

EVAWUD23

**Elimination of Violence Against Women
who Use Drugs Campaign**



2023 Global Actions Report

The EVAWUD23 campaign brings together women who use drugs in all our diversity together with our allies around the world to address the gendered and violent impacts of punitive drug policy. Coinciding with the United Nations Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls 16 days of action (25 November to 10 December), EVAWUD participants are united by a shared determination to end violence against women and gender diverse people who use drugs.

Women and gender diverse people who use drugs are subject to extreme rates and a wide range of violence due to patriarchal norms combined with punitive prohibition of some drugs. State-driven stigma, criminalisation, harmful gender norms, and corruption drive substantive health and safety harms and pose access barriers between women and gender diverse people who use drugs and critical harm reduction and gender-based violence services.

In 2023 there was an unprecedented record number of grant applications for the EVAWUD23 campaign as well as several organisations participating without small grant support. Summaries were documented, as below, on actions in Brazil, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Australia, Serbia, Greece, Italy, India, Kenya, Catalunya, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, Peru, Portugal, Sierra Leone, Ukraine, and Indonesia. Acknowledgements also to partnering organisations: YouthRISE, EuroNPUD and IDPC.

Aroeira and Tulipas do Cerrado - Brazil

In Brazil the EVAWUD campaign was spearheaded by Aroeira and Tulipas do Cerrado. The two organisations firstly held internal community meetings to discuss the impact of violence against women who use drugs and how gender diverse people experience violence in specific ways. A second gathering was then held with women in the unhoused community in the centre of the country's capital Brasilia.



“It was really nice to be a part of the conversation circle, to have the perception that we are connected with other women who are going through violence in other corners of the world and who are also seeking to organize themselves politically to create strategies to reduce this violence. We talked a lot about the context of the war on drugs in Brazil and how this mainly affects women living on the streets, trans people, sex workers and how prohibition translates into legal measures by the state that ultimately significantly increase violence that affect us. We talked about abandonment, the lack of resources and support to fight against the state of the moral difficulties and fascist setbacks that are happening in Brazil now. In this context, it is essential to seek to form these international networks with people in places that have already advanced in the

discussion of various issues and recognize the urgency of our needs as women who use drugs.” (participant quote)

This Life - Cambodia

In Cambodia the organisation This Life created a centrepiece video titled “**Draw the Line**” focusing on a girl navigating everyday life in Cambodia, a country where the discrimination and marginalisation of women is very much embedded in the culture. Throughout the video, a girl witnesses different instances of women and girls being abused. She symbolically “draws the line”, a call for action for young people in the country to draw the line against attitudes and cultures that normalise the oppression of women and gender diverse people who use drugs. The video received nearly 500,000 views.

Resources were also shared through the website of This Life in Khmer and English with over 10,000 people visiting the site. Additionally, many people reached out asking for assistance, and This Life Without Violence, a programme dedicated to tackling domestic violence and its harmful effects, was able to intervene.

Tackling the issue of domestic violence requires a unified effort from all stakeholders, including community members, NGOs, and government bodies. Accordingly, This Life



also successfully collaborated with the British ambassador, local NGOs, national media and GIZ as well as the Women’s Resource Center. With support from the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, an exhibition was held showcasing the work of organisations and their beneficiaries in addressing domestic violence.

Flor y Miel - Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, the collective Flor y Miel participated in EVAWUD23 through three initiatives. In the national march against violence towards women, the organisation distributed information and free condoms, fostering crucial conversations about the impact of the war on drugs on women. The collective also developed a social media campaign, strategically addressing violence related to the war on drugs, garnering widespread awareness and engagement.



The highlight of the campaign in Costa Rica was participation in the National Congress, where a press release was delivered to committees on human rights, security, and drug trafficking. This interaction laid the groundwork for future political advocacy and enabled concerns to be expressed directly to legislators.

AIVL, ATDC, ADS, SSDP, QuIHN, Harm Reduction Victoria and DanceWize Victoria - Australia

AIVL (the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League), successfully orchestrated the EVAWUD campaign in Australia, amplifying its impactful message across multiple platforms. A highlight was the featured podcast, **News from the Drug War Front - 2XXfm 98.3** which played a crucial role in elevating the campaign's visibility. This initiative boldly tackled the systemic violence perpetuated against women who use drugs by media narratives, and the pressing need for better access to support and harm reduction services.



The EVAWUD Campaign in Australia also involved collaborations with ATDC, and ADS in Launceton, Tasmania as well as further engagement with SSDP, QuIHN in Queensland, Harm Reduction Victoria and DanceWize Victoria. The campaign centered around **social media content** produced and released by AIVL across the 16 days of activism, reinforcing the key points being highlighted by EVAWUD23.

The campaign also highlighted specific issues of relevance to women who use drugs in Australia, including the loss of custody rights for mothers who use drugs, the inaccessibility of domestic violence shelters, and the lack of gender-sensitive drug-related services. This online campaign was coupled with on the ground work in Tasmania with the Alcohol and Drug Service sporting orange during the campaign and EVAWUD campaign posters being hung throughout neighbourhoods.

The Drug Policy Network South East Europe DPNSEE (South-East Europe) - Serbia

DPNSEE coordinating the EVAWUD23 campaign across several countries and organisations in South-Eastern Europe, with collaboration from local partners and the distribution of the campaign **press release** translated by DPNSEE. A fact sheet on women and drug use was also distributed to partners.



DPNSEE also ran a social media campaign which had a total of half a million engagements and interactions, with most of these coming through the DPNSEE Instagram account. A meeting was also organised in the Palace of Serbia with support of the Serbian government to share experiences working on this topic from government ministries, UNODC representatives and civil society organisations. The meeting was widely covered by media across multiple countries in the region and very well covered by the media in Serbia (**N1**, **Beta**, **Danas**, **Radio 021**, and **NasloviNet**).

PeerNUPS - Greece

In Greece the EVAWUD campaign was coordinated by the PeerNUPS group with events taking place in both Athens and Mykonos.



The EVAWUD poster was printed on t-shirts for the community group to wear and informational posters and leaflets were placed in the bookshop “Exarcheia”, located in the traditionally anarchist and drug-using neighbourhood of Athens.



The EVAWUD Campaign was also promoted through a radio show featuring local PeerNUPS activist, Daphne.

Chemical Sisters - Italy

Chemical Sisters organised a protest against government proposals that put pregnant women in danger upon incarceration and increase stigma and violence toward women who use drugs. A speech was held together with the main harm reduction agencies of the city of Turin, with legal experts and activists. A night event was held in a self-managed space in the city providing safer use and informational materials, offering counselling, and collaborating on drug checking services.



Chemical Sisters also coordinated a live radio broadcast at the local independent radio station announcing the EVAWUD campaign, talking about stigma and violence against women who use drugs, and interviewing a worker from an anti-violence centre.

On top of these activities, materials were distributed at the local drop-in centres and a training was organised with doctors and activists speaking to women and gender diverse people who use drugs accessing the harm reduction services.

Yet We Rise Collective - India

In India, a support group meeting was held in New Delhi which was unfortunately interrupted by the police and indeed this is an example of the stigma and discrimination associated with women who use drugs in India.



Despite the interruption, the attendees were able to discuss important issues they face, including the lack of availability of OAT in local clinics resulting in women being forced to travel significant distances to access treatment. The participants also highlighted the difficulties they face in attending clinics that are overwhelmingly attended by men. All agreed that their primary concerns as women and gender diverse people who use drugs remain the lack of access to safe spaces and harm reduction services, as well as the stigma and discrimination they experience.

Women Nest - Kenya

An EAWUD community forum was held for experience sharing and learning from each other. Participants were also informed about processes for reporting cases of violence and how to access relevant health care services (including survivor case management, psycho-social support, legal advice, counselling and shelter access). Different help lines where women can get help and support were also shared.



Women Nest in collaboration with Nairobi County and other partners in Mathare Area planned and participated in an event to mark the launch of the 16 days of activism.



A community walk aimed to create awareness of the different challenges women who use drugs face including violence, stigma, discrimination and restrictive gender norms. The occasion was attended by government officials who promised to ensure that women's safety and other rights are protected. The platform created a sense of belonging for the women who use drugs participants as they found opportunity to express themselves.



Additionally, Women Nest developed and shared different messages through social media for each of the 16 days.

Metzineres - Catalonia

Metzineres carried out multiple EVAWUD23 actions across its social networks, in the streets and in its premises in El Raval (Barcelona). These included participation in demonstrations held on 24 and 25 November for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (with the reading of the EVAWUD manifesto and the use of posters created for the occasion); the organisation of workshops and debates on normalised daily violence that we receive as women who use drugs; a route organised in the neighbourhood to learn about the history of women and gender-diverse people who have historically occupied public space despite the repression and violence experienced; and the participation of Metzineres in a webinar organised by the University of the West Indies on harm reduction with a gender perspective.



Metzineres also coordinated EVAWUD23 through its social media (**X posts**, **Facebook**, and **Instagram**) and **website post**, allowing followers to learn in depth about Metzineres proposals to put an end to gender-based violence against women who use drugs.

Colectiva Conversaciones Entre Viajeras - Mexico

For EVAWUD23, “Colectiva Conversaciones Entre Viajeras” organised 4 core activities. A workshop was conducted with women who use drugs in rural settings. Through writing, poetry, and oral expression, these women shared their experiences, exploring and developing strategies for self-care and harm reduction as a means to combat and eliminate the violence they face in their day-to-day lives. Informational brochures on harm reduction and a directory of resources and spaces to seek help in case of violence were shared.

Another workshop was organised for women who are mothers of teenagers with experiences of drug use in their homes. They shared their life stories, addressed questions, and proposed interventions from a perspective free of violence, stigma, and discrimination.

Discussions were also held with girls about the different forms of violence women are exposed to in their community, addressing the use of drugs and associated risks from their perspective. Using doves with messages of peace, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the expressions of violence and abuse that women endure.



Additionally, information was shared with high school students about the importance of knowing women's rights for the prevention of violence, as well as approaching drug use from a harm reduction and self-care perspective. Their feelings and proposals were explored through creative writing and narrative reading.

Drug Policy Action Group (DPAG) - Myanmar

Despite worsening of the current conflict situation and fighting in the country which limited the participation of partners, DPAG was able to organise a photo campaign to commemorate the EVAWUD23 16 days of activism with the following objectives:

- To enhance the participation of women and girls who use drugs, people of diverse gender identities, and general youth in the #EVAWUD2023 campaign.
- To promote awareness among the general population about gender-based violence against populations affected by punitive drug policies.
- To reduce stigma and discrimination, and to protect women and girls who use drugs from gender-based violence and forced demands.
- To demonstrate solidarity with the global EVAWUD23 campaign



Following from local partner consultation and agreement on campaign activity, a committee was established with experienced persons of diverse professional backgrounds such as a photographer, a gender activist, an ethnic youth leader, and a community mobilisation specialist. The photo contest was announced on the **DPAG Facebook** page and also circulated among DPAG members and networks in local languages. The contestants were from various communities affected by punitive drug

policies. Selection of the winners was based on the quality and presentation of the photos and also key messages or personal stories which were relevant to the campaign objectives and attractive to the viewers. A total of six contestants were selected as winners!

During the sixteen EVAWUD23 days, DPAG partners participated by posting and sharing their photos on social media with key messages. They included representatives of key populations, youths, celebrities and faith-based groups.

YouthRISE Nigeria, Global Care for Health Support Initiative (GCHSI), Solace Hub, and Women & Girls Capabilities and Empowerment Organisation (WGCEO) - Nigeria

YouthRISE Nigeria, GCHSI, Solace Hub and WGCEO engaged the office of the States' Sexual and Domestic Violence Agency, the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response, Department Ministry of Justice, and the Federal Agency for the Control of AIDS (FACA) in collaborative activities across Nigeria. Firstly, an advocacy discussion concerning the inclusion of an agenda for women and gender diverse people who use drugs in the national response to gender-based violence. The outcome of the engagement was participation in the FACA awareness road walk representing the community.



The groups also participated in community outreach, the highlight of which was the 'Movie Show' starring 'The Wildflower' a Nigerian film that shed light on the pervasive issue of gender-based violence. Following the screening, a representative from the Ministry of Justice provided valuable insights into the reporting process for participants, especially for women who use drugs, emphasizing the importance of medical examination, a police report, emotional support, and legal assistance in responding to rape and abuse.

The campaign also utilised **social media** through **press briefs** and **graphics** to engage the public. This enlightened the public on the realities of women who use drugs in the context of the negative stereotypes that sustain violence toward women who use drugs, affecting their health, human rights, and social inclusion.



Soma – Peru

The campaign organised by Soma was titled “*Ser mujer en un mundo con drogas*” or “Being a woman in a world with drugs”. Six informative summaries, on the topics of **incarceration**, **maternity**, **alcohol consumption**, **sexual violence**, and **organized crime**. were published in Spanish, based on especially picked content of articles and studies of interest on the topic of the elimination of violence against women who use drugs, tailored to the Latin American audience. The video is available on their **Instagram** together with an English **transcription** of the video.



MANAS, GAT, MUSA and CASO – Portugal

In Portugal there were two EVAWUD23 campaign events, in Lisbon and in Porto. The Porto campaign was organised by women of the MUSA collective who, one postcard at a time, asked women and people of different genders who use drugs, as well as relevant professionals and organisations, to contribute to the elimination of violence against women and gender diverse people who use drugs. Each person was invited to send a message in favour of eliminating violence against women and gender non-conforming who use drugs to a specific service, person or institution. For women and gender non-conforming people who use drugs, the postcards could be directed to someone who has been a positive role model or who has contributed to the elimination of violence in their lives.



Meanwhile in Lisbon, GAT organised a conference attended by 90 people in the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon, in a room full of diversity, including experts, women using drugs, trans women, racialised women, and homeless women who were present in the main discussion of the journey. It was a day full of engagement and dignity.

No more politics and academic expertise without including us: because we have a voice, a body, and a mind that is willing to show you our lived experience and what we advocate for: safer spaces for women using drugs, included in a national strategy for drug consumption rooms, shelters where women who use drugs are welcomed, safer spaces for trans people accessing hormones, respect for child custody.

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AdvocAid - Sierra Leone



In Sierra Leone, AdvocAid EVAWUD23 activities were conducted in **Kenema**, **Freetown**, and **Makeni**. Outreach was undertaken by AdvocAid staff with women with lived experience as drug related ‘offenders’ with the main aim of addressing harmful gendered attitudes and violence targeted towards women who use drugs. AdvocAid paralegals provided legal education to empower communities to know their legal rights and the legal framework. The outreach was accompanied by media coverage with the main intention of allowing AdvocAid to effectively communicate their messages to a wider audience.

AdvocAid also conducted a television engagement in Freetown where the legal manager was hosted on **SLBC TV** to speak about the relevance of the EVAWUD23 campaign. She called on the government to introduce measures that take account of women’s distinctive needs, as the enforcement of punitive laws was unnecessary and results in overcrowding of detention facilities and also advised the adoption of a public health approach with expanded harm reduction services so as to provide health care and social services.



IEC material such as orange T-shirts with advocacy messages, banners for each of the three regional offices and placards were used. This was central to the campaign to spotlight the negative impact of criminalisation to the wider community to act as a catalyst for change.

Club Eney - Ukraine

Club Eney conducted focus group discussions with women and gender diverse people who use drugs in Kyiv. All participants reported increased violence during the war as well as forms of institutional violence including from police and social workers revoking parental custody rights. The majority of attendees reported not accessing other services because of stigma, discrimination and fear of persecution.



An information campaign was conducted online in **social media** with the international campaign tags and an EVAWUD23 picture **campaign**. The campaign was fully developed and led by women who use drugs. The **activities** also converged as part of the All-Ukrainian action "16 days against violence" with the Kyiv City Center of Social Services and the patrol police of the city of Kyiv. A training was held for the staff of the Club Eney on the prevention and elimination of domestic violence against women and gender diverse people who use drugs. Club Eney employees updated their knowledge about the algorithm of actions in situations of violence and received contacts of services that provide assistance to survivors, as well as holding a discussion debunking widespread myths.

PPRI and GAMMA - Indonesia

To commemorate the EVAWUD23 16 Days of Activism and to also highlight the International Day for Women Human Rights Defenders, on 29 November 2023, PPRI and GAMMA held a talk show session entitled "*The death penalty is not a solution: Academic Sensitisation as an Effort to Influence Policy on Defending the Rights of Women Sentenced to Death in Narcotics Cases*" at Krisnadwipayana University (Bekasi, West Java).



The event opened a space for joint dialogue between several representatives, namely M. Afif Abdul Qoyim, the Director of LBHM (the legal aid institute - based in Jakarta, that provides free legal assistance to marginalised groups, including people facing the death penalty for drug related offences), academic Dimas Arya Aziza and Nofia Erizka Lubis as representative from PPRI. The dialogue was also attended by 50 law faculty students and 15 representatives of the community of women and gender diverse people who use drugs.

The discussion space was important for improving understanding of how conditions in Indonesia, where women who use drugs are sentenced to death, are exacerbated by the ways in which law enforcement is gender insensitive by excluding consideration of the multiple layers of injustice and oppression experienced by women sentenced to death row. In the midst of the failure of “War on Drugs”, with punitive approaches fuelling worsening prison conditions, there is an important solution that is being ignored by the government; adequate harm reduction services that are tailored or women and gender diverse people who use drugs.



An EVAWUD 23 talk show raised the involvement of academics to provide perspective on the importance of gender analysis in formulating policies related to resolving narcotics cases where, ethically, the unique circumstances of women cannot be ignored. Through this discussion, law students who may later become judiciary officials, either as prosecutors or judges, were encouraged to develop a comprehensive perspective on how bring justice to women charged with drug related offences.



WHRIN extends gratitude and congratulations to all those participating in the EVAWUD23 campaign. Together, women who use drugs in all our diversity are gaining momentum in protecting the rights and safety of members of our community. EVAWUD activities are increasingly targeted towards service, policy and practice adjustments and reforms designed to protect and assist women and gender diverse people who use drugs who are experiencing or are at risk of violence. Please keep us posted on any further campaign and related activities so we can promote, share and hopefully replicate your progress in other locations. Please also share this report through your networks and beyond.

<http://whrin.site>