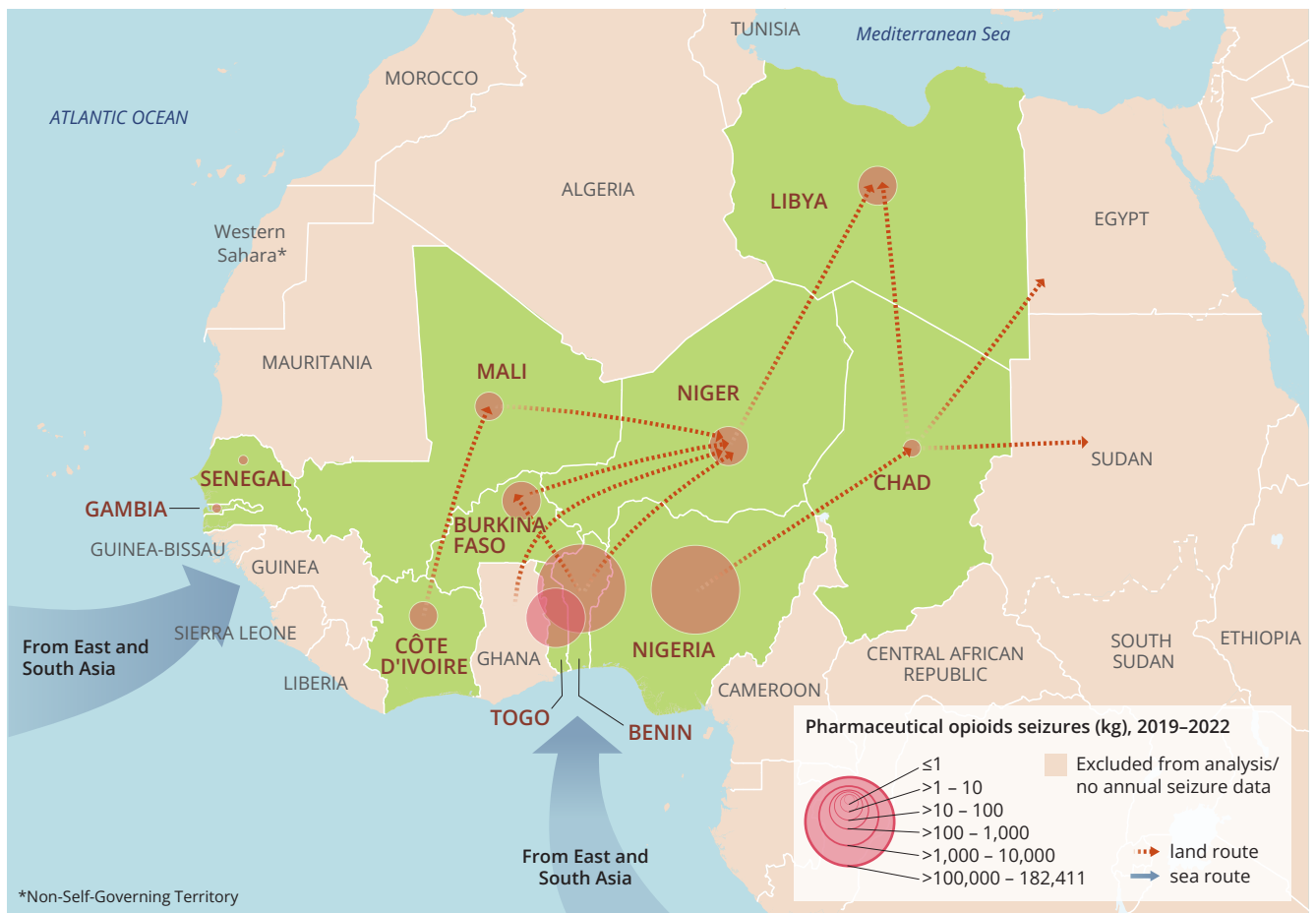
Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire.

FIG 10. Trends in tramadol seizures in Chad, Mali and the Niger 2019–2022



Sources: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 from Chad, Mali and the Niger; and government information from 2019, 2020 and 2021 from Chad, Mali and the Niger. Burkina Faso reported annual seizures of 30 kg of tramadol in 2020 and 848 kg in 2022, which is insufficient to conduct trend analysis. No data were available for Mauritania and no data available for Chad for the period 2019 to 2020.

MAP 3. Main pharmaceutical opioid trafficking routes to and from the Sahel countries, and annual seizures of pharmaceutical opioids in West and Central Africa, 2019–2022



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Sources: UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform, annual report questionnaire and interviews with law enforcement officials.

Prior to that, during operations conducted on 1–2 January 2021, law enforcement officials in the Niger dismantled two large international drug trafficking networks in Niamey that had connections in several Sub-Saharan countries and the Maghreb. Authorities seized 110,800 tramadol tablets en route from Kano, Nigeria, that were destined for markets in the Maghreb and local gold-mining sites.^{81, 82}

In January 2020, Chadian customs authorities seized a shipment of 246 cartons (roughly 47 kg) of tramadol that was en route from India to Libya via Douala, Cameroon. On 24 July 2020, 10 individuals involved in the case, including high-ranking security and intelligence officials, were convicted of drug trafficking.^{83, 84}

On 7 May 2021, law enforcement officials in Ghana seized a container holding 50 boxes of “tafrodol”, an imitation of tramadol, amounting to 1.5 million 120 mg capsules of the drug.⁸⁵ The following year, on 17 May 2022, Togo law enforcement officials seized 80 boxes of 120 mg “tafrodol” capsules, or roughly 2.4 million

capsules, with a total weight of 1,119 kg.⁸⁶ Both shipments were in transit to Burkina Faso from India and marked as containing confectionery.

Main actors involved in drug trafficking

Drug traffickers based in the Sahel countries seem to operate independent, fluid networks held together by ties of kinship, including among Arab, Tuareg and Tebu communities.⁸⁷ Trading networks within those communities have been involved in the trans-Saharan trade for generations, both in licit products and smuggled oil, and cigarettes and other undeclared commercial goods.⁸⁸ Some of the networks have used their knowledge of routes and weapons to transport drugs, including cannabis resin, cocaine and pharmaceutical opioids.⁸⁹

Communities in Northern Mali, the Niger and Chad tend to consider the smuggling of commercial goods and fuel as licit activities (*al-frūd al-îalâl*), but drug trafficking is generally considered illicit and morally reprehensible

EMERGENCE OF OTHER SYNTHETIC DRUGS: THE CASE OF PREGABALIN TRAFFICKING IN THE NIGER AND ELSEWHERE IN WEST AFRICA

The Niger has expressed concerns about the emergence of pregabalin trafficking in the country.^a Pregabalin, an anti-epileptic medical product that can be misused and create dependency, is yet to be listed as a high-risk drug with medical interest in the Nigerien legal framework.^b This situation allows traffickers to circumvent domestic legislation and makes it difficult for law enforcement to investigate and arrest people implicated in pregabalin trafficking.

In 2021, 150,000 pregabalin tablets were seized in Agadez and 300,000 pregabalin capsules were seized in Zinder.^c Seizures continued in 2022 and into 2023, with 158 pregabalin tablets seized in Agadez, 112,514 pregabalin capsules seized in Maradi and 30,000 pregabalin capsules seized in Zinder.^d No annual estimates are available for 2023, but authorities in the Niger seized 390,000 capsules of pregabalin in a pickup vehicle in November 2023.^e

Pregabalin trafficking also affects other countries in West Africa, with Togo reporting a seizure of 5,974,500 pregabalin tablets from South Asia in the port of Lomé on 1 June 2022.^f Nigeria also apprehended two traffickers in possession of 391 kg of cannabis, 259,000 tramadol tablets, 100 bottles of codeine-based syrup and 150,000 pregabalin tablets on 21 October 2022.^g In Algeria, 14,000 and 6,180 pregabalin tablets were seized by customs authorities on 4 and 6 June 2022, respectively. The drugs were en route from Mali to Algeria.^h

a UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2022 from the Niger.

b OCRETIS, *Rapport annuel d'activités de l'Office Central de Répression du Trafic Illicite Des Stupéfiants*, 2021.

c Ibid.

d OCRETIS, *Rapport annuel d'activités de l'Office Central de Répression du Trafic Illicite des Stupéfiants*, 2022.

e UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.

f Ibid.

g Ibid.

h Ibid.

(*al-frūd al-îaram*).⁹⁰ That said, the higher commercial value of drugs means that drug trafficking has been used to challenge traditional power structures within and across these communities and led to the emergence of powerful traffickers.⁹¹ The Panel of Experts on Mali has documented, for example, how the wealth accumulated through the smuggling of licit and illicit goods has enabled Tilemsi and Lehmar Arabs to be recognized as separate fractions and to avoid paying tributes to the Kounta Arabs, a maraboutic tribe in northern Mali.⁹²

In Chad, northern Mali and the Niger, competing trafficking networks often align with and directly involve armed groups or former members of armed groups operating in the area that are bound by the same alliances and ties of kinship. In Mali, for instance, traffickers from the Lehmar Arab community are reported to have been connected to groups affiliated to the Plateforme des mouvements du 14 juin 2014 d'Alger (Plateforme), a coalition of armed groups signatory to the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, most notably the Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés (GATIA) and the Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad – Plateforme (MAA – Plateforme).⁹³ Some of these traffickers are also reported to have been close to Al-Qaida-affiliated groups, including Mouvement pour l'unification et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) and Al-Mourabitoun.^{94, 95}

By contrast, traffickers from the Kounta Arab community and their Ifoghas Tuareg associates have tended to rely on groups associated with the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA), another coalition of signatory armed groups that includes the Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (HCUA), the Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) and the Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad (MAA-CMA).⁹⁶ In the Niger, some of the main drug traffickers were former leaders of the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice, an armed group active during the Tuareg rebellion from 2007 to 2009.⁹⁷ Armed groups have also trafficked drugs across the northern borders of Chad and the Niger and the southern border of Libya, where they operate.⁹⁸

Although there is overwhelming evidence of the continued involvement of armed groups in drug trafficking across the Sahel countries, there appears to be less evidence of violent extremist armed groups, such as the Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) or the Islamic State-affiliated Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), playing an active role in drug

trafficking, albeit with two notable exceptions. The first is the documented reliance of the Lehmar Arab networks on MUJAO during its occupation of Gao in 2012;⁹⁹ the second is related to the seizure of firearms and cash in the Niger in February 2015, when the nine individuals arrested were suspected of being affiliated to a terrorist group. Investigations revealed that they had been selling drugs to individuals in a foreign country. It was also discovered that one of the members ran a charity in Libya that dealt with fundraising for the group. Part of the money raised from the sale of drugs was used to purchase vehicles, weapons and ammunition. The cash seized, roughly \$562,500, was to be used to finance terrorist operations in the Niger and the Sahel in general. All of the individuals arrested were charged with criminal association in relation to a terrorist enterprise, possession and transport of firearms and ammunition, money-laundering and terrorist financing.¹⁰⁰

The fact that there appears to be limited evidence of the involvement of violent extremist armed groups in drug trafficking in the Sahel countries does not mean that such groups are not involved, and evidence of their involvement may yet emerge. Moreover, violent extremist armed groups are also likely to benefit indirectly from drug trafficking, such as through the payment by traffickers of *zakat*, a form of wealth tax imposed by JNIM and ISGS in areas where they operate, or by taxing convoys that cross areas under their control.¹⁰¹ What is clear is that armed groups that are not considered violent extremist armed groups are directly involved in drug trafficking in the Sahel.

Principle enablers of drug trafficking

Corruption and money-laundering are key vulnerabilities that facilitate drug trafficking flows in the Sahel countries.

Corruption

One of the most significant enablers of drug trafficking in the Sahel is corruption, which can include members of the political elite as well as leaders of armed groups and community leaders. Research shows that income associated with trafficking in drugs such as cocaine and cannabis resin has been used to influence power dynamics between community leaders and to penetrate different layers of the State, effectively shielding traffickers from prosecution.¹⁰²

INDIVIDUAL TRAFFICKERS MONITORED BY THE UNITED NATIONS PANEL OF EXPERTS ON MALI

Of the eight individuals who were under sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council until 31 August 2023^a for threatening the peace, security and stability of Mali, three were directly involved in drug trafficking and had a close connection to armed groups, including terrorist groups. The reports by the United Nations Panel of Experts on Mali, which was mandated to monitor the implementation of those sanctions, provide valuable information about the profiles of the three individuals, the way they structured their networks and their connection to other criminal groups, including armed groups.

The three included a Lehmar Arab businessman who had been using the proceeds of cocaine and cannabis resin trafficking and other crimes to support various armed groups, including the Al-Qaida-affiliated Al-Mourabitoun and MAA-Plateforme.^b With a drug trafficking operation extending from Guinea Bissau to Algeria,^c he was related to a former mayor and Member of Parliament who had been acting “as a political relay for narcotics traffickers (...) protecting their interests from interference by State authorities, paying off security services and warning traffickers from the Lehmar Arab community about potential

counter-narcotics operations.”^d This individual was an influential member of the MAA-Plateforme and, according to the Panel of Experts on Mali, had been appointed special advisor to the President of the National Transition Council in 2021.^{e,f} Also sanctioned was a GATIA chief of staff from the Tuareg community^g who had been conducting drug convoys in northern Mali, from the southern parts of the Kidal Region to Algeria and the Niger, in association with armed groups operating in the area, most notably CMA and MAA-Plateforme.^h

The Panel of Experts on Mali identified other individuals involved in drug trafficking in the Sahel, although not under United Nations sanctions, including a Malian national from the Berabiche Arab community and Oulad Ghanam fraction who had been controlling drug trafficking operations from Mauritania through the Timbuktu and Taoudenni regions, with military backing from MAA-CMA.ⁱ Another Malian national from the Ifoghas/Ifergoumissen Tuareg community, who was in charge of the CMA-affiliated criminal network,^j was involved in intercepting drug convoys from other groups, including GATIA convoys of cannabis resin.^k

In the Niger, the Panel of Experts on Mali reported the involvement of a Nigerien national from the Tuareg community, a former armed group leader and founder of the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la

In addition to the main actors involved in drug trafficking discussed in the previous section, the following examples of recent seizures, arrests and detentions in the Sahel countries shed light on how drug trafficking is facilitated by a wide range of individuals, such as politicians and members of the security forces and judiciary, including when circumventing controls and avoiding arrest and judicial proceedings:

- » A seizure of 215 kg of cocaine in the Niger in January 2022 (as mentioned in the above section on cocaine) was made in the official vehicle of the Mayor of Fachi, a remote settlement north-east of Agadez.¹⁰³ The drugs were concealed in the vehicle in order to circumvent controls.¹⁰⁴
- » The investigation into the case of 17 tons of cannabis resin seized in the Niger in March 2021 (as mentioned in the above section on cannabis resin) revealed the involvement of a prefect, a gendarme and a customs official who were suspected of sharing their expertise with the criminal network involved.¹⁰⁵
- » The court files of the June 2018 seizure of 2.5 tons of cannabis resin (as mentioned in the above section on cannabis resin) reveal the involvement of three police officers and one member of the National Guard of the Niger, with one of the police officers being suspected of diverting some of the cannabis resin himself during the investigation. The procedure against him was annulled on a procedural matter, however.¹⁰⁶

Justice, who had been a close associate of a late drug baron and former Member of Parliament until the latter's death in February 2016.^l This individual was arrested in relation to the seizure of 17 tons of cannabis resin in Niamey in March 2021, but was released in November 2022 over a procedural breach.^{m,n} He had been working closely with an influential GATIA military official in Mali.^o

Another Nigerien national from the Tebu community was sentenced to 20 years in prison in absentia in relation to the seizure of 2.5 tons of cannabis resin in the Niger in June 2018,^{p,q} but he managed to escape arrest and was suspected of having fled to Libya or Tunisia.^r His was the highest sentence handed out in the case because of his role in moving the drugs across the border.^s Previously, he had also been involved in interceptions of various drug convoys.^t

- a The sanctions first set out by the Security Council in paragraphs 1 to 7 of its resolution 2374 (2017) were last renewed by the Council in its resolution 2649 (2022) for a period that ended on 31 August 2023, after Russia vetoed a draft resolution that would have renewed them. See United Nations General Assembly, Meeting after Russian Federation's Veto of Sanctions Text, General Assembly Speakers Consider Consequences for Stability in Mali, 78th Session, 3rd Meeting (PM), GA/12528, 11 September 2023.
- b UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and extended pursuant to resolution 2432 (2018), S/2019/636, 7 August 2019, para. 111.
- c UNSC, Midterm report of the Panel of Experts on Mali, S/2020/158/Rev.1, 18 March 2020, para. 86.
- d UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and extended pursuant to resolution 2432 (2018), S/2019/636, 7 August 2019, para. 108.

- e UNSC, Security Council 2374 sanctions committee amends three entries on its sanctions list, SC/15053, 22 October 2022.
- f UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts on Mali established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017), S/2022/595, 3 August 2022, para. 130.
- g UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 79.
- h UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, para. 44.
- i UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, paras. 92 and 94.
- j UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and extended pursuant to resolution 2432 (2018), S/2019/636, 7 August 2019, para. 116.
- k Ibid, paras. 116 and 117.
- l UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 86.
- m UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, para. 80.
- n Arrêt No. 22-067/CC/CRIM du 29/11/2022, Cour de Cassation, Chambre Criminelle, République du Niger.
- o UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, para. 81.
- p UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 83.
- q Décision N°021/2020 du 28 mai 2020, Tribunal de Grande Instance Hors Classe de Niamey, République du Niger.
- r Ibid.
- s Ibid.
- t UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 83.

- 】 In July 2020, a tribunal in Chad sentenced 10 people, including senior security and intelligence officials, for trafficking in tramadol,¹⁰⁷ who were convicted in relation to a seizure of 47 kg of tramadol that had originated in India and transited Cameroon en route to Libya.¹⁰⁸
- 】 In July 2019, three high-level officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chad were arrested following the seizure of containers of tramadol in the Port of Cotonou, Benin, in February 2019.¹⁰⁹ According to media reports, they sought the release of a Chadian national arrested in Cotonou in relation to the seizure on the grounds that it was destined to the Chadian armed forces.¹¹⁰

- 】 The two sons of a former President of Mauritania, who was in office between 1980 and 1984, were sentenced to prison terms in relation to the seizure of 1.3 tons of cannabis resin in January 2016 on the road between Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.¹¹¹ One of them had already been sentenced to seven years imprisonment for cocaine trafficking in Morocco in October 2007.¹¹²

Money-laundering

The challenges posed by drug trafficking in the Sahel countries are compounded by the fact that traffickers use the region to launder their criminal proceeds, including through trade-based money laundering, which is defined as the “process of disguising the proceeds of crime and moving value through the use of trade transactions in an attempt to legitimise their illicit origins.”¹¹³ This practice makes financial transactions more difficult to track while creating additional income opportunity, giving traffickers additional economic leverage and a veneer of legitimacy.¹¹⁴

Key actors involved in drug trafficking often may own, or are directly involved in the management of, legally registered companies, at times operating across multiple countries. A Malian national who was under United Nations sanctions, for example, owned a company registered in the Niger that specialized in transport and traded in extractives, including precious metals and fuel. The Panel of Experts on Mali reported that the company was also registered under a slightly different name in Algeria, with the trafficker and one of his relatives appearing as company directors on the commercial registrar.¹¹⁵ The two Algerian nationals convicted in relation to the above-mentioned June 2018 seizure of 2.5 tons of cannabis resin in Niamey, the Niger, obtained their visas to the Niger on the grounds that they were working for the company and had to travel to Gao via Niamey.¹¹⁶

The above-mentioned March 2021 seizure of 17 tons of cannabis resin in the Niger is another example of how fuel companies can be used to camouflage drug trafficking activities, with the drugs being seized in a compound that also contained a fuel tanker truck. According to a Nigerien law enforcement officer, the principal arrestee in the case owned a service station north of Agadez and was laundering the proceeds from drug trafficking through his fuel company. The cannabis was to be hidden in separate compartments in fuel tankers and transported from Zinder to Agadez within the Niger, at which point it would have been dispatched towards Libya in four-wheel drive pick-up trucks.¹¹⁷

Drug traffickers tend to invest their illicit proceeds in growing sectors, including gold and real-estate, relying on West Africa’s cash-based informal economy.¹¹⁸ In 2021, for example, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) issued a notice regarding a French national with Malian and Senegalese

passports involved in drug trafficking who,¹¹⁹ according to media reports, was laundering drug money in large real estate projects in West Africa, including through companies registered in Europe.¹²⁰ He had been arrested in Mali in 2016 and extradited to France before escaping prison in 2018.^{121, 122}

Also, the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money-Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) documented the arrest in Mali in 2017 of a drug trafficker who had been purchasing gold at a price exceeding the market price from illegal gold traders at a market in Bamako. Large amounts of cash and drugs were seized upon his arrest and the trafficker confessed that he had been using drug money to purchase gold from unauthorized traders in order to re-sell it in a country in Asia.¹²³

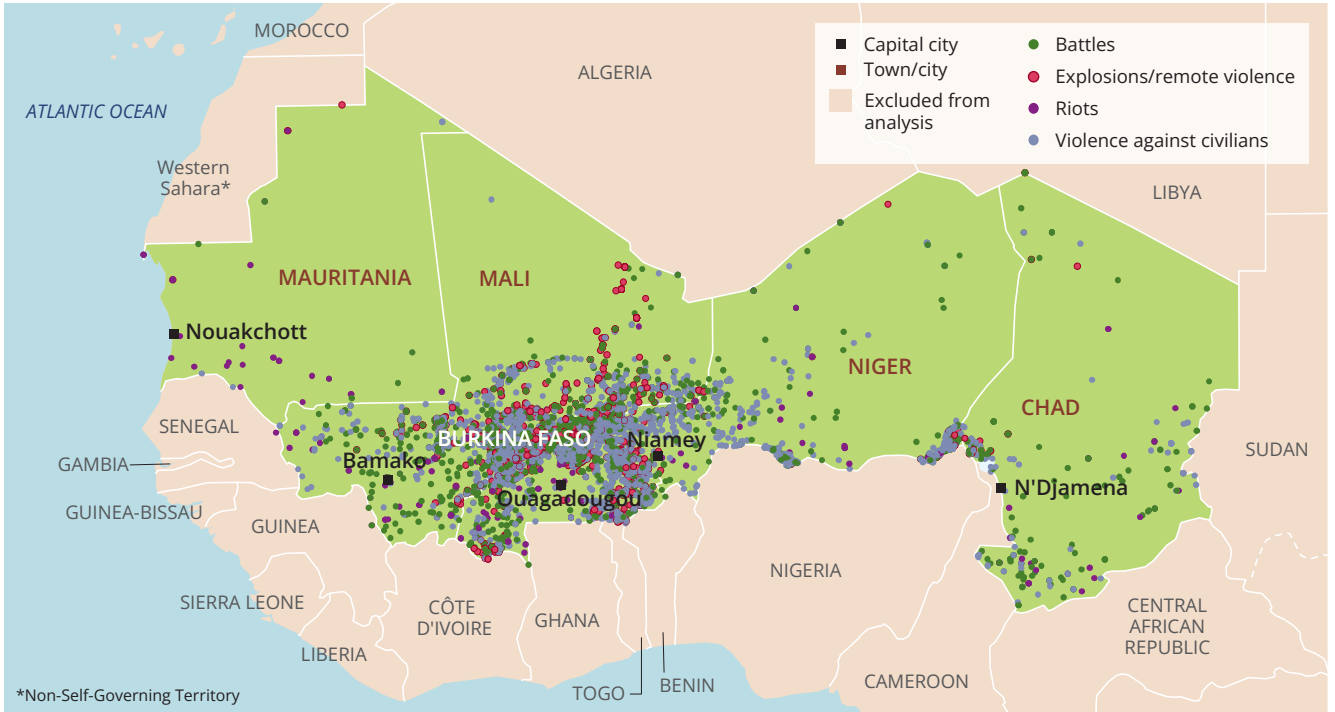
Impact of drug trafficking in the Sahel countries

Over the past decade, the Sahel countries have been affected by a high level of conflict and related political violence. The monitoring of fatalities and violent incidents shows that there was an upward trend in both over the period 2020–2022, from an estimated 7,000 fatalities in 2020 to more than 10,000 in 2022 and from some 2,300 to 3,600 violent incidents over the same period (figure 11).

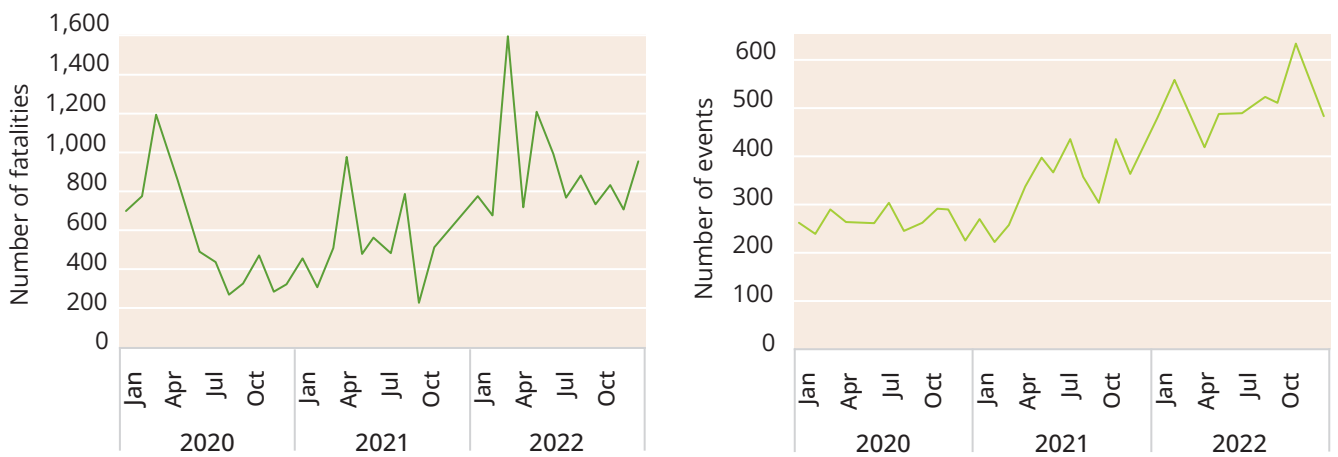
The political landscape in the Sahel countries also remains volatile. Four of the Sahel countries are in a state of political transition, with coups d’état having taken place in Burkina Faso (January 2022 and September 2022), Mali (August 2020 and May 2021) and the Niger (July 2023), and the killing of Idriss Déby, President of Chad, in April 2021.^{124, 125, 126} Coups and attempted coups have also been reported in neighbouring countries, including Guinea (September 2021), Guinea-Bissau (February 2022) and the Gambia (December 2022).^{127, 128, 129}

Among multiple factors that impact the security and political situation in the Sahel countries, organized crime and drug trafficking undermine the stability and development of the region.^{130, 131} As in other conflict-affected areas of the world, the drug economy and instability in the Sahel are linked through a vicious cycle in which weak rule of law facilitates the expansion of the drug economy, which can, in turn, provide financial resources for maintaining or expanding the conflict, while undermining the state response (figure 12).¹³²

FIG 11. Development and concentration of political violence in the Sahel countries, 2020–2022

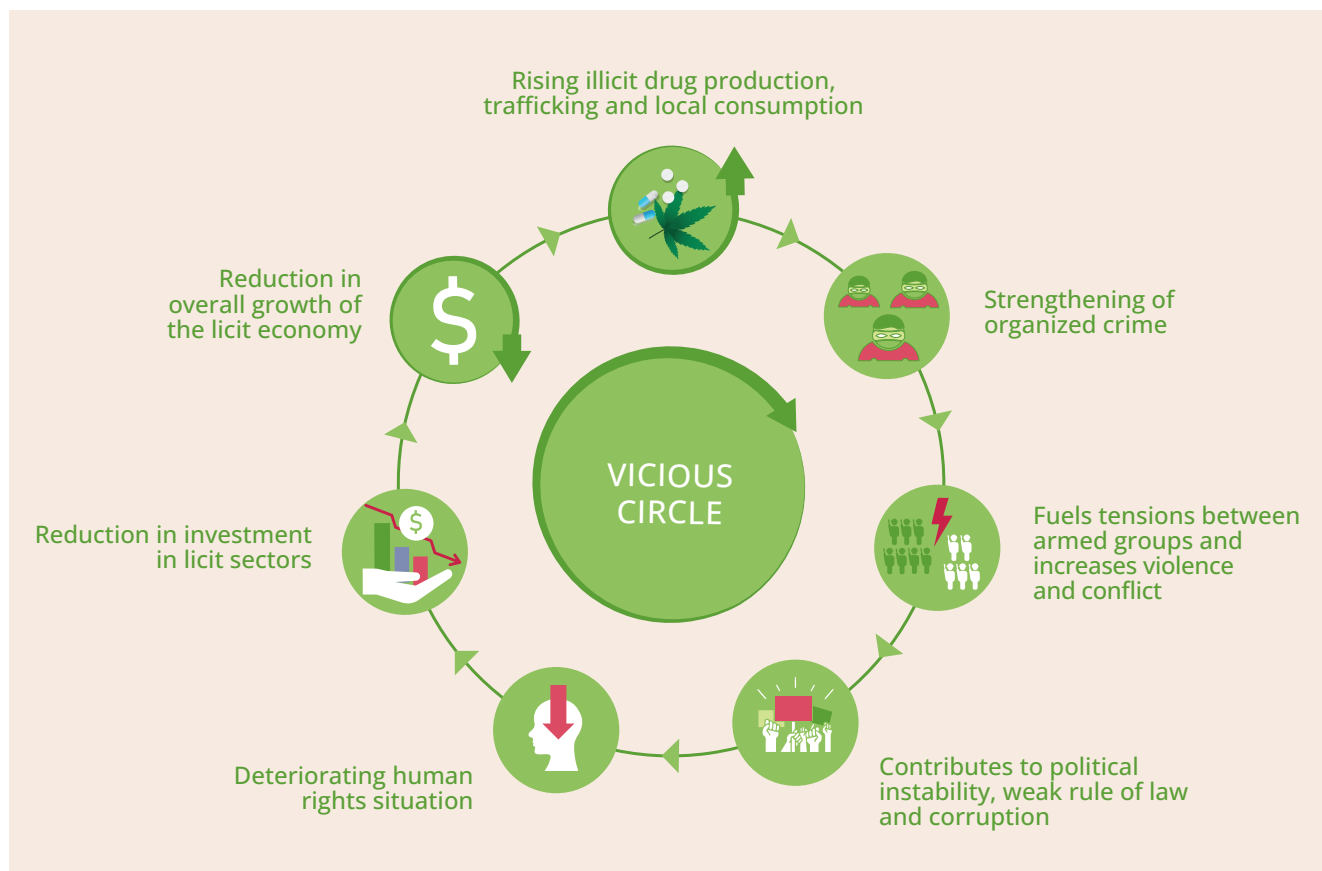


The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2022. Available at www.acleddata.com.

FIG 12. Vicious circle of conflict and the drug economy



Source: UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023).

Drug trafficking provides financial resources to armed groups operating in the Sahel, including Plateforme and CMA in Mali, enabling them to sustain their involvement in conflict, in particular through the purchase of weapons.¹³³ The involvement of armed groups in drug trafficking for several decades and the seniority of some of the traffickers within those groups, as mentioned in the above section on the main actors involved in drug trafficking, illustrate that this is not just a circumstantial activity but a core part of their funding mechanism. Violent extremist armed groups are also likely to benefit from drug trafficking indirectly through the payment of *zakat* by traffickers, for example.¹³⁴

Competition over drug trafficking routes in the Sahel and interceptions of drug convoys by competing armed groups have led to violent clashes and reprisals, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries among those groups, perpetuating the cycle of violence.^{135, 136} The Panel of Experts on Mali has documented several such incidents. On 9 June 2020, for example, a drug convoy

belonging to traffickers from the Lemhar Arab community and escorted by GATIA elements was attacked at a meeting point on the border between Mali and the Niger, north of Tamalat. The drugs were supposed to be escorted through the Niger by Nigerien traffickers who sent in reinforcements to counter the attack, leading to up to 20 deaths.¹³⁷

Several incidents of hostage-taking among trafficking networks have also been reported. For example, two Nigerien traffickers were taken hostage and brought to Mali in 2016 so as to force their boss to return the proceeds of stolen drugs, before being released in 2017.¹³⁸ Similarly, the Malian authorities reported that criminals had taken a family hostage in Bamako from 18 to 27 November 2022 and demanded a large sum of money and information about the location of a cocaine stash seized by law enforcement officers.¹³⁹

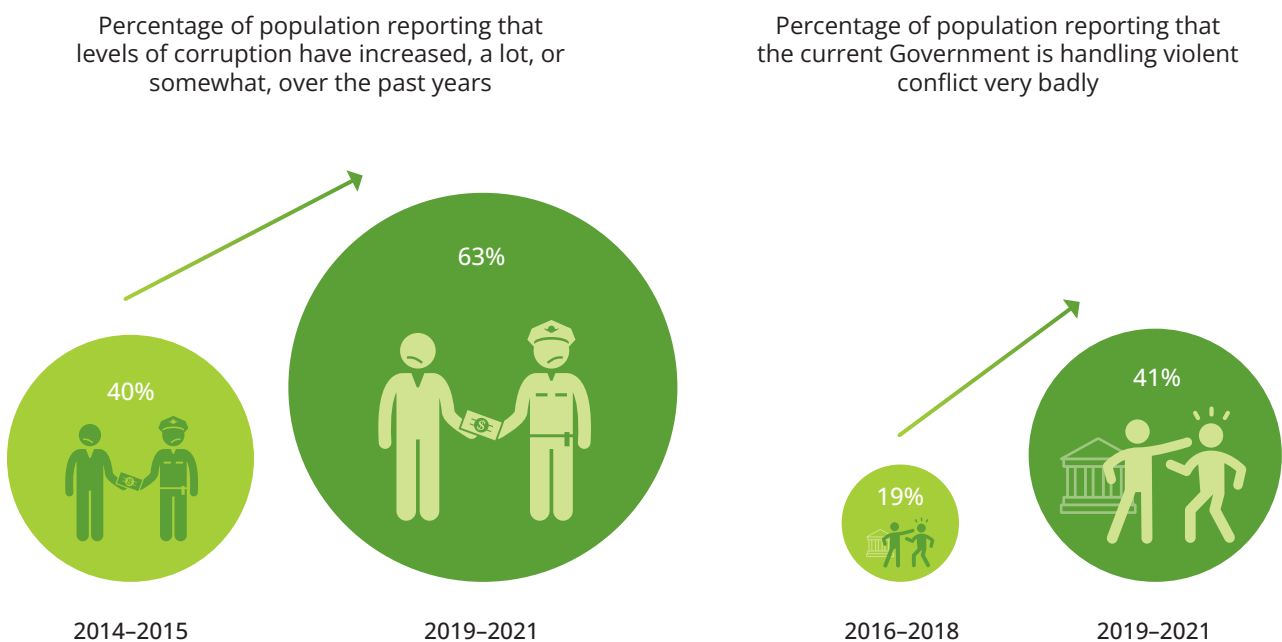
Corruption and the perception that drug traffickers, including members of armed groups and individuals under

sanctions by the United Nations Security Council, carry out their criminal activities with relative impunity, undermine the credibility and legitimacy of state institutions, as well as electoral processes.^{140, 141} In a recent report on military coups in Africa, the United Nations Development Programme highlighted the fact that popular frustration with government performance, including as a result of corruption, has increased the risk of coups taking place in West Africa and fuelled (at least temporarily) support for incoming military juntas (figure 13).¹⁴²

Drug trafficking also undermines economic development in the Sahel countries. Through money-laundering, the illicit proceeds of drug trafficking can infiltrate and damage the reputation of financial institutions and businesses, distort the economy, with criminal actors being able to make investments above market prices, and enable traffickers to gain control over large sectors of the economy.¹⁴³ Some of the companies owned or actively managed by drug traffickers in the Sahel are registered in multiple countries, including outside the region, invest in several critical sectors such as transport, gold, fuel and real estate, and continue to generate revenue despite the sanctions previously targeting the individuals involved.¹⁴⁴

Last but not least, drug trafficking has a direct and growing impact on people’s health as local drug markets expand. As mentioned in the above box on drug use in the Sahel and West Africa, drugs transiting the region have started to penetrate local markets and, while specific data on drug use prevalence are not available for the Sahel countries, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and the Niger have reported increases in drug use, including of cannabis and pharmaceutical opioids, since 2020.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, in 2020, law enforcement in the Niger reported the dismantlement of two clandestine drug laboratories producing crack cocaine destined for the local market.¹⁴⁶

FIG 13. Decreasing confidence in the Government in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, the Niger and the Sudan



Source: UNDP, *Soldiers and Citizens: Military Coups and the Need for Democratic Renewal in Africa*, 2023, p. 58, using Afrobarometer data for Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, the Niger and the Sudan.

Conclusions and policy implications

Drug trafficking is well implanted in the Sahel countries and continues to undermine peace, stability and development in the region, not least because it benefits armed groups, fuels competition between them and undermines the legitimacy of state institutions through corruption. As noted by the United Nations Security Council, action is needed if organized crime and drug trafficking networks in the Sahel are to be disrupted.^{147, 148} The responsibility to address such threats and challenges lies with States in the region. However, their transnational and complex nature requires comprehensive and coordinated approaches at the national and international levels. If drug demand and supply are to be simultaneously addressed, the involvement of all sectors of the State, most notably law enforcement, the judiciary and health sector, as well as the support of technical and financial partners, are critical.

I The inclusion of an integrated response to drug trafficking and organized crime is necessary in stabilization efforts in the Sahel.

Drug trafficking should be considered a destabilizing factor in and of itself, and not simply when it intersects with terrorism. Focusing solely on the nexus between drug trafficking and terrorism risks creating blind spots in the response and allowing criminal groups, including other armed groups that are not labelled as terrorist groups, to operate with relative impunity.

I Establishing or strengthening the mandate of interministerial committees on drugs in the Sahel countries could support data-collection efforts and the adoption of drug policies that are comprehensive and evidence-based.¹⁴⁹

Although Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger have established similar drug response bodies, their mandate could be strengthened, not least to ensure the highest level of participation by the different ministries involved.^{150, 151, 152} Chad created an interministerial committee on drug abuse in 1992, but it has not yet been operationalized.^{153, 154}

I Efforts to produce, collect and analyse data and share information on drug use and drug supply are needed in order to inform evidence-based policies and the programming of prevention and

treatment interventions and anti-narcotic law enforcement activities.

Member States in the Sahel have recently increased their efforts to produce data on drugs and crime. For instance, at the time of writing, Sahel countries have focal points responsible for ensuring annual contributions to the annual report questionnaire, the United Nations mandated data-collection tool on drugs, and share some data on drug seizures. However, major challenges remain in ensuring the production, centralization, quality control and analysis of data on drug use (for example, data on the prevalence of drug use, disaggregated data on the profile of drug users and data on overdoses), the response of the criminal justice system (for example, the number of people arrested and sentenced for drug trafficking) and drug production (for example, data on drug laboratories and illicit crop cultivation).

Given the challenges faced by the Sahel countries in conducting regular general population surveys to estimate the prevalence of drug use, other options could be explored for assessing drug use using indirect methods, or conducting waste-water analysis in strategic locations such as urban areas. In terms of drug seizures, the production of harmonized databases at the national level across the different law enforcement agencies, in particular customs, the gendarmerie and police, as well as armed forces that regularly intercept drug convoys, is critical for assessing the evolution of drug trafficking flows in countries.

I The threat to public health caused by drug trafficking requires a stronger response for addressing drug demand and contributing to harm reduction, including through the adoption of evidence-based prevention and the provision of drug treatment and other services in line with international standards on drug use prevention and international standards for the treatment of drug use disorders.^{155, 156}

This includes ensuring that drug use disorders are considered primarily as health problems rather than criminal behaviours and that people with drug use disorders are treated in the health care system rather than the criminal justice system.¹⁵⁷ Essential treatment services for drug use disorders should be available at different levels of health systems, including specialized treatment programmes for those who need such services.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, community-based engagement interventions

should be leveraged in order to conduct drug prevention and support the rehabilitation of drug users, particularly in the case of young people.¹⁵⁹

I If drug use and drug trafficking are to be effectively addressed, there is a need for the Sahel countries to continue to strengthen their legal frameworks for regulating drugs in line with international standards.

In most cases, drug-related laws and regulations in the Sahel countries were adopted decades ago and require revisions to align them with international standards. For example, drug laws were adopted in Burkina Faso in 1999, in Mali in 2001, in Mauritania in 1993 and in the Niger in 1999.^{160, 161, 162, 163} In Mauritania, drug laws provide for the death penalty for the repeat offence of drug production, trafficking and use, although the country has observed a de facto moratorium on the death penalty since 1987.^{164, 165} Repressive drug laws that criminalize drug use or provide for disproportionate sentences for drug offences hinder access to medical treatment for drug users and often contribute to prison overcrowding.¹⁶⁶ The consideration of alternatives to conviction and punishment in appropriate cases, including the decriminalization of drug possession for personal use, is a particular requirement.¹⁶⁷

I Effectively disrupting criminal networks involved in drug trafficking requires the Sahel countries to sustain their efforts to prevent, detect and intercept drug trafficking flows and to develop criminal justice responses that prioritize drug trafficking cases involving high-level cases with direct links to organized crime, armed groups, money-laundering and corruption.

Financial investigations and specialized investigative techniques, such as controlled deliveries, are an effective means of disrupting and dismantling criminal organizations. Building the capacity of forensic laboratories to test drugs in order to assess their origin and level of purity would also support investigations in transnational networks. Drug seizures alone are not sufficient for disrupting highly adaptive drug trafficking networks and the Sahel countries should ensure that suspected drug traffickers are brought to justice in a fair and timely manner. As specialized investigative techniques and court proceedings are resource intensive, States should prioritize drug trafficking cases involving individuals with direct links to organized crime, armed groups,

money-laundering and corruption, including those who have previously been under UNSC sanctions. Tracking illicit financial flows using anti-money-laundering tools will not only deprive drug traffickers of their proceeds but also allow Governments to recover criminal assets. Confiscation and asset-recovery mechanisms need to support the reinjection of the proceeds of crime into the criminal justice system budget and investigations. Financial investigations can also unmask corruption associated with drug trafficking networks.

I Greater international cooperation at the law enforcement and prosecutorial levels is necessary for ensuring proper drug trafficking investigations.

Since drugs can be smuggled easily through and out of West and Central Africa, regional cooperation should be strengthened in order to systematically gather data and information on trafficking flows, to enhance timely information-sharing and to facilitate enforcement and judicial responses. Judicial cooperation with countries of origin in North Africa, Latin America and South Asia, as well as with countries of destination in North Africa and the Middle East and Europe, is also recommended. This could be aided by using the international cooperation provisions of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the United Nations Convention against Corruption, in applicable and appropriate cases, to investigate and prosecute the most damaging forms of drug trafficking by high-level perpetrators.

Other avenues for increased regional cooperation include the UNODC CRIMJUST project, which is aimed at disrupting criminal networks operating along illicit trafficking routes, the UNODC and WCO Container Control Programme and the UNODC, Interpol and WCO AIR-COP project, which are aimed at building the capacity of Member States to prevent the cross-border movement of illicit goods.^{168, 169, 170} The Sahel countries should strengthen their international cooperation in the field of investigating professional money launderers who sell their services to drug traffickers. In this regard, national authorities should continue participating in international cooperation initiatives such as the Asset Recovery Network for West Africa (ARINWA), the network of Financial Intelligence Unit of West Africa (RECEN-UEMOA) and the Intergovernmental Action Group against Money-Laundering in West Africa (GIABA).

Endnotes

- 1 For the purpose of this report, “Sahel countries” refers to Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger.
- 2 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023), pp. 188–189.
- 3 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2021 and 2022 from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger.
- 4 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2021 and 2022 from Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.
- 5 UNODC, *Global Report on Cocaine 2023* (Vienna, 2023), p. 104.
- 6 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 UNODC, *Global Cocaine Report* (Vienna, 2023), pp. 110.
- 9 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 10 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 from Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger; and government data for 2019, 2020, 2021 from Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger; UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023), p. 188.
- 11 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 12 UNODC, *Global Report on Cocaine 2023* (Vienna, 2023), p. 111.
- 13 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, annex XIII.
- 14 UNODC, Current situation with respect to regional and subregional cooperation in addressing and countering drug trafficking – Report of the Secretariat, Thirtieth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Africa, UNODC/HONLAF/30/3, 7 August 2020, para. 13.
- 15 Data derived from the Illicit Drug seizures with relation to European Airports (IDEAS) database 2017–2023. The IDEAS database is a product of voluntary information sharing between several airports, mostly located in Europe. It is not a representative sampling of all European airports.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 IDEAS database.
- 19 UNODC AIRCOP dashboard 2023. AIRCOP is a multi-agency project implemented by UNODC in partnership with INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO). It is aimed at strengthening the capacities of international airports to target and intercept high-risk passengers, cargo and mail, as a contribution to the fight against illicit drugs and other illicit commodities, terrorism-related threats, trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. It is also aimed at facilitating communication and coordination between origin, transit and destination countries to disrupt cross-border illicit flows and criminal networks. AIRCOP is implemented in 41 airports in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, South-Eastern Europe and South-East Asia.
- 20 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 ENACT, “In Morocco, is cocaine the new cannabis?”, 11 April 2018.
- 23 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2021 from Morocco.
- 24 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 from Algeria.
- 25 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2021 from Algeria.
- 26 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2022 from Mauritania and the Niger, 2021 and 2020 from Burkina Faso and 2018 from the Niger. The Niger also reported secondary source countries, including Lebanon in the annual report questionnaire 2020 and 2021, and Afghanistan in 2020.
- 29 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2022 from Morocco.
- 30 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2021 from Algeria, Morocco, Belgium, Finland, France, Gibraltar, Hungary and Spain.
- 31 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), *European Drug Report 2023: Trends and Developments*, 2023.
- 32 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali, S/2018/581, 9 August 2018, para. 123; UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2020, 2021 and 2022 from Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Morocco, the Niger and Tunisia.
- 33 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 88.
- 34 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 35 AFP, “Plus de trois tonnes de haschisch saisies près de la Mauritanie”, 9 January 2019.
- 36 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, para. 73 and footnote 65.
- 42 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 43 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, paras. 77–87.
- 44 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2020 from the Niger.
- 45 UNODC, *Global Report on Cocaine* (Vienna, 2023), p.114.
- 46 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 47 Communication with the Office Central de Répression du Trafic Illicite des Stupéfiants, the drug enforcement agency of Senegal, 22 July 2023.
- 48 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 49 Communication with the *Office Central de Répression du Trafic Illicite des Stupéfiants*, the drug enforcement agency of the Niger, 23 November 2021.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, para. 79.
- 52 Ibid., para. 80.
- 53 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 54 See also UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, para. 74.
- 55 This includes a disruption in October and November 2020. See United Nations General Assembly, Western Sahara, Working paper prepared by the Secretariat, A/AC.109/2022/17, 10 February 2022, paras. 6–16.

- 56 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 100.
- 57 UNODC, *Global Report on Cocaine* (Vienna, 2023), p.112.
- 58 UNODC, *At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa* (Vienna, 2021), p.51.
- 59 Ibid., p 1.
- 60 WHO, *Critical Review Report: Tramadol, Expert Committee on Drug Dependence*, Forty-first Meeting Geneva, 12–16 November 2018, p. 15.
- 61 UNODC, *At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa* (Vienna, 2021), p 4.
- 62 Ibid., p 9.
- 63 Ibid., p 12.
- 64 UNODC, Online World Drug Report 2023, “Global and regional trends in opioid use”.
- 65 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023, “Executive summary”* (United Nations publication, 2023), p. 46.
- 66 West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (WENDU), “Statistics and trends on illicit drug use and supply 2018–2019”, 2021, p. 27.
- 67 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023, “Special points of interest”* (United Nations publication, 2023), p 21.
- 68 UNODC, Online World Drug Report 2023 – Latest data and trend analysis.
- 69 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2022 from Mali and Mauritania.
- 70 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2022 from Chad.
- 71 UNODC, *At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa* (Vienna, 2021), p17.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 “Several interviewees in West African countries referred to the existence of clandestine laboratories manufacturing tramadol. Although Nigeria is the country in which suspicions are strongest, this issue concerns the whole region. According to a Beninese user of tramadol, clandestine laboratories run by Asians may be active in a residential district of Cotonou.” UNODC, *At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa* (Vienna, 2021), pp. 20–21.
- 74 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023).
- 75 UNODC, annual report questionnaire 2022 data: 43 tons of tramadol were seized in Nigeria and 10 tons of tramadol were seized in Benin in 2022.
- 76 Icilome.com, “Togo-La folie du Tramadol, la cocaïne des pauvres à Lomé”, 20 Juillet 2023.
- 77 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2022 from Benin.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2022 from the Niger.
- 80 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 ONEP, “Lutte contre le trafic illicite de drogue au Niger: 110.800 comprimés de tramadol d’une valeur de 100 millions de FCFA saisis par l’OCTRIS à Niamey”, 7 January 2021.
- 83 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 84 Remadji Hoinathy, “Le trafic illicite de stupéfiants au Tchad contribue à l’insécurité régionale”, *ISS*, 25 August 2020.
- 85 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 UNODC, *Global Report on Cocaine* (Vienna, 2023), p. 112 and 149.
- 88 UNODC, “Fuel trafficking in the Sahel”, Transnational Organized Crime Assessment – Sahel, 2022, p. 17; Adib Bencherif, “Des élites touarègues face aux trafics de drogues. Quelles recompositions morales et sociopolitiques?”, *Politique Africaine*, vol. 3, No. 163 (2021), pp. 61–83; Ines Kohl, “Afrod, le business touareg avec la frontière: Nouvelles conditions et nouveaux défis”, *Politique Africaine*, vol. 4, No.132 (2013), pp. 139–159; Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); UNODC, *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*, (Vienna, 2009), pp. 27–32.
- 89 International Crisis Group, *Drug trafficking, violence and politics in northern Mali*, (Brussels, 2018), p.3.
- 90 Adib Bencherif, “Des élites touarègues face aux trafics de drogues. Quelles recompositions morales et sociopolitiques?”, *Politique Africaine*, vol. 3, No. 163 (2021), pp. 61–83; Julien Brachet and Judith Scheele, *The Value of Disorder: Autonomy, Prosperity, and Plunder in the Chadian Sahara*, (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 91 Adib Bencherif, “Des élites touarègues face aux trafics de drogues. Quelles recompositions morales et sociopolitiques?”, *Politique Africaine*, vol. 3, No. 163 (2021), pp. 61–83; Julien Brachet and Judith Scheele, *The Value of Disorder: Autonomy, Prosperity, and Plunder in the Chadian Sahara* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 92 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and extended pursuant to resolution 2432 (2018), S/2019/636, 7 August 2019, para. 74.
- 93 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali, S/2018/581, 9 August 2018, para. 131. Other Plateforme-affiliated groups include Ganda Izo, Mouvement pour le salut de l’Azawad (MSA) of the Dawсахak, and Ganda Koy.
- 94 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali, S/2018/581, 9 August 2018, para. 131.
- 95 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and extended pursuant to resolution 2432 (2018), S/2019/636, 7 August 2019, para. 111.
- 96 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali, S/2018/581, 9 August 2018, para. 131.
- 97 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 86.
- 98 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011), S/2018/812, 5 September 2018, para. 184; UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 81.
- 99 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali, S/2018/581, 9 August 2018, para. 131.
- 100 GIABA, *Terrorist Financing in West and Central Africa* (2016), p. 22.
- 101 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, para. 148.
- 102 Luca Raineri and Francesco Strazzari, “Drug smuggling and the stability of fragile states: the diverging trajectories of Mali and Niger”, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* (2022), vol. 16, No. 2, p. 228; Adib Bencherif, “Des élites

- toouarègues face aux trafics de drogues. Quelles recompositions morales et sociopolitiques?", *Politique Africaine*, vol. 3, No. 163 (2021), pp. 61–83; Olayemi Jacob Ogunniyi and James Onochie Akpu, "The challenge of drug trafficking to democratic governance and human security in West Africa: a historical reflection", *Africa Development*, vol. XLIV, No. 4 (2019), pp. 29–49.
- 103 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 104 UNODC interview with a law enforcement official in the Niger, 5 May 2023.
- 105 UNODC interview with a law enforcement official in the Niger, 7 July 2023.
- 106 Décision N°021/2020 du 28 mai 2020, Tribunal de Grande Instance Hors Classe de Niamey, République du Niger.
- 107 UNODC, "Trafficking in medical products in the Sahel", Transnational Organized Crime Assessment – Sahel, 2022, p. 19.
- 108 UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform.
- 109 UNODC, *At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa* (Vienna, 2021), p. 42.
- 110 VOA, "Démantèlement d'un réseau de trafiquants présumés de Tramadol à N'Djamena", 5 July 2019.
- 111 G5Sahel, "Spectaculaire saisie de drogue : le gouvernement mauritanien donne des précisions", 8 February 2016.
- 112 Groupe de Recherche et d'Information sur la Paix et la Sécurité, *Panorama du Trafic de Cocaine en Afrique de l'Ouest* (2012), pp. 24–25.
- 113 Financial Action Task Force (FATF), *Trade-Based Money Laundering* (Paris, 2006).
- 114 GIABA, *Typologies Report on Laundering the Proceeds of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in West Africa* (2010), para. 7.
- 115 UNSC, Midterm report of the Panel of Experts on Mali, S/2020/158/Rev.1, 18 March 2020, para. 87.
- 116 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 78.
- 117 UNODC interview with law enforcement officials in the Niger, 12 December 2021.
- 118 WACD, *Not Just in Transit: Drugs, the State and Society in West Africa* (2014), p.27.
- 119 EUROPOL, Notice Joel Soudron, December 2021.
- 120 Antoine Albertini, "Extrêmement discret, mobile, détenteur de plusieurs passeports: Europol lance un appel international pour retrouver un narcotrafiquant énigmatique", *Le Monde*, 3 December 2021.
- 121 ECOWAS Community Court of Justice, Decision N°: ECW/CCJ/JUG/10/17, 16 October 2017.
- 122 Antoine Albertini, "Extrêmement discret, mobile, détenteur de plusieurs passeports: Europol lance un appel international pour retrouver un narcotrafiquant énigmatique", *Le Monde*, 3 December 2021.
- 123 GIABA, *Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Linked to the Extractive Industry/ Mining Sector in West Africa* (2019), p. 27.
- 124 UNSC, Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel Report of the Secretary-General, S/2023/490, para. 3.
- 125 UN News, "Guterres condemns apparent coup attempt in Niger", 26 July 2023.
- 126 UNSC, The situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa – Report of the Secretary-General, S/2023/389, para. 7.
- 127 UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, S/2021/1091, para. 5.
- 128 UNSC, Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel Report of the Secretary-General, S/2023/490, para. 14.
- 129 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, "Press statement on the attempted coup d'état in the Gambia", 23 December 2022.
- 130 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts on Mali established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017), S/2023/578, 3 August 2023, para. 86.
- 131 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) concerning Libya, S/2014/106, 19 April 2014, para. 132.
- 132 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023), p. 182.
- 133 Danilo Mandić, *Gangsters and Other Statesmen: Mafias, Separatists, and Torn States in a Globalized World*, (Princeton University Press, 2020), pp. 103–123.
- 134 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) and renewed by resolution 2541 (2020) concerning Mali, S/2021/714, 6 August 2021, para. 148.
- 135 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, paras. 93–102.
- 136 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) concerning Libya, S/2014/106, 19 April 2014, para. 132.
- 137 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 102.
- 138 UNSC, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 7 August 2020, para. 83.
- 139 Ministry of Security and Civilian Protection of Mali, Communiqué, 27 November 2022.
- 140 WACD, *Not Just in Transit: Drugs, the State and Society in West Africa* (2014), pp. 20–22.
- 141 Adib Bencherif, "Des élites touarègues face aux trafics de drogues. Quelles recompositions morales et sociopolitiques?", *Politique Africaine* (2021), vol. 3, No. 163, p. 73.
- 142 UNDP, *Soldiers and Citizens: Military Coups and the Need for Democratic Renewal in Africa* (2023), p. 58.
- 143 GIABA, *Typologies Report on Laundering the Proceeds of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in West Africa* (2010), para. 51.
- 144 UNSC, Midterm report of the Panel of Experts on Mali, S/2020/158/Rev.1, 18 March 2020, paras 86–91.
- 145 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2021 and 2022 from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and the Niger.
- 146 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire 2020 from the Niger.
- 147 UNSC, Resolution 2374, S/RES/2374 (2017), 5 September 2017, p.2.
- 148 UNSC, Resolution 2359, S/RES/2359 (2017), 21 June 2017, p.1.
- 149 United Nations International Drug Control Programme, Model regulation establishing an interministerial commission for the coordination of drug control (not dated). Available at: https://www.unodc.org/pdf/lap_imccdc_model-regulation.pdf.
- 150 Décret No. 2011–1050/PRES/PM/MS/MEF du 30 décembre 2011 portant création, attributions, composition et fonctionnement du Comité national de lutte contre le tabac au Burkina Faso.
- 151 Arrêté No. 2016–0802/MSPC-SG du 12 avril 2016 fixant l'organisation et les modalités de fonctionnement du Secrétariat Permanent de la Mission interministérielle de coordination de lutte contre la drogue.

- 152 Décret No. 92–277/PM/MJ du 17 Août 1992, portant création de la Commission Nationale de Coordination pour la Lutte Contre la Drogue au Niger (CN-CLD); Ordonnance N° 99–42 du 23 septembre 1999, relative à la lutte contre la drogue au Niger, article 89, provides that another commission, placed under the authority of the Prime Minister, would be created by decree. The decree has not yet been adopted.
- 153 Décret No. 185/PR/M.INT/SEC/92 portant création d'un Comité Interministériel National de coordination de la Lutte contre la toxicomanie.
- 154 Communication with the Chadian Police, No. 392PT/PMT/MSPI/DGPN/DIS/23, 5 December 2023.
- 155 UNODC and WHO, *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention: Second Updated Edition* (2018).
- 156 UNODC and WHO, *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders: Revised Edition Incorporating the Results of Field Testing* (2020).
- 157 *Ibid.*, principle 3.
- 158 *Ibid.*, standard 1.1.
- 159 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.
- 160 For Burkina Faso: Loi No. 017/99/AN du 29 avril 1999 portant Code des drogues.
- 161 For Mali: Loi No. 01–078 du 18 juillet 2001 portant sur le contrôle des drogues et des précurseurs.
- 162 For Mauritania: Loi No. 93–37 relative à la répression de la production, du trafic et de l'usage illicite des stupéfiants et substances psychotropes.
- 163 For Niger: Ordonnance No. 99–42 du 23 septembre 1999, relative à la lutte contre la drogue au Niger.
- 164 Loi No. 93–37 relative à la répression de la production, du trafic et de l'usage illicite des stupéfiants et substances psychotropes, articles 3, 4 and 5.
- 165 Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Mauritania, CCPR/C/MRT/CO/2, 23 August 2019, para. 24.
- 166 United Nations system common position supporting the implementation of the international drug control policy through effective inter-agency collaboration, CEB/2018/2, annex 1.
- 167 *Ibid.*
- 168 UNODC, CRIMJUST. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/drug-trafficking/crimjust/index.html>.
- 169 UNODC, Global Container Control Programme. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/ccp/index.html>.
- 170 UNODC, AIRCOP. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/AIRCOP/1-aircop-home.html>.

DRUG TRAFFICKING IN THE SAHEL

TOCTA
Sahel
Transnational Organized
Crime Threat Assessment

Drug Trafficking in the Sahel is part of a series of transnational organized crime threat assessment reports on the Sahel.

With a focus on cocaine, cannabis resin and pharmaceutical opioids, the report explores drug trafficking in the Sahel by examining market dynamics, trafficking flows, the main actors involved and the enablers and impact of this form of trafficking on the region.



ISBN: 9789210022705



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime