Drugs, Ports and Other Challenges – In Need of a Comprehensive and Coordinated Multilevel Strategy

Policy report based on the expert workshop 'Port Cities Fighting Transatlantic Drug Trafficking' (Hamburg, April 2025)

Authors:
GIGA: Sabine Kurtenbach, Janaina Maldonado, Jonas von Hoffmann
EU-LAC: Alberto Brunori, Diego Durán Cruz, Madeleine Palacios
HIAS: Martina Lassalle

1. Introduction

A 'cocaine bonanza' – more supply and demand of purer and cheaper cocaine – is burgeoning on both sides of the Atlantic. Patterns of production, trafficking and consumption are constantly changing. New production territories, maritime routes and consumer markets are gaining prominence. Yet, the crucial role of ports in the smuggling of cocaine from Latin America to Europe has remained unchanged. The three major European ones of Antwerp, Hamburg and Rotterdam play a leading role here. Tackling transnational drug trafficking is a shared responsibility which requires a coherent, comprehensive and coordinated response not only from governments, customs and law enforcement but also civil society and industry on both sides of the Atlantic. Policies aimed at addressing the harms of transnational drug trafficking should be smarter, not just harder. It is essential to learn from experience, while also drawing on expertise and promoting dialogue between analysts, practitioners and decision-makers. Because of how transnational drug trafficking itself operates in a network structure, a network is needed to counteract it more effectively.

Recognising the tremendous challenges which local, national and international law enforcement face along the whole commodity chain with the surge in supply and demand, the repercussions for public health as well as the importance of fostering dialogue between experts and practitioners on both sides of the Atlantic, the European Union—Latin America and the Caribbean Foundation (EU-LAC) and the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) co-organised, with the support of the City of Hamburg, the two-day workshop 'Port Cities Fighting Transatlantic Drug Trafficking' in early April 2025. The event offered a unique space to generate in-depth, interdisciplinary and insightful discussion between experts from diverse backgrounds. The workshop's core focus was to facilitate the exchange of knowledge as well as nurture action-oriented reflections on the changing dynamics of drug trafficking from Latin America and the Caribbean to Europe, addressing the role of ports and port cities herein especially. This policy brief presents some of the core themes and insights emerging from the workshop, highlighting a number of key takeaways.

2. Key Takeaways from the Expert Workshop 'Port Cities Fighting Transatlantic Drug Trafficking'

Key Message	Recommendation
On the role of international cooperation	
The illegal drug trade operates through transnational networks and affects both the Global North and Global South; as a multilateral issue it is a shared responsibility which requires a coordinated response.	**Coordinating efforts and sharing information, best practices and innovative technologies are essential to move beyond individual and localised successes alone. To this end, it is important to strengthen and expand existing bi-regional mechanisms of cooperation between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union, including COPOLAD and the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs.**
On the role of ports	
Europe has become an increasingly important site in the global demand for cocaine. In this context, ports have become privileged entry and exit points for illegal drugs given that large volumes of cargo passing through aids concealment (only 2–10 per cent of containers are inspected).	**Customs and law enforcement should prioritise controlling ports as key entry and exit points, allocating greater human and material resources to this task rather than targeting local small-scale retailers and consumers. Enhancing collaboration and coordination among all actors involved in ports' security governance (for example, through joint inspection programmes) is also paramount.**
The European Ports Alliance (Antwerp, Hamburg, Rotterdam) is one of the main examples of multi-scalar coordination and smart cooperation in developing joint responses to drug trafficking and organised crime.	**Facilitating the exchange of information, knowledge and operational intelligence between ports as well as improving security across key logistical corridors are essential. This could be achieved by strengthening and expanding existing alliances to other European ports, Latin America and also to secondary or nontraditional ports – such as those in the Caribbean, which are gaining strategic relevance in the cocaine supply chain.**
On the role of private actors	
The private sector must be part of any solution to the problem of drug smuggling via ports; they must be part of the solution. Yet, they are often not involved in efforts to counter the drug trade. Along the commodity chain, private actors have an important part to play.	**Reinforcing controls in private ports and expanding public–private partnerships to increase levels of investment in smart infrastructure in aid of early detection, prevention and information-sharing are key. Private security companies, port operators and logistics providers must be engaged to help counter transnational drug trafficking and also held accountable for the security of global logistics chains.**
On the role of state institutions	
Institutional weakness and systemic corruption within governments, judicial systems and security forces facilitate criminal infiltration and hinder effective efforts to counter drug trafficking.	**Investing in policies striving to improve professional standards, salaries and working conditions of control agents, as well as promoting institutional accountability, are essential to strengthen institutions from within and avoid infiltration. Investing in 'software' holds more promise than in military 'hard-ware.'**
Incomplete and imperfect information bedevil counternarcotics efforts. More reliable data is needed to better understand dynamics and trends, aiding policy formulation, evaluation and revision.	**It is essential to strengthen domestic capacities to produce reliable data and foster collaboration with academia and civil society. Additional strategies – such as the creation or strengthening of regional or bi-regional observatories – can also serve as valuable tools for generating evidence in support of informed decision-making.**
The global illicit drug economy is highly dynamic and adaptive. Cocaine and other narcotic routes, as well as consumer markets, are constantly evolving.	**State responses must constantly innovate and adapt to keep up with transnational criminal networks and markets which transcend jurisdictional boundaries. Civil society, public–private and international cooperation as well as innovative data collection and analysis initiatives will be key to improve counternarcotics efforts.**

Key Message	Recommendation
On the role of law enforcement	
The illicit drug trade is a highly profitable enterprise whose revenues are its lifeblood. Yet, tracing financial transactions and money laundering have not played a central role in counternarcotics.	**Rather than focusing on the weakest links in the supply chain, law enforcement should prioritise tracing illicit revenues to cut off the financial resources of criminal organisations. Moreover, the relationships between these organisations and economic, political and social elites need to be better investigated. This will require both political will and a shift in judicial orientation.**
The drug issue has been framed primarily as a matter of crime and law enforcement, rather than as a health concern. Most responses have relied on repressive strategies, including militarisation and the targeting of low-level, non-violent offenders. These strategies have failed to achieve their stated goals: the elimination of production, commercialisation and consumption alike.	**Law-enforcement strategies should be complemented by demand-side interventions (prevention and treatment) and broader public policies tackling the structural drivers of drug use and criminal involvement (access to education, job creation, sustainable livelihoods). This will require a holistic human rights-based approach that includes a regulatory framework prioritising multilevel coordination and increased public investment in these neglected areas.**
Drug markets are not inherently violent but can become so under certain conditions. Not only illicit drugs but also policy responses to them can generate negative externalities.	**Many countries of the Global South have experienced a dramatic rise in violence, human rights violations and social exclusion. Any public policy or initiative should consider the fact that repressive state interventions can be detrimental to democracy and the rule of law, as well as fuel violence and increase the organisational capacities of criminal actors through mass incarceration (i.e., if prisons are controlled by inmates). These dynamics can lead to entrenched societal and criminal violence, which becomes extremely difficult to reverse.**
On the role of civil society	
Civil society organisations and local communities have a key role to play in addressing the effects of the drug trade and in promoting alternative approaches to status quo drug policy.	**State interventions should be grounded in situated knowledge and local experience. It is essential, then, to ensure the participation of local and bi-regional civil society organisations, academia and think tanks, as well as the private sector in the formulation of public policies seeking to address drug trafficking and its manifold repercussions.**

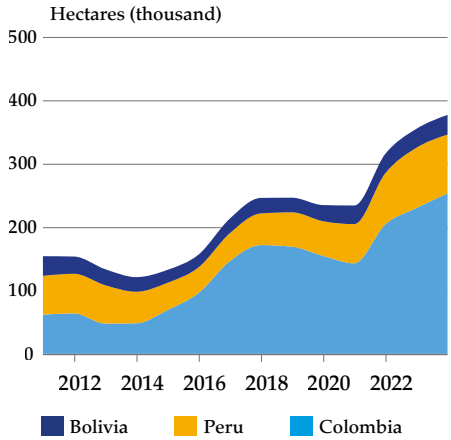
3. Port Cities and the Challenge of Transatlantic Drug Trafficking

> *Drug trafficking is a dynamic global criminal business, affecting all Member States. The threat posed by drug trafficking networks has increased and will continue to do so. Both demand and supply of most types of drugs are high, as are the illicit profits criminal networks can make. The impact of drug production and trafficking — in particular on health and the environment — is substantial. Using tools such as corruption, violence, and money laundering, drug trafficking networks destabilise society and undermine legal economies and trust in institutions. (Europol 2025, p. 54)*

The production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs are longstanding but unresolved concerns for local, national and international authorities alike. Although new psychoactive substances and synthetic drugs are already posing novel societal challenges, cocaine remains a major issue for producing countries in the Andes (Bolivia, Colombia and Peru); for transit ones (such as Brazil and Ecuador); and, for European nations with growing consumer markets (Durán-Martinez 2021).[1] A 'cocaine bonanza' is underway (McDermott & Dudley 2025), as marked by increased capacity as regards the drug's cultivation, refinement and transportation alongside exponential growth in consumer demand (GI-TOC 2025; EUDA 2025). Never before has there been so much cocaine both in circulation and consumed globally (UNODC 2025). At the same time, new production territories, maritime routes and consumer markets are gaining prominence (UNODC 2023). In this context, ports and shipping routes are fundamental to connecting all parts of the drug supply chain (Pérez 2014). European ports are increasingly becoming gateways for cocaine shipments from LAC (McDermott et al. 2021; Sergi 2023; Brombacher 2024). In particular, Antwerp, Hamburg and Rotterdam play a key role in the cocaine business. Ever-increasing seizures, ones often making the headlines, suggest a significant increase in the amount of cocaine being smuggled through Europe's ports (Europol 2023).

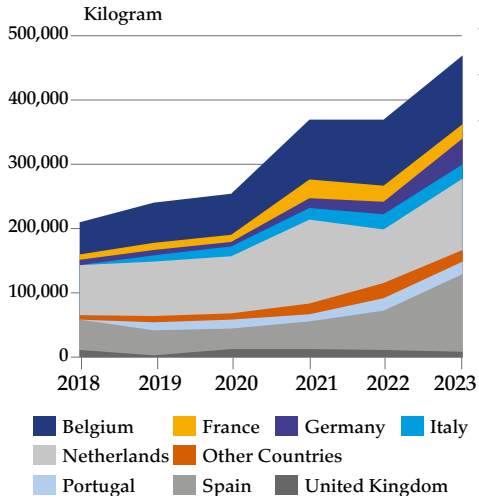
Figure 1. Coca Cultivation, Cocaine Seizures and Cocaine Prices and Purity

Coca Cultivation in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia



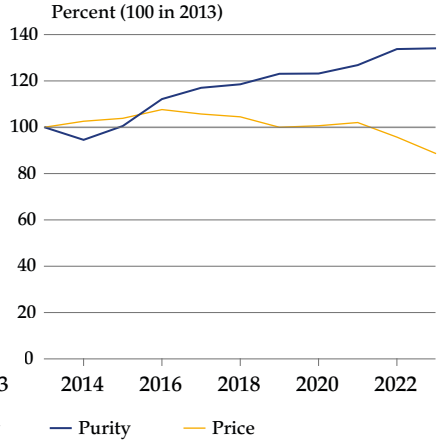
Source: compiled by Valencia (2025) with data from UNODC

Total Cocaine Seized in Europe (2018–2023)



Source: compiled by Valencia (2025) with data from UNODC

EU's Cocaine Purity and Price (2012–2024)



Source: compiled by Valencia (2025) with data from EUDA

1 This might be an increasingly artificial distinction, as there is both consumption in 'traditional' producer countries and production (of other illicit drugs) in European 'consumer' countries. Brazil for instance, is one of the largest consumers of cocaine (UNODC 2025).

In recognition of the challenges which transnational drug trafficking poses to local, national and international law-enforcement bodies as well as to the well-being of communities and to public health at large, and in light of the importance of fostering dialogue between experts and practitioners on both sides of the Atlantic, the European Union—Latin America and the Caribbean Foundation (EU-LAC) and the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) co-organised, with the support of the City of Hamburg, the two-day workshop 'Port Cities Fighting Transatlantic Drug Trafficking' in early April 2025.[2] This policy brief reports on some of the crucial insights emerging from the workshop and outlines key recommendations ahead of the upcoming CELAC-EU Summit (to be held in Colombia in November 2025). The groundbreaking event offered a unique space to generate in-depth, interdisciplinary and insightful discussion between experts from diverse backgrounds. The purpose of the workshop was to facilitate an exchange of knowledge and to nurture action-oriented reflections on the changing dynamics of drug trafficking from Latin America and the Caribbean to Europe, with a particular focus on the pivotal role which ports and port cities have to play in countering this illicit industry.

Given the highly dynamic and adaptative nature of the cocaine economy, the actors involved in it, as well as the modes of transportation and transit sites they make use of, are constantly evolving (UNODC 2023). With airports having become increasingly securitised (Schouten 2014), the benefits of transporting small quantities of drugs via air travel and freight have decreased due to the high risk involved. Meanwhile, ports have become of paramount importance instead as global trade intensifies (Sergi 2023). Ships are the most efficient means of transporting large quantities of goods, whether legal or illegal. In 2024 alone, the Port of Hamburg saw 111.8 million tonnes of goods pass through its container terminals (Port of Hamburg 2025). The sheer amount of cargo being handled, as well as necessary speed of processing, facilitate the smuggling of cocaine (Naím 2005). A single container can transport large quantities of the drug hidden in tomato cans, sugar or banana boxes, dissolved in fruit juices or blended into textiles (UNODC 2023). Cocaine is relatively easy to hide, complicating the work of both customs and law enforcement (Rastello 2010). Furthermore, maritime corridors can be multipurpose: Latin American cocaine can travel to Europe, and North African hashish can be transported to Europe and onwards to South America (GI-TOC 2023). Maritime transport is also highly versatile, with many types of vessels being used to transport cocaine: container ships, fishing boats, speedboats and even submarines (Eski 2022).

As shipping is central to the logistics of the cocaine business, ports have turned into key nodes in the drug-trafficking networks which now span the globe (Sergi et al. 2021). This includes those in the Caribbean, frequently overlooked when addressing this issue (Griffith 2000; Hill & Morris 2017;). Both traditional and non-traditional ports have become exit, entry and distribution points for cocaine (Sampo 2019; Sampo & Trancoso 2023; McDermott et al. 2023). Not only do cocaine shipments arrive at ports, but most of it is further distributed while only some of the cocaine is sold and consumed in port cities (UNODC 2023).

As transnational drug trafficking has expanded, diversified and become more professionalised (McDermott et al. 2021), governments have sought to modernise detection systems and technologies to stop (or at least reduce) the flood of cocaine entering through respective ports (Europol 2023). As official figures on and news headlines of arrests, eradication or seizures attest to, counternarcotics operations have generated results. However, localised and individual successes on this front do not necessarily reduce aggregate levels of drug production, trafficking or consumption (UNODC 2010). Rather, counternarcotics operations have tended to alter production sites, trafficking routes or the substances consumed (Reuter 2010). Per the so-called 'balloon effect' – when in response to pressure being applied in one place production moves to another place (Seccombe 1995; Friesendorf 2005; Windle & Farrell 2012), trafficking routes and their prevailing modes of operation adapt and bounce back elsewhere when confronted with increased attention and pressure (Boekhout van Solinge 2022).

Hence, practitioners and academics agree unilateral or uncoordinated approaches are likely doomed to fail, and that it is crucial to keep on strengthening existing bi-regional cooperation mechanisms (e.g., the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs, or COPOLAD). Moreover, workshop discussions highlighted how merely focussing on the illicit drug trade is not enough, as the underlying conditions and contextual factors which facilitate drug production, trafficking and consumption, as well as the consequences of state interventions, need to be taken into account. Counteracting transnational drug trafficking and addressing its repercussions is a daunting task which calls for comprehensive and coherent efforts at multiple levels. So doing requires improved understanding and information, in particular learning from experience while also drawing on expertise and promoting exchange between analysts, practitioners, civil society actors and decision-makers.

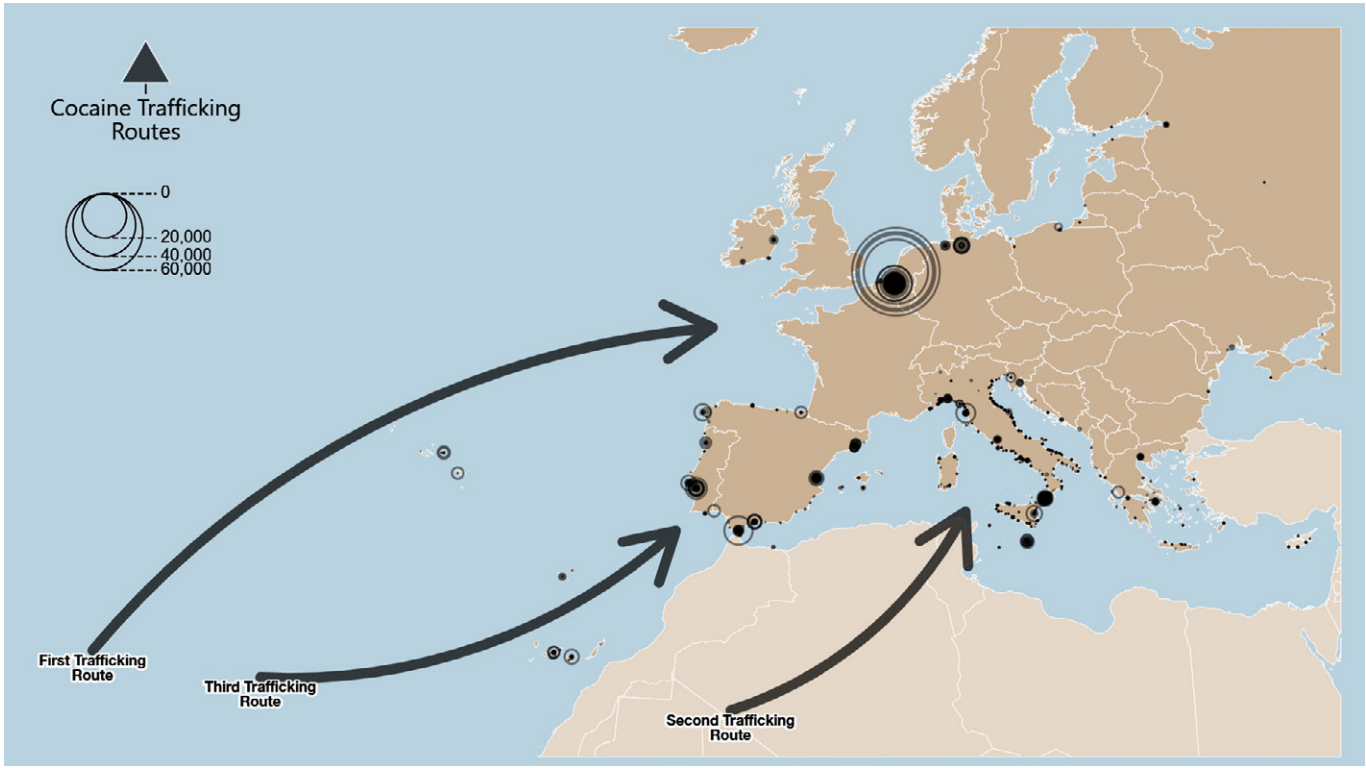
2 For more information, see: Experts Workshop Port Cities Fighting Transatlantic Drug Trafficking.

4. The Changing Geopolitics and Political Economy of Cocaine

As those participating in the workshop underlined, the nature of drug trafficking has changed substantially over the last decade (Durán-Martinez 2021). Today's routes and methods differ from those of the past, thus requiring fresh analysis and thinking (Lien & Feltran 2025). From the 1970s to the mid-1990s, the so-called 'cartels' from producing countries such as Colombia dominated the Latin American cocaine market (Thoumi 2003). The United States was the main consumer market at the time (Mares 2003), with the drug being transported along routes heading from Colombia initially through the Caribbean, and later via Mexico and Central America, before finally reaching US territory (Griffith 2000; Bagley & Rosen 2015; Durán-Martinez 2017). Notorious figures such as Pablo Escobar dominated newspaper headlines, and the public imagination (Feiling 2009). Throughout the 1990s and into the first decade of the new century, Mexico, Colombia and Central America at large were heavily affected by the 'War on Drugs' waged by consecutive US administrations to 'end' the flow of cocaine from South to North America, which led to an increase in related violence within certain territories (Bergman 2016; Durán-Martínez 2017; Lessing 2018; Yashar 2018). In most Latin American countries, iron-fist policies – such as the 'kingpin strategy' of taking out their leaders – failed to eliminate drug-trafficking organisations entirely (Brockett 2019; Giralt Brun & Korarska 2022; Velasco 2023). Rather, these cartels fragmented and multiplied, a process known as 'atomization' (Atuesta & Pérez-Dávila 2017). Partially as a result of counternarcotics operations and internal conflicts, such entities splintered, new trafficking routes emerged and the cocaine economy underwent significant changes, growing in sophistication and opening up new markets (Durán-Martínez 2021).

With cocaine consumption plateauing in the US, the European market became an increasingly attractive alternative for drug traffickers (UNODC 2023; EUDA 2025). Of course, cocaine being smuggled to Europe is not a new phenomenon (Mares 2003). It has long been exported to Europe via airplanes (Rastello 2010) and vessels (Pérez 2014), involving partnerships between 'cartels' and 'mafia-style' organisations hailing from Italy, Russia, the Western Balkans and elsewhere (Sergi 2020, 2021, 2024; Starring et al. 2023). Nevertheless, recently, Europe has started to form an increasingly important part of the global demand for cocaine (McDermott et al. 2021; UNODC 2023; EUDA 2025).

Figure 2. Drug Flows: Maritime Routes to Europe and Cocaine Seizures



Source: compiled by Valencia (2025) with data from UNODC

How drugs are trafficked constantly changes. As the expert workshop participants highlighted, organised crime has become more professionalised and sophisticated, and its actors have taken advantage of globalisation and technological innovation to further their pursuits (Lien & Feltran 2025). They use closely integrated transnational logistics networks, have improved means of communication and benefit from the growing exchange of licit goods (Shelley 2018). These individuals and their organisations also quickly adapt to governmental efforts to root out drug production and trafficking (Bouchard 2007; Reuter 2010; MASIF 2025). They operate across borders and form ties with other crime syndicates as part of transnational networks with shifting configurations (Naím 2005). Actually, in the first decade of the new millennium, organised-crime groups increasingly transnational in scope began operating in partnership: Colombian-based producers and Brazilian-based middlepersons, for instance, took care of logistics from the Andean region to the West African coast (Feltran, Pinho & Bird 2023). European groups bought huge amounts of cocaine and took care of unloading at destination ports such as Antwerp, Hamburg and Rotterdam.[3]

Each step along the way, those involved in drug trafficking are making a killing. By the time cocaine hydrochloride reached the streets of Berlin, it had increased its wholesale price by 2,000 per cent, with a retail price of 80 Euros per gram on average in 2023.[4] The promise of vast profits motivates drug traffickers to innovate and try to stay a step ahead of customs and law enforcement; killed or imprisoned associates can be readily replaced (Wainwright 2016). Different trafficking methods and techniques are employed to move cocaine from one place to another. While the main way of trafficking cocaine is through hiding shipments in contaminated containers (rip-on/ rip-off, cloning, switch, 'trojan horse'), it is also smuggled with purpose-built semi-submersibles or 'narcosubs,' divers who recover drugs attached to the hull of ships, motherships that drop off loads near to the shore without stopping for go-fast to recover them or the use of smaller vessels such as fishing boats and sailing boats (UNODC 2023; Europol 2023). The variety of techniques, routes and actors involved in maritime trafficking (Pérez 2014) are a testament to the dynamism, diversity and resilience of the cocaine commodity chain (UNODC 2023).

Different counternarcotics measures have long sought to eliminate or at least disrupt the production and trafficking of cocaine, as well as to reduce demand (Andreas & Nadelmann 2006). The War on Drugs – with its repressive emphasis on supply-side counternarcotics operations (Bertram et al. 1996) via the destruction of coca plantations, the dismantling of trafficking organisations and the arrest or execution of their kingpins – has achieved little to reduce aggregate coca production, purity, retail prices or consumption rates (Andersson and Keen 2023). While customs and law enforcement seize a growing amount of coca, producers and traffickers have shown extremely high levels of flexibility and adaptation, finding new routes and adapting their structures from hierarchical organisations to criminal networks (Lien & Feltran 2025; Fatjona Mejdini 2025). At the same time, there have been unintended consequences coming with the repressive approach taken to tackling the drug trade.

Although drug trafficking is not inherently violent (Andreas & Wallman 2009; Naylor 2009 Grisaffi 2022), localised, confrontational counternarcotics operations, as well as intragroup disputes over market profits and territories, have fuelled extraordinary levels of brutality – especially in the Global South (Lessing 2018). The War on Drugs' negative externalities have led some analysts to critically argue that the medicine has been worse than the disease (Global Commission on Drug Policy 2021). A myopic and exclusive focus on symptoms – such as violence and crime – to the detriment of other structural factors underlying production and consumption – such as inequality, weak institutions and corruption – has undermined policy effectiveness (Stevens 2011). Both drug production and trafficking are socially and spatially embedded activities which do not take place in a vacuum (Van de Bunt et al. 2014). Neither organised crime nor illegal markets should thus be understood as mere dysfunction or alien forces, but rather as part and parcel of the socio-economic system (Kappeler & Potter 2017). More comprehensive counternarcotics measures should be designed accordingly, namely so as to also address root causes and facilitating factors.

3 One of the major police intelligence operations of the past five years dismantled such a scheme, Operation Hinterland: 15 arrested in Brazil over 17 tonnes of cocaine worth billions | Europol.

4 On average, a kilo of cocaine hydrochloride costs 2,000 US dollars in Bolivia and 42,000 US dollars in Germany (UNODC 2023). Of course, such a comparison does not provide detailed insight into the value chain. There are many different asking prices at each stage, and the amounts received by the various parties involved – producers, traffickers and brokers – differ greatly. However, this price differential does provide an indication of the profit potential of cocaine as a commodity. UNODC compiles data on retail drug prices and purity over the years and across regions: dp-drug-prices | dataUNODC.

5. Ports' Critical Importance to Maritime Drug Trafficking

Experts agree that Europe's ports, and in particular Antwerp, Hamburg and Rotterdam, have become major entry points for illicit drugs arriving on the continent's shores. Ports play a crucial role in facilitating both the legal and illegal movement of people and goods, (McDermott et al. 2021). They are multifaceted and functional spaces of arrival, transit and departure, 'which is why securing, governing and policing the waterfront is an extremely complex task' (Sergi et al. 2021, p. 3). Ports are both gateways and barriers, and act as local and global entry and exit points. Port governance therefore requires multi-scalar structures, demanding connections be made at the local, national and international levels (Sergi 2021). The nature of port spaces also creates a tension between guaranteeing security and facilitating trade (Sergi et al. 2021). Experts noted how ports' multiple roles can be at cross-purposes: while trade flows require rapid processing and decentralised arrangements being in place, security is premised on control, inspection and centralisation. For instance, extensive background checks might be useful to prevent infiltration by organised crime but undermine flexible contracting as regards port personnel. Certain tensions and contradictions characterise counternarcotics endeavours and port security (Europol 2023); managing them requires coordination and cooperation between different actors: customs, law enforcement, logistics providers, port authorities and terminal operators. Ports play a critical role both in facilitating and in countering drug trafficking for a variety of reasons:

- They are logistical hubs par excellence which connect countries to global trade flows: coming and goings are an inherent part of their role as points of entry, exit and transit for goods and people alike.
- They are physical infrastructure featuring not only ships and containers but buildings, machines and people.
- They are places of social interaction. As work environments, they employ people (who do not necessarily earn well) potentially approachable and recruitable as accomplices.
- They are legal constructs with overlapping and contradictory laws and regulations, jurisdictions and institutions.
- They are locations of security governance provided by a diversity of public and private actors who do not necessarily share the same objectives.
- They are virtually impossible to control completely. With more than 90 million containers passing through European ports each year, overwhelmingly carrying legal goods, it is physically impossible to inspect them all. According to Europol (2023), only between two and ten per cent of these containers are inspected.
- They are a bottleneck when it comes to bringing cocaine in, retrieving it and (by)passing controls intended to stop such smuggling. This makes ports a strategic location for customs, law enforcement and criminal actors alike.

In ports and at sea, legal and criminal activities co-exist and overlap. There is no clear distinction between licit and illicit endeavours; rather, there is a continuum ranging from cooperation to extortion, and include legal, illegal, formal and informal actors (Beckert & Dewey 2017; Feltran et al. 2022). This complicates efforts to counter undesirable practices. Most actors are involved in only a handful of specific acts (such as retrieving a shipment, driving a truck or leaving a door ajar), or do not know more than they need to. Not all activities involved in trafficking drugs are necessarily illegal or criminal to the same extent; often, it is only certain actions or goods which break the law. These nefarious aspects may be embedded in practices or transactions which are otherwise perfectly legal, take place within licit market structures (e.g., shipping companies and port terminals), and be carried out by actors otherwise legally operating (Beckert & Dewey 2017).

Sometimes crimes are committed unwittingly. With one method of smuggling, by attaching concealed cargo to the hull, a ship's crew remain unaware they are also transporting drugs (Europol 2023). Attention to the social embeddedness of crime in ports and their specific vulnerabilities – not just physical ones – is key, as inside help is often relied on (Roks, Bisschop & Starring 2021). Neither ports nor the crimes committed on-site occur in a vacuum; they are part of physical, political and social environments. Broader questions about how logistics facilitate illicit trade are pivotal and require an understanding of the 'politics of circulation' (Stepputat & Hagmann 2019), at both the supply chain level and at that of each specific logistics hub. Understanding drug trafficking as a series of market exchanges, which take place along supply chains connecting producers and consumers (Beckert & Dewey 2017), provides a more comprehensive view of both illegal activities and security vulnerabilities inside and outside of ports. This underscores the need for coordinated and strategic responses across the entire supply chain.

In this context, the European Ports Alliance (European Commission 2024), discussed during the workshop, was highlighted as a relevant initiative: it acknowledges the key strategic role ports have to play in counternarcotics as well as the importance of cooperation alliances. This alliance is a prime example of efforts to develop joint responses to drug trafficking and organised crime.[5] Experts agreed that expanding such alliances to include other European ports, as well as other major Latin American ones and non-traditional ports in the Caribbean, would enhance security and promote the exchange of knowledge and best practices. Alliances which include different actors operating within across different ports can help to counteract some of the abovementioned resilience and adaptability of transnational drug trafficking.

5 For more information, see: European Ports Alliance to fight drug trafficking and organised crime - European Commission

6. State Responses to Drug Trafficking and Facilitating Political, Socio-Economic and Institutional Factors

Since at least the 1980s, state responses to drug trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean have followed more or less the same playbook, alternating between periods of greater and lesser repression. These have included high levels of incarceration of marginalised populations, increased lethality rates in areas of market dispute and police operations based on a logic of warfare and the recovery of national sovereignty focused mainly on the retail markets (Keefer, Loayza & Soares 2010; CELS 2018; Feltran et al. 2022). Ultimately, these operations have ended up stimulating intra-criminal conflict (Durán-Martínez 2017) and/or hostilities between cartels and security forces (Lessing 2018). The War on Drugs' supply-side focus (Bertram et al. 1996), especially as it has been internationally financed – i.e., Plan Colombia in 1999 with US aid (Gaviria & Mejia 2011) – and focused on the criminal-justice system, has also proven to be both inefficient and costly (Andersson & Keen 2023). Furthermore, it has contributed to making Latin America the world's most violent region for decades now (Pearce 2018). As mentioned above, counternarcotics measures have been criticised for focusing on the symptoms rather than underlying conditions, for being predominantly reactive and reliant on short-term 'fixes', and for making questionable assumptions while failing to adequately account for the externalities and 'blowback' produced by the policies pursued (Gootenberg 2012; Global Commission on Drug Policy 2021; Andersson & Keen 2023).

State responses to unauthorised drug production and trafficking should consider how different criminal activities co-exist with and co-depend on each other, and what factors facilitate them (Bergman 2020). For instance, a consistent pattern is the establishment and growth of markets thriving off the protection of illegal operations: personnel, mostly from law-enforcement agencies operating illegally, sell or exchange protection in exchange for money and/or political commodities (Misse 2006). This phenomenon is directly related to systemic corruption within a given region's security forces and criminal-justice systems, as well as to weak institutional structures allowing infiltration. Workshop participants emphasised that without addressing corruption – often prevalent among those tasked with tackling drug production and trafficking – counternarcotics measures risk becoming performative (though no less bloody).

Configurations of protection and control are key in shaping the levels of violence coming with drug markets (Durán-Martínez 2017). As noted, while the latter are not inherently violent they can become so under certain conditions (Andreas & Wallman 2009; Naylor 2009; Snyder & Durán-Martínez 2009). For example, at the retail level, drugs in Europe are distributed by small-scale dealers via mobile-messaging apps, delivery services or networks of acquaintances, traditionally functioning with relative ease and without much physical violence (EUDA 2025). However, these European markets have recently become more deadly, particularly in areas of intense competition over access to international trafficking routes such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, Rotterdam or Stockholm (GI-TOC 2025). The way in which the state responds to illegal markets will, in part, determine their characteristics, logics and interactions, and thereby associated levels of violence (Andreas & Wallman 2009; Naylor 2009; Snyder & Durán-Martínez 2009). High profits and market disputes exacerbate violence, but so does the type of state 'regulation' (Reuter 2009; Stevens 2011).

In the short-term, addressing high levels of violence is key but should not take away from long-term efforts to tackle underlying factors – for instance, a number of cases of corruption were recently uncovered in Germany (Brombacher 2025). Both in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, little investment is made in measures which increase social protection and offer sustainable economic alternatives to demographics tempted by criminal recruitment (Global Commission on Drug Policy 2018). As a rule of thumb, prevention is cheaper than treatment when it comes to drug use (MacCoun & Reuter 2001). Similarly, too little investment goes into policies focused on pre-empting criminal infiltration of state security institutions or infrastructure providers (Chêne 2008). As mentioned during the workshop, provision of 'software' (training and professional standards) and decent wages are, in the long run, more effective than more military 'hardware' when it comes to tackling drug production and trafficking.

Furthermore, following the money and better intelligence are key to more successful counternarcotics operations. One of the main weaknesses of many current drug-control measures is that they tend to go after the weakest links in the commodity chain, as the most visible and least powerful actors (Insight Crime 2019). For the same reason, these are also the least impactful pieces to take off the chess board and the most easily replaceable (Reuter 2010). Tracing financial transactions and anti-money laundering strategies are essential for going after more important players in the transnational drug economy (Usman Kemal 2014). Long-term and sophisticated joint intelligence operations and police investigations, such as the one which exposed the SKY ECC scheme (OCCPR 2024), are instrumental for identifying those behind putting together and brokering transatlantic shipments. The results of such an approach might not always come quickly or easily but will be more impactful in the long run than going after non-violent, street-level dealers, coca farmers or drug users (MASIF 2025).

Technology also plays an undeniable role in port security, surveillance and counternarcotics operations. Innovations in advanced tracking – from point of origin to destination – can enhance supply-chain transparency and safeguard important shipment routes (Europol 2023). However, technology can also create vulnerabilities for port security and maritime shipping exploitable by criminal actors (Eski 2016). Workshop experts noted that regardless of technological advancements, humans will remain the weakest link. Thus, addressing transatlantic drug trafficking will require more than just technical solutions.

International coordination and cooperation, the political will to address underlying social factors as well as societal buy-in are all essential if drug-control policies are to stand a chance of success. Addressing drug trafficking necessitates a comprehensive, coherent and coordinated multilevel and multilateral approach: one which understands the phenomenon as a complex policy problem, a shared responsibility and a task demanding joint responses. Not only must production and trafficking be tackled but so too the impunity and corruption which engender drug crime and violence. Building 'economies of peace' in conflict zones which offer meaningful and sustainable alternatives to the cultivation of illicit crops further requires ensuring state accountability, responsiveness and the provision of public services and goods. Similar to in post-war contexts, war economies per se do not determine the levels of violence; they are mitigated by other factors besides, such as inclusive institutions (Kurtenbach et al. 2025).

7. Civil Society Responses to Drug Trafficking and Its Consequences: Experiences and Innovations

Although often overlooked, civil society can play an important role in countering drug production, trafficking and consumption. As an organised part of the political environment, civil society can contribute to the identification of problems and crafting of solutions. First, civil society can play a key role in documenting and making visible the costs and consequences of status quo drug-control policies (Count the Costs 2012). Civil society voices have been crucial for advancing debates over alternative approaches to the drug issue (Fordham 2020). Second, civil society and local initiatives can be 'laboratories' for alternative drug policies providing better solutions and able to eventually become part of governmental programmes should they prove effective (Blickman & Sandwell 2019). Harm-reduction measures, such as needle exchanges, began as disparate local responses to become national policy, later endorsed internationally (Szalavitz 2021). Third, civil society voices should be heard and included in the design of counternarcotics and drug policies on different levels, in order to increase buy-in, reduce unintended negative consequences and ensure participatory decision-making (CSIDP 2018). Without incorporating those directly affected or supposedly benefitting from said policies, interventions risk building on false assumptions, drawing questionable conclusions and offering policy solutions unworkable in practice.

Most workshop participants agreed on the essential role civil society activists have played in confronting (drug-related) violence in Latin America, a region seeing the highest rates of homicide and police lethal violence globally for decades now (Durán-Martínez 2017; Yashar 2018; Bergman 2018). Examples include the massacres in Ecuadorian and Brazilian prisons (Telles et al. 2020); police brutality on the streets of South America's major cities, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil (Vedovello 2024); the mass graves found in Comuna 13 in Medellín, Colombia, and in Jalisco, Mexico (Willis & Durán-Martínez 2024). Latin America is home to the most violent parts of the transnational drug-trafficking supply chain (Crisis Group 2025). The victims of drug-related violence and the War on Drugs are often the most vulnerable populations in these territories: women, human rights activists and racialised young people who operate on the lowest rungs of the retail market (CELS 2018).

In contexts of localised state weakness or complicity, it is often up to civil society collectives to discover such horrific cases of violence (as was the case in Colombia and Mexico), using this information to pressure governments across the region into investigating and curbing criminal and state violence (for instance, Gallagher 2022). Moreover, in many countries of the region, movements of mothers mobilising against state violence or self-organised community security projects have emerged (for example, Zubillaga & Hanson 2024), as have observatories gathering and systematising data on extreme violence and enforced disappearances related to the drug trade as well as institutions which monitor corruption at the state level.[6] Especially in contexts of institutional weakness and official complicity, they provide invaluable information otherwise unobtainable.

While the scale of the violence resulting from drug trafficking is undoubtedly greater in Latin America and the Caribbean, European cities are increasingly worried about their own futures too. Whereas politicians promise quick and easy fixes, appealing to mano dura policies or punitive populism (Bonner 2019), a truly sustainable economy of peace can only be built if the people living in affected areas help co-construct human security agendas (Dammert 2019; Pearce 2018; Pearce & Velasco 2022; Durán-Martínez 2024).

6 Examples of civil society observatories are Transparencia Venezuela and Fogo Cruzado in Brazil.

8. Transnational Drug Trafficking in a Global Context: Common Challenges, Comparative Insights and Lessons Learned

Drug trafficking is an issue of both a local and international nature, one which poses challenges both in the Global North and Global South alike. At the same time, cocaine is one – but not the only – illicit drug of concern. In different ways, the trafficking of different substances affects each corner of the globe. Examples abound of different illicit drugs connecting countries and crossing borders.

- Captagon provided a crucial cash supply to the internationally sanctioned and domestically embattled Assad regime in Syria as it was smuggled to and sold in the Gulf countries (Bank & Haupt 2025).
- Fentanyl and its precursor chemicals make their way from China to the US, where it has contributed to the next escalation of the overdose crisis. This occurs either via Mexico, where it fuels violent clashes between different drug trafficking organizations and state security forces, or directly, using existing supply chains or mail-order schemes (Felbab-Brown 2022).
- Methamphetamines produced in Southeast Asia are not only consumed recreationally but related to precarious and exploitative work conditions, as they are sometimes cynically used by employers to maximise their employees' working capacity by suppressing hunger and keeping users awake (Lai and Stoicescu 2020).
- Hashish grown in North Africa is exchanged for cocaine on the West African coast or in the middle of the Atlantic and then transported back to South America, where it has found consumer demand (GI-TOC 2023).
- Kush, a relatively new mixture of synthetic cannabinoids and strong opioids, has been linked to the death of thousands in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Bird & Bruijne 2025).
- Cocaine is transported in myriad ways from Latin America to Europe (UNODC 2023). One route sees the drug produced in Bolivia, pass through Brazil, be sent for storage in warehouses on the coast of West Africa to 'cool down' before then being repackaged in containers and shipped to Europe (Feltran, Vianna Pinho & Bird 2023).

Just as varied as the substances described above, so are the transnational drug-trafficking routes used to move these commodities across the globe. These passageways are in constant flux, as the supply of illicit drugs keeps satisfying the insatiable demand for different substances worldwide. In recent years, drug markets have been constantly changing and the global economy they give rise to permanently expanding (UNODC 2025). Despite isolated successes in interdicting cocaine shipments, eradicating coca crops and arresting drug traffickers, retail cocaine is both purer and cheaper than ever before (GI-TOC 2025). Other narcotics are also spreading rapidly. From the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia to West Africa, from the streets of Aleppo to those of Medellín, drug markets are diverse, decentralised and have characteristics which depend on the interconnection between substances, government and criminal policies, state penetration and logistical arrangements. The drug economy has proved remarkable resistant to interference. Some workshop participants pointed out how crises as regards the production of a particular substance represent new market opportunities for others. For example, the Taliban's ban on heroin production in 2022 may have fuelled synthetic opioids taking hold in some parts of Europe thereafter. The resilience of drug production and trafficking is partially explained by the fact that these are extremely lucrative activities (Wainwright 2016), ones benefitting from state infiltration and social embeddedness.

To address drug trafficking's multiple dimensions more effectively requires comprehensive, coherent and coordinated multilevel strategies. For example, after experiencing violent disputes over drug markets, the Netherlands invested in combining knowledge-based and data-driven disruption strategies with prevention and protection measures, as well as combatting impunity through a multilevel approach involving law enforcement, administrative, civil, academic and financial actors and means (Staring et al. 2023). Willingness to draw on comparative insights and a sense of shared responsibility should be at the forefront of designing responses to transatlantic drug trafficking. Valuable lessons can be learnt from decades of successes and failures, as well as best practices, across the globe.

9. A Call for Action

As noted during the workshop, tackling transnational drug trafficking is a complex task and shared responsibility. Although by no means a new topic of inquiry, debate or policy, much remains unknown about the ever-changing patterns, logistics and locations of these illicit activities and their far-reaching effects. Continued dialogue between expert practitioners and academic analysts is especially important in this context. There is much both groups can learn from each other. To design, implement and evaluate more effective policy solutions addressing complex problems like transnational drug trafficking, practice needs theory just as theory needs practice.

Ahead of the CELAC-EU Summit, it is crucial to stress that the fight against transnational drug trafficking needs to be smarter not just harder. One key lesson emerging from our expert workshop is that transnational drug trafficking operates as a network, involving multiple actors engaged not only in illegal activities but also in legal businesses on both sides of the Atlantic. To counter such a network, we must build one of our own. The earlier-mentioned European Ports Alliance was highlighted as a prime example of what is possible here, in seeking to formulate joint responses to drug trafficking and organised crime at large. Expanding these types of alliances, alongside other existing bi-regional spaces of cooperation (like the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs) requires political will if concrete, coordinated actions helping facilitate knowledge exchange, improve security and disrupt trafficking networks are to gain impetus.



The workshop in Hamburg in April 2025 offered a unique space to generate in-depth, interdisciplinary and insightful dialogue and discussions between experts from diverse backgrounds and facilitated the exchange of knowledge and action-oriented recommendations on the challenges of and responses to changing dynamics of illicit drug trafficking from Latin America to Europe, and in particular what role ports and port cities play in combating drug trafficking.

10. References

Andersson, Ruben, & David Keen. 2024. *Wreckonomics: Why It's Time to End the War on Everything.* Oxford University Press.

Andreas, Peter, & Ethan Nadelmann. 2006. *Policing the Globe.* Oxford University Press.

Andreas, Peter, & Joel Wallman. 2009. *"Illicit Markets and Violence: What Is the Relationship?" Crime, Law & Social Change 52 (3):* 225–29.

Atuesta, Laura, & Samantha Pérez Dávila. 2018. *"Fragmentation and Cooperation: The Evolution of Organized Crime in Mexico."* Trends in Organized Crime 21 (3): 235–61. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117 017 9301 z.

Bagley, Bruce, & Jonathan Rosen. 2015. *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today.* University Press of Florida.

Bank, André, & Johannes Haupt. 2025. *"Der Sturz Assads in Syrien Ist Nicht das Ende von Captagon."* GIGA Focus Nahost 4. Hamburg: German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA). https://doi.org/10.57671/gfme 25041.

Beckert, Jens, & Matías Dewey, editors. 2017. *The Architecture of Illegal Markets: Towards an Economic Sociology of Illegality in the Economy.* Oxford University Press.

Bergman, Marcelo. 2016. *Drogas, Narcotráfico y Poder en América Latina.* Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Bergman, Marcelo. 2018. *More Money, More Crime: Prosperity and Rising Crime in Latin America.* Oxford University Press.

Betram, Eva, Morris Blachman, Kenneth Sharpe, & Peter Andreas. 1996. *Drug War Politics.* University of California Press.

Blickman, Tom, & Katie Sandwell. 2019. *Cannabis in the City: Bottom up Policy Reform for Cannabis Regulation.* Transnational Institute Drug Policy Briefing 51. https://www.tni.org/files/publication downloads/cr_policybrief_web_def082019.pdf.

Boekhout van Solinge. 2022. *"Global Cocaine Flow, Geographical Displacement and Crime Convergence."* In The Evolution of Illicit Flows, edited by Ernesto Savona, Rob Guerette, and Alberto Aziani. Springer.

Bonner, Michelle. 2019. *Tough on Crime: The Rise of Punitive Populism in Latin America.* University of Pittsburgh Press.

Bouchard, Martin. 2007. *"On the Resilience of Illegal Drug Markets."* Global Crime 8 (4): 325–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/17440570701739702.

Brockett, Charles D. 2019. *"The Drug Kingpin Decapitation Strategy in Guatemala: Successes and Shortcomings."* Latin American Politics and Society 61 (4): 47–71.

Brombacher, Daniel. 2024. *The Big Bubble: Cocaine Market in Europe.* Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. https://www.rosalux.org.ec/en/the big bubble cocaine market in europe/.

Brombacher, Daniel. 2025. *What Lies Beneath: Germany's Hidden Organized Corruption Threat.* Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/what lies beneath germanys hidden organized corruption threat/.

CELS. 2018. *The Internal War: How the Fight Against Drugs Is Militarizing Latin America. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales.*

Chêne, Marie. 2008. *Fighting Corruption in Countries with Serious Narcotics Problems.* Anti Corruption Resource Center. https://www.u4.no/publications/fighting corruption in countries with serious narcotics problems.

Count the Costs. 2012. *The Alternative World Drug Report.* Open Society Foundations. https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/alternative world drug report counting costs war drugs.

Crisis Group. 2025. *Curbing Violence in Latin America's Drug Trafficking Hotspots.* International Crisis Group Report No. 108. https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2025 03/108 latam drugs violence.pdf.

CSDIP. 2018. *Civil Society Involvement in Drug Policy: Good Practice Collection.* Correlation – European Harm Reduction Network. https://www.correlation net.org/wp content/uploads/2020/01/good_practice_collection.pdf.

Dammert, Lucía. 2019. *"Challenges of Police Reform in Latin America."* In Routledge Handbook of Law and Society in Latin America, 259–77. Routledge.

Durán Martínez, Angélica. 2017. *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico.* Oxford University Press.

Durán Martínez, Angélica. 2021. *"Cocaine Smuggling: Between Geopolitics and Domestic Power Struggles."* In The Routledge Handbook of Smuggling, 183–95. Routledge.

Durán Martínez, Angélica. 2024. *"Conflict Mitigation or Governance Choreographies? Scaling Up and Down State Criminal Negotiations in Medellín and Lessons for Mexico."* Crime, Law and Social Change 82 (4): 867–91.

Eski, Yarin. 2016. *Policing, Port Security and Crime Control: An Ethnography of the Port Securityscape.* Routledge.

EUDA. 2025. *European Drug Report 2025: Trends and Developments.* European Union Drugs Agency. https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/european drug report/2025_en.

Europol. 2023. *Criminal Networks in EU Ports: Risks and Challenges for Law Enforcement.* Security Steering Committee for the Ports of Antwerp, Hamburg/Bremerhaven and Rotterdam.

Europol. 2025. *European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: The Changing DNA of Serious and Organised Crime. Publications Office of the European Union.*

Feiling, Tom. 2009. *The Candy Machine: How Cocaine Took Over the World.* London: Penguin UK.

Felbab Brown, Vanda. 2022. *China and Synthetic Drugs Control: Fentanyl, Methamphetamines, and Precursors.* Foreign Policy at Brookings, March 7. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/china-and-synthetic-drugs-control-fentanyl-methamphetamines-and-precursors/.

Feltran, Gabriel, Cecilia Lero, Marcelli Cipriani, Janaina Maldonado, Fernando de Jesus Rodrigues, Luiz Eduardo Lopes Silva, and Nido Farias. 2022. *"Variations in Homicide Rates in Brazil: An Explanation Centered on Criminal Group Conflicts."* Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social 15: 311–48.

Feltran, Gabriel, ed. 2022. *Stolen Cars: A Journey through São Paulo's Urban Conflict.* John Wiley & Sons.

Fordham, Ann. 2020. *"The Meaningful Participation of 'Stakeholders' in Global Drug Policy Debates: A Policy Comment."* International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement 12. http://journals.openedition.org/poldev/3861.

Friesendorf, Cornelius. 2005. *"Squeezing the Balloon? Crime, Law and Social Change* 44 (1): 35–78. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611 006 9005 9.

Gallagher, Janice. 2022. *Bootstrap Justice: The Search for Mexico's Disappeared.* Oxford University Press.

Gaviria, Alejandro, & Daniel Mejia. 2011. *Políticas Antidroga en Colombia: Éxitos, Fracasos y Extravíos.* Editorial Universidad de los Andes.

Giralt Brun, Eduardo, & Genevieve Kotarska. 2022. *"The Kingpin Strategy: More Violence, No Peace."* RUSI Informer. Royal United Services Institute. https://www.rusi.org/networks/shoc/informer/kingpin strategy more violence no peace.

Global Commission on Drug Policy. 2018. *Drug Policy and the Sustainable Development Agenda.* https://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp content/uploads/2020/06/2018SDG_ENG_web.pdf.

Global Commission on Drug Policy. 2021. *Time to End Prohibition.* https://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp content/uploads/2021/12/Time_to_end_prohibition_EN_2021_report.pdf.

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime. 2023. *"Intercontinental Drug Trafficking Networks Operating via West Africa Have Begun Trading Hashish Directly for Cocaine."* Risk Bulletin 9. https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/weaobs 009/03 intercontinental drug networks west africa trading hashish for cocaine.html.

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime. 2025. *European Drug Trends Monitor.* Issue 3. https://globalinitiative.net/wp content/uploads/2025/03/Observatory-of-Organized-Crime-in-Europe-European-Drug-Trends-Monitor-Issue-3-GI TOC-July 2025.pdf.

Gootenberg, Paul. 2012. *"Cocaine's Long March North, 1900–2010."* Latin American Politics and Society 54 (1): 159–80. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548 2456.2012.00146.x.

Griffith, Ivelaw L. 2000. *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean.* Springer.

Griffith, Ivelaw L., ed. 2004. *Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror: Challenge and Change.*

Grisaffi, Thomas. 2022. *"Why Is the Drug Trade Not Violent? Cocaine Production and the Embedded Economy in the Chapare, Bolivia."* Development and Change 53 (3): 576–99.

Hill, Sheridon, & Patrice Morris. 2017. *"Drug Trafficking and Gang Violence in the Caribbean."* In Crime, Violence and Security in the Caribbean, edited by Raymond Izarali.

Inkster, Nigel, & Virginia Comoli. 2012. *Drugs, Insecurity and Failed States: The Problems of Prohibition.* Routledge.

Insight Crime. 2019. *"The Expendables: The Weakest Links in the Drug Trafficking Chain."* Insight Crime. https://insightcrime.org/news/expendables-weakest-link/.

Kappeler, Victor E., & Gary W. Potter. 2017. *The Mythology of Crime and Criminal Justice.* Waveland Press.

Keefer, Philip, Norman Loayza, & Rodrigo Soares. 2010. *"Drug Prohibition and Developing Countries: Uncertain Benefits, Certain Costs."* In Innocent Bystanders: Developing Countries and the War on Drugs, edited by Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza. Palgrave Macmillan and The World Bank.

Kurtenbach, Sabine, Angelika Rettberg, Gabriel Rosero, & José Salguero. 2025. *"Non state Armed Actors, War Economies and Postwar Violence – Examining the Connections."* World Development 191: Article 106918.

Lai, Gloria, & Claudia Stoicescu. 2020. *"Drug Policy in Asia: The Origins and Extremities of Prohibition."* In Research Handbook on International Drug Policy, 163–84. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Lessing, Benjamin. 2018. *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America.* Cambridge University Press.

Lien, Nicolas, & Gabriel Feltran. 2025. *"(I)llicit Chains: Some New Hypotheses Regarding a Changing Global Cocaine Market."* Journal of Illicit Economies and Development 7 (1).

MacCoun, Robert, & Peter Reuter. 2001. *Drug War Heresies.* Cambridge University Press.

Mares, David. 2006. *Drug Wars and Coffeehouses: The Political Economy of the International Drug Trade.* CQ Press.

MASIF. 2025. *Evaluating Cocaine Market Interventions: How External Shocks and Disruptions of Criminal Networks Impact the Cocaine Trade and Social Outcomes.* Monitoring and Support Project for the Global Illicit Flows Programme. European Commission. Accessed July 2025. https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/MASIF-Study-on Evaluating Drug Market Intervention FINAL 1.pdf

McDermott, Jeremy, James Bargent, Douwe den Held, & María Fernanda Ramírez. 2021. *The Cocaine Pipeline to Europe.* Geneva: InSight Crime and Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. https://insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-cocaine-pipeline-to-Europe-GI-TOC-InsightCrime.pdf.

McDermott, Jeremy, & Steven Dudley. 2025. *"GameChangers 2024: Global Cocaine Networks and Trump 2."* Insight Crime. https://insightcrime.org/news/gamechangers 2024 global cocaine networks and trump/.

Naím, Moisés. 2005. *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy.* Random House.

Naylor, R. T. 2009. *"Violence and Illegal Economic Activity: A Deconstruction."* Crime, Law & Social Change 52 (3): 231–42.

OCCPR. 2024. *The Crime Messenger: How Sky ECC Phones Became a Tool of the Criminal Trade.* Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. https://www.occrp.org/en/project/the crime messenger.

Pearce, Jenny. *2018. Elites and Violence in Latin America: Logics of the Fragmented Security State.* Violence, Security, and Peace Working Papers No.1.

Pearce, Jenny, & Juan David Velasco. 2022. *"Persistent Violences and Transitional Justice: From Security to 'Provention' as a Guarantor of No Repetition."* In Transitional Justice in Colombia, 209–30. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

Pérez, Ana Lilia. 2014. *Kokainmeere: Die Wege des Weltweiten Drogenhandels.* Pantheon.

Port of Hamburg. 2025. *Statistics: Seaborne Cargo Throughput.* https://www.hafen-hamburg.de/en/current/statistics/.

Rastello, Luca. 2010. *I Am the Market: How to Smuggle Cocaine by the Ton and Live Happily.* Granta.

Reuter, Peter. 2009. *"Systemic Violence in Drug Markets."* Crime, Law & Social Change 52 (3): 275–84.

Reuter, Peter. 2010. *"Can Production and Trafficking of Illicit Drugs Be Reduced or Only Shifted?"* In Innocent Bystanders: Developing Countries and the War on Drugs, edited by Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza.

Roks, Robby, Lieselot Bisschop, & Richard Staring. 2021. *"Getting a Foot in the Door: Spaces of Cocaine Trafficking in the Port of Rotterdam."* Trends in Organized Crime 24: 171–88.

Seccombe, Ralph. 1995. *"Squeezing the Balloon: International Drugs Policy."* Drug and Alcohol Review 14 (3): 311–16.

Sergi, Anna. 2023. *"Through the Sea, via the Port, and into the City: Illicit Trafficking on the Waterfront."* In Maritime Crime and Policing, 31–47. Routledge.

Sergi, Anna. 2024. *"Cocaine and the Port: Utopias of Security, Urban Relations, and Displacement of Policing Efforts in the Port of Piraeus."* European Journal of Criminology 21 (3): 329–49.

Sergi, Anna, Alexandria Reid, Luca Storti, & Marleen Easton. 2021. *"Ports, Crime and Security."* Governing and, 2021.

Shelley, Louise. 2018. D*ark Commerce: How a New Illicit Economy Is Threatening Our Future.* Princeton University Press.

Snyder, Richard, & Angélica Durán Martínez. 2009. *"Does Illegality Breed Violence? Drug Trafficking and State Sponsored Protection Rackets."* Crime, Law & Social Change 52 (3): 253–73.

Staring, Richard, Lieselot Bisschop, Robby Roks, Elisabeth Brein, and Henk & de Bunt. 2023. *"Drug Crime and the Port of Rotterdam: About the Phenomenon and Its Approach."* In Organized Crime in the 21st Century: Motivations, Opportunities, and Constraints, 43–61. Springer International Publishing.

Stevens, Alex. 2011. *Drugs, Crime and Public Health.* Routledge.

Szalavitz, Maia. 2021. *Undoing Drugs: How Harm Reduction Is Changing the Future of Drugs and Addiction.* Hachette.

Telles, Vera da Silva, Rafael Godoi, Juliana Machado Brito, & Fábio Mallart. 2020. *"Combatendo o Encarceramento em Massa, Lutando pela Vida."* Caderno CRH 33: e020024.

Thoumi, Francisco. 2003. *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes.* Johns Hopkins University Press.

UNODC. 2010. *A Century of International Drug Control.* United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

UNODC. 2023. *Global Report on Cocaine 2023: Local Dynamics,* Global Challenges. UNODC Research.

UNODC. 2025. *World Drug Report.* United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/world-drug-report-2025.html.

Usman Kemal, Muhammad. *2014. "Anti Money Laundering Regulations and Its Effectiveness."* Journal of Money Laundering Control 17 (4): 416–27. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMLC 06 2013 0022.

Valencia, Eduardo. 2025. *Drug Flows: Maritime Routes, Cocaine Seizures, and Coca Cultivation* (Europe and the World). Transfer for Transformation, German Institute for Global and Area Studies. https://www.giga-hamburg.de/de/publikationen/drug-flows-sea-based-interdictions-and-cocaine-paste-seizures

Van de Bunt, Henk, Dina Siegel, & Damián Zaitch. 2014. *"The Social Embeddedness of Organized Crime."* In The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime, edited by Letizia Paoli, 321–339. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vedovello, Camila de Lima. 2024. *"Urban Slaughters in the City and Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (2009–2020)."* Cadernos Metrópole 26: e6164747.

Velasco, Oscar. 2023. *"Unintended Consequences of State Action: How the Kingpin Strategy Transformed the Structure of Violence in Mexico's Organized Crime."* Trends in Organized Crime. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117 023 09498 X.

Wainwright, Tom. 2016. *Narconomics: How to Run a Drug Cartel.* Ebury Press.

Willis, Graham Denyer, & Angélica Durán Martínez. 2024. *"Making Sense of Clandestine Graves: Material Epistemology and the Political Geography of Uncertain Knowledge."* Political Geography 115: 103223.

Windle, James, & Graham Farrell. 2012. *"Popping the balloon effect: Assessing drug law enforcement in terms of displacement, diffusion, and the containment hypothesis."* Substance Use & Misuse 47, no. 8-9 (2012): 868-876. https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2012.663274.

Yashar, Deborah. 2018. *Homicidal Ecologies: Illicit Economies and Complicit States in Latin America.* Cambridge University Press.

Zubillaga, Veronica, & Rebecca Hanson. 2024. *"Shoutings, Scoldings, Gossip, and Whispers: Mothers' Responses to Armed Actors and Militarization in Two Caracas Barrios."* Latin American Research Review 59 (1): 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2023.58.

EU-LAC Foundation
Fundación EU-LAC

EU-LAC FUNDATION

ABC-Strasse 2, 20354 Hamburgo - Alemania
T: +49 (0) 40 80 60 11 45-0
info@eulacfoundation.org
www.eulacfoundation.org

The EU-LAC Foundation was founded by the European Union and its Member States and all Latin American and Caribbean States and is funded by its members.

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Union.

GIGA
German Institute for Global and Area Studies
Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien

GERMAN INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL AND AREA STUDIES LEIBNIZ-INSTITUT FÜR GLOBALE UND REGIONALE STUDIEN

Neuer Jungfernstieg 21 20354 Hamburg Germany
T: +49 40 42825-593 FAX +49 40 42825-547
info@giga-hamburg.de
https://www.giga-hamburg.de/

The GIGA is an independent social science research institute and member of the Leibniz Association. We analyse political, social, and economic developments in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, as well as global issues.