



IN BRIEF



WOMEN AND DRUG POLICY

Photo: A drug treatment centre in Myanmar. ©UNODC.

What's the Issue?

There is growing consensus among policy makers that drug-related policies impact women and men differently.

Around the world, women face higher stigmas associated with drug use than men. The stigma associated with women's drug use is typically compounded by existing gender inequalities and stereotypes. For example, women drug users experience higher rates of physical and sexual violence than women who do not use drugs.

In some countries, women drug users can lose custody of their children and be subjected to forced or coerced sterilization and abortion.

Women who inject drugs are at a higher risk of contracting HIV, often due to their limited access to demand reduction services, such as sterile injecting equipment, as well as health-care services, including for sexual and reproductive health.

In many countries, a lack of gender-sensitive drug treatment opportunities is a barrier to women's access. Without effective drug treatment, women drug users are less likely to reintegrate into society.

Women who are imprisoned for drug-related offenses may experience specific challenges. They often face disproportionate criminal penalties compared to their offense and can be subjected to sexual violence by law enforcement personnel.

Our Solutions

UN Women is committed to improving the understanding of the impact of drug policies on women by working with Governments and other stakeholders to implement the outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, entitled "Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem," adopted in 2016.

DEMAND REDUCTION: UN Women supports Governments and other stakeholders in their efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, including barriers to women's access to drug-related services.

LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING: UN Women works with Governments and civil society organizations to promote women's leadership. This includes efforts for their full and effective participation in developing drug-related policies, including prevention, responses and interventions.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING: UN Women supports national gender equality mechanisms to strengthen their capacities to mainstream gender perspectives in the development and implementation of national policies. The Entity also supports gender mainstreaming in the work of the UN system.

GENDER STATISTICS: UN Women provides technical and financial support to Governments to enhance their production, analysis and use of gender statistics.



How We Make a Difference:

Recent UN Women successes from around the world include:

TANZANIA: UN Women has worked with Mukikute, a national network of organizations of women living with HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis, on improving access to harm-reduction services to diminish the impacts of drug use. The work also focused on improving dialogue at the district level to include gender perspectives and the priorities of women drug users in HIV and AIDS District Plans, strategies and budgets.

INDONESIA: UN Women contributed to the review of the national AIDS strategy by organizing a Gender Forum with diverse groups, including women living with HIV and women injecting drug-users. The Forum focused on gender equality and increasing women's participation in decision-making on HIV. The Government's national strategy makes gender equality a key principle of all HIV programming and budgeting, and specifies scaled-up outreach to underserved groups of women, including women who inject drugs.

EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA: UN Women supports greater coordination and strategic planning among women living with HIV and harm-reduction organizations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. UN Women has also helped representatives of national networks of women living with HIV, including women who use drugs from 11 countries, to establish a Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS and to define its overall mission and three-year work plan. The network also developed a regional campaign to end gender-based violence that women living with HIV and women drug users face.

GLOBALLY: As part of its UN system coordination mandate, and as the Secretariat of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), UN Women works with United Nations entities, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), to support implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and gender-related recommendations emanating from UN General Assembly special sessions, conferences and summits, including the recommendations contained in the outcome of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- 1 in 3 drug users worldwide are women, yet women only account for 1 in 5 drug users that are in treatment.
- Women drug users experience sexual and physical violence at a higher rate than women who do not use drugs. It is estimated that 40 to 70 per cent of women drug users experience violence.
- Many women who use illicit drugs have identified relationship problems as a cause for their drug use such as intimate partner violence, victimization and injury, as well as issues related to parenting and exposure to childhood and adult trauma.
- In some regions, the proportion of women that have come in formal contact with the criminal justice system, specifically for drug-related offenses, is above the global average of 12 per cent. This includes 19 per cent in Oceania and 13 per cent in East and South-East Asia.

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*The 2016 National Women's Forum on HIV and AIDS is one of the many activities promoted by a UN Women-supported national network of women living with HIV in Ukraine.
Photo: Alina Yaroslavskaya.*