

# Pandemic fallout to be felt 'for years': UN drug agency

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The coronavirus pandemic is pushing more people into drug use, while illicit cultivation could also get a boost, the UN said Thursday, warning that the crisis's fallout was likely to be felt "for years to come".

The Vienna-based United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

(UNODC), which each year pulls together data from its wide network of member countries in its [annual report](#), said it also feared illicit opium poppy and coca leaf cultivation could rise as the [economic crisis](#) caused by the [pandemic](#) led to joblessness and other problems around the globe.

"The new report shows that [drug](#) markets have swiftly resumed operations after the initial disruption at the onset of the pandemic" last year, a statement by agency said.

Top opium producer Afghanistan reported a 37 percent jump in the amount of land used for illicit poppy cultivation during 2020 compared with the previous year, the report said.

Inequality, poverty and mental health conditions—known factors that push people into drug use—are also on the rise across the world, it said in a chapter entitled "COVID-19 fallout likely to be felt in drug markets for years to come".

Most countries have reported a rise in the use of cannabis during the pandemic, it said, noting generally people decreasingly saw risks in its use.

The crisis has also seen an increase in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs, while consumption of drugs that are "typically used in social settings", such as cocaine, has dropped.

UNODC noted ever bigger shipments of illicit drugs and increased smuggling amid disruption to commercial air traffic.

## **Record global cocaine manufacture**

Even before the pandemic, global cocaine manufacture doubled in output between 2014 and 2019, when it reached a new record of an

estimated 1,784 tons, according to the report.

It has reached all-time highs in recent years, which is also in line with increasing global [drug use](#) in part due to the growing world population.

Cocaine supply chains to Europe are "diversifying, pushing prices down and quality up and thereby threatening Europe with a further expansion of the cocaine market", it said.

It added that a rising number of smaller groups, including some originating in the Balkans, was now involved in cocaine trafficking, leading to "increased competition and efficiency".

In a positive development seen by UNODC the area under coca bush cultivation declined globally by five percent in 2019.

This was largely driven by the first significant fall in [cultivation](#) in six years in Colombia though the South American country continued to be by far the largest source of [cocaine](#) globally.

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