**Human rights challenges in addressing the need of individuals who face multiple disadvantages and need recovery from drug dependence**

RUN is an initiative established back in 2013 and since then, RUN has grown to a collaboration of organizations supporting people in recovery as well as individuals who are going through the recovery journey, with a membership of 69 organisation across the world.

RUN is pleased to provide input to the OHCHR regarding the global human rights challenges. Regrettably, the current discourse on human rights within drug policy has become a divisive international discussion. On one side, there is an emphasis on the "Right to use drugs," while on the other, the focus is on the "Human Right to a drug-free life." This polarization is worrisome as it overlooks the experiences of individuals who are vulnerable and face multiple disadvantages. It is crucial to acknowledge lived realities of individuals who live in our communities and ensure their recovery from drug dependency is prioritized.

Drug dependence is a complex health condition that requires comprehensive and balanced approaches in policy-making. It is imperative to aim for recovery-oriented drug policies that prioritize the well-being of individuals struggling with drug dependency. Similar to any other chronic health condition, individuals affected by drug dependence deserve nothing less than appropriate support and care.

The right to health necessitates evidence-based prevention, treatment, **care**[[1]](#endnote-1)**,** rehabilitation, recovery, and social integration interventions. All individuals should be treated equally, without any form of discrimination. It is crucial for the law to explicitly prohibit all forms of discrimination and ensure effective protection against discriminatory practices based on various grounds, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, or any other status, in practice as well as in writing.

However, stigma surrounding addiction and recovery presents a significant obstacle for individuals in realizing their right to health and access to treatment. Stigma disproportionately affects women and girls, making them even more vulnerable to drug dependence, exploitation, and involvement in drug trafficking. Urgent measures are needed to address this issue and dismantle the barriers created by societal stigmatization.

Furthermore, it is evident that the current drug control system is failing to adequately protect children. The prevalence of drug use among teenagers is reaching alarming levels, with the majority engaging in occasional or recreational drug use. Sadly, most countries lack the necessary treatment and recovery services specifically tailored for children and women. Additionally, drug-using children often face criminalization, burdening them for the rest of their lives.

To create a more just and effective drug policy, we must create comprehensive and inclusive approaches that prioritize prevention, treatment, recovery, and social-integration. Such policies should address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of different populations, particularly women, and children. By reforming current drug policies and implementing evidence-based strategies, we can ensure the protection of human rights and promote healthier and more inclusive societies. RUN wants to draw your attention to the following key challenges:

1. Prioritizing recovery: Recovery should be the focus and aim of treatment and the patient’s health should be the central concern.  This may result in many more people getting better and fewer people remaining in expensive, clinical treatments in the longer term. The challenge remains to ensure a continuum of care from detox via treatment to aftercare and stress the long term aspect of recovery and a shift from an acute care model to the one of sustained recovery management
2. Lack of knowledge and capacity: The challenge is to enhance the knowledge and capacity of policymakers and relevant national authorities regarding the various aspects of the world drug problem, especially recovery and reintegration of people with severe dependence problems. This includes ensuring that they have the necessary understanding and skills to develop national drug policies that align with human rights principles, protect vulnerable members of society, and promote the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.
3. Non-discriminatory access to health, social and recovery services: The challenge lies in ensuring equitable access to health, recovery services, jobs and housing for drug dependent individuals and those in recovery. This means providing services that are of equal quality and availability to all individuals, including marginalized groups such as youth, women, children, and vulnerable members of society.
4. Supervision and quality of treatment and rehabilitation facilities: The challenge is to establish effective supervision of drug treatment and rehabilitation facilities by competent domestic authorities. This includes ensuring the provision of high-quality services and preventing any potential acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Compliance with domestic legislation and applicable international law is also crucial.
5. Addressing vulnerability of women and girls: The challenge involves identifying and addressing the protective and risk factors that make women and girls vulnerable to exploitation and participation in drug trafficking. Efforts should focus on preventing their involvement in drug-related crime through targeted interventions, support systems, and recovery programs that are gender sensitive.
6. Protecting underage drug offenders and affected children: The challenge is to establish effective coordination among the justice, education, law enforcement, and social services sectors with recovery and rehabilitation services. This coordination should ensure that the specific needs of underage drug dependent individuals and children affected by drug-related crime are appropriately considered. Providing them with necessary drug treatment and related recovery support services, and considering their mental and physical well-being pose significant challenges.
7. Children whose parents use drugs: Many children grow up in an environment where the consequences of close relatives’ drug abuse are constantly present. The risk of developing an addiction is exacerbated by the risk factors associated with parent substance use and dependency. [[2]](#endnote-2) Existing drug policies and harm reduction measures often overlook the support required for these children and their families. The challenge lies in creating and implementing comprehensive interventions targeting families, mothers using substances, and considering parental responsibilities and children's needs are necessary to address this issue effectively. Prioritizing the well-being of these children is crucial for breaking the cycle of addiction and promoting healthier outcomes.
8. Gender perspective and involvement of women: The challenge is to mainstream a gender perspective into drug policies and ensure the meaningful involvement of women at all stages of policy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This requires developing gender-sensitive and age-appropriate measures that consider the specific needs and circumstances faced by women and girls needing threatment, rehabilitation and recovery services. Implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women poses further challenges.
9. Inclusion of human rights and welfare in reporting: The challenge is to voluntarily include information on the promotion of human rights, as well as the health, safety, and welfare of individuals, communities, and society, in reporting to the CND. This requires capturing recent developments, best practices, and challenges related to the domestic implementation of international drug control conventions.
10. Stigma: It is imperative to prioritize efforts in reducing the pervasive stigma and discrimination surrounding drug dependency. This includes addressing stigmatizing attitudes and behaviors among society, healthcare providers, media, communities, and institutions. Raising awareness about the realities of drug dependence and implementing structural changes are essential to combating this deep-rooted issue. By showcasing stories and making recovery visible we can create an environment conducive to recovery, well-being, and the realization of the full human rights of individuals battling drug dependency.

Conclusion

To ensure a human rights-based drug policy, it is imperative to prioritize the implementation of policy measures that encompass evidence-driven prevention, enhanced access to treatment, and the promotion of pathways to recovery. These efforts should be guided by principles of non-discrimination, evidence-based approaches, trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity, and tailored services based on age and gender considerations. Recognizing the diverse needs of individuals, it is crucial to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach and instead foster a system that provides personalized and accessible services.

To uphold human rights in drug policy, it is necessary to provide increased funding and support for prevention strategies, treatment, recovery and aftercare services that are person-centered and aligned with the individual's unique requirements. Emphasizing social integration and community engagement, recovery-oriented services must aim to address social exclusion and marginalization, allowing individuals to reclaim their roles within society.

To achieve a comprehensive and rights-based approach, it is essential to integrate recovery services into the wider fabric of society rather than isolating them. This requires the collaboration and coordination of various stakeholders, including policymakers, service providers, and communities, to create an inclusive and supportive environment for individuals on their recovery journey by addressing local needs.[[3]](#endnote-3)

By prioritizing evidence, human rights, and recovery, we can advance drug policies that offer humane alternatives to incarceration, promote sustainable rehabilitation, reintegration services, and long-term recovery outcomes. It is crucial to seize this opportunity to shape policy frameworks that are both effective and grounded in the principles of human rights, while avoiding any endorsement of the legalization of illicit substances.

Yours sincerely,

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RUN- Recovered Users Network

1. UNODC guidance note for UNODC staff- Promotion and protection of Human rights-2011 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. WDR 2018: Booklet 4 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Inclusive cities: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/16066359.2018.1520223 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)