



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 8 December 2023
(OR. en)

16573/23

CORDROGUE 123
SAN 732
RELEX 1449

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	WK 11214/2023 REV 2
Subject:	EU Statement on the occasion of the second intersessional meeting of the 66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (Vienna, 4-6 December 2023) - Challenge: "The rate of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remains high"

Delegations will find in the Annex the above-mentioned statement as expressed on behalf of the EU and its Member States at the second intersessional meeting of the 66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) (Vienna, 4-6 December 2023).



European Union

Statement at the Thematic session 2

Second Intersessional Meeting
66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Vienna, 4-6 December 2023

Challenge: “The rate of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remains high”

Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The **persistently high prevalence of blood-borne infections amongst people who use drugs** is a pressing concern. According to the World Drug Report 2023, approximately 13.2 million individuals injected drugs in the world in 2021. Injecting drugs entails a substantially elevated risk of HIV and hepatitis C transmission. Globally, about 1.6 million individuals who inject drugs live with HIV. Unsafe drug injection also contributes significantly to the hepatitis C epidemic, accounting for 61% of newly diagnosed acute HCV infections in the EU.

The periodic updates on our progress towards achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** of the 2030 **Agenda** consistently highlight that there is one transmission mode where we stay far behind the goals that we have set ourselves, namely, HIV and viral hepatitis transmission due to unsafe drug use.

Prevention, easy test access, early diagnosis and access to evidence-based treatment for people with HIV and viral hepatitis must be stepped up; otherwise, drug-related challenges will leave more people behind. We need to put a special effort in ensuring pharmaceutical treatment and in providing risk and harm-reduction measures with enough scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness in decreasing the transmission of infectious diseases, such as the implementation of needle and syringe programmes to prevent blood-borne infections among people who inject drugs taking into account national needs and national legislation.

We should pay special attention to **people in vulnerable situations**, such as people in prison and compulsory care settings and after release, people displaced by humanitarian emergencies, women and men who engage in sex work and prostitution, people experiencing homelessness, those suffering from a mental disorder and any others who face barriers in accessing services. Furthermore, women face unique challenges, including limited access to treatment for women who use drugs and a higher likelihood of being introduced to drug use by male partners. This can increase their risk of infection, as well as risk for developing drug use disorder. To counter these serious challenges, we must adopt a gender mainstreaming approach across our efforts and work towards reducing the stigma surrounding HIV and viral hepatitis.

Allow me **to conclude** by saying that evidence-based information is available on interventions that are cost-effective and respectful of human rights to decrease the transmission of infectious diseases associated to drug use. To achieve favourable outcomes, we all need to provide a comprehensive package of information and services for people who use drugs in order to decrease the spread of infectious diseases associated to drug use.

Thank you.
