

# International Drug Users Day

## 1 November 2021

### #PowerOfPeers



For years we have heard lip service from governments and policymakers about how community is a critical actor in the global health space. Yet while verbal commitments continue to be recycled, people who use drugs at the community level continue to experience criminalisation, exclusion and injustice. The COVID-19 pandemic has [provided us with more proof](#) that in times of crisis, it is the community who responds first by extending solidarity and supporting each other through challenging times. Despite this, the community of people who use drugs around the world continue to be under-funded, under-invested and excluded.

The world has learned harm reduction saves lives, but saving lives has become more political than ever. Funding for harm reduction services remains extremely low and very little of this funding goes to people who use drugs and their organisations. Around the world, drug policies are still very much driven by criminalisation and punitive laws and practices. Almost all countries have laws that criminalise people who use drugs. We have not seen major reforms in the current environment, especially ones that include people who use drugs in the development and implementation of new policies. Even as more countries begin to embrace decriminalisation, our recent report [Drug Decriminalisation: Progress or Political Red Herring?](#), highlights how it is misleading to call these policies progress when they still contain sanctions.

The War on Drugs has been one of the greatest policy failures of our time, with countless lives lost to incarceration, preventable deaths and disease and pushed to the very margins of society. And yet thanks to peer-led advocacy, we are not without hope. For the first time in history the Global AIDS Strategy includes social enabler targets. These '10-10-10' targets on gender-based inequalities and violence, restrictive legal and policy environment and stigma and discrimination have been signed off by Member States. They include a historic target on decriminalisation of drug use and possession that has further been adopted within [the 2021 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS](#).

The world will not achieve these global targets without people who use drugs at the center, because it is the lived experiences of activists fighting for the rights of people who use drugs that have brought us here. Despite continuous tensions, frustrations and pessimism, our community has grown with collective pride, hope and resilience. We remain united and will continue rallying around a common goal of ending the War on Drugs with full decriminalisation with no sanctions.

Today, on International Drug Users Day, we celebrate our history and affirm our rights. We demand that the community of people who use drugs are fully resourced and funded and provided with the space to participate in decision-making process and that War on Drugs must be ended with full decriminalisation of drugs with no sanctions.

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International Network of People *who* Use Drugs

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