



Contribution to EU Drugs Strategy Action Plan

Give your feedback on: Tackling drug trafficking – EU drugs strategy and EU action plan

Overemphasis on supply reduction and impact on young people:

The upcoming EU Drug Strategy represents a crucial opportunity to address evolving drug use and markets in Europe. However, concernedly, this call for evidence implies that the focus of the new strategy will primarily be on supply reduction efforts. It is evidenced that such efforts have contributed to human rights violations that disproportionately affect the most marginalized communities, including young people.

The OHCHR 2023 Report on Drug Policy and Human Rights highlights the links between punitive supply reduction efforts and human rights violations faced by young men from poor and marginalised communities. The report emphasises that supply-focused enforcement disproportionately sweeps up low-level actors: latest figures from UNODC show 61% of arrests are for possession, and most convictions for 'trafficking' involve only possession. Early criminalization undermines youth development, mental health, and inclusion.

The rising availability of nitazenes and synthetic cathinones, especially in Eastern Europe, shows how supply shortages of 'traditional' drugs fuel more potent and unpredictable substances, raising health risks.

These patterns are especially worrying for young people, who are experimenting with NPS more than many other demographic groups, and are therefore at heightened risk of overdose and health harms. Because these substances are often extremely potent, even very small doses can lead to life-threatening poisonings.

Therefore we recommend that comprehensive Action Plans are developed covering all pillars of the EU Drug Strategy, including demand reduction, harm reduction, and international cooperation. We also recommend ensuring equitable allocation of resources across all policy areas.

Health and Socio-Economic Factors

Further, young people in Europe are amongst those with the least access to health and harm reduction services, due to the impact of punitive drug laws, the absence of stigma free youth-friendly services. Socioeconomic factors such as social exclusion are linked to higher chances of drug use and related harms, which can also worsen disadvantages, for example by limiting young people's access to education or job opportunities.

Therefore we recommend that the new strategy includes expansion and funding for comprehensive harm reduction services, including youth tailored/led services that meet the intersecting needs of young PWUD. We also recommend that an Action Plan is developed for harm reduction, with measurable, need-based indicators that are decided in consultation with young people. Finally, we recommend that a full spectrum approach is adopted to address the socio economic disadvantages faced by young people



Young people's meaningful engagement in decision making in the EU

Civil society pushback across Europe systematically excludes young people from advocating for their rights and participating in both harm reduction service delivery and policy development. In Kyrgyzstan, stakeholders note few youth are involved in service design, with little funding or motivation for participation. This reflects wider European trends where punitive policies and foreign agent laws deter youth participation.

Any process for development of new strategies such as this should include consultation with young people, particularly those directly impacted by punitive drug policies. The European Union's establishment of the President's Youth Advisory Board launched in July presents a critical opportunity to center youth voices in drug policy discussions. We call for an expansion of the Youth Advisory Board structure for other bodies, particularly within the EUDA, while ensuring that membership is diverse and inclusive of all young people. The EU's youth advisory structures must ensure that those who bear the greatest consequences of current policies have authentic decision-making power in shaping alternatives.