

## **Punjab's Drug Stigma: Unpacking the Governance Failures Behind the Label**

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### **Abstract**

*Why is Punjab, the land of five rivers and legendary resilience, now synonymous with a crippling drug crisis, while other states with comparable or even higher substance abuse rates evade the same damning label? Forget the sensational and rhetoric headlines. Punjab's drug crisis is not just a story of addicts and smugglers; it's a damning expose of governance in decay. While the Golden Crescent's heroin bleeds across the border, the real poison lies within: A system which is puzzled with unemployment, a judicial backlog and alleged conflict between those sworn to protect and those who profits from destruction. A systemic failure that has left Punjab's youth adrift in a sea of unemployment and despair, prey to a nefarious network that stretches from traffickers to those in power. Despite multiple assurances like Health Minister Balbir Singh's statement that "the government is determined to root out drug abuse from the state," This paper shreds away the "drug capital" label, revealing it as a convenient scapegoat. By examining and understanding the historical aspect, the disproportionate focus of media and news, We argue that Punjab's stigma is a consequence of leadership abandoning its people, leaving a generation to trade the strength of their heritage for the fleeting oblivion of a syringe.*

*"Our government has launched a great war against drugs in Punjab. Drugs have ruined a large number of our youth and children. Those who sell drugs will not be spared. Drugs will be eradicated from Punjab forever." - Arvind Kejriwal, Aam Aadmi Party National Convenor (March 2025)*

**Keywords:** Punjab Drug Crisis, Governance Failure, Drug Stigma, Youth Unemployment, Golden Crescent.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1: The Escalating Crisis: Unveiling the Scale of Drug Abuse in Punjab

*"A nation's downfall begins when its youth fades into oblivion." — Allama Iqbal.*

Punjab (*Land of 5 Rivers*) once a bastion of bravery and abundance, now staggers beneath the crushing weight of addiction. The state was once a gateway for commerce, culture and ethnicity is now becoming a gateway for heroin and other synthetic drugs, courtesy of its 553 km porous border with Pakistan. The Golden Crescent which involves (*Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran*) pumps narcotics into Punjab as in **June 2023**, a significant operation in Ferozepur led to the seizure of **77 kg of heroin** from four individuals involved in a **trans-border smuggling racket**. In 2023, **The Punjab Police arrested 14,952 drug smugglers and seized a total of 1,135.25 kg of heroin**. The most recent comprehensive data (February 2022) comes from a study conducted by the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) in Chandigarh, study reported that **over 3 million individuals in Punjab**, approximately 15.4% of the state's population, were consuming various substances.<sup>i</sup> Alcohol was identified as the most commonly abused substance, with over 2 million users, followed by tobacco with more than 1.5 million users. Additionally, around 170,000 individuals were reported to consume opioids.

In March 2023, *Punjab Health Minister Balbir Singh* informed the state Assembly that there were **874,000 drug addicts** in the state, with **262,000 registered in government de-addiction centers** and **612,000 in private centers**.<sup>ii</sup>

### 1.2: The Underlying Rot: Governance Failure as the True Source of Punjab's Crisis and Stigma

But drugs are only the symptom of a deeper decay – **16.2% youth unemployment**, an exodus of young minds (**1.25 lakh student visas in 2022**), and a system where the police, politicians, and traffickers work together<sup>iii</sup>. Other states – **Himachal growing charas, Kerala drowning in alcohol** – face their own crises, yet Punjab alone carries the stigma. Why? Because **governance has failed, leadership has abandoned its people, and those meant to protect the state profit from its destruction**. Without urgent reform, Punjab risks not just its youth, but its very soul.

*“When the lions of Punjab trade their swords for syringes, who will guard the land of the Gurus?” – Inspired by Sikh history.*

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has raised concerns about the high percentage of prisoners in Punjab jails who are drug addicts, highlighting systemic issues in law enforcement and rehabilitation efforts. The NHRC’s notice to the Punjab government underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to address the root causes of drug abuse rather than solely focusing on punitive measures. A study published in the *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities* exposes the deep cracks in Punjab’s battle against drug abuse, revealing a toxic cocktail of peer pressure, rampant unemployment, and an unchecked flood of narcotics seeping through its porous borders<sup>iv</sup>. But beyond these surface-level triggers lies a far graver truth – **decades of administrative inertia and feeble law enforcement** have allowed this crisis to metastasize, turning addiction from a social ill into an unrelenting epidemic. In the **absence of bold leadership and decisive action, Punjab’s youth remain trapped in a cycle of despair**.

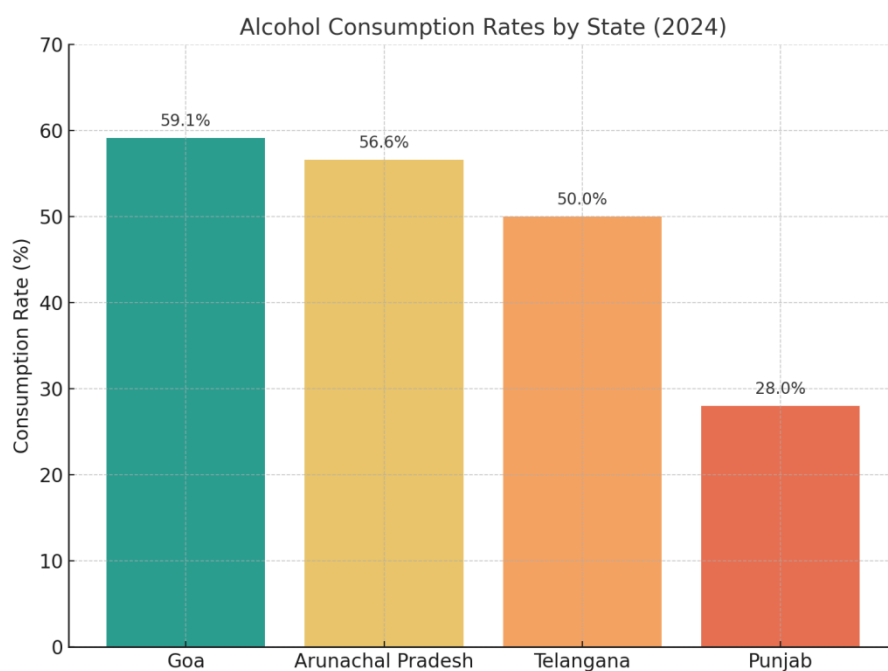
*“A nation can survive its fools, and even the ambitious. But it cannot survive treason from within.” – Marcus Tullius Cicero.*

Punjab’s drug crisis is not just a consequence of trafficking routes or economic decline but a symptom of **deep governance failure**. While other states battle their own vices, **Punjab** on the contrary **bears the burden alone** less due to reality and more to political neglect. If leadership remains indifferent, the state won’t fall to war or famine, but to the slow poison of its own decay.

## 2. Drug Problem in Punjab – The Numbers vs. Perception

### 2.1: Challenging the "Drug Capital" Label: Statistical Comparisons

Punjab's drug crisis has been lately a focal point of media and political discourse, often amplifying the state's struggles while overlooking similar challenges in other regions. According to the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022**, Punjab registered **10,220 NDPS cases**, ranking among the highest in the country but if we put other states into consideration like **Uttar Pradesh (7,742 cases)** and **Maharashtra (9,132 cases)** also report significant numbers, yet do not face the same level of stigma<sup>v</sup>. Whereas Punjab does have a severe opioid crisis, the **2024 alcohol consumption** report shows that **Goa (59.1%)**, **Arunachal Pradesh (56.6%)**, and **Telangana (50.0%)** have far higher alcohol consumption rates than Punjab's **28.0%**<sup>vi</sup>, raising the question: *why is only Punjab labeled as the "drug capital"?*



*Note: This column chart represents alcohol consumption percentages for individual states. The figures are independent and do not represent parts of a whole – hence the total exceeds 100%. Each percentage reflects the proportion of the state's population that consumes alcohol.*

## 2.2: The Role of Media in Constructing a Narrative of Stigma

Media narratives have played a crucial role in shaping this perception. Bollywood films like *Udta Punjab* and sensationalist news coverage have painted an exaggerated image of the state's drug problem, often ignoring systemic failures that fuel the crisis. A study by the *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* found that **65.5% of substance abusers in Punjab's rural areas were between 11-35 years old**, with heroin (20.8%) being a major concern. However, research also highlights deeper socio-economic issues—**79% of addicts were either unemployed or working part-time**, pointing to governance failures rather than just cultural decay<sup>vii</sup>.

The **Bhola Drug Racket case (2013-2024)**<sup>viii</sup>, one of Punjab's biggest drug smuggling scandals, saw several politicians and police officials allegedly involved, further fueling claims of political complicity.

## 2.3: The Interplay of Politics, National Security, and Stigma

The **2019 abrogation of Article 370** in Jammu & Kashmir was justified partially by linking it to curbing drug and weapon smuggling from Pakistan, an argument that indirectly tied Punjab's situation to national defense strategies. **The BJP-led Central Government** often links Punjab's drug issue to national security concerns, citing Pakistan's "**narco-terrorism**" strategy. In **March 2025**, Union Home Minister Amit Shah referred to "**No mercy for drug cartels**"<sup>ix</sup>, positioning Punjab as the primary target. Similarly, in **April 2025**, Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria flagged off a '**Pad Yatra**' against **drug abuse from the Kartarpur Corridor**. During the event, he noted an alarming rise in drug abuse and the increasing challenge of narcotics **smuggling from Pakistan via drones**, emphasizing the need for collective efforts to combat this menace<sup>x</sup>.

Despite Kerala ranking highest in total drug-related cases (**26,619 in 2022**), and Maharashtra consistently registering **high NDPS cases**, neither state sees comparable political or media scrutiny. In contrast, Punjab's drug crisis is frequently discussed in Parliament and state elections, with opposition parties using it as an **attack tool** against ruling governments. Data from various sources shows Punjab is often painted as India's "*drug capital*," the numbers tell a different story—one where perception overshadows reality. According to the

**National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) (2019-21)**, Punjab's alcohol consumption among men stands at **28%**, a figure far below several other states. **Goa leads at 59%, Arunachal Pradesh follows at 57%, and Telangana records 50%**. Even states like **Chhattisgarh (48%)** and **Jharkhand (46%)** surpass Punjab in alcohol consumption, yet they don't bear the same stigma. Similarly, the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022** data shows that **Kerala (26,629 NDPS cases)** and **Maharashtra (13,850 cases)** reported more drug-related offenses **than Punjab (12,818 cases)**<sup>xi</sup>. Despite this, the national discourse remains fixated on Punjab's crisis while turning a blind eye to the rampant substance abuse and trafficking elsewhere. This implies that while Punjab faces significant challenges related to drug abuse, the heightened focus may be influenced by political agendas, potentially overshadowing similar issues in other states. *The narrative of Punjab drowning in drugs isn't built on statistics – it's built on selective outrage. While the state has a drug problem, so do many others, often worse. But Punjab alone is made the scapegoat, allowing deeper governance failures across the country to go unquestioned.* the article **"Punjab has a Drug Problem but Governments Ignore Source of Menace"** from Newsclick<sup>xii</sup> discusses how Punjab's drug issue became a political focal point. As Malcolm X once said, **"The media's the most powerful entity on Earth... because they control the minds of the masses."** It's time to question not just Punjab's drug problem but also the larger forces deciding which crises deserve the spotlight and which remain in the shadows.

### 3. Historical Context – How Punjab Got Here

*"The past is never dead. It's not even past."* – **William Faulkner**

#### 3.1: The Scars of Partition and Geopolitical Instability

The Partition of 1947 was a defining moment in Punjab's history as it left Punjab with deep economic and social scars. The state was once a massive center of trade and agriculture with a strong self-sustainable economy but got brutally divided, displacing over 14 million people and triggering one of the largest forced migrations in history. Punjab lost its industrial and commercial hubs to Pakistan, including Lahore, its former capital, which disrupted trade routes and economic stability. This sudden demographic as well as geographical shift led to overcrowding in urban centers like (Ludhiana and Jalandhar) and a decline in artisanal and

small-scale industries like the Sialkot (now in Pakistan) and Jalandhar were twin centers of sports goods manufacturing.<sup>xiii</sup>

International players also played a role in shaping post-Partition Punjab. The hurried and arbitrary **Radcliffe line**, drawn in just 5 weeks by British lawyer **Sir Cyril Radcliffe**, was a geopolitical disaster that not only divided **communities overnight** but also **exacerbated border tensions that persist to this day**. The result was Punjab's economic and cultural region, was suddenly cleaved in half, cutting off trade routes and disrupting supply chains. The British colonial administration had extracted wealth from Punjab for centuries but left behind **no institutional mechanisms for rehabilitation** thus forcing many refugees to turn to agriculture in the absence of industrial opportunities.

In addition to this Cold War geopolitics played a role in Punjab's trajectory. The Indo-Pakistani conflicts of **1947, 1965, and 1971** ensured that Punjab remained a **highly militarized border state**, leading to heavy **police surveillance and political instability**. Allegations of **CIA, ISI (Pakistan's intelligence agency), and even Soviet KGB** involvement in exacerbating Punjab's internal strife point to how **Punjab has long been a geopolitical chess piece in international power struggles**.

Thus, Punjab's post-Partition crisis was not just the result of local governance failures but also **the direct consequence of reckless colonial policies, international economic interventions, and Cold War-era geopolitics**. The present-day economic distress, agrarian crisis, and even the state's drug problem are deeply intertwined with these historical events, proving that **Punjab's struggles are not merely self-inflicted but the legacy of decades of external manipulation and neglect**.

### 3.2: The Border as a Conduit: Geopolitical Location and the Influx of Narcotics

The smuggling routes are the Punjab's geopolitical nightmare as the state shares **553-km border with Pakistan**, marked by porous stretches and inadequate surveillance infrastructure, has made it a prime entry point for narcotics into India. The state lies along the infamous **Golden Crescent**, a region comprising **Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran**, which produces nearly **85% of the world's illicit opium** (UNODC, 2023)<sup>xiv</sup>. Given the volatility of Afghanistan post-Taliban resurgence, drug production and smuggling have only intensified,



with **heroin, synthetic opioids, and methamphetamine** flooding into Punjab. Statistical evidences shows, **A single consignment of 532 kg heroin** worth ₹2,700 crore was seized at the Attari border<sup>xv</sup>, hidden in a rock salt shipment from Pakistan. Drug seizures along the Punjab border **account for over 60% of heroin recovered in India**, despite other states like Gujarat and Maharashtra also receiving large shipments. Smugglers exploit Punjab's terrain, border gaps. **Small tunnels** have been discovered along the border, facilitating narcotics transfer, The **Sutlej River**, which runs along the border, is used to float packets of drugs wrapped in waterproof material or Many cross-border **laborers, farmers, and transport workers are used as carriers**, often unaware of the full extent of their involvement<sup>xvi</sup>. Despite similar vulnerabilities, **other states like Gujarat and Maharashtra have also reported large drug seizures**, yet Punjab disproportionately carries the stigma of being India's "drug capital." **The Mundra Port in Gujarat**, managed by Adani Ports, witnessed one of India's biggest drug busts – **almost 3,000 kg of heroin worth ₹21,000 crore was seized in 2021**<sup>xvii</sup>. However, national discourse rarely focuses on these regions the way it does on Punjab. The **slow prosecution of major drug lords and lack of systemic reform** indicate that drug smuggling persists not just due to geography, but due to **corruption and administrative inertia**.

The need of the hour is a **holistic crackdown on smuggling networks, alongside political accountability** unless Punjab will continue to be unfairly labeled while the real culprits – international cartels and complicit officials – operate unchecked.

*"Corruption is worse than prostitution. The latter might endanger the morals of an individual, but the former invariably endangers the morality of the entire nation."*

– Kautilya (Chanakya), Ancient Indian Philosopher and Economist.

## 4. Governance Failures in Tackling Drug Abuse

### 4.1: Inadequate Law Enforcement and a Burdened Justice System



Punjab Police and Narcotic Control Bureau (NCB) along with this Anti-Narcotic Task Force (ANTF) was established to specifically deal with drug trafficking and abuse. Despite, its mandate, the ANTF reportedly struggled due to **insufficient manpower** and **logistical support** which made it largely ineffective against well-organized drug cartels with **reports in 2024** highlighting the **ANTF have 861 personnel**<sup>5</sup> deployed in the field **against a requirement of 2,200**<sup>xviii</sup>. Moreover, The Judicial system aggravate the issue with it's own inefficiencies studies revealing that the **42.1% of the state's prison population** comprises individuals accused or convicted under the **NDPS Act**. Along with this, As of January 2025, **Punjab district courts are over-burdened with 845,319 pending cases**<sup>xix</sup>, with approximately 62% languishing for over a year this backlogs further disturbs timely justice delivery and pro-long detentions. The enforcement and legal arsenal is further accompanied by BSF (Border Security Force) and intelligence agencies but their coordination with Punjab Police makes compromised situations. Major **allegations of a nefarious nexus** which includes many police and administrative officers, politicians, political parties and drug peddlers further fuels the crisis. Traffickers are increasingly utilizing advanced methods such as the dark-net and cryptocurrencies. The **Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) reported 92 cases involving the dark-net and cryptocurrencies, and 1,025 cases involving parcel or courier services between 2020 and April 2024**<sup>xx</sup>.

#### 4.2: Ineffective Prevention and Rehabilitation Strategies

India's approach to spreading awareness about drug-abuse and establishing drug rehabilitation centers has predominantly showed poor measures and actions to implement comprehensive, reformative yet progressive strategies, If put in comparison with more efficient & effective models implemented internationally. Starting with Portugal where the nation decriminalized personal possession of all drugs in 2001 and the result was impressive because this act shifted the focus to health focused interventions and the outcome as suggested by reports was drastically impressive HIV infections attributed to injecting drug use decreased from 1,287 cases in 2001 to just 16 cases in 2019<sup>xxi</sup>.

India on the other hand is exercising it's National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) which aims to provide preventive education, awareness generation, and rehabilitation services but again the reach and impact of these initiatives have been limited.

As of 2023-24, approximately 581,813 beneficiaries accessed services<sup>xxii</sup> supported by the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment, a modest figure given the country's vast population and the scale of substance use disorders.

#### **4.3: The Unemployment-Addiction Nexus: A Failure of Economic Policy**

Political discourse is replete with grandiose promises of generating vast vacancies for acquiring employment that too during election cycles. Yet, these proclamations often lack substantive execution methods and tends to serve more as rhetorical devices in speeches than actionable plans. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) such as "Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan and Pahal Foundation"<sup>xxiii</sup> have been participating actively in rehabilitation and awareness campaigns but their efforts are capped by independent funding and lack of governmental support. There is a hidden nexus between Punjab's soaring youth unemployment and its escalating drug crisis is a glaring testament to systemic governance failures and political exploitation. Despite Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's assertions of creating over 55,000 government jobs in 36 months , the tangible impact on the ground remains dubious. The state's unemployment rate stood at a staggering 21.6%, surpassing the national average of 17.8%<sup>xxiv</sup>. This economic stagnation has rendered the youth susceptible to substance abuse, with reports indicating that every third individual in Punjab is ensnared by drugs other than alcohol and tobacco.

#### **4.4: Opaque Implementation and Lack of Data-Driven Strategies**

Time-to-Time initiatives are there like the 'Yudh Nashe Virudh'<sup>xxv</sup> campaign are commendable in intent but at ground level the execution is very poor because the framework or the methods to make such initiatives work is never shared among the public or the data which shows the differences is never brought up. This strongly suggests that such initiatives are just to ensure that the government just wants to be highlighted in the news. The funds are needed to implement such initiatives and again the utilization is opaque again suggesting that corruption is still running through the nerves of government like the drugs through the addicts. The dearth of comprehensive data on drug addiction further hampers the formulation of targeted interventions.

All this figures, comments and data suggests that Punjab's youth are ensared in a never ending loop which includes fake reforms and superficial measures. There is a need to break this cycle providing a paradigm shift towards transparent governance, evidence-based policymaking, and an unwavering commitment to addressing the root causes of unemployment and addiction.

## 5. The Role of State-Based Solutions

### 5.1: Technological Interventions for Border Security

Implementing an AI-Driven integrated border surveillance system (IBBS) like the one which is active on borders of India & Bangladesh which involves use of infrared cameras, drones, motion sensors along with satellite imaging to monitor the Punjab's 553-km border with Pakistan.

#### **Implementation:**

1. Set-up a joint Punjab-BSF anti-smuggling task force with cross-border intelligence sharing.
2. Deploy AI-based profiling at border villages to track suspicious movement.
3. Introduce harsher penalties under the NDPS Act for corrupt enforcement officials aiding drug smuggling.

Regulatory reforms needed for this is Mandate real-time reporting of seizures by all agencies to a central state-run portal.

### 5.2: Economic Revitalization and Employment Generation

Economic reforms and Employment generation is needed which can be addressed by Launch a **"Punjab Micro Startup Mission"** to support agro-tech, green manufacturing, and rural processing units.

#### **Implementation:**

1. Offer ₹1-5 lakh seed grants to youth-run rural startups.
2. Provide land banks and single-window clearances for MSMEs in border districts.
3. Partner with German dual education systems for vocational skill-transfer.

for this there are a few regulations needed to ensure smooth functioning like Create a State Employment and Innovation Bill to ensure some percentage of reservation in new local jobs alongside this state can conduct tax incentives for companies hiring from identified drug-vulnerable zones.

### 5.3: Promoting Media Responsibility and Narrative Transformation

Another need of the hour is, **Media Responsibility & Narrative Change**. Which establishes a Punjab Media Ethics & Representation Council (PMERC) for youth portrayal in films and news.

#### **Implementation:**

1. Provide state funding and awards for documentaries highlighting recovery stories.
  2. Incentivize OTT platforms to produce Punjab-centric content that isn't drug-related.
  3. Include media literacy on substance abuse in school academics curriculum and establish such co-curricular activities which educate students on substance abuse.
- This involves regulation changes like amend Cinematography Rules to add social sensitivity clauses on drug portrayal and Mandatory disclaimers and helpline numbers on films depicting drug use in Punjab.

### 5.4: The "SAAJH" Model: Culturally and Technologically Integrated Solutions

In order to combat drug abuse in Punjab, legal reform must align with culture and technology. The "SAAJH" model—Smart, Accountable, Aware, Justice-driven, and Human-centered—offers this synergy.

1. **Virtual NDPS Courts** with community cultural juries (including ex-users, scholars, and sociologists) speed up trials while reflecting societal values.
2. **AI surveillance** at culturally sensitive locations (like Gurdwaras and melas) detects trafficking patterns without violating community trust.
3. **Faith-based rehab** is legally integrated by mandating Gurmat therapy, kirtan, and spiritual healing in certified centers, supported via CSR and health schemes.
4. **Blockchain-backed case tracking** ensures transparency from FIR to rehab, limiting political interference.

5. **Village-level “Drug Watch Committees”**, under Panchayati Raj, use biometrics and app-based tracking to monitor and mentor at-risk youth.

*“In a land where identity is sacred, justice must walk with tradition, not against it.”* These frameworks not only strengthens enforcement but restores trust by using Punjab’s cultural capital and digital potential. It blends community healing with judicial innovation.

## 6. International Comparisons: Global Drug Use and Media Censorship

### 6.1: Colombia’s Drug Policy and Media Censorship

During the 1980-1990’s, The media stream of Colombia was heavily manipulated by the drug cartels, mainly Pablo Escobar’s Medellín Cartel. Escobar utilized media outlets to shape his public image, portraying himself as a philanthropist and local hero. He used to fully finance full-page ads, magazines, news papers, etc. Which portrayed opposing the government’s anti-drug efforts and the US-Colombian Extradition Treaty. Escobar’s influence extended to political spheres, securing an appointment as an alternate Liberal Party member of Congress.

### 6.2: How Colombia Fought Its Drug Problem

Medellín, which was once the epicenter of Colombia’s drug violence, went through a major transformation called as “social urbanism.” This was done under the guidance of Mayor Sergio Fajardo, the city invested in public infrastructure, education, and community programs, particularly in marginalized neighborhoods. This approach reduced crime rates and improved quality of life, serving as a model for urban renewal.

*A new ten-year drug strategy was introduced by president Gustavo Petro focusing on:*

1. **“Oxygen” Strategy:** Providing support to vulnerable communities involved in coca cultivation, including economic alternatives and public health initiatives.
2. **“Asphyxiation” Strategy:** Targeting large-scale drug traffickers and criminal networks through enhanced interdiction efforts.

This dual approach aims to reduce coca cultivation by 40% over a decade.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### 6.3: International Comparisons

Countries	Framework
China (Asia)	The government mandates the removal of content that contradicts “core socialist values,” which includes discussions on drug use. <sup>xxvii</sup>
Slovakia (Europe)	Slovakia’s Criminal Law Section 174 criminalizes the public dissemination of content that portrays drug use (excluding alcohol) in a favorable light. <sup>xxviii</sup>
Nigeria (Africa)	Nigeria’s National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) monitors media content to prevent the promotion of drug use. <sup>xxix</sup>
Australia (Oceania)	Australia implements a harm-reduction approach to drug policy, focusing on public health rather than criminalization. <sup>xxx</sup>

#### 6.4: International Organizations and Drug Policy Initiatives

Organization	Primary Focus	Key Initiatives	Recent Data/Developments
UN (UNODC)	Global drug control and crime prevention	World Drug Report, DMP	296 million global drug users in 2023; significant shifts in opium production <sup>xxx</sup>
NATO	Security and defense	Counter-narcotics training, stabilization missions	Maritime Security: Conducting surveillance and interdiction operations to deter and disrupt illegal activities, including drug trafficking, in the Mediterranean Sea. <sup>xxxii</sup>
G20	Economic policy and global cooperation	Health and economic discussions	Addresses drug issues within broader health and economic contexts. <sup>xxxiii</sup>
EMCDDA	Monitoring drug trends in Europe	Data collection and analysis	83,000 drug-related deaths in Europe in 2023. <sup>xxxiv</sup>



<b>BRICS</b>	Economic and health cooperation	Anti-Drug Working Group, pharmaceutical collaboration	Emphasis on joint efforts to combat drug trafficking and improve medicine access. <sup>xxxv</sup>

India can draw lessons from international best practices and localizing them can offer better strategies to handle drug perception, media censorship, and policy design as these global ideas and efforts showcase a growing understanding that drug challenges are not just legal or criminal issues as they are intertwined with health, economy, and media influence.

## 7. Conclusion

*"The five rivers of Punjab can once again flow with prosperity, but only if the currents of governance are redirected towards hope and opportunity."*

The struggle of Punjab with drug abuse is a deeply entrenched crisis, its roots entwined with historical trauma, vulnerabilities at geopolitical stage and critically as well as persistent governance and administrative failures. The core of the problem lies not just in porous borders or choices of individuals but in systematic weaknesses. The stark reality of unemployment along with selfless individuals beings pushed towards substance abuse as a means of coping with despair and lack of opportunity. The future demands a drastic paradigm shift where blaming Punjab alone serves only to obscure national failures and create a barrier towards implementation of effective solutions. Ultimately, overcoming Punjab's drug crisis demands shifting the focus beyond the harmful stigma and understanding the deep-seated governance failures. At the end, The solution lies not in blame-shifting, but in a collective commitment to better governance, comprehensive reforms, and a genuine investment in the lives of people.

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