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Drug Trafficking Dynamics in Libya and across North Africa

Trends and Implications

January 2026

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Drug Trafficking Dynamics in Libya and across North Africa (2020-2024):

Trends and Implications

January 2026



MENA DRUG
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Middle East and North Africa

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Content Overview

Aisser Al-Hafedh
Anja Korenblik
Angela Me

Research, Analysis and Drafting

Julie Astoul
Frances Thomson

Data Management

Francesca Massanello
Andrea Oterova
Umidjon Rakhmonberdiev
David Rausis

Editing

Sarah Crozier

Mapping

Coen Bussink
Muhamad Nasir Lukman

Graphic Design and Production

Chloe Carpentier
Suzanne Kunnen
Maria Moser

Administrative Support

Bahaedeen Abdulmajid Ali Abufayed
Iulia Lazar
Eya Mejri

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Key takeaways

- In response to growing concerns over the changing dynamics of the drug markets in Libya and the wider region – and at the request of the Libyan authorities – UNODC developed this research report to support evidence-based action aimed at addressing drug-related threats and their impact. The *National Strategy to address the repercussions of the spread of drugs and psychoactive substances phenomenon in Libya 2025-2030* (henceforth the National Strategy on Drugs), endorsed by the Libyan Government in 2024, presents opportunities for joint action and is grounded in the principle that addressing the world drug problem is a shared global responsibility.
- Seizure data and interview research indicate a rapid rise in the volume and variety of drugs being trafficked through and into North Africa over the past decade. An increase in seizures in Libya reflects counternarcotics efforts but also suggests that the country has been increasingly used as a node in this growing regional drug trade; criminals in Libya are facilitating the movement of cannabis resin, cocaine, illicitly sourced pharmaceuticals, and synthetic drugs across West and North Africa, the Middle East, Europe and beyond. These changes in Libya and the rest of North Africa reflect broader regional trends documented in the latest *World Drug Reports*, especially the diversification of drug markets across the African continent linked to the growing use of its territories for transit operations.
- Africa continues to serve as a transit region for cocaine shipped from South America to West African ports, which is then trafficked by sea or overland through North Africa to major consumer countries in Europe. As global cocaine production has grown, so has the use of these trafficking routes, including through Libya. Routes are also diversifying. For example, seizure data indicates that cocaine is now being shipped directly from Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil to Libya for handling and subsequent re-export. Libya's role appears to have shifted from one of several transit countries in North Africa into an emerging node for the onward trafficking of cocaine to multiple markets. Libyan networks are allegedly acting with more autonomy, connecting traffickers in the Americas to 'traditional' markets in Western Europe, growing markets in South-Eastern Europe, and new markets in the Middle East.
- Libya also serves as a node for cannabis resin trafficking (and to a lesser degree, herb), facilitating flows – mainly from Morocco, but also from producing countries in the Middle East – across North Africa and beyond.
- The most dramatic developments in regional illicit drug markets relate to the manufacture, trafficking and consumption of synthetic drugs and the trafficking and non-medical use of pharmaceuticals, especially tramadol and pregabalin. As indicated in the 2025 *World Drug Report*, over the past decade, the non-medical use of and trafficking in pharmaceuticals (often manufactured illegally or diverted from legal supply) has skyrocketed in Africa. Libya has become a consumer market for these pharmaceuticals, and also an important transit country for other destinations, including Egypt and Algeria. In addition to pharmaceuticals, authorities in Libya and neighbouring countries have seized amphetamine-type stimulants, including MDMA/ecstasy and "captagon". The reported seizure of equipment for the manufacture of pills in 2024 and 2023 raises additional concerns.
- As recognized by *Libya's National Strategy on Drugs*, the Libyan public is extremely concerned about an observed growth in drug use and associated "slow violence", such as health problems, family conflict/



breakdown and non-organized street crime. Key informants attribute the growth in drug use to increased availability and low costs as well as growing demand linked to anxiety and depression in a context of armed conflict and economic instability.

- The growth in drug trafficking in Libya has reportedly been enabled by extreme flux within the security landscape since 2011. Key informants concur that smuggling and trafficking have become easier due to governance challenges and institutional weakness, including corruption and limited capacities. Despite efforts to establish stable and centralized state security forces, as of 2024, Libya continued to face constraints in tackling the country's illicit economies. In addition, the recent growth in drug trafficking is said to have been enabled by "economic hardship", especially in marginalized borderlands. In some areas, there is reportedly widespread social acceptance of trafficking for this reason.
- Drug trafficking in North and West Africa, including in Libya, operates within a broader illicit ecosystem, alongside the smuggling and/or trafficking of people, fuel and firearms. Some groups not directly engaged in trafficking nevertheless reportedly extract revenue through taxation, security provision, and control of strategic infrastructure. According to reports by the UN Panel of Experts, groups involved in criminal activities have also used coercion to gain access to institutional resources and, in the case of Libya, to exploit the black market in foreign currency. These financial flows have allegedly reinforced these groups' influence over institutions, undermining law enforcement efforts and contributing to prolonged instability in Libya and the broader region.
- Interviews for this report, alongside previous research conducted by other entities, point to how the drug trade has fuelled violence in Libya, Niger, and the broader region by adding to the multiple reasons for clashes among different groups, many of which operate transnationally.
- As documented by the UN Panel of Experts, a large amount of military equipment has flowed into (and out of) Libya since 2011, despite an arms embargo. Lax control over the distribution of war materiel within the country means that many of the groups reportedly involved in organized crime, including drug trafficking, are extremely well equipped. The involvement of foreign fighters, some of whom have been implicated in organized crime, has made the situation more complex.

THE WEB OF ILLICIT ECONOMIES: ONE CRIME FEEDS ANOTHER



Introduction

Libya's geographical position places it at the crossroads of trade flows between the Sahel and the Mediterranean, and between North Africa and the Middle East. Its long coastline, expansive deserts, and porous borders offer ideal conditions for illicit economies to thrive. Subsidies (e.g. for fuel, foods and medicines) introduced in the 1970s incentivized smuggling into neighbouring countries. The regime led by former President Muammar Qadhafi is said to have enabled and exploited this smuggling for political and economic purposes, granting selected actors and networks permissions for their operations. After the uprising against former President Qadhafi in 2011 and consequent civil war, this centralized system disintegrated, leading to the fragmentation and reported growth of smuggling and trafficking operations.¹

Since 2011, Libya has faced recurring cycles of armed conflict, notably in 2014-2015 and again in 2019-2020. The United Nations has sought to facilitate dialogue and foster stability in Libya through successive mediation efforts and peace agreements.² However, the influence of competing actors over political institutions and key economic resources has continued to hinder long-term stability and unified governance.³

Ongoing violations of the UN arms embargo has further complicated stabilization efforts. Despite international restrictions, various actors have continued to provide military support to rival coalitions. This has not only undermined Libya's political transition but also helped to empower criminal networks.⁴

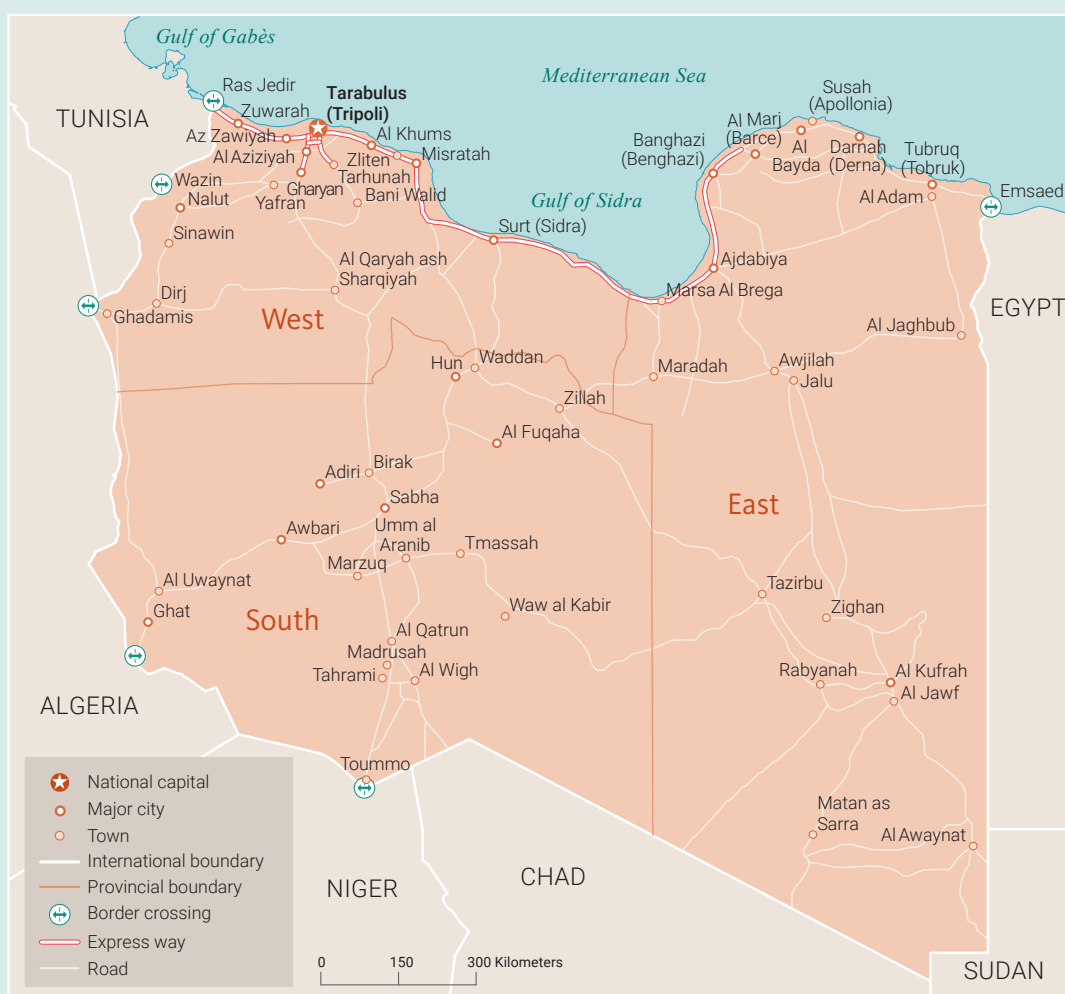
In this context, Libya has reportedly witnessed the consolidation of poly-criminal economies. Most research to date has focused on the black market in fuel, the smuggling and trafficking of persons, and the illegal trade in firearms. Drug trafficking remains understudied compared to other illicit economies in Libya and the region. This report aims to fill that gap by providing a comprehensive assessment of recent developments, based on analyses of data on the supply of drugs and interviews with key informants (see annex 1). It sheds light on the country's evolving role in regional and global drug markets, and the impacts on Libya and beyond. It seeks to inform national, regional, and international stakeholders on the challenges posed by drug trafficking and organized crime, supporting efforts to develop coordinated strategies to combat the expansion of illicit drug markets in Libya and its wider implications. In addition to analysing drug trafficking patterns and their impacts, the report offers with an overview of the key enablers and a contextual analysis. This context should be taken into account when designing or assessing responses to drug-related challenges in the country.

BOX 1: UNODC IN LIBYA

UNODC began its operations in Libya in 2007, initially implementing a broad portfolio of programmes – covering organized crime, trafficking in persons, and counterterrorism – with full support and funding from the Libyan Government. UNODC’s activities in the country came to a halt in 2011 and it maintained a minimal presence until 2020 when the Office started steadily expanding its presence and operations. Current efforts focus on addressing organized crime, including trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants, and corruption, as well as responding to drug-related issues, and promoting justice for children. UNODC’s work emphasizes strengthening data collection and analysis, supporting legislative

reforms, and building institutional and operational capacities. In 2023, Libya requested support to counter drug trafficking and reduce drug use in the country. Under the UNODC and the League of Arab States Regional Framework for Arab States (2023–2028), endorsed in March 2023, UNODC remains committed to deepening its partnerships and supporting the countries of the region, including Libya, in their efforts to bring about stability, the rule of law, and justice. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between UNODC, and the Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC) also provides a platform for further cooperation.

MAP 1 Administrative map of Libya



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Sources: HDX; UN Geospatial

Context and Enablers

Libya's illicit economies have undergone significant transformations since the fall of former President Qadhafi's regime. The black market in fuel and the smuggling of migrants and trafficking of persons, all of which surged in the wake of the 2011 revolution and subsequent civil wars, have grabbed the international community's attention. This report focuses on the lesser-known illicit drug economy. Various types of evidence collected by UNODC indicate a growth in drug trafficking in Libya since 2011 and especially since 2014 and 2020. International drug trafficking networks are using the country with increasing frequency for transit operations and for temporary warehousing of larger and more diverse consignments. Libya now appears to play a more prominent role in the redistribution of drugs across the region (see section 2). It has also become an increasingly important consumer market for illicit drugs (see sections 2 and 3).

Extreme flux within the security landscape has enabled rapid growth of Libya's illicit economies since 2011.⁵ Most groups involved in criminal activities are territorially rooted and relatively small, often operating at the town, district or neighbourhood level. Coalitions and alliances tend to be fragile; the relationships between these groups are frequently changing.⁶ In this context, the tightly managed patronage system and associated controls that existed under the former regime came undone, reportedly allowing illicit activities to expand, either directly run or protected and taxed by distinct groups (see below).⁷ In Libya, different types of actors or groups are not always easy to distinguish and have varied relationships to illicit economies.⁸

BOX 2: LIBYA'S POLITICAL CONFLICTS AND DIALOGUES

Since 2011, Libya has experienced recurrent clashes and periods of large-scale conflict (2014-2015 and 2019-2020). These larger conflicts are closely related to rivalries between the western or Tripoli-based authorities, which initially emerged from the General National Congress elected in 2012, and eastern-based institutions, which were formed by a segment of the House of Representatives (HoR) elected in June 2014.^{9, 10}

In December 2015, following UN-facilitated negotiations, representatives from both sides signed

the Libyan Political Agreement, establishing the Government of National Accord (GNA), which a UN Security Council Resolution recognized as the country's sole legitimate executive authority.¹¹ In practice, however, parallel institutions continued to operate, contributing to further political and social fragmentation.¹²

In April 2019, armed groups re-organized once again to either support or oppose a recently launched offensive on Tripoli.¹³ A ceasefire agreement was signed in October 2020, following discussions facilitated by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).¹⁴ This led to the launch of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, with the aim of forming another provisional government and transition plan. The Government of National Unity (GNU) was established in February 2021, replacing the GNA as the UN-recognized government in Libya. However, rival institutions have continued to operate.¹⁵

Over the years, institutional and political conflicts, and fragmentation more broadly, have contributed to shaping drug trafficking in Libya and other illicit economies.

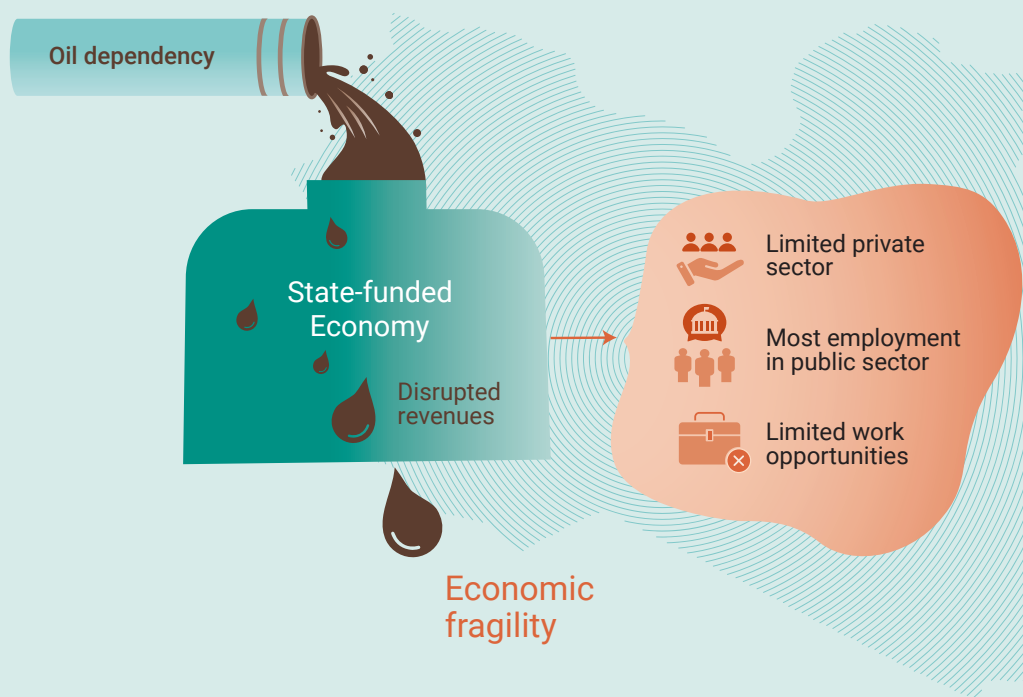
In Libya, different types of actors or groups are not always easy to distinguish and have varied relationships to illicit economies. Some groups have opposed criminal activity while others tolerate it in exchange for loyalty, and/or participate in it for profit.^{16, 17} The distinctions between groups that act as legitimate security providers versus those that behave as criminal organizations are fuzzy.¹⁸ This fuzziness is intensified by the fact that many groups that are not involved directly in trafficking nevertheless allegedly profit from it by taxing movements and/or by charging for protection in areas under their control.^{19, 20} The Panel of Experts noted that, over the past decade, access to public resources has fluctuated, prompting some groups to rely on a mix of revenue sources, including illicit ones.^{21, 22, 23} The Panel of Experts has also repeatedly reported that certain armed groups and individuals in formal roles could be involved in drug trafficking, illicit fuel trading and/or the smuggling of migrants (SoM).²⁴ In some cases, legal income-generation activities are said to be blended with illegal ones.^{25, 26}

BOX 3: LIBYA'S ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE ON OIL AND THE OIL-FUNDED PUBLIC SECTOR

Libya's economy is almost entirely dependent on oil and oil-funded government employment. In 2023, the oil and gas sector accounted for 60 per cent of Libya's GDP, 94 per cent of export earnings and 97 per cent of government income.²⁷ Unemployment is around 15-19 per cent. An estimated 90 per cent of people who are formally employed were public sector employees in 2023, compared to 76 per cent in 2001.²⁸ Some 2.2 million people are on government payroll, in a country of around 7.3 million.²⁹ Just over 44 per cent of Libya's employed population works in the defence sector (covering all types of defence and security employees), compared to nearly 27 per cent in education and 8 per cent in health. State spending on wages and salaries nearly tripled between 2020

and 2023, when it reached 39 per cent of total expenditure.³⁰ Oil-based economic growth and oil-funded government spending have been erratic since 2011, due to oil blockades imposed by some groups, as well as global factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic.³¹ The fragility generated by dependence on oil and government spending, plus the channelling of large proportions of the national oil revenue to the defence sector in a context of instability and a non-cohesive security apparatus, may have increased the Libyan people's exposure to illicit economies. Economic hardship and participation in locally based groups are often listed by key informants interviewed as reasons for the recent growth in drug use and trafficking in Libya.

LIBYA'S ECONOMY AND THE PATH TO ILLICIT ACTIVITIES



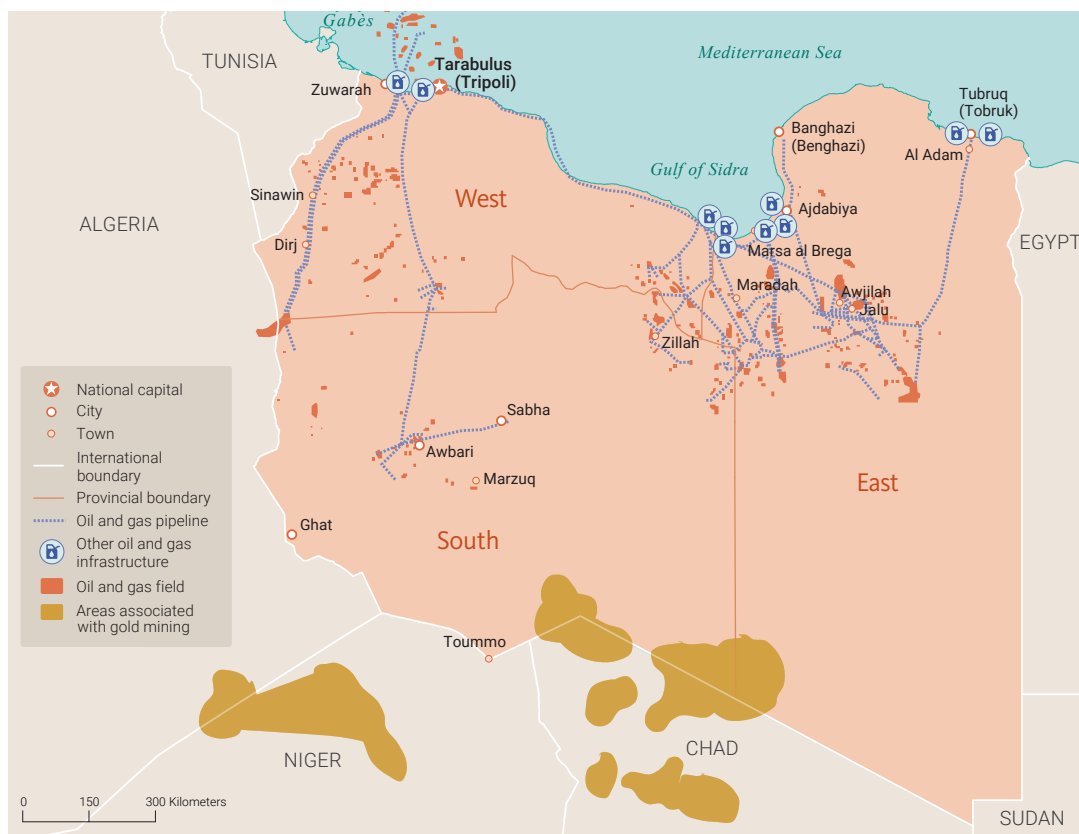
The black market in foreign currency is said to have been an important source of income for some groups involved in illicit activities.³² Taking advantage of controls under Libya's fixed exchange-rate system, they obtain authorizations to acquire foreign currency through collusion or fraud and resell it at a major profit.^{33, 34, 35, 36}

Many groups also generate income through direct involvement in smuggling and/or trafficking, or through taxation of these activities and the charging of other fees, including for security services or for use of buildings.³⁷ Fuel smuggling is probably the largest of Libya's illicit economies. State subsidies that date back to the Qadhafi era make it profitable to smuggle fuel abroad and small-scale fuel smuggling is often deemed socially acceptable, especially in regions of high unemployment and economic informality.^{38, 39} Nevertheless, large-scale smuggling means that it can be difficult for Libyans to find fuel at the official state-subsidized price, which has caused public anger. Low-level smugglers transport small amounts of fuel overland, while elite smuggling involves tanker trucks and even tanker ships that move large

orders overseas, sometimes using fake documents and international tenders to give an appearance of legality.^{40, 41} The UN Panel of Experts on Libya considers that oil has become "an unprecedented source of revenue for armed groups", which now control key private and public oil sector organizations and influence large segments of the supply chain.^{42, 43} Drug trafficking (discussed at length in section 2) must be understood as part of a larger criminal ecosystem in which fuel smuggling and other illicit schemes surrounding the oil economy are key.

Libya's traffickers move a variety of other goods, in addition to fuel, including vehicles, subsidized foods, contraband cigarettes, drugs and weapons, as well as people.⁴⁴ These economies overlap and interact.⁴⁵ For example, individuals and networks previously involved in the smuggling of migrants are said to have moved into drug trafficking in the context of increased migration control in both Libya and Niger in the mid to late 2010s.⁴⁶ And while large consignments of drugs, especially cocaine, appear to be moved separately, along their own routes, small amounts of pharmaceuticals and cannabis

MAP 2 Sites and infrastructure for exploitation of oil, gas and gold



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Sources: UNODC, MESS, HDX.

are sometimes smuggled with migrants entering Libya or by migrants under pressure to find ways to pay for their journey.⁴⁷ Likewise, trucks with contraband fuel have been used to move weapons while individuals involved in fuel smuggling have also been caught with illicit drugs.⁴⁸ Another example of poly-trafficking is the exchange of second-hand SUVs and weapons for drugs. While drugs like cocaine or cannabis enter Libya northward from its southern border, weapons and other illicitly sourced goods cross the border southward.⁴⁹

Taxes on movements and protection fees are key sources of income for many locally based groups.⁵⁰ Control over roads and seaports allows influence over both legal and illegal flows. For that reason, checkpoints are often a source of contention between groups, but also of cooperation.⁵¹ Some checkpoints are shared by several, even opposing, groups; they negotiate among themselves to let each other pass, but when these agreements are violated or breakdown, violent conflict follows.⁵² In some cases, taxes on movements are difficult to distinguish from protection charges. The fee paid at a checkpoint may cover general security provision in the area, with patrols ensuring people moving through the territory or stretch of road are kept safe.⁵³ In other cases, protection is clearly a separate enterprise. For example, some groups in Niger and Libya accompany drug trafficking convoys through difficult and dangerous desert terrain, advising on logistics, ensuring they do not get lost and protecting them from bandits.⁵⁴ Finally, there are examples of 'protection fees' more akin to extortion or charging for an operation permit rather than an actual service.⁵⁵

BOX 4: UNDERSTANDING KEY TRAFFICKING ACTORS

In Libya, many actors and groups are territorially rooted within a particular area, town/city, or even a specific neighbourhood, and mainly operate in their places of origin.⁵⁶ They are typically organized around a mixture of bonds and loyalties, including to individuals, extended families, a particular community or neighbourhood, ethnic group or tribe.⁵⁷ This local character can foster a degree of accountability to the communities they claim to protect or serve.⁵⁸ As a result, some communities support their local groups, particularly if they are perceived as effective security providers and offer employment or other basic services.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, civilian support has declined for some groups, especially where violence causes collateral damage, smuggling disrupts fuel access or prices, or petty crime and local drug sales go unchecked.⁶⁰ In response to growing public discontent and international scrutiny, several groups now present themselves as anti-corruption or anti-crime actors – though in practice this can mean targeting rivals rather than ceasing their own illicit activities.⁶¹ That said, some groups have made genuine efforts to limit local drug distribution, expel unruly members, and promote professionalization. In some parts of the country, there are reports of efforts to move beyond local affiliations by forming more diverse groups composed of fighters from different regions and backgrounds. However, it is unclear how cohesive or prevalent such formations are.⁶²

The extreme flux in the security landscape and localism of armed groups shape trafficking dynamics, creating segmented routes and competition over profits.⁶³ At the same time, shared interest in ensuring smooth operations can compel even rival groups to cooperate.⁶⁴ In the Southern region and in the borderlands shared by Libya, Niger and Chad, people and goods are often passed from the control of one group to another at unofficial dividing lines between their areas of influence.⁶⁵ The compulsion to cooperate to ensure the smooth functioning of the illicit economy, and more generally to protect and maintain it, is likely even stronger in areas where the local population depends on smuggling and trafficking for their livelihoods and among groups that are territorially rooted and remain accountable to this population.⁶⁶

Key informants concur that trafficking has generally become easier in Libya in the last decade due – reportedly – to weakened and limited capacities of law enforcement and control over some of the country's ports and land borders.⁶⁷ This is largely attributed to the alleged proliferation of groups involved in illicit activities.⁶⁸

UNODC interviews suggest that weakened control over smuggling and trafficking is also a consequence of corruption.⁶⁹ Key informants allege that influential individuals – across all regions of the country – allow smugglers and traffickers to operate in exchange for a fee and provide them with information and protection.⁷⁰ Several informants reported cases of more direct involvement specifically in the drug trade.⁷¹

Additionally, the recent growth in drug trafficking is said to be enabled by “economic hardship” and unemployment, especially in marginalized areas and borderlands.⁷² Political instability and armed conflict have contributed to serious deterioration in basic services such as health-care and education, as well as massive economic losses, while worsening the historic dependence on oil wealth and the oil-funded public sector for employment and growth.⁷³ In some places, there is reportedly widespread social acceptance of trafficking for this reason, reducing community cooperation with law enforcement and even at times hindering their operations.^{74, 75} Though Libya continues to be classified by the World Bank as an upper-middle-income country, many development indicators rank low.

Foreign involvement in Libya's conflicts is another factor that has shaped the development of the country's illicit economies. Despite an arms embargo – which the UN Panel of Experts called “totally ineffective” – military assistance has continued to flow into Libya, significantly impacting conflict dynamics.^{76, 77} In addition, lax control over the distribution of war materiel within the country means many of the groups involved in organized crime, including drug trafficking, are extremely well-equipped.⁷⁸

Other forms of international assistance – not considered a violation of the UN sanctions regime – have also impacted conflict and criminal dynamics. In 2018, the UN Panel of Experts stated that they were “concerned by the attempts of various armed groups to gain legitimacy by ostensibly supporting efforts to combat irregular migration and thereby receive technical and material assistance from foreign actors”.⁷⁹

The alleged involvement of foreign fighters and mercenaries has further complicated the situation. Fighters from Chad and the Sudan have reportedly been involved in criminal activities, including human and drug trafficking, as well as armed conflict, since at least 2015.⁸⁰ Some researchers note that as mercenary employment in Libya declined, foreign fighters either turned to crime and illicit economies or left Libya for other conflict zones. The latest 2024 report by the UN Panel of Experts claims that one of Libya's stronger armed coalitions is increasing security cooperation with authorities in the Niger and Chad, potentially indicating yet another re-organization of armed power.⁸¹ In general, cross-border collaboration between armed groups and crime networks, and the movement of foreign fighters and war supplies between nearby countries, remains a persistent source of destabilization within the region.

Drug trafficking dynamics across Libya and beyond

Data on drug trafficking in Libya before 2011 is limited, but some accounts suggest it was a transit country with a relatively small consumer market for drugs, mainly cannabis and, to a lesser extent, cocaine.⁸² Heroin was also reported as being trafficked and used in Libya prior to 2011.⁸³ Available information indicates that like other illicit economies, drug trafficking operated within a centralized system during the Qadhafi era.⁸⁴ As explained in section 1, the fall of the former regime led to the decentralization of trafficking operations in some parts of the country, with various groups involved in trafficking competing for control over key routes along the trans-Saharan corridors and the Libyan coast. In other parts of the country, attempts to bring back a centralized control have been witnessed, apparently with some success. Political fragmentation and the extreme flux within the security landscape after 2011 has facilitated the expansion of trafficking and made law enforcement increasingly challenging.

Libyan counternarcotics officials have observed a significant increase in the volume and variety of drugs trafficked in the country between 2011 and 2024, although these observations are not reflected in official statistics. This growth was particularly pronounced in the aftermath of two large-scale conflicts in 2014–2015 and 2019–2020.⁸⁵ Post-2011, there was a surge in the trafficking of cannabis and cocaine.⁸⁶ By 2014, the market included higher volumes of pharmaceutical and synthetic drugs such as tramadol and ecstasy.⁸⁷ After 2018, “captagon” was added to the list of synthetic drugs reported seized in Libya.⁸⁸ In 2020, sedatives further broadened the trafficking spectrum; that year, pregabalin overtook tramadol as the top substance seized in the country, in terms of both the number and size of seizures.⁸⁹ These trends – identified by different interviewees and by Libyan officials during consultation meetings – are confirmed by available seizure data presented below that were received from different countries and partially from Libya.

As of 2024, Libya’s drug trafficking dynamics continue to align with broader North African trends; cocaine trafficking is on the rise, and synthetic drugs make up the main bulk of reported seizures. At the same time, emerging evidence suggests that Libya is playing an

increasing role in the trafficking of drugs destined for various markets, offering a cheaper and easier alternative for transit, storage, and distribution across the region and beyond.⁹⁰ The country’s growing capacity for warehousing different types and large volumes of drugs and for influencing trafficking far from its borders indicate that Libya is poised to impact not only North African trends but also those of other continents.

BOX 5: INTERPRETING SEIZURES AND TRAFFICKING INDICATORS

Understanding the dynamics of drug trafficking through seizure data presents several challenges. An increase in seizures does not necessarily indicate an increase in trafficking activity; it may also reflect improved efforts from law enforcement, shifts in enforcement priorities, or even competition between groups involved in trafficking. Conversely, the absence of seizures does not necessarily reflect an absence of trafficking, particularly in areas where high levels of corruption or the control of some locations by criminal and other groups may suppress enforcement efforts or reporting (see section 1).

While UNODC uses official seizure statistics from Libya as a baseline for analysis, several limitations affect their accuracy and completeness. The national data collection system is fragmented, with different entities reporting independently. In 2025, UNODC was informed that a centralized reporting system under the Office of the General Prosecutor had been established and that consolidated national data on seizures would be submitted to UNODC. The figures shared with UNODC remain partial, with the most consistent data coming from the Counter-Narcotics Office through Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) submissions, which do not capture all seizures. The volumes presented in Figures 2 and 3 therefore reflect only minimum annual amounts, which the Libyan authorities themselves acknowledge are underestimated. Political instability and recurrent conflicts have also contributed to underreporting

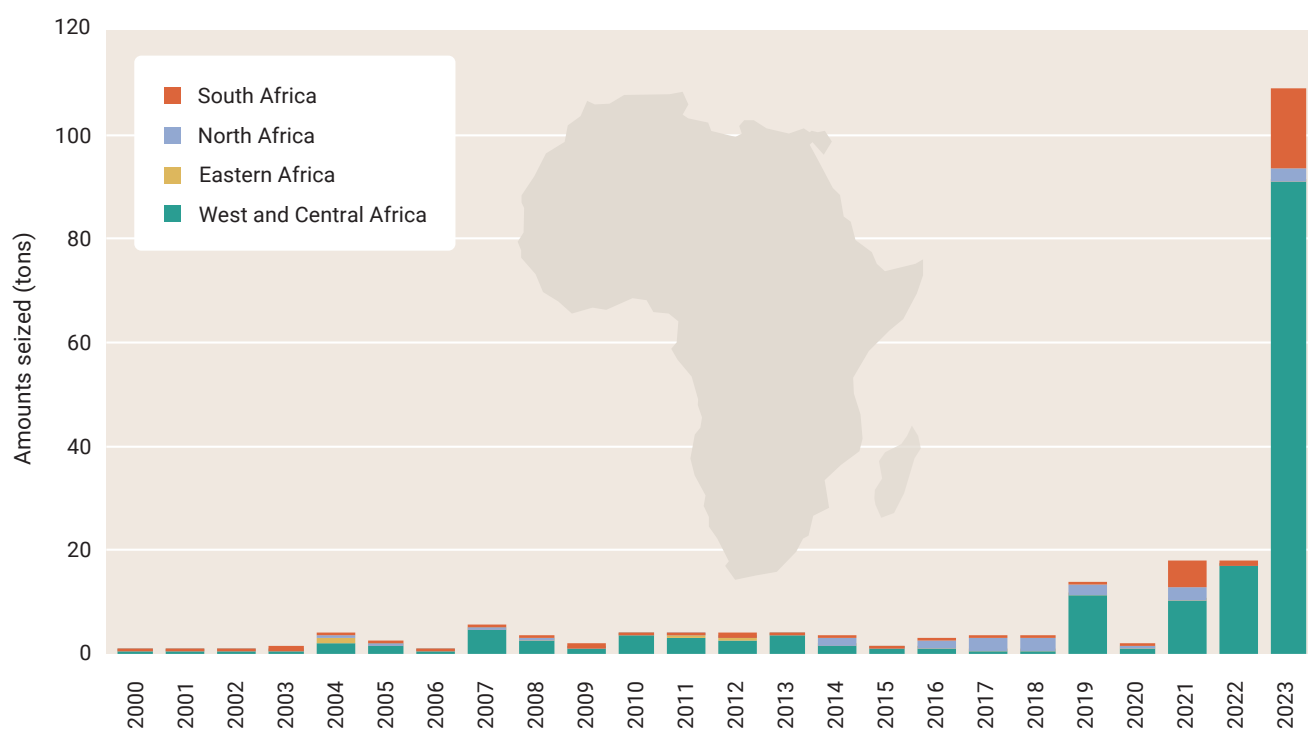
as well as the complete absence of data for certain years. Moreover, seizures represent only a small share of overall drug flows, and law enforcement faces challenges in intercepting shipments in parts of the country.

To overcome the limitations in interpreting drug seizures, seizures are not analysed in isolation; rather, they are interpreted alongside other sources of information such as price and purity trends, qualitative reports from law enforcement, and interviews with key informants. These provide insights into local dynamics and operational challenges not reflected in official statistics, enabling a more comprehensive and context-sensitive analysis. This triangulation also helps determine whether seizures are more reflective of increased trafficking flows, enhanced interdiction efforts, or broader structural factors shaping the drug market.

Cocaine trafficking

Flows of cocaine trafficked through the African continent have intensified in the past years in the context of growing global production and use of the drug.^{91, 92, 93} Drug traffickers are increasingly using West and Central Africa for the transshipment of cocaine, with a notable increase starting in 2019, as indicated by seizures (see figure 1).^{94, 95, 96} As far as North Africa is concerned, volumes of cocaine seized remained high during the period 2016–2023, despite two decreases in 2020 and in 2022 explained by a drop in volumes reported seized by both Morocco and Algeria (see figure 2).⁹⁷ Meanwhile, individual seizures reported by antinarcotic agencies in Libya and South American countries indicate a possible surge in cocaine trafficking towards and through Libya during the 2018–2024 period.^{98, 99} This surge is not fully captured in reported seizures in the region; the limited capacities of counternarcotic agencies, along with shortcomings in centralizing and reporting data in some North African countries, make it difficult to accurately reflect seizures and their trafficking trends in official statistics.

FIG. 1 Trends in cocaine seizures in Africa, based on national-data level, by sub-region, 2000 – 2023



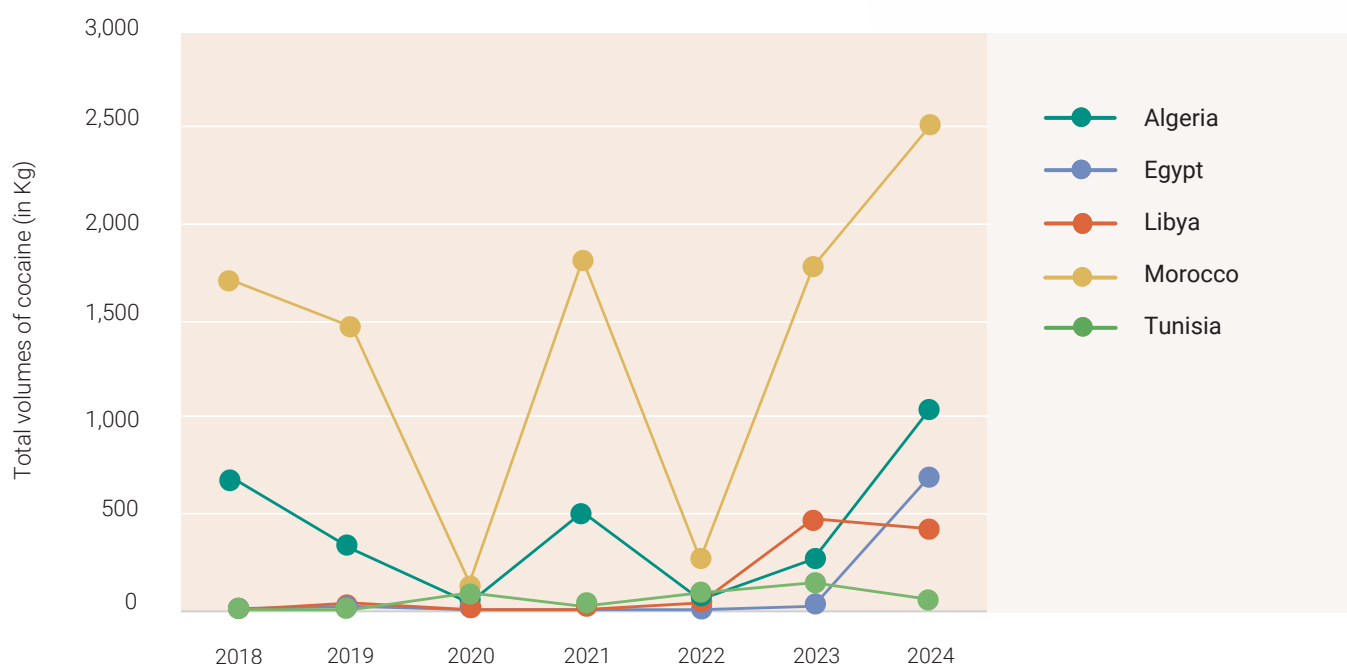
Source: UNODC, responses to the ARQ.

As noted above, Libyan agencies involved in countering drugs report that cocaine trafficking in the country has been increasing, with individual seizures showing relatively large volumes arriving or intended to be shipped to Libya as of 2020 (see table 1).¹⁰⁰ This data also suggests that traffickers established a direct route between South America, where cocaine originates, and Libya, where the drug either transits or is temporarily kept before being moved to other markets. Furthermore, the analysis of individual seizures reported signals that traffickers predominantly use “rip on” operations, meaning that drug shipments are unloaded in Libya along with legitimate cargo.¹⁰¹ Interviews with key informants similarly suggest that the flow of cocaine trafficking from South America to Libya has reached worrying proportions, noting that shipments of cocaine from Ecuador to Libya could be occurring monthly.^{102, 103} It is extremely difficult to calculate the income made from cocaine trafficking in Libya because the volume of the cocaine that transits Libya is unknown, but the recorded single seizures of cocaine made in Libya alone in 2024 would have had an approximate street value of \$3.7 and \$7.8 million USD in 2024.¹⁰⁴ If all recorded individual seizures made between 2018 and 2024 in Libya, or indicating Libya as a destination (see table 1), were considered at 2024 retail-price estimates,

their total market value would range between USD 41.8 million and USD 99.4 million. It should be noted that these figures reflect retail prices and therefore do not represent the profits captured by Libyan actors alone; revenues are typically shared across multiple segments of the supply chain, including foreign suppliers, regional intermediaries, and local facilitators involved in storage, protection, and onward movement.¹⁰⁵



FIG. 2 Trends in cocaine seizures in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia



Note: This graph is based on seizure data reported to UNODC through the ARQ between 2018 and 2024. It reflects total seizures reported by Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Libya reported annual volumes of cocaine seized for the period 2018–2021, but these figures are inaccurate and not comprehensive. Reporting improved in 2022, 2023 and 2024, yet data for these years still show limitations and mainly reflect submissions from the Anti-Narcotics General Administration (ANGA).

TABLE 1 Examples of major individual seizures of cocaine made at ports implicating Libya as destination of shipment (2018–2024)¹⁰⁶

Date of seizure	Amount seized	Place of seizure	Country of shipping departure	Shipping transit stops	Destination for offload	Seizure details
July 2018	43 kg	Buenaventura Port, Colombia	Colombia	ND*	Benghazi, Libya	Concealed in the structure of shipping container
October 2018	17 kg	Gioia Tauro Port, Calabria, Italy	ND	Italy	Benghazi, Libya	ND
December 2020	582 kg	Guayaquil, Ecuador	Ecuador	ND	Libya; Syria	ND
December 2020	612 kg	Malta coastal waters	Ecuador	Malta	Libya	ND
February 2022	270 kg	Canary Islands coastal waters	ND	ND	Libya	Concealed in frozen chicken
March 2024	128 kg	Benghazi Port, Libya	Ecuador	ND	Libya	Concealed in or amongst bananas
May 2024	269 kg	Al-Khums Port, Libya	Brazil	ND	Libya	Concealed in frozen chicken

*Note: ND stands for No Data.

The amount of cocaine reported seized in Libya or in other countries but with Libya as the intended destination appears small when compared to the amounts seized in other countries or regions.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the limited data that is available indicates quantitative and qualitative changes over the last few years in terms of Libya's role in global cocaine flows; these changes are significant for the country and region, even if Libya still represents a small proportion of cocaine reported seized globally. Key informant interviews and recent seizures indicate that Libya has evolved into a growing cocaine node for markets in Europe and the Middle East, and the volumes suspected to be transiting through Libya are much higher than what is captured in statistical reporting or seizure data.^{108, 109} The increasing role of Libyan wholesalers is further highlighted by the frequency of direct shipments from Ecuador to Libya, which suggests the existence of established supply chains linking South American producers to Libyan intermediaries and, in turn, to buyers outside Libya, underscoring Libya's emerging strategic role in regional cocaine flows. Container seizures in Libyan ports in 2023 and 2024 show the operational complexity of networks that are able to coordinate global routes and temporary storage for large-scale shipments, leveraging Libya's strategic location.¹¹⁰ Compared to more traditional Mediterranean trafficking routes – through Morocco and Algeria and mostly to European

markets – the cocaine supply chain from Libya tends to be more diversified, targeting South and South-Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.^{111, 112} The increasing market for cocaine in the Middle East, in particular, could reinforce Libya's role as a critical node in the global drug trade.¹¹³

Opening of direct sea routes

According to Libyan Customs, most high-volume consignments are intercepted in ports or dockside warehouses, confirming the growing role of the country in cocaine transit along sea routes.¹¹⁴ In the past five years, reported cocaine seizures at these locations occurred mainly in the ports of Tripoli, al-Khums, Benghazi and Tobruk (see table 1 and map 3).¹¹⁵ As noted above, these seizures highlight the growing role of Libyan ports as entry points for South American cocaine destined for markets in the Middle East and Europe and, potentially, the increasing autonomy of Libyan trafficking networks.¹¹⁶

This emerging cocaine trafficking flow often follows pre-established commercial shipping routes for licit goods, with cargo vessels from South America making stops or conducting transshipments in Malta and other key Mediterranean ports before continuing to Libya (see table 1).^{117, 118} To clarify: some cocaine shipments are

offloaded in Malta and transferred to smaller vessels bound for Libya, while others remain hidden in containers continuing directly to Libyan ports.¹¹⁹ Once in Libya or

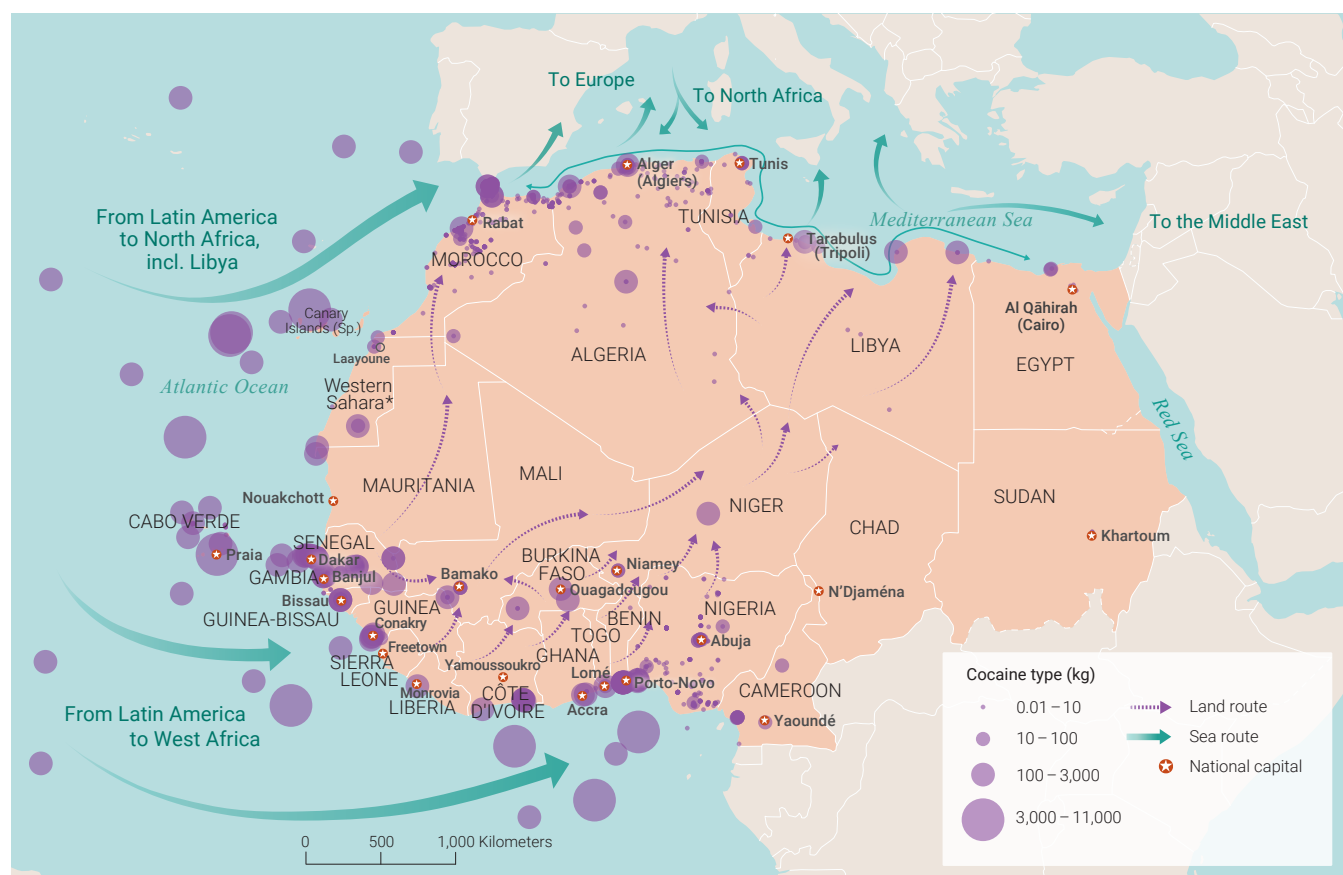
Libyan waters, the drug is either transhipped directly or stored before being sent to other markets.

BOX 6: A GROWING COCAINE MARKET IN NORTH AFRICA?

Cocaine use has been increasing across Africa for the past two decades, but the lack of data prevents a clear understanding of the level of use.^{120, 121} National experts in North Africa perceive cocaine-based substances, including crack cocaine, to be among the top three to five most commonly used drugs in their respective countries.¹²² Reflecting this consumption trend, recent seizures indicate that small volumes of cocaine are increasingly being trafficked from Europe to North Africa. This “reverse flow” is particularly evident along maritime routes linking ports such as Marseille and Genoa to North Africa ports – most

notably Tunisia, where authorities frequently report interceptions of individual passengers or couriers and vehicles (both private and commercial trucks) carrying cocaine on ferries. Interviewees suggest some of this cocaine is for the domestic Tunisian market, while some is redistributed to neighbouring countries.^{123, 124} This trend has been facilitated by gaps in border control on southbound routes, as enforcement efforts largely remain focused on northbound routes, based on the long-standing perception of North Africa as a transit region and export hub rather than a destination for cocaine and other drugs.¹²⁵

MAP 3 Main cocaine trafficking routes to and from Libya and neighbouring countries with individual seizures, 2020 – 2024



* Non-Self-Governing Territory

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Source: UNODC, responses to the ARQ, and Drug Monitoring Platform.

Continuous use of land routes

The biggest cocaine seizures in Libya have occurred along the coast, suggesting that maritime routes play a central role in country's current trafficking patterns. Nevertheless, the drug also continues to enter the country through multiple overland routes that connect by Libya to ports in West Africa (see map 3).¹²⁶ Seizures reported between 2019 and 2023 in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger confirm the persistence of cocaine trafficking routes through the Sahel towards Libya, as well as Algeria.¹²⁷

Prior to reaching Libya, cocaine is trafficked through multiple overland routes connecting the country to the Gulf of Guinea (see map 3). Key informants in Libya indicate that cocaine is mostly trafficked into the country from the south, including through routes originating in Niger.¹²⁸ Gold mining sites at the northern border of Niger have become common stopovers along trafficking routes for both cocaine and cannabis, offering secure locations for refuelling, storage, and logistical support for traffickers en route to Libya, Chad, or other neighbouring countries.¹²⁹ Cocaine (and cannabis resin) is typically transported from Niger to Libya using SUVs or heavy motor vehicles that are rarely intercepted. In some cases, they are accompanied by armed escorts.^{130, 131} In addition to using armed escorts, criminal networks exert territorial control over strategic transit points to ensure safe passage for their goods and reduce the risk of seizures. They also rely on coded communications to coordinate movements securely.¹³²

Different forms of cocaine are trafficked overland across Africa, including cocaine hydrochloride, base form, and crack cocaine. While cocaine hydrochloride is typically moved across borders in large quantities with armed convoys for protection, crack cocaine tends to be trafficked in small amounts and thus is more difficult to trace. Small quantities of crack cocaine have been reported seized in southern Libyan cities and are occasionally found on individuals acting as “drug mules” who conceal the drug on their person.^{133, 134} Several people serving as “mules” were arrested in 2023 in Niger, allegedly en route to gold mining sites near Algeria or Libya, and carrying up to 1 kg of crack cocaine per trip.¹³⁵ Reports of dismantled crack laboratories in West and Central Africa, including a recent case in Niger, point to emerging local processing activity, raising concerns about a potential expansion in the availability and consumption of different types of cocaine products across the continent.¹³⁶ According to Libyan law enforcement, recent crack seizures indicate a trafficking pattern involving the smug-

gling of cocaine from Libya to Tunisia, where it is processed into smokable crack form before being reintroduced into Libya. This processed crack is then distributed in border cities and other peripheral areas. The export of cocaine to Tunisia for processing into crack is difficult to explain given that the processing of cocaine into crack is relatively easy and requires few inputs and that crack is bulkier and thus more difficult to transport than cocaine.¹³⁷

BOX 7: NETWORKS AND CROSS BORDER TRAFFICKING

Cross-border trafficking requires significant coordination between the different networks involved. The modus operandi varies depending on the nature of the ties between traffickers and/or groups on either side of the border. According to key informants, in general, in the case of shipments moving northward from Niger to Libya, drugs change hands at prearranged meeting points – whether within a city, a checkpoint between cities or other locations in the border region that act as unofficial dividing lines between the areas of influence of different groups or tribes. In the case of shipments moving westwards, Libyan traffickers assume control on one side of the Libya–Tunisia border, while Tunisian traffickers take over once the shipment is on the other side. In contrast to many of the groups operating across the Niger–Libya border, which are often bound by ethnic or tribal loyalties, the relationship between Libyan and Tunisian traffickers is strictly transactional, based on financial arrangements rather than long-term alliances.¹³⁸

Drug trafficking networks along both the southern and western borders operate within a structured hierarchy with distinct roles. In Libya, high-level national coordinators manage logistics, finances, and external partnerships for cocaine and cannabis trafficking, while facilitators oversee storage and transport. Transporters and enforcers handle shipments, which are tracked using GPS-equipped vehicles.¹³⁹

Route selection depends on law enforcement patrols, terrain, and agreements with networks involved in trafficking.¹⁴⁰ Some armed groups play an essential role, facilitating movement by providing security for convoys and intelligence on patrol move-

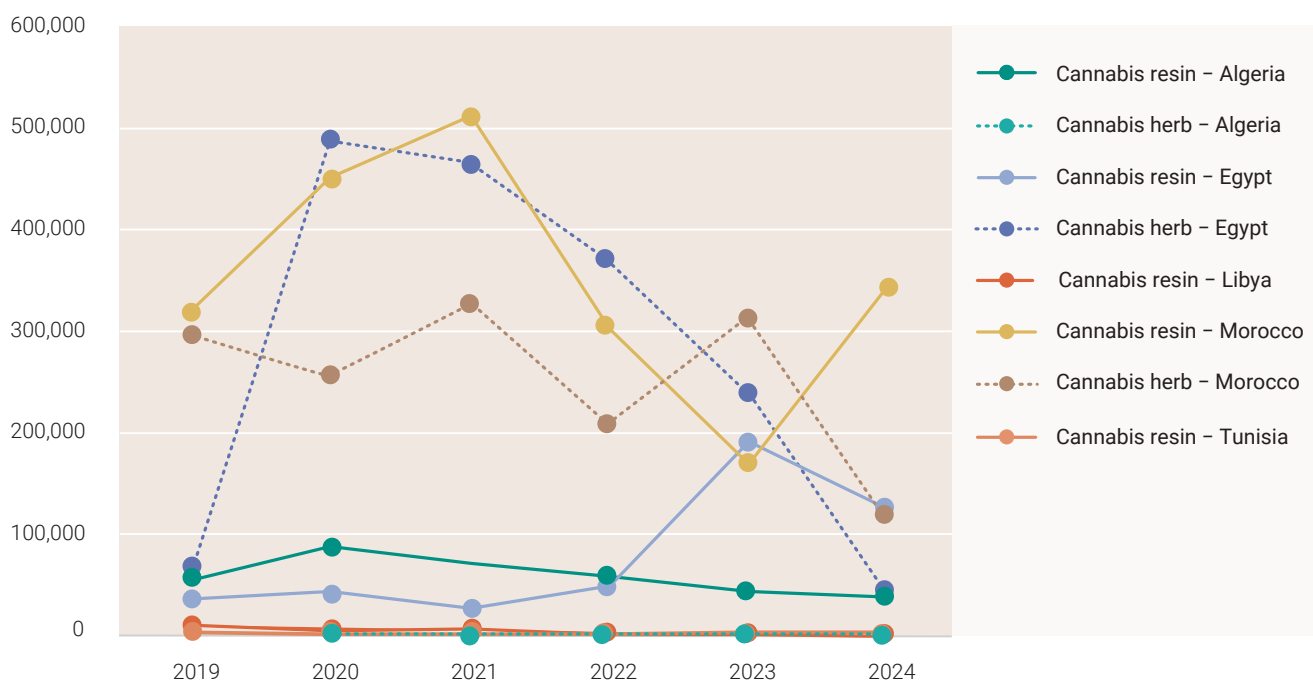
ments. Security is also ensured through tribal alliances and bribery.¹⁴¹ Bribery at border crossings is especially common, while alternative desert routes are secured by armed escorts. The traffickers interviewed highlighted the importance of monitoring law enforcement patrols, to either evade them or negotiate safe passage with some individuals. They also emphasized the influence of key figures who maintain connections with powerful individuals or groups, ensuring smooth operations through financial incentives and strategic partnerships.¹⁴²

Despite their structured nature, these networks remain highly adaptable. Traffickers adjust routes, transport methods, and personnel in response to law enforcement actions and shifting political conditions. For example, in response to increased controls at the Libya – Tunisia border, they began using inconspicuous families to move drugs past checkpoints.¹⁴³ This adaptability has allowed drug trafficking to thrive despite increased counter-trafficking efforts from law enforcement.¹⁴⁴

Cannabis trafficking

Approximately 406 tons of cannabis resin were seized in North Africa in 2023, accounting for a significant portion of global cannabis resin seizures (approximately 32.4 per cent).^{145, 146} Most cannabis resin seized in North Africa continues to be reported as departing from Morocco.¹⁴⁷ While Morocco has historically recorded the highest seizures, Egypt has also reported large volumes. Notably, in 2023, Egypt's total seizures of cannabis resin exceeded those of Morocco, reaching 191 tons.¹⁴⁸

FIG. 3 Total cannabis seizures made in North Africa countries by type, 2019-2024 (in kg)



Note: The annual volumes reported as official statistics by Libya do not fully correspond to the seizures documented through other reporting channels, suggesting possible gaps in data coverage or reporting practices.

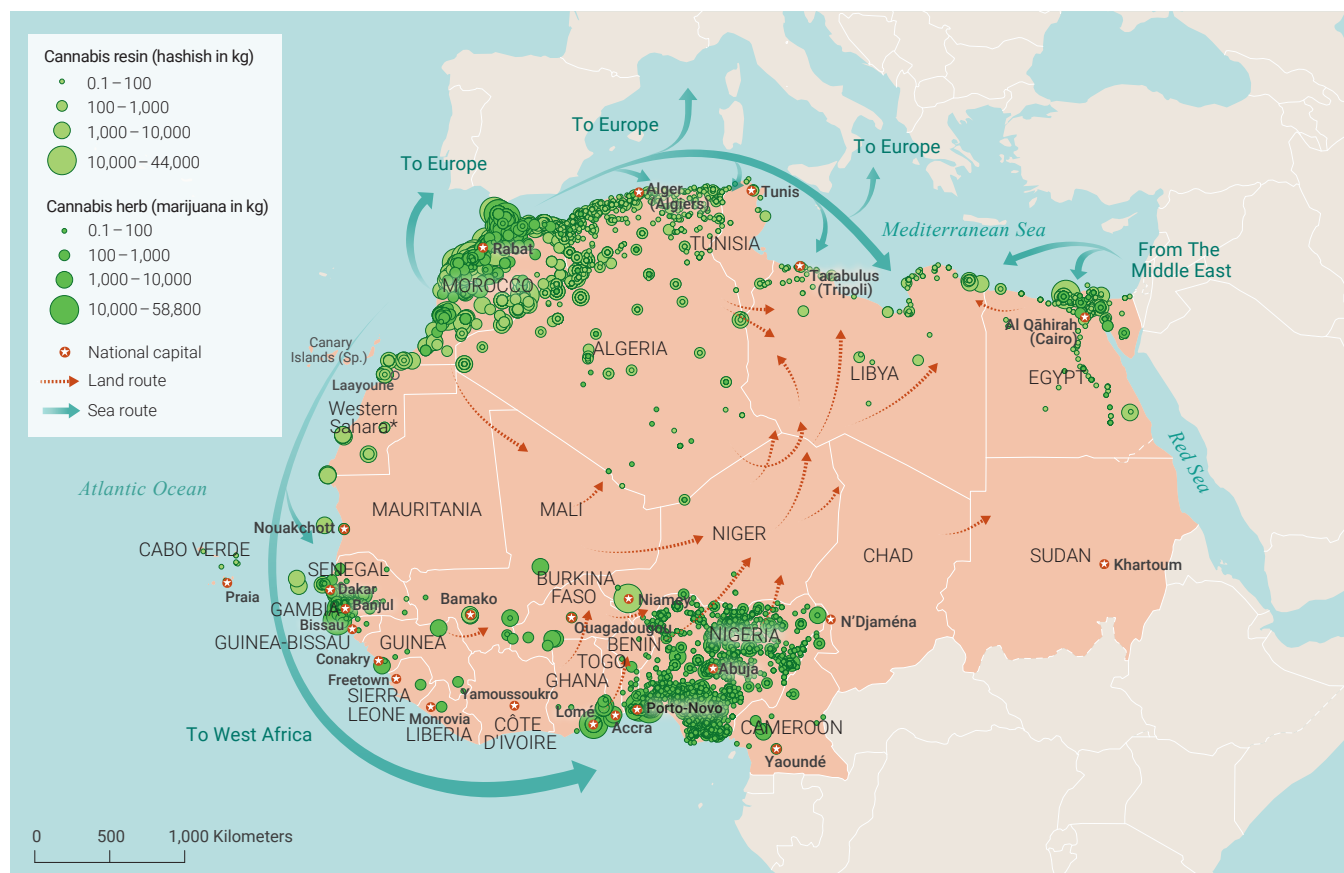
Source: UNODC, responses to annual report questionnaire.

As noted earlier, the extreme flux in Libya's security landscape, the prevalence of a predatory economy dominated at times by criminal and armed groups, and corruption have likely restricted capacity of law enforcement to control border areas and ports. Thus, reported interdictions, particularly at the southern border, likely represent a small part of the actual supply of cannabis in the country. Consultations made with Libyan law enforcement suggest there is a continuous flow of cannabis resin into the country.¹⁴⁹ Table 2 shows individual seizures of cannabis resin reported between 2020 and 2024 for coastal areas and ports alone. Four recent seizures in 2024 were together worth between 8.37 and 14.65 million LYD or circa \$1.22-2.14 million USD at 2024 retail-price estimates.¹⁵⁰ It should be noted that these figures reflect retail prices and therefore do not represent the profits captured by Libyan actors alone; revenues are typically shared across multiple segments

of the supply chain, including foreign suppliers, regional intermediaries, and local facilitators involved in storage, protection, and onward movement.

Seizures in Sahel countries indicate that Libya is an important destination and transit country for Moroccan cannabis resin, alongside other countries in North Africa.^{151, 152} According to Libyan law enforcement, cannabis resin seized in Libya has mostly departed from Morocco, but cannabis originating in the Middle East and Western Asia has also been reported seized in Libya.¹⁵³ Data from reported seizures indicate that Niger in particular, but also Egypt, Greece, Lebanon and Spain are key departure/transit points for cannabis resin heading to Libya.¹⁵⁴ At the same time, Tunisia and Algeria recorded seizures of cannabis that transited through Libya, underscoring its role as a trafficking node.¹⁵⁵

MAP 4 Main trafficking routes for cannabis-type drugs in North And West Africa, with individual seizures, 2020-2024.



* Non-Self-Governing Territory

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Source: UNODC, responses to the ARQ, and Drug Monitoring Platform.

TABLE 2 Main individual seizures of cannabis resin reported in Libyan ports and coast cities (2020–2024)¹⁵⁶

Date of seizure	Amount seized	Place of seizure	Country of shipping departure	Shipping transit stops	Destination for offload	Seizure details
December 2020	800 kg	Banghazi	ND	ND	ND	ND
August 2021	1.2 tons	Tobruk	ND	Sabha	ND	Vehicle intercepted on the road moving from Sabha to Tobruk
August 2021	500 kg	Tobruk	ND	Sabha	ND	Vehicle intercepted on the road moving from Sabha to Tobruk
2022	570 kg	Tripoli	ND	ND	ND	ND
2022	180 kg	Port of Tripoli	ND	Greece	ND	ND
February 2023	380 kg	Tobrouk	ND	ND	ND	Stored in a private house, found with cigarettes and firearms
May 2023	25 kg	Port of Al-Khums, Libya	Morocco	Malta, and other ports around the Mediterranean	Libya	Found in a second-hand car imported into Libya
May 2023	60 kg	Derna	ND	ND	Libya	
January 2024	300 kg	Tobrouk	ND	ND	ND	ND
January 2024	6 kg	Derna	ND	ND	ND	ND
January 2024	12.5 kg	Zliten	ND	ND	ND	ND
February 2024	100 kg	Port of Misratah, Libya	Morocco	Spain	Libya	Found in a second-hand car – SUV type – imported

Cannabis resin entering through seaports

According to law enforcement officers in Libya and Tunisia, cannabis resin trafficking along the North Africa coast has reportedly been constant over the past five years.¹⁵⁷ Libya appears to be at the confluence of sea routes from North Africa and the Middle East and West Asia, which continue to supplement traditional overland routes through Algeria and Tunisia.^{158, 159, 160} Traffickers are reported to occasionally drop packages of cannabis resin equipped with GPS trackers at sea, to be retrieved

later by other members of the network.¹⁶¹ Once in Libya, cannabis is often stored before being redistributed, either for domestic use or for onward smuggling by land and sea.¹⁶² Recent seizures have occurred in private houses in urban coastal areas.^{163, 164}

Cannabis resin shipments enter Libya through seaports in all regions, facilitating distribution within Libya and to neighbouring countries. In addition to Misratah and Al-Khums, Tobruk is also reported as an important port for cannabis trafficking, particularly given its proximity

to Egypt and the rest of the Middle East.^{165, 166} Smaller volumes of cannabis have also been seized in fishing ports, suggesting traffickers use a mix of large-scale and more discreet entry-points.¹⁶⁷

Small scale reverse cannabis resin flows

Between 2020 and 2024, Libya and Tunisia both recorded relatively small seizures of cannabis resin that had first transited through Southern and Western Europe before reaching North Africa, pointing to a small-scale “reverse flow” in the sense that historically cannabis resin has flowed the other direction.

In 2023, 25 kg of cannabis resin was found concealed in a second-hand car – probably being imported for resale in Libya – arriving from Antwerp via Malta at the port of Al-Khums.¹⁶⁸ In the case of Tunisia, there has been a rise in cannabis trafficking via ferries from Marseille and Genoa, with drugs often concealed in passenger vehicles or luggage. Tunisian Customs has regularly intercepted shipments from these ports, ranging from 1 to 30 kg, with occasional larger seizures of 100 to 300 kg.¹⁶⁹ For example, in 2023, authorities seized 134 kg of cannabis resin hidden in a private car coming from Italy via the port of Genoa.¹⁷⁰

A more recent seizure, in May 2024, off the coast of the southern city of Mahdia, further confirmed this evolving trend. Tunisian authorities intercepted 300 kg of cannabis resin along with 25,000 ecstasy pills that had initially been transported from Italy before being transferred to a fishing boat in Tunisia. Satellite phones linked to this shipment suggested potential connections to Libya, raising the possibility that part of the consignment was destined for Libya. These seizures, coupled with key informant interviews, underscore the growing capabilities and cross-border coordination of criminal networks operating across North Africa and beyond.¹⁷¹

It is too early to determine whether this trend will persist. But the use of imported vehicles and passenger ferries from Europe suggests that traffickers are testing new methods and streams, or shifting smuggling routes to evade heightened enforcement along traditional supply chains. These recent changes may reflect broader geopolitical developments or growing tensions affecting traditional land-based corridors. Economic considerations may also be driving traffickers to explore new routes to keep costs down or to maximize profits from surplus quantities. This could potentially reshape the region’s drug trafficking landscape.¹⁷²

Cannabis resin trafficked to Libya overland

Similar to cocaine, most seizures of cannabis in Libya are reported to occur in the country’s ports, but the drug continues to enter the country via multiple land routes as well.^{173, 174, 175} Some convoys move through Algeria, crossing desert passes into southern Libya, while others take more eastern routes, reaching Libya directly or Egypt.^{176, 177, 178} Additionally, others travel inland through northern Niger, heading towards the tri-border region with Chad and Libya.¹⁷⁹

The cannabis resin trafficked overland from Morocco to Libya traditionally transits through Algeria or the Sahel through Mauritania and Mali before reaching Algeria, northern Niger, and ultimately Libya.¹⁸⁰ However, since 2020, traffickers allegedly began to regard this route as risky due to the presence of international troops and widespread banditry in parts of Mali.^{181, 182} They appear to have shifted routes towards Niger in response, with some shipments entering first through the ports of Benin and Nigeria.

Seizures in Niger highlight its key role in regional overland cannabis smuggling. In March 2021, authorities in Niamey intercepted 17 tons of cannabis resin, reportedly trafficked through the port of Cotonou and destined for Libya.¹⁸³ Investigations suggest previous shipments of similar volumes had also followed this route.¹⁸⁴ In 2023, Niger also reported rising numbers of seizures of cannabis resin, including cannabis departing Ghana along its border with Benin, allegedly destined for the local market or neighbouring countries including Mali and Algeria.¹⁸⁵

Within Libya, shipments are stored in key transit cities such as Sabha, Ubari, and Marzuk before being distributed within the country or smuggled to neighbouring countries or other regions.^{186, 187, 188} While much of the cannabis resin from Morocco seized in Libya is trafficked for the local market and neighbouring countries, Egyptian authorities have also reported cannabis from other Middle East countries destined for the local market and/or Libya.¹⁸⁹

Pharmaceuticals and other synthetic drugs: Illicit manufacture, diversion and trafficking

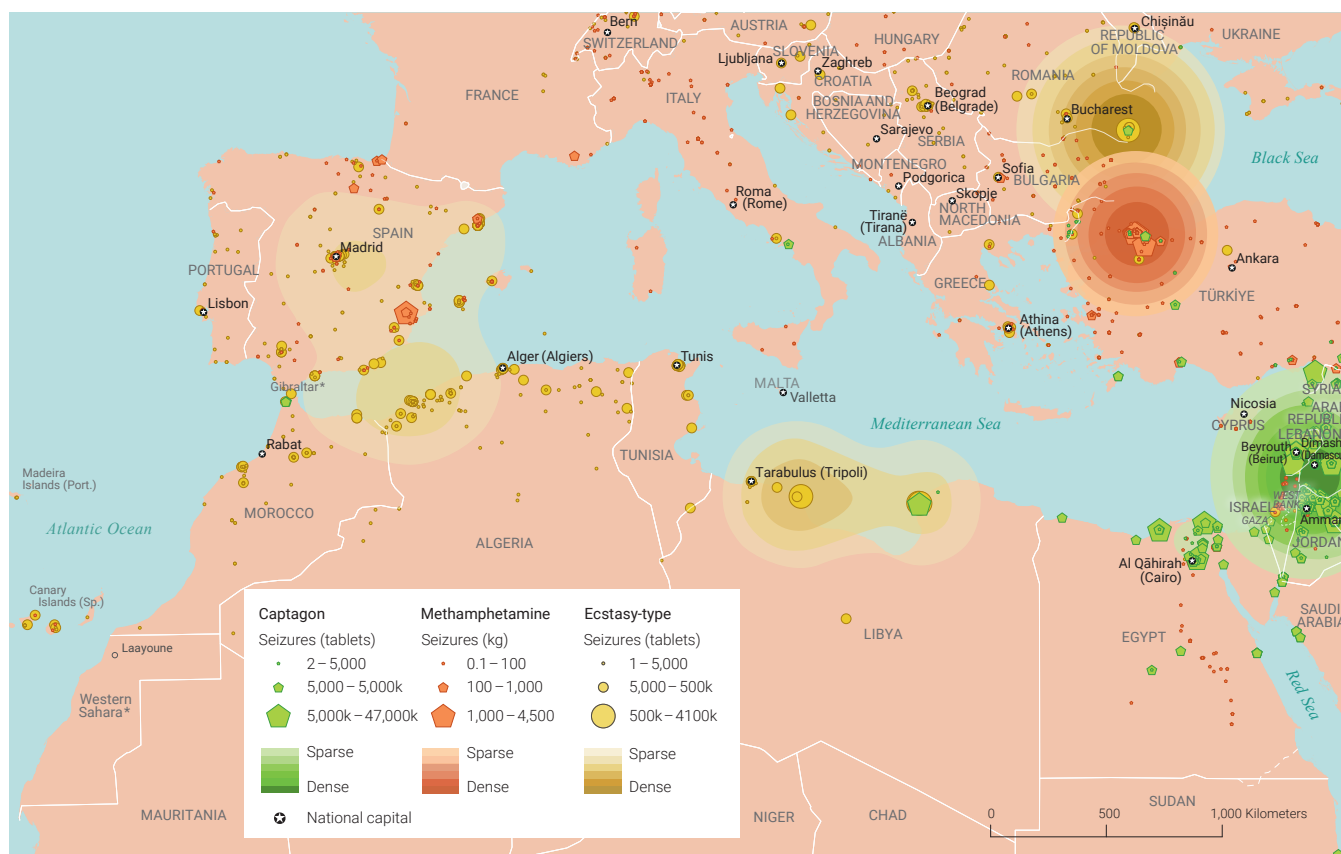
The volume and variety of pharmaceuticals – manufactured, imported and/or traded illicitly including through non-standard high dosage packages – and other synthetic drugs trafficked in Libya has increased sharply over the past decade, becoming a major concern for the Libyan authorities.^{190, 191} The surge in trafficking of pharmaceuticals and other synthetic drugs reflects both regional and global trends.¹⁹² The manufacturing and trafficking of synthetic drugs has certain advantages over plant-based drugs, such as low production costs and the ability to produce them almost anywhere.¹⁹³ Libya is increasingly playing a role in the transit and small scale production of synthetic drugs as well as being a destination for them.¹⁹⁴ The latter has captured the Libyan public's attention; growing domestic consumption,

particularly among youth, is perceived as a serious threat to the country's stability and public health (see section 3). Each subsection below contains details about the markets for specific synthetic drugs, while this introduction provides an analysis of overall trends.

Before 2011, pharmaceutical opioids such as tramadol were the primary synthetic drugs smuggled into Libya.¹⁹⁵ According to key informants interviewed, tramadol trafficking surged from 2014 onwards, with shipments primarily directed toward Egypt and, to a lesser extent, the domestic Libyan market.¹⁹⁶

By 2018, there were signs of “captagon” trafficking in Libya; notable interceptions were reported in Tobruk and Benghazi that year. In 2024, Libyan Customs reported a major seizure in the port of Benghazi of 18 million “captagon” tablets originating from Syria.¹⁹⁷ Significant seizures of “captagon” allegedly destined for North Africa have also been reported outside the region. For

MAP 5 Main seizures of ecstasy-type drugs, methamphetamine and “captagon” in North Africa, Middle East and Southern Europe, 2020 – 2024



* Non-Self-Governing Territory

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Source: UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform

example, Lebanese Customs reported the seizure of one million “captagon” pills in 2023 in the port of Beirut, hidden in agricultural equipment destined for Tunisia.¹⁹⁸ The recent change of regime in the Syrian Arab Republic, where most “captagon” was illicitly manufactured, raises questions about the future scale and flow of “captagon” trafficking, including the possible relocation of production in the region and beyond.¹⁹⁹

Ecstasy seizures have been consistently reported in North Africa in the past decade, often linked to smuggling routes from Europe, with the highest volumes (up to 1.2 million ecstasy tablets in a single seizure) reported seized by Tunisia, Algeria and Libya.²⁰⁰ The former reports frequent seizures of ecstasy arriving via air and sea routes, particularly on ferries.²⁰¹ In the case of Libya, ecstasy has been increasingly smuggled into the country in second-hand cars imported from Europe, especially the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Belgium. The final destination of these drug shipments is unclear, but the pills may have been in transit to Tunisia and other consumer countries in the region and/or may have been intended for Libya’s own – more limited – internal market.²⁰²

Since 2020, pregabalin trafficking has also increased significantly, with authorities in Libya regularly seizing thousands of tablets a week, primarily at ports but also along border crossings with Tunisia and Algeria.²⁰³

Interviews in Niger point at tramadol and pregabalin or other pharmaceuticals being sometimes mixed with heroin and reconditioned into different forms, including tablets or crystals. Nigerian criminal networks allegedly also transform tramadol of varying quality into a substance sold as a form of pseudo-heroin, with street names such as “tramadol 1000” or “Russian roulette”.^{204, 205}

In addition to the growing volumes and varieties of synthetic drugs being trafficked, recent incidents have raised concerns about the country’s possible emerging role in activities related to tablet manufacturing. In early 2024, Libyan counternarcotics authorities dismantled a laboratory in Tobruk, near the Egyptian border. The facility contained equipment used for tablet manufacturing, though there was no confirmed evidence of the specific substances being produced.²⁰⁶ Tramadol was found on-site; however, the absence of forensic drug profiling prevented clarification of what, if anything, was being produced.²⁰⁷ Similar concerns had already arisen in the country a year earlier, in 2023, when similar tablet manufacturing equipment was seized in Tripoli.²⁰⁸

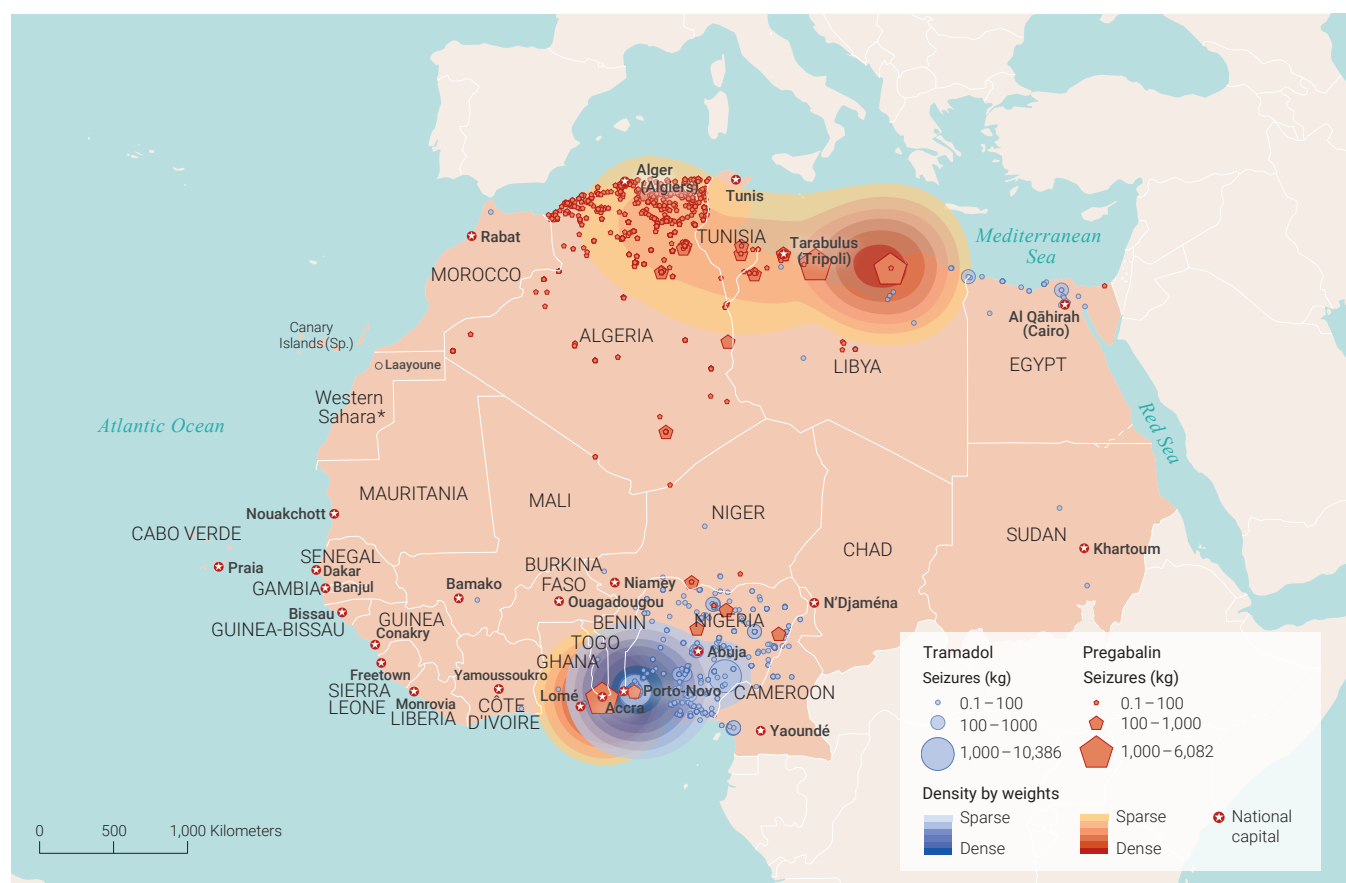
While large-scale seizures of synthetic drugs, such as those detailed above and below, indicate the involvement of powerful trafficking groups, tramadol and pregabalin are also allegedly trafficked in small amounts by more opportunistic traffickers. Apparently, it is fairly simple for someone seeking extra income to buy these pills cheaply in one country or city and then travel to another location – sometimes but not always across national borders – where they can be sold at a higher price. In contrast to cannabis and especially cocaine trafficking, barriers to entry for small-scale synthetic trafficking seem to be relatively low.²⁰⁹

Pharmaceutical opioids (tramadol)

Tramadol is a synthetic opioid that is not under international control, but in a number of countries it is a controlled pharmaceutical used to treat pain. This opioid is widely used non-medically in some parts of Africa.²¹⁰ West Africa has become a major hub for the illicit market of tramadol, with key seaports serving transport routes through the Sahel and North Africa.²¹¹ Africa accounted for 57 per cent of all pharmaceutical opioids seized worldwide between 2019 and 2023 and, more specifically, 93.4 per cent of global tramadol seizures between 2017 and 2023.²¹² Tramadol arriving at West African seaports – mainly in Benin, Nigeria, and Togo – is transported to the Sahel by buses, trucks, and motorcycles, using both primary roads and less-travelled routes.²¹³

In the case of tramadol destined for Libya, shipments originating in Nigeria and Benin are often transported northwards overland through Niger.²¹⁴ Seizures of around 100,000 to 150,000 tramadol tablets reported between 2021 to 2025 in different Nigerien cities illustrate this trafficking route.^{215, 216} Smugglers use convoys of four-wheel-drive vehicles to move tramadol across the desert, often hiding shipments among other contraband, such as fuel and counterfeit goods.²¹⁷ Once in Libya, shipments are stored in southern cities such as Al-Qatrun, Ubari, and Sabha before being repackaged and distributed locally or trafficked onward, particularly to Egypt.²¹⁸

Notwithstanding the importance of overland trafficking through the Sahel, the largest volumes of tramadol arrive in Libya via maritime routes.²¹⁹ For example, in 2023, Customs seized more than 4 million pills in just two interceptions at the port of Tobruk. In 2022, similar shipments were reported seized in the ports of Misratah (1.2 million) and Al-Khums (1.7 million).²²⁰ Assuming a low to mid-range price of 1.5 LYD per pill, or \$0.22 USD cents per pill at the 2024 average black market exchange rate,

MAP 6 Main seizures of tramadol and pregabalin in North and West Africa, 2020–2024

* Non-Self-Governing Territory

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Source: UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform

the pharmaceutical opioids seized through these interceptions between 2022 and 2024 (totalling just under 7 million pills) would have had a combined market value of around 10.5 million LYD or 1.5 million USD.²²¹

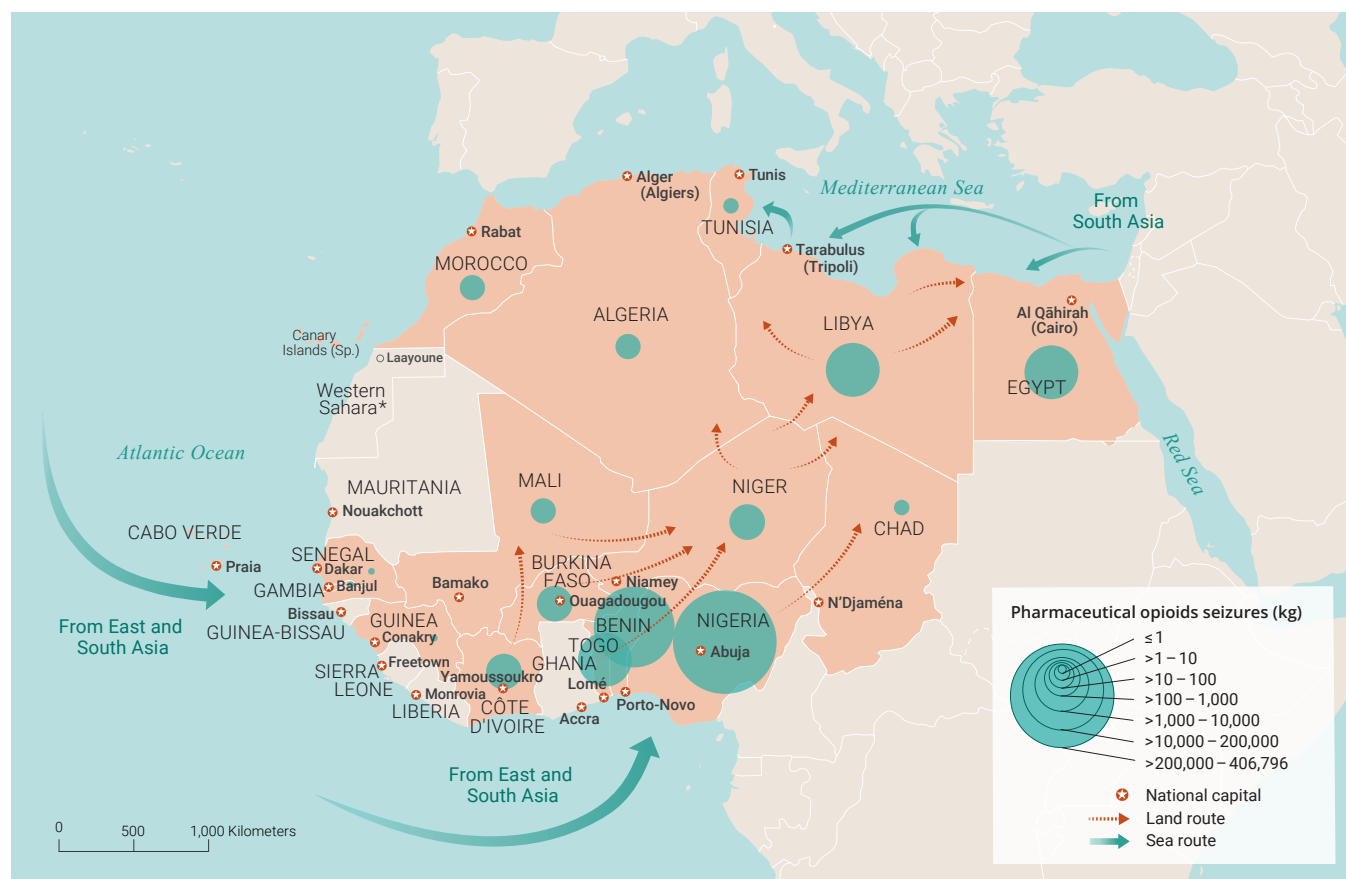
Traffickers often conceal shipments of tramadol (and also pregabalin) with legitimate pharmaceutical imports, taking advantage of the country's porous ports. Once inside Libya, shipments of tramadol are repackaged for domestic use and onward trafficking to neighbouring countries, mainly Egypt and also Niger to a smaller extent.

Domestic retail-level sellers include informal pharmacies, cigarette shops, and street dealers.²²² The high level of accessibility of tramadol in Libya has made it one of the most widely misused substances in the country, according to key informants.²²³

Pregabalin

Since 2020, Libya has reported a significant increase in the trafficking of pregabalin, which is diverted from the legal supply.²²⁴ Pregabalin is a substance that is not under international control, but in a number of countries it is a controlled pharmaceutical used to treat neuropathic pain. Qualitative information suggests that pregabalin is also misused for its dissociative and euphoric effects.²²⁵ Pregabalin follows the patterns observed with tramadol. Libya has emerged as a key transit country and market for the drug, which is trafficked primarily through maritime routes into Libyan ports, as well as overland routes via the Sahel. Much of the supply originates in South Asia and is mainly destined for Algeria and other North African countries, alongside domestic consumption.²²⁶

MAP 7 Main pharmaceutical opioid trafficking routes to and from North and West Africa, and annual seizures of pharmaceutical opioids in North and West Africa, 2020 – 2024



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Source: UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform

Libya's ports account for the largest seizures of pregabalin that are intercepted without the required permits or in quantities larger than reported in the paperwork and thus likely destined for illicit markets. One of these interdictions occurred in 2023 in the port of Benghazi; 15 million pregabalin tablets were found in a container allegedly originating in India.²²⁷ In January 2024, another 8.6 million pills were intercepted at the same port.²²⁸ These pills – from just two seizures – would have had an estimated market retail value of 236 million LYD or circa \$34.5 million USD using the average black market exchange rate for 2024.²²⁹

Smaller but still significant seizures have taken place at other entry points, including 1.3 million tablets confiscated at a checkpoint along the coastal road near Tripoli in 2023.²³⁰ Additional shipments were intercepted inland, including 200,000 tablets seized in Nalut near the Tunisian border, with the driver reportedly coming from

Sabha.²³¹ Later that year, 178,000 pills were confiscated in Ghadamis, near the Tunisia–Algeria–Libya border.²³²

While maritime trafficking dominates in volume, overland smuggling through the Sahel also plays a crucial role. Pregabalin enters West Africa primarily through Nigerian ports before being transported northward toward Libya and Algeria. From Lagos, shipments move through Zinder and Maradi in Niger, following the same established trafficking corridors as for cannabis resin and cocaine.²³³ Seizures in Niger highlight the growing role of the Sahel as a transit zone for pregabalin. For example, 105,000 and 90,000 pills were seized in May and September 2023 in Arlit and near Gouré respectively; in both cases, the drugs were reported to be bound for Libya.²³⁴ Tunisia has also reported a rise in pregabalin trafficking, with most shipments transiting Libya before being redirected southward to Algeria as a final destination, and to a lesser extent, Tunisia.^{235, 236}

Air trafficking also plays a role in the pregabalin trade. In December 2019 and January 2020, Niamey Airport authorities intercepted shipments originating from Addis Ababa bound for pharmaceutical depots in Libya, demonstrating the role of aviation in illicit pharmaceutical supply chains.²³⁷

Smuggling methods for pregabalin closely resemble those used for tramadol. Large shipments are often moved in shipping containers or lorries/trucks and concealed within or alongside common consumer goods, such as powdered milk and other licitly supplied

pharmaceuticals. Pickups are also used for overland routes, each carrying between 30 and 40 cartons of pills.²³⁸ Smaller-scale traffickers – such as those that cross the Nigeria–Niger border – frequently hide capsules inside jerrycans intended for water or fuel, which they then transport on motorcycles.²³⁹

Pregabalin is becoming a key substance in illicit pharmaceutical markets across North Africa.²⁴⁰ Its dissociative and euphoric effects, relative affordability, and the ease with which it can be transported, seem to have all contributed to the growing popularity of the drug.

Main synthetic drugs used and trafficked in the Arab countries

Ecstasy: a group of synthetic substances including MDMA (3,4 methylenedioxymethamphetamine), MDA (3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine) and MDEA (3,4 methylenedioxyethylamphetamine). Similarly to amphetamine and methamphetamine, these substances have stimulant and entactogenic effects.

Tramadol: a synthetic opioid analgesic primarily prescribed to treat mild to severe pain in both acute and chronic cases. It is not internationally controlled under the drug conventions, but it is widely trafficked and often found in illicit markets in high-dosage formulations for nonmedical use

Pregabalin: a medication that is typically prescribed for neuropathic pain, epilepsy, and anxiety disorders. It is increasingly found in illicit markets for non-medical use, often in high doses.

“Captagon”: is a drug sold on illicit drug markets using the brand name of a former medicinal product that contained fenetylline. Today’s illicit “captagon” tablets vary and are usually a combination of amphetamine and caffeine, and in some cases, theophylline, quinine and paracetamol or other additives. The tablets have stimulant effect.

Methamphetamine: a chemically related drug to the group of amphetamine-types stimulants (ATS). It is sold on illicit markets in crystalline or powdered form and has strong stimulant effects.



The impacts of drug trafficking

The illicit drug economy is one of several sources of funding that have reportedly allowed Libya's different influential criminal, armed and/or other groups to gain influence, as indicated in section 1. Resources obtained through trafficking in Libya – whether directly or indirectly through taxation – have been used to pay fighters higher salaries in some parts of the involved countries, buy-off potential adversaries and reward people for their cooperation.²⁴¹ These resources have enabled the groups involved in criminal activities to acquire greater military as well as economic power. As documented by the UN Panel of Experts, this in turn has helped them to bolster their influence over different institutions and state resources, including taking up institutional roles and accessing funding, which adds a veneer of legitimacy to their criminal activities (see section 1).²⁴² This vicious cycle undermines civilian authorities and challenges the attempts to build and sustain accountable institutions in Libya.²⁴³

In addition to fuelling corruption, the growing drug trade has contributed to violence in Libya and the broader North and West African region by adding to the many reasons for clashes between the different actors and groups and with state security forces, including those of neighbouring countries.²⁴⁴ Extreme fragmentation and flux in the security landscape, and the territorial rootedness of different groups involved in trafficking, contributes to high levels of competition and conflict as well as compelling cooperation (see section 1).²⁴⁵ Violent competition and conflict are exacerbated by historical tensions between ethnicities, tribes and families, which seem to have been better contained previously through a centralized system of control.²⁴⁶ When cooperation between armed groups breaks down, civilians are often impacted. In some cities, several periods of violence faced by civilians were attributed to disputes over the trade in cannabis resin for example or other drugs.²⁴⁷ Violent clashes linked to the drug trade are said to be more common in the western regions of Libya due to higher fragmentation of the security landscape in the region, and in the southern area due to growing banditry.²⁴⁸ However, this does not necessarily indicate a higher volume of trafficking in these regions as the modus operandi of traffickers may vary across the country. The pattern is apparently similar in northern Niger, where violent clashes and armed banditry are said to have increased – reviving old antagonisms between trafficking networks dominated by different ethnic

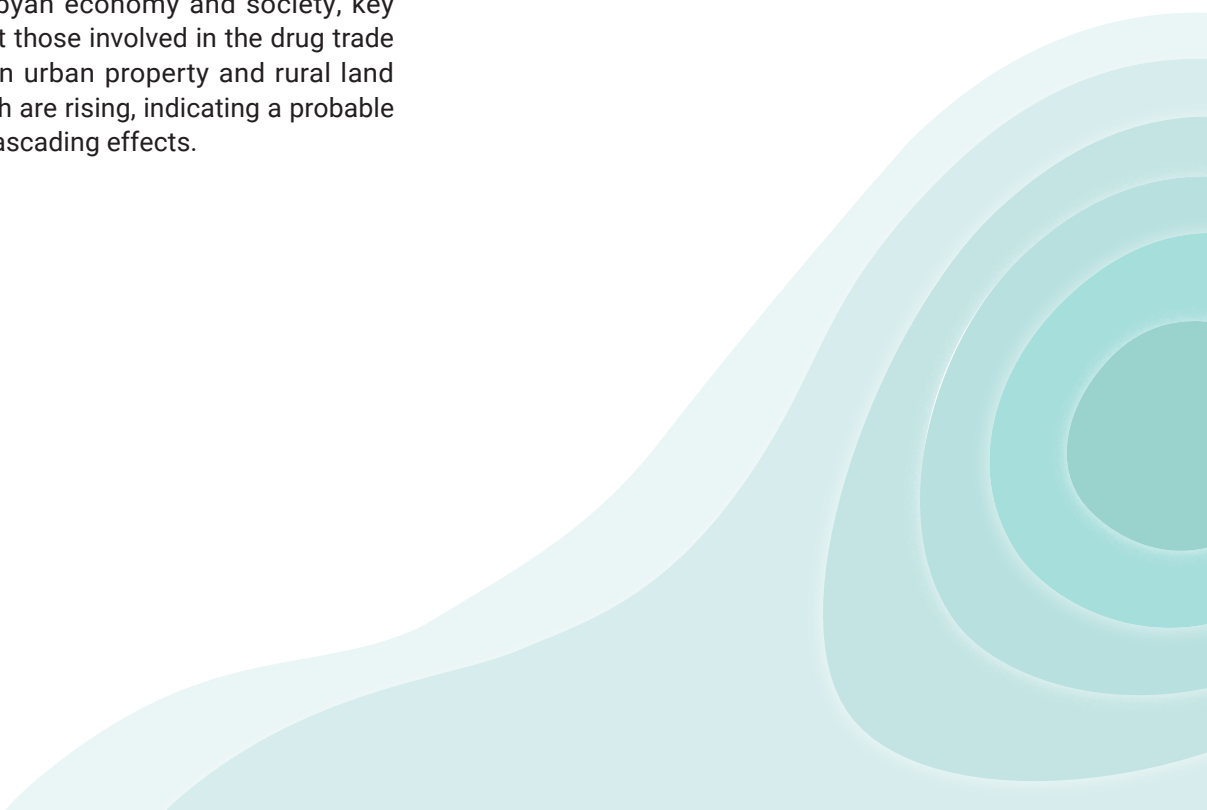
groups – following the undoing of a system based on centralized control.²⁴⁹ These conflicts, like ethnic groups and trafficking/smuggling networks, transcend national borders.²⁵⁰ Indeed, violent competition and clashes between groups within southern Libya are said to have impacted the balance of power among trafficking and smuggling networks in Niger.²⁵¹

Key informants express particular concern about the “slow violence” – or the conglomeration of gradual and often unseen harms – associated with growing drug use, especially among Libya's youth.²⁵² Research conducted for this report and other qualitative studies indicate that Libyan society is extremely concerned about an observed growth in drug use across the entire country.²⁵³ According to UNODC interviews, drug use used to be a hidden affair confined to a small subset of the male population in Libya's larger cities, but over the last 5-10 years has become more common and more visible among women and people of different social classes, even in smaller towns.²⁵⁴ There was a clear consensus among those interviewed that the use of pills (especially tramadol and pregabalin, but also ecstasy and “captagon”, or a mixture of these) has exploded over the last few years.²⁵⁵ Young people are reported to be the main users, in a country where approximately 19 per cent of its 7.4 million inhabitants were between 15-24 in 2025.^{256, 257} Problematic drug use has led to health issues, family conflicts, debt, job loss and other financial difficulties.²⁵⁸ Interviewees claim that this has caused broader social problems and mounting crime including petty thefts, armed robbery, rape and murder.²⁵⁹ This “slow violence” is part of broader social tensions engendered by drug economies, which simultaneously bolster and destroy livelihoods.²⁶⁰

Domestic drug use has grown in parallel to Libya's expanding role in global trafficking networks, which has increased supply in Libya and potentially also in the region.²⁶¹ Interviewees attribute the growth in drug use among Libyan youths to increased availability of drugs, ease of access (for example, through delivery services and in pharmacies and cafes), and falling prices/low costs.²⁶² The increase in drug flows through Libya has likely contributed to the ease of access reported by UNODC's interviewees. Rising drug use and associated “slow violence” has also been reported in Mali and Niger, especially in gold mining areas, and in the broader Sahel.²⁶³

Rising drug use is also attributed to armed conflict, economic instability and social breakdown. In addition to growing supply, key informants noted several factors driving demand in Libya, including recreational use; using drugs as a “coping mechanism” for dealing with fatigue, stress/anxiety and depression, linked to overwork, unemployment and other forms of “economic distress”, while fighters are said to use pills for “relief”, “courage”, “stamina”, “alert[ness]”, “operational endurance”, “stimulation” and to “supress fear”.^{264, 265, 266, 267, 268}

At present, data on the economic impacts of drug trafficking in Libya is limited, but qualitative information suggests that profits from illegal economies could distort farmland and housing markets, reducing accessibility. Experts report that much of the drug trafficking profits acquired in Libya are laundered and invested abroad.²⁶⁹ However, some of these criminal proceeds do stay in Libya itself, where their primary destination is urban and rural real estate, including agricultural land.²⁷⁰ Real estate prices in Libya have surged since 2011, and especially since 2014, making homes and land unaffordable for many.²⁷¹ In other countries, drug money has fuelled real estate booms that have exacerbated inequality and violent conflicts, while also contributing to inefficient land use, thus limiting agricultural production.²⁷² While there is insufficient evidence to determine the extent to which laundering and investment of criminal proceeds has impacted the Libyan economy and society, key informants report that those involved in the drug trade favour investments in urban property and rural land and that prices of both are rising, indicating a probable link that could have cascading effects.



Conclusions and Recommendations

The growing volume and variety of drugs flowing into and through the Sahel and North Africa has increased the need and the demand for action in the region. The *World Drug Report 2025* noted rising public health concerns across the continent around rapidly diversifying drug markets.²⁷³ In Libya, the imperative for action is particularly pronounced; domestic drug trafficking networks have multiplied connections with suppliers in different parts of the world, turning the country into a growing distribution centre and expanding consumption market. Recent events in other countries – such as the political changes since December 2024 in the Syrian Arab Republic, which until then was the main producer of the amphetamine “captagon” – could impact Libya’s position within regional and global illicit drug economies in the coming years, and also potentially affect other fragile contexts in the region.²⁷⁴

Sustainably addressing drug trafficking will require transforming the environment that has enabled the growth of multiple illicit economies in Libya and the region more broadly. This means tackling complex problems such as political instability and fragmentation; corruption and limited institutional capacities influenced by different groups; the militarization of society; youth unemployment, which in Libya lies at around 50%; and broader “economic hardship”, especially in marginalized border regions.²⁷⁵

As stated in the *National Strategy on Drugs*, addressing the socio-economic factors driving participation in illicit drug economies will be a key component of effective policy and programming going forward. The country’s planning for economic diversification away from dependence on hydrocarbons might be leveraged to also support a shift away from dependence on illicit economies, including drug trafficking. To reduce reliance on illicit employment provided by groups involved in drug trafficking and related incomes, this diversification must prioritize job creation, especially for skilled and semi-skilled workers, and be based on inclusive forms of development. While effective development planning and public investment is currently challenged by political fragmentation and corruption, as a middle-income country with significant oil revenues, Libya also holds enormous advantages and potential.²⁷⁶

As part of efforts to generate alternative employment, the Libyan Government may need to consider its spend-

ing priorities, which currently favour work in the defence and security sector, with 44 per cent of employment, over education and healthcare, with 27 and 8 per cent of employment respectively.²⁷⁷ Under existing conditions, this high proportion of employment in security has tended to consolidate rather than dismantle the criminal ecosystem. At the same time, it is important to recognize that changes to public expenditure could have destabilizing impacts and upset the current political settlement, which has led to relatively low levels of violence in Libya since 2021.²⁷⁸ This is the type of quandary Libya is facing.

One fundamental part of the country’s economic diversification strategy will necessarily focus on government investment in technical training and education more generally. As noted in a recent World Bank report, the quality of education in Libya has deteriorated significantly over the last decade or so, seriously limiting the country’s overall development processes and prospects.²⁷⁹ Investments in education will need to be complemented with investments in infrastructure, such as renewable energy to ensure reliable access to electricity, which in many areas is lacking.²⁸⁰

Public health care provision will also require investment, for the direct wellbeing of the population and for the country’s longer-term development on which a sustainable shift away from illicit economies depends. A recent UN report highlights how some municipalities are facing acute shortages of medical personnel, equipment and supplies.²⁸¹ Investment in the public health system is also extremely important for attending to the mental health problems that have contributed to growing drug use and the negative health impacts of this growth in use.

Reductions in drug use, or at least the mitigation of associated harms, is one area in which the Libyan Government and neighbouring country governments may be able to achieve results in the medium term, even in the current context of instability. The Government of Libya has recognized the Libyan public’s alarm about the growing consumption of illicit drugs by prominently referring to drug use and drug use disorders in its *National Strategy on Drugs*. It proposes to attend to the issue of drug use, through (i) expanding access to support services – including rehabilitation – for people who use drugs, and through (ii) educational campaigns that improve awareness of the potential dangers of drug use. These

types of interventions, if based on scientific evidence, have the potential to unite people across national, political, ethnic, tribal and other divides.

The *National Strategy on Drugs* also includes a proposal to review and update national drug laws and policies in line with international standards and best practice, creating space to build and refine an approach centred on inclusive development and public health, in line with UNODC/World Health Organization (WHO) international standards.²⁸²

Transforming the political and economic environment that has allowed multiple illicit economies to thrive in Libya and across the region is a long-term challenge requiring careful, coordinated and sustained action across multiple policy areas. This is especially difficult to attain in a context of political fragmentation and instability – and one in which counter-crime policies and operations have allegedly been instrumentalized and thus become sources of tension and division.²⁸³ Nonetheless, there is scope for the Libyan authorities and international actors to respond more effectively in the short to medium term.

The following recommendations, which cover interventions of different timespans and complexity, are intended to support and complement Libya's commitments as outlined in its comprehensive *National Strategy on Drugs*:

- ▶ **Strengthen and operationalize the *National Strategy on Drugs* through an integrated, balanced approach to supply and demand.** Expand the Strategy to ensure comprehensive coverage of both supply reduction and demand reduction pillars; develop a detailed action plan with adequate resource allocation for implementation; and establish a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to measure progress and address gaps in timely manner.
- ▶ **Enhance national inter-institutional coordination and cooperation.** Establish an inter-ministerial committee on drugs that brings together all relevant national actors involved in counternarcotics efforts and ensure that this coordination mechanism is fully aligned with the objectives and implementation framework of the *National Strategy on Drugs* and supported by regular information-sharing.
- ▶ **Establish a national research and analysis centre.** Building on existing institutional initiatives, create a dedicated unit that consolidates drug-related data and national expertise, serves as a centralized knowledge repository, and strengthens analytical capacity across national institutions. The centre could bring together practitioners and academic partners to enhance research, analysis, and methodological rigour. It could be embedded within, or operate under the auspices of, the Office of the General Prosecutor, given its existing role in coordinating national statistical efforts. Its work, which could include the production of analytical notes or threat assessments, would inform evidence-based policymaking and contribute to the implementation of the *National Strategy on Drugs*.
- ▶ **Enhance national capacities for drug-related data collection and analysis by providing technical assistance** that improves the quality, consistency and centralization of drug data within national institutions. Priorities include improving the detection, identification, profiling and analysis of drugs; standardizing and centralizing the reporting of interdictions and seizures; improving quantitative information on drug use; and strengthening the ability of forensic and toxicology laboratories to identify and analyse drugs. More generally, data collection systems should serve the operationalization of the *National Strategy on Drugs* and contribute to fulfilling Libya's data reporting obligations under the United Nations Drug Control Conventions, including by informing broader mixed-methods studies aimed at assessing market dynamics, trends and needs.
- ▶ **Establish an early warning system** to detect the emergence of new substances on the national illicit market as well as monitoring drug use, and submit data to the UNODC Early Warning Advisory for an international data-informed response, building on existing seizure, forensic and health data and allowing for incremental development in line with national capacities.
- ▶ **Provide and use expert input for the design of evidence-based interventions, especially for the development of Libya's public health approach to demand reduction, drug use and drug use disorders.** To address increasing drug use and its health and social consequences, improved prevention, treatment, care and recovery support services, including harm reduction, should be developed. Addressing the health dimensions of the drug problem could unite different factions, communities and political forces around a shared drug policy goal. The international community can contribute to Libya's efforts to use

existing evidence to design interventions that are effective in addressing the health-related drug challenges and aligned with international standards on treatment. This might include support for interventions rooted in school and family life, which have proven to be more effective than general prevention campaigns, as reflected in the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention.²⁸⁴

- ▶ **Consider reviewing the country's drug laws**, as proposed in the *National Strategy on Drugs*, and in line with the international legal frameworks, including the three international drug conventions and related instruments; and human rights standards. These laws – like specific interventions – would also be strengthened by using available evidence and ensuring alignment with the public health approach.²⁸⁵
- ▶ **Promote participation of civil society, especially community-level organizations, in the design and implementation of drug programmes**, for effective operationalization of the *National Strategy on Drugs*. This report notes the political fragmentation in Libya, which may pose challenges to the implementation of the Strategy. However, the report also highlights strong community-level bonds, which might be leveraged to ensure the success of the policies and programmes associated with the Strategy. Carefully selected representative community organizations could be involved from the early stages of policy and programme design to ensure local ownership and effective adaptation to context. Religious figures and other influential individuals such as sports leaders could also play a critical role in addressing drug-related issues, for example by creating supportive environments and building resilience within communities.
- ▶ **Design policies and programmes that attend to specific needs**. As highlighted in this report, key informants in Libya perceive that drug use is growing among women and young people. Tailored data collection and analysis related to these subgroups within the Libyan population is required for appropriate policy and programme design.²⁸⁶
- ▶ **Support cross-border and local development initiatives based on multi-/bi-lateral partnerships**. These initiatives should target regions where economic opportunities are bound up with illicit economies. They should focus on employment creation and the promotion of cross-border cooperation for economic development at the local government level. In

Libya, these initiatives could be linked to broader economic policies that aim to diversify away from hydrocarbons and strengthen results by coordinating investments and interventions with municipal councils and local communities. These initiatives could also build on existing local peacebuilding and development plans, created by municipalities, local authorities and communities with the support of the international community.²⁸⁷ Further development planning could be strengthened through relevant data collection and studies, for example, on labour markets and barriers to entrepreneurship.²⁸⁸

- ▶ **Calibrate law enforcement and the criminal justice system towards a long-term reduction of drug markets**. Targeting small-scale smugglers and traffickers may show tangible results in the short term but is not effective in dismantling criminal groups and markets, and could fuel social conflict and economic instability, especially in borderland regions with high dependence on illicit economies. An increased focus on disrupting and dismantling trafficking operations and organized criminal networks is needed to reduce drug markets in the long term. As an enabling step, a review of existing law enforcement operational capacities and organizational arrangements could help identify priority gaps. Asset forfeiture law could be used to confiscate and redistribute ill-gotten wealth to promote more inclusive development but could cause instability in the short term if those affected are sufficiently powerful to upend the prevailing political settlement. The potential trade-offs between tackling different types of illicit economies should be considered, given evidence that a decline in one type of trafficking/smuggling may be associated with an increase in another.
- ▶ **Scale-up efforts and commitments to counter corruption**. Libya is collaborating with international partners to build its capacity to prevent and combat corruption and money laundering and could benefit from further accompaniment in this area.²⁸⁹ This is important not only for effective and just law enforcement, but also to safeguard investments in alternative livelihoods and public health related programmes. Corruption risk assessments could provide concrete, sequenced and operational recommendations to strengthen integrity, transparency and accountability frameworks relevant to drug control efforts. In addition, civil society could be invited to form citizen's oversight committees to improve

transparency and accountability and build trust around the use of public resources.

- ▶ **Develop smart border policies through collaboration between international, regional, national and local actors.** Securitized approaches may increase the incentives for trafficking and further consolidate the criminal ecosystem. All policies related to border management need to consider the distributional effects of border hardening and the potential harms this may cause to the most vulnerable populations who rely on informal trade and cross border labour markets to survive.^{290, 291}

- ▶ **Make better use of intergovernmental agreements and platforms.** Use international conventions to increase international cooperation to combat drugs: the United Nations Drug Control Conventions, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its associated protocols, and the United Nations Agreement against Corruption (UNCAC) provide a solid basis for regional cooperation. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) enable Member States to share experiences, best practices and lessons learned, enhance technical cooperation, promote asset recovery and mutual legal assistance, and address illicit financial flows linked to drug trafficking and organized crime.

- ▶ **Implement regional partnerships to improve co-ordinated actions and to share information and research expertise and best practices.** This could include trust-building exercises among governments in North and West Africa and the Mediterranean, with the aim of developing and/or activating existing bilateral agreements to enhance intelligence sharing and joint operations for disrupting and dismantling trafficking operations and networks. Multilateral spaces and agreements are also vital. Libya and international partners could strengthen collaboration with existing entities, such as the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States (LAS), the Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC) and the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) and create additional spaces for dialogue. Continuous information sharing and research on these areas is especially important given the newness of many synthetic drugs, in some cases with unknown pharmacologies and no established treatment, and the constantly changing methods of drug distribution and marketing, including through social media platforms. Awareness campaigns, for example, must be regularly updated to respond to new drugs and new methods of promotion.²⁹²

Annexes

Methodology

The UNODC adopted a mixed methodology in preparing this report on drug trafficking in Libya, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Geospatial and open-source methods were employed to collect and analyse data from online, field-based, and institutional sources. Seizure data were encoded with geolocation coordinates for different sub-regions, enabling visual representation on maps by location and scale.

Qualitative methods included 88 in-depth interviews with a wide range of stakeholders across Libya and from other countries keen to cooperate by facilitating field research (see interview list below). Between July 2023 and January 2025, 33 interviews were conducted in different cities and towns of Libya with law enforcement officers, operators and transporters involved in trafficking, health professionals, judicial and prosecutorial staff, civil society representatives, social workers, and drug users. Additional interviews were conducted in Mali (18 in total) and Niger (32 in total), between June and August 2023, with relevant stakeholders involved in trafficking networks linked to Libya. Several experts or analysts and law enforcement officers from other countries were also interviewed. These interviews, transcribed and reviewed by the research team, served as the basis for generating qualitative insights that were cross-referenced with primary and secondary sources.

Joint roundtable consultations in 2024 with law enforcement officials from Libya and Tunisia further informed the report. Several consultations/meetings with Libyan authorities, including the Anti Narcotic General Administration and the Economic and Social Development Board, were held between October 2023 and October 2024.

Quantitative methods consisted of the collection and analysis of administrative data sets. Key sources included the Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) and the Individual Drug Seizure (IDS) database within the UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform (DMP). These were complemented with statistical data and seizure records shared by Libyan and neighbouring country authorities, as well as geospatial data reviewed and verified by the DMP team.

In addition to primary research, the analysis for this report draws on existing literature to better understand the intersections between trafficking, conflict dynamics,

border economies, and the fragmentation of governance in Libya. Sources included academic publications; reports by independent policy institutes (e.g., Chatham House), international organizations (e.g., the IMF and the World Bank), and the Libyan Government (e.g., the Audit Bureau); articles by journalists; and UN documents especially from the Panel of Experts on Libya and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, quantitative data on Libya remains uneven and fragmented. ARQ submissions only partially cover some regions, and there is currently no centralized data management system for drug-related information. However, in 2025, UNODC was informed of efforts by the Office of the General Prosecutor to establish a centralized mechanism for drug data management, which may help address this gap in the future. Not all seizures are systematically recorded and stored, which limits analyses of trends over time and across regions. This reflects a continental challenge, as many African countries face similar shortfalls in the availability, quality, and consolidation of drug-related data. Second, the sensitivity of drug trafficking information has posed an additional constraint. Despite efforts to frame data collection as a contribution to showcasing counternarcotics efforts, national counterparts have at times shown reluctance to share data, particularly where it intersects with institutional accountability or security concerns. Third, field research was constrained in certain parts of Libya and Mali and some neighbouring countries could not be included in the study – in both cases due to insecurity, political changes, access limitations, and/or budgetary restrictions. These challenges were partly mitigated through supplementary interviews, and through triangulation with datasets – such as the IDS or ARQ – from neighbouring countries. Finally, while some interviews were conducted with female health professionals and social workers, women's participation in this research was limited. Women remain underrepresented in both law enforcement and trafficking networks in Libya, while cultural barriers and security considerations constrained engagement with female drug users and affected community members. Despite these limitations, the methodology used allowed for a multi-layered analysis of drug trafficking trends, routes, and actors, offering an evidence-base for developing policy and operational responses.

Interview list:

Interview number	Location	Date	Status	Sex
1	Libya	August 2023	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
2	Libya	August 2023	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
3	Libya	August 2023	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
4	Libya	August 2023	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
5	Libya	September 2023	Operator	Male
6	Libya	September 2023	Operator (transporter)	Male
7	Libya	October 2023	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
8	Libya	September 2023	Operator (transporter)	Male
9	Libya	October 2023	Drug user	Male
10	Libya	October 2023	Drug user	Male
11	Libya	September 2023	Operator (middle level)	Male
12	Libya	October 2023	Social assistant	Female
13	Libya	August 2023	Medical personnel (Mental Health)	Male
14	Libya	October 2023	Office from the General Prosecutor	Male
15	Libya	October 2023	CSO	Female
16	Libya	November 2023	Operator (middle level)	Male
17	Libya	November 2023	Social assistant (MoSA)	Female
18	Libya	November 2023	CSO	Male
19	Libya	November 2023	Social assistant (MoSA)	Male
20	Libya	January 2025	Low level trafficker	Male
21	Libya	December 2024	Low level trafficker	Male
22	Libya	January 2025	Low level trafficker	Male
23	Libya	January 2025	Low level trafficker	Male
24	Libya	January 2025	Low level trafficker	Male
25	Libya	December 2024	Low level trafficker	Male
26	Libya	December 2024	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
27	Libya	December 2024	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
28	Libya	December 2024	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
29	Libya	December 2024	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
30	Libya	December 2024	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male

Interview list:

Interview number	Location	Date	Status	Sex
31	Libya	December 2024	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
32	Libya	December 2024	Law enforcement (Mol)	Male
33	Tunisia	October 2024	Law enforcement	Male
34	The United Arab Emirates	October 2024	Law enforcement	Male
35	Serbia	October 2024	Law enforcement	Male
36	Mali	July 2023	Law enforcement	Male
37	Mali	July 2023	Law enforcement	Male
38	Mali	July 2023	Operator (gold trafficking)	Male
39	Mali	July 2023	Law enforcement	Male
40	Mali	July 2023	Law enforcement	Male
41	Mali	July 2023	Law enforcement	Male
42	Mali	July 2023	Analyst	Male
43	Mali	July 2023	Analyst	Male
44	Mali	Aug-23	Analyst	Female
45	Mali	July 2023	Analyst	Male
46	Mali	July 2023	Analyst	Female
47	Mali	Aug-23	Analyst	Male
48	Mali	July 2023	Community leader	Male
49	Mali	Aug-23	Analyst	Male
50	Mali	July 2023	Law enforcement	Male
51	Mali	Aug-23	Analyst	Male
52	Mali	July 2023	Analyst	Male
53	Mali	July 2023	Analyst	Male
54	Niger	June 2023	Justice personnel	Male
55	Niger	June 2023	Law enforcement	Male
56	Niger	June 2023	Civil Society	Male
57	Niger	June 2023	Law enforcement	Male
58	Niger	June 2023	Businessman	Male
59	Niger	June 2023	Analyst	Male
60	Niger	June 2023	Community leader	Male

Interview list:

Interview number	Location	Date	Status	Sex
61	Senegal (online)	June 2023	Analyst	Female
62	Niger	June 2023	Former official	Male
63	Niger	June 2023	Operator	Male
64	Niger	June 2023	Magistrate	Male
65	Senegal (online)	June 2023	Analyst	Male
66	Niger	June 2023	Law enforcement	Male
67	Niger	June 2023	Magistrate	Male
68	Niger	June 2023	Analyst	Male
69	Niger (online)	June 2023	Magistrate	Male
70	Niger	June 2023	Law enforcement	Male
71	Niger	June 2023	Representative/Politician	Male
72	Niger	June 2023	Analyst	Male
73	Niger	June 2023	Representative/Politician	Male
74	Niger	June 2023	Civil Society	Male
75	Niger	June 2023	Civil Society	Male
76	Niger	June 2023	Operator	Male
77	Niger	June 2023	Civil Society	Male
78	Niger	June 2023	Operator	Male
79	Niger	June 2023	Civil Society	Male
80	Niger	June 2023	Law enforcement	Male
81	Niger	June 2023	Law enforcement	Male
82	Niger	June 2023	Representative/Politician	Male
83	Niger	June 2023	Civil Society	Male
84	Niger	June 2023	Law enforcement	Male
85	Niger	June 2023	Representative/Politician	Male
86	Niger	June 2023	Businessman	Male
87	Niger	June 2023	Civil Society	Male
88	Libya	October 2024	Law enforcement	Male

Note: This list comprises interviews conducted primarily with experts and practitioners who were consulted solely for their expertise and therefore remained anonymous. These interviews were complemented by consultations held in September 2024, May 2025, and November 2025, involving various entities from the Libyan Ministry of Interior, including the General Administration for Drug Control and the Criminal Investigation Department, as well as the Customs Authority, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Office of the Attorney General.

Endnotes

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- 17 Tim Eaton et al., *The Development of Libyan Armed Groups...*, 2020, page 34; Matt Herbert et al. *Illicit economies and peace and security in Libya*, 2023, page 5.
- 18 Matt Herbert et al. *Illicit economies and peace and security in Libya*, 2023, pages 4-5; Other researchers write of "hybrid" groups created by "militia leaders and career criminals with overlapping interests" – see Micallef, Mark. *Shifting sands – Libya's changing drug trafficking dynamics ...*, 2019, page 11.
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- 20 See, for example:
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- S/2021/229, page 37, paragraph 121;
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- 22 Eaton, Tim. *Security actors in Misrata, Zawiya and Zintan ...*, 2023, page 44; Matt Herbert et al. *Illicit economies and peace and security in Libya*, 2023, page 13;
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See also: Tim Eaton et al. *Conflict Economies in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2019, pages 16 & 30-31.
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- 36 Under Libya's fixed rate exchange system, Central Bank officials decide who is authorized to acquire foreign currency, which is issued to importers through "letters of credit" for a given commodity or service. Black market players obtain these letters of credit through collusion, force and fraud. The foreign currency they acquire is not used (or at least not in full) for importing goods or services but instead is sold on the black market at a large mark-up. The Libyan Audit Bureau reported identifying over \$570 million USD worth of fraudulent letters of credit in just 11 months of 2016. A more recent report by the Libyan Audit Bureau highlights continued problems.
- 37 On the various ways Libyan armed groups profit from the smuggling of migrants and trafficking of persons, see: S/2023/673, pp 18-20, paragraphs 57-59; S/2018/812, pages 13-16, paragraphs 48-70; S/2017/466, pages 63-64, paragraphs 255-262; S/2016/209, pages 46-47, paragraph 208; S/2015/128, pages 46-47, paragraphs 195-197.

For more general examples, see : Eaton, Tim. *Security actors in Misrata, Zawiya and Zintan* ..., 2023, page 44; Matt Herbert et al. *Illicit economies and peace and security in Libya*, 2023, page 13; Tim Eaton et al., *The Development of Libyan Armed Groups*..., 2020, page 30.
- 38 One measure of this growth is the increase in the number of fuel stations, many of which only exist on paper or don't open to the public. See: S/2018/812, page 40, paragraph 151; Lacher, Wolfram. A political economy of Zawiya..., 2024, pages 42-45.
- 39 S/2019/914, page 52, paragraphs 175-176. S/2019/914, page 52, paragraphs 175-176
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- 44 Mangan, Fiona. *Illicit Drug Trafficking and Use in Libya*..., 2020;

Micallef, Mark. *Shifting sands – Libya's changing drug trafficking dynamics* ..., 2019;

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- 46 Micallef, Mark. *Shifting sands – Libya's changing drug trafficking dynamics* ..., 2019, pages 4, 12-13, 25;

Tinti, Peter. *Tackling the Niger–Libya migration route: How armed conflict in Libya shapes the Agadez mobility economy*. London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, ISBN: 978 1 78413 607 9, 2024, page 39. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/07/tackling-niger-libya-migration-route>.

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Also, interviews conducted in 2023, 2024 and 2025.
- 50 Ibid, see all sources in endnote 66; see also example in S/2018/812, page 42, paragraphs 163-164.
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- 55 See, for example: Eaton, Tim. *Security actors in Misrata, Zawiya and Zintan*..., 2023, page 41. One researcher distinguishes between "direct protection", "taxation for safe passage" and "extortion" - Mangan, Fiona. *Illicit Drug Trafficking and Use in Libya*..., 2020, page 15.
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- 58 Eaton, Tim. *Security actors in Misrata, Zawiya and Zintan...*, 2023, pages 6 and 36-37.
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- 62 Tim Eaton et al., *The Development of Libyan Armed Groups...*, 2020, pages 40, 48, and 54; Lacher, Wolfram. *A political economy of Zawiya...*, 2024, pages 29 and 59. On attempts to prevent local drug distribution specifically, and public demand/support for such actions, see: Mangan, Fiona. *Illicit Drug Trafficking and Use in Libya...*, 2020, pages 21 and 23; Micallef, Mark. *Shifting sands – Libya's changing drug trafficking dynamics ...*, 2019, pages 9-10.
- 63 Lacher, Wolfram. *A political economy of Zawiya...*, 2024, pages 44, 48-49; Tinti, Peter. *Tackling the Niger–Libya migration route...*, 2024, page 20; Tim Eaton et al. *Conflict Economies in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2019, pages 35-36; Matt Herbert et al. *Illicit economies and peace and security in Libya*, 2023, pages 5 and 12; Mangan, Fiona. *Illicit Drug Trafficking and Use in Libya...*, 2020, page 15.
- 64 Matt Herbert et al. *Illicit economies and peace and security in Libya*, 2023, pages 13 and 18; Lacher, Wolfram. *A political economy of Zawiya...*, 2024, pages 51 and 62. Eaton, Tim. "Stability at What Cost? Smuggling-driven Development in the Libyan City of Kufra". XCEPT Cross-border Conflict, Evidence, Policy Trends, 10 February 2023. Available at: <https://www.xcept-research.org/stability-at-what-cost-smuggling-driven-development-in-the-libyan-city-of-kufra/>.
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- 66 Eaton, Tim. "Stability at What Cost? ...", 2023.
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- 79 S/2018/812, page 2.
- 80 S/2017/466, pages 17 and 18, paragraphs 79 and 83; see also S/2016/209, Annex 7.
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- 83 In 2009, the prevalence of opiates use in Libya was estimated as up to 0.2 to 0.3 per cent of the population aged 15-64. Source: UNODC, World Drug Report (2011). Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2011/The_opium-heroin_market.pdf
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- 85 Consultations conducted in May and October 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia and Tripoli.
- 86 Interviews #2, #12, #26 and #32, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024.
- 87 Ibid. Also reported by Libyan authorities during consultations conducted in May and October 2024 in Tunisia and Tripoli.
- 88 UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform. Details about the first seizure of "captagon" destined to Libya reported on: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/greece-seizes-big-drugs-haul-from-syrian-freighter-sailing-for-libya-idUSKBN1OD1RT/>
- 89 Interviews #4, #26, #31, #32, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024. TO BE ADDED: STAT TUN + LIB
- 90 Consultations conducted in May 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia. Also, interview #33, #34, #35, interview conducted by UNODC in 2024.
- 91 UNODC World Drug Report, 2025. Online segment available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr-drug-market-patterns-trends.html>
- 92 Global cocaine production reached a record 3,708 tons in 2023, an estimate that was 34% higher than for 2022 (source 2025 WDR). This most recent increase is primarily a reflection of updated yield data that resulted in a production estimate for the country some 50 per cent higher than that estimated in the previous year. There has also been an increase in the total land area with coca cultivation in Colombia, which reached a historical high (based on data since 2005) of 253,000 hectares in 2023. See: *Monitoreo de territorios con presencia de cultivos de coca 2023: resumen ejecutivo*. Bogotá: UNODC & MinJusticia, October 2024, page 5. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/rocol/es/noticias/colombia/monitoreo-de-territorios-con-presencia-de-cultivos-de-coca-2023.html>. This surge in supply has been accompanied by increased violence in key countries along the supply chain, such as Ecuador and Caribbean nations. Cocaine markets are expanding, particularly in Western and Central Europe, with more shipments via North Sea ports, and in non-traditional markets in Asia and Africa. Cocaine trafficking impacts most regions globally.
- 93 UNODC World Drug Report, 2025. Online segment: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr-drug-market-patterns-trends.html>. In 2023, 278 per cent more seizures were made en route to Africa than in 2015. The largest increase in this respect has been recorded for North Africa and West and Central Africa.
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- 98 IDS reported by the General Department of Criminal Investigations (CID) and the Anti-Narcotics General Administration (ANGA) from 2019 to 2024. See, UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 99 Consultations conducted in May and October 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia and Tripoli.
- 100 Consultations conducted in May 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia.
- 101 IDS reported by the General Department of Criminal Investigations (CID) and the Anti-Narcotics General Administration (ANGA) from 2019 to 2024. Also, in interviews #33 and #35, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024.
- 102 UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 103 Interviews #33 and #35, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024.
- 104 These values were calculated multiplying the amount of cocaine seized (397 kg) by a price range of cocaine reported in Libya. The ANGA (Anti-narcotic General Administration) reported a price of 105,000-250,000 LYD or Libyan Dinars per kilo of cocaine in Libya in 2024. An assumption was made on using a mid-range price of 175,000 LYD, which at the official exchange rate of 4.83 in 2024 (this is the 2024 average calculated by UNODC using data from the World Food Programme webpage) is around \$36,600 USD. Using a parallel or black-market exchange rate of 6.84 (this is the 2024 average calculated by UNODC using data from the World Food Programme webpage), the price would be closer to \$25,900 USD. Note that prices tend to vary from city to city; this variation is not reflected here.
- 105 Assuming a price of \$177,000 LYD or Libyan Dinars per kilo (this was the mid-range price in Libya in 2024), individual seizures listed in table 1 are worth around 340 million LYD, about \$49.7 million USD at 2024 parallel or black-market exchange rates or \$70.4 million USD using the 2024 average official exchange rate.
- 106 UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 107 Cocaine seizure data from different regions and countries, that may be used as a point of comparison, can be found in: UNODC, Global Cocaine Report, 2023. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf
- 108 IDS reported by the General Department of Criminal Investigations (CID) and the Anti-Narcotics General Administration (ANGA) from 2019 to 2024.
- 109 Interviews #1, #5, #7, and #33, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023 and 2024.
- 110 Ibid.
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 IDS reported by the General Department of Criminal Investigations (CID) and the Anti-Narcotics General Administration (ANGA) from 2019 to 2024.
- 113 UNODC, Global Cocaine Report, 2023. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf
- 114 Consultations conducted in May and October 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia and Tripoli.
- 115 Ibid. Also see, UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 116 Interview #33, interview conducted by UNODC in 2024. Also see, IDS reported by Member States.
- 117 UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform. Also see, IDS reported by Member States indicating Libya as a destination country.
- 118 About commercial shipment routes: UNCTAD, Review of maritime transport, 2024. Available at: <https://unctad.org/publication/review-maritime-transport-2024>
- 119 Ibid.
- 120 UNODC, Global Cocaine Report 2023. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf
- 121 UNODC, World Drug Report 2025, Key findings & Online segment. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR_2025/WDR25_B1_Key_findings.pdf & <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr-drug-market-patterns-trends.html>
- 122 UNODC, Responses to the ARQ from 2019 to 2023 for Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.
- 123 UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 124 Interview #33, interview conducted by UNODC in October 2024.
- 125 Ibid. Also, consultations conclusions from a round table on cross-border trafficking between Libya and Tunisia hold in May 2024.
- 126 Ibid. Also, interviews #67, #76, #77, and #80, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 127 UNODC TOCTA Sahel, Drug Trafficking, 2024.
- 128 Interview #62, #66, #75 and #76, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 129 Interviews #66, #68, #75, #80, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 130 Interview #7, #12, #14, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023. Also, interviews #20, #21, #22, #23, and #24, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024.
- 131 Ibid.
- 132 Interviews #72 and #75, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 133 Interview #70, interview conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 134 Interviews #61, #70, #83, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 135 Interview #70, interview conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 136 UNODC, TOCTA Sahel, Drug Trafficking, 2024.
- 137 Consultations with Libyan anti-narcotic entities conducted in June 2025, in Tunisia.
- 138 Interviews #8 and #11, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023. Also interviews #21 and #23, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024.
- 139 Interviews #2, #3, #4, #6, #8, #11 interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 140 Interviews #26, #27, #28, #30, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024.
- 141 Interviews #20, #21, #23, #26, #27, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024 and 2025.
- 142 Interviews #20 and #24, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024 and 2025.
- 143 Interviews #25, #29, #30, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024 and 2025.
- 144 Interviews #24, #27, #28, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024 and 2025.
- 145 Production of cannabis resin in Morocco was estimated to 901 tons in 2022.
- 146 Coupled with seizures made by Western and Central European countries (35 per cent), seizures of cannabis resin represent 64 per cent of the total seized globally between 2017 and 2023, making this geographical area a hub for cannabis trafficking. See, UNODC, World Drug Report, 2025. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr-drug-market-patterns-trends.html>
- 147 UNODC, World Drug Report, 2025.
- 148 UNODC, responses to the ARQ 2024.
- 149 Consultations conducted in May 2024, in Tunisia.
- 150 The market value of the seizures are indicative of the profits order of magnitude. ANGA (Anti-Narcotic General Administration) reported a price of 20,000-35,000 LYD or Libyan Dinars per kilo of cannabis resin in Libya in 2024. The values provided in the main text assume a mid-range price of 27,250 LYD, which at the official exchange rate of 4.83 in 2024 is around \$5,644 USD. Using a parallel or black-market exchange rate of 6.84, the market value is closer to \$3,986 USD. Note that prices tend to vary from city to city; this variation is not reflected here. Prices also vary depending on the type and origin of cannabis resin: a mid-range price was used above.
- 151 Multiple interviews conducted in 2023, 2024 and 2025 in Libya indicate that armed groups participate in trafficking by imposing taxes to guarantee safe passage or through bribery. Additionally, they reveal widespread corruption at border infrastructure points.
- 152 UNODC, Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment (TOCTA) Sahel, Drug trafficking, 2024. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta_sahel/TOCTA_Sahel_drugs.pdf
- 153 UNODC, responses to ARQs from 2019–2024 for Libya.
- 154 UNODC, responses to the ARQ, and Individual Drug Seizures (IDS). Also, frequent seizures of cannabis reported by Libyan anti-narcotic agencies in the city of Tobruk, which borders Egypt, seem to confirm the smuggling of cannabis from Egypt into Libya.
- 155 UNODC, responses to the ARQ, and IDS.
- 156 UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 157 Consultations conducted in May 2024, in Tunisia.

- 158 UNODC, World Drug Report 2022.
- 159 UNODC, responses to the ARQ and IDS.
- 160 As reported by Libyan law enforcement officers consulted during round tables held in Tunisia in May 2024 and June 2025.
- 161 Ibid.
- 162 Ibid. Also see IDS reported by the ANGA in 2023 and 2024.
- 163 Interviews #11, #12 #13, #16, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023 and 2024. Also, UNODC, responses to annual report questionnaires 2022, 2023, and 2024.
- 164 Ibid.
- 165 IDS reported by the General Department of Criminal Investigations (CID) and the Anti-Narcotics General Administration (ANGA) in 2023 and 2024. See: UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 166 Interviews #33 and #88, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024.
- 167 Consultations conducted in May 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia.
- 168 IDS reported by the Libyan Customs in 2023 and 2024. See, UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 169 UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform. For examples of seizures of cannabis seized on ferries, see: <https://www.webdo.tn/fr/actualite/national/tunisie-6-kg-de-cannabis-saisis-au-port-de-la-goulette/131784> or <https://www.tuniscope.com/article/389278/actualites/societe/port-de-la-goulette-saisie-de-14-plaques-de-cannabis-235012>
- 170 UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform. Also see: <https://lapresse.tn/2023/05/05/douane-saisie-de-1249-plaques-de-cannabis-au-port-de-la-goulette/>
- 171 UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform. Also see: <https://realites.com.tn/fr/dune-valeur-de-8-milliards-300-kg-de-cannabis-et-25-mille-comprimés-de-stupefiants-saisis-a-sousse/>
- 172 Interviews #33, #34, #35, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2024.
- 173 Martini, Jeffrey, and Elissa Miller. *Illicit Drug Trafficking and Use in Libya: Highs and Lows*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, May 2020.
- 174 Interviews, #72, #80, #84, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 175 Interviews #62 and #75, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 176 Interview #80, interview conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 177 Interviews #59, and #83, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 178 Interview #75, interview conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 179 Interview #80, interview conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 180 UNODC, TOCTA Sahel, Drug trafficking, 2024.
- 181 UNODC, TOCTA Sahel, Drug trafficking, 2024.
- 182 Interviews #83 and #87, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 183 UNODC, TOCTA Sahel, Drug trafficking, 2024.
- 184 Interviews #55 and #67, interviews conducted in 2023.
- 185 Ibid. The same year, the Central Office for the Repression of Illicit Drug Trafficking (OCTRIS) reported the seizure of 333 kg of cannabis resin hidden within a wooden bed and destined for Algeria, and another 210 kg seized in Balléyara, northeast of Niamey, further illustrate the establishment of regular trafficking routes from West Africa to North Africa. Also see more seizures at: <https://levenementniger.com/niger-ocrtis-335-briques-de-cannabis-de-plus-de-278-kg-saisies/>; <https://www.lesahel.org/lutte-contre-le-traffic-de-droque-917-briques-de-cannabis-dun-poids-de-8125-kg-deux-motos-et-une-somme-de-435-000-fcfa-saisies-par-loctris/>; and a general report from CEDEAO about cannabis trafficking in the Sahel in 2023: <https://www.agencecofin.com/sante/1109-121430-cedeao-11-pays-ont-saisi-83-734-kg-de-droque-en-2023-rapport>
- 186 For example, in January 2024, 1 kg of cannabis resin was reported seized in Gharyan in a car of an individual coming from Sabha.
- 187 Interviews #34, #59, #80, and #83 interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 188 Interviews #69, #75, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 189 UNODC, responses to ARQs and IDS.
- 190 High-dosage formulations of tramadol (typically above 200 mg per tablet) and pregabalin (typically above 300 mg per capsule) are not standard for medical use and are considered illegal, as they fall under controlled substances regulations in several countries due to their potential for misuse and dependence.
- 191 Consultations conducted in May 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia. Also, UNODC, responses to annual report questionnaires (ARQ) from 2018 to 2023.
- 192 UNODC, World Drug Report 2025.
- 193 UNODC, World Drug Report 2023.
- 194 Interviews conducted between 2023 and 2025 in Libya. Also see IDS reported by Libyan Customs and Anti-narcotic General Administration (ANGA).
- 195 Consultations conducted in May 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia. Also, UNODC, responses to ARQs from 2018 to 2023.
- 196 Consultations conducted in May 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia. Also, UNODC, responses to ARQs from 2018 to 2023.
- 197 IDS reported by Libyan customs.
- 198 Consultations conducted in May 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia. Also, UNODC, responses to ARQs from 2018 to 2023, as well as IDS.
- 199 UNODC, World Drug Report 2025. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR_2025/WDR25_B1_Key_findings.pdf
- 200 One of the most recent and significant seizures reported by the Tunisian National Guard, in April 2025, involved approximately 1.2 million ecstasy tablets. See: UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 201 IDS reported Member States in North Africa from 2020 to 2024. See also, UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 202 Ibid. Example of seizure: In March 2023, 1.7 million tablets of ecstasy were seized aboard five second-hand cars loaded onto a commercial vessel transporting thousands of used vehicles at the port of Misrata. The same vessel later stopped at the port of Benghazi, where an additional 600,300 ecstasy tablets were discovered.
- 203 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire (ARQ) in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.
- 204 For seizure data, see: UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 205 Interviews #66, #73, and #83, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 206 IDS reported by the Libyan Anti-narcotics General Administration (ANGA) in 2024. See also, UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 207 Information reported by the Libyan Anti-narcotics General Administration (ANGA) in 2024. Also reported during consultations conducted in May 2024 with the Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia.
- 208 Ibid.
- 209 Interviews #71, #77, #83, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023; see also Micallef, Mark. *Shifting sands – Libya's changing drug trafficking dynamics ...*, 2019, page 25.
- 210 UNODC World Drug Report 2025.
- 211 UNODC TOTCA Sahel, Drug Trafficking, 2024.
- 212 UNODC World Drug Report, 2025. Accessible at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr-drug-market-patterns-trends.html>
- 213 UNODC TOTCA Sahel, Drug Trafficking, 2024.
- 214 Interviews #65, #68, #75, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 215 Examples of seizures: in January 2021, 150,000 tablets were reported seized in Dosso. In May 2023, 100,000 tablets of tramadol were reported seized in Berni N'Konni. In April 2025, a seizure of 109,000 tablets was reported seized in Dosso. Seizures reported by OCTRIS. Example available at: Available at: <https://www.actuniger.com/societe/20927-coup-de-filet-des-fds-a-dosso-un-agent-de-renseignement-et-un-ravitailleur-arretes-2-terroristes-neutralises-a-falmey-et-109-900-comprimés-de-tramadol-saisis.html>
- 216 Interview #72, interview conducted by UNODC in 2023. Also see: UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 217 Interviews #63, #75, #80, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.

- 218 Interviews #63 and #75, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 219 IDS shared by Libyan Customs. Also, consultations conducted in May 2024 with Libyan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finances (Customs), in Tunisia.
- 220 UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 221 According to ANGA, in 2024, tramadol prices ranged between 15 and 25 LYD per strip of 12 pills in Libya, which works out at 1.25-2.08 LYD per pill. Based on interviews, prices vary from 0.5-1.66 LYD per pill when purchased in strips of 12, to 2-5 LYD when purchased as individual pills (UNODC interviews #1, #2, #3, #4, #7, #8, #12). The figures in the main text are based on a low to mid-range price of 1.5 LYD per pill. The figure of \$0.22 USD cents per pill was calculated using a black-market exchange rate of 6.84 (this is the 2024 average calculated by UNODC using data from the World Food Programme webpage to use the UN official rate). Note that prices tend to vary from city to city; this variation is not reflected here. Prices also vary depending on the type and origin of the tramadol; a mid-range price was used. Unfortunately, no prices are available for Libya for the 2022-2023 period, so 2024 prices are used for all years.
- 222 Interviews #5, #6, #8, #11, #16, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 223 Ibid.
- 224 (IDS shared by Libyan Customs, and Anti-narcotics General Administration (ANGA). Also see, UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 225 UNODC, World Drug Report, 2025. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR_2025/WDR25_B1_Key_findings.pdf
- 226 UNODC responses to ARQs.
- 227 IDS shared by Libyan Customs, and Anti-narcotics General Administration (ANGA). Also see, UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform.
- 228 Ibid.
- 229 The market value of the seizures give only the order of magnitude of the profits they would have generated. ANGA (Anti-Narcotics General Administration) reported a price of 10 LYD per tablet of pregabalin in Libya in 2024. Pills can be sold for an even higher price individually. Using the official exchange rate of 4.83 in 2024 (this is the 2024 average calculated by UNODC using data from the World Food Programme webpage), this is around \$2.07 USD per pill. Using the parallel or black-market exchange rate of 6.84 (this is the 2024 average calculated by UNODC using data from the World Food Programme webpage), each pill has an estimated market value of \$1.46 USD cents. Note that prices tend to vary from city to city; this variation is not reflected here. Prices also vary depending on the type and thus quality of the pregabalin; hence the range used above. Unfortunately, no prices are listed for Libya for 2023, so 2024 prices are used for both years.
- 230 Ibid.
- 231 Ibid.
- 232 Ibid.
- 233 Interviews #63 and #72, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 234 Volumes reported by OCTRIS through their annual reports for 2021 and 2022. Also see, UNODC, Drug Monitoring Platform for individual seizures.
- 235 Consultations conducted in May 2024, in Tunisia. Also, IDS and UNODC, responses to ARQ.
- 236 M. Laribi, N. Chaouali, S. Jaballah et al., *Détournement de la prégabaline à des fins toxicomaniaques – état de la situation, risques et moyens de lutte*, Annales Pharmaceutiques Françaises, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pharma.2022.11.005>. A prospective study conducted in 2020 by the toxicology laboratory of the Emergency Medical Assistance Center (CAMU), based on 1,179 forensic cases, and cited in this article, showed that pregabalin is the third most commonly misused psychotropic substance in Tunisia.
- 237 IDS. Also interview #70, interview conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 238 Interviews #81 and #86, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 239 Interviews #63, #81, and #86, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 240 Consultations conducted in May 2024, in Tunisia. Also, IDS, and UNODC, responses to ARQ.
- 241 Lacher, Wolfram. *A political economy of Zawiya...*, 2024, page 40; see also sections 1 and 2 of this report
- 242 Examples of armed groups' influence over government entities and involvement of officials or state-affiliated armed groups in criminal activities in:
S/2024/914, page 6 and 7-8, paragraphs 9-10 and 12-20;
S/2023/673, pages 6-9 & 23, paragraphs 9-10, 13, 15-18, 24, 59-62, 70 & 72;
S/2022/427, pages 7-9, paragraphs 11, 14;
S/2021/229, pages 6 and 37, paragraphs 8-10 & 121;
S/2018/812, pages 7-8, paragraphs 14-17;
S/2017/466. pages 11, 14-15, 53, 61; paragraphs 37-40, 55-59, 194, 242, 245.
- 243 Lacher, Wolfram. *A political economy of Zawiya...*, 2024, page 40; Hakan, Adam. *A political economy of Tripoli's Abu Salim...*, 2024, page 13-16.
- 244 For example, the UN Panel of Experts on Libya documented clashes between armed groups involved in drug trafficking in northern Niger and between the Nigerien army and cross-border traffickers who escaped into Libya – S/2014/106, page 35, paragraph 132. Another example was provided by an interviewee who was injured during clashes with the Algerian army following its interference in a drug trafficking operation – Interview #22.
On violent competition over smuggling/trafficking routes in northern Niger/southern Libya: Interview #59, #65, #72, #75, #84, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023 and 2024.
On violent competition over smuggling/trafficking routes in Mali: S/2020/785/Rev.1. "Letter dated 7 August 2020 from the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolutions 2374 (2017) on Mali addressed to the President of the Security Council". United Nations Security Council. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3877352?ln=en&v=pdf>
On violent competition over drug trafficking in the Sahel more generally: UNODC. "Drug Trafficking in the Sahel", 2024, page 32.
- 245 On armed clashes related to smuggling within Libya: Interviews #20, # 68; On informal agreements to minimise conflicts and related disruptions: Interviews #11, #22, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 246 Tim Eaton et al., *The Development of Libyan Armed Groups...*, 2020, page 43; Mangan, Fiona. *Illicit Drug Trafficking and Use in Libya...*, 2020, page 25; Micallef, Mark. *Shifting sands – Libya's changing drug trafficking dynamics ...*, 2019, page 23.
- 247 Lacher, Wolfram. *A political economy of Zawiya...*, 2024, pages 24, 34-35, 32, 49.
- 248 Matt Herbert et al. *Illicit economies and peace and security in Libya*, 2023, page 12.
- 249 Interviews #59, #72, #75, #80, #, #84, #87, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023 and 2024.
- 250 Interviews #64, #68, #78, #80, #81, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023 and 2024.
- 251 Interviews #68, #78, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 252 The term "slow violence" was originally coined by Rob Nixon in his 2011 book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*; it has since been applied to the harms associated with problematic drug use. See, for example: Dan Seng Lawn et al. "The Pat Jasan drug eradication social movement in Northern Myanmar part one: Origins & reactions". *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 89 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2021.103181>.
- 253 See also: Mangan, Fiona. *Illicit Drug Trafficking and Use in Libya...*, 2020.
- 254 Interviews #3, #8, #9, #10, #11, #12, #19, #27, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023 and 2024; though some interviewees (#4) stressed that women are still a minority among drug users.
- 255 Interviews #1, #2, #3, #5, #7, #10, #11, #12, #14, #16, #17, #19, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 256 Some interviewees referred to people under the age of 25 (Interviews #2, #7, #13); others to people under the age of 35 (Interview #4); others to "youth" (Interviews #6, #8, #17); "younger users" (Interviews #11, #12, #13); "young adults", "young people", "young men" or "young women" (Interviews #8, #12, #14, #15, #16, #19); "teenagers" (Interviews #8, #10, #11, #12, #15, #16) and "girls" (Interview #8).
- 257 UN Population Division Data Portal. Available at: <https://population.un.org/dataportal/>
- 258 Interviews #9, #10, #12, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 259 Interviews #5, #13, #14, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.

- 260 See *Voices from the borderlands 2020. Illicit drugs, development and peacebuilding*. Drugs & (dis)order; UK Global Challenges Research Fund. Available at: <https://drugs-disorder.soas.ac.uk/voices-from-the-borderlands-2020/>
- 261 For evidence of how increased drug trafficking to and through Libya may have impacted flows in neighbouring and nearby countries see section 2 of this report.
- 262 Interviews #2, #3, #4, #8, #9, #10, #12, #13, #15, #17, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 263 Interviews #36, #37, #38, #40, #44, #47, #48, #50; #61, #74, #77, #79, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023 and 2024; see also: UNODC. "Drug Trafficking in the Sahel", 2024, pages 22-23; Tinti, Peter. *Tackling the Niger–Libya migration route ...*, 2024, pages 39-40.
- 264 Interviews #5, #6, #7, #10, #13, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 265 Interviews #3, #4, #7, #9, #12, #14, #15, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 266 Interviews #2, #3, #4, #5, #7, #10, #12, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 267 Interviews #7, #8, #9, #13, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 268 Interviews #2, #6, #9, #16, #18, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 269 Interviews #1, #4, #11, #34, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023 and 2024.
- 270 Interviews #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #11, #13, #16, interviews conducted by UNODC in 2023.
- 271 Almkhitar, Attawiri. *Land administration and land rights for peace and development in Libya: Analysis and recommendations*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the Global Land Tool Network, 2023. Pages 18 and 22. Available at: <https://unhabitat.org/land-administration-and-land-rights-for-peace-and-development-in-libya-analysis-and-recommendations>.
- 272 See, for example: McSweeney, K., Richani, N., Pearson, Z., Devine, J., & Wrathall, D. (2017). Why Do Narcos Invest in Rural Land? *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 16, 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lag.2017.0019>.
- Colombia provides clear examples of how the acquisition of rural real estate by drug traffickers can exacerbate existing conflicts and generate new ones by increasing inequality and reducing access to farmland. See, for example: Richani, Nazih. "The Agrarian Rentier Political Economy: Land Concentration and Food Insecurity in Colombia". *Latin American Research Review*, 2012, 47(2), 51–78. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/latin-american-research-review/article/agrarian-rentier-political-economy-land-concentration-and-food-insecurity-in-colombia/ABF25F105CBBD3DE8ED6C544AA5EFD43>
- On similar dynamics in Honduras and Guatemala, see: Tellman, B, et al. 2021. Narcotrafficking and Land Control in Guatemala and Honduras. *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, 3(1), pp. 132–159. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31389/jied.83>
- "The laundering of drug profits into land speculation" and related violence is also touched upon in: UNODC, *World Drug Report*, 2023, Chapter 4. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/res/WDR-2023/WDR23_B3_CH4_Amazon.pdf.
- 273 UNODC. *World Drug Report 2024*, "Key Findings and Conclusions", page 40.
- 274 On the role of the Syrian Arab Republic in the production of Captagon, see: UNODC. *World Drug Report 2025*, "Special points of interest", pages 12 and 34.
- 275 Youth unemployment data from: The World Bank. *Libya Economic Monitor...*, 2024, page 2
- 276 According to the most recent report by the UN Panel of Experts on Libya, armed groups recently "consolidat[ed] their control over the management of the country's oil revenue and the national budget" – S/2024/914, page 6, paragraph 10.
- On the country's economic advantages, see, for example: The World Bank. *Libya Economic Monitor...*, 2024; International Monetary Fund. IMF Country Report No. 24/206, July 2024.
- 277 Data taken from: International Monetary Fund. *IMF Country Report No. 24/206*, July 2024, page 16. Note: a date for the data is not given, but it appears to be for 2023.
- 278 A graph with the number of violent events in Libya over the years is included in: The World Bank. *Libya Economic Monitor. Stabilizing Growth and Boosting Productivity*. Fall 2024 page 3. The graph clearly illustrates a sharp decline in violence between 2020 and 2021 and sustained until 2024.
- 279 The World Bank. *Libya Economic Monitor. Stabilizing Growth and Boosting Productivity*. Fall 2024.
- 280 United Nations Libya. *2024 Situational Assessment of the South of Libya – Updated Annex to the UN Common Country Analysis for Libya*. Available at: <https://libya.un.org/en/287647-situational-assessment-south-libya-2024#:~:text=This%20document%20presents%20a%20detailed,development%2C%20peacebuilding%2C%20and%20resilience>.
- 281 United Nations Libya. *2024 Situational Assessment of the South of Libya*, pages 22-23.
- 282 On evidence-based demand reduction and harm reduction measures, see: UNODC/WHO, *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention*, second updated edition, 2020. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/prevention-standards.html>;
- E/CN.7/2024/L.5/Rev.2 Unedited revised. "Preventing and responding to drug overdose through prevention, treatment, care, and recovery measures as well as other public health interventions to address the harms associated with illicit drug use as part of a balanced, comprehensive, scientific evidence- based approach (agreed COW)". Commission on Narcotic Drugs Sixty-seventh session, Vienna, 14–22 March 2024, Agenda item 5 (e) Implementation of the international drug control treaties: other matters arising from the international drug control treaties. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_67/Documents/ECN72024L5Rev2_unedited_revised.pdf ; https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2024/march/20240322_harm-reduction.
- 283 For example, the United Nations Panel of Experts on Libya notes that in attacking "human rights defenders, humanitarian workers, social activists, academics and journalists [...] attackers deliberately misused national laws to characterize victims as "criminals", "drug dealers", "apostates" and "spies" in an attempt to justify and obtain public support for the acts of violence and intimidation directed against the targeted persons" – S/2023/673, page 17, paragraph 53.
- On the instrumentalization of anti-crime operations, see also: Matt Herbert et al. *Illicit economies and peace and security in Libya*, 2023, page 23; Lacher, Wolfram. *A political economy of Zawiyah...*, 2024.
- 284 UNODC/WHO, *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention*, second updated edition, 2020. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/prevention-standards.html> AND E/CN.7/2024/L.5/Rev.2
- 285 See also: UNODC. "Drug Trafficking in the Sahel", 2024, page 35.
- 286 Global data and quote from: *World Drug Report 2025*, "Special points of interest", pages 4 and 19.
- 287 United Nations Libya. *2024 Situational Assessment of the South of Libya – Updated Annex to the UN Common Country Analysis for Libya*. Available at: <https://libya.un.org/en/287647-situational-assessment-south-libya-2024#:~:text=This%20document%20presents%20a%20detailed,development%2C%20peacebuilding%2C%20and%20resilience>.
- 288 United Nations Libya. *2024 Situational Assessment of the South of Libya*, pages 35 and 37.
- 289 UNODC. "Libya", United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, No Date. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/romena/uploads/documents/Publications/Final_-_UNODC_in_Libya_Publication.pdf.
- 290 See, for example, evidence from Afghanistan on how hardening borders did not reduce illicit flows but did negatively impact border communities and their survival economies: Jan Koehler, Ghulam Rasool, Azizullah Ibrahimkheil. "Dynamic borderlands–The challenge of adapting to hardening borders in Nangarhar and Nimroz", *Drugs and (dis)order/SOAS*, University of London, 2021. Available at: <https://drugs-disorder.soas.ac.uk/dynamic-borderlands-the-challenge-of-adapting-to-hardening-borders-in-nangarhar-and-nimroz/>.
- 291 S/2024/914, Annex 16 "Ras El-Jdir border crisis", pages 91-94.
- 292 The final point in this recommendation draws on: E/CN.7/2024/L.5/Rev.2 Unedited revised.



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