



# Seychellois want more government action to curb the country's drug epidemic

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 819 | Anne Okello**

## Summary

The World Drug Report 2022 from the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (2022) estimates that about 284 million people worldwide used illicit drugs in 2020, a 26% increase over the past decade. In addition to endangering the physical and mental health of the user, the adverse effects of drug abuse ripple across societies and generations, including its links to violence and other forms of crime.

In Seychelles, a surge in heroin use has more than quadrupled the estimated number of users, from 1,200 in 2011 to 5,000-6,000 in 2019 – meaning that nearly 10% of the country's working-age population is dependent on the drug (Saigal, 2019). This would give Seychelles the highest national per-capita heroin-use rate in the world. Cannabis is also widely consumed, while the use of other drugs, such as crack cocaine and methamphetamines, is steadily rising (Bird, Stanyard, Moonien, & Randrianarisoa, 2021).

Seychelles' Division for Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation (DSAPTR) endeavours to curb drug abuse through a variety of programmes. Its methadone treatment programme, based on an approach to drug policy that views drug addiction as a chronic disease, has received local criticism for its distribution of needles, which seeks to avert the spread of HIV and hepatitis C through the sharing of needles (Rodrigo, 2022).

Meanwhile, reports of police harassment of drug users has raised concern within civil society that Seychelles will move toward a "zero tolerance" approach under which drug users are penalised rather than assisted (Bird et al., 2021).

In its first-ever survey in Seychelles, Afrobarometer included a special module of questions to explore citizens' views related to drugs. Seychellois say that drug abuse, addiction, and trafficking should be the government's second-highest priority, trailing only management of the economy. A majority of citizens think the government is doing a decent job of tackling drug abuse, but views are divided on whether ordinary Seychellois can play a role in fighting drug abuse.

Only about one-third of respondents favour legalising the sale and consumption of marijuana. Asked what they consider the most effective strategy to curb drug abuse, Seychellois most often cite intensifying efforts to reduce trafficking and enforcing severe penalties for users.

## Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

In Afrobarometer's first survey in Seychelles, a team led by the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Seychellois in December 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

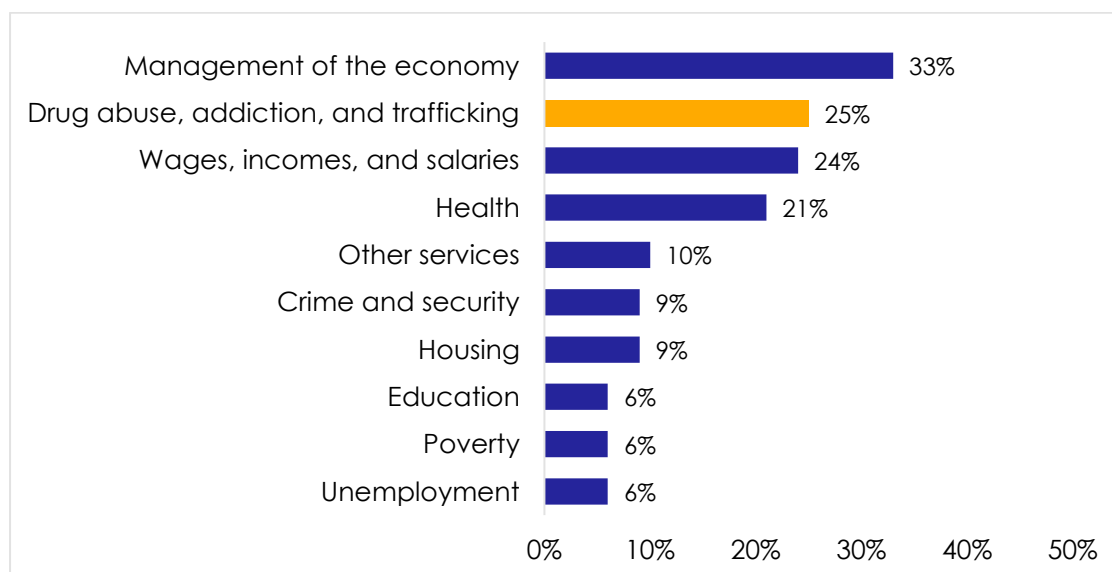
## Key findings

- Drug abuse, addiction, and trafficking rank second on a list of the country's most important problems that Seychellois want their government to address. One-fourth (25%) of respondents identify these drug-related issues as one of the country's top three challenges.
- A majority (55%) of Seychellois say the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" in tackling drug abuse.
- Nearly half (46%) of citizens oppose decriminalising the sale and consumption of marijuana or cannabis.
- More than one-third (37%) of Seychellois consider intensifying efforts to reduce drug trafficking the most effective strategy to combat drug abuse.
  - A further 28% say heavily penalising drug users is the best option.
- More than four in 10 respondents (44%) think that ordinary Seychellois can play a role in the fight against drug abuse.

## Drug abuse and how it should be addressed

Seychellois see the trade and consumption of drugs as one of their country's most critical threats. Among the most important problems that they want their government to address, citizens rank drug abuse, addiction, and trafficking second (cited by 25% of respondents as one of their top three priorities), trailing only management of the economy (33%) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Country's most important problems | Seychelles | 2022**

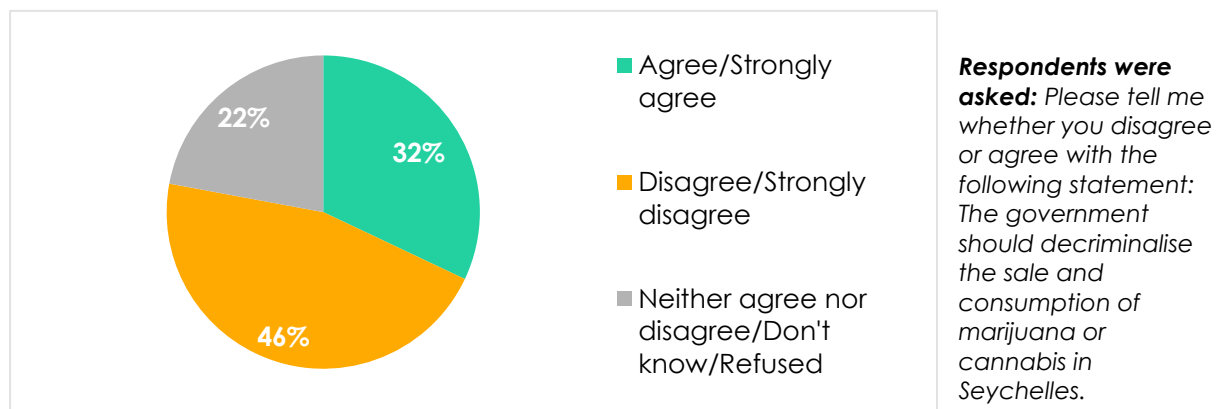


**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three responses. The figure shows % of respondents who identify each issue as one of their country's three most important problems.)

The law allows Seychellois to access cannabidiol-based products for medicinal purposes. The recreational use of marijuana is illegal, and efforts to legalise it are deeply controversial (Gappy, 2022). Many opponents see cannabis as a gateway drug, arguing that many heroin addicts in the country began their drug journey with cannabis (Rodrigo, 2022).

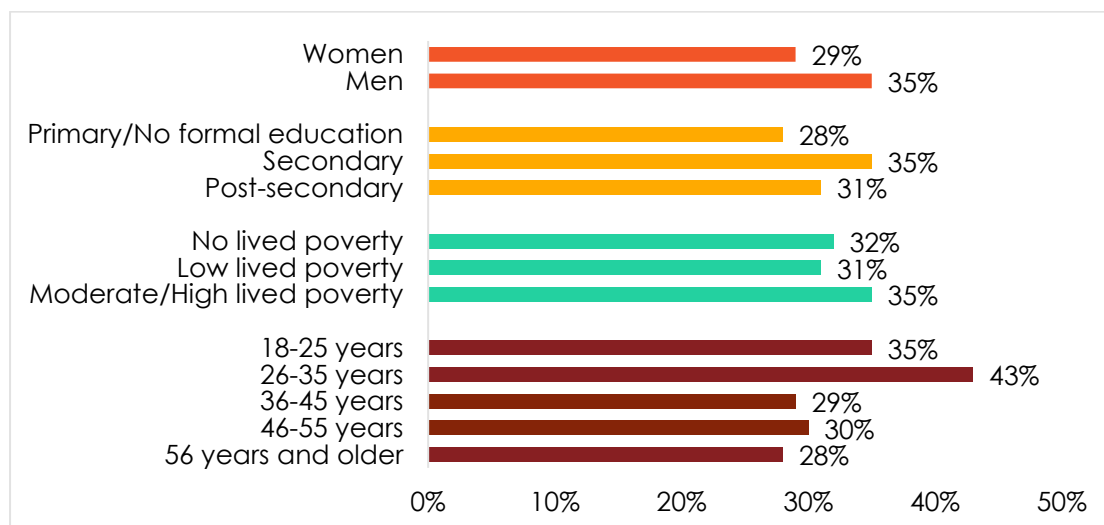
The divisiveness of this issue can be seen in survey data. While almost half (46%) of Seychellois “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the idea of decriminalising the sale and consumption of marijuana, three in 10 respondents (32%) favour legalisation (Figure 2). More than one in five citizens (22%) are either unsure on the issue or unwilling to share their thoughts.

**Figure 2: Should marijuana be decriminalised? | Seychelles | 2022**



A comparison across demographic groups shows significant differences in views on decriminalising marijuana. Support for legalising cannabis is far higher among younger respondents (35%-43% of 18- to 35-year-olds) than among their middle-aged and older counterparts (28%-30%) (Figure 3). Men are somewhat more likely than women to support the drug's decriminalisation (35% vs. 29%). Respondents with primary schooling or less (28%) are slightly less likely to endorse legalisation than those with secondary (35%) or post-secondary (31%) education.

**Figure 3: Support for decriminalising marijuana | by demographic group | Seychelles | 2022**

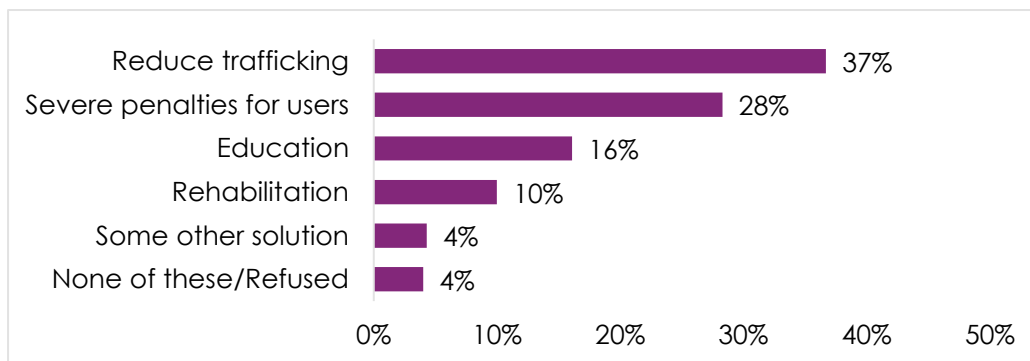


**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with the following statement: The government should decriminalise the sale and consumption of marijuana or cannabis in Seychelles. (% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)

Over the years, Seychelles has implemented a variety of anti-drug measures, from the Misuse of Drugs Act 2016 to substance prevention and rehabilitation programmes (Bird et al., 2021). However, the islands' porous marine borders make the country vulnerable to traffickers, while drug-related corruption often undermines anti-narcotics efforts (Nourrice, 2021).

When asked how drug abuse should be tackled, almost four in 10 Seychellois (37%) say that intensifying efforts to reduce drug trafficking would be the most effective strategy, while 28% propose enforcing severe penalties for drug users as a deterrent (Figure 4). While one-sixth (16%) of respondents believe an education campaign would be the most effective strategy for combating drug abuse, only 10% propose rehabilitating drug users as a priority.

**Figure 4: Best strategy to reduce drug abuse | Seychelles | 2022**



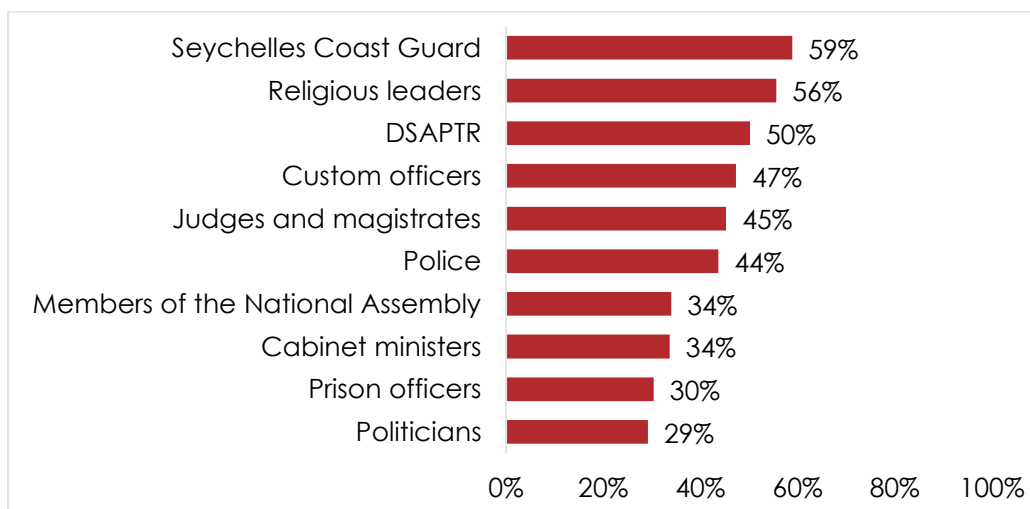
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, which of the following proposal would make the most effective strategy for reducing the problem of drug abuse in Seychellois society today?

### Responsibility for combating drug abuse

The Afrobarometer survey gauged how much trust ordinary citizens have in the ability of a variety of authorities to deal with drug abuse.

Majorities say they trust the Seychelles Coast Guard (59%) and religious leaders (56%) "somewhat" or "a lot" to fulfil their role in combating drug abuse, while half (50%) express faith in the DSAPTR (Figure 5). Somewhat fewer put their trust in customs officers (47%), judges and magistrates (45%), and the police (44%).

**Figure 5: Trust in authorities to combat drug abuse | Seychelles | 2022**

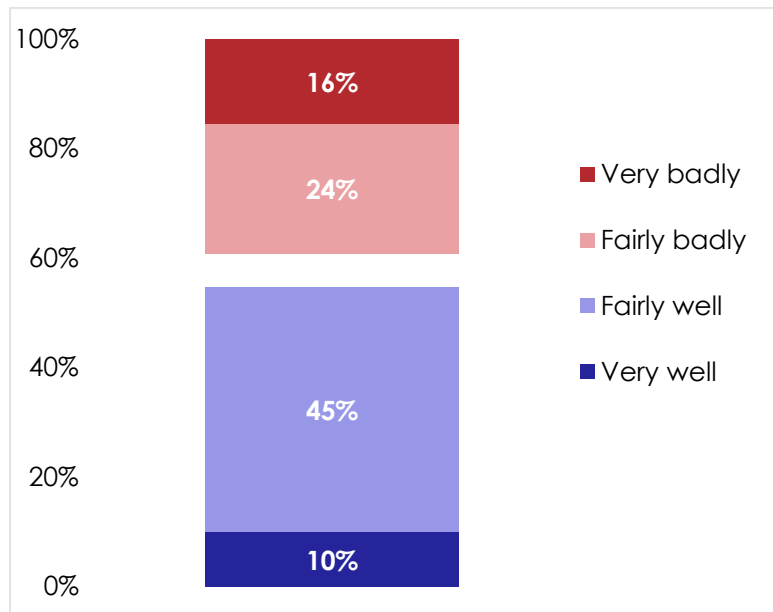


**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust the following groups to fulfil their role in combating drug abuse in Seychellois society today? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Other leaders and institutions fare worse. Only a third (34%) of respondents think members of Parliament and Cabinet ministers will do their part to address the issue, while even fewer trust prison officers (30%) and politicians (29%) “somewhat” or “a lot.”

Despite a lack of trust in many government authorities, more than half (55%) of Seychellois are pleased with the government’s performance in tackling drug abuse (Figure 6). But a sizeable minority (39%) disagree.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 6: Evaluation of government performance in combating drug abuse**  
 | Seychelles | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is combating drug abuse or haven’t you heard enough to say?

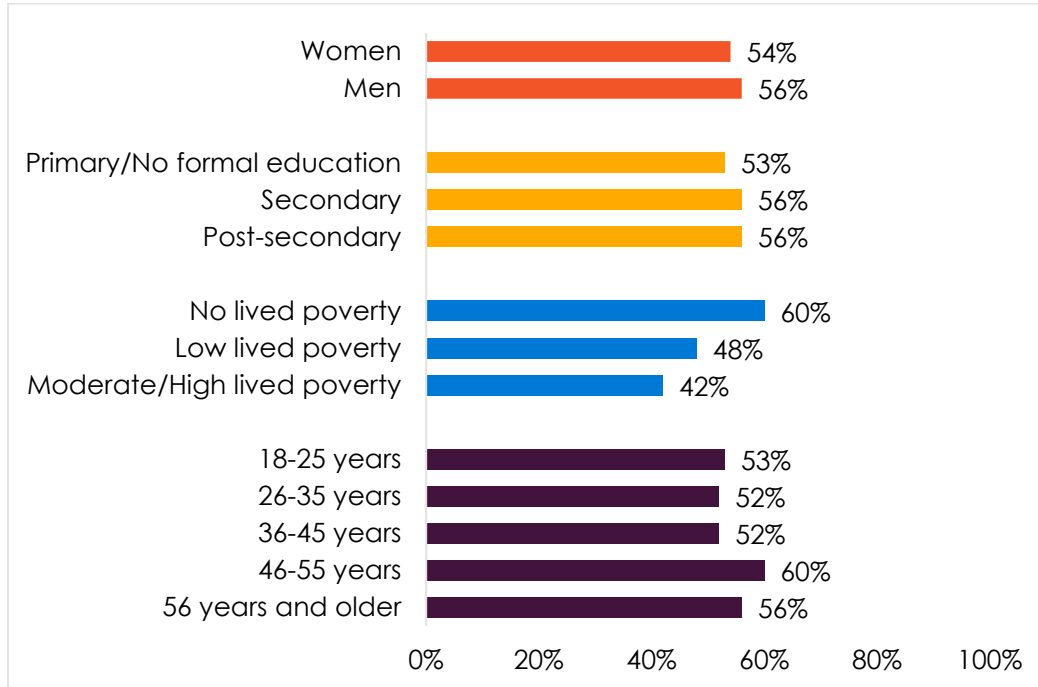
The view that the government is performing well in combating drug abuse is fairly consistent across genders and education levels. However, this assessment is much less common among poor respondents (42%) than among the country’s well-to-do<sup>2</sup> (60%) (Figure 7). Young and middle-aged citizens (52%-53%) are less satisfied with the government’s efforts than their elders (56%-60%).

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<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures (e.g. 16% “very badly” and 24% “fairly badly” sum to 39%).

<sup>2</sup> Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

**Figure 7: Positive assessments of government performance in combating drug abuse**  
 | by demographic group | Seychelles | 2022

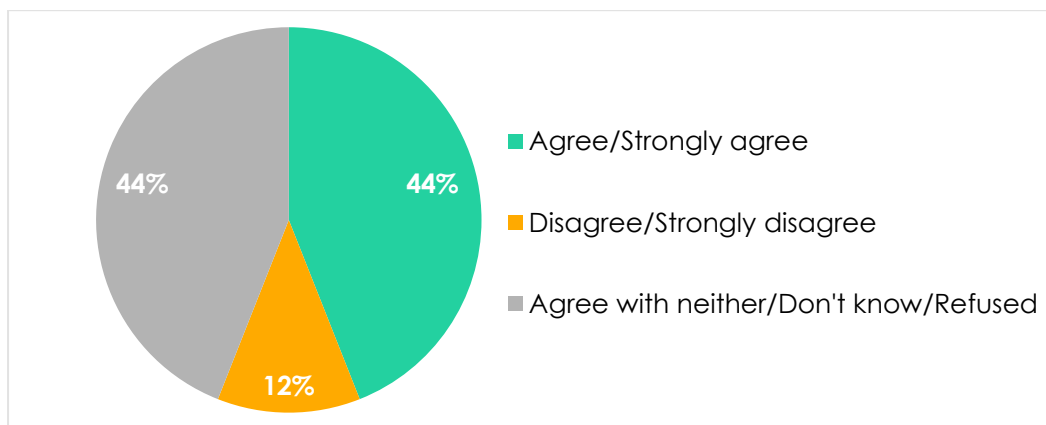


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is combating drug abuse or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

On 26 June every year, communities around the world mark International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, providing an opportunity for all actors in society, including ordinary citizens, to raise awareness of the adverse effects of drug abuse (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023).

In Seychelles, more than four in 10 respondents (44%) think that ordinary citizens can play a role in the fight against drug abuse (Figure 8). However, just as many (44%) are unsure or ambivalent about the role of non-specialists.

**Figure 8: Can ordinary citizens help in combating drug abuse?** | Seychelles | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with the following statement: Ordinary Seychellois can play a role in the fight against drug abuse in this country?

## Conclusion

Drug abuse is extensive in Seychelles, affecting large segments of the population. Afrobarometer survey findings reveal that citizens see this as the second-most pressing challenge the government needs to address.

The government has adopted a variety of measures and approaches to deal with drug abuse, from harm reduction and rehabilitation efforts to punishment. Survey data show that a majority of citizens appreciate the government's efforts, though many express doubts about whether authorities can be trusted to fulfil their roles in combating drug abuse.

In the long-running debate about whether marijuana should be decriminalised for personal use, about one-third of citizens support legalisation, while almost half believe this is the wrong route to take; more than one in five don't take a stand on the issue.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Malawi provide technical support to the network.

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