DIGEST No. 8

Support. Don’t Punish

Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA)

2020

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PREFACE

REPRESSIONS KILL

People who use drugs need support, not punishment

On June 26, 2020 a number of events were held within the framework of the global campaign “Support. Don’t Punish” in the countries of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region with the support of the Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs (ENPUD), the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA), the International Consortium on Drug Policy (IDPC) and other networks and organizations, as well as with personal support of the activists and initiative groups. The COVID-19 pandemic made its adjustments to the campaign. However, the restrictive measures did not stop the activists, and they managed to hold the activities and events albeit in a changed format.

The campaign declares that health care and human rights must be installed in the core of drug policy. Activists took to the streets to publicly protest cruel and senseless government policies aimed at people who use drugs. Every year this campaign is held all over the world with the purpose of drawing attention to this unsolved problem over and over again!

June 26 is also the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. Such a discriminatory and repressive name for this day was invented at the UN. Of course this is not surprising, taking into account the roles played by the United Nations in the never-ending "war on drugs" around the world, and in cowardly disregard or support by various structures and agencies of this organization of the methods of repressive drug policies of many countries around the world.

On the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking many countries talk about how they have “contributed” to a successful “war on drugs”. In past years, some countries celebrated this day with public executions or public beatings of people who committed drug-related crimes.

On the other hand, the UN has designated June 26 as the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. It is intended to remind us that torture did not remain in the distant Middle Ages together with inquisition, alchemy, bubonic plague and cities without sewers.

However, it is in the name of the "war on drugs" that people are subjected to murder, torture and violence. Torture and punishment are at the heart of modern drug policy. Thus, participation in the international campaign “Support. Don’t Punish” is an opportunity to support a proper and humane understanding of this important day.

The number of countries and cities participating in this campaign is growing every year. Even the COVID-19 pandemic could not prevent this. This demonstrates one thing: we all live in the world in which hundreds of millions of people on all continents of the planet Earth use drugs every day. And we are ready to talk about this publicly and demand support, not punishment.

After all, despite the fact that drug use is widespread and isn’t associated with violence, the principal approach of the governments to this issue remains to prosecute and punish those who use or possess drugs for personal use.

The only things the states of the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, in which we live, can offer to people who use drugs are: REPRESSION, HARASSMENT, VIOLATION OF RIGHTS, PROHIBITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS, PUNISHMENT, HUMILIATION, OSTRACISM, DISCRIMINATION AND STIGMA.

However it has become obvious to everyone, including the state and security agencies, that such a policy is not effective and does not yield any results today. The only result of the ongoing repression is aggravation of serious social and medical problems, overcrowded prisons, numerous violations of human rights: from death penalty and extrajudicial killings to inhuman and compulsory treatment, as well as many other negative consequences.

There are thousands testimonials of such repressions against people who use drugs: from the obvious that happen in plain sight and are committed at the state level, to routine atrocities committed locally and possibly not visible to public. However all of it is out there, and is clearly or secretly present in the life of every person who uses drugs.

The society and the state, obsessed with drug phobia, try to hide the truth; they want to keep people who use drugs out of sight: in prisons, insane asylums, torturous rehabilitation centers, they want to brush off the obvious. However on the day of the "Support. Don’t Punish" global campaign we openly testify that:

REPRESSIONS KILL

Criminal convictions for possession of small quantities of drugs have already crippled millions of our lives; “drug corruption” of law enforcement agencies has already destroyed the bodies and institutions that are there to protect the law and us, the people; the HIV / AIDS epidemic and viral hepatitis have already killed millions of our loved ones; sexual abuse by law enforcement and medical officials has already deprived us of our ability to go on with our lives; billions wasted on the “War on Drugs” were not spent on healthcare and education.

At the same time, despite all of the above, drug use was, is and will remain a reality of this world!

REPRESSIONS DO NOT WORK

For too long governments have been waging this war with disproportionate, unjust and grossly ineffective measures. Today it is no longer possible to close our eyes to the obvious things - how dangerous and destructive are punitive laws against PERSONAL DRUG USE are.

IT'S TIME FOR SUPPORT, NOT PUNISHMENT!

CAMPAIGN EVENTS

“Support. Don’t Punish” in EECA region

LITHUANIA

Kaunas

In Kaunas, the RIGRA Social Support Center together with the Lithuanian Initiative Group of Psychoactive Substance Users held a series of actions and events within the framework of the “Support. Don’t Punish" campaign.

The main demands of the 2020 campaign were as follows:

• Free naloxone to be made available to anyone who uses psychoactive substances!

• Support, not punishment! (Only psychosocial and medical care can help people who use drugs).

• Drug enforcement is disproportionate and repressive, it needs to be reformed!

• People who use psychoactive substances should no longer be prosecuted for using!

The first event took place on June 26 at the Kaunas branch of the Republican Center for Addictions, where the OST therapy is provided. The activists declared the need to expand the availability of naloxone.

On June 27, at the RIGRA Social Support Center, an event was held with the participation of representatives of the initiative group of Lithuanian psychoactive substance users. A discussion of the current drug policy and of the ways it should be improved was held. After the discussion RIGRA’s Director took part in a radio program and gave an interview to one of the national channels, where she spoke about the problems faced by people who use drugs and about the shortcomings of the country's drug policy.

The activists managed to attract a lot of attention from the staff of the Republican Center for Addictions in Kaunas. Their participation in the events of the “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign was much more substantial than during the previous year.

“This gives us hope that the stigma emanating from those who work with people with drug addiction will decrease. It is incredible that there is so much need to reduce stigmatizing behavior among those who are there to help people who use drugs, but unfortunately this is our reality. Nevertheless, it seems to us that something is changing in the right direction. It may be a gradual process, but we see changes already”, said Grazina Aleksaitiene, RIGRA’s Director.

In addition, activists and participants of “Support. Don’t Punish” received a letter from the Director of the Department of Drugs, Tobacco and Alcohol Control under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in support of the campaign, acknowledging the fact that the need for

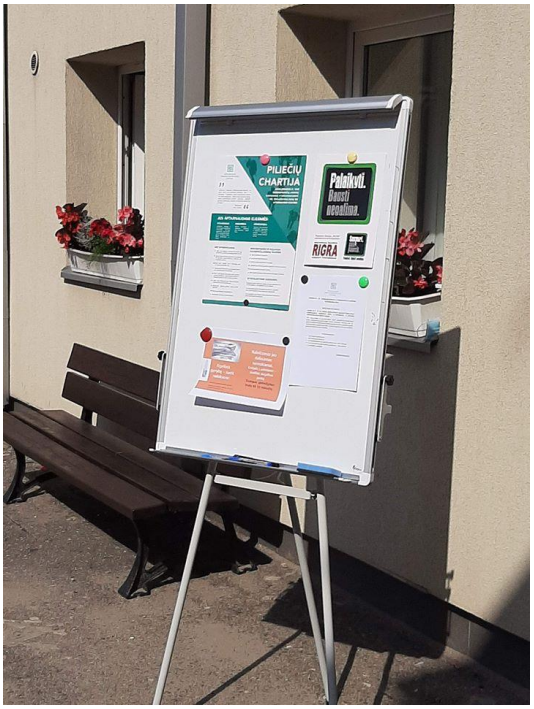
affordable naloxone is becoming more and more dire. This is an encouraging development, because this support has come from a government agency. If this Department supports the demands of the community of people who use drugs, then the chances for a real positive direction change in the situation increase.










PILIEČIŲ
CHARTIJA
Pabėgti
nepavyks.
RIGRA


Support.
don't
punish.
RIGRA
Nebausti, o padėti!
Pabėgti
nepavyks.

UZBEKISTAN

Tashkent

In Tashkent a flash mob was held with the participation of the PWUD-Tashkent initiative group within the framework of the “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign. It was attended by outreach workers from the private counselling rooms from several districts of Tashkent. The main demands of the activists were the fight against stigma and discrimination and the strengthening of the role of key populations in the decision-making process at the state level.



RUSSIA

Kaliningrad

In Kaliningrad, the goal of the actions held within the framework of the "Support. Don't punish" global campaign was to mobilize the community of people who use drugs in the matter of solving legal problems, including for those who are held in detention.

The original plans for the day's activities were adjusted to accommodate quarantine and COVID-19 terms. However, the changes lost their importance because the city quarantine measures were lifted by June 26, although certain restrictions, especially for mass gatherings, remained in force.

The planning of the activities was done well in advance of the event by the activists and clients of Soprichastnost (Involvement) Initiative Group with the support of Stanovleniye (Becoming) Initiative Group, which also protects the interests of the community of people who use drugs.

The roles and tasks for the June 26 event were chosen by the activists themselves. Some activists were responsible for printed materials; others were in charge of T-shirts procurement, while the rest were negotiating with local authorities, resolving coordination and logistical issues. A number of team members participating in the preparatory process disseminated information about the event, collected the names of people who died from an overdose from their friends, etc. Thus, the preparation process for the event had itself become one of the tools for mobilization of the community in the city. It became possible to involve many new people who use drugs in organization and execution of the event, those who either did not know about the initiative group before or used to limit their participation to the passive roles of clients and recipients of services.

On June 26, before the main event, 26 participants gathered at the office of the "YULA" partner organization. The activists changed into "Support. Don't Punish" t-shirts, collected information materials and posters. After that, everyone got into taxis and travelled to an Orthodox church, where the priest agreed to hold a special memorial service for people who died from drug-related causes. After the service, the priest handed out the New Testaments and discussed with the activists over tea what support and assistance the Orthodox Church could provide to the community of people who use drugs in Kaliningrad.

After that the campaigners returned to the office of the partner organization. The office hosted an open seminar for the activists who work with people who use drugs in places of detention in Kaliningrad region. The seminar was attended by 36 people.

One of the speakers of the seminar was human rights activist Sergei Poduzov, co-chairman of the "Chelovek I Zakon" (Man and Law) organization. He updated the participants on the topic of what human rights are. The speaker paid special attention to the situation with human rights in

places of detention. He listed positive obligations that the state does and does not fulfill before its citizens.

Together with the participants Sergey Poduzov discussed the availability of medical care in the institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service and the matter of the release from prisons on the grounds of illness. Multiple comorbidities are a common condition for people who use drugs. They require special medical care and rehabilitation support in detention. This important role is played by social workers who accompany such people throughout the recovery phase.

During the discussion the participants from Soprichastnost Initiative Group raised the issue of the detention of people in abstinent state (a serious physical and psychological condition experienced by people withdrawing from drug use). In such situations, people suffering from drug addiction may confess to committing crimes that they did not have any involvement in. In such cases pressure exerted by the law enforcement agencies on the person under interrogation can be considered to be the use of violence in order to obtain a confession. A person in an abstinent state needs medical assistance first of all.

During the course of the seminar the participants also talked a lot about creating initiative groups to represent the interests of the community of people who use drugs at every possible level. An active discussion unfolded on the topic of how this could and should be carried out. One option discussed was community mobilization, another – involvement of partner organizations for representation of the interests of the community in the restricted environments, for example during interactions with the police.

After the seminar, late at night, the activists working on harm reduction and prevention among street sex workers went to their outreach work. There they informed sex workers who use drugs about the global “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign, distributed informational materials and prophylaxis.

In the days following June 26, outreach workers handed out informational materials about the “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign at outreach locations throughout Kaliningrad. More than 60 people who use drugs have thus become campaigners in the city.

It can be stated that the event achieved its goal in terms of capacity building and mobilization of the community of people who use drugs in solving legal problems, including in places of detention. Thus, the campaigners were able to get acquainted with an international lawyer and enlist his support in the event legal assistance is required in the future. The activists improved their knowledge of human rights and freedoms as well as their protection, so that in the future they will be able to spread it among people who use drugs, including in places of detention. This is important because some of the participants at the time of the campaign were investigated for

drug-related crimes under the Russian legislation. Their sentences will result in real terms of detention in places of deprivation of liberty.

Yet another success story is linked to the fact that new members of the community participated in the events of the “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign in Kaliningrad, and they intend to further participate in the activities of the Soprichastnost Initiative Group. This allows to widen the efforts of skills, information and knowledge dissemination among the members of the community and provides for more effective protection of human rights of the people who use drugs, including those have served or are currently serving their sentences.




Support.
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punish.


Support.
don't
punish.
НЕ НАКАЗАНИЕ


Support.
don't
punish.

Orenburg

In Orenburg, the purpose of the activities held on June 26 by Pravo Kazhdogo (Everyone's Right) organization was direct targeted assistance to people who use drugs and their families, such as provision of food packages, medicines, clothes, toys, children's books, prophylaxis and much more.

This year COVID-19 exposed the sores of the society that many were aware of before, while others could only guess about. People who could be classified as middle class before the pandemic lost their jobs and were left behind. The social sphere lacks manpower and resources to help everyone who is in need here and now.

Key communities - people who use drugs, sex workers, HIV-positive, etc. - were the first to struggle in this situation. They desperately need help on regular basis: legal, psychological, medical. Today what they needed the most was food and medicine, so these resources became the main focus of Pravo Kazhdogo in Orenburg.

In Orenburg, 36 families with special status were in need of help, including 42 children. They were all waiting for food and medicine they could not afford to buy on their own. All of them could not or chose not to put their trust in the state "helping" services.

All the more valuable for the activists of Pravo Kazhdogo was the trust of these families. This is because this help is intrinsically tied to the responsibility for maintaining the qualities of support: unconditional, safe, without judgment. “Support, do not punish” is the essence of every action.

As the result of the action, essential kits were prepared and distributed (food, household chemicals, medicines, clothes) among 36 families with 42 children. Pravo Kazhdogo enjoyed support from local volunteer movements and initiative groups of private philanthropists in Orenburg. In addition to the above a system of direct assistance to people who use drugs in Orenburg was established, which will continue its operation for at least until the end of all quarantine restrictions. Agreements with the media and philanthropists who supported the activists during the event shall remain in effect even after the activities are over. This allowed the organization to develop a number of joint plans for further actions.

Donors and partners of Pravo Kazhdogo have been made aware of the real needs of people who use drugs. All funding applications that the organization plans to submit in the near future will include, among other things, the results of the "Support. Don’t Punish" initiative.


Support. Don't punish.
ПРАВО КАЖДОГО


ПРАВО


МАГНИТ



Ekaterinburg

The activities of “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign in Yekaterinburg this year were focused not on actions, but on informing people who use drugs about their rights and opportunities to protect them due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine.

On June 26, LUNA organization activists set up a mobile point, where, in addition to testing for HIV, they provided legal assistance to members of the community of people who use drugs. Lawyers and advocates from the "Yekaterinburg Bar Association" partner organization were invited to provide consultations. They advised on criminal, civil and administrative cases brought against people who use drugs during quarantine.

The mobile point with consulting lawyers and attorneys visited 4 districts of the city during this event. During the stops LUNA activists handed out humanitarian aid kits, information brochures and souvenirs with the logos of the “Support. Don’t Punish" global campaign.

The mobile point worked for two hours in each district; there was enough time for everyone to receive the necessary services. Thus, more than 200 humanitarian aid kits were distributed, 102 people received legal advice. 12 people (mostly stateless and women) were registered to receive social and legal support from the organization.

Many members of the community of people who use drugs who visited the mobile point were surprised to learn about the “Support. Don’t Punish” initiative and of the existence of such a commemorative day. So far in Russia only the activists and a limited portion of the community are aware of this date. There is hope that those who spoke to the LUNA activists on June 26, not only people who use drugs, but also ordinary citizens, human rights activists, lawyers and others, will pass this information on to their relatives and friends.




Support.
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punish.


Support.
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Support.
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punish.


ЛУНА
Центр социальной помощи
LUNAIDS.ORG
ВИЧ-СПИД

Novosibirsk

In Novosibirsk as part of the “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign the ENPUD activists filmed a documentary telling three stories of people who use drugs. The film focuses on the lives, persecution, punishment of its heroes and their search for support that can give them the strength to live on.

The film is available at:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/ENPUD/permalink/1574813842675127/





Saint-Petersburg

Since December 2019 the State Duma of the Russia Federation has been working on introduction of the measures against "drug propaganda" into the Criminal Code. At the same time the articles and statements comparing heroin and alcohol or informing about harm reduction of substance use are being attacked in the media. All of this demonstrates that the Russian government is ready to continue and even to intensify its "war on drugs", which, in fact, is being waged against the citizens of the country.

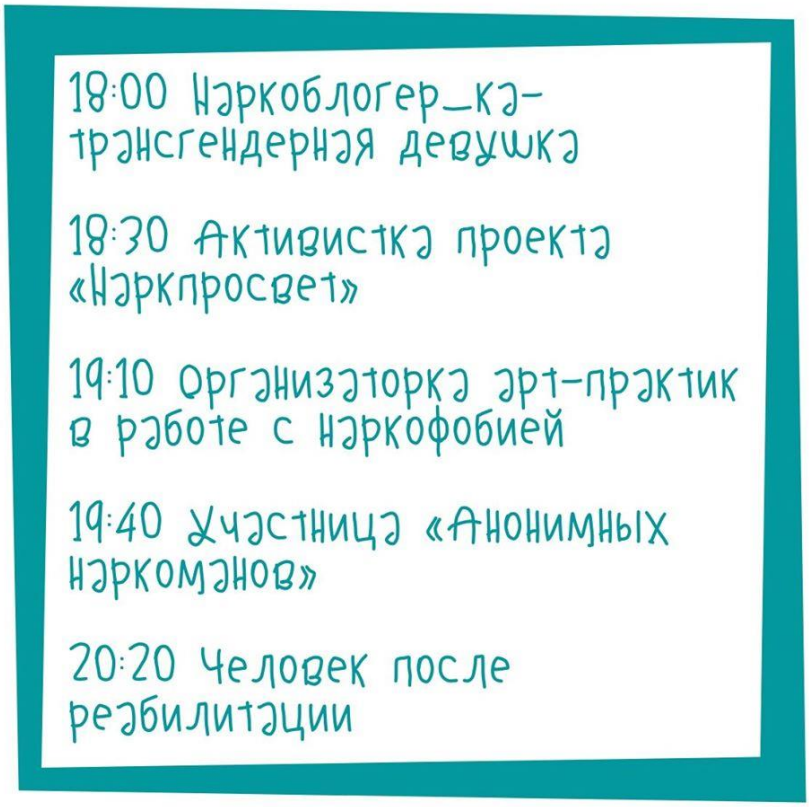
“Drug propaganda” legislation, persecution of journalists and NGOs, the impact of systemic censorship on the lives of people who use drugs and on society as a whole, possibility of an open dialogue about substances and harm reduction - these and other topics of current importance for Russia were discussed at an online event on June 26 carried out with the support of “Trava.education” (Weed.education) on-line resource.

The program included the following activities: a meeting with lawyers, a Living Library activity with people who use psychoactive substances, a discussion with harm reduction activists and journalists who write about drug policy, and much more. Anyone could join this event.

The video with the participants of the event is available at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVpHPwCe0nk&t=6s

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OP8K0zHVAI8&t=562s



MOLDOVA

Balti-Chisinau

Organization and coordination of the events in Moldova within the “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign was done by the PULS Initiative Group, representing the interests of people who use drugs. This year, activists in Moldova had several tasks.

First, to remind the country officials about their obligations to liberalize drug policy in accordance with the signed Association Agreements with the European Union. Second, to motivate the government to take action to reduce the number of imprisoned drug offenders. To fulfill this agenda, the activists identified target groups for the country-level campaign at the general meeting of the initiative group: politicians and parliamentarians; Ministry of Justice; media; society.

At the preparation stage for the events in Chisinau and Balti it was discussed how to minimize the risks of infection during the planned actions in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine measures, and how to avoid violation of the prohibitive measures adopted in the country. It was decided to use large plush toys to replace people.

The quarantine measures and requirements of the Extraordinary Commission did not apply to toys as they could not infect each other with coronavirus, and it is impossible to punish them for non-compliance with social distancing regulations. As the result it was decided to organize art performances: rallies of plush toys with posters, slogans and logos of the “Support. Don’t Punish" campaign in Balti and Chisinau.

The event featured creative slogans: "Let them go", "What about the prisoners?" The activists also printed postcards to be distributed to passers-by containing clear information in the form of numbers and graphs on how much health care services cost for people who use drugs and how much money is needed to imprison them. The data clearly showed and proved that the cost of medical care was significantly lower than the cost of imprisonment. Stickers with the logo of “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign were also produced, so that they could be affixed to cars, taxis, ambulances and police vehicles, as well as to the buildings in urban areas of Balti and Chisinau.

During the planning stage an assessment of possible risks for the activists in terms of their safety was also carried out. Based on the experience of the events of the previous years, in order to avoid problems with the police in connection with the street actions, we decided to act strictly in accordance with the current legislation while taking into account the decisions of the Extraordinary Commission in connection with the quarantine. Street actions were to take place in front of the Ministry of Justice in Chisinau and in front of the city prison in Balti.

Social networks flash mobs were also planned, such as the proposals to take a picture with a poster with the words of support, or to publish the logo of “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign in the social profile as a sign of solidarity with the community of people who use drugs. In addition to this, the tasks to make a video on the topic "Support for me means...", to take photos and videos documenting the actions and to upload these materials to social networks and the media were suggested.

The campaign kicked off by announcing two open events on Facebook and inviting everyone to join them. The first one was the plush action "What about the prisoners?" near the city prison in Balti. The second was the action event "Support. Don’t Punish" at the Ministry of Justice building in Chisinau.

The plush action "What about the prisoners?" took place outside Balti prison in the morning of June 25 in support of the need of the measures to reduce the prison population in connection with COVID-19. Public activists demanded the release of one third of prisoners who are serving sentences in penitentiary institutions in Moldova. As it was previously decided, due to the risk of the spread of the coronavirus, some of the protesters were replaced by plush toys with posters.

“We need to release, roughly speaking, two thousand people. Two thousand is our money. Two thousand is breathing space and the ability to influence the spread of COVID-19 in the prison system in actual practice” said Vitaly Rabinchuk, head of PULS Initiative Group, during the action.

The activists called on the heads of penitentiary institutions in Moldova to follow the example of European countries and to replace imprisonment terms with other arrest measures. Today more than 6.5 thousand prisoners are serving their sentences in penitentiary institutions of Moldova.

During this action the head of the local prison first tried to interfere with the activists in person, and then called a police squad. However, the police could not find any violations in the actions of the participants.

The next day, June 26, the activists arrived in Chisinau and held a picket outside the Ministry of Justice of Moldova. They handed over a letter addressed to the Minister of Justice Fadey Nagachevsky demanding liberalization of the country's drug policy, softening drug laws, reducing the prison population, etc. During the picket outside the Ministry of Justice, representatives of the Ministry did not interfere with the activists, they were friendly and professional. A reply to the letter is expected in the near future that will determine further advocacy steps and actions.

More than 20 people from the community of people who use drugs participated in the campaign activities. The activists' demands were supported by media, UNAIDS, human rights advocates and organizations working in the field of harm reduction.

Four media outlets and leading opinion leaders with own information platforms published materials about the activities. In total, the publications about the “Support. Don’t Punish” enjoyed more than 16,000 views, were reposted more than 50 times and were commented up to 260 times. The disputes that unfolded under these posts on social networks indicate that the activists managed to make the issues addressed by the actions public and visible.

We managed to establish relationships and get support from UNAIDS, from several representatives of the Equality Council and the Council for the Prevention of Torture. The campaign was supported by other communities, such as PLHIV, LGBT, NGOs working on reintegration of former prisoners, who offered to conclude a memorandum of cooperation.

The representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs form the 4th anti-drug department ANTIDROG contacted the initiative group and proposed to continue the general work on the list of substances in the so-called “table of synthetics”. This work is to involve the issue of increasing the substance weight threshold permitted for possession, as well as the development of alternative measures of punishment for drug-related crimes.

As the result of the campaign, the community of people who use drugs received additional incentives and motivation to build up their potential. Its voice got louder.







Необходимо освободить заключенных, в качестве профилактической меры, для снижения распространения COVID-19, по примеру стран ЕС, где освобождены были почти 130 000 заключенных из 20 государств-членов.



GEORGIA

Tbilisi-Kutaisi-Ozurgeti

The goal of “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign in Georgia this year was the advocacy for a humane drug policy through the joint actions of the community of people who use drugs, youth and government agencies. In line with this goal, the activists formulated the following tasks: to educate the population about the need for a drug policy focused on protection of human rights; to advocate the need for a human rights-based drug policy with the government institutions; to disseminate information about the special needs of people who use drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic; to create a number of videos about basic community demands.

The organizations New Vector (Tbilisi), Rubicon (Kutaisi) and Phoenix (Ozurgeti) from three regions of the country, members of the GeNPUD (Georgian Network of People Who Use Drugs), joined the action within the “Support. Don't Punish" global campaign under the above agenda on June 26.

Prior to the action, GeNPUD issued a press release to inform the media and society about the “Support. Don’t Punish” global campaign. The press release was to mobilize activists, community members and ordinary citizens, bringing together all those who want to support the campaign. The press release stated the following:

“On behalf of our organizations, we would like to express our protest against the repressive drug policy in the country, which is punitive in nature and violates fundamental human rights.

Our goal is to urge the authorities to influence decision-makers and to initiate appropriate processes for the support of a humane, people-centered drug policy.

Under current legislation, Georgian citizens are criminally liable for possession of small doses of substances and, as a result, spend years in prisons. At the same time, the first duty of the state is to take care of its citizens. The people need moral, social, medical support, not punishment.

As a society and as citizens, we all face this problem together. Join us for the action on June 26 at 19:00 in front of the State Chancellery of Georgia and voice your protest!"

On June 26 the activists publicly voiced their demands in Tbilisi, in front of the State Chancellery of Georgia. They expressed solidarity with the illegally arrested people who use drugs, called for the liberalization of drug policy and for the expansion of the access to life-saving services.

“Today the government continues to use violent methods against people who use drugs as part of its repressive drug policy. We will protest this injustice aimed ar the citizens of our country,” said Koka Labartkava, head of New Vector.

“We are protesting the country's repressive drug policy, which is punitive and contrary to fundamental human rights. Our goal today is to provide assistance to people who use drugs so that they could re-socialize and return to society,” said Kote Rukhadze, a member of New Vector.

Considering the fact that the community of people who use drugs is a group vulnerable to COVID-19, the organizations also paid special attention to dissemination of information on proper behavior in order to avoid the danger of infection on that day. For example, activists prepared a leaflet about the special needs of people who use drugs. It explained why at this difficult time they most need support, not punishment. The leaflet contained information on the importance of the June 26 global campaign and basic instructions to follow during a pandemic. All informational materials were distributed during actions and events among community members, their relatives and friends.

During and after the campaign GeNPUD representatives filmed several videos. One of them was produced as part of the "Support for me means..." ENPUD campaign. Each of the interviewed activists expressed their opinion about what support means for them as people who use drugs. These messages highlighted the vital needs of the members of the community, such as access to health care, community support, as well as decriminalization of their status.





არ დასაჯო!

GeNPUD
ნარკოტიკების მომხმარებელთა საქართველოს ქსელი
GEORGIAN NETWORK OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Support.
don't
punish.

მოდი აქციაზე!

26 ივნისი - 19:00 საათზე
სახელმწიფო კანცელარიასთან

მზრუნველობა დასჯის ნაცვლად!

ახალი ვექტორი
NEW VECTOR



KYRGYZSTAN

Bishkek

The main problem in Kyrgyzstan in the field of drug policy today is the disproportionately high fines for possession of drugs with no intent to sell, which came into force on January 1, 2019. These laws are contrary to humanity and contribute to propagation of corruption. Law enforcement officials and the entire judicial system do not always respect human rights, and when we mention people who use drugs, their rights are violated at every turn throughout the whole country. Also the inability to pay fines on time in accordance with this new legislation deprives members of the community of freedom.

And that is it. There are no in-country programs for work with people who use, for example, new psychoactive substances (NPS). Such groups of people can only expect hefty fines and jail time.

The Harm Reduction Network Association (AHRN) planned to hold a workshop together with students and teachers of the Law Academy of the Kyrgyz Republic (KR) within the “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign framework. However due to the difficult situation in the country related to COVID-19, all mass events were banned. The same rule applied to any actions or meetings in public places.

As the result the AHRN activists chose the social hostel “Ranar” to become the venue for the “Support. Don’t Punish” events. In addition to the necessity to adhere to COVID-19 pandemic measures and restrictions on public events, “Ranar” was also chosen because its territory has become a second home for the community.

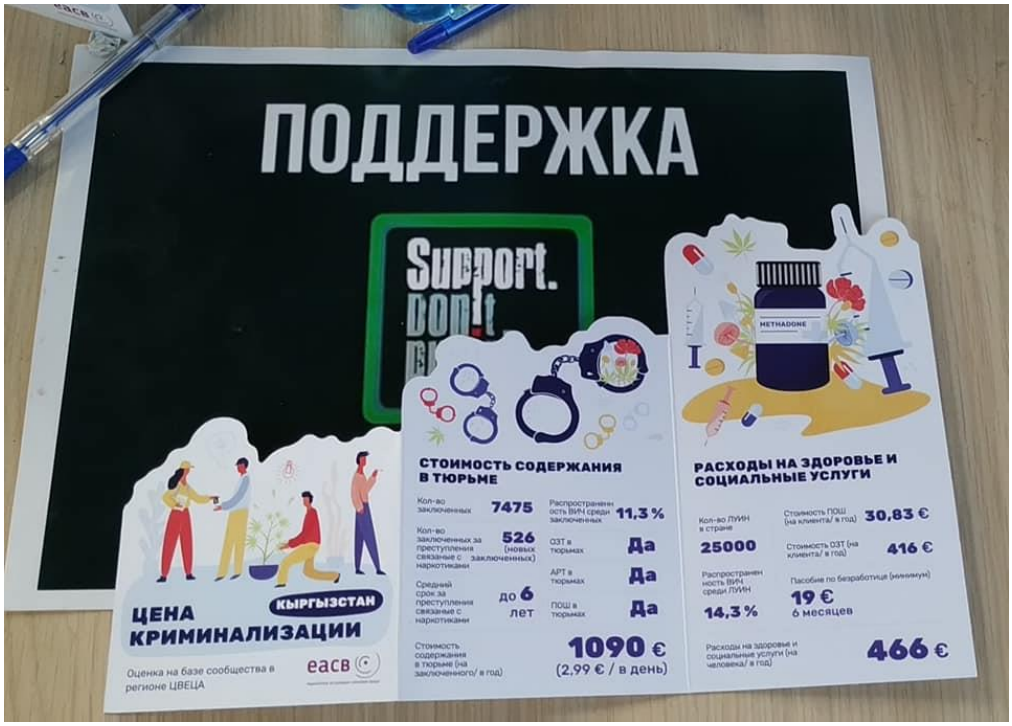
On June 26 AHRN street lawyers and activists from the community of people who use drugs gathered there and held a free-to-attend mini session on the topic "Our steps towards drug regulation in Kyrgyzstan." The meeting attracted 10 people. Free dialogue brought the participants together; they enjoyed an understanding of unity and help. The need for support and operation of communication platforms was voiced. This should directly affect the growth of community members' commitment to programs and services as well as the development of community potential. The stronger the community, the more freely the clients will be able to gain access to the services that meet their own needs, and not the ones that match somebody else’s indicators of program effectiveness.

The community must not be silent. The topical issues need to be raised so that the voice of people who use drugs could be heard at all levels. Despite the fact that the situation with COVID-19 in Kyrgyzstan remains very difficult in comparison with other countries in the EECA region, work must continue.

The strategy for further action was also discussed. For the next three to five years, according to the situation in the Kyrgyz Republic, there will arise a partial need to co-finance syringe exchange points, however this requires a study on the real number of people who use drugs in the country. There also is a need for quality opioid substitution therapy services, services provided by social institutions and rehabilitation centers. All this is necessary due to the fact that there has been an increase in the number of cases of NPS use obtained via the Internet.

As part of the June 26 action, the activists made a graffiti with the campaign logo on the wall of the “Ranar” hostel using the colors and symbols of the campaign. T-shirts with the “Support. Don’t Punish” logo were produced, the design and slogans of which were discussed with all the participants of the action.






support
don't
punish


Support
don't


Support
ПОДДЕРЖКА
А НЕ НАКАЗАНИЕ
Support. don't punish.
Я СКАЗАЛ "НЕТ" НАРКОТИКАМ!
НЕТ
ПОДДЕРЖКА
А НЕ НАКАЗАНИЕ

UKRAINE

VOLNA in the regions

On June 26 actions and flash mobs within the framework of the global “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign were carried out all over Ukraine. Almost all regions of the country participated in them. Small groups of people took to their cities’ streets holding handwritten posters with the same message: “Support. Do not punish."

The activists responded to the appeal of the All-Ukrainian Association of People Living with Drug Addiction (VOLNA) to join the global campaign and were not afraid to speak out publicly about decriminalization and repressive laws in the country. In addition to Kiev the campaign for the change of the repressive drug policy has been supported by 20 more Ukrainian cities this year.

Initiative groups from Ivano-Frankivsk, Lutsk, Chernivtsi, Kirovograd, Odessa, Mariupol, Slavyansk, Poltava, Kharkov, Zhitomir, Kiev, Belaya Tserkov, Cherkassy, Zaporozhye, Lvov, Lugansk, Dnipro united in order to make a statement about the problems associated with the repressive drug policy of Ukraine.










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негайно
звільнити
Наталію
Зеленіну


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Support.
Don't
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Требуем поддержать
а не наказывать
и выполнить рекомендации
ООН по декриминализации
Украинской
наркополитике

Kiev

On June 26, 2020 a performance-action "We are for fair play: Drug policy without a wild card" was held near the building of Verkhovna Rada in Kiev.

The participants of this action including people who use drugs, public figures and human rights activists staged an impromptu performance in order to draw attention of the officials and society to the current repressive drug policy and problems that hundreds of thousands of people from the community in Ukraine face every day.

“Presidents change, governments and parliaments change, but, unfortunately, the repressive drug policy in Ukraine does not. Its results are the epidemics of HIV, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis, criminalization of people who use drugs. All of that is happening against the background of flourishing organized drug crime and dominance of new synthetic psychoactive substances under the protection racket of the relevant law enforcement agencies, accompanied by the onslaught of "pseudo-rehabilitation" services not regulated by the state! It seems like the drug policy has its “wild card”! That is why we, like thousands of people in hundreds of cities around the world, came here to call on the authorities to take action to ensure a humane drug policy in Ukraine and to implement the UN recommendation on decriminalization. Our goal this day is to proclaim “Support! Don't punish!” said Oleg Dymaretsky, director of VOLNA (All-Ukrainian Association of People with Drug Addiction).

The activists called on the authorities to decriminalize people who use drugs by changing the focus of the law enforcement system to countering organized drug business.

Another message of the action addressed new legislative initiatives in Ukraine. While there is no consensus in the Ukrainian parliament regarding the legalization of cannabis for medical purposes, since January 1, 2020, criminal fines for illegal possession of drugs (even for personal use) have increased 30 fold: from 1,700 to 51 thousand hryvnias (from $ 62 to $ 1875).

This negatively affects and poses a threat to 350,000 people who use injection drugs in Ukraine, their families and friends. At the same time, draft law No. 2784 (Draft Law on Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Countering Illicit Trafficking of Narcotics, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors as well as Their Abuse) regarding the compulsory treatment of people who use drugs was introduced to the Parliament. This fact demonstrates not only the failure of the state to fulfill its international obligations regarding the changes of drug policy and decriminalization (UN recommendations on decriminalization), but also significantly increases the level of “drug corruption” among law enforcement officers, as well as the risks of exacerbation of HIV and viral hepatitis epidemics.

More than 60% of those convicted of possession of drugs for personal use in Ukraine receive criminal punishments for something that most civilized countries does not consider to be a criminal offense at all. Possession of drugs without the intention to sell, even in minute quantities (for personal use) is punished in Ukraine by imprisonment for the period of up to three years (Article 309 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine).

The order of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine No. 188 of 01.08.2000 “On the approval of tables of small, large and especially large quantities of narcotics, psychotropic substances and precursors in illegal circulation”, establishes an inadequately low minimum threshold for criminal liability. It is much lower than in many European countries. The practice of applying criminal legislation results in a high level of criminalization of people who use drugs. The result of such repressive and inhuman standards is the fact that every year thousands of people with drug addiction get a criminal record and receive criminal convictions, including imprisonment instead of adequate treatment and rehabilitation.

That is why at the rally in front of the Ukrainian parliament the activists called on the authorities to "wake up" and radically raise the "threshold" for drugs in order to bring them in line with the best practices of the European Union.

“Decriminalization, implementation of harm reduction programs, expansion of access to treatment and substitution therapy have proven their effectiveness and appear to be the measures that can significantly improve the situation with drug use in Ukraine and reduce harmful consequences for the country and communities,” said Anton Basenko, Chairman of "VOLNA" Board.

The activities of “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign in Ukraine attracted more than 150 people who use drugs from 25 Ukrainian regions. The activists have succeeded in attracting attention of the authorities to formation of drug policy for 2021-2030.




МИ ЗА ЧЕСНУ ГРУ:
НАРКОПОЛІТИКА БЕЗ ДЖОКЕРА


VIRUS




МИ ЗА ЧЕСНУ ГРУ:
НАРКОПОЛІТИКА БЕЗ ДЖОКЕРА

Mariupol-Slavyansk-Kryvyi Rih

Proryv (Breakthrough) Initiative Group from Mariupol aimed to mobilize the community in the Donbass region during "Support. Don't Punish" campaign and to invite them to build trusting relationships with decision-makers in order to propagate the use of all available tools to protect the rights of people who use drugs. One of the main tools is a humane drug policy that works in the interests of the country's citizens. The action brought together participants from three cities: Mariupol, Slavyansk, Kryvyi Rih.

During the preparation phase the organizers conducted an online meeting to discuss all ideas and suggestions. They discussed goals and assigned areas of responsibility. They also managed to come to an agreement with the director of a local TV channel about providing a possibility for several activists to participate in the Slovo Protiv Slova (Word vs Word) talk show where people with different views meet and discuss particular problems. The topic of the show was to be the life and the problems of people who use drugs, as well as their need for support without punishment.

Since quarantine measures were in full force in Mariupol, the TV crew was unable to reach the activists. As a result, all videos for the talk shows had to be filmed using own resources. The talk show went on air live on June 18. The activists invited a number of guests including the police, the head of the AIDS Center and a pastor of one of the churches, an active opponent of harm reduction programs. The conversation was not easy. It was difficult to convince the participants, but the activists managed to state the problems of the community and demonstrate ineffectiveness of the existing drug policy and lack of support for the drug dependent people using their personal stories as examples.

This talk show became part of the information campaign that took place before June 26. The campaign participants managed to conduct more than a dozen interviews with different people on the topic of the upcoming events, inform various specialists, doctors and nurses of the OST program, etc. Also the Facebook page of Proryv Initiative Group published information about preparation and basic requirements for the "Support. Don't Punish" events.

It is important to note that following the talk show, the information campaign on social networks, direct conversations with people and the June 26 rally, the flow of calls and letters requesting advice, help or directions for the people with certain problems has increased. There are many cases when people are afraid of the police and have already suffered from unacceptable interactions and human rights violations. There are plenty of such stories. In a state governed by the rule of law, such situation is unacceptable. After being released from prisons people lose not

only faith in humanity, but also lose the notion of “the good”. All this requires the Ukrainian legislation pertaining to drugs to be changed as soon as possible towards liberalization.






Support.
Don't
Punish.


Support.
Don't
Punish.


Support

Ivano-Frankivsk

The goal of the June 26 action in Ivano-Frankovsk was collecting the testimonies of the activists about discrimination against people who use drugs and their criminalization. “Drug use is the competence of medical professionals, not the police” this is the concept the state and the society should be guided by in their actions. The action was organized by Zahid Shans organization.

The place for the action chosen was opposite the city and regional administration building. Props, posters were prepared, a script was written. At the preparation stage an advertisement for the action was printed and posted in places accessible to people who use drugs (opioid substitution therapy rooms, narcological dispensary, etc.) Invitations were also sent to journalists, representatives of the police force, ombudsmen at the Supreme Council of Ukraine, etc. The police representatives present at the event requested to see permissions to hold the event and later observed the activities without interfering. The action was coordinated with the local authorities.

After the event the activists received a promise of cooperation from the human rights representative of the Center for Public Health. Numerous publications appeared in the media and on social networks voicing the demands of the activists. Having witnessed the action, the regional police stated that although they adhere to neutrality in this matter, what they saw made it clear to them that drug policy needs to be changed.




ОЛІКАРБОНАТ
Support.
Don't
punish.
ЛЮДИ ОЧІКУЮТЬ
НА ПІДТРИМКУ
А НЕ НА ПОКАРАН


307
309
188
2784
Support.
Don't
punish.

KAZAKHSTAN

Temirtau-Karaganda-Taraz-Uralsk-Ust-Kamennogorsk-Semey-Almaty

Drawing attention to the vulnerability of participants in substitution therapy programs and people who use drugs to COVID-19 has become the main topic of actions and events of Kazakhstan PWUD Forum within the framework of “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign. At the moment Kazakhstan PWUD Forum is active in 6 Kazakh regions. Representatives of 7 cities (Temirtau, Karaganda, Taraz, Uralsk, Ust-Kamennogorsk, Semey, Almaty) took part in the actions and the events.

During preliminary online meetings, the activists assigned the activities and allocated the resources for the campaign to be carried out in the regions of the country: production of promotional products with the campaign logo, costs of promotional products delivery to the regions of Kazakhstan, production costs of two videos: on the situation in the cities of the country and on the topic of the “Support for me means..." campaign.

During the preparation phase, the updates about the campaign were published in chats and social network groups in Telegram and WhatsApp used by people who use drugs with a call to join the campaign activities. Also, online meetings were held for everyone who wished to participate in the campaign. At those meetings the activists shared their campaigning experience, provided information and held a master class on video and photography. The campaign was to include a social networks flash mob with the “Support. Don’t punish” logo voicing the main demands of people who use drugs.

In total, the campaign reached about 2,000 people. Some of the people who took part in online meetings refused to participate in the flash mob due to personal safety concerns and possible problems with the police. People were afraid that their situation might worsen if they started openly talking about themselves.

Throughout the campaign it became possible to mobilize people who use new psychoactive substances via Telegram channels. A lot of people responded, however they keep rather private in communication, many of them fearing and mistrusting the activists who provide support to people who use new psychoactive substances. Nevertheless, during the campaign, for example, more than 30 new members joined and several became new volunteers via OverDose Telegram channel (set up with the goals to reduce harm from the use of psychoactive substances, to provide psychological and legal support). This demonstrates that after the campaign the community has come to trust the support provided by harm reduction activists.


КАЗАХСТАН


Answer



ESTONIA

Tallinn

On June 26 the Estonian Society of Psychoactive Substance Users (LUNEST) joined hundreds of organizations and tens of thousands of activists to commemorate the outdated and inhuman UN message against drug abuse and smuggling. This year the activists took part in the "Time for New Norms!" campaign organized by the European Network of People Who Use Drugs, EuroNPUD.

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to pose a potential threat, traditional public activities of the "Support. Don't Punish" campaign were not held in Estonia. Instead, each person had an opportunity to demonstrate their willingness and support for the LUNEST initiative by sharing the campaign poster on social media accompanied by topical hashtags such as #SupportDontPunish, #нетнаказаниямдарешениям and others.

The "Time for New Norms!" campaign within the "Support. Don't Punish" initiative framework drew the attentions of the state and the society to the following necessary actions:

• Accommodation for the homeless. There are more people who use drugs among homeless people than among general population. Their situation is not alleviated in any way by the fact that most social housing providers require the tenants to adhere to drug abstinence rule in order for them to be able to gain access to housing. As the result of this requirement many homeless users are deprived of the care they need and are therefore more susceptible to all risk factors, including chronic infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C. Provision of social housing for the homeless who use drugs, on the one hand, will help prevent and reduce the spread of infectious diseases in the general population, and on the other hand, will allow the homeless to reintegrate into society at a pace that suits them.

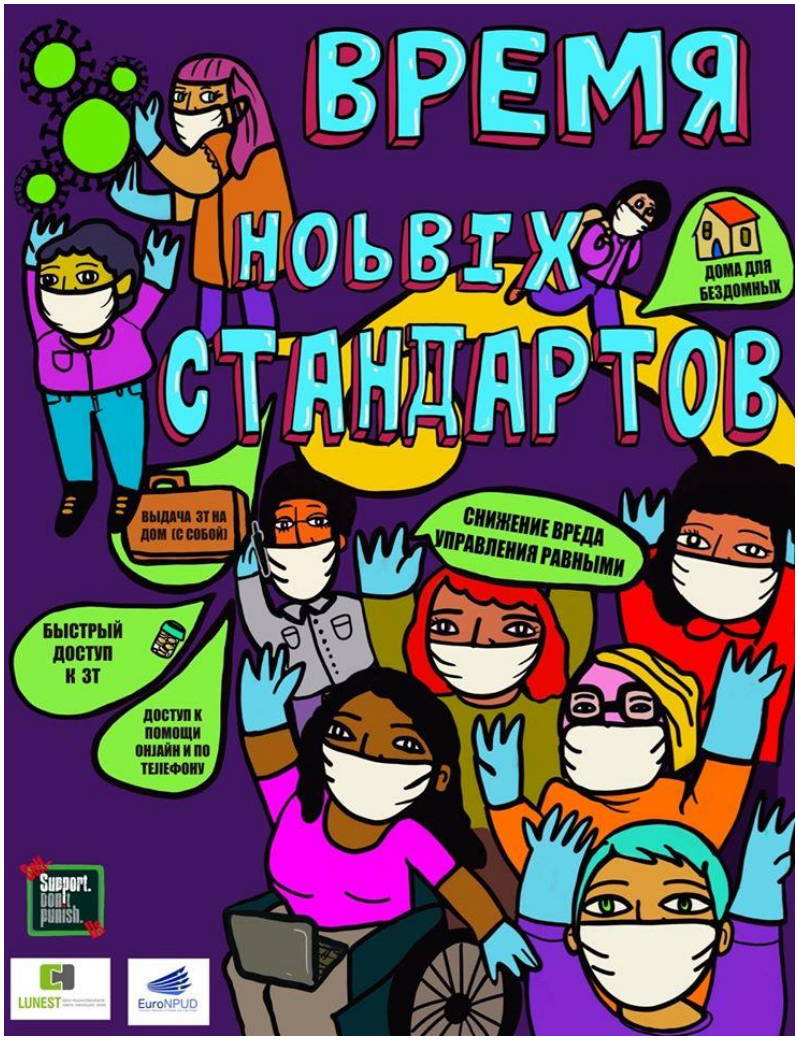
• Substitution therapy for home administration. The obligation to visit substitution clinics every day to take medications is the main reason why substitution therapy patients are reluctant to receive this service or fail to adhere to the treatment. This becomes especially difficult for those patients who have underlying medical conditions and those with regular jobs. Releasing substitution therapy medicine for self-administration for a period of a few days, as it was done during the pandemic, will improve the image of the service, increase the client base and make reintegration easier for many people. In the longer term, the entire clinical protocol for substitution therapy should be modernized, as it has remained unchanged since 2012.

• Expedited access to substitution therapy. Opioid substitution therapy should be readily available to all who need it. This should also apply to the arrested and other detainees. According to the existing outdated practice, only those prisoners who are the existing clients of the program

are provided with an opportunity to continue substitution therapy during their detention. Such a situation makes opioid users who have not had a chance to receive substitution therapy very vulnerable.

• Peer involvement in provision of harm reduction services. In Estonia, people with experience of drug use and / or drug addiction are being gradually involved in harm reduction services, in the development of social and support services as developers, peer counselors and support staff. For these services to operate with utmost efficiency, it is imperative that people who use drugs are more involved in community-related decision-making.

• Telephone and online support services. The Estonian digital state provides a number of services for people who use drugs via online means and by telephone. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was recommended to avoid face-to-face contact, many online and telephone services helping people with addictions unexpectedly proved to be effective and relevant. It is extremely important to maintain their availability for people in need of support, regardless of their location. Promoting the development of network and telephone services in the areas where the range of local services is narrower than in Tallinn and Ida-Virumaa will help many who currently do not enjoy access to them.



GERMANY

Berlin

On June 26, the joint project of the BerLUN community and IDPC “2020 SUPPORT. Don't PUNISH. Global Day of Action Initiatives Program" was completed. The BerLUN community had developed an action plan, within the framework of which the activists carried out 5 different actions in 7 months. It is important to note that some of them have grown into own separate projects.

The first stage was a rally dedicated to the World AIDS Day. On December 1, BerLUN members held a rally at the International Stele Always Remember. We have to always keep in mind that people who use drugs are the main risk group. Prevention and unhindered access to HIV / AIDS treatment is one of the community's goals.

The second action was planned for March. The activists wanted to arrange a meeting with students who are going to become social workers. However the COVID-19 epidemic changed those plans. Mass events were temporarily banned. Therefore face-to-face event was called off. For the same reason BerLUN had to cancel the photo exhibition, which was planned as the third event of the program.

Because of the circumstances the activists moved all the events to the Internet. It took time and effort, but worked out in the end. The ZOOM conference of the BerLUN community was attended not only by students, but also by social workers and the activists from the community of people who use drugs in Germany. BerLUN members got to know young people who will soon start helping people who use drugs, and it was important that the latter would get a better understanding of the specifics of working with migrants. Activists hope that such practice and communication will continue.

The photo exhibition, canceled due to the epidemic, was transformed into the *Blogs of street reporters* project. On their berlun2017 Instagram channel, BerLUN members started to publish community members’ video blogs. Anyone could make a video on a topic related to the life of people who use drugs and post it on this channel. Five hundred people subscribed to the channel in two months. This project will continue developing and will become even more interesting and popular. As part of this initiative, the activists also started helping people who do not have access to means of communications and the Internet. Friends and acquaintances donated smartphones to BerLUN, and the activists purchased SIM cards and distributed them to those in need.

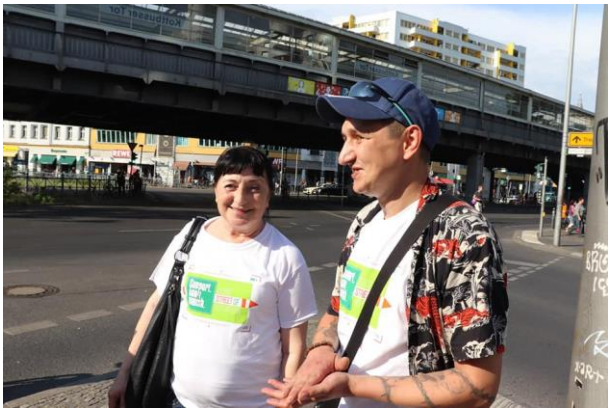
The fourth event within the framework of the project was weekly outreach work of the community activists. On weekends needle exchange services are operating in a limited fashion. Therefore the activists decided that on Sundays they could spend a couple of hours distributing sterile equipment, as well as masks, which have become very much in demand due to the

epidemic. The commodities were supplied to BerLUN by Fixpunkt and the masks were obtained from Berliner Aids-Hilfe. These events promoted better coordination between the community and service organizations. Also people who use drugs realized that they can organize themselves into self-help groups and solve their problems on their own.

The event series was completed with a traditional meeting near the Kottbusser Tor metro station. Friends of BerLUN from Deutsch Aids-Hilfe, Berliner Aidshilfe, Fixpunkt, JES, and other organizations and communities joined the gathering. The activists summed up the results of the project, congratulated everyone on BerLUN's birthday and ended the evening with a dinner to which all guests were invited.

It is important to say that this project provided an excellent opportunity to promote the idea of a humane drug policy, to obtain new knowledge, helped to establish new contacts with people from different spheres of activity, for whom the motto "Support. Don't punish" is important.







CONCLUSION

The demands of the activists of the campaign “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign in the countries of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region can be combined and summarized in the following:

Rejection of the "War on Drugs", which in all countries boils down to the same thing: a war on people. Repression doesn't work! People need support, not punishment. It is the doctors who have to deal with drug problems, not the police.

Changing attitudes towards people who use drugs and getting rid of prejudices and stereotypes. People who use drugs are NOT JUST HIV CARRIERS. People who use drugs are equal and responsible members of society with full rights and human dignity.

Rejection of ineffective drug policy in all countries of our region. It is necessary, as a matter of priority, to decriminalize possession of drugs without the intent to sell and to replace criminal prosecution of people who use drugs with administrative sanctions, or completely abolish any and all penalties.

We hope that our demands will be heard. If not, next year we will meet again at the events of the global “Support. Don’t Punish” campaign.

Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs (ENPUD)

Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA)

International Consortium on Drug Policy (IDPC)