

# **DRUG POLICY REFORM: THE NEED FOR CLIENT INSPIRED ADVOCACY**

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KASIA MALINOWSKA, MSW, DR. PH  
DIRECTOR, GLOBAL DRUG POLICY PROGRAM  
OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

 @OSFKASIA

*“Criminalization of drug use and possession for personal use and the widespread stigma, discrimination and violence faced by people who use drugs hampers access to health and harm reduction services.”*

**-UNAIDS, 2019**

# 2019 UNODC GLOBAL DRUG REPORT

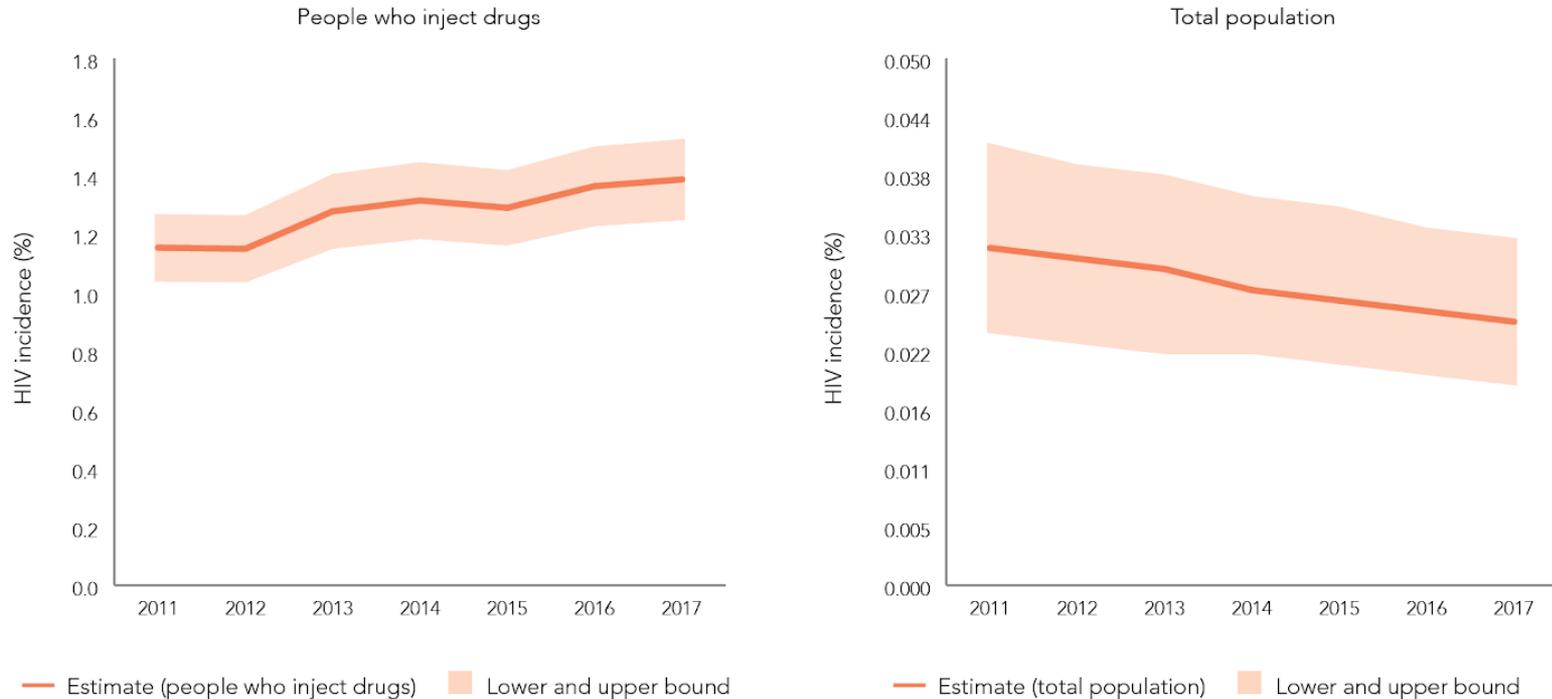
- Data reflecting the drug situation in 2017:
  - 271 million people reported using drugs during the previous year.
  - This reflects a 30% increase from 2009.
  - 11 million people used injection drugs.
  - 1.4 million people who used injection drugs live with HIV and 5.6 million live with hepatitis C.
  - 585,000 people died as a result of drug use.
  - Only one in seven people with drug use dependence receive treatment each year.

# HEALTH IMPACTS OF DRUG POLICY ENFORCEMENT

- Stigma and criminalization of drug use leads to:
  - Needle sharing
  - Risky, rushed injections
  - Unhygienic environment
- Stigma and criminalization of drug use contributes to:
  - Health and harm reduction barriers
  - Overdose deaths
  - Increased incidence of HIV and hepatitis

# HIV INFECTIONS AMONG PEOPLE WHO USE INJECTION DRUGS IS RISING

Comparison of incidence of HIV, people who inject drugs and total population (all ages), global, 2011–2017



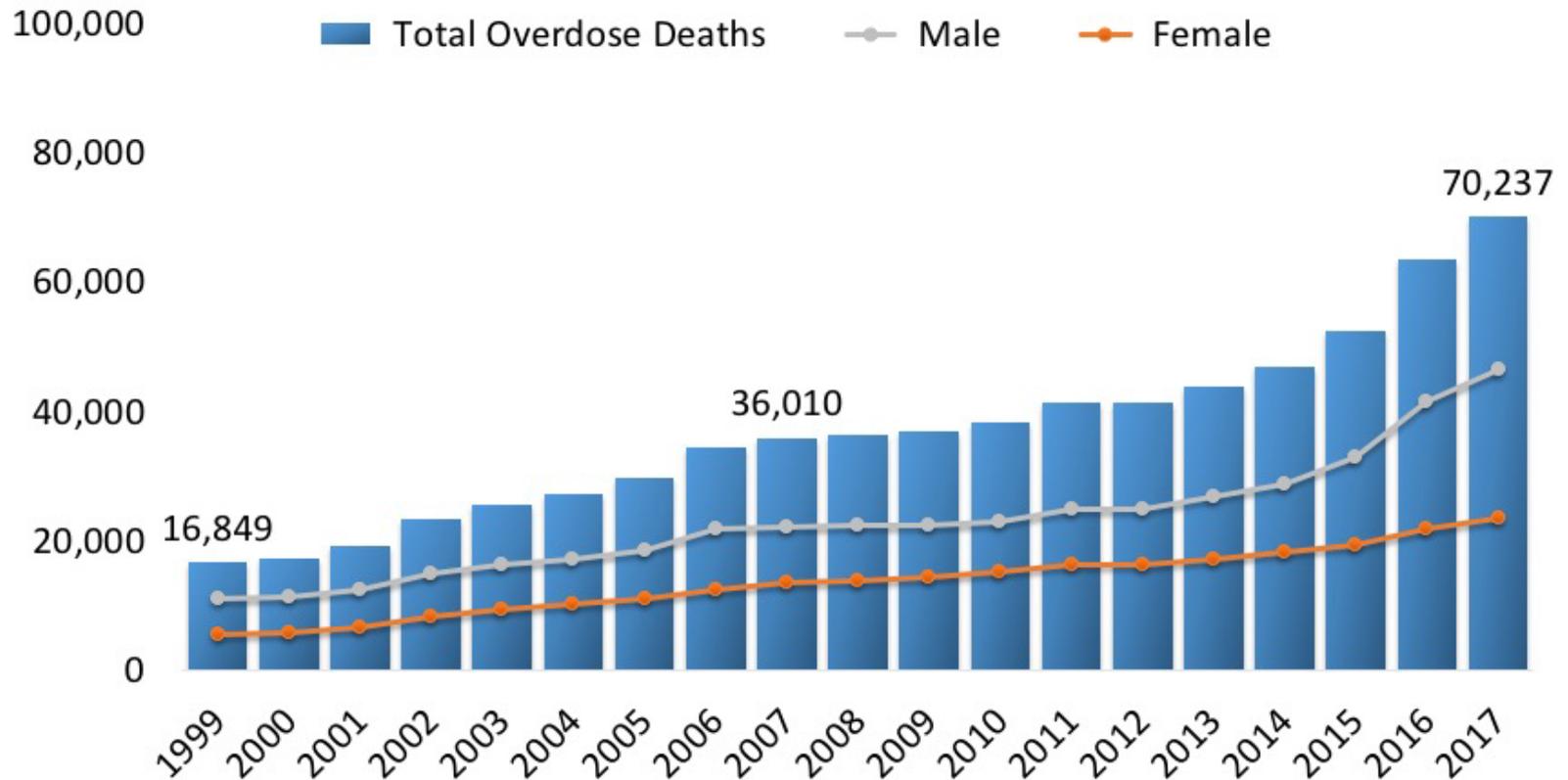
Note: The scales of the vertical axes in each graph are different. HIV incidence is considerably higher among people who inject drugs compared to the general population. Plausibility bounds for incidence among people who inject drugs are adopted from the new infections' calculated bounds rather than directly estimated.

Source: UNAIDS 2018 estimates.

Source: UNAIDS (2019): *Positive movement: safety, trust and services for people who inject drugs*

# U.S. NATIONAL DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS

Number Among All Ages, by Gender, 1999-2017



Source: National Institute on drug Abuse (2019):  
*Overdose Death Rates*

*“Punitive drug control policies have especially failed women and families. The current global drug control regime institutionalizes laws and practices that disempower women, and violates the principles and values fundamental to women’s equality.”* -UNGASS 2016 Women

## Declaration

*On the occasion of the UNGASS on the World Drug Problem, organizations working toward gender equality call on the international community to end punitive drug policies that threaten the rights, health, and wellbeing of women, children,*

# WOMEN AND DRUG POLICY

- Significantly higher mortality rates and increased likelihood of injection-related problems.
- Greater vulnerability to HIV, Hepatitis C and other blood borne infections
- Access to affordable, scientifically sound, gender-appropriate treatment is often unavailable.
- Women are reluctant to seek care for fear of negative judgment or hostile reaction from service staff.



# WOMEN AND DRUG POLICY

- In some countries, pregnant women who use drugs and seek treatment risk arrest and incarceration for the remainder of their pregnancy.
- Mothers who use drugs and seek treatment or other services risk losing their parental rights in some countries.
- Criminalization heightens the vulnerability of women who use drugs to trauma, rape and gender-based violence.



*Source: Drug Policy Alliance*

*“Less than 10% of people like me end up asking for treatment, or medical help of any kind, for their substance problems. Less than 10%. That’s not because we don’t want help...I could lose my job, my home, and custody of my child. I could be denied medical care. I could be treated like a criminal.”*

*Source: Huffpost (2017): The Stigma Of Addiction Is More Dangerous Than Drug Overdoses*

# THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACTS OF DRUG POLICY ENFORCEMENT

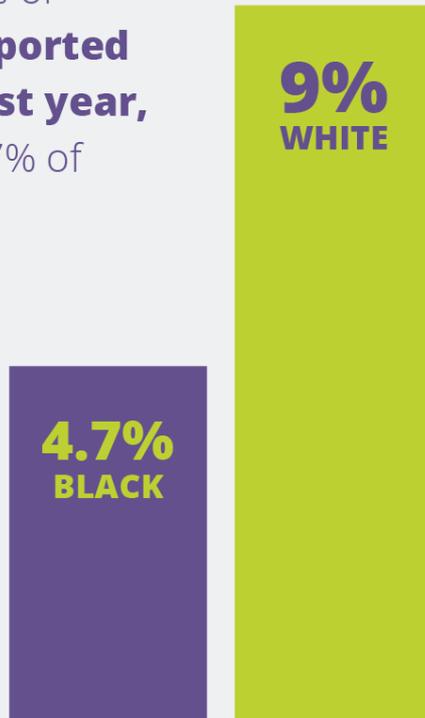
- About one in five people in prison globally are incarcerated for drug-related offenses.
- People in detention lack access to adequate health and harm reduction services.
- They are at greater risk for HIV, TB, hepatitis and other health risks.
- 80% of people incarcerated for drug-related offenses were arrested for possession only.



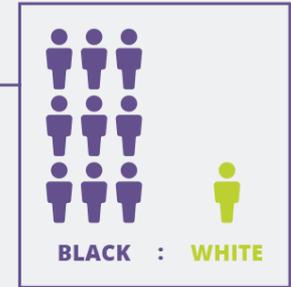
Source: Washington Office of Latin America, 2016

# RACE, DRUGS AND DRUG POLICY

An estimated 9% of white people **reported using drugs last year**, compared to 4.7% of black people.



Black People are **NINE TIMES** more likely than white people to be stopped and searched for drugs, despite using drugs at a lower rate.



Rate for stop and search for drugs per 1,000 in population



#ColourOfInjustice

Source: *The Colour of Injustice: 'Race', drugs and law enforcement in England and Wales*

# RACE, DRUGS AND DRUG POLICY

- In the UK, Black people are arrested for a drugs offence at 6 times the rate of white people, and Asian people are arrested at almost twice the rate of white people.
- Black people are more likely to receive harsher responses from law enforcement for drug possession.
  - From 2009-2010, 78% of black people stopped for cocaine possession by the police in the UK were charged.
  - In the same years, only 44% of white people stopped for cocaine possession in the UK were charged.

*Source: The Colour of Injustice: 'Race', drugs and law enforcement in England and Wales*

# LESSONS IN DRUG POLICY: SWITZERLAND

- Significant **open drug scene** with **high rates of overdose** and the **highest prevalence of HIV in Western Europe** in the mid-1980s.
- **Physicians, social service providers** and **city officials** sought federal assistance for policies that would expand harm reduction services.
- **1994 reforms** introduced heroin-assisted therapy, methadone maintenance, needle exchange, safe injecting rooms and syringe programs in prison.
- **Results** included a dramatic **drop in HIV incidence** and mortality, a significant **decrease in drug-related deaths**, and a **declining number of new heroin users**.
- The Swiss system of popular referenda meant that policy-makers had to convince the general public of the value of these measures.
- Rigorous monitoring of all new measures built the evidence base that helped shape public opinion and public confidence.

# LESSONS IN DRUG POLICY: PORTUGAL

- In the **1990s** people viewed drug use as the number one **social problem** in the country, including its visibility on city streets and its link to a growing HIV epidemic.
- A government-appointed committee of **doctors, lawyers and other experts** urged the strategy of **decriminalizing** possession and use for all drugs.
- The government accepted this recommendation.
- Since **2001**, people found using narcotic and psychotropic drugs are offered the help of specialized **health services, counselors and social service providers** rather than any form of criminal sanction.
- **Results** demonstrate a **significant decrease in HIV incidence** and **increased utilization of health services** by people who use drugs, including treatment for drug dependence, has greatly increased.

# SUPPORT FOR POLICY REFORM

*In 2019 the United Nations Chief Executives Board, chaired by the UN Secretary General and representing 31 UN agencies, issued a statement expressing strong and unanimous support for the decriminalization of possession and use of drugs. The statement calls on member states to “promote alternatives to conviction and punishment in appropriate cases, including the decriminalization of drug possession for personal use.”*

# ADVOCATE

- Globally: UNAIDS, WHO, UNODC, Human Rights bodies
- Regionally: EU, AU, European Courts, Inter-American Court on Human Rights, ASEAN
- Nationally: Human Right bodies, courts, local jurisdictions

# ADVOCATE



Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (Eurasia Region) - [info@HarmReductionEurasia.org](mailto:info@HarmReductionEurasia.org)



Agência Piaget para o Desenvolvimento (Portugal) - [info@apdes.pt](mailto:info@apdes.pt)



Harm Reduction International - [office@hri.global](mailto:office@hri.global)

