

Intersessional meeting including Thematic Discussions on the Implementation of all International Drug Policy Commitments, following up to the Ministerial Declaration of 2019

Prohibitive and punitive drug policies pose more harm than good

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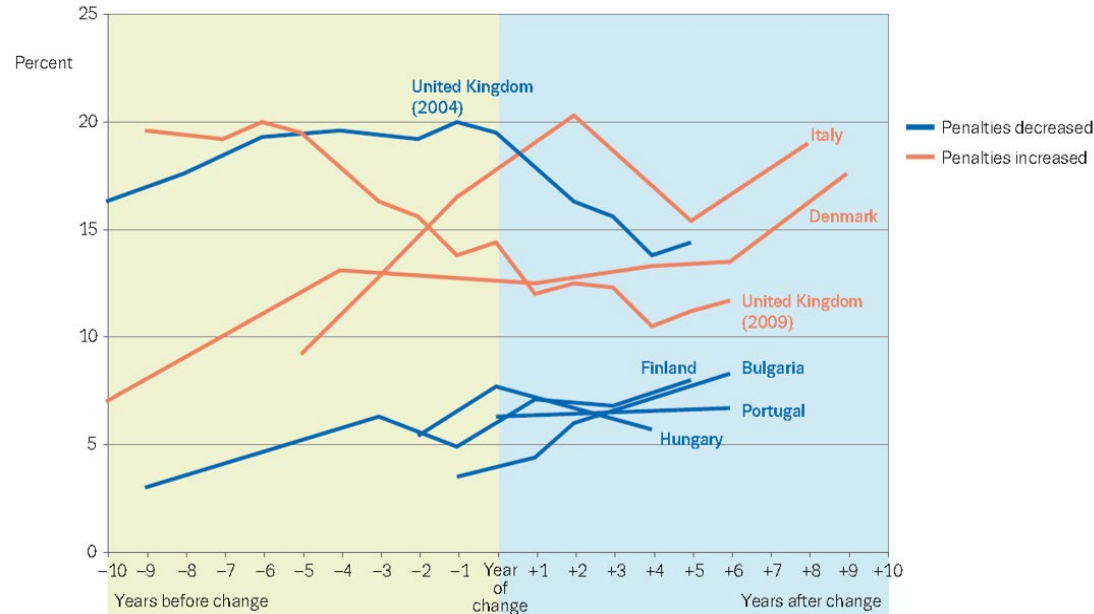


21 September 2022, Vienna

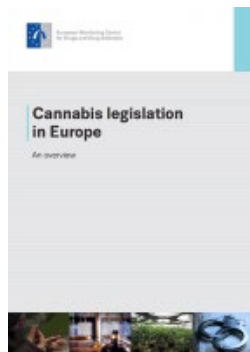


Decriminalisation does not lead to increase in use

Cannabis use before and after changes in legislation in selected countries: use in previous 12 months among young adults (age 15–34)



EMCDDA (2018). Cannabis legislation in Europe, p.22.



Panel B. Cannabis use cumulative starting probabilities

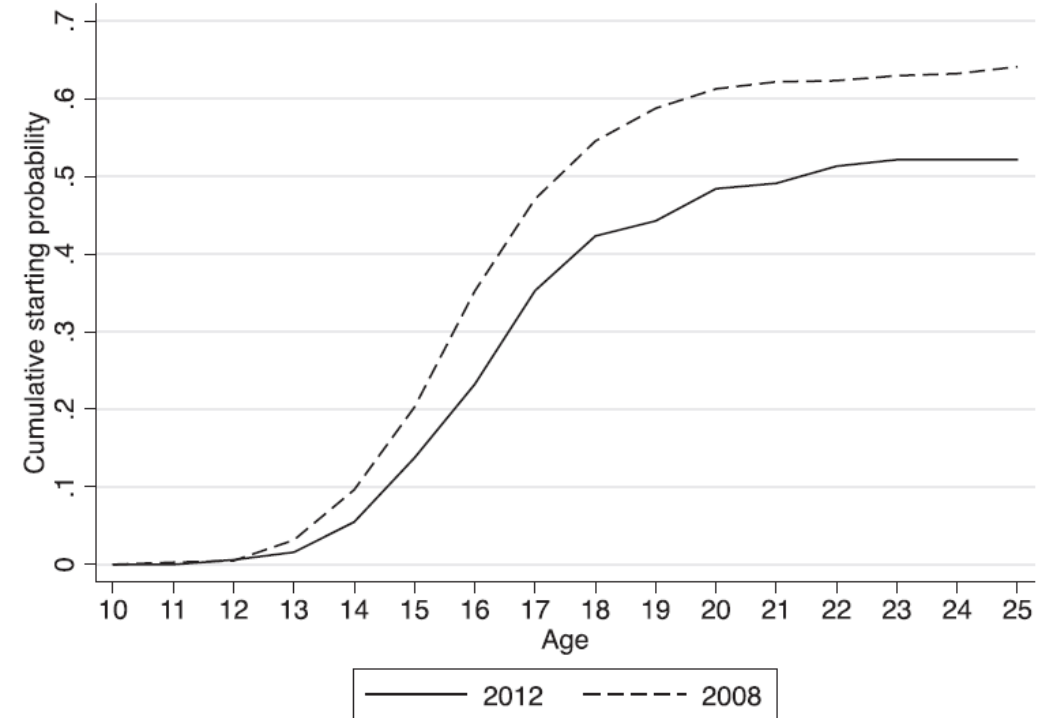


Fig. 2. Cannabis use starting rates and cumulative starting probabilities by age.



Research paper

Cannabis decriminalization and the age of onset of cannabis use[☆]

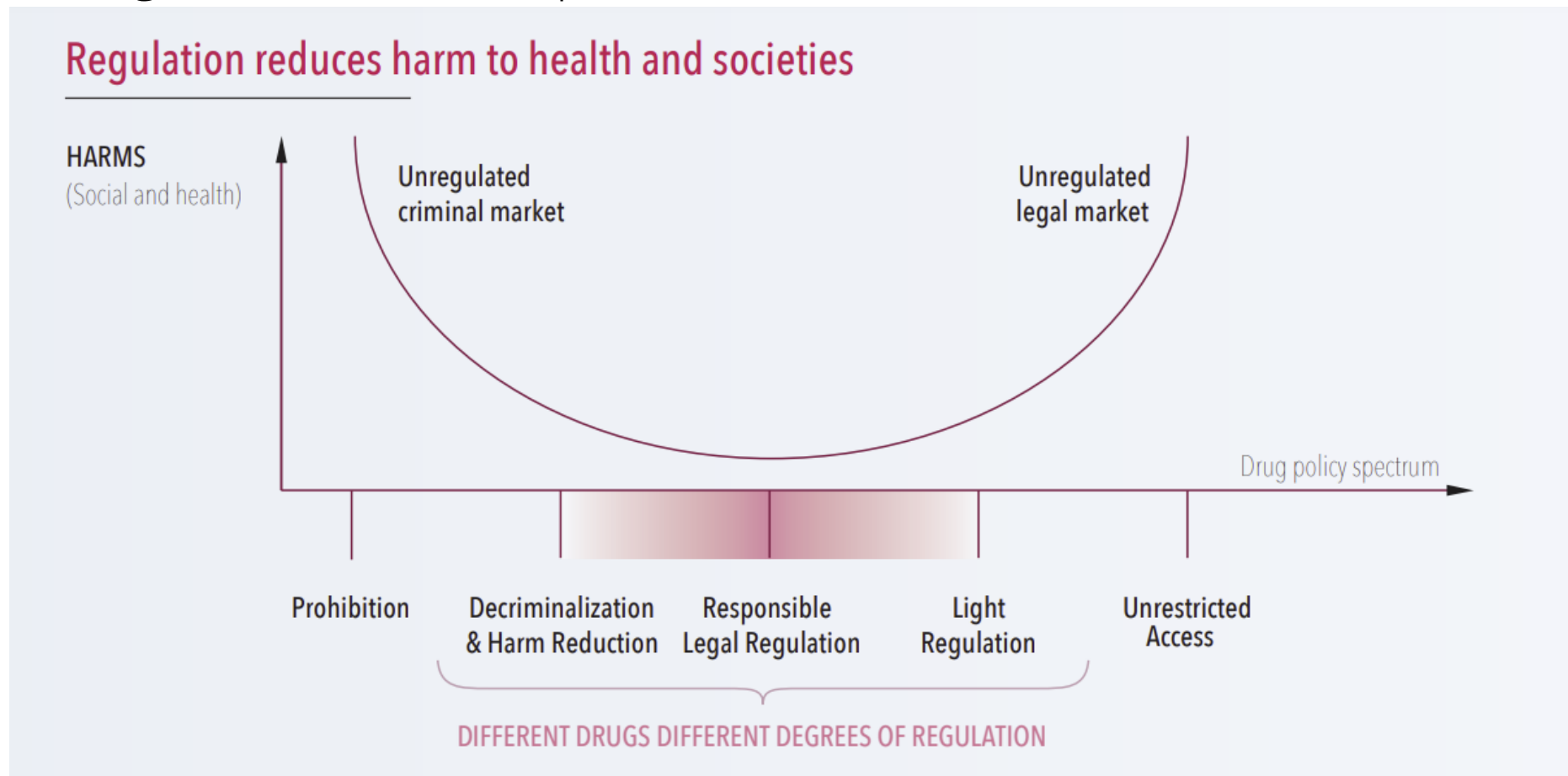
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U-curve of drug regulation

U-shaped relationship between substance use-related harms/well-being and the level of prohibition





Why is the strict prohibition harmful?

- Increases risk behaviours and harms of drug use
- Increases negative consequences of drug use (incl. infectious diseases, overdoses)
- Stigma and discrimination
- Limited access to medications and (health, social) services
- Criminal market threatening justice and rule of law
- High social costs including law enforcement
- Overflowing prisons



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Public Health and International Drug Policy:

Report of the Johns Hopkins – *Lancet* Commission on Drug Policy and Health

Joanne Csete, Adeeba Kamarulzaman, Michel Kazatchkine, Frederick Altice, Marek Balicki, Julia Buxton, Javier Cepeda, Megan Comfort, Eric Goosby, João Goulão, Carl Hart, Richard Horton, Thomas Kerr, Alejandro Madrazo Lajous, Stephen Lewis, Natasha Martin, Daniel Mejía, David Mathiesson, Isidore Obot, Adeolu Ogunrombi, Susan Sherman, Jack Stone, Nandini Vallath, Peter Vickerman, Tomáš Záborský, and Chris Beyrer



The war on drugs is incompatible with the fight against HIV



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Despite a 25% reduction worldwide in the incidence of HIV between 2010 and 2017, a recent report from UNAIDS highlights the growing problem of HIV among people who inject drugs (PWID). Since the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem, which reaffirmed member states' commitment to addressing the public health consequences of drug use, there has been little improvement in the health outcomes of PWID. The incidence of HIV among PWID has risen from 1.2% in 2011 to 1.4% in 2017. PWID are also disproportionately affected by the burden of HIV, with about 12% infected with HIV. Although interventions exist that prevent HIV transmission in this key population, criminalisation of drug use, punitive drug policies, stigma, and marginalisation severely limit the implementation and uptake of services worldwide.

Portugal is one of the few countries to have pursued decriminalisation, and it stands as an important illustration of what can be achieved by shifting to a public health approach to drug use. In 2001, Portugal decriminalised drug possession for personal use, and drug use, which are now exclusively administrative violations. Drug trafficking is still prosecuted as a criminal offence. Despite predictions at the time of an increase in drug use and drug tourism by opponents of decriminalisation, the opposite happened with a decline in use of many drug categories. Resources redirected to provide treatment programmes for PWID and a shift to harm-reduction measures have reduced drug-related mortality and disease transmission. Before decriminalisation, Portugal had the highest rate of HIV among PWID in the EU, but between 1999 and 2003 there

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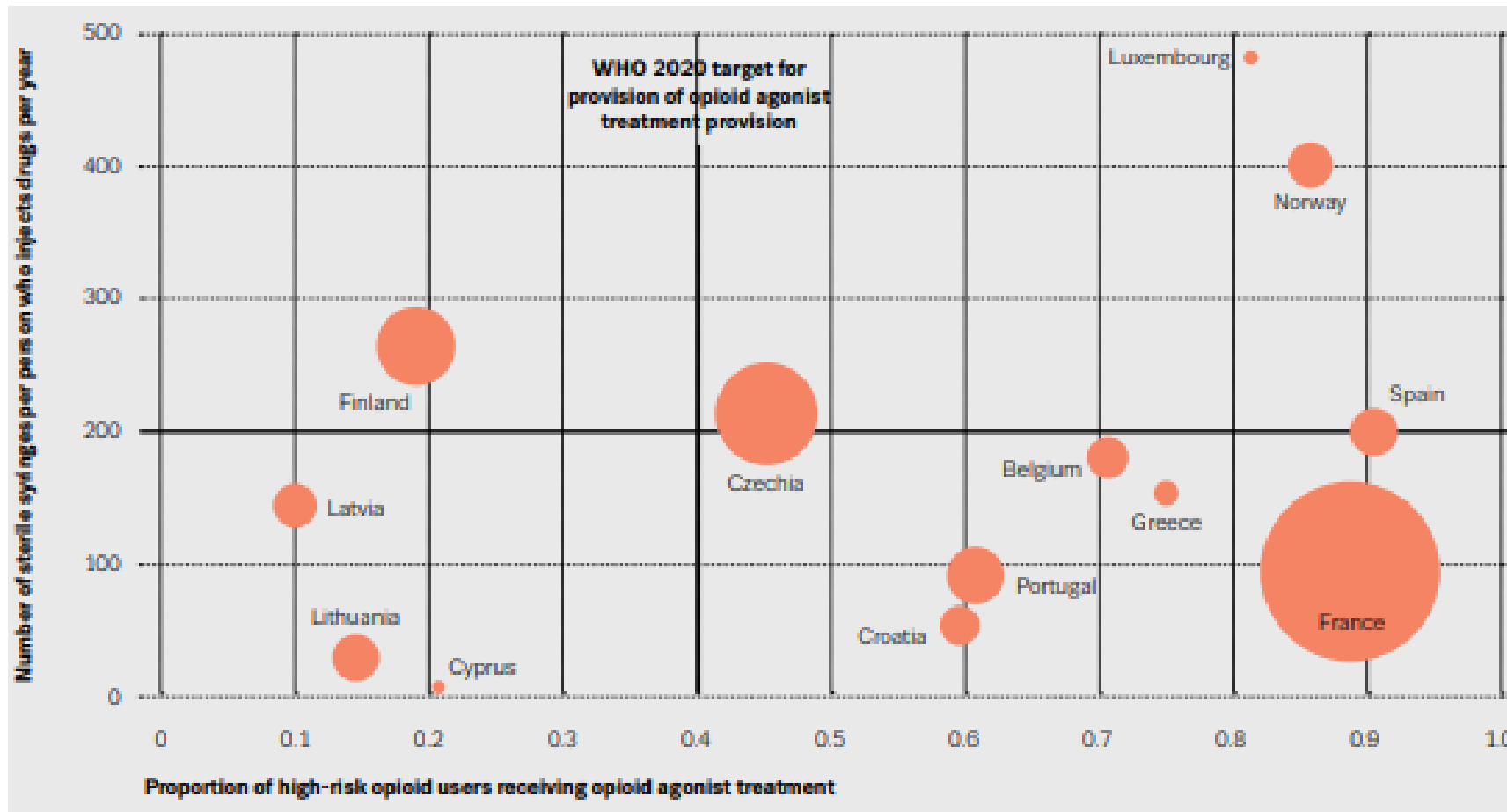
See **Articles** page e315

For the **UNAIDS report** see http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/JC2954_UNAIDS_drugs_report_2019_en.pdf

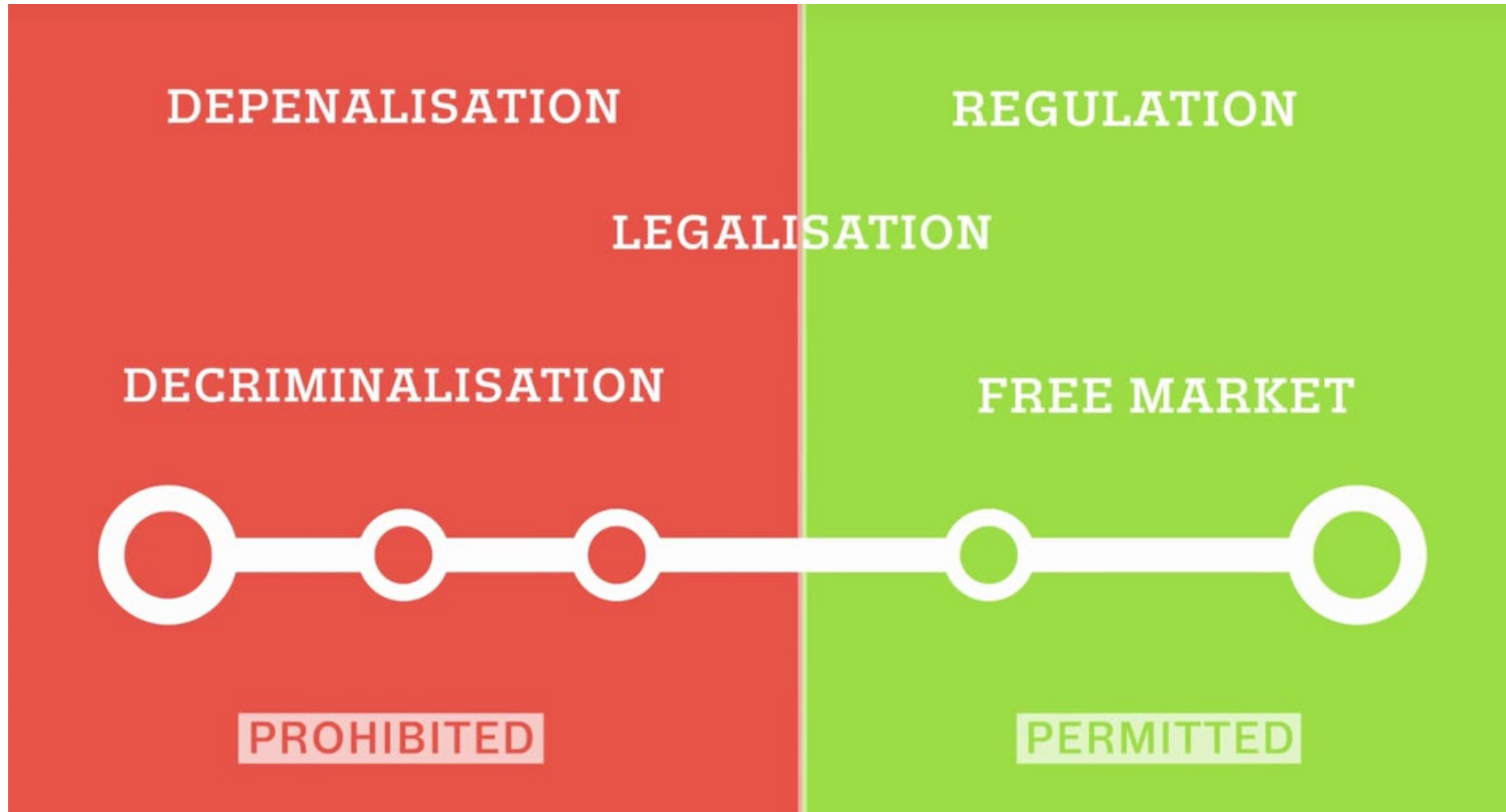
For more on the **outcome of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session** see <https://www.unodc.org/documents/postungass2016/outcome/V1603301-E.pdf>

For more on **HIV among people who inject drugs** see **Articles Lancet Glob Health** 2017; 5: e1208–20; **Articles Lancet Glob Health** 2017; 5: e1192–207; **Articles Lancet HIV** 2017; 4: e303–10; **Articles Lancet HIV** 2018; 5: e569–77;

Limited availability of harm reduction and treatment interventions in Europe



It is time to change





It is time to change

- Balanced approach between public health and criminal justice system
- Firm respect for human rights: human dignity, equality and non-discrimination
- Proportionality of control: different drugs pose different and various harms
- Proportionality of sentencing, refusal of death penalty
- Depenalisation and decriminalisation of minor offences (use, possession, cultivation for personal use...)
- Alternatives to imprisonment and coercive sanctions
- Implementation of effective harm reduction and treatment responses
- Gender and minority sensitive approach



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Thank you for your attention
Questions, comments?

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