

# EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025

## INTRODUCTION – Aim, Foundations and Approach

1. The EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Strategy’) provides the overarching political framework and priorities for the European Union’s drugs policy for the period 2021-2025. The framework, aim and objectives of this Strategy will serve as the basis for the EU Action Plan on Drugs from 2021 to 2025
2. The Strategy aims to protect and improve the well-being of society and of the individual, to protect and promote public health, to offer a high level of security and well-being for the general public and to increase health literacy. The Strategy takes an evidence-based, integrated, balanced and multidisciplinary approach to the drugs phenomenon at national, EU and international level. It also incorporates a gender equality and health equity perspective. 3
3. By 2025, the priorities and actions in the field of illicit drugs, coordinated through the Strategy, should have had an overall impact on key aspects of the EU drug situation. The coherent, effective and efficient implementation of measures should both ensure a high level of human health protection, social stability and security, and contribute to awareness raising. Any potential unintended negative consequences associated with the implementation of the actions should be minimised, and human rights and sustainable development promoted.
4. 4. The Strategy is based first and foremost on the fundamental principles of EU law and, in every regard, upholds the founding values of the EU: respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, solidarity, the rule of law and human rights. The Strategy is also based on international law, the relevant United Nations (UN) Conventions<sup>1</sup> which provide the international legal framework for addressing the illicit drugs phenomenon, and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The Strategy takes into account policy developments at multilateral level, and contributes to the acceleration of their implementation. First and foremost, the EU strongly supports the outcome document of the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the world drug problem entitled ‘Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem’, which is the most comprehensive policy document in that respect. It also supports the 2019 Ministerial declaration on strengthening our actions at the national, regional and international levels to accelerate the implementation of our joint commitments to address and counter the world drug problem, the applicable goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN system common position supporting the implementation of the international drug control policy through effective inter-agency collaboration, and the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy. The Strategy has been drafted on the basis of the principles set out in the Lisbon Treaty and taking into account the respective competences of the EU and individual Member States. Due regard is given to subsidiarity and proportionality, as the Strategy intends to add value to national strategies while respecting national needs and legislation. The Strategy should be implemented in accordance with these principles and competencies. Furthermore, the Strategy fully respects the European Convention on Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and is guided by the human right to health, which should apply to everyone regardless of, for example, age or gender. All women, men and children, including people with drug-use disorders, have the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including freedom from violence.

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5. Drug policy is of a cross-cutting nature. It is also a national and international issue that needs to be addressed in a global context, by a variety of stakeholders. The Strategy provides a common and evidence-based framework for responding in a consistent manner to the drugs phenomenon, within and outside the EU. It supports and complements national policies, provides a framework for coordinated and joint action and forms the basis and political framework for EU external cooperation in this field. It thereby ensures that resources invested in this area are used effectively and efficiently.
6. The Strategy builds on valuable input from the Commission Communication EU Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs 2021-2025<sup>2</sup>, on the lessons learned from the implementation of previous EU drugs strategies and action plans, including the findings from external evaluation<sup>3</sup> and builds upon the EU's achievements in this area. It also takes into account the EU Security Union Strategy for 2020-2025, the Health and Food Safety strategic plan for 2016-2020, and other relevant policy developments and actions at EU and international level in the field of drugs. In addition, the Strategy is informed by an ongoing assessment of the current drug situation, in particular as provided by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addictions (EMCDDA) and Europol. Finally, it takes into account information provided by civil society.
7. The Strategy addresses existing and evolving challenges, and takes on board evolving evidencebased approaches. Furthermore, given the dynamic and complex nature of the drugs phenomenon, which once again became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Strategy adopts a future-oriented approach in order to anticipate changes. Strategic foresight has been integrated with the intention to increase EU preparedness and ensure an efficient response to future challenges.
8. The Strategy is structured around three policy areas that will all contribute to achieving its aim: (I.) Drug supply reduction: Enhancing Security, (II.) Drug demand reduction: prevention, treatment and care services, and (III.) Addressing drug-related harm; and three cross-cutting themes in support of the policy areas: (IV.) International cooperation, (V.) Research, innovation and foresight; and (VI.) Coordination, governance and implementation. Altogether, the Strategy encompasses 11 strategic priorities.

### **Strategic priority 6: Ensure access to and strengthen treatment and care services Priority areas to address:**

- 6.1. Ensure voluntary access to treatment and care services that work in close coordination and collaboration with other health and social support services.
- 6.2. Promote peer work.
- 6.3. Identify and remedy the barriers to accessing treatment and ensure and, where needed, extend coverage of treatment and care services based on individual needs.
- 6.4. Reduce stigma.
- 6.5. Widely implement treatment and care addressing the specific needs of women.

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6.6.

Implement models of care that are appropriate for groups with special care needs. 6.7. Provide and, where needed, improve access to, availability and appropriate use of substances for medical and scientific purposes.

### **A special focus on Women:**

6.5. Widely implement treatment and care addressing the specific needs of women.

Measures need to be taken to better identify and address the barriers that women face in engaging with and pursuing counselling, treatment and rehabilitation services. These barriers include domestic violence, trauma, stigma, physical and mental health issues, pregnancy and childcare issues, all of which may be aggravated by demographic, socioeconomic, situational and personal factors. Effective service delivery should be sensitive to the specific needs and life experiences of women with drug-use problems and should recognize that patterns of drug use and problems may differ from those experienced by men. Women-only service options should be developed, as should services that take care of accompanying children and that offer other forms of specialist care, such as close working partnerships with care providers and with services working with vulnerable women and victims of domestic violence.