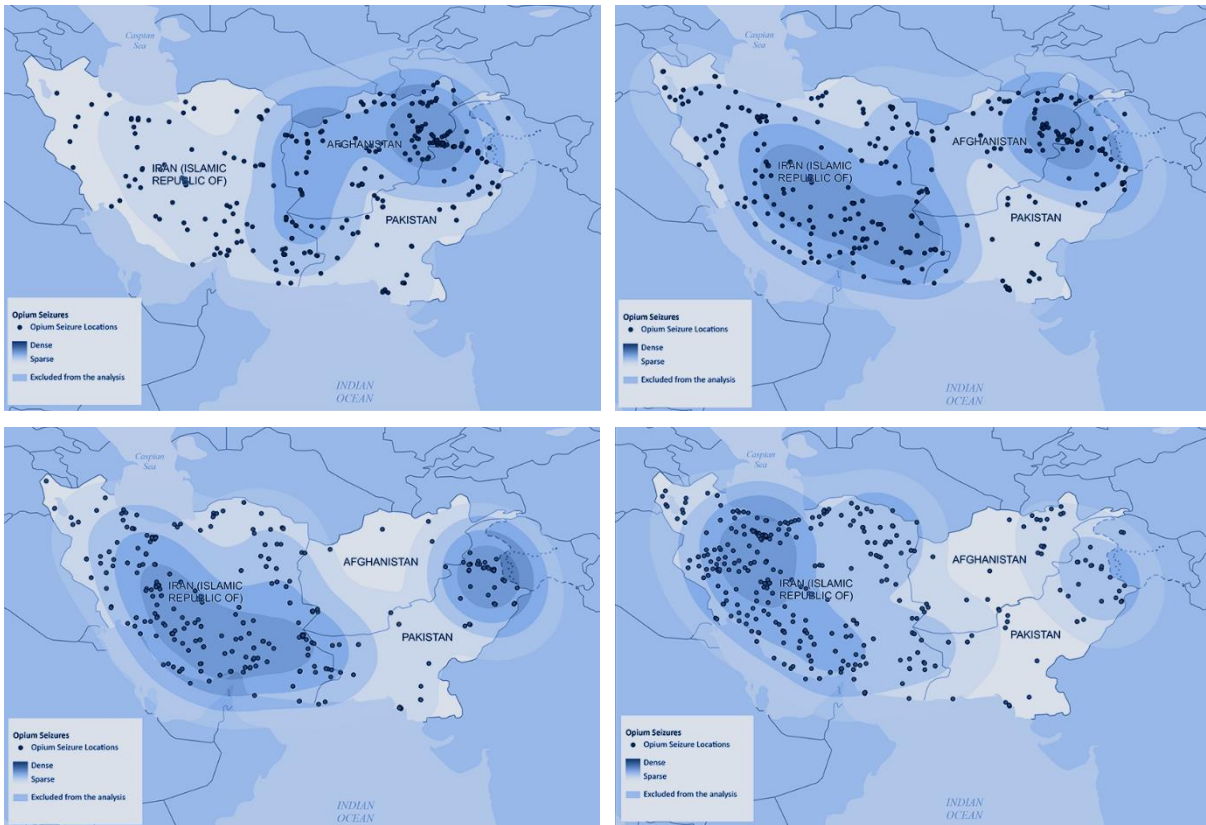


UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform Brief on Afghanistan and neighbouring regions:

Update on patterns and trends in heroin,
methamphetamine and opium trafficking
from 2020 to 2023, before and after
the April 2022 Afghanistan Drug Ban



BOX: INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA USED IN THE ANALYSIS

The evidence reported in this brief is based on the analysis of geo-coded individual drug seizure data housed within the UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform. The platform consists of a dataset fed by different layers of information. It is mainly based on significant drug seizures currently communicated to UNODC by Member States via the officially mandated Individual Drug Seizure data collection channel, though some information gaps resulting from insufficient reporting by national authorities are addressed by using public data, mainly from government sources and data from other contributors, as and where relevant.

The Drugs Monitoring Platform and its analytical outputs aim at examining possible changes in trafficking patterns and providing knowledge that can support law enforcement, strategic responses and policymakers. This is based on a constantly evolving and expanding dataset, and several data caveats should be borne in mind. These data can provide insights into some overarching trends in drug trafficking. However, there are limitations to interpretation. For one, seizure events are a function of illegal flows, interdiction efforts, and counter-smuggling efforts. Changes in any one of these factors may therefore result in increases or decreases in seizures, thus affecting interpretation.

This analysis is based on selected countries situated along stages of the so-called Southern route (including East and Southern Africa), and along the Balkan, Caucasus, and Northern routes (excluding Western and Central Europe), focusing on seizures of heroin, methamphetamine, and in some cases opium, taking place in South-West Asia, South Asia, the Near and Middle East, Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Seizures in bodies of water within the mentioned subregions, such as the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea or the Indian Ocean, are also included and referred to as “maritime” seizures.

The reporting of seizure activity in Afghanistan has decreased dramatically since August 2021, making it difficult to assess the trafficking situation in the country.

The data comparison covers the period 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2023. The dataset includes significant seizures (above a certain weight threshold). Unless otherwise indicated, relatively small seizure events (i.e., those involving less than 1 kilogram of heroin, opium or methamphetamine) have been included in the analysis. Seizure events analysed in this report total 20,362 published within the Drugs Monitoring Platform as of December 2023. The results outlined in this analytical document are not conclusive and trends may change as more data on seizures become available.

This brief explores the possible impact of the April 2022 Taliban ban on the production and trafficking of opiates and methamphetamine across different regions (and countries) affected by Afghan heroin, opium and methamphetamine. Trends are examined comparing the period from January 2020 up to March 2022, and then from April 2022 to December 2023¹.

It is important to note that the trends identified when comparing the period before and after April 2022 do not always imply a causal relationship with the drug ban imposed by the Taliban. Disruptions in trafficking can take time to manifest as the supply chain may be affected by the holding and release of stocks over time. In addition, other events and dynamics can also impact the behaviour of traffickers and other relevant actors, including geopolitical conflicts or changes in prices due to the uncertainty of some measures². However, this analysis can provide insights into overarching emerging trends in opium, heroin and methamphetamine trafficking across the regions mentioned.

A degree of uncertainty persists regarding the attribution of observed changes in drug trafficking trends, particularly when examining subregions geographically distant from Afghanistan, where other trafficking patterns and drug production dynamics may be at play. More specifically, whereas heroin production can often be explicitly traced to Afghanistan, the identification of methamphetamine production can be more challenging as there is potential for it to be produced in any country across various geographic regions.

As the data collection of officially reported individual drug seizures is a continuous activity, not all data for 2023 may have been reported prior to the publication of this brief. In addition, as mentioned in a previous DMP Brief³, the individual seizures recorded in the DMP are not meant to be comprehensive of whole amounts seized in a geographical area, the aim is rather to characterize all main significant seizures to describe patterns and flows of trafficking.

¹ There have been previous government bans on opium poppy cultivation and other drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan dating as far back as 2000 and 2001, which were strongly enforced. The 2022 opium harvest was largely unaffected by the ban, while the 2023 harvest, between April and July 2023, was 95% smaller than the year before. See https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2023.pdf

² Seizures are a function of interdiction efforts, trafficker countermeasures, and overall flows of illegally produced drugs. Therefore, caution must be used when making inferences about drug trafficking from seizure events. See Reuter, P., 1995. Seizure of drugs. Encyclopedia of Drugs and Alcohol, 3, pp.1022-1023.

³ See https://dmp.unodc.org/sites/default/files/DMP_brief-5_fv.pdf

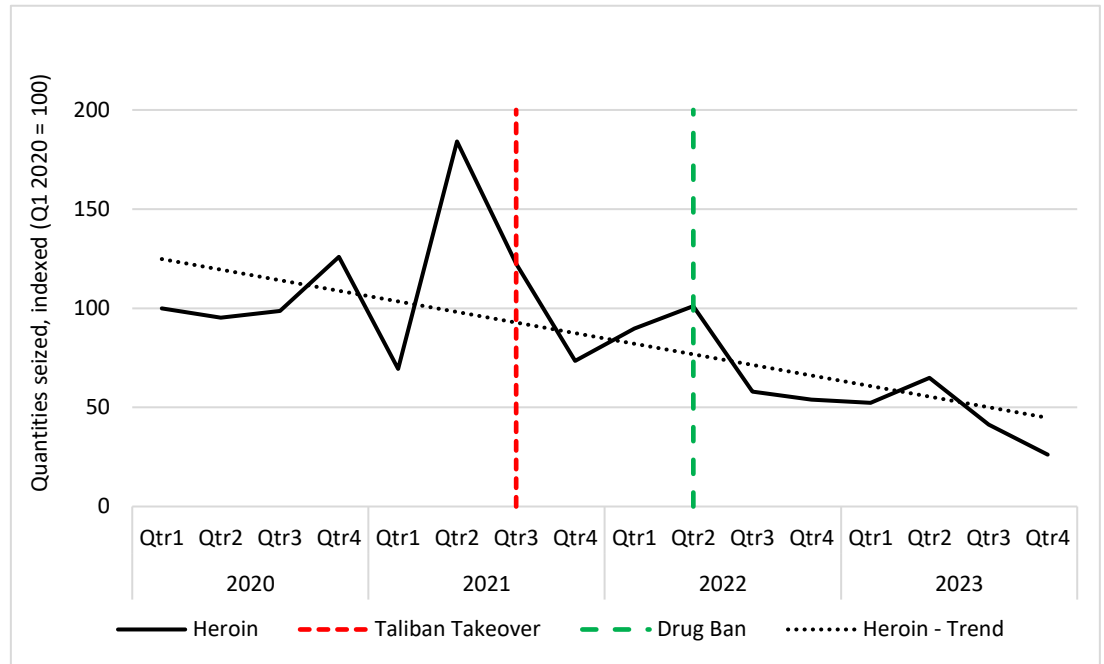
1

Flows of individual heroin seizures indicate that heroin trafficking has continued in the regions observed, although at a lower rate after the April 2022 drug ban in Afghanistan and throughout 2023.

2

With the overall decrease in heroin supply, average shipment sizes have also decreased across several subregions after the ban, with the most notable decrease observed in South-Eastern Europe. In contrast to this trend, shipment sizes have increased marginally in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, and South-West Asia.

FIGURE 1: INDEX OF QUARTERLY HEROIN SEIZURE AMOUNTS RECORDED IN THE DRUGS MONITORING PLATFORM IN CENTRAL ASIA AND TRANSCAUCASIA, EAST AFRICA, EASTERN EUROPE, THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH-WEST ASIA, SOUTH ASIA, SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE, SOUTHERN AFRICA AND MARITIME SEIZURES, 2020-2023

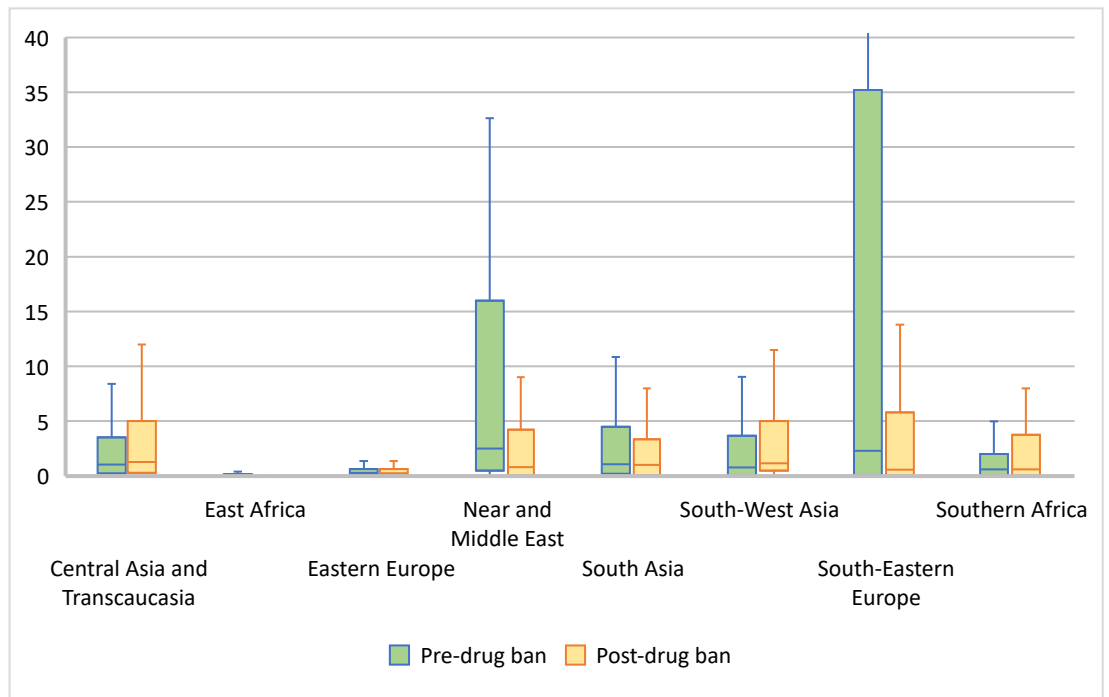


Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

Note: Trend data are shown relative to the average quantities seized in Quarter 1 of 2020, set to 100.

Seizures at sea or 'maritime' seizures are ascribed to a body of water when they occur in international waters, or in cases where the country of jurisdiction cannot be readily determined. In this case seizures were in the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF WEIGHTS OF INDIVIDUAL HEROIN SEIZURES BY SUBREGION, BEFORE AND AFTER APRIL 2022



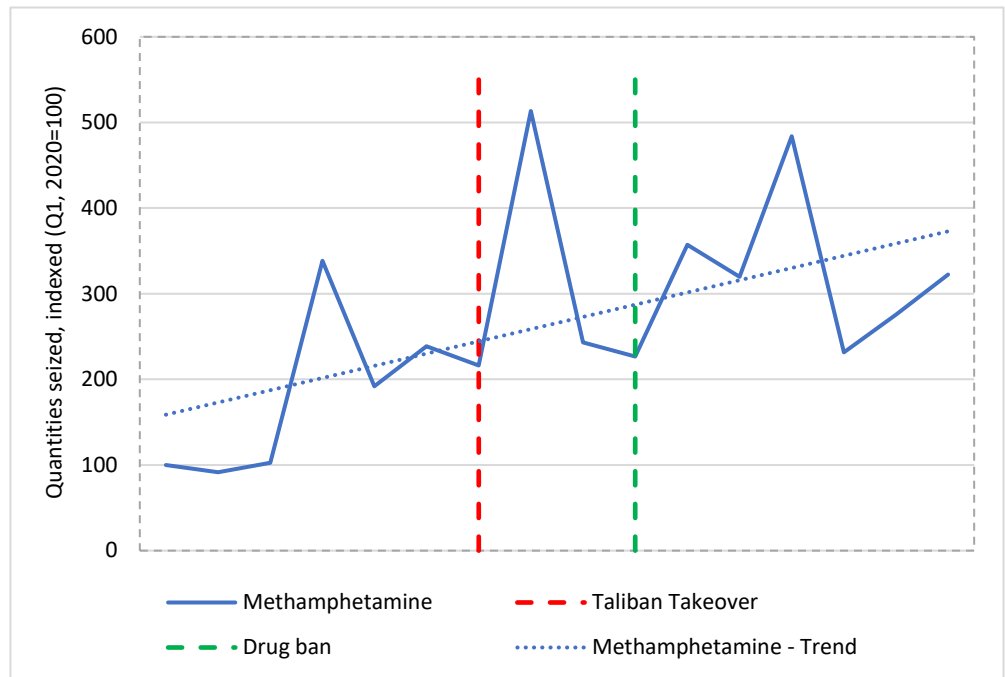
Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

Note: The bar graphs represent the range between the first and third quartile of seizure results. The horizontal line within the bar graphs depicts the median.

3

Methamphetamine seizure patterns suggest an ongoing increase in trafficking beyond April 2022 and extending into the end of 2023 in terms of the frequency and volume of methamphetamine shipments linked to Afghanistan, which may suggest continued manufacture of the drug in Afghanistan.

FIGURE 3: INDEX OF QUARTERLY METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURE AMOUNTS RECORDED IN THE DRUGS MONITORING PLATFORM IN CENTRAL ASIA, SOUTH-WEST ASIA AND OMAN, 2020-2023

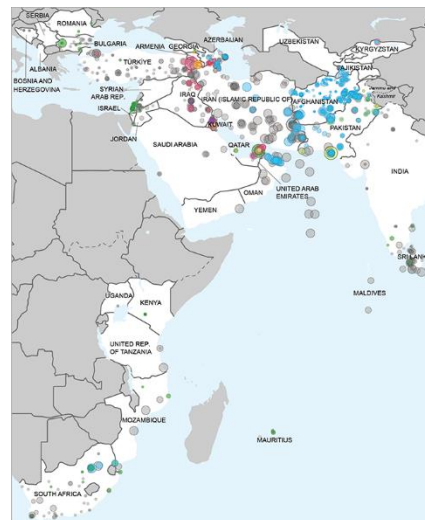


Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

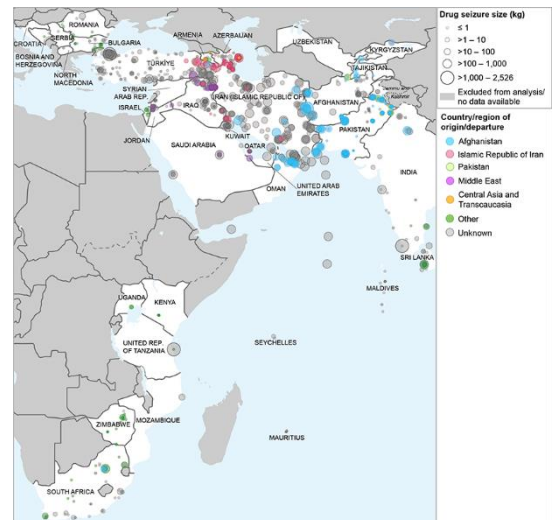
Note: Trend data are shown in relation to an average quantity of seizures prior to the first quarter of 2020, where 100 equals Quarter 1 of 2020. These locations were selected given the clear indications that the seized drugs originated in Afghanistan.

MAP 1 AND 2: INDIVIDUAL METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURES IN CENTRAL ASIA AND TRANSCAUCASIA, SOUTH-WEST ASIA, SOUTH ASIA, THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE, EAST AFRICA, SOUTHERN AFRICA AND MARITIME SEIZURES BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, 2020-2023

JANUARY 2020-MARCH 2022



APRIL 2022-DECEMBER 2023



Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

Note: 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.

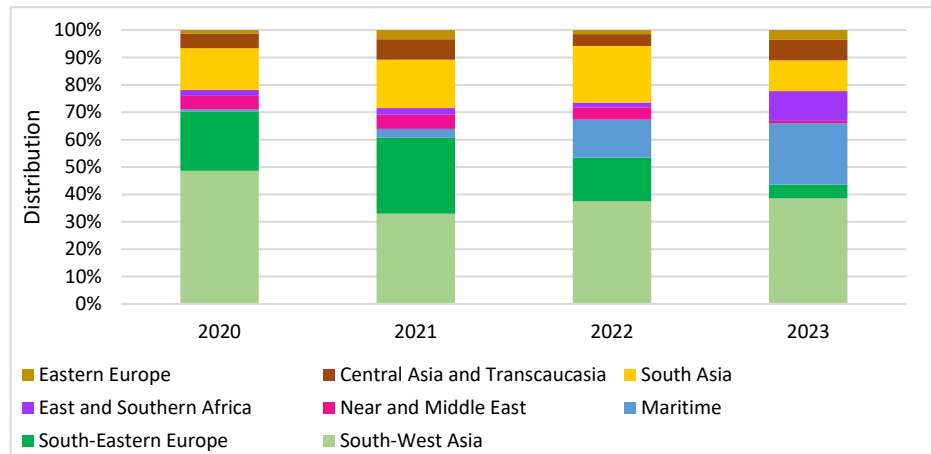
Seizures at sea or 'maritime' seizures are ascribed to a body of water when they occur in international waters, or in cases where the country of jurisdiction cannot be readily determined. In this case seizures were in the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

4

For both heroin and methamphetamine, maritime trafficking has continued to increase in prominence into the end of 2023, including the size of shipments, though it is not clear if this is a direct impact of the drug ban or the result of other trafficking dynamics.

Figures 4, 5 and 6 below refer to both the proportional and average size increase of maritime seizures.

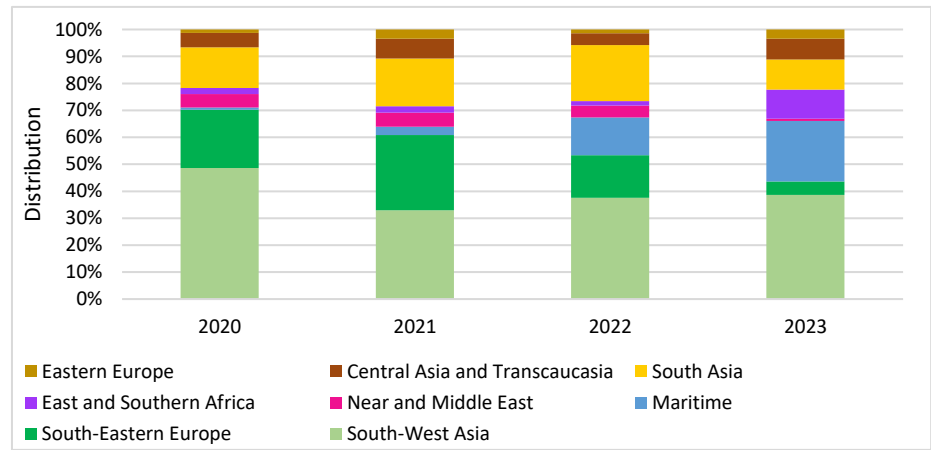
FIGURE 4: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF QUANTITIES OF HEROIN SEIZED RELATED TO AFGHAN OPIUM PRODUCTION REPORTED IN SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL HEROIN SEIZURES, 2020-2023



Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

Note: Seizures at sea or 'maritime' seizures are ascribed to a body of water when they occur in international waters, or in cases where the country of jurisdiction cannot be readily determined. In this case seizures were in the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

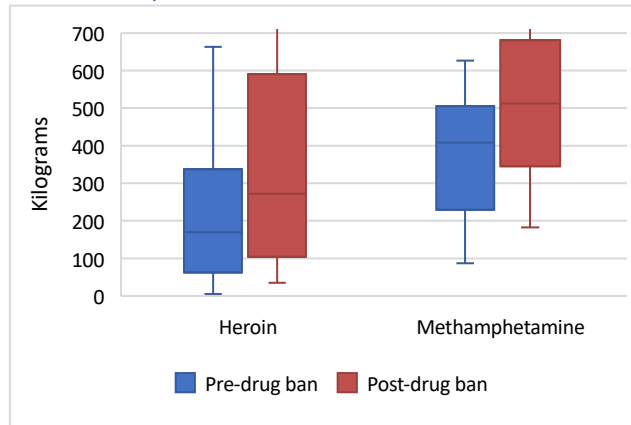
FIGURE 5: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF QUANTITIES OF METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZED REPORTED IN SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURES, 2020-2023



Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

Note: Seizures at sea or 'maritime' seizures are ascribed to a body of water when they occur in international waters, or in cases where the country of jurisdiction cannot be readily determined. In this case seizures were in the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

FIGURE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF WEIGHTS OF 'MARITIME' INDIVIDUAL LARGE HEROIN AND METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURES, BEFORE AND AFTER APRIL 2022



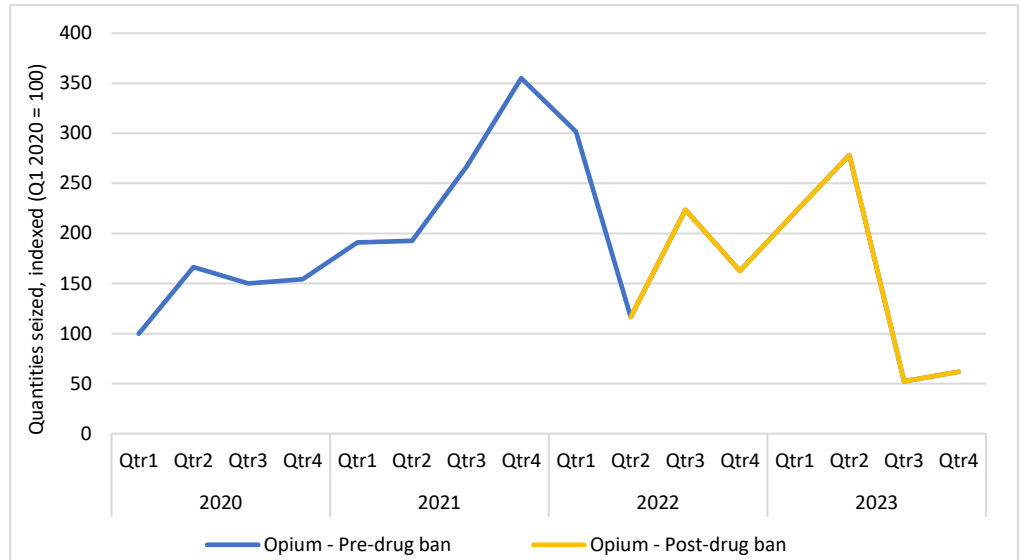
Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

Note: Seizures at sea or 'maritime' seizures are ascribed to a body of water when they occur in international waters, or in cases where the country of jurisdiction cannot be readily determined. In this case seizures were in the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. The bar graphs represent the range between the first and third quartile of seizure results. The horizontal line within the bar graphs depicts the median.

5

Fluctuations in relation to the size and flow of individual opium seizures were observed in countries neighbouring Afghanistan between 2020 and 2023. This indicates a lower rate of opium trafficking, especially in 2023, suggesting a reduction in opium supply after the drug ban in Afghanistan.

FIGURE 7: INDEX OF QUARTERLY OPIUM SEIZURE AMOUNTS RECORDED IN THE DRUGS MONITORING PLATFORM IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN AND PAKISTAN, 2020-2023



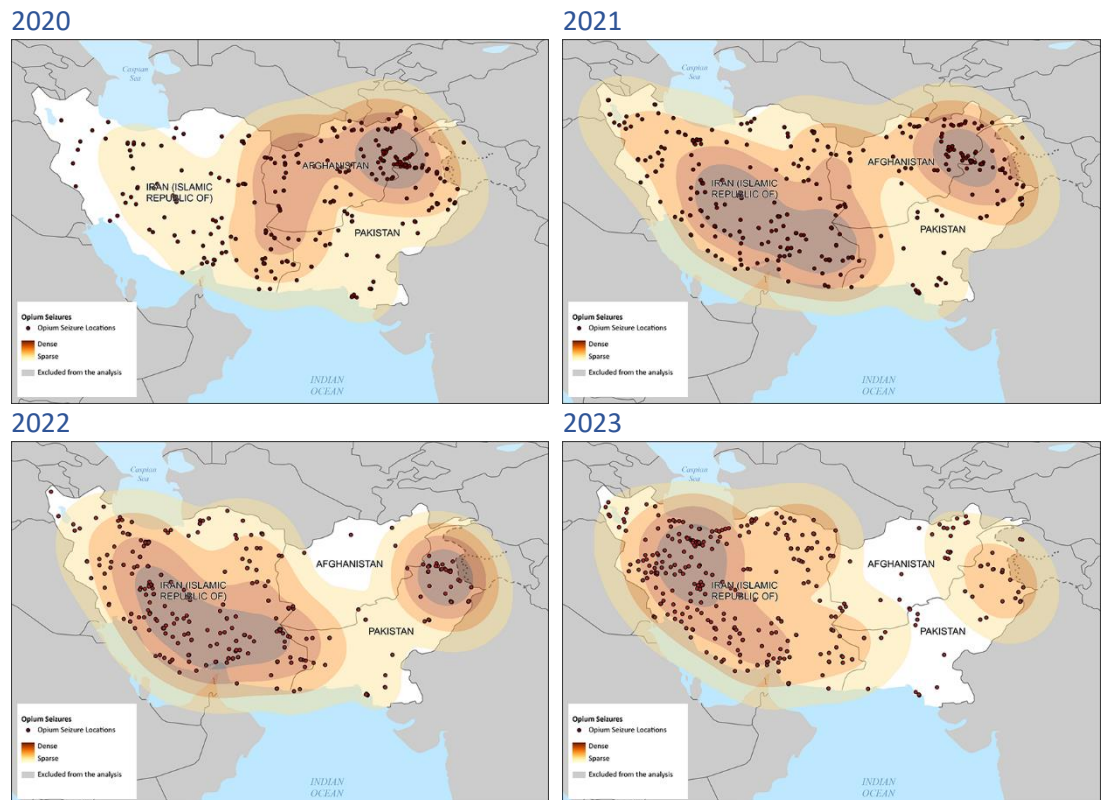
Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

Note: Trend data are shown in relation to an average quantity of seizures prior to the first quarter of 2020, where 100 equals Quarter 1 of 2020.

6

As less opium has been trafficked after the Taliban takeover, opium seizures have concentrated more towards the West.

MAP 3: SIGNIFICANT OPIUM SEIZURES IN AFGHANISTAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN AND PAKISTAN, 2020-2023



Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

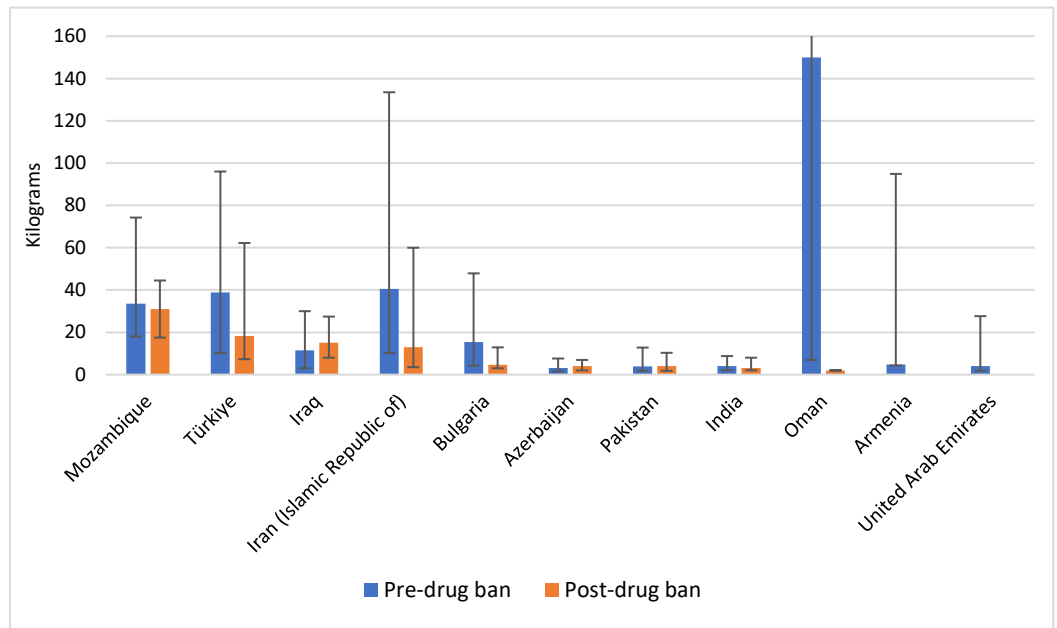
Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has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

7

Countries that have traditionally been affected by large transit of heroin, such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Mozambique, Oman, Pakistan, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates have continued to see flows of heroin, although in smaller shipments following the drug ban in Afghanistan.

For methamphetamine, on the other hand, the supply in transit seems to present a mixed picture, with increases in the median size of shipments found in selected countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Bulgaria, India and Azerbaijan, and decreases observed in Oman, United Arab Emirates, Mozambique, Türkiye, Armenia and Pakistan.

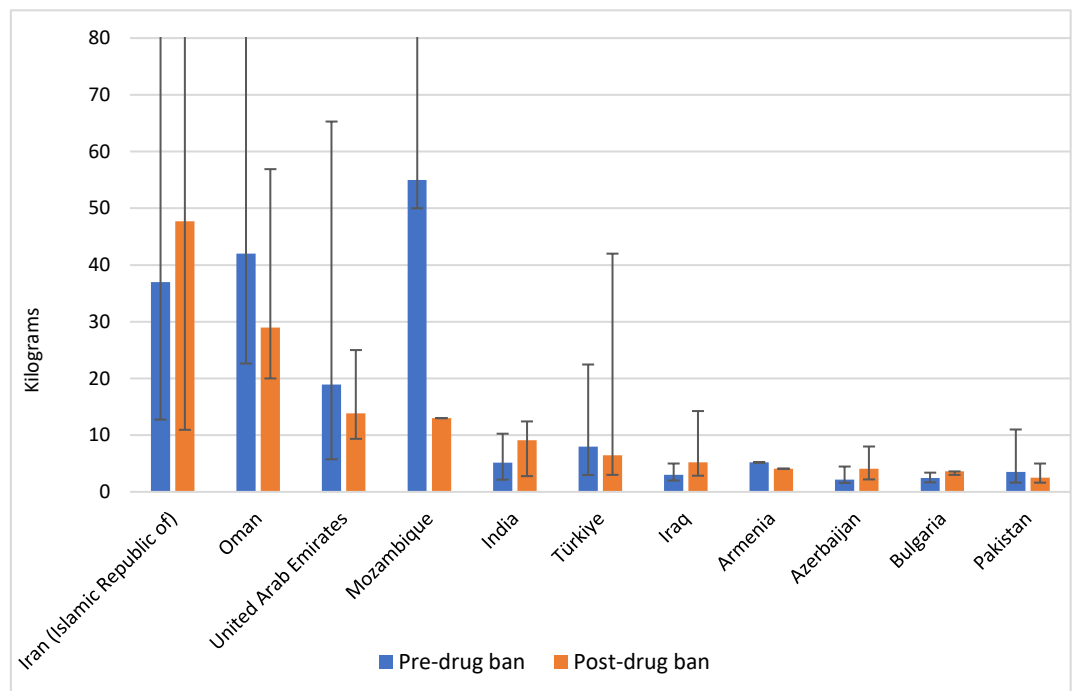
FIGURE 8: MEDIAN WEIGHT OF INDIVIDUAL HEROIN SEIZURE EVENT IN ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, BULGARIA, INDIA, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, IRAQ, MOZAMBIQUE, PAKISTAN, TÜRKIYE, OMAN AND UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, IN KILOGRAMS, 2020-2023



Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

Note: Error bars indicate the range between the first and third quartiles. Seizure events involving under 1kg have been excluded from the analysis to allow comparison of medium to large seizures to examine possible trends in trafficking. The current available data for Oman reflects a small number of singular seizure events and may not be indicative of a trend.

FIGURE 9: MEDIAN WEIGHT OF INDIVIDUAL METHAMPHETAMINE SEIZURE EVENT IN ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, BULGARIA, INDIA, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, IRAQ, MOZAMBIQUE, PAKISTAN, TÜRKIYE, OMAN AND UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, IN KILOGRAMS, 2020-2023



Source: UNODC, Drugs Monitoring Platform

Note: Error bars indicate the range between the first and third quartiles. Seizure events involving under 1kg have been excluded from the analysis to allow comparison of medium to large seizures to examine possible trends in trafficking.

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

UNODC ACKNOWLEDGES THE FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THIS BRIEF