



## COUNTRY FACTSHEETS, EURASIAN NARCOTICS

### UZBEKISTAN 2004

#### General Information

Population: 26.4 million  
 UNDP Human development index ranking: 107 (out of 177 states)  
 TI Corruption indicator: 2.3 (0 highly corrupted, and 10 highly clean)

Uzbekistan does not have a long history as a drug trafficking transit country. Since independence, however, it has experienced significant penetration by trafficking networks and has seen an increase in addiction. A small amount of poppy and a larger amount of cannabis is grown in some regions for domestic consumption, but the increasing securitization of the state makes it difficult to form a clear picture of all aspects of the drug trade. Due to the perception that it is a strong state and because of the US military presence in the country, Uzbekistan has become a base for international agencies focused on all aspects of drugs and security in Central Asia. As a large and relatively powerful country in Central Asia, it regularly maintains a forceful stance in negotiations with its neighbors.

#### Smuggling of Drugs

Uzbekistan shares a 137km border with Afghanistan's north and is a significant route for heroin bound for Russia and Europe. As in the other Central Asian republics, the proportions of heroin and opium smuggled have tilted substantially towards heroin in recent years. Furthermore, there have been significant seizures of heroin precursor chemicals in the country, apparently bound for Afghanistan.

Its border with Afghanistan has been well-defended and most seizures take place on the border with Tajikistan. There are some advantages to trafficking through Uzbekistan, due to its relatively favorable infrastructure and geography, when compared with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The continuing exposure of corruption in Uzbek security services (as well as other state organs) confirms that increasingly harsh punishments for trafficking are having little deterrent effect.

#### Health and Economic Aspects

**Corruption:** Uzbekistan scores poorly on corruption, which is unsurprising given the economic circumstances in the country and the increasing power of the state over citizens. Moves towards authoritarianism does make it difficult to determine corruption levels accurately, however, particularly with regard to the drug trade – since powerful officials are in a strong position to cover and threaten their way out of exposure.

**Money laundering:** In some ways, Uzbekistan's legislation against money laundering is in advance of other Central Asian republics and in 2000 a fund was established to direct confiscated assets towards law enforcement activities. Until 2002 there were no prosecutions for money laundering. Since the Central Bank still controls more than half of the financial sector's assets and foreign bank operations are extremely limited, money laundering in Uzbekistan largely requires official complicity.

**Drug abuse and HIV:** Prior to the 1980s, drug addiction was not a widespread problem. The overwhelming majority of drug consumption was of marijuana and raw opium. In the mid-1990s this changed, and Uzbekistan is battling a rise in drug addiction. The number of registered drug addicts has increased substantially and it is reasonable to assume that the total number is a great deal larger. Over the last 20 years, drug addiction morbidity has doubled in some cities, including Tashkent, Khorezm, Samarkand and Surkhandarya.

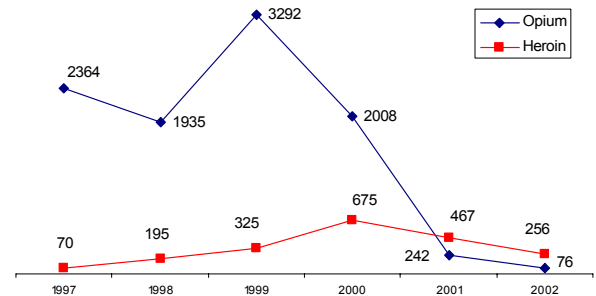
Concurrently, HIV infections have been increasing rapidly. The problem is compounded by the stigmatization of HIV by society and the state itself, rendering figures unreliable and effective treatment difficult to obtain. The near-term outlook for the spread of HIV is grim.

#### Political and Societal Aspects

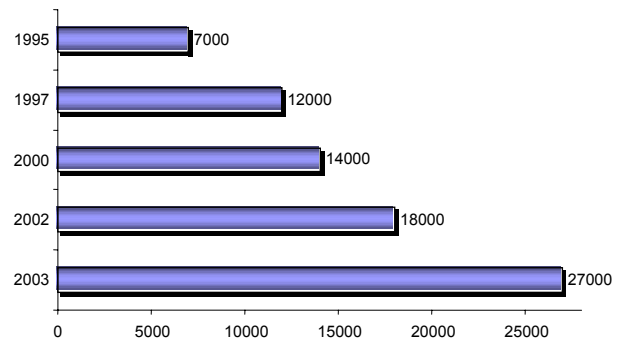
The drug trade clearly affects the state and society, from the poor who courier heroin to the corrupt officials facilitating movement and laundering. As the centralization of power has occurred and continues, largely premised on the perceived threat from Islamic militancy, Uzbekistan's ability to respond forcefully to the drug trade is offset by the state's inability to monitor its own parts. In many cases the political changes implemented in the country have not necessarily counteracted the drug trade so long as it is not hostile to the state. In many ways the influx of foreign interest into Uzbekistan has given support to the regime, although in recent times some foreign governments have spoken out against abuses of power. The degree to which this can be effective at causing political and social change is questionable while other interests remain in the ascendancy, however.



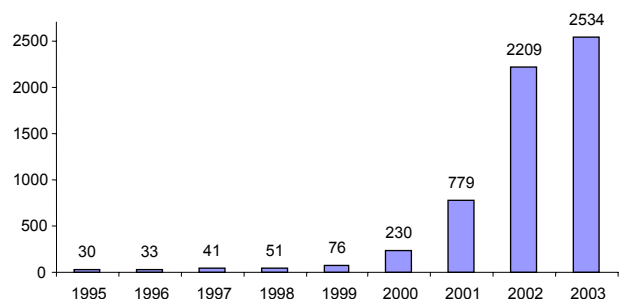
Seizures in Uzbekistan 1997-2002 (kg)



Registered drug users



Registered HIV cases



## Counter-Narcotics Efforts

### State

As in most other criminal fields, Uzbekistan's security services have a great deal of leeway in pursuing drug traffickers and dealers. Counter-narcotics efforts are almost exclusively framed as an issue of security and there are few facilities offering effective treatment for addiction or HIV infection. Punishments for possession, dealing and trafficking are harsh.

The government has been keen to take on all assistance in improving the efficiency of its police and border guards, particularly that offered by the U.S. and UNODC. State health facilities are simply not able to cope with the demands of drug rehabilitation and HIV treatment and perpetuate the social stigma attached to both problems.

### Civil Society

The ability of non-government organizations to act against drug addiction and trafficking is limited by the right to intervention reserved by the government in these fields. Foreign NGOs complain of the difficulties of acting within Uzbekistan as many of them are treated with suspicion. Similarly, the press has difficulty in raising public consciousness about drug issues because it is far from free and censorship is almost omnipresent.

Nevertheless, NGOs (mostly foreign) operate four needle exchange programs and there are some demand reduction efforts, almost entirely funded by foreign governments and mostly implemented by foreign NGOs.

### Regional Cooperation

In the past Uzbekistan has been somewhat erratic when it comes to cooperating with its neighbors, but the heightened presence of countries and agencies from beyond the region appears to have encouraged it to take a more consistent line in its willingness to cooperate.

The other Central Asian republics still view Uzbekistan with some suspicion, however, stemming from its willingness to ride roughshod over others' interests and to exploit its relative power. It also has a tendency to hector its neighbors, particularly on border issues, which complicates regional efforts at drug control.

Uzbekistan is a member and the current president of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (other members are China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan) and the "Six plus Two" group of countries (China, Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) oriented towards issues in Afghanistan. Each year, Uzbekistan participates in the Kanal, a week-long yearly cooperative effort made throughout the Caucasus, Russia and Central Asia against drug crimes.

### International

Uzbekistan is a signatory to most major conventions relating to drug control, including the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotics, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1989 UN Convention on illicit traffic in Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic substances. Compared with Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan is seen as a stable environment in which to base international assistance for Central Asia and many foreign governments are actively engaged. For example, it is slated to receive \$11m from the US in 2004 for security and law enforcement alone.

A Memorandum of Understanding on Sub-Regional Drug Control Cooperation was signed in Tashkent in May 1996 by the governments of the five Central Asian republics and the UNODC. The UNODC Central Asia Regional Office is in Tashkent, recently established but likely to grow as that agency's activities in the region proliferate. Current projects involving Uzbekistan include the Project on Precursor Control in Central Asia and the Diversification of HIV Prevention and Drug Treatment Services.

## Related publications by the Silk Road Studies Program and the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute

### Database of the Narcotics, Organized Crime, and Security in Eurasia Project:

The current version of the database contains statistics and information on illicit drugs and related issues in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) Russia, the and Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan).  
<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/drugtrade.htm>

**Publications: (View these and more online at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org> and <http://www.cacianalyst.org>.)**

"Stemming the Afghan Heroin Industry in Central and Southwest Asia", by Svante Cornell, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2004.

*Stability and Security in Tajikistan: Drug Trafficking as a Threat to National Security*, Silk Road Paper by Johan Engvall, December 2004.

*Counter-Narcotics Policies and their Challenges in Central Asia*, Silk Road Paper by Kairat Osmonaliev, November 2004.

*U.S. Afghanistan Policy: It's Working*, CACI Occasional Paper by S. Frederick Starr, October 2004.

"Transnational Crime: the Neglected Threat", by Svante Cornell, *Axess*, September 2004.

Niklas Swanström and Svante Cornell, "Is Afghanistan's Opium Boom Reversible?", *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, 14 July 2004.

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