



GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT

for the **2024** mid-term review
of the Commission on
Narcotic Drugs

Prepared by:
**THE VIENNA AND NEW YORK NGO
COMMITTEES ON DRUGS**

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Executive Summary

The Vienna and New York NGO Committees on Drugs welcome the opportunity to provide this report highlighting the broad perspectives of global civil society who work in the field of drugs to the 2024 Mid-Term Review. This report presents findings from civil society contributions to the CND Thematic Discussions under the CND 2019-2023 work plan, alongside insights from recent regional consultations and a global online survey of civil society representatives.

A total of 173 global civil society organizations participated in the online survey in late 2023, complemented by regional consultations across Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Americas, and Europe during late 2023 and early 2024. Additionally, written contributions were received from organizations in the Middle East and youth-led groups. The majority of the respondents who contributed identified as directly involved in service provision to people who use drugs and other community members or as advocacy organizations operating at the national or local level in their respective countries. Their work focuses predominantly on the fields of health, education, and human rights-based approaches to address drug-related issues.

This report seeks to compile the diverse perspectives of civil society regarding progress made on the 11 challenges outlined in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration. It provides detailed insights from respondents concerning the inadequacy of reliable data for assessing the impacts of advancements in drug-related issues. Additionally, the report documents civil society's observations on both progress and challenges related to the identified topics, showcasing examples of how NGOs are actively addressing these issues on the ground.

Many respondents pointed to setbacks or stagnation in addressing challenges associated with the rise in drug-related deaths, unmet needs for drug treatment and health services, non-compliance with international drug control conventions, and human rights obligations. Similarly, there were concerns about the insufficient value of confiscated proceeds of crime linked to money laundering arising from drug trafficking. Notably, challenges perceived to have made the most progress were related to the expansion and diversification of the range of drugs and drug markets, as well as the high transmission of HIV, HCV, and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use. In terms of relevance to their areas of work, civil society respondents highlighted challenges one, four, five, and six as the most significant.

Additional challenges, progress, and emerging trends highlighted by the respondents encompass 1) insights into civil society engagement within the UN system, with a particular focus on Vienna; 2) the progressive impact of discussions on drug policy at the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council; 3) the stagnancy of drug policies; 4) the impact of war and crises; 5) harassment and violence experienced by civil society, and 6) the lack or inadequacy of funding. The report closes by identifying key issues related to the way forward towards 2029, calling for support for capacity building in public health, evidence-based prevention, comprehensive and quality harm reduction, and equitable access to treatment and recovery services. It also underscores the need for non-discriminatory and human rights-based drug policies, including moves towards non-punitive and proportionate approaches. Finally, the report emphasizes the importance of increased financial support for NGOs and enhanced international cooperation that acknowledges the compliance of drug policies with broader international treaties.

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Introduction

We are delighted to present the Global Civil Society Report on the impending mid-term review of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in 2024. This report is a collaboration between the Vienna and New York NGO Committees on Drugs (VNGOC and NYNGOC), bringing together insights from a global online survey, regional consultations, and civil society contributions to the CND discussions spanning from 2019 to 2023.

The document underscores the importance of meaningful, comprehensive, structured, and balanced civil society engagement in the formulation and implementation of drug policies on all levels. We firmly believe that integrating diverse perspectives from global civil society organizations enriches policy discussions, offering a mosaic of insights. Much like Member States, civil society organizations exhibit diverse viewpoints. This report aims to represent these varied opinions, acknowledging that constructive debates and disagreements are inherent elements of a robust and inclusive policymaking process.

Methodology

This report summarizes data from a comprehensive mixed-methods study involving NGOs worldwide working on drug-related issues. These organizations operate in diverse areas, including direct service provision, policy advocacy, research, prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, education, and other related fields.

The VNGOC and NYNGOC collaboratively developed the online survey questions and conceptualized the regional consultations in September 2023. The online survey incorporated both quantitative and open-ended questions, encompassing the challenges outlined in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration. The web link to the survey was circulated via emails, websites, and social media by the VNGOC and NYNGOC and by numerous partners and networks around the world between 18 October and 8 December 2023. The survey was available in Arabic, English, French, Russian, and Spanish and comprised 50

questions in total, with Likert scale questions and open-ended text-based questions to elicit more in-depth and richer responses. A 'skip logic' feature was integrated into the survey, guiding respondents based on their responses (i.e., some 'no' responses led to respondents skipping over follow-up questions).

The online survey was complemented by regional consultations for Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Europe, conducted either online or in a hybrid format. The Africa hybrid consultation in November 2023 was closely coordinated with the African Civil Society Forum on Drugs. The Asia-Pacific online consultation took place in November 2023, facilitated by the VNGOC Asia-Pacific Ad-hoc Working Group, while the Americas consultation occurred online in January 2024 in collaboration with the American Coalition on Drug Policies. European regional consultations, organized alongside the Civil Society Forum on Drugs in the EU, comprised three online meetings and one in-person gathering. Additionally, the report integrates contributions made by NGOs during the thematic discussions of the CND from 2019 to 2023.

Limitations

Several limitations are associated with the survey and consultation process employed in this study. While the survey was available in five languages, interpretation services were only provided for two regional consultations, potentially limiting contributions. Both the survey and consultations assumed a level of familiarity with the policy documents of the CND, particularly its 2019 Ministerial Declaration, which could have discouraged participation from individuals or organizations less acquainted with the referenced UN documents. Another limitation of the consultation process was that it often asked for respondents' opinions on progress toward various UN goals, which may be beyond respondents' organizational expertise. In addition, not all regional consultations were able to cover all challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, and for Africa, the Americas, and Asia-Pacific, only three

challenges (identified in advance through a registration form) were discussed in more detail.

Consideration should also be given to factors related to outreach and dissemination. Consultation opportunities were primarily shared among VNGOC and NYNGOC members, potentially limiting engagement to NGOs associated with these committees. Furthermore, all regional consultations were conducted during workdays and working hours, potentially restricting participation to organizations with ample personnel resources or those more focused on policy. Grassroots organizations and those offering in-person services may have faced challenges attending consultations and participating in surveys due to time constraints. Furthermore, several (especially global) organizations participated multiple times with different representatives from their membership (e.g., in the survey and different regional consultations), contributing to potential duplications. Similar to past consultation processes, such as the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) consultations and the online consultation leading up to the 2019 Ministerial Segment, the current process did not encompass every nation globally. Nevertheless, recognizing that NGOs hold a unique role, working directly with affected communities, exercises such as this report remain vital contributions to UN discussions on drug-related issues. There is an imperative to continually expand outreach for future consultations.

Results

Overview

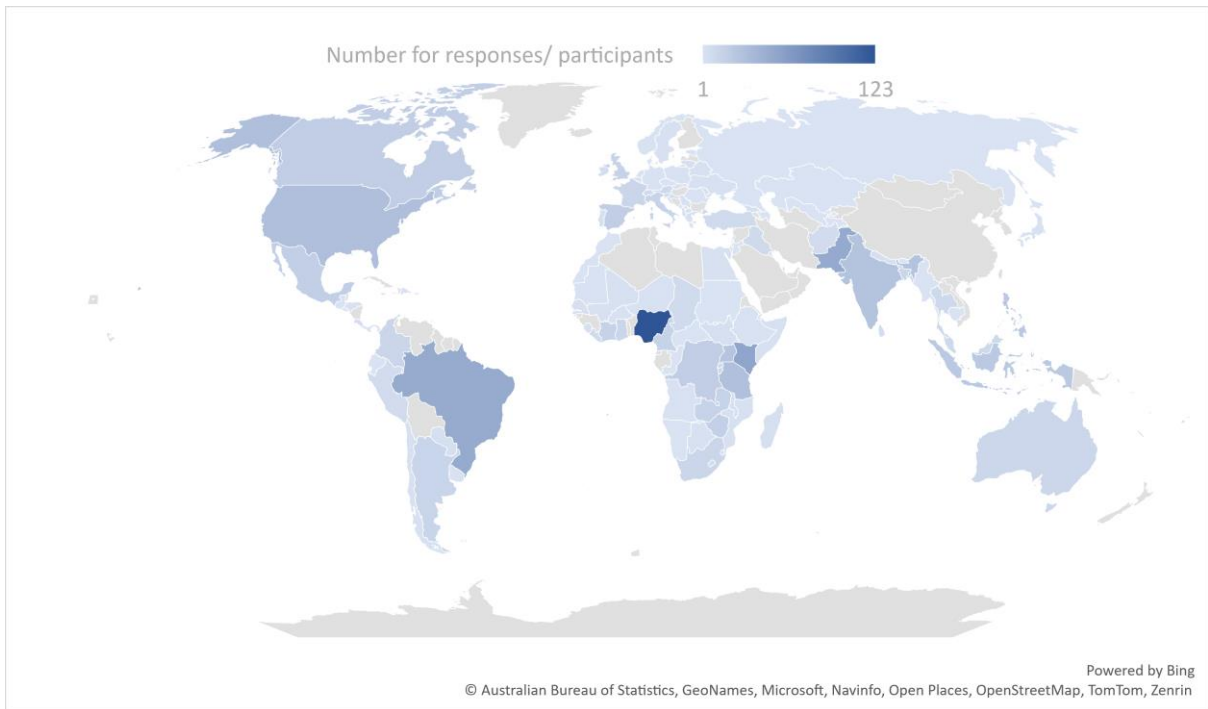


Figure 1: regional representation (online survey & regional consultations)

The online survey was completed by 173 organizations, almost half of which were from Africa (47%). In total, responses were collected from 69 countries and territories around the world. Approximately 170 people participated in the four regional consultations, sharing their views and inputs on selected challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration.

The responses represent a diverse range of NGOs from across the world. The majority of the respondents who contributed identified as directly involved in service provision to people who use drugs and other community members or as advocacy organizations operating at the national or local level in their respective countries. Their work focuses predominantly on the fields of health, education, and human rights-based approaches to address drug-related issues.

	Total sample N=173 (%)
TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	
Direct Services Organization	117 (68%)
Advocacy Organization	117 (68%)
Research Organization	54 (31%)
Umbrella Organization	30 (17%)
Other	4 (2%)
LEVEL OF OPERATION	
Local level	90 (52%)
National level	140 (81%)
Regional level	63 (36%)
International level	64 (37%)
NUMBER OF STAFF	
Less than 5	85 (49%)
5-10	29 (17%)
11-20	22 (13%)
21-50	15 (9%)
More than 50	22 (13%)
YEARS IN OPERATION	
Less than 2 years	10 (6%)
2-5 years	24 (14%)
5-10 years	45 (26%)
11-20 years	41 (24%)
More than 20 years	53 (31%)
ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUS	
Prevention	129 (75%)
Harm Reduction	95 (55%)
Human rights	89 (51%)
Drug law reform	75 (43%)
Recovery	63 (36%)
Treatment	63 (36%)
Research (academic)	53 (31%)
Coordination	51 (29%)
Criminal justice	34(20%)
Access to controlled medicines	21 (12%)
Supply reduction	19 (11%)

Table 1: Respondent Characteristics

Most respondent NGOs were relatively small, with 10 or fewer employees. Some 31% of NGOs have been in existence for over 20 years. The expertise and areas of focus of the NGOs were broad, and the two most common areas of work were prevention and harm reduction.

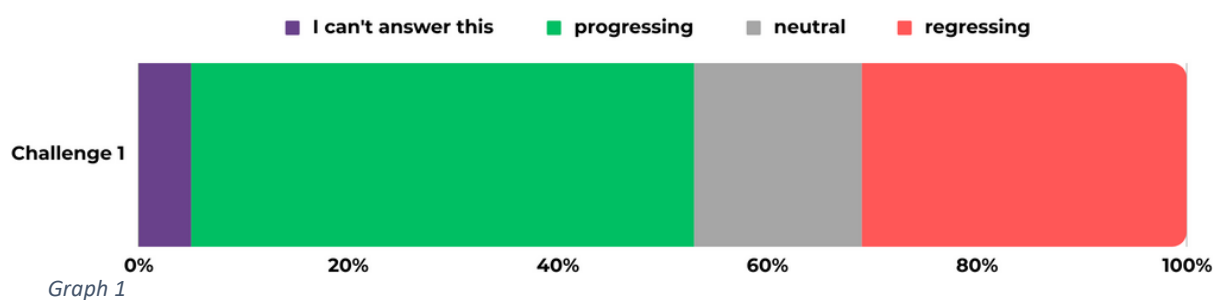
Survey respondents were asked a series of questions for each of the challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, including whether efforts toward addressing the specific challenge were progressing, neutral, or regressing. Overall, there were some challenges where the majority of respondents saw progress, namely the challenges associated with the expansion and diversification of both the range of drugs and drug markets (Challenge 1) and the persistently high transmission rates of HIV, the hepatitis C virus, and other blood-borne diseases linked to drug use, including injecting drug use in specific countries (Challenge 5). For other challenges, the majority of respondents were of the opinion that efforts were neutral or regressing. For the challenge that drug-related deaths are increasing (Challenge 4) and the challenge relating to the proceeds of money-laundering (Challenge 10) the regression perceived was especially high.

The work of the NGOs participating in the survey tackles all challenges outlined in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of respondents highlighted that their organizations primarily focus on addressing health-related challenges, particularly challenges one, four, five, and six. Similarly, the overall registered participants of the regional consultations expressed a keen interest in discussing challenges three, four, and five. However, regional variations emerged in participants' preferences. African NGOs exhibited a heightened interest in challenges four, five, and eight, while Asia-Pacific participants were particularly focused on challenges four, five, and eleven. In contrast, NGOs based in the Americas expressed a strong interest in challenges one, four, and eleven. All challenges were considered at the European regional consultations, which was possible as a result of its longer duration over several days, enabling the coverage of more content.

Challenges	Progress	Neutral	Regression	NGOs working on the issue
<i>Challenge 1:</i> Expanding & diversifying range of drugs & drug markets	48%	16%	31%	61%
<i>Challenge 2:</i> Record levels of drug abuse & illicit cultivation, production & trafficking	40%	23%	33%	55%
<i>Challenge 3:</i> Health & regulatory challenges posed by synthetic opioids & non-medical use of prescription drugs	42%	23%	32%	58%
<i>Challenge 4:</i> Increase in drug-related deaths - unmet need for drug treatment and health services	36%	21%	41%	66%
<i>Challenge 5:</i> High transmission of HIV, HCV & other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use	47%	23%	25%	65%
<i>Challenge 6:</i> Adverse health consequences associated with new psychoactive substances	37%	25%	31%	61%
<i>Challenge 7:</i> Low availability of internationally controlled substances for medical & scientific purposes	31%	32%	23%	34%
<i>Challenge 8:</i> Increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption & other forms of organized crime	37%	18%	35%	43%
<i>Challenge 9:</i> Low value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money laundering arising from drug trafficking	19%	16%	49%	18%
<i>Challenge 10:</i> Criminal misuse of information & communications technologies for drug trafficking	35%	24%	24%	27%
<i>Challenge 11:</i> Non-compliance of responses with international drug control conventions & human rights obligations	26%	36%	24%	39%

Table 2: Has there been progress in addressing the challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration?

Challenge 1: Expanding & diversifying range of drugs & drug markets



What progress has been made to address the challenge?

This challenge has been ranked the highest in 'progress made' according to civil society perspectives since 2019, with 48% of respondents indicating advancements in addressing the expansion and diversification of drugs and drug markets. However, it is noteworthy that 31% of respondents also observed regression and 16% saw efforts to tackle this challenge as neither progressing nor regressing. Civil society input on this issue was widespread across all regions, with many highlighting the positive responses arising from the implementation and expansion of early warning systems, drug checking services, drug monitoring observatories, and alliances formed between these initiatives. Respondents underscored the significance of discussions around the unintended consequences of drug policy, encompassing various drug markets such as cannabis, synthetic drugs (including fentanyl), benzodiazepines, and nitazenes. There was a shared recognition of the need to acknowledge opportunities for diverse approaches in addressing this global challenge.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

Despite many NGOs reporting progress under this challenge, 31% of respondents indicated that there has been no progress in addressing the expansion and diversification of drugs and drug markets. Respondents highlighted the global impact of synthetic drugs, particularly citing the North American drug toxicity and overdose crises. Responses noted the increased harm individuals experience when consuming unidentified and

unknowingly contaminated substances, as well as the challenges faced by communities responding to overdoses affected by contaminated markets. Statements at thematic discussions explicitly acknowledged severe impacts on Indigenous populations, LGBTQIA+ communities, and those facing socioeconomic inequalities, among others.

Some respondents in the African region specifically identified impacts related to violence and fragility, challenges in local governance, and the urbanization of expanding drug markets. Several participants of online regional consultations emphasized the key challenges they must deal with when working to address such issues, including the serious lack of effective public policies to address the expansion and diversification of drug markets in their countries, along with campaigns promoting education based on misinformation and fear and contributing to the stigmatization against people who use drugs. NGOs highlighted the lack of holistic approaches addressing both demand and supply reduction, the lack of political will for meaningful changes, and the limitations and challenges they experience in addressing social determinants under current drug policies.

Issues related to the expansion of online markets (linked to challenge 10) were identified, and multiple responses called for the decriminalization of drug-related offenses. A number of Latin American respondents outlined issues in the treatment and diagnosis of substance dependence of new substances, persistent obstacles in generating and disseminating information about new substances, and confusing narratives linking the fentanyl crisis and its impact to cocaine markets. Concerns about geopolitical

strategies linking the drug war to attempts to control South America were also cited as a challenge in the region.

Some participants at the Americas regional consultation, as well as some civil society remarks during the thematic discussions, expressed concerns over a recurring phenomenon where scheduling and law enforcement activities lead drug markets to shift towards more highly potent - and thus more easily trafficable – comparable substances. In light of such a phenomenon, some participants argued that supply reduction interventions are ill-equipped to address the harms caused by diversifying drug markets, advocating instead for public health and human rights-based initiatives that can better address this challenge and the devastating loss of life caused by overdoses from consuming toxic unregulated substances.

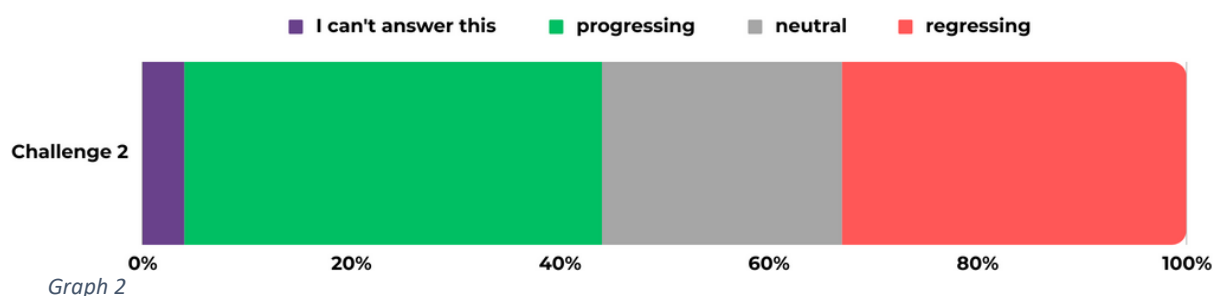
While there was no consensus, some participants raised safe supply initiatives and legal regulation based on the outcome report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights titled "Human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem," which were supported by some.

How do NGOs address this challenge?

About 61% of NGOs responding to the survey indicated that they actively engage in addressing issues related to the expansion and diversification of drug markets. These organizations outlined their efforts in implementing a range of services, including harm reduction, treatment, recovery, counseling, outreach, and rehabilitation. NGOs also described their contributions to scientific and peer-reviewed journals, analyzing the effectiveness of both health-based and law enforcement responses to this challenge.

Many responses, including those from peer-led organizations, highlighted work in producing harm reduction materials for new substances, as well as expanding the implementation of harm reduction programs, including initiatives like drug checking and supervised consumption services. Responses emphasized the aim to address the unintended consequences of drug policy, including criminalization and unregulated drug supply. NGOs focusing on prevention underscored their work in the education space. They provided examples of education programs for young people and police services, as well as efforts in organizing awareness campaigns.

Challenge 2: Record levels of drug abuse, illicit cultivation, production & trafficking



What progress has been made to address the challenge?

Globally, 40% of respondents identified progress in efforts to address the challenge involving the abuse, illicit cultivation, production, and manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. 33% saw efforts regressing and 23% remained neutral. Participants also noted that the illicit trafficking of substances and their precursors

has reached record levels. Responses highlight that illicit demand for and domestic diversion of precursor chemicals are on the rise. However, regional perspectives varied, with respondents from Asia-Pacific and Africa identifying more progress (53% and 50%, respectively) than respondents from Europe and the Americas, where only 15% and 24%, respectively, perceived at least some progress.

During regional consultations, European NGO representatives noted increased cooperation between customs offices across Europe. They attributed some success to increased funding for customs offices, especially in harbors. Additionally, some cited recent experiments in regulating the legal cultivation of cannabis as promising practices. Alternative development schemes that take into account the whole supply chain were also attributed to progress made. Interventions during the CND thematic discussions highlighted the success of voluntary crop substitution initiatives, ensuring not only crop eradication but also facilitating access to development for marginalized communities.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

About 33% of respondents indicated that there has been at least some regression in this area and that challenges persist in all regions, with African NGOs expressing their concern about the increasing rate of these challenges across Africa. Organizations from low- and middle-income countries mentioned they encountered funding constraints that hindered their ability to sustain activities, including providing key services in the fields of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery. Despite advocacy and awareness programs, changing public perception about drug use remains challenging. Stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs, individuals in recovery, or those with substance use disorder persist, obstructing their access to health services, including treatment and rehabilitation programs.

During the CND thematic discussions, Latin American NGO representatives highlighted challenges faced by women beneficiaries of illicit crop substitution programs, who are not always included in decision-making processes and often face disproportionate caregiving burdens and security threats. Meanwhile, representatives from Africa noted with concern that drug use among young people with substance use disorder is rising to alarming levels.

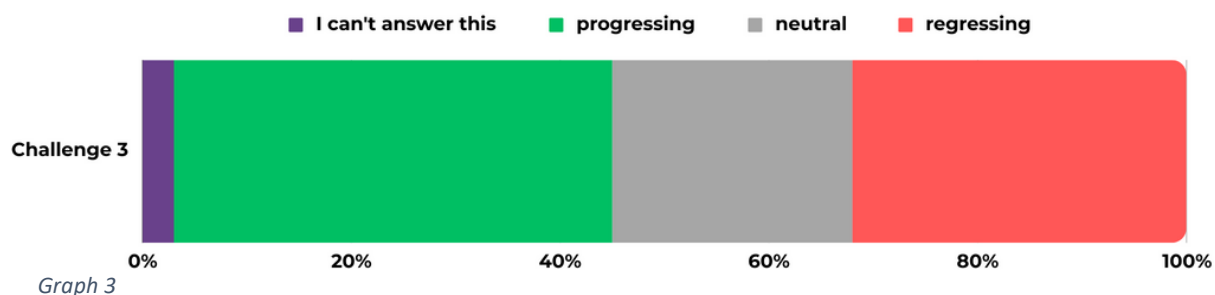
Several respondents to the online survey also indicated that coordination between various stakeholders tackling supply-side challenges is sometimes lacking and that collaboration efforts between law enforcement and communities should be stepped up. The rising challenge of synthetic drugs was also mentioned both in the online survey and the regional consultations. Some participants in the European regional consultations voiced concerns about the growing reach of organized crime in European countries, particularly expressing worries about young people entering organized criminal groups.

How do NGOs address the challenge?

From all survey respondents, some 55% indicated that their organizations actively contribute to addressing this challenge. A broad range of NGOs from Africa, Latin America, and Asia spoke during the CND thematic discussions on this challenge. Those representing people who cultivate drugs advocated for increased community participation, calling on Member States to fully incorporate crop substitution policies and promote alternative rural development.

Respondents to the online survey shared a variety of activities as part of their work, including comprehensive awareness and education campaigns in Africa and Latin America, targeting schools and communities. In tandem with awareness efforts, many NGOs indicated their work on drug use prevention, especially among children. Others highlighted their advocacy efforts, though approaches differed. While some NGOs focus on urging governments to implement more robust drug control and enforcement acts, others advocate for decriminalization and responsible legal regulation of drug markets. NGOs actively collaborate with international and regional organizations, attending hybrid forums to share knowledge and strategies. Additionally, they focus on community empowerment, working with vulnerable groups and farmers to provide alternative livelihoods and address the underlying socio-economic factors contributing to drug-related challenges.

Challenge 3: Health and regulatory challenges posed by synthetic opioids & non-medical use of prescription drugs



What progress has been made to address the challenge?

The online survey reveals that 42% of respondents noted progression in addressing health and regulatory challenges posed by synthetic opioids and non-medical use of prescription drugs, while 32% observed regression since 2019 and 23% indicated that efforts were neither progressing nor regressing. During the European regional consultations, some participants emphasized progress in addressing challenges associated with synthetic opioids and non-medical use of prescription drugs in various programmatic areas linked to the adoption and increased access to opioid overdose prevention measures. These measures include access to naloxone at harm reduction sites, regular skill-building training for law enforcement on using naloxone, and information campaigns on overdose risks and the need for naloxone use for people who use drugs and their relatives and peers. Governmental and NGO actions contributed to a decrease in opioid-related overdose deaths in Europe, as discussed in the regional consultations. Enhanced knowledge of medication-assisted treatment among law enforcement, patients, and their relatives reduced the number of cases of mistaken confiscations of prescription medication. Some participants in the European regional consultations also acknowledged the impact of non-medical controlled substances regulation on prescription drug issues. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted experimentation with better practices in access to harm reduction, introducing new services such as small-scale drug checking services in Switzerland and

sharing fentanyl strips as part of harm reduction packages in some European countries. The pandemic also led to the introduction of supervised consumption services. One participant in the consultations highlighted that while Europe may not be facing a fentanyl crisis, other synthetic opioids like nitazenes are on the rise. Some respondents to the online survey from North America raised strong concerns about the worsening fatal overdose epidemic resulting from the contamination of the unregulated drug supply, in many cases with synthetic opioids, which people who use drugs consume unknowingly.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

Participants in both online and in-person European regional consultations discussed the mental health and social risk factors associated with synthetic opioids use, some emphasizing the very high risk of overdose. Several respondents noted that, in Europe, synthetic opioids primarily pose a supply-side challenge driven by criminal organizations due to their cost-effectiveness and ease of trafficking, creating demand. They stressed the urgent need for open data on prescription drugs, including sharing data for early warning systems, conducting research on the unregulated market of synthetic opioids, and implementing better control measures by the pharmaceutical industry. There was also a call for academic scrutiny of scarce data on the non-medical use of prescribed drugs.

Despite positive changes, in most European countries, a number of participants of the

regional consultations were witnessing a disproportionately high naloxone access threshold, with naloxone distributed only via ambulance and drug treatment services as a prescribed drug. They noted how this limitation restricts opportunities for peers, social workers, and close individuals to save the lives of people who use drugs, especially in the context of high overdose rates related to non-medical prescription drug use. Moreover, they also emphasized how the transition to synthetic drugs introduces new challenges to harm reduction and health services, including a lack of funding for needle and syringe programs (NSP) with referrals and support, insufficient supervised consumption services, very limited access to drug checking services, and stigma hindering substance use help-seeking. According to the opinions expressed during the European regional consultations, the prevalence of non-medical use of prescription drugs is higher among women. Some respondents to the online survey from North America highlighted that limited access to health and harm reduction interventions, such as safe supply initiatives, drug checking services, and supervised consumption services, contributes to overdose events and fatalities.

During the thematic discussions, civil society remarks shared perspectives on North America's overdose crisis and the tramadol problem impacting North, West and Central Africa, the Near and Middle East, and South-West Asia, stating the importance that international controls on tramadol do not jeopardize access to pain treatment.

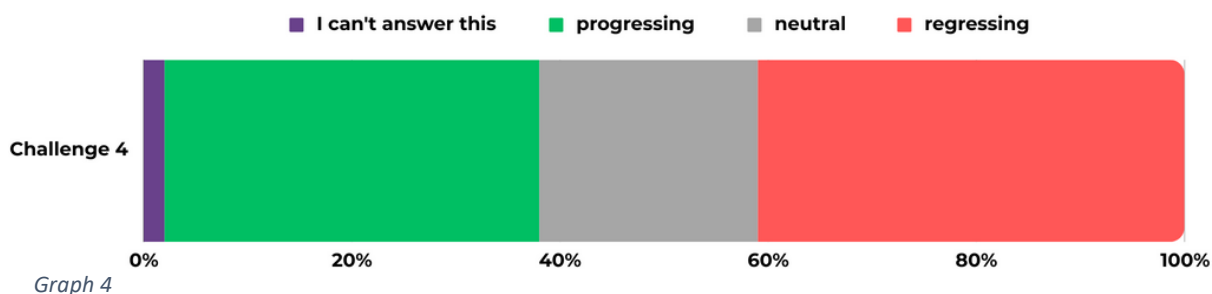
How do NGOs address this challenge?

Out of 173 respondents, 58% of civil society organizations are actively focusing their efforts to address this challenge. Results from the online survey reveal that, faced with increased levels of overdose deaths, some civil society organizations collaborated to raise awareness of the synthetic opioids trend. Respondents indicated they worked with governments to identify innovative policies, advocating for increased access to and funding for critical harm reduction interventions such as supervised consumption services, drug

checking, or naloxone distribution. Additionally, policies such as the decriminalization of drug use and related activities, along with safer supply programs, were also highlighted. Some organizations formulated policy principles on decriminalization and responsible legal regulation, incorporating a health, human rights, and social justice perspective, particularly in the context of synthetic opioids.

Many civil society organizations globally engage in educational activities to share information about the health risks of synthetic opioids. They provide training to experts, peers, and relatives on the use of naloxone to prevent overdose deaths. Collaborative efforts, such as the "Moms United to End the War on Drugs" campaign in 35 states of the USA with partnerships in six countries, bring together mothers and other relatives for advocacy and information campaigns. Research and support programs addressing non-medical benzodiazepine use by young people, like the Benzo Research Project in the UK, prioritize elevating youth voices and improving support systems by integrating practical expertise with lived experiences to reduce drug-related harms. Numerous NGOs have initiated rehabilitation and harm reduction programs. For instance, Toronto's Drug Checking Service provides information on the contents of drugs, helping individuals make informed decisions and uncovering the composition of the drug market amid an overdose crisis fueled by an unregulated drug supply of synthetic opioids and other unexpected substances. Another crucial aspect of some civil society organizations' efforts in harm reduction involves sensitizing youth in high schools, colleges, and universities about the risks of drug use, including non-medical use of prescription drugs. Targeted educational programs discourage youth experimentation with substances and provide information on associated risks, significantly contributing to public health and safety. These efforts also address scientific, legal, and regulatory challenges, fostering a healthier and safer community

Challenge 4: Increase in drug-related deaths - unmet need for drug treatment and health services



What progress has been made to address the challenge?

Results from the online survey revealed that 41% of respondents identified regression in addressing the challenge of the increase in drug-related deaths and unmet needs for drug treatment and health services, while 36% believed that progress had been made and 21% remained neutral.

During the Americas regional consultation, participants pointed out areas where progress has been achieved since 2019. They emphasized the increasing dialogue and cooperation among different actors, with the discourse becoming more evidence-based. Access to drug checking services has also expanded, and some NGOs can offer such services at the community level, although their availability remains limited in most parts of the continent. Additionally, several participants reported a wider availability of naloxone in community settings, contributing to overdose prevention. The importance of laws providing immunity from prosecution for drug offenses when reporting an overdose to emergency services (i.e., Good Samaritan laws) was also underscored.

In the African regional consultation, some participants reported limited progress in addressing this challenge. Few countries showed improvement in the treatment referral system for people who use drugs, and there were some education efforts aimed at reducing stigma towards individuals with substance use disorder. NGO representatives did share positive experiences with collaborative efforts across sectors, including collaborations with faith-based organizations.

Within the context of the European regional consultations, several participants noted steady improvements in access to naloxone and take-home methadone. Some European countries, including those in Eastern Europe, are incorporating supervised consumption services into their national strategies and recognizing the importance of community-based services for people who use drugs and those in recovery. The increased global acknowledgment of the need for gender-sensitive health services was welcomed as progress, although a number of participants acknowledged that gender-specific challenges persist.

During the Asia-Pacific regional consultation, some participants highlighted progress in evidence-based treatment and health services, with several countries aligning national standards to international ones.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

While the perception of progress varied by region, NGO representatives identified diverse challenges, expressing concern across all regions that funding for health and treatment services remains insufficient, resulting in inadequate coverage, especially for marginalized populations.

In European regional consultations, some participants noted the challenges faced by women who use drugs, highlighting their limited access to treatment and health services, coupled with instances of gender-based violence and heightened stigma. They underscored how women, particularly survivors of gender-based violence, may face

difficulties accessing women's shelters in some European countries. Additionally, it was mentioned that women encounter more obstacles in prison compared to men when seeking drug treatment and health services. Limited access to harm reduction services in prison settings was also observed in many countries. Discussing the increase in drug-related deaths, some participants highlighted the rise in crack cocaine and stimulant use, noting that health services might be ill-prepared to handle the departure from more traditional use patterns. In this regard, they expressed concerns about outdated opioid agonist treatment (OAT) protocols and restricted coverage of NSP.

The Asia-Pacific regional consultation addressed a range of challenges, including human rights abuses, ineffective trials, and harmful consequences associated with prisons and compulsory rehabilitation centers in some countries. The often disproportionate focus on law enforcement measures was seen as a significant challenge, along with limited or nonexistent harm reduction services in certain countries. Some participants highlighted that community and civil society voices are often left out when designing and implementing policies, leading to ineffective measures. Others emphasized the health risks posed by new drugs, the increased prevalence of methamphetamine use impacting mental health, and the associated rising rates of depression and suicide. Additionally, some participants stressed the neglect of evidence-based prevention, especially for children and young people, and the insufficient attention given to holistic solutions offering a continuum of care.

In the African NGO consultation, challenges included limited access to life-saving medications like naloxone, methadone, and buprenorphine in many countries. A number of participants indicated that treatment and rehabilitation services were often inaccessible due to barriers such as availability, costs, and the stigma associated with treating substance use disorder. They also highlighted struggles with capacity among health service providers and emphasized the need for more training

and capacity building to ensure evidence-based services.

Some NGO representatives from the Americas consultation expressed concerns about the criminalization of drug use contributing to increased overdoses, particularly affecting young Black populations in parts of Latin America. Some participants emphasized the need for evidence-based prevention and treatment programs, with some noting the lack of treatment services beyond those based on abstinence. Insufficient access to harm reduction services, including NSP, OAT, naloxone, supervised consumption services, drug checking services, and safer supply initiatives, was also raised. As in other regions, several participants from the Americas highlighted challenges in regard to stigma and gender-based violence.

Remarks during the thematic discussions underscored the importance of treatment and recovery services, together with prevention and harm reduction, as integral parts of the continuum of care in any national health system. There was an emphasis on the significance of services tailored to vulnerable groups, such as women, children, people experiencing homelessness, individuals with HIV, Hepatitis C, co-occurring disorders, offenders, and others. Additionally, reintegration was identified as a crucial step in recovery, prompting treatment and recovery organizations to redesign re-entry programs and advocate for laws facilitating the reintegration of individuals who complete treatment.

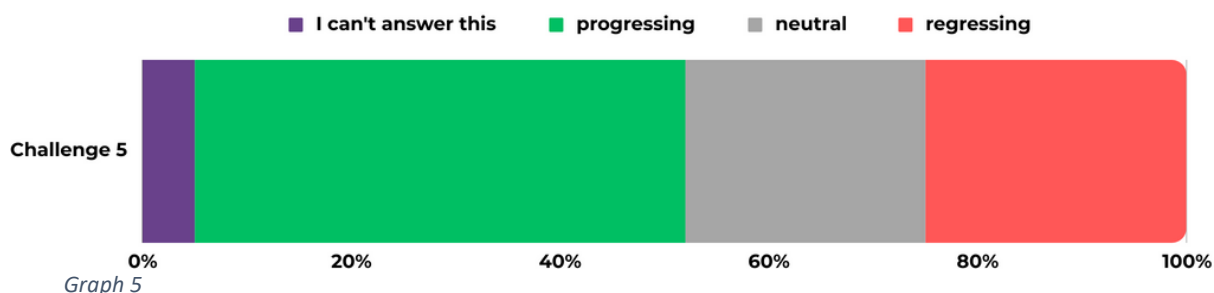
How do NGOs address this challenge?

Among all respondents, 66% indicated that their organizations actively work to address this challenge, representing the largest number across all challenges. This underscores the crucial role NGOs play in bridging gaps in health services and serving as instrumental forces in saving lives. The online survey revealed a myriad of interventions showcasing the diverse efforts of NGOs, from advocacy to direct service provision, all geared towards enhancing the well-being of the communities they serve. Some highlighted their advocacy

work with governments for decriminalization, provision of naloxone, and harm reduction services ranging from NSP to supervised consumption services and drug checking

services. Others outlined their focus on providing evidence-based prevention, treatment, and recovery, ensuring accessibility for all individuals.

Challenge 5: High transmission of HIV, HCV and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use



What progress has been made to address the challenge?

With 47% of respondents acknowledging progress in addressing the challenge of high rates of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus, and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, this challenge secured the second-highest rank in terms of 'progress made.' 25% identified regression and 23% neither progress nor regression in efforts to address the challenge.

Some participants from the Asia-Pacific regional consultation mainly saw progress in high-income countries in the region with comprehensive, accessible, and affordable prevention, harm reduction, testing, diagnosis, treatment, and recovery services being offered. They attributed the decline in HIV and HCV among people using drugs to community-based and harm reduction responses with key actions including building a community approach, utilizing services with access points for people who use drugs, peer-based approaches, and adopting comprehensive and coordinated strategies. Specific services for sex workers and innovative models, such as New Zealand's rehabilitation program in prisons, were recognized as critical. NGOs play a critical role as highlighted by the NSP implemented in Macau SAR China that has resulted in zero new HIV infections among injecting drug users since 2016.

Several participants at the European regional consultations also observed advancements in tackling the high transmission of HIV and HCV, with HCV having been eliminated in several countries. Throughout the region, several participants observed reduced stigma for HCV and HIV and improved treatment with new medicines. Progress was also perceived in HIV prevention sustainability, with successful PrEP programs available for men having sex with men and people who use drugs. Initiatives addressing chemsex in Eastern Europe and Central Asia were also highlighted.

Remarks during the CND thematic discussions in 2020 underscored progress with the establishment of drop-in centers offering harm reduction services, including a pilot of opiate agonist treatment with methadone. Statements outlined the positive outcomes, such as improved health and community reintegration, emphasizing the importance of such programs. However, there is a call for increased political and health sector support to overcome persistent obstacles, stressing the need for decriminalization related to drug use and possession for personal use to enhance success in reducing HIV infections among people who inject drugs.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

While acknowledging the progress made in various regions, persistent challenges are

evident. Insights from regional consultations in Africa and Asia-Pacific underscored the critical issue of funding and the necessity for security schemes to encompass community-led initiatives and harm reduction programs. Some participants in both regions identified consequences of unsafe drug use, challenges related to literacy, limited access to service, and the absence of comprehensive prevention and harm reduction programs as major obstacles. Stigma, educational initiatives, and the impact of criminalization on progress were also noted challenges. Additionally, limited access to controlled medicines for pain relief and insufficient donor funding further impact services in low-income countries.

In their discussions during the regional consultation, African NGOs illuminated a multifaceted landscape of challenges and opportunities. They emphasized the need for affordable and accessible evidence-based treatment, highlighting the importance of scaling up comprehensive services while addressing stigma. Given the continent's young population, meaningful inclusion of young people in policymaking was underscored.

While some participants in the European consultations observed that progress was made in the availability of PrEP access for people who use drugs, in some other areas of Europe access remains limited and HIV and HCV testing for people who use drugs and HIV prevention for chemsex users is often still insufficient. In addition, participants at the European regional consultations acknowledged notable progress in many European countries but highlighted the disproportionate impact on marginalized groups. Sex workers face significantly higher risks, while migrants, refugees and disabled people who use drugs encounter difficulties in accessing HIV treatment. Although mental health issues are being more recognized, insurance coverage can still be an issue in many countries. Some participants noted that going forward, sustainable funding for health services, such as prevention and harm reduction, is key to maintaining the progress made. It was also mentioned that the wide availability of harm reduction services,

including NSP, is particularly useful. Moreover, prevention efforts through education and awareness raising among the general population, as well as key populations, were evaluated as effective responses for decreasing HIV and HCV transmission.

Interventions during the CND thematic discussions in October 2020 highlighted global trends in services for HIV prevention, treatment, and care for people who inject drugs. Speakers underscored that, since 2018, the UNODC/UNAIDS/WHO Comprehensive Package of services for HIV prevention, treatment and care for people who inject drugs has remained stagnate since 2018 for needle / syringe programs (with some countries ceasing implementation and 4 new countries adopting) and decreased for the gold standard OAT with 2 less countries, to only 84 countries today. This overview, however, only captures part of the story, revealing substantial geographical gaps and uneven service distribution, even in countries with a longstanding history of harm reduction initiatives. Specific sub-groups face distinct barriers. These groups include women who use drugs, people who use stimulants and/or non-injecting methods, people experiencing homelessness, and men who have sex with men. Women who use drugs are still frequently overlooked despite the complex harms, stigmatization and structural violence they face. A substantial increase in gender-sensitive services is necessary to appropriately address their needs and progress the commitments under CND Resolutions 59/5, 55/5 and 61/4. Overarching structural problems also negatively affect access to services. Criminalization, racism and discrimination against Indigenous, Black, and brown people results in people from these communities disengaging from or actively avoiding health services. Criminalization, stigma and discrimination by health services and law enforcement were also echoed by in another intervention from an African organization of people who use drugs, resulting in marginalization and contributing to negative mental health outcomes.

How do NGOs address this challenge?

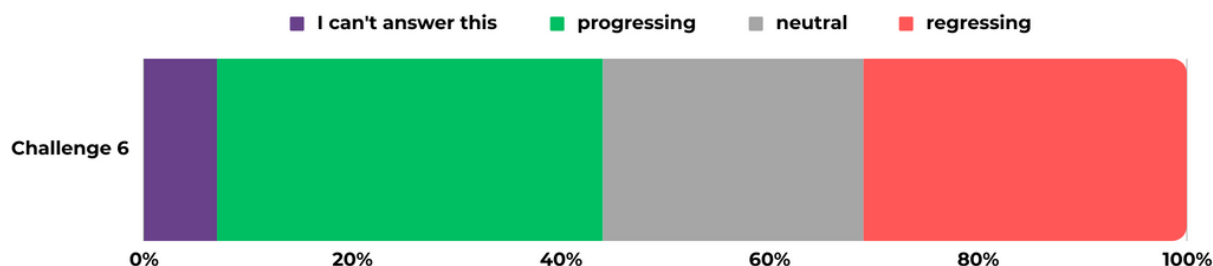
About 65% of NGO responses to the survey indicated that they are actively addressing HIV, HCV and other blood-borne diseases among people who use drugs through a range of interventions. NGOs are involved in educating health professionals on the transmission of HIV, HCV, and blood-borne diseases associated with drug use. They often implement a multifaceted approach, including prevention strategies, harm reduction initiatives, voluntary HIV testing, as well as guiding affected individuals to appropriate care facilities. In addition, many organizations provide vital harm reduction services, such as NSP and HIV testing. Advocacy efforts also play an important role in addressing the high transmission of HIV and HCV, with some respondents indicating that they are involved in community awareness campaigns. Among the activities employed, it was mentioned the collaboration with affected communities and the engagement with international organizations, governments, and communities to shed light on the unique risks faced by people who use drugs.

During the 2020 CND thematic discussions, an African NGO shared their dynamic response to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Implementing a Crisis Intervention Plan with unprecedented speed, the initiative addressed the urgent need for substance use disorder services, particularly for people experiencing homelessness and vulnerable communities. The plan not only focused on withdrawal management and medical support but also aimed to alleviate the stigma associated with substance use disorder, ensuring the well-being of individuals during the pandemic. Evolving into a Standard Operating Procedure and referral pathway, this multi-disciplinary effort demonstrated the necessity for adaptive strategies in times of crisis. Another African NGO of people who use drugs highlighted progress with the establishment of drop-in centers offering harm reduction services, including a pilot opiate substitution therapy with methadone. Positive outcomes, such as improved health and community reintegration, underscore the importance of such programs. However, there

is a call for increased political and health sector support to overcome persistent obstacles, emphasizing the need for legal revisions related to drug possession for enhanced success in reducing HIV infections among people who inject drugs.

During the 2023 thematic discussions, another NGO showcased their Mobile Outreach Program in Lisbon, highlighting the importance of screening for drug-related infectious diseases like HIV among people who use drugs. The program employs a holistic approach, combining health education strategies and health literacy promotion to combat stigma and promote self-care. Case managers and monitors working in the program prioritize linking clients to treatment services and offer the convenience of direct observed therapy. Data from 2001 to 2021 reveals the substantial impact of the Mobile Outreach Program, having managed over 8,300 individuals - predominantly males. Notably, the program's consistent efforts in HIV screening, needle exchange, and condom distribution underscore its vital role in harm reduction over the years, emphasizing the need for continued investment in such initiatives.

Challenge 6: Adverse health consequences associated with new psychoactive substances



Graph 6

What progress has been made to address the challenge?

Globally, 37% of respondents identified progress in efforts to tackle the challenge posed by the adverse health consequences and risks associated with new psychoactive substances (NPS), while 31% of respondents indicated they perceived regression and 25% perceived neither progression nor regression. Notably, only 15% of respondents based in the Americas saw progress in addressing this challenge.

Some participants in the European regional consultation on health-related challenges highlighted the significant progress that has been made by establishing and maintaining a quality Early Warning System in Europe by the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and the network of REITOX National Focal Points (NFPs). This system relies on data from civil society organizations, underscoring the need for closer cooperation between government agencies and NGOs. The region has witnessed an improved scientific understanding of the effects and health problems related to NPS, an increased but still insufficient number of civil society-led drug checking services, enhanced poison and toxicity information, and improved cooperation between authorities nationally and internationally. The proliferation of civil society websites and tools has facilitated better information sharing, leading to more efficient early warning systems and classification processes.

Moreover, several participants in the European regional consultations concluded

that NPS are generally not widespread in Europe but do appear among some subgroups of people who use drugs, often as part of polysubstance use. Problematic long-term NPS use has increased among certain subgroups of people who use drugs, posing challenges for medical services due to unknown symptoms and treatments. There is a notable lack of information sharing between government agencies or ministries, such as health and interior ministries. The focus tends to be on short-term consequences, like psychotic status, rather than potential long-term health and social consequences. Data on NPS use in Europe remains limited, emphasizing the need for improved information dissemination about substance effects and risks.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

About 31% of respondents indicated some regression in the past five years in addressing challenges associated with NPS, with a slightly lower regression observed in Africa (25%). Organizations from the Americas described a worsening situation, with 52% of respondents indicating that efforts are regressing. This regional difference can be attributed to the proliferation of synthetic opioids, a type of NPS, in the Americas, resulting in a devastating overdose and drug toxicity crisis.

A number of participants of the European regional consultations identified several challenges in their work and in their own environments and countries based on their knowledge and experience. They agreed that more training for police, medical staff and staff in nightlife venues is needed to address health

risks and overdoses caused by NPS use. Additionally, more research and studies are needed for neutral approaches in evidence-based drug policy developments and regarding the potential serious health and social consequences of NPS use. A "marketing challenge" was highlighted, as NPS represent competition for "traditional" drugs and bring about more complex quality and legal system issues. There is also a significant difficulty in reaching "harder-to-reach" people who use NPS, with a lack of adequate and specialized prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, and counseling services, especially for youth in Europe. The region is witnessing increased overdose and mental health issues related to NPS use, creating a higher demand for mental health treatment among people who use NPS.

Noteworthy best practices included efforts by the EMCDDA and NFPs, resulting in an improved and high-quality Early Warning System in Europe. This system, where civil society organizations significantly contribute by providing key information about current NPS on the drug market, including data gathered by drug checking services, could represent a best practice for other regions.

Civil society from the Middle East highlighted that the adverse health consequences of and risks associated with NPS have reached alarming levels in their region.

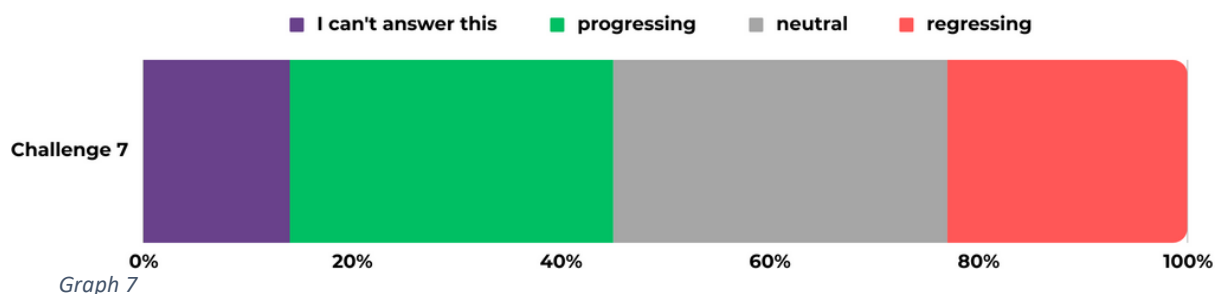
During a thematic discussion focused on this challenge, a recurring phenomenon across drug classes, described as the "displacement/replacement effect" by UNODC,

was also addressed. The discussion emphasized that scheduling, blanket bans, new prohibitions, and enforcement crackdowns have been unsuccessful in curbing supply and demand, leading to market mutations that increase harm. The civil society statement called on Member States to examine the ramifications of supply reduction interventions and to consider health interventions developed with people who use drugs and civil society that are better equipped to reduce harms, including tailored harm reduction interventions, decriminalization, and expanding access to safer supply initiatives.

How do NGOs address this challenge?

Some 61% of respondents to the online survey indicated their commitment to addressing adverse health consequences associated with NPS, with many detailing a wide range of activities. Several respondents highlighted their focus on capacity building and training for health providers and psychologists, aiming to enhance their understanding of emerging substances and the associated health consequences. NGOs actively contribute by delivering evidence-based prevention curricula and training programs to communities and schools. Additionally, some organizations provide harm reduction services, including drug checking services, and establish peer support mechanisms to minimize health risks for people who use drugs.

Challenge 7: Low availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes



What progress has been made to address the challenge?

Globally, 31% of respondents to the online survey identified progress in efforts to address the low availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, while 23% believe there has been regression in addressing the challenge and 32% indicated neither progress nor regression.

Some participants in regional consultations noted advancements in the regulation of controlled substances for pain relief and palliative care, which is linked to the adoption of laws or policies that facilitate access to cannabis-based medicines in at least 18 countries since 2019. In 2020, cannabis was removed from Schedule IV of the 1961 Single Convention on Drugs, recognizing its therapeutic value. The therapeutic use of psychedelic substances is also evolving for treating various illnesses, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and drug dependence, with over 450 clinical trials ongoing worldwide, mainly in high-income countries. Some participants suggested that most European countries and the US have sufficient access to medicines, along with control mechanisms in place to prevent overprescription and opioid diversion. Participants at the European regional consultations highlighted progress in medical staff education and guideline improvement under the leadership of the World Health Organization.

While OAT using controlled substances for drug dependency treatment is implemented in

most countries in Eurasia, North America, and Western Europe, these programs are less prevalent in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. Many countries in these regions use only one or two substances for OAT programs, and despite growth since 2019, the provision of OAT in prisons remains inadequate. A number of respondents to the online survey noted significant progress in Nigeria and some African countries due to changes in drug policy to accommodate medication-assisted treatment, though these medications are not readily available yet.

Despite disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, service providers, especially peer-led services, displayed resilient leadership. They responded quickly by adapting service delivery, providing remote counseling, online support, and offering take-home doses of OAT and naloxone to individuals through state and non-governmental service providers.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

As indicated by some respondents to the online survey, the global disparity in access to controlled medicines persists. Over 82% of the global population has access to less than 17% of the world's morphine-based medicines, and there is a 40-fold difference in the availability of opioids for pain management and palliative care between high-income and low and middle-income countries, partly due to strict controls.

Some participants in the European regional consultations emphasized that a key challenge in accessing controlled substances for pain

relief, suffering, and drug dependency treatment is the lack of availability of medicines. Limited access outside the capital and major cities, bans on certain substances like tramadol and codeine, trade control measures, and fear of prosecution and sanctions were identified as obstacles. High medicine prices and restrictions on the usage of generics were cited as significant barriers to affordability in low and middle-income countries. Complicated drug procurement procedures and supply chain challenges were pointed out as factors leading to the interruptions or shortages of essential medications. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, causing interruptions in OAT treatment in several countries (e.g., Lebanon, Moldova, Belarus, etc.). Economic, political, humanitarian, and environmental crises have also put access to controlled substances at risk.

Survey responses reported a lack of or insufficient training or awareness among health professionals in using controlled substances for medical purposes in various countries. Some participants in regional consultations highlighted factors such as "opioid phobia," cultural bias, fear of diversion towards the unregulated market, stigma reported by patients, lack of community knowledge, and insufficient funding for advocacy and awareness raising. Several participants also noted that traditional medicine systems are ignored in discussions, while overprescription was outlined as an issue in some countries or communities, leading to overdose deaths and substance use disorders. Responses to the online survey underscored that the needs of women who use drugs are under-addressed, which results in this population facing higher barriers to receiving OAT services than men and a lack of services tailored to their specific needs.

Civil society emphasized the need for proper research, data collection, and analysis, including documenting treatment effectiveness. Participants mentioned that countries often lack demographic data on health-related suffering and treatment needs using controlled substances. There is also a gap in research to understand the access barriers

in specific regions, as well as research on the therapeutic use of psychedelic substances, hindering the development of evidence-based solutions. Some participants in European regional consultations highlighted the importance of funding research on potential effects before releasing new treatments independent of industry influence and interest organizations.

How do NGOs address this challenge?

Among all respondents, 34% indicated that they are concentrating their efforts on overcoming the challenge and ensuring access to controlled medicines.

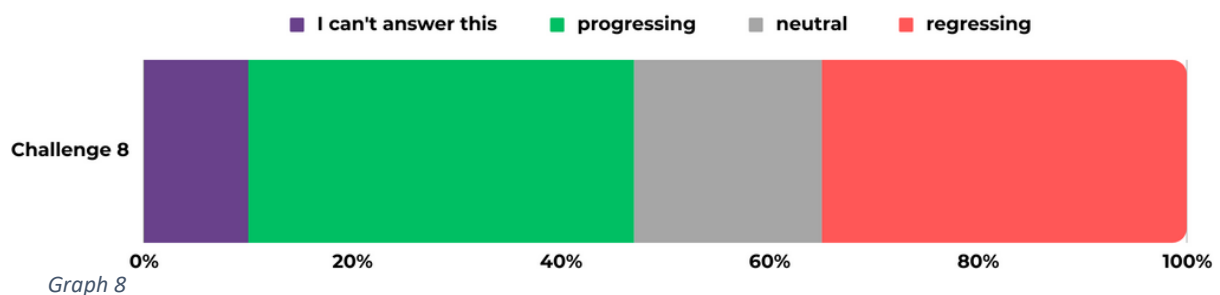
As highlighted in survey responses, many civil society organizations worldwide are advocating for the availability of prescription pain medications for patients who need them. That includes those using these medications as an alternative to toxic unregulated drugs through the provision of safer supply programs, which are an extension of standard medication-assisted treatments such as methadone and buprenorphine/naloxone and provide pharmaceutical grade alternatives to contaminated drug supply to people who are at high risk of overdose. Many civil society and community groups emphasized the importance of adding new substances to the list of essential medications, especially in humanitarian settings. When facing humanitarian crisis, violence, repression, hostility, and war, it is often NGOs on the ground that come up with solutions to continue delivering vital drug services. For example, as described in remarks during the thematic discussions, when faced with a shortage in access to OAT on occupied territories in Ukraine, civil society in cooperation with health facilities organized provision of support for evacuation, accommodation, food, as well as access to harm reduction and OAT. To address multiple challenges, civil society, led by a community of people who use drugs in Ukraine, established a broad coalition, working closely with the Parliament, the Ministry of Health, law enforcement, experts, and international partners to introduce different substances, such as cannabis and psychedelic substances

for the treatment of mental health conditions caused by war traumas, gender-based violence, and PTSD.

Described ongoing advocacy efforts aim to sensitize authorities to review the use and demand for opioids in patients with life-limiting conditions experiencing moderate to severe pain. In the MENA region, some NGOs have worked to facilitate the international shipment and distribution of essential materials for healthcare and pain relief, advocating for simplified customs and

regulatory procedures to enhance access. Civil society organizations are actively engaged not only in advocacy but also in providing peer-led, community-based social care support as part of OAT programs. They contribute to building the capacity of healthcare systems in underserved regions to responsibly use controlled substances for pain management and palliative care, offering training and educational programs to healthcare professionals to enhance their knowledge of controlled substances and their appropriate use.

Challenge 8: Increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime



What progress has been made to address the challenge?

Respondents to the online survey were divided on whether efforts in addressing the challenge of increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime were progressing or regressing, 37% saw progress while 35% indicated that efforts were regressing, and 18% observed neither progression nor regression. Upon further review of regional variations, respondents from Africa and Asia-Pacific were more likely to indicate that they observed at least some progress in addressing links between drug trafficking and organized crime. However, respondents from Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean were most likely to indicate that they had seen regression in regard to this challenge.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

Corruption, including among government officials, remains one of the key challenges that many respondents face. In addition, the

perceived levels of violence associated with unregulated drug markets seem to have risen across the world since 2019. Some respondents from Africa identified a lack of synergies and communication among civil society organizations and between civil society organizations and government agencies as some of the recurring challenges. In addition, many NGOs suffer from funding shortages. Several participants of the European regional consultations identified the increased use of information and communications technologies by organized crime groups as one of the major hurdles that law enforcement faces and highlighted that accountability for corrupt officials continues to be low. While there was no consensus, some respondents identified prohibitionist approaches as one of the main sources of insecurity and violence.

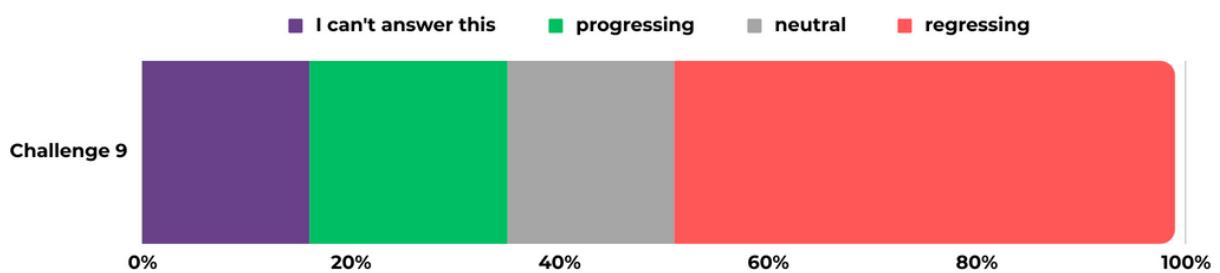
How do NGOs address this challenge?

About 43% of the respondents indicated that their organization works on addressing the challenge of increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime. Respondents working to

address the challenge reported that progress made includes better collaboration between civil society organizations and law enforcement and among different government agencies in some countries, increased awareness among the public about corruption and other forms of organized crime, and positive outcomes of responses that aim to build resilience among youth from marginalized groups. Some participants of the

African regional consultation highlighted that they benefited from linking with international networks. Noteworthy best practices included collaborative efforts between security and civil society in Nigeria, resulting in a Drug Control Master Plan and joint national action plans. In Tanzania, progress was seen in the implementation of international anti-corruption conventions and innovative approaches to tackling challenges.

Challenge 9: Low value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money laundering arising from drug trafficking



Graph 9

What progress has been made to address the challenge?

From all survey respondents, 49% saw regression when it comes to addressing the challenge concerning the low value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money laundering arising from drug trafficking. Only 19%, the lowest number across all challenges, indicated that progress has been made since 2019, and 16% remained neutral. There were no significant differences between regions.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

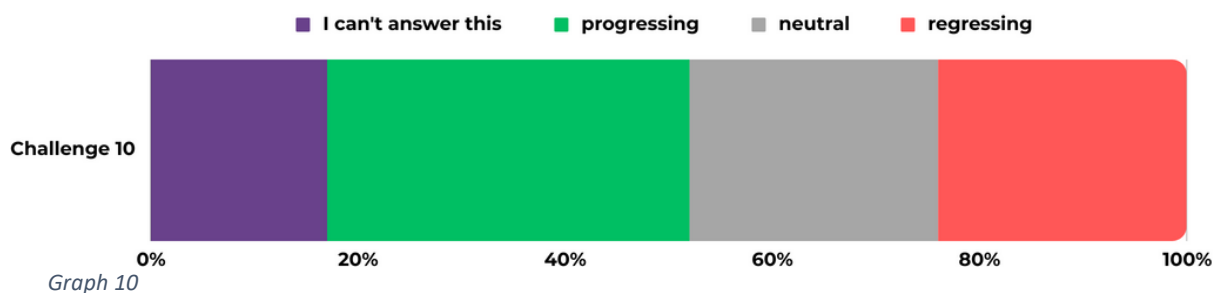
Some participants of the European regional consultations mentioned that enhanced investigative tools and increased collaboration between countries and international organizations focusing on investigating and seizing assets linked to organized crime have constituted some of the progress made in the region. In addition, strengthened policies in the banking system across Europe that aim to

better tackle money laundering show some promise. On the other hand, key challenges such as tax havens and insufficient regulation for finance operators remain, as does the concern by some respondents that confiscation is not an effective deterrent scheme.

How do NGOs address this challenge?

Only 18% of respondents indicated that their organization works to address this challenge. Using the proceeds of confiscated goods to invest in health and social services was cited as a good practice both in the regional consultations as well as the contributions to the CND thematic discussions. Remarks at the CND thematic discussions highlighted that this approach ensures property seized by the state from criminals satisfies the public interest and promotes a sense of justice. At the same time, speakers noted that the social use of illicit-gained assets encourages civil society participation in responses against crime.

Challenge 10: Criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for drug trafficking



What progress has been made to address the challenge?

About 35% of all respondents saw progress, 24% saw regression, and 24% observed neither when it comes to addressing the challenge connected to the criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities. There were no significant differences between regions.

In the European regional consultations, some participants mentioned that progress made in the past five years includes increased cooperation between countries to access encrypted messengers.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

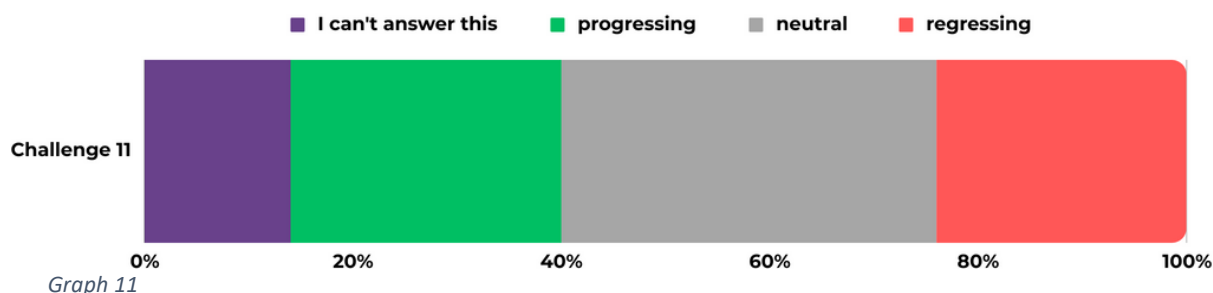
Responses noted that several challenges persist, such as the need for evidence-based drug prevention campaigns that avoid stigmatizing individuals and the apparent lack of accountability/responsibility of major internet companies in removing harmful content. The misuse of communications technology, misinformation, fake news, and state censorship were also identified as risks. While there has been some effective crackdown on darknet activities, the bulk of drug supply has shifted to social media and peer-to-peer platforms, making them convergence settings for illicit activities. Key issues to address in the upcoming five years include the need to enhance insight into communication avenues, establish good

practices for prevention and harm reduction on social media and darknet markets, increase peer-to-peer harm reduction on information and communications technology platforms, and conduct more research and monitoring on online services. Additionally, some concerns were raised about laws targeting "drug propaganda," emphasizing the importance of not restricting the sharing of harm reduction information.

How do NGOs address this challenge?

Only 27% of respondents indicated that their organization works to address this challenge. Some NGO representatives who contributed to the CND thematic discussions on the topic in October 2021 and October 2023 underscored the complex interplay between technology and drug practices. Their remarks emphasized the challenges and opportunities in the digital space and noted social media's role in drug transactions, providing convenience but posing risks. Research presented also critiqued the "takedown" approach as counterproductive and suggested a nuanced strategy focusing on the most harmful substances and markets. Additionally, statements underscored the global challenges posed by the criminal misuse of information and communications technologies, proposing a multidimensional and humanitarian approach, training for law enforcers, and the importance of awareness and human rights-compliant actions from governments amidst emerging technologies.

Challenge 11: Non-compliance of responses with international drug control conventions and human rights obligations



What progress has been made to address the challenge?

Most respondents to the online survey believe there has been neither progress nor regression in addressing non-compliance of responses with international drug control conventions and human rights obligations (36%), followed by those who believe there has been progress (26%) and those who believe there has been regression (24%). Upon further review of regional variations, respondents from Africa and Asia-Pacific were more likely to indicate that they observed at least some progress in addressing this challenge. However, respondents from Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as those working globally, were most likely to indicate that they had seen regression in regard to this challenge.

What challenges do NGOs encounter when addressing this issue?

Some respondents and participants across regional consultations addressed the topics of non-compliance of drug policies with the international drug control conventions and non-compliance of drug policies with human rights obligations, either jointly or separately. A number of participants at the European regional consultations discussed that non-compliance with the international drug control conventions is often linked to the non-respect of the human rights of people who use drugs. They discussed the disproportionate historical focus of Member States in emphasizing drug control objectives, as opposed to health responses and ensuring sufficient access for medical and scientific purposes, in the

interpretation and application of the international drug control conventions. A key challenge identified among participants was the absence of a systematic mechanism for addressing non-compliance when countries do not adhere to the conventions, including non-compliance often linked to the non-respect of the human rights of people who use drugs. Several participants at the Asia-Pacific regional consultation emphasized the importance of adopting a human rights-focused approach in drug policies, advocating for more community-based action and a shift towards health-focused policies rather than punitive measures. International collaboration was stressed as crucial, with some participants calling for support from other countries in the form of best practice examples to enhance drug policies and ensure compliance with human rights standards.

With respect to non-compliance of drug policies with the international drug control conventions, some shared perspectives on the legalization and regulation of cannabis for non-medical and non-scientific purposes. Some believed that such approaches were in conformity with the conventions by upholding their overarching purpose of ensuring the health and welfare of humankind, whereas others maintained that such approaches went beyond the flexibility offered by the conventions. Across these perspectives, some expressed concerns related to the challenge of commercialization of cannabis and corporate capture. Some participants at the European regional consultations identified the emergence of non-commercial models of legal regulation in some European countries and suggested that the lack of UN guidance on the

legal regulation of drugs, including cannabis, based on health and human rights, poses a challenge. While there was no consensus, given the reality of changing cannabis policies around the globe, some respondents and participants across regional consultations called for more open discussions at the international level on how the international drug control regime should be reviewed and modernized to accommodate this reality and ensure that legal regulation is aligned with the UN pillars of human rights, development, and peace and security. Some participants at the Americas regional consultation raised concerns that the international drug control regime will grow increasingly obsolete if it continues to fail to acknowledge shifting national approaches. Some respondents welcomed the World Health Organization's critical review processes for cannabis, as well as for the coca leaf.

With respect to non-compliance of drug policies with human rights obligations, some respondents and participants across regional consultations discussed human rights violations related to the right to health, right to life, right to be free from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, right to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention, right to a fair trial, as well as the right to equality and freedom from discrimination, among others. Human rights concerns included the criminalization of people who use drugs as well as those at the lowest levels of drug trafficking, the use of capital punishment, as well as extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, for drug offenses, the use of compulsory treatment for drug dependence, the insufficient access to health services, including evidence-based prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services, as well as insufficient access to controlled medicines, and the stigmatization and discrimination against people who use drugs, including those in prisons and other places of detention or closed settings, as well as their further marginalization on the basis of race, gender, class, and age. The stigmatization of people who use drugs remains a central element of government policies across the world, with

downstream impacts on the enjoyment of all human rights, including a whole range of economic, social, and cultural rights.

Many respondents expressed support for proportionate sentencing, decriminalizing drug use and possession, and ensuring law enforcement efforts are fully consistent with human rights obligations. Some participants at the European regional consultations raised concern about the lack of access to alternatives to punishment and conviction, even when permitted by the conventions, and identified criminalization and stigmatization of people who use drugs as inextricably linked. Concerns were also raised about the inadequate opportunities for accessing evidence-based healthcare, prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services affordably and effectively, as well as about racial profiling and targeting by police of marginalized populations, including migrants, undocumented migrants, refugees, racial minorities, people of African descent, Roma people, Indigenous people, and youth.

Some respondents and participants across regional consultations identified the importance of rights acknowledged by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some participants at the Americas regional consultation discussed the disproportionate negative impacts of drug policies on Indigenous Peoples, including overdose, as well as on Black people, and considered the role of colonialism, racism, and classism. Some respondents, participants, and remarks at the thematic discussions emphasized that appropriate measures to protect children and youth must be rights-compliant and effective and include refraining from criminalizing children because of their drug use or possession of drugs for personal use, the development of accessible and child-sensitive prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services as well as accurate and objective drug education for children. Several respondents and participants also emphasized the importance of gender-sensitive healthcare, prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services for women, including pregnant women, as well

as LGBTQI+ individuals. A number of participants at the Asia-Pacific regional consultation emphasized targeting women and LGBTQI+ individuals in the context of drug policies, sharing instances of torture and extortion, and underscoring the human rights violations that occur within the framework of drug control.

Particularly among some respondents from Latin America, ensuring a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights was identified as a key challenge. Drug control measures were seen as posing a challenge to the climate crisis by generating pollution, degrading natural habitats, causing deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and other environmental damage, and causing exposure to highly toxic, bio-accumulative, and persistent substances. Another challenge raised was shrinking civic space, which creates barriers and challenges for civil society and undermines the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and has, in some cases, led to the closure of life-saving harm reduction services, undermining the right to health and the right to life, among others. Some respondents and participants across regional consultations emphasized the importance of Member States and UN agencies meaningfully engaging civil society organizations, people who use drugs, people in recovery, and affected communities such as farmers, youth, and Indigenous Peoples, in the design, implementation, and evaluation of drug policies.

Some respondents, participants across regional consultations, and remarks at the thematic discussions welcomed the growing body of commitments, findings, and recommendations from across the UN system on the human rights implications of drug policy, expressing support for those contained in the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy, the UN system common position supporting the implementation of the international drug control policy through effective inter-agency collaboration, as well as resolutions from the Human Rights Council and the recent report of the Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights, titled, “Human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem.” Further collaboration across UN bodies was called for in order to enhance coherence between the international drug control regime and international human rights obligations, as well as the sustainable development agenda. Some suggestions to this effect included that the CND and UNODC consistently incorporate human rights into their work, such as by establishing a standing agenda item at the CND to address the human rights impact of drug policies and including a specific chapter on human rights in UNODC’s annual World Drug Report, which would be informed by other relevant UN agencies and bodies. While there was no consensus, some respondents and participants across regional consultations expressed concerns that the international drug control regime is incompatible with international human rights obligations and called for Member States to review and reform the international drug control conventions and system to align with human rights objectives, which take precedence over drug control.

How do NGOs address this challenge?

About 39% of the respondents to the online survey indicated that their organization works on addressing this challenge. A wide variety of activities were undertaken by respondents in this respect, including conducting research and advocacy, producing publications and other resources, raising awareness, engaging with government officials, strengthening partnerships, as well as documenting human rights violations, delivering frontline services, and providing legal support to affected populations. Noteworthy best practices include the development of tools and materials to examine and monitor human rights concerns related to drug policies, such as the Global Drug Policy Index, which allows for comparisons at the international level. Another such example is the report “The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview,” which has monitored the use of the death penalty for drug offenses worldwide since 2007. Some respondents also shared best

practices in strengthening partnerships and collaborations, such as those of the American Drug Policy Coalition (CAPD), which is a regional coalition of civil society organizations and networks that work to foster an informed social debate with a view to promoting non-punitive policies, based on scientific evidence, human rights, and public health, that respond effectively to the various problems associated with drugs in the Americas. The VNGOC's Asia-Pacific Ad-hoc Working Group is another example of enhancing collaboration, as its purpose is to strengthen participation and

engagement between civil society organizations from the Asia-Pacific region, and the Working Group generated a common position after extensive consultation reflecting the need for placing human rights, health, and evidence at the center of all drug policies. Another noteworthy best practice among several respondents included making submissions and providing inputs to UN human rights bodies, including treaty bodies and special procedures such as the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' General Comment on Drug Policy.

Challenge 12: Availability of reliable data

The topic of geographical coverage and availability of reliable data on the various aspects of the world's drug problem was not selected for the CND thematic discussions despite being highlighted in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration and was not specifically included in our online survey. Despite that, some survey respondents highlighted it in their open answers, underscoring the importance of the topic for further discussions. The respondents who discussed this topic agree that UN agencies (including but not limited to UNODC) should provide more reliable, comparable (especially if collected by different sectors, such as government, civil society, and academia), detailed, and verifiable data that demonstrates the magnitude of the current and future drug-related problems and trends, especially amongst the most vulnerable populations and in rural areas. For some respondents, data collection and analysis remain insufficient and unable to track some critical aspects of drug policy. The UN System Coordination Task Team on the Implementation of the UN System Common Position on drug-related issues offers a mechanism for improved data across relevant UN agencies, including UNAIDS, UNDP, OHCHR, UN-Women, and UNICEF, among others.

Some civil society representatives decided to highlight and reflect on this challenge during regional consultations. Some participants of the European regional consultations extensively discussed this challenge as an important and relevant topic for their region. A number of participants highlighted that there

has been some progress in data collection and analysis and engagement of civil society in these processes in Europe, especially due to improvements achieved by the EMCDDA and the network of REITOX NFPs. Some global initiatives have been launched by civil society and the academic community regarding proposals for additional indicators, such as on human rights, harms and consequences of drug use, and the aforementioned Global Drug Policy Index. There was a continuation of open dialogue with UN agencies (e.g., UNODC, UNDP, and WHO) regarding the involvement of civil society in the monitoring and evaluation processes of drug services and policy outcomes, as well as data collection at the global level.

Some participants involved in the Asia-Pacific consultation noted a lack of engagement with relevant NGOs in the Pacific region, as well as a lack of regional data from this region, calling on neighboring countries to support the collection of relevant data on drug-related issues and to support the establishment of community-led services in the region. Some participants of the European regional consultations also identified several challenges in their work, such as a lack of detailed and comparable information in official international or national drug reports, a lack of data on evidence-based prevention programs in several countries, flawed implementation of international prevention standards, and inadequate coverage of and access to treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services (especially among girls and women).

Additionally, there is insufficient data and information on young people who use drugs, drug-related problems in the LGBTQI+ community, and opioids use for medical purposes. There are also significant gender, age, race, and ethnicity related challenges in data collection processes due to a lack of disaggregated data. A lack of data on the impacts and consequences of criminalization, decriminalization of drug use and/or possession of drugs for personal use, as well as legalization and regulation of drugs, such as cannabis, for non-medical and non-scientific purposes, was also identified.

Other challenges, progress made and emerging trends

What other progress has been made regarding addressing drug-related issues in your country, region or internationally in the past four years (2019-2023)?

- **Civil society involvement and collaboration**, and increasing involvement of people who use drugs, people in recovery, and other affected populations, particularly farmers, youth and Indigenous Peoples: Many participants of the global survey and regional consultations highlighted positive examples that indicate progress in the involvement of civil society in decision-making at the national and international levels, as well as more collaborative efforts amongst civil society. For example, multiple NGOs from Africa mentioned involvement in the development of national drug laws and strategies, often supported in this work by regional and international civil society networks. International collaboration among NGOs was stressed as crucial, with many participants calling for support from other countries in the form of best practice examples to enhance drug policies and ensure compliance with human rights standards. In addition, the increasing involvement of people who use drugs and people in recovery in advocacy, policy and service design, and implementation was highlighted by several responses to the survey and across the regional consultations, as well as the growing

Noteworthy best practices included efforts by Switzerland, resulting in progress made in the case of improved qualitative and quantitative data on specific topics and new services to overcome the challenge of non-membership in the EU and EMCDDA. In Peru (particularly in the Amazon region), progress was seen regarding the establishment of a wide network of numerous computerized telecentres by civil society organizations that allow the population to access reliable drug-related information that is not manipulated by organized crime.

access and participation of other groups especially affected by drug policies, such as farmers, youth, and Indigenous Peoples.

At the UN level, significant progress in improving civil society participation in drug debates was observed, including by broadcasting and archiving the proceedings of the CND on UN Web TV, as well as multiple Member States including civil society representatives on their official delegations to the CND. Many NGOs highlighted a further need for national and international organizations, and international cooperation agencies, including social organizations, to be included in the design, implementation, and evaluation of drug programs. Some participants mentioned the work of the VNGOC and NYNGOC in helping to increase the inclusion of civil society, and the Ad-Hoc Youth Working Group of VNGOC in supporting youth engagement. Finally, several respondents welcomed the establishment of the International Indigenous Drug Policy Alliance.

- **Prevention, treatment, and recovery:** Many NGOs highlighted the progress in their work, as well as standards in the field of prevention, treatment, and recovery, noting the lack of a corresponding 'challenge' specifically for the area of prevention and recovery. Multiple

respondents and participants of the regional consultations, particularly in Europe, mentioned that progress has been made towards the implementation of international prevention standards and policy developments like the resolution on early prevention adopted by the CND in 2023. Some also highlighted the progress made by UNODC in this field, such as the CHAMPS initiative, underscoring the importance of promoting more investment in evidence-based early prevention. Others encouraged a broader thematic focus for children- and youth-specific initiatives and ensuring the inclusion of youth-led groups and organizations in such campaigns. Some participants underscored the lack of adequate treatment, emphasizing the need to focus further on aftercare and family empowerment programs. Particularly in Latin America, some NGOs highlighted the need to move away from abstinence-based treatment and to adopt measures that can prevent the occurrence of forced hospitalizations, including ending the public financing of compulsory treatment.

- **Harm reduction, safe/safer supply, and overdose prevention:** Many civil society participants noted the expanding harm reduction approach to addressing drug use as a positive development, mentioning a diversifying range of service models and interventions, including further expansion of supervised consumption services, and implementation of drug checking services in more jurisdictions. Citing the context of a global public health crisis, some participants expressed the need to include harm reduction explicitly in language adopted by the CND, as has happened at the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council. It was further highlighted that in facing the increased levels of overdose deaths, particularly in North America, some civil society organizations coordinated efforts and worked on further developing innovative approaches, such as safe supply programs, supervised

consumption services, drug checking services, and naloxone distribution. Some governments adopted safer supply initiatives and lower barrier provision of regulated drugs to reduce fatalities associated with the contaminated and unregulated drug supply. Many participants highlighted the lack of sufficient access to harm reduction and overdose prevention, underscoring these novel programs as generally positive, while some others expressed concern about drugs being diverted to unregulated markets and not decreasing the supply.

- **Legal regulation:** Some NGOs highlighted that the most important progress has been the initiatives for the legal regulation of certain drugs, most prominently cannabis, by several countries, seeing the opening of the debate as well as the initial results from these frameworks as positive. They stressed the potential of legal regulation as a tool to break the linkage between drug markets and organized crime, with multiple regional consultations discussing the recommendation made for considering legal regulation of drugs in the 2023 Report of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights on human rights in drug policy. Several other NGOs pointed to legal regulation as a setback, perceiving it as the relaxation of control measures and expressing concerns about potential increases in the prevalence of drug use, particularly pointing to the increased potency of cannabis in emerging regulated markets.

What setbacks or challenges have NGOs faced regarding drug-related issues in the past four years (2019-2023)?

- **Stagnancy of drug policies:** Several respondents, across all regions, observed that while the content of discussions over drug-related issues has shifted, it has yet to concretize into policy changes at both national and international levels. Respondents who highlighted this issue perceived a lack of political will to reform

legislative frameworks to reflect the changing issues, realities, and alternative responses that are proving positive. Some NGOs expressed difficulties in working in a context with a lack of updated policy leadership and guidance at national and international levels. At the global level, the slow implementation of the UN System Common Position was mentioned by several participants, who called out for particular action to be taken by Member States to implement the recommendations at the national level.

- **Insufficient evaluation and lack of indicators to measure progress:** Particularly in the field of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery, a number of respondents highlighted the need for more indicators to measure progress in policies and practices. Several respondents, most prominently in the European regional consultations, highlighted the possibility of introducing respect for human rights as an indicator for the evaluation of drug policy.
- **War and crisis:** Multiple NGOs who participated in the global survey and regional consultations were directly affected by war and armed conflict, yet they continued the provision of services and life-saving assistance to people who use drugs in these challenging circumstances. Affected NGOs developed strategies to respond to needs in situations of war and crisis, including providing support to refugees and internally displaced people.
- **Harassment and violence against civil society:** Despite progress in civil society involvement in some contexts, several NGOs, particularly in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, highlighted poor cooperation with the government and a lack of a safe space for civil society to act due to threats from officials as well as criminal groups involved in drug trafficking, the latter even resulting in killings of civil leaders.

- **Lack of funding:** A major overarching issue prevalent across all the challenges and regions is the lack of sustainable funding for NGOs, particularly prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery service providers. Some participants also pointed to the misallocation of resources, with health budgets being diverted to other sectors like the military.

What new trends have emerged regarding drug-related issues in the past four years (2019-2023)?

- **Increased engagement by UN human rights bodies:** In the past four years, several significant trends have emerged in the context of drug policy discussions. One of the key developments highlighted by NGOs is the increased engagement of UN human rights bodies in these discussions, aiming to align the challenges with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and promote human rights, development, rule of law, as well as peace and security. Some participants emphasized a growing need for UN guidance and recommendations on the legal regulation of drugs in line with health, human rights, and development.
- **Focus on racial justice, equality, and non-discrimination:** There is a growing call to place racial justice, equality, and non-discrimination at the center of drug policymaking. Many NGOs from all regions emphasized the crucial need to broaden the discussion beyond the currently highlighted challenges. This broader conversation should include the impact on marginalized communities in debates surrounding drug policies.
- **Criminalization of women and youth:** A major concern highlighted by participants involves the criminalization of women and youth under the pretext of the violence associated with the drug trade and law enforcement responses. Specific attention is given to gender- and age-specific drug

policies and interventions. Some participants emphasized the importance of gender sensitivity to improve women's access to treatment and recovery options. This includes addressing the double stigma faced by women who use drugs, as well as their vulnerability to gender-based violence and the severe health consequences of drug use.

- **In Asia Pacific**, challenges in accessing treatment, the cultural stigma associated with substance use disorders, and financial constraints faced by marginalized communities were emphasized. Additionally, targeting women and LGBTQI+ individuals in the context of drug policies has led to human rights violations, including instances of torture and extortion.
- **In Africa**, pervasive stigma and discrimination from healthcare workers, fear of arrest, and limited funding for specific health services were noted. A link between gender-based violence and HIV, limited funding for hepatitis services, stigma from religion or culture, corruption, misallocation of funds, and inadequate support for health professionals are prevalent challenges.
- **In Latin America**, challenges in addressing social determinants affecting populations, criminalization of poverty, and racial disproportionality in the application of drug laws were issues outlined by

respondents. Some participants expressed concerns regarding the criminalization, death, and disappearance of people who use drugs in impoverished and marginalized areas, noting that most deaths in the region are linked to the consequences of violence stemming from clashes between drug trafficking and security responses rather than to the use of substances.

- **Decolonization of the drug control regime:** A pressing concern highlighted by some NGOs is the imperative to decolonize the drug control regime. This involves addressing the inherent tensions between the existing drug conventions and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Responses mentioned the systematic threat and violence against Indigenous leaders, who are actively working to protect their communities and habitats, underscoring the urgency of this matter. Some participants also emphasized the need to recognize the environmental harms associated with drug policy.
- **Addressing root causes of drug-related issues:** Some NGOs underscored the critical importance of tackling the root causes of drug-related challenges. These root causes include poverty, inequality, and limited access to education and healthcare. Some participants emphasized that drug policy documents must better reflect the consideration of economic, social, and cultural rights.

The way forward

Survey respondents and participants in the regional online, hybrid, and in-person consultations were also asked about the key issues that need to be addressed in the next five years to ensure that drug-related issues are adequately addressed in the spirit of the joint commitments. Many non-governmental organizations spoke about the need for **capacity building and comprehensive public health training** for healthcare providers, NGOs, as well as decision and policymakers to deliver better services to their communities in the areas of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery. Some participants highlighted the need to support the healthy upbringing of young people (especially those from low-income areas) by **investing in evidence-based prevention** interventions, addressing the needs of women, children, and young people in prevention efforts, and prioritizing comprehensive drug prevention and education programs to raise awareness of the risks of drug use, especially among young people. Some participants emphasized the need for more comprehensive research and studies on evidence-based prevention measures and on risk and protective factors for diverse population groups.

Responses indicated the need to **improve access to and availability of effective harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services**, with a focus on evidence-based and accessible care, improving its quality, and addressing new patterns of drug use. Additional calls were made for capacity-building programs to ensure the availability of needed healthcare professionals, providing quality, accessible, and affordable harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services in low-income or resource-poor settings. Many participants also called for increased financial support in the form of grants to strengthen NGO capacity, along with more funding for training programs in prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery. Respondents noted that trained and certified staff are crucial to tackling global and national drug-related matters.

Moreover, some participants recommended strengthening harm reduction

initiatives by ensuring sustainable funding for comprehensive and quality health services and **expanding access to services such as OAT, NSP, supervised consumption services, naloxone, drug checking services, safer supply initiatives, and other comprehensive low-threshold harm reduction services to reduce health and social risks** associated with drug use. The need for **improved mental health services** and support for people who use drugs and people with substance use disorder was also emphasized, particularly for people who use NPS.

Many NGOs called for **increased international cooperation**, with different priorities. Some responses focused on law enforcement and the fight against drug trafficking. They emphasized the need for increased cooperation between law enforcement agencies around the world and called on the international community to promote collaboration by strengthening networks linking local, national, and international governments. They also highlighted the need for strengthening international cooperation in combating and addressing the global nature of drug trafficking, as well as in implementing various plans to prevent drug trafficking through capacity building and curbing economic corruption. Responses noted that NGOs should become more effective and empowered in preventing drug trafficking and developing early warnings, threats and risk assessments, especially with regard to NPS.

Other responses emphasized the need to reinvigorate the validity and content of the drug conventions and **to strengthen and better monitor compliance with other international treaties** and obligations, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child. They emphasized the need for the international community to align the sustainable development agenda with drug policy. For that, respondents highlighted the need **to promote the economic and social development of communities affected by the impact of the unregulated drug market**, as

well as address the impact of drug policies on the environment. Moreover, responses underscored the need to address the impact of the unregulated drug market and drug policies on human rights, particularly on the **right to equality and non-discrimination**, to prevent the occurrence of racial discrimination and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Some participants called for prioritizing the health, well-being, and human rights of people in the drug supply chain, including farmers, while also taking into account broader issues such as the climate crisis, access to clean water, and the well-being of their children.

Many emphasized the need for thoughtful and sound policy reforms and policy-making processes that incorporate a range of elements. Many recommended that **policies should prioritize public health and human rights**, with some mentioning that the focus should be on non-punitive and proportionate approaches, including decriminalization of drug use and possession for personal use, as well as for the sharing or selling of drugs for subsistence, for supporting personal drug use costs and for providing a safe supply for people who are at high risk of overdose. Others pointed out that a balance needs to be struck between law enforcement and regulatory approaches to tackle the expansion and diversification of drug markets, including efforts to curb the production and distribution of unregulated drugs. Some pointed to the need for policymakers to **consider and implement alternative approaches, such as decriminalization and legal regulation**, and to **improve mechanisms around access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, including for palliative care**.

A share of the participant NGOs recommended that governments give greater weight to human rights commitments, with UN agencies and bodies beyond UNODC playing a more active role in the setting of drug policies. Some encouraged reform and modernization of the international drug control system to establish achievable, realistic, and measurable targets. Others called for technological advances and pointed out that data collection and analysis are still inadequate and fail to capture some critical aspects of drug policy.

They also called for data to be disaggregated by gender and other social aspects, allowing for the employment of an intersectional approach. **Better involvement of civil society and affected communities in data collection, analysis and interpretation** at global, regional, and national levels was also suggested. Overall, respondents emphasized that **data on prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, and human rights should be improved at all levels**, as well as included in national and global reports to provide a more comprehensive picture of the global drug situation.

Some participants had concerns about shrinking spaces for meaningful civil society participation in national drug policy processes and international drug policy forums. Some emphasized the **importance of including people who use drugs and people in recovery in the policymaking process**. Others highlighted the need to include impacted populations in these discussions, such as women, young people, and people who need controlled medicines to treat painful symptoms or other conditions. The issue of funding was also very often raised, particularly regarding more **sustainable and longer-term funding for evidence-based prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services**. Additionally, increased funding for monitoring and evaluation of service and program delivery was also underscored.

Among the concrete proposals to improve the world drug situation, some **participants in the European regional consultations** mentioned the need for a joint UNODC-WHO initiative to train medical staff and fight corruption, the need to support UNODC laboratories in drug analysis and civil society in harm reduction, the expansion of heroin-assisted treatment programs and introduction of safer supply initiatives, and the regulation of substances. Some participants called for increased cooperation with drug-producing countries, emphasizing the need to develop the legal economy in such countries through alternative development programs. The proposal was also suggested for implementation within some European countries (e.g., Albania). According to

respondents' views, alternative development must consider not only farmers and/or producers but also the entire supply chain, including logistics (i.e., warehouses, lorry drivers, etc.). In addition, they called for better anti-corruption measures, increased evidence-based drug prevention, access to harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services, and raising awareness of the threat posed by organized crime. They also called for better links between HIV/AIDS prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services, tackling the stigmatization of people who use drugs and people with substance use disorder, addressing somatic symptom disorder, better control of the pharmaceutical industry in relation to NPS and synthetic drugs, and addressing harm reduction, treatment, and recovery gaps for those in prisons and other closed settings.

Participants at the Asia-Pacific regional consultation called for strengthening partnerships at all levels, increasing data collection, and removing barriers to accessing evidence-based prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery services across the region. Some participants highlighted the need for comprehensive early warning systems for emerging substances (e.g., NPS) and the need to consider drug-related problems as a public health and not a criminal issue. Finally, they called for measures to reduce long waiting times for court proceedings and pre-release detention.

Participants at the African regional consultation emphasized the urgent need to increase the number of harm reduction facilities and build the capacity of peer educators in the region. Several participants called for harm reduction measures in conflict regions to be taken into account and for non-governmental organizations to be funded so that they can carry out their work effectively. They also emphasized the need for access to life-saving medicines such as naloxone, methadone, and buprenorphine.

Participants at the Americas regional consultation pointed out that in some countries most deaths related to drug trafficking and drug use are usually not due to the consumption of the substance but to the consequences of violence associated with the drug trade and law enforcement responses. Several participants expressed the need to expand continuously functioning community services, combat structural racism in drug policies, strengthen measures to monitor police operations, implement and expand access to psychosocial support for youth through the public health system, and improve accessible social policies for people who use drugs (i.e., housing, food, income, etc.). Finally, some participants called for prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery measures that take into account traumatic factors, for policies that allow people who use drugs to receive information on the contents of their substances (i.e., drug checking services), especially given the toxic, unregulated drug supply, and for the employment of a gender perspective in health services provided for people who use drugs, including for dealing with systematic violence.

Participants from the Middle East underscored the importance of developing a civil society common position on drugs for the region establishing a consultative infrastructure for NGOs to discuss various drug-related issues with authorities and other relevant actors in the region. This would help them to better coordinate their efforts and share experiences and best practices. One of the biggest challenges in the Middle East continues to be the illegal production of synthetic drugs. Receiving technical and logistical support from local armed groups, the production and trafficking of synthetic drugs makes the impacts of drugs and drug policies in the region more dangerous.

Conclusion

The Global Civil Society Report for the 2024 mid-term review of the CND provides a comprehensive overview of the progress and challenges in addressing drug-related issues since 2019. The report highlights the varying perspectives of civil society organizations and emphasizes the importance of their meaningful and comprehensive engagement in the formulation and implementation of drug policies. The findings outlined in this document reflect the perspectives of civil society that progress has been made in certain areas, such as relating to challenges on the expansion and diversification of drugs and drug markets, and the decline in HIV and HCV transmission in some countries. However, the majority of respondents indicated regression or stalling in efforts to address challenges related to the increase in drug-related deaths and unmet need for drug treatment and health services, the non-compliance with international drug control conventions and human rights obligations, and the low value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money laundering arising from drug trafficking. For all but one challenge, more respondents saw regression or stalling rather than progression. Where more respondents saw progression, it was not a significant majority, at just 1% above those that saw stalling or regression. Overall, civil society can agree that there is much work ahead in sufficiently addressing challenges associated with drugs and drug policy in the period until 2029 and beyond.

Going forward, the report identifies key issues that need to be addressed to ensure that drug-related matters are adequately tackled. These include:

1. The need for capacity building and comprehensive public health training;
2. Investment in evidence-based prevention interventions;
3. Improved access to harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services;
4. Addressing root causes of drug-related issues, such as poverty, structural violence, racism, inequality, and lack of access to education and healthcare;
5. A shift towards health-focused policies rather than punitive measures;
6. Enhanced collaboration across UN bodies to enhance coherence between the international drug control regime and international human rights obligations, placing equality and non-discrimination at the center of drug policymaking.

The report provides valuable insights into the challenges, progress, and future directions for addressing drug-related issues, emphasizing the crucial role of civil society organizations in shaping effective and inclusive drug policies.

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