



# Economic and Social Council

**Working towards political stability**

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**Topic:** Exploring the causality and correlation between legalisation of drugs, drug addiction and the increase of criminality rates

**Chair:** Alina González

**Co-Chairs:** Anastasia Salvat, Sofia Trost

## II. Introduction

### Committee

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime was established in 1997 as the outcome of merging the United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme. Its aim is to address and resolve the issues of drug control, transnational organised crime, corruption and international terrorism. UNODC helps member states with reforming their criminal justice systems to ensure the previously mentioned issues are resolved.

### Topic

All around the world, people consume drugs, some for medical, others for recreational purposes. While most countries legalize the (controlled) use of pharmaceutical drugs, many have much stricter laws regarding the recreational use of drugs. While the occasional use of drugs doesn't necessarily cause any harm to other people, the issue our world is facing is that many people have severe addiction problems. As many countries criminalize drug trafficking, this leads to the creation of mafias, that make millions with illegal drug trafficking. The issue with these groups is that they usually try to get their way using violence, thereby increasing the criminality rates in their countries drastically.

## III. Definition of Key Terms

### Drug-related crime

A drug-related crime is a crime related to being involved with the manufacture, trafficking or distribution of drugs classified as illegal or having a potential of abuse. Such crimes are commonly committed in gangs. Possessing said drugs is also illegal if a medical prescription cannot be presented.

### Substance abuse

Substance abuse, commonly referred to as drug abuse, is the use of an addictive substance in quantities or ways that are damaging or even lethal to the consumer and can put the people surrounding said consumer in danger.

## Opioids

Opioids are a type of drug used to reduce from moderate to severe pain. There are several types of opioids. The first type is prescription opioids. Their use is legal when prescribed by a doctor, but they come with serious risks and side effects. An example is morphine. The second type is fentanyl. Fentanyl is a much more powerful pain reliever which is often used to treat severe cancer pain. It is once again only legal when prescribed by a doctor. However, the illegal distribution and manufacture is increasing every day. Lastly there is heroin, which is an illegal opioid that causes many deaths a year due to overdose.

## IV. History of the topic

### Timeline of Events

#### First uses of drugs

Archaeological research states that ancient civilizations, such as the Greeks and Romans, consumed hemp and opium. Native American tribes are also said to have used drugs such as cocaine, which is known to provoke feelings of ecstasy and out-of-body-experiences. However, they did not use these drugs for recreational purposes, but to contact their ancestors. Opium poppies were one of the first psychoactive plants to be used by humans and the earliest known evidence of their usage was found in Italy. Many Old-World cultures are believed to have used opium and cannabis for medicinal purposes or to commemorate the dead.

#### Opioid addiction crisis in the US

Over 75% of the roughly 107,000 drug overdose deaths in 2021 in the US involved an opioid. Opioids are the leading cause for overdose deaths in the United States, and most of the times, the victims get firstly familiarized with them when they get them prescribed by a doctor. The most used opioid in the past was Oxycontin, which was first developed by German researchers in 1916 from opium-derived thebaine. Even though it was developed relatively soon, it didn't arrive to the US until the mid 90's and it was introduced into the United States market in 1996. The people who were prescribed Oxycontin had a tendency

to get addicted to this drug. It's clear that not much has been done regarding the control of pharmaceutical drug consumption, as anyone with a medical prescription could go to a pharmacy and get Oxycontin. That is why opioids are still a big threat that should be kept in mind when debating this topic.

## The 1960's

The 1960's can be considered as the beginning of the popularisation of recreational drugs, especially LSD, Marijuana and Hallucinogens. Hippies promoted the recreational use

of hallucinogenic drugs, particularly marijuana and LSD, in so-called head trips, justifying the practice as a way of expanding consciousness. Drugs were one of the reasons for people to become "hippies". At the same time, crime rates began increasing drastically in the United States between the 60's and the 90's, its peak being in the year 1991. In this matter, it can be said that there was/is a correlation between drug abuse and the increase of criminality rates.

## Criminal gangs in Latin America

Some of the countries with the world's highest criminality rates are in Latin America, for example Venezuela, Honduras, El Salvador, Guyana or Brazil. The main reasons for this are, high income inequality and unemployment rates, and organised criminal groups. As there are such high unemployment rates, that also leads to more young people joining the criminal gangs. Most of these gangs have so much power, that even the police are afraid of them and won't do barely anything to stop them. They can be associated to drugs, as most of them make their earnings with illicit drug trafficking. Criminal gangs that specialise in drug trading are also called "Narcos". Drug traffickers in Mexico, responding to drug use in the US, have turned to synthetic drugs and opioids, like crystal meth and fentanyl. Increased use of crystal meth in Mexico's border cities has been tied to rising violence, as criminal groups compete for control of local markets. Furthermore, Latin America is home to the world's only producers of cocaine in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia. It is extremely expensive to produce cocaine, so the market value is constantly increasing. One kilogram of cocaine can cost between 3,000€ and 35,000€, depending on the country it is being sold in. That is why many criminal gangs there are so interested in drug trafficking. As they are already in Latin America, they can get them for cheaper, as shipping isn't as expensive and they can resell them on the black market for a much higher price, making huge profits.

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

## El Salvador gang crackdown by president Nayib Bukele

A great example for how the previously mentioned criminal gangs take over control in their countries and maintain their power using violence can be seen in the country of El Salvador. It is used to be considered one of the most violent places in the world, as different gangs would fight each other but also turn on anyone who would try to interfere. However, in the last year, the country's leader, Nayib Bukele, has attempted to fight against them by arresting thousands of citizens suspected to be a part of one of the gangs. It is presumed that the Salvadoran leader has arrested about 2% of the country's adult population. Even though this has finally led to peace in the country, many people criticise the strict measures Bukele has imposed, as some believe he is also arresting innocent people and the conditions prisoners must live with and the way they are treated are considered "inhuman" or against human rights by many.

## Treaties from UNODC

Since the creation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, they have created three different treaties to try and solve the issue of drug abuse.

The first treaty is the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs from 1954, which was then amended by the 1972 protocol. It seeks to limit the possession, use, trade in, distribution, import, export, manufacture and production of drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes and combats drug trafficking through international cooperation to deter and discourage drug traffickers.

The second treaty is the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, from 1971. It focuses on the diversification and expansion of the spectrum of drugs of abuse and introduced controls over a number of synthetic drugs according to their abuse potential on the one hand and their therapeutic value on the other.

The third and last treaty passed by the UNODC is the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, from 1988. This Convention provides comprehensive measures against drug trafficking, including provisions against money laundering and the diversion of precursor chemicals. It provides for international cooperation through, for example, extradition of drug traffickers, controlled deliveries and transfer of proceedings.

## The Netherlands plans on stricter laws regarding drug consumption

The Netherlands, specifically the city of Amsterdam, has long been seen as a tourist destination for those who like to party. However, in this past year, Amsterdam has banned smoking cannabis in public and is imposing fines to get rid of party tourists. People

caught smoking cannabis in public could now be facing a fine of up to 100€. As this is not a very big amount of money, especially for a country as rich as the Netherlands, many believe that these bans won't change anything about the situation. However, even though the Netherlands don't have many strict laws on drug consumption, it doesn't have a high crime rate, like Latin American countries for example. So the question is, does it really depend on the laws regarding drug usage if we aim to lower crime rates?

## **V. Possible considerations for the future**

Is banning all drugs an option?

No, seeing as drugs include both recreational and pharmaceutical drugs. Pharmaceutical drugs could actually save one's life in eg. an accident, so banning these cannot be an option, unless scientists find a substitute that does not provoke addiction. Furthermore, it would only increase the rates of drug associated crimes, such as drug trafficking. That would mean that, while it may be possible to keep legal drug consumers away from them, illegal markets would start making millions, which in the end would lead to crime rates increasing.

## **VI. Questions to have in mind when writing a Resolution**

-What effect does limiting or controlling the use of drugs inside one's country have on criminality rates, especially the rates of drug related crimes?

-How can a member state have better control over the illegal use of drugs?

-Is there a possible solution to the issue that could be implemented by all member states, not strictly dependent on the financial resources of each nation?

-Is there a correlation between the poverty rate and the number of drug-addicts in a country?

-Should a distinction be made between pharmaceutical and recreational drugs?

## **VII. Major Countries Postitions**

The United States of America

Over the last few years, the epidemic of opioid use is continuing to rise in the United States of America. Since 2000, there have been 400.000 opioid-involved deaths in the country and in the year 2021, 25 people died everyday due to an overdose of heroin. The reason of these deaths can be drawn from two main issues, the first one being the increasing number of illegally distributed opioids in the United States. An example is the rising amount of illegally manufactured and sold fentanyl. Another clearly concerning issue is overdose. Those people who have access to said opioids often become addicted to them, meaning they cannot stop taking them and end up taking too much for their own good. This puts them at a higher risk of anxiety, depression, infectious diseases, suicide thoughts and death.

## El Salvador

As previously mentioned in the Timeline of Events, there have been several internal violence problems between gangs in El Salvador. They were the rulers of the street and all citizens lived in fear every day of having to experience violence or even being murdered. However, one year ago, the country's president Nayib Bukele declared "war" against those gangs. He imposed enormous security measures and gave the police the power to arrest anyone who is suspected of being in one of such gangs. He claimed this to be "emergency security measures". Since then, about 65.000 suspects have been arrested and people can now start to live properly again and do simple things like meeting someone in the neighbourhood without fearing to be attacked or even murdered. Nevertheless, during all of these arrest, there have been violations of some important human rights. Due to the bad state that the prisons are in, there have been several deaths and until today, after a year, there still remain people in prison who are held without being declared guilty.

## Mexico

Mexico has been experiencing a crisis of kidnappings, disappearances, and other criminal violence since 2018, which has resulted in over 30,000 deaths per year. Although gangs and drug cartels are primarily responsible for this violence, the state has also violated human rights in its fight against these organizations. The largest impact is felt by the citizens of Mexico themselves, which then try to leave the country to avoid violence and end up migrating to the USA, causing overmigration and drugs to cross the border, which end up leading to an epidemic of drug overdose in the US. Drug traffickers and criminal organizations in Mexico have also become much more structured since the 1980s, designating separate zones for each gang to rule in and building networks and routes for trafficking. However, as production and distribution grew, the different gangs started fighting for territory and market access, which is still fueling the rising violence in Mexico.



## VIII. Conclusion

It is clear that the legalisation of drugs affects the criminality rates in a country. However, it usually has a bigger influence on them in countries where they are still illegal or where a large part of the population is living below the poverty line, as they tend to use drugs as a way to escape the harsh reality that they live in. To find a good solution to this issue, all countries will have to collaborate and most of all, they will have to take every member states socioeconomic capabilities into account. Only then will we be able to find a solution to this issue that all countries can put into action.

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