

# I. TRENDS IN ILLICIT DRUGS SMUGGLING

## 1. Seizures of Smuggled Illicit Drugs

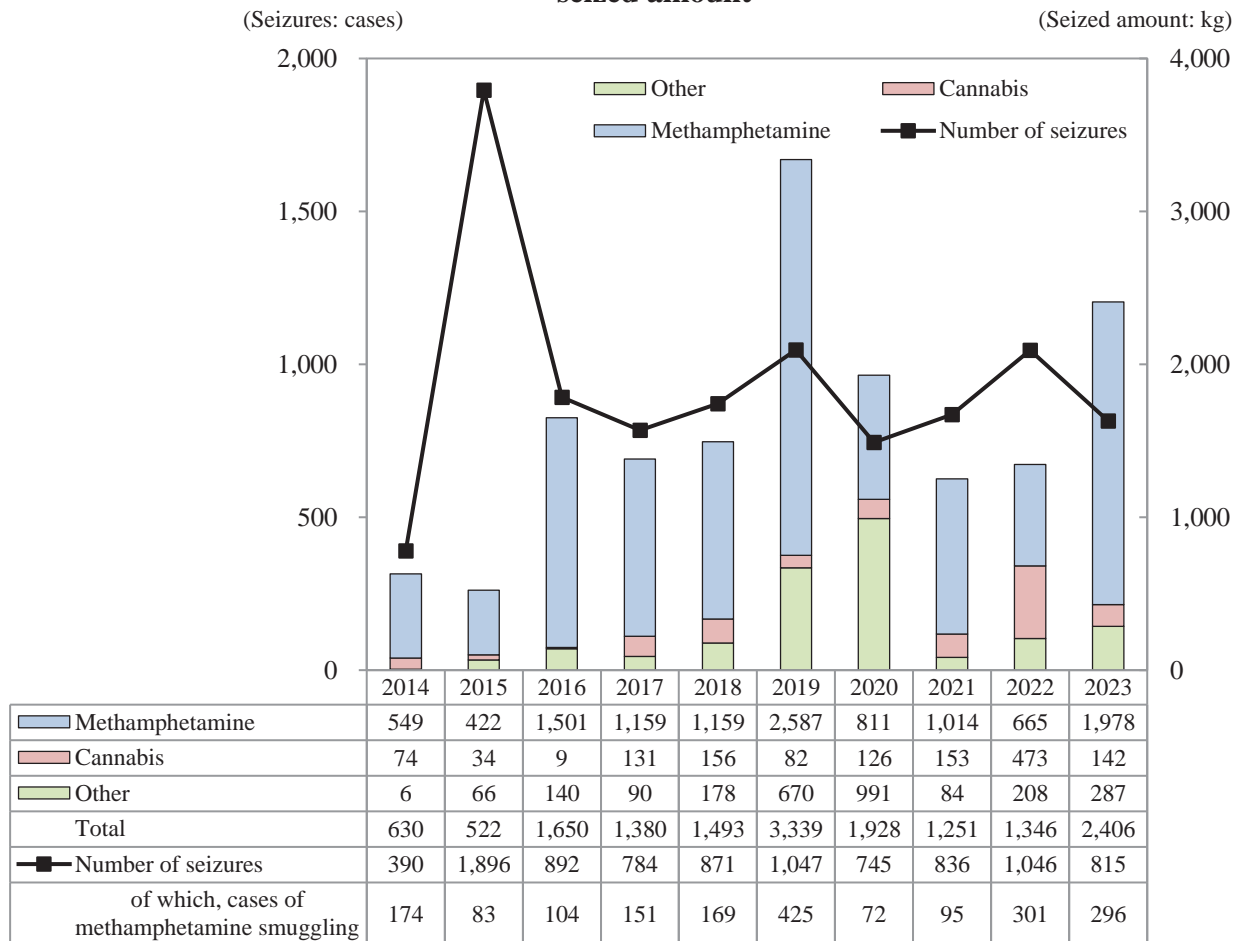
The total number of seizures of smuggled illicit drugs<sup>\*1</sup> during the one-year period from January to December of 2023 was 815 cases (down by 22% from the previous year), while the total amount of seized illicit drugs<sup>\*2,3</sup> increased to approx. 2,406 kg (up by 79% (id.)). The total seized amount exceeded 2 tons, exceeding 1 ton for the eighth consecutive year, recording the second largest amount.

\* 1 "Illicit drugs" refers to methamphetamine, cannabis, opium, narcotics (heroin, cocaine, MDMA, etc.), psychotropic substances and designated substances.

\* 2 "The total amount of seized illicit drugs" excludes tablet formed drugs.

\* 3 The seized amount excludes those whose weights, etc. are not defined. The same applies hereinafter.

**Transition in the number of seizures of smuggled illicit drugs and the seized amount**



(Note) "Others" includes opium, narcotics (heroin, cocaine, MDMA, etc.), psychotropic substances and designated substances.  
Figures for 2023 are provisional.

## (1) Methamphetamine

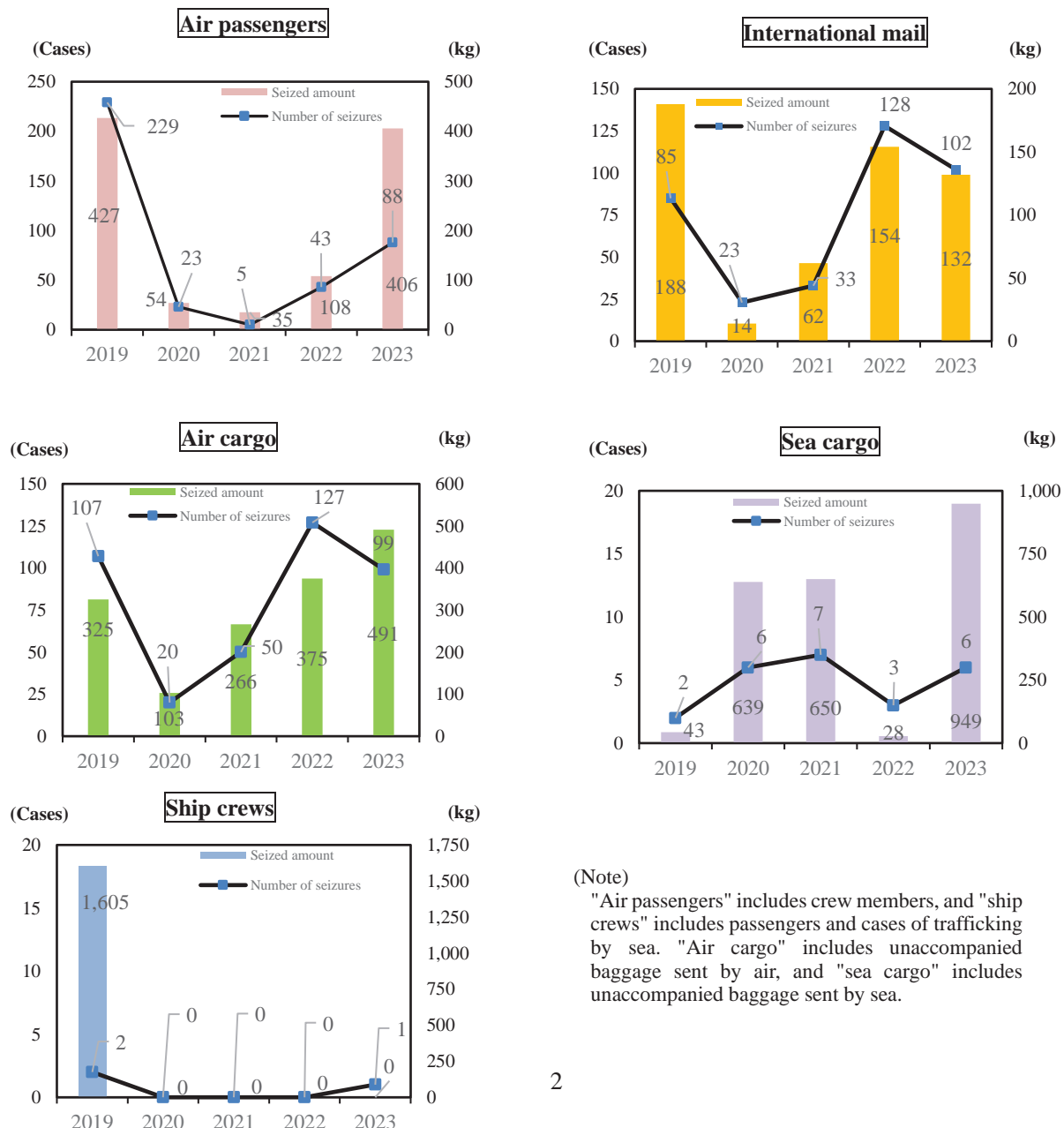
### < Seizures of smuggled methamphetamine >

The number of seizures of smuggled methamphetamine during the one-year period from January to December of 2023 was 296 cases (down by 2% from the previous year), while the amount of seized methamphetamine increased significantly to approx. 1,978 kg (up by approx. 3 times (id.)), recording the second largest amount.

Seized methamphetamine is equivalent to approx. 65.93 million doses, worth approx. 122.6 billion yen in end price.

By mode of transport, the seized amount of methamphetamine from sea cargo was approx. 949 kg (up by approx. 34 times (id.)) and that from air passengers was approx. 406 kg (up by approx. 3.8 times (id.)), both showing significant increases from the previous year. The seized amounts from air cargo and from international mail were approx. 491 kg (up by 31% (id.)) and approx. 132 kg (down by 15% (id.)), respectively, remaining at high levels.

### Transition in the number of seizures and seized amount



Multiple large-scale smuggling cases were detected, including those in which the largest-ever amounts of methamphetamine were seized from sea cargo and air cargo. There were also large-scale smuggling cases involving air passengers, such as a case in which a smuggler attempted to smuggle approx. 24 kg of methamphetamine at one time.

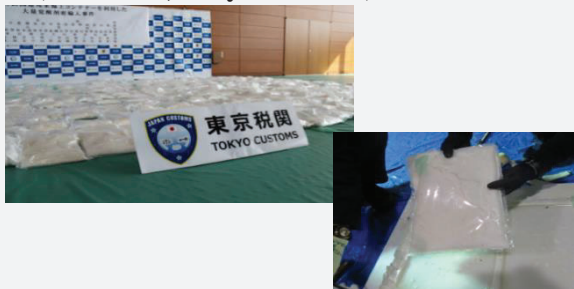
### < Major seizures of smuggled methamphetamine >

#### [Case 1] Sea cargo

<< Largest-ever amount seized from sea cargo >>

Customs seized approx. 704 kg of methamphetamine concealed in sea cargo (a PVC board) that arrived from the UAE.

(Mar. 2023; Tokyo Customs)



#### [Case 2] Air cargo

<< Largest-ever amount seized from air cargo >>

Customs seized approx. 113 kg of methamphetamine concealed in air cargo (a grinder) that arrived from Mexico.

(Sep. 2023; Osaka Customs, etc.)



#### [Case 3] Sea cargo

Customs seized approx. 116 kg of methamphetamine concealed in sea cargo (maple syrup bottles) that arrived from Canada (Jun. 2023; Yokohama Customs)



#### [Case 4] Air passenger

Customs seized approx. 24 kg of methamphetamine concealed in the personal effects (a suitcase) of a passenger who came from Canada to Narita International Airport.

(Jul. 2023; Tokyo Customs)



#### [Case 5]

Customs seized approx. 2.9 kg of methamphetamine concealed in international mail (board game boxes) that arrived from the United States.

(Mar. 2023; Nagoya Customs)



#### [Case 6]

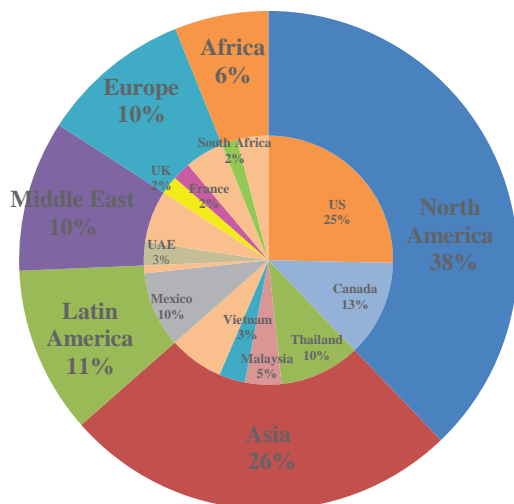
Customs seized approx. 30 kg of methamphetamine concealed in air cargo (a machine tool) that arrived from Mexico.

(Jul. 2023; Osaka Customs)

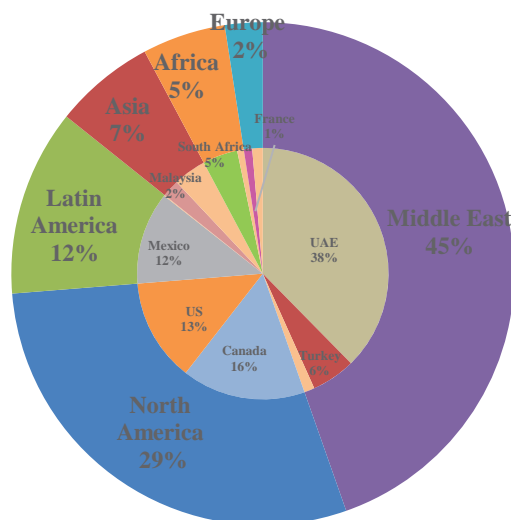


Looking at seizures by source, North America accounted for the largest proportion, at 38% (112 cases). In terms of the seized amount, the Middle East accounted for the largest proportion, at 45% (approx. 883 kg).

Number of seizures by source



Seized amount by source



## (2) Cannabis

### < Seizures of smuggled cannabis >

The number of seizures of smuggled cannabis during the one-year period from January to December of 2023 was 132 cases (down by 4% from the previous year), and the seized amount also decreased, down by 70% (id.) to approx. 142 kg.

The seized amounts of herbal cannabis and cannabis resin, etc. (including cannabis products, such as cannabis liquid and cannabis sweets, in addition to cannabis resin) both decreased to approx. 74 kg (down by 77% (id.)) and to approx. 68 kg (down by 57% (id.)), respectively.

Looking at seizures by source, the United States accounted for the largest proportion, at 32%, followed by Thailand (22%), Viet Nam (9%), and Canada (9%). Asia and North America jointly accounted for approx. 80% of the overall total.

### < Major seizures of smuggled cannabis >

[Case 7]

Customs seized **approx. 24 kg of herbal cannabis** concealed in the personal effects (a suitcase) of a passenger who came from Canada to Narita International Airport. (Sep. 2023; Tokyo Customs)



### (3) Narcotics

#### < Seizures of smuggled narcotics >

The number of seizures of smuggled narcotics (heroin, cocaine, MDMA, etc.) during the one-year period from January to December of 2023 decreased to 234 cases (down by 1% from the previous year). The seized amount increased to 276 kg (up by 47% (id.)), while the number of tablets seized decreased to approx. 36,000 (down by 55% (id.)).

The number of seizures of smuggled cocaine increased to 67 cases (up by approx. 2.4 times (id.)), and the seized amount also increased, up by approx. 2.1 times (id.) to approx. 103 kg.

The number of seizures of smuggled MDMA, etc. decreased to 60 cases (down by 39% (id.)). The number of MDMA tablets seized decreased to approx. 36,000 (down by 55% (id.)) but the seized amount of MDMA in other forms increased to approx. 109 kg (up by 17% (id.)).

#### < Major seizures of smuggled narcotics >

[Case 8]

Customs seized approx. 1.1 kg of cocaine that a passenger who came from Germany to Tokyo International Airport had swallowed and concealed in their body.

(Jun. 2023; Tokyo Customs)



[Case 9]

Customs seized approx. 6.9 kg of MDMA and approx. 996 g of ketamine concealed in the personal effects (a suitcase) of a passenger who came from Canada to Tokyo International Airport.

(Oct. 2023; Tokyo Customs)



### (4) Designated Substances

#### < Seizures of smuggled designated substances >

The number of seizures of smuggled designated substances during the one-year period from January to December of 2023 decreased to 143 cases (down by 60% from the previous year), and the seized amount decreased to approx. 11 kg (down by 45% (id.)).

#### <Major seizures of smuggled designated substances >

[Case 10]

Customs seized approx. 127 g of designated substances (isobutyl nitrite) concealed in international mail that arrived from Viet Nam.

(Apr. 2023; Kobe Customs, etc.)



## **2. Influences of Illicit Drug Abuse**

Methamphetamine and narcotics significantly harm the mental and physical health of people who abuse them, make them unable to live like human beings, or even cause deaths.

Hallucinations or delusions due to the illicit drug abuse may lead to heinous crimes, such as murder or arson, or traffic accidents in some cases. The abuse of illicit drugs may thus cause irredeemable damage not only to abusers themselves but also to the people around them and to society as a whole in the end.

### **(1) Mental and physical influences**

The abuse of methamphetamine and other illicit drugs fatally destroys abusers' mental and physical health. Major organs are subject to serious adverse influences listed as follows, which may even cause death in the worst case.

- Brain: Brain atrophy and brain hemorrhage (memory deterioration and senility symptoms)
- Eyes: Optic nerve disorder and fundus hemorrhage (decreased vision and loss of sight)
- Bronchi: Mucosal abnormality (bronchitis)
- Lungs: Mucosal abnormality (lung cancer)
- Stomach: Gastric mucosal abnormality and bleeding (gastric pain, nausea, and emesis)
- Bone marrow: Red blood cell dysplasia (anemia)

The abuse of illicit drugs hinders normal brain development and worsens abusers' mental balance. Abusers may temporarily feel to be clear-headed or have nervous excitement, but will be overwhelmed by a sense of exhaustion or a feeling of fatigue, and will eventually have hallucinations and delusions.

### **(2) Influences on surrounding people**

The abuse of illicit drugs not only exerts influences on individual abusers but also causes damage to the people around them and society as a whole. One of the representative adverse influences is violence. Long-term abuse of illicit drugs causes disturbance of perception, decreased appetite, emotional disorder, hallucinations and strong paranoia, due to which abusers often use violence on their family members or develop abnormal behavior, such as carrying a weapon all the time. Family members and people around them are swayed by such behavior and are forced to live with fear and suffering.

The high prices of illicit drugs often make abusers heavily debt-ridden, leading to the destruction of families or failure of lives, or triggering minors to take money from the home. The abuse of illicit drugs thus also causes serious economic problems.

Furthermore, the abuse of illicit drugs triggers various offenses. There seems no end to the heinous crimes, such as murder, arson, captivity, and injury, caused by hallucinations, delusions or flashbacks,\* or theft just to get money for purchasing drugs.

Additionally, it is also a serious social problem that money paid by illicit drug abusers becomes the source of funds for international narcotics crime organizations and organized crime groups in Japan. In this manner, the influences of abuse of illicit drugs threaten people's lives on a broad scale from various aspects.

\* Once a person develops a hallucination, delusion or other symptoms of mental illness due to the abuse of illicit drugs, even if the person superficially seems to have recovered through treatment, his/her base prone to mental disorders remains and something may easily trigger a mental disorder, such as a hallucination or delusion, after the person stopped the drug abuse and resumed his/her normal life. This is called a flashback, which may be caused by a trivial stimulus such as drinking alcohol or mental stress.

Refer to Japan Customs' Website: <https://www.customs.go.jp/mizugiwa/smuggler/abuse.htm> (Available in Japanese)