

KLE MUN 2025

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

*Agenda: Tackling the Proliferation of  
Synthetic Drugs and Global Narcotics  
Networks*

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# Letter from the Executive Board

**Dear Delegates ,**

I hope this message finds you in great spirits. As Chair of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for the 2025 edition of KLE MUN, it's my distinct pleasure to extend a warm invitation to you for our upcoming conference. We're excited to have you join us as we tackle the vital agenda of *Tackling the Proliferation of Synthetic Drugs and Global Narcotics Networks*.

This year, we're focusing on one of the most pressing threats to global health and security: the rampant spread of synthetic drugs and their intricate distribution networks. As delegates, you'll engage in robust discussions to explore effective measures to disrupt these illicit operations and enhance international cooperation. Your insights will be invaluable in crafting innovative solutions to address these vulnerabilities.

KLE MUN offers a unique platform to step into the roles of diplomats and policymakers. We've curated an urgent agenda requiring collaborative approaches. By engaging, you'll enhance your understanding of international law and human rights, contributing to actionable strategies for combating this global menace.

I encourage you to bring your ideas, experiences, and questions to the table. Our committee fosters critical thinking, open dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving. Should you have any queries, don't hesitate to reach out. I'm here to assist you and ensure your experience is enjoyable and rewarding. I look forward to welcoming you to an engaging and productive conference.

**Best regards,**

**Pranathi Shivakumar**

**Chair, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime**

# Introduction to the UNODC

The *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)*, established in 1997 with roughly 500 staff globally, is a world leader in combating illicit drugs and international crime. It also spearheads the UN's terrorism prevention program.

UNODC focuses on educating the public about drug abuse dangers and bolstering international efforts against illegal drug production, trafficking, and related crimes. To achieve this, UNODC has initiated various programs, including promoting alternatives to illicit drug crop cultivation, monitoring these crops, and implementing anti-money laundering projects.

Furthermore, UNODC strives to enhance crime prevention and support criminal justice reform. This work aims to strengthen the rule of law, foster stable criminal justice systems, and combat the increasing threats of transnational organized crime and corruption. In 2002, the General Assembly endorsed an expanded program for UNODC's Terrorism Prevention Branch.

Its activities primarily involve assisting States, upon request, in ratifying and implementing the eighteen universal legal instruments against terrorism.

With 20 field offices spanning over 150 countries, UNODC staff collaborate directly with governments and non-governmental organizations. They develop and implement drug control and crime prevention programs specifically tailored to each country's unique requirements.

# Introduction to the Agenda

## *Agenda: Tackling the Proliferation of Synthetic Drugs and Global Narcotics Networks*

The rapid spread of synthetic drugs and the evolving global narcotics networks pose a severe threat to public health and security. The UNODC highlights that these illicit drugs are transforming markets, increasing consumption, and driving up drug-related illness and death. Unlike plant-based drugs, synthetics are cheap to make anywhere, making them incredibly hard to find and stop.

Criminal organizations exploit regulatory loopholes, technologies like the dark web and cryptocurrencies, and global supply chains to expand their operations. They use sophisticated chemistry to create potent, ever-changing compounds, challenging law enforcement and public health. This illicit trade also fuels other crimes, conflicts, human rights abuses, and environmental damage.

To counter this global challenge, UNODC's 2021 Synthetic Drug Strategy promotes a holistic and synchronized global response. The strategy rests on four pillars: multilateral cooperation, early warning systems, effective health responses, and targeted counternarcotics interventions. UNODC aims to empower Member States to dismantle criminal networks, detect new drug trends, prevent abuse, and deliver treatment, all while championing international collaboration and information exchange.

# Key Words

- **Synthetic Drugs:** These are illicit substances chemically manufactured to mimic the effects of traditional drugs (e.g., cannabis, cocaine, opioids). They are a significant threat due to their rapid production, low cost, high potency, and continuously evolving chemical structures.
- **Global Narcotics Networks:** These are transnational criminal organizations that orchestrate the production, trafficking, and distribution of illicit drugs worldwide. They leverage technological advancements and global supply chains to operate across borders and evade detection.
- **Synthetic Drug Strategy (UNODC 2021):** A comprehensive framework launched by UNODC to guide international, regional, and national efforts against the global synthetic drug problem. It emphasizes a coordinated and holistic approach.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:** The collaborative efforts among multiple countries and international organizations to address the global drug problem. This involves sharing information, coordinating law enforcement operations, and harmonizing policies.
- **Early Warning Systems:** Mechanisms designed to rapidly detect and analyze emerging drug trends, particularly new psychoactive substances (NPS). These systems enable timely responses from public health and law enforcement.
- **Counternarcotics Interventions:** Actions taken by law enforcement and other agencies to disrupt the supply of illicit drugs. This involves interdiction, dismantling production facilities, seizing precursor chemicals, and arresting traffickers.
- **Precursor Chemicals:** Chemicals legally used in legitimate industries but that can be diverted for the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs. Controlling their trade is crucial for disrupting synthetic drug production.

# Key Events

- **Launch of the UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy (2021) :**

In 2021, UNODC launched its comprehensive Synthetic Drug Strategy, providing a crucial framework to guide international, regional, and national responses to the burgeoning synthetic drug problem. This strategy is built upon four interconnected pillars: fostering multilateralism, establishing robust early warning systems, implementing effective health responses, and executing targeted counternarcotics interventions. It underscores UNODC's commitment to supporting Member States in strengthening their capacities to disrupt criminal networks, identify emerging drug trends, prevent drug abuse, and provide treatment and care, emphasizing global cooperation and information sharing. The strategy aims to address the dynamic nature of synthetic drug markets which pose unique challenges compared to plant-based drugs due to their mobility and ease of manufacture.

- **Annual World Drug Reports (Ongoing, e.g., 2023 Edition) :**

The UNODC annually publishes its flagship World Drug Report, which provides a comprehensive overview of global drug markets and trends, with increasing focus on synthetic drugs. The 2023 report, for instance, highlighted the growing complexity of evolving drug threats, noting the relentless spread of synthetic drugs which are cheap and easy to manufacture anywhere. It underscored the significant harm caused by these substances, including the surge in fentanyl-related overdose deaths in North America and increasing methamphetamine trafficking in various regions. These reports serve as a vital evidence base for policymakers, raising awareness about the need for systematic data collection and informing global responses to evolving drug challenges.



- **Establishment of the Global SMART Programme (2009 onwards):**

The Global Synthetic Monitoring: Analysis, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme, established in 2009, is a strategic UNODC initiative to monitor, analyze, and report on trends related to synthetic drugs, particularly amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) and New Psychoactive Substances (NPS). This program provides critical early warning and trend analysis, enabling Member States to respond effectively to emerging threats. It collects and disseminates information on new substances, production methods, and trafficking routes, thus enhancing the preparedness of national institutions to formulate timely and effective responses.

- **Intergovernmental Expert Group Meetings on the Global Synthetic Drug Problem (Annual, e.g., January 2024 & 2025) :**

UNODC regularly hosts open-ended intergovernmental expert group meetings dedicated to enhancing international and regional cooperation to address the global synthetic drug problem. For example, meetings in January 2024 and 2025 provided platforms for experts from Member States to engage in focused technical dialogue, sharing experiences and best practices. These discussions often revolve around the four pillars of the Synthetic Drug Strategy, covering topics like strengthening forensic capabilities, improving early detection systems, and developing science-informed health responses. These meetings are crucial for fostering collaboration and identifying areas for enhanced international action.



- **Capacity Building Initiatives to Counter Darknet Drug Trade:**

UNODC actively engages in capacity-building initiatives for law enforcement agencies worldwide to combat the illicit drug trade operating on the dark web and utilizing cryptocurrencies. These initiatives provide specialized training on understanding and investigating online drug markets, financial investigations related to cryptocurrency transactions, and open-source intelligence gathering. For instance, UNODC has conducted workshops to equip officials with the necessary knowledge and tools to detect, investigate, and dismantle drug trafficking networks operating in the digital realm, acknowledging the critical role technology plays in the expansion and evasion tactics of narcotics networks.

# Information on Key Treaties

- **The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol**

This convention is considered the cornerstone of the international drug control system, consolidating previous international agreements and expanding control measures to include the cultivation of plants used for narcotic drugs. It aims to combat drug abuse by restricting the possession, use, trade, distribution, import, export, manufacture, and production of drugs solely for medical and scientific purposes. The 1972 Protocol notably strengthened provisions regarding efforts to prevent illicit production, traffic, and use of narcotics, emphasizing stricter control over these substances.

- **The Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971**

Adopted in response to the diversification and expansion of the spectrum of drugs of abuse, particularly synthetic psychotropic substances like amphetamines, barbiturates, and LSD, this convention introduced controls over a wider range of substances not covered by the 1961 Convention. It aims to balance the potential for abuse of these substances with their legitimate therapeutic value. The convention classifies psychotropic substances into four schedules based on their abuse potential and medical utility, with varying levels of control measures.

- **The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988**

This convention was a crucial response to the rapid growth of international drug trafficking, addressing the financial and logistical aspects of the illicit drug trade. It provides comprehensive measures against drug trafficking, including provisions against money laundering and the diversion of precursor chemicals. The 1988 Convention mandates international cooperation through mechanisms such as extradition of drug traffickers, mutual legal assistance between States in drug-related investigations, and controlled deliveries. It essentially criminalizes the entire drug market chain, from cultivation and production to shipment, sale, and possession, and aims to deprive drug traffickers of their illicitly acquired assets.

These three conventions form the bedrock of the international drug control system, enabling UNODC to work with Member States in developing national legislation, strengthening law enforcement capacities, and promoting international cooperation to effectively counter the proliferation of synthetic drugs and the operations of global narcotics networks.

# Other Proposed Solutions

## **1. Strengthening Early Warning Systems and Forensic Capacities**

- Proposal: Enhance national and international early warning systems for emerging synthetic drugs and strengthen forensic capabilities for rapid identification and analysis.
- Goal: Enable quick detection of new substances, facilitate timely public health responses, and support law enforcement in identifying and interdicting illicit synthetic drug production.

## **2. Promoting Science-Informed Health Responses**

- Proposal: Expand evidence-based drug prevention, treatment, and care services, including medication-assisted treatment and harm reduction, aligned with international standards.
- Goal: Reduce drug-related morbidity and mortality, minimize the health and social harms of drug use, and ensure accessible, voluntary, and human rights-based support for individuals with drug use disorders.

## **3. Enhancing International Law Enforcement and Judicial Cooperation**

- Proposal: Strengthen mechanisms for mutual legal assistance, extradition, and joint operations to disrupt transnational narcotics networks, including those operating online.
- Goal: Facilitate more effective cross-border investigations, prosecutions, and asset recovery, dismantling criminal organizations involved in synthetic drug trafficking.

#### **4. Addressing the Diversion of Precursor Chemicals**

- Proposal: Improve national regulatory frameworks and international monitoring systems to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals used in illicit synthetic drug manufacture.
- Goal: Disrupt the supply chain for synthetic drugs by controlling the flow of essential chemicals, requiring vigilance from both authorities and the chemical industry.

#### **5. Countering Cybercrime and Darknet Drug Trade**

- Proposal: Develop specialized technical assistance and training for law enforcement on investigating online drug markets, cryptocurrency transactions, and digital forensics.
- Goal: Equip Member States to detect, investigate, and prosecute drug trafficking on the dark web and through other digital platforms, targeting the anonymity used by criminals.

#### **6. Preventing Money Laundering from Drug Trafficking**

- Proposal: Strengthen capacities to detect and interdict illicit financial flows, including those involving cryptocurrencies, derived from synthetic drug trafficking.
- Goal: Deprive narcotics networks of their illicit profits, thereby undermining their operational capacity and deterring further criminal activity.

# Case Studies and International Cooperation Successes

- **Record Seizures of Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia:**

UNODC reports consistently show significant increases in synthetic drug seizures, especially methamphetamine, across East and Southeast Asia. These record achievements stem from enhanced regional cooperation, intelligence sharing via UNODC's Global SMART Programme, and coordinated law enforcement. Such multi-country efforts clearly disrupt the synthetic drug supply chain, effectively curbing their proliferation.

- **WCO-UNODC Container Control Programme (CCP) Successes:**

The joint World Customs Organization (WCO)-UNODC Container Control Programme (CCP) exemplifies effective international cooperation. The CCP sets up Port and Airport Control Units in Member States to intercept illicit shipments in containerized cargo. Operations like TIN CAN, involving 58 countries, have led to major seizures and arrests, showcasing how customs and law enforcement collaboration, backed by UNODC, disrupts global drug trafficking by targeting supply chain vulnerabilities.

- **Strengthening Forensic and Investigative Capacities:**

UNODC actively boosts Member States' investigative and forensic capabilities, improving outcomes in synthetic drug cases. A recent UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy project significantly enhanced crime scene investigation skills for synthetic drug crimes in Latin America and the Caribbean, training various personnel. This capacity building, supported by partners like Global Affairs Canada, aims to increase successful prosecutions through better evidence collection and stronger cooperation among criminal justice stakeholders.

# Questions A Resolution Must Answer (QARMA)

Here are some Questions A Resolution Must Answer (QARMA) for the agenda: *Tackling the Proliferation of Synthetic Drugs and Global Narcotics Networks*:

- How can global legal frameworks be updated to effectively control new synthetic drugs and their precursors?
- What mechanisms can ensure rapid intelligence sharing on emerging synthetic drug threats and trafficking routes?
- What specific roles should international bodies like UNODC and WHO play in coordinating global responses to synthetic drug proliferation?
- How can developing countries be better supported in establishing robust forensic, law enforcement, and health capacities to counter synthetic drugs?
- What protocols should be adopted globally for real-time responses to new synthetic drug surges and related public health crises?
- How can public-private partnerships, especially with chemical and pharmaceutical industries, prevent precursor diversion and online drug sales?
- What monitoring and evaluation processes will measure the effectiveness of international initiatives against synthetic drug proliferation and network disruption?
- How can countries collaborate to ensure consistent application of international control measures for synthetic drugs across borders and online platforms?



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- **UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy (2021 onwards):**  
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- **UNODC Global SMART Programme:** Information integrated within the broader UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy and related publications.
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