

Turnover of Global Organized Crime: \$870 Billion... a Year

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The annual turnover of transnational organized criminal activities such as drug trafficking, counterfeiting, illegal arms trade and the smuggling of immigrants is estimated at around \$870 billion, the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said.

Screenshot from UNODC's global awareness-raising campaign emphasizing the size and cost of transnational organized crime.

“Transnational organized crime reaches into every region, and every country across the world. Stopping this transnational threat represents one of the international community's greatest global challenges,” said UNODC's Executive Director, Yury Fedotov, in a news release.

“Crucial to our success is our ability to raise public awareness and generate understanding among key decision and policymakers.” The \$870 billion turnover from transnational organized crime is six times the amount of official development assistance, and is comparable to 1.5 per cent of the global domestic product, or seven per cent of the world's exports of merchandise, according to UNODC.

Drug trafficking is the most lucrative form of business for criminals, with an estimated value of \$320 billion a year. Human trafficking brings in about \$32 billion annually, while some estimates place the global value of smuggling of migrants at \$7 billion per year, according to a UN news release on 16 June.

Trafficking Also in Environment

The environment is also exploited: trafficking in timber generates revenues of \$3.5 billion a year in South-East Asia alone, while elephant ivory, rhino horn and tiger parts from Africa and Asia produces \$75 million annually in criminal turnover, UNODC notes. At \$250 billion a year, counterfeiting is also a high earner for organized crime groups.

In addition to the financial costs involved, the agency's awareness-raising campaign seeks to highlight the human costs of these criminal activities to societies. Each year, countless lives are lost to drug-related health problems and violence and firearm deaths, among other causes. In addition, some 2.4 million people are victims of human trafficking.

“The UNODC-led campaign also illustrates that despite being a global threat, the effects of transnational organised crime are felt locally. Crime groups can destabilize countries and entire regions, undermining development assistance in those areas and increasing domestic

corruption, extortion, racketeering and violence,” UNODC noted in a news release. “The campaign drives the message that someone ultimately suffers and there is always a victim.”

The Huge Impact of Drug Abuse

Three weeks earlier, the head of the United Nations anti-drugs office highlighted the impact of drug abuse around the world.

In fact, in 26 June, UNODC chief, Yury Fedotov, said that countering transnational organized crime and illicit drugs must become an integral part of the development agenda, the UN reported.

“Heroin, cocaine and other drugs continue to kill around 200,000 people a year, shattering families and bringing misery to thousands of other people, insecurity and the spread of HIV,” Fedotov told the UN General Assembly, during a special thematic debate on drugs and crime as a threat to development.

“At present, only around one quarter of all farmers involved in illicit drug crop cultivation worldwide have access to development assistance – if we are to offer new opportunities and genuine alternatives, this needs to change,” Fedotov said.

The Assembly’s debate coincided with the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, observed on 26 June, and was also the forum for Fedotov’s launch of UNODC’s flagship study, the 2012 World Drug Report.

The UNODC chief said that drug-producing and drug-consuming countries alike have a stake in fighting the illicit drug trade, adding that Governments should not forget that illicit drugs also affect health and security globally.

Drug use appears to be spilling over into countries lying on trafficking routes, such as in West and Central Africa, which are witnessing rising numbers of cocaine users, and Afghanistan and Iran, which are grappling with the highest rates of opium and heroin use.

Mr. Fedotov noted that as developing countries emulate the lifestyles of industrialized nations, drug consumption will probably increase, placing a heavier burden on countries ill equipped to deal with burgeoning drug demand. International support should therefore aim at strengthening the capacity of vulnerable nations to confront that challenge, he said.

The 2012 World Drug Report finds that although global patterns of illicit drug use, production and health consequences largely remained stable in 2012, opium production had rebounded to previous high levels in Afghanistan, the world’s biggest opium producer.

In addition, lower overall levels of cultivation and production of opium and coca have been offset by rising levels of synthetic drug production.

230 Million People Use Illicit Drugs

Around 230 million people, or five per cent of the world’s adult population, aged 15 to 64, are estimated to have used an illicit drug at least once in 2010, according to the Report. Problem drug users, mainly heroin- and cocaine-dependent persons, number about 27 million, roughly 0.6 per cent of the world adult population, or 1 in every 200 people.

On opium, the Report says that Afghanistan has returned to high levels of opium production.

Global opium production amounted to 7,000 tons in 2011, up from 2010, when plant diseases wiped out almost half the crop yields and triggered steep price rises in Afghanistan. Myanmar remained the world's second largest poppy-crop grower and opium producer after Afghanistan, with cultivation up by 14 per cent in 2011 and a nine per cent share of global opium production.

On cocaine, the Report finds that the number of estimated annual cocaine users in 2010 ranged from 13.3 million to 19.7 million – or around 0.3 to 0.4 of the global adult population.

North America, Europe, Australia, Major Markets for Cocaine

The major markets for cocaine continue to be North America, Europe and Australia. The United States saw cocaine use decrease from 3.0 per cent in 2006 to 2.2 per cent in 2010 among adults, and in Europe cocaine use remains stable but continues to rival use in the United States. However, cocaine use is up in Australia and South America, and it is also spreading to parts of Africa and Asia.

The 2012 World Drug Report finds that the use and global seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants, the second most widely used drugs worldwide, remained largely stable.

However, in 2010, methamphetamine seizures, of around 45 tons, more than doubled those of 2008, due to significant seizures in Central America and East and South-East Asia. In Europe, 'ecstasy' pill seizures more than doubled, from 595 kilograms in 2009 to 1.3 tons in 2010, indicating a stronger market on that continent.

And Up to 224 Million People Use Cannabis

There are between 119 million and 224 million estimated cannabis users worldwide, according to the Report, with Europe the world's biggest market for cannabis resin, in the form of hashish, mainly supplied by Morocco, although its relative importance is declining.

Most European Union countries report the increasing indoor cultivation of cannabis herb, known as marijuana, possibly reflecting a growing preference for marijuana over hashish.

The Report also considers the non-medical use of prescription drugs, noting that in many countries there is more non-medical use of prescription drugs than of controlled substances, other than cannabis.

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