

**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**

AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

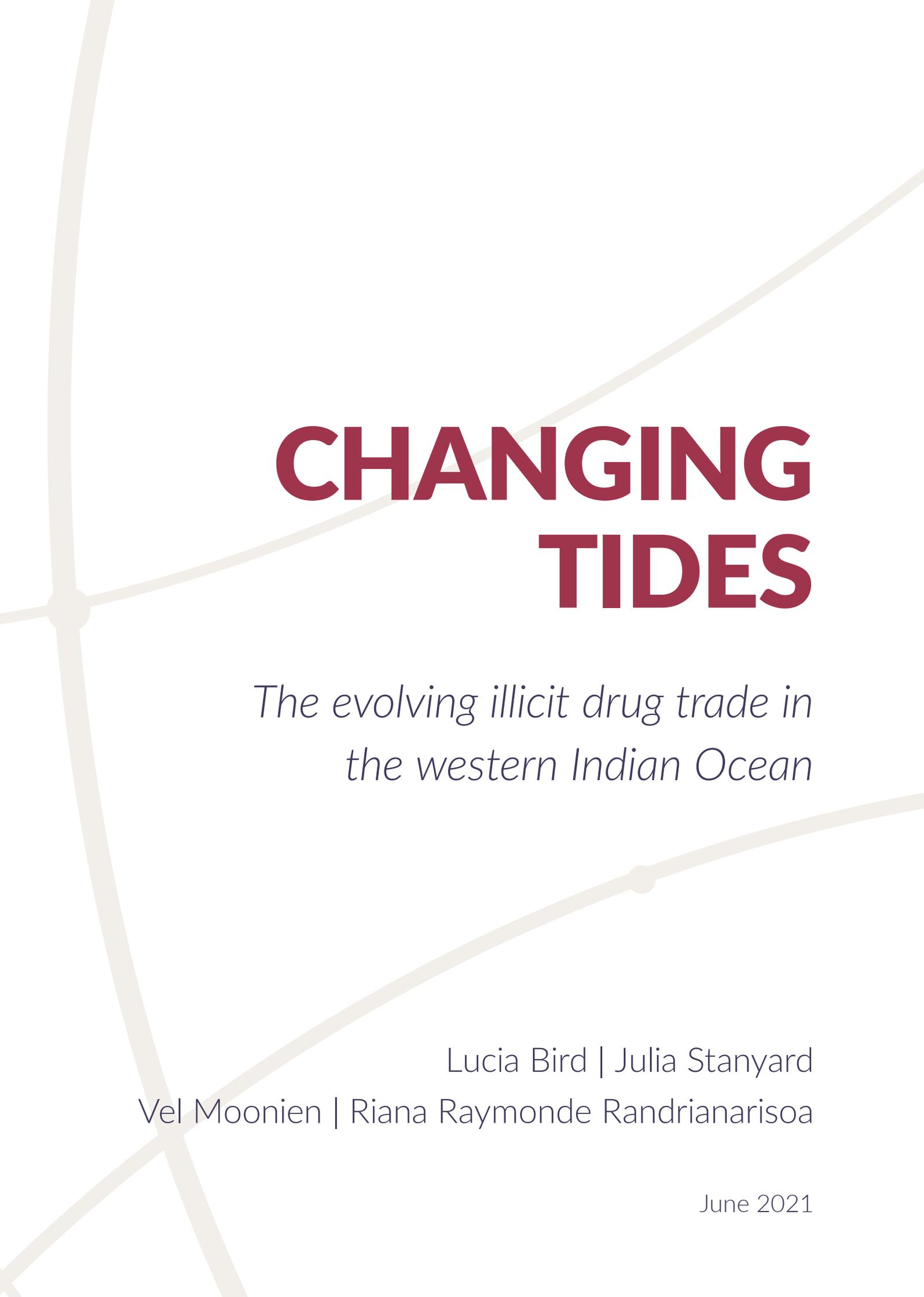
CHANGING TIDES

The evolving illicit drug trade in
the western Indian Ocean

LUCIA BIRD | JULIA STANYARD

VEL MOONIEN | RIANA RAYMONDE RANDRIANARISOA





CHANGING TIDES

*The evolving illicit drug trade in
the western Indian Ocean*

Lucia Bird | Julia Stanyard
Vel Moonien | Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa

June 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost we would like to acknowledge the input of the full research team across the islands, without whose perseverance and hard work – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic – this report could not have been completed. This includes, but is not limited to, Sebastien Gignoux, Noura Sahimi and Georges Nicette. Their dedication to the research in difficult circumstances has been remarkable. We also wish to acknowledge the input of everyone who was generous enough to participate in the research as interviewees and survey participants, particularly the many people who use drugs whose input has formed a crucial part of the research. We would also like to recognize the input of the many experts consulted as well as the support and information provided by law enforcement bodies and government institutions.

Finally, we are grateful to many on the GI-TOC team. Thanks to the Publications team and Elné Potgieter and Liezel Bohdanowicz for producing the maps and graphics. Thanks also go to Julian Rademeyer and Jason Eligh for their support throughout the research.

© 2021 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Global Initiative.

Cover: © *Pedro Ferrão Patrício/Alamy*

Design: Elné Potgieter
Cartography: Liezel Bohdanowicz

Please direct inquiries to:
The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Avenue de France 23
Geneva, CH-1202
Switzerland

www.globalinitiative.net

CONTENTS

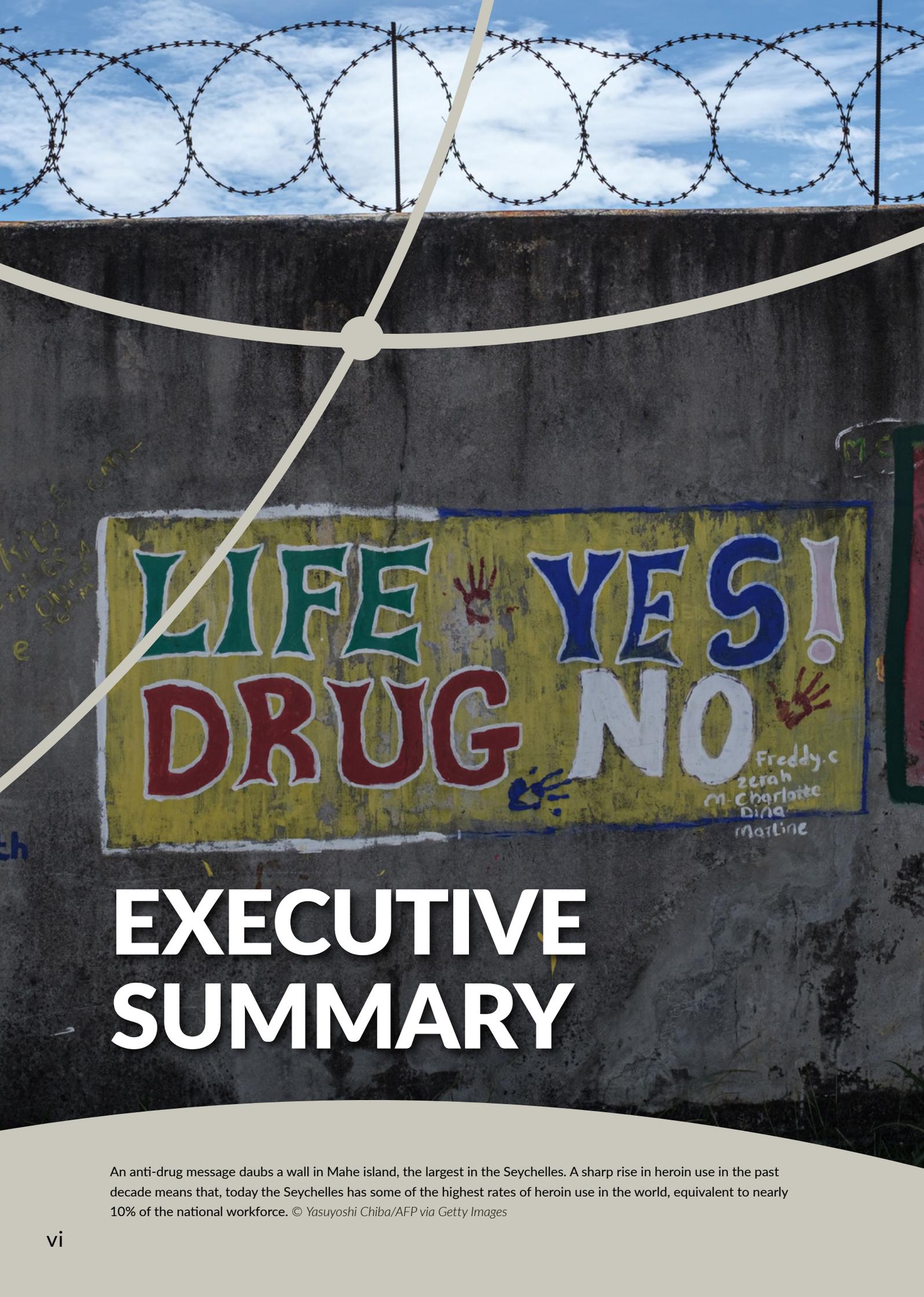
Abbreviations and acronyms	v
Executive summary	vi
Methodology.....	6
Survey of regional markets by drug type	7
Heroin	9
New psychoactive substances	17
Cocaine.....	21
Cannabis.....	24
Market characteristics	30
Drug trafficking networks in the Indian Ocean islands	31
Violence.....	34
Corruption and protection structures	36
Impacts	37
Cultural change.....	38
Public health.....	40
Drugs and democracy: the erosion of institutional governance.....	43
Responses	46
Policing the Indian Ocean: a crowded space.....	47
Islands' responses to drug trafficking.....	49
Looking forwards	52
Recommendations	54
Notes.....	58



Dhows in the old harbour of Mahajanga, Madagascar. Sources report that Madagascar-produced cannabis is transported to the Comoros archipelago via Mahajanga. © Ariadne Van Zandbergen / Alamy Stock Photo

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADSU	Anti-Drug Smuggling Unit, Mauritius
AIS	Automatic Identification System
ANB	Anti-Narcotics Bureau, the Seychelles
APDAR	Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation, the Seychelles
CTF 150	Combined Task Force 150
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FSL	Forensic Science Laboratory, Mauritius
GI-TOC	Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
MGA	Malagasy ariary
MSM	Militant Socialist Movement
MUR	Mauritian rupee
NPS	new psychoactive substances
SCR	Seychelles rupee
PWUD	people who use drugs
PWID	people who inject drugs
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

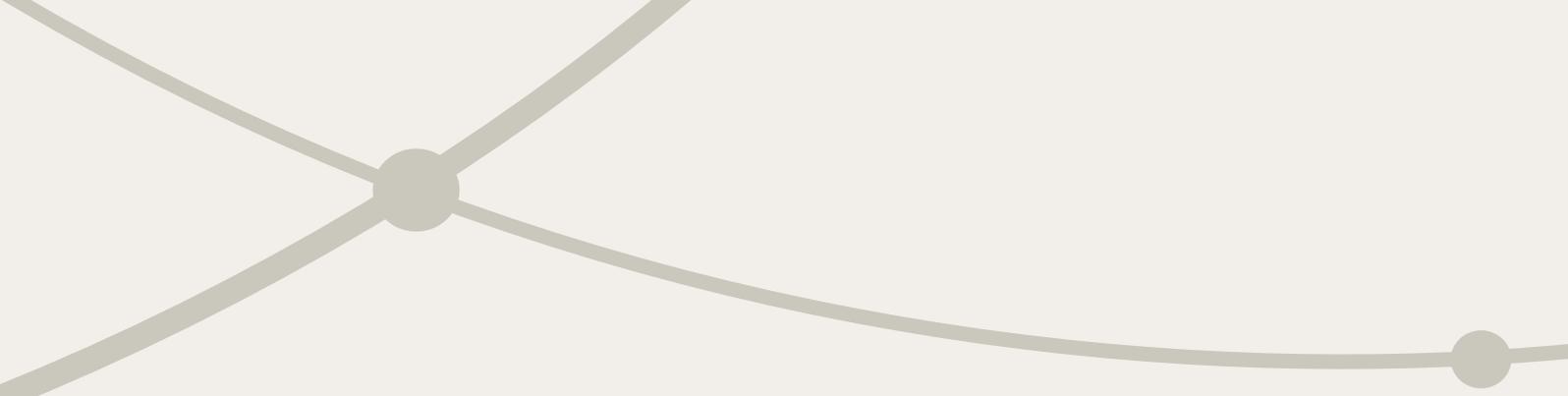


LIFE YES!
DRUG NO

Freddy.c
zerah
m. Charlotte
Dina
marLine

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An anti-drug message daubs a wall in Mahe island, the largest in the Seychelles. A sharp rise in heroin use in the past decade means that, today the Seychelles has some of the highest rates of heroin use in the world, equivalent to nearly 10% of the national workforce. © Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images



The islands of the western Indian Ocean have been drastically impacted by illicit drug markets. Positioned between Africa and Asia, these island states have been affected by shifts in drug production and trafficking on both continents, while forming a distinct and unique inter-island drug trafficking ecosystem. Significant changes are under way in this ecosystem, with increasing volume and diversity of illegal drugs being trafficked to and between the islands.

While the dynamics of drug markets are shaped by a range of domestic political and economic factors, all the islands (namely Mauritius, the Seychelles, Madagascar, the Comoros and the French Overseas Territories of Mayotte and Réunion), are rendered vulnerable by their proximity to a major heroin trafficking route and growing regional methamphetamine and cocaine routes.

The ongoing prominence of the 'southern route', where heroin cultivated in Afghanistan is trafficked via East and southern Africa to end markets in Europe and the United States, has meant that increasing volumes of heroin are being trafficked through the western Indian Ocean. This has shaped a secondary flow of heroin to Mauritius and the Seychelles, and had a dramatic impact on these small island nations. Mauritius and the Seychelles are home to deeply entrenched heroin markets, and the Seychelles is estimated to have the highest per capita rate of heroin consumption in the world.

High demand for heroin in both Mauritius and the Seychelles, together with changes occurring on the East African seaboard, is in turn fuelling Madagascar's emergence as a *'plaque tournante'*¹ – a turning point in regional, and to a lesser extent global, drug trafficking routes. Rendered vulnerable by both its geography and weaknesses in its governance, Madagascar is being pushed into an unwelcome position of prominence in regional drug markets. Already ill equipped to handle the impacts of spiralling drug consumption, twin disasters in 2020 further diminished available resources: Madagascar experienced its worst drought in a decade and fell into economic recession due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Since 2015, drugs trafficking to and through the western Indian Ocean Islands has not only materially increased but also diversified. Long-standing heroin flows have been joined by a flood of synthetic cannabinoids, which have fundamentally disrupted drug markets in Mauritius, Mayotte and the Comoros. Meanwhile, record-breaking cocaine production in Latin America and spiralling demand in Europe and Australia have combined to supercharge global cocaine trafficking routes,² with significant impacts for the region. GI-TOC research in 2019 tracked growing volumes of cocaine being trafficked to the East African seaboard in containers from Latin America,³ and our research found use and trafficking of cocaine to be on the rise in several of the islands.

Corruption is arguably the single most significant factor underpinning the growth of drug markets in the western Indian Ocean.

Most recently, GI-TOC research in 2020 identified Afghan-produced methamphetamine being trafficked with heroin along the 'southern route'.⁴ In the Seychelles, health authorities recently detected methamphetamine use for the first time, and people who use drugs (PWUD) reported that the drug was increasingly available.⁵ Although seizure levels across the islands are low in comparison with other drugs, there are indications that meth consumption may rise in future.⁶ Methamphetamines were not the focus of this research, and warrant further scrutiny across the islands.

Corruption is arguably the single most significant factor underpinning the growth of drug markets in the western Indian Ocean. Drug markets enjoy a degree of protection across the islands, although this is far more limited in the French Overseas Territories of Réunion and Mayotte. In Madagascar and the Comoros, drug markets are one of many illicit markets facilitated by corrupt elements of state institutions, while drugs are the major criminal economy in the Seychelles and Mauritius, and therefore stand out as a unique driver of corruption. The impact of drug-fuelled corruption on the democratic and criminal justice infrastructure of these two islands constitutes the biggest obstacle to an effective response, especially as the factors which have made Mauritius and the Seychelles attractive to trafficking networks – comparatively high spending power, high air and maritime connectivity and convenient proximity to a major international drug trafficking route – remain unchanged.

The western Indian Ocean Islands are often neglected in studies of the African continent, seen as too 'different' for effective comparison.⁷ Perhaps in part because of this, Madagascar's emergence as a significant drugs transshipment hub has received limited attention to date. Yet as argued above, the region is closely connected to the illicit dynamics on the mainland.

This research aims to shed light on the political economy of drug trafficking in the western Indian Ocean island states. This report not only describes the changing drugs flows and trafficking routes, but also explores how drug networks operate in the island states and the implications of the drug markets for the political economy of the islands.

Summary of drug market dynamics in the Indian Ocean islands

ISLAND	DRUG USE	ROLE IN TRAFFICKING ROUTES	DRUG MARKET DYNAMICS	PROTECTION OF DRUGS MARKETS	POLICY RESPONSES
Seychelles	<p>The Seychelles reports some of the highest levels of heroin use in the world, at around 5% of the country's population. Since the latest government-led estimates of the heroin-using population in 2018, use has reportedly continued to rise. Cocaine use is low but reportedly rising.</p>	<p>The Seychelles is a destination market for heroin, cannabis and, to a lesser extent, cocaine. Our research found that the island state does not serve as a transit country for drugs either to other Indian Ocean island states, or globally.</p>	<p>Imports of heroin and other drugs to the Seychelles are reportedly controlled by a small number of individuals who supply numerous domestic distribution networks. Domestic networks are Seychellois-dominated and drugs are sold through several intermediaries before reaching PWUD.</p> <p>Drugs trafficking networks are reportedly benefiting from growing community support and legitimacy in the Seychelles, as traffickers are increasingly seen as 'entrepreneurial' Robin Hood-esque figures. Demand for heroin has risen significantly in recent years and new illicit entrepreneurs have moved into the heroin market.</p> <p>Low levels of violence relating to drugs markets are reported in the Seychelles. However, some violence and disappearances related to drug trafficking were reported in interviews with PWUD.</p> <p>Proceeds from drug trafficking are laundered through cash-intensive businesses in the Seychelles such as car hire businesses and real estate deals, as well as businesses which rely on the exchange of foreign currency.</p>	<p>Widespread corruption of law enforcement in the Seychelles reportedly protects drug-trafficking markets. This includes protection of street-level drug dealing as well as higher-level protection within the police force.</p>	<p>The Seychelles has made significant policy shifts towards a more health-based approach to managing rising drug use, including the introduction of a widespread methadone substitution programme. The country has recently been listed by the EU as a non-cooperative jurisdiction for tax purposes, at least partially connected to issues of drug-related money laundering. Capacity to investigate drugs-related money laundering is limited.</p>
Mauritius	<p>Heroin use has a long history in Mauritius. The island has some of the highest rates of heroin consumption in the world, and use is reportedly rising. Synthetic cannabinoids are reportedly the most consumed drug type on the island, and consumption has accelerated since 2013. Cannabis use is widespread, while use of cocaine and psychotropic pills is less common.</p>	<p>Mauritius is a destination market for synthetic cannabinoids, heroin, cannabis and, to a far lesser extent, cocaine. Our research found that the island state does not serve as a transit country for drugs either to other Indian Ocean island states, or globally.</p>	<p>A small number of long-standing wholesale heroin importers operate alongside a larger number of networks in coordinating imports. Synthetic cannabinoids are imported by a significant number of players. The numerous domestic distribution networks typically sell a range of drugs, including synthetic cannabinoids and cannabis.</p> <p>Drug trafficking presents a key money laundering risk to Mauritius. Proceeds from drug trafficking are laundered through cash-intensive businesses, including fast food restaurants, casinos and car wash outlets.</p> <p>Drug-related violence is rare. Mauritius' long-standing drugs market is interwoven into the informal economy of the island. Many networks and kingpins enjoy support from local communities</p>	<p>Mauritius' drugs market reportedly enjoys significant protection from state institutions, and widespread corruption across state criminal justice and security infrastructure was perceived by stakeholders to be pivotal to operations.</p>	<p>Since 2006 the Mauritian government has adopted a strong public health response, including widespread methadone substitution programme and needle exchange clinics. This sits alongside a predominantly prohibitionist approach to drugs. The Government launched a 2015 commission of inquiry into the drugs trade; interviewees expressed frustration that many of the recommendations published in 2018 remain unimplemented. The 2019 grey-listing of Mauritius by FATF was partly due to weaknesses in addressing drug-related money laundering. Bolstering follow the money approaches is a priority.</p>

ISLAND	DRUG USE	ROLE IN TRAFFICKING ROUTES	DRUG MARKET DYNAMICS	PROTECTION OF DRUGS MARKETS	POLICY RESPONSES
Comoros	Heroin use in the Comoros is low, as it remains unaffordable to many Comorians. Use of <i>chimique</i> , as synthetic cannabinoids are known in the islands, has been growing rapidly since 2017.	The Comoros is not a major destination or transit market for heroin trafficked through the Indian Ocean. Heroin reaching the islands is predominantly from Tanzania, and to a lesser extent Madagascar. Cannabis is also imported from both these countries. <i>Chimique</i> is produced on the islands from precursors imported from China, via Mayotte.	Illicit drugs networks in the Comoros primarily comprise importers – largely Tanzanian and Malagasy nationals – intermediaries who coordinate the domestic market and low-level domestic distribution networks. PWUD and dealers reported that well-protected ‘bosses’ enjoy a long-standing role at the high levels of the Comorian market. Drug-related violence is rare.	Drugs networks, like other illicit markets on the Comoros, are reportedly broadly facilitated by state infrastructure. This includes the use of profits from the drugs trade to finance election campaigns and endemic corruption among law enforcement.	Beyond law enforcement operations (weakened through corruption), the response to drugs markets has been limited, with scarce public health provision and outdated legal frameworks.
Mayotte	<i>Chimique</i> is the most widely-consumed drug in Mayotte and use has been rising sharply since 2011. Heroin and cocaine use is limited and isolated to wealthier communities.	Mayotte is not a major destination or transit market for heroin trafficked through the Indian Ocean. <i>Chimique</i> is produced on the islands from precursors imported from China, and cannabis is primarily imported from Madagascar by sea, often via Anjouan island.	The <i>chimique</i> market presents low barriers to entry because the precursors are readily available by online routes from producers in China. This has led to the creation of new drugs networks operating in Mayotte. Importers of cannabis and synthetics – the two most commonly consumed drugs – are distinct, though domestic distribution networks overlap. Widespread coverage of the public health impacts of <i>chimique</i> have created stigma around use and involvement in the trade. Street dealing in <i>chimique</i> is associated with groups of irregular migrants, who suffer from high levels of anti-migrant sentiment.	There have been a small number of customs and law enforcement officials arrested in connection with drug trafficking, but these appear to be instances of low level corruption on an individual rather than systemic basis.	The surge in <i>chimique</i> use has driven drugs up the political agenda in Mayotte. The response has combined law enforcement approaches with a focus on addressing <i>chimique</i> as a public health concern, including on preventative trainings and rehabilitation.

ISLAND	DRUG USE	ROLE IN TRAFFICKING ROUTES	DRUG MARKET DYNAMICS	PROTECTION OF DRUGS MARKETS	POLICY RESPONSES
Réunion	Réunion's drugs landscape has diversified and grown, with increasing demand for cocaine, LSD, cannabis resin, prescription medicines and ecstasy, and a small but growing flow of synthetic cannabinoids. However, domestic heroin use is extremely low.	Réunion, uniquely of the Indian Ocean islands, primarily imports drugs by post and air from mainland France. It is not a major trafficking transit or destination market for heroin. Réunion exports cannabis to Mauritius.	<p>A significant proportion of drugs imported into Réunion are purchased online by individuals and imported by post - this presents extremely low barriers to entry. The drugs market is small, and drugs-related violence is not widely reported.</p> <p>Investigations have dismantled some small Europe-based networks. Although some stakeholders suggest increasing sophistication, networks remain small-scale.</p>	Although corruption among state institutions is recognised to exist, it is reportedly low, and public confidence in the organs of the state correspondingly high.	The increase in drugs trafficking has prompted growing state focus on illicit drug consumption and trafficking. Coordinated law enforcement responses have reportedly been successful in the past at countering flows of methamphetamines and heroin to Réunion.
Madagascar	Heroin use in Madagascar is far lower than other Indian Ocean island states such as Mauritius and the Seychelles. However, heroin use is rising sharply, particularly in urban centres. Cocaine use is far lower but also increasing. Cannabis, which has long been grown domestically, is widely used.	Madagascar is primarily a transit market for heroin being trafficked to other Indian Ocean island states and globally. It is also, to a lesser extent but increasingly, a transit market for cocaine. Madagascar is a significant producer of cannabis, most of which is consumed domestically while some is exported to the other island states.	<p>The Malagasy drugs market is reportedly centralized among a small number of major traffickers who direct networks from Antananarivo. Interviews suggest these few, major figures have dominated the market for several years. These trafficking networks are not specialized in particular drug types but work in heroin, cocaine and methamphetamines, cooperating with overseas networks for international trade and with lower-level localized drugs networks to service the domestic market. The cannabis markets are distinct.</p> <p>Levels of drug market violence are reportedly low. Interviewees in Antananarivo and Nosy Be reported that trafficking networks in certain urban areas receive support from their communities. Violence is more associated with the cannabis market, where players are often armed.</p>	Interviewees did not report high-level corruption among government officials as has been reported in investigations of other illicit markets in Madagascar, such as rosewood. However, widespread corruption in law enforcement was reported, and interviewees argued that the weakening of the Malagasy state through corruption and other forms of organised crime has left the country vulnerable to exploitation by drug trafficking groups.	The Malagasy government's approach to countering drug trafficking and use is strongly skewed towards supply-reduction approaches, and harm reduction and health-based responses to drug use are not widely practiced. Law enforcement agencies in Madagascar reported that cooperation between different agencies is hindered by a lack of mutual trust and suspicions of corruption.

Methodology

This study draws on extensive semi-structured interviews and field research conducted by a team of specialist researchers across the island states – in Mauritius, Madagascar, the Comoros, Seychelles and Réunion – throughout 2020.⁸ The interviews encompassed a range of individuals whose professional and personal roles provide insight into the drugs market, as shown in the graph below. In Mayotte, in part due to challenges caused by the pandemic, research was conducted through remote interviews alone.

Field research was supplemented by remote interviews conducted with stakeholders across the islands and a range of international analysts with expertise in the region, together with an extensive review of open-source literature, data and reporting on drug markets.

Surveys of drug markets and street-level drug pricing were also conducted. These surveys were based on data shared by PWUD, using methodologies that the GI-TOC has developed to examine the dynamics of illegal economies more broadly.⁹ They identified the retail price (i.e. street price) for different drug types in a given market location, and collected information on factors that influence variations in retail price within a particular market. These surveys help build quantitative data on drugs markets and supplement the qualitative interviews. For the purposes of cross-market comparison, drug prices have been converted into euros (using exchange rates from the time of data collection), with the local currency given after.

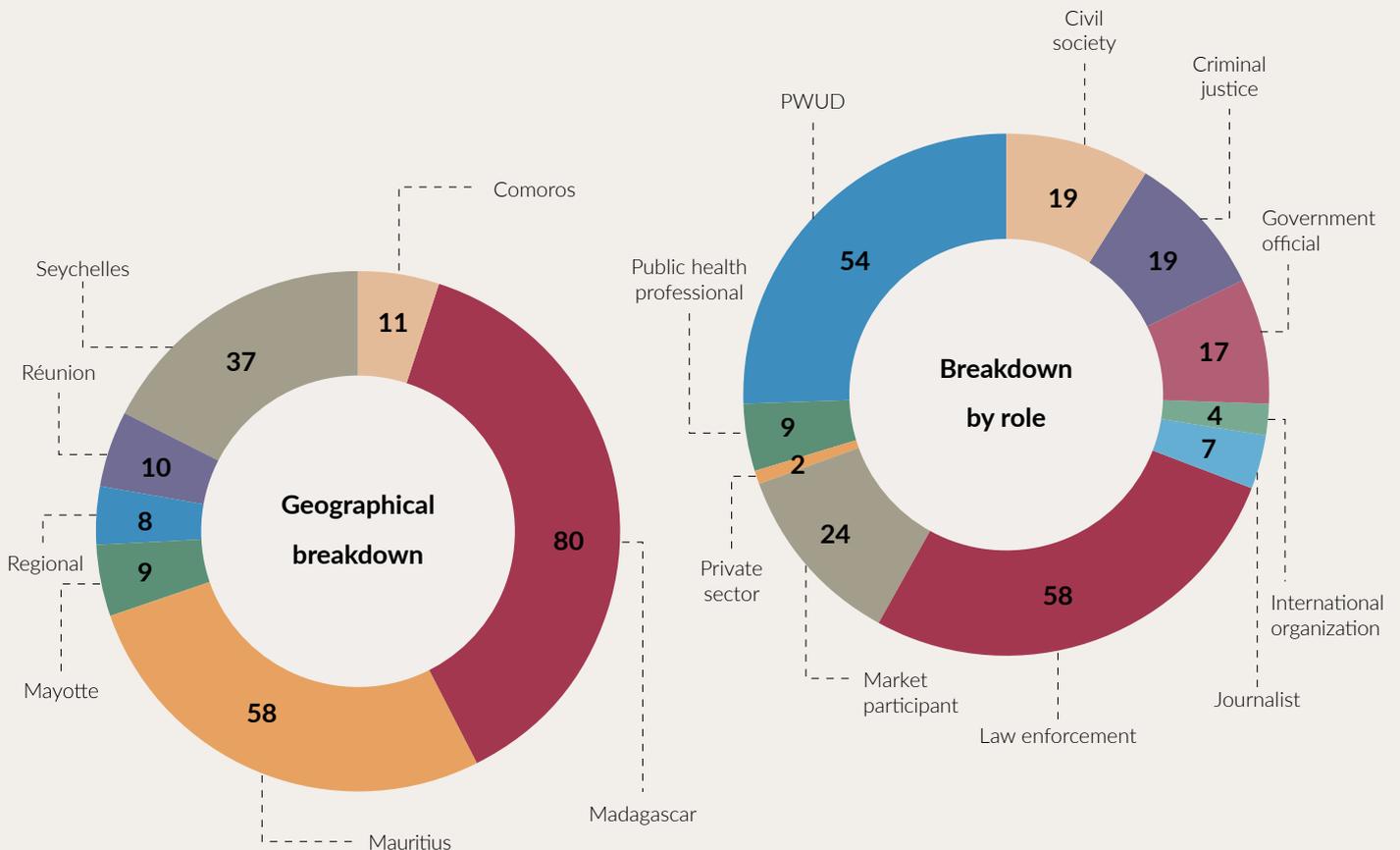


FIGURE 1 Breakdown of 213 interviewees by island and interviewee type.



SURVEY OF REGIONAL MARKETS BY DRUG TYPE

A vessel at sea near Nosy Be, Madagascar. The island of Nosy Be is reportedly a hub for the trafficking of drugs in Madagascar and drug consumption in Nosy Be Hell Ville, the main urban centre on the island, is rising sharply.

© CFimages / Alamy Stock Photo

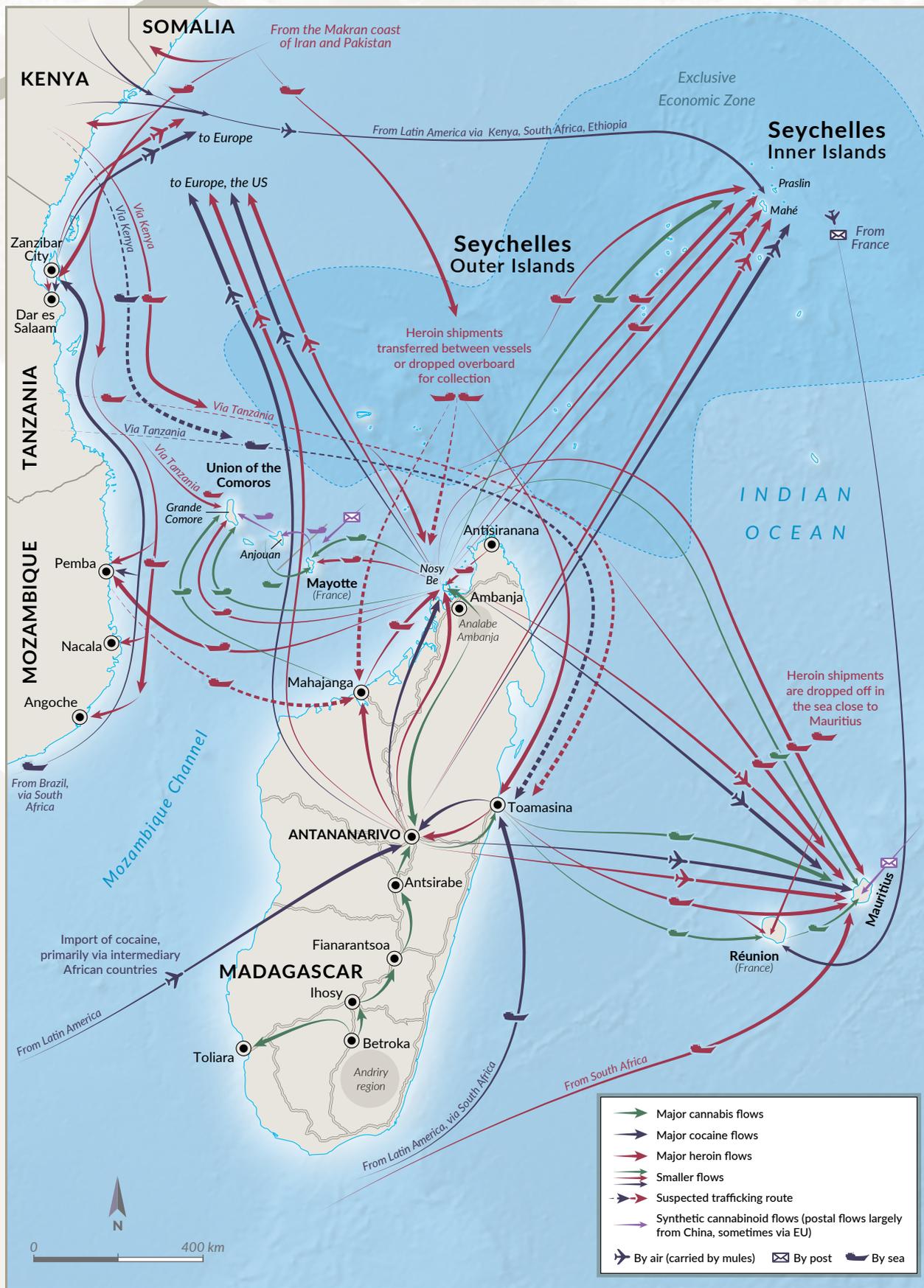


FIGURE 2 Key drug flows through the western Indian Ocean islands.

Heroin

Heroin is by far the region's most prominent and long-standing drugs economy. The scale of the heroin market has led to the development of sophisticated trafficking networks in the island states, poured money into the hands of drug traffickers, driven corruption and established the landscape in which markets for other drugs have developed.

Heroin is transported to the island states predominantly through maritime routes, with smaller volumes carried by air.¹⁰ Transshipment at sea from larger vessels to smaller boats is a common method of import across the islands: drug consignments are offloaded either directly onto small boats, or into the sea, sharing GPS coordinates with accomplices on land. Seizures indicate that containers are also used to traffic heroin to, and between, the islands.¹¹

Several major maritime flows feed the islands' markets (together with a number of smaller flows by sea and air). In the first, heroin is trafficked to transshipment points on the East African seaboard, including Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, before being later transported to Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles.¹² Several sources report that shipments are also transported directly from the Makran coast to Malagasy waters, to be transferred onto smaller vessels before landing.¹³ The Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, based in Madagascar, argues that Madagascar is too far for dhows to reach from the Makran coast, and posits instead that transshipment to smaller boats occurs further north in the waters near the Seychelles.

Dhows and bulk carriers en route to eastern and southern Africa are also reported to offload a proportion of their heroin consignments in the vast Seychellois exclusive economic zone, where it is picked up and landed on the Seychelles by smaller vessels.¹⁴ (This direct supply from Iran is not available to

Mauritius, which may contribute to the higher price paid for heroin there, as discussed below.)

The Seychelles and Mauritius are the principal consumer markets for heroin. Their comparative wealth – relative to other countries around the Indian Ocean littoral – has made them attractive and lucrative (if small in absolute size) secondary destinations, and they have been actively targeted by traffickers moving heroin along the southern route. The development of these island markets thus differs to that of heroin markets in countries along the East African coastline, where GI-TOC research has suggested that domestic heroin markets formed as a result of overspill from the volumes transiting towards end markets in Europe and the US.

Although the Seychelles and Mauritius were both rendered vulnerable by wealth and geography, the heroin markets of the two islands have different histories, as shown in the timeline. Heroin consumption in Mauritius has deep roots, pre-dating the material expansion of the southern heroin route. Early heroin seizures suggest that the primary means of trafficking were mules and boats bringing heroin from India, which has close socio-economic and political links to Mauritius.¹⁵ This started to change in the late 1990s, when Mauritius became a secondary destination for the growing volumes moving along the southern heroin route, driven by surging production in Afghanistan and Myanmar, a spike in European demand and displacement from the long-standing northern and Balkan routes driven partly by interdiction efforts.¹⁶ Between 2000 and 2004, heroin flows through the Indian Ocean reached unprecedented volumes as networks trafficking heroin from Afghanistan leveraged ports across the East African coastline as transshipment points en route to lucrative consumer markets in Europe and the US.

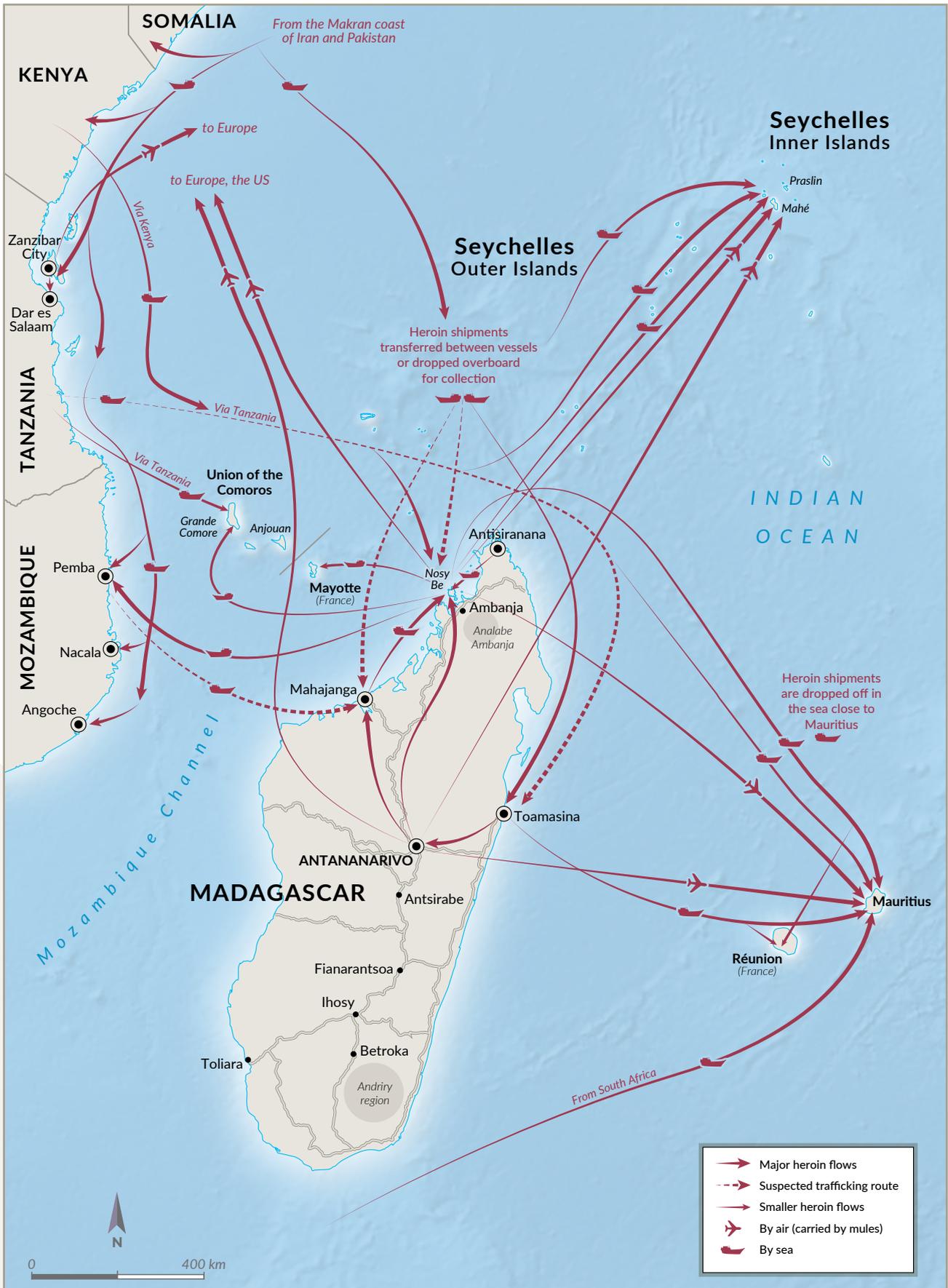
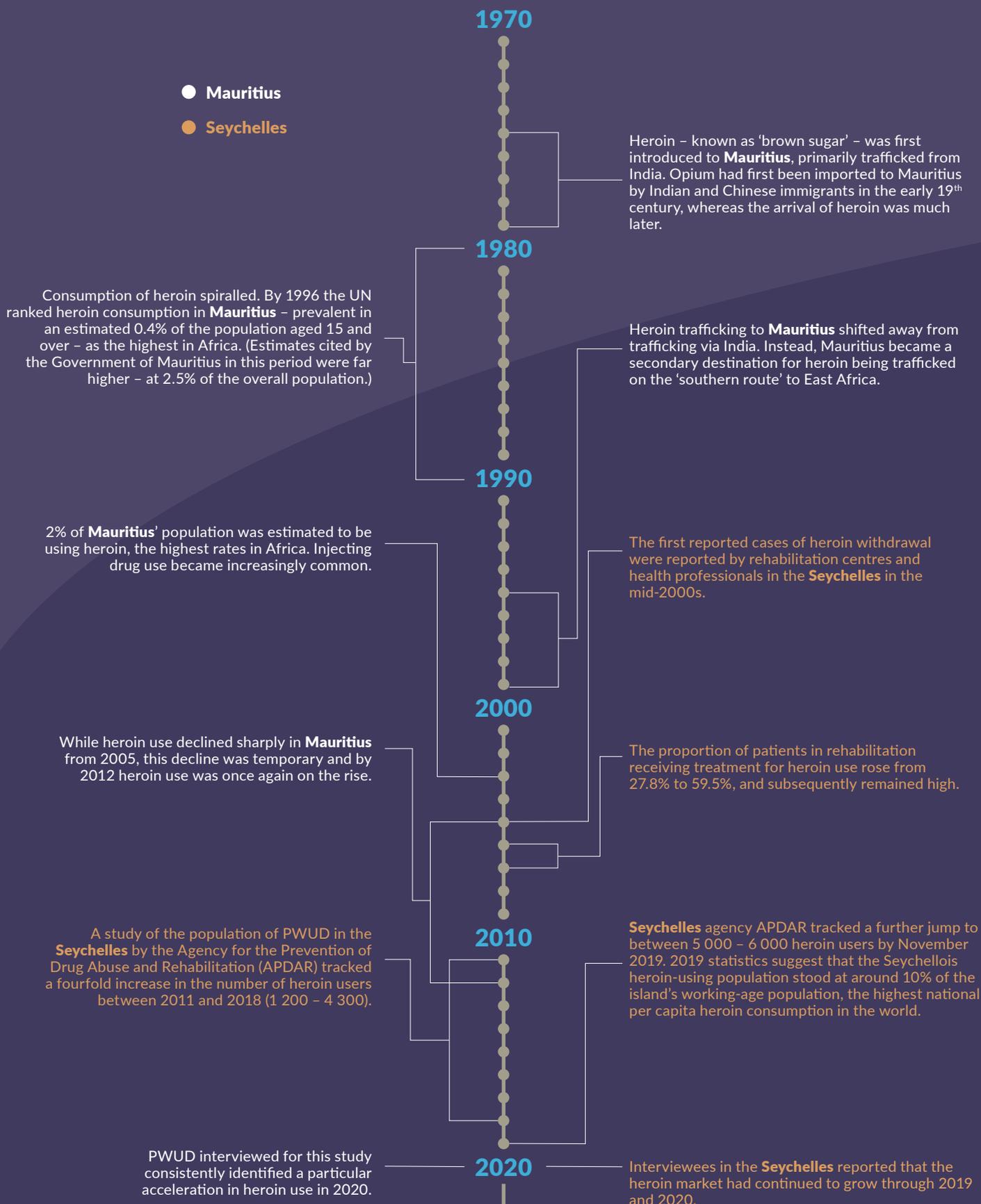


FIGURE 3 Key heroin flows through the western Indian Ocean islands.

The development of heroin markets in Mauritius and the Seychelles



By contrast, the Seychelles' heroin market is a more recent phenomenon, emerging in parallel with this period of expansion along the southern route. According to rehabilitation centres and professionals, patients first started reporting withdrawal from heroin in the mid-2000s, and heroin swiftly rose to be the principal substance for which patients sought rehabilitation treatment. According to the Seychelles' Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation (APDAR), there was a fourfold increase in the number of heroin users between 2011 and 2018 (from 1 200 to 4 300). This had reportedly jumped to between 5 000 and 6 000 heroin users by November 2019, equivalent to around 10% of the island's working-age population, making the Seychelles the country with the highest per capita heroin consumption in the world.¹⁷ Stakeholders interviewed for this research, including law enforcement, PWUD and health officials, pointed to further growth in the heroin market between 2019 and mid-2020.¹⁸

The changing role of dhows in illicit flows across the Indian Ocean

Dhows – a type of wooden fishing vessel traditionally used in the Indian Ocean – have long been the major vessel type bringing heroin from the Makran coast of Iran and Pakistan to the southern Indian Ocean.¹⁹ These vessels are also used for a range of other illicit flows through the Indian Ocean, from cargoes of other drugs such as cannabis round the Horn of Africa, arms shipments to Yemen and Somalia, human

smuggling down the East African coast and charcoal smuggling to Somalia.²⁰ Dhows, of the 'Jelbut' type as pictured below, have also recently been found to be transporting methamphetamines produced in Afghanistan and trafficked from Pakistan to southern Africa. These cases have included mixed shipments of methamphetamines and heroin.²¹



◀ A dhow – the *Payam Al Mansur* – pictured moored in the Seychelles after it was intercepted by Seychelles authorities carrying almost 100 kilograms of heroin and almost 1 kilogram of opium in April 2016. © Twitter

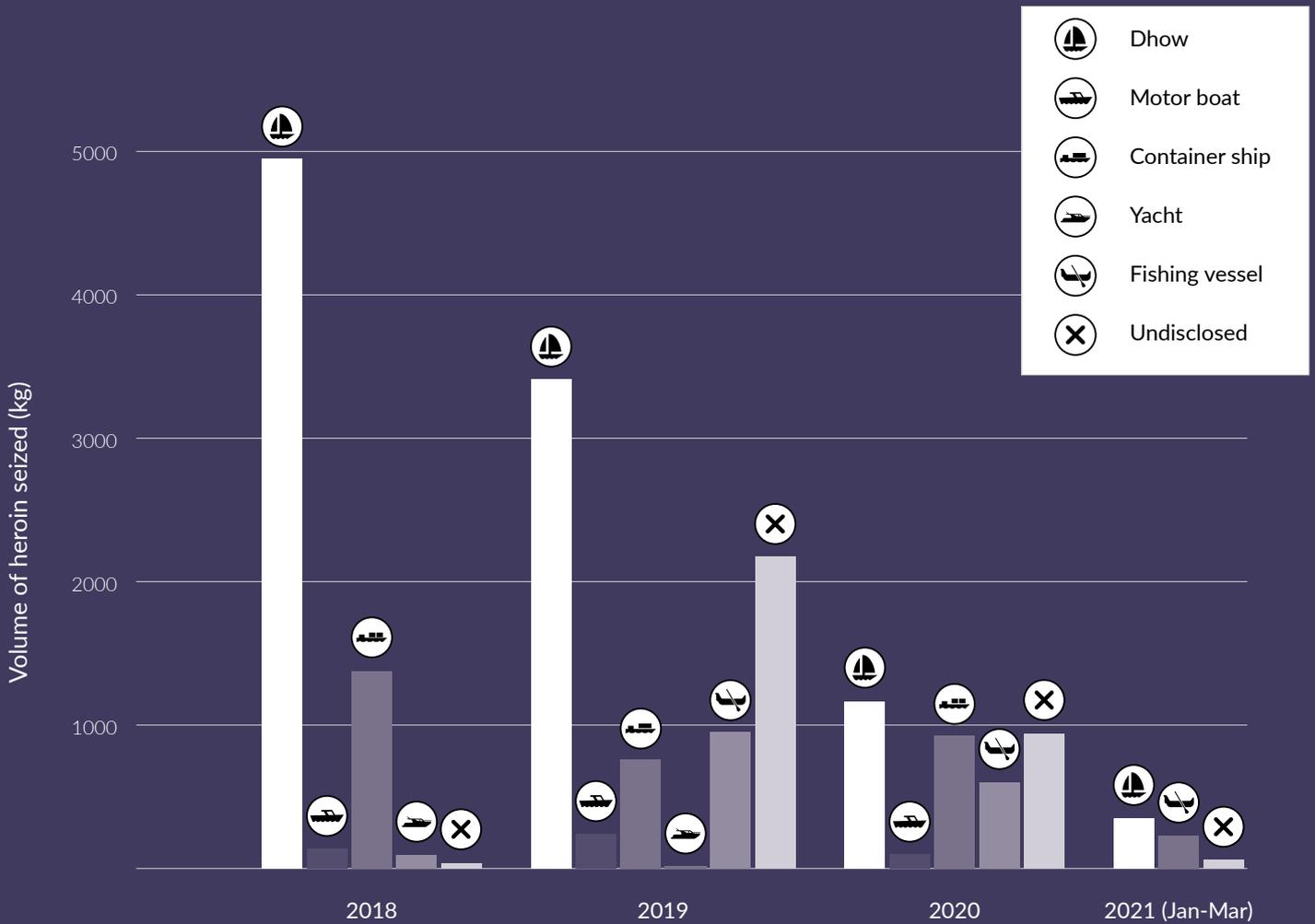


FIGURE 4 Maritime heroin seizures in the western Indian Ocean, 2018 to March 2021, by vessel type.

SOURCE: Adapted from Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre data, supplemented with external data sources, including press reports.

The popularity of dhows in illicit flows is partly due to the ubiquity of these vessels in the Indian Ocean, and their ability to travel to ports not suitable for larger vessels. Dhows are also relatively durable over long distances, with some vessels involved in heroin trafficking being adapted to further enhance their long-distance capabilities, including by adding extra-large fuel tanks.

Yet their popularity may be waning. While many interviewees in law enforcement still highlighted dhows as the major vessel type for trafficking, interviewees also cited purse seiners (a larger type of fishing vessel),²² while others argued that trafficking

modalities as a whole were shifting away from the use of dhows towards bulk carriers, steel-hulled vessels and containers, as authorities are now highly aware of dhows' historical connection to trafficking.²³ These vessels are able to travel further than dhows (meaning they could directly reach states which are currently believed to be beyond the reach of dhows, including Madagascar), and larger vessels are less affected by seasonal weather conditions. The coronavirus pandemic is reported to have impacted dhow traffic more severely than bulk cargo shipments, including in containers, and may accelerate the adoption of alternative trafficking methods.

Based on the scale of their domestic heroin consumption markets, analysis has speculated as to whether Mauritius and the Seychelles are transit points for heroin being trafficked by air to markets in Europe and the US. A 2012 US State Department report said: 'While Mauritius is not a significant transshipment location on a global scale, the island state is increasingly seen as a regional hub for heroin distribution, often intended for onward movement into Europe and even the United States.'²⁴

While it is difficult to discount this possibility completely, interviewees in this research, including members of law enforcement agencies, intelligence services, the coastguard and dealers in both countries, did not, with only one exception, share this view.²⁵ Other indicators, such as the high price of heroin in Mauritius, also mitigates against the idea of Mauritius as a transit country, as the presence of high-volume flows through the country could be expected to depress prices.

Similarly, the Comoros has also been cited as a possible transit point in the international heroin trade. One commentator suggested that bulk carriers move heroin from Iran to the Comoros before containerizing the drug for transit to Europe (leveraging the significant container port in Anjouan).²⁶ Supporting this, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has reportedly identified one bulk carrier that travels from Iran and regularly passes both the Comoros and north-eastern Madagascar (the island's primary drugs export area), which is suspected of offloading heroin to smaller vessels.²⁷ Reporting of dhows sheltering around the Comoros in 2020 following a spate of interceptions around the Mozambican coast could point towards the increased use of the Comoros as a transit point in the future.²⁸

At present, however, our research did not find evidence of the Comoros operating as a significant transit point. The archipelago was rather found to operate predominantly as a small destination market, with the majority of heroin imported from Tanzania, leveraging long-established trading and cultural links.

By contrast, Madagascar is developing as a regional drugs transshipment hub and is sometimes described as a *plaque tournante* – a 'turning point' – for drugs destined primarily to the rest of the Indian Ocean region and also further afield.²⁹ Interviewees both within and outside Madagascar consistently reported that heroin trafficking through the country has grown significantly over the past five years. The majority of heroin arriving in Madagascar is trafficked to other Indian Ocean island states, predominantly the Seychelles and Mauritius,³⁰ but interviewees in law enforcement agencies in Madagascar have reported with confidence that heroin reaching the island by sea (as explored below) is also being transported onwards by air to Europe and North America (Canada and the US), using mules.³¹

The rise of Madagascar as a transshipment point can be linked to shifts in the southern route along the East African coast. Disembarkation points for vessels carrying heroin have, in broad terms, shifted southwards along the East African coast over a number of years: from Kenya through to Tanzania and ports in northern Mozambique.³² Growing law enforcement focus on disrupting flows has played a role in displacing landing points south. Increasing seizures of heroin off the Mozambique coast and disruptions due to the conflict in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province may now be contributing to Madagascar's increasingly prominent role as a repackaging and redistribution hub.

Domestic geographic and socio-political factors combine to make Madagascar highly vulnerable to exploitation by criminal networks. There is low naval or coastguard capacity to effectively monitor the island's five-thousand-kilometre shoreline, which is peppered by informal ports and landing points. Limited infrastructure renders some rural areas difficult for government forces to access, especially when combined with issues of banditry and armed cattle rustling, meaning state oversight of some rural and coastline areas is minimal.

Chronic governance weaknesses compound these challenges. Madagascar's 2009 military coup, and the five-year transitional period (and institutional decay) which followed, proved pivotal to the development of the island's illicit markets. Between 2009 and 2014, criminal networks flourished, contributing to the rise of Madagascar's now-entrenched illegal markets in wildlife, gems, timber and other environmental products.³³ Corruption related to these markets has further damaged already weak institutions.³⁴

In light of these vulnerabilities, commentators have warned for some years that Madagascar either is, or is at risk of becoming, a hub for international drug trafficking. Our research finds that these warnings are coming to fruition. While domestic heroin consumption is – and has always been – far lower than in Mauritius and the Seychelles, Madagascar's role as a transit country is driving a domestic market. Heroin use has, particularly since 2015, been growing, particularly in urban settings such as areas of Antananarivo and Hell-Ville, the main town on the north-eastern island of Nosy Be, which is also an important maritime heroin export point.

Réunion and Mayotte were not found to play a significant role in regional heroin trafficking dynamics. Heroin use in both islands is far lower than Mauritius and the Seychelles. Instead, as explored below, trafficking routes from mainland Europe and the rise of synthetic cannabinoids are larger influences on these islands' drug economies.

Heroin prices in the Indian Ocean islands

The average price of heroin in Mauritius was, during the period of data collection in 2020, €108 per gram (MUR 5 042) – more than double the price of heroin in the Seychelles, which was on average €46 per gram (SCR 917). When broken down to price per dose (the most common volume of heroin sold at street level), PWUD in Mauritius paid approximately 50% more than PWUD in the Seychelles: €6.40 (MUR 300) compared to €4.60 (SCR 91.60) per dose.³⁶

Seychellois prices may be lower in part due to the shorter supply chain, which feeds the market directly from the Makran coast. Notably, heroin price in the Seychelles have dropped sharply over the past few years, with PWUD pointing to 2018–2020 as the period of steepest decline. While some media

reporting and statements by the Seychellois drugs authorities have linked this decline to the introduction of a large-scale methadone programme, the causes remain unclear.³⁷

In Madagascar, PWUD in Antananarivo and Nosy Be paid less – €33 (MGA 150 936) and €36 (MGA 165 454) on average per gram respectively – than PWUD in the Seychelles. This supports the characterization of the island as primarily a transit market, with a domestic consumption market met from overspill from the significant volumes being repackaged and redistributed.³⁸ The lower prices in Madagascar likely reflect both lower demand and high supply from the transit route, and the lower relative buying power of Malagasy PWUD.

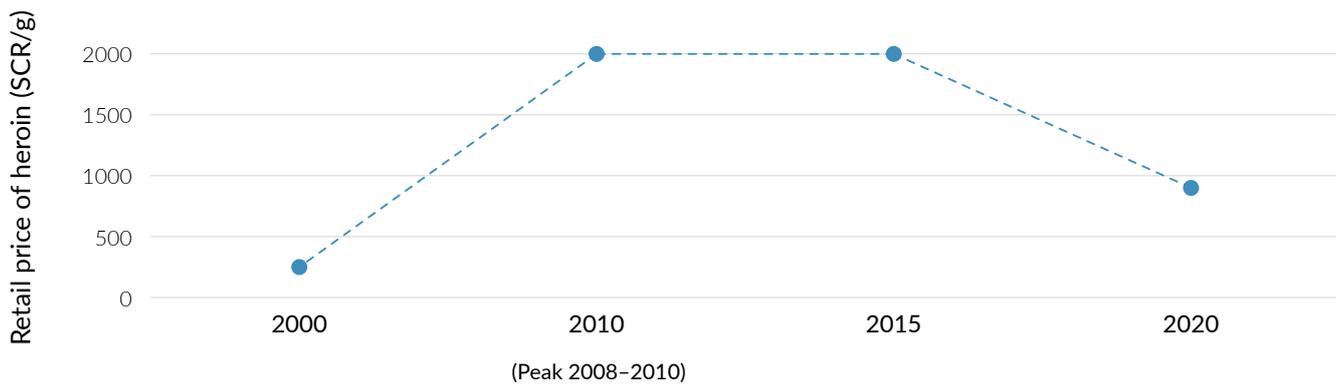


FIGURE 5 Fluctuations in estimated retail heroin price, Seychelles, 2000–2020.

NOTE: Historic data shared by local researchers (gathered through discussions with PWUD over time), and supplemented with 2020 GI-TOC survey data.

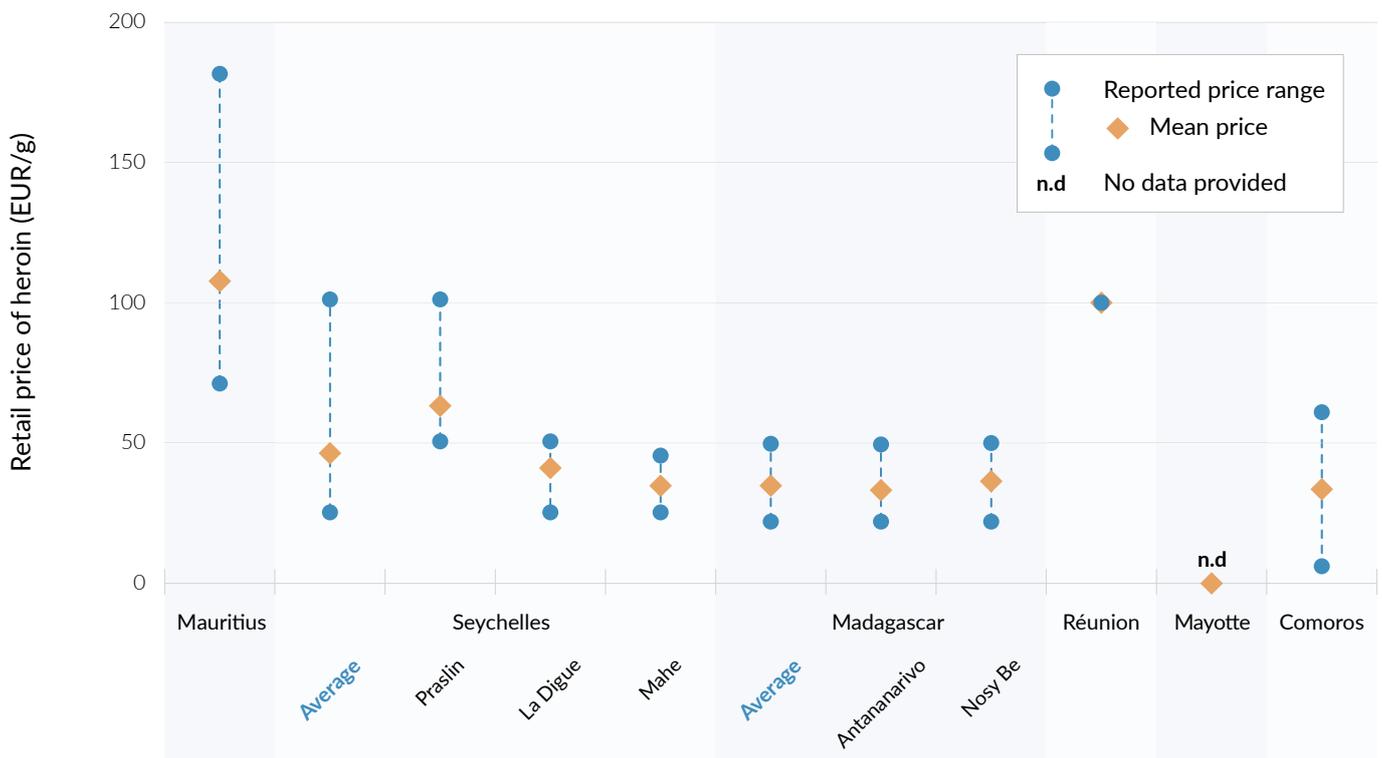


FIGURE 6 Retail heroin prices, 2020.

SOURCE: GI-TOC drug pricing survey data used for Madagascar, Seychelles and Mauritius. For the Comoros and Réunion, data collected through interviews with local stakeholders (including PWUD), supplemented by external reports.

New psychoactive substances

Synthetic cannabinoid compounds, known as *chimique* (meaning 'chemical'), are by far the most significant NPS market across the islands. Synthetic cannabinoids arrived in the region between 2011 and 2013.³⁹ By 2015, they had drastically changed the illicit drugs markets of Mauritius and Mayotte, and by 2018 that of the Comoros.

The first compounds on the Mauritius market had names such as 'Black Mamba', 'C'est pas bien' and 'Batte-dans-la-tête'. By 2020, law enforcement, PWUD and rehabilitation workers agreed that synthetic cannabinoids had become the most widely used drug on the island (with the exception of cannabis), with use particularly concentrated among the youth (including 13- to 18-year-olds).⁴⁰

In Mayotte, which had an extremely limited pre-existing drugs market, synthetic cannabinoids quickly became the island's most prevalent drug (again with the exception of cannabis), spilling over into the neighbouring Comoros islands, and effectively creating a Mahorais drug problem where none had previously existed. In contrast, usage was negligible in the Seychelles, Réunion and Madagascar at the time of writing.

The vertiginous rise in synthetic cannabinoid use is in part attributable to the nature of the market and supply chain. Synthetic cannabinoids, and their precursors, are purchased online and imported, predominantly from China. Testing by the Mauritius Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) found that 95% of synthetic cannabinoids on the island originate from China.⁴¹



FIGURE 7 Key synthetic cannabinoid flows through the western Indian Ocean islands.

Small quantities of precursors make significant volumes of chimique, which, in turn, can bring vast profits.

Imported in powder, or less commonly liquid form, largely through postal and express courier services, the cannabinoids are sometimes disguised in foodstuffs; in 2020, a spate of cannabinoid imports in Mauritius were disguised in chilli paste.⁴²

In China, precursors are manufactured legally in vast quantities, meaning they are widely available and cheap on the surface web. Dark web capabilities are not required, and neither are established transnational relationships with suppliers overseas, which can pose barriers to entry into heroin or cannabis markets.

Increasingly, synthetic cannabinoid compounds are being imported in the form of precursors, which are harder to detect. These precursors are then combined on the islands, being simply mixed with a range of easily available solvents and sprayed onto plant material, including tobacco, tea or herbs.⁴³ (In Mauritius, one of the substances mixed with the precursors is *baygon*, a pesticide;⁴⁴ the resulting chimique is known as 'strawberry' due to its sweetness.)⁴⁵ This ease of manufacture obviates the need for domestic laboratory expertise or specialist equipment (as required, for instance, for meth production).

Small quantities of precursors make significant volumes of chimique, which in turn can bring vast profits. Individuals arrested for chimique trafficking in Mayotte report that €10 of the compound can be converted into chimique with a street value in Mayotte of between €200 and €400.⁴⁶ Highlighting similar metrics, Salim Hossanee, Assistant Superintendent of the Mauritius Police Force, reported in a public forum that 1 kilogram of pure synthetic cannabinoids has a street value of over €372 000, and 1 gram of the pure compound can generate 300 grams of drugs to be sold on the street market.⁴⁷ One kingpin in Mayotte imprisoned in 2016 claimed to have made between €10 000 and €20 000 per day from the chimique trade.⁴⁸

Low costs of production and import means limited capital is required to enter the market, giving it the characteristics of a 'bridge' criminal market: new entrants use synthetic cannabinoids to build capital before entering other, more capital intensive, markets (either licit or illicit). In Mauritius, individuals have used synthetic cannabinoids to enter the drugs market and then diversified into heroin and cannabis (although given the high demand for and profits of synthetic cannabinoids, many have also chosen not to diversify). Others have used profits derived from single, or occasional, synthetic cannabinoid imports to establish businesses. These occasional importers use synthetic cannabinoids as a way of making a high return on investment, at times even crowd-funding imports. As one PWUD said, 'More and more young people dealing in drugs tend to operate like a cooperative society. They raise funds to bring in drugs.'⁴⁹

These characteristics mean that new players can easily enter the drugs market. In Mayotte, synthetic cannabinoids triggered an explosion in the number of dealers. In Mauritius, an established drugs market, synthetic cannabinoids not only swelled the market further, but also fundamentally disrupted and democratized the market.⁵⁰

Chimique is smoked, an easy method of ingestion which facilitates use. Further, the low price of synthetic cannabinoids – enabled by the relative simplicity of the supply chain – makes them accessible to a wide demographic.



A placard in Moroni, the Comorian capital, stating 'Mayotte is Comorian and will remain so forever' – reflecting the long-standing political tensions over sovereignty on the archipelago. The Union of the Comoros gained independence from France in 1974, but Mayotte voted to remain French. Mayotte's status has been a source of diplomatic conflict since. © Alastair Nelson

In Mayotte, while synthetic cannabinoid consumption first arose in young people across the island's socio-economic demographic, it has more recently become concentrated among poorer communities, particularly in groups of Comorian irregular migrants to Mayotte. In Mauritius, rising cannabis prices (see further explanation below) have made synthetic cannabinoids the more affordable option.⁵¹

As chimique compounds are predominantly purchased online, high rates of internet access appear influential in the emergence of the market. Mauritius has a burgeoning information and communications technology sector, while in Mayotte the explosion of synthetic cannabinoid use occurred in parallel to a spike in internet penetration rates. Penetration particularly accelerated from 2011, where the island became a French overseas department, triggering a growth in investment reflected in quickly enhanced connectivity (penetration jumped from 10% in 2007 to 43% in 2017).⁵²

However, while this could be taken to suggest that jurisdictions with low levels of internet penetration (such as Madagascar) could benefit from a degree of protection, the development of the market in the Comoros suggests that this is a false comfort.

Synthetic cannabinoids were first noticed in the Comoros on the island of Anjouan in 2017. Customs and coastguard officials in the Comoros report that synthetic cannabinoids first arrived via passengers on

the ferry from Mayotte.⁵³ *Kwassa kwassa* – small fishing boats which are used to smuggle irregular migrants and cannabis into Mayotte – may also carry synthetic cannabinoids on the return journey back to the Comoros,⁵⁴ although Mahorais customs and police have not reported any seizures of synthetic cannabinoids on the passenger ferry or intercepted *kwassa*.⁵⁵ Regardless of the supply route, synthetic cannabinoid use in the Comoros has grown at an alarming rate, and Comorian interviewees consistently identify Mayotte as the source, noting that synthetic cannabinoids reached Anjouan (the easternmost of the islands under the Comorian administration and closest to Mayotte) first, and by 2019 had diffused to the other islands.

Although initially imported in composite form, groups on Anjouan quickly developed domestic production facilities. Existing passenger ferries and trading links between the Comoros and both Madagascar and Tanzania could provide an avenue for synthetic cannabinoids to spread further.⁵⁶ The potential spread of the synthetic cannabinoid market is particularly concerning as the public health impacts of the market are significant, as explored further below.

Although other synthetic drugs such as ecstasy and LSD are available in the region, primarily in Réunion, Mauritius and the Seychelles, consumption is less widespread, remaining concentrated in wealthier elements of society.

Synthetic cannabinoid prices in the Indian Ocean islands

While heroin and cannabis are far more expensive in Mauritius than on the other islands, synthetic cannabinoids are significantly cheaper in Mauritius than in the Comoros or Mayotte, the other two key synthetic cannabinoid consumer markets.⁵⁷ Cannabinoid prices in Mauritius demonstrated remarkable consistency across the island.

In both Mauritius and Mayotte, synthetic cannabinoids were perceived to be affordable across social strata. In Mayotte, an additional strain, termed *la chimique du pauvre*, has been developed to cater to the most disadvantaged PWUD.⁵⁸ By contrast, in the Comoros PWUD stressed that synthetic cannabinoids remain expensive, particularly in comparison to cannabis.

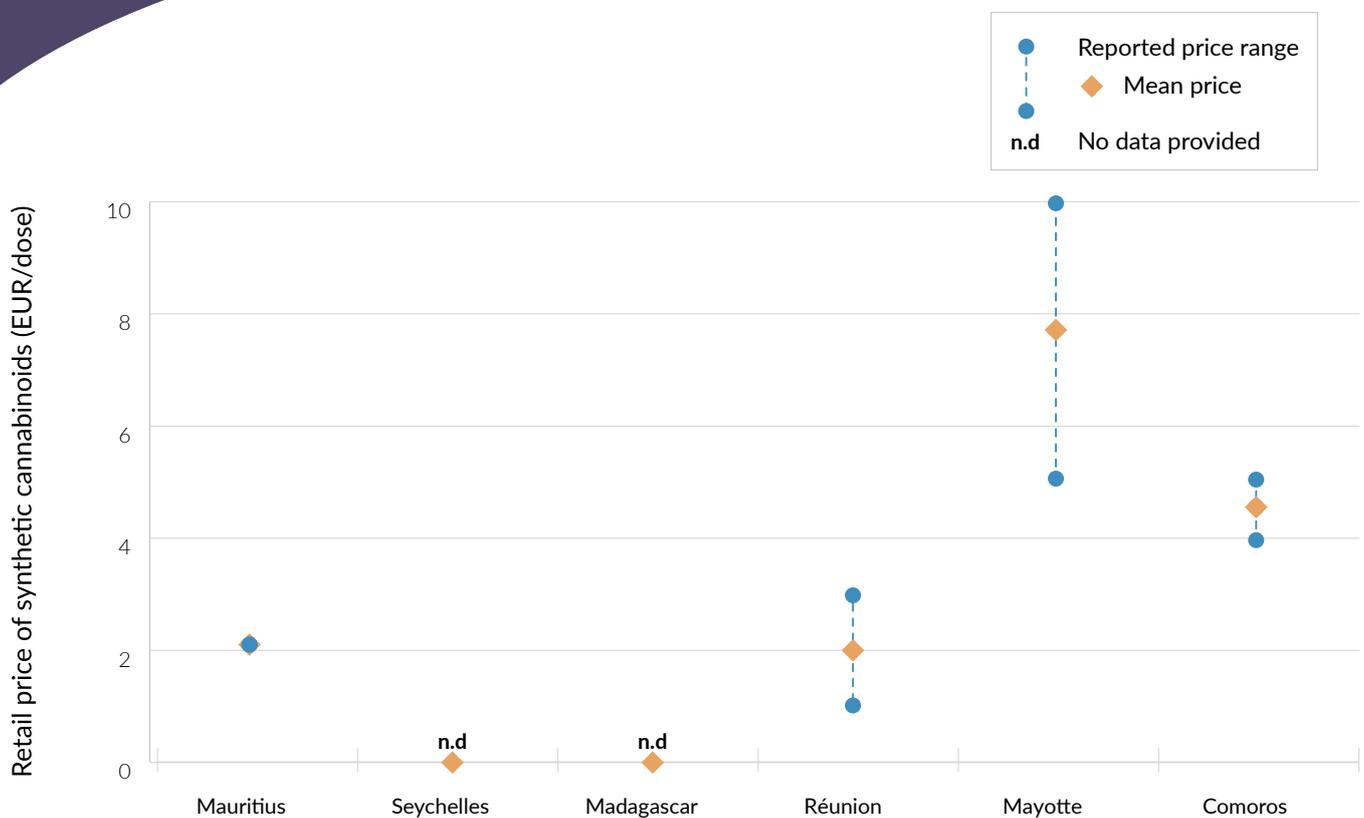


FIGURE 8 Retail synthetic cannabinoid prices, 2020.

NOTE: No data is provided here for Seychelles and Madagascar because synthetic cannabinoid use has not been reported in these countries.

SOURCE: GI-TOC drug pricing survey data used for Mauritius. For the Comoros, Mayotte and Réunion, data is from interviews with local stakeholders (including PWUD), supplemented by external reports.

Cocaine

Cocaine use, though still much smaller than the Indian Ocean market for heroin, is on the rise, particularly in the Seychelles and Réunion. The diversification of established trafficking networks into cocaine means that the drug could quickly gain traction in the island states.

PWUD in the Seychelles reported that cocaine first became widely available across the islands in early 2019, particularly in the form of crack.⁵⁹ Seizures point to Brazil as the primary point of origin for cocaine entering the Seychelles, with the drug predominantly imported by air. While many mules arriving in the Seychelles start their journey in Brazil (transiting via southern or East Africa), others come directly from countries in East Africa, including Kenya and Madagascar.⁶⁰ From both points of origin, seizure data points to Ethiopia's Addis Ababa and South Africa's OR Tambo airports as key transit points to the Seychelles.⁶¹

Madagascar operates as a growing transit point for cocaine (although as of 2020 the volumes transiting the country were reported to be far smaller than those of heroin). Cocaine originating from Latin American source countries (Colombia, Bolivia and Brazil were all cited by interviewees) makes its way to Madagascar via East and southern African countries, in particular South Africa, and to a lesser extent Kenya and Tanzania by air. Consumption of cocaine (though, again, to a lesser extent than heroin) was also perceived to be

rising sharply in Madagascar, though the price of cocaine means it is perceived as an 'exclusive' drug and unaffordable to a large proportion of the population.

Cocaine arrives in Madagascar primarily by sea, but onward transport is primarily by air, both to other Indian Ocean island states (primarily the Seychelles), and, to a lesser degree, to Europe and the US. For example, Jean-Francois Campo, alias Jeff 'le Malgache', was arrested in 2013 and subsequently sentenced to five years in jail for overseeing an international cocaine trafficking ring that sent cocaine (in relatively small volumes) from Peru via Madagascar to Réunion in 2012 and 2013.⁶²

Seizure data and interviewees point to imports to Réunion being predominantly from mainland France, by post and air, rather than from mainland Africa. Although seizures remain low by volume, legal, medical and law enforcement professionals concur that cocaine has become far more available and widespread since 2015.⁶³

Rising cocaine use and importation was also reported in Mauritius, although to a lesser extent. In 2019 the greatest proportion of seizures were associated with cocaine, but this was due to what appears to have been a one-off bumper seizure of 93 kilograms.⁶⁴ Although local interviewees were certain that the consignment was not intended for the local market, ensuing investigations have not confirmed the actors behind the consignment, or its final intended destination.

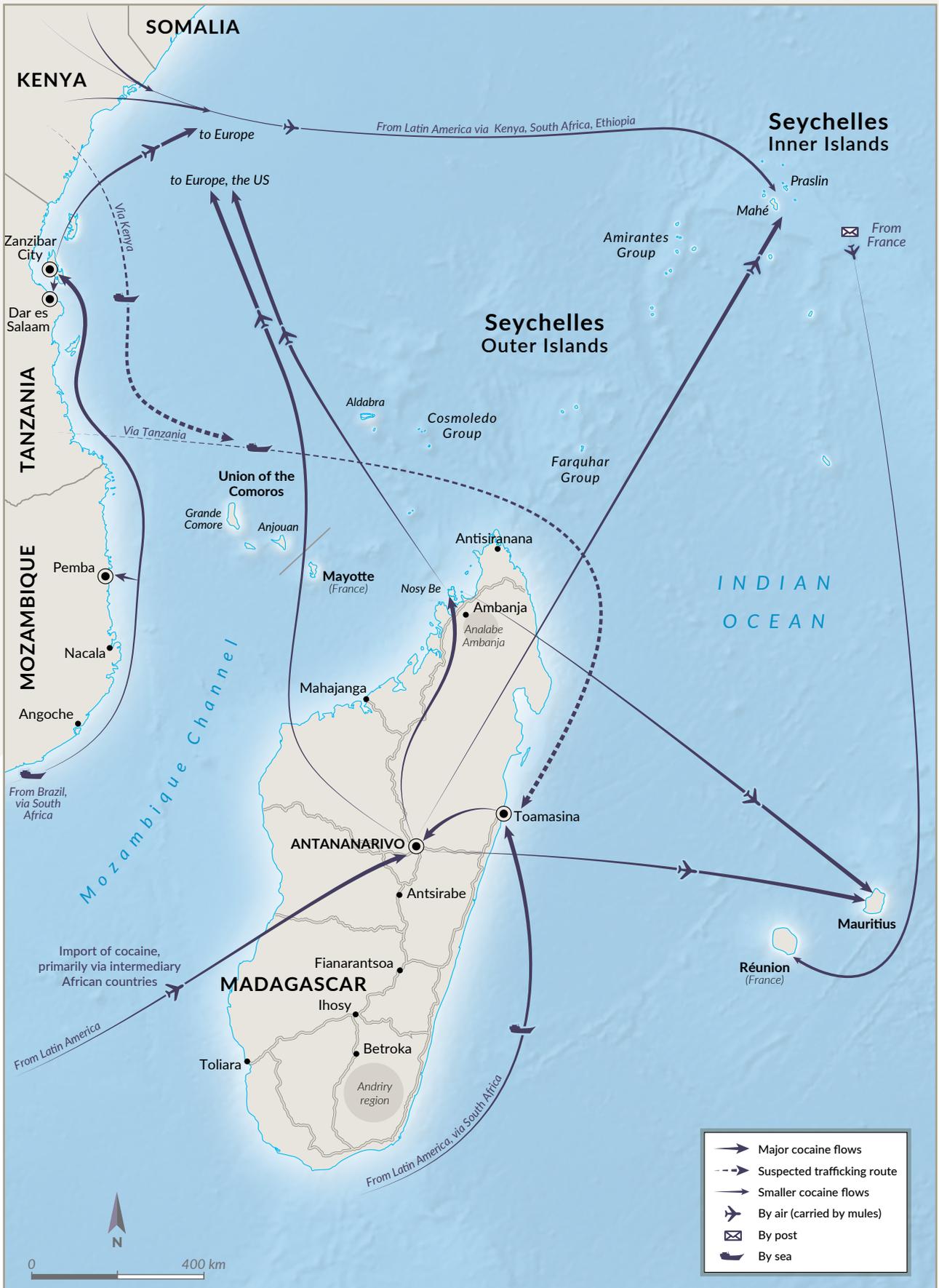


FIGURE 9 Cocaine flows through the western Indian Ocean islands.

Cocaine prices in the Indian Ocean islands

Prices reported for cocaine across the islands far outstripped those for heroin or other drugs, reaching an eye-watering range of between €253 and €405 (SCR 5 000 to SCR 8 000) per gram in the Seychelles. This could reflect the fact that cocaine is a relatively new market in these islands and lacks a wide consumer base. Similarly, the average price per gram reported in Mauritius was €296 (MUR 12 600).

PWUD in both Mauritius and the Seychelles reported that the drug is still seen as very expensive.⁶⁵ Similarly, cocaine in Réunion costs between €120 and €150 per gram, more than twice the price it sells for in Paris,⁶⁶ despite the fact that street purity is reportedly much lower (between 10% and 15%, compared to 67% in mainland France).⁶⁷ This is in line with a broader trend

of prices being higher in French Overseas Territories, including Réunion, than in mainland France. (The high price of basic commodities engendered the movement known as *la vie chère* – ‘the costly life’.)

The comparatively lower prices reported in Madagascar – €68 per gram (MGA 309 524) – likely reflect both the relative buying power of the average Malagasy cocaine consumer (compared to Réunionois or Seychellois, for example), and Madagascar’s role as a transit point. Nevertheless, prices remain high relative to average incomes, including in the communities where drug consumption is concentrated. This would suggest that cocaine supply to Madagascar is plentiful (as destined not only for Madagascar itself but other markets), but demand remains low and the consumer base small.

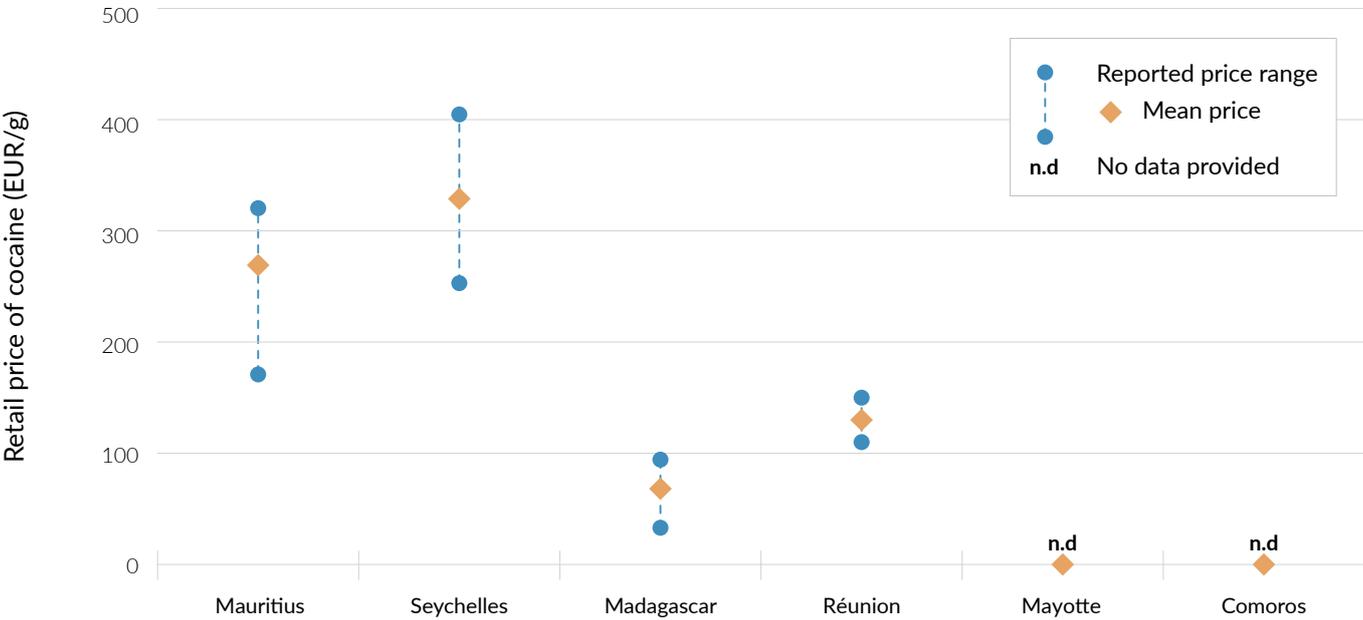


FIGURE 10 Retail cocaine prices, 2020.

SOURCE: GI-TOC drug pricing survey data used for Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritius. For Réunion, data collected through interviews with local stakeholders (including PWUD), supplemented by external reports.

In Madagascar, fields of cannabis covering hundreds of hectares are found in the main production areas of Analabe Ambanja in the north and Betroka in the south-east.

Cannabis

Cannabis has a long history in the Indian Ocean, and has been cultivated across the islands. In the modern cannabis market, two key trends have emerged. Cannabis production has boomed in Madagascar, which exports regionally, while eradication efforts in Mauritius have increased reliance on imports and fuelled the island's synthetic cannabinoid market.

In Madagascar, fields of cannabis covering hundreds of hectares are found in the main production areas of Analabe Ambanja in the north and Betroka in the south-east. Cannabis production offers a livelihood for members of communities in remote rural areas where there are few alternatives. While widely consumed in Madagascar – the majority of Malagasy-grown cannabis is for the domestic market – large and increasing quantities are trafficked by sea to other Indian Ocean island states, primarily Mauritius and the Comoros (the latter also operating as a transit point to Mayotte).

In Mauritius, significant law enforcement efforts have targeted cannabis cultivation and consumption.⁶⁸ Cannabis was principally grown on the slopes of the mountains surrounding Chamarel in the south-west of the island, often in the middle of sugar cane fields in an effort to disguise the crop. However, such efforts had limited success against the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU), which used helicopters to spot and spray crops. These operations, alongside more traditional uprooting techniques, have destroyed a significant proportion of domestic cultivation.

This has had two key impacts. Firstly, it has driven up the price of cannabis, which increased almost fourfold between 2015 and 2020, from €15 to €57 (MUR 800–MUR 2 675), transforming cannabis into a 'luxury item'.⁶⁹ Stakeholders consistently identified this as a key driver of surging synthetic cannabinoid use, as this drug is far more affordable. As one PWUD in Mauritius explained: 'Most pot smokers shifted to synthetic drugs because cannabis is becoming a luxury. Being well paid, I can afford it, else I would have stopped. Can you imagine that the price of cannabis is almost as high as heroin?'⁷⁰

Secondly, plummeting cultivation in Mauritius has boosted imports from Madagascar, and more recently Réunion, to feed demand. The difference in price between the points of origin and sale makes this an extremely profitable venture for exporters: street-level cannabis prices in Mauritius are over 2 000% higher than those in Madagascar, even at the lower range of prices cited in Mauritius.⁷¹

Réunion's exports of cannabis to Mauritius is the sole instance of the island operating as drugs exporter, and arguably its key engagement in the inter-island drugs market. The June 2019 interception of 142 kilograms of cannabis near a small port on the eastern coast of the island, by far the largest seizure, highlighted the scale of exports.⁷² In other respects, Réunion's small drugs market is more closely



Cannabis is packed into sacks like these, attached to wooden poles to enable it to be transported on foot from the Andriy region, near Betroka, primarily to Antananarivo. © Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa

ties to mainland France. Although with close cultural ties to the other Creole islands, Réunion is distant from its neighbours both in geography (226 kilometres away from Mauritius, the closest island) and trading links. Instead, Réunion is economically and politically linked with France. Its economy, both licit and illicit, reflects this.

Comorian law enforcement report that cannabis imports from Madagascar, particularly from Nosy Be, have increased over the last five years, partly as a result of decreasing local cultivation (in this case not driven

by eradication efforts). Smaller volumes are also carried on the passenger ferry running from Mahajanga, and on the weekly cargo ferry from Tanzania.

There are also reports that Madagascar has developed facilities for refining cannabis into cannabis resin, which is then shipped to the other Indian Ocean islands, particularly to the Comoros and Mayotte.⁷³

Contrasting to developing trends around the world and across East and southern Africa, none of the Indian Ocean island states have made moves to decriminalize or regulate the production and consumption of cannabis.



FIGURE 11 Key cannabis flows through the western Indian Ocean islands.



Cannabis prices in the Indian Ocean

The spike in cannabis prices in Mauritius stands in contrast to the relatively stable and low prices for cannabis in other islands. For example, in the Seychelles the price (at SCR 35–50 (€1.70–€2.50) per joint) has reportedly been stable for over a decade.⁷⁴ Similarly, while cannabis prices in Mauritius escalated even further during the COVID-19 lockdown between March and June 2020, no such change was reported in the other islands.

In Madagascar, PWUD in Antananarivo reported that cannabis cultivated in Betroka is slightly more expensive than that cultivated in Ambanja (although the latter is reportedly of better quality as a result of the drier climate in the north). This reflects the longer road journey from Betroka, which incurs greater expense, in part due to the need to pass through, and in some cases bribe, a larger number of road checkpoints.

Madagascar's Gendarmerie Nationale commence an operation to destroy cannabis fields in Ambalabe, in the north of the country. In this operation alone, in July 2020, more than 100 hectares of cannabis were burned and a dozen people were arrested.

© Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa



Port Sainte-Rose, Réunion, where 142 kilograms of cannabis en route to Mauritius were seized in 2019, shining the spotlight on cannabis trafficking from Réunion to Mauritius. © Sebastien Gignoux

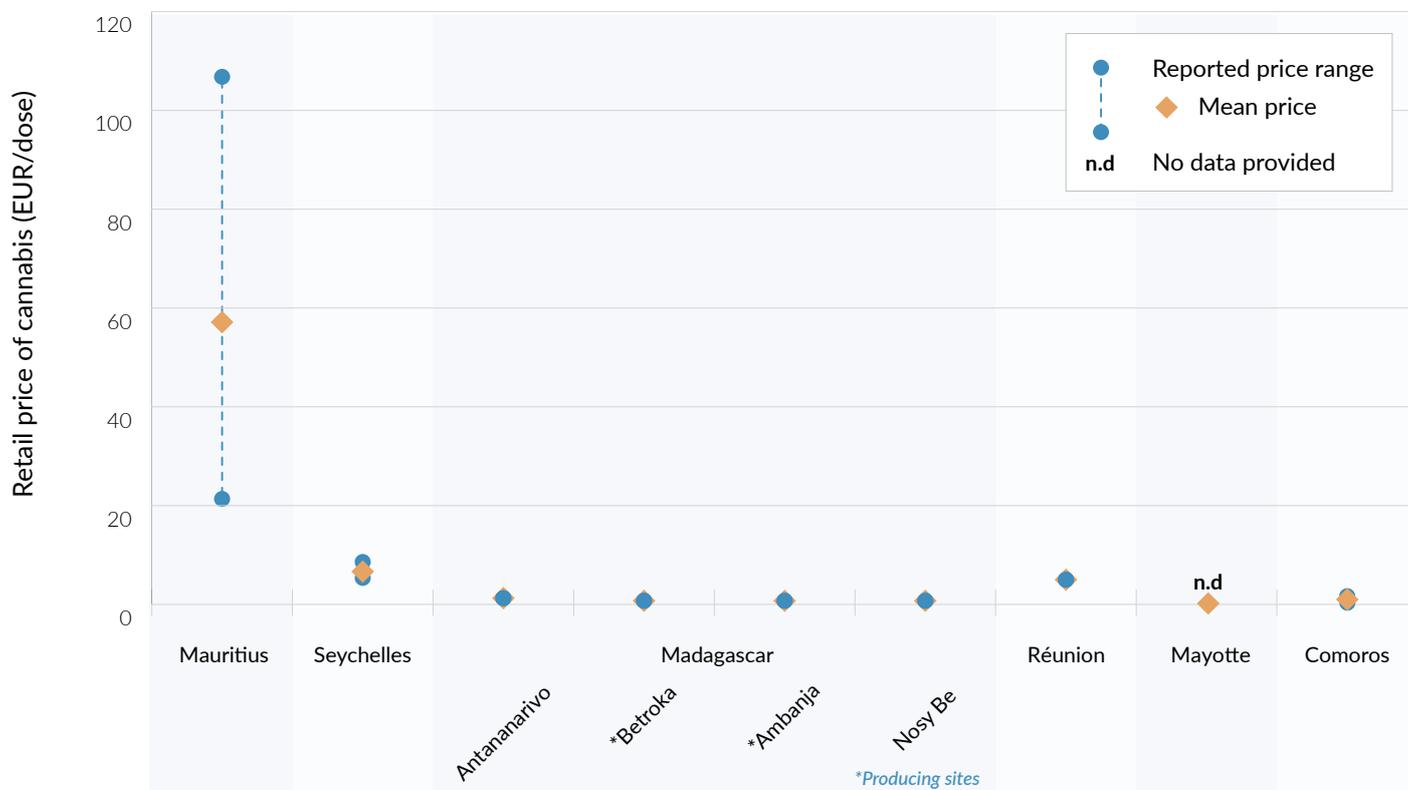


FIGURE 12 Retail cannabis prices, 2020.

NOTE: Cannabis prices in Mauritius are significantly higher than any of the other islands.

SOURCE: GI-TOC drug pricing survey data used for Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros. For the Seychelles and Réunion, data collected through interviews with local stakeholders (including PWUD), supplemented by external reports.

Major events in the Indian Ocean drug markets

- Mauritius
- Réunion
- Seychelles
- Comoros
- Madagascar
- Regional
- Mayotte

1970

● Heroin use first emerges in **Mauritius**. In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, rates of heroin use rise to become the highest in Africa.

The 'southern route' for heroin trafficking, from the coast of Pakistan via East Africa towards end markets in Europe, begins to expand significantly.

● **Mauritius** begins a pioneering policy approach addressing the health impacts of drug use. This included the roll-out of significant opioid substitution and needle exchange programmes, together with demand-reduction programming, including media campaigns. Drug possession and use remain criminalized.

● The Combined Maritime Forces Task Force 150 (CTF 150) is launched. CTF150 is made up of a coalition of nations and dedicated to the disruption of illicit maritime activity. It is the most prominent naval force intercepting drug shipments in the Western Indian Ocean.

1980

● Synthetic cannabinoid use first reported in the Indian Ocean islands. These substances are now a significant part of the drugs market in Mayotte, the Comoros and Mauritius.

● A military coup takes place in **Madagascar**. During the following five-year transitional period, corruption proliferated and criminal networks flourished. Illegal markets in wildlife, gems, timber and other environmental products became entrenched. This has shaped the political environment in which Madagascar's drug economy now operates.

1990

● Admissions to health institutions in **Mauritius** relating to synthetic drug use, primarily cannabinoids, increase fourfold. This upward trends began to level off in 2018.

● Admissions to health institutions in **Mayotte** relating to synthetic drug use, primarily cannabinoids, increase significantly, then decline after 2015.

2000

● The population of heroin users in the **Seychelles** increases fourfold between 2011 and 2018 – from 1 200 to 4 300 users – according to data collected by APDAR. APDAR tracked a further jump to between 5 000 and 6 000 heroin users by November 2019.

● The **Seychelles** introduces the Misuse of Drugs Act 2016, marking a significant shift towards a public-health orientated response promoting the treatment, education and rehabilitation of PWUD, while also bringing in changes for law enforcement and offenders. The Seychelles now has a large-scale methadone programme administered by the APDAR agency that was established in 2017.

2010

● Synthetic cannabinoid use is first reported in Anjouan, the island of the **Comoros** archipelago closest to Mayotte.

● Synthetic cannabinoid use becomes widespread across the islands of the **Comoros** archipelago.

● Heroin use begins to grow in **Madagascar**.

● Prices for cannabis in **Mauritius** increase fourfold in five years. This is possibly attributable to law enforcement efforts to eradicate cultivation of cannabis on the island. Cannabis is instead imported from neighbouring Réunion and Madagascar.

● Interviewees in **Réunion** report a period of expansion of the drugs market. Cocaine becomes more easily available.

2020

● Methamphetamines produced in Afghanistan are identified along the 'southern route' alongside heroin shipments. Methamphetamine use is reported for the first time in the Seychelles.

● The **Mauritius** Commission of Inquiry report is released. The report emphasized that the drugs market was protected by pervasive corruption across state infrastructure, including customs officials, prosecutors and the prison service.

● PWUD in the **Seychelles** report that cocaine became widely available in the islands.

● The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic leads to the shutdown of the tourism industry, a major part of the economy for many of the island states. Remittances of citizens living overseas drops, heavily impacting lower-income island states, particularly Madagascar and the Comoros.

● The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) adds **Mauritius** to its 'grey list' of countries with strategic deficiencies in their regimes to counter money laundering and terrorist financing. FATF identified 'drugs and drug related offences' as a key source of illicit finance. Mauritius remains on the 'grey list' following an update in February 2021.

● The **Seychelles** is added to the EU's list of 'non-cooperative jurisdictions' which now includes 12 nations listed because of concern that their policy environments support tax fraud or evasion, and money laundering. The country remains on the list following an update in February 2021.

2020



MARKET CHARACTERISTICS

Chinatown, Port Louis, Mauritius. © Walter Bibikow via Getty Images



Drug trafficking networks in the Indian Ocean islands

While the island states are closely connected via multiple drug trafficking routes, the structure of each island's drugs market is unique.

Interviewees in Madagascar reported that the drugs market is controlled by a small number of major traffickers, who largely direct operations from Antananarivo. These traffickers are not specialized by drug type, but work in heroin, cocaine and methamphetamines,⁷⁵ cooperating with overseas networks for international trade and lower-level localized networks to service the domestic market. Sources in Malagasy intelligence services and in the drug market in Antananarivo specified that these major traffickers may be as few as five,⁷⁶ while other interviewees described a small number with a greater degree of generality. The exception to this is the cannabis market, which has very distinct dynamics, particularly in the cannabis producing regions (see 'Cannabis markets in Madagascar: a unique political economy' box below).

Sources identified these major traffickers to be nationals from mainland Africa, specifically Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria.⁷⁷ The 2019 arrest of Lusinga Adam Martin, a South African national alleged to be the leader of a major trafficking network moving drugs through Madagascar, highlighted this international involvement: Martin's is considered to be the most prominent drugs case prosecuted in Madagascar in recent years.⁷⁸ High-level Mauritian traffickers were also reported to conduct business in Madagascar, reflecting the substantial integration between the two drug markets.

These players have reportedly dominated the Malagasy drugs market for many years, even as the market has grown significantly, suggesting that new entrants find it difficult to compete with established networks with pre-existing connections to overseas suppliers and buyers and entrenched protection networks among law enforcement.

Smaller networks operate in key urban areas in Madagascar to service the domestic market. In Nosy Be, the local market is reportedly dominated by a single family, while dealers operating in the Antananarivo suburbs such as 67ha are predominantly from the north of Madagascar. This suggests there may be social barriers to entry, with dealers keeping recruitment into the networks among their own communities.⁷⁹



Rodrigues Prison in Mauritius. Major drug traffickers in Mauritius reportedly control their networks from inside prison walls. © INTERFOTO / Alamy Stock Photo

The higher echelons of the market in the Comoros also demonstrate significant stability. In interviews, low-level dealers report that the 'bosses', or *caïds* in French, have been established for years. *Caïds* facilitate trafficking through their close connections with (or membership of) the political and security establishment. The lower-level domestic distribution networks appear more open, and PWUD report that new dealers enter and leave the market regularly.⁸⁰

Unlike in Madagascar, the Comorian drugs market is controlled largely by Comorian nationals, although importers were reported to be primarily Malagasy and Tanzanian (reflecting the key source countries for the Comorian drugs market). Similarly, drugs in Mauritius and the Seychelles are a domestically controlled business, with connections to overseas networks primarily to facilitate import, for example, from dhows travelling from the Makran coast.

In the Seychelles, it was reported that a small number of individuals coordinate large-scale heroin imports.⁸¹ Their established connections with overseas suppliers allows them to occupy a niche in the market which other new entrants cannot easily compete with.⁸² Protection of these figures by corrupt elements in law enforcement and the state also makes their position stable.⁸³ Law enforcement sources stated that the major players in the market may number as few as five (a view confirmed by some interviewees with links to the drugs market), but others argued that there are more than 15 importers who supply more than 20 domestic networks.⁸⁴ The growing scale of heroin consumption – which increased fourfold between 2011 and 2018 – has made the market increasingly lucrative, tempting a greater number of new dealers into the market.

As the market has grown, it has experienced a parallel increase in fluidity, and some new entrants have been able to penetrate the upper echelons of network hierarchies. A similar trend occurred in the development of the market in Mauritius, where an initially small number of predominantly Muslim networks (approximately six in the 1980s) based in the Plaine Verte suburb of Port Louis multiplied and diversified in ethnicity and geography over time.⁸⁵ However, the large-scale disruption the Mauritian drugs market experienced following the advent of synthetic cannabinoids in 2015 has not as yet any parallel in the Seychelles.

The structure of the Mauritian drugs market was originally built around profits from heroin trafficking,

which required long-standing relationships with suppliers, and was thus controlled by a smaller number of players. Elements of these structures remain: three of the most commonly cited top heroin kingpins – Peroomal Veeren, Siddick Islam and Curly Chowrimootoo (alias 'Tinana') – are long-standing figures in Mauritius's drugs market. According to ADSU estimates, there are only between three and five high-level kingpins, a figure broadly corroborated by other interviewees, suggesting these individuals could control a significant proportion of the heroin market.⁸⁶ Dubbed the 'trio of hell of heroin trafficking' by local media, all are serving lengthy prison sentences. However, stakeholders reported that all three continue to coordinate their business from prison, facilitated by corrupt elements of the prison services and in close cooperation with each other and powerful networks operating outside prison.⁸⁷

The emergence of synthetic cannabinoids triggered an explosion in the number of *ti patron* (Creole for 'small kingpins'), who operate alongside these long-standing heroin importers. As outlined above (see 'New psychoactive substances'), the synthetic cannabinoid market poses extremely low barriers to entry and offers significant profits, driving a burst of new entrants and 'a democratization of the trade'.⁸⁸ Booming demand meant that new entrants did not displace existing players, but operated in parallel or collaboration with them, driving expansion of the market.

Some long-standing heroin trafficking networks, such as *Démolition*, diversified into synthetic cannabinoids while remaining heavily involved in heroin trafficking (both imported independently and sourced through wholesale importers). *Démolition*, a powerful network which has been active for over a decade, controls the territory of Roche Bois near the port area of the capital, a drug-selling hotspot and likely the most profitable territory on the island.

Similarly, domestic distributors typically deal in both heroin and synthetic cannabinoids alongside other drugs (although some specialize in cannabis). However, although many networks and low-level dealers engage in both heroin and synthetic cannabinoids, there remains a distinction between the two markets. Some high-level players specialize in one, and control of the synthetic cannabinoid market is far more fragmented.

This dispersed control is a characteristic of synthetic cannabinoid markets across the Indian Ocean islands. In Mayotte, the advent of synthetic cannabinoids

also triggered a surge in the number of players in the drugs market, which had been extremely limited beforehand. Among the new entrants, there is a clear distinction between importers – some of whom have little ongoing connection to the market after selling on the chemicals – and domestic distribution networks. Law enforcement arrest statistics demonstrate significant involvement of overseas, predominantly French, nationals in the former.⁸⁹ By contrast, gangs of young unemployed irregular migrants – predominantly Comorian nationals – reportedly play a significant role in distribution.

While this distinction between import and domestic distribution is less clear in Réunion, the market is similarly fragmented and dispersed. Synthetic cannabinoid use is low, but consumption of other types of synthetic drugs, particularly ecstasy, is rising. Their purchase is heavily reliant on dark web purchases and postal imports, which can be coordinated by individuals in small volumes, rather than requiring well-connected network structures. Although networks with connections in Europe coordinate imports by air, including of cocaine and cannabis resin, these are reported to be of limited sophistication.



Heroin seized by the customs service in Toamasina, Madagascar, in connection with the arrest of a major suspected drug trafficker known as 'Papa Freddy', in May 2019, considered to be the most significant drugs arrest in Madagascar in recent years. The numbers on the packaging of the heroin are reportedly used by heroin suppliers to correspond with the correct recipients of the shipment. © *Brigade des stupefiants-Douanes Madagascar*

Violence

Drug markets of the islands of the western Indian Ocean are characterized by a notable lack of violence. In Madagascar, there were very few reports of violence at any level of the market (with the notable exception of cannabis-producing regions, as explained in the box below), while in Mauritius and the Seychelles the occasional reports of violence relate only to lower-level dealers and middlemen within the local distribution market, not to high-level kingpins.

Across the islands, where violence does occur, it rarely involves firearms.⁹⁰ Although high-level traffickers are reported to carry firearms in Mauritius,⁹¹ Madagascar⁹² and (extremely rarely) in the Comoros, these are cited to be for 'personal security' and appear to play a more

symbolic role in protection, rather than being used in territorial disputes or to coerce members of other trafficking networks.⁹³

One significant exception to this dynamic is within the cannabis-producing region of Betroka in Madagascar (see box 'Cannabis markets in Madagascar, a unique political economy'). Another exception is the chimique market in Mayotte, which experiences petty gang violence, in some instances involving firearms imported illicitly from Anjouan in the Comoros.⁹⁴

In Madagascar, Colonel Ramaromisamalala Mamy Marly, head of the counter-drug brigade in the National Gendarmerie, noted that drug networks avoid violence out of a wish to 'operate discreetly' and avoid attention

of law enforcement.⁹⁵ Similarly, in Mauritius, the lack of violence was partly attributed to a concerted strategy among players in the drugs market to minimize police attention, characterized as a 'non-aggression pact' by one ADSU official.⁹⁶ Flying under the radar is particularly important in Mauritius, where tourism is a significant source of employment and revenue. Not only do players in the drugs market directly benefit from the tourism sector, but outbreaks of violence tarnish the pristine reputation of the island and could draw a more strident state response, with entrenched protection networks set aside by a need to protect the state's GDP.

In the Seychelles, incidents of drug-related violence are reported to be becoming more frequent. Among these are a number of 'disappearances' thought to be linked to drug trafficking. However, these reports have not been confirmed by police or linked to the drugs trade in the domestic press. Some interviewees cited a lack of press freedom in the Seychelles as curtailing publicly available information on drugs and drug-related violence.⁹⁷

The high degree of protection offered by state structures and local communities alike in Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles also limits the need for violence.⁹⁸ Further, high levels of collusion and co-financing of imports are reported among major

importers, financiers and kingpins across these three countries. While greater competition exists at street level, there remains some level of collaboration: in Mauritius, dealers 'lend' drugs to other dealers on the understanding that the favour will be repaid if they are ever short. Said one PWUD and dealer: 'Dealers won't fight on the streets so as not to have any trouble with the neighbourhood. Even if one kingpin controls a territory, they tend to help each other when there is a shortage of drugs on the market.'⁹⁹

Demand for drugs continues to grow on the islands, perhaps preventing excessive competition. Notably, despite the significant disruption caused to the drugs market in Mauritius by synthetic cannabinoids, stakeholders did not report a parallel increase in violence. However, if supply and demand dynamics were to change significantly in the future, this could trigger a shift in the violence associated with the market. Jérôme Boule, journalist and former chairman of the Fact-Finding Committee on Drugs, predicted that, in Mauritius, 'if there was a drop in demand, this could well stoke greater violence'.¹⁰⁰ The Seychelles – with similarly small population, and large yet ever-growing drugs market – could experience a similar trend.

Cannabis markets in Madagascar: a unique political economy

The cannabis market in Madagascar is unique among Indian Ocean drugs markets in several ways. Research for this study focused on Betroka, a region in southern Madagascar which is one of the main domestic sources of cannabis.

In Betroka, cannabis trafficking is controlled by large, hierarchically controlled networks that exercise a significant degree of control over the territory in which cannabis is produced. These groups are also involved in other criminal economies: many have been involved in cattle rustling and banditry, and more recently informal artisanal mining, which is a significant and growing economy in the region. Some of these groups have used military-grade weapons and play an important role in the circulation of illicit firearms in Madagascar.¹⁰¹

Speaking to the GI-TOC in an interview, one cannabis trafficker in the region reported that his gang – reportedly numbering in the hundreds and

primarily made up of young men – reached a pact with regional law enforcement: the gang surrendered arms from former cattle-rustling operations in return for impunity in its cannabis venture.¹⁰² 'Hery' (not his real name) presented himself and his group as 'Robin Hood' figures, using cannabis as an opportunity for a livelihood which would otherwise be unavailable to those in his region. 'We bring together hundreds of young guys ... who have never set foot in school. We think of ourselves as highwaymen. The leaders of this country forget about us. ... We are not criminals like you think, we are trying to provide for our families.'¹⁰³

The degree of local political power wielded by traffickers, together with their ability to impose a 'tax' on other traffickers wishing to operate in the region and their involvement in arms flows, suggest that they are not simply entrepreneurial groups but have some characteristics of criminal governance.

Corruption and protection structures

Corruption enables drug trafficking networks to operate with a significant degree of impunity across the islands, and functions as the single most important structural enabler of the drugs markets in Mauritius and the Seychelles.

In both countries, elements of law enforcement bodies facilitate the trade, with the specialist anti-drugs units singled out as uniquely corrupted.¹⁰⁴ In Mauritius, reports of collusion or corruption concentrate on the units patrolling the profitable drug hotspots of Roche Bois and Rose Hill; one high-ranking unit member is currently under investigation by the Independent Commission Against Corruption due to suspected payoffs by drug networks.¹⁰⁵

In the Seychelles, stakeholders described instances of drugs seized being re-sold by police officers,¹⁰⁶ and investigations into players in the drug markets being obstructed at higher levels of the force.¹⁰⁷ PWUD in the Seychelles also reported instances of dealers being arrested then released after payoffs.¹⁰⁸ Representatives of the Seychellois prison authority stated that street-level corruption among law enforcement officers has become increasingly brazen, saying that they had seen police officers openly taking bribes in front of colleagues and the public. This appears to be occurring in parallel with the wider cultural shift in the Seychelles, as outlined below, towards a greater normalization around the drugs market as a whole.

In Mauritius, the 2018 constitutional Commission of Inquiry report emphasized that the drugs market was protected by pervasive corruption across state infrastructure, including customs officials, prosecutors and the prison service.¹⁰⁹ Many interviewees pointed to further entrenchment of corruption since the publication of the report.

Stakeholders emphasized that the drug markets in both countries could only have achieved their current scale with high-level protection among elements of the political establishment, although details remain murky (as explored further in 'Public health' below).

Drug-related corruption in Madagascar and the Comoros was framed in a slightly different way by interviewees. High-level political protection of criminal markets, including environmental markets such as rosewood in the case of Madagascar, or human smuggling in the Comoros, has been a factor of each countries' politics for many years. In contrast to Mauritius and the Seychelles, the drugs market is merely one of a number of lucrative illicit markets facilitated by the state.

In the Comoros, the *caïds* – the high-level bosses who provide protection to drug trafficking networks – are widely recognized to be embedded in criminal justice and political institutions.¹¹⁰

In Madagascar, the booming drugs market is a relative newcomer to the island's political economy, and protection structures constructed by the more long-standing environmental markets are quickly being redeployed to facilitate this new source of revenue. High-ranking officers in the Malagasy police and security services confirmed that protection of drug trafficking networks by corrupt officers is widespread,¹¹¹ while corruption within the judiciary is widely perceived to lead to low sentences for drugs trafficking.¹¹² Although stakeholders pointed to facilitation by political office-holders, the drugs market appears less embedded in Madagascar's political sphere than other criminal economies, particularly environmental crimes. (The cannabis market in Betroka, which enjoys almost complete protection from political and criminal justice institutions, is a notable exception.)¹¹³

Madagascar's drugs markets have, to date, received limited scrutiny: the degree of state protection may well be greater than that identified to date. Further, as the drugs market grows in profitability and becomes increasingly enticing to the political elite, it is set to attract growing political protection.

In contrast to these four island states, state protection of the drugs markets appears more limited in Mayotte and Réunion, with reports of corruption largely limited to low-level collusion by customs or police officials.



IMPACTS

A shanty town in Port Louis, Mauritius, known as Parc Coson, meaning 'pig park' in Creole. Parc Coson is the largest drug-selling hotspot in Mauritius, with dealers selling a whole range of drugs. © Vel Moonien



Cultural change

Drug markets penetrate the society of each of the island states under study, driving cultural change and entrenching inequality. The legitimacy of the drugs economy in society, and the degree to which the drugs market is a core element of the political economy of the area, is tied to the market's longevity and profitability.

Drug networks are most intricately woven into the informal economy of Mauritius, the island with the region's most long-standing heroin market.¹¹⁴ The flashy lifestyles adopted by mid- and low-level drug dealers exert a glamorous and aspirational pull among young people on the island, and are indicative of an emerging 'gang culture'. Further, the drugs market provides employment opportunities for many, and dealers are widely reported to make regular payments to the community in return for protection. For example, a significant kingpin operating in Cité Richelieu reportedly gave each household in his street €214 (MUR 10 000) each month so as to have 'peace of mind'.¹¹⁵ The relationship is partly transactional – as one PWUD explained: 'Kingpins don't do charity. They pay for a service. You should be able to resist and obstruct the police during a raid.'¹¹⁶

Some networks have demonstrated the characteristics of a shadow welfare state, contributing to funeral or wedding arrangements and paying electricity and water bills. This role was reinforced during the lockdown in March 2020, where a number of networks, including Démolition gang in Parc Cochon (Roche Bois) and Labonne in Cité Barkly, both poorer suburbs, are reported to have distributed food.¹¹⁷

Although there were fewer reports of networks directly supporting the community in the Seychelles, stakeholders emphasized the accelerating entrenchment of the market in the island's social fabric. Representatives of CARE, an organization working with children in the Seychelles who have been affected by drug use, report that children they work with have begun to view drug dealing to be a legitimate career choice, and one which many of them identified as the most likely avenue to pursue.¹¹⁸ Supporting this sense of a cultural shift, community resistance to police investigations and raids is reportedly increasing, and sources pointed to a recent dilution in the social taboos surrounding drugs. The openness with which drugs are used and dealt, and brazenness of associated corrupt practices, such as bribing policemen, were identified as a major and recent change. David Esparon, the Deputy Attorney General in the Seychelles, said: 'Drug dealers are seen as Robin Hoods and people support them.'¹¹⁹ The outpouring of grief at the 2020 funeral of a major drug trafficker, with many mourners wearing matching T-shirts emblazoned with 'RIP Good hearted boss', revealed a depth of community support which was cited as a first in the Seychelles.



Celebrations at the funeral of a reputed drug trafficker in the Seychelles, 2020. As can be seen, the deceased was hailed as 'boss' by members of the community. © Social media

In Madagascar, the 67ha neighbourhood in Antananarivo, home to a large migrant community from other areas of the island, provides a case study in how drugs have become more prominent in Madagascar's urban economy.¹²⁰ While cannabis has been embedded in the neighbourhood since before the country's independence in 1960, the emergence of heroin and cocaine is far more recent, and only occurred in the last five years.¹²¹ Over this period, sale and consumption of drugs has become part of the business of 67ha's bars, restaurants and small hotels.¹²² PWUD in the area identify several establishments known to provide a setting for drug sales, as well as small rooms and hidden areas – either at the back of restaurants, for example, or on rooftops – catering to people who inject

drugs (PWID).¹²³ These areas are reportedly set up in agreement between the proprietors and employees of the hotels and bars, and local dealers.¹²⁴ Similar trends were reported in Nosy Be,¹²⁵ where drug dealing is reportedly seen as part of the attraction of the area to tourists, and so coexists with the local economy.

The synthetic cannabinoid markets of Mayotte and the Comoros, which gained traction over a similar time period, stand apart from other drug markets across the islands in that they attract significant stigma, likely generated by the highly visible public harms wrought by the drug. In the Comoros, users of synthetic cannabinoids were repeatedly described by interviewees as insane.¹²⁶



In Mauritius, Mayotte and the Comoros, the emergence of synthetic drugs has triggered visible impacts on public health, particularly among youth. © Thomas Cockrem/Alamy Stock Photo

Public health

As drug consumption across the islands grows, the markets exact an ever-greater public health cost. In the established consumption markets of the region, the Seychelles and Mauritius, the toll of widespread heroin use on health systems cannot be overstated.

Injecting drug use is widespread in both countries – estimated to be between 10 000 and 20 000 in Mauritius – with commensurate impacts.¹²⁷ While the HIV rate among PWID in the Seychelles – at 12.7% – is lower than in other countries, it almost doubled between 2011 and 2018.¹²⁸ Hepatitis C prevalence among PWID experienced a parallel twofold increase across this period.

Nor are health impacts solely associated with heroin. The emergence of synthetic cannabinoids triggered highly visible impacts on public health, particularly among youth, in Mauritius, Mayotte and the Comoros. It catalyzed a spike in admissions to public health institutions in both Mayotte and Mauritius, with health professionals initially struggling to know how to treat patients.

This increase was particularly acute when synthetic cannabinoids first entered the market. As shown in Figure 13, Mauritius admissions related to synthetic drugs, predominantly cannabinoids, increased fourfold between 2015 and 2016, levelling off by 2018.¹²⁹

In Mayotte, admissions similarly spiked in 2015 when synthetic cannabinoids entered the market, but then decreased significantly.¹³⁰ PWUD and health professionals interviewed attribute this initial spike to the inexperience of the local 'chemists' who created excessively high concentrations of the drugs.¹³¹ Once chemists achieved the right dosages, overdoses decreased in frequency.¹³² Similar dynamics have been tracked with the introduction of new psychotropic substances in Europe, such as ketamine and GHB2/ GHB1.¹³³

Although admissions levelled off after the initial spike, synthetic cannabinoid consumption continues to have a significant public health impact. For example, in Mauritius, as at 2019, synthetic drugs remained the leading cause of admissions in public health institutions due to drug consumption (representing 62% of total admissions).¹³⁴

While detailed estimates of the number and demographics of people using drugs in Madagascar

are not available, it is clear that the face of drug consumption is changing. Consumption of heroin and other hard drugs such as cocaine have historically been low (although widespread cannabis use has been present for decades). However, across the spectrum of interviewees – from law enforcement to civil society activists and local government officials – there was a remarkable consistency in an observed rise in drug consumption, particularly of heroin, over the past three to five years. This increase was reportedly concentrated in key urban locales, and among young people, predominantly men.

Resources for addressing the public health impacts of growing drug use are limited, with addiction specialists reporting that the health response to drug consumption is not prioritized by the state.¹³⁵ A number of interviewees emphasized that the gravity of increased drug use has not yet been realized by the Malagasy authorities.

PWUD participating in the Seychelles methadone programme receive medication on Mahe island, Seychelles, November 2019.

© Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images





People queue to receive methadone at a mobile clinic in the Seychelles, November 2019. © Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images

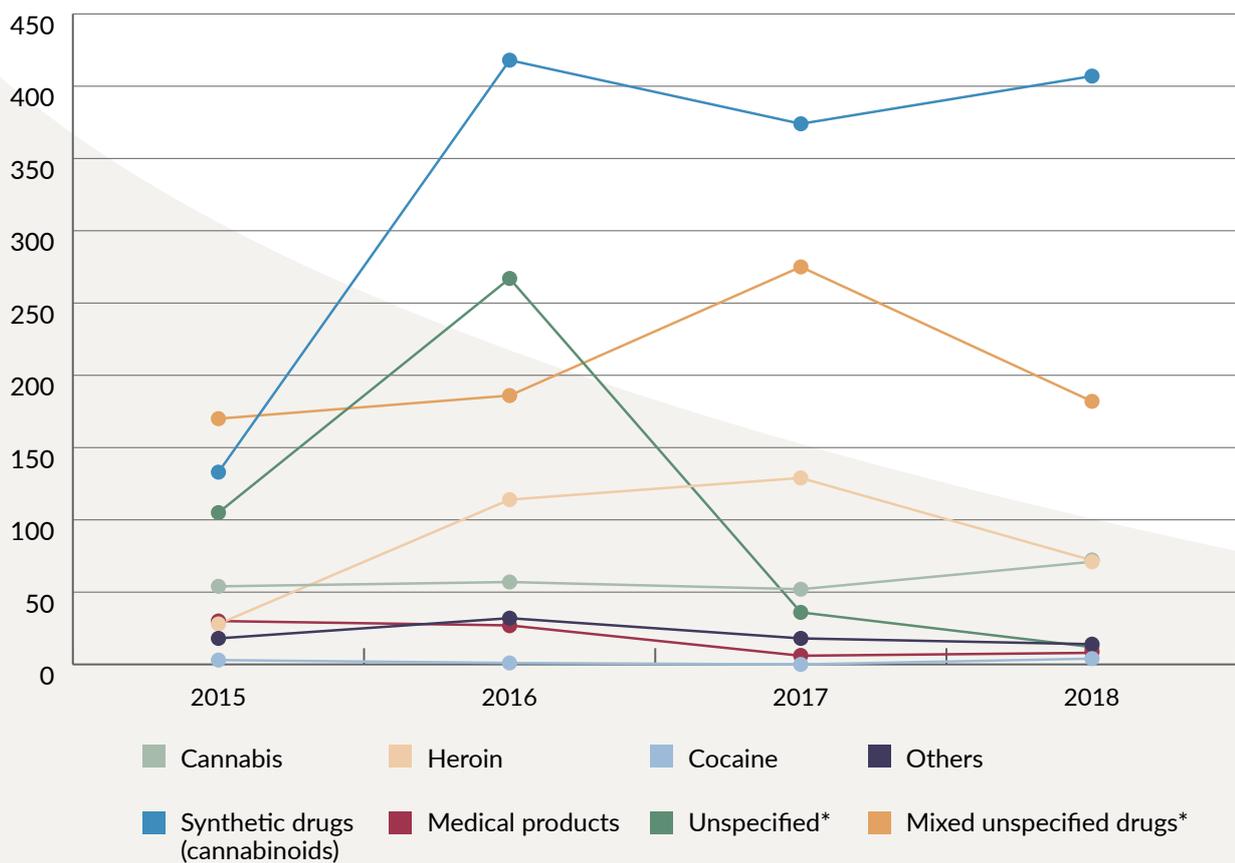


FIGURE 13 Admissions into public-health institutions in Mauritius relating to drug consumption, January 2015 to November 2018.

NOTE: Most admissions for 'unspecified' and 'mixed unspecified' drugs will refer to forms of synthetic cannabinoids. 'Medical products' combines admissions relating to methadone consumption, Subutex, valium and other unspecified medical products.

SOURCE: National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023, Republic of Mauritius.

Drugs and democracy: the erosion of institutional governance

Illicit markets both leverage governance weaknesses to enable operations and entrench and expand corrupt practices, making them more rewarding and thus resilient. Corruption fuelled by drugs markets is eroding democratic institutions and law enforcement capacity across the islands, albeit to differing degrees.

The impacts are most severe in Mauritius and the Seychelles, which both rank highly in global governance indices. In both countries, drug-fuelled corruption is hollowing out state institutions: law enforcement is deeply compromised (as outlined above), and while impacts on political processes are more difficult to ascertain, cracks in the image of good governance projected by both countries are starting to show.¹³⁶

In Mauritius, vocal elements of the domestic press, particularly *L'Express* newspaper and a number of radio stations, have been staunch critics of the government.¹³⁷ By contrast, in the Seychelles the markedly less independent press means that the growing influence of the drugs market on state institutions is occurring in silence.

Interviewees in the Seychelles voiced concerns that corruption, fuelled by drug profits, is reaching ever higher levels of government. However, while a number of interviewees named individuals at the heart of government and security infrastructure reportedly linked to the drugs trade, such reports are difficult to substantiate and a taboo subject with many interviewees.¹³⁸

PWUD, sources in the fishing industry (heavily affected by heroin use) and some members of the broader Seychellois community reported instances whereby individuals acting on behalf of political campaigns have offered PWUD payment in cash or kind (i.e. drugs) to attend political rallies and vote as instructed.¹³⁹ They emphasized that connections between the drug markets and the political establishment are rife, but not discussed. One of the PWUD reporting vote-buying cited the lack of press coverage of these events as one example of this culture of silence.¹⁴⁰

In Mauritius, one senior prison official expressed the view that the response to the drugs market is 'not even stagnating, we are going backwards'.¹⁴¹ This sentiment was echoed by other interviewees, who also emphasized the lack of progress (or worsening state of corruption) since the 2018 Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking report.

The commission made 460 recommendations, including the disbandment of the ADSU, as the commission perceived the body to be too corrupt to reform.¹⁴² The government reported fast-paced implementation of the commission's recommendations – an official government press release stated that 80 had already been implemented by October 2018.¹⁴³ However, stakeholders interviewed unanimously disagreed, stating that nothing has been done.¹⁴⁴

Interviewees repeatedly pointed to an upsurge in the drugs market since 2015 (when the current MSM (Militant Socialist Movement) administration took power, and synthetic cannabinoids emerged),¹⁴⁵ together with the perceived lack of action following the 2018 commission report, as evidence of a lack of political will on the part of the current government to address the growing drugs problem. Roukaya Kasenally, a democracy analyst based at the University of Mauritius, echoed the sentiments expressed by many in concluding that the perceived lack of action 'poses the question: who does it serve?'¹⁴⁶

Corruption fuelled by drug markets is eroding democratic institutions and law enforcement capacity across the islands.

The 2019 elections, marred by widespread allegations of procedural irregularities, marked a departure from Mauritius's record of free and fair elections. The electoral campaigns have become extremely costly, and the 2019 elections campaign was highlighted by civil society, opposition political figures and democracy analysts to have been in part funded by dirty money,¹⁴⁷ although limited financial reporting by political parties means that financial sources remain largely a 'black hole'.¹⁴⁸ The ruling MSM party reportedly received substantial contributions from backers in the gambling sector,¹⁴⁹ an industry widely suspected of being used to launder proceeds from the drugs market. Kasenally concludes that 'it is impossible to establish' a clear link between electoral financing and the drugs market, 'but it all seems to be pointing in a particular direction'.¹⁵⁰

The 2020 inclusion of Mauritius on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list for weaknesses in its anti-money-laundering systems, procurement corruption scandals, misspent pandemic relief funds and the increasing impunity and visibility with which the drugs market operates, has driven widespread unease of governance decay.¹⁵¹

In both the Seychelles and Mauritius, the illicit drugs market was highlighted as a uniquely powerful driver of corruption. This contrasts to the context of the Comoros and Madagascar, where drugs trafficking is instead one of myriad illicit markets driving corruption, and Réunion and Mayotte, where institutional impacts to date appear to have been limited. In Madagascar and the Comoros, resource scarcity sits alongside corruption in leading obstacles to addressing the islands' drugs markets.

Recognizing the scale of drug-related corruption is a crucial first step in tackling it. The Seychelles' first regime change since independence, swept in by the 2020 elections on an anti-corruption drive, could present a window of opportunity.

A fishing vessel at La Digue island, Seychelles. Sources in the fishing industry in the Seychelles report that businesses have been heavily affected by high rates of heroin use among fishermen. Some fishing vessels and crews are also reportedly involved in ferrying drug shipments to shore. © Sergi Reboredo / Alamy Stock Photos



Illicit financial flows and the downgrading of the Seychelles and Mauritius

In 2020, the financial systems of Mauritius and the Seychelles, which are both significant offshore financial centres, were downgraded in international rankings due to weaknesses in anti-money-laundering systems.¹⁵² In both countries, the drugs market was identified as a key money laundering risk in assessments by international financial regulatory bodies before the downgrade.¹⁵³

In Mauritius, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – arguably the most influential financial governance authority in the world – identified ‘drugs and drug related offences’ as a key source of illicit finance, and noted the country’s failure to ‘conduct parallel financial investigations’ in drug trafficking offences.¹⁵⁴ In 2019, the year before the downgrade, only five arrests were made for money laundering in connection with drug offences, with two resulting in cases brought against arrested individuals.¹⁵⁵ In the wake of the downgrade, the government of Mauritius has progressed a range of additional legislative amendments to strengthen the regulatory framework to combat money laundering.¹⁵⁶ However, a senior official in the Prosecutor’s Office expressed concern regarding the efficacy of bodies tasked with tracing drugs money.¹⁵⁷

In the Seychelles, the financial system has been dogged with accusations of organized criminal activity since it first emerged as an offshore hub,¹⁵⁸ but the European Union’s decision to include the island on its list of ‘non-cooperative jurisdictions’ in 2020 was still a major reputational blow.¹⁵⁹ The country remained on the list following an update in February 2021.¹⁶⁰ Failure to address regulations enabling opaque beneficial ownership of shell companies was a key driver for the downgrade.¹⁶¹ Seychellois shell companies (whose existence is facilitated by limited beneficial ownership regulations) have been linked to multiple investigations into illicit financial flows and corruption, and were cited as a corporate structure used in the laundering of drug profits.¹⁶²

In both countries, drug trafficking is by far the most profitable illicit market, and drug profits pose a significant risk to the integrity of their financial systems. Both governments failed to act on repeated warnings from international regulatory watchdogs ahead of the downgrade to address the risk of money laundering, marring the image of good governance projected by both countries to date.



RESPONSES

The Gendarmerie Nationale conduct an operation to destroy cannabis cultivation in the Analabe Ambanja region, northern Madagascar, in July 2020. © Gendarmerie Nationale - Ambanja Madagascar



Policing the Indian Ocean: a crowded space

More than 140 000 vessels tracked with an Automatic Identification System (AIS) cross the Indian Ocean every year, together with countless smaller vessels not required to carry an AIS, making the Indian Ocean among the most transited oceans in the world.¹⁶³ It is also a pivotal maritime trading route, with around half the world's container vessels, one third of bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of global oil shipments crossing its waters.¹⁶⁴

Myriad illicit flows also transit the western Indian Ocean, with narcotics being the most prevalent.¹⁶⁵ This has led to the establishment of a wide range of international maritime security cooperation initiatives, agreements, joint ventures and treaties, while the weakness of the island states' maritime-surveillance capacity (with the exception of the French islands) means they are deeply dependent on support from foreign powers, who have long had an interest in the region. France, India, the UK and the US all feature in the national-security infrastructure of the islands and the surrounding ocean, and China and Japan¹⁶⁶ have also recently entered this crowded space. The Combined Task Force (CTF) 150, a multilateral naval force made up of a coalition of countries, it is the most prominent international force acting to counter narcotics trafficking.¹⁶⁷

However, there are doubts as to whether all these different initiatives and interests provide an effective response to Indian Ocean trafficking. Timothy Walker, a leading maritime security expert at the Institute for Security Studies, refers to the disconnect between UN Security Council resolutions, combined taskforces and the needs of regional states as a 'triangle of gaps'.¹⁶⁸

That said, the practical challenges of policing this vast area are daunting. The expanse of the Indian Ocean means that tracking maritime shipping must be intelligence led, but such intelligence is reliant on AIS data, which is incomplete and non-comprehensive. Smaller vessels, such as the fishing boats often used to collect drug consignments, are not required to carry AIS, and even larger vessels can turn off the tracking systems at will, creating 'transmission gaps'.¹⁶⁹ These two 'loopholes' significantly hamper the effectiveness of AIS by rendering much maritime movement invisible.¹⁷⁰



A Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 operation in March 2021, in which 2 800 kilograms of hashish and 50 kilograms of heroin were seized. CTF 150's maritime security activities include counter-narcotics trafficking operations such as this one. © Lt Cdr Tom Thicknesse RN, CTF 150

These practical challenges are compounded by three factors, whose relative prominence is disputed by stakeholders. Firstly, stakeholders point to the legal complexity of maritime surveillance, where even vessels in possession of confirmed intelligence cannot board another country's ship unless a range of conditions are met.¹⁷¹ Interdiction operations cannot exceed their mandate: the CTF 150, for example, cannot board a vessel that is implicated in criminal flows unless such flows can be linked to terrorist financing (although this does not hamper interdictions of heroin, which is widely cultivated in Taliban-controlled areas).¹⁷² Further, many nations active in policing the Indian Ocean not only lack countertrafficking mandates, but are also hampered by jurisdictional boundaries.

Even if the vessel is boarded and illicit goods are seized, prosecuting the crew is often complex, and consequently many interceptions merely result in the narcotics being thrown overboard, with the crew and vessel free to go. French navy vessels based in Réunion

regularly seize quantities of heroin, but this typically results only in the drugs being thrown overboard.¹⁷³

Secondly, stakeholders identify gaps in capacity at law enforcement, prosecutorial and judicial levels in the island states as the most significant challenge for states combating maritime drug trafficking. Some pointed to the final acquittal of the crew of the *Payam Al Mansur*, an Iranian-flagged dhow seized by the Seychelles Coast Guard in 2016 and found to be carrying almost 100 kilograms of heroin, as a glaring example of this shortfall in capacity.¹⁷⁴

Finally, commentators point to a lack of political will among stakeholders, suggesting that the plethora of initiatives established to fight maritime crime, including drugs trafficking, largely amounts to lip service. Limited coordination between the many powers that crowd the western Indian Ocean further weakens responses and hampers information sharing. Ultimately, maritime smuggling in the Indian Ocean is a crime characterized by 'a stark absence of effective deterrents'.¹⁷⁵

Islands' responses to drug trafficking

The disparate drug policy approaches taken by each of the focus countries in the western Indian Ocean reflect the fragmenting global consensus on prohibition.¹⁷⁶ Legislation in Madagascar and the Comoros, which have not been revised since 1995 and 1997 respectively, deploy a bluntly prohibitionist approach. Those of the Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion and Mayotte (the latter two being governed by French law), which have experienced frequent revisions, continue to criminalize the market, but have also moved towards a recognition of drug use as a public health concern.

While extremely prohibitionist on paper, in practice the Comoros and Madagascar exhibit significant inertia in the face of growing drug consumption (as reflected by the lack of legislative reform).¹⁷⁷ Responding to the growing drugs markets is perceived by Malagasy stakeholders to be low on the state's agenda.¹⁷⁸ Law enforcement and counsel were scathing of the island's 'archaic' legislation, particularly the wide discretion granted to judges in sentencing, which was viewed as an enabler of corruption.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, in the Comoros the response has been limited (notably the Comorian penal code merely prescribes a blanket term of between one and 10 years, without distinguishing between use, possession and trafficking).¹⁸⁰

In the Comoros and Madagascar, a lack of data weakens political will to respond to the growing drug markets, which remain to a significant extent shrouded in secrecy. Greater evidence is required to paint a clearer picture of the islands' evolving drug markets and their impacts in order to galvanize a stronger response. Currently, as ever-larger volumes are trafficked to and through the islands (particularly through Madagascar) both countries risk an unfettered slide into the inevitable overspill impacts on domestic consumption, to which they are poorly positioned and ill resourced to respond, particularly after the devastating impact of the pandemic on the islands' tourism and remittance-dependent economies.

In contrast, significant resources have been poured into responding to the drugs market in Mauritius, and addressing the growing market has featured highly in political manifestos of all parties for many years.¹⁸¹ Since 2006, a pioneering public health response has driven the roll-out of significant substitution and needle exchange programmes, together with demand-reduction programming, including media campaigns. This has occurred in parallel with a continued focus on interdiction:¹⁸² the country's ADSU's arrests for drug-related offences have been sharply increasing year on year, climbing from 1 743 in 2014 to over 3 000 in 2019.¹⁸³ This increase has been particularly dramatic since 2015, when the advent of synthetic cannabinoids drove expansion and fragmentation of the market.

However, arrest and conviction data shows that the increase was heavily driven by possession offences, which often relate to PWUD.¹⁸⁴ Illustratively, 92% of convictions for drug offences in 2019 were for either possession or use, with only 4% relating to dealing or importation.¹⁸⁵ Although 85% of convictions resulted in a fine rather than imprisonment, the state resources expended on these convictions, and the cost to those charged, is significant.¹⁸⁶ Despite spiralling arrests and convictions, stakeholders reported no discernible impact on the growth of the market, and identify corruption as a key factor driving the market's resilience.¹⁸⁷

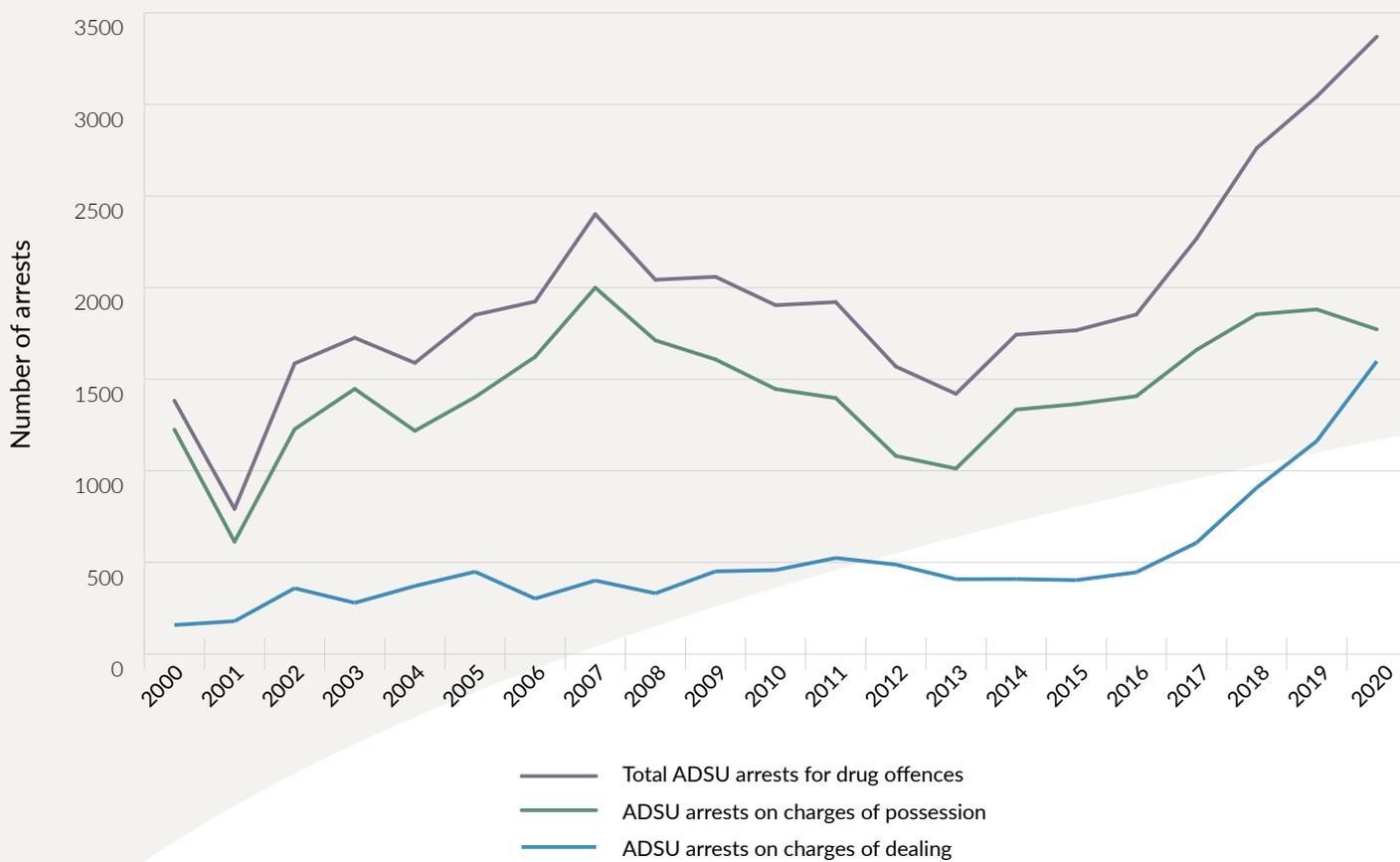


FIGURE 14 Anti-Drug Smuggling Unit (Mauritius) arrest data, 2000–2020.

SOURCE: ADSU

The Seychelles enacted a similar pivot a decade later, shifting towards a public health approach and publicly recognizing the failure of its prohibitionist response. Since 2016, a growing proportion of the budget has been earmarked for prevention and demand-reduction activities, and the government has rolled out a significant methadone programme. Reforms to the Misuse of Drugs Act aimed at decriminalizing use. However, the indicative thresholds for the quantity of drugs used to create a presumption that an individual is a dependent user, and therefore should not be criminally sanctioned, are too low (with the exception of cannabis).¹⁸⁹ Usage practices mean PWUD typically carry quantities of drugs exceeding the decriminalized threshold, risking ongoing criminalization, undermining the regulatory intent.¹⁹⁰

Despite the significant resources expended, drug use has continued to increase and kingpins operate with a significant degree of impunity. The lack of an independent media with significant investigative capacity means few allegations of corruption are brought into the public sphere,¹⁹¹ while the rare investigations that do occur are hampered by limited capacity among anti-corruption authorities, law enforcement agencies and civil society.¹⁹² The Seychelles anti-corruption body, for example, founded in 2016, reportedly has a small and inexperienced team and has not yet publicly prosecuted any drug-related corruption cases.¹⁹³

While the approach of the French Overseas Territories of Mayotte and Réunion is of course shaped by that of France, it has also been dictated by local



Shown here is the only fast-response vessel that conducts coast guarding patrols at Nosy Be Hell Ville, belonging to the naval force of the Malagasy army. Due to budget limitations, officers often cannot purchase fuel to operate the vessel.

© Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa

developments.¹⁹⁴ On both islands, drugs have historically been a low government priority. This continues to be the case in Réunion, which has a limited drugs market. By contrast, the ‘chimique epidemic’ that reached its climax in Mayotte in 2015 drove drugs to rocket up the political priority list.¹⁹⁵ The state response, which combined a law enforcement response with efforts to address synthetic cannabinoids use as a public health concern (including preventative trainings and rehabilitation), is perceived by public health specialists to lag behind fast-growing drug use.¹⁹⁶ Further, as synthetic cannabinoid use has become increasingly concentrated in the irregular Comorian migrant community (a highly marginalized group), fewer PWUD in Mayotte are seeking treatment.

Struggling to keep up with new psychoactive substances

Chemists have an ‘almost infinite scope to alter the chemical structure’ of NPS, with legislation prohibiting certain chemical compounds quickly made redundant by the emergence of new NPS on the market.¹⁹⁷ In response to this, some states (including New Zealand and the UK) prohibit all psychoactive substances unless explicitly defined to be legal.¹⁹⁸

However, all the island states adopt the more traditional legislative approach of prohibiting drugs by reference to a list included in the legislation – and

are struggling to keep up with the kaleidoscope of chemical structures used in NPS. In Mauritius, the FSL has reportedly identified 40 different types of NPS since 2013,¹⁹⁹ in which period the anti-drugs law has been reformed three times.²⁰⁰ Similarly, law enforcement and health officials in Mayotte have expressed helplessness in the face of the growing chimique market, noting that traffickers change the composition of the drug as soon as the previous composition is prohibited.²⁰¹



LOOKING FORWARDS

In Madagascar and the Comoros, where the pandemic has brought increasing economic decline, profits generated by drug markets have become important sources of income. © Gianluigi Guercia/AFP via Getty Images



The diversification of drug consumption and trafficking through the islands is of significant concern. Widespread synthetic cannabinoid use is already exerting a significant public health cost in Mayotte, the Comoros and Mauritius, and the market is well positioned to spread further, posing a particular threat to Madagascar, which is ill resourced to respond to the public health challenge. Rising volumes of methamphetamines being trafficked from South Asia through the South East African coastline also pose a growing risk to the islands.

The governance impacts of the drug markets across the islands are also increasing. In Mauritius and the Seychelles, the corruption which underpinned the development of the islands' now vast drugs markets is deeply entrenched and spreading further, posing the single biggest obstacle to responses. Recognition of the pervasive governance impacts of the drugs markets is a key first step in addressing them, a step which the new administration in the Seychelles is well placed to take.

The coronavirus pandemic continues to affect all the islands under study. Although the health cost of the virus has yet to be determined, its economic impact has already been severe. The loss of tourism has dealt a significant economic blow, and stakeholders expressed concern that consequent economic stress and unemployment could further swell drug consumption markets.

In Madagascar, the pandemic has been compounded by drought, and World Bank figures suggest poverty is rising for the first time in years in an island that already ranks among the poorest in the world.²⁰² Similar economic decline has been tracked in the Comoros, which has also been hit by drops in remittances due to the pandemic.²⁰³ As livelihoods evaporate in the wake of the pandemic, the profits generated by the drug markets (which have proved remarkably resilient to COVID-19 restrictions), are set to constitute an ever more important source of income.

Recommendations

1. Recognize and respond to the role of the drugs market in driving systematic corruption across criminal justice and broader state infrastructure.

The pervasiveness of drug-fuelled corruption remains ignored in the countries of focus, particularly in the Seychelles and Mauritius, where it is the single biggest obstacle to effective responses.

In the Seychelles, the new political administration is well positioned to meet campaign pledges to recognize and address corruption, drive greater transparency across state operations and enhance press freedoms. In Mauritius, the government should capitalize on the extensive research behind the 460 recommendations of the state-established 2018 Commission of Inquiry and regain stakeholder confidence by implementing long-overdue reform.

The Indian Ocean Commission – a intergovernmental organization involving the five focus countries with a mandate across issues of democracy, political stability, terrorism, law and transnational crime – is well positioned to draw attention to the scale of the challenge posed by corruption to effective responses, and call for action to combat this threat.²⁰⁴ Further, investigative journalism should be supported across the islands to empower the press in its role as a critical force, to the extent permitted by civil society space (see recommendation 4 below).

2. Recognize and address the rapidly emerging role of Madagascar as a key regional drug trafficking hub, and the consequences this has for regional illicit markets and stability.

The Malagasy state should recognize the alarming acceleration in drugs trafficking and use as a political priority, and acknowledge the already-growing public health impacts. The African Development Bank, which has already committed over €14 million in support for a post-COVID-19 recovery plan, is well positioned to support the state in bolstering public health responses to the growing drugs market.²⁰⁵ The African Union Division of Social Welfare and Drug Control is also well positioned to push for PWUD-centric policy development in Madagascar, and support the state in mitigating the impacts of accelerating drug use in society.

3. Embed PWUD at the heart of policymaking and civil-society response frameworks, and strengthen the public health response to drugs.

Too often PWUD are sidelined by policymaking processes – a state of affairs that results in ill-conceived laws and policies which are ineffectual or counterproductive in practice; at worst, PWUD are explicitly targeted and arrested. Instead, PWUD should be central to policymaking and considered key partners in building effective national and regional responses to the operation of drugs markets and the harms they propagate. Existing networks of PWUD should be given a greater voice by states building responses, while such networks should be established in islands where they are lacking. Enhanced and more formalized communication between island networks could further magnify their voice.

Where the public health response to drug use is extremely limited or non-existent (namely the Comoros and Madagascar), it is key to establish state-funded rehabilitation services for PWUD and adopt regulatory changes required to facilitate the introduction of substitution and needle exchange services. In Madagascar, where use is rising at a particularly concerning rate, international and regional organizations should prioritize support towards public health services catering to drug use.

4. Strengthen the regional civil society response, particularly by enhancing media coverage of drug trafficking and its impacts.

Civil society has a crucial role to play in documenting and exposing the scale of drug trafficking markets and the extent of their impact, not only on public health but also on state institutions.

The media is central to supporting shifts in public attitudes towards drug use, paving the way for soft policy approaches based predominantly on harm reduction. To strengthen the media's coverage of drug use and trafficking, donors could support workshops for journalists across the islands (to the extent possible, given the shrinking civil society space in the Comoros) on investigative techniques, sensitive PWUD reporting (e.g. the use of terminology which does not demonize or stigmatize PWUD), personal security measures and relevant sources of evidence. PWUD should be key actors in shaping the narrative of the media regarding drug consumption, and central participants in relevant workshops.

International donors should consider leveraging their convening power to facilitate the bringing together of PWUD and civil society actors across the islands to share experiences, combine voices and strengthen skillsets. This could include establishing a cross-island network of journalists whose portfolios contain a focus on illicit drugs and corruption to enhance the ability of the region's journalists to provide holistic analysis and monitoring of the evolving drug markets.

5. Adopt approaches that decriminalize the use of drugs.

The global consensus on prohibition is fragmenting, and states across the world are pursuing a range of soft policy approaches as an alternative to domestic prohibition. Evidence from countries adopting approaches that decriminalize illicit drug consumption, including from Portugal, which became the first country to decriminalize all drugs in 2001, point to significant economic benefits gained from reducing the cost of illicit drug use (largely from a material reduction in drug-related health burdens on the state), and benefit PWUD and local communities.²⁰⁷

The islands stand to gain a great deal from moving towards a more progressive and evidence-based approach to drugs, particularly given the scale of the illicit drug markets they face.²⁰⁸ And there is regional precedent: a number of countries in East and southern Africa have started to move away from a wholesale prohibition approach; there is, for example, a growing trend across the continent for the decriminalization or legalization (in part or in full) of cannabis.²⁰⁹

This could constitute a potential first step in overall reform of state drug policy, which could bring significant benefits in the islands of focus. In Mauritius, support of decriminalization of cannabis use has gathered momentum, and is repeatedly proposed as a possible response to growing synthetic cannabinoid use, including by the 2018 Commission of Inquiry. In a number of rural areas of Madagascar, cannabis production is a key livelihood and could offer a route out of poverty for marginalized populations if cultivation were rendered legal in all, or certain, contexts.²¹⁰

Although decriminalization approaches do not offer an effective response to the criminal markets underpinning the narcotics trade, they may be a key step in the process towards a more holistic state response, and carry significant benefits from a harm reduction perspective.

6. Revise anti-drugs laws to ensure they provide appropriate frameworks for effective response.

Madagascar and the Comoros should update national counter-narcotics legislation in line with internationally accepted harm-reduction approaches. Technical assistance programming to support the enactment of such legislation should be prioritized by international organizations, including the UNODC.

All states should ensure that legislation distinguishes appropriately between use, possession for use and possession with intent to deal, in a manner which avoids the penalization and imprisonment of PWUD for possessing small quantities of narcotics.²¹¹

7. Ensure interventions target the most vulnerable and marginalized elements of society, who are at heightened risk of recruitment as consumers and drug dealers, including irregular migrant communities in Mayotte.

In Mayotte, addressing synthetic cannabinoid use is intricately tied to migration policy; the targeting of irregular migrants as synthetic cannabinoid consumers and their recruitment as small-time dealers are best addressed through development interventions. Responses focused on enhancing integration of irregular migrant communities would significantly diminish the population vulnerable to synthetic cannabinoid use and dealing.

8. Strengthen the state institutions tasked with pursuing 'follow the money' responses to the drugs market, and prioritize resource allocation to enhance capacity.

All focus states are limited by the weak capacity of the financial investigation units responsible for tracking the illicit profits generated by the drugs market and prosecuting cases of drug-related money laundering. In Mauritius and the Seychelles, sophisticated and opaque formal financial systems offer additional money laundering opportunities alongside the plethora of cash-based businesses (which are also co-opted in the Comoros and Madagascar). It is therefore imperative to bolster the specialized technical investigative capacity of the personnel of financial investigation bodies, including financial forensics expertise, and boost human resources.

9. Enhance collaboration and intelligence sharing between regional states regarding drug use and trafficking dynamics.

The island markets are intricately interconnected. Greater coordination and information sharing between states in the region, including by enhancing engagement with and through existing regional bodies, including the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, is required to improve the overall understanding of drugs trafficking in the region and bolster the regional response. The development of regional strategic priorities could support such a unified response.

10. Improve information sharing, testing capacity and investigative capabilities regarding synthetic compounds (particularly synthetic cannabinoids and their derivatives) across the region.

It is a pivotal moment to enhance regional intelligence sharing regarding synthetics markets in order to (i) empower states with well-established synthetics markets to identify common challenges and solutions, and share information regarding new trends and compounds; and (ii) ensure states where synthetic cannabinoids have not yet become common are well positioned to raise an early warning and act fast to prevent the market establishing itself (Madagascar, the Seychelles and Tanzania are particularly at-risk states).²¹² Regional bodies, including a revitalized Southern African Development Community Drug Control Committee, should play a key role in facilitating intelligence sharing.

NOTES

- 1 Phrase used in an interview with a source in the Malagasy Marine Nationale, who chose not to be named, 9 June 2020. Also used in media coverage of drug trafficking in Madagascar: see *Drogue dure: Madagascar, plaque tournante du commerce illicite, Midi Madagasikara*, 23 May 2017, <http://www.midi-madagasikara.mg/dossiers/2017/05/23/drogue-dure-madagascar-plaque-tournante-du-commerce-illicite/>.
- 2 Since 2012, levels of cocaine production have been sharply rising, with UNODC estimates indicating that 2017 was a record production year, with 1 976 tons manufactured – a rise of 25% on the previous year. This was due in major part to an increase in coca production in key producer countries, notably Colombia, where the area of coca cultivation (which tripled in size between 2013 and 2016) had risen to an estimated 171 000 hectares by 2017. Bumper seizures of cocaine across West Africa indicated a glut of cocaine being driven through global trafficking routes in unprecedented volumes.
- 3 See Alastair Nelson, A triangle of vulnerability: Changing patterns of illicit trafficking off the Swahili coast, GI-TOC, 15 June 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/triangle-vulnerability-swahili-coast/>. South Africa has emerged as a large supplier of cocaine to Australia. See Lewis Isaacs, As Africa's infrastructure develops, so too does its drug supply to Australia, Dateline, 23 August 2019, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/dateline/as-africa-s-infrastructure-develops-so-too-does-its-drug-supply-to-australia>.
- 4 Recent cases of dhows (Indian Ocean fishing vessels) carrying mixed loads of heroin and meth have been reported, and meth consumption in countries across mainland East and southern Africa is growing. Jason Eligh, A synthetic age: The evolution of methamphetamine markets in eastern and southern Africa, GI-TOC, March 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/meth-africa/>.
- 5 The Anti-Narcotics Bureau, by comparison, did not report any seizures of or investigations into methamphetamine trafficking. Interview with Derek Samson, principal officer of Corporate Affairs, Anti-Narcotics Bureau, and Johnny Malvina, Anti-Narcotics Bureau, 26 May 2020. Email exchange with Michelle Sabury, Outreach Coordinator, Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation, 19 June 2020.
- 6 Law enforcement authorities in Mauritius seized 32 grams of methamphetamines in 2019. Although extremely small in volume, it is key to monitor whether this supply increases going forwards. Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Secretariat, National Drug Observatory Report 2019, January 2021, [https://](https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/National%20drug%20observatory%20report%202019%20Final.doc%2011.pdf)
- 7 Tor Sellström, *Africa in the Indian Ocean* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015), citing Richard Dowden, *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles* (London: Portobello Books, 2014), which excludes the Indian Ocean States.
- 8 In Mauritius, the majority of interviewees preferred to remain anonymous. Given the large number of interviewees, and overlapping roles of several, a referencing system (using X or Y followed by a number), is used in the footnotes.
- 9 Jason Eligh, A shallow flood: The diffusion of heroin in eastern and southern Africa, GI-TOC, May 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/heroin-east-southern-africa/>.
- 10 In the Seychelles, the Anti-Narcotics Bureau (ANB) stated that there has been a recent decline in the proportion of heroin coming in from South Africa and Kenya by air. Significant seizures point to an uptick in heroin being trafficked by air from Madagascar, predominantly by Seychellois, Malagasy and Kenyan mules. See Sharon Uranie, Heroin busts in Madagascar disrupt smuggling of \$365 thousand worth of drugs to Seychelles – Seychellois and Kenyan nationals arrested, Seychelles News Agency, 3 December 2015, <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/4198/Heroin+busts+in+Madagascar+disrupt+smuggling+of+++thousand+worth+of+drugs+to+Seychelles+-+Seychellois+and+Kenyan+nationals+arrested>; ANB communiqué – Man gets 10 years for the offence of conspiracy to import a controlled drug, *Seychelles Nation*, 28 June 2019, <http://www.nation.sc/articles/528/anb-communique-man-gets-10-years-for-the-offence-of-conspiracy-to-import-a-controlled-drug>; Daniel Laurence, Court in Seychelles holds Malagasy man suspected of heroin trafficking, Seychelles News Agency, 23 April 2018, <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/9029/Court+in+Seychelles+holds+Malagasy+man+suspected+of+heroin+trafficking>.
- 11 A spate of seizures in late 2020 and early 2021 in containers transported from Madagascar to Mauritius triggered enhanced surveillance of all containers travelling across this route upon arrival in Port Louis.
- 12 Interview with the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, 13 October 2020, by phone. Interview with team leader of the EU-funded project EU Action Against Drugs And Organized Crime (EU-ACT), 9 April 2020, by phone.
- 13 Interview with Capitaine Mahavahasina Daudet, Company Commander of Gendarmerie Nationale in Nosy Be, (also former company commander of the Gendarmerie National at the Port of Toamasina in 2019), Nosy Be, Madagascar, 9 June 2020.

- 14 Previous reporting from UNODC in 2018 noted that there was insufficient evidence to support suggestions that heroin is trafficked direct from Iran to the Seychelles. However, in interviews for this research, law enforcement officials and sources with links to the heroin market confirmed that the direct Iran route did exist. See Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Southern Route Partnership, Drug trafficking on maritime routes to island states of the Indian Ocean. Conference Paper, April 2018.
- 15 Mauritius's ties with India are reflected in the island's demography (70% of Mauritius's population is of Indian descent); financial flows (Mauritius is a key source of foreign direct investment into India); and national security. Paul Adams, Financial services: Banking on a good location and the law, *Financial Times*, 7 September 2012; Rajiv Bhuvra, Will Mauritius regain the tag of India's top investor?, *Fortune India*, 20 April 2020, <https://www.fortuneindia.com/investing/will-mauritius-regain-the-tag-of-indias-top-investor/104479>. Prevalence of mules from India widely reported: see CIA, Narcotics Review, August 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP87T00685R000100010001-7.pdf>.
- 16 Afghanistan's opium output quadrupled in the decade up to 1995, and continued on a steep upwards trajectory (with a brief pause between 2000 and 2001). Production in Myanmar, already accelerating through the 1990s, surged at the turn of the century.
- 17 The 2018 APDAR survey also found that there were circa 2 000 PWID. See Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation, Seychelles biological and behavioural surveillance of heroin users: 2017, February 2018. Figures for 2019 reported by APDAR and cited by the BBC: Kanika Saigal, Why Seychelles has the world's worst heroin problem, BBC, 21 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50488877>; Addiction in paradise: Seychelles battles heroin crisis, France 24, 20 February 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200220-addiction-in-paradise-seychelles-battles-heroin-crisis>.
- 18 Interview with an official at the Seychelles Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture, 18 June 2020; interview with Derek Samson, principal officer, Corporate Affairs, Anti-Narcotics Bureau, and Johnny Malvina, Anti-Narcotics Bureau, 26 May 2020; interviews with Raymond Saint-Ange, superintendent, Prison Services; Samir Ghislain, deputy superintendent; and Elsa Nourrice, principal probation officer and head of prison rehabilitation service, 26 May 2020. Email exchange with Michelle Sabury, outreach coordinator, APDAR, 19 June 2020.
- 19 Interview with Derek Samson, principal officer, Corporate Affairs, Anti-Narcotics Bureau, and Johnny Malvina, Anti-Narcotics Bureau, Seychelles, 26 May 2020.
- 20 Risk Bulletin of Illicit Economies in East and Southern Africa, Issue 8, May–June 2020, GI-TOC, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/esaobs-risk-bulletin-8/>.
- 21 Jason Eligh, A synthetic age: The evolution of methamphetamine markets in eastern and southern Africa, GI-TOC, March 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/meth-africa/>.
- 22 Interview with Cyril Bonnelame, CEO of Seychelles Fishing Authority, 2 July 2020.
- 23 Interview with team leader of the EU-funded project EU Action Against Drugs And Organized Crime (EU-ACT), 9 April 2020, by phone.
- 24 US Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 7 March 2012, cited in KnowYourCountry, Mauritius: Risk and Compliance Report, March 2018, http://www.knowyourcountry.info/files/mauritiusamlaug14_2.pdf.
- 25 For Seychelles: interview with Derek Samson, principal officer, Corporate Affairs, Anti-Narcotics Bureau, and Johnny Malvina, Anti-Narcotics Bureau, Seychelles, 26 May 2020 (authorities did caveat this in that it is not the primary focus of interdiction efforts). For Mauritius: interview with X1, ADSU, Mauritius; interview with X4, senior prison official, Mauritius, 23 May 2020; interview with X12, senior National Coast Guard official, Mauritius, 22 June 2020; interview with former high-ranking intelligence officer, Mauritius, June 2020; interview with X6, investigator at the Independent Commission Against Corruption, Mauritius, 4 July 2020; interview with X32, high-ranking officer at ADSU, Mauritius, June 2020.
- 26 Interview with team leader of the EU-funded project EU Action Against Drugs And Organized Crime (EU-ACT), 9 April 2020, by phone.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Alastair Nelson, A triangle of vulnerability: Changing patterns of illicit trafficking off the Swahili coast, GI-TOC, 15 June 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/triangle-vulnerability-swahili-coast/>.
- 29 Phrase used in an interview with a source in the Malagasy Marine Nationale, who chose not to be named, 9 June 2020. Also used in media coverage of drug trafficking in Madagascar: see *Drogue dure: Madagascar, plaque tournante du commerce illicite, Midi Madagasikara*, 23 May 2017, <http://www.midi-madagasikara.mg/dossiers/2017/05/23/drogue-dure-madagascar-plaque-tournante-du-commerce-illicite/>.
- 30 PWUD, law enforcement, coastguard and civil society representatives in Mauritius, the Seychelles and Madagascar all reported the importance of this trafficking route. Stakeholders in the Seychelles and Madagascar reported that these handovers sometimes take place near the coast of Madagascar as well as far closer to the Seychelles. Interview with Raherimaminirina Zoly Miandrisoa, head of the Gendarmerie brigade Djamadjar, Nosy Be, Madagascar, 9 June 2020; interview with a representative of the Madagascar Central Intelligence Services, Antananarivo, Madagascar, 5 June 2020; interview with Hery Francois Rakotosolofa, chief of customs, Hell-Ville, Nosy Be, Madagascar, 8 June 2020.
- 31 Interview with Raheirininirina Olivier, Chief of the Department against Terrorism and the Fight Against Drug Trafficking, Central Intelligence Service; interview with Jean Claude Benoit, Commissioner of the Air and Border Police; interview with Captain Mahavisana Daudet, Commander of the Gendarmerie Nationale (also former commander of company of the Gendarmerie Nationale at the Port of Tomoasina in 2019), Madagascar.
- 32 See Mark Shaw, Simone Haysom and Peter Gastrow, The heroin coast: A political economy along the eastern African seaboard, GI-TOC, 2 July 2018, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-heroin-coast-a-political-economy-along-the-eastern-african-seaboard/>; Alastair Nelson, A triangle of vulnerability: Changing patterns of illicit trafficking off the Swahili coast, GI-TOC, 15 June 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/triangle-vulnerability-swahili-coast/>.
- 33 International Monetary Fund, Republic of Madagascar: Selected Issues, IMF Staff Country Reports, 17/224, July 2017, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2017/07/18/Republic-of-Madagascar-Selected-Issues>.

- lic-of-Madagascar-Selected-Issues-45098, Kaunain Rahman, Casey Kelso and Matthew Jenkins, Overview of corruption and anti-corruption in Madagascar: Focus on the natural resource sector and gold, Transparency International, April 2019, <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/Country-Profile-Madagascar-2019.pdf>.
- 34 Kaunain Rahman, Casey Kelso and Matthew Jenkins, Overview of corruption and anti-corruption in Madagascar: Focus on the natural resource sector and gold, Transparency International, April 2019, <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/Country-Profile-Madagascar-2019.pdf>.
- 35 See, for example, Small Arms Survey, Ethos of Exploitation: Insecurity and predation in Madagascar, 2011, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2011/en/Small-Arms-Survey-2011-Chapter-06-EN.pdf>.
- 36 Note that the weight of doses varied significantly within each island. The average dose in Mauritius weighs 0.09 gram, while that in the Seychelles averages 0.1 gram.
- 37 Addiction in paradise: Seychelles battles heroin crisis, France 24, 20 February 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200220-addiction-in-paradise-seychelles-battles-heroin-crisis>; interview with Fady Banane, former PWUD and founding member of the Drug User Network Seychelles, 16 June 2020.
- 38 In Antananarivo, the largest sample included in the survey consisted of 2.1 grams, costing MGA 400 000 (€86.41); the smallest were 0.2 gram samples. The price per gram has been calculated to standardize this variation. This was the largest variation in purchase size seen across the islands.
- 39 Synthetic cannabinoid compounds are one type of new psychoactive substances. Synthetic cathinones have also been detected, but cannabinoid compounds are by far the most common.
- 40 Supporting this, almost 95% of admissions at the specialist Nenuphar treatment and rehabilitation ward, which caters for minors and young people up to the age of 23 years with drug-related problems, related to NPS use. Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Secretariat, Mauritius National Drug Observatory Report 2019, January 2021, <https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/National%20drug%20observatory%20report%202019%20Final.doc%202011.pdf>.
- 41 Republic of Mauritius, The Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, Report, July 2018, <http://cut.mu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Commission-of-Enquiry-on-Drug-Trafficking-Report-optimized.pdf>. Follow-up engagement with FSL in 2020 confirmed that the vast majority of synthetic cannabinoids continue to originate from China. Encrypted messenger communications with FSL officer, June–August 2020.
- 42 In July 2020, Mauritian customs seized synthetic drugs in a jar of chilli sent from China by post. The FSL tipped off the ADSU and customs after having found chilli flakes in an empty container sent for analysis. Encrypted messenger communications with FSL officer, June–August 2020.
- 43 Stakeholder interviews across the islands. Also reported in UNODC, Recommended methods for the Identification and Analysis of Synthetic Cannabinoid Receptor Agonists in Seized Materials, 2013, https://www.unodc.org/documents/scientific/STNAR48_Synthetic_Cannabinoids_ENG.pdf.
- 44 Interview with X22, rehabilitation worker specializing in HIV/AIDS, Mauritius, June 2020.
- 45 Interview with X10, PWUD, Rose Hill, Mauritius, June 2020.
- 46 Testimonies of individuals arrested for chimique trafficking offences, as reported in a telephone interview with Dr Youssouf Ali, addiction specialist, Mayotte, 9 June 2020. Similar metrics were reported in: Agnès Cadet-Taïrou, Michel Gandilhon, *L'offre, l'usage et l'impact des consommations de "chimique" à Mayotte: une étude qualitative*, Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies, May 2018, <https://www.ofdt.fr/publications/collections/rapports/rapports-d-etudes/rapports-detudes-ofdt-parus-en-2018/loffre-lusage-et-limpact-des-consommations-de-chimique-mayotte-une-etude-qualitative/>.
- 47 Salim Hossanee, Assistant Superintendent of the Mauritius Police Force, Drug trafficking tests Mauritius's good governance record webinar, ENACT, 28 October 2020, <https://enactafrica.org/events/drug-trafficking-tests-mauritius-good-governance-record>.
- 48 Agnès Cadet-Taïrou, Michel Gandilhon, *L'offre, l'usage et l'impact des consommations de "chimique" à Mayotte: une étude qualitative*, Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies, May 2018, <https://www.ofdt.fr/publications/collections/rapports/rapports-d-etudes/rapports-detudes-ofdt-parus-en-2018/loffre-lusage-et-limpact-des-consommations-de-chimique-mayotte-une-etude-qualitative/>.
- 49 Interview with X17, former PWUD enrolled in methadone programme, Port Louis, Mauritius, 13 June 2020.
- 50 Notably, 2019 arrests relating to synthetic cannabinoids constituted the biggest proportion (48%) of all dealing offences (although heroin constitutes the biggest proportion of possession offences). Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Secretariat, National Drug Observatory Report 2019, January 2021, <https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/National%20drug%20observatory%20report%202019%20Final.doc%202011.pdf>.
- 51 Interview with X1, former high-ranking officer of ADSU, 3 June 2020, Mauritius; interview with PWUD, close to Grand Gaube/Goodlands, Mauritius, June 2020; interview with social worker, former assessor of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, Mauritius, 9 June 2020. The price difference between cannabis and NPS in Mauritius has reportedly driven some traffickers to mix the two products while still marketing the resultant drug as cannabis, making some cannabis users wary.
- 52 Sustainable Development Goals, Indicator 17.8.1, Internet users per 100 inhabitants, <https://www.sdg.org/datasets/indicator-17-8-1-internet-users-per-100-inhabitants-5/data?geometry=44.571%2C-12.938%2C45.725%2C-12.703>; Digital 2017, Mayotte, Datareportal, 1 February 2017, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2017-mayotte>; Departement de Mayotte, Schéma Directeur Territorial d'Aménagement Numérique du Département de Mayotte, April 2013.
- 53 Interview with Harifa Abodo Nouridine, head of Customs Inspection Unit, Mutsamudu Port, Anjouan, 21 January 2020. Interview with Lieutenant Nasser Issa, Comoros Coast Guard, Grand Comore, August 2020; interview with Moroni Port Authority official, Grand Comore, August 2020. See also Alastair Nelson, A triangle of vulnerability: Changing patterns of illicit trafficking off the Swahili coast, GI-TOC, 15 June 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/triangle-vulnerability-swahili-coast/>.
- 54 Interview with Andry Rakotondravola, editor-in-chief for radio production at Mayotte Premier, 28 May 2020, by phone.

- 55 Mahorais customs officials and National Police interviewed by local press: *La « chimique », une drogue arrivée de Chine qui sévit dans la région*, 9 December 2020, <https://lejournaldemayotte.yt/2020/12/09/la-chimique-une-drogue-arrivee-de-chine-qui-sevit-dans-la-region/>.
- 56 In assessing the potential spread of chimique, it should be noted that Madagascar's large local cannabis cultivation market, and extremely low prices – US\$0.03 per gram in producing regions – would mean that chimique would be more expensive than cannabis, and arguably therefore less attractive.
- 57 Across Mauritius, Mayotte and the Comoros (the principal consumer markets for synthetic cannabinoids), PWUD reported buying in doses (rather than grams). In Mauritius, PWUD reported that each dose weighed 0.1 gram, a volume confirmed by the FSL testing of seized doses. Note that this commentary is based on the pricing data collected during the 2020 research period.
- 58 Agnès Cadet-Tairou and Michel Gandilhon, *L'offre, l'usage et l'impact des consommations de 'chimique' à Mayotte: une étude qualitative*, Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies, May 2018, <https://www.ofdt.fr/publications/collections/rapports/rapports-d-etudes/rapports-detudes-ofdt-parus-en-2018/loffre-lusage-et-limpact-des-consommations-de-chimique-mayotte-une-etude-qualitative/>.
- 59 Interview with Fady Banane, former PWUD and founding member of the Drug User Network Seychelles, 16 June 2020.
- 60 Kenyan female national remanded for importation of 255g of suspected cocaine, *Seychelles Nation*, 7 August 2019, <http://www.nation.sc/articles/1088/kenyan-female-national-remanded-for-importation-of-255g-of-suspected-cocaine>; Daniel Laurence, Kenyan national accused of bringing cocaine into Seychelles for organized group, *Seychelles News Agency*, 2 April 2018, <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/8934/Kenyan+national+accused+of+bringing+cocaine+into+Seychelles+for+organised+group>.
- 61 Detentions of mules carrying cocaine – including several Brazilian nationals, as well as Kenyan, Seychellois and Tanzanian nationals – point to a network of air routes through Ethiopia's Addis Ababa and South Africa's OR Tambo airports to the Seychelles. (Both airports are hubs for cocaine trafficking internationally, not just to the Seychelles.) A spate of seizures support air imports dominating the flow. See Salifa Karpetyan, Brazilian man sentenced to 6 years in prison for importing cocaine into Seychelles, *Seychelles News Agency*, 17 November 2019, <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/12022/Brazilian+man+sentenced+to++years+in+prison+for+importing+cocaine+into+Seychelles>; Seychellois couple arrested in Brazil in possession of 3.361kg of cocaine, *Seychelles Nation*, 5 September 2019, <http://www.nation.sc/articles/1440/seychellois-couple-arrested-in-brazil-in-possession-of-3361kg-of-cocaine>; Tanzanian businessman remanded for importation of approximately 750g of suspected cocaine, *Seychelles Nation*, 14 November 2019, <http://www.nation.sc/articles/2348/tanzanian-businessman-remanded-for-importation-of-approximately-750g-of-suspected-cocaine>.
- 62 *La Réunion: un trafic de cocaïne entre le Pérou et Madagascar dévoilé*, *L'Express*, July 2013, <https://www.lexpress.mu/article/la-reunion-un-traffic-de-cocaine-entre-le-perou-et-madagascar-devoile>.
- 63 Interview with Dr David Mété, head of the Addiction Service at the University Hospital Centre (CHU), Réunion, 24 June 2020.
- Local media have declared an 'explosion' of cocaine use and – perhaps in an overdramatization of the reality – decried an imminent cocaine-fuelled increase in criminality and violence in Réunion. See *Explosion du trafic de drogues: 'Personne n'a failli. On faillirait si on baissait les bras'*, *Journal de l'Île*, 1 July 2019.
- 64 Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Secretariat, Mauritius National Drug Observatory Report 2019, January 2021, <https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/National%20drug%20observatory%20report%202019%20Final.doc%2011.pdf>.
- 65 In Mauritius, cocaine was described as being primarily used by the elite, out of reach to all but a wealthy minority.
- 66 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), France Country Drug Report 2019, https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/11335/france-cdr-2019_0.pdf. The cocaine price in France is recorded between a range of €60 and €105.
- 67 Interview with Julien Barraco, lawyer at the Saint-Denis bar, July 2020, Réunion. Mainland France purity data from European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Statistical Bulletin 2020 – price, purity and potency, <https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/stats2020/ppp>.
- 68 Cannabis has significant cultural significance in Mauritius in the form of a drink called bhang, which is central to a Mahashivarti, a Hindu prayer for the Lord Shiva, who himself reportedly smoked cannabis. For conviction statistics, see Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Secretariat, Mauritius National Drug Observatory Report 2019, January 2021, <https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/National%20drug%20observatory%20report%202019%20Final.doc%2011.pdf>.
- 69 Interview with NGO in Mauritius running needle exchange program for PWUD, July 2020, Mauritius.
- 70 Interview with cannabis PWUD, close to Grand Gaube/Goodlands, Mauritius, June 2020.
- 71 Cannabis in Nosy Be is referred to as prôty or kifafo, whereas in Antananarivo it is described either as *karoty* (carrot) or *baomba* (bomb), depending on the weight and shape of the package. In Betroka, the cannabis sample was referred to as bona halilo.
- 72 *Trafic de zamal vers Maurice: Peines allégées pour les 'petits poissons' de l'Anse des Cascades*, *Journal de l'Île*, 13 September 2019, <https://www.clicanoo.re/Faits-Divers/Article/2019/09/13/Trafic-de-zamal-vers-Maurice-Peines-allegees-pour-les-petits>.
- 73 Interview with Moroni Port Authority official, Grand Comore, August 2020; interview with Dr Youssef Ali, an addiction specialist, Mayotte, 9 June 2020, by phone. Seizures of cannabis resin in Réunion (which lacks local processing capacity) increased significantly between 2014 and 2019 (from 3.8 kilograms to 150 kilograms). However, these seizures were linked to air traffic from mainland France. Interview with Patrice Ver-net, regional customers director, Réunion, 22 June 2020.
- 74 Extensive discussions with Seychellois researcher and consultant, March–July 2020.
- 75 Interview with Emilson Rabemananjara, technical advisor, and Naina Andriamampandry, Directorate of Studies and Strategies, SAMIFIN (Financial Intelligence Unit), 4 June 2020; interview with Colonel Ramaromisamalala Mamy Marly, Chief of anti-drug trafficking department, Gendarmerie Nationale of Madagascar, Antananarivo, 4 June 2020.

- 76 Interview with a source in the Malagasy Central Intelligence Service, Antananarivo, 5 June 2020; interview with a drug dealer in 67ha, Antananarivo, 19 June 2020.
- 77 Interview with a source in the Malagasy Central Intelligence Service, Antananarivo, 5 June 2020; interview with Raherimaminirina Zoly Miandrisoa, head of the Gendarmerie brigade Djamadjar, Nosy Be, Madagascar, 9 June 2020; interview with Jean Claude Benoit, Commissioner of the Air and Border Police, 8 June 2020.
- 78 Interview with a source in the Malagasy Central Intelligence Service, Antananarivo, 5 June 2020; Hajatiana Leonard, *Trafic transnational - Le baron de drogue chassé*, 28 May 2019, L'Express de Madagascar, <https://lexpress.mg/28/05/2019/trafic-transnational-le-baron-du-traffic-de-drogue-chasse/>.
- 79 Interview with Commissioner Ramamonjisoa Tantely, chief of the anti-drug service of the Police Nationale, 15 June 2020.
- 80 Interview and survey with PWUD and dealer, Moroni, Grand Comore, 20 July 2020.
- 81 Low-level distributors do not require cross-border connections, making it easier to enter the market. In both Mauritius and the Seychelles, the growth in the number of dealers has engendered competition and friction between networks. However, interviewees cited growing drug use as evidence that there remained space for 'new entrants' to carve out a niche.
- 82 Interview with two criminal prosecutors in the Seychelles, 9 July 2020.
- 83 Interview with a PWUD, the Seychelles, 13 June 2020.
- 84 Interview with Fady Banane, former PWUD and founding member of the Drug User Network Seychelles, 16 June 2020.
- 85 Interview with X26, former senior intelligence officer, police officer, Mauritius, June 2020.
- 86 Interview with X4, senior prison official, Mauritius, 23 May 2020.
- 87 *Veeren, Chowrimoothoo et Islam: le trio d'enfer du trafic d'héroïne*, ION News, 30 July 2018, <https://ionnews.mu/veeren-chowrimoothoo-et-islam-le-trio-denfer-du-traffic-dheroine-30072018/>.
- 88 Interview with Jérôme Boule, former chairman of the Fact-Finding Committee on Drugs in 1995 and former MP, Mauritius, 19 June 2020; interview with X32, high-ranking ADSU officer, Mauritius, June 2020; interview with Y7, senior counsel, State Law Office, Mauritius, 17 June 2020.
- 89 Agnès Cadet-Taïrou and Michel Gandilhon, *L'offre, l'usage et l'impact des consommations de 'chimique' à Mayotte: une étude qualitative*, Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies, May 2018, <https://www.ofdt.fr/publications/collections/rapports/rapports-d-etudes/rapports-detudes-ofdt-parus-en-2018/loffre-lusage-et-limpact-des-consommations-de-chimique-mayotte-une-etude-qualitative/>.
- 90 Violent incidents in the Comoros, when they do occur, are concentrated in Moroni. Interview with Allaoui Maoulana Charif, Head of the Anti-Drug Brigade, Grand Comore, 16 September 2020; interview and survey with PWUD and dealer, Moroni, Grand Comore, 20 July 2020.
- 91 The ADSU reports tight control of firearms on the island, noting that networks are instead armed with tasers, tun-guns, pen knives and daggers. However, there is broad consensus among other stakeholders (including PWUD, officers in the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the National Security Service, legal counsel and dealers) that kingpins, or their paid 'bouncers', carry firearms.
- 92 Interview with Commissioner Ramamonjisoa Tantely, chief of the anti-drug service of the Police Nationale, Antananarivo, Madagascar, 15 June 2020.
- 93 Two sources in Madagascar both reported that Seychellois traffickers meeting Malagasy boats out at sea travel armed (though it was unspecified whether these are firearms or other weapons) for reasons of protection; interview with Raherimaminirina Zoly Miandrisoa, head of the Gendarmerie Brigade Djamadjar, Nosy Be, Madagascar, 9 June 2020; interview with Hery Francois Rakotosolofo, chief of customs, Hell-Ville, Nosy Be, 8 June 2020.
- 94 Agnès Cadet-Taïrou and Michel Gandilhon, *L'offre, l'usage et l'impact des consommations de 'chimique' à Mayotte: une étude qualitative*, Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies, May 2018, <https://www.ofdt.fr/publications/collections/rapports/rapports-d-etudes/rapports-detudes-ofdt-parus-en-2018/loffre-lusage-et-limpact-des-consommations-de-chimique-mayotte-une-etude-qualitative/>.
- 95 Interview with Colonel Ramaromisamalala Mamy Marly, chief of anti-drug trafficking department, Gendarmerie Nationale of Madagascar, Antananarivo, 4 June 2020.
- 96 Interview with X32, high-ranking officer at the ADSU, Mauritius, June 2020.
- 97 A range of interviewees, including in the Seychellois Coast Guard but also in rehabilitation organizations, cited the disappearances of fishermen importing drugs as a key, under-reported, form of violence associated with the drugs trade in the Seychelles.
- 98 Low levels of violence typically point to a high degree of collusion with state organs.
- 99 Interview with Y29, PWUD and dealer, Cité Kennedy, Mauritius, June 2020.
- 100 Interview with Jérôme Boule, former chairman of the Fact-Finding Committee on Drugs in 1995 and former MP, Mauritius, 19 June 2020.
- 101 Oliver Jütersonke and Moncef Kartas, *Ethos of Exploitation: Insecurity and predation in Madagascar*, in Small Arms Survey 2011, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2011/en/Small-Arms-Survey-2011-Chapter-06-EN.pdf>.
- 102 Interview with 'Hery' (name has been changed), leader of a cannabis trafficking organization, Morafeno, Madagascar, 3 July 2020.
- 103 Ibid. Translated from the French: '*Nous regroupons des centaines de jeunes garçons ... qui n'ont jamais mis les pieds dans une école. On nous considère comme des bandits de grands chemins, les dirigeants de ce pays nous oublent.... Nous ne sommes pas des criminels comme vous pensez, nous essaient de subvenir au besoin de nos familles.*'
- 104 Interviews with Raymond Saint-Ange, superintendent, prison services; Samir Ghislain, deputy superintendent; and Elsa Nourrice, principal probation officer and head of prison rehabilitation service, 26 May 2020; interview with representatives of the Anti-Corruption Commission Seychelles, 16 June 2020; interview with an ex-police officer, Victoria, Mahé, 16 June 2020; interview with a former army and police officer, 26 June 2020.
- 105 Interview with X7, senior prison official, Mauritius, 22 May 2020; interview with X26, former senior intelligence officer, police officer, Mauritius, June 2020; interview with X37, PWUD,

- Mauritius, 13 July 2020; interview with X20, PWUD and former dealer, Rose Hill, Mauritius, 13 June 2020.
- 106 Interview with an opposition party activist, 14 July 2020.
- 107 Interviews with Raymond Saint-Ange, superintendent of Prison Services; Samir Ghislain, deputy superintendent; and Elsa Nourrice, principal probation officer and head of prison rehabilitation service, 26 May 2020; interview with representatives of the Anti-Corruption Commission Seychelles, 16 June 2020; interview with an ex-police officer, Victoria, Mahé, 16 June 2020; interview with a former army and police officer, 26 June 2020.
- 108 Interview with Fady Banane, former PWUD and founding member of the Drug User Network Seychelles, 16 June 2020.
- 109 Republic of Mauritius, The Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, Report, July 2018, <http://cut.mu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Commission-of-Enquiry-on-Drug-Trafficking-Report-optimized.pdf>.
- 110 Interview and survey with PWUD, Moroni, Grand Comore, 9 August 2020; interview and survey with PWUD and dealer, Moroni, Grand Comore, 20 July 2020.
- 111 Interview with Commissioner Ramamonjisoa Tantely, chief of the anti-drug service of the Police Nationale, Antananarivo, Madagascar, 15 June 2020.
- 112 Interview with Capitaine Mahavihasina Daudet, Company Commander of Gendarmerie Nationale stationed in Nosy Be, 9 June 2020; Raherimaminirainy Zoly Miandrisoa, head of the Gendarmerie brigade Djamadjar, Nosy Be, Madagascar, 9 June 2020.
- 113 For example, Emilson Rabemananjara, a technical councillor with SAMIFIN, the Malagasy financial investigation bureau, confirmed that there is one ongoing investigation of money laundering relating to drug trafficking concerning an elected official. Interview with Emilson Rabemananjara, technical advisor, and Naina Andriamampandry, Directorate of Studies and Strategies, SAMIFIN, 4 June 2020.
- 114 Klaus Von Lampe, *Organised Crime: Analyzing Illegal Activities, Criminal Structures and Extra-Legal Governance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016.
- 115 Interview with Y28, ex-PWUD, current social worker, Upper Plaine-Wilhems, Mauritius, 12 June 2020. A significant dealer in Goodlands, a town on the northern tip of Mauritius, reportedly follows a similar practice; interview with X7, senior prison official, 22 May 2020, Mauritius.
- 116 Interview with Y27, PWUD, Batterie-Cassée, Mauritius, 16 June 2020.
- 117 Interview with X26, former senior intelligence officer, police officer, Mauritius, June 2020; interview with rehabilitation worker specializing in HIV/AIDS, June 2020.
- 118 Ongoing discussions with Seychellois consultant and researcher for this paper, March–July 2020.
- 119 Interview with David Esparon, deputy attorney general, 10 June 2020.
- 120 Interview with Clovis Razafimalala, an environmental activist in Toamasina, June 2020.
- 121 Interview with Ranaivoarivony Jaonson, president of the fonkotany (local government area) of Ankasina 67ha, 22 July 2020; interview with a police officer in the precinct of 67ha, 22 July 2020.
- 122 Drug sales have become part of the informal street economy of 67ha. For example, it is common to be able to purchase a small packet of cannabis from a telephone credit seller or a cigarette seller. Observations in the area and testimonies of PWUD suggest heroin is primarily on offer but other drugs are also widely available. Field notes of Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa, consultant with the GI-TOC, Madagascar, throughout the research for this paper.
- 123 Field notes of Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa, consultant with the GI-TOC, Madagascar, throughout the research for this paper.
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 Community cooperation with police investigations was reported to be low. This is likely in part due to perceived corruption by the police and poor relationships more broadly. It was also cited by some stakeholders as evidence of the community protecting drug markets.
- 126 Field notes of, and debrief with, Noura Sahimi, consultant with the GI-TOC, Comoros, throughout the research for this paper.
- 127 Estimates by the Mauritius National Plan put the PWID population at 10 000, but NGOs interviewed by the Commission of Inquiry in 2018 suggested that the state was underestimating PWID population, and instead suggested that there were 20 000 PWID in the country. National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023, https://dha.govmu.org/Lists/DocumentsLinks/Attachments/15/National%20Drug%20Control%20Master%20Plan_Master_04092019%20pdf%20final.pdf. Commission of Enquiry Report, 2018. In the Seychelles, data published in 2018 estimated the PWID population to be 2 560: see APDAR, Seychelles Biological and Behavioural Surveillance of Heroin Users: 2017, February 2018, shared by the author.
- 128 According to the dates of publication of the two APDAR IBBS surveys. Rates of hepatitis C among PWID also doubled, reaching 76.1% as at 2018. APDAR, Seychelles biological and behavioural surveillance of heroin users: 2017, February 2018, shared by the author.
- 129 Admissions due to intake of illicit drugs in public health institutions between 1 January 2015 and 30 November 2018; cited in the Mauritius National Drug Control Master Plan 2019. In 2017, 44% of inpatient treatment cases reported to public health institutions relating to drug use problems concerned suspected use of ‘new psychoactive substances’, dwarfing the 17% related to opioids and opiates. Republic of Mauritius, Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, National Drug Observatory Report, March 2018.
- 130 Interview with Dr Youssef Ali, 9 June 2020, Addiction specialist, Mayotte, by phone; Agnès Cadet-Tairou and Michel Gandilhon, *L'offre, l'usage et l'impact des consommations de 'chimique' à Mayotte: une étude qualitative*, Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies, <https://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/docs/epfxacy5.pdf>.
- 131 Interview with Y29, PWUD and dealer, Cité Kennedy, Mauritius, June 2020; interview with cannabis PWUD, close to Grand Gaube/Goodlands, Mauritius, June 2020.
- 132 Interview with Y29, PWUD and dealer, Cité Kennedy, Mauritius, June 2020; interview with cannabis PWUD, close to Grand Gaube/Goodlands, Mauritius, June 2020.
- 133 Agnès Cadet-Tairou and Michel Gandilhon, *L'offre, l'usage et l'impact des consommations de 'chimique' à Mayotte: une étude qualitative*, Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies, May 2018, <https://www.ofdt.fr/publications/collections/rapports>.

- 134 The most recently published data on public health admissions is from 2019. See Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Secretariat, National Drug Observatory Report 2019, January 2021, <https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/National%20drug%20observatory%20report%202019%20Final.doc%2011.pdf>.
- 135 Information provided by Major Rakotonrainibe Andriamparany at the detoxification centre at the Lutheran Hospital of Ambohibao, Antananarivo, over a series of meetings, June 2020.
- 136 Note that stakeholders emphasized that the judiciary in Mauritius operated entirely independently, and that allegations of drug-related corruption in judicial processes were centred rather on prosecutors, or lower-level court administration staff. See Peter Gastrow, *Termites at work: A report on transnational organized crime and state erosion in Kenya*, International Peace Institute, 2011, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/IPI-Termites-at-Work-A-Report-on-Transnational-Organized-Crime-and-State-Erosion-in-Kenya.pdf>.
- 137 The critical editorial stance of *L'Express* has triggered a number of defamation cases brought by members of the government, and meant the newspaper is ineligible for government advertising – a significant source of revenue on the island.
- 138 Interview with representatives of the Anti-Corruption Commission Seychelles, 16 June 2020; interview with a former army and police officer, 26 June 2020.
- 139 Interview with a group of sources in the fishing industry, who requested anonymity, 7 July 2020.
- 140 Ibid.
- 141 Interview with X7, senior prison official, Mauritius, 22 May 2020.
- 142 Republic of Mauritius, The Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, Report, July 2018, <http://cut.mu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Commission-of-Enquiry-on-Drug-Trafficking-Report-optimized.pdf>.
- 143 Government Information Service, Prime Minister's Office, Mauritius, Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking contains some 460 recommendations, says Prime Minister, 17 October 2018, <http://www.govmu.org/English/News/Pages/Report-of-the-Commission-of-Inquiry-on-Drug-Trafficking-contains-some-460-recommendations,-says-Prime-Minister.aspx>.
- 144 Interviews with numerous stakeholders in Mauritius, including Roukaya Kasenally and Ramola Ramtohol, 18 January 2021, by phone. Many interviewees suggested that only two minor recommendations had been implemented by mid-2020, namely the banning of cigarettes, which are used as currency, and postal money orders in prison.
- 145 The 'upsurge' in drugs trafficking was unanimously identified by stakeholders, and recognized in the National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023, https://dha.govmu.org/Lists/DocumentsLinks/Attachments/15/National%20Drug%20Control%20Master%20Plan_Master_04092019%20pdf%20final.pdf.
- 146 Interview with Roukaya Kasenally and Ramola Ramtohol, 18 January 2021, by phone.
- 147 Roukaya Kasenally and Ramola Ramtohol, *The cost of parliamentary politics in Mauritius*, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, September 2020, <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Cost-of-Parliamentary-Politics-in-MauritiusWEB-FINAL.pdf>.
- 148 Interview with Roukaya Kasenally and Ramola Ramtohol, 18 January 2021, by phone; Roukaya Kasenally, Ramola Ramtohol, *The cost of parliamentary politics in Mauritius*, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, September 2020, <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Cost-of-Parliamentary-Politics-in-MauritiusWEB-FINAL.pdf>.
- 149 Jean Michel Lee Shim, the owner of SMS Pariaz, a large betting conglomerate on the island, is a major donor and supporter of MSM. Patrick St Pierre, Jean-Michel Lee Shim: *Le pari gagnant du MSM*, *L'Express*, 20 October 2019, <https://www.lexpress.mu/article/363292/jean-michel-lee-shim-pari-gagnant-msm>. An editor appointed to one of Shim's newspapers resigned shortly after appointment, apparently once it became clear that the newspapers would not operate independently. The chair of SMS Pariaz, Mukesh Balgobin, is also known to be an MSM supporter.
- 150 Interview with Roukaya Kasenally and Ramola Ramtohol, 18 January 2021, by phone.
- 151 Democracy analysts in Mauritius also point to growing clientelism and patronage in the islands' institutions. Laurie Rivolo, *'Payons-nous le prix du népotisme et de l'incompétence', réagit Transparency Mauritius après la catastrophe du Wakashio*, *Defimedia.info*, 10 August 2020, <https://defimedia.info/payons-nous-le-prix-du-nepotisme-et-de-lincompetence-reagit-transparency-mauritius-apres-la-catastrophe-du-wakashio>. This is supported by Transparency International reporting, which found that 61% of respondents in Mauritius reported that corruption had increased between 2018 and 2019. See Transparency International, Mauritius, <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/mauritius#>.
- 152 Financial Action Task Force (FATF), *Jurisdictions under increased monitoring*, 21 February 2020, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/high-risk-and-other-monitored-jurisdictions/documents/increased-monitoring-february-2020.html>; Mauritius added to the European Union's AML high-risk third country list – implications for European businesses, *Debevoise & Plimpton*, 5 June 2020, <https://www.debevoise.com/insights/publications/2020/06/mauritius-added-to-the-european-unions-aml>; European Commission, *Council revises its EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions*, 18 February 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/news/council-revises-its-eu-list-non-cooperative-jurisdictions-4_en.
- 153 Within the FATF assessment, 'drugs and drug related offences' were identified as the 'major risk in Mauritius', from a money laundering perspective.
- 154 Mauritius has taken significant steps to address weaknesses in the system, and is seeking to be removed from the grey list quickly to mitigate the negative impacts on its financial centre. See *Mauritius added to the European Union's AML high-risk third country list – implications for European businesses*, *Debevoise & Plimpton*, 5 June 2020, <https://www.debevoise.com/insights/publications/2020/06/mauritius-added-to-the-european-unions-aml>.
- 155 Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Secretariat, National Drug Observatory Report 2019, January 2021, <https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/National%20drug%20observatory%20report%202019%20Final.doc%2011.pdf>.

- 156 Sharmilla Bhima, Mauritius government further strengthens laws on money laundering and financing of terrorism. Appleby, 30 June 2020, https://www.applebyglobal.com/news/mauritius-government-further-strengthens-laws-on-money-laundering-and-financing-of-terrorism/?utm_source=Mondaq&utm_medium=syndication&utm_campaign=LinkedIn-integration.
- 157 Interview with X38, senior state counsel, Mauritius, 14 July 2020.
- 158 Under the rule of President France Albert René (who came to power in a 1977 coup closely following the islands' independence), the Seychelles first emerged as an offshore financial centre, particularly through the operations of Giovanni Mario Ricci, an Italian businessman accused of connections to Italian organized crime, who was granted sole rights to incorporate offshore companies in the Seychelles. See Stephen Ellis, Africa and international corruption: The strange case of South Africa and Seychelles, *African Affairs*, 95, 1996, 165–196.
- 159 The EU now lists 12 nations due to concern that their policy environments support tax fraud or evasion, tax avoidance and money laundering. The EU's decision followed that of France to add the Seychelles to its own list some months before. Seychelles named to EU's tax-haven 'blacklist', *Africa Times*, 20 February 2020, <https://africatimes.com/2020/02/20/seychelles-named-to-eus-tax-haven-blacklist/>.
- 160 Council of Europe, Taxation: EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions, accessed 17 March 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-list-of-non-cooperative-jurisdictions/>
- 161 The Seychelles had made commitments and then missed deadlines to report remedial actions being taken. Interview with three members of the Seychelles Financial Investigation Unit, 17 July 2020.
- 162 A 2014 investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (which documented the links between international corruption scandals and the Seychelles) argued that the country was acting as a safe harbour for international criminal capital. See Matthew Shaer, Michael Hudson and Margot Williams, Sun and shadows: How an island paradise became a haven for dirty money, *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ)*, 3 June 2014, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/offshore/sun-and-shadows-how-island-paradise-became-haven-dirty-money/?src=longreads/>. A 1995 law which granted impunity from prosecution to any businessperson willing to invest US\$10 million in the Seychelles (and widely condemned as welcoming criminals) was struck down but, the ICIJ argued, the legacy of impunity continues. The allegations in the report prompted a personal rebuttal from then-president James Michel. See Hajira Amia and Sharon Uranie, Seychelles president's office: ICIJ dirty money article is 'one-sided', *Seychelles News Agency*, 3 June 2014, <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/722/Seychelles+Presidents+office+ICIJ+dirty+money+article+is+one-sided>.
- 163 Figure shared by Indian Maritime Fusion Centre during a telephone interview, 14 August 2020.
- 164 Tor Sellström, *Africa in the Indian Ocean: Islands in Ebb and Flow*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- 165 The 2019 edition of the annual report published by the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, based in Madagascar, notes that narcotics represented 106 of the 166 illicit maritime traffic activities recorded across the Indian Ocean as a whole. Law enforcement priorities shape the focus of interdictions and could skew statistics, but this certainly points to the significance of illicit drugs in the region's commodity smuggling dynamics. Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, *Activity Report 2019*, Antananarivo, Madagascar, 20 March 2020.
- 166 Anthony Bergin, David Brewster and Aakriti Bachhawat, *Ocean horizons: Strengthening maritime security in Indo-Pacific island states*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, December 2019, <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2019-11/Ocean%20horizons.pdf?gM3NpsCPHNIM6P.eC96xJFYLWf-wyR4tV>.
- 167 The CTF 150 is made up of a range of participating nations including Australia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the UK and the US. The mandate of the CTF 150, originally set up as an international military response to Somali piracy, includes counter-narcotics trafficking (as a link to terrorist financing). As the threat of Somali piracy waned, drug trafficking became a relatively more prominent security threat in the region and a larger part of the mandate and work of the CTF 150.
- 168 Interview with Timothy Walker, senior researcher focusing on maritime security, Institute for Security Studies, 12 June 2020, by phone.
- 169 The ability of vessels to turn off AIS transponders and the limited scope of vessels required by the International Maritime Organization regulations to carry AIS both pose significant challenges to maritime surveillance. Discussions considering how existing AIS data can be better leveraged in responding to maritime drugs trafficking should be prioritized by states and regional maritime information fusion centres. International Maritime Organization, AIS transponders, <https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Safety/Pages/AIS.aspx>.
- 170 Interview with Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, 13 October 2020, by phone.
- 171 These complex jurisdictional arrangements are a significant challenge to addressing maritime crime, while simultaneously offering an opportunity to organized crime actors. Based on comments by Alan Cole, speaking at Blue Crimes: Rethinking the Maritime Security Agenda, 10 September 2020. See also Brian Wilson, A diplomatic game-changer: Reshaping the fight against terrorists and criminals at sea, *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs*, 1, 4, 2009, 135–136.
- 172 The relative success of the CTF 150 operations is also believed to have driven a shift in routes taken by dhows travelling the southern route further out to the high seas, outside the jurisdiction of the CTF 150. Recognizing this, CTF 150 representatives have, as early as 2018, requested an extension to their jurisdiction, but this was not agreed to by funding powers. Informal discussion reported by international drugs market analyst, May 2020, by phone. Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, *Activity Report 2019*, Antananarivo, Madagascar, 20 March 2020.
- 173 Interview with Patrice Vernet, regional customers director, Réunion, 22 June 2020; *Lutte contre les trafiquants dans l'océan Indien: Les saisies de drogues se multiplient*, clicanoo, 31 May 2019, <https://www.clicanoo.re/Faits-Divers/Article/2019/05/31/Lutte-contre-les-trafiquants-dans-locean-Indien-Les-saisies-de>.

- 174 For more detail on the case, see Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Eastern and Southern Africa, Risk Bulletin 8, GI-TOC, May–June 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Civil-Society-Observatory-of-Illicit-Economies-in-Eastern-and-Southern-Africa-Risk-Bulletin-8.pdf>.
- 175 Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Julie Høy-Carrasco, Navigating changing currents: A forward-looking evaluation of efforts to tackle maritime crime off the Horn of Africa, Centre for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen, September 2018, https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/publikationer/navigating-changing-currents/download-rapport/CMS_Rapport_2018_4_-_Navigating_changing_currents_final_digital_19092018_.pdf.
- 176 This fragmentation was first clearly exposed in the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem in 2016.
- 177 The Comoros and Madagascar are both termed ‘inertial states’ in Jason Eligh, The evolution of illicit drug markets and drug policy in Africa, ENACT, 9 July 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-evolution-of-illicit-drug-markets-and-drug-policy-in-africa/>. In Madagascar, drug use is penalized by one year in prison, while trafficking is penalized with ‘temporary hard labour’; see Article 141, Law 97–039, 4 November 1997, on control of narcotics, psychotropic substances and precursors.
- 178 Rakotondrainibe Andriamparany, head of the detoxification centre at the Lutheran Hospital of Ambohibao, emphasized the lack of prioritization given to a health response over a series of meetings in Antananarivo, June 2020.
- 179 Commissioner Ramamonjisoa Tantely, chief of the anti-drug service of the Police Nationale of Antananarivo, pronounced Madagascar’s 1997 legislation to be ‘archaic’ – a sentiment echoed by myriad stakeholders interviewed for this report. The judiciary are permitted by law to consider a wide range of aggravating and mitigating circumstances in prescribing sentencing for drug offences. Ramarosata Jesse, a public prosecutor in Betroka interviewed on 2 July 2020, noted that this discretion is widely misperceived as corruption. Most stakeholders disagreed, although a number cited the legislative discretion as an enabler of corruption.
- 180 Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, Code pénal, Article 328, 1995, <http://comoresdroit.comores-droit.com/wp-content/dossier/code/penal.pdf>.
- 181 For example, see L’Alliance Lepep, Gouverner pour le peuple, avec le peuple, Manifeste Electoral, November 2014, https://ionnews.mu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/manifeste-electoral_alliance-lepep.pdf; L’Alliance Morisien, Manifeste Electoral, ensam tou possib, October 2019, https://www.scribd.com/document/431657625/Manifeste-Electoral-de-l-Alliance-Morisien-2019?secret_password=jArdmiY1RRDhCs3XV2Vd#-fullscreen&from_embed.
- 182 Rey Chad Abdool, Policy change towards implementing harm reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 30, 2016, 140–142. Drug use remains criminalized, with a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment (although in practice a fine is often meted out instead).
- 183 The number of ‘consumers and traffickers’ arrested remains a key indicator of success in the Mauritius National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023. There is no distinguishing between the different forms of arrest. Not only does this arguably incentivize the arrest of PWUD to ‘make up numbers’, but it is a faulty metric of success. Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023, https://dha.govmu.org/Lists/DocumentsLinks/Attachments/15/National%20Drug%20Control%20Master%20Plan_Master_04092019%20pdf%20final.pdf. As at 2019, there were 5 496 persons on the methadone programme, and 47 needle exchange programme sites. See Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Secretariat, National Drug Observatory Report 2019, January 2021, <https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/National%20drug%20observatory%20report%202019%20Final.doc%2011.pdf>.
- 184 Republic of Mauritius, Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, National Observatory Report, March 2018, https://health.govmu.org/Documents/Main%20Page/New/NDO_MOH_FINAL_JOSE_VERSION_05July_2018_Brown.pdf. Arrest data shared by the ADSU; interview and survey with X19, ‘Ti Blaka’ PWUD and former dealer, Parc Cochon, Port Louis, 13 June 2020.
- 185 Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Secretariat, National Drug Observatory Report 2019, January 2021, <https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/National%20drug%20observatory%20report%202019%20Final.doc%2011.pdf>.
- 186 Ibid.
- 187 Mauritius is perceived by a number of international and domestic analysts alike to have failed to live up to its promise to deliver innovative responses. See regarding the former: Jason Eligh, The evolution of illicit drug markets and drug policy in Africa, 9 July 2019, ENACT, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-evolution-of-illicit-drug-markets-and-drug-policy-in-africa/>.
- 188 In line with this, the Seychelles National Drug Control Master Plan 2018–2022 earmarked more human and budgetary resources, increasing the resources available to the agencies tasked with managing demand- and supply-reduction work in the Seychelles. As of early 2020, the methadone programme had reportedly reached 2 500 of the Seychelles’ population of heroin users: Addiction in paradise: Seychelles battles heroin crisis, France 24, 20 February 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200220-addiction-in-paradise-seychelles-battles-heroin-crisis>. Regarding the timing of the policy pivot see: Jason Eligh, The evolution of illicit drug markets and drug policy in Africa, 9 July 2019, ENACT, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-evolution-of-illicit-drug-markets-and-drug-policy-in-africa/>.
- 189 The more generous 30 gram allowance for cannabis reflects a differentiated prohibition approach (notably distinct from Mauritius, where 57% of convicted drug offences between 2013 and 2016 related to cannabis). Republic of Mauritius, Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, National Observatory Report, March 2018, https://health.govmu.org/Documents/Main%20Page/New/NDO_MOH_FINAL_JOSE_VERSION_05July_2018_Brown.pdf.
- 190 Article 38 (2) and article 39 (3) contains provisions to avoid incarceration of ‘drug user’ and ‘drug-dependent’ for small amounts of possession. The Seychelles courts can pass a suspended sentence of imprisonment for a term of not more than two years under section 282 of the Criminal Procedure Code, depending on the circumstances.
- 191 Interview with an official in the Seychelles Department for Social Affairs, 17 June 2020; interview with representatives of the Anti-Corruption Commission Seychelles, 16 June 2020; interview with two representatives of the Seychelles Coast Guard, 19 June 2020.

- 192 The Seychelles Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Committee, which includes representatives from key law-enforcement bodies, noted a widespread lack of capacity as an obstacle to effective anti-corruption investigations. Interview with representatives of the Anti-Corruption Commission Seychelles, 16 June 2020.
- 193 Interview with representatives of the Anti-Corruption Commission Seychelles, 16 June 2020.
- 194 French law grants the prosecutor and judiciary significant discretion in determining the penalty for use of drugs, which can include rehabilitation and community service. The law also enables the PWUD not to be given a criminal record due to this infraction (taking into account the long-term negative impacts of recorded offences). French Code of Criminal Procedure, articles 41-1 and 41-2.
- 195 Interview with Dr Youssouf Ali, addiction specialist based in Mayotte, 9 June 2020, by phone.
- 196 Ibid.
- 197 UNODC, World Drug Report 2013, 26 June 2013. Some states mitigate the risk of new compounds falling outside the scope of extant legislation by referring to generic classifications (e.g. by chemical family) – the approach taken by France – but even here the risk remains that a significant chemical alteration would move a compound beyond the scope of the prohibited family.
- 198 UK Government, Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/psychoactive-substances-bill-2015>; New Zealand Ministry of Health, Psychoactive Substances Act 2013, <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/regulation-health-and-disability-system/psychoactive-substances-regulation>.
- 199 Of the 40 types of NPS identified by the Mauritian FSL, 36 were synthetic cannabinoids, two synthetic opioids and two synthetic cathinones. Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023, https://dha.govmu.org/Lists/DocumentsLinks/Attachments/15/National%20Drug%20Control%20Master%20Plan_Master_04092019%20pdf%20final.pdf.
- 200 The Mauritian anti-drug law was reformed once in 2013 to include synthetic cannabinoids and cathinones and their derivatives; again in 2015 to add Pregabalin; and again in 2019 to include additional cannabinoid and cathinone compounds. For example, see the 2019 amendment: Dangerous Drugs (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2019 GN No. 93 of 2019, <http://www.pharmacycouncilmu.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/MLaws-The-Dangerous-Drug-amendment-of-schedule-Regulations-2019-1.pdf>.
- 201 Agnès Cadet-Tairou and Michel Gandilhon, *L'offre, l'usage et l'impact des consommations de "chimique" à Mayotte: une étude qualitative*, Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies, May 2018, <https://www.ofdt.fr/publications/collections/rapports/rapports-d-etudes/rapports-detudes-ofdt-parus-en-2018/loffre-lusage-et-limpact-des-consommations-de-chimique-mayotte-une-etude-qualitative/>.
- 202 World Bank, Madagascar, Indicators, 2009–2020, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/976141492207282722/data-mdg.pdf>.
- 203 World Bank, Comoros, Indicators, 2009–2020, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/249791492188156070/mpo-com.pdf>.
- 204 Indian Ocean Commission, *Nos Domaines D'Intervention*, <https://www.commissionoceanindien.org/axes-strategiques/nos-domaines-d-intervention/>.
- 205 African Development Bank, Topics and Sectors, Health, <https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/sectors/health>.
- 206 See, for example, the early results of the wave of referendums being held on decriminalization of a range of illicit drugs across states in the US: Nicholas Kristof, Republicans and Democrats agree: End the war on drugs, *New York Times*, 7 November 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/07/opinion/sunday/election-marijuana-legalization.html>.
- 207 George Murkin, Drug decriminalisation in Portugal: setting the record straight, *Transform*, June 2014, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/ungass2016/Contributions/Civil/Transform-Drug-Policy-Foundation/Drug-decriminalisation-in-Portugal.pdf>.
- 208 Practical implementation of decriminalization approaches should incorporate law enforcement and judicial sentencing methods (the latter crafted through sentencing guidelines), furthering steps taken to date in adopting such approaches in the Seychelles and Mauritius.
- 209 Ngobani Ndlovu, African countries are cashing in on cannabis, *The Article*, 14 March 2020, <https://www.thearticle.com/african-countries-are-cashing-in-on-cannabis>.
- 210 Cannabis has been legalized in some countries in Africa, but the benefits of the shift are being accrued by large, often foreign owned, corporations, rather than cultivating communities. If legalized, state protections should ensure benefits are accrued by the local population.
- 211 Note that the introduction of fines instead of incarceration for PWUD discriminates against the most marginalized and economically deprived PWUD, who continue to face incarceration or face severe economic hardship through fines.
- 212 These recommendations are in line with those put forward by other researchers in the region, including Richard Chelin, *Breaking bans: The scourge of synthetic drugs in Mauritius*, ENACT, 23 September 2020, <https://enactafrica.org/research/research-papers/breaking-bans-the-scourge-of-synthetic-drugs-in-mauritius>.



GLOBAL INITIATIVE

**AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME**

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 500 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

www.globalinitiative.net