

UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform Brief: Possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in opiates and methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan

Introduction

Within a span of 12 months, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the global economy, public health and daily life. Drug trafficking relies heavily on legal trade to camouflage its activities and on individuals being able to distribute drugs to consumers. Accordingly, measures implemented by Governments to counter the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to affect illegal drug markets.¹

This brief is aimed at demonstrating the value of the UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform as an early warning tool for promptly shedding light on, identifying and anticipating possible emerging and ongoing trends, patterns and dynamics related to drug trafficking routes, in order to support law enforcement, other operational activities and policymakers. Based on a select number of illustrative country examples, the specific intention of this brief is to reflect the platform's attributes by focusing on trafficking in opiates and methamphetamine from Afghanistan against the backdrop of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. Unless otherwise indicated, the data

comparison covers the time period March to December in both 2019 and 2020.

The analysis contained herein is based on a continually updated set of individual drug seizure data captured by the Drugs Monitoring Platform. The Drugs Monitoring Platform and its analytical outputs are aimed at providing knowledge based on a constantly evolving and expanding dataset, bearing in mind that several data caveats should be taken into account (see Scope and limitations of the data used in the analysis).

WHAT IS THE UNODC DRUGS MONITORING PLATFORM?

The UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform is a multi-source system for collecting, visualizing and sharing drug data aimed at providing access to near real-time data on drug trafficking trends, delivering data using interactive visualizations adapted to user specific needs and improving early warning drug threat identification for law enforcement and analysts.² The Drugs Monitoring Platform provides additional geographical insight on current drug trafficking trends, with over 430,000 geo-coded drug seizure data points obtained from countries around the world. At present, an estimated 8,000 real-time data points, collected within the previous six months, are entered into the Drugs Monitoring Platform annually.

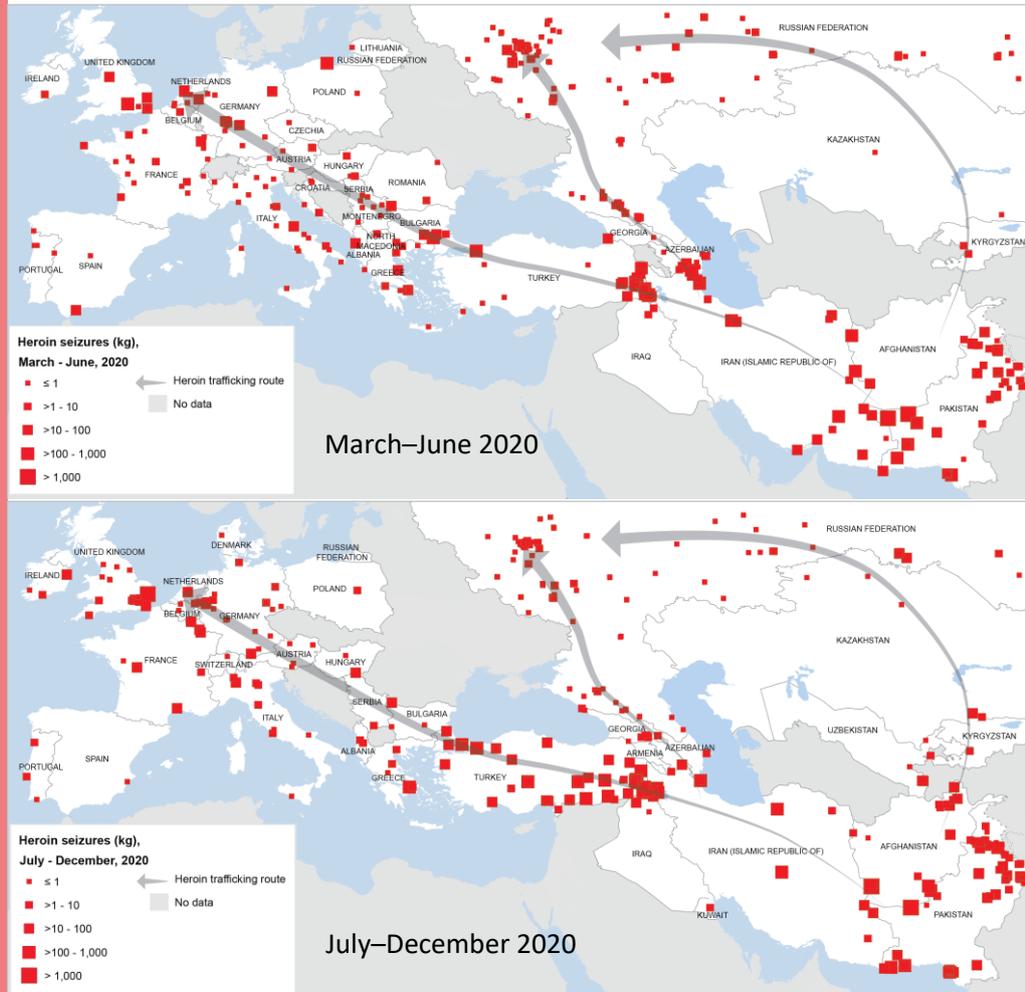
¹ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2020* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.XI.6 (Booklet 1)); UNODC, Research Brief: *COVID-19 and the Drug Supply Chain: from Production and Trafficking to Use* (Vienna, May 2020).

² UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform. Available at <https://dmp.unodc.org/>.

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The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped the Balkan route from maintaining its status as the principal trafficking route for Afghan opiates. Nor does it seem to have prevented the Caucasus branch of the route from serving as a possible transit corridor for trafficking opiates to European markets.

SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL HEROIN SEIZURES ALONG THE BALKAN ROUTE AND THE NORTHERN ROUTE

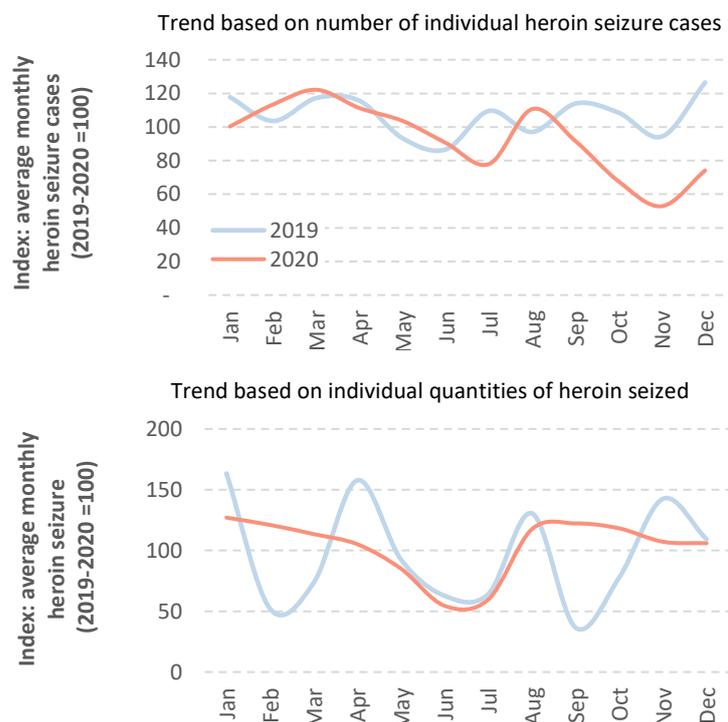


The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform.

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Despite short-term fluctuations, perhaps resulting from waves of COVID-19-related restrictions in some countries, the large heroin seizures made during 2020 in countries other than Afghanistan suggest that large-scale opiate trafficking has continued throughout the pandemic, possibly by means of larger shipments than before it began.

TREND ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL HEROIN SEIZURES LINKED TO AFGHAN OPIATE PRODUCTION, JANUARY 2019 TO DECEMBER 2020*



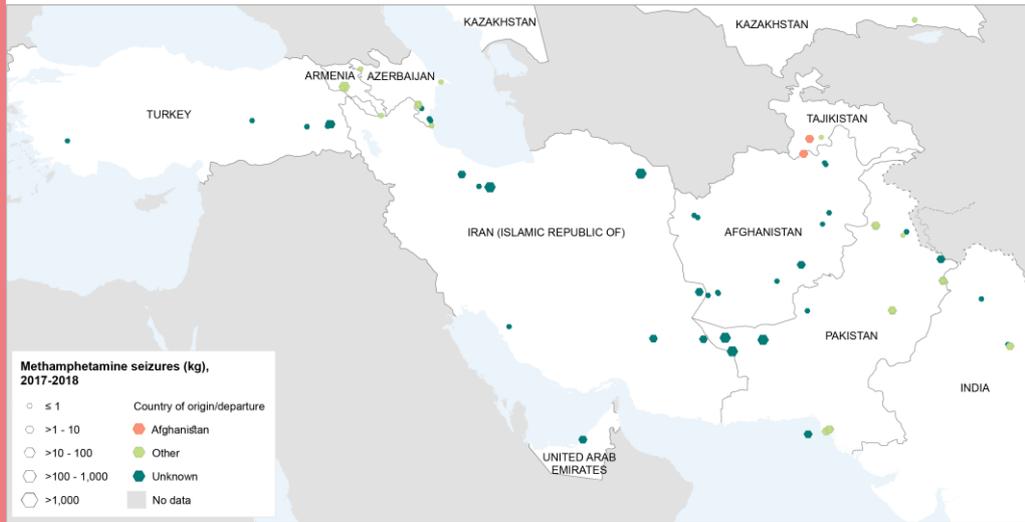
*Data covering Africa, Central Asia, Europe, Near and Middle East/South-West Asia and South Asia Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform.

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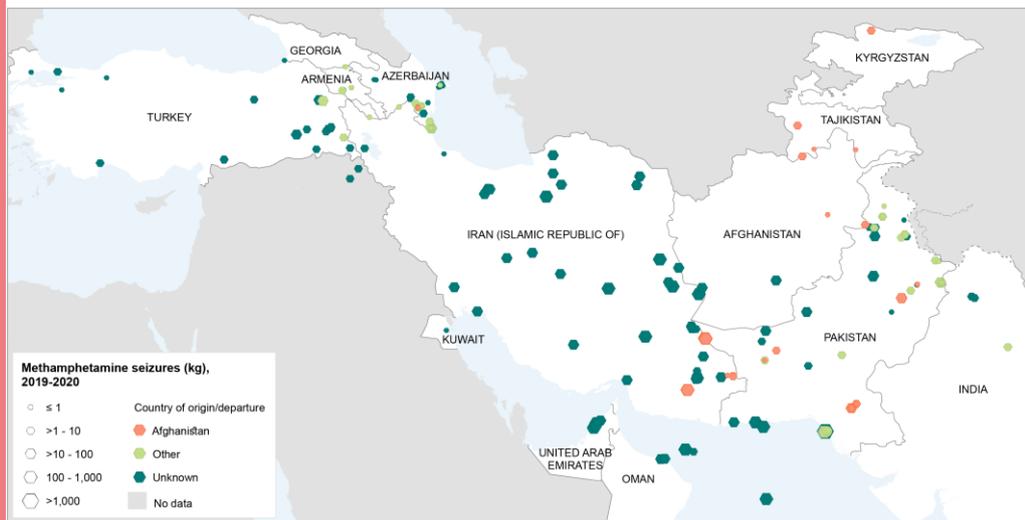
The pattern and origin of methamphetamine seizures in countries neighbouring Afghanistan suggest that the manufacture of the drug in Afghanistan has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SIGNIFICANT SEIZURES OF METHAMPHETAMINE IN SELECT COUNTRIES OF THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST/SOUTH-WEST ASIA, SOUTH ASIA, CENTRAL ASIA, CAUCASUS AND TURKEY BY ORIGIN 2017 TO 2020

2017–2018



2019–2020



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Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform.

To read more, please visit: <https://dmp.unodc.org/>