



Regional Platform
EECA

Special Issue, 3rd April 2024

67th session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs 14-22 March 2024, Vienna, Austria



The [67th session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs](#) (CND) took place from March 14-22, 2024, in Vienna, Austria. For the community of Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA region) and [Eurasian Harm Reduction Association](#) (EHRA), it was an opportunity to engage with delegates from countries, co-sponsor side events, participate and ask questions in the informal dialogues with WHO, UNAIDS and UNODC, and advocate for progressive drug policies centered around public health and human rights.

This special issue of the newsletter highlights information on activities of civil society partners from the CEECA region during the 67th CND session.

Historic Harm Reduction Resolution

On the last day of the CND, a groundbreaking [resolution](#), **the first of its kind WAS accepted, recognizing harm reduction as an essential part of an effective public health response.** This landmark decision encourages member states to develop and

implement harm reduction measures to minimize the adverse public health and social consequences of non-medical drug use. [UNAIDS welcomed](#) the adoption of this crucial resolution, highlighting the need for a rebalancing of drug policy towards proven public health approaches. The resolution aligns with the targets set in the 2021-2026 Global AIDS Strategy and represents a significant political commitment to prioritizing harm reduction interventions like needle-syringe programs, opioid agonist maintenance therapy, and naloxone for overdose management.



Check out a wonderful [article from IDPC](#) on the issue!

Unprecedented split between pro-reformers and prohibitionists

High-level Declaration by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the 2024 midterm review, following up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration was [adopted](#).

The 67th CND Session witnessed an **unprecedented split between pro-reformers and prohibitionists**. [The call for reform](#) was led by a pro-reform coalition of more than 60 countries, led by Colombia. This coalition challenged the longstanding "war on drugs" approach, sounding the alarm on the catastrophic consequences of punitive drug policies that fuel violence, corruption, human rights violations, and environmental devastation while undermining health and development. What is more, Colombian President Gustavo Petro and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk delivered strong speeches urging transformative change in global drug policy, with Petro describing the current system as "anachronistic and indolent." The Colombian Ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Laura Gil, stated that it is a "moment of reckoning" and pledged to bring pragmatism to an environment marked by denial.

The prohibitionists, represented by the Russian Federation and forming a coalition of 46 states also presented their [statement](#). The coalition chose a moralizing and shaming approach, expressing their concern that other countries' policies are not in line with the three international drug control conventions (more precisely – legalization of cannabis for recreational purposes), that human rights (right to life, right to health) are being violated by legalising cannabis. And as the best solution to all drug-related issues, they suggested strengthening cross-border law enforcement and international cooperation, as well as protecting youth through education and "building resilience of young people to stay drug-free".

Regional Advocacy & Joint Strategy



At the Plenary session on March 20th EHRA's Executive Director Anna Dovbakh talked about the ["United for Change: Joint Advocacy Strategy for Comprehensive Health and Harm Reduction Services for People Who Use Drugs in Europe"](#). The strategy developed by four regional networks within the [BOOST project – Correlation European Harm Reduction Network, Drug Policy Network SEE, EHRA](#) and [EuroNPUD](#). Priorities outlined called on member states to increase political will and financial sustainability for community-based harm reduction, promote community-driven harm reduction tailored to diverse needs, ensure access to health services for people who use drugs, and secure universal access to comprehensive health and social care for this population.

Engagement of Civil Society Partners from EECA



Read more about events and sessions 67th CND Session at [EHRA's website!](#)

March 18

["Addressing human rights challenges related to drug use in humanitarian and other crisis settings"](#)/ side event by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights co-sponsored by EHRA – focused on challenges and responses to humanitarian crises, access to controlled medicines in emergencies, and the importance of flexibility in responding to crisis situations.

At the session on **"Global civil society inputs for the 2024 midterm review and beyond"** EHRA Executive Director Ganna Dovbakh presented the [report representing a wide range of expertise and perspectives on drug-related issues](#).

March 19

["25+ years of opioid agonist therapy implementation in Central and Eastern Europe and the Central Asia region: challenges and innovations"](#)/ side event co-organized by Frontline AIDS, Alliance for Public Health, EHRA, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, Alliance for Equality and Health (Moldova) on the implementation of opioid agonist therapy (OAT) in the region. Presentations covered the situation with OAT in Ukraine, Moldova, and the challenges faced in providing these life-saving services during the ongoing war in Ukraine.

"Economic, social and cultural rights in drug policymaking: the relevance of an upcoming CESCR general comment on drugs" / organized by Amnesty International – centered around the impacts of drug policies on economic, social, and cultural rights, and the need for education, harm reduction program expansion, and the elimination of drug-related criminal records as barriers to employment, housing, and parental rights.

March 20

"The intersection of public health and law enforcement: Advancing drug policy reform, harm reduction, and collaborative strategies" / side event organized by Moldova government. Included discussions on the role of law enforcement in contributing to reform drug policy; as well as emerging partnerships between police, health experts, and civil society organizations prove that they can work together to save lives while reducing crime.

"Tenacity in the Shrinking Civic Spaces: Challenges and Response of the Organizations and Activists Working on Drug Policy and Health in Eastern Europe And Central Asia" / side event – explored the challenges and resilience of organizations and activists working on drug policy and health in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Focused on the mechanisms used by undemocratic governments to restrict civil society participation, such as labeling NGOs as "foreign agents," restricting access to information and funding, and initiating criminal prosecution for advocacy and service provision. The event was organized by the Andrey Rylkov Foundation, EHRA, Amnesty International, the HIV Legal Network and the Rights Reporter Foundation.

"State control over people with drug dependence: searching for a coherent public health policy" / EHRA side event – reviewed problematic points related to drug registries and their impact on the rights of people who use drugs, with presentations from colleagues in Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and the ECEACD Commissioner.

March 21

Report **"LINKING DOTS: Assessment of opportunities for optimal access to MENTAL HEALTH CARE services for people who use drugs in the CEECA region"** presented at the side event **"Mental health and people who use drugs"**, organized by Dianova International. The report highlighted obstacles in integrating mental health services for people who use drugs in the region.

"Unveiling Injustice: Exploring the Human Rights Impact of Drug Policies in Central & Eastern Europe & Central Asia Region" / side event organized by the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR). Presentations covered violations of economic, social, and cultural rights, the impact of criminalization on harm reduction services, and the need for increased engagement with UN human rights mechanisms.

EHRA participated in a *side event* on "[Drugs and social networks: between best practices and the risk of censorship](#)", which centered on engaging with young people who use drugs through social media, the challenges of censorship and content moderation, and the impact of state censorship on harm reduction organizations in the region.

March 22

["Addressing substance use disorder in crisis settings"](#) / *side event cosponsored by EHRA* – presented how Ukraine was and is still responding to the drug dependence issues during the ongoing war.



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