A NATIONAL SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

DRUG TRAFFICKING



Introduction

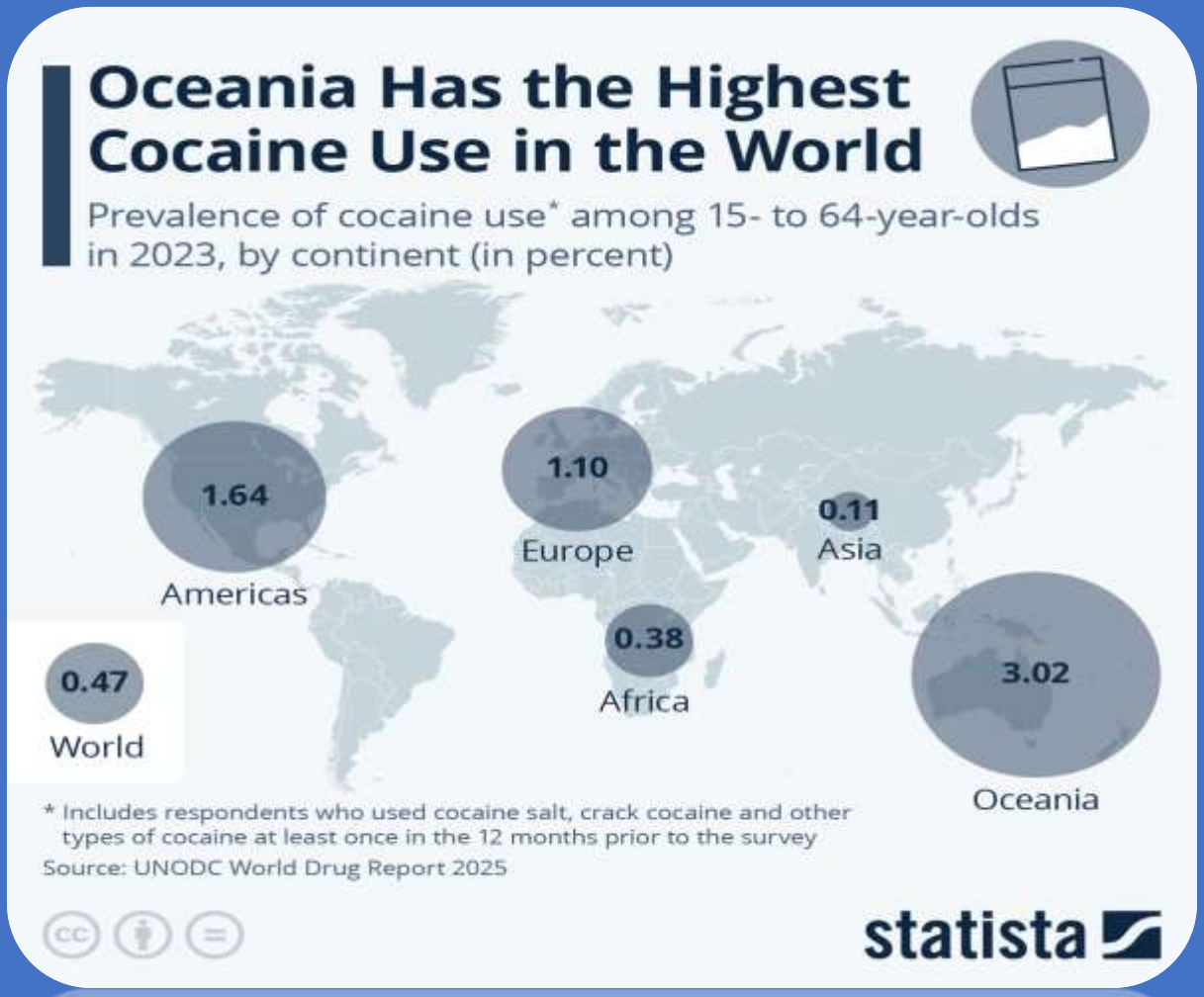
Our Islands, Our Responsibility

Vanuatu is widely known as a peaceful nation built on strong kastom, family ties, and community values.

However, like other Pacific Island countries, we are increasingly exposed to transnational criminal activity. Drug trafficking is one of the most serious emerging concerns in the region.

Our geographic location places us along maritime routes connecting Asia, Australia, and the Americas. While these connections support trade, tourism, and development, they also create opportunities for criminal networks to move illegal drugs across borders.

Drug trafficking is not only a law enforcement issue. It is a national security concern that affects our sovereignty, economic stability, public health, and the future of our young people. Early awareness and coordinated action are essential to prevent this threat from taking root in our islands.



How Drug Trafficking Can Affect Vanuatu

Although Vanuatu is not a major producer of hard drugs, regional reports show increasing movement of methamphetamine and cocaine through Pacific maritime routes. Small island states are sometimes used as transit points because of their wide ocean spaces and limited monitoring capacity.

Vanuatu's long coastlines and dispersed islands make border enforcement challenging.
Remote areas may be vulnerable to illegal offloading of shipments. In addition, domestic cannabis cultivation continues to present enforcement difficulties in rural areas. Potential impacts include:

- **Increased drug availability in communities**
- **Youth involvement in drug use and distribution**
- **Links to theft, violence, and other criminal activity**
- **Strain on policing and health services**

Even small increases in drug circulation can have serious consequences in a close-knit society like ours.



TRAFFICKING ROUTES INTO THE REGION



Source: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariate

Drug traffickers are becoming more adapting and more cunning in the way they traffic drug, the major trend transport use for trafficking drugs in the region currently are:

Private yacht & sail boats



Air Freight & Postal Services



Narco- Submarine



National Security Implications

Drug trafficking affects more than individual users and has wider security implications.

Social Stability: Substance abuse weakens families and communities. It contributes to school dropouts, unemployment, criminal activity and domestic conflict. Over time, this can erode social cohesion.

Economic Security: Tourism and small business development are central to Vanuatu's economy. A rise in drug-related crime could damage the country's reputation as a safe destination.

Governance Risks: Organized criminal groups often seek to exploit weak systems. Corruption linked to trafficking can undermine public trust in institutions and weaken the rule of law.

Sovereignty and Border Integrity: Protecting our Exclusive Economic Zone is not only about fisheries management. It is also about preventing illegal activities, including drug trafficking, within our national territory.
Drug trafficking therefore poses risks to stability, development, and national integrity.

National and Regional Action

The Vanuatu Police Force, together with Customs, Immigration, and maritime authorities, plays a leading role in preventing and investigating drug-related offences.

Key measures include:

- Border screening at Ports and Airport around Vanuatu
- Maritime patrols within national waters
- Intelligence-led investigations
- Enforcement of drug control and anti-money laundering laws

Vanuatu also cooperates with regional and international partners through:

- Pacific Islands Forum security initiatives
- Pacific Transnational Crime Network information sharing
- INTERPOL global cooperation

These partnerships strengthen national capacity and ensure coordinated responses across the Pacific.



A Shared Responsibility

Preventing drug trafficking requires a whole-of-nation approach. Government agencies must continue strengthening surveillance, training, and legal frameworks. Financial monitoring systems must detect and prevent money laundering linked to drug crime. Regional cooperation must remain strong. At the same time, communities play a vital role. Chiefs, church leaders, teachers, and parents are key partners in prevention. Awareness programs targeting youth are essential to reduce demand and protect future generations.

Vanuatu's resilience has always come from unity and shared responsibility. By acting early and working together, we can prevent drug trafficking from undermining our peace, stability, and sovereignty.

Protecting Vanuatu from drug trafficking means protecting our people, our communities, and our future.