



**CoE
Brazil**

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR ILLICIT DRUG SUPPLY
REDUCTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Covid-19 and drug
trafficking in Brazil:
the adaptation of
organized crime and the
actions of police forces
during the pandemic**



UNODC
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sobre Drogas e Crime



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**PÁTRIA AMADA
BRASIL**
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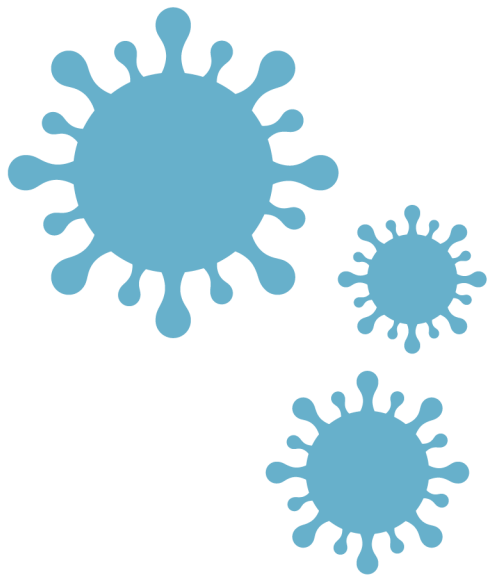
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*A study that aims to
understand the dynamics
of drug trafficking
in the context of the
covid-19 pandemic.*

Table of contents

Main conclusions	10
OVERVIEW	10
CANNABIS	13
COCAINE	16
POSSIBLE CHANGES	21
OTHER DRUGS	21
Social implications	22
Possible answers	22

Main conclusions

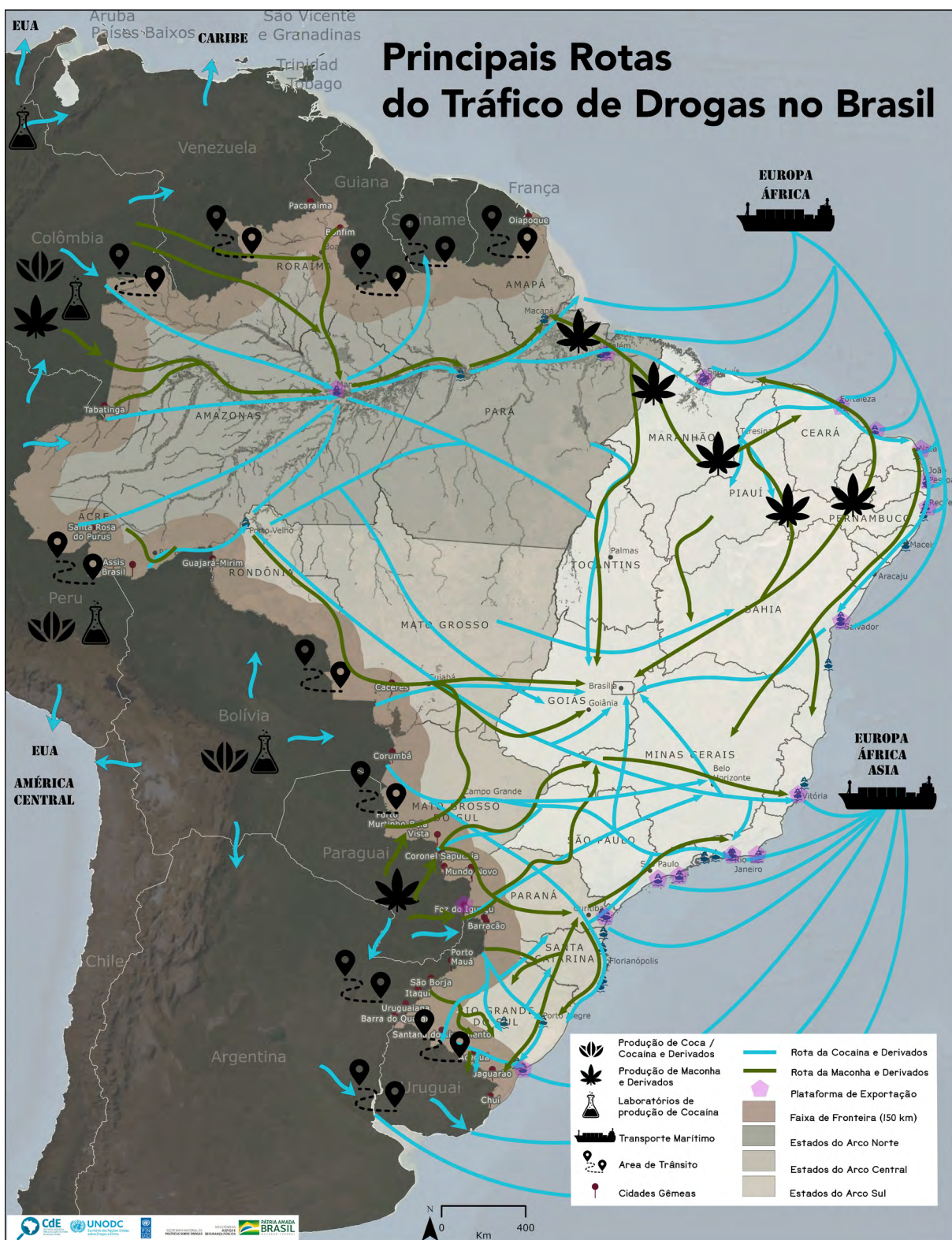
OVERVIEW

Map of drug trafficking routes in Brazil

Identified from the most recent data from several Brazilian institutions and from other countries, the main illicit drug trafficking routes shine a light on the size of this market's problem in Brazil.

Located on the maritime border, ports are used as export platforms and correspond to the shipment of cocaine (blue lines) to Europe, Africa, and Asia. There are several trafficking routes with this destination, which are constantly changing.

In this way, Brazil remains a strategic region for the transit of cocaine without major changes in the routes traditionally established pre-COVID-19 pandemic. However, during the health crisis, organizations that work in drug trafficking showed a strong resilience, with the capacity to adapt and diversify routes as needed, to ensure the non-interruption of activities.





Positive results of the VIGIA Program

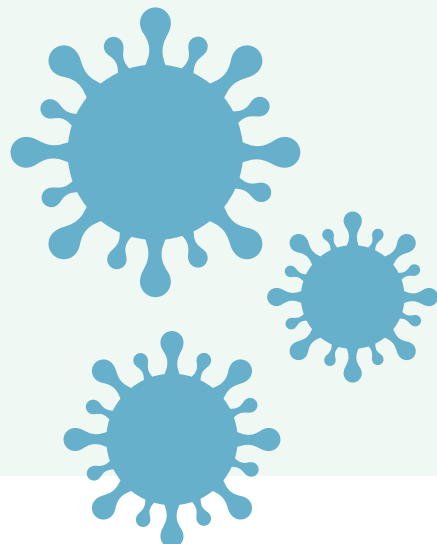
The National Border Security Program (VIGIA), a public policy of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, induced policing in the border areas where it was implemented and recorded an increase in illicit drug seizures. This growth trend can be partially explained by factors arising from the pandemic, but also due to VIGIA's results.

Resilience of criminal organizations

Criminal organizations have adapted to increased surveillance, to less highway traffic and to the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Representatives of the security forces reported the enticement of more people involved in the act of trafficking, especially for the role of “olheiro”, an individual who monitors police work and passes information to drug dealers. According to police officers interviewed, part of the explanation for the significant increase in seizures occurred because drug dealers got together in small groups, like a consortium, to transport cannabis loads. The sale of drugs via mobile phone apps, a practice known as “drug delivery” or “disk drug”, also increased during this period.

Changes to the routine of police action

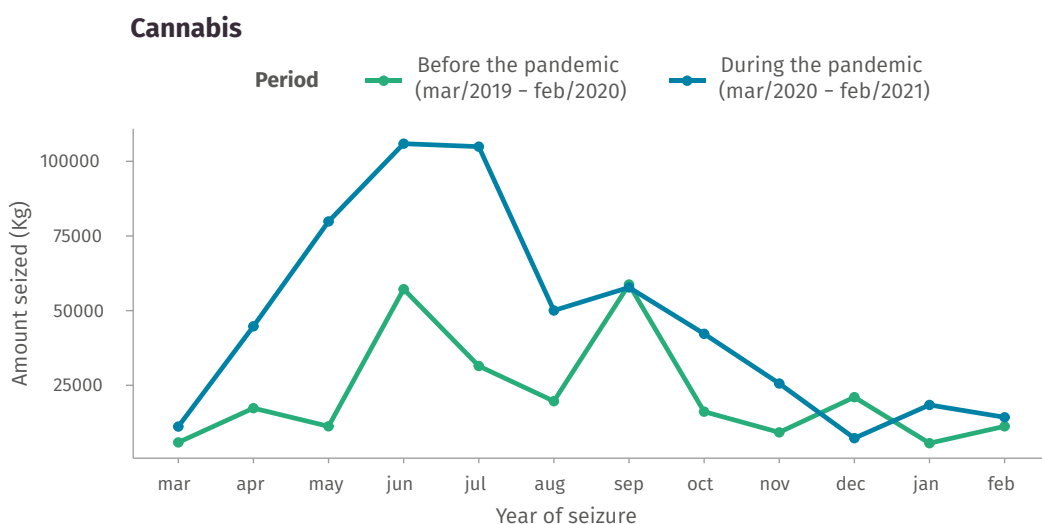
The COVID-19 pandemic changed the day-to-day activities of public security professionals. Overt policing was the activity that underwent the greatest changes, due to the need for more interpersonal contact. In police work, investigations took a toll at the beginning of the health crisis, a period when there was an adaptation of police work to the new health guidelines and protocols. However, as it was considered an essential activity, police work was not interrupted.





CANNABIS

Significant increase in cannabis seizures



According to Federal Police (FP) data, between March 2019 and February 2020, 265 tons of cannabis and derivatives (hashish and skunk) were seized. In the following period, between March 2020 and February 2021, the volume increased to 562 tons, representing an **increase of 112 %** in the 12 months following the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

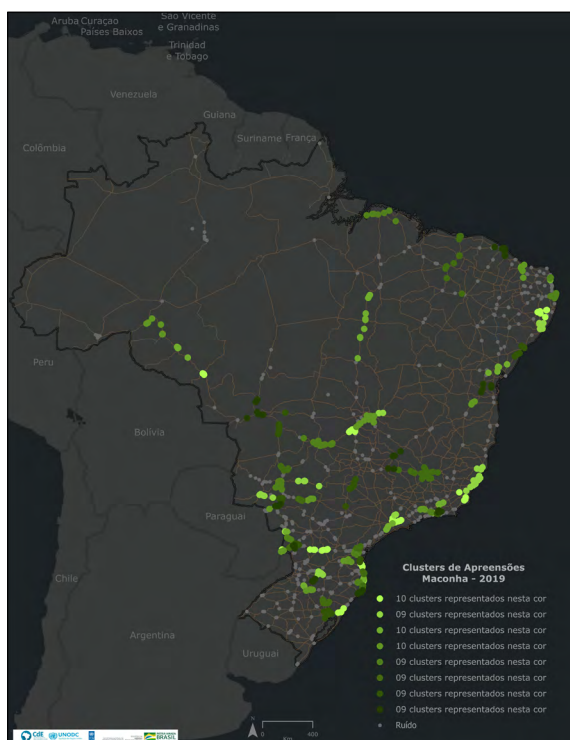


When using geospatial analysis techniques to generate a cluster map¹ of the seizures by the Federal Highway Police (FHP), some differences were observed in the possible routes used by criminal organizations between 2019 and 2020.

In 2020, the state of Rio Grande do Sul presented new routes and larger cannabis seizures compared to 2019. These data suggest a possible trend in the use of routes towards the south of the country.

¹ The terms “cluster” refers to a geographically delimited group of occurrences of sufficient size and concentration to be unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Cannabis seizure cluster by the FHP in 2019



Cannabis seizure cluster by the FHP in 2020



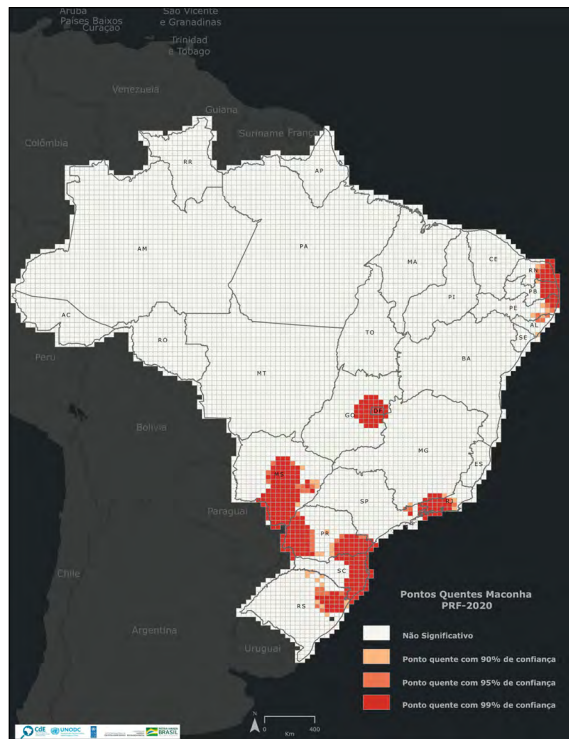
By generating a heat signatures map, a geospatial analysis technique that allows the visual identification of areas where seizure occurrences seem to be higher, we found

that, although more numerous, cannabis seizures remain concentrated in the same locations.

Heat signatures of cannabis seizures by the FHP in 2019



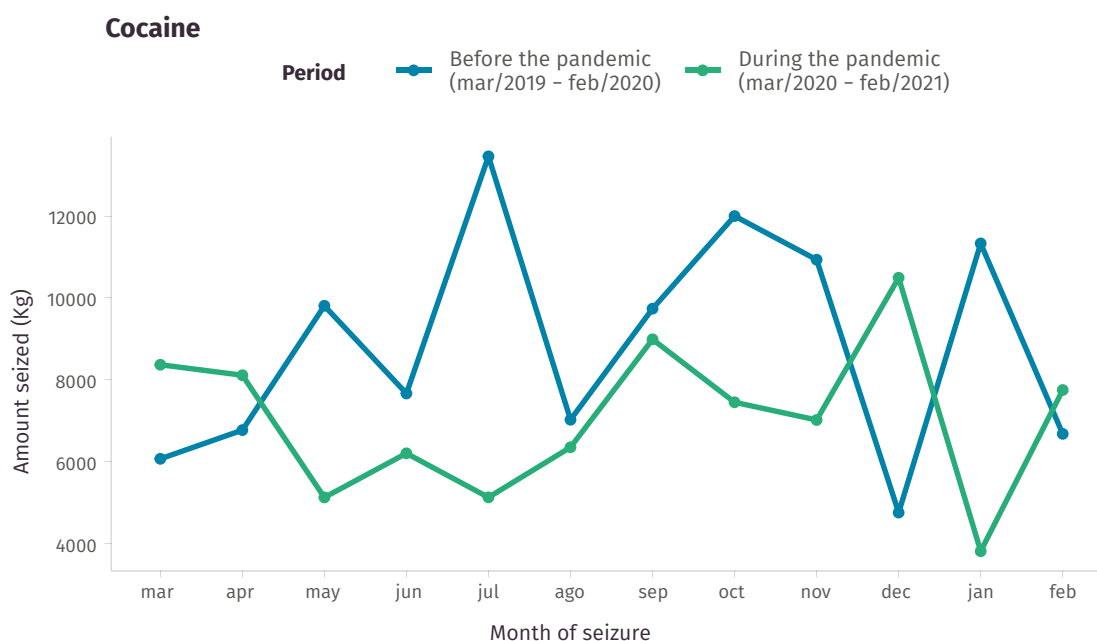
Heat signatures of cannabis seizures by the FHP in 2020





COCAINE

Global decrease in cocaine seizures



According to Federal Police data, between March 2019 and February 2020, 106 tons of cocaine hydrochloride and coca paste/base (including crack) were seized. Between March 2020 and February 2021, the volume increased to 85 tons, representing a **decrease of 20%** in the 12 months following the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.



This decrease in seizures should be read in a broader context, in which the drug production was affected, as well as the complex shipping logistics to various parts of the world by air and sea (among other means).



A decrease in cocaine seizures at airports was also recorded, probably due to the flight restriction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, the four airports with the most seizures remained the same, according to Federal Police data.

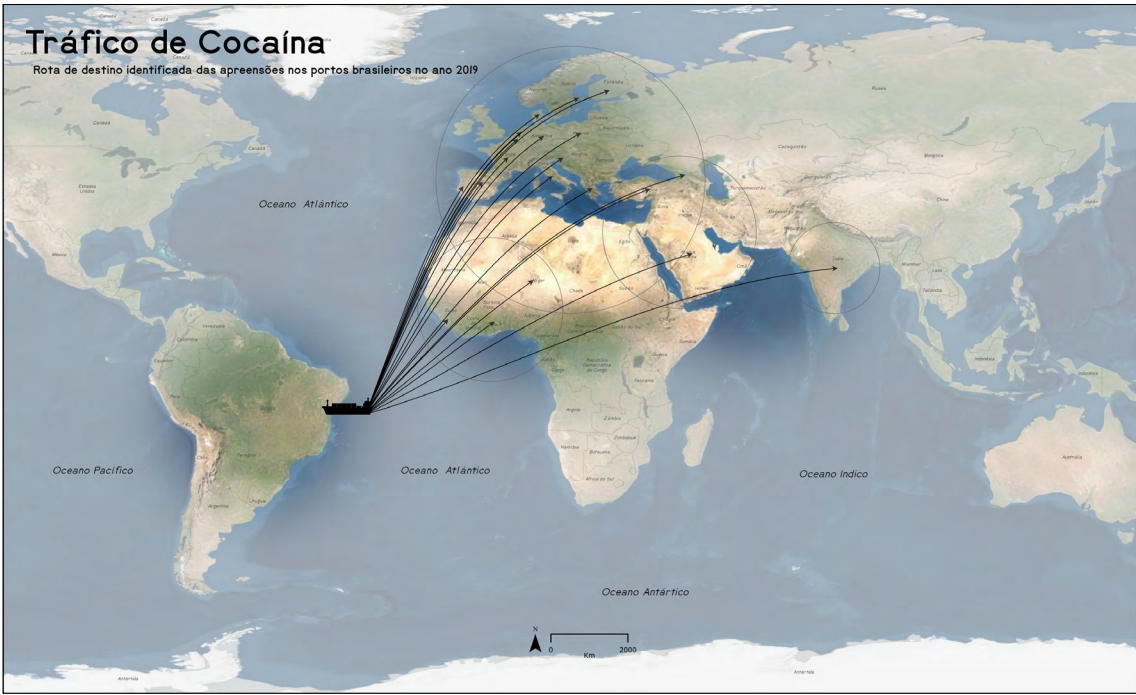
Regarding seizures in Brazilian ports, a decrease of **24%** was also observed **between 2019 and 2020**, according to Federal Police data. However, there was a diversification of the ports, with a decrease in cocaine seizures in the ports of Santos (SP) and Paranaguá (PR). If, in 2019, seizures in these two ports represented 73.7% of the total, in 2020 the proportion fell to 58.6%. In this sense, other Brazilian ports began to register more seizures compared to the previous year, such as **Salvador (state of Bahia)**, with an increase of 121% (from 3,383 kg seized in 2019 to 7,499 kg in 2020), **Ilhéus (state of Bahia)**, which had no



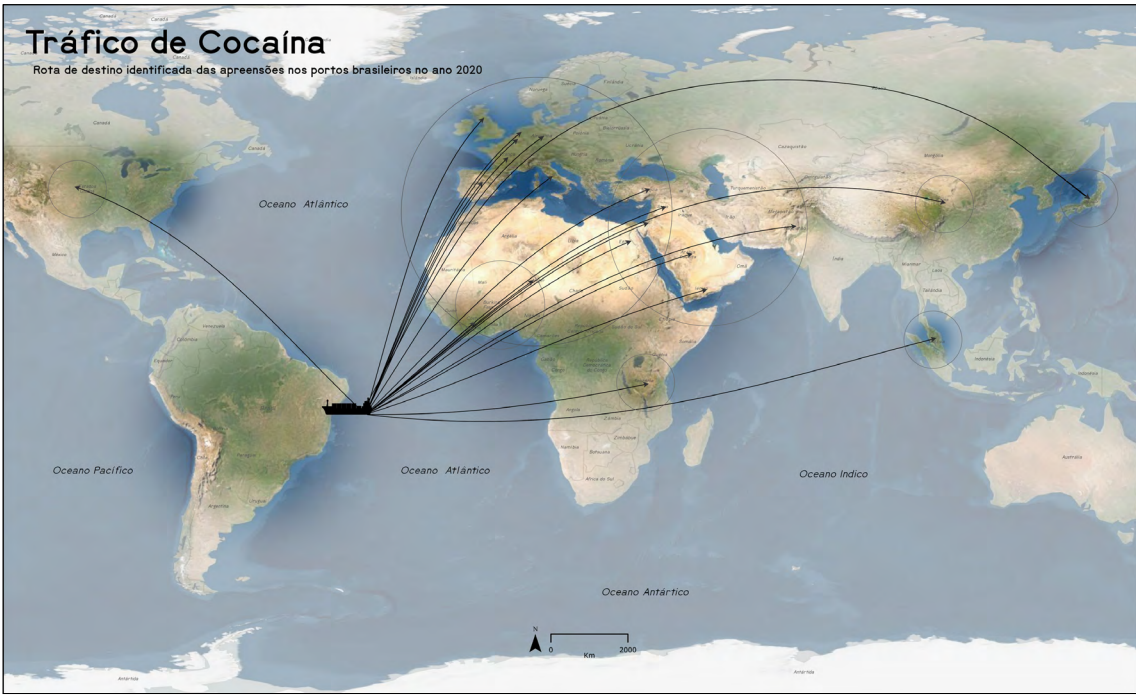
seizures in 2019 and recorded 2,188 kg in 2020, and **Joinville (state of Santa Catarina)** with an increase of 1,733% (from 235 kg seized in 2019 to 4,315 kg in 2020).

Just like there was a diversification of the ports of origin, the places of destination of the shipments were also expanded.

Destination route identified from cocaine seizures in Brazilian ports – 2019



Destination route identified from cocaine seizures in Brazilian ports – 2020

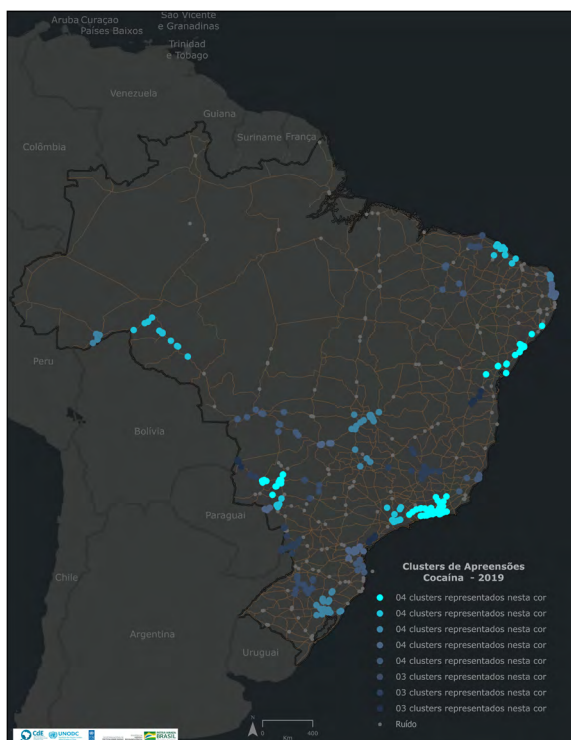




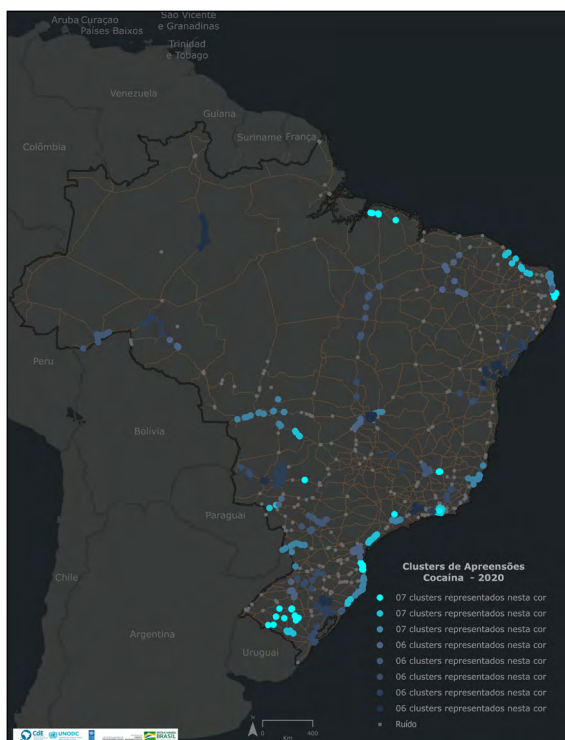
According to interviewees, the surveillance of Brazilian ports faces some difficulties, with a shortage of people and equipment to carry out cargo inspections.

By using geospatial analysis techniques to generate a cluster map of seizures, we found some differences in the seizures by the Federal Highway Police between 2019 and 2020.

Cocaine seizure cluster by the FHP in 2019



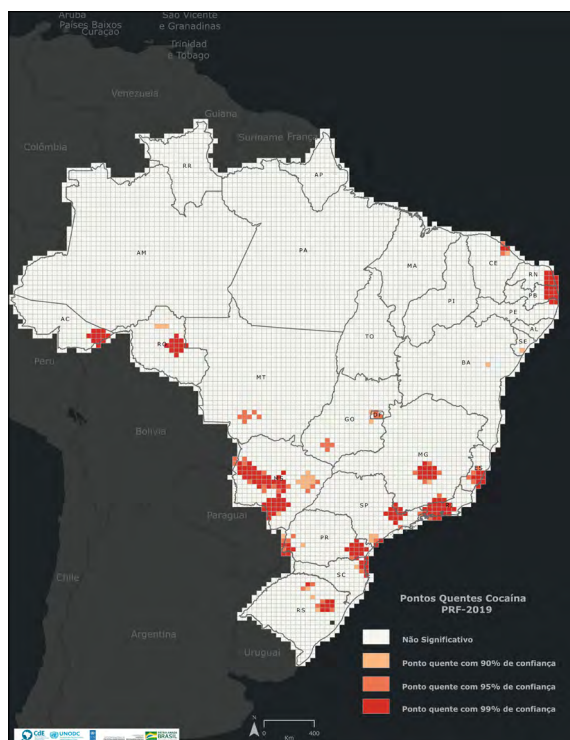
Cocaine seizure cluster by the FHP in 2020



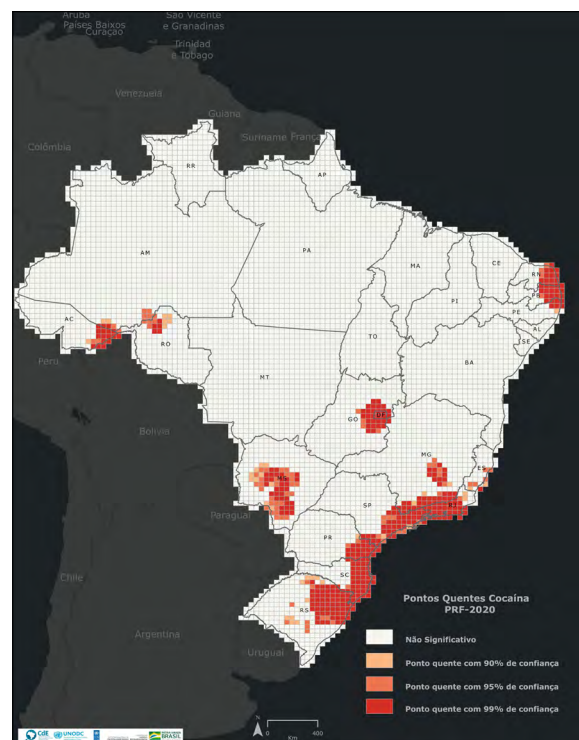
In 2020, the state of Rio Grande do Sul presented new clusterings in relation to 2019, with an expansion of seizures in the southern region of the state, near the border with Uruguay.

When generating a heat signatures map, some changes in the routes used by cocaine trafficking are observed, although in close regions, evidencing a greater geographic concentration in these areas from 2019 to 2020.

Heat signatures of cocaine seizures by the FHP in 2019



Heat signatures of cocaine seizures by the FHP in 2020



According to the perception of police officers, it was possible to see an increase in the volume of cocaine being sent in small quantities by postal service.

POSSIBLE CHANGES

The change in clusters' spatial behavior suggests that, as efforts to interdict traditional routes increased, criminal groups may have sought alternatives and diversified routes to the south of the country in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

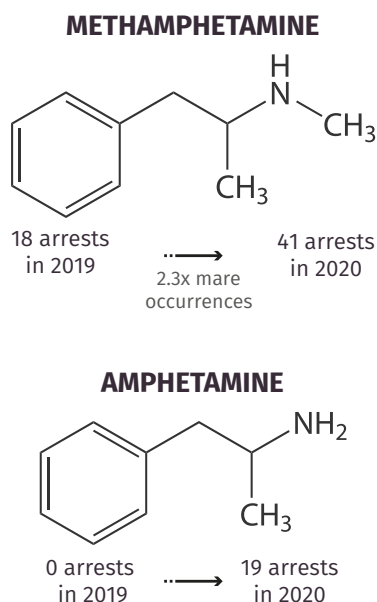
The Geospatial Intelligence analysis suggests that, from the interviews and focus groups carried out in the study, although the restrictions arising from COVID-19 have reduced the possibilities of drug trafficking by air, seizures on the main land access routes in the national territory have not decreased, and the impact of the pandemic has also not extended to modalities that use maritime

transportation methods. On the contrary, there has been an increase in seizure concentrations on federal highways along the country's coastline, which may suggest that criminal organizations have intensified efforts to use the ports infrastructures and continue their illicit activities aimed at international drug trafficking.

Even though there has been a decrease in seizures at ports, the extensive diversification of Brazilian ports and the routes of destination of cocaine shipments to other countries show the importance of this transportation method in the transnational cocaine traffic.

OTHER DRUGS

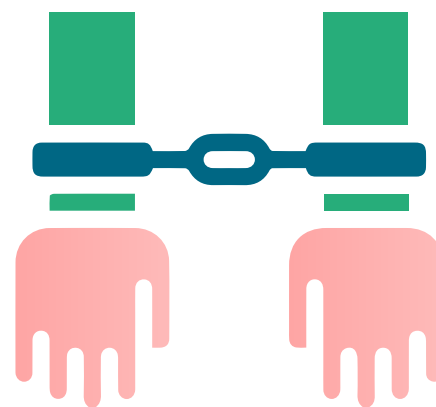
Data from the Narcotics Testing Centre (NEE) at the Institute of Criminalistics of the Technical and Scientific Police of the State of São Paulo indicate an increase in the detection of methamphetamine, amphetamine, and MDA, with emphasis on the first two, in the comparison made between 2019 and 2020.



Social implications

The social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the increase in poverty and other vulnerabilities, may have contributed to an environment that favored the enticement of more people to work in drug trafficking.

Data relating to the arrest records for people caught in the act, provided by the National Council of Justice (CNJ), point to a profile of black men, with low schooling and a precarious entry into the labor market as predominant among prisoners involved in drug trafficking.



Possible answers

Criminal organizations continue to specialize and increasingly use new technologies, entry into other markets and new resources such as cryptocurrencies. These situations reinforce the importance of continuous improvement of the actions by police forces and activities aimed at the decapitalization of organized crime.

The importance of monitoring the financial activities of criminal organizations is evident when we think about the limitations of an analysis based only on numbers of seizures. Data on illicit drug seizures are fragmented among several institutions in the country, which is why this study collaborates with an integrated and global vision for the debate on the issue at hand.



It is recommended to monitor, for longer periods of time, the behavior of drug seizures, as well as improve information on trafficking routes, production, consumption market and drug prices. This is a complex market and, from the analysis of this information, it will be possible to build a more concrete overview of its operation. Like putting together a puzzle, in which the correct position of each piece makes the scenario more evident, studies and diagnoses on the subject also create a favorable framework for the implementation of more effective public policies to reduce the supply of illicit drugs.



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