

# Drug Capitals of the World

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Afghanistan, which produces 90% of the world's heroin, as well as the largest share of cannabis resin, could stake a claim to being the "drug capital of the world". But, in reality, there are many "drug capitals", depending on whether we are speaking about drug consumption, or drug production.

Naturally, most of the poison is consumed in richer nations, whereas it is produced in poorer countries. The picture, however, is complicated and ever-changing and the most recent report on the drug trade from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said there was an increase in drug abuse in developing countries. It highlighted a boom in heroin consumption in Eastern Africa, a rise of cocaine use in both West Africa and South America, and a surge in the production and abuse of synthetic drugs in the Middle East, as well as South East Asia.

UN Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa said: "We will not solve the world drugs problem by shifting consumption from the developed to the developing world. While rich people in rich countries can afford treatment, poor countries can't absorb the consequences of increased drug use. The developing world faces a looming crisis that would enslave millions to the misery of drug dependence."

There was more positive news in the fact that **opium cultivation has declined in Afghanistan, and coca production in the Andean countries has dropped by 28%** in the last decade. But this does not necessarily mean fewer drugs are being consumed and the UN report said drug use had stabilized in the developed world.

Afghanistan Opium Trade

Source: *Graphic.is*

This article will consider these recent trends, as well as naming the global capitals of drug consumption and production for each of the four main categories of drugs – heroin, cocaine, cannabis and amphetamines.

## Heroin: Capitals of Production

There is a clear "winner" in this category. **Afghanistan produced 6,900 metric tonnes (mt) - around 90% - of the world's heroin in 2009.** Although that figure fell by up to 48% in 2010 because of crop blight, the UN estimates that more than 12,000 tonnes of Afghan opium have been stock-piled, which is enough to supply the market for 2.5 years.

Because Afghanistan is so important to heroin production, many people wonder why the occupying forces do not destroy the opium fields. But Brian Shapiro, the Director of Communications at the UK organisation DrugScope, says the situation is far too complex.

"For one thing, if the US spent billions on eliminating it this year, could they afford to do the same next year, and in 20 years time? The occupying forces have decided on a cost-benefit basis that the war on terrorism is more vital than the war on drugs. There's also the issue of winning hearts and minds in the battle against insurgents. If they destroy the farmers' crops, they won't be too popular."

**The impoverished local farmers need to produce opium to survive.** "Afghan wheat is far less profitable than opium and would be subject to the competitive markets of a global economy. It's impossible to make money from conventional agriculture because the country's infrastructure was laid to waste when the Russians pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989. Railways and roads were destroyed and no money has been put into restoring them as the country has been at war the whole time."

Although Afghanistan dominates heroin production, large quantities are produced in Myanmar (around 330 mt a year) and in Latin America, notably in Colombia and Mexico. **Since 2003, Mexico has been the world's third largest source of opium, producing around 325 mt.**

## Heroin: Capitals of Consumption

**Western Europe and Russia together consume almost half the world's supply of heroin.**

The largest market is Western Europe, where about 60 % of regional consumption is accounted for by four countries, the UK, Italy, France and Germany.

Russia is the second largest market. It has 1.6 and 1.8 million users, a prevalence rate of 1.6%, a high percentage (37%) of whom are HIV positive. About **25% of Afghan heroin is trafficked along the 'Northern Route'**, usually through Tajikistan to Osh in Kyrgyzstan, before transiting Kazakhstan to Russia. Although Afghanistan produces most of the world's opiates, it seizes less than 2% of them. Iran and Turkey are responsible for over half of heroin seizures.

## Cocaine: Capitals of Production

Colombian traffickers produce most of the world's cocaine, although between 2000 and 2009, the area under **coca cultivation in Colombia decreased by 58%**, mainly due to eradication by the Government. **At the same time, coca cultivation increased by 38% in Peru and more than doubled in Bolivia (up 112%).**

Mexican drug cartels emerged over the last 10-15 years as the primary organizers for shipments into the US, largely replacing Colombian groups.

## Cocaine: Drug Capitals of Consumption

The biggest markets are in the US and in Western Europe, although cocaine consumption has fallen significantly in the US in the past few years. "One reason for the drug-related violence in Mexico is that cartels are fighting over a shrinking market," said Antonio Maria Costa. "This in-fighting is a blessing for America, as the resulting cocaine drought is causing lower addiction rates, higher prices and lesser purity of doses."

To an extent **the problem has moved to Europe, where the number of cocaine users doubled from 2 million in 1998 to 4.1 million in 2008. By 2008, the European market (US\$34 billion) was almost as valuable as the North American market (US\$37 billion).** The shift in demand has led to a shift in trafficking routes, with an increasing amount of cocaine flowing to Europe from the Andean countries via West Africa. "People snorting coke in Europe are killing the pristine forests of the Andean countries and corrupting governments in West Africa," said Costa.

## Cannabis: Capitals of Production

**Cannabis is the world's most widely used drug. It is grown all over the world, and smoked by 130-190 million people.** The biggest exporters are Afghanistan and Morocco, but the UN found evidence of indoor cultivation in 29 countries, particularly in Europe, Australia and North America.

Brian Shapiro, from DrugScope, said: "Globally, a lot more cannabis is home-grown than was the case 10 years ago. We first saw the emergence of cannabis farms in Canada and the US, producing potent forms. Now in the UK, these farms, run by **Vietnamese gangsters, are producing about 75% of cannabis on the market.**"

## Cannabis: Capitals of Consumption

There are cannabis users everywhere, but the highest prevalence is in Oceania (9.3%-o 14.8%). In New Zealand, for example, the prevalence is 14.6 % of the population aged 14-64 years. Lifetime prevalence of cannabis abuse in Fiji and Papua New Guinea is about 47 and 55% respectively. The next highest prevalence is in the Americas (6.3% to 6.6%).

## Amphetamines: Capitals of Production

Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) can be made anywhere the precursor chemicals can be found, so manufacturing happens close to markets. The UN found the largest number of illicit laboratories in the US, the Czech Republic, Australia, China, Slovakia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Canada and Mexico.

The ATS market is harder to track because of short trafficking routes and the fact many raw materials are both legal and readily available. Manufacturers are quick to market new products like ketamine, piperazines, Mephedrone and Spice and exploit new markets.

## Amphetamines: Capitals of Consumption

**The number of people using ATS - estimated at around 30-40 million** - is soon likely to exceed the number of opiate and cocaine users combined. Oceania, East and South-East Asia, North America, and West and Central Europe are the regions with the highest prevalence rates. Although 'ecstasy' use in Europe has plummeted since 2006, the manufacture of ecstasy has increased in North America, notably in Canada, and in several parts of Asia.

"We will not solve the world drugs problem if we simply push addiction from cocaine and heroin to other addictive substances - and there are unlimited amounts of them, produced in mafia labs at trivial costs," warned Costa.

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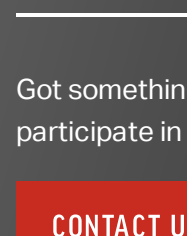
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