

TEN STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL ACTION ON DRUGS

The 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document (“Outcome Document”) provides a comprehensive menu for a broad, balanced and effective drug policy, based on public health, human rights and the three international drug conventions.

Member states and civil society organizations from all over the world should use the years leading up to the next milestone in 2019 for one thing: **action implementation at the national and local level**. We don’t need more words, documents, or commissions. We need action.

The Drug Policy Futures network appeals to all Member States to prioritize the following ten areas when addressing the Outcome Document, consistent with the social and political context of their respective nations. These steps, if well-implemented, will greatly improve national drug policies and yield to a substantial reduction in drug-related harms.

1. Reduce drug use prevalence

The overarching goal of every Member State’s drug policy should be reducing the prevalence of drug use. This will lead to lower numbers of problematic drug users, as well as a reduction in numbers of adolescents who are exposed to drug use in their peer group. Member States should monitor drug use prevalence regularly and adjust policies based on results to make prevention programmes more efficient.

2. Mobilize a million communities

Effective prevention efforts are even more effective when they are synergistic and implemented by local communities. Local initiatives should involve local authorities and public services, schools, police, parent groups, and other community-based organisations. Also, the United Nations should invite local communities all over the world to join United Communities, a global initiative for local prevention. With appropriate action, that initiative could reach one million communities by 2019.

3. Prioritize early intervention and assistance to vulnerable groups

Schools and local communities should set up systems to assist vulnerable groups, particularly children. Identifying and helping youth who struggle with childhood trauma, family problems, abuse, school attendance, and other problems is important. At such an early stage, even simple interventions by teachers, health or social workers, and family and neighbours can make a great difference.

4. Offer treatment, rehabilitation, and harm-reduction alternatives

Based on the principle of non-discrimination, all people with drug use disorders must have access to a wide range of services. Treatment, harm reduction, and rehabilitation should be integrated. Such services must also aim at maximizing the affected individuals’ possibility for recovery, and include family and friends. Empowering those struggling with drug abuse through connecting the individuals’ own resources with health care providers is essential to limiting mortality and morbidity while preserving dignity and self-respect.

5. Organize local support systems after specialized treatment

Failing to reintegrate those who have completed specialized treatment back into their communities wastes resources and causes human suffering. Treatment programmes must plan for reintegration with society afterwards; a place to live, meaningful work, a social network, and meaningful leisure activities. Treatment centres and local municipalities must coordinate reintegration from the very start of the treatment programme.

6. Programmes for better parenting

Parents can make a big difference as agents for prevention. They have a great influence on the behaviour of and the future of their own children, as well as other children in their community. All countries should therefore develop and implement culturally sensitive support programmes for better parenting. Such programmes can serve to build self-confidence for parents, build networks, and disseminate knowledge about the impact of drugs on young people's development and their peer group.

7. Support self-help groups for drug users and those in recovery

Across the globe, self-help groups for drug users (current users as well as those in recovery), have proven successful as a tool for escaping from drug abuse and reintegration into society after treatment. Such groups are therefore a very useful complement to more formal treatment services, and should be integrated into the totality of treatment and recovery services in all countries.

8. Support alternative development

A development approach aimed at improving people's quality of life is needed to mobilize local communities where illicit drugs are produced. Governments in these countries should fund alternative development programmes in drug-producing areas. The most conflict-ridden countries in Latin America and Asia need support from the international community. Good governance is also a critical part of alternative development; if corruption is not controlled, drug-related crime cannot be controlled.

9. Develop and implement alternatives to incarceration

Several countries have already implemented an array of diversion programs to replace incarceration or fines as reaction to minor drug offences, including dissuasion commissions, youth contracts, drug courts, and rehabilitation programs for drug users. More countries should follow suit and experiences should be shared internationally, organized through UNODC.

10. Implement the principle of proportionality in sanctions

Sanctions for drug-related offences must be proportional to the crime committed. The international drug conventions do not demand incarceration for drug users. Rather, they encourage prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation as alternatives. These approaches focus on treating the substance abuse disorder underlying criminal activity. Additionally, militarization of law enforcement, capital punishment and other inhumane and disproportionate methods should be abolished as they are not in accordance with the spirit of UN conventions.

**This statement is supported by an alliance of networks
that include more than 300 NGOs from all over the world.**