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**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS NEW ’GOLDEN TRIANGLE’ OF FENTANYL AND FIREARMS TRAFFICKING IN NORTH AMERICA**

A new report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) highlights the regional dynamics of illicitly manufactured fentanyl in North America. While underlining the public health crisis caused by opioid-related overdoses in the United States and Canada in the past two decades, it also draws attention to high homicide rates in Mexico. To illustrate this point, while the United States and Canada, respectively, have opioid death rates of 25 and 21.5 per 100 000, Mexico has a homicide rate of 24 per 100 000 (more than four times the global average of 5.8 per 100 000). More than two-thirds of firearms recovered from crime scenes in Mexico and submitted for tracing were sourced from the United States (particularly from Arizona and Texas). Ready access to such firearms is exploited by groups involved in fentanyl trafficking. The two markets are interconnected.

The phenomenon of illicitly produced fentanyl and guns causing a high number of deaths is particularly concentrated in the Mexican states of Baja California, Sinaloa and Sonora, and the US state of Arizona. The report labels this region as a new ‘golden triangle’.

Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is quintessentially a North American product. It either crosses the US–Mexico border multiple times until it is delivered to consumers, or it is manufactured in Canada largely for domestic consumption, using know-how from Mexican criminal organizations. Supply chains take advantage of the economic integration that exists between the three North American countries.

The report also highlights the high volume of precursors shipped in small packages from China, taking advantage of a rule, known as *de minimis*, that allowed packages valued at up to US$800 to enter the US duty-free and with minimal paperwork and inspection. President Trump ended this practice by executive order on 2 May 2025 for packages from China and Hong Kong.

While it appears that production of fentanyl is concentrated in certain areas controlled by certain criminal groups, such as the Sinaloa cartel, the report highlights how American citizens are significantly involved in trafficking, underscoring the transnational nature of the business. The report also points out that illicitly manufactured fentanyl is produced in both Mexico and the United States, where significant quantities of tablets are pressed. The situation is somewhat different in Canada. In addition to massive supplies of finished illicit fentanyl flowing into Canada from the US, the country also sees fentanyl precursors, mostly from China, being illicitly imported, synthesized and sold for consumption domestically. The report found little evidence of a Canada–US fentanyl trafficking route.

The report includes recommendations for all three countries, and underlines the need for trans-border cooperation to reduce the harm caused by this transnational threat.

‘By presenting a trilateral perspective on how fentanyl markets work in Mexico, Canada and the US, the report underscores the need for a coordinated response, centred on reducing preventable deaths in all three countries’, said Cecilia Farfán-Méndez, head of the GI-TOC’s North American Observatory. ‘We look forward to contributing to an informed debate on how to address the devastating impacts that these illicit markets have in communities across borders.’

The full report will be published on Thursday, 4 September at 12:00 PM CEST (06:00 AM ET) at the following link: <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/unregulated-fentanyl-in-north-america-a-trilateral-perspective/>

**ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME**

The Global Initiative is an independent civil society organization, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, with a globally dispersed secretariat and a high-level advisory board. Its network members include prominent law enforcement, governance, and development practitioners dedicated to seeking new and innovative strategies and responses to organized crime.