

**THE GLOBAL NETWORK  
FOR DRUG POLICY REFORM**

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2023







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## **Our vision is:**

Drug policies that advance social justice and human rights.

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## **Our mission is:**

To amplify and strengthen a diverse global movement to repair the harms caused by punitive drug policies, and promote just responses.


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# Background

## About IDPC

IDPC is a global network of nearly 200 non-governmental organisations from all around the world, who come together to promote person-centred, rights-reinforcing drug policies at the national, regional and international levels. IDPC was founded in 2006 and, since 2011, has been an independent, not-for-profit organisation legally registered in the UK, with offices in Bangkok and London. In 2020, IDPC has also become legally registered in both the Netherlands and Ghana. With funding from an increasingly diverse portfolio of donors, the IDPC network has rapidly become a strong, collaborative initiative and a trusted source of expertise on drug policy reform. The IDPC Secretariat produces annual **Progress Reports** to demonstrate the network's many collective achievements, impacts and successes.

The IDPC network has broad and diverse expertise, including community-led networks, grass-roots groups as well as major international organisations. Members agree and align with five core **policy principles** that guide our collective advocacy:

- 01** Drug policies should be developed through an objective assessment of priorities and evidence.
  - 02** Drug policies should comply with national, regional and international human rights principles, laws and standards.
  - 03** Drug policies should focus on reducing the harmful consequences, rather than the scale, of drug use and markets.
  - 04** Drug policies should promote social justice and the inclusion of marginalised groups, rather than focus on punitive measures towards them.
  - 05** Drug policies should be developed and implemented based on open and constructive relationships with civil society and affected populations.
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# SOLIDARITY TO PROMOTE DRUG POLICIES THAT ADVANCE SOCIAL JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS



STRONG, INTERCONNECTED & DIVERSE CIVIL SOCIETY & COMMUNITIES WORKING TOGETHER TO REPAIR THE HARMS CAUSED BY PUNITIVE DRUG POLICIES AND PROMOTE JUST RESPONSES.

## Situation assessment

This Strategic Plan comes in a crucial period for drug policy reform efforts. The global picture is polarised – with positive developments taking place in all regions of the world, but incredibly inhumane and disproportionate responses embedded under authoritarian regimes. On the one hand, efforts to decriminalise or legally regulate the use of some or all drugs continue to emerge in increasingly diverse settings. On the other hand, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, mass incarceration, capital and corporal punishment and other gross violations of human rights continue to be committed in the name of ‘drug control’. Further, repressive drug law enforcement measures disproportionately impact upon people who are poor, women, Indigenous peoples, and people who are socially disadvantaged because of immigration status, gender orientation, ethnicity or race. Intersecting systems of oppression, including racism, classism, gender-based violence, armed conflict, ableism and xenophobia, are also dramatically exacerbated by draconian drug policies.

The picture is also mixed with regards to civil society space: while the opportunities to engage at UN drugs fora have been increasing, civil society space is shrinking in numerous countries and other international fora, and non-governmental organisations and actors are being shut down, persecuted or threatened by their governments. Despite these challenges, the global drug policy reform movement continues to grow in strength and diversity, uniting in solidarity around key moments (such as 26th June, the Support. Don’t Punish Global Day of Action) to hold governments accountable, and to challenge inequalities and egregious human rights abuses (for example, President Duterte’s deadly ‘war on drugs’ in the Philippines).

At the international level, the rhetoric continues to edge forward, while the long-standing ‘consensus’ amongst governments on prohibitionist drug policy falls apart. However, progressive statements are not consistently translated into sufficient funding or ground-level reforms to enable their realisation, while member states remain unable to properly acknowledge the failures from the last decade of international drug policy so as to not repeat them in the sustainable development era. All 31 UN entities have agreed to a progressive **Common Position on Drugs**, incorporating harm reduction, decriminalisation and rights-based approaches. Yet the UN, and multilateralism itself, is under greater scrutiny and threat than ever before. This all means that the work of IDPC is as important now than it has ever been.

At the time of writing this Strategic Plan, in 2020, the world was also in the grip of a global COVID-19 pandemic – with widespread uncertainty of the short- and long-term implications for global networking, advocacy and funding. In the midst of such a complex situation, the IDPC Secretariat will remain alert to the evolving needs of our members and the consequences for our established modus operandi as the “new normal” emerges.

## About this strategic plan

The IDPC Strategic Plan 2021-2023 is the latest in a series of three-to-five year plans developed in consultation with members and partners to guide the work, direction and priorities of the network. Like its predecessors, this Strategic Plan is built around the pillars of work that have effectively defined and structured IDPC's work for many years:

- Networking and communications (including media engagement)
- Building evidence (research and publications)
- International advocacy (including at key UN fora on behalf of the network)
- Regional and national advocacy (including campaigning and other efforts to support the work of members)

In addition, this Strategic Plan also adds a fifth pillar:

- Capacity strengthening: to reflect the ever-growing demand for training, technical assistance and support across a range of different audiences, regions and topics, as well as IDPC's growing role as a principal grant recipient, project coordinator and onward grant provider to a wide range of civil society and community-led partners.

The current Strategic Plan also, for the first time, defines five 'priority areas' for 2021-2023, following consultations and discussions with the membership and partners:

## Decriminalisation and criminal justice reforms

Criminalisation exacerbates inequalities, racial and social injustice, and drug-related harm. In many parts of the world, drug laws are a colonial remnant which swell prison populations, widen the criminal justice net, and worsen public health and welfare outcomes such as HIV and hepatitis infections and drug-related deaths. Some form of decriminalisation (the removal of criminal penalties for certain activities related to drug use) has now been adopted in around 30 countries. The UN System Common Position on Drugs (see below) also reinforces the multilateral support for this approach. As such, the 2021-2023 period is an important opportunity for the IDPC network to build on momentum towards 'gold standard' decriminalisation (the removal of all punishments for low-level drug offences).

## Drug policy impacts on women

Punitive drug policies fuel and feed off a range of social inequalities, and women are disproportionately impacted in countless ways. For example: women typically have less access to appropriate health services (including harm reduction and drug treatment), legal aid and other forms of support; the number of women incarcerated for drug offences continues to rise dramatically; the links between gender-based violence and drug use exacerbate vulnerability; and women who use drugs face a double stigma due to stereotyped gender roles in society. IDPC and key partners and members of the network have increasingly focused on this issue in recent years, and 2021-2023 is a key opportunity to expand our knowledge and advocacy, and to work with the women's rights, feminist and trans rights movements to change policies in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on gender.

## The global Support. Don't Punish campaign

Since its inception in 2012, the Support. Don't Punish campaign has been a huge success, nurturing grassroots mobilisation to raise awareness of the need for drug policy reform and harm reduction. The campaign has favoured the empowerment of hundreds of community-led networks and allies worldwide, developing capacity and fostering collaborations between local partners and movements. Yet the campaign still has significant untapped potential, and 2021-2023 is a crucial period to take the campaign to the next level – growing its recognition 'outside the bubble', leveraging long-term advocacy to catalyse local reforms, and raising its global profile.

## Cross-UN involvement and the Common Position

For more than a decade, the IDPC network has been calling for greater UN system-wide coherence – to break the monopoly of the Vienna-based drug control structures and encourage a broader, more inclusive debate on drug policies that truly encompasses human rights, health and the SDGs. The UN System Common Position on Drugs has the potential to deliver this, but now that the document has been adopted and released, it is crucial that it is normalised and operationalised. The IDPC network, having fought so hard to get to this position, must ensure that the Common Position remains 'live' and influential – despite resistance from some influential conservative countries and stakeholders. Continued engagement at the multilateral level as a whole remains a crucial component of drug policy advocacy and civil society's watchdog role, as the norms and regulations that filter down from this level remain a hugely significant influence on national and regional policies and approaches.



## Protecting civil society space and building alliances

Globally, civil society organisations are facing ever-growing restrictions, barriers and hostility – particularly from authoritarian governments that see us as a threat. As a civil society network, it is IDPC’s responsibility to monitor, document and resist such trends at all levels. Through strategic engagement with vehicles such as the Vienna and New York NGO Committees on Drugs, the IDPC network has helped to achieve greater civil society engagement in UN drug policy debates – but such space needs to be constantly defended at the international, regional and national levels. IDPC must work proactively to harness the unique power of civil society networks and alliances that can hold governments accountable. In collaboration with a wide range of partners, IDPC will promote the invaluable role of NGOs, and the meaningful participation of all groups whose situation of vulnerability is exacerbated by existing drug policies.<sup>1</sup>

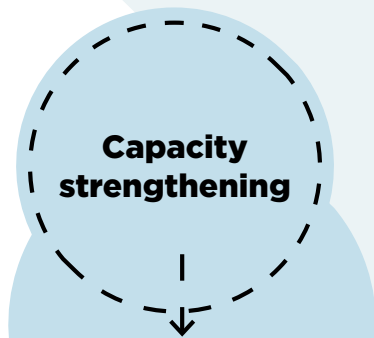
These are specific areas of work where the IDPC network has identified a potential added value of its direct engagement and contributions, working in coalition with our members and various other partners. IDPC’s core work outside of these five areas will continue, structured as always by the pillars above and managed by the IDPC Secretariat through annual work plans. **Setting these priorities does not indicate an intention to limit the work of the IDPC Secretariat and network, nor that the countless other areas and aspects of drug policy reform are not essential.** But, rather, these five have been identified as priority areas for specific attention and growth in order to best serve the sector and the populations that IDPC ultimately works for.

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<sup>1</sup> This diverse list includes (but is not limited to) people who use drugs, subsistence farmers of crops destined for the illegal drug market, people living in poverty, women, Black people, indigenous peoples, young people, and other communities marginalised because of immigration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or race.

# IDPC Strategic plan 2021-2023: matrix

Five priority areas



→ Sharing news, lessons learnt and examples of developments and reforms; working to improve media understanding of the issues; and bringing members and movements together to discuss collaborations.

Workshops, webinars and other tools to build knowledge and advocacy skills for decriminalisation in all settings – including a focus on the technical aspects of reforms in practice.



→ Increased engagement and coordination with a range of women’s organisations and the feminist movement to build solidarity and strategise for advocacy on shared agendas.

Empowering women-led organisations and community leaders through grant-making, technical support, trainings, workshops, and the creation of platforms for voices to be heard.



→ Further enhancing the online presence and impact of the campaign and its messages, including through the recruitment of high-level campaign ambassadors for drug policy reform and harm reduction.

International, regional and national workshops and engagements to strengthen campaigning, planning, evaluation and advocacy; direct financial and logistical support to partners around the world to support campaigning.



→ Promoting awareness of the UN System Common Position, and sharing key developments from across the UN in relation to HIV, health, human rights, justice and the SDGs, to support our members’ work.

Webinars and other resources focused on how civil society can better use the UN System and its Common Position to support advocacy for policy reform, harm reduction, and achievement of the SDGs and global HIV targets.



→ Reaching out to new allies, building solidarity and further broadening the diversity and scope of the IDPC network – including LGBTQI+, feminist, racial justice and indigenous groups, among others; closely monitoring the impact of COVID-19.

Guidance, webinars and other online/virtual tools to demystify policy-making processes and engagement mechanisms; sharing examples of how civil society can influence policies and reforms; onward granting or other support to enable such influence.

# Five pillars of our work

## Building evidence

Maintaining and updating the global decriminalisation map, while also documenting and exploring the various models and practices emerging around the world, and the growing evidence of their impacts.

Documenting the stories of women affected by drug policies, and demonstrating the disproportionate impact of punitive responses and human rights violations on women.

Using the global campaign to demonstrate and document the growing global momentum behind drug policy reform and harm reduction.

Closely working with the UN Task team to monitor the impact and implementation of the Common Position (as well as other resources and mechanisms), and to promote new research and analysis.

Building alliances with specialist organisations to produce policy analyses and recommendations, as well as academic partners to develop a Global Drug Policy Index to enhance global advocacy and data.

## International advocacy

Strengthening collective advocacy for decriminalisation in all UN settings, pushing for visible political support as well as calling for implementation of the UN System Common Position.

Increased work with women-led and women-focused civil society partners to ensure better UN engagement on the issue, including of UN Women and relevant mechanisms.

Bringing the campaign's voice and asks to the primary target audience – government officials.

Ensuring visibility of the Common Position and Task Team across multilateral fora in Vienna, Geneva and New York; ensuring that drug policy remains a focus despite competing priorities such as COVID-19.

Continued engagement in efforts to protect and expand civil society space at UN drugs, human rights, HIV, health, development and security fora – including through the NGO Committees – and promoting the engagement of a broader range of partners.

## Regional & national advocacy

Direct support – such as technical advice, trainings, resources, media engagement and connections to policy makers – to respond to the needs of network members in their ongoing advocacy work.

Providing support, guidance, resources and linkages for members working to implement women-friendly, rights-based responses and harm reduction services on the ground. Fostering dialogue on women and drug policy, especially in Asia and Latin America.

Direct support for campaign engagement in more than 100 countries around the world – through small grants, technical advice, materials and guidance – both on the Global Day of Action, but also as part of broader advocacy efforts.

Promoting the UN System Common Position as a tool for national and regional advocacy, and providing mechanisms to highlight where the Common Position is being disregarded by UN officials at the local level.

Supporting members to seek and build effective cross-sector alliances at the local level that can hold governments accountable; and promoting civil society space at regional fora such as the EU, AU, OAS and ASEAN.

## Organisational development

In addition to the strategic and thematic content of this Strategic Plan, the ongoing review and refinement of IDPC's governance systems remains an important commitment for 2021-2023. Following detailed governance reviews in 2008, 2012, 2017 and 2019, IDPC has an appointed **Board of Directors** – which in turn has delegated specific tasks to a Finance and Resources Committee, a Governance Committee, a Membership Committee, and a fifteen-person **Members' Advisory Council** that is elected by the membership to represent different regions and groups.

These bodies, with support from the IDPC Secretariat, will seek to evaluate their performance and effectiveness against their mandates to provide the financial, legal and strategic oversight for the organisation's work. The Board, in particular, will undertake regular internal skills audits to inform recruitment and composition, alongside a 360-degree review of their work, and will continue to enhance the financial sustainability and donor appeal of the IDPC network, as well as overseeing the establishment of IDPC offices in Ghana, the Netherlands and Thailand.

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# How will success be measured?

## By the end of 2023...

The IDPC network will have been clear leaders, driving momentum and tangible reforms that have advanced social justice and human rights at all levels. The punitive, racist and ineffective responses that dominated in certain settings will have been curtailed, slowed and vociferously challenged. As the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs prepares for its next high-level meeting in 2024, the IDPC network will have meaningfully participated,

highlighting both the failures and solutions in the response to drugs. Our membership itself will have grown in diversity, expertise and capacity. Significant progress will have been made across all five of the identified 'priority areas': many more jurisdictions will have decriminalised drug offences; the issues facing women who use drugs will have become a central part of the response; the global Support. Don't Punish campaign will have continued to grow in scale, recognition and impact; progressive, cross-UN action will have become an irreversible norm; and civil society will have been empowered to play its vital role as a pillar of democracy and justice.

During the previous Strategic Plan, annual membership surveys have emerged as an important source of information and insight – and they will continue to be used to measure progress for 2021-2023. The surveys are an opportunity to tap into the collective knowledge of the network, gauge levels of engagement, satisfaction and empowerment, and to learn from successes and setbacks alike. They ensure the authenticity of IDPC's role as *the* global network for drug policy reform.

For 2021-2023, a series of established indicators will be monitored by the IDPC Secretariat in order to measure trends and successes. These are designed as proxies that indicate broader change, rather than exhaustive monitoring tools, and will be included in the annual Progress Reports:

- The cumulative number of country delegations making high-level calls during CND for proportionality of sentencing, decriminalisation, treaty reform, legally regulated markets and/or the abolishment of the death penalty.  
Source: *CND Blog*
- The number of new jurisdictions adopting effective decriminalisation or regulation models.  
Source: *Decriminalisation Map and direct monitoring by the IDPC Secretariat*
- The number of countries supporting harm reduction in national policy documents.  
Source: *HRI's Global State of Harm Reduction*
- Perceived levels of media and political support for policy reform.  
Source: *IDPC Membership Surveys and other measures*
- Perceived levels of civil society engagement in drug policy processes.  
Source: *IDPC Membership Surveys and other measures*
- The number of new members recruited from outside of the drugs field.  
Source: *IDPC membership database*

The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) is a global network of NGOs that promotes objective and open debate on the effectiveness, direction and content of drug policies at national and international level, and supports evidence-based policies that are effective in reducing drug-related harms. IDPC members have a wide range of experience and expertise in the analysis of drug problems and policies, and contribute to national and international policy debates. IDPC offers specialist advice through the dissemination of written

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materials, presentations at conferences, meetings with key policy makers and study tours. IDPC also provides capacity building and advocacy training for civil society organisations.

The IDPC Strategic Plan 2021-2023 is the latest in a series of three-to five year plans developed in consultation with members and partners to guide the work, direction and priorities of the network.

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