

# MADMUN XVI



**United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

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## Letter From the Chairs,

Dear Delegates,

The opportunity to chair at MADMUN is an inspiring experience that we couldn't be more excited to participate in. We look forward to seeing engaging debates on important topics where delegates can truly embrace their positions, views, and desires. MADMUN and other MUN conferences are the perfect place for students to take a stand for their beliefs and share how they aim to bring their ideas to life. Don't be afraid to share your ideas or opinions. Model UN is a great way to get out of your comfort zone and challenge yourself!

As chairs, we expect delegates to not only embrace their positions but also advocate for their viewpoints that they believe in. Both topics for this committee are deeply sensitive, and we hope to see delegates engage respectfully and collaborate to address these issues. You don't know if a fellow delegate has had an experience with either of these topics, so please be kind. Inappropriate or disrespectful conduct related to either subject will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Delegates should focus on the intent and reasoning behind their speeches. Developing thoughtful, realistic solutions is essential, as practicality is at the heart of the committee's mission.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to us using these emails: [26meyer139@sasd.net](mailto:26meyer139@sasd.net) or [ace.k.arnold15@gmail.com](mailto:ace.k.arnold15@gmail.com)! We can't wait to see all the amazing things you guys will do in this committee!

Your Chairs,

Aoife Meyer and Ace Arnold

## **Committee Overview**

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, also known as the UNODC, was established in 1997 when the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention merged with the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP), and the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division merged to create one organization. Later renamed in 2002, the UNODC was created to strengthen the global response to interconnected issues such as illicit drug trafficking and abuse, crime prevention, terrorism, and political corruption.

The UNODC works to better equip governments to address challenges related to drugs, crime, terrorism, and corruption through a combination of research, policy support, and international cooperation. It aims to raise global awareness and deepen understanding of these issues, promoting informed action at national, regional, and international levels. A significant portion of its funding, around 90%, comes from voluntary contributions provided by member states. Its budget for 2022 - 2023 totaled \$822 million.

Headquartered in Vienna, Austria, the UNODC employs over 3,000 people globally. The organization has 115 active field offices and maintains two liaison offices in Brussels and New York. The UNODC also oversees several sub-agencies, including branches dedicated to terrorism prevention and criminal justice reform.

## **Topic A: Rise of Synthetic Opioids**

### **Background**

Synthetic opioids are manufactured in laboratories and are significantly more potent than natural opioids, which are drawn from the opium poppy. Although natural and synthetic opioids are created differently, they both interact with the same receptors in the brain that produce analgesic, or pain-relieving effects. Common synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, methadone, and buprenorphine are widely used in medical settings for the management of pain and opioid use disorder (OUD), as recognized by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Opioids are known for their addictive nature, but fentanyl is 50-100 times more potent than morphine, making it highly addictive and raising the risk of overdose. Like natural opioids, synthetic opioids target mu-opioid receptors (MOR). Opioid drugs also affect kappa (KOR) and delta (DOR) opioid receptors. An opioid's addictive potential is determined by how quickly the drug works in the body and how easily the body can absorb the drug. The faster the drug's effects wear off, the more intense the withdrawal symptoms can be. People often take opioids for two main reasons: to increase pleasure or reduce pain, both of which lead to repeated use. The repetitive use leads to a growing tolerance and bigger dependence, and when combined with the two, it often leads to overdose. (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

The opioid epidemic came in four waves, the first wave being in 1990, with the cause being the overprescription of opioids. The second wave was semi-synthetic opioids such as Heroin, Oxycodone, also known as OxyContin, and Hydromorphone, which began in 2010. The wave that delegates will be focusing on is the third and fourth wave: synthetic opioids. This wave began in 2013 when synthetic opioids were introduced to drug trafficking, the most notable being fentanyl, which has spread internationally, according to the European Union Drug Agency.

The situation has only worsened as synthetic opioids have emerged in the fourth wave, being paired with psychostimulant drugs (cocaine and methamphetamine), along with drug dealers now lacing other drugs with fentanyl to make them more potent. (EUDA).

## **Present**

The opioid epidemic, once mostly confined to the United States, has become a growing global crisis, with countries in Europe, such as Germany, experiencing small outbreaks of synthetic opioids entering the market in 2023 (World Health Organization). Since 2009, Europe has seen the emergence of 57 new synthetic opioids, the most notable being nitazene. Nitazene is considered to be 1,000 times more potent than morphine and 40 times more potent than fentanyl, making this drug highly dangerous. The emergence of new opioids like fentanyl and nitazene can be attributed to several factors, including the heroin shortage caused by the opium poppy production ban in Afghanistan, which forced users to seek alternatives, and the fact that synthetic opioids like fentanyl and nitazene are relatively cheap to manufacture. Although some individuals may actively seek out synthetic opioids, many unknowingly purchase counterfeit drugs that contain synthetic opioids, such as heroin, cocaine, and benzodiazepines (National Library of Medicine).

The trafficking and transportation of synthetic opioids is an ever-evolving challenge. These drugs are moved through various methods, including the dark web and transshipment routes. Key ports used for trans-shipment include those in Africa, Iraq, Pakistan, Türkiye, the UAE, and countries bordering the Black Sea or the Adriatic Sea. Türkiye alone seized 22.2 tonnes of heroin in 2021; when combined with seizures by the EU, Türkiye, and Norway, the total reached 31.8 tonnes. Further west, major transit countries include Ethiopia, Uganda, the

Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Africa. These nations primarily serve the Southern trafficking route, an emerging alternative to the more established Balkan Route. The Balkan Route passes through Iran, Türkiye, the Balkan countries, and enters the EU via Bulgaria or Greece. However, the Southern Route is gaining popularity, along with maritime trafficking, which involves smuggling drugs via commercial sea routes. The continuous evolution of trafficking routes exacerbates this growing issue. According to the EUDA, contributing factors include geopolitical, social, and economic conditions, as well as migration trends, transportation risks, and others. Due to the constant changes in these routes, it becomes increasingly difficult to track and intercept shipments of illicit opioids.

As the opioid epidemic continues in waves, so do the efforts to combat it. Each country adopts its unique approach, supported in part by broader international coordination through organizations like the UNODC. The UNODC has developed five key pillars to fight the opioid epidemic. The first pillar involves recognizing early warning signs and analyzing ongoing trends. The second pillar is responsibly prescribing opioids for medical and scientific use, and the third pillar addresses prevention and treatment programs. The fourth is international law enforcement targeting drug trafficking, and lastly, the fifth pillar is building national and global drug control capacity.

Some countries have zero-tolerance drug laws, such as Sweden. Sweden is known for its strict stance on illegal drug use. The policy was introduced to try to create a drug-free society. The punishment for illicit drug use varies and can be either jail or a contract-based treatment program. Contract Treatment is used for those who are recurring drug addicts, where their crime is closely linked to their addiction. Their plan can be at their home, or they may choose to go to a facility. However, if the individual fails their contact treatment, they will be sentenced to jail.

Beyond this initiative, Sweden also has many non-governmental anti-drug organizations, and each town has its local anti-drug coordinator who collaborates with local schools, churches, and police. Though Sweden saw a decline in drug-related deaths throughout the 2000s and was even praised by the United Nations, this trend has been reversed in recent years. By 2020, there was a notable increase in drug-related deaths. In that year, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare reported that Sweden's drug overdose rate had risen to 6.46 per 100.000 inhabitants. Sweden has also been criticized for its approach to treating addicts. Many claim that due to limited funding, strict privacy laws, and a lack of family support, many addicts do not receive help until their addiction becomes life-threatening (Wikipedia).

Germany does not have a total ban on drugs; however, doctors try all other options before prescribing opioids to a patient. This is because they are “less susceptible to pressure from Big Pharma to write unnecessary opioid prescriptions” (Nathan Yerby). The treatment for opioid use disorder (OUD) is easier to access through methadone and buprenorphine. Germany also has 24 drug consumption centers in six German states (Addiction Center). They also struggle with their programs being defunded.

Another notable country is Portugal. Portugal took on a unique stance in combating the opioid epidemic: it decriminalized the use of illicit opioids. Instead of jail time, individuals caught using opioids are sent to a local panel called the Commission for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction. This panel typically consists of three individuals, including healthcare professionals and social workers. They will evaluate the situation and decide the type of treatment, if any, the individual will receive.

This approach is meant to make people more comfortable seeking help, as they no longer fear the possibility of being arrested. This strategy not only dropped the use of illicit opioids but



also dropped HIV infections via drug injectables by 90% (AMA Journal of Ethics Illuminating the Art of Medicine). Portugal also recognizes that not everyone is ready or willing to stop using drugs, and instead follows harm reduction strategies. As a part of this, Portugal created safe injection sites, which offer sterile equipment, medical attention in case of an overdose, and access to social services. These sites also work to reduce the transmission of diseases, such as HIV. However, despite Portugal's best efforts, the country has recently experienced a rise in the use and overdose of illicit opioids. This is partly due to reduced funding for harm reduction treatment programs.

Each country has strikingly different approaches to how it combats the opioid epidemic. From criminalizing drug use to embracing decriminalization and harm reduction. Each strategy has faced criticism, and most seemed effective at first, only to be followed by the resurgence in illicit opioid use. The fight against illicit opioids continues to be a constant and difficult uphill battle for countries around the world. (AMA)

## **Conclusion**

The opioid epidemic continues to be an ever-evolving crisis, now dominated by the rise of synthetic opioids like fentanyl and nitazene. Countries have continued to respond to this crisis with a multitude of strategies, from zero-tolerance laws to decriminalization. While these efforts have shown positive results, they have also faced many setbacks as drug trafficking continues to evolve, funding declines, and new substances emerge.

No singular solution can solve this global crisis. A coordinated international response is essential, one that balances public health, law enforcement, prevention, and access to treatment.

Delegates, you must now work together to develop solutions that effectively address these urgent challenges.

### **Questions to consider**

1. How do we prevent a potential fifth wave of the opioid epidemic?
2. What balance should countries strike between criminalizing drug use and adopting harm reduction approaches?
3. How can funding and resources for addiction treatment be sustained and improved globally?
4. What strategies can be implemented to better track and disrupt the changing trafficking routes of synthetic opioids?
5. How can international organizations such as UNODC better support countries with differing approaches to the opioid epidemic?

## **Topic B: Gun Violence and Control**

### **Background**

Firearms were designed with one goal; to destroy. In ancient China, after gunpowder was discovered, it was used to make military weapons. Later, they were developed for everyday life. For protection, for sport. As these new uses were introduced, they needed regulation and law to go with them so they wouldn't become a detriment to society.

The first laws made regarding firearms was the National Firearms Act which was created in 1934. It was designed as a set of rules, protocols and regulations towards both the possession, producing, importing and exporting of firearms—and their accessories— in the U.S.A.

The Cold War played a massive role in Latin America's reigning issue of gun violence. During the war, a mass of weapons were transported to the countries of Latin America which led to illegal markets heavily trafficking firearms around the country. This meant that the countries lost control over the sale of guns which led to more mass shootings and crime due to the inability to regulate who used and owned firearms.

Before 1999, shootings were relatively rare. Rates of mass shootings through the 70's stayed low with typically only 2-4 mass shootings per year in the United States. In the 80's this rate increased and a pattern of gun related violence began to form in the U.S.

The catalyst was the Columbine Massacre in 1999. On April 20th two students entered Columbine High School armed with deadly rifles, proceeding to kill 13 people then themselves. This set the reputation for the United States carrying the brunt of the world's casualties due to firearms.

**Present**

Despite the new laws and regulations put into place, this did not stop gun violence from rapidly becoming a world-wide problem. Between 1990 and 2016, 6.5 million people were killed by a firearm; accounting murders, suicides, and accidental deaths.

The vast majority of these deaths are by murder or suicide. This presents the question, does mental health play a role in gun violence? It has been found throughout time that murder and public shootings are committed 95-97% of the time by people without a mental illness. Whereas suicides are almost always mental health related.

When considering this, you must think about how different laws and regulations may have helped or prevented wrongful injuries or deaths across the world. Sometimes, there are things out of the government's control, but if we put in and most importantly, enforce code of regulations then the world's populations stand a much better chance of being protected.

Even though we have a myriad of laws, orders and regulations on firearms, it doesn't seem to put an end to the extreme violence across the world. They become such a common and everyday item, many—if not most—people have one in their home. Because of such widespread access, it means they're present for all the good and bad times in life. They can be brought on family hunting trips, but they can also stare a distraught person in the face, maybe the last thing they see before it takes their life.

This is why, to be able to regulate firearms you need to know who they are being sold to. This is a major part of current gun laws. The government has requirements and standards for gun owners, such as mental evaluations, analyzing criminal records, and much more. This is impossible to control though if they cannot trace where guns are being sold.

Gun trafficking, though not a main contributor, is still a wide problem to the safety of the people and the economy. Gun trafficking is when firearms and/or their accessories are illegally transported and sold around the world. Trafficking results in untraceable weapons that can be sold to people with no knowledge of their intentions.

In 2020, the Nova Scotia attacks were committed, killing 23 people. The weaponry used by the perpetrator was illegally obtained via gun trafficking in the U.S.A.

In Sahel, a Northern-Central state in Africa, they face a fatal arms race. They experience a large number of crimes, including but not excluded to kidnappings, robberies, and gun trafficking. The market is extreme and often missed by authorities. Despite UN intervention, the cycle of violence continues and has even forced some people to trade weapons for food or flee their homes due to the ongoing violence.

Gun trafficking such as this also has a direct impact on the economy. Not only does it reduce the risk of a weapon being sold to an inadequate person, but also reduces the money brought in by their sales, which brings the possibility of putting the economy around them in distress.

This would affect places who legally sell firearms and other weapons and also everyday towns and small businesses. When a mass shooting occurs, it often puts stress and fear into the people around it. It makes people anxious and not want to go to work or school or simply shopping which overall would bring down the economic status of the affected area.

Tackling gun violence around the world will take cooperation and willingness from the whole world. Willingness to take steps some may not think we're ready to. Resolving this issue will require empathy and the understanding of the past, as the past sometimes is the only thing we may learn from to avoid repeating previous tragedies.

## **Conclusion**

More and more deaths are occurring every day. Innocent children are being killed in places they're supposed to be safe; people are afraid to go to school or work because sometimes now, going out in public means risking your life. More action must be taken to protect our people. Despite previous intervention from the UNODC, thousands of people are still being killed unjustly every day, lives cut short before they could see their full story.

Everybody in the world deserves to be safe. They deserve to feel safe. Sometimes that may mean they need help, sometimes that requires stepping up and making a worldly change. Clearly, the current laws of our world are not adequate given the extremities of the violence occurring. As a representative of the UNODC, it is now your responsibility to bring peace and ease the suffering of our citizens around the globe.

## **Questions To Consider**

- What can the UN do to ease the world's minds, preventing more issues from occurring?
- Can regulations be put in place to prevent trafficking of weapons?
- Would enhancing mental health care decrease the likelihood of shootings occurring?
- Is the issue a matter of new regulation, or enforcement?
- How can the UN use instances like Columbine, Nova Scotia, and the Sahel arms race to improve and maintain preventative measures to similar crimes occurring?
- Is it possible to solve both the concern of safety, and the economy?

## Resources

### Topic A

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